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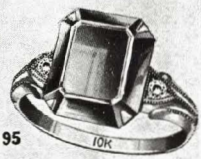

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WIN-DI-GO

HUGHIE MARR was spreading trade goods on the shelves so that they occupied as much space as possible, when Emile, his half-breed tripper, came in.

"You fool 'um Indians' eye but you no fool 'um stomach," Emile said grimly as he dusted the frost crystals from his caribou skin coat.

"No imagination, eh?" Hughie grunted. "Guess I was trying to kid myself. How was your trip?"

"Pretty much fur, but it all killed early. Nobody get any rabbits, and all the Indians, they stop hunting to catch 'um grub."

Hughie stared, both mittened hands on the counter.

"This soon?" he demanded. "I didn't think that would hit for a month yet. When this North Country gets her back up, she sure can make it tough."

Emile nodded, a bit of terror in his dark eyes. The North had struck, and repeatedly. Always the off year for rabbits is bad, when Ojibwa hunters and fur-bearing animals alike are deprived of their usually abundant food supply. And, as if in warning of its intent, the North had filled the rivers to overflowing in early fall and two big freight canoes of Hughie Marr's second brigade had been crushed in Myingen Rapids and four tons of flour, bacon and tea had been lost.

Then, laughing, the North had hurled winter into autumn, depriving Hughie of the chance to get in new supplies.

A novelette by ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Normal outfitting of his hunters had depleted food stocks until the storehouse was bare. He had trapped his own carefully measured rations, risking starvation to equip the last hunter. He had given $20,000 in "debt." Now, so early as the New Year, hunger's black shadow lay across the white wilderness.

"Every hunter, he scared," Emile said ominously. "Me see only ten caribou tracks. Something happen to whitefish too. Ash-wan-i-mak's woman, she lift the net four mornings and get only twelve."

Hughie was silent. It meant that black-eyed kiddies were already crying for food in a score of wigwams.

"This be good winter for *win-di-goes,*" Emile added. All the white blood had flowed from his body, so that only the red remained.

"Quit it!" Hughie Marr barked. "That's old woman's talk."

Yet none knew better than the trader how true is the *win-di-go,* most powerful of the Ojibwa's evil spirits. When mentally deranged, even as white men often are, or driven insane by superstition or starvation as the Indian sometimes is, a meat-eating people is very near cannibalism. The vast North is sprinkled with stories of it, of maniacal individuals in years of plenty, of men and women maddened by hunger when the rabbits mysteriously and completely disappear, of human bones found in kettles, empty clothing piled in isolated wigwams, of fiendish cries in spruce swamps at night.

"There are *win-di-goes,*" Emile said simply.

"All right!" Hughie snapped. "See any trippers?"

"Philippe Marceau, he come from Wabigoon Lake, but the hunters no like that Syrian, Ben Kay."

Alien traders from Asia had just begun to penetrate fur land. Wholly aside from the commercial opposition they presented, Hughie felt there was something perverse in a people who, reared in the squalor and heat of an ancient desert, now sought to establish themselves in the clean, new North.

"Yeah," he growled, "but Ben Kay will squeeze the fur out of the poor devils before spring. He's got grub."

"He not know about a bad rabbit year," Emile suggested.

Hughie glanced up alertly. "You've hit it! There'll be little fur killed from now on. If Kay has given much debt, he's worrying already."

"That's what Philippe, he say."

"*Niss-i-chin!* We'll find out how scared Ben Kay is. Start for Wabigoon Lake in the morning. Say you saw no rabbit tracks within fifty miles of him, though the pests are chewing up wigwams around here. Tell him we're getting more fur than we can handle because all the game's following the rabbits into this district. We're running shy of trade goods from buying so much, understand?"

Emile's eyes lighted. He knew fur land and its tricks. Always it is the winning more than the prizes that gives zest to the battle for pelts.

"How much I pay?" he asked.

"Bluff him! Scare him! But we've got to have the grub. Got to feed our people! Pay fifteen dollars for flour and seventy-five cents for bacon. Take all he'll sell and pay cash so he can't back down. Bring the biggest load you can."

Early the next morning, without rest from his ten-day "trip," Emile started eastward. Hughie tossed him $1,000 in cash as if it were a sack of tobacco, but the tripper tucked it inside his shirt with all the Ojibwa's reverent acceptance of a trust.

Soon after his departure, Pe-tah-bo, an old, bent Indian, no longer able to hunt, went out onto the lake to lift the gill net through the ice, a bitter job. In the afternoon, he hobbled through the brush down the shore, muttering over empty snares, searching vainly for fresh tracks. His toil netted five whitefish and two rabbits, not sufficient to sustain the post's three people.

Day after day this continued. Hughie Marr rubbed holes in the heavy frost on the house windows and watched the white expanse of Dogtooth Lake with dread. A hunter arriving now would be driven to the post only by hunger.

Then Na-sho-tah came, slowly dragging a small toboggan on which were his rabbit-skin robe and a few pelts. He was one of the best hunters in the district, steady, dependable, always settling his debt each spring, a man with three children and an industrious, zealous wife.

Hughie listened to his halting story. The children cried for food. Their mother had been starving herself for them and was not strong. There were no rabbits, whitefish or caribou. Na-sho-tah himself was gaunt, with a helpless, pleading look in his eyes.

"Can't go back on a man like that," Hughie muttered, as he went to the storehouse and appraised his own depleted provisions. "Na-sho-tah's done *his* best."

Jane, Emile's wife and the post cook, came to the door.

"You get hungry, too," she said without emotion.

"Want to see those kiddies starve?" Hughie snarled. "We're both too fat. Do us good to eat less for a while."

"There be *win-di-goes* this winter," she said as she turned away. "Me eat 'um dog food now, I guess."

Na-sho-tah departed the next morning with a full belly, and with flour, bacon and dried whitefish, put up for

the sleigh dogs, on his little toboggan. He had gilling twine, too, that he might make a second net and perhaps increase the daily catch. The last was a present from Hughie.

"What you eat?" Jane demanded when the Indian had gone.

"Emile will bring something from the Syrian's," the trader answered.

"The Syrian no sell, what we do? That whitefish for the dogs, it nearly all spoil last fall."

"We'll get s o m e t h i n g," Hughie answered.

He resumed his vigil. Emile had been gone a week. The Syrian's post on Wabigoon Lake was one hundred miles to the east. No snow had fallen to block trails. Emile might be back any moment.

Just before the early dusk, a black spot appeared far down the lake, but the dark dash of a toboggan did not follow.

"That white man pretty tired," said Jane, as Hughie entered the dwelling house.

"Trust a woman not to miss anything," the fur trader laughed. "How about caribou meat for him?"

"I cook 'um fish."

"That fellow is hungry, Jane. He stops every little ways."

"He eat fish," she insisted. "Maybe he buy fur."

Hughie grinned. Any stranger in fur land is open to suspicion.

AN HOUR passed before feet crunched on the snow outside. No knock sounded, but the door was pushed open and a white man came in.

His rude entrance and appearance proclaimed him a stranger to the North. His eyes were angry and his full, red face was twisted by exasperation.

"You must have seen me coming!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you send some dogs to help me in?"

"I'm all out of St. Bernards just now," Hughie answered, after a swift glance had told him that the man was not in a serious plight. "But I've got some of the stuff they carry in the little wooden kegs."

The stranger downed the whisky Hughie brought.

"Thanks," he said. "That's the first act of decency I've seen in this god-forsaken country. There should be better police supervision—some means to insure safety."

Hughie did not comment. From his first sight of the man far out on the lake, he had believed him to be a spy, possibly the representative of a large company seeking a foothold in a district which Hughie had won for himself after years of struggle. Fur land's code is its own, and deception and trickery have long been accepted as h o n o r a b l e weapons.

"My men deserted me," the stranger continued angrily, as he helped himself to another drink. "Gave me nothing but trouble since I left Wabigoon Lake twelve days ago. And early this morning, while I still lay in bed, they departed with dogs, toboggan, food, everything! I've not had a thing to eat since last night. When I get out, I'll see they're prosecuted to the limit. It is nothing less than murder to desert a man like that."

"Michel and Joe McCarthy?" Hughie asked.

"You know the tricky scoundrels, eh? I'll see they get a spell in jail."

"Michel and Joe are good men."

The stranger drew in his breath so swiftly it almost whistled. He was above medium height, with thick chest and shoulders, but he gave an impression of softness.

"Calm down," Hughie advised good-naturedly. "Better knock that snow off your legs before it melts. And get washed up for supper."

The stranger ignored this.

"See here!" he snarled. "I'm Austin Bales, of New York City. My time is

too valuable to be wasted in arguing the merits of a couple of half-breed loafers. What I want is to get out to the railroad as quickly as possible. It is imperative. I want you to put me up tonight and have a dog team with driver and assistant ready to start early tomorrow morning. The quicker I make the trip, the more it will be worth to you."

"Not a chance," Hughie said indifferently.

He still believed the man was a spy. It is an old fur-trading trick, getting someone into a post who pretends ignorance of the country and its ways.

"I said I'd make it worth your while," Austin Bales insisted angrily.

"I doubt if you could. You had two good men and a dog team last night. Most likely it's your fault you haven't got 'em now. Better wash up for supper."

Jane stood by her guns. She served boiled whitefish and wild rice. Austin Bales inspected the food finically but hunger drove him to eating it without comment. Hughie winked at Jane in the kitchen door.

"Wild rice is a treat for us," the trader said. "Very little of it so far north."

If Bales understood the taunt, he ignored it.

"I am a member of a big firm in New York," he said abruptly. "We are becoming heavily interested in Canadian mines. You can see it is of great importance to us to have certain information about a property between here and Wabigoon Lake, or I would not have come into this frozen hell. The deal may run into big figures. But we must act at once. You can name your own price, Marr. Only, *get me out.*"

Hughie had expected some such story. Prospectors had been active in the district for two years. But a certain quality in Bales' voice when he spoke the last three words told of a desperate purpose.

The man opened a leather case he had carried and lifted out several plump canvas bags such as are used for ore samples.

"Here are letters from my firm," Bales continued. "This is a certified check for fifty thousand to close the deal. Can't you understand, man? I've got to get out at once or we lose our chance."

As Hughie examined the papers he heard the tinkle of a sleigh bell, and instantly he was at the door.

A glance told the story. Emile was leading his team up from the lake, and behind the dogs trailed a toboggan with a little heap at one end instead of a long, bulging load.

Hughie returned to the living room. Austin Bales did not see the stricken expression on the trader's face.

"You've got to get me out!" Bales exclaimed. "I don't care what it costs."

"Don't you?" Hughie retorted. "Jane! Send Emile in here."

The half-breed entered a few moments later. His first act was to hand Hughie the bundle of bank notes. The trader tossed it onto the table.

"Wouldn't he sell you anything?" he asked in Ojibwa.

Emile, glancing at Bales, took the cue instantly.

"Ben Kay just laughed at me," he answered in the same tongue. "Someone has told him all about bad rabbit years. He knows we lost two canoes. Right away he sent Philippe Marceau into our district with flour and pork."

"The damned rat!" Hughie exploded in English, but he switched back to Ojibwa. "He'd see people starve before he'd lose an advantage. Some of our Indians won't trade with him because they got debt here. They'll come to me, and I've got to feed them."

"I heard sleigh bells," Bales interrupted. "Has this man a dog team?"

Hughie ignored that. His mind was battling fiercely with a problem of life and death. His own commercial success was, to a certain extent, at stake, but

the picture that goaded him was of starvation hovering over many isolated wigwams, of men, women and children helpless to avert the doom that had descended so swiftly.

"Did you meet Michel and Joe?" he asked.

"This morning," Emile answered. "Is this the man who said he would have them sent to prison? They told me they tried to please him, but all the time he complained. He struck Joe and kicked Michel. He wished to ride when the load was too heavy for the dogs. He must have a tent with a stove each night, which meant much work after a long day, and he complained always of the food. When they got near here they left him because they were afraid. He would not pay them."

"I thought it was like that," Hughie growled. "What did they say he was doing? I think he is after fur."

"They said no, that he cared only about rocks near Amik Lake, where they camped for a week. He made them dig snow and break stones, and when he saw the stones broken he was like a starving man who has just killed ten caribou. Then he wanted to drive fast to the railroad. And he rode on the toboggan."

"You haven't answered my question, Marr," Bales interrupted. "Has this man a dog team?"

Hughie looked at the New Yorker, but without seeing him. Austin Bales was not a fur spy, and for the trader he had ceased to exist.

"We've got to get in food, and lots of it," he said to Emile, still speaking Ojibwa. "How are your dogs?"

"I come back fast."

"Can't help it. Take out the weakest and put in the other two. Start early in the morning and catch Michel and Joe before they get to Wabigoon Lake. They have less than a day's start. The Syrian will hire them if I don't get them first."

"Then what?" Emile asked.

"Head for steel. Ahtik is nearest from Wabigoon. Load on all the flour and pork you can, and come back. Take that money. Next trip you can go to Sabawi from here. I'll have you mail a letter to Dave Connor there. We must keep Michel and Joe busy all winter freighting. Tell them to pick up all the dogs they can. It's going to be a killer of a winter, but I'll feed these Indians if it costs fifty dogs."

Emile picked up the money and nodded gravely that he understood.

"Put that down!" Austin Bales commanded. "I'll pay you a thousand dollars if you take me out to the railroad."

Emile looked at him as if for the first time.

"Same you pay Michel and Joe?" he asked.

"I'll write you a check now. I'll cash it for you when we get out. I'll make it twelve hundred."

Emile's black eyes surveyed Bales as from a great height.

"You want to ride all time," he said as he turned his back. "You need 'um two teams."

Hughie Marr laughed. "I pay Emile forty dollars a month for a lot of damned hard work, Bales," he said.

The New York man ignored that. "Where are you sending him?" he demanded.

"To the railroad for grub."

"What! Then he can take me! Or are you interested in those prospects, Marr? Why are you trying to balk me? Lay down your cards. I'll raise any ante."

"Look 'em over," Hughie said, and he made a gesture of spreading out a hand. "A hundred and fifty people facing starvation, Jane and Emile and I among them. They come ahead of all the mines in Canada with me. You can't go with Emile because he's traveling fast to catch Michel and Joe. You couldn't keep up, and you couldn't ride because he's carrying three hundred pounds of

dog food. And he's got to catch them before the Syrian hires them or my people will starve."

As he spoke, Hughie saw the whole situation with sudden clearness. He strode across the room and faced Bales.

"If you're in a hole, you dug it yourself," he said harshly. "You'll live if you don't get your mines. But my Indians will die if I don't get in food for them. If you had treated Michel and Joe like human beings, you'd be on your way to the railroad now."

WITH that, he forgot Bales, and pushed Emile before him into the kitchen, where he talked long and earnestly while Emile ate his supper. Afterward they went out and fed and carefully inspected the dogs, deciding on the six best. Jane, at Hughie's command, took some of the precious flour and baked a dozen bannocks for Emile.

"And give him the biggest slab of bacon," Hughie added. "Emile's going to work hard. We're only sitting around. If there is fresh fish, we eat. If not, we go hungry."

He and Emile went to the little log building in which the dog food was stored. They picked over a thousand dried and frozen whitefish, to find 150 spoiled.

"We could eat this ourselves in a pinch," Hughie said, "but the dogs need the best. Most of this stuff is hardly fit for them, let alone for a man."

When Hughie entered the dwelling house, Austin Bales renewed the attack. He was cool and determined and argued logically until Hughie turned away. Then he blustered and threatened, and brought only a grin to the fur trader's face. In the end he begged and made extravagant promises.

"I don't want you here!" Hughie broke in savagely. "We may all be starving before Emile gets back. But I can't risk slowing Emile down. Famine has hit the bush and I must have Joe and Michel freighting for me the rest of the winter. Alone, Emile will catch them. If he takes you, he can't. In a month or two, when I've got grub moving, I'll send you out. Not before."

He gave Bales his bed and slept on a couch in the living room. Jane called him many hours before dawn and he helped load the toboggan and harness the dogs. A friendly slap sent Emile on his way.

But as he entered the kitchen, Hughie saw Austin Bales dashing out the front door. The man loped down to the ice, yelling frantically, lugging his leather bag. From the open door, Hughie watched Emile stop and wait. He could see the black outlines of the two men against the snow on the ice.

The trader grinned confidently. The grin had not faded when the dogs started on, Emile at the tail rope. Bales followed, yelling, but he soon dropped behind. He could not stand the six-mile-an-hour shuffle that carries a dog driver through a long day. After a while he stopped and turned back.

"Marr, I'll get you for this!" he exclaimed virulently when he returned.

"For what?"

"Balking me. You could have sent me out with that man. You're costing me a fortune."

"Sending you out with Emile would have cost the lives of a dozen or more Indians."

"You mean you're putting a bunch of dirty savages ahead of a deal that may run into millions?" Bales demanded.

Hughie Marr stared at the man. "An Indian is a human being! I suspect he is a bit more human that you are. He loves his children. He is bossed by his wife. He likes jokes. He laughs easily and often. He works hard at his job and, in a good year, he makes from one to three thousand dollars. But he is still a child in most ways and he needs supervision. A fur trader can rob him, but

a decent trader knows he is really father of a big family. And, besides, the better father he is, the bigger his returns."

Hughie broke off, strode across the room, then back again.

"I'm through talking to you," he said savagely. "Your sort had no business coming into this country. Long as you're here, I'll try to feed you, same as I would an Indian. But, from now on, keep your mouth shut. If you don't like Dogtooth Lake Post and the way it's run, there's lots of good walking in any direction."

Hughie Marr went into the kitchen, and wiped Austin Bales from his mind.

"Jane," he said, "I'm going to help Pe-tah-bo lift the net. And set another one."

The Indian woman grunted. She knew what he meant. The white *o-ge-mah* of a fur-trading post must maintain his prestige by never doing manual work. It is the rule of the white man with the savage the world around.

"There more men to eat now," she conceded.

Hughie worked all day on the lake, cutting holes through four feet of ice, running a spruce pole from one to another, as a woman sews with a needle, until at last he could stretch a net between two holes a hundred yards apart.

Constantly he watched the wide expanse of lake, dreading the arrival of another starving Indian, like Na-sho-tah, for now he dared give a hunter nothing except a few spoiled whitefish.

No hunter came. Hughie returned to the post just before dark. As he entered the dwelling house he turned for a last look.

Far out on the lake he saw a tiny speck. It was low, like a dash, not an exclamation point, and it was crawling slowly. Hughie grasped his binoculars.

"Jane!" he called after a swift look. "Heat up tea and start some soup. And get that stone jug hot first. Wrap it in a blanket."

He ran to the dog yard at the rear and slipped harness on the two remaining animals. After snapping their traces to a toboggan, he went to his room and took an eiderdown robe from the bed. Jane came out with the heated jug full of boiling tea and the dogs were away, yipping and clawing frantically at the frozen trail, Hughie lying flat. Bales and Jane watched from the door.

"He wouldn't go after me," Bales growled.

"That Indian hurt," Jane said. "Maybe feet froze. Guess 'um die."

The fur trader returned nearly an hour later. He unsnapped the traces and himself dragged the toboggan into the house. Upon it was lashed a body wrapped in the big robe. Hughie jerked the lashing through the side lines and gently drew aside the eiderdown.

A man lay there, his face ghastly pale beneath a red stubble of beard, his small body curiously shrunken within heavy clothing. Strips of blanket wrapped about the knees were torn to shreds, pitiful evidence of how the legs had been dragged through many miles of snow. The trousers on one thigh were stiff with that strange pink of frozen blood.

"You're all right now, Gil," Hughie said gently. "Boost that fire, Bales. Jane, bring anything hot you have around the kitchen."

Jane had already heated stones and wrapped them in squares of an old blanket. She had more steaming tea, some thin meat broth and the whisky bottle.

"What's 'um matter, this Gil Evans?" she demanded.

Profanity burst from the red-bearded lips, forceful and vivid and startlingly diversified.

"What you hangin' onto that bottle for, Jane?" the injured man concluded, and he snatched it from her and took a long, gurgling drink. "Who ever heard of a feller shootin' himself in the leg

after he's lived in the bush long's I have. Of all the damned fool idiots—"

He broke off for another swig. Jane packed hot stones about his body. Hughie was already busy with a knife, ripping trouser legs and underclothing.

"Go slow on that liquor," the trader warned. "Feed him some hot broth, Jane. He probably hasn't eaten for three days."

"Two!" Gil Evans snapped. "But I drug myself more miles than I'll probably be able to walk again. Easy, Hughie!"

The trader had exposed the wounded leg, wrapped in blood-soaked strips of underwear. Now he was lifting the knee.

"You missed the bone!" he exclaimed with relief.

"Yeah, but I must'a cut a vein. Didn't dare start for three days, 'cause the leg would freeze with a tourniquet on."

Hughie stripped the foot of the injured leg. It was like marble. Gil Evans groaned, his head fell back, his eyes closed.

"Good thing," Hughie muttered. "Can't feel anything now. We'll have a look," and he slashed the woolen strips from the wound.

A HALF hour later he had Gil Evans on the couch with fresh bandages of flour sacking on the leg. Jane was washing the frozen foot in cold water and talking monotonously in Ojibwa. The injured man was sound asleep.

"Whisky put him out," Hughie said as he looked at Austin Bales for the first time. "Guts! Gil's tougher'n a four-inch rope of twisted babiche. He didn't shoot himself. A carcajou had gotten into his cabin. Gil came home and set his rifle against the door jamb and when he opened the door the beast ran out. Knocked the gun down, and it went off."

"How far from here?" Bales asked.

"Twenty-five miles, and no trail broken. Dragged himself all the way. Never stopped, day or night. Most any other man I know would have quit or died."

"Will he lose the leg?"

"Losing your leg is losing your life up here," Hughie said harshly. "Jane says the foot will come round, though the toes are gone. But that bullet wound looks bad."

"Then you'll have to take him out!"

A note of excitement in Bales' voice lifted Hughie's head.

"Where does that get you?" the trader challenged.

"But if you take him—"

Hughie leaped to his feet with a snarl. Disasters had been tumbling upon his head. His own life, Gil Evans' life, the lives of all his people, rested upon his shoulders, and Austin Bales ignored everything for one purpose.

A groan from Gil Evans swung Hughie back to his patient. Again Bales was wiped from his mind as he grasped the trapper's two hands with a firm grip.

"Don't hold it in, old boy," he whispered. "It'll be easier if you cut loose."

Profanity sprayed from between Gil's clenched teeth.

"Nothing ever made me yell yet!" he snorted.

But his face twisted, his body writhed, and his eyes rolled up in agony. Sweat beaded Hughie's forehead. Jane held the frozen foot, her face stolid but her dark eyes soft and wet.

"Is he dying?" Bales asked in sudden horror.

"He's wishing he could," Hughie gritted. "Blood running back into the foot after Jane got the frost out of it."

Later, Gil Evans began to curse again, but feebly. Hughie and Jane relaxed. The injured man was given more whisky and soon dropped off to sleep. But his body continued to twitch and moans escaped from his tight lips.

Hughie and Jane examined the frozen foot.

"May be big toe, he all right," Jane said. "Other toes, they gone. He not walk so good."

"I'm not worrying about that," Hughie grunted. "The leg doesn't look right. Five days now. If he starts a temperature!"

They forgot supper until late. Afterward, Hughie sent Jane to bed and remained at the injured man's side. Austin Bales was silent, but he kept the fires going in the living room and the kitchen.

When Gil Evans was resting more easily, Hughie left his side.

"Listen, Bales," he said. "Gil is a trapper. He works like a dog and earns five thousand a year. When I started buying fur here, it was Gil who saved me—twice. Loans and talking to the Indians. I'll see my whole business sunk in the lake before I'll let Gil lose that leg. So, if you've got anything to say, keep it to yourself."

He sent Bales to bed. Toward morning he called Jane.

"Guess that flour and bacon you give Na-sho-tah be good here now," she said as she drank a cup of tea. "You think you feed three. Now you feed five."

"Things have piled up on us," Hughie conceded. "It will be two weeks or more before Emile is back. I'm glad you hung onto that caribou meat. Gil will need it."

"This Bales, he just eat."

"Hundred percent liability, all right. Jane, maybe you'll have to be the *o-ge-mah*. If any hunters come, tell them Emile will be back with flour and pork. Give them the best of the dog food. At least, it will keep them alive. If a man brings his family, set him to work lifting nets and snaring rabbits. The woman, too."

"You take 'um Gil Evans to steel?" she asked.

"Don't know yet. That's a bad leg."

Jane finished the tea. Her round, flat face remained without expression.

"Gil, he good man," she said at last. "Me help Pe-tah-bo lift net and catch 'um rabbit. You come back quick—this good year for *win-di-goes*."

Hughie went to sleep thinking how well Jane had expressed both her desire to help and her shortcomings. She was still an Indian, with the superstitions and lack of executive ability of her people, and fearful of the absence of the guiding hand and force of a white man in the crisis that faced them.

When the late dawn came she called the trader. Gil Evans had wakened. He was weak, and the dreaded temperature had set in. Bales was up, silent but watching Hughie intently.

The dressings were changed. Gil cursed a bit, though with less vehemence.

"Bake as many bannock as you can," Hughie said to Jane in Ojibwa. "Put most of that wild rice in a bag for me. And two of those three sides of bacon. I'll pick over the dried fish and get the best for the dogs."

"You are going to steel?" she asked.

"Must! Have to give Gil his chance."

Bales did not need to understand the words. The set look on Hughie's face told him even before the preparations began.

"Marr," he said when he found the trader in the fish house, "I'm going with you."

"No!"

"I'll pay anything you ask."

Hughie broke a frozen whitefish across his knee and showed Bales the spoiled flesh.

"Thaw that out and smell of it," he said quietly. "It's not fit for working dogs, but Jane and Pe-tah-bo and you will be eating it soon if you want to keep on living. We have twenty-five pounds of flour left, three slabs of bacon and a little wild rice. Nets and snares haven't kept us going the last week. Emile will not be back for fifteen days.

A hunter came Friday and said his family was starving. Men will be flocking in soon with the same story. They're depending on me to feed them."

"All the more reason I should get out," Austin Bales interrupted. "I will only be eating food they should have."

"That's right," Hughie agreed, and he still spoke without emotion. "That's all you are to me, Bales—a belly to be filled."

"Stop that sort of talk!" the New Yorker exclaimed harshly. "You're maudlin over these dirty Indians. There's a fortune at stake, man. I'll make up any losses you have this winter. Why won't you take me out?"

Hughie Marr remained unruffled. "I have only two dogs," he said. "They must pull Gil and our sleeping-robes and what little grub there is for us and themselves. It is two hundred miles to Sabawi. I'm not sure I can make it. But I'm going to bust something trying."

"I can help!"

"How? By eating flour and pork the dogs must haul? By adding your sleeping-robe to a toboggan and I must help pull? By playing out and slowing me down? How much trail could you break? How long could you travel when the food is all gone? Bales, I have a hard trip, a desperate one. I can't, and I won't, handicap myself with you. It means Gil Evans' life. This is final."

Hughie got away that afternoon. Bales pleaded and threatened and stormed, but the trader did not waste energy discussing the matter.

"If I can get any sort of a team, I'll bring it back loaded with grub," he said once. "You can go out with it."

A light snow had begun to fall at noon, fine crystals that did not promise more than an inch or so. Bales went down to the ice as Hughie drove off. He followed a little way, walking slowly. Turning once, the trader saw that he had gone back.

HUGHIE did not think of the man again. Never had he started on a journey with such dread. His two dogs were tired and footsore from their swift two-hundred-mile trip to Wabigoon, and he needed four for the work. His food was woefully insufficient. A trail must be broken, perhaps all the way. After a killing day he must stop and, unaided, make a camp in which Gil Evans would be as comfortable as possible in the open. He must sit up late preparing suitable food for the injured man and changing his dressings.

But Hughie accepted the hardship and the toil, the risk of starvation. These were a part of the North itself. Above all was a great and gnawing fear for his friend. The toboggan thumped and slowed and jerked on the uneven trail, and every movement must have meant torture to Gil. Despite the blankets and two eiderdown robes, his blood-drained body would suffer from the cold. And always, with Hughie, was the terror of infection from the wound, or frozen toes, the agony of thinking he might be only a day too late.

He drove on through the early dusk. On through the cold, clearing night. The going was fairly good on Dogtooth Lake and the dogs were able to maintain a good pace. But the portage at the south end had not been broken and, after stopping to cook a meal and heat broth for Gil, Hughie passed a line from the toboggan. This, attached to his shoulders by a tumpline headstrap, enabled him to help pull.

The dogs strained, bellies low. Hughie lifted his snowshoes straight up, crushed down the snow ahead, tugged at the line. It was maddeningly slow, dismayingly tiring, and quickly developed pains in the lower legs. Eight times each mile it was necessary to rest himself and the dogs.

Hughie cursed, for he never broke a heavy trail without remembering pic-

tures he had seen, with the webbed shoes as Mercury wings, their wearer skimming over the surface of drifts. That is sometimes possible in the Far North, where intense cold and bitter gales pack and freeze snow in open spaces until it is like ice.

But Hughie was in the nearer North, in a forested country that produced conditions he dreaded more than cold or lack of food. The snow was a fine powder into which the webs sank a foot or more. He was compelled to lift them straight up to clear the toes. They collected a heavy load of snow. Their thongs froze until they were like bands of steel coated with ice. In time, he knew, they would cut the skin despite moosehide moccasins and thick socks and duffle, cut until the snow on his feet was red with blood.

In addition to the heavy labor of breaking trail, Hughie pulled steadily. His webs did not flatten a complete trench in the snow for the toboggan. The footing for the dogs was soft and uneven, and with each step they were compelled to give their utmost.

Two miles of this brought Hughie to another lake and easier progress. But each hour he stopped, walked back and lifted the robe from Gil Evans' face.

"I'm all right," Gil always growled. "Don't bust anything, boy. Take it easy."

The late dawn glowed, and still Hughie kept on. The day passed, night came. Not until three hours after dark did he stop, make camp, heat broth for Gil, feed the dogs, thaw out a bannock and fry bacon for himself. For eight hours he slept, then cooked a slim breakfast and went on.

The second day was clear and cold. A large lake permitted good progress. Hughie pressed always, driven by dread, by thought of the silent man on the toboggan. Three hours after darkness he turned into a dense spruce thicket.

"Take it easy, boy," Gil whispered when the robe was thrown back from his face.

For more than two hours, Hughie piled toil on top of the terrific labor of the day. He changed dressings, heated broth, made a comfortable camp, portioned out the best fish for the exhausted dogs, cooked his own meal at the very end.

"Get to sleep," Gil Evans growled.

Spent, drugged by toil and the cold air, Hughie wrapped himself in his robe and lay down beside the dying fire. He wakened toward morning to find the fire ablaze, and Austin Bales, sitting sound asleep, beside it.

"You rotten skunk!" Hughie snarled as he jumped to his feet.

Bales started, lifted his head. His face was haggard. Fear showed in his eyes, a fear of the North's numbing desolation, of its cold, white horror.

"I thought I'd never catch you!"

It was a sob. He was awake only to some experience through which he had just passed. In silence, Hughie placed more fuel on the fire and turned to Gil Evans.

"I'm still alive," Gil grumbled. "I'd 'a saved you a lot o' trouble if I'd shot myself in the head instead of the leg."

"Shut up!" Hughie retorted. "When did this fellow get in?"

"Half hour ago. I was awake. He brought grub."

The trader jerked up a flour sack beside Bales' leather case. In it were part of a side of bacon and a rudely formed, half-raw bannock.

"Yeah," Hughie said. "He stole the last of the food I left with Jane, while she was lifting nets—to get him fish."

He spoke quietly. His anger was too great for expression. Bales saw his face in the firelight and was silent.

Hughie prepared breakfast for himself and Gil. It was a meager meal, and he did not offer Bales anything. When he had finished he lashed Gil and the

outfit to the toboggan, harnessed and hitched up the dogs.

"Get in there and pull," he said to Bales. "And pull, damn you!"

He held out the headstrap of a tumpline, a broad band of leather to loop about the shoulders and attached to the toboggan by a line leading over the dogs.

Suddenly Hughie's control broke and his rage poured out.

"I can't send you back. You'd die. Some people probably class you as human and they'd make murder of it. But you're not going to cost Gil Evans his life, if I have to take a club to you. You're not going to hold me back a minute. I told you not to come and, by God, you'll wish you hadn't!"

He started at once, breaking trail in the deep snow. Rage and a fierce resolve quickened his pace. He jerked up his webs, thrust them ahead, crushed down a path. Once he looked back to see Bales walking in the freshly made tracks.

"Break joints!" Hughie snarled. "Long as you're here, you're going to make it as easy for the dogs as you can. Watch this!"

He illustrated how his own snowshoes did not break down a complete path, but how a second man, stepping where the first did not, could leave a smooth trench in which the toboggan would slide more easily.

After a quarter of a mile he motioned Bales into the lead and himself took the long single trace. Bales had never broken a trail. He slowed under the heavy strain, stopped after a hundred yards. Hughie shoved him on.

ALL DAY they alternated in the lead, with only a brief stop at noon. Bales was staggering when darkness came, but Hughie would not quit for three hours more. The night was clear and windless and the cold shut in with the cruel strength, and almost the swiftness, of a steel trap. It turned their breath to steaming plumes, froze it on their backs and shoulders, formed icicles where sweat dripped from their eyebrows.

Hughie's fierce rage ceased only when he stopped at last and lifted the robe from Gil Evans' face.

"I'll be walking tomorrow," Gil said.

But his voice was weak, his face pale, and Hughie was driven to a new outburst of activity.

"Take off your snowshoes and get busy!" he barked at Bales. "Throw the snow up like this."

Using one web as a shovel, Hughie started clearing a space ten feet square down to the ground and heaping the snow in steep banks on three sides. When he saw Bales was working acceptably, he began falling young spruce trees and slashing off the limbs.

"Lay a floor of these," he commanded the weary Bales. "Butts to the open end. Thatch from the back."

He cut more spruce, carried a big bundle to the camp site and thrust the large, flat limbs into the snow bank at an angle so they formed a partial shelter on three sides.

"Finish the job!" Hughie barked, and he was off after fuel.

He cut it in eight-foot lengths and soon had a fire going across the open end of the camp, into which he now dragged the toboggan. Bales had finished the slanting windbreak. The flames leaped and lighted what was suddenly a cozy home in the bleak wilderness.

Hughie removed Gil from the toboggan and hung it high in a tree, where the dogs could not get at the rawhide which held it together. The dogs were fed a fish each and the harnesses also hung aloft. As Hughie again grasped his ax he saw Bales sitting before the blaze.

"Keep away from that fire!" he commanded. "It will melt the snow and frost on your clothes and wet them. Come with me."

He drove the man into the darkness

and ordered him to carry in the wood as it was cut. For half an hour Hughie worked swiftly, until the pile was higher than the camp and Bales was staggering from fatigue.

"Now, take off your skin jacket," the trader said, as he removed his own. "Beat all the snow and frost off of it with a stick. If any is left on, it will melt, wet the leather, and you'll freeze. Beat that snow off your legs, too, before you go near the fire."

When his own clothing was free from snow, Hughie went into the camp and, after a brief look at Gil, started snow to melting in two kettles. He set wild rice to boiling in one and then turned his attention to the injured man.

Despite the intense cold, it seemed warm and snug in the camp. The fire roared across one end and its heat was reflected by the three walls of snow and brush. Hugh lifted Gil nearer to the blaze, rolled back the robe and blankets and examined the wound.

"I'll have to change these dressings," he said as he warmed some whisky in a tin cup. "Throw this into you first."

He forced a cheerful tone with difficulty. Gil Evans was a hard man to down, and now he was down. His usual caustic comments were lacking, even after drinking the whisky. His skin was ghastly white and he lay with eyes closed.

It was half an hour before Hughie could prepare supper. He made broth of caribou meat for Gil, fried a little bacon and thawed half a frozen bannock for himself and Bales.

That was all. Only of scalding tea was there an ample supply. Bales wolfed his food. It was gone before Hughie had scarcely begun. The trader ate slowly, took small bites, chewed thoroughly.

"Where we camped?" Gil called from his robe.

"South end of Martin Lake."

"You're traveled, boy! That's half way."

"In miles. I smell snow."

"Not when it's as cold as this," Gil retorted. "It must be close to forty below."

"All of that. Feeling better?"

"If you'd brought my snowshoes, I'd be walking tomorrow."

But Gil's voice was weak and a flush had come to his face. Hughie looked up at the sky. Faint feathers of high, gale-torn clouds were drifting across it.

He wrapped Gil well, feet to the fire, and spread his own robe. The fire was dying and Bales reached for more wood.

"No," the trader said. "Spruce throws so many sparks, you'd ruin our bedding. You'll sleep warm enough in that rabbit-skin robe you stole from Jane's bed."

Bales was about to turn in, all standing, when Hughie spoke again.

"I don't care about you or your comfort or whether you die or not," he said. "I'm interested only in getting Gil out. But, now that you're here, you're going to help with all that's in you. The better you care for yourself, the more help you'll be.

"First off, you wear too many clothes. You've been sweating like a horse all day. I don't care about that, only you're liable to freeze at night and be less use the next day. So let that top shirt ride on the toboggan tomorrow. And take off your socks. Put the inner pair inside your undershirt, next the skin, the way I have. They'll be dry and warm in the morning and your feet will last longer."

They turned in. In the morning they had wild rice and a bit more bacon for breakfast. Again a roaring fire was built, but the temperature had risen. The sky was clouded. A faint breeze came. Hughie saw Gil looking up, but neither spoke of the storm that would strike.

As the night before, Austin Bales was silent. He ate his meager breakfast. The man was not resentful or sullen. He had not recovered from the terror

of his long chase through a vast, white emptiness.

Hughie drove both Bales and himself without mercy that day. In mid-afternoon Bales stumbled frequently as he was breaking trail. Twice Hughie caught him keeping the trace merely tight, leaving the weary dogs to do all the pulling.

Snow came before the night, large flakes drifting silently down. Darkness was earlier, and it seemed complete. But they were on a sluggish swamp river and Hughie kept on for four hours, guided by the banks, before turning ashore and making camp.

"Can't we have more to eat than that!" Bales burst forth when Hughie cut a few slices of bacon. We're starving, man!"

"More to eat of what?" the trader asked. "You knew I was traveling on slim rations for one when you followed me. Did you think I was going to quit eating just because you might catch up with us?"

"I've got to have more," Bales muttered. "I can't go on this way."

"Find it," Hughie said.

THEY slept warmly that night, beneath a thickening blanket of ceaselessly falling flakes. Three hours before dawn they were on their way again.

The soft snow was a dismaying obstacle. Even Hughie was forced to rest more often. He broke trail two hundred yards, Bales half that. They kept going for three hours after dark, and were still in the swamp river.

Gil was not interested in his warmed whisky that night. Hughie did not dare lift the robe to change the dressing or even look at the leg, the snow fell so thickly. But Gil's robe was getting damp, and after supper Hughie went for more fuel. When he returned he saw the broth kettle swinging slightly on its hook. A big piece of caribou meat was gone from it.

"Bales, I don't know whether to kill you or only beat you half to death," Hughie said. "Or maybe I'd better take it out of you on the trail. Tomorrow'll be the worst day you ever lived."

He had spoken so quietly, Bales was deceived.

"But I'm starving!" the man protested. "I ran all one day and two nights to catch you. I've had no rest, no proper food."

"Starving!" cried Hughie Marr. "You don't know what starving is! Why—"

He told the city man something about the dreaded *Win-di-go.*

Bales only scoffed.

Never had such rage seized Hughie Marr. He was weakened by hunger and toil. Hopelessness had come with the slow progress of the day and the knowledge that many days of slow progress lay ahead, that the slim rations would not last, that Austin Bales would be responsible for Gil Evans' death. Bales saw the fury in his eyes, and did not move.

But Hughie's first purpose dominated even his rage. He knew he could not waste energy on this man, that he must still fight for his friend's life.

"You're right," he said. "You haven't had proper food. The dogs are game to the marrow. They were tired when they started. They'll die in the traces if I ask it. I've fed them the last fish. From now on, you get the worst. A fish a day, like the dogs, and I'm apologizing to them for that."

Hughie made Gil comfortable for the night and folded his robe about his own worn body.

"And that caribou meat you stole," he said, "that is your breakfast."

Two terrible days followed. The snow, light, fluffy, let their webs sink a foot and a half. The intense cold that always follows a heavy storm had gripped the North with steel claws. All night the trees cracked like rifle shots and the

thick ice of the lakes groaned and roared like heavy artillery.

Austin Bales moved through a white, cold world that was black with despair and hot with torture of body and anguish of mind.

He moved so slowly. Hughie Marr was such a demon of energy. The snow was such a soft, baffling, maddening foe.

The bacon was gone, and the caribou meat for Gil's broth. Only a little wild rice remained for the injured man, a bit of flour and frozen, rancid fish. The staggering dogs left bloody footprints. The tops of Bales' feet were cut to the bone, though he did not see the big red stains on Hughie's moccasins. Always they dragged the burden of a dying man.

And Hughie Marr was as good as his word. He drove Bales without pity. He fed him rotten fish. He encouraged the dogs, and cursed the man.

"Listen, Marr!" Bales whispered desperately one night. "We can't go on like this. Evans can't live. He's dying now. It's a dead man that's holding us back."

He waited fearfully, but Hughie did not speak.

"Don't you see?" Bales pleaded in panic. "The food is gone. We're only starving ourselves to death. But I've been thinking. Without him, we could kill one dog and eat it. Have the other to haul our robes. We could get out. But if we don't, Evans will die. And we will! We've got no chance, Marr!"

Still Hughie did not speak. He had begun to see this man as he was, not so thoroughly selfish as completely lacking in imagination, in comprehension of death coming to anyone except himself; a man deadened by absorption in his own affairs.

And Hughie himself was without hope. He knew he could not keep up this exhausting labor, knew that Gil was much weaker, that they could not go much farther without food. The future was as black as the darkness pressing in about their campfire.

"Yeah," Hughie growled. "It's a crazy idea. But, by God, we're sticking to it, Bales! Nobody asked you to join this party."

That thought stuck to bring fresh resolution the next morning, and at noon on the third day after Bales had stolen the caribou meat, the North bowed to Hughie's ruthless determination. They found a freshly broken trail leading south.

"An Indian going to Sabawi!" the trader shouted. "We can travel now! Gil! Did you hear me?"

Almost at once he saw unfamiliar rabbit tracks in an elder swamp and called a halt.

"I'll set snares!" he shouted again. "Meat! In an hour I'll have it! Skins and guts and bones for the dogs! Fresh meat for us! It'll give us the strength to get in."

Hope flamed. Gil Evans spoke for the first time in twenty-four hours. The dogs, ghastly thin, lying flat on the snow, caught the excitement and looked up with dumb faith.

"Clear a space and lay some boughs," Hughie said to Bales. "Start a fire. Melt snow for tea. I'll be back soon with fresh meat. Meat, man!"

"You're only guessing," Bales answered dully. "And it's too late."

"I don't guess fresh tracks. We'll eat. We'll rest a bit, get some strength, and hit through to Sabawi without stopping. Gil, we'll save that leg!"

He was gone with his snares. Austin Bales sank to the bundle of robes at the rear end of the toboggan. He had never known there could be such weariness or such hunger, such hatred of a man. He did not think of mines or fortunes, but only of food and rest, of escape from the demon who had driven him through an endless white nightmare.

ALMOST at once after leaving the trail, Hughie found a runway and looped a wire snare above it. The North was a strange foe, he thought. It bludgeoned you with fierce cold and emptiness and despair, but it did give you, except every seventh year, the snowshoe rabbit in all his dumbness.

Hughie grinned until his frost stiffened face cracked. Believing he is protected by his white coat, the varying hare sits confidently when a man walks within two feet of him. The moment the man passes, the hare darts away on the back trail. Hughie saw this happen, and laughed aloud as he glanced around to count one for the pot.

The runways, packed in fresh snow by the huge hind feet of the hares, divided and multiplied. Hughie set more loops, saw the black twin dots of eyes against the whiteness, pressed on through the thicket to reap all he could from this strange oasis in a vast, rabbitless desert. It was an hour before he started back, and on the way three snares yielded meat. There would be more later, he knew. Gil Evans would have his chance for life.

Weary but exultant, Hughie reached the trail. Gil lay in the deep snow beside it, his robe half unrolled. The toboggan was gone, and Hughie's robe, and the dogs and cooking utensils. Bales, too, was gone.

Gil lifted his head when he heard the creak of snowshoes.

"Bales is the sort that laughs at an Indian's notion of a *win-di-go*," he said. "But he does worse than kill and eat us."

All life, and all hope of life, departed from Hughie Marr. He was stripped of his meager defenses against the implacable North. He lacked even the toboggan upon which, without dogs, he might still have dragged his friend toward a vanished safety.

"He beat the dogs to their feet," Gil continued. "And when they started he *rode*."

That vision stuck as Hughie cleared away the snow, laid a bough bed and started a fire. Bales riding! Driving famished, exhausted dogs! Leaving Gil Evans to die!

