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EDITOR

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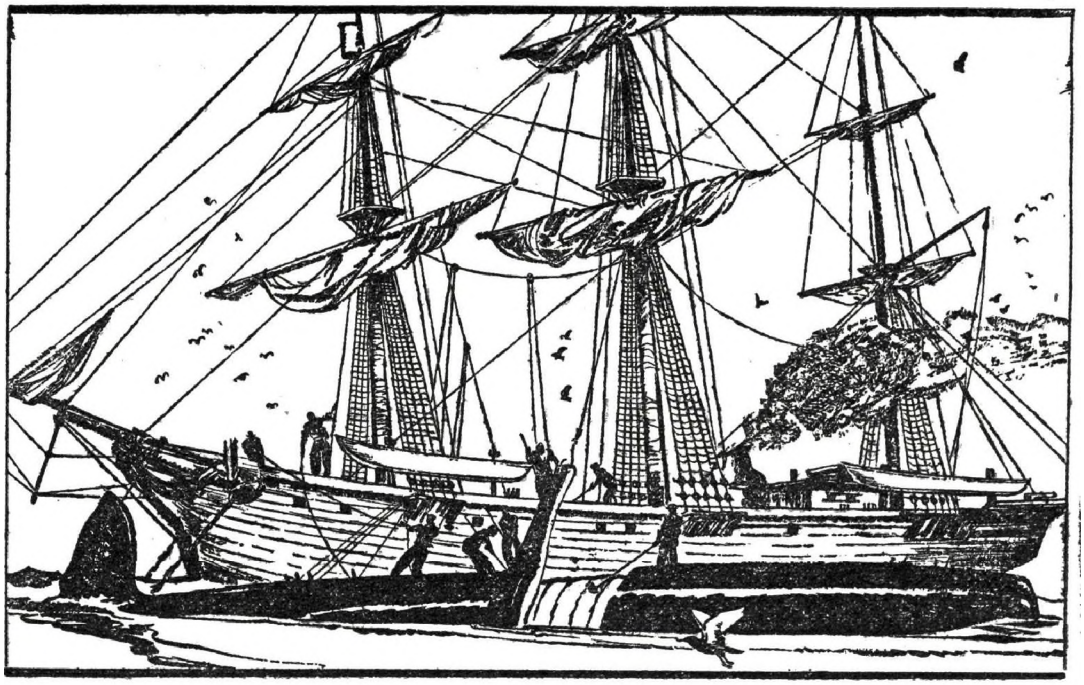


Yo-ho-ho and the BARREL OF RUM

By STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

IT WAS funny to watch the crew being paid off and to see some of 'em shy at sight of the barrel standing in the corner of the outer office of the owners. I was well back in the line and could see the whole show.

With the slop-chest accounts in front of him, the clerk sat dividing and subtracting, a little pile of dirty bills and stacks of silver at his elbow. First he'd divide the gross value of the oil and bone by the "lay" of the man in front of him, then he'd deduct the sum total of the tobacco, brogans, sou'westers, dungarees and such issued by the Old Man during the past sixteen months. What little remained was handed to each man in cash.

A growl, a slam of the office door, and the discharged whaleman would go out and slink up a New Bedford side street where the brown and yellow maple leaves were almost kneedeep in the gutters.

Cockney Brown turned the color of an oyster when he noticed the fifty-gallon barrel sitting on its chines. With quivering fingers he picked up the few dollars coming to him, and the line hitched along.

Lawyer Ames came next, a big duffer who was forever keeping the watch below awake with his bellyaching about seamen's rights. He'd sworn that when payoff came he'd make the owners deduct for a certain pair of boots he claimed had paper soles. Otherwise he'd make 'em eat what was left. But

now, after one look at the barrel in the corner, he forgot all about the boots. Without a word, the forecastle lawyer picked up his thirty-four dollars and padded away in the hair-seal mukluks he was still wearing.

Domino, the giant black boat-steerer was next in line. Of all the men who sailed aboard the *Golden Horn* and lived to get back to New Bedford, he had the best excuse for being annoyed at the sight of the barrel. I watched him curiously. The clerk looked up at him, then called off his lay. So much for bone, so much for oil, the clerk said after checking his figures. Domino stood like a black statue.

"No slop-chest charges," I heard then, and saw the clerk wet his thumb and count out a few bills.

What I believe to be the longest arm in the Western Hemisphere reached for the banknotes, and with an inarticulate gasp of thanks the dumb whale-killer passed on and out.

My turn came soon and, grasping my one hundred and sixty-fifth share—minus slop-chest—I reached the sidewalk in time to see Domino climbing into the skipper's buggy. Captain Eben had been waiting for him, for between cruises the black man made his home with the whaling master, splitting wood, building fires, running errands, doing all in his power to make the old widower comfortable and keeping the grounds of his cottage looking neat.

Afloat, ashore, they were always together, as they had been for years. Now, together, they drove off; and as I watched the skipper's white sidewhiskers flutter gently in the wake of his nag, I was put in mind of the lift and fall of the weather leech of a royal when you're steering full and by. Standing so, one hand buried deep in my pocket, its fingers cupped around my slim earnings, a newspaperman found me.

"You came in short handed," he began by way of an excuse.

I nodded.

"I'm checking up on strange stories they're telling about the voyage," he went on to say, and offered me a cigaret.

I shared his match, but volunteered not a word.

"How about this man Brassford?" the reporter persisted.

"It's a long story," I said warily—and suddenly an idea hit me.

I needed a hot bath and a change of underwear. I craved a few drinks, a big steak and some fried potatoes. This fellow probably knew the town—the speakeasies handling the best stuff. He needed the story. I could give it to him full and straight—for certain considerations.

So I handed him a cold fact or two which made his eyes bulge. The bait took; and as I explained my immediate wants he beat me to the bargaining.

"Come on," he interrupted, and took me by the arm. "I'll guarantee you the best in town. I represent a Boston paper and a press association. Everything'll be on me."

Two hasty drinks came first, and over them the reporter shot questions at me hot and heavy. I answered him as best I could, and straightway he ducked into a telephone booth and made a call. I had another whisky while he was inside, and when he came out I was feeling fine. We went to a couple of stores and bought some gear. Then he walked me to a barber shop where there were baths in the rear.

I'd almost forgotten I was hungry, so good was I feeling. I was soaping myself and singing the first verses of "Santie Anna" when the reporter bust in on me.

"What train will they take up to the city?" he asked, excited-like.

I rinsed the suds off my face and shrugged my soapy shoulders.

"You can search me. Most likely they'll make telephone arrangements and board a Boston train in the morning."

He muttered something about his papers demanding pictures, and then dashed out. I went on with my scrubbing and singing, forgetting for the moment the evil wrought by the man, John Brassford, he whom we aboard the *Golden Horn* had come to call Brass.

Seventeen or eighteen verses of "Santie Anna", covering his adventures with his wooden leg "way down on the plains of Mexico", and I was out of the tub, dry and dressed.

"Burn these," I told the head barber privately, and handed him a little bundle wrapped in a newspaper. He understood, and fingered it gingerly.

Immediately the reporter took me in tow. In a booth in one of the best restaurants in town I ate as I'd never eaten before. And between the ordering and finishing of the oysters, the stuffed turkey with giblet gravy and cranberry sauce—not forgetting the plum pudding I picked off the bill—I told what I knew of the happenings aboard the *Golden Horn* while in Hudson Bay . . .

IT WAS a year ago this last June [I began] when I signed for the cruise to the Arctic. I'd made two whaling voyages before, and on account of experience was in line for boat-steerer. We sailed, and when the tug left us and we lined up for watch picking I was chosen by the mate for his port watch. Afterward, when he found I was handy with an oar and didn't get rattled when we lowered for whales, he made me bow oarsman of the boat he headed. Domino, the black dummy, was his boat-steerer. I might as well tell about him right now.

He was so black that in certain lights his big cheekbones showed purple. His eyes were two yellow holes with dots in the middle of 'em. He wasn't tall, he wasn't short, and to look at him from the front you wouldn't notice much about the build of him except for his long skinny arms. But a side view was different. So deep was his chest it seemed to bulge out his back and give him a deformed look. His shoulder-blades were buried deep under knobs and ridges of muscle and tendon, and like the gorilla of his native Africa his ears were small and his thumbs were extra short.

No man that I know aboard the *Golden Horn* ever laid eyes on Domino's throat. No matter what the weather, he was always wrapped to the chin. Ugly scars must have accounted for that, for according to one of the stories told about him he'd been found off the African coast on the beach of Annabon Island with a knife rammed through his neck. He was more dead than alive when Captain Ebenezer Gray lugged him aboard the *Morning Star* and nursed him back to life. That was many years ago. Since then he'd become a whaleman and a crackerjack boat-steerer.

Some of the lighter colored iron-pitchers from the Azores got jealous of him and fell to calling him a "Kabendi nigger", "gorilla's cousin", and the like. But Domino soon put a stop to that, for he chased one fellow into the top-gallant trees of the old *Canton* and heaved him overboard where he almost drowned.

Some men came to respect him. Many came to like him. He worshiped every square inch of deck trod by Captain Eben; and if he'd been allowed he'd have slept at the door of the captain's cabin.

All this gives you a fair idea of the black boat-steerer, Domino. He wasn't good to look upon. His efforts to speak brought strange squeals and gurglings from his crippled larynx—sounds that at times would make you creep all over. I'll only add that he was the strongest man of any race or color I've ever seen in action, and one of the best natured, if let alone.

Well, as I was saying, we sailed, and coiled down. I was picked for the port watch. Domino, too, fell to the port watch and, as the weather was mighty hot until we got well up toward the Strait of Belle Isle, he did his sleeping on the tarpaulin battened over the fore hatch.

Four days out, though, and he wasn't sleeping alone. We'd come across signs of a wreck—planks and such, two barrels of flour as fine under the wet skin as it was the day it left the mill. And then along floats a life-raft with a crate of drowned chickens on it and a half drowned pig. The pig was about the size of your two fists put together, and when Domino adopted it about all it had left was an appetite and a squeal.

Until the nights grew cold the pig and the black man slept curled up together on the fore hatch, and then Domino contrived a small house for it just abaft the galley.

ALL went fairly smooth with the old bark and its crew, and by the time we sighted the first ice off the Labrador coast we'd got fairly well acquainted with each other down for'ard. Chums paired off, little cliques and factions were forming in the two watches, and each forecastle hand had a mate—all except John Brassford.

Brassford was a lone wolf, a sour sort of fellow with a crooked lower jaw and a lot of teeth missing. He hardly ever spoke, on deck or below. And after supper, instead of joining with the singing and skylarking, he'd polish his pan with a fistful of oakum and squat scowling on the chest in front of his bunk, his crooked jaw fastened on the short stem of a new clay pipe.

If his wish was to be let alone, he sure got it, for there was something evil about him—his quick side glances, his sneaking ways—that warned men to keep off, to let bad medicine alone.

"Lay aloft and loose the mainto'gallants'l, you, Brass!" the mate had sung out one morning.

The name stuck. Brass he became from that moment.

Our first mixup came right after we'd sighted ice. We were shortening sail so's to take it slow and easy, and men of the port watch were swarming up the weather shrouds to furl and pass the gaskets. Brass was near the foot of the line. As he made for the rail and was about to grab a ratline, the little pig got in his way. He kicked it aside—not very hard—but at its frightened squeal Domino went into action. Standing at the pinrail coiling up buntlines, he'd had an eye on the pig and saw the kick. I was at the wheel at the time. What with the cook whistling in the galley and the slap and hiss of water under the run, there was quite a bit of noise. Yet plain above it I could hear the half scream, half gurgle, that came from the throat of the dummy.

He leaped for the rail, but found the shrouds full of climbing men. Brass, quick as a cat himself, was by this time halfway to the maintop. But that made no difference to Domino. There was another way up, the way of a jungle man. His long black arm whipped up to a topmast-backstay. The other long arm shot above it with his upward spring. Then hand over hand he went up that stay. Not as circus performers climb a rope, smoothly and slowly, but with the quicker-than-the-eye movements of an ape of the forest. He actually overhauled his man before the futtock-shrouds were reached, and then his long arm whipped out and black fingers plucked Brass from the ratlines.

The sight was uncanny. Men on deck and aloft stopped their work to stare. For at arm's length this human gorilla held the other and shook him as a terrier does a rag. Not for long, though. Domino had his program to carry out before any one could call him off or interfere. With a speed that would have burned a normal man to the bone he slid down the backstay and dragged the half conscious Brass over to where the little pig was balancing himself in the waist. Down on his knees Domino forced Brass, then pointed at the pig and grunted what probably meant, "Beg his pardon."

It was then that Captain Eben called from the break of the poop. Domino looked up, grinned; and then with a wide sweep of his arm flung Brass away from him and into the scupper.

RESOLUTION ISLAND was reached and the *Golden Horn* was poking her blunt nose between the ice packs of Hudson Strait before Brass was able to quit his bunk and stand his watch on deck. Whatever was in his heart, he'd at least had a lesson in kindness to animals.

Three days inside the ice-choked Strait headwinds forced us to tie up under the lee of a floe. There was nothing much to do except keep watch, do odd jobs around the deck and wait for the wind to haul. It was July now; and although the short nights were cold, the long days were warm enough.

The after-gang got in some light reading and heavy smoking. Some bundles of old magazines put aboard by the owners were opened up, and Captain Ebenezer and the mate took first crack at a bunch of newspapers they'd gotten while gamming a Bluenose fisherman to the south'ard of Belle Isle. It was

while they were both sprawled out in some folding chairs they'd rigged to starboard of the wheel one morning that I got an eyeful and an earful.

I was white-leading a leaky pane in the cabin skylight when all of a sudden I saw Captain Eben sit up straight in his chair, his newspaper held out flat in front of him. So strange was his attitude that the mate looked over at him curious-like.

"Look, Mister!" the skipper said, blinking his eyes fast as he always did when the ship was in danger or whales were up.

He held out the paper to the mate and pointed to something in it.

Open mouthed, the mate flung down his own paper and took the skipper's. Over the top of it I saw his eyes widen.

"One thousand dollars' reward!" I heard him say presently. He spoke softly, a little pause after each word.

"Dead or alive," the skipper breathed in a low tone.

I edged nearer so 's to hear better and perhaps get a glance at the paper. But all I caught was a dirty look from the mate. So I bent over my brush and started in on a new pane that didn't leak.

The skipper and the mate spoke low and earnestly for awhile, but I couldn't get a word of it. All I could gather by their actions was that the mate was trying to talk the skipper into what he didn't want to do. At least a dozen times the Old Man shook his white head and stared out across the floating ice on the Labrador side.

Finally I heard three words.

"Send for him," the captain ordered.

Straightway the mate got up and strode to the break of the poop.

"You, Brass!" he bawled; and when an, "Aye, aye, sir," came back to him from a boatswain's chair creeping down the foremast, he ordered the man to lay aft at once.

Brass came slowly toward the pair, wiping his hands on a ball of oakum. He didn't know what was up, but I reckon he had a pretty good idea—especially after the skipper looked from his face to the paper, and then back again.

"Roll up your left sleeve, Brass," the captain ordered softly.

Like a bird watching for cats the man shot each of the two a quick glance. From red he turned a dirty yellow, then red again.

"Up with it," the lanky mate barked, and took a step toward him.

No one now was paying the slightest attention to me. I edged a little closer, so close that I could see the facial muscles of Brass working like worms beneath his skin. He had clamped his crooked jaw tight shut and was grinding what teeth he had left. But he was obeying orders; and as he fumbled at the sleeve of the dirty cotton shirt and jerked it up I could see a red and blue anchor tattoed on his forearm.

"Never mind takin' off your right shoe, Brass," the skipper said grimly. "We know who you are and where you came from."

Like a trapped animal Brass glared around him. In a flash he sensed there was nothing to do, no possible escape for him in these sub-Arctic waters. Then he calmed somewhat, and during the rest of the interview stood mute and sullen.

"Mr. Hunt, here," the skipper went on to say after a little, "is for chainin' you up 'tween-decks till we get back to New Bedford next Fall. I don't agree with him. 'Twould mean practically detailin' a man to fetch and carry for you, to say nothing of an extra fire all Winter. We haven't coal to spare for that. So I guess the best we can do is to let nature take its course until we head back for port. Then we'll turn you over to the authorities and take our reward."

Not a word came from the man we learned later had come aboard the *Golden Horn* almost direct from the yard gang of the Charlestown State Prison. He stood breathing heavily, his eyes fixed on the ice over the taffrail.

"So get you for'ard," the skipper said not unkindly, "and for the time being we'll forget all about it."

"And watch your step or we'll clap the irons on," the mate said as Brass turned and made off.

I tried my best to get a look at that paper, but the Old Man folded it up and took it below with him. All the watch

on deck had seen Brass called aft, and when I went for'ard I was plied with questions. But I shook my head to one and all. I hadn't seen anything. I hadn't heard anything. What I knew I kept to myself.

THE very next day the forecastle was buzzing with the whole story. The mate told his boat-steerer; the boat-steerer talked it over with the cooper; and Cockney Brown overheard 'em. He spilled it right and left, and now everybody knew we had an escaped convict aboard. According to the yarn in the paper, Brass was one of the crew of a steamship sailing out of New York. With some others he had jimmied the bullion room of the ship and got away with valuable express packages. The messenger was shot by Brass in what the papers claimed a "cowardly and cold blooded way"; and later, when the gang was rounded up in Boston, a detective was killed. Instead of taking 'em back to New York, they were tried for murder in Massachusetts.

Brass, owing to some twist of the law, drew life. A couple of years later he was working with a quarry gang when an explosion injured his head and right foot. They patched him up and, except for the loss of two toes and his jaw permanently crooked, he was able to take his place in the yard gang. That brings us up to the day before the sailing of the *Golden Horn.*

No one knows how he escaped from Charlestown, although they think it was in a freight car being shunted out of the yard. Anyway, he managed to get clear, find clothes and keep out of sight of the New Bedford police.

That about covers the history of Brass, except that the express company was peeved about the escape and offered a thousand dollars for his capture dead or alive. It seems express companies, like the Post Office Department, never forget. And so the very day we sailed I guess all the papers were plastered with reward ads and photographs.

Brass must have sensed that the news had leaked down for'ard, for he couldn't help but notice how the boys eyed him and stopped their talking when he came near 'em; but the happenings of the very next day shoved his affair into the background.

Whales were sighted close by—bushy-spouting bowheads that played around us until the skipper couldn't stand it any longer. The wind was still against us, and we were moored bow-and-stern in the lee of a heavy floe. But we managed to lower two of the port-side boats. Both of 'em got fast, each to a different whale. It was dangerous work, for there was almost as much floating ice around as there was open water. Right away the third mate's whale sounded and streaked under a big floe. Something went wrong at the loggerhead—maybe they held the turn too long—for the boat hit the edge of the floe and split in two halves. All managed to scramble out on the ice except the tub-oarsman. He must have got fouled in the line and dragged under the ice. His body never showed up.

But that's only a part of the grief of the day; for the waist-boat of the second mate, six men in it, went steaming off downstrait in the boiling wake of a racing whale. We men on the spare boat that had shoved off to pick up the third mate and his gang saw two low walls of green water rising at the sides of the thirty-footer as it flashed away to the southeast'ard down an open lead. We heard the deep *pong!* of a shoulder gun a time or two—and then we reached the ice and took off the shivering men.

No one laid eyes on the waist-boat again. Whether they cut loose or whether the bowhead dragged 'em down to Resolution Island will never be known. We cast off and combed those waters for a week, but not so much as a drifting oar did the lookouts at the main and fore report. The second mate and five others were dead men as far as we could reason it out; for if they'd gained the shore on either side of the strait they'd have signaled us or come under our glasses as we stood on and off.

Empty bunks stared us in the face. Two others held lads sick with pneumonia from their spilling out of the third mate's boat. They both died within an hour of each other on the eighth day after the ducking.

We were now nine men short—one of

'em an officer. It looked like the *Golden Horn* had a Jonah on board, a jinx hungry for human lives. So as we cruised up and down the bay, ranging from Marble Island to Roe's Welcome, the watch below fell into the habit of eyeing one another as much as if to ask—

"Who'll be next?"

Death was in the air of that sour-smelling forecastle. Tired as we were when we'd finally turn in, horrible dreams would come to us and spoil our sound sleep; and the long drawn, "Rise and shine, bullies!" of the man calling the watch would send us staggering up on deck, half rested and fit for a fight with our best friend.

AFT as well as for'ard spread the air of gloom and tragedy. Captain Eben's weather-seamed face got to twitching more and more as the August days dragged by and the monotonous cruising went on. The lanky mate grew more short tempered than ever. He had the work of two to do now, and we'd never wear ship or go into stays but he'd drive men to the braces with kicks and curses. Only two aboard seemed satisfied: Domino the dummy—and the pig, little no longer.

It was a fair sized porker now that roamed the deck and nosed along the scuppers. He'd sort of outgrown his affection for Domino, and his favorite post was at the galley door, begging a handout from the Portugee cook. Domino took it kind of hard at first, but gradually he again became popular with the pig. Back scratching did it. In the lee of the cooling tank by the try works they'd grunt to each other by the hour while Domino raked him with his long black claws. And no man dared sneer or laugh openly at the comradeship.

"A fine roast for Christmas," I heard the mate say to the skipper one morning when I was at the wheel.

I didn't get the Old Man's reply, but I caught a grave look on his face as he stepped off again.

"Over Domino's dead body you'll get your roast pig," I fancied myself telling the two of 'em, and then turned my eyes up to the leech of the royal.

It was well I did so, for with the watching and the listening that was none of my business I almost had the ship aback. Quickly I gave her a bit of up-helm and watched the half spilled royal belly out. Then I sneaked a glance for'ard to see if anybody had noticed. I was just in time to see all hands and the cook running toward the waist, and to hear a commotion that couldn't mean anything but a fight. All I could see from where I stood was a bunch of heads and shoulders milling around below the level of the poop. I could hear the sound of hoarse voices barking words unintelligible to me.

But quick as it began, just as quickly was the row over; for, following an agonized yell, three men climbed the poop and made for the booby hatch over the companion leading down into the steerage. I didn't recognize Brass at first, because blood from his nose was smeared all over his face. The long mate gripped him on one side; Domino had him on the other. Down the hatchway went the three of 'em.

I was busy with my steering for a minute or two, and when I looked up again I saw Captain Eben at the galley door giving the cook some orders. Curiosity all but ate me up. But as the hands of the clock crept around to ten and I struck four bells, Lawyer Ames came aft to relieve me.

"Full and by," I gave him the orders.

"Full and by," he repeated as he grasped the spokes and shot a glance aloft. Under his voice he added, "We're short another man. Brass has done for Red Howard."

I went for'ard, hungry for details and a smoke, and as I passed the try works I saw something covered with canvas laid out on the cooper's bench. A deepwater fellow handy with the palm and needle was already falling to on his job.

I lighted up and joined the gang around the windlass. There wasn't much length to the story. It was short and ugly, like Cockney Brown who told it to me.

"Red bumps into Brawss—purely accidental," said the Londoner who had found the sea. "Brawss calls 'im out of 'is nyme. Red soaks the lag on the

nose. They lock for a bit and Brawss is getting the worst of it, when 'e drags out 'is sheathknife. Before any of us can 'inder 'e lets poor Red 'ave it 'tween the ribs. Now we'll 'ave another bleedin' sea funeral. If this keeps up we won't 'ave 'ands enough to bryce the yards."

Brown had spoken well and truly, I mused, as I smoked and stared out over the port bow at the fantastic brick-and-blue colored mirage of the low lying coast plastered high in the sky. One man dragged under the ice; six men towed God knows where; two dead of pneumonia—and now a good man stabbed and another in irons. That made us eleven men short. And even aboard a generously manned whaling bark a shortage of eleven meant—

"ABLO-O-OW!" came the long drawn call, dousing all thoughts of Brass and sending the blood to my cheeks. An eighty-barrel cow was abeam to starboard. We got to windward of her and lowered two boats. I was bow oarsman in the mate's boat. We upstick and with paddles and sail ran down on the lady. She was most obliging, stayed up until we were right on her. In with the paddles, down stick and up-centerboard, and as we touched her black skin Domino gave her the darting gun. Quick as a flash he whipped a second iron into her up to the hitches, and then I witnessed a marvelous feat of strength.

The whale was sluggish, perhaps badly wounded by the bomb. The mate was about to change places with Domino, and was stooping to take the big shoulder-gun from its cleats, when suddenly the black man reached for a lance and rammed it into the whale. A foot or two in, and the human gorilla actually climbed the haft hand over hand, the long shank sinking as he climbed, until the head, six feet below, found the vitals of the monster. The fin relaxed, thick warm blood from the spiracles marked the last breath from the bowhead, and she was ours. Now began the dirty, heavy work.

The *Golden Horn* bore down on us, shortening the tow. We passed the fluke chain and moored the carcass alongside. The cutting stage was unlashed and swung out. One at a time we hoisted the boats. With a handy-billy we whipped the heavy cutting-in blocks up into the main-top and ran the fall to the windlass drum. It was "Heave, bullies!" now.

For hour after hour we heaved at the windless brakes, the endless strip of blubber rising inch by inch almost to the maintop, the whale being stripped like the spiral peeling of an orange. The sweat dripped from us as we bobbed up and down. Our tendons seemed turned into hot wires that burned our arms and shoulders. The call, "Avast heaving!" that came all too infrequently while the tackle was fleeted for a new grip, was the sweetest sound I believe I've ever heard.

Then we'd stop, panting and wiping the sweat from our eyes while the big boarding knife of Domino would sweep across the blubber and the heavy blanket piece would thump down the hatchway. Then it was:

"Heave, bullies! Heave lively!"

Four hours went by, and we broke off for coffee. It was then we gathered in the waist and listened to the short prayer of the skipper. Then the canvas bundle that had been Red Howard slid off a hatch cover tilted over the port rail, and we went back to the windlass brakes.

Eleven men short we were, and the shortage told. The skipper himself was out on the stage, plugging away with a long spade. Domino was doing the work of three men. Even the cooper and the steward were doing their bit at the brakes. Every man aboard the bark was hard at it—every man except the cook and the prisoner chained in the steerage. It must have been the sight of the cook sliding back the booby hatch cover that put the mate in mind of this fresh man, for he ducked below and came back with Brass trotting before him.

"Earn your grub, you rat!" the mate yelled, and booted him toward the windlass.

The one man made a difference, for now the pawls clinked faster and the rests came oftener. Night fell and the

bug light was rigged. A half bushel of whale scraps blazing in the iron basket gave us light enough to finish the cutting-in, and then the easier but dirtier work of trying-out began. Fires were kindled under the two try pots.

Blanket pieces were cut into horse pieces and piked up on deck to be minced. That was my job. I wielded the double-handed knife and kept two men busy lugging filled tubs over to the try works. One of these men was Brass. The look on his crooked face was enough to give a fellow the shivers. Sullen, murderous, he spoke to no one, and no one spoke to him. An hour of this work, and came a minor tragedy that had quite a bearing on the end.

THE starboard watch was working ship while we of the port watch were holding down the trying-out. They'd unrigged the cutting stage and slipped the jointed rail back across the gangway. Two of 'em were aloft sending down the heavy tackle, when something went wrong. A yell, a scattering of men in the waist, and down swished two of the big blocks. One of 'em crashed through my mincing-horse. The other hit the pig, which only a minute before I'd noticed nosing around the main hatch coaming.

Domino set down his bailer and jumped from the little platform where he'd been ladling oil into the cooler. I helped him untangle the fall and pull the gear off the pig. The animal was dead as a nail—not even the ghost of a squeal in him. The black man took him in his arms and laid him on the cooper's bench.

The bug light was burning low, and in the growing darkness we were standing like a lot of yaps, looking at the dead pig and the fallen tackle and the busted horse, when the mate jumped down from the poop and started his footwork.

"Bug light!" he yelled, and booted the man nearest him.

It happened to be Brass. As some one threw scraps into the iron basket and the light flared up I had a good view of the face of the killer. He was glowering at the mate, who'd left off abusing us to examine the pig. Like a snarling wolf, the upper lip of the convict was baring the few teeth he had left in his head and the ugly gaps between 'em. His eyes fairly burned holes in the back of the stooping officer, and for a moment I looked for him to grab a blubber pike and jump to it.

Suddenly the mate turned, grinning.

"Glory be! Roast pork!" he sung out to the Old Man, who'd just come from aft to see what damage was done.

For a minute or so the two of 'em stood there chinning, and then the mate whipped around and grabbed the man nearest to him. It chanced to be the convict. With roast pork on his mind it was a thousand to one the mate didn't realize it was the late prisoner he was talking to and holding by the shoulder.

"Slip aft and fetch a knife from the galley," he barked, and gave Brass a shove.

I went for a bit of marline to serve the busted legs of the blubber horse. When I got back the mate was showing Brass how to dress the pig. The Old Man was standing nearby, his face twitching a bit as he stole a look up at Domino. The skipper knew him—he knew what the black man thought about that beloved pig.

I couldn't help but follow the skipper's eyes, to see how Domino would take it. He was on his little platform just for'ard of the bubbling pots, his long black fingers curled around the shaft of the bailing ladle. His mouth was open, his chin sunk deep in his neck wrappings as he looked down on what was going on not a dozen feet away. He was standing rigid in the full glare of the bug light, maybe swaying a little to the easy roll of the bark.

It's funny how a fellow's thoughts will ramble, even on a night like that; but I was thinking that he was more purple than black, when all of a sudden I saw his jaw snap shut and his ladle dig deep into the starboard pot. The pig dressing had begun.

For a minute I thought the black man was going to heave boiling oil on the carver of his pet, but presently I gathered he was merely working off his rage by furious ladling into the cooler. Now I had my own job to attend. I

fell to. Down in the blubber room of the main hatch, by the light of thick-globed lanterns, they were piking up horse pieces over the coaming. There was a young mountain of 'em piling up around me. I worked fast, but soon found it growing dark.

"Bug light ho!" the mate sang out just as I looked up to see what was wrong; and for the first time since Brass had the knife in his hand, the officer partly turned his back.

I don't pretend to know what was going through the brain of the convict. Maybe he reasoned there was no hope of escape; that once the trying-out was over he'd be chained in the steerage again. Eventually the prison doors of Charlestown would close on him for the balance of his life. Anyway, here he was now, a weapon in his hand, his chief tormentor close by. The light flared up as hot scraps were forked into the basket. It glinted on the blade of the knife which rose and fell.

Many eyes saw the deed and, as the mate slumped and sank to a sitting posture against the apron of the bench, seven or eight of us rushed toward the killer. The Old Man was nearest. He feared nothing on earth or in the sea. He closed in. Again the knife rose. But even as Brass crooked his elbow, and before any of us got within an arm's length of him, what seemed to be a shadow came streaking over the try works.

It was no shadow. It was Domino, diving to protect his friend and master. Down went the killer. Down also went two or three others knocked over by the flying tackle. When I gained a footing on the slippery deck it was to see Brass held squirming but powerless high above the head of the dummy. Like a man undecided what to do with an unwelcome burden, Domino stood rigid for a moment or two. Then his head moved slowly and we could see him staring into the darkness beyond the lee rail. Then he shifted his gaze to a point forward and took a step in that direction.

I couldn't see his face. No one had then the slightest idea of his intention. But all present saw his knees bend, his barrel shaped body sink a foot or so. Then suddenly he sprang erect, and with a guttural sound intended for either joy or hatred—perhaps both—he heaved the killer into the boiling oil of the starboard pot.

Strong men turned their backs. A hissing noise nipped short a cry of agony, and we turned horror-stricken to listen to the mate.

"There's a thousand dollars fryin' up there," he said weakly, attempting to rise. "Get him out," he added, and collapsed.

We got him out. The mate lived and got well. That's why the *Golden Horn* came into port eleven men short, and that's about all there is to the story. The rest of it's up to the identification experts at the State's prison.

THE reporter had been a patient listener, taking notes from time to time. When I finished he sat frowning and thoughtful for a few moments, making little pencil marks on the tablecloth.

"They'll identify all right," he said, still looking down. "The broken jaw and missing teeth will match up with the dental chart they're sure to have. What gets me—" he looked up—"is how you managed to keep—er—it for nearly a year. Did you have a taxidermist aboard?"

I shook my head.

"Brine?" my host half whispered.

Again I shook my head, then gave the lowdown.

"'Twas rum; double distilled Medford rum—a hundred-and-fifty proof—as supplied to explorers, whalers and the Hudson's Bay Company."

The newspaperman stared first at me and then at a time-table he'd fished out of his pocket. I also stared regretfully down at a bit of plum pudding I couldn't possibly manage.

THROWING THE BULL FOR PIPEROCK

By W. C. TUTTLE

IT WAS lack of bacon and beans, not patriotism, that sent me and Dirty Shirt Jones down into the fleshpots of civilization. Fact of the matter is, we never thought about the Fourth of July bein' so close. We've done cleaned up a nice poke of gold on Plenty Stone Creek, so we're financially all right.

We expected to git drunk, shoot a few holes in the floor and ceilin' of some saloon, then go back to shovelin' gravel, sadder but wiser. Now we pilgrims into the main street of Piperock and ties Faith, Hope and Charity, our pack burros, to the hitch-rack at Buck Masterson's saloon.

Dirty Shirt is a measly little devil, with one eye that don't care what the other eye is doin'. This loose one jist kinda bobs around, independent; and the drunker Dirty gits the worse that eye goes lookin' at things. Dirty Shirt ain't got no more ancestry than a burro —and he don't care. In fact, he don't care about anythin'.

For a lot of years me and Magpie Simpkins had been pardners in and out of crime; but Magpie gits citified in a way, havin' a hankerin' to do big things; so I pardners off with Dirty in order to make a livin'.

Now we're back in old Piperock, which is in Yaller Rock County, in the State of Montana, and may the Lord have mercy on our souls! That may sound like a queer sort of a statement, but it's true. Old Piperock wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't that Paradise and Yaller Horse antagonizes 'em. Paradise and Yaller Horse are a couple villages of vice, harborin' the finest collection of penitentiary bait you ever seen. There ain't a ounce of brains in the two towns, and they don't know it. It's shore a sad state of affairs; but where ignorance is bliss, it's a hell of a good place to stay

away from.

Me and Dirty stops in front of Buck's saloon and looks across the street. There's the entrance to the old Mint Hall; but they've put up a new sign and a bigger one, which reads: "Peace Conference."

"Now I lay me down to sleep," says Dirty.

"Why?" I asks.

"Well, that's the only prayer I know," says Dirty, "and that there sign shore tells me we'll need outside assistance. Ike, as much as I hate sheep, I'd rather see a sign proclaimin' they had wool for sale. Looky there! Seven horses from Paradise! Look at that hitch-rack in front of Wick Smith's place. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. And all from Yaller Horse. Uh-hu-u-u-u-uh! I've got a hunch that Old Lady Peace is havin' growin' pains. Let's git a drink."

We found Ricky Henderson tendin' bar for Buck. Ricky is a barber by birth, but he tends bars in his off moments. He's the only man in Piperock who never got shot for usin' perfume. Ricky greets us cheerfully and pleasantly.

"Hello, you old pack-rats," says he. "It's about time you showed up and got the wood ticks kerosened out of your hair. What's your pleasure, gents?"

"Seein' you in hell, with a beartrap on each foot," says Dirty Shirt. "Dig out that nitric acid, which you call whisky."

Well, we had a couple burnin' sensations, and then Dirty asks Ricky what's new in the line of lynchin' and homicide.

"Not a thing," says Ricky. "Not even blood poisonin'. We've done buried the hatchet with Paradise and Yaller Horse, and today the peace conference is progressin' big, with Magpie as chairman. There ain't been a shot fired over there today."

"Peace conference?" asked Dirty Shirt. "Meanin' what, Ricky?"

"Magpie's idea," says Ricky, moppin' the bar. "You know he's been workin' a long time to bring peace to Yaller Rock County."

"Yeah," says Dirty, "if it'd been me, I'd have jist set out a bunch of poison baits."

"Well, I reckon he's goin' to make a go of it this time," says Ricky. "There's seven from Yaller Horse, seven from Paradise, and seven from Piperock."

"All armed?" I asks.

"Yeah, I reckon they are. Anyway, I seen Testament Tilton goin' in with his sawed-off shotgun. I tell you, gents, it don't seem exactly right for a minister of the Gospel to be packin' a shotgun."

"I don't see why not," says Dirty. "When them sidewinders from Paradise and Yaller Horse starts shootin', the Gospel peddlers don't mean a thing—except a target."

"I know it. Anyway, I'm anxious to know what they're goin' to do about the Fourth of July. You see, this meetin' was to decide on a three-town celebration, where, how and what. Naturally Piperock is wishful of havin' her here. They've got jist four days to prepare. How about another drink?"

WELL, there wasn't no sign of any breakup in the peace conference; so we buys a bottle and takes the burros down to the cabin which belongs to me and Magpie. It's about a hour later when Magpie shows up.

Magpie Simpkins is one of nature's experiments that went all wrong. He's almost seven feet from end to end, thin as a bed slat and as serious as a undertaker. He's got a long, sad face, with pouched eyes like a bloodhound, long, wispy mustache, and his head is plumb full of parts of bright ideas.

He looks sadly upon me and Dirty Shirt, after viewin' the bottle.

"Start your oration," says Dirty Shirt. "Don't mind us."

Magpie sets down and sighs deep-like.

"Come ye here in peace?" he asks.

"With reservations," says Dirty. "I hear you're consortin' with the scum from Paradise and Yaller Horse, Magpie."

"There is peace among us," says Magpie. "I've fought and bled for peace. It has been my burnin' ambition, and realization is upon me. I have given my best, and success is my reward."

