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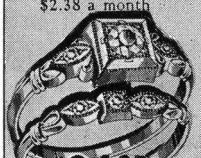

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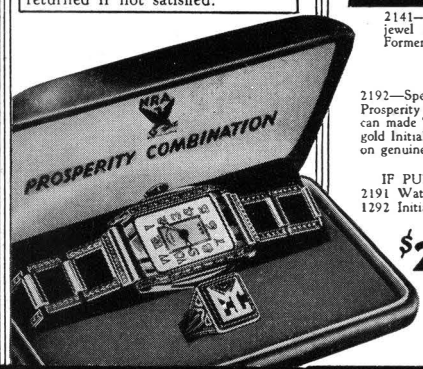

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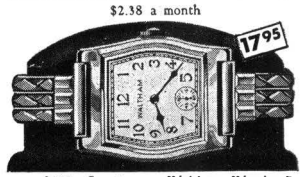

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Volume 89, No. 6 — Twice A Month

November 15th, 1934

Red Of The Arrowhead (4 parts, part 1) GORDON YOUNG 2

"Three, four gamblers got killed today," said Red. "Good riddance," said Miz George. "Glad you think so," said Red. "They was pickin' on a young feller tryin' to mind his own business. I wasn't lookin' for trouble—" "You! Again!" roared Miz George. "Damn your soul, Red!"

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Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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RED OF THE ARROWHEAD

By GORDON YOUNG

A four-part serial

CHAPTER I

NEW ENEMIES

THE cowboy lay forward in the saddle with elbow on the horn and watched the Timtons being put out of their house, off their land.

A deputy sheriff, brought along to enforce the foreclosure and prevent trouble, squatted in the shade and seemed trying to pretend he had nothing to do with it. Deputy Marr knew that lean red-headed cowpuncher and didn't like him; knew, too, Red's feelings about having a sheriff help throw folks out of their homes on the banker's say-so. In years gone by, and not so many at that, Deputy Marr had for a little while worn a star under Red's father, a grim hard-eyed sheriff who ran the country honest and didn't let law interfere with justice. Marr hadn't lasted long. He didn't have in him what it took to ride for the old sheriff. Things had changed quite a lot in Tulluco since his death.

The Timtons had a dirt-roofed cabin joined to a dugout in the hillside. They were carrying out such household goods as the Johnsons, father and son, didn't want to claim under the chattel mortgage.

A fellow from down south of Tulluco who in a shy way was a bit sweet on Timton's oldest girl had borrowed a wagon and team. Timton and the fellow came staggering out with an old iron kitchen stove.

Young Johnson, a fellow of thirty or more, with a broad face, sunken cheeks and sharp nose that looked like it had been pinched too much before it hardened, walked up and looked the stove over as if half-minded to say something.

Timton snarled, "Maybe as how you want it?" He was a tall hungry looking fellow, some shiftless.

Mrs. Timton called anxiously through the door, "Now you Tim, shet up! We can't he'p ourselves!" The hot Arizona sun, dry winds and much work had wilted her. She was thin and dark and must have been pretty once. Some folks said she wasn't any better than she ought to be. The Timtons didn't have a very good name.

Old Johnson was standing at the door. It was a hot day and he was sweating with black broad-brimmed hat pushed to the back of his head and a wadded

"When they get that tricky they need watching clost—even after they're dead."

bandanna in his fist. He, too, was a little uneasy under the calm stare of the red-headed cowpuncher. Old Johnson rumbled in unctuous approval, "That there is right, Mrs. Timton. We are being generous to let you have your household goods. Lawful, you know, ever' stick an' chip belongs to us."

Red lifted his head a little, his eyes fixed on Old Johnson. Red hadn't seen him for a couple of years and thought he looked more than ever like a big toad that had learned to walk on its hind legs—had much the same wide mouth, big belly, flat forehead and sharp-tipped nose. Johnson glanced uneasily toward the cowboy and looked away. He didn't like Red. Hadn't liked Red's father.

Red straightened up, hooked a knee about the horn and rolled a cigarette. He scratched the match on the leg of his pants which looked like a pair of overalls with the bib and shoulder straps cut off. Except for his boots there was no finery about him, but there was the rawhide toughness of a range-bred boy and a blue-eyed glint in his look that was steady as the glimmer of polished iron. He wore two guns, long heavy .45's, with the holster ends tied to his legs. They were the old single-action Colts with which his father for twenty years had enforced his notions of what

was right in Tulluco. And anybody who knew the kid knew that he could, and would, use them if his fur was rubbed the wrong way.

A couple of dirty young 'uns, about ten to thirteen, both girls, came out looking scairt and moving quiet. They carried some little bundles and appeared to think somebody might snatch the things away. They half-sidled up to the wagon and with nervous backward staring offered them to their dad. Timton poked the bundles into the wagon.

Red leaned forward in the saddle, spoke slow and distinct with his glance drifting from Deputy Marr to young Johnson, and coming to rest on Old Johnson, who mopped the back of his neck vigorously with the wadded bandanna:

"Me now, I sort of allus felt sorry for myself that I wasn't rich, had me a bank and some cows, with folks owing me money. But now I see what all you got to do for to be rich, like scaring kids and makin' their folks hit the grit. Well, I'm quite some pleased to ride for wages, sleep good o' night, eat my beans and—"

Young Johnson's cold pale face got a little red. He spoke up, mad. "Nobody's askin' for your opinion!"

Red grinned and went on, slow and persistent as a bottle fly's buzz. "I'm generous thataway. Freehanded-like. When I get me an opinion I just scatter it same as money. And me, I don't see how the hell you can sleep good after throwing these folks out—"

"They oughtn't have borrowed if they —" That was Old Johnson, all swelled up and hot. He wasn't a tall man but was thick of shoulders, sort of spindling in the legs like a man that eats well and sets a lot. Since Sheriff Clark's death he strutted more than formerly.

"Don't argy with him, Dad," said Young Johnson, who was the wiser, colder and meaner of the two. His first name was Clinton.

"Oughtn't have borrowed, hm?" Red asked, then went on mild and casual: "I don't know, of course, but I bet me you bankers sort o' coaxed this man here to take a little loan for to buy himself some cows and spread out—"

"That thar is exactly what!" said Timton, sullen and indignant, glaring at the Johnsons.

Red said, "Um-hm," with much the satisfied expression of a stud player turning over an ace.

"Here!" Old Johnson blurted, losing his temper, nearly blowing up. "What call you got to stand around here insultin' folks! None o' your business to be here! This here now is my land! Get off it!" He waved a hand and glared as if expecting Red to turn tail and mosey.

Red grinned some more. He said, "Feller, I'm ridin' for Miz Dobbs. This range ain't fenced and her cows wander far. Part o' my business is to inspect what's goin' on on the unfenced range of our neighbors. An' my suspicion is that such neighbors as kick folks who owe 'em money out from under a roof need watchin' clost!"

Young Johnson said, "How dare you talk like—"

Old Johnson bellowed, "You ain't goin' to be ridin' for Mrs. Dobbs long! I'll tell her how you talked an'—"

Red stopped grinning but he didn't look mad, just sober, and said cool and sassy:

"I hear tell you got a mortgage on Miz Dobbs' Arrowhead, too. That right?"

"None o' your damn business!" Old Johnson shouted, waggling his fist, making ends of the bandanna fly.

"Well sir," Red went on, "beef is down and times is bad. Cowmen are so mighty short of money that I wouldn't put it beyond you for to hope you could kick even her out of her house. They is some folks in this country as say you play all sorts of tricks for to get hold of ranches. So let me tell you something, feller! If ever you run

any kind of a shindy—*you*," his look shifted from Old Johnson's face to Young Johnson whom he knew as the more unscrupulous of the two, "I'll kill you! Both you!"

Red added a nod to drive the words in, then as if explaining a little, "She's been purt-near like a maw to me. Grandmaw anyhow."

Both Johnsons stood for a moment or two in dazed gaping, and their faces moved until eyes met in a kind of anxious questioning, each of the other, as if wondering how certain secrets had been guessed. Then Old Johnson came to life as if a bee had got in the seat of his britches. He wheeled about and shouted, "Marr! Marr, you hear this fellow threaten my life! And Clint's life! As deputy sheriff—"

Deputy Marr looked blank and said, "Hhn?" kind of like he was waking out of a doze. He pretended he had a splinter or something in a finger, picked at it. He knew Red didn't wear those heavy guns for ornament.

Timton and the fellow who was helping him, Mrs. Timton and the two little Timton young uns, just stared, solemn, uneasy, and pleased. None of them knew Red, but they knew who he was, and it was mighty refreshing to have the Johnsons talked to thataway.

Deputy Marr stayed squatted and began to roll a cigarette. He had his head tipped forward so that the hat brim cut off all view as if, ostrich-like, what he didn't see wasn't his concern.

A voice in the doorway said, "Thank God they's somebody has got the spunk to talk back to you!"

Red looked and saw a girl glaring at Old Johnson. She was about seventeen and, in a slightly coarse but vivid way, pretty. Her voice was sharp, her eyes black. There was a gypsy-something about her, even to the sort of burned gold color of her face. Red didn't know anything about the Timtons, hadn't even known this girl was on earth. He felt a little funny, like he had been caught showing off.

Sara Timton went on talking to Old Johnson. "We ain't even got coffee and bacon! We got about a half sack of flour. My folks don't know where they're goin' even. Just heading for the mines. Me, I'm all right. I can take care of myself. But these chilern and maw. You want paw's little dab of land and the water. He was a fool for to borrow the money, but you were a dirty swindler to coax him into taking it!"

Young Johnson eyed her as if about to say something spiteful but that redhead on horseback made him uneasy, so he took out his knife, picked up a stick and began to whittle. His voice had a hurt regretful tone:

"Dad, it just goes to show! The more you do for folks, the more ungrateful they are. Here we are lettin' 'em take all this household stuff and still they—"

Sara Timton put her hands on her hips, stepped from the doorway, went close to him: "And if Mrs. Hepple wasn't too high-toned for to use such stuff as is good enough for us, I reckon you'd send it over to her as a present, hm?"

Young Johnson swallowed a time or two and pressed his thin mouth tight. Some color flared into his cheeks but he wouldn't look up. Old Johnson coughed awkwardly and cleared his throat.

It was talk of the countryside that both Johnsons were in love with the second Mrs. Hepple. She was a fine looking rather flashy woman who had come into the country many years before as a widow-lady with a couple of children; both boys. There had been a great scandal in the cow country when old Hepple, a big rancher, had got rid of his wife and son and married her. As a widow, Mrs. Hepple's name had been Bush. The older of her boys was now a sort of kingpin gambler there in Tulluco and was still called Bush, Joe Bush. Old Hepple had been a rip-roaring cowman

and fighter in his day, but for quite a while now had been half-paralyzed and folks said Mrs. Hepple went gallivanting around a lot more than was right for a respectable woman. Her carryings-on with the Johnsons, father and son, made a lot of talk.

Sara Timton walked over to Red. He straightened up, unhooked his knee, put his foot in the stirrup. She threw back her head. Her hair was thick and curly. She didn't smile but was earnest. "When you come to town you must come to the Best Bet and see me. I am going to work there."

Red felt shy and awkward. He could stand up to any man, bad men, and not bat an eye; but the stare of a pretty girl made him feel a little funny. He said, "Me and Jim of the Best Bet is old friends. I allus do my loafin' there. All us Dobbs punchers do."

"You tell them Sara will be glad to see any friend of yours, won't you?" The last two words were softly coaxing.

"Sure." Red was casual and not very sincere.

She asked sort of cautious-like, "Do you know Joe Bush?"

Red grinned a little. "Me, I was born in Tulluco. Know ever'body—or used to."

"Oh, then you know 'Gene Close?" Her tone suggested that she rather liked 'Gene Close.

"Him and Windy Jones? Sure. I've crawled in between their blankets many a time. We rode together a lot onct."

Sara said, "They are nice boys," and Red said, "You bet. I got to be goin'. 'Bye."

She stood looking at him. He rode at a slow trot, was slim and straight in the saddle. She went back into the house.

Red rode about two hundred feet, reined up, leaned over and peered at the ground. He turned in the saddle and called, "Hey, Timton. They is something I want to show you!"

Timton went with shambling hurried walk, peered at the ground, then looked questioningly at Red.

"Say, Timton, is that so, what she said about you all not having grub?"

"That's about the size of it. We are aimin' to go down to Monohela an' maybe do some good at mining a little."

Red opened his palm. Something fell with twinkling glitter. "Old Jeb Grimes he called my pat hand last night. Usual, Jeb is a smart feller. You can just sorta figger Jeb is makin' you a little present for to fill them young uns' bellies. S'long an' luck!"

Red was off at a lope before Timton could say anything. He stooped and picked a ten dollar gold piece from the dust. He looked after Red, looked at the coin. He rubbed the sweat off his forehead with swipe of forearm and took a deep breath. He didn't have much liking for the Dobbs' Arrowhead outfit, especially not for old Jeb Grimes who was a dangerous man and from time to time had ridden in on the Timtons to nose about and see if they were eating Dobbs' beef.

Timton wasn't a bad fellow but he wasn't much good. Now he felt pretty choked up and warm inside. He gripped the coin hard and thrust it deep down into his empty pants pocket before he let go, then turned around and went shuffling back up to the house.

THE little old famous cowtown of Tulluco sat on the road that led to Monohela. There was quite some mining boom on down in Monohela, so the coming and going of people to and from the mines surged through the old cowtown.

The road to Monohela skirted the range of the Hepple outfit. Lots of miners and shiftless folks, and some camp butchers, were said to be helping themselves to Hepple cows; which didn't fill the Dobbs' punchers with any grief,

though the feud was supposed to have died out. Bitter memories of it lingered in both cow outfits.

The feud had begun long, long years before when Dingley Hepple, then a young cowman, and an even younger and newly married cowhand named John Dobbs argued over a double-branded calf that didn't happen to be ear-marked. The Hepple brand was H P on the right shoulder; the Dobbs, an arrowhead on the left hip. Double branding could have happened by accident only if a running iron puncher was hasty and careless, didn't look his stray calf over carefully before throwing and burning it. But it was more likely that some maverick chaser, not liking either the Hepple or Dobbs outfit, did it as a joke just to see what would happen.

Hepple was a fighter and so was Dobbs. They shot each other, not seriously. Their cowboys took up the shooting and it was carried along the range.

Now Dobbs was dead and Hepple was old and partly paralyzed.

In the beginning the Dobbses had a partner, Red's father, later sheriff of Tulluco. An honest stern man. Old Hepple had respected him, even trusted his justice as sheriff.

In Sheriff Clark's day Tulluco had been a well-ordered town. There might be a lot of noise, laughter and fun; and, after the fall roundups, much drinking and a wasteful scattering of wages. A few migratory girls seemed to know when the roundups were going to be over and drifted in to dance with the boys. The big cowmen of the country, if it had been a good year and beef was on the rise, gave barbecues, held horse races, put up purses for roping and riding. The honest hardworking boys could make all the noise they wanted, cut capers and raise hell. Their lank grim hard-eyed sheriff was considerate and thoughtful toward folks that earned their wages honest; but he was hell on outlaws, rustlers, tinhorns.

Since his death and the coming of the gold excitement things had changed. There was lot of rustling. The stage was held up now and then. Murders were not uncommon. Tulluco was over-run with blackleg gamblers and Joe Bush, Mrs. Hepple's son, seemed to have most to say about how things were run.

RED rode with spurs a-jingle into the town. He had been away from Tulluco for acouple of years, only lately returned; and though he had ridden in a time or two the past two weeks, he still stretched his neck in gawky interest at the changes that had come over the old place. The Best Bet, for instance, had added a second story of flimsy unpainted pine, and the downstairs had been enlarged to a barn-like place. It was no longer merely a saloon. It was a dance hall and gambling house.

The dust in the street was near to ankle deep on his horse. Other horses, and wagons and horses, were kicking up dust. It rolled like smoke and drifted about. Red waggled his head regretful, didn't like the way the country was filling up.

He went on down the street to the Stage Company Office which was next door to the Golden Palace Hotel, an old two story frame with wide porch in front and an upper story were high-toned people, usually with ladies, sat sometimes in the evening looking down on the town and out cross the country that took on a kind of misty deep purplish color in the bright starlight.

As he swung off a negro that the cowboys had dubbed Lucky on account of what he could do at craps, jumped over the hotel veranda. Lucky was more or less a fixture at the hotel. He grinned, "Howdy, Mistuh Red!"

"Lo. You gettin' fat, Lucky. How you been doin' at craps lately?"

Lucky's grin went away. He shook his head. "Mah science it is all plumb

busticated, Mistuh Red. These heah gambluhs in this heah town—wu-ouf!"

"They must be pretty damn crooked if they can skin you!"

"They is fo' sho. They was a killin' again last night. A miner felluh he objestacted an'—"

Red grunted. "Yeah, I reckon. An' got shot."

"No suh. Joe Bush he throwed a knife into 'im."

Red lifted an eyebrow. To him there was something unclean and treacherous about using a knife. He made mild sounds of disgust, then with a jerk of thumb over his shoulder, "You want to trot my horse down to the barn?"

"Sho' do, Mistuh Red. An' you ought fo' to see how them gambluhs don't like fo' Old Jeb to stand around eyin' 'em."

"'Tain't soothin' at anytime for to have Old Jeb eying you," Red agreed.

Lucky rode off and Red went into the Stage Company Office. A small dried-up man with spectacles sitting half way down his nose said in a squeaky voice, "Oh hello, you. Lookin' fer Jeb? He's in back thar. Be keerful he don't bite."

Red opened the door into a little back room. Jeb Grimes sat with hands folded on his lap and his feet on a table. He could stay motionless longer than anybody Red ever heard about.

Nearly everybody thought there was some Indian in Jeb Grimes, but nobody with a cautious regard for well being said so. He was old but his hair was black, dead black. His face was nearly black and deeply lined. He was straight as a soldier. Jeb had been in the country a long time and worked for the Dobbses all that time, but nobody knew much about where he had come from. He was at times talkative with friends; at other times for days, weeks, you could scarcely get a word out of him. He had the name and look of a killer—and was. Odds simply didn't mean a thing in the world to him. He carried a revolver, but there was usually a rifle within arm's reach and he used it for a hand gun.

"'Lo, son." When Grimes talked his words bubbled with throaty softness.

Red squatted on the corner of a table, flung his hat at a chair. "Pretty gosh-blamed soft for a wore-out old cowhand! Settin' around town here a'waitin' for Miz George to come home. I wisht I was old and purt-near useless, so I could loaf."

Jeb grinned slow and amused. Most folks treated him with such a heap of respect that maybe he liked being talked to impudent and sassy by a boy he thought the world and all of.

Among themselves, and by many old-timers, Mrs. Dobbs was called "Miz George" by her boys, some of whom were even older than she. Mrs. Dobbs was due home from a trip. Nobody knew just what day, so Jeb was staying in town to wait and bring her out to the ranch when she came.

"You'll grow old an' useless plenty soon." Jeb spoke soft and slow as he stared at the dust-covered windows, as if a little regretful about his own age.

Red laughed at him. "Shucks. You ought to let some purty girl make a fool of you. I hear tell that makes old shy-pokes frisky an' joyful."

Old Jeb waggled a hand, a long slim hand. He knew Red was trying to stir him up and make him snort a little; and he refused to stir. Just smiled and eyed Red. Jeb had slit eyes, narrowed from long years of peering into the distance.

"I reckon," said Red, swinging a leg and eying the boot toe, "I been a sorta' fool this mornin'. I'm out ten dollars an' told a lie. In a way of speakin', you owe it back to me. How about payin' your honest debts?"

Jeb stared, inquiring. "How it come?"

"Well, by happen-so on the way to town I rode south, like you said I ort once in a while. I pulled up at that fel-

low Timton's for to water my horse and maybe smell some fried steak. Them Johnsons was there evictin' 'em."

"Good riddance," said Jeb.

"Yeah? Well me, I don't like nesters much better 'n I like a sheepherder's smell. But 'tween the Timtons an' them Johnsons for neighbors—I bet where one 'ud maybe steal a cow for the fryin' pan, the others 'ud steal a herd for the packin' house!"

"Then Timtons are an onery lot. Them Johnsons are mean, cold, an' some crafty at business—like Apaches on the warpath. Me, I'm more scairt of hyderphoby skunks 'n I ever was of Injuns. I've shot plenty of both an' know whereof I make my remarks." Jeb's voice had the sound of water flowing over pebbles.

"It's joyful for to know they is something that can scare you. Me, being scairt so frequent, I thought maybe as how I lacked some manhood. Well, it sorta' riled me to see them kids bein' yanked out from under a roof. I expressed some opinions, free, gratis and fluid. Old Johnson he up and said as how he was going to see to it that Mis George fired me. Where'pon, as you can imagine, I tucked my tail between my legs and felt bad."

"I 'magine," Jeb muttered, half a-smile.

"Then I called that Timton off to one side and give him ten dollars—"

Jeb spoke in a way that isn't printable.

"I said," Red went on, gleeful and shameless, "as how I won it last night off you at poker!" Jeb, being nearly unbeatable at poker, at least among friends, snorted. "I told him he could just sorta' feel it was a little something from you. So how about payin' me back, hm?"

"You was showin' off in front o' that Sara girl. 'Gene Close is sweet on her. 'Gene'll tie yore skelp to his belt if you go makin' eyes at her."

"From the way she spoke I guessed he was. She asked did I know him."

"Him an' Windy ain't the good kids they ust to be," said Jeb, meditative.

Red grunted, skeptical. Jeb was a suspicious fellow. He had a lot of tolerance for Red's foolishness, but appeared to think other young fellows ought to act sober and settled down.

THE stage came in. Mrs. Dobbs was not among the passengers and the driver was somebody Red didn't know.

Jeb sat down on the bench in front of the Stage Company Office, rolled a thin cigarette. "We'll set till the rush is over at the Bonanzer, then go eat." Jeb didn't like to be jostled by crowds.

Red sat beside him and wished for a drink, but he couldn't speak of it. Whiskey was bad medicine for Jeb. He might go for a couple of years and not touch a drop, but when he did start drinking sensible people high-tailed for tall timber. His voice stayed low but he went looking for trouble, and he didn't care how many people joined in to make it for him. He had promised Mrs. Dobbs that he wouldn't take another drink as long as he was riding for her.

While they were sitting there two people came riding fast up the street on fine slim-legged horses. It was Mrs. Hepple and that younger boy of hers that folks called Pinky, though the name made him mad.

Red never could get over his admiring amazement at the way Mrs. Hepple sat a side-saddle. Most women rode astride, and those that didn't had nothing of Mrs. Hepple's ease and grace. Red had once climbed a side-saddle just to see how it felt. It felt like he was about to fall off—as if he were out of place and unsure. So he figured that Mrs. Hepple must be purt-near a better rider than any man.

She was a handsome woman with a bold dark face, bright eyes, and always wore some red about her. She carried

herself a little haughty in public, yet unbent quick and pleasant when spoke to. It had hurt her name to have Old Hepple get rid of his wife and young son to marry her; and now her reputation, never the best, was bad—spoiled. She was too much with the Johnsons. Her elder boy was a blackleg gambler. Young Pinky wasn't any good, either.

Red never had liked her but had always been respectful. His dad, the sheriff, had strapped him good for making slurring remarks about Hepples when he could scarcely more than talk. From babyhood Red had been a Dobbs' man because Mrs. Dobbs made such a fuss over him and had him out to the ranch a lot.

In not liking Mrs. Hepple Red saw, or told himself that he did, a certain watchful mean look deep back in her eyes. When she was irritated her face changed much as if she took off a mask. There were a lot of not nice stories vaguely told of her. Everybody knew that the first Mrs. Hepple had been a lady.

It seemed queer to cow folks, at a time when beef was down and rustlers riding almost like raiders, that Mrs. Hepple appeared to have plenty of money.

Pinky was a handsome boy, up pretty close to Red's age but no more like Red than a piece of colored calico is like rawhide. He was proud of his looks and nursed them with all sorts of fancy fixin's. A bad-spoiled kid with a vicious streak that showed in a cat-like temper. Offhand, people would think he was one of the nicest fellows anywhere. He had easy manners and a smile. Red didn't have much of a downright dislike of Pinky, but just simply had no use for him. As a kid Pinky was an awful little liar, but his maw would stand up for him like a she-bear for a cub.

Now as they came riding up to the Golden Palace, Pinky looked about from side to side as if to make sure people were admiring him and his maw. He was purt-near as proud of her as of himself. His look fell on Red, and he called, "Oh hello there, Red!" just as pleasant and eager as if Red were a good friend.

Mrs. Hepple got off at the block the hotel people had fixed there mostly for her since she came often and kept a room. She unfastened the black riding skirt, let it fall and stepped out. She looked toward Red and said, "Well, well!" Then she stepped down from the block which was only a few feet from where Red and Jeb were sitting and put out her hand.

Red stood up, pawed at his hat, grinned nervously. "Howdy, Miz Hepple." He thought she had lost some of her good looks since he last saw her. Pinky crowded in and shook hands. She asked, "When did you get back? You have been gone a long time."

"Oh a couple weeks ago. I was gone most near two years, yes'm."

"Want to ride for me, Red?" She had a rich if slightly hoarse voice and knew how to make it sound coaxing, almost like she wanted you to let her cuddle you.

"Of course he does, Maw," said Pinky, looking Red over as if even with approval of his plain dress.

"I'm sure mighty obliged, Miz Hepple." Red felt awkward and seemed a little short of breath. "But y'see, I've a'ready gone to work on the Arrowhead. Just come to town for mail."

Pinky grinned much as if he was thinking, "Why you poor chump, go riding for that second rate outfit when you might straddle an H P horse!"

Mrs. Hepple's manner changed as if some ice water had been splashed on her. She smiled by just tightening the muscles around her mouth and lifted her eyebrows. "Oh I see. Well, good luck." She turned away, cool and haughty again. "Oh I see!" Pinky said, too, sort of sneering a little. Pinky's spurs—he wore jinglebobs—rattled and tinkled alongside of her as they went up the steps to the hotel veranda.

Red clapped on his hat and heaved a big breath. He turned to speak to Jeb but held his words and blinked a little. Jeb was all huddled down with his hat pulled low. Anybody who knew him, no matter how well, wouldn't have recognized him in that posture because Jeb was always rigidly erect and his eyes met everybody's with a sort of challenge.

Red blurted, "Gosh a'mighty, you got cramps or somethin'?"

Jeb lifted his head a little and the look that went from under the hat brim toward Mrs. Hepple's back made Red know there was something pretty mysterious between them.

Red said, "Whatever the hell is the matter, Jeb?"

Jeb got up with the cautious air of being ready to turn if Mrs. Hepple looked about. "Come 'long, son. Let's eat." They walked along the street.

On the Emporium corner, Jeb stopped. He said, slow and hard-eyed: "Son, you will do me some favor just to forget and not ever to speak about it. I been near caught a time or two before. It's one reason I don't like comin' to town. Some day, mebbe, you'll find out. But I hope not! Now let's go 'cross here to the Best Bet an' you can have yore drink. Then we'll eat."

CHAPTER II

Gunfire in the Best Bet

TWO months later.

It was so early in the morning that the Best Bet, open day and night, was almost deserted. The Mexican roustabout, having taken a whispered message from the bartender up-stairs to where the girls slept, came back, languidly sprinkled water and began sweeping up damp sawdust with a push broom. Now and then somebody came in for a hurried drink and went on his way.

Red, at a table near the bar, played solitaire.

Jim, the bartender, a fat placid man, sleek of hair with a bulging mustache that had been dyed black, leaned on the bar reading a month old Denver *Republican*. For years and years Jim had come out from Denver every fall to tend bar at the Best Bet. The townsmen had grown to accept him as a citizen, he came so regularly and was a gentleman. Now he owned an interest in the Best Bet.

Over the bartender's head behind the bar was a placard:

> Notice. Anybody wearing guns indoors will be arrested.—Sheriff Nims.

It was a fresh placard, not yet fly-specked.

Jim said, "I see they is even a piece in the paper here about how cowmen are sufferin' from rustlers down in our neck of the woods."

Red, eying his cards, grumbled, "An' no wonder! They have made it agin the law for to shoot rustlers an' horse thieves, like onct." Red added, pleased: "But that don't mean they ain't a little shootin' done to 'em, now an' then."

Sara Timton came sauntering in the back way. It was not yet quite nine o'clock. She looked sleepy but had fixed herself up nice in a gypsy costume.

Sara said, "Oh hello, Red," just as if the Mexican hadn't told her he was down-stairs.

He said, " 'Lo," and eyed her for a moment or two, thinking how much prettier she loked than when he had first seen her. She was painted some and powdered, looked a little thin in the face, had on lots of cheap jewelry and the flouncy colored skirts were attractive.

Sara pulled back a chair and sat down. "What you doing in town so early?"

Red yawned. "Me and Miz George was up nearly all night with a mess of collie pups bein' born. Then Miz George

said, 'It's too near morning to go to bed. We'll have some breakfast, then you can light out for the mail.' The which was done."

"I didn't roll in until about four this morning myself," said Sara, but Red was not interested and went on with his game. She lay forward on her arm, her dark eyes fluttering between the cards and his face. Red switched a king for a queen, and Sara said, "Oh, shame on you! And folks think you are an honest boy, Red!"

"'Taint dishonest not to deceive nobody. Particular, not yourself."

She studied his face for a long time, then, "Red, were you ever mixed up in the Hepple and Dobbs range war?"

"They ain't been no range war for a long time. Just some hard feelin's."

"Think trouble will start again, maybe?"

Red said, "Pah!"

"There is talk, you know."

"They is always talk about somethin' or other that's nobody's business."

"Why don't you think there may be some more trouble?" Her voice was insistent as a fly's buzz.

He thoughtfully cheated as he spoke: "It ain't a cow outfit no more. Old Dingley, being crippled thataway, ain't snortin' around for trouble like onct. And Pinky wouldn't look so handsome if he got all smoked up."

"Supposin' Pinky heard you talk like that, Red?"

"He's got ears. If he'll bring 'em clost he can hear."

Sara watched him, then. "But there's Joe Bush. He's a Hepple." Her voice was low, cautious-like. "And," she added with low-toned bitterness, "he's in close with the Johnsons." Her voice dropped still lower, increased in bitterness: "They'll ruin Mrs. Dobbs if they can. Just like they did my paw!"

"They try it, an' the cattle cars to hell 'll be packed with bad-hurt *hombres*," said Red offhand, not much concerned.

Sara meditated, her look steadily on his face. "Mrs. Hepple is pretty, don't you think?"

Red grunted, noncommital.

"Was the first Mrs. Hepple pretty?" She seemed determined to pry talk out of him.

"Oh I was too much of a kid to know who was pretty and who wasn't five or six years ago."

Jim lay on his elbows at the bar, listening. He spoke up casually. "Been longer than that, Red. She come from nice folks back East and went home. With that boy of hers." Jim shifted his chewed cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, looked hard at Sara and seemed a little amused and mildly sorry for her.

"You haven't answered my question, Red. Do you think Mrs. Hepple is pretty?"

"Aw shucks. All the thinking I do about a woman's looks is Miz George's. Has she got her war paint on or ain't she? If so, me an' the dogs sneak out behind the corral and set quiet."

Sara struck him with languid slap. "Oh you—afraid of a woman!"

"I don't know anything it's wiser to be more afraid of. Particular if that woman is Miz George on the war path." He pushed away the cards, lay back in the chair, let his spurred heels overhang the seat of the chair in front of him. "The Lord shore got his shuffle mixed when he made Miz George a woman."

"What's wrong with women?" Sara asked. She was weary but smiled.

"Lots. They got no business out-tirin' us men. Having more grit and being smarter. Women ought to be just purty, easy scairt, cook good, and make us men think we're some punkins. That right, Jim?"

The bartender spoke lazily. "Sure. But what ought to be, ain't, with women."

Red leaned far back against the chair, tilted his head, eyed the placard. "Whatever you reckon bit Bill Nims for to make him stick up a thing like that?"

"Law and order, son," said Jim, sarcastic. Sara made a derisive sound.

"I've knowed Bill Nims," Red went on with his eye on the notice, "since I was a little shaver. He used to ride out sometimes with my dad. I never suspicioned he was a damn fool."

"In a lot of cowtowns, I hear tell," said Jim, "they used to be orders to take off your guns when you went into places."

"Supposing he tried to take your guns off you, Red?"

Red squinted at her drowsily. "I'm peac'ble. But I don't read well. That's all. He's wearing my dad's star. I was brought up to do whatever the man as was wearing that star told me to do." Red yawned, fitted his hat to make an easier resting place for his head against the back of the chair, shut his eyes.

Sara lay forward with chin on forearm, staring at him. He was blue-eyed, young, lanky, brown as old leather with freckle patches showing under the tan. He had rather a long nose and wide quick-smiling mouth. She now knew all about him that could be overheard from townsmen or cajoled out of the cowboys that liked to see her pretty face attentive when they talked. He had roamed far, been through a lot of smoke in range wars and tough cow towns, and was now back in Tulluco County as a sort of pet cowboy of Mrs. Georgiana Crittenden Dobbs of the Arrowhead.

Red was really dozing. Sara watched him. She sighed and got up. In a tired slow way she crossed to the bar, slumped down on her elbows, put her hands in her hair.

"Whiskey, Jim."

He gave her a quick look. She had changed a lot since coming to the Best Bet, learned fast, and was downright pretty in that gypsy get-up, with bright colors, flouncy skirts, dangling earrings and brassy jewelry. She had a temper, too.

Her eyes lifted to the notice. "Jim, is it true the sheriff has throwed in with gamblers?" Jim grunted vaguely and his look advised her to shut up. "I reckon," she went on, staring at the notice, "he takes his orders from that old toad of a banker, Johnson. God, how I hate him!"

Jim, mild and paternal, suggested, "If you want to linger in this town, don't talk so damn much."

"All right. All right," she said petulently. "You don't need to make a sermon. Give me whiskey."

He folded the newspaper, struck a match, sucked on his chewed cigar. He took it out of his mouth, trying to see why it wouldn't light, and tried again. It did not light. He tossed the match away, bit the cigar in two, put one piece on the shelf behind him and slowly began to chew.

"What you need, Sara, is not whiskey —it's a spankin'!"

"What I need, Jim," she admitted bitterly, "is a horse-whipping for being such a fool! But I can't help it. You ought 've heard the way he lit into them Johnsons!"

Jim nodded. "I've heard 'im. An' seen 'im." He looked across at Red, snoozing with head back and feet on the chair before him.

A shadow fell inside the doorway. A tall man, young and pale, with mustache so waxed it looked artificial, stood there. He had black eyes with a sheeny glitter in them, and wore a blue velvet vest, polished boots and long-tailed black coat. A new silky wide-brimmed black hat was pushed up on his sleek black head. He had on a black tie and white hard shirt. He was Joe Bush, kingpin gambler of Tulluco.

He looked at Sara, then at Red, again at the girl. His grin was a sneer. "Didn't I tell you what I'd do if you ever done

it again? You, gettin' up this time of morning for to—"

"Whiskey!" she said, sharp of voice and rapped her knuckles on the bar.

Jim said, "Mornin', Mr. Bush," and was not answered. He put out a bottle and glass.

Sara, keeping her eyes on Bush's face, filled the glass to overflowing, pushed the bottle away, let her fingers rest about the glass.

Jim noted the look in her eyes and gave Mr. Bush a glance that was like a warning, but the gambler took no notice. Then Jim, by way of having something to do, soused a beer glass in a bucket of cold water and began wiping.

Bush showed even white teeth. His grin was very like his mother's when she smiled with muscular twitch of lips. He said, sneering and angered:

"I won't have you all wore out and sleepy at night! You get back to bed or—"

"I'm no damn man's slave!" There was a snarl-like curl to Sara's lip.

"No sass or I'll—" Bush stepped close with hand lifted.

Sara pitched whiskey glass and all at his face with such force that her aim wasn't good. The glass missed. Whiskey splattered him about the neck and white shirt front.

He said, "Damn your soul, I'll show you—" and jumped at her.

In the past two months Jim had seen enough to know her for a wildcat in petticoats, so his jaw dropped and he almost let the glass slip as he saw Sara not even try to dodge but huddle her face in her hands and cringe. Bush hit her. She groaned, fell as if struck by a club and lay still.

Red's spurred boots hit the floor. What he said was the worst he knew to call a man and there was plenty of it.

Joe Bush turned with hand belt high. His pale face was ghastly white and looked as strained as if half-starved. The black glitter of his eyes in so pale a face made him look grotesque. He lifted his left hand in a placating gesture, said quickly:

"Now just a minute, Red, and I'll —"

The next instant Bush's right hand flashed. A heavy bowie went blade-first and shadow-swift so very near to Red that had he not been standing slightly sideways it would have struck deep and close to his heart.

Red's gun, fired from the hip, roared over the low-slung holster.

Joe Bush's grotesque face had a look of almost silly surprise in the instant that he teetered before he fell, face down, one hand under him, the other out in an awkward twist on the floor.

There was the sound of clattering feet in the rear as the roustabout threw away his long-handled broom and ran from a back door.

Jim put down the beer glass, flung the damp cloth over a shoulder, leaned across the bar and stared at Sara. She got up slowly, pushed at her rumpled skirts. Her eyes watched Red, shifted, caught the bartender's look. Her mouth tightened.

Red peered at the gambler. "When they get that tricky they need watching clost—even after they're dead."

Jim said, "Damn!" in a soft voice. "An' him Mrs. Hepple's boy! You"—he seemed with half-furtive shift of glance to be accusing Sara—"have shore played hell!"

Sara flung up her arm, pointed at the notice. "Bah! Where'd Red be now if he'd paid any attention to that fool law!"

"Y'know," Red mused with meditative cock of head, "I never sorta believed tales about knife-throwers being dang'rous. Reckon they is a lot of things I don't believe I orta. He worked it slick!"

Red prodded out the empty shell, poked in another, put the gun in its holster, with rattling scrape of long-shanked

spurs went across the room after the knife.

Jim leaned far over the bar and, with confidential low tone near Sara's ear, said:

"*You* are the one that worked it slick!"

"Me?"

"*You!*"

Sara shrugged a shoulder, pushed at her loose wavy hair, dipped into the skirt pocket and brought out tobacco and papers. "You tell Red and I'll kill you!"

PEOPLE from nearby up and down the street had heard the shot and rushed to the open doorway, saw a body down and all quiet under the thin haze of smoke that drifted high overhead.

The owner of the Bonanza from across the street, a small pot-bellied man, was the first in: "What happened, Jim?" Simpson, owner of the Emporium, which was also the postoffice, was right at his heels. One look and he said, "Red's done it again!" An old-timer stooped, took a look at Joe Bush's face, and muttered, "They'll be hell to pay!"

Close behind them came Mamie, the Bonanza waitress. She was red-headed, not a pretty red, with a hard face somewhat bleached by steam and soapy dishwater. Mamie had grown up in Tulluco and called folks by their first names or any other names that seemed suitable.

Young Johnson, so-called though he wasn't so very young, came hurrying with pinched nose poked out and eyes a little owl-like. A voice that sounded pleased to give bad news, called at him:

"Red Clark shot yore friend Joe Bush!" Young Johnson stopped as if he had stumped his toe, caught his balance, suddenly looked scairt. Somebody mumbled, "Miz Hepple 'll have a fit"; and young Johnson, with out-thrust of neck and jerky movement of head until he could get a look through the crowd at Red, said between clenched teeth, "He's goin' to wish to God he'd never come back to this country!"

There was babble of questions, confusion of comment. Jim, the barkeep, set out glasses and bottles, business-like. He spoke calm: "Joe Bush struck Sara. Red, he was dozin' in a chair, woke up, give Bush a cussin'. Bush, soft as pie, put up a hand and said. . ."

Sara's face set sullenly under their stares.

A bushy-faced freighter and his swamper surged in, shouldered through, looked at Bush, at Sara, cussed in approval. The way they talk irritated young Johnson. He said, loud and shrill, "The law won't stand for killings any more!"

The busy-faced freighter yelled right in Johnson's face, "The law has been standin' plenty for gamblers shootin' miners that don't like to be cheated! I got me a gun right here to loan if you want to argy with the kid about it!"

Johnson backed away from the ugly freighter as if he didn't like so much bad breath in his face. Then somebody, far back toward the door, yelled, "The law stands for crooked bankers kickin' chilern out from under a roof!" Sara had spread her story to help make people hate the Johnsons.

Johnson started backing for the door, but shouted defiantly, "He killed Joe Bush an' he's got to be arrested!" He went out of the door with jeering words knocking about his ears.

"But," said somebody ominously, "Joe Bush, he's got friends."

"So's Red!' Sara snapped.

Mamie glared at Sara and sniffed. The virtuous Mamie had no use for dance hall girls. They wore bright ribbands, short dress which was scandalous; silk stockings, often red; lots of jewelry. They painted, smoked, had an easy life of it, just dancing, singing, drinking. "Friends!" Mamie squawked. "Why, some of us knowed Red since he was knee-high to a grasshopper!"

Among those who came was Dr. Barstow, bareheaded, partly bald, wearing galluses over an unbuttoned and not clean shirt. He had a gray mustache, whiskey-bloated face, mild eyes and carried a pill bag. He crouched by Bush's body. "Help me turn him over."

When the body was turned over they saw that a derringer was under Bush. He had thrown the knife and drawn the gun with incredible swiftness.

"Why, he isn't dead, quite!" the doctor announced.

Dr. Barstow, even though a broken, shiftless fellow, had the physician's zest to save the life of a badly wounded man. He sent out to borrow the shafts of a buggy down at the livery stable and got some boards from packing cases at the Emporium, had blankets fetched from the Golden Palace where Bush lived, and made a stretcher. Men carried the gambler down to the hotel.

Sara went out the back way, pausing at the rear door to see if Red looked after her. But Red didn't. He stood with his back to the bar, resting on his elbow. Somebody slipped two bits into the music box, wound it up, and the thing began chiming Yankee Doodle. Red was spoken to but answered with grunts.

He didn't like talking. He was thinking. Red tried to think honestly. So he had shot another man, had he? There were folks that he pretty much respected who had warned him that he had the instincts of a killer. Mrs. Dobbs, for instance, certainly wasn't squeamish. She had somehow learned pretty much about all Red had been through during the past two years up in Lelargo and Tahzo. She told him that he had done more shooting than seemed reasonable in a downright honest boy. She said he could shoot better than an honest man ought, the which made him sassy and much too ready to have trouble. He had a heap of respect for Mrs. Dobbs.

Sheriff Nims came in with some men following him. One of them was Deputy Marr who now had his hat brim high up like a man that means business.

The sheriff said, "Howdy, boys," and the men said, "Howdy, sheriff!"

Nims was a big man, round of face, round of body, roughly dressed, robust, good-natured. His wife's folks owned a big cow outfit. He had wanted mighty hard to be sheriff and his folks spent a lot of money. There couldn't be a much more important job than sheriff for the title of town marshal, county assessor and tax collector went with it. Nobody was over him but the supervisors, and old Banker Johnson was chief supervisor.

Sheriff Nims pushed up his hat and strode along back to where Red stood with an elbow on the bar behind him, watching the sheriff come.

"Well, Red, so you played hell, huh?" The sheriff's voice was a little loud, regretful, not unfriendly.

Red said nothing. He looked at the big solid silver star on the sheriff's vest as if the dull glitter fascinated him.

"I just rode in from my ranch—" He called it "my ranch" but everybody knew it belonged to his wife, who was a mighty fine woman. "—an' heard you shot Joe Bush. Miz Hepple's goin' to be mighty cut up."

"I reckon."

"Can't you read?" The sheriff tossed up his hand, pointing.

Red moved his head, eyed the notice as if he had never seen it before and couldn't read very fast. He looked at the sheriff and said slowly:

"When you make gamblers and such-like walk 'round in their shirt tails, I reckon then maybe they won't break your laws. Under them long-tailed coats they can hide a scatter gun."

"But a boy that's had your upbringing, Red, oughtn't to break no laws! If your dad's name had been signed to that there notice, would you be wearin' them guns?"

"Nor gamblers wouldn't be packin'

knives, an' pocket guns, neither!"

Sheriff Nims' big tanned face colored a little, nevertheless he spoke deep-voiced and paternal:

"But if somebody else breaks laws, that ain't no excuse for you to do it. If you hadn't been wearin' them guns you wouldn't have had no quarrel with Joe Bush and—"

"If I hadn't been wearin' nothing but my toe nails, I'd 've cussed him like I done. He hit a woman!"

"Oh pshaw now," said the sheriff. "Her kind are ust to beatin's off and on. Turn around and belly up. Let's have a drink." He clapped down a twenty dollar gold piece. A sweeping gesture invited everybody to the bar. "That notice," he explained in a pardoning tone, loud enough to be overheard, "was put up since you come in for the mail last week. So naturally I reckon you didn't see it."

Red took a deep breath and eyed him, not answering. Red couldn't tell whether he sort of liked Nims for making it easy for him, or disliked him for not doing more as a sheriff ought.

Men along the line were lifting glasses. "Here's how! . . . "Health, sheriff! . . . All the way, sheriff!"

He acknowledged it all with a flourish and tossed whiskey at his mouth, took off his hat, drew a bandanna from the crown, wiped his forehead, face, and back of his bull neck.

"How's things to the ranch, Red?"

"Fine, I guess."

"Any trouble with rustlers out your way?"

"Oh I reckon maybe some squatters back in the hills eat veal onct in a while."

