

APRIL

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Adventure

Leonard H. Nason
L. Paul
Thomson Burtis
Robert Simpson
S. B. H. Hurst
Royce Brier
Charles Beadle
Alanson Skinner
Bill Adams
William Westrup

3 Complete Novelettes





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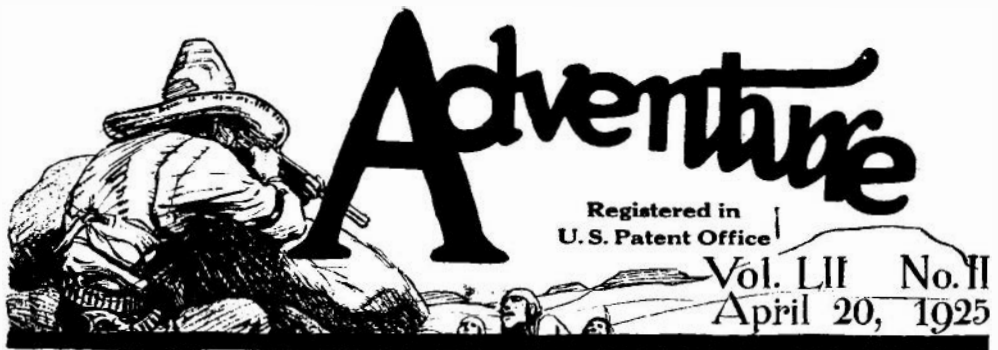
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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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GRAY seas and gray lands were but battlegrounds for the defender of the youthful King Magnus' title. "SWAIN FOSTR" is a complete novelette of viking days, by Arthur D. Howden Smith in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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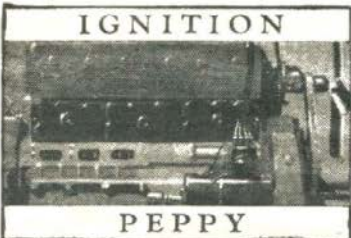
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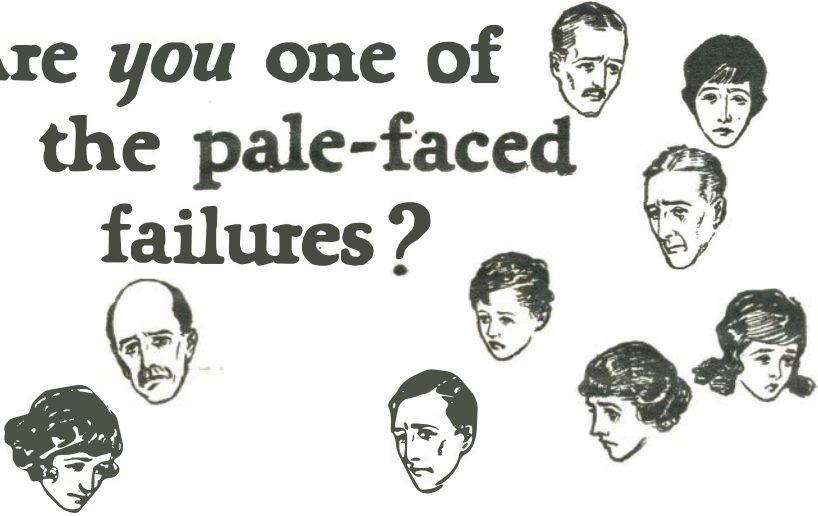


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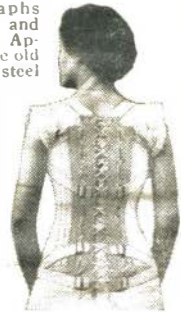
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Adventure

April 20, 1925 Vol. LII No. 5



Eye-Wash

A Complete Novelette
By
Leonard H. Nason

Author of "A Hearty Meal," "Rockets at Daybreak," etc.

IN THE midst of a broad, flat plateau there was an intersection of two roads. The road running east and west came into sight over a slight rise, went directly across the table land as if it knew its own mind, and disappeared from view behind a rocky knoll.

On the east side of the crossroads it was deserted, but on the west side there were a number of curious structures along the northern edge, things that looked a little like tents and again like canopies spread for shade, and upon the third look, one likened these mysterious dwellings to lace curtains spread in the sun to dry by an industrious housewife. What seemed to be a stove pipe, long and slim, projected heavenward

"Eye-Wash." copyright, 1925, by Leonard H. Nason.

from each pavilion. There was a light haze about the place and at intervals one could see movements behind the curtains' tracery.

The slim tubes were not stove pipes, but heavy guns. When smoke came from their black mouths, they withdrew a good half their length under the canopy, and then leaped out again, at the same time eructing a shell as big as a man, and sending it forth a number of miles, to fall among certain men of Germanic descent, and utterly destroy them and their works. The tents, or canopies, or lace curtains spread to dry were rolls of netting, decorated with tufts of grass and were spread to cloud the sight of enemy observers, airplane or balloon.

The north fork of the four corners also came upon the plateau from below. The

north fork came from the front and hence was a busy road. At present there was a long line of traffic on it, huge wide-hooded trucks, a limousine or two, some motorcyclists, and a number of ambulances.

This traffic was at a standstill. The foremost truck was a good hundred yards up the road from the four corners, but there was nothing in front of it to impede its progress, and the road stretched white and shining, free and open, under the morning sun. What, then, obstructed the advance of these machines?

Hark! There was a distant moan like that which heralds the approach of an express train. Much swifter than any train, albeit it had no wheels, the moan became a rattling roar. The train was overhead, arrived at a steep incline, rushed shrieking down it, and smote the earth with a sound of rending thunderbolts. Dirt leaped high, a sudden fountain, jeweled with stones and hunks of steel, then came clattering down again.

A man climbed from a pit by the roadside near the head of the column and waved a nonchalant hand at the line of traffic. Their motors roared, and the trucks moved forward. They lingered not by the wayside, those trucks, but galloped away, lumbering like elephants, and the swift motorcyclists scudded by them, their whistles shrilling. A minute ticked by, then the man by the road held up his hand, the traffic stopped again—no argument either—and the man took to his hole.

The foremost vehicle now in the line was an ambulance, one of the three-quarter-ton type, used by the American forces. The driver thereof threw out his clutch and leaned over his wheel, as the man by the road held up his hand. He inserted a cigaret in his mouth and, lighting the match with his thumb nail, applied it to the cigaret.

"Rouge, ain't it our luck," said he to the man on the seat beside him, "to be the first car in the line?"

"I'd rather be the first in this one than the last in that one," said Rouge, indicating the end of the moving line, that was hustling with all speed down the south branch.

"Yeh, but s'pose one o' them freight cars falls short?"

At that moment the freight car clattered on its way and, making as much noise as a hundred, every one with a flat wheel, it

shattered itself into junk in the field beside the crossroads.

"How'd yuh like to be an M.P.?" asked the driver, as the man in the hole got out again and waved his hand for the traffic to move forward.

"I'd swap with him," said Rouge. "He's got a hole right handy an' he gits in it when he hears one comin', but I ain't got no hole an' I got to sit right here or else jump out 'n' break my neck."

"I ain't got yuh hit yet, have I?" asked the driver.

"No, Wally," said the other, "you ain't. But I don't hold it against yuh. You done your best."

Northward the American troops battled their enemy in the thickets of the Argonne. It was hard going. The enemy were entrenched on the crests of the rolling hills and the Americans had to fight their way up the slopes. The Germans were protected by concrete and barbed wire, but they had no protection for their nerves.

An attack would begin, say at dawn, and the Germans, chuckling in their emplacements, would destroy the attacking force as a child sweeps away a spider's web. When the machine gunners were about to knock off and have a bit of sausage and beer, they would hear firing and perhaps a grenade or two would fly their way. They went immediately back to their thumb-pieces, not chuckling. The new attacking force would be destroyed, but where the Germans killed ten, a hundred would spring up.

The enemy had no time to eat, no time to sleep, machine gun nests would be flanked, their crews killed, and eventually the whole defense system, its garrison haggard and worn, would collapse. This method of attack is very costly, however, and can only be employed by a force having an unlimited reservoir of replacements back of it.

The flood of wounded rolling back from the front engulfed the hospitals and since it was humanly impossible to give them proper care, many died that might have lived. The ambulance drivers earned their dollar a day. If they had been paid for overtime they would all have been rich.

"We're about due fer relief, ain't we?" asked Rouge, as the ambulance rocked down the next hill.

"Might be," answered Wally, "an' then again we might not. How long we been on?"

"Golly," said Rouge, "wait till I think. It's hard to remember, because if we go on in the morning, the first thing you know its night, an' then before you can get used to it, up comes the sun, and in a coupla trips it's night again."

"If you was hangin' onto this wheel," remarked Wally, "instead o' sittin' there sunnin' yourself, the time wouldn't go so fast!"

"Well, I offered to drive often enough 'til you got so hard-boiled an' tellin' me to go to —"

"Yeh, after I let you drive once an' you climbed into the back of a truck an' then took us off the road an' up a bank. This here is a ambulance, not a tank. There's places it can't go."



THERE was a pained silence after that that lasted until the ambulance slid up to a row of tents, a field hospital where the wounded brought in from the first aid posts were sorted out, and sent here and there according to the severity of their hurts. Rouge helped to unload and after the usual argument about the number of blankets to take back, he leaped into the offside of the seat and cried to Wally:

"Git in, kid, git in! Us for sleep an' rest."

"Us *not* for sleep an' rest," said Wally, where he sat on the running board, inhaling tobacco smoke. "That major, old 'Bellyband,' he says to me, 'Hustle up to Avocourt, there's a lot o' wounded up there. They're catchin' — up there an' we want to get all we can out before it gets too hot an' we can't evacuate none.'"

"Well, let's be goin'," said Rouge with resignation.

"Not 'til I finish my cigaret. I won't save no lifes by throwin' away a good cigaret."

When the cigaret was finished, Wally climbed to his seat, blew his whistle a couple of times and, turning around, rumbled away toward the north again. He craned his neck out from under the roof and examined the sky.

"Gonna rain again," he announced. "They oughta fit these wagons with pontoons, we'd have a easier time."

They went past the crossroads again where they had been held up by shell fire. Fritz was paying no more attention to this place, for the M.P. now stood at the intersection of the roads and the traffic rolled in a steady stream.

Wally turned off to the left and, passing

the eight-inch babies with their sweating crews, he snaked along a road lined with machine gun columns, and shortly arrived in a shattered town. Strangely enough, the street of that town was empty. It was not a long street, one could see from end to end of it, and not a soul moved thereon. The ambulance came to a sliding stop.

"How come no one in sight?" asked Rouge. "You ain't took us into Germany, have you?"

"Fat chance," said Wally. "I know this town's well as I know my own. Where they all gone? Here's a good cellar. Let's stop 'n' halt right here. The first aid station's down the street, but I don't go till I have a look to see where the American army's gone."

As Wally finished speaking, they heard the distant moan of the approaching train without wheels. As men dive from a spring-board, the two dived from their seats down the cellar stairs near which the ambulance had stopped. They hit the bottom of the stairs as the shell arrived in the street.

"Whoa, boy!" they both exclaimed.

That shell was a big one and some of the house over their heads fell down into the cellar with a sullen sound.

"Good-by ambulance!" cried Wally. "Let's see what's left of it!"

The two emerged from the cellar and staring their eyes through the smoke, tried to see what was left of their machine. Apparently it was unharmed.

"Let's get in it an' go!" cried Rouge.

"Let's," agreed Wally.

They tore across the road and climbed into the machine again.

"Now —!" they both said.

There was considerable dirt scattered over the floor and cushion and Wally, looking down on his side, could see that the shell had struck but a short way off.

"Lookit," he exclaimed, pointing, "mud-guard, runnin' board, hood, an' tire, I'll bet!" He got down. "Yep, we got one through the tire. It wouldn't be our luck if we hadn't." He looked closely at the little box under the seat. "Here's a hole through here, too, Rouge," he cried. "See what it done while I have a look at this tire."

Rouge spoke quickly from the cellar entrance—

"Come in out the rain, Wally, I hear another one."

A steam boiler fell from the sky with so sudden a shriek that Wally had but time to flatten himself on the ground before the explosion. The shell burst some distance down the street and a piece of it buzzed through the top of the ambulance.

"You hit, Rouge?" cried Wally, raising his head from the ground.

"No, I ain't," answered Rouge from the cellar. "I go downstairs when I hear them G. I. cans comin'. You're gettin' heavy on your feet. They'll be gettin' you one o' these days."

"You come outta that an' see is our spare gas can punctured!" shouted Wally.

He bent over the tire again and Rouge, keeping a cautious eye on the cellar entrance, opened the box under the seat and dragged out the two tin cans that were in there.

Wheeeel!

The two hit the bottom of the stairs together that time, but the shell was even farther away.

"They're walkin' 'em up an' down the street," muttered Wally. "No wonder them machine gunners was haltin'. Did the gas can have a hole in it?"

"No," said Rouge, his eyes round with tragedy, "but the other one did, an' the last o' our beer all run out!"

"Serves us right for not drinkin' it last night," said Wally. "You ain't got brains enough to make a omelet for a cootie. 'Save it for tomorrow,' says you. 'Save it for tomorrow.' Now it's all gone to —! Let's go fix that tire an' get outta here."

"You crazy?" demanded Rouge. "Go out an' play with a flat tire with all that ironware clatterin' around? I aim to stay right here in this nice dry cellar."

"You drag the seat o' your pants up them — stairs right sudden," said Wally. "You want to stay here 'til that ship o' oun gets all hammered to —? Want to walk back about ten kilometers or so? We'll fix that tire an' curve outta here!"

"You aim to take a load out?" asked Rouge, as the two rushed around the ambulance and began to wrestle with the tire.

"We'll see about that when we get the tire fixed," answered Wally. "Maybe we'll get a ride out ourselves, head first."

A motor purred behind them and there was a squeal of brakes.

"Hey!" cried a voice. "Where at's La Remise Farm?"



WALLY looked over his shoulder. There was a large and imposing limousine drawn up beside the ambulance. There was one man inside the machine and a driver leaned over the front door. It was this last who had questioned Wally.

"Snap out of it!" cried the driver of the limousine. "Where at's that place? Ain't yuh listenin'?"

Indeed Wally was listening and so was Rouge, but they were not listening to questions. They listened for the distant moan of a large hunk of steel filled with highly explosive material. They heard it.

"Here!" barked a voice, "where are you going?"

The door of the limousine opened and a red face protruded therefrom. Wally noticed in passing that the overseas cap that surmounted the face bore two stars upon it. Wally continued to go, nevertheless, about his own affairs, and the general in the limousine, not being deaf, shot out of the door and followed. He knew that a message of love from the skies would fall in the immediate vicinity. Wally, Rouge, and the general dived down the stairs.

Bong! Stones and dust flew down after them, the cellar entrance was obscured by a thick brown cloud, and all three began to inspect themselves to see if they had been hit.

"Jerusalem my glorious home!" said the general, or words to that effect. "Let me go out of this town! Do either of you flat-heads know where La Remise Farm is?"

"No, sir," they both answered loudly and clearly.

"Bah!" cried the general, and leaped up the steps as swiftly as his stomach would let him.

Wally and Rouge looked at each other and then remained in the cellar. If the general did not see them he would not think of them, and they felt the better part of valor would be to stay out of sight. One of the limousine's tires might have been punctured.

The general's face appeared at the opening of the cellar.

"Come out of that hole," he bellowed. "What d'yuh think you are, a couple of — snakes? Come up here like men! My driver's hit."

The two went up. The limousine was untouched and waited patiently, like a faithful horse, its motor still running. The

shell had burst diagonally across the street and, such is the strange behavior of shells, had hurled a sheaf of steel across the road which, missing the limousine by an inch, had removed the top and sides from the ambulance as completely, though not as neatly, as if the deed had been done with an ax.

The driver, leaping from his seat on the other side of the limousine and running for the opposite side of the road, had run directly under the shell. Wally could tell at a glance that the driver was dead and beyond any earthly aid. It occurred to him that the other's burial would be a difficult thing.

"Can you drive this machine?" barked the general suddenly.

"I c'n drive anything that goes on wheels," answered Wally.

"Get in, then, get in! Let's go! Let's get to — out of here!"

"That's where we're likely to go, all right," muttered Rouge.

Whoop! Blam! The three flattened out instantly. There was a thunder of brick and crashing tile from down the street. While the smoke still lay thickly, Wally and Rouge leaped to the seat, the general fell into the back, and the car roared away.

They went down the street like a beam of light and plunged into the smoke. The upper end of the street had had considerable attention paid to it and the road was deeply pitted with shell holes. Into these lurched the limousine.

"Breakers ahead," roared Wally. "Stand by to pump ship!"

Bang! The car struck a hole, shot out of it, every spring and bolt protesting, went into and out of another and began to shake herself as a dog does on coming out of the water.

Rouge hung to the roof, now swinging out over the roadway, now straining every muscle to keep from falling on Wally, hurled against the dash, battered on the floor, the car shaking savagely as if trying to break his grip, and all the while, Wally, his knee braced on the seat, half standing, half sitting, hung to the wheel and kept the car on the road.

A shell burst behind them, and a hole appeared in the hood that looked as if some one had dropped a splotch of black paint there. A last buck, a last pointing of the radiator skyward, and they were on level ground once more.

"—!" gasped Wally, removing his cramped leg from the seat. "See is the old man hit."

Rouge looked into the back of the car. There was a heap of clothing there, a snarl of legs and arms, out of which two fine shiny British boots reached toward the ceiling. A voice came from this tangle, a stifled, yet emphatic voice, a voice that spoke with deep feeling.

"He's all right," shouted Rouge. "Hark at him. Oh, man, think o' the words a guy learns in twenty years in the army!"

The road curved, and Wally, leaning like a motorcyclist, took the curve at thirty miles an hour. There was renewed clamor from within the car.

"He ain't ridin' with no gold brick now," cried Wally. "He's ridin' with a ambulance driver."

"Well, remember you got a buddy on the seat with yuh," pleaded Rouge.

"You're all right," said Wally. "Stick with me, kid, an' you'll wear a *Cross dee Gerr*. I always did want to drive one o' these things! I think I'll put in for a regular chauffeur's job, to some guy that rates a car."

"There's a M.P. Whyacha ast him the way?"

"Will," agreed Wally.

The car came to an abrupt stop, its brakes screeching to the high heavens. The effect of the sudden stop brought the passenger upright against the front of the car, and immediately he tugged to open the sliding pane.

"Hey, soldier," cried Wally to the M.P. "Where's La Pallice Farm?"

"Never heard of it," answered the policeman. "What outfit yuh lookin' for?"

"This here is a division commander," suggested Rouge. "Ast him where the division P.C. is."

"Where's the division P.C.?" asked Wally.

"Which one?"

"Which one? Don't you know what division is operatin' in this sector? How many divisions are there here? You're a great cop!"



AT THIS moment the general got the pane open and thrust through his head. Wally gathered that the general wanted them to drive on. It was with some difficulty that he understood, but the burden of what the general said, the motif of the symphony, was to proceed.

Wally tramped on the accelerator and the car leaped from under him. The general was removed bodily from the window to the back of the back seat, and after that he was too busy keeping unwound from himself to say any more.

"Don't break no axle," cautioned Rouge in the driver's ear.

"I won't break no axle," Wally assured him. "All I'm worryin' about is how far off the boche are. We don't want to run into 'em."

"You'd strike some of our guys first."

"Maybe so, an' maybe not," said Wally.

Bram!

"There goes your axle!" cried Wally.

"Flat tire," said Rouge.

The car, however, striking a stretch of smooth road, snored on smoothly.

"'Sall right," said both the men.

"Shell?" suggested Rouge.

"Naw, no smoke. By golly, I know what that noise was. We musta run by a battery just as one of the guns let go. I done it once before, at night."

"Kid," cried Rouge, "we're gettin' close, now don't forget it. Them seventy-fives goes right up with the doughboys!"

"Well, what the —'ll I do?" exclaimed the distracted Wally. "Turn around and go back? Ol' Stoopngrabit in back there ain't doin' any worryin', is he?"

"No, but you get him captured an' you'll get court-martialed for it."

The road entered a stretch of leafy woodland. The woods were green and thick, and they were also wet. The rain that stopped and fell and stopped again, as if it was trying to send a message in Morse, had doused the woods thoroughly, and the water dripped from the leaves. The car was well into the forest in a few seconds, such was its speed, and the two men's noses went into the air instantly.

"Is it?" asked Rouge.

"I'll say," Wally replied.

He threw out the clutch and applied his brake. The rear end of the car came up beside the front to see why the sudden stop, and by the time the general had risen from the floor, the two men on the front seat had gotten on their gas masks. The general's face appeared at the open window, but he needed to ask no questions. His smeller told him what, and the sight of the two goggle-eyed, black-faced triangles on the front seat confirmed it.

The general tugged to close the window. He would be safe enough in the glassed-in car. It occurred to Wally as he straightened the car on the road again, that the general probably had no mask. If so, the general was S.O.L. One soldier, one mask, and to ask a soldier for his gas mask was to ask him for his life.

The car proceeded down the leafy road. The gas mask prevents conversation, even with one's self for part of its machinery is a huge rubber gag. Moreover, the tightness of the rubber makes the face itch, especially if there is any stubble of beard. There is a tight clip that pinches the nostrils together so that the wearer will be sure to breathe through his mouth and, as this clip is actuated by a powerful spring, the pressure on a man's nose becomes unbearable in a very short time. The air comes through the filtering can but slowly, saliva flows from the gag and down a man's chin, and the escape valve blubbers and sobs. Ten minutes is a long time to wear the contraption.

"To — with the — thing," muttered Wally. "I'll take my chance on the gas."

A shell howled at them from the heavens and, bursting with anticlimatic silence, rolled out a cloud of white vapor. Wally kept his mask on, and drove the car through the ghostly smoke with a pounding heart. They came out of the belt of woodland on to a grassy plain. There was a hedge at the far side of the plain and several batteries of light guns were behind it, with beautiful smoke rings curling from their thin muzzles. The field continually erupted dirt and stones, like a man coughing with a full mouth.

"Hey, ham-head," cried Rouge, lifting the side of his mask away from his jaw, "they won't have no divisional P.C. up this far, you'll be in Germany in another mile!"

Wally made no reply. He had been hoping all along that he would come to a road that turned off either to right or left of the one he was on, but the road did not appear. And he knew as well as any one else that when a man gets up to the light guns he's not over far from a whole lot of action. A motorcyclist curved by. There was a frenzied hammering on the glass.

Wally cleared his mouth of the gag and lifted the chin of the mask.

"See what the old Dick wants," he said.

Rouge was already parleying by signs with the general and turning about he shouted. "Follow that motorcycle!"

"Right!" said Wally.

He looked out over the side to see more clearly. The sun appeared suddenly and Wally took a hasty look up at the sky. It was almost blue. His gaze swept to the road again, but in doing so his line of vision crossed the northwest horizon. There was a dim gray dot there, a grey jelly bean on a sheet of blue paper. Rouge saw it at the same time and he and Wally both pointed and gurgled to each other.

The limousines went into the ditch on two wheels, across it, and through the field. A salvo burst on the road they had just left, then four shells resounded in the field, as if a chord on a piano had been struck.

Wally applied the brakes with all force and when the car had stopped, tore off his gas mask. He needed clear vision. He took another look at that jelly bean, that balloon, that *drachen*, and marked where those four shells had burst. The general roared merrily from within the car and hammered mightily upon the window pane.

Another salvo, this time on Rouge's side, quite near, because there was considerable whining and buzzing of steel fragments after the explosion. The balloon had spotted the car and was trying to get a bracket on it.

"All aboard!" cried Wally and, with roaring motor, he tore across the field.

He had spied an opening in the woods at the far side, an opening that must be a road. His sinking heart told him that the boche knew of that road and undoubtedly had the range of it all set down and their guns calibrated on it. It would be death to follow it.

"Lookit," shouted Rouge, "there goes the motorcycle!" Wally looked and beheld the motorcyclist flitting from tree to tree, only it was plain that he was on another road not very far through the woods. The other road was below the field, and the ground sloped down to it.

"C'n we make it?" gasped Rouge.

Berram!

"Got to," answered Wally.

They swung around and fled across the field, rolling and pitching like a ship. The incline of the slope helped them when they reached the woods, and they hurtled down it. Wally wondered why the general did not protest with his usual vigor. The car sneaked between large trees, uprooted small ones, and tore loose a few strands of rusty barbed wire.

"Who said the tanks are comin'?" roared Rouge. "Oh, —, look out!"

Wire usually means that a trench is near. One paralleled the lower road and the two men saw it at the same instant. It was too late to stop and they could not have backed up hill if they could have stopped their descent.


"Hold tight, Rouge," cried Wally, and stood upright on the accelerator.

The limousine shot toward the foot of the slope as doth a bee to its hive, or rather as the daredevil about to loop the loop rushes down the steep descent from a high platform. The front wheels of the car rose to the trench's parapet. Rouge went up against the roof, the motor roared as the rear wheels left the ground, and they were on the road and halfway into the ditch on the other side.

The car came to a standstill, and Wally, leaning from his seat, made sure that all the wheels on his side were still with the car. Then, with no comment, he backed the car onto the road again, and straightening out, headed down the road toward the high plastered wall of a farm which, from the motorcycles and sidecars clustered about the entrance, seemed to be a Post of Command.

"Hey!" shouted Wally. "Is this La Carise Farm?"

At the sight of the official limousine with its two stars, there was a stiffening of backs and a hasty departure of some in the rear to warn those within the farm that authority was without.

 "THIS is La Remise," answered a very erect bareheaded officer. "Is that what you are looking for by any chance?"

The door of the limousine opened with a bang and a little cloud of sulphur floated out. Wally leaped from his seat, and saluting snappily, cried out—

"This here is your farm, General!"

The general crept out, feeling his way carefully. At once there were exclamations of sympathy and horror from all the bystanders. The general held his hands to his face and tears streamed down his cheeks. His nose also wept. His eyes, when they could be seen, showed highly inflamed lids. It was apparent that the general had been badly gassed and probably could not see.

Up stepped the very soldierly, military officer, and bending at the waist with a

slight click of his shiny spurs and a tiny tinkle of the silver ding-dang that he wore on his wrist, he placed his hand on the general's shoulder, where that dignitary had sunk to a seat on the running board.

"Are you able to see, General?" asked the officer, in accents of culture and refinement.

"You're tootin' I can see, you — tailor's dummy!" roared the general. "You perfumed —, I can smell, too! What do I hear? 'The brigade can not make further advance!' And a little later, 'In the face of heavy hostile fire, the brigade has been forced to retire to reorganize.' What next?"

"Here is old 'Tea and Toast' calling me up from the corps. 'Your right brigade has pulled out in confusion and disorder,' says he. 'A gap in the lines has developed. The situation must be restored immediately or disaster is imminent.' Let him handle his corps and leave me to my division. He couldn't be captain of a volunteer fire company and do it right!"

The general leaped to his feet.

"And so we retreat in confusion, do we? And here are all the goldbricks! Can you handle a rifle, you barber pole? Well, grab one and haul your handsome mug to — out of my sight. Go and get yourself killed like a man! The rest of you get hold of a rifle or an ax or a club and be ready to do a little fighting. Lead me to the brigadier!"

The brigadier appeared with a little train of officers. The general rose to his feet and restrained himself with difficulty. He dashed the tears from his eyes, and bent a lowering gaze upon his chief of brigade.

"Good afternoon, General," said the brigadier.

The division commander made no reply, but beckoned to his subordinate and led him a little to one side. The watchers could not hear a word, nor could they see the division commander's face. The major general, however, could be seen to brandish his hand in air, to beat the palm of one hand with the fist of the other, and finally to place both hands on his hips and with arms akimbo like a ruffling rooster's wings, to wag his head vigorously from side to side.

Rouge nudged Wally with his elbow.

"Kid," said he, "I'd like to hear what's goin' on. I bet a guy could learn some words would make a mule stand on his head!"

"I bet," agreed Wally.

The division commander then returned, wiping his eyes with his coat sleeve.

"All you men, git!" he roared. "Up on the lines, now, every one. The gravy train is ditched. And you," he addressed the very nervous wreck that was all that was left of the handsome jingling officer. "You! If I see you again unless you're wounded or dead, I'll give you the — kick on the bottom that you ever got in your life! Move out!"

The general watched them go. Then he turned to the brigadier.

"I think," said he, and his voice reminded one of a naked sword, "that your personal efforts would assist very materially with the reorganization of your brigade." The brigadier moved out, too.

"Now," said the division commander, turning to Wally, "you belong to the medical corps. You do a little work. See these eyes of mine? I'm gassed and I can't leave this place tonight. If I do these handshakers will let the boche through on us. You hump yourself back to my P.C. I'm going to send a man back and he'll show you where it is, and you ask for Colonel Martin.

"You tell him I want some eye-wash, and you bring it back here. If I'm not here, you hunt around for me, I won't be far, but you bring it back here. By —, if you don't come back with it I'll hunt you all over France till I find you and bang you. You can't escape me! Understand? Colonel Martin, now."

The general then approached the officers that had come out with the brigadier from the farm, and who were now huddled together like sheep on the approach of a strange dog. The general inquired of every one his duties and waved his hand toward the front or pointed to the farm, according to the place where he judged the officer was most necessary. One of the last ones he commanded to stand aside until he had finished with the others, and him he talked with a minute or two and then led him to the limousine.

"Take this officer back with you," ordered the general. "He knows the way, and it shouldn't take you very long. He has a better route than the one that we came up."

"They'll take you back all right," continued the general to the other officer, a captain. "That driver may climb a few trees, and he may take to the air like a plane, but

he'll get you back. I know what the pea in a rattle feels like. You'd better wear your tin hat. Be sure to start these birds off promptly. My eyes sting like — and they won't get any better without treatment. Mustard in the eyes is bad stuff. Didn't think it would affect me in the car, but it did. Run along now."

"Rouge," said Wally, as they climbed to the front seat again. "Have you got any squirtin' tobacco about you?"

"Wally," said Rouge, bitterly, "you know — well I ain't got no squirtin' tobacco."

"Want a chew?" asked the captain. "Here."

He dived into his blouse pocket and Wally tore off a piece that a supply sergeant would have called "Size Three Stout."

"Don't you chew?" the captain asked Rouge in mild surprize, as he opened the door and prepared to get into the rear of the limousine.

"I did, sir," said Rouge, "but I swore off."

"What did you do that for?"

"Well, sir, one night I was asleep an' my buddy here was drivin' and I had a chew in my mouth. Well, I woke up and there was a narrer gage engine gettin' right in the seat with me. Yes sir! I swallowed that chew."

"It didn't hit us, you —," said Wally. "An' you should have stayed awake anyways."

"No," said Rouge, "it didn't hit us, that's right, but you couldn't have put a Dijon franc between the back o' our bus an' that three-year-old size engine."