"Go ahead, feller," says Dirty Shirt. "You interest me strangely."

"Don't try to be funny, you drunken little hoptoad," says Magpie. "Jist 'cause I promoted peace, you don't need to

think I ain't war-like."

"Yeah," says Dirty Shirt, "and if you don't look out your burnin' ambition is goin' to cook your goose. What's the idea of all this peace conference, anyway?"

"In the beginnin', as the Bible says, we aimed to have a Fourth of July celebration in Piperock. Paradise and Yaller Horse has the same idea. Now, we're too close together for each and every town to have a successful celebration; so I united the big ideas, brought the dove of peace among us—and there you are."

"Well," says I, "will it be any different than usual? Will there be any less casualties than usual?"

"That's the keynote of the whole thing, Ike," says Magpie. "It'll be so different that you'd never rec'nize anythin' about it; and it was my own idea. Of course, I had to change my ideas a little to git it all set with the peace conference."

"You would," agrees Dirty. "It's a wonder you got out alive."

"What's the big idea?" I asks. "I suppose you'll use Mrs. Wick Smith as Goddess of Liberty, and Testament will recite the Declaration of Independence."

"Wrong, brother; wrong as usual," says Magpie. "We're goin' to celebrate the Fourth of July with a bullfight."

Dirty snorted some whisky through his nose and almost choked to death. We yanked him back from the Grim Reaper by hammerin' him on the back.

"What in hell has bullfightin' got to do with the Fourth of July?" I asks.

"Why not?" demands Magpie. "Fightin' is fightin', ain't it? You see, the Ladies' Aid Society has got to rise a little money, and we had to have somethin' we could charge admittance. They're puttin' it on under their own auspices. That is, they was."

"What do you mean—was?" I asks.

"Well, it's like this, Ike. Paradise and Yaller Horse has both got a Ladies' Aid Society."

"And they want a cut of the money."

"Uh-huh."

"How'd you fix it up with 'em?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"Easy enough. We'll have three bullfights all at the same time, and the first man to kill his bull wins the money for his Society."

"Three bullfights at once?" snorts Dirty.

"It's a novelty." Magpie nods. "I'm the matador for Piperock, Tombstone fights for Yaller Horse, while Hassayampa Harris opines to beef his bull for the glory of Paradise."

"And," says Dirty Shirt, his loose eye kinda loopin' the loop, "what does you fellers fight with?"

"Swords."

"Swords? Ye gawds, Magpie!"

"And each bull is marked," says Magpie serious-like. "You've got to down your own bull or it don't count for you—it counts for the other feller. We're goin' to build a high fence across each end of the street, leavin' the arena a hundred feet long and as wide as the street."

"And the swords," says I. "Where are you goin' to git 'em?"

Magpie has his answer on the tip of his tongue:

"Easy enough; we'll use the ones we used to parade with, when we had the Knights of the Yallerstone Lodge. I'm goin' to wear the uniform I used to wear when I was Grand Exalted Ruler of the World."

"What'll the rest of the bullfighters wear?" I asks.

"That's their business, Ike. After the fight we'll have a barbecue."

"After the fight you'll have a inquest, you mean," says Dirty. "And if this here country ain't changed a good deal, you'll have to send outside the county to git six able bodied men to act as a coroner's jury."

"Dirty Shirt, you forgit we've buried the hatchet," says Magpie.

Dirty Shirt laughs.

"But you're still wearin' loaded guns, I notice."

"Well," says I, "you can pick yourself a nice, soft hearted old bull and win the money quick, Magpie."

"Can I? You see, Ike, my bull will be furnished by Yaller Horse, we furnish one for Paradise, and Paradise furnishes the one for Yaller Horse."

"Your three-cornered peace conference didn't overlook much," says Dirty Shirt.

"Except peace," says I.

ME AND Dirty Shirt rode to Paradise the next day. In times of war we've allus been more or less welcome down there, but we can feel that friendship is in the sere and yaller leaves, as you might say.

"Are you-all backin' your own hero?" asks Half Mile Smith. "If you are, I'm wagerin' even money on Paradise. If you ain't civic prideful, don't mention Piperock to me, 'cause I'm war-like."

"We didn't come in sorrer nor in anger," says Dirty Shirt, "but if you fang-toothed, crippled crawlers aim to make war medicine—well, you never seen the day you could run a buffalo on me and Ike."

"Don't pay no attention to them two, Half Mile," says Mike Pelley. "They ain't got neither money, brains nor pride."

"The same of which we've got plenty," declares Half Mile.

We has a few drinks of their fightin' whisky, when in comes Yuma Yates, first lieutenant to Tombstone Todd, of Yaller Horse. They had Yuma in mind when they built the penitentiary.

"Well, well!" says he. "I find m'self among the sheep and goats. Whar is all the bettin' money, or ain't you got nerve enough to bet that Tombstone Todd can't kill bulls faster 'n any man in this county. How about you Piperockers? There used to be men up there, before me and Tombstone moved out."

"Was run out, you mean," corrects Dirty Shirt. "You offerin' any kind of odds, or are you jist exercisin' your tonsils? Fact of the matter is, I don't believe there's a hundred dollars of bettin' money in Yaller Horse; I know there ain't in Paradise."

Well, it was jist too bad that Dirty Shirt had that poke of gold; and after three drinks of that liquid flame, I wasn't able to make a protest. It weighed seven hundred dollars.

I don't remember gittin' home, but I do remember there was a lot of shootin'; and I woke up to hear Dirty Shirt sayin' to Magpie:

"There ain't no mebbe about it, Magpie. You've *got* to kill your bull first. Me and Ike bet seven hundred dollars on you."

I opened one eye and seen Magpie sharpenin' a sword on a grindstone, which is bein' turned by Dirty Shirt Jones.

"Put a point on her," says I. "You'll never git nowhere tryin' to slice a bull on the run."

"What do you know about a bull?" asks Magpie.

"Well," says I, "I know there's a difference between throwin' it and spearin' it."

For the next couple days Piperock is the busiest place on earth, aided and abetted by Paradise and Yaller Horse. Me and Dirty Shirt keeps plumb away from all activity and mourns our loss. We seen the bull they brought up from Yaller Horse. He's as long legged as a giraffe, and he'll weigh twelve hundred pounds. If you shot him with a .30-30 the bullet would bounce back and hurt you. And if he don't hate everythin' on earth, his actions shore belies his feelin's.

They put him in a chute and painted Piperock in big black letters on both sides of him. And Paradise brought his equal to wear Yaller Horse on his sides. Piperock ain't picked out the one for Paradise, but the boys are out scoutin' the range. Pete Gonyer painted a banner to stretch across the street in big, black letters;

GLORIOUS FOURTH OF JULY
MOST STUPENDUS SHOW
EVER BEEN SHOWED HERE
3 BULLS 3 MATADORS
LADIES' AID SOCIETY OF
PIPEROCK, PARADISE & YALLER HORSE
ALL FIGHTING AT ONCE.
WINNER TO TAKE ALL
ADMISSION ONE DOLLAR

And they've got another sign, which reads:

ADDED ATTRACTIONS
4TH OF JULY
MRS. TOMBSTONE TODD
AS
GODDESS OF LIBERTY
* * *
PATRIOTIC SPEECH BY
HON. JUDGE STEELE
* * *
PRAYER

TESTAMENT TILTON
* * *
MUSIC BY THE
PARADISE MOUNTED BAND
* * *
DEAD BULL BARBECUE
*

Dirty Shirt said it shore looked interestin', except that he wasn't in favor of a Goddess of Liberty five feet two inches tall, weighin' two hundred pounds. I got hold of Chuck Warner, who plays in the Paradise Band, and he said there was only him and Muley Bowles and Henry Clay Peck in the band these days. Chuck plays a slip-horn, Muley beats the bass drum and Hen Peck plays a flute.

The committee built them fences pretty good, and about in the center of the arena they built up sort of a thing like a judges' stand; some spindlin' two-by-four legs and a platform with a railin' around it. In the middle of this platform they put a tall box. Magpie said that was the pedestal of the Goddess of Liberty. Pete Gonyer put some furniture casters under this box, and Magpie explained that this was so they could turn the goddess around and around, lettin' everybody see her real good.

"It'll be a symbolic thing," says Magpie. "I'm goin' to make up as Uncle Sam and pose with her. She'll hand me a olive branch, which means peace. It'll be pretty to look upon, Ike."

"Danged unusual, too," says I, " 'cause Mrs. Tombstone Todd, even with a olive branch, is a dangerous person. But is all this before or after the bullfight?"

"Before. This is the first thing. Me and Mrs. Todd are all draped over with white cloth, like a couple statues. Pete Gonyer and Scenery Sims holds the ropes which unveils the tableau. When everybody is seated, Chuck Warner blows a couple notes on his horn, Pete and Scenery yanks on their ropes—and there we are.

"After that is over, Testament Tilton says a prayer, and then the judge makes his speech."

"Better have the prayer first, Magpie," says Dirty Shirt. "It's allus better to be on the safe side of things around here."

"It don't matter," says I. "If anythin' goes wrong, prayers are too slow actin' to do any good."

"There won't be anythin' go wrong," says Magpie.

"Where are the bulls goin' to be?" asked Dirty.

"In that storeroom of Wick Smith's. Them big doors gives 'em plenty room to come out. Scenery Sims, Yuma Yates and Ornery Olsen will be up on that platform, judgin' the bullfight. Gents, that is goin' to be good."

"Yeah, it better," says Dirty. "I notice you limpin' a little."

Magpie nods and yanks at his mustache.

"Been practisin'," says he. "Usin' a bale of hay to practise my fatal lunge. Worked fine, except that I slipped once and hurt my ankle a little."

"Dodgin' the bale of hay?" asks Dirty.

"Pretendin' to."

"Well, don't slip today. Any old time you and that Piperock bull gits close together, you jist remember that me and Ike has got seven hundred dollars down on your ability."

"I appreciate that," says Magpie. "It shows confidence."

"It shows danged ignorance," says I.

I UNDERSTAND that the Fourth of July dawned as usual. It was merely hearsay as far as I was concerned. Anyway, I begins to git sort of a clear vision along about noon. I paid my dollar for a ticket, but they didn't furnish any seat. They'd done strung barbed wire fences along the edges of the sidewalks, presumin' to keep away the bulls and make the crowd stay on the sidewalk.

Tombstone Todd is handlin' the bettin' for Yaller Horse, while Hair Oil Heppner negotiates for Paradise. I don't reckon Piperock had any bettin' commissioner, but they had an idea of bettin' plenty on Magpie. You can look into that storeroom and see them three bulls, all lettered up and bawlin' to go.

Here's Chuck, Muley and Hen settin' on their horses, with their slip-horn, drum and flute. The top of the plat-

form is all hung with a lot of white stuff, and on each side is a feller holdin' the pull ropes; Scenery Sims one one side and Pete Gonyer on the other. Right near Scenery is the mounted band.

Everythin' seemed all right until Sizzlin' Singleton, of Paradise, crawled out through the barbed wires and kinda interrupted things.

"Feller-men and wives," says Sizzlin', "Piperock, as usual, is hoggin' things. Our peace conference has done decided on a even break for all three towns. Yaller Horse gits the Goddess of Liberty, Piperock gits the Uncle Sam. Them is both Piperockers unveilin' the Livin' Statues—and what does Paradise git?"

Zin-n-n-ng! Pop!

Somebody throwed a bottle of beer at Sizzlin', and it hit poor little Scenery right in the head. He jist kinda folded up like a push-and-pull organ and sets down. It made me mad. I dunno why it should. Scenery Sims don't mean anythin' to me. And right then I didn't care who yanked that rope. But I crawled out through them wires and walks over, takes the rope out of Scenery's hand and faced that side of the street.

"Sizzlin'," says I, drawin' my gun, "you've got until the count of five to git back through them wires."

He made it in three, but left his pants and one sleeve. Then I says—

"Go ahead with the show, gents; we're all set."

"All right, Chuck!" yells Testament Tilton.

About all I know about this is hearsay. I seen Chuck lift up that slip-horn and rear back in his stirrups; he blowed a blast right down past his bronc's ears that would wake the dead. The next thing I knowed the bronc was halfway over my rope, and I seen that slip-horn turnin' end over end in the air.

Well, I was goin' away from there; and I was shore takin' the rope with me. They tell me somethin' went wrong, but I didn't see all of it. Somethin' brought me up short, and I lit on the seat of my pants in the street, jist in time to see the Goddess of Liberty upside down in the air, headin' for terry firmy; and Uncle Sam, all spread out like a red, white and blue eagle, kinda sailin' down. I heard later that the ropes got twisted. I should have had the one Pete had. I know danged well I shouldn't have had the one I did have, 'cause I got it twisted around one foot and somebody's horse got tangled in the other end.

I'm settin' there, wonderin' which end of Uncle will hit the ground first, when my vertybray went *ru-u-u-u-u-u-up!* jist like a whole train of freight cars act when the engine starts, and I finds myself about two feet off the earth, goin' like hell. I might have been goin' yet, except that the horse stopped to kick me loose from the rope, and my boot pulled off.

Ensues, as they say, a blank spot in my life. I woke up in a chair in Buck's saloon. I recognize Testament Tilton and Judge Steele, but it takes me quite awhile to decipher Tombstone Todd and Hassayampa Harris. Dirty is there, and he's got a gun in his hand.

Tombstone is wearin' red pants, blue coat and a white plug hat, and around his waist is a American flag for a sash. Hassayampa is wearin' tight pants, blue with a white stripe, which looks like part of the Paradise Band uniform. He's got a Woodman of the World coat, and on his head is a brown derby hat which comes down around his ears.

"I tell you, Piperock forfeits all chances," says Tombstone.

"You can't do that," argues the judge. "We've bet lots of money, and it ain't Magpie's fault that he got yanked off that pedestal and incapacitated."

"We gits a chance for our money, or I'll git huffy," says Dirty Shirt. He's so drunk that his one loose eye won't stay put; and when he's thataway he ain't got no feelin' in his trigger finger.

"The way I looks at it," says Hassayampa, "the contest is between me and Tombstone and our two bulls. You see, our agreement was that in case of any one of us was crippled, we'd have to name the man to take our place."

"That's illegal!" snorts the judge. "You know danged well that Magpie bit one whole side out of that bass drum and he can't talk."

"We'll find out if he can't talk," says Dirty Shirt. "C'mon."

Well, they went out where the crowd

is yellin' for the bullfight to take place; and I went behind the bar and helped myself to a bottle of whisky. I filled eight glasses, lined 'em out on the bar, and then went around and started down the line. I'd jist eliminated number seven when I finds the room fillin' up behind me. I manages to git my gun loose, but they took it away from me. Dirty took that last drink of mine while about seven fellers shake me all to once.

I have a hell of a time tryin' to find out what it's all about; and after while I understands that Magpie named me. Me fight a bull? Well, if it wasn't so ridiculous, I'd have got mad. I shore told that bunch where to go. They shook most of that whisky out of my head; and then Testament Tilton, him bein' a minister of the Gospel, got right in front of me and talked slow. There wasn't no chance in the world for me to misunderstand him.

He informs me that the honor and glory, not to mention most all the loose money, of Piperock depends on me. Magpie managed to say my name; and it's up to me. I either do or die.

"Old pardner," says Dirty Shirt, "if I was you I'd rather take a chance on the bull than on Piperock. You don't know what the bull will do, but you do know what Piperock can do to you. And Tombstone and Hassayampa are gittin' ready to make a two-handed game out of it, 'cause they said you didn't have nerve enough to face a bull."

"Gimme that hayknife," says I. "Mebbe I can kill Tombstone and Hassayampa before the bull kills me."

Them seven drinks of whisky hit me about that time, and I've got another blank period; but somebody held my head under water, dang near drownin' me, and I commences to git what Magpie calls lucid periods. I can hear a lot of cheerin' and all that, and here I am out in that arena, lined up with Tombstone and Hassayampa.

I'VE got on a uniform that belonged to Magpie when he was the chief sword swallower of the Knights of the Yallerstone. It was made to fit a seven foot two-by-four; and I'm five feet six—and wide. How they ever got me into it is a question. I've got on a hat with a ostrich plume, and in both hands I've got that sword.

"Bow!" snorts Tombstone. "We're all bowin' to applause."

"I didn't come out here to bow," says I.

"Jist what the hell did you come out here for?" asks Hassayampa.

Well, I didn't know jist then. Everything is sort of a blur. Bulls! That was it. I came to fight bulls. I felt for my gun, and it was gone.

Then I heard Chuck Warner blow a long blast on his slip-horn, and old Judge Steele yells:

"On guard! Turn loose the bulls!"

Man, I shore got lucid then. I started to run one way and my feet started the other, and between us we fell down. I heard them three bulls hittin' the sides of the doorway as they came out; and the crowd is yellin', some of 'em shootin' holes in the air, and some of 'em starts throwin' firecrackers into the arena.

"Git up, Ike, and kill your bull!" screams some feller that prob'ly bet four bits.

I couldn't see no bulls, the dust is so thick. Then one of 'em came out of the fog, and I tried to bulldog him; but it turned out to be Hassayampa Harris, and I let him loose jist in time to meet Yaller Horse's bull. I didn't see his name as I went up, but he stopped to see where he throwed me; and I read the name on my way down. I couldn't lose that sword 'cause it was tied to my wrist, but I ignored it.

I hears a big lot of yellin', and here comes Paradise, one horn hooked in Tombstone's sash, and Tombstone is hackin' away at his horns with the sword. Tombstone is only hittin' the ground once in awhile.

Everybody along my fence is yellin' for me to git up and fight; but I can't see any use of pickin' a fight. If them bulls want me, they know where I am, I reckon.

About that time Hassayampa Harris comes out of that fog, runnin' at top speed, and not over a foot behind him is that speckled bull.

"Turn on him!" screams the crowd.

I reckon the bull understood English, 'cause he skids to a stop, swaps ends

real quick, and comes back to play tag with me. I didn't have a Chinaman's chance. Me and that bull looked into each other's eyes through that fog of dust, and jist then somebody screamed:

"Don't kill him, Ike! That's Paradise!"

And all that saved him was another bull, makin' a blind circle of the arena, crashing into my bull like a runaway train. Of course, I got knocked down and run over, but that wasn't so much. My sword got busted in two, but I didn't mind.

All I could do was wander around in a fog of dust, kinda hoo-hooin' to myself so I wouldn't git lost. I never had any intention of bein' a hero. Piperock had called upon me and I was givin' the best in me for the old town. That's all any man can do.

Well, the bulls are gallopin' agin; so I gits ready to do battle. I seen a bull goin' past, and it shore looked to me like he had one horn through the seat of Hassayampa Harris's pants; but they was goin' too fast for me to be sure.

Well, it sounds like the crowd was goin' crazy; so I yelled with 'em to make it unanimous; and about that time either Yaller Horse or Piperock hit me from the rear, and I landed upside down against the barbed wire fence.

I got away from there and went wanderin' back into that dust fog. I reckon I was halfway across the arena, when I bumped into the rear end of a bull. I reckon he was also wonderin' where to go next; so I grabbed his tail in both hands. I says—

"Bull, whither thou goest, I will go." And we went.

Mebbe that bull didn't know where to go before I tailed on to him, but he shore made up his mind in a hurry. And did we go? We passed more bulls in the next minute than I thought was in all of Montana. I think there was at least twenty of 'em marked Paradise and mebbe more of 'em marked Yellow Horse. I didn't try to spell out the names—jist part of 'em. I never was knowed as a fast reader; but I saw enough to know I was tied off on my own piece of beef.

And every time I passed Paradise, there was Tombstone Todd, still tryin' to dehorn him. Man, I never heard so much noise in all my life. You couldn't see anythin', couldn't hear anythin'. I jist got a death grip on my bull, and didn't pay no attention to any other part of my body or his. All I know is that I've got two hands and one eye left. I know I'm hangin' on, and I must have hands to be doin' that; and I know I've got eyes, 'cause they're full of dust.

THEN comes a tremendous crash and my bull stops dead. Naturally I comes to a more or less sudden stop, and I'm kinda spinnin' around on the seat of my pants when a bull jumps right over me.

Then the world seems to rise up under me, and I grabbed with both hands. I'm tossed around quite a bit; but I lock both legs, and a bull bellers right down my right boot top. I shuts my eyes and tries to make a guess what'll happen next. I'm goin' kinda fast, and I'm expectin' any minute to hit somethin'. The air is clearer now, and I gits to feelin' around. Ears and horns are ahead of me, bein' propelled by a bull.

Sock! A rope catches me around the neck, jerks my feet loose, and down I come in a shudderin' crash. Well, I wasn't in no hurry to move, but after while I sat up. I've got a clothes-line around my neck, and I'm in Wick Smith's back yard.

Hangin' to a busted fence post is Tombstone Todd, a busted sword in his hand, hackin' at a loose picket. Flat on his back, both feet up the same fence, is Hassayampa Harris. He's lost his pants, and that derby is down over his face like one of them iron hats the old-time knights used to wear.

"Whoa! Whoa!" says Tombstone. "Stop before I kill you! Who-o-oa!"

You can't hear jist what Hassayampa is sayin', on account of that derby down over his mouth. It sounds like:

"Pfoof! Pfoof! Hargl, hargl!" And he's workin' both legs, like he was tryin' to run.

I looked off at a bald hill, a quarter of a mile away, and I seen three bulls headin' for the timberline in single file, heads down.

And about that time the crowd finds us. They wasn't sympathetic; I never

expected they would be.

"It was a draw," decides Judge Steele. "That's all you can make of it. All bets declared off."

"Ike spoiled it all," says Hair Oil Heppner. "He hurried his bull agin the end fence and busted it down. I knowed he was too cowardly to fight."

I didn't have nothin' but about six inches of that sword left, and Hair Oil had a gun, but I made a run at him. I mean, I intended to make a run at him; but I never took my legs in on the secret, and they was headed for Wick's house. I reckon somebody roped me before I hurt myself. Anyway, I had another blank period, which are merciful things to have at times. I woke up in Buck's saloon, laid out on the pool table. There's a lot of discussion, and I can see it's night, 'cause the lamps are lighted. I can see Magpie standin' against the bar, and he shore looks like the tail end of a hard Winter. There's lots of folks in there from Paradise and Yaller Horse.

"Well, it's all over now," says Magpie. "I reckon there can't be no real peace among us. Somethin' allus ruins it. Who the hell ever let Ike Harper yank that rope, anyway?"

"He took it upon himself," declares Mike Pelley. "Sizzlin' thought Piperock was hoggin' all the show; so he went out to git a even break for the rest of us. Somebody hit Scenery Sims, and then this iggerent Ike Harper crawled out there, swore he'd shoot Sizzlin', and took the rope himself. You can see how it came out. As soon as he's conscious, Tombstone Todd wants to shoot him for yankin' his wife off that there platform."

"I knowed about that part of it," says Magpie. "I was peekin' from a hole in that drapery and seen what the danged idiot done. I thought for a minute it was his civic pride."

"Civic pride!" snorts Hair Oil.

"I'll civic pride him," says Sizzlin'. "He can't ruin my pants on bob wire and live to gloat over it."

"But what I want to know is this," says Magpie. "Who in hell ever asked him to take my place and fight that there bull? He's the last person I'd ever pick for that job."

"You done it yourself, Magpie," says Hair Oil.

"I never did!"

"Yes, you did, Magpie," says the judge, and Testament backs up the statement.

"It was like this, Magpie," says Testament. "You and Tombstone and Hassayampa agreed that if anythin' happened to any of you, you'd have to name your substitute yourselves. That was the agreement."

"I know it was, Testament," admits Magpie.

"All right. When you was laid out from that Uncle Sam dive you made, we asked you who you wanted to take your place. Don't you remember?"

"You—you asked me what I wanted to do about it?"

"We shore did," says the judge.

"I thought you meant about Ike upsettin' the tableau."

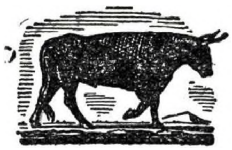
"You said, 'Ike Harper.' "

"Was that all you heard?" asks Magpie painful-like. "Mebbe my voice failed me."

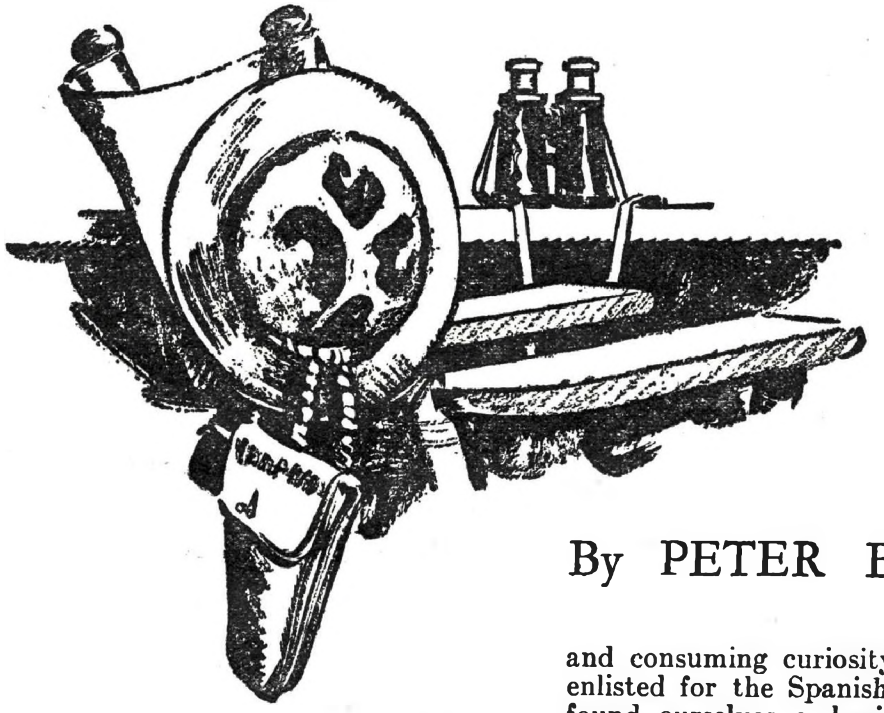
"Failed you?" says Hair Oil. "What did you intend sayin', Magpie?"

"I wanted to say, 'Ike Harper ought to be hung for this.' "

And then I slid off that table, crawled to the back door, and went away. It's shore a queer old place—Piperock.



The Expiation Of PRIVATE O'MARA



By PETER B. KYNE

NOW that I have passed the zenith of my life and am route-stepping toward its sunset, I find there is nothing left to me that is quite so delightful as a little rustic bungalow facing salt water, a wide, deep veranda, a well upholstered chaise longue, some old whisky, some old memories and an old friend with whom I may discuss the last two named delights. That is why I spend at least one weekend a month with Malachi O'Mara, who, like Mr. Kipling's Mulvaney, was a co'pril wanst; but, unlike Mulvaney, was not afterward rejuced.

Malachi and I have been friends since that period of Philippine history that will be known, while one of the Old Army survives, as the Days of the Empire. We were infantry privates then, abandoned wretches of twenty years and consuming curiosity; wherefore we enlisted for the Spanish War and later found ourselves embroiled in the Filipino Insurrection. I was invalided home after six months of that and subsequently discharged; but Malachi, having the constitution of a water buffalo and finding soldiering very soothing to his nationalistic predilections, remained.

Now he is a retired major, with thirty-four years of actual service, but credited with forty because for quite awhile active service in the Philippines counted double time toward retirement. Under the present Army pay bill, which is based on length of service, the genial Malachi, who would still be a bad man to meet in a street riot, draws more retired pay than some brigadier-generals. He is, moreover, the king of poker players and, as he has never married, he always saved something out of his pay. He is a breeder, exhibitor of and dealer in dogs, with Kerry blue terriers a specialty.

In France he lost his left hand, so he draws compensation for half disability, which is pleasing to him because that check enables him to support more dogs. He lives on a wooded bluff at Belvedere, on San Francisco Bay, and is cared for by an old Bantoc boy, a former head-hunter, who has been with him twenty years. Malachi quarrels considerably with Abelardo. When Malachi gets tight, which, as becomes an old soldier, he sometimes does, Abelardo puts him to bed.

When Abelardo gets tight he gets in jail, and Malachi bails him out or pays his fine, takes him home and gives him five lashes with a rhinoceros *kiboko* which Malachi picked up in Singapore for this very purpose. Thereafter Abelardo is very good for a long time. He is a marvelous cook, a perfect housekeeper—thanks to Malachi who, armed with the *kiboko,* makes a thorough inspection each day at noon—and a peerless mixologist. His home-brewed beer is poignantly reminiscent of the past. Malachi swears Abelardo sells some of it, but Malachi doesn't care.

"Did I ever tell you," Malachi asked one late afternoon, as we sat on his veranda and lazily watched the planes settling into Crissey Field across the Bay, "how come I shtarted me upward rise in the Ar-rmy?"

"No," I answered, "and the tale should not lack interest. I did thirty days with you once because you honeyed me into upsetting a native house on stilts one midnight and scrambling the sleeping family more or less."

I'D HAD a dozen summary courts [said Malachi] and wan gineral coort was hangin' over me, whin Auld Cut-The-Daisies, who was our comp'ny commander afther you wint home, forgive me all an' made me a co'pril. Ye niver knew Auld Cut-The-Daisies; he come to us from the Twinty-thirrd Infanthry, an' his name was Reginald Throckmorton; his rank, captain. Sour an' auld he was, but a soger man to the last button. He was kilt in the Camarines, and he did not like me. For that matther, why should he? We called him Auld Cut-The-Daisies from a habit he had—the officers wore swoords in the field in thim days—of walkin' around with his blade unsheathed, cuttin' thoughtful at this an' that.

I mind he cut down a young banana tree whilst contemplating the sthrathegy of an attack at Appari; he kept swishin' at me, with the point grazin' me belt buckle whilst he considhered whether a chevron would reform me or ruin me. God be his comfortin', he decided on the chevron, for betther or for worse, an' sure afther that I didn't have the heart to annoy him. An' now look at me! Barrin' the loss av me left hand, which don't amount to a damn, I've had nothin' but good luck since . . .

Abelardo, ye saddle colored scut! *Mas cerveza! Pronto!*

We were down be the edge av Batangas [Malachi resumed] skirmishin' around in the bosk, an' it the middle av the rainy season, when Auld Cut-The-Daisies received an ordher to bring us back to Pasay, whince we were to march to San Pedro Macarti an' there embark on *cascoes* for the Laguna De Bay counthry. Me heart broke entirely. Ye'll remember we were up there with Lawton's Bill Posters in April av '99 an' did a good job, then abandoned the counthry—an' now we were goin' back to help do it all over agin.

Well, back to Bacoor we marched, an' there we received an ordher to go aboord a *casco* lying on the beach an' shove off into the channel av Bacoor Bay, where we were to drop the anchor an' wait until a launch come from Manila to tow us in. 'Twas a dark an' lowerin' mornin' as we poled off the beach, eighty-odd men an' the captain; the wind was comin' in gintle puffs, an' sure an ape could see 'twas a typhoon blowin' up.

"I misdoubt if I should obey this ordher," says Auld Cut-The-Daisies to the top sergeant, takin' a squint at the weather. "Shtill, an ordher is an ordher —an' may the Lorrd have merrcy on our sowls."

So we pushed off, an' a mile out in Bacoor Bay we dhropped the hook. This at eight in the mornin'. At ten no launch had come for us, but the typhoon had.

"Divil a second longer will I wait for that launch," says Auld Cut-The-Daisies. "We'll go back to the shore." An' wit' that he had us out on the bamboo side-stagin' wit' the long poles, dhrivin' them to the bottom forward an' walkin' aft whilst we pushed.

'Twas murderin' worrk, wit' the wind blowin' agin us; an' finally says Auld Cut-The-Daisies:

"Lads, we'll never make it. Have we an ex-sailor in the lot av ye? If we have, I'll resign command to him."

Praise the Lord, we had one—the comp'ny cook, who'd wanst been second mate on a whaler. He come forward an' wit'out a worrd took the long tiller that conthrolled the big, heavy hardwood sixteen-foot rudder ye mind they have on a *casco*.

" 'Tis unfortunate we haven't a rag of sail, sir," says he, "but the topsides an' the *nipa* shack amidships will do as good."

It was so. Twelve mile we made in forty minutes at the tip av that typhoon, across Bacoor Bay an' out into the channel av Manila Bay. The waves was kickin' up somethin' scandalous, worrse an' worrse as the typhoon gathered itself together; an' finally we shipped a sea.

" 'Tis Kitty bar the door now," says Auld Cut-The-Daisies. "Sure we'll all be drownded like rats. Shtand up, min," says he, "an' sing the National Anthem. We'll die worrthy av the best thraditions av the auld regimint."

"Go to hell," yells the cook. "Who in this an' that could ever sing our National Anthem anyhow, an' who in hell is in command av this expedition, if not me? Ye'll have the goodness to kape yer mouth closed, Captain, an' not be puttin' notions in the heads av the enlisted min."

An' wit' that he give the tiller a hell av' a twist, an' we swung round an' shtarted for the shore on a quartherin' angle. We'd come boundin' out from shore on wan tack an' now we were goin' back on the other, so I knew that cook—may the heavens be his bed, wherever he is this long day afther—was a sailor man.

"Lengthen out gun slings," yells the cook, "an' shlip yer pieces on yer backs, so ye'll have the two arrms av ye free. I'm goin' to beach her. Shtand by to leap overboard the second she hits, for good luck or bad, 'tis the best I can do an' the only thing to do, for out in the channel we'll swamp an' sink like a plummet."

In to the beach we come, ridin' the waves fifteen or twinty feet high, takin' a bit av wather over the weather rail an' some slop over the stern, but gallopin' for it like a mad thing. We rode the crest av a monsther into the beach until it wint from under us—an' shtill we dhrove on. Thin another monsther wave lifted us an' we rode that.

"Here's where we all go to hell together," yells the cook.

We dhrove free for twinty seconds, thin the wave wint from undher us, crashin' up the beach, an' down we come wit' a back-breakin' smash that shplit that *casco* like I'd split the head av you wit' a bolo. An' overside we all wint. We lit on sand in wather up to our armpits, but the next wave lifted us up the beach an' then sucked us back. But sure a dozen o' the lads managed to scramble out av it, an' as we come dashin' back wit' the thirrd wave they grabbed us an' lifted us to our feet, for sure we were helpless on our bellies. So in that way we got ashore, without the loss av a man, although all av our rations, the kitchen equipment an' the field desk would niver catch up with us agin.

"Bless me sowl an' gizzard," says Auld Cut-The Daisies, "but that was well done, an' 'tis the bowld brave cook ye are!" An wit' that he shook hands with the cook. " 'Tis in Paranaque ye've landed us, an' only one march from our objective. Sure we can make that on an empty belly. Do you," says he to the top sergeant, "billet the min in yonder churrch whilst I make reconnaissance."

We had fires goin' in the nave av the churrch, dhryin' ourselves out, when Auld Cut-The-Daisies come in, an' his naked swoord in his hand. An' be that we knew he was in throuble an' was thryin' to think himself out av it.

"Sergeant," says he to the top, "we're in hell's own hole. There's the king of freshets on in the Paranaque River an'

the bridge is out. To make matthers worse we have no rations an' there's none available in this *barrio*. In fact, the population's starvin'; an' to make matthers worrse agin we've a scourge av cholera an' confluent shmallpox here, Lord 'a' merrcy on us. We're due at Pasay tomorrow mornin' where they're congregatin' throops for this Laguna De Bay expedition, an' here we are shtuck fast, like a cow in a bog."

"We'll get a *banca* or two an' cross the river that way, sir," says the top. "'Twill take all hours, but eventually we'll win across an' get there in time, divil a fear."

"There's neither *banca* nor raft in the whole damned benighted counthry," said Auld Cut-The-Daisies, "an' 'twould do no good if there was. They'd be swamped. Come take a look at that hell anointed shtrame."

So we all wint wit' him to look at the Paranaque River; an' faith, 'twas up wit' a vingeance, an' a four-foot choppy wave in midshtrame, wit' the current runnin' twinty mile an hour.

"No man or nothin' could live in that, sir," says the top. "We're marooned in hell, an' nobody knows it but us. Until that river goes down no man may cross it for help. Sure, we're tee-totally lost from the serrvice, since nobody knows where we are."

AULD Cut-The-Daisies comminced slashin' at a patch av weeds growin' along the bank. There was desperation in the face av him. Hunger we could stand, but shmallpox an' cholera might kill us all before we got out of it.

"Would any man in me command be such a fool as to attimpt to swim that river, I dunno," says the Auld Man. "An' since I'd not ordher a man to his death, I'm callin' for volunteers."

Divil a wan of us volunteered. We had followed Auld Cut-The-Daisies through hell an' would agin; but we'd a chance in action and there was no chance in that river.

"The situation is desperit," says Auld Cut-The-Daisies, an' cut down a square yard av weeds. "The man that would get across that river an' sind help for us would find a co'pril's chevrons on the farther bank."

Now heaven knows I'd always wanted to be a co'pril, but I'd lacked the common sinse an' moral courage to work for it through military channels. Av a sudden I was ashamed of me twelve summary coorts-martial an' the gineral coort Auld Cut-The-Daisies had promised me for bein' dhrunk an' disordherly an' shlappin' the snoot av a sergeant that had reproved me. Well I knew I was facin' a dishonorable discharge an' mayhap a year in Bilibid prison, an' as a result I hadn't been shleepin' well for a week.

"Be the toenails av Moses," says I to meself, "here's where Malachi O'Mara reshtores himself to good ordher."

An' wit' that I shtepped up an' give Auld Cut-The-Daisies the big figger four.