The sheriff looked at his watch. "Stage past due. Late again." He put the thick turnip-sized watch away. "Now, Red, next time you ride in just leave your guns at, say, the Emporium. I sorta' have to not make exceptions. An' Red, I'm hopin' like hell," said the sheriff, dropping his voice to a low rumble, "Joe Bush don't die. If he don't. I reckon nothing much 'll be said about it—legal, that is. But he's got friends. An' there's his maw. Anyhow, I won't rush things. S'long, Red."

The sheriff waved his hand and strode out with Deputy Marr, who looked disappointed, following.

Red leaned back against the bar with a stolid, perplexed, and cautiously thoughtful expression. Other men were leaving or talking briskly. Another barkeep had come on duty to help. Jim was down toward Red's end.

Red asked, low-voiced, "Jim, what's he mean by 'if Joe Bush don't die?' Why'd anybody think I shot 'im? What's this country comin' to?"

Jim spoke softly. "You been away quite some time, Red, and not back long. Things is changed. Lots of funny monkeydoddling these days."

Red stood solemnly perplexed.

"An' by the way, Red. You've noticed, ain't you, Sara is always here ever' Thursday morning when you come in for the mail?"

"Well?"

"Why you think she is?"

"I never thought."

"Other days she don't show up till about seven or after, night-time."

"You mean on account of me?"

"Do your own figgerin'," said Jim.

"I don't spend no money on her."

"That's what Joe Bush knowed, too! Made him mad. He's hired her for to loaf around the faro game he's got here. He wanted her to be his girl." Jim daintily fingered the tight curls of his big black mustache, nodded.

Red eyed a knothole overhead very much as if about to throw something at it, hard.

"And listen, Red. Joe Bush has got friends. He was sort of boss over the rig-ups all over town. Whether he dies or don't, you leave your guns at the

Emporium and you'll be killed. Maybe so if you don't!"

Jim moved away, wiping the bar as he went.

CHAPTER III

A Stranger Comes by Stage

THE stage went by the Best Bet at jangling trot and with cloudy swirl of dust.

Red caught a hazy glimpse of the six-horse Concord's driver, old Rim Cramer whose hands were stiffened claw-like by so many years of holding reins. He was quite likely, if he took a dislike to any of the passengers, to put his team through a pace that rocked the stage along the edge of a drop-off in a way that set strong men to swearing and the less strong to praying.

Once the stage company fired him for scaring the peewadding out of one of its Eastern stockholders. Thereupon Mrs. Dobbs said emphatic that if they didn't put Rim Cramer back on his run she would give him a herd of broncs and her old stage coach and let him run an opposition line; that she liked the way Rim Cramer drove; and the idea of an Eastern chucklewit telling folks out West who they could have for a stage driver and who they couldn't didn't set well in her craw. When Mrs. Dobbs rared back on her hind legs and started snortin', most folks set up and give some heed.

Red ran at a jog trot, with other people jog trotting, all for no reason except to catch a glimpse of the passengers down near the corner where the stage stopped before the company office. Today it was packed with travel-stiff and dust-covered people.

One was known as "Judge" Harris, a little dried-up sharp-faced lawyer who always dressed like he had come out of a band box and looked as a puff of wind could blow him away. With him was a lightly veiled young woman. She was his niece whom he had just fetched from Denver. The veil was not heavy enough to conceal her pretty face.

There was a young Eastern fellow who asked some fidgety questions and was shown the livery barn off down the street. He started for it in a big hurry.

Among others that got out of the stage was a big man in a dark suit of store clothes but had a range-bred look about him. His eyes were narrow, his face bony, his legs bowed. Not a young man, not old, with a sort of cautiously watchful air.

Red sized him up, noticing things. There was a lumpy spot on each hip. His coat tail wasn't long enough to cover a proper six-gun holster and he didn't look like a fellow that would wear short-nosed guns. Red guessed the lining had been cut from the hip pockets and the holsters rammed down inside the pants. That would make setting down uncomfortable but at least give a fellow the sort of guns he was used to. The man had cold quick blue eyes with a sort of glisten in their look.

Red met the stranger's look with a mild stare. The fellow stared back, hard, smiled with one side of his mouth, stepped closer, said:

"Howdy."

"Howdy."

The man drew tobacco and papers and began to roll a cigarette. "Long in this neck of the woods?" asked the man, sizing Red up.

"Um—some. Know ever' chuck-wagon camp."

The fellow grinned, twisted the cigarette, reached for a match. Red looked at the man's hands. They were brown as his face, not calloused, not rope-burned. The cigarette he had rolled was very slender.

"My name it is Buck." He turned toward the Golden Palace, looking after Harris and the niece. "That was the purtiest girl I ever seen in my life. But

she does look a little peaked." Buck slurred all of his "r"s softly.

From the sound of his voice he was likely from Texas; and from the shape of the cigarette, near the border. On close view, not likely to be good leather. Something pretty mean deep down under the cold glitter of his eyes. Big devil, with a chest like the side of steer. Red would have bet a dollar that he was on the dodge, else was a killer. Maybe both. Red didn't care. A few times the last couple of years he himself for a little while had been on the dodge. If Joe Bush died he might be again, right soon.

Red went over to where Rim Cramer sat on a bench waiting for the company agent to get through with some business. At the sight of Red, Cramer's grin set wrinkles astir on his old weather-beaten face.

"Lo, kid. How's Miz George?"

Cramer belonged to the inside circle of Dobbses, so Red was frank:

"Havin' conniption fits, one after t'other. And like you know, when she's on a rampage, a parcel of Apaches sound gentle and soothin'."

"What all is troublin' of her, son?"

"Things is bad. Rustlers—my good gosh! And Rim, they is even some sheep been moved into Cocheno Valley!"

Cramer whistled, then, earnest:

"Why the hell ain't they been moved out?"

"Don't fret. They're going. But 'tain't just sheep. Feed all over is getting thin. Outfits from down Monohela way, to get away from miners, is runnin' cows up toward our range." Red spoke low, glanced aside. "The Hepples, I hear tell, is plannin' to horn in!"

Cramer shook his head, skeptical. His oaths were lurid. "Why, they dassn't! She licked hell outa' them Hepples onct an' has still got the same men as done it ridin' for her!"

"Yeah, but for forty a month the Hepples can get plenty of bad *hombres* as never heard of Jeb Grimes an' them like 'em."

Cramer lifted his hat and scratched his head. "I shore am sorry for Miz George."

"Her favorite colt broke its legs in a dog hole. Old George Robertson has got rheumatics again. That granddaughter from the East keeps her riled. I'm only sorta' mentionin' trifles, so to speak—but they send her on the warpath!"

"What else, Red?"

"Well, she's worrit some, a little, over that mortgage the which is purt-near due."

"Why won't them Johnsons renew it?"

"Why? 'Cause they'd like to own the Arrowhead themselves."

"Hell's blazes, 'taint that bad? Is it, Red?"

"Me," said Red softly, "I got a suspicion the Johnsons are doin' what they can to make it that bad. Looky, Rim. Thick as Miz Hepple an' them Johnsons are—would she start making trouble for the Arrowhead 'less them bankers nudged her into it?"

"But she ain't started yit, Red?"

"Nope. An' the devil is purty liable to have him a couple of bankers to toast if she does start. You eatin'?"

"I gota argy with the agent first. You looked into the doin's of that Cross-Box outfit yet, like I told you?"

"I'm keeping it in mind for an off day. I'd hate like hell for to catch Windy Jones and 'Gene doin' what they orn't. But I do hear tell," said Red, regretful, "they run around some with young Pinky Hepple."

Cramer went in to have his usual ups and downs with the small dried-up agent whose spectacles sat halfway down on his nose. When Cramer came shambling out his eyes were fixed on Red in a queer look.

"Hn! So you up an' plugged Joe Bush this mornin'? Why didn't you tell me?"

"He throwed a knife."

"Miz Hepple 'll skin you alive!" Cramer tugged at his hat. "An' I bet that fool law about takin' off yore guns ain't nothin' but the gamblers pullin' the wool over Nims' eyes so they'll be the only ones to wear weapons under them long-tailed coats. Bill Nims ain't a bad feller, I reckon. But he's scairt stiff he'll maybe hurt somebody's feelin' an' lose him a vote next 'lection. I'm glad to see you ain't payin' no attention to that fool law."

"'Twouldn't be such a fool of a law if ever'body obeyed her."

They went into the Bonanza and found seats. Red put his hat on the floor. Cramer tipped his to the back of his head. Mamie flew around like a whirlwind wearing petticoats. As she scattered dishes before them, almost as if dealing cards, she said rapidly:

" 'Lo, Rim Cramer! Have a good run? It's apple pie today. The pig's doin' fine."

She swirled away with a kind of back-handed pat on Red's shoulder to apologize for not having time to speak to him.

Cramer, thinking it a great waste to throw restaurant scraps to the dogs, had fetched in a baby pig from somewhere along the line, built a pen out back and presented it to Mamie.

Red was cleaning up a double cut of apple pie when Lucky poked his shining face through the door, looked about. He came in.

"Mistuh Red, Jedge Harris he wants fo' you to come oveh to Palus."

THE Golden Palace had been built years before by a smooth-tongued stranger who persuaded the cattlemen that they ought to have a proper place to stop in when they came to town. It was badly run down, in need of paint, repairs, furnishings. It was now in the hands of outsiders who maintained a pinchbeck pretense of style, had table clothes and served napkins. You got the same napkin three times a day for a week; the same table cloth, too, if you didn't spill enough coffee and catsup to make it go to the washtub. Since the hotel was full-up anyhow, the management didn't see need in wasting money to make it more attractive.

Harris lived there, had his office there.

The hotel looked a little deserted when Red went in. Most people were in the dining room. Red went up the stairs, strode along the hall, tapped on Mr. Harris's door. A thin harsh but low-pitched voice said:

"Come in, Red."

Red opened the door. "How'd you know 'twas me?"

"How many men with six inch spurs and dollars rowels am I expecting?"

Red flapped his hat at his leg and grinned.

Harris, in a neat way, looked very much as if he had been sewn in green hide and left out in the sun till the hide shrunk in hard wrinkles to fit his small body. His face was thin, sharp, his eyes birdlike in darting quickness, his hands small as a woman's.

"Shut the door and sit down, Red."

Harris got up from the table, came close, looked at Red with hawk-like peering. There was a whipcracker snap of voice:

"Why'd you shoot Joe Bush?"

"He throwed a knife."

"Why?"

"I give him a man-sized cussin'!"

"Why?"

"He hit a woman."

"Why?"

"She sassed 'im and throwed whiskey in his face."

"Who is she?"

"Sara Timton there at the Best Bet."

"A vicious cold-blooded dirty little devil! And you know it!"

"Maybe so," Red admitted.

"You young idiot!"

"I reckon."

"Red, don't you know she hoped you'd

shoot if he hit her? She made him hit her!"

"Aw shucks. Why'd she wanta do that?"

"Don't ask me to explain the workings down inside the mind of a woman like Sara. She comes of a no-good family. Maybe she wanted the excitement. Maybe she had a big loan from Joe Bush and figured an easy way not to pay it back. Women such as she like the fame of having men killed on their account. Nice story for this country! The son of Sheriff Clark kills a gambler in a quarrel over a dance hall girl!"

Red, awkwardly humble, said, "You make it look so I don't feel so very damn proud of myself."

"How 'll you feel to be put on trial?"

"When 'twas self defense?" Red asked in utter amazement.

"From now on, Red," said Harris in a slow thin voice, faintly ironical as if somehow even he didn't quite approve, "the justification for homicide in this great commonwealth of Tulluco County is to be determined in court."

"That you lawyers' doin's?"

"It," said Harris, still ironical, "is the doings of the Anglo-Saxon race from the days of the witenagemote and manifest in judicial procedure from the acceptance of the Magna Charta."

"Um-hm, I reckon. It's plain as a hair brand after you've shaved a cow's rump. You trying to tell me I'll be arrested and have a trial by some of what you call my peers?"

" 'Peers' be damned," said Harris bitterly. "It'll mean, Red, before a pack of gamblers. Or their sympathizers. You know I'm not in active practice. I'm out here for my health. I'm not mixed up in the damn politics. But don't worry. If it comes to a pinch, I'll do what I can for you."

"I ain't frettin—yet."

Harris smiled, gazed at him with downright liking, lifted the bag of tobacco and papers from Red's shirt pocket and began to roll a cigarette. "How'd you happen to come back to Tulluco? You were superintendent or something for a big outfit up in Tahzo, weren't you?"

"Nope. Just range boss for one of Dunham's outfits. And so all out of place telling men older than me, that knowed more about cows, what to do that I wasn't happy. So I come home."

"The Arrowhead must be pretty much like home to you." Harris lit the cigarette, replaced the sack and papers in Red's pocket.

"I growed up sorta' feeling Miz George was kin folks. But I never wanted to ride for her. It was too clost to home and my dad could hear if I raised hell. Of course, in them days I was young—"

The lawyer's birdlike eyes played over Red's young face and he smiled.

"You don't need to grin, Judge. I drawed man-sized wages when I was fourteen an' earned 'em."

"I know you did."

"Well, now that I've growed up and quit drinkin'—much. An' don't play no poker only onct in a while. And have got too fat and lazy to like cleanin' my guns, so think twict before I use 'em. And am otherwise a changed feller—some; well, now I don't feel so skittish about livin' among nice folks as knowed me when I wore diapers. After my maw died, I wasn't hardly weaned an' Miz George she just sorta' played like I b'longed to her."

Harris sat on the corner of a table, breathed smoke at the glowing end of the cigarette, then looked up, spoke frankly:

"But you always were a little wild, Red."

"I try to raise hell, allus, for them that make trouble for the outfit I work for." Red stood up, slapped at his leg with his hat, then flipped the hat on, pulled at his belt, shook himself. "Was you wantin' anything else of me, Judge?"

A smile brightened Harris' sharp face.

"Yes, you young rascal. For one thing, I want you to know I'll do anything I can at any time to help you, so if—"

"Loan me twenty dollars?"

"Twenty dollars?"

"I need it in some business."

Harris drew a buckskin pouch, opened it. "One enough?"

"Thanks." Red pocketed the piece. "Got to be. S'long." He turned to the door.

"Hey, wait a minute," said Harris, amused. "I want you to take word to Mrs. Dobbs that my niece is here. She told me to let her know so she could have Dora come out—" He turned to the door of an adjoining room, opened it. "Dora?"

A sweet voice answered, "Yes, Uncle." The slender willowy dark girl came in, smiled, said easily, putting out her hand, "So you are the Mister Red Uncle told me of?"

Red pawed at his hat, pulling it off. He shook her hand gingerly, dropped it. "How do? Pleased for to meet you. I gota be goin'!" She was like a picture book girl. He could have stood and stared at her, but jerked himself away with, "Well, s'long."

Out he went, shutting the door with a vigorous swing.

Dora was a sweet-faced, pretty girl. She shrugged her shoulders, spoke in an amused resigned way. "I seem to have frightened him!"

Harris laughed. "Rattled him, yes. Frightened? I doubt if it can be done. That boy had better look sharp or he'll be an outlaw yet. The doctor says Bush hasn't a chance. If so—well, there's likely to be the devil to pay. Red won't admit it and gets mad if you hint at it, but he has the makings of a killer in him."

He put an arm about the girl, squeezed. Her parents were dead. She was in his care now. "You'll like it out at the ranch. Mrs. Dobbs is a charming old lady even if one side of her tongue is pretty rough. And there's the granddaughter, recently from the East."

Red went down to the stage company barn, got his horse and rode to the Emporium.

A clerk went behind a rack of pigeon holes marked 'Post Office' for a bulging leather bag in which the mail for the Dobbs ranch had been put. Red hefted it.

"My holy gosh! I come for mail, not freight!"

He opened the pouch, dumped the mail on the floor, stooped, having a look. There were a half dozen letter which he examined carefully, and much surprised found one in a scrawling pencil addressed to *Red Clark, Arrerhed Ranch, Tuluco*. There were two or three stock magazines, a few newspapers, and eight thick mail order catalogs.

"When one fellow writes for a cat'-log," Red grumbled, "it puts the others in mind to write, too. Here," he told the clerk, "poke these away till a wagon comes. My horse ain't a pack mule."

He opened his letter and read:

> Dere sir: you done me a faver. So me Im tellin you Jim Cross of the box cross outfit has throwed in with the Hepuls and is monkeyin with yore alls bran. Sept for what you done fer me they cud run off all arrehed cows. T. Timton. I mean I wudnt care.

RED swore under his breath, crushed the letter and envelope, rammed them deep into his pocket. He didn't feel good and went on saying things to himself as he slapped the ranch mail into the pouch. He carried it to his saddle, tied it on, and was starting in a hurry across the street when the clerk, with a catalog in hand, came out of the door and called:

"Hey you, Red!"

"Now what?"

"This here one is addressed to Mrs.

Dobbs herself. I thought you didn't notice."

"That's diff'rent." Red came back. "But you ain't no business man. Here me, I'm doin' what I can to keep folks from mail-orderin' what like as not you've got to sell and you—"

The busy clerk hurried in doors. Red stood with the catalog in hand and, not wanting to stop and untie the pouch, also not wanting to carry the thing, he tore off the wrapper, opened his shirt and stuck it down inside his waist, flattening it out to reduce the bulk and working it around back to be more out of the way.

He hurried across the street and into the Best Bet. The barkeep Jim was still on duty, but two other men were now behind the bar to help take care of the rush. Red signalled to Jim and went on down to the end of the bar. He saw the look of the flashy gamblers. The stared as if trying to scare somebody.

It was bad for gambler's prestige to have their kingpin shot by a cowboy, particularly as Joe Bush, having a lot of family influence to back him, had fixed things slick for them in the town.

Jim set out a bottle and two glasses. "On me."

Red planked down the gold piece, spoke low-voiced:

"Give this here to Sara like it was yourn and tell her to vamose, cut stick, git! Go on down to Monohela or any old place."

Jim gave the coin a light flip of forefinger, pushing it back. "No use, kid." He stroked his heavy mustache. "She'd blow it for drinks. Anyhow, why?"

"I don't want her hangin' around when I come to town. I figger maybe she's a sort of joner."

"Um-m-m," said Jim, meditative.

Three gamblers walked by behind Red. They had the tense strained air of fellows who are trying not to appear a little uneasy. Jim eyed them steadily until they had gone on down to a crap table where they stopped, whispered together, glanced back.

"Watch out," said Jim, with warning.

Red said, "Sure, I'm watchin'." Then he asked, low and earnest, "You don't think, do you, Jim, she could've put up a sort of job on me?"

Jim shrugged a fat shoulder. "She's a woman."

"So I'm beginnin' to suspicion. What you reckon she had against Joe Bush?"

Jim glanced to the right and left, leaned over, wiping the bar.

"I make my guess she figgered him and the Johnson's are in cahoots in the gamblin' rakeoff. They're sorta' running the town and sheriff. She'd burn down a house to singe them Johnsons' eyebrows. Then too she didn't like the way Joe Bush he pestered her to be his girl."

A fellow was bumping a dollar on the bar, impatient to be served. Jim moved along up. Red put an elbow on the bar, fingered his chin, brooding.

Without the slightest warning a shot was fired squarely and point blank into Red's back. One of the three gamblers had walked up as if merely passing by and simply jerked out a gun.

Red staggered, lurched sideways and whirled. There was the roar of a heavy gun as he shot from over the holster. The fellow was hit squarely in the heart and simply toppled forward like a dummy that has lost its balance.

An outcry broke loose. Jumbled oaths and panic sounds, almost hysterical. Somebody yelled with blurting squawk, furious and afraid, "Kill the . . ." It was one of the two other gamblers by the crap table. His lips were drawn back over the teeth of his wide-open mouth as if about to rush forward and bite. He swung up a short-nosed gun with wild sudden jerk; shot. The other gambler, as if trying to keep up with a signal that had come unexpected, fired too.

Red leaned forward, a gun in each hand, and opened fire. His face had a stripped, naked look. All other expres-

sions than utter intensity were gone. He shot fast. His heavy guns boomed with a jarring kick that pitched the muzzles up in his hand. Bullets slapped at him. A bottle flew apart on the shelf behind the bar and whiskey gushed. Spurts of dust came from the white adobe wall as lead flattened there. Some men went down as flat on the floor as if they had been hit; others crouched under tables. The doorway was jammed by the surge of men that had bolted in a huddle. They shoved, squirmed, squawked, trying to get through. Bullets flew wild as bees from an overturned hive. Gamblers here and there had pulled their short pocket guns to join in.

Red could shoot almost equally well with either hand. In a close mixup he was likely to blaze with both guns at once. He knocked over the two gamblers by the crap table that way; then, because of bystanders, he fired at others with a half second's pause in aim.

Within a half minute from the first treacherous shot, pointblank in the back, the guns were stilled. Red, grim and tense, peered through smoke, ready for more—almost hopeful for more. But the fight was over. There wasn't a face at the doorway but from up and down the street a pack was gathering on the run.

Red reached to a nearby table and put down a gun. With a solemnly slow movement he twisted his arm around to feel of his back. His staring anxious look changed to an expression of funny surprise. His mouth, open in a doubtful gasp, laughed.

Jim called through smoke haze, "My God, you gone crazy!"

"The joke it is on me!"

"Joke!" Jim gasped and reached for a bottle of whiskey.

"I knowed I was hit in the back. I felt the thud. I says to myself, 'Red, old son, they got you!' So I thought while I could wiggle I'd make it a fight. Now I was purt-near ready to lay down and feel sick, a little. But when I reached around to feel some life blood pourin' out, I felt Miz George's cat'log! Thank God them things are fat. Now I 'spose out' grat'tude I'll have to order my pants by mail.'"

Jim poured himself a big drink of whiskey and wiped his face with the damp bar towel. He shook his head two or three times as if there just weren't words suitable for now.

Red, with wary lift of eyes at people who were beginning to stir, prodded out shells, reloading. Men were getting up from under the tables. Before the eyes of the crowd that was huddling near outside the door, still hesitating a little to come into the smoke, these fellows who had been under tables tried to appear that they had stood up all the time and been interested spectators.

Two gamblers were dead, a third was huddled under the crap table, moaning with hands to belly. Another that had got out of the door had a busted shoulder.

In the jumble and hum of words, a voice called, "Where's the sheriff?" Another, louder, "Here's Marr!" And Deputy Marr was, not eagerly, pushed to the front. He said, "Now Red, you can't do things like t-this and not expect to-to—"

Red looked at him, dropped an arm and his hand hung beside a gun butt. "You goin' to try to arrest me? Up an' talk! Are you?"

"Well, n-no not if—"

Men, pleased, yapped jeers at Marr.

"Awright then," said Red. "I'm goin', 'less, of course, somebody else wants to argy." His look glanced along faces, then he pushed through the crowd that readily gave way.

Quick words of approval flew at him. "You done good!" . . . "Old Nims'll throw a fit!" . . . "Yeah, one jest like Marr's! . . . "Joe Bush—Hepples—now, kid you've raised hell aplenty!" No one thought of stopping him. "Them Eastern tinhorns has learnt somepun!"

Buck, the range-bred stranger in store clothes, turned to a fellow and asked admiringly, "Who in hell is that kid?"

"Him? Red Clark! Old Sheriff Clark's boy. An' hell a-whoopin' when guns are goin'!'

"He's *who?*" said Buck with up-jerk of head as if hit on the jaw. He turned to face the way Red had gone. "Old Clark's —I been lookin' at—talkin' to—"

Buck yanked at the brim of his hat, lurched forward, making for the door with a hand under his coat and shouldering men roughly. His mouth was tight-set, his hard blue narrowed eyes glittered. He paused outside the door, looked down the street. Red, at a gallop, was turning the corner.

At the corner he met and passed a horseman. Man and horse looked fagged. It was young Johnson. He twisted in the saddle, his look following Red as if watching somebody escape that he didn't dare stop. Johnson faced about and saw the crowd stirring at the Best Bet doorway.

He struck the tired horse, came at a lagging gallop. Buck stepped from the edge of the board sidewalk into the dusty street, raised a hand. "Well, whoa there!"

Johnson jerked his horse, peered down. "You've come at last."

"An'," said Buck, accusing, "where all the hell have you been when—" Buck pointed toward the way Red had gone. "He was the very first feller I talked to! 'Twould have been nice if I knowed!"

Johnson got off the horse, moved slow, being stiff and tired, also unhappy. "I've been to Mrs. Hepple's ranch. Took word about her boy. Joe Bush and—" He tightened his fingers on Buck's arm. "Look here. I don't care how you do it, but first, before we ever start the other thing—you've got to—"

Johnson pointed the way Red had gone, dropped his voice to a whisper, sibilant and fierce as a snake's hiss.

CHAPTER IV

Gun-Law on the Range

SOME miles outside the town Red overtook a buckboard jogging along. The curtains were up. A nice faced well dressed young man in the back seat was swaying and bobbing from the jar of the ruts. The young man had a slightly pained expression as if his tail bone was sore. Red recognized him as the fellow who had come in the stage and at once gone toward the livery stable.

Red, without drawing rein, said, "Howdy," friendly-like as always to strangers on the road. The young man bobbed his head but kept both hands firm on the seat to stop being joggled more than he could help.

The driver, an ordinary looking fellow, lolled drowsily and didn't appear to be jolted at all. Red said, "Howdy" to him and the driver, raising his whip in greeting said, "Howdy."

It was late in the afternoon when Red passed through the sycamores, all hand planted years and years before at the foot of the hillside below the old Dobbs' house.

The house had grown from a little, window-slitted, one room adobe that stood off Indians in the early days to a great sprawling house, big as a hotel. The Dobbses had been an hospitable family, theirs a pastoral empire and generosity. In the old days, when soldiers were in the land, officers and their wives not merely visited but stayed for weeks. The wives even got bossy like they were paying a little board and had some rights to fuss.

It was a great sorrow to Mrs. Dobbs that all her children had been blighted with short lives. None were now living; and only one grandchild who had been born and brought up back East. Mrs. Dobbs, being lonely and hungry-hearted, had by preemptory threat of disinheritance, about two months before, got

Catherine Pineton to come to live with her on the ranch.

As Red appeared through the sycamores, Catherine jumped up impatiently from the hammock swing on the wide low veranda that overlooked the hillside and waved her arm.

The collies charged down hill to meet Red. They were a broad-faced, strong-jawed breed, savage as wolves if aroused —said to be crossed with wolves, but gentle as kittens with the family. The "family" being Mexican servants, their babies, aged parents and vague relatives.

Catherine came with flurry of shirts on the run to meet Red at the hitching rack. "Where on earth," she demanded in eager but only half-playful petulence, "have you been? I've waited hours and hours!"

Red, nutying the pooch, told her, "Me, I had some little business."

She fidgetted, watching the sack. The collies sniffed at her. What they really sniffed was the smell of that French poodle she carried about so much.

He waggled a hand as if aimlessly shooing flies. "Nope, they ain't a thing for you, Miss Kate."

"You are teasing!"

"No'm. Honest. You any idea where Miz George is?"

"You haven't a letter for me, Red?"

"Look for yourself." He dumped the mail on a veranda table. She fingered it, then turned, held out a hand. "Don't tease, Red. Give me my letters. At least one little fat letter! Please!"

Red stooped, gave the big collie that pawed him a playful cuff. "Duke," he told the dog, "that there is a woman for you. They never believe a feller 'less he tells 'em what they want to hear. The which is encouragin' to make us p'lite fellers lie a little." He grinned at Catherine. "Miz George in a good humor?"

"No. I made her as mad as I could this morning."

"Why you want to rile her all the time?" Red was vaguely indignant.

Catherine was a pretty girl, white, golden, lacy, dainty who had been brought up back East by a fastidious Pineton aunt. "Red," she demanded, "is it intelligent of grandmother to expect me to like this ranch? This awful country?"

"Best cow country anywhere!"

"I'm not interested in cows, thank you! And don't you suppose I get tired of listening to the number of Indians that grandmother at my age had killed right out of this window!"

"She shore done it, too!" said Red, proud.

"All very admirable of grandmother, no doubt! But I don't care whether or not there is any of the good old fighting Dobbs or Crittenden blood in me. She makes quite a point of there not being, you know."

"Oh the way you act gets her dander up."

"And you have heard how she talks to me. As if she were a little disgraced because her grandchild can't ride bucking horses! And I can't shoot. I don't know the first thing about skinning a cow. And don't want to! I hate these beastly wolves that she calls dogs!"

Red shook his finger at Duke, bidding him listen.

"And I love my dog Trixy! I'm afraid of snakes, bugs, and mice. I like tea and she thinks that is shameful. I shudder at her talk about what she calls 'shooting scrapes.' I think it horrid, barbarous! And she says *you* are as bad as anybody, Red."

"Me? Shucks! Huh."

"Then why do you wear those awful looking guns?"

Red looked down on one side, then on the other, as if sort of wondering what these guns were doing tied to him. "Oh," he suggested mildly, "they sorta' help a little to make a balance, horseback."

"She drives me frantic, boasting of

that horrible Dobbs-Hepple war and telling how 'her boys' killed men! You don't know how glad I am that you told me yesterday *you* had never hurt a Hepple in your life!"

"Yes'm, an' shore told you the truth —yesterday." Red dropped the "yesterday," mumbled lack of emphasis. Catherine was always talking about the Hepples as if they were somehow real folks.

"And isn't it awful, Red," she went on in a flurry of earnestness, "the way men in this dreadful country kill one another!"

He fidgetted, spoke vaguely, pulled Duke's ears.

She said, "Civilized people respect the law. Have courts and judges—and prisons!"

"Um-hm. They're doing that in town now, too, I hear."

"I hate this country. I like pretty things. I like music and books. She doesn't even know that her piano is out of tune, oh ghastly! I loath Mexican pottery and Indian rugs. I think this ramshackled old house is horrible. And I'm not going to pretend anything I don't feel! Ought I?"

"You know," said Red with amused drawl, "I reckon they is more of that good old fighting blood in your veins than you calc'late. You are the only body, man or woman, in this whole danged country that sasses Miz George back!"

Catherine smiled and patted his breast with light flutter. There was always a strong and, to Red—not to Mrs. George!—a pleasing smell of violets about her. "And you, Red, are the only nice person I've found in this whole damned country! And I like you in spite of what grandmother says!"

"About me bein' a bad feller?"

"No. About you being such a fine 'feller' that if I don't marry some such man as you, she'll sell the ranch and give the money to a nigger orphan home! Not leave me a dollar!"

Red colored, grinned, shuffled his feet.

"So," Catherine went on gaily, "cute little pickaninnies must grow up adoring your handsome bust that will stand in their marble hall!"

Red didn't quite get the drift of that, looked puzzled, then, impulsively, "Aw shucks. Maybe Miz George 'll like him fine!"

She caught Red's arm, pleaded sweetly: "When he comes, you will, won't you, try to see that the men don't take a dislike to him? I know grandmother will like him when she gets to know him, providing," she added breathlessly, "she doesn't suspect who he is!"

"Miz George is gosh a'mighty suspicious an' quick-seein'."

"And Red?"

"Yes'm.'

"You mustn't let even him know that you know who he is. I promised not to tell a living soul. But I had to have somebody I could trust to mail my letters. Didn't I? And Red, there is really so much more that I could tell you about him that I haven't really broken my promise. Honestly, I haven't. Some day you will understand."

"Um-hm."

"And please, Red, you will be nice to him, won't you? You barbarians do usually make fun of people from the East, don't you?"

"Well, look how they act."

"But he is really fine!"

Red spoke gravely, "Since you up an' married 'im, he'd better be—or stay a hell of a long way from this ranch!"

"Sh-hh-h!" She clapped a dainty hand to his mouth. "Somebody might hear! And if grandmother knows that she would scalp me! But Col. Howland knows *all* about him, about both of us, and he approves. But if grandmother knew, she'd be so prejudiced that Hal wouldn't have a chance. But you will, won't you, Red, help him?"

"You bet. But I got to catch Miz

George in a good humor or it's me as will get scalped!"

"What have you done, Red?"

"Oh I had a sorta' argyment with a feller, or maybe two or three, there in town. I want to catch her in a good humor 'fore I dare try to tell my side of it."

Red raided the kitchen, laying hold on a prune pie; and, pie in hand, went to have a look at the pups.

Their mother was a savage beast, but her eyes pleaded softly for Red's approval of the fuzzy litter as she followed with apprehensive watchfulness every move he made in turning them over. Then, with only Bella to see, he took out the scrawled letter from T. Timton and re-read it, muttered in a hurt voice, "Damn their souls. I bet Hepples *are* back of it. And back of Miz Hepple—them Johnsons!"

RED heard the dogs yapping far down the hill and he hurried around to the front of the house. Catherine, from the swing, moodily stared into the distance.

"Somebody's coming down yonder," Red told her, "and the dogs are sayin' 'tain't homefolks."

He listened and heard the grind of wheels on rocks, then hoofs. The dogs, out of sight, barked loudly. A buckboard came into view. Red recalled the nicely dressed young man he had passed on the road.

"Gosh a'mighty, Miss Kate! I bet that's him now!"

"It can't be!" She jumped up, peered under her hand, ran forward a few steps. "Oh Red, it is. It is Hal!" She jumped up and down in glee. "But—oh how can I act as if I don't know him! How can I!"

"Better be careful. Mexican kids are smart people. They'll tell Miz George."

The buckboard wound up the hillside and stopped before the house. The dogs bounded about, barking, casting glances at Red to see if he thought these strangers were all right.

The young man stared at Catherine and looked guiltily solemn. A fat Mexican woman, very stately, and two or three girls, came to the door, watching. Little Mexican toddlers, naked as fish, came from around corners. The arrival of a city stranger these days was an event.

The driver sang out, "Oh, hello there!" as if Red were an old acquaintance.

Catherine, breathing hard and very flushed, returned to the hammock swing, clenched her hands, tried to seem cool.

The young man got out, travel-stiff and very embarrassed. "Is Mrs. Dobbs at home?"

"She'll be along soon. Come and set," said Red, friendly, lifting a foot to the wheel hub, eyeing the young fellow.

"I am Harold Mason. I have a letter to Mrs. Dobbs from her old friend, Col. Howland."

"You'll be right welcome. Come and set," Red urged, keenly studying Mr. Mason's face. It was fatter and softer than the young faces seen on the range, but was good-looking. Miss Kate's husband. Well, so far, he looked all right.

The driver was getting out some bags. Red told the Mexican girls to pack them into the house. Mrs. George would yank his head right off if a stranger guest wasn't made welcome.

Mr. Mason sat down. He was hot and flushed. He tried not to stare at Catherine, but his eyes sneaked toward her in spite of himself. The young Mexican girls stared with frank interest. Red could hear them saying in Spanish that he was good-looking. Mexican youngsters squatted down, staring pop-eyed and shy.

Red said, "This here is Miz George's gran'daughter. Miss Pin'ton."

Mr. Mason arose, bowed. "How do you do, Miss Pineton?" A sly tinge of amusement crept into his voice. He had a hard time to keep his face straight.

Catherine nodded aloofly, not daring to trust her voice.

Mr. Mason sat down. He said, "Nice day."

Catherine looked away, her lips tight. Laughter was right in her mouth, trying to break through. Red said, "Yeah, you bet."

The driver took a chew of tobacco, gazed about, waiting for something. Red called, "You stayin' the night?"

"I sorta' cac'lated to."

"Over down yonder is the barn. An' bunkhouse. You'll be welcome."

"Thanky," said the driver. He climbed to his seat, shook the reins, drove off.

The collies gave Mr. Mason an embarrassing going over. Duke, a big shaggy dog, suddenly rose up with purposeful energy, put his paws on Mr. Mason's knees, peered into his face. Mr. Mason jerked back.

"Down, Duke!" Catherine cried anxiously. "Red, make him get down!"

"Aw, he won't bite. He's sayin' 'Howdy'."

Catherine was frightened. "Red Clark, make that dog get away!" She knew those collies did bite.

Red yanked the dog aside, wooled him with rough affection.

"Red Clark?" said Mr. Mason, his eyes popping. "Are *you* Red Clark? I saw you ride by us from town and—" He stopped, looked a little excited and not quite sure.

Red grunted, noncommital, wondering what this fellow was up to.

"Was it *you*," asked Mr. Mason, as if holding his breath, "who shot that gambler just before the stage got in?"

Red asked, "What gambler?"

Catherine, vaguely accusing and alarmed, spoke up. "Red, did you shoot somebody?" She just couldn't believe the things her grandmother told about Red. He seemed so mild and good-natured.

"*Me?* Huh." He grumbled, "I'm peac'ble as an old boot." He eyed Mr. Mason as if about to accuse him of slander. "Why you say that about me?"

"I heard men talking at the livery stable. I went there just as soon as the stage stopped. Didn't even wait for lunch." That was aimed obliquely at Catherine, disclosing his eagerness to get to the ranch. "They said a Red Clark had shot—"

"Oh they's a mess o' Clarks around," Red told him. "Lots of 'em redheaded An' somebody's shot there in town purt-near ever' day. Or ought to be!" To Catherine. "I got me some business to tend to. 'F Miz George comes, you tell her I'll be right back."

Red rode off slowly. Two or three of the collies followed with uplift of heads as if waiting for a favorable chance to inquire into his private opinion of the stranger.

Red thought, "I wonder what all is going to be said when they learn about them other gamblers? A whole lot depends on how I break the news to Miz George. She's liable to up an' fire me. That feller messes up my chances to be dipulmatic, I'll not like him so very damn much!"

Red found Mrs. George on horse back down by the corral where she was reading the riot act to old Harry Paloo, which showed what a bad temper she was in because old Paloo belonged to the family. She finished off with quirt a-dangle in wide sweep of arm and the flat statement that there wasn't a man on her range these days as was worth his salt.

She turned on Red as if about to jump him, too, then struck her horse. "Red, come back along to the house." From the sound of her voice she was sure riled. "I want to talk to you." She was off at a 'lope.

Red gave little old Paloo a pleading look of inquiry. Paloo shrugged his thin shoulders and raised a wrinkled hand as if giving a vague benediction for drawing her mind off him.

Old Paloo was pretty near as dangerous a man as Jeb Grimes, but looked mild, had a gentle voice. "Today over at Huskinses, a dog drug a fresh shank bone round the corner of the house while I was there. I asked for the hide, but they wouldn't show it. She says I ought've made 'em. That she will!"

Red followed Mrs. George, eyed her straight back. It wasn't a good sign when she rode with that right arm crooked at the elbow and that quirt dangling from her gloved wrist, flapping about as if getting ready to hit something.

Mrs. Georgiana Crittenden Dobbs was sixty or more. She was not tall, was rather thin, very wrinkled and gray. She could ride all day and, if any of her baronial neighbors wanted the game, play poker all night and be bright-eyed next day. When needful, she swore like a trooper. Yet the boys that rode for her thought she was not merely the best cowman in Tulluco but a perfect lady. Many people called her a "holy terror."

Near the hitching rack she hit the ground before her horse stopped, and cast loose the reins. She wore a divided corduroy skirt, old tight fitting boots of very fine leather, small spurs and a stiff-brimmed hat that was fastened by thongs under her chin.

As Red dismounted she turned on him. Her tone sounded as if she were cussin' as she said, "Sheep, rustlers, nesters ain't enough! Them Hepples are putting on their war paint—who's that?" She had caught sight of Mr. Harold Mason alone on the porch. He was within fifty feet of her. Her question would have carried three hundred. Mr. Mason bounced up as if he had been shot at.

"He come, he says, with a letter from Col. Howland."

Mrs. George changed instantly. Guests were guests, whatever her troubles. She strode forward with hurrying stride. There was no dillydallying about her movements, ever. She thrust out her hand, the quirt dangling. At that moment, Red felt kindly toward Mr. Mason. His presence was softening.

Mrs. George talked fast, with a sharp sound to her voice, but friendly. "From Col. Howland? Glad to meet you. Where the devil is Kate? How is the Colonel? Sit down. Have a drink? I want two! Red, go bring whiskey. Have you met my granddaughter?"

Mr. Mason was a little flustered by the snap in her voice and her sharp gray eyes. He said, "Oh yes, I, I he—" Pointing at Red. "He introduced me to Miss Pineton. She excused herself only just now to dress for dinner. From Col. Howland—a letter." He seemed pretty nervous and held out the letter. "My name is Mason. Harold Mason."

Mrs. George tore open the letter. Evening had come, but in the dim light she read swiftly and without glasses. It never took her two glances to see anything.

Red went into the house for whiskey and almost bumped against the eavesdropping Catherine just inside the doorway. With her hand on Red's arm she went along the wide dark hall with him until well out of earshot of Mrs. George, then whispered, "Oh Red, do you think she will like him?"

"Sho-ore," said Red with long drawn assurance. "He's a nice feller, ain't he?"

"Oh *you* are nice!"

"I been tellin' folks that all my life. But some is suspicious of my facts. Go on, skeddadle. I'm going to get him a drink."

"But he doesn't drink!"

"Gosh a'mighty, he'd better if she offers it to 'im."

"Then just give him a wee little!" In the darkness she held thumb and forefinger close before Red's nose, measuring.

Away she went, a-scamper on tip-toes with skirts in lacy rustle and leaving a vague warm odor of violets in the air.

In the kitchen Red teased the girls about thinking the stranger so handsome, and asked for glasses, tray, ginger ale. He laid hold on the whiskey without having to ask. He went out on the porch carrying the tray gingerly.

There was probably no other person on earth, certainly no other who wasn't sick, for whom Red would have played servant before a strange man. No other cowboy on the ranch would have done it cheerfully for even Mrs. George.

As he put the tray down, Mrs. George said, "Fetch some lamps, Red."

He fetched, with glance aslant to see if Mr. Mason snickered. Any cowboy would have eyed Red with a grin bigger than a long horn's loop; but Mr. Mason apparently didn't know that spurs, boots and guns weren't a part of a ranch butler's outfit. Anyhow, Mr. Mason was too tensed up over his own ticklish situation to feel like grinning at anything.

Mrs. George poured drinks, three big ones. Mr. Mason did not in any way flinch from the liquor except at following her and Red's way of gulping it down.

Red sat off by himself in the shadows, alert to change the subject if this fellow mentioned gamblers. Mrs. George rolled a cigarette, patted her breast pocket. "Match, Red." He gave her a match. She had another drink. So did Mr. Mason, but he sipped cautiously. She, half-asprawl on the hammock, held her glass, smoked, gazed at Mr. Mason. He, eager to make a good impression, talked. His talk was all right but Red wanted to give him a warning kick on the shins. Mrs. George liked to talk, too.

AFTER a time Mr. Mason was shown to his room to wash up and get ready for dinner.

"'Pears like a nice feller," Red ventured.

Mrs. George carelessly discarded from her lap letters she had ripped open, glanced at. "Beef down again. Oh, him? Col. Howland says so." Her thoughts flicked into the past. "Colonel now. Shavetail when I first knew him. He was in love with Kate's mother." Briskly, "Any news?"

Red cleared his throat. "Yes'm, a little. Judge Harris he got back with that girl."

"Nice girl, isn't she?"

"'Pears to be."

"I want her out here. Kate's lonesome as a broken-legged cow. What else in town?"

"They's a new law. Sheriff Nims has got him up a notice as how you'll be arrested if you wear guns in saloons and places."

Mrs. George ripped the wrapper from a stock journal, flipped it open. "Good law." She turned a page, glanced over it. "What did you do? Stay out in the street?'

"Some gamblers there wouldn't have got so bad hurt if they'd obeyed that there law."

"You don't mean Bill Nims shot 'em?" Her tone was incredulous, her look hopeful.

"No, not exactly. They sorta' jumped a feller. Easy goin' feller that was minding his own business."

"Who?"

"The first time, that Joe Bush he throwed a knife an' got plugged then —"

"Joe Bush!" Mrs. George was startled and not displeased. "Well. Hm. From what I hear, he's needed killing for quite a while. Who done it?"

"Well, you see, then later on some of Bush's friends they started a fight. Quite some little noise in the Best Bet for a spell. Now gamblers ain't so num'rous as previous."

"Served them right. Pack of blacklegs!"

"Y'know, I hoped you'd sorta' think so, 'cause honest to God, Miz George,

I wasn't lookin' for trouble and they —"

Mrs. George slapped the magazine to the floor, stiffened bolt upright. Her wrinkled mouth grew tight-set as she gazed at him. "Red Clark!"

"Yes'm."

"You killed Joe Bush?"

"No'm. Just shot 'im. He ain't dead —or wasn't."

"Who else?"

"Bush was one. I don't know the names of all the others."

"*All* the others? How many?"

"A couple more. Or maybe three. Three, I reckon. Or four. I ain't sure, quite."

"Damn your soul!"

"But Miz George, they drawed first an'—"

"You'd let the devil draw first!"

"Honest, Joe Bush he was pertendin' to be friendly, then throwed a knife. Next time—looky here!" Red took up the mail order catalog, showed the hole at the back of his shirt. "I happened to have this under my shirt. Round back. First I knowed, a feller plugged me. Naturally I done something. Orn't I've?"

She peered at the powder-marked hole in the shirt. She fingered the catalog, cast it to the floor. "Red, why the devil are you always getting into trouble?"

"Oh I'm like a knock-kneed horse, I reckon. Allus stumblin' into it."

"Give me another drink. How many men have you shot in your life?"

"I don't know. All them I could that need it." He moved his hand up and down a holster, slowly, as if petting the thing.

Mrs. George struck her boot a hard whack with the quirt, kicked at the catalog, shook her head, swore vaguely. "Red, damn it, you aren't just another cowboy on one of my horses. Give me another drink." He poured it for her.

She held the drink in her hand, looked straight at him. "After your mother died, you almost grew up here. You were the sweetest baby!"

Mrs. George's biggest weakness was over babies, any kind. Pups, calves, colts, or bear cubs. Often she sat holding some little Mexican toddler. She liked being touseled by baby fingers.