With a vicious jerk, Hughie grasped the back of a rabbit with his two hands and ripped the skin from a red, steaming carcass. He tore out the entrails and spitted heart, liver and lungs on a splinter. He cut the carcass into quarters, thrust a stick into each and set all to roasting beside the blaze. A second rabbit was treated thus, and the warm body of the third tucked within Gil's robe.

"When?" Hughie asked.

"Half hour ago."

Hughie ate a half raw rabbit, stripping the bones of the last shred. By then the second was roasted, and he set it beside Gil.

"I'll be back," he said gruffly. "Don't worry about that. And I'll bring the toboggan. A rat like Bales can't beat us, old-timer."

He was away, shuffling swiftly on his snowshoes. After the toil of the past week, it was like skimming on skates to travel this smooth, hard trail. And his strengthless body was driven miraculously by a blinding, heedless rage. Portages and small lakes and a stretch of river slipped behind, but Hughie saw nothing except the pink marks of dogs' bleeding feet on the white, frozen trail.

Those marks told much. They told of staggering steps weaving from side to side. Often a larger spot, almost red on the snow, indicated that exhausted animals had stopped despite Bales' frantic urging. Always, beside these, were moccasin tracks off the trail where the fleeing man had leaped forward to beat the dogs.

Hughie cursed with renewed fury when he saw these signs, and soon they became more frequent. Three miles from where he had left Gil Evans, the

dogs stopped each hundred yards. The fur trader quickened his pace. He knew the chase could not last much longer. He was not surprised when he rounded a bend in a small stream and found Bales and the dogs only a hundred yards ahead.

The dogs were lying down. Evidently Bales had been beating them, and they had refused to, or could not, go farther. The man had opened a knife and was bending over the leader when he saw Hughie.

The fur trader forgot his weariness. His snowshoes clattered on the frozen trail as he ran forward. He had no weapon. He did not think of one. He did not even consider that Bales had a knife. He just kept running, and he hurled himself at the other with primitive fury.

Bales was frantic. Starved, worn out, desperate, thoroughly cowed by the North, he was no match for Hughie Marr. He had weight and height, but these would have been of no avail against Hughie's more compact and more responsive body, against the trader's wrath and the justness thereof. Bales even forgot the knife, and it fell into the snow.

But he was not wearing snowshoes. He had been riding. His feet were free. Hughie never considered his own webs, any more than he had considered anything except venting his fury.

And Bales, believing himself cornered, fighting like a trapped animal, leaped forward after the first impact. He stepped onto both of Hughie's snowshoes, unwittingly pinning the trader to the ice. Bales' weight and his terror did the rest. He bore Hughie backward, striking frantically.

Hughie could not roll over. He could not get the clumsy webs from his feet. A chance clip on the jaw stunned him. A sweeping blow to the side of the head put him out.

A few minutes later the fur trader recovered consciousness. One leg had been twisted. His head cleared. But the river was empty. Bales and the dogs had gone, and with them the last chance for Gil Evans' life.

Even then, Hughie started in pursuit. But a hundred yards told him it was hopeless. His leg hurt too much, and quickly got worse. Bales would run, driving the dogs. They could pull an empty toboggan. They would be miles away.

Hughie spent two hours hobbling back to where he had left Gil. Most of the rabbit was eaten. Gil seemed cheerful enough, even when he heard the story. He was getting better and, Hughie knew, just at a time when it would be impossible to take him out.

"Dave Connor will send someone for us when Bales gets in," the trapper said.

"How will Dave know?" Hughie demanded harshly. "Bales won't tell him. The skunk won't say he was near Dogtooth Lake Post or ever saw me. He'll tell Dave he got out alone, and he'll take the first train for the States, and New York. We're sunk, Gil."

Hughie built up the fire and gathered more wood. He visited the snares and found five rabbits. He and Gil would not starve for a day or two, but to move Gil without a toboggan was impossible.

DARKNESS came before Hughie returned from the snares. He made Gil as comfortable as possible, set two rabbits to roasting, built up the fire. His own robe had been on the toboggan. He did not even have a kettle in which to melt snow for drinking water. His tobacco pouch was nearly empty. Trees snapped from the heavy frost and a nearby lake rumbled and roared beneath the pressure of the intense cold. The North had them, despite all they had done.

Hughie knew he could go on alone, that he could reach Sabawi. But he knew that if he did, Gil Evans would

starve, would freeze. Gil could not move from his robe.

Gil broached this, and drew a savage snarl from the trader.

"Shut up!" Hughie snapped. "I've got a knife. I can make a toboggan of birch bark and haul you. I'm not licked yet."

But Hughie knew he was. Gil slept. The trader huddled close to the fire. He was exhausted, and his leg hurt. He would have given his right arm for freedom to eat another rabbit. The cold bit deeply and aroused him when he dozed. And once he wakened to hear the tinkle of a sleighbell, coming from Sabawi.

He piled the last of his fuel on the fire and the dry spruce snapped and flamed. In its light, Hughie saw dogs, his dogs, limping, crawling, dragging an empty toboggan. Behind them ran Austin Bales.

Hughie jumped to his feet, red murder lust shaming the glare of the fire.

He took only a few steps. The ghastly expression on Bales' face was appalling. The man's eyes rolled sightlessly. He blubbered. He babbled. He plunged on past the astonished Hughie, shattered, stumbling, mad.

The fur trader caught him by an arm and whirled him about. Bales threw up both arms to shield his face, not from a blow but from sight.

"What's happened to you?" Hughie demanded, harshly, with something of wonder.

That released words, a jumble that carried no meaning. Never had Hughie believed it possible a man could be so completely broken. Awe of it kept his rage in leash until scattered phrases began to tell the story.

A mile or so beyond the place where they had fought, Bales had seen a wigwam on the shore of a muskeg pond. Smoke lifted from the cross-poled peak and he had stumbled toward it.

An Indian woman was alone in the wigwam, an old hag, horribly shriveled, hovering over a small fire. A kettle with a tiny human foot sticking over the edge. The body of a little girl, headless, armless—Old hag grinning evilly, cackling, rubbing blood-stained hands.

Austin Bales covered his face with his heavy mittens. His body shivered uncontrollably. Hughie returned to the fire, and felt his own fury becoming a puny thing before such utter demoralization.

Gil Evans lifted his head and looked at Bales. He had not heard the story.

"What's the matter with him?" the trapper asked. "He see a *win-di-go*?"

"Yes," Hughie whispered, and at sight of his grim face in the red firelight, Gil did not scoff, or speak again.

Bales' hands dropped from his face and he came closer.

"I wasn't scared back," he said in a voice suddenly firm. "It opened my eyes. I'm ashamed. I'll do anything you say. I'll pull Evans myself. I—I—can't you understand, Marr?"

They remained in camp that night. The dogs were given the skins, bones and entrails of the rabbits. Bales recoiled in horror when Hughie offered his a pair of roasted hindquarters, but in the morning, hunger drove him to them.

Without comment, he took the headstrap and long line ahead of the dogs when they were ready to start. And he put his weight against the line. Often the dogs, themselves marvelously revived by a little food, let their traces go slack against Bales' swifter pace.

Hughie saw this as he limped at the rear. His leg hurt terrifically. He was blind from fatigue and pain and hunger. More than anything for which he had ever longed, he wished to stop, to lie down, to abandon himself to the inexorable drag of his weariness.

Yet he kept on. Gil's plight drew him, and his own desire to live. But Bales, as the day passed, proved the stronger force. The man seemed tireless. Often he urged the dogs to their feet with the long line. He did not speak. He did not look up from the trail when

they passed the wigwam in which the *win-di-go* still lived, for smoke rose from the forked poles.

Starvation was throttling the man, yet an inner power seemed to drive him on. Hughie marveled at it—until he could marvel only that miles somehow passed, that the pain in his leg did not strangle him.

Night came, and they did not stop. Pink spots marked the trail. The dogs whimpered. Yet always Bales drove forward. Hughie dropped behind at midnight. He staggered, limped, wondered why he did not fall. In the early dawn he tumbled against Dave Connor's door in Sabawi.

Dave was already in competent charge. A surgeon was on his way from Port Arthur. Gil had been put to bed amid encouraging profanity, and Bales slept on the counter in the store.

"Your men got to Ahtik two days ago," Dave told Hughie. "Started right back with full loads. I've ordered a ton of flour and pork and got another team of dogs for you. They'll be here tomorrow, ready to go, and your Indians will eat."

The surgeon arrived at noon.

"You brought him out in time—just," he said a half hour later. "Two toes will be the damage."

"Gil will live, walk again?" Hughie whispered.

"No question of it. I'm more worried about the other man. He keeps mumbling about cannibalism. You boys must have had a tough time of it if hunger drove him to such grizzly thoughts."

"No," Hughie answered slowly. "Bales wasn't thinking of eating us. Bales brought Gil out. Nearly killed himself doing it. And he learned the Indians are right about this *win-di-go* business."

Later he saw Bales at the hospital.

"I'm sorry," the city man murmured feebly. "I—I want to do something to make it right. I know I can't offer money and the agent says the Indians will be taken care of for the rest of the winter anyway. But I want you to know this: when the mines open up, as they surely will, there is going to be somebody in charge who will understand and help your people, instead of—just a money-grubbing city man."

THE FIRST OBSERVATION BALLOON

IT WAS in the Boer War, back in 1900, that I first saw the balloon used for artillery observation. We had a spherical one with a passenger basket attached. This was transported in a wagon drawn by oxen. A windlass, operated by hand power, with cable attached, was used for hoisting and lowering. This crude arrangement we thought was the very latest and up-to-date in the new science of military aviation and I guess it was, for aeroplanes and dirigibles were still far in the future.

Two observers went up in the basket and communicated by means of field telephone or signal flags.

I saw its practical use demonstrated at the battle of Zaand River. A Boer "pom-pom" had been annoying us from a concealed position across the river. The balloon spotted it and a few shots from a field-gun put it out. Then a heavy Krupp gun started shelling us from a distant kopje. The third shot from our 4.7 in. gun, whose aim was corrected from the balloon, spelt "finis" for the enemy weapon and its crew.

I attended a Kaffir song and dance some time after and a big Zulu chanted a song telling of how the English went up in a balloon and talked with God, who told them how to win the war.

—JACK FINLAY.

HARD RANGE

By S. OMAR BARKER

THE CURLY X was a greasy-sack outfit. It didn't cost much to run. It couldn't afford to. The Old Man, knowed roundabout as Droophorn John, had his brand on about four, five hundred head of speckled cattle—the sorriest lookin' mess of cow-animals that ever muddied a creek. An' as for range, I reckon you'd call ol' Droophorn a scavenger.

He took the leavin's. He shoved his scrubs onto the dry benches up canyons that was too rough an' rocky for regular spreads like the JY's an' Ladder A's to bother with. He scattered a few head here an' there onto little two-by-four mesas that many a goat wouldn't have climbed. It wasn't nothing unusual to see Curly X critters spread out from hell to breakfast along some steep slope where even a rattlesnake couldn't stretch out straight for the tumblerocks an' boulders.

Hard range, but nobody else wanted it, an' ol' Droophorn never grumbled. You take an' ol' droophorned, long-shanked, speckled cow, an' she'll manage to git along where a good beef animal would starve; an' ol' John was kinder like his cows.

His headquarters was some little ol' ratty dugouts way up in a dry draw that got to be called Curly X Canyon. He never throwed in with the big round-ups, an' his chuck wagon was just some hardtails an' pack-saddles, with gunny-sack kyaks to tote the grub in. He even rode a mule his ownself, as often as not, an' he didn't hire no cook nor foreman. Looked after both them jobs hisownself, or let his hands rustle their own beans sometimes.

He never had more than three or four hired at one time, anyhow. He had a way of gittin' out on a rimrock an' callin' his cattle to salt, so that outside of

hustlin' 'em all over hell to find the grass patches, an' keepin' 'em herded off the big outfits' ranges, he didn't have much need for cowboys.

Hell of a brand to ride for, it was. The big spread riders called us "pack-rats." Kinder contemptuous. But Droophorn John always found somebody sunk enough, one way or another, to suck at his skim-milk payroll.

You take me. I've rode top strings in my day, an' yanked calves up to the fire faster'n they could heat the irons. But you don't do so good at fifty-five, specially after you've had a 'leven-hundred-pound bronc roll around on you, an' spent a year or two on crutches gittin' over it. Of course the Ladder A, where it happened, would have kep' me on as kinder of an extra roustabout, but it smelled too much like charity.

"You're a damn fool, Mike," snorted ol' Fred Werts, big auger of the Ladder A, when I told him I aimed to join up with the Curly X. "No self-respectin' cowhand would be caught dead, scallywaggin' for ol' Droophorn. Besides, what does he pay?"

"Not much," I came back right smartly. "Just about what I'm worth, an' at least I'll be earnin' what I get, not spongin'."

"It's fellers like you—an' ol' Droophorn," commented Fred, "that disgraces the cow business."

So that's how come me ridin' the roughs for a greasy-sack spread.

Time I speak of, there was four of us. I reckon we all had our reasons for bein' there.

Dub Duncan's was prospectin'. Dub was a burro man by rights, not a cowhand. Wore laced boots an' toted a little pick around on his saddle ever'wheres he went. A job on the Curly X was just a grubstake for him, while he looked for gold—an' never found any.

The feller that called hisself Bill Smith was a squatty, weasel-eyed, black-whiskered waddy with a knocked-back chin. He wore two pistols, an' he kept 'em oiled. Sometimes he snarled an' whimpered or bellered out in his sleep like a pup sheepdog cornered by the wolves, an' he took to the brush at the sight of a stranger.

You got the idee, though, that them guns was just what you might call "Dutch courage," kinder. You knowed without askin' that he was dodgin' the law, here, an' like as not had mighty few guts to face it with when found.

The fourth man was a young'un. Now, he was a hand with a horse an' rope, Chel Carney was. Young, like I say, an' well set up, an' right handsome in the face—till you looked close an' seen his eyes. Blue as violets, they was—an' vacant lookin' as the knocked-out windows of a deserted squatter's shack. I got shocked plumb back onto my haunches the first time I heard him try to say anything. Baby talk, it was. Mighty near it anyhow. He played a Jew's-harp, an' he went into a regular tantrum if you didn't pass him the lick-can quick.

That was the outfit: a burro man, a chinless waddy, wanted by the law, a rosy-cheeked half-wit, an' me, a busted-down ol' cowhand from the scrap-heap. An' the boss—well, whoever named him Droophorn John scored a bull's-eye. From the middle up, he sagged—shoulders, chin, mustache, eyes an' all. An' from the middle down—well, there was a loose, hopeless droop to the seat of his pants that made a feller wonder if he wasn't used to havin' 'em kicked—an' takin' it.

I reckon it wasn't much wonder that all them proud riders on the big spreads looked on the Curly X layout as about four smells lower than the stink of a sheep camp. Not that the Curly X ever gave anybody any trouble. One thing Droophorn done—he kept his cows west of Arroyo Largo, off the big outfits' range.

SECOND week I was ridin' for ol' Droophorn, me an' this Chel Carney come up on a little bunch of them ol' speckles one day, billy-goatin' around on a rocky bench tryin' to fill their bellies offa scattered saccaton an' shinnery leaves, an' not makin' out none too good at it, while right off yonder across the Arroyo on the flats below 'em was gramma tall enough for a sickle, an' thick as the hair on a dog's back. Only there wasn't no easy way for them Curly X's to git down from that bench by theirselves, an' if they did, there was still the arroyo an' kinder of a one-pole riggin' of fence on the east bank to keep em' off the gramma.

But I spied a way we could shove aside a boulder an' trail 'em down, with yonder a crossin' we could open in the arroyo. Looked mighty foolish to me to see all that rich gramma grass jest standin' idle.

"Come on, Chel," I says, "let's shove this bunch down yonder to grass."

Chel let up on his Jew's-harp a jiffy an' kinder stared at me big-eyed.

"Oh my," he says. "We be'r not!"

He drawed the JY brand in the air with his finger an' went back to Jew's-harpin'.

"Hell," I says, "they can spare it. They don't own the whole world around here, noways."

"Whole worl'?" he says, lookin' puzzled. "That's a heap o' country, ain't it, Mike?"

"Yeah," I comes back, "an' plenty room in it for ever'body. Now then, you cut out around these cows while I open the trail, you savvy."

"Oh, my!" he says again. "We be'r not!"

But when I threatened to take a stick to him, he give me a hand, finally, an' we worked about thirty cows over into better grass. They'd been doin' fair amongst the rocks, but they'd do a heap better down here. We left 'em grazin' an' rode on, an' I never give 'em another thought.

But the next morning about breakfast a JY rider come lopin' into camp. Not the foreman, not even his *segundo*—jest a hand, an' a young 'un at that. But he spoke mighty brash.

"Mister," he says to ol' Droophorn, "since when you figger to run your damn scrubs on JY grass?"

Now I'd mostly been used to a sharp question callin' forth a sharp answer. But Droophorn John never bristled up a mite. Neither did this Bill Smith feller, for all his two guns. Nor Dub Duncan, nor this Chel Carney boy.

"Why, now," says Droophorn John, kinder whiney, like a beggin' dog, "I always aim to keep 'em off, best I can. You find any of my ol' specs strayin' onto your range, mister?"

"Strayin' hell! Thirty head was drove onto JY range yesterday, old man. Reckon you didn't know nothin' about it, eh?"

"Why—why no, I never knowed—"

"Listen here, cowboy," I butted in, "since when does the JY claim the whole damned earth? I shoved them cows out into them gramma flats, if you want to know, an' what of it?"

"Oh my!" gulps Chel Carney. "I knowed we be'r not!"

"Just this of it," says this young JY rider, still addressin' his remarks to Droophorn John instead of me. "Come noon, you have them speckles hustled back up off the flats, you savvy!"

Well, that was mighty sassy talk, it seemed to me, but my gun was off yonder in my bedroll.

"Bill Smith," I whispered, "jest loan me one of them hawglegs a minute—"

But instead he begun backin' off.

"Now, now Mike," whined ol' Droophorn. "We don't want no trouble. Why, shore, mister, we'll git after them cows right away. Yes, sir, we'll shove 'em back onto the benches where they belong right *pronto*. Won't you light an'

take coffee with us. I'll have it b'ilin' in jest a jiffy, an'—"

"Thanks," says this young cockadoodle, "I'll jest take mine with me."

An' so sayin', he laughed kinder contemptuous, flipped his loop right sudden, yanked the coffee pot over into the fire, jerked up his rope an' loped off.

Not since I come outa diapers have I ever saw such insolence give an' took without no fight. But crippled up like I am, I couldn't move fast enough to do nothing myownself till he was done gone. What I did do, I busted this Bill Smith feller one in the face for hangin' onto the guns of his when I tried to grab one outa the holster.

"You'll pay for that, some time!" says Bill Smith. He looked kinder white around the gills.

"Better make it now, feller," I says. "I'm li'ble to drop dead of disgust before night. Come on! Fists or guns?"

Well, it looked like at last I'd tapped a nerve that had anyways a little spark in it. This Bill Smith feller actually started like he aimed to draw one of them well-oiled guns of his. And then—"

"Oh, my!" gulps Chel Carney. "You be'r not, Bill!"

An' damned if he didn't jump right over there and grab both of that chinless *hombre's* pistols away from him.

"Now, now, boys," says ol' Droophorn, "le's not have no trouble."

"What we be'r," said this half-wit kid, "we be'r have some breakfus'."

Well, a man can't hardly do battle with cowards an' half-wits, an' I never was much hand for tongue-frothin' where I couldn't use fist nor gun. So we had breakfast.

"Droophorn," I said, as we saddled up. "I'll help shove them cows back into the rocks this mornin', then I'm through. This ain't no cow outfit. It's a—it's a—damned if I know what it is!"

"I'm mighty sorry, Mike," says Droophorn John, kinder soft an' mournful. "My cows've got plenty good range of their own, I reckon. I jest kinder try not to have no trouble, that's all."

I meant what I said about quittin', all right, but damn my hide! All mornin' I kept noticin' this Chel Carney's blank-lookin' eyes gazin' at me ever' time we rode close to each other, an' he never got out his Jew's-harp a single time. Dumb as he was, I felt mighty sorry for the kid, an' kinder took a likin' to him.

After we got Droophorn's scrubs hazed back up onto the Hoot Owl Rim, Chel rode over an' drawed rein alongside of me. He put a hand over on my arm. I couldn't help noticin' what a good, strong, clean hand it was, an' capable lookin', too. But now it was kinda shaky.

"I—I kinder like you, Mike," he gulped. "I wisht you wasn't quittin'. I —I told Bill Smith he'd be'r 'pologize."

An' shore 'nough, here comes this Bill Smith feller.

"Listen," he says, "I guess I'm purty much of a scrub, but the way things is I'm kinder nervous about mixin' into things that might git folks to talkin' about me. Any words I spoke outa turn this mornin', I take 'em back. I know this here's jest a lousy, greasy-sack outfit, but—well, I know ol' Droophorn—an' Dub an' me an' the kid, too—we been mighty proud that a regular hand like you throwed in with us. We're mighty sorry you feel like you got to quit, Mike."

"Git to hell outa here, both of you!" I says, all of a sudden. "Who the hell said I was quittin'?"

I knowed myself for a mush-gizzard, jug-headed damned fool as quick as I said it, but said it I had. That night I bedded down once more amongst the pack-rats up Curly X Canyon.

THAT winter I learned somethin' about ol' Droophorn John: he loved his cows. Close to five hundred of the goatiest, bobtailedest, stringy-shankedest, no-

accountest off-color line-backs an' speckles—an' Droophorn set as much store by 'em as if they was milk-pen pets. Knowed 'em all, one from 'tother, an' mighty near had 'em all named.

Snowfall was mighty scant that winter. Two men could have done all there was to do on the Curly X, but ol' Droophorn John kep' all four of us on. Dub Duncan made out to put in a lot of his time prospectin', but the rest of us, on the coldest days, we rode. Just let a wind come knifin' acrost them dry mesas at forty miles an' ten below zero, an' Droophorn John would stir us out before day. Then he'd issue orders.

"Dub," he'd say, "as long as you're rock-peckin' up thataway anyhow, you better circle them north ridges an' see that ol' Isabel an' her bunch ain't freezin' their tails off on them barrens. Bill, ol' Blue-Tail an' ol' Queenie was up on North Pole Mesa with about forty head yesterday. I kinder misdoubt if them two ol' wobble-shanks has got gumption enough to drop into the breaks for shelter outa this wind. You better see to 'em. Mike, you know how ol' Jig-Step an' them steers tends to work out towards them Ladder A coves on a day like this. Better check on 'em. Chel, you an' me will kinda scout the rims, west."

An' so on. Only it got so it was always, "Chel, you an' me will do so an' so." That seemed to kinder rile the kid up, because he figgered the old man just didn't trust him to git out an' look after things alone. Sometimes he'd sneak off by hisself anyhow, an' like as not locate some lone cow or heifer calvin'—like these speckles was always doin' outa season—in the cold, an' come packin' the calf in on his saddle an' workin' the cow along somehow, at the same time, on the end of his rope. An' the old man always give him hell for tryin' such by hisself over that rough, rocky country.

Half the time none of them hill-wise ol' cows that he could name off so glib never needed no succor anyhow.

But the time come that follerin' spring an' summer, when they did need it, an' need it bad. The winter's scant snow an' strong winds ushered that hard Curly X range on into spring mighty brown an' dry. An' short. The et-off grass made a little bitty showin' of green, along in April, but the blades shoved out slow, an' they didn't last. The soil of them draws an' benches was light and cinderish. It hadn't held no moisture like the 'dobe out yonder on the flats. You could see from the rims that the gramma was bladin' right decent there, with a heap of last year's feed still standin'. The JY an' Ladder A hadn't never needed to graze it too heavy anyhow.

I made bold to broach ol' Droophorn John about it.

"Wouldn't do no harm for us to shove a few head out thataway a piece," I said. "Them big outfits ain't needin' it."

"No," he says, "I've always made out on what range I got. It ain't so troublesome. Besides, it'll come a rain now about mid-April. It always does."

But it didn't come no rain in mid-April. Nor late April. Nor early May. Nor mid-May. Not up there in the breaks, anyhow. Clouds kept shovin' over us, showerin' some out on the flats, but leavin' us so dry a feller had to prime hisself to spit.

Cows that had come through the winter in fair shape begun to look like calico bags full of bones. It looked like, as the feller says, we'd purty soon have to tie rocks on their tails to keep 'em from kickin' up behind when they bawled, they was so poor. It got so we'd drive a wobbly cow half a mile to a hat-sized patch of old grass we'd located, somewheres in amongst the rocks.

But they was tough critters, them speckles. Up to late May nary a one had died. But it didn't take half an eye to see that they'd start layin' down an'

never gittin' up all over the place soon.

Them big outfits was usin' their grass closer to Arroyo Largo some, now, but they still had plenty.

So finally old Droophorn John said he reckoned he'd have to see what could be done.

He rode down to see the Ladder A boss, an' took me an' Chel with him.

"Mister Werts," he says, kinder whiney, "my feed's gittin' mighty short. I allowed maybe you could spare me the use of a few sections till it rains."

Ol' Fred Werts give a little grunt an' squinted up at the sky.

"It ain't goin' to rain while this wind keeps up, I reckon," he says. "An' if it don't, the Ladder A won't have no grass to spare. If it does, you won't need it."

"But my cattle," begins Droophorn John, "they're—"

"Your what?" says Werts. "Listen, feller: if you don't know it, it's time somebody told you: them ol' speckle-shanks you run, it's a dead waste to put grass into 'em, any way you figger it. You just as well make up your mind to keep such stuff plumb off Ladder A range, mister."

So then we rode on to the JY.

Long Tom Ellison, JY range boss, give us a short answer.

"Got no grass to spare," he says.

"But my cows," whines Droophorn, "they're starvin'. Maybe—maybe you'd buy 'em, Mister Ellison. I'd sell 'em—cheap, to git 'em on feed."

"Droophorn," says Long Tom, "you couldn't give them nanny-goats you call cattle to a cowman if he had all the grass in the world. Raisin' scrub stuff like that is a disgrace to the cow business. You keep 'em off my grass, you savvy?"

It wasn't as if Droophorn John hadn't always leaned backwards to stay off of all grass that them big outfits claimed, but was just as much his as theirs, by rights, an' I made bold to say so.

"Be that as it may, Mike," says Long Tom. "I'm hired to look out for the JY brand, an' I reckon you heard what I said."

Chel Carney had been settin' there on his horse, softly twangin' his Jew's-harp. Now all of a sudden, he straightens up.

"Me?" he says. "No, sir, I didn't hear a word!"

"Never mind, Chel," sighs ol' Droophorn. "Let's travel."

On the way back we come onto Dub an' this Bill Smith feller tryin' to drag out some ol' bone bags that'd risked a spring bog too far after a wisp or two of grass. We finally hauled 'em out, but what for? They wouldn't never git up again. I borrowed one of Bill Smith's guns an' put 'em outa their misery. Five of 'em, countin' the calf.

I noticed Chel Carney lookin' mighty solemn.

"Mike," he says, "I bet starvin' to death ain't no easier on an ol' speckle scrub than a JY whiteface, is it?"

We found another dead 'un up close to the dugouts.

"That's ol' Jig-Step," said Droophorn John kinder chewin' his whiskers. "She was a mighty good trail-leader, ol' Jig-Step was."

Well, that bony carcass didn't look much like a jig-steppin' trail leader now. You didn't think so much about it, shootin' a fat steer for beef. But starvation—it just ain't very purty somehow. Kinda remembers you about how all of us, man-critter an' cow-critter alike, comes of the same ol' dust.

IT RAINED a little patter that night, but not enough to do any good. Not enough even, to quiet the all-night bawlin' of them pore ol' scrubs all up an' down the draw from the dugout. I reckon we all laid awake most of the night listenin' to it. But we must have dozed off towards mornin', because when ol' Droophorn stirred out about an hour

before day, Chel Carney was gone, an' we hadn't none of us heard him leave. His saddle, and a horse was gone, too. The old man took it kinda bitter.

"Treated him like my own son, I did," he says, "an' so right now, when I need him the worst, he quits on me, sneakin' out like a coyote in the dark."

It wasn't no use pointin' out that Chel couldn't have conjured no grass up outa the dry dust of them sun-parched hills.

"Boys," says Droophorn John, at breakfast, kinder watery about the eyes, his face as gaunt as the carcasses of them dead cows, "the Curly X is out in the sands, an' sinkin' fast. Ain't no call for you'all to sink with her. I'll pay you boys off, what I can, an—"

"Bushwah!" busted in this Bill Smith, with more spunk than I'd ever seen him show before.

"That's right," says Dub Duncan. "You can't fire us now, Droophorn. Listen here: there's a pot-hole patch of grass about the size of your hat back west of Volcano Rock. I'll take a coupla sticks of my powder and blast out the rim so them cows can git down to it. It ought to fill up a dozen or two.

"All right," says Droophorn. "All three of you go look after it. I'm feelin' kinder porely. I reckon I won't ride out none, today."

So we left him settin' there, a picture of a whipped dog if there ever was one. But when we happened to glance back from the first ridge-top, we spied the old man out saddlin' up a horse, an' he was doin' it fast.

"That's funny," says Bill Smith. "Thought he was aimin' to lay in today. An' he ain't ridin' his mule, neither."

"Maybe," I says, an' I says it bitter, "he's goin' to ride down an' apologize to Tom Ellison an' Fred Werts for not kissin' their feet when they kicked his pants yesterday."

But as it turned out, he wasn't.

It didn't take two looks to see that this pot-hole of Dub Duncan's wouldn't amount to one man's spit in hell as far as relievin' close to five hundred head of starvin' cattle was concerned. We used what powder we had on an openin' to it, but it wasn't enough. We worked at it till noon, then we set back on our haunches an' rolled some thin smokes.

"Goda'mighty!" says Bill Smith presently, "listen to 'em. Death chant, that's what it is."

Cows git so they bawl thataway when they're hungry.

"Wonder where Chel took out to?" says Dub.

Then all of a sudden we caught ourselves all lookin' from one to the other, mighty earnest, an' I knew that Dub Duncan has forgot prospectin', an' Bill Smith ain't rememberin' to be skeered of folks seein' an' recognizin' him any more. An' my thoughts match theirs.

"To hell with Droophorn John, boys," I says. "Let's start shovin' these critters out to grass!"

Dub Duncan an' this Bill Smith feller hit the saddle as quick as I did. We begun gatherin' there on the west end. We gathered about seventy-five head an' trailed 'em west towards the flats, aimin' to pick up more as we went. But somehow we didn't run into many. Just one or two here an' there. The bawlin' had sort of let up, too.

Then, from the Hoot Owl Rim we looked down onto them first flats of the Ladder A range an' seen cattle. Speckled cattle, Curly X cattle, scattered out an' goin' after that gramma grass to beat all hell in a bear-hide. Didn't look like more than fifty, sixty head, though, an' there wasn't no sign of a rider with 'em.

"Funny," I says. "Somebody must of breached that arroyo rim for 'em."

Somebody had. When we'd trailed our little drag on down, we found him. It was the old man. Old Droophorn John. He wasn't dead, but it looked kinder like he would be 'fore long. He'd

been shot purty bad. It didn't look like ol' Droophorn, hardly. He was wearing two guns an' there was a kinder tight, firm expression on his slack ol' face, like that of a man ready to face hell an' high water to put his cows to grass.

He'd put 'em there, too—a few of 'em.

"Why, damn your ol' hide!" this Bill Smith feller jumps him as we tended his wound. "What you mean, sendin' us all off thataway while you come trailin' into trouble out here all by yourself?"

"They—they wasn't yore cattle a-starvin'," quavers the old man. "I—I kinder counted on Chel a-helpin' me, but then he went an' run off some place, an'—an' I ain't no hand to drag other folks into trouble. I jest shoved a few out here my ownself. I run into a couple o' them Ladder A boys an' we had some shootin'. But—" his saggy eyes kinder gleamed—"I run 'em off! Looky yonder—how them hungry critters takes to the grass! Yonder's ol' Blue-Tail, an—"

"Listen!" I busted in.

From somewheres way north up the arroyo come a sound like a man thumpin' the soft of his fist against a 'dobe wall. A shot, it was. Ol' Droophorn heard it, too.

"Git me my hoss," he makes out to gasp, tryin' to git up.

"Bill Smith," I chopped in, "you stay here with Droophorn. Dub an' me'll go see which end o' hell's loose up yonder."

Me an' Dub had done hit the saddles by the time I got it said.

"Hold on here!" hollers ol' Droophorn, plumb weak an' hoarse. "Jest hark a minute, Mike! Mike—I—I'm afeerd I'm done for. My—my cattle—if you save any of 'em—I'd sorter aimed Chel Carney to have 'em—till he went an' run off on me. Only now—"

But me an' Dub was already takin' out. We give them poor, skinny ponies a mighty cruel run. Dust haze lay over them tumble-rock hills west of Arroyo Largo as we come strainin' on up onto them gramma grass coves of the JY range—the dust haze that a cowherd raises on a dry, cindery trail. An' here, yonder, ever'where—way off from where ol' Droophorn could possibly have shoved 'em, was them poor ol' bone-bag speckles with the Curly X brand, heads down to the grass, an' goin' after it.

We listened for more shootin' but didn't hear any. Then, yonder we spied a bunch of men on horseback. Five of 'em. An' between them an' the nearest of the cattle, another 'un, settin' up mighty straight on a plumb wore-out horse. He was about thirty paces off them other five, an' he had his pistol out.

IT WAS Chel Carney, the half-wit, an' them others was Long Tom Ellison an' four of his JY riders. They had their hands on their guns, too, an' some of 'em seemed to kinder calculate on me an' Dub as we come ridin' up alongside of the kid. It looked like one of 'em done got him a shot arm.

"Hello," says Chel. "You be'r go back. Them fellers is kinder mad."

So they was. Said Long Tom:

"Listen, you pack-rats," he says, "ain't no sense in gittin' yourselves all killed. I'm givin' you one more chance: git them scrub cattle outa here!"

"Why, no," says Chel Carney. "I jest brung 'em!"

"Boys," says Long Tom, "let's be reasonable. You know these scrubs ain't worth a damn to nobody. All you're doin', you're standin' up to git shot for a crazy ol' pack-rat that ain't got the guts to say boo to a goose. If that ain't a fact, why ain't he here to fight his battles hisownself?"

"I'll tell you why, Tom Ellison," I says. "He's layin' back yonder, shot—maybe dead by now."

"Oh, my!" says Chel Carney, an' it sounded like the way a lonesome pup sometimes howls in the night.

"Hell," says Long Tom, then. "That makes it simple. If the ol' coot is dead these scrubs ain't got no owner. If they starve it ain't nobody's loss. Listen, you boys put up your guns an' I'll make it right with you. My boys'll just chase these scrubs back where they come from, an'—"

"Mister!" Chel Carney was white to the lips as he said it. "You be'r not!"

"Boys," I growled under my breath, "Tom's offerin' you an' I out—if you want to take it!"

"Bushwah!" snorts Dub, the burro man, an' lays a hand on his gun.

I'd borried one of ol' Droophorn's .45's myself. But it was Chel Carney, the half-wit, that knowed what to do, an' done it. He turned his horse an' rode right straight towards them JY riders, cool as Christmas. An' us pack-rats sided him. Seemed like we'd listened to all the bawlin' of starvin' cattle we aimed to, whoever they belonged to.

Just three damn fools, we was, thinkin' about hungry cows an' a droopy-eyed boss layin' wounded off down the arroyo —maybe dead by now—an' a half-wit kid a-leadin' us.

"Oh, my!" says Chel Carney. "I reckon we be'r start shootin'!"

You couldn't doubt but what he meant it. Them JY riders knowed it, too.

All of a sudden one of 'em swung his horse, broke away an' took out. It was the one with the shot arm—the same young cockadoodle that had come up to the Curly X dugouts so bold an' brash that mornin' before breakfast. The rest didn't run, but they didn't shoot, neither. They kept lookin' at Long Tom for the cue. An' Long Tom, I reckon he knowed guts when he seen 'em. Or maybe he was just cowman enough to appreciate how even us pack-rat hands could feel about hungry cattle. He didn't act scared, somehow, but he took his hand off his gun.

"To hell with it, boys!" he says. "A few acres of grass ain't worth it! Come on, let's go!"

When they was gone, Chel Carney kinder crumpled an' begun to whimper.

"Oh, my!" he says. "I wisht ol' Droophorn had knowed I wasn't quittin'."

"Why, 'course he knowed, Chel," spoke up Dub Duncan, plumb gentle. "First thing he said when he got up this mornin': 'Chel's done took out to put my cattle to grass, boys, singlehanded. Rouse up. We got to git out an' help him!' Ain't that right, Mike?"

I lie purty good sometimes. I said it was. But I needn't have. For yonder come this Bill Smith feller, an' with him, loppin' around in the saddle on the second bony horse, was ol' Droophorn John. He wasn't too dazed by his hurt to see more or less how come all these Curly X cows grazin' on JY gramma. He'd seen them JY riders pull out, too.

"Why, howdy, Chel," he says. "I see you done moved quite a bunch. I 'lowed you would."

"Oh, my!" says the kid. "Jest lookit them cows, how hongry they was!"

Even hurt like he was, ol' Droophorn set up straighter in the saddle than I'd ever seen him before, an' damn if we don't all just imitate him.

Funny thing, even after ol' Droophorn finally got well of his wounds, our Curly X cows stayed on the gramma out beyond the Arroyo Largo, an' neither the JY nor the Ladder A never made us no trouble.

I see Tom Ellison once a couple months later.

"Still packrattin' with half-wits for that greasy-sack outfit, Mike?" he asks.

"I am," I snaps back, plenty brash, "an' plenty proud of it!"

Long Tom Ellison, range boss of a mighty big Class A spread, kinder scratched his head an' grinned.

"An' I'll be damned if I blame you, Mike," he says.

Two Rogues and a Picaroon

By ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

CAPTAIN RICHARD PARADENE, of the private armed ship *Sorry Jest*—known through the Caribbees and on the Main, behind his back, as Long Diccon the Picaroon—picked his way scornfully down the rocky, littered street of the buccaneer settlement on Tortuga Bay. The ramshackle, palm-thatched huts on either hand were as open to the passer's view as to the mosquitoes which swarmed up from the steaming jungles of the island's interior; and had the picaroon been interested he could have studied every form of vice known to man.

In the old days, a generation past, women had been forbidden the island—they were too weighty a factor in raising the death-rate of the Brethren of the Coast. But with the passing of the great period of "the Account" the rule had been relaxed and the favors of a hundred wenches, white, brown, black, and yellow, were freely offered as Long Diccon passed—a handsome figure, to be sure, with his plumed hat, cocked

with a golden quetzal; his flame-colored velvet coat and laced shirt and boots of soft Cordovan leather, his left hand resting upon the hilt of his rapier of ancient Toledan steel.

He ignored these lures as he did the hails from the pothouses which alternated with brothels. And it says much for him that with close upon ten score hard-fighting sailormen aboard the *Sorry Jest* not one ventured to oppose his order against shore-leave. Whoever disobeyed would have been treated as a deserter and forfeited his share of the prize-money which made Paradene the most popular skipper of the strange, seafaring community, compounded, as it was, of every class of raiders from picaroons to pirates, grouped under the general term of Brethren of the Coast and plying their trade from half a dozen various ports.

The master of the *Sorry Jest* had serious business in prospect, and he did not choose to lose a man in a knife-brawl or to the blandishments of any of the wenches who preyed upon their kind.

At a turn in the path he halted to scrutinize a pair of tall ships which had dropped anchor that morning close by his own. Of greater tonnage, he judged, galleon and carrack in type, broadsides bristling with a greater show of guns; but he made certain, as he studied them, that the *Sorry Jest,* with her sweeter lines and heavier culverins, could outsail or outfight either or, mayhap, both.

The *Sorry Jest* was the love of his life —he loved her more than he did Solita, the girl men called the Spanish Jade, although she was neither Spanish nor, in whole, a jade: Solita, whose favors were not lightly given and who was known as widely as himself as the fairest and truest light-o'-love in Port Royal town.

He had some knowledge of those two ships, knowledge gained from Solita, who was acquainted with everything of import in the Indies, and partly, from a conversation he had just had with Monsieur Perron, Intendant of the French West India Company, whose unpleasant task it was to achieve a pretense of governing Tortuga from his perch in Dovecote Castle, isolated on its cliff above the harbor.

"Ah, Monsieur Capitaine," Perron had lamented, "you do not know what rogues these people are. If it were not for my guns and my garrison, all too small, and that to reach the castle they must climb ladders of iron, it would not be a month before they had my life and looted the Company's goods."

"Aye," Long Diccon had rejoined, "but ye make a profit of 'em. They serve ye to advantage. Where else would ye gain wares as valuable, so cheap, but from loose rascals who figure gold or goods as worthless for aught save rum and wenches?"

"But they always ask more," the Intendant retorted venomously. "They threaten to carry their trade to Port Royal."

"And how many would be allowed the freedom of the town?" interrupted Long Diccon.

"No matter," persisted the Intendant. "If they may not go there, as ye know, they'd have the freedom of the Dutch Islands, or the Bahamas, or Charleston in the Carolinas, or New York or Boston in New England. Their trade is not so cheap as ye might think."

Long Diccon smiled coldly at this.

"It is possible, then," he remarked, "that we might do business, together, Monsieur Perron."

"And how?" the Intendant inquired.

"Tell me, first," replied Long Diccon, "of those two rogues whose ships have anchored closer than I would prefer to mine."

The Intendant crossed to an embrasure.

"Ye speak of the carrack which flies the ensign of the Knights of St. John of Malta?" he asked. "And that un-

speakable galleon which defiles the lilies of France?"

Long Diccon nodded, and Monsieur Perron responded, with a venom exceeding that which he had previously shown:

"By the Mass, *mon capitaine,* they are of the veriest worst. There are none to exceed them in cruelty, in beastliness, in cupidity!"

"But are they fighting men of worth?" Long Diccon asked smoothly.

"They are demons," exploded the Intendant.

Long Diccon sighed almost rapturously.

"And their crews?" he suggested.

"Children of hell," moaned Monsieur Perron. "Satan's own."

"Better and better," murmured Long Diccon. "Are they, in truth—"

"The Knight of Malta," the Intendant observed with sarcasm, "is a creature deformed both physically and mentally. He goes by the name of Little Gobbo. His companion in villainy is l'Abbé Rouge, a red-headed Norman, an unfrocked priest, who combines in his person every quality of wickedness."

Long Diccon sighed again.

"How apt to my purpose," he said to himself. And louder:

"Ye'll vouch there are none more abandoned, Monsieur l'Intendant."

"How? I vouch?" cried Monsieur Perron. "*Mon capitaine,* I will take oath to it! Did not the pair of them assault me here when I would not accept from them a quantity of spoil the half of what they had promised to deliver in return for the ammunition they had obligated themselves to purchase? I would I had been able to slay them in their tracks, but they were too clever, the rogues! They saw to it that only the most worthless of their ex-galley slaves were sacrificed. Yet I'll say this for them: few of their kind bring in spoil as choice or salable."

"Then they are, in sooth, the men whom I seek," said Long Diccon, rising from his seat.

"Humph," grunted the Intendant. "If ye'll heed my advice, ye'll walk far before ye seek such piratical fellows. I have been told of ye, *mon capitaine,* I know y'are fearless. But these are not ordinary men. They would rather slay than loot, and rather torment than slay."

And he flung his plump carcass back into an armchair and quaffed a long drink of sack.

"Any beast may be tamed by intelligence," said Long Diccon, moving towards the door. "I am obliged to ye, *monsieur.* And it may chance that ye shall be the gainer for the information."

He was gone before the Intendant had ceased to wipe his sweaty face with a soiled neckkerchief-end.

"A fool, this Englishman," he complained to no one. "But I hope he does not slay one of them by a lucky thrust. Zut! 'Twould be the first step in my recall. I could not show a profit without their takings."

MORE than a memory of this conversation lingered in Long Diccon's mind as he halted at the turn in the path to the landing-beach, wrinkling his nose distastefully at the odor of singed meat rising from the smoke-fires where the buccaneers were making the *boucan* whence they had their name—that is, drying beef, which could be barreled or boxed and taken to sea without fear of its spoiling. An acrid, smoky odor, which none forgot who ever had landed on Tortuga strand.

But Long Diccon ignored it the instant his eyes marked the two crowded longboats pulling ashore beneath him. No mistaking their disorderly array, the tangle of gaudy costumes, canvas breeches and weapons flashing in the hot sunshine.

He meditated a moment, his fingers firmer on his rapier-hilt.

"It could not be better," he decided. "There's but the one means wi' such gentry."

And he continued the descent at a leisurely pace, assuming the negligent hauteur which was his usual carriage in public.

Midway, the path—if it could be called that—narrowed, passing between steep banks which occasionally retained a torrential overflow from the hills. At its foot, the crews of the longboats were swarming across the beach, led by two of the most extraordinary characters he had encountered amongst the always extraordinary Brethren of the Coast.