"Sir," says I, "Lord knows I'm no credit to the outfit, so I'll do me best to save it from shtarvation or death be disease. If I die in the attimpt, well an' good. If I make the farther bank all must be forgiven; an' at the next guard mount I'm to be the co'pril av the guard."

"Whin I hung up a co'pril's chevrons for that job," says Auld Cut-The-Daisies, "I excluded you from competition, although gladly would I see ye make the effort. God might be good an' waft ye away from me forever."

There was a laugh at me expinse at that.

"I take that ill av the Captain," says I. "He didn't mintion anny exceptions. Sure this is no way to treat anny man."

"O'Mara," says he, "ye're a baltherin' vagabone."

"Beggin' the Captain's pardon, sir," says I, "but the Captain must be a Jew or a Turrk. Certain it is he's no Christian, for such, seein' a man make aminds for his past, would have the dacency to forgive an' forget, an' not lay insults on him forenist his cumrades. To hell wit' a favor from the Captain. May he choke on his co'pril's chevrons. The Captain asked for a volunteer. Private O'Mara volunteers."

"Ye're a grandshtander, like all av yer breed," says Auld Cut-The-Daisies, but I marked that he'd set to work slashing down a new patch av weeds.

"Whin reportin' to the Captain as a volunteer for cerrtain death," says I, "I saluted the Captain. He has not returned me salute. Am I to infer from that bit av military negligence that the Captain, while an officer, is not a gintleman?"

"For a centavo I'd have ye gagged," says he, but he saluted me.

"I ask the Captain's lave to die," says I.

He slashed away another bit av weeds an' finally, says he:

"Well, die an' be damned to ye. Ye're wan enlisted man I have not learrned to love. Whin do ye shtart?"

"Whin I get damned good an' ready, sir," says I, an' wit' that I saluted him, turrned me back an' left him an' the comp'ny there shtarin' at the river.

I wint back to the churrch, helped meself to the canteens av a dozen av me milithary betthers, imptied them all an' jammed the corks down as far as they would go. Ye'll remember the canteen shtraps in thim days was made av white linen. I tied the twelve canteens fast to the cartridge belt after firrst removing the cartridges, for weight was something I could not afford. I thin piled all of me equipment in a corner, shtripped mother-naked an' tossed me few rags av clothin' on top av that, where they'd find them and bring them wit' them if an' whin they left Paranaque.

Wearin' only me shoes, I shtepped out into the open as shameless as Aphrodite herself an' shtruck off up the river bank through the woods. Three mile upriver I wint before makin' the sign av the cross an' makin' an act av contrition for me sins, an' leapin' into the river, but firrst tyin' me shoes around me neck.

MEANWHILE Auld Cut-The-Daisies an' the comp'ny had come back to the churrch, an' be that time the captain was minded to give me a kind worrd or two to take the rough edge off the tongue av him.

"Tell that good-for-nothin' O'Mara to report to me, Sergeant," says he to the top—an' just thin the top spied me equipment an' me clothin' in the corner where I'd put 'em.

"I'm thinkin' he's gone for to try his luck, sir," says the top, "for cerrtain it is ye have one man in yer comp'ny, an' him mother-naked."

"God forgive me," wails Auld Cut-The-Daisies, "I laid too sharp a tongue on him, never dhreamin' he was that sinsitive—the guardhouse rat—an' now he's gone to his death. Oh, wirra wirra, me heart's broke," which was the firrst time anny of them ever knew he had a heart for aught save fightin'.

"'Tis likely he'll thry from upriver, sir," says the top, "figurin' to quarther the shtrame before he's swept down an' out to sea. 'Tis possible we may see him goin' by the town an' wave him a last farewell."

An' wit' that he took off for the river bank agin wit' the comp'ny an' Auld Cut-The-Daisies shtampedin afther him.

All this, av coorse, I hearrd afterward.

Well, sir, I wasn't into that river to me buttocks before the current jerked me off me feet. But wit' the cartridge belt loose enough to shlip up undher me arms an' a dozen impty canteens tied to it, like floats on a fishline, I did not sink, but was whirrled out into the river, ridin' sthraight up. I'd provided a bit av space bechune the canteens to left an' right to give freedom to me arrms, an' immedjiately I comminced paddlin', whilst wit' me legs I give an imitation av a man thryin' to walk on wather.

'Twas terrible. Wanst in the middle av the sthrame where the choppy waves av the channel flipped up an' down like three-foot teeth in a saw, I was sucked down an' up, down an' up; but never, be the grace av God, kept so long undher that I was dyin' for air before I come up agin—thanks to the impty canteens. An inch at a time I fought me weary way across that channel rip, an' from it I won clear half a mile above the town. I was three quarthers av the way across when I wint tearin' by the comp'ny lined up on the bank. An' though I wint by like a bat out av hell I was filled wit' pride, so I waved me arm at thim an' drew a cheer.

"Ye mad divil!" yells Auld Cut-The-Daisies, tossin' his swoord in the air. "Will ye forgive me, O'Mara? Say ye'll

forgive me."

"I do," I yell back at him, "but I want no favors from ye, sir. I'm only doin' me djooty."

" 'Tis the firrst time ye ever did it gladly an' freely," howls Auld Cut-The-Daisies, an' covered his face wit' his hands, for he could not bear to see me, wit' all me faults, swept into the tumblin' maelstrom where the river met the big breakers from the bay.

I was done for. Me legs were like lead, an' I'd quit usin' them; me arrms ached an' I had wather in me lungs an' in me belly.

"Lave be, O'Mara," says I to meself, "an' get it over wit' as quickly as ye can," an' wit' that I let me poor tired legs down—an' shtruck bottom!

Wit' that, new hope brought new strength, an' I heaved an' threw meself an' scrambled; just as I reached the shoreline av the beach I felt the sand shelvin' upward from the channel. Another scramble along the bottom an' I shtood up in three feet av wather. I was in the slack of the current close to shore now; an' because God is good an' the divil always looks afther his own, I managed to stand agin what current there was, although 'twas all I could do. I puked out some wather an' drew three deep breaths, then staggered ashore an' fell on me face on the lip av the river.

'Twas only because me face rested on two canteens an' they in the sand that me nose just cleared the wather, or I'd have drownded in three inches av it afther riding safe through thirty feet av it for three mile.

I rested awhile, puked some more, an' dhragged meself clear before faintin'. They towld me aftherward I lay there half an hour wit'out movin'. Be that time the thought come to me that I had a mission to perform. So I got to me feet, sthaggered in circles a bit an' set off down the beach for Pasay—a matther av three miles—although it might have been three hundhred for all that anybody in Pasay would ever know the Arrmy had lost a comp'ny in Paranaque, for we had no throops bechune Pasay an' Paranaque, an' divil a Filipino would carrry a message for us.

I was till late in the day makin' that three miles, but in the ind I crawled up off the beach an' made me way inland to Pasay. In the middle av the main *calle* who should I bump into but Gineral Lawton, him that was later killed at San Mateo?

"Will ye tell me, soger," he barks at me, "why you presume to appear fornist innocent men, women an' childher in undress uniform? Co'pril av the guard, take this lunatic an' wrap him in a poncho before he disgraces the Service."

"Bad cess to ye, sir," says I—an' fell in a faint at his feet.

Ye recall Lawton, belike. Aye! He was a cavalryman an' could never get over the idjea that infanthry wasn't mounted. Give that man good infanthry, an' he'd overtake an' capture a hive av bees. An' he was good to me that day, for wit' his own hands he held the neck av a bottle av good American whisky to me lips an' scalded me gullet so I came to an' towld him what had happened.

"I'll scalp that man Throckmorton," says he. "Sure, he might have known no launch would be around to tow ye in this day."

"An' why not, sir?" says I. " 'Twas promised—an' he relied on that promise."

"He should know," says the gineral, "that when the friars at the Manila Observatory fortell a typhoon shtrikin' this part av the counthry, the auld Spanish maritime law shtill howlds. A black flag goes up over the office av the captain av the poort, an' wanst that black flag is up no launch may lave the shelther av the Pasig river, whilst all the ships in the bay get out exthra anchors an' prepare for the blow."

I WAS sorry for Auld Cut-The-Daisies, for I knew I'd all but broke the heart of him.

"Sir," says I to the brigade commandher, "I risked me worthless life to save Captain Throckmorton an' the comp'ny. An' why, think you, did I do that? Because he rated it, sir," says I. "If a man's to be judged by the worrst he does rather than the best—"

"So 'tis a guardhouse lawyer ye are," says he, but smilin' a little. "Very well, let be. We've a wire still clear to Ba-

coor, an' I'll telegraph the officer commandin' there to try can he get food across the Zapote river. The cinter span av the bridge is out across the Zapote, but he might cut long bamboos and lay thim across, havin' tools to do it wit'. Thin his min will crawl over with food an' march to Paranaque. In three days we'll sind a launch wit' another *casco* to come in on the beach at low tide an' fetch them away. And, out av courtesy to you, I'll say nothin' to your captain."

"'Tis the comp'ny cook ye should coort-martial, sir," says I. "If the *omadhaun* had beached us north av the river instead av south we'd all be here now."

"He'll be here in time as it is, soger."

"Then ye might see to it, sir, that there's ammunition an' new kitchen equipmint for the comp'ny whin it gits here. We lost all that in the shipwreck."

"Begorra, Private O'Mara," says the gineral, "if Captain Throckmorton don't make ye a co'pril for this day's wurrk 'tis the vile ingrate he'll be. I must speak to him about ye."

"Please do not do that, sir," says I. "The commandhin' gineral should never interfere in the internal administhration av a comp'ny. I'd ha' been a co'pril long ago had I deserrved it, which I did not."

"To hell wit' ye for an obstinate an' talkative Irishman," says he, an' wint off chucklin'.

Whin Auld Cut-The-Daisies arrived wit' the company—an' 'twas three days before the typhoon blew itself out so they could embark agin, land at Manila an' march out to Pasay—I'd new clothin'. I reported to him for djooty, an' found him outside headquarthers in a bit av a garden with a bit av a banana tree growin' in it. He pulled his swoord whin he saw me comin' an' comminced swipin' at the banana tree. He acknowledged me salute an' kept on hackin' away till he'd ruined the banana tree. Then says he, makin' wicked swipes at me belt buckle—

"There was a co'pril's chevrons on the beach where ye landed, Private O'Mara, but I doubt if ye saw thim."

Me pride was up.

"I wasn't lookin' for thim, sir."

"Ye unmintionable pup," says he, "for two shtraws I'd run me swoord through ye. Go to the quarthermasther sergeant," says he, "an' get them. An' see to it that ye have them sewed on by rethreat when the top sergeant reads ye out. Remember, ye will be obeyed an' respected accordingly, until the impident head of ye swells an' busts or the black heart of ye rises wit' sogerly pride an' bids ye wear thim till a vacancy for sergeant occurs. There's hot worrk ahead of us in Laguna province, an' 'tis in nature ye may git yer chance . . ."

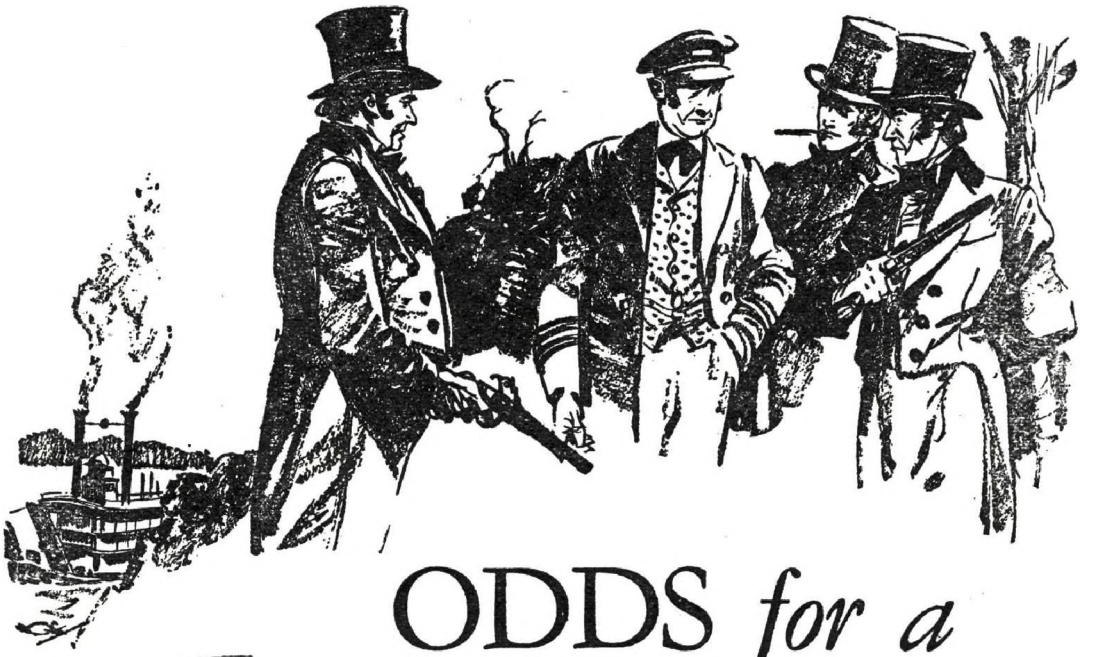
* * *

Abelardo came out on the veranda and glared disapprovingly at Major Malachi O'Mara as he concluded his narrative.

"*Muy mucho hablar*—very much talk," he said. "No more drink. Dinner ready."

The major pulled his big frame up out of the chaise longue.

"Afther chow," he promised, "I'll tell ye how I got me sergeancy in Laguna Province."



ODDS *for a* GAMBLER

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

EVEN before the boat had pulled away Harry was warning the old Senator again about cheating.

"And don't get the notion that I don't mean it! I'm with you in any game anywhere, so long as there's no tricks."

"Why, of course, Harry lad! Didn't I promise you that after the—the little misunderstanding last week?"

Harry smoothed a moon-on-the-water silk waistcoat down over his stockinet trousers, which were the color of vanilla ice cream. He pursed his lips grimly.

"You may call it a little misunderstanding. I call it a mighty nasty situation. If that Yankee had ever pulled the trigger—"

"Of course, Harry lad! Of course! But then, he didn't."

Harry Potter sniffed. He combed his glossy black sidewhiskers and ran a reverent hand over his curls.

"I think the only reason why he didn't was because you were so drunk."

"Oh, not really drunk, Harry lad! Of course, I'd had a little wine—"

"Um-m—a little wine being about eleven sherry cobblers stiffened with cognac and maraschino and the Lord knows what else."

He cocked a beaver upon his head and fixed it at a swanky angle. Then he reached for his coat; but when he saw the expression on the old Senator's face he paused. He smiled—and Harry Potter had a charming smile. He put an impulsive hand upon the Senator's forearm.

"Sorry I'm stewing so. But I really do think you ought to go easy on the liquor, Senator. And positively, I won't stand for any more cheating." He tossed his head petulantly. "There's no need for it, anyway! We're both good enough to win nine times out of ten, and win honestly."

"Of course, Harry lad! Why, of course!"

The young man pulled on a dark blue tailcoat, thoughtfully adjusted his lapels and made for the door.

"I'm going out to watch them pull in the landing planks."

The Senator nodded, smiling. He knew that his dapper young partner was in fact not at all concerned with landing planks. He was not blind, the Senator, for all his years. He had seen Harry bow to that pretty minx from New Orleans. Somebody from a quality family, like Harry himself. Somebody Harry had known in the Vieux Carré back in the days before Harry's family had met bankruptcy and he himself had been obliged to take up the river life. Oh, the Senator knew where Harry Potter would be for the next few hours! And he smiled as proudly as a father when the dandy walked out.

He often felt like a father toward Harry, who resented that attitude with all the vehemence of his excitable nature. He beamed when he saw the youth in fine feathers like this. And he was not at all ashamed to be seen with him, for he was aware that his own dumpy figure, his carelessly arranged clothes, his red and wrinkled face showed up Harry's beauty at its best.

Now he leaned out of the window and watched his partner start down the deck. Harry did not even glance at the scene on the dock, but walked promptly toward the ladies' cabin.

An assistant steward came hurrying along. The Senator hailed him.

"Boy, run forward and fetch me a sherry cobbler." He indicated the desired size with his two hands. "And plenty of brandy in it."

The boy started away. But the Senator called him back.

"And while you're there, get me a pack of cards."

The Senator turned away from the window; there was a worried frown on his face. While talking to the steward he had overheard a man's voice. He had not seen the man, who evidently was around a corner of some deck corridor near this window, but he had caught a few words—enough, anyway, to convince him that there was going to be trouble on this trip.

" . . . name's Martinson. Major Horace T. Martinson of Mobile, sir. Well, I don't play much cards myself, but I guess if . . ."

The Senator knew Major Martinson by reputation. A professional gambler—a professional bully, too—the fellow could be genial enough when he was winning; and he usually did win. But he was a very poor loser. And he was called the best pistol shot from Cairo to the Crescent.

So Martinson was aboard? That was why the Senator had sent for those cards. A promise was one thing, but an unscrupulous sharp was another. He and Harry had very little money left, and Harry would be wanting new clothes when they got down to New Orleans.

When the boy returned, the Senator downed two large swallows and then dried his hands carefully. He took the oil lamp from its socket and lighted it. With large and pudgy fingers, which nevertheless moved as gently as the fingers of an artist doing a miniature, he heated the Government stamp on the card box until it was loose enough to be peeled half off. He took out the cards.

He turned to his carpetbag and took out a razor. But then he paused, shaking his head. No, that would be too apparent.

He put the razor back and fumbled further until he found a tiny ball of stuff which looked like tallow—but it wasn't tallow. This he heated over the flame of the lamp until it became soft, very thin, but not greasy—a pliable, colorless paste. With this, after it had cooled a trifle, he went to work on the aces, the kings and the queens.

It didn't take him long. Afterward he wiped his hands again and finished his drink while he waited for the paste to congeal. Then he put the cards together again and shuffled them, slowly at first, then faster, then slowly again. With eyes closed he selected twelve cards and arranged these on the berth in rows of four. He opened his eyes and looked at them, then nodded, pleased.

He rearranged the cards in their proper order, put them back, and very carefully sealed up the box. He examined the seal and nodded again. He put the cards into a hip pocket, briefly inspected a pistol he carried in the other hip pocket, stepped out on to the prome-

nade deck and lighted a cheroot.

There was nobody in the barroom but the bartender himself. The boat was moving out into the river. The passengers, and most of the crew, were lining the starboard rail.

"Ha, Pete, m' lad, fix me a sherry cobbler, will you?" He glanced through a window on the starboard side. "But first come take a look at this crazy nigger, Pete. Say, that fool's going to fall in!"

Pete, partly out of respect for a customer, partly from plain curiosity, went to the window.

"Which nigger?"

The Senator stepped back of the bar for an instant and placed his package of cards on the top of the small pile there. Then, quickly, noiselessly, he returned to the window.

"That big fellow over by those bales. He's likely to step right over if he dances much closer, eh?"

THE sailing of a Mississippi packet invariably was a thrilling sight, alike for those aboard the packet itself and those who remained on shore. Flags were flying; the band was playing; friends of passengers waved startlingly white handkerchiefs; clerks rushed here and there bawling last minute instructions; and roustabouts, their work finished, stood on bales and barrels and boxes, cheering wildly.

The Senator and the bartender watched for some minutes, until the boat had moved well out into midstream. When they turned back toward the bar they found a dark, heavyset man in a black frock coat leaning against the counter.

The bartender bobbed obsequiously.

"How are you, Major?"

The newcomer nodded.

"Straight bourbon, Pete."

"Sorry. The Senator here had his order in first."

The Senator went to the bar, right arm extended, a winning smile on his face.

"Well, there's no hurry about me, Pete. Anyway, perhaps we could have our drinks together, if this gentleman would care to join me?"

They shook hands, introducing themselves in a perfunctory manner.

"I'm expecting a few friends," Major Martinson said in a make-conversational way. "Going to play a little poker."

"That so? Poker's a game I enjoy a lot."

"Would you care to—uh—join us, maybe?"

"Say now, that's right handsome of you, sir. But I don't want to nose into any private party."

"Not at all, Senator! Not at all! I'm sure my friends would be glad to have you. Ah, here they come now—"

The friends were three. The Senator knew instantly that one was Martinson's capper, the others just suckers.

"This is Senator Trent, gentlemen. We've struck up an acquaintance here, and he'd like to join our little game, if you have no objection. Senator, this is Mr. Carmichael—and Mr. Ryan—and Mr.—uh—what did you say your name was again, sir?"

"Hauser," said the capper; and the Senator almost smiled openly.

Hauser was a tall and bony fellow, emphatically a blond, with a Yankee accent. Ryan and Carmichael were both Louisiana planters, amiable, middle aged, obviously rich.

"Won't you gentlemen join me and Major Martinson in this drink first, eh?"

It was the Senator's habit to drink a lot and permit suckers to think that he was intoxicated. It was easy to do; for nobody, not even Harry Potter, suspected how much the old fellow could stand.

They tossed a coin to determine who would buy the cards, and Carmichael lost. Pete sold the top deck: The Senator noted this even while he was telling a racy story.

As they were seating themselves, the Senator saw Harry Potter passing one of the windows. Harry was in the company of that New Orleans girl, bending attentively over her. The Senator smiled. Harry was a mighty fine poker player; but as long as Major Martinson was going to be in this game, the Senator was well satisfied that his own partner was elsewhere and having a good time.

For the first three hands the Senator held nothing higher than a jack, and so it was not until the third hand, which he himself dealt, that he learned he had the wrong cards.

His fingers never lied to him— Yet he had seen the bartender take this deck from the top of the pile.

He picked up his hand. One of his cards was an ace; and his practised fingers felt the edge of this while he told his fellow players about an hilarious experience in Cincinnati recently.

When he felt the edge of that ace he knew that this deck, like the deck he himself had placed behind the bar, had been doctored by an expert. But not in the same manner. *This* deck had been "stripped"; that is, the long edges of the high cards had been gently shaved with a razor for the dealing of bottoms and seconds. It was a common trick. It was, in fact, precisely what the Senator had first intended to do with his own pack.

And, of course, that explained everything. Major Martinson, with his capper and a couple of good suckers soon to appear, had hastened to the barroom during the sailing excitement, as the Senator had done—and for the same purpose. But it had not been necessary for Martinson to distract the bartender while he placed his fixed cards on top of the pile; for the bartender and the Senator, alone there at the time, had both been looking out of a window.

So they were playing with Martinson's cards. The fact merely amused the Senator. There was plenty of time. He downed two more drinks, talking gayly all the while. Luck was running against him, even though he never went into a pot when Hauser or Martinson dealt. But this didn't trouble him either. He'd had sixty-two dollars with him, and already he had lost forty dollars of this.

Repeatedly while he played he saw Harry Potter pass that barroom window in the company of the girl from New Orleans. Harry was having a wonderful time, and this made the old Senator happy. Undoubtedly the girl was falling in love with Harry. Any girl would fall in love with a lad as attractive as he. The Senator beamed—and ordered another drink.

"Don't you think you're pushing them down pretty fast, Senator?"

This was Hauser. He and his partner feared that the unexpected addition to their game would get drunk too early.

"Well, I'm losing a bit, but that don't bother me."

Hauser added hastily:

"I didn't mean to presume to tell you how much you ought to drink, of course! Only I was about to suggest we raise the ante, and I didn't like to take advantage of you in case you were feeling your liquor a bit, see?"

"Not at all! It's an excellent suggestion, sir. Let's make the limit five dollars, eh?"

Ryan and Carmichael were willing, and so was Hauser. Major Martinson feigned reluctance for a short time, and then he too consented. And the Senator ordered another sherry cobbler.

Harry Potter and his pretty companion walked past again. Passengers drifted into the barroom, drank for a time, watched the game for a little while and drifted out.

IT WAS the Senator's deal. He handed the cards to the capper for the cut, and while Hauser was cutting them the Senator achieved the climax of yet another story. Roaring with laughter, he spread his palms—and his right hand knocked over the sherry cobbler.

He was all apology. With his own handkerchief he insisted upon wiping Hauser's sleeve and hand, and he called for the bartender to remove the broken glass and to wipe the table.

"And bring us another deck, too. I'm afraid I've ruined this one."

There was, of course, the chance that Martinson had placed two decks of marked cards on the bar against the possibility that somebody else might be there first to buy the top one. But this was unlikely. And the first touch of the new cards, when he dealt them, reassured the Senator. Now, at last, he had his own weapons with which to fight that dirty cheat of a Martinson. He dealt himself three kings and dealt Martinson three queens, and made a

good pot. He was barely in time about this. He had been down to his last few chips and had only two silver dollars left in his pocket.

After that he won handily, and always at the expense of either Martinson or Hauser. Those two despicable card sharps were furious, but the Senator was having a wonderful time.

But Martinson was darkening like a Summer evening's horizon; he was talking less, almost growling when he did talk, and watching the Senator with eyes bright with hate. Martinson, the Senator knew, was only guessing that the cards were doctored. There were some gamblers skilled enough to recognize cards like these, but the major was not one of them. Nevertheless, he was getting suspicious. So it would be well for the Senator to quit soon; and in preparation for this event he took another drink.

"Beats me how you can win like this when you're so liquored," Carmichael observed.

"Me?" The Senator wagged his head in mock indignation and made his voice thick. "Why, I'm not drunk!"

"Hum-m—" said Major Martinson.

It was at this moment that Harry Potter came into the barroom. For some time now the Senator had not seen Harry pass the window; he had been wondering what had happened to Harry.

Well, whatever it was, it had not been pleasant. The Senator was alarmed when he saw his partner's face. Harry was pale as a ghost. He did not even notice the poker game. He went directly to the bar, where he ordered and drank two straight whiskies in quick succession. Then he ordered a third whisky; and when he had downed that he turned quickly and walked out—walked right past the poker game again without seeming to see it.

The Senator was worried. He knew that Harry Potter seldom drank whisky and never drank anything alone. He was familiar with Harry's intense, youthful moods; but he was convinced that this was more than a mood. The lad had been hurt by something, and hurt horribly.

"Your deal, Senator."

He shook his head. He rose, remembering to sway a bit and to hiccup.

"I think li'l walk aroun' the deck maybe—"

"Some dinner might help," Carmichael suggested sympathetically.

"Yes—li'l walk—li'l dinner . . . "

He pushed his chips toward the center of the table. Ryan, who was banking, counted the chips and handed over the cash without question; but Hauser and Martinson were furious. Martinson, in particular, was dangerously angry; his face was a deep red, his chin was low, and there was an ominous flash of teeth under his black mustache.

But the Senator didn't care. He was concerned only with Harry Potter. He stuffed the cash into his pocket without counting it; he knew how much it was—three hundred dollars. He muttered something about rejoining the gentlemen later, and staggered out.

It was growing dark, the end of a long Summer day. The boat throbbed mightily as it pushed through water that was changing from a cream-and coffee color to a deep chocolate.

Harry was not on the promenade deck. The Senator went up to the Texas and found him there, alone, leaning against the rail just forward of the starboard paddlebox, and staring gloomily down at the water. A cub was in the pilot's house, but nobody else was in sight. Most of the passengers already had gone to dinner.

"How 'bout some poker, Harry lad?"

Harry did not even turn his head.

"I don't feel like it."

"What about some dinner then? The gong rang ten minutes ago."

No answer.

"Don't feel like dinner either, eh? What do you feel like? You look as though you felt like committing suicide, the way you stand there."

Harry said slowly, earnestly—

"As a matter of fact, Senator, that's just what I was thinking of."

THERE could be no question of the man's sincerity. The Senator knew his partner too well to break into tut-tutting or pooh-poohing Nor would bluster be of any help. Instead, the Senator

shrugged carelessly.

"Lord, Harry lad! Because a girl's cool one day that don't mean she's going to be cool the next, does it?"

"Oh, *she's* all right!" Harry suddenly stood erect.

He took off his hat and held it in front of him while he scowled at a passing flatboat.

"*Janet's* all right! And even if she should turn me down, I wouldn't be so cut up about it. I like her well enough, yes. Always have. We used to play together when we were children. But I'm a long ways from being in love with her." He put his hat on again with a snap. "It's that damn family of hers," he muttered, returning to the rail and to his contemplation of the water.

The Senator knew when to be silent. It pained him—really, physically pained him—to see Harry unhappy like this.

At last Harry said without looking up:

"I've known the Chauvins as long as I can remember. Our family used to have dinner with them, and Janet's brother and I took riding lessons and fencing lessons together; and I was best man when he got married, and all that. I think we're even kin of some kind, though it's mighty distant. Of course, that was before my father died and I learned I was poor."

The Senator said nothing. He was beginning to understand.

"So when I met Janet on this boat, naturally we got together again and talked over old times. And then her mother came up to me. Like ice, she was. Said she was glad to meet me again and hoped I was doing well, but she thought it was time Janet went to her stateroom. I told her Janet and I'd agreed to sit together at dinner. She said she didn't think that would be proper. I began to realize there was something odd about her manner, and I asked her what was wrong. Then she came right out with it. Told me she didn't care to have her daughter seen in public with a—with a—" Harry looked up. "Senator, you know what she called me?"

The Senator knew, but he didn't dare to say it.

"She said she didn't want Janet seen with a common steamboat gambler. And the terrible part about it is that she's right. She's absolutely right . . ."

There were no protests from the Senator; protests would only antagonize his friend. Very gently and quietly, he led Harry away from the rail and toward the steps down to the promenade.

"We both need dinner."

The young man held back.

"They might be in there."

"I'll look in first for you."

They weren't in there. Harry suggested that probably they'd ordered the meal sent to their stateroom so as to avoid the embarrassment of having a common steamboat gambler bow to them in the dining saloon.

"If it'd been a man, I could have challenged. And I would have too! But you can't call out a fat woman!"

The Senator selected a choice claret, but Harry refused to touch it. Harry ate very little, poked at his food, head low, chin upon his chest.

"She was absolutely right," he muttered once.

Abruptly he pushed his plate from him, long before the Senator had finished his wine and food.

"Don't drink any more of that stuff," he said, "or you'll be drunker than you are now. I'm going for a walk."

The Senator finished dinner, finished the wine too. The wine did make him a bit drunk, he realized as he hurried out looking for Harry. But vinegar would fix that, later.

He found Harry leaning against the same portion of the Texas deck rail. That spot made the Senator a trifle dizzy. The water was a considerable distance below; and anybody who might jump or fall here would be caught promptly in the great, clattering paddle-wheels and dashed to pieces. Was that why Harry had selected this spot? The Senator touched his arm.

"Now what about that poker, Harry lad?"

"I don't feel like playing. You go back in."

If Harry could be interested in poker, all might be well. Harry was a serious player, steady, relentless, slow; when he

sat at the table he gave to the cards every bit of his attention.

"I can't go back," the Senator lied. "They cleaned me out. I got just two dollars left, and it's a five-dollar game. But you could beat 'em easy. I could have beat 'em myself if I'd been sober."

Harry frowned, and for the first time his thoughts came away from the Chauvin family.

"The dirty sharps," he rasped, "cleaning you out when you're drunk!"

It delighted the Senator to hear this. It meant, for one thing, that Harry was not so immersed in self-pity that he couldn't remember his partner and friend. For another thing, and more important, it meant that Harry would play poker.

The Senator knew just how much money Harry had—sixty-two dollars. They always split exactly even after every game. But he also knew that Harry was a good enough player to make that sum go a long way even in a five-dollar game. Ryan, Carmichael, Hauser and Martinson were going clear to New Orleans; it would be an all-night session.

"Go in and clean up, Harry lad. Get that money back for me, eh?"

Harry grumbled, but he moved away from the rail.

"I've always got to be getting you out of trouble—"

FIVE minutes later the jubilant Senator was introducing Harry to the poker players.

"This gentleman's going to take my place so's I can give all my time to drinking."

The others were affable, but the Senator could see that Martinson still was losing and was in a towering rage. Harry bought sixty dollars' worth of chips and sat in. The Senator went to the bar.

"Give me a cordial, Pete," he said in a loud voice. Then for Pete's private ear he whispered, "Meaning vinegar."

Pete grinned, and served him vinegar in a cordial glass. Somebody at the poker table said something about not understanding how any man could hold that much; and Harry, not altogether without a note of pride in his voice, said—

"He drank a whole bottle of St. Julien at dinner too."

The Senator finished his drink and shoved the glass back across the bar.

"Same again, Petey lad."

The vinegar made him wince, made him shudder the whole length of his body. But it straightened his gently rocking brain, and it steadied his hand. He hiccuped, waved loosely at the card players and zigzagged for the door.

Up on the Texas deck two negroes were tuning their fiddles, and men were stringing up festoons of Japanese lanterns; there would be dancing there soon. But the Senator was not interested in dancing. He walked around and around the promenade deck, and sometimes, when nobody was in sight, he stopped to peer into the barroom from a window on the larboard side; the window was protected by jalousies, so that he could see without being seen.

Harry was winning, but not much. Hauser seemed a little behind, and Martinson obviously was losing heavily. Martinson was in a black cloud of rage, and from time to time he glared at Harry Potter from under his shaggy black brows.

Once when he went to this window the Senator scented trouble. He had an instinct for trouble.

Harry was handing the cards to Hauser for a cut. And he was glaring at Martinson, on his left. Ryan and Carmichael were looking perturbed.

The Senator could not see Hauser's face.

"And I tell you he was not winning when he quit the game. He'd been cleaned out. He told me so, outside."

Martinson snorted.

"That's part of the business, I suppose?"

Harry had started to pick up the cards, but he paused; he had not taken his gaze from Martinson. The others were silent, frightened.

"What do you mean by that remark, sir?"

The watching Senator first thought of hurrying around to the door and staggering in, pretending to be riotiously drunk, breaking up the game by fall-

ing over the table—anything like that. He knew Harry's quick temper, and knew of Martinson's.

But Martinson's next words—or rather, the voice in which he uttered them—convinced the Senator that there would be no time for such a course. So without hesitation he drew his pistol, cocked it, set the end of the barrel between two of the slats and sighted on Martinson's heart.

"I mean that I think your friend, Trent, won by questionable methods. I mean that—"

Harry cut in—

"You've said enough for a low-life bully!"

He rose, pushing his chips to the center of the table. Martinson's face, previously dark red, became almost black; and his right hand moved toward a waistcoat pocket. If that hand had moved a little farther Martinson would have been a dead man.

But the major put his hands back on the table; both of them. He reached for the cards.

"You're leaving, eh? I guess it's my deal then. Give him his money, Ryan, and let him go."

Ryan pushed over some cash. Harry placed this in his wallet, and then addressed himself again to Martinson.

"Are you prepared to apologize to my friend for what you said about him? And to me for saying that I'd associate with a cheat?"

Martinson grunted. He was dealing the cards.

"Of course not."

"Then, sir," Harry said, "you will hear more about this, very soon." He started for the door.

"I'll be right here," Martinson called after him.

The Senator thrust his pistol back into a hip pocket and scurried to the stateroom. He'd scarcely had time to throw himself into the lower berth when he heard Harry's step.

The young man came inside slowly, fumbled for the lamp, lighted it and gazed with a sniff upon his partner.

"Are you sober enough to carry a challenge?"

The Senator opened his eyes.

"Eh?"

Harry repeated the question.

The Senator nodded foolishly, making an O with his lips.

"Decided to fight the fat mother after all?" he asked.

"Don't be silly, please! I'm going to call out Major Martinson."

"No?"

"Yes!"

"But he's a crack shot, and you couldn't hit a barn."

"Do you think that makes any difference to me?"

The Senator knew that it didn't.

"What was the quarrel about?"

"Something personal."

"Anything to do with me?"

"No. I was insulted personally. There's no use arguing, Senator. I'm going to fight him, and the sooner the better."

But the Senator wasn't arguing. He was keeping up the talk in order to give himself a chance to think. He knew Harry's stubbornness. And even if Harry could be talked out of the thing—and that would be impossible—even then, Martinson would insist upon fighting. A man like Martinson thrived on duels and the publicity they meant.

Of excuses there could be none. They were even now bumping the levee at Memphis. The challenge could be written, delivered and accepted in Tennessee; the next morning they could fight in Mississippi; and long before there were any indictments, the survivor would be in a third State, Louisiana.

The fact that they were on a boat meant nothing. The captain of the *Yorktown* was known to be an enthusiastic adherent of the duel. The boat was to carry mail from Memphis as far south as Natchez. There were dozens of small landings on that trip, near any one of which the meeting could be staged. The captain would arrange to have some piece of machinery conveniently broken at one of those places. It had been done before; it could be done again.

All of this Harry Potter knew. Major Martinson knew it too.

"I'm assuming you're willing to deliver, Senator. But I'm worried about whether Martinson will consent to ac-

cept it from you."

"Why?"

"Because you're so drunk. It might make the thing irregular."

The Senator had forgotten that he was supposed to be drunk.

"In case he doesn't, do you know anybody else on board we could ask to do it?"

And now the Senator had an idea. He nodded slowly.

"There's Wrathway. Burton Wrathway. I saw him come aboard just before we did. Good family and all that, though he's pretty down and out now, from what I hear. But he must have been involved in plenty of affairs of honor in his time."

"Do you know him well enough to ask him?"

"Oh, sure."

"Let's go to the writing room then."

Now the writing room, the Senator had estimated, was just where Burton Wrathway could be found. If Wrathway had a single dollar in his pocket he'd be at the bar. Wrathway would do anything for money, these days.

BURTON WRATHWAY was there, as the Senator had predicted. The Senator introduced him to Harry, and then Harry sat at one of the tables to pen the challenge; and meanwhile the Senator and Wrathway had a long, very serious, very low voiced conversation. Wrathway nodded several times. They ceased talking abruptly when Harry Potter returned to them. Wrathway read the challenge.