She drank a little, looked away toward the great shadow-blotted distance. "I'm getting old, Red. I want them about me that I like for more than just doing their work proper—What is it, honey?"

A little thin-legged bright-eyed Mexican girl came out of the shadows on the run, and said breathlessly in Spanish, "Our colt has got away and papa will be angry, and would you please, *señora*, have somebody"—her bright eyes flashed at Red—"help us to catch him?"

Red was up and moving before Mrs. George could speak. He caught up the child that wriggled gleefully. Mrs. George called, "Hurry back here, Red. I'm not through with you by a hell of a sight!"

Mrs. George sat with a cold cigarette between her fingers, her hand against her cheek, thinking. The drumming of hoofs roused her, and she lifted her head, listening, then arose as the hoof beats started up the hillside toward the house.

The horseman rode right up to the edge of the veranda and piled off. He was only a lanky brown kid, thirteen or fourteen, that worked about the livery stable there in town. The horse was in a lather and the boy's face was masked with dust.

"Miz George, Ma'm," he gulped, proud of his importance as a messenger. "Here's a letter from Jedge Harris. He tol' me to come lickety-split an' I shore done 'er! He give me two dollars an' said 'f you'd say I got here afore eight o'clock he'd give me *three* more an—"

The eager kid went on talking as Mrs. George turned to a lamp, opened the note, read:

My dear Mrs. Dobbs: Joe Bush is dead and with an unaccustomed alacrity the

Honorable Supervisors of Tulluco have empowered the Sheriff to offer a reward of $1000 for William Tyler Clark, alias Red. This is, of course, inspired by the high estimation in which the Honorable Supervisors hold the dead blackleg's mother. I am sending this with all the speed available. No man was ever more justified than Red was in killing Bush but I am sure every effort will be made to bring him to trial and that the trial would be a farce of perjury, false swearing, intimidation of witnesses, if not indeed the furtive assassination of the prisoner.

And may I with diffidence, venture to suggest that it would be discretion on your part to send Red away from the ranch, out of the country, until this flurry blows over. Any effort on your part to shelter him will only involve you in needless complications with the so-called Law and Order that for some obscure reason is now dedicated to the sanctity of human lives even when such lives belong to blacklegs, rustlers, horsethieves, and other common vermin. In the vernacular of the countryside, tell Red to hightail for tall timber and lay low.

I have the honor to be your friend. Sincerely, Harris.

P. S. The printer informs me that the reward notices now being set up refer in smaller type to the three or four other men Red shot this afternoon. Your keen perception will detect the significance of that typographical discrimination!

Mrs. George set her thin lips tight and held the letter above the lamp chimney until it caught fire. She was watching it burn, but a movement from the boy caught her eye.

"Sammy," she said, in a far gentler voice than the look on her face would cause one to expect, "run around to the kitchen and tell 'Nita I sent you. Eat all you can hold. You won't have to hurry on the way back to town. But I want you to light out right off."

"Yes'm," he gulped and bolted. He had been in the Dobbs' kitchen before. Nice and big and how them pretty girls fed a feller!

Mrs. George went into the house and came back with a tablet and pencil. She put the tablet on the table and stood up to write:

Dear Judge: For forty years I've stood up for my men when they did right. I'm sorry it happened. Joe Bush being a Hepple makes it bad. I am keeping Red right here by me. I am not going to tell him about that reward or how his being here may make trouble for me with your damn Law and Order. He would bolt just to protect me. So now if I let anybody come out here and arrest him it would be just the same as if I kept him here to betray him!

There is nothing secret about this letter. You can tell folks what is in it, or you can show it and let it serve notice to all and sundry there in town, and especially such cowmen and cow-women as may think old lady Dobbs is getting too old and feeble to hold her land, water and cattle, that from now on gun-law rules my range, just like in the old days. Bill Nims can come out and arrest me—or try it!—any time he has a mind. From now on, like in the old days, rustlers are going to be treated just like plain thieves and I'll kill 'em on the range just like if I caught 'em in my bedroom. Sincerely, Georgiana Dobbs.

There was a postscript, thanking Harris for sending word and urging him to send out his niece.

Mrs. Dobbs laughed a little as she folded up the letter and put it into an envelope. Fighting talk always did cheer her up. She felt better, much better now. The only thing was that Harris, a cautious man, might not show it to Sheriff Nims. If not, well then she could go to town and tell the whole kit and caboodle of 'em herself!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

SAWDUST SAVAGE

The boom boss was the one woodsman who packed a gun, so Rusty pawed wind without hesitation.

By JAMES STEVENS

IN THE frosty air the steam from the tub of thawing dynamite made a white cloud. Stooping, Rusty Hance thrust head and shoulders into the billowing fog, gripped the handles of the tub and lifted the devil's brew from the open fire. He straightened slowly, his gaze sweeping the river. Between bluffs of lava rock the log booms, crusted with snow and ice-locked, were grimly still. The far bluff was dim in closing twilight.

At Hance's left the bluff shouldered into the river, shutting the sawmill from his view. Upstream some fifty yards the bluff bulged into a second shoulder. It was a rugged shield against the norther that was slashing from the pine woods and glacial gorges of the Oregon Cascades. The giant pocket was a prime place for a powder cache. An easy trail snaked up the bluff side and on to the yards of the logging railroad.

Rusty Hance was the sawmill superintendent of the Maring Lumber Company. It was the smallest outfit on the river, though the Maring timber holdings were the finest in the region, and only a hard fight had kept the saws running through two bad years. Hance had

fought down one threat after another, and now he was at grips with the fiercest freeze that had struck Butte River in seven winters. Only dynamite would keep the log booms open.

Hance booted a blanket-lined box toward the tub and stooped into the steam. His back, immensely broad in a mackinaw of black-and-red checks, was toward the bluff trail.

He pulled off a pair of double gloves —horsehide over wool—and began fishing the thawed sticks from the tub. When a dozen sticks were out Hance cut as many lengths of fuse. He then punched holes in the ends of the sticks with a wooden awl. This done, he warmed his hands for a moment over the fire.

It now cast a brightening circle of light in thickening shadows. The mill boss gazed down-river. He scowled as he saw that the upper string of the lights that fringed the mill pond had not been turned on. Hance had left orders with Brock Megan, the boom boss, to keep the logs moving in the open water there through the supper hour.

Rusty Hance did not trust Megan. But the man was the Maring logging boss, and since the winter shutdown of the woods camp the only job for him was on the booms. He was a prime logger, a relentless driver of men in the woods. Hal Maring, the young owner and manager, had insisted on keeping Megan.

His eyes still clouded with a frown, Hance turned back to his job. There was a box of blasting caps in his right mackinaw pocket. Hance was reaching for them, when the rocks behind him grated from a swift and heavy tramp of calked boots.

"Hold 'er!" sounded Brock Megan's growl. "Paw wind, Rusty. I mean both hands, and I mean sudden."

In the instant Hance smothered an instinctive surge of fighting temper. Megan was one woodsman who packed a gun. Hance straightened up, both hands jutting above his shoulders. He felt a warning jab in his back from something round and hard. Then Megan's left hand, huge and knotty, pawed his armpits, his hips, and slapped his mackinaw pockets.

"No gun, of course," Megan muttered contemptuously. "What's that?"

Through the thick blanket cloth he had felt the small round shape of the box of blasting caps. Hance had anticipated the question.

"She's a box of snoose," he said readily.

"So you're a Swede, hey?" jeered Megan. "All right. Face around. Tromp fer that trail. Me and you are goin' to the woods."

Hance silently obeyed, knowing what murderous force was behind him, knowing also why it had been turned on himself. Megan drove him into a rapid climb up the trail and over the rim of the bluff.

A gasoline speeder stood on the first siding. Its motor was idling. Just beyond the speeder a string of empty log cars loomed blackly in the blowing shadows.

"Mount up, Hance." Megan ordered. "Front end, face to'rds the back. Hustle 'er up."

Again Hance wordlessly obeyed the order. A double-bench seat bulked in the middle of the car's platform, extending from the front end to the rear. His hands still elevated, Hance stepped to the platform, turned and sat down with his back to the wind.

Megan kept him covered. Heavily mackinawed, the man loomed in the clouding twilight like a stump set on two knotty butt limbs. His left hand swung up an oversized electric torch. He shot the spot of light along the string of cars in three long flashes. In the dusky distance twin beams winked thrice, and went out. Megan pocketed

the torch and swung up to the rear end and right side of the bench seat.

Hance spoke, in a dull tone of complaint.

"You run me off in such a rush I left my gloves. Can I warm my hands in my mackinaw pockets?"

"Yeh, if you're careful to keep 'em there."

Megan's eyes glittered watchfully in the dusk as Hance jammed his hands under cover and hunched his back against the wind.

"Like that," Megan growled, "if you want to stay healthy."

He lowered the revolver and gripped the butt between his thighs. He bent over the controls. His hands, black in woolen gloves, were like the paws of an ape as they seized the gear shift and the throttle. The lazy drone of the motor increased into a sullen rumble through a stoutly muffled exhaust. The car jerked, its wheels spinning on frosty rails. Then it rolled into the wind and for the woods.

PINE logs blazed redly from the fireplace in the living room of Buckhorn Lodge. Pinney Lang stood at ease there, though he was an unwelcome guest, his back to the blaze, thin hands clasped behind him, his angular, black-garbed figure inclined in a slight stoop toward Hal Maring. The firelight softly masked the frosty austerity of Lang's countenance. It glowed in the tight, iron-gray curls that fringed his high, ascetic forehead. As he talked, in a soft, persuasive tone, Lang was like a priestly counselor.

Only the man's eyes marred the general effect. They were little eyes, deep-set, black, like small pine knots, almost lightless.

Hal Maring was slumped in a huge leather chair. A tray loaded with bottles and glasses was set on an end table at his right. Maring poured his third stiff drink since Lang's entrance. Without a word or a look for his guest he lifted the glass in a shaking hand.

Lang paused, his thin mouth twisting in a sardonic smile, as the younger man downed the liquor in a gulp. The fire crackled explosively, showering sparks against the screen. A red glow surged into the great room, and smokily ebbed. There was no other light.

At the hall door the shadows were deep. During the pause the door was inched open. In the blackness of the hall Ruth Allen peered through the narrow gap to the great room. She had brought the day's scale sheets and reports from the sawmill office and was about to leave when the Chinese boy had announced Pinney Lang. Ruth had lingered in the hall. She squirmed at eavesdropping, but her knowledge of what Lang's surprise visit might mean to Maring's hundred men and their families caused her to ignore her scruples. She listened.

"To sum up, Maring," Pinney Lang's sibilant drawl sounded again, "this freeze will inevitably cause a time default in your government contract. I shut my mills down this morning. You will be forced to do the same tomorrow, I promise you. If you refuse my offer, you will unquestionably fail to meet your obligations with the Greenport National in the spring. I'll then take over your mill and timber without paying you a cent. Take my offer now, and you will have the lodge, and sufficient income for at least a modest living."

Lang paused again, expectantly. Maring poured another drink. His voice sounded in a thick mutter of defiance.

"You can go to hell, Lang. For the last time, I won't break my promise to my dad. He'd feel the shame in his grave if I did."

"And if you lose everything?" said Lang softly.

"I'll not," Maring muttered. "We won't shut down. Hance will keep the

river open. You don't know Rusty Hance."

"Hance?" A sneer edged Lang's drawl. "The best men have their price, Maring."

"What do you mean by that?" Maring rasped the question.

"Have you heard any blasting from the river during the past half-hour? Telephone the mill, and send somebody for Hance; he'll not be found. Rats leave a doomed ship before it's too late—the wise rats with full pouches."

"You're—it's a damn' lie," Maring protested feebly. "Not Rusty—"

"Rusty Hance." Lang's voice cut in like the drone of a saw in dead wood. "Likewise Brock Megan and your head sawyer, Dave Allen. Maring, you're done for. You'll take this, tonight, now, or nothing."

Lang had opened a billfold. He drew a slip of stiff yellow paper from it and waved it before Maring's eyes. Maring crouched forward staring at the yellow slip like a rabbit staring at a snake.

"Thirty thousand dollars," said Pinney Lang. "A certified check. This is your third and last chance. Think fast, Maring."

Hal Maring slumped back in the chair with a groan of defeat. His hand jerked again for the tray. A glass tinkled and crashed.

RUTH ALLEN shut the hall door. She had heard enough to know that only swift and desperate action would stop Maring's surrender. Her one hope was in her brother Dave, the mill's head sawyer. She could not doubt Dave. Lang had lied about him. She would find Dave, bring him to the lodge to face his traducer.

Rusty Hance—it was easy for Ruth to believe the worst about the superintendent. Dave called him a sawdust savage. Ruth was the order clerk, and her duties forced her into contact with Hance several times each day. She resented him. He was as grim and hard with her as he was with his men. His face was ugly with lines of strain and scars of labor and battle. His hands were ugly with bunched knuckles. The man was a fighter, a bully in Ruth's eyes, one who drove his men relentlessly with a lash of fear.

Ruth had known Rusty Hance only through the winter, in the crisis of the fight to save the Maring Lumber Company from a crash.

The girl slipped out of the lodge entrance, darted around a big car that was standing in the driveway, and ran down the snowy road to a bridge that crossed to the sawmill.

The millhouse was dark and silent. Ruth was gripped by new fears. Dave, she knew, had been left to keep the machinery turning against the cold. She skirted the mill and descended the gangway to the pond float. Only one man was working the logs, and by the light of a single lantern. Ruth asked him about Dave.

"He went up the catwalk a spell ago," the logger answered, "and he ain't come back. Said he was goin' to see what was wrong with Hance. That's all I know."

The man's tone was stubborn. He turned his back.

Swaying against the wind, Ruth stared into the river shadows. Before her the plank catwalk curved on around the mill pond. On this, the sawmill side of the river, it extended the length of the booms.

A drumming note surged in the wind, and faded. It was the sound of a blast, from far in the woods.

"What was that?" Ruth cried sharply.

"Dunno," was the mumbled answer.

The girl stared desperately on into the shadows. Above the bluffs the stars blazed brilliantly in a moonless sky. There was a faint sparkle of frost crys-

tals on the snow. An explosive crackling sounded from the logs.

"That's what it was." The girl sighed with relief. "The freeze."

She started on. The frozen snow crunched under her quick footfalls.

THE motor of the speeder charged heavily as it labored up the steep, twisting grade in the hills west of the sawmill town. The rails in the wake of the car were two black lines that vanished in a flat bed of snow. In the slash that flanked the tracks the stumps were dim, stubby shapes capped with white. The wind was roaring louder now. The big timber, and deeper darkness, were close.

For that deeper darkness Rusty Hance was biding his time. His back hunched against the beat of the wind, hands jammed in mackinaw pockets, he had remained motionless and silent since the start of his enforced ride. Facing Hance, Megan drove with his left hand. He had shifted his gun to a shoulder holster under his mackinaw and he was keeping his bared right hand inside the coat.

Hance stolidly waited for an open fighting chance. As the speeder chugged on toward the deeper shadows of the woods he troubled his mind but little about the plan behind Megan's murderous play. It was enough for Hance to know now just what he had to fight. On that he concentrated the force of the faith that ruled his life.

"In every play take the fighting chance," Hance had once advised his young head sawyer, Dave Allen. "Take it with your whole heart, give it the last drop of your blood, and fighter's fortune will give you her grin. Then you'll beat the slickers and smarties every trip. Ever read about General Grant? Kid, he was a tramp, a sucker, except when he turned loose and fought. Then fighter's fortune made him a king-jack. He fell for politics, and lost all his luck. If you get what I mean, there's something to think about."

So, as the speeder rolled from the slash into a black wall of timber, Rusty Hance shut from his mind everything but a plan for a desperate fighting play. Megan's rush for a getaway had left one chance to his captive. Rusty Hance gripped it in his right mackinaw pocket as he huddled under the wind, apparently submissive.

Hance knew every inch of the right of way. He was waiting for the speeder to approach a giant snag that towered at the right of the tracks, near the crest of a steep grade. The approach would be through a long, deep cut in the shoulder of a rocky hill.

At last the motor was chugging laboriously in the black shadows of the cut. Brock Megan was a vague, shapeless bulk as he hunched over his controls and yanked the throttle down. A profane growl sounded from him at the motor's sluggish response.

Hance eased his right hand free. It held a solid grip on the box of blasting caps. He rested his fist on his hip, behind a mackinaw fold, and waited, calculating grimly.

At the rear of the car Megan was on the right side of the bench seat. There would be no shelter between him and the dead tree. Hance's hope was in his own position. He could hurl the chunk of hell and at the same time throw himself down on the platform behind the bench planks. That is, if Megan wasn't too fast with his gun.

The fighting chance. Rusty Hance took it as the speeder rattled and groaned from the blackness of the rock cut. One long glance over his left shoulder, a glimpse of the giant snag as it loomed close, then his right hand shot up and over in an axman's swing.

As the box of caps hurtled from his hand, Hance shoved himself into a plunging dive for the speeder platform. In the instant of his plunge hell broke loose

with a lightning blaze and crashing thunder.

In the flash Hance glimpsed Megan starting up, jerking his gun. A tremendous crackle of splintering wood merged with the explosion. The blasted giant of a snag showered great slabs and slivers over the speeder, amid a hail of bark chips and rotten wood. All that, as Rusty Hance plunged to the platform planks, facing inward to the bench. A huge shooting splinter ripped through the back of his mackinaw. A slab thudded into his jutting left shoulder.

So much in the click of seconds. Then a last crashing shock. The top of the snag had broken off and tumbled. Its downward swish smothered the roar of a gunshot, and then the car was heaving and pitching under the giant blow, jamming to a sudden stop. A monster hand seemed to pick Hance up and hurl him out and down. He butted snow, and something harder.

A thick, milky fog rolled down. Every instinct in Hance fought out of it. In a moment he was sitting up, fiercely shaking his head and staring through a blur at the wrecked speeder. Hance pawed at his eyes. The blur was a trickle of blood from his forehead. His left shoulder ached painfully and his mackinaw was ripped up, but he was still altogether. Fighter's fortune had given him a grin.

Hance shoved up to his feet and prowled around the speeder. It was derailed, the motor dead, the rear end of the platform smashed under the snag-top. Brock Megan was huddled in the wreckage. He seemed dead, but Hance at last felt life beating faintly under the man's ribs. Hance lugged up his limp bulk and stowed it on the clear end of the speeder. He then labored the snag-top aside and poled the wheels of the car back on the rails.

The wheels and the axles appeared undamaged. The brake lever was bent sidewise, but it worked. Hance pocketed Megan's gun and the big torch and climbed to the splintered platform. He released the brakes. The wheels clanked slowly on the rails, but were soon humming in a fast roll down the steep grade.

Milepost 9 stood at the lower end of the cut. Some fifteen minutes after Hance zoomed past the post he was bringing the car to a stop at the spot where Brock Megan had gunned him aboard.

Hance swung down and tramped back to Megan. The man was still motionless, but breathing. The mill boss stared over at the yawning blackness of the bluff pocket, debating his next move. His top urge was to get back to his dynamiting job, to make sure that the boom men were out fighting the freeze. One of them could be sent up to take Megan on to town. Still, the hellion was likely freezing to death right now.

His own hands were going numb. Hance slapped new warmth into his fingers. There was a lull in the wind. In it he heard a woman's voice, a shrill tone that carried from the darkness of the pocket. Hance turned swiftly for the rim. He halted and peered down.

The fire was out. Not one spark shone upward. The woman's voice faded. Then a man's sounded from the deep shadows, harsh with anger. The wind surged again, smothering the words.

Rusty Hance started down the trail. He crouched along like a wolf on the prowl, his boots sounding but faintly on the snowless rocks.

HANCE kept close to the base of the bluff until he reached the powder cache. This was a roomy cave that had been blasted in the solid rock. Its entrance was framed with an iron door. The door was now standing open. The mill boss hauled up and glowered into the star-shot river shadows.

They were broken by the dimly outlined figures of a man and a girl. Hance

knew them now. The two Allens. Dave was still talking, in an increasingly angry voice. Now Hance could hear his words.

"You've told me, now I'm telling you what you're going to do," Dave growled. "You're beating it up that trail for home. I'm finishing my chore here, and I'm heading back to the mill to meet Mr. Lang. Things have gone too far for any turning back. Hance and Megan have beat it for the woods. They sold out, so what could I do? Just what I'm doing. Damn' it, you want to see the folks starve?"

"I don't want to see you be a crook!" A shrill of hysteria sounded in the girl's voice. "You let Brock Megan lie to you, trap you, Dave! I know something terrible has happened. I've felt it since I found Hance's gloves here. Dave, he wouldn't run off barehanded!"

"Aw, you're crazy," Allen cut in. "Seeing things."

But he sounded uneasy. He rasped out an oath, as though to fire up his courage.

"We've gabbed enough," he went on. "You had no blasted business butting in. Wonder you didn't break your neck, crossing them logs. Now you lay off. I'm stowing this tub and locking up the cache."

Hance eased backward into the doorway. His boot struck a box. He stooped and felt its corners. It was the box of thawed dynamite. As he straightened up, the mill boss was seeing a clear picture of the game behind Megan's play. He realized that Megan and himself were to appear to have run out together. Dave Allen had trailed Megan, to clean up around the powder cache. Maybe Dave had known that Megan intended to make a gunplay, maybe not.

Hance did not ponder the question. He peered on into the shadows. Dave was stooping. He swung up with the tub. The girl stood back silently as he turned toward the black wall of the bluff.

The mill boss set himself in the doorway. He cocked his right fist. Despite the cold, he felt a hot itch in the knuckles. Lately this kind of itch had been chronic with Hance when he was around Dave Allen. The kid was a pine sawyer born, too good for his own good. He wanted to run the whole sawmill. Hance would have slapped his ego down long ago, had it not been for the kid's sister.

Ruth Allen thought Rusty Hance was a terrible man. That it mattered to him he had stubbornly refused to admit, even to himself. But he had tried to reform his fists somewhat, he had at least kept them off her cocky kid brother. She still thought he was terrible.

RIGHT now Hance was through with soft reform. Dave Allen was going to get a long-needed lesson, and he was going to talk turkey. It was too bad that Ruth had to see it all, but that couldn't be helped.

When Allen was two steps from the doorway, Hance swung out. The tub clanged to the rocks between them. Hance booted it aside with his left foot as he lunged. His cocked fist shot from his shoulder, looping over in a chopper's swing. It bumped the big kid between his left ear and cheekbone. He toppled over the tub.

Hance stooped swiftly, hooked Allen up and dumped him through the doorway. He grabbed the iron handle of the door, yanked it shut and shot the bolt. Then he hauled out Megan's torch and clicked it on. As the spot flashed on Dave Allen he was sitting up, holding his jaw, and groaning. His eyes bulged with fear as Hance squatted before him and glowered close.

"You talk, kid," rasped the mill boss, "and fast. Get this first. I never sold out or run out. Megan took me for a ride under the snout of a gun. For a ways, he did. With this gun."

Hance pulled the revolver half-way from his pocket, then let it slide back.

"You tell me about Lang, or I'll unear you. Well?"

The kid talked, like a scared kid, his sullen swagger utterly vanished. He chattered feverishly, his gaze roving from a stack of dynamite boxes along the back wall to the iron door. He said:

"Jeez, Rusty, I was sure—Lang and Megan swore you was in on the play. They showed me the mill'd have to shut down anyhow. Lang promised me a boss job in his mill. I got the folks—the old man crippled up—"

"Chop the sniveling," Hance snarled. "What's doing now?"

"Uh—Lang and Maring are together, closing the deal. 'Sall I know, Rusty, honest," muttered the kid. "I was to clean up here—Megan said you and him'd have to leave in a rush—and then report to Lang at the sawmill office. Then Ruth come up like she was crazy—crossed the river on the logs—raving it was all a crooked deal—"

"That's enough. I'm the gent who's reporting to the sawmill office," said Hance grimly. He shoved himself to his feet. "Get up," he ordered. The kid wobbled to his feet. "Pull yourself together, Dave," the mill boss went on, in a gentler tone. "You've just been a blasted fool—I hope. I'll give you a fighting chance. Will you take it?"

"Yeh." Allen gulped, then he straightened, looking more like a man. "Sure," he said. "I guess Ruth was right. I'll do what you say."

"All right. First thing, you go up to the bluff-rim siding. Megan is there on the speeder. Maybe he's dead. Get him to the doc. Then you ramble hell-bent back to the mill and get the machinery turning. Keep it going. We're licking this freeze. That's your part. Understand?"

Hance unbolted the door and shoved it open. Then something happened, something that Hance did not know how to fight. Ruth Allen fairly fell into his arms. She clutched his mackinaw, held herself close, sobbing hysterically. Instinctively Hance put his arms around her. He forgot everything in gloried-up realization that here was something he had grievously yearned for through the past three months. For just three months Ruth Allen had been the sawmill's order clerk.

Then the glory crashed out.

"Dave," the girl was sobbing. "Oh, Dave, I was afraid—afraid—"

"I'm not Dave," said Hance dully.

With a smothered scream the girl freed herself and stepped back. Hance swept the spotlight up from the rocks, turned its glow on himself and the kid behind him. Then he let it play over Ruth Allen. She shrank back fearfully, a hand up as though to shield her face.

"It's all right," said Hance quietly, through twisted lips. "You go with your brother." He turned back to Dave and whispered. "Send her on ahead when you're at the rim. Megan—savvy?"

Then he started deliberately for the river. The voices of the brother and sister faded in the wind behind him as he took to the logs. The going over the inert, ice-locked timbers was easy enough for the mill boss. He lurched and swayed on at a swift gait. At mid-river his spot light picked up Ruth Allen's tracks. Must have been a tough crossing for her, Hance thought dully. A game girl, even if she was so—so—

"So damn' civilized," mused the mill boss, finding the word he wanted. "Jeez, if she'd only never gone to college, if she only had some bark on her!"

He heaved a gusty sigh and plowed on, swerving from the small, tormenting tracks. He had a dismal feeling that his fighter's faith had utterly betrayed him. Not until he was on the solid planks of the catwalk and heading into new action did Rusty Hance feel the fire he lived by rekindle within him.

THERE were still no lights on the piles of the mill pond, but the windows of that shanty on the log-slip float shone through the shadows. An uproar of voices in excited argument sounded through the door as Hance swung up. He yanked the latch and shouldered inside.

A gang of mackinawed men circling the box stove gaped at the mill boss as though he were a ghost. For a moment of silence, broken only by the heavy breathing of the men, Hance stared around the circle. It was a picked crew of twenty, whom he had ordered to return to the mill after the supper hour, to work on the logs and keep them moving through the night.

Hance let his gaze halt on an old logger, the man who had been boom boss before the winter shutdown of the camp in the woods.

"Why the holdup, Marshall?" he rasped. "What the hell's the argument about? You all want to be frozen out of your jobs?"

Old Jim Marshall shouldered out of the gang. He was the lone boom man who had been at work when Ruth Allen was hunting her brother.

"We was all sky hootin', up in the air," he said. "Quittin' time Megan come down from the office and tolt us the mill was shuttin' down. Said we was to go home and stay there, then he went on up the booms after you. I stayed, and after supper two of the boom crew come back, along with these here men you'd picked from the mill. Some wanted to go to work, some didn't. We was argyin'."

"There'll be no more argument," growled Hance. "Marshall, you're boss again. Light up the booms. Get going, you apes!"

There was no more argument. Hance stood back and let the rugged gang surge out. Nobody talked up. The mill boss looked as though he'd been fighting bobcats and was ready to fight some more. Blood streaked the left side of his face. His mackinaw hung on him in three parts. Particles of ice and bark clung to the wool. His steely gray eyes seemed to bore through a man.

Hance was seeing Pinney Lang. The vision fed his fighting temper to a white heat. For a considerable time he had craved to do assorted violence to the chief of the Lang Lumber Company, the big outfit on down Butte River. Lang wanted the Maring timber, particularly a stand of big trees which had enabled Maring to bid in a government contract for select cedars. Hal Maring would have yielded. Rusty Hance was the iron in the Maring company. Lang had tried to bribe him, had threatened him, and at last had tried to break him.

So at last it was an open fight. Rusty Hance was wading into it in the only way he knew, with fist and boot, with all he had.

He pushed out of the shanty after the last man. Lights blazed around the mill pond. The steel of peaveys and pikepoles flashed in the rays, as the men strung along the catwalk and spread over the logs.

The mill boss turned for the gangway up the log slip and headed on around the dark mill. Above the stacks of lumber in the yards he saw lights shining from the windows of the sawmill office. It was a squat frame building, standing on a rise of ground that lifted above the yards. Beyond it stood a smaller building, the company hospital. Shortly beyond the railroad tracks ran on to a bridge over the river and into a network of yard sidings and switches.

Hance was running as he emerged from the last row of lumber piles. Through the shine of a broad rear window he saw the shapes of three men about a desk. It was a window of Hal Maring's private office. Evidently the last deal in Lang's game was on.

But there must still be a fighting

chance. There was always a fighting chance, Hance thought desperately, as he charged up the short slope to the front steps.

They led up to a porch. Hance mounted them with slow and quiet steps. The front door was locked, but the mill boss had a key. He fumbled it out and eased the door open, peering through the widening crack. Suddenly he held the door.

The door to Maring's office was open. Maring was coming out. Disheveled, white-faced, starey-eyed, the young lumberman looked a sick and beaten man. Behind him Lang reached out a steadying hand. Maring swayed over to the big corner safe and began to twirl the knob. Lang watched him with a mirthless, thin-lipped smile. Hance glanced on into Maring's office. A fat, bald man was still seated at the flat-topped desk. He was Judge Bowley, Maring's lawyer.

"An all-around sellout," Hance muttered savagely to himself. "And I'd have never been able to prove I wasn't in on it, the way they bamboozled the kid—"

The thought of Dave Allen seemed to have come automatically to mind. Then Hance realized that a dull iron clink of wheels on rails was beating faintly through the boom of the wind. He closed the door quietly and prowled to the end of the porch toward the railroad. He peered around the corner of the building and through the blowing shadows toward the bridge.

A blacker shadow was moving in the vagueness of frosty starlight. The clinking beat sounded clearer. The moving shadow drew close to the building that housed the hospital.

The bang of a door from inside the office jerked Hance around. The Allens would have to wait. Again he eased the big front door open. The main office was empty. Blank panels had closed on Maring and Lang.

The mill boss swung on in and around the front counter. He moved swiftly to Maring's door, halted, and cautiously tried the knob. It held in his grip.

The rich, oratorical tones of Judge Bowley boomed through the panels:

"Take my advice, Hal, and strike while the iron is hot. End it all, now. Sign here." There was a pause. "And here."

A sobbing groan from Maring, then Lang's sibilant drawl:

"Thirty thousand dollars, Maring. A certified check—"

RUSTY HANCE waited no more. He took a long step backward and dropped into a sidewise crouch. He lunged, shoulder-butting the panels. The door fell before him with a splintering crash.

Three startled pairs of eyes stared up at the mill boss, through the flare of a desk lamp, as he lurched up and on into the room. In some three seconds Hance took in the layout.

Hal Maring gaped blearily at him over some official looking documents that were spread out on the desk. A pen slipped from his limp right hand. At his left Judge Bowley, his puffy eyes unwinking, stared like a scared and flabbergasted Buddha. On Maring's right Pinney Lang was fingering a stiff slip of yellow paper which was plainly a bank check. He let it fall to the desk. His right hand drooped below the top.

Rusty Hance was keeping his fighter's faith. He did not pause to parley. One long glance at the layout, and then he drove for the desk in a lunging stride. A swipe of his right hand swept the documents from Maring. He ripped them two ways. Then he grabbed the check and jammed it inside his mackinaw.

The judge squatted on like a fat wooden image. Maring was at last beginning a wheeze of protest. Lang was pushing back in his chair. He leaned to the left. His right hand suddenly darted for his hip.

Hance dived downward, his right

shoulder striking under the desk top. He lifted and heaved. The heavy desk swung over and into the three men like a broad-beamed battering ram.

The desk top had caught Lang's legs. He jerked them free and rolled toward the back wall, still clawing at his hip. He whipped out a small automatic as Hance swung close. The mill boss jerked a short kick at the flash of white hand and blue steel. The steel rang from the calks of his foot, whirled from Lang's hand, and thudded to the floor. Lang fell back in a corner, on his shoulders, his hands spread against the walls. His teeth gleamed in a wolfish snarl. His lean, wiry arms stiffened, to drive himself up and out at the legs of the oncoming timber savage.

Such was Rusty Hance now, a timber savage cornering a timber wolf. He saw Lang through a smoky red blaze of murderous wrath. He lunged in to put the calks to the wolf, to brand him with the cold steel of the sharp spikes that glittered from his boots. It was the immemorial way of a finish fight in the big timber.

A girl's scream struck through the red haze. That quick the fighting temper in Hance grayed out. He hauled up with a swinging jolt against the wall at his left and shoved around. Ruth Allen was just inside the door, gazing wildly at the havoc. Dave loomed behind her.

The fight was over. Hance felt its finish in himself. He looked grimly away from Ruth and around the room. Things were beginning to unscramble. Maring was crawling from under the desk. Judge Bowley was wheezing to his hands and knees. Suddenly Hance picked up the automatic. As he dropped it in beside Megan's gun he started for the door.

He shoved by the Allens without looking at them, and tramped on through the front office to the porch. He stopped at the top step and stared down at the mill. In the pond lights the boom men were small, moving figures as they worked the logs down from the ice.

"Hey, Rusty!" Dave Allen's excited voice shot out from the office door. "Wait a minute. Got things to tell you." Hance turned and faced the kid. "Megan was on his feet and full of fight when I got to the speeder," Dave chattered on. "Had to maul him some, and made him talk. We've enough on Lang and Megan to jail 'em both. Ruth is a witness to Megan's story. We turned him over to the doc. Say, I've been a bonehead, Rusty!"

"Ruth?" Hance chopped in. "Didn't you send her on, like I said?"

"She hopped back when she heard the brawl." Dave laughed exultantly. "Say, you should've seen her! She had on your gloves over her own. Seemed to do something to her. Say, she socked Megan, and I mean she socked! Hey! What the—"

All of a sudden Hance was backtracking into the office. Ruth was coming through the counter gate. Hance stopped solidly before her. He stared grimly down, the steely fighting gleam in his eyes again. Sounds of pain and wrath surged out of Maring's room, but Hance ignored them. For a moment he just stared. Ruth as silently met his gaze. He did not read fear in her eyes now.

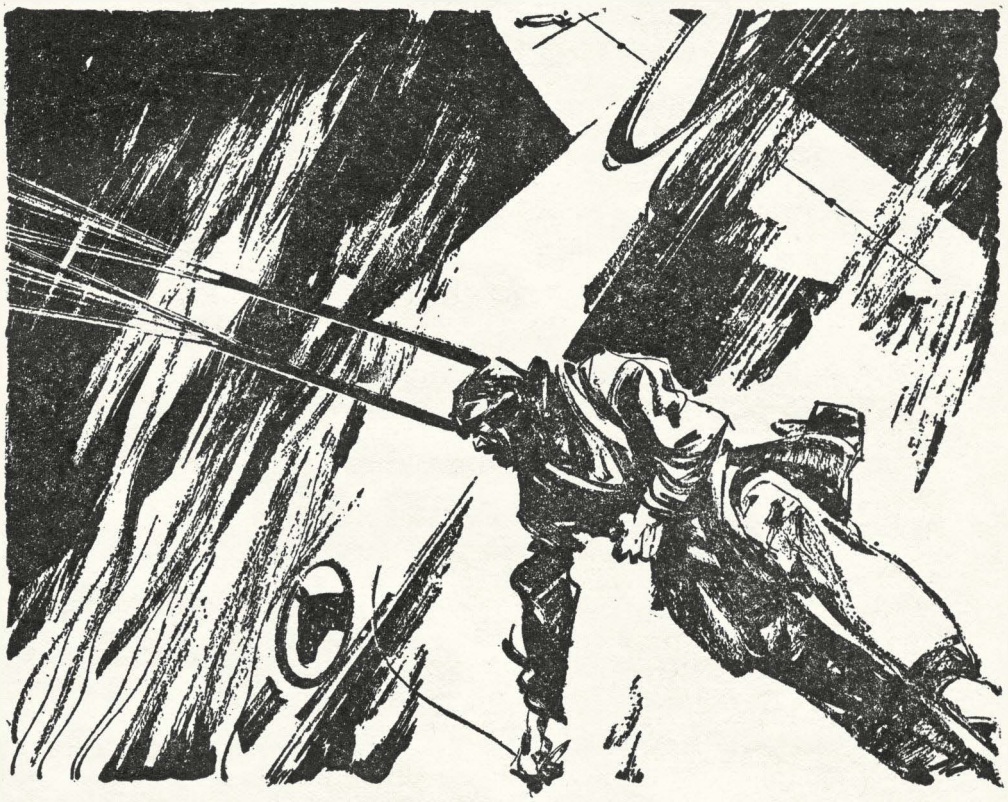
"You listen," Hance said, in his hard order-giving tone. "I've got that certified check. Lang is not to get it back till he has his bank renew Maring's notes. He won't call in the law, with our threat of criminal charges against him. I've got to get out on the logs. What you're to do is hide out this check and then work on Maring. Understand?"

She nodded, her eyes still searching his own. Hance pulled out the check. As Ruth reached for it, he said softly:

"Logger, you've got my gloves—"

She started, glanced down at her hands, monstrous in the huge casings of horsehide. As she pulled them off, she smiled. For Rusty Hance it was his image of fortune, in a full grin of glory.

BROOD OF THE BLACK COCK



The sky was black above—the Pacific, black and empty below.

A novelette by GEORGE BRUCE

IT WAS breathlessly hot. The teakwood decks of the *Saratoga* threw off rising heat eddies over the two and a third acres of space. Even the Black Cock which stalked so proudly in silhouette against her tremendous stack seemed wilted. The metal work was blistering to the touch. The sun was like an open door in a blue blast furnace.

The watch-officer spoke matter-of-factly to the skipper. "The glass is still falling, sir."

The skipper nodded. His eyes were fixed upon the rise and fall of storm waves breaking in endless mountains and valleys before the prow of the ship. "Bad weather," he said shortly. "It struck the other fleet hours ago. Must have been pretty bad to have made them use the radio. We intercepted the message. We'll get it before many hours."

The two officers stood side by side looking out over the sea.

There was the pounding of the falling mountains of water against the steel sides of the carrier. Each time she drove into one of the overhanging cliffs of brine her mighty hull vibrated and the pulsing of her tremendous engines slowed under the strain.

About the *Saratoga* the battle fleet was nosing into the swells. Dreadnaughts rode the crests of the waves, slid down

into the valleys, shook themselves doggedly, hurled ponderous tons of water from squat decks, threw the power of man-made engines against the avalanches of water thundering down on them, conquered and went on. The destroyers and ships of the scouting force rolled and pitched, shuddered and careened perilously.

The *Saratoga* hung aloof from the main body of the fleet. Her planes were aloft. The two-starred flag of a rear-admiral floated from her truck. Her sharp prow, followed by her lithe, graceful body, cut the heavy waters cleanly.

Against the horizon bulked the silhouettes of the *Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Wyoming, New York, Maryland, New Mexico* and *California.* Squat bulldogs of the sea, their fighting tops swaying in the manner of inverted pendulums. Farther away the outlines of the heavy cruisers. Still farther away the *Raleigh* and other light cruisers of the scouting force were sliding over the horizon, being swallowed up in the vastness of the universe.

Now and then an insane apparition darted through the lanes between the ships—a destroyer under forced draft, caroming against the surface of the sea, running with her rail awash and her decks slanted at ninety degree angles.

Out of invisibility came the tiny whine of distant airplane motors. The eyes of the fleet were looking for the "enemy."

There was an atmosphere of tension flung over the Armada. Men on duty on all the ships contrived to pass points of information with suspicious regularity. Now and then an officer on duty on a bridge looked down upon the upturned face of a deck officer and shook his head in a reluctant negative. In turn the deck officer gave the same dubious signal to the men of his division.

From the dizzy heights of the *Saratoga's* stack, a boatswain's chair was suspended by an unseen web. The occupant of the chair braced his feet against the stack and wielded a paint brush with affectionate and expert zeal. His little board seat swung back and forth with the motion of the ship. Yesterday, in a forty-mile-an-hour gale there had been a hitch of ten seconds between the landings of two planes. The second plane, timed to the second on its landing, had been forced to open throttle at the last instant, after coming to a near stall in the hope of land without a second circle. The wind had picked up the ship before it could answer the gun.

Abeam of the "island," the towering superstructure formed of the stack and turrets and bridge of the carrier, the ship had been dashed against the stack. The wreckage had dived overboard. Under the eyes of the admiral the emergency crew had gone over the side, cut the pilot loose from his cockpit and had dragged him and the wreckage aboard. The record of no fatalities aboard the carrier was intact—but there was a scrape on the stack. The man in the boatswain's chair was dressing the wound.

On the *Saratoga,* and aboard her sisters, the planes carried out assignments on split second schedule, the wind and elements notwithstanding.

There were planes out from the *Saratoga* at the moment. Seventy-two of them, somewhere. Lost in the blue infinity; lost over the rim of the horizon or in the reaches of space. Buzzing little wasps and huskier bombers, manned by leather-faced, keen-eyed young hellions who looked down upon the battle fleet with rather pitying eyes.

The seventy-two planes were attempting to "contact" the enemy.

Somewhere south of the Blue Fleet, with which the *Saratoga* was operating as an offensive unit, the Red Fleet was maneuvering. The Red Fleet was on the defensive. Its assignment in the problem the mighty pieces were playing was to protect the coast of Lower

California against invasion. The Red Fleet had an aircraft carrier. It also had the assistance of the Army off-shore bombing squadrons. The aircraft, submarines and destroyers of the Red Fleet were searching frantically for the attacking force, but particularly for the *Saratoga*, to put her out of commission before she could unloose her planes.

It was a thrilling game. Thrilling for the battlewagons, for the cruisers, for the scouting force—but most thrilling for the *Saratoga*. She was the focal point against which every strategy and force of the defensive fleet was directed.

Until today the problems of the war game had been all-absorbing. The spirit of competition aboard the great steel ships was lifted to a pitch not to be found anywhere else in the world. There was not an officer or a man aboard any ships in the fleet who did not believe in his heart and soul that his Navy was better than any other Navy in the world; his fleet division was superior to any other of his own Navy; his ship better than any other ship; his turret better than any other turret, or his engine room more efficient than any other.

The spirit of competition seethed among gun crews, boat crews, deck divisions, and in the black gang. Wherever men moved, there they trained themselves to be more efficient than other men. The proud "E" was the reward for the effort. The man who wore the "E" was a marked man. He moved among his fellows as a privileged being. The mark of his expertness and the expertness of his mates was upon the stacks, the turrets, the guns and the equipment of which he was master.

But today the problem of Red against Blue was being carried out in an almost mechanical manner. The problem was being handled efficiently and expertly, but it was not all-absorbing. From the admiral of the fleet to the Filipino boy stewards, men went about duties abstractedly. Below decks, the watches off duty gathered in knots and spoke staccato, meaningless, unfinished sentences.

The abstraction was all the more pronounced aboard the *Saratoga*. The rear-admiral was on the bridge along with the skipper, the executive officer, the navigator and the watch officers. Now and then the admiral glanced toward the communications system, pausing in an expectant manner, and then resumed his slow pacing, his eyes darting out over the turbulent horizon to the west. He, in common with the entire world, was waiting for news which would come out of the mid-Pacific. News of a modern Jason and his crew.

BUZZ MARTIN, lieutenant, junior grade, air pilot, United States Navy, sat hunched in the tiny cockpit of his Boeing Fighter. He was leading his flight of Horse's Necks, grim little ships marked with the head and neck of the great racehorse, Man O' War, which the flight had taken as an insignia. Man O'War! That had been a swell insignia for a carrier group until Chet Randall—the lucky mug—had turned the insignia into a laugh with a wise crack.

"Horse's head, huh?" Randall had said, pointing derisively. "You mean, horse's neck!"

Since then Buzz Martin's outfit had been the Horse's Necks. Escape from such a crack is impossible.

There was a foreboding in Buzz Martin's soul. Spectres of two forced landings on his last two flights stalked through his memory. Two forced landings! And some humorous mug in the ready room giving him the needle.

"They always go by three. Everything goes by threes."

The idiot! Yesterday that had been, when he had brought in a Boeing with a dead stick.

There was a welter of instruments in front of him. He hardly glanced at them excepting to give them occasional, auto-

matic notice. The Boeings were fiying a tight formation in spite of the gusts and down drafts which blew out of a mass of nimbus on the southwest horizon.

"Horse's Neck is a swell name for a flight leader like me," thought Buzz morosely. "Two forced landings on two flights. And the third coming up."

The sense of foreboding increased.

Bill Hart, flying close to his tail on the right, lifted a hand and waved. Under his goggles Hart was grinning. Right before the take-off Hart had been grinning.

"Gee, Buzz!" he told Martin. "Old Man Trouble is riding your tail. First thing you know we'll be sending you ashore with a case of the jitters. A guy has just so many of those forced landings in his system."

Where in hell *was* the carrier? What a life. Trying to pick out a toothpick floating on the Pacific Ocean. Whole lifetime concentrated on getting off the toothpick, promptly losing it, squirming with the intensity of the struggle with mental mathematics and navigation in trying to find it again, and then landing on the damned thing—only to do it all over again on the next day.

He made an attempt to force himself not to look for the carrier; to shake off the heavy feeling within his chest. He tried to concentrate on the other fighters about him, but his eyes returned to the gray spume of the sea below and to the search for a trace of the carrier.

Then it happened!