One a tall, lanky man, with a shock of red hair and a melancholy horse-face, Diccon knew for the galleon's captain, l'Abbé Rouge, defrocked priest of Normandy; his belt was bristling with pistols, and a heavy cutlass swung at his thigh.

The other was a dwarf of a man, whose short legs bestrode the shoulders of a seven-foot Negro, and whose single weapon was a boarding-pike, brandished by an arm as long as an ape's. This would be the Norman's companion rogue, Little Gobbo, a Maltese, who laid farcical claim to being a Knight of Malta; his steed was known as Bini, atop of whom he was accustomed to lead his boarders in action.

The rabble at their heels was cursing and yelping, even dancing uncouthly, excited over being on land after weeks at sea, with a grand debauch in prospect. But Diccon observed that for all the disorder the pack kept at their leaders' heels—there was some measure of discipline amongst them, although it was only a discipline inspired by fear.

He halted where he stood in the middle of the gulley, and it was then that the two pirate chiefs took notice of him. l'Abbé Rouge let out a resounding string of French oaths, and Little Gobbo exclaimed in the *lingua Franca*, which was the common speech of the polygot Brethren of the Coast:

"By the cock that crowed, who may be this fancy fellow? Out of the way, my puppet!"

"Could it be a new Intendant?" hazarded the Norman.

"If 'tis, we'll slice his ears," answered Little Gobbo.

The Norman shook his head.

"The Intendant would bide in the castle when he saw us coming, brother,"

"True," assented Little Gobbo. "But whoever he is, he'd best be off."

They were so close now that Diccon could see the Norman's fishy blue eyes, and the gnarled, ugly features of the dwarf, so ugly, so whittled askew by wickedness, as to seem almost jovial in expression—and, indeed, a bizarre, outlandish joviality was one of the scoundrel's characteristics.

"D'ye hear me?" he hailed. "Run away, my pretty. But first I'll ha' that golden bird on your hat."

"No, no," interposed l'Abbé Rouge. "We'll even shake a main of dice for it, Gobbo."

"Aught to oblige ye, Abbé," Little Gobbo generously agreed.

Long Diccon laughed shortly.

"A fine pair o' braggarts," he exclaimed. "The bird's yours for the taking."

l'Abbé Rouge and Little Gobbo roared with laughter, imitated by the giant Negro, whose face, if possible, with its heathen mask of cicatrices, of blank, yellow eyes, was more fiendish than his master's. And the mob behind them howled a chorus of savage mirth.

"By the Mass," the Norman cried, "is the fellow mad?"

But Little Gobbo regarded Diccon more attentively.

"Yon's the *Sorry Jest*," he said. "Would you by chance be him they call Long Diccon? Aye, so! I ha' heard tell of ye. A soft knave does discredit to all

the Brethren, wi' your pretense o' virtue and belittlings o' stout men who prey as they can. Awell, my master, we'll ha' your golden bird, in any case, and if ye say nay I'll drive an ell of this pike through your middle."

"What o' my cutlass, brother?" objected the Abbé.

"Ye shall ha' first cut," Little Gobbo compromised. "But only his ears, mind ye. His heart's mine. And belike, I'll eat it as l'Lonnoise was wont to do."

"More bragging," Diccon said contemptuously. "But I'll make a bargain wi' the pair o' ye—my life against your bondage to me."

They stared at him in amazement.

"He'll make a bargain!" exclaimed Little Gobbo.

"He'll fight the pair o' us!" echoed the Norman.

"Singly or together," Diccon amended indifferently.

There was an interval of silence, then a spatter of laughter, which died away.

"And just what might be your meaning?" inquired the dwarf.

"What I said," replied Diccon. "I ha' need for two rogues o' your breed. And ye'll not lack for profit in my service."

"Strong words," derided l'Abbé Rouge.

"But well-spoken," quoth Little Gobbo. "I'm of a mind to try him out, brother."

"Humph," scowled the Abbé, drawing his cutlass. "'Twill be a shame to spoil that coat. 'Twould fit me."

"So be it," Little Gobbo agreed, "and the bird shall be mine."

He made a preliminary thrust with his pike, which Long Diccon ignored, being out of reach, but the picaroon raised an admonitory word.

"One thing more," he said, "Ye'll pledge me by the faith o' the Brethren your knaves shall stand clear."

The pair opposite him exchanged a glance.

"Agreed," said both.

Long Diccon's rapier flashed from its sheath, a streak of blue flame. He stood easily on guard, one foot advanced.

"Let's to it," he invited.

AND SO began the combat which was talked about for years in the pothouses of Tortuga, in the taverns of Port Royal, in the careening places of the Bahamas, wherever gathered the Brethren, until the day came when the last glamour of the Freebooters, whatever their practices, was dissolved in the anarchy of disorganized piracy.

Something in his manner sapped the confidence with which his opponents had accepted his challenge, and they advanced upon him warily, the negro Bini seeming to sense his master's mood without command. But l'Abbé Rouge attacked first, his cutlass flailing the Toledo blade in great, sweeping strokes, which Diccon parried casually—always with an eye upon the cumbersome progress of Little Gobbo, astride his remarkable steed; that boarding-pike was a weapon of reach, and its iron-bound staff could not very well be split.

The Maltese was within thrust of him before Diccon stepped back and to the left, closer to the Abbé, who immediately pressed what he conceived to be his advantage, which was precisely what the picaroon was looking for. The Toledo flickered out like a snake, seeming to twine about the cutlass; Diccon gave it a twist of his wrist—and the Abbé stood weaponless, as Diccon turned like lightning to avoid Little Gobbo's pike.

The Norman crimsoned with rage beyond his usual bent. He stooped quickly to snatch up the cutlass, but his own ruffians shouted as one:

"Faith of the Brethren, Abbé! Faith of the Brethren!"

For every one of them knew that if once that pledge was dishonored no man amongst them ever would trust or be trusted again. And the Abbé snarled out

of the corner of his wide, cruel mouth, and stepped aside to watch the second phase of the contest, which had not lasted two minutes in all.

Little Gobbo was quite merry over his companion's misfortune.

"St. John be my champion!" he exclaimed, chuckling like a demon. "But y'are failing in your skill, Abbé. 'Tis well I am here, and Bini. Keep me wi'in reach o' Master Diccon, ye black elephant. Aye, Master Diccon, ye'll not find Little Gobbo so easy to your blade."

"'Twould be easier for it to master the pair o' ye," rejoined Diccon, "but that I may not do ye a serious harm."

"Ho, ho," cried the hunchback, darting a swift thrust, which Diccon parried with a clang of steel. "The cockrel crows again! And why—" he mimicked, like the clown he must have been, something of the other's sententiousness—"may ye not do us a serious harm?"

"For that I'll ha' need o' ye, rogues though ye be," returned Diccon, and stooped under a second pike-thrust—only to realize his mistake, for he barely escaped the clutch of the negro's enormous hands, a secondary weapon in Little Gobbo's traditional scheme of attack.

The picaroon was amazed at the celerity and shrewdness of the odd combination. The negro was as keenly vigilant as his rider, who, from the height of those stalwart shoulders, was well-nigh out of reach of the rapier's menacing point; the weight of the dwarf was no handicap upon his ability, while the yellow eyes were quick to ferret out Diccon's shifting strategy, his blubber-lips mumbling a series of warnings: "Him go back, massa."

"Him come back."

"Him sword go fo' under!"

Almost, Diccon thought, it would be necessary for him to disable the negro first, but he hesitated to do this, since it would require a serious wound to bring down that mountain of bone and sinew, and Little Gobbo's usefulness would be cut in half without his black bearer. No, Diccon decided, it must be the dwarf, himself—or failure. And failure was inconceivable to the picaroon's arrogant nature.

He leaped into action with the suddenness which colored all his feats. With a fierce flanconnade he beat aside a dart of the pike, no mean effort, for Little Gobbo's ape-arms were corded with muscles of steel. And as he did so he ran under the shaft and launched a mighty kick at the negro's shins—shins, he knew, were a negro's most sensitive point. Bini groaned and staggered, and in that moment the rapier point flashed upward, lancing neatly the hand which held the pike. Instinctively Little Gobbo relaxed his grip, and the pike spun through the air to clatter on the rocks a dozen paces away.

"Godamercy!" gasped the dwarf, clutching his bleeding palm to his misshapen chest, a grotesquely childish stare of bewilderment in his deep-set eyes. "Y'are a devil, Master Diccon. Aye, ye reek o' the pit!"

"Speak for yourself," retorted Diccon, stepping back to avoid a malevolent paw from the negro. "And bid your black man keep his hands to himself, else I'll slice his gizzard for him."

He leaned on his rapier-hilt, breathing little more than ordinary; but there was a hard brightness to his eyes, which would have warned any one who knew him that his exultation was tempered with a ruthless determination to gain the end he had set himself.

The raffish crew choking the entrance to the gully eyed him with awe and fear. Not one of them would have dared to oppose either of their two captains. What they had seen savored of art-magic—several, who retained some rudiments of the old faith, crossed themselves or made the "horns" to avert the evil eye.

None spoke, except the Abbé, who exclaimed derisively:

"Sooth, y'are a worthy man-of-arms, yourself, Brother Gobbo!"

Gobbo cursed him, wringing the blood from dripping fingers. And finally Long Diccon spoke:

"Ye'll not ha' forgotten our bargain?"

"A blind bargain," cried the Norman. "Y'ha' no justice for that, Monsieur Diccon!"

But again there was a murmur of his own men:

"Faith of the Brethren!"

As was typical of their kind, such a fighter as the picaroon fascinated their horny souls, devoid of any virtue except admiration for a man braver, luckier or more skilled than themselves.

"Would ye care to try a second bout, Monsieur l'Abbé?" Diccon inquired.

"No, no," he answered hastily.

Long Diccon smiled coldly.

"You, Little Gobbo?" he suggested.

"With my pike-hand in this case?" protested the dwarf. "Not I, even though I were able. They ha' spoken amiss of ye, my master—and master is what y'are. Y'are the first has ever been able to say he has bested Little Gobbo, astride of black Bini!"

Diccon bowed acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Then we may proceed with the bargain o' which I spoke?"

Little Gobbo hesitated, until a third murmur came from his followers.

"Oh, aye," he grunted. "Y'ha' won, Master Diccon."

The Norman nodded sour confirmation. "And what may it be, this bargain?" he asked.

"That," replied Diccon, "is not a matter for public discussion. We will repair to my cabin, sirs."

"Why not mine?" interposed the dwarf.

"For several reasons," retorted Long Diccon, "of which one shall be sufficient —and that is that I am to be admiral o' the venture."

"Ho," cried the dwarf. "So 'tis a venture?"

"Even so," quoth the picaroon, "which reminds me that your fellows here must return aboard. I'll ha' no fuzzle-heads putting to sea wi' me."

Something comically like a moan arose from the massed ruffians. And Little Gobbo objected:

"But we are come in from two months at sea! Our throats are crusted wi' salt."

"No matter," Diccon answered steadily. "Ye'll return aboard ship, all but the bosuns, who may make such provisions for victualing as ye require. I ha' spoken already for ye wi' the Intendant."

They gaped at him.

"Ye ha' spoken to the Intendant!" exploded the Norman.

Diccon nodded indifferently.

"I came hither for no other reason than to find ye two. So now we'll be off."

And he strode through their ranks, which parted readily for him, without a backward glance, as if entirely confident of obedience. They followed him as meekly as a pack of sheep.

Instead of signaling for one of his own boats, Diccon elected to save time by accepting a seat in Little Gobbo's, and was quietly amused to know how the huge negro edged away from him convulsively on the spacious thwart. There was little said during the brief passage across the harbor, for he discouraged it with his habitual curtness.

There were but two persons he admitted to intimacy: Solita and Mendoza, the Spanish Jew, who handled his affairs in Port Royal. And he was amused again to perceive the respectful attention they gave to the clean and orderly decks of the *Sorry Jest,* cannon greased and tompioned, crew all dressed alike in broad breeches of white sailcloth.

"Ye might be a King's ship, no less," exclaimed Little Gobbo.

IN THE after cabin, its spacious walls hung with tapestries, curtains Solita had sewn draping the open stern-windows, they were equally appreciative, and when deft negro boys served prime sack in golden goblets, which had come from an archbishop's palace, it was the Norman who settled back comfortably in his chair, loosened his soiled neckcloth, and growled like a fed wolf:

"Aye, by'r Lady, ye do yourself well, Monsieur Diccon. Y'ha' rare fortune, I can see." "Better than most," Long Diccon answered, without vanity. "Which brings me to this bargain betwixt us. I ha' before me a venture for the success o' which I shall possess more than the one ship. Tell me: ha' ye heard tell o' the Havana merchant's fleet, which is due from Spain six weeks or two months hence?"

Both assented.

"Not much to it," growled the Norman. "Silks and satins, velvets, cloths o' the best, I grant ye, but what's that for loot? 'Tis the treasure from the Main we cruise for by choice."

"And there y'are as foolish as the bulk o' your sort," retorted Long Diccon. "Besides cloths, the fleet carries stores o' pottery, cutlery, the gewgaws o' womankind, wi' weapons, powder and ball, lead in bulk, farming tools, all the gear o' merchantry. I can sell that to good profit in Port Royal, and ye could do nigh as well wi' the Intendant here or in the Dutch Islands—'twould be nowise unprofitable to carry it as far as New York."

They were impressed, despite themselves.

"There's sense to it," admitted Little Gobbo, who, Diccon had perceived, was the sharper of the two.

"Also, 'tis far easier o' execution, and surer than baiting the treasure Flotas," he proceeded, "unless ye ha' intelligence of the dates they sail and the courses they follow. These Havana galleons carry little metal, no soldiers and makeshift crews. One broadside, and they'll heave to."

Little Gobbo pounded the table with his whole fist.

"No wonder they prate o' ye wherever the Brethren gather," he cried. "Why ha' none o' us taken thought to it?"

"'I ha' but just learned o' it, myself," Long Diccon admitted. "And from a source unimpeachable."

He meant Mendoza, although he withheld the Jew's name.

"Now, this is the plan: We'll sail hence as soon as all are victualed. The Havana galleons will come through the Straits of Florida, and 'tis there, in the narrow seas, that we must bide for them. But to make certain of our chance, one of us must act as lure to the *garda costas* and any galleys which may be lying under the Morro. Which o' ye has the fastest ship?"

"The Abbé's *Esperance* can outsail my *Santo Tomasso* mayhap a league in five," said Little Gobbo.

But the Norman half-started from his seat, angry blood enfusing his bony face.

"Aye, and will ye seek to be rid o' me so the loot may all be yours?" he demanded. "Sit, sir," Diccon answered evenly. "If ye ha' heard aught o' me, ye should know that my word and my justice ha' never been questioned. As for your companion—"

He paused significantly, and Little Gobbo emitted a cynical chuckle.

"My word and my justice may be questioned," said the dwarf, "but the Abbé knows as well as I that 'tis to my advantage to sail in company wi' him, and moreover, if I cheated him he'd follow me to the end o' his days. I say naught o' the Faith o' the Brethren."

The Norman subsided, with a sullen shrug.

"Humph," he growled. "Fair words are no more than fair words. If I am not wi' ye, how shall I receive my share?"

"That can be arranged," answered Diccon. "It may be that if y'are sufficiently alert ye may lose the Dons ye take in chase, and slip by them in the night, in which case ye could rejoin us belike in time for action. But if otherwise, my purpose is to take the captured ships two or three days to the eastward before we transfer cargoes. We can settle upon a rendezvous, wi' the understanding that if storms or pursuit interfere we will all encounter as speedily as may be here at Tortuga. Is that sufficient for ye?"

l'Abbé Rouge nodded, his sullenness at least partially appeased, and Diccon took from a drawer of a wall-desk three sheets of foolscap, scantily inscribed.

"I ha' drawn up an agreement that the three of us must sign, in order that there may be no conflict betwixt us. My ways are not yours, and whoever sails wi' me must abide by my rulings. Shall I read?"

They agreed, and he recited deliberately:

"These Articles of Agreement entered into betwixt Captain Richard Paradene, hereafter entitled the Admiral, and Monsieur l'Abbé Rouge and Signor Little Gobbo for the purpose of securing the purpose of a cruising venture to be under the sole orders and direction of the said Admiral, to wit:

"First. The object of the venture to be the interception of the Havana merchants' fleet in the Straits of Florida.

"Second. All spoils to be divided equally betwixt the three ships, whether or not any of them be absent on duty designated by the Admiral.

"Third. All prisoners to be fairly treated after they have yielded, and women not to be misused or removed aboard ships of the Squadron, the laws of the Brethren of the Coast applying in this particular.

"Fourth. Ships captured to be released as soon as possible after removal of their cargoes, with the proviso that one or more of them be retained for transport of cargo, if that be necessary, in the which case the said ship shall be sold as profitably as may be at Tortuga or any convenient place."

"A milk-and-water business, if ye ask me," grumbled Little Gobbo. "Who follows all the laws of the Brethren these days?"

Long Diccon fixed him with a bleak glance, and he added hastily:

"Oh, I'll sign, I'll sign!" The Norman's comment was a curse in French.

"Ye cast away good ships would fetch us a pretty penny," he complained.

"Ye fools!" Diccon exclaimed impatiently. "Will not ye see that the more ships we leave the Spaniards, the more prizes await ye in the future? 'Tis the cargoes net ye the most, not clumsy galleons no other nation seeks by choice."

"Oh, have it your own way," yielded the Norman, while Little Gobbo regarded Diccon with open admiration.

"What an Admiral!" he applauded. "What a mind! I misdoubt me ye'll make my fortune yet, my master!"

Long Diccon produced pen and ink, and shoved the papers toward them. The Abbé signed easily in a smooth, clerical hand; Little Gobbo stuck out his tongue, schoolboywise, and labored over his task so that the sweat broke out upon his wrinkled brow. When all had finished, Long Diccon rose.

"What? No more wine?" protested the dwarf.

"There's work for ye to do, sirs," retorted the picaroon. "We sail within two days, so bestir yourself to water and victual your crews. And see to it they bide sober. If I catch one o' them drunk I'll expect ye to masthead him twenty-four hours." "And ye'd call us cruel fellows!" clowned the dwarf.

Yet they went about their tasks with an energy Diccon could not dispute, and toward sunset of the second day the

little squadron stood out of the harbor into Mona Passage, watched from Dovecote Castle, if the truth be known, by Monsieur Perron with unspeakable relief.

They ran westward through the night, keeping as far as possible from the Cuban coast, and in the morning set a course north of east which would likewise conduct them outside of the sailing lanes of the Spanish coastwise traffic. At the season the winds were fair to them, and luckily, they escaped any weather worse than stiff following breezes, which kicked up heavy seas, but in no way deterred them.

Gradually, as they made their northing, Diccon closed the coast, until some two glasses distant from the cliff-bordered entrance to Havana harbor they were within sight of the shore-line. Here he fired a signal-gun, and he and Little Gobbo drew ahead of the *Esperance*, which promptly commenced to fire her batteries as furiously as though she were engaging a hostile fleet.

Both the *Sorry Jest* and the *Santo Tomasso* flew the gold-and-red Spanish ensign, and most of their ports were shuttered to give them the appearance of peaceful merchantmen. From his poop, with the aid of a prospect-glass, Diccon could see people watching from the beach. The thunder of cannon echoed over the sun-blazoned sea, and the smoke swirled and eddied shoreward. There was every appearance of a realistic combat. He watched the hour-glass attentively, turning it the instant the last grain of sand had slipped down. It was half-empty again before the masthead lookout hailed he could see the gray walls of the Morro rising out of the sea to starboard ahead.

"All save a score o' the men below-decks, Whitticombe," he hailed his boatswain, and climbed into the mizzen-shrouds to gain a better view of what should happen.

His plan was at its first crisis, but you might not guess that from his calm face and leisurely manner. He watched patiently until the Morro focused in his lens, growing slowly larger and larger, and when he saw a half-dozen low-waisted craft crawling under the castle walls like dragon-flies his one sign of satisfaction was a quiet smile. He waved an arm to Little Gobbo on the poop of the carrack, and the dwarf waved back.

"Load a gun, Master Gunner," he called down, and then waited again while the dragon-flies were transformed into *garda costas*, with fore- and after-castles teeming with men and the snouts of half a dozen cannon projecting from their ports.

He glanced astern, and knew that the *Esperance*, wreathed in smoke and thundering aimlessly, must be easily within sight of the Spaniards.

"Loose that gun," he hailed the deck, and the ruddy flame of the discharge jetted out from the larboard side of the *Sorry Jest*. The Abbé, upon this prearranged signal, ran off before the wind, with every appearance of panic, fired one last harmless broadside, and then came about and scuttled off on a quartering course.

BY THE time he had reached the deck the galleys were much nearer, making rough going of it in the teeth of the wind, the waves sweeping their waists and deluging the naked slaves who tugged at the bucking sweeps. One passed between the *Sorry Jest* and the *Santo Tomasso*, and Diccon could hear the hoarse panting of the slaves, and smell the dank stench from the crowded benches. He frowned, and muttered to himself:

"Some day, Paradene, my lad, ye'll free a parcel o' those poor knaves for the pure mercy o' it."

But he wiped the frown from his face as one of the officers hailed him incomprehensibly. Smiling gayly, he sprang to

the bulwark, and swept off his hat in a graceful bow, becoming one who had been rescued from corsairs.

The officer gestured toward the receding *Esperance,* and Diccon nodded and pointed also, inviting pursuit. In a moment the galleys had foamed by, and the Straits were open and no one in Havana would dream that they'd be held by hostile craft against the expected merchant fleet.

As the two ships came abeam of the Morro, Diccon, had the ensign dipped and fired another gun, and the flag on the tall staff on the battlements was dipped in return, with an accompanying puff of smoke. Little Gobbo, not to be outdone in impudence, followed his Admiral's example, and was responded to accordingly.

The Spaniards, Diccon reflected, would take it for granted that the "rescued" ships were homeward-bound from the Main, and many a Don would sigh to himself, thinking of the fortunate fellows who might look forward to the blessed mother country, where there were neither pirates nor picaroons nor heretics.

Next morning saw the *Sorry Jest* and the *Santo Tomasso* well into the Straits, with the weather murky and unsettled, a contingency not too favorable for Diccon's plan. However, he suspected that he was well in advance of the galleon's approach, and there was nothing to do but accept conditions as they arose. He ran to the eastward entrance, and there he and Little Gobbo divided the beat, the dwarf patrolling the northern waters, himself the southern, taking due care to remain beyond observation from the Cuban coast.

So two days elapsed; the third day the weather cleared and the wind dropped. The two ships plodded back and forth like sentinels, meeting more or less midway of the Straits, exchanging observations and separating again.

Diccon was fairly sure from what Mendoza had told him that the galleons would not attempt to navigate these treacherous waters at night. They were cautious sailormen, the Dons, and with Havana so near they would not risk being caught by any sudden blow which might pile them on the coral reefs.

Diccon wondered idly whether the Abbé had been taken. He didn't much care. He had seen enough of Little Gobbo to be confident of the dwarf's seamanship and pugnacity; the two of them could cope with the unwieldy merchant galleons, capture enough to make the venture profitable.

But late the afternoon of the tenth day a large ship was sighted in the west. If she was a Spaniard, she must be taken to prevent her reporting them, so the *Sorry Jest* bore down upon her, showing Spanish colors. She was still a league off, however, when the lookouts identified her by the loom of her forecastle and the rake of her mizzen as the *Esperance.*

The Abbé was in an unsavory mood, it developed. He had sprained his foremast and carried away several headsails in escaping the galleys, which had followed him for two days and nights—or as long as the slaves could be kept at the sweeps, with some slight aid from their single square sails—and he was disposed to be resentful that the merchant fleet hadn't been accounted for, as also to be dubious that it would ever appear.

But Diccon cut his grumbling short, and sent him northward to pick up Little Gobbo and tighten the patrol of the Straits. And as it happened, the Norman had his reward for his undoubted efforts, for it was he who first sighted the galleons and fired the signal-gun, which drew the other two ships upon him, as had been agreed.

It was early morning, not much after dawn. The Spaniards were clumped together in slovenly formation to take advantage of the pilot of the leading vessel, who was supposed to be best ac-

quainted with these waters. They hadn't the least suspicion that the approaching ships were enemies—the Freebooters rarely visited the Straits. And when Diccon's squadron closed them, each selecting its special prey, the bulwarks were lined with men shouting greetings.

"Fire low, Master Gunner," Diccon ordered. "I'd ha' as little bloodshed as may be."

But those tigers, the Abbé and Little Gobbo, were not so merciful, and the opening broadsides were answered by a wailing and shrieking which pierced the succeeding roar of cannon fire. The leader struck immediately to Diccon, and he sent a boat's crew to take possession of her, then wore to intercept a fine carrack, which was running free for the Cuban coast. By the time he had her in hand the fleet had scattered in every direction, some heading back into the Atlantic, some risking the Florida reefs, the majority standing westward, desperate for Havana and the protection of the Morro's guns.

Of fifteen sail, ten had escaped. The Abbé had taken two, one not of much account; Little Gobbo, with his slower ship, had but one, but she proved the most valuable of the lot, a gorgeous galleon of eight hundred tons, laden with a cargo of Eastern goods from Ragusa.

AT THE moment, there was no attempt to estimate the worth of the spoil. There was too much to be done, of necessity—several of the prizes had been injured aloft, and new tackle must be rigged; the prisoners sorted out, and confined, except for small working crews to help the prize crews; and finally, the eight ships, scattered over an area a league square, brought into an irregular formation.

It was mid-afternoon before Diccon could make signal to beat to the eastward for the agreed rendezvous. The pace, naturally, was the pace of the slowest ship, and to make progress the more difficult, several of the prize-masters were not too competent, notwithstanding which all were in sight the next morning.

The course was southeast, to bring them so much nearer to Tortuga after the dispersion, and Diccon held to it for three days, although even then he had not gained the desired position; but he was afraid a storm might blow up, and drive them apart, and he dared not wait longer. So, with a lookout at every masthead, he ordered overside all the smallboats available, and himself visited in turn the several prizes, attended by his two subordinates, to inspect the manifests.

They were rich beyond belief, so rich that it was physically impossible to stow away the half of what they had taken, and to accommodate so much they were obliged to make use of the great carrack which had fallen to Diccon. Indeed, there was not an item of her cargo he would have abandoned, and her holds were so full that she could take aboard no more.

The Norman watched with sulky avarice, Little Gobbo with clownish delight, as he conned the values of the spoil.

"We ha' been fools, my Diccon," cried the dwarf. "And y'are the wisest o' all the Brethren. What a haul! 'Tis the loot of a town, *per Bacco!* The plate fleet would scarce be richer."

"Humph," grunted the Abbé. "Bide until ye ha' sold it, Gobbo."

"Aught ye cannot sell, leave to me," rejoined Diccon. "Now, to work—work as ye ne'er worked. For if a tempest rises we are like to lose all save the carrack.

"And she would be worth the venture alone," added the dwarf.

They were a week about it, driving the prisoners to aid them, shifting and

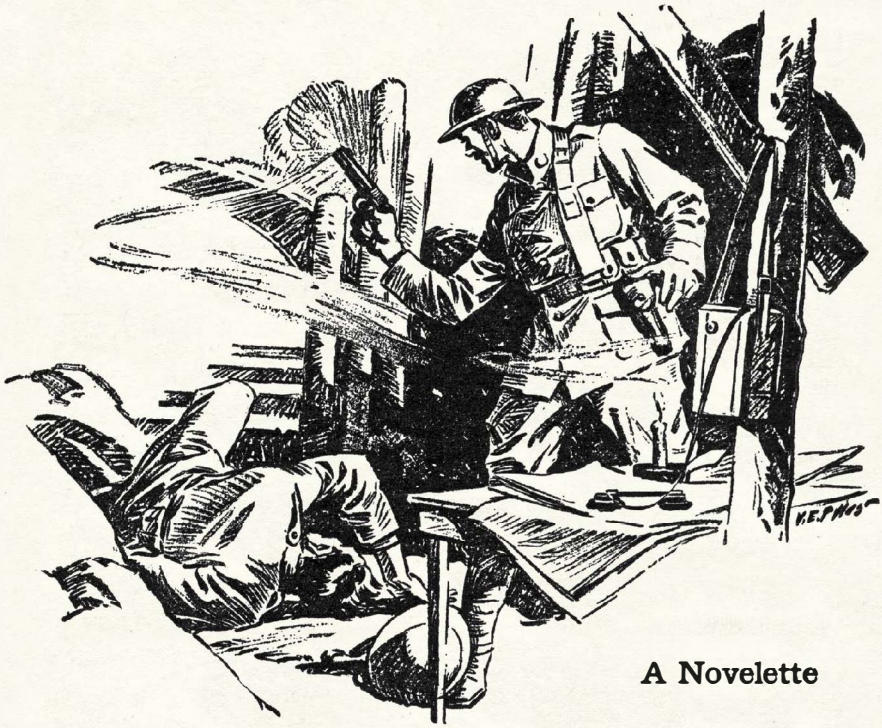
sorting and resorting, arguing and compromising over this and that. And ever Diccon had one eye on the sky and one on the horizon for a vengeful Spanish squadron. Iron man that he was, he heaved a sigh of gratitude when the last had been done that could be done, and the carrack's passengers and crew distributed amongst the four other prizes, a proceeding which drew an emphatic protest from the Abbé and Little Gobbo, who were disposed to hold a few of the richer merchants and two grandees for ransom.

But against this Diccon set his foot down firmly. They'd abide by the Agreement, he declared, or take his culverins athwart their decks. And they yielded, as always, the Abbé ungraciously, Little Gobbo with a quirk of clownish jest.

Not bad to work with, the dwarf, Diccon decided anew, and the Norman had his uses. But he'd be glad to part company for a while with his two rogues. He was hungry for Port Royal—and for Solita, who should have the pick of his Genoese velvet, and the rare Persian rugs and rarer muslin from Indian looms. He thought much of Solita as they bowled south for Tortuga.

And Diccon was doubly glad a month later, after they had made division of the loot, and completed their business with Monsieur Perron, who not only was eager for a share of the cargoes, but had a purchaser for the carrack—who was, to be honest, no more than a dummy for that most honorable of corporations, the French West India Company.

He was a brave figure, standing on his poop, one hand on his rapier-hilt, the other holding his jeweled hat, as the *Sorry Jest* made sail, and the cannon roared a parting salute from Dovecote Castle, and the *Santo Tomasso* and the *Esperance* vomited smoke from their batteries, the crews of the three ships cheering and waving to each other, Little Gobo perched aloft on Bini's shoulders, shouting louder than any. He bowed very courteously and waved back. But it was of Solita he was thinking—and a little, perhaps, of the consternation of the stay-at-home merchants whose market would be wrecked by his cargo.



A Novelette

A Question Of Discipline

By THEODORE FREDENBURGH

HALF buried in a tangle of underbrush and shattered trees the guns of C Battery crashed, flaming red into the red of the rising sun. Before them, etched against the high color of the morning sky, a ragged ruff of stiff brown trees blocked their line of fire and, by arbitrarily setting the gun elevations necessary to clear them, set a minimum range.

A scant three thousand yards ahead the weary American infantry forming the spearhead of the drive, exhausted, hungry and miserable, crouched in hastily scraped-out fox-holes and thanked God that, for once, the artillery guys were on the job.

At the battery, Chink Malloy, with a sharp picture in his mind of a reserve infantry battalion lying unprotected in the underbrush about the nearby trees which obstructed his fire, stooped at the breech of his gun and, with a quick, practised eye, squinted through. Beyond the gleaming tube of the gun-bore the stiff plumes of the trees blocked his vision. With a swift half-turn of the elevating wheel he lifted the muzzle until the crimson splurge of the morning sky was clear to his eye.

"Load!"

He stepped back, slapping Fog Evans, his loader, on the shoulder.

With a sharp clang the shell went

home, the breech clashed shut and an instant later, with an ear-shattering blast, the gun hurled its missile.

At almost the same time the gun next at Malloy's left fired. In the following split second a cracking blast among the tree-tops ripped them to pieces and flung the tops, branches, steel splinters and death upon the infantrymen resting on the ground below.

With the sound, Malloy's head turned smoothly toward the gun at his left. There Sergeant Barrow, a broad-shouldered, dark and sulkily good-looking youngster, glanced arrogantly in Malloy's direction and made a furtive circular gesture toward the man controlling the elevating gear. The firer, acting on Barrow's signal, deftly rotated the elevating gear so that in the space of a long wink the gun pointed well above the tree tops. Barrow nodded sharp satisfaction to the firer and dropped from the edge of the gun-pit to a spot near the open breech. Ostentatiously then he went through the motions of checking the clearance of his gun.

Malloy's square, ruddy face tightened with contempt and the long scar which, crossing his cheek and drawing one eyebrow into an Oriental slant, had got him his nickname of Chink, showed white against the flush of his anger.

"Yellow-belly," he muttered.

Beside him Fog Evans, his loader, thrust his mouth close to Malloy's ear and shouted.

"Barrow sent that one off without checking his clearance."

"Did you see that?"

"Yeah. He fired blind and he ain't got the guts to face the music. He's all wind and water — nothing here." Evans thumped his belly with a grimy fist.

"There'll be hell to pay," Malloy snapped. "Remember what you saw. He fired almost even with me. Get the idea? He'll pull any kind of a story to whitewash himself. In a pinch your story might just pull me out of a hole."

"Ain't it the truth," Evans spat on his hands and took the next live shell from the ammunition passer and prepared to reload.

At the other gun Barrow, his alibi completed, sprang back to his post on the lip of the gun-pit and grinned smugly across the distance separating him from Malloy.

It was this smug arrogance that had made of Barrow, in the brief period since arrival with the battery a few weeks before, a greatly disliked man. His reputation for excellence in college athletics and his participation in a family fortune were facts which Barrow seemed to think should be discussed whenever two or more of his battery mates got together. Not satisfied with that he had taken great pleasure in demonstrating his superior imagination by indulging in sharp tricks which violated the code of rugged honesty prevailing among his mates.

They in turn, as men war-wise in their generation, mentally touched Barrow's broad back with yellow; held their peace and their opinion and cynically waited for the inevitable test, which, in time of war could not be long delayed.

Malloy watched him for a second with a still face, then dropped into the pit of his own gun to check its clearance before firing again.

He was reaching for the elevating wheel when a hand fell sharply on his back.

Across his shoulder Malloy confronted his battery commander, Captain Raukee, a severe-looking man with a fine, cold face and eyes like gray ice.

"Stand away, Malloy." Raukee signaled the gun corporal to take charge of the gun.

"My shot was clear, sir," Malloy protested, stepping out of the pit.

"Meaning that Barrow's was not?"

"I'll let him explain that. He's good at it."

"Report in my dugout. I'll speak to Barrow."

In silence Malloy swung away and tramped across the muck and mire towards Raukee's dugout. About him guns clanged and crashed, releasing an acrid blast of red fire and smoke into the dawn-light. Enemy shells searching through the woods screamed overhead and broke with a jar and a shuddering rumble—now this side, now that, now deep in the still darkness of the woods at the rear.

At the door of the dugout Malloy looked back. Raukee, with Barrow beside him, was leaving the pit of Barrow's gun. Although more heavily built, Barrow was of a height with the spare Raukee, whose angular figure moved stiffly in contrast to the slightly rolling gait of his companion. Malloy could imagine the sluggish play of Barrow's sulky features as he alibied himself to the battery commander, and he shrugged scornfully at the thought as he went down the dark and slippery steps of the dugout.

A FEW seconds later Raukee and Barrow stepped into the clammy room where the battery maps lap sprawled in the dull glow of candles set on nail points at the upper corners of the ammunition-box table.

"Let's have it, Malloy," Raukee said without preamble. "What happened?"

"Nothing to report, sir." Malloy saluted formally, "I checked my piece before each round according to orders."

"His piece was low," Barrow asserted vindictively.

"*After* the shot," Malloy countered. "It jarred off on the recoil."

"It could," Raukee agreed. "Did you check, Barrow?"

"Yes, I did, captain." Barrow's unctuous tone was positive. "There is no doubt about responsibility for the shot."

"That will do."

"Do you mean—?"

"Silence!"

"I—"

"A premature burst due to carelessness is a bad thing," Raukee said eyeing both men coldly. "Either you, Malloy; or you, Barrow, is lying. Whichever of you it is had better speak up. Malloy?"

"I checked, sir," Malloy said briskly, "before each shot. I knew those treetops would catch the first shot that wasn't checked for clearance. The idea has been giving me the heebie-jeebies all night."

"Hm. Barrow?"

On the wall behind Raukee the telephone whirred into life. Impatiently he snapped the receiver down.

"Mr. Raukee," he snapped, and after a pause that was quick with the accusing tone of the man at the other end of the line, "I am fully aware of what has happened, sir. Apparently our fault."

He paused again, and his face hardened as he listened.

"How many?" he said at length. "Several killed—two killed and four wounded. Of course I realize the seriousness of it. What's that?"

He pressed the receiver close to his head, striving to shut out the jarring blasts of the guns firing on the position above him.

"Certainly," he went on stiffly, "I am investigating now. I will take action as soon as I am able to fix responsibility."

He listened a second or two and then hung the receiver back on its hook.

"Two killed and four wounded," he remarked dryly, facing the two men. "This is more than a simple case of sloppy firing. Thanks to your carelessness, men have been killed." The finely drawn lines in his face deepened and the pale ridge of his mouth grew paler. "Those men have been murdered," he said solemnly. His eyes held those of the two non-commissioned officers.

Malloy returned his gaze steadily and

a knotty ridge of muscle on the side of his jaw marked the setting of his teeth together. Beside him Barrow stirred nervously and the color slowly drained from his face. In a sidelong glance he caught the grim set of Malloy's features and the uncompromising force that his taut and powerful body radiated.

His eyes darted to Raukee, who stood watching him with cold eyes that were one with the stillness of his face. Barrow's gaze drifted over Raukee and settled on a spot in the wall above the captain's head. His lips moved as if he would speak but could not force himself to it. His eyes wandered again and he fell to shuffling his feet heavily in the mud of the floor.

"Spit it out," Raukee said harshly. "What's on your mind?"

"I don't like to say anything, I—" Barrow began in a wandering and reluctant way.

"Say what you have to say and say it as briefly as possible."

Malloy wondered what Barrow was going to say. With the evidence of Fog Evans for an ace in the hole on his side, he didn't care much and calmly awaited Barrow's effort to escape the consequences of his slap-dash firing.

"Yes, sir!" Barrow flushed darkly at Raukee's tone and a note of sulky resentment came into his voice as he began to speak. "I didn't want to squeal—I wouldn't have only—" He paused then, as if uncertain whether to go on.

Squeal? What the hell did Barrow mean, squeal? Malloy bristled but held his tongue.

"Get to the point!"

"Yes, sir. Malloy didn't check. I was watching." He blurted. "He started to check but changed his mind and signaled for the shell to go in. He didn't check for clearance, sir."

Beside him Malloy stiffened and slowly pivoted until he could look into Barrow's face.

"I waved—I wanted to call his attention, but—"

"You white-livered liar!"

For the space of a short drawn breath events hung suspended.

Then Malloy sprang forward and his fist, in a long swing that carried the forward-moving weight of his body with it, slammed against the side of Barrow's head and drove him to the dug-out wall.

Malloy drew back and Barrow came off the wall with his fists flashing. For a moment he held the stockier man at bay—but though Barrow was strong as steel wire, Malloy was the better fighter and, taking all his opponent could give, smashed through the barrier of Barrow's knobby fists, to drive solidly into his wind. Barrow gasped, leaning helplessly against the wall. Malloy deliberately stepped away from him, then chopped a sharp blow to his unprotected jaw. Without a sound, Barrow sagged against the dug-out wall.

The whole affair had not occupied a half a minute and Raukee, recovering from his first stunned surprise, sprang across the dug-out. With a half-smothered curse he caught Malloy's arm and spun him around.

"You dumb fool!" Raukee cut himself short and disgustedly flung Malloy's arm from him. "You've made an ass of yourself, Malloy."

"I couldn't let him get away with such a raw deal, and besides—"

Raukee smiled a sardonic smile of understanding and raised a silencing hand.

"And you have convicted yourself of wiping out a squad of men," he commented dryly.

"You know that I have never run out on a responsibility," Malloy retorted quietly, "and I can prove that my gun was checked before every round."

"That's all, Malloy," Raukee sat down stiffly. "You jeopardized your proofs when you lost your head a minute ago."

"What are you going to do?" Barrow demanded arrogantly. He stood unsteadily erect, covering the side of his face with his hand.

Raukee's eyes flashed, but his face remained impassive.

"Drop that tone, Sergeant."

He interlaced his fingers on the table top before him and his knuckles showed white as his hands strained together.

"Here—" he paused, eyeing Barrow with a still and frigid gaze— "you are Sergeant Barrow—no more—no less. The fact that your civilian background —that you are—"

He fell silent then and glanced quickly at Malloy.

"I'm your commanding officer," he said turning back to Barrow. "Don't forget it again."

Barrow smiled insolently.

"Listen, Tom—"

"Silence!" Raukee struck the table. "If we weren't so short-handed, I'd send the pair of you to the guardhouse."

Behind him the telephone again rang imperiously.

He swore in his throat and snapped the receiver down.

"Raukee!" he said and, after a few seconds, in an acid-sweet voice: "Has the Major any suggestions as to how, if it does become necessary, I shall move up at the gallop? Neither limbers or horses have arrived."

He smiled thinly as a racket of sharp words came through the instrument.

"I can move in the time it takes to hook on," he replied. "I am maintaining my firing schedule until the limbers come. Certainly, sir. Quite so, sir. Positively, sir."

He hung up.

"Our infantry is having a hard time," he said dourly. "A strong enemy counter attack is developing. Fortunately it's on a narrow front. God knows what the Boche intends by it. They must know we are in force here. We'll move up as soon as limbers arrive and if they break the infantry defense we'll give them a dose of high explosive at close range. Mobile warfare stuff."

"Where is the attack?" Malloy's eyes glistened with suppressed excitement.

"Left of us, I should say. Unless it spreads it shouldn't affect us, but if it does, we are spare battery and we'll get the dirty work. Limbers are on the way up. All caissons should be loaded with H. E. shell. Yours ready, Malloy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You, Barrow?"

"Why, sir—"

"Short a few rounds as usual, I suppose. Well, get them loaded—take instantaneous fuse. I'll also ask you, Sergeant Barrow, to keep a respectful tongue in your head; and you, Malloy, to be less quick with your fists. We can't take the time to clean up this low-shot affair now, but we will go to the bottom of it as soon as we have a breathing spell long enough to check up on the other members of your sections who might have noticed what was going on. It won't be forgotten, rest assured of that. On your way, both of you, and see that you are ready to go when the limbers come."

AN HOUR later C Battery rocked and jolted in a billowing dust cloud over a shell-pitted white road which drove straight as an arrow toward the infantry front line.

To right and left of the road burned and trampled wheat fields rolled toward a horizon broken only by the twisted ruins of once cool and shady woodlands. Among the wheat, where laggard burying parties in their undershirts gathered the dead, poppies nodded and preened, offering their bloody chalices to the sky.

Beyond the furthermost roll of the fields the muffled din of bursting shells, the racket of machine-guns and the whack of one-pounders marked the area of the threatened break-through. High

above the ragged patches of trees scarring the skyline, cones of gray-black smoke with a core of fire at their centers whirled open with a sharp cracking explosion and drifted, soiled and lazy clouds in the still air.

Beside Malloy in the choking dust Fog Evans shouted comments from behind the dirty bandanna he had tied over his nose and mouth.

"Barrow is a big baloney," he shouted with muffled derision. "He's a Park Avenue wonder with ball-room gilt all over him. 'I am Sergeant J. Allerton Barrow,' he says, 'of the New York Barrows.' For cripe's sake, Chink, where do these yellow-belly dodos come from? Raukee ain't like that and everybody knows he's the Duke of Long Island or something. Barrow knew Raukee in the States," he concluded abruptly.

"How do *you* know that?"

"I heard them having a little talk about it the day Barrow showed up. A polite talk," he said meaningly. "I was in that little cubby-hole back of Raukee's quarters where we keep the extra rockets. They're relations."

"Quit beating about the bush," Malloy said testily. "What did you hear? I suppose you are going to tell me that Barrow is Raukee's old man."

"No, he ain't," Fog said, wagging his head from side to side, "but he is Raukee's half brother. The way I get it, Raukee's old man didn't get along too well with his old lady way back years ago, so she up and married another guy named Barrow and so here comes this flossy jack of a sergeant to razz Raukee. Funny, ain't it?"

"What's funny about it? Barrow is making it tough for him. No wonder he took wisecracks from Barrow without whittling him down to a sergeant's size."

"And what does that make you? Barrow pops off a low shot and tells his dear brother you did it and brother Raukee hangs the laurel on you so the family honor will not be smirched. That don't make you the nanny with the long gray beard, does it?"

"Don't forget that when I got this—" Malloy touched the long scar that marked his face—"Raukee came back into that blown-up dugout and got me. If he hadn't I'd be pushing up the daisies right now."