"All right. Now go up to your stateroom," he directed. "We'll let you know as soon as we get the answer. Meanwhile, it'd be best for you to be out of sight."

Harry bowed very formally and stalked out. He held himself rigid, frowning, with tightened mouth. He looked younger than ever.

After this the Senator took a roll of banknotes from his pocket and handed this to Wrathway.

"But remember—not a drop till this whole business is finished!"

"Not one drop," Wrathway promised. "Come on."

The four poker players looked up suddenly when this pair entered the barroom. All of them knew what was coming. Even Pete, the bartender, probably knew or guessed.

The Senator reeled slightly as he approached the table, and his face was extraordinarily serious. He halted dramatically in front of Martinson and drew a letter from an inside coat pocket.

"Major Martinson, I have a message for you, sir."

Martinson asked quietly—

"Is it a challenge?"

"It's a challenge," the Senator said.

He glanced at the others. They didn't stir. They were willing to be present.

"I'll accept it," Martinson said.

The Senator started a bow, swayed, stumbled in recovering his balance and dropped the letter. Wrathway picked it up and handed it to the major, who opened it, scarcely glanced at it, and with a gesture of bravado tossed it aside. Martinson looked across to his capper.

"You'll act for me?"

Hauser said he would.

"The writing room would be the best place for a discussion," Wrathway said. "Nobody's there now."

So they went to the writing room. The Senator declined to enter. He said he still needed air; Mr. Wrathway could make all necessary arrangements for him. So Wrathway and Hauser went inside and talked for a long time. Then they went here and there about the boat, which was still in dock at Memphis. They saw the captain. They saw at least one passenger. And eventually Hauser went back to the barroom, while Wrathway rejoined the Senator on the afterdeck and went with him to see Harry.

Harry had been lying on his berth, half dressed, but it was clear that he had been fully awake. He sat bolt upright. The Senator bowed and reported pompously:

"Major Martinson has been handed a challenge and has accepted. He has appointed Mr. Hauser his representative. All details have been arranged. Captain Hawkins has kindly offered the use of his own pistols, which neither principal has ever handled. The dis-

tance will be fifteen paces, the signal a handkerchief jerked from a point midway on the line of fire by a person to be agreed upon by both representatives. Firing will continue until either principal has been pronounced by Dr. Winterhaven to be incapable of fighting any longer. Dr. Winterhaven is a passenger and a skilled surgeon, who has kindly consented to act in this affair."

Harry nodded seriously. The Senator continued, talking as though he were garbed in a toga and reading from a rod-wound scroll:

"The meeting will be tomorrow morning as soon after four o'clock as the light permits. At about that time the boat is due at Maxford's Landing. The boat will be kept at the landing until the affair has been concluded. The only witnesses are to be Dr. Winterhaven, Captain Hawkins, and a nigger to carry coffee; but each principal has the privilege of inviting one personal friend in addition. I believe that's all."

"Thank you," said Harry. "Now I think I'll go to bed."

"Excellent idea. I think I'll do the same thing myself."

They bowed to Burton Wrathway, who bowed in return.

"Good night, sir, good night."

"Good night, gentlemen."

The Senator undressed rapidly and took the lower berth. Harry Potter undressed more slowly; he was nervous, and he didn't wish to have even the Senator notice that his hands were trembling. He got into the upper berth and blew out the lamp. For some time there was silence in the room.

Presently—

"Senator?"

"Yes?"

"You awake?"

"Yes."

"I just wondered how we'll know when we get to this place. Suppose we oversleep?"

In the darkness the Senator smiled. He only hoped that the brave lad would get some sleep!

"The captain's sending his nigger to notify us. So snooze away. You want to be good and fresh when the time comes."

The Senator himself didn't sleep much. He lay listening to Harry's irregular breathing and nervous twistings and wondered whether he'd done the right thing. It had been the best thing he knew. He just couldn't bear the thought of permitting that boy to get hurt.

It was still dark when the captain's boy came knocking softly.

"You-all want coffee?"

"Not now," the Senator said. "Out there."

The boy scurried away, wide eyed, looking over his shoulder.

IT STILL was dark; but dawn was breaking through the river mist. The big white boat moved like a specter toward the tiny pier. There was the subdued clang of a signal bell; there was a creaking of ropes, some muffled grunts, the scrape of a landing plank.

They went down to the main deck, where they found Wrathway, the captain and Dr. Winterhaven. The captain was holding the pistols, in a red leather case, under his arm.

The only light that showed on the boat was from high above, where the pilot looked down at them from his glass house. The captain had invited him to witness the affair, but he was a Yankee and chary of duels. He was afraid he'd get into trouble.

"You go ahead," Dr. Winterhaven said to the captain. "I'll show the other gentlemen the way. I've been here before."

The air was warm and sticky. It was growing lighter all the time. The grass was wet, slippery. They ascended a small incline, went over a little mound and entered a path in the woods. The path was easy to follow, for they had come above the mist now. Spanish moss hung in dank clumps from the branches of the trees. The silence was complete; even the birds had not yet awakened.

They came to a large oval clearing, free of any tree or bush, where dew glittered in the onrushing dawn. The place might have been designed as a dueling ground. Harry examined it thoughtfully.

"Which way will we stand?"

Wrathway only smiled and turned away to whisper to Captain Hawkins. Harry appealed to the Senator.

"How will we stand?"

The Senator shrugged. He was buttoning his coat tight about him, though it was warm in the clearing; he pulled his hat low and removed a stud from his cravat and a withered flower from his buttonhole.

In a few minutes the others arrived—Dr. Winterhaven, Major Martinson and Hauser, followed by the captain's boy staggering under the weight of a huge coffee urn. There were hooks around the sides of this urn, and cups hung from them. The thing was used, ordinarily, for serving coffee on the deck of the *Yorktown.*

Major Martinson went directly to the Senator and waved a piece of paper under his nose.

"You damn fool! *You* signed this thing!"

The Senator turned his back.

"You wrote it all! I just discovered that a little while ago!"

"Please address yourself to Mr. Wrathway, my representative."

Harry cried:

"But he didn't write that challenge! *I* wrote it!"

The Senator shook his head.

"Not that one, Harry lad."

"Good Lord! You mean you were drunk and challenged this man yourself?"

"I guess that's what must have happened. I sort of lost your challenge and I didn't want to put you to all the trouble of writing another, so I just sort of wrote one myself."

Martinson and Hauser were raging at Wrathway.

"I didn't understand I was to fight this fellow!" Martinson pointed to the Senator. "This business is irregular!"

"It's perfectly regular. You called Senator Trent a cheat, he wrote a challenge, you were handed that challenge, and you accepted it. It's not our fault you didn't read it properly until this morning."

"But he handed it to me himself!"

"He did not, sir. I handed it to you. I did that in the presence of my principal and of your own representative, besides two disinterested parties. Probably the bartender saw it too."

"But—but he made the arrangements himself!"

"My principal," said Wrathway sternly, "did nothing of the sort. He accompanied me when I delivered the challenge, and later he walked with me and with Mr. Hauser as far as the entrance of the writing room. But he had no hand in making the arrangements, except insofar as he conferred with me as his representative."

Hauser said—

"And if we refuse to fight?"

"The whole thing has been perfectly regular. If you refuse to fight it will be my duty to post your principal as a coward, a bully and no gentleman, on every steamboat in the lower river. Please decide promptly. The sun will be up very soon."

Harry, open mouthed, wide eyed, was shaking his partner's arm.

"But, Senator, you can't do this!"

"Why can't I?"

"If you were so drunk—"

"A man can waive his own drunkenness. Besides, I was the challenging party myself."

"But—but I want to fight him!"

"You can have what I leave."

"But he may—Lord, Senator, he may kill you!"

"Harry lad, before you were even born I was splitting the wafer at a greater distance than fifteen paces. And I've had a certain amount of experience since then, too. And not all on wafers." He pushed Harry back. "Step aside, lad. They've measured it, and here comes Wrathway to place me. There's nothing you can do now."

WRATHWAY placed his principal as Hauser placed his. They faced each other. Wrathway looked at Hauser, who nodded. Each thrust a loaded pistol into the left hand of his principal, muzzle down.

Wrathway announced in loud tones:

"Gentlemen, the representatives have agreed that Captain Hawkins will give the signal. He will first call, 'Prepare to fire,' at which the principals may place their weapons in high firing posi-

tion. If either principal fires before the handkerchief is removed, he will be killed instantly by one or both of the seconds."

He drew a pistol of his own, cocked it and stepped aside. Hauser did the same.

On the green, green grass midway between the Senator and Major Martinson lay a handkerchief terrifyingly white.

Captain Hawkins stood about halfway between the duelists, but well out of the line of fire. In his right hand was one end of a piece of string; the other end was tied to the handkerchief.

"Prepare to fire, gentlemen!"

The Senator took his pistol in his right hand, raised it above his head, muzzle up, and cocked it. There was no flabbiness, no frowsiness, about him now. He was gazing with a hard, arrogant smile at Major Martinson.

And Martinson, he saw, was less angry than frightened. Yes, the man was frightened! Facing an unexpected enemy had brought panic to him. Oh, it would have been very fine to kill an inexperienced lad like Harry Potter! That would have been just the sort of thing the major enjoyed. But this old Senator person who always held aces to your kings, who could drink more than three ordinary men and still play baffling tricks, who could stand motionless with his pistol—motionless, smiling, taunting—that was something quite different; and the major was frightened.

And the Senator smiled.

The handkerchief was jerked away. Both arms descended, both pistols exploded. The shocked air was filled suddenly with smoke and the smell of gunpowder.

Major Martinson's knees doubled under him and, half turning, he fell backward. He was screaming with pain.

Wrathway hurried to his principal and took the smoking pistol.

"Kill him?" he whispered.

"No. Just in the elbow as he was bringing it down."

"You're not touched?"

The Senator shook his head.

Captain Hawkins remained where he was, holding the string. Hauser and Dr. Winterhaven were on their knees beside Major Martinson, whose screams had subsided to whining, whimpering sounds. Harry Potter, on one side, was open mouthed, pale, staring at his friend.

Presently Hauser stalked across the clearing to bow before the Senator and his second, who bowed in return.

Hauser addressed himself only to Wrathway.

"Sir, my principal has been hit in the right elbow and his arm is broken. Dr. Winterhaven will not tolerate a second shot. But my principal refuses to consider this matter closed and wishes to meet Senator Trent at some future date."

"I don't fight cripples," the Senator growled. "But I'll leave you an address where a letter will always reach me."

They bowed again, and Hauser gave them permission to quit the field. The Senator thrust his arm through that of Harry Potter. Wrathway hurried ahead.

It was full daylight when they got back to the boat, and the mist had lifted. Deck hands were busy here and there. Passengers were emerging, yawning, from their staterooms. A steward hurried back and forth with white pitchers of hot water. Pete, the bartender, came out of his main deck cabin for a breath of fresh air and was pounced upon by Wrathway, who handed him something and hustled him toward the barroom.

"You're certain you're not hurt?" Harry asked again.

The Senator shook his head.

"But you're trembling all over, Harry lad. You ought to have a drink. I see the bar's opening—"

"No more drinking before breakfast! We've had too much of that. If you hadn't been drunk last night all this wouldn't have happened."

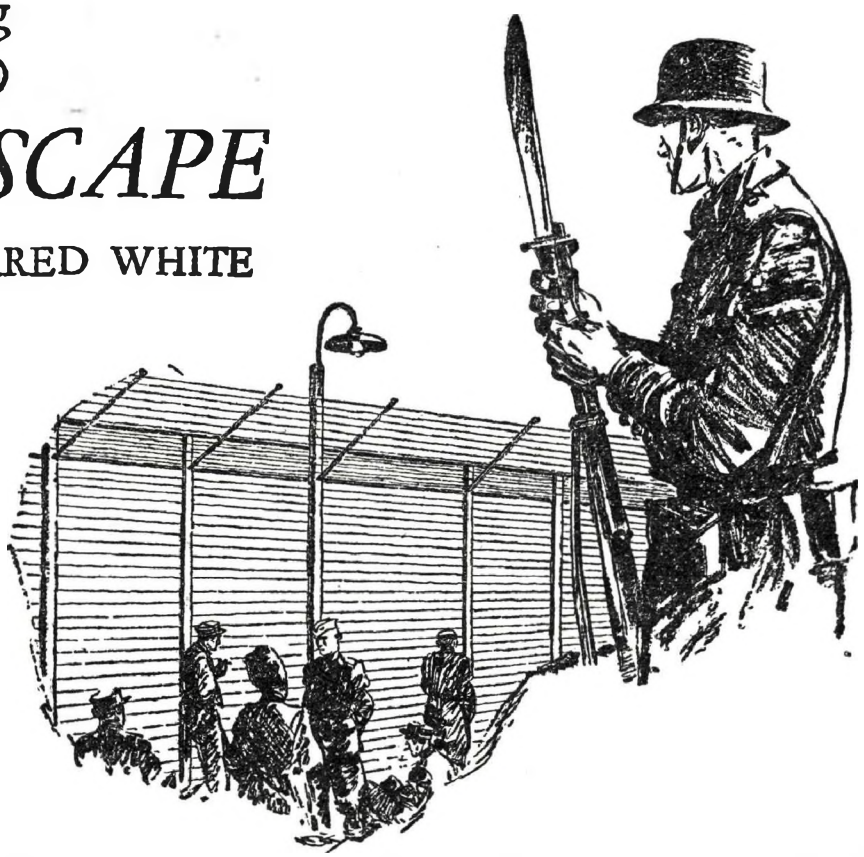
"Um-m. I suppose that's right, Harry lad."

Anyway, the Senator thought, he had only two dollars left, and that wouldn't purchase many cobblers. But then, Wrathway had lots of money now. And within an hour Wrathway would be buying champagne for everybody on the boat. So it looked like a pretty pleasant trip after all.

Continuing

ESCAPE

By ARED WHITE



The Story Thus Far:

WHEN Sergeant Gill led four men on a sortie into No Man's Land he had no idea he would soon be far behind the German lines, at Ulm, imprisoned in a dungeon with his corporal, while his other three men were confined in the German stockade. But the patrol had been unluckily trapped in a shellhole, and rather than sacrifice himself and his men to no purpose Gill had surrendered.

Questioned at German headquarters by Hauptmann Waldefischbach, the three American privates—Van Blick, Maurice and Marr—stubbornly refused to give information. Corporal Sandstrom not only refused but, angered by tempting offers of freedom and special rations, insulted Hauptmann Waldefischbach. For this outburst not only Sandstrom received fifteen days, but his superior noncom, Sergeant Gill, was sentenced to ten days in a cell. Meanwhile the three privates mingled with the other prisoners of war in the Ulm stockade.

At the end of his ten-day sentence in the cell, Gill was transferred to the stockade. He sought his comrades. He was discovered by Van Blick, who, in spite of lean rations, seemed irrepressibly buoyant.

"We been expecting you all day, Sarge!" he exclaimed. "We're all set for escape—and tonight's the night! All it needs is you to put on the finishing touches. We can't go back by way of the Front; so it's Switzerland or bust!"

SERGEANT GILL showed no enthusiasm at Van Blick's sweeping announcement. He cast a quick look about. They were alone in the middle of the enclosure with no one within earshot.

"What mischief are you up to now, in my absence, Van Blick?" Gill demanded.

"Sarge, I'm telling you we got a hole in the wall. A Belgian let us in on it. He's been working on it for nigh on a year and all it needs is a couple of kicks and out we go, hell bent for the border."

"A hole in the wall—where?"

"Right in quarters, through the main wall, Sarge. A brick at a time, this duck has scraped it out with nails. He puts the bricks back in place every morning and carries the mortar out in his pocket. It's a neat trick and it lets us right out in front where they ain't no guard at night."

"How did you get in on this idea, Van Blick—and what does Maurice think of it?"

"Maurice he's all hopped up, Sarge. Hasn't even pulled any of his nasty wisecracks. Says it is a cinch. Marr says the same thing. When you see the layout you'll feel the same way."

"Who is this Belgian bird, Van Blick, and how'd he come to let you in on his game? How do you know it isn't a trap of some kind?"

Van Blick groaned his impatience at the sergeant's incredulity.

"Ah, hell, Sarge. This Belgian's been penned up here for a year and he's sure burning up with hate for the Boches. All he wants to escape for is to get back to the Front where he can pour lead again. They wrecked his house and he sees red every time you say Boche. Marr digs him up and gets thick with him and when he finds out we're figgering on a getaway he let us in on his game. He says this herd of Russians and Roumanians here is a lot of meek sheep without guts enough to break out—and so the Belgian's wanting some he-men for company across the border."

Gill retained his noncommittal air as he reflected calmly and at length. From his brief observation of the strutting Prussian colonel he knew that the fellow's insufferable vanity would cause him to take every conceivable precaution against the crushing humiliation of being outwitted by prisoners. On the other hand, an intelligent prisoner, given a year in which to plot and plan, might have found the flaw in the barrier. And it was logical enough that the Belgian should want help in making his break.

"I'll have to study the thing over a few days and learn the lay of the land," he told Van Blick finally. "There's plenty of time without hurrying things."

Van Blick groaned again. He laid his hands pleadingly on the sergeant's shoulders. Gill stepped back quickly.

"Better not get too close to me, Van," he warned. "I'm not exactly—alone. You see, they had lots of company for me where I been staying."

"Ah, don't mind that, Sarge. They're everywhere here. I been a-crawl since the first day. It's them Russians, I reckon. But that ain't nothing. I could stand that, Sarge, if they'd only feed a guy. Say, do you know I got two men now I've wronged. The cook of old F Company with his good old slum, and that Boche back at the Front with his sauerkraut and wienies. Know what I have to live on here? Breakfast, potato soup with damn little potato in it, that black bread made out of sawdust and mud from the taste of it, and what they call coffee. It's made out of cooked acorns. And to think, Sarge, I ever made remarks about good old U. S. Army chickory!"

"Well, I can tell you how to get that diet changed quick," said Gill with a wry smile.

"What you mean, Sarge? They been holding out better eats on us?"

"Just make a false step and you'll learn what I mean, Van. In their little private hotel where I've been you get bread and water—and you get the bread measured. Two hundred grams, all weighed out for you, twice a day with water. And once every five days you get a pint of that fine potato soup that you lucky lads have been gargling three times a day."

"I'd ruther get stood against a wall than put up against a mess like that," protested Van Blick with a convulsive shudder.

"Then watch your step and don't go off half cocked on this escape gag. I'll look it over at my leisure. Besides, Sandstrom is hung up for another five days for disrespect to a Boche sergeant, if you can picture that. So we're not making any move until he's clear to move with us."

CHAPTER V

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

THE BELGIAN prisoner, who introduced himself as Sergeant Gouda, was a tall, sallow man of thirty with small glinting blue eyes, a spiked blond mustache which he spent much time in nursing, and a general air of well being far above that of the disheveled, dull,

staring and utterly demoralized run of prisoners. This was due to an affluence which had found its way from Belgium, he explained, through the Copenhagen correspondent of his Brussels bank. Prisoners in funds were allowed, under prison rules, to have special foods sent them from the village, although the Belgian explained that the graft was so prodigious that there was little left out of his allowance.

Besides, he had been hoarding his marks against the day of escape and now had upward of a thousand marks in paper money hidden away ready for use in the flight across the frontier. He explained this as the sole reason that he was not able to purchase extra rations for his American compatriots.

Gill took an instinctive dislike to the fellow. Also a sharp distrust which was not easily discounted. But he pretended complete sympathy with the plan of escape, without committing himself definitely, and listened appraisingly to all the details and material evidence. The thoroughness of the Belgian's plans, and the evidence of his long, painstaking work in forcing a hole through a double brick wall, were most convincing. In some way he had gotten hold of a small map of the country about Ulm, showing the roads and routes as far south as Berne, in Switzerland.

From a study of this map, to which Gill devoted the better part of a day, he convinced himself that the feat of reaching the Swiss frontier was not an impossible one. It meant a march of something over eighty-five miles, through one of the less thickly settled regions of Germany. Hills and innumerable small streams, which lined the route south and west from Ulm, meant hard hiking. But they also meant plenty of cover for hiding out by day. Two serious obstacles interposed themselves—the mighty Danube and the Rhine. Gill knew that at the first alarm the crossings of the Danube in the region of Ulm would be closed. Therefore it would be a matter of getting a small boat or swimming for it. As for the Rhine, once they reached the point where it came racing down the Swiss frontier, nothing could stop them.

The hole in the wall which the Belgian had forced was a patient and skilful bit of work. The secret aperture had been driven just under the Belgian's wooden bunk in the dismal room which he now shared with the Americans and a French corporal who had preceded the Americans to Ulm by a few days after having been captured in a raid east of Reims. Late at night, while his comrades stood vigil with straining ears, Gill inspected the hole in the wall. One by one the Belgian removed bricks which were held in place by strips of wood cunningly shaped and colored to resemble the displaced mortar.

Crawling into the cavern with a stub of a tallow candle to light his way, Gill found the mortar chiseled away from the bricks of the outer wall to a thinness where a few hearty kicks would complete the job. Thereafter, it would be a matter of running across to the wall, leaping over and bolting through the night to the south and west.

Having had his lesson from listening walls, Gill offered no comment when he emerged from the hole. But immediately after roll call the next morning he drew the Belgian into the enclosure, well away from prying ears.

"The Frenchman, he has nothing to say," said Gill. "Does he go with us?"

Gouda's narrow eyes kindled.

"Ah, yes, monsieur," he said. "The fellow says nothing of what in his mind goes on, but you may always trust a Frenchman to wiggle through a hole in the wall when a chance he gets."

"Suppose, though," said Gill, "he has it in his head to tip us off to the Boches?"

"No fear of that," said Gouda quickly, with an indifferent toss of his hands. "He knows too well that the Germans no love have for his breed, so he can not win favor." The Belgian's eyes sparkled again as they fixed themselves narrowly on Gill. "You are ready to leave tomorrow at midnight? Your friend will from the rat hole be up in the morning?"

"There's a question or two I want to ask you about this little deal," Gill evaded, studying the ground thoughtfully. "First, how about a compass to hold our course with to the Swiss border?"

"Ah, I an excellent compass have, monsieur. In fact there is no detail of which I have overlooked."

"How we going to shake that pack of wolfhounds they keep around here? I'm thinking they'll have the whole lot on our track as soon as they find out we've beat it."

Gouda's smile spread and he gave Gill a reassuring slap on the shoulder.

"Behind a loose brick, I have that attend to," he said. "Two cans of red pepper which the scent of the best dog kills. A compass. A German pistol filled with ammunition. A year it has taken me these to get; but you can see, monsieur, I have overlooked nothing. Tonight I will with your own eyes let you see. So you will be ready tomorrow night at the hour of midnight, monsieur?"

Gill reflected for several moments while Gouda stood rubbing his hands expectantly.

"Yes," Gill assented finally. "After thinking it all over, it looks good to me. But I'll have to wait and talk it over with the last of my crew when he gets out tomorrow."

"He will be willing enough to say farewell to this place, monsieur," predicted Gouda, "when he comes from out of the rat hole."

"Maybe," said Gill. "And if he is, we'll be with you to the last man, Gouda."

"*Bon*," exclaimed Gouda. "But it is not wise that we be seen with our heads together too much. So, as the Germans put it, *auf sehrbaldiges-wiedersehen!*"

"So long," said Gill.

With the long day before him, Gill sauntered aimlessly about the enclosure. Although he was stirred with a restlessness that urged him to a swinging stride, he held himself firmly in check. In the first place, a show of energy would attract attention to him in a place where men moved with a deadly listlessness. Furthermore, vigorous exercise would whet his appetite, and too keen an appetite was not desirable when the noon meal offered no other hope than a pint of thin, watery, vegetable soup and a carefully measured hundred grams of sodden black bread.

He avoided the Frenchman purposely, threaded his way among the sodden Russians and examined the precautions against escape that the Germans had provided in their wire barricades. Two walls of barbed wire blocked the way. The first one was an interwoven network of barbed strands rising to a height of fifteen feet and having a depth of fully twelve inches. Fifty feet beyond that was a second wire barrier a dozen feet high. And the space between these two barbed walls was a deadline. To appear in that space was to be shot down on sight. Only by a miracle of energy and good fortune could a break be made in that direction, Gill reasoned.

Gouda's tedious preparation for escape through the brick walls of the main barracks building, therefore, was logical enough. Such desperate alternatives as scaling the roofs of the barracks or overpowering successive German sentries offered only a precarious chance even to men of audacious nerve and energy. In plain sight of the enclosure, as a grim reminder to all prisoners, were the rough wooden crosses that numbered the toll of those who had tried.

GILL tried to analyze his distrust of Gouda, an instinctive distrust that had persisted since his first meeting with the fellow. As a leader of men, Gill had learned to estimate quickly those with whom he had to deal. Loyalty, courage, tenacity and intelligence were the traits for which he looked. And he had learned to find the measure of those qualities in just two places—a soldier's eyes and his voice. A square jaw meant as little as a receding chin, he had found. It was the mettle within that carried men through, whether in personal dealings or

the heat of battle, and that mettle expressed itself in the set and glint of the eyes and the timbre of the voice. Gouda had a thin, persuasive, ingratiating voice that did not measure up. And his eyes were too reticent, too close set and too vacillating to encourage confidence. Not a man to take long chances, Gouda, nor to pin faith in for leadership in such a venture as forcing the Swiss frontier.

On the other hand, Gouda's plan was convincing. What possible motive could the fellow have for treachery? It was inconceivable that the Germans would bait such a trap to catch prisoners who were already safe in their hands. As for inviting the Americans in on the break, Gouda was just the type of man who would want some one else to share the dangers. Gill could picture him sending an American through the hole first, or blaming them for the whole mess if things went awry.

Van Blick broke in upon Gill's reflections in a fever of excitement which he tried vainly to disguise in a strained effort at unconcern for the benefit of possible prying eyes. Maurice and Marr hung in the background in a state of ill concealed anxiety, awaiting the outcome of Van Blick's interview.

"What's the answer, Sarge?" pleaded Van Blick. "We figger you've sure had time enough to make up your mind by now. If we don't get away tomorrow, we're going to get caught in one of them *Kommandos*, and it ain't maybe."

"What you mean by *Kommando?*" demanded Gill.

"Them's the last word in Boche wise stuff," said Van Blick with a pained grimace. "The Boche wheat harvest is ready and all us prisoners go out and do the farm work. Sunup to dark, seven days a week!"

"Where'd you pick up that idea?"

"Gouda told me it was coming. Said it'd catch us sure if we don't hurry." Van Blick groaned. "Think of slaving like that on a bite of liver sausage and slimy soup and them damn mud pies these Boche call bread. Sarge, I'd sooner die like a man trying to go back. You ain't going to stay here, Sarge, are you, and help hang up the Boche harvest for 'em?"

Gill shook his head solemnly.

"All right, Van," he said. "You can tell the boys I'm with you. I've been holding off until I could size the whole thing up. But I've just now decided. Now's our big chance and we're taking it."

"Thanks, Sarge." Van Blick bubbled over. "I knew right along you'd do it. Can I tip the boys that all's set for tomorrow night?"

"As soon as Sandstrom is back on earth and ready, we jump," said Gill.

In his farther meandering about the enclosure during the morning, Gill so shaped his steps that he came face to face with the Frenchman, who acted as if he were trying to avoid the meeting. The Frenchman was passing on with a curt nod when Gill blocked the way.

"Do you happen to talk English, monsieur?" he inquired casually. "If you do, there's something I want to ask you about—something important."

The Frenchman did not reply at once. His thin, keen face was an expressionless mask, but his alert blue eyes were riveted on Gill. The American read that the other was searching him out, making a cautious appraisal of him. Finally the *poilu's* level eyes softened.

"*Oui, monsieur,*" he replied softly. "I speek ze Anglish a leetle. Permit me, I am ze Monsieur Antoine Manet-Lepage, French infantry."

"I'm Gill, American infantry," said Gill, extending his hand.

"*Bien, monsieur,* I am enchanted." Manet-Lepage bowed. "A mos' charming day, monsieur, is it not?"

"What I wanted to ask," said Gill bluntly, "is whether you're going to escape with the Belgian and us through the hole in the wall."

Manet-Lepage froze instantly, his face paling, his mouth snapping shut, his eyes changing to flint.

"What I theenk, I do not say wiz my tongue, monsieur!" he said stiffly.

"See here, monsieur!" said Gill earnestly. "You can trust me, if that's what's worrying you. We're honest with you and you can bank on us. Say, do I look like the kind of man that would play sneak for the Boche!"

Another period of boring into Gill's eyes and the Frenchman emerged partly from his shell.

"But no, monsieur," he exclaimed. "But to escape, it is ze death and to plot ze escape—it is worse zan ze death."

"You're afraid of the Belgian, monsieur? Is that what you're driving at?"

Manet-Lepage shrugged.

"You can speak ze Russian, yes, monsieur?" he asked enigmatically. "If so, it is good zat you speak—"

"English is the only language I know anything about, but what has Russian got to do with it?"

"For ze long time ze Russians have been ze prisoner here, monsieur. Zere is much zey can tell, ver' much about ze *Kommando* and ze *Herr Rittmeister*."

"But if there's something you know that I ought to know, why don't you tell me yourself?"

"*Pardon, monsieur.*" The Frenchman shrugged as he looked Gill fully and frankly in the eyes. "You are to me ze stranger, monsieur. In war—ze tongue he learn ze great discretion. I will theenk. Tomorrow—perhaps I will speak."

Manet-Lepage turned on his heel and strolled abruptly away. Gill made no effort to follow him. He knew it was idle to force the issue. The Frenchman would reveal his secret, or keep it to himself, according to his own inclinations after he had made up his mind how far the American was to be trusted.

Thereafter during the day Gill and the others discreetly avoided one another. The decision had been made to escape. The details had been worked out. The date alone remained to be settled upon definitely. All clearly sensed the danger of whispered conferences, or of talking apart in the center of the enclosure under the watchful eyes of the *Landsturm* sentries. Gill was in bed late at night, his mind prying into every corner of the day's events when he felt the hot breath of an unseen figure over him. The fellow shook him lightly, thinking him asleep, cupped his hands and whispered into Gill's ear. It was Gouda.

"Quiet, I will show you what it is you wish to see," said Gouda.

The night patrol had left their quarters only a few moments before. Gill arose silently and followed Gouda's guiding hand to the wall. The Belgian groped cautiously, fumbled with a brick and then blew a bright spark into his trench *briquet*. The glow dimly lighted up an aperture in which reposed the promised compass, pepper cans and a German automatic pistol. Snuffing the fire with his fingers, Gouda replaced the brick and guided Gill back to his bunk.

"You have with your own eyes seen," whispered Gouda through his cupped hands. "All is ready for tomorrow night."

"You can count on me to go through," Gill whispered back. Then he climbed back into his bed of wood shavings and went peacefully to sleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE HERR RITTMEISTER BAITS A TRAP

SANDSTROM'S time in the rat hole was due to expire immediately after noon soup of his fifteenth day below, according to Gill's calculation. But by sunup Gill was lolling about the enclosure with a watchful eye, working on a theory of his own that the corporal might appear much earlier than schedule. He had his own reasons for wishing to be the first to see Sandstrom and break the news to him.

He also watched with suppressed eagerness for Manet-Lepage. Whatever decision the Frenchman had made, he must have made overnight, since this was the day of the break. Presently the Frenchman came up to him casually, but without hesitation and with but little of the cold reserve of the day before.

"I have theenk, monsieur," he said in a

low, friendly voice. "I have decide zat I will speak, for are not ze Americaines my comrades? Beware, monsieur. Ze escape —it is impossible!"

"You mean it's a trap, eh?" Gill inquired. "With that Belgian just baiting us on?"

An affirmative shrug of the shoulders was Manet-Lepage's reply.

"But I can't see just what his idea would be in selling us out that way to the Boche, monsieur."

The Frenchman nodded significantly to the rows of wooden crosses outside the barricade and smiled cynically.

"Zen I will tell you," he said, lowering his voice and speaking in a quick staccato flow of words. "Zis week, ze *Kommandos* go to ze feelds to harvest ze Boche wheat. All ze prisoners zey mus' go. And so zey will not have ze heart to escape—ze *Herr Rittmeister* makes one terrible example. So, monsieur, tonight you go through ze wall. You carry wiz you compass and pistol, ze implements of escape by what zey call ze escape by force. Zen, when from ze hole you come—poof! One hundred lights flash and it is day—and zere stands one whole company of *Landsturm* infantry which fire wiz many muskets. *Sacrebleu!* One minute and you are dead. Ze reign of terror he is complete, and zen will zese dumb Russians work well in ze fields. Another great victory for ze red *Herr Rittmeister*. Ze *Herr Rittmeister*, monsieur, is ze black beast who is ze disgrace even to ze Kaiser's war prisons—zis prison ze blackest hole in Germany!"

"Where'd you get the dope on this?" Gill demanded.

"It is mos' fortunate, my friend, I speak ze Russian. Ten, twenty, maybe feefty Russes is rats in ze trap before zey learn."

"Then that Belgian—"

"*Diable!* Monsieur, Gouda is Boche—ze Boche *Feldwebel* in ze uniform *Belgique*—agent of ze mad *Herr Rittmeister*."

Manet-Lepage turned away abruptly.

"But too long mus' we not speak together," he said over his shoulder. "*Au revoir, monsieur.*"

Gill turned slowly in the opposite direction. As he reflected upon what he had learned, a grim smile crackled in the fire of his eyes. What the Frenchman had told him was no surprise, except that he had thought capture rather than death lay beyond the hole in the wall.

Sergeant Gill's reflections were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Sandstrom in the enclosure. Exactly as he had expected the American had been released early in order that he might have time to join in the projected passage of the walls. Sandstrom was gaunt, grimy and sallow, but his eyes had lost nothing of their luster and his chin was higher, the set of his mouth even more defiant.

"Never touched me, Sarge!" he snapped. "Me, I let them Boche learn I can take everything they got in their little old jail."

"I've got a favor to ask of you, Sandstrom," said Gill soberly. "It's something I want you to go through with to the limit."

"Shoot, Sarge. If it's anything besides being polite to these jailers, I'm for it."

"That happens to be just what I want, Sandstrom. I want you to lay off the rough stuff, calm down and be real meek for a week or two, or anyhow till I tell you different."

"That's bitter medicine, Gill. But if you say so, I'll do my best—that is unless one bird crosses my trail. Then back into the rat hole I go quick—for murder if I get the chance!"

"What blood grudge you got on now, Sandstrom?"

"Listen. I was dying by inches for a cigaret down there. Me, I warbles no Boche, but some of them gives me a smoke free. Last night I took off my web belt and offers it to a new Fritz sentry down there for a smoke. He smiles and nods and takes the belt. Then what does he do but spit in my face and laugh like it was a damn good joke. But I'll see that Heinie again some day if I have to stoke my way back to Bocheland after the war."

"I don't blame you, Sandstrom. But

please forget it for a few days. We're in a trap. You've got to pull us out of it. You got to play weak and sick for awhile —too weak to walk. Get it?"

"It'll not take much acting, Sarge. But me, there's a lot of go left in my system yet if I get a crack at that Fritz sentry."

"When Maurice, Marr and Van Blick ask you if you're on, tell them you are, in a few days, soon's you can walk. But don't talk with them any more than that, no matter what they say about a cinch escape tonight. Can I count on you, Sandstrom?"

"Sure, didn't I say I was taking orders, Sarge? What you says goes. But I'm not in for sticking around these diggings much longer, even if I have to fight my way out."

"Then go over now and turn in, Sandstrom. Here, I'll hold your arm and get you into your bunk. There you stay, except at soup time, for the next few days."

The faces of the other three Americans fell when they saw Sandstrom come limply into quarters on Gill's arm. They knew that Sandstrom would not yield lightly to physical ailment. Time and again they had known him to sneer at sick call when he was barely able to walk. Not even the flu had put him on his back.

"Is Sandstrom with us?" Van Blick queried in anxiously.

"Soon's he's able to walk," said Gill.

"Then we ain't going—going tonight, Sarge?"

Gill made no reply as he carefully arranged the wood shavings in Sandstrom's bunk and solicitously helped the corporal down. This finished, he went outside, closely followed by Gouda, long faced and ill at ease.

"Tonight we must go," muttered Gouda. "No longer possible is it to delay."

"But you have seen," said Gill, "that my friend Sandstrom is too weak to walk now. As soon as he is strong enough—"

"It will be too late!" said Gouda. "Soon will come the *Kommando* to the fields; then are we lost. No one can he escape from the muskets and wire pens of the harvest fields."

"Sandstrom will have his strength in a few days, if you will only wait," pleaded Gill. "It'd be his death to try hiking to Switzerland until he's got his legs under him."

"It is his own affair. Leave him behind. His life is not worth to you as much as your own and the other American comrades. If you do not—then will I lead the other Americans through—and you may stay here and rot!"

Gouda shot out his ultimatum through taut lips, a threat in his voice. The sergeant accepted the edict thoughtfully. He studied the ground for some moments, as if torn by indecision.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he replied presently. "Just give Sandstrom two days—and then if he isn't strong enough to hold his own, I'll carry him out on my shoulders."

"Then with the other Americans will I go tonight!" snapped Gouda with finality, half turning to leave.

"No, the lads will not desert Sandstrom!" Gill halted him. "They'll stay here and sweat it out if I tell 'em to—and we're sticking here, Gouda, to give Sandstrom a chance."

"Until tomorrow, then, will I wait, but no longer," Gouda yielded grudgingly.

"No, until the day after tomorrow. By giving Sandstrom a part of our ration at mess, he will have some strength by that time."