"Let's go," said the captain, grinning.

"There's a balloon up, sir," shouted Wally, as he shifted gear.

"Don't care, the road is through woods. Go straight along and take the second left."



THE limousine sped down the road, the captain sitting on one of the folding seats so that he might direct Wally through the open window with more ease than he could from the back seat. They went back through a forest, along a road lined with great trees, and so thick was the underbrush that they could not see a foot off the road on either side.

There was a ditch on either side of the highway, and this ditch was full of dead horses and mules. They had died in harness and had been dragged into the ditch

out of the way of traffic. Once in a while there was a broken carriage there, or an abandoned rolling kitchen.

Traffic on the road became heavier as the limousine progressed, for Fritz was paying this road no heed and the ambulances and all traffic coming from the front were being routed over it in consequence. Wally sped through it as a serpent through grass. They made way for him, too, in deference to the two stars on the windshield.

"I'm glad fer once I c'n drive goin' back without thinkin' about no bad cases I got in back and without hearin' a bunch o' yelps every time I go over a bump. Wheel Watch us go!"

"Easy now," remonstrated Rouge, "You don't want to break up the Old Man's car. He'd skin yuh alive."

"I won't break up his car," answered Wally. "I'm a skillful man. Watch me."

He shot up to a truck, swung to the left just as it seemed imminent that a collision would occur. and passing the other vehicle so close that his mudguards scraped the other's wheels, he shot in front of the truck and almost made the driver turn into the ditch.

"Haha!" exulted Wally, "he don't dare swear because he thinks the general is in the car. He ain't got a word to say. I'm sure grateful to the old boy for letting me take his car."

A finger tapped him on the shoulder. The captain leaned through the window and with mouth at Wally's ear, informed him that the speed was excessive.

"I don't care about the car or you," said the captain, "but my own neck is quite precious. Now duck around the next turn, and we'll be there."

Thus admonished, Wally slowed down a bit and turning down the next road, around the base of a small hill, he found himself driving before the sandbagged entrances of a number of dugouts that ran into the side of the hill.

"Stop at the entrance to the one that has all the telephone wires going in," directed the captain.

Wally complied, driving the limousine well off the road onto the grass, so that it would not obstruct traffic.

"Now, then," said the captain, "you'll find your man in that second entrance. I suppose you can get back all right?"

"Sure can, sir," answered Wally.

"Well, you'd better be going then," directed the captain and he disappeared into the hole where the telephone wires went into the hill.

"Come on, Rouge," said Wally. "You'n me together. I don't want to go in that mine alone."

"I know where this here place is," said Rouge, as the two crossed the road. "This here is the old Frog army P.C. These holes an' the guys runnin' in and out reminds me of a anthill."

"Well, get a gait on yourself if you don't want me to remind you of a army mule," urged Wally. "If we ain't back with the general's eye-wash pretty quick he's liable to get impatient, an' I don't want him rarin' and snortin' around me."

"What was that guy's name that the Old Stick told us to ask for?" asked Rouge, as the two plunged into the damp, moldy-smelling entrance to the dugout.

"Well, ain't you a bright guy! Yessir, you're a help to a man if ever there was one. You ought to be in a searchlight section! Now you gone an' forgot that guy's name! Why didn't you write it down?"

"Aw ——!" cried Rouge indignantly. "You never said I was to remember his name!"

"Well, I don't have to tell you to git in the seat when we go out for a load, do I? I don't have to tell you to rally round when chow call blows, do I? —— right, I don't. It's your duty to remember these here places where we go to, an' I do the drivin'. I suppose you want me to drive an' remember, too, an' you sit on the seat like a —— sight-seein' congressman an' do nothin' but say, 'Hullo boys, tell your father I saw you an' be sure not to forget to vote next fall!' What the —— you do fer to earn your pay, I don't know!"

"Now look," expostulated Rouge. "You're runnin' over with bug water. You forgot that guy's name an' you're tryin' to hang it on me. You couldn't remember your own name if you didn't have a dog tag to remind you what it was. You forgot the name o' that farm the general told us to find and you asked for two different names. I heard you."

"An' also for a medical corps guy you ain't got enough brains to make me laugh. You may be a driver an' all that, but if brains was water you couldn't give a louse a drink. Who would the old general send

to for eye-wash? Why to the division surgeon, wouldn't he? Just ask for the division surgeon, an' say 'General's compliments, how's chances on a little eye-wash?'"

"You ain't sick, are you?" asked Wally. "You don't want to lie down an' rest a while maybe? After all that effort o' brain you ought to take a day off. You want to be careful you don't give yourself brain fever."



A BLANKET was torn aside and a beam of light shot out into the passage from a side room. Appeared a wrathful officer.

"What the —— is all this?" he inquired, "Old Home Week? This is no place to hold arguments. What do you two men want, if anything? Don't you know better than to come in here without authority?"

"We're tryin' to find the division medical officer," said Wally, "on a errand for the general."

"Well, he's right here, all you have to do is to ask for him and not hold an open discussion in the corridor. There are some of us here that are trying to do a little work. Come in!"

He held the curtain aside and the two stepped into a floored room lighted by electricity and with two oil stoves dispelling the chill. There were many men there and reams and reams of paper. Typewriters hammered continually and a soldier kept sticking pins in a great map on the wall and taking others out, as the boy in a broker's office marks up on the blackboard the latest quotations. The place was blue with cigaret smoke.

"Colonel Emory," said the officer, leading the two to a table in a corner. "Here are two men that claim they have a message from the general."

Rouge twitched Wally's sleeve violently.

"That ain't the guy's name," he whispered.

"Shut up, for ——'s sake, he's a doctor. ain't he?" answered Wally.

The man at the table was a lieutenant colonel and wore the insignia of the medical corps. He was going over some papers, probably the divisional casualty returns, or requisitions for medical supplies, or something of the sort and, keeping his finger in his place in the pile of papers, he looked up inquiringly at Rouge.

"It's him," said Rouge, pointing to Wally.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" asked the colonel.

He had a round fat face and was well upholstered about the body. He wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses and had small twinkling eyes, so that he looked much as Santa Claus must have when he was a younger man.

"Well," continued the colonel, "and what have you on your mind?"

"The general," said Wally, "he's up at the front, an' he sent us back to see if you could give him a little eye-wash."

"Eye-wash?" asked the officer, and his twinkling eyes fixed themselves obliquely at a point on the ceiling. "Is that what he asked for?"

"Yessir," said Wally. "He needs it right bad."

"Hmm," said the officer. Returning his gaze to Wally, "How are you going to get it back to him?"

"He give us his car," said Rouge eagerly.

"Shut up, you," said Wally. "You sicked me on to do the talkin' an' now you stay out of it."

"We-e-e-ll," said the officer slowly, getting to his feet, "We'll have to see what we can do."

He went toward the back of the room and they could hear a door open and shut after him. After a time he came back and went about the room inquiring of the busy workers who had a bottle. Some paid no heed, others spoke vulgarly and with obscene words.

The doctor rubbed his head and walked about the room, then pausing a moment in indecision, a bright thought struck him, and he hastened away again to put it into execution. In a moment he was back once more and this time he extended some mysterious object to Wally.

"I didn't have any bottle, you tell the general," said the doctor, "but this will do, and ask him to please be careful of it, because it's the only one I've got, and I'd hate to lose it right now. I washed it out thoroughly."

Then he placed the object in Wally's hand. Wally, dumbfounded, held it to the light, and Rouge leaned nearer to see. Both choked. It was a red rubber hot-water bottle.

"Is the eye-wash in it?" asked Wally.

"Yes," said the doctor, "it is. Be careful of it."

From without the dugout came a rumble as of coal sliding into a cellar. It lasted

several seconds and when it ceased all the typewriters were stilled. A crash as of a thunderbolt, as if a man of enormous strength smote a great sheet of tin with a weighty hammer. There were subdued shouts, and running feet in the passage. A man at the upper end of the room who sat at a desk, and who was probably the chief of staff arose.

"Steady all," he said. "Mr. Eliot, step out and see where those shells are going. Be sure that the gas guard is standing by."

The men in the room affected laughter. The room quite rang with their merriment for a moment. Wally and Rouge did not laugh. It is the man who is not accustomed to shell fire that laughs when a bombardment begins, and it is the green outfit that cracks jokes when they pass the thicket of white crosses on their way up to the front. There is no necessity for laughter in either case. A man who has suffered a bombardment once never laughs at one again, and a man who has been on a burying detail sees nothing in a cemetery to joke about.

The shells continued to slam into the road. Dirt began to sift down from the ceiling.

"I say, Cummings," called the chief of staff, "call up the artillery and see who's shooting. I think we're getting some retaliation fire. If any of our guns are going, tell them to lay off it."

"Listen to this," said Wally, speaking behind his hand into Rouge's ear. "This is war for yuh."

A man at a telephone began to speak code names into the transmitter and finally got his connection.

"Hello," he cried, so that all might hear who would flap their ears his way. "Des Moines speaking. Are any of your units pulling off a shoot? . . . Well, find out, will you? . . . What difference does it make? Well, I'll — well tell you: The boche are blowing us off the map here. . . . All right, do."

The man at the telephone regarded the roof and whistled through his teeth. He got some dirt in his eye and began to curse. His unseen friend spoke once more.

"Hello, yup, still here. . . . All right, I'll tell him," He turned to the chief of staff. "The brigade says that one of their regiments is having a shoot against a field train they've discovered. Very choice target."

"Tell 'em to lay off. The boche have got

a choicer one here. My neck is worth as many boche field trains as I can count."

"Lay off it, Tommy," said the man at the phone. "Lay off it. Jerry's knocking our P. C. into a hen house. Division commander says to cut it out."

Pause. The man at the phone uncrossed his lazy legs and leaned both elbows on the table in an attitude of attention. The shelling ceased and the room was as still as death.

"*Ark-ark-ark*," said the telephone receiver, as though an angry hen were within it. The man removed it suddenly from his ear and regarded it with horror. Then he replaced it and became quite red about the gills.

"Yessir," said he, "yessir, I understand, sir." The receiver fizzed like a wet fire-cracker. "Yessir," said the man at the phone. He hung it back on its hook.

"It's the general," said he to the chief of staff. "He said he ordered the shoot himself, and that, to put it mildly, it doesn't bother him a bit if we all get blown to —."

"I thought of that," said the chief of staff. "He's at the P. C. of the brigade Mackintosh, as the boche say. I thought of it the minute you said it was the division commander who wanted the firing stopped. I hope this is a good dugout."

The firing began again and the shells whooped and howled like roistering companions. Every once in a while there would be an extra loud explosion, and the blanket over the doorway would flutter as if blown by a breeze. At times some one would cry out and men could be heard carrying wounded along the passage.

"Rouge," said Wally. "You an' me better be goin'."

"I thought of it first," said Rouge, "but I was wonderin' if there wasn't some way out of it."

"Not much," said Wally. "You heard that old he-horse sound off up at the farm, an' you just heard him clear across the room through a telephone an' him all o' three miles off. Well, how much of an alibi you gonna have if you don't show up pretty quick with some stuff fer his eyes?"

"How we gonna get out?" asked Rouge.

"We'll get out like we always do outta a place when they're throwin' pots an' pans around. We'll say a short prayer an' run

like — an' jump in the car an' away we go."

"Away we go where?"

"Why tuh —, where else?"

"Who carries the eye-wash?"

"Why you."

"Why me? You crippled?"

"No, I ain't crippled, leatherhead, but I got to drive, ain't I? Can I drive an' hold a bottle o' eye-wash too? An' what are you gonna do?"

"All right, I'll carry it," said Rouge. "I ain't no buck passer."

Without further word the two crept out and along the passage. They waited with a group of orderlies just inside the doorway until there was a pause in the shelling, when Wally cried—

"Come on, kid," and the two dashed out.

They dashed out, prancing. The other men in the doorway of the dugout began to call.

"Git in outta that road. Wanta get killed? Git under shelter, you — fools!"

Wally and Rouge stood motionless in the center of the road, still holding their attitudes of running men. They slightly resembled dogs who have come to a point.

"Hey!" called the orderlies, "come in outa that!"

The two men in the road had not yet moved. They were looking at something with intense interest. They were looking at the general's limousine. The limousine had been carefully drawn off the road onto the grass. When it had been driven there, there had been no hole behind it, but there was one now, one that would have taken a spring out by the roots to have driven over.

The back part of the limousine was almost over this hole. Where the driver's seat had been was another hole. Here and there were bits of twisted frame, and shattered wheels, and the larger portions of the body, with little weeping flames running about them. There was not much smoke. The oil and most of the wood had all been burned away some time ago. There was a smell of roasting leather.



"WALLY," cried Rouge, "let's you an' me go before a shell hits us!"

The two turned and fled down the road. A shell whistled and they lay down. When the load of coal had been delivered, they leaped to their feet and ran again. On the main road things were

quieter and the two stopped to catch their breath.

"Maybe a truck will come along," panted Rouge, "and let's get in, and let's go an' not git out 'till it stops."

"What the — do you mean!" cried Wally. "You mean to beat it off? Ain't you got no guts?"

"Yes, I got guts an' I got a few brains, too. You want to go back an' tell that firespittin' pinwheel that we went an' got his nice big car blowed up? Well, he'll lick the — out of you, I ain't kiddin' yuh!"

"Button your mouth," said Wally, "an' see can your ears do a little work. You heard that guy say he'd hang us if we didn't come back? What's he gonna do if we blew up his car an' beat it too? What's he gonna do? He's gonna break a gut! Him waitin' for his eye-wash an' you an' me in a truck beatin' it. He'll start telephonin' pretty quick if we don't get back and I don't want the M. P.'s to git after me. You an' me been in stockade once an' I don't crave it, whether you do or not."

"All right, have it your own way, brave man," sneered Rouge, "an' when you're breakin' the old rocks you c'n say, 'I done my duty, an' they done me dirt.'"

"Here comes a truck, Rouge, let's git on it. An' don't drop that bottle."

A truck clattered up the road toward them. It was of British manufacture and had a great wide seat in front, with high doors on either side of it.

"Hey," cried Wally to the driver. "Goin' up?"

The truck slowed down and the two men clambered aboard, shutting the door behind them.

"Thanks," said Wally, as the two sat down on the seat, "goin' up far?"

"No, I hope not," said the driver. "Make yourselves at home, fellars. I'm glad to have company. They oughtn't to make a man drive alone on these roads all the time. I'm glad I met up with you boys."

Wally looked at the truck driver. His face was white and strained and his eyes haggard. His breath came pantingly and his knuckles where he gripped the wheel were quite white with the pressure.

"This guy's scared," decided Wally.

"Got any chow in back?" asked Rouge.

"No," said the driver, yelling above the sound of the truck's bumping. "I'm goin' up with engineer supplies. Shovels an'

the like o' that." He choked. "Three nights I been without sleep an' they put a jinx on me."

"How come jinx?"

"I got a load o' crosses in there, all nice and white."

"Ah!" said the other two.

The truck bumped along and at each crossroad some of the traffic turned off, and new traffic turned on the main road. There were other trucks, some empty, some full of wounded, blue French camions, huge Packards, British lorries, trains of caissons, convoys of slat wagons loaded with hay, and a continuous string of motor-cycles. Finally the truck swung down a side alley itself.

"Here's where we leave yuh," said Wally, getting up.

"No, don't go," said the truck driver. "Wait a minute. Where you lads want to go? Maybe I can fix it. This road I'm goin' don't take you but a little piece off the other. Wait till I get my map."

The driver hauled out a map and the three put their heads together over it. It seemed, after some argument, that the road they were going down would eventually arrive at another intersection, from which a north-westerly road would take them back to the main one again, not far from the farm where the general had established his temporary post of command.

"You guys stay with me and I'll take you down there," said the driver. "I don't want to go alone. I'm sick o' drivin' alone.

I ain't scared, you know, but I'm lonesome."

"We're in a fierce hurry," said Wally.

"Well, how we gonna get there the quickest, ridin' in a truck or walkin'?" objected Rouge.

"There's other trucks, ain't there?"

"How do yuh know?"

"No," interjected the driver, "you won't get no ride, because most of 'em carries three or four guys on 'em an' there ain't room for no more."

"All right," said Wally, glaring at Rouge, "have it your own way. Keep your hanky in your hand, an' be sure not to let your nose run, like mamma's little man. We'll ride in the truck because it's too far for our little legs to walk."

The road down which the truck rumbled was deserted. No traffic passed in either direction. There were little paths

leading off into the woods with signs in red and arrows pointing that told one what was that way.

The signs were in German, for this had been German territory until a week ago. "*Zu Batterie Rennenkampf*," "*Feldpostamt*," and at the foot of one path was a huge sign like a bulletin board with the word *Bekanntmachung* painted across the top in faded letters.

"Kinda lonely road," hazarded Rouge.

"Maybe they're shellin' it," moaned the driver. "Them shells is awful. It hurts every time I just hear one go. I tell you boys I'm all in. I ain't had no sleep for three nights."

Now in the ditch beside the road was an M. P., and it was his duty to rise and forbid traffic to proceed any farther. The M. P., however, had just become eligible for six feet or so of French soil. M. P.'s are human after all and this one had been on duty in a gas filled area for twelve hours. He had inhaled quite a bit of gas of the phosgene variety, that does the work slowly but surely.

The M. P. had been taken out of the gassed area and put on duty on this road, where after a few minutes he collapsed. He knew he had been gassed, but as long as he could walk he decided not to say anything about it. There was a certain stigma to being evacuated for gas and a man who applied for a ticket on the plea of gassing was more likely to get a hobnailed shoe in his anatomy.

Well then, the M. P. was dead and the road was open, and the truck slammed down it. The three men in the seat heard a siren moan, like a distant fire engine and scarcely had their brains registered the sound than the fire engine rushed upon them with thunderous report. A great black column shot toward the sky about fifty yards in front of the truck, the top of it above the trees, and the men on the truck felt the wind of it like the blast from an electric fan.

The driver put on the brake with all his might and the truck ground to a stop. From the truck into the ditch went the men like so many frogs. There they looked into each other's white faces.

"If it's a walkin' barrage, we're gone," spoke Rouge. Wally rose on one knee and looked down the road.

"If it is," said he, "we better get goin'

and we can duck between the shells. They ain't fallin' very close. If it ain't, we better go just the same. We can slide under them bursts same as we do on any crossroads."

The truck driver began to sob wildly.

"No! No!" he cried, "don't take no chances. I knew I couldn't make another trip! I'm killed, I'm killed, I know I'm killed." He wrung his hands.

"Poor guy," said Wally. "They work them truck drivers too hard. A guy's only flesh 'n' blood after all. Three nights on these roads would give any one the willies."

Another shell hiccoughed itself to bits.

"Same place," cried Wally. "Come on, Rouge, drag your self outta this hole an' let's get back in that truck—an' don't drop that bottle."

From the truck seat the two looked eagerly down the road. The truck's driver chattered in the ditch, the tears running down his face, but the other two paid no attention. The truck driver was off his conk and would undoubtedly have a ticket for the evacuation hospital pinned on him as soon as some first aid man found him. Meanwhile the carriers of the water bottle had provided themselves with transportation. The next shell grunted heavily just off the road and Wally, speeding up the motor, shifted his gear and let in the clutch.

"Whoa!" shrieked Rouge.

The truck had shot backward some twelve feet and into the ditch. Wally spoke terrible words.

"You're a good driver," spoke Rouge, "not to know how to shift gears. It's lucky our rear end wasn't over a bridge."

"Go wash your neck," said Wally, leaning over the side to see how deep he was in the ditch. "I guess I can get out of here. We ain't loaded."

The motor roared and the truck surged back to the road again.

"Now then, Fritz," said Wally, "shower down."

"Hadn't I better get out," asked Rouge, "an' watch to see you don't knock no trees down with the tail gate?"

"Sit tight, kid, sit tight, we're rarin' to go this time."



WHEN the next shell had become débris, the truck went. They shot through smoke, and Rouge, ducking so that only his eyes and helmet came over the top of the door, could see the wreckage

of some kind of a dump or échelon, piles of cases scattered about, a broken wagon, a water cart with a dead horse in the shafts, some half demolished tents and a body or two. Then they were by and well up the road before the next burst.

"Yahoo!" yelled Wally. "We fooled yuh, Fritz. We'll be back to the old boy in no time. Got the bottle safe, Rouge?"

"Sure have," said Rouge, "if you don't pile us up in the ditch again."

"You hang on to that bottle, red head, whether I pile you in the ditch or not."

The truck rattled along at a faster pace than it had ever gone before in all its eventful life. The woods ended suddenly and the road crossed a wheat field, toward woods on the far side.

"There's the balloon!" cried Rouge, and opened the door to descend.

"Stay in, you — fool!" shrieked Wally, trying to open the throttle yet wider. "We'll be in the woods before he can see us!"

The truck seemed to fly across that open space, but to the men on the seat its pace was slower than a crawl. They reached the woods again and still no sound of shell.

"Beat 'em, by golly!" cried Rouge.

While they yet exulted, the truck came to the road that went to the northwest, and Wally slowed down and waited for the traffic to clear before he turned on to the other road.

Now, because a road runs through woods does not mean that a man is safe from balloon-directed fire. The enemy had maps and knew the course of all the roads. The men in the balloon watched the open spaces, and when a convoy crossed one of these spaces, or a single truck for that matter, the observers timed it and, knowing the distance from the edge of one forest to the edge of the next, they had a good idea of the truck's speed. They then calculated where the truck would be at a given second and telephoned a request to have a flock of shells land at that spot at that second. If the target was a single truck, two shells were enough. Sometimes they were wrong, and sometimes not.

The enemy did not know that the northwest road was being used. Indeed if they had found it out and had begun to shell it, the traffic would be routed elsewhere.

Wally turned on to the road and Fritz's H. E. bouquet arrived. Wally and Rouge both knew that that shell was going to sit

down on the seat between them and having no desire to be there when it arrived, they cast themselves on the floor of the truck, all among the clutch and brake and accelerator and steering column and what not. The shell landed, just on the other side of the road and as Wally was going down. He saw an ambulance there disintegrating into little bits and then he was down behind the dashboard, where he felt the truck shoved sidewise under him.

"You dead, Wally?" asked Rouge in a whisper.

"No," said Wally. "How's the bottle?"

"The bottle's all right. Let's get to — out of here before another one of them sock-oes down."

They stood up and Wally tried to release the clutch. The clutch did not release. Then Wally looked over the dash, and he and Rouge gaped at the hood of their machine, or rather at where the hood had been. There was no hood there now, only a half a radiator that bled rusty water. There was a huge bite taken out of the front part of the motor and oil was trickling down the sides.

Just beyond the truck was the chassis of the ambulance that had taken the greatest force of the explosion. There was nothing left of it but the hood, the bodies of the driver and the orderly under a pile of wreckage on the seat, and two sticks that had once been uprights that supported the top.

Wally and Rouge took to the woods and there was a general scattering of drivers from the other vehicles while the enemy gave two more stamps of his steel foot for good luck. When the smoke had cleared away, the men all climbed back to the road and inspected the wreckage. There was a French truck in the ditch with two dead Chinamen on the seat—the French used them extensively for truck driving—an ambulance had been destroyed, and Wally's truck had its motor ruined.

The ambulance was easily shoved out of the way, but the combined efforts of all the men could not move the truck. Wally had left it in gear when he ducked and the force of the explosion had shoved the motor and probably bent the crank shaft. There was a clamor of advice, and all the while the men kept looking up as if they expected to see another shell coming.

The enemy, however, left them alone, for he had not a great many guns and the

one that had fired the shell had probably found another target to play with. Men shouted to each other what to do, but they were all loath to go very far from the ditch.

"Put it outta gear!" cried one. "It's in gear. Yuh can't push it in gear."

"Let off the brake. Who put the brake on?"

"Come on up with one o' them trucks an' give us a tow."

"Naw, stay back with 'em, don't go gangin' up; you'll draw fire."

From the rear of both lines of traffic came a steady shrieking of whistles and profane and sacrilegious requests to clear the road. In addition to the natural haste and hurry of these men to be about their affairs, there was always the chance that Jerry might throw some more shells there. And of course Wally's truck had to be in just the position that would make it impossible to pass on either side.

At this moment an officer appeared. He was in command of a convoy of double jointed four-wheel-drive boys, and he waved his hand to two of these. They clattered up like faithful steeds. These trucks were evidently part of a tractor battery, for they had crossed guns on their sides, and one of them had a windlass attachment on the back of it for hauling big caterpillar-mounted guns out of mud.

Out leaped the merry gunners, all clad in one-piece overalls, and falling upon the injured truck, they looped ropes about it here and there, ran them around the windlass, took some to the other truck, and with a wave of the officer's hand, the machinery started groaning and rumbling. The windlass spun, the ropes creaked, and with a sudden lurch, Wally's truck in the road gave up the struggle, was dragged slithering across the road and hurled ignominiously into the ditch. The motors roared their applause, and the two currents began to flow again, no one paying the slightest heed to the two downcast men in the ditch, one of whom held a red hot water bottle gingerly by the neck.

"— 's grease!" muttered Wally. "Ain't there no trucks but what got six or seven goldbricks on the seat?"

"You waitin' for a truck?" asked Rouge.

"No, I'm expectin' a girl to come along that I got a date with. Whaddyuh think I'm standin' here for?"

"Aw, —," said Rouge, "If you're wait-

in' for somethin' to give yuh a lift you don't need to wait for no truck. I'm the guy that keeps his eyes open!"

"What's eatin' you?" asked Wally suspiciously.

"Follow me," answered Rouge, and led the way up the road a few yards. "C'n you manipulate one o' them, Speed King?" he asked.



BEFORE them, its nose buried in the ground where it had run off the roadway, was a motorcycle and side car. Its rear wheels were still on the right of way, but the forward one was in the bottom of the ditch. The rider or driver lay in a heap under the machine. He looked flat; one had to examine closely to see whether it was a man or a heap of clothes that had been tumbled from the seat. Therefore the two knew he was dead. An officer still sat in the side car. He must have been riding with his knees in the air, and the shock of the car going into the ditch had hurled him forward, doubling his legs under him, and catching the lower part of his body under the hood of the side car. Then, instead of falling forward, he had fallen back and so remained in the car to bring a stony gaze to bear on the two men. Wally halted in some confusion.

"Come on," said Rouge. "He's dead, too. Can't you tell a stiff when yuh see one? He ain't got no back to his head. Let's heave him out and git this thing on the road."

"How'd you know this was here?" asked Wally, as he dragged the motorcycle's rider up the bank.

"I seen it go flooey off the road while I was duckin' fer that shell. I knew they was hit because this rider bends in the middle like some one soaked him in the wind, and off he goes. You shove, an' I'll pull now."

Wally took hold of the handle bars and, pushing on them with all his might, and Rouge pulling on the side car from the road, they tried to get the machine on an even keel once more. It resisted their efforts. The slope was too steep and the machine too heavy.

"Now look," said Wally. "You come down here an' let's straighten her out, and then heave it up, both shovin'. An' by the way, where's that eye-wash?"

"I put it down right in back of you," said Rouge. "You don't expect me to shove no

old junks like this around an' carry a water bottle in my teeth, do you?"

"You put your tin hat over it!" directed Wally, "then no shell is liable to knock a hole in it."

"Put my tin hat over it?" cried Rouge. "You put your own tin hat over it. This here iron derby is got a duty of protectin' my old gray head march on she said, an' don't you forget it. If you're plannin' on going up to old Reachandrinkit an' sayin', 'Sir, here's your hot-water bottle gimme the medal of honor,' that's all right, but you ain't gonna protect that said bottle with my tin hat. I'm tellin' yuh, Wally, you may be Daredevil Dick and the Demon Driver, but you ain't——"

"Aw, tie a loop in your chin," said Wally, "an' come down an' give us a hand. If you keep on talkin' you'll start some one to blowin' a gas horn. If you was to put half the energy into fightin' the Jerries that you do into these here five-minute sermons for busy men, the war'd be over in a week. Come on and put a little meat on these handle bars."

Thus urged, Rouge came down and the motorcycle was forced to yield to the combined efforts of the two men. The passing truck drivers looked at the two curiously, but continued on their way nevertheless.

A little service in the zone of advance is a great thing to teach a man to kill his own snakes. If anyone had seen the killing of the motorcycle's original driver, they had had no interest in it. The neighborhood was too dangerous to waste time looking after a motorcycle guy, when one had a truck to chaperon. Moreover, the penalty for succoring the wounded by any one not wearing a Red Cross armband was very severe. This because if a soldier could quit his post or duty any time he saw a wounded man there would soon be left no one to fight.

"Now then," said Wally, "let's see does this thing go. Git in, Rouge."

"No," said Rouge, eyeing the machine with disfavor. "You start it, and when it gets goin', then I'll get in. Maybe."

"Well, give it a shove then."

Rouge shoved the side car manfully, his toes scratching at the road. The passing autoists jeered profane advice. The motor suddenly took hold, and the throttle being wide open, shot forward like an arrow from the bow, nearly tipping Wally back-

ward off the saddle. Rouge thrust his nose into the highway. Hearty laughter from a passing motor car. Rouge leaped to his feet, to see Wally curving down the road in a cloud of dust.

"Hey," he cried, "come back here, you son of a gun! —— you if you run off and leave me."

He began to run after the motorcycle, for he had no desire to be left alone on a strange road so near the front and miles from a rolling kitchen. However, Wally brought the machine under control and stopping, turned about on his seat and waited for Rouge to catch up.

"Where's the fire?" queried the panting Rouge as he stumbled up to the motorcycle.

"Where's the bottle?" asked Wally.

"Oh, guts 'n onions!" cried Rouge, "that —— bottle! I left it on the bank!"

"Go back 'n' get it!" said Wally sternly, "you was the hard-boiled guy that wasn't gonna let me win no medal o' honor with your tin hat. Well, you just drag your old differential joint back an' git that bottle."

Rouge sighed heavily, but feeling the justice of Wally's remark, he turned and ran back to the place where he had left the bottle, hoping to find it safe. It was there and intact. He shook it at his ear and the contents gave a smothered gurgle, very comforting to the ear. Then he returned to the motorcycle.

"Let's go," said Rouge, settling himself in the side car. "You sure you know how to manipulate one o' these here?"

"Kid," said Wally, "I was born with one in my mouth. When you want to go fast you turn this handle and when you want to go slow you turn it back again. This here knob is just the same as a gear shift."

"Make it roar like them dispatch riders do," said Rouge.

Wally made it roar by suddenly opening the throttle. Unfortunately he let in the clutch with his foot at the same time, and the seat almost went out from under him. Rouge's head nearly snapped off.

"Gah!" choked Rouge. "Shut her down, for ——'s sake."



THE motorcycle was mounting a slope as a plane soars from a take-off. There was a great truck ahead of them, its wheels churning the gravel and throwing out a steady stream of it behind.

