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THE DEVIL'S CREW
by
ROBERT CARSE

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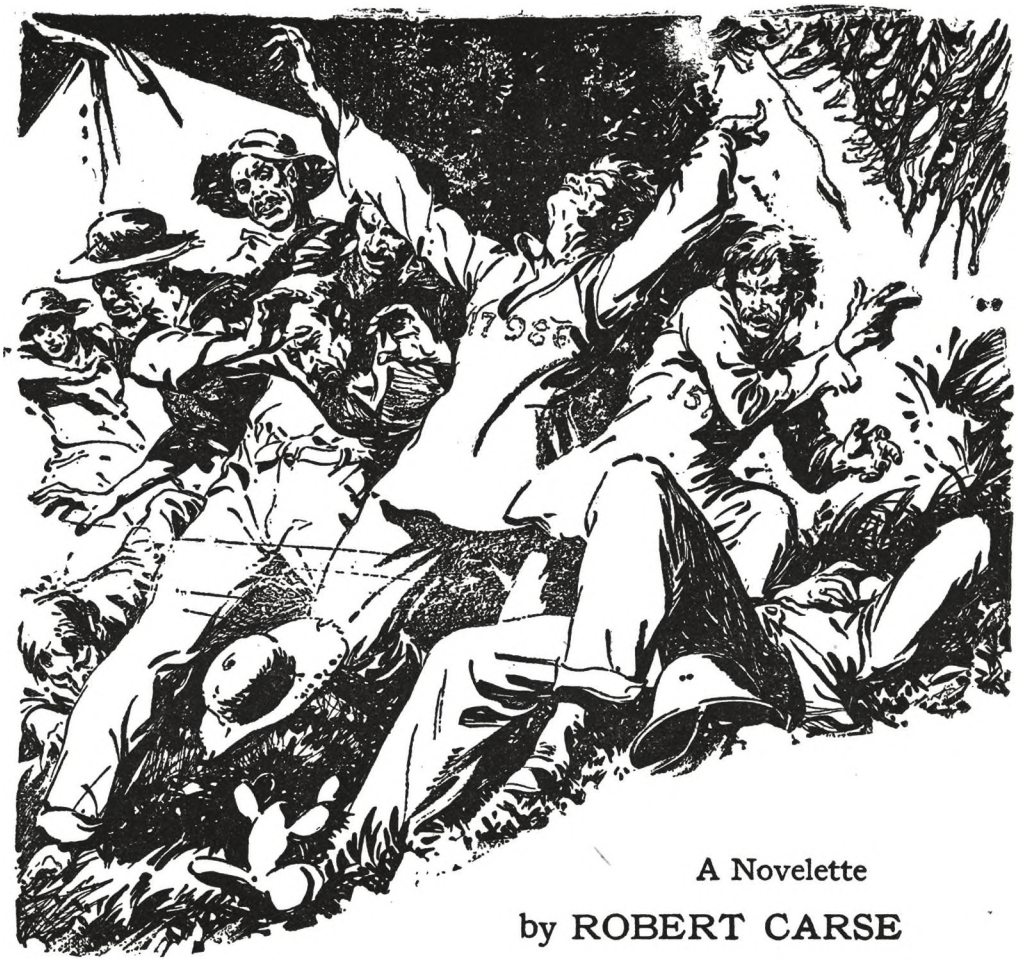
THE DEVIL'S CREW

AGAINST the narrow coral reef the Trade wind broke with a constant vast echoing which made Goare think of far-off shell fire. Day and night ever since he had been here, that had been the predominant sound, and even near dawn, in the small, shallow place he had dug for himself among the scrub brush and palmettos, the warm, steady gusts of that great wind struck his face and half-naked body. In some ways Goare welcomed that fragrant rushing of the Northeast Trades, although for him it brought old and bitter memories.

All the way from Africa, where he had spent so many years of soldiering and fighting, then across the open Atlantic, over the far islands of the outer Caribbean fringe where he had been born and passed his youth, at last here to him, crouched on this exposed reef, the wind came, making him remember, keeping the memories alive in his wearied brain, restraining him somehow from laughing up into the sun for the last time and wading into the sea and to his death.

He rose now, in the false tropic dawn, impelled to movement again by the knowledge that suicide, an end to all this hiding, was so close and easy. The reef he stood upon still was called the Palisados, the name given it by the old Spanish. Behind its barrier the harbor of Kingston lay broad, dark and safe,



A Novelette

by ROBERT CARSE

the loom of the Blue Mountains and the south shore of Jamaica like the shadow of an immense dream beyond.

Goare stared again at the harbor and the white and wide town. There were many ships there: Kingston was one of the greatest ports in the islands. There would be half a dozen or so vessels, he knew, sailing before noon, passenger ships for Panama, or for Haiti and New York, island schooners and freighters that would touch most anywhere. They would swing out to sea past him, around through the entrance by the pilot station at old Port Royal, then for the open and far horizon.

Goare made a little and bitter laughing sound aloud; he had seen thirty-seven such ships put out to sea in the three weeks he had been here, while he crouched in the sand and stared, knowing that in all probability he would never go forth with any of them, unless it was as a prisoner in irons, and back, towards French Guiana, just another escaped convict being returned to the place which someone had possessed the dubious humor to name Devil's Island.

Goare turned, sat down upon the edge of the shelter he had dug for himself. He was trembling all over. He had escaped, he told himself, using that painful knowledge he had returned to countless times since he had been here; he had got away from Guiana and the prisons, this far, and now freedom seemed more distant, more bitterly remote than ever.

All his and Boyan's money was gone.

The little supply of food and water he had managed to bring here with him was practically exhausted, and although he had nearly starved himself during the last few days, the rest of it must go today, or tomorrow. While, back in the steaming, dank horror of the convict wood-camp in Guiana, Boyan, the man who had soldiered and suffered with him for years, was waiting for him to return, to get him also to freedom.

And, over there, four miles away in the port, every policeman had a full description of him, Goare, as an escaped and dangerous convict, as had the captain and purser of every ship between Para, Panama and New York.

"You'll wait a long time, soldier," Goare began, as though Boyan were right beside him and could hear his husky whisper, "if you wait for me—"

Then he stopped and whispered words, stooping tensely far down, staring out to see, where the false dawn had receded back into full darkness again. Out there, the heads of the combers pounding towards the Palisados showed dim light, a licking of phosphorus as they broke charging in. But a small-boat was there, and sweeping close in under the shove of the Trades. He could see its dully white bows low among the combers, and the fluttering shape of its lugsail, being slacked off and dropped now as the man at the helm headed for the beach.

Goare had no gun or knife, not even a club. Days ago, though, he had fashioned a chunk of rough coral in a sling torn from his shirt. With that, he had told himself repeatedly, he could kill at least one of the men who came after him to take him back to the creeping madness of the prisons.

He left the hollow of his shelter, the end of the rock sling wound around his taut hand. On his belly and his knees he crept down through the Spanish bayonet and the wind-bent, stunted palmettos until he was not ten feet from where that boat would land. Only one man rode in it, he saw now, watching the other go forward from the tiller to the bow, pick up a painter coiled there, then, as a comber broke beneath, leap to the coral lithely and run up the sand, to make fast his line about a palmetto trunk.

SILENTLY, mirthlessly, Goare laughed, still hidden from sight. Just by the quick, certain motions, the loom of his grotesquely heavy and bowlegged figure, he was able to recognize the other man. It was Soemel, the captain and owner of the ship which had picked him up, for the price of all the francs he, Goare, had, and brought him north from Paramaribo in Dutch Guiana. Soemel was standing erect now, looking around him in the opening flush of the real dawn light, and calling out his name.

"Goare!" he called. "Hey, man! Hey, Goare! It's me—Soemel!"

The shipmaster, Goare noticed, before he answered and got to his feet, had no weapon visible upon his body, and carried his hands conspicuously free from his sides to show that they were empty.

"Yeah," Goare answered him, getting fully to his feet, the chunk of coral swinging at his wrist. "What?"

Soemel laughed at him as he saw him.

"You look like a sand-crab," he said.

"I've been eating them," said Goare in a flat voice. "Raw. But, what's it to you? I haven't got a nickel—not one damn' sou; you know that. But if you—"

"Pipe down," Soemel told him; he was lurching light-footed over the sand toward the taller, slighter man. "Listen to me, while I talk fast. Because I was late in getting out here, and I want to be gone by the time the dawn is up."

"You know," Goare said slowly, watching the light and close-set eyes, the coarse features of the flattened, bearded face, "that I know you for a louse and a dirty crook. And if you come here

to trap me for the coppers now, if you ever try to cross me, I'll kill you."

"Listen to him!" said Soemel. "Listen to him, will you? But, get off that, me tough buck, and listen to me. Who brought you here? I did—Luke Soemel. For a price, sure, but, I brought you here. And I tipped you to the fact out to sea that the coppers everywhere were looking for you. I fixed it so we could hit this port at night, and I gave you food, and water, and fixed you a raft, and sneaked you ashore here. If it wasn't for me, the coppers would have a collar on you now. And you say you don't trust me; you call Soemel a louse and a crook.

"But maybe this squatting in the sun and chasing crabs and counting ships has made you a little loose in the top, hey? Maybe you forget how slick I got you aboard down in Paramaribo. And maybe, too, you don't remember that when we argued the price down on the coast, you told me half the dough you had was your pal's, and supposed to buy your pal's way out, too. How about your pal down there in the prisons, that lad, Boyan, you spoke to me about? *Por madre,* I ain't the guy to remember a man about his pals; you was the one who brought it up."

"Still," Goare said in a voice which seemed to contain a soft note, "you took every last franc note I had away from me, and you wouldn't wait, there in Paramaribo, for Boyan. So what?"

Soemel lifted stub fingers to the dirty tangle of his beard and cursed in Low Country Dutch and Portuguese. "'So what?' the man says," he stated to the dawn. "You're a good bit loose in the top from laying in here, so I'll tell you 'what,' *chico.* You want to break your pal, this Boyan, out of the prisons down there . You're trapped like a scupper rat right here, yourself. No money, no food, no place to go, without it, where the coppers won't put the hand on you. So here's Soemel. I ain't making any laughs, or any lies—you know me, and you know the ship I got. Both ain't too good. But, I just lined up a job that is, and you're the one lad who can help me."

Talking, Soemel had moved back a pace or so from the other man.

"No," he said in a low and conversational voice, intently watching the bigger man's eyes. "No, sonny." He tapped his rear trousers pocket. "I'd blow you all to hell before you could let me have it with that coral hunk. And you wouldn't get beyond Morant Point in that boat of mine. Anyhow, you ain't got enough food and water left to go out to sea, and that's why I waited for a couple of weeks, and almost to dawn, before I come out visiting."

Soemel was ankel-deep in the surf now, and he had drawn the pistol from his hip pocket, had it in his hand. Silently, he retreated farther to the boat, reached down and in over the gunwale, and when he straightened fully the bottom-plug was in his hand and Goare could hear the suckling inrush of the water across the foot-boards.

"That, maybe," Soemel said, "will make things a little easier whilst we're talkin'. Too, some nigger in a fishing boat or some fella in the light-house or the pilot-tower might see her here, and wonder what the hell, and we don't want that now." Smiling, Soemel put the boat plug in the pocket he had drawn the pistol from, still keeping the pistol in his hand as he came up out of the water.

"Will you listen, soldier?" he asked.

"Go ahead," Goare said, an expression like a smile about his mouth, "and talk."

"*Gracias,*" Soemel told him. "Because you asked me a couple of questions you ain't give me time to answer yet. You asked me why I didn't hang along down in that Dutchy port and wait for your pal to get out of the jug and get over, so's I could take him along with you. Well, it was you yesself who told me your pal had the fever, and was flat on his

back when you pulled out, and that was why you shoved off alone, without him. And, was I the guy to stay alongside the dock in a little, one-spot port like Paramaribo, dischargin' no more stuff, and loadin' no more, and with you shoved down in a coal bunker where a smart Dutchy cop might catch you any time? Answer me that, soldier."

Slowly, and bitterly, Goare smiled upon him.

"That's right," he said.

Soemel's smile in return seemed to hold real warmth. "That's the way," he said. "Because your pal might ha' been weeks getting over that fever, or he might ha' died of it. You don't know, and the only way you can know is to get back down there. That right, too?"

"Right!"

Soemel shrugged, speaking far more swiftly now.

"That's where I'm going," he said, "right back down there—if you'll listen to a little savvy and reason, and if you'll ship with me."

"What the hell do you mean?" Unconsciously, Goare was moving forward, his wide eyes bright and staring, his lips back from his teeth in his emaciated, lined face.

"Back!" Soemel's voice had a whip crack sound, and the pistol was level in his hand. "Stop right there, *hombre!* That's it. All I want out of you now is the answers to a couple of good questions. You ain't no Frenchman, are you? You're an American, and your folks used to run a plantation over there on Tiamba Island, off of Martinique. But, even though you was nuts enough to go and fight with those Frenchies during the War, and to stick along in their Legion afterwards, you've had enough o' that and enough o' soldierin' now."

In a cracked, hoarse voice, Goare laughed at him and at the sunlit, lovely day.

"I fought for them for twelve years," he said aloud, talking as though he stood alone here. "I thought I was a pretty good soldier, just as Boyan did. Boyan had been in the War, too; he'd been a captain in the Russian Imperial Guard."

"And your pal socked a German sergeant, over there in Morocco one night," Soemel said, as though reciting the lines of a play he had learned very carefully. "Some square-headed donkey who had been trying to shake down a few francs that you guys got from home. And you, you tried to pull this Russian guy off, but when the guard showed up and tried to haul Boyan away to the jug, you up and barged the corporal of the guard on the jaw. So they shoved you both in the disciplinary battalion for a couple of years' stretch, and you guys busted out of there, and when they tried to pick you up again, you fought with the patrol, and you hurt two or three guys bad, and one died. So they said they didn't want boys like you around Africa and their Legion any more, and they handed you pieces for life, out to Devil's Island. Maybe you forget, soldier, but you told me all o' that, the first night you was out of Paramaribo on the ship with me, after we'd been drinkin' a little rum."

"Yes," Goare said in a flat voice, staring, "maybe I forget—telling you. But not the rest."

"The rest I guess you'll never forget," Soemel said, squatting down in the sand with the pistol loose in his hand now. "That's what I figured, and why I come here, like this. Because I want to pull a job, like I said, and I want you with me on it, and your pal, Boyan, and maybe fifty more guys like you. Tough babies. You know Huerteros, over in Manacapa?"

"The guy who's dictator and president?"

"The guy who's been running the country for thirty years; yeah. He's gettin' old, and tired. Manacapa ain't getting to look so good to him anymore, and a place like Paris, or New York, is

beginning to look a whole lot better. But, what bothers this guy, Huerteros, is getting out of his own country. Because he's got around to where he wants to get out of there bad, and the folks don't want to see him go. In fact, the folks would blow his top off first, if they don't blow it off anyhow, pretty soon. They figure he might'a stole some o' their dough, somewhere, sometime. So they watch every plane pulling out, and every ship, and there's that poor old guy and nobody to get him out of the place. Nobody but a guy named Soemel."

Goare nodded at him, narrow-eyed.

"Go on," he said.

"It ain't much. It's really easy. Because I got that lousy old ship of mine, and there ain't no good reason why you and I, with the ship, couldn't get Boyan and fifty more of the best fighting babies from one of these Frenchy prison camps. Then, we kind of ooze over to Manacapa, and we get Huerteros out."

"How?" Goare asked, his hands held tensely before him.

"I been down in Manacapa since I dumped you here," said Soemel evenly. "I been talkin' with this old crook, Huerteros. He tells me trade ain't so good in Manacapa, or anywhere, freight rates and cargoes bein' what they are. He feels so sorry for me he gives me five thousand bucks gold, if I'll go and buy half a dozen sub-machine guns, and some rifles, pick up some tough guys, and then come back, and pick him up. Those folks down there in his place ain't going to suspect him, tryin' to slide out on a slow old ship like mine, and, even if they do, you and me, and the fifty tough boys with the sub-machine guns and some rifles, ought to get him out of the town. Him and three, four of his friends. Fifty thousand in gold for that is the price that goes to us when he's landed on the dock in Panama or Havana."

"With the cops," Goare slowly said, "waiting behind all the national artillery for us on the dock, in either place."

Soemel tilted his head aside in the sunlight and laughed at him.

"Wait a minute, will ya? You was born and brought up out here, in the islands; you know this place. You oughta know that you and me can anchor easy in my ship off the coast in French Guiana, land in a boat, get back in the bush to that wood-camp where your pal is if he's alive, and bring him and fifty more out. What's half a dozen Frenchy guards going to do against you and me and a couple of machine-guns? What's that greaser army over in Manacapa going to do against you and me and fifty boys with them same guns and some rifles?

"Then, what's going to stop us beating it off from Manacapa to this island you come from, Tiamba, and putting you and the rest of the escaped boys ashore there? There ain't nobody left alive on Tiamba now, not a soul. The hurric'ne last year tore the crops all to hell, and the last folks got out and went to the other islands. Fifty of you birds, armed with the guns I'd leave you, and you knowing the island as you do, should be able to duck any law they'd send after you until you could build a boat and go where the hell ever you felt like—having twenty-five thousand in gold, as your pay-off for springing Huerteros, to splice between you. Then I'd dump old Huerteros where I'd want, any time or place I'd want, and pick up my own share of the dough."

Soemel stopped, sweat beads glinting on his flat, low brow. He swabbed them off with thick fingertips, turned and pointed to the small boat, completely submerged in the surf, now, even the stub mast tilted over into the combers and hidden from sight.

"Nobody ain't ever called Luke Soemel an angel," he said. "But nobody ain't ever called me a dumb-head either. My hooker's lyin' over here at the coal docks at Port Royal. Walkin' easy, I can get back along the reef here an'

aboard her right after dark, nobody seein' me go through the town. After dark, if you was to work quick, you could dump the water out of that boat o' mine, right her and be all set when I bring the ship along out here, to sea. You'd know her, wouldn't you, even in the dark, could sail out alongside her?"

"I should," Goare said, unsmiling.

"All right. Then, without even slowin' down, we heave you a line from the ship, we bring you and the boat aboard, and none of these nosey guys around here is any wiser. Then we head for Guiana. It's you and me from then on, and them other guys. We're partners. We're partners now; you want to shake?"

Goare spoke and moved only after a long moment of silence, a moment in which many memories and echoes of old dreams flickered glancing through his brain, and he called back to him Vladimir Boyan's fevered and haggard face, the Russian's forcedly gay, soft voice when he had last seen him and said good-by to him before he had slipped off into the blackness of the Guianan night and toward what, then, had seemed like certain freedom.

"Yes," he said, holding his hand out, "we shake, and we're partners. Give me that boat plug, then shove off!"

A TIGHT kind of smile was at Goare's mouth, a desire for laughter was in his throat as he waded up through the last of the coastal mud and stood on the beach in the absolute blackness of the Guianan night. Beside him, Soemel stood wide-legged, intently staring and listening, a light Spandau auto-rifle, identical to the one he held, gripped across his thigh.

Behind him, advancing up from the boat which had brought them in from Soemel's ship and now held the pick of Soemel's rough neck crew in waiting, was Karnoupoli, the Greek ex-gunrunner who served the ship as mate and sole deck watch-officer. Karnoupoli bore another light Spandau in his hands, and rifles, Spanish and German Mausers, hung by their sling-straps from his shoulders, as they did from the shoulders of Goare and Soemel.

Where, and how, Soemel had got those guns, Goare did not know. But it was a packet of hell, Goare thought swiftly, again eying those two men who were his companions, a packet which within half an hour he was going to hand to some of the guards who had made this place here hell for other men.

He turned a little aside, whispering to Soemel and the saturnine, catlike Greek:

"Follow me, right on up through here. The camp is smack on the Cayenne road. There's only six guards, and, as I told you, the next camp is ten kilometers away. When we get there, when I'm set, I'll make a noise; I want those guards to be awake, and up yelling, to give me a target for this nice little piece of pipe. When we've dusted the guards off, I'll go in and pick out the guys we want after I've found Boyan; I know them all —I worked and lived with them for two years. You guys stay back, and cover me. And only hand out rifles to the men I name; once those monkeys know there's a break on, they'll all want to come along. You savvy? O. K. We go."

For just an instant more he paused, to look back over his shoulder at Soemel's old, small and dirty ship where she lay at anchor a mile off the coastal mud bank, to take a directional bearing from her and the dim white flick of the North Star. Then he swung and strode forward and up into the weird, tearing tangle of the mangroves and first jungle brush.

How long he and the two men who closely followed him went through that, he did not know. To him, thinking of Boyan, thinking of the gun he carried in his hands, it seemed a very long time. Afterward, he knew that it could not

have been more than twenty-five minutes at the utmost.

Then he and Soemel and the Greek came forth quite abruptly into an open kind of savannah where Guiana grass grew waist-high and a thin pallor of starshine lay. And right across the savannah, not fifty yards away from where he and the other two stood, was the white loom of the faded, rotted tents of the convict camp.

On the other side of that, he knew, was the road which was pompously called by the French officials Colonial Route Number One, and was supposed to connect Cayenne, the capital, with the port of Saint Laurent on the Maroni, but in thirty years had not progressed thirty miles. Again, he smiled, then, tight-lipped, staring, strode on through the swaying, tugging grass.

Half-way through it, he stopped. He balanced the auto-rifle lovingly in his hands. In a loud and clear voice that slashed sharply across the soft night jungle sounds, he called out. He called two or three of the camp guards by name, describing them briefly as filth and worse than filth. Then, laughing now, he called Vladimir Boyan's name, adding:

"Hey, Russian! Roll out! Hit the floor! *C'est bien moi, ton copain*—Goare!"

In the camp, a kerosene flare at a tent door licked up a flash of light. Figures showed vaguely there, figures dressed in white and wearing white helmets. Convicts wore gray canvas, and wide straw heats; guards wore white, and helmets.

"With love and kisses!" Goare shouted, and let the Spandau go from the hip.

He walked forward as he fired, using quick, sure bursts of no more than six or eight rounds at a time, right on through the high grass. Bullets cracked back past him, voices challenged and cursed, then were still. The guards who still lived, he told himself, had got religion, and no more showed themselves in their white uniforms against the dark jungle background. He laughed hoarsely at them. He was at the corner of the first row of tents now.

A guard lay twisted there, his head upflung awkwardly in death. That one had been named Maligny, recalled Goare, and his personal petty racket had been the holding out of quinine and medicines from the camp store and their later sale in Saint Laurent. He spurned the body with his bare heel as he passed.

"Hey, Boyan!" he called recklessly out again. "Come out—you crazy Russian!"

From a tent wing a Ruby revolver flamed in rapid discharge at him. A slug whipped off one of the rifles he carried slung from his shoulders, splashed his neck with a stinging spray of lead particles. Instantly, the Spandau leapt roaring in his hands. The guard walked forward as though mysteriously drawn by death. It was Creuniche, the head guard of the camp, and death had caught him in his underdrawers and shirt. His hands were held against his stomach where the Spandau burst had got him, and he screamed in recognition at Goare before he tipped over and down slowly.

Past him, Goare looked into the tent where he had emerged. It was the infirmary tent: a candle in a globe burned there. On a filthy cot, a small and delicately molded man with great, dark eyes and a pale golden beard was reeling up to his feet.

"How are you, kid?" Goare asked in English.

Boyan could not help laugh at him.

"Better," he said, "you thick head! Creuniche just came in to get me now; I'd been slobbering in the fever that you'd come back and spring me. So I kicked him in the pan, just before he drew a line on me, and just before you shouted out a second time. Give me one of those guns!"

"Have two," Goare told him. "I want to rub out the rest of the guards."

"They're gone. Creuniche ordered them to beat it back in the bush as soon

as he heard your little number. Creuniche was the last one, and all he wanted was to make good his promise and knock me off before he went. Come on; let's get out of here. I've seen enough of this joint!"

"Wait a minute!"

With Boyan at his shoulder, Goare stopped at the door of the tent. Wild howls, animal cries and curses rose about them and a weird maze of faces and bodies, the several hundred convicts of the camp, veered out of the darkness upon them.

"I want fifty guys from here," Goare said.

"For what, in the name of a name?" Boyan barked at him.

"For a job," said Goare, smiling wryly. "For—" the phrase had suddenly come to him and pleased him—"the devil's crew!"

He advanced a pace or so from the door of the tent. He turned the Spandau sidewise in his hands so that the light from the candle behind slid glinting upon it, and those half-insane men before him could fully see it.

"Be still, you!" he bawled at them. "Hold up! You know me—Goare, and all the lice are dead or gone now. Reygand—you there? All right, step out! Come up here, beside us; take that piece from Boyan. Juneux! *Viens, toi*—up beside Reygand!"

From the milling, stumbling, craning crowd, the two men tore themselves forth. They were both ex-colonial soldiers, broad and big men, calm and certain in their movements and reactions even now. From Boyan, and then from him, Goare, they took spare rifles, fondled the bolts lovingly and suggestively in their hard hands. To them, low-voiced, Goare said:

"I want some more guys. I'll call out their names and tell them to step out. I can't take all these. Shoot any man in the legs who jumps without being called. There's more cartridges in my pockets. Now, you!"

Cold and swift in the knowledge of his necessity for speed and the presence of Soemel and the other armed man over there on the edge of the savannah, he called forth the convicts he wanted one by one. He did not hesitate, knew he could not; called out the healthiest, the strongest and the toughest, leaving, as well as he could, the weak, the slow and the truly criminal.

Three or four times, once in a concerted rush, many of the others broke towards him and the men around him, recognizing if not understanding in his calm choosing that if they were not called, they would be left behind. But Boyan and the two other armed ex-soldiers shot low right into that mass at once, and drove it back, and then Soemel and the mate, Karnoupoli, were there, yelling forth in warning also, making a display of their auto-rifles and giving out their shouldered weapons to the other chosen men.

With the picked fifty standing in a solid square, the armed men asking them on the outside, Goare yelled at Soemel:

"Start them going! Get them down to the beach and on their way to the ship! I'll take care of these other guys!"

Then slowly backing, he and Boyan followed after. Strangely, a silence had fallen upon those left behind. They stood dully gaping, shambling. Only the few men who had been shot through the legs during the rush cried out. That group's complete and somehow awful silence made Goare stop, made the moisture of tears rise surprisingly against his eyelids and brought a kind of soft thickness to his speech when he chose to speak to them.

"I'm sorry," he said, knowing that they would curse him forever for the words. "You guys—you guys have got to stay. This is no *fête champêtre*—no picnic. I can't take you all. But, the bush is there, and you'll find a few guns

and chew that those rats, the guards, left. Beat it, before they're back on you." He straightened fully up; he tried to make his voice finally loud, and gay. "Good luck, *mes braves!*"

After that, he did not look clearly at them again, did not have to, for none of them now tried to follow, and he was thankful that Boyan was at his side, was weak from the fever still, needed his arm and attention in support through the savannah and the brush leading to the sea.

Once, when they stood nervously upon the muddy, mangrove-strewn beach watching the dawn light leap up across the sky and the ship's boat come back a final time for them, Boyan spoke to him.

"That's the worst bit of business," he said very slowly, almost in a whisper, "that you, or I, will ever have to do. But, there was only one way of doing it, and you used that. But, what's the job, *copain?*"

Goare stared from him out across the flat sea at the small and rusted, filthy ship where the fifty he had chosen jammed against the 'midships rail and gazed shoreward still in rapt, dazed astonishment.

"The job," he said, "is no better, I guess, than the one we just got through with. But, I promised, when I beat it, that I'd be back and get you out. This was the one style I had of doing it; this, and the job, will be the price. But, wait until we're out on the ship, soldier, wait until I've had a drink and this place is astern, before I tell you about the job."

"I've got a gun in my hands," Boyan said slowly, "and I'm with you; that's just about enough."

Goare shook his head, and his smile was bitter, and strained.

"Guy, you're going to need that piece more than you ever needed any gun before. Me—I don't know; from now on, I think I've just bought us a piece of bad luck. You, and the fifty boys out there—the guys from hell."

EVEN Soemel himself did not know the exact age of that ship he owned and commanded, or where she had been built. But as the dawn widened over the sea he turned on his bridge and looked at Goare and Boyan where they stood beside him and said in his cracked, strange voice:

"Don't worry about this one. She's dirty, sloppy topside, but not down below-decks. And she can make knots. We're outside colonial waters now, and anyhow they ain't got no ship to send after us, even if they knew we was the ship that did the job. Tomorrow afternoon, late, we ought to raise Manacapa and go in alongside an hour or so before dark—right alongside the dock, I mean. So—" he stared at Goare and with a brief gesture of a sloped shoulder indicated the fore-deck below—"whyn't you talk with your boys, and tell 'em a little of what it's all about? Tell 'em, too, when you're through with 'em they can lay aft to the galley and draw their chow, and that tomorrow, when we go ashore, there'll be a good rifle for each man, and a good snort o' rum first. Later, when you and me and yer pal here have had a chance to parlay it out, you can tell each guy his job, in detail.

"Yeah," Goare said slowly.

He had swung around. With his forearms propped upon the paint-spattered gray canvas of the furled wind-dodger, he was gazing down at the fore-deck and his weirdly, fiercely chosen collection of recruits. They sat on the Number Two hatch, silent, weary, or too bemused still by the suddenly, unexpected facts of freedom to speak aloud. But many of them had been staring up at the bridge, watching him and Boyan and Soemel, and now, as he faced them, the old soldier, Reygand, called out in a sharp voice:

"Attention! Garde à vous!"

The habit of their prison discipline was deep in them, and almost all at one time or another had done active military service. More than two score of them at once leapt to their feet at Reygand's words, whacked their heels together, pulled their heads up and their hands straight at their sides. Quickly Goare smiled down at them.

"*En repos,*" he told them. "Take it easy. You've had enough of that where you just came from. Later on, we'll be using some of that, but not now. Because I want you guys for a job, and on it you're going to take your orders from me, and from Boyan, here, and from that man who's standing on the other side of Boyan. He's the skipper of this ship. He's the guy who slipped me from Paramaribo when I sprung myself, and he's the guy who brought me back, and helped me spring you guys. Without him and his ship, you wouldn't be here. Just keep that in the back of your noggins all the time from now on.

"Because tomorrow the skipper here is putting his ship into Manacapa. We're going ashore and bringing aboard a lad named Huerteros. He's the president, and a lot of the folks, a lot of the army, maybe won't want him to leave. That's our job—to see he does. We get twenty-five thousand, American gold, when he's safe aboard.

"That's the end of our detail; that washes us up. Then Soemel's going to put us all ashore up on Tiamba, in the Windwards. There's nobody on Tiamba now; the hurricane cleaned them all out. I know; I used to live there. And I know no cops are going to come and get us out of there until we want to go, because there's a cliff eighty feet high right around the whole place, and we'll have the guns and gear to keep 'em from doing that.

"Tomorrow, when we go ashore in Manacapa, each of you guys will have a decent rifle, and a good chow first. That's all, for now. Except Reygand and Juneux are going to be sergeants over you guys and break you up into two platoons. If any of you want to crack tough and not obey them, or start swiping stuff around the ship, I'll handle you, if they can't. And you know me.

"Now, lay aft to the galley and draw your chow. Clean food is something most of you birds haven't seen in years; I hope you like it."

They laughed and cursed joyously at him when he was silent, they made bawdy prison gestures of approval and pleasure. But when the two big, hard and competent professional ex-soldiers, Reygand and Juneux, told them to stand and fall in one by one in two groups of platoons, they obeyed instantly and quietly, a few of them even saluting with semi-mock gravity. Then, in fairly compact ranks of double file, Reygand and Juneux leading them, they swung off down the deck to draw their rations, their hard, bare feet smacking evenly in time on the deck. "*Nom de nom!*" said Boyan low-voiced at Goare's side. "The first clean whiff of freedom does things to them. They're men again."

Goare had wheeled, was gazing narrow-eyed at him.

"You," he said swiftly, "you'd like to see them marching to bugles, and behind a flag. And be leading them. Going to—"

"—Places you and I, or they, will never see again," the Russian broke softly in upon him. "'*Cré pipe!* But, I admit it—the old dreams die hard. All of us, we're alive, though, and free, and that for now is enough. And that, as I begin to see it, soldier, is about the only good part of this job."

The big, gaunt American shook his head at him.

"There's some old crack I read in a book once, about beggars and horses. But, to hell with that. And come on, we go eat; Soemel's got chow and maps in there in the chart-room. For a guy who's

had a bout of the fever, you're doing pretty well. But, me, when I'm through with the charts and chow, I'll want some sleep, myself."

Karnoupoli, the Greek mate, was beside the binnacle in the little wheel-room, checking the compass as the big, bullet-headed and half-naked Negro sailor at the wheel changed course. He looked up and smiled at them as they passed.

"T'at's t'e way to handle 'em," he said in his almost lisping voice to Goare. "T'e trained white mice fer t'e Manacapa cheese, hey?"

"Tougher than mice and a hell of a sight tougher than cheese," Goare told him; there was something in the Greek's eyes and the formation and expression of the man's face he could never get to like. "But, they're 'trained', all right."

SOEMEL sat upon the puffy, cracked leather of the settee along the after side of the tiny chart-room, busily wolfing down food from a stacked tin tray, a pile of charts and coastal maps before him on the deck. Silently, he pointed to the food, did not speak to them until all of it and the coffee in the big pot were gone.

"Here's Manacapa," he said then, picking up one of the charts from the deck and holding it out between his greasy fingers. "Here's the port. We warp to the dock there. The Presidential Palace is here, on the plaza. That's six minutes, fast going, on foot, from the dock, and two minutes pretty fast going in a car; I timed it when I was there. Our old school chum, Huerteros, will be in the palace. Him and his pals."

"What pals?" asked Boyan in a soft, easy voice.

Slowly, from the outstretched chart, Soemel stared over at him. "The three or four guys who ha' been in it with him, reefin' the country of all its jack. The minister o' finance, the general o' the army, the head o' the national bank. You know, they all been crammin' it pretty hard, and when Huerteros goes, they all want t' slide along, too; stayin' behind, for them, would just be askin' for general lead poisonin' from the public."

"Then, maybe, too," Goare said in much the same sort of voice Boyan had just used, "Huerteros doesn't trust your tender mercies much."

Soemel tilted aside his head and roared with laughter.

"You boys ain't dumb," he said. "Thank God."

But Boyan sat studying him grave-eyed and intently.

"This bird Huerteros isn't going to try to bring any of his loot in cash with him, is he?"

"Not that I know; no," Soemel said, serious also now. "An' he'd be one big sap if he did. I don't think he's that dumb."

"All right," Goare told him. "He certainly would be a sap, if he did. So get along, about the details of this trip from the palace."

"It's like I said,' Soemel said. "We can figure two minutes running time, if they'll let a car through. There's only one street going down to the docks and it's pretty narrow. They might try to block it, flip a piece of dynamite, or a hand grenade, and rip the pavement all to hell, so's a car would have to stop."

"Can this guy Huerteros and his pals run?" Goare asked, leaning forth to take and light one of Soemel's cigarettes.

Soemel smiled a little bit.

"Huerteros's fat, an' he's old, but he'll run—with bullets at one end and champagne an' caviar in Paris at the other. He'll run, if he has to, and us, and his pals, will see that the does. That's the last and best job they got to do down in that country, havin' already hauled all the loose dough out of it."

"Yeah," Goare said unsmiling. "Simple arithmetic and faith in you should keep those guys shuffling. But, trust or

no trust—after the job is done you're taking us to Tiamba Island, and you're putting us ashore there. That's the one thing we want, that and a few of your guns to hunt and to protect ourselves with, after we land. But, no double-crossing in between. And, we mean just that—no double-crossing. No matter what happened in Manacapa, no matter what kind of crooks Huerteros and his gang have been, if they're knocked off out to sea aboard your ship, that's mass murder, and most any government will hold you for it. After all, when Huerteros gets out of there, he'll still be the incumbent president, and the guys with him will be his cabinet officers."

Soemel wagged his thickly shaped head at him.

"That's smart talk," he said. "Huerteros had talk just like that when I seen him last. That's why I figured on you boys. If there's dirty work to be done over there tomorrow, you'll do it—I won't. I won't fire a shot, unless they come right up and blast at me, close. And, out to sea, between Manacapa and Tiamba, I'll pay you boys off with your split of the price. Then I'll land you. Then I'll bring Huerteros and his lads into port, and collect my price.

"If there was any shooting, any rough stuff with the army or the folks down in Manacapa, you guys, a bunch of escaped convicts, did it, and you're gone. Where, I don't know, and Huerteros and no other guy aboard this ship is going to know, and I'll have good reason for not knowin'. I'm just an old *amigo* of Huerteros, and brung him out of his country when he wanted to be brung.

"So now, let's talk about how we slip you boys ashore, and how we fix it up so they can line up along the street between the plaza and the dock. Th' reception committee for th' farewell committee; you know."

"Yeah," Goare said, his eyes hard, his mouth drawn, "I'm beginning to get the idea."

During that further and complete discussion of details, the little, quiet-faced Russian, Boyan, said practically nothing, just sat on his corner of the settee, listening to Soemel and to Goare. But when, finally, Soemel had brought forth a bottle of rum from a locker and toasted them and himself, and they had gone down from the bridge toward the rooms assigned to them in the main-house, Boyan spoke in a low and even voice to the American:

"It's smooth, all this, soldier. Almost too smooth to be right. There's a lot of brains behind it, and all of them aren't Soemel's; a lot of 'em must belong to this lad, Huerteros. After all, he didn't make his money picking pennies out of gutters. And, what I'm afraid of is not the job in the town, but the job after, out to sea."

Goare had stopped in the broad, white sunlight of the deck and stood looking at him.

"That's it," he said. "But, all we can do is stick along and play it now—play it as it comes."

THE open sea was astern. The passage they ran through now was called the Boca Chica, the "little mouth," and the blunt bow of the ship pointed up almost constantly into the red, wide eye of the westering sun as the Greek, Karnoupoli, in command on the bridge, conned the course expertly between the coral reefs and the steep green beauty of the jutting headlands. On the forecastle-head and the poop, Soemel's crew walked about quite calmly, getting out the mooring lines.

"We'll be in there in about half an hour now," Goare said in a slow voice.

He stood beside Boyan in the sunlight on the little midships deck, where they had been working most of the day cleaning and inspecting the sub-machine guns and the rifles which they had just

finished issuing to the fifty men of Goare's legion.

"So," Boyan answered him. With small, easy movements, he was combing out his soft beard. "Do you think these guys will be all right, though, up in the town?"

"Yes; sure. Nearly all of them want only one thing: freedom. They know; they've been through it, and they want to go on the straight now. But, you'll be with them the whole time in town, and I'll be with this other guy."

"Soemel?"

"*Exacte.* I wouldn't trust him with the corners off a loaf of bread. I'm going to go right up to the palace with him, and all the way back. I don't want any fancy work hung on us now."

"Where is he," asked Boyan quietly, "right now? That Greek number is navigating the ship."

Goare reached down, and lifted from against the hatch coaming the sub-machine gun he had taken as his own.

"I told him," he said to Boyan, already moving forward towards an alleyway, "to keep completely away from those lads of ours, and to keep all of his crew away. Up until now he's done it."

"Up until now," Boyan echoed, shrugging a little as he followed the big American swiftly along the alleyway forward.

THE fifty from Devil's Island sat upon or stood about Number Two hatch, engaged in obeying Goare's last order to them and effacing the big, black prison numbers from their canvas jumpers and trousers or working out various methods to conceal beneath their clothing the weapons just rationed them. But two or three of them stood at an after corner of the deck, up against the bulwark and removed from the rest. Soemel stood with that smaller group, and was talking to it with low-pitched but vehement sentences, and the eyes of the men there widened, shone as they listened.

Only one of that group, Bou Kader, an Algerian who had once been a *goumier* in the Saharan Camel Corps, looked up immediately as Goare and the Russian came along the deck towards them. The Algerian's thin, flat lips worked, he turned his hawk face obliquely aside and whispered to Soemel. The bow-legged and heavy man wheeled around at once then, and smiled.

"How are you, gents?" he asked them. "But you babies have seen a lot of war and battlin'; you ain't at all excited."

"I'm quivering like a girl," Goare said, his eyes and face grave. "And as curious. What were you talking to the lads about, Soemel?"

"Nothin'," Soemel said easily. "Nothin' at all. Tellin' them how the town lays, and just how we're goin' to pull th' job."

"I've already told them that," Goare said. "And I've told you to stay away from them, and keep your crew away from them. And, you promised you would—you rat!"

"Listen!" Soemel said. His voice was harshened with anger and he scowled as he spoke. "Pipe down with them kind of words, guy! I'm runnin' this ship and this job. Who the hell brought you here?"

"'Listen', me neck!" Goare said.

Soemel carried a big Webley & Scott revolver prominently in his hip pocket, and his hand began to clamp back towards it. With his left hand, Goare held out to Boyan the sub-machine gun he carried; with his right hand, he hit Soemel full in the mouth.

He knocked him spinning and around and almost down. He followed after and struck him three more times before Soemel gave up the idea of pulling the gun. He kicked him as he lay upon the deck and laughed at him.

"Get up," he said, "you thick and lying donkey! Before I kick your nose

through your ears. That's it! Stand there!"

From him, for a fractional instant, Goare looked at Bou Kader, the Algerian, and the two other convicts.

"That's just a little idea," he said to them in French, "of what you'll get—and this swipe here will get—if any one of you tries any odd business. The job's going to be done the way I told you, and no other way. I'll see it's done that way, and if I don't, Boyan will, or Reygand, or Juneux. No cheap crook is going to spoil all our chances of real freedom."

His head swung; he looked back, at Soemel.

"You understand French, flap-ears," he said to him. "You were talking French to these mugs when I came up the deck. So, you savvy what I told them. Try anything like it again—and I won't shoot you; I'll just slap your face in with my two hands. Understood?"

Soemel was spitting blood and trying to smile.

"You win that one," he said hoarsely. "But, you got me wrong; we're all in on this job together. If one guy starts pulling a phoney, none of it will work. Mind you, American, I ain't saying you're right, for poking me, and I ain't saying I'm forgetting it, either. But, we got other things to do now."

He gestured with a hairy hand over the side and toward the bow.

Swinging widely, her old, worn engines thumping with a tremoring beat against the tide rip, the ship had just turned another headland and the ancient, closely piled, lemon-colored city lay before them. From the bridge, where he had finished sending aloft the pilot flag on the halyards, Karnoupoli leaned forth to curse at them in a high, strained voice.

"You are a pack of stupid dogs!" he told them. "Standing there and yapping over something that is nothing now! In a couple of minutes, from the pilot boat or from the town, they will be able to see your collection of daisies there. Get them off the decks, *nombre de dios!* Hide them—as you said! Get the American and the Russian off the deck, too. Or are you all nuts?"

Goare, Boyan and Soemel laughed at him in the same instant.

"You make savvy!" the American called back at him, then turned and was calling out at the fifty craning and nervously taut men.

"Yank the corner of that tarpaulin loose off the hatch!" he ordered them. "Haul a couple of hatch-boards off and beat it down in the hold. Stay all together, in the topside 'tween-decks, and stay quiet, until I yank the hatch open again and call down to you. Then come up fast, for then we go! *Allez vous en!*"

They moved swiftly at the whipped sound of his voice, ducking from sight of the shore and the pilot boat beneath the barrier of the bulwark, sliding rapidly down the ladder into the hold through a corner of the hatch. When the last of them had gone grinning and softly cursing down, Goare and Boyan pulled the hatch-boards and the tarpaulin back into place, ran for the shelter of the forecastle themselves. On the bridge, where he had just arrived panting, Soemel was shouting in surprisingly fluent and polite Spanish at the men coming alongside in the pilot launch.

From the darkness of the stuffy forecastle, their guns held hard in their hands, Goare and the quiet little Russian watched the pilot come up over the side and mount to the bridge, to stand conversing smilingly there with Soemel and Karnoupoli as he conned the ship in towards the dock.

"So far, you're right," Boyan whispered to the American. "That *pilote* has accepted Soemel's Jamaican clearance papers, and if he suspects anything, he has not said a word about it, and shows nothing. But, a few pieces of gold, of this man's gold, would do the trick for him."

"That's it," Goare answered him in the same kind of a whisper. "And that's probably it for the customs guards and inspectors, too. The hand, so far, has played right."

Then both he and the Russian were silent, crouching in waiting. A winch was turning thumping over on the forecastle heads. Yells were exchanged between the ship and the dock as Soemel's nondescript crew got the lines ashore and made fast. The pilot, one of Soemel's bad cigars in the side of his mouth, came clattering down the ladders and went down over the side on the accommodation ladder some of the sailors lowered for him. On the bridge, Soemel gave an order, and the Greek rang off the engines. Then, grinning, he and Karnoupoli, with one last, searching look toward the outspread city beyond, came down on deck.

GOARE and Boyan met them by the forecastle door.

"Smooth," Soemel said, still grinning, "smooth as silk. There's a couple of guards, *douaneros*, on the dock, but they're both asleep with their feet turned up. There's a sentry, a soldier, out at the gate, but he's alone, and he's a stupid Indian, wouldn't know how to fire his gun if you showed him. And *señor el pilote* said everything is quiet in the town—as quiet as the grave. So, call that pack of wolves of yours, and we'll go. Karnoupoli and my lads are going to stay here, aboard. They've got a few pieces of stuff, so they can cover us up if we get in a jam coming back. You, American—" his pale eyes flickered up at Goare's face—"want to go with me up to the palace, hey?"

"That's right. Boyan will stay with the men; he'll be in charge of them."

"All right," Soemel made a shrugging gesture. "But, can you walk all right, with that gun jammed down inside your pant's leg?"

"When I can't, I'll tell you. Go let the lads out, Boyan!"

They came up into the sunlight from the darkness of the hatch blinking and staring about them, then laughing as they saw how Goare and the Russian had hidden their guns inside their wide, baggy canvas trousers.

"You try some of the same," Goare said to them at once. "You see that street up there? It's the Calle de la Marina, and it leads straight to the plaza and the palace. Soemel and I are bound there now. We'll be six—seven—minutes getting there. Soemel says he talked with the president last night by radio, and he should be all set to shove off. So, we should be out of the palace in another five minutes.

"If we don't show up in another ten, come and get us, or if you hear firing, come and get us. If that gets too tough, or Boyan tell you, or Reygand or Juneux, beat it for the ship and get to hell out of here. As I say, Boyan's in command of you, and then Reygand and Juneux.

"You know how to stand in the street, while you're waiting for us, and how to hide your guns. And don't fire a shot until you have to. Get that? All right—we'll be seeing you!"

Walking stiff-legged, as though with a limp from some infirmity, Goare turned from them and started for the rail and and the ladder, Soemel at his side. That far, Boyan walked behind, then to reach up and quickly take the American's hand in a hard, sharp clasp.

"Good luck, baby!" Goare told him.

Boyan gave him a short smile.

"Play them as though you had them!" he said. "But when the heat goes on, we'll be there."