With a muttered oath of disgust, Gouda turned on his heel and strode away in high dudgeon. Gill saw him stirring at the others, urging them to follow him at midnight. Van Blick hurried over to Gill.

"That Belgian," cried Van Blick, half in frenzy, "says it's tonight, or he goes out on us alone, Sarge. Then where are we?"

"Are you three the kind of birds that would run off and leave a sick buddy to rot in a Boche jail?" demanded Gill.

"Sarge, you know a damn lot better'n that!"

"Then forget it. When Sandstrom's

back on his feet we move. Till then, here we stay. That Gouda'll stick, too, when he finds he can't bluff us."

"You're right, Sarge," moaned Van Blick. "We'll stick with you and Sandstrom. But it is tough luck."

When he had received the verdict of the other Americans, Gouda reported dismally back to Gill.

"If it is that I can upon you to depend for the night after tomorrow, I will here wait," he announced condescendingly.

"You can count on me to go through the second Sandstrom is able to toddle," Gill affirmed resolutely.

SOON after dark Gouda returned to quarters from a round of the enclosure. The others already were in bed and sleeping soundly, Sandstrom snoring with his usual noisy abandon. After assuring himself that none of the Americans was awake, Gouda felt his way to the wall, fumbled cautiously behind the loose brick and got into bed. Hours later, when the midnight check inspection occurred, the German patrol found seven serenely sleeping prisoners. The German in charge, after tolling off the recumbent figures, announced that all was well and stamped out, leaving the room plunged in darkness.

No sooner was the midnight patrol gone than Gill arose from his wood shavings, slunk silently across the room, listened for a cautious instant to Gouda's labored breathing, then sank fingers of steel in the fellow's throat.

There was the sound of threshing about in wood shavings, and the dry, convulsive gurgling of a man being strangled. A second figure arose at sound of the struggle, slipped across the room and seized Gouda's floundering wrists, tying them behind the victim's back with a stout strip torn from a German prison blanket. At the same time Gill thrust a heavy woolen gag into the helpless Gouda's mouth, secured it with a woolen thong, released his stranglehold and lashed the man's legs with a strip of barbed wire.

"Me, I'll truss him while you frisk him," whispered Sandstrom.

From the wood shavings of Gouda's mattress, Gill extracted the long barreled pistol he expected to find there, together with a long bladed knife, a smaller jackknife, watch and trench *briquet*. Then, while Sandstrom tied the helpless man securely into his bunk, Gill felt out the loose brick, got the compass, cans of pepper and thickly folded maps. This done, he awakened the others one at a time and gave them terse, whispered orders through his cupped hands.

Manet-Lepage alone failed to respond to the summons.

"I warned you, monsieur," he whispered. "It is ze death!"

"But we've got the Boche in their own trap," said Gill. "I've done away with Gouda. They'll not expect us through the wall tonight."

The Frenchman vaulted noiselessly from his bed.

"*Oui, monsieur*, I will follow," he announced in an excited whisper.

Since he had not dared take the others into his confidence in advance, Gill now set about organizing them for his next maneuver. He gave Sandstrom instructions to arrange them in single file against the wall of loose bricks. Sandstrom leading, Manet-Lepage immediately behind him, then Van Blick, Marr and Maurice. No matter what happened, no one but Gill was to speak. Under no circumstances were they to scatter. Or, if they were forced apart in the darkness after getting through the wall, they were to assemble at the right of the road leading south past the prison, and at a point five hundred yards on their way. Gill's identification signal in event of emergency was a single low whistle, to be replied to by the same sound, executed in the same key.

With a final warning that any show of panic would be fatal, a warning which he whispered to them one at a time, adding a reassuring pat on the shoulder, Gill removed the bricks and led the way into the

hole. He moved very deliberately, without the slightest show of haste. A full hour must elapse before another inspection, and an hour should put them well on their way before the alarm would be raised at the finding of Gouda. Reaching the outer wall of bricks, he scratched away the remaining shell of mortar with the aid of Gouda's jackknife, removed a single brick and attempted to penetrate the black veil beyond.

Nothing was to be seen or heard and, after an eternity of watchful waiting, he removed a second brick and a third. Slowly the hole grew until it was large enough to squeeze through. Easing himself outside, Gill assisted Sandstrom and Manet-Lepage through. Van Blick was halfway through when all froze at an unmistakable stirring close by. A chilling silence. Gill was reassuring himself that it must have been his overwrought imagination when the sound occurred again. A single footstep, little more than a stealthy crunching in the sandy ground.

For seconds that lengthened into an eternity, Gill crouched close to the wall, daring barely to breathe. There was no mistaking that sound. A curious sentry on his rounds, who thought he had heard something. Luckily he was waiting for some further evidence that his senses had not tricked him. It was a game of waiting. Finally the sentry's patience wore itself out. He took another careful step forward, then another. A black silhouette loomed up suddenly before Gill's eyes. He drew himself together, without breathing, and waited until the German was hard upon him, then catapulted with a force that threw him against the German, fingers gripping the man's throat, before the sentry could gather his shocked senses or make an outcry.

Sandstrom was into the assault almost before the two struck the ground. He stuffed a rag into the prostrate man's mouth, bound his arms behind him and was making for his legs when Gill intercepted.

"We may need this bird," whispered Gill. "Get him on his feet and bring him along with Gouda's knife at his ribs."

Gill picked up the sentry's musket and as soon as they had the German on his feet, led out across the grounds to the brick wall that ran around the outer grounds at the front of the prison. They scaled the wall without trouble, lifting their prisoner over, and headed into the open road, walking in file at the edge.

Over the first few hundred yards they moved cautiously, but as the prison wall faded behind them, Gill broke into a lively trot and held the pace up a long, sloping hill until the others were gasping for breath behind him. The German, unable to get his breath through the gag, and hampered by his soft, beefy carcass, gave up the struggle and sank to the ground. Gill halted his fugitives and debated briefly on the problem of the heaving sentry.

"Can you warble enough Boche to get something through this lad's skull?" he demanded of Manet-Lepage.

"Like one Boche do I speak ze langwich of ze Boche."

"Then tell him we'll not kill him if he watches his step," said Gill. "What we want him for is to head us out of this country and on to the through road to Switzerland. If he opens his face or starts anything, into his ribs goes a knife. If he behaves himself, we'll turn him loose at the proper time, a trifle damaged but with a whole skin. Can you get that idea across to him, monsieur?"

The Frenchman broke into a long, guttural flow of German. Judging by the length of his speech into the German's ear, he must have elaborated in his own way upon the instructions. He ended by kicking the German to his feet. The prisoner replied in a supplicating voice.

"He say zat please not to kill him, monsieur," Manet-Lepage interpreted. "Mos' faithfully will he serve us as guide, he say. It is well!"

"Good," said Gill. He consulted Gouda's watch under a glow from the trench *briquet*. "But we got to get moving. In another half hour they'll find out what's happened. We got to get across the

Danube before the alarm breaks, or it'll be a case of lay low and swim."

"Ah, zen, hurry, monsieur!" exclaimed the Frenchman, "because ze Danube, it can I not swim."

CHAPTER VII

DOWN THE BLUE DANUBE

THE swift upper reaches of the Danube swept through the Württemberg countryside an easy hour's walk from Ulm, or fifteen minutes less than that from the prison. Gill had made good use of his brief survey of Gouda's map. He had laid out his tentative course to the border. A hard course, but at least one that the Germans would hardly expect him to follow. Across the Danube immediately south of Ulm, then sharply west by south to Sigmaringen, thence toward Schaffhausen and west by south across the Rhine where they came upon it. Thereafter to Zurich or Berne.

The Germans would expect the fugitives to cling to the road on the north side of the Danube with the intention of crossing the bridge at Sigmaringen. On an airline, it would be a journey of about a hundred kilometers. By the tortuous route they would be compelled to follow, a march of a hundred and fifty kilometers, Gill estimated. Even under the most favorable conditions, traveling by night and hiding out by day, twenty kilometers a night would be maximum speed. But ten days, Gill thought, should see them standing on the Rhine opposite Switzerland, ready to go across.

On resuming the march, Gill put the German ahead at a dog trot, releasing the gag so the fellow could fill his heaving lungs with air, but keeping his arms lashed to his side. He took the added precaution of fixing a stout cord to the prisoner's belt and holding him on the leash against a possible break into the thickets that lined the road.

Although his whole crew was fighting for breath under the long run, and the German puffed like a horse afflicted with the heaves, Gill goaded them on at the killing pace, uphill and down, over the undulating course to the Danube. The road upon which they traveled would be an open road only so long as their escape remained undiscovered. By one o'clock, at the latest, the patrol would discover Gouda. Then pursuit would be hastily organized, high powered automobiles would come roaring up the road loaded with *Landsturm* infantrymen, wolf hounds and police dogs. All routes to the Danube would be under guard, without a doubt, no later than one-thirty.

As they ran on against time, Gill's mind was busy. The taking of a German prisoner was a contingency upon which he had not depended. The fellow, being plainly a native Württemberger, doubtless knew every foot of the country, Gill reasoned. A plan shaped itself in his mind. A more certain way than pepper for throwing the dogs off the trail, as well as the Germans. As they came to the top of another long rise, staggering from the exertion, he halted them again and held his breath to listen. The night continued as quiet as a cemetery. Things were working on schedule so far. The prison was not informed of what had happened.

"I got some more interpreting to put across to Fritz," Gill addressed Manet-Lepage, when he had caught his own breath. "Tell him we'll make a bargain with him. If he knows where he can grab a boat and get across the river, we'll agree to turn him loose when we're on the other side."

"*Bien, monsieur,*" panted the Frenchman.

The German gasped an eager acceptance of the proposition. Yes, he knew quite well where there was a good rowboat, moored at the north bank of the Danube, one belonging to the Herr Jubingen, a hide dealer of Neu-Ulm. The German panted the additional information that he was a good oarsman and would be able to put them safely across the Danube—in exchange for his freedom.

"Ask him how much farther we got to hike to the boat," Gill instructed the Frenchman. "Also find out if there's any trails off this main road that will take us there."

"To ze river it is one kilometer," said Manet-Lepage, after a prolonged exchange with the prisoner. "Many trails are zere, monsieur, but ze road, it we leave not for one half kilometer."

As he blew a glow of fire into the *briquet* and held it to his watch crystal, Gill gasped. Five minutes to one o'clock.

"Move out!" he cried. "In another jiffy the Boche will be on our trail."

They goaded the prisoner into a lumbering trot. Gill made another rapid mental estimate of the situation as he ran. In another few minutes the patrol would find Gouda. Two or three minutes would suffice to spread the alarm. Probably ten minutes would find the first pursuit automobile headed for the Danube. One kilometer, five-eighths of a mile, for the prisoners yet to run before they would be at the Danube. That should take them ten minutes. Then, if they found the boat and met with no delay, they should be out into the stream before the pursuit could cover the distance. A close connection with not an instant to spare.

Each time the prisoner lagged, Gill prodded him on. The fellow was staggering again by the time he turned down a sharp narrow trail. But Gill, catching the first glint of starlight on the dancing water of the Danube, only forced him ahead at a faster gait. Thereafter it was a race, a willing race on the part of the fugitives, until they found themselves at the river bank. A short run westward and they came, with a cry of joy, upon a large gray boat chained to a small elm. Another obstacle, a heavy lock. Gill calmly ordered the others into the boat while he found a rock with which to smash the lock. Every instant was priceless now. The rush of the waters would make it difficult to hear the pursuit until it was hard upon them. The lock refused to yield. Minutes passed like hours while Gill pounded the flat surface to no avail.

A QUIVERING shaft of light suddenly darted over the skyline above them. It dipped downward as the pursuit car swept over the crest and rushed toward the river. In another minute or two the car would speed on to the bridge a hundred meters to the west and establish a sentry post there. Perhaps, at the same instant, men and dogs would be dispatched to Herr Jubingen's boat. Gill held on to himself. The one desperate alternative to loosening the boat was a plunge into the swift-moving waters of the upper Danube. Attempt to hide by land now would be sheer folly. Rock in hand, he stepped to the prow of the boat.

The chain was looped through a hole in a thick crosspiece in the bow. With a terrific blow of the rock he smashed the board, and the boat swung out into the current with such suddenness that Gill was forced to plunge into the river and swim after it. Half a dozen strokes and his hand was over the gunwale. The others pulled him aboard.

"Now kick that Boche back in the hind end of the boat and give me hold of the oars," he ordered.

As Gill headed the boat out into midstream with a few powerful strokes, the German pursuit auto came to a halt on the bridge upstream. He caught the excited shouting of orders. A dog yapped its lust of the chase.

"Sit steady there and stay in the bottom of the boat," snapped Gill. "Forget them Boches, unless you want to upset this tub."

At the end of a half hour the German prisoner began stirring nervously in his seat. Presently he bolstered up his courage to the point of protest.

"Ze animal he say we have pass ze last landing where is a road in Bavaria," Manet-Lepage translated.

"Tell him the Danube makes a pretty good road all by itself," Gill replied curtly. "Saves walking."

The German set up a noisy wailing when this was repeated to him. Manet-Lepage silenced him with a sharp repri-

mand.

"Ze peeg he say you promise him zat you give to him ze liberty," chuckled the Frenchman. "I tell him, one word from you, and into ze river we throw him."

"Yes, and I'll give the word to chuck him overboard if he gets to be a nuisance," growled Gill. "I'll keep my bargain with him right enough, if he behaves."

At a point where the banks rose high over the river, with willow thickets crowding the water's edge on the Bavarian side of the Danube, Gill ran the boat ashore. He leaped out, made a hasty reconnaissance of the point and returned to shove the craft back into the stream. Three more such landings he effected at selected points before he finally located a place that suited his purpose—a bend in the river where the high bank was thickly tangled with willow and saplings. Here he ordered the others ashore, had them beach the boat, drag it back into the willow thickets, carefully efface all evidence of their landing, and follow him to a secluded spot just under the crest of the rise.

"Now turn in and sleep, the whole lot of you," Gill directed. "I'll take first turn at watch. We got to rest when we get a chance on this little expedition, and now's your chance."

"Me, I ain't done nothing but ride," Sandstrom objected. "You done all the work, Sarge, and it don't seem right for you to keep your eyes peeled now."

"Thanks, Sandstrom, that's a nice spirit," said Gill. He added stiffly, "But let's all understand each other. We got to cut out this debating. No more argument from now on. When I say do a thing, it's got to be done and no time wasted in talking about it. We're back in the Army now!"

He bound the prisoner's legs, allotted the others a space where they must remain and mounted the bank to a point where he had a clear view of the river in both directions. It was now two o'clock. The German pursuit must be out in force by this time. It was Gill's place to watch the river for boats until sunrise.

DAWN crept on with no other disturbance than the lively chorus of frogs and the swish of the Danube. When the first red pennants of sunup were flaunting in the sky, Gill arose and peered over the tops of the willows for a survey of the immediate country behind them. An apparently uninhabited region lay about him, a succession of hills dotted with small oak and fir and thickly carpeted with green underbrush. As far as eye could reach there was no sign of road or trail, no streamer of smoke to single out a lonely habitation.

After making a survey of their rendezvous to assure himself that there was no danger of discovery from the river, he woke Sandstrom and stationed him as lookout. A check of the German property disclosed that Gouda had used live bait to tempt them into escape. The compass checked out in good condition. The map was a small detail map covering the terrain of Württemberg and Bavaria, and reached well into Switzerland. Even the pepper was real. Gouda's pistol was well oiled and with a full magazine of ammunition. As for the prisoner's Mauser, it was in fair condition, with loaded magazine and twenty rounds of additional ammunition in belt pouches. The prisoner's effects also netted them a package of tobacco, a small box of matches and a large pocketknife.

An invaluable haul, Gill told himself. Not only would they be able to follow an intelligent course, but they would not be helpless in event of surprise by a small German search patrol. But his gnawing stomach reminded him of a handicap that would become acute before the first day was ended. They were without food, without visible means of securing food. Even if they came upon game, the crack of a rifle might betray them. A fire would be even more dangerous. As for foraging off the country, the alarm would be scattered high and low over the countryside and their appearance would be the signal for an immediate betrayal.

Gill thrust this disquieting thought

aside. There was the day ahead of him in which to struggle with that problem. If the worst came to the worst, they would have to take some chances rather than starve. Today it would be a matter of pulling in their belts and washing down their hunger in river water, since he had no intention of leaving their hiding place before night. Perhaps not then, unless he had been able to chart their future movements to his entire satisfaction.

Manet-Lepage awoke, bright and smiling.

"Ah, *bon jour, monsieur,*" said the Frenchman. He looked about at the heavens, stretched himself, sat down beside Gill and filled his lungs gratefully. "Ze air of liberty, it is mos' delicious, monsieur."

There was something reassuring in the Frenchman's easy self-control and brimming confidence. The set of Manet-Lepage's eyes, the timbre of his voice, had won Gill's confidence at their first meeting. But now, from the manner of the man's awakening, he knew that he had an ally who would stand the test of fire in the gaunt days ahead of them.

"Things are sure going our way, Manny," replied Gill. "Your name after this is Manny. You call me Sarge."

"*Bien, monsieur,*" replied the Frenchman with a smile. "I am much compliment."

"That crew of mine is going to wake up pretty soon," said Gill. "The first thing they're going to want to know is, when do we eat. We can get by today all right, and tomorrow. But these lads have not been feeding any too heavy of late. No food; no hike. Have you got any ideas to offer?"

Manet-Lepage lifted his shoulders and spread his hands in a gesture of unconcern.

"It is no danger zat we starve, Monsieur Serge," he said. "Much more is zere to eat zat is bettair zan ze potage Boche."

While the others slept on, Gill took the Frenchman on a short reconnaissance of the country in their immediate rear. A walk of half a mile brought them to the top of a low-lying ridge of hills, and from that vantage point they were able to see only another ridge beyond that, somewhat higher and more heavily pin feathered with small pine. The junket gave them some idea of the difficulty they would face in travel by night. It would be a matter of fighting their way through the brush at places, of endlessly climbing uphill and down until they came into a more favorable terrain. Not a cheerful adventure on a starvation diet.

When they got back to the rendezvous, all were awake and sitting in a weary, dismal circle. Van Blick got up eagerly at sight of Gill.

"Say, Sarge, when do we eat?" he demanded.

"There's the table set right in front of you," said Gill, pointing to the river. "Go fill yourself up."

"Dutch soup, eh?" grumbled Van Blick good-naturedly.

Gill smiled.

"Go get your fill of water and go up and relieve Sandstrom. An hour on and an hour off, with everybody taking their turn. We're staying here till night. Maybe longer."

While Marr and Maurice took the German prisoner to the river for his morning repast of Danube water, Gill and Manet-Lepage turned their attention again to the map.

The chart's shading showed that the country grew rougher and more hilly as it approached the Swiss frontier. To the west and across a part of their course stretched the edges of the Black Forest, through a fringe of which they saw they must penetrate in order to avoid the chain of lakes bordering on Switzerland directly to the south and southwest. But, though sparsely settled, the whole region was liberally sprinkled with roads and remote paths.

When in the heavier forests Gill reasoned that they might be able to travel by road at times during the night, and make progress across timbered hills during a part of the day.

THEIR work was interrupted by a violent explosion from Sandstrom as he reported back from sentry duty. Gill turned to see the corporal, face livid with rage, shaking his fist under the German prisoner's nose.

"Turn the Boche loose!" Sandstrom bellowed to Marr. "Unfasten the pig. Me, I want his hands and legs loose so I can learn him a few tricks."

Marr was obeying, while Sandstrom danced impatiently in front of the livid German, who towered head and shoulders above the corporal.

"Here, what's this disturbance?" Gill inquired calmly. "Have you gone clear loco, Sandstrom?"

"Sarge," raged Sandstrom, "this is my meat, the bird I been looking for. It's him I traded my web belt to for a cigaret —and got spit on. Didn't I tell you all bets was off when we come face to face?"

"Snap out of it, Sandstrom!" Gill ordered. "This is not any time to be thinking about such things. Besides, you don't want to pick on a helpless prisoner."

"Helpless?" echoed Sandstrom. "Did he pick on me when I was helpless? Me, I'm waiting to give the big porker a even break, and no odds asked for size. Cut him loose and put that biggest knife in his hands. I ain't—"

"That's all, Sandstrom," Gill lashed at him.

Sandstrom's lips bared his teeth and the muscles of his jaw worked convulsively as he slowly mastered himself.

"Me, I'm a soldier, Sarge," he muttered finally. "What you say goes with me. But that's damn high handed orders you're putting over on me, and you know it."

"Sure I do, Sandstrom. But it's a necessary order—and look sharp that you don't forget it."

Through the day Gill alternately dozed and pored over the map while the others lolled about dispiritedly, waiting for night and action. Whatever plans Gill had in mind he kept to himself. Shortly after sundown, while they were waiting for dusk, he began plying Manet-Lepage with questions about the course of the Danube after it entered the Balkans.

"But, monsieur, zat is impossible!" the Frenchman protested, divining that the American's mind had turned to thoughts of escape by river. "It is ze thousand mile, perhaps more."

"A thousand miles by boat, downstream, isn't any longer than a hundred on foot with short rations," said Gill with an enigmatic smile.

"Ah, zen, monsieur really intend to—"

"I've been thinking all day while the rest of you have been moping," Gill interrupted. "I think my plan is sound enough, when you know it."

"*Bien, Monsieur Serge,*" Manet-Lepage acceded with a smile. "But ze dinner—ah, it is time for ze dinner."

He got up and started for the river over which the first shadows of dusk were settling.

"Say, Sarge," exclaimed Van Blick, leaping to his feet and staring anxiously after the Frenchman, "did that bird mean you've got some rations staked out for tonight?"

"Danube soup—help yourself," said Gill crisply. "Now don't start yowling about food again. You've got a hard night in front of you."

"I ain't complaining none," said Van Blick, "but if that's the lay, then make that Frenchy stop talking about food. I don't want that word mentioned again in my hearing till it means something."

"Them's my sentiments, Sarge," cried Marr.

"All right, I'll speak to him," Gill agreed. "Now gather your things together. We're moving in a few minutes. Down the river by boat—and no questions answered."

Van Blick took up another notch in his waist belt. Marr and Maurice followed his example. Sandstrom was back on sentry duty at the crest of the bank.

"All set," cried Gill. "Come on in, Sandstrom. We're leaving now."

TO BE CONCLUDED

On the Trail

I

By T. SAMSON MILLER

THE long column winds along the twisting narrow trail, the head loads bobbing above the grass like a string of buoys in a yellow sea. The blacks step like automatons to the soporific beat of a tomtom. The white man marches a little ahead—just far enough to escape the odor of perspiring bodies. If the leader is wise he leaves the carriers to the command of their headmen. He interferes only when necessity impels. Anyway, he has other matters to occupy his mind, such as whether the country ahead has water, if the natives will be friendly, if food supplies can be obtained, if he will be held up by an avaricious chief.

Occasionally the hippo thong of a headman cracks in the air and descends on a bare back with a flesh-dulled *thwack*. A shirker, or a carrier stealthily loosening the cap of a waterskin to lighten his load, has been caught. That means tragedy, if it is dry country ahead. The hippo thong is the only argument, the only corrector.

From time to time the trail avoids a spot that was once haunted by evil spirits, or turns out of its course to take in the shade of a huge baobab tree.

A strange bird flies across the trail. The column comes to a muttering halt. If there is a juju man among them he will be consulted. It is as if a black cat had crossed the path. Dark omens and portents are seen. The blacks cry out that the white man is leading them into bad country. They discover all at once that they are far, far from their huts, and wives and children. Fears beset them. They give way to homesickness.

The white man, if he knows his business, will patiently humor their fears, laugh them away, coax the carriers on the march again. If he is short tempered he will shout and kick like a mule driver, and have trouble on his hands ever after, will have to get fresh carriers. If he is wise he will look for the ringleader in one who has shed his loincloth for trousers and colored shirt—a "spoiled nigger". He has been too much around the trading stations and contemptuously calls his loincloth brothers ignorant bushmen.

The molten ball of the sun is halfway to meridian. The column has been marching since before dawn. The white man signs to the tomtom man to cease drumming. Instantly, like a freight train to which loose brakes have been applied, the column comes to a halt, head load buffering head load. Loincloths are emptied of insects grubbed from the grass as the carriers marched. Beetles, caterpillars, worms, scorpions are dumped into pots of mealies, to add a meaty flavor. A meal, then the blacks lay like logs till the afternoon sun cools, when again the tomtom signals the march. There is a fight for the lighter head loads, for in spite of the white man's care to apportion his stuff into regulation sixty-pound packs, there are single articles and cases that fall short.

The fight over, the blacks make coils of grass to take the dead weight of the loads off their skulls, balance their loads on their heads, and again the march is on.

The conical thatches of a village ahead are sighted. Something moves out—a group of men. Assagais glint in the starlight. The white man calls a halt. It is palaver. The king of the village says:

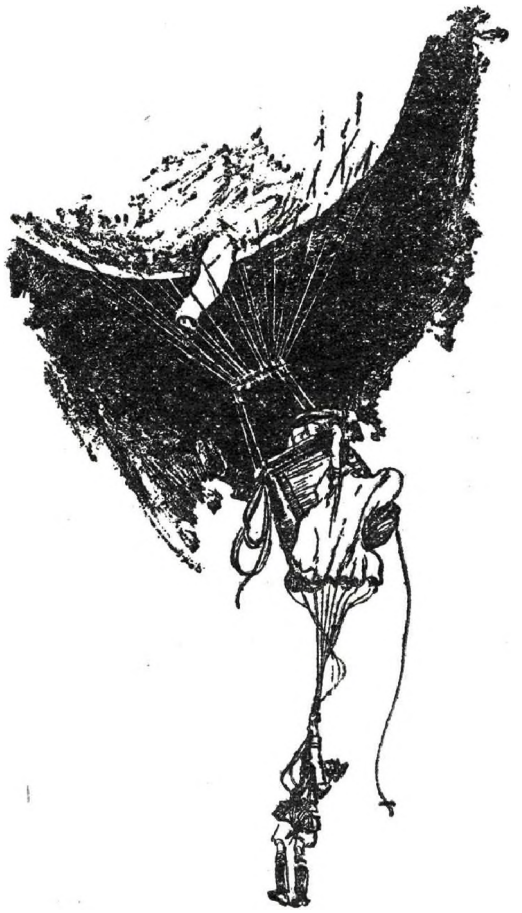
"You are too many mouths, O white man. Our granaries are empty."

Or—"You come to spy out my country. You are bad."

Or he will be cunning and turn the arrival of the column into good fortune, overcharging for supplies.

The BALLOONATIC

By LELAND S. JAMIESON



FORT BRECKENRIDGE and the sober waters of the Gulf of Mexico lay under a misty moon. In the officers' club the orchestra was playing softly. Young officers and their ladies passed occasionally on the sidewalk, dimly silhouetted shapes, heads together, arm in arm. The world, as the night advanced, was peaceful.

But Colonel Harry A. MacKissick's mind was not. He sat on the massive porch of his quarters and drank occasionally from the frosted mint julep glass at his elbow; for the first time in many months he faced a situation which he did not know exactly how to meet. He cudgeled his brain for diplomatic words and could not find them. Major-General Oscar Hanson sat by his side, preferring a Tom Collins to a julep, waiting to hear what Old Mac had to say.

"I tell you truthfully," said MacKissick at last, "I don't see the necessity for such a thing. I have two young lieutenants, Brent and Sanders, who are capable balloonists. I see nothing to be gained by displacing them tomorrow and using their balloon ourselves. They've done a satisfactory job of observation so far, and this affair tomorrow is important. I'm afraid we'd only slow things up. Fact is, I'm sure of it."

"You compliment me!" General Hanson returned testily, speaking loudly so that Old Mac, deaf as he was, could hear.

"I don't mean to," the Old Man declared; and quickly added, "I mean, General, it isn't that I'm afraid to fly. It isn't that. But in a military problem of the kind we're having tomorrow, I think my man, Brent, is more capable than either one of us."

"Well, you're wrong," Hanson declared bluntly. "I've served in Air Service. Furthermore, you have been in command of this post three years and you have never made an observation flight. I'm going to take you up tomorrow and show you some things you never dreamed were possible in laying targets and making quick adjustments of fire. The age limit gets around to you in another year or so, and it will be to your advantage to make this flight—in the interest of serving out the remainder of your time . . . Well, Colonel, if you'll excuse me, it's my bedtime."

He arose, straightened his shoulders and walked with exaggerated military stiffness from the porch and disappeared in the direction of his room.

Old Mac, feeling old and baffled and out of step with everything, took a

big drink of his mint julep. The Army, and the Coast Artillery in particular, he pondered angrily, had gone to the devil. When a man like Oscar Hanson got to be chief of a branch as important as the Coast Artillery was, and would stoop to retiring a colonel two years before his time following a disagreement such as this had been tonight—and would, Old Mac thought grimly, continue to be in the morning—well, when that happened, the C. A. had gone to hell.

He didn't like Hanson, and the feeling was both strong and mutual. Hanson was a martinet who dealt in personalities and petty, trivial displays of rank. He had come into the Army through West Point, the more accepted way, and MacKissick had come up through the ranks; therefore, while Hanson was the younger, he was a general.

Tonight, instead of asking Old Mac if he wanted to go aloft tomorrow, the general had said bruskly:

"MacKissick, I'm taking you up with me tomorrow. I'll handle the observation and you'll take notes. You've never availed yourself of the opportunity of going up in this balloon you have at your disposal. I can't imagine why; I can't imagine a field officer who will not do the things his juniors have to do. It's time you changed your policy in that respect."

It was, Old Mac thought at the time, a little ridiculous to insinuate that he lacked the nerve to fly. He had established himself, he felt, both in the Cavalry and Coast Artillery. Once in war and once in peace he had been awarded medals for valor; his bravery needed no substantiation. It wasn't that he was afraid to fly in a balloon with any skilful pilot. He had never done so, simply because it had never occurred to him that he had a duty in the air.

But he was mortally afraid to fly with General Hanson. It was common knowledge that Hanson couldn't roll a wheelbarrow without wrecking it. He had been "washed out" of Air Service, out of lighter-than-air, following the fifth crash in his experience. His companion had been killed when the basket of the craft whipped down upon a telephone pole. Old Mac did not deceive himself. It made him almost tremble to think of going up with such a man.

Furthermore, there was pride involved, totally apart from his disconcerting apprehensions. Fort Breckenridge was in his care, his job; and the records made there were his joy. He had not been a hard-boiled, scrupulously disciplining officer there three years for nothing, building up a personnel second to none in military efficiency and morale.

The war game the next day was with a Naval gunboat which would appear offshore, and Old Mac meant to see that Breckenridge accounted for itself. Balloon observation was the key to fire control, and he didn't intend that General Hanson or anybody else should interfere with Lieutenant William Brent in the basket of the kite.

"Well," Old Mac thought corrosively, "after forty-one years with Uncle Sam, you're in a fix. You either get yourself retired or get banged up riding with a balloonatic. Which shall it be?"

SATURDAY dawned clear and calm, and as soon as the sun had risen the temperature soared. The visibility was unlimited, an excellent condition for aerial observation. At breakfast General Hanson predicted that they would enjoy themselves immensely on the flight. Old Mac, sipping his orange juice, grimaced and said nothing. Bitterness filled his soul. He could not, he had decided during the night, afford to give in to retirement. Equally impossible was the risk, in his state of fear of physical calamity, to go up with the general. He wanted to speak frankly to this stuffed-shirt superior, but words were denied him; there were no words—words that could be spoken to a major-general—which would suffice.

The maid just then came in with the morning paper, so they occupied themselves with reading and with finishing their breakfasts. The scarehead of the paper read:

BALLOONISTS RIDE OUT STORM; CONTINUE FLIGHT TOWARD GULF

Johnson leads National Elimination Race Flyers; sighted over Dallas; flying rapidly southward.

Dallas, Texas, June 2nd. (Special). Lieutenant Kepie Johnson, of Scott Field, tonight led the field in the National Elimination Balloon Race by a margin that assures him of first place. Shortly before dark today his balloon was seen to emerge from a severe thunder and electrical storm to the north, and as it passed over this city to the southeastward, Johnson dropped a note stating that he and and his aide, Lieutenant Branch, were in good health and spirits.

As far as could be ascertained, all other entrants in the race have been forced down, most of them in widely scattered portions of the country. Johnson, tonight, alone remained in the air . . .

General Hanson read this, passed the paper to MacKissick for similar perusal and, when Old Mac had finished reading, said:

"The boy made a remarkable flight. MacKissick, you've missed much valuable experience by never going up before. You'll enjoy it this morning."

"I," thought the Old Man, "would enjoy seeing you get sick enough to die!"

Aloud he said, repeating last night's argument:

"I think it's unwise, General. We'll only slow up the handling of the problem. I wish you'd reconsider your decision." He smiled coldly, adding gravely, "I haven't convinced myself, actually, that you weren't joking anyhow."

"No?" the general returned, his florid face expressionless. "Well, MacKissick, in case you think I'm joking, you might better forget it. I'm not. I've no sympathy for a field officer who —ah—lacks the fortitude to do the things his juniors have to do. You have your choice; you don't have to go with me. But if you don't, I'll have you in retirement before you can pack your things to leave this post. You should have availed yourself of the opportunity long ago, and I consider it a gross neglect of duty that you haven't done so."

MacKissick looked up stonily.

"Neglect of duty!" he repeated icily, and paused as if considering the implications in the phrase.

The dining room was tensely quiet. He tried desperately to hold his tongue. He knew Hanson. The man was dangerous. He was a superior officer. But Old Mac had held his tongue for years. In a sudden, violent outburst of heedless rage he blurted:

"Hanson, you're nothing but a petty, sneaking skunk. I've forgotten more about fire control than you'd learn if you lived to be a thousand. You're a general because your father-in-law is a lousy Senator. Everybody knows that, Hanson, so don't try to get indignant. You killed a man in a balloon from nothing but empty-headed stubbornness—shut up until I'm through—and now you order me to go, for the good of the Service. Well, in spite of your rank, you can go to hell! You'll bulldoze me into nothing of the sort!"

The general, in a flaming rage, seemed for a moment unable to get breath enough to speak.

"You," he finally bellowed, "are through! When today's problem is finished, you report back here under arrest! I'm going to try you, MacKissick! I'll show you who you are! Retirement? Hell, no! You won't get retirement. You'll go before a B board before the year is out. I hope you've got some money saved, because you're going to need it!"

He pushed back his chair and stalked away to his room; Old Mac heard him throwing things upon the floor in preparation for departure.

He sat there, staring first at the partially eaten food upon the table, then at the old, familiar furnishings. His eyes strayed to his wrinkled hands, unconsciously tense upon the table edge. They were old, the fingers gnarled and stiff, the skin loose, the veins too evident. Age! He was, he considered tragically, an old man. Sixty-two. But old as he was he must, now, look desperately ahead. The picture had, in two mad minutes, changed.

Following retirement, instead of a peaceful, financially secure time of rest before he died, he would be cast out. He knew Hanson. A Class B board would follow instructions. Old Mac, like almost all other Army men, had been content to feel secure in the knowledge of his pension when his days of usefulness were over. Now, in a moment of indulgence, he had robbed himself of that. He suddenly wished that he had decided to fly with Hanson

and take his chances.

Hanson tramped into the room and stood by the door. MacKissick, deep in thought, did not hear him. The general walked across the room and took his seat. His face was a mask.

"MacKissick!" he said loudly. The deaf old man looked up. "MacKissick, I've reconsidered. You'll have another chance. You don't deserve it—no officer who speaks as you spoke awhile ago deserves anything but a court-martial. But if you want to make this flight today, we'll drop the charges. However, you're too old to stay in Service. You must apply for immediate retirement. I'm leaving the decision with you."

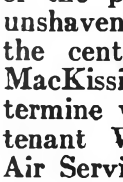
Old Mac's eyes dropped from General Hanson's lips back to his hands. Pride urged him to stand his ground. Retirement? Hell, he had two years to go. Nobody had complained before. But if Hanson sent him up before a board, it would be a tragic ending of a long career. He must, in spite of everything, cling to his retirement pay. He looked up, his eyes cold and gray.

"I'll fly with you," he said. "You've got a black soul, Hanson." He got slowly to his feet, towered in the room. "But why? If I'm to be retired, what's the point of it? What's it going to gain?"

Hanson returned bluntly:

"Because I ordered you to go. My orders can not be ignored—as you see."

"Yes," said MacKissick icily, "generals must be obeyed."



THEY went, in hard silence, to headquarters. There, in the corridor, surrounded by almost every younger officer of the post, were two strangers—two unshaven, red eyed men who formed the center of a wild demonstration. MacKissick paused a moment to determine what was going on; and Lieutenant William Brent, dapper junior Air Service officer at this Coast Artillery fort, broke through the group and led the taller of the strangers with him.

"Colonel," Brent said, failing to see General Hanson in his excitement, "this is Kepie Johnson! Just landed up the country about sixty miles. Brought his balloon in to have it packed for shipment. Kepie won the National Elimination Race!"

Old Mac shook hands with Johnson unenthusiastically.

"You're Johnson, eh?" he confirmed the introduction; and to Hanson, who had stepped up importantly, "General, here's the man we read about this morning."

"That so?" Hanson asked, and was immediately accorded more attention than was Johnson. The junior officers looked at him with stiff respect. "Well, well! That's fine. Fine! That was a real race you made!"

He asked a multitude of questions, while Johnson, tired almost to exhaustion, stood in agony and tried to answer them.

While the general was doing this, Colonel MacKissick touched Bill Brent on the arm and motioned him aside; they left the knot of men assembled in the corridor and went unnoticed to the colonel's office.