Flying stones smote Wally on the mouth and one rebounding from his nose filled Rouge's eye with water, so that he was unable to see how close they came to going right under the rear of the truck. They shot around the right side of the truck, one wheel in the ditch, Rouge spitting profanity and gravel, and shot over the top of the hill.

"Shut her down! Shut her down! Shut her down!" chanted Rouge.

"The — thing is stuck!" howled Wally.

The descent of the hill began. At the foot of the hill was a company of infantry, resting in the ditch out of reach of passing trucks. Shrill cries heralded the arrival of the motorcycle, and the infantry scattered like so many clucking hens. The machine roared by them just as Wally, by a supreme effort, dragged the side wheel from the ditch, and the machine resumed an even keel.

A can of hash, a large yellow one, hurled by an irate doughboy smote Rouge just where his head joined his neck, and the red-headed man's nature leaped to savage life.

"Shut off this — thing," cried Rouge, rising in the side car. Seizing the handle bar with both hands he shut off the throttle and nearly ditched the machine at the same time. Then, showing his helmet back from over his eyes where the can had knocked it, he endeavored to scramble from the side car and return to massacre the doughboys.

"Now stay in the car," ordered Wally. "They'll knock you for a loop. Look at 'em."

Rouge and Wally both regarded their wake. The infantry were some distance back, but they had flowed out into the road, in imminent danger of being run over, and were shaking their fists and brandishing their rifles at the two with the motorcycle. Their language came clearly and it was more picturesque than polite. Rouge became more peaceable, but he shook off the hand Wally had placed on his shoulder.

"Naw," he said, "I'm too nervous a temperament to ride with you. You're givin' me heart failure. Lemme out."

"Sit down," said Wally. "Sit down an' be a man. You'll be all right now. I found out how the clutch works."

"It ain't the clutch makes it go like that. It's that exhilarator, or whatever you call it."

"The throttle rod got bent," said Wally, "and it sticks. But I'll fix it." He dis-

mounted and pried at something with a screw driver from the tool kit. "There," he said, "that'll be better."

"Now never mind roarin' again," said Rouge. "I ain't got any craving to hear roars. Do you know where you're at?"

"You're — tootin' I do. You hang onto that bottle and I'll drive an' we'll both get there safe."

The motorcycle proceeded now at a more leisurely pace, and Wally used the time to slyly find out what all the different knobs and pedals did. Rouge regarded him with a suspicious eye, but said nothing. They presently came out upon another road, which Wally hailed joyously as the one that that had left when the truck first turned off. Rouge was unconvinced.

"Don't go too fast, Barney Oldfield," said he. "Remember you got me in this bathtub and I don't want to wake up and find myself almost to Berlin. I don't like sauer kraut, not for a steady diet."

"Aw, shut up," said Wally acidly. "You're worse than a guy's wife in the back seat. 'Don't go too fast, John, look out for that car coming. John, do you know where you are, John? I think the right-hand turn is the one to take, John. Have you got plenty of gas, John?'"

"Yeh, well a guy don't take his wife ridin' around with a lot of rough Germans runnin' loose."

The road, if it were the same one that they had gone down in the limousine, was not filled with traffic as it had been. Not a truck rattled by, no ambulance raised the dust, not even a mule cart jounced over the stones. Wally cautiously opened the throttle a little wider.

"I bet the road's closed," yelled Rouge. "There ain't no trucks on it. They must be shellin' it. Don't go so fast!"

"I ain't going fast, you — fool. Want to stop here till a G. I. can flatten yuh out?"

"No, nor I don't want to break my neck, either."

"Well, hang on. I got a neck o' my own that I'm kinda choice of."

The motorcycle purred on its way rejoicing. Bit by bit Wally opened the throttle and Rouge's protests were torn from his mouth by the rushing wind. If the road were closed, the less time they spent on it the less chance there was of a shell.

Now the road had indeed been closed

because of a bevy of shells that had roosted there, but the shells had ceased to fall after the first few salvos. Fritz knew by experience that a couple of rounds in the right spot would close up the road, and that it would not be opened again for some time. The result would be a further embarrassment of the American communications, at a small expenditure of gun fire.

Wally had thought back over his first trip down in the general's car and remembered that there were no shell holes in the road. The road had been fired on since he had been down it though, and presently the motorcycle drew near the place where the firing had been done. Wally saw it first, being higher than Rouge.

For about twenty yards the road looked as if it had been dug up preparatory to laying a sewer. Then Rouge saw it and let out a howl like one of his ancestral banshees. Wally felt madly with his foot for the brake, but did not find it in time.

The front wheel of the machine dipped into the first shell hole, shot out of it, down and up again, the machine leaped in air, came down to earth, bucked like an outlaw horse, plunged down into another and deeper hole and stopped short. Its riders continued on their way.

In the air, Wally, arms and legs wide, passed Rouge, who was flying wrapped up like a ball. Rouge still held the water bottle by the neck so that he looked like Mercury bearing gifts, tin hat and all. Mercury, it will be remembered, wore a tin hat of regulation size and shape.



WALLY came down and lay for a moment until he got back his wind. He was thankful that he was still alive. He was glad that he had landed and would fly no more. He hoped the motorcycle had not been wrecked. Then he got painfully to his feet and limped toward the tumbled heap that was Rouge.

"Rouge," called Wally, "are you dead? You —, if you busted that bottle you better be."

"No," said Rouge, turning his head so that one eye regarded Wally with reproach. "You —, I ain't dead, but it ain't your fault. If you want to be an aviator, go ahead and enlist in the air corpse, but don't drag me into it. I ain't no hankerin' to be a bird."

"Git up, kid," answered Wally, helping

the other to his feet. "The bottle ain't broke, is it?"

"We can be thankful it's rubber an' not glass," answered Rouge, examining the hot water bottle.

He took it gently and it chuckled happily.

"It's all right," cried Wally. "Now let's see how bad the motorcycle is bust."

"You go right straight to —," answered Rouge emphatically. "From here on I walk. There ain't men enough in the A. E. F. would get me into that bathtub again."

"All right, you walk, but I'll ride. Gimme the bottle."

"What you gonna ride on?" asked Rouge doubtfully.

"The motorcycle."

"You got a snowball's chance in —! Look at it."

Wally went back to where the motorcycle lay on its back or face, whichever it was, its two rear wheels in air. It did not take an exhaustive examination to show that that machine would never go to any other destination than a salvage pile. The front wheel looked like a new moon, the handle bars pointed to opposite points of the compass, and the gas tank had a bleeding wound, from which gas still bubbled.

Wally rubbed his lame hip and meditated. It could not be very far to the farm where the general was, and a foot journey would not be impossible. On the other hand, he had smitten the ground in his fall with some force, and his side was exceedingly sore. He reflected that he was lucky he had not broken his neck.

"Well," began Rouge, "now what? Want to stop and repair that thing?"

"Use your brain," said Wally, "use your brain. If you used it oftener, it wouldn't get so rusty. From now on we move dismounted."

"Good. You carry the bottle."

"How come?" protested Wally.

"Well, I been carryin' it all the time an' you been hopin' I'd punchure it an' we could beat it back to our nice deep hole an' I'd get any — that was issued out because I was carryin' it when it got punchured. Well, you carry it for a while. You ain't got no car to drive now."

"Gimme it," said Wally. "It don't weight nothin'. If it gets a hole knocked in it we gotta go right along just the same, to show the general we didn't beat it on him."

"All right," agreed Rouge. "You'll be carryin' the bag. You tell him it got bust. Me, I'll wait outside for yuh."

"It ain't bust yet, so don't get up no sweat over that."

"No, it ain't bust, nor we ain't there neither."

After that they began to walk along. Walking is a very trying exercise, especially if one is an ambulance driver and not used to it. In addition, these men had been sleepless for two nights, and had had no breakfast nor any dinner. Their legs began to pain them. A distance that seems short in an automobile is very long to walk, as any motorist who has sought the nearest gas station on foot knows very well.

The road was lonely and silent, the woods on either side thick and impenetrable and but for the cases of emergency rations, boxes of ammunition, blankets, packs, overcoats, rifles, and machine gun carts with which both ditches were filled, the men would never have known they were in a battle zone.

The sky had become overcast and it would undoubtedly rain very soon. If it did, they had but to pick up the first slicker they saw and put it on. There were a lot of slickers in the ditch. Once in a great while, especially during the pauses they took for rest, they could hear a faint sound off to the right front, like distant cheering at a football game.

"There must be a kind of a fight goin' on over there," remarked Rouge, as he and Wally rested on an overturned water cart, and the distant clamor was especially loud and prolonged.

"I guess maybe it's the old general makin' 'em snap out of it," answered Wally. "Let's be glad you an' me don't belong to his gang. He's up there makin' a lot o' work for you an' me."

"Yes, an' we won't get no time to rest either. We gotta account fer where we been all day an' getting our car broke up an' everything."

"Come on," said Wally, getting to his feet. "If we ain't up there pretty quick, we won't need to account for nothin'. That old boy will hang us. Come on, we're pretty near there, I can see where the other road turns off."

"Oh-h-h-h!" groaned Rouge, getting painfully to his feet. "You was the wise guy that wrecked that motorcycle! I told you

you was goin' too fast. Now look at us disturbin' the dust. I ain't walked so far as this since I was at Camp Cheese an' they walked us five miles right straight up in the air from the boat."

"You c'n sit down an' wait here for me," said Wally. "You ain't obliged to go. It don't take two men to carry a bag o' eye-wash."

"Nix," said Rouge emphatically. "I'm gonna stick right around. You might get a medal or a piece o' change or somethin' an' you bet I'm gonna get one, too. I lugged that bottle half way, don't you forget it. An' furthermore I ain't crazy to be alone in these here woods, because some rough boche might be left in 'em an' come out an' bite me."

Thus passing the time in light conversation, as the books say, the two came to the intersecting road, at the far end of which they could see a few motorcycles and a number of men standing around. They stepped forward vigorously, for there was the farm they sought, in the cellar of which was the general, who would no doubt confer honor upon them and would, at the least, offer them a draft of champagne, which beverage generals were popularly believed to carry about with them in a water cart.

They went down the road at a good pace and turned into the courtyard of the farm. It was a typical *auberge* in the zone of the armies. On the side nearest the road were the living quarters, on the opposite side the horse barns and cow sheds, now occupied as sleeping quarters by the telephone operators, dispatch riders, clerks, etc. of the brigade headquarters.

The third side of the yard showed a roofless shattered enclosure and a fire blackened wall, where some shell had once set the place to burning, and on the fourth side was an open shed under which were two motorcycles. The former occupants of the place had left their mark in the signs painted over some of the many doors opening from the courtyard. "*Gefangenen*," "*Unterstanden für officieren*—officers' funk-hole"—and over the door into the house, "*Kommando der Gruppe Von Sturmberg*."



"I WONDER where the general hangs out," said Wally, stopping and looking around him. "Give a look, Rouge, you know your way around these places better'n I do."

Rouge, of course, being the ambulance orderly, had to help load, and having gone into many a farm on a wet night when he could see through the darkness as easily as through his helmet, knew the internal arrangements of farm yards quite well.

"I don't see no kitchen," said Rouge. "Mostly they have 'em under the shed."

"—— the kitchen, where's the general?" cried Wally.

A head thrust itself from a grain loft window.

"What the —— you screechin' about?" asked the head.

"Where can I find the general?" asked Wally.

"Go in the second door an' upstairs. First door on the right. You guys from the front?"

"No," said Rouge.

The head thereupon withdrew.

"They're curious as —— to know what's goin' on at the front, ain't they?" said Wally. "I bet there's a lot o' smoke bein' raised there."

Rouge grunted and continued to look about for signs of the kitchen.

"Come on, greedy gut, let's find the general," continued Wally.

"Now, I don't need to go up," said Rouge. "You go. I'll hunt around for some chow. We don't need both of us to go up."

Wally mounted the stairs as directed and rapped at the door. A stentorian voice cried—

"Kahm een!"

Wally doffed his tin hat and went in, bearing the hot water bottle before him as a messenger of ancient times would bear the king's signet. He expected to find the rough-faced general facing him behind a table spread with maps, but instead there was only a bare room, a field desk, a telephone, and a young officer with his blouse unbuttoned, who leaned back in his chair and had his feet on the table. Wally came to a halt and saluted.

"What do you want?" asked the officer.

He was bored to death and full of wrath, that officer, because he wanted to go up to the lines and the Old Man kept him back at headquarters.

"I'd like to find the general," said Wally.

"What for?"

"Well, he—er—he sent me on a mission."

"To get that?" asked the officer sarcastically, pointing to the hot water bottle.

"Yessir."

"Well," continued the officer, "he's not around. He might be back soon and he might not. I don't know when he'll be back. Leave it on the desk and I'll give it to him."

"I can't do that," said Wally. "He wanted it in a hurry, sir."

"Well," snarled the officer, throwing away his cigaret and taking another from a large can at his elbow, "you can sit out in the yard and wait until he comes back then, I don't care."

At this moment feet rushed up the stairs, the door opened, and Rouge entered with the eagerness of a bohunk tearing through the swing doors of a saloon on pay day. Rouge banged his heels together with a clash and brandishing his arm, saluted and then looked sidewise at Wally as if to say, "How's that for snap, kid?" Wally regarded him with disgust.

"This man with you?" the officer asked Wally.

"Never saw him before, sir," answered Wally, looking daggers at Rouge.

Rouge let down the drawbridge of his jaw and gasped. Wally kicked him slyly but sharply in the shins.

"Ow!" cried Rouge.

"I think you men are drunk," said the officer. "I've a mind to turn you over to the police. Get the —— out of here!"

They saluted and went. At the foot of the stairs, Wally placed the hand that held the bottle on his hip and leaning the other hand against the wall, regarded Rouge with a bitter, bitter look.

"—— you," said Rouge, "you needn't look at me like that. You ain't had a bath since I had one, so you needn't put on no airs."

"Ain't you the bright-eyed boy, though!" cried Wally. "Whatever did you come chargin' into that room for? You said you wasn't goin' up and in you comes like a gang o' shock troops into a café. If we ain't in the mill right now it ain't because you didn't do your poor best to get us in. What the ——'s eatin' you anyway? Shell shock, or are you just crazy?"

"Go fan yourself with an alley-lily," said Rouge calmly. "I figured the general might slip you a little drink or a cigar or something, an' I knew —— well I'd never get no halves on it unless I seen it."

"Uh!" grunted Wally. "You oughta be

a sergeant. You're too bright to be a buck private. Well, listen, brains, the general ain't in an' that looey thinks we're drunk, an' so we got to sit here till the Old Boy comes back."

"Let's haul into the kitchen," said Rouge, "they got a bunch of canned Willie in there. Come on."

The kitchen and living room of the farm had been used as a mess room and general hangout for junior officers. It was full of orderlies now and they readily made room for Wally and his companion. The two sat down, and applied themselves to a can of hash and one of jam.



ROUGE ate heartily and when he had satisfied his appetite, sighed heavily.

"I wisht I had a cigaret," said he, "I crave one. Soldiers always smokes cigarets."

"How do you know?" asked one of the other men.

"I read it in a book," said Rouge.

"You win," said the man, and passed him a package of cigarets.

"Where's all your friends gone?" asked Wally.

"Who you mean?" said the other man.

"Why, all the officers 'n shavetails that hang around a headquarters."

"Oh, well, the Old Man chased most of 'em up to the front and when he went up himself he took the rest along with him."

"Went up himself?" cried both the ambulance men. "Is he gone up to the front?"

"That's what," said all the men in the room. "He moved the P. C. up complete. He got sore because we had to fall back, and went up to take a hand himself."

"Boy, he took a hand, too," spoke up an older man, who bore upon his arm the star, the wreath, and all the gorgeous embroidery that indicates the highest noncommissioned rank in the army, that of master signal electrician. "He cussed out the whole division by wi'less and I bet they got some of it clear back in Chaumont. When the men look for trouble on the lines they find nearly all the wires fused into a mass. That's from car yin' such scorchin' language. I'm workin' on a heavy system of protectin' fuses, so that the wires can carry the extra load without quittin' on the job."

When the chorus of laughter and cries of, "You tell 'em, kid," and "I'll say he burns

the wires," had died out, Wally asked his informant if the general was expected back shortly.

"You got a message or anything for him?" asked the other soldier.

"I ain't got any message," said Wally, "but maybe he'd like to see us right soon."

"We got a bottle of eye-wash for him," announced Rouge.

Before Wally could rebuke his companion, two or three men cried at once:

"Eye-wash! Say, if you're the birds that took the old man's car and went after eye-wash for him you better start raisin' dust. Boy, he just thirsts for a look at you two."

"We didn't tell him you burned his car up, either," said the high ranking non-com. "One of my dizzy operators come down with the message just as the Old Man was going out the yard with a rifle in each hand. But we didn't let on. If he got killed he'd never miss his car, an' if he didn't get killed, you guys might, and anyway the news would keep."

"Just the same," spoke up another soldier, "if I was you birds I'd begin to pick 'em up an' lay 'em down right toward where the Old Man is at. He wants that eye-wash, cause he said so, an' if you guys don't get it up to him pretty — quick an' priesa he's goin' to string you up by the ears. He said that, too."

"How can we find him?" asked Wally helplessly.

"You got good ears, ain't you?" cried the men. "Well, go out in them woods an' listen. You'll hear him."

"Aw, lay off the comedy," said the high ranker. "Look, guys, you go right across this road an' you'll see a old path, a kind of a wood road, that looks like it would be a swell road to take a *pasear* down with your girl. Well, that road wanders along for about a mile, an' there's all kinds o' wires strung along the ground. Well, you follow the road an' when the wires turn off you follow them, and then you'll hit the Old Man. He'll have a P. C. up there in a hole of some kind. You guys got any guns?"

"No," said the two with sinking hearts.

"Aw, they won't need none," cried several, "an' if they do, them woods is all full o' stiffs an' there's guns enough there to fit out a division. We was up there stringing wire this morning. It's safe anyway, because the boche ain't monkeying in them woods. They're more over to the left."

"I guess we go, don't you?" said Wally, turning to Rouge.

"I guess," agreed Rouge, and Wally, gathering up the bottle, the two went out into the yard and crossed the road, followed by the good wishes of the orderlies and what-not in the farm.

"It's comin' on to get dark," said Rouge, looking up at the sky, and holding his hand outspread, "an' it's gonna rain—it's rainin' now."

"It can't hurt the eye-wash," said Wally, "we got it in a rubber bottle."

"No, but it might hurt us. Man, where has the day gone to? Here it's night again, an' no sleep. Can you see the road?"

"Yeh, I can see it now, but I don't know about after dark."

"Well, there's the wires to follow."

"That's so. Anyway, maybe he won't be far."

They heard the swift rushing shriek of an approaching box-car and immediately lay down as if to let it pass above them. It crumped in the woods at no great distance, and before the two could get to their feet again, numbers of the box-car's companions, howling joyfully, hurried to the spot and piled one upon the other, like schoolboys at play.

"They shootin' at us?" gasped Rouge in a pause in the shelling.

"Naw," answered Wally, rising his head and trying to see about in the woods. "There's a outfit or a crossroads or a dump or something around here they want to knock for a gool."



THE shelling continued, a real savage barrage, a sowing of steel up and down the woods. Probably Jerry suspicioned a force of reserve troops in those sylvan fastnesses, or else he was pulling a raid on some of the advanced positions and the barrage was to prevent the arrival of aid.

The two ambulance men lay on the ground and listened. There was nowhere to go, and it would be certain death to try to penetrate the barrage. When the howling and crashing stopped, it was very dark and the rain, pattering on the leaves, made quite a racket in the sudden silence that followed the last shell.

"Come, kid," said Wally, "let's be on our way."

Rouge accordingly got up and they began to go cautiously along the road again.

"Yuh needn't be afraid o' losin' your way on this path, by golly," said Rouge, "because the minute you get off the grass you run your conk up against a tree. If it wasn't for that I'd be scared. We can see here about as good as Jonah in the whale's pantry."

"Feel around with your foot for them wires," directed Wally. "We can't have far to go, but let's be sure we're right."

The wires were there all right, quite a number of them. Wally could hear them rustle as Rouge kicked them with his foot. "You'd think they wouldn't lay 'em all in a bunch like that, wouldn't you," continued Wally, "right where one shell would wreck the whole caboodle of 'em."

"What's that?" cried Rouge in a terrified whisper.

Wally's blood went home immediately to his heart from the uttermost parts of his body. Off to the right a very little way in the woods there was a light about the height of a man's head from the ground. It looked like a candle and it flickered to and fro as currents of air wafted it. It was stationary, however, and was not enclosed. It seemed to float in the air.

"There's another," croaked Rouge.

"I see it," said Wally, his breath coming hot through his dry lips. "There's a whole flock o' them there. Lookit!"

Pow! A tremendous sound, half shriek, half crash, followed by a bell-like clang. A hoarse shout, another explosion, another clinking jangle.

"One o' the lights is out!" gasped Wally.

"Maybe they're shootin' 'em out for cigars," whispered Rouge hopefully.

There was another shout, followed immediately by quite a clamor, then one voice spoke clearly,

"Aw, how the — can I fire if the — aimin' point blew out?"

"Well, couldn't you take a chance? You're in abattage, ain't yuh? Yuh ain't shook loose from yer axles, are yuh? Let'er go!"

Clang!

"Aw, that's a — battery of seventy-fives," said Wally with relief. "I seen 'em before. The clang is the guy throwin' the empty shell on the pile, and them lights are candles they got on sticks so they can aim at 'em."

"What they want to shoot candles for?"

"They don't shoot candles, skull, they aim at the candles an' shoot the boche."

"Have another drink an' pass me the bottle," said Rouge with sarcastic emphasis.

"Come on, let's get outta here," said Wally. "Yuh can't explain nuthin to you. You can't understand. A man's got to have brains to understand a explanation."

"— you!" snorted Rouge. He took one step on his way, tripped, and fell to earth. There was a veritable peal of bells. Some one under Rouge's body gave a smothered curse, and the red-headed man's groping hands found themselves tangled among quite a number of empty shell cases. There was a clamor of voices from the unseen battery, then instant silence.

Aw-aw-aw-aw-aw! cawed an auto horn nearby. Another one at some distance awakened to life. Far down the valley a Strombos bugle began to whine and the auto horns echoed it, calling and calling, a clamor like that raised by a traffic jam, when every impatient driver protests the delay. The horns continued to blow, some slowly and steadily, others with panic haste, and in the short intervals of silence the two could hear the steady jingle of triangles, and the deeper note of steel plates merrily beaten.

Wally was halfway into his gas mask before the thought struck him that Rouge had started all this excitement. He inhaled cautiously. The air was pure, at least as pure as could be expected in that charnel house. Wally put forth his hand and took some one by the back of the neck.

"Come on, you scurve," cried he, "you louse! Waddyuh mean? Why don't you look where you're goin'?"

"The gas guard was asleep an' I knocked his — alarm over on him," panted Rouge, as he and Wally broke into a run.

"I can see that," answered Wally, "an' you got the whole sector in its gas masks, too. Come on, put distance between you an' this place. They're lettin' up on their horns. Man, did you ever hear such — to pay? Let's git on, we're loosin' time."

They trotted on for some distance until they were entirely out of breath, and the road suddenly came out upon a clearing.

"Now where are we at?" panted Rouge, coming to a stop.

"I don't know," said Wally. "Where's the wire?"

"Right here. It goes on straight, I guess. Hot dog, here's a trench. Let's sit down in it an' rest an' then we won't have to flop if a shell comes our way."

"All right," agreed Wally, "let's. Better toss a rock down there, though, it may be full of water with all this rain."

There was no splash when the rock was thrown and Rouge leaped down. He could not have made a louder noise had he landed in a tank full of water.

"Hey, —, it's up to your neck in here," he cried. "No, it ain't. Come on down Wally, they got sandbags or somethin' here we can sit on."

Wally thereupon joined his companion in about half a foot of water. There was a pile of sandbags along one side of the trench floor and it was possible to sit upon these and draw one's feet out of the water.

"Let's consider," said Rouge. "It's time we held a council of war."

"What's the big idea?" asked Wally, sitting down on the soggy bags and drawing up his feet. "You goin' to back out now?"

"No, I ain't, but I think we ought to have some idea o' where we're goin' before we go bargain' any farther through these wet woods. Hark at them horns! Ain't they never goin' to quit? Well, - as I said, I ain't used to walkin' an' I'm about outta gas, an' so I don't crave to hunt after this guy no farther. He said, 'Come back to the farm,' an' we come back to the farm and he wasn't there, an' so I claim— What you sniffin' at, Wally? Smell gas?"

"I dunno. I small somethin'. I'm gettin' wet, too. It's rainin' like —."

"We should have brought our slickers," agreed Rouge. "Well, as I was about to say— Fer —'s sake have you got a cold or what?"

"No, I ain't got a cold," said Wally with asperity, "only I was thinkin' that you're kinda like a dog I once had that met up with a skunk. The dog was all right till it come a wet day an' then you could smell him a mile off. Well, Rouge, I ain't kiddin' yuh, but when your clothes get damp you ain't no rose. You oughta try to get a wash once a year anyway."

"Well, is that so!" cried Rouge, leaning to one side to get a good view of his companion. "Who the — told you you was balm o' Gilead yourself?"

"Wahh!" Rouge emitted a warwhoop that made the woods ring.

"What's eatin' you!" demanded Wally, after some prefatory words. "You steam callyope, shut up! If there's boche in these woods they'll scalp us!"



ROUGE made no reply, he was scrambling out of the trench with all speed. When he reached the parapet, he uttered the one word, "Stiffs!" and then was gone.

"Huh?" said Wally.

Stiffs? Were there stiffs in the trench? He felt behind him, then to his right, where his hand found icy water. What was he sitting on? It was a little long for a sand-bag. His searching hand encountered a loose piece of cloth. He lifted it. There was no sand under it, but more cloth, and the edge of a pocket.

Wally gave a convulsive start and his other hand went into the water again, but deeper this time, and if it had not struck bottom suddenly, Wally would have fallen into the bottom of the trench himself. As he straightened himself again he was aware that there was no mud under the hand that was in the water. There was something hard. What was it? Hair. His thumb slipped into an open mouth, skinning the knuckle on teeth.

Wally floated from the place where he was sitting to the top of the trench. He never remembered putting hand or foot to earth; he only knew that one second he was in the trench and the next on the parapet, and the third second he sailed down the black road, ran headlong into a tree where the road curved, recovered himself and dashed on.

"Hey, Wally!" panted a voice.

"That you, Rouge? Come on!" The two continued their way until they were quite out of breath.

"Whoa, now," gasped Wally at last. "Let's wait a while."

"Oh, boy," said Rouge, taking off his helmet to cool his brow. "That trench was full o' stiffs, piled up like wood. I put my hand right in a guy's eye."

"You got nothin' on me," answered Wally. "I felt a guy's head. When you want a thrill you put your hand out an' get a mitt full of hair under about half a foot o' water. An' he opened his mouth an' bit me. An' us sittin' on 'em so calm. No wonder I thought you was a little ripe!"

"I was thinkin' the same about you,"

remarked Rouge, "but I was too polite to say so."

"The — you preach," scoffed Wally.

"An' now," continued Rouge, putting back his helmet and getting his breath again. "I suppose you lost the bottle in the trench, or left it go when I fell over the gas alarm. I ain't heard you sound off about it for some time, an' I seen you come outta that trench like you was usin' two hands to help yourself with."

"Well, why didn't you remind me of it, then?" asked Wally. "If you seen me without it, why didn't you tell me to go back an' get it?"

"I was too busy myself," said Rouge. "I had no place to go, but I was goin' away from that trench. An' if I said 'bottle' you'd have told me to go back an' get it. I ain't ridden on your ambulance seat for nuthin' all these months."

"You never give it a thought," said Wally emphatically, "till right this minute. You was scatterin' across the landscape too fast to give thought to anything."

"You didn't have no butterfly in your governor neither," Rouge remarked.

"Well, maybe, but allee same, I never lost sight o' my mission, like the 'Soldiers Handbook' says I shouldn't. I got some brains, you know. J'ever note that a hot water bottle's got a loop fer a handle?"

"It's red, too, an' got a cork," answered Rouge. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Button your mouth, ignorance, till I get through talkin'. This here bottle's got a loop fer a handle, an' so I puts my waist belt through the loop and carries the bottle always with me an' still got two hands an' no chance o' leavin' the bottle nowheres in the excitement o' the moment. I had a hunch we might have a interestin' time in these woods."

"Once in a while," remarked Rouge in a tone of admiration, "you almost make me think you got some sense. Now it takes brains to think up a stunt like that. I don't see how you done it."

"Stick with me, kid," said Wally, "an' you'll be a lance corporal in a couple o' years."

"Shut up!" husked Rouge suddenly. "I hear talkin'!"

Wally listened. He heard at first only the steady throbbing of his own arteries, then far, far off, a clattering sound such as

he used to make when he was a boy by rubbing a stick along a picket fence. There was a sullen growling of guns, a shell coughing, then intervals of silence, with no sound except the dripping of rain on the leaves and the pattering of the drops on the men's steel helmets.

"Where the — do you hear talkin'?" whispered Wally.

"I heard it, sure thing," whispered Rouge. "Come here."

He led the way a little farther down the road and they halted again. There they stood and listened, holding their breaths that they might hear the better. Wally seemed to discover it first, for his groping hand found Rouge's arm and closed on it like a vise. A third man had joined the party, for they could hear him breathing.

Wally debated whether to run at top speed or to stay where he was and hope the newcomer would not notice him and Rouge. Then he gathered his muscles for a leap. This new man might be a sentry, perhaps the first one of the ring about the post of command. He might be a gas guard. Whatever he was, he had not heard the two approach, or he would have challenged, and now finding them so near, he might shoot at them first and challenge afterward.

Wally's hands grew cold. Sentries in thick woods on black rainy nights are inclined to be nervous, and careless with their trigger finger. Suppose this bird slapped a grenade at them!

"Leggo my arm," spoke Rouge, "you're takin' a chunk right out. Who's that guy there? Hey, fellar, do you know where the general o' this outfit hangs out? We got a bucket o' eye-wash for him."

Wally took a deep breath and shuffled his feet nearer the strange man. The man had been sitting down, but he now stood up, not a foot away, and Wally could see him. The other's form was not very distinct, but he had a little round cap on his head, his blouse was long and flared at the bottom, and his breeches had no peg whatsoever. His smell was strong, and of different character than the Americans.



"HE'S a boche!" cried Wally. "Hit him, Rouge!"

"Hit him yourself," said Rouge. "I'm gittin' away from here."

Rouge haunched his shoulders, swung his arms and dug his heels into the ground. He

leaped forward mightily and Wally was not far behind him. If they had run from the trench full of stiffs, they flew now. They splashed through mud, stumbled and fell and leaped to their feet again. Suddenly Wally halted, but the going was slippery and his sudden application of the brakes caused him to skid against the back of Rouge's legs and they went down in a heap.