On the dock, the two customs guards again lay slumped in sleep upon coffee sacks, their dirty uniform caps over their faces against the sun and flies. They did not stir or do more than snore as Goare and Soemel strode swiftly past them and

into the cool length of the cargo shed. But the young Indian soldier on sentry-duty at the gate outside was busily pacing back and forth, his carbine carried tightly on his shoulder, and he must have seen the merged shadows of the fifty led by Boyan, moving in the cargo shed behind. Because, at once, he turned as the American and Soemel came toward him, and brought his piece from his shoulder into his hands. Goare and the shipmaster seemed to fail to see that until they were right up to him.

"*Buenos dias,*" Soemel said pleasantly. "*Muchissimo calor, si?*"

"*Buenos—*" began the sentry slowly, then saw the blow Soemel was starting for his jaw, and tried to duck and bring his carbine around.

Soemel had his big revolver out in his hand, hit him a slanting blow across the forehead and temples with it. The soldier went down and flat with a kind of gasping, coughing sound.

"We go," said Soemel, after he had looked keenly around him across the cobbled open space they now stood in. It was the fish market, and in this hour of siesta, deserted except for a sleeping negro woman in a far booth and two skinny dogs.

"Right," Gore answered him, striding forward, but then, ten paces farther on, to slow up, look quickly back.

Boyan and the fifty were at the door of the cargo shed now. They had come upon the unconscious sentry and had hauled him back into the shadows, were slowly moving out in a loose, easy formation.

The Calle de la Marina was a narrow and arched way, deep in shadows, strongly reminiscent for Goare of many of the streets in the North African towns he had known. Along its lower end, toward the docks, were small shops and drinking places, all closed now and heavily shuttered during the siesta hours. But closer to the plaza it widened out, so that one automobile could race alongside another for a certain distance, and several shops and cafes were already open there, and Goare saw men in uniform, soldiers and police, lounging inside.

But then he and Soemel were at the palm-lined plaza with its typical white-washed iron bandstand and cast bronze statue of Bolivar. And past the narrow boles of the palm trees on the far side, they could see the fiercely gleaming white roccoco marble of the palace.

"Five minutes—here," Soemel said. He had his big, ornate gold watch in his hand. "You walk fast for a man who has a machine-gun as a seam for his pants leg, American."

"And I want to ride back, with that in my hands," Goare said softly.

"You will," Soemel croaked at him, stepping rapidly across the dried, scuffed grass of the plaza at his side. "See the big car there, right at the steps? That's our chum's. And the lad behind the wheel works for him, and for nobody else."

The man behind the wheel of that car, Goare saw, as he and Soemel passed it and went on up the wide marble steps of the palace, wore a conventional chauffeur's uniform, but his swart, dark face was that of the trained, studied killer, and he wore a big German automatic strapped right up against his shoulder, where he could reach it with one hand, and still drive.

"This must be a nice place to live in," the American admitted aloud to Soemel, feeling very calm, very certain and somehow gay now.

"But never very healthy," Soemel told him. "Even though they usually have about a dozen sentries and a couple of motorcycle cops here, around the steps, and they've got none now."

"But that big bar, down there at the beginning of the Calle de la Marina," Goare said softly, "seemed to have an awful lot of uniforms in it—cops and army officers. And, while it won't do you a damn' bit of good to look back now,

a car as big and as fast as that one down at the curb just turned into the plaza. Loaded with guys in uniform. So where will we find your chum?"

They reached the top of the steps, were before the plate glass and bronze front doors of the palace. Wooden, brightly striped sentry-boxes faced them on each side, both empty.

"Right here," Soemel said, all the forced calmness gone from his voice, the words thick and rushed. "He said he would be right here. If he—"

"Pipe down!" Goare barked at him. "There he is; he's coming!"

A WHOLLY involuntary smile lifted at his mouth and eyes as he saw Huerteros. The man was rapidly pushing through the doors toward them. Huerteros was a tall man, at one time must have been considered handsome. Now his great, fat frame was sagged with worry and undue, unaccustomed haste, and his broad, heavy face, which bore plainly the crossed strains of his Spanish, Indian and Negro blood, was the color of a dirty white silk handkerchief, his little, dark eyes protuberant, gleaming.

For some reason, a reason Goare was never able to understand, he was dressed as though going to an official reception; he wore a silk hat jammed down upon his heavy, cone-shaped skull, a high collar and a puffed silk cravat of many colors, a cutaway coat and striped trousers, pointed patent leather shoes that had mother-of-pearl buttons and red leather uppers.

In one hand, he carried a huge Gladstone bag that already was beginning to tear loose from its handle because of the weight within it; his other hand was inside his coat, and upon the butt of the pistol that Goare knew he carried there.

"You are ready?" he snapped at Soemel in Spanish. He was staring around the plaza as he spoke, then swiftly at Goare. "Who is this man?"

"One of my *muchachos*," Soemel said harshly. "Come on—let's get out of here! I've got fifty more of them down the street."

"Wait!" Huerteros had turned his head to look back into the palace, his gun half drawn from its holster, but the three men who had been grouped there with him were already following.

One of them, a small, broad man with full Indian blood, was in a red and black uniform studded with gold lace and stars, wore the insignia of a general upon his tunic collar and peaked, plumed képi. The others, like their president, were in formal morning dress, and carried heavily laden bags in both hands. They did not speak, any of that three, or even look more than briefly at Soemel or Goare; they gazed wide-eyed down into the plaza and towards the Calle de la Marina and the harbor. It was Goare who spoke, to Soemel.

"What've these babies got in the bags? Just a little stuff that was left over? Maybe a million, two million, in notes and gold?"

"Listen!" Soemel's voice was ragged-edged with anger. "This ain't no time to make a liar out o' me. Yeah—it's just that: two million in gold and notes they couldn't sneak out. And that's why you're here, an' I'm here. But—"

"I'll take care of all the 'buts', when you try to pull any, here or out to sea." Goare spoke with the auto-rifle yanked up into his hands, his head and knees bent, his lids brought down so that his eyes were nothing but black-glinting slits between. "No wonder you needed fifty tough guys—to get this load out of town, you rat!"

"Listen—" Soemel started to say again, but then the little, dark-faced man in the general's uniform was speaking.

"Look out there," he said in Spanish, to Soemel, to Huerteros and all of them

there on the steps. "Ifnayal is in that car across the plaza. Somehow, he has found that we are going, going this way, now. And—"

Huerteros and the man in the general's uniform were looking at each other; with a whipping motion, Huerteros had his gun out, jerked it up in a commanding gesture toward Soemel.

"Take us!" he said. "Words never matched bullets!"

Soemel did not have time to answer him. Bullets fired from the big car indicated by the general, and from unseen men at the windows of buildings opposite, struck all about them there on the steps. With a whispering sound, the general's gold sword knot was gone, the silk hat whipped from Huerteros's bald, yellow head.

As they ran down the steps, Goare and Soemel pushing Huerteros between them towards that man's car, they could hear the plate glass of the palace doors crash in beneath a huge, concerted volley, right across the spot where an instant ago they had all been standing.

The swarthy, hawk-featured man at the wheel of the car already had the doors open, the motor drumming over; he had the machine in second gear and at close to fifty miles an hour before Goare was fully in and slammed shut the door on that side. Then Goare was unable to do anything but watch the other car, coming around the corner of the plaza on two screaming wheels toward them, and the faces and actions of the men in the car with him. Huerteros was calm now, utterly so, and Soemel and the little general crouched without word, their weapons lifted and steadying upon the target of that other machine.

Farther up into his hands, Goare brought his own auto-rifle, taking a quick glance towards the head of the Calle de la Marina, the one street of exit to the harbor and the ship. It was as he had thought; a line of men, men in the uniforms of the army and the municipal police, stood across the pavement at the head of the street, and rifles and revolvers were held high and ready in their hands.

"If we had same strawberries," Goare whispered, wholly to himself, "we'd have a festival. You sap!"

But then he heard the whickering roar of Soemel's auto-rifle, turned his head and gun muzzle.

The other car was coming directly at them, and at almost the same rate of terrific speed. Jammed at its windows and upon its running boards half a dozen officers in dark uniforms knelt and fired as fast as they could pull triggers. But Soemel's work with an auto-rifle was accurate if not consummate. His lash of lead crested along the hood and then the windshield of the other car.

It smashed biting in death against the man at the wheel. He slid and slumped in his seat; Goare could see his hands come up from the wheel galvanically and go to his smashed face. The men pressed against the windows and on the running boards were jumping or falling; the machine was out of control, beginning to spin like an evilly immense top.

Somewhere in the rear of the car where Goare knelt, a man prayed a few words aloud in cracked Spanish. Then the other car struck them, spinning sideways. Carried along by it, already jolting wildly with its own momentum, their machine in a staggering, spinning sort of rush went three times right around and the screaming of the line of men across the street end was the only sound topped by a whimpering edge of horror.

The gun was almost flung from Goare's hand. He was nearly catapulted through the roof of the car, then flung to the floor, an unknown, galling mass of arms, legs and bodies upon his back and neck. Then, quite subconsciously, he felt the unknown man at the wheel regain command of the machine, the

tires grip and hold, the hurtling course straighten out and take on controlled direction.

There was a constant, shocking series of thuds, like waves beating against the hull of a vessel in a storm, then one final, immense slam, and the arresting of all motion. Suddenly, then, the weight of the others' bodies was gone from his back and neck and he straightened up, shaking the blood from his forehead cuts by broken glass out of his eyes, staring into a strange gloom.

"*Hombre,*" he said, meaning to speak to the driver of the car but unable to hear his own words, "you sure know your business!"

Absolutely reckless and daring, the driver had hammered the machine through the side of that armed line and right into the big bar on the corner of the Calle de la Marina. It had stopped at last squarely up against the rear wall, smashed and twisted tables, chairs and bodies all around and under it. That, Goare saw and understood in one momentary glance. Then he saw Soemel, Huerteros and the others.

They were limned against the light from the street. They were fighting against the group of police and soldiers there, and were trying to get out into the street, down it. Soemel's auto-rifle was already yammering again with a frantic note. Past askew tables and chairs, over smashed and torn bodies, Goare went to join them. In that narrow place, Soemel's gun had done awful work, and the dark-uniformed men in the street had fallen a little back.

THERE was an open space of perhaps a dozen yards where nothing but the bodies of the dead and wounded lay. Out into it, still with the heavy suitcases, the little Indian general and the two men in formal dress moved, in a kind of triangular formation in the protection of which Huerteros walked, reeling now, blood from a head wound splashed down upon his fancy cravat.

Whatever Huerteros had done or not done, Goare thought, going rapidly out into the street and after Soemel where that man fought a rear-guard action of one, those three men about the president had some sort of respect, or reverence, for him. They placed their own lives behind that of Huerteros, as had the driver of the car, who still sat inside there, beneath his wheel, his neck instantly broken when the car hit the wall.

But then, sidewise, Goare stared at Soemel.

"We're lucky, you swab. We're almost through. One more good shove, and we will be."

Soemel was blinking the sweat from his eyelids, changing the grip of his hands upon his hot auto-rifle.

"Lucky is right," he said thickly. "But I got no more shots in this piece, and those guys are coming back for more."

The man was right, Goare saw. Crawling along the cobbles and along the walls of the houses, the last score or so of that group of police and soldiers still came stubbornly after them, firing as they advanced, marking their targets upon the tall form of Huerteros, and upon Soemel and him, here. The cold, cracking breaths of bullets were constantly close about his head. He made a low, cursing, grunting sound in his throat, then called bawling out:

"Boyan! Hey, *la legion!* Come up and take it!"

Then, at once, as Soemel did, he went down flat to his face and stomach on the cobbles, listening to Boyan's raucous, instant answering shout, and the eager thudding of feet as the fifty arrived in their charge. Shooting from the hip, smashing with the butts and barrels of their pieces, Boyan and the first segment of the fifty went lashing by him and Soemel and, watching them, then straightening up and turning, Goare

knew that this, at least, was won now.

Those soldiers and police at the head of the street had made no bargain in their souls for such a grinning, lustfully skillful horde as this, gave back, stubbornly shooting and holding on at first, only at last to turn, drop their guns and run.

Grinning also, Goare swung, his glance obliquely yet on Soemel. Soemel was gazing with a wide stare down the street in the direction Huerteros, the little general and the other two had gone in their odd, close formation. A smashed, violent burst of shots had just broken there. And now, not twenty-five yards away, slumped to his knees and hands, Huerteros crawled, his eyes, his mouth slack, mumbling dimly aloud.

About him, grotesquely tossed in the positions of death, lay the little general in the gaudy uniform, the two strange men in formal dress. But, even now, Huerteros's hands were going out for the handles of the bags those three men had dropped in death, and Soemel and the big ex-soldier, Juneux, were running towards him, lifting him up, and lifting the laden bags up.

Goare turned very slightly where he crouched, to call out. But Boyan also had heard that racketed burst of shots; he was breaking loose from the last bitterly savage knot of soldiers at the street end, came forward at a quick, agile run through the piles of the dead towards him, Goare.

"Soemel," whispered the Russian instantly. "Soemel did that, the dirty *salop'!* Give me that!" He was reaching out for the auto-rifle in Goare's hand.

"No," Goare said to him swiftly. "Not yet—not here. We're not certain yet that Soemel did it. And, see those bags? That's the joker in the pack; Soemel admitted to me, when I gave him a quick interview, up on the palace steps, that they've got two million in notes and gold in them. Two—Soemel and Huerteros—goes a lot more times into two millions than five. And if it was Soemel alone who pulled this one, Huerteros wouldn't be on his feet now."

Those two must hang very close together. A real brother act. But, more than that, we've got to get out of here and aboard that ship, no matter what happens when we get there. And we can't, without Soemel, and without the gold. That Greek mate and the crew have got enough guns to keep us off the ship, if we don't come back with Soemel and the stuff."

He strode forward as he talked in that low, intense voice, the Russian at his side. Soemel was looking up at him, where he had pulled Huerteros to his feet, was shoving him along, towards the ship.

"Some of your wolves knocked off those three *caballeros,*" said Soemel in a high, harsh voice. "Now hell will pop. I thought you had them in hand so they'd obey you."

"No more hell than before," Goare told him, in an even, steady voice. "Not for us. And they'll obey me—watch them!"

He swung, standing straight.

"*Rassemblez!*" he shouted at them. "Pick up your dead and wounded and get back to the ship! Reygand—take ten men and form a rear-guard! *Marche-la, donc!*

Those of the fifty had been standing tending to their wounds and their weapons, or bent over the half dozen of their dead and seriously wounded. Their eyes were somber, their faces gauntly drawn as they heard and obeyed him, and Goare saw that only one man, Bou Kader, smiled, and that Bou Kader, instead of the Mauser rifle issued to him aboard ship, carried a big, blued-steel automatic in his hand.

"It's the *bico*—Kader," Goare whispered to Boyan, his lips unmoving. "He's the one that Soemel got to do the job. Slide up beside him, and stay beside him. I'll take care of the rest! Understood?"

"Understood," whispered back Boyan.

Then, with his cat-like, quick stride he was moving ahead, his rifle held in the crook of his arm, but his eyes never off the Algerian's darkened, now unsmiling face. Waiting until Boyan had gone and taken up his position there, Goare strode ahead to Soemel and to Huerteros. The big, fancily dressed man was talking in a jerky, incoherent voice with Soemel, moving his hands in loose, unarticulated gestures.

"No," Goare broke in upon him, speaking also in Spanish. "You can't kid me. So get along, start going!"

At his shoulder, Soemel offered him an oblique smile. "You make sense, soldier," he said to Goare in English. "I didn't kill those buddies of his."

For just an instant, Goare allowed himself the pleasure of staring down fixedly into Soemel's blandly glaring, then blinking eyes, then nodded with his head towards the ship at the end of the street.

"Let's get on aboard," he told him in a low voice. "Before that Greek, your mate, double-crosses you."

Soemel did not answer him, except to make a thick, muttering sound in his throat. But, Goare noticed, the man carried a revolver in each hand still, and, walking behind the four men chosen to newly carry the bags of gold, he kept an even stride with him, never let him get a pace ahead or to the rear of him.

"You're funny, Soemel," he admitted aloud once, as they crossed through the shadows of the cargo shed and on towards the dock and the ship, "but I can't laugh at you."

SOEMEL did not answer him, no more than turned his head very briefly to stare at him. He was intent upon the ship now, and the Greek Karnoupoli, at the rail. Karnoupoli carried a rifle, the men of the crew along the decks and upon the roof of the wheel-house carried rifles and revolvers, and Goare, smiling a little bit, saw their muzzles swing toward him and towards Boyan. But, standing at the foot of the ladder leading up on deck, Soemel cursed out at the Greek.

"Pipe down on that!" he yelled at him. "The whole job's on the square! We got the stuff; it's right here. Let them come aboard!"

Karnoupoli shook his head at him and he was grinning. "Not with t'em guns in t'eir hands I won't; not with two million bucks comin' over the side!"

Soemel, slowly shuffled, turned and blinked at Goare.

"You hear him?" he asked the American. "You hear what that thick-headed Greek swab says?"

"You're a cute pair, together," Goare told him. "But, sure, we'll give you our guns, once we're aboard. Reygand and those guys back there behind us will keep theirs, though, until we're all on deck." He swung his head. "*Compris*, Reygand?"

Reygand and the ten men of the rear-guard stood with their feet spread broadly, deployed out in a wide line along the stringer-piece of the dock.

"That's right, *sidi*." Reygand spoke with his hand comfortably upon the bolt of his Mauser. "Just let them make the first funny little sign."

An almost hysterical babble of curses was coming from Soemel; he was starting up the steep ladder. Huerteros right behind. "I'll kick your dirty head in!" he yelled up at the Greek. "Who owns this packet? Who's running this job? Get away from him—lay along and single down the lines, so we can pull out o' here!"

As his head cleared the rail, Karnoupoli shoved the muzzle of his rifle right in under Soemel's chin. "I'll blow it off, right like t'at," he told Soemel. "If I thought for a moment you was in with those *hombres*. And, they hand over those guns as they hit the deck!"

At the foot of the ladder, clustered thickly, those of the fifty looked at

Goare and at Boyan, their eyes filled with a hard, desirous light, their lips pulled from their teeth.

"How about it, *sidi?*" one of them, Juneux, asked Goare.

"Nothing doing!" Goare answered them in the familiar prison *argot*, speaking so fast and so low that he knew those above could not understand a word of what he said. "Later, yes; if we have to. But, not now. Now, play it their way. Go on up!"

One by one, silently, they obeyed him, going up the ladder after Soemel and Huerteros, piling their guns in a heap in the scupper waterway as Karnoupoli stood strainedly and watched them. Only when the last of them, Reygand, had come aboard and dropped his gun there, and he had seen Soemel moving towards the bridge with four of the crew carrying the load of gold between them, did the Greek move, or speak.

"It ain't you, only," he said hoarsely to Goare and Boyan. "It's him, too—Soemel.

Then he waved a hand, and the big Monserrat negro who served him as a boatswain came forward, empty sacks in his hands, and shoveled the guns up, stuck them in, staggered away with them in his arms towards the bridge. Sweat was running loosely down the Greek's face; he shook it from his eyes and the corners of his mouth as he yelled at the crew.

"Get them lines off! Get a man on that wheel! *Pronto! Pronto!* Look, down there on the dock!"

Out from the shadows of the cargo shed and from the market, the final and desperate dregs of the force they had beaten were coming forth, silently at first, then yelling, sprinting as they saw the men on the decks running toward the mooring lines. But the men who had answered the Greek's commands were already on the forecastle-head and the poop, had let slip the lines there, to go sliding and splashing down into the widening space between the shipside and the dock. And from the bridge, as he shouted orders at the wheelsman within, Karnoupoli let loose with the rifle he held, and the ship was free, backing out, beginning to turn in the stream, the old accommodation ladder smashing down from the side into the water as its gear snapped beneath the unaccustomed strain.

"Just like that," Goare said softly, "we go." He stood among the Devil's Island men on the midships deck. Speaking, he let his eyes go to Boyan's face. Boyan stood beside the Algerian, Bou Kader, and now Boyan reached out, caught the yellow-skinned man loosely by the throat.

"You've got a gun," Boyan said in a conversational sort of voice. "You've got a pistol stuck inside your jumper that you didn't give up, as we did, when you came over the side. Give me that!"

Bou Kader made a flinching, wrenching motion, his hand clawing in toward his loose jumper collar. Boyan struck him between the eyes, knocked him flat, jumped upon the small of his back, then took the pistol away. With it in his grip, he let the Algerian up. Before he spoke again, or Goare spoke, he looked towards the topside. Karnoupoli was out of sight on the bridge; Soemel, the gold and Huerteros had disappeared. Steadily, though, the ship was heading for the open sea, and Manacapa, in the blue, thin light of the first dusk, was vague, already distant astern.

"You want to do this?" Boyan said then, to Goare.

"I'll begin it; yes," Goare told him. Slowly, he was moving forward a little bit to face Bou Kader more fully. "Four of the lads," he said in a flat voice, "got killed back there, pulling that job. Their share was to be five hundred dollars gold apiece, and a good crack at real freedom. There's half a dozen wounded guys over there who maybe won't draw their pay, either. But, that was their

gamble, and they knew it and they took it. That makes all our share higher, because we're going to live, and keep on living. But, not you, *bico*. Because you didn't play the hand with us. You played with Soemel. It was you who plugged that *Indio* general back there, and the two fancy-dressed guys with him—and with the rod Soemel gave you. You didn't work with us; you worked with Soemel, and you thought you could make a few more dimes that way. Like hell, you can. So, say goodbye to the boys, and I'll say goodbye for you to Soemel, and Huerteros."

The Algerian's eyes burned blackly in his head. His breath came in harsh little broken gusts.

"You lie, American," he said finally in a choked kind of voice. "You lie, and want to get my share of the dough—you and the Russian . . . . You can't knock me off; Soemel—"

"Soemel won't do you a damn' bit of good now," Goare cut in upon him. "Soemel's got all he wants out of you, you sap. And, I won't knock you off; not a bit of it. But, you didn't stick with us, your mates, you double-crossed us, and played your hand your own way, and Soemel's way. So you can talk to the boys now; you can tell them all about it, and see how they figure it."

The Algerian had drawn his body into a sort of crouch. His hands were up, out before him. Slowly, jerking, his eyes went from face to face, around the ring of men which had so quickly, smoothly formed about him.

"Listen!" he said, croaking the words. "Listen!"

But they did not even laugh at him, and, foot by foot, they were closing in on him. He lifted his head, started once to scream, and looked into their eyes, then sprang, was somehow through and past them, stumbled in the scupperway, kicked back at them, clawed up the bulwark rail, was upon it and was gone, his body making a flat splashing sound as it struck and sank.

Upon the deck, Goare spoke.

"This job is tough, and getting tougher all the time. That's what is going to happen to any guy who doesn't stick with us, and do what he's told, when he's told. You get me? All right. Now fix up these boys, the dead and the wounded. Then go draw your chow. After that, you're going to get paid off, man by man, and then—"

He stopped, and he swung as the others around him swung. From aft, there was a smashed series of shots, one, then another, then two, clashed together in echo. Evenly, Goare drew his breath, and the pistol taken from Bou Kader lifted a little in his hand.

"I thought so," he said softly to Boyan, then, looking up, he abruptly saw Soemel and Huerteros at the bridge rail above.

Soemel carried a gun in one hand, a sack which chinked with the sound of gold as he moved it in the other. Huerteros's eyes were bloodshot, slowly blinking; he, also, carried a pistol in his hand. Soemel spoke, down to Goare and Boyan and those from Devil's Island:

"It was the Greek. That thick swab. He tried to jump me and Huerteros as we was counting out the dough for you boys. I plugged him—and here's your dough. But, listen to me; the rest of that stuff, all the dough, is right up here. Any lad o' you who tries to come up here, will get plugged, *pronto*—and, you don't believe me, try it. I've kept my part of the deal; I'm headin' up for Tiamba Island now, as I told you I'd do, and here's your payoff. Catch it!"

THROUGH the growing darkness, he flung the laden sack down then, and it hit the hatch, split, and the bright coins went rolling and jouncing over the tarpaulins and the rusty decks. The

men whom Goare and Boyan had recruited to bring with them here roared and screamed, cursing as they leapt after it, fighting, kicking, gouging over the gold pieces while, above, Soemel and Huerteros stood laughing softly, and Goare and the little Russian stood in utter silence. It was after the shipmaster and Huerteros had moved from sight on the bridge that the American and Boyan stepped forward, Goare with the big pistol level.

"Now," he said flatly to them, "you bring it here, on the hatch, every last, lousy bit. You heard me!"

They poised panting and trembling, the coins jammed against their palms or under their bare feet soles, their eyes wild, nearly insane. But then, man after man, they obeyed him, sent a stream of coins down where Goare stood with the gun and Boyan knelt and busily, accurately counted. When the piles were even, stacked like so many poker ships, Goare called off the names and the men stepped forward. "Five hundred apiece," he told each man monotonously, "and your share of the shares that would have gone to the lads who got killed. Pick it up; it's yours!"

Old Juneux was the one who hesitated and cleared his throat.

"That's going to make a flock of hard news, *sidi*," he said in a dry, slow voice. "No matter how you dole it out to them. They'll gamble for it, and battle for it, after. None of us has seen more than fifty francs at a crack for years."

Goare jerked his head up in a sharp motion; at the far end of the hatch, the first men to be paid off were already gambling, their voices, shrill and savage, rising.

"It's theirs, *mon vieux*," he said. "I couldn't hold it back from them. But, keep an eye out, will you? You know."

Juneux's short, brown forehead wrinkled in a scowl as he stared towards the forecastle door, where a dozen of Soemel's tough conglomerate, half-caste crew stood, their eyes bright, watching that flashing exchange of gold coins on the hatch. "*Si, sidi*" he said. "But those guys are just no good any more . . . ."

Boyan spoke when he and the American had reached the after end of the far deck, stood alone there in the now full, purple-shaded darkness.

"Well," he said in a voice he kept very even," that washes this job up; we're all through, now. Look." He raised one hand a little bit, towards the firmly marked white constellations in the blue-swept sky. "The course to Tiamba should lie north, hey! And the course he's on now is square due east—"

"Right back to Guiana; yeah." Goare's voice was a whisper lower than Boyan's "It looks like they sure got us licked now, doesn't it? Those two guys certainly work well together; they probably got so much on each other, they have to!" He stared fully into the eyes of the other man, his face gone haggardly gray in exhaustion and desperation now, the lines deep about his mouth and forehead.

"I got you into this, guy," he said harshly. "Through my own dumbness. You and those other poor swabs up there. It's about time I tumbled to myself; I'm going topside now, right up the ladders to the bridge. When you hear this flicker—" he turned in his hand the pistol taken from Bou Kader—"get up on the boat-deck and let a boat go—beat it. Any way you can."

Boyan laughed at him, softly.

"It takes more than one man to outboard and lower a boat, and this tub is still under way. Come on!"

"Listen—" The American was trying to draw back from him, start for the ladders to the bridge. "They'll have guys watching the boats. But, if I start some action, you'll have a chance."

"A chance at what? Come on, monkey; we can both jump that boat guard. Snap it up!"

From the after side of the main-house, up the little iron ladder there, they

gained the dark, littered and vague expanse of the boat-deck. It seemed utterly deserted. Up through the engine-room skylight a dull light and a clashing of machinery rose, and that was all.

They were beside the after boat on the port side, rapidly ripping at the boat-cover lashings and gripes, when Huerteros spoke. He stood by the motor-equipped boat forward, his big body hidden by the loom of it. He held a Spandau gun in his hands. He laughed as Goare went for the pistol.

"Drop it," he said in Spanish, "or I'll blow you apart. That's it. Now, listen!"

They could do nothing else but listen, their hands jammed achingly above their heads; from the foredeck was the slam of guns, the pound of running feet, the yells and sounds of fighting men.

"You came up," Huerteros told them calmly through those sounds. "Soemel went down. He and the crew are shoving your daisies down under hatches now. So, get along. *Vayamos!*"

"Yeah," Goare said. But, obliquely, sidewise, he could still smile at Boyan.

Soemel and the big Monserrat negro who served as boatswain, a dozen more of the crew, rifles and revolvers in their hands, stood by the forward corner of the fore hatch when Huerteros brought Goare and the American there. Stretched out on the deck, shot a dozen times through the head and body, lay old Juneux, Reygand and four or five others of the Devil's Island men not far from him, and also dead.

"Get down, you thick-heads," Soemel said thickly, straightening up from where he had been peering down into the hold. "All your pals are there."

Then he laughed, and with his free hand reached out and smacked Goare full across the face.

"How do you like it?" he asked.

Goare did not answer him, kept his hands back, one sharp, vibrant bit of knowledge restraining him.

"All right," he said, and tried to smile also, then swung over the hatch edge and down, into the hold, Boyan clambering behind him.

Overhead, even as he and Boyan were still on the rungs of the ladder, they could hear the heavy hatchboards being battened securely down into place, and the yelled orders of Soemel and Huerteros at the crew.

"The engines are stopped," he whispered to Boyan, wholly disregarding the cursed questions of the remnants of the fifty below them in the blackness of the 'tween-decks.

"All hands are on deck. Bringing that two million bucks aboard was as much of a surprise to them as it was to us. And that's the trouble now—Soemel's letting this one drift right in on the beach. And he's opened the sea-cocks. Listen! That's water pouring in damn' fast."

"You mean?" Boyan asked him.

"I mean that Soemel and the fat guy will have to work awful fast and smooth to get away in that motor-sailer before Soemel's crew jumps them—for that same two million bucks."

They were down on the plates of the 'tween-deck now, in among the wounded and cursing, stunned men.

"Listen to me!" Goare said to them.

Then, as a kind of silence came over them, he spoke, swiftly, hoarsely, unseen in the darkness:

"There's water pouring by the ton into this one now. She'll sink, or she'll capsize, before she hits the beach. We got to get out of here, and you've got to follow me and Boyan. Understood, you lugs? All right—come on!"

His hands out, against the slimy steel of the side plates and the bulkheads, he was already working aft, searching for the manhole cover which he knew must be somewhere here in this hold, and would open to the alleyway leading aft eventually to the engine room.

He found it, grazed his knees across the rough edges of the flange-nuts hold-

ing the heavy cover in place. He kicked and ripped those off with his bare hands, slammed the cover aside, went down and through, Boyan after him, the silent, straining pack of the Devil's Island men behind Boyan.

It was while they were stumbling through Number Two hold seeking the alleyway entrance there, that they heard the shooting up on deck.

"That big Monserrat nigger had a gun, for one," Goare jerked back at Boyan. "But there goes one of the Spandaus now."

Then he was crouched down, in and through the other man-hole entrance, stood erect in the dimly lighted fire-room, where already oily water slopped across the floor-plates. But, through the fiddley grating above, he could hear no more volleys of shots, only a vague and distant scuffling and scraping, an occasional shout or shot.

"The Spandau fixed them," he said to Boyan in a low, laughing voice, then he was jumping for the rungs of the ladder leading topside, a spanner whipped up from a hose connection in his belt.

THE MAIN deck was deserted when he and Boyan got there, the others jamming at their backs. From the boat-deck, they heard the creaking of boat davits and gear, low, uneven, hurried voices. Then, off on the starboard side, where the open sea stretched darkly, Goare saw the faint white shape of the motor-sailer, just swinging out from under the bow. Huerteros strained clumsily there at the oars, panting as he pulled, Soemel crouched down in the motor-well and hauling heavily at the fly-wheel.

"That's us," said Goare. "Our meat." He swung once, as he shed his jumper, and gazed back over Boyan's shoulder at the men he had chosen to come here and fight with him.

"There's the beach," he told them in a flat voice. "And the bush beyond. Good luck!"

Then, side by side, he and Boyan dived from the canting, listed rail.

As far as their lung power would take them, they swam under water when their dives would carry them no farther, rose swiftly and without sound up through into the surface darkness. The motor-sailer was not fifty feet from them; even through the roaring of the guns and voices back on the ship where the Devil's Island men battled the crew for the other boats, they could hear Huerteros as he cursed Soemel, telling him to hurry.

Soemel still crouched in the motor-well, fiddling at the carburetor float and whipping the fly-wheel of the heavy two cylinder motor up. One hand up upon the gunwale edge, Goare leaned easily in and let him have it with the long, clean steel of the spanner handle right across the base of the neck. He did not cry out; he just pitched forward face foremost upon the motor block.

It was Huerteros who yelled, and reached down for the Spandau gun cocked against the thwart beside him. But Boyan was in over the stern-sheets by then, and Boyan got him from behind, rolled him to the floor-boards, choked and kicked him to unconsciousness there.

There was a regular ship's compass in the boat, Goare found, after he and Boyan had bound the two with a halyard taken from the gear of the stub mast and flung them on the forward floor-boards. Also, the two million in gold and notes, in the same staid black Gladstone bags, was underneath the thwart in the stern-sheets, carefully packed.

Beyond that, the boat had the regular equipment of food, water and gear; enough, Boyan said, flipping the fly-wheel over and hearing the first soughing response from the motor, to take

two men quite a distance, say several hundred miles, but not four men.

Goare did not answer for a moment, sitting at the tiller and staring astern. The ship was gone from sight now, and all the other boats were gone. The sea was silent, dark and bare there; they in this boat rested alone on the sea.

"Yeah," he said then to Boyan, above the opening, regular beating of the motor. He had taken the compass up, cradled it comfortably between his knees, had just set course by it. "There'll only be two of us, after a few hours now."

"Where you going?" Boyan asked him, clambering aft.

"There's lots of places for us to go," Goare said, smiling a little bit. "That mast and sail are good, and there's plenty of chow and water, for the two of us—as you said. But, there's only one place for these two babies."

"You," Boyan said, "are not telling me."

The dawn was high across the sea, laying a yellow, fulgent light upon the Boca Chica and the low, jungle-lined shore of Manacapa when Goare brought the boat in through the outer combers along the muddy beach. Forward, the Spandau gun in one hand, Boyan was freeing Soemel and the former president, Huerteros, from their bonds, kicking them erect.

"That's Manacapa," he explained to them, needlessly. "And where you're going. You, and your two million bucks in gold. Here's where you start, right now; I guess it's only about neck deep, out here, when the combers are down."

Behind him, stacked together, were the saggingly heavy Gladstone bags. Boyan touched one of them with his foot.

"Pick 'em up," he told Soemel and Huerteros. "And, don't drop 'em in the surf. You do, I'll plug you. Because some of those natives there ashore might have need for those bags—if only to make headstones for you two guys. Get going."

They cursed at him, and plead with him and with Goare at the tiller, then, their faces a kind of grayish, unclean color, picked up the bags, and got going.

His sail reefed down in the dawn breeze, Goare let the boat beat back and forth offshore there for a time, as he and Boyan watched the two struggling and often completely submerged figures stumbling through the mud and the smashing combers towards the shore, where, quietly, men in uniforms and with guns stood now.

"I guess," Goare said, finally putting the tiller over and heading out to sea, "those two guys are going to lead a short and unhappy life from now on."

Boyan had come aft. With Goare, he stared out, and toward the far Northern horizon, beyond which lay Tiamba Island and the place the American had made up his course for now.

"Yeah," he said, "Maybe it's funny, but I was getting around to guessing the same thing."

Scourge of the Small Knives

By WESTON MARTYR

IF YOU sweep up the scrapings from the jails of all China, it stands to reason you are going to get a precious collection of bad eggs. And if, on top of that, you go to work and sort out the worst specimens from your collection, you can then be certain you have achieved a most notable concentration of thugs. Well—that's how my cargo of devils was raked up.

It happened very reasonably and simply, too. About the time I first took over command of the *Wisby Hall* the gold mines on the Rand ran short of labor, because the simple Kaffir is a wise man, and he won't work unless he has to. He'd work until he'd earned enough to buy a wife to work for him, and then he retired smiling. The mine owners were silly enough to offer higher wages, but the result was, of course, that the unmarried boys came in and earned their wife-money in less time than ever, and then *they* retired happy. After that the mines were in the cart—until somebody thought of recruiting labor in China. They went to the Chinese authorities for permission to recruit, and the authorities were delighted.

"Yes," they said. "You bet. And, what's more, *we* will supply the men. You send your ships and we'll fill 'em up with coolies"—at so many dollars a head.

The result was that, when the ships turned up, they just emptied their jails into them, thus getting rid of their criminals, saving the expense of their keep, and making an honest penny or so for themselves at one sweep. You can't beat a Chinaman at that sort of game.

Well, that's how the dregs of China came to be dumped into the Transvaal. I've heard they were fine workers, though. They'd drill two holes in a shift against a Kaffir's one, and the mine people were mighty pleased with 'em. They'd escape from their compounds

every now and again, of course, and then there'd be hell to pay round and about Johannesburg for a bit.

I have heard, too, that it paid to be popular with 'em if you worked below ground, on account of a playful habit they had of signaling "Man coming" on the engine-room bell, and then sending up your severed head in the skip. They were tough, all right, but they did put their backs into their job, and the miners were mighty sorry when they had to send them all back again.

Somebody started a Chinese slavery fuss in the papers. I never quite got the true hang of it myself; but it seemed to me the mine people were happy, and so were the coolies. Apparently the politicians weren't, though; so those coolies had to be shipped back again. Some of them didn't want to go at all, and they made trouble.

They were mostly men who knew they'd be shot into prison the moment they landed in China, so you can't very well blame them for kicking. And I must say I don't blame the Chinese authorities either for wanting to make sure of those birds as soon as they arrived, for they weren't the kind of lads any authorities, even Chinese ones, would care to have loose about the country.

The Peking Government didn't want 'em back at any price, and I believe they said so officially. In any case, what with one thing and another, the worst bunch of the lot, about eight hundred of 'em, were kept back till the last shipload; and then, my luck being out as usual, my ship was chartered to load that unholy gang at Durban and take them to Ching-Wan-Tau. That's how I got the most infernal mob of toughs on record loaded on to me.

I got ready for trouble. And I didn't have long to wait for it, either. In fact, it started the moment the charterers took over the ship at Durban. They had to fit her up, of course, and they played Old Harry with her.

They fitted the after 'tween-decks solid with wooden bunks, and ran up four tiers of berths in Numbers Three and Four lower holds. They even built a hospital on top of the wheel-house aft; but, except for fixing a row of rice cookers the size of young donkey-boilers along both sides of Number Two hatch, they left the fore end of the ship alone.

Then they filled the main hold with stores, and put the ship down six inches by the head, and I went to the agent and protested. I raised Cain. I said they'd made the ship unseaworthy. He said that six inches out of trim wouldn't hurt, and, anyhow, I'd have to lump it, because the fore part of the ship had to be kept absolutely clear of all coolies.

"If we were to give 'em a free run of the deck," says he, "it wouldn't be long before they'd take charge of the ship. You'd find them roosting in your bunk, captain, and they'd certainly make trouble with your lascar crew. They're dangerous men," says he. "They aren't safe, and that's a fact. And that's the reason we mean to make the after end of your ship a sort of prison for 'em. We're going to fit an eight-foot iron grill right across your deck amidships, and if you take my advice you won't let any of them get forward of it once you're out at sea."

Then he finished off by telling me that, instead of making difficulties, I ought to be grateful to the charterers for thinking of my safety and comfort. That was the first time I'd heard I was going to ship a dangerous cargo, and I remember I went straight out of that office and did something I'd never done in all my life before. I went and bought a pistol—an automatic.

When I got back aboard I had another surprise. I found the charterers had appointed a man to take charge of my cargo for me! He was the sort of man I haven't got any use for. Finch

was his name. A great big bucko of a man, whose only qualification for the job, as far as I could see, was that he could talk Chinese. He'd brought a dozen or so assorted Chinks along with him—cooks and orderlies he called 'em.

NEXT morning our cargo arrived alongside—a train-load full; and it took Finch all day to get those coolies aboard. It seems he wasn't taking any chances. He made the shore people march the beggars up our gangway one by one, and as each man reached the deck, Finch and his boys went through him.

They did the job properly, too. They stripped every one down pretty well naked, and searched 'em and looked through their bundles of duds and things. I could see those Chinks didn't like it a bit; and whenever Finch came across a knife or a bit of opium or something, they'd give him some mighty dirty looks.

Not that Finch cared, bless you. He stood there looking as fierce and tough as he knew how, and every now and again he'd touch up any boy that showed signs of jibbing with his sjambok. And a sjambok's a nasty thing to get hit with. It's a strip of dried rhino hide, and a smack with one on the bare skin will draw blood quick if you aren't careful. And Finch wasn't careful at all.

I didn't like it; but that wasn't the time or the place to interfere—so I waited.

The last man in the procession came up handcuffed between two Kaffir policemen. He was a big man, but he didn't look particularly dangerous to me. In fact, he had rather a fine-looking figurehead on him—sort of quiet and sad and gentle. But Finch gets into a great state about the beggar, and he comes bawling to me wanting to know where he is going to stow him.

"The swine's dangerous," says he. "He's murdered three men down the Rhineveldt Deep, and the only reason his neck isn't stretched for it's because they badly wanted him for some other devilment in Tientsin. He'll get *his* all right," says he, "when they get him ashore at the other end; but what I want to know is, what'll I do with him now?"

"Oh, put him in your bunk," says I, "and good luck to him."

With that I laughed, and went up on the bridge and got the ship under way.

Eventually we shackled the murderer to a stanchion down Number One hold. It was the mate's idea, and the man was nice and snug down there, and well out of the way of everybody. And as for not liking Finch—well, he wasn't my style; but he had his points, and I have to admit it.

I had him up to my cabin the first night out, and went for him about the way he was manhandling the coolies. It was my idea to go easy with them and leave 'em alone and not stir up trouble, and I said so.

I told him to take a close reef in that sjambok of his, or one night, as likely as not, he'd be getting his throat cut, to say nothing of the throats of the rest of us white men aboard.

And then, when I'd quite done, *he* started. He told me some things that surprised me and made me feel mighty thoughtful. He said he mightn't know much about ships, but he did know how to handle coolies, and that if I thought we would ever get to Ching-Wan-Tau unless he put the fear of death into those Chinks and kept it there, then I was an old fool. Yes. That man sat there in my cabin and called me an old fool! And I sat and listened to him.

I had to, for, you see, he was speaking the cold truth—and it frightened me. I knew we had a bad crowd aboard all right, and that if they wanted to scupper us they wouldn't have much trouble doing it; but I hadn't worried much here because I never seriously thought they'd want to scupper us. But according to

Finch, that was just what they were almost sure to do. Says he:

"There's over eight hundred of 'em, and they're all bad; but there's one gang a darned sight worse than the rest. They're all due for the clink as soon as they get ashore; but some of them are due for more than that. They won't live long once their police get hold of them—and they know it. And if you were in their place, what would you do?

"Why, you'd get hold of the ship and run her in somewhere handy along the China coast and clear out. It stands to reason; and it's my firm belief that's what they'll try to do. And as for getting hold of this ship—it's easy. What does the the crew amount to? There's you and me and your three mates and the four engineers. That's only nine of us whites all told, not counting the doc, who's a half-caste Macao Portuguese, as far as I can make out, and not to be relied on. And you know better than I do what your lascar crew is worth; but I bet, if it comes to a scrap, that they'll lie low and try and save their skins—and I don't blame 'em."

Well, that was bad enough; but as soon as he had got me pretty near frightened to death with talk like that he started off again on a fresh tack.

"Now, here's another thing," says he. "These birds don't get paid their wages till they get to Ching-Wan-Tau. That was a little scheme arranged by our repatriation people. When I was wangling this job out of them in Pretoria they tried to tell me this bally scheme of theirs was a better insurance against trouble aboard the ship than the armed guard I was asking for. According to them, the coolies were all going to be good boys, because they knew if they weren't they wouldn't draw their pay. That's why we haven't got a guard. Can you beat it? The Chink authorities jumped at the idea, of course. They get the handling of the cash that way, and a fat lot of it our coolies are likely to see. The trouble is, the beggars know it. They know they haven't a hope of ever touching a bean of their money.

"And d'you think that's going to make nice good boys of 'em? You bet it isn't. Why, they're ripe for trouble. And the worst of it is that making trouble's worth while for some of them. Knowing what they know, each man must have drawn an advance before they left Jo'burg. Wanted to make sure of getting something, I guess. Anyway, when I was searching them I found nearly every man-jack had from five to ten pounds stowed away on him. It doesn't sound much; but it means there's from six to eight thousand pounds loose aboard this ship; and what's more, it's all in round, yellow, golden sovereigns.

"Now, captain, you can believe me or not, just as you like; but I know we've got men aboard here who'd cut every throat in the ship rather than let a sum like that get away from them. And yet you sit there and tell me to go slow and treat the beggars easy. Why, if I don't show 'em, right from the start, that I'm top dog, and mean to stay there, then you and I and the rest of us white men would be wise to step over the side now. We'd be a darned sight more comfortable there than if we stayed aboard."

Yes, that's just about the way that man talked to me. I was scared. And when I had more time to think about things I was more scared than ever. What worried me most was that I couldn't do anything about it. I knew, against that crowd of Chinamen, we nine whites were helpless. They could have knocked us on the head and thrown us all overboard any night they liked. That grill amidships the charterers were so proud about was really as much use as nothing, because it didn't prevent any one from climbing over the engine-room casing and dropping down on us from the top of the fiddley.

Then the Indian Ocean's a lonely place. Ships didn't carry wireless then,

remember, and there was no port I could run into. Even if there had been I didn't see what excuse I could give for calling in anywhere. It's a serious thing for a master to deviate out of his proper voyage. It means expense to the owners, waste of time and bunkers, with the insurance on the ship invalidated, and the Lord knows what else.

You've got to have some mightly good reasons before you dare deviate—and what reasons could I give? I should have looked pretty blowing in somewhere, and saying I'd come because I was scared of what my cargo might get up to. No, I could see I'd got to get the ship to Ching-Wan-Tau or nowhere. You see, I was in a nasty fix—and no way out of it.

FOR the first week things kept more or less quiet. There was a lot of grousing about the chow, of course, and a scrap or so at nights in the 'tween-decks; but nothing much happened to amount to anything until two coolies died of beri-beri, and there was a riot because we dumped them over the side.

It seems their friends wanted to keep 'em and bury them in China; but we couldn't keep any corpses aboard, of course, and Finch had to climb up on the after-hatch and tell 'em so. Things looked nasty for a bit, but when they burst out laughing at something he'd said, I knew Finch had managed to fix 'em. He told me afterwards what the joke was.

"I told 'em," he says, "we didn't feel like keeping any corpses about the place this hot weather, but the next man that died, his friends could have him—and welcome. And then I offered to bet ten dollars Mex to a ticcy they wouldn't keep him for more than three days. They saw the sense of the thing then, and that settled it."

Finch said he didn't mind that kind of trouble, and how it was simple enough to settle just ordinary foolishness like that with nothing ugly behind it.

"What worries me," he says, "is this small knife outfit the beggars have started. How they smuggled the knives through beats me, especially when I think of the way I went through 'em as they came aboard. I could have sworn there wasn't a weapon of any sort on the lot, and now here's these damned small knives turned up. I don't know how many there are yet, or who's got them; but I reckon there's maybe a dozen or twenty coolies aboard each with a knife on him. And, captain, these are the birds we've got to look out for.