"Brent," Old Mac said, inside the office, "General Hanson is planning for us to use your balloon in the fire adjustment problem this morning. I've tried to dissuade him, but unsuccessfully. I don't want to go, and don't want him to go."

He paused, considering. Propriety restrained him; he should not, a colonel, criticize a superior officer before a junior. Yet he was nervous and upset and almost desperate. He went on:

"If I were positive the general were a skilful pilot, it might be all right. But I have no such assurance. I tell you frankly I don't care to go aloft with him, and don't want him to use the balloon. I thought perhaps you could arrange for it to be—er—flying badly, or some such thing, so he would consider it inadvisable to make the flight. You could do that, of course?"

Brent nodded, glancing out of the window, and passed his hand carefully over his sleek black hair. He had never dreamed of an opportunity such as this. Some weeks earlier, for a prank of his, he and his friend, Lieutenant Sanders, had been sworn to complete sobriety by Old Mac. Not only sworn, but ordered, on a dire pen-

alty if they disobeyed, not to take a drink within six months. And they found this punishment irksome, not to say, at times, a tragic inconvenience. Brent had promised himself an adequate retaliation. It would, he considered thoughtfully, be a satisfying episode if he could adroitly have the drinking ban removed, and then, equally adroitly, make it necessary that Old Mac fly with Hanson. The ways of justice, he thought whimsically, were devious.

"It can be arranged, sir," he answered MacKissick soberly. "You want the captive balloon incapacitated—except for an experienced pilot—is that it?" He smiled suddenly, and added, "I can do that, Colonel, and then, when the shoot is over, get the balloon fixed up again."

"No," Old Mac said. "No, don't do that, Brent. Don't be in any hurry fixing the balloon again. The general might insist on flying it."

He almost related Hanson's reputation as a balloonist, but decided not to do so. He did, however, say:

"No, Brent, it has been a long time since the general has flown and—well, we've only this one balloon, you know. Don't make the repairs, if repairs are necessary, until he's gone."

Brent nodded. MacKissick, he knew, wouldn't have given a dime a dozen for all the balloons the Air Service had in supply. The colonel, obviously, was afraid to fly. And Brent meant to make him fly—and see the flight. Already he had a plan. But he said:

"Colonel, if the captive balloon flies, I'll fly it. I'm giving you my word, sir."

Old Mac smiled warmly. He even laid his hand on Bill Brent's shoulder.

"I'll depend on you," he said. "And—ah—Brent, about this drinking business—you recall?"

"Do I?" Brent grinned. "How could I forget it? I was about to men—"

"Well, forget it now," the Old Man instructed warmly. "I appreciate this thing you're doing for me, Brent."

"Quite all right; I thank you, sir. Now, to fix that kite of mine—"

He departed.

MacKissick, maintaining outwardly a calm and placid matter-of-factness, invited General Hanson into his office for an explanation in detail of the game of war.

BRENT, meanwhile, arrived at the bedding ground of the balloon which was shortly to be put up for artillery adjustment work; he called Donelson, sergeant of Air Service, to one side. Kepie Johnson's free balloon, he learned, had been delivered for packing, but was still on the truck in the transportation building. Forthwith Donelson departed and some minutes later returned with the truck and the balloon.

So when General Hanson and Colonel MacKissick and the members of their staff arrived at the bedding ground just after nine o'clock, the kite balloon was still bedded down, moored to the ground with a multitude of sandbags. But Kepie Johnson's free balloon, like a huge gray soap bubble in the sun, was inflated for flight only a hundred feet away.

Hanson had an audience—Brent and Sanders, a half dozen Coast Artillery officers, a score or more of soldiers of the Air Service.

"I've decided to pilot your observation balloon this morning, Brent," he announced. "Colonel MacKissick has asked to go aloft with me. We'll control the adjustment by telephone, and conduct a full inspection after we get down. Prepare the balloon while I inspect the chartroom."

Brent glanced at MacKissick.

"I'm sorry, sir," he returned to the general. "We discovered a defective valve about a week ago, and ordered a new one, which has not arrived. Perhaps the General will not think it advisable to take the captive balloon because of that."

He may have stressed the word *captive* just a little, but he did not seem to do so consciously.

"You see, sir, the valving must be done manually. It would be quite easy to valve too little and rip the fabric. That, of course, might necessitate a parachute jump."

"You can't afford to risk that, General," MacKissick put in stiffly. He was afraid Hanson, in his stubbornness,

would override Brent's objections to the flight—which Hanson did.

"I'll chance it," he declared, speaking for his audience. "I was Air Service in the war. Qualified as a balloonist. I can still handle myself in the air. Prepare the balloon, Brent." His lips changed into an affected smile, and he glanced at MacKissick. "The colonel, here, asked me to take him up, so we're going up—even if I have to use that free balloon of Johnson's."

Old Mac was cursing softly between his teeth.

"You're a damn liar!" he snarled under his breath in Hanson's ear. "It's bad enough to have to go in a balloon that's tied down with a cable—with you flying! I won't go in the free balloon!"

Brent heard the words. MacKissick, being deaf, often talked louder than he thought. Brent wondered at the Old Man's vehemence. He could, at that juncture, have stated that Johnson's free balloon was inflated only for a test and was not in commission to be flown. But he thought it would be sport to see MacKissick forced to fly. He said—

"If you'll pardon me, General, I don't think it wise for you to go in my balloon."

"Unbed the other one," Hanson commanded tersely. "Come on, Colonel. We'll take a hop and then conduct inspection. The Navy hasn't showed up yet. We'll have ample time."

"Wait," Old Mac demanded. "We'll fall in the water in that outfit. I fell in two weeks ago with a jumping balloon; I ought to know."

"There's not a breath of wind," Hanson reminded. And then, louder than was necessary, "What are you afraid of?"

Old Mac hesitated. Behind him were his officers and men. He could not, without humiliation, publicly decline to do something which his superior officer undertook so eagerly. He could do nothing save go, however much he might distrust Hanson's ability in the air, however much he dreaded the ordeal. He walked forward rigidly beside the general toward the free balloon, swearing in a guarded, caustic tone.

Old Mac took a position in one corner of the basket, grasped a stay in each hand as if afraid he would fall out. Hanson glanced about the rigging, found the valve cord, saw the red-painted rip-cord, looked for an instant at the instruments.

"Brent," he called, "they've changed the layout in these baskets since I did my flying. But I'll get along. Cast off!"

"Remember, General," Brent warned, just as the crew dropped the mooring lines, "this is a racing balloon! Good luck!"

The big bag started upward slowly, its sleek sides smooth with gas which had expanded under the direct rays of the climbing sun. At fifty feet it seemed to leap. Three hundred, and then five hundred, then a thousand. The Coast Artillery officers, clustered down below, looked up in curiosity; they had no appreciation of the drama of this flight. But Brent sensed it. He grinned at Gene Sanders, his superior officer in the Air Service, and then ran hastily to the bedded kite balloon and procured from its basket two pairs of binoculars which were kept there for use later in the day. He came back and handed one to Sanders.

"From the way they're starting off, this may be good," he chuckled. "I don't know what it's all about, but the Old Man was sore enough for murder! I didn't know the general was really a balloonatic—didn't think he'd take the free balloon even after I had planted it for him."

"Your guess," Lieutenant Sanders said, from upturned, open mouth as he watched the rising bag through the glasses, "is just as good as mine."

TO GENERAL HANSON, the balloon seemed to have jumped into the air. As it left the ground he had reached for the valve cord and, in doing so, had dropped the sand scoop overboard.

He valved once, gently, almost timidly this first time; need for valving, as he remembered, did not come until a craft of this kind reached some considerable altitude.

Old Mac, deadly grim and silent,

standing there holding to his basket rope, was like a swimmer who has dived into unpleasantly cold water. The shock of altitude addled him, yet it did not overcome his fears. His mind was busy estimating the dangers of this position high above the earth. His sense of outrage did not vary; he held Hanson in contempt and hatred, and now he was at the other's mercy, come what might.

Yet, as they climbed rapidly, he did give attention to the changing aspect of the world below. The beach, from two thousand feet, was a curving ivory line with a dark strip where the lap of subdued waves had washed the sand. He saw the town and port of Henderson three miles to the east; red buildings, black wharfs, gray grain elevators, the towering beach hotel called Seaside, the pier and the dancing pavilion at its end.

It was, in spite of the stabbing dread of danger, strange magic to be here. The world was a saucer whose edges reached almost to infinity before becoming welded to the brassy sky at the horizon.

They ascended straight into lifeless air three thousand feet, and Hanson tugged again at the valve cord to slow the ascent. With unaccustomed eyes he watched the instruments in the basket, and especially the rate of climb. It recorded almost a thousand feet a minute. During the fourth minute, when they were still rocketing and the altimeter showed over four thousand feet, MacKissick noticed that Fort Brenkenridge was sliding slowly southward; they were drifting north upon a lazy wind.

The thought of flying across the five-mile lane of water which cut off Henderson Island from the mainland brought remembrance of the inspection he was to hold within two hours, of the artillery observation which must be carried out that day. Duty, for the moment, crowded apprehension into the background of his mind. It would require half the day to get a car to come across the causeway if they landed in the wilderness of grass flats that formed the coastal plain.

"General," the colonel said in sudden alarm, abandoning his stony silence, "there *is* some wind up here! You'd better land!"

Hanson laughed in contempt.

"I'm flying the balloon," he reminded, and then added in a patronizing, chiding tone, "MacKissick, don't admit that you're afraid. You're scared to death, but be your rank and don't make it so evident. I'll take care of you."

Old Mac had biting words upon his tongue, but pursed his lips and in stiff silence gazed out to sea.

The rise into rarified air continued, accelerating rather than decreasing as each thousand feet was added to the altimeter. Hanson valved now and then, frugally, paying slight attention to the instruments. He forgot that the gas had been put into the bag that morning when it was cold. And he did not know, or he forgot, that the gas must expand as they went up, due to the decrease in atmospheric pressure; that this expansion would increase the volume of air displaced by the balloon and thereby increase the lifting power of the bag.

At seven thousand feet the balloon rose more slowly, yet even at that altitude it went up five hundred feet a minute. Hanson, his ears affected by the rapid change of pressure, did not hear MacKissick speak again. He was interested in the scene, the changing aspect of calm water in the Gulf, the gathering clouds to the eastward. Then Old Mac turned and shouted.

"Hanson, the wind's changed again! Look down there now!"

The general looked at the rounding earth over the edge of the basket. Straight down eight thousand feet. And instead of Breckenridge below, instead of the curving beach, was open water. They were fully a mile from land—and drifting rapidly to sea. The island lay, small and serene, the size and shape of a mullet, to the north. Their speed was perceptible even as they watched. The space of open water widened.

HASTILY the general valved. He hauled down on the valve cord and held it down. The escape of gas was not, of course, audible to his ears, but the reaction of the balloon was obvious.

It had, in the last two minutes, passed its altitude of equilibrium, above which it had been carried by inertia, and above which it would not remain without the loss of ballast. It would have oscillated and started down a moment later, for the air was now quite cold, causing a contraction of the gas and a consequent loss of lift. But Hanson had forgotten all this. He valved.

In doing so, he overvalved. When the big bag started down he did not loose his grip upon the cord; he held it. And in half a minute the balloon was descending as rapidly as it had been going up before. It dropped, accelerating swiftly. Danger, coming just as swiftly, was not yet apparent.

During flight with any lighter-than-air craft, expansion and contraction of the lifting gas are extremely important. Buoyancy is obtained, of course, by displacement of the air with a gas lighter than air. Lift, therefore, is directly proportionate to the volume of displacement. Gas expands under heat, expands under decreasing atmospheric pressure. These forces are constantly in operation.

The balloon seemed to fall. MacKissick, clutching his stays, looked over the side and made clucking noises with his tongue as the earth rushed up at him. Fear took possession of him; he could not turn away to look at his companion. Hanson, still clinging to the valve cord, abandoned the instruments and calculated how long it would require to get down. There was a mild south wind below them, and then calm air. They must reach the wind and stay in that elevation until they drifted over land again, after which, the general suddenly decided, it would be quite expedient to land. He had, he believed, had enough of this today. His ears were hurting him.

"I wish," complained MacKissick, turning suddenly, "that this thing would let loose of my stomach! I can't get my breath!"

"Hold it," Hanson snapped. "You'll get it in a minute—on the ground, at the rate we're going. Talk about fast elevators!"

MacKissick gulped as the change of pressure reached his ears. He tried to swallow, and failed. A strange buzzing assailed him, like the beginning of an attack of apoplexy. That passed, and dizziness beat at him. But he clung to his ropes as if his life depended on them. Meanwhile he vigorously cursed the unpleasantness of his sensations.

At a thousand feet, when they were a hundred feet from the beach and rocketing to earth, Hanson let go of the valve cord and waited for the balloon to cushion and take up level flight. He waited almost half a minute. The statoscope still showed well below the thousand-feet-a-minute mark—down! They were fifty feet from shore and five hundred above the water in the mild south wind. And then Hanson became afraid that they would not land upon the beach, but in the water; the wind, he suddenly decided, would not have time to blow them in.

"Ballast!" he snapped. "Heave it out!"

Old Mac, normally deaf, his ears now clogged by the changing pressure, did not hear.

"Ballast!" the general roared.

He struck McKissick on the shoulder and reached down with both hands for the thirty-pound bags of sand and flung them overboard.

MacKissick turned and saw the movement. There was that in Hanson's action, perhaps a drastic urgency, which caused the Old Man for an instant to forget both his fears in this swift flight and his hatred and contempt for his superior.

"What?" he shouted. "What for?"

"We're going to crash!" Hanson exploded.

There were twenty bags of sand inside the basket, and in ten moves he dropped them quickly to the sea.

The balloon, however, heavy from loss of gas, heavy from the contraction of what gas it still contained, slowed very little in its descent. Momentum carried it on down, although there was now sufficient lift to take it back several thousand feet into the air—if it ever started upward. But it went on down, and the sea breeze pushed it toward the shore.

Hanson had not thrown out the ballast soon enough. With a sudden,

devastating sound, like that of a rock falling into loose plowed ground, the basket thudded into a dune a dozen yards inside the beach. Hanson shouted just before they struck, perhaps answering the booming warnings which MacKissick had been uttering inarticulately for the last three hundred feet.

They struck with a force that was amazing. The wicker of the basket bent and folded from the impact. Old Mac, even with his hands upon the basket ropes, could not keep his feet; and Hanson, with no support, crumpled like an empty sack. MacKissick fell on top of him, breath and reason gone.

In the dull agony of pain they lay thus where they had fallen, sprawled and crumpled in the damaged basket. The blow of landing had almost knocked MacKissick out. His leg was bent under him, and slowly he realized that the pain was centered there; it must, he considered hazily, be broken. Yet that seemed less important than that it might have been worse. He was alive, and the balloon had landed safely although violently; he had lived through a flight with Oscar Hanson, the balloonatic.

Some two minutes passed before he got his breath and tried to lift his aging body. And then he discovered that it was difficult to do so. He seemed pinned down, drawn against the basket floor as by a magnet. The leg was useless; he struggled with his hands. Then, when at last he clawed himself upward, one thrust of pain in his knee and the pain suddenly passed. He drew himself erect and found that he could stand. Hanson scrambled up, his face bleeding on one side where a broken piece of wicker had sliced his cheek. Just then MacKissick made a terrible discovery.

"Hanson, we're not on the ground!"

The general looked down quickly. Fort Breckenridge was once again below them, far away. He looked at the altimeter and was shocked to find it registering four thousand feet. The balloon was rocketing. He grabbed for the valve cord and put his weight on it to stop that wild ascent.

But he hesitated, then released the valve. He had valved before, expecting to land, and by some miscalculation which he did not understand he had crashed into the dunes. By a further error he had dumped out all the ballast, trying to slow the fall. He had no ballast now, nothing which could be thrown overboard. The situation baffled him.

MacKissick thundered:

"You're a fool! Let's get down from here! I've had enough of this." He glared malevolently at the senior officer. "I thought you knew how to handle one of these contraptions well enough to keep it on the ground!"

"Kite balloons," the general confessed. "I flew one once when it broke away—flew it as a free balloon. I supposed this would be about the same. But something's wrong. It doesn't act just right—the way I had expected."

Old Mac, all thought of relative rank abandoned, choked and sputtered.

"You mean," he finally snarled, his wrath so great that he had forgotten to become afraid, "you don't know anything about this one? Damn you, I'll show you what I think of you! And *me* up here!"

MacKISSICK was a man of violent actions and reactions. With a gnarled fist he suddenly swung, and struck Hanson in the eye. It was a nasty blow, and it almost knocked the general from the basket.

"Retire me!" he bellowed. "Try me! Go ahead. But I'll pay you for the dirty, underhanded way you forced me on this ride." Forthwith he smashed his other fist into the general's mouth.

Hanson made no effort to retaliate; he said nothing for a moment. He spat over the side and then declared, in a voice that sobered Old Mac instantly—

"We'd better both get on our parachutes."

Silence for an instant.

"Lord," MacKissick uttered fervently, "I don't know how to jump! Damn you, you've got to get us down!"

"I'm going to try," the general promised grimly. "But I've discovered things—things I didn't know."

MacKissick had turned his back and did not hear. He grabbed up the line

that extended over the edge of the basket and attached itself to the 'chute below.

The events herein narrated occurred several years ago, shortly after the World War. The present seat-type parachute had not then been invented, and balloons, when they carried 'chutes at all, were equipped with the pouch type, a canopy of fabric fastened in a covering which in turn was attached securely to the bottom of the basket. When a balloonist jumped, he simply climbed over the side and let go; the line pulled the 'chute canopy from the pack and it automatically opened. In ordinary flight the occupants of the basket wore only a harness, from which the parachute line was detached for freedom of movement; and in an emergency the line was snapped instantly to the harness and the jump was made. This, then, was the type of equipment Hanson and MacKissick had.

They snapped the lines in place for use if necessary. The general, glancing at the five thousand foot reading of the altimeter, pulled down on the valve cord. He watched the rate-of-climb. Inertia carried the balloon on up. There seemed no end to its ascent.

But it did stop, finally, at fifty-five hundred. It stopped, and the climb indicator swung down to zero and hovered there a moment. Then it flipped on down—and stayed. A wind seemed suddenly to blow at them—vertically, from the earth. The bottom of the big gray bag folded upward from the appendix—there was no appendix bridle—wrinkling with a sound like that of heavy silk in friction. The wind increased from below, the folding of the envelop continued; and at four thousand feet the bottom was pressed upward almost to the equator.

Hanson stood tensely at the basket rim, looking at the ground. He had ceased valving when the balloon had started down, but a clutching fear assailed him as he saw the craft accelerating swiftly. The impact of the earth, this time, would be more devastating than before; the basket had been weakened. It might, the general concluded quickly, be fatal He could not trust to such a landing. It was time to jump. He wondered whether he could persuade MacKissick to leap before him.

There was no need of jumping, actually, for Hanson could have torn out the rip panel and collapsed the balloon entirely, throwing the bottom of the bag up into the top of the netting and forming a parachute that would have served to get them down. But he didn't know this. So he said:

"Well, MacKissick, over we go." He tried to affect a nonchalance. "We'll smash our spines if we hit like this!"

He tried to be calm about it, for he thought MacKissick was too excitable. But his voice was harsh, and it crackled with the static of command.

Old Mac looked once at the sickening space between them and the ground. It was more than half a mile. He was, for a moment, on the verge of panic. He was a novice, completely out of his element. On the ground he was slow to be afraid; but he was now thoroughly frightened. Yet because he was a novice, he knew nothing but to obey Hanson's barked command.

"I don't know how!" he answered. "You go ahead. I'll watch you—then follow."

"Right!" Hanson snapped. "This way!"

He scrambled to the edge, climbed up and poised a moment there. Speed was paramount. He didn't look to check the position of the 'chute line. He toppled over and disappeared below the rim.

Old Mac felt the basket jar as the general reached the end of the rope and snapped it taut. He forced dangerous thoughts and visions from his mind; he had to go now, space or no space, regardless of what might happen to him when he fell. He imitated Hanson, stepped up on the basket rim.

At the moment he thought he heard a yell below him; but he was very deaf and decided it had been his imagination. He started to leap forward. The sound came again, a scream of terror this time, and Old Mac was sure of it. He looked down, for a moment saw nothing, then saw Oscar Hanson swing out into view, dangling on the end of the 'chute line a dozen feet below.

Almost too late to stop himself from falling, he grabbed a stay and scrambled back into the basket. A dozen things crossed his harassed mind within an instant. Hanson's parachute had failed, leaving him dangling below the basket where the impact with the earth would crush him when they struck. He leaned over the side, trying to see.

And then he saw! The general's 'chute line was not extended directly from the pack on the bottom of the basket. It came up into the basket, looped inside, around a corner stay rope, and thus extended to the pack. Pulling upward from the pack, it could not drag out the parachute.

THE situation was desperate. The balloon was falling at almost fifteen hundred feet a minute. The wind made by their passage downward through the air was strong. MacKissick tried to estimate how much time he had. He thought of cutting the corner stay rope, which would release the 'chute rope and clear the 'chute. But he had no knife and could find none in the basket.

Like a shock came another thought. Why bother? This was not his fault. He himself could still jump. He had, he thought with racing mind, assaulted his chief of branch. Hanson was not, to judge by past performance, a man who would forget that; an enemy of this gaunt old colonel's, he would not waste time with gratitude. The idea tugged at Old Mac's mind. So easy to accomplish, so justified at this dangerously low altitude. But he could not do it, even though he hated Hanson.

"Climb up the rope!" he shrieked. "I'll haul you in!"

The general's ashen lips moved, and Old Mac understood.

"Quick! For God's sake!"

"Come on!" MacKissick bellowed, and struggled with the line.

Hanson weighed a hundred and ninety pounds; Old Mac only a hundred and seventy. Both men were old. But Old Mac fought the line with the desperation of despair. He must save Hanson before he could save himself. He was afraid to look away from his straining hands, afraid the shock of seeing the earth so close would rob him of his nerve. Inch by inch he hauled up on the line, while the hemp sliced flesh from his fingers.

Then suddenly Hanson's fingers appeared upon the rim. MacKissick leaped forward and grasped him by the shoulders and helped him in.

"Quick!" the general rasped. "We're getting close!"

He gathered up the 'chute rope, tossed it out and saw that it was clear —and dived away. Old Mac followed. As he went over in a horrifying fall, the Gulf of Mexico seemed close enough to touch. A hand seemed to tear into his stomach; and then the rope snapped taut and jerked him to a slower speed as the parachute trailed out and opened in the still and silent air above the beach. He didn't hear the sharp report as the canopy of fabric bloomed above him. His eyes were following Oscar Hanson in the latter's oscillating downward path. He saw the general land, roll with the impact and fall. At that same instant he himself splashed into the calm ripple of the ebbing tide ten feet from shore.

The balloon, now light, checked itself and slowly climbed again; but with the loss of gas from the general's excessive valving and from a small rip at a seam obtained in the first wild climb, it reached its altitude of equilibrium at three thousand feet and slowly settled down. The sea breeze increased a little later and drifted it across the channel to the mainland, where soldiers found it on a grass flat late that afternoon and brought it back for shipment.

At a banquet given that evening in honor of Major-General Oscar Hanson at the club, Lieutenant William Brent sat diagonally across the table from his commandant. Cocktails had been served earlier, and Brent, no longer held to dull sobriety by the edict from Old Mac, had given way to a somewhat sparkling inebriation. It was time for toasts. An epauletted commander from the Navy offered one; the group around the table drank with him. The general arose and looked about him. His lips were swollen; his eye had not responded to the beefsteak which had been applied to it that afternoon. He

was, in fact, a very battered major-general.

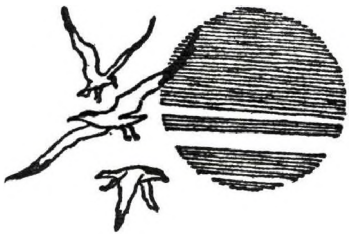
"I drink, gentlemen," said he, in the best official manner, "to the officer on my right—your commandant. His colorful career was almost brought to an untimely close this afternoon, but he came through splendidly. It is a shame that age must, at sixty-four, force such men to retirement." He paused, and actually smiled as he looked with one eye at the officers about him. "However, I have more to show for this afternoon than he has; he's a tough guy, your colonel is."

There was laughter, and another drink around. Bill Brent suddenly thought of something. He lifted his glass and spoke, but his tongue, perhaps a little thickened, proved untrustworthy. He looked meaningly at Old Mac across the table, and suggested:

"Colonel, I po—plopose a drink to the Army's foremost airman—the balloonatic of old Fort Bleck—old Flort Beckenridge. Splenderful flight he made this morning. I watched it all—all. So I pa'pose a rousing jeer—" his tongue went completely back on him—"pa'pose a rishing cheer to General Hanson!"

Amid the restrained laughter, the general himself interrupted the caustic, pointed words on Old Mac's lips

"Thank you, Brent," he said. "But I think I'm satisfied. Hereafter you can rise, my boy, and Old Mac and I will be content to cheer."



Shark

By BILL ADAMS

HE was out on the boom end, seated with a long line in his hand,
With the tropic sky above him. 'Twas a thousand miles to land.
There was tropic sea beneath him; and he watched the swift fish go
As he sat on the boom end fishing in his forenoon watch below
He saw the darting bonito, and the sinuous dolphin's leap,
And the lightning dash of the albacore; and, low in the dimpling deep,
The long sharp snout of the barracoot'. A petrel hovered by,
And a marlinespike bird was screaming from somewhere in the sky.
An azure tropical morning, with the merest breath of a breeze,
And never a white cap breaking on the width of the tropic seas.
Her sails arched up to the heavens, tier upon tier, snow-white;
And her decks they flashed and dazzled, with brasswork and varnish bright.
And the breeze it fluttered and faded, till it died altogether away,
And becalmed in the blue of the tropics the towering clipper lay.
And the sun blazed down on her brasswork, the pitch it melted and ran
In the seams of her decks. And no one, no mate or no sailorman,
Took heed of the first voyage 'prentice as he wiped the sweat away
And looked to the placid blue water that waveless beneath him lay.
And he stripped the shirt from his shoulders, and he kicked his trousers free,
And he dropped a rope to the water, and he gently slid down to the sea.
"I'll write," he thought, "this evening, and I'll tell them at home how I
Took a swim in the tropical ocean." —And the bell struck by and by,
And the mate asked, "Where's that youngster? What's come o' the kid, d'ye know?"
And they hunted the green first voyager, they sought him high and low.
They called down the dark sail locker. They called to the bright blue sky—
And all that they had for answer was the marlinespike bird's harsh cry.

Concluding

The BUNGLERS

By HUGH PENDEXTER

The Story Thus Far:

WHEN Ramblin' Peevy, the Tennessee mountain man, joined General Hull's American army marching on the Canadians near Detroit in the War of 1812, he had under his wing young Jim Cassy, the youthful son of Jim Cald. Cald had quarreled with the boy's mother years before, and left the Southern hills. He did not even know of the existence of the boy.

By chance the two old friends met, and Peevy told Cald of his son. Cald was heartbroken to think of the pain he had caused his faithful sweetheart, and tried desperately to make friends with his son. But the boy, grieving over the wrong done his mother, curtly repulsed his father.

Shortly before the Americans moved in behind the stockade at Detroit, a British spy and assassin, known as Captain Ween, began to take toll of unwary American sentinels. Cald became frantic with fear lest his own son be struck down, and he and Peevy endeavored to run the renegade to earth. Behind the British lines one night Peevy ran across the spy and almost succeeded in killing him. From that day the lank Tennesseean became a marked man.

Meanwhile the British had closed in on the American army, and General Hull, a rank incompetent, surrendered with scarcely a shot fired. Peevy immediately began to plan for the escape of his friends and himself from the murderous Ween. By great good fortune his scheming was furthered by Ween himself, who selected young Cassy for headquarters secretarial work. Peevy instructed Cassy to forge two letters from Captain Roberts, commandant at Mackinac, and Mr. Porthier of the Northwest Fur Company, requesting that Peevy and four companions of his selection be released for work among the Missouri tribes.

Then Ween struck. He gave it out that his Winnebago servant was going to smell out American plotters by his strong "frog medicine". Peevy caused two arrows, with Shawnee markings, to be made. When the Winnebago was about to begin the magic which would have resulted in the death of Peevy, he suddenly fell dead with an arrow through his breast. A second later Ween dropped, severely wounded in the throat. As soon as the arrows were examined the British were hard pressed to keep the Winnebagos from turning on the Shawnees.

That night Tecumseh, chief of all the Shawnees, came to Peevy, who had once saved the great warrior's life. He told him that he knew the bowman and that no Shawnee had released the fatal bolts.

"How long will you keep silent?" asked Peevy.

"When the sun again leaves his teepee in the east and again crosses the earth to roll in his blanket in the west, Tecumseh speaks."

"TWENTY-FOUR hours," mused Peevy. To Tecumseh he said, "Then it will be a race between the friend of a chief and the sun. If the white man runs away, how long before the Shawnees are on his trail?"

Tecumseh again swept the heavens, then said:

"One sleep after the man runs away. When the sun gets up from his blankets in the east for the second time."

"It is good," said Peevy.

He produced his pipe, filled it, lighted it and handed it to his red friend. The latter puffed ceremoniously to the four winds of the earth, to the sun, then re-

turned the pipe. Peevy did likewise, and the bargain was sealed between them as inexorably as if by a decree of fate. After sunset Peevy would have thirty-six hours before the avengers of Shawnee honor would seek his trail. He stood while the chief was in sight, then hunted Cald and repeated the gist of the accusation, his own veiled confession and the period of grace he could enjoy.

"If he was a real friend of yours he'd keep his yawp shet," growled Cald.

"He's stretchin' his notions of honor quite a point as it is," said Peevy. "Derned han'some for any man, white or red. At sunrise tomorrer we've got to be wearin' out our moccasins. You tell the boy— Oh, I was forgettin' he ain't on speakin' terms yet with half of his parents."

"What won't they do with him!" groaned Cald. "If he's here an' alive when Ween gits round to speakin', he must shoot hisself, or be hanged."

"They won't do nothin' to him. Be you idiot 'nough to think, if worse gits to worse, that I won't step forward an' take all the blame, writin' the letters an' everything?"

"That'll never work, or I'd do it," said Cald. "If he's here an' alive when Ween gits over his shock an' can speak, the lad must shoot hisself."

"Shet up that sort of talk," Peevy commanded. "I'm here, ain't I? Got a cold supper waitin' for me down in old Tennessee, ain't I? My medicine mighty soon will begin a-workin' an' a-rarin', till you'll reckon that all hell's busted loose. When I git real mad I scare myself. Mebbe we can fix it for you 'n' the boy, with Gutherie an' Bills, to sneak to the river an' float downstream ahind logs, or in a boat, an' git a long start without leavin' any trail. With me ramblin' round from fire to fire an' showin' myself at the Shawnee camp, no one will be watchin' you folks. Wonder what chance a man has to take a knife in an' show it to Ween!"

"Double sentries. No chance, or I'd done for him afore now."

Peevy drifted off into reminiscences, hoping to lighten his friend's somber mood.

"Old Ricks, down home, used to tell how he won all the 'portant battles in the Revolution by sort of advancin' in a retreat by wearin' his pants hindside foremost, so the enemy never could tell if he was chargin' or runnin' away."

But no verbal gymnastics could lift the terrible burden from Cald's heart. His grief became more poignant as his son came up, his brown face heavy with fear.

"What's gnawin' of you, younker? You look deathstruck. If the Injuns see that face they'll reckon you're a coward," said Peevy.

"I am afraid," the boy confessed. "I've been questioned till my head aches. Officers took turns. They've gone through the letters an' picked out some written by Roberts an' Porthier."

"Studyin' the hand of write," mused Peevy.

He considered this the most dangerous phase of the entire investigation.

"They're wastin' their time with the letters," said the youth, his tone taking on a note of pride. "I can imitate the writin' of old Satan hisself till he'd swear he wrote it. They took away an' fetched back quite some parcel of letters."

"Then they ain't proved nothin' agin you," Peevy encouraged.

"But now they're lookin' for the 'portant letter Roberts said he was sendin'!"

"But that's the one Peevy wrote for you to slip into the last mail," spoke up Cald.

The youth did not seem to hear his father. He continued staring at Peevy. The latter said—

"We must haul out tomorrer night at the latest an' trust to luck an' the Anti-Federalist party."

"Sartain death," groaned Cald. "Injuns would run us down in no time."

"Well, mebbe," Peevy said philosophically. "But they'd l'arn they'd had a race an' a right smart finish."

"Hush your talk!" Cald warned. "We must scatter. Here comes an orderly."

His companions noted the direction of his gaze and beheld a young subaltern importantly crossing the parade ground.

"If this business doesn't clear up mighty soon I'll crawl on my hands an' knees to Brock an' say I'm guilty, an' ready to pay the price," said Peevy.

THE youngster, proud of his trim uniform, proud of being word bearer for headquarters, came to a halt and surveyed the men coldly.

"Howdy, Gineral," gravely saluted Peevy.

"If your name is Peevy you will report to headquarters at once."

"I'm him. But I wonder how they knew my name?"

"Then you know what you are to do."

With that the youngster wheeled and stalked away, chin up.

"Fine lookin' younker. Feels his oats as every younker should," murmured Peevy. "Wonder what black kettle's cookin' for me at headquarters. If I don't come back, an' you're not bothered before sundown, try to git to the river an' float down tonight an' strike for the Ohio."

"You'll come back, of course," insisted young Cald. His eyes betrayed great fear.

"I hope so. If I do we'll pull out mighty quick. Tecumseh told me his braves would be after me, but that I'd have a good start."

"We'll go down fightin'," said the boy. "Brock'll remember us for the way we finished."

"That's the proper spirit!" approved Peevy. "But bein' dyin' heroes will be the last thing we do. An' no singin' of 'Sinclaire's Defeat'."

Then he was away with long strides, and the two Calds stood side by side and watched him pass by the sentries at the gate. Suddenly discovering his proximity to his father, and possibly fearing he would be tempted to enter into conversation with the sad faced man, the son hurried away among the cabins.

Peevy's angular visage betrayed no uneasiness as he reported to an orderly. Almost immediately he was ushered into the presence of General Brock. He saluted awkwardly, but was composed and at ease as he stood and looked the commander in the eye.

Brock ceased fumbling a package of papers and, without any preamble, said—

"Peevy, I have here a communication from Mr. Porthier, of the Northwest Fur Company."

"Porthier's one of the finest men I ever had any dealin's with," said Peevy.

"I also have a letter from Captain Roberts, commanding at Mackinac."

"Fine man. Worst thing about this war, or any war, you always have to fight agin some one you think a heap of, an' defend—"

"Allow me to proceed," coldly interrupted Brock. "Mr. Porthier believes he can use you to the advantage of his company if you could carry belts and a talk to the Mandans and other tribes on the Upper Missouri."

"I'd do most anything for Porthier."

"You'd be willing to go to the Big Bend of the Missouri and faithfully carry out any instructions?"

"Just as sartain, Gineral, as he asks me."

"Captain Roberts writes in the same strain. I'm free to warn you that I have suspected you, and still suspect you, of being in the plot to kill the Winnebago and Captain Ween. Did I have proof of your guilt, I should be compelled to deny Mr. Porthier's request."

"I'm innercent as a lamb unborn, Gineral. Ween will tell you that. He'll git his senses back almost any minute. No hurry about me goin' to Canada. It'll be time enough after Ween talks an' tells you—"

"Enough, rifleman! You will start an hour before sunset."

"I'll be dawggone glad to be out of that stockade. It'll be like old times to be doin' work for Mr. Porthier."

He backed toward the door as if expecting to be dismissed. Brock halted him by saying:

"Not so fast. Mr. Porthier thinks you will need four of your countrymen to help in doing this errand."

"I can go to the Big Bend alone, blindfolded—"

"So you will give my orderly the names of the four you will take. The five of you will sign the parole. You will be passed through the gates before sundown."

"I snum! But that's a sticker. Lots of good men here, but just who will go I can't tell. S'pose I write the names after I've skinned back an' talked with 'em?"

"Very well. That's all."

"Except guns," Peevy gently reminded.

"With my pass you will need no guns."

"Your pass will be shield an' buckler, as the Good Book says, till I run across of reds who can't read. I'd rather go to Montreal a prisoner than to fare north without a rifle."

Brock was pleased that the rifleman unconsciously should acknowledge England's sovereignty over the vast Michigan lands. With a slight modulation of his precise military voice, he said:

"Very well. You'll each be given muskets, powder and ball, and a knife and hatchet as you leave the stockade. Our scouts are south, not north or west. I scarcely believe you will meet with any. However, a pass will be given each of you. You will travel overland to Saginaw Bay where a boat will pick you up and carry you to Mackinac. That is all."

PEEVY had an almost overwhelming desire to run as he returned to the stockade. His temples pounded with joy and fear. The scheme had worked, and he felt proud of his craftiness. But Ween might recover the use of his voice at any moment, and halters would be dealt out instead of firearms. As he passed through the gate he was praying for the sun to hasten along on its eternal errand, and afford five desperate men, at the least, a chance to go down fighting with guns in their hands.

Forcing himself to proceed at a casual walk, he reached the south side of the stockade, where he was promptly joined by Cald.

"Don't git excited. At sunset tonight. Don't act excited or crammed full of glee. Tell the younker."

He passed on and found Gutherie and peppery tempered Bills together. He was hard put in forcing them to conceal their great joy. They discounted all danger from the pursuing Shawnees or Canadian rangers, did Ween recover the power of speech.

Cald's heart pounded heavily as he came up to his son to tell him the good news. His voice in his own ears sounded like a stranger's as he said:

"Good news, son. We be pullin' out at sunset today if nothin' happens."