"Where the — are you goin' to?" cried Rouge.

"Shut up, you — fool!" whispered Wally. "Do you know where we are? Do you know why that boche didn't shoot at us?"

"He didn't have no rifle," guessed Rouge. "Aw, horse-teeth! Gee, when a guy sees how happy you are, he wonders what good it does to have savvy. Sure he had a rifle. It had one o' them rocky mountain buck tooth bayonets on it, too. Well, he didn't shoot because he figured we was as good as prisoners. We're in Germany an' we been runnin' farther in for the last five minutes."

"Well, let's turn round an' run out," suggested Rouge.

"——," said Wally.

Rouge said nothing, neither did he move. A match had flared, not a yard from his face, and its light had been held to a cigaret beneath a helmet that looked like a coal scuttle and that same light had illumined a face with small eyes, an upturned nose, and high cheekbones that could have belonged to no other race than the Teutonic.

When the first man had lighted his cigaret, he held the match out and the tiny flame, reflected from cupped palms, lighted another face as like its fellow as two peas in a pod. The light went out, but not before it had illumined a few pairs of boots of the pattern worn by the German soldiery. Now that they listened for it, the two Yanks could hear feet shuffling, men moving about, low muttering in German, and the rattle of equipment.

Wally kneeled slowly and carefully down, and tried to get the heads of the men on the road against the skyline, but the woods were too thick. However, if he and Rouge had gotten in, they must be able to get out again. He kicked himself because he had been too lazy to hunt about for a rifle or a grenade or two to arm himself with. That trench of the dead men must have been the old boche front line. Any fool would have

known that and have realized that he had come too far.

Wally reached out and tugged at Rouge's sleeve, then drew the other gently backward. They stepped slowly and carefully down the road, reaching backward and feeling for their foothold before resting their weight on that foot, and after they had gone a dozen or so steps from the place where the match had been lighted, they turned, intending to proceed a little faster.

They changed their minds, however, and did not proceed at all. There was a group of about six men in the path, and their heads were outlined against the sky, for the woods were open at the far end on this side. They were boche and no mistake.

"I ain't licked," said Wally desperately to himself.

He still had hold of Rouge and he dragged him sidewise, intending to get into the woods off the road, and so perhaps be able to pass around the picket, or patrol or whatever that group was. They proceeded sidewise, those two ambulance men, and so reached the ditch, into which they fell and became all snarled and entangled with the men who were sitting there, and who swore at them roundly in a strange and guttural tongue.

They went into the center of the roadway again, wondering if they were awake. It did not seem possible that they could be in the midst of a company of the enemy and live so long. Wally applied his mouth to Rouge's ear.

"Take off your helmet," said he, "I bet they don't know we're Yanks. Leave your helmet off an' they won't find it out."

The two put their helmets on the ground, and then Rouge had an idea.

"Here," he whispered, pulling Wally by the hair, "let's crawl outta here."

Wally silently agreed by tugging at Rouge's arm and away they went. The bottle that Wally had carried all this time with his belt through the handle, and which had swung and flapped like a Scotsman's sporran, now trailed on the ground, and hindered progress sadly.

After a half minute's cautious advance, Wally rested on one hand and with the other sought to push the bag around so that it would not fall in front of him. When he put his hand down again, he shoved his palm into the midst of a man's stomach, and the owner of the stomach gave tongue, a hurry of words that sounded as if he were

trying to clear his throat and talk at the same time.

At the same second there came a harsh cry a few feet away, followed by much angry muttering and a stern command that was probably for silence.

"—," said Rouge, in a voice that thundered and reverberated, "leggo o' me!"

"Kamerad," said Wally, without further parley, holding his hands aloft.

There was considerable laughter from the darkness and many comments, so that Wally knew there were quite a number of men sitting or lying on the ground in front of him. They had not been there when the two had come down the path; they must have moved in there from the ditch, or else they had just come out of the woods.

He waited a long time for some one to seize him, and then it occurred to him that they must have all jumped on Rouge, whose voice had so clearly heralded his nationality. Still there was no sound of a struggle, nothing but men calmly breathing, muttering here and there, and the suck, suck of a man walking through the mud at a short distance. Some one thrust his hand into the back of Wally's neck. He swung about, but a husky voice whispered in his ear.


"There's a million of 'em here. We ain't got the chance of a celluloid supply sergeant in —."

"What'll we do?"

"Come on into the ditch an' sleep. Maybe they'll drag out an' leave us. They don't know we're here yet."

Wally mentally congratulated Rouge. The red-headed lad was indeed showing signs of rudimentary brains. The two could surrender just as safely in the morning and if they continued to crawl about in the darkness they were sure to get a bayonet through them sooner or later. Meanwhile, whatever the outcome, they would be in a night's sleep. They crawled off the road, but their organs of smell informed them that that ditch was full of the enemy as well as the one on the other side.

Back to the center of the road again. The grass there was long and they lay down, wet as they were, and pillowing their heads on their gas-masks, went instantly to sleep. So, many times had they slept and not known whether they would wake in France or Paradise or hell, that slumber in the midst of their enemies was not difficult to find.

 WHEN Wally opened his eyes it was quite light. It was a foggy, rainy dawn, and the mist rose heavily from the woods on either side of the road. On all sides Wally could see clumsy leather boots, funnel-shaped and flapping, men getting sleepily to their feet and adjusting the can in which they carried their gas masks. Some huddled under the trees, their overcoats about their shoulders. It seemed that some signal had awakened them, and doubtless the same thing had awakened Wally.

If he could see the Germans clearly, why could they not see him? Why they could, of course, but they must think he was a stiff! They might go on and leave him lying there and he might yet escape. He turned his eyes, keeping his head very quiet, to where Rouge had lain down.

Hot dog! They had gathered about Rouge and were probably going through his clothes in search of whatever of value might be therein. As Wally watched in horror, the group broke up and there was Rouge on a stretcher, elevated on the shoulders of four Germans. Had Rouge been hit during the night? If a stray shell had wandered in there, it would have certainly awakened Wally. Rouge was borne away, and Wally, forgetting that he was supposed to be dead, sat up and watched the stretcher bearers.

He beheld a German regarding him with startled eye. Wally stared at the other, trying to see if his expression was hostile, and wondering whether he should cry "*Kamerad*" or lie down again and play possum. The German grinned bashfully and dropped his eyes to the ground, then swinging his shoulders like a nervous schoolgirl, he walked away.

"——!" thought Wally, "when did I have my last drink? I must have the snakes! Didja see that Jerry haul himself when he saw me lookin' at him?"

Voices from the upper end of the road whither the jerries had borne Rouge.

"You ain't hit, you —— goldbrick!"

"Well, who the —— said I was?"

"Well, what the —— are yuh doin' on a stretcher then?"

"These here krauts put me on it!"

Wally stood up, again forgetting his position. In the direction of the voices, barely visible through the fog, was a group in olive drab. Wally's heart leaped for joy. They were not alone in their captivity then, Upon the arm of these new Yanks was a

white band with a Red Cross. Some of them knelt on the ground and the others stood. They were dressing wounded.

"——!" exclaimed Wally. He rubbed his eyes, but the vision persisted. Beside the Red Cross man was a Yank doughboy, and not only did he hold a bayoneted rifle in his hands, but he had a companion similarly armed.

Wally, with swimming head, looked around. The sight of the rifle reminded him that he had not seen one for some time. Sure enough, though there were upward of a hundred Germans in sight, not one of them was armed, nor had so much as a "*Gott Mit Uns*" buckle left of their equipment. Then Wally's straying glance came to rest.

There was a kind of saw-horse structure across the road, built of saplings and small trees, very like a jump for a horse show, but this hurdle was covered with barbed wire. It was a portable entanglement. Wally had often seen them along side roads, where they could be quickly swung into place to link up a defense system.

This one was evidently a gate, for it closed the end of the road at the place Wally and Rouge had tried to crawl out, when they had struck the men sitting in the road. Wally's eye had no glances for that entanglement after the first one, for against the end of the gate stood a man in a slicker, about which was fastened a waist-belt bulging with ammunition. The man had a tin hat over one eye, and a cigaret from which a thread of smoke climbed into the fog. Water was trickling slowly down the Yank's bayonet, where it had dripped down from the trees. Golly! Suppose that bayonet was a Hun's and that water Wally's blood! The ambulance driver shuddered and turning upon his heel, went in search of Rouge.

Rouge was coming up the road to meet his comrades.

"What the —— is all this?" cried Wally.

"Got the bottle?" asked Rouge.

"To —— with the bottle," choked Wally.

"Where are we? Are we dead or prisoners, or crazy or what?"

"Don't get excited," said Rouge. "Never get excited your first hitch! Stick with me, kid, an' you'll be a jigadier brindle."

"Are you drunk, too?" cried Wally. "There!" he continued, drawing himself up, "the poor nit wit's gone crazy fer sure now. Don't be hard on the boy. The shock's

upset his weak mind. Don't cry, Rouge, dear, I won't let 'em hurt you. Naughty, naughty boche. Wally spank!"

Rouge's reply was a fitting one, even if it can not be even suggested.

"While you been scratchin' your old lice, I been gettin' information," Rouge went on. "Do you know what this here is?"

"No, but I guess it's a madhouse."

"Well, it ain't. This here is a bunch o' Jerry prisoners waitin' fer daylight to be lugged out to the pens."

It was not ten minutes later that the two ambulance men went blithely along the woodland paths once more. One of the first aid men had informed them that the general was breakfasting not three minutes' walk up the road and that he was probably in a pleasant humor, for the brigade had been reorganized, had sustained three heavy attacks with ease, and was in shape to move forward in an attempt to recover the ground they had lost on the previous day.

"Well, what I can't dope out," said Wally, "is how we got in the middle o' them Jerries, and through the gate an' everything without one o' them guards sayin' somethin'."

"Listen," said Rouge, "an' I'll explain in words o' one syllable, which you can easy understand. While you was lyin' on the ground in a stiff fright, I was lookin' around an' findin' out. While these here Jerries was bein' collected, some more come sneak-in' around the flank and they sneaked right into our support. Well, they was bein' marched down the road in back of us, and that guy with the rifle an' all that riz up, he musta been waitin' to turn himself in.

"So then we run like — an' run into the main bunch that was sittin' in the ditch, and while you was gettin' off your foot an' tryin' to screw up your old courage, they shuts the gate an' them guys that they brought in sits down, where we run into 'em when you has that bright thought you was goin' to crawl free."

"Well, you didn't have no bright thoughts, Rouge, that's a bet. You was so scared you near shook the fillin's outta your teeth."

"Well, is that so? Huh! Who was the guy that squeaks '*Kamerade*' like a wounded Fritz in the upper bunk goin' over a bump?"

This reference to travel by motor recalled Wally to the remembrance of his mission.

"Say, kid," said he soberly, "we wanta get rid of this here bottle o' eye-wash, an' get a written order from that general where we been, because if we turn up *minus* one G.I. ambulance and A.W.O. Loose for two or three days, you know where we go, and if you don't know what S.O.L. means by now, you'll find out then."

"You tell him," said Rouge, "there he is."



A TURN in the path disclosed the general and his erstwhile gilded staff.

They were ragged and torn, bearded and red-eyed, and the mud in which they had slept was plastered thickly upon them. The general sat on a wooden box, and the others on the ground, wrapped in their rags. A man read to the general from a sheet of type-writing, and pointed to a map case that was spread at the general's feet.

The general himself drank from a tin cup, blowing upon it the while. There was a small, very smoky fire going in the center of the group, with numbers of tin cups clustered about it in the process of having their contents heated.

Wally came to the edge of the group and coughed. An officer turned about and looked at him.

"What do you want?" asked the officer.

"I'd like to speak to the general, sir," said Wally.

"Well, he's busy. Come back in an hour."

"Well, this is very important, sir."

"Come back in an hour," said the officer loudly and sternly.

"*Harrh!*" snarled the general. "Who you telling to come back in an hour? Want to see me, soldier? What do you want? What the — do you mean, Captain, by telling a man to come back in an hour? How do you know he isn't a runner? What's on your mind, soldier?"

"I brung this for you," said Wally, struggling to find words, for the general's presence and the staring staff embarrassed him.

So saying, he undid his waist belt and brought forth the hot-water bottle. The crimson leaped from the general's neck to his brow, as the red ensign of Johnny Bull soars to the masthead at sunrise. One of the staff tittered and the general marked who he was, so that that very night he started on his journey for Blois, to issue blankets for the duration of the war. The general looked again at Wally and made a

mental selection of the words he would say.

"You know, General," said Rouge soothingly, "eye-wash."

He grinned in an insinuating manner.

"Eye-wash?" roared the general. "By George, are you two the men I sent after eye-wash? And you chased me away up here? Gentlemen," said the general, looking around, "that's what I call devotion, that's what I call the spirit of duty. Accomplish your mission, no matter what the odds. I dare say you boys have been roaming about the woods all night, having hand-to-hand fights and all kinds of experiences. And neither one of you armed? Well, I'm —!"

He paused, glaring about at the silent staff. Wally and Rouge stood proudly, their heads lifted and chests arched.

"I'm very grateful," continued the general, "even if your sacrifice was unnecessary. That gas that bothered me was tear gas and not mustard, and the effect wore off in a short time. Did you leave my car where it won't be stolen?"

"Yessir," said Wally, "we left it at the division P.C. The one in the dugout under the hill."

"They won't no one steal it," said Rouge. "When we saw it last there wasn't enough of it to tempt a Jew junk man."

It is regrettable that the general's words can not be set down as he said them. Such treasures must be passed from generation to generation by word of mouth, like folklore legends, for no printed page can bear them.

There was a sudden flurry among the staff, and cries of pity and alarm. All turned and beheld an officer stumbling along, his clothing in shreds, a cloth bound about his eyes, and two other officers supporting him. Wally seized the moment to implant his foot with vigor in the geometric center of Rouge's anatomy.

"Here," cried the general, "what's the matter with the colonel? Is he wounded badly? Here, let him sit down. Has he had first aid? How did it happen?"

"Mustard," said one of the colonel's supporters, as they assisted the colonel to sit on the wooden box. "We went through an area that had been heavily gassed and the wet weather and rain kept it active."

"Is it in your eyes, Colonel?" asked the general.

The colonel nodded.

"Too bad," said the general. He gave a sudden start and threw up his hand. "Hah! The very thing! Here, hand me that hot water bottle. You two soldiers aren't so dumb after all. What could have been more opportune?" He began to unscrew the plug of the bottle. "By George, this is luck! Here's all the eye-wash you want."

He took out the plug and made to pour a little of the eye-wash in his hands. He stopped with a jerk, and extending the bottle at arms length, regarded it. Then slowly, with protruding eyeballs, he brought the bottle beneath his nose.

"Hah!" he cried. "You man, there, who gave you this?"

"I don't know, sir," said Wally. "I forgot his name."

"I told you it was Martin, didn't I?" howled the general. "Colonel Martin, Division Gas Officer."

"We forgot," said Rouge, "an' so we asked the division surgeon, a fat guy with glasses."

"—!" said the general. "You asked that rum hound for eye-wash for me! So that's who gave you this! Eye-wash means only one thing to him. That old sponge!"

The general looked into the bottle.

"— fools! They've wrecked my car and come all the way up here with a hot-water bottle full of whisky!"

He looked up quickly, unconscious perhaps that he had spoken his thoughts aloud, and glared all around the circle again. The staff looked like men who display their throats to a physician. They hung out their tongues and said, "Ah!"

The general looked at them all and then swiftly swept the hot-water bottle from sight under the breast of his trench coat.

"There's just two drinks there," he said, "one for me and one for the colonel."

His eye once more came to rest upon Rouge and Wally. His brow lowered and his jaw muscles tensed.

"Get the — out of here!" he commanded, nor did he return their farewell salute.

In silence the two went down the path, in silence they turned into the grass-grown road, in silence they pursued their way until they came to the trench of the dead men. Here Rouge sighed.

"Wally," said he, "if you'n' me had only had the sense to inspect that eye-wash, how many times we coulda made use of it!"

The Confirmation of Peter

By
S. B. H. Hurst



Author of "Erased," "The Second Fall," etc.

THE missionary—his mission and his converts still but ad ream in his brain—beheld the land of promise, appropriately, from the crest of some low, snow-filled hills. This was in the early days of Alaska, years before the Klondike strike on the Canadian side, when what white folk wandered in that country of miracles were, and had to be, as tough as the land they traversed. The weak and the overgentle died, yet the missionaries sometimes thrived; and this one, Aspland, with his lone Indian and a team of dogs, had come to the country, holding his soul firm to his purpose of lifting not only the whites, but also the Indians, to a better way of life. There below him was the big river, upon a bend of which squatted the Indian village.

It was a chilly prospect. The fall of the year, the first of the snows—a somber welcome. Scores of dogs yelping fighting insults at his tired team as Aspland reached the village in the late afternoon, to meet half a dozen white men whose welcome, while at first disguised, was similar; a lawless crowd, clutching at whatever offered. Hence, the condition of that Indian village which they had terrorized was not nice.

But they greeted the approaching outfit with cheers. Any novelty or new face was an event. They jovially masked their suspicion of the newcomer's business; but after some words among themselves concerning the cross he wore they began to prove that

the legend which says that all missionaries up north were always treated with respect is legend well drenched with myth. Disturbing myths is a difficult and dangerous business which, however, needs sometimes to be done.



"AND wot?" asked one sinister individual. "Wot might you be wantin' in this place. Who in — asked you to come buttin' in?"

The priest did not reply, so a friend of the speaker suggested— "Maybe, Pete, he came to marry you—to five or six of your lady friends among the squaws."

"—," yelled Pete, "I don't have to marry them. And I ain't a marrying man, anyhow." He turned again upon Aspland, ferocious because of the gentle attitude of the priest. "Come on, now! Open up. If you're just pretending—all right! But if you're a regular Gospel-slinger, come here to make trouble—then you'd best go before I beat you up and run you out of camp. Savvy?"

"You appear to be a sort of leader here?" suggested Aspland quietly.

"You bet your — life I am. What I say goes. Now, what about you?" answered Pete.

It was one of those dramatic scenes which cluster through the history of Christianity—offspring; as it were divided as children are by the years, clustering about the great drama of the Founder. The autumn dusk

was gathering. A cold wind moaned across the river. The Indians crowded around, openly admiring Pete, their boss. In the background the medicine-man condescended to look on, incuriously. And the dogs milled eternally.

"Well?" asked Pete.

"I am here to stay," said the priest quietly.

A howl of amusement greeted the words; but Pete knew that the laughter would turn against him if he allowed Aspland's words to pass without instant and drastic action.

"Are you a fighting man?" he asked ominously.

"No," answered the priest; and his voice betrayed neither his disgust at the scene nor his weariness of travel.

"Then," said Pete, "you had better begin to learn to be one. Take this for your first lesson!"

And he struck the unexpecting Aspland a heavy blow on the cheek, knocking him down.

Through the haze of his distress and indignation the priest sought for something to which he could relate the blow—some experience for action—but found nothing. In all his life no one had struck him in the face before. He struggled to be calm and forget the sting of the hurt. The gray sky loomed cruelly; the yelling of the hilarious crowd surged to and fro like the howling of a Roman mob. The priest was lying in the arena, and all the thumbs were turned against him. What should he do? He had never had a similar experience. And then he remembered.

Pete was standing like some impresario flattered by the applause of the audience his show has amused when Aspland got to his feet, saying—

"Perhaps you would like to hit the other side?"

And while Pete laughed and showed much amusement he was troubled by that quiet voice. He was a brute and not a coward, but he dare not reject Aspland's offer. He must be all brute or cease to be boss. His was a tough gang. He lifted his fist, shouting:

"You bet I will. You don't pull that old stuff on me!"

And he struck Aspland upon the other cheek, knocking him down again.

But the priest, lying on the hard ground,

was no longer the victim of an arena mob.

He was a cool and resourceful fighter in momentary trouble, taking the count in order to collect his forces. The yells no longer affected him, the dun sky no longer depressed. The vision of the mission, with gentle white sisters teaching the children of the Indians, ministering to the mothers—Aspland saw his vision as Galahad saw the Holy Grail, and got up to fight for it. He confronted the still amused Pete.

"I have obeyed the Master, but, lacking His spiritual power, I am compelled to do His work with material hands."

He began to remove his upper garments. The crowd became silent. The white men, waving back the Indians, instinctively formed a ring.

"You'd better take off your coat, Pete"—Aspland smiled as he said it—"because I am going to give you an awful licking!"

Pete laughed hugely.

"Well, you've got guts, anyhow, so I won't hurt you too much. I may even let you stick around the camp a while, if you promise not to preach!"

But, nevertheless, he took off his coat and blew upon his fists.

A warm glowing flowered up the priest's spine, dividing over his shoulders and joining again up his breast. He thrilled to instinctive joy of combat. The silence grew. The crowd began to feel that something uncanny was going to happen in the emotional storm breaking about it. Even the white men shouted no encouragement, or jest to Pete, but breathed heavily. The sky lightened somewhat before settling into night.

Pete was no boxer, but the missionary had, quite early in his period of education, noticed that a militant Christianity is needed when trying to rescue the souls of roughnecks, and so had gone in for boxing until he had reached a proficiency where most professionals would have found him a difficult handful. They faced one another, Pete swinging his arms, the priest putting his up correctly with the calm confidence of a champion. So obvious was this that all the white men realized that a boxer stood before them. And Aspland acted like one. The now alarmed and entirely bewildered Pete waved a huge right arm to block a left feint for his jaw. At the same moment the priest's right hit him like the snap of a whip just under the heart with

force enough almost to fell an ox, and Pete collapsed.

The white men shouted, and the Indians echoed shrilly. In the background the medicine-man knew premonitions akin to those enjoyed by Pete.

"Get up," commanded Aspland shortly. "I am going to lick every one of you white men before I eat, and—I'm hungry!"

"The ——!" Pete's best friend breathed his awe of the seemingly impossible, his hope of the enjoyment of wonders. Pete got up.

There was no referee and no watch to time the rounds. But, then, rounds were hardly required, except in the sense that every time the priest hit him Pete craved many minutes in which to recuperate. But, time or otherwise, no man could stand up long under such punishment, and within a short space after the fight started Pete lay unconscious.


The priest, his clean way of life standing him in great stead, raised an imperative hand and several Indians advanced to obey.

He pointed to Pete.

"Put him to bed," he said quietly.

And when the Indians had carried away their burden he turned and spoke to the remaining white men with fine indiscriminatio.

"Next!" he said.

 THERE was an understandable hesitation; until, feeling no doubt that, as Pete's best friend, the conventions demanded his response—Pete's best friend, who had jested of weddings, took off his coat.

He did not last as long as Pete.

Again the priest commanded the Indians.

"Put him to bed!"

And they carried away the best friend of Pete and laid him by his friend—hastily, because they were deeply interested in future events.

But such fighting is hard work, and when the next man stood forward Aspland was tired. Also, he had traveled far since dawn. The third man was short but as broad as he was long, and he was encouraged to begin by his observations of the previous fights and certain experiences of his own. He had noted that Pete and his friend had very foolishly stood up and tried to trade punches with a skillful boxer; the boxer beating them to every punch. Even Aspland's build

added to this opinion, for the priest weighed about one hundred and eighty with wide shoulders and somewhat slender body. Besides, his knocking out of Pete and his friend left no room for argument.

The thickset man carried his reasoning further. A man built like the priest was not ordained for wrestling or for rough and tumble bar-room fighting. The thick man felt a certain scorn for Pete and his friend. He would show better sense than to try to box with this fighting slinger of psalms. No set rules had been made. It was well. The thick man decided upon his method of beating the priest. He advanced upon Aspland with the lowered head of a bull, his hands and body in the attitude general to bears.

The Indians shouted, and the whites felt more confident that the priest would be defeated and so be unable to establish over them a spiritual tyranny which they feared more than any physical brutality. Both whites and Indians understood and appreciated the thick man's style of fighting.

The thick man rushed in. Aspland, surprised by this new form of attack, hit him as he came but as he was slightly off balance the blow merely staggered the wrestler and before the priest could follow up the thick man had gripped him. They rolled over the ground, fighting viciously, each in his own way.

But it is difficult properly to hit a man who is wrestling with one, and the man who heaved and clawed and even bit at Aspland was a thick-necked person also, with tremendous vitality. Struggling with this man, the priest could not hit effectively. His weariness grew; his clothes began to hang from his body in shreds. The thick man was tearing at everything his fingers could reach, always, trying like a dog, for the final killing hold. His arms ached from his impotent punchings. Aspland had no thought of losing, but winning from this bear-like animal did seem impossible.

Then there came a time when the priest lay on his back panting, dimly hearing the furious shoutings, vaguely seeing the darkening sky, gasping against the fingers that clawed his throat—cunning fingers that felt for and held the ways of the priest's breath, fingers that were slowly choking him to death.

Again the vision, and new strength to live and struggle. But the will to do was not enough—a way had to be found.

The crowd began to close in, for now the two men lay in one place, Aspland unable to move, the other neither desiring or needing to—deliriously slaving his joy of apparent victory, happy in the belief that he was killing his man. And the mob of observing humans had no more thought of saving the priest than they would have had of saving some malemiut from the fangs of another when the dying dog was too old and infirm to be of any value and, to them, would be better dead. Yet the vision persisted. Oh, where was the way?

Aspland knew only too well that he must get rid of those fingers around his throat or die horribly. But how? The other's hands were too strong for him. How? Where was the way? There must be a way. Strange sounds in his ears—a discord amid the overture to "William Tell." A growling and a drumming. The vision! Was that vision to fail because of him—because the priest of God failed to do His work?

Dying, Aspland did not lose faith—he merely despised his own weakness. He was dying, but his failing consciousness struggled for a way of guiding his hands to rid his throat of those killing fingers. He was suffocating—

There came a dim memory. Ah, what was it the swimmer had said? At an old wharf in a far-away sea-port. How difficult it was to think. Coherence seemed entirely lost amid that awful noise in his ears. Ah, there again. Yes, the swimmer. What was it? Oh, what had he said. God, for one breath of air! That swimmer. Ah, he had saved a heavier man than himself. Aspland had talked with him. Had asked him—

"Did he struggle with you?"

And the swimmer had answered—

"He gripped me around the throat as if he wanted to squeeze the life out of me!"

And the priest had asked—

"How did you get his hands away from your throat?"

And now—what had that swimmer said?

Aspland was going. Below him yawned an infinity of dark into which he was falling. He knew that he could not remember what the swimmer had said, because he could no longer think at all.

Then, suddenly, the pressure loosened. The frenzied fingers of the thick man had left the throat of the priest and were gripping at his right wrist! Why? Aspland

would never remember remembering what the swimmer had told him years before, but automatically he had reacted to that telling during the second when he struggled for memory, those seconds which seemed as hours. For his powerful right hand was pressing, palm up, against the chin of the thick man, threatening to break that one's neck—threatening only, but so real was the feeling that the thick man had gripped at the wrist of the priest to save himself. Just as the swimmer had said. As the swimmer had said!

The air was like wine. And what was perhaps quite as important was the position of the jaw of the thick man. Such a beautiful blow—behind it all the energy pent up in the dawn-memories of thousands of the priest's ancestors who had been nearly killed but had, instead, just managed to kill their enemies. In other words, a whale of a punch. Not exactly an uppercut, but then, technique hardly matters.

The crowd, awestruck, beheld a priest of God staggering to his feet, his clothes no longer clothes but a medley of indecent rags strung together here and there by a miracle. They hardly breathed as they watched him standing there a moment, ere he lifted an imperative if shaky hand and pointed to the knocked out thick man.

"Put him to bed," he commanded the Indians.



AND while as in some heroic dream the mob watched these proceedings, he turned upon the remaining white men with a nobly casual—

"Next!"

But there was no next.

There was instead a startling yelling of acclaim, while the medicine-man departed thoughtfully and the whites rushed in and lifted the priest to their shoulders to carry him, shouting his praises, about the village while Indians and dogs followed, baying a discordant chorus.

"Put me down!" demanded Aspland during a lull not destined to last.

"Aw, say, father!" expostulated one convert wistfully.

"Put me down I said," went on the priest. "If you don't put me down at once I'll thrash every one of you!"

They put him down reverently. He surveyed himself, and blushed.

"One of you please get my other coat"

He was obeyed by men squabbling for the honor.

"Now see if Pete is able to come out here, I want to talk to him."

Pete appeared, trying to mask bashfulness by his efforts to beam friendliness out of what was left to him in the matter of eyes. The priest, radiating his consoling smile, held out his hand, and Pete became his for life. More shaking of hands, and Aspland asked for silence. Those rough men had been charmed and amazed by his fighting, but now he gripped and held them as nothing physical could hold—not by words only but through mystery-hued vibrations of soul which touched his hearers into responsive music.

It grew quite dark. Aspland, putting aside his hunger and weariness, looked at his shadowy congregation. Suddenly, Pete—who stood by the side of the priest with the same sort of pride with which he would have stood at the side of the heavyweight champion of the world and posed for the camera—suddenly Pete lifted an apologetic paw, and said:

"Beg pardon, boss—'scuse me, *father*—but the gang wants to see as well as lissen." He turned upon his friends. "What in — you guys thinking about. Two of you run and get the bishop some sort of—some sort of pulpit for him to stand on; and be — quick about it."

And he expanded with further pride at his memory of the word.

Halfway between tears and laughter, yet supremely happy, Aspland allowed himself to be assisted to mount the quite remarkable pulpit.

It was a wild people to whom he spoke and a wild scene which lay around him. The Indians could not understand, but they were impressed. Besides, they did understand the first word in the lexicon of the soul, which is courage. Once or twice Aspland had to pause and pretend to cough to avoid laughing. It was the strained attitude of the whites that did it. At first Aspland did not catch the memory; then it came with humorous force. For the whites had indeed become as little children and, quite unaware of what they did, they were behaving as they had behaved during those tiresome Sundays of the long ago when stern authority had frozen them into small images supposedly indicative of religious enjoyment.

And when Aspland had told them of the mission that was to be, "Pete, I want you to be my first assistant. And you boys will help, won't you?"

"You bet your — er—you bet, father, old man."

II



IT WAS sixty below, and the air about the mission was so still that one might well have believed it frozen. The sky hung heavily, as if waiting to break into fragments of storm. A blizzard had just ended. The presage of the weather was evil.

"If Larouch was able to travel, father, it would be bad enough. But for you to go alone is—please don't attempt it!"

"Sister—" begun Father Aspland, to be interrupted by the arrival of a weirdly wrapped figure just out of bed.

"Go back," ordered the sister. "Larouch, you are not fit to be up, and you know it."

"Pardon," whispered the sick man as he tottered to the chair she pulled forward. "Pardon. It is *M'sieu le curé* I would wish to speak."

"You must do what the sister tells you," said Aspland gently, "and go back to your bed."

"Merci— Tanks. But, father— *father*, where you go wid dat sled and dogs?"