"They'll get together; and, in fact, as far as I can make out, they've formed themselves into a sort of a gang already. It's in the nature of a Chinaman to do that sort of thing. A secret society's a regular institution with 'em, and a secret society's just what these swine with the knives have formed. It's secret all right, because I'll be hung if I can find out who's in it; but what they call themselves—to give you the English of it—is Small Knife Society.

"I've managed to find that much out, anyway. I was anxious enough about this trip of ours right from the start; but now this thing's happened—well, I'm scared, and I'll admit it. It's all very well to say they've only got little pocket-knives, which is the only kind of a knife they could have hidden; but the point is, they are armed.

"Twenty men with knives on 'em and working together are going to run the rest of this bunch. They'll run them like sheep. They'll run them and they'll rob them; and if anybody objects they'll cut him up in small bits. I know these birds, captain. I've worked with Chinese most of my life, and I can see what's going to happen as plain as if I was sitting in a movie, with the picture running in front of my eyes. You mark what I say! Before we get to Ching-Wan-Tau the men who've got the knives will be the

men who've got hold of most of the money too. They know, as well as we do, the minute this ship arrives she's going to be filled with police. Chinese police. And who'll collect that money then? Why, the police; and you can't tell me those Small Knife blighters are going to wait for that. No, sir! As sure as my name's Bill Finch, they'll try to do us in and then pile this ship of yours up somewhere handy, and clear out with what they've got. That is, they will if I can't stop 'em. I don't know if I can; but I'm going to have a shot at it."

It was about then that I began to think a lot more of Finch than I did when I first saw him. I think, if he hadn't been rash, he might perhaps have managed to settle the trouble. But he was rash. His notion was to jump right into the middle of a mess and try and clean it up that way, instead of skirmishing about a bit, like a wise man, and then putting his smack in where it was likely to do the most good. One morning he didn't show up at breakfast. He didn't turn up at all, although I turned the ship inside out looking for him. He just vanished.

I don't know what happened, but I can guess. He must have made too much of a nuisance of himself for those Small Knife people, and I suppose they just laid for him one night when he was going his rounds, and then slipped him over the side. I should think that was about what happened. However, there he was—gone; and it seemed to me at first that it put the lid on things properly. The job was up to me then—and I couldn't see how I was going to tackle it. The worst of it was, Finch was the only man in the ship who could talk Chinese, and I couldn't find one coolie out of the lot who understood English.

And I tell you, with Finch gone and out of the way, things didn't take long to warm up. The daytime wasn't so bad: just that crowd of yellow beggars squatting all over the after-deck and chattering a language that didn't sound human. It was the nights that got on your nerves. There was hell to pay at night down those after-holds. You could hear it. I didn't know what was going on, you understand, because we never dared go aft in the dark at all. But you could hear things happening all night. Plenty of things, and it was awful.

Those Small Knife devils were doing it all, just as Finch warned me they would. I had plain proof of it. Da Silva, our doctor, was a better man than I'd thought. He wouldn't face that hospital of his on top of the wheel-house at night; but each morning he'd go aft and attend to what would be waiting for him. And every day there'd be maybe six or a dozen poor devils, all cut about and bleeding, for him to sew up and bandage.

I used to go aft too, and lend him a hand, and I noticed the wounds were all about the same—just slashes and long shallow cuts as if they'd been done with razors or small sharp knives. I don't remember that we ever had a real deep wound to deal with; but all the same we had some horrible-looking cases.

And five of 'em died—from loss of blood, I guess, as there wasn't much whole skin left on any of 'em. That Small Knife lot was putting its trademarks on the rest of the bunch all right.

It was plain enough what they were up to: just robbing the rest, as Finch said they would, and if any one kicked or tried to make a fight of it, then they sliced him up, and Da Silva and me we'd have to fix up the results in the morning. At the rate they were working I could see it wouldn't be long before they'd have every coolie in the ship cleaned out, and then, as likely as not, it would be our turn.

If I could only have talked the lingo I might have done something. Roused up the rest of the Chinks, perhaps, and made 'em set about those Small Knife birds. Or at least I might have found out who they were, and then we whites

could have had a go at them. As it was, I was helpless; but I did what I could, of course. I got the engineers to connect up some flexible hose to the deck steam-pipes. We led the hoses up on the bridge, so that if steam was turned on they'd squirt straight down both bridge ladders.

We reckoned to gather on the bridge if things got desperate, and give the beasts a dose of high-pressure live steam, and boil a few of them at any rate before they scuppered us.

WITH all this worry and trouble on my mind I was a fine sample of a nervous wreck by the time we'd run across the Indian Ocean and raised Achin Head. One night, when we were about half-way down the Malacca Straits, I was standing up here trying to make up my mind whether or not to take the ship into Singapore—and chance getting fired for it,—when I caught sight of somebody leaning on the rail right up in the bows. It was dark, but I could make out the shape of the man against the sky, and I saw he was a Chinaman.

It startled me, because the forepart of the ship wasn't a place where any coolie ought to have been. I could see the man wasn't one of the crew, for, even at night, it's easy to tell the difference between a Chinaman and a lascar. It wasn't natural, anyhow, for any of the hands to be knocking about forward at that time of night; and you know our look-out man is stationed up in the crow's nest and never on the fo'c'sle head.

Well, things being in the state they were, I thought I'd better go forward and see what the fellow was up to. I had on my carpet slippers, so I sneaked quietly along the deck; and when I tell you I felt in my pocket to see if I had my gun on me, you'll understand the state of mind I'd got into during that last week or two.

The chap was standing right up in the eyes of the ship, and I'd got about abreast of the windlass before he heard me. I startled him all right, and he jumped round and stared at me with his mouth open. And then it was my turn to jump. I recognized him at once. He was the bird who should have been ironed to a stanchion down Number One hold—the murderer, in fact, that Finch had made such a fuss about when he'd first come aboard.

I'd clean forgotten all about him, and it gave my poor nerves an awful shock to run suddenly up against the beggar like that. I suppose I must have got rattled, because, though I don't remember pulling out my gun, I can still see myself jumping about behind the windlass and pointing my revolver in the general direction of that poor man. No wonder I scared him. He dodged about, too.

"Don't shoot!" he sings out. "It's all right. Don't shoot."

And I was so surprised at hearing English from him that I couldn't have stopped him if he'd come for me. However, he didn't show any signs of that, and when he'd got over his scare and I'd got over mine, we just stood there looking at each other and feeling sheepish—at least, I know I did.

"Well, John," says I at last, "it may be very funny and all that; but you're supposed to be a dangerous murderer, and what I want to know is how did you get on deck? And what d'you mean by talking English anyway?"

He didn't speak for a bit; just hung his head and backed away to the rail and looked sulky, and I was pulling out my whistle to call the watch when he suddenly put out his hand to me and said:

"Don't."

Like that he said it; just "Don't," and there was something about the way he spoke that I—well, I didn't.

I asked him again who he was and how he'd come by his English, and after

a bit he went right ahead and told me his trouble.

I can't remember his words, of course, but if you'll believe me, he talked better English than I do myself. It turns out he'd lived in London for seven years or so, learning to be a doctor, which accounted for things. He asked me if I was an officer, and when I told him I was the captain he opened out a lot. He said an Englishman would give him a square deal if any one would, and then he asked me to give him a chance.

A few days after we'd started, it seems he'd discovered he could slip his wrist out of his handcuff. He was left quite alone down the hold, and the only time he saw anybody was when one of the cooks brought his chow down to him in the morning. He'd lie low all day, he said; but on some nights, when things were quiet on deck, he'd venture up for a bit and get some clean air. He said he'd made up his mind to wait and drop over the side one night and swim for it if we passed close enough to any land.

It was a mightly slim chance; but the man was desperate, and I could see he meant to do what he said. I was the only soul aboard who knew he could slip his irons, and he begged me to say nothing and leave him to take his chance. In any case, he said he'd rather drown than be tortured to death, which was what he seemed to think he was due for if the Chinese officials got hold of him again.

He didn't tell me exactly what it was he'd been up to in China to make himself so unpopular with the authorities; but as far as I could make out he'd been what we'd call an agitator or something like that, and that's a thing you know very well yourself the Chinese high muck-a-mucks won't stand for at any price. He must have had some sort of following, too, in Tientsin, which was where he'd been at work, because they started to riot one day and did in a mandarin or somebody, and then this chap had been arrested and tortured to make him give away his pals.

He said he wouldn't do it, and he'd been waiting and hoping for a quick death, when they surprised him by putting him aboard ship and sending him off to South Africa. I think the man must have been a natural born kicker. I mean, if he saw any dirty work going on he was the sort that couldn't rest unless he'd done his darnedest to clean things up.

He even gets into trouble again on his mine. He found a gang there who were running and robbing the rest of the coolies and doing 'em in with a steel drill or a charge of dynamite if they objected. He said he couldn't stand it, so he got up a gang of his own. It was pretty much the same sort of thing he'd done before in Tientsin, and there'd been scrapping, of course, and some more men killed. He told me his lot had managed more or less to clean the other gang up; and then, with his usual luck, he ran foul of the Jo'burg C.I.D.

They found out he had something to do with the business, but they got hold of the wrong end of the stick, because, instead of giving him credit for stopping the trouble they reckoned he was the cause of it, and ran him in for murder.

That was his yarn, or as much as I can remember of it. It was a hard luck tale anyhow, and I was sorry for him, and believed him. And his talk had set me thinking. I hadn't exactly a plan in my head; but what he'd said about that gang down the mine reminded me of my own troubles.

"If he managed to fix that lot," thinks I to myself, "then he might be able to settle these Small Knife beggars too."

That was a good thought, and when I'd got it clear in my head I put it to him flat. I told him the state of things aboard us, and what I was afraid might happen before the ship got in. I told him everything, and then I said straight out that, if he thought he could settle the

business, I'd see he got his chance to get away.

"If you think you can do it," I said, "then go ahead. But you must understand I can't help you—openly at any rate. You were put aboard here as a murderer. You're in my charge, and my job is to hand you over to the police as soon as we arrive. But if you pull this thing off for me, then I'll give you every chance I can to get clear away from the ship before the police get hold of you. You'll have to trust me," I said. "Will you do it?"

"I will," says he, straight out like a man, and I knew from the way he spoke that I could trust him too. He held out his hand to me on the strength of our bargain, like a Christian, and we shook.

And then, for the best part of an hour I should think, we two stood there behind the windlass and planned things out. I was hoping to goodness all the while that no one would see us, because if one single soul aboard the ship ever got to know I was hand and glove with the man like that, his escape would look too fishy and more than I'd care to risk.

He saw that point, too; so we tried to settle things then and there, so as not to have to see each other again, that being too risky. We agreed he'd better stay down below in his irons during the daytime, and do what he had to do at night. He wouldn't tell me how he was going to set about the job; but he seemed fairly certain that if he could get into the afterpart of the ship he'd be able to manage. I told him how he could do that by climbing over the fiddley and engine-room casing.

"If I can find friends aboard," he said, "it will be less difficult. But, captain, I must have a weapon. There is only one way to stop those men now," he says. "Captain—you must let me have your pistol."

Now this was something I tell you I didn't like the thought of at all. Don't misunderstand me. I trusted that man, and I wasn't scared he'd turn my own gun on me. No. But I didn't like to think what else he might have to do with it. He was as good as a self-confessed murderer, remember—in a good cause, maybe; but, still—a murderer. And, believe me, it makes you think before you hand over a loaded automatic to a man like that. And I was thinking hard, and wondering what I'd better do, when he bent down and looked me close and straight between the eyes.

"It's either them or us, captain," he said, "and you must face it."

And with that he took the thing gently out of my hand—and I let him take it. He balanced it in his hand for a little, and then he said:

"Good. When the matter is finished, you shall have proof of it. Then you must tell me how to escape."

"If the ship ever gets to Ching-Wan-Tau," I said, "that's all the proof I'll need; and the best chance I can see for you is to swim for it, as you meant to before. What else can we do? You'll have to swim; but I'll see the ship gets in to Ching-Wan-Tau Roads at night and I'll anchor her as close as I dare to the land. I'll try and see the way's all clear for you—and the rest you'll have to do yourself. You'll be in your irons down the hold, and, as soon as we anchor, you must slip up on deck quickly and drop over the side and swim ashore. Will you be all right if you do get ashore?"

"If I can land without being seen," he says, "I've friends who'll hide me. But how shall I know when the time has come—to swim?"

"When the anchor's let go," I said. "Then's your time. You'll hear the chain running out all right. You'll hear that down the hold even if you're asleep. Well—that will be the signal."

"Good," says he again. "But take the ship in very close to the shore, captain. I can't swim far; but I'll trust you. You

must trust me too, and when I've done what I've got to do, remember, I'll be waiting and listening for your signal."

After that we shook hands again on our bargain, and I left him. I went upon the bridge and he went down the hold. I didn't see him again.

IT'S NOT wise to put too much trust in any man. We trusted each other too much, and it isn't fair. We're only human—and things happen: things you can't foresee. And one forgets. Just for a second or two, perhaps; but one does forget—and then the trust is broken. No, it wasn't fair.

Don't you make any mistake. My friend didn't fail. No. He did all he said he would; although I don't know how he did it. I can only guess, and go by the facts—as they appeared. For instance, you take the facts we'd find each day inside Da Silva's hospital. The first few days after I'd made my bargain there'd be the usual crop of victims—twelve to twenty poor devils, that is, all slashed up and bleeding. And then one morning Da Silva comes along, smiling all over his face.

"They don't fight no more," says he. "Today there is no one cut."

But next morning he wasn't so happy.

"Bad, captain, bad," he says. "Four men they bring me today. Four—all shot in the face and dead. It's bad for us, captain, I think, now they begin shooting."

"Maybe it's not so bad as you think, doc," I told him.

And that's all I'd say, for I guessed what had happened. And when I went aft and took a look at the corpses, I knew it was all right—for my partner wasn't one of 'em.

The next fact to appear was an old gunny sack. It was shoved through the port-hole over my bunk that same night, and it fell on me with a bump and a rattle that scared me out of the first good sleep I'd had since we'd left Durban.

I switched on my light in a hurry and picked the thing up. It was heavy, and the mouth of it was tied up with a piece of twine. For a little while I just sat there looking at the thing, and wondering who'd thrown it in and what was in it. But when I did open it and spilt the contents out on my blanket, I understood at once.

It was a message—to tell me one side of the bargain had been fulfilled. It was proof, too, that tumbled out of that bag on to my lap. Nineteen small knives and my Colt automatic was proof enough for me. The knives were just ordinary folding pocket-knives, and the blades of four of them were broken; but all the rest were as sharp as razors. The barrel of the gun was fouled and the magazine was short of four cartridges.

It was good evidence; but I wasn't keen on any one else seeing it, so I put the things into the bag again and went out on deck and dropped the lot overboard.

For a minute or two I thought of going forward and paying my friend a visit. I wanted to tell him I understood, and thank him, and try to make some better arrangement for getting him clear of the ship; but there was a bright moon shining full on the forward deck, and the officer on the bridge would have been certain to see me, so I turned in again —and slept.

Next day at noon Cape Shangtung was abeam, and we headed west to run through the Gulf of Pechili to Ching-Wan-Tau. That gave us two hundred seventy miles to go, and meant arriving about three o'clock the next afternoon. This wouldn't do, and I saw I'd have to slow the ship up if I was to carry out my part of the bargain and get her in after dark.

Now, you can't go easing a ship down unless you've got good reasons for it. It all goes down in the log, of course, and

when you get home they call you up to the office and want to know what you've been playing at. However, there it was, and I'd got to chance it. Slowed down the ship had got to be, office or no office, and I was trying hard to think of a good excuse, when the weather supplied me with the finest kind of a one I could have wished for.

It came on thick. It started with some patches of fog closing down on us about four in the afternoon, and it got thicker and thicker, until by ten o'clock that night we were steaming dead slow, and you couldn't see the foremast from the bridge.

The Gulf of Pechili's a horrible place to be drifting around in in thick weather. When a fog shuts in properly there it's apt to last for a long while, and the blessed tides run all over the place at the rate of knots, and you can't tell where or how far they're going to set you.

By midnight I didn't like the look of things. We'd been dodging along dead slow for hours, and I wasn't sure within twenty miles or so where we'd got to. Cape Lai Lee Shan was somewhere ahead of us I hoped; but I didn't want to hit it, so I stopped the engines and sent the second mate aft to take a cast of the lead. I did it because it never pays to take chances at seat, especially in a fog; but as a matter of fact I felt pretty sure we'd got plenty of water under us.

So you can understand when that young officer of mine came running up the bridge ladder singing out he'd got bottom at eight fathoms, it gave me the deuce of a start. We'd been set to the devil and gone off our course, and there was only one thing to be done. I roused out the mate to stand by forward, and then took another cast of the lead. This time we only got six fathoms, and I saw it was high time to bring the ship up and wait until we could see something.

"Stand by, forward," I sang out, and "All ready, sir," answers the mate.

"Let go, then," I shouted, and "Leggo, sir," says he.

Then there was a squeak from the windlass brake and our cable roared out through the hawse pipe, shaking the whole ship as it went.

"Give her thirty-five fathoms to the water's edge, mister," I said, and then I walked to the binnacle to watch which way the tide would swing us.

And the tide there must have been running like a race, for as soon as the ship brought up on her cable she swung round through nine points so quickly you'd have thought a tug had got hold of her head. I looked over the side and heard the tide regularly sluicing past us.

"Hear that?" said I to the second. "No wonder we've been set off to blazes."

Then, in a flash, I understood what I'd done. I feared I was too late; but it wasn't many seconds before I found myself on the fore deck, shouting down the hold to the man who'd been waiting there and listening for the signal I'd promised to give. I called and I kept on calling; but I got no answer.

He'd heard the signal. He'd taken me at my word and gone overboard—with the ship somewhere in the middle of the Pechili Straits and a five-knot tide running past her straight out to sea.

HOGMEAT

Hogmeat shrills: "The first bilge rat that crosses the floor hostile, I pins him with a implement."

By H. H. MATTESON

I AND GO-BANG Gibbons is setting into our little office at the Apex Salmon Cannery, when a pop-eyed party comes surging in breathless, seizes I and Go-bang by the sleeve, and yanks us toward the door. We both lay a-back and ask this frantic party what the *ranikaboo* is, and what's the hurry.

"It's murder!" he wheezes out. "Violence, and thieving that will end in a killing! *Klatawa!* And hurry!"

This excited stranger is a stout medium tall *tillicum,* and he's got a black eye, and a lip split, and he's still wearing what's left of a greasy apron, from the which we deduct very accurate he is a camp cook.

"A fellow craftsman of mine, a camp cook," the stranger resumes on when he gets back his steam, "is to get kidnapped violent. Similar a precious treasure is to get stolen, and a terrible fight will rage and in the *mommix,* murder is sure to be done. Come on. Let's hurry!"

They's no delaying this impatient cook further, so I and Go-bang pile into the *umiak,* and the frantic party similar, him announcing he'll reveal out details as we paddle along.

"For where shall we lay the course?" asks Go-bang.

"For the Pant's Patch salmon camp on Whale Skull Island," says the cook. "Pile her into high. I just got to save

my fellow cook from indignities, or start a seam trying."

The Pant's Patch salmon camp. They'd been plenty trouble at the Pant's Patch of late. I'd seen Go-bang talking earnest to Hoedown Holliday, boss of the Pant's Patch, but it was something confidential, so I didn't know what it was exact.

Former, the Pant's Patch sold us lots of fish. Of late, it hadn't sold none. They was troubles there of some kind.

"Who's getting murdered?" asks Go-bang, as we shoot the skin boat away from shore. "What's going to get stole that is so precious?"

"They's just no telling exact who will get killed," answers the cook. "What is to get stole is a quart tin can of this vodka whisky, that they do say Hoedown Holliday has guarded with his life for years. The party that is to get kidnapped is the little camp cook of the Pant's Patch, which they call him Hogmeat."

"And all them violences is to be pulled off at the Pant's Patch?" asks Go-bang.

"Whatever," says the cook. "Soon as ever it gets dark, the program of pillage and rapine will start."

"And what camp do you hail from, stranger?"

"Oh, I hail—I was attached up former to the Devil Do camp. You know the Devil Do?"

I see Go-bang, who is paddling bow, kind of jerk his head at the mention of the Devil Do. Oh yes, we know the Devil Do. They hain't a cut-throatin'er outfit anywhere in the North. Them outcasts in the Devil Do hain't really fish hands at all. They just pretend. They're fish-pirates, waterfront thieves, poaching seals and sea otter when they get the chance.

"So you're the cook for the Devil Do." says Go-bang kind of disgusted.

"Was the cook, *tillicum*. I was. I hain't no more. I god abdicated violent very recent."

We're both hoping this cook of the Devil Do will get down to his reckoning, and spread us his yarn prompt and clear, but he goes on *wauwauing* wandering and discoursive, and they's no stopping him.

"Gents," he says, fetching a deep breath, "I just got to reveal out that my title is Toploft Allison, and I hain't no more a cook than I work button holes into dish rags with red silk. No, no, I hain't a cook. I'm a pile driver hand. For years, hence my title, I lofted in driver outfits all amongst these islands.

"But I got out of a job. They was no lofting, no fish sliming even, or trap tending. I'm in desperate need of a job when I crosses up with this Sinamoxt Barnes, who is the boss of the Devil Do. Sinamoxt, who is very sad and dejected, confides in me how the camp cook had run off with a native woman leaving 'em plumb destitute. The boys of the camp, Sinamoxt said, had tried turns at cooking, but the consequences of which they wasn't a man in the camp would speak to any other but to cuss him, and invite to fight.

"Gents," says the ex-cook and driver man, "I should ought to a been wary of that situation. But I wasn't. I was desperate in need of warping myself onto a pay roll. So I says to the Devil Do boss, 'Mister Sinamoxt,' I says, 'you-all can't imagine how cunning I be once you turn me loose amongst the pots and pans. Hands that eat my cooking, why in no time they waddle like bull walruses on a ice floe.'

" 'Hired,' says this Sinamoxt impulsive. So I pile onto his gas boat, and away we go for the Devil Do.

"With the first meal I serves up to them boys in the Devil Do, which it was supper yesterday, obnoxious looks is cast. With the second meal, breakfast this morning, mutterings is heard. With the third meal, noon today, them Devil Do boys raise up in a group, bust me two-three *chukkins* in the face and eye,

tear my pants and shirt, and hurl me forth onto the beach.

"Right there I quit. But I got my clothes, and my big silver watch in the *wickiup* lean-to adjoining the chuck shack where I was to 'a' slept. I crawls in a winder that's open into the *wickiup*, and I starts very silent stowing my war bag for flight.

"But I just can't help hearing what's going on in the chuck shack, the wall is that thin, or from seeing similar through a crack.

"A big outlaw, which they call him Snipe Legs, he sets by the table, cracking his fingers, and glaring voracious at another big hand they call Kusko.

" 'Kusko,' says this Snipe Legs, 'if I was any way sure you'd washed that bull neck of yourn recent, I'd take to gnawing into same for to obtain nutriment.'

" 'Don't do it,' growls Kusko, 'And beware. I'd change your mind for you complete before ever you fastened a fang.'

" 'Shut up!' bellers Sinamoxt, the boss. 'All of you shut up. And leave me think. If any hand interrupts me further I'll bust him up all fine for fish bait. Shut up!'

"In the five-six years I been lofting amongst these islands, I observed that a fish camp boss is the boss account of he's willing and able to step onto the beach any time, and lick decisive any hand he's got. It's similar with this Sinamoxt Barnes. He hain't but about thirty year old, and he's big and *skookum*, and moves like a cougar, and has got *tumtum* equal to a bear. Oh, yes, spite of the fact this Sinamoxt hain't got but seven fingers all told, hence his title, there being just a thumb and little finger onto one hand, the other hand, account of him favoring and saving the finger shy hand, the good hand is twice the size of natural and hard as a rock, and he slings it reckless and fatal. Sinamoxt is the boss, and they hain't a doubt.

" 'Shut up, you-all beach rats,' bellers Sinamoxt as he sets there holding up the finger shy hand, and glaring at it malevolent. 'What we need in this camp is a cook. All right. Leave us then caper forth and obtain such cook, by hand if need be. Wherever is the best cook any ways near?'

" 'Concerning that they hain't a doubt,' says Kusko. 'Over to the Pant's Patch they got a cook that approaches to the sublime. He's that good he should ought to be called a chef, and his name is Hogmeat.'

" 'You foller the trend of my thoughts, exact, Kusko,' says Sinamoxt. 'This Hogmeat is the *hiyuest* cook in the archipelago. While he hain't but five foot tall, and has to work standing onto a little platform, they do say a man that eats once of his *mich-u-sak* and bacon, hain't never the same again'."

It was then this gabby ex-cook has to go into details again, and while I and Go-bang wishes he'd proceed on with his narrative we had to listen. "It's likely you-all know about this *mich-u-sak*," says Toploft. "It's wild sorrel fermented like we used to make sauerkraut back home, but it lays over regular sauerkraut like plum duff over a poultice.

"But getting back to Sinamoxt. 'This very night,' he says, 'when it gets good and dark, we'll go stampeding in amongst that Pant's Patch, and we'll convince this Hogmeat to join up with the Devil Do.' But they's other considerations other than obtaining this chef, Hogmeat. Oh, sure. 'Fact is,' says Sinamoxt. 'I been owing a bitter grudge to Hoedown Holliday for years. During the process of abducting off this Hogmeat, which task I'll leave to you-all boys, I aim to engage this Hoedown, and lick him till his tongue hangs out clean to his belt. Oh, yes, if I don't bust this Hoedown wide open to wind and weather, you just hand me my rattle and my teething ring.'

" 'I'd proceed on there very cautious,

Sinamoxt,' advises one of the boys. 'While I don't make so bold as to say this Hoedown is as good a man all ways as you be, Sinamoxt, still and all he comes clost to it. I'd go in wide-eyed and wary.'

" 'The hell!' exploded out Sinamoxt, spitting copious. 'Any teetotaler that depends on just tea for his steam, I can lick him easy. One time, years ago, when Hoedown was drinking, I'll admit he was a fighting fool. But no more. When he left off toddy, he sucked his *tumtum* similar. But besides abducting off Hogmeat and licking Hoedown, they's still another important matter.'

"I SEE through the crack how Sinamoxt set there grinning horrible, holding up the finger shy hand, while the boys lean for'ard waiting to hear about item number three.

" 'You know this Hoedown Holliday has got most a full imperial quart tin can of old Vladivostok vodka whisky,' says Sinamoxt. 'They do say he's guarded that vodka with his life, for years.'

" 'But you just says he don't drink none no more,' objects Snipe Legs.

" 'Which he don't. He's a plumb teetotaler. It seems like when Hoedown swore off drinking, three-four years ago, he had this quart, and to remind hisself constant how he'd swore off, and how he could stand being tempted, he's kept that quart of vodka always in his room even standing side of his bed at night.

" 'Now this here is the program for the evening,' Sinamoxt continues on. 'We'll go surging into the Pant's Patch, and you boys grab Hogmeat, which he hain't only a hand full, and I'll turn myself loose, and I'll lick this Hoedown till he resembles something spoiling on the beach.

" 'While you boys have snubbed this Hogmeat up fore and aft so he can't go to careening off into the larch bresh and get away, and I've licked Hoedown satisfactory, but not to the point of rendering of him unconscious, I'll make search of his shake-down and obtain that tin quart of vodka. Then with Hoedown looking on, I'll take a deep swig out of the can, and hand it around, and we'll drink hearty in turn till the can's empty, and then we'll sling the can onto the floor, laugh derisive, and I'll likely give Hoedown two-three kicks in the face at parting, and we'll prance out of there with little Hogmeat in our midst. And that there, boys, is the evening's program.' "

"A lot of the hands laugh hearty, and say how they'll enjoy a drink out of Hoedown's can, and a *hiyu* feed later, prepared by hogmeat. While I'm looking and listening to this *wauwau,* I been stowing my war bag hasty. I fetches one last look through the crack in the wall, and I don't remember if I ever did see a man looking meaner than Sinemoxt. He generally always keep one eye half shut, like he entertains cunning ideas, and his mouth is a thin, square slit like the hole in the post office door."

"Oh, I know" says Go-bang impatient. "But what time was it when you left the Devil Do?"

"Just after noon," repeats Go-bang, cook.

"Just after noon," repeats Go-bang, glancing up at the sun. "Did you come direct from the Devil Do to the Apex?"

"Yes," says Toploft Allison, "and I come a-raring. I hails a Aleut in a skin boat, and I gives him my big silver watch to cargo me in."

"That being the case," says Go-bang, "we better hit 'er up a lick. You'll find a extra paddle under the rail there, Toploft. You light in and paddle too, port side a while, then sta'board."

For a few minutes we paddle on lively. We got quite a distance to go to arrive at the Pant's Patch, and darkness will be falling any minute almost.

"I'm terrible anxious we should get to the Pant's Patch ahead of Sinamoxt,"

says Go-bang final. "This Sinamoxt is a natural killer, and hates Hoedown. I know too the Pant's Patch trap has been pirated twice of late, and the web slashed, and in consequence Hoedown couldn't pay his hands, and he gives 'em all I. O. U's, and turns 'em off, and Hoedown is all alone at the Pants Patch with just one hand, and them two won't stand no manner of show against Sinamoxt and his whole cutthroat crew."

"Just one hand, Toploft?" I asks. "Who might that one hand be?"

"Hogmeat, the cook. Hogmeat says he don't aim to get fired till he says so hisself. Oh, I'll tell you, this Hogmeat hain't just a terrible good cook, he's a stanch and true little *tillicum,* and he swears he'll stand by Hoedown long as he's got a leg under him and a button on his pants. Why Hogmeat, he aims in between spasms of cooking just what him and Hoedown needs, to help patch the web, stand a trick with the downhalls, and help Hoedown work the trap so they can get to going again. Stanch a *tillicum* as Hogmeat is, why I don't want him man handled, and Hoedown neither."

"This Hogmeat is sure a honor to the culinary craft," says Toploft earnest. "I wisht I was such a cook, and as stanch a hand as him. I hope we arrive up in time."

Well, we paddle for all we're worth, but, like always, in the Aleutians, they wasn't any twilight, and sudden it's dismal dark, and we're into a channel thick with reefs and we get slowed up. And it's double dark when we drive up onto the spit that's likely a quarter of a mile from the Pant's Patch chuck shack, and we all pile out of the skin boat, and go catfooting it acrost the hard packed sand.

We're likely a hawser len'th from the chuck shack, when we see a light flicker, and a yell comes booming out through the dark, and a window crashes in, and a door sound like it's tore from the hinges.

We just tear across then, and they's a winder in the stern of the chuck shack, and Go-bang, who's ahead, comes to a plowing stop to fetch a observation through the glass at what's abeam. I and Toploft, we run up too and there the three of us stares into that winder just putrified.

Yes, Hoedown Holliday is in there, and little Hogmeat, and they're fronting up to Sinamoxt and four of his men, two of 'em ag'in five.

Just the same, spite of them heavy odds, Hoedown and Hogmeat hain't in the need of aid, assistance or succor. No, no.

The little vest pocket of a cook had drawed his platform up back of the work bench onto which he compounds his delicious *muckamuck,* and he's got laid out onto the table handy in front of him, three of them taper bladed French knives, four butcher knives and his cleaver. Hogmeat had just went into action, hence the mad yell that had come shrieking out of the chuck shack.

Paler than ghosts, this swab, Kusko, is leaning weak agin the wall, and plumb clost to his ear, and still throbbing and vibrating, is a long butcher knife sunk into the larch wall timber half up the blade.

"Stand back agin that wall, all of you." Hogmeat shrills in his childish treble. "All stand back. The first bilge rat that crosses the floor hostile, I pins him with a implement."

Hogmeat was clutching the cleaver in one hand, and a French knife in the other, and he just makes a circle of fire around his head with the knife, like he's all set to sling it.

Seems like this little Hogmeat, being too tiny and fragile to fight good by hand, had perfected hisself in a art. Seeing Hogmeat is a proud little rooster, and can't abide a insult, why, between times of cookery, he'd prance out back

of the chuck shack, and practise slinging at a stump till he can part a gnat's eyebrows at forty foot.

"Stand back agin that wall, you-all whale lice," he screams.

Again he whirls a blade, and kind of sights it menacing at Snipe Legs.

And they all did fall back to the wall but Sinamoxt. Sinamoxt he stands out three-four feet, and he's glaring destructive at Hoedown who's setting comfortable and serene on the end of the bench.

This here Sinamoxt he continues on glaring very poisonous at Hoedown like a cougar all set to jump his meat.

"You-all, Sinamoxt," sings out Hogmeat at the Devil Do chief. "You step three paces for'ard, three and no more. *Wauk-sel*"

From the tail of that half shut, green eye of hissen, Sinamoxt regards at Hogmeat who's kind of hefting and balancing a French knife, and Sinamoxt steps out as ordered.

Then Hogmeat begins addressing hisself to Hoedown, like it's a friendly chat, and they hain't a soul else but them present.

"Hoedown," says the little cook, "you all heard the vulgar and disgusting language this Sinamoxt emits when he come prancing in. Why as dirty and offensive as can be, this Sinamoxt insinuates how he can lick you, Hoedown, you and your grandchildren if any such they ever is. Special, Hoedown, you must 'a' gathered how this Sinamoxt propounds his vile theory he can lick anybody that keeps a can of vodka for as much as a single hour without consuming same. Oh, yes, you heard all that, Hoedown. And if you're through laughing, why organize yourself and careen to the front."

Hoedown he has been laughing hearty, and still grinning broad he stands up, and he shucks off his tarpaulin coat and gives it a heave into the corner. Then he steps over till him and Sinamoxt is facing each other.

"Now a further kindly word of warning to you-all sculpins lined ag'in the wall," says Hogmeat. "During this here conflict that is to ensue, Tyee of the Pant's Patch, versus the Tyee of the Devil Do, the first bilge rat amongst you that bats a eye, or wags a ear as sign of interfering, I crucifies him instant in his tracks, and they hain't a doubt."

With that, like they're Indian clubs, Hogmeat swings and circles with his cleaver and his biggest French knife.

The very first move of this Sinamoxt shows he's dirty. Hoedown, hands hanging, is waiting for Hogmeat to give the word. Sinamoxt don't wait for no signal. Of a sudden, Sinamoxt launches hisself into the air like a flying squirrel. He lights onto Hoedown all sprawled out, and such is the weight of this pirate, and the fury of his attack, him slinging in a terrible lick with that big, hard rock fist of hissen, that he capsizes Hoedown over onto the floor, and is astraddle instant, and swings a nasty *chukkin* to Hoedown's face.

While Hoedown is down, it hain't with pleurisy. He hain't never lollygagging slow where action is demanded. He bridges his body up sudden, thereby spoiling Sinamoxt's aim, and spilling him off, and the same time Hoedown lifts a sliding up-in-the-air belt that plunks into Sinamoxt's belly, and goes plowing on and up, and cracks the pirate's jaws together like you spring a wolf trap with a stick.

In a instant both men is milling on the floor, and both get up simultaneous, and they mingle frantic, and go weaving acrost the floor, crashing into the table, bouncing off the wall, and they fetch up in a corner gouging, and kneeing each other, and lamming in the licks that would broach a fish scow.

And they fight out of the corner, dog eat dog, and progress back, the air just full of slinging fists, and one of them miscreants against the wall pops out a foot to trip Hoedown.

"Stand back!" Hogmeat's scream is shrill as a whistle toot.

Zing!

Humming like a terrible mad hornet bee, that French knife slithers acrost the room. This party at the which it's aimed, is wearing one of them knitted caps with a little tassel onto the top. Very neat the point of the knife impales this tassel, whisking the cap offen the pirate's head, and there the cap hangs on the boards, and the Devil Doer stands very foolish feeling of his head to see is his skelp intact.

BLITHE as can be, the fight goes on. No man moves out from the wall again. All of them pirates, and us three watching ardent through the winder, why we're all blowing and puffing, and straining our fists, and kind of making little gouges into the air like we was all personal into the combat.

All eyes bulging watches the battle rage up and down the room. Sinamoxt gets a pile driver lick in the chest that shoots him back amongst his pirates by the wall. Such is the respects inspired by this tiny Hogmeat, that not a hand is raised to stay him, and he falls down, and he crawls, and he's up, and he launches hisself at Hoedown again like forty wild cats.

Gents, that there was a fight. This here Sinamoxt, low as he is, and considering the work he follered, is a *hiyu pukpuker,* and they hain't a doubt, and Hoedown similar. A little hampered likely with that finger shy hand, this Sinamoxt makes up with the other which is deadly as a sixteen pound iron maul.

Them two warriors go careening around the chuck shack, and Sinamoxt he's got Hoedown's face battered to a bloody pulp, and is concentrating very earnest in belting Hoedown's jaw loose from his skull.

Just the same, the pirate's system kind of leaves him open amidships, and Hoedown is plastering in licks to the enemy ribs which every larrup booms like you hit a rain barrel with a club. Again and again, Hoedown pumps 'em in, and if this Sinamoxt wasn't thewed like a polar bear, them ribs would 'a' got shored off his keel like a derelict on the reefs.

And at last, Hoedown organizing desperate, shoots in one that centers in the pirate's power plant. Sinamoxt kind of sags, and doubles, and jacknifes down like a hinge in his back had busted, Hoedown clutches him before he falls, and kind of supports him up, balancing the free fist, and waiting to pop it in.

But Hoedown never slings the lick. Sinamoxt is done. When Hoedown lets go his holt, Sinamoxt collapses down like a wet sack, and he lays in a huddle of a heap, kind of twitching and kicking feeble like a chicken for your Sunday dinner.

Still not a pirate moves out from the wall. No word is spoke. Breathing is hard and loud. Sinamoxt, final, kind of rolls over feeble, opens a eye stupid, and lays looking up at Hoedown.

"Sinamoxt," says Hoedown quiet, and almost polite, "it's all ways likely that you'll remember distinct, a dark night of something over three year ago. I recalls it very vivid. They was a cannery tender plowing through Dead Man Channel in the dark that night, and it had three scows of fish towing astern. Oh, you'll remember it, Sinamoxt.

"I and Billy Dale was riding them three scows as watch," Hoedown goes on. "We was supposed to be on them scows to see no pirates didn't come popping alongside in the dark, make fast, and brail out four-five hundred salmon apiece.

"I was in the sternmost scow, Sinamoxt. Billy Dale he was for'ard. The night was cold and foggy and I had a full tin can quart of hundred and twenty proof vodka whisky with me. I hadn't et recent, and when I imbibes down two-three heavy drinks, I go sleepy and

stupid, and I half way hear a yelp for'ard, and thud of a oar falling onto a human head. It's then I hear a gurgle in the water right by me, and a big dory surges up, and a hand grabs the rail of the scow, and the other hand begins stabbing fish out of the scow with a one tined *piu*.

"I'm still fuddled with them drinks, but not sufficient to make me foolish entire. I hain't got no gun. They's anyway four-five dories of pirates clinging to the scow rails, and that oar belt had put Billy Dale away. Yes. I figure I'm the next to get a oar athwart my binnacle.

"No I didn't have no weapon, only a fish scaler that happened to be hanging in a leather loop on the scow rail, and I grabs this fish scaler, and I lams loose at the big hand clutching the rail.

"It's then exact, that I get my *chukkin* acrost the head with a oar, and I collapses down among the fish, and I don't know nothing until it's daylight, and the tender has set the three scows in at the cannery docks, and they find Billy Dale dead, and I find three human fingers, shore off very neat, resting on the rail of the scow."

Hoedown he pauses dramatic. All hands is breathing harder still. Sinamoxt is glaring up like something wild.

"Hold up that there shore off hand of yourn, Sinamoxt," says Hoedown.

But Sinamoxt kind of shoves that hand in under him, and growls, "You haint got proof, Hoedown. Any man can go shy fingers by accident. I don't know nothing about the killing of Billy Dale. To hell with you, Hoedown, you tea-drinking granny."

Hoedown makes out to grin very wry account of thick and busted lips. "I be a tea drinker—now," he says. "Former, I lickered up very free. But I gets swore off complete, Sinamoxt, when they found Billy Dale dead. In a way, I killed Billy Dale—too stupid drunk to surge to the front for him. I swore then I'd never take another drink. I never did. I've just kept that can of vodka since, for a—for a souvenir and a reminder."

"Bilge wash," says Sinamoxt disgusted, trying to get up. "The hell with all that muleying, Hoedown. What you aim to do with me—with us, Hoedown? But if you figger anyway you can attach up the killing of Billy Dale to me you're *pelton* crazy."

Again the pirate starts to get up, and Hoedown he shoves him back.

"You stay there a spell, Sinamoxt," he says, and signs to Hogmeat to see the pirate done it.

Hoedown walks acrost the floor, and through a door leading into his little office and sleeping room. In no time he's back, and he's packing under his arm the big tin can of vodka whisky.

"Lay that finger shy hand of yourn out onto the floor flat," orders Hoedown.

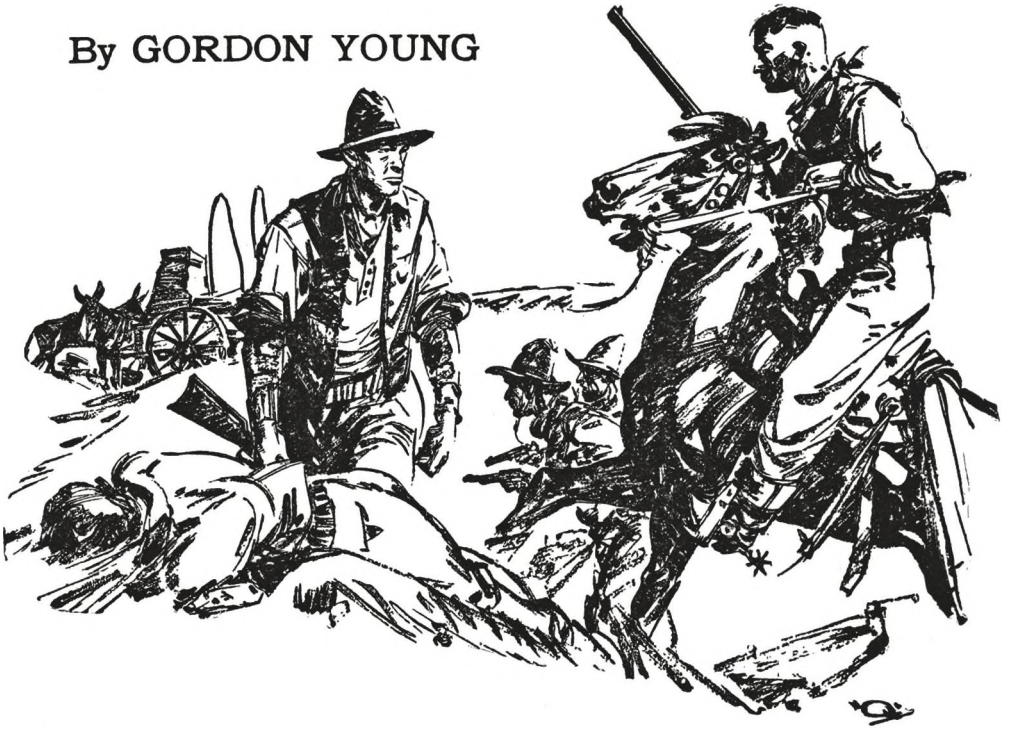
Sinamoxt he hesitated a minute, but shoves the part of a hand out like ordered, and lays it palm up.

Hoedown he kind of shakes the tin can of vodka, and unscrews the top, and upends it, and spills out some of that high power, hundred and twenty proof licker, and it fairly smokes, this vodka does, it's that strong, and Hoedown shakes the can some more and he spills out one after the other, and lays 'em in place where they fit exact, Sinamoxt's three missing fingers.

It's then that Go-bang Gibbons circles the chuck shack lively, and yanks open the door, and he stands there, and he kind of careless slings back his coat disclosing out his deputy marshal badge.

"Very neat work, that there, Hoedown," says Go-bang, pointing down at them three alcohol preserved fingers. "I don't know whenever I enjoyed a fight more complete. You especial, Hogmeat, I commends you very high for skill and *tumtum*. You-all mud sharks ag'in the wall there, you're all under arrest. Sinamoxt, we'll ticket you for aiding and abetting the killing of Billy Dale."

By GORDON YOUNG



RED OF THE ARROWHEAD

PART THREE

SYNOPSIS

Red Clark of the Arrowhead was in the Best Bet when Joe Bush, kingpin gambler of Tulluco, hit pretty Sara Timton. A sign above the bar said "Anybody wearing guns indoors will be arrested." Joe Bush threw a knife and Red shot him dead.

Joe Bush's mother, Mrs. Hepple, ruled the Hepple ranch, rival of the Arrowhead. The Johnsons, father and son, Tulluco bankers, were allied with her. Red's employer, Mrs. George, is bitter against the Hepples, who had killed her husband.

To avenge Joe Bush's death, three gamblers attack Red. He kills them and a $1000 reward is put on his head.

At Arrowhead, where rustlers and mortgages and sheepherders harass Mrs. George, her granddaughter Catharine Pineton entertains an Easterner. Harold Mason, to whom she is secretly married. Red's friend, old Jeb Grimes, bitter cowhand watches as gun rule again becomes law at the Arrowhead.

Mrs. Dobbs discovers that the Huskinses, at the suggestion of the Johnsons, are eating her beef. She horsewhips Huskins, defies Sheriff Bill Nims' attempt to arrest Red on a charge of man slaughter. Jim Cross, a ne'er do well rancher nearby, is found double-branding Arrowhead cattle, aided and abetted by the Hepple outfit and the Johnsons. Red kills Cross.

A visiting stranger called Buck shoots at Red, and thinking that he has killed him, goes to collect the reward.

Meanwhile Howard Mason admits that he is the son of Mr. Hepple by a former marriage. And Dora Harris, niece of the local judge admits her en-

gagement to Pinky Hepple. Mrs. George Dobbs is unaware of these relationships.

Jeb Grimes and Red ride out to drive sheepherders off the ranch.

CHAPTER X

THE SHEEPHERDERS' BATTLE

ALONG about eight o'clock they reached a muddy waterhole, gave the horses a drink, opened a can of tomatoes apiece, ate some bread and cheese, and rode on.

A little before noon they came to the stake and shale fence at the mouth of Cocheno Valley where Dobbses wintered stock. The fence barred it from grazing in the summer.

Red piled off, opened the gate. They rode in. Here the valley looked as barren as if it had been burned over. The ground was gray and brown instead of black, but the destruction was complete —more complete than by fire. Fire at least left roots, and after rain grass would come up rich as ever. Sheep grazed close, and their cloven hoofs chopped the earth as if hacked by tiny grub-hoes. Also they left a stench offensive to cattle. Wherever sheep had grazed, the loco weed sprang up—or so ranchers thought and said. To cowmen, a fellow that ran sheep was worse than a man that fired the range; and anybody caught firing the range was shot down on the spot, or any other spot where he could be found.

To Red's eyes it looked as if the distant valley were covered with a mess of woolly maggots. Hepple cows in the valley would have been better than anybody's sheep. Far ahead they saw a light spring wagon on the hillside and, nearby, some hobbled burros.