The oil pressure gauge showed zero. Dropped with one thump to the bottom of the glass. A lump which had been his heart bounced against the back of his throat. His nerves were suddenly grabbed by a clenched fist and twisted into knots. His head turned quickly to the left and looked over the side of the Boeing. He reached for the throttle.

There was a grinding, tearing shock from in front of his face and the screaming of tortured metal and the odor of scorched steel. A flash of flame blinded him. He ducked his head instinctively and reached for the release ring of the fire extinguisher.

He pulled it hard. There was the hiss and swish of chemicals flooding the motor, but not before the flame had spurted from under the motor cowling and had circled and twisted about his head, licking hungrily for the wings of the Boeing and his face. A great cloud of black smoke erupted from the motor. The prop came to a jerking halt and went dead stick.

The Boeing lost flying speed and went into a near stall. He pushed the nose down to give it a great angle of glide. His head was twisting right and left. He wondered why the hell he was so cool about all this; why he acted so naturally. Didn't he know that he was up eight thousand feet, out of sight of the carrier, in a jalope with a motor shot to hell, and just a split second from bailing out to escape being roasted to death?

It seemed there were two persons within Buzz Martin, one, acting in the most natural manner in the world, doing the necessary things in an emergency, and the second, watching the first Buzz Martin and in a panic. And the funny thing! He couldn't tell which of the two was the real Buzz Martin!

Where *was* the carrier? How in hell did they expect a guy to get down out of a spot like this?

He sensed, rather than saw, a blurred shape go rioting by his right wing tip. Bill Hart, looking at him, his mouth open, his face like a gargoyle. Wanting to know if everything was O. K. Buzz waved his hand and pointed to the blackened mess that had been a motor.

Hart waved encouragement and pointed back over the tail of his ship with a rigid arm. He jabbed his forefinger at the sea two or three times, telling Buzz that he was going down to tell the car-

rier to prepare for an emergency landing.

Then Hart's fighter was gone, flirting its tail upward and diving like a striking eagle. The rising, nerve shattering screech and whine of Hart's motor came back to Martin from the gray depths below. His brain was busy with calculations having to do with time in flight, distance, direction and the speed of his ship, and the course and speed of the *Saratoga.*

He breathed an unknowing prayer when he finished with the figuring. A little thing like a mistake in multiplication or division meant disaster. He nursed the single-seater down, hoarding its altitude, coaxing it out of spins and stalls, straining his eyes in searching for the carrier.

His lungs were aching with the inhalations of acrid smoke. It still poured from the cowling. The heat of the ruined motor made his flesh itch queerly. He felt for the rip cord ring of his 'chute.

The altimeter said 4,000 feet.

There it was! The *Saratoga.* And never looking more like a floating toothpick. And the sea was running high. She was rolling like hell.

He felt like putting his head down on the crash pad and closing his eyes. Felt like turning loose the controls, like relaxing his cramped muscles to ease the tension within his body. He ached all over. There was a searing pain behind his eyeballs.

But he coaxed the crippled ship on its way; nursed it into a position behind the carrier—still very high, and then, very slowly, followed the *Saratoga* on her course. He knew that Hart had told them that he was coming. They would handle the carrier to make his landing as easy as possible.

For the first time he was conscious of the slack pitch of the wires and the low humming of atmosphere against the wings. The Boeing was like a tired, weighted gull. It seemed anxious to breast itself against the water and to end the agony of its helpless descent.

Martin wiped away the cold sweat which trickled down his cheeks from under his helmet with a sweep of the back of his hand.

ON THE *Saratoga's* bridge, the officer of the watch gave an order: "You may strike four bells, Graves."

At that instant the radio C. P. O. on duty twisted in his chair, snatched at his telephone and spoke a word.

"Bridge!"

The admiral's pacing was halted short by the ringing of the telephone bell. He watched the face of the watch officer who answered the summons.

The radio C. P. O.'s voice spoke a clear staccato. "They made it!"

The strain on the bridge seemed instantly dissolved. The watch officer turned to the admiral. He almost shouted.

"They made it!"

The admiral's eyes lost some of their brooding intentness. A glow—perhaps of pride—gathered within the crinkled confines of his fine old eyes.

"See if you can get details," he ordered quietly.

There was the sudden angry screaming of a motor from overhead. The watch officer at the telephone stood motionless with the instrument gripped in his hand. Other officers rushed to the bridge rail. A ship was diving headlong for the deck of the carrier, coming down in a plunging reckless dive with motor wide open.

The very ferocity of the motor tone threatened to rip the longerons and mountings out of the plane. It flattened suddenly a hundred feet above the flying deck, pulled up in a dizzy sweep of wings and went screaming back into the space from whence it had dived.

"That's Bill Hart," commented the

watch officer. "He's signaling another emergency landing."

The skipper nodded. His eyes were fixed on the dizzily climbing plane.

A siren shrieked from somewhere below. The sound was picked up and amplified into a tornado of noise by the annunciator system. The clear, incisive voice of the control officer spoke a metallic command over the mechanical voice.

"Stand by for emergency landing!"

Below, on the flying deck, men were racing to stations. Fire crews, collision crews, rescue crews. A boat crew leaped into a crash wagon, snatching at life preservers as they leaped. The davits swung outward.

A ghostly creature, moving awkwardly in a suite of heavy white asbestos, took his station. His head was covered with a helmet of the same material. His hands were covered with thick asbestos gloves. He was "Hot Papa." It was his duty to dive into the inferno created by a burning plane and to drag out the occupants.

Barking voices of officers:

"Here with that extinguisher!" "Move in closer!" Snap into it, men!"

The motion picture cameras were trained and waiting for the emergency. Every time that siren shrieked the cameras ground so that a record of the emergency might be studied later.

From high overhead came the swishing and wailing of airplane wires cutting into space.

A voice shouted:

"There he is!"

There was a silence, and in the midst of the silence the same voice said disgustedly:

"Jeez! Another Horse's Neck!"

The carrier was rolling. She was pitching fore and aft. The flying deck was a constantly moving surface. The plane overhead approached with almost painful caution. The prop was at dead stick. There were little wisps of smoke arising from about the motor. The head of the pilot bobbed right and left as he studied his position and jockeyed his ship toward the threadlike runway. He had to allow for the forward motion of the carrier; the slacking of his own forward speed; the resistance of the wind; the eddies about the stern of the carrier. He was shooting at a mark less than ninety feet wide and two hundred feet long.

The nose of the plane went down. The engine room telegraph ordered a reduction of speed. There was an instant when the world seemed to come to a complete standstill, when the angry sea lulled in the constant hammering against the sides of the carrier, when every eye was fixed upon the frail white thing hovering over the stern of the carrier.

Then the plane swooped through the last hundred feet of its altitude, flattened, stalled and dropped onto the deck. The arrestor gear caught it and held it fast. Human arms reached for the wings. The emergency crews relaxed.

The pilot sat still in his cockpit for a long moment. His face was olive-green under the sun and wind tan. Then he unfastened his safety belt and crawled out of his 'chute harness. He slid his feet down onto the deck.

"Well," he said casually, a little jerk in his voice. "That's that!" His feet moved about on the deck. He took one or two strides as if to assure himself that something solid was under his feet.

"Oil pump," he informed the crew about him, in a conversational tone. "The motor grabbed and stuck—"

He glanced covertly out of the corner of his eye toward the bridge. He walked away from the plane with a fine exhibition of nonchalance.

The admiral said:

"That was well done. That deck is not exactly standing still."

The skipper frowned.

"By this time he should have plenty

of practice at that sort of thing. That was Buzz Martin. It makes just three times in three days he's had a forced landing and plumped himself down exactly like that. It gets a trifle monotonous."

The watch officer said:

"There are no details, sir. Just the radio flash. The flight landed at Pearl Harbor at nine thirty-seven."

A series of flags broke from the flagship.

The admiral read them without consulting the signalman of the watch.

"It must be official," he said dryly. "I see the C-in-C is hanging out congratulations."

The admiral paced the length of the bridge, looking out over the sea.

"Very well done," he said as an afterthought. "A Navy-like job. I hope Mr. Mussolini happened to be looking this way at the moment. And I'm afraid Mr. Balbo will be a trifle miffed."

The C. P. O.'s voice from the radio room spoke again.

The watch officer said: "What!" His voice sounded like the crack of a subcaliber gun.

"Eleven of them are in," said the C. P. O.'s voice. "The BW10 developed motor trouble during the night and fell behind the formation. As yet she had not checked in and has not been reported. She was last seen about Latitude 30-50, Longitude 141-12. A destroyer division has been ordered to that position to take up a search. Lieutenant-Commander Randall, flight commander, is aboard the BW10."

THE admiral took a breath. His eyes were surveying the expanse of the Pacific, going from top to top of the smashing waves, looking down into the cavernous valleys of water which opened under the *Saratoga*. The white capped ridges seemed suddenly to grow to tremendous heights. They lashed and banged and thundered against the steel sides of the carrier.

"A plane wouldn't last long down in this," he said. "Not even a BW10."

"It'll be a lot worse in a few hours," said the skipper.

"Damned fine men on that ship," commented the admiral. "Can't afford to let men like those drown like rats."

The admiral's fighting face appeared. Grim, pursed mouth, narrowed eyes, flaring nostril flanges.

"Just where are we, Navigator?" he demanded.

The navigating officer stuck his head through the chart room door.

"Latitude 32-02, Longitude 124-20, sir."

"Sending *destroyers!*" snapped the admiral. "What the hell can destroyers do —what can they see—in *this?* How far are we from where they last sighted the BW10?"

The navigating officer did lightning mathematics on the chart. "About a thousand miles, sir," he informed.

The admiral snatched at the telephone.

"Radio!" he barked into the transmitter.

The metallic voice of the radio chief answered from below.

"Get the flagship," ordered the admiral. "The *Saratoga* requests permission to go after the BW10. Tell the admiral I said that this was an aircraft job—and a Navy job. I'm going to get those men!"

He replaced the instrument.

"Lay a course for Latitude 30-50, Longitude 141-12," ordered the admiral.

For an instant the skipper's eyebrows lifted.

"You don't suppose I'm going to wait on the *Pennsylvania* for a thing like this, do you?" demanded the admiral. "To hell with the Reds and the Blues! This is a matter of four lives. The lives of four men who are out there on a couple of sticks of wood, some metal tubing

and a few yards of linen. And the glass falling a mile a minute."

The navigating officer swung dividers and moved protractors over the chart. He came up with cryptic figures on a page from a scratch pad. The skipper glanced at them. He moved the engine room telegraph all the way over. The man at the wheel changed the course. The 888 foot ship listed sharply as she whipped through a half circle, leaving a boiling wake. She lunged forward with a sudden growl, as the two hundred thousand horses below her decks hit the traces to drive her through the pounding seas.

The control officer asked the bridge for instructions on the seventy-one planes still aloft.

The admiral said: "Pick 'em up on the run."

The control officer glanced at the sea and sky. His mouth settled into a thin line. He gave orders to radio to contact the flight leaders.

A rear admiral on the *Raleigh* wanted to know where in the hell the *Saratoga* was going. The rear admiral was a classmate of the *Saratoga's* rear admiral.

The *Saratoga's* rear admiral spoke out of a stiff face. "Tell him to stick around and go on playing with the Reds—we'll be back."

The white bone in front of the *Saratoga's* prow leaped higher and higher. spray showered her high decks as she cut through the sea. The water under her prow hissed and whined with an angry note. Her belly seemed to creep lower and lower to the level of the sea. There was a silence among her crew. There was a picture in the collective mind of all aboard of an airplane down on the surface of the sea—tossed about, hammered by such waves—being broken to bits and with four Navy men clinging to the wreckage.

A group of three Boeing fighters swarmed down out of the blue, summoned by the radio. The landing crews went into the nets. The three Boeings broke out of formation and into the landing circle. Beautiful maneuver, timed to absolute precision. They came in, one at a time, over the frothing, boiling wake of the carrier, cutting motors at the exact moment necessary, daring the treacherous wind currents following the ship, sighting for the rolling, pitching, ninety foot lane which stood between them and destruction. Signals shot in staccato sequence to the planes. The white landing flag was flying from the carrier. The second triad of Boeings broke into the landing circle, just as the third ship of the first triad touched the deck.

The Boeings were whisked away toward the bow by trained hands, moved by the magic of men who knew exactly what to do, and who acted in concert without a wasted motion.

Triad after triad of the *Saratoga's* brood pursued her over the sea, hung over her, circled, waiting turn to land, filling space with the drone of motors, breaking into the landing circle.

First the single-seater fighters. Then the two-seater scouts. Then the bombers.

The lighter, smaller ships were taxied forward and the heavier ships remained near the stern. The moment the bombers touched the deck, hands pulled wing-hinge-pins, jury struts swung into place, and the wings of the bombers folded themselves against fuselages. A miracle was taking place—seventy-one planes—large and small, landing and being parked on two acres of teakwood deck.

A tremendous elevator carried certain of the ships below deck—down into a hangar which was a marvel of engineering. Five hundred feet long—and without a single supporting stanchion to interfere with the free movement of ships within the space.

Crews, working at top speed, secured the planes on deck by nose, tail and wings to eye-bolts in the deck—so se-

cure that a hurricane could not tear them loose.

Then it was all finished, and the carrier's flying deck was crowded from stem to stern with fuselages, motors and wings. So closely packed that laterally the wings nested within themselves and bare inches separated fuselage from fuselage and the controls of one ship from the controls of the ship next in line.

And all the while the purring growl from the four great motors of the carrier went on and on, and the seas smashed against her, and she settled lower and lower as her two hundred thousand horses took the bit between teeth.

The admiral watched the work on deck while the great ship picked up full speed. Once, the *Saratoga,* merely to give evidence of her sovereignity of the seas, had made a run from Hawaii to the United States at a sustained speed of thirty-two knots. That had been after a proud challenge had been flung into the face of Neptune by the blue ribbon trans-Atlantic liners, *Bremen* and *Europa.*

The *Saratoga* had said nothing. She merely did thirty-two knots across the Pacific—and never started a bolt or a rivet. Nothing afloat could match that record.

The admiral turned away from the bridge rail. His eyes were a trifle narrower and perhaps the crow's feet about the corners were a little deeper.

"By God," he told the skipper, "she *is* a smart ship!"

The skipper looked at him for a fleeting instant. He merely nodded and turned his face toward the sea.

BUZZ MARTIN sat scrouged down on a divan in the ready room. There was a black scowl on his face. He was clutching a bit of paper in his hand. A chief yeoman had delivered the paper to him a few minutes before. There were lines of writing on the paper—terse—and very much to the point.

> You will give in writing below any explanation you may have concerning three forced landings made by you following your last three flights.

His mouth was moving. It was expressing silently a blistering streak of profanity directed at all officers who wrote such letters to flying officers. He was still wearing his leather coat. His helmet and goggles dangled from a lax arm. His body was still jumping with the jitters. He still remembered the sound of that motor as the pistons grabbed and ground, and black smoke swirled about his head. He still remembered the smell of tortured metal and the finality of the prop going dead stick with nothing in sight but the Pacific Ocean.

Bill Hart diving out of the sky to tell the boys he was coming—again.

Hot flushes of humiliation and chagrin ran over Buzz Martin. Where in the hell did that guy get off, writing him that kind of letter on top of all the grief? He snatched a fountain pen out of his pocket and backed the letter on his knee. He clamped his teeth together. The pen point dug into the paper with the angry pressure of his fist.

"Gravity and a broken oil pump," he wrote, and signed his name. He wanted to add, "So what?"

It was a hell of a life! A guy went out and got himself half-killed and some punk wrote him letters demanding an explanation. Here he was, stuck, and guys like Chet Randall were getting all the breaks and all the glory. As if there weren't men on the *Saratoga* who could fly rings around Chet Randall the best day he ever lived! But Chet Randall, the lucky stiff, had his name in all the papers, and his mug smeared all over page one. Chet Randall, commanding officer of the "Glorious Adventure of the

Modern Navy"—the mass flight of the bombers to Hawaii!

The way those newspapers spread the ink! Cripes! Twelve ships, gone over with a fine-tooth comb for three months. Pedigreed gas and oil. Two motors each. Two hundred and ten miles an hour cruising speed without humping the motors. The last word instruments, construction and comfort. Five hundred men of a special crew mooning over them like mothers at a baby parade mooning over pet offspring. All because they were going to fly from San Francisco to Hawaii! Wasn't that a hell of a job after all that preparation? How could they miss? If there was a chance of missing they wouldn't go until the Navy was sure they wouldn't miss.

There was a bitterness bubbling up within him. The bitterness was centered around a mental picture of Chet Randall; around pictures in the newspapers with such captions as: "Leader of Modern Argosy!" "Lieutenant-Commander Chetwood Randall, Commanding Officer of the Navy's Hawaii Flight!"

That lucky mug Randall! Somehow he was always one jump ahead of the pack.

When it had been a toss-up between Chug Johnson and Buzz, Randall had taken Chug! That was the burn-up. Chug Johnson! The best friend Buzz had in the world! One swell egg. But cripes! The whole Navy knew that Chug Johnson couldn't get anywhere without Buzz Martin. And the way Randall had put in the rap:

"I'm taking Chug, Martin, because —well, he has an intangible something I like. He's typical offensive tackle—puts his head down and charges through."

Buzz remembered the morning Chug left to join the Hawaii Flight. Standing there on deck saying good-by and good luck to Chug. Chug's kit going overside into the launch. Chug—shuffling his feet, the big baboon—trying not to look happy. Trying to play down the fact that he was going to fly the BW10 to Hawaii. Chug Johnson with his flat-faced mug and twisted nose, and his little blue eyes staring out of a crinkled face. His big hands fumbling around his flat flanks. Chug Johnson, a tackle, going into a play without Buzz Martin at quarterback. Old Chug, who always had to have the signals called twice.

Buzz Martin swallowed hard. Well, they were in Hawaii by now. The whistles were blowing, the grass skirts were swaying, the glasses were clinking, the bands were playing. They were heroes —and Chet Randall was the big hero. But hell, that was nothing new. It'd be just like Randall to step ashore twanging a ukelele. He always managed to fit himself right into the local angle. He was that lucky! The only man in the history of the Academy to run the wrong way with the ball and to score a touchdown.

Heroes—and Buzz Martin was sitting in the ready room "explaining in writing."

He lifted his head. He noticed the surge of power from under his feet. He looked around him. The ready room was strangely empty. He heard feet pounding; heard voices speaking excitedly. A knot of men broke into the room. They pounced on him.

"Boy, oh boy, are you the lucky mug!" They chorused in a breath. "Listen! The BW10 is down at sea!"

Martin sprang out of his seat. His face was suddenly white, strained.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Just got it as we came in. We were flagged down—picked up on the run. And we mean on the run! Where the hell do you spend your time? We're doing a right about face without even waiting for the admiral's O. K. The Old Man is driving for Latitude 30-50, Longitude 141-12. That's where they think they lost the BW10. She's down. Mo-

tor trouble all the way. Randall is on the BW10. Chug's flying her—"

MARTIN pushed against chests with his hands to force a way through the circle. He was out of the door. He broke on deck. He saw the sea pouring past the steel race horse—saw the mountain-high waves breaking over her. He glanced at the bridge. A voice hailed him.

"Too bad. About Chug, I mean."

He ignored the voice. He was searching for Peters, the control officer. He stood with his hands hanging at his sides, his eyes eaten by a sudden grief gnawing from within his soul.

Peters came hurrying along the side of the island. There was a frown of concentration on his face. His eyes passed sharply over the lines and rows of planes made fast to the deck. At a glance he saw hurrying crews surrounding each ship, taking motor cowlings from around the engines, checking, rechecking, prying, examining into the metal guts of the planes. The fuel hoses were spread over the deck. Oil and gas was being pumped into the tanks.

The wind was coming up out of the southwest. It made a little moaning sound as it whipped around the stack and superstructure of the carrier. A moaning sound like the beginning of a ghost parade. The wings of the planes quivered under wind pressure in spite of the secure lashings. The carrier stuck her nose into the swells and drove ahead. Her flat deck dipped and lurched. The service crews worked on without noticing wind or sea.

Martin's hand touched Peter's arm.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said apologetically. "Only—you know—Chug is on the BW10. I just wanted to know—what chance do you think they have?"

The frown melted from between Peter's eyes. There was a little light of sympathy in his eyes. His voice lost its usual burr and snap.

"I'm sorry as hell, Martin," he said. "It's tough, I know, thinking about the damned thing, but you can be sure that if they have a chance of pulling through, Randall will pull the BW10 through—and we'll find them. If they can only stay afloat long enough, we'll get 'em. If this weather would only hold off another forty-eight hours." His eyes went anxiously to sinister black clouds piling up on the southwest horizon.

"They've got everything," he went on. "Flotation gear, water, emergency rations, life-raft—and guts. It isn't as if it came suddenly, as if they went diving into the sea without a chance to get ready. They must have known they were going for hours while they were fighting those lousy motors that let them down. When they had to land you can bet your last nickle they were ready for it. If it wasn't for this weather I'd lay odds that we'd get them without trouble. But this soup piling up. . . ." He shook his head.

"There won't be any question about me—flying—will there?" asked Martin. "You can't explain in writing why an oil line goes sour on you one day and something goes haywire with a magneto on another day, and the motor just quits on general principles on another day. You don't suppose it's any pleasure to me to ride a cripple down, do you?"

Peters permitted his face to relax. His eyes flicked over Martin's tense jaw and strained face.

"Of course you're going, Martin," he said. "After all, it's your right to go."

"Thank you, sir," nodded Martin. There was a little croak in his voice. "If old Chug is out there, I'll find him. I've been riding on his tail since we were plebes. He'll expect me to come after him."

"Sure—sure. I know how it is. Well, get yourself set. We'll be there before any of us are ready for the job."

Martin swung away. He tried to go below. But the very thought of below-

decks stifled him. He stood on deck in the lee of the island and watched the sea roar past, watched the waves rise higher and higher, with the spume breaking from the wavetops in the force of the wind and carrying over the *Saratoga's* superstructure until her turrets were cascading water.

He stood there and stared at the seething cauldron of the ocean, and at the nimbus gathering off the port quarter. It seemed that the black nimbus insisted upon forming itself into likenesses of Chug Johnson's face—and into moving visions of days and nights the two of them had shared.

DARKNESS fell and the running lights of the *Saratoga* were all that were visible in the universe. They studded the darkness. They were constant in an inconstant world. On the bridge the rear admiral and officers of the watch were silent. Now and then they consulted the revolution counter. After the first shock of surprise they were silent at the figures showing on the instrument. From thirty-two knots during the first two hours of the race, the counter had crawled up to a reading equivalent to thirty-two and a half, and on to thirty-three. As night fell she was driving ahead, through that terrible sea and wind at a thirty-four knot gait.

She gathered herself and hurled her weight against the weight of the sea—smashed through, went down the swell with a mad rush—came up, quivering and shaking; smashed again. The seas which broke against her made cavernous sounds reverberate from her hollow belly.

At midnight she was logging thirty-four and a half knots—forty statue miles an hour, and her energy output was two hundred and ten thousand horse power!

Her thirty-three thousand tons were tearing through the smother. The planes on her deck were running with water, drenching wings and fuselages. They strained and tugged at the eve bolts. The wind had risen to sixty miles. The sky was an inverted pot of black ink. The low flying nimbus was settling over the deck.

The radio crackled throughout the night calling BW10. And the operators on duty strained ears with listening, but no sound came from the sea.

The destroyer squadron on the same hunt reported position. The admiral snorted and paced the bridge with a slightly accelerated stride.

The *Pennsylvania* asked for the *Saratoga's* position.

The rear admiral on the *Raleigh* waited until the official conversation with the flagship was finished, then cut in.

"Why don't you haul up the anchor?" he inquired sardonically. "You'll probably be in dry dock for six months after this."

"Tell him to go to hell," growled the *Saratoga's* admiral. He called the engine room and spoke with the chief engineer.

"You understand what we're doing, don't you?" he inquired. "We're making an attempt to save four lives—and there's quite a blow up here. Give her the gun!"

"Yes, sir," answered the chief engineer. There was a wry smile about his mouth. There was nothing else to say. The engines were giving everything they had.

At eight bells in the morning the storm really broke. First a barrage of thunder and lightning and a wind which for ten minutes blew at a hundred mile velocity. Then a downpour of rain, driven before the wind until it struck in the manner of a machine-gun enfilade. It beat against the wings of the planes.

Men, crouching, clinging to supports, fought to keep the ships lashed down to the deck. The sound of a thousand rolling snare-drums came from the taut

linen of the planes. Seas broke completely over the high bow of the carrier, buried the single seaters in her nose up to lower wings in a tumult of swirling, hissing salt water, and flooded off the flat surface of the flying deck. Men clutched and clawed and fought the storm.

The dawn broke slate-gray. Not really dawn. Merely a reflection of a gray light from an invisible sun. As far as the eye could see, the ocean was piled up in jagged crags higher than the stack of the carrier. The clouds were under a thousand feet. The rain had stopped, but the wind moaned and howled and ripped over the deck.

In the ready room, pilots with personal equipment piled around them sat in rows on the divans, smoked and waited for the word to fly. They listened to the booming of the sea against the carrier and the howl of the wind. Now and then they glanced about with narrowed eyes and mouths which seemed suddenly thin lipped and grim. There was no conversation. They merely sat . . . and listened.

All but Buzz Martin. He paced the length of the room, his eyes glancing toward the door to the flight deck, his hand clutching his helmet and goggles. He was wearing dungaree trousers and nothing above his waist. His leather coat was tossed on the table. His eyes were a trifle bloodshot, and the muscles of his jaw stood out under the flesh of his cheeks.

At ten o'clock, twenty-four hours after the beginning of the run, the *Saratoga* had covered seven hundred and ninety-two miles and was exactly on her course. At noon she had logged eight hundred and fifty-eight miles. At four in the afternoon, still moving with her magnificent speed, and all unruffled, she was at the latitude and longitude at which the BW1O had last been sighted.

The destroyers were two hundred miles away.

At three-thirty the strident voice of the annunciator had hurled the answer of the *Saratoga* to the elements. The thin note of a bugle. "Flight quarters!" Men swarmed up from below. Mechanics were climbing in and out of cockpits. There was the grind of inertia starters and the whine of starter and motor turning over, followed by the barking of exhausts. The flying deck became a bedlam. It became a windswept hell which was filled with the flame from exhaust stacks, and with the hurricane of the elements and of turning propellers.

Men flitted about through areas of concentrated, swift death—flitted in front of spinning propellers, through the haze of exhaust fumes. Flitted expertly, without thinking of the death. There were signs about the deck at a dozen places: "Beware Propellers"—propellers which could slice the head from a man's shoulders or the torso from his body without pausing in revolution. Steel bladed axes moving with terrific force and velocity. Tornados from the slipstreams of motors being run up which could snatch the unwary from his feet and whirl him into half-a-dozen spinning buzz-saws.

Men were standing by to cast off the lashings. They were alert, waiting for the word. The unlashing must be done very carefully. The ships could not be freed from the wires confining them until they were clear—until the ships in front of them were taking off. With unconfined wings, the slipstreams from the ships in front would have piled the deck with wreckage.

More and more motors running up. The blast grew oppressive, it beat against faces and bodies, snatched the breath from the nostrils. The din caused ear drums to recede and it beat against the brain like blows from a rivet gun.

THERE had been a short lecture to the pilots in the ready room just before "Flight quarters" had sounded. Peters had stood in the center of a circle of brown faces and brown leather.

"Make this a Navy-like job, men," he said quietly. "It'll be no party. The conditions are a little better, but they're still lousy. You'll be out of sight of the carrier almost from the minute you leave the deck. The very nature of the assignment will make this a tough business.

"Once you're aloft, form a circle with the carrier as the hub. You'll spread out from there, increasing the radius of the circle as you go away from the ship. The main idea is to keep the surface of the sea under your immediate observation. You'll have just about a thousand foot ceiling. You'll have a forty mile wind from the southwest. There is a chance that the wind will abate in two or three hours. If one of you happens to sight the BW10 he must mark the position exactly so that we'll have no difficulty in finding the spot.

"All in all, this is a job calling for individual initiative. You'll be on your own, once you're flying as a part of the circle. Most of the time you'll be out of touch with the other planes of the circle and with the carrier. Each of you must make up his mind in advance exactly what he will do if and when he sights the BW10 on the sea. You'll have to think that out for yourself.

"One thing, check your navigation! Be careful. Take as few chances as possible. The *Saratoga* will proceed on her present course at fifteen knots. Watch the duration of flight and distance covered. The one-third fuel load on return to the carrier is suspended on this assignment, but I don't want any ship to go down on the sea out of fuel. Make it back here before you go dry. Now, any questions?"

There were none.

"Very well. And remember, the eyes of the world are fixed on this spot, where the BW10 went down. She's a Navy ship—and we're Navy men—and we're going to get those Navy men on the BW10 back! That's all!"

On deck, Martin stood with a knot of pilots between the planes. The annunciator blared his name over the screech and roar of warming motors.

"Martin!" barked the mechanical voice. "Lieutenant Martin, report to the control officer."

Martin made his way back to the island. He found Peters waiting for him. Peters studied his face for a long moment. Martin stood rigidly, staring at the control officer's face.

"You—feel all right, Buzz?" asked Peters. There was a strange reticence in his question.

Martin understood. Peters wanted to know if those three forced landings had cracked his nerve. He gave no sign that he understood.

"Certainly, sir. Never felt better in my life."

Peters became the control officer immediately.

"You wanted to be in on this," he said. "Well, you're in! I'm letting you off first. Go back to that crate of yours—and if you don't bring Chug Johnson back on board I'll put you under hack for ten days and see that you get a transfer to a collier."

Martin's tense face relaxed for a moment. "Thank you, sir," he said.

Peters offered his hand. "Good hunting, Buzz," he said. "I have a sneaking hunch you'll bring home the bacon."

"If they're there, I'll find them," promised Martin. "It's always been like that between Chug and me."

He whirled on his heel and strode toward the bow of the carrier. He was walking like a man just decorated.

He drew himself up into the cockpit and squirmed into his 'chute harness

and locked his safety belt. He saw grimy faces—tired faces—staring up at him. His hand was on the throttle. The motor in front of him ticked over. He glanced at the instruments. On either side of him other single seaters were poised, ready. The wind still moaned. The sea was still a smother of spume, spray and mountainous waves. The water lapped over the bow of the carrier—collapsed on the flying deck.

The signal! "Release planes!"

The lashings were off. He opened the throttle wide. The motor spat flame. The fuselage seemed dragged forward by a giant hand. The tail blasted high in the air on the force of the slipstream. The ship moved toward those running seas—gathering speed, launched itself from the deck, went up with the propeller dragging it through space.

Behind Martin, as he cleared the deck, a second single seater made the short run over the bow, and a third—and then the second row of ships were unlashed, and moving. Ship after ship, with pilots avoiding the wash of the ship in front. Going over the bow in a steady procession. Not a lost instant, moving with clock-like precision, in spite of the wind and sea—streaming off into gray space—rising, circling, nose following tail. Then two seaters after the single seaters, and finally the heavy bombers—taking the run past the island—lifting, surging upward.

And the miracle occurred again—the crowded planes had been launched! The flying deck was empty, and the carrier was merely a dot against the rioting surface of the ocean—a thread—no more.

For two or three minutes the planes maneuvered, forming a circle, banking like circling gulls. Then they snapped into level flight, each of them pointing outward from a common center—and drew farther apart—and farther—until they were individual units, following the segments of a circle—headed out over the blank and storm tossed expanse of space above the Pacific.

Buzz Martin's compass read ten degrees north of west. He glanced at the clock and the air speed meter. He set the beam finder. The carrier's radio signals were like wasps buzzing in his ears. He lifted his head and looked out over the nose of the ship. There was a jagged feeling in his stomach. What could live on that ocean—what could survive? Pictures grew in his mind. Four men, clinging to a wing with the seas breaking over them—ripping at them, beating them—until fingers became numb and relaxed—and turned loose all holds. His teeth ground together.

He went up to the ceiling. The wind whipped under the clouds. It caught at the small wings of his Boeing and tossed it about viciously. Up drafts swirled him into the scud flying under the receding nimbus, and he fought his way out. Down drafts pushed him dizzily lower until it seemed they would drive him against the surface of the sea.

The motor labored and groaned, but it kept turning. There was the ghost of those three forced landings due to motor trouble stalking in the back of his brain. He glanced at the sea. The hackles at the back of his neck stood erect at thought of going down into that.

He forced himself to keep his head turning like a beacon. After a while his eyes were heavy and the eyeballs seemed covered with glue. He could not tell where the sea ended and the horizon began. The horizon climbed up and up until it touched the black canopy of clouds. There was nothing in the universe but the spinning propeller in front of his face, and the pressure of the wind. He was alone—an atom before the face of existence, permitted to live because a few drops of gasoline went into a cylinder, exploded under the urge of a spark, and created energy.

HE GOT to thinking of Chet Randall. It seemed that Chet Randall, cold-eyed and with a sarcastic little smile, had stood over him like a slave driver through an eternity. Back at the Academy—Chet Randall a lieutenant, senior grade, assistant athletic officer—coaching the backfield—giving particular attention to the plebes. Chet Randall's dry, biting voice sounding over the thump of bodies and the grunting breaths of charging linemen.

"So you're the football hero of Podunk Academy?" he asked of Martin. "You're the fair-haired boy who ran all the touchdowns, called all the signals, converted all the goals, and told the coach what to do when he was hot and bothered. Listen, plebe, did you ever hear of teamwork? Did you ever run behind ten men? This is the Navy. You're playing football for the Navy—not for Podunk Academy. In the Navy we expect every man to do his duty. Listen! You stay behind your interference the next time or you'll be running around that mile track until you're dizzy. Now snap into it."

Always like that—always on top of Buzz Martin. Always that cool, impersonal voice and that driving manner. Nothing ever satisfied him.

Second year—with Buzz Martin running the scrubs against the varsity. Knowing damned well that he could handle the team better than the varsity quarterback. Standing out there, day after day, taking brutal beatings—to make the varsity look good. Slashing off tackle now and then, when the scrubs were lucky enough to be given the ball—slashing, with Chug Johnson cleaning the hole for him, shifting in and out, giving that mug on the varsity the arm—and hearing the whistle blow—and Randall's voice again, weary, insulting.

"Really, Martin, we're not trying to find out whether you can run. We're trying to find out if this Penn play can get through the line. Please . . . don't waste time."

Third year. Buzz Martin a second string varsity quarterback. Sitting on the bench, watching Jared, the first string quarter, running the team. Stewing, groaning, shifting around on the bench, without Randall so much as giving him a tumble. All the way up to the Notre Dame game, without a minute on the field. Third quarter. Notre Dame 13, Navy 0. And Jared out there trying to smash line plays through a line that a battering ram couldn't penetrate. Navy outweighed by thirty pounds to the man—and Jared playing that kind of a game.

Suddenly Randall's voice in his ear.

"So you think you're a quarterback, do you?"

Randall dropping on the bench beside him. Martin looking him in the eye, and answering: "Yes sir," and wanting to say: "You're damned right I'm a quarterback after looking at that."

Randall nodding his head toward the field.

"O. K. Go out there and run the team."

The thrill of that race across the turf—race with his hand up to the umpire and his voice: "Martin at quarter for Navy in place of Jared!" And the amplifiers over the field echoing the announcement.

Navy's ball on the five-yard line. Second down, twelve to go. The huddle. Trotting into line. The thump of the ball in his belly. Fading back—his own pet Number Three play. Unbalanced line against the left sideline, with the center bang up against the line, acting as end and center too. Racing to the right—fading—with the eligible men drifting down the field—Hunk Gaines, the center, lumbering along the left sideline. The Notre Dame backs covering the eligible Navy back field men and the eligible end.

Then a quick snap pass across the field—low and flat. Hunk Gaines gathering

the ball in his arms on the dead run and lunging along the sideline for eighty yards and a touchdown. And the Navy stands screaming and throwing hats in the air.

Standing there, in the face of those big green shirts, and kicking the goal.

Notre Dame kicking off. The ball coming end over end. Fellows, right half, grabbing it and cutting to the right behind interference. Martin trotting toward the left sideline. Fellows chucking a lateral to Martin just as both the Irish ends smacked him down. The ball skidding along his fingertips; lunging after it—grabbing it—racing, alone, without interference, down the field. The Irish sucked over to the right side of the field by the trick—never putting a hand on him—going over the goal line standing up—tossing the ball to the referee—going back to convert—hearing the whistle and feeling a hand slap him on the back and a voice say:

"Sorry, old man. Jared for Martin."

Trotting off the field with the Brigade giving him a Navy.

Seeing Randall's face, expressionless, looking at him. Randall's voice saying: "Very nice, very nice," and then turning his head away to watch the game.

Navy getting licked in the fourth quarter, 20-14.

Fourth year. First string quarter. Playing his heart out. Looking for a hand from Randall, and getting merely an impersonal nod or two, or impersonal instructions—never a human note in the voice—like a machine. And the newspapers booming Martin of Navy for All American!

Lucky stiff, Randall, wearing an A.P.'s wings on his tunic. Married to a girl with a million bucks. The darling of Annapolis society. Dropping into those juicy assignments. Relieved as coach at the Academy to go on flying status on the West Coast.

Graduation for Buzz Martin. And an application for flight training—and on the training field the first officer to greet him was Randall! The guy was everywhere! And Randall had made a pilot out of him as he had made him a quarterback. By making Buzz Martin foaming mad—making him do things he didn't know how, but doing them anyhow—just to show Randall! Dragging Chug through the course—just to show Randall.

Randall—white teeth, blue eyes, thin-faced, ram-rod figure. Randall! Cripes! The whole world was filled with Randall.

Well, this was a nice spot for a lucky guy! Down—on an airplane wing. For the first time in his life shouting for help. This would be good! Cripes! If Buzz Martin could only get a break! If he could only find the BW10 and Randall. If he could only wing down out of the sky and have one chance to grin in Randall's face. He knew just how he'd act. He'd go aboard the BW10, if there was anything left of her to board, and say, very formally: "Very glad to see you, sir!"

That would kill Randall!

And Chug—Chug would bust a gut laughing!

HE LOOKED around him consciously this time. His eyes had been scanning the sea during the interlude of mental pictures. The same empty sea—the same storm lashed waves. The nimbus was receding. There was five thousand feet of ceiling. His eyes searched for a flying plane. Blank—nothing but the darkened heavens. It was getting dark.

He glanced at the clock. Two hours and a half! He drew a long breath. He calculated his position by reckoning. He could still hear the radio beacon. It was faint. Where in the hell was the carrier? Where was the mob of planes? He had just gas enough to get back. His eyes bulged doggedly.

"I'm not going back," he told himself, aloud, as if for greater assurance.

He dropped lower over the sea—down to five hundred feet. After another hour he knew he was not going back. There was not enough fuel left in the tanks now and the last faint light of the day was draining through the western horizon. There was a hard lump in his throat. His hand gripped the stick. He blinked to clear his vision. What the hell did it matter whether he got back or not? Chug was down there, with the seas breaking over an airplane wing.

He came erect in the cockpit. He pushed the goggles up from over his eyes. He stared. Unconsciously he eased the Boeing nearer to the surface of the sea. What? Jeez! It couldn't be! A guy couldn't be this lucky! It just didn't happen to guys like Buzz Martin. There wasn't a break as big as this in the world. But there *was* something down there—something sloshing about on the water—something like a one by twelve, half submerged, crumpled, broken.

He went down until his wheels were skimming the water. He peered through the gathering darkness. He thundered over the floating debris. Cripes! It WAS an airplane wing! Half broken in two —coming apart—four lumps on it.

One of the lumps rolled over and exposed a white face—and waved a leaden arm.

Martin felt his arm waving back. His voice screamed into the whine of his motor. His eyes were staring.

"Stay with it!" he begged. "Stay with it!"

He lifted the Boeing up off the water. There was a trickle of sweat down his back and his arms and legs felt weak. He looked at the gas gauge. Three-quarters of an hour. The pit of his stomach was weighted with lead. Three-quarters of an hour! God knows where the carrier was. God knows how he could locate that splinter of wood and linen down there so that it could be found again. It was shredding. It could not live through another night. It was now or never. No way to signal—no way to shriek the news of his discovery. No way to summon the carrier or to signal another ship.

Cold sweat streamed down from under his helmet. He could not take his eyes off that floating wing. He dared not—one glance away from it and it was lost in the darkness and the swirl of the sea. He was flying blindly, circling the spot. He couldn't go away and leave Chug—and Randall. Like hell!

He carried the Boeing up a thousand feet. At a thousand feet somebody ought to see a signal—a rocket. He reached for the rocket pistol. He held it over his head and pulled the trigger. The flare went up in a graceful arc and exploded two hundred feet above. He fired another. There was one left. The sea was being devoured by the darkness. By straining his eyes and forcing concentration he could still make out the floating wing.

He sat there with the pistol in his hand. Suddenly his head snapped up.

"I'll make a smoke they can see," he told himself grimly.

He unfastened his safety belt and grabbed for the rip-cord ring of his 'chute. He cut the switch and ran the stabilizer all the way up. The Boeing swished, began to stall.

He stood up in the seat. He fired the rocket pistol—into the gas tank!

There was a ghastly explosion. He felt himself going over the side of the ship with a wave of flame. He was plunging for the sea. The Boeing above him was a blazing torch. Flame roared in a solid mass fifty feet above its wings. It reeled about, cockling one wing and then the other, being bullied out of a spin by the set controls, sloshing about, hanging in space, gliding down—a flying furnace, aflame from nose to tail. The darkening sky about it became a cherry red. The reflection of the fire danced

and sparkled on the lower cloud surfaces.

Out of the corner of his eye as he fell, he glimpsed the floating wing below. He fell five hundred feet. He yanked on the rip cord. The 'chute opened—snubbed him—and he was drifting down—toward the sea. He slipped the 'chute to the right, forced it toward the wreckage.

He unfastened the harness when he was still two hundred feet from the water. He pulled himself up and kicked his legs free. He clung to the harness with his hands. Twenty feet up he swung his body sharply and dived. He hit the surface of the water with a shocking smack. He went under. He swam frantically, driven by the fear of having the 'chute settle over him like a net.

He couldn't see the wreck of the BW10. He tried to force his body up out of the water to look for it. He swam—he was alone, on his own—in the middle of the Pacific with storm waves breaking over his head, and with a leather coat holding him like a straight jacket. He managed to free himself from the coat and swallowed a gulp of water.

He battled against the sea. He heard a voice—hoarse—words torn from a raw throat.

"Buzz, here—you damned fool! Here—this way!"

He lifted his head. He expended the last ounce of his strength—fought the water—felt hands grab his wrists—felt himself being pulled onto something which submerged loggily under his weight.

He sat on the edge of the wing. He saw faces. Faces with red eyes and salt-eaten flesh and with swollen, ghastly mouths. He saw hands like claws. After a while he understood that this was Chug's face—and the other was Randall's.

Randall was looking at him—at his naked torso.

They sat there in silence. The wing rose and fell heavily and sluggishly with the drive of the seas. The breath going into Martin's lungs was like molten lead.

The sky was still filled with the red glow of the burning Boeing. The burning ship had been checked on the surface of the water. They watched it burn to red hot embers—hiss—sink. They sat there through an eternity. In his brain, Martin understood that the four men of the BW10's crew were dying. Were staying alive because they refused to die.

THERE was a sound above them. Something coming out of the darkness—flying low—through the very last light before black night. Martin lifted his head and saw a ghostly outline. An amphibian—from the carrier! Attracted by the fire. His brain screamed—but no sound came from his mouth. He could not speak.

The five of them sat there and stared silently at the flying ghost.

The amphib turned away. Martin licked his mouth with a dry tongue—his eyes were fixed on the disappearing plane.

The amphib's motor suddenly was silenced. The wings slipped sharply, pointed for the floating wreck—glided down carefully, delicately. There was a splash as it hit the top of a wave, skimmed over it and fell into the trough.

Randall was staring at Martin's naked chest. His mouth moved. There was a croaking from his throat.

"There's the Navy for you," he said disgustedly. "Look at him, Johnson. On duty out of uniform! Coming aboard like that! I think I'll have the *Saratoga's* executive officer put him under hack for ten days. It's no use—I've been trying to make a man out of that plebe for years—it's hopeless."

Martin grinned.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said.

Randall turned his head away.

"Under hack? Is that all?" croaked Chug. "Why, he oughter have to spend

the rest of his life making little ones out of big ones!"

"What d'ya mean, little ones out of big ones?" demanded Martin.

"Ever hear of willful destruction of government property?" asked Chug.

"Well?"

"Well, hell!" said the cracked voice. "Why, you bum, you burned up that Boeing, didn't you?"

Somehow, Chug's head sagged forward. Martin had to grab it to keep it from going in the water.

The pilot aboard the amphib taxied close to the wing and rode the seas. His ship was buckling like a wild thing as the seas tossed it about.

"The carrier is on the way—burning things up. Be here in an hour," he called across the space. "I'll get in close and take you aboard."

Randall's body stiffened. There was outrage on his bloated face. His split lips drew back from his teeth.

"You will like hell!" he answered hoarsely. "We made it this far under our own power—we'll sit here until the damned carrier comes. Abandon your own ship if you feel that way! We'll stay put!"

An hour and ten minutes later the crew of the BW10 was aboard the *Saratoga*, and the remnant of the wing had been hoisted onto the deck.

The Black Cock on the carrier's stack seemed actually strutting with its head lifted and its throat swelled in a lusty crow.