"You know," answered the priest.

"But, oh —, I so weak. But you mus' no go."

"Eh?"

"If Larouch seek—die—dat all right. Nothing at all. Jus' a man dead, that all. But if you go out alone, and bleezard come, and you die—then dat —. Mooch worse' an—, for us all. For Alaska, for de 'ole world. You mus' no go."

The priest said nothing, and the sister nodded approval of the meaning of the words of Larouch.

"So you no go," the sick man nodded feebly. "You no want to bring — to us all. You come here to bring us heaven, father. You no go wid that dogs and sled. Bien!"

"I know the country, and can handle the dogs almost as well as you," countered the priest.

"Better 'an me—the dogs love you most. But if storm come then no man pull through excep' by luck—and he be — queek and cover up wid sled. Jus' luck most time.

If luck had then God 'Eemself He get froze up."

"Larouch!" began the sister; but Aspland, smiling, raised his hand for silence.

"I am going," he said simply.

"But, father," implored the woman; "look at the weather. Surely, you won't try to get there alone?"

To please her the priest looked again at the mass of white which was all the country, at the menacing signs of storm. Even if the weather did not grow worse, to travel that deep, soft snow meant the heartbreaking toil of breaking trail ahead of the dogs.

"But I promised the children, sister."

"Children!" Larouch felt like Samson praying for just one moment of his old strength. "Children. Lots of children—and tomorrow, and nex' day and forever lots of children, but only one Fader Aspland. Kids, children. Only Indian children anyhow."

"Larouch, don't you love children?"

"Sure Larouch love children; but he love you more than any — Indian children, or any sort."

The man's Latin emotion was frothing painfully.

"Larouch, suppose your father had made a promise to you, and had then broken that promise—wouldn't it have hurt worse than many beatings? Would he ever again have seemed like the same father?"

"No, by —!" exclaimed Larouch.

"I promised the children!"

"But, father—" began the sister.

"I promised those children that I would bring them—bring, not send—bring them a sled filled with toys in time for Christmas morning, so that they should have a Christmas such as white children have. Can I break my promise and disappoint the little ones?"

There was silence. Larouch and the sister hung their heads in an embarrassment for which they sought adequate excuse and explanation. Aspland smiled.

"Think of the children, then—the little Indian children who have so few pleasures, and whose lives lack so much that white children get as a matter of course. They are anxiously expecting their first real Christmas, with Santa Claus and everything. Think of the children, and you will forget the weather!"

They made as if to tell him that while they could think of the children and try to

ignore the threats of the weather they could not forget their love for Father Aspland, and the danger he faced so heroically, but he gave them no chance—smiling and saying good-bye too heartily.

Then he mushed his dogs into the wan twilight of that drear day.

He mushed his dogs, and went.



CLEARING the mission, began the heavy trail-breaking work; and while the priest was strong and full of energy he could not help becoming aware of the fact that he would be a somewhat weary Santa Claus when he reached his destination. He realized that he had not given himself too much time, that it would have been better—but, no, he could not have started the day before, or the day before that, either; the blizzard would not have permitted traveling.

Circumstances had apparently compelled his starting upon his journey that morning; as they had so caused his traveling alone. The seemingly kind, the seemingly cruel play of circumstances. But Aspland had faith in the Stage Director. And he had the stimulant of his mental picture of the joy of the children when he reached them. Still, many miles of this sort of work, was—never mind, it would be over in good time. And there were places where the wind had swept, where the snow was thinner and the going not so difficult.

Sometimes there came his only worry—he might be late and keep the children waiting. He would have to keep going. He had no time to rest. For himself he did not mind—had he not the joyous anticipation of making children happy? But the poor dogs—it was hard work, even for dogs. The man's kindly nature caused him to exaggerate the fatigue of the dogs. Their feet were in good shape, and there was nothing on the trail to cut them.

The day seemed to close rather soon, and somewhat suddenly. Aspland did not look at his watch—one expected a very short day. He must have made slower time than he thought. He would have to hurry. The wind was getting up too. What an eery, keen wail was in its voice!

The first of the snow swept like the breath of some huge ghost across the trail, and the priest realized that he would be hard put to it to keep the trail and not lose it among the many miles he had yet to travel. There

was also the greater danger of the blizzard in which the world of whirling grey takes possession of the mind of the traveler until he is hypnotized by it into loss of all sense of direction and, finally, sleep.

Father Aspland braced himself to fight this, and his long habit of self-control supported him to the fight.

But again his greatest concern was the disappointment of the children. He was afraid that he would be late and that the children, not knowing that he was on the way, would believe themselves bereft of Santa Claus. Thinking thus, and driving his dogs for all they were willingly worth, Father Aspland began to wonder about Santa Claus. Who was to play the part of the genial saint and distribute the toys to the Indian children? Generally there were only sisters at the mission school. Of course, some stray traveler might drift in out of the storm, willing to oblige by donning the huge white whiskers concealed among the packages on the sled, but, otherwise, the priest would have to be Santa himself. He visioned the smiling sisters, and laughed aloud. But, perhaps, some man would come along and help out, for Aspland doubted his ability to make believe so that the children would not discover his identity.

It was getting horribly cold, and the sheets of driving snow seemed thicker. Then, through the wraith of white, he heard the unmistakable sound of another team and sled coming toward him.

The driver of the approaching sled was working his dogs furiously, evidently in a hurry to get somewhere out of the weather. Down the wind came another voice. There were two men with the coming team. The priest pulled aside. The wind being with them, the other men would not be aware of the priest's outfit in time to prevent the almost inevitable scuffling between the dogs if they got too close, tired as they were.

Suddenly through the gloom the other outfit loomed hugely, magnified in the faint light. With a yell the other men stopped, and came forward to greet the priest as courteous travelers will. Wrapped up as the three men were, identification was difficult, but a roar from one of them told of his recognizing Father Aspland. Then the priest, staring, saw Pete and his friend.

"How, father! Where are you going this fine day, anyhow?"

And, with the snow glutting the opening

of his parka, Pete turned himself the better to screen the priest.

Aspland, hiding a smile, pretended sternness.

"Where are you two boys going?"

It was too dark to see their uneasy faces but Aspland could easily sense their uneasy souls. Christmas Eve, and the two men racing through the storm for one of their sprees. Much as they liked the priest, this meeting was hardly the sort of meeting about which their thoughts had revolved for many hours; and while they knew that the priest had small use for that disgusting by-product of civilization, the reformer, they did not understand that his own magnificent self-control had long made him sympathetic with the need of most men for a spree. Consequently, both Pete and his friend were embarrassed.

"Oh, just taking a bit of a holiday, father!" Then, hastily, hoping to head off further questioning, "But were are you going? This ain't no sort of weather for you to be travelin' in—alone!"

The wind whirled and bit, tossing words strangely. It really was no sort of weather for any man to travel in.

"I'm afraid you boys have farther to go than I have," shouted the priest.

"Are you going to try to camp? Better stop overnight at the mission, keep Larouch company."

Pete and his friend had been partners for many years, until they had reached that plane of understanding where few words are required. The priest told briefly of his cargo, his need of haste, pictured the anxious children.

"Them darned little Indians," yelled Pete.

"And you going to play Santa!" yelled the friend.

"All alone this weather," went on Pete. "No you ain't, not while two unsaintly roughnecks can go along with you. You've had the laugh on us for a long time, father, but this time we're going to get the laugh on you—watching you wear them whiskers!"

"You mean," gratefully, "that you'll travel with me."

"Father," roared Pete, "you're sure some fighter, but you wont try to lick us two and the dogs just because we want to go along and see the show, will you? Even if we does laugh at them whiskers."

"We must hurry to get there in time,"

said the priest, his heart too full for talk.

"And there'll be some luck about our getting there anyway," muttered the friend, dubiously considering the increasing storm.

"We'll have more fun and save our money," yelled the delighted Pete, who knew that Aspland knew that their sole reason for giving up their spree was to take care of him and dreaded being thanked for it.

"And we'd best be on our way, because I don't want to disappoint them Indian kids that's waiting to laugh at old Santa Claus."

"Santa," mumbled the friend of Pete. "Proper — weather for Santa. I'll break trail with our team. Look out. Those lead dogs is hungry for a scrap. Mush, you malemiutes, mush!"

"The weather is rather bad, isn't it?" asked Aspland with finely assumed innocence of things meteorological.

"Bad, well maybe—but not for Santa Claus," shouted Pete. "Did you ever see a picture of Santa when he wasn't traveling in a young blizzard. No, you never did. He's always surrounded by snow and reindeer. I wouldn't want to play Santa if it was fine—leastwise, watch you!"

The priest laughed as he panted with the sled.

"No, not me. I'm not sufficiently impressive."


"Eh—haw, you brute— What, father?"

"You wouldn't want to deprive those kids of any amusement, would you, Pete?"

"Who—me? Why, of course not!"

"Then think what a splendidly impressive Santa you'd make. Think of the whiskers, Pete."

"I am," bawled Pete.

 THEY went on, slowly. The weather was growing worse. Father Aspland had known for some time that he would have been lost if Pete and his friend had not met him and turned back to take care of him—he knew himself to be lacking in the sense of direction, and he knew, further, that a man alone can not keep going as three men can; and now he felt that, even with all his companions' skill and strength, the odds were all against the toys reaching the children; the odds were against the three men living through the storm, against which a sort of anger and the keen wish to make the children happy had caused them to fight when ordinary caution forbade it.

They did not discuss it, but it came over them that they could neither find shelter or turn back. A sudden change had altered the situation from a fight against a storm in order to reach a destination to a fight against death. Even the dark was not normal dark. They wasted no breath on talk—they needed it all for their labor and to coax their tired dogs, to whose primitive and sensible feelings this traveling in a blizzard was such a foolish business.

The dogs wanted to lie down, curl their tails and let the snow warm them into comfortable sleep. But the men persisted, and drove against a seeming infinity of wind-blown obstruction, the dogs edging this way and that, whining appealingly. Finally the team driven by Pete's friend, which, being ahead, had the worst of it, refused to go farther. Pete's friend came back to the other sled, which had also stopped.

"I'm going to cut the dogs out," he shouted. "Ours was the weakest team, anyhow, and never could have made it. I'll put a bit of our dunnage on this sled, and let our dogs go. They won't bother this team none."

That was all; but it was almost equivalent to abandoning ship and taking to the boats on a desolate ocean.

"All right," Pete's roar sounded far away. "We've got to drive these huskies to death. Here's no place to overturn the sleds for a chance of shelter. Ain't no way of gettin' a fire. We just got to keep going."

"And I," mused the priest, "I brought these two generous boys into this, when they would have been all right going their own way."

He tried to express his sorrow, but they would have none of it. He had known the good stuff hidden behind the rough on the day he licked Pete and his friend, but now he saw it. It warmed him, the more so because Pete voiced the priest's own feelings—

"We just got to get those darned toys to the kids. Come on, boys, I wouldn't have those kiddies disappointed. What's a bit of snow, anyhow?"

They were feeling their way now, with the gallant mission team acting as if they, too, wanted to make the childrens' Christmas a success.

The lead dog was superb. He bullied his mates with vicious fervor. With a good lead dog a man may go far even if the rest of the outfit is weak. And this was a wonderful

team. Pete roared his opinion, the while expressing his first word of danger-hint.

"If we get through we're got to thank this — fine team of yours, father!"

And Father Aspland agreed with him.

The world whirled dizzily around them. Had one of them lost sight of the others he would never have been seen again. They had no compass.

The gray pall moved hideously, as if pregnant with hungry ghosts whose touch was death and who struggled to reach the straining men. Suddenly Pete hit his friend hard between the shoulders. Then he did the same for Aspland.

"Eyes straight," he roared. "This — whirl will daze you if you let it. Try and sing. All together, now!"

And Father Aspland started a hymn with cracked voice. The others joined him, the dogs whined louder, and somehow they kept their heads and their senses from falling asleep. But it was bitter cold, and although so far no man had been frostbitten the energy from their last meal had been nearly used up. Do what they might, they would be too late it seemed for Christmas morning. They wondered how far they had traveled. Pete was certain they had not lost the trail.

The pain of the cold. Father Aspland felt himself to be a spectator of his numb body as it moved drunkenly through endless space. His eyes were useless. Against him all the weight of the world seemed to press.


Against this he fought dreadfully—harking back to himself by closing against his companions. Once he heard the laboring Pete telling some unseen and ancient antagonist that it was near morning and that he would see him in — before he stopped or thought of quitting. And again to Aspland the clear knowledge that these men had saved his life—so far. Through another vague dream the priest felt his hand petting the head of a laughing child.

He awoke to find himself patting the head of the straining lead dog. He wondered how and when he had gone ahead of the sled. They were about done. Gallant hearts and powerful muscles could do no more. The hanging heads of the dogs showed them beaten.

Then, suddenly, the dogs seemed to be slipping against some barrier. Pete, trying to roar out a rallying curse, lifted his whip.

A bitter gust of wind blew the snow clear for a moment. The northern wall of the mission school was blocking the dogs' farther progress.

III

 UNWITTINGLY Father Aspland had created a problem for his children of the mission. Accustomed to the humorous acceptance of Santa Claus among the young of easier lands, he had not anticipated the reverence which "Saint" Claus would evoke among his youthful and so-near savage charges.

The children discussed it, low-voiced, among themselves. Obviously a kindly saint, Pete, garbed curiously and adorned with large white whiskers through which now and then protruded red ones, gave those children much concern as to his exact place—they wanted to be sure of his niche, as it were. And they had no desire to show ignorance of such an important character to either Aspland or the sisters. In their dilemma, the most bold became direct. They got Pete aside.

"Are—you—Saint Claus?"

"Sure thing," Pete had never enjoyed himself as much in his life. "Sure thing. I'm the toy-bringing saint, all right."

"Then you're Christian—like us?"

Pete was uncertain about the likeness, but thought it best to say that he was.

"The father made us Christians," said another dark infant proudly. "Did he make you one?"

She pointed to Aspland at the other end of the room.

"He sure did," said Pete.

"But I thought saints were Christians without being made," persisted another.

Pete mopped his brow, disarranging the already disorderly whiskers.

"Eh?" he parried.

"Have you been confirmed, too?"

"Eh, what's that?" Pete's bewilderment swamped his natural caution.

"Confirmed. When the hands are laid on you to make you full Christian?"

"Sure, I been confirmed," said Pete.

"Who did it?"

"Him!" Pete indicated the priest with a huge paw. "Sure, he laid hands on the lot of us—that time he first came up here. I'm confirmed, you bet, for I was the first he hit—he sure confirmed me most special and particular!"

Port of Somewheres Else



By

L. Paul

Author of "Stummicks," "Rabbit Foot," etc.

CAPTAIN BUDGETT stood on the bridge of the *Lobelia* looking down on the forward deck of his craft. The crew were loafing around after breakfast waiting till the mates should come to set them to work, the *Lobelia* being docked at Sorel, a small town on the St. Lawrence below Montreal.

Captain Budgett was a short, stubby man with an iron-gray beard and a twinkling eye. Just now that eye was busy with two new sailormen, Simmons and Emmet, a study in contrasts. Simmons was tall and husky, Emmet short, and though wiry, far from powerful.

"They loaf about the same as the rest. Can't tell nothing about 'em yet," thought Captain Budgett.

Then he turned as the first officer, crossing the bridge, coughed softly. That the captain knew for the prelude to some kick or other.

"I—I been wantin' to speak to you, sir," the first began. "Them two new hands, Simmons and Emmet—"

"They only been aboard one night. You can't have nothing against them yet."

The captain had his own reasons for feeling at peace with the world. Still this first officer got on his nerves at times.

"Names sound familiar," First Officer Stevens explained. "When I was up to Montreal, sir, t'other day, an' had that faintin' spell, I run into a ship's officer at the—the horspital; had the next room to

mine, he had, and he was ravin' mad. The—the doctor said he figgered it was two sailormen called Simmons and Emmet druv him off his chump, sir. Said he talked continually about them in his ravings. Briggs was his name, that officer, an' I just thought I ought to tell you sir."

"You think too danged much, mister," the captain grinned, for he had just seen light on a recent episode. "Ay, and you talk too danged much, 'specially for your own good. Horspital you say? And a poor ravin' madman that sailors druv crazy? Briggs, he was called, eh? Second Officer Briggs no doubt. And he was in the next room to ye, was he?"

"Well, listen to my bedtime story, Mister Stevens. You come whining to me about having to go up to Montreal, and me thinking this little dump o' Sorel was a dead sort o' place took pity on you and let you go.

"Horspital! Faintin' spell! You mean drunk and in jail, that's what. And if you hadn't tried to blacken them poor lads' characters with prison chatter, lads that come aboard highly recommended, I'd never ha' got wise to your little fandango. But when you talk about a ravin' maniac called Briggs, well, I ain't stupid. I can add two to two. Drunk you were, and as for this Briggs, mad he was, right enough. For didn't these very sailormen save their poor cap'n when this Briggs attacked him? Yes sir."

"Now they ain't been tellin' you lies like

that, sir?" the first protested, hoping to shift the limelight away from his personal affairs.

"Never a peep. But they had a bit o' writing from their last captain saying they done thus and so, line and verse like I told you, an' that this Second Mate Briggs was in jail for attempted manslaughter, mutiny and other little things. The only reason them two fine chaps was footlose and free being that the owners had sold their craft out o' British registry. And that bein' a captain's words, well when a captain and a mate disagrees the captain's words is to be taken."

"All captains was mates once," First Officer Stevens ventured.

"So was all chickens eggs, mister. But you never run into a chicken that smelt like a bad egg. The liars and slanderers stay on with mate's rating and only the good ones get their command. And now, unless you want something, shut up and let me do the talking. Those men come recommended proper and you'll lay off 'em, understand? Likewise you'll walk careful, you and the other officers, all this day. There's company coming aboard."

"Is that so?"

The first seeing a diversion, threw as much polite interest into his tone as he could manage.

"Yes, mister, my company," the captain smirked. "Might even say my steady company. Lady friend; widdler woman; took a fancy to me. Kind-hearted lady she is too and I don't want her comin' down forty-five miles from Montreal to hear rough words and see great brutes o' officers hounding poor sailormen around.

He paused, winked meaningly.

"Course, this here kindness ain't permanent. She's just sort o' cracked on kindness and we'll humor her."

"All right, sir." The first turned away. "The third was just tellin' me he'd figgered on cleanin' out the holds. But I guess it can't be done till this here female visit is over."

"Just a minute," the captain called him back. "This here ain't for general circulation, but I got to tell you. You'll understand how it is, Stevens. I meet up with this little Missis Emily Waters and we get along fine. Well, a tramp skipper ain't no catch for a widdler woman that could splice an alderman or an admiral, 'cordin' to

whether she liked 'em shore-going or deep sea. An' so—well, I kind o' let her think the *Lobelia* was a liner, a freight liner. And now——"

"——." The first officer snickered as he cast a glance over the rusty old tramp. "An' now she's coming down to look your liner over."

"You got a knack of saying useless words," the captain complained. "Now you trot out the 'Book of Flags and Funnels.' Nobody in this one-horse town of Sorel'll know we're lying. But I aim to pick one that ain't familiar to these parts to make sure."

"Pick what?" asked the first.

"Funnel marking. The old *Lobelia's* goin' to be adopted *pro tem* into a fambly. You go get that book. Liners don't have plain black funnels."

The first dived into the chartroom and came back with the "Book of Flags and Funnels." They scanned its pages together.

"That there'll do. "The captain tried to pronounce a long Greek name, and failed. "Anyways it looks distinguished-like. You tell the third to slap a green band on the funnel—pea green."

The first closed the book.

"Why not make it a good lie and join the Cunard?" he suggested. "She won't know you're lyin'."

"Ay, mebbe not. But them dummed pilots that passes would." The captain smiled craftily. "Like the kindness, this here funnel markin' has to last out the day. And speakin' of the kindness, you make sure the rest o' the officers understand about it. Not a cuss out o' them an' if they can say 'please' and 'thankye' to them sailormen so much the better—for the day."

"They'll get out o' hand. The first was a pessimist. 'Specially them two new ones, Simmons and Emmet. And what'll we do if they get too fresh, any o' them foremast scum?"

"You'll buy a wee book and mark it down," the captain advised. "Then, when the lady goes ashore and we drop down to Trois Rivieres for cargo this night, we can tot up the score and devote tomorrow to squarin' things. Unless——"

He paused and smiled a thought fatuously.

"Unless——" prompted the first officer. "Unless Missis Emily Waters likes short

engagements, "the captain concluded. "In which case the green stripe and the kind hearts'll last till the *Lobelia* puts to sea with us a happy pair. Now you send that steward o' mine up as you go down."

The captain's steward was a small, nervous, untidy chap who fitted the picture the rusty old *Lobelia* made.

"Now look here, me lad," the captain hailed him. "Ain't you got a clean coat? And them hands, grubby they are."

"Yessir. Yessir," agreed the steward.

But privately he wondered. That coat had passed unnoticed for ten days. As for his hands, how could a man keep clean on a dirty old tramp, anyway?

"There's a lady coming aboard for the day," the captain warned him. "You'll set an extry place at table and she'll maybe like her tea, her arternoon tea. And I want none o' this clumsy grub-pushing, but all the vittles lightered along side proper and ceremonial, like this was the Cunard. Don't give the first officer a knife to lick till he's helped himself formal to the butter, neither. This lady's refined."

"Yessir. Yessir." The steward looked puzzled.

"What you staring at?" asked the captain hotly. "If this white weskit o' mine wasn't ironed proper its your fault. Get below now and clean up your crockery. Messy, it was, at breakfast."

There rose a disturbance forward. The third mate had begun to shepherd his charges to their various tasks. The captain leaned over the bridge rail and called to him:

"Mr. Jones, Mr. Jones."

Just as well to get that funnel painted right away.

The third looked up, waiting.

"Send a man ashore for a gallon o' green paint, pea green," the captain ordered. The third looked surprised, as well he might; pea green was a color hitherto unknown aboard the *Lobelia*.

"Funnel marking," the captain went on. "I want a band a foot wide slapped on quick."

The third, from the tail of his eye saw a big sailor edging forward. Some noble soul, doubtless, eager to undertake the arduous task of fetching that paint. The third grinned as he turned.

"Lookin' for work, me lad?" he asked kindly.

"Yessir," the big sailorman replied hopefully.

"A cheerful hand you are, Simmons. Willin' and eager and obligin'. I'll not disappoint you. You can paint the funnel. A green stripe a foot wide, you and Emmet."

He turned to the bosun.

"Bos', you hop ashore and get 'em the green paint."

Then he strolled aft where the first officer was waiting.

The big sailor, Simmons, stood there glaring at the departing officer's back.

"Now if that ain't cruel," he grumbled. "Me stuck up there on that hot funnel paintin' her green. If there's one color I hate more'n another it's green."

"What about me?" Little Emmet edged up to him. "Just because I'm a friend o' yours I get drug into all these here dirty jobs."

"Look sharp there." The third mate turned for a moment. "Sling a plank up there and break out your brushes."

"Another day spoiled." Simmons shambled off. "And all on account o' a mate."

"And who else ever spoils anything?" asked little Emmet, as he followed. "Ain't you been to sea long enough to know that spoilin' days is mates' business?"

Meanwhile the first officer passed his glad tidings on to his juniors. A lady was coming aboard for the day, a gentle lady who hated violence in word or deed, a lady in whom the skipper had a deep, perhaps a marrying interest. Hence no evil words must shatter the balmy summer air. Let the sailors be never so wicked and provoking, the officers must still suppress their just anger, must voice their rebukes, for the time, in honeyed words.

One gleam of hope remained, and one alone. With night the lady would depart. At eventide the three mates, released from her sweet influence, might speak again as men and officers; could ferret out the day's delinquents and ease their minds before retiring by releasing their pent-up eloquence.

"And if you can't remember, buy a book and mark it down," advised the first officer, borrowing the captain's words. "As for me, I was born with a prime mem'ry, and if I can't recollect who's to blame for anything I'll chalk it down to Simmons and Emmet."

"And at that you'll not be far wrong," the second mate agreed. "But them sailormen'll get out o' hand, you can't gentle such with kind words."

"If you don't, the captain'll be on to you heavy. 'Tis serious with him," the first advised. "This woman's a widdier with her bit o' the blunt."

"She's simple-minded, too," grumbled the third. "Now how the — can I clean ship with kindness and prayer. Or is prayer barred?"

"Your kind is," the first warned him. "But cheer up. Tonight we drop down-river to Trois Rivieres to pick up cargo. And if them foremost blighters think Heaven's come to Sorel they'll wake up, some morning and find theirselves forty mile away in —."

"Nevertheless it ain't proper. Mark my words, no good'll come of kindness."

The third went away shaking his head. The first officer dived into the saloon where the captain's steward, having hastily washed his white coat, was bestowing some much needed attention on his finger nails. Between him and the first was a deep and abiding friendship, paid for by the steward by sundry tots from the captain's private stock. He felt, quite properly that in the hour of affliction he could depend on the first officer for advice.

"Now 'ow does yer serve arternoon tea?" he asked petulantly.

The first had been raised in a hard school. "Tea, is it?" he asked. "Why, there's them that likes gin and them that sticks to Scotch or brandy, but for a woman ye should open wine. Wine and biscuits is the proper caper."

The steward regarded him doubtfully. "Are ye sure?" he asked.

"Why not, lad? When the old man himself sneaks down for his wee nip does he call for a drink? No. 'Steward,' says he, 'give me a touch of tonic.' And when you swig from his private bottle, as any right-minded steward'll do if he has a chance, what do you say? Why 'tis the heat, the heat that oppresses you and you need a pick-me-up. And if the skipper calls it tonic and you call it pick-me-up, what else is left for a poor widdier woman to call it but tea? Break out a bottle of wine, lad, and you'll not be far wrong. And if it's handy I'll taste it to see if its' the right sort. Widders is pertickler about their drink."



UP AGAINST the grimy black funnel of the *Lobelia* those two hapless sailormen, Simmons and Emmet, labored at their task beneath the hot afternoon sun.

"Green stripe, is it?" Emmet grumbled. "'Tis sinful pride and no good'll come of it, Simmons, me lad. Ain't black the nat'ral color for a pack o' rotten tin like this craft? Why must we deck her out like a bloomin' Cunarder? Pride, that's wot. And who pays? Who sets up here on a plank, sweatin' an'—"

"You don't," Simmons snapped. "And that there swab of a third mate knows it, bless his innercent — heart. He's playin' 'I Spy' back there by the poop, peekin' through his fingers at ye, Emmet."

"Let him peak." Emmet brushed away languidly. "And let him hearken. Let him use his ears like his eyes, the swine, pickin' us for this dirty job. Let him hark to what Emmet thinks o' mates in bulk and him in pertickler."

And in a cracked voice the little sailor began to sing.

The Lord he made the sailormen to sail the seven seas.

To fight the gales a-voyagin', in port to take their ease.

The Lord he loved the sailormen, as history relates. But the devil he got jealous and he made the ruddy mates.

The Lord, he blessed the sailormen—"

"Now what may that be?" Simmons interrupted him.

"That's moosick, stoopid." Emmet paused in his song and gestured impatiently, with his paint brush. "Moosick to cheer up sad hearts."

"Mebbe moosick cheers a man up. That damned croakin' don't," Simmons replied, working stolidly.

"Pore chap. Work's been the ruin o' his temper."

Emmet resumed his song.

"The Lord he blessed the sailormen, which was the proper thing.

"He gives them all the Seven Seas and taught them how to sing.

"He made the first great chanty and they roared it to the moon.

"But the devil sent the ruddy mates and they sung out of o' tune."

"Now that—" Emmet paused. "That's po'try, if yer likes, or if yer don't like, Simmons, me lad, you bein' a pore ignorant

sailorman with no proper pride to yer——”

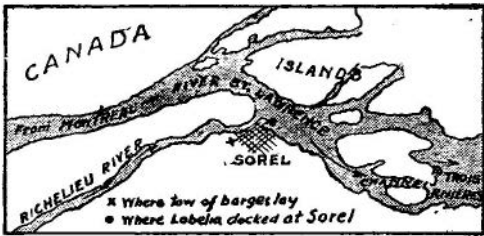
“Aloft there,” the third mate lifted his voice. “Playin’ all afternoon? D’ye think this ship’s a kindergarten? Mebbe it is, me lads, but recess’s over. Slap that—— paint on blanked quick, you pair o’ long-shore loafers, you long drinks o’ bilgewater.”

“Hark to him,” Emmet began to toil furiously. “Hark to his pleasant voice.”

He dipped his brush in the paint pot, viciously. The paint splashed up over his fingers and he cursed feelingly.

“Cramps his style, bless him.” Simmons glanced toward the bridge where beneath the edge of the awning he could see a skirt. “Can’t speak his little piece proper with pettycuts aboard. He’s suffering, pore lad.”

Emmet looked aft. The third mate did indeed have a repressed, thwarted look. But deeper sorrow was in store for him. The captain was sore at him anyway.



That green stripe should have been finished hours ago and he had had to lie extensively to explain its partial completion to the lady of his heart. Naturally he blamed the third.

Moreover he had just been assuring his fair charmer that never did he permit harsh words aboard the *Lobelia*. He ruled by kindness and the Golden Rule, he did. And now this same third mate, in spite of warnings, had belied him, had raised his voice in anger. The captain sent his steward to fetch Mister Jones to the bridge.

“Was you remarkin’ anything out loud, Mister Jones?” asked the captain when the third, having clumsily touched his cap to the lady, stood apprehensively before him.

“Men on the funnel—loafing, the blighters,” the third explained.

“And you abusin’ them! Ain’t I told you kindness is better’n harsh words?”

The captain tried to look the indignant father of an oppressed ship’s company.

“Remember—those poor men are your dependents. They can’t answer back.”

Mrs. Emily Waters waved a chubby finger in coy rebuke.

“No more they can, ma’am,” the third agreed. “I’d just like to see them swabs answerin’ me back.” He hesitated feeling instinctively that this last remark was not successful. “I’d just like to see them answerin’ me back. ’Twould show they had proper sperrit,” he amended.

“Treat ’em kind, Mister Jones,” the captain ordered sternly.

His words filtered up through the bridge awning and came to the ears of two surprised sailormen.

“That ain’t nat’ral. D’ye think the old man’s off his chump?” Emmet asked hopefully.

“It’s love, lad. Simmons explained. “Love and a soft head. His heart’s hard enough, since he’s an officer.”

The third mate on his way aft paused, with the funnel shielding him from the bridge.

“You wait, you just wait, me lads,” he whispered hoarsely.

“Speakin’ o’ madness and such-like,” Simmons went on, placing his tone nicely so that it would just reach the red-faced third officer. “Speakin’ o’ madness, have yer noticed our Mister Jones?”

Helplessly the third continued to glare upward. Then he had a bright thought. From his pocket he drew a piece of blue chalk, such as is used to check cargo. On the deck he inscribed the name, “Simmons,” and after it placed a succession of crosses.