"How can I forget it," Fog cried in a bored voice. "Don't I hear about it every time you and Raukee have a set-to."

"Still, Raukee might sell me down the river to cover his sniveling brother. He'd be a louse if he did, but with you to back up my story he'll have a fat chance if he tries it."

"Now you're talking."

"Okay, Dope." Malloy grinned. "Keep the lid on till it's time to spill, then sock it to them."

The column, half obscured in the dust, moved stolidly into a shattered village and, skirting the tumbling gray walls, halted along the length of the street.

IN THE sunless and cool gloom of a wagon shed which had escaped damage, Malloy and Evans settled their backs against a wall to eat. Toward the infantry line the brazen sounds of battle clattered and thumped and rumbled; and a still, hot wind drifting from some new direction brought to them the stench of corpses rotting in the sun.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Evans said judicially, "if we was to run into a first-class meat-packer's holiday up there."

He ducked his head toward the rising sound of battle.

"I suppose you haven't heard that we are supposed to be pinching out a big salient?" Malloy said acidly. "Did you think Heinie was going to greet us with confetti and rice?"

"Still, it's pretty peaceful around here, you got to admit," Evans stuffed his mouth with beans. "The way you go

round pining for the war to up and sock you! Ain't you satisfied?"

Around the corner of the wagon shed Sergeant Barrow came, balancing his mess things as he walked. Half blinded by the hot, white sunlight in the street outside, he blundered through the cool gloom of the wagon-shed toward an old wagon-pole which, abandoned when the occupants of the now ruined house had fled, lay across his path. Without seeing it or the two men sitting, backs against the wall, in the semi-darkness of the shed, Barrow stumbled over the pole and with a smothered curse sprawled in the dust. His mess kit and supper banged to the ground and his canteen cup, collapsing suddenly, deluged him with the hot coffee.

Evans laughed.

"Shooting low again, Sir Algernon?" he called derisively.

Barrow reared up from his place on the ground and stared into the half light.

"Wise guy," he said angrily. "Close your trap."

"Says you," Evans, still laughing, turned his back and leaned forward to lift his coffee cup. For an instant Barrow stood peering towards him while his fists clenched and a look of crafty cruelty spread across his face. Then suddenly he lunged forward. Evans heard him and sensing too late the real force of Barrow's anger, dropped his cup and sprang erect. Barrow's swinging fist clipped the small Evans and tumbled him limply against the wall.

Malloy sprang to his feet. For an instant Barrow was surprised into immobility.

"Square off, you sleazy liar," Malloy gritted. "You're going to get the damnedest lacing you ever had."

In silence Barrow dived at him. They came together with a flat crushing smack of bone and flesh and for a moment were locked together in a fury of unleashed rage. Then they broke and Malloy, his body crouched and his dark face white with implacable anger, went for him. Barrow met him with wide swings of his long muscular arms and Malloy, taking the blows stolidly, bored in and laced his fists into Barrow's midriff.

Barrow backed away, taking a solid right on the side of his neck. His head jerked queerly but he circled and, rushing again, fists flashing, he beat down Malloy's guard and slammed his knotty fists into Malloy's face. A trickle of blood appeared under Malloy's nose but he came back for more. Barrow rushed him again and Malloy, stepping back a little, took Barrow of balance and with looping right swing jarred the rangy, sergeant to his boots.

Again and again he slammed Barrow's head before Barrow drew out of range, with Malloy plunging after him. Barrow kicked then, and Malloy, blocking it, went beserk.

The only sound was the harsh breathing of the fighting men—their grunts as they gave or took a blow and the low, painful moan of Fog Evans, who had propped himself against the stall-wall. Then as quickly as it had begun it ended.

Malloy missed a wild left punch, took a hard blow against his ribs, and swung his right fist hammer fashion between Barrow's eyes. Blood spurted from Barrow's nose and with a bellow of pain he turned and ran towards the white sunlight beyond the stall.

"Let's get out of here, Fog," Malloy panted. "He'll have Raukee and half the battery here in a minute."

He caught Evans' arm and dragged him up.

"Can't you walk?" Evans' legs caved like soft rubber beneath him.

"Hell!"

Malloy scooped him up and slinging him across his shoulder staggered awkwardly out of the shed. In the rubble-strewn yard outside he turned sharply

away from the road and dodging among piles of debris staggered on until a hundred yards separated him from the street.

Beside a tumbled-in well marked *Eau Potable* he put Evans down and dragged a bucket of water from the well. He splashed some over Evan's face and as the whiteness faded a little turned him over and rapidly manipulated the tortured muscles of the back of Evans' neck.

"Y'gotta snap out of it, Fog," he urged. "Get going, boy, we can't stay here all day."

Evans grinned wanly.

"Okay," he said, "I'll make it. Just give me a minute."

"Stay here," Malloy darted off among the piled ruins of the town. In a few minutes he came back with the dirty mess kits in his hands.

"Nobody turned up," he said. "What are you doing, making out your will?"

"Sort of," Evans folded the soiled paper which he had spread on the round of his steel helmet and tucked it with the pencil into a pocket of his tunic.

He flashed a bright look at Malloy. "That's all right, ain't it?" he asked, then grinned suddenly. "A guy can't live forever and anyway, according to what I hear, there's a war in these parts and you know what these dam foreigners are when they get a loaded gun into their hands."

"Only the good die young," Malloy said dryly. " 'Course you might go nutty but you'd have to have a brain in the first place for that. Looks to me like you was detailed for a long life at hard labor."

He splashed water over his own face, feeling gingerly of a bulge that was growing beside his left eye. A little water inside his nose blocked the slowly oozing blood.

"Come on," he said. He led Evans, whose legs were beginning to work normally, in a wide half circle towards the column.

"Walk in quietly and deny everything," he ordered.

Evans went toward the column. Malloy turned back and running swiftly, circled as to reach the road at a point lower down. In sight of the guns he slowed to a walk and with his mess kit tucked under his arm went unhurriedly into the road.

TIGHTLY calm as usual, Captain Raukee rode along the battery column directly in Malloy's path. He reined in as Malloy came up to him and impassively waited.

"Sergeant Barrow had an accident," he said, fixing a cold and accusing gaze on Malloy.

"Did he, sir?" Malloy lifted blank eyes to his commander.

"Your left eye will be black tomorrow," Raukee said bluntly. "You wouldn't have any idea about what happened to him, I suppose?"

"I've been with Fog Evans since we halted," Malloy countered reasonably. "The heat or something knocked Fog out for awhile. You'd almost think somebody had slugged him."

"Yes," Raukee nodded. "So the heat knocked him out, did it?"

"That's what I thought, sir."

"You're a bad liar, Malloy," Raukee said acridly. "And for a man with charges hanging over his head, you've got your nerve. I should have placed you in arrest before we left on the mission. We'll have a real showdown when the present row is over. Get back to your section."

From the head of the column the call notes of a trumpet sounded the attention. Raukee swung away and cantered rapidly toward the sound.

From the top, excitement was spreading downward through the column. The weary drivers and cannoneers gathered

in gabbling clumps and pointed. Shielding his eyes against the sun, Malloy saw a dusty staff car near the head of the column. In it a man stood erect, waving his arms at a man on horseback who even at this distance, Malloy recognized as the battalion commander.

Flanking the staff car, a brace of dispatch riders gray with powdered dust nervously maneuvered their motorcycles around the car. As he watched, the man in the staff car turned and spoke sharply to one of them. The driver lifted his head tensely, cupping his hand back of his ear. An instant later his head dropped in a sharp nod and he shot away in a sudden explosion of dust. Distantly then, the beating roar of the machine reached Malloy. A moment later the trumpet sounded.

"Forward! Trot!" the order echoed mellowly across the fields.

The wearied horses leaned into their collars and the rumble of tireless carriages began again. Whips whistled. Drivers cursed. The weary nags hesitated, choosing between the sting of the whip and the pain of exhaustion tearing at their muscles, and at the end broke into a stumbling run. The cannoneers with a hand-hold on a strap or rod ran heavily beside the carriages. The guns rocked and bounced over the shell-pitted road, the billowing white dust rose in a choking cloud, the sun became a malignant ball, crouching above the wheat fields and the dark shadow of distant woods.

In the section next behind his, Malloy caught glimpses of Barrow running with his crew and, near the heads of the lead team of Barrow's straining horses, the weakened figure of Evans gamely trying to keep up with his own section which, despite his best efforts, drew ahead while he fell further and further back toward Barrow's gun. Malloy swore and yelled encouragement to Evans who waved an unsteady hand and managed a twisted grin of assurance.

In the field flanking the right side of the road, shells began to fall and to the right, where a shattered stand of trees were a ragged dark blot against the yellow fields, puff balls of gray smoke swirled to the sound of bursting shrapnel and high explosive shells coming muted but sharp to the laboring batterymen.

Beyond the woods a single plane dropped low, seemed to pause a moment, then swung, banking sharply away. For an instant the Maltese crosses on the fuselage, glowed black; then, climbing rapidly, the ship headed toward its own lines.

Shell-fire in the fields shrieked closer to the road, then leaped it, making a bracket.

A deeper feeling of grimness settled over the column. There would be hits soon. A bracket, bursts on both sides, meant hits.

A shrieking demon rushed down and the blast and clang of it smashing the road behind was followed by the shrieks of wounded horses.

Malloy looked back. The dust cloud thinned for an instant, showing a confused unheaval close behind where the horses and men of Barrow's section were mixed together in a plunging mass. Like a ghastly tableau enacted in the swirling dust clouds of a world beyond his reach, Malloy saw Evans standing, his hands covering his face, outside the edge of the roaring, blood-smeared horses. The little loader tottered forward as Malloy watched; then his legs caved beneath him and he pitched face down into the wheat near the edge of the field. His legs drew up sharply once as he turned over, then straightened, and with the rest of his broken body, went slack. Further back Barrow, his arms thrown wide in a gesture of shocked surprise and confusion, ran clear of the terrible melange of maddened horses and the

flailing fragments of the carriages they flung about. Malloy cried out and even as he loosened his handgrip to assist Evans, the force of his war training asserted itself, holding him to the job at hand.

Evans had gone—snuffed out like a light. The guns were going in at half a gallop!

The dust thickened suddenly and Malloy's world was again bounded by the restraining bonds of discipline, the rolling rumps of the nearest horses, the guns, and the waveting dusty heads of the wheat crowding up to the roadside; but in his mind's eye the plucky figure of Evans blinded and shot through and through, trying with the last thrust of his legs to move forward to his station, remained in torturing contrast to the panicky figure of Barrow running clear to safety. Then the woods were quite near and wide open spaces on either sides marked the level of the fields.

Another shell screamed in well ahead of Malloy and the whole column slid to a profane stop. The horses, like old women whose excitement exceeds for a moment their decrepitude, danced and blew impatient wind through their nostrils, while the drivers cursed roundly. The halt was brief. A few seconds later Malloy was passing an overturned ammunition caisson which heaved with three mangled horses, one of which still breathed, into the ditch. Two drivers, face down in the dust, lay still and bloody beside the wrecked caisson.

Ahead, the top of the column swung sharply into the wheat fields on the right and the gun sections, their horses strained forward into the harness, plunged headlong in a wildly careening line across the uneven ground of the fields.

Clinging to a strap, Malloy sturdily hopped over holes and mounds. The wheat stalks whipped his legs.

The high warning notes of the trumpet came sharply down wind the next instant.

"Action right!"

The horses wheeled sharply and the cannoneers with a lift and a swing uncoupled the pieces and, as the drivers, clearing at a gallop, swept away down the line, swung the guns into line. Barrow ran up to Raukee, making an excited report, and Raukee, standing easily behind the battery, thrust him aside and passed his orders in a dry voice that was sharp and clear above the din.

MALLOY felt cold. Evans was dead. Quickly he shifted his gun crew to fill the vacant post and stared dumbly at the new face which stood beside him in Evans' place. He remembered that this new kid was a conscientious lad named Lusk, a dependable boy who watched with sharply eager eyes for the load signal; but he wasn't Fog Evans, grinning like a Cheshire Cat and letting go little squirts of brown juice from the tiny quid of tobacco he always nipped off before an action.

Fog must have had a hunch about being knocked off—else why did he make wisecracks about a will? Under the spur of his thoughts he decided to bury Evans himself. Burial parties would be a day or two getting into the area and Fog couldn't be left out in a field like a dead dog. Realization that with the passing of Evans went his chance of proving that Barrow had been responsible for the low shot drifted through Malloy's mind, adding a further touch of bitterness to his loss.

"Point-blank range! Explosive shell! Instantaneous fuse! By salvo from the right." Raukee's voice rasped across his consciousness. Malloy violently threw his mood off.

Raukee paused. The gun crews, acting swiftly, were in a matter of seconds ready. Across the shield of his gun Malloy could see the target now—heavy lines

of German infantry stolidly advancing at five hundred yards' range. Gray-green robots they were, half buried in the deep well of their rounded helmets. Automatic-rifle fire was rattling from the small patch of woods and American infantry lying prone a hundred yards ahead of the guns looked back with heads blocking their ears against the shattering explosion of the guns. "Like kids at Fourth of July fireworks," ran through Malloy's head.

"Fire!"

From the right of the line the battery salvos began.

Timed, methodical, without hurry or excitement, the guns launched in fire and smoke their cylinders of death on the advancing German troops. Stolidly Malloy watched the fire take effect.

Before him the blotch of blood-red poppies spotted a field of yellow grain, and behind them was a heavy moving wall of men that was suddenly reached by a blasting torrent of fire and smoke. Breached — breached — and breached again. The fire, adjusted by direct observation, was tearing the attacking infantry to pieces.

The broken German ranks reformed—broke—reformed. Frantic officers in advance of their men waved their arms, urging the staggering lines to hold, and were snatched into the gaping maw of shell-bursts before their work was finished. Malloy wondered without interest how long they would stand under the slaughtering fire of the battery. He forgot that, as the enemy, advised of what was occurring, shifted his artillery fire to search out this incredible line of American artillery which dared to pit itself, at five hundred yards, against rapidly-moving infantry.

But they were too late. The attacking German infantry, faced with the impossible task of walking five hundred yards into the mouths of endlessly belching monsters, broke, and like terrified rabbits ran this way and that in confused and hunted panic.

A faint cheer went up from the American infantry lying prone before the guns.

An infantry officer ran from the woods waving a 'Cease Fire' signal.

At a gallop the limbers came bounding across the fields. High above, a German plane adjusted the fire of the German batteries.

In a wild curve Malloy's limber dashed in to his gun, was hooked on and when, a moment later, the trumpet sounded "Column to the Rear," went with the others at a lumbering run across the uneven fields toward the road.

The enemy artillery concentration steadied on the positions they had held a few minutes before, then lifted and swung, following the escaping batteries which now, having reached the road, rumbled madly in a race for the protecting screen of a heavily wooded rise a few hundred yards ahead of them.

In the air a pair of American single-seaters dropped suddenly, their wings gleaming like polished silver as they turned upon the hapless German controlling the fire. Muffled almost beyond hearing the staccato whack of the planes' guns sounded distant and soft.

The German fire, deprived of its aerial guidance, wobbled, see-sawed erratically and then centered with tragic intensity a furious concentration of explosives on the now empty and dust-clouded road.

Inside the screen of the woods the batterymen cherished a brief moment of safety. The horses, winded and pitiful, sagged exhaustedly in the harness and one or two, worked beyond their strength, quietly fell down and lay, legs outstretched and flanks heaving, indifferently waiting the release which could not in any case be far off.

RAUKEE was standing with Barrow beneath a large and bedraggled tree when Malloy came back after burying all that was mortal of Fog Evans. At sight of Barrow his face darkened and his fist tightened about the little packet of letters and odd possessions which Evans' pockets had yielded.

As he came up Raukee abruptly ended a bitter tirade which Malloy could not hear.

"What do you want, Malloy?" he said brusquely.

"Fog Evans was knocked off back there, sir," he reported. "He had a touch of sunstroke," he went on bitterly, "and couldn't keep up. So when that shell fell he was straggling near Sergeant Barrow's section and was killed. I just finished burying him."

Raukee's mouth tightened. "You got his papers? Left an identifying mark?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir. I nailed his identification disk to a wheel spoke, and brought his papers in. I haven't looked at them." He held a smeared heap of personal possessions towards Raukee.

"Evans," Raukee murmured. "We might have had the luck to lose a less useful man. Get back to your duty, Sergeant, and hereafter leave the interment of casualties to the burying parties."

Raukee looked at and through Malloy and Barrow's features relaxed into what was almost a smile of content.

"Wipe it off," Raukee said dismally. "Get going, Malloy; my business with Sergeant Barrow is private."

Raukee watched Malloy out of sight among the trees before he spoke again to Barrow.

"I have already told you," he said abruptly, "what I think of your attack on Evans. Shut up—I don't care what reasons you have. It was Evans' gameness against your beef, and God knows you have enough of it for three of Evans' size. Well, Evans is dead now and Malloy has already taken revenge on your hide."

"You would stick up for that mucker. Doesn't it mean anything to you that we are almost brothers?"

"Yes, it does," Raukee's voice was soft. "It means that I've got to remember that we have the same mother. That for her sake I have got to make something other than an arrogant ass of you. I've got to make you stand on your own legs and answer for your own actions. You don't lack courage and you don't lack brains; but living in the lap of luxury with people hawing and jawing over you has put so much fat on your opinion of yourself that you are almost useless."

"I am the best judge of that."

"I am not insisting on the respect due my rank, at the moment, but in another moment I will. I have a job for you, Sergeant. A job which falls naturally to your lot. It may kill you or it may cure you. In any case it is line of duty." The intimate note went out of Raukee's voice. "You will report to Lieutenant Blount, who is liaison officer with the infantry lying before the town of Bery."

Barrow turned pale.

"But the infantry haven't been able to take Bery. They have been trying for days. They'll try again. I might be killed."

"Yes, you might be killed," Raukee agreed coldly. "Several hundreds or thousands of infantrymen may be killed too. This is war and it's about time you discovered that war is not a tea fight."

"But you can't do this to me," Barrow began, then realizing that Malloy had again come up on them again went silent.

"What is it?" said Raukee, noticing Malloy.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but there's a carload of officers prowling along the road outside the woods. The car has

stars on the windshield—I thought it might be brass hats or the general."

Malloy took in the pale worry of Barrow in a sidelong glance and a contemptuous light which he did not try to conceal brightened his eyes.

"I'll have a look at them. You had better get started at once Barrow, Bery is four kilometers. You'll want to get there before dark."

"Infantry hopping off, sir?" Malloy inquired.

"Liaison. Sergeant Barrow is going up."

Malloy wiped all expression from his face.

"The staff car has halted where we broke a trail into the woods, sir," he said stolidly.

Barrow glanced sharply at him, then without a word crashed off through the underbrush.

"Let's go, Malloy," Raukee started off. "What the devil are brass-hats snooping around here for?"

DAWN of the next day was wet and gray beneath the lowering storm clouds that hung over the battle area. The batteries which had taken part in the previous day's adventure had joined the regimental firing positions and were steadily hammering target after target as the infantry, wallowing over soggy fields or surging through vigorously defended woods that were quickly strewn with their broken bodies, valiantly forced the enemy back toward his old line behind the distant and shattered towers of Reims.

On the C Battery position, Malloy, bedded under a piece of elephant iron, wallowed in the luxury of sudden, enforced, and agreeable idleness. He thought of Evans' death, bitterly at first, and then began to wonder what happened to a man when he was snuffed out like that. Fog was a queer little guy. He didn't have much to say but he always got what he wanted somehow and he was game to the last breath.

A soldier, dropping to his knees outside Malloy's hideaway, broke in on his thoughts and he stared sourly at his visitor.

"Sergeant Malloy," the soldier shook Malloy's foot and grinned impishly.

"Coco," Malloy said without enthusiasm, "dog-robber to the skipper, or in the words of Coco himself, orderly to Captain Raukee. What do you want, bloodhound?" he concluded sourly.

"Rise and shine," Coco said brightly. "Report to Captain Raukee. Important."

"What's up?"

"Hah!" The orderly grinned provocatively. "You'll find out. No more bunk fatigue for you."

"Some day I'll get you on the business end of a manure fork," Malloy growled, "and when I do—"

"Sure," said Coco blandly. "I heard all that stuff before. Raukee is all steamed up. You better snap into it."

Malloy found Raukee beneath a rickety lean-to propped against a tree. The captain of C battery prowled to and fro with the air of an animal angered and frustrated by the bars that held him captive.

"Coco found you, I see," he greeted Malloy dryly.

"Somebody ought to take out a dog license for him," Malloy retorted.

"You're due for a dirty assignment," Raukee said.

Malloy nodded, but said nothing.

"Blount, the officer in charge of the infantry post before Bery, has put in a howl to our battallion headquarters. It seems that Sergeant Barrow is not functioning efficiently. He is 'more damned trouble than he is worth' is the way Blount expressed himself. Battalion has just climbed all over me about it." He paused eyeing Malloy cynically. "Somebody must go out to Bery and put Barrow right," he said. "And because you are the best all-around man the

battery can muster, I am going to pass the buck to you, Sergeant. You will go out there and see that whatever needs be done is done efficiently. You will replace Sergeant Barrow and give him a demonstration of integrity and self-effacing efficiency."

"Is that all, sir?"

"No. I want you to bring Barrow back here unharmed. I have a very good reason for wanting to talk to him."

"I can't wet-nurse him through a case of steel poisoning," Malloy said.

"Do your best." The profoundly cynical expression of Raukee's features deepened. "You see, Sergeant," he said, "Sergeant Barrow is my half brother. Naturally I want him to show well—a matter of family pride. Family pride," he repeated, as if bitterly amused by the implication of the words.

"I'll do what I can, sir."

"Yes. You don't seem surprised. Did you know that Barrow was related by blood to me?"

"Evans told me; yes, sir."

"Evans, eh. A peculiar little man. I don't think I fully appreciated Evans while he lived."

"When shall I start, sir?" Malloy fidgeted uncomfortably under Raukee's mood.

"Barrow is a spoiled young fool," Raukee went on, "he has always had everything he desired without any effort on his part. At school he was good at sports because it made him the center of attraction. The result of it all is that I have a pig-headed donkey on my hands when I need a man who knows how to forget himself when there is a job to be done. Somewhere inside him he has courage but he will have to develop some good horse sense before it will come out. He must realize that his body is subject to the same risks that beset every man in the combat area."

Raukee paced away a step or two, then moved back to his place before Malloy.

"He must learn to walk humbly with the rest of us," he said musingly. "Get on out there, Malloy," he continued, suddenly brusque, "and do the best you can. I don't need to tell you that I am placing more hope in you than I have ever placed in any man before. It's unmilitary, but I am just human enough to want his mother to be proud of him—she's my mother, too."

He held out his hand and there was an expression bordering on defiance in his eyes.

"I'll give it a whirl, sir!" Malloy took his captain's hand and briefly squeezed it. "Like as not the infantry will hop off against Bery again?" he suggested.

"Move up with them unless Blount has other orders. Get back here as soon as you can; and bring Barrow with you. That low-shot affair needs settling and I feel sure that it can be settled now. On your way and keep your head down."

Malloy moved off through the trees and Raukee, with an expression that was a strange combination of his usual military immobility and the glow of an inner warmth struggling for recognition, watched him until with a light pack slung to his back he strode off toward the road to Bery.

MALLOY found Barrow in a dank and foul-smelling dugout scraped from the reverse slope of a low knoll. Outside, like steel wire, dull-shining in the stormlight, rain streaked across the fields before Bery. In the distant gloom machine-guns emplaced in the crumbling ruins of the town and the forest flanking it on either side hammered like giant woodpeckers.

As Malloy entered, stooping to clear the low door, Barrow looked and scowled.

"What the hell do you want?" he demanded truculently.

"The officer in charge of this post," Mallow returned calmly.

"I am in charge of this post. What are you doing here?"

"Can the tough line, Barrow," Malloy said shortly. "Where's Blount?"

"He's dead, bumped, knocked off. He stopped a handful of rivets from the town. So, wise guy, I am in charge and I don't need any advice from you."

"Okay. I wanted to slip it to you easy but if you want it hard you can have it. There's a rumor at the battery that you aren't so hot on this job." Malloy dropped his light pack and crossed the little dugout to the table where Barrow sat staring belligerently at him. "Captain Raukee sent me out here, Barrow. He told me to take over this post and to run it properly."

"The hell you will." Barrow stood up angrily.

"The hell I won't," Malloy retorted. "You try to mess me up and I'll knock tar out of you and turn you in on all the charges I can find in the book. I've got plenty against you, Barrow. On top of that low-shot business you busted Fog Evans so hard that he had to straggle because he was still woozy and couldn't keep up with my section on the road. Result, he was smeared when a shell fell into your section. Maybe his number was up. I don't know about that, but I do know that if he had been with me where he belonged he would be out here with me now."

"Making alibis for you, and wisecracking his betters. For once he got a sample of what he had been missing by hiding behind you all the time."

"I'll see you later on the subject of Evans. Right now I am telling you that you are relieved of command in this post and that you will remain here and take your orders from me according to instructions from your brother, Captain Raukee."

"So he cry-babied to you." Barrow sneered in a furious voice.

"Ah! Tie it up, you—"

A rain-drenched runner popped in at the door and thrust a folded message at Barrow.

"From Major Prawl," he said huskily. "The major wants to know if the barrage he asked for is going to be fired or are you dead from your neck up. It's all in the note." The runner stuck a grimy finger toward the paper and looked at Barrow expectantly.

"Fire will commence on schedule—in two minutes," Barrow growled.

"Okay." The runner bolted into the rain.

"What barrage?" Malloy said bluntly.

Barrow pushed a map toward him and sourly indicated a thin red line fronting Bery.

"The schedule is written down in the book." He tossed the post record on the table.

Malloy swung the map around and examined it closely. Then, unhurriedly, he took a ruler that lay near the map and scaled off the distance between the red barrage line and the town. His head snapped up then and his voice when he addressed Barrow was sharp with apprehension.

"Who gave you the location of the infantry line?" he demanded.

"Who? Why, Prawl did. He's commanding the infantry around here. He ought to know where his own line lies."

"Ought to but he doesn't. I estimated the distance to Bery as I came in. It's six or seven hundred yards. This barrage line lies at least thirteen hundred yards from the town—five hundred yards behind this very post. We will have a curtain of fire falling behind both us and the infantry in less than two minutes. It will move forward and sweep over our men. Do you know what that means? Have you ever had to lay with your head ground into the dirt while your own barrage passed over you? Do you know that a barrage is supposed to wipe out everything that lives within its area? Get on the telephone and order the fire held until I can check this."

"Major Prawl gave me those figures and I'll be fried in hell before I'll ask for a suspension on your snap judgment."

Malloy sprang to the telephone fastened to an upright and spun the crank. The click of the operator plugging in was in his ears as with a roar that shook the dugout the barrage fell. The operator's voice announcing his code station came clearly across the wire and Malloy, identifying himself, realized by the sudden deadening of the line that he was cut off. Vainly hoping the line was in, against his certain knowledge that it was not, he spun the crank again and again, and at last flung the receiver from him in disgust.

"The line's gone," he snapped, "a hell of a mess you've made of this. Where are your rockets?"

"Nuts to you. Who do you think you are, God?"

Malloy's eyes blazed and he stepped close to Barrow to coldly berate him.

"Prawl gave you figures which you were too smart to verify. The military textbooks you have read didn't tell you anything about the dumb mistakes majors and colonels make. You're a story-book soldier fresh from the States. You've soaked up a lot of muck in the schools and you've come out here to learn your trade at the expense of those men lying out there in the mud. You've even cut your own telephone line. In a few minutes you'll have us all buried in this damned grave. A hell of a non-commissioned officer you turned out to be." Malloy swung his arm back, reaching for a Very rocket pistol that hung against the wall. Barrow saw in the swing of Malloy's arm a threat and sprang away.

"If you try to slug me again I'll let daylight through you. I will. So help me God."

"Nuts." Malloy caught the rocket pistol and flinging the table aside started toward Barrow who unwittingly blocked his way to the sack of rockets which hung from a nail behind Barrow's head.

With a dew of perspiration beading his now livid face, Barrow backed away, fumbling at the flap of the holster that held his service pistol.

Outside, the barrage, like a thundering Juggernaut, screamed and blasted, rolling down upon the helpless American forces which, lying mud-smeared and half drowned in shallow fox-holes and shell-craters, and pinned in place by the German machine-gun fire on front and flanks, watching the inexorable precision of its ghastly march upon them, beat the ground in mute and futile protest. The little underground post shook until the rotten timbers supporting the roof shuddered and hunks of soft wood plopped silently into the mud.

THE pistol was in Barrow's hand before Malloy realized the war madness that had seized Barrow. Half stunned by the shocking knowledge that Barrow was wild enough to shoot, Malloy stopped in his tracks and then driven by the necessity which roared to ground a few hundred yards away he went forward again.

"The rockets," he cried, "we've got to stop the barr—"

The shot slammed across his words with only a bare fraction of time between it and his own final and complete acceptance of Barrow's intent. Malloy went sidewise, plunging heavily into the mud of the dugout floor. The bullet chunked into the planks forming the side walls.

Malloy twisted and threw the rocket pistol grenade-wise from his nearly prone position on the ground. The heavy brass instrument hit Barrow between neck and shoulder and drove him, half strangled, to the wall. Malloy was up before Barrow could recover and with a sharp kick sent Barrow's pistol flying from his hands. He snatched the Very pistol from

the ground and with the sack of rockets clutched in his fist dived through the door.

Outside the wind whistled and the rain deluged the flooded fields. Towards Bery the machine-guns pounded and red fire licked from the ruined town and along the edges of the inscrutable forest. Toward the rear, two hundred yards away, the barrage laid a precise line of explosions, each overlapping the other. Like well-drilled soldiers, the shells dropped in perfect order, each throwing a geyser of mud and steel splinters high and wide. For an instant the artilleryman's appreciation in Malloy glowed at the sight of work well done, then it was gone, swallowed in the ghastly reality of what this barrage meant. With cool precision matching that of the barrage itself, Malloy fitted a rocket into the pistol and the next instant the "Cease Fire" rocket signal, a string of three red lights with two green ones dangling beneath them, soared into the storm.

German machine-gunners, quick to sense trouble and a target, swept the area from which the light had come with their fire. The bullets whined around the exposed Malloy and lashed the nearby ground to fury. Impervious to everything but the necessity of avoiding a ghastly tragedy, Malloy fitted a second and a third rocket into the pistol and launched them, lurid torches against the lowering storm clouds, majestically into the rain.

With the rockets gone, he stood staring into the murk. If a rocket relay station picked the signal up? Rearward, the barrage lifted, moved fifty yards nearer, paused, then— Far away a set of red and green lights feebly winked, soaring into the sky.

The rocket relay!

Somewhere back there, on a hill, a lone soldier or two had been waiting for an emergency such as this. Malloy prayed his thanks to a God he had all but forgotten that the rocket guard had been alert.

A whipping blast of machine-gun fire tore across the top of the post and Malloy, aware of it for the first time, flung himself into the nearest hole and with stinking water drenching him wriggled back to the low door of the dugout. A soldier Malloy had never seen slid around the edge of the knoll. The man was smeared with field mud from head to feet and his stubble-bearded face was filthy with dirt from the fields.

"Who the hell are you?" Malloy demanded.

"Wire patrol. Lieutenant Blount's detail. That cock-eyed barrage chased me in ahead of it."

"Well, chase yourself back and get that line working, the barrage cut it."

"My partner was working on the other side of the barrage. Maybe he's fixed it already."

"Haul!" Malloy commanded harshly. "Patrol that line for breaks. I'll test here; we can't do a thing until the line is in again."

"Now you're talking!" The soldier grinned through his mantle of mud. "Looks like we got an old-timer on the job for a change. Step on it, Sarge. This lousy war has gone to pieces in these parts." He hitched his test phone higher and slid out of sight around the corner of the knoll.

Malloy crawled through the dugout door and, standing erect, went straight to the telephone in the corner. Through his concentration on the vital necessity of getting fire down again at the earliest instant he was conscious of Barrow in the opposite corner, but did not so much as look his way. At the telephone he spun the crank and listened, straining to hear the faintest indication of contact with the artillery headquarters at the rear. Through seconds that seemed like hours he listened to the utter silence of a line that was dead and as silent as a grave.

Then abruptly a great clicking and scratching broke out.

"Hello! Hello!" Malloy shouted.

The scratching went maddeningly on.

Malloy cursed.

"O. P., O. P." a voice said, faintly, at last.

"Okay," Malloy cried. "Get off." He spun the crank until it seemed the signal at the other end must raise the dead.

"Opper," a voice said giving the code station name of Artillery Headquarters. "Lay off that bell crank."

"Operations."

"Operations," a new voice took up the conversation.

"Sergeant Malloy, liaison detail before Bery. Increase range six hundred yards and fire as scheduled."

"What happened, sergeant?" The voice was calm.

"Infantry error—six hundred yards out on their position figures."

"Why didn't you check?"

"Reported for duty just as the barrage fell. Will you lay down the new fire?"

"In ten minutes precisely. Make a full report as soon as you are relieved."

"Damn red tape," Malloy muttered.

A runner appeared at the door and Malloy forestalled the question on his lips.

"Report to Major Prawl. Tell him the barrage will fall in exactly ten minutes, same schedule as before."

The major says, "What the hell is wrong with you guys?"

"Why don't your officers find out where their positions are before they ask us to lay down a barrage. That last set of figures was six hundred yards out."

"Yuh want me to tell Major Prawl?" The runner squinted at Malloy skeptically.

"Tell him whatever you like. Tell him we were delayed because the cook was having a baby. Anyway, get going! This isn't a debating club."

The runner popped out and Malloy swung around to face Barrow.

BLOOD oozed from a ragged cut just above Barrow's collarbone and made a muddy brown stain on his torn shirt. But it was not the blood which held Malloy's attention. In a half crouch against the wall, Barrow's posture was that of an animal poised to spring and his face, which in repose was sulky and rather handsome in a heavy way, was set in an expression so bestial that involuntarily Malloy's indrawn breath of amazement passed his teeth with an audible hiss and he instinctively fell into a defensive posture.

Barrow laughed, a dry, blood-curdling, sound that seemed to rise from some arid reach of his reason and which stirred in Malloy an almost murderous desire to rend him asunder.

"Stand up and take it," Barrow gloated. "You're the tough guy of the outfit, aren't you? You're the little white-haired boy of the battery commander. You're the brave hero who comes in the nick of time to save the day. Well, let's see you save yourself now."

"You're off your trolley," Malloy retorted, trying to appear unshaken by this new Barrow. "The infantry will hop in a few minutes and we must go with them. Get a light pack together."

"You get one together and get out of this post," Barrow snarled.

"Look here, Barrow," Malloy began, in a conciliatory tone.

"Get out of here while you can walk." Barrow suddenly produced his service automatic and scowled above its sullen blue barrel.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to drive you outside where the Boche can knock you off, then I am going to report to my precious brother who had me relieved as an incompetent."

"You're mad." Malloy straightened suddenly and faced Barrow's gun. "Fur-

thermore," he said deliberately, "You are as yellow as a lemon."

Barrow's lips curled in a bitter sneer, but he said nothing.

"Yellow." Stifling a desire to bolt from the menace of Barrow's gun, Malloy went on. "You haven't the guts to plug me cold; and you haven't the guts to go forward with the infantry whether you plugged me, or ran me through the door. You're a fourflusher and a quitter, Barrow; a liar with less backbone than it would take to outfit a butterfly."

Malloy stiffened himself to carry his desperate attempt at diverting Barrow's mind toward the idea of a vainglorious climax to its conclusion.

"You might knock off a medal for valor in a jam like this. You might have the whole battery at your feet. You might, if you had the nerve to go through with your job—to move up with the attack and take your chances with the rest like a man. But you won't. Instead you'll crawl back to your brother with your tail between your legs, crying foul." He paused, then said distinctly: "If you've got the guts—shoot! Let's see how much of your brother's blood you have in you and how much of you is stuffed with putty. Your mother wanted her son to be a hero, Raukee said."

Malloy could see from the quick compression of Barrow's features that his last thrust had got under his skin. It was the most fleeting flash of spontaneous emotion and Barrow was almost at once again in control of his mad blood.

"I can afford to take talk from the like of you. You're gutter scrapings, Malloy; and in a gutter brawl like this war, you're in your element. Well, you can go outside and get your head blown off; that's what you went to war for."

"And you'll let the infantry whistle for a means of artillery aid when they need it—there is good, courageous stuff in you."

"Never mind about me. I—"

Malloy lunged suddenly, striking at Barrow's legs seeking to drag him down and disarm him. But the other was too quick and his emotional hatred had gone too far to be arrested.

The gun whacked as Malloy lunged and two more shots boomed in the narrow dugout before he hit the ground.

Malloy fell asprawl in the mud and, unable for the moment to overcome the shattering shock of a broken leg, lay there on his face. Above him, Barrow watched with an expression in which dawning realization and horror blended with the fading mask of his madness. In his hand the gun stood stiffly out, a blunt blue jut that faintly smoked. Barrow looked at it, then slowly felt around for the open top of its holster and dropped it in.

"Chink," he said in a queer voice.

"It's my leg," Malloy growled. "Get my face out of this lousy mud."

Barrow dropped to his knees and carefully turned Malloy on his back, and the two men were face to face.

"Well, you did it," Malloy growled. "But I still think you couldn't have, if it was a cold job."

"You ought to have a bandage," Barrow said in a stunned way. "The blood—"

"Put it on," Malloy shook Barrow's arm. "Tight, high up, and tie a hunk of a board from the wall on for a splint. Snap into it. The infantry hops in a minute or two."

While Barrow broke out a first aid packet and made a hasty tourniquet and splint, Malloy tried, through the increasing pain, to discover if the bone was shattered or merely grazed. The agony made him blanch and a deep groan escaped his clamped teeth.

"Lie still!" It was Barrow, whose voice was tight with purpose now.

"The infantry have got to have an artillery contact man. How the hell can I lay still. Use your head, man."

"I'll use my head. Lie still while I tie you up. Christ!" he swore suddenly,

"you're a fat-headed Mick. You think you're the only one in the world that's worth a damn."

"I'm all that's good for a damn in this hole in the ground," Malloy retorted. "You shot me, didn't you; and you're running out on me. What the hell do you want me to do, kiss you?"

Outside, the barrage screamed over the post to beat in thunderous crashing waves beyond the crouching infantry in the fields on the town side of the post.

Malloy sat up swearing in an anger of frustration. He drew his injured leg up, and the searing pain of it drew a shuddering groan from him.

Barrow cuffed him roughly and forced his shoulders back onto the floor.

"Lie still, you fool," he said harshly. "I'm shoving off with Prawl's gang. But don't get any phony ideas about it. I've got no more use for you now than I ever had, Malloy, but you can't call me a yellow dog and make it stick. I'll take your damned liaison detail and I'll pull it through. Then you can tell everybody how I shot you and how you would have saved the day only I kept you from it."

"You'll never grow up," Malloy growled. "Well, are you going or are you waiting for the committee of congratulation to arrive with a silver loving cup?"

"I'll leave the medals to you, and while you're busy telling Raukee how hot you are, tell him I fired that shot without checking my clearance. He won't be able to touch me for it because I'll be buddies with the birds the shell knocked off."

The wire detail man poked his head inside and let go a splash of tobacco juice on the floor.

"We moving up or bedding down here?" Then noticing that Malloy was hurt, said: "Hey, what's up, Sarge?"

"Haul your tail," Barrow snapped. He shoved the man out and caught up and hastily folded a map.

"Atta boy, Bullhead," Malloy applauded from the floor.

Barrow hesitated, looking at him. For an instant it seemed that the hard shell of his defense was about to crack, then he spat with exaggerated venom.

"Shanty Irish," he growled. "Nuts to you."

His boots squidged in the mud of the floor and he was gone.

THE ambulance that took Malloy from the forward first-aid station to the tented evacuation hospital a few miles from the infantry lines rattled and banged with the spite of the devil over the torn and broken roads reaching rearward from the forward battle area.

Malloy fervently cursed Barrow, the war, his luck, and all the works of his Satanic majesty which had contributed to his present predicament. His broken leg, bound in splinters that seemed bent upon crushing his bones to powder, throbbed heavily.

With every bounce of the ambulance, a meteoric shower of pain shot through his whole body, drawing cold drops of moisture from his pores, and set him off on a new line of profane analysis of war and its glorious meaning when boiled down in the fetid interior of an apparently springless, tireless, and thoroughly decrepit ambulance.

He reached the evacuation hospital at last, begged a drink of brandy, got it, and decided that two or three months in a hospital and convalescing were not to be sneezed at.

Raukee, led by an orderly, came down the row of cots as Malloy warmed to the brandy and the vision of clean sheets, nurses and the peace of the convalescent area. The captain touched his helmet as he came abreast of Malloy's cot and regarded him fixedly without speaking.

"What happened to Barrow?" Malloy said bluntly. "Last I saw of him he was high-tailing out with the infantry that went to storm Bery."

"Sergeant Barrow," Raukee said steadily, "is lying in a cot in this hos-

pital. He was brought here before you were. He took an awful beating, Malloy."

"Hit bad, huh?"

"Bad enough. When they finish taking the splinters out of him I should say that he will spend some time patching up his manly beauty. Incidentally—" Raukee's back stiffened and his tone roughened—"Barrow has spilled the whole story of the fracas you and he had in that dugout."

"What did he say happened in the dugout?"

"Don't be an ass, Malloy. You know what happened. You have a broken leg, haven't you?"

"Yeah," Malloy gingerly felt the stiff bandages that bound him. "A Heinie took a shot at me with a machine-gun. He was in the woods somewhere."

"Barrow took a shot at you," Raukee corrected him, "and family or no family he has got to stand trial for it. I—"

"A Boche shot me," Malloy interrupted. "That's my story and that's what I'll tell anybody who asks me any questions about it."

"You'll do nothing of the kind."

"Okay! Put me before a court and see. And when I say I don't know anything about this cock-and-bull yarn Barrow has been spinning to you; where will your case be? I'll tell you. It will be a bust and the court will ask through channels, what the hell the captain means by taking the members of the court away from their wine, women, and pinochle to listen to such eyewash."

"You're insubordinate and impossible. Besides, Barrow must stand trial for firing that low shot."

"I thought I was to be tried for that?"

"You may remember that I told you I had underestimated Evans."

"Evans? What has Evans got to do with it?"

"Evans wrote a statement that was among his papers when he was killed. It stated flatly that Evans had watched Barrow fire without checking the clearance of his gun. He even swore to the truth of what he was writing. Of course an oath without witnesses is no oath at all, according to the law, but to me it carried singular force. Evans was not the kind of man to do a thing like that unless he was deeply stirred."

"Evans is dead. He told me he was writing a will."

"I put this thing up to Barrow. At first he stalled but, in the end, confirmed Evans' story.

"Barrow pulled a boner and a couple of guys were bumped off. That same outfit went over in the attack on Bery and where is it now? An officer who was beside me in the aid station told me there wasn't enough left of the original attacking force to put in your eye. It can't help anybody to put Barrow through the mill on that low-shot charge."

"Why the devil are you so bent on protecting Barrow all of a sudden? What's got into you?"

"Nothing. Barrow was a fool; he was too fat in the head to get anything right. Then he woke up and he took it on the chin. He's all busted up, isn't he? Well, what the hell difference whether a lot of fat punks in a rear area sit in judgment on him or not? Half of them don't know what he was up against and never will."

"But it's military law; and discipline must be maintained.

"And now that he is filled to the neck with discipline—the kind of discipline a guy gets from sticking his nose into the muzzle of Boche guns—the law is going to put him in the cooler or a disciplinary barracks to maintain it. It sounds like a lot of baloney to me."

"So—?"

"Major Prawl, of the infantry, made a mistake that damn near cost the lives of half a battalion. Why pick on Barrow? Why not begin with the generals and work back—or maybe they don't

make mistakes, being that they can pass the buck down so far. Why don't you write to Barrow's ma and tell her he is a hero or something?"

"I'll do no such thing."

"All right then, write home and tell her Barrow is a jail-bird and a yellow-belly."

"Not by a damn sight."

"Thank God," Malloy sighed noisily, "you have made up your mind. When you see Barrow tell him the standards of machine-gun practice in the German army are lousy. So long, skipper."

"Well, I'll be—By Gad—!" Raukee arose.

"Here's the pill-rollers come to get me. They're going to send me back to the Base today. The doc told me when I came in." Malloy grinned. "See you in the funny papers."

The orderlies, with a respectful nod to Raukee, rolled Malloy onto a litter and carried him out.

For a long minute Raukee stood frowning after him, then he swore softly.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "I will be tee-totally damned!"

He pulled a batch of charge sheets and notes from the pocket of his trench coat and thoughtfully crumpled them between his fingers.

THE FAST RUNNING SHEEPHERDER

WELL, a guy comes from the East and tries to git a job running cattle. He 'lowed he had just graduated from college — Harvard or Yale or some of them big schools up there. Said he'd been a big athlete and played in all sorts of games and run in big foot races and the like. 'Lowed he come to Texas to be a big rancher. He said, though, he'd be willin' to begin at the bottom and work his way up.