Jeb Grimes didn't change his gait. Simply rode forward at a trot. It was like him to go into a fight, and he had been in plenty, just about as if he meant to be killed. Men with rifles in their hands began to rise up from near about the wagon. Red counted six on foot, one man on horseback. The herders had known that some day soon cowmen would come. A herder climbed to the wagon seat and scanned the country to see if other horsemen were coming down on them. It wasn't easy to believe that only three would ride in.

The sheepherder on horseback rode out in front of the wagon, raised his hand, bawled—"Stop right whar you air, you fellers!"

Grimes, Paloo and Red were neck and neck at the trot, with rifles in the crook of their arms.

The herders on foot scattered a little, moving fast with the scramble of men who think maybe they have already waited a little too long. Some got behind the wagon, others scrouged down on the ground. The man on horseback slid off his horse and laid the rifle across the saddle, yelled at the top of his voice—

"Halt, damn it! Halt whar you air!"

It was beneath the dignity of Jeb Grimes to talk back to sheepherders. He called to Red, "You talk easy. Speak up!" Jeb swung to the right, and Paloo, as if at a word of command, veered to the left.

Red went on up to within easy speaking distance of a hundred feet or so. The fellow behind his horse looked anxiously from right to left. He knew Jeb Grimes and he knew Harry Paloo; and Red knew him.

Red reined up and called, "Well if it ain't Mike Comber! Gosh a'mighty, Mike, you allus took a bath reg'lar! How it come you turned sheepherder?"

Mike Comber up and spoke his little piece. "You fellers git out! This here is public domain, the which you got fenced illegal. Me an' my sheep stay!"

Mike Comber had been in the country a long time, worked off and on for various outfits, had a few cows of his own, a wife and some kids. As he spoke his little piece to Red, Comber's head swung uneasily toward Grimes, tall and motion-

less in saddle, who had reined up and looked ready.

" 'Public domain!' " Red jeered. "You never got words like them 'tween your jaws, Mike, 'less somebody pried open your mouth an' poked 'em in. Who?"

"Me an' my sheep got a right here!"

"Your sheep? Hell, Mike, we know they ain't yours. They b'long to somebody as ain't got the grit to run his own sheep on our range, so he's hired you to come an' get shot at for 'imself! Who?"

"They is law in this land!" said Comber, speaking some more of his piece. "You all interfere with my rights an'—"

"Mike, you're an old cowman. These ain't your sheep. This ain't your range. If your wages is big enough to make you willing to get bad hurt, earnin' 'em, all right! You and these sheep are in here just to make trouble for Miz George. We know that. So if it's trouble you want, be happy that it has come! Whose are they?"

"Mine!"

"You're a liar!"

Comber shot. Red had guessed that he would and sat with toes at the edge of his stirrups. Red threw himself out of the saddle, and the bullet passed just about where his head had been. Guns opened up like a bunch of firecrackers.

Harry Paloo could nearly play a tune on a rifle. He thought Red had been knocked out of the saddle. Paloo's first shot killed Comber's horse so as to put Comber out in the open; and his second shot knocked Comber sprawling as he tried to dodge down behind the dead horse. Then Paloo swung off and began firing across his saddle.

Red dropped the rifle without firing it and went for his revolvers. The Ghost wasn't gun-broke and began to plunge. The reins were on the ground and he had been trained not to drag them, but he plunged and sidled, kicking up a dust and almost trampling Red.

Grimes didn't draw foot from stirrup and shot with almost rhythmic timing. He was fast, steady, unhurried and deadly. He didn't seem to notice at all that men were blazing at him. A herder had some dust knocked in his eyes, squalled, jumped up, flung away his rifle and ran. Two other men rose up with hands lifted. The other three on the ground over there by the wagon didn't move. Grimes pointed his rifle at the two fellows who were surrendering, said, "Git goin'!" and gave the muzzle a swerve by way of emphasis. They started off, walking fast, with faces jerking about in fear of bullets at their backs.

Red went over and kneeled down by Comber. "Mike, you ort've knowed better!"

Comber had been shot through the hips. He said, pleading:

"Give me a drink, will you, Red?"

Red took up Comber's rifle, pitched it beyond reach, then pulled the revolver from Comber's belt, tossing it aside.

"I ain't that kind! You know I ain't!" Comber groaned, reproachful. Red didn't much think so himself but wasn't taking chances.

He went to the wagon, shook a canteen, brought it back, kneeled, raised Comber's head. Comber took a couple of swallows, coughed, looked up.

Paloo, on foot, stepping soft and looking mild, came up leading his horse. Comber stared at him, said dully:

"Harry, you air mighty fast." He rolled his head to one side, peered at Red, took a deep breath. Red gave him more water.

"I reckon I purt-near done for," Comber muttered.

"Why you ever turn sheepherder, Mike?" Red coaxed.

"I swore never to tell."

"Gosh a'mighty, you go an' get yourself killed just to protect on'ry sneakin' fellers! Think of your kids an' wife! Who got you into this, Mike?'

"Them Johnsons there in town."

"Them banker fellers, eh?" Red asked

cool and smooth, cocking his head at Paloo and nodding. Comber moved his head in weak assent.

"But didn't you know, Mike, if Grimes and Paloo and Robertson and old Slim Hawks come a-ridin', this would happen?"

"I owed money to the bank. I got a wife an' chil'ren. They agreed to cross it off. But I ort've knowed, Red."

"All right, Mike. You just take it easy as you can. We'll do whatever is do-able for you." To Paloo: "We'll take him along in with us. You mind roundin' up them burros?"

Grimes sat in the saddle, patient and indifferent. His job was over. The herders were done for. Tomorrow Robertson would send in some boys from the line camps to harry the sheep out of the valley and scatter them to the coyotes and wolves and such nesters as were low enough to eat mutton instead of steal veal.

Chain harness lay across the wagon tongue. Paloo and Red hitched up. They threw out stuff to make room for a pallet on the wagon bed, piled folded blankets, and spread tarpaulin over the bows to keep the sun off Comber. The burros were hitched and stood in their tracks with woebegone air. Comber was carried and lifted into the wagon, given another drink. He said, "Thanky, boys."

Red put his rope on a burro and got into the saddle. It was slow going, but there was something like a road rutted into the ground by the grub wagons that brought in supplies when men were in the valley.

"You all light out ahead," Red said. "I'll be along in when I get there."

Grimes and Paloo rode off at a trot, steadily. Red went at a slow walk. Now and then he halted to give Comber a drink. It was a hot day. He was tired, sore, sleepy. Going at a burro's walk was the hardest kind of work. Much of the time he rode with a leg around the horn and, drowsing, almost fell off.

The afternoon passed. Twilight came, then deepening shadows, and night brought out the stars. Coyotes yapped from afar off. Here and there an owl fluttered heavily, like something thrown. The burros, sad of face and untiring, plodded on with slim dainty feet. Red yawned, rubbed his eyes. He didn't dare sleep in the saddle. The burros had to be guided.

It was away after midnight when he pulled into the ranch. All was quiet, but as he swung off a big-bodied shadow with a beard came limping, stick in hand. Robertson had waited up.

"How is he, Red?"

"A'right I reckon. 'Pears to be asleep. I thought Miz George would like to have a talk with him."

"I ain't seen her so mad in years as when she heard it was them Johnsons."

"You ain't seen her have so much cause, neither, I reckon. I'll go roust out somebody to help carry 'im in. Then water and feed these burros."

Red went into the bunkhouse, shook up Slim Hawks and Harry Paloo. They slipped into their pants and boots and came stumbling out.

Old Robertson said, "Go along back to sleep, boys. He is dead. Bled to death, I reckon."

THE next morning Red was having a talk with Mrs. George under the sycamores in front of the bunkhouse. Her quirt moved fretfully and she was angry; but he repeated in good humored stubborness—

"I'm goin' along to town with you all. You got to let me go—or fire me. You fire me, I'll tag along!"

"Red Clark, I don't know what's got into you! With that reward on your head—"

"Shucks! I shot them Johnsons' gamblers. Paloo and Jeb shot their sheepherders. You're takin' Paloo and Jeb. You got to take me, too. I wouldn't

miss hearin' you talk to them fellers for a hundred dollars!"

"But if they try to arrest you there in town?"

"You're plannin' to get in after dark. *I* won't be seen—much. Anyhow, I'm going!" Red stooped and pulled at a collie's ear.

"I never in my life been so over-rode this way before! I ought to fire you as a matter of principle!" She was exasperated, but also a little forgiving. "'Course, there'll be enough boys along to make Bill Nims mighty polite about asking you to get arrested. For that matter, there's likely to be warrants out for Jeb and Harry, and even me!" She chuckled a little. "But I don't think you ought to go. For one thing, they'll be hardly anybody left around here but Robertson and Dutchy and Joey."

"And are you takin' Hal Mason to show some more about us out West?"

Mrs. George grinned, bright-eyed. "My worries about him are over, I think. He rode back yesterday and went to bed. Had a pain in his side and was stiff. I wish you could have seen Kate's face! Done me more good than a rise in beef." She took Red's tobacco from his shirt pocket and asked for papers, then rolled a cigarette.

"I bet you never had a saddle pain in your side. I get 'em sometimes when a horse pitches, stubborn."

"But you don't climb off and go to bed!"

"I sure would if I done what I feel like."

"But you don't. That's the point."

"It all comes from me havin' been such a cute baby!"

Mrs. George swung the quirt at him.

"You've changed plenty. By the way, I think Dora Harris is good for Kate. They are out riding now. Both wearing my skirts. I'm glad Kate has at last got up gumption enough to straddle a saddle."

"Mason with 'em?"

"He is not. He's up to the house setting on a cushion. His tail is sore. I wish it was blistered! I'm thinking up a letter to write Col. Howland!"

Mrs. George got into the saddle and rode off. Red went down to the musty harness room and worked on his cartridge belt. Some of the loops were unstitched. There was an old stitching machine that he didn't know much about, so he talked to it as if trying to bully the thing into good behavior. He had the belt fixed and was rubbing away with neats foot oil when the doorway was darkened.

Dora had come up on horseback. She said, cheerily—

"Good morning, Mr. Clark!"

The floor of the harness room was two feet above the ground. He strapped on the belt and stood in the door at a height almost face to face with her. She looked past him, leaning a little. "Are you alone, Red?"

"No'am. I got a purty girl here talkin' to me!"

"I am glad you think so." She smiled and slipped a hand from its glove. Her tone was low and serious. "Red, Mr. Mason asked me to mail this without letting anyone know when I returned to town."

"Huh?"

"Look at the address."

Red looked:

Mr. Dingley Hepple,
HP Ranch,
Tulluco.

"Well I'll be damnedified!"

"Red, I hope I am doing right. It seems odd that a guest of Mrs. Dobbs', just from the East, would be writing Mr. Hepple, secretly. You know how I feel about the Hepples, but I love Mrs. Dobbs and Catherine. And if there is anything underhanded being done, I don't want to have—"

"Him knowing about you and Pink,

he reckoned you wouldn't mind mailing his letter."

"But I do mind if—what shall I do?"

"Give it to me."

She did, and Red promptly ripped it open. "Why Red!" He didn't answer, simply read:

> My dear Father: I know you will be surprised to hear from me after all these years, and more surprised to find that I am in this country. I hear that you are not well and I do want to see you very much. I have always remembered you with affection. Mother died about two years ago. Col. Howland said that since this was the country of my birth, I ought to return. If you want to see me, please write to H. M. Hepple, Tulluco. There are some important things that I want to talk to you about. I think I can explain why that old feud must not be revived under any circumstances. Your loving son, Harold.

Red tore up the letter.

"Why Red! Was it something dreadful?"

"Nope. It wasn't. 'Bout a feller old Hepple used to know what went East. But like you said, a guest of Miz George's has no business writing Hepples times like these."

"Red, I know, just *know*, that Charley Hepple is doing everything he can to prevent trouble, and—"

Red grunted, non-committal, eying her. He thought it a dirty shame for a nice girl like this to be so bamboozled by a no-good scoundrel like Pinky.

"I must be going. Catherine will wonder where I am."

After she turned the horse, Red looked at the scraps of paper in his fist and pondered. One way, there wouldn't be much wrong in a fellow writing his dad that way. Mason 'peared to have some good intentions about the range trouble; but, in Red's mind, it was wrong of him not to cease altogether from thinking of himself as a Hepple. He was now nothing but a Dobbs man.

"Besides," Red mused, "I done him a big favor. He don't understand about things. Old Dingley, being sick-a-bed, Miz Hepple would read that letter. If she finds out Dingley's boy is around in this country, writing to his dad, she'll maybe figger he wants to horn Pinky out of some cows. And that Buck feller is likely to take a shot at him through a winder. Jeb says he knows she had to do with his coming out here after me."

THAT evening Red, just about dark, carefully avoided the ranch house when he went up to see how the collie pups were making out, but Catherine caught him.

She crowded into the shed where the savage Bella was stretched out, blissfully relaxed as the puppies sucked her breast.

Catherine was wearing her coolest don't-touch-me-manner. "Red, why did you play that mean trick on Hal?"

"I didn't play any tricks of any kind." He turned a pup over on its back, scratched its belly. "These here pups—later on when they are bigger, I'll show you how Bella teaches 'em. I'll kill a rattler and bring it in, then she'll—"

"Red, you know you did!"

"I know I didn't."

"He said you rode fast when he asked you not to!"

"Listen, you!" His rudeness gave her a start. "Miz George sent me and Jeb Grimes and Harry Paloo to Cocheno Valley on some work. Mason wasn't ready when 'twas time to go. They went on. I waited for 'im. It was my job to catch up with 'em. I wish to God he hadn't told me he was a Hepple—"

"That's just it! You dislike him and want to make grandmother dislike him! You do things to make him ridiculous! You can't forgive him for being a Hepple!"

Red said, "Bite her, Bella. Go on. She needs learnin' more'n your pups ever will!"

"You aren't being in the least amusing, Red!"

"I ain't tryin' to be!" He faced her, spoke sharply. "I like you. I'd like you even if you wasn't Miz George's kin. But bein' who you are, I'd most near break my neck to have things like you want. But you got me in a pickle. Miz George won't never forgive me if she finds out. And she will. You can't fool her long. Far as I know, or think, Mason ain't really a bad feller. He wanted to know how to make Miz George like 'im, and I told him the best I knowed. He'll have to be like the men she likes. Ride and shoot and do as told, and work like hell. He'll have to be a Dobbs man—and at the showdown, fight his own kin folks!"

"Never!"

"And if he done all that," Red went on, imperturbably, "she prob'ly wouldn't like him over-much. Hepples fought her from the time she was a girl, just married. They tried to ruin her ranch. They burnt her range. They stole her cows. They shot her men. They near murdered her husband—"

"She did as much to them!"

"She done more," Red admitted proudly, "since she licked 'em! That ain't the point. She hates Hepples like I hate a polecat that's climbed into my blankets while I'm asleep. She won't forgive 'em. She won't forgive anybody that does forgive 'em. And your husband is a Hepple. You are goin' to catch hell. And I'm goin' to be some splattered too with fire an' brimstone. And 'tain't my fault if your husband can't ride. Or if he gets drunk. Or if he goes to bed 'cause his settin' place is sore. Or—"

Catherine slapped him, hard, with resounding smack squarely on the cheek. Without a word, but with eyes flashing, she backed out, turned, slammed the door of the pen.

Red rubbed his cheek, grinned, laughed. "Oh, no, they ain't no good old fightin' blood in her! I bet before long her pet Hepple crawls under the bed to get away from her, and she'll poke him out with a broom stick and break it over his head! Bella, you're the nicest lady I know. Though at that, I bet these pups' daddy is a wolf—the which to a proper collie is just like a Hepple!"

CHAPTER XI

THE DOBBS FACE THE TOWN

MRS. George rode into Tulluco at nightfall with four horsemen behind her. They kept off the main street where there were a lot of people milling about and cut 'cross lots to a flat adobe house with a long porch at the front. The windows were lighted, so folks were home and it would be about supper time.

They all climbed down, but Slim Hawks and Harry Paloo stayed with the horses. Mrs. George took Red and Jeb Grimes with her. Their boot heels and spurs made a racket on the porch floor. Mrs. George knocked on the door with the butt of her quirt. She beat fast and hard.

It was opened by Milton Johnson. His face was cold, sly and mean; a broad face, pinched at nose-tip and not covered with much flesh. His mouth was thin and his ears stuck out. He gulped a little at seeing Mrs. George and especially at Red who was supposed to be dead since nobody had brought to town a correction of Buck's story from the Arrowhead. Old Grimes being there, too, made it harder for Milt Johnson to swallow easy. These weren't nice people to quarrel with, and Mrs. George looked quarrelsome. Just beyond the porch he saw two other men guessed who they were.

Mrs. George said, "I come to see your dad, Milt."

Milt Johnson said, "Sorry, Mrs. Dobbs, but dad ain't to home. He went—"

A strong heavy voice called from within the house.

"Who is it, Milt?"

"So!" said Mrs. George stepping in.

"He must have just come in the back way," Milton explained with no embarrassment at all. "You are always welcome to our house, Mrs. Dobbs." There was a reserved alert suspicious stare in his cold eyes. He seemed inviting in Mrs. George only.

Red pulled off his hat and almost bumped into him as Milton was making to close the door. Grimes kept his hat on. He paused and looked hard at the young banker. Grimes' black eyes had a kind of bright glaze, like opaque polished stones. He didn't say a word but he had given a threat.

Mrs. George stamped through the big room where supper was being put on the table and to a doorway where old Johnson stood in mystified glower. But old Johnson put on his best manner—

"Hello, Mrs. Dobbs. Was you wanting to see me?"

"I come for a talk."

Mrs. George marched by old Johnson and into the next room. Red followed, dragging his rowels. Grimes, somehow in silence, gave Milt Johnson orders to get along in there, too. Grimes pulled the door shut and stood before it.

Mrs. George pushed up the stiff brim of her hat and turned on old Johnson. He was big-boned, broad, not tall, wore baggy clothes. He was sixty or more, coarse of feature, thin of mouth, with sunken pale eyes. His forehead sloped back. Behind his back folks called him "Toad" Johnson. His voice was deep. Mrs. George's was shrill and her grey eyes were on fire:

"Johnson, your sheep are off my range! Your herders killed or run out! And I am here! Start talking!"

She drew the quirt thongs between her gloved fingers, taking out the kinks. Old Johnson sucked in a deep breath and swelled up. He stared hard, held his breath and looked sort of funny and helpless.

"N-now Mrs. Dobbs, I—I—I can explain! Th-they wasn't *my* sheep a-tall! Not a-tall! I—agent—merely acted as agent and—"

"Whose?"

"Why, Mrs. Dobbs, a banker has to have things confidential and—" Just as he thought he was getting along fine that quirt whizzed past his nose. He stepped back and looked scared. Milt Johnson wet his thin lips with a smacking sound. He opened his mouth as if about to say something, but didn't; just left it open as if to help his breathing.

Mrs. George said, "It is my business to know who is trying to ruin my range and the agents of them that do it will catch just as much hell as anybody else. Out with it!"

Old Johnson backed up and she followed, step for step. He was well against the wall and she was just a good quirt's reach away. He knew she was liable to horse-whip the tar out of him and there wasn't much of anything he could do about it. His face got splotched with pale spots and his eyes jumped about as if looking for a good place to duck.

Mrs. George swung back her arm, the quirt straightened out behind her. The banker flung up his crooked arms before his face and said quick, "Young Hepple and his maw!"

Mrs. George let the quirt fall. She looked as though all the breath had been knocked out of her. There were some things one cow outfit wouldn't do to another, like poison waterholes and run sheep. What took her breath was the admission of this cow-country banker that he had thrown in with Hepples to ruin her.

She said slowly, almost low-voiced—

"A cowman's banker running sheep!" It sounded as if she cussed him with the worst words known to the range.

Milt Johnson licked his thin lips some more and said oozily—

"Business is business, Mrs. Dobbs, and a banker must—"

Grimes spoke with bubble-like softness. He said, "Shut up!"

And there was silence until Mrs. George said in a tired hurt way—

"I don't know what's come over this country."

Red had to take hold on himself with both hands to keep his mouth shut. He didn't dare speak up. He glared at old Johnson as if trying to give him a lot of good reasons for worrying. Johnson's anxious eyes lit on Red's face and skittered into an overhead glance. He appeared to remember that Red had said he would kill him, and Milton too, if they tried to run a shindy on Mrs. George. The shindy had been run, and Red looked purposeful.

There were heavy steps outside the room. The door opened with a shove, and Grimes spun about. It was Bill Nims and with him, tagging along, mild and unobstrusive, was little old Harry Paloo.

Sheriff Nims looked hot and worried. He stared at one Johnson, then at the other, as he blurted out in his deep voice—

"Word's just come the Monohela stage—Cramer is killed, and the messenger! Your big shipment—they got it!" Then, grudgingly. "Howdy, Mrs. Dobbs." He stared at Red who was supposed to be dead. "What you doin' in town?"

"I brought him!" said Mrs. George.

The sheriff took off his hat and rubbed a hand over his sunburned forehead. It was going to be bad if folks knew Red had come to town and not been arrested after so much hullabulloo. But the sheriff switched back to the robbery with:

"Four men, I hear. Masked. The messenger showed fight an' they killed him from behind the rocks down at Tipson Grade. They killed a lead horse. Then they shot old Rim Cramer with his hands up in the air!"

"Thirty thousand dollars!" said Milt Johnson and shook his head.

"Bad, awful bad!" said old Johnson.

Red eyed the Johnsons and thought that for money-lovers they were standing up pretty well under the shock. Maybe Mrs. George had scared them so bad they couldn't suffer much.

Old Johnson seemed to think he could buck up some with the sheriff there. He cleared his throat and took a deep breath. He said, deep and slow, trying to show that he was firm and calm, "Sheriff, there is a man you want to arrest!"

Sheriff Nims looked at Red and said, troubled, "Yes, I ort."

"An', sheriff," said old Johnson, getting back some confidence and speaking louder, "even if Mrs. Dobbs here is an old friend, she is breakin' the laws. She killed some men on public domain and she is protectin' that there outlaw, Red Clark, so—"

Mrs. George grinned, cold and savage, slapped her boot with the quirt. "You're damn right I'm protecting that outlaw! Red, you light out for home. I'm staying in town. I've got some business with Bill Nims, right here and now. He's going to stay and listen to me. So Red, you don't need to push your horse none, hurrying."

"But Mrs. Dobbs, them stage robbers, I ort—" the sheriff protested.

"Done the crime in Monohela County, Bill. I'm going to talk about robbers and such right here in Tulluco. First off, Bill Nims, you are a cowman. I want you to listen to what these Johnsons have been up to!

She leveled her finger at old Johnson and started in.

Red went out to the horses.

Slim Hawks chuckled as he said —

"Me an' Harry told Bill Nims that Jeb an' jest a couple o' fellers was in thar talkin' to ol' Johnson. I bet he nearly busted his bellyband when he

saw you an' Miz George was them fellers!"

"Tell you about the hold-up and Cramer?"

"Yep. But why them Johnsons sendin' that money down there?"

"To swap coin for dust. They's big money in it. I rode guard onct for a bank that as done that up to the mines at Lelargo. Miz George she sure gives 'em hell—an' is still shovelin' coal! My orders is to light out for the ranch. S'long."

RED rode out of town, taking a way that avoided main street. The Ghost, being gray, was likely to be looked at, but few people knew the horse anyhow.

He gave some thought to the stage robbery. The only reason, ever, for shooting a driver was if he recognized the highwaymen as somebody who were thought to be good citizens; or to ease a grudge. Drivers weren't hired to fight.

"It's goin' to be hard on Mamie. I bet you she goes and hugs that pig an' cries."

Red wasn't taking the road home. He had insisted on coming to town with Mrs. George chiefly because he did want to hear her light into them Johnsons; but he also had something else on his mind.

Because it was a starry night and the Ghost could be noticed at a distance, Red pulled down into arroyos and worked his way in the general direction that would bring him up behind the Golden Palace. He knew the town and surrounding country as well as he knew the Dobbs bunkhouse, every dip and rise, almost every sage, at least every patch of cactus.

He took a lot of time because he wanted it to be late before he went to the hotel, otherwise somebody might see him.

A little more than a hundred yards back of the Golden Palace it was just plain desert; but on such a bright night it might look funny to see a horse staked out there. Red didn't like walking, but there was a good-sized gully about a quarter of a mile off. He rode The Ghost into that, found a suitable rock, carried it into the gully and made the horse fast so he wouldn't go climbing up the bank to graze.

"You behave yourself, Spook. An' don't go whinnyin' to the purty mares you can't see up there in town."

He smoked some cigarettes, loafed about until he judged it was almost twelve o'clock, then went up near the hotel and waited a while to make sure nobody was about. Then he climbed the veranda rail and tip-toed with light rattle of spurs through the entrance.

An oil lamp, turned low, burned in its bracket on the wall at the side of the stairs. Red went up the stairs, hurried along the corridor, knocked lightly at Harris' door.

"Who is it?" Harris called in thin sharp tone.

"Me, Judge. I got to see you!"

"Who are you?"

Red spoke low. "Red Clark!"

There was a muttering of reproachful oaths, a squeak of bed springs, the scrape of a match, the nearly noiseless scuffle of bare feet and Harris, lamp in hand, opened the door, help the lamp high above his head and peered. Then he stepped back, pulled the door wide, said, "Hurry up in here, you damn fool. Somebody may see you! What the devil you doing in town?"

Red came in with shuffle of feet, pulled off his hat, grinned, looked uncomfortable. Harris, a small thin man, wore a long-tailed white night gown that came below his bony pipe-stem ankles. The thin hair of his sparrow-like head was rumpled. He said encouragingly and anxious—

"What's wrong, Red?"

Red began a cigarette. "Listen, Judge. I come about somethin' that ain't done

o' my business a-tall, but—" Red took a hand from the paper and pulled at an ear, at a loss for words.

Harris put down the lamp and took up his own sack of tobacco and brown papers.

"Go on, Red."

Red looked a little sweaty and uncomfortable. "Judge, your niece is shore a nice girl!"

Harris smiled with tolerant twitch of thin lips. "I think so, Red. And am glad you do."

" 'Tain't that!" said Red, embarrassed. "An' I feel like a damn tattler. But—" Red hesitated, then blurted—"her an' Pinky are plannin' to run off an' get married!"

Harris jerked back his head, peering. He dropped the unlighted cigarette, and struck his palm with small bony fist. What he said was sulphureously blasphemous, and mostly self-blame. It appeared that Dora being so lonely, he hadn't minded her dancing in the dining room to Bucky's fiddle, though most of the dances had been with Pinky. "I told her he was no damn good!" said Harris. "But women are fools, Red, just plain unadulterated fools over good-looking men!"

"Listen, Judge." Red inhaled deeply, spoke earnest. "Me, I make quite a point of never hidin' what I do. So 'f it comes to a showdown, you just up an' tell her 'twas me as told you! I'd rather she hated the sight of me than—"

"Tell her nothing!" said Harris, with trembling fingers beginning another cigarette. "I'm glad you told me. That damn worthless lying pup! And tell me, Red, what about that fellow Buck who claims—"

"Huh. Shot from the dark through a window—an' missed. Then run like hell."

"Has Mrs. Dobbs gone on the warpath yet, as she threatened?"

"She shore has. Sheepherders scalps is danglin' to her belt. I left her over to the Johnsons skinnin' them bankers alive. You'll hear plenty tomorrow, but me, I'd better be goin'."

"You had that!" said Harris, urgently. "And I want you to know that you couldn't have done Dora a more important service. Nor me a bigger favor!"

RED ran down the stairs and in the hall came slap-dab up against Pinky Hepple hurrying into the hotel along after one o'clock in the morning.

Red looked him over with new interest. Pinky was sure enough a good looking boy, sort of blond though his maw was dark as the Queen of Spades. As usual, Pink was wearing a lot of range finery, but now it was dust covered and he looked tired and a little skittish.

"'Lo, Pink."

Pinky gave a jump. His lips curled back in a cat-like snarl and his arm twitched but didn't go toward his holster. He knew better. "Oh, you! I thought you was dead!"

"Hope you ain't disappointed none too much. Why you starin' at me so hard?"

The look on Pinky's face showed that he was deciding what it was best to say. He didn't want a quarrel, not face to face and alone. Red could lick him with fists, cuss words, or guns; and Pinky knew it.

"B-Buck said he shot you!"

"He tell you?"

Pinky said "No," so quick and earnest it sounded just like a lie. "But I heard it said by folks."

Red inquired as mildly as if asking for a letter at the postoffice:

"Buck happen to be 'round town, some'heres?"

"No. I mean I don't know. I just rode in. Maw keeps a room here. I was going to wash up before going up town."

Red barred the stairs by standing in Pinky's way and looked him over. "Was you thinkin' some maybe, of taking it

out on me on account of what I done to your brother, hm?"

"Red, you know me and Joe wasn't good friends much."

Red said, "Huh." He knew Pinky was backing down. He knew that blandly earnest look on Pinky's face didn't mean a thing. His eyes ran up and down Pinky's finery, now dusty and spotted with some sweat stains, like he had rode a long way in a hurry.

Pink's boots were fine leather, ornamently sewn with colored thread. He wore chased silver spurs with silver jinglebobs to make more tinkle when he walked. He didn't do cow work, much less in brush, but wore fancy chaps that were fringed and lined with silver buttons. His was a pearl handled revolver and had a couple of naked girls carved on the pearl grip. Holster, cuffs, hat band were hand stamped. He wore a silk neckerchief and a deer skin vest. Looked just like an Eastern goof's notion of what a cowboy was like; and he always had money. Good punchers never had money only once in a while and didn't keep it long. Otherwise they wouldn't have been good punchers.

"Well, Pink," said Red, critical, "you shore do look sorta tired and wore out, like you'd come far and been hurryin' some."

"What I do ain't none of your business, is it?"

"Might be," Red suggested with the sort of mildness that irritated folks, "if you do it on Dobbs' range."

Pinky's voice exploded into a pleased sneer-tone:

"Well you can just tell old lady Dobbs that—"

"*Miz* Dobbs, Pink!"

"—that we—"

Miz Dobbs!" Red snapped.

"Well, Miz-zus Dobbs then, that us Hepples have squatted down over where them Huskinses was livin' and are moving cows into the Basin! Our men are already there! That's sorta puttin' one over on you all, ain't it?" Pinky grinned, glad to give unpleasant news.

Red asked, soft as pie, "You seen Huskins' face? How you like to look like that?"

"No chance!" said Pinky with triumphant jeer. "We got fightin' men on our side!"

"Honest, Pink?"

"You'll damn soon learn! Too bad you didn't come a-ridin' for us that time my maw asked you. I got to go wash up."

That was a request for Red to stand aside and let him pass.

"Um-hm. By happenchance is one o' them fightin' men you got ridin' for you named Buck?"

Pinky said instantly, "No, I don't know anything about Buck."

"So you got fightin' men on your side? Now ain't that too bad for us pore little Dobbses? Me, I'd be plumb scairt, Pink, 'cept I happen to know you are as much of a liar as a side-winder is a wiggler. But if they is a lick of truth in what you say about squattin' down at Huskinses, then you Hepples are sure hankerin' for some bad luck!"

Red stepped aside, gestured, bidding Pinky trot along up the stairs. "Miz George gets done with you, your face won't be pink. Be black an' blue!"

Pinky's handsome face took on a spasm of meanness. He was a natural born liar, with soft smooth face and deceptive look; but he didn't have much self-control, and Red knew how to torment him. A look of fury flared over Pinky's face; but he didn't get so mad as to forget that Red was a killer.

"Git along. Let me see how you look a-walkin' up stairs. Toddle, Pink!"

There was nothing much that Pinky could do about it without starting a fight, so he went up the stairs sullenly, and when he peeked a little over his shoulder, he saw Red keeping an eye on

him. Red had no good opinion of Pinky's playing fair in a shooting scrape.

RED jumped the veranda and started on a run for his horse. He was thinking that if Hepples had moved in on Huskinses' Place it would be well for him to ride wide on his way home. He could be shot out of the saddle—and somebody would collect a thousand dollars for doing it.

Then he thought of Mrs. George and the boys. If they went jogging up and the Hepples were laying for 'em—Red stopped in his tracks. He faced about and started the other way, back toward town, not yet deciding what to do, but sure that somehow Mrs. George ought to know. The Hepples hadn't moved in without being prepared to fight. Red didn't put ambushing above them. Not when it looked like Pinky and his maw and the Johnsons were running things. In his day old Dingley Hepple would always come a-rarin' right out in the open; but he lay abed, paralyzed some.

Maybe Pinky had lied and maybe he hadn't. Red felt Mrs. George just had to be warned.

He judged it was between 1:30 and 2 o'clock. The air was mild with a pleasant tang of chill. Stars were bright. He walked over to where he could have a look down Main Street. There was only an occasional figure or two staggering through splotches of light in the wide-open doorways of the saloons. People were not in the street, but the dim hum of loud voices, far off, and music came from the Best Bet. The gamblers would be busy at their games.

Red kept in the shadows and went to the corner across from the Best Bet. People over there seemed to be having a good time. He wondered where the devil Mrs. George was. It wasn't likely that she had rode for home already; and if she stayed in town, she would surely have put up at the Golden Palace. He had idled about, watching the veranda, and hadn't seen anything of her. If any of her boys were still in town they would most likely be over there in the Best Bet.

Red felt he ought to have a look. From across the street he could see only shadow-shapes that moved through the thin smoke haze. Now and then he could hear the shrill laughter of some girl sounding as if she was having a good time. He wondered if Jim was on duty. Jim roomed and boarded with Mamie's mother; and if he weren't on duty, Red could go there and have Jim go find Mrs. George.

Red told himself there was no use acting like a scare-baby, so he walked across the street, stood to one side of the bright doorway and looked in. Jim wasn't there; but 'Gene Cross was, and dancing with Sara. She had gone back on the floor as a dance girl after Joe Bush was shot. Windy was there, too, but not dancing.

Red thought it was mighty funny for them to be there. They sure wouldn't be there enjoying themselves if they knew that Mrs. George, Jeb or Harry or Slim were in town. He had an impulse to walk in and say, "Hello" because he very much wanted some words with them. He didn't have much of a grievance because they had got away, and he wouldn't get up much of a sweat to catch them again. In his heart, Red blamed their rustling and all on 'Gene's uncle. He wished he could get them off alone because he wanted to ask them about that fellow Buck.

A couple of men were coming to the door so Red stepped back and hugged the shadows. The men were miners. Before they got out of earshot, Red heard one say he had lost over three thousand dollars in two days. "Nuthin' to do now 'cept to go back to the mines!" That helped Red to understand a little how the gamblers could afford to pay

big money to somebody to run crooked games.

He edged round for another peek at the doorway and saw Sara leading 'Gene with an arm about his waist to the bar. Her face was bright and flattering with enticement. 'Gene made a not quite sober flourish and called, "Drinks for the house on me!" A vague buzz of commendation went up. Sara looked pleased. She got a cut on the money he spent for drinks. It took much money to buy drinks like that. Red wondered some as to what 'Gene and Windy could have been up to. "Something not honest, I'd most near bet," he said reluctantly. Somehow Windy, who was a cheerful fellow, now looked a little down at the nose and was quiet-like, as if not happy.

CHAPTER XII

JEB GRIMES STARTS DRINKING

RED headed for the house of Mamie's mother. Jim, for years, had boarded with that gaunt hardworking widow when he came to Tulluco.

She lived in a small wooden house with a picket fence to keep stray cows and horses from the garden. Red wondered if there was a dog. Mamie had a passion, like fierce motherhood, for pets. Horned toads or horses, anything, even the pig; but Cramer's giving it had helped her to love that. Nobody lived within a stone's throw of the house which was right at the edge of town; but Jim, being a little fat, thought the walk did him good.

Red went to the gate and hoped that Mrs. Miller wouldn't see him. The old woman had a rifle and didn't mind living alone when Jim and Mamie were away. He knew where Jim's room was and meant to tap on the window.

A sharp voice spoke through a front window and Red saw the end of a rifle come out into the starlight. "Who air you?"

"Red Clark, maw. I come to see Jim."

"Land o' Goshen! I plumb near shot you, Red. It just goes to show! Mame? Mame, wake up. Red is here for to see Jim!"

Mamie said, "Red?" and almost screeched, "Then he wasn't killed!"

"Don't 'pear likely," said Mrs. Miller.

Both women came to the door to let him in. Mrs. Miller's husband had died soon after coming to Tulluco; and, though a widow with a young 'un, she wouldn't put up with anything that looked like charity from anybody, but had washed, sewn, waited table, clerked, until Mamie had got big enough to go to work.

As kids, when Mamie and Red got into mischief, Mrs. Miller spanked both with stern impartiality. Mamie, being stubborn, just wouldn't cry; and Red, a prideful boy, couldn't cry if a girl didn't; so as Mrs. Miller didn't think a spanking or a switching did any good unless it brought yells and tears, the two kids had been well tanned.

Mrs. Miller pulled down the blinds which were made of heavy wrapping paper and lit a lamp. There were some gray streaks on her hair, but still a lot of brick red, too. Mrs. Miller had a gaunt face and Mamie looked just like her.

Their heads were frowsy from sleep but not their eyes. Mrs. Miller pulled a light blanket off the foot of the bed and put it around Mamie because it wasn't proper for a man to see a girl in a nightgown.

Mamie asked—

"Why are you in town, Red?"

He guessed they hadn't yet learned of the stage robbery and killing, so he didn't speak of that, but told how it came about that he had to try to get word to Mrs. George.

Mrs. Miller awakened Jim who slipped into his pants, poked his nightgown

down inside the waist band, pulled his broad colored galluses up over his shoulder, took up an unlighted cigar butt and came in, fingering his mustache tips.

The women both at once retold what Red had said. Jim tried to make his mustache stay curled and twisted hard as he said—

"You oughn't be hangin' around town, Red."

"I gota get word to Miz George. Be bad if Pinky wasn't lyin.' "

"I sold out my interest in the Best Bet. I don't like how things is run here in town. I still work there extra, but don't hang around down town. But I'll dress and mosey up to see what I can find out for you. You can pile into my bed."

"I got a horse staked out in the 'royo back of the hotel. I can't leave him."

"We've got a stable. Red," Mamie told him.

She called it a stable but it was a shed where she had once kept an old broken-down horse as a pet. According to Red it had died of a broken heart at thinking of all the comfort it had missed by not finding Mamie when it was a colt.

"Maybe folks 'll be peeved at you all if they find out I sorta holed up here," Red suggested.

Mamie and her mother spoke at once. Mamie said, "Folks can go to the devil!" and Mrs. Miller, "What else air friends fer than to help a body?"

"I'll go get The Ghost."

Jim dressed with his usual care to look neat as if the social elegance of bartenders must be maintained even at 3 o'clock in the morning.

As they walked off together, Red asked if he had heard of the stage robbery. Jim said he hadn't heard because he had come home in the afternoon, and Mamie wasn't working at the restaurant anymore. Some miners had seen the pig and paid to have it roasted. When Mamie found it out it had been killed, she gave her boss a plain good licking with some scratches about the face thrown in to help him wish he hadn't done it. Now she had the promise of a job at the Emporium the first of next week.

Jim said, "Mamie ain't purty but she would look different if dressed up. A good man couldn't have anybody better to look after him."

"Um-hm. I think pore old Rim Cramer sorta looked forward to that. She'll be mighty broke up. 'Nother thing, Jim. You see if Sara can't get out of 'Gene and Windy where that feller Buck is. I seen 'em in the Best Bet spendin' money."

When they separated, Red gave the town a wide circle. He hadn't walked so much since once when he was thrown miles from camp. Red would explain that he was a good rider only because he hated so to have to walk.

He rode The Ghost to Mamie's shed and carried in a bucket of water but there was no hay. Mamie said she would get some from a Mexican in the morning, also a bucket of oats, and for Red to lie down and rest while waiting for Jim.

He pulled off his boots, pants and hat, hung his guns over a post of the bed and was soon asleep. When he awakened he didn't know it was broad daylight because the shades had been drawn and pinned tight. The women had wanted him to sleep. They both had the motherly feeling that a lot of sleep, like a lot of food, was good for a man. It was pretty near noon when he roused up.

Both the women were solemn faced and Mamie had been crying. She had learned about the robbery and Rim Cramer. And about something alse too. Mrs. Miller told that in a tone scornful with disbelief:

"Ol' Johnson was shot in the shoulder last night an' he says you done it!

"I'd be willin' for to take the blame if it was through the heart!" Red told her.

"No, you wouldn't! It was from the dark jest as he was comin' out the door. Ol' Johnson an' young Milt, too, says you swore to kill 'em! An' Deputy Marr, he says he caught sight o' the feller an' 'twas *you*. 'Long about two o'clock. It's all over town that you done it! Folks say you know 'twas Johnson as put Bill Nims up to posterin' that reward for you an'—"

Red was unimpressed. He said, "Maw, I'm hungery. An' what of Miz George? Jim find 'er?"

"That's plumb funny, Red. They was no trace of hair ner hide o' Miz Dobbs an' them boys in town last night. Jim he come back to the house to say so, then went off up town again to find out more if he could."

"Huh. Didn't them Johnsons say she paid 'em a call?"

"Jim didn't hear about it if they did. There is whoopin' excitement over Ol' Johnson bein' shot, 'specially as fool folks think 'twas you!"

"If Marr saw me, or thinks he did, why wasn't I killed?"

"Marr is a deputy," said Mrs. Miller shrilly, "because them Johnsons want 'im. Not 'cause Bill Nims does. He arrests boys that throw rocks in winders."

"An' evicts folks as can't pay mortgages," said Red and went down to a stack of flapjacks that he flooded with blackstrap.

ALONG about the middle of the afternoon Jim came back to the house and the women served dinner. There was, said Jim, a big whoop and stir over the stage holdup and murder, and excited talk over Johnson getting shot.

"He ain't bad hurt a-tall," said Jim. "Has got his arm in a sling. But it cur'us how many sensible people 'pear to think maybe you done it!"

The women stood by making bitter comments on such persons as would think a thing like that.

Jim said he had heard that Mrs. George and her boys had rode out to the Nims' ranch last night. Red nodded, understandingly.

"Her and Sally Nims was always good friends. An' a good cowman, the same as Miz George. Did Miz George lead Bill along by the ear for to be present?"

"No. The sheriff and some folks is ridin' out around lookin' for tracks of the stage robbers who maybe headed up Tulluco way."

Jim ate his dinner, smoked on a cigar, talked some more, repeating what he had said. Red fretted and wondered if he oughn't to be riding since Mrs. George was still paying him wages; but Jim gave him a look that meant there was something more to be told when he got a chance. So to pass the time he and Red played seven-up while Mamie helped her mother with the dishes. Then both women decided they would go up to the store, buy a little something for supper and hear what the talk was.

As soon as they had passed the gate, Jim tossed the cards aside, screwed tight on a mustache tip and said, "Sara wants to see you, Red."

"How she know I am in town, Jim?" His tone was almost accusing.

Jim put a match to his cold cigar, puffed. "She is smart. When I asked her to find out from 'Gene and Windy about Buck, she looked at me a while then up an' said, 'If Red is where you can tell him what I tell you, he is where I can tell 'im myself. At least I won't tell nobody but *him*. And I know plenty!' "

"I don't wanta see 'er."

"Don't blame you, son. But she won't tell me anything."

"She know anything?"

"Maybe she does. Maybe she don't. She is a woman and you can't tell." It was hot in the room. Jim took off his

coat, laid it over the back of a chair, wiped his neck.

"Maybe she is lyin' to make you come. Use your own judgment."

Red said—"Yeah," doubtfuly. "I ain't got no much of what you call judgment when it comes to women."

Jim sighed, chewed his cigar, fingered the cards. "One thing, though. She'll purt-near know whatever 'Gene and Windy can tell."

Red smoked a cigarette nearly to the end before he asked, "If I agree to see her, how'd I work it?"

Jim cleared his throat. "She said you could come around back and up stairs to her room between nine and ten tonight. She has got a room alone since the girl she lived with has gone to Monohela. Ace of Hearts is tacked to the door. I'm working tonight. Do I say you are comin'?"

Red studied for a while. "I reckon."

MAMIE and Mrs. Miller came from town breathless and angry. 'Peared like nearly everybody in town seemed to think Red had shot Johnson.

"But most of 'em think you done right!" Mamie threw in.

Also Mrs. George had just rode in with Grimes, Paloo and Hawks. They had spent the night at the Nims' ranch.

"I hear tell," said Mrs. Miller, "that she is mad as a wet hen over thinkin' you shot Johnson—"

"Huh," said Red, untroubled, "she don't believe that."

"I hear tell she had a talk with Depyty Marr and—"

"She is smart. If he says I done it she won't believe 'im. But has she heard, do you reckon, about Hepples at Huskinses' Place?"

"I hear tell she is stayin' in town tonight," said Mamie.

Jim put on his coat. "I got to go to work. I'll see as how she gets word. I'll eat supper up town, Maw. An' Red, do I tell the party as how you'll come? 'Bout nine or little after?"

Red ate a big supper. Troubles didn't much bother his appetite. After supper he poked the shells out of his guns, had a look and reloaded.

Mamie said fiercely, "You'll be careful, won't you, Red?"

"That is how I keep myself lucky. Somebody may have heard as how I am ridin' a grey horse. Can I have a bucket of water an' some soap? I'll show you how careful I am!"

Red took a bucket full of soapy water and bluing and went out to the shed. He rubbed the mixture on The Ghost. A white horse was conspicuous.

He felt a little queer and almost uneasy about riding around to see Sara because if people found out they would sure misunderstand. Somehow, too, he seemed to remember Sara as a prettier girl than he had ever thought when looking at her. The nice letter she had sent him helped the mental picture. Last night he hadn't got a very good look, but she had seemed mighty pretty then, too.

He said to himself, "Miz George won't believe me on oath about that Sara girl. But I wanta know about Buck. I owe him a sorta debt. I'm pernickety about payin' debts."

Red rode around back of the Best Bet and left his horse tied to a wagon that was near a scraggly cottonwood on a vacant lot. He hesitated a little about leaving his rifle. Somebody was more likely to steal the rifle than the horse; but a rifle would only clutter his hands.

He didn't have a watch but he knew it was somewhere around nine or after. He stood in the shadows for a time, just waiting. He didn't at all like going up stairs over the Best Bet. When he was hunted he liked to be out in the open. "Dead or alive" was a bad order. He could be shot down on sight, in the back even, and the fellow that did it might not be much admired but he would be paid.

Near the back of the Best Bet he could hear the hum of voices broken by the staccato sounds of laughter and shouts. He looked through the narrow open back door. There was a dense cluster of men about the faro table. The lookout had his hat pulled low and stared down intently from his high chair. Somebody must be bucking the bank, hard.

Red went up the back stairs. They were of pine, seemed pretty flimsy, and were built up outside of the old adobe wall. He opened the door. Here was the smell of unpainted pine, and also the perfume that girls used. The addition was so new that the pine looked fresh except on the level where sticky hands had groped for support and matches had been struck. The hall was narrow and there were rooms only on one side. A dim bracket lamp was about half way down the hall.

On the door of the third room he saw an Ace of Hearts.

He tapped lightly and there was no answer. He tried the door. It was unlocked. A lamp, turned low, was burning. He went in slowly and closed the door.