“T’orrow’s another day, me lads,” he remarked meaningly, and stumbled aft. “Tot up them marks, Simmons, me man. We’ll wipe them out some morning.”

“He don’t seem happy.” Emmet followed him with his eyes.

“No wonder. Think o’ the fine words choked up in his red neck,” Simmons snickered. “Just the same, ’twould make life softer if that there skirt stuck aboard for a voyage or two. She’s got sensible ideas, she has. Her first must ha’ been a foremast lad.”

“She’s gettin’ her reward.” Emmet pointed downward. The steward was carrying a loaded tray toward the bridge.

Meanwhile Captain Budgett was seeking to erase all memory of the recent unpleasantness.

“If there’s one thing I hate worse than cruel mates, ’tis the drink,” he remarked.

The widow smiled approval.

"Once in a while, when a man falls overboard, maybe, but never for pleasure," he went on. "It's a curse, ma'am. On this ship we're teetotal. One small flask o' brandy for sickness and nothing else allowed."

He paused as the steward appeared with his tray.

"What's this?" asked the captain of the *Lobelia* in a suppressed tone.

"It's —it's tea, sir, like you ordered," the steward stammered.

The captain looked, silently, for a moment. There was a fair white cloth. There was a stone flask of gin, labelled plainly. There was a slender bottle of wine, a plate of biliously frosted biscuits, and nothing more, save two thick glass tumblers.

"It's tea, eh?" the captain groped for words. "Call that tea?"

"Arternoon tea, like you said, sir," the steward explained patiently. He looked apprehensively at the two thick clumsy tumblers. "Not the proper caper for wine, sir. That I know," he explained. "But them's all the glawses we got, sir, same's you allus takes your mornin' tot o' gin out of, sir."

Aloft, two sailormen who had heard their captain's hypocrisy, laughed.

The captain rose and kicked the tray violently. The bottle of wine rolled across the bridge and shattered on the deck below. The steward caught the gin and saved it from the same fate. Then fled.

"Blimey!" Emmet rolled with mirth. "Did ye hear that, Simmons?"

He lost his balance, clutched wildly at the ropes, and the brush, loaded with green paint slipped from his hand, described a graceful arc, comet-like, bounced on the bridgerail and landed fair in the middle of the captain's white waistcoat.

"Now what the blanked blanked —!"

The captain forgot the lady fair, forgot even the fleeing steward. He clutched the rail convulsively, leaned over and looked up. Simmons ostentatiously waved his brush. Emmet, less fortunate, sought to shrink behind the curve of the funnel.

"You done that a-purpose, you — swab." The captain forgot that he was an officer and gentleman for the day. "Come down here ye swine till I kick the daylight out o' ye. I'll work up your old iron my man."

He paused, for a soft hand was plucking at his sleeve. Mrs. Emily Waters, the apostle of kindness, stood beside him.

"You naughty man," she simpered. "You naughty, naughty man to scare me so! For a minute I thought you were in earnest. You've quite frightened that poor little chap."

"I—I—it's the heat," the captain gulped.

"Heat?" she took him at his word. "If the heat makes you feel like that, what about those poor fellows up there against that hot chimney?"

The captain of the *Lobelia* was a strategist. He doubted if he could look longer on the two sailormen and remain mute.

"Come down, me lads," he said in what he hoped was a kind fatherly tone. "Accidents will happen."

He longed for a chance to reason with them as a captain should. But there was the widow to consider. Already he had shocked her. He must, at one stroke, remove all temptation and recover lost ground.

"Tumble ashore me poor lads," he remarked. "Take a bit of a run for your healths."

Then, turning, he sought his reward in the smiling countenance of the lady by his side.



SOREL lies on the St. Lawrence, where the Richelieu enters. Down this latter stream come long strings of barges, coal laden from the States, by way of Lake Champlain. One of these tows slid out of the river as Simmons and Emmet sauntered gaily ashore.

"Now that's real sailerin'." Simmons eyed the last barge of the tow.

On its deck a man half sat, half lay, lolling against the deckhouse, one arm thrown lazily over a long tiller.

"No danged funnel, nor yet no paint, to say nothing of mates and such."

As he spoke a woman came out of the barge's cabin and stood over the man. She waved her arms violently. She reached down and cuffed him on the ear. She snapped at him in rapid Canadian-French. He rose, fumbled with a bucket for a moment, making it fast to a light line, lowered it overside, filled it. When the two sailormen last saw him he had grabbed a scrub brush and was disappearing into the cabin of the barge.

"Ain't that the limit?" Emmet remarked.

"No sooner does yer see anyone bossin' someone than there's cleanin' to be done. If it ain't holystones or paint its scrub brushes. No, there ain't no mate aboard that there craft, Simmons, me lad, but there's a she-captain, and not one o' the kind sort, neither."

"A captain," Simmons repeated. "Speakin' o' captains, are ye forgettin' urn? Come night that soft-hearted female'll be ashore, and then if I ain't misjudgin' him, Budgett's goin' to be hostile."

"Don't you worry about what he'll do to me," Emmet admonished his chum. "By the look in his eye that third mate'll be keepin' the light burnin' in the windy for ye, Simmons. And when he gets through alterin' your dial 'tis precious little you'll see o' me an' me friend, the captain. When we get back aboard——"

Simmons grabbed his arm, shook him.

"Not when, but if we get back aboard," he corrected. "Yonder string of barges is goin' somewheres else, ain't it?"

"Is gone, ye mean," Emmet replied. "Like a lot of bright idees, yours come too late. Is gone."

"There'll be others," Simmons went on. "Now if so be two sailormen could ship aboard one o' them flat-bottomed arks, well, the Port o' Somewheres Else 'd be better'n here. We ain't got no pay to lose and we can allus ship aboard some decent deepwater craft when we gets tired o' this freshwater stuff."

"For a stoopid man you talk sense at times." Emmet started up towards the town. "I figger those tows is made up above the burg a bit, say a mile up the Richelieu. And if we can't sign on, well, I've stowed away aboard reg'ler hellships and there's nothing on them barges to be scared of."

"Right you are," Simmons agreed, and followed him.

Above the town they found what they sought, a long tow, partly made up, lying against a rotting river wharf. A busy tug was bustling about. As they approached she shot off down stream and moored at a coal wharf.

"They'll be off before long," Simmons said. "Now who does the talking?"

"Who allus does?" Emmet protested. "If I travel with you much longer, Simmons, my tongue'll be no more use to me than the captain's kind heart."

"So you say."

Simmons stepped aboard the first barge. A man, his wife, and two children were sitting aft. The man rose as they came up. The two children, wild little creatures, shrank against their mother's skirts.

"A fine craft ye have here," Simmons began.

"Fair 'nough," the man agreed, "but a mite crowded just now."

"I think you're mistook, mister. With them purty kids aboard it's a shame to take chances navigatin' alone like you do."

"I can handle most folks that come bustin' aboard."

The man frowned, flexed his arms, shifted to the balls of his feet. Simmons watched him apprehensively. He did not look friendly.

As for Emmet he stretched out his hand and patted the smaller of the two children, a girl, on the head.

"Smart little nipper, ma'am," said Emmet.

The smart little nipper, as if to justify such praise, wriggled clear of his caress, and turning, bit his wrist.

"Smart 'nough," the bargeman agreed. "Now git. I don't want to buy nothing nor hire nothing and the little gurl's give away all ye'll get aboard here."

"Nice folks them," Simmons muttered as they leaped ashore again. "Now for why must ye tease yonder little nipper?"

"Nipper is right." Emmet rubbed his wrist. Then he pointed to the next barge where other children stood watching.

"Tame your own wildcats. I'm through," he said.

Big Simmons hailed the folk aboard that next barge. "You ain't got no objections to talking sociable?" he asked.

They had not. The trouble was that their converstaion was limited to the French-Canadian *patois*.

"Ho! You're doin' fine," Emmet jeered. "Stirrin' up them furriners."

"Now see here. None o' your lip," Simmons snarled, and strode off.

They went down the whole line of barges. With the exception of the first they found no one who talked English. And French was to them as obscure as Hindoo.

"And now, I s'pose we go back aboard. A pleasant night'll be had by all," Emmet groused.

"Not by a jugfull." Simmons led the

way to the shade of a tree. He stretched himself out, filled his pipe, lit it.

"A fine mess you made o' everything," Emmet continued his plaint.

"Shut up," Simmons roared. "Leave me think. I got to plan something."

"Think ahead, Horatio Nelson. There's a battle comin'," Emmet laughed and reached for his own pipe. "But before ye get that there brain o' yours all tangled up, pass over the 'baccy."

Then silence, while the sun dropped lower and the tugboat down river took on coal.

At last Simmons spoke, dreamily, slowly, as one piecing together a puzzle.

"Georges," he said. "Georges, he's got to have a moniker and Georges'll serve."

"Georges?" Emmet prompted.

"'Twas painted on that last barge," Simmons went on. "Now if a man's name is painted on a craft 'tis reasonable to figger him aboard her, ain't it?"

"I sailed in a windjammer, name o' *Napoleon Bonaparte* once," Emmet objected. "Likewise I'm blowed if that there holy whale I heard tell of had *Jonah* on his bow an' stern. Aside from them cases you may be right."

"His name'll be Georges," Simmons insisted. "The bloke's got to have a name and Georges'll do as well as another."

"And why must he have a name," Emmet asked.

"Because I got to think about him," Simmons went on. "Now if I remember right there was just him, Georges, aboard that last barge."

"So there was, but you talk like there was a gang o' Georges."

"Use yer head, ignorance, Georges is Frenchy for George."

"Go on. He's christened." Emmet gave up the struggle. "Now think about him as yer likes."

"He's alone," Simmons proceeded. "He's alone, is Mister Georges of the last barge. But he won't be, come dark for there'll be three aboard that craft, two o' them walkin' soft and sock-footed with their boots slung round their necks."

"You're bound to have that battle, Horatio," Emmet grinned. "But pleasure yourself, me lad. 'Twill soon be time to go aboard the *Lobelia*."

"We'll creep in on Mister Georges soft and sudden," Simmons went on. "We'll waste no time argyin', but if he keeps on

talkin' his furrin lingo, off he goes. The tug'll be yanking that tow down river soon, and come daylight we'll make the Port o' Somewheres Else. And when Mister Georges gets loose we'll be safe aboard some ship, leadin' the honest life we're used to."

"And what if Georges shows fight?" asked Emmet nervously.

"If you won't play with my rabbit, little man, go back to the *Lobelia* an' toy with them tigers." Simmons rose. "C'mon, its nigh time to sneak aboard the barge."



THE sun set. They paused at the river bank. From the tiny cabins of the barges lights shone. The tug was edging away from the coal wharf. Simmons bent, slid off his boots, knotted the laces and slung them over his shoulder. Emmet followed suit.

They stepped noiselessly aboard that last barge. They crept slowly across her narrow deck. Bending, Simmons peeped into the cabin.

The man Georges was seated with his back to the companionway, shredding leaf tobacco with a large knife.

Simmons slid along the deck and leaped down into the cabin. One great arm went round Mister Georges' neck, shutting off his startled cry. With his other hand Simmons seized a tangled mass of shredded tobacco and jammed it into his prisoner's gasping, open mouth.

"Have a chew, Mister," he remarked, kindly, and grabbed the knife. "Now, me lad, quick with some heaving line." "Emmet had followed him. He seized a coil of light rope and bent to bind Georges' ankles.

The man, struggling frantically, was growling and spluttering.

"Wot's he saying?" asked Emmet.

"He's tellin' us to put the 'Not at Home' sign out, for the owner's goin' ashore." Simmons clutched his prisoner tighter. "He's remarkin' that we'd best tie him tight because he's got a mean disposition. He's alludin' to them trees over yonder with the bushes growin' round em, which same was made for hidin' bargees."

"He's a mine o' information." Emmet rose and drew Georges' wrists together. "Now, that'ol hold him. Best stuff yer cap in his mush. He's swallered that tobacco. And it ain't right for them kids on the other craft to hear him cuss."

"A kind heart you have, Emmet me lad."

Simmons took the hint and gagged his prisoner. Then together they bore him up on deck, slid him ashore and tethered him to a tree in the bushes.

"Come mornin' you'll thank us Georges," said Simmons. "You restin' pretty here and us navigatin' your stinkin' old barge for ye."

"Look sharp," Emmet admonished.

Dark forms were casting off mooring lines along the tow. The tug had paid out her hawser, was whistling testily.

"Look sharp, we're off."

"Slip them lines."

Simmons leaped aboard and took the tiller. Emmet obeyed and then followed him.

Together they crouched by the tiller, as the long string of barges curved away from the bank and headed down stream.

"We'll pass close by the *Lobelia*," Emmet guessed. "P'raps we better lie doggo till we're clear."

"And why?" Simmons laughed. "Them bridge vermin won't see nothing more than they figger on seein' an that's just a bunch o' barges."

"In that case," Emmet grinned in the darkness, "In that case they'll do more than see them, they'll hear them. Put that helm over for we're swinging into the St. Lawrence. Yonder's the *Lobelia*. If we can't swing the tail o' this tow closer they'll mebbe miss some o' my remarks."

"Mind your helm there aboard that barge." It was the voice of the third mate, wailing across the dark water that separated the tow from the wharves.

"Now do ye see what I see?" Emmet called back.

"What do ye see?" Simmons roared, even louder.

"I see a miracle, mate. They've put engines into a sardine can. They've stuck a — baby on the bridge. Hark, he'll be cryin' for his mother."

"Blast you—come alongside and I'll show you." The Third's voice almost held a hint of tears. His extreme youth was a sore subject with him.

"And us Yanks think ourselves reckless," Emmet went on. "But we wouldn't go to sea in a misfit like that, would we mate?" Then he dropped his voice. "For —'s sake what's a Yank town?" he whispered.

"For why?" Simmons asked. "And what's this 'Yank' stuff?"

"Make him think we ain't us. What's the name o' a town over the line? ye've got a minute to think it up. Our Mister Jones is still talkin', and judgin' by his langwidge the cap'n's lady's gone."

"Reno," Simmons hazarded. "I kind o' recollect its a Yank port."

"I never seen nothing like that in Reno Harbor, did you, Lemuel?" Emmet raised his voice again. Then he dropped it. "Call me Silas, ye lunkhead. That's a good Yank name too."

"Ay, Silas—but don't tell yon baby, ye'd break his heart." Simmons stopped, listened. Faintly across the waters came the third's answer.

"Makes me sort o' homesick for the *Lobelia*," said Simmons. "He sure swears beautiful."



IT WAS an hour later. The tug and its attendant barges were several miles down river. At Sorel wharf men were letting go the hawsers that held the *Lobelia*. The captain and the third officer were on her bridge.

"Haven't seen them two, Simmons and Emmet, come aboard yet, sir," the third reported.

"And you won't," the captain retorted.

"He did not want the third to suspect just how eager he himself was to meet up with the offenders."

"If you'd forget your grudges and pay more attention to your work, Mister, you'd get ahead faster."

A bad temper had Captain Budgett. The widow had left without answering definitely his proposal. And all evening he had looked forward to a settlement with the two sailormen whom her sweet presence had protected. And they had thwarted him.

"I wonder how them two got ashore?" remarked the third, innocently. "If I'd seen 'em I'd have stopped the swabs."

"You didn't see 'em go. Likewise you didn't see 'em come back," the captain growled. "For back they come, I'm sure. Right now I bet they are hiding out somewheres aboard till things cool down. They've no money. They can't make any other port if they did desert. And if you and the bosun can't find them its because they are better men than you."

The third officer glanced down at the deck.

"Might slip the cover off the forward hatch. 'Twas open this afternoon."

The captain's eye brightened.

"No," he decided. "If they're there they're hungry. We won't open her till noon tomorrow. That'll give their stumicks a chance to do what my mates ain't capable of performing—punish 'em. Here's the pilot. Stand by that telegraph. We're off."

But the captain was an optimist. Far from being in the forehold the two culprits were having the time of their lives aboard that last barge in the tow, several miles downstream.

The barges were close together, a short hawser connecting each with its fellows. Simmons it was who noticed this.

"It ain't shipshape," he protested. "Besides I see a lantern bobbin' about forward somewheres. D'ye suppose them barges visits around?"

"And why not? It's pershin' lonely on this craft," Emmet replied.

"Why not?" Simmons started forward. "Suppose a dozen of 'em comes back off here to see Georges."

"They'll come a blame sight farther than this before they see him," Emmet comforted him.

"Talk sense." Simmons paused. "Look, there's the lantern comin' over the barge ahead. What'll we do? If so be they get on to us we'll land in jail at Trois Rivieres."

"The man that jails me'll know he fought a fight," Emmet promised. "You and yer fights!" Simmons eyed his small companion scornfully. "These here bargees ain't boys, but men. We'll use strategy. 'Member what Georges looked like? Drinkin' sort o' man, I'd say. You go hang overside and if anyone yelps, make a noise as if you was miserable sick—seasick—drink sick. It'll hold 'em off a bit."

"I allus gets the dirty jobs," complained Emmet.

But when a hail came from the barge ahead he obeyed without a moment's hesitation. His effort was, at least, earnest. As for Simmons he was already forward, crouched down behind the winch, loosening the short towline, paying it out until the barge ahead drew away a bit.

The hails from the other barge increased in volume.

"Let 'em rave," Simmons called back to his comrade. "An' you can stop that there

disgustin' exhibition. I got a hundred feet o' towline out and no bargee'll do a blondin' over that. We're safe till morning."

"We are like —!" Emmet cocked an ear as a deep whistle sounded ahead. It was thickening a bit. Wisps of fog were scudding by the lantern on their barge. The channel was narrow and ahead somewhere an upbound liner making for Montreal was bawling for a clear channel.



THE tug's whistle roared an answer. The tug herself began to claw over to the south bank of the channel where, ahead, a white gas buoy marked the shoal water.

"This command business ain't as good as it looked," Emmet remarked nervously.

Somehow that hundred feet of towline seemed to have cut them off from their little world.

"Command," snorted Simmons. "Call this command? Why, you poor cold-footed slug, this ain't nothing! S'pose you was skipperin' that liner ahead. Then you could worry proper."

"He's worryin'. Something's coming down stream, too. I can hear a screw churnin'."

Emmet stared aft. A black hulk showed up against the dim skyline. Red and green lights winked.

"Freighter, coming down light," Simmons diagnosed the case.

The freighter's whistle cut loose, as if to confirm his fears.

Emmet, crouched there, recognized the tone.

"The old *Lobelia!*"

The tugboat had now got over to the southward. Ahead the liner was coming up at a mere crawl, feeling her way towards them. Behind, through the still night they could almost hear the *Lobelia's* engine-room telegraph jangling. Captain Budgett, tugging at it, was cursing fluently.

It was then that the tugboat fouled the white gas buoy. She hung there, her propeller caught in the buoy's anchor chain. And the tow, caught in the three knot current, swung right across the channel.

The *Lobelia's* whistle bellowed again. Then her anchor chain rattled.

"Kind o' mess ye read about in books," Simmons grinned. "There'll be words about this. Them passenger packets don't like no mixups."

"*Lobelia* ain't enjoyin' herself, tryin' to hold agin' that current. I'd like a peak at her bridge. Old Budgett looked a capable sort o'cusser," Emmet said, and dived for the cabin.

"What you doing there?" asked Simmons.

"Lookin' for a hatchet. Can't ye see, lunkhead? S'pose the *Lobelia* keeps comin' on and fouls our topline. I aim to cut us loose." Simmons cast a glance astern. "She's comin' sure. Anchor's draggin'."

He stretched out his hand and grabbed the hatchet Emmet had just found.

"You leave things be. 'Tain't no manner o' use cuttin' loose—yet."

"And why? Aim to drown, ye fool?"

"Drown nothing. You stand by, little man and you'll be a hero."

Simmons stepped forward, Emmet quaking at his heels.

"Heroes that can't swim'll be dead heroes," the little man complained.

Behind them they could hear the voices of the *Lobelia's* officers. The freighter was dragging her anchor. Her screw was reversing frantically to cut her headway. And the three knot current was still driving her on. The captain wasn't sure of what lay ahead. He didn't want to get close enough to see. But he had no choice.

The fog lifted a bit. He could make out the low shadow of a canal barge to the northward; could distinguish the main tow well over to the south. Further down the liner's lights showed. But there seemed to be a clear passage.

"Slip the anchor chain," Captain Budgett bellowed. "We're going through!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The third mate made for the fo'c'sle head. The telegraph jingled. Then came the rattle of free chain as the third cleared it at the first shackle. The *Lobelia*, with her propeller kicking, came on, gathering way.

Then out of the calm water rose a hawser, coming taut as the barge *Georges* drifted further north. The *Lobelia* slid her nose against it.

"That does it," groaned Captain Budgett, reaching for the telegraph automatically. "We fouled that tow."

He pushed the man at the wheel aside and tried to swing his ship clear. But the topline went slacker across his bows. On one end of it was the barge, *Georges*. On the other the rest of the tow and the tugboat. The single barge being the lightest

was the one to give ground. The hawser dragged it in towards the *Lobelia*. She herself rasped along towards it.

"Stand by to jump and clear that scow," Captain Budgett roared.

He knew that if they bumped the barge hard she'd sink in midchannel quick as a wink.

"Aye, aye, sir."

The third officer grasped an axe. A sailor made a line fast and dropped it over-side.

"Cut her. Cut her, — ye!" On the barge Emmet danced with excitement. "If they sink us—you may be a swimmin' fool, but I ain't."

"Keep yer head."

Simmons pushed him back, then waited calmly till the barge grated alongside the *Lobelia*. As the third mate's figure came sliding down the rope, axe in hand, Able Seaman Simmons cut the topline free.

"All clear, sir," he bellowed.

The third checked his descent. Then felt the rope below him grow taut.

"Out o' the way and let a man climb that knows how," cried Able Seaman Emmet, homeward bound.

The barge scraped harmlessly along the *Lobelia*, knocking the rust off here and there.

"— river rats—sound asleep," the captain decided, looking down on her empty deck from the bridge. "Good work forward, lads." He raised his voice as dark figures scrambled back onto the fore-castle head.

"Now, how did them two get there?"

The third officer was busy with his problem as he came back inboard. "Must ha' jumped," he decided in grudging admiration, and turned to see who the heroes were. The *Lobelia's* bows were a good twenty-five feet above the deck of the barge. And he'd been the first man down that rope. Those two figures now climbing up after him must have jumped. There was no other explanation.

"Simmons," he whispered. "Simmons—and Emmet!"

"Yessir." Simmons eased himself over the rail, trying to look modest. "We seen our duty an' done it. That's all, sir."

"That you did, lads."

The Third, at heart, was a square man. As the dismembered tow drifted astern, as the liner daintily picked her way past,

the third officer went to the bridge to make his report.

When he had finished the captain wiped the perspiration from his forehead. It had been a dirty tangle. The green stripe seemed to have brought him bad luck. And but for two sailormen who had apparently jumped down into the darkness to cut her free, that barge would now be lying on the bottom in mid-channel.

The captain shuddered as he imagined what the wreck commissioner would have had to say about it. Then he glanced forward.

"Simmons and Emmet!" he said. "They must ha' been hidin' round from place to place, in the chain locker, maybe," he hazarded. "Either way, 'twas providence."

"That it was," the third agreed.

His ticket had been in danger, too.

"Simmons and Emmet!" the captain reflected. "Well, they're brave lads, and have done good work this night. We'll let bygones be bygones. Tell the second to take the bridge and send them sailormen up. I want to thank 'em personal."

Down in the saloon the first officer, pajama-clad, was blarneying the steward.

"A fair twister, that," he said. "My nerves is broke."

"So's mine." The steward held a stone jug of gin in his hand and shook it calculat'ingly. "And so's the captain's, likely."

"Now a wee nip o' that might help a

man," suggested First Officer Stevens hopefully.

"Swelp me, its all we have aboard." The steward set three glasses on the table, and divided the gin between them. "One for me, and one for you and one for his nibs, old Budgett," he finished.

The first officer, licking his lips, drew nearer.

It was then that the door swung open and the captain pushed two-half apprehensive sailormen into the saloon.

"Simmons—and Emmet!" breathed the first officer.

The captain eyed the three glasses suspiciously, then smiled.

"After all," he said. "Why not? Good lads, both. I drink your healths."

Solemnly he passed a glass to each of the two sailormen, modest heroes of the night. He took the third himself. A low involuntary groan burst from the lips of the first officer.

"Allus glad to bear a hand, sir," little Emmet said.

"Specially when appreciated proper, sir," added Able Seaman Simmons.

The captain shook the empty gin bottle. Then he turned to the first officer.

"There ain't enough to go round," he apologized, "but you can join in the sperrit of my toast." He lifted his glass. "A health to two good sailormen, who seen their duty an' done it!"



A Four Part Story
Part II



Calvert of Allobar

By Robert Simpson

Author of "Bad Business," "Neither Money Nor Power," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

JOHN "JOCK" TODD, agent for the African Produce Association, and his wife, Bella, sat on the veranda, looking out on Allobar Creek. All Allobar was stirred up by the incidents of the previous night, when Calvert, agent for Paller & Co., had been confronted on the creek by a terrifying blue light operated by some unknown natives.

As they talked Calvert, immaculately dressed, appeared on their wharf. After laconic greetings, Calvert, who was despised for his drunken life and association with the natives, asked that he might talk with Zatta the Pure, the native woman who attended Bella.

But from the superannuated Zatta, Calvert learned nothing of what was going on in the natives' minds, or more of what he already knew: That the natives had announced their presence the night before by *Obu-madu*, or the decapitation of two slaves, a custom of the priesthood of N'ri of Ibo-land.

Zatta gone, Calvert again told them of seeing the blue light the night before, of having his canoe upset; but he did not tell them that he was drunk, or that he was on his way to see Ruth Kenley, sister of Walter Kenley, the district commissioner.

Suddenly he stopped talking, then cried:

"Well, I'll be —! Isn't he — Just a minute, Jock. I want to look closer at that chap."

Calvert strode down the steps and approached a native of singularly noble physique who had ap-

peared on the wharf. He was the same youth he had seen the night before on his own beach.

Calvert learned that the native was from Nishi and was called Biko; that he was to become house boy for Captain Dick Talbot of the West African Frontier Force.

Afterwards Calvert did not mention the peculiar fiber anklet worn by the native, marking him as one in authority.

After dinner Walter Kenley came to Todd's beach and asked that Bella be sent to stay the night with Ruth. Kenley informed the two men that all the whites had been summoned to the government beach, because he feared a native uprising, at the instigation of one called Akka-Chuku.

Bella and Calvert went by gig to the government beach, Jock promising to follow later. At the beach they were met by MacConnachie of the Public Works Department.

He asked the honor of escorting Bella to the Kenley's and showed his hostility to Calvert's accompanying her.

Calvert and Bella refused his offer bluntly and made off toward the house. MacConnachie leaned against the wharf rail.

"Calvert!" he muttered unbelievably. "Calvert!"

And after a minute or so, when the gig had drifted away from the wharf—

"Something's going to break, sure as —!"

CHAPTER VII

"TOMORROW AT FOUR."

THE Kenley bungalow was an unpretentious three-roomed affair situated about midway up the beach and fronting a concrete path that ran from the executive offices to the tennis court and cricket field in the extreme rear.

Although the bungalow boasted a small vegetable garden that was in some likelihood of becoming famous, inasmuch as it was among the first really successful experiments of its kind in that part of the world; although its ménage was presided over by a woman who was not a wife—an impossible situation from a native standpoint—it was, otherwise, just a bungalow, in which Ruth Kenley endured a housewifely existence

and tried to see to it that the Accra cook did not strain the coffee through a sock that was on its way to the wash.

It was this kind of kitchen expediency that had brought her out to Allobar. She had heard and read of too many men being blandly poisoned by the things that came out of the kitchen, and when her brother had been invalidated home on his previous "tour"—a trader would have called it a "trip"—she had accompanied him on his return, filled with sisterly zeal to protect the sanctity of his stomach at all hazards.

Kenley had objected, of course. But his case, particularly after a siege of ptomain poisoning, had been a bad one; and from the moment of the inception of the idea in Ruth's mind he had never had a chance of making his objection good in any event. Life, between these two, had always been a losing fight for Kenley.

So that Ruth had been privileged to learn at first hand why the West Coast of Africa had earned the sinister soubriquet of the White Man's Grave; and she was convinced, after several months of more or less narrow-eyed observation, that house boys and cooks had done their fair share of the grave digging.

Meantime, she was seated in the living room writing to a sister who was the wife of an official on the Gold Coast, and she was saying nothing at all about the simple circumstance that "next week's letter" might possibly be unavoidably delayed.

The present letter was almost all about vegetables, and dwelt at some length upon the astounding fact that Walter and she had had a serving of fresh kohlrabi at dinner; in short, a housewifely letter to another housewife from whom Ruth had learned most of what she knew about gardening.

Her writing desk was an ancient kitchen table dressed up in a coat of economical black enamel and relieved of its funereal hue by a piece of Hausa embroidery. The shaded stand-lamp at her elbow revealed several pieces of the customary wicker furniture from Madeira, and the most casual visitor would have had no difficulty in detecting the multicolored native mats that were strewn, apparently haphazardly, on the floor.

The stand-lamp also acted as a kind of spotlight upon Ruth's generous mass of soft brown hair which, in certain lights, seemed to have a touch of Titian unobtru-

sively woven through it. And when, as occasionally happened, she paused and lifted her head to think of the right word or to perfect a phrase, the glimpse an unseen and uninitiated observer might have had of her face would probably have made him wonder why a woman of her sort should put up with the seamy, frying pan kind of life Allobar had to offer.

The answer was simple enough. It lay in the proud fact that the dark-blue eyes, the broad forehead and the firm mouth and chin were those of a woman who came of generations of women who had, in one way or another, dedicated themselves to the Service.

Sitting there, broiling in the middle of a bush-bound Niger swamp, with a disguised white-pine kitchen table for a writing desk, now and then glancing unseeingly at the pale-yellow house lizards on the walls, and apparently giving no thought to the possibilities that lay in the priestly name of Akka-Chuku, the Hand of God—this, for Ruth Kenley, was not a mere chance adventure.

It was a heritage. All of the Kenley daughters and most of the Kenley sons had done it for ages. The army, the navy, the Indian civil service and the political and administrative departments everywhere, from Singapore to Kano, had drawn them as the light of the stand-lamp beside Ruth's chair was drawing a cloud of moths and flies into its yellow glare.

And undoubtedly it was this that made Walter Kenley so serious and so zealous in the performance of his duty. He had a lot of competitors in his family.

Scattered hither and yon, over all the earth, were brothers and cousins and uncles and brother-in-law and all their wives and families who had their ears close to the ground listening for the good report.

And that some of them, as is the way of the world, probably hoped the report would not be altogether good, served only to make Allobar's D. C. more serious and more zealous every time he happened to think of it.