Well, he went to all the outfits and he couldn't git anybody to take him on.

It was mostly on account of his lingo. He was wantin' a "position" or "employment," with a "future" to it. And he wouldn't say "wages," but always asked about "remuneration" and "emolument" and the like. Some of the bosses didn't know what the hell he was talkin' about; some of 'em said he must be a rustler; and others said they wouldn't hire a damn foreigner until he learned to talk United States, or at least Mex'can.

And so the pore feller had to hire himself to a damn sheep man.

Old Man Mason told him the first thing to do was to take them sheep out to graze. He told him to be shore to git 'em back by night, and to be damn shore to look after the lambs and git every one of 'em back in the pen. If he didn't there'd be some tall hell-raisin'.

Old Man Mason went back to his shack and set in the shade all day. Finally it was might' nigh dark, and the herder hadn't come in with the woollies. The Old Man waited a while longer, and still the herder didn't show up. About nine o'clock he started out to the pens about three hundred yards from the house, to see if he could see anything of the critters. On the way out he met his new sheepherder.

"Did you have any trouble with the sheep?" says he.

"Not with the sheep," says the herder. "But," he says, "the lambs occasioned me considerable perturbation."

Well, Old Man Mason didn't know what the hell he meant, and he didn't want to ask, for fear he'd appear ign'rant; so went on to the pens to see what was the matter with the lambs.

The moon was up, and he could see over the rock fence. The sheep was all huddled up in the middle o' the pen, and the Old Man counted a hundred and seventy-five jack-rabbits runnin' around and buttin' the fence, doin' their damnedest to git out.—From "Tall Tales from Texas," by Mody C. Boatright.

THE WOODS RUNNER

By HUGH PENDEXTER

(Third of Four Parts)

SYNOPSIS

I AM Enoch Watson. My father and my father's father were both sailors and I should have been born with salt water in my blood, but even as a boy I loathed the sea. I wanted to be one of those men who pushed so boldly westward into the great wilderness beyond the Atlantic seaboard. But in the year 1740 I yielded to my family's wishes and shipped on my uncle's boat the *Northern Queen*. Then Fate played its trick. The ship was wrecked off the Virginia coast, and I, miraculously saved, found myself working in an inn in Norfolk. There I met a servant named Joe Cantil. Together we planned to venture back into the Blue Ridge country. His red hair and trading ability made it possible for him to get along with the Indians. One night three pirates had a terrific fight at the inn and fled. Under cover of the excitement Joe murdered his master and fled likewise. Shortly after, I helped a beautiful girl called the Bird Woman escape from jail—she was charged with being a witch—and I too had to flee. I met up with two men called Pinau and Michi who took me to a settlement called Borden's Grant, where the settlers offered me a cabin and land if I would act as scout or woods runner for them. I gladly accepted, and immediately set forth to learn what I could about the French and Indians who menaced the settlement from the north. To my amazement I came across in the woods the three pirates from the inn, now apparently good friends. After I took leave of them I saw them talking to a man from Borden's Grant who I was sure was a spy and traitor. My suspicions were proven sound when the man started to stalk me. We began a desperate game of hide and seek with death as the loser's portion. Finally I

won. On his body I found a notched stick giving a tally of the settlers on Borden's Grant. As I examined this I was surprised and taken prisoner by an elderly scout with a Scotch accent. It was my Uncle Berachah, long supposed to have drowned at sea. Mistreated by the British, he had joined with the French and now was compelled to take me to their camp up the Ohio. There he told Captain Desartre I wished to join also. It was the only way to save me and keep his faith with the French. As the Shawnees in camp danced about the fire that night, a scout brought word that a band of Cherokees was coming to join them and that with them were three pirates. Uncle Berachah explained that the pirates sought him, since he knew where treasure was buried. I knew I must escape. Joe Cantil, who was with the Indians in camp, helped me. When the dreaded Lynx Man—a medicine man dressed as a lynx—came into my tent to kill me, I killed him instead and Joe dragged his body to the river. The French would read the signs and think the corpse trailed in the dirt was mine. I slipped off into the forest and encountered another scout from the Grant named Posby. His laziness and greediness caused him to lag behind and the Indians got him. At last I came to a cabin owned by Pinau. From inside the cabin I saw an old Indian named Powhatan John down on his knees doing something to the trail. Then he faded into the forest and a short time after another Indian appeared, a magnificent red man.

PART III

THE Indian lifted a hand, and three other Indians noiselessly appeared. All but the first comer started to steal around the cabin. The fourth man advanced up the path. I could hear a savage on the west side of the cabin grunting and speaking to a companion. Then red hands appeared to secure a purchase on the small opening which served to help ventilate the cabin and to increase the draught of the short, squat chimney. I aimed my gun, knowing that in the next second I must open my defense. A shrill exclamation in front of the cabin caused the hooked fingers to vanish, and I heard the feet of the spy hastening to learn the cause of the alarm.

I stepped on the block of wood and peered through the peephole over the door. A warrior was seated beside the path and staring at his foot and gingerly removing what looked to be a big splinter. One of his companions grunted harshly and whipped out a skinning-knife and cut into the foot to cause the blood to flow more freely. A third man cautiously examined the ground and then gently knelt and swept the blade of his knife over the path.

He grunted explosively as he discovered something. And yet, as he held it up, it was nothing but a splinter. I had heard much about the savage's indifference to pain, and his stoical composure when being tortured. But this man, who had stuck a splinter in his foot, was frightened. His gaze was as wild as a hawk's as he glared at the insignificant wound. Another man explored the path, and more splinters were discovered.

The wounded man stared down at his leg, which seemed to be swelling perceptibly, then straightened his back, held up his head and said something to his fellows. With scarcely any hesitation one drew his ax and killed his wounded mate with one crushing blow.

For sheer horror I had witnessed nothing like it in all my life. Obviously the wounded man had requested his companions to end his life. And all for a splinter!

The warriors stood staring at the cabin and pointing at the door. Then they wheeled and cautiously examined the

ground between my refuge and the growth. Suddenly one man straightened and spoke to his companions. They picked up their dead mate and carried him to the edge of the growth, and thrust him under some bushes. They turned as if to depart, and I believed I was through with their company, when the man who acted the rôle of executioner leaped into the growth.

There followed the sounds of scuffling and much squawking. Then the investigator was dragging old Powhatan John from his hiding place. Two men held the ancient helpless, while another gingerly explored his scanty coverings. From a bag formed of snakeskin was produced the skin of a rattlesnake. Next came a small red basket. The contents were dumped on the ground. The receptacle seemed to contain nothing except more of the curious splinters. A vague understanding of the tragedy began to seep through my horrified brain.

A complete understanding was afforded me when they trussed the ancient up carefully and cautiously and stuck the splinters into his shriveled hide. Then they rose and stole away down the slope. The Powhatan was not tied down. There seemed to be nothing to prevent his leaving the place could he work his hands free. Yet he knew he was doomed.

In a quavering voice he began chanting what, presumably, was his death song. I distinguished the word *Kiwasa*, his tribal god, which demanded terrible hecatombs. I waited, determined to run no risk of being jumped by the Cherokees. The Powhatan began to feel the effects of the awful poison which he had used in laying his death-traps.

At last I opened the door softly and stepped forth with a faggot of wood raised to still his cries did he seek to sound any alarm. The doomed wretch stared at me as if I had been a ghost, and opened and closed his mouth, but made no sound. His next act was horribly dramatic, yet based on good judgment, I believe. He plucked a small knife from his loin-cloth and stabbed himself through the heart.

The cabin could be no abiding place for me after such a horrid experience, although I believed I could have stayed there for days without suffering from any intrusion. But the whole experience quite devastated my nerves, and I was eager to take my luck with knife, ax or bullet. I waited in a snug covert down the slope until the Cherokees could have traveled some distance. Then I entered the valley floor and made for the Grant. Not till then did I remember the hidden gold. Nor did I long to possess it. Bloody history was behind such fortune. Land was the only enduring property.

CHAPTER TEN

SUSPICIONS

NOW that I believed I had a fair chance of reaching the Grant, life became more precious to me, if such an embellishment be possible. Nor was I forgetting the savages I had escaped by faring south and finding sanctuary in Pinau's cabin. The Frenchman saved my life when he bought that log house. I took it for granted my late trackers were ahead of me to scout the settlement. I was starved for food. Once I fancied I heard a red scout calling in the north, and yet it might have been a loon.

The settlement had good lookouts, for a sentinel noted my coming the moment I emerged from the growth and entered the cleared land, and there was a surge of men, women and children to meet me. Polly Mulholin was the first to greet me, and I found her kindly, homely face very beautiful as she displayed her big white teeth in friendly greeting, and said:

"They vowed you'd be killed. I said you'd make it."

"Aye, Mistress Mulholin—"

"Everyone calls me Polly."

"Polly it is then. But I've taken journeys I enjoyed more."

She sighed heavily and deplored:

"I s'pose I must wait for the telling. You look so peaked, and too wild-like to waste time giving your story twice. But just one question. Did you find signs of Injuns?"

"Both the French and their Indians."

"God ha' marcy on all these poor people!"

"At the least they need not be taken by surprise. Is my cabin up?"

"First tap we done after you left us."

"Show me the way to it. I'll rest there while telling my story."

"Rat me! But you be half starved. I'll fetch some meat and bread that'll put meat on your ribs. You look older."

"One can age fast where I have been. But a razor and a shave will help my appearance some."

"We've fretted. Pinau thought you must be lost for all time."

"Hard work to kill a Watson," I boasted.

Yet my heart was aching as I noted the number of children on the Grant, ranging from toddlers to boys and girls in their early 'teens. One four-year-old villain stalked me with fixed gaze and from a tiny bow discharged an arrow. He should have been playing with a fat puppy, or twisting a cat's tail.

By now a score or more settlers had sighted me and were bellowing the news that a scout had returned. All tasks were abandoned as men and women converged upon me, even the most distant crying out to learn the news. I refused to talk before Borden came up, too weary to tell my adventures needless times. A messenger was sent to bring him from his work of surveying a parcel of land west of the tract. Then, Polly Mulholin was pushing me through a doorway and informing me it was my house, that I was "at home."

Never had I anticipated that the thrill of ownership of something I had earned could so deeply affect me. For some moments I could but stand and stare at the clean room, redolent with the aroma of freshly fashioned timbers. In New England I had had no such sense of proprietorship. The doorway was narrow and the two windows were small and high. I could peer from the latter easily, but needed to stand very erect.

I could see the high stumps which marked the bounds of my little kingdom of fifty acres. And it was *mine*, bought and paid for by my endeavors. For a bit I was deaf to the frantic questioning, and oblivious to the apparent nervousness of the settlers.

My first realization of the people's impatience was when I heard an aged man fretfully exclaim:

"Is he a zany? Be it he lost his wits?"

"He's leg-tired, old simpleton," curtly spoke up Polly Mulholin. "The all of ye hold your tongues. When Master Borden comes I vow he will talk fast enough. An' here comes my kettle, a-bubblin', an' a-sizzlin' hot with toothsome stew. Clear out, the all of ye! Can't young master eat in peace in his own house?"

"That's all very good, Mistress Mulholin," spoke up a man, "but we be fair worrited."

Outside a voice curtly demanded:

"Why are you men and women not at your tasks? Fall back! You'd be better engaged in getting your cabin rights."

Then Borden was in the doorway, his broad shoulders filling the opening. He gazed at me, as I was gobbling the stew, and grunted:

"Ha! You don't look over promising for a bringer of news. You've been gone over long. Lost your tongue?"

"I've traveled over long and far. You wish me to report now, and here?"

"Am I giving you a cabin, land and corn for keeping silent?" he answered.

Behind him I beheld Michi and Pinau.

The German was gesticulating with his thick arms and broad hands. The Frenchman appeared to be contradicting him. The two were crowding close to the doorway when I told Borden:

"The French and Indians are on the river formed by the Greenbriar and a stream from the south."

"The big Kanawha," announced Pinau.

"No one here can dispute you," dryly said Borden. "Not even if you add that they also are in the moon."

"I'm telling you what I saw. Captain Desartre is in command of the mixed force."

"Ha! That *is* important news," conceded Borden.

"I was in their camp two days. I was accepted as a new recruit." I could not say that my own uncle was Desartre's right-hand man.

"Of course you couldn't tell us what nations of Indians were there?" It was plain Borden doubted my having visited the enemy's camp.

"Until the night I came away they were Shawnees. Then the Cherokees came in. The Bird Woman was there and was friendly to me. I should have been discovered for a spy, and burned, had she not helped me."

"Would to God she'd come here and live!" sighed an aged man.

"We don't want her here," said Borden. "Get along with your report."

I told with some details of the runners sent to stop the Cherokees, going at her bidding; also, how the latter failed to meet the messenger, and arrived at the river camp. I told briefly of my escape after killing the Lynx Man. I made no mention of Cantil, lest he be sought for the killing of Dee. Doubtless this omission was unwise. I suppressed that bit of information through sympathy for a much abused man. Borden's broad face drew down in dour lines as I continued and estimated the combined force of French and Indians.

"Damme!" the Proprietor exploded. "We haven't counted on being attacked by white men."

In my haste to give the vital part of my discoveries I had neglected to tell of the three pirates, and the scout I had shot. I supplied these facts. Borden scowled ferociously and growled:

"The red seamen shall hang! But this man you say scouts our frontier for the French. Aren't you drawing the strong bow?"

I did not relish his skepticism, but controlled my temper, and explained, "You know the scout better than I do. He was here, smoking kinnikinick. You resented my calling attention to his love of the Indians' tobacco. He trailed me in the woods and tried to shoot me. I shot him. He had an arrow shaft with three sets of notches. Deep ones for the men, less deep for the women, and tiny ones for the children."

THIS revelation evoked a sullen roar of rage. Borden's manner changed, although he continued to frown: but now it was not because of me and my report. In a low voice he said:

"So he hobnobbed with the red seamen and they set him on your track. Who can we trust now?"

Pinau called out over Borden's shoulder:

"Does our young friend speak French?"

Borden looked his inquiry. I shook my head.

"I was just wondering how he could talk with the Frenchmen he says he met," observed Pinau.

Borden's heavy face flushed. He wheeled on me and said, "That's a good suggestion. Knowing no French, how did you manage to win the Frenchmen's confidence?"

"I carried in the arrowshaft. The commandant speaks English quite well."

"He betrayed us!" excitedly exclaimed a man outside the cabin.

"I betrayed no one!" I hotly shouted

back. "The savages have scouted this place from the putting up of the first cabin. They have scouted it since. I used the arrowshaft to secure their good will long enough for me to learn something of their strength."

Borden was in two minds. Finally he said:

"Doubtless they know our strength. Perhaps the delivery of the arrow was necessary. Any spy entering their camp would need something to deceive them. You killed an Indian and weighted his body and threw it into the river. That brings us to your flight."

"And to Posby, one of your scouts. He's dead."

"Good God! How? Where?" barked Borden.

I gave the details of the man's death. Several loudly bewailed his passing and were quick to praise his courage. Borden quelled this display of endorsement and bluntly said:

"No man is valuable who gets himself killed through ignorance, or carelessness. Posby knew the habits of the Indians. His stomach was stronger than his head. I have no sympathy for him. Call in all the workers. We'll fight them here. Now, Watson, have you emptied your wallet?"

It was the first time he had called me by my name. I sensed that his attitude was changing, although his heavy brows continued drawn down in a scowl. I briefly detailed my flight after parting from Posby, and all that occurred at Pinau's cabin. My descriptions of the splinters in the path approaching Pinau's cabin caused gasps of horror. Pinau heatedly exclaimed:

"The base villains! And my totem mark on the door!"

"Never mind," broke in Borden. "It's good enough news to know the old devil is dead. Watson, you think those savages scouted this settlement after leaving the cabin?"

"I did not venture to catch up with them. But I believe they must have scouted this place." Then I sought some information, saying, "I do not see Sewell or Carver here."

"Out on a scout," spoke up Polly Mulholin. "But not together. They have but little liking for each other."

Borden reverted to the Ridge, by asking, "Those savages who killed Powhatan John—of course you couldn't tell what red nation they belonged to."

"They wore their hair roached, erect, like the Shawnee at the French camp."

"Thank heavens they weren't any of the Iroquois tribes," mumbled Pinau.

Borden called on Pinau and Michi and two seasoned borderers to step to one side and confer with him. I could see that he was much troubled. As he was leaving the cabin he turned and kindly told me:

"You have done good service and have earned your cabin rights and corn."

The settlers had small inclination to return to their various tasks. The men were grave. The women were frightened, and began shrilly calling to their children. One of the men frankly confessed:

"I'm scared. I'm for gitting back to the Coast. Time enough to make a home here after them red devils have been crowded far down the Ohio."

"They won't enter my cabin except over my dead body," boomed the Mulholin woman's deep voice.

They were the two exponents of the settlement's reaction to my budget of news. They scattered, only to come together in two groups. It was as plain as my big nose that the two factions were practically of the same strength. First one group, and then the other called on me to give my opinion. I had but the one answer: that a bold defense of the settlement would be successful. To encourage the weak of heart I added:

"There is no certainty that the Cherokees will stick to the French. They will not like to be harnessed up to the Iroquois, with whom they have fought from time out of mind. They did not remain

in the French camp as they believed the Raven Mockers—evil witches—were flying over it. This place can be held if all cabin themselves when a scout reports that the enemy is near. These twelve cabins roughly forming a square can hold them off. If they burn the others we can shoot quite a number as they start the fires. New cabins can soon be put up. If they drive us off, they will be twice as bold when they attack another settlement. There will be a fight, but it will be safer to remain here than to try to cross the ridge. We would be overtaken before we could reach the first settlement east of the ridge."

"That's a good, sound talk," said a man behind me. I recognized Borden as the speaker. He added, "You hold differently, Captain Pinau?"

"I've said my say. I was thinking of the women and children. I'd prefer to give up this settlement for all time than to have one little child slaughtered."

Michi urged his bulk forward and announced:

"I will go to the wild men and talk to them in several ancient tongues. I am sorry I could not have talked with the poisonous man and learn if his killing by snake venom is not the same practice of the ancients. But it might be best if the children were over the ridge."

"See here, Michi!" interrupted Borden. "Frontier men and women have raised and kept their children with them ever since the first white child was born in the wilderness. Men will fight harder if they have wives and children to protect. Those who wish to go back over the ridge may do so; but they will forfeit their cabin rights."

"No women will be going back, Mister Borden," spoke up the Mulholin woman. "We have homes here. We'll hold 'em. Women and men must die when their day comes; but it's better to die trying to make a home than to go hungry without a place to lay your head. These red divils will next think they own the moon."

This ended the general talk. Borden talked with me before going to place outposts a few miles from the settlement in all directions. He told me:

"Our men are too rash or too afraid. Posby should have returned. To allow himself to get killed as he did was close to bloody treason. Sometimes I think that a coward on a scout is of more value to us than the overconfident man. The coward may fetch false alarms, but even then our settlers get practice in quickly forting themselves. You will be willing to go out again soon?"

"I will be ready," I replied. "But should I return to the French camp it would mean death at the stake. I believe you can count on this: that the Bird Woman will help us, give us warnings, and the like."

"No! She's more red than white. She was captured when a child. She has the red mind."

"White folks haven't always been kind to her," I reminded. "They charged her with being a witch and locked her up."

"There you have it!" he exclaimed. "Then why think she would help the race that locks her up?"

I had said too little, or too much. As I remained silent he repeated his query and added:

"Be you dumb, or just tongue-tied?"

As frankness was better with his kind I briefly related how she had been held as a witch in Charles City, and how I had set her free. My recital left him in two minds. He grumbled about interfering with the duly appointed authorities.

I reminded:

"Had I left her in gaol I now would be dead down on the Kanawha."

He pursed his lips and stared thoughtfully at the western forest; then a rare smile lighted his usually dour countenance. He softly exclaimed: .

"Why, looky, young man. She had

not been proven a witch. So you can't be charged with freeing a witch. And who's going to know anything about it if she doesn't tell? You keep your trap shut. I'll keep mine shut. Now that I know your service to her I can see a chance of her seeking to warn us if danger threatens, all along of you being here."

"She would warn this settlement if she never had seen me. She is the kindest creature one can find." But I did not believe my duties of scout obligated me to tell anything about Cantil, who was wanted for murder. I believed that Borden had a very rugged respect for the law. And, as a fact, Cantil had killed Dee, even if I did not class it as murder. The German came along, and asked me:

"This Captain Desartre? What does he plan to do down here?"

"He thinks to drive all settlers over the ridge, so that no crops can be planted in the valley. He expects to secure the help of the Cherokees. He already has the Shawnees. If he can induce the Iroquois to join his red army he is confident he can send red axes chopping down the doors of Albany, keep the water road open to Canada, and sweep the frontier down through Virginia."

"So? He is very ambitious. And what else did your sharp ears gather?"

"I heard him say that blood would flow in the streets of Philadelphia."

"*Mein Gott!* A bold fellow! Nothing short of conquering all the Colonies will satisfy him. While in New York town I heard about a white man being his most valuable adviser. Saw you such?"

"His officers do no talking. The soldiers do as bid, and say nothing."

His last query gave me a rare start of nerves. I had but small doubt as to whom the commandant's adviser was. My uncle. It was horrible to contemplate.

Michi stared toward the west and mumbled, "You did well. You would have done a thousand times better could you have learned more about that man. And could you have stopped his voice forever you would have done a million times better."

I frankly confessed that my chief thought after being conducted to the camp was to escape.

"So the three pirates followed you there," he mused.

I affected not to consider this a query. But it troubled me sorely to think what might be thought of me, and what might happen to me did they learn Desartre's adviser was my uncle.

"How long will the commandant wait there until beginning his raids?" he continued.

"I have no way of knowing that. I should expect him to start at once, while he has the Cherokees with him. But by this time the Bird Woman may have scared them away by making them hear the Raven Mockers."

He nodded, absent-mindedly. Next his eyes were glowing with fresh interest. He said:

"More important to history is the discovery of the first men in America. Didn't you see even one rock that looked like there were ancient markings on it?"

"I was too busy, trying to get away. Too scared, lest I be cooked, to study the rocks."

He was disappointed. He shook his huge head and mumbled, "Youth. Unsteadiness. Ignorant of true historic values. I believe I will try and get in touch with some of the Cherokees."

"You'll get in touch with an ax," I warned.

He stared at me dully, as if not seeing me, and mumbled, "Pure science is never frightened."

With his hands clasped behind his broad back, the head bowed low, he left me and walked toward the woods. It gave me a creepy feeling to see his huge bulk advancing on what might be an ambush of our enemies.

THE settlers were back to their labors. Some were felling trees south of where Michi disappeared in the growth. Others were busy with vegetable gardens, while the women had a never-ending variety of tasks. Such a luxury to close my eyes and relax and feel that my hard-earned tranquillity would not be disturbed. I must have dozed off, for the next I knew was something hard, nudging my ribs. I came to my feet like a jumping-jack and stared into the blinking eyes of the German. In his deep voice he said:

"I found something in the woods, where the lightning tore a branch off the big oak."

He pointed a fat hand as he spoke.

"You have reported it to Borden?"

"Not yet. Just to you, my young friend. Do you go and see what it is. Then you can tell Herr Borden if you think best."

"I can think of nothing which should not be told him."

"Good, my young friend. But the sun sinks lower into the forest."

I had no idea as to what I should expect to find. I had small relish for going. The settlers were withdrawing to their cabins, fearing the gathering dusk. Securing my rifle, I sauntered toward the spot which Michi had indicated. I was vastly puzzled. I entered the edge of the timber and walked slowly and warily. It was an ancient wood and had scarcely any ground litter. Horsemen could range widely and seldow bow the head to escape low-hanging limbs. I could discover nothing, and was turning back toward the clearing, when as suddenly as if embodied from thin air Joe Cantil stood before me. He grinned broadly and rocked with silent laughter. I stared in amazement. He softly said:

"You should have been there the next morning after your escape!"

I gave his hand a mighty grip and softly replied:

"You impossible fellow! How could I be there when I was running for my life? And are you completely mad to come here, where some peace officer might pick you up?"

"There is no peace officer in all the Colonies who can pick me up. Such a time that next morning! The Lynx Man was hunted high and low for killing you. They went to the river bottom, seeking your body. Your uncle was mightily upset."

The last was given the lie by a sly wink. He fished in the bosom of his hunting shirt and produced a scrap of paper. I held it up to the waning light, and read the two words, *Clar Innis*. It was a greeting, congratulations and a benediction, all in one. I thrust it in my pocket and rapidly told him:

"Tell him I came through. Tell him these two words, 'Clan Buchanan.'"

"I come to find if you were safe."

"Surely, Joe, you never came all this distance, risking death or capture, just to act his messenger."

"He gave me a talk for you. He begs you to return far east of the ridge and to get all the settlers to go with you."

"Then they will strike here," I murmured.

"I can't tell the secrets of my friends just so my damned English enemies can turn a profit," he dourly replied.

I asked if the three pirates had shown up.

"They've come in. They'll make stout fighting men. The commandant will see to that. Moon Face tried to ruffle his whiskers, but melted under one long look. He's the one to make that bloody trash knuckle down. But they'll be no good in a fight unless they think they can get loot. The big Guinea is there. He's scared of me. He won't stick. He'll be back, asking some one to make him a slave again."

Suddenly I was filled with an awful suspicion. I demanded:

"Joe, did my uncle send you here to

spy on the strength of this settlement?"

I was vastly relieved when he promptly shook his red head. I was disturbed when he added:

"The Shawnee will scout this place till they know every man. Better get them to leave the valley."

"I must tell Borden what you've told me. That they will attack us."

"That's it. No matter what any one says this settlement will go down under red axes." I was to recall that statement and understand its hidden meaning.

Before I could speak, Cantil was warning, "Some one comes in a hurry."

I COULD hear it. Either a woods novice, or the bringer of important news. Cantil treed himself. The newcomer was approaching from the west. He was fairly hurling himself through the wood. He was Carver, and his face was a hideous mask, so distorted were his features. I called out to him, but he did not seem to see, or hear me. I caught him by the arm as he would have passed me, and turned him to an about-face, and demanded:

"Savages after you?"

"Leave be!" he panted. "I've come for powder 'n' ball! Mine's used up."

"Why run yourself off your legs? Safe for you to walk, isn't it?"

"Leave be!" he hoarsely repeated. "I'm not hunting for a hiding-place. I'm after powder 'n' ball. Red devils killed poor Sewell!"

This was hard news, as the Northerner was an excellent fighting man, despite his abasement before his religion.

"You and Sewell scarcely were friends," I reminded.

"He was my truest friend! Never will I have another such! O my God! Don't you understand? The lead was for *me*. He leaped in front of me and caught it in his chest!"

"And you'll do what, mister?" spoke up Cantil, now emerging from behind the tree.

Carver heard him, but did not bother to look at him. He said:

"I'll kill twenty red devils to even up for poor Sewell. Don't try to hold me!"

I released my grip and the half-mad man ran for the cabins. His wild appearance and haste alarmed all who beheld him. There ensued a rush of the more nervous. Cantil backed away, and hurriedly said:

"I've finished my errand. I'm going back. Keep out of the woods. If you have common sense, fall back east of the ridge. Good-by. You were a good friend to me. Scant chance of us meeting again. Be sensible. Get away from this place."

Then he was vanishing as softly as a mink, and I heard no sound of his going. I walked slowly back to my cabin, my mind whirling with many thoughts. I regretted the passing of Sewell. I was surprised that Carver took it so to heart. I met Carver returning to take up his quest of hate. He had several powder horns slung over his shoulder and was carrying a bag, presumably filled with more of the explosive. Borden and Pinau came and met me, and I asked them if they had heard of Sewell's death. Borden, very grave of face, bowed his head.

"I tried to hold Carver here, but he is one beset. His anger will send him into bullet, knife or ax, and we will have lost two good men instead of one. But, enough of that for now. There is one point in your account of your visit to the French camp not clear in our minds. How came it that you had a chance to escape?"

"I've explained that."

"M'sieur Borden is curious how it came that you were left alone in your shelter," said Pinau. "You gave brandy to a savage and killed him."

"He came for brandy and to kill me. He tried to bite my hand when I gave him the brandy. Did you people want him left alive?"

Borden ignored the sarcasm, and said:

"There was dancing and feasting across the river. The Frenchmen were there, but you were left alone. Captain Pinau is rightly curious to know why you were given so much freedom."

"Also, if you were vouched for by some one who stands high in Desartre's estimation," added Pinau.

"Are you trying to poison Borden's mind against me?" I hotly demanded.

"That isn't answering our questions," said Borden.

"The answer is simple enough. I was accepted as a friend of the French. I carried to them the tally on the arrow-shaft which I found on the body of the kinnikinick man, the man you trusted to scout for *you*. It was plain to Desartre I didn't have to enter his camp."

"There was an old acquaintance of yours there?" softly asked Pinau.

"The Bird Woman was there. Also Joe Cantil. The latter is wanted for killing a planter."

"We'll leave it for the time," said Borden. "But if I find a man has deceived us—"

"You'll shoot him. I can't thank Captain Pinau, if in any degree he has poisoned your mind against me."

"Too much is at stake to waste time sparing one's feelings," said Pinau. "Some may think it strange you should have made your camp apart from Posby. He's been out before and always has returned."

"Good heavens! Now you accuse me of killing poor Posby!"

"Not as severe as that. But you were near him when he was killed," reminded Borden.

"And I'd have been dead and scalped alongside of him had I kept with him. He acted and talked like a crazy man. He insisted I was too far south of the Grant. I followed his travel directions and missed this settlement by several miles' travel to the north. I had to beat back down the ridge and travel here from the east."

"We won't talk about it any more now," moodily said Borden. "Your release of the witch-woman, who now lives with the Indians, might be plausibly explained. Your ability to make straight to the enemy's camp causes some surprise. One would have expected that you would have met savages on the way. Or be received as a prisoner by the French."

"I set the Bird Woman free from gaol, east of the ridge, before I ever knew I was coming here. I made the enemy's camp by finding a river and following it down till I came to it. Your first scout, in whom you placed all trust, was in the pay of the French. I killed him, after he had taken a shot at me. The arrow tally was delivered to the French. I am not to be condemned for not meeting any savages on my journey to the Frenchmen. I made a bargain with you. I have done as I have promised. I am against the French all the time, all the way. I have warned you this place will be attacked. Just before being called here the white husband of the Bird Woman brought a like warning."

"Leave be! Leave be!" mumbled Borden. "The cabin and land is yours. But one can not be too careful out here."

"Drink for the devil!" exclaimed Pinau. "But, M'sieur Borden, did you not hear his words? A white man from the French camp has been here and we do not see him, or talk with him!"

"The Bird Woman sent him to warn us against an attack. He would not have come into the settlement. He would not talk with any here except me."

Borden lifted his head and declared:

"The captain's right. I am the man this refugee from the law should have talked with."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AN INTERRUPTED JOURNEY

I ENDEAVORED to convince Borden that it would have been useless for me to have attempted coaxing Cantil into the settlement. He appeared not to hear me. I realized that a half truth and half lie made poor yoke-mates. And yet I could not see that my failure to name my uncle could cause any additional danger to the settlement. I was ill at ease when Borden and Pinau withdrew. Of a sudden I found my cabin too confining. I picked up my long gun and wandered forth, rather moody in spirit.

Something went *plump* against my back, and I wheeled about to behold the young rascal, who once before had taken a pot-shot at me with his blunt arrows. I picked him up and tossed him about, to his great delight, and told him to keep close to the cabins. Without much thought as to where I was strolling I arrived at the edge of the clearing where I had met Joe Cantil. Continually running through my mind was the conviction that my Uncle Berachah was bound to prove my greatest embarrassment.

My gloomy meditations were flipped aside as I heard steps carelessly crashing through the growth. I experienced my greatest shock when the heads of two savages emerged from the growth. Only the heads. There were no bodies! A second glance was necessary before I discovered the hands and wrists of the bearer of the ghastly trophies. Carver! He was panting as if he had been running, yet there was no moisture on his brow or face.

"In God's good mercy!" I exclaimed. "Where did you make that bag? Are any more close by?"

"Worse luck, no," he mumbled.

"I heard no gun-fire."

"Fetched one with the ax, one with a knife. They got their eternal come-uppance! I'm goin' to git enough to build a high monument over poor Sewell. Red devils will find that the most expensive job they ever did was when they killed him."

Then he was hurrying to the cabins. Once the nature of the trophies were discovered, women exclaimed shrilly and the men loudly cheered.

Borden ran from his cabin and talked with Carver, who turned and slowly came back to where I was standing. He was mumbling and muttering. I spoke to him twice before he sensed my presence. His voice was thick with passion as he explained:

"The fool says I can't heap up the heads I fetch in. . . . All right. I'll hang 'em by their hair in the trees around the cow-pen, where the scuts coming to steal cattle will see 'em."

I was interested in the cow-pen, almost a complete circle of fallen timber, where the cows were driven when it came time for them to drop their calves. I believed it could be made a secondary defense, if the settlement were attacked from the west. Ten good shots, under cover of the *chevaux-de-frise* should be able to work considerable mischief on any enemy.

Pinau emerged from Borden's big cabin and approached us, saying:

"M'sieur Carver, M'sieur Borden says you must come back and finish your report."

"You tell Borden I ain't no black man. You tell him if this settlement is too finicky about the forty heads I was planning to heap up, then it's too good for me."

"Now, now," soothingly coaxed the Frenchman. "He is much pleased that you killed the savages. But a pile of heads will scare the women and little children. That little warrior with the tiny bow and arrows—you don't want to frighten him, *m'sieur*?"

Carver shook his head, and said:

"Lord forbid I ever would go to scare a younker. Tell Borden I'll come back and report after I've tied these ugly faces high in the trees at the cow-pen."

"That is much wiser, I'm sure. I congratulate you on your good hunting. But can't you tell how many savages were in the band, and how close to us? M'sieur Borden should know the truth at once."

"I caught these two as they was coming down a trail. Treed myself, let both pass. Used the ax on the hindmost and knifed t'other. Prob'ly feeling the way for a big scout band."

"And of what tribe were they?"

"You oughter know by looking at the heads. No Shawnee wears his hair like that."

"Cherokees, of course," mumbled Pinau. "It is vitally important information. I fear we are in for a hard fight, my friends, now those two red nations have smoked a pipe with the French. The Long House, in self-defense, may also have accepted the enemy's calumet."

"I don't believe it," I stoutly spoke up. "The Senecas can hold the western door against any French forces, and the Mohawks can hold the eastern door. To break through either door would exhaust the French strength."

"A Daniel come to judgment! My young friend, you have a good head. But I fear you overrate the power of the Long House."

"Not when they hold the Abnaki on a leash," I retorted.

"Here comes a stranger, lickety-split," interrupted Carver. "Must be riding express."

Forthwith we joined the other settlers in streaming out to meet the newcomer. Borden, as usual, did the talking. I would rather have the cow-pen with Carver than listen to one who could not be so well informed as we were about conditions along the exposed border. As I came up, I was much flustered to hear Borden telling the stranger:

"This is Enoch Watson."

I did not know the man. As I was staring at him, he announced:

"Very good, Borden. Watson, I am a law officer. I come to arrest you and take you back to Norfolk for aiding and abetting the escape of a murderer, one Joseph Cantil, a bound-man."

My brain seemed to be benumbed. I never had looked for trouble in that quarter. I could only gape at the officer. Now he was afoot and reading a paper, which was only a jumble of legal terms to me. Pinau was the first to react to the visitor's demand. Addressing Borden, he asked:

"Does the Norfolk jurisdiction extend out here?"

Borden was perplexed for a moment; then he was saying:

"I expect the Colony of Virginia to defend me from all enemies. Then, I must lend a hand in aiding the Colonial authorities. I earnestly hope, Watson, that you can clear yourself of this charge."

"Cantil fled alone. I aided him none," I told him.

"I have but one duty to perform, Watson," said the officer. "To take you back. I shall be highly pleased if you are acquitted of all blame in this matter. Will you go without resistance?"

"I will make no resistance. But if you are off your guard I shall try to escape. Under no circumstances will I offer you any violence."

"I've taken in bigger men than you," was the grim reply. "Never lost a man yet. Damme! What's that?"

The onlookers roared in amusement at the man's startled expression. The little boy with the bow and blunt arrows had loosed a harmless shaft which knocked the officer's cocked hat off his head. The victim was very angry. He avowed:

"That brat should be soundly whipped."

"No, he will not be punished," I spoke up. "Why, you simpleton, he is barely more than a baby."

Whereat my young friend thanked me for interceding by kicking my shins, and shrilly announcing that he was a man and a mighty hunter of Indians.

"I desire to start back at once. Borden, in the name of the law I demand a fresh mount. Can you procure a horse, Watson? If you cannot, you'll have to walk at my stirrup, with a cord around your wrist."

"I'll see you damned first," I told him. "I'll do no walking."

"That would be rather barbarous," said Pinau. "The settlement will furnish him a horse. The whole business strikes me as being very silly. You can not have any proofs."

The officer doggedly replied:

"I have a paper which tells me to do a certain thing. I obey. If any mistake has been made, then the fault is with my betters. If Mr. Watson will promise not to attempt an escape we can make the trip in comfort. He will be hampered none by cords, or irons."

This was better than the talk about being tied to his stirrup. I realized he was but doing his duty. I assured him I would go peacefully with him and make no effort to escape. I had not much fear as to how the hearing would end. I was favorably known to many patrons of the tavern, and I believed I could count on their influence to set me free. But I did deplore the time I would lose in going and returning. The officer stared at the grisly trophies Carver was carrying, and decided, "I wish to start back at once. I don't like this frontier. If we can have food set before us, and a package of cold meat and bread to take with us, we'll speedily be off."

I feared lest Polly Mulholin would manhandle the officer to his grievous hurt. She loudly denounced Borden for permitting the officer to take me away, and fiercely harangued the settlers to similar effect. It would not have been difficult to render the man's errand futile; but he was doing his duty. I motioned for my champion to cease her tirade, and announced I was anxious to dispel any suspicions as to being concerned in Cantil's crime.

We ate and packed a parcel of food. Borden furnished me with a horse, which I promised I would return to him in good season. He did not share my optimism, but wished me good luck. Once more was I leaving the Grant, and this time on a more disagreeable business than that which had taken me down to the Great Kanawha.

I WAS somewhat surprised, as we traveled along the horse-path through the woods, to observe that my captor was developing a case of nerves. Frequently he would ask me, in a scarcely audible voice:

"What's that?"

I would tell him it was the *boom-boom* drumming of a ruffled grouse. The barking of a fox gave him a rare case of fidgets. At every natural forest sound he would demand:

"What's that?"

"Were you as nervous as this when you rode out here alone?" I asked.

"No. I think it was the talk of the men and women back there, and the sight of those heads. But I've mastered it."

We were some four or five miles from the settlement, when a muffled *boom-boom,* punctuated by a sharp definite note, prompted him to remark:

"Ruffled grouse are very thick around here. Why are you reining in?"

"That was gun-fire we heard," I told him. "Two trade muskets and a rifle. Indians fired two shots at a white man. He sent back one small bullet."

"Oh, see here! Come, come! How can you know that? If the noise was made by guns, why don't they shoot again?"

"They scarcely have had time to reload. Any reds who haven't fired, haven't seen anything to shoot at."

"Well, I suppose it's safe to ride on?"

"Not until we know which way the chase is heading."

"But there may not be any chase."

"The white man fired last."

The law-officer was afraid. Nor could I blame him. He was out of his environment. He must have suffered much, mentally, in making the journey to the Grant. It spoke well for his sense of duty. There can be no courage superior to that of a man who perseveres while experiencing great fear.

There came a faint, bubbling cry. My companion's brow was dotted with perspiration as he looked to me for an explanation. He said:

"Sounds like some one is hurt."

"It's the red man's hunting call. They're chasing some one. Hark!"

For a second time we heard the thin, whip-like *crack.*

"Sounds louder," mumbled my companion.

"The chase is heading this way," I explained.

With a grunt he wheeled his mount around and took the back track. I quickly overhauled him and asked him to explain his purpose.

"Back to the settlement!" he cried.

"I'll ride with you now over to the ridge. But if I return to the Grant I will not accompany you to Norfolk. I shall go on a scout into Indian country."

"Go to the devil if you so wish! For God's sake, can't we travel faster?"

I rode alongside of him and seized his hand and warned:

"Slow down! We have time to spare. If reckless riding brings you to a mishap, I shall go on."

This warning—or else sufficient time had elapsed to permit him to view our situation more sanely—resulted in his reining in to a moderate gait. Twice we heard muskets, and knew the savages must be hot on the trail of the white man. I feared the latter had met his fate, when the sharp voice of his gun sounded.

"He's making for the settlement," I told my companion. "Do you ride on and give the alarm, so the people may be well forted."

"What about you?"

"I'll bide here a bit, hoping to pick up the fugitive."

The man was out of his environment and was sore afraid. Yet he told me:

"I'll stay here with you. I never quit a prisoner yet!"

"If they break from the growth I can't defend you. You must take care of yourself. If you value your hair, ride on!"

He was genuinely a brave man. He was entirely out of his environment. He was horribly frightened. Yet he would have stayed by me, if not for a crescendo of horrible howling, which sounded to be dangerously close. Not until then did fear overwhelm him. With a husky, "Follow me," he was galloping along the Grant path. He barely had rounded the first bend in the path when a figure staggered from the bush on my left.

It was Carver. He walked unsteadily. I hopped from my saddle and seized his arm, and got him to the horse and commanded, "Up with you! I'm fresh. I'll run with a hand on your stirrup."

He was too breathless to talk. His lungs wheezed like leaky bellows. I slapped the horse over the withers and away we pounded. The wild discovery-cry announced when the reds entered the path. I did not look back. Carver half turned and carefully sighted his gun, once he had caught the motion of the horse, and fired. A sharp yelp announced a hit.

I passed him my gun and took his empty weapon just as we cleared the woods and entered a small interval where there was no cover. We crossed this and were ready by the time the first bounded into sight. He must have

sensed danger if he stuck to the open path, for he leaped aside and endeavored to dive into the nearest bush-growth. Carver shot him through the body and sent him spread-eagling most handsomely.

With a celerity I never saw surpassed my friend reloaded and neatly picked off the next red to show himself. The savages were paying a rare toll, even did they bag the two of us. Carver would have remained for more to run into range, but the yelling had ceased, and I warned him:

"They are cutting across through the growth! Ride! Do you want to get me killed?"

The thought of danger to me called him back to sanity. For ten minutes I ran my best, ran myself off my feet. Then Carver was on the ground and motioning for me to ride. I mounted and watched to see if he was able to keep up his long, flying strides, and quickly realized his legs had new life. The savages did not sight us again, and when we reached the Grant, Borden and twenty fighting men were coming to meet us and turn back the savages. The law officer had carried word of an impending Indian attack.

"Good hunting, Carver?" called out Borden.

"Done for six! Wish I could 'a got their heads."

"How many in the band?" asked Pinau.

"Small scout-band. A round score, I'd say. I opened fire as soon as I seen 'em."

"You were both rash and foolish," roared Michi. "If you'd been killed we'd been at their mercy."

"If he hadn't done as he did, they'd have bagged the law officer and me," I remarked.

The women, instead of entering their cabins, remained in the open; waiting to see what would develop. Possibly they were incited to run this risk by the spectacle of Polly Mulholin swaggering back and forth, with an ax over her shoulder. Her sleeves were rolled high, and revealed biceps a man might have been proud of. Several of the settlers scouted toward the Indians, and were gone so long we all were afraid.

There had been no gun-fire, but we were picturing them taken by surprise before any could discharge a weapon. Finally they came straggling back to report that all signs showed that the enemy had traveled west. While the probable significance of this retreating to the west was being discussed, we all became silent and stood as rigid as statues for a moment as a woman's wild, despairing scream split the air.

Borden barked orders for half the men to remain as they were while he led the others racing to the north side of the Grant to investigate the alarm.

I followed at his heels. Michi pounded along behind me, and ran well for one so obese. Before we had covered more than half the distance a woman came running to meet us—a frantic, terrorized creature, her eyes wide with awful horror. When we could calm her enough to be coherent she said over and over:

"They've took him! They've took him! Took him away on a hoss, with Borden's wild stallion a-chasing 'em!"

I recognized her as being the mother of the little boy who delighted to shoot blunt arrows at me. I told Borden:

"Tell that law officer I am after that stolen child. He can wait here till I return. Then I will go with him. Keep Carver here, very close. All he knows is to kill every savage he can line."

"I'd go gladly, if I could trust these people to act rationally while I was gone," said Borden.

I knew he meant it, but his place was on the Grant. Leaving him to explain the situation to the officer, I entered my cabin and secured an extra horn of powder, a double handful of small bullets, and was tearing a shirt up and dipping it in bacon fat for patches, when

Michi entered. He glanced out the two small windows as if to make sure there were no eavesdroppers, and told me:

"My young friend, you may venture far in your quest. A man of your name stands high with Desartre. I will wait. I will say nothing if you bring back the child."