The bottom of the lamp rested on the edge of a sheet of pink writing paper that hung down from the table. It had been placed where it must be noticed and one word in large letters was written there and underscored: "*Wait.*"

It was a small room. The walls were thin unpainted pine. There was no closet and the dresses hung on nails. A mirror was above a pine kitchen table. The table was covered with wrapping paper that had a cut-out pattern for a fringe. There were little bottles and a big powder box on the table and much powder spilled on the dusty floor. One straight back cane-bottom chair was at the table before the mirror and another beside the bed. A pair of worn red satin slippers lay overturned under the bed which was covered with a turkey red table cloth for coverlet.

Red sat down cautiously with as much gingerliness as if afraid the chair might give way. He pushed back his hat, faced the door and waited.

He heard the hall door close, the running patter of tip-toes, and Sara opened the door, breathless. She had made herself as pretty as she knew how and wore her best finery. She pulled the door to, said, "Oh, Red!" laughed and threw her arms about his neck before he could move.

It wasn't unpleasant, but he thought he oughn't let her. He wriggled his head out of her hug so he could speak easily and said:

"What of that feller Buck?"

She laughed, squeezed harder, and asked teasing—

"What of that feller Red Clark!"

Somehow Sara didn't look quite as pretty as he had been thinking she was. She was closer than she had ever been before and he saw, as he had never noticed before, that there was stuff on her eyelashes, stuff on her cheeks, stuff on her mouth, and lots of powder. The strong perfume smell was almost too much when she had her breast against his face. A little way off, when one was inattentive as he had been, these things weren't noticed. He knew too that she was what is called a "bad woman" and he was a little afraid of being friendly with bad women because they were smart, reckless and made trouble. He sort of more than half way believed also that she had tricked him into shooting Joe Bush. Bush needed shooting, but Red didn't like having been tricked.

She patted Red's cheeks and swore at the Johnsons whom she said had caused the reward to be put up. Red didn't think it sounded good for any woman, except Mrs. George, to swear. Mrs. George made it sound all right.

"I'm awful sorry you didn't kill old Toad Johnson last night!" Her tone was just about as if she were offering con-

dolence for the death of some one in his family.

"I didn't do it!" said Red.

Sara was on his lap. She drew back her head, studied his face, pulled his nose, laughed a little, then jerked his head against her neck, holding him tightly.

"You don't need to lie to me about that, you silly boy!"

"Aw damn it, I don't shot folks from the dark!"

"But Toad Johnson—"

"Not even the Devil, I wouldn't!" said Red, earnest. He wriggled uncomfortably. "But what about that Buck?"

Sara got off his lap and bounced down on the bed, making the springs squeak and put a hand on Red's knee. "Them Johnsons has hired him, Red, to lead the fighting for the Hepples. I hear tell he is a killer and mean, and 'pears like he had it in for you all along."

"How that come? I never seen him before that day here in town when he first come."

"I don't know. 'Gene and Windy says so. They are working for the Hepples too. They have been blowing advance wages. Three hundred dollars!"

Red said—"They are liars. Why pay all that when real fightin' men would ride for forty a month an' no advance?"

"Red?" She leaned close, as if the better to study his face, and said low and hurriedly. "Gene is jealous that I like you!" Red looked blank. "And I do!" Pause. "Don't you like me, just a little wee teeny bit, Red?"

He said, "Sure," evasively. "But this here is business. Hepples ain't smart but they ain't goin' to pay—"

"That's what 'Gene and Windy told me when they rode in late last night. And they had the money, too. They come to town with Pinky. He's down there now betting stacks of chips that high—and losing! 'Gene and Windy are staying out of sight tonight, some, because that old Jeb Grimes is up at the front of the bar. He is drinking and Jim sure looks worried."

"Gosh a'mighty, they's reason for to be worried if Jeb is—but he promised Miz George. I wonder what can have happened. But what about that Buck?"

"Oh I could have killed him myself, Red, when 'twas said he had killed you. But he stayed in town. Out to the Hepples I hear. What happened between you and 'Gene and Windy? 'Gene is mighty mad at you."

"I caught 'em change-brandin' Miz George's cows."

Sara knew that rustling was a bad crime but she didn't really feel it was so terrible. She shook her hair, making it fly. It was dark and curly. She thought it looked better if bushy. She took Red's cigarette from between his fingers, put it into her mouth, drew back her head a little, narrowed her eyes, smiled.

"Red Clark, there is a thousand dollars reward for you!"

She seemed teasing, yet with a something sort of serious under her words. He said, "Um-hm" and didn't feel quite sure. There was no telling much about women, her kind anyhow.

"So you," she said, leaning forward. "had better kiss me—nice!"

He grinned, felt shy, shifted his feet —and leaped to his feet, overturning the light chair and taking a backwards step as the door was flung wide.

SARA screamed and jumped from the bed. 'Gene had taken off his boots to slip up on them. He had been drinking. A leveled gun was in his hand. He said, quick and mad:

"I've heard talk about you an' her, so—"

He shot point blank. Sara, with head up, had flung herself before Red with arms out stiffly behind her as if with far backward reach hedging him in. She crumpled forward without a word; fell

just about as one of her dresses that was hanging up might have fallen if a nail had come loose.

It looked like 'Gene, anyhow, had meant to kill her, too. He was overhasty to be quick about shooting again and his aim was bad. His gun and Red's went off together. Red killed him on his feet and shot him a second time with the same gun as he was falling. A playing card would have covered both holes in 'Gene's breast.

"You damned fool," Red said with a sound as if bad hurt, "when we was friends! She wasn't nothin' to me!"

He dropped to a knee and pulled at Sara. Her head moved as if her neck were broken and her eyes were open in an unseeing stare. There was blood coming from her breast. He knew the sounds of the shots would bring men but he thrust the gun into its holster, heaved up Sara in his arms, laid her on the bed. 'Gene, with the drop at point blank range, could not have missed him. Sara had taken the bullet and Red felt all choked up in realizing that.

He jumped over the dead body of 'Gene and down the hall. His boot heel stamped. He opened the door to the stairs. Already there were three or four men crowding at the bottom of the stairs with faces lifted, and one man was already half way up.

Red drew his gun, shouted, "Out of the way!" and jumped down the stairs. He struck against the man who was half way up. It was Deputy Marr who had probably expected to find merely some drunken miner showing off by making a noise up there. Marr rocked back, off balance, against the banisters and the banisters broke. Red, cat-quick, whaled the barrel of his revolver over Marr's head even as they toppled. They fell together. It wasn't far, some seven or eight feet, but Red was jolted pretty hard. Marr had been unconscious when he hit the ground, and would have a welt on his head big as a goose egg for days to come.

Red scrambled up into a crouch, cocked his gun, tried to get his breath. His words came in pauses, but they a warning edge: "Keep off—all you—not a move!—or—" His second gun seemed to spring into his hand, muzzle on.

Red began to back off, edging around so as to make a break for his horse a hundred feet away. People just seemed to swarm out of shadows on all sides. His name was spoken shrilly. Every man there had stared at the posters offering the reward for him. There was also Johnson's verbal promise of increased reward. Nearly every man among them was armed. A thousand dollars was a lot of money, and the name of having killed or captured Red a lot of fame. It looked bad for him.

All of a sudden a horseman came tearing down through the alley with a yell that simply lifted the hair of old timers who knew what the Apache warwhoop was like. Some people who didn't move fast had to fling themselves back as if knocked over for the horseman came as if the Devil himself were in the saddle and would have trampled them. He was tall and straight and had a rifle half lifted as if it were a revolver. He rode through the crowd, yanked up his horse, called:

"Red?"

Red said, "Yeah!"

"Where's yor hoss?"

Red pointed. "Over yonder a piece!"

Jeb Grimes turned his horse about, faced the crowd. "Has anybody," he inquired soft-toned, clear-voiced with that curious bubble sound in his throat, "got them some objections to me an' Red here takin' our time about doin' our departin'?"

Nobody spoke up. Some eyes shifted to watch Red cut catty-cornered across the vacant lot where his horse was tied. Others stared fascinated at Grimes who

backed his horse, followed slowly but faced the crowd.

People who knew him said soft and warning to those about them, "That there is old Jeb Grimes and he's been a-drinkin'!"

"Take yor time, son," Grimes called as if he was pleased and hopeful that somebody might start monkeying with him.

Red didn't take much time but gathered up the end of the rope in loose coils and hit the saddle. Grimes turned his horse and came up alongside. He ordered severely, "Walk 'im now! Never run when folks chase you. Makes 'em swell-headed with feelin' important!"

Some people had run up the stairs and an excited fellow who liked to give bad news shouted down from the landing that Red had killed a man and that Sara girl.

Grimes was riding at a walk, a slow walk at that. "Did you do that, son?"

"Gosh a'mighty no! 'Gene Cross shot the girl, him bein' crazy jealous. I killed him. She saved my life. Where the devil did you come from, Jeb? And how did you know 'twas me?"

Grimes pulled a pint bottle of whisky from his pocket, drew the cork with his teeth, held it out. Red took a drink and was tempted to let the bottle fall and break; but he was afraid Grimes might face about and ride back for another. Grimes reached out for the bottle, put in the cork and returned it to his pocket without having a nip for himself. He wasn't going to spoil his nice edge by overdoing it.

Red tried to jog a little faster, but Grimes wouldn't have it. He said—

"Whoa-up, son. We got all the time in the world. We ain't workin' for Miz George no more!"

"What in hell?"

"You're fired an' I quit."

"You, Jeb? Quit?"

Grimes looked over his shoulder, sniffed. "I smell me some trouble.' It sounded just like as if, being hungry, he sniffed steak frying. "Be a shame to have 'em wear down their hosses chasin' us. Mebbe we'd better ride back to 'commodate 'em."

"Nobody's in sight. Come on. Why'd you quit, Jeb?"

Grimes was staring backwards. "Best way on earth, son, for to keep folks from follerin you is to chase 'em."

"All right," Red agreed, humoring him, "if they start followin', we'll chase 'em. But why did you quit?"

" 'Cause Miz George has lost her mind. Gone plumb clear crazy, son."

"Miz George?"

"Yes, Miz George. She come to town 'safternoon an' heard you shot Toad Johnson an' talked with Marr, an' listened to a lot of fool lies an' argyments about why you—"

"She believes that, Jeb?"

"She said she just couldn't put up longer with all the trouble you made. She said she didn't quite know just what to think. I tried to tell her just perzactly what she ort to think, the which was that if you ever took the trouble to shoot Toad Johnson he would be dead, not struttin' around with his arm in a sling a-offerin', I don't know what all. Oh well, one thing led to another, so I up an' quit. She purt-near wept."

"Then got mad?"

"Then got mad," Grimes admitted. His words bubbled softly, and he was a little amused. "Told me I was no good anyhow. Never had been worth my salt. Was glad to be rid of me. All of the which I agreed to polite as I knowed how an' that made her madder. Then I went over to the Best Bet an' was havin' me some drinks with Jim when we heard shots. He said, 'My God, that's Red! He's up-stairs!' So I poked a bottle in my pocket, hit my hoss, an' rode around back for to take some part in whatever doin's was done. An' here we are, son, just two punchers a-ridin'

out lookin' for a job. My hoss is fresh. Who's yourn?"

"The Ghost."

Grimes peered. "The Ghost? What kinda likker have I been drinkin'?" He raised his look to Red's face. "You 'pear natural, but if this is The Ghost—he has got The Ghost's build but—"

"Soap an' bluin', Jeb. Where we headin'?"

"Oh, we'll ride out some'eres, have a drink an' sleep, git up, have a drink an' ride off some'eres. Shh! Lis'en. I hear 'em comin'!"

Red had keen ears but he hadn't caught the sound of hoofs before Grimes spoke. In a few minutes a bunch of hard-ridden horses came to view out of the dimness. Red said—"They think I shot that girl!"

Grimes said, "Come on, son!" and wheeled his horse, drove home the spurs, gave a yell wild as any Indians', let the reins fall on the horse's neck, and went at full gallop straight for the pursuers. He opened fire with the rifle.

Red followed, spurring hard and swearing at Grimes' madness—if it were madness and not a well-founded contempt for such people as must huddle together to chase a man or two. There were a few wild answering shots, some scared yelping, then the astounded pursuers turned tail, scattered, went hell-for- leather straight back up the street.

Grimes reined up. Red went plunging on ahead before he could pull The Ghost down. When he came back, Grimes was reloading his rifle and, for one of the few times in his life, grinning. He patted the side of the butt, called his gun "a good girl, an' like most women, allus ready for to argy!" He pulled his bottle, took a swig, passed it to Red.

"They think I shot that girl, Jeb." Red was apologizing for, almost approving of, the pursuers.

"Now mebbe they'll go back an' think some more," Grimes suggested. "Le's go on about our business."

AS they rode Grimes told about going to the Nims' ranch.

"Her an' Sally Nims talked up near all night. That runnin' sheep is some rilin' to cowmen. Miz Nims she rode over today to see her father. She says if Bill ain't plumb honest, she'll skin 'im alive."

"You hadn't ort've quit, Jeb."

"She hadn't ort've listened to Dep'ty Marr. To me he's jest a louse off an' Injun.'

But Miz George is in a fight, Jeb. That Buck has been hired, and of course men like 'im, to clean us out. You are her best man."

"Know it," said Grimes, matter-of-fact. He nursed the rifle in the crook of his arm and rolled a cigarette. "Have 'nother little drink, son?"

"Not yet. Listen, Jeb. Did she or Jim tell you that Hepples have moved in on that house where them Huskinses was kicked out? They are bringin' in cows, of course. Why else would they squat down in our Basin?"

A match was flickering before Grimes' eyes. He drew back his head a little, faced Red, asked almost in a whisper, "What you say, son?"

"I bumped into Pink Hepple at the Golden Palace. We said 'Howdy' an' such-like. He got a wee peevish over me makin' a remark or two an' up an' said I could tell Miz George that Hepples had planked fightin' men down in the Basin, over to Huskinses."

The match flame was right at Grimes' fingers but he shook it out, not dropping the stick until the flame was dead. He put the cigarette in his mouth, rode in silence for a time. Pretty soon he pulled something from his pocket, gave it a fling. It was a bottle of whisky. He struck another match, lit his cigarette.

"Well, son, looks as how you an' me was a-ridin' again for Miz George, hm?"

Red cussed him, pleased and joyful.

As they jogged on, Grimes said:

"Nice o' them Hepples, ain't it, son, for to come over clost where they'll be easy found? I hope Miz Hepple she come along. I been waiting' a long time now to up an' say 'Howdy' to her!"

Red was tempted to pry a little with some questions, but decided not to. Grimes might turn sour and silent.

In about an hour or so they saw a horseman against the skyline on a hill quite a piece ahead. The man was flogging his horse. He rode sort of lumpy and awkward.

"Whoa-up, son. We'll wait here in the gully. He comes from the way we are headin'."

They drew off to the side of the road, waiting. The horseman seemed a heavy man and floundered in the saddle. As soon as he saw Red and Grimes waiting ahead he left the road and started 'cross country.

Grimes called, "Halt!" in a way that made Red jump a little. It was always as surprising as an unexpected shot to hear Grimes' velvet voice explode with power and sharpness.

The fellow flogged the harder as they took out after him, angling to cut around them; but it seemed about all he could do to stay on the horse. When he saw he was being headed off, he tried to double back and turned too sharp. The horse slipped and fell.

By the time they rode up the horse had got to its feet but the man was on the ground, swearing outlandishly. Red said, "Gosh a'mighty, Dutchy!"

Dutchy's round eyes popped in his round fat face. He tried to get up and grabbed his crippled leg, swearing. There was no understanding him for he was jabbering German. When he remembered and tried to speak English it was so excited and broken that about all Red could make out were the cuss words with "Hebbles" and "dod Buck" thrown in every now and then.

"Calm yourself some!" Red urged.

Dutchy went on jabbering, but presently they began to get the story. Then it was Red who used the cuss words. Grimes squatted on his haunches, silent and attentive.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ATTACK ON THE ARROWHEAD

THAT morning it had been shortly after breakfast up to the Dobbs house when Duke lifted his head, growled deep in his throat and stood up.

Mason sat with elbows on knees and had a kind of silly grin, expressive of bliss, as the two girls, with arms about each other on the hammock swing, giggled in confessional ecstasy. Catherine had just confided her own secret about being married to a Hepple.

Duke growled again and the hair rose along his back. Other collies stirred, threw up their noses, listening.

"What's the matter with those dogs?" asked Dora.

Duke gave a sharp bark, high-pitched, and bolted down the hill with a half dozen dogs following.

Dutchy, fat and crippled, limped around the corner, pipe in mouth and little round blue eyes peering. He mumbled, "Zumpody iss combin'." Dutchy had been working on the leaky water tank behind the kitchen.

The dogs, now out of sight, set up a kind of frenzied yapping. Dutchy shook his head, doubtful.

Far below down the hillside, moving through the sycamores like a flight of shadows, horsemen could be seen. They came clearly to view on the winding road. The horses labored on the upgrade under the thresh of quirts and kick of spurs.

"Dey nod our poys," said Dutchy, uneasily.

The snarling dogs sprang savagely at the riders legs, snapped at the horses' noses. A collie was knocked over, trampled, lay howling piteously. The eight horsemen came on.

"Gott!" Dutchy bellowed, flapping his arms as if to shoo them, "you girls ged ind der house. Dot feller Buck!"

"And—and old Huskins!" Mason gasped.

Catherine whirled. She looked taller, her face was thinned and pale. "Why don't you men do something!" She seemed accusing Dutchy mostly but her eyes were fixed on Mason's face as if in sudden tense appraisal.

The horsemen, now near the house, began shooting the dogs. They couldn't dismount with those brutes ready to come at their throats. Catherine shrieked, "How dare you!" and moved as if to run forward among the dogs, but Dora caught her. "Oh don't! Don't! You would be hurt!"

Duke's head was almost as high as the saddle horn, leaping with hopeless effort for Buck's throat when Buck shot him. All the men were banging away, partly at the dogs, partly for the noise.

Buck rode right up to the end of the veranda, yanked up his horse with hard high jerk of arm. The revolver was still in his hand, but his hand hung low at his side and without menace. He was grinning, savage and pleased, looked longest at Dora, said—

"Well, folks! Howdy!"

"Gott!" Dutchy blurted. "You are pandits!"

"Well now," said Buck with friendly sort of jeering, "ain't that just like a damn Dutchman! Folks ride in for a visit, soc'ble like, an' you call 'em hard names!" Buck swung his arm, shouted at his men: " 'Round 'em up, fellers!"

The horsemen stormed on around the house, shooting into the air. They were making sure nobody would escape from the house. Two jumped off and turned back 'Nita and her girls, brought them through the house and out on to the veranda.

"Here's all we found, Buck," said a pot-bellied man who had a wide-jowled, flat moon-like face.

Old Huskins piled off his horse clumsily. His bearded face was scabbed, looked grotesquely like an odd attempt at disguise.

They were all a hard looking lot, none younger than Buck, none so broad chested, and all seemed none the less scoundrels because they grinned as if having a good time. Only Huskins looked as if he wanted to hurt somebody for the pleasure of it.

A lean old thin-faced fellow with broken teeth drawled—

"I reckon, Buck, from now on Dobbses won't hold thar tails so high in the air, hm?"

Buck stood with hat in hand. His lips were twisted in a kind of malicious good humor as he looked at the girls.

"None of you all is goin' to get hurt. Shore a pleasure for to meet you again, Miss Harris!"

Dora held her breath, stared with gentle dark eyes in a daze of uneasy astonishment. She remembered him well enough from the long ride in the stage, and with no dislike.

"W-why are you doing this?" she asked timidly.

"Ho, lots of reasons. You, maybe, are one of 'em!" Buck grinned. He seemed trying to be nice.

The pot-bellied man thrust out an arm, pointing toward the bunkhouse and corrals down in the valley. "How 'bout them thar, Buck?"

"I'm plumb forgetful when I talk to purty girls! Sam, you all go on down an' do what you come for. 'F you need my help you won't be worth a damn! So me an' Hank 'll stay up here. He's a lady's man, too!"

Hank was the old withered scrawny man with broken teeth and tobacco-dribbled mouth.

The pot-bellied Sam yelled—

"Hit yore hosses an' come a-humpin'!" The men whooped, partly at Hank's being a lady's man, partly in sheer glee at the easy success of the raid. They

strung out in a furious gallop down the hill, old Huskins behind with elbows flapping like broken wings.

Catherine straightened until she seemed to rise on tip-toes. She threw back her head with a jerk that shook the blonde curls, spoke angrily and her voice did not tremble:

"What are you doing here!"

"Me?" Buck grinned. "Oh come now! Me, I'm havin' a good time mostly—or meanin' to! That right, Hank?"

"You girls are lucky," said Hank. He had a voice that sounded as if his vocal cords were raveled. "And," with intent to please and reassure Dora, "he has talked a lot about how nice you air!"

Buck reached out for Dora's hand. She drew back, staring timidly.

"Aw, I won't hurt you!" His voice wasn't rough, was almost mild in its coaxing. He took the hand, patted it. Dora's was a gentle nature, with none of Kate Pineton's fire and fierceness; and she seemed to feel it was better to act submissive than to anger him.

"Hi, looky, Buck!" Hank called and pointed.

Buck faced about and stood with mouth parted in intent watching of the far-off midget-like figures in the valley below. The horsemen had pulled down before a limping figure with beard flying and rifle lifted that came hurrying out to meet them. Old Robertson scorned to take cover. The pot-bellied Sam rode forward with arm lifted, palm out, as if to parley. A shot was fired, then another. Robertson, taken off guard, had been shot by one of the men behind the pot-bellied fellow. He fell forward, lay like a tired man asleep.

"You Gott-tam gowards!" Dutchy blurted, rocking back with crippled sway on his short leg, glaring. He clapped the meerschaum back in his mouth and stared with blue-eyed anger at Buck who paid no attention at all. But Hank, with a hand on his gun's butt, walked over to Dutchy, jerked the pipe from his mouth, threw it down, tromped on it, slapped him. "Shet up or I'll larn yuh—"

"Aw," Buck called casually, "keep yore shirt tail in, Hank!" There was an easy authority in the way he spoke as if he were used to being obeyed.

"You call us cowards agin," said Hank, showing his broken teeth, "an' I'll blow a hole through you!"

"That," Catherine snapped shrilly with a sound that was almost like Mrs. George's angered tone, "would prove you weren't a coward—wouldn't it!"

Hank glared at her and met a fierce stare. It was his eyes that moved first.

Down in the valley the horsemen had dismounted and were scurrying like looters through the bunkhouse and kitchen. Two men came out of the kitchen dragging a man in his undershirt and a white apron. Joey was nearly dead of fright. He was tied to a sycamore.

A man on a bareback horse, riding with a halter, bolted from behind the stables. It was the Mexican Sanzo making a break to carry word of the raid. Yelps went up and men began shooting rapidly. Sanzo, shot through the back, slid off. A man jumped into a saddle and took out after the horse, shooting. The horse stumbled, hit in the leg. The fellow rode up and killed it, then galloped back toward the bunkhouse, yelling as if he had done something to make a noise about.

Smoke began to appear through a bunkhouse window, then flame.

"They jes' ain't goin' to be no Dobbs ranch no more!" said Hank.

Men were running about through the smoke, carrying fire to the kitchen, stables, corrals. The crackling roar of the dry timber came like a sound of high wind. There was little, or no smoke, after the fire took hold, but a high sweep of flame and even the air on the hilltop was for a time as if it had come from an oven.

The stately 'Nita watched the fire with a look as if her own home were burning. Her hands were wrapped tightly in her apron but she made no sound. Her daughters huddled against her and wept. Dutchy cussed under his breath.

"We're burnin' this here house, too, 'fore we leave!" said Hank, evilly pleased and showing black broken teeth.

"No? No? You aren't, are you?" Dora asked of Buck. She was so breathless that her voice sounded soft and coaxing. Instinct seemed to warn her how best to hide her fears and get on the weak side of this ruffian.

"Aw don't you fret none, honey. *You* ain't goin' to be hurt!"

He didn't see the look Catherine gave him. It was scornful and challenging, as if she would rather lose her head than soften a word or glance.

The men in the valley had ridden into the pasture, roped horses, then cut the wire fence and drove out the horses they didn't want, scattering them over the country.

Catherine clenched her fists, held her arms straight at her side, moved so as to stand directly in front of Buck. "Why are you doing this? You! If you are just plain thieves, rob the house—and go!"

Buck looked amused. "Kind of a cross-patch, ain't you?"

"What's the meaning of all this?" Her voice was edged with increased sharpness.

"Why, ain't you heard?" He was vaguely mocking. "Range war has come! You Dobbses are wiped out. We are Hepple riders—makin' a clean sweep! A damn sight cleaner sweep, by God! then even them as hired us bargained for!" He laughed as if somewhere behind his words there was a good joke, not yet disclosed.

Catherine was so angry she looked frozen. She said coldly to the unhappy Mason, "Since these men are from *your* ranch, why don't you speak up!"

Buck perked up his ears. "What you talkin' about?"

Mason was pale. He moved a step nearer. His mouth was so dry his tongue sounded thick and his voice trembled, but he lifted his face with a steady look:

"I am Mr. Hepple's son and this is m-my wife!"

He put out an arm, meaning to take Catherine's waist protectively but she turned aside, stepping off as if she scorned support.

"You're who?" Buck frowned for a moment in a kind of wonder as to why a thing like that would be told him; then he laughed. "You Dobbses are smart, ain't you? Huh! I won't swaller that one. I know more about this country than you think. I know all about the Hepples!"

"But, B-Buck, it is true!" said Dora. Using his name was desperate flattery and her fears made it sound shy.

"What you talkin' about, honey?" He still thought Dora the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

"He *is* Mr. Hepple's son and he and Catherine *are* married!"

"Ho no, you can't fool me. And if you can't, nobody can! From what I hear tell, old lady Dobbs 'ud poison any Hepple as set foot on this ranch! Besides, now that Joe Bush was killed, they's only Pinky that is the son—"

"Oh, but please listen!" Dora exclaimed. She somehow felt it must be better to have Buck know Harold Mason was a Hepple. Hastily, with panting nervous eagerness, she told the story of the marriage and its secrecy, of Harold Hepple coming to the ranch as Mason.

Buck slapped his leg. "I'll be damned if that ain't some joke! Not only on old lady Dobbs but on your step-maw, too! She'll be mad enough to bite herself when she learns you'll maybe want a share of Pinky's cows—an' hern! Ho ho, here her and the Johnsons are a planning to get the Arrowhead from old lady

Dobbs an' you've already got it, so to speak! Ho ho ho! I'll be damned!"

Buck laughed some more. It struck him as good and funny. "Well, here comes the boys. Now we'll enjoy ourselves a little." He turned toward 'Nita. "You trot to the kitchen an' cook up somethin' good. Make it plenty! Hank, go 'long and see they don't bolt. Them's purty girls, so watchin' 'em will be a pleasure!"

The men were clattering up, jumping from horses, roughly good-humored.

Buck told them, "This feller here with the sick calf look is ol' Ding Hepple's boy and married to old lady Dobbses' gran'daughter!"

Sam, the pot-bellied, asked, "You goin' to take him over to see his step-maw, Buck?"

"That might be a good idee," Buck agreed with thoughtful sideshift of glance at Mason.

Sam swaggered close, leered at Catherine. "Kinda nice, ain't you?" Her hand, without any warning, whacked his face. The smack had the sound of two leather straps snapped together. Men guffawed. Sam looked a little sheepish, rubbed his jaw. "She's got the kick of a two year ol' in that paw of hern." Then, with glint of malice, "But I'd damn soon tame you if you was mine!"

"You," said Catherine, sweeping their faces with a look that included all of them, "are a fine lot of two-legged things to call yourselves men! You"—her look fixed on Buck—"are a coward and look it! You knew the men were away from the ranch! You wouldn't have come otherwise! You'd have run, run! just as you did that night when you shot at Red Clark from the dark through a window—"

That wasn't the way Buck had told it to folks. "Shet up!" he snarled. "Oh, I'll—"

"I won't shut up! You coward! You were afraid of Red! You shot from the dark—"

Buck said, "I'll shore shut yore mouth for you good!" He lurched at her with raised fist. Catherine shrank back, then stopped and straightened as if too proud to run. Buck struck her with open hand across the mouth.

Dora screamed, "Oh don't! Please don't!" and hid her face.

Mason, wild and helpless but brave, rushed at him. "She is my wife, you dog!" His fist wavered in awkward swing at Buck's face. Buck knocked him down and kicked him again and again, glad to have some one on whom to work off his rage.

Catherine flew at Buck with fingers set claw-like. Men grabbed her, pulled her back. They held her firmly and grinned with a kind of admiring tolerance of her spunk. She begged them to make Buck stop. A big fellow with both hands on her wrist shook his head with a kind of warning. "No, Miss. We know 'im! An' we don't meddle when he's mad!"

Buck didn't feel proud of himself. He had worked off his temper but Dora was staring at him with fear and reproach. He seemed oddly submissive in wanting to please her.

"I don't like Hepples!" he said as if somehow vaguely justifying what he had done. "I'm 'sposed to be workin' for 'em. But them bankers hired me to. They knowed, for one thing, I had it in for Red Clark. They knowed, too, I don't mind making trouble for folks! Hepples are no good. None of 'em. There's that Pink—he thinks he is goin' to marry you. But he ain't! I wouldn't let you marry into a no-count outfit like that. And you wouldn't want to if you know what all I know about 'em. 'Sides, what marryin' is done to you, me, I'll do it!"

He was quite goodhumored again and patted Dora's hand, then put an arm about her, pulled her to him. She neither yielded nor resisted; but there was such reproach in her eyes that he said—

"She hadn't ort to rile me. I'm a good feller if I ain't riled."

Mason got off the floor all bent over. He was bleeding, half-sobbing and stumbled into a chair, blindly. Catherine dabbed at his face with a small handkerchief and stood over him in a kind of protective rage, helpless but unafraid. Some of the men peered at her with furtive admiration, spoke one to another out of the corners of their mouths: "That girl's got grit, feller!" . . . 'Tain't many as 'll sass Buck!"

Buck didn't like the sudden solemn feeling that had come over everybody. "Hey, what's the matter with you all! Come on, let's get into the house. We're goin' to eat soon. And, by God, drink now!"

They moved into the house. Mason was half dragged, stumblingly. He was hurt, and hurt the deeper by his helplessness. A man, not unkindly, held to one arm; Catherine to the other. Mason sat down and she stood with an arm about his shoulders.

Men searched through the house, especially old Huskins. With clatter of cowhide boots he ran from room to room, emptying trunks and dumping drawers on the floor. He said loudly that he had a right to whatever he could get out of that old Dobbs woman. Men grinned, eyeing one another with secret understanding, and called, "Pop, be shore an' don't overlook nothin'!"

When he had gone through the house he went nosing about outside and opened the gate into the shed where the savage Bella nursed her pups. His yells brought men running and they found him on his back in a corner wildly flailing the air with his heavy cowhide boots. The dog had torn his clothes half off and leaped this way and that, slashing at him with ripping teeth as a wolf strikes. They shot Bella. With her back broken she crawled at them with teeth bared and snarling; and when a bullet went through her brain she lay flattened out with a look as if still ready to jump. When Haskins got to his feet he ran and jumped on her body, cursing.

"I'm goin' to tromp to death ever' damn one of them pup-dogs!" Huskins bellowed, and started toward the shed.

One of the men caught him by the shoulder and flung him back. He said with slit-eyed menace, "You just aint!"

Huskins went limping into the house, bellyaching about his bad luck, and the men tormented him with pretended seriousness that Bella had had all the signs of a mad dog.

Wines and liquors had been found and were brought out by the handful and in baskets. Dutchy's fat body and the way he lumbered tickled some of the men. After they had a few drinks they laughed at his crippled waddle and it amused them to make him play waiter. All were soon nicely warmed and a little tipsy. Their loosened tongue haphazardly disclosed that nearly all them had been on the dodge, and some still were. They had been attracted by the Monohela mining boom to this part of the country and raked together to ride for Hepples. Many of them had rode with Buck before.

One fellow poked at the piano, thumping the bass keys as if trying to imitate thunder. Another cocked his feet above his head and sang, "Oh bury me not on the lone, lone prairie." Voice rose in a higher pitch, goodnatured. They had no uneasiness whatever about loitering in the Dobbs house. Once in a while somebody would go out and have a look and come back. There was no other guard kept.

'NITA and her daughters were fixing dinner. They worked sullenly, scarcely speaking. Some of the men pawed the girls who said nothing, made no protest, were as impassive as dummies.

'Nita, quite as if getting a package of

salt, opened a dark little closet door high over her head and took down a box of rough-on-rats. Dutchy saw what she was doing. He furtively wrenched it from her hand. In his thick broken English, half-whispered, he told her not everybody would be poisoned at once and that those who weren't killed would be murderous. She made no reply at all, but simply turned to the stove, poked in wood.

Buck had pulled Dora on to his lap and was trying in what was a respectful way for him to tell her some more about how much he liked her. She had none of Catherine's fierceness and he mistook her passive fright for a kind of yielding. He drank much whiskey and she, pressed, took a little wine. She felt in need of something because she was faint and seemed choking.

Buck told her she mustn't think any more about Pink Hepple who was a bad feller and sure to be hung! Both the Johnsons, he said, were sweet on Mrs. Hepple who was a pretty woman and swell dresser, but sure a bad one. " 'Specially if she don't like you!"

Pinky had told Buck all about how his maw had worked them Johnsons to a T. She told old man Johnson that she was nice to his boy Milton so he would like her for a maw when old Hepple died; and she told Milton that she was nice to his dad so he would like her for a daughter when old Hepple died.

Buck slapped his knee and thought that was pretty good. "Regular Hepple trick—like sneakin' into the Dobbs house by marryin' the gran'daughter!" Buck said it was Mrs. Hepple who had coaxed the Johnsons into throwing in with her son Joe Bush for to let gamblers run games like they wanted. "Bad lot, all of 'em." Buck even sounded indignant. He said—

"I like you too much not to make you do what is good f'r you!"

Dora smiled nervously. She was desperately anxious to keep Buck in a good humor. All he saw was the smile and that pleased him.

Them Johnsons, Buck explained—repeating, he said, what Pinky had told—at one time and another had dished out purt-near twenty thousand dollars to Mrs. Hepple. Naturally, they didn't want that money to come out of their pockets. They thought stockholders in the bank ought to help pay for her clothes and Pinky's gambling. They had a talk with Pinky and explained how to work it slick. They would put a little money in an express box, make up the weight with a gunny sack full of iron, and send it on the stage to Monohela and say it was $30,000 in coin. Pinky and some friends were to hold up the stage. The few hundred dollars in the box would be for Pinky and his friends to spend. The Johnsons could then explain the bank shortage and have some thousands left over to hire men to fight Dobbses.

"Pink he got them two kids, 'Gene Cross an' Windy Jones, for to throw in with him. But none of 'em knew anything about holdin' up a stage. So they got 'em another feller—"

Dora was listening in a kind of anguished breathlessness. He could tell by her look that she suspected him of being that fellow. So he said, "—feller, whose name I don't know for to help 'em."

The shotgun messenger thought he was guarding $30,000 and showed fight. They killed him. Then they saw that the old driver looked like he had recognized somebody and 'Gene Cross, who was anyhow suspicious that Rim Cramer had tattled some about Cross-Box rustling, killed him.

"So Pinky is shore to be hanged," Buck told her, gleeful. "And I want you to go with me. After I get through here in Tulluco—and when I settle up some little business over to the Hepple ranch, I'll be through—I'm goin' down to Mexico where I've got friends, and get me a

ranch. I am going to take you along."

"Please, I—oh you mustn't make me—"

"Oh I'll be good to you. I'm a nice feller thataway!" Then he laughed, looked across at Mason. "An' I'm shore goin' to take him along to the Hepple ranch and show him to her. 'Twill help me argy her into raisin' my wages some!" He grinned, sinister and ironic. "Tonight," he said, "we'll stop over to that place old woman Dobbs druve Huskins off. Then tomorrow—"

Some of the men, in prowling about, had released Trixy from her closet. She came into the room and barked wildly. Men were amused by the furious little puff ball and poked out their boots, tormenting her into a frenzy. Her yapping was so shrill and persistent that Buck turned from trying to talk nice and persuasive to Dora and said, "Shut that thing up!" A man kicked the poodle as hard as he could, sending her some ten feet through the air and against the wall. Catherine shrieked and ran to her pet, crouched down. Her tight-set lips trembled. The little poodle had a leg broken and whimpered with pleading lift of tiny head as if trying to understand.

Buck, telling Dora what a fine fellow he was, pointed to Mason as an example of what a man oughtn't be like. Mason was bleeding about the face and had some bones nearly broken. Buck called him a cry-baby.

"Now me, I onct crawled more'n ten mile with a busted leg across the desert without a drink of water! An' never whimpered none!"

Catherine stood up, hugging the poodle to her breast. "You are nothing but a big brute anyhow!" she screamed at him. "And a coward! If I were a man I would kill you!"

"Huh, it's been tried by men!" said Buck, complacently.

"You tried to kill Red Clark when he wasn't looking and—"

"I got a right to kill him any old way I can. His dad killed my dad and—"

"Your father needed killing then!" Catherine's voice was shrill and furious: "Needed it if only for being the father of such a thing as you!"

He shoved Dora off his lap. Catherine's tongue had cut him again. He glowered, looked mean.

"Coward!" she shrieked.

"I ain't afraid of—"

"You are afraid!" Her tongue was loose again.

He yelled at her to shut up. She wouldn't shut up. She said anything and everything that swirled into her mind. He had seemed to wince most at mention of Red; so she said—

"You are afraid of Red Clark! He would shoot you like *that!*" She stamped a foot, showing how quick Red would shoot. "You know it, you coward! To shoot from the dark through a window—"

Buck's men grinned furtively, amused to see him, a bad man if ever there was one, tongue-lashed by a girl, a pretty girl.

Buck's temper again exploded. He cursed her and jumped up. Dora screamed and snatched at his arm, pleading. She might as well have caught at the shoulder of a wild horse. "Ho, onct ain't enough, huh?" He struck her.

Catherine rocked back, but kept her balance, stood firm, not flinching.

Mason weakly came up out of the chair. There was a mad dazed look in his eyes. He could scarcely see. He could scarcely stand. He was trembling. He swung wildly. Buck knocked the blow aside with almost casual toss of forearm.

"And you ain't had enough yet either, eh? I'll shore give it to you now!" He drew a gun. Catherine dropped the dog and flew at him. He threw her aside and struck Mason over the head with the gun barrel. Mason fell as if shot.

"Oh, you have killed him!" said Cathe-

rine as if she had lost her voice and could no more than whisper.

"I ain't. But I shore will if you don't shut yore damn mouth!"

She threw herself knees down over Mason. He was bleeding from nose and mouth and lay on his side as if dead. She called to him. Her hands fluttered about his face and breast, searching for signs of life. Her courage, her devotion, her prettiness, made Buck, who again didn't feel very proud of himself, say, "Too damn bad you don't love a *man* 'stead of sissy feller like him!"

That was like putting a match to powder. She was on her knees and her head went up in a way that sent her yellow hair flying. "He's braver than you!" The gleam in her bluish gray eyes was like the glint of bright metal. "You are ten times stronger, so he is ten times braver than you ever could be because he isn't afraid!" Her wild look flashed about on the stolid-staring faces. "You beasts! Beasts! You let him beat a helpless boy like this! You let him strike *me!*" Their eyes swayed blankly to avoid her fierce look. "Strike women!"

Old Huskins was half-drunk so he didn't feel the pain of the dog bites now. His pockets bulged with stolen stuff. He growled, "I'd smack e'r again, good, Buck!"

Buck whirled on him. "Keep yore damned mouth shut or I'll—" He drew back his fist and Huskins shrank away, blinking.

One fellow mumbled vaguely, "Aw let's be ridin'!" One studied his dirty fingernails. Another stared from a window, suddenly interested in scenery.

Dora put her arms about Catherine. "Darling, come with me!" That seemed a way of escape from the room for Dora.

"I won't leave Hal!" said Catherine.

"An' you ain't goin' to get out of my sight!" Buck put his hand on Dora's shoulder, trying to be gentle. "I liked you from that time in the stage!"

Dora trembled. Her nature was not defiant. She used his liking for her to coax Buck into letting Mason be carried into Catherine's room.

The men who carried him, because of a kind of abashed admiration for Catherine's spunk, were almost gentle. "Careful of the kid," one mumbled.

The men began to drink again and grew half way gay. It was a good joke for them to make old Huskins shell out all the loot he had picked up. They divided everything among themselves. He whimpered and cussed, and was jeered.

After they had eaten they were ready to ride. Buck stuck to his notion about packing young Mason along. Dora, in a kind of timid desperation, tried to talk him out of taking any of them and mentioned the dangers he would run in handicapping himself with "prisoners".

Buck was contemptuous. "Anyhow," he said, "you ain't no prisoner. You're goin' to be my wife." He made Dutchy bring an empty tin can and to show how well he could shoot, threw it out of the door. He hit it once in the air and again before it stopped rolling on the ground. "Why," he demanded, patting the gun after reloading, "ort I be afraid of anybody?"

There was some talk of firing the ranch house before they rode off. The lean Hank and the pot-bellied Sam insisted, but Dora's coaxing had the most weight. Buck said, "We done more now than them bankers 'll like since they feel it's their property we burnt!"

Mason was dragged out. He was sick, hurt, helpless, and begged not to be taken. "I just can't stay in a saddle!"

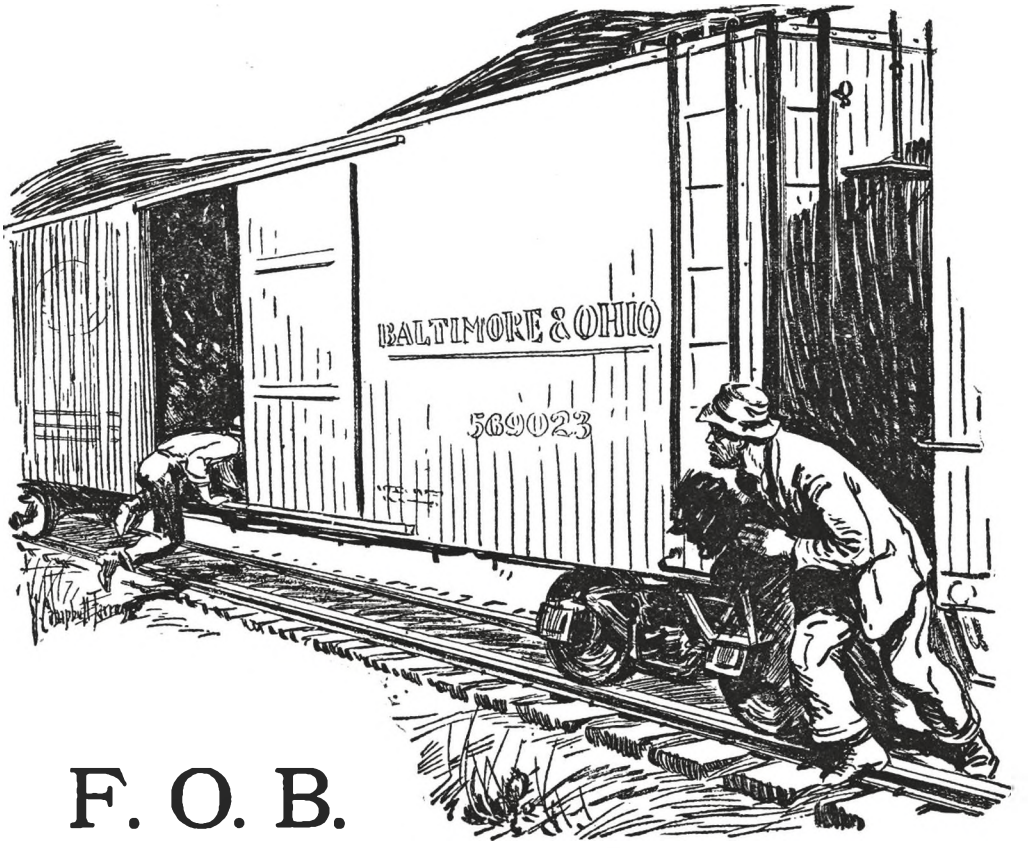
"We'll tie you in!" said Buck.

"And I," Catherine announced fiercely, "will go wherever my husband goes if I have to follow on foot!"

Buck eyed her with frank admiration. "Women like you are shore scarce." He turned to Sam. "Get a horse for her.

As soon as they were gone, Dutchy brought in an old horse that had been tempted by a pan of oats to within reach of a loop. Then set out for town.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



F. O. B. Furnace Flats

AN OFF-THE-TRAIL STORY BY ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

As Acting Chief Dispatcher Hoggarth lay on the parlor divan in his house at Bakersville, feigning sleep, he could hear his wife moving about stealthily. She was packing a bag. A contemptuous smile straightened the thin lips of Hoggarth. She was, he guessed, planning to run away. Well, let her!

How, though, would she do it? And where would she go? Adam Hoggarth knew quite well that there wasn't another man in her life. She was slight, timid, work-worn, shabbily dressed because Hoggarth had always kept her so. Men, he thought, wouldn't be interested. Nor was Clara Hoggarth herself the sort who would be running away with a man.

When he heard her leave the house, Hoggarth arose and looked at his watch. It lacked only half an hour of time to go on his trick. In the prolonged illness of Chief Dispatcher Jones, Hoggarth, the senior of three trick dispatchers, was acting chief. Night work being preferable at this desert division point, he had re-arranged the tricks so that his own period of duty ran from 8:00 P. M. until four in the morning.

Now, when he went outside, he caught a glimpse of Clara as she retreated in the dusk. She wore a hat, carried a hand bag and was moving in the direction of the depot. Was she making for a train?

Hardly, for no passenger train was due out before midnight. Besides, she had no money.

Hoggarth knew that definitely, because he had never allowed her to touch a cent of cash. The household bills he had paid, stingily, himself. Not only was the man cannily close-fisted, but he had nursed a theory that the one sure way to control a wife is to keep her purse empty. With an empty purse, a women can't go places and get ideas.

Having half an hour to spare, Adam Hoggarth now followed to observe just what manner of flight Clara hoped to achieve without funds. The slight figure ahead of him turned a corner. Hoggarth, in the deepening gloom, followed at half a block. By then it was evident that she was making for the freight yards.

When she reached a wide ladder of tracks Hoggarth, for a little while, lost sight of her. These tracks were badly congested with idle rolling stock. Clara had slipped in between two strings of empty box cars when Hoggarth next glimpsed her. She was a dozen cars up the dark, narrow aisle, shining a pocket flash to illumine the lettering on a box car. She took a step or two of retreat, as though boldness forsook her, then stood indecisively in the gloom, returning then resolutely to the door of the car under inspection. A calculating meanness stood out on Hoggarth's high cheekboned face as he watched her. She was, he understood, planning to stow away on No. 74.