Quite naturally, with a heritage of this sort, behind her and all about her, Ruth Kenley's manner was that of one who was born to the purple. This did not mean that it was an ultra-superior manner. Simply that it was quiet and sure, displaying an easy familiarity with all of the ropes.

Her years were twenty-five and every one of these years had been thoroughly steeped in tradition. The Kenley point of view was,

from habit and necessity, the service point of view. And if it had a tendency to be bound about with red tape or had an officers' quarter's flavor or seemed at times to be clothed in the language of an official report, and was inclined to elevate its eyebrows at the distressing stupidity of the sit-by-the-fire taxpayers who made it possible for the Crown agents in Whitehall Gardens to issue monthly checks, Ruth could no more be held responsible for this than John Todd could be held accountable for an unrequited but persistent desire for oatmeal for breakfast.

And, as was inevitable in Allobar under the circumstances, to compare Ruth Kenley with Bella Todd, who had been an Imrie, and one of the Andrew Imries at that—there simply was no comparison.

Though they spoke something akin to the same language; though their home addresses, on either side of the Cheviots, were hardly eight hours apart by a fast train, their mental processes were almost as foreign to each other as those of the Fiji Islander and the Eskimo.



CALVERT was thinking the greater part of this as he walked sedately at Bella's side, touching her arm lightly with his shaky finger tips as an insurance against any misstep in the uncertain light of the police sergeant's lantern

Bella's enigmatic remarks on the subject of Ruth, occasioned the trend of Calvert's thoughts and he had been naturally curious to learn what Bella had promised to tell him if he kept sober.

The stipulation did not insult Calvert. It flattered him. It told him that Bella knew all that was necessary for her to know about him and that it made no difference to her desire to be friendly. This, Calvert felt, would save him the trouble and inconvenience of apologizing later.

But when he tried to resume their conversation where MacConnachie had interrupted it, Bella refused to discuss Ruth Kenley further, and with that conversational adroitness which Calvert had come to respect, she changed the subject to MacConnachie.

"He's not a good man, that," she told Calvert frankly. "Not when his dander's up. And he'll not forget that ye didn't listen to him about stayin' behind to see about the boat."

"No?"

"No, he'll not. So ye'd better keep sober and watch."

Calvert's finger tips fell away from her arm, and as a Hausa orderly chose that moment to trot past on his way from the dimly lighted barracks to the waterfront, Calvert waited until the barely audible patter of the naked feet had trailed off into silence.

Then he said quietly:

"That's the second time you've advised me to keep sober. What makes you think I won't?"

Bella looked up at him, glanced at the police sergeant who walked solemnly ahead with the lantern, then brought her eyes back to Calvert again.

"Men like you don't stop in a day. Nor in a week. I've seen too many o' them wasted wi' the drink not to know just about what you're thinkin' and wishin' and shakin' about. Ye're even feared to keep hold o' my arm because ye think I'll find ye out!"

Calvert did not laugh this time. Neither did he at once take hold of her arm again to suggest to her that she was wrong. For she was perfectly right. And he knew that no manner of bluff would be in the least convincing. So they walked in silence for a little while until, as if from out of the bush beyond the cricket field, there came the faint, rolling thunder of drums.

The police sergeant stopped. Calvert's head jerked upward a little, and Bella, instinctively reaching out a hand, touched his coat sleeve ever so lightly.

"That's drums," she said in a low voice. "Just like last night. But farther off." A pause. "Dod! I hope that priest chiel isna—I mean is not—choppin' off another head or two."

The police sergeant started forward again with a jerk, and at a decidedly more hurried gait this time, without any particular regard for those who followed. Calvert did not order him to slacken his pace, or make any attempt to discuss the significance of the drums with Bella.

The lights of the Kenley bungalow were hardly more than fifty yards away, and he thought he would feel better and more free of foot when he got John Todd's wife off his hands.

"Do they always cut somebody's head off when they beat the drums?" Bella asked.

"No—not always. Probably just a *ju-ju* play to celebrate the notion that the joke's on Kenley. May last for days, too."

Bella accepted this rather staccato explanation without argument, but Calvert knew she did not take much stock in it even though they had reached and passed the outer border of Ruth Kenley's vegetable garden before she spoke again.

Then she said quietly:

"It'll be an awful shame if they spoil Miss Kenley's garden on her. She's worked terrible hard on it, poor thing."

Calvert's red-rimmed eyes glanced quickly down at her and gaped. Her charity, particularly in the teeth of the grimly prophetic suggestion that accompanied it, was a breath-taking thing. Beyond a doubt there were strange and uncanny depths to Bella Todd which her surface prettiness disguised with appalling subtlety.

So Calvert merely murmured something of no consequence and hurried Bella up to the Kenley's front door, more or less fervently praying that the meeting between her and Ruth would involve no awkward moments as far as he was concerned.

For a little while he thought the drums were coming nearer, but just as Ruth Kenley appeared in the bungalow doorway, the sound of them died down again to a faint, almost inaudible mumble.

"Mrs. Todd?" Ruth called quietly.

"Aye—I mean, yes, Miss Kenley. Mr. Calvert o' Paller & Co. is wi' me. Can we come in?"

In the short, rather sharp pause that followed, Bella was sure that Ruth was smiling quietly to herself at Bella's accent. But Calvert knew better than that.

The pause was no longer than three of his steps, but it was quite long enough to inform him that Ruth's indcision was wholly on his account. His appearance as Bella's escort was just as much of a shock to her as it had been to MacConnachie, and she was unable to make up her mind about him until he went near enough for her to get a closer look at him.

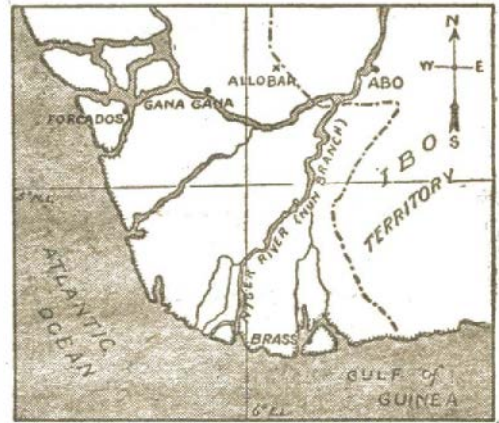
"Oh—" this was rather faint as the sergeant of police stepped aside—"good evening, Mr. Calvert. Yes, please do come in, Mrs. Todd. It was awfully good of you to come over so quickly."

But the glance she cast in Bella's direction, after she had observed Calvert at close quarters, was an absent-minded thing that,

as she shook hands, did not make the welcome any too cordial.

"Oh, it's no bother to me, quick or slow," Bella said complacently, and added for good measure, when Ruth had told the sergeant of police to go back to his post: "My faither was the quietest and the quickest man in an emergency I ever hope to see, and he used to preach to us bairns that though any fool could put out a fire if there was lots o' water handy, it aye took a quiet mind and a steady hand to make a mad bull see reason. So he said, 'Make a' your emergencies mad bulls and ye'll not go far wrong.' And I've aye tried to remember that to my profit."

Ruth laughed at Bella's pronunciation of the words profit and emergency, just as she would always laugh at Bella's accent wherever laughter was in the least possible.



But it would always, from her point of view, at least, be a laugh of pure delight because she thought Bella's accent even more fascinating than herself.

And because she obeyed impulses just like other less sentient people, she suddenly flung an arm about Bella's shoulders, murmured, "That's splendid!" and drew her hurriedly into the living room.

Calvert followed as a matter of course and closed the door behind him just as Bella wriggled somewhat sharply free of Ruth's altogether friendly arm.

"Dinna do that," Bella said and made no effort to correct herself this time. "It's not—och, well," apologetically, "maybe it was just the way I was brought up. But I never could see that one woman huggin' another woman was ever very convincin'."

Ruth laughed again, but not quite so

spontaneously this time, then glanced quickly at Calvert as if in search of help of some sort, and found him giving all of his attention to his sun helmet which he was twirling about in his hands.

It was not a new sun helmet, and though it had been whitened up that day, in keeping with the rest of him, it did not carry its disguise very well. So Calvert fumbled it out of sight behind him while he tried to look straight at Ruth, who obviously expected him to say something to fill the breach.

And then suddenly, louder and nearer, came the rumble of drums.

Ruth's chin came up quickly and her glance immediately shifted to Bella to see what effect the ominous sound had upon her. And Bella's head was a little on one side listening.

"They're nearer," she said at last in a low voice that was as uncannily remote from fear as the expectant look in her face. "A lot nearer. I hope they'll no' keep John back."

Her large brown eyes were filled with the mildest kind of inquiry. That John would win his way across Allobar Creek in spite of every and any kind of opposition that might arise, she evidently did not doubt for a moment. She was hoping simply that he would not be put to the bother of fighting for the privilege of saying good night to her.

"Is Mr. Todd coming over?" Ruth asked mildly.

"He said he would," Bella answered. "But just for a minute, maybe, and ye're not to bother about him. Not even a wee bit. He'll not stop long."

Ruth nodded and smiled and, paying no visible attention to the again diminishing sound of the drums, glanced at Calvert as if she were trying to believe he was as real and clean as he looked.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Calvert?"

"No, thanks. My gig and crew are waiting for me down at the wharf and——"

"You're going back to Paller's tonight?"

"I don't think so," Calvert returned guardedly, and observed the look of relief that came into her eyes.

Of course, it meant nothing more than that she was glad that he was sober enough to stay in a place where he would be moderately safe; but even this kind of anxiety on his behalf, from a girl like Ruth Kenley,

was better than none at all. And then, to his utter amazement, he heard her say:

"I'm awfully glad you brought Mrs. Todd over. I've been wanting to talk to you for quite a while, but have never found the opportunity somehow. Do you think you could make it convenient to come in tomorrow afternoon—about four?"

Calvert's helmet was out in front of him again, twirling round and round, not at all unlike the inside of his head.

"I sketch a bit, you know," Ruth went on when he had mumbled something or other that had the word pleasure in it. "And Dr. Millbank of Lagos, who is quite a patron of art and seems to know an awful lot about it, told me on the way out that the first thing I ought to do when I reached Allobar was to look you up. He said you had done some wonderful things and that if I could induce you to help me——"



CALVERT'S ears received no record of the rest of it. He was just dimly aware of Bella staring brown-eyed up at him from out of the depths of the D.C.'s favorite chair, and she was nodding her head at him as if she knew he needed some one to help him and was telling him that it was his turn to talk. And after a long interval, he heard his own voice saying stiltedly:

"Thank you, Miss Kenley. I shall be very glad—tomorrow afternoon at four."

Then he was saying good night and bowing himself formally out into the open air, where he backed into the Kroo-boy who had arrived with Bella's uniform case. And he did not stop to give the boy instructions what to do with the thing. In fact, Calvert was halfway down to the waterfront before he was fully aware of the circumstance that he had left the bungalow and no longer had John Todd's wife in his care.

At this point he paused and grinned. It was not a pretty grin because he was shaking from head to foot, and his throat was dry and thick and burning, just as if he were trying to swallow a piece of live coal.

Tomorrow at four. Tomorrow——

This, to Calvert, was very amusing. And it was most amusing because he knew it would be utterly impossible for him to remain sober that long. So, of course, although he accepted the invitation, there was no further need to think of it.

For all that, he thought it had been decent

of old Doc. Millbank to praise his stuff as Ruth had said he did. He would send Millbank that daub of Forcados he had always wanted and perhaps some day—

Again the drums, and this time a flare of light that rose, not unlike a white pillar, from out of the bush behind the cricket field.

Calvert turned his wavering attention to the light and blinked at it until it dropped suddenly out of sight, then he stood, in suspended animation, as it were, listening to the drums which seemed to be marching nearer and nearer, with all the unreasonableness of a steam roller, to the absurd refrain of "tomorrow at four."

Presently there were scattered shadows that moved up the beach on either side of him. Some of them, but not many, were white men. The remainder were black; at first just a few, then more and more of them in straggling, patchy groups, without lights and apparently without tongues.

They were all moving in the direction of the drums and none of them who passed closely enough to have done so, stopped to ask who he was or what he was doing there. Neither did he, on his part, make any inquiry as to the purpose they had in mind.

He simply stood as still as his shaking legs would allow, and tried to think of some one on the government beach who would be likely to offer him a drink on the strength of his engagement to call upon Ruth Kenley "tomorrow at four."

This kind of credential, he felt, was worth several drinks out of any man's bottle.

But since everybody on the government beach, and quite a number that he knew perfectly well did not belong there, seemed to be giving all of their attention to the drums just then, he decided that perhaps it would be better, and much more politic, if he tried, first of all, to fend for himself.

This thought suggested that, while the excitement was at its height, it was just possible that he might be able to get hold of a canoe and sneak up to his own beach, which, of course, would make him independent of everybody.

If MacConnachie or Geddes, the transport man, was not too vigilant, or had not received any too definite instructions with regard to him, a canoe would be just the thing.

Besides, if there were any fighting, Cal-

vert was quite sure most of it would come off where the drums were not.

So he turned his back upon the lure of the sound of them and upon the light in the Kenley bungalow, and faced the water-front.

Thus, it so happened that, with the exception of Biko, who hoped to become Captain Talbot's house boy, and Lali, the daughter of Chief Okpari, who had no business to be there at all, Calvert was the only human on the government beach who was facing the river at that moment.

The machine-gun that was posted on the main wharf was not exactly human, so it could not be counted.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FUGITIVE

CALVERT encountered no opposition on his way to the waterfront. The shadows to right and left of him, which were thinning down to ones and twos, with somewhat lengthy intervals between, paid not the slightest heed to him.

Presently he was forced to conclude that they were not the nucleus of an army, but simply the camp followers; refugees of a sort, just like himself, who had received definite instructions to proceed up the beach, probably to the barracks, where temporary quarters of one kind or another would be provided them.

And on his way down, Calvert had no difficulty in convincing himself that the direction in which his own steps were turned was not altogether justifiable.

In the first place, his Kroo-boys were waiting for him, and when they were disposed of, it would only be right and proper for him, as Paller & Co.'s agent, to assure himself that the transport department really did pick up Ferguson and the rest, as John Todd had intimated.

This attended to, it would hardly be decent for him not to make sure that John was able to get across the river to say good night to his wife, particularly since good morning seemed likely to be a matter of some debate.

The friendship of a man like John Todd was a thing to respect and cultivate, and there was not the least doubt but that friendly consideration of this kind would give him, Calvert, all the time he was likely to need in finding a canoe.

So that he turned the postoffice corner of the executive building and headed for the tail of the main wharf, fortified with many excuses, most of which he hoped he would not have time to use.

Omitting the Hausa who, with a rifle at his shoulder, was doing sentry duty in front of the D.C.'s office, the first man Calvert encountered was Kenley, himself, whose "two or three days up-river" had obviously been shortened considerably.

"That you, Calvert?"

The D.C.'s voice was as sharp as his eyes. There was evidently nothing to be gained from haggling with him.

"Yes," Calvert answered simply. "I've just delivered Mrs. Todd to your bungalow, as per instructions. And I wanted to see if my gig crew——"

"Gone up the beach with Ferguson and the Oil Rivers men. Report to Talbot at the barracks, or to Dr. Allen at the hospital, if you think you know anything about first aid. Todd's wife all right? No hysterics?"

Calvert smiled in spite of the avalanche that had swept away all his excuses.

"Mrs. Todd isn't an hysterical kind of woman," he said dryly. "But I'd like to wait down here for a while to see that John gets across all right. She'll expect me to keep her informed, you know, if he should happen to be a bit late."

A brisk shadow came down the front steps of the executive building just behind Calvert.

"That's all right, Kenley," the shadow broke in before the D.C. could decide whether Calvert's plea was worth considering. "I'll see to it that Mrs. Todd doesn't jump off the wharf if Todd is delayed." The shadow laughed. "Better give Calvert a bottle and a dark corner, and then you'll be sure he's accounted for."

Calvert did not even turn his head when MacConnachie's voice sounded behind him.

"Report to Talbot," Kenley decided crisply and spun off into the dark. "He'll tell you what to do."

Then Calvert turned, not merely his head, but also his whole body, in MacConnachie's direction; a slow and deliberate movement that had considerable bulk and muscle behind it. As he turned he remembered what Bella Todd had said about MacConnachie. If all of Bella's prophecies materialized as truthfully as this one——

"MacConnachie," Calvert said very

slowly, "your suggestion is excellent. If you'll find the bottle, I'll have no difficulty in producing the dark corner."

Plainly, MacConnachie had not expected this, and the quality of his repartee was ample evidence of the effect it had upon him.

"Get up the beach, you swine!"

Then Calvert hit him.



FOR the fraction of a second, Calvert of Allobar was himself again, and, as far as MacConnachie was concerned, it was long enough. It is doubtful whether he knew he had been hit. When he went down he did not stagger or flounder around or make any kind of fuss about it. His knees just doubled up and he flung quietly upon his face toward Calvert; so that even the Hausa sentry, who was much nearer to the sound of the blow than Kenley, heard the nasty snap of Calvert's fist against MacConnachie's jaw, but could not determine without a closer examination just what had happened or who had been hit.

And by the time the Hausa had reached MacConnachie and had recognized him and had called the D.C., Calvert was emerging from the rear entrance of the executive building, which, being part office and part residence, was never closed.

When Calvert, having somewhat amazed a house boy or two, found himself in the open air again, hobnobbing with several thousand mosquitoes in the friendly shadow of a wine palm, he had a little time to think; with the result that he decided it was not impossible that being something of a fugitive from justice was just the rôle he had been looking for.

It made a canoe and departure from the government beach not simply a matter of appetite, but of necessity.

For the blow he had struck he had no regrets whatever. Except for the amount of nervous energy he had expended upon MacConnachie's jaw, he was rather glad the thing had happened. It proved he could still "pull" his punches quite a little and get the same old effect out of them. Of course, in a longer fight——

Calvert did not have to follow this thought very far, and, just then, had neither the time nor the inclination to measure his present strength and stamina with that of former years. He thought he had muscle and dexterity enough to paddle a canoe

about two miles up-river; and if he could paddle it up, he did not think it would greatly matter to him or to any one else whether he paddled it down again or not. At least, not that evening.

The likeliest place to find a canoe was the tail end of the main wharf. There, according to MacConnachie's instructions regarding Calvert's gig-boat, all smaller craft were being tied up under the vigilant direction of Captain Geddes, R.N.R. And though it would not now be possible for him to approach Geddes's domain by a direct route, he did think that, by making a detour involving a little bush travel and a short swim, the thing could be done at the expense of little more than a wetting.

Also, if there were any canoes hugging the mangrove-stick breakwater that extended beyond the limits of the new permanent, concrete construction with which the government beach was fronted, he might find the swim unnecessary. He hoped he would. He did not like to think of subjecting his new trousers—which had a significance far beyond the mere identity of a pair of white flannel pants—to a more or less green and slimy bath of that kind.

There were no more vagrant shadows passing up the beach, and the drums had, for the time being at least, quieted down considerably. Occasionally, with an accompanying flare of light, now blue, now white, the rumbling beat of the drums leaped to a crescendo, only to die away again to a sullen murmur that seemed prepared to continue all night. He hoped Kenley or Captain Talbot was not being misled by it to any extent.

Talbot, as Calvert was aware, was a shrewd, quiet and capable fighter who knew his business thoroughly, and who knew it as well as he did principally because he had had a lot of it to attend to. And, of course, if the rumpus actually did develop into a fight, Talbot would at once and automatically assume complete command of everything and every one.

This, Calvert thought, was assuring. It was none of his affair, but he liked to feel, before he took his departure from the government beach, that Ruth Kenley, Bella Todd and the rest were in the care of a man who was not likely to be fooled by false alarms that acted as a mask for the real thing.

This much being certain, Calvert knew

that, with the element of a surprise attack disposed of, even a man of N'ri, blessed with the name of Akka-Chuku, could not make much headway with machetes and a muzzle-loader or two against breech-loaders and a machine-gun—particularly the machine-gun.



IT WAS with those sober reflections that Calvert, for whom, of course, no audible hue and cry had been raised, cautiously left the none too comfortable shadow of the wine palm and headed obliquely for the bush to the right of the beach.

His course gave the impression that, like the majority of shadows who walked that way, he was bound for the barracks, but it inclined gradually nearer and nearer to the bush where he expected to have to step even more cautiously than he was doing now. Unless he was fool enough to allow himself to stumble upon some one who had heard of the MacConnachie incident, there was not much chance of him being interfered with, until he tried to enter one of the several bush paths that led away from the beach.

At any one of these his real trouble would probably begin, as all the paths and most of their inconsequent tributaries within the bush would be most carefully guarded and in such fashion that it would be difficult for the casual beholder to tell whether they were guarded or not.

Nothing would be more simple than to pick the wrong one. And the visible presence of two Hausa sentries before the main paths on that side—one of them almost opposite the tiny six-bed hospital—meant simply that the chances of a surprise attack by these routes were slim enough to permit the Hausa to stand upright instead of crawling around on their stomachs, as several of their compatriots were probably doing elsewhere.

Calvert avoided the hospital and the first of the Hausa sentries by doing a little crawling on his own account. He did not like this, but the grass was short and clean, and when he had progressed as far as another friendly wine palm, the hospital and the sentry were behind him and the bush was at least a hundred yards nearer than it had been when he had begun his snake-like journey across the government beach.

Under the wine palm he adopted a sitting posture and looked about him while he

gathered breath enough for another hundred yard crawl.

Upon the other side of the beach, in a direct line from where he sat, were the lights of the Kenley bungalow. Calvert smiled to them and slowly turned his attention to a plodding hurricane lantern that moved up from the waterfront toward the bungalow at what looked to him to be an exact representation of John Todd's unhurried, methodical gait.

Calvert hoped it was as his glance shifted up the beach to the barracks: A squat, dull spread of brick and galvanized iron with dimmed, far-scattered lights that winked bleakly at him and told him to keep away.

He took another look at the Kenley bungalow, then considered the hospital for a moment, only to allow his wandering gaze to pass on to a two-storied building of fair size, situated about midway between the hospital and the executive building, which was devoted principally to stores and to provide living quarters for the Allobar Public Works Department.

MacConnachie, however, did not live there. He had a room on the upper floor of the main executive building, known to the majority of the traders as the consulate, and Calvert had hoped that the annex, as a last resort, might have provided him with a little hospitality. Just at present it was in complete darkness, and there was no possibility of it being in the least hospitable now in any case.

So, when his eyes had absorbed the government beach in all its parts, including the vaguely outlined mud and thatch quarters occupied by the colored government clerks beyond the barracks, Calvert was more convinced than ever of the necessity for giving his whole attention to the bush paths that led away from it.

Naturally, he began with the path that was nearest, followed it with his memory to a given point and stopped there; paused just a moment or two, then came rather hurriedly back again. He was afraid he did not like that one. It was too liberally strewn with—

Calvert's thoughts and eyes and the muscles of his neck particularly stiffened into a kind of frozen stare. That he had legs and arms and a body ceased, for the moment, to matter. He was conscious of nothing below his Adam's apple.

About the thirty-second of an inch away

from his anatomical symbol of the Fall was the point of a long, nastily thin knife which remained a most unpleasant fixture; as free from any suggestion of nerves as a copper-lined palm-oil-testing pan.

There was a hand attached to the knife and an arm attached to the hand; a small and shapely hand and a round and shapely arm, the shapeliest, Calvert was sure, in all Allobar.

And above the arm was a face, that had no earthly business to be on the government beach.

"Hello—Lali."

CHAPTER IX

LALI

CALVERT tried to be nonchalant, but he was afraid it was not much of a success. The point of the knife pricked his skin for one thing, and Lali's eyes, as Calvert privately expressed it, were chockfull of —.

"Where—did you—come from?"

The jerky pauses in Calvert's speech were accounted for by the knife point which plainly gave him his cue to shut up and to speak only when spoken to. So, for half a minute perhaps, he looked down into the eyes of a woman and derived not a particle of pleasure from the privilege.

"What's the matter I no kill you?" Lali demanded at last in a low and venomous whisper. "Sof'ly, sof'ly, I cut your head 'way and no man *savez*."

Calvert's eyes admitted that this was quite true. He had known Lali for rather more than ten years and he had never suspected her of having any scruples about doing anything she happened to want to do badly enough. And if his head had been Kenley's or John Todd's, he imagined there would have been little time wasted in conversation.

"Maybe so you like me, li'l bit," he suggested simply enough. "Plenty time Lali come talk for me when she no *savez* white man fash'."

Lali's eyes receded and narrowed and, if anything, the wrist that controlled the long, thin knife became stiffer and more uncompromising than ever.

For her present purposes, and they were nefarious enough without a doubt, Lali was clothed only from the waist down, her

overcloth being loosely wrapped around her like a belt. And though the inevitable silk handkerchief was wound about her head, its gaudy yellows and reds, lively and bright enough in the day time, did not lend any cheer to Calvert's situation in the dark.

Considering the blandly simple moral standards by which this daughter of Okpari was controlled, Lali had every reason to consider herself, and to be considered by others, what is commonly known as a good girl. Her preferences among men, in spite of her unquestioned reputation as a beauty, had been astonishingly few, always dignified and indubitably intense and sincere while they lasted.

Once and only once had she made a mistake. And the fact that she had told Calvert all about it, from her own point of view, of course, proved that Calvert had never been one of her preferences. Lali was not the kind of fool who would attempt to discuss the old love with the new.

Possibly because he could listen to her in her own tongue and impart white man's wisdom in a language that was black, she had found Calvert useful on many occasions. He had made her understand things she never could have understood in pidgin-English.

Perhaps she was thinking of this now. Calvert hoped she was; and in an effort to assist her to do so he said in Ibo:

"Does the edge of Lali's knife drink the blood of him whom Zanza fears?"

A low, whispering guttural was the answer he got, and though the knife scarcely moved, Lali's eyes widened sharply.

"Zanza!"

She put all the contempt of which she was capable, and this was considerable, into the name.

"She is a thin brown bone drying in the sun."

"A brown bone with eyes," Calvert added, as if he were simply making a suggestion.

And though Lali shrugged her finely rounded and polished ebony shoulders, slowly and magnificently, he knew, when the knife point was jerkily drawn back an inch or two, that the mention of Zanza's name had had the effect he had hoped for.

Every canoe boy knew how these two had hated each other, ever since John Todd had ordered Lali removed from the A.P.A. beach one glaring Christmas morning.

Presently, however, Lali asked, as if she were anxious to get away from the subject—

"What you do for dis place—so?" A gesture encompassed Calvert's unorthodox situation. "Which time white man go take walk for gov'ment beach on him belly, all same lizard?"

Calvert grinned slowly. Apparently she had observed his approach to the sheltering wine palm and he did not blame her for being a bit dubious about the manner of it. Also, he appreciated that, from Lali's point of view, it was going to be rather difficult to explain. Nothing short of the whole truth would be in the least convincing.

"I want go for my own beach," he said simply.

Lali's eyes narrowed again.

"Wharf live for bush?" she asked pointedly and skeptically. "What's matter you no go for wharf?"

"Gov'ment man take all my gig-boy. So I go get canoe. You *savez* which place I fit to catch canoe?"

This apparently guileless inquiry made the knife recede another few inches and Lali almost smiled.

"Plenty gin no live foh gov'ment beach?" she asked almost sympathetically.

Calvert's answering smile was rather uncertain. He did not care much for the idea of discussing his thirst with Lali. Besides, as a spot of blood over his Adam's apple gave ample testimony, she was no longer a friend of the white man. She was one of the enemy and in all probability, she was not alone.

Whether she had completed her business on the government beach or still had it to attend to, he did not know, but he thought it would be as well to find out if he could possibly do so. Otherwise there was no saying whom she would be sticking her nasty looking knife into before morning.

"Plenty gin live," he said with a frankness that was intended to be disarming. "But I no like um. You *savez* which place I fit to catch canoe?"

"Maybe so," Lali answered noncommittally. "And maybe so you talk lie foh me. White man be white man them time black man go shoot gun foh D.C. face."

Calvert tried to look as neutral as possible.


Technically, all disturbances of the sort were between the government and the disturbers. Trade was assumed to be a thing

apart. But this theory did not work out very well in practise, particularly in the disturbed section. However, a sudden loud clamor of the drums, which had been rumbling quietly for some time, gave Calvert an excuse to change the subject.

"What's matter they make plenty noise—so? White man no fear for drum."

Lali shrugged her silky black shoulders again; this time with an air of long suffering patience.

"Dat be play palaver," she said frankly and plainly indicated her own private contempt for so much unnecessary noise. "Black man he fool. Suppose he no do so, he no fit to fight li'l bit. Be all same gin or toambo for him head."

 CALVERT'S amusement was wholly inward. But even under these circumstances he had no difficulty in remembering an occasion when, in a public square in a large city, he had listened to a cart-tail orator with a powerful larynx, who was beating upon the eardrums of several thousand perfectly respectable, white-collared gentlemen, and employing as drum-sticks the kind of patriotic platitudes that made the most noise; this, so that the latent fighting spirit of his compatriots would come to life and result in a record day at the nearest recruiting office.

He did not, however, tell Lali of the universally acknowledged necessity for noise when war recruits were in demand. Her frank disapproval of the drums was rather startling and, for a second or two, it suggested to Calvert something of disagreement in the councils of the enemy.

And then she was looking directly at him along the long, thin blade of the knife, and her voice, in her own tongue, low, intense and filled with most malicious decision, came to his ears with unpleasant distinctness:

"You, white man Calvert, hear! When Lali, the daughter of Okpari, fights, the falling of a leaf is as the sound of thunder. Lali comes and Lali goes and the drip of blood from the point of a knife speaks louder than the touch of her foot upon the ground."

An impressive pause.

"For, long, long beatings of the heart, your life was Lali's. She looked and she saw and she laughed, and you neither saw nor heard. And of all white men, you,

white man Calvert, are the least a fool. But your life was Lali's—five, ten, twenty times. And she did not kill. *Savez?*"

This was as true as it was ugly. It painted Lali not so much in a new light as in a much brighter one that revealed all the dark corners and left little or nothing to the imagination. More than this, however, it heralded something like a bargain to be made between them, and Calvert's previous notion that Lali was not alone began to fade out rapidly.

Though she was mentioned prominently in connection with the Akka-Chuku's defection to the government, she had plainly shown that she did not approve of Zatza's share in the business or in the noisy method of drumming up recruits. This gave color to the possibility that she was playing a lone hand and was desperately flirting with disaster in the hope of achieving some kind of glory that had suddenly become very necessary to her. So Calvert said carefully in Ibo:

"Lali is the quiet that goes before the wind, and the grass does not bend under her feet. She is a she-leopard without spots. And when she looked, she saw and laughed inside her head. But she did not kill. *I savez.*"

The knife moved away again and suddenly the point was turned downward and driven with lightning speed and force into the ground between them. The hilt, which was of the plainest, was within easy reach of Calvert's hand, and he was thus given to understand that Lali had definitely decided to make him a present of his life.