"You speak in riddles," I said, yet wincing at his words.

"Truth will out, and work as hard to uncover all the facts in your humble case, as it will to establish much more important facts; such as the identity of the first men in America. You go on a noble errand. But be careful, very careful. Captain Pinau is suspicious."

"Then he can be damned. I can't control his thoughts."

"I should say not, my young friend. No more than Berachah Watson can control my thoughts."

He was beaming amiably, in his dull, heavy way, as he said this. I was sore afraid. Lowing his voice to a whisper he added:

"You and I may strike a bargain yet."

I feared him. He impressed me as being a very sinister force. I replied:

"No bargains. I am not to be blamed for a man's name. Now I must be off, and I only wish I had that stallion."

"That black beast would kill you as quickly as could a wild tiger."

"I never heard of a tame tiger. Within six seconds the stallion would be following me like a dog."

He tossed up his fat hands, and as he left me, I heard him mumbling:

"Mad! Quite mad! Like the other of his name."

BELIEVING that several Indians would hold back as a rear guard and, incidentally, ambush any pursuers, I did not press the chase too hotly at the first. Four miles from the Grant, and traveling due west, I came to where the band had split. All but four had swung back to the east, bound to even up the fearful score made by Carver. I was convinced that the child was with the band holding to the west.

One of these was mounted and, presumably, was carrying the child, as there were no small footprints in the marshy places where the retreating savages crossed. That they were intent on reaching their main camp was evidenced by the fact they were traveling at a run. I could find but one purpose in such haste: to rejoin the main body and urge an attack on the Grant in force.

Farther on, the trail told me other facts. They had paused to allow the horse to drink, and the mad stallion had intruded. The depth of the imprints, the length of his stride convinced me of that much. These laid down a trail the veriest novice could follow. At intervals the foot men endeavored to drive the brute back.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MEDICINE!

THERE can be no tragedy more heart-breaking than that of a stolen child. If one can imagine a degree of suffering, even beyond what we call "worst," it will be found when the young victim is fated to grow up a member of an alien and savage race.

I remembered when my uncle, home from a long voyage, served as one of several Massachusetts men to arrange with a band of an Algonquin tribe, in the western part of the Colony, to exchange an Indian boy for a white boy. The former was as wild and intractable the day he was handed over to his red parents as he was on the first day of his captivity.

In great contrast was the white child, under red tutelage for little more than a year. The latter seemed to have forgotten his parents and all which per-

tained to his white home. Several times he ran away, essaying to return to his red foster-parents.

Whether this phenomenon results from the greater freedom the Indians grant their male children, with practically no attempt at discipline, or whether the child of all races is at heart a barbarian during his first ten or twelve years of life, is something for very wise men to explain. And they have not, as yet, explained it.

There are many instances where captives were exchanged between the whites and the reds in New England. In almost every such case, the white boy, or girl, was loath to leave the red village, whereas the young red prisoner was as eager as ever to return to his own people. A boy in a red family, whether he be a native, or a captured white, never is corrected. This, for fear it might break his high spirit. And yet, even this suggestive explanation of the riddle does not satisfy me. It remains an enigma.

I realized all this as I pressed my quest. And the thought of the chubby bowman of the Grant growing up with a red mind was most horrible to contemplate.

I sensed a personal loss, from having served as a target several times for his concentrated stalking. I fancied I yet could feel the soft *plump* of the tiny arrows between my shoulder blades. I based my scant hopes of recovering him on the theory he would not be hurried back to the Big Kanawha, but would be held in some red camp until the entire red body had retreated.

Thanks to the persistence of the stallion, and the deep prints of his sturdy hoofs, I rapidly could follow the general direction taken by the child-stealers. I might be north, or south of the line of flight, yet I ever was sure of being on their trail. I was enabled to make excellent time, as the quarry had but the one purpose—to get back to the main body.

Had small bands branched off to seek isolated cabins, my quest would have been quite hopeless. Nor did the party I was seeking display any inclination to hide their trail. Perhaps it was believed the settlers were too much afraid to venture far from the Grant.

It was pleasing to find I had no need to hunt for the trail. It was plain as a bear's tracks. The stallion had blazed it for me. The brute was a ravening monster. I was confident the Indians had set the beast down as being crazy, just as humans can be thrown off their mental balance. And yet unless he jumped me from ambush and trampled out my life before I could talk to him, I had no fear of him.

I estimated I had traveled for four miles along the trail when I came to the foot of a gradual descent, and into the slot of a very ancient path. I could see a half acre of wet land, with thick swamp growth. Now I could see the stallion's tracks very clearly, where it had entered the reeds. But there were no tracks leading back to the trail. If the beast had cut in farther ahead, all was well. Had he, or should he, enter the trace behind me, then my errand was sadly handicapped. I walked along, hoping to find the tracks emerging from the growth and resuming the main trace.

I suddenly sensed a zone of peril. There was added to my discomfort the very disagreeable conviction I was being watched. Nor was it any red surveillance which was creating goose-flesh between my shoulders. It was something more immediate, something many times more dangerous. I stepped to a beech. And so sure was I that I had guessed correctly I lost no time in pushing my long gun up rest across two branches. Then with a spring I was gripping a stout limb and was chinning myself over it when the attack was made.

It was something more than a rushing forth from cover. It was an explosion of unreasoning satanic rage. The fringe on my hunting shirt was ripped off just

as I secured a stout purchase on a higher limb. I rested on my stomach across two, not over stout limbs, and stared down into the fiery eyes of the black demon. He was working himself into a lather as he reared and impotently struck at me, and clashed his ferocious grinders against the empty air.

Having escaped the onslaught I lost all fear. I talked to him in wheedling, falsetto voice, which I would use in interesting a kitten, or a mother cat. Such an insignificant medium of appeal to so huge and devilishly cunning bulk might impress one as being not only futile but also idiotic. However I had often experimented with bulls and stallions back home and had won more than a neighborhood reputation for being a "tamer of the wild."

My captor continued rearing his height, but his jaws were no longer snapping the foliage. I told him what a good fellow he was, although he could have had small notion what a Christian meant by that index. The flattened ears soon were pricking forward; and when he whinnied, as if seeking more light, I believed the battle to be won. I waited until he was in a desirable position, then dropped astride of him, leaving the long gun in the tree.

He reacted by giving a mighty bound. Yet he did not attempt to turn his magnificent head and spoil one of my legs. I gently scratched back of his ears, and he came to a standstill. When I removed my hand he tossed his head impatiently and demanded more scratching. I knew I had won. By knee-pressure alone I guided him under the beech and sharply told him to be good. He quivered and trembled a trifle when I rose on my knees, then to my feet and recovered my gun. Then I was dropping astride, and he was pretending to nip my legs. I discovered, as I had expected, that the line of least resistance with him would be to pursue the Indians and the child riding on the gelding. If the stallion could not meet with a mare, his next idea of happiness was to batter and perhaps murder a gelding.

I had won a victory, but there was a penalty. I no longer could practice cunning in approaching any Indian night-camp. My mount ran like the black devil I feared he was, and he was, and it was for me to recline low on his back and escape overhanging limbs. I had won a regal friend. Before two days in my possession he would willingly brave hell's fire to reach my side.

He seemed to have lost much of his mad lust to tear through the night, and I decided the boy had been shifted over to a brave riding the gelding, while the rider of the mare had turned into a side trail of some lonely prowling. Doubtless the man on his back was the one line of thought he was following.

By instinct he must have been following the line of least resistance, for the black growth was very dark. Yet he took the turns in the old Indian trace at a speed which kept me swallowing convulsively and lying as flat as possible, with my head low on his powerful neck.

Before I realized the peril, he was rounding a bend and making for a campfire. I glimpsed figures in silhouette against the flames, performing some ceremonial dance. I mightily endeavored to hold my brute back, even riding so far forward as to grip his ears. But he scented the gelding. The one desire in his life, the one thing he must do, was to kill that neutral character. There was a flash in which I glimpsed figures leaping about in the firelight, and then they plunged into the timber. The black stallion must have appeared to them as being the most powerful of their vicious gods, coming to take toll on four feet.

The gelding was quick to sense his danger, and fear gave him strength he otherwise never would have possessed. He broke his fastenings and crashed into the woods. Only by reaching forward and closing my new pet's red nostrils did

I manage to bring him to a quivering standstill. Even that treatment scarcely would have sufficed had the gelding remained in sight.

I called for the Indians to show themselves. The Bird Woman and Joe Cantil appeared, and the former uttered a little cry which fetched in the savages. Every warrior patted his lips, where a white man would have exclaimed aloud to express his amazement.

Affecting not to recognize Cantil, I called out:

"Who is the leader here?" With a wink and a grin he answered:

"So long as it's you, and not the devil, and all my red brothers are behind, or up trees, I might say I am in command."

"Joe. Tell your hidden friends that I have taken the evil out of his heart so long as we are here, but that I can put it back quickly. He's a ghost horse. If I should leave him it will be a hard winter for the Shawnee and all allied tribes."

Joe replied:

"My wife will tell them that, or thereabouts. She can talk with any an' all Injuns. But, my master of the *Walter Raleigh—*"

"Change that," I curtly cut in.

"My good friend, always—" and I knew he meant it— "Nancy Jess will only do what she believes is right. I—I will cheerfully commit murders to help you along."

"I am asking no favors from Nancy Jess. I want her to tell these savages in the open and those still in the bush that very thing. And I want her to know I am seeking no favors."

Cantil stared at me shrewdly, and said:

"I'm on to your little game. You want the younker back."

"You read my mind. Produce him."

By this time an almost complete circle of savages silently had been formed.

"Not so fast," murmured Cantil. "I'm medicine with this band. But I don't know if my medicine is strong enough to make them give up this youngster. Every warrior wants to adopt him. If there's a brave in this camp he hasn't nailed with one of his arrers, it's simply along of him being out of shafts. We've got a big chief 'round here somewhere. Lad nearly put out his right eye. Chief says he will adopt him."

My heart sank as I murmured:

"Of course he is all-powerful here."

"Like hell he is!" was the hot reply. "Biggest medicine in all the timber twixt here and that far-away Mississippi River, is Nancy Jess."

"Maybe she will aid me."

As I spoke I glanced around, but the Bird Woman had vanished. But another had entered the scene on my immediate right. He wore many silver beads and a necklace of silver coins, beaten very thin. I rightly assumed this was the chief. He was staring at me and the stallion. Doubtless his men had told him how they had been chased by a demon horse. One eye was covered by a strip of trade cloth—probably one of the targets my young friend of the bow had scored. My mount twisted his head and pretended to bite at my foot. I thrust my foot well forward, and he held it between his jaws, but hurt it none.

"Where's the lad, Joe?" I called out.

"With Nancy, who is fetching him along. Here's the young rip. Hi, laddie! Not at the poor old hossie!" Cantil cried.

"Poor old hossie," murmured the child. And thereat he shifted his position and released the blunt-headed arrow that left a faint red disk on Cantil's throat.

"I hope to Gawd you'll take him away!" sighed my friend. "But if Nancy is willing, the chief mayn't be."

"I came here to get him and take him back to his distracted mother. Call the Indians into the open and explain that this is a ghost stallion, that he will never rest easy until his little master is returned to the settlement. When the ghost horse dies and goes on to the Ever

Darkening Land his spirit will be at every camp-fire this band of Shawnee light."

THE warriors, like ghosts, almost completed a circle. They kept the width of the cleared space between them and my charger. The chief was an exception. He was on my immediate right, his eyes glaring at the stallion, then glowing approvingly as he watched the little prisoner.

The child, now on his stomach, his eyes wide and revealing his intentions, even as the glistening eyes of a puppy gives warning of his felonious designs on moccasin, or shoe, was pushing himself slowly ahead by digging his toes into the ground. He gave the suggestion of stalking big game. I could hear the necklace of beaten silver coins musically tinkle as the chief shifted his position to watch the lad. His distended eyes, his grunt of admiration for the youngster's technique, showed his deep sympathy with the toddler.

I suddenly discovered I was watching an exciting bit of drama, all done in pantomime. All were silent, and seemed to be holding their breath. Even the stallion had ceased his nervous treading and with ears pricked forward was watching this new atom of humanity. In waiting to witness a death-struggle between Titans, the red men scarcely could have been more intent.

The child was working his way to a small bush, scarcely high enough to hide his curly head. The chief's eyes glistened with appreciation. He seemed to be holding his breath.

On the chief's right, two warriors distant, sat a very fat savage, who obviously had stuffed himself with meat, and was now asleep. The warriors looking over or through the thin cover, saw the little bow slowly being drawn to its utmost extent. Then the mighty hunter before the Lord rolled on his left side and sent the shaft to hit the fat, drowsy warrior on the nose.

Many who live along the seashore and know but little about the red man believe in the fallacy that the Indian never laughs. Could they have seen the fat man bouncing into the air, and have heard him *yowl* like a tree-cat; and could they have heard the wild cachinnations of the delighted circle, they would realize that the red man has a decided sense of humor.

The chief's eyes were filled with tears, and his figure was shaking. I softly told the youngster:

"Baby, you did a poor service for yourself."

"No baby. Man!" he corrected, and scowled at me.

"Want to ride on the big hossy through the woods and see your mother?"

This appealed to him. At once he was trotting over to the stallion, whose ears were back, whose eyes were showing much white. I must proclaim the brute to be dangerous, and, thereby, admit I had not fully conquered him. Or, I must see to it that the lad must play out his rôle as a mighty warrior. The stallion's ears were back, and showing much white. I yawned, and extended my arms and stroked a leg, and in a syrupy voice told him what a wonderful fellow he was.

The ears pricked forward, and he lowered his head and stared down curiously at the mite now standing between his front legs and striving to bring his bow into position that he might bag real game. The smack of even a small, blunt-headed arrow would be something the stallion would not understand. I casually stretched forth a hand, and told him he must not hurt his big hossy.

It gave him an idea of new adventuring. He crawled between the stallion's legs, tried to stand erect, and bumped his head. The stallion winced, yet kept his ear cocked as if to catch my mumbling of silly nothings.

Finally the young man finished his explorations; and the red men again patted their lips in amazement at the lad's medicine. I shifted the lad to the stallion's back. This was not resented. Perhaps the small hands clawing into the mane were faintly reminiscent of a currycomb.

Cantil huskily called out:

"You're bigger medicine than I be. That black devil has raised hell with this band on two different times. They tried to kill him. Now they believe he is a ghost hoss and that no arrer, or bullet, can hurt him."

"I'm taking the child back to the Grant. Keep them from chasing me, if you can."

"That's a tall order."

"Say that the little chief's medicine sends him home. That he is going on the medicine horse. Tell the chief the boy will come to see him some day, riding on a white horse."

"Enoch, I have no medicine here," replied Cantil. "They like me along of my red hair. It is Nancy who is the medicine."

"Why, then! Call her to make the talk."

He groaned softly and turned his head, so the savages might see his bleak face. He murmured:

"Nancy Jess wants a male child. An Indian woman told her she never would have one. She believes it. She wants this boy."

"She will stop me from taking him away?" I mumbled. My heart was bleak at the thought of having lost, when the game was all but won.

"No. But the chief may stop the boy's going if she doesn't make a talk."

"Hush! The chief speaks."

After the chief had harangued for several minutes, Cantil curtly informed me:

"Chief offers three squaws, five horses and a bale of buffalo-robes to be divided among the men here if he can have the boy."

"Tell him the spirit horse came for the boy. If he does not carry him away he will come again, and will then be a death horse to all who see him."

While Cantil was repeating my threat I mounted, with the child before me. Cantil was still talking. I had won, or lost. The sooner I rode the better my chances would be to take the lad through the darkness and down the dark trail. The stallion whipped his head around, bared his teeth and grabbed my foot.

The chief's eyes glistened with hope. I murmured some nonsense, and scratched behind the brute's ears. He released my foot, unhurt. The chief drew his blanket over his head and walked away from the firelight and into the darkness. I chirruped to the black and headed for the narrow trail. He was away like a bolt, and our exit was most dramatic. But almost instantly he had settled down to a slow pace, intelligently feeling his way until he had lost the fire glare from his eyes.

Back in the red camp there sounded the confusion of several voices, shouting, or arguing. But there were no signs of pursuit. My brute was most capable of picking his path even at night. He had run wild for much of the season. He drifted along, an ebon form in almost ebon darkness, for several miles. Then we were following the path through an area where the wind had taken much toll. I glimpsed the stars and knew our course was direct enough, provided the Indians did not give pursuit and drive us from it.

The boy was sleepy. He murmured:

"Doggies howl."

But I and the stallion knew the voices to be the hunting call of a wolf pack. With a faint snort he quickened his pace, and when we reached a natural clearing he crossed the grassy interval like a black meteor.

I am ashamed to confess I lost my

sense of direction once we entered the long dark aisle of ancient timber. When we emerged into the moonlight and I could glimpse the surrounding country, although for a bit it was a nebulous, unreal land, I quickly located myself, and the unreal became real. The stallion now knew the way as we had entered the main trace to the Grant. He lengthened his stride and seemed to be hurtling himself along. And the child slept in my arms.

When we came to the outposts they scarcely had challenged us before we were by them and racing for the candlelight of the cabins. I brought my steed down to a walk, and the first person to recognize me was Polly Mulholin.

"Catch the young hunter," I called to her, and forthwith tossed the little lad into her outstretched arms. There came a scream from the distracted mother and she snatched the child from the friendly bosom and cuddled him close, and stared wildly at me as if fearing I would take him away.

"*Mon Dieu!*" shrilly exclaimed Pinau's voice. "I don't know how you did it, but it is big medicine. Two coups you have counted! The child and that black devil."

"He's a good devil now," I replied. "When one understands horses, and can convince a horse he is a friend, there will be no trouble."

Then I called aloud so all might hear, and explained that the stallion was mine, by right of conquest, that he would harm no one, if they did not assault him with clubs and the like; and that I wanted all settlers to leave him alone.

Michi came bobbing along, huskily exclaiming:

"Two miracles! The child and the wild horse!"

"Three miracles," corrected Pinau's metallic voice. "It will be interesting to learn how you managed to bring the child back. The savages had him, I assume."

"Certainly they had him. They accepted him as a medicine child. He was potting them with his bow and arrow when my medicine nag took me into the firelight of their night camp."

"But, is it not a bit peculiar they should let you ride off with the young prisoner and such a noble beast as that stallion?"

"Your medicine, my young friend, must have been very strong," mused Michi. "But he can explain."

"Nothing will be explained to you two men," I retorted. "Borden is welcome to all the details. I did what I started to do. Recover the child uninjured. I saw no others from this settlement chasing a band of savages in the dark and then riding into the firelight and fetching the boy back. Captain Pinau and Herr Michi, if you are trying to tell these settlers that I have influence with the savages because they feel friendly toward me, you are doing me a great injustice and doing me a great evil. I wish to God I did have much influence with them. If so, I would have them far in the South, or far down the Ohio, and all their French masters along with them."

"That's talk with real guts in it," bellowed Polly Mulholin. "I don't see as you two men done much for the settlement."

"Woman, keep your place," Michi heavily advised.

"I'm always in my place. I'm where I'm needed. I'm wondering why Ben Borden gives you two a cabin and food. For doin' nothin', I suppose."

Pinau swung away. I regretted the woman's harsh speech. For Pinau paid liberally for any work done for him on the Grant, and, along with Michi, had aided me in getting west of the ridge. I shook the woman's arm gently and whispered:

"No rough talk, Polly. If at times they are suspicious, it always is in the interest of all the settlers."

I walked away to find the stallion, although I suspected he had retired to his old lair, the cow-pen for the night. I found him cropping grass beside the cabin where the rescued child was now soundly sleeping. I caressed his arched neck, and he pretended to nibble my long hair. I called him to come to my cabin, and stay there for the night. He started after me, and then turned back, perhaps to be near the sleeping child, whose medicine must have been very strong.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DANGER FROM THE WEST

THE proximity of the enemy's scout band seemed to unnerve the settlers, more than would, I believed, an attack in force. It was the old story of anticipation being worse than the truth. It was useless for Carver, who seemed to range the woods at will and without any hindrance, to insist that only small scout-bands were in the surrounding growth. Nor did the man's repeated goings and returnings at will give the people of the Grant any feeling of assurance.

He was set apart, much as is a crazy man who fails to fit in with the orderly development of organized society. He was irrational, even in his quest for vengeance. His major thought was not for the safety of the living, but for reprisal for the slain. Yet none would fight more sturdily for the common objective, the defense of the Grant. He was an oddity, with a blind man's luck.

The Grant's attitude in his case, to an outlander would have appeared to be eccentric. Whereas the death of a red marauder should have been hailed with thanksgiving, many of the cabin men frowned on his savage reconnoiterings. It was useless to combat this fallacy and argue that the Indians would be less given to raiding wherever a reckless nemesis was bound to retaliate with bloody toll. More than one settler maintained:

"If he leaves 'em be, mayhap they'll leave us be." As if the red savages ever overlooked an easy victim!

Fear had clamped a heavy hand down on every cabin roof. Settlers were dreading reprisals for each of the gruesome heads Carver had brought in and hung on high branches as so many warnings for the red tribes to keep away. It was a strange process of reasoning, this. It was much as saying, "Make them afraid of you and they will attack you." As if the policy of non-resistance ever appealed to any red tribe in North America!

The Quakers in Pennsylvania had adopted much of this policy; and it was death to advance beyond the Susquehanna River, where John Harris was endeavoring to maintain a ferry.

We held a general council one evening shortly after I returned with the little boy. Carver was the first to harangue the circle of home-makers. He insisted there were only small scout bands in the surrounding woods, and he added:

"Let them go back and report heavy losses and they'll trouble us no more, but will look for easier meat. If these critters, now hanging 'round this Grant ain't turned back, we'll have a cloud of 'em down on us an' in such numbers we can't turn 'em back."

"That's the history of New England," I spoke up.

Pinau replied, saying:

"New York Colony has peace. It lives in friendship with the Iroquois. There is no place in America where settlers are as safe as they are under the eaves of the Long House. Settlers from Pennsylvania know this and are flocking in there to sleep sound of nights. Not only do the Iroquois leave them alone, but they won't allow the Delaware, or Southern tribes to disturb them. We should build

a like confidence between us and the Shawnee."

"It never worked in Massachusetts," I replied. "Nor in the District of Maine, or in the New Hampshire grants. The Iroquois do not depend on game alone. They have wonderful orchards and vegetable gardens. They hold the greater part of the Colony. Let settlers trespass on their lands and then see how sound of nights they will sleep."

Carver insisted that the red and white races never would live in peace, side by side. Not without logic he added:

"Injuns live on game. Takes half a dozen square miles to feed one red hunter. Iroquois be different. They raise much corn, beans, squash, and the like. No white folks can go hunting or do any planting in the Long House. Trouble will come from them yet. If these critters snuffling 'round us now ain't turned back with a heavy loss there won't be no corn planted west of the Blue Ridge till folks with more guts come and take up land and hold it."

The majority of the settlers were afraid of a general war, however. One man was applauded because he insisted:

"When they know we'll leave them be, they'll leave us be. Carver, you lost a friend. It's too bad. But you haven't any right to drag us all into a general slaughter so's you can kill some more Injuns."

"They run when they know I'm on their track," growled Carver.

Another peace-man spoke, saying:

"We be surrounded by a solid ring of Cherokees an' Shawnees. Why bait 'em to attack us in force?"

I felt bound also to remind the anxious men and women:

"It's hardly a case of settlers and Indians alone. Huge grants of land are being handed out. The Indian sees himself losing his old hunting grounds. They're bound to fight to the death. If we stay this side of the ridge we must fight."

CARVER leaped to his feet as I finished, and added:

"This ain't a war just 'twixt us and the red savages. It's a war between England and France as to who will own this country. The French won't leave the Injuns alone. They give 'em guns and powder. They give 'em presents for all English scalps they take back. French hold the Ohio country along of profits from the fur trade. Their homes be up in Canada. They don't want any English settlements west of the Blue Ridge. Settlements scare game away, or our trappers git it. We be fighting the French as well as the Injuns. Lick the Injuns and you've licked the French. It's either that or be gobbled up by the French. Take your choice."

"This little settlement can't fight a army of Cherokees and Shawnees," persisted the man of peace.

"You talk like a fool," retorted Carver. "Cherokees are being scared back home by the Raven Mockers. Shawnees can't make us budge, if they ain't helped by French soldiers. And who's scared of the French? They ain't got enough men down here to take this stout place if every man fights his bigness."

"Fight the bloody devils!" hoarsely shouted Polly Mulholin.

"I wish they'd go away and leave us alone," tearfully spoke up the mother of the little boy.

"That's what we all are wishing," said Pinau. "Perhaps if Carver would call a halt to his indiscriminate killings we might make peace terms with them. Perhaps they are trying to make such terms with us. But if every man they send to this settlement is to lose his head we won't make any progress toward peace."

But Polly Mulholin would have none of such talk. She came to her feet, and her deep, masculine voice carried far as she called out:

"Listen to me! If we don't fight, what will we do? Go back over the Ridge?

The red devils be hoping we try that. Then they can pick us off a few at a time. We won't see 'em, but we'll catch their arrers and bullets. You can all go, but I stick to my cabin rights. I won't quit raising corn just so's some red nagers can have more land to hunt deer in. It's the first property I ever owned, and auld Satan hisself can't make me budge from it. All of ye can go back to the coast. I stick here. They'll probably get me, but they'll know they've had a fight!"

"Woman, don't defy the Almighty," warned a somber voice.

"I ben't!" cried the amazon. "But I be defying auld Satan."

Borden, perhaps afraid lest his settlement be stampeded back to the shore, now intervened, saying:

"There is no question but what this settlement will persist. It's just a question as to what's the best to do. What think you, Captain Pinau?"

Pinau stood and swept his dark eyes over the anxious assemblage and slowly replied:

"I'm for defense, to the last man. But I'm no one to invite trouble. Governor Shirly, of Masachusetts has relied on my judgment in the past. I fancy I have done some good work for the New York Colony. If I have, it's because I look before I leap. I do not think it's wise to draw the savages' attention to us. No particular hatred has been shown toward us yet. They picked up a child, but readily gave him back to young M'sieur Watson. If M'sieur Carver's vendetta against the red man is arousing a great deal of hate, and is making them determined to wipe us out, I'd say it is better for him to keep quiet for a while. Until, at the least, we know for a surety that the Cherokees have returned to their country. Also, until we know what is the strength of the mixed Shawnee-French force down on the Big Kanawha."

"Master Watson has told us all that!" exploded an Irishman.

"He has told us what he thinks," mused Pinau. "But several of us find discrepancies, contradictions, if you please, in his report."

"The young man has told us what he found in the West," slowly remarked Michi. "Each man can weigh it according to his liking. He reported finding Cherokees, Shawnee and a French force. Our scouts have supplied proof which seems to bear him out in his report. I accept his talk as being very correct."

"There are several things which the young man has not explained," reminded Pinau. "M'sieur Borden will tell you we are gravely disturbed by what he has failed to report."

"Neither you, nor Borden, or any other man alive can place a finger on any statement of mine which warrants you in saying that!" I loudly called out.

"Then I apologize, M'sieur Watson," said Pinau. "Perhaps I should have said that the manner of your escape is not very clear."

"La-la-la, mister!" exploded Polly Mulholin. "Then your head is as thick as your name is French. The young man told us everything. He came back. He had fights with the red devils. Since then he's fetched back a stolen child.

"This man Watson is wanted in Norfolk on the charge of aiding and abetting one Joe Cantil, a murderer, to escape," spoke up the law officer. "The officials of Charles City Shire also want to examine him in connection with the escape of a certain woman, charged with being a witch."

This made me exceedingly angry. It was the first time the Charles City authorities had been mentioned. I called back at him:

"You have no authority to speak for the Charles City officials. I started with you once for Norfolk, but you preferred to turn and race back to the cover of this Grant. On that return ride I saved

your life from the Indians. I never will ride again as your prisoner and protector. If the Bird Woman hadn't escaped from the Charles City gaol all on this Grant would be prisoners, or dead, by this time."

"You talk too fast and too loud," grumbled Borden. "It isn't for you to say how far a sheriff's writ shall run in this Colony, or how hard we would have fought if faced with dire peril. Just now we are concerned with what is best to do for the defense of this settlement."

"Only one thing you can do," I told him. "Stick here and fight it out."

HE NODDED approval, and in a more affable voice said:

"Let your faults east of the Ridge be what they may; your advice rides with mine. Now, you people, for the last time: all of you who wish to cross the ridge are welcome to risk that faring. But those who go will leave their cabin rights behind them. No settler can hold property on this Grant who is unwilling to defend it. I am staying here."

Michi came to his feet with much elasticity and loudly announced, "Herr Borden, I will go into the forest and learn why these savages hate us. If they have gone away I will learn that."

"Herr Michi, you speak from ignorance," coldly said Pinau. "They would have you skewered with burning splinters before you could make yourself understood."

Michi subsided, his broad face drawn down most lugubriously.

"All this talk is much beside the question," impatiently said Borden. "Once for all it must be decided who wish to remain here and dare the Indians to do their worst. And who will throw up their rights and travel back to the coast."

He stared around the big half circle. The tense silence which followed was punctuated by a shrill ululating cry from the western woods. A shiver of dread was experienced by many, including myself. None had any apeptite to take the eastern path. Carver came noiselessly to his feet and made for the forest.

"He should remain here," spoke up Pinau.

"He wouldn't stay, even if I commanded it," grumbled Borden. "And he's too valuable a scout to send off the Grant."

We slowly broke up into small groups. More than a few were afraid. Nor could one blame them. Savages' signaling to each other close to an isolated settlement is apt to be disquieting to the strongest nerves. A man was sent to see that the sentinels were at their posts on the outskirts of the Grant. Various small groups formed to give expression to what backwardness had held them back from an open discussion. Some of the men, perhaps emboldened by fear of the savages, expressed disapproval of Pinau and Michi. This I deduced from a strong conviction that Borden was influenced by the couple's views on various matters.

Polly Mulholin, although a novice in border ways, had absorbed much knowledge of frontier perils from listening to the scouts. She shrewdly prophesied: "We've whipped 'em in small parcels. It will be easier to lick 'em in a stand-up fight."

I readily agreed with her, but always providing the red men would stand up and fight. Could the settlement escape a surprise attack in force the stubbornness of the pioneers would turn the red horde back. A young man, entirely ignorant of forest warfare, boasted:

"We can kill a dozen of them where they kill one of us. See what Carver's done."

"False confidence has wrecked many an undertaking," I reminded the speaker. "We are not all Carvers. Thus far the Indians have taken a greater toll than have the whites. This because they

kill children and women as well as men. But the reds must lose in the end."

Michi came up and earnestly prophesied:

"When the blow falls it will be on the west side. If we can post a band of men in the cow-pen there will be but little fighting here among the cabins."

Some of the settlers smiled, but I believed the German had the right of it.

Before there could be any argument on that point a red scout's cry rang out. It sounded very close to the cabins. The men were instantly eager to sift into the black woods and seek to make a kill.

"It's a decoy," Pinau warned. "The man is close by, but there are others with him."

Hardly had he spoken when a gun exploded and was followed by a bubbling attempt at a war-cry. The group was dumb for a moment, then I was saying:

"Carver's gun! I can tell its voice in a hundred."

As if to testify to the astuteness of my ears we heard the raucous defiance of our men. The woman whose little boy had been captured and recovered, and who lived on the west side of the settlement, loudly called her lad by name in a strident voice. Then she was tucking up her skirts and was running toward her cabin. I was alongside of her in three bounds and was demanding:

"Where is the boy?"

"He was at my side a short time ago. God keep him from the woods!"

I raced ahead of her and was in time to overtake the youngster as he was running through the darkness and making for the cow-pen, his tiny bow and arrow ready for immediate service. I swept him up and hastened back and met his half-crazed mother. I told her:

"Take my cabin. Keep away from your cabin. Stay in my cabin until this is settled."

To the lad I said:

"I love the big hossie."

"Young man, you love the big horse?"

Yet he was chagrined that I had interrupted his scouting; and he squirmed like a fish to escape.

"If you go into the woods I will drive the big horse away and you never will see him again."

With mother and child locked in my stout cabin I spread my blanket at the back of the house and slept soundly until the first morning light aroused me.

OTHERS were up before me, however, as breakfast smokes were rising from several cabins. When I came to my feet I missed the gelding, which had been tethered a few rods from my house. The rope had been removed from the picket pin. Impelled by instinct I turned to my cabin. No Indian had taken the gelding, for was not I alive? The door was unbarred and slightly ajar. A glance showed me it was empty.

A thundering of hoofs brought me outside again and in time to confront the stallion. He essayed to dodge by me, but I was desperate and managed to catch him by the mane, but nearly at the expense of dropping my gun. The next moment I was on his broad back, but had no control of him. I could have reached forward and gripped his nose and shut off his wind, but it was obvious he had an idea while I had none.

He swept out of the clearing, the big brute swinging like a meteor into the eastern trace. Within a quarter of a mile I was sighting the frightened gelding and was seeing the little boy and his mother perched on the creature's back.

I yelled a warning. The woman glanced back and slid to the ground, dragging her child after her. The gelding knew death was on his trail and broke into the growth. I thundered up, and by pinching the beast's nostrils brought him to a quivering standstill. At that, I'm convinced he would have crashed after the gelding if not for the child. I

picked up the boy and placed him on the stallion's back, and then took time to lower on the woman. My anger vanished as I beheld the terror in her wide eyes.

"Were you crazy?" I asked.

"A voice told me to flee!" she wailed.

"Then it was a French voice. Death lies ahead on this eastern trail. We will go back."

The stallion minced back and forth, torn by his two desires: to find and exterminate the gelding, and to remain with his young master.

"I had a dream," wailed the woman. "I saw this place attacked. Many were killed. White men came and fought with the Injuns against us. Mister Carver was killed just as the fighting ended. Then the voice woke me up. I want to git back where folks live in peace."

"Your dream was sending you and your son to death, not to peace."

The lad interrupted my scolding by climbing out on the stallion's neck, whereat the beast slowly lowered his head and allowed his rider to slide gently to the ground. I was picking the boy up when the stallion snorted with rage and raced like a black streak up the trace. The gelding foolishly had broken from cover.

I whistled shrill and peremptorily. The big black gave no heed, for the lust to kill was in his blood. Then came the climax, one I had not dreamed of—a burst of gunfire. The gelding dropped, dead. Lead whistled close to my head. I yelled for the woman and child to run for the clearing and knew even while crying out, that such a retreat would avail the poor victims nothing.

The stallion pivoted and raced back toward us. The brute was intelligent enough to know we were in danger, or else he desired to feel the boy clutching his mane. He slowed down, and it required but a second to toss the woman astride and pass up the child and to slap the brute's satin flank as a signal for him to be off.

As the stallion made back for the clearing I took to the growth beside the trace and repeatedly sounded the discovery cry. I heard it repeated in the south, and knew that Carver and I had the savages between us. The gun-fire had instantly brought the settlers on the *qui vive,* and now men appeared in the trace.

I showed myself and gestured for them to keep back. The Indians must have spotted the settlers as quickly as had I, for no guns were fired at me.

When I reached the settlers I reported:

"Indians in the eastern trace! Keep back here! Carver is out. He'll report their strength. I think it's only a scout band. It may be a decoy, to keep us busy while they attack on the west side. Tell the women to cabin themselves." Then to the distracted widow, "Go to my cabin. Keep the boy inside."

The woman hysterically called out:

"I dreamed they was on our backs! God curse 'em an' pity us!"

"You done well, Watson, to locate the pesky critters," called out an aged man.

"Thank the gelding. They heard him pounding up the trace and must have believed he had a rider. They killed the poor brute before making sure."

The settlers were now out in force. Borden was barking orders, sending groups to all sides of the Grant. I called to him and told him a scout-band had closed the trace to the east.

"Who cares?" he shouted. "No one is traveling that way." The ancient man who had complimented me for happening to discover the presence of the enemy, again called out in his thin treble, "Look! Look! Must be the devil, hisself!"

HE was pointing to the south where the forest had not yet succeeded in conquering a glassy stretch of meadow land. I beheld a phenomenon. A buffalo was walking on his hind-legs in the growth, and was making derisive gestures at us. Three of the settlers blazed away, but did him no damage. I called out for them to desist from wasting gunpowder. Their muskets would not carry that distance with any degree of accuracy. But my long gun would. I warned the men to stand to one side as I was about to shoot. Even as I spoke the situation was entering another phase. A second figure darted from the growth to take the stage with the first performer. The newcomer was wearing the scalp of a tree-cat. He yowled hideously, like the beast he represented, and forthwith seized the first masquerader by the horns and gave the grotesque head a violent twist, leaving the huge masque upside down. Scarcely had we witnessed this than we were catching the glitter of sunlight on a long blade that rose and fell twice.

As there arose a muffled death-cry the victor was discarding his disguise and with a defiant yell came bounding toward us. He was Carver.

Panting heavily he threw his gun on the ground, and bitterly complained:

"Red scouts too close, or I'd fetched along with me that gay buffler head, and his own head under it, damn him! It it wa'n't for that writin' I'd got two or three more."

"But you got the man you went after," I consoled. "What do you mean by 'a writing'?"

He drew me to one side, his anger fading, his brown face revealing only bewilderment. In a whisper he told me:

"A warnin', or a threat. Pinned to a tree near the cow-pen. I can't figger out what it means. Plain enough to read, too."

The settlers now were taking their posts on all sides of the Grant. The little boy was telling the women much that was apocryphal. Carver glanced about and then produced from under his hunting shirt a piece of bark. It contained five words, neatly printed with a piece of charcoal. It read:

DEATH COMES FROM THE WEST.

In minute letters in one corner were the two words: *Loch Lomond.*

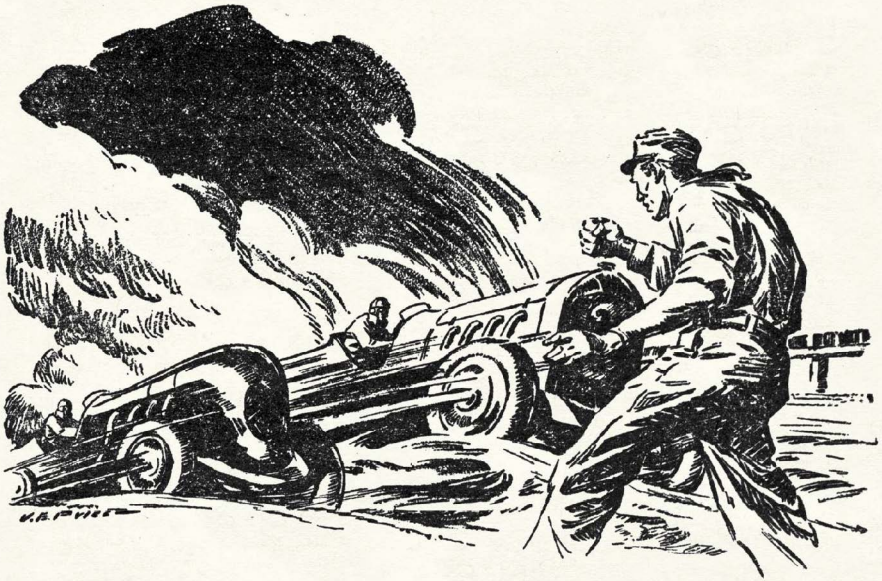
(TO BE CONCLUDED)

BIG FISH

LARGEST of all true fish is the whale shark. The prize whale shark was caught in June of 1912 off Knight's Key, Florida—38 feet long. Girth, 18 feet. Another whale shark found near Cuba had 6,000 teeth of various kinds. They don't go after people, though. Its heart weighed 43 pounds, liver 900 pounds. The skin of the Cuban monster, two inches thick, weighed around a ton.

Several whale sharks have been caught by getting stuck on the prows of ships. When there are no scales big enough to weigh them, the fisherman takes the length in inches, multiplies it by the girth squared in inches, and divides by 800. This trick gives the weight. Some fishermen add a ton or so in case they might be wrong.

—J. W. Holden.



SLOW ENOUGH

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

ROOSTER DULANE kicked the green car off the corner with a petulant throttle foot. With diminishing speed he rolled toward the pits.

There Fence Gordon, his forehead like a washboard, was burning cigarettes. Fence was feeling low. Hastily he thrust his discouraging stop-watch, sole souvenir of more prosperous days, into his pocket. He looked long at the speed-worn car approaching on the dirt straightaway and sighed.

"I'm on my way out of the racing game—even as an owner who does his driving behind the rail in the pits," he told himself.

The diminutive Rooster Dulane threw his crash helmet on the grass and brandished a fist about as hard and small as a pinion gear in the face of the worried young owner.

"So you think a man like me is goin' to wheel a clunker like that tomorrow against Bill Worth and the rest of them hot babies, do you?" he rasped.

"It needs tearing down but I haven't had the cash, Rooster," Gordon apologized.

"Well, you can put a body on it an' sell it to the iceman, you featherfoot! Or roll it yourself—it'll be plenty fast enough for you!"

"Now wait a minute, Rooster," Gordon demurred. "I'll admit that I never got the checkered flag first. But it was the fences that fixed me, not the chills."

Rooster ignored the point. He was wild. He waved his fists. He glared at the empty grandstand that would be filled tomorrow and at the stretches and turns of the half-mile dirt track.

"A swell, hard-hittin', game driver like me an' no car!" he raged. "Me sittin'

in the stands—or lettin' 'em breeze past with me wheelin' a crate like that! An' two-fifty bucks for a first in the final! What a laugh!"

"There's a chance, Rooster," said Fence Gordon, but his voice was not confident. "Look at that fellow over there on the fence."

Rooster Dulane swung around. He scowled at the only person near them, a big gangling, cow-eyed fellow in greasy dungarees. As this man squatted on the fence his long bony arms dangled close to his feet.

"I don't see nothin' but that Scandahoofian *dumkopf* that fills radiators, stops kicks an' pumps tires when they let him," the cocky little driver snapped. "Whereabouts you mean?"

"I mean him—John Hanson," Fence Gordon muttered. "He used to work in a garage and sometimes some of the bunch let him help with the motors—though they don't pay him nothin'. John's offered to tear her down tonight for me—and take his pay out o' the purse, if any."

Dulane's eyes snapped at the anxious, embarrassed car owner like spark plugs under test. He breathed heavily.

"Cheese!" he said with dramatic despondency. "I am down, ain't I? A lousy jalopy that won't ape, owned by an ex-driver with faded nerves who never went any place but through the rail. An' he wants to add a square-headed gorilla with fingers like feet to the aggregation. I'm through!"

"We haven't even started," Fence Gordon reminded him sadly.

Rooster Dulane picked up his helmet with an air of finality. Then he froze, staring with slitted eyes at a rig just coming on the track. It was a brand new fifteen-hundred-dollar sedan towing a gleaming scarlet Naylor—a double overhead camshaft job.

The driver of that caravan of prosperity changed his course as he sighted Rooster. Just alongside Gordon's green clunker he jammed on his brakes with a triumphant thrust of his foot.

"Hi, Fence! Hi, Charlotte Rooster!" he greeted and leaped out. This cheery young man in ice cream pants and a Fair Isles sweater of vivid design aimed a mighty slap on Dulane's back.

Rooster sidestepped indignantly but swiftly and the broad hand fanned the air.

In no way taken aback Bill Worth converted the sweep into a gesture of gratified ownership directed toward his rig.

"That's what you buy when you win races, Roosie," he declared loudly. "That's what you get for winning 'em! Whyn't you try it some time?"

Sourly Fence Gordon scowled at him. Two trips to the hospital—two cars wrapped around themselves in two successive meets—had caused the evaporation of a similar outfit.

"Some lady must be spendin' plenty on you!" charged Rooster.

"Three of 'em wanted to, old cock-a-doodle," Bill Worth admitted, not too modestly. "But I wouldn't let 'em. 'Later,' I says to 'em. 'Later, when I can't cop purses no better than Rooster Dulane!' "

Bill Worth turned his back on the speechless Dulane and walked rapidly and critically around the green clunker.

"Well, all I can think of is I better take it and let you wheel mine, Rooster," he decided thoughtfully. "That way even you'd have a chance. Has it got a motor or do you sail it?"

He leaped back into his sedan and threw in the clutch with a reckless jerk before Rooster Dulane could get his gritting teeth apart. A little swirl of dust enveloped them as Bill pulled on to the other end of the pits.

The small driver again whammed his helmet to the dirt with a vehemence that did it no good.

"I'll beat that cocky, light-footed son if I have to do it in a taxicab!" he vowed.

"Talkin' to me like that! I was leadin' him both times that—"

He picked up the helmet, flicked a bit of grit off it and beckoned imperatively.

"C'me here, greaseball!" he commanded.

The lanky Scandinavian came toward him with the awkward stride of a giraffe. In front of the fulminating little driver his towering figure, a good foot taller, folded up humbly as he telescoped his backbone and let his bony chin sag onto his chest.

This humility was pleasing to the outraged speed pilot. For the first time something that was almost hope flickered in Fence Gordon's harassed eyes. Rooster's chest was inflating again.