For here on track seven was spotted that string of Baltimore & Ohio grain cars which had come to the Pacific coast with loads, and which for a long time had been cluttering up the Bakersville yard. It had been hoped that return loadings would develop, but none had. And this afternoon the trainmaster had stopped by Hoggarth's house to relay a complaint from the Old Man himself. The burden of this was that the old man was tired of looking at those foreign empties, and he wanted them dispatched to hell out of town. So Hoggarth, in Clara's presence, had phoned the trick dispatcher on duty, instructing him to arrange to deadhead that string of B. & O. box cars east on 74.

Now Hoggarth saw his wife open a sliding door and crawl in. Once in, she slid the door shut. Again Hoggarth's lips compressed in a smile of contempt. How far did the little fool think she would get that way? It would take weeks for those strays to reach the home line, if they ever reached there at all.

Then Hoggarth realized that Clara wouldn't be caring just how far away she went, as long as she cleared this Bakersville division where she was known. Her one idea was to slip away from Hoggarth. Perhaps she hoped to get only as far as Albuquerque, and with luck she might. Suppose she did! What then?

She would try to get work. Being untrained and shabbily dressed she would, in these depressed times, fail. Inevitably she would be picked up as a vagrant. The police or some charity organization would find out who she was and ship her back home.

Meanness concentrated on Hoggarth's hawkish features. He didn't want her shipped back home. She was an obstacle. She stood in the way of Hoggarth's not unacceptable attentions to the widow of an Antelope Valley ranchman, a buxom lady who not only possessed many unencumbered acres but who had just collected ten thousand dollars in life insurance. And divorce, Hoggarth knew, would be costly. He was aware that in California a husband is likely to emerge from such litigation with little more than his shirt, to say nothing of paying alimony the rest of his life.

Yet now, of her own accord, Clara had stowed away in this box car due out, shortly, on 74! New ideas came to Hoggarth. His eyes contracted, schemingly.

His face dulled to the heavy grayness of lead. No. 74, he realized, would be utterly in his own control until it cleared the Bakersville division. Suppose it was wrecked! But no, that wouldn't do. The dispatcher on duty would be too plainly culpable. Too, a stowaway in midtrain would probably survive the wreck.

Then another angle of thought seeped to Hoggarth. Its hellishness made him shaky for a moment. Yet he braced himself against retreating from it. It was a chance which could never come again, and it was absurdly simple. Nor would there be any way in which he, Hoggarth, could be blamed. He could stand absolutely aloof from it.

For he wasn't supposed to know his wife was in that car. She had no business being there. She was taking chances. She might be assaulted by some tramp or booted off by a hard-boiled brakeman. Or she might remain unaccosted in the box car. Under a certain condition readily conceivable by Acting Chief Dispatcher Hoggarth, the very worst fate she could encounter would be to remain unaccosted in that car.

He moved forward stealthily; his tread did not audibly crunch the cinder path as he approached the car Clara had entered. Once there, he noted its number. Baltimore & Ohio 569023. An easy number to remember. The car's sliding door had a hasp and staple, like the door of a barn. Adam Hoggarth now tried to imagine that he was some old-maidishly conscientious yard employee chancing along here, the sort who would pick up a bolt or lost coupling and take it to the shop, or who might secure a car door so it wouldn't rattle loose on the run.

Almost soundlessly he put the eye of the door hasp over its staple and dropped into place the iron pin suspended there for the purpose. Then he walked softly two cars ahead and crawled under a car. Returning along the next path to B. & O. 569023 he saw that its other door was already bolted.

His wife therefore was imprisoned. She didn't know it yet, but she soon would. Then if she desired she could effect her release by crying when one of 74's crew came along to inspect hose connections or check the car list. But she wouldn't cry out, because that would defeat her purpose of flight. Nor would locked doors, at first, alarm her. She would reason that she could cry out later, at any main line stop, and be heard by a trainman or by an employee at some way station.

FIVE minutes later Hoggarth arrived at the dispatching office.

"Anything on Furnace Flats, George?"

"If there isn't," returned the trick dispatcher who was being relieved, "it's about the only storage space on the division not cluttered up with eastern empties."

"Well, we got no right to kick," Hoggarth said. "I reckon those eastern lines beef about our strays, same as we beef about theirs."

The specific order from higher up was to clear the division yard of foreign empties. Hoggarth, settling to his trick of work, now reconsidered his method insofar as it concerned a string of B. & O. box cars. His idea had been to dump them into the lap of the next division east, whose officials would, disgruntledly, shove them on to the next. Disgruntledly, because division officials do not like to have strays in train lots kicked into their yard. Ton-miles of revenue freight per ton of fuel burned are what make a haul report look good or bad.

Hoggarth knew that Mike Mullen, C.D. at the next division point east, was easy to antagonize on that score. He also knew that Mullen's own division was crammed with strays. So he called Mullen on the wire.

"Mike," he tapped out, "I'm shoving

thirty-five B. & O. empties at you on 74."

"For loading where?" Mullen tapped back sharply.

"At the North Pole, or suit yourself. We're just tired of looking at them around here, so we're scooting them toward home."

The volley of answering clicks was all but profane. "What do you think we are, a junk yard? Can't you store 'em somewhere?"

"Wait till I look at the trackage chart," Hoggarth tapped back. After a delay, he added: "If you'd rather not handle 'em just now, Mike, we *could* kick that string out on Furnace Flats. I hate to treat a nice railroad like the B. & O. that way, but—"

"But what?" Mullen coaxed. "Sure you can. Maybe the borax pits'll reopen next month, and then you'd have loadings east, right there handy."

The suggestion having been fished for and caught, Hoggarth pretended to relent reluctantly. He changed the orders for 74, though the make-up of the train remained the same. It was to pull out of Bakersville with thirty-five foreign empties and thirty loads. Ninety miles east, the string of empties was to be bunted out on a desert spur for storage until further orders. As far as Acting Chief Dispatcher Hoggarth was concerned, there would be no further orders. At least not until the next grain harvest, when the B. & O. began tracing those strays.

AS freight train No. 74 crackled over the frog points and hit the main line east out of Bakersville, Clara Hoggarth rode forlornly in car 569023. It was pitch dark in there. After a while, she briefly illumined the interior with her pocket flash. It was a nice clean grain car, she saw, almost new.

The same glow illumined her slight self. Seated on the floor with her back to a wall, she seemed more like an unfledged girl than the work-worn thirty-year-old wife of Adam Hoggarth. Trouble was in her small face. A brown-eyed prettiness had once been there. Character was still there, peeping from the hurt corners.

From the bag she took a buttered bun. then let the flash go dark while she ate it. The train was at full speed now. Car 569023 rocked and jolted. After miles of jolting, the stowaway groped in her bag for a thermos of water. Doing so, her fingers touched a revolver there. It was a weapon her husband had always kept in the house. Knowing that thugs and criminals often ride freight trains, she had, at the last moment and with extreme distaste, put it in the bag.

Now she closed her eyes. With her back to a wall and her slim, cotton-clad legs outstretched on the floor she tried to sleep, but couldn't. The fact that she was running away from Hoggarth was too exciting. She was afraid of Hoggarth. Except for one dim, restraining hope she would have run away long ago. The hope was that she might hear some word of an older brother last heard of in Alaska. If she knew where he was, she could go to him.

Now she had given up that hope.

Beneath her the fish-plates clicked, rhythmically, and the clicks were strangely comforting. Each of them took her another rail length from Hoggarth. Hoggarth would be surprised, she thought, when he went home at four in the morning and found her gone.

Finally she did doze for a short while. When she awoke, No. 74 was still rattling along at main line speed. She she heard frog points crackle under the wheels, and a succession of hoarse echoes as the train whirred by the buildings of a town. What town? She decided to look out and see how far she had gone.

But when she arose and tried, she failed to open the door which had admitted her. The other door was also

locked on the outside. Odd! She tried to think who might have locked the first door. One of the train crew, she decided.

The fact did not immediately alarm her. She wanted privacy, and she had it. She could make her presence known at any station, and be released. Now again she sat down with her back to a wall. Again she dozed.

More miles the train rocked and jolted. Violent jerks awakened her. The couplings took and gave slack as No. 74 slowed. After a further crawling pace, the train stopped. Sharply, in the new stillness, the woman heard a clatter of equine hoofs on a paved street. Oro, where this line crossed the Nevada Central, had a paved street. Most likely this was the crossing stop at Oro.

Then she heard a step on the cinders just outside her car. Then came a rasping sound as someone fumbled with the hasp of her sliding door. A brakeman? Would he put her off? She heard the pin noisily withdrawn from the hasp. Then the door was slid open about two feet. A mellow moonlight came in. A man, she saw, was about to crawl into the car.

He wasn't a brakeman. By his tough, unshaven face, this fellow was a vagabond. Some train-hopping tramp transferring from the Nevada Central to this intersecting line. He saw her dim outline just as he got one knee on the floor of the car. Halting in that pose, he peered at her with a leer of surprise.

"If it ain't a skirt! Howdy, baby! All alone?"

Clara shone her flash full in his face. It was a degenerate face, fat-lipped. The man's eyes were bloodshot and the neck of a bottle protruded from his coat pocket. In a moment of panic Clara Hoggarth brought the blunt-nosed revolver from her bag and cocked it with a click. She pointed it.

"Go away," she said faintly.

Without debate the man retreated. Dropping to the ground he disappeared toward the rear of the train. The door stood two feet open. In a moment Clara arose to close it.

Before closing it, she looked out. They were, she saw, at Oro. Looking toward the rear of the train she saw the tramp. He was opening the door of the next car. Before climbing in he took a long pull from his bottle. Then he wiped a ragged coat sleeve across his mouth and entered the adjacent box car.

The couplings jerked and two whistles came from the engine. No. 74 bumped over the N. C. crossing and moved on. Clara closed her door and returned to her old position. The tramps attempted intrusion was, she realized, fortunate. For now she wasn't riding behind locked doors.

Lucky she'd brought along the pistol, though. It occurred to her now that she didn't know whether or not it was loaded. She had taken it from her husband's desk at home, on an impulse of afterthought, without looking to see.

Now, with her flash, she examined the weapon and found that it was *not* loaded. It was, after all, useless. She laid it on the floor beside her and fished another buttered bun from the bag.

By now the train was again at main line speed and well out of Oro. A railroad woman, Clara Hoggarth knew the division quite well. Oro, she knew, was eighty miles out of Bakersville. Ten miles farther was a place called Brown's Siding. A little farther on was a spur called Furnace Flats.

Her thoughts reverted to the tramp. From now on, she knew she'd be frightened every time she heard an approach outside her car. That thought started another. Since she had heard the tramp's approach, and had distinctly heard the scratching sound as he withdrew the pin from the door hasp, why had she *failed* to hear the original locking of her door?

The only answer she could summon

was that whoever had locked the door had done so stealthily. Since Oro was the first stop, the locking must have occurred back at Bakersville. A brakeman might have locked the door there. But he wouldn't lock it stealthily. Who would?

The thought worried her. Who would approach the car furtively, lock her in, and then glide silently away? Her husband? Had Adam Hoggarth followed her to this box car? The one certain fact was that someone had stealthily locked that door. Although she could think of no motive, she could cast no one for such a part except Adam Hoggarth. She knew he was treacherous and cunning. But why would he lock her in the car?

What she did concede was that he *might* have done so, and for no kindly reason. Then she realized that, as dispatcher on duty at this very minute, her husband was in complete control of the train. It meant that she herself was at this minute under his control. The idea spelled menace.

The idea of a besotted tramp in the next car also spelled menace.

Suddenly and thoroughly alarmed, Clara decided to get off at the next stop. No matter where it was, she would get off. Later she could board another freight, and go on.

TELEGRAPHER John Redstone's trick of duty was almost finished when he handed an order to No. 74's engine crew. No. 74 buckled into motion and crawled by him. On a hoop Redstone handed a duplicate of the order to the conductor as the caboose passed. The order instructed No. 74 to go in the hole at Comstock for No. 9.

Redstone re-entered the depot and observed that it was 11.56 P. M. His period of duty ran from four in the afternoon until midnight. For the other sixteen hours of the day there was no wire service at Brown's Siding, whose entire population consisted of Redstone himself.

A timid voice made him turn about. A woman with a small, tired face, shabbily dressed, stood in his doorway. She carried a bag. Without asking, he knew that she must have dropped off No. 74.

Without asking, he knew other things. He knew she wasn't a female hobo. Her brown eyes were harassed. She was nervous, at her wits' end and on the ragged edge of a breakdown. One look at her and Redstone was all sympathy.

"Come in, please." He placed a chair for her. A child's voice could not have been gentler, although John Redstone was a hundred and ninety pounds of desert-tanned man. "What made you pile off that freight?"

When she sat wearily down without answering, he said:

"But of course you'd be getting off, if you were in one of those B. & O. empties. It was your last chance. Because even this dump beats Furnace Flats."

She was suddenly more startled than weary.

"Furnace Flats?"

"Sure. You knew they're going to kick those cars out on the spur there, didn't you?"

"Oh!" A horror grew in her brown eyes and her face was white. "Furnace Flats! Are you sure?" Clara Hoggarth knew the division.

"That's where they go," the operator said. "The dispatcher fixed it up right after he went on duty. I heard him talk with Mike Mullen about it on the wire. What's the matter?"

Clara had hidden her face and was crying.

"What's it all about?" Redstone wanted to know.

He was not an easy man to lie to. Nor was Clara Hoggarth an accomplished dissembler. Almost before she knew it the visitor had admitted that she was

the acting chief dispatcher's runaway wife.

Redstone wasn't surprised. Gossip spreads like fire along a railroad division, and even the call boys knew that Adam Hoggarth had been notoriously cruel to his wife. John Redstone had never seen Hoggarth, but for a long time his opinion of that person had been definitely unexpressable.

He spoke soothingly to his visitor. He brought out a few facts and guessed others. In ten minutes he pretty thoroughly understood the situation. Or thought he did. His theory was that the husband had schemed to bury the wife alive in a box car on Furnace Flats. Redstone's knuckles swelled and the veins stood out big and blue on his forearm. Two impulses ruled him. One was to get into action and improve the prospects of this regufee; the other was to drive a fist hard into Hoggarth's face.

"Tell you what, I'll lend you some money," he said. "Then I'll flag No. 9 and put you on it. You can ride straight to your people; you've got folks somewhere?"

She was grateful. But she couldn't let him do that.

"Besides," she said, "I've no one except a brother last heard of in Alaska."

John Redstone asked more questions. To his four-square mind the issue then became crystal clear. Either Dispatcher Hoggarth was guilty or he wasn't.

"We got to hold everything," he said bluntly, "till we find out. Either he did or he didn't. If he did, he thinks you're still locked in that box car. He thinks 74 is stopping right now, at Furnace Flats, to cut the train between the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth car. Then they'll kick the thirty-five empties out on the spur, rehook to the thirty loads and go on."

Redstone sat in rigid thought, his fingers drumming on the table. For a while there was no sound except the clicking of the rheostat. "You say you have a brother last heard of in Alaska?" he asked abruptly.

Drying her eyes with a handkerchief, she nodded.

"Did your husband ever see this brother?"

"No. Harry left the country before I was married."

"But you've mentioned him to your husband?"

"Yes."

"What is your brother's name and business?"

"Harry Collison. He follows mining."

"He's older than you?"

"About six years."

"Did your husband ever see a picture of him?"

"No."

"He's an out-of-door man roughly about my own age," Redstone thought aloud. To Clara he said: "Listen, lady; there's only one thing to do, and that's to quit guessing. Guessing that Hoggarth tried to pull something, and *knowing* he did, is two different things. By tomorrow, we're going to know."

Resolutely he overrode her protests. And she did want to know.

"For the next fifteen hours, " Operator Redstone said, "I won't be here. I'll show up at four in the afternoon, just in time to go on duty. You lock yourself in and wait." He nodded toward a door giving to his bachelor quarters. "There's a good bunk and plenty of grub. You won't see a soul until I show up at 4:00 P. M. By then I'll know whether he did or he didn't. If he didn't, you go back to him; if he did, you don't."

Once more he overrode her protests. She'd be snug and safe here. And he promised he wouldn't in any way menace or threaten Hoggarth.

"Just in case anybody comes around, take this gun," he said. He offered her a pistol.

That reminded her that she had left her own unloaded revolver on the floor of car 569023.

John Redstone went into his bedroom, where he donned his go-to-town suit and a five-gallon Stetson. Between his last two jobs he had taken a hunting trip in the Northwest. With the corduroys and flannels he had worn then he packed two scarred and scuffed suitcases. A leather tag on one of these enclosed a card labelled, "John Redstone, Brown's Siding, California." Redstone took the card out and threw it away.

"Where was your brother when he last wrote you?" he called to Clara.

"Fairbanks," she said.

On another card Redstone lettered in ink, "Harry Collison, Fairbanks, Alaska," and tagged the suitcase with it.

His flivver was parked in a shed back of the depot. Redstone embarked in it and drove swiftly to Oro. Only by a few minutes did he beat No. 9 there. But this was long enough for the filing of a Western Union telegram which read:

Mrs. Adam Hoggarth,
Bakersville, California.
Will arrive on No. 9. Please meet me.
Love.
Harry.

With his travel-scarred bags Redstone boarded No. 9. The ticket he offered was to Silverton, one station past Bakersville.

Although the telegram would be delivered in a sealed commercial envelope, Hoggarth, he was convinced, would be humanly curious enough to open it. What then? The one certain thing was that, with or without a cock-and-bull story, the man would appear to meet brother-in-law Harry at the train. Hoggarth's dispatching trick, Redstone knew, ended at 4:00 A. M. No. 9 was due to reach Bakersville at 4:36 A. M. After changing engines, it would pull out at 4:46 for Frisco.

DAWN was just breaking when John Redstone lowered his tall and tanned bulk to the Bakersville platform. A bag in either hand, he stood looking expectantly about. Evidently he hoped to be met there. He loomed in the gloom big and ruggedly prosperous, like a man who has been places and weathered a few storms.

For a minute or so he posed there. A taximan approached, but Redstone shook his head. Then Adam Hoggarth appeared. He was sure it was Hoggarth because the man had a worried look and had stood sizing the big traveler up for a moment before approaching.

"Looking for someone?" Hoggarth inquired in a strained voice.

Redstone beamed heartily. "Sure am, pardner. My sister. Maybe you know her. Her name's Hoggarth."

"Yours is Collison?" Hoggarth's query seemed to choke him.

"That's my handle, pardner."

"I'm Hoggarth," Hoggarth said. He looked, though, like he wished he weren't. "Your sister is—"

"In bed, of course," Redstone supplied quickly and contritely. "Glad you didn't rout her out. Didn't figure on the train gettin' here this early, or I wouldn't a wired her. Anyway, I'll see her day after tomorrow."

"Day after tomorrow?" Hoggarth stared stupidly.

"Sure. I gotta ride straight through on this train to Frisco. Big deal on with my bankers there today and tomorrow. Then I'll be back and we'll throw a party, eh, pardner?" Redstone slapped Hoggarth heartily on the back, adding: "Got a little surprise for sis that'll make saucers outa those brown eyes o' hers. How is she, anyway?"

A look of dazed relief crossed Hoggarth's face. "She's all right, I guess. I just came off duty and haven't seen her since supper."

"You got the bulge on me, pardner. I

haven't seen her in nine years," Redstone chuckled. "Haven't treated her just right, maybe. But I aim to make it up to her." Redstone winked. His thumb dug Hoggarth fraternally in the ribs. "You might give her just a little hint, pardner. Tell her Santa Claus is due day after tomorrow."

"Santa Claus?" Hoggarth stared vacantly.

"That's my name," Redstone avowed heartily. "Just turned a deal in gold mines for a million of what it takes, and I aim to settle a cold tenth of it on sis. Reckon that'll make her mad, pardner?"

Hoggarth stood petrified.

"Won't need but one of these bags in Frisco," Redstone followed up. "Might as well leave it with sis till I show up day after tomorrow."

He handed over the bag tagged as the property of Harry Collison.

"All aboard!" the conductor yelled. No. 9 had changed engines.

With his other bag Redstone mounted the steps of a coach. "I'll be seein' yuh, pardner." He waved back a jovial farewell to Hoggarth.

The train pulled out. Redstone crossed the vestibule and descended the opposite steps. No. 9 was gathering speed. Before it gathered too much. Redstone hopped off. He dodged behind some freight cars and scurried away in the gloom of dawn.

"How much to Oro?" he asked when he found a Bakersville taxi.

"Thirty bucks, mister."

"Make it forty if we're there in three hours."

It was 1:50 A. M. when John Redstone embarked in his own flivver at Oro. He still had one of his bags. Among the items of that bag there was a pair of field glasses.

By 8:40 he was at a sign on the main line reading, FURNACE FLATS. The only other improvement at Furnace Flats was a spur extending at right angles for a mile out on the soda-white desert. Well out on the spur were spotted thirty-five B. & O. box cars.

If the theory of Hoggarth's guilt was sound, the man should appear before long for the purpose of rescuing his victim. Hoggarth would, Redstone reasoned, be eager to rescue a goose for the sake of its golden egg. He would devise some far-fetched clew to explain why he suspected she might have become marooned here; his idea then would be to cajole her into returning home. Once there, he would hope to pamper her into submission by the time Brother Harry appeared.

A low butte arose about half a mile west of the spur. Redstone drove to it, parking so that the butte screened his flivver from both the main highway and the string of B. & O. cars. Then, mounting the eminence with his field glasses, he lay flat on his stomach and waited.

For hours he lay under the broiling sun. When by noon Hoggarth had not appeared, Redstone began to doubt his theory. Still he waited. The limit of his waiting must be 3:30, because at four o'clock he had to go on duty nine miles away, at Brown's Siding.

When three o'clock came without result, Redstone felt sheepish. His trap had failed to spring. Possibly Hoggarth wasn't guilty, or perhaps the man had penetrated the masquerade.

At 3:30 the watcher was ready to give up. Then he made out a car approaching in the distance along the highway. In a few minutes the car left the highway and turned out along the Furnace Flats spur.

With his glasses Redstone made out that it was a black coupe with but one occupant. The one occupant was Hoggarth. Hoggarth was driving slowly now along the line of B. & O. empties. Occasionally he stopped the coupe but did not get out. Redstone divined that he was reading the car numbers. The man must have made a note of the car

whose presumed occupant he now sought to rescue.

It was all Redstone needed to know. The man was guilty, or he wouldn't have come. Only a guilty knowledge could have brought him to Furnace Flats. Redstone's impulse was to go to him and break every bone in his body. He restrained it, because he had promised the lady he would not either accuse or threaten her husband.

Nor was Redstone concerned with Hoggarth's reaction of surprise or alarm when, in a moment, he was due to discover that the box car was unlocked and empty. Right now it was 3:45, which meant that Redstone had already delayed too long. He would be late in reporting for duty at Brown's Siding.

So he slipped down the far side of the butte to his flivver, embarked in it and drove easterly across the flats, keeping the butte between himself and Hoggarth.

There was no guess work about it now. He was grimly certain that Hoggarth had plotted an atrocious fate for his wife.

THE tramp aroused himself and rubbed bleary, bloodshot eyes. Daylight was seeping through the cracks of his car. During his sodden sleep, he reckoned, this freight must have come a long way from Oro. Just now it was standing still.

But when he arose and looked out, he saw it was no longer a train. It was a string of empties spotted on a desert spur. Not a house in sight! It meant he'd have to hoof it. The tramp turned and kicked viciously at an empty bottle, sent it rolling across the car floor.

He opened the other door. It was the same in that direction. Nothing in sight but desert. He'd have to hoof it. The sun, though, was blistering. Maybe he'd better wait until dark.

Later, from the other door, he saw an automobile coming along this line of box cars. The tramp brightened. Here was a chance for a haul out of this hell-trap. Plenty of room. Only one man in the car.

The car, a black coupe, came on, passed the tramp's box car and stopped before the door of the next one. The driver, a hawkish man in shirt sleeves, got out. He stood gaping at the partially open door of the next freight car.

"What about a ride outa here, mister?"

The hawkish man whirled nervously. When he saw that it was only a bum, he snapped out, "Nothing doing."

The tramp saw him go to the door of the next car and peer in. The man's gaze seemed to be riveted upon some object inside. In a moment he pulled himself up and crawled into the car.

What the tramp wanted was a ride out of the desert. His throat was dry. Why couldn't that fellow take him? There was plenty of room. The tramp left his own car and went to the door of the next one.

"Have a heart, mister," he whined. "Gimme a lift outa here."

The hawkish man, who had just picked up something from the floor, turned irritably. "Get going," he said. There was a blunt nosed revolver in his hand.

The tramp got going. He didn't think it out any further than that. But to make certain he wouldn't be stopped he deftly slid the box car door shut, closed the hasp and dropped the pin into place. The motor of the automobile was still running. The tramp embarked and got going.

He struck a cross-desert trail where a sign read, "To Arriba, 66 miles." The tramp knew that Arriba was on the Nevada Central, which crossed this other railroad at Oro. One destination was as good as another. The tramp drove on toward Arriba.

A straw hat and coat were on the seat. He put the hat on. In the coat he found

a wallet. A Utopian property, from the vagabond's viewpoint, was in that wallet. It was a pack of annual passes. The passes favored Adam Hoggarth, train dispatcher of the P. & S. E. There was a P. & S. E. pass, a Pullman pass, and a pass on every major railroad west of the Rocky Mountains.

The straw hat and coat, plus a shave at Arriba, made the possesor of these cards of carte blanche transportation fairly presentable. He abandoned the coupe at Arriba and rode the cushions of a parlor car to Reno.

REDSTONE was ten minutes late in reporting for duty at Brown's Siding. "They're calling you," the woman who awaited him there said. BN was clicking on the rheostat, impatiently.

Redstone answered the call. It was a train order. Clara Hoggarth stood by while he took it. They were both railroaders, and the railroad came first.

Redstone turned then. His grave nod answered the inquiry of her eyes. She was not, he saw, much surprised.

She winced when he gave her a full account of his day, but that was all. Then slowly she pulled on her faded felt hat.

"Is 72 going to stop here?" she asked listlessly.

John Redstone didn't want her to catch No. 72. Or 74, or any train at all. He tried to think of some decent excuse which might hold her. Then he remembered that he himself was starting a trick of vital work after having gone thirty hours without sleep.

"Listen," he said, "this trick's goin' to be tough. I'll probably drowse off and wreck a train, or something, or anyway get fired for not answering a call."

"Of course," she said sympathetically.

"Can you telegraph?" he asked.

She said she couldn't. But having lived for seven years in an atmosphere of telegraphy, she knew enough to distinguish the exceptionally easy call, BN. Especially when it was repeated insistently.

"Fine and dandy," Redstone applauded. "Tell you what. I'll sit here and drowse. You listen. Whenever they call BN, you wake me up."

She took off her hat. Redstone did drowse. Three times in the next four hours she awakened him. Each time he beamed approvingly. Funny, how she seemed to fit in around here.

At eight o'clock he said, "Now we'll find out if Hoggarth got back in time for his trick."

John Redstone knew the various sendings over the division wire. Some operators tapped sluggishly, some briskly. He knew them as he would have known voices.

"It's a relief man," he reported in a little while. "I reckon Hoggarth didn't get back in time. Or maybe he arranged a lay-off."

Followed another four hours of vigil. It was a strangely intimate vigil, the man dozing, the woman occasionally arousing him for duty. John Redstone had a feeling that he was going to miss her. She seemed to belong here. Hang it all, why couldn't she belong here? Just then she awakened him. BN was clicking on the wire. Redstone knew he had been dreaming.

As midnight approached, he heard a bit of station-to-station gossip.

"Hoggarth didn't arrange a lay-off," he told Clara. "They expected him to go on duty at eight, but he didn't show up. And now they know he drove to Arriba."

"Arriba? That's on the Nevada Central, isn't it?"

Redstone nodded. "His car is parked on a street there."

In a little while he heard more news. "He rode the N. C. from Arriba to Reno," Redstone reported. "It means he got the wind up. He couldn't face brother-in-law Harry without producing

his wife, so he just blew the country."

Her eyes were brown and round. "Are you sure?"

"It's a pipe. Because the N. C. conducter booked the number of his pass. And speaking of passes, I'm about to pass out something to eat. What about some Java and hot cakes?"

Clara Hoggarth laughed with a note strange to herself. It had been a long time since she had been this glad to cook a man coffee and cakes.

"Stay here till I call you, please, sir."

This was the life, Redstone thought comfortably. You sat right here till you were called to coffee and cakes. When she did call him and he went back there, he was astonished at the neatness of his quarters. Everything was hung up or put away. It had never been that way before. Nothing, he decided when he sat down beside her, had ever been quite like this before.

"Cream?" she asked.

"If you please." He'd be a chump, he thought, if he ever let her get away.

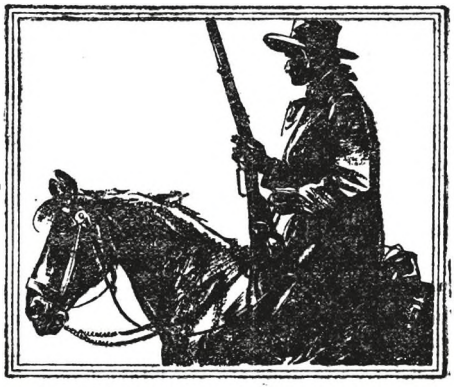
"Sugar?"

"All you can spare." There was an obstacle, of course, Hoggarth. But it wouldn't always be that way.

"I wonder where that fellow is," he thought aloud.

She dropped in the sugar and said, "I wonder."

Outwitting the Arizona Rangers



By ELLISON RAND

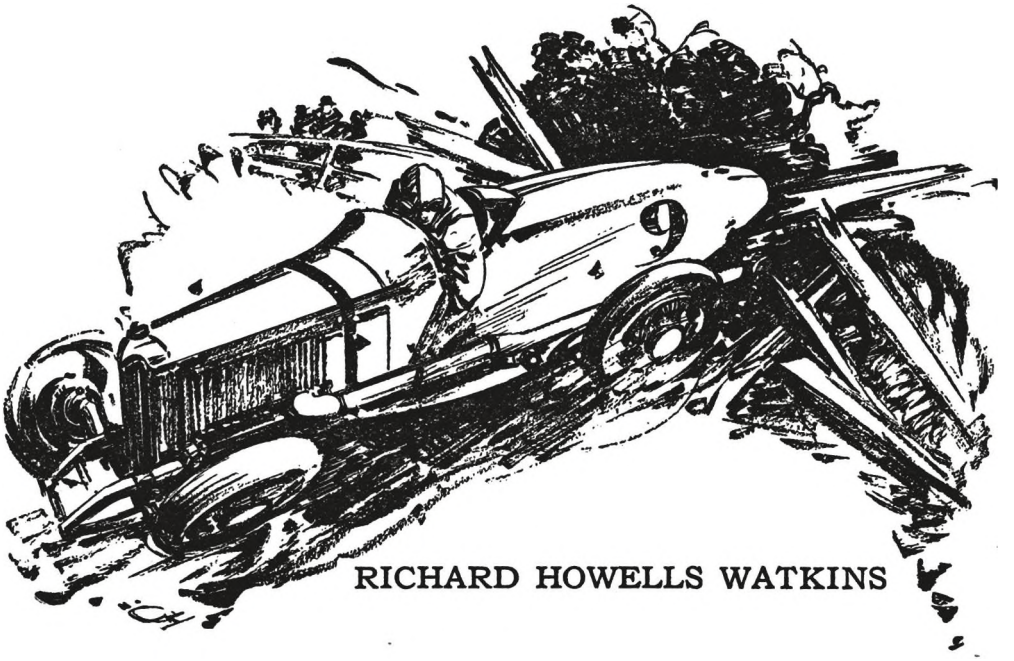
THE escape of Jim Courtright from the Arizona Rangers gave the Old West a laugh and made him a celebrity in frontier days.

Courtright was marshal at Fort Worth, Texas, and generally well liked, when Rangers from Arizona arrested him for an old killing in that state. As they were about to board train with him, citizens of Forth Worth gathered about them and demanded his release. The Rangers refused to give him up but were persuaded to delay the departure of Courtright while his fellow-townsmen tendered him a farewell banquet. That seemed the simplest way to avoid trouble since a promise was given that there would be no interference with his removal afterwards.

The citizens committee, however, neglected to mention that certain preparations were being made to obviate further dispute on that score. Under the table at Courtright's place two six-shooters were fastened. Near the close of the feast he unlimbered the artillery, covered the Rangers, backed out of the hotel and got away on a waiting horse.

Some time later, when the affair had blown over, Courtright returned to Fort Worth and resumed his duties as marshal. Before long, he was shot dead by the keeper of a gambling house.

THE SECOND-SPLITTER



RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

A LEAN young man, no more than five feet tall by any honest measure, sprang upon the bucket seat of a crimson racing car.

The bird-like keenness with which he surveyed the half mile track was in no way dimmed by the scar running from the outer corner of his drooping right eyelid to his slightly mutilated ear. Nor was his eagerness to examine the oval course tempered in the least by a strawberry colored burn, plainly of recent date, on the left side of his scrawny neck.

The straightaway in front of the grandstand had once been oiled. A few crystals of calcium chloride had now been distributed meagerly here and there to lay the dust. But most of the track presented to Jack Rainey's searching gaze the unrelieved harsh brownness of raw Jersey dirt.

To an experienced eye that track shrieked of shoestring promoters, third-rate cars, youthful outlaw drivers and purses as thin as the paint on the red car.

Nevertheless Rainey's scrutiny was strictly uncommercial. He looked at the track with glistening, intent blue eyes, as a fighting man might look at a formidable and merciless enemy.

Anyone with the stub of a pencil and the back of an envelope could have demonstrated conclusively that even if each young pilot there won every race he entered he was wasting his time if he valued time at more than fifteen cents an hour.

No practical result would come of this mathematics. On week days the drivers worked for a living; on week nights they toiled long and hard on their cars; at week-ends on tracks like this all over the country they stepped on their accelerators—speed kings of the dirt.

"So this bull ring thinks it's slow, does it?" Rainey said to the plump, perspiring mechanic bending over the motor below him. "Well, it'll be surprised, Bennie."

Bennie Cole did not answer. With a last distrustful tug at the wire to a spark plug he pulled down the hood and

strapped it; then mopped his forehead against the convenient pad formed by his rolled shirtsleeves. Uneasily he estimated the number of early birds scattered in the small, peeling grandstand.

"Unless the fans start coming soon they'll never pay off," he muttered to himself with conviction.

"What's the track record around here?" the small driver on the seat inquired briskly of the pits in general. The question brought a pained look to Bennie's streaming face.

"Thirty-one flat—an' try an' clip a fifth off it!" said a pilot fussing over his trimly stream-lined bright green car.

Jack Rainey laughed.

"Now listen, Jack; forget that record stuff!" Bennie Cole besought his driver in a low voice. "What do we care about records? All we want is to nurse the mill along an' just cop one piece of change." His voice became coaxing. "Huh, Jack? Just a piece of change so we eat an' maybe get us a couple o' shoes an' a new radiator shell. Huh, Jack?"

"That's right," Jack Rainey agreed, but his eye was still on the bank rising from the grandstand straightaway into the south curve. "I want to wheel her around a few laps before the time trials."

"Sure, Jack, sure!" Bennie Cole said with anxious heartiness. "As soon as they open the track. It's lucky we doped all this out last night, isn't it? In the time trials you don't push her so you don't qualify for the fast car heat. You lay back, see, an' start in the second or third heat—with the slower jobs. That way we get a chance to cop a heat or the consolation. So we go into the main event with money in our pants an' the car still revving nicely. Huh, Jack? Even if they do pull away—"

"Thirty-one seconds to do half a mile!" said Jack Rainey, scowling at the track. "Isn't that a hell of a record, Bennie?"

"Not for a rough bull ring like this. And look at those banks!" the mechanic said emphatically. "All wrong. So I'm glad you're saving the job by not trying to hit it up too soon, huh, Jack?"

"What, Bennie?" muttered the small driver. "Oh—yah, that's right. How long before they let us start in wheeling 'em?"

"You got a lot of time yet. And you haven't eaten," Bennie said. He dragged a quarter out of the pocket of his dungarees. "Hamburgers over in the tent, Jack. I've had mine."

His eyes glowed for an instant. "Tonight we eat high, wide and handsome, Jack—just because we got sense enough not to tangle with these fast cars till we've got us a stake in one o' the prelims. Ain't that so, Jack?"

Rainey took the quarter and flung it high in the air. Bennie uttered a throaty, incoherent cry and his eyes clung feverishly to the whirling coin. But the pilot caught it easily.

"Heads!" he said. "My lucky day, Bennie. Who wouldn't be lucky on a track where the record's thiry-one flat?"

Bennie breathed deeply but did not answer. Doubtfully he watched Jack Rainey threading a quick, easy way among the cars inside the flimsy fence that marked the pits.

"The price o' five hamburgers—and he nearly chucks it away!" he murmured. "I'd give a square meal to know whether he's dumb or deep."

Catching sight of an approaching figure, Bennie's broad, worried face split into a beaming smile. He thrust out a hand to the lank, melancholy man in dungarees.

"Well, Pete Enfield!" he said heartily. "What's a real mech like you doin' down among the outlaws? I figgered you'd be tunin' something for Indianapolis this year."

Pete Enfield gave vent to a sardonic croak. Then he turned his eyes upon the crimson machine. He looked at it only fleetingly but Bennie winced, nevertheless.

"The tow car looks pretty lousy," Enfield remarked in his sad, disillusioned monotone. "Where's the racing job?"

"Don't rub it in, Pete," Rainey's mechanic said shamefacedly. "I got her turning up, anyhow, and if she holds together we might cop something. We got to cop something!"

"That's the time you don't," Enfield said gloomily. "One of the times, I mean!"

Bennie discarded the unpleasant topic.

"Who you working for, Pete?"

"An angel, Charles L. Holst, the moving van kid." Enfield replied without obvious happiness. "The guy's a sap. Owns a big storage warehouse an' Saturdays an' Sundays he has to tangle with trouble as a race car owner."

"I know him. What's he got?"

"Two fast hand-me-downs from the big tracks. Hurry Harrahan an' Robbie Robertson are wheelin' 'em. They'll clean this meet. But it's just small change. Who's in your red clunker?"

Bennie Cole's smeared face mingled hope and doubt once more. "I got Jack Rainey. Crazy as a bedbug but he can roll. If we had a real job he wouldn't know your two babies were out o' the pits."

He frowned. "No kidding," he said. "Only thing, he fights the track."

Pete Enfield laughed and a couple of other mechs looked around to see who was using the file.

"This track's been fought before," he said. At the slow, considered pace of a pall bearer he started to pass outside the pits. Bennie clutched his arm.

"What are the chances of borrowing an eighteen inch wheel, Pete?" he asked eagerly. "The rubber on that left rear isn't so young."

Pete didn't even laugh this time. "Answer that one yourself," he said and moved away.

Revolving his plump body rapidly Bennie Cole located a man a good deal fatter than himself in the far corner of the enclosure. This middle-aged gentleman, drawn aside from the brisk action around him, was plainly smelling something disagreeable. Although not so tremendous in the warehouse business he knew his colossal importance at a track where nobody else was more than five meals ahead of his appetite.

Bennie hurried toward him.

"How are you, Mr. Holst?" he asked with hushed deference. "I ain't seen you since you won that twenty miler at Harriston."

Mr. Holst relaxed. That twenty miler had been the major triumph of his racing stable and Bennie had been handling a wrench for him at the time.

"Hello, Bennie," he condescended. "What have you got?"

"Nothing like you've got, Mr. Holst," the mechanic replied with a respectful glance at the blue and cream racing cars over which the van owner stood. "But Jack Rainey, the chauffeur's good. He'll make the hack ape for us, even if the cylinders are egg-shaped. I'm not saying we can clean you, though."

Mr. Holst grunted and dusted off his trouser knee. "Don't think I'm interested in the prize money here, Bennie," he said. "I've a couple of hot cars but Harrahan and Robertson are featherfoots, both of 'em! Brought 'em here to let 'em get confidence. They can't help winning all over the East if they get the habit."

"They're lucky to have you back of 'em, Mr. Holst."

"They won't stay lucky if they don't cop," the angel said darkly. "I've got my eye on another D. O. Fronty that's hotter than these two jobs. Neither of my cruisers gets her unless he starts unwinding the one he's got now."

"You want to look over Jack Rainey, then, Mr. Holst," Bennie Cole assured him earnestly. "He can turn dirt. Mr. Holst, if he just had a crate that would churn out the revs—"

Mr. Holst turned sour suddenly.

"I've heard that often!" he snapped. "It's always the job that's slow, not the driver. I'm here! Let him show what he's got."

THAT was that. Bennie, with a sad glance at the five eighteen inch spares, returned to the crimson machine. Jack Rainey, his mouth full of hamburger, was waiting impatiently.

"Track's open," Rainey said. "Let's get going."

They rolled out the machine with plenty of help from hovering mechanics and spectators.

"We got to cop something, Jack!" Bennie reminded, lips close to Rainey's ear as the driver revved up the motor. "Save the paprika for the money laps."

Rainey, listening intently to the motor with his head on one side, nodded in amiable acquiescence. Then he eased in his clutch.

Nobody could kick about Rainey's driving then. While other cars roared past him he cruised gently around the track, sometimes hugging the infield fence; sometimes going into the corners high on the bank. Bennie Cole, who should have been reassured by this mildness, wasn't.

As soon as the announcer began bellowing to start the time trials Rainey came into the pits.

One by one, in highly colored homemades and hand-me-downs, hopeful youths with taut faces and less hopeful veterans who had once rolled in faster company came out, unkinked their cars in a couple of laps and buzzed around on their time trials. Jack Rainey, a newcomer there, fidgeted beside the crimson machine as he waited to hear his name called.

Nobody made any passes at the record. Hurry Harrahan, coming briskly off the corner into the home stretch, nearly spun. But even so his time was only 32, a full second behind the low mark. Robbie Robertson, in the van owner's other entry, stepped a lap in 31 and three-fifths. Of the others only four came within a second of Harrahan.

"A nice thirty-three, huh, Jack?" Bennie whispered. "Just a nice—"

"D'you think I'm wearing a wrist watch?" Rainey broke in petulantly. "When is that hog caller goin' to remember my name?"

The announcer came through just then. Rainey flipped out of the pits and bored into the air immediately. He took two practise laps, riding low on the banks and then came down the grandstand stretch with his hand raised.

It wasn't because Bennie knew that Jack had his accelerator down to the floor that he muttered to himself; it was the length of time that Rainey kept it there, peaking the speed right into the first corner. He was clinging to the outside of the straightaway.

Bennie stared at the curving guard rail.

"There we go!" he gasped.

Somehow Rainey, with a flick of his fingers to the hand brake, swept across the dirt at the start of the turn and crammed the skidding car into the grove near the infield fence. He went bouncing and lurching up the bank, but his rear wheels, biting the track like buzz saws whenever they hit, kept the car surging on around the curve. He roared on, throwing a cloud like a destroyer laying a smoke screen, but the cloud was pulverized brown Jersey dirt. To Bennie that concealing dust meant that he was still on the track, anyhow.

The back stretch was short and rough. Rainey, coming off the corner into it, seemed to be moving almost as fast as he had been on the grandstand straightaway.

Though he was jumping on the car with all he had in his right foot he didn't get the leaping spectacular acceleration that a real machine will show. It was the way he had maintained velo-

city on that first curve that helped his motor maintain its speed. He hit the next curve hard, both hands on the wheel, without braking.

Again it looked to Bennie like a hole in the fence. But Rainey hadn't miscalculated his track. He stayed on, a good four feet from the flimsy guard rail. Edging his car down the bank, he kept coming. He came off the bank as if he was falling off a precipice. Though the car skittered wildly across the first of the stretch he controlled it in time and roared for the finish line.

The starter, on his toes to dodge a spinning or rolling car, almost forgot to waggle his checkered flag.

"Time, thir-rty and thr-r-ree fifth seconds, a noo recor-r-rd for this track!" bellowed the loud speakers while Rainey was coasting around.

In the pits, with the applause still pattering across from the stands, Bennie Cole looked at his driver.

"What do we get for that?" he inquired coldly. "You grandstand hero, you, you've got us into the fast car heat!"

Rainey wriggled in his bucket seat; then wriggled out of it.

"Listen, Bennie, it sort of got me going. A race track—an' nobody's toured it in better'n thirty-one!" he said apologetically. "All you have to do is hit—"

"Go'n' bow to your public while I see how many rods you threw!" Bennie Cole snarled, slamming up the hood. "Us in the fast car heat. The fast car heat with this clunker! How much grub an' gas does that add up to?"

Abashed, Jack Rainey wandered away with his hands thrust deep in his pockets. He was unaware of admiring eyes gazing upon him from the fence around the pit and less admiring but more thoughtful eyes from within the enclosure. Cash was particularly scarce at this meet and here was another guy, from nowhere, come to grab off a slice! Generously the home boys agreed they had to hand it to him. But the "it" did not mean money that would buy spare tires. Rainey strolled down the infield to look at the first corner.

Bennie Cole, feverishly ascertaining that the car still had connecting rods, wrist pins and pistons left inside the cylinders looked up to find himself an object of the majestic interest of Charles L. Holst.

"That little guy can travel," the car angel conceded generously.

Bennie took his hands off the hot motor. "He's wonderful, Mr. Holst!" he said almost reverently. "Give him a real job to wheel and he'd burn the bricks at Indianapolis. What I mean, Mr. Holst, he's class!"

Mr. Holst yawned histrionically. "Tell you what, Bennie," he said. "You and this boy come to dinner with me tonight. I'll talk to him. You know me, Bennie; I like to help a good kid along."

"Sure, sure, Mr. Holst!" Bennie declared. "That's great. I'll have him ready. Now, Mr. Holst, there's just one thing. I ain't kidding you, but this old wreck's got a knock in it now that sounds like a piston's tryin' to come through the head. I don't want you to be disappointed in us if we don't cop much to-day."

Mr. Holst waved a magnanimous hand. "You're talking to a man who knows his alligators, Bennie," he said. "See you after the main event."

"D'you eat early, Mr. Holst?" the mechanic ventured.

"Sure; I get hungry, standing around here."

"I do, too," Bennie said. "Right after the twenty-five lapper, Mr. Holst."

Bennie leaned against the radiator, although the radiator was steaming.

"Am I smart?" he muttered in helpless admiration. "Baby, am I smart?"

His trance was not of long duration. Two more tail end cars lurched around

the track in thirty five seconds and then they called the fast car race.

Without breaking the news about dinner Bennie got his car and driver to the pole position.

"Do what you can, Jack; that's all you can do!" he pattered almost incoherently. "I'm backing you, Jack, same as usual, huh, Jack?"

"I'm sorry about that record, Bennie," Rainey murmured, but his eyes were down the track. "It was just that—"

"Sure, sure!" Bennie soothed. "You just had to show the track some tabasco; I know how it is, Jack."

"You know how it is?" the driver exclaimed. "I figured you didn't, Bennie."

"Sure I do," the mechanic insisted. "Now don't let it get you if these cruisers beat you to the flag. Everybody knows now you ain't got the acceleration. And don't crack yourself up, Jack; I'm thinking of you, boy, not the job."

Jack Rainey grunted and squinted down the track.