So he waited to hear the price, trusting all the while to Lali's instincts as a guard against the possibility of interruption, favorable to him or otherwise.

For a while the woman looked at him across the barrier of the knife hilt, and if she were not seeing straight through his head to the lights of the Kenley bungalow, it was not from lack of concentration.

"Long time," she said simply in pidgin, "you be Lali friend. Them time when Lali be young too much, and no get sense foh her head, be you make her *savez* white man fash'. Lali 'membah." A short pause. "You want catch canoe?"

This was too simple to be believed, but Calvert said truthfully enough:

"I want catch canoe. You *savez* which place I fit to catch him?"

"I *savez*. I get canoe foh waterside."

"Which place?"

"I bring you dere."

Calvert paused, as he had every justification for doing. Lali smiled pityingly and glanced at the knife.

"Suppose you fear," she offered generously, "you fit to take knife. Be all righ?"

Without a doubt there was a catch somewhere, and Calvert was not sure that he wanted a drink as badly as he thought he did.

"What you go do them time we catch waterside?" he asked cautiously.

"I go foh canoe. Den me an' you, we go foh you beach an' you go get plenty gin, all same you belly like um. Den we come 'way and I go bring you foh Government beach so no man *savez* you done go 'way. Palaver set?"

Calvert did not think so; not quite yet. Her perfect understanding of what he wanted to do, if it could be done at all, was amazing, and her willingness to assist him, not only with a canoe, but also with the vital aid of her strong young paddle-arms, was just a trifle too generous to be accepted without considerable thought and caution.

It was not the risk to himself that made him hesitate. This, he was sure, was almost negligible. Lali could have dispatched him with ease in the past few minutes and had no need to jeopardize her own safety by saddling herself with his company so as to dispose of him more impressively elsewhere.

Neither would his capture serve as an incentive to the possibly wavering rank and file of Akka-Chuku's cohorts. Aside from the fact that he had been captured before and tenderly returned to his own wharf, he was sensible of the obvious circumstance that he was not a Kenley or a Talbot, and that his importance in Allobar's scheme of things, from a black as well as a white standpoint, had waned to the vanishing point.

There had been a time when Calvert of Allobar—but there was no sense in bothering about that now. *Zatza*, perhaps, might enjoy seeing him tied to a stake head down, and would doubtless go some distance out of her way to bring it about. But there was not the least likelihood of Lali adding further risks to her already all too risky venture, simply to provide

Zatza the Pure with a happy hour or two.

So that the whole business was altogether too involved to be decided in a minute; and Calvert did not have a quarter of that length of time in which to make up his mind.

"You fear?" Lali whispered, after a side-long glance in the direction of the hospital which was the nearest habitation of any kind. "What's matter? You think I talk lie? You think I go make you fool?"

Calvert shook his head in an effort to declare that nothing was farther from his thoughts. But his eyes dropped quickly to the knife hilt which was somewhat symbolical of a cross of honor between them; and then rested for a brief space on his white flannel trousers.

Lali did not see his eyes widen but presently she heard him laugh softly and her right hand made an impulsive movement toward the knife. Apparently Calvert saw this exhibition of nervousness, but it did not make any difference to his point of view or his laughter.

"Sof'ly," Lali cautioned, staring a little. "You no get sense foh you head?"

"No, Lali," simply. "Just pants on my legs and I'm going wherever they lead me. You never wore a pair of breeks, Lali, so you wouldn't know what I mean in any case. But they cost a head a leg, so there should be a lot of life in them."

Lali did not understand any of this and Calvert did not expect her to. So while she started at him and kept her hand within easy reach of the knife, he said seriously:

"Palaver set. I go." Then dropping into Ibo: "But the little feet of Lali are swift and quiet as the light of the morning. And mine are heavy and thick like oil that is cold in the calabash. Does the hippopotamus run with the she-leopard or the snail take wings to follow the dragon fly?"

Lali did not answer this at once. For a longer time than she really could afford, considering her situation, she looked steadily at Calvert and, like him, seemed to be trying to decide whether or not there was some kind of trap in his rather odd and sudden acceptance of her offer. Then slowly and quite impressively she drew the knife out of the ground and held it out to him.

"Be you take um," she said in humble pidgin. "You be man. I be so-so woman. Be besser suppose you take um."

Calvert made a show of hesitating, then, to prevent any untoward accident happening to any of the Hausa sentries, he solemnly accepted the knife and stuck it rather gingerly into his belt.

"Be all right," he said. "I 'membah Lali long time."

Then after a short pause:

"We go now?"



FOR answer, Lali tightened her overcloth about her waist and glanced once more in the direction of the little hospital where a solitary light marked the probable presence of Dr. Allen at work in the laboratory. Then, with a final questioning glance at Calvert, as if she still had some lingering doubt about his sincerity, Lali whispered to him in Ibo to follow and slithered softly and slowly off into the dark.

Calvert followed.

He did not hope to be able to emulate Lali's uncanny snake-like soundlessness and invisibility. Neither did he anticipate that the little adventure would actually lead him to his own beach. His principal sensation was one of curiosity.

So far, the statuesque bronze figure of Biko, the house boy in embryo—who had, of course, begun the whole affair so far as Calvert was concerned—had inspired many amazements; amazements unthought of in Calvert's scheme of things forty-eight hours before.

Thus, he was not really following Lali, the misguided daughter of Okparri. He was following Biko who had invested him with the highest-priced pair of trousers in Nigeria, and thereafter, step by step, had led him forth on the broad highway to—what?

Biko, who was carefully following Calvert, seemed the most likely person in the world, just then, to help him to find out.

CHAPTER X

TWIGS AND GUNS

THE lean, lithe form that followed in Calvert's wake from the direction of the hospital was the same as that which he had seen standing on his own oil wharf. And it lost none of its sleek, shiny-skinned magnificence because, like Lali, it glided along on its stomach instead of on the feet

which Calvert had said seemed to have air-cushions in the soles of them.

But the face was different.

The eyes had no hint of patient sorrow in them now. They were quiet enough, but it was the quiet of an assurance that was bounded by no thought of limitations. If this were the face of one who aspired to be a house boy, a house boy would necessarily require to be nothing short of a god.

Lying flat upon the sun-scorched grass, patiently measuring the speed of his movements by Calvert's. Biko could scarcely be referred to as a shadow. Most of the time he was just a thin, wavering line that disappeared entirely now and then.

And though Lali, as Calvert was not slow to observe, seemed to have a genius for making her path lie through the darkest spots, Biko appeared actually to dare the moon's efforts to discover him and still remained as elusive as any lizard pretending slumber on a pile of dark-brown palm-nut kernels.

There was no weapon in Biko's hand or any sign of one upon his person, which was clothed as usual in the simplicity of a loin cloth.

Of course, his situation was different from that of Lali's, and much more favorable, from a governmental standpoint, than Calvert's. As a matter of fact, being a servant of the government, he had a perfect right to follow suspicious characters such as they undoubtedly were.

More than this, if he were able to find out what they were about, or better still, make them captive and bring them bodily to Captain Talbot, his chances of becoming Talbot's house boy would be greatly enhanced thereby.

With altogether different and more kindly thoughts of Biko in his mind, Calvert continued to follow Lali. And it was not long before he realized whither she was leading. A bush path which, to him, would have led to nothing more encouraging than a shallow, muddy little side creek, where his chances of pilfering a canoe would have been as frail as a shop-boy's honor, was evidently going to lead Lali to something much more definite.

There was a Hausa sentry visible before this path. But he was there simply as a precaution against accidents of Lali's sort. For Calvert knew that the path, short, straight and without turns or forks of any

kind, would be of no earthly use to Akka-Chuku, largely because the little side creek would not float enough canoes to allow an attacking force to accumulate in sufficient numbers to make an assault against superior weapons at all possible.

But as an aid to departure from the government beach, provided one had a small canoe handy and the tide was not all the ebb, it was ideal.

Of course, there was the Hausa sentry to be considered, and as he paced back and forth with his gun on his shoulder, Calvert noted that he did not seem to be of the sort that suffered in the least from nerves or from the still more stultifying complaint of being too swaggeringly sure of the power of his uniform. This, though his nearest neighborhood in uniform was too far away to be of any use to him in an emergency that was sudden enough.

Calvert, however, did not attempt to think for himself in the matter. He was following Lali, who had probably slipped past the Hausa earlier in the evening and was apparently satisfied that she could do so again, and, this time, take Calvert along with her, in spite of his none too easily concealed bulk and the comparative slowness of his movements.

So when Lali came to an abrupt halt a little to the right of a clump of lime bushes, Calvert immediately took the hint and accepted the shelter of the bushes without hesitation. This done, with one eye on Lali and the other on the Hausa sentry not more than twenty yards away, he waited to see what Lali would do. He had not long to wait.

Abreast of the path, the Hausa halted just as suddenly as Lali had done and his head turned sharply in the Ibo girl's direction as the sound of a cracking twig, or a sound suspiciously like it, struck upon his ear.

Lali's carelessness at such close quarters surprised Calvert, particularly so close to a sentry of this sort who showed no disposition to become in the least excited. The stiff-necked steadiness of his movements had a drill-ground snap in them that, from Calvert's present viewpoint, was rather discouraging.

For half a minute perhaps the Hausa stood perfectly still, staring and listening intently, evidently trying to make up his mind whether the slightly darker shadow that was Lali, really was something worth

bothering about. Then, with that same drillground precision, he lowered his gun from his shoulder, struck a strictly business-like pose and began moving, one slow step at a time, straight toward the spot he suspected.

For the Hausa's sake, Calvert was glad the long, thin knife was in his possession; for Lali's, he hoped the sentry was not as sure a shot as his unhurried steadiness would seem to predict.

And another twig cracked.

The Hausa stopped. Calvert's chin jerked upward and he drew a deep long breath. For, this time, the cracking of the twig did not come from Lali's direction, but from what seemed to be the other side of the little clump of lime bushes. Naturally, the sentry's attention snapped in that direction instantly.

"Who go dere? Wha's matter? Yo' be — fool! Wha' you do dere?"

The Hausa's dignity was offended. There was no valid reason for twigs cracking all around him like that, and unquestionably it expressed a considerable contempt for his sentryship.

But there was no answer from the other side of the lime bushes. So the Hausa, muttering imprecations in his own tongue, slowly and cautiously turned his head in Lali's direction. And Calvert at once realized that he had made the mistake of watching the Hausa instead of the girl. As far as Calvert could see, she had vanished with a thoroughness that left nothing at all to argue about.

The trader's smile of appreciation was not enthusiastic, even though the sentry's discomfiture seemed to be on a par with his own. He heard the man exclaiming rapidly in low voiced Hausa, mingling a little pidgin English into his remarks so that there would not be any doubt about what he thought of the matter.

"Brother of lice that feed on lice—some man head go catch leak one time—son of a she road without eyes—I be Madugu and I go make shoot all same yo' belly neber go chop no' more—eater of pigs and spawn of a molting owl—who go dere!"



HAVING finally delivered himself of this orthodox challenge, Madugu paused mentally and physically. He did not appear to be able to decide whether to advance or retreat, but with a

last, lingering glance at the spot where Lali had been and still another at the lime bushes, he backed slowly toward the entrance to the bush path, apparently with the intention of taking his stand directly in front of it, so that, if any one wanted to enter it, it would be necessary to crawl through his legs.

Calvert did not think he would care to try it, particularly since Madugu continued to hold his rifle in a defiant, last-stand kind of way, his trigger finger, if it were acting in unison with the rest of him, crooked and poised for instant action.

So Clavert stayed where he was, wondering where Lali had gone and who or what had cracked the twig on the other side of the lime bushes.

There was no answer to either of these queries; not until the sentry had backed almost to the entrance to the path and was making ready to plant himself firmly before it.

Then, almost immediately, as the broad naked feet were trying to become fixed in one place, Calvert heard a sudden alarmed grunt of pain, followed instantly by a thin, pig-like squeal; and, drowning the tail-end of the squeal, came a shot and the clatter of a fallen rifle.

Madugu's drill-ground precision had dropped entirely away from him in something less than two seconds. In that brief space of time, he ceased entirely to be a soldier in the W.A.F.F. and became a simple Hausa boy from Zaria, who, like any other of his color, is most tender immediately above the heel. And when he squealed, he leaped several feet into the air and kept on leaping until he had vanished into the murk toward the barracks.

Calvert had a vague conception of the Hausa trying to catch hold of his heels with every leap he made—something like a dog chasing his tail—and after that, as Calvert thought dimly at the time, only the echoing thunder of the shot remained.

He had no idea where the bullet had gone and did not care, but the rumpus its discharge had made was like the sudden arousing of several thousand devils, most of them inside his own head. Other shots have doubtless made more noise and this one would never lay claim to being heard around the world. But it was heard all over the government beach and this was enough for Calvert.

In a kind of smoke-blurred haze that was more mental than actual, he saw Lali crouching in the entrance to the bush path, snatching up the sentry's discarded rifle, but when he reached her and wrested the weapon from her hands and leaned it against the nearest shrub, his movements, though surprisingly swift and decisive, were all mechanical. He was not consciously thinking—just going.

"Canoe!" he snapped sharply. "Make quick! Where canoe?"

Lali, however, took time enough to be surprized, and she looked up at Calvert as if she were trying to remember when she had met this kind of Calvert before.

Then she laughed a wide-mouthed laugh, possibly to give Calvert an opportunity to see all of the shiny and sharp white teeth that had played such havoc with Madugu's ankle and discipline in a perfectly timed, bone-deep bite.

After which, without any conversation whatever, she darted down the path toward the little side creek at a pace that "made quick" rather quicker than even this suddenly and strangely rejuvenated Calvert could keep up with.

But the path was short and straight and before the inquiring clamor of voices on the government beach, some of them like far-off echoes of others that were much nearer, came close enough to be really threatening, Calvert was assisting Lali to float a canoe that, like a certain romantic bicycle, had been built for two.

"You *savez* paddle?" the girl asked in a cautious whisper as they swung carefully into the shadow of the bush on the opposite bank of the narrow little creek.

"I *savez* anything for dis time," Calvert declared feelingly.

"Wait li'l bit," Lali cautioned with an appreciative grin. "You paddle make noise too much."

So Calvert crouched low in his seat, and, though the darkness was black enough to conceal any identity, remained as idle and inconspicuous as possible until the canoe's nose had poked its way out into the main stream, no great distance above the government beach. Then Calvert bent his back and worked.

Behind him, on the government wharf, where a machine-gun darkly commanded the river, the sound of white men's voices still raised in some excitement, once more

quicken the life in his sluggish limbs, as the ever-threatening rumble of the drums had been altogether unable to do. Evidently, the probable discovery that the shot was a false alarm had not yet reached the wharf, and Calvert had no desire to be found in Lali's company under these or any other circumstances.

So he gave all of his attention to the task of making his paddle stroke measure the rhythmic sweep of hers, and, for the time being at least, forgot all about the twig that had cracked on the other side of the lime bushes.

However, Biko was not very far behind; not more than a dozen canoe lengths to be quite accurate, and the canoe he was traveling in, which Calvert had seen no sign of when he had entered Lali's, was a luxurious eight-paddle affair with a small matted deck covered with a grass awning amid-ships.

Biko was not one of the paddle boys. Looking just a trifle muddy, as if he had done quite a little wading in somewhat shallow water, he was seated on the matted deck, with a faded blue print-cloth bundle swaying back and forth beside him. He was gripping a service rifle close to his chest and seemed to be getting considerable ecstasy out of the circumstance that he had found it growing on a shrub.

But Zatta the Pure, who had other things to think about, did not even lift her head.

CHAPTER XI

BOTH SIDES OF THE QUESTION

ON THE government wharf, in the barracks, but particularly among the government's temporary, and for the greater part, unwilling guests, a situation that was not far removed from panic, developed in the few minutes that immediately succeeded the inadvertent exploding of Madugu's rifle.

Kroo-boys who were, of course, altogether defenseless, and not yet accustomed to their new quarters—a kind of roped-off compound on the cricket field—suddenly began to mill and squeal, not at all unlike frightened cattle, a fair percentage of them bolting in a dozen immaterial directions.

The wives of the government's colored clerks, whose living quarters were thatched mud huts beyond a mango-tree line, bushward of the cricket field, rushed into the open, dragging numerous progeny with

them, and added to the pandemonium by screaming questions at one another which no one on the government beach could answer at that moment.

White men raced hither and thither rather aimlessly for a while and for the succeeding half hour or so, no one except possibly Captain Talbot, whose customary slouching gait did not alter in the slightest, was certain of anything.

And over at the Kenley bungalow, where Ruth was doing her best to accommodate herself to the novelty of having Bella Todd around the house, all of this excitement, beginning with the downfall of MacConnachie, had its own decided and peculiar effect.

It was John Todd who brought up from the wharf to the bungalow the first reliable information on the subject of Calvert's assault upon the P.W.D. man; that is, the punch that Calvert had so considerably "pulled" had developed into an assault by the time John had reached the government beach.

According to MacConnachie, he had been hit with a blunt instrument, something like a cooper's hammer, and unquestionably the P.W.D. man was doing his best to believe this and to make the law believe it, too.

MacConnachie found it difficult to believe that any one in the Nigerias, and particularly a dissolute representative of trade like Calvert, could hit him just once with the naked fist and so utterly and completely knock him out. For MacConnachie had stayed out, not merely for seconds, but for minutes—in fact, until Dr. Allen had brought him round again.

John Todd listened to MacConnachie's version quite seriously, his long face betraying no hint of the fact that for private reasons he was prejudiced in Calvert's favor from the start.

"I just told him to go up the beach," MacConnachie grumbled savagely, all of his *matinée* idol effects forgotten for the time being. "Gave him no offence at all. And then he slammed me on the jaw with something he took from his pocket." A growling pause. "What the ——'s the matter with you fellows, any way? If a government man takes a second look at any of you, you're as ready to fight as a bunch of Killenny cats. Good lord! We don't want any of your —— crew——"

"Shut up, Mac," Captain Geddes of the transport department broke in. "Todd's all right. We all owe him money."

This brought a rather half-hearted laugh from the young assistant district commissioner who was standing by, and whose bill with the A.P.A. was two months overdue.

John, however, did not commit himself in any way. With an almost imperceptible smile, he looked around for Kenley, then asked the A.D.C. where he could be found.

"In his office, I think. Wait a moment and I'll——"

"No, don't bother. I'll find him myself, if he's there."

And John, paying no further attention to MacConnachie, turned his substantial feet in the direction of the D. C.'s office which, just then, was lighted by a solitary standlamp.

Kenley was fiddling rather nervously with some papers when John went in, but he pulled his hand away sharply and looked up at his visitor in a manner that suggested that the MacConnachie incident had ruffled him more than it had any right to do.

"Hello, Todd. I hear your wife arrived all right. Sit down. What's the trouble?"

Kenley's speech, like his hands, was jerky and nervous. He knew perfectly well what John had come to see him about.

"This Calvert-MacConnachie business," John began and remained standing. "Of course, ye'll take no more heed o' it?"

"Well, I'm afraid MacConnachie must decide that. If he insists upon bringing a charge of assault——"

"As bad as that?" John's expression became still more solemn; then he asked: "Will ye let me know if he does?"

"Why?"

There was a faint irritation in the word that Kenley would have liked to have left out.

"Oh, nothing much. But a charge o' that kind is unusual out here between white men, and I was just wonderin' if, a' things considered, it would be advisable."

"Calvert is hardly a——"

Kenley remembered in time that he was the district commissioner, and did not finish it. But as far as John was concerned, he did not have to. And it was not at all difficult for John to remember that Calvert had been his guest that evening. Therefore Kenley's implied slur upon Calvert's whiteness was not any too complimentary

to John, whose method of reasoning, most of the time, was something of an exact science.

"Well," Kenley qualified more brusquely than apologetically. "He's hardly quite the thing, is he?"

John pursed his lips a second or two, then said slowly and with conviction:

"That's accordin' as ye happen to be lookin' at it. But if my advice is worth a bawbee, ye'll leave Norman Daniel Calvert alone. To my mind, he's far and awa' the biggest man on this river—drunk or sober."

A pause, to give Kenley a chance to digest this.

"Do ye know where he is?"

"Oh, somewhere on the beach. I haven't time to go beating the bushes for him now. He's safe enough."

"Aye. I don't doubt that. No' a bit," John agreed dryly, but did not mean it in quite the same light as Kenley did. "Well, I'll be going up to see the wife. Guid nicht to ye."

So that John reached the Kenley bungalow for the purpose of saying good night to his wife in a rather solemn frame of mind. But when he reached there he found that not only was Bella anxious for the properly filled in details of the MacConnachie incident, but that Ruth Kenley also seemed to be interested in learning just who was at fault and why.

In fact, it was Ruth who asked the first question, principally because Bella, though she had predicted some trouble of the sort, did not want to appear too interested in what had happened to MacConnachie lest John put a construction of his own upon it.

"One of the colored clerks came past with the story that Mr. Calvert stunned Mr. MacConnachie with a hammer," Ruth explained when John had made himself comfortable on the veranda. "Surely that isn't true?"

John said he did not think so, and told the story both as he had heard it and as he interpreted it, which was to the effect that Calvert would not raise his hand against any man without reason, and further, that he had raised only his hand and nothing else.

"But why should Mr. MacConnachie lie about it?" Ruth asked, already regretting the impulse that had prompted her to invite Calvert to tea the following afternoon.

She did not like to think she had made the mistake of inviting a man who, hardly ten minutes after he had received the invitation, had become involved in a cheap brawl with a man like MacConnachie who would never be invited at all.

"It doesn't seem to me to be reasonable that, if Mr. MacConnachie was at fault, he would want to make a fuss about it. White men don't, as a rule, air their quarrels any more than they can help out here. Do they?"

"Not wi' their fists. No' often," John admitted. "But I know Calvert, and I know he doesna need a hammer in business o' that kind."

Ruth smiled. She liked to hear John Todd talk. He was such a dry, long faced man with a sense of humor that seemed to come all the way up from his boots. But, of course, she knew he was prejudiced in Calvert's favor because Calvert was a trader; and did not suspect for a minute that she was so eager to believe MacConnachie's story simply because Calvert, from her angle of it, had proved himself a nuisance who had given her brother something more to worry about.

Bella said nothing. She was wondering how she could tell John about the incident at the gig-wharf when Calvert and she had arrived at the government beach. And it was not until after the startling interruption of the shot had brought all three of them sharply to their feet, and the resultant pandemonium had held them there for long and puzzled minutes, that Bella's chance came.



IN THOSE first few minutes, Ruth Kenley was very quiet. Once she glanced at Bella who was standing beside John, her hands at her sides, her eyes fixed with a curiously hopeful intentness upon the spot from which the sound of the shot had come. Bella seemed actually to be regretting that there was only one.

Then, since the colored members of Ruth's household needed quieting, she acknowledged John's offer of assistance in the matter, but insisted upon putting and keeping her house in order herself; and while she was attending to this, Bella hurriedly and whisperingly told John about the gig-wharf incident.

John listened in no small surprize, although he was careful not to betray any of

it, and nodded sagely now and then to encourage Bella to go on.

"And I told Mr. Calvert he'd have to watch him," she concluded. "But he got into trouble wi' him for a' that."

"Aye," sonorously. "I see. I'm glad ye told me."

"Ye'll help him?" Bella asked quickly. "I wouldna like to think o' him gettin' into any trouble because o' me."

"He'll no' do that," John promised. "But he's no' a man that's likely to need help from me or anybody else. If he's still on the beach, which I sore misdoubt, I'll find him and——"

Ruth Kenley came out again and John, who had all this time been watching the shadow-like figures that rushed hither and thither on the broad government lawn, said he thought the excitement was dying down.

"Some Hausa sodger, most like, let his gun go off by mistake," he suggested by way of explanation.

"I hardly think that," Ruth said with wholly unconscious loyalty. Then quickly, to the figure of an orderly coming up the short path to the bungalow—

"What is it?"

"Cap'n Talbot done say be all ri'," the figure answered. "No palaver live. Plenty soon all be sofly, sofly, all same God palaver chu'ch."

Ruth laughed softly. She knew the orderly was quoting Talbot word for word.

"All right. Tell Cap'n Talbot Mar Kenley say, 'Thank you too much.' *Savez?*"

"Yes, mar."

The orderly wheeled and departed barrackward, while Bella gave John a nudge with her elbow that, even if he had not taken the trouble to catch a glimpse of Ruth's face, would have said quite distinctly:

"Did ye hear that? Did ye hear that laugh? Did ye see her face when she got that message? Dod! Imagine a cauld-lookin' icicle like her bein' in love!"

Then Ruth was saying quietly—

"Well, after that, I think we can sit down again."

So they sat for a while, waiting for the details of this new and farther reaching excitement, Ruth trying in the mean while to entertain her guests who could, of course, not be expected to be greatly disturbed over the added burden of responsibility that had fallen upon her brother's shoulders.

And in the course of half an hour, when quiet had settled down upon the government beach, from wharf to bush, and only the spasmodic rumble of the drums continued to disturb its peace, both Talbot and Kenley brought the result of their separate findings in person to the bungalow.

Talbot had learned that Madugu had been bitten in the heel by some one who had made off with his rifle; while Kenley who was doing his best not to seem too exasperated, had discovered that Calvert had apparently managed, somehow or other, to make his escape from the government beach.

Adding these facts together, plus the circumstance that no further antagonistic demonstration of any kind had followed the shot, it was not difficult to assume that Calvert, who had made such appalling short work of MacConnachie, had, by some means, made even shorter work of Madugu as a sentry.

Not that Kenley or Talbot believed that Calvert had done the biting; not with his teeth at any rate. But that, in some mysterious fashion—perhaps with an instrument of some kind that had jaws—he had had something to do with the business, they had no doubt whatever.

Talbot, who was possibly one of the most careless appearing soldiers who ever stepped out on parade, accepted the facts as he might have been expected to do; carelessly and with a drawling, monosyllabic indifference to either the civil or military aspect of the case.

Kenley was different. To him, Calvert's disaffection was serious. Aside from whatever element of criminality there might be in it, it was a recklessly disturbing influence in the midst of disturbance, and could not reasonably be overlooked now or in the future.

"I'm afraid he'll have to go," he decided, leaning against one of the veranda uprights and speaking thus freely for John Todd's benefit. "We can't have his sort out here. Although he's Paller's agent, we all know poor Ferguson does the work and that Calvert is just a vagrant, not a whit better than any deck hand left behind by a Hamburg gin tank."

"Ye mean ye'll deport him?" John asked slowly, and felt Bella gripping his coat sleeve much more excitedly than he had ever known her to do.

"Nothing else for it," shortly. "And I'm

simply telling you about it because you seem to be extraordinarily interested in him. Of course, if you have any influence with him and we can do the thing quietly—well, I'm willing to concede that much."

"Ye might as well shoot him," John said tersely.

"Oh, nonsense!"

John did not like this, and Captain Talbot, sleepy-eyed though he seemed to be, saw that he did not. But it was Bella who resented it first.

"It's no' nonsense. John never speaks without reason. And ye canna—I mean ye can not put Mr. Calvert out o' the country, not until ye catch him anyway!"

"Wheesht, Bella," John chided, but not very convincingly, while Captain Talbot, who was seated on the far side of Ruth, smiled a barely perceptible smile and surreptitiously took a gentle grip of Ruth's arm to prevent her from becoming too excited about the matter, which she momentarily gave evidence of doing.

Kenley laughed because it was at once the safe and the polite thing to do.

"We'll catch him," he said, and seemed to have no doubt about it; then promptly changed the subject. "Do those drums bother you very much, Mrs. Todd? I hope they're not going to keep up that racket all night."

"No, they don't bother me a bit," Bella said, but in a tone that indicated that the Calvert matter was by no means settled or even side-tracked. "I kind o' like the sound o' them, and I'd like it better if they were mair—I mean more certain o' themselves."

"More certain!" Ruth exclaimed, with a short, rather forced laugh, because she secretly had not liked her brother discussing his decision upon Calvert with the Todds. She felt that he had belittled his case and himself by referring a purely governmental matter to a trader for consideration. "What do you mean by that? They're quite certain enough for me."

"Och, well, they keep comin' and goin' instead o' just comin'. And I dinna—I mean do not—like a chiel—a man, who just keeps talking about fightin', but never does it. And that's what the drums sound like to me."

Ruth laughed, of course, and said, "You extraordinary child!" just as if Bella were

not three months older and married besides.

John said, "Wheesht, Bella," as usual, and Kenley laughed and stared a little.

But Talbot's sleepy smile became a grin, and, as he glanced past Ruth's perfect profile, toward Bella's pretty, alive round face, he distinctly remembered at least a dozen sergeants of the line who had had faces just like that; harmless appearing, "bonny" men who fought like tiger-cats, and either sang or smoked or swore most indecently while they were doing it.

"Then you like a fight?" Kenley declared and asked at the same time.

"No' that exactly. I just don't like a lot o' blitherin' about things that are never done. My faither used to say to us bairns: 'The tongue is might, but awfu' noisy. It's first and best use is to cry for help. But if your head and your hand are as quiet as they should be, ye'll never need it.'"

Again Kenley laughed, but Ruth said quietly:

"Your father, Mrs. Todd, must be quite a remarkable man. Might I ask what his business is?"

"He's a farmer."

"Oh."

It was difficult to determine whether this was a sound of disappointment or relief. In any event, there followed a rather long, flat silence, which ended when John rose and announced broadly—

"Well, I'll be getting back."

There being no objections raised to this, Bella walked with him to the end of the short concrete strip that joined the main path, while the others, having severally said good night, trooped into the living room.



"GOOD HEAVENS, Walter! What on earth made you discuss the Calvert business with Todd?" Ruth demanded at once, while Talbot slouched patiently around waiting for her to sit down. "Don't you see that if there's any room for discussion, you half admit the weakness of your case?"

"Not at all. Todd isn't a fool, and he has a tremendous influence with the trading crew, even with Dilby of Marsden's, who is rather a superior sort of cuss for a trader and hasn't much time for Todd socially."

"But it's your business to get rid of Calvert, if he must be gotten rid of, not Todd's. You can't expect those kind of people to respect the judiciary—" Ruth liked this

word—"if you let them think for a moment that you need their advice or influence or anything. And as for bringing Mrs. Todd over here—" she turned to Talbot quickly—"isn't she awfully funny, Dick? Even her really horrible lack of breeding is fascinating. And she has as much need of our protection as an ironclad."

Talbot smiled lazily, then murmured, "She's a pretty little devil," by way of approving of Ruth's verdict on the subject of Bella's ability to take care of herself.

Ruth had turned to her brother again:

"I suppose we've got to see it through? For a few days? But it won't be any more than a few, will it?"

Kenley made a grimace of sympathy with his sister's point of view, then, much to