"What makes you think you can overhaul a racin' motor, greaseball?" the short driver demanded.

"In a garage I learned to tune motors," John Hanson said meekly, fumbling with his big hands.

"I can get the use of a shed right next to Bud King's machine shop for two bucks," Fence Gordon put in earnestly. "I got the two bucks."

"Give the boy a chance!" Dulane commanded generously. "Maybe I'll wheel it and maybe I won't."

He stalked away. He moved a trifle faster but in no less dignified a manner when the roving eye of glib Bill Worth fell upon him.

JOHN HANSON hit a timing gear with a striking hammer.

Fence Gordon's wail of anguish was an instant echo of the sound of the blow.

"Gyp part!" said the big Norwegian in his slow English. "It would strip."

Despondently Fence looked at what had happened to the teeth.

"That means I got to drive ninety miles tonight in a Model T," he mourned. "D'you know what those things cost?"

"Races," answered the man in dungarees, gently. He dropped the gear into a box full of scrap metal.

Rooster laughed raucously at the sight of Fence Gordon's sorrowful face.

"You only own the car," he reminded him. "I got to roll it—maybe. Let's get out o' here before he puts corners on the wheels."

"If you wish compression we need piston rings, too," John reminded the owner politely.

IT WAS after midnight before Fence Gordon got back with the new parts. Dulane had gone to bed.

The motor was still spread out over twelve feet of workbench. John Hanson's long, careful fingers were slowly going over the water pump. His face brightened at the sight of the piston rings.

"The cylinders are not egg-shaped," he reported. "Dulane will have good compression."

"Maybe he will—if he drives," Fence answered uneasily. "Don't get too upset if he backs out on us, John."

"I do not get upset," replied the mechanic placidly. "This is my chance—this motor."

Fence Gordon glanced sadly at the array.

"It used to be a good motor," he said. "There was one race there when I had 'em all by half a lap. Only I slid right through the guard rail."

He touched his ribs in rueful reminiscence. "It was a hefty hunk of timber at that."

"Perhaps you were driving too fast," Hanson suggested innocently.

Fence's harassed face curled up into a wry grin.

"Maybe I was. This race game has got me down, John. I never could win myself but I'm set to hang on until this car takes a race—even if it cops with me sitting in the grandstand."

He sighed.

"Confidence!" he said. "That's what wins—self-confidence—and I haven't got the confidence of a canary left in me. Too many one-way fences around these tracks—and the last one I met cracked me as well as a couple of bones."

"Motors win races," Hanson corrected mildly. "All drivers have self-confidence."

Fence grinned again. "I've noticed something of the sort. Well, Rooster hasn't any confidence in Bill Worth, anyhow."

John Hanson picked up a pair of pliers. His eyes, a washed-out blue, seemed to glow as they dwelt on the orderly litter on the bench.

At two A. M. Hanson had not even begun to assemble the motor, so Fence Gordon wrestled the Model T back to the auto camp near the track. In his shack he poured his wealth on the dingy bed coverlet. He had three one-dollar bills and practically enough small change to make up another dollar. The stopwatch had gone the way of most of his other possessions.

"I won't be staying in this business long—unless Rooster gets plenty tough on those curves tomorrow," he decided.

ROOSTER didn't seem so tough in the morning. The little driver pushed through thunderous confusion, swirling oil fumes and fast-moving mechanics to the pits. Though he was arrayed in full racing attire, spotless white sweater and gray corduroy trousers and crowned by his silver-plated crash helmet, his right arm was encumbered by a girl and his hard little face was contorted by a sappy smile.

"My outfit, Liz," he said, and indicated the green car, which now was in one piece.

The blank-faced Hanson, whose eyes were rimmed by weary red lids and the animated Fence Gordon, whose eyes were rimmed by a layer of dust, were bent earnestly over the four-cylinder power-plant.

"Young fellows—but I'm giving 'em a chance to work for a winner," Rooster explained to the girl. "How many pistons did he put back in her, Fence?"

Not even the sight of the girl wiped the hopeful grin off Fence Gordon's face.

"Roll her a couple of laps before the time trials, Rooster," he urged, laying a hand on the green car's wheel. "John's got something! I've been warming her up and she'll turn it in twenty-nine seconds or I'm a banker!"

He reached into the body and pressed the accelerator.

"Listen to that!" he demanded.

Rooster Dulane unhooked the girl from his arm. He drew close to the motor, hearkening with head cocked to the velvety purr of power that ran under the bellowing uproar of the exhaust.

"Open her up!" he said, staring at the tachometer.

He watched the needle as Fence fed her gas.

John Hanson slipped on the earpieces of a stethoscope and applied it to place after place on the gently shuddering cylinder block. His flat, tired face wore the expression of one who hears holy music and is transfigured.

"She revs," the stocky little driver admitted. "But will she—"

He swung around. Not ten feet from him, screened by the noise, the girl was entering most vivaciously into a tête-à-tête with the resplendent Bill Worth.

"I'll be back!" Rooster snapped and darted toward the two.

"Why, Rooster!" exclaimed Bill Worth warmly. "You look for all the world like a racing driver!"

"I'll skip what you look like!" Rooster flung at him and took the girl's arm in a grip of steel. "C'me on, Liz; I've got your seat picked out."

The girl came; it was that or be torn apart.

"See you a little later, Elizabeth,"

Bill Worth called after her cheerily. "I don't spend as much time on the track as he does."

From the stand Rooster Dulane returned on the run to the green job. His face was the same scarlet as Bill's car. He tightened his helmet with twitching fingers.

"I'll show that lug enough dust to bury him!" he said through his teeth.

"Do it in the twenty-miler!" Fence Gordon counseled. "That's where the dust and dough are thickest."

"When I need a guy that's gone canary-colored to learn me driving—I'll look you up!" Rooster retorted hotly. He turned his back on the owner and kicked the right rear tire.

"C'me here, greaseball!" he ordered. "Check that shoe for pressure. Put the stick on them front wheels—they look like they're toein' in. Prove to me that rusty gas-tank will hold pressure. How loose is the steerin'? Put something under that seat cushion to raise me two inches. Climb under an' make certain the plug is tight in that crankcase. For God's sake show a little interest in this automobile, you lousy wooden soldier!"

Obediently John Hanson swung his long body into action on jobs he had already done.

During the time trial that would determine the starting positions in the preliminary heats Rooster Dulane kept the big mechanic jumping. He stalled off impatient officials who were trying to get him onto the track for his trial.

"Find out Bill Worth's time!" he commanded Fence Gordon. "Never mind anybody else's—what I want is Bill Worth's!"

Meekly enough Fence Gordon obeyed. Though the owner, he believed that the man who risked his neck should be the man who gave the orders affecting the neck.

"They clocked Bill at thirty seconds flat," he reported shortly to the little driver. "That's the best time—and good for a bull ring as rough and narrow as this one."

"And nothing that hasn't taken the trial but me," Rooster said. "All right, let's go! Roll her!"

He strode alongside the car adjusting his silver-topped crash helmet while Fence and Hanson rolled it out. Then he paused to wave his hand at a section of the impatient stand.

"Wheel that iron around—or shove it in the ditch!" the exasperated starter warned.

Rooster ignored him. Twice, blaring down the stretch, he signaled that he was ready. Twice he hit the first corner so hard that the car went into a time-wasting slide and twice, imperatively, he signaled for a recheck.

"He is driving too fast," said John Hanson.

Rooster came around a third time. The starter, with jaw stuck out vengefully, grasped in his hand not only the green starting flag but the white flag that meant, "Stop next lap."

Rooster took the hint. He opened up, hurtled past the stands and braked a bit before he hit the curve. All the way around he kept coming, but nowhere did his spurting wheels sling up the tall geyser of dirt that means a bad slide.

"Twenty-nine and three-fifths—the best today!" reported the loudspeakers and the fickle grandstands broke into applause for the straggler they had condemned as vigorously three minutes before.

Back at the pits, Rooster Dulane shot out of the car in a hurry.

"You took the pole position in the first heat away from Bill Worth!" Fence Gordon shouted in his ear.

"Be with you in a minute!" Rooster replied. He started toward the grandstand but Fence grasped his arm.

"They're coming out for the heat now!" he warned. "You haven't time—"

Rooster stopped but not at the clutch of Fence. He saw Bill Worth coming

from the section toward which he was headed.

"Elizabeth was thrilled—till I explained that there wasn't any money in time trials," Bill said.

Rooster scowled.

"You're due for a cleaning—and I'm handling the whitewash this heat," he threatened, and stalked back to his car.

"Greaseball!" he snapped. "Take up on them shock absorbers—get 'em tight! I thought the springs were shot. She handles like there was ice under her. Get going!"

Fence Gordon grabbed a wrench and went at it with Hanson. The mechanic's big, clumsy looking fingers were stronger yet more gentle than his own. They finished the job and rolled out the car while Rooster stood on the track, scowling at the stand and at the grinning Bill Worth in his scarlet Naylor. Rooster was red hot.

"First two cars qualify for the main event—get going!" yelled the starter.

"Save her for the final!" Fence Gordon murmured. Rooster did not answer.

COMING around for the flying start Rooster Dulane, almost out of sight behind the wind screen, tried to steal a lead, fifty feet from the line. But Bill coolly cut his gun and the four cars behind braked with him. The starter waved his fist instead of the flag and he waved it at Rooster, far ahead of the field. No start!

Next time Rooster waited with the others for the flag. They got it. Side by side he and Bill Worth blasted into the turn. Rooster had the shorter and smoother inside course and he kept his hand off the brake.

The rejuvenated green car bored down into the groove by the infield fence. But it was going too fast to stay there. In spite of Rooster's wheelwork it bounced halfway up the side of the bank.

Bill Worth, oblivious of the rest of the field on his neck, braked his scarlet bus —a mere touch—and tried to knife in behind the skidding green car to the hole left beside the fence. But Rooster got down the bank again in time to cut him off.

They snored around toward the backstretch. The two leaders opened a big gap on the others. Bill Worth pressed hard, taking the grit flying up from the wheels ahead. Rooster kept him behind. He broadsided off the corner into the backstretch a good ten feet ahead of the scarlet Naylor.

Fence Gordon, balanced on a pile of somebody else's wheels in the pits, gripped John Hanson's shoulder.

"Now we'll see what the job's got!" he breathed. A moment later he shouted gleefully.

"It is a good motor in that old car," Hanson asserted solemnly. "A beautiful motor—like velvet."

The green bus was shooting down the backstretch and Bill Worth's Naylor was gaining only inches on it.

"Bill may be lying back!" Fence muttered. "Nine laps to go! Besides, the first two finishing qualify."

His eyes, dry from not daring to blink, focused more fiercely upon the two machines as they rammed toward the next turn. Abruptly Rooster opened a gap on Worth.

Fence Gordon groaned. Bill Worth wasn't quitting on a curve. It could only mean that the angry Dulane was hitting it too hard.

He was. The green car wavered an instant as he tried to bend it round; then broadsided up the bank in a cloud of dust. For a moment it looked as if the car would hit the rail.

Fence Gordon's jaws clenched. Well he knew what it meant to go through. Watching it, though, was worse than standing the gaff himself.

But the four wheels, plowing sideways, checked the green machine on the verge. It spun slowly, high on the bank.

Bill Worth's scarlet machine hummed on alone.

Toward Rooster Dulane's almost motionless car blared the rest of the field. Two cars, Ames and Belber driving, went shooting into the turn side by side.

Chris Belber, the pilot outside, lifting his foot, got his skidding car under control in time to miss Rooster, but not by much. Past him they fled, leaving him in swirling dust.

The spin had not killed Rooster's motor; he straightened out and shot down the bank onto the tail of the last car.

The tail-ender's motor had been spitting; Rooster Dulane took him before he was out of the curve. On the home stretch he opened up to the limit, riding the outside lane and catching another man in front of the grandstand. In spite of his spin he was in fourth place.

"Too fast," murmured John Hanson gravely, as Rooster gunned his mount into the turn at the limit. "It is a good motor but—"

"If he can get Ames and Belber, John, he can cruise along in second place and qualify." Fence muttered feverishly. "This is only the second lap and—"

Rooster Dulane dived across from the outside edge of the stretch toward the groove by the infield fence. He didn't make the groove, for his car, jolting on the rough going, pulled a half spin. Rooster was able to check his mount and get going again.

Belber had pulled up to Ames and the two rocketed down the backstretch as close as a car and its shadow. But in the turn Ames' outside rear shoe blew. The car veered uncontrollably toward Belber's.

Only because he had seen the tire go did Chris Belber have time to wrench his wheel. He sent his bus zooming up the bank into the loose dust, straightened out and slowly gathered speed again in the dry, powdery surface.

Rooster Dulane was far enough behind to keep out of the jam. By the time he got to the spot Ames' disabled mount was fifteen feet from the infield fence and skidding backwards. He tore past. With mounting acceleration he got by Chris Belber, too, before that young man was quite sure the fireworks were over.

That break put Rooster in second place.

Bill Worth was almost a lap ahead.

Quickly the starter swung the yellow caution flag commanding all drivers to hold position and watch the track.

For four laps, while mechanics labored to get Ames' car out of the middle of the track, the other cars circled under control, with the hawk-like eye of the starter upon them. Then as the track was cleared, he flicked the green flag and they lifted the pace.

"Coast, Rooster!" Fence muttered prayerfully.

"Why should he run fast now?" Hanson said placidly. "He is sure to qualify for the big race. The motor will have a breather."

But, three-quarters of a lap behind Bill Worth, with only four laps to go, Rooster Dulane stepped on his throttle.

Fence shook his head. Hanson's face went bleak.

Screaming under full gun, the green car hurtled down the stretches. Shuddering under Rooster's sudden lunge at the handbrake, the little bus bounced half-way up the bank. Then, with rear wheels spurting dirt and fighting to whip forward, it bored on around the curve into the backstretch, where Rooster's foot came down again with merciless weight on the accelerator. He was flogging it to the limit.

In the stands people clapped and cheered at the spectacle of this fearless little daredevil fighting to win against

such a terrific lead. In the pits drivers and mechanics grinned derisively.

"He'll sling a rod through the case!" Fence Gordon moaned.

John Hanson, his big hands working, said nothing. With red-rimmed eyes and intent ears he followed the progress of the racked and tortured green bus.

Out in front, Bill Worth, gratified at having a race handed to him after a tough start, kept his car cruising along at a brisk pace—but not a pace brisk enough to give his pistons or connecting rods an excuse to kick a hole in his motor. He nursed his job.

Bill had lost most of his public. All but the knowing ones were cheering wildly to urge Rooster Dulane on. The raging Rooster, flirting with guard rails and fences, defying annihilation and his own experience, revved his motor to the limit in his blind attempt to get Bill Worth. He gained and kept gaining. Bill, pumping easily to be sure there was lots of gasoline handy to his carburetors should he need it, watched him come.

When Worth's scarlet machine swept past the checkered flag to victory Rooster Dulane was not two hundred yards behind him.

But on the last curve the green car had not gained. The smooth, even scream of power from the motor had been interrupted.

With cold despair Fence looked at the big mechanic. John Hanson's long arms dangled at his sides as helplessly as if they had been broken. His tired blue eyes were fixed upon the white plume of steam gushing out of the green car's exhaust pipe.

"If he'd just had to rack her like that to qualify it wouldn't be so bad, John," Fence muttered. "Head gasket blown—or what else?"

Hanson did not reply.

Rooster's momentum swept him up close behind Bill Worth's car as Worth circled around to get to the pits.

In the backstretch Bill Worth turned to grin at his simmering rival in the steaming green car. Bill made the rotary gesture that means speed, took both hands off the wheel for an instant to clap them together in tantalizing applause and kissed his fingers to the distant grandstand.

Rooster's lips moved. He kept inches behind the scarlet leader. When they pulled into the pits amidst cheers from the stands the little driver sprang from his bucket seat. He was out almost before the voiceless owner and grim mechanic could reach the car and unstrap the hood.

ROOSTER DULANE thrust past a couple of pilots and got to the scarlet car as Bill Worth was swinging out his legs. Furiously Rooster swung at the victorious one. His knobby little fist smacked against Bill's chin with a noise like a firecracker.

Bill's head snapped back and his body followed it. He almost went out the other side of the car.

Somebody grabbed Rooster and somebody else halted Bill's backward course. But it took three men to restrain the fulminating Rooster and two to steady Bill while he strove to regain his wavering wits.

They hustled Dulane away and held down Bill Worth to soothe him while the cars were rolled out for the second heat.

John Hanson and Fence Gordon were taking off the cylinder head. Much water had been lost from the cooling system. The water jacket was dry.

Rooster Dulane came to them while the second heat was on. They did not even see him. There was a chance that the motor had not been ruined.

"I'll give him hell from the green to the checker in the main event," Rooster promised. "If it hadn't been for a fluke I'd ha' taken him good and proper in that heat."

"I hate to see a good motor kicked to blazes to thrill a bit of fluff," Fence Gordon said crisply. "Did you sock Bill because he wouldn't let you win?"

"Now, listen, Mister Ex, I'll take no more lip from you than I will from him," Rooster Dulane flared. "If you knew that lug like I do—"

He growled in his throat and walked away. When the second heat finished he crossed to the grandstand.

John Hanson and Fence Gordon found that though the gasket had blown the cylinder head was intact and nothing had burned out. They put in a new gasket and bolted down the head with painstaking care. The third heat was over and the consolation race on when they had finished the job. Whether the motor still had the stuff they could not tell. There was still mute agony in Hanson's faded blue eyes.

Through the dust raised by the unlucky boys fighting it out in the consolation Fence Gordon looked across at the grandstand for his driver. He could make out the vivid Elizabeth, but Rooster Dulane was not with her. Neither was Bill Worth. Fence took a turn around the pits and the infield without any luck and finally tried the washroom. Rooster had taken enough dust in that first event to rate a couple of baths.

Rooster was there. He was bent over on his elbows in front of a bowl full of soapy water and one hand was dazedly feeling the back of his head.

He had a bump there the size of a valve head and still rising.

Fence dragged him out into the air and propped him against the side of the shed. He was bewildered, incoherent and shaky. What energy he had he spent in cursing Bill Worth.

"Told him I'd wheel him off the track in five laps—and he slugs me—from behind!" Dulane spat out.

Fence Gordon was white and cold with anger as he led the shaky Rooster Dulane over to the emergency ambulance for some cold-water treatment. The interne and nurse hauled him aboard in spite of his language. He would wheel no more that afternoon.

Fence Gordon looked across the track again. The consolation was over. Bill Worth, with a solicitous hand on his chin, was in the stand beside the gushing Elizabeth. As Fence watched he turned away from her and sauntered back to the pits.

Glancing tight-lipped at the waiting green car, Fence Gordon became aware of John Hanson beside him, fumbling with his knuckles.

"You can drive it," the tall mechanic said. "You are a registered driver. The motor is tuned. It will still rev."

Fence Gordon gave vent to a monosyllable of bitter laughter.

"I lost my nerve, John," he said. "I went through one too many fences. Haven't you heard that?"

John Hanson continued to stare at him with steady mild blue eyes.

"Haven't you got your nerve back, boss?" he asked.

Bill Worth came strolling over. "Where's Battling Rooster Dulane?" he asked. "I want to tell him what's going to happen to him this ride."

"Save your chatter," Fence retorted curtly. "I'll see you after the final. You'll need two alibis when we finish this race. I'm riding."

Bill Worth's eyes opened.

"You're riding?" he repeated. He grinned cheerfully. "That's the boy! Confidence! That's all you need! Confidence, a couple of strong wrists—and a wad of hard luck for me."

Fence Gordon took a step toward the debonair pilot but Hanson put an imploring hand on his arm.

Fence stopped.

"Right you are, John!" he responded to that gesture. He turned toward the judges' stand. "I'll fix up the substitution. Don't you leave our job for a minute. It isn't safe."

Bill Worth shrugged his shoulders at the last curt sentence.

"If that's how you feel, that's how you feel, wild man," he said coolly. "The less I like 'em the easier I beat 'em."

It didn't take long for Fence Gordon to arrange the shift in drivers but the bull-lunged starter was already lining up the cars when he came back. Main event! They rolled her out.

John Hanson stood awkwardly beside the car, rubbing his knuckles and listening to the motor. Fence settled into the bucket seat and cleaned a pair of borrowed goggles.

The substitute driver's face was grimly set. He had ahead of him three possibilities. He could win, crack up or fade out of this hard game he loved.

"I'll give Bill hell this trip," he promised huskily.

"I would like to know how to drive a racing car," said John Hanson slowly. His cow-like eyes turned upon the tense driver and, in spite of himself, Fence grinned at the earnest statement. "When you hit the fence in these other races were you always out in front?"

"Every time," said Fence sadly. "While I was on, I was leading. And that's right in dirt-track stuff, John. Any good driver will tell you the same."

The tall, awkward mechanic crumpled up his broad forehead in thought.

"It was because you were driving too fast that you did not win?" he asked in his laborious English.

Fence Gordon lifted his goggles to glance at the big Norwegian.

"Are some drivers, like Dulane, too fast to win, just as some are too slow?" Hanson plodded on. "I would like to know how to—"

The field—seven cars—dragged around waving them on. But Fence did not let in his clutch. He was looking shrewdly at Hanson's blank face.

"Got some brains behind that concrete front of yours, haven't you, John?" he charged. "Trying to tell me something?"

"Roll or quit!" railed the starter.

"Aren't you telling me something you know—that you do not drive slowly enough to win?" Hanson asked quietly.

The green car slid into movement.

"I'll try it!" Fence shouted over his shoulder. "Thanks!"

The field—seven cars—dragged around the course.

Bill Worth, on the pole inside Fence Gordon, looked him over thoughtfully on the backstretch. Nobody who had ever fought to beat Fence Gordon into a turn forgot it.

The slower cars in the rear were hitting their limit but as the field stormed down on the line they were well bunched. The starter jerked his green flag and jumped nimbly clear of the fastest getaway of the year.

THE NAYLOR shot full speed at the first. Bill Worth was gunning his mount to the limit to protect his inside berth from the expected onslaught of Fence Gordon. Fence had always been willing to trade his unbroken neck for an early lead. Bill broadsided in and found himself fighting for control of his rioting mount with the track to himself.

A good ten feet behind, Fence Gordon slid his green car a bit and clung to the infield fence. Close beside Fence, but without enough gun to get by, hung Chris Belber.

Fence was watching the man ahead instead of risking his life and motor to grab the lead. There are forty laps in a twenty-miler.

Vigorously Bill Worth strong-armed his mount toward the infield rail. He jolted on around the rough curve. His position remained undisputed, in spite of the time he had lost in getting his car under control. Coming off into the backstretch he darted another perplexed look at the wild man astern. Fence

Gordon was taking his dirt, not challenging. He was merely standing off Chris Belber.

Bill Worth's lead lengthened by fifteen feet.

Though he breezed down the stretch like a bullet, Worth reached for his handbrake before he neared the next curve. To Fence it was apparent that Bill Worth wasn't taking another corner as he had the first if nobody had enough gun or guts to worry him.

Still Chris Belber hung on alongside the green car. Fence gave him no chance to pass on stretch or curve. But neither did he open much of a gap between his green wasp tail and Belber's gleaming radiator.

"Slow enough to win!" Fence Gordon commanded himself. With his eye on his rival's position ahead Fence felt out the track. Jealously he hoarded a bit more gun than he showed as he blasted through the dust behind Bill Worth. Not as much gun as the scarlet Naylor—but some. In spurts too brief and occasional to warn Bill Worth he kept assuring himself that he had that hidden power of acceleration.

As he stormed past the pits he got a glimpse of the huge bulk of John Hanson, motionless beside the track. That reminded him again. Slow enough.

The laps flitted by and the brown dust mounted. In the fifteenth Chris Belber got tired of hanging on. He planted his big foot down hard as he lunged at a curve. He beat Fence Gordon into it but drifted up the bank, bouncing, on the verge of a spin. Fence, manhandling his bus, clung to the inside of the track and left him five car lengths astern.

Bill Worth suddenly saw that Fence had shaken Belber. He opened up, though Fence had not cut down the two hundred feet by which he trailed. When Bill eased up, two hectic laps later, Fence was still there, still apparently riding at all he had, the same distance astern.

Bill anxiously consulted his tachometer. But his motor was turning out its revs; unless his clutch was slipping he was batting out the speed.

With his eye on the rev-meter Bill Worth slammed into the next corner. His terrific skid toward the crash rail convinced him that his car had the stuff. But it lost him several seconds.

Fence gunned his car when he saw Bill was experimenting. He had gained a hundred feet by the time Bill had subdued his riotous Naylor. But when Bill glanced around again he was hammering ahead at the same steady gait.

Bill could only chalk up that lost hundred feet to time lost in coming out of the slide. He handled his car with some restraint on the next two curves and found that he lost no ground. He settled down to a fast, clever safe clip—not far below the limit of speed on that rough, narrow oval, but far enough to avoid grief.

"He thinks I haven't got it!" Fence Gordon confided to the green car. "Stay with me, bus!"

In the stands they were on the seats, roaring over what looked like a ding-dong battle between the two leading machines. It takes a professional eye to distinguish pace in the upper notches. The cars were churning up dirt and pebbles, roaring furiously, spitting blue smoke, swaying, skidding and jolting, gaining and losing, with little distance between them as mile after mile whirled by.

A laboring black car abruptly threw a connecting rod through the crankcase and coasted to the pits. Another tail-ender, with the pilot pumping air to keep pressure on his gas tank, blew a shoe, slid through the infield fence and rolled over. A thrilling race!

The track was clear; the race went on. The driver walked away from the crack-up.

Fence Gordon kept an eye ahead; Bill Worth an eye astern. Once again

the starter watched them blaze by; then got his blue flag from the rack. When they passed next time the leaders would be on their last lap.

Fence glanced around, locating positions of the trailing cars by the mounting wake of dust flung up here and there on the oval. As he hit the backstretch Bill Worth made sure again that the hundred feet lead was still there—or almost.

Bill hummed down the backstretch, braked a bit to steady his bus and thrust into the curve that led to the blue flag. There were two cars on the curve hopelessly behind but hotly racing each other, and churning up as much dust as if they were breaking records.

At the moment when Bill Worth reached for his brake Fence Gordon, with an eye on the dust-shrouded curve, opened up all he had. His heavy right foot shot gas into his twin carburetors; the speeding car surged on faster. Into that brown-screened corner the green car hurtled.

Here was Fence's chance—a thin one, but a chance. The time for strategy was past.

He hit that curve with all the abandon of the past—but with a bit more of the feel of the track.

The car broad-sided and jolted, but Fence's strong arms, mastering the kicking wheel, fought off twin dangers—a spin and the guard rail. He held the track and kept going. More by driving instinct than by sight he bored through the swirling dust. His car was flying; he did not try to force it down into the shorter course by the infield fence. The two clunkers, with fifty feet between them, would be clinging to that fence unless—

Pebbles rattled on goggles and stung his face. He roared past churning rear wheels. One tail-ender left behind; The dust was thicker. His motor was revving close to top. On! The lunging car, under the compulsion of centrifugal force, was fighting to shoot off that curving brown way.

Fence's goggles were filming up fast. But to take a straining hand off the wheel meant a certain crash. Safer to drive half blind—but that dust was frightfully dense.

Suddenly, as something cut his cheek, he knew why he was in such a brown fog. There was a car dead ahead—in the middle of the track—passing one close to the inner rail. He caught a gleam of scarlet through the hurtling brownness. It was Bill Worth's Naylor, just taking the clunker.

Not for an instant did Fence hesitate. His foot drove the throttle down to the limit; his weary, aching arms eased on the wheel. The green car jammed up the bank, toward the crash rail.

With his left front wheel churning perilously close to the scarlet Naylor's whirring right rear tire Fence Gordon blared on. Only cramped inches on either hand lay between him and disaster. Locked wheels or the touch of the guard-rail—either would do it. He jammed on. Three abreast!

Bill Worth's be-goggled eyes were all on the clunker. Two cars side by side on that curve were one too many when the one inside was handled by a young driver who might skid out at any instant.

Suddenly Bill ducked involuntarily behind his windscreen. From dead ahead an unexpected, slashing hail of grit hit him. There was something green drawing away—diving across the track toward the inside berth, ten feet ahead of him and the clunker. He fought to steady his weaving machine.

Fence Gordon had come up from nowhere in that dust screen and passed him at the one instant when he was sure he was safe.

Off that corner into the grandstand stretch Fence Gordon blasted with all he had. He fought his skid and then

with his throttle and wheel kicked his whipping rear end back into place.

He went down the grandstand stretch with his motor uncorked to the limit. Everything he had he poured in. Gripped by a triumphant fury as in his old days of unsurpassable speed he surged ahead.

He never caught a glimpse of the blue flag snapped at him by the starter. For as the next curve leaped up ahead of him he saw momentarily John Hanson out on the track, a rigid, menacing, berserk figure. The big mechanic had one mighty arm raised, with fist clenched in a gesture of ferocious threat. The other arm was outstretched palm downward, the warning to slow.

The sight of him cleared the wild racing frenzy out of Fence Gordon's brain; he lifted his foot and darted a glance astern. Next moment he touched his hand brake briefly and barreled into the curve.

Bill Worth was behind and coming like a vengeful thunderbolt. But that was no reason for Fence to crash his car or rev the motor into scrap.

Hard as he hit the turn Fence Gordon kept command. His whole body was one with the car, arms and wheel, foot and throttle, moving together in intricate, confident action. He bent the jolting, sliding car around that ever-curving way. Out into the backstretch he flashed. Once more he opened up to the limit. Again he snatched an instant to look behind. The scarlet Naylor had lost distance on that curve but now on the straightaway it was picking up fast on the old green machine.

It took bitter power of will for Fence to brake as Bill Worth tried to jump him into the corner. But brake Fence did. Though his terrific momentum sent him drifting high up the bank he held the car to it.

The inside groove was wide open but Bill Worth, too, was shooting into the curve too fast to force his mount down the bank.

With arm muscles leaping and straining Fence straightened out. He surged on, sliding, whipping, jarring. Here, on the turn, he held his own, and more. But on the last stretch that led to the checkered flag—there the scarlet Naylor would come into its own.

Fence saw the brown dirt straightening out ahead. With half his mind screaming for full throttle he cut his gun an instant. Just before the banked curve leveled off he jammed his car in close to the infield fence with all his power.

Then he opened up again.

His left front shoe flicked at the fence as his rear end whipped outward. But the banked dirt halted the skid. Wood crackled, a bit of white rail dissolved beside him but still he controlled the car. The wheel stayed with him. On, along the shortest possible path he hurtled, right foot planted hard.

The scarlet Naylor flashed into his sight, on the outside. Bill Worth had snapped off the corner with full acceleration, scorning the short path by the fence, eating up the track.

But where he tried to straighten out the hurtling scarlet bus the track was level. No slope of the brown dirt rose to slow the slide of his whirring rear tires. They whipped toward the outer fence. Then the car in a half spin leaped with skittering wheels diagonally toward Fence Gordon and the infield rail.

Though his muscles leaped convulsively Fence Gordon did the hardest thing of all—nothing. His car at full throttle flashed past before the scarlet Naylor could touch him.

Bill Worth managed to wrench his wheel in time to curve clear of the infield fence just behind the green car. Straight once more, he opened up. With screaming acceleration his car rifled down the stretch. But the green car had been for seconds at the top of its pace. The Nay-

lor could not pick up full speed in time. Fence Gordon put his green bus past the checkered flag a full car length ahead of the Naylor.

Thirty feet beyond the finish line Bill Worth, in the grip of his last-minute acceleration, flashed by the green bus. Then, with a rueful shake of the head, he braked hard and pulled in behind the winner. He had been too fast to win.

BACK at the pits, oblivious of the raucous applause, Fence Gordon dragged himself out of the green bus. He shook hands with John Hanson, but his weary, begrimed face was stern. He had a job to do.

About the same time Rooster Dulane, telling the nurse he'd be right back, jumped off the front seat of the ambulance.

Without a word these two drivers turned toward Bill Worth as he rolled in the scarlet Naylor.

But John Hanson gripped Fence's shoulder.

"No!" he said. "Worth did not hit Dulane. I hit him gently—so—and I meant it!"

"What!" yelped Rooster Dulane. "Why, you—"

"Yes," said John Hanson, nodding placidly. "With this wrench—gently but hard enough. How could I let you ruin that fine motor when a good driver could win with it?"

Rooster snatched the wrench up off the broad palm. He was hot enough to do red murder.

But Fence Gordon caught at it, too.

"Wait a minute!" he commanded, wrinkling his dusty forehead. "I suppose it's wrong, John, to sock a man one-third your size with a wrench when his back is turned and then let us think another fellow did it. No; it isn't quite right—but it sure worked right."

He turned to Dulane. "What'll you have, Rooster—the winning driver's share of the purse or a sock at John?"

"D'you think I'd take money to wipe out a wallop like that?" Rooster blazed indignantly.

"Sure," said Fence Gordon with the greatest confidence.

Bill Worth strolled up. He had been examining with rising interest Rooster's bandaged head and the demure girl in nurse's uniform on the ambulance.

"Lend me the bandage, Rooster, and I'll never speak to Elizabeth again," he proposed. "What could be more reasonable?"

Wildly Rooster's eyes leaped from the girl in the grandstand to the nurse in the ambulance. He tried to move two ways at once, and the grinning Bill seemed to block both ways.

"When do they pay off around here?" Rooster demanded feverishly of Fence. "C'me on; what are we waiting for? Get going! You're slower than you are on the bull ring!"

"I'm slow enough to collect," Fence Gordon replied. He handed the wrench back to Hanson.

"A man who ruins motors should be hit harder," John Hanson declared somberly. "Much harder!"

"You gave me back all my racing confidence, John," Fence said. Then he stopped to eye the indignant mechanic and the heavy wrench with a sudden keen personal interest. "Almost," he added.

BONEHEAD

By FRANK C. ROBERTSON

THE dog had got his name two years before in Harrington's lambing sheds. First the name was tacked on because the big, splay-footed, ungainly pup had a head that was bone white, while the remainder of his mongrel body was an assortment of colors ranging all the way from ebon black to pale yellow. But the scrapes which the pup's awkwardness got him into indicated that the name was otherwise well chosen.

There were twenty men in the lambing crew, and five thousand sheep, to say nothing of the teams that drew sledloads of hay or corn along the alleys to feed the sheep. How then could a nine-months-old pup with an unquenchable curiosity about life keep from being stepped on?

Always large for his age, Bonehead lacked the nimbleness of the collie pups belonging to the sheep outfit. So it was that when with them he marched importantly along in front of the hay wagons, barking loudly to clear a path for the team, he was apt to find himself suddenly cut off in the middle of a milling bunch of hungry ewes and wedged in so tightly between their woolly bodies that he would have to yell abjectly for help.

Often he lost his footing and was submerged beneath a woolly sea and his whereabouts could be ascertained only by his crescendo wails of pain and fright. Once, when dodging an angry ewe that tried to butt him he landed under the hind wheels of a hay wagon, and miraculously escaped death, even though he received a broken leg. After that there was scarcely a day that he wasn't bowled over and butted around by some usually timid ewe convinced that he had designs upon her offspring.

For a sheep dog to be mauled by a

sheep was the height of indignity. Bonehead wasn't sensitive, but he was scared. Thereafter he adopted Ollie Justice, one of the herders, and was always either just behind or between the herder's heels. The men were always playing tricks upon him. Was Ollie's back turned somebody was likely to stab Bonehead in the rear with a sharp-tined pitchfork. They fed him biscuits loaded with cayenne pepper. The pup's life was far from being one glad, sweet song.

Why Bonehead managed to entwine his worthless self into the affections of Ollie Justice none could say. Perhaps it was because the big, somewhat taciturn herder was a lonely soul himself. Ollie had been an orphan, kicked from pillar to post in his childhood, and he sympathized with Bonehead. That spring when Ollie took a ewe and lamb band on the range he took Bonehead along as an extra dog in spite of the predictions that the pup would never learn to be a sheep dog.

The predictions almost came true. For many months the pup caused far more grief than any assistance he could possibly have rendered. When Ollie quit the outfit that fall Hank Anderson, the foreman, told him grimly to take Bonehead with him or the dog would be shot. So it was that the pup passed into sole possession of the man he had chosen as his personal god.

In time even Bonehead learned the rudiments of herding sheep. He learned to go around the herd and not through it. Learned to trail the laggards away from camp in the morning and toward it at evening. Learned above all that the herd was never to be deserted for even an hour lest some marauding coyote or wolf make a raid during his absence.

By the time the dog was three years old Ollie had dispensed with any other canine. The dog had long since outgrown his awkwardness, and he was fat and sleek. Often Ollie talked to him, and at such times the big dog's happiness knew no bounds. Had Bonehead been able to understand everything that his master said his joy would have been tempered. For Ollie Justice dwelt in the shadow of a great fear.

The preceding summer Bonehead had been taken to a town for the first time. For a week he was unhappy as in the days of his puphood when he was constantly getting in somebody's way. Wherever possible he kept so close to Ollie that his master had difficulty in walking. But at the same hour every day Ollie passed through a door which was barred to dogs. The big fellow could only lay and whine, while the corridors were filled with people who looked at him with either fear or amusement.

Once when Ollie came out and the big dog sprang up with a joyous whine the herder failed to give him the usual pat on the head. Instead, Ollie's attention was all given to a lanky man with a dirty beard and mean, furtive eyes. At the moment there was nobody else in the corridor. The man paused and spoke a few words to Ollie. The herder made no reply, but something in the man's tone made Bonehead's ruff rise.

What the man said was simply this:

"You swore Chaim Wilkinson onto the gallows, Justice. Some day us Wilkinsons'll git yuh fer it."

THAT had been months ago. Now autumn had come and was nearly past. The gorgeous red and gold colors which made the canyons live with beauty were losing their sheen. The aspin leaves had browned and with every breeze laden with a hint of coming winter flocks of them let go the branches which had nurtured them all summer and frolicked away in a final dance before they would be buried under the snows to become fertile mold.

"Time we was gittin' outa here, Bonehead," the herder remarked. "There

ain't another herd this far back in the mountains."

Bonehead whined an agreement and bounded ahead toward the camp. It was nearly noon and the big dog had an unappeasable appetite. Suddenly he stopped, and the ruff of coarse hair along his neck stood straight up. A low whine rumbled in his throat.

"What is it, Bonehead?" Ollie called. "Some cussed porky raidin' our camp." It had been Bonehead's misfortune to tangle with several porcupines to his own consequent woe. Having several score of quills plucked out of his nose with a pair of pliers had finally taught him wisdom.

The dog wagged his tail briefly and stalked on a few feet. His distended nostrils quivered. Not yet had he glimpsed the unseen menace, but there was a threat in the air.

Ollie raised his rifle ready for use, but even as he did so there came the blast of a rifle report. The shock of a bullet brought a startled look to the herder's face, and then he sprawled face downward in the grass. A lanky figure in overalls stepped quickly from the bush behind which he had been hidden, and again raised the rifle. Discovery by the dog had caused him to fire at a range twice the distance he had intended. He couldn't be sure that one bullet had done the work.

But before Wilkinson could pull the trigger a seventy-five pound canine projectile was hurtling toward him. Instinctively Bonehead had known that this was an enemy; just as he had known it that day in the Pocatello court house.

The assassin promptly changed his mind. Instead of shooting again at Ollie he fired hastily at the dog. The bullet seared along Bonehead's back. The dog bit at the burned place, but didn't stop. Wilkinson suddenly saw Ollie Justice slowly getting to his knees, and he realized that the dog would be upon him before he could fire again. With a bitter oath the fellow leaped into the brush and under its shelter legged it for his horse.

Ollie fired once at his invisible foe, and then whistled for his dog to come back. It had taken many painful lessons to learn Bonehead that that whistle must be obeyed, but once the dog understood what a command meant it was never forgotten. Reluctantly, he turned and trotted back to his master.

For five minutes Ollie swayed there upon his knees, listening. He had heard his enemy ride away, and he was sure that Wilkinson would not return. Then he got slowly and painfully to his feet.

"You saved my life, boy," he said to the dog. "If you hadn't seen him he'd have put that bullet where he wanted it."

Bonehead whined anxiously. The taint of blood was strong in the air, and he knew that all wasn't right with his beloved master.

The sheepherder realized, too, that Wilkinson's object might yet be obtained. The bullet shock was wearing off, but outraged nerves told him that he had a smashed shoulder. He could feel the blood seeping down through his undershirt. He had to have help. The nearest ranch was forty miles out at Homer flat. He might find a sheep camp before that, but it was a chance. Certainly no help would come to him, and he was weakening fast.

He went on to the camp and poured out a basin of water. Into it he poured sheep dip until the water turned the color of milk. It was his left shoulder that was hurt. With his scissors he cut away the clothing from the wound and bathed it with the powerful antiseptic. Next he cut a clean flour sack into long strips of about three inches wide, which he tied together. He fastened one end to a small tree, backed under it, and wound the bandage as tightly as he could about the wound. When only a few inches at each end was left he fash-

ioned a knot and pulled it tight by throwing all the weight he could bear against the tree.

Finally he cut the end of the strip and sank to the ground. He was utterly exhausted, but he had dressed the wound as good as any ordinary person could have done.

His real difficulty had only started. He had to get his saddle horse and ride for help. Fortunately his horses were close to camp. They were always easy to catch, and after some difficulty he managed to saddle one with one hand. By that time he was weak and dizzy. Great globes of cold sweat stood out on his skin, and waves of darkness which each time grew harder to overcome swept over him. All the while Bonehead looked on with big, inquiring eyes.

"The sheep," Ollie muttered. "Can't leave the sheep.

It was a tradition of the range that a herd must never be deserted. It was doubly important with this one because the herd belonged to a widow with a houseful of small children, all dependent upon this one herd of sheep.

Too well the herder knew that he might never reach the settlements. Even if he did he might not be able to tell where the herd was. At the very best it would be two or three days before any one would come back to search for the herd. And much might happen to an unguarded herd of sheep in that time.

It was a wild, brushy country. Predatory animals were sure to attack and scatter the herd into dozens of little bunches. Many of them would never be found at best, and if it happened to snow they would all be lost. Toll of the sheep's natural enemies would destroy a season's profits.

Ollie Justice was a man of pride. It was a matter of personal honor that the herd come through with only normal loss. His failure would bring heartbreak and disaster to those who had trusted him. Yet the man knew that he couldn't stay. His eyes, already burning with fever, fell upon the dog.

"Bonehead," he said softly, "you've got to stay with the herd."

The big dog wagged his tail and looked fondly into his master's eyes. Thought of abandoning his master would never enter his canine mind, and Ollie knew it.

Regretfully the man took a rope from one of the horses and called the dog up to him. A few minutes later Bonehead was tied to a tree near the camp. Wonderingly the dog lay down and watched the curious movements of his master.

Finally the herder hauled himself into the saddle and clung desperately to the horn until his senses cleared. While consciousness yet remained he lashed himself to the saddle. With the bridle reins in his good hand he turned and rode slowly toward the herd.

Instantly Bonehead jumped and tried to follow. The rope jerked him back and he emitted a hoarse bark of protest. He leaped again, springing to his hind feet, but the rope jerked him over backward. He hit the ground with a grunt, and then squalled his lusty protest as he saw Ollie vanishing from his sight. Suddenly he seemed to go mad. He snarled and fought the rope like a wild thing. Sometimes he was upon his back, clawing at it with his feet; again the slaver flew in all directions as he attacked it with his teeth.

Meanwhile, Ollie Justice had ridden around the herd and started them out toward the flats. Recurrent waves of weakness warned him that he dared not linger. If he could hold onto himself until he got out of the mountains his horse would take him to some ranch if they weren't sighted before. It was his only chance.

Presently he rode around the herd and kept on a course which he knew they would follow. He had done all he could. Eventually, he knew, Bonehead would worry through the rope. The dog would

follow his horse's tracks back to the herd. But the dog would be baffled when he came to the place where the sheep would have trampled out the horse tracks and destroyed all scent. What Bonehead would do then was problematical. Nobody but Ollie Justice would have expected him to take charge of the herd.

IN TIME Bonehead gave over his paroxysms of violent effort. He stood quietly with the rope kept taut, only a low, sobbing whine issuing from his throat. In his own way he was trying to figure out the reason for this desertion.

His faith in the herder was complete. Ollie was a god. Whatever he did was right. Ollie would not have tied him up unless there was a reason for it, but Ollie's image grew more vivid with every passing minute. He had gone. For the first time in their long association Ollie was lost. In sudden frenzy the big dog again hurled himself against the biting hemp. He was short-haired and the rope burned his flesh, and the muscles of his neck ached horribly.

He stopped at last from exhaustion. The sun was almost down and no sign of Ollie or the herd. But the paroxysms of panic had passed. He could not break the restraining rope, but its restraint grew more irksome with every minute. He slashed at it with his teeth and then paused to spit out the threads of hemp that stuck in his mouth.

But he sensed that he had done something to the rope and he renewed his attack with his powerful teeth. As he felt the strands part he forgot to be irritated by the stuff that stuck in his mouth and chewed on with feverish haste. One by one the strands parted until only a single one remained. It eluded the dog's teeth, but parted as he twisted his head in an effort to get it again. He was free!