THE starter got them rolling. Bennie climbed up on top of fence around the pit, planted a grimy hand on somebody's car top and watched. On time trials Robbie Robertson was placed alongside Rainey in the first rank. Hurry Harrahan wheeled in the inside berth just behind the crimson record holder. Three other cars, including the green machine piloted by chunky Sam Blackmer, completed the field.

It was Rainey's job, in the pole position, to set the pace for the flying start. Coming around the turn into the grandstand stretch, where the starter waited with his green flag out of sight, he opened up.

"'At's the bean, Jack!" Bennie muttered. "Get her churning out the butter on the—huh?"

The starter shook his head just when Rainey, on the straightaway, had steadily built up the speed of his mount. He kept the starting flag hidden.

Bennie groaned. That meant no start; another lap was needed to get the field into position.

Rainey glanced around again, lifting his foot off the throttle. The pace slackened. One of the cars behind was lagging with a fouled spark plug that refused to hit. Suddenly the plug fired and cleared itself; the driver gassed his car in a hurry and shot into his place.

The starter changed his mind. He jerked his green flag into sight and waved them on.

"A swell break that is!" Bennie mourned. "A dead slow start!"

Rainey's throttle hit the floor instantly. Robertson, Harrahan and the others gunned their motors at the same time. The red machine surged on but Robertson's blue car alongside it seemed to Bennie's disgusted eyes to pick up speed like a diving airplane. It leaped down the stretch well ahead. Before that first curve came up both the cars in the second rank had also blasted their way past Rainey's sluggish mount. All three leaders hit the curve hard. With hands cinching up the brakes they cut their velocity in plenty of time to slide around instead of shooting up the bank.

Rainey, blaring into the corner with mounting momentum, found the track blocked by more than flying grit and stinging pebbles. His radiator shot toward the long tail of the bouncing green entry that had followed Robertson and Harrahan past him. There was nothing to do but drift up the bank.

Blackmer, opening up his green car after braking, pounded on around the track in the infield berth. Though Rainey's foot was down hard he couldn't get back his speed. It wasn't there under the hood.

Through the choking, swirling clouds

of dirt he followed, barely holding his own.

"Here's where we take a tanning," Bennie mumbled, glancing uneasily about for a look at Charles L. Holst. He didn't see the manager.

In the back stretch the blinding dust lifted, but so did the pace. Robertson had less than a length on Harrahan; the green car roared along twenty feet behind the blue and cream leaders.

At the start of that short straightaway Jack Rainey was fourth by no more than ten feet. But the three cars ahead gunned him to death right to the next corner. They went into it clawing their brake levers.

What Rainey lost on that stretch he made up on the curve and again the green car's tail loomed in the flying brown dust, close ahead of the red radiator. But when Rainey eased up the bank to pass his front wheels hung level with Blackmer's spurting rear shoes. Then, near the end of the curve, the green car pulled ahead and opened another gap on the stretch.

"You would gun us into the fast car race!" Bennie whispered. "Now like it!"

There were five more laps just like that. Jack Rainey kept coming, full throttle, on the corners, but he kept losing as steadily on the straightaways.

"There's no piston rings made that'll cure egg-shaped cylinders," Bennie Cole told the world. By that time he had located Holst over in the grandstand between a couple of vivid ladies. "The compression ain't there, that's all. Look at—Come on, Jack!"

The green car, coming off a corner, with a driver too long worried by close pursuit, broadsided across the track. Bennie, on his toes, saw Rainey percolate through the hole by the infield fence while Sam Blackmer was busy saving his life. In third place Rainey blasted down the grandstand stretch almost as fast as he had in the time trials. He got the blue flag that meant last lap a couple of hundred feet behind Harrahan in the cream machine, and once more went jamming into the groove near the infield fence as if he didn't know the curve was waiting for him.

Bennie Cole sweat ice as the car jarred sideways up the uneven bank. Rainey's stocky short arms won his fight with the lashing steering wheel. Throwing a thick brown wake into the air he spurted on around the turn. He was jumping on Harrahan's tail in the backstretch and Robertson, in first place, wasn't a length beyond his team mate.

Harrahan glanced back and put on a play. Bouncing and lurching, he shot down the rough backstretch full gun, swept alongside the startled Robertson near the last turn and dived across in front of him for a berth by the infield fence. Though he nearly spun he didn't quite. He took the long turn like a master.

Rainey, with some good initial velocity, did better on that backstretch than he had done before. The red car was going fast enough to flirt with the guard rail as he crashed into the last turn behind the blue car that had led the race since the first lap.

Bennie, straining his eyes and cursing the dust, made out that the red car came plunging around the bank, pushed its red hood half a length ahead of the blue and held place as they both came off the corner into the home stretch. Then Robertson, in the blue, stepped heavily on his accelerator. With no fuss at all he lunged ahead to take second place by an easy twenty feet.

Bennie Cole climbed down and rested, leaning his chin on the top of the fence.

"Races are like that," he muttered, glowering at the curve beyond the finish. "Just like that!"

Suddenly he ceased to mourn and leaped up on the fence again.

That flick of his eyes had not deceived him. Rainey, shooting into the curve

with waning velocity, had blown that left rear tire.

The car hung for an hour on the right wheels, front and rear. Then it spun vertiginously. The green car, finishing a poor fourth, spun with it as Sam Blackmer caught sight of the red menace ahead and whipped his wheel around to dodge it.

The crimson machine came to rest against the infield fence. The green, slithering up the bank, stopped inches from the guard rail headed the wrong way.

Nobody was injured except Bennie, who jumped off the fence in his haste and hurt his foot. Borrowing wheels is a tough job on any track and Bennie didn't know these outfits and hadn't much time. Though he cast a wistful eye at Pete Enfield, standing with lack-lustre eyes fixed on his feet near the Holst team's supplies and spares he kept away from that part of the pits. Holst, himself, might lend him a wheel but it wouldn't do to let him know how flat they were.

Nevertheless, when the crimson car came limping into the pits Bennie had a wheel.

"Don't blow this one, Jack," the mechanic implored him. "I put up my tool kit for it with a bird who's more like a pawnbroker than a race pilot. What we need now is a first or second in the next heat. You're in because you didn't cop in the fast car race. Jack, you got to take a place if you want to qualify for the main—"

Jack Rainey got out of the bucket seat. "here's a bad leak in a hose connection or somewhere, Bennie," he said.

The mechanic looked in silence. Then he dropped to his knees and looked again.

Bennie borrowed back his tool kit. That took salesmanship, fast salesmanship. The damage was a hole in the radiator where a flying stone had hit it.

The two remaining heats in which first and second cars qualified for the main event were run off while Bennie did what he could. He worked like a complete machine shop to plug up the old shell without cutting off too much cooling capacity. Holst strolled by once while Bennie was working but didn't even look at the machine.

"Maybe he's forgotten already!" Bennie muttered, with a sagging heart. He struggled on grimly and finished the job.

"We still got a chance to eat this week," Bennie gasped as he wiped the sweat out of his eyes. "The winner of the consolation gets fifty bucks, besides qualifying for the big race. Fifty! Roll her out!"

BENNIE'S eye flitted appraisingly and even hopefully over the bunch of misfits and semi-wrecks lining up for the consolation. Everything that hadn't placed that day was out on the track to fight for that fifty dollars. The starter motioned the red car to the pole position. That record was still remembered, although it was nearly two hours old, now.

Bennie saw Jack Rainey's gaze, ignoring his rivals, go down the track to the first bend and then rove on, around the narrow dirt oval. The starter, legs wide apart, looked over the field, spat in the dust, started to jerk his thumb and then paused as a ninth entry was trundled out of the pits.

"You got the idea, Jack; beat 'em to the corner and then loaf along," Bennie murmured in his ear. "You'll be in the clear and they'll be smothering each other in their own dust."

"If you ask me," Rainey said thoughtfully, "thirty and three fifths seconds isn't so hot for a track."

"Now for Pete's sake, Jack—"

"Get going!" yapped the starter.

Jack Rainey opened his motor wide.

"Tell 'em to clock me by laps, Ben-

nie," he said over his shoulder and vanished in a puff of exhaust smoke.

Bennie, shouting, ran after him for twenty feet; then ducked the oncoming field, went over and leaned heavily against the judges' stand.

"If that two-timing, car crashing little squirt don't stick to business this race —" he was vowing when a flat, scarred grey-headed man looked down at him from the stand.

"Hey, mech, we're clocking your wild man by laps," said the official.

"Thanks," muttered Bennie. He walked away and climbed up on the fence again. His square, stubby hands were shaking.

"Clocking him by laps," he repeated numbly. "Yah, I'll bet there isn't anything more'n a dollar watch among that gang up there."

It took four laps to get the boys in the consolation away to something that looked like a start. In this, their last chance of the afternoon to drag down a little money, they were all feverishly set to blast into the first corner ahead of the mob. But Jack Rainey in the first row, wasn't letting anything get by him. He kept rushing the starting line at a brisk pace.

"A flying start is a flying start to Jack," Bennie told himself.

The field, absorbing the idea at last, came humming to the line in something like formation. They got the green flag.

Once more Bennie Cole saw Rainey rocketing for the corner with all he had under the hood. His red mount was in her own class, now. He pulled ahead of the brown car that had started alongside him and slanted over to the outside of the straightaway, still picking up speed. When, near the turn he wrenched his wheel and sent his car plunging across the track toward the infield fence there was nothing near to interfere with that broad, fast skidding rush. Five seconds later the curve was a dust-clouded melee of skittering wheels and swerving cars but Rainey was scorching the brown dirt out in front. His speed forced him well away from the infield fence but he kept his whirring rear wheels just clear of the clogging loose dirt slung by many tires up toward the outer fence.

Bennie swayed on the fence. "Lift your foot an' coast to the finish!" he besought his driver aloud as Rainey shot down the backstretch. "You got two hundred feet on the best of 'em, fifty bucks dead ahead, Jack! Lift your foot!"

There was nothing but lead in Rainey's throttle foot. He kept it down hard.

Somebody was grunting beside Bennie Cole. His eyes dropped downward briefly and made out Charles L. Holst laboriously climbing from running board to front fender of the sedan by the fence.

Bennie helped him up. "Look at him ramble!" he said with sternly forced enthusiasm.

"I see him," said Holst grimly. He shook his head with business-like disapproval. His eyes were as hard as black marbles. "What's the idea of risking his neck an' a racing car like that? Ain't he got any sense?"

Bennie coughed. "Oh, he's just—kidding the boys," he mumbled.

As if a score of powerful cars roared along on his tail Rainey jammed his mount into the turn off the backstretch and bent it around as if it were hinged.

Every revolution in that sturdy old motor, every foot of speed in that racked and straining car, every bit of strength in his small, wiry body, the driver was calling out. Supremely he dominated the bitter, intricate conflict between the powers of his mount and the physical forces that would whirl it headlong off the curving track.

Broadside, Rainey came off the corner into the grandstand stretch.

Again the fat angel shook his head.

"All alone—and look at him jump her!" he said, his voice shrill with disap-

proval. "It won't do, Bennie. He don't know how to drive a money race, piling up a lead like that in one lap!"

"You can't blame him, Mr. Holst, with only fifty bucks up, for amusing himself by hanging up another mark with a clunker," Bennie argued fiercely. "What's fifty bucks to him?"

"That dinner's off," Holst announced. "What I'm lookin' for is a money driver —and Rainey ain't that."

Bennie didn't reply. His jaw was dropping and his eyes were protruding from his head.

Jack Rainey had whipped the sliding car into line at the first of the grandstand stretch and then, steadily, peaked his speed to the limit all the way down the straightaway. The field was already a quarter lap behind him.

With the turn leaping up ahead of his rushing car Rainey touched his brake handle briefly—mere lip-service to the terrible power of momentum—and swirled into the bend.

The groove near the infield fence had been gouged deeply by the day's sliding wheels. The red car hit it right but fearfully fast. It bounced hard up the bank. Rainey's stubby little forearms had his wheel under rigid control. The car landed on all four tires, headed truly to withstand a skid yet hold the track.

But the machine suddenly thrust its forward end into the brown dirt like a porpoise diving into a wave.

"Axle!" gasped Bennie.

It was the front axle—a complete break between the springs. That stout "I" bar should not have gone, but it did. Crystallization, a flaw or fate.

For a scant second the springs ploughed the earth. The front wheels spread. Then the rear end whipped around. The back wheels seemed to jerk the wreck up the bank.

Bennie saw Rainey's hand already darting to his ignition switch. Tail first the machine hit the flimsy guard rail with a crash. Then man and car vanished through the gap.

"What'd I tell you?" Holst cried. "Dippy!"

But Bennie was no longer on the fence.

Jack Rainey, with nothing more than a gouge in his cheek, was on his feet beside the overturned car beyond the gap in the guard rail, when Bennie got there. He looked all right as well as Bennie could make out through the crowd but the job looked bad.

Rainey's enigmatic eyes were on the rough spot in the track that had washed out his mount. Around the oval the survivors in the consolation race were winding up a blistering last lap in a three car finish.

Bennie dropped to his knees and looked at the frame, the motor and the rear axle housing.

"This track is good for twenty-nine flat—as she lies, Bennie," Jack Rainey said. "D'you think there's a chance o' somebody wanting me to ride for 'em in the big one?"

"No chance," said Bennie and the tow car rolled up.

"Sure you'll get paid for it," Bennie Cole assured the tow car owner with the violence of desperation. "But you know how it is after a crack-up. It's only a little way from here, anyhow."

The man rumbled uncertainly. "Hardly worth haulin'," he muttered, glancing at the carcass of the red car, slung in chains behind his truck. He paused doubtfully beside the step.

Jack Rainey, present but aloof, was watching the victorious Robbie Robertson come rolling slowly down the stretch while the grandstands acclaimed his easy victory in the twenty-five lapper. Time fourteen minutes, nine and two fifth seconds.

Bennie's eyes gleamed in sudden hope at the sight of the complacent Charles L. Holst strolling toward him instead of toward his winning car.

The angel stared at Jack Rainey and

shook his head. "You're a hot stepper but you leave me cold, young fellow," he said and then turned to the crestfallen Bennie Cole.

"Listen, Bennie, I need a mech who can tune 'em up like you tuned that piece of junk," he said, with a flick of his thumb at the red wreckage.. "You're all washed up here; I'll buy you a dinner and we'll talk it over. Come on; I'm gettin' hungry."

Bennie gulped and looked at Jack Rainey.

The small driver grinned at him. "It sounds like a swell break for you, Bennie," he said evenly. "I got this coming to me. Grab the job quick."

"Dinner, huh?" Bennie mumbled, chewing his lip.

"Good luck, boy," Rainey said cheerfully. "Sorry I wrecked her." He put his hands in his pockets and swung around to head away.

"No!" yelled Bennie. "Wait, Jack!"

He grabbed the scrawny little driver by the arm and with sudden, explosive vehemence jerked off his own greasy cap and dashed it to the grass.

"You're crazy, Holst!" he said passionately, rounding on the fat car owner. "You want me to leave a driver that can take turns like they was stretches! You're crazy!"

"Double that to you!" snarled Holst.

Bennie Cole turned his back on the fat angel and thrust Rainey toward the front seat of the tow car. "Get aboard, Jack," he said and then, just as authoritatively to the tow car driver, "Get going out o' here!"

Obediently the man revved up his motor; then he braked and jerked a hand ahead toward the exit from the pits. Robbie Robertson's winning blue car, surrounded by a crowd of pit men, mechanics and spectators, blocked the way.

"Hey, you!" bawled Bennie Cole. "Out o' the way for the track record holder! Gangway for Jack Rainey!"

Robertson, still in the seat, turned around. He laughed derisively at the sight of the little driver up on the seat of the truck with the red wreck trailing ignominiously behind.

Then, with a furious expletive, he grabbed for his handbrake.

The fickle mob around him had suddenly, spontaneously laid hands on his victorious machine and shoved it twenty feet down the track.

The tow car lurched out of the pits. A ragged, deep-throated yell came from the crowd.

Bennie, beaming and chuckling, scrambled aboard as the truck crossed the track. An instant later he grabbed at the driver's arm.

"Brakes!" he yelled. "Stop!"

Charles L. Holst was waddling along behind them, shouting and waving his fat arms.

The tow car stopped and Mr. Holst panted up.

"Maybe I am crazy, Bennie!" he gasped. "But I got a hunch—I got it just now. He does take them turns like stretches. We'll have the dinner, boys! Hey?"

"Dinner suits me," said Jack Rainey placidly.

Bennie Cole and Charles L. Holst both examined the scrawny little driver. In both the plump faces was a baffled, uneasy uncertainty.

"Maybe he's a great driver, Bennie," Holst muttered.

"Maybe he is," said Bennie honestly.

"How'd you like a chance on the Eastern A.A.A. circuit, my boy—maybe a chance even to race on the bricks at Indianapolis?" Holst demanded of the pilot. "A chance to wheel against the greatest in the world at Indianapolis?"

"Indianapolis?" Jack Rainey considered the matter and nodded. "Fine!" he said. "Say, do either of you know what's the fastest that track's been turned in?"

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

BLACK WATER

YOUNG Clipper Jim McLin, Tennessee mountaineer lumberjack fighter, was whipped for the first time in his life. But no man had done it. Florida had done it. Always he'd wanted to see Florida, and now his dream was realized, and at the end of the dream he found himself penniless and a victim of the worst case of homesickness imaginable.

To him it was a crazy place, this land of palm and pine. Not only were there no mountains. Here even the streams were black, not crystal clear like his home streams. Decaying vegetation did it, some told him; others said that palmetto roots were responsible. McLin now hated the very sight of black water. It had become an unreasonable obsession.

The river stretching out to his left in the late twilight drained a part of big Lake Okeechobee and the upper Everglades. Along the concrete wall under his feet were moored all manner of small craft—cabin cruisers that carried tourist fishing parties into the nearby Gulf, launches, speedboats, a yacht or so. He eyed each of them as he walked wearily along. A river front cop hailed him.

"I've been watching you, buddy. What're you up to?"

McLin always told the truth. Clipper Jim told the truth now.

"I air a-lookin' fer a place to sleep, i-god." His voice was a musical drawl. "'Lowed I could mebbe find a place on one o' these yere boats."

It sounded like vagrancy.

"Move on," said the officer.

The young hillman was stalwart, and his muscles were like seasoned hickory; moreover, he was hot-headed; his first impulse, therefore, was to throw the cop into the river. But the McLins, wild as they were, had never fought law. Without another word Clipper Jim walked on up the river wall, and out of the lighted district.

He came at last to a slim gray launch with a short, low cabin in front and a

long cockpit aft, half hidden under a pair of leaning coconut palms. After a moment's hesitation, he stepped aboard, found the tiny cabin door open and crept inside. There were two very narrow berths. McLin crept into one of them, and five minutes later was sound asleep and dreaming blissfully of his grandfather's beech-tree spring and snowy laurel bloom.

Ten minutes after that, two heavily-built, sunburned men came with boxes and bags of foodstuffs, which they dropped into the cockpit. One of them cast off, and the other started the motor. The vessel ran at half speed until the outskirts of the town lay a mile behind; then the motor began to roar under a wide-open throttle. And the roar woke Clipper Jim McLin.

He sat up in the berth, bumped his head, rubbed his eyes, and remembered. Through a small porthole he could see, in the slanting beams of a rising full moon, a bank lined with cabbage-palms, pines, and moss-bearded liveoaks. He turned his gaze through the narrow doorway. One of the two men lolled in the stern seat, smoking. The other was at the wheel.

A slow grin spread over McLin's lean, bronzed face. No need to borrow trouble. He lay back on the berth, and went off to sleep again.

Hours passed. The moon climbed higher. The black river narrowed, became more and more tortuous. The verdure on either bank was now so thick as to form a solid jungle wall. The man at the wheel cut the throttle half, and began to look for the mouth of a creek. When it appeared ahead and to the right, he turned the launch into it.

This creek, which was alive with alligators and deadly cotton-mouth moccasins, drained a sawgrass marsh that stretched for miles to the southward. Not far from the river there was an island of an acre or so studded with cabbage-palms and liveoaks and rimmed with cypresses. Near the center of the island stood two old tents, one larger than the other. Each had its opening screened in order to keep the mosquito hordes out.

The larger tent was lighted yellowly by a tallowdip. On one of three Army-style cots lay sprawled a slender young man, who would have been handsome were it not for his cold, even murderous, pale-blue eyes. He was smoking a cigarette and listening with mild interest while a scrawny, barefoot Negro who sat on a box strummed a homemade banjo and sang an ancient song of the Georgia cottonfields.

"Big-eyed ra-a-a-a-abbit, shoo!
Shoo!
Big-eyed ra-a-a-a-abbit, shoo!
Shoo!

"Call ole Ro-o-o-o-o-over, hyuh!
Hyuh!
"Call ole Ro-o-o-o-o-over, hyuh!
Hyuh!

"There's Bill and Pasco," the young white man cut in, going quickly to his feet. "Damn, but I'm hungry, Isom."

Isom put aside his crude banjo. He, also, sprang up. "Lawd's sakes!" he exclaimed. "I sho' is hongry too, Mistah Beaut. Le's go!"

The gray launch, motor silent, was just drifting up against a half-submerged cypress log that they used as a landing, when Beaut Snell and the Negro reached the bank.

"Get any grub, Pasco?" Snell asked.

"Plenty," answered Pasco Roby, rising from the stern seat.

Snell and Isom ran down on the log and into the bright moonlight. Roby and Bill Hayner passed up the boxes and bags, and followed them. The foodstuffs went straightway to the smaller tent, where a gasolene camp stove was put to work. Soon odors of boiling coffee and frying bacon permeated the atmosphere.

IT WAS the stopping of the motor that woke Clipper Jim McLin in the stuffy little cabin. He lay there slapping at mosquitoes and wondering just where he could be, until the above-mentioned savory odors reached his nostrils. Then he crawled out of the cabin, and spied the pair of lighted tents among the trees. From somewhere down the blackwater creek came the bellow of a bull alligator. Overhead a swamp owl cried weirdly. McLin shuddered in spite of himself, and made for the cook tent.

Without ceremony he stepped inside —and found himself looking into the muzzles of revolvers in the hands of Bill Hayner and Pasco Roby. An automatic pistol was ready in the grip of Beaut Snell.

"Lawd's sakes!" gasped black Isom, at the stove.

"Howdy," said McLin, grinning amiably. He'd seen into the muzzles of guns before. It wasn't that he didn't recognize danger here. The heavy countenances of Hayner and Roby furnished ample proof of this, as did the leaner face and cold eyes of young Snell. " 'Pears like you'd envite a feller to have supper with you, 'specially when the feller ain't had a bite to eat the whole day!"

"Where the hell did you come from?" spat Hayner.

Clipper Jim told him, told him just about all there was to tell, Hayner jerked his stern gaze around to Beaut.

"You and Isom been awake all the time Pasco and me was gone?"

"Sure, and we've not seen a soul nor heard a boat's *put-put*. It's so still out here we could 'a' heard a boat five miles —so *damned* still it nearly runs me crazy. The jake must 'a' been givin' us a straight tale, Bill."

Isom said: "I is been in the mountains one time, Mistah Bill, and he sho' do talk lack a mountain man, sho' 'nuff."

"Search him, Pasco," Hayner growled.

Roby did it, and found next to nothing. Guns went back into pockets. They gave McLin food, but not half enough, and afterward escorted him to the other tent. Hayner lighted a second tallow-tip. All of them sat down.

"You, McLin," said Hayner. "You can't sleep outside, for the mosquitoes would kill you. Wouldn't matter so much, but I don't want to please the rotten mosquitoes. We got only three beds, as you can see. You can sleep on the ground in here. If anything bites you, it's either a diamond-back or a cotton-mouth, and there's nothing to do but pray, so don't wake us up."

This was not even grim humor. He meant it.

Clipper Jim had come to the conclusion that the three white men were outlaws in hiding, and the conclusion was correct. It was the last of a gang that had terrorized the lower east coast of the state, robbing institutions running in importance from peanut stands to banks, killing on more occasions than one. Hard pressed by a doughty sheriff and his posse, they had stolen the gray launch and escaped inland by way of the St. Lucie River canal, Lake Okeechobee, and the long river. They'd found Isom in a lone shack on the canal, had brought him along for a man-of-all-work without pay.

"Why, I've slep' on the ground a heap o' times, and I reckon I ain't much afeared o' snakes," drawled McLin.

Then he spied the black man's musical, or unmusical, instrument. He took it up and raked a finger across the strings.

"Ef this yere don't beat everything—a banjer made out o' a dishpan!" He laughed. "Purty nice-whittled pegs though, and real genny-wine strings. I used to pick a banjer, and I used to sing some. Mind ef I tries her out?"

"Have it your way, Caruso," sneered Bill Hayner.

Clipper Jim sang "Dying Gambler," an old, old song of the dim-blue home ranges, and strummed a tinny accompaniment.

"I've drunk my part o' good licker,
And I've drunk my part o' bad.
I've done my part o' hard fightin',
And never turned tail to no man.

"I've do-o-o-o-o-one my part
O' hard fightin',
And never turned tail to no man!"

There were many verses.

When he had finished, the three outlaws looked toward one another and winked. The scrawny Isom now stood grinning broadly just inside the tent opening.

"Lawd's sakes!" he exclaimed delightedly. "Mountain man sho' can sing. Does you know Sweet Chariot, mountain man?"

McLin's eyes gleamed in the yellow light. "Oncet I heard a preacher say that that very song war one o' the black folks's biggest claims on immortality, and I be derned ef I don't believe him. I ain't got nary speck o' religion in me, i-god, but fer a long time I air had a crazy fool notion I'd like to have that sung over me when I come down to die."

He crooned—

"Swing lo-o-ow, sweet chariot,
Comin' fer to carry me home!
Swi-i-ing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' fer to ca-a-a-arry me
Ho-o-o-o-ome!"

Isom's eyes were brighter than McLin's now. Pasco Roby spoke in a sharp voice.

"We got to sleep some. Beat it, nigger. Pile down there, McLin."

The hillman gave the crude banjo to the colored man, who hurried away toward his quarters in the cook tent.

When Clipper Jim had stretched himself out on the hard-packed damp ground, Hayner and Roby proceeded to bind him securely hand and foot. McLin was too wise to object. They were armed, and he guessed that they would shoot on slight provocation.

"You're not stealin' our boat while we're snoozin', y'understand," Beaut Snell explained.

"I already figgered out why you war a-tyin' me,' said the mountaineer. "I didn't aim to come yere, but I air yere, by my own fault, and so I'll take my luck as she comes—like the gambler in the song."

"She'll come plenty tough," bluntly said Bill Hayner, drawing a quart bottle of fiery sawgrass moon from under a blanket.

The trio had a nightcap. Then they extinguished the feeble light of the tallowdips and went to bed.

McLin was so busy thinking that he gave no attention to the sounds of the Everglades wilderness night—the occasional bellowing of alligators, the cries of owls, the croaking of frogs, the splashing of fish in the nearby creek, the *wak-wak* of night herons, the lonesome wailing of a chuckwillswidow. His thoughts were, naturally, of escape. If he could manage to free his wrists and ankles, and get to the launch while his captors slept. . . . He knew nothing of motors, but the little vessel would float back to civilization, since it was downstream all the way. In spite of his prodigious strength, however, his bonds held.

Hayner took them off the next morning. McLin grinned at him.

"Needn't be so tickled over it,' said Hayner. It was half a snarl. "I done that so you could work. I want all this gallberry and buttonbush cleared away from the tents. We got a lot o' clothes that needs washin'. When you're through with that, I'll find somethin' else to keep you out o' devilment. And get this. One small crooked move out o' you, and we'll shoot you and throw you

to the 'gators. Snook aboard our launch, didn't you!"

Pasco Roby and Beaut Snell, standing close by, laughed at Clipper Jim's wry look.

"Run off, if you want to," said Snell.

"Sure," said Roby. "Start right now."

"And git shot in the back? Not me, i-god," McLin said. "I shore ain't a-goin' to enjoy this none, but I air a-takin' my luck as I find hit now, and so ef you'll jest half feed me—"

"We won't," interrupted Hayner. "Grub's too hard to get. You'll rustle your own grub, and you'd better be at it."

McLin stared. Hospitality had been bred into the very bone of him, and this was for the moment beyond his comprehension.

Black Isom called his masters to breakfast. Hayner and Roby ate first, Snell watching Jim McLin and the launch. In no time McLin rigged up a crude fishing outfit—a slender nail taken from a box and bent into a hook, a yard of strong cord that he'd had in his pocket, a pole cut at the creek's edge—and Hayner grudgingly allowed the Negro to give him a strip of bacon rind for bait. Skittering the bacon rind on the surface near beds of lilypads, McLin hooked five bass and landed one.

He broiled the fish over a stick fire, and ate it with relish, even if it *had* come out of black water! Isom slyly donated a pinch of salt.

The rest of that day McLin slaved for the outlaw trio. He drank black water like the others. At sundown he caught, broiled, and ate another fish. His second night here was a repetition of the first, and the second day a repetition of the first day. Broiled fish as a steady diet was rapidly losing its charm. Isom had been able to sneak out only half a tin of corned beef for the singing mountain man. Clipper Jim became a little desperate. If only they wouldn't watch the launch so closely! They had a great supply of sawgrass moon in bottles, and they guzzled it continually, but never when McLin was unbound did they fail to keep an eye on the launch.

ON THE next morning, the hillman was at his fishing when Isom walked up behind him as though for the purpose of watching him, and spoke in a series of shaken whispers.

"Don't let on lack you heah me, whitefolks. I got some bad news. When this grub we got is gone, them is gwine move out—and leave you heah to die. Afeard you'll tell somepin'. Ain't nobody eveh comes heah, not even Semi-noles. And them is gwine leave me, too. Didn't say so, but I knows. Them been talkin' N' Awleens, N'Awleens, N'Awleens. Grub-'ll las' mebbe a week. Betteh think fas', mountain man!"

"I already been a-thinkin' fast," McLin whispered back, without turning his head, without the slightest pause in his bait-skittering. "I—"

"Ssssh! Heah come Mistah Pasco!" breathed Isom.

Roby's countenance was dark with suspicion. "What're you two cooking up, eh? What—"

He had reached the Negro. He dealt him a kick that sent him sprawling. Clipper Jim McLin dropped his pole and sprang at Roby, and stopped, wisely, when he found himself facing Pasco's always ready revolver. Hayner and Snell ran up. Pasco gave McLin a terrific cuff with the flat of his hand. The mountaineer rose with fire in his eye and blood trickling from his lips.

"I'll see how game you three fellers air!" he flung at them. "Put down them guns, and I'll thrash all three o' you! I-god, I mean hit. Put down yore guns and see!"

They laughed at him. He knew suddenly that this wasn't going to win anything for him. He curbed his boiling rage, and spoke quietly.

"I ain't as big a fool as you think I am, mebbe. You fellers air a-hidin' from the law. But I don't give a dern about that. Me, I ain't no law officer. I've seed that no man can git out o' this yere jungly hell alive without a boat, 'count o' the snakes and 'gators and sech. Ef you'll take me and Isom with you whenever you leaves yere, jest take us to some p'int whar we can walk on half-dry land, I give you my word I won't tell nothin' and Isom won't neither. Now what do you say to that?"

Again they laughed at him. Then the three turned toward the camp. McLin realized, for the first time, just how desperate the situation was. He had to save Isom, also, for Isom had befriended him.

That afternoon Isom was alone in the cook tent when he heard the low voice of Jim McLin coming through the rear canvas wall.

"Find ten pieces o' paper the size o' yore hand, and git 'em to me on the sly. Do what I say, black boy!"

"What you gwine do wit' them papers, mountain man?"

"I air a-hopin' we'll walk out o' yere on 'em,' drawled McLin.

"Lawd's sakes!' gasped Isom. "Voodoo stuff!"

In the evening after tallowdips had been lighted in the larger tent, the black came with his dishpan banjo. He wanted McLin to sing and play. Bill Hayner cursed him and ordered him back to his quarters.

"Aw, hell," Beaut Snell said, "it's so damn' still here it nearly drives me bughouse; let's have the music, Bill."

Hayner gave in, and produced yet another bottle of sawgrass moon. McLin took the crude instrument, sat down on a box and sang, strumming an accompaniment. The old hill song held a significance that was not entirely lost on the bad men—

"Shoot me with a rifle gun,
Shoot me low or shoot me high.
Shoot me with a pistol ball!
Goin' to live anyhow till I die.

Anyhow, anyhow, till I die!
I'm a-goin' to live anyhow
Till I di-i-i-ie!"

He sang other such songs, and finished with the chorus of Sweet Chariot for the scrawny black.

On the next morning when he went to fish for his breakfast—with a rebellious stomach—he came upon a dozen roughly cut small squares of brown wrapping-paper in the fork of a young mangrove. The Negro had not forgotten. McLin had just pocketed the squares slyly when Isom screwed up his courage and called to him from the cook tent:

"Neveh thought to tell you, white-folks—them cabbage-pa'ms has got a cabbage in the top which is good to eat; tastus lack celery."

McLin had been given a hatchet for use in clearing the scrub from the vicinity of the tents. With this he hacked out a palm bud. The outer layers were tough and bitter, but he found the inside good enough to make his broiled fish half palatable.

Days passed. The food supplies of the outlaws ran low. The fact that they'd made no move toward bringing in fresh supplies convinced McLin that they did intend moving, as the Negro had said.

Then Isom found a chance to whisper: "Mountain man, us ain't walked out o' heah on them li'l papehs yit!"

THE last meal was a breakfast, and Hayner, Roby and Snell began preparations for departure immediately afterward. Under the muzzle of his revolver, Pasco Roby drove Jim McLin down to the launch, and there ordered him to bail out the bilgewater. The hillman went to work with deceptive willingness. Roby sat down on the log landing, pocketed his gun, and produced a cigarette.

He had just scratched a match when a heavy wrench came from the cockpit with the speed of a thunderbolt and caught him squarely across the forehead.

The next second both he and McLin were waist-deep in the black water, and a second after that the mountaineer was in possession of the gun.

"Bill—!" dazedly cried Pasco Roby.

Hayner and Snell came running, reaching for weapons as they came. Clipper Jim leveled Roby's revolver at them.

"Hands up quick!" he barked—"and I mean *quick!*"

They saw death in the barrel of Pasco's gun, and obeyed. McLin waded out, had Isom disarm the two and toss their weapons far into the creek.

"Lawd's sakes!" Isom wailed. "You aims—"

McLin threw Roby's gun, also, far into the dark stream.

"I aims to thrash hell out o' the three of 'em, black boy," he said. To Bill and Beaut: "Starved me, didn't you? Made me work like a dawg. Washin' yore clo'es, lowdown job. Goin' to leave me and the nigger yere to die; wouldn't take us whar we could walk out and save ourselves. All right, come and git hit!"

Hayner and Snell, delighted at this chance, were already coming. They'd show this jake something about the rough-and-tumble stuff. He'd been a fool to throw the guns away. While the still dazed Pasco Roby stood in the creek and stared, his pals leaped at McLin like a pair of enraged panthers. Blows passed swiftly and furiously.

It was a tremendous job. Bill Hayner was built like a steel bridge, and Beaut Snell, for all his slenderness, was as tough as wire cable. When the terrific battle swung into its climax the three were on their knees, panting hard, bleary of vision, both faces and shirtfronts a welter of blood. A sudden jolt on the chin put Snell to sleep. Hayner subsided, at last, from the effects of a blow to his solar plexus.

McLin had Isom bind them hand and foot. Just as this was finished, Pasco Roby waded out of the creek with a wrench in his hand. McLin saw him coming, staggered to his feet and swore, and went to meet him. They struck at the same time, the hillman with his last strength, and both went down and lay still.

Scrawny black Isom hastened to bind Roby's limp wrists and ankles, and turned on his knees to Jim McLin. The mountaineer lay on his back, eyes closed, a red gaping fresh wound high on his forehead. Isom thought he was dead, and began a weeping, mourning chant—

"O Law-ud! Good Law-ud! Ha' mussy on he, Law-ud! O Law-ud! Good Law-ud! Ha' mussy—"

"Black boy!"

"Gloree! You—you—you ain't daid, whitefolks?"

McLin struggled up to a sitting posture. "Listen! Hear that? We air a-goin' to walk out o' yere on them papers yit, i-god, is my bet!"

Isom heard now the steady *put-put* of a motor launch. A few minutes, and a grizzled sheriff stood with his posse on the jungly island's low shore. The officer fired questions.

"There's a bunch of rewards out for these birds, so you'll be well paid for all you went through," said the sheriff. "Now we'll hustle the prisoners to jail and you to a doctor."

" 'Tain't nothin'. How many o' my messages to the law did you find?" the hillman asked, as two members of the posse helped him to his feet.

"Only one came to me. A fisherman picked it up. How many did you send?"

"Ten," said Clipper Jim, "in ten empty moonshine bottles. Happened to have a pencil stub in my pocket. Figgered some of 'em war bound to drift down in time. I made that derned old black water work fer me, i-god!"

BRITCHES SPREE

Trembling, Pappy crept to the stump.

By CHARLES M. BROWN

PAPPY GIMBLE slammed a skillet he had just washed onto the hot cook stove with a clash and threw some tin vessels into the pan of greasy dishwater so violently that the clatter was terrific.

The noise brought his son, Ralph, the huskier of the Gimble twins, into the lean-to kitchen jutting from the main building of the camp on Blue Gum Donic.

"What's frettin' you, Pappy?" Ralph demanded, eying his scrawny little parent sternly. "You tryin' to bust up the cookin' things?"

Pappy whirled from the bench holding the dish pan. He mopped a sleeve across his red, perspiring face and glared at his son. Ralph leaned in the doorway, his wide shoulders almost filling the opening.

"Dang it, Ralph! How much longer have I got to wear these danged women-things?" Pappy blazed, plucking at the folds of the blue calico mother hubbard swathing his spare body. "Ain't the time most up—this spell?"

The giant's eyes wandered coldly over his parent's queer attire. Pappy wore cotton drawers and an undershirt under the calico garment and that was all. His feet and shanks were bare. The feminine sunbonnet that he wore when he ventured out in the blazing daytime sun hung on a nail beside the outer door.

"If you'd behave yourself, an' let licker alone, you wouldn't never have to wear them women-things, ever," Ralph informed his parent grimly. "Your times up on the eighth, Pappy. That's a week more. If you behave yourself, you'll get your britches back then, I reckon."

Pappy's sinful small countenance screwed up in a black scowl. His straggly, straw-colored mustache drooped dismally. He scratched a red-bug bite on one ankle with the horny toe of the other foot and his gritting grip on the

corn-cob pipe stem threatened to shear the thing.

"It ain't right—you boys takin' away my britches an' forcin' me to wear these women-things!" he whined pathetically. "Just 'cause a man took a few nips o' licker down to Blazed Oak don't give you leave to belittle him this way. I'm danged tired o' doin' all the chores an' pot-wrastlin' for this camp!"

"Ain't you forgettin', Pappy, that you stole all the grub money out of the china cup, an' spent it gettin' your hide full of licker?" his son reminded relentlessly. "Raymond and me are creditin' you with four bits a day against what you stole. It's your fault it took six weeks to work out your debt, this time."

Pappy swung back to his dish washing, muttering. It wasn't any use to argue with Ralph, and Raymond, the other twin, was even harder. A man sure was unlucky to be afflicted with a hulking pair of sons like the twins. Plump disrespectful to their pappy, they were!

Ralph, after a moment, went back to his disturbed task of fashioning bass flies in the camp living room. Pappy didn't bang any more pans about. He didn't fancy being "belted."

There were times when Pappy was genuinely proud of his strapping twin boys, but this was one of the days when he could take no satisfaction or reflected glory in their reputation as two of the best guides and boat-pushers on the "Spread" of the St. Francis River.

When the river was right and the black bass striking, there was hardly a day when there was not a quota of from three to six sportsmen at the Gimble Camp on Blue Gum Donic. They always came again.

Pappy had reared the twins, left motherless at ten, in a more or less haphazard manner. They lived at Blazed Oak then, and Pappy worked in the saw-mills there only enough to earn sufficient money for clothing and necessities for himself and the boys, and enough more for liquor for his Saturday night sprees.

The boys grew up, fulfilling the promise of huskiness shown at fifteen. When they were eighteen, and eligible for jobs in the mills, they started in doing men's work and drawing men's wages. After their first pay day, Pappy retired from useful occupation.

From boyhood the twins had spent every available hour on the river and learned every slough, chute and channel of the Spread, a fishing paradise. When mere youngsters their services were in demand as boat-pushers, and in duck season, it paid them to lay off at the mills and earn good fees guiding sportsmen.

It was a natural thing then, that when the lumber business went into a slump and the mills shut down for long periods, that they should build the camp and work up a clientele. They had saved enough money to buy the few acres on Blue Gum Donic—a timbered, high bit of land jutting into the spread—and had enough left over to start the building.

There were six big rooms in the shack and a large sleeping porch for summertime sleeping. It was clean, comfortable and well screened. Fishermen and duck hunters came again and again.

They were twenty-one the month the camp was finished and they took over managing Pappy's affairs in a big way.

The idler had taken a lively interest in the building of the camp and had contributed a lot of advice and almost no manual labor. On the day they moved meager possessions the six miles from Blazed Oak to the donic by boat, Pappy got the shock of his aimless existence.

The twins informed him, that night, that henceforth and from then on, he would be expected to do the cooking and roustabouting around camp, with such assistance as they could lend.

For two years now, they'd kept him at it, except for lapses that were grow-

ing less and less frequent. Especially since Raymond, the shrewder of the twins, had evolved the plan of punishment for Pappy's backsliding that so irked his soul.

Arguments and "beltings" — Ralph holding Pappy spread-eagled while Raymond laid on a broad leather belt— failed to cure Pappy of the habit of periodically filching all loose change in camp and managing somehow to get down to Blazed Oak for a buster.

One night, a year ago, the twins had gone grimly to Blazed Oak for Pappy. He'd slipped the camp in the afternoon while they were out with fishermen. They'd brought him home in a state of blissful stupor and dumped him in his bunk.

When Pappy awakened next morning, his head a roaring ache and his gullet parched, he couldn't find his shirt and pants. Nor were his spare clothes hanging behind his bedroom door. Promptly he set up a roar and it was then that he was introduced to the hated mother hubbards. Raymond had bought the things in town, that night.

He was informed in no uncertain terms that he must wear the dresses or nothing, and must do all the camp chores and the cooking unassisted until he'd worked out his pilferings and served penance.

Pappy had sworn and raved, and scornfully kicked aside the despised mother hubbards. But a good belting, plus the attacks of needle-beaked insects when he tried going it in his underwear alone, broke his rebellious spirit. He donned the inglorious garments and stuck closer to the camp than a tick to a sheep's back.

His own clothes, except underwear, stayed locked in a stout, iron bound chest along with the twins spare clothing, during periods of punishment. Pappy had found out early that the chest was ax-proof, and that meddling with it brought beltings. River neighbors were warned against loaning him the "britches" that he wanted so badly.

When serving sentences, Pappy was a shy and retiring creature. Guests at the camp rarely caught sight of him and many a boat-pusher, sliding past Blue Gum Donic in the river, chuckled at the sight of a queer, frocked little figure darting behind an outhouse or diving into the shelter of thick bushes.

His lapses from sobriety were becoming few and far between now. But his thirst merely languished. This last spree had earned him a longer sentence than he had ever drawn before. Pappy was heartily sick of the ignomimy of his predicament and of doing all the chores.

He'd toiled in a torrid kitchen until seven tonight, cooking a late supper of fried bass, fried potatoes and hot biscuits for the twins and six sportsmen sojourning at the camp. Pappy was plumb tuckered out.

Worse than that, his system craved liquor until his nerves shrieked with longing. One of the sportsmen guests had been unwittingly responsible for that. He had left a swallow or two in a highball glass mixed before sitting down to supper and Pappy had sneaked the glass into the kitchen, downing the dregs. The taste had primed him with a feverish craving for a real bender.

Finished with his choring, Pappy blew out the kitchen lamp and went to sit and cool off in the outer doorway. The July night was velvety dark just now. There would be a moon presently but only the stars lit tree tops and reflected on the shallow, purling river channel. Pappy packed his filthy pipe and lighted the thing. He was scheming craftily.

There wasn't a nickel in loose change about. He'd looked. And all the boats at the landing were securely padlocked, even if Ralph wouldn't hear him puttering down there. Getting away from Blue Gum Donic through the swamps to high land was a thing impossible.

PAPPY had an ace buried, though. If only he could get ahold of a pair of britches, he could manage getting down to Blazed Oak, all right, and take his chances of getting a bottle on credit. But in the mother hubbard, never!

He arose and softly stole through the lean-to kitchen to peer at Ralph, humped over under a glaring gasoline lantern, fashioning flies to be used on the bass in the morning. Raymond had taken the guests on a frog-gigging expedition and wouldn't be back to camp before eleven.

He got his shoes from a corner of the kitchen and slipped outdoors. As silently as some prowling weasel he hurried to the lower end of the donic, beyond the garden clearing, where his ace was securely hidden in the dense overgrowth tangle at the water's edge.

Pappy chuckled. The twins didn't know about the bateau he'd salvaged drifting past the donic one morning, when they both were away. He'd poled it down here and cleverly hidden it in a little slough under concealing overhanging brush and vines.

Pappy had developed a habit of talking to himself a lot. He mumbled tonelessly now, speaking his thoughts.

"If I kin git over to Pike Simes' shack on 'tother side of the Spread, I kin git a drink, an' maybe bum a pint off'n Pike," he told himself. "He'll horse me, 'bout the women-clothes, but he'll gimme a drink."

He got into the bateau and as noiselessly as an otter starting a prowl, poled it out of its hiding place and through devious channels and chutes to the spot where Pike Simes had his miserable shack on one of the lesser frequented of the many channels through the Spread.

A stranger would have been hopelessly lost in that maze of waterways in broad daylight. The river here flowed through a dozen or more narrow, shallow and swift channels, the banks lush with rank growth. The Spread was something like a mile in width. Pappy knew it almost as well as the twins, and poled unerringly to his goal.

Pike Simes was an ornery, thieving rascal, with a bad reputation on the river. He robbed and cheated any sportsmen falling into his clutches, and was a poor guide and a lazy pusher in the bargain. The twins wouldn't let Pike light on Blue Gum Donic.

When within sight of Pike's shack, which to Pappy's dismay was dark, the sound of a laboring outboard motor propelling a craft upstream reached his ears. Promptly he poled the bateau into deep shadows of the overhanging bank and hid in a vine tangle.

"Dang it! Might be Raymond, froggin' over this way!" he muttered, and then, cocking his ears carefully, recognized that it was not the Gimble motor popping. The sound was different.

Pappy waited, fretting. "It'll be just my ornery luck to have Pike gone off sommers!" he worried aloud, peering downstream anxiously.

The first beams of a rising moon had crept over the timber tops. There was light enough on the water to show the dark outlines of a big skiff when it rounded a distant bend. As Pappy watched, the craft headed in for Pike Simes' landing and the motor died.

"Hit's Pike!" his heart bounded with relief. "An' he's been down to Blazed Oak. He'll have licker, sho!"