Propaganda Balloons

By J. W. HOLDEN

MILITARY men now see the importance of propaganda sent directly into the enemy's trenches. In the last war Austria defeated Italy at Capretto after dropping reams of leaflets behind the Italian lines—notices pointing out the hopelessness of the odds against Italy. Early in 1918 the Propaganda Section of the A. E. F. ordered five hundred paper balloons for the same purpose. None ever arrived, but they were able to get a few from the British Army.

Nine feet tall, full of hydrogen, they were sent up in a favorable wind bearing four pounds of leaflets strung on a slow-burning fuse. As the fuse shortened the sheets dropped off in bunches and were scattered by the wind. Airplanes took bundles of propaganda over the enemy lines, often flying so low that the pilots could see men picking the leaflets up.

Most of the sheets—in German, of course—were printed in Paris. One type showed small and large pictures of an American soldier, to illustrate the growth of the A. E. F. Another called the "Prisoner Leaflet" explained clearly what fine treatment awaited our prisoners of war. A variation of this type was printed on the back of a postcard such as the enemy wrote home from the trenches. Sometimes the menu of the prison camp was included as a special attraction.

Propaganda of the A. E. F. was unique in that it always told the truth; all texts were carefully verified by General Headquarters. In fact the demand for American propaganda grew faster than the sheets could be turned out. A huge propaganda drive was planned for the winter of 1918-19, when hundreds of paper balloons were to be directed at the Rhine towns far from the trenches—probably the most ambitious enemy-propaganda scheme yet considered.

FREDERICK C. PAINTON

No one, Bill perceived, was looking his way.

JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE

IT HAD been tough up on the Vesle River. The Germans held the heights and did not intend to yield an inch. By day they showered Fismes and the swampland with deadly machine-gun fire and the harrying shells of 77's. By night they flung patrols down the ridges and the fighting was hand to hand and hellish.

The Thirty-first Regiment had eighteen days of it; and they left a bloody trail when they reluctantly broke off and marched back to Etampes for rest and replacements. C company was badly cut up, and Line Sergeant Bill Tuttle was still in command the second day after billets had been reached.

He mustered the seventy-eight survivors that morning for the divisional inspection officer, and the D.I.O. looked them over and made a mental note that Tuttle must be a damned good non-com. These men, he perceived, had dubbined shoes, their uniforms were neatly patched and sewn, their rifles cleaned and a joy to an infantry officer's heart. Their faces were haggard, but their eyes were clear. Good morale.

All this, the D.I.O. told himself, by a platoon sergeant; and just before he had inspected a company whose C.O. was already slated for Blois because his men were slovenly, disgrunted, with discipline terrible.

"Mm, yes!" muttered the D.I.O. And then, to Big Bill Tuttle, "What outfit before the war, sergeant?"

Big Bill saluted with just the proper hesitation at the tin hat brim. "Twenty-second Infantry, sir."

"Mm, yes. Saw it on the border. Good work, sergeant." The D.I.O. turned to

go, then as one regular to another he added, "Poor Savage talked about recommending you for a commission, sergeant. Too bad he was killed. But the papers are made out and I've no doubt you're new C.O. will give a first endorsement."

"Thank you, sir." Big Bill hesitated then asked, "Could the colonel tell Sergeant Tuttle who the new company commander will be?"

"He'll be in today—should be here now, sergeant—name of Stonehedge. Good luck!"

He did not see, turning away, the sudden quiver that shook Tuttle's six feet of muscle and bone. He caught himself instantly though, did Tuttle, and turned smartly to face his company.

"No drill today. Take a swim in the Marne if you like. Company-y-y-y dis-MISSED!"

He went back to the orderly room. A moment before he had seemed big, even huge. You got the impression of broad square shoulders that strained olive drab seams to the limit. Big calfed legs, slim hips. His face was nearly as broad as it was long, a face that jutted out to a solid chin and above this overhanging brows, Roman nose and a firm thin mouth. The face might have been good-looking once but it was marred by glistening red scars, the seeming survival of bad burns. To those who asked, Big Bill used to mumble something about a July 4th accident.

He did not, however, seem quite so big now. It was as if the D.I.O.'s remark had taken something out of him, Stonehedge!

"Hell!" he muttered shrugging. "It couldn't be the same. It just couldn't."

Yet it was possible. This was a regiment of the National Guard of that State. If—he broke off abruptly, came stiffly to attention.

In the little *mairie* office stood an officer with the twin silver bars of a captain pinned to his shoulder straps. He was a small man, and only small described him. His face was small and his body was small, little-boned, thin-muscled. With the gold pinch spectacles that he affected he looked almost feminine. He had a tiny mouse-colored mustache, neatly olipped. In a slender white hand he clutched a swagger stick. His trench coat flared properly, his Bedford cord breeches were of the best, and his leather boots shone like mirrors.

Tuttle saw him bending over the opened field desk, picking up first one paper and then another. He did not look up as Big Bill's heels clicked. But Bill saw the gray eyes move, yet the head stay steady, and no doubt remained to Bill of the identity. That eye trick was his trick.

It was time to say something.

"Acting First Sergeant Tuttle reporting to the company commander," he said.

The tiny officer held his position for a space. Then he moved with a slight rustle of sound.

"Yes," he said in a mild, soft voice. "I'm Captain Stonehedge, assigned to this command. But you er—know me, er—Sergeant Tuttle."

A quiver shook Big Bill and he fought it down.

"I'm not trvin' to kid you," his voice was harsh. "Tuttle's my name in the army."

Captain Stonehedge took out a cigar and a cigar clipper of gold and snipped the end. On his wrist he wore a gold watch with a tiny gold shield for the face. He kindled the cigar carefully from a gold briquet and puffed blue smoke.

"Ah, yes, of course," he said mildly. "Naturally, Tuttle. But er—tell me, how did you effect your escape? It always remained a sort of mystery, you know."

Big Bill laughed harshly, his eyes narrowed.

"Nothing to it. I'd been watchin' them take ashes out at ten o'clock for three years. So that morning I left the shoeshop for the toilet and climbed into

an ash can. Put the ashes over me. They burned me here." He gestured to his marked face.

"Clever," said Stonehedge thoughtfully. "We never suspected."

Again there was silence. The sound of laughter outside, the clop of hobnailed shoes on the cobbles. Big Bill drew himself up to take the blow.

"And I suppose," he said thinly, "you're going to send me back to that hell-hole?"

"Of course," nodded Captain Stonehedge calmly. "You're a convicted murderer doing a life sentence. The fact that you escaped four years ago doesn't change that."

Terrible memories gibbered at Big Bill and reflected in his eyes.

"You can't mean it," his voice shook. "You wouldn't send me back, knowing I killed that rat with my two hands and that he had it comin'."

He paused, took a step forward. "God, don't you know there's such a thing as justifiable homicide?"

"There is no justifiable homicide," rejoined Stonehedge. "You killed George Langtry. You made him suffer. The State punishes you."

Big Bill took another step forward. It was as if he could hardly keep his hands off this tiny man who held such power over him.

"Christ!" he muttered through set teeth. "And they call it justice. Anybody would have killed Langtry who was a man. He did what he did—and boasted about it—and when I kill him the State makes the girl suffer—and me, too."

He shifted impatiently, tensely. "Doesn't it mean anything that I've gone straight since I came out? That I'm a good soldier? That I never did a wrong thing in the world before or after?"

"Murder," said Stonehedge, "is murder. A man has to pay. As warden, you're the only prisoner I ever lost. I'll be glad to send you back to make the slate clean."

Big Bill's hands rose, clinched. His face became a mask of unleashed fury. Stonehedge did not move, did not blench.

"You crummy little screw," snarled Big Bill. "A cold-blooded rat like you able to send me back to a lifetime of shoemaking, iron bars, slops and stinking chloride. Never to see the world. Never to—"

"Silence!" cut in Stonehedge. His voice did not rise overly, yet it demanded obedience. "This is very unpleasant. But what's to be done will be done, and all your cursing won't change it."

He puffed on the cigar. "I've been looking through your service record—and it is excellent. Since the company has been so badly shot up and drew new officers and many new non-coms I'm not going to hurry about turning you in. I owe it to myself and the company to keep an experienced man."

He paused. Then:

"Besides, you can't get away. The M.P.'s and the French Sureté make sure of that. You'll continue as acting first sergeant until the company is in shape."

Just once Tuttle opened his mouth to refuse. Then, as if an idea had occurred, it clamped shut.

"Very good, sir!" He was again the soldier.

He checked the morning report, the sick report. He referred to two men who had gone A.W.O.L. to Chateau Thierry.

"I suggest confinement to quarters for ten days, sir," he said dispassionately. "They have good records in the lines. And I suggest a little loosening up on passes. Let the men get a change, sir, it will do them good."

Stonehedge shook his head. "No loosening up. From what I hear the company will go back to the lines. I want it disciplined and ready. And we'll stiffen the drill schedule. Recall at five-fifteen instead of four-forty-five. That's all, Sergeant Tuttle."

Big Bill about-faced smartly and left the room.

THE next ten days were crowded with intensive drill. The stubble of the wheatfields was trampled into mud. Advancing under barrage conditions, open order, skirmishing, patrols. And then, too, the ceaseless monotony of close-order drill when the yells of "Squads right into line!" "Left oblique!" rang out.

With only seventy-eight veterans to leaven the replacements the work progressed slowly. The lieutenants were awkward with their platoons. Every one bellyached about the long drill schedule, particularly a little trouble-maker named Hanson. But over it all Big Bill urged them on, and over him Captain Stonehedge's dry little voice began to make fighting machines out of rookies.

Big Bill never made a wrong move. He was the perfect first sergeant. He knew that one man and one man only could send him back to San Miguel prison. Big Bill intended to do something about it—presently.

Among the rank and file Big Bill was liked and he did more toward whipping the men in shape than Stonehedge. They disliked the little man, called him a ribbon clerk behind his back. And if a lieutenant was in doubt about a maneuver he came to Tuttle and not to the dry little captain.

The orders to move came. The company wasn't ready and Tuttle knew it and so did Stonehedge. Not enough training in offensive tactics for open fighting. But they knew how to load and fire Springfields and handle grenades, and that was enough for the high command that wanted this division for attack.

After mess that evening Captain Stonehedge called Tuttle into the orderly room.

"We're marching at eight," he said in his precise little voice. "We entrain at Dormans." For just a perceptible space he paused. Then: "You've handled the men well, Tuttle. And the lack of complete training and the raw officers make it necessary for me to keep you as first sergeant. This is a big battle we're going into. This division will be at the spearpoint. I can't deprive these men and this company of its only experienced non-com."

He paused again, puffed delicately at his cigar.

"You can't escape, as I've told you. In fact, this is an opportunity. If you are a casualty—why, nothing further will be said by me. If we *both* get back—" he emphasized the word sharply— "I shall do my duty."

Big Bill Tuttle did not lower his eyes.

"Yes, sir," he said impassively.

"Inspection of equipment in fifteen minutes, then, sergeant," said Captain Stonehedge.

C Company detrained with the rest of the division at Toul and marched north on the Bernecourt road, hiding by day in the woods to avoid the curious inspection of German aircraft. The men, Tuttle thought, stood the grueling marches well. A few shed their new shoes and extra uniform when possible, and to these Stonehedge gave bitter lectures.

This caused grumbling.

"We're gonna shake the packs at the jump-off anywhy, what the hell's eating the counter-jumper?"

Stonehedge didn't like this. Tuttle said to him:

"Grousing men are in good shape. They'll come through, sir, although that Hanson is a trouble-maker."

Tuttle marked the man for transfer at the first opportunity. But none came. And south of Bernecourt, after having spouted every day concerning the rights of enlisted men, he reported sick when the company got up shelter halves in the Bois de la Hazelle.

"Get back to your squad," snarled Tuttle. "You're not sick, just yellow. If

you don't keep that trap of yourn shut it won't be the Jerries who let a slug through you."

"You've no right—" Hanson began, but Tuttle's look caused him to slink back.

Stonehedge had heard, walking about in his stealthy fashion.

"He's a trouble-brewer, sergeant," he said. "But I won't have the men threatened. Hereafter, refer such cases to me."

Tuttle's eyes stared blandly.

"Very good, sir."

He watched the slight figure move away through the broken trees. Big Bill's hand lightly touched the .45 Colt automatic holstered to his thigh. Then he went off to see how the field kitchen was doing.

The next afternoon extra ammunition was issued; and marching orders arrived. The division was to move up to the jump-off line along the road from Beaumont to Seicheprey. Captain Stonehedge went up to the front to arrange about relief and did not return until shortly before dusk when he summoned the platoon commanders. Big Bill was also present.

Stonehedge raised the polished gold cover of his own wrist watch and gave the time.

"Set your watches," he ordered.

When this was done the captain continued in his dry, brittle voice.

"This is the biggest attack of American troops—the first under our own command, I'm told. The barrage begins at H hour minus four hours. That's one o'clock. We jump off at five o'clock. There will be a rolling barrage, and our first wave will hug it closely. The guide will be right. I'm issuing you each a copy of the battalion combat order. You'll have to do with only two maps. Maps are important, but there never seems to be enough of them. Any questions?"

No one spoke.

"We move up at eight-thirty," resumed Stonehedge. "There must be no smoking and no unnecessary noise. It is a surprise attack and if the Germans get suspicious the relief operation will be badly punished by shell-fire."

He allowed his voice to die away, waiting for comment. Again there was none.

"Our battalion," he continued, "as you can see, is the right of the regiment, and our objective for the first hour is the Bois de la Sonnard. As the right of the battalion we will have the duty of keeping contact with the Eighty-ninth on our right. The division boundary cuts the woods in half, so we must be carefull of liaison to make sure we don't overlook any German machine guns and get shot up from behind."

As he spoke a certain tenseness came into the officers that was not lessened by the slam of heavy siege guns hidden in the far end of the woods.

"One more word: you have been taught, as much as possible, how to flank out machine-gun nests. Use those tactics. They will save lives that a frontal attack would waste. That is all, gentlemen. and good luck."

After the lieutenants had gone Stonehedge said to Big Bill, "You will stay with me and the runners. You've had experience in this sort of thing. In case of a mistake or a hold-up you will be valuable."

"Yes, sir," said Bill impassively.

ALL DAY it had been clouding and the night came on blackly, so that by the time the company drew out on the road in its formation the rain began to fall in torrents. In those days of few roads and many outfits, every unit moved on a timetable to forestall traffic jams. So now the sodden beat of thousands of hob-nailed shoes resounded on the metalled road. Water dripped from steel helmets, ran down the necks of slickers, dripped upon the calves of men's legs. Soaking wet, miserable and

soon tired, they kept contact and formation only by clutching at the file ahead. Trucks flung mud on them. Limbered artillery wheeled by, and the night was cut by shouts of "Mootch over!" "For crysake, gangway!"

Men and guns and trucks. And more men, and more guns. There seemed no end to them.

Big Bill strode along, keeping a watchful eye on the file closers. Rain drummed on his tin hat. Underneath his slicker his Colt .45 slapped his flank at every step and each thump called it to Bill's mind.

At a brief halt until M.P.'s could clear a block ahead he moved along the left of the column. A man was talking, protesting. Big Bill recognized Hanson's voice.

"They ain't got any right, I tell yuh," he moaned. "I'm sick. I've had this damned dysentery since Adam wore knee pants. If we wasn't led by a lot of beasts I'd be sent to a hospital."

A few murmurs, some of agreement, others of protest, rose. Some one said—

"Aw, pipe down."

Such talk was dangerous, especially to men going up for a major attack. All were afraid; all thinking of the shell or slug with their name on it. Courage must be screwed to the sticking point by leadership. One man's panic might affect a company the same as the cry of fire in a theater sends a wave of blind fear through an audience.

Big Bill swore under his breath, and groped among the men for Hanson. Roughly he grabbed the soldier, walking at number four in the third squad.

"Lissen," he said thinly. "Are you goin' to keep your mouth shut, or am I goin' to poke you one?"

To emphasize the command he slammed the gun snout into Hanson's belly until the man grunted with pain. He whined a promise, but when the march was resumed Big Bill put another sergeant at the tail to watch for stragglers, and himself walked close by Hanson.

This side of Seicheprey the regimental guides began sorting units. Voices grew low, even to whispers, as if the Germans, three thousand yards away, might hear any word. Big Bill, a cynical twist to his mouth, rather expected Stonehedge to show helplessness in the relief. But instead the contrary took place.

Stonehedge jumped nimbly about the communication trenches, squirmed up the reverse slope of the hill and watched each platoon take over. When the battalion commander came to check the dispositions the company was all set.

At one tick past one o'clock a crashing roar rumbled and thundered along the line. The night became bright with the electric sparks of 75's and 155's firing as fast as half-naked men could slip a new charge into the breeches. Overhead came the rustling of big caliber shells, shushing along as if silken streamers were tied to the steel.

The Yank barrage had begun.

Lashed almost hub to hub, 75's smashed the German first and second lines to piles of churned earth.

Four solid hours the drum-fire continued, echoing and reverberating across the desolate, rain-soaked countryside; rumbling in valleys, cutting sharply across the crests. The men nodded to themselves.

"Geez, what a smash! How'd you like to be on the receiving end o' *that?*"

At twenty seconds of five o'clock Big Bill Tuttle stood in a firing bay alongside of Captain Stonehedge. The trench was crowded with men who, now that the last few seconds had come, began to fidget and grow gray. Big Bill's whistle hung by the curved mouthpiece from his lower teeth. Occasionally he lipped it. In his right hand was his automatic pistol.

Stonehedge was watching his wrist dial. In the greenish glow, the second

hand was jerking toward H hour. Fifty-eight, fifty-nine—sixty!

The terrific din stopped as if burked by a gigantic hand. But hardly had the reverberation died away before it broke forth anew. A rhythmic, slamming crash as if some one had pulled all the bass stops on an organ. And added to the crash and howling of the big guns was the hysterical roar of machine-guns firing a high angle barrage.

"Time to shove off," Stonehedge's voice somehow pierced the din.

His whistle blew. Big Bill's shrilled, and the sound was taken up by a score of others. By now the rain had ceased and a dirty gray color was across the sky so that some features of the sodden countryside could be seen. By this faint light men could be seen rising from the brown earth like brown ghosts answering the last call. The shell-pocked earth, so deserted a moment ago, now swarmed with men who walked slowly forward as if out for a morning ramble.

Shouts of "Close up!" "Your guide is right!" made thin waves of the olive drab. Big Bill scrambled up the slope alongside Stonehedge, who pressed closely after the automatic riflemen sauntering forward, their cumbrous *chaut-chauts* gripped at their right hips.

More shouts to close up, watch the guide, keep the intervals, rose above the uproar.

Before Big Bill had advanced a hundred yards the ground was clearly visible. The mist had holes and swirled and eddied. Just ahead of him the ground sloped downward, then rose away into the pale ground mist. In the middle distance there was a solid wall of flame-shot smoke with flickering jets of red at its base. It stretched away to right and left as far as Bill could see. It paused for a space, then with a gargantuan leap went ahead and rumbled anew, traveling like the Biblical pillar of fire and smoke. The rolling barrage.

The scouts hugged this barrage. Big Bill, watching the alignment, saw that, despite occasional clamor when a man slipped and fell into a water-filled shell-hole, the line was knitted together well. Then Bill's gaze came back to Captain Stonehedge; the company commander walked slowly, deliberately, his hands in his trench coat pocket, his body slightly inclined forward as if he were breasting a strong wind. Bill fingered his gun. Too soon yet, he told himself, the jerries hadn't showered down yet.

A moment later he noticed with a start that there was hardly any return fire. The thunder of the "departures" was deafening; and he had to watch closely for some minutes before he saw three or four German shells tear themselves apart along the line. He glanced back. One or two men were down. The nearest clutched at his leg, examining something. Just beyond him was an olive drab form whose strangely punctured appearance bespoke death.

On the whole, though, there was no such devastating fire as he had encountered in the bloody marshes of the Vesle.

"Wait'll we hit their front line," he muttered.

Presently he was stepping high through torn and snake-like strands of barbed wire, the holding posts of which had been uprooted or twisted by the hurricane of the preliminary barrage.

A MACHINE-GUN riveted sharply, followed instantly by the *br-up* of the *chaut-chauts*. Came then the coughing snicker of hand grenades. Big Bill had a fleeting glimpse of a big German in a trench, right arm upraised with a stick grenade in it. Bill's gun roared and the man was flung back against the rear of the trench as if slammed with a giant fist. He stayed spread-eagled a second, then slipped out of sight. Stonehedge steadied himself on Bill's arm as they leaped the trench. There were three or four gray figures

slumped around an up-ended Spandau machine-gun.

Stonehedge glanced at his dial, and studied the map with the blue and red crayon marks on it.

"Right on time, sergeant."

Bill thought it strange how the man's dry, brittle voice carried through the din.

The advance continued at the same steady pace. By the time the fringe of the Bois de la Sonnard was reached, the sun was definitely out; you could see your shadow; and there was no longer any ground mist to hide the advance from the German depth defense.

A staccato clatter riveted ahead; and Bill heard the familiar eggs-frying-in-lard sound of machine-gun slugs whipping the air. Holes appeared now in the line; shouts of "Close up!" could not patch them. Screams and yells came thinly through the roar, and howls for stretcher bearers.

"The krauts are out of their holes," muttered Big Bill. "Now, we'll hit something."

Still the line shoved doggedly forward, men falling to be shot again and again. The Germans, wizards with machine-gun defense, laid out a field of fire and rained bullets thirty inches high to make this segment a depth zone. Men hit in the legs went down and had their bodies drilled before they hit the ground. Big Bill was jerked half-way around and, looking down, saw that his field glasses —a souvenir of the Vesle—had been smashed.

Beside him Captain Stonehedge, his left hand holding the map and his right a Colt, was moving steadily ahead and peering at the woods in near-sighted fashion as if trying to locate the fire. Now, another staccato hammering arose, and still a third, as if pneumatic hammer operators were working frantically to get through before noon. Big Bill knew what it was.

A machine-gun screen in depth to retard the advance. And the advance would have to halt until combat groups could silence the Maxims. He lagged a few steps behind.

Now, he told himself, was as good time as any. He looked right and left. Many men were down, others were diving into shell-holes, taking cover behind trees. Officers and non-coms were trying to urge them to their feet. He returned his gaze to Stonehedge, who was lifting the polished gold cover of his watch to find the time. Already the barrage was beginning to pull away.

No one, Bill perceived, was looking this way. The ex-warden was ten yards ahead, and Bill couldn't miss. In that stiff counter-fire, with men dropping every second, none would question the fall of the captain. And he would be spaded under ground and no one ever remark he was shot in the back.

Big Bill's automatic leveled at his hip. In his eyes, his face, his hunched posture came the rigidity of purpose. The slender back was a hell of a big target.

Then the instincts of three years' soldiering broke through his purpose. Why did the fool study his watch instead of doing something to keep the advance going? The attack was dying on its feet; and once the men had the security of shell-holes it would be merry hell trying to get a new impetus. Big Bill thought then that if the captain went down the tucker would go out of the men and they would lie there like idiots, held up by a machine-gun screen that a little vigor would soon overwhelm. He decided to postpone his own purpose until the company was on the objective.

He hastened to draw alongside Captain Stonehedge. The latter spoke quietly.

"Take the second platoon, sergeant, and clear out the right of those woods. That seems to be the main resistance. I'll get the company forward on the left."

Big Bill, cursing himself for a dalli-

ance he should not have admitted, hurried along the second platoon whose lieutenant and sergeant were casualties and booted and dragged them to their feet. He heard Stonehedge's whistle, and then, in the necessity of the present job, lost himself.

THE platoon, seven men short, worked swiftly to the right under his direction. He could hear the clatter of a gun, but the echoes rebounded on themselves, making its location puzzling. Silent figures scurried from tree to tree, then spread out, rifles ready and grenades, too.

Bill tossed a big stone to the right. The fury of the gun assailed his ear almost directly ahead. He gathered the men. They went forward. Two died in the rush, but three grenades did the business, and they took no prisoners. A new clatter rose as the enfilade gun began to hose their position with steel.

Big Bill began to stalk it. A strange bitterness came over him as he stole forward from tree to tree. Men were funny beings, he thought. Here he had just killed four men, two of them just kids from their looks, and if the facts were known he would be highly commended. They gave you medals here if you killed enough men. But home, in a moment of towering rage at injustice and trickery, he had killed a man with his bare hands and the State, the same men who commended him now, would exact his youth, his earning power, his very life in the long run.

He couldn't understand it. Fifteen yards ahead there was a German Maxim emplacement. He would storm it, kill men he had never seen, men he had no grudge against. That would be heroism. Killing a rat—that was murder.

The train of thought broke, as, gently parting some brush, he saw the machine-gun nest. There were only two men in there. One was a boy who had blond down on his face that shone yellowly against the exhausted gray of his skin. His eyes were bloodshot, and his body twitched spasmodically. He was a loader and sat on additional boxes of ammunition. He suspected they were being stalked, and he wet his lips and his eyes went shivering around the green depths.

The gunner was perhaps forty, and proud of his appearance, for even now, in his filthy exhaustion and in the realization that he had been left to die at his gun, his dirty hand was stroking the bristles of a mustache that needed trimming. He straddled the gun, his thumbs ready to press the corrugated firing mechanism and loose a rain of cupronickle slugs.

A slight noise came from behind Big Bill. The gunner jerked alert. Bill pulled the ring on the grenade, counted steadily so there would be no comeback, and then loosed his thunderbolt. It hurled truly into the nest, struck the gunner on the back and rolled near the boxes of ammunition.

The youth screamed, *"Durch Gott!"* and tried to hurl himself clear of the nest. The gun hammered raucously. Then the grenade roared. There was a mist of smoke and flying earth, and a crimson spray at one end. The platoon, lunging forward, found no need for bayonets. Both men were dead, horribly so.

Bill laughed thinly. In the next thirty minutes he combed the woods edge thoroughly to make sure they left nothing behind. Presently Stonehedge was up on the left, the line cohered once more, and the advance resumed. There was little resistance along here. A few machine-guns that were quickly smothered, and then that line of resistance was passed, and they moved on to the next.

Big Bill moved forward behind Stonehedge. Funny how the damned screw insisted on leading the way! And presently he heard the whip-like crack of

rifles, and the spasmodic chatter of machine guns. Bill looked around. The men, widely spaced, were getting forward, hugging cover, closing in on the position which was again a delaying resistance. No eyes were on Bill. Once again his trigger finger quivered inside the trigger guard of the Colt.

A shot and the slight figure was down. Bill could toss away the automatic. Against the resisting line ahead a rifle would be better anyway and he could get one from a casualty. Mentally, he aimed the gun from his hip.

But for some unexplained reason within himself he hesitated. "It's no worse bumpin' him then those krauts back there," he raged at himself.

A cry came from the left. Captain Stonehedge looked up from his watch.

"Sergeant Tuttle," he ordered, "take the third platoon and put it with the second and assume command. Spread out to the right to make sure there are no enfilade guns to take us in flank. And we seem to have lost contact on the right. Throw out a small patrol and see if you can find any of our people."

Big Bill silently turned and with a crouching run reached the two platoons. Together they were a sizeable group of twenty-eight men. The rest of the battalion was around somewhere. The woods resounded to calls, whistles and the *rat-tat* of Maxim fire. The corporal ahead of Big Bill was calling his squad illegitimates and urging them ahead. A stray slug in the chest cut short his exhortations and did not make the platoon any more eager to advance.

"Get forward," cried Bill harshly, "Yuh don't earn a dollar a day here."

By the scruff of the neck and by well-directed kicks he got the advance going. He was again a soldier with a mission. Hanson was in this platoon. Big Bill hauled him alongside.

"Stay up here with me," he grunted. "You'll stop a slug from hittin' a better man."

The corporals or acting non-coms had their men in hand now, and under Bill's direction the advance made good time. Three small, crescent-shaped trenches with a few Germans were mopped up. There were no prisoners taken. Then the woods began to thin; the trees rose firmly from sod on which there were no bushes or protecting features.

Again Stonehedge's whistle blew and the advance became the old squad rush and flop system. A squad got up, raced ten or fifteen yards and flopped. Then the next and so on until the line was straight again. Here, Bill saw, was the main German resistance short of the town gleaming whitely far ahead on the crest of a ridge.

The barrage had steam-rolled here but the woods had offered fair protection against it, and Bill knew that the Germans were out of their holes, ready to put up resistance. He dodged fire-lanes, worked his amalgamated platoon around the flank. Presently he saw the bright earth of a new trench, a few hastily hastily strung barbs of wire nailed to the trees.

He got out his clippers, and called to a soldier near him.

"Give Hanson your clippers," he said.

To the senior corporal he ordered, "Keep up a steady fire on the trench." He grabbed Hanson and bellied forward. "Come on, rat, and earn a day's pay."

Hanson was shaking with fright, but he was more afraid of Bill's stern face. He came. And they went forward at the rate of a yard a minute while over their head a sizeable body of fire kept the Germans interested. The platoon edged forward behind them, stopping only to volley. Bullets were skipping brightly off the wire. It was a hot spot. Bill's lips curled cynically. Funny, he usually had to screw himself up to a job like this. Now, it didn't mean a thing.

Suddenly he kicked Hanson to his feet.

"Cut," he yelled, and his own clippers

began to snip through the strands of wire.

The slugs tore the air around him. A stick grenade, the string jerked, fell to one side and roared.

"Up and at 'em," yelled Big Bill.

An answering shout came from the platoon, which tore its way through the cut wire unmindful of the clothing ripped in the process. Hot blasts of fire came into their faces; men screamed and the grenades went forward to cough with white gouts of smoke. The two machine-guns in the end of the trench vomited madly and then went silent. Howls, squeals, animal-like cries began to fill the air as the platoon leaped headlong into the trench and began to wield the bayonet.

A GERMAN non-com, huge and savage, leaped for Bill, the Luger in his hand spouting streaks of flame. Big Bill wondered how the man could miss. Then they met chest to chest. The German's breath smelled of garlic. His one hand snaked for Bill's neck. Battle lust gleamed in his eyes, and under his impact they both went to the floor of the trench.

Here they rolled and squirmed and writhed while feet trampled them. Once a German tried a thrust at Bill with a bayonet, but Bill turned his antagonist upward. Once a Yank paused in a wild rush, apparently with the intention of waiting an opportunity to blow the Boche non-com's brains out. But another German went for him. So the fight waged, a zoo at noontime feeding making no more weird sounds.

The German gouged Bill's eyes with his thumbs, tried to pistol-whip him with the empty Luger. Bill got his teeth in the thumb and nearly bit it off. He got a leg free, and kneed the German in the crotch with all his strength. The man screamed in agony. He doubled up and Bill grabbed the empty Luger and smashed it with all his strength into the German's face. The face became a welter of blood and the body slumped. Bill got panting to his feet.

The battle raged as before, but the Yanks had driven the Germans the length of the trench. Already several lumbering gray figures had clambered over the edge and were running at their best speed. Then the mopping up began. The only Germans who survived were the runners whom bullets missed.

Less than five minutes later from the wood's edge a flare shot skyward, and as Bill began re-forming his depleted platoon an airplane thrummed low overhead. Black crosses glittered on its wings.

"Hah," muttered Bill, wiping his forehead, "the krauts know they lost this trench, and they know its range. Boy, will they shower down?"

Captain Stonehedge thought so, too, for he said, "Pass the word to pull up to those fields. They will shell this trench heavily."

Big Bill yelled the order, watching Stonehedge as he did so. The little man had a welt on his face. His clothing was torn by wire and falls, yet, somehow, he did not appear upset or disarranged. The decimated company pulled up to the fields where the grain was waist high.

As Bill saw, they were none too soon. Four shells hooted out of the air and tore themselves apart in a beautiful bracket on the trench.

"They may try a counter-attack," said Stonehedge. "Still, I wonder. Our whole front is advancing. Let's pull up to that town and await a message from the major."

As Bill went to the platoon, the captain called—

"Did you find any of our people on the right?"

"No, sir," said Bill.

They got forward well into the wheat, and Bill could see the town a mile away on the other side of a valley. Occasional

puffs of black smoke seeped out of it showing it was being shelled.

Stonehedge said grimly: "I hope the division on our right isn't too much delayed. We may find ourselves wedged in the German lines."

Bill was about to reply when the man next to him gave a bubbling sort of cry and pitched forward on his face. He hiccoughed a couple of times like a man who has laughed too much, then his fingernails ceased clawing the earth.

Swiftly Big Bill bent over him, turned him over. The jaw hung agape, the man was dead. But he had no wound in front. Bill cursed and turned the corpse belly down. There was a hole squarely between the shoulder blades.

Something crackled past him. A man farther down the line stood up whirled, screamed and vanished in the wheat.

"They didn't keep up, sir," said Bill, referring to the right division. The krauts have pushed machine guns around our right and we're being shot up from the rear."

Bill knew it was a serious situation; and realized the Germans would soon take advantage of their chance. And they did. The single battery shelling them shortened its range; and four more batteries at least must have joined in, for dozens of stalks of high explosive shell began to bloom in the field.

Big Bill looked up, saw the circling plane that was directing the fire.

"The bastard," he muttered. "Shot up from behind and shelled. He knows we have no place to go."

THEN without warning the plane directing the artillery fire, suddenly dived down. It flatted out at the neck of the valley and came at them in a gentle dive. Over the throbbing roar of its motor came the patter of machine-gun fire. The guns on its cowling grew red-tipped. The slugs began to kick dust-lines through the flattened line of infantry.

On it came, running down the ragged line, hosing the ground with steel. Screams of fury and terror, howls of agony and pain rose in an uproar to greet this strafing. The men cowered down, dug wildly to get underground. The roar of the motor grew louder. The shadow of the plane slipped over Big Bill's head like a shark's on white sandy bottom. The plane screamed skyward, banked sharply and came tearing back for another smash.

There was nothing so nerve-racking, Bill found, as being shot at from a plane. Many of the bullets—most of them, in fact—went wild. But some few did take effect, and these, together with the awful feeling of helplessness combined to bring panic to the soldiers There was no hiding from such attack. No trees, no hole in the ground; nothing could stop those bullets from above.

Big Bill yelled to Stonehedge:

"We can't stay here. Let's take the town ahead."

Stonehedge's voice rang out, "Plenty of cellars in the town ahead. Every one up and attack." His whistle shrilled.

But there was no response. Momentarily the plane was a mile or so away making a bank to come back. Hanson, his long narrow face ghastly with terror, scrambled to his knees, turned to the rear.

"Our officers are crazy and they're getting us all killed," he screamed. "We can't get ahead, we can't stay here. Let's go back."

He turned and started to run for the protection of the woods. Big Bill gritted a curse and reached for the casualty's rifle that lay a yard or so away. He knew that in that moment of panic the men were thinking only of safety and would follow any one who gave promise of providing it.

He turned with the rifle. But before

he could raise it Stonehedge's voice rang out:

"Halt!"

Hanson tripped and fell, but leaped up again.

"Killing us for nothing," he screamed. "If you're men, come on."

A shell howled out of the air and burst asunder about fifty yards to the right. Clods of earth smote Hanson down, but he got up and ran again.

A few other men were crawling in pursuit. In a second the whole company would run like mad, and the day's advance be lost. But before Big Bill could fire, another gun roared near his ear.

Hanson seemed to trip, plunged forward, sliding on his face to come to a twitching stop. He wiggled convulsively a second and then lay still.

Stonehedge yelled:

"If another man follows he'll get the same dose. Tuttle, take command of your platoon. Forward, C Company, and any man who stops behind I'll kill."

There was a moment's hesitation, but the non-coms were already cursing the survivors. Big Bill strode among his platoon, jerking them upright as if they were men of straw. The men knew that if they remained here the flanking fire or shells would get them. If they fled to the rear they'd be shot. Safety, if any, lay in the town ahead. Thereupon, they took up the advance.

In combat groups they worked across the floor of the valley and took up the ascent of the slope toward the battered village. And now, once again, Big Bill was directly behind Stonehedge. He carried the bayoneted Springfield at his hip. Rifle-fire from the village was taking some toll. He knew that the advance would not go beyond the village, might not go on at all. This was, indeed, he believed it to be, his last chance.

The rifle snout looked into Stonehedge's back. The captain was staring at his watch, then looking to right and left. A perfect target.

But for some reason which Bill could not define, he was unable to bring himself to fire. Once, twice, he gritted his teeth. He tried to screw his courage to the point. He thought of harmless Germans dead and mangled. He tried to visualize gray walls, and an endless eon without the sun. His finger tightened, but the trigger would not pull.

"No worse him than the Jerries," he cursed himself, but he knew better. Whether true or false the idea was in his brain that the Germans were enemies of his country. To kill them was a duty he could understand. And in killing Langtry it had been with his hands, with the man resisting.

But to shoot a man cold-bloodedly, deliberately in the back—he could not and he suddenly knew it. No matter what the consequences.

For seconds his rifle stretched out at the target. Several yards were covered in this fashion. Bill's face was a cold gray mask. Then suddenly he pushed rapidly in front of Stonehedge and led the advance into the village.

Those who saw Bill that day could never understand his reckless idiocy. He led the way into the trench they stormed as if inviting a bullet or a grenade. And the men, heartened by the sight, plunged after him. With renewed impetus and orders from the battalion major, they pushed on beyond the town, with Bill going ahead seeming to seek the death that passed him by.

By nightfall the company, now in liaison with the rest of the battalion on the left and the Eighty-ninth Division on the right, was dug in before the Bois de Bouillonville. Bill led them again the next day, the thirteenth, but the Germans had pulled out in the night, and by the following dusk the St. Mihiel salient was reduced and the company lay in the woods fronting Haumont with nothing but an occasional shell to worry them while they consolidated the position.

AND SO, five days later, the company returned with the rest of the division to Troyon to rest and re-fit. Big Bill, face gray as granite, went into Captain Stonehedge's quarters. He could stand it no longer. He thrust aside the gas curtain and said:

"Sergeant William Teller, alias William Tuttle, reports to the company commander."

Stonehedge, dry as a mummy, brittle and frigid, was bending over the field desk. His glance came up bird-like with no movement of the head.

"At ease, sergeant. Sit down," he said calmly.

Big Bill shook his head.

"I can take my medicine standing up," he said. "This can't go on. I—"

"Sit down," cut in Stonehedge. "That's an order."

Big Bill squatted on a packing case that creaked under his weight.

Silence. Big Bill felt himself trembling. Stonehedge picked up a gold mounted fountain pen.

"Sergeant," he said with a strange human note in his dry voice, "would you have shot Hanson if I had not?"

"Why sure—sir." Big Bill looked surprised. "You barely beat me to the slug. It was a case of his life or getting us all killed and losing what we had gained."

Stonehedge looked thoughtful. "Er—of course. Justifiable homicide, perhaps."

Big Bill gave a start. "You said once there wasn't any justifiable homicide."

"Yes," nodded Stonehedge. "Rather interesting. A man hardly knows what is justifiable homicide until he meets the situation, eh, sergeant?"

Big Bill said nothing. His mind was in a whirl. He watched Captain Stonehedge pick up an official document and scrawl his name at the bottom.

"First endorsement for your commission, Sergeant Tuttle," he said, accenting the name. "I hope you get it."

Big Bill visibly staggered. "But—you—how—"

"I'll send it through today," went on Stonehedge, ignoring Bill's perturbation.

He held up another paper, carefully folded, which he began to rip into shreds, letting the pieces sift through his fingers like small snow.

"I had written that and left it with the company records," he explained." It won't be needed—now."

A wintry smile lifted his small mouth.

"Also, sergeant," he said, "I admire your self-restraint."

He lifted his right arm and flipped up the polished gold cover of his wrist watch.

"I was watching your reflection in this," he murmured softly. "I wondered that last time if you really would not shoot."

Big Bill gasped.

"An interesting experiment, sergeant," Stonehedge's voice seemed to come from a long way off. "I'm afraid I'll never be sure murder is murder again. That's all. Inspection at five o'clock. You're dismissed, Sergeant Tuttle."

LOSER TAKES NOTHING

Guinard, the cow-faced one, struck him on the shoulder with his club.

A novelette by ROBERT CARSE

FOR days, for all the days since their leaving France, that place where they had been imprisoned had been filled with sound. Here in the hold of the prison ship, even when they, the prisoners, had been silent in the exhaustion of grief or the bitter sickness of the long, hot passage, there had been the sounds of the working of the ship, the throbbing beat of the propeller, the thrusting echoes of the engines.

Now the ship's sounds had gone away as the engines stopped, and the prisoners too were silent, waiting in a kind of rigor.

The ship had crossed the bar, in from the sea. Below, there, they had been able to hear and sense dimly the boarding of the pilot, then the slower movement of the ship up the river. Many of them had got up and stood jammed against the few port-holes, trying to stare out and see this land of Guiana to which they had been sentenced, most of them for life.

But one of the old-timers, a man who had escaped from here, been recaptured and resentenced, had spoken quietly and told them. He said that it would be hours yet before they would be able to see anything more than the coastal mud. He smiled as he said that, through the beard he had grown since they had left St. Martin de Ré and France, then, in his slow, quiet voice told them:

"You'll have time to see it all. Lots of time before you die!"

Some of them had cursed him for that, but he had not listened. A butterfly had blundered in through a port-hole, glinting and swerving in the dim light, and Dogan, the American, had caught it in his hand, kept it loosely there, and they had occupied their time staring at that, muttering at the fragile markings and loveliness of its wings.

Now, though, from above, they had just heard the flat braying of the ship's whistle, and the echoes of the captain's voice shouting to his chief officer on the

forecastle-head, the rumbled running of the cable out through a hawse-pipe as an anchor was let go.

They jammed back against the ship's sides as close to port-holes as they could get, all of them, the little second-timer leading.

"Albina," he said hoarsely, craning up at the port-hole rim. "That's the Dutchmen's town, on the other side. There's where we're bound for—St. Laurent, right over here."

He turned, pushing with his hands, looking back and blinking from the sunlight. Dogan, the browned, big-shouldered American, still sat on the edge of his bunk, holding the butterfly. It had been injured somehow in its flight, and was dying in his hands.

As the little second-timer spoke to him, he looked up, and let it slide slowly from his palm to the concrete of the deck.

"St. Laurent," the second-timer had said to him; "we'll be going in alongside pretty soon, *sidi*."

Once, in his early days, the second-timer had served with the colonial troops in North Africa, and in him was deeply grained respect for any man who had been an officer in the Foreign Legion. And, during the passage out from France, Dogan had kept a sort of order and decency among them here that the guards had either been unwilling or unable to maintain. The other men shuffled and stood back aside for Dogan now, let him poise wide-footed alone before the port-hole, with Vramy, the second-timer at his shoulder.

"Pretty, hey?" Vramy asked him, his thick, black prison cap held high in one hand. "So pretty that I've never been able to forget it for a minute, all the time I've been away, *sidi*."

"I could figure that," Dogan said. He spoke in a voice held almost to a whisper, turning and smiling, for Vramy. "I guess there'll be a lot like you."

The ship was moving again, coming up on her anchor, swinging in toward the ramshackle dock. Men there, convicts in faded canvas uniforms with wide black numerals stamped across their jumper chests, were heaving in on a line, bringing ashore the breasting hawser belayed to the end of it.

Dogan watched them, the haggard, yellowish faces beneath the ragged brims of the wide straw hats they wore against the white, hard sunlight, their hurried, almost clumsy efforts. Then he stared beyond them, at the saffron sky where the fronds and heads of palms rested unmoving under the constant swoops and descents of vultures.

It was as he had dreamed, very much the same as he had imagined to himself, ever since that day his sentence to perpetual imprisonment in this place had been read down to him. It was not the sun, the palms, the vultures and the muddy, slow river which held his thought: it was the men on the dock, the men in the prisons beyond, with whom he would serve out his whole life, if he were not to die here—or somehow escape.

Against the hot brass of the port-hole brim, Dogan's fingers clenched shortly, then relaxed. His head came back, his shoulders and whole body straightened, as though he were before his marching company of the Legion again, and on parade. Fronting that crowd upon the dock were men in white uniforms and solar helmets, sun catching upon their gold braid and the ribbons and bright metal of their medals. What, Dogan said silently, old Vramy behind him would call the *"gros legumes"*—the big shots—the men who ran penal and political Guiana.

Some of those officials were smiling now, waiting for this fresh shipment of the undesired and desperate to come in from France, turning to chat and joke with their wives, the few white women in the crowd about them.

Dogan could see and study them close-

ly, make out the various medals they wore, their bodily characteristics and features. And they, too, he thought suddenly, sharply, must now be able to see and examine him closely, framed distinctly by the narrowness of the porthole.

He cursed, then laughed in a quick burst of low sound, for he had just recognized two men in the cluster of officials on the dock below. And now Lammand had seen him, swung to jerk at Frajac's sleeve, point up. Dogan wore his woolen prison cap; his blood was Irish-American, and in his youth he had gone to school with those two staring officials below, had joined the Legion with them on a hot August dawn in 1914.

He lifted off the clumsy cap in a half formal and mocking kind of salute.

"How are you, gentlemen?" he called clearly down to them. "But don't let me surprise you; I always knew we'd meet again."

Then, grinning, grinning for old Vramy gaping at his shoulder and for all the other men behind him in the prison ship, he turned away and moved stumbling in his wooden-soled convict sandals to his plank bunk, grasped at the greasy, moist wood, dropped upon it, sat with his fingers up and extended tightly against his eyes.

ABOUT him, the other *forcats* were screaming, yelling and shoving, grasping up their canvas sacks which held the few personal belongings left to them, yowling back at the guards who had come down the ladders and the passages between the cages and were ordering them into line for disembarkation.

Dogan heard them faintly; in his head, he had taken himself far distant from them. In a swift, searing flicker of memories, he had transported himself back to what had once been his home near Prospect Park in Brooklyn; again, sitting here, he could recall that last moment in which he had seen his mother and his father. His mother had wept in that moment, but he and his father had laughed together, for, then, he had just been going off to France and to the University of Paris to finish his post-graduate work.