Without looking at him the boy bowed his head to show that he understood. Heavy of heart, the defeated man returned to where Bills was lying on his back and scowling at the fleecy clouds.

Peevy's work was not yet finished. He made a list of his companions and gave it to a sentinel at the gates and explained that it was to be taken to headquarters. Then he returned to his cabin where, in the excavation under his bunk, were four rifles. He had no intention of carrying a musket if possession of the superior arms were possible. After a bit of brooding he perfected the only scheme his shrewd mind could evolve. He passed behind the cabin and examined the stockade. Returning, he came upon Bills and spoke to him briefly. Bills nodded and lounged away. Gutherie came up and asked—

"No chance of bein' fooled, I hope?"

"If a certain man finds his tongue we'll all git ready to cheat the noose. Never see the sun so slow. Like a nigger left to work alone."

"If we could do somethin' to keep our minds off the waitin'," sighed Bills.

"You can. Start a rasslin' bee farther along. While folks be watchin' it, you come back here, go round the cabin to the stockade where you see a strip of bark hangin' loose low down. There's a small openin' atween the timbers at that p'int. Make it bigger. Just big enough to 'low rifles to be poked through."

"Then shove 'em through?" eagerly asked Gutherie.

"No! I'll 'tend to that. But you must do more. There's some loose litter that's been thrown out from the cabins. While folks are watchin' the rasslin', remove the short section of the bottom log at the back of my cabin. Inside, in a hole under my bunk, are four rifles. Snuck 'em, one at a time, to the stockade an' cover 'em with the litter. Put the piece of log back an' come an' see the fun."

Peevy strolled to where young Cald was giving Bills a hard battle. The inmates of the stockade welcomed the diversion. Soldiers and Indians, as well as the prisoners, flocked in to form a huge ring. When Gutherie finally appeared Peevy challenged him. There

was no make-believe in the efforts of the two men. With desperate recklessness they hurled each other about in a way which caused more than one copper colored hand to pat the lips in the aboriginal manner of expressing astonishment. The two men were on the ground, revolving rapidly. Then they were erect, and Gutherie was hurled over his adversary's shoulders. He came to his feet as lightly as a cat and secured a hold around Peevy's neck, which seemed to lengthen that portion of the Tennessee man's anatomy, until the latter ceased resisting and leaped ahead, butting like a goat.

When the match was over Peevy found an officer standing beside him. For an instant his stout heart quailed. To take the bull by the horns he asked—

"What's the latest word from poor Cap'n Ween?"

"Still unable to move or speak. The surgeon fears the spinal cord has been injured . . . Here are your passes. Included is the statement that you accept parole and won't reenlist. If you will fill in four with the names of those who are to accompany you, my errand will be finished."

He produced a lead ink container and a quill, and Peevy, using the top of an empty barrel for a desk, wrote in the names of the two Calds, Bills and Gutherie.

The wrestling was continued, Gutherie taking on Bills, who had put young Cald's shoulders to the ground. Peevy drew apart and threw himself down. Before he sensed the chief's presence Tecumseh was squatting beside him.

"It was a good fight. Why did my friend do it?"

"Just to fergit that we be penned up in here."

"Would a straight tongue say that?"

Peevy endured the boring gaze of the chief for a few moments, then he slowly shook his head. Tecumseh stood erect and warned—

"After the sun rises for the second time the Shawnee will bring back to Brock any white men from this place they find in the woods."

"If they carry the belts of Brock?"

"The Shawnee, until the wounded man can speak, will see no belts."

"Tecumseh is a great man, because he always speaks with a straight tongue. Does he want his wampum back?"

"A chief never takes back a gift. White men do that."

CHAPTER XI

FLIGHT

PEEVY reported to his companions: "Boys, we're out of the war. We're to travel to Saginaw Bay, where we can git a boat for Mackinac. The young officer let me sign your names on these passes. Each says that the holder is on parole an' can't fight in this 'ticular war any more. You mustn't make me out a liar. If you be caught fightin' you'll be hanged, if they can spare the time, an' shot if they be in a hustle. Bills, you pass out the gate, show your pass an' ask for the musket what's waitin' for you. Just say the rest of us is comin' along after we've said goodby to our friends.

Foller along the south side of the stockade, an' stop to wait for us where you see what looks to be a woodchuck's hole atween two timbers. Push your musket through the hole an' we'll shove back a rifle. Gutherie, you follow in half a minute after Bills; Jim, you go third. Young Cassy—Cald, to call you proper—you foller your pap. The fourth rifle's mine, an' the musket I fetch along will go to the fifth man. If any one makes a fuss about you goin' one by one, just say you're actin' sly so's not to attract the 'tention of the Winnebagos. Now be off."

Peevy, smoking his pipe, loitered along inside the stockade where the rifles were concealed. He barely had halted when the brown barrel of a musket came through the opening. A rifle promptly was given in return. The four rifles were exchanged for the less accurate weapons in less than ten seconds. Then Peevy, with a musket over his shoulder, sauntered down to the big gate. To the young lieutenant in charge of the sentinels he said—

"There should be some rations waitin' for us."

"Your men have cooked meat and bread for the five of you. Your passes

will permit you to receive more from the picket band at Roleau's Mill."

As Peevy was walking away a gray haired sergeant fell in beside him and remarked:

"Your men seem to think the Winnebagos will give you trouble. We'll try to hold them from follerin' you. I'll give you good luck even if you be a damned Yankee."

"We ain't Yankees. To be a Yankee you have to live in New England an' carry wooden oats an' nutmegs in your pocket. Everything outside calm an' peaceful?"

"All's well, as it always is, where his Majesty's army is on guard."

"I'll have to pass them comfortin' words along to my friends. No news of any sort?"

"No. The prisoners soon will be started for Montreal. Captain Ween is able to move his fingers slightly. We hope his trouble will clear up mighty soon. The arrow did somethin' to the spinal cord at the base of his neck. His Winnebagos are gettin' ugly."

"Tell the cap'n we're hopin' he'll be on his feet right smart. So long."

Peevy sauntered carelessly until he had rounded the front of the stockade and could see his friends some distance ahead. Then he lengthened his stride and soon come up with them. He was quick to notice a heavy bag Cald senior was carrying. He had not had it when he left the stockade. Peevy asked:

"What you got in that bag, Jim? Jug of rum?"

"What I brought down from Hawg Island an' buried out back here."

"Cap'n Ween's silver doin's! Dawggone, but I'd clean forgot it."

Peevy handed the musket to young Cald and received in exchange his long rifle. Taking the lead, he set a brisk pace in making for the St. Joseph road. With the long tireless strides of the forest runner the five men covered six miles by time the light of early evening gave way before the invading dusk. Peevy sought to persuade Cald to cache the heavy bag of silver, but met with no success.

"Half yours, half mine. I'm carryin' a present to a woman in Tennessee, if she'll take it."

Bills, ever inclined to be querulous when compelled to do anything not connected with cooking big kettles of meat, was the first to suggest:

"We'd be better off, Ramblin', so far as dodgin' any Winnebagos is consarned, if we quit this trace an' took to the woods. Too many cleared places along here. No good cover when it comes to fightin'."

"We must git beyond Roleau's Mill afore it gits too dark. It's goin' to be a mighty hard race, once we turn south an' try for the black swamps of Ohio. An' we'll bless them same swamps, if we make 'em, as heartily as we ever cussed 'em."

"Old Brock's bound to send Injuns to dog us an' see that we travel toward Saginaw Bay," gloomily warned the elder Cald.

He had won his heart's desire—to be outside the stockade with his boy—yet his fear was great. The one thing of importance in his estimation was the safe return of the lad to his mother. By comparison, nothing else counted.

"Most likely Brock, not bein' a fool, will git suspicious when no word from Saginaw tells of our arrivin' there. Or when he gits a letter from Porthier or Captain Roberts which doesn't mention me lovin'ly by name. But ahead of any white scouts will be the Winnebagos. Even now they be trailin' us. The old sergeant said he'd hold 'em back. But he don't know his Injuns."

"Chasin' us!" exclaimed young Cald; and he swung his head from side to side as if expecting to discover red warriors.

"Just so, son. But we'll be thankful it ain't the Shawnees that's doggin' us. Tecumseh will let 'em loose at sunrise, day after tomorrer. Our toe hold on life ain't sartain beyond that time."

"Looks promisin' that we ain't met any Injuns out here," optimistically observed Gutherie.

"Nothin' for 'em out here to do," said Bills. "They'll stick close to Detroit where they can git rum. But settlers down this way will know they've got company inside of thirty-six hours. Fast runnin' won't save our hides. We've got to outsmart the Injuns. By an' by we'll have Brock's army after us."

"Not till he l'arns we ain't headin'

north to Saginaw Bay," said Peevy. "I've kept back some news. Bad news can't come too late to suit me. Cap'n Ween could move his fingers when we was leavin' the stockade."

Instinctively every man increased the length of his stride and glanced back through the gloaming. Gutherie was the first to react with speech. He exclaimed:

"Land o' marcy! If Ween can talk he's upset everything! Brock will be sendin' mounted riflemen after us."

"Ain't come along yet," said Peevy grimly. "An' they want to send a crowd."

"How far have we traveled up to now?" asked young Cald, his voice tremulous, despite his efforts to make it sound casual.

"Better'n six miles. Roleau's Mill is right ahead. I want to be seen there when we turn north as if making for Saginaw," Peevy replied.

"Oh, let's turn south now!" insisted the youngster.

"In good time, son. It won't do for any scout band to meet us, streakin' south, when our papers say we're bound north."

FIVE minutes later a deep voice demanded:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Five men, bound on Gineral Brock's business an' carryin' his passes," Peevy promptly replied.

"Advance, one man, with all passes."

"I'm the critter to bring 'em, mister," cheerfully replied Peevy. "Can't see hide nor hair of you. I'll walk toward your voice. Here, take my gun, Bills."

He confidently advanced and found himself surrounded by a group of men. Three of these led him into the growth for a few rods, while the others remained as guards over the rest of the party. The coals of a supper fire permitted the lighting of a twist of bark. By this flaring light the passes were carefully examined. The lieutenant in command of the scout band inquired—

"Why didn't you take boat from Detroit?"

"Because Gineral Brock didn't offer to send us that way. We're bound for Saginaw Bay where a Northwest Fur Company boat will pick us up."

"You seem to be out of your course."

"Tell that to Gineral Brock. Give me back the papers. We was ordered not to waste any time."

The lieutenant was inclined to be ugly. One member of the picket said:

"If the passes are regular, it's nothing to us how they get into Canada, Lieutenant. I won't share in any responsibility connected with holding up the general's passes."

"Of course not. None of us do," hastily said the lieutenant. "It's the general's signature, all right. You men were prisoners of war?"

"Most sartain. Paroled," said Peevy. "But what interests us now is some victual doin's."

"You shall have food. Call the rest of your men in."

Peevy whistled, and his four companions came forward with several soldiers behind them. The lieutenant was unable to dismiss a certain uneasiness in the back of his mind. His expression was dour as he reluctantly handed back the passes.

Peevy smiled ingratiatingly and said:

"Now we're here we might as well spend the night. Mebbe our friends have some strong waters with which we can warm our stummicks."

"Not by a damned sight!" grumbled the lieutenant. "We've been stuck out here overlong. What little rum we have won't be enough to see us through till we're relieved. Any news?"

"Winnebagos busted loose on a red path. Watch out for 'em."

"That's not pleasant hearing," said the lieutenant. Then to his men, "Regardless of General Brock's signature, I feel in my bones that these men are up to some game. Perhaps you men would like to rest here for a day or so?"

"Not less you put us under arrest. Then we'll be glad to stay. Our business is up at Mackinac. We don't care a cuss whether you believe we're reg'lar or crooked."

"If it wasn't for that signature I'd teach you a lesson, my tall friend," said the lieutenant.

"Do tell! Then that signature has saved your limbs from bein' busted. The name oughter be very precious to you.

Now that's been said on belts, do we git somethin' to eat an' drink?"

"Nothing in your papers to show that this picket post is bound to subsist you."

"We'll go farther an' mebbe fare better. Till then we can live off our humps. Still, along of these other men I'll warn you to keep an eye out for the Winnebagos. They've got to kill somebody, even if it's only a British soldier."

"Get to hell out of here!" commanded the wrathful lieutenant. "If it wasn't for that name I'd give you ten of a stout oak limb. I was going to feed you. Now you can starve, and I won't care."

"Go ahead. You'll also be layin' that oak limb on to the backs of Gineral Brock, Cunnel St. George an' the King of England. I won't mention the backs of Mr. Porthier of the N. W, an' Captain Roberts at Mackinac. I could name a lot of more backs if I could think of 'em. Boys, we'll travel farther an' take a sleep."

WHEN they were some distance from the picket post and following a narrow Indian trail, a deep slot worn in the hard earth by countless padding feet, Peevy said softly:

"That was a bad trap. That young man's smart, but hasn't quite enough courage."

"Hush!" cautioned young Cald.

But one did not have to strain his hearing to hear the sound of guns and the mad yelling of infuriated savages. Peevy whispered:

"I told that uppity feller the reds was comin'. The frog's people stumbled on to the pickets' camp an' 'lowed it was ours. Thank glory! Here's an openin'."

He halted and glanced up through the hole in the forest roof and took note of the stars. He quickly announced:

"We've been goin' a bit west of south. More so than we need. We'll make another mile an' camp. Injuns won't find out their mistake till early mornin'."

Bills urged—

"Let's travel all night."

"An' be so tuckered we can't travel in the daytime," countered Peevy. "You'd find fault with somethin' you enjoyed. Like Mrs. Gid down home. She quit her husband on the grounds he wasn't the father of her last two children."

They ate of their cooked meat. The night passed uneventfully. Gutherie, from the top of a tree, reported no signs of a smoke in the north. They finished their meat and bread as they walked along an ancient game trail. The woods continued open, with but little ground litter, and young Cald's spirits were high. He believed they were out of danger and that it would be but a question of time before he would be back on Little Briar Run with his mother, through with the war. Peevy talked but little, and it was Bills who noticed this taciturnity. In a low voice he asked—

"Smellin' trouble?"

Peevy held up his hand for silence. His companions heard the disturbance and instantly treed themselves. Peevy read the sounds more intelligently:

"Herd o' deer. But no shootin'."

"We need fresh meat," insisted Bills.

"We need our sculps to keep out the rain," added Peevy. "You reckon them critters be crashin' along like that just to limber up their muscles? Somethin' back along skeered 'em. That somethin' is headed down this way."

"Winnebagos," mumbled Cald.

"I 'low you're right, Jim. Injuns found some signs. Water ahead. This game trail leads to it."

The trail was beaten deep in the hard earth by the passing of many buffaloes and other ruminants, from ancient times. Peevy now took the lead, limiting his companions' progress by his own. Even when a shrill ululating cry sounded in the north, the Tennessee man would not quicken his pace. Then all were relieved by the sound of running water. Peevy cautiously descended the bank of a stream and gestured for his companions to remain on the edge while he spied up and down the river. It was roofed by the forest. Gingerly picking his way along the east bank, he came to a blowdown, where half an acre of rooted and dead trees had fallen beneath the mighty fist of the wind. With extreme care he skirted this until he found a narrow opening in the heaped confusion. He gestured for his friends to enter the jumble, and said, in a low voice:

"I'll soon be back. No shootin' if I

make a bit of noise."

Young Cald, in a whisper, begged him not to go. Peevy motioned for all to work into the blow-down, and then carefully retraced his steps. When he came to the crossing he again caught the tremulous call. It seemed to come from the northeast, and again it appeared to emanate in the northwest.

"Red scouts be stretched out in a long thin line, a-combin' the country."

He splashed into the stream and left wet footprints on several exposed rocks, and in clambering up the south bank he purposely broke branches by seizing them and drawing himself upward. He made an obvious trail some distance from the river, and then worked back, using the utmost care. He removed his wet moccasins and daintily picked his way downstream until he came to the blow-down. He softly called to his companions, hidden somewhere in the fallen timber.

"I'd fired in another half minute," growled Bills from somewhere inside the area of broken and lodged trees.

Peevy cautiously penetrated to where his friends were crouching and reported all that he had heard. Then he added:

"We must find a back door. If they happen to locate us in this mess they may fire the deadwood. Our way out must be to and across the river."

"You can crawl to hell an' gone under this topsy-turvy jumble," said Gutherie.

It required but a brief examination for Peevy to locate the shortest path to the river bank. He crawled; he walked almost erect. At no time was he in sight of any one in the tempest stricken area. He was pleased to find that some of the old growth giants had toppled into the stream, thereby permitting access to the water, and almost a complete passage of the river without the risk of being discovered by any watchers on either bank.

PEEVY stationed Gutherie on the river bank and warned Bills to keep on the alert against a surprise attack from their own shore, and then advised the two Calds to follow his example and secure a bit of sleep. But neither father nor son could become unconscious of their peril. Peevy, however, soon was slumbering.

When a hand touched his arm he instantly was awake in every faculty.

"They've come," whispered Bills.

Peevy nodded, gestured for his companions to remain where they were, and then noiselessly slipped through the tangle to where Gutherie was keeping guard. The latter nodded toward the south bank.

"One red nigger come down to the edge of the water an' then went back up the bank."

Peevy, remembering his backward steps into the river, smiled grimly. Yet it was disturbing to know that for all his woodcraft the savages had been able to follow him across the stream and down the bank to where he had recrossed. His respect for the Winnebagos, as trackers, was much increased. Yet, compared with the ferocious Shawnee men, the Winnebagos were not greatly to be feared. Should he and his friends be held there in fallen timber overnight, then Tecumseh's warriors, keen as questing hounds, would be on the trail and routing them out. The Winnebagos, finding tracks leading up the river bank, took it for granted that some one had crossed the river at that point.

"Somethin' moving in the bush growth on t'other side," whispered Gutherie.

Peevy's gaze traveled along the opposite shore, and he was startled to behold the vindictive face of Captain Ween showing for a moment. No, he was not mistaken. Then did hope almost desert him. There was something implacably fatalistic in the killer's quick recovery: It was characteristic of the man's relentless will to evil. The weakening thought flashed through his mind that Ween was a Fate which could not be denied. The officer, as stealthily as an otter, flitted through the growth, his black cloak flapping and suggesting a monstrous bat. His garb was entirely black, except for a white bandage around his wounded neck.

Peevy was tempted to shoot, so greatly did he fear the uncanny, ruthless man. Gutherie, obsessed by a similar desire, raised his cocked rifle, and would have pulled the trigger if not for Peevy's fingers suddenly thrust between the flint and the hammer. Yet the moment

the monster had disappeared he wished he had allowed Gutherie to kill. After the fluttering figure had vanished Peevy told his companion—

"I'm crossin' to bag the scut."

"No—wait," urged Gutherie. "If I git a glimpse of him I can pot him from here."

"His killer must be on that side, an' leave tracks," whispered Peevy. "See! He's workin' downstream to find more signs. The trail of one man bothers him. He hunts to find if we spread out an' if all of us crossed. I'll fetch him when he comes up the bank to tell his red friends if only one man has crossed. If I don't come back, wait till dark an' then make a try for it. If I come back in a hustle, be ready to cover me."

With that, Peevy was down the bank and wading waist deep under cover of the litter of dead growth. The water was low, and much of the way could be made on flat rocks, jutting above the surface. For concealment he selected one fallen monarch, snapped off some ten feet from the ground, whose big trunk and trailing limbs extended almost to the opposite shore. Although able to walk erect during the first half of his journey, he was forced to crouch low when he reached the south bank. There was never a doubt in his mind as to Ween's being the dynamic force behind the pursuit. Brock would give much to recapture the man who had duped him. Ween would never rest until he had evened the score. He could picture the rage of Brock and St. George when learning how they had been fooled. Hundreds of riflemen would be flung far south, spurred on by offers of promotion and money rewards.

In fact, the Tennessee man firmly believed such hunters already were sweeping south, with a horde of red savages, to scour the woods with malevolent thoroughness and celerity.

"We oughter have made a all-night job of it," Peevy told himself. "An' today we oughter be racin' our hearts out. Troops, too, will be down here. Oh, Lawd, that poor boy mustn't be taken alive! This world would be all right if men didn't make a mess of it."

Then Peevy became thoroughly objective. He estimated the position of the sun through the top of the forest and at once recalled the ruthless hunters, unleashed by Tecumseh. Then from his cover he beheld Ween, standing on the open bank of the south shore, and some distance below the ragged, tangled mass of timber. He watched the dread figure, even more ominous because of the black cloak. Ween was contemplating a crossing, which indicated he had observed something he deemed worthy of investigation. This, Peevy quickly decided, was the wreckage of timber in which his friends were now awaiting his return. Peevy hesitated until the sinister figure gathered up the cloak, preparatory to wading the shallow stream.

The border man slowly raised his Deckard rifle, remarkable for its precision, and took careful aim. Then he pursed his lips and whistled shrilly. The black figure straightened, and Ween darted his keen glances along the bank. He must have discovered Peevy, for with frantic haste he discarded his cloak and plunged into the water without pausing to sound an alarm. Peevy waited patiently, believing that Ween could not negotiate the crossing without lifting his head long enough to gulp down a mouthful of air. The border man slowly ranged his gaze across the lane of water. Then the surface was disturbed, as if a fish were swirling to the surface after bait.

WEEN broke water within three feet of a big rock. Instantly he lunged ahead to gain its protection. There came a thin report, and the small bullet finished its journey, scoring a hit just as Ween's back was vanishing from view. Pausing only to reload, Peevy hastened back to his friends and found them on the alert and much alarmed. He briefly explained what had happened and directed that, if attacked in force, they were to cross and take to the forest. He added that he would soon return if the savages failed to make a new discovery.

He recrossed to the south bank and resumed his advantageous position, watching a dozen Winnebago men drift past his hiding place as silently as ill omened birds of prey will coast down from high in the blue heavens. Curious

cries of an interrogative nature shrilly sounded on both banks. A man on the south bank was the first to discern the discarded black cloak. He raised a piercing discovery cry and plunged into the stream. Peevy held his fire and watched the warrior drag the inanimate figure up the bank.

After a brief investigation the death cry was raised. Then moccasins were pattering through the growth on both shores. Copper colored bodies, freshly oiled, cautiously moved in and out, always seeking cover, yet not knowing from what direction the mortal bullet had been fired.

Peevy returned to his alarmed and excited companions and quieted them by detailing what had happened. None could, for awhile, believe that Ween actually was dead. Peevy suggested a bold course.

"They feel sort of lost with their white chief dead. Soon Tecumseh's braves will be after us. That'll be another kettle of fish. Foller me to the south bank an' we'll make a big try afore any word of this business can reach the picket band at Roleau's Mill, an' from there by messenger, on horseback, to Detroit."

This suggestion was readily indorsed by all. Anything but inaction was what the fugitives desired.

"This playin' hide 'n' seek gits on my nerves more'n a downright good wring," said Bills.

The Calds warmly welcomed the prospect of speeding south. Gutherie, more bellicose, suggested that they take the initiative and confound the Winnebagos by attacking them. He shrewdly argued:

"They thought a heap of that Ween's medicine. Now he's pegged out they'll be skeered of their shadders, an' we can put the lead to 'em most mortally."

"I reckon you're right," agreed Peevy. "But our really an' truly big job is to save our hides. So, we'll play we're cowards an' run like the devil trailin' through his first snowdrift."

He went ahead and reconnoitered the south bank before signaling to the men, waiting waist deep in midstream, to join him. They struck due south through open woods, and made excellent time. Bills, of the sour disposition, had a change of heart and lamented their haste in renewing their flight. Gutherie grumbled and reminded his companions:

"I told ye we could 'a' done for the whole parcel of 'em. We'd not only had the fun of a good wring, but we'd put a scare into the reds that would slow down Injun raids into the south for a whole gineration."

"Friends an' neighbors," spoke up Peevy, "don't feel too downcast over runnin' from a fight. I'm afraid I must promise you a right smart come-uppance afore we reach safe territory. I ain't 'xactly what you'd call a coward, but I like to quit when I'm ahead. Had a neighbor who started when scurcely more'n a boy to do what other folks couldn't do; to drink scaldin' hot water. He kept at it an' at it, and got so he could drink water what would scald the gizzard out a ordinary mortal. But he couldn't be satisfied till he could drink it fresh from the snout of a b'ilin' kettle. At last he called the neighbors in an' 'lowed that the great day had come. An' dawggone if he didn't scald his insides so bad that he had to live on skim milk for the rest of his days. Now, friends, I ain't no great shakes for milk. Come along! Come along!"

By the fading light of the setting sun and under the star riddled roof of the heavens the weary fugitives doggedly trotted south until midnight. They snatched three hours' sleep, finished the last of their rations and resumed their journey. Could they but reach the black swamps, then the terror of Hull's army on the northern faring would become their sanctuary. And there were stout cabins, so many storehouses for the army, in which they could barricade themselves if the game of hide and seek became too strenuous. In the morasses and in hidden places a resolute man could stand off a dozen enemies. So confident were two of their number that after breakfast and an hour of travel Bills spoke for himself and Gutherie when he urged:

"Let's take it easy, says I. We're almost home."

"You're almost home just like Mrs. Whitten come within one of havin' twins," said Peevy.

"But even if old Tecumseh makes

good his threat of chasin' us, he can't be far on the road," insisted Gutherie. "With the lead we've got—"

"We ain't got no lead, except in hours," interrupted Peevy. "Take out the time for meetin' the picket band at Roleau's Mill. Then subtract the time for sleepin' an' bein' nailed in the blowdown, an' you'll find we ain't very far from Detroit this minute. We're thirty-six hours away, but in miles it don't figger up so awful much."

"Dawggone if I'll run till my heart busts," grumbled Gutherie.

"Then you never will be writ up in hist'ry as a survivor," said Peevy. "The Shawnee hearts are very sound. They'll lose no more time than a wolf runnin' a deer. But if you folks walk I'll do the same."

"When the Shawnee l'arn that we've pinned death on Ween, they'll quit runnin' an' take it easy like we do," argued Bills.

"What *we* pinned on Ween," sarcastically mused Peevy. "I remember now; it was you, not me, who spooned out his last medicine."

Then Cald tugged at his sleeve. Peevy gloomily gave him his attention. With a smile, the first his countenance had worn since meeting the Tennessee man in Bills's temporary camp, Cald nodded his head at his son who was in the lead. At first Peevy did not understand. Then Cald touched the back of Peevy's hunting shirt and again nodded at the boy. Now Peevy understood and smiled. Cald, surreptitiously, had fastened the little bunch of Tecumseh's wampum to the boy's collar. He whispered—

"Done it while he slept."

THE woods now were open and gracious. Hardwoods predominated. The lateral rays of the western sun were gilding the forest crown. Fat gray squirrels ran along their lofty roads through the oaks and scolded the invaders. Optimism was high. The Winnebagos, lacking in leadership now that Ween was dead, were not likely to persist in fighting a foe they scarcely had sighted. Yet Peevy and Cald, in the backs of their minds, pictured Tecumseh's relentless trailers and killers.

Near midday Gutherie halted abruptly and pointed to the north. Peevy's keen ears also had caught the sound—the noise of something crashing through the growth. He expected a mounted Shawnee to come into sight. He motioned for the men to tree themselves, and took his own position behind an oak. With long-rifle ready, he waited for the newcomer to materialize. Then came the anticlimax.

A white man burst into view, his face wild with terror. Even when Peevy stepped from cover and called on the man to halt, he plunged on as if blind to the presence of the fugitives. Peevy caught him around the waist, threw him to the ground and kneeled on his chest. He seized him by the ears and bumped his head smartly on the forest floor as he demanded:

"Who be you? What are you runnin' from? Can't you see we're whites? Stop bein' foolish." Then he rose and helped the forlorn creature to his feet.

Young Jim Cald demanded—

"What's your name?"

As if addressing an invisible audience, the fugitive stared blankly into the north and babbled:

"If Cap'n Nate Heald hadn't sp'iled the powder an' spilled the liquor, as ordered by Gineral Hull, the Injuns might not 'a' done it."

"Nathan Heald!" softly exclaimed Peevy. "Commandin' at Fort Dearborn at Chicago . . . See here, Crazy-as-a-Loon, has there been some killin' doin's nigh Dearborn?"

"Win-ne-meg, the Pottawatomi, told him not to quit the fort. Lord! Lord! Why did I live to see it!" The hysterical creature waved his arms grotesquely and wildly continued, "Why didn't we stick to the fort? We could 'a' stood a six months' siege. Hull ordered us to git out. Hull—hell!"

"You-all left the fort?" prompted Peevy as he gently patted the man's shoulder.

"An' the sand hills, of all places! We charged an' drove 'em in front, but they ducked back an' smashed both flanks. Never such a sight! Never such a sight!"

The last was screamed. Gutherie clapped his hands over the man's mouth

and nose and all but suffocated him.

"You simmer down, coot-head. The enemy has Fort Dearborn, a present from Hull. Garrison, with women an' children were killed. You got away. That's it, eh?"

"Yes, yes," gasped the fugitive. "But such a terrible—"

"Stop it!" commanded Peevy. "When did this happen?"

The man eyed him blankly and said:

"You see, stranger, Heald promised to give all supplies an' sich-like, that he couldn't cart away, to the Indians. But he destroyed the arms an' powder an' rum."

"If they'd got to the rum they'd done worse, if possible," commented Peevy. "Now when did this happen?"

"The fifteenth of August. The band played the 'Dead March'. Cap'n Wells blacked his face with wet gunpowder, to show he knew what would happen to him. Quit the fort an' give up a fightin' chance, for *that!* Thirty soldiers. All the women. Twelve little children a-ridin' in a cart. Lawd, why let such things be?"

"So Dearborn beat Detroit by one day in surrenderin'," mused Peevy grimly. Then he stared to the north and sharply reminded his companions, "We're most as bad as Hull an' Heald. Git movin'. 'Spose we must take this poor critter along. We've lost time we never can buy back."

The newcomer quickly proved to be a great handicap and raised a grave question of border ethics. The man was mentally unbalanced. He talked rapidly under his breath, when not crying aloud in wild hysteria. He was deaf when asked to give his name. To simplify matters Peevy named him Coot and ordered the flight to be resumed at increased speed. Then arose the question of what to do with Coot. The five men were quick to realize their speed would be reduced by fifty per cent if the stranger accompanied them. Jim Cald violently insisted they push on and leave the man to follow, or remain behind. He was logical in reasoning:

"He's crazy. Injuns won't hurt him. But even if they'd kill him there ain't no call for five of us to hold back to die with him."

Young Cald as earnestly objected to leaving the man behind. He expressed his belief that the fellow's wits would soon clear up and that he would cease to be a hindrance. Bills strongly echoed the senior Cald's words.

Gutherie impatiently reminded:

"We're losin' time! Git a-goin'! If he can't keep up he can drop out. I'm off!"

"All of you be off," ordered Peevy. "I'll trot along with our new neighbor. We'll be passin' you mighty pert inside the next five miles. This feller's got a lot of hidden strength. But he can't just remember where he hid it."

Gutherie and Bills were away like arrows from the bow. Jim Cald persisted in keeping behind his son. He tossed his big bag of silver ornaments into a clump of bushes. Peevy, at a dog trot, with a hand under the stranger's elbow to help him along, believed the race would end with the Shawnee the losers. The fact that he was heading for the black swamps of northern Ohio added to his optimism.

Suddenly he stumbled and lurched against his wild eyed companion. Neither root, fallen timber nor a rock caused the misstep. It was a clear, ringing bird call—the bubbling song of the bobolink. It was filled with kinks and eccentric twists of rare harmony, such as never could be reduced to a written musical score. Such a song as is linked with buttercups and wild strawberries in the Northern States. But now it was late August, and the Tennessee man knew the feathered musicians for a month had been covering the rice fields of Georgia and South Carolina.

"Might as well try to make me believe that they have prime watermelons up here round Christmas time," he mused. "Listen, neighbor, you got to perk up a trifle, or be mighty lonesome."

The hunting call of the Shawnee sounded on his right. It was as venomous as the howling of a Winter wolf pack. Peevy seized his companion by the arm, shifted his line of flight to the southeast. Again sounded the call, this time on the left.

"Coot," Peevy mumbled, his eyes worried, "we seem to be in a very narrer lane."

The man wrenched clear of him and yelled:

"Injuns! Injuns! Oh, Lawd, Injuns!"

"You've asked for 'em. They come," snarled Peevy.

And, realizing he no longer could play the good Samaritan, he darted away in an effort to catch up with his mates. His world went black to the accompaniment of a ringing, clanging noise.

CHAPTER XII

TECUMSEH PAYS

WHILE Peevy was regaining consciousness he had the sensation of falling from an incredible height. He landed with the sensation of a jar and pain in his side. He laboriously opened his eyes and looked about. His gaze rested on a weird and impossible countenance. The evil visage, which seemed to enlarge and contract, had blood-red lines radiating from the corners of the cruel mouth. The savage drew back his foot to bestow another kick.

For a moment Peevy could not orient himself. He could not gage any lapse of time, or sense his environment. Then every faculty was awakened as his gaze rested on the silent form of poor Coot, whose head had been cleft by an ax. Peevy dully deduced a similar weapon had laid him senseless, and that by chance, or intention, he had been hit with the flat of the weapon. There was a cacophony of yowls and screams, and the thud of moccasined feet. The painted face close to his, the burning eyes glaring into his, switched him out of the bottomless well of oblivion and left him sprawling helpless on the ground, the focal point of two-score pairs of gloating eyes.

With a snap his memory was functioning again. He remembered the race with him and Coot lagging behind, the latter's wild yell which had brought the savages upon them.

"The white man comes back from the darkness?" asked the sonorous voice of a Shawnee.

Peevy knew the dialect well. Half closing his eyes, he replied:

"I was asleep and resting. Why did you wake me up?"

"The sun comes and goes. The white man will see it for the last time."

Peevy glanced up again at the hideous painted face and knew, if this man be his captor, he could expect not even the mercy of a quick death. A second and more searching glance at others now drawing closer told him he could expect no mercy. He considered Coot to have been most fortunate in having stepped off the earth so comfortably. That victim could scarcely have sensed the impact of the blow that killed him. The Tennessee man feared that any such great good luck would not characterize his own departure.

Then the mental images took on perspective and he recalled all the picture. With an effort he lifted his head for a moment to glance about. What he beheld caused him to break into a sweat of horror. Two men were trussed up close to a nearby tree. Peevy stared impassively up into the hideous face, and his hand slowly traveled to the throat of his hunting shirt, where it halted and fumbled uncertainly. His captor believed he was endeavoring to loosen the garment so he might breathe the better. With a slash of his knife he severed the cord and gashed the prisoner's chin. If Peevy felt the sharp bite of the blade he was too much on the alert, now, to betray that fact. His fingers continued to fumble until they found what he sought.

Slowly withdrawing his hand he exposed between his fingers the silver gorget, the gift of Tecumseh. The warrior crouching at his side and bending over him hissed like a snake and drew back. His guttural voice demanded—

"Where did the white man find that?"

"In the hand of Tecumseh, who gave it to him."

"Your tongue is as crooked as your life is short," said the savage.

Quite recovered from the force of the blow, Peevy remained quiescent. He said—

"If the Shooting Star is here he will say the white man's tongue is straight."

"A Shawnee man does as he will with his prisoners," sullenly declared the warrior.

"The sign from Tecumseh, the Shoot-

ing Star, is like a shield. I shall receive no hurt in this Shawnee camp."

"White dog! You shall burn!" promised the Indian. His eyes flickered with red lights as he advanced his face more closely to exult over his captive. "Black Bird has said so."

"You talk like a quacking duck, not like a black bird," Peevy jeered.

With the snarl of a wild beast, Black Bird flung himself upon the prisoner and pulled a scalping knife. Gripping Peevy's scalp lock between his teeth he moved to cut a red circle about the trophy, so he might the more easily tear it loose.

It was then that the deep voice of Tecumseh came most graciously to Peevy's ears. The chief asked:

"You do not know the gift of Tecumseh? Are you a boy? Is this your first red path?"

The savage glanced up, his eyes baleful; after meeting the eyes of the haughty leader, he scrambled away from his victim, but sullenly insisted—

"The white man is mine."

"It will be talked."

A hand gripped Peevy's arm and the prisoner came to his feet. He stood with half closed eyes while he fought against a sinking sensation which he knew, if unconquered, prefaced complete insensibility. His first few steps were uncertain. Tecumseh, standing behind him, relinquished his grasp so that the prisoner might fight off the weakness unaided. A warrior, whose face was a mass of scars as if his features had been furrowed by the devil's comb, now interfered.

"A white man must burn. We must make our medicine strong," he said.

"Your medicine takes strength from Tecumseh's medicine. When his medicine is strong, as it is today, my brother's will be strong. We have one dead man." He pointed to Coot. "We have two prisoners besides this man. Do my children want to burn all the white men in the world?" Then his voice became strident and he sternly announced, "This man is safe so long as he wears the gift of Tecumseh."

His bearing and manner, the light of his eyes, as well as his voice, all bespoke an unalterable will. Those who had exhibited insubordination came to heel like whipped dogs. But their gaze, now resting on the other prisoners, was baleful with the malignity of demons.

PEEVY, now that he had stepped back from the brink of a terrible death, felt the greatest horror and deepest pity as he found himself discovering the tightly bound prisoners to be the Calds, father and son. Tecumseh explained:

"Two white men got away. That man stopped to help the young man, who tripped and fell."

"They must die?" hoarsely asked Peevy.

"Can Tecumseh set all his prisoners free, and be Tecumseh, with warriors glad to follow him on a red path? Do the *Englishmanaka* set their prisoners free? Do the Long Rifles of the Thirteen Fires tell their prisoners to walk away?"