Then, when the skiff bumped the landing and several shadowy forms stood up in the boat, his heart sank. Pike had company, and even the driving thirst wouldn't whip Pappy to the ordeal of letting either strangers or river people catch him in his ignominous attire.

Gruff voices reached his ears, the words not distinguishable.

"By gravy, one of them fellows is powerful drunk!" Pappy muttered, peering. "Takes two of 'em to walk him!"

As he watched, the wobbling one slipped on the sapling duckboard landing

and fell kerplunk into the soft and slimy mud at the water's edge. The two helping swore loudly, plucked the unfortunate one out of the mud and bore him bodily up the bank.

Then a tall, lean figure Pappy recognized for Pike Simes' got up from the stern, where he'd been tending motor, and left the skiff after tying up. He trailed after the others.

Pappy sat in the bateau, debating. Three of the men hadn't worn overalls.

"City fellers," Pappy sniffed. "They horse wusser than river-folks. Guess I might as well push on home, 'fore Ralph takes out lookin' for me."

His curiosity about Pike's visitors was stirred, however. He let the bateau slide downstream, keeping close to the bank shadows, until it had drifted below Pike Simes' shack. Then he poled across and tied up in a clump of willows, scrambling to higher land. He stole back to the clearing around Pike's shack, crouching in thick underbrush at the edge. He could hear voices clearly now, and see into one room of the shack through a window.

He heard Pike say: "Better git the clothes off him. He might take sick in them wet things. I'll take 'em down to the river an' rinse 'em out good."

The two strangers bent down. The other fellow was on the floor, Pappy guessed. Somebody cussed pretty strongly and there was a lot of low toned talk Pappy couldn't catch. Then Pike Simes popped out of the cabin and went down to the skiff.

Pappy watched Pike rinse a suit of clothes and a shirt in the river. He seemed to be spending more time at it than was necessary to wash away soft mud. The watcher, deep gloom about him and gloom and disappointment shrowding his soul, looked on morosely.

Presently Pike had the task done to his liking, came up the bank and walked directly toward Pappy's place of concealment. Pappy shrank to the very earth. Pike stopped at a huge old stump in the little clearing and spread out the clothes. Then he returned to the house.

The sight of those clothes spread out in the now illuminating moonlight made Pappy writhe wretchedly. A pair of britches—and a coat and a shirt if he wanted them, within ten yards of his quivering nose!

He peered at the shack. He could no longer see anyone through the window, but he could hear the sound of someone cracking ice at Pike's old ice chest in the shack kitchen. They were going to make drinks in there.

Trembling, Pappy left his covert and swiftly crept the ten yards to the stump. He scooped up the spread clothing and scuttled back to the shadows. He wriggled through underbrush with no more noise than a lizard scuttling and reached his bateau.

In five minutes, poling furiously and silently, the bateau was a good mile downstream from Pike Simes' shack.

Pappy let the bateau drift with the current then, and in the soft moonlight examined his purloined treasures with bubbling chuckles of delight.

"Feller wasn't much bigger'n me," he mouthed, holding up the britches. "Danged fancy suit, too! Lookit them checks!"

One by one he turned out the soggy pockets, hoping that a small coin, or some article that might be sold and converted into cash, had been overlooked. Pappy's disappointment increased as the store of empty pockets diminished.

But when his nervous fingers probed into the very last pocket—the small fob pocket in the trousers waist band—he got a thrill.

There was a small damp wad in that pocket. He yanked it forth and the moonlight was strong enough to identify his find as paper money.

Pappy suppressed a whoop of glee with difficulty. With fingers that trembled he carefully separated the soggy

bills. A ten, a five and three one dollar bills. Perfectly good money, that would dry out spendable anywhere. More money than Pappy had had his hands on in many a day.

Carefully he smoothed and folded the bills again. He thrust them into a pocket of the trousers, stood up and shucked the hated mother hubbard. He wadded the garment into a ball and consigned it to the river. Then he donned the damp shirt and trousers.

"Heh-heh-heh!" Pappy snickered. "Britches, you goin' travelin'! We're goin' out to the main channel an' catch somebody with a pusher-boat goin' down to Blazed Oak. We kin pay for a tow, if he don't want to hook us on for nothin'."

PAPPY got his tow from where the Spread channels converged into a broader, deeper river three miles below Blue Gum Donic. The accommodating riverman who happened along in an outboard motor-driven skiff was glad to accommodate him. Pappy had him cast loose just before the main part of Blazed Oak was reached, and tied the bateau up at the veneer mill landing.

He made his way up the bank to where the glowing embers of the slab conveyor waste pile sent forth ruddy, warm waves, and resolved himself before the coals. Very carefully, while his britches and coat steamed, Pappy dried the money.

"Goin' to git me a bottle, fust thing," Pappy planned aloud. "Then I'm goin' to have a drink, or maybe two, an' then get me a steak at the Blue Front Restaurant. Dang it, I'm sick an' tired o' fish!"

It was only nine-fifteen when he trotted into a pool room at the lower end of Blazed Oak's main stem, hurrying on past the few busy tables to the back room behind a closed door.

A shout greeted his appearance there. Quite a little crowd of rivermen and mill hands sat around at tables, drinking beer or tossing off harder stuff illegally vended. Most of them knew Pappy and all about the mother hubbard cure.

"Well, if it ain't Pappy Gimble!" a burly riverman cried. "Where'd you git them britches, Pappy? How'd you give the twins the slip, this time?"

Others crowded around the little man, grinning delightedly. Pappy scowled ferociously.

"Ne'mine all the horsin' now!" he shrilled. "Jus' 'cause I don't come to town more'n once in a couple o' months ain't no sign I can't come when I want!"

"I notice though, you don't traipse in wearin' your mother hubbard!" a man jeered and the laughter irked Pappy.

"I'm a man, ain't I?" he stormed. "An' my own boss, when I want to be. I let them strappin' twins o' mine have their little joke about them women-things, but when I set my foot down, I do what I please. Lemme git through!"

"You talk big, Pappy," his first tormentor chuckled. "If Ralph or Raymond happened in right now, nobody could see you for the dust, you'd hyper so fast!"

Pappy squirmed through the ring and approached the grinning fat man behind the counter that served for a bar. He planked a dollar bill down "Gimme a pint, Charlie, an' none of your rotgut, neither! I want the oldest corn you got!"

The bartender shoved a flat pint across the counter and poured water into a cracked tumbler. Pappy pulled the cork and tipped the bottle between parched lips. A good third of its contents gurgled down his throat.

"Whooey!" yipped one of the watching rivermen. "Lookit Pappy's gullet sizzle! It's been a spell since he oiled it up thataway!"

Pappy lowered the bottle, scorning the water chaser, and grinned at his audience. Sure that they were all watching, he put the uncorked bottle down on the counter, peeled another dollar from his roll, holding it so the ten would show,

and tossed the dollar across to the bartender.

"Gimme another one like that, Charlie," he ordered. "For the other hip pocket."

The watchers, amazed by the display of wealth, silently watched Pappy take another hearty swig at his first bottle. When he pocketed the remains of that one, and shoved the full bottle into the other hip pocket, they made way for him when he swaggered from the bar.

The steak idea had popped up again and Pappy now felt primed to do a good T-bone justice.

A half block from the pool hall, brilliant lights from the Blue Front Restaurant illuminated the sidewalk. Just as Pappy stepped into the full light a man came out of the restaurant entrance and stopped short on sight of the little man.

A big man, tanned and leathery of countenance. His corduroy pants were tucked into high-laced leather boots and he wore a gray flannel shirt and a broad brimmed felt hat. A bone handled revolver of imposing size peeped from a holster at his belt.

Pappy, recognizing the sheriff, bobbed his head politely and sidestepped to pass the man. A powerful hand shot out and gripped a handful of Pappy's coat collar, halting him abruptly and lifting him to his toes.

"Say! Where'd you get those clothes, Pappy Gimble?" the sheriff demanded, keen blue eyes boring into Pappy's scared ones.

"Why—I—uh—bought 'em off'n a fellow what was fishin' up to the spread," Pappy lied uneasily.

"Yeah?" A stubby finger touched Pappy's shirt, at the right breast. "How'd you hurt yourself, Pappy?"

Pappy tucked his chin down and his eyes, popping, noticed for the first time the pinkish stain on the shirt breast. A stain that deepened at the shoulder of the shirt.

"I spilled a little elderberry wine on me, takin' a swig," he mumbled falteringly. "Thought I had it washed out."

The stabbing finger found a hole in the fabric of the coat, at the shoulder. "I suppose you poured the wine through the hole, didn't you?" in stern sarcasm. "You come along with me, Pappy. I want to talk with you."

Ten minutes later, sweating profusely in a small hot room at the courthouse, Pappy told the truth about his acquiring the clothes to the sheriff and two grim-faced deputies. His eyes keep bulging at the stolen coat, turned wrong side out and hung on a chair back. The lining of the armhole of the right sleeve was stained a deep brown for inches around the shoulder.

There hadn't been light enough, anywhere Pappy had been until he hit the blind tiger, to notice the stain on the shirt or the hole in the coat. And he'd been too intent on other matters to notice when he'd hit the oasis.

The sheriff and his deputies exchanged glances when Pappy had quavered his story.

"I reckon he's tellin' the truth, sheriff," the red-headed deputy grunted. "Pappy wouldn't have nerve enough to take a hand in that business this afternoon. Anyhow, he's been on the donic in his dress for three-four weeks, maybe."

The sheriff eyed Pappy sternly. "You say there were three men, strangers, besides Pike Simes?" he demanded. "Do you suppose they're still in Pike's shack now?"

"There was three of 'em, city folks," Pappy nodded. "I reckon they're still there on the donic." His eyes strayed longingly to the confiscated bottles, now on the sheriff's desk.

"Pappy, the Valley Lumber Company's paymaster was held up late this afternoon," the sheriff informed the culprit soberly. "He was bringing a cash payroll from Memphis. Three men did the job, and the paymaster shot one of

them before they got him. He lived long enough to tell us, and describe the man. The one he shot wasn't a big man and he wore a loud checked suit. I guess it was his clothes you stole, all right!"

"Jumpin' catfish!" Pappy gulped. "That fellow wasn't drunk a-tall, then! He was hurtin' from his wound!"

"I guess he was," the sheriff grunted, and turned to his deputies. "I get it all now," he said grimly. "Those three crooks made a deal with Pike Simes, to boat them up to his shack on the donic after they pulled the stickup. A darn good place to hole up, with us having the country combed for three men in a getaway car."

"We better," the red-headed deputy suggested eagerly, "get up a posse and get up there in a power boat. They'll maybe hike out, if they find somebody swiped those clothes."

The sheriff eyed the anxious Pappy. "Do you reckon, Pappy, you could lead us to Pike Simes' shack, and show us how to get on the donic without a lot of noise coming up? I'd like to surprise 'em, if I can. There'll be shooting, if we don't, and somebody'll get hurt."

Pappy looked startled and scared. This talk of bad men and shooting didn't set well with him. His was a peaceful nature.

"I might could," he quavered doubtfully. "I could show you how to go up the east channel, an' cut across above Pike's an' drift down to the donic. He wouldn't hear your engine, thataway."

"Pappy knows the Spread," the redhead put in. "We'll have to have somebody guide us that does."

The sheriff, watching Pappy, nodded. "Hand him his bottle," he ordered surprisingly, and a deputy put the tapped bottle into Pappy's trembling hands. "Take a little shot, Pappy," the sheriff advised. "It'll do your nerves good."

Very promptly Pappy hoisted the bottle and drained it. Astonished grins on the part of the officers applauded the feat.

Pappy wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and put aside the empty bottle, popping out of his chair and squaring his scrawney shoulders.

"Gimmie a gun, sheriff," he demanded cockily. "I'll take you folks to the place, an' if them fellows get funny, we'll blow 'em off the donic!"

The sheriff chuckled and clapped Pappy on the shoulder blades. "That's the stuff, rooster!" he praised. "You put the other bottle in your pocket, just in case we need it. But we'll handle the guns, oldtimer. All you got to do is to get us to the donic without any fuss. Let's get started, boys!"

A LONG, broad skiff skimmed the swift waters of the east channel of the Spread, propelled by a twin-cylindered outboard motor of goodly power. The sheriff, his two deputies and two other determined men sworn in for emergency duty sat on the middle seats.

Pappy Gimble sat in the stern, with the man handling the engine and rudder. Unerringly, Pappy had been directing the course.

"Pull her down!" he ordered now, after peering ahead. "Now swing her left into that chute. Take it easy, 'cause it's pretty shallow through there."

It was shallow. The skiff hadn't gone far until a sunken stump did things to the propeller and a pin snapped. There wasn't time to fix a new one.

There was a longhandled oar in the skiff and Pappy replaced motive power. The outboard motor was shipped and Pappy, after a long pull at his almost depleted second bottle, shoved the big skiff the remaining distance to the donic where Pike Simes had his shack.

As silently as a drifting log the skiff nosed in on the upper end of the donic. The five grim officers disembarked, the

skiff owner, also armed, following. Pappy Gimble, however, stayed by the boat.

He killed the last of the bottle and lay flat on the damp bottom. His contract was merely to pilot the expedition, not to take part in any raids.

The only sounds for a time, after the rustle of the raiders slipping through underbrush died away, was the bellowings of giant frogs and the whirr of insects in the trees.

Then, following on the echoes of a stentorian command to "Get up your hands, in there!" came the rattle of pistol shots. Pappy buried his face on the wet planks and his toes beat a nervous tattoo. When a riot gun which one of the deputies had carried boomed he fairly flopped about in the skiff.

The battle was brief. A man screamed hoarsely, in great pain. Men swore at the tops of their voices. And then things quieted down.

Pappy ventured from the skiff up the bank, and tremblingly approached Pike Simes' shack, where flashlights lit up the clearing brilliantly.

When he had made sure that the law was triumphant, he approached boldly and stared at the handcuffed men lined up before Pike Simes' shack. Two of them were prone. A man about Pappy's size clad in blood-stained underwear, and another of the city chaps, who nursed a shattered arm and swore bitterly.

Pike Simes, scared and shaking, his unwholesome face a ghastly greenish hue, stared pop-eyed at Pappy when the little man swaggered into the lights.

Pappy swayed a little. A quart of corn liquor, absorbed in generous doses and in such a short time as he had killed the two pints is a mean cargo, even for a man with Pappy's capacity.

"How come you here, Pappy Gimble?" Pike Simes snarled. "Where'd you git them britches?"

Pappy grinned at the scowling riverman owlishly. "Evenin', Pike," he greeted importantly. "I come up with the law, to gather in your crowd. I had to make a leetle stop here fust, to git me some britches."

Pike stared ferociously. The man in the underclothes propped himself on an elbow and hurled a string of choice ephithets at Pappy.

"You get my clothes off that sneaking swamp-rat!" he wound up, addressing the sheriff. "Maybe you'll be hanging me yet, but I don't want to die of pneumonia, you big ox!"

"Get a blanket out of the shack, and cover him, Lem," the sheriff ordered the red-headed deputy. Then turned toward the river and cocked his ear. "Boat coming!" he announced with pleasure. "Hope they'll turn out to be a party with a big empty skiff. We'll need another boat to handle this crowd."

Pappy, who'd also heard the stutter of an outboard motor, recognized the tune. He began to shake and his eyes darted about uneasily. When the sheriff and others not guarding the prisoners went down to the landing to meet the craft, Pappy didn't follow.

He stood his ground until the group, augmented by two tall and husky newcomers, started back for the shack. Then he darted into the shack with a little squeal of dismay.

Ralph and Raymond Gimble—Raymond with a small bundle under his arm, came up to the shack on either side of the sheriff, who was explaining something with many a chuckle.

The twins looked grim and apparently could see no humor in what the sheriff was telling them. They halted before the shack and their eyes went questing for Pappy.

A deputy guarding the prisoners grinned and offered information. "Pappy just ducked into the shack."

The sheriff said: "Pappy's a little tight, boys, but he's darned lucky this night! The mill people put up five hundred reward for information leading to the arrest of the payroll bandits. I

reckon Pappy is the legal claimant for the reward, all right."

The twins regarded him solemnly. "When you get the check, sheriff, just hold it until one of us comes for it," Raymond said. "We'll take care of the money for Pappy."

Without further parley, the twins went into the shack.

The posse, exchanging grins, had the delicacy not to follow. Presently came sounds of scuffling and Pappy's shrill voice, raised in outraged protest.

Raymond Gimble appeared in the shack doorway, minus his bundle and holding the checked trousers and coat, and the stained shirt.

"Here's that fellow's clothes," he said. "Pappy won't be needing 'em any longer." He went back into the shack.

The posse waited, and even the prisoners, silent and sullen now, watched the shack doorway in an interested fashion.

Ralph and Raymond came out and halted just outside the door. There was a deep silence, as they waited a few moments. Then Raymond spoke: "Pappy!" he called loudly. "We're going home, Pappy!"

A small figure, barefooted and clad in a blue calico mother hubbard, shot out of the door and scuttled to the river bank.

"Hold on," said the sheriff. "What you going to do with him?"

"Sixty days," said Raymond.

"He done a good deed, though," the sheriff said. "He caught some crooks. You boys oughtn't to be too hard on your old man."

The big twins looked at each other, a little uneasily.

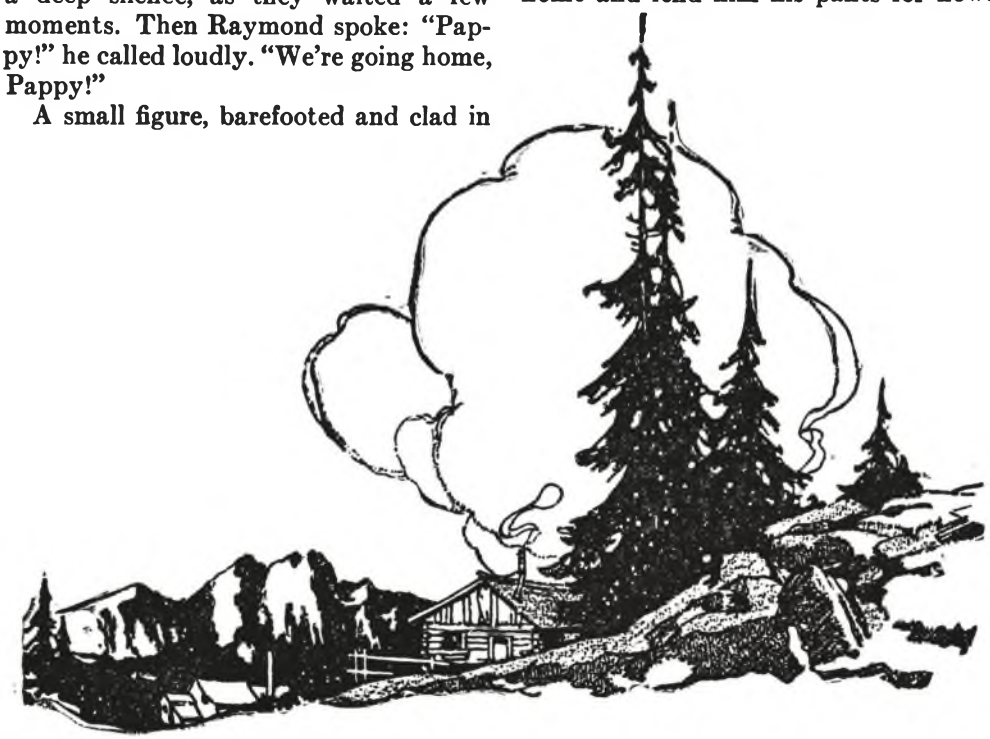
"Sometimes I've thought maybe—" said Ralph.

"Yeh," said Raymond.

"A man got a right to a drink once in a while," said the sheriff.

"Tell you what," said Raymond. "That five hundred now—we could make a fund of it, and dump Pappy out in the woods once in a while with a bottle but"—he concluded fiercely—"if he gets to spreein' any other time, back in that dress he goes."

"Sure," said Ralph, "but let's git him home and lend him his pants for now."



THE CAMP-FIRE

The meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers.

JOINING our Writers' Brigade in this issue is H. H. Matteson, with the story "Hogmeat."

H. H. Matteson's professional title is Dr. H. H. Matteson, but he has moved around so much that he is sometimes referred to by his confreres, he says, as "the medical hobo."

For twenty years he has been making his profession take him places.

He spent one year as surgeon to a development company in the wilds of Yucatan.

Then deciding he wanted to study prison life from the inside, he succeeded in getting an appointment as surgeon in one of the Federal Penitentiaries.

All this was interesting to him, because he enjoys making deductions about human conduct from watching characters in action, but there were other places to see.

He then had an extensive experience as a ship's surgeon.

Then as sanitary inspector in the Aleutian Islands and Southeastern Alaska, he had an unusual opportunity to learn the intimate and little known life of the salmon fishermen, sealers, whalers, fox farmers, etc.

It is about these islands and their people he prefers to write, because he believes the remote fish camps, and fox farms of the Far Aleutians are the stage of the most amazing human dramas he has ever witnessed, where the strong motivations of life, hate, love, and revenge are played out with a stark realism he hasn't seen elsewhere.

He has had more than five hundred stories published in the United States and Europe.

Of these he remarks: "None are so very ladylike, but all are, at least, sincere attempts to be honest with the characters and themes.

"The term 'rugged individualism,' may, perhaps, be applied to the characters encountered in the Aleutian Islands, more fittingly than almost any other place on earth. The fox farmers, fish-pirates, cod fishermen, whalers, are colorful in the extreme, and, as a usual rule, make their own rules of conduct as they go. When a fisherman, mild curing salmon, smoking them in alder smoke, on a remote island, was asked if he did not fear the encroachment of Jap fishermen, the occasional Eskimo or Tartar, he grinned, and replied, 'Hereabouts, I just got to be my own army and navy.'

"The camp cooks—Hogmeat is a very real person indeed—are in a class by themselves. Always they are the autocrats of the camps, if good, and they are to be pitied if they are mere pretenders. When I first saw Hogmeat, he was throwing a cleaver at a larch stump. Asked for an explanation for this unusual exercise, he replied that as he didn't heft but a hundred ten, and wasn't but five foot, he just had to perfect himself in an art of self-defense.

"The fish camps vie with each other in the selection of striking names. Devil Do and the Pant's Patch are genuine names. Others, preposterous, and inspired neither by rhyme or reason it would seem are 'The Pig Eye,' 'The Belly Buster,' 'The Sadder Showdown,' reminiscent of a poor hand at poker, perhaps, 'Polly's Pimple,' etc."

HAPSBURG LIEBE tells us about the hero in "Black Water."

Black Water is all fiction, except for the mountaineer, Jim McLin (not his real name,

of course), and I got him smack out of life. He came down here to Florida to visit me—it happens that I myself was born in Tennessee's dim-blue ranges—and I did my best to entertain him; took him hunting and fishing; showed him as much as I could of this land that to him at first was all wonderland. It soon palled on him. No mountains, you see. He became so homesick that I feared for his sanity! It was the water, the dark streams, that hit him hardest. He simply couldn't get over that. The streams at home were crystal-clear. "Damned old black water. Hit ain't natchel. I air a-goin' home, i-god, Hap; and when I git to Big Rock Creek I air a-goin' to lay flat on the rocks, drink my belly full and rub some in my face." And he went.

The songs he sings in the story he sang to us here, plinking out the tunes on a banjo that I borrowed for him. They are very old songs, having been handed down from mouth to mouth through many generations of hill-folk.

As for the Everglades—this is still one of the least known, most mysterious portions of the earth's surface. I have read articles by men who penetrated the 'Glades from widely-separated points—Lake Hicpochee on the north, Big Cypress Swamp on the west, Miami Canal on the east—and no two of them seemed to be describing the same section. I went (hunting) deep into the 'Glades from upper Lostman's River, on the south, and if I'd been doing an article, it, too, would have been different. On one point, however, we surely would have agreed, and that point is *vastness.* Leagues upon leagues of wet plain, sawgrass and soft-grass marsh, cypress and bay "heads," big and little "hammocks" covered with pine and cabbage-palm and palmetto, all tangled in scrub and wild vine; here and there a creek or a slough or a pond—and then more leagues upon leagues of the same, endlessly. Billions of snakes, mostly poisonous cotton-mouth moccasins. Some monster diamond-backs, and dwarf rattlers. Alligators. Wild birds. Insects that bite. . . .

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON likes fishing for trout in remote mountains. He sent along a typical communication with his story "F.O.B. Furnace Flats." The story has nothing to do with fishing, so he didn't write about the story—he wrote about fishing.

One of the comrades dropped in to inquire (merely because I am just back from a trout trip to the California Sierras, and because it was the first time for such reason I had ever deserted my favorite stamping grounds in Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico): which is the best trout country, the Sierras or the Rockies?

My answer is—the Rockies offer the best creek fishing while the High Sierras offer the best lake fishing. Most of the water along the Continental Divide is creek water; in the Sierras the contrary is true; it is a region of myriad lakes.

The enemy of good fishing is good roads—and the California roads are too good. But a good road won't spoil a lake as quickly as it will a creek.

One usually catches more trout in the Rockies than he does in the Sierras, but the Sierra trout are likely to run bigger. The reason is that big water makes big fish. A trout which lives its entire life in a small stream at high altitude seldom gets very big; but if that same trout has access to a chain of lakes, it will grow lustily. A trout, like a steer, needs range to grow.

Ten thousand feet in the Rockies is colder than ten thousand feet in California. Timberline in the Rockies is higher than timberline in the same latitude in the Sierras. One sees more deer in the Sierras and fewer mosquitos. The Rocky Mountain creeks are brushier, the slopes more wooded, the air moister. Even though one scales the highest pinnacle of the Sierras, the breath of Death Valley is still close by.

Rocky Mountain fishermen as a rule, I think, stick more ethically to flies and spinners. All too often one tramps hopefully to some remote California trout lake only to find a lot of folk squatting on the bank with leaded lines parked, using salmon eggs or worms. Disgusting, don't you think? They go at it like it was the real-estate business—with bait.

For getting your creel quickly full of nice, pan-size trout, one can't beat the streams of Fremont County, Wyoming, Park County, Colorado or Taos County, New Mex. But for lakes—! Within ten miles of my camp this summer, in the Sierras, there were forty-three lakes. The creeks joining them were tourist-infested, but one could nearly always get a limit by penetrating to one of the more remote of those lakes. And get more varieties than he could in the Rockies. In scores of Rocky Mountain excursions I have only caught four kinds of trout—Eastern Brook, Rainbow, Loch Leven and Cutthroat. Yet in the Tioga country this season I caught all four of those plus four more—German Brown, Golden, Steelhead and Dolly Varden.

Having consumed or given away all trout

on hand, it was necessary on my last day there to catch a full limit to take home. A California limit is ten pounds or twenty-five trout. So on that last day I tramped to the remotest of the forty-three lakes, to be sure of a limit. The tough luck was that I got there in a dead calm. The lake was like glass. You can't catch 'em out of a lake in a dead calm, because the fish can see you as easily as you could see a policeman across the street.

I sat down and waited for a breeze, so that a ripple would make the surface of the water opaque. None came. By two in the afternoon there had still been no ripple—and my creel was still empty. Then I went to the lake's outlet, where the flow from it falls over a precipice fifteen hundred feet into Lundy Canyon.

I peered wistfully over the edge. That almost inaccessible canyon far below me would be, I thought, a fisherman's Promised Land. Could I climb down and back? Hardly, at least not with a mid-afternoon start. I was about to turn away with a sigh when my eye glimpsed a narrow ledge, barely visible under the spray and about a third of the way down that fall.

Maneuvering to a better angle of view, I saw that there was really more of the ledge than I had thought. The fall dropped sheer about five hundred feet to it; the water ran there in a shallow riffle for about fifty yards and then dropped the last thousand feet straight down to the canyon.

I found a trail down to the ledge. It was about like descending a spiral staircase from the fiftieth floor of a skyscraper. On the ledge I found forty yards of fishable water. And boiling with Rainbows. These trout weren't like those up in the lake, "uncertain, coy and hard to please." They were starving and asked no quarter. They would have taken a bit of red wool cloth as readily as my Coachman. In one hour I was toiling back up that fifty-flight staircase, my creel ten pounds heavier.

That is the trick, in any man's country; find the place where the other fellow didn't go.

RECENTLY J. T. Howard of Fergus Falls, Minn., who wore a straw hat along the Amazon for two years and survived nicely, wrote to inquire why a sola topee was considered necessary in India—was the British sun hotter than the Amazon sun, and what's wrong with a straw hat? Gordon Mac Creagh replied that nothing was wrong with a straw hat, or a felt one either, so far as he knew, and he believed the whole business a matter of convention rather than necessity. From Knowlton Rodlay of Key West, Florida, comes the following:

Don't know about India or Amazon. But I noticed the Mexican Indians and those in the American desert country always wore felt hats, and masses of black hair piled under the Stetsons in the sun time, while I went bareheaded or wore a straw hat.

The late Will Livington Comfort told me it was dangerous to go bareheaded for prolonged intervals in the California sunshine. Personally I regard the British topee as scenery. You know how Johnny Bull loves to *dress* the part—what?

Mr. Rodlay adds:

Richard Howells Watkins clicks with the true sea tang in "The Landlubber."

In 1906 I was shanghaied off the Seattle docks aboard the German sailing ship, *Omega*, out of Hamburg. We went under sail from Port Angelus, Puget Sound, round the Horn to Rotterdam in four months to a day. I made then the acquaintance of the "sugi-muji" Watkins mentions. First time I've seen it in print. I can still feel the bite of "muji" in my fingers when I had to use it cleaning up aft. (They made me cabin steward, seeing I had a game leg and couldn't very well hang on aloft in handling sail.) The *Omega* was an iron ship, but square-rigged, with fore, main, mizzen and jigger. By the way, suji-muji is really caustic lye and mighty hard on the hands.

Watkins evidently knows his sea stuff. Congratulations on "Landlubber."

And I liked Ared White's "Secret Service Agent B-7."

SURE, it was a pleasure to have that Bill Adams story, as John C. Kay, attorney, of Wichita Falls, Texas, suggests:

I have just been thinking that an editor must be greatly pleased when he opens a manuscript like "Solitary Skipper" in one of your late issues, by Bill Adams.

Mr. Adam's presentation of this story, without stopping to explain the psychology of the thing, is very interesting.

ASK ADVENTURE

BURIED treasure is around any corner, over any hill in old Mexico—but it is difficult to say which corner and which hill.

Request:—"Sometime ago a friend of mine had occasion to befriend a Mexican, and this fellow told him a very fantastic story of hidden treasure in old Mexico, not so far from the border.

To make a long story short, my friend has the fever to go hunt for it. He has never had any experience roughing it, cannot speak Spanish. If this Mex's story were true why hasn't someone else found this treasure long ago?

His claim was that Indians and Mexicans would not touch it out of fear. The Mex said he would guide my friend and asks for nothing unless the treasure is found.

Please tell me what the Mexican laws are about these things? Would they claim all of it or part, and about what would it cost us to outfit for a 3 month trip into its location and return. I've not given you much to give me information on but I know so little. The Mexican will divulge only so much, unless we take him on the trip. I'm so skeptical of things like this but want to give ourselves a gambler's chance if possible.

—R. K., Lawrence, Kansas.

Reply by Mr. J. W. Whitetaker:—I would not like to throw a damp blanket over any treasure hunt if there was the least chance of finding anything of value. If all the so-called buried treasure in Texas and in Mexico were really true it would be enough to pay off our National debt. There is a buried treasure or lost mine in nearly every locality you visit in southwest, central, and western Texas and in every small town in Mexico as well as in New Mexico and Arizona. I have never heard of any of this wealth being found with all of the people that have been searching for it for years and years. After every Revolution in Mexico for the past hundred years there has been said to have been buried many millions of dollars worth of gold and silver to prevent the other side from obtaining it. Nothing to it except a good story to entertain children.

It would be a good outing for you if you had plenty of money to tide you over for the few months that it would require to locate the spot which is "just over the hill" and to pay the guide and feed him and several members of his family who would make it convenient to drop in at meal time.

The usual line is that the natives are afraid to look for the buried treasure on account of various superstitions, about religious beliefs in which various gods are guarding the treasure. I would suggest that you tell your friend to forget all about the Mexican's promises and buried treasure and the money that he has saved up to hunt for buried treasure be placed in some good company that pays a reasonable per cent of interest will amount to more than he could find if he searched a year for buried treasure.

The Mexican Government would claim about 25% of anything found; the appraisors about 10% and the petty officials in that locality would come in for about another 10% so by the time you got through paying per cents you would have about half the original find left and all the expenses to bear.

IF you want venom, massage the snake's forehead.

Request:—1. In what part of the woods are rattlesnakes most likely to be found?

2. What form of shelter do they seek and what and how is the best way to hunt for them?

3. What part of the year are they the most abundant?

4. What is the method of extracting venom from them? What is it worth and how can it be disposed of?

—CARL GRAY, Cedar Run, Pa.

Reply by Mr. Karl Schmidt:—Rattlesnakes are especially partial to rocky districts in Pennsylvania. They take refuge in crevices in the rocks. They are most easily found when emerging from their hibernating dens, where they gather for the winter.

Venom is extracted by holding the snake just behind the head, holding the fangs over the edge of a glass dish and massaging the temples. It is quite dangerous to handle snakes until you have had training or practice. I do not believe that there is any market for or commercial value of venom at present.

Besides the timber rattler, a small rattlesnake, called the massasauga, is found in bogs in Pennsylvania.

JUST what does a man face if he tries to go through the Everglades?

Request:—"I have a desire to take a trip through the Everglades, if they are as wild and unsettled as I understand them to be.

1. What route would it be best to take, from what town on the outskirts?

2. What equipment should one carry? I plan to have a canoe, fishing tackle, shotgun, hammock, mosquito netting, and snake serum.

3. Is it possible to live off the country—fish and small game, or would I have to burden myself with supplies?

4. Most important—would it be possible to turn such a trip to financial advantage, even to defray expenses?"

—EDW. H. THOM, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Reply by Mr. Hapsburg Liebe:—The Everglades territory is much more wild and unsettled than you can possibly imagine it to be. It is a vast territory, vast as the sea. This is a place "Where angels fear to tread."

It is an immense plain, mostly wet, especially during the summer when there is so much rain. Broad marshes, patches of woods, mostly of pine and palm and palmetto, all tangled with scrub and wild vines, some creeks, some ponds, some sloughs and bayous. It is the easiest place on earth to get lost in, and the hardest place imaginable to get out of. White men have little or no business there. I think if you'll take a trip from Miami on the east coast, over the Tamiami Trail to Fort Myers on the Gulf coast, you'll see enough of the 'Glades to keep you out of there. Now to your questions—if you *must* go.

1. Start from Miami. Go up the Miami Canal, which drains a part of Lake Okeechobee, in a good-sized rowboat powered with an outboard motor. This boat should be flat-bottomed, and should be big enough to sleep in and hold your supplies too. You could go in a canoe, or you could row the rowboat, but it would mean a great deal of hard work.

2. Equipment? A light water-proof tent. Folding cot beds, small and light. Mosquito nets. Mosquito dope. Change of clothing, all washable, and soap. Snake-bite medicine. See a good Florida doctor as to this. The poisonous snakes you'd find would be cottonmouth moccasins—millions of these—and rattlers and possibly coral snakes, and they're all bad. A remedy that would aid in the bite of one of these snakes might not work with the others; and no matter what the remedy is, the person bitten must get to a doctor anyway, and as soon as possible—*snake-bite is bad stuff*, and don't let anybody tell you it isn't. Enough but not too many cooking utensils, and don't omit a vessel for boiling your drinking-water. Figure out your own food supply; don't take bulky stuff. A good lantern, and kerosene for it. The simple medicines. A first-aid kit. For fishing, a freshwater casting outfit, with spare lines, 24-lb. test black silk, with artificial baits, which should include a few trolling spoons. A 12-guage shotgun with ammunition for squirrel, duck, and deer (you won't see many deer, will be lucky to see one a week). You'll need a fishing license and a hunting license, and the latter-named costs about $25.00 for a non-resident. Get these in Miami. Inquire in Miami as to seasons on both fishing and hunting.

3. It will be hard to live off the country, since you'll tire of fish quickly and all game is scarce and seasons are limited. There are no fruits or berries, etc., to speak of out there. Cabbage-palm buds (may be cooked like cabbage) would help. Raw, they taste like celery. The outside, incidentally, is very bitter.

I can't see how you could turn such a trip to financial advantage unless you could write it up and sell it, with photos, to some magazine or other.

Be careful you don't get lost in the 'Glades! There's nothing the least bit funny about this. Even professional guides get lost in there, and some of them don't get out. I can imagine nothing worse.

SHOW your medals on dress occasions, in specified order and according to donor.

Request:—Can a person be identified by his medals? Is there any engraving on them which would identify the owner? I think some of the Canadian medals have the owners' names engraved on the edges—how about medals of other countries? Is engraving of name, date or place done on any other medals, and if so whereabouts on the medal? I have examined several scores of medals and have not found any such information, but if someone should be sufficiently sentimental about his honors, could it be done with propriety? I should like to know especially which French, Belgian or English medals this

could be applied to with most ease and effectiveness—and also for what particular valor these medals are presented.

What medals of the above named countries are worn on the left breast pocket? How many of them can be worn at a time on parade occasions?

—MRS. F. B. SHALTERS, Detroit, Mass.

Reply by Mr. Howland Wood:—As far as I know the English government is about the only one that stamps the names of the recipients on their war medals and campaign badges. This also includes the Canadian medals. Most of the other countries do not put the names on the medals. Sometimes they put a serial number. Our government puts only a number but in the circulars they state that you can have your name stamped or engraved on privately if you wish. This on most of them is done around the edge. In a few cases there is a blank space to put this on. With the Distinguished Service Cross, Medal of Honor and a few of the other medals the government does, however, inscribe your name, but not on the campaign badges.

Very occasionally do you find a name on some of the French or Belgium medals but so rarely that it is really unusual. These were done privately.

All campaign medals are worn on the left breast. Medals for valor are mostly worn on the left breast. Occasionally some of those of the higher grades are worn about the neck. A few of the higher orders of knighthood are worn on the right breast. Different nations naturally have their own rules about wearing medals but it is safe to say that all should be worn on dress occasions, and in a certain specified order; the decorations first, the valor medals next, then the campaign badges and then some of the miscellaneous medals for civil performances, etc. Our government and most other governments are particular that no medals given by a power of lesser status should be worn on a government uniform. By this I mean medals given by states, cities and organizations have no place on a government uniform.

THE American wild turkey, a proud, vain bird, is rapidly becoming tamed —or extinct.

Request:—I should very much appreciate it if you would give me some information about wild turkey in Virginia.

Any information you might be able to give me about methods of hunting would also be appreciated, though the information about the birds themselves is most desirable at present.

—A. S. TODHUNTER, Hackettstown, N. J.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—As an American game bird the wild turkey has no peer. Although once so confiding and stupid as to allow our early New Englanders to club it to death, the advancing extermination of this bird has made it wily and suspicious of the arch destroyer of wild life, and today where it exists at all it has retreated to the most inaccessible mountain and swampy-bottom districts; even there the hunting of the wild turkey is a process calling upon all the skill and artifice of the hunter. It is said that in the fall a good pointer may scent a flock of young innocent birds, but even then the opportunity for a good shot is rare and the most expert gunner may pursue a long and weary chase before luck, if any, attends his efforts.

No peacock is more proud or vain than the turkey cock in spring. At early dawn, "Sailing to the ground from his perch, in hope of having attracted some hen to his breakfast ground, the cock, at sight of one, displays every charm he possesses; his widely spread tail, his dewlap and warty neck charged with bright red blood; and drooping his wings as he struts before her, he sucks air into his windbag, only to discharge it with a pulmonic puff, that he evidently considers irresistibly fascinating. Dandified, overwhelmingly conceited, ruffled up with self-importance, he struts and puffs, until suddenly an infuriated rival rushing at him gives battle at once; spurs, claws, beaks, make blood and feathers fly, and the vanquished sultan retires discomfited, leaving the foe in possession of the harem." So jealous is the male of his mates (he is a polygamist) that unless they hide their eggs and chicks he will destroy them in a fit of rage; so the parents, when breeding is done, live of necessity apart and not till the nesting, which lasts about three months, is over does he rejoin the hens —the latter having purposely concealed their presence during the interval. Among the hens jealousy is unknown. They often incubate their offspring in a kind of community of nests, the females taking turns on the different nests at incubating or brooding.

The spring love song of the cock is shrill and clear and altogether different from the coarse, fat-choked gobble of the barnyard variety. There have been voluminous monographs written on the history of how this bird acquired its name, all of which can be better condensed down to the two or three words that are the common call note of this species, "turk, turk."

Uneducated wild turkeys may be summoned within gunshot by an imitation of the barred owl's hoot, and by mocking the female's plaintive yelp (done, after plenty of practice, with a turkey wing bone, or a vibrating leaf placed on the lips).

Wild turkeys dislike flying and will not leave the ground under any but emergency conditions, except for roosting at night. A flock of 16 were once recorded flying over a lake to treetops 300 yards distant on the opposite shore (this occurrence is reported

as if it were an event). This bird is strictly resident and non-migratory.

Wild and tame turkeys are so closely related that after breeding the wild for 10 generations in captivity, the offspring though pure wild stock cannot be told from the tame. What is a wild turkey? What is a rabbit dog? If he won't hunt rabbits he is no rabbit dog, and if your wild turkey can be run down by a flock of Boy Scouts he is no wild turkey; in other words he is not magnificent *Meleagris gallopavo silvestris* but simply humble *Meleagris gallopavo domesticus.*

In twenty-six states recently attempts have been made to breed wild turkeys and liberate them for stocking purposes. So unsuccessful have these experiments been that eight states have abandoned the effort, and most of the balance admit defeat. The technique of one game farm in Virginia (where this practice seems to yield fair results) is: six hens are placed in a wired pen ten feet square; these pens situated a mile apart, in thick bottom woods; birds fed and watered daily by a man who rushes in, drops food, rushes out again and heats pen with a whip to make birds wild and apprehensive. Food is also placed outside the pen to attract wild males. In two weeks the females are freed and mate with the wild cocks. Propagated wild turkeys exhibit a pronounced tendency to go domestic, which of course utterly destroys their value as game, and further such reverted birds are not wise enough to care for themselves in nature.

Once common as far north as the Dakotas, Ontario and Maine, the wild turkey has vanished from most of its range and today occurs sparingly, if at all south of a line drawn from Washington, D. C., through Santa Fe, New Mexico. In those states where it is still extant but rare, long close seasons have not brought it back. Generally artificial propagation has been a rank failure, and the only successful method of transplanting the bird where it has been wiped out is to trap wild pairs elsewhere and plant them together. Only in Texas and Alabama is the wild turkey holding its own.

If you want present distribution of wild turkeys in Virginia, I suggest you communicate with the State Game Department, at Richmond.

YOU can build one of those speedy, snug kayaks the Eskimos used—

Request:—Can you tell me where I might find out how to build a kayak?

—JOHN BATEMAN, New York, New York.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Perkins:—The following outfits can give you plans and instructions on building kayaks:

Fellowcrafters, Inc., 18 Beacon St., Boston, Mass.

Boat Shop, Greenville, Pa.

ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE

Fishing.—JOHN B. THOMPSON (OZARK RIPLEY) care *Adventure.*

Small Boating.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Canoeing.—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 117 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating.—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping.—MAJ. CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., American Tourist Camp Ass'n, 152 W. 65th St., N. Y. C.

Yachting.—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Motor Vehicles; Automotive and Aircraft Engines.—EDMOND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers.—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 69, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons.—CAPT. ROBERT E. GARDNER, 17 E. Seventh Ave., Columbus, O.

First Aid, Hiking, Health-Building.—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, N. J.

Camping and Woodcraft.—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Mining and Prospecting.—*North America.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-Precious Stones.—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Calif.

Forestry in U. S., Big game hunting.—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry.—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Box 575, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading.—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 North Main St. Paris, Ill.

All Army Matters.—CAPT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

World War.—*Strategy, tactics, leaders, armies, participants, historical and political background.* —BEDA VON BERCHEM, care *Adventure.*

All Navy Matters.—LT. CMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U. S. N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Fla.

U. S. Marine Corps.—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, R. F. D. 1, Box 614, La Canada, Calif.

Aviation.—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

State Police, Federal Secret Service, etc.—FRANCIS H. BENT, 184 Fair Haven Rd., Fair Haven, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police.—PATRICK LEE, 157-11 Sanford Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

Horses.—MAJ. THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pebio, Colo.

Dogs.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

North and Central American Anthropology. —ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Taxidermy.—SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *Insects, poisonous, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *Reptiles and Amphibians.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ornithology *Birds; Habits, distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.

Stamps.—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals.—HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society. Broadway, at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Radio.—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Rd., Roselle Pk., N. J.

Photography.—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif.

Football.—JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose St., N. Y. C.

Baseball.—FREDERICK LIEB, 250 Bronxville Rd., Bronxville, N. Y.

Track.—JACKSON SCHOLTZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Swimming and Lifesaving.—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skiing and Snowshoeing.—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Canada.

Archery.—EARL B. POWELL, care *Adventure.*

Wrestling.—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of

Education, New York University, Washington Sq., N. Y. C.

Boxing and Fencing.—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

The Sea Part 1 *British and American Waters. Ships, seamen, statistics, record, oceans, waterways, seas, islands. Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Horn, Magellan Straits, Mediterranean Sea,* Islands and Coasts.—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESENBERG, 47 Dick St., Rosemont, Alexandria, Va. ★2 *Antarctic.*—F. LEONARD MARSLAND, care *Adventure.* 3 *Old Time Sailoring, Ship Modelling and Marine Architecture.*—CHARLES H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Sunken Treasure.—*Authentic information of salvagable sunken treasure since 1588.*—LIEUT. H. E. RIESENBERG, 47 Dick St., Rosemont, Alexandria, Va.

The Tropics.—SEYMOUR POND, care *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands.—BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Ariz., care Conner Field.

★**New Guinea.**—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand; Cook Island, Samoa.**—TOM L. MILLS, *The Fielding Star,* Fielding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania.**—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands.**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross." Suva, Fiji.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States, and Yunnan, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, India Kashmir, Nepal.*—V. B. WINDLE, care *Adventure.* 3 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China, Southern and Eastern China.*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care *Adventure.* 4 *Northern China and Mongolia.*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3, Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. 5 *Japan.*—OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntingdon Ave., Scarsdale, N. Y. 6 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.* 7 *Palestine.*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 26th Ave., West, Vancouver, B. C.

Africa Part 1 ★*Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 26th Ave., West, Vancouver, B. C. 2 *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—GORDAN MAC CREAGH, Box 197, Centerport, Long Island, N.Y. 3 *French Somaliland, Belgium Congo, British Sudan.*—Temporarily vacant. 4 *Tripoli, Sahara, caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.* 5 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.* 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Nigeria.*—N. E. NELSON, Firestone Plantations Co., Akron, Ohio. 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, and Rhodesia.*—CAPT. F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Simi, Calif. 8 *Portuguese East.*—Rᵒ G. WARING, Corunna, Ont., Canada. 9 *Buchuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgium Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, 24 Cuba St., Havana, Cuba.

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