That was the summer of 1913—not the summer of 1914. In August, 1914, he and Louis Lammand and Jules Frajac, those two white-clad men below on the dock now, had gone North from Paris up the long, straight, poplar-lined road which had led them and their outfit of the Legion to war—and had led him, Mike Dogan, who had stayed with the Legion, learned to love it and become an officer in it, far beyond, to this.

Dogan lifted his head, let his fingers fall away from before his eyes, brought himself, stiffly, to smile.

"Just old school chums," he whispered aloud. "Louis and Jules and American Mike Dogan. Then *copains* of the Legion for four years; until somebody won the War. Now—"

Staring up, he broke away the muttered words he had been saying; bow-legged and bald-headed Vramy stood before him, grinning nervously.

"But you know better, *sidi,*" he said in a whisper.

"Know what?" Dogan asked sharply.

Vramy lifted one skinny shoulder inside his thick prison jumper, dropped it again.

"Cow-Face, the *surveillant chef,* has had them all in line but you, and he has called your name three times."

"No," Dogan said; he was standing, grasping up his *musette* bag holding his possessions. "I don't want to tangle with him, not yet, not here. Nor later."

"Yes." Vramy was stooped way down, slouching along beside him and the slowly moving line of convicts. "Later would be better, much better. But you haven't got a knife now?"

"No! And why?"

Vramy's hand went out, caught against Dogan's shoulder, deftly turned him into his space in the line of otherwise silent men.

"Because, *sidi*, a knife, a knife right through his satchel, is just what our shipmate Cow-Face needs. But as soon as we are off the dock now, they will take all this junk away from us, give us new stuff, shirts, pants and hats. And before they do that favor, they will search us."

Dogan, staring back, could not help but smile a little bit. "Yes, I know. You mean that Cow-Face should be given a knife, all right, but that it shouldn't be put handle-first in his hand."

Slowly, Vramy gave him his sidewise, winking grin back. "That is right, *sidi*. But, a man should have a knife in prison, for the lugs like Cow-Face—after they have got us ashore here, and shown us all the sights. Look! Already they let us climb ladders!"

Coming up from there, out of that dim and stinking hold where they had lived more than a month, the sun struck them heavily. Men in the line stumbled and cursed aloud, swaying across the topside decks towards the ladders leading down over the side. The white-uniformed guards were ready for them; cursed and struck them back.

At the ladder-head, his revolver out in one hand, a heavy stick in the other, Guinard, the head-keeper whom little Vramy had dubbed Cow-Face, laughed aloud as he watched the crouched bodies and stumbling feet in the line.

"You don't like it, hey, you sons? Well, here a man gets used to it—or he dies. Step along in there! Step up! *Bougez-vous, et vite!*"

Dogan had expected them to be there, but not so close. Frajac stood right behind the line of guards which separated the prisoners from the crowd, and Louis Lammond, big, powerful, spectacular and distinct in that press of people, stood directly to the rear of Jules Frajac. It was Lammand who saw him first, leaned forward and spoke softly to Frajac, making a slight indication with his head toward the clumping, marching line.

Frajac stood stiffly, handsome, delicate, in his carefully cut uniform of lieutenant-governor, his brown, soft eyes wide now and intently staring beneath the flared brim of his solar helmet, Lammand's stoop-shouldered bulk in complete contrast. His white-gloved hands lifted a little from his sides as the file which held Dogan swung past, but he was utterly silent, and it was Lammand who spoke, loudly, almost laughingly:

"Which proves it a small world, even for old schoolmates. You spoke to us from the ship, *forcat?*"

Down the line, obliquely staring, Dogan could see Cow-Face's turned head, and the strained, masklike expression which had come to Jules Frajac's mouth and eyes.

"No," Dogan spoke in a voice which could not be heard five feet away; "I was mistaken, *M'sieur le Senateur.*"

Louis Lammand laughed at that; his head back, one big, brown hand going to thwack Frajac solidly upon the shoulder.

"You heard?" he asked in that somehow heavy yet mocking voice. "That one with the red head says he does not know us—although he has the smartness to call me 'senator'."

But Frajac was turning from the line, and away from Lammand; his voice came tautly sharp in an order to the groups of guards and negro soldiers:

"Clear the dock and the streets now! Quickly! This is not a show!"

DOGAN was standing, stripped naked, a bundle made of his old uniform in his hands, four places from the table where the inspecting doctors and prison officials sat in the Depot Penitencier when Guinard, the cow-faced one, ap-

proached and struck him a glancing, warning blow on the shoulder with his club.

"I don't know what you've done, swab," Guinard told him, "and, as for me, I won't weep when they croak you. But stand up there for inspection next. Then fall out and report over there at the head inspector's office. See that door?"

From him, Dogan looked across the great, barren room, humid and malodorous with the presence of many men, then nodded.

"Oui," he said flatly, *"oui—m'sieur."*

The uniform they gave him to replace the one issued him in France was not new, nor clean. Across the chest of the jumper, and across the trousers, just below the waistband, he could read what had been its former wearer's prison numerals, his own baldly reprinted over them. Both jumper and trousers were far too short, came barely below his elbows and his knees, and the sloppy straw hat, much too big for his head size, he already was carrying in his hand when he stepped forward from the last of the examiners and knocked upon the door Guinard had indicated.

It was Frajac who answered. Frajac sat behind the head keeper's desk within; he and Louis Lammand, who sat with a long black cheroot in his mouth, his heels high up on the desk, were the only two men there. Just inside the door, Dogan stopped, met his heels and stood still. From its position against his chest Frajac lifted his head, and the huge Lammand took the cheroot from between his heavy lips and blew smoke toward the barred window. Frajac spoke, at once:

"You are a *Matriculé* 61,204?"

"That's right," Dogan said, his eyes, his voice steady. "How are you?"

There was a scraping sound as Louis Lammand brought the front legs of his chair down hard against the floor. He spat before he spoke:

"Cré nom! Do you think, you low dolt, that you are still in the halls of the University with us, or on the *terrasse* of the Café Rotonde, drinking bock?"

Frajac answered that, looking sidewise and calmly at Lammand. "I shall answer that, if you please," he said, "and I shall take full charge of questioning the prisoner, *M'sieur le Senateur.*"

"You will," Louis Lammand was smiling as though at a joke, "until I stop you. Go ahead, Mister Lieutenant-Governor!"

On the desk top, Jules Frajac moved one of his hands in a gesture of command.

"Come closer," he said to Dogan. "Stand right there. You are sentenced here to the penal colony for life. The proved charge against you is one of unjustifiable homicide. From the official papers brought to my attention I have been able to gather there was some question in the Court of Assizes in Fez, where you were tried, as to your eventual guilt, but that it was finally established against you. If you—"

"Fichtre!" Louis Lammand said thickly, stamping his cheroot butt out on the bare desk top. "You'll be asking him if you can help him wipe his nose next. Tell him, man!"

Still as though calmly, Jules Frajac went on:

"Of course, I have some personal knowledge of your background. I have had you brought here now for two reasons: the first is, I am frank in telling you, because of confidential government reports the penal administration has received out here concerning your actions before your arrest and conviction, many of them being reasons for your conviction.

"The other, a personal one, because I want to warn you that any such conduct as you showed during the latter part of your service as a lieutenant in the Legion, and later as a private individual while you were living in North Africa,

will here only end in tragedy for yourself—instant added punishment and, further, death.

"Also, though, I want that you tell me, as an administrative official of the colony, what you believe to be the justice or the injustice of your presence here as a life-termer. Understand—fully—that what you say now may later have great influence concerning your treatment here."

From the chair, Louis Lammand had got to his feet. His prominently featured face had taken a deep color of rage, or of pent laughter. Right past Frajac, he strode to where the American stood, and reaching out caught him by the slack of his jumper front.

"Ca c'est de la blague," he said rapidly and hoarsely. "That's all a lot of bilge. Here's what Frajac is trying to say—in his girlish way: that you were forced to resign your commission in the Legion because of what amounted very damn' much to mutiny. That, afterward, with what little dough you'd saved, you bought a fruit plantation there, between Marrakesh and Colomb Bechar, and started trying to make a living for yourself—and raising a lot of hell for the military and colonial government.

"So, Frajac wants to say—and I'm saying it—that if you try to pull any of the same sort of funniness here you'll go, all in one piece, into the solitary cells for a good stretch, and if that doesn't do any good, you'll go into the 'bamboos', the local graveyard, in two pieces, the guillotine making the pieces. Now, say what you want, and quick!"

Easily, almost softly, Michael Dogan said:

"If I felt like laughing, I might laugh at you right now, *M'sieur le Senateur.* . . ."

Then his steady, pale blue eyes were on Jules Frajac, and he was speaking to that man alone:

"You two guys served all through the War with me. When it was over, you got out, and I stayed in. I thought I liked it; that it was where I belonged. It was—for quite a while, until I got a colonel who figured everything out on paper, and was lost when he lost the paper. That was about four years ago; I'd had about twelve years of desert fighting before that. I was used to leading my own outfit, doing my own jobs in my own way, and as long as I was successful, my bosses let me be.

"Not that guy. He pulled a whole battalion into a bad job, into one of his paper-planned battles. He'd just been shifted over, through pull, to the Legion from some Metropolitan outfit. Out in the *bled*, he was sour. Sour enough to open the whole show up wrong. I had two sections; as I saw it, I had to pull them out of his battle formation, and go my own way.

"It saved my outfit, and, I think, stopped a wholesale massacre. But he lost a lot of men anyhow, and I got the rap for that: I was brought up on charges; I was called 'an extreme and conceited individualist', and 'mutinous'; I was charged with 'all but cowardly action in the face of the enemy'. I was broken out of the Legion for what I think were another man's mistakes and guilt."

"That," Louis Lammand said, smiling, "is what you think. The court—'

"If you please"; Jules Frajac had partly risen from his chair, "I shall speak with the prisoner alone. Go ahead, *bagnard.*"

Michael Dogan was sweating, and his desire was practically irresistable to turn and to strike fully with all his aching strength at Louis Lammand's copper-colored jaw. But to Jules Frajac he said meticulously:

"I have known for over twenty years, Mister Lieutenant-Governor, that the Lammand family was a powerful one in Guiana, but that never was a senator from Guiana allowed the privileges of

taking part in the questioning of a convict. But it is perhaps due to the fact that the senator, and the lieutenant-governor and the convict were all at one time—"

"All right, Frajac." There was an unmusical kind of laughter behind Louis Lammand's words. "You see? The American has the idea that because, once, we were his friends, he can stand here now, like this, and say such stupidness. In one thing, though, he is right: you are the lieutenant-governor, and how about that?"

High up about Jules Frajac's cheekbones the blood had flushed, so that the eye sockets were sharply marked, giving an odd and strong lustre to the eyes themselves.

"Thank you," he said, very slowly, as if with difficult. "I shall answer that, immediately, *Bagnard,* there is no such thing as friendship here, not between officials and convicts, and absolutely none between any of us three now in this room. In Guiana, such things do not exist.

"And now, before I dismiss you, I wish to tell you just one more thing: Your eventual arrest and conviction to life imprisonment were due to the fact that you, only as a private individual, placed in the hands of the natives working for you on your plantation arms and ammunition, trained them in the use of weapons; later, during the raid of a dissident tribe into the part of Morocco where you were living, you even led those men in an armed attack. As a direct result of which a government agent was shot and killed by one of the men in your employ and under your command. I wish to make it known simply to you that I am fully in possession of those facts, and that you, here in the prisons, are a marked man already, if you for a moment contemplate escape, or any subversive, mutinous work among the convict population of the colony. That is all."

"And," Michael Dogan's voice rose gradually in the room, "you don't want me to tell you that I armed and trained those field-workers of mine, all of them old soldiers in the regular colonial forces, and led them finally in action, only because this same lousy son of a colonel I spoke of before was in command of the district, and no man's life was safe unprotected while he served there? Wait a minute—please! And that this guy who was supposed to be shot by my men was of the dissident tribe who had made the raid into the territory, and had gulled the colonel into taking him on as a native agent and a spy. That I knew, as a fact."

"But you are here," Louis Lammand said quite gently, "and he is dead, whether he was a spy—or your grandmother's cousin. So now, *bagnard,* get out of here. *Allez-y!*" Lammand's lips were wide, his lips back from his strong teeth. "Some one has just spoken of 'old friends' here. So, as you start for the door, let me quote back to you a phrase I remember from a night when a young American named Dogan was teaching a young Frenchman named Frajac and a young Guianan colonial by the name of Lammand how to play the American poker. It was the American's phrase, as he counted all the money, that 'loser takes nothing'. You may think you stand complete 'loser' now. But, let me tell you that you still have your head; that, in Guiana, is counted as quite a lot, and is easily lost. You heard me—Beat it!"

Standing motionless, Dogan did nothing but smile at him before he took his glance away and looked at Jules Frajac. In that moment, Frajac's face was gauntly old, the eyes dull, nearly shut, as though against some sharply returned inner pain. But his head and glance came up, met the American's glance, and his voice fell hoarsely through the room:

"You have heard the order! Move, *bagnard!*"

IT WAS already dusk when Dogan left the Depot Penitencier beside the bow-legged and bearded guard who accompanied him with a sourly smelling pipe in one corner of his mouth and a Gras carbine at the "ready" in his hands. Out over the mangroves and bamboos along the river to the west the sun had gone behind a low cloud, and a thick haze lay there, up through which he could hear the sounds of frogs, night birds and insects in a clashing murmur.

Ahead, across the vast, dusty space where he and the guard walked, he could see the low and wide bulk of the Depot de la Transportation, hear the snarled rolling of the drums beating the tattoo and the return to the prison of all the working parties for the night.

At the gate where the sentries stood, the guard halted and at once poked him heavily in the side with the butt of the carbine.

"Take off your hat and lift your arms, *crapaud,*" he said. "You get searched, every time you go in your love-nest here, and lots of the times coming out. Don't cry all night."

At him, his head up, his hands lifted in the ordered position, Dogan smiled, then went on in. Hundreds of convicts from the various work parties in the bush and along the river were coming in through the gate in front of him and behind him, men who were *anciens,* old-timers, here, and did no more than stare dully at him as they passed.

Then, suddenly, he was in the immense main room of the prison, where only faint light or surreptitiously guarded candle flames showed at great intervals, and a smell rose towards his nostrils and throat which was like that of a foully kept stable or a battlefield where many men recently and terribly had died.

In long rows, closely, plank bunks stretched the length and width of the room. Naked and sweaty men sat or lay upon them, eating their night's rations gulpingly from wooden bowls, playing cards, the famous prison games of belote and Marseillaise, or already prone in sleep or exhausted revery.

Through that light, he was unable to see ten feet in front of him, had halted, was on the point of asking his way, when a dull, murmured voice spoke at his shoulder and he turned easily, his hands forming naturally and swiftly into fists as he remembered all he had heard of this place, and what he had seen and partly checked on the prison ship.

Vramy stood beside him there, barefooted, stripped to the waist, his bald head shining with sweat, his breath reeking with *tafia,* the Guianan prison drink —obviously already more than a little drunk.

"So, *sidil*" Vramy told him in the low prison whisper which could not be heard by a man two feet away. "They've been putting you through the squeezer already, huh? *C'est ce gros legume-la,* Lammand. Lammand, the guy who runs this place—every last little stinking, rotten bit of it."

"You know!" Dogan said, strangely angry at the other's knowledge.

"Sure, I know." Vramy was winking at him again, leading him down an aisle between the bunks. "Who in this place doesn't? Lammand's father came out here as a prison official, and stayed to make one of the few fortunes ever struck in this place. And the son's got the old man's style licked a hundred ways. But come on and eat. I got your gear for you, over at the Depot, and there's a bunk you can have. The chow is lousy, but you don't need me to tell you that."

"Wait a minute!" Dogan had the smaller man by the bare and sweat-slippery shoulder, was holding him motionless. "How about this other thing, about this guy we just named? How does he get away with all that?"

The little, stooped and parrot-like man came close up to him, the sagged,

gaunt face solemn now, almost openly strained and alarmed. "Listen, *sidi;* let's miss that one now—just skip right on by it. Tomorrow, when we go out *en curvée,* out to work, you'll see, for yourself, and, if you don't then, maybe that guy Vramy will tell you. But, not here, and not now—like I said. Now, eat your chow, before one of these wolves swipes it right out of your hand. This joint never did make out to be a girls' seminary."

THROUGHOUT that night, Dogan's sleep was a succession of bad dreams in which there was no rest, and where, in all of them, he saw the laughing, grimacing face of Louis Lammand. Toward the dawn, thunder rumbled and stammered heavily. Then rain came smashing down, and it was impossible to sleep any longer there, great gouts of water pouring through the roofing, wetting all of them that lay below.

At half past five, when the drums rolled for them to awaken and arise so that they might wash and dress and drink the sour black coffee before going out to work, there was not a man asleep in the vast room.

At six o'clock the various working *corvées* formed up and staggered forth, the guards hauling the sleepier and slower ones into line, checking them as they went out through the gates. The sun burned smoking against the wet ground outside, and Dogan's eyelids were already puckered up protectively against it as he swung his glance to old Vramy, limping along beside him. "Where are we bound for, soldier?"

One of Vramy's hand went up and out.

"Where we came from yesterday, *sidi*—the river. It's the rainy season, as you found out a little while ago. But that means the river's up, and the *talki-talki* boys, the bush niggers, are floating big rafts of logs down. Mahogany, and rose and log wood all bound for France. It's our job to haul the rafts in alongside and anchor them, then get them ready for when the ships come in. What I'm telling you now is part of what you asked me last night; a lot more you'll see for yourself."

They were at the steep and high bank now, and the first files of the *corvées* were stripping off their jumpers, rolling their ragged trousers high above their knees, skidding down through the clayey mud into the water and splashing out toward the huge rafts of green, water-slimed logs.

"Work for elephants," Dogan said low-voiced to the old man as they plowed out waist deep into the mud-riled stream, his eyes up toward the guards above, who were crouched already under their big black sun umbrellas, their carbines slung forward at their sides.

"Not men's work, anyhow." Vramy answered him. "But that doesn't matter here; we were forgotten as men a long time ago."

All his life Dogan had considered himself to be a strong and a tough man; even through his months of imprisonment before his trial, and afterwards in France and on the way out here, he had employed all sorts of exercises to keep his body in shape. But at half past ten, when the guards seated above called them up out of the water to fall them in for the march back to the prison for breakfast, he heard the bawled orders dimly, was just able to scramble up the bank and find his place in the panting and beslimed lines of men.

The half-loaf of dried bread that was shoved in his hands with the wooden bowl partly full of greasy soup, he forced himself to eat, gagging over it, almost vomiting, knowing that he needed it, must have it.

"You've got the idea," Vramy croaked over at him from his bunk. "Keep at at it. A lot of the lads when they first

come out here can't eat at all, and then it's too late for them to begin."

"We're going back there, now?" Dogan asked him, tasting the salt of his sweat on his lips.

"That's it, *sidi*. All day long. . . ."

Men fainted in the thick, pressing heat on the river that afternoon; one, toppling sidewise, had his leg caught between two *bois-de-rose* logs, screamed dully twice as the logs closed in, crushing the foot and the lower part of the leg to a pulp. The guards came down then, all together, calling sharp orders, shoving with their carbine butts and muzzles, but one convict, a skinny man with long brown hair and a beard, sprang out to the far end of a raft, lifted his hands above his head and shouted in a high voice:

"Don't pretend that you're going to take him to the hospital! Don't give us the gag you're going to waste anesthetic and bandages and clean sheets on him. Throw him in the river right now! Heave him to the sharks!"

A gray-headed guard who wore medal ribbons and war service chevrons came out after him, calling in a low voice, repeating several times: "Forget it, now! Forget it! It was the lad's own fault; he slipped himself!"

But the bearded man laughed shrilly at that and thrust his fingers clawing towards the yellow-hazed sky. "Don't ask me to forget it! Ask Lammand! Ask the senator! It's on his soul!"

A barked, gabbled roar of laughter and comment came from the other convicts then, and what the guard said to the long-haired man Dogan could not hear, but that one was suddenly silent, foolishly grinning, and his hands had fallen at his sides, he stooped low to his work of hauling chain and logs into position again. Vramy, though, shoulder-deep in the water a few feet from the American, turned his dripping head and said in that sudden, controlled whisper of his:

"There's the answer to your biggest question, *sidi*. And the reason they had you in and put the squeezer on you yesterday."

"I was getting," Dogan muttered, "to figure out that answer for myself."

Narrowly staring, he looked at his hands before him on the rough bark of the log, brought them into fists, then relaxed them again, smiling now at all the bad dreams in which he had seen Louis Lammand's face, heard his gayly mocking voice.

IN THE darkness of the great prison room, Dogan saw it but vaguely where he lay stretched upon his bunk; the slow and quite silent gathering and grouping of men in a far corner where two of the small, prohibited slush lamps burned. Vramy, too, he saw, sitting up, had risen and was watching that gradually gathering collection of men, and the old convict's hand had just gone down, brought up from its hidden position against the inner side of his thigh the knife he had mysteriously come into possession of since returning to the prison. "What's it about, old-timer?"

A hissed sound which was a curse came back from Vramy. "Don't let it bother you, *sidi*. That stuff's not for you—not for me."

"What the—" But then he heard the moaning, wavering stream of curses, and recognized the voice. "So," he said. Strangely, he was grinning. "That's our long-haired friend, who made his proclamation of truth out in the river this afternoon."

"*Sidi! Sidi*, cut it out!" Vramy's hands were groping at his shoulders, trying to hold him back. For an instant, very shortly, Dogan turned to look at him. "Sure," he said, "that's just what I'm going to do."

The convicts were packed in rows eight and ten deep about the space where the long-haired man stood and screamed.

Dogan grasped them by the shoulders or by the arms, deftly hauled them aside and back to let him and Vramy get on through. Up against the front rank, he stopped for a moment, staring, silent.

The long-haired, lanky convict was there, nearly down on his knees, gibbering and writhing in agony, trying to back away and out of the grip of the man who faced him inside the ring of bodies. The other was thickly set, tremendous, with the broad and sloped shoulders, the conical skull and undershot jaw of an ape. At the base of his throat, just above the black, thick mat of hair upon his chest, a huge human eye had been tattooed, to glare constantly and fixedly.

In the Legion, and in the prison ship, Dogan had seen one or two other men who had been insane enough or tough enough to sport that design: it represented the "eye of the police"—meant that it would be upon them, the wears of it, all their lives. Also, it meant that the man who dared to have it tattooed upon him was a sworn, outright and habitual criminal and what was known as a *costaud,* one who was madly proud of his history and ability as a killer, was always ready to prove it, at any time.

His lips slightly parted, his nostrils distended, Dogan drew in a long breath, as though on the point of taking a deep and exhilarating dive. He looked aside and around him, at the men nearby. One, who had just finished cursing Vramy for squeezing in against him, wore tatooed proudly upon his shoulder the device and motto of the Legion. Flatly, right upon that design, Dogan slapped him with the back of his hand.

"What's it all about, Legionnaire?"

The wearer of the Legion device shifted the position of his feet, changed the carrying of his hands, then grinned slowly. "That's not my business, *sidi.* But the rough guy, Maxel, says that poor bearded dope there, La Tapouille, stole from him."

"Stole what?"

"Stole nothing, *sidi.* Maxel just wants a few francs."

"For what?"

"Now you're asking me something I can't answer you, *sidi.*"

"So you're yellow, too, hey, Legionnaire?"

"I don't know about that, *sidi;* maybe. But, wait, until Maxel puts those ham-hooks on you."

Dogan still wore his prison jumper. He took it off and dropped it behind him, wiping his hands dry on it first, brushing the rough canvas across his scarred, broad knuckles. Easily, he stepped out two paces from the edge of the tightly pressing ring of bodies.

"Maxel!" he called. "Hey, Maxel! Cut it out!"

Maxel did not look up at him, did not seem to have heard him. Maxel had the bearded man, the one they called La Tapouille, by the hair of the head now, was flailing short and chopping blows at the weakly protected face.

Dogan, walking a little forward on the balls of his feet, came so that he stood where La Tapouille's feet thrashed in agony against the grimed concrete floor.

"Maxel," Dogan repeated, "cut it out!"

Then, reaching out, he caught the semi-conscious body of the beaten man by the feet and legs, hauled and hurled it limply away. "Take me," Dogan said softly, "a man to work on, *costaud.*"

Maxel's eyes were the size and color of metal shoe buttons. They raised and flickered as Maxel laughed. And then, at once, he reached forth and struck. It was the kicking blow of the *savate,* beautifully and almost perfectly executed. It missed Dogan's groin and side by perhaps an inch, caught hard enough to swing him half around. But its execution brought Maxel forward, past the American, and, rising from his crouch, Dogan crossed smoothly in with the left

and then the right, to the jaw both times.

Maxel staggered aside as if weirdly dancing, stopped, stood motionless and gazing for a moment, the blood from his cut mouth making a slow, dark drool down along his jaw. Toward Dogan he spat out the tooth the crossing right had smashed loose, then brought his face into an expression remotely like a smile.

"You want it, do you?" he asked in a voice as shrill as a girl's.

Dogan did not answer that; Maxel was already vaulting through the air at him, his entire body whipped up into a whirling, striking ball of malevolent force, his feet lashing tremendous blows. Dogan got part way back from that, was only struck once, in the shoulder, then knocked nearly flat. He was more than half erect when Maxel, landing from his spring, wheeled in on him.

Dogan knew the man now, understood his style of fighting: that of the Legion and the African penal battalions, learned originally from Arab wrestlers in cheap, back street cafés of the North Coast, improved and widely embroidered upon by Europeans whose one great desire and pride was the ability to smash and kill rapidly any man. Maxel was using an Arab trick now, lunging at him head foremost, attempting to smash down and stun his opponent, catch him in the chest and groin with his bullet-like head or one of his savagely upflinging knees.

Whirling on his heels and aside, Dogan offered him the classic response; clipped up and under with a long, ranging uppercut at the man's shoulder-guarded jaw, felt his blow smack and shock home, saw the other land heavily, sag only slowly erect. Back, his hands out and up in a regulation boxing crouch, Dogan laughed at him.

"You're fighting with the Legion, lug! They've got newer and better tricks than yours in the *Bat' d'Afrique* now!"

Maxel made a shrill whistling sound as he inhaled through his bloodied mouth and nose. His hands and body twitched with a rage that was close to insanity, but the little eyes flickered, and, watching, Dogan knew that the words somehow had penetrated, had aroused the first white-hot stab of fear in the other's brain.

Then, slowly, Dogan raised his voice, putting all the lash of mockery he possessed in it, remembering the dull ache of pain from that fierce head butt which was running down his right side from his shoulder.

"Come on; you asked if I wanted it!"

The beads of bloody moisture shook away from Maxel's lips.

"*Salop'!*" he said. "You'll have it!"

Then, standing up, using the same general European style of fighting posture Dogan did, he came out at him.

Dogan let him chase him, let him run him back and forth from side to side, even let him hit him four or five times, on the shoulders, the guarding fore-arms and the biceps. Maxel tried to butt him in the throat with a rapidly revolved elbow-point once, and, spinning sidewise, tried to bring his knee cracking up. It was that which Dogan had been waiting for: his moment. Then, he straightened Maxel up and out: let go the hooked left which snapped back the grimacing and bloody, concave face, the right which started nearly at his knee, caught underneath the heavy jaw-point and sent the man in a backward parabolic dive which landed him flat upon his shoulders.

How Maxel got up from there Dogan did not know. He got up three times, blindly attempting to kick, gouge and kill. Dogan hit him as he would a target on the range, in utter calmness and with precision, closing the eyes, ripping the mouth, the ears and nose, sending the man down, and down again.

He had struck the third blow, was bent to watch Maxel, when he heard the fluttered kind of cry behind him, and swung, swerving aside in knowledge. But

the man who had slid forward into the ring behind him was convulsively releasing the knife he held in his fingers, and the knife imbedded between his shoulders stood sharply quivering up. Then Vramy was there, walking crookedly on the sides of his bare, rheumatic feet, his hands empty, an almost sheepish kind of grin pulling down the corners of his wide mouth.

"A friend, *sidi,*" Vramy said. "A friend of Maxel's, who thought his pal might need help—some help like a knife. Me? I don't know. It might have been that big Legionnaire who told me that guy was a friend of Maxel's; all I saw was this mug doing a slide out here on his face."

THE former Legionnaire was forward from the roughly formed and shouting ring of bodies now also. He was grinning slightly as he spoke.

"You were quick, *sidi,* quicker than I thought. That's a nice job."

Mildly, Dogan cursed him and Vramy.

"It isn't over yet," he told them. "That just begins it. Are there any other guys here out of the Legion?"

"Sure, five or six."

"All right, get them, and get Maxel. Take him over there in a corner. I want to talk to him. Right away. Understood?"

They took Maxel and dumped him on a bunk in a corner, washed his face off with water mixed with salt until his eyes sagged open. He struggled to fight and strike as soon as consciousness came in on him and Yerlot, the big Legionnaire, had to slam his head from side to side with open-handed blows half a dozen times before he sat slumped still up against the wall.

"You know me?" Dogan asked him then.

"I know you; so," Maxel said. "And I've had enough."

"I was going to ask you that," Dogan told him. "Now, I don't have to. So I'm going to ask you this: Why did you beat up that poor punk?"

"He stole, *sidi;* he swiped—" Maxel stopped, trying to draw his hands up toward his face, looking obliquely into Dogan's face, and past him, at the faces of Vramy and of Yerlot and the other old soldiers of the Legion there.

"All right—*que vat*—he didn't steal."

'That's it; that's better." Dogan's voice had a nearly gentle quality about it now. "But, today, that poor swab went half out of his head out in the river, and called out a certain guy's name. Lammand's name. I know; I was there, and saw the guard talking to him, piping him down. But, the guard wasn't going to sock that guy right there in public, was he, Maxel? And make a stink where somebody from the town, some civilian, might see it and hear it? No, it was much better that you should draw a few francs in lousy pay from Lammand right here, in the jug, and beat the head off that swab—just as a lesson to him, and to all the other mugs in the prison as to who runs the place, and when and how a man should keep his mouth shut. Answer that, rough guy!"

Maxel stirred there where they held him. Cords stood out on his neck and the flat slope of his forehead. He panted with a sort of rasped, choking sound before he was able to speak:

"Listen, you, can put the squeezer on me, but—"

"Wait a minute, *sidi.*" It was little Vramy, and in his long-fingered hands he held a knife very much like the one taken from the back of the dead man a little while ago. "Let me talk to this tomato, *n'est-ce-pas?*" Vramy shrugged a shoulder up. "He knows me; he knew me when I was here before. He's wise to the fact that I'm wise to him. Hey, Maxel?"

Leaning a bit forward, Vramy brought the edge of the knife blade delicately

against the pulsant cords of Maxel's throat.

"Take the sticker away," Maxel told him harshly.

"After," Vramy said. "First, the *sidi* and all us guys want to hear you make a little music. Don't be scared—you can talk right up; you know as well as I do that the guards got orders from 'up the street' to all turn deaf tonight, while you did your little job in here. They wouldn't even mind seeing a couple of stiffs tossed out from under the bunks in the morning. But. you work for Lammand, and that's what the *sidi* wants to know. You, and almost every guy in this place work for him. You get paid, though; you keep us poor slobs in line.

"You, and some of your buddies, like the one who got jabbed in the satchel tonight, grab a few francs a month from Lammand to keep us going—to get the work out of us. Lammand has all those contracts for the lumber in the river, and for the new buildings in the town; he's making a fortune out of us, and out of our sweat. He gets his contracts done for almost nothing—for the few francs he greases you and your *costaud* pals, while he keeps the prison officials scared back with the stuff he's got on them, the crooked rackets they run in selling our regular rations to the up-river niggers, faking the death lists, keeping guys 'alive' who have been dead and buried out in the bamboos for years.

"You know Lammand's the senator from here; you know the guy will squeal in France unless the prison big shots come on the line for him and his racket. You think you're safe, even here, you thick lug, among us—the guys they've forgotten in France, the guys who are dying every day, in a hospital where the doctors haven't got any decent medicine and equipment, where we're run in to die after working our hearts out for your boss, Lammand, in the sun all day, on rations that wouldn't keep a small dog alive. And so you see the knife, sweetheart, and you—"

"All right, *mon vieux.*" Quietly, reaching over, Dogan took the knife. "You've said a lot, and what we want now is our playmate here to answer it. If he dies, it won't be with this, but by the 'widow', the guillotine. *Quoi donc,* Maxel? Do you want to speak now, or shall I let all these boys soil their hands on you?"

Maxel had his lips parted to shout, or scream in warning to the rest of the prison and the guards when, stepping forward, Yerlat, the Legionnaire, slammed his head back against the planks with a blow which started shoulder high:

"You heard the *sidi,* rat! Speak up!"

The words from Maxel came low at first. and thickly, then more clearly, rapidly:

"Yes, it is Lammand. He runs all this place. He has it by the throat. He's got them all frightened, or in with him. It's been all his way ever since the Governor got sick and went back last year, and this one, Frajac, was left as lieutenant-governor in charge. But Frajac—"

Dogan was bending down, his fingers hard in against Maxel's strained biceps.

"How about Frajac? Is he in the thing with Lammand?"

Turning his head, Maxel tried to smile.

"No, that Frajac is just a fool—a weak, honest slob. He knows what is wrong, and, more than once, he's tried to stay it, but Lammand and the others are too strong for him. He's just one guy against all of them, and, as Lammand has shown him, a lot of this stuff has been going on out here long before his or Lammand's time."

"Good." Dogan had straightened up and back. "You know me now, Maxel. You know us now, and what we can do. You can get out of here, right tonight. I want you to see Frajac—for me. I want you to tell Frajac I sent you, and that I want to see him, as soon as I can.

If not, one of us will find you, or all of us. *Tu sais,* Maxel. I've seen a lot of lugs like you, and all of them were glad to die quick. Get up out of here now, and on your way!"

Maxel stood staggering, gaping, swabbing with twisted fingers at his ribboned and bruised face.

"Right now?" he asked.

"Right now," Dogan told him quietly. "And to Frajac. You're working for me now—not for Lammand." Dogan's hand went out, took the knife up from his belt, held it over. "Here; this is how little I'm afraid of you, and Lammand, and how much I trust you, now. You'll probably need it, with what some of these guys around here think of you. But, don't let me have to take it from you again; I'll carve initials with it, the next time."

JULES FRAJAC had a garden in back of the house which he had come to occupy during his stay in Saint Laurant. There were a small fountain and a rough stone basin toward the center of the lawn, and roses, hibiscus, bougainevillea, lime and mango, lemon and orange trees grew there. In the soft, rain-cooled night after the fierce white parching of the day's passage, it was a deeply peaceful and a lovely place.

Michael Dogan, who had experienced no peace and seen no beauty for many months, and had just finished his second day of toil in the river after a sleepless night, was all but lulled into a sensation of quietude, sitting there in the broad canvas deck chair on the small stone terrace of the house beside Jules Frajac, the man who had been one of the two closest companions of his entire life. But the other's nervousness, the manner in which he sat rigidly on the edge of his chair, and the memories, the vast, new and terrible knowledge he, Dogan, held in his brain, brought the words fiercely and almost instantly from him:

"You know why I sent him—Maxel?"

Jules Frajac did not turn from his position in the chair, seemed to stare yet out into the fragilely shadowed garden, or up at the palely star-marked sky. "No, I don't; I'm afraid that you will have to tell me."

Dogan swung where he sat and gazed fully at him, his bruised and battered hands held strongly between his knees.

"You know, though, that Maxel and perhaps twenty men like him among the convicts work for Louis Lammand. You know that, obviously, Maxel must have admitted to me his connection with Lammand, or he would not have come here to you at my order. You know, then, from that, that I understand practically fully now all the rotten, murderous crookedness that has been going on here in the prisons. You must be aware that I understand that Lammand runs all this place, holds and controls it crookedly, and to his personal ends. Even, you must think that I believe you to be a murderous, callous crook along with Lammand."

"You have learned a great deal very fast," Jules Frajac said then. "What more can I tell you, or do you want to say?"

"A lot of things!" Michael Dogan said in that hoarse, hard undertone. "Me—I'm through; I went my own way, lived my own life, took the gambles the way I saw them, and lost them. That's all; that lets me out. It's like Louis Lammand said the other day: 'loser takes nothing'. I'm not asking anything for myself; it's only for these other poor swabs here. And it's guys like you—the big officials—who are as much to blame as Lammand. He's only taken advantage of a lousily corrupt system."

Dogan let his voice subside there, sat in silence, fingering tightly the stub of the cigarette Frajac had given him when he had come here for a few minutes ago. Then, beside him, in a voice just beyond a whisper, the other man said:

"You are telling me all the things which I have told myself ever since I have been here. And, I admit all of them. But, you would have me change the system? You believe that I can?"

"You can—sure."

"But, you know, you have just all but said, that corruption always has gone on here, goes on in all colonies, most governments, anywhere."

From his chair Michael Dogan got up straightly, to hurl his cigarette stub far across the lawn. "You," he said distinctly, "are afraid of Lammand—and what he can do to you, and your fine old family name. You're afraid of the power he's got in France, and the stink he can raise there. Why, you—" Violently, fully, he cursed the other man. "You fought beside me for four years, and now—"

"Now you think I'm yellow. And you don't remember that, if you go on like this, you will very probably lose what is left of your freedom, your health—most likely your life, too. Beyond that, though, if Lammand fulfills the contracts he's working on now, he will leave here for good, never come back to Guiana again, and his personal—direction —of the system will be over with. He will not ever come back here."

"Unless," Michael Dogan said, "they send him back with a number stamped on his chest. What he's doing here now is crooked as hell, and you know it. How about it? Answer me that!"

Jules Frajac rose in his chair to answer him, had turned and lifted his head, when, at the far end of the garden, the gate latch clicked and Louis Lammand stood there, the vagueness of the starlight upon his strong, staring face and mirroring up into his eyes from his immaculate shirt front. He was the one to speak; they stood there waiting for him until he had come right up to them. He bowed then to Jules Frajac, wheeled slowly and gave his firmly mocking smile to Dogan.

"I heard that the lieutenant-governor had a caller," he said to the American. "One of the men who works for me came and told me that, and about a fight last night in the prison. But, you must not mind some small surprise on my part at finding you here."

"No, I don't." Dogan's voice was instant, ragged with rage. "But, mind this, big boy: I'm wise—wise to all this show. And, unless it stops, stops right away, you'll find all the cards falling against you."

"You mean?" Lammand said.

"I mean this, guy. You've got contracts in this town worth millions of francs to you. You've got lumber lying in the river, you've got crude rubber coming in out of the bush, you've got buildings being rebuilt here, all of which are handled or to be handled by prison labor for you.

"Well, unless better conditions are put in force in the prisons at once: full rations, and much better ones, much better sanitation in the prisons, greatly improved medical service and supplies in the hospitals—you'll very suddenly find these thousands of poor prison mugs working for you now, doing no work at all. You'll find those contracts which you think are going to make you rich enough to quit Guiana forever no more good than to blow your nose on. And that the name of Louis Lammand, who started out as a pretty good guy, will end up as the biggest laugh in the box from Panama to Para—even back to Paris."

Louis Lammand smiled as he spoke. "I remember you now," he said. "I remember you very well; you were always quick to get into trouble, but always awfully slow in getting out of it. But, the kind of thing you just got through talking about would make a whole lot more trouble than you can stand right now, *mon ancien ami*."

"Nuts to you," Michael Dogan said in English. "I'll swap your trouble for

my own any day. And, unless you come on the line right away, yours'll begin damn soon now, tonight."

Louis Lammand took out his flat cigrette case, gave himself a cigarette, clicked his lighter on, clicked it off, then spoke to Jules Frajac:

"I don't think you need any better witnesses to what this man has just said than myself and yourself. Do you want to call a guard for him now, or shall I have my servants throw him out?"

"If you please," Jules Frajac's voice was a muted murmur, "I shall handle this myself." Then, squarely, he gazed into Dogan's eyes. "I am very sorry, but you must go now. And I must ask you to remember all that I told you upon your first day here. Another wild, irregular move faintly like this will mean that you shall be sent into solitary confinement. This situation, if there is a situation such as you have attempted to describe to me, must be handled by myself alone. You will report immediately to the guard at the gate."

Michael Dogan stood still for a moment, looking about him at the softly fragrant and lovely garden, then at the faces of the two carefully groomed and alertly motionless men before him. "All right," he said, nodding to both of them. "But, I'm going to tell you this now—all three of us will be in the pay-off on this; not one of us, all of us. So long!"

THE odd part of it, even to Dogan, who had planned and fought bitterly and constantly for it to be brought into execution, was its quietness. It was a mutiny, but there had never been another mutiny like it in the prison colony of Guiana, and very probably nowhere else in the world.

In the mornings of the first few days after Dogan had finally started it going, when the drums rolled, calling them the prisoners forth to work, they rose calmly, formed into their usual columns, turned out to the tasks assigned to them. But there, in the river about the log rafts, or in the town where they mixed lime and cement and carried stone or stowed raw rubber, every man of them in prison uniform slowed at his task, retarded his individual work gradually, until his performance, his production, was one-third or one-fourth of what it had been before that night Dogan had gone to see Jules Frajac and there met Louis Lammand.

During the first and second days, the watchful, nervous guards had raged and struck, but, so far, it was not any one man they could fasten upon, or a score or a hundred; it was three thousand men—remembering the promises Dogan had made to them and the way he had beaten down and all but killed Maxel, Lammand's leading agent of terror right within the prisons—who smoothly taunted their white-uniformed captors, and did it with perfect coordination, in a complete body, making all the usual signs of labor, but performing only a shadowy mockery of it.

After the second day, looking up from where he seemed to work in the river with the others of the logging gangs, Dogan saw a group of guards on the bank above setting in place a Vickers machine-gun, with Louis Lammand directing them. It was Dogan's tremendous desire to laugh then, to call jeeringly out at Lammand, but he quelled it, feeling the tensely nervous glances of the other prisoners on his face, knowing once again the strain of the immense burden they had placed upon him.

But the sight of that machine-gun, all the significance behind its being positioned there, and the fact that Louis Lammand personally had come to see the gun set up, strengthened and reassured Dogan, kept him back from open laughter and mockery, allowed him the

hope he had been fighting for so dimly and so long.

Near him, Vramy stood, performing a number of clever and wholly ineffectual gestures in the general fashion of making fast a raft chain. In the sibilant prison whisper he had learned from him, Dogan said:

"We seem to be winning a bit, *mon gars*. They're getting afraid; he, Lammand, is."

His lips and head unmoving, Vramy told him, "They should be, *sidi*. He's got to meet all his contracts by the end of the month, or they kick right back in his face. But, tonight, and from tonight on, watch yourself. Lammand isn't the one to quit so easy and so soon; he's the last one to do that—the dirty twist! This machine-gun business is probably just a gag. He must hate your guts so much, he'd like to tear 'em out with his hands."

"I need exercise," Dogan told him, grinning just a little bit.

"But not a sticker through the basket, or a long piece in solitary out on the island, just when we're on our way to win. But, shall I tip the word to the others, what you just told me?"

"Sure; tip them all. Tell them machine-gunned dead men don't move logs and rubber and stone."

"But a contract's still a contract."

Pleasantly, Vramy spat, and then in the same motionless style he had used with Dogan, spoke whisperingly to the feebly moving men on his other side.

THE trouble started right at the gates of the prison that night, as Dogan and the members of his *corvée* were coming back in at the end of the day. One by one, in the usual manner, the convicts were stopping at the gates, raising their straw hats from their heads, lifting their arms and hands up to be searched by the guards. Vramy had been passed through, was going on in, and Yerlot, the big ex-soldier of the Legion, was stepping up to take Dogan's place as that man finished, when Guinard, the cow-faced head keeper, leaned forth and without warning hit Dogan fully in the face.

He knocked the American caroming back and down, followed after him, kicked him rolling over twice. Then, standing above him, his big Ruby revolver in his hand, his boot toe drawn back for another cracking blow, he said hoarsely:

"I heard you, swine! For days, you've been whispering names and insults at me as you've been passed in. Now is the last night; say them now—get up and say them clearly out!"

Dogan lay very still, catching back his breath and his senses, bringing the fierce grip of his will into control over his anger and his hatred. Softly, he said:

"I've said nothin, *m'sieur*. You've got me wrong; I haven't said a word."

But Guinard had not listened to that; it was not his role to listen. He was grasping down for the American's throat, yanking him up to his feet, then kicking at his ankles and shins with his huge, hobbed boots.

"Say it now!" he ordered Dogan in a raging voice. "Repeat it, right here! Say it to me as a man—not as a keeper, and I'll fight you man to man. Or would you like all your playmates here to know that you really are yellow-backed?"

"Strike you;" Dogan said the words quite slowly, "and then have you blow my head off—for striking a guard. Sure, I'm yellow, Guinard."

In his hairy hand, Guinard's revolver was lifting, swinging around squarely. But he could not take his eyes from Dogan's eyes, and the staring glances of all the other guards behind were also on that revolver and his convulsively gripping hand.

The knife which killed him Guinard never saw. It was thrown underhand

and with extreme, certain swiftness by one of the convicts in that line. Guinard only heard it—the small, flute-like drumming sound it made through the air. He had time to swing part way aside and attempt to obey his orders, pull the trigger of his revolver and shoot Dogan down, but that flipping blade was in his throat first.