For a moment Bonehead was half dazed. He stood there with the short piece of frayed rope dangling from his neck, his eyes rolling with bewilderment. Then he remembered. He must find Ollie and the herd.

He knew where he had left the herd, and he struck out at a brisk lope. He had gone nearly half a mile when he remembered how Ollie had left the camp. He stopped, and then began to sniff along the ground in zig-zag fashion. Soon he found the horse tracks, and they seemed to be going toward the herd. He gave a joyful whoof. Ollie had been going toward the herd, and he would soon find him.

Another mile, and he could see where they had left the herd, but it was gone. No sign of Ollie either. He went on, following the horse tracks. He knew where Ollie had intercepted the herd, but from there on it was hard to follow the tracks. Finally he lost them altogether, where the sheep had wiped them out.

He followed the herd. It was deep dusk. A night hawk zoomed within two feet of his head and he cringed. And then he heard the distant tinkle of the sheep bells. He listened eagerly, but failed to hear the loud cheery yells with which the herder bedded down the sheep at this time of day. He ran on.

He found the sheep scattered along a brushy creek, and now he knew that something was wrong. They were rambling aimlessly, when they should have been safely bedded down upon the top of some open ridge or knoll. Anxiously, an inquiring whine rising to the starlight, he circled clear around the herd, unmindful of the fact that the sheep bunched up in terror as he moved carelessly around them. He circled once, and then back-tracked in a wide circle as he would when looking for lost lambs—but no Ollie.

Close to the herd he hunkered down and lifted his muzzle to the stars. A long, weird, quavering howl escaped him

and undulated over the hills to die away in a low, mournful chant. The sheep bunched up more tightly in nameless terror. Into their dumb brains percolated the fact that they were left unprotected amid the countless dangers of the wilderness.

No sooner had Bonehead's cry died away than it was answered by the crescendo howl of a timber wolf a mile away. The effect upon Bonehead was electrical. He raced to the top of a ridge barking forth his challenge to this traditional enemy. For a quarter of an hour he barked his defiance as he had barked it a thousand times in the past. And yet—there was a subtle difference. Always before, the herder had been at hand to back him up with the mysterious long stick which could encompass the death of a wolf or coyote at great distanees did they foolishly show themselves. Now there was no herder, and beneath the bravado there lurked a primordial fear.

Once Bonehead paused for breath, and instantly the timber wolf howled again—a taunting, insulting challenge.

Bonehead hurled his defiance back again, but soon became silent. His short, bristly hair stood upright. He had no fear of a coyote. Plenty of times he had put them to rout, and once he had killed one—a young one foolish enough to get within reach of his iron jaws. But this was a wolf—an entirely different proposition, as he well knew.

The sheep had left their huddle and were hurrying on down the canyon in a crazy stampede. Bonehead followed them with doubtful footsteps. The sheep were going the wrong way—camp lay in the other direction. But his thoughts were occupied with the wolf. Unless he was alert that gray marauder would slip in and kill a sheep.

For half an hour he followed the herd with constantly growing uneasiness. He did not know that the herd was getting into a canyon that was shunned by every sheepherder because of its mazes of chaparral, and its labyrinth of fallen timber, where it was next to impossible to hold a herd together, and practically impossible to get them out except a little bunch at a time.

There was a sudden rustle in the brush as of a number of sheep running, followed by one short, terrified bleat. The marauder had struck. Bonehead bounded forward. Green eyes glared at him from above something white. There was fear in his heart, but his courage was greater. It was his job to defend the sheep from all things predatory. He did not realize that he himself was a formidable looking object as he bore down with terrific speed. And the wolf had learned that where a dog was a man would not be far away.

Bonehead's rush ended amid a swirl of dead leaves around the freshly killed sheep. Mysteriously the green eyes disappeared. A raspy, throaty growl rumbled from Bonehead at this unexpected victory. He made half a dozen long, stiff-legged jumps in pursuit and then had business back at the carcass. If the wolf wanted to go away he was more than willing to let it.

The retreat of the wolf, however, had dissipated much of the dog's uncertainty. His tail no longer drooped so disconsolately. He pondered over the sheep. Long before this they should have been slumbering upon the bedground. He could not get them back to camp, but the sheep themselves were pulling toward the top of a ridge, and when they came to an open place they hesitated. Bonehead trotted around them and they huddled together in a woolly wad. Their meek obedience gave him the old sense of mastery.

It was not long till loneliness overtook him. Nose pointed toward the moon he chanted his sense of loss. He could not as yet comprehend the fact that Ollie had gone. In the hours that were to come his melancholy wails were to grow

sadder and sadder as Ollie failed to return.

Now, however, the conviction grew in his mind that Ollie must be at camp. The herd had at last settled down contentedly, and Bonehead slipped away. Soon he was running at the height of his speed. It was farther back to camp than he had thought, but as he approached, his unfailing instinct told him it was abandoned. His pace grew slower and his tail drooped.

For a long while he sat by the dead camp-fire, occasionally uttering a cry like a hurt baby. He chanted a requiem that was indescribably sad.

There was food under the wagon but he did not touch it. Once more he followed the herder's tracks to where he had lost them, but he did not give up the search. Around and around he circled, and shortly after daybreak he found where the tracks of a horse led away in a straight trail. What it all meant he did not know, but he pressed on with his nose close to horse tracks which were familiar. He would find Ollie.

Suddenly he halted. The herd! It was feeding time, and for the first time in his memory he was not there to render discipline, and to see that no predatory animals took unrighteous toll from his stupid charges.

He remembered the wolf, the ancient enemy of his clan. Even now it might be there slaughtering without let or hindrance. Must he not go back? He shook his head, and the frayed rope end struck his face. Ollie had tied him up, and he sensed that the master never did anything without good reason. It was beyond his doggish mind to understand what those reasons were, but he had come to accept them on faith.

But surely Ollie had not intended to leave him imprisoned to the aspen sapling. Anyhow he was free from that now, but his beloved man god had not wanted to take a dog with him. Bonehead at last comprehended this thoroughly. The eager light died from his soft brown eyes. A picture of utter dejection, he turned slowly back—back toward the herd.

His duty was clear. The herd must never be left untended. He would stay with it until Ollie's return.

When Bonehead returned to the herd he found the sheep scattered all over a brushy hillside, and they were getting farther and farther into Lost Canyon. The big dog was in a quandary. Some instinct warned him that the sheep were going the wrong way. According to habit he trotted along behind, hurrying up the stragglers, but he was not satisfied. He felt that if Ollie were along he would be sent around to turn the leaders back.

Finally he went around them, and gained confidence as he progressed. He reached the leaders, and barked his orders for them to turn back, and they fled before him, their short tails bobbing ludicrously.

BONEHEAD followed, but the herd was broken up by the chaparral. Finally, however, he seemed to have them in one band, but they were in the bottom of the canyon, their thirst having drawn them that way. The big dog drank and lay down in the shade of a pine tree, and here he stayed until the herd began to move.

Strange, unfamiliar things floated vaguely through the dog's brain. His lonesomeness was heavy upon him, and the urge to return to the camp and see if Ollie had not come was well nigh irresistible. Several times he had half arisen, but always something drew him back. He must stay with the herd until Ollie came back to him. When the woollies began to graze out from the creek they found the big dog in front of them, and they turned hastily toward the head of the canyon—toward the camp.

This much Bonehead had sensed—by

reason or by instinct, whichever the process is by which dogs indubitably do arrive at certain very positive conclusions—that he must stay by the herd, and the only way to get back to camp himself was by driving the sheep before him. But a much harder problem lay before him.

The herd had got too far into the dense brush of Lost Canyon for it to be taken back the way it had come. In two hours it was split into twenty bands in the small open spaces between the long fingers of chaparral brush.

Bonehead labored and raced to keep the band together, but without avail. He would try to drive one small bunch into another, and suddenly find them up against an impenetrable thicket through which a jack-rabbit could not crawl. His dumb charges would mill around and look at him wonderingly with their soft, silly brown eyes. They could not go farther, so they stood and stared stupidly at the dog. And while they were standing the other bunches were getting into similar pockets. It was a problem to tax the brain of a man.

From one bunch to another the big dog moved. For the most part he worked silently, but occasionally his deep voice boomed out angrily. He made no progress. Now, if ever, was the time for him to abandon the herd. Pangs of hunger gnawed at his vitals. He stopped to rest, and his gaze rested upon the form of a timber wolf sitting boldly in an open space on the other side of the canyon. The wolf was a picture of insolence with his ears pricked ahead and his tongue lolled out.

Bonehead knew the wolf would never have dared show himself so if the herder was around. At last the animal had recognized that the herd was unprotected. At any time it could dash in and make its kill, and it was simply biding its time. It was too much for Bonehead to stand.

With a roar the big dog charged toward his enemy, fairly making the hills ring as he voiced his anger. He could not take a straight course as the brush baffled him, but he plunged and scrambled till he got through it some way, and at last he raced up to where the wolf—had been.

Bonehead's sense of triumph was short lived. In just a few minutes he located his foe in another open space. The wolf showed no sign of fear. It was waiting.

Bonehead's noisy charge had, however, had one curious result. It had stampeded the sheep. In blind panic they were fleeing back to the bottom of the canyon—the only way they could have escaped from the chaparral. Soon they were tightly bunched, milling around and uttering queer, frightened little bleats. Finally the bolder ones began to trail out on a horizontal line on the farther slope of the canyon, into a place where sheep had never gone before.

Behind the herd came Bonehead. Did a straggler fall behind, his sharp teeth nipped it hard enough to send it scurrying on for the shelter of its fellows. Did a bunch start to wander away into one of the blind pockets, there was Bonehead to turn them back. He had sensed that there was only one way for him to exercise his control and protection over his charges, and that was to keep them in a bunch.

Night descended, and the herd was in a cul-de-sac from which the dog had been unable to extricate it after an hour of effort. The sheep lay down, and Bonehead withdrew a little distance to wait. He was swamped in misery. Hunger assailed him, but there was nothing to eat. There was food back at the camp, but he could not leave the herd. Somewhere at hand lurked the gray killer.

Fear was added to the big dog's trouble. Fear of the nameless things which were as nothing when his master was with him, but which became ghostly objects of dread now that he was alone. And there was the tangible fear of the

grim marauder which he knew hung upon the heels of the herd.

He tipped his nose to the sky and mourned. The herd stirred uneasily. Night breezes rustled the brush. He yearned for Ollie, but there was a hopeless note in his dreary wail.

SUDDENLY the lament died in his throat. The short, thick hair of his ruff bristled with menace; lips curled back from gleaming fangs. Twenty feet distant the timber wolf had stalked forth from the brush, greenish eyes regarding the dog with cool insolence. Then, with what was almost an insulting gesture, the wolf coolly turned away—toward the herd.

It was too much. Bonehead charged. He was almost upon his foe when the wolf leaped aside with unbelievable speed. He had expected the attack; had deliberately provoked the dog to make it. And as the wolf doubled up after the leap it whirled and its fangs left red furrows down the big dog's ribs.

Before Bonehead could stop, the wolf assumed the aggressive. It rushed and its snapping jaws just missed the dog's throat but inflicted painful wounds on the side of his head. But now Bonehead had lost his fear. Lust of battle was upon him, and hatred of the hereditary foe left him with but one thought—to fight on until death ended the conflict.

The wolf leaped again, but this time flashing fang met flashing fang. Lips were torn and bleeding, but the combatants were insensible to pain. They rose on their hind legs and wrestled mightily, but the superior weight of the wolf told. Bonehead went over backward. But before the wolf could fasten on a death grip the dog twisted free. The wolf bounced in and his fangs ripped Bonehead's shoulder. It tried for the throat, but was checked.

Bonehead captured an ear, and his enemy capered in a frenzy of pain until the teeth tore loose. The dog lost his footing as his teeth split the ear, and before he could move the timber wolf had pounced upon him. With swift, unerring instinct the powerful fangs dropped to the dog's throat. Bonehead felt his breathing stopped as his foe strove to reach the jugular vein.

Now indeed Bonehead fought for his life. He kicked and bucked; his strong hind legs racked the wolf's belly as he tried to get leverage to throw his foe off, but to no avail. He was slowly being strangled. His eyes glazed, and he gasped and gurgled in the agony of suffocation. Still, the wolf had not been able to reach the desired jugular. His mouth was stuffed full of the dangling rope end that was still around Bonehead's neck.

There was too much rope. Suddenly the wolf released its hold, and paused an instant to spit out the hemp that irritated its mouth. It proved an ill-advised delay. Just enough consciousness remained in the dog to give him the will to fight on. As the pressure on his throat was released he turned on his side, gasped breath back into his burning lungs, and then fastened his teeth into the nearest part of his enemy's body. It happened that the great jaws clamped together over the wolf's front foot, and as they closed down with irresistible power the bones crumbled beneath them.

The wolf surged back, but the maddening pain brought him forward again. Blinded by the agonizing sensation, the frenzied wolf slashed again and again at his short-haired foe. The flesh along Bonehead's side was cut to ribbons, but grimly he held on, crunching, crunching, the feel of the bones being shattered bringing sweet satisfaction to his mind.

Suddenly the wolf threw itself backward. It rolled and bucked and twisted like a thing gone mad. It howled abjectly as the pain became unbearable. Still Bonehead hung on like grim death, eyes closed, and every muscle tensed. But his hold was slipping as his victim's

contortions wrenched the imprisoned leg now this way, now that.

Once the struggling wolf managed to plant a hind leg squarely against Bonehead's head, and as it straightened out the dog was lifted straight into the air. His teeth slipped off and came together with a click. Bonehead got his balance and rushed back to the fray, but all he saw was his recent foe diving frantically toward the closest brush as fast as three legs could carry it.

For half an hour Bonehead lay and panted. Then he got to his feet and staggered down to the water. Already his limbs were stiff, and he wabbled from sheer weakness as he walked. The cold water refreshed him somewhat, and he crawled under a down log and nursed such of his wounds as he could reach with his tongue. He had lost much blood. Gradually he ceased to lick with his tongue. He lay still, and it seemed that he would never move again.

The sun was high when Bonehead dragged his weary limbs from his shelter. He wanted to lie there and recuperate. He needed rest, but his instinct to duty drew him forth. The herd would be moving; he could not let them scatter again.

The sheep were in a region of burned-over timber. Down logs in every stage of decay lay in criss-cross fashion. The sheep were clambering among them like so many ants—becoming irretrievably scattered. But Bonehead knew how to gather them. From flank to flank he trotted, dragging his sore and weary body, bending the leaders always inward, and keeping the stragglers moving up.

It was a task which any sheepherder would have shrunk from; would have declared impossible of accomplishment. But shortly before the sun went down the herd emerged intact on the top of a ridge. Bonehead had brought them across Lost Canyon with the loss of but one sheep.

It was open country on the down slope. And that afternoon Hank Anderson, foreman of the Harrington outfit, from far below picked up the herd with a powerful pair of field glasses.

"It can't be," he remarked to his companion. "Justice was out of his head when we found him, but he kept ravin' about his sheep bein' in Fish Creek basin. If they are we'll never find half of 'em. But that's a herd of sheep way up there, and who can they belong to?"

"If it's Justice's herd an' they was in Fish Creek basin then they must've crossed Lost Canyon," Jim Bailey said.

"That's impossible. Nobody could bring a herd of sheep through Lost Canyon," Anderson argued. "But we'd better have a look at that herd anyway."

It took two hours of hard riding before the men reached the herd. They stopped with astonished words, profane, yet somehow reverent.

The herd was coming straight down a ridge, while behind it limped and wabbled a huge dog with a white head. That white head was now covered with dried blood. Great gashes still lay open along the dog's body, and it seemed to be limping on all four legs. Yet whenever a sheep lagged, somehow the dog managed to stump over and give it a nudge.

"It's the herd we're lookin' for," Bailey breathed in awe. "That dog has brought 'em across Lost Canyon alone, and from the looks of him he's had to fight half the coyotes in the country."

"I could have had that dog once," Anderson muttered ruefully, "but I told Justice if he didn't take the mutt away I'd have him shot."

At their call Bonehead looked up and wagged his tail, but his eyes searched for a man that wasn't there.

"Lookin' for Ollie," Anderson said. "Hand him up here, Jim, an' then you trail the herd down the best way you can. I'm takin' old Bonehead down to see Justice."

THE CAMP-FIRE

The meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers.

SAYS S. Omar Barker of his story, and himself, and an old argument that once was bandied about the Camp-Fire:

If there is anything man's eyes may look upon that really gets down and grips his guts like the sight of starving creatures, man or animal, I don't know what it is. And that, briefly, is the theme of "Hard Range". It doesn't require a bold, brave, dashing, naturally fight-some man to become stirred up to heroic fearlessness for the sake of securing food for starving fellow creatures, two-legged or four. Starving cattle—and even a craven, greasy-sack outfit is going to do something about it. And not chiefly because of the value of the animals, either. Just because it isn't human to look upon hunger and remain passive. I suspect that the recent drought on this Southwestern range had quite a bit to do with the writing of "Hard Range".

Of myself, there is little to say. I am not new to *Adventure*, either as reader or contributor, but my yarns and verses have not appeared here frequently for several years. I was born some forty years ago in these New Mexico mountains, raised outdoors, afoot and ahorseback, and now I'm back again to settle down here for good, writing, riding, fishing, hunting, camping, woodsin' around in one of the few remaining primitive mountain areas of the U. S.

And, by the way, since my appearance in Camp-Fire quite a few years ago "augurin'" that cougars never scream, I've heard one. Just one—once. And my brother Elliott, who is New Mexico's State Game Warden, and rather generally considered the state's premier woodsman, *still* hasn't heard one. This report isn't to reopen the argument. It's just to back down—a little—on former statements about the alleged vocalizing of Southwestern cattywampuses.

FRANK C. ROBERTSON returns to our Writers' Brigade after a long absence. It was with *Adventure*, as he explains, that he got his start.

I am more than pleased to be back in *Adventure* again, for it was to *Adventure* that I sold my first real story, "The Hole in the Rock", which appeared in 1922. During the next three years *Adventure* used a number of novels and short stories of mine. As I recall, the last one was a short story about a mule called "'Lisbeth", which was published in 1925.

I have always had a particularly soft spot in my heart toward this mazagine, not only because it was the one in which I first broke into print, but because I doubt if I could ever have made the grade without the kindly help of the then editor, Arthur Sullivant Hoffman.

At the time I sold "The Hole in the Rock", I was living on a dry farm which I had homesteaded some seven years before, after having spent some ten years prior to that working on cattle ranches, herding sheep, and following various construction jobs as a migratory worker. I had proved up on the homestead, gone in with my father and brother on an adjoining dry farm, mortgaged the whole business for $7,000, and was on the verge of losing it when I decided to devote my spare time that winter to writing. Selling the story didn't save the farm, but it was quite the biggest thrill of my life, and has saved me until this time at least from the necessity of too close an association with what we used to call a stick of ignorance—the handle of any tool used in manual labor.

THE letter from Arthur Sullivant Hoffman brought, and still brings, warm reply from our readers. Surely it would be difficult to match anywhere, in editorial annals, the hearty letters that have greeted the appearance of his name again in *Adventure*. Typical excerpts follow:

From William H. Clark of Los Angeles, California:

Have just finished reading the Camp-Fire in the current issue, and boy, did I get a thrill! When I saw A.S.H. tacked on to the

end of that letter, I felt that the depression and all the rest of the things that have been the matter with the magazine and Camp-Fire and in fact the whole darn works, was going to be remedied and everything was going to be all right again.

I have been a reader of *Adventure* for longer than I care to remember, twenty years in fact. At one period I quit it for several months at a time, but every once in a while I would find myself looking for the old friend on the newsstand and walking home with it again only to be once more disappointed.

In the last few months, however, it has been more and more filling the old place in my reading (not to become sentimental and say heart) and I find myself getting impatient for it to appear on the stands as I did in the good old days. You are to be congratulated for bringing it back, and I have only one suggestion, and that is that as soon as possible you return it to its old size and price. I think when you do you will more than find the old gang with you one hundred percent.

In all my life I have never waxed enthusiastic enough to write a letter to a magazine before, but it has certainly been gratifying to see the old friend come back and the sight of Arthur S. Hoffman was too much for an old sap who is getting close to fifty. He doesn't know me from Adam's off ox, but give him my regards and tell him that there are many of us that are looking forward to hearing from him again, and that I for one would like to hear what he is doing now.

Good luck and best wishes to the magazine and staff.

FROM A. R. Dunn, of Hollywood, California:

When I saw Arthur Sullivant Hoffman's name in the February first issue, I just had to haul out the typewriter and click off a "Viva!" This letter from this great editor and personality is the final proof that the high standard for stories and the unique spirit of the Camp-Fire of the old *Adventure* were back with us once again.

Congratulations on the new-old *Adventure*.

FROM William D. Leetch, of Danville, Virginia:

Read Mr. Hoffman's fine letter and am gladdened thereby. May *Adventure* live forever. I want my children and their children to read its stories and thrill to them as I have.

FROM C. H. B., of Sedalia, Missouri:

I read A. S. H.'s letter and am glad to see him in print again. Hope his predictions are right. I've read *Adventure* almost continually for fifteen years, and am hoping to see it come back again to its former self as so many have expressed in Camp-Fire.

FROM William M. Mumm, of Columbus, Ohio:

I was much pleased with the letter from Arthur Sullivant Hoffman. I have been a subscriber since before his time, and I met him personally in New York many years ago while he was on the job. The point I want to make is that what he says about his experiences checks with what I know about the matter, and I am hoping that on the strength of his experience you will continue to build the magazine to where it used to be in its literary qualities.

WE'VE done an injustice to the Arizona Rangers, and thank Gladwell Richardson, of Flagstaff, for straightening it out. He writes:

I suspect that by now the editors of *Adventure* know just how much in error was the very short article appearing in the December 15th issue, on page 91, entitled, "Outwitting the Arizona Rangers." Jim Courtright, according to the article, escaped from the custody of Arizona Rangers at Fort Worth, Texas. Something on the same order as the article appearing in *Adventure* was published by a Texas paper some time ago.

The truth is that if Courtright, "The Longhaired," ever came to Arizona at all he did so without creating any stir whatever. He was never wanted for a killing in Arizona. It was not Arizona Rangers from whom he escaped at Fort Worth, Texas, in 1884, but from a New Mexico officer and Texas Rangers. The New Mexico officer's name was Richmond. He made the mistake of taking Courtright from the jail to a restaurant he often patronized. Guns were hung on nails under the table favored by Courtright. There was no such affair as a banquet given in Courtright's honor before his scheduled departure for New Mexico to stand trial for murder. A number of Courtright's friends crowded in to say goodbye that Sunday night and when they did so he pulled out a gun and threw down on the New Mexico officer and the Texas Rangers.

"Boys," he is alleged to have said, "I ain't goin' back to New Mexico. I got other plans!"

Be it said for the Texas Rangers they were under Richmond's orders, and had protested against his method of taking Courtright from jail to let him eat.

As for the Arizona Territorial Rangers, no prisoner ever made good an escape from them. No law enforcement body in the world ever had as fine and clear a record as they. They "got their man" in foreign countries or anywhere else. Their membership was always so small that the general rule was for one man

to work alone. Two rangers made up a full force, and three constituted a crowd. Time and again pairs of them demonstrated their ability to whip huge mobs, armed and fighting with the avowed purpose to take a prisoner from them or to halt enforcement of the law.

No tough man or fast gun slinger ever lasted long against the Arizona Rangers. The rangers were gunmen themselves, the fastest crew ever seen in the West. One of them downed three rurales after he had been shot through the lungs from ambush before the rurales could shoot him a second time. Another ranger, Webb, drew and killed Lon Bass, brother of Sam Bass, after Bass had the drop.

Had the Arizona Rangers been in charge of Courtright that Sunday night when he threw down with his hidden gun, Luke Short would never have had the opportunity to kill him. The Arizonians would have "rubbed" him out then and there, and any of his friends who might have taken a hand. Again, Courtright might not have been so quick to cross guns with them. To kill an Arizona Ranger was equivalent to signing one's own death warrant. The Arizona Rangers had an unwritten code that if one of them was killed while on duty or without an even break his brothers would avenge him as quickly as possible. Jefferson Kidder, Arizona Ranger, was ambushed and slain by a rurale across the line in Mexico. One of his mates announced casually that he was "resigning," dropped across the line and spent two years trailing down Kidder's slayer. With that little job attended to, the ranger crossed the line again and pinned on his badge of authority.

I hope this imputation on the fine record of the Arizona Rangers may be corrected, and with best wishes for the continued success of *Adventure*.

IT LOOKS as if the depression may be sliding into history, and even a depression, like a war, has some bright spots.

Recently I had a card from a man who was leaving for California.

I met him early last fall. He had a sailboat for sale. I hailed from shore, and this little bronzed man rowed in for me. He'd been skinning an eel he caught overside, for his supper. He wore only a pair of khaki trousers hacked off at the knees, and of their own accord they had developed a fine buckskin fringe. He was clean shaven; his boat was shipshape; he looked fifty and was sixty-seven.

I came to know him, and his story. He'd been a financial man, averaging eighteen thousand dollars a year, living well (so called, he said), with many suits he was fussy about, and (he was a bachelor) a valet to do the fussing. He showed me the last of the suits, with a grin. He had weighed one-hundred-seventy-eight then, and one hundred and ten now. He'd been fond of his stomach. The skin hung on it now in a few wrinkles—you can't stretch it for years as he did and take in all the slack at sixty-seven.

In the Big Smash his savings of eighty-five thousand dollars had melted almost as rapidly as the snowflakes melt outside my window at this moment. He lost his job a few months later. He closed out everything, resigned a high honorary position he had in a great city's government (I can't be specific and expose him to view in his Robinson Crusoe shorts), gathered the wreckage, and bought a boat. He had almost nothing left, and he'd never had a boat, knew nothing of them, but he'd always thought that someday he'd get one. And he moved his good library aboard.

He'd never felt as well in his life. He liked the sunsets on the water, he liked the lapping round the boat, he liked being his own captain and crew. It was a kind of adventure, he said, and he'd always been too busy to have any adventures. He hadn't a single damned regret, and it was pretty good at sixty-seven to be as nimble as a boy.

The last time I saw him he was swinging in a bosun's seat at the top of the forty-foot mast. He was steadying himself with his bare feet, he wore the same fore-shortened pants, and waved a paint brush at me.

He's on his way to the South Seas. He'd always wanted to see them some time, he said.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

IN PHILATELY a grill is to hold the canceling ink on the stamp.

Request:—I am a young stamp collector who is slightly puzzled over something.

I have three stamps (U. S.) in my collection which are listed in the catalogue as with and without a grill. I do not know what the catalogue means by grill. I happened to see your address in *Adventure* Magazine and thought you might be able to throw some light on the matter.

—EDWARD BOCUSZ, Paterson, N. J.

Reply by Mr. H. A. Davis:—A "grill" is a series of small indentations applied to the stamp by a steel die, the surface of which consists of a series of pyramidal bosses which penetrate the paper. The object was to break the paper, so the canceling ink would penetrate and prevent cleaning so the stamps could be used again.

If you have access to Scott's U. S. catalogue you will find the subject discussed in the fore part of the book as an introduction together with other informative matter.

AN *Ask Adventure* expert sends us this added information about Easter Island:

In the January 15th issue of *Adventure* Mr. McCreadle replies to a query by Mr. Kuhn of Columbus, Ohio, regarding Easter Island. Mr. Kuhn states that he was unable to find much information about the monoliths and also desires data regarding expeditions to the islands.

It so happens that a few years ago I was very much interested in Easter Island myself and, I believe it was in 1925 or 1926, when I was on the West Coast, some of us old *Adventure* men out there contemplated an expedition of our own. But the owner of the schooner we were to sail on reneged and nothing came of it.

I would have written sooner, but it took me some time to dig up my notes which, by the way, are only partly accounted for. However, here's what I have, hoping it might interest Mr. Kuhn.

The original name of the island was "Paasch-Eiland", so named by its discoverer, the Dutch Admiral Jacob Roggeween, who, at Easter time of 1722 set foot, as the first white man, on the island's steep coast. The log book of the Roggeween expedition still exists. I've read it somewhere, but it does not contain much, except a rather good physical description of the island.

A German explorer, Carl Friedrich Behrens, visited the island in 1730 or thereabouts. He published a book in 1738, a copy of which I saw (1929) in the University library at Leipzig. From it one gathers that Behrens was also a member of the earlier Dutch expedition. Behrens' dope has more to do with ethnographical studies and is interesting reading. The German's book is entitled "Der wohlversuchte Suedlaender" in English: "The Well-tried Southlander." The next notable visitor was the Frenchman, La Pérouse. He took a long trip through the South Seas (between 1785 and 1788) and his countryman Milet Mureau published the findings in book form. I believe the English title of the book is "La Pérouse's Exploring Trips" and should be available in the New York Public Library. The most interesting and probably most exhaustive writings about Easter Island are contained in an article by Henry Balfour which was published in the Journal of the Folk-Lore Society, London, Vol. XXVIII. It not only contains an excellent description of the island and its inhabitants, but also numerous illustrations which prove that the various motives used by the unknown inhabitants of Easter Island were or are also used by the Solomon Islanders, especially the bird-man motive and the man holding a fish.

During the 80's of the last century, the German gunboat "Hyaene" anchored off Easter Island (Sept. 20 to 23, 1882) and the paymaster Weisser wrote a somewhat dry, but even today still authoritative and informative book about the island. This man was an authority on ethnographical subjects. But the United States Navy was on the spot three years later, the U.S.S. *Mohican* anchored there and Paymaster Thomson's report was, up to a short time ago, the most illustrative and exhaustive source of information about Easter Island. His report can be obtained, I believe, from the United States Navy archives or the Navy Library; Captain Knox, ret. is in charge. (Washington, D. C.) In 1904, Alexander Agassiz made the first good photographs of the island, but I'm sorry to say that my notes do not disclose just where these pictures have been published.

In the Spring of 1913, Mr. and Mrs. (Katherine) Scoresby Routledge, accompanied by a number of scientists visited Easter Island on

the SS *"Mana."* They stayed there from March 1914 to August 1915 and her book "The Mystery of Easter Island" is regarded as a splendid work.

Mr. McCreadie states that the natives on Easter Island speak the same language as those of the Cook group. However, to be more specific, (and this belongs to a subject in which I majored, i.e. Philology), I'd like to say that the idiom spoken on Rapanui, as the natives term Easter Island, is generally Polynesian but has an especially noticeable likeness to the language spoken by the natives of New Zealand. As is well known, the original natives of New Zealand were Maori, a culturally speaking, highly developed race. Even to-day, the word "maori" on Easter Island means as much as "scientist," "artist." In parenthesis here, Mr. Balfour wrote that the problem of Easter Island opened up again the old argument about the Melanesian elements which were supposed to have influenced the Maori culture in New Zealand.

There are many other idiomatic examples. For instance, "wind" in the Rapanui language is "tokerow" or "tokerao," a matter of spelling. Any white man living in the South Seas knows that in that region the names of the winds mean nothing more or less than the names of neighboring islands. Now on Samoa (and I've been there) East wind means "toelao." One might be almost sure that in this wind-name there is a reminiscence of the Tokelao archipelagos (170 degrees West and 10 degrees south) and it may be that the forefathers of the present-day inhabitants of Easter Island touched the Samoa and Tokelao Islands on their way to the new abode.

The Rapanui language also is similar to the one spoken on the whole Samoan archipelago, also on Tahiti. Even Cook noticed that his Samoan boy Mahine could carry on a conversation with the people of Easter Island when he touched there.

The penetration, or let us say influx of Polynesian elements on Easter Island is not so mysterious as is generally supposed. There are plenty of spoors and tracks and footprints. The road leads from New Zealand, via Samoa, Tahiti, Mangareva (by the way, there is a legend on Easter Island, the so-called Hotu-Matua Legend, which is also known on Mangareva!), Pitcairn Island (likewise adorned with stone monoliths) to Easter Island.

I could go on a long way, but Easter Island is not within my province. However, if Mr. Kuhn should like to have more dope, he's welcome. I'll let him have anything I've got. Judging from his name, if he is able to read German, the Insel Verlag in Leipzig, Germany, published a good book about Easter Island some years ago. I think the title is "Die Oster Insel." I don't remember who wrote it, but the book could be gotten from Brentano.

Yours sincerely,

BEDA VON BERCHEM.

THE truculent grampus may be only an innocent insect larva.

Request:—In this section we have an insect commonly called a "Grampus" that is supposed to be very poisonous.

This insect's body is about two inches long, has two claws on its head and a spiny tail about two inches long, with three pairs of legs, and black in color; it lives under rotten wood and damp places and seems to be very vicious.

Can this be a specie of scorpion such as found in Central and South America?

—P. C. LAINHARDT, Tampa, Florida.

Reply by Dr. S. W. Frost:—The name "Grampus" denotes an animal that is ferocious, dangerous or has the appearance of being savage. The Hellgrammite, a perfectly harmless but dangerous looking insect larva, has been given this name. One of the Dolphins has been called a "Grampus" or "Killer" because it ferociously attacks its prey.

The creature you describe is probably the "Grampus," "Mule killer" or false scorpion. However, it is not poisonous. It is known to science as *Mastigophroctus giganteus* and is common in Florida, Texas and several of the Southern states. Do not confuse this with the true scorpion, which is very poisonous and may even cause death. In the "Grampus" or false scorpion, the first pair of legs are very much elongated and distinctly longer than the claws. In the true scorpion the legs are normal and much shorter than the claws.

BLACK opals are found in Australia, but in Nevada there are opals made of wood.

Request:—I am interested in black opals and would like to know all their characteristics.

Could you tell if Australia is the only place where they are found? I would like to know if they are in demand by people today.

I should also like to know if the black opal, and girasol, sometimes called the royal fire opal are one and the same.

Could you tell if any books are on the market dealing with these two stones?

—W. E. HOLDER, Edmonton, Alberta.

Reply by Mr. F. J. Esterlin:—The opal is described in a general manner in all books dealing with gem materials, but I know of no work which treats the opal alone. It may be that large stone houses which specialize in black opals may have written something about these stones, but none have come to my attention.

The girasol is merely a type of black opal this variety. Other varieties include, harlequin opal—which resembles a patch-work which is distinguished by numerous small flakes of fire in the stone, and is a name for

quilt; peacock opal—which takes its name from the color—and other names which have been applied for sales purposes. Large, unusually fine stones are often given a name to distinguish them from all other stones.

As all gem materials have fallen somewhat in demand it is difficult to tabulate the demand, but fine stones are getting scarce, and are always saleable. It is a type of stone which can be easily appreciated and the values are widely known by the public.

Australia is the only source of this stone, although a somewhat similar variety is the opal from Nevada, which is opalized wood. These are obtainable in thick pieces and are as beautiful as the Australian, but are uncertain and liable to loss of color, as well as subject to cracking.

TAKE a short trip first. And don't bite off more than you can chew.

Request:—I am considering a motor boat trip along the following route: Starting at Cleveland, through Lake Erie and the New York State Barge Canal and the Hudson to New York, down the coast to New Orleans, up the Mississippi and the Chicago Drainage Canal to Chicago, and through the Lakes back to Cleveland. (Note: Possible reversing of the route so as to go downriver on the Mississippi to save gas.)

Would like to spend about a month on the trip, about the middle of the summer. Planning on two companions, camping for the night, or sleeping on the boat if we can afford a large enough one.

Would greatly appreciate it if you would answer the following questions, or whichever lie within your department:

1. Is this trip possible (geographically, can a small boat pass through the two canals on the route)?

2. Is it possible to travel in sheltered waters all the way down the Atlantic Coast?

3. How large a boat would be necessary for the waters traversed?

4. How much would it cost per mile to run such a boat, and what speed could we expect (average, both hourly and daily)?

5. Would it be possible to drift all the way down the Mississippi, and how long would it take?

Don't hesitate to tell us any bad news. We are young men, with limited experience in the open, but lots of ambition.

—CARLTON COBERT, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reply by Mr. G. T. White:—The trip you propose is possible but I would recommend going down the Mississippi, instead of up as it will save the equal of several thousand miles of travel.

You will not have sheltered waters all the way down the coast. At New York you will have to go out around Sandy Hook and in at Manasquan, a distance of about 30 miles. At Beaufort you will have to go out to Southport, a distance of about 70 miles. Then you will again go out from Southport for a distance of 77 miles to Georgetown. Otherwise you will be entirely within shelter, but such bodies of water as lower Delaware Bay and the Chesapeake can get mighty rough in spite of being sheltered from a nautical standpoint.

If you mean to camp out on shore at all times, I believe you could get by with a husky 21-footer but I urge you to consider some arrangements whereby you could sleep aboard some of the time. Along the inside route you will find hundreds of miles of marshes where finding a decent camp site would be a job. Also you would have open water, and plenty of it in the Gulf.

Speed on the water costs money. For instance, to get a cruising speed of 8 miles in the above boat you could get by with no more than two gallons an hour, maybe a bit less. To get 15 miles in the same boat would require between four and five gallons an hour. In this I am figuring on a pretty husky boat to stand the gaff and give you room to turn around and stow your stuff. I believe you will find that an average of 100 miles a day will be pretty high. In fact, considering laying up waiting on bad weather it would be better to figure on not much over 50 miles a day. On that basis the trip will take about three months. To do it in a month would set a speed record and cost you close to 8 gallons an hour for gas.

I think you could drift down the Mississippi if you had a month to spare but that would grow mighty monotonous and the actual progress would depend upon the water conditions. I don't think much of that idea. Now for another thing. Don't take a chance on the Gulf, or Florida in July, August, September or October. Hurricane season is no time for a tiny boat out in wide water.

Here's my advice. Buy a cheap boat and cruise from Cleveland to New York, making side trips to Champlain and then fooling around New York waters until your month is up. Then try to sell the boat for enough to get back to Cleveland. You'll kill a month, find plenty of camp sites and gain experience that will teach you whether or not you want to make the big trip. If, as I imagine, you have had little boating experience, don't attempt the trip you outlined, it takes too much skill for novices.

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, 250 Bronxville Rd., Bronxville, N. Y.

Boxing—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 117 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

Coins: *and medals*—HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

First Aid—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 1208, Orlando, Fla.

Fishing: *salt and fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait; camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, (Ozark Ripley), care of *Adventure.*

Football—JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose St., N. Y. C.

Health Building Activities, Hiking—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 1208, Orlando, Fla.

Horses: *care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting; jumping; and polo; horses of old and new West*—MAJOR THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pueblo, Calif.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping—MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M.D., care American Tourist Camp Ass'n., 152 W. 65th St., N. Y. C.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Yosemite, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif.

Old Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Oriental Magic and Effects—JULIEN PROSKAUER, 148 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. No. 3, Box 69, Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns: *foreign and American makes; wing shooting*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

★**Skiing and Snowshoeing**—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Small Boating: *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Stamps—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Avenue, Denver, Colo.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, 134 N. 4th St., Columbus, Ohio.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of Education, New York University, Washington Square, New York, N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American; north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Automobiles and Aircraft Engines: *design, operation and maintenance*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachute gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders, venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Ethnology: (*Eskimo*)—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry: *in the United States; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, Box 576, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Fur Farming—FRED L. BOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, New York.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill.

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mining: *territory anywhere in North America. Mining law, prospecting outfitting; any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Motor Vehicles: *operation, legislative restrictions and traffic*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *outfitting, work in out of the way places, general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Precious and semi-precious stones: *cutting and polishing of gem materials; technical information*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 901-902 Shreve Bldg., 210 Post Road, San Francisco, Calif.

Radio: *telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Railroad: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure.*

Salvaging Sunken Treasure: *authentic information of salvagable treasure since 1855*—LIEUT. H. E. RIESEBERG, P. O. Box 238, Benjamin Franklin Sta., Washington, D. C.

Taxidermy—SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE SUBJECTS

Army Matters: *United States and Foreign*—CAPT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 184 Fair Haven Rd., Fair Haven, N. J.

Navy Matters: *United States and Foreign*—LT. COMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U. S. N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Fla.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—PATRICK LEE, 157-11 Sanford Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, 184 Fair Haven Rd., Fair Haven, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, R. F. D. 1, Box 614, La Canada, Calif.

World War: *strategy, tactics, leaders, armies, participants, historical and political background*—BEDA VON BERCHEM, care *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

The Sea, Part 1 *British and American Waters Ships, seamen, statistics, record, oceans, waterways, seas, islands. Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Horn, Magellan Straits, Mediterranean Sea, Islands and Coasts.*—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESEBERG, P. O. Box 238, Benjamin Franklin Sta., Washington, D. C. ★**2** *Antarctica*—F. LEONARD MARSLAND, care *Adventure.*

The Tropics—SEYMOUR POND, care *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Ariz., care Conner Field.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand; Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star,* Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies*—V. B. WINDLE, care *Adventure.* **2** *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China, Southern and Eastern China.*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care *Adventure.* **3** *Northern China and Mongolia*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3, Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. **4** *Japan*—

OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntingdon Ave., Scarsdale, N. Y. 5 *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*. 6 ★*Palestine*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 26th Ave., West, Vancouver, B. C.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 26th Ave., West, Vancouver, B. C. 2 *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland. British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—GORDON MAC CREAGH, Box 197, Centerport, Long Island, N. Y. 3 *Tripoli, Sahara, caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*. 4 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. 5 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Nigeria.*—N. E. NELSON, Firestone Plantations Co., Akron, Ohio. 6 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, and Rhodesia.*—CAPT. F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Simi, Calif. 7 ★*Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, Cornnna, Ont., Canada. 8 ★*Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, 24 Cuba St., Havana, Cuba.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Europe, Part 1—G. I. COLBURN, East Ave., New Canaan, Conn. 2 *The Balkans: Jugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece and Turkey. The Austrian Succession States: Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary—History, customs, travel.*—BEDA VON BERCHEM, care *Adventure*.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. 2 *Venezuela. The Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.*—DR. PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 414 W. 121st St., N. Y. C.

★**West Indies**—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Central America—E. BRUGUIERE, care *Adventure*.

Mexico, Part 1 ★*Northern Border States.*—J. W. WHITSAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. 2 *Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche.*—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Prk., Md. 3 ★*South of line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—JOHN NEWMAN PAGE, Sureno Carranza 16, Cuautla, Morelos, Mexico.

★**Newfoundland**—C. T. JAMES, Box 1331, St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland—*Dog-teams, whaling, Eskimos, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Lorlag, Alaska.

Canada, Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island*—FRED L. BOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, N. Y. 2 ★*Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St., Quebec, Canada. 3 ★*Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungova and Keewatin.*—S. E. SANGSTER, care *Adventure*. 4 ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton, Ont., Canada. 5 ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 269 Victoria Rd., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. 6 *Humers Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Dept. of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. 7 ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. 8 *Northw. Ter. and Arctic, Ellesmere Land and half-explored islands west, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland.*—PATRICK LEE, 157-11 Sanford Ave., Flushing, N. Y. 9 ★*Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie, Northern Keewatin, Hudson Bay Mineral Belt.*—LIONEL H. G. MOORE, Flin Flon, Manitoba, Canada.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Yosemite, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States.*—FRANK WINCH, 405 N. Spalding Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 2 *Utah and Arizona.*—GORDON GORDON, P. O. Box 2582, Tucson, Ariz. 3 *New Mexico (Indians etc.).*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. 4 *Wyoming and Colorado.*—Homesteading, etc. E. P. WELLS, Sisters, Oregon. 5 *Nevada. Montana, and Northern Rockies.*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. 6 *Idaho and environs.*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. 7 *Texas, Oklahoma.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 1 *Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.*—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. 2 *Missouri, Arkansas, Missouri River up to Sioux City, Ozarks, Ind., Ill., Mich., Miss., and Lake Michigan.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure*. 3 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi river.*—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. 5 *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, La., swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottom.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. 6 *Great Lakes (all information).*—H. C. GARDNER, care *Adventure*.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Eastern Maine. All Territory east of Penobscot River.*—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. 2 *Western Maine. All Territory west of Penobscot River.*—DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor Me. 3 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 1332, New Haven, Conn. 4 *Adirondacks, New York.* RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. 5 *West Va., Md.*—ROBERT HOLTON BULL, 1206 Second Ave., Charleston, W. Va. 6 *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure*. 7 *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains South of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

THE CAMP-FIRE

If you have read this issue of our magazine we do not need to tell you anything about the quality of the stories, but did you by any chance miss that unique department, *The Camp-Fire?* If so turn to page 120 and get together informally with readers, writers and adventurers from all over the world who meet here to swap yarns and experiences in the simple fellowship of men who love courage and the out-of-doors.

ASK ADVENTURE

Just as the fact that you are a reader of our magazine makes you a member of *The Camp-Fire*, so too does it entitle you to make use of the services of our *Ask Adventure* staff absolutely free of charge. Ninety experts are ready to answer questions about all parts of the world and on all subjects of interest to out-of-doors men. And if you have no questions of your own you'll find the answers to the other fellow's interesting. Turn to page 123.