"White men do not burn their prisoners."

"Red men do not keep them shut up in stone walls, where life is worse than death."

The Tennessee man believed he was losing ground if he argued with the chief. He slowly advanced toward the prisoners. The Indians gave ground jealously, but did not bar his path. Peevy came to a halt. Young Cald looked very boyish as he met the borderman's pitying gaze and silently begged to be saved. Then Peevy's eyes lighted and he said:

"Mebbe you'll be all right, younker. If you ain't lost that bunch of medicine wampum that your pap tucked under the collar of your huntin' shirt while you was asleep."

For a bit the boy's face was radiant with hope. His voice was husky as he begged:

"Look! Look! See if it's there!"

Peevy caught him by his shoulder and rolled him on his face. Then he carefully and slowly lifted the fringed collar. Hissing like snakes, the Indians glared at their leader and drew back. Peevy met the chief's gaze and in English said:

"You told me I could save a friend with that wampum. There is my friend,

a boy."

Tecumseh's face remained immobile. His gaze was a challenge as he swept it about the half circle of warriors and made each man lower his eyes. Then he threw up his right hand for silence and attention and haughtily announced:

"The young man lives by the medicine of Tecumseh. Your chief pays a debt he owed to a white man. Set the boy free. We will not take the hair of a boy on this path."

None stirred. All glared malignantly at Peevy, who was becoming in their estimation a most disagreeable fellow. Tecumseh's height seemed to increase as he warned:

"A chief has spoken. Must he speak again?"

An aged warrior advanced and kneeled by the side of the captives, his wrinkled face heavy with disappointment and anger. With a few slashes of his hunting knife he severed the bonds. Even then the youth feared to move, not understanding what had been said. It required the voice of Peevy to get the lad on his feet. Tecumseh, desiring to remove all temptation from his angry braves, instructed Peevy:

"Tell the young man to go home. He shall have a gun to shoot game. But he must go at once."

Peevy joined the boy and interpreted Tecumseh's speech. The lad's eyes would have filled with tears, had not Peevy quickly warned:

"Hold that head up! Look ugly. Look 'em right in the eye an' tell 'em all to go to hell."

The boy forced himself to sweep his scowling gaze over the enraged half-circle; and then he managed to inquire of Peevy:

"What next? Be I free to go now?"

"Thanks to your pap, you're free," slowly replied Peevy. His heart was heavy in sympathy for both father and son. Yet the senior Cald was smiling as if listening to the most beautiful music ever heard by mortal's ears.

"I don't understand," said young Cald slowly. "You surely are the one who talked an' saved me."

"The bunch of wampum, Tecumseh's wampum, under your shirt collar saved you."

"An' I never knew 'twas there. You put it there?"

"I told you that you're free thanks to your pap. He put the wampum under your shirt collar. Chief says for you to pick up your rifle an' go home to your ma."

THE boy was quick to seize his rifle, powder horn and bag of tiny bullets. Then his brows scowled in bewilderment and he slowly inquired—

"But my father—he goes with me, of course?"

Peevy averted his face to escape the expression of horror which he knew must mask the lad's comely features when he heard the truth. He fixed his gaze on Cald senior; the man was smiling as one who has nothing more to ask of earth. By a mighty effort Peevy controlled his voice long enough to say—

"Your pap must stay that you may go."

"Stay!" It was a whisper. "You can't—you don't mean—but he'll come after me very soon?"

"I'll be there almost soon as you be, son," cheerily called out Cald. "Tell your mother all about it. Tell her I never knew. She'll know what I mean. Just say I reckoned she meant for me to keep away when she sent me off."

"But you must go with me! Surely it's for you to say that an' make her happy."

Cald, still smiling, gently explained:

"I may be slower in comin'. But you must hustle so's she can be happy agin without too much waitin'."

Worried by unthinkable suspicions, yet striving to ignore them as beyond belief, the boy turned to Peevy.

"Is there some game in this? He's comin', ain't he?"

It had to be said. The savages were getting impatient to be at their victim. Peevy clamped both hands on the lad's shoulders and burned his gaze into the frightened boy's eyes.

"You're old 'nough to go to war. You're old 'nough to play a man's part. Life's hell on this border. When your pap hid that wampum under your shirt collar he tossed away his own life, once he got caught. I'll promise this much—

he won't suffer."

"My God! My God!" cried the boy, dropping his rifle, throwing up both hands and slowly walking around his father.

"He's makin' medicine," called out Peevy in the Shawnee tongue.

Old Cald sharply commanded:

"Stop it! Want to git us both killed? You start your boots for home. With you on your way I can play some game an' follow. You can't help me any by stayin' here. You can do only harm—to me. Now go—son."

"Pap—can't I say goodby? Can't I touch your hand?"

"Son, when I went away I didn't understand. That day I done the worst day's work in all my life. Today I hope I've done the best day's work. One she'll always remember. You must dig out. Injuns gittin' onpatient."

Tecumseh pointed to the south and said sternly—

"Go!"

The lad walked about the helpless figure, bent down and placed a hand on his father's tightly bound hands. Then he caught up his rifle, his throat choked by suppressed sobs, and blindly walked to the south, his head held high, his eyes blinded by tears, his steps unsteady with unutterable grief.

Peevy requested of Tecumseh:

"Hold a council, my friend. Give the boy time to git beyond all hearin'."

"We will talk," announced Tecumseh.

He gestured with both hands for his warriors to follow his example and be seated.

Although impatient of further delay, they took their positions. Their eyes were ever darting sidelong glances at the silent figure of the prisoner. To kill time Peevy told of the coming of the Winnebagos and of the death of Ween. He also disclosed the entire plot to deceive General Brock, even to relating the part that the released prisoner had played. The braves nodded in approval. They were loyal to England so long as it suited their convenience. The chief across the big water was stronger than were the Americans. For Ween and the Winnebagos they had only contempt. The frog medicine was a failure and had killed its owner.

One veteran red raider spoke up and told of the massacre at Fort Dearborn. He characterized the garrison as squaws. In turn, Peevy told how he made the Shawnee arrows, and the reason for using them in killing the frogman and wounding Ween. He explained how he smothered the telltale twanging of the bow. His audience patted their lips in applause of the white man's cunning and deceit in turning suspicion against the Shawnee. The singing of the song especially aroused their admiration. Then Peevy insisted he was hungry. Red etiquette precluded any delay in setting forth a pack of cooked meat and some army hardtack. All the while Cald lay like a log.

PEEVY ate slowly, talking with the chief between mouthfuls, but with his gaze ever fixed on the silent figure. At times he fancied Cald had mercifully died. When he had finished he glanced up at the low sun and estimated that young Cald had had time to cover between four and six miles. He had no fear that the band would start in pursuit of the boy so long as Tecumseh was with them. When Tecumseh gave a gift he did not take it back. Suddenly rising to his feet, he abruptly informed Tecumseh—

"Your friend would say goodby to his white friend."

"It is good," was the grave reply. "The white man goes on a long journey."

Peevy rose and walked briskly to Cald, whose face was a mixture of joy and heartbreaking misery. Joy for the son he had saved, and for the love of that son he had won; misery for the woman whom he would have made happy. The Indians started to rise and follow the white man. They were jealous of all the liberties he took in the great chief's camp and suspicious of his motive in every act

"Is it goodby, Ramblin'?" Cald asked.

"In a sort of a way," said Peevy.

He opened his hand and displayed the silver pendant. Then kneeling, he quickly tied the cord around the tanned neck so that the ornament lay exposed on the front of the shirt. Then rising

and briskly rubbing his hands, he said:

"I'm tryin' to send you on after the younker. It's all I can do."

"By Tecumseh's medicine?" hoarsely demanded Cald.

"Just so."

"But you?"

"If it works for you I'll be catchin' up afore you git down to the black swamp road."

He walked back to find Tecumseh erect and suspicious, his eyes burning. He harshly demanded:

"What has the white man done now? Is he the great chief of the Shawnee Nation?"

"He has been the friend of that great chief. He has given the medicine to the man who must see his son and squaw again. He should go at once."

"Tecumseh's medicine is not handed around like a beaver trap. One medicine was to save a friend. The boy goes home. One medicine was to cover you, not that white man."

"There is a little squaw down in Tennessee. She has medicine hair. She found a Shawnee man outside her cabin. He was in the snow. He had been there most of the night. He was too proud to call for help. The medicine squaw took him in and thawed the ice from his blood. She fed him until he was able to walk. One morning she gave him his last breakfast and he went away. Tecumseh is a great chief. He pays well. He owes for that last breakfast, which sent him away strong, to live and catch *me*."

"Take your medicine back from the white man and go," sternly ordered the chief.

"No. The father of the boy must go. Your friend has no children to look for his coming."

"Tecumseh's medicine saves only the man he gave it to," insisted the chief.

"It saves whoever receives it as a gift. Tell that man to go after his son—and pay for your breakfast."

Tecumseh, his eyes smoldering, talked briefly to his warriors. Their eyes glowed like hot coals. Peevy was vastly more valuable as a prisoner than Cald could ever be. The chief's visage was stern and relentless as he turned to Peevy and said:

"You have heard. You have saved a son for his mother, and a man for his squaw. Tecumseh pays for his breakfast. But you have nothing left to trade for your life. Your squaw with the medicine hair will watch many moons, but you will not come. You have said it. Not Tecumseh."

"Tecumseh would do the same for a friend."

"Not unless his friend was a great chief and could lead the Shawnee better than Tecumseh can. You throw away two gifts of a chief. Each a gift of your life. You have thrown away your life. You have made this trade. You must take that man's place."

"I am not afraid. Set him free. I will show my medicine is strong."

Tecumseh walked rapidly to the prisoner and recklessly slashed the rawhide thongs, pointing to the south and indicating that Cald depart.

The warriors advanced on Peevy, their eyes glittering with rage. Peevy called out:

"Don't run till you git out of sight, Jim. Then run like hell. Don't stop till you reach my clearin'. Your woman should be there."

"I can't go an' leave you—"

"Away at once, or you'll never see your younker. You should be overhaulin' him tomorrer. He'll need you when he hits the black swamp. I'll overhaul you. Make it a race!"

The temptation was too great to be withstood. Cald staggered awkwardly for the first few rods, then found his circulation restored and ran swiftly. Nor did he dare to look back, lest he behold something which would demand of his manhood that he return and take Peevy's place at the stake.

After the released prisoner had vanished in the gathering dusk, the savages switched their hot gaze to the prisoner. Tecumseh sternly called out—

"When the moon comes up you must die."

"A man can die but once. The moon soon will be above the trees, the color of blood. The smoke from the burning trees makes it red, just as hate makes the Shawnee red in their thoughts. The man from the Tennessee fire is not a great chief, but he pays his debt. First,

he gives a present to Tecumseh and his warriors. It is worth many beaver pelts. It is in that clump of bushes to the north. I left it there for Tecumseh when I was running. The warriors may see it and handle it, but it is bad medicine to bring it from the bushes before the moon comes up."

The warriors, now assured of a victim, gazed inquiringly at their leader. Tecumseh, suspecting some ruse, stared moodily at one of the few white men he had held in high esteem. He demanded—

"How can a gift for a chief and his warriors be found up there among trees?"

He half turned and pointed over his back trail.

"Yet it is there. Tell the braves to go and look and handle, and hold it up for Tecumseh to see. When was my tongue crooked?"

Tecumseh gave an order, and two young braves ran into the bush growth and floundered about for a bit, and then sounded their discovery cry. All eyes were upon them. One held up several silver bracelets. Another cried out excitedly that there was much of the white metal. The older men could not retain their show of indifference. As one, the band swept forward to examine and admire. Tecumseh, deeply puzzled by this almost miraculous appearance of the silver ornaments, unconsciously advanced a rod or two toward the excited group of savages. And in that opportune moment Peevy noiselessly drew back toward the old growth and was in full flight and vanishing into the dark woods before any Shawnee could yell a warning.

CHAPTER XIII

HOME SWEET HOME

WHEN Peevy, racing southward, beheld the figure of a white man coming toward him, he waved his squirrelskin hat and gestured for him to turn back, and then increased his gait until his long legs seemed to be skimming over the ground. The man came on, more swiftly than before, and again Peevy portrayed danger by wildly propelling his hand forward, palm to the front. The lone traveler from the south was very obtuse, or reckless, for he continued to advance. As the distance between the two was lopped off at both ends sufficient for each to see the other clearly, Peevy, in alarm, cried aloud—

"Jim Cald!"

Cald waved his hand and came to a stumbling halt, pumping hard for wind.

Peevy came up to him and demanded:

"Are you crazy in the head, you ganglin' fool? Have you forgot the way home? After bein' away for seventeen years you might fergit the trail to Little Briar Run, or to my clearin'. But you oughter be able to hit the State of Tennessee somewheres."

"I haven't forgotten the way to Little Briar, my friend. But in my madness I forgot you, stayin' behind to die in my place. I thank God to see you down here. How close are the Injuns?"

"Either on my back or at Roleau's Mill, Detroit. I don't know."

"They didn't follow you?"

"Injuns chase Ramblin' Peevy? I dared 'em to do it. Don't see any, do you? But why'n all creation, with the whole United States to walk in, do you come up this way? Right 'bout face, you big, long legged, loose j'inted fool. An' hustle, or have your hair in a hoop!"

"Ramblin', I humbly ask you to forgive me for diggin' out as I did. As you say, I'm crazy. Rather, was. 'Twas thinkin' of Annie an' the boy what made me pull out like a mis'rable coward. Thank God I come to my senses in time. Think of meetin' Annie, after all these years, an' havin' to tell your little woman how I left you surrounded by red axes, an' as how you stepped in an' took my place to save my hide. I can't ever wash that out of my conscience. I must 'a' been crazy. We'll see it through together an' take as many of 'em along with us as we can. Better cover down below here."

"We'll have to race faster 'n old Bill Buck uster run. He'd go so fast he'd reach the nearest whisky shop five minutes afore he arrived. Then he'd have to wait for hisself to come in. The Injuns now was streakin' after me till after midnight."

"Praises be I had brains 'nough, guts 'nough, just 'nough common, lowdown sense, to know a big right from a awful wrong! But how did you manage it?"

"Oh, it wasn't anything for me to do. Just the Peevy way of doin' the right thing at the right time. I told Tecumseh that if a man raised his hand agin me that I'd fergit my manners an' kill all of them."

"That's reg'lar Peevy talk. Now let's hear the truth."

Peevy explained, his voice apologetic for not having boldly departed with his friend.

"Ramblin', I was busted wide open by thinkin' of how my poor boy looked when he quit me—how he put his hands on my hands. If it wasn't for that, I'd never let you placed the chief's medicine on me. You must 'a' give 'em their mortal come-uppance."

"I done well—even for a Peevy," modestly admitted the Tennessee man. "Of course, I had a lot of trainin' from explainin' things to my little woman. For she's harder to fool than any Injun. Tecumseh is a great man. But he'll smoke my hair if he gits me agin. Now let's try to hit Tennessee without runnin' any more scalp risks. We don't have to take foolish chances, as we be paroled men. We can honorably hunt an' fish an' have a good time, an' leave it to others to do the surrenderin'. I'll surrender just about so much for my country, an' then I call a halt."

"If only Andy Jackson could 'a' been in old Hull's shoes!" sighed Cald. "We'd 'a' taken Montreal an' Quebec afore now." Then with a childish touch of curiosity he said, "Can't just help wonderin' as to how an' when Andy will figger in the war. It would be prime fun to go along with *his* army."

"He'd move in just t'other direction. N'Oleans."

Peevy affected a frown, yet new lights, which suggested nothing of gravity, twinkled in his eyes. He slowly said:

"If I come to decide I was tricked into signin' that parole, just as Brock was tricked into acceptin' it, I might come to think that my honor would let me go back on the whole business, an' take a fling with Andy."

"I'll stay paroled if there be any welcome for me on the Little Briar," stoutly averred Cald. "No chance of catchin' up with the younker, I 'low."

"Not a bit. He's streakin' home mighty fast. Once he hits the Ohio swamps we might be within pistol shot of him, an' never know it."

"I'd hoped, but knew it was foolish to think that I could overhaul him an' go back along of him. There mayn't be any welcome for me on Briar Run."

"At Peevy's clearin'," corrected the Tennessee man.

They swept on as only border men could, their moccasined feet rolling mile after mile behind them, their loping gait seeming to demand no exertion.

It was dusk, and they were casting about for a hiding place, when Cald softly whistled a discovery signal. Peevy automatically treed himself and stabbed his keen gaze right and left.

"In the south," murmured Cald. "Just got a glimpse of a man in the oak openin'."

"Mebbe a Injun," whispered Peevy. "Can't see him any more. Must 'a' treed hisself."

"There he is— Gracious heavens!"

With this outcry Cald suddenly raced forward, moving as rapidly as if he had not exerted himself for hours. Peevy thought him mad until his shifting line of vision picked up a figure painfully toiling toward them. Then the Tennessee man rivaled his companion in speed.

YOUNG Cald, footsore and weary, advanced with bowed head. He was within hailing distance before he discovered the two men approaching. He halted, and his heart seemed to stand still as he gazed. He rubbed his eyes and stared again. With a cry of joy he shed all weariness, as if it were an old garment, and moved like one born of the winds. He was inarticulate when he threw his arms around his father. Peevy reduced his speed to a leisurely walk. Father and son, with arms around each other's shoulders, faced the Tennessee man. Peevy's angular face slowly crinkled in a broad grin of happiness. But his voice was casual as he said—

"So you lost your way, younker, an' sorter bogged around in a circle."

"He got mixed up in the growth," Cald exclaimed.

"No!" Young Jim shook his head emphatically. "You two started me off on a shameful business. What if I'd gone home? What if I had told my mother I was afraid of death, an' ran away an' left my pap alive in a Injun camp? That I left him there, waitin' to be slaughtered! What would she 'a' thought? What would she 'a' said?"

"No use wonderin' what a woman might say about somethin' she don't know, an' needn't know," said Peevy.

"Not by a danged sight!" hotly contradicted the youth. "She'd met me, her eyes like lights in heaven till I told the whole story. Then she'd asked me, 'An' how comes it that you be down thisaway if your pap is follerin' a rough road?' Thank the Lawd I got over my crazy scare in time to put back here an' hand Tecumseh his wampum an' tell him an' his red scuts to go to hell. Now we can give 'em a fight!"

"There's no more fightin' in this war for any of the three of us, my son," gravely said Cald. "But 'twas right han'some of you to come back to share in your old pap's farin'."

"You're not old," said the youth. "Ma ain't neither. But I'm glad we're trailin' back. I'm glad our backs be to the war. An' to think how pleased Missus Peevy will be to see you, Ramblin'!"

"To be sure. Sartainly. Yes, yes—yes sirree!"

But had father and son been less taken up in studying each other, they might have noticed that their companion winced a trifle, and that his features were set in an expression of apprehension.

BEFORE coming in sight of the Peevy cabin and clearing, the returning wanderer developed uneasiness. He said to his companions:

"You two go along. Don't say a word about me till asked. Then say I'm in mortal peril, somewhere upcountry where the fightin's the hottest. When you hear me call out say somethin' 'bout 'Thank heavens, he's saved!' an' then keep back an' off to one side."

While the Calds were hastening forward, one to greet the woman he had not seen for years, the other to make a mother supremely happy, Peevy was climbing a tree, from the top of which he could spy on his home. It was his favorite point for all such reconnaisances. His heart beat faster as he beheld the slim little woman, with a crown of fiery hair, standing in the cabin doorway and observing the happiness of the Calds. She had married when seventeen, and there had been periods when she was alone. She was the only one to hear the familiar song of the screech owl, and her blue eyes flashed with hastily kindled fires. The call was repeated, a weirdly sweet and shivery tremolo.

The blue eyes were quickly lifted to search the treetops. Then her hand reached behind her and reappeared, clutching a rifle. Peevy closed his eyes and held his head motionless. There followed a sharp explosion, and Peevy felt his squirrel cap twitch. A squirrel's tail leaped from the hat and floated to the ground. Peevy raised his voice and gently rebuked—

"That makes quite a mess of squirrel tails you've shot off my hat, my dear."

She made no reply, but skilfully commenced reloading the rifle.

"In the name of the War Department, stop shootin'! I'm on parole an' can't fire back!"

She passed the Calds, without either of the three giving her any heed, and came to the bend in the trail. With an upward glance she called out:

"Mr. Peevy, I'm waitin'. Just like I had the War Department tell you. You've been gone overlong for that molasses."

"My dear, I busted the jug. But I come back covered with scars an' glory."

"You forgot what you owed to me, Mr. Peevy, an' went away to have your fun. You forgot what you owed to Tennessee, an' *surrendered!*"

"I was the only one to refuse to turn in his sword," he defended.

"You come back a officer?"

"I come back to be with you, my dear. I'd been a officer if Hull hadn't been measured for my sword, an' then

surrendered afore a body could do anything. Anyway, I ain't been gone seventeen years."

"I'd be waitin', Mr. Peevy, if it was fifty years."

"I'll be a gineral in the next war."

"Come—come down."

Her voice was low yet commanding, much as a mother might use in speaking to an erring child.

"What you keep one hand ahind you for? You go back, my dear, an' stand in the doorway, where I've always dreamed of findin' you."

"Come down!"

"First, let me ask you: Did you git word to the circuit rider?"

"It's framed on the wall. I rubbed some ashes over it to make it look old. I wrote in the date. If you can't go to war, Mr. Peevy, you might use some of your strength in gittin' up the Winter's wood."

"I'm just achin' to be at them stubborn logs."

He whistled bravely as he descended. He grinned nervously as he swept his wife up in his long arms. As he gently set her back on her feet, the hand came from behind her back and deftly swung a skillet. As Peevy staggered back under the blow she smiled graciously and said—

"You big silly!"

Then the truce was completed when her round arm was linked through his, and the two walked to the cabin, where the Calds were now talking. Peevy grinned sheepishly at the happy family, then swept his eyes to the framed marriage certificate. Suddenly he became stern and official and ordered:

"You two stand up an' grip hands. As justice o' the peace I'm goin' to hitch you in double harness, so there can't be no question of the first marriage runnin' out along of Jim's absence from home."

The legal ceremony was soon performed, and Peevy gallantly saluted the comely bride. Mrs. Peevy sharply inquired—

"How about me, Mr. Peevy?"

She was in his arms when two men filled the doorway. One of the pair said:

"Just called to see if your woman had got any word from you, Ramblin'. We project to cross the mounting an' see how Silas David's doin' with his b'ar huntin'. He's allowed all Summer he had some right pert b'ar dawgs. B'ars will be mighty prime an' fat this season. We're hankerin' most mortal, Ramblin', to have you along."

"Well, well," mused Peevy, stroking his chin whiskers, "I might run over, but I couldn't stop more'n a day—or so. Depends if my little woman can git along without me."

"You will go if you will, Mr. Peevy, but I'll be waitin' for you," gently promised Mrs. Peevy.

Her big blue eyes stared up into his face and reminded him of a child's honest gaze. He shifted his glance from the small oval face and the glorious wealth of hair to the family frying pan. Gingerly running his fingers over the back of his head, he decided:

"Boys, in these troublesome times I 'low to stay to home. So I'll stick here an' hunt my own b'ars. Plenty up on the chestnut ridge."

Mrs. Peevy crowded closer against him and whispered some request. Stifling a groan, Peevy told the company:

"My little woman hones an' hankers to hear young Jim Cald lead in the singin' of 'Sinclaire's defeat.' His mam told my wife about it."

"An' every one must join in," added Mrs. Peevy.

Young Cald stepped forward and sang, with all lending their voices:

"To mention our brave officers, is what I wish to do,
No Sons of Mars e'er fought more brave, or with more courage true;
To Cap'n Bradford I belonged, in his artileree,
He fell that day amongst the slain, a valiant man was he."

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

FACT or fancy—hypnotism among the lower animals?

Flushing, New York

Although I have long been a listener-in at the Camp-fire, I have had the unexpected pleasure of only one appearance in the charmed circle of contributors—that when a query to Mr. E. E. Harriman on buzzards as carrion eaters found its way into your columns and started one of those interesting debates for which the Camp-fire is famous. I therefore again approach with some hesitancy—fearful of setting off another verbal battle.

However, I've long been puzzled by one of those oddities of nature, and so far I haven't been able to get a satisfactory or logical explanation. Here's the question: Do some animals have powers of hypnotism, or the ability to "charm" other creatures? There are many native beliefs in various parts of the world of strange powers possessed by some animals, such as the ability of a snake to charm a bird, and of other animals to place their prey in a state of inaction or inability to escape from impending capture. Being more or less practical minded about most things, I've been inclined to class these along with hoop-snakes and the tales of "coach-whip" snakes beating their victims to death.

I'VE never found a scientific explanation of the remarkable actions of a cat I owned a few years ago. This cat could, literally, charm snakes. At the time I was living in the swamp country of Southern Alabama, and the cat would have been in the alley if there'd been any alleys. It was a lady cat, with a motley fur, a homely face and a nasty disposition.

This cat would go into the swamp and return accompanied by various kinds of snakes—moccasins, blacksnakes and the other breeds common to the section. She seemed to prefer the poisonous variety, however, and seemed to have the greatest success in working her charms on moccasins. On at least a dozen occasions she brought back big water-moccasins—fellows at least three feet long. The snakes would follow her about, coil up alongside of her, move when she did and pay no attention to anything else when she was with them. The cat, on the other hand, seemed to watch the snakes closely and see that they stayed right at her side. If her attention was distracted for a moment the snake might start away, especially if a small chicken passed close by. But as soon as the cat noticed this, she'd pass in front of the snake, and the reptile would coil up beside her or follow her.

If any one tried to molest the snake, the cat would bristle and fight. On two or three occa-

sions the cat was known to have kept the snakes with her for several hours. Twice she brought them into the house to play with her kittens—sitting back and looking on like a proud mother who'd bought her babies a new toy. The kittens were afraid of the snakes, which appeared to anger the mother. Once we found a snake on the kitchen floor with its head chewed off and the old cat under the stove bathing her kittens.

The end of the story was the cat went into the swamp one day and never came back.

NATIVE swampsters, when asked about the strange affair, merely nodded sagaciously and replied: "Sure, cats can charm snakes." Perhaps some member of the Camp-fire circle or one of the Ask Adventure experts can give me some information.

And while I'm hunting information on snakes, can any one tell me if there is any basis of truth in the idea that snakes avenge their mates? I've run across this belief in the South, the West Indies and found a man from Brazil who told a swell yarn about a snake which avenged the death of its mate by killing the wife of the man who had slain it. —HAYNES TREBOR

INNOVATORS of many things adopted by the Occident, the Chinese, it seems, and not Bertillon, deserve credit for first employing fingerprints for identification:

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In reading the Camp-fire columns I notice that one of your correspondents says that A. M. Bertillon recognized the value of fingerprints for identification purposes and advised the use before Sir Galton or Henry. I am a fingerprint expert and would not like to be classed as a Bertillon expert, but as a fingerprint expert. I often see articles in magazines and newspapers where they say fingerprints were turned over to a Bertillon expert instead of a fingerprint expert.

The Chinese used fingerprints thousands of years ago; also Marcallo Malpighi, a Spaniard, mentioned fingerprints as identification in the year of 1686. In the year of 1823 Jean E. Purknje, a professor, wrote a Latin thesis entitled "A Physiological Examination of the Cutaneous System," in which he described the patterns of fingerprints. This was long before Mr. A. M. Bertillon started the Bertillon measurements, and I do not see why he should be credited for fingerprints.

—JOHN F. CLARK

A FURTHER note on cooking at high altitudes:

Azusa, California

Regarding your caption: "A reader challenges a long accepted theory of physics" above the letter presented by Ned Foster in the December 15th issue, I too disagreed with Mr. Fred J. Brownsword in the July number, but did not take the trouble to write. The statement that food can be cooked at any altitudes that exist in the United States does not challenge any accepted theory of physics and is a fact that can be easily proved. The theory to which you referred was undoubtedly concerning the boiling point of water. As a matter of fact, at near 100 degrees centrigrade the boiling point of water changes by one-tenth of a degree for 2.7 mm. change in pressure. Roughly that would mean a boiling point of approximately 84 degrees on Mt. Whitney, the highest peak in the U. S. A.

A light cover on any kettle will overcome the difference in the boiling point by increasing the steam pressure slightly, and fried foods and baked foods are as easily cooked as at sea level.

As proof of the above statement I can refer you to any resident of the many cities in Colorado above 5000 feet. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Holliday and I spend our summers in the high mountains, and last summer entertained Ranger Ralph Wise of the Sequoia National Park Service at an altitude of above 10,000 feet at the foot of Mt. Whitney with bean soup, beans, Spanish rice, biscuits, dried-apple pie, and canned cherries for desert. Five days later we cooked three days at an altitude of 12,800 feet near the foot of Forester Pass while we were shoveling a trail through the snow and over the snow on the Pass. Mr. Earl Sutherland, trail foreman, and members of his crew ate with us and will testify that we cooked beans, rice, and baked bread without any equipment except a kettle with an ordinary lid and a collapsible oven. We could not carry three months' provisions and a pressure cooker on three burros with any degree of success.

—JAY N. HOLLIDAY

The caption Comrade Holliday refers to applied precisely to this statement of Mr. Foster: " . . . but the facts are that elevation—at least up to thirteen thousand feet—has nothing to do with it (cooking)" Apropos, here's what the "International Encyclopedia" (under *Boiling Point*) has to say:

"In elevated positions, where the atmosphere is rare and the barometric pressure comparatively low, the boiling point is lower than at the level of the sea. Mexico City, 7000 elevation, water boils at 93.3C (200° F); Himalayas, water boils at 82.2C (180° F).

"Boiling water is thus not always equally hot, and in elevated places *many substances can not be cooked by boiling.*"

Quoting from Bulletin No. 180, University of Wyoming Agricultural Experiment Station, "Vegetable Cookery at High Altitudes"—tests made at Laramie, Wyoming (7159 feet):

"The chief variations found upon comparing high and low altitude time tables for cooking

vegetables occurred in boiling vegetables. Green cabbage, Irish potatoes, parsnips, rutabagas, squash, sweet potatoes and turnips require about 20 to 25 per cent more time than Chicago quotes. This would mean approximately 4 per cent in time for each 1000 feet rise in elevation. Beets, cauliflower and onions require the greatest increase in time, 55 to 66 per cent . . .

"Mild-flavored vegetables which require long periods for cooking, such as carrots and beets, yield a product better in flavor and color if cooked in the pressure cooker."

Excerpt from "Cake Making At High Altitudes" published by Educational Department, Igleheart Brothers, Inc. (Swans Down Cake Flour):

"Around 3000 feet, however, recipes need to be modified . . . Above 3000 feet baking temperatures should be increased slightly as the altitude increases (about 2 or 3 degrees for every 1000 feet rise)."

THE Kensington stone: If a genuine relic of medieval Scandinavian wanderers, it is most curious that it should be found in a place settled five centuries later by their own countrymen.

As one of the host of armchair swashbucklers who wouldn't know what to do with an adventure if they met one, for years I have used *Adventure* to furnish vicarious thrills. I realize I have no right to edge up to the Camp-fire, and have hitherto contented myself with an occasional rare ejaculation from the smoke-laden shadows. However, this time I am coming into the full glare, with a tale which should make the boldest even of real adventurers sit up. This is the story:

In 1898 a stone was discovered near Kensington, Minnesota, enmeshed in the roots of an aspen and variously described by witnesses as from eight to ten inches in diameter. The much weathered stone was inscribed with runic characters, which for some time offered some difficulty, particularly the numerals, in the way of exact decipherment. In view of the location of Scandinavian medieval relics in a site so unexpected, the matter was dismissed as a fraud. However, among those unconvinced of this explanation was Mr. H. R. Holand, and he has devoted some twenty years of patient and skilled attention to the subject. The runes proved to be of late Swedish character, in accordance with the date inscribed on the stone—1362—and the numerals themselves correspond closely with a rare and little known form of numeration in use about that time. The inscription, as deciphered by Mr. Holand, reads: "Eight Goths (Swedes) and twenty-two Norwegians on a journey of discovery from Wineland through the west. We had camp by two skerries one day's journey north of this stone. We fished one day. After we came home we found ten men red with blood and dead. AVM. (Ave Virgo Maria.) Deliver from evil." Separately on the side: "We have ten of our men by the sea to look after our ships fourteen days' journey from this island. Year 1362."

NOW, not only is there general accordance of the characters and the language with those of the period mentioned, but there are divergencies from standard usage with respect to both, which would be very unlikely in a forgery, as for instance the use of the medieval word "illy" for "evil", instead of the current, and much better known word "onde". The site of the stone—the "island" of the inscription—is at present completely dry; but trained observation shows it to be an elevation amid marshy land, certainly water-covered in the past. Most significant of all, there is recorded that in 1354 King Magnus Erickson, ruling over both Norway and Sweden, commissioned a mixed expedition of Swedes and Norwegians to investigate the Greenland colonies, of which other less authenticated records tell that they had in part been abandoned about 1342 by migration of the settlers to America. The expedition did not return to Norway until 1363 or 1364.

Mr. Holand has carefully inquired into the circumstances of the finding of the stone. To summarize his results very briefly, among the Scandinavian settlers of that part of Minnesota there was none who could be presumed to have the expert knowledge of runes which would be required to forge the inscription, and in 1898 the circumstances of King Magnus' expedition were almost unknown. Findings would indicate that the stone had been *in situ* at least seventy years, thus antedating the beginning of Scandinavian settlement by a minimum of about thirty-five years. Finally, Mr. Holand, whose interest in the subject was widely known, has received from the finders a number of medieval Scandinavian implements—three battle-ax heads, a hatchet head, a spear head and a fire-steel, found in scattered sites in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Most of these findings are definitely attested.

That is the story. As to the authenticity of the stone, believe it or not. If authentic, it is one of Fate's rare jests that the stone should have been left in a region which later became one of Scandinavian settlement. And true or not, think of the adventure of it!

—H. E. EGGERS, M. D.

P. S. To forestall possible criticism, the phrase "fourteen days' journey", while absurd from the viewpoint of land travel, becomes less so if interpreted in seafaring terms. The unit term was a standard Scandinavian expression for a distance of about seventy-five miles; and 1050 miles is a close approximation of the distance from Kensington to the mouth of Nelson River. —H. E. E.

PLEASE address all communications intended for this section to "The Camp-fire", care of the magazine.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Mounted Police

STETSONS are worn without insignia.

Request:—"I would like to know if the Royal Canadian Mounted Police wear insignias on their hats." —PAUL J. MAHAY, Canal Zone

Reply, by Mr. H. Patrick Lee:—The Royal Canadian Mounted Police wear hat insignia on their field service caps—a buffalo's head surrounded by a wreath and scroll inscribed with the motto: *"Maintien le Droit."* No hat insignia is worn with the stetson hat.

Sidearms

SILENCERS for the smaller calibers of automatics.

Request:—"Can a silencer be used on an automatic? A revolver?"
—RAYMOND W. BERG, Fort Worden, Washington

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—A silencer can be used on the .22 Colt, Reising or Hartford automatic pistols, but not larger calibers. Silencers can not be used successfully on revolvers, either, due to the space between barrel and cylinder, which allows gas to escape on firing.

Drinking Water

TEST for purity. Boil or use Halozone tablets.

Request:—"What is a good way to tell whether drinking water is pure?"
—THOMAS BARRON, New York City

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—The presence of organic matter in water—and this means impurity—can be determined by adding a little diluted potassium permanganate to suspected water. If it remains purple it is probably good; if it turns yellowish it is doubtless impure. I would take no chances. Use only that coming from a drinking water supply which does not come from a contaminated drainage area.

The safest thing is to purify it. Furiously boil the water for 30 minutes, then cool.

Another method is to add Halozone tablets—one to a quart of water. Pour from one vessel to another after standing for 20 minutes and it is safe for drinking. The pouring is to aerate it to get rid of the gas generated by the Halozone.

Zeppelin

STRICTLY speaking, the *Akron* is not a Zep, but a Zeppelin *type*.

Request:—"1. Is the Navy dirigible, *Akron*, made by the Goodyear-Zeppelin Co. of Akron, Ohio, a Zeppelin?

2. Do the letters *ZRS-4* (the name of the Akron while being built) mean Zeppelin Rigid Ship No. 4?"—EUGENE KEYARTS, Madison, Connecticut

Reply, by Lieut. J. R. Starks:—1. All rigid dirigibles made after the Zeppelin patents are the Zeppelin *type*. So far I know of no large rigid dirigible which was designed in any other way than after the Zeppelin ideas, although methods of construction and materials of construction certainly have changed since the first Zeppelin was delivered to the United States. Therefore, it is better to say that rigid blimps are of the Zeppelin type, than to say they are Zeppelins. The *Akron*, if you believe me, is a Zeppelin type.

2. Yes, *ZRS-4* stands for Zeppelin Rigid Ship No. 4. Now, if all rigid ships were always called Zeppelins, or if no other type of rigid ship were anticipated *but* the Zeppelin type, then the Navy probably wouldn't put the letter R in their *ZRS-4*. Or they wouldn't put in the letter Z.

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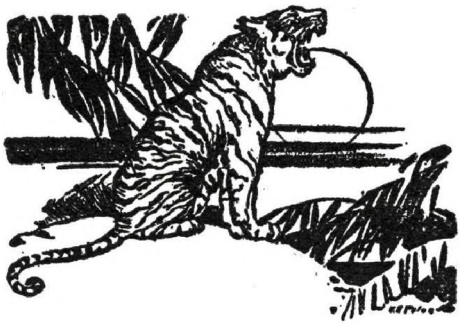

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