He fell as though very tired or sleepy, choking a little bit, his revolver discharging twice in the dust before he lay still. Then, at once, Vramy's voice licked in above those sounds of Guinard's dying, cracked in warning at the other guards:

"Stand still, you! Keep your hands up! Go after the American, or any of us, and you'll get what Guinard got! He asked for that—and he was paid for it. You know that; Lammand paid him. Or go ahead and kill a couple of us! Nine hundred of us will kick your faces in! Come on, *sidi;* these other lugs weren't in on the deal with Guinard. They're just too dumb to be hired by Lammand. Come on! We all go inside!"

They went in, all of them, feeling and obeying the electric command in the little old man's voice and manner, the complete calm and sureness of Dogan's quiet, instant movement on toward the inner gate and the interior of the prison. They strode right past the other guards, over and around Guinard's hunched body; those coming after, led by Yerlot, even smoothly raised their hats and hands and arms, as though the group of gaping, dull-faced guards there might now take the trouble to inspect them.

Inside, standing upon the first bunk he reached, Yerlot and Vramy and the other trusted leaders closed in about him, a vague, surging mass of faces and shouting figures beyond him in the room, Dogan talked to them. He told them to be quiet, to hang on now. This, he said to them, was the beginning of the end, one way or the other:

"This can't go on. You know that. Tomorrow night, by the latest, we've got to start working for that guy, Lammand, or he never will meet his contracts. It's just until then that we've got to stick—keep calm. But, if we break now, if he can get his hands on a few of us for some offense or another, he'll win, and we'll lose, and the whole lousy business will be worse than ever. So, pipe down. Stop yelling, and baiting that yellow pack of swabs out there who call themselves guards. Go draw you chow; it's ready!"

He had his own wooden bowl in his hands, filled with the evening's rice and soup, was going back towards his bunk with it, Vramy and Yerlot behind him, when he saw Maxel. Maxel was walking down the aisles between the bunks, coming toward him. Upon the planks of his bunk, Dogan carefully put his food bowl down, stood wide-legged and ready, waiting, hissing out a warning to the ex-Legionnaire and Vramy to let him be, alone, to handle this.

Maxel was very drunk, had just pitched an empty *tafia* bottle from him. His peculiarly small eyes contained a dull, red gleam of insanity and reasonless rage. Sweat ran in bright marks down around his eye sockets and past his grimacing, moving mouth, dripped from his chin down over the gaudily tattooed "eye of the police", and he mumbled to himself as he walked, did not look up or stop that deep gabbling until Dogan called sharply to him:

"What do you want, Maxel?"

"You!" Maxel said, and sprang at him, hauling at the knife hidden in the back of his waistband.

It was narrow there between the rows of bunks. Dogan had very little space in which to move, and very little time. But both his hands, cupping smoothly up, caught Maxel's knife arm, used it as a lever, and he sent his knee stabbing up and under the man's other arm at the pit of the stomach.

In the quick shock of the pain from

that squarely caught blow, Maxel forgot the knife, if only for an instant. He tried to drive his free hand in at Dogan's throat or face, and Dogan got him, caught him off balance, turned him just a bit more, then, one hand coming from the straining knife arm, drove his fingers, stiffly distended, right into Maxel's eyes.

The man screamed a nearly equine sound of agony. His body thrashed against Dogan's body, convulsed but locked in pain. He went aside, and back, up against the knee-high bunk on which Vramy had just crouched. Then, Dogan measured him and struck him with a stiff and snapping blow to the side of the jaw. The bunk planks whimpered as Maxel's great weight came against them, then skidded over them, his head, hands and legs whirling in the air like the parts of some vast and fantastic top.

He was slumped in the aisle on the other side, half supine and part conscious, when Dogan came over the bunk at him. Dogan struck as he jumped, lashing the eyes and the mouth, smacking the knife away, bringing one knee and thigh pinning down on that arm and hand.

The desire to kill, the consuming, searing eagerness to have this man's life, was enormous in him then, licked back everything else in his brain and consciousness, and his fingers were deep in against the fluttering throat cords when Vramy came and grasped at his wrists, knelt down and stared fully into his face, spoke to him very slowly in a clear and reasoning voice. "No, *sidi*," Vramy told him. "Not that. Don't kill him. You hear me, *sidi*? Don't kill him!"

A sickness of revulsion, of ebbing rage, choked Dogan, made it impossible for him to speak for several minutes. Then the words dragged dimly from him.

"Why not?" he asked. "If I don't, Lammand will, now. He's gone too far; death's the only out for him."

"Sure; sure." Vramy spoke almost as though to a child, or to a drunken man. "But, let him talk first, hey, let him tell us what he knows. Get up now, *sidi;* go over there and stretch out on your bunk. Let Yerlot and me bring this ape to, and talk to him."

DOGAN lay prone upon the bunk, one numbed, aching arm flung carelessly half across his food bowl. Unclear and odd images ran staggering through his brain; his breathing, the pounding of his blood, made a blurring and ragged rhythm in his ears, through which he heard only distantly and not at all distinctly what these other men around him did and said. They had revived Maxel, he knew; he had heard Vramy's voice, and Yerlot's, now Maxel's, thick, stuttering, dully heavy:

"Go ahead, Vramy. You got the sticker."

"Me?" Vramy's voice was shrill, keenly lifted above the surf-like roaring of the voices of all the other men beyond. "No, not now, sweetheart. I'm a little late for that pleasure. I'll let Lammand do it, or the boy who runs the guillotine. The sharks will sure get sick on you, *mon beau.* But, come on; spill it! Why—after the American showed you, only the other night, that you couldn't beat him to it in a thousand years. What's got you, dummy?"

What Maxel said in answer then, Dogan did not hear, for a time was unable to sustain any coherent thought; the throbbing pulse of the pain and weariness through his own body was too great, and Maxel's voice only a low, cluttering collection of gutturals. But, suddenly, it rose, became sharp, and the other men, those who had come forward from all over the prison room to press in behind Vramy and Yerlot, were absolutely silent.

"He promised me just the one thing: two more years out there in solitary, on

the island. In the 'silence', where you sit, and look at the walls, and the cockroaches, and you—"

Maxel's words were gone away in a kind of panted gasping.

"I know." There was an astonishing gravity and a gentleness in Vramy's words. "They've had me there, too, *ancien*. The knife's better than that."

"Give me the knife, then!" Maxel's voice was strong, a scream. "Give me that, or the other."

"No, not the knife, Maxel." Vramy was on his feet, moving, and his voice came closer, louder to Dogan. "You've asked for what you're getting, but not the American, or me, is going to take the rap for a knife through you. The other, though, that's nice; that's quick, and dainty, huh, Maxel?"

Dogan was erect on his bunk, rising up from it when Vramy came slowly sidling through the ranks of the gaping convicts towards him."

"You sit still, *sidi,*" Vramy said to him at once. "You've had your show."

Lithely, as he had spoken, Vramy's gnarled, puffed hands had gone down and lifted up the bowl holding the American's rations, and now, rapidly, he was backing off from Dogan, the bowl carefully guarded by his bent arms. "This is only a little favor I'm doing for our pal, Maxel. The last favor I'll ever do for him, if what he says—"

Across the crowd, the matted heads and wild faces, Dogan could see Maxel for a moment. The twitching began with Maxel's lips, then encompassed his whole body. Words which were shredded out of incoherence burbled and choked in his throat, and his head was slack, down on his chest, his shoulders and body sagged, his eyes dully unseeing. He had seen, remembered Dogan with shocking swiftness, men who were sentenced to die standing just like that before the execution squad. The words broke strongly in his throat:

"Hey, Vramy! Cut it out! Come back here! Let go of that!"

But, if he heard him, Vramy did not stop, and the mass of men was galvanically moving, trying to crowd even more closely in, about Maxel, and where Vramy stood beside Maxel now, the food bowl holding the rations that the guards had doled out for him, Dogan, upheld in his hands.

Then Dogan lost sight of both of them, of Vramy, calm, smiling and commanding, and of Maxel's face and eyes, pooled with a sort of wild terror, or joy. Dogan struck the men who stood before him, ripped them back, yelling hoarsely at them to let him through.

Some few of them understood him, obeyed and stood a little aside, but the bowl in Vramy's hands was empty when he saw it again, and Maxel was standing stiffly, staring at all of them, morsels of the soup-sticky rice on his lips still, that smile of terror and of joy in his eyes.

But the swift action of the poison in the food must have been playing up through all his blood to his heart and brain, for he turned sidewise from them in the little free space, took a step or so, choked calling out, and tipped forward rigidly in death.

"*Guari,*" Vramy said in the silence that lasted while Yerlot made room for the body to slide fully down. "Bush nigger poison. That was going to be Lammand's gift of the day to you, *sidi*. It's all right; Maxel wanted it. That's what he asked me for. Out on Ile Joseph, in solitary, a lot of the guys try to bump themselves off, and he would've tried that, and the guards always stop them. If us birds here hadn't ripped him up into chunks first. It was the only out for Maxel, and he knew it, and it was the only out for us."

Dogan waited for a moment before he spoke, so that the words might sound strongly calm when he said them:

"I'm running this job, old-timer. I've

run it right up to here. You should have let me handle this. I began all this business; got you guys into it."

Vramy smiled at him, saying a grunting curse. Then, flickering in a weird smile of acknowledgement, he let his eyes run over the faces of the men ringed thickly and as yet silently behind.

"No, *sidi;* you had the guts, and the brains, to show us what to do. But, that's all over now. Lammand's out to get you; he knows that if he stops you, he stops all this show, and the brains, the heart will go out of it, and he'll have us right back, and worse, than we were before. So, we're not going to take any more of that. We're not going to stand around and see you paying the freight for all of us. We're going to bust to hell and gone out of here—right now—tonight. Those guards are yellow, and scared. To stop us, before we get and kick Lammand's ribs to his ears, they'll have to cable for soldiers from Martinique. And you—"

Dogan started the blow for the little man's jaw with all the veiled swiftness of motion he possessed, but Vramy was sidewise and back from him, laughing a little wryly, and men from the thick wall of bodies behind had his arms, were grunting apologetically.

"You see, *sidi?*" Vramy asked of him. "It's not just me; it's all the lads. You duck Maxel, twice, you duck Guinard, you duck a dose of poison, just by luck. What the hell, give him time, and Lammand can hire a thousand guys and find a hundred poisons. Come on. We're going out of here!"

They roared then, they made a thunder of dissonant and bestial, eager sound which was like nothing else Dogan had ever before heard. Past him and around him, they moved in every direction and every fashion. Some of them sang, or screamed, or wept, or constantly called curses, tearing at the wooden bunks, ripping the heavy planks away, smashing them into clubs for the guards or pry-bars for the windows. Through the room they raged like a sea, carrying him finally with them, thrusting him up in the front wave, where it coiled and recoiled smashing against the wide, steel-barred caging which penned them off from the first of the inner gates.

There were guards beyond, as dim and unreal as phantoms in their white uniforms against the far shadows, as yet making no movement and little sound, that lost and unreckoned upon the surf of sound from within the bars. The steel was being twisted, flung back aside by sheer weight and Vramy was half way out, and through, when the beam of whitely piercing light flicked stabbing in upon them.

IT CAME from a military searchlight set in the middle of the opened outer gate, and its beam against their faces and eyes was as shocking and startling as a blow. Strangely, their frantic movement stopped there, and they stood still, blinking against its brilliance, growling and cursing, but somehow made self-conscious and chastened, dropping back from the bars, trying to get away from the center of the beam.

Lammand, Dogan thought, attempting to stare along the flaring funnel of light, Lammand must have been the one to figure this out. Then Dogan's jaws grew taut, and he stood straighter there. In from the further gate, breaking away from the section or so of negro colonial infantry which was grouped behind the officer handling the searchlight, Lammand was advancing forward through the gates, a *chaut-chaut* machine-gun held loosely in one arm, but with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and Jules Frajac stiffly striding at his shoulder.

Lammand halted only when he was within three or four feet of the barred cage, almost within reaching distance of

the men inside. He stood exactly before Michael Dogan, turned first to say a sentence over his shoulder to Jules Frajac before he chose to speak to the American:

"This is your idea?"

"You give it a name," Dogan told him.

Lammand smiled. "It's Frajac who asked me to come here—like this. Frajac says he wants me to make peace; that he knows I can."

"So you come to me," Dogan said. But then he stared at Jules Frajac. "You know the only kind of 'peace' I'll listen to. Is that the kind you've got Lammand to offer?"

Jules Frajac moved his lips, lifted one hand a little from his side. "Yes. He asked me to come here, with him, after my insistence that some sort of settlement be made between you."

"So," Michael Dogan said. "And before a lot of hell broke loose around your heads, his head—and his contracts fizzed out in his hands. But, this is no place to talk terms."

Faintly, Louis Lammand offered him a smile. "I told Frajac you'd say that," he said. "And I'm forced to admit that this isn't the place to do it. But, Frajac's offered us his house to talk in, and himself as mediator between us, witness to what we agree."

"Wait a minute!" Inside the bars, Dogan was turning around, gazing keenly at Vramy, Yerlot and all the others. "You lads are in this with me. Do you trust me to make the pay-off for you?"

"Sure," little Vramy's voice cackled up, "we trust you, *sidi*. But not that big rat, Lammand. Listen, M'sieur Frajac;" Vramy worked along inside the bars until he stood right before Frajac, "if anything happens to the American while he's out with you, the only work done around here for a while will be burying dead men, because we'll come after Lammand first, then you, and every other guy in uniform outside the walls. Get that? We don't care: our lives don't mean anything to us any more, if you pull a fast one on the American, or don't give him what we want, the last thing we'll do is have a paper-chase with you and Lammand."

"Yes." The word came after a full minute of silence from Frajac. "I understand. And you have my word, my personal word for his honest treatment and safe return to you."

"All right!" Vramy barked at him. "Get going with him, then!"

It was Frajac who stepped forward and opened the gate in the cage and let Michael Dogan out, Frajac who, silently, turned and led the American and Louis Lammand from the prison and out along the Rue de la Republique through the soft darkness to his house. He did not speak, and the two tautly watchful men behind him were wordless until they had entered into his living room and he had flicked on the desk light there.

Then he pulled a heavy chair to him, slid into it, mutely pointed to other chairs in the room. Louis Lammand smiled at him, from him to Michael Dogan. "All right," he said at once in his vibrantly controlled voice, "let's say you've won. Let's say you know too much, and unless some real work is done on these jobs of mine, all my contracts will be held against me. What do you want? How much?"

Slowly, and softly, Michael Dogan said, "Two hundred and fifty thousand francs. That will get the right kind of medicine in here, fix up the hospital with decent equipment, get good food for the men, adequate sanitation for the prisons—all the stuff this place needs."

"That's all, then?" Louis Lammand asked quietly.

"That's it, and only a small piece of what you'll make out of us, when your contracts go through, and you leave here for good."

"You've got it all figured out pretty

neatly," Louis Lammand said. "You're smarter than I thought, American. But, how do you want the money, and when?"

"Right now. In cash. That's the only way you can square this deal."

Louis Lammand laughed at him. "You want," he said, "to have me, the senator from this place, give you my personal check for two hundred and fifty thousand francs? And then what the hell would you do about cashing it, and using it?"

"No." Michael Dogan was looking past him, and at Frajac, seated in a position like that of one of ease in the chair beside the desk. "You can make your draft out to Frajac, here. All he has to give me is a receipt, and his word that the money will be used the right way. I've still got trust in him, if not in you. Once Frajac's got the draft, and I've got the receipt from him, I'll tell them in the prisons, and tomorrow morning you'll start getting your work done."

"I wish I could thank you," Louis Lammand said, his eyes darkly narrowed. But from inside his tunic he had drawn a check book, was lifting up a pen from the desk stand. He wrote swiftly, slashing the letters in thick, wide strokes, the sum, and Jules Frajac's name, then his own signature. "Here!" He shoved it across the desk blotter to Frajac. "You've heard him!"

"Yes." Frajac's voice was very low. "But, I want you to understand that I don't at all like the way this thing is being done."

"I understand a lot of things," Lammand said, unsmiling. "Give this fellow his receipt now, and a pat on the head, and tell him to get on his way!"

A flush of color swept the narrow length of Frajac's face. He half rose from his chair.

"You forget," he said to Louis Lammand in a hoarse voice, "that I am the senior official here."

Louis Lammand laughed briefly, taking his cigarette case out into his hands. "You make it hard for me to remember. . . . Go on, write the receipt he wants!"

Dogan folded the slip of paper tightly when Frajac had signed it and held it up to him, made a small, hard lump of it, thrust it securely down inside his jumper collar.

"Enough?" Louis Lammand asked of him, his eyes wrenching up from Frajac's face.

"Almost enough," Dogan said to him. "There's just one more thing I would like: a good, square poke at your jaw."

Louis Lammand stood for a moment with his hands on his hips looking fully into the other's eyes. "Wouldn't it be funny," he asked him then, "if I gave you that—after giving you all this?"

"I'll try to laugh at that some time," Dogan said softly; he was already in motion toward the door, the other two silent, motionless behind him in their locked gazing.

There were many patrols in the streets when he came forth there, guards walking in pairs, their white uniforms and helmets glinting in the moonlight, and files of negro soldiers in bulky khaki and clumping, clumsy field boots, their rifles sloped from their shoulders by the sling-straps.

AT A steady trot, keeping to the middle of the street, he started to run past those men, down the dusty way, willing to get back in the prison now, eager to be with the men he considered to be friends and mates, that strange and tragic conglomerate who had fought with him, and won with him. He was past the Depot Penitencier and heading across the open space toward the main prison when the two guards stepped forth and stopped him.

He knew neither of them, he saw at once, marking the bearded, fever-sallowed faces and the savagely watching

eyes. These were men just transferred in from Cayenne, or from one of the bush camps out at St. Jean or Charvein.

"Where you running, to, mug?" the taller of them said, his hand gone down in a clamping motion towards his revolver butt.

"The jug," began Dogan, but then knew enough not to speak, but only to run.

They were both upon him at once, the smaller man grappling at his arms and legs in a rude kind of tackle, the one who had drawn his revolver clubbing with it at his head. Whirling, he broke free from the smaller man's tackle, had his body poised to strike protectively at the other, when the Ruby revolver barrel caught him smacking across the forehead, knocked him down and almost out.

They leapt upon him in the dust then, jammed their knees in against his shoulders and his groins, hammered his head back and forth until his mouth was open, then shoved the pieces of wood and the cloth of the gag in against his teeth and tongue.

He kicked and struck when they lifted him up, but they were in possession of his arms now, and heavily spurned his bare feet with their steel-hobbed boots. When they began to walk with him back around the shadowed rear of the Depot Penitencier and out towards the first patches of the bamboos and the edge of the bush, he ceased fighting against them and walked quietly, saving his strength, regaining his wind. Lammand, he knew now, would be there to meet them, somewhere. And he, Dogan, had forgotten to remember that Lammand was a man who lost very badly, if he ever lost at all.

Lammand was already there, standing in an opening in the bamboo thickets, when the two guards hauled him forward. Lammand had taken off his tight tunic, and his solar topée, was rolling his sleeves up from his strong, thick fore-arms. He smiled when he saw them coming towards him through the grass and the first of the bamboos.

"All right," he said to the guards. "We've been through this before; you know. Just take the gag out of his mouth. If I put my knuckles back, I want it to be against his teeth, and not that hunk of wood."

They wrenched the gag away from Dogan's mouth and stood there laughing as they held him, waiting for Lammand to begin.

Lammand was pleasurably flexing his hands, his wrists. "You forget—my friend. You're kind of new to prisons and to this place; you don't know just how soon and how easily the fight will go out of those other mugs over there in the prison, when they know that you're dead—you, the big, bold leader. And I wouldn't mind even knocking off a few of them, that little snipe, Vramy, and a few more, just to prove my point. And, what if I did kill a couple of dozen of them? The rest would work harder afterwards, remembering, and there's always—substitutes I can run in from the bush camps to fill the holes."

"Frajac—" began Dogan, low- voiced.

"Frajac," Lammand broke in on him, "won't do anything, even if he could. You forget—my friend. Frajac comes from an old and fine family in France. Scandal is the one thing he and his family won't, and can't, take. And, if in the morning, he's silly enough to go to the local bank here and try to cash that draft I gave him for you, he'll find that there will be nothing like enough funds in my account to meet it. I might even be there at the door of the bank to meet him, and to remind him that for the lieutenant-governor of the colony to attempt to cash my personal check for such a sum as that is really pretty dangerous—with all the scandal and corruption among officials already known to be going on in the place, and

especially after such a strike as this. Because you'll be missing then, and that receipt you have—"

Lammand had advanced a bit as he spoke, his body and hands coming into position for the blows he sought to strike. Stretching far out, tearing with all his strength at the grips the two guards held upon his arms, Dogan was just able to kick him lightly in the chest. That blow knocked Lammand partially off his balance, angered and surprised him, moved the two guards to swing with their free hands at Dogan's head.

One of them, the man to his left, Dogan butted smacking in the mouth with his head as Lammand came in it at him, yelling thickly in his rage and slamming with both hands. Dogan's foot went out again, tangling at Lammand's straining legs, then vised scissoring back in around the legs of the guard to his right, the bigger and more dangerous man, who already had gone for the revolver at his hip.

The flame from the first shot out of that seared the hair from the back of Dogan's head just as he hammered home his first numbing, stunning blow at the jaw of the other guard. The second shot tore through the bamboos as, blindly, Dogan whaled his fist back wide-armed, rolled over from the man he had knocked unconscious and went after Lammand.

Lammand had a gun, wore it in a hip holster inside the rear pocket of his trousers. He had it out and halfway up when Dogan kicked it spinning from his hand, laughed with an insane sound of joy and swung for Lammand's throat.

DOGAN did not know; Frajac must have come there just in the moment that the guard lifted his revolver once more, slowly this time, wishing to make absolutely sure, limning the American's body in the moonlight against the dark background, seeing Lammand fall writhing and rolling on the ground and safely away from a bullet's course.

Frajac called out as he advanced. He said several words in command, words Dogan and Lammand only vaguely heard, but to which the guard with the revolver did not respond. Frajac shot that man then, three or four times through the chest and head, called to the other guard, scrambling dazedly up, to be still, or that he, too, would be shot.

But, in the dim light, that second guard did not recognize Frajac, perhaps did not understand the hoarse words, reached down for his own pistol, and Frajac shot him through both legs.

The guard was still screaming and thrashing among the bamboos when Frajac came over to Dogan and to Lammand, called both their names. Dogan had hammered the bigger man down beneath him, held him almost flat against the ground, one of his hands free, for Lammand's face and throat. But he looked up at Frajac and laughed at him.

"Get away!" he said. "Here is where this guy and I finally pay off!"

As Dogan spoke, looking up and turning his head slightly in a kind of grim carelessness, Lammand heaved beneath him, broke one leg free, lammed it in under the American's jaw, hurled him over and away from him. But, reeling, vaguely conscious, Dogan was up on his feet and waiting for him when Lammand lunged. Lammand came running, groping and yelling, mindful now only of getting his hands upon the other, violently and rapidly killing him.

He caught his hands upon Dogan's body, he clawed and struck tearing at the other's mouth and eyes, panting bubbles of blood up from his own lips. But Dogan had him, had the locked grip upon his neck with one hand, was striking repeated and shocking blows fully into his face with the other.

Lammand gave from that; even through the insanity gripping him, that pain was too great. In a blind, fumbling sidewise movement, he tried to get away, or back, so that he could strike fully himself, and then Dogan gripped him.

He half tripped and half flung back the bigger and heavier man, clasped him in an instinctive, locking grip, by the groin and by the socket of one arm. He lifted him high and above him, kicking, twisting, striking yet, and flung him clear.

Sharply, through the darkness, both he and Frajac could hear the brittle, clear, quick sound as Lammand's neck snapped striking the ground. That knowledge of Lammand's death was for them immediate and unmistakable. They did not even move for several minutes across the trampled, smashed grass to look at him. Dogan just wavered staggering, laughing and sobbing aloud words to himself which made no sense, said nothing.

Then Frajac was close before him, took him by the shoulders, shook him, brought some degree of sense and calmness to him.

"I'm sorry," Frajac said. "I'm very sorry. I should have come sooner. But he—I didn't think that he would do this."

"No." Dogan spoke clumsily, resetting the bones of his broken nose. "Neither did I. I only hoped so. But, you've shot two guards—and you've got that check of his."

"I have it, yes," Frajac said, "and I am going to use it as I promised you—even promised him. But you—"

Dogan inclined his head towards where Lammand lay.

"Loser takes nothing. Me, I don't care as long as you keep the bargain. But, back in France, they'll want to know who killed Lammand, and how, and who shot those two guards, and how come you happened to get a check of Lammand's, and are spending it the way you say you will. What do you think—that you can answer them those things?"

Gravely, Jules Frajac smiled.

"I can try," he said. "That—that will be my gamble. But, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going back to the prison first," Dogan said in a low and quiet voice. "And tell the boys how the rest of the hand is going to be played for them, by you. I guess they're still kind of interested in that—"

He paused for a moment then, letting his voice drop off, and turned his head, looked behind them, at the dark and high, blue-black line of the jungle, to him the unknown, the unexplored and dangerous.

"Then I'm going there."

He turned back, nodding to Jules Frajac, giving him his hand now in silence. Then he swung away, pausing for a stride to peer down in the whitish moonlight glare at Louis Lammand's uptwisted face, and move on into the further darkness, walking straightly, calmly.

SHEEPHERDER

I felt queer. Pink sheep! But they weren't more unreal than the pale blue of my neighbor's flock.

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

(An off the trail story)

WHEN I put up my traps in the spring and carried my sell of furs out, and put the money into the bank, I began to feel worried. I'd never caught better fur, nor sold so high, according to the market, in my life, but I couldn't bring myself to spend it. I got the feeling that sometime I might need money and the trapping might be done for; the loneliest man in the world is the fellow who has caught up his trapping country too clean and when he reckons the supply of wild life, knows that it won't support him any more. Then he must hunt new territory, and from what I've heard tell, and what I've seen, mighty little trapping is left anywhere. We've skinned the golden goose and sold its feathers.

I'd trapped a sight closer than I realized. Take it in these desert mountains and valleys, with just a scragged timber belt along the middle of the higher range, and before a man knows it, he's left the springs and waterholes desolate. Coyotes and wolves go when they're pressed hard. Mink that have somehow found their way to streams that begin in scattering timber and end in alkali muck fall before the trapper's lures and are gone before he thinks. A few marten in the green timber count up fast, but how are other marten coming in to take their place? And, of course, the poisoners clean up everything where they operate on squirrels, rabbits and other eating animals.

A man knows the few fine furs are the

progeny of wanderers, and if the runways of the high Rockies are trapped close or the sheep pastures doped, the isolated timber belts'll be barren and as there are no pockets now where fur is overcrowded, none of the youngsters will venture across the arid basins through the bare and desolate mud lumps and colored rocks looking for a far and lonely range with vacant marten dens.

I reckon I was scairt up when I figured on the winter trapping. I don't know why I worried, after doing so well, but I expect man has to worry about something. I made up my mind I'd better find a summer job and there'd be lots of others looking for work, too.

Well, say, it struck me all of a heap that maybe I could get a job of 'tending sheep, and out west of me was a ranch. I had heard anybody could get a job as sheepherder, and of course I knew why, because they say a sheepherder gets his brain touched with the lonesomeness, but I had lived alone at my trapping every winter and got so used to my own company I never missed other people.

I went west to the ranch and saw the owner, named Parks. I had work just as easy as that, and I sure was lucky. The ranch was away down in the bottom of everything, and pretty near the level of a salt lake to the north a ways. The winter grazing was around a tule marsh, and this swale, being fed by springs, wasn't so poison as some water over toward the salt lake. Sheep wintered there pretty comfortable and they wanted men to shepherd them out of the desert for the summer grazing back in the mountains, where there's water, grass, timber shade and some cool air.

All I had to do was look after the flock, keep it rounded up and use it along, higher and farther in the mountains wherever anything grew a sheep or goat could eat or gnaw. Perhaps coyotes would come around.

Bears might happen along, and that didn't worry me any especially as bears are prime skins till along in late June. As to the rest of it my flock had a dog to do the running and chasing and give the alarm. I was lucky, getting the flock, for it had been found without its shepherd, who had kind of disappeared —fellow they called "Happy," and his name made me feel good, too, with the easy times ahead of me.

"The dog knows his business," the sheep owner remarked. "He'll take care of the sheep, and about all you'll have to do is to take care of yourself. I suppose you can do that outdoors."

He looked at me, kind of anxious, meaning it, but I excused him, seeing as he couldn't have understood I was a trapper, who always run about two hundred miles of high lines and spot sets in the foothills and deserts.

"Bear away toward the south," the foreman of the flocks told me. "Here's a man'll show you about the lie of the springs, according to the lie of the mountains."

SO WE started, the dog, the sheep and the sheepherder. Just as they had said, the dog took care of the sheep. He was an old timer, but not in his own years—it was bred into him a long while. His hair was long, sort of tawny color, for the desert sun had faded it. Of course, he was mostly collie, but he wasn't all collie. He had a good deal the shape of a collie, except the way he held his head; almost all the time, he held it straight out in front of him, and the curl down of his neck and face to his sharp, grinning jaws was Indian —Indian dog, I mean.

He worked along clear of the flock, loose herding them, and only once in a while he'd raise his head, standing on his hind legs, to look it over. Seeing him do that gave me a queer feeling, for he would take two or three steps along, so as not to lose any time, and

then drop forward and go slithering on his way, watching the outlines.

I had a gallon can of water, a .25-20 carbine, a pack with a little grub in it, and some odds and ends of what a man naturally carries camping, but going light. Ten pounds of water and fifteen pounds of other things were enough. I left my horse and burros over in my trapping country grazing with a ranch herd. I didn't bother with a wannigan.

The sheep were all flock-broke and no strangers to give any trouble. They were a homely lot, I noticed. Sheared and lank, they ambled on their way, and some of the rams which had traveled that route often knew it, if they knew anything, leaving me just keeping them company. Over the east I could see another flock, only half a mile away, but headed a little more easterly than we were.

I strolled over to pass the time of day with the shepherd, but he wasn't sociable. He looked at me rather offish, stood between me and his sheep, and leveled his wide eyes at me, while his dog came walking sideways along his flock. I asked him where our water was, and he leveled his staff toward a gap in a range, without a word, and I went back to my animals.

Then as I approached them, I felt their voices. That's the way it seemed to me. There they were, hundreds, thousands of them, and as they darted along from nibble to nibble, jerking their silly little tails, their bleating ran through my breast. I hadn't noticed before the sound of the flock. While I used around the ranch, talking what little I did with the others, the sheep hadn't been so much. Now they were just about everything, and they were a voice in the desert.

Spring melt of snow had watered the slope where just sage grew. Now there was grass, of a kind, and weeds of kinds. They were the things that only need three drops of water around a seed to swell and sprout it, and the roots dive down, the stems and leaves thrust up, with all the anxiety of plants to grow up. flower and run to seed—to be done with the job before the withering, unwinking desert sun should dry them up. Stepping on those desert herbs among the permanent sage crushed them, and they flattened out with low noises under the heavy soles of my shoes. While the flock bleated, the plants seemed to have protesting voices against my bruising, grinding feet.

As night fell, the sheep drew crowding together. The dog swung wide around them, looking out into the colors of the evening sunshine. The flock off to my left was drawn up, too, shrinking into the face of the land, dust hovering over it like salty mist. There was, it seemed, water for sheep, the flow from the cañons into the desert. My sheep went to a little rivulet which ran out of that gap in the range they had pointed out to me. The sheep all hesitated about drinking it. By and by a goat stepped forward and pecked snuffling into the water and then they all grabbed in and drank their fill.

Bleating, they bedded down in the two lights after sunset. They settled and resettled themselves. They were pink under the evening glow, and I felt queer. Pink sheep! But they weren't any more unreal than the pale blue of my next neighbor's flock. Behind us, where we had ambled all day long, crushing pulpy plants and scraping through brittle sage—and the smell of it a relief after the odor of sheep—was a mirage lake. The lake was deep blue, and waves were breaking along the near shore, great, silent waves with white foam. Where the ranch had been was a fleet of ships with orange colored sails, and a gray mountain in the north seemed to be floating in the sky above the real lake we knew was there—a sky that was rose colored, darker than the foolish pink of the sheep. As well as I knew

the desert, I could hardly make myself believe it wasn't real.

I cast down my pack and broiled a young rabbit which I had shot, and camped above the sheep on the temporary brooklet. At the shot, the dog had bounded around and glared at me, looking up with those Indian dog eyes of his. I tossed him the heart, lights, liver and other edibles of the rabbit, and he mouthed them down. While he ate, he turned to look at the sheep.

With the darkness, the familiar yelp of the coyotes broke across the slopes, and I started up with my .25-20. The dog was nowhere in sight. The voice of the wolf sounded nowhere in particular, but mostly up the grades toward the mountains. I was a real hunter and trapper—which mostly sheepherders aren't. I slipped along to give that bellowing coyote a lesson—and the voice led me two or three hundred yards toward a knoll, probably some worn down mountain. All I wanted was to see the brute against the sky, and then I'd show him!

Suddenly, behind me, I heard a something—the confusion of a sheep flock in the night which is like no other sound in the world. Their little hoofs pounded, and the sagebrush crackled. They were starting up, and panic hit me hard. I was frightened, thinking what a devil of a note it would be if I stampeded my flock the first night.

Then there was a sudden, sharp, shrill challenge, and as I ran at top speed, I heard the snarling fight of a dog and wolf in the blue desert night. What a fool I was! One coyote had yelped and yodeled away up above my camp to toll me away; his mate, or mates, had gone silently, swinging wide down wind to the other side of the flock, and came raiding.

Naturally, I did the other fool thing. I tried to short-cut it through the flock, now bounding to its feet. I fell over all of them, and when I arrived on the far side, the dog was barking his orders to the sheep that had run out, driving them back to their places. Perhaps a hundred sheep had been scattered, and he brought them in again—all but one. A quarter of a mile away, I found its picked bones when the dog tracked it and led me to it.

At first, I couldn't remember what they said the dog's name was. Now I looked at him, and saw where one of the raiding brutes had slashed him down the shoulders. He had worked on, paying no attention to the wound. Now I washed and dressed it. He never whimpered, except once when he turned and seized my wrist with a terrific grab—but left only two faint dents in the skin. No sooner had I poured the iodine into the wound than he left me, to go pacing and walking, head down, along the sidelines of the flock.

Slip, they had called him! I recalled the name at last. The man who had turned out missing from the flock had trained him with an old dog, now blind and helpless, but pensioned, at a ranch back in the mountains. Slip had no other interest in life than the sheep. When I walked among them, he would draw near and watch me with that uplooking, questioning, resentful stare that he addressed to even the shadows of ravens that flew over.

We had come five miles, a little more. The spring gap in the mountain seemed no nearer, the ranch no farther away. We made seven miles the following day, and that night, when the coyote howled, I slipped down to the far side of the flock, and—nothing happened. Nothing, that is, to my flock. But I heard, across the sounding board of the desert slope, a nearly human cry in the darkness. It seemed—was probably—miles distant. I heard the sharp yelp of a dog far away. I did not leave my own charge—no, indeed!

But anxiously I lurked around the outskirts of the flock. I returned to my

own bed, slept a while, and then sat up to look at the island of animals in that dry, night sea. My responsibility rested more heavily on my shoulders. I slept, but it was a light sleep. A bleat, different from the low flock murmuring, would bring me wide awake to my feet before I had wandered a week with that swarm of stupidity.

I WAS on the right wing, up near the head, one day when I recognized a sheep. It was one in the whole flock. I remembered having seen it the day before. During the years of my trapping I had learned to know a pekan, a mink, a marten by its tracks. I stared at that one sheep which I knew, and asked myself how in the world I had distinguished it from all the others?

I tried to make myself believe that it was a tuft of wool hanging from its neck, left when they sheared it—a job they did, thank fortune, before I won the job of being a sheepherder. But I knew that it wasn't that tuft of wool. It was something in the brute's bearing. I walked off around the flock, taking the dust down the lee, and ambled up on that side of the flock again. Sure enough, I knew that sheep—and there it was, in the same place in the whole group that it had been before.

There flashed into my mind the whole count of those brutes! I recognized a dozen of them, a hundred, a thousand—the whole community of sheep! I told myself that it was a lie, and I swore it aloud. But it was true; I knew them all, and I knew their flock places; but it wasn't because I knew their places that I knew the sheep; I felt, or saw, or understood, when a sheep was out of its place, just the way I'd seen a colonel go into a fit, one time, when one of his regiment wasn't keeping step.

There they were—every one of those ungainly, ragged, bleating, jumpy sheep was an individual. They were all of them exactly alike, and yet every one was an individual. I caught myself straining my ears, wondering which one of them was making a particularly shrill and penetrating blat? I asked myself what difference did it make which one blatted, and it didn't make any difference, but unless I thought about that first I would be wondering about it.

We ascended the first mountain range; I flocked the sheep through a pass and down to a spring on the other side; at the end of that day, when night fell, I could not remember how the pass looked, nor the appearance of the range on either side, but there passed before my eyes black sheep faces with white curls on them, no two alike; and white sheep faces, with black curls on them; and heavy sheep eyes, with lids half closed, and pop-eyed sheep in a state of constant excitement and anxiety; and at last I knew what it was that had drawn my attention first to one particular sheep.

The animal had a quick, nervous way of lifting one foreleg—just one!—that resembled the alert gesture of a walking deer. I was even filling my head up with the hoofprints of the flock. The years that I had spent studying the tracks of animals now weighed upon me irresistibly. In all that flock no two sheep walked or bounded exactly alike. To save myself, I could not resist watching the hoof prints. At the same time, my glance turned out into the neighboring wilderness and resented a jackrabbit under a gnarled cedar of a hill side, or a vulture circling patiently as it watched the flocks, or I regarded with suspicion the broken rocks of an avalanche from some steep peak.

Slip drew nearer to me, after a time. When we were in good feed, and we could see every brute in the basin of a valley sweep, he would even come and lie down where I could rest my hand on his shoulders. Sometimes, instead of watching the sheep, I would catch him

rolling his eyes up to watch my face.

A wagon they sent out to carry grub to us came by, and threw out a bag of stuff, hardly stopping. The driver was a twisted faced little old fellow, and I had nothing to tell him, or he to tell me, so he just went on. Slip and I knew our business! *Knew it* isn't quite strong enough, I'm thinking. Sheep was a habit with us. Every sheep was on our minds. If one lifted his foot too high, I'd run in and perhaps pick a prickly pear thorn out of the split of the hoofs. A lame sheep worried me for days—some shoulder sprain, I think.

I couldn't help but think about Happy, the man who disappeared from this flock, what could have happened to him. He had a banjo, they said, and the sheep liked to hear it. He'd been tending sheep twenty years, and before that he was a great hand at dances, where he'd play the banjo and sing songs and act the card. He was a gay one with the ladies, too, they said, but when he went to tending sheep he would be away out in the hills when there was a dance, and naturally he couldn't get to them any more. But leaving the flock the way he did, with no one to look out for them but Slip, was an irresponsible thing I didn't understand. I told myself that while I couldn't pay a banjo, and didn't care anything about such a foolish accomplishment, I was taking better care of the flock than Happy did.

Soon no other flock was in sight of us. I was glad of it. On a hot day, with no wind, the yellow haze of a flock about ten miles north of us—that unsociable herder's charge—was visible from my own line of march. One sunset that dust bank stood a yellow ochre dome in a purple sky. But I remember thinking that it wasn't as beautiful a color as the old gold above our own heads. My sheep were wonderful. When I discovered that, I thought what a strange idea I must have had, when I hated myself for knowing one sheep from all the others.

Now that I knew them all, and recognized their voices, and saw their hoof prints in the wide pathway we made, reaching through the spring desert weeds into the curly bunch grass and flowers of the higher, moister mountain pastures, I looked into my memory of those early flock-tending days with the suspicion that I must have been kind of a funny fellow then.

The dog and I walked together, up and down among the sheep, and I called them by name. Flat-tip, Snuffle, Jumpy, Skeek—oh, it was easy to find a name for each one, for every sheep was different in just one respect from all the other sheep. A nick in a hoof, a shred of wool, a cast of an eye—I knew those brutes so well that I was ashamed to think of humans. I don't exactly know why I was ashamed, but that's the way I felt.

The dog and I were friendly. The sheep needed a lot of care, and they were reckless. Even the grown-up animals would wander off, negligently, and if we didn't keep eternally vigilant, a coyote would strike into these strays. Between us we fronted and broke down a big brown bear that came a-raiding, my little .25-20 carbine doing wonders that black night. Slip and I just had to take care of all that bumping, bounding, bleating mass. He'd stop by a tired lamb, and I would come along and carry it a ways.

We crossed a road in the mountain foothills. It was one of those automobile highways. The boss sent me a little tent, and some other camp things for this was the boundaries of my grazing range, and I was to keep my flock hereabouts during the summer graze.

We had a good water hole, and a mountain brook that sang down a cañon, and the brook was alive with trout—that brook. The waterhole was west a ways at the brim of a desert valley. The woods were in patches, and most of the time I could bed the sheep down at night in an opening. The nights under the trees were worrisome, for it was cougar

wilderness, bear country, and coyotes were ever ranging the open land and small timber wolves were in the woods.

IT SEEMS as though I should have enjoyed those woods grazing days. In a way, I suppose I did. I sure filled my head with a lot of sheep, but they were an awful worry. Mostly nothing happened, but sometimes there'd be a raid. Then Slip and I would charge up and out of camp, to hunt into the troubled flock—and I could run now through the flock at top speed, on the blackest night, without touching one of them.

We'd drive away the marauder, or kill it, and perhaps for very exasperation, having driven the killers away, would range up and down along the side lines, growling and shouting challenge into the dark. By and by, when the flock was all quieted, and the baffled cry of the coyotes came from a great distance, we, too, would grow quieter, and return to our beds. There he'd dream and start up, half awake, and there I'd dream and, upon some strange sound, we'd both find ourselves on our feet, wide awake and full of hostile vim.

It was our grazing. It had been hired, paid for and our sheep had the right to it. What then was my indignant amazement, one day, to find a hundred head of white-face, hornless beef cattle down in a corner of our country, where we hadn't fed through yet.

I laughed at the cowboy trick. I knew one worth two of his. Where did I learn it? Didn't I saw I knew sheep, tip by curl by hoof? I laughed and I spread my flock wide to graze them down among the cattle. I had the sheep all around those Herefords, and I kept them there. I kept my sheep grazing a circle of starvation around those Herefords. In about a week, I was laughing up my ragged shirt sleeve. I'll bet the sheep ate half a hundred pounds off every one of those fool cattle, starving them where they stood. Even Slip seemed to grow good natured, when he saw what we were doing to those cattle, which couldn't find their way into grass long enough for them to eat. They sure were a hungry, scraggly bunch of beef, when the cattleman found them.

Oh, but he was a wild man! I'd liked to have talked to him, but he gave me one look, kind of hesitated, and then drove his cattle away. I sort of remembered that look. It was a sort of a glance, at first, and then sort of a surprised bulging of his eyes, and then, not so much angry as I'd expected, as it was something else. What else it could be I couldn't think, but I dreamed about it. I talked to myself a good deal about it, too. And when I'd talk, Slip would look at me, and listen just as if he knew exactly what I was saying.

I'd wanted to talk to that cattleman and tell him how he'd been trespassing, but he hadn't allowed me to do it. I remembered some ranchers I'd met off and on, while I was trapping. I'd talked to them—but not the way I'd wanted to talk to this one. We'd been friendly, then; but now we all—Slip, the sheep and me—had rigged up that little herd of cattle, starving them and eating them off their legs, and being glad of it.

More and more, Slip watched me, and listened to me. He would walk away and stop, looking at me. He would go off by himself, where the sheep were grazing wide in the open timber—and come a-running, and then go away when he had looked at me. I wondered about that.

For years and years, when I had been trapping, my winters were spent all alone on the line. A hunter, I traveled still through the timber; a trapper, I watched the wild things, furs and what fur eats; now sheep were not like anything I had ever paid much attention to, and they were interesting too.

This summer, except for the few days at the winter-grazing ranch, I had had

only Slip and the sheep to talk to. By keeping close tabs on myself, I found that I was talking to them, some, when I didn't really know it.

Leaning down to drink out of a little spring one day, I saw something. It was a face I'd never seen before. Long haired, long whiskered, shaggy and funny eyed. I was right thirsty. I shut my eyes and drank. I went away, and did not look back. After a while, I sort of surmised that that man was me.

That was funny, too; just knowing it was me was quite a lot of satisfaction, for I was worried, along at first, for fear it was Happy, that other sheepherder, the man who had trained Slip—so they said.

I could tell a lot of stories about Slip, but somehow, even now, I hate to do it. When a man's been close friends with somebody, it just doesn't seem right, telling all about it. There are things you can't get words for, how he came to be confident I was taking care of the sheep, and when they are left out, what remains seems sort of tasteless, like water that hasn't a tang of salt in it. Along at first, out in the deserts and around their brim, I thought I shouldn't care much for what they called alkali, but I know, now, you need salt in water, the same as on meat, or in pancakes.

I don't think Slip ever could care for any one, quite the same as he did for me. When he was through suspicioning me, and my intentions toward the sheep, we were sure fast friends. That's what sharing the same job of tending sheep did for us. I've kind of a memory of seeing a woman taking care of a baby, and something the way she acted sort of reminds me of the way Slip and I felt about those sheep. They just had to be taken care of, and it was second nature, and first nature, for us to do it. He pulled a ram out of a mudhole it was mired in. More than once the two of us ran out in the night to chase away bears and cougars.

THE boss rode through one day.

"Say, Jim," he hailed, "you haven't seen that other wild sheepherder around here, have you?"

"What other one?" I asked, kind of frozen the way he asked it.

"Why, Happy. He trained Slip, you know. Say, that man was a sheepherder. Been at it for years and years—lasted twice as long as most. But, of course, same as lots of 'em, the band of woollies got him at last."

The boss expected me to answer, but I didn't. I just looked at him. Presently he shrugged and drove on. I was glad to see him go for I wanted to be alone with my sheep. After he was gone, though, I was surprised, come to think twice, for I'd always liked to talk to people every where else.

A dusk came. The birds had gone to roost and the first star was shining bright among the darkening evening clouds. But the coyote song and chorus of the night had yet to begin when I heard away off yonder the lilt and lift of music. It was old and tantalizing, a banjo picking light steps I'd listened to long ago, but didn't want to hear again, for fear those tunes would call me away—away from my band of sheep.

Slip froze, paralyzed with expectancy, and the sheep voices hushed as they raised their heads to listen; only just the lambs kept on bleating. I know by them that it wasn't a fool dream of mine, and I looked, I kept a-looking, looking where the pick-a-picking kept a-coming from.

And there coming down through the junipers was a man, stepping light, and a-picking picking right. He was tall and slim and gray, lifting his knees, his shins a-dangling, the way a sheep man's do; his hair was shaggy, streaked white and black, and he wore a blue denim jacket, blue overalls with little white stars in lines, and heavy laced boots. I knew those tunes. They were dance tunes. They whispered and tinkled like the

echoes of my dreams and memories—no need to tell me this was Happy, that famous sheep herder who had trained Slip, using the Scotch and Indian in that dog. The old breeder rams and ewes stood up in their beds and lifted their heads, twitched their tails and made funny little noises they'd never made for me. Even the lambs and the wethers were ungrateful to me when that picker came tromping, lifting his feet—his face shining and smooth in that late candlelight of the dusk.

He spoke and Slip broke for him, frantic with joy strangling in his throat, not my Slip any more. The sheep stirred in his direction—they're like that. But even those old billy goats we had for steadying the band blatted and shook their chin whispers. There I stood a stranger to them all.

Happy had returned to his flock. I reckon they'd forgiven him—or forgotten he'd abandoned them. The stray shepherd had returned. That's all they cared. That picker gave me a glance of immeasurable superiority, contempt and pity. I couldn't fight him. What could I do? He picked away on his foolish, tinkling, bumping banjo—music that bridged the years as I stood there looking and peering, trying to place those tunes.

"I see they left the old rams and goats," he turned to me and said, "And those old ewes. I'd know them anywhere. But most of them I don't know, the fat wethers and the lambs. Tell me about the others, won't you—you know, this flock and those that aren't here."

He asked and looked all right, but a little wild was in his eye. The big jolt to me was the sheep that weren't there. That opened up the history of the flock spreading out to let me see beyond. They'd graze on; come autumn they'd cut out the lambs; on the big ones wool'd grow in winter pasture and come spring they'd be sheared; then the wethers'd be herded toward the railroad, through those white-washed, two-deck corral runways into the double deck cars; then long trains would roll with them, as they still bleated, over the Rocky Range and down the long one-way rails into the stockyards and the inevitable machine-work tragedy there.

"Oh—I remember," Happy suddenly gasped, as in a sudden pang, "I know—I was kinda fussed. They've be'n shipped—They always ship 'em away—Cockleburr, Rabbit-snoot, Cross-footer, all of them. Humans are like that—the friends you leave behind—those that ship away—"

Picking—he leaned and picked some more. West Canada music, summer breezes in the spruce knolls, blizzard norther down the creek valley—it broke through me right then that this shaggy, long-hair, smooth-shaven man had gone daffy on this job. He'd quit it—worrying about what was at the end of the sheep band trail, because they took those sheep he knew away and killed them. Then he came back.

The spell that had sort of wound around me, tending those sheep, just shed and fell off. I left him there with his sheep. He was picking his banjo and Slip was prancing around, mouth open trying to bark, speak, and only able to strangle in his throat. I turned my back to go and there I was lifting my knees, my shins dangling—walking like a sheep tender. I heard the sheep band murmuring and then, presently, only just the banjo plunking, whimpering, tinkling, dying behind me.

I've gone back to my trapline, and not taking too many furs. It doesn't pay in the long run to trap your country too close. Sometimes I think of Happy picking at his banjo and the sheep bedded on the ground bleating, and Happy and Skip knowing every sheep in the flock. And it seems like a fine life too, and more company than on a trapline.

But a man could go crazy tending sheep.

He told Bad Jimmie to go away.

MR. FLIPWIG, voter and taxpayer

By WILLIAM C. FORD

AS LITTLE MR. FLIPWIG was passing the Court House a man in brass buttons came down the steps and grabbed him. They were trying Bad Jimmie Waters for murder in there, and they needed another juryman. All the panel had been telling the Judge that they were opposed to capital punishment even for Jimmie, and so the Judge had been obliged to excuse them.

What the jurymen really meant was that they were opposed to capital punishment for erring jurors, applied by friends of convicted gunmen after the trial. They just couldn't bring themselves to the point of dying for a country that protected the rights of murderers, but couldn't protect the lives of jurors.

Mr. Flipwig wasn't opposed to capital punishment, and he wasn't afraid of Bad Jimmie or his friends; so he answered up, sharp and bright, to the questions they put to him.

He told the Judge that he'd vote for conviction in a minute if he thought the defendant did it, and he'd hold out till after train time if he thought he didn't, and that he hadn't formed any opinion even after he'd taken a slant at Bad Jimmie. And then the defendant's lawyer challenged him. The defense, however, had just used up its last challenge in throwing out a college professor. They had hoped to get a slot machine merchant instead. So Mr. Flipwig sat on the jury.

When Mr Flipwig was comfortably

seated he looked around the court room. He saw the two deputy sheriffs first, because they were the most conspicuous. They sat at their little desks at each side of the room, wearing long blue coats with many brass buttons. They looked very important indeed until the judge spoke to them. Then they jumped.

The judge himself sat up in front at the bench, facing everybody and keeping them in order. He wore gray hair and a black robe and was kind of testy and cross like a camel. Everybody was afraid of him but Mr. Flipwig.

The attorney for the defense sat at one of the tables in front of the bench, and looked, friendly-like, at the jury; and the defendant sat in the prisoner's cage and looked as innocent as he could.

At the other table in front of the bench sat the assistant district attorney who had the prosecution in charge. It was an important murder trial, so the district attorney himself was busy elsewhere. The district attorney had been selected and elected by the people, and as sometimes happens in the larger communities, he had been so busy helping in the selection, that he hadn't had time to bother to learn all the little things about trying a case, and when he got in a court room he was apt to step on his own feet.

The assistant district attorney was a big man with a sharp face. Mr. Flipwig thought he looked more worried than the defendant.

THE crime itself, as alleged by the prosecution, was quite simple. Mr. Waters, defendant at the bar, had been seen by the victim (now dead) shooting a filling station proprietor in a stick-up. The victim had been so thoughtless as to identify Mr. Waters to the police.

The filling station man of course had been gone and forgotten for now these many moons. The present victim also was gone. Bad Jimmie had stepped over to his home one evening after supper, and disposed of him with a machine gun, so that he couldn't appear in court. The police were discouraged, but not too much. They had charged Bad Jimmie with the crime of murdering the witness.

The defense seemed to have many angles, Mr. Flipwig gathered as the case went along. The defendant couldn't have done it because he was in San Francisco at the time, visiting friends, and the friends said so their ownselves; also that he was in New Orleans. A still further defense was that the police had always been down on Jimmie for some mysterious reason, and never gave him a show. And that the assistant district attorney knew he hadn't any business to ask any such questions as he asked, and was trying to prejudice the jury against this innocent young man.

Mr. Flipwig gathered, also, from certain expert medical witnesses, that if a defendant has picked hoodlums for his pals, then he isn't responsible for any little mistakes he may make, because it will be his environment, and not his true self. Also, that if the prisoner's pa and his grandpa were almost as mean as he is, that lets the prisoner out too, because he can't help his heredity. The worst he could get under those circumstances would be three square meals a day in a free insane asylum.

But through it all Mr. Flipwig's keen mind got it that the real underlying defense was that the jury had the nerve to bring the prisoner in guilty instead of minding their own business and letting him go, the prisoner's good chums and fellow members were going to get square with that jury.

And Mr. Flipwig noticed poisonous looking persons in the court room gazing intently toward the jury box.

The case dragged along for a few days, and the lawyers argued, and the judge charged, and the sheriffs took their staves and marched the jury up-

stairs to the room where things are decided.

There it developed that some of the panel were a bit reluctant about bringing in a verdict of guilty. They didn't just say why, but put it rather on some little mannerism that they didn't like in some of the government witnesses, or on the speech the defense lawyer made, or on the claim that the defendant was a victim of circumstances, and that his nobler nature had been somewhat dampened by his surroundings. Anyway, they didn't want to convict; and Mr. Flipwig got the idea that they were afraid.

Around ten o'clock the vote stood eleven to one for acquittal, and Mr. Flipwig inquired what would happen if there was a disagreement. He learned that Bad Jimmie would be held safe in jail eating and sleeping at the taxpayers' expense, until the State got round to trying him again.

Mr. Flipwig decided to agree with the other eleven and vote not guilty, thus easing their minds, and finishing things up. He was a man of direct and simple action.

The jury came in looking sheepish enough. The clerk almost fell over backward when they said "Not Guilty," and the judge almost went through the ceiling, and the district attorney nearly went through the floor.

The attorney for the defense shook hands with his client and anybody else who'd shake hands with him, and the defendant got sulky about something and went out and telephoned for various things to be got ready for him at Jakie's speakeasy. Mr. Flipwig went to a newspaper office and researched.

THE next day Mr. Flipwig called Bad Jimmie Waters on the telephone. He had to try several places, but finally got him at Gus's.

Jimmie was kind of ugly, especially when he found it was not a lady who was calling him: and when Mr. Flipwig opened up and told Mr. Waters that he had been present behind the door at another one of his little escapades, when Bad Jimmie had murdered an old gentleman who ran a pawnshop out in Brooklyn, Bad Jimmie was fit to be tied.

Bad Jimmie controlled himself long enough, however, to ask Mr. Flipwig's name and address, which were obligingly furnished. Mr. Flipwig said he'd be glad to talk it over with Mr. Waters anytime but Sundays, but that his present inclination was to spill it to the police. He made a few remarks that might lead a moron to think he hoped for a piece of change.

Jimmie made his voice a little less sinister as he inquired of Mr. Flipwig whether he'd be at home that evening. Mr. Flipwig said he would, but that he couldn't see him at home at the time named, because he knew a little of Bad Jimmie's reputation, and his housekeeper was going out that night and he'd be all alone, and his home was in a sparsely settled part of town. He said that as he knew Jimmie had disposed of a number of witnesses before, he didn't feel just safe about meeting him under those circumstances, and he would prefer to talk it over at the Y. M. C. A. next morning, in the room where they hold the checker tournaments.

There was a little pause over the telephone then, while Bad Jimmie was digesting this, but after a while he said "O-Kay" quite jovially.

In speaking as he did about the pawnbroker Mr. Flipwig had had no specific knowledge about the old gentleman, except that he knew the police had questioned Bad Jimmie briefly about such an affair, but had had no evidence.

At midnight Bad Jimmie arrived at Mr. Flipwig's home. He was alone, but armed. He cut the telephone wire, and rang the front door bell.

Mr. Flipwig didn't go to the door. He got out of bed and shouted down from

an upstairs window, and told Bad Jimmie to go away. He said he was unarmed and alone and it wasn't fair. Bad Jimmie took a shot at him with a silenced gun.

Then Bad Jimmie opened the front door, which Mr. Flipwig had left unlocked anyway, and came upstairs.

Mr.Flipwig had closed and bolted his outer chamber door. This opened into a little vestibule about six feet long, which led to the inner door of his upstairs suite, and this inner door Mr. Flipwig had wired from a high tension power cable. Mr. Flipwig was a scientific man and he had quite a machine shop in his cellar, run by powerful electric currents.

It had been but child's play for Mr. Flipwig to put a steel plate in place of the rug on the floor before the inner door, and spill some water about, so that when the switch was on, if anybody stood on the plate and took hold of the metal door knob Mr. Flipwig had provided, he'd get an electric shock that would lift him up on the wings of the morning.

Bad Jimmie tried the outer vestibule door and called upon Mr. Flipwig to open.

"That door is locked!" cried Mr. Flipwig from within. "I warn you to keep away!"

Bad Jimmie's answer was to send a bullet through both doors and the side of the house. It didn't hit Mr. Flipwig, because Mr. Flipwig had stepped aside after speaking.

"I warn you," said Mr. Flipwig again. "Don't you break down that door! This is murder, and the penalty for that is electrocution. I warn you!"

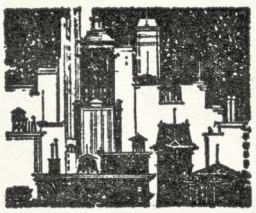
"Oh yeah?" said Mr. Waters.

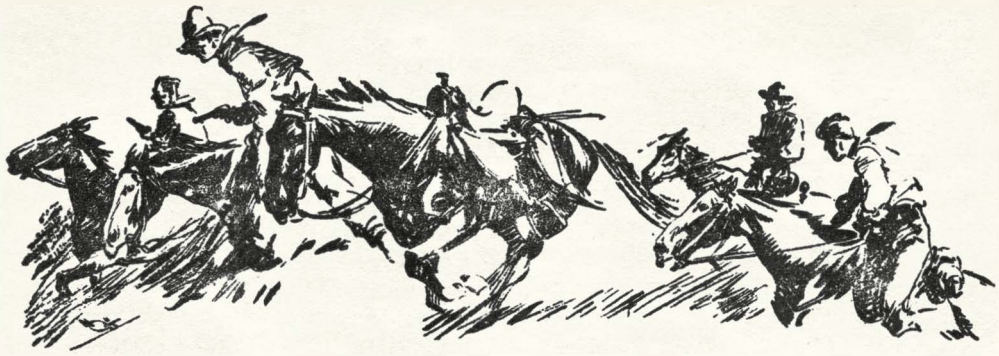
At this point, James had just smashed in the vestibule door. It was frail, and the job was not hard.

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Flipwig. "Don't you dare touch that inner door knob."

At this point Bad Jimmie was striding through the vestibule. He stepped on the steel plate, and he reached for the metal door knob, which he confidently seized.

Mr. Flipwig had a car and it wasn't far to a bay, and he disposed of the body in a quiet and efficient manner, not claiming any credit for himself, and in fact not mentioning the matter to anyone whatever. And likely as not, sooner or later, in some way, he'll get the bill for the electricity used out of the State, because he feels it was really their job, only they didn't get round to it. He'll collect it too. Because whether an account is due from the State or to the State, Mr. Flipwig likes to see that it is paid.





THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

IN this issue begins a serial by Gordon Young, "Red of the Arrowhead."

An argument arose in the office over the editing. This story has a flavor—not only in the characters, and the human and humorous touches surrounding them, but also in the phrasing of their talk and thoughts, and in the writer's own words, which run deliberately now and then off the trails laid down by the grammarians.

Here is a case in point from Gordon Young's story:

Jeb grinned slow and amused. Most folks treated him with such a heap of respect that maybe he liked being talked to impudent and sassy by a boy he thought the world and all of.

Suppose we edited it to conform with something we thought nearer to the King's English.

Jeb grinned slowly and in amusement. Most folk treated him with such respect that maybe he liked being talked to impudently by a boy of whom he thought all the world.

Something's gone there. That kind of language doesn't fit around Jeb Grimes.

So we've let Mr. Young go right ahead and tell this story exactly the way he thought it ought to be told. He knows more about this yarn than the textbooks do.

OF his novelette "Loser Takes Nothing" Robert Carse has this to say:

This is a tough story, the writer here admits. But, Guiana, and what is generally known as "Devil's Island," is a tough place. It is, without a doubt, the toughest place I know. In no sense is it a prize, lying low along the South Atlantic coast, packed full of fever and with more than a little prevalence towards leprosy (of which, despite a few left-handed protests by the French government, there is plenty in the penal colony) than anywhere else in the world. France's original idea in placing a penal colony there was eventually to "colonize" the place: the result, at least at this comparatively late writing, is a tragic joke. No free man, in his right senses, and for any time at all, has gone there to live or to make a living, although in the interior, are diamond, gold, oil and rubber fields which have never been exploited and, very probably, never will, until the "colonial" theory is changed.

But, despite all that, a great deal of misconception concerning the place has got into the public prints, and perhaps the major misconception is that of the title for the prison colony: Devil's Island. The much publicized island is a little, two-bit place about eight miles off the mainland coast, reserved only for prisoners who have committed a political or military crime, and is one of a group of three islands, the other two, Ile Joseph and Ile Royale, holding the wholly unfortunate gentlemen who have gone bad in the mainland prisons and been sentenced there to solitary confinement.

Some misguided punster a long time ago gave those islands the name of the Islands of Salvation: he has not been heard from since.

From there, the Islands of Salvation, only an extremely small handful of men have escaped. Eddie Guerin, who engineered the famous Shattuck job in New York, was one, but that was, from all honest-to-God escape angles, an easy feat, because Guerin got away in a small steamer hired and handled

by his loyal and also once famous friend, Chicago May, now dead. The others who tried it from the islands have been many; most of them ended up as bait for sharks, either essaying to swim it, or on little banana stem rafts they were able to contrive somehow. One who so did succeed was a lad named Dieudonné, who was a perpetual escaper, was recaptured, and recaptured again, until finally the French, out of weariness and some recognition for his bravery, pardoned him. At the time of his escapes, a small laugh was raised due to the fact that in French his name, Dieudonné, translated means "God-given," and his success in getting away from Ile Joseph on a couple of banana stems certainly was.

But, right there, practically all the laughs rising out of colony stop. It is, as was first mentioned, a tough place, about which a lot more truth, at least a lot more truthful fiction, should surely be written, if only to tell the world what a rotten hell-hole of utter despair and misery the name implies.

TO the historian W. J. Ghent, author of the books "The Early Far West" and "The Road to Oregon" we owe the following information on the battle of the Little Big Horn. A number of times has this battle been re-fought in Camp-Fire, with the following questions hotly contested: Should Reno have held his place in the bottom instead of fleeing in panic to the hills? Was his force inadequate to the task? Did the alleged flight of the Indian scouts affect the possibility of his holding his position?

Over a long period of years Mr. Ghent has made a detailed study of the records of the battle. Because the controversy has been of long standing and because of the historical importance of his findings, we are glad to give Mr. Ghent full space.

Among the many popular misconceptions regarding the battle of the Little Big Horn are two so grossly inconsistent with the facts that they have been kept alive only by propaganda. One is that Reno's battalion consisted of only 112 officers and men, and the other that (as it is usually stated) "the 25 Indian scouts fled at the first fire." As to the first, it is to be said that Reno's command consisted of at least 146 combatants. This number is nearly three times that which Forsyth had at the Arickaree Fork of the Republican (1868), four times that which Powell had at the Wagon Box fight (1867), and five times that of the buffalo hunters at Adobe Walls (1874). As to the second misconception, the Indian scouts with Reno in the valley did not number 25, but only 10 (eight Arikaras and two Crows), and the only flight in which they engaged was that led by Reno himself, and participated in by all his battalion, to a refuge on Reno Hill.

Reno, in his official report of July 5, 1876, does not state the numerical strength of his command. In his reply to Gen. Rosser, 25 days later, he gave the number as "120 officers and men and about 25 scouts and guards" (guides). At the Court of Inquiry, Feb. 8, 1879, he whittled this number down to 112 officers and men, avoided mention of the civilian combatants and disposed of his Indian allies by saying that they ran away.

Reno's testimony is, as a rule, undependable, and in this instance it is demonstrably untrue. The exact number of men in Reno's command is readily ascertainable, with only a slight margin of possible error, by any one who takes the trouble to examine the available data.

In the first place, there were, including Reno and the two acting assistant surgeons, 11 officers. Dr. Porter, however, testified that he was not armed and that he refused a gun offered him by Reno, and it may be that Dr. De Wolf also was unarmed. The net total is nine.

The number of enlisted men in the three companies is given by Godfrey, from a study of the muster rolls of April 30 and June 30, 1876, as follows: A, 38 (which exactly tallies with Capt. Moylan's testimony, Jan. 25, 1879, at the Court of Inquiry); M, 47 (which is two more than the number given by Capt. French in a letter, Aug. 6, 1880, to the mother of Lieut. Cooke); G, 36 (a number that, so far as the writer is aware, is not disputed). These figures are of course net and exclusive of the seven men from each company assigned to the packtrain. As for M company, it seems probable that French was merely approximating the number of his men and that Godfrey's figure is correct, but the smaller number will be used in this computation. In addition, there were with the battalion Elihu T. Clair, of Company K, Hare's orderly, and Edward Davern, of Company F, Reno's orderly. Two others crossed the river with Reno—Archibald McIlargey and John Mitchell, both of C—but they are to be eliminated from the count since both were sent to Custer and neither returned. The total of enlisted men is 121 (possibly 123).

This total of 130 (possibly 132) officers and men was not the whole of the combatant force. The two white scouts, Charles Edwin Reynolds and George B. Herendeen—brave, clear-headed and experienced Indian fighters—would have been, in a determined and sustained battle, perhaps the equal of any four or five of Reno's soldiers. Not so much can be said for Fred F. Girard (who, according to unfriendly testimony, had no stomach for the fight) or for Isaiah Dorman, the Negro interpreter; but the two quarter-breed Blackfeet scouts, William and Robert Jackson,

were capable and experienced frontiersmen. Here are six more combatants to add to the list.

Other than the Indian scouts there were thus at least 136 combatants. There were two Crow scouts—Half Yellow Face and White Swan—who bore their part well, the latter twice wounded. Also there were eight Arikara scouts, of whom three were killed and one wounded. The total is 146.

The part played by these Arikaras has been misrepresented ever since the battle. Some one started the story of their alleged flight from the battlefield. It fitted in well with the defense mechanism of the partisans of Reno, and it has been repeated over and over again. Reno testified at the Court of Inquiry (Feb. 8, 1879) that all the Indian scouts "but three or four" ran away, and when again asked about the matter said that he had about 24 or 27 of these scouts, but that "as soon as the Indians commenced firing they cleaned out." He thus implied that *all* of them had fled. The statement, with its implication, was untrue and grossly inconsiderate of the loyalty and bravery of eight of these allies. Later, on the same day, apparently forgetting his previous testimony, he mentioned the fact of "some Indian scouts" having been on the hill during the siege and specifically named Half Yellow Face and White Swan, though he omitted to include any of the four Arikara survivors who also were there.

But the tale of the Indian flight persisted, to become in time accepted history, and even the careful and conscientious Godfrey, in his classic *Century* article of January, 1892, accepted the slander as truth.

In 1920 appeared *The Arikara Narrative*, a book by Dr. A. McG. Beede and Prof. O. G. Libby, and a more sober version of the episode became available to the public. The authors had interviewed, under what they considered rigid conditions to ascertain facts, eight Arikara survivors of Custer's command, two of whom had taken part in the fighting. Some of the testimony betrays itself, to any student of the battle, as obviously inaccurate; some of it is, in Indian fashion, highly imaginative and fabulous, and some is plain fabrication. Two or three of these witnesses, according to the late W. M. Camp, who interviewed most of them, proved to be "notorious liars." But a careful sifting of what was told and a check-up of the worthwhile residue with what is known from other sources, reveals the book as notably valuable.

With the general command leaving the Rosebud were 23 Arikaras, four Dakotas, six Crows and four part-breeds (Mitch Bouyer, Billy Cross and the two Jacksons). On the division of the regiment and the advance toward the village, 10 of the Arikaras, the four Dakotas and the half-breed Dakota interpreter, Billy Cross, remained out of harm's way on the east side of the Little Big Horn.

Only 13 Arikaras crossed the river with Reno, and five of these immediately busied themselves in rounding up Sioux ponies and taking them across to the east bank. They had no part in the fight. The testimony of Girard (Jan. 20, 1879) that "some of our scouts had gone outside (apparently out of the ranks) after some ponies," accords with the statements of the Indians. So also does the testimony of Varnum (Jan. 21, 1879): "There were eight or ten Indian scouts with me at the time" (after crossing the river). The names of the eight Arikaras were Bloody Knife, Bob-Tailed Bull, Young Hawk, Goose, Little Brave (or Little Soldier), Red Bear, Red Foolish Bear and Forked Horn. With them were the two Crows and the two Jacksons. None of them fled from the command during the fight in the valley. It is true that they fell back from where they had been placed with the left flank, but so also did all the rest of the left flank, and there is no justice in singling them out for discredit. One of them (Bloody Knife) was killed in the timber, and the others of course took part in the headlong flight of the whole battalion. Two other Arikaras (Bob-Tailed Bull and Little Brave—not Stab, as the monument erroneously says) were killed during the flight, and a fourth, Goose, was wounded. Goose was subsequently landed from the *Far West* at Fort Buford, and it is presumed that White Swan had previously been landed at Fort Pease.

A recapitulation of the data shows the net combative strength of the battalion to have been as follows:

Officers	9
Enlisted men	121
Arikara scouts	8
Crow scouts	2
White scouts (Reynolds and Herendeen)	2
Part-breed scouts (William and Robert Jackson)	2
Interpreters (Girard and Dorman)	2
Total	146

The subsequent movements of the other Indian and part-Indian scouts is a matter that belongs here and is briefly appended. Most of the scouts maintained, in after times —whether truthfully or untruthfully will never be known—that on their enlistment it was understood they were not expected to fight but only to lead the soldiers to the hostiles. If the statement be true, the fact further evidences the courage of those who did take part in the battle. Some of them said further that their orders were, in case the command was defeated, to return to the supply camp at the mouth of the Powder River.

The part played by Bouyer is well known, and the conduct of four of his Crow companions has been definitely ascertained. Bouyer went to his death with Custer, but Goes Ahead, Hairy Moocasin and White Man Runs Him went no farther than the ridge

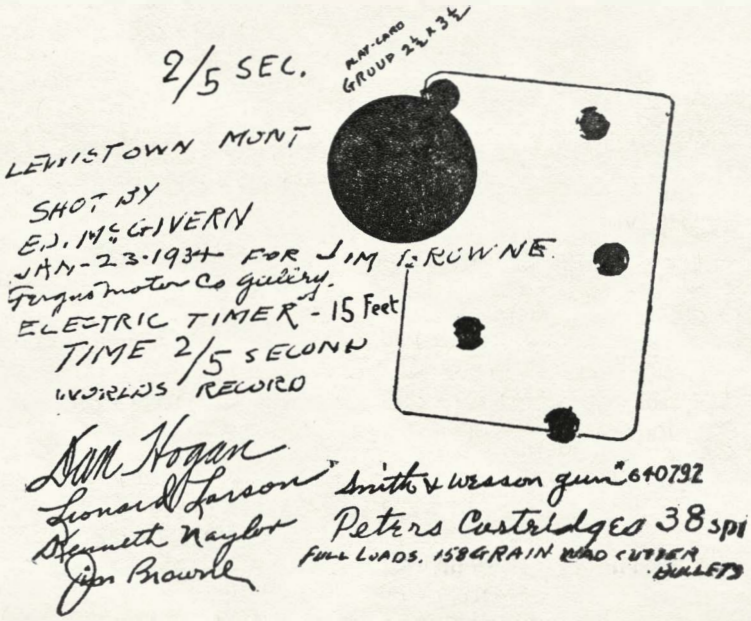
back of Reno Hill. There Bouyer told them (so they said) that Custer had ordered them back to the packtrain. At any rate they turned back in time to join Reno's fugitives streaming up from the valley. Before the Sioux, at about 6 p. m., returned from the annihilation of Custer to surround the Reno-Benteen command, the three Crows had disappeared, and on the following morning were seen (and one of them was questioned) by Lieut. Bradley near the mouth of the Little Big Horn. They did not return with the relieving troops, but crossed the Big Horn and went back to the old Crow Agency on the Stillwater.

Curly, the 17-year-old boy falsely alleged to have been with Custer in the battle, disappeared much earlier than his three companions and struck out for Tullock's Fork. Shortly after dawn the next morning he appeared, at least 45 miles away, on the Yellowstone, opposite Fort Pease, where he conversed across the water with the scout, Thomas H. La Forge. On the following morning, the 27th, about 10.30, he reached the steamer *Far West*, at the mouth of the Little Big Horn. It is unlikely that he saw any part of the battle, though at some point on the divide between Tullock's Fork and the Little Big Horn, he may have had a distant view of a surging mass of Indians. As he knew no word of English, and as the men on the *Far West* knew no word of Crow except the tribal name Absaroka, he could communicate nothing whatever except the general intimation of a disaster. It is certain that he made no assertion of having accompanied Custer until white men had put this notion in his head; and though he found profit and glory in sometimes playing the role assigned to him, it is also certain that more than once, before reputable witnesses, he flatly repudiated the preposterous stories of his exploits which white men had invented for him.

The Arikaras and friendly Dakotas, with Billy Cross, who refused to take part in the fighting, doubtless remained for some time in the neighborhood, in scattered groups, waiting the issue of the battle. Both Benteen and Godfrey testified to having met a group of scouts, of whom the Crow, Half Yellow Face, was one, on the south slope of Reno Hill as their battalion approached Reno; and Lieut. Mathey testified that in bringing up the packtrain, more than an hour later, he met and talked with an English-speaking half-breed (who could have been no other than Billy Cross). Some of these scouts probably took counsel of their fears and early started for the Powder River. When the Sioux returned to attack Reno all the remainder, except those with the command on the hill, also broke for the Powder. They were pursued for some distance, but all safely escaped.

SOME while ago Pink Simms of Lewistown, Montana, and A. Cunningham of El Paso, Texas, were exchanging shots in Camp-Fire over the shooting ability of "World's Champion" Ed McGivern, of Lewistown.

["Leave out the fancy titles," Ed McGivern wrote to me. "Just Ed McGivern of Montana is all the title I ever use."]



Pink Simms had written to Camp-fire:

"He can fire five shots, double action, in two-fifths of a second; and group them under a dime, this at twenty feet."

A. Cunningham hopped on the statement, and the shooting became general.

What caused it was an ambiguity of statement, later cleared up in Camp-Fire. McGivern can fire five shots, double action, in two-fifths of a second. McGivern can group five shots under a dime at twenty feet. He can't, he hastens to assure us, do both of these at once.

Well, nobody in the world can do that —and this seems a very safe statement.

I have a number of McGivern's remarkable targets, and am reproducing the one that shows what he does with the five shots fired in two-fifths of a second, at fifteen feet. The five shots are covered with a playing card. The black circle in the cut is, of course, the bulls-eye of the target.

He shot the target, he writes, after recovering from a considerable illness, and desiring to make sure his eye and arm had not been affected. He says:

"I wish to thank W. C. Tuttle for his very gentlemanly attitude and comments, and also Donegan Wiggins for his fine conduct all through the discussion."

And he wants to hear if Mr. Cunningham still wants to put up "that purse of around $1,000."

MANAGING editor Joseph E. Cox recalled a story about a sheepherder that Raymond S. Spears sent to Adventure some years ago. The story hadn't been right, and had been returned, and yet it was unusual enough so that it lingered around in his mind.

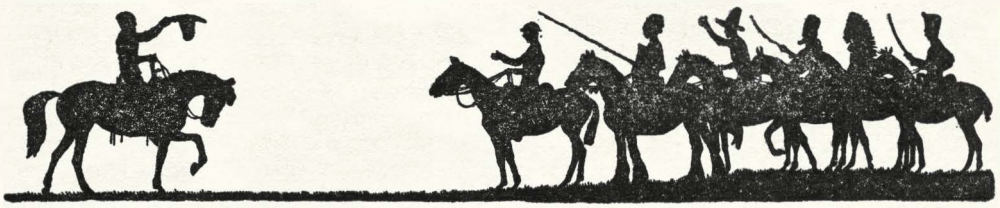
So we asked Mr. Spears to rummage around for that yarn, see if he could get some notions about improving it, and send it in again. He wrote:

"Joe Cox remembers a story of mine about a sheepherder? Now listen to this: that story is 'The Sheepherder.' It was written on June 17, 1920. I messed around on it a while, and here is what happened—Sent to Adventure, November 12th, 1920, back December 2nd. Now how can a man who was handling thousands of manuscripts remember *one* fourteen years ago?"

Mr. Spears saw the story in another light after that long interval, tinkered with it, sent it East again, remarking "it was an off-trailer and a puzzler." It is in this issue. You may not like it or you also may find it sticks around in your memory.

Mr. Spears, by the way, discovered in his typewriter man's shop in Inglewood the one good method of oiling a typewriter. Beside his busy machine he keeps a Flit gun filled with light machine oil. When his typewriter sticks or gets cranky, he picks up the gun and shoots at the typewriter from every angle. In the fog of oil thus created, all the parts needing lubrication get it, and the oil doesn't harm the other parts.

—H. B.



ASK ADVENTURE

For information you can't get elsewhere

THE mysterious poisoning of thousands of waterfowl in the Salton Sea of California.

Request:—"About a couple of months ago there appeared in one of the Boston Sunday supplements a very interesting account of the migration of ducks to the Salton Sea in California, where they tragically perished by the thousand in a most mysterious manner.

Could you tell me more about this, or refer me to some book on the subject? One would like to know whether there is any known explanation why the poor creatures should continue to flock to a place which has proved so deadly to them, and in such a wholesale way; and how long this state of things has been observed. Also whether the actual cause of death has been ascertained."

—HUGH C. WILLIAMSON, Boston, Mass.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—The Salton Sea is one of numerous aquatic areas in the West that rather mysteriously poison waterfowl. The article you refer to probably exaggerated the condition with regard to Imperial Valley; as a matter of fact, duck disease (as it is called) has been much more serious in other districts, notably I believe Oregon, Nevada and Utah. It is caused by excessive alkali and salts in solution in ponds and marshes frequented by ducks. The aggregate destruction of wildfowl by this means is deplorably colossal but it seems nothing can be done about it unless the "infected" areas might be either drained or screened (!) off. It takes some time after acquiring the disease for the ducks to die, and if afflicted ducks are removed to clean water they often recover completely. State conservation commissions and the Biological Survey have thus transported truckloads of sick wildfowl, but of course this remedy is not practical. It is impossible, with the element of time a major factor, to provide lookouts, trucks and men enough for this large project.

I recite the above from memory of an account read some three years ago. If you will write the superintendent of documents, Washington, D. C., enclose ten cents, and ask him to send you Technical Bulletin No. 41 you will have in your possession practically all the information available in print on this subject.

A READER asks if an ocelot can be tamed to become a pet.

Request:—"I have been wondering for some time about ocelots. I saw one some time ago in a zoo in New York, I believe, and it seemed to me as though it might make a nice pet. It seemed very playful behind the bars.

I would like to know anything about the temperament of this cat and if it would be suitable for a pet. Also I would appreciate it if you would inform me as to where I could locate one of these cats and for about how much. Is it possible to raise them in capitivity and, if so, how low a temperature can they stand, how often can they he bred, and what care should be taken of them. Could they be raised in the house as ordinary house cats are raised?"

R. S. CARTER, JR., Marquette, Mich.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Young:—The habitat of the ocelot is quite large, beginning in Texas down around Brownsville and ranging through Mexico, Central America, Panama, and on down into South America to beyond the equator. It is without doubt the most beautiful of the cat family.

Down in the tropics it is quite common to see them as house pets and I think you will find a few pet ones out around Hollywood at the present time. If taken as kittens they are easily tamed, heing different in this respect to the bobcat or wild cat which is not amenable to domesticity. Even in their wild state they are not aggressive but will put up a bad scrap if cornered.

You will find them in most of the large zoos in the United States semi-domesticated or wild. The obtaining of a house broken pet brings on more talk. It would possibly require making a trip down into the countries where they are indigenous and purchasing a pet from some one who owns one that has been raised from a kitten. Across from Brownsville, Texas, would be the nearest place.

All the cat family is descended from the saber-toothed tiger of ancient times and their breeding habits are about the same as the tigers and house cats. They range tropical and subtropical climates and would have to be protected from extreme cold in the winter time.

SHE'S a smooth, speedy craft and like no other, the Chesapeake Bay canoe.

Request:—"Can you give me any information on Chesapeake Bay log canoes?"
—CHARLES ELLIS, JR., Savannah, Ga.

Reply by Mr. Charles Hall:—The dugout boat is probably older than civilization on this continent. In Panama today there are fifty-footers sailing in trade, each one carved out of a single huge log. These boats are schooner rigged and many of them are quite old. On the Chesapeake Bay the canoes, as they are called, are built up of three or five ogs, treenailed together and dubbed off to the desired shape outside and hollowed inside. A single strake of planking is usually added to make them a little deeper and there is a narrow side deck and a short deck at the ends. The bottoms are fairly thick as the boats were mostly built for the oyster trade and had to stand years of shovelling without showing signs of getting thin. It used to be a rule of thumb that a canoe's bottom thickness was about equal to her draft of water when light.

They carry the most unholy rigs I have ever seen except on a sailing canoe—a regular racing one, I mean—and they are sailed in the races for the Governor's Cup as a canoe is sailed. The boats are so narrow that they lack the necessary stability to carry their immense racing rigs, so they use hiking boards, each a stout plank with several huskies on it. These are shoved out on the weather side, the inboard ends being thrust under the lee gunwales, and the live ballast hikes in and out as needed to keep the boat on her feet. And how they can ghost along with almost no wind at all! They slip ahead with each tiniest catspaw that ruffles the bay. It used to be the practice when racing, and the wind petered out, for the skipper to tell off certain of his crew to swim ashore to lighten ship, but I believe that this is prohibited at present.

I have seen the model of the "Island Bird," built in the 80's—in fact I took off her lines—and she was a sweet thing with beautiful lines. She is still afloat and doing some good racing at St. Michaels, Maryland. She is, as I remember it (I have not the plans by me) about 24′ long and carried some 700 square feet of sail, quite a lot of canvas for such a narrow hull.

All in all, they are wonderful boats and practically all of them were built as work boats, speed being desired to get their oysters to market in the shortest possible time. The natural rivalry of the sailorman attended to the rest, and the canoes became faster and faster, with formal races as the result. Go to St. Michaels some time when they are racing and see some marvelous boats.

THE real Mexican way to make chile con carne.

Request:—"Can you furnish me with a formula for real Mexican chili or furnish me with the name of some person that can, also give me the name of some house that can supply all flavoring that goes in it."
—BRADLEY JONES, JR., Chattanooga, Tenn.

Reply by Mr. J. W. Whitetaker:—Perhaps none of the Mexian dishes are so well known as chile con carne, which literally means chile peppers with meat. A good recipe for this popular dish follows: Two pounds of meat, three tablespoons lard, ripe tomato cut in pieces, two buttons chopped garlic, one medium size onion, two tablespoons of chili powder. Cut meat into small pieces, and put in a frying pan, with lard, cooking slightly brown. Add garlic, onion, salt, pepper, and tomato. Mix chili powder thoroughly with ½ cup hot water, add to the meat, and let boil until meat is very tender. Add additional water as needed. This chile should be made with plenty of gravy.

We are very fond of this dish during the winter time and my wife uses the above recipe—there are other recipes for making chili that is used by canning companies here in Texas but their canned chili has not the proper flavor.

Write to the Walker's Austex Chile Co., Austin, Texas and request one of their Recipe Books on Mexican Dishes—and also have them quote you prices on the raw materials to make the same.

Also there is the Gebhardt Chile Co., San Antonio, Texas which would be glad to supply you with information and their Mexican Cookery Book.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

Fishing.—JOHN B. THOMPSON (OZARK RIPLEY) care *Adventure.*

Small Boating.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Canoeing.—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 117 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating.—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping.—MAJ. CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., American Tourist Camp Ass'n, 152 W. 65th St., N. Y. C.

Yachting.—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

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All Shotguns.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers.—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 69, Salem, Ore.

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First Aid, Hiking, Health-Building.—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, N. J.

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Precious and Semi-Precious Stones.—F. J. BESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Calif.

Forestry in U. S., Big game hunting.—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry.—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Box 575, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

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World War.—*Strategy, tactics, leaders, armies, participants, historical and political background.*—BEDA VON BERCHEM, care *Adventure.*

All Navy Matters.—LT. CMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U. S. N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Fla.

U. S. Marine Corps.—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, R. F. D. 1, Box 614, La Canada, Calif.

Aviation.—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

State Police, Federal Secret Service, etc.—FRANCIS H. BENT, 184 Fair Haven Rd., Fair Haven, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police.—PATRICK LEE, 157-11 Sanford Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

Horses.—MAJ. THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pebio, Colo.

Dogs.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

North and Central American Anthropology.—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Taxidermy.—SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *Insects, poisonous, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *Reptiles and Amphibians.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ornithology *Birds; Habits, distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.

Stamps.—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals.—HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway, at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Radio.—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Rd., Roselle Pk., N. J.

Photography.—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif.

Football.—JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose St., N. Y. C.

Baseball.—FREDERICK LIEB, 250 Bronxville Rd., Bronxville, N. Y.

Track.—JACKSON SCHOLTZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Swimming and Lifesaving.—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skiing and Snowshoeing.—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Canada.

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Wrestling.—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of Education, New York University, Washington Sq., N. Y. C.

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The Sea Part 1 *British and American Waters. Ships, seamen, statistics, record, oceans, waterways, seas, islands. Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Horn, Magellan Straits, Mediterranean Sea,* Islands and Coasts.—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESENBERG, 47 Dick St., Rosemont, Alexandria, Va. **2** *Antarctic.*—F. LEONARD MARSLAND, care *Adventure.* **3** *Old Time Sailoring, Ship Modelling and Marine Architecture.*—CHARLES H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

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★New Guinea.—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★New Zealand; Cook Island, Samoa.—TOM L. MILLS, *The Fielding Star,* Fielding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania.—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands.—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardrosa." Suva, Fiji.

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Madagascar.—RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

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West Indies.—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Neuva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Central America.—E. BRUGUIERE, care *Adventure.*

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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, 436 Orchard St., New Haven, Conn. **4** *Adirondacks, New York.* Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. **4** *West Va., Md.*—Robert Holton Bull, 1206 Second Ave., Charleston, W. Va. **6** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga., Sawmilling.*—Hapsburg Liebe, care *Adventure*. **7** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains South of Virginia.*—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

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"Bunk!" —says CHARLES ATLAS

"I'll Prove *in the first 7 days* YOU can have a Body like Mine!"

No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement.

DON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! Don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumb-bells, springs or any other such contraptions!

Both these ideas are all bunk —and I have PROVED it. All I need is 7 *days* to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for My body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of Dynamic Tension can do for YOURS!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I was a few years ago. *Then* I was a physical wreck, a 97-pound weakling—flat chested, spindly legs, arms and legs like pipestems.

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This Secret Has Helped Thousands

Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what Dynamic Tension has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and puny as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man *can* and *ought* to be with mighty energy, tireless endurance and muscles that stand out like bridge-cables all over their bodies.

I have written an interesting booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

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I'd like you to know what Dynamic Tension has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book, which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and no one will call upon you.

I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others: give you broad, powerful shoulders, biceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid and muscular, and an evenly developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

Will you gamble a stamp to win a body like mine? Then mail this coupon TODAY! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 139-L, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

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Gamble a stamp today. Mail coupon for free copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It shows you from actual photos how I have developed my pupils to my own perfectly balanced proportions. Where shall I send your copy? Write your name and address plainly on the coupon. Mail it today to me personally.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 139-L
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N.Y.

I want the proof that your system of Dynamic-Tension will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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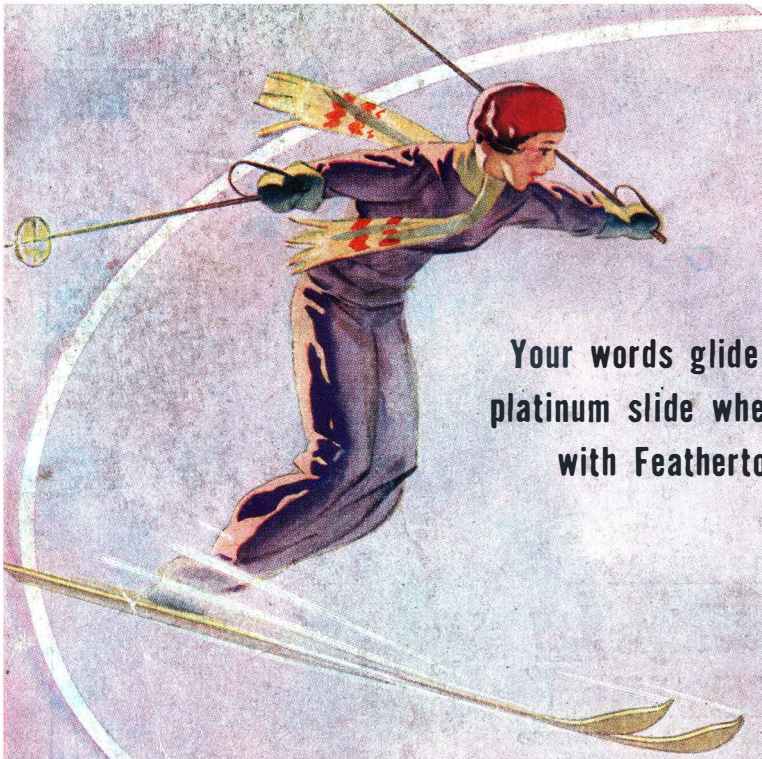
City ..... State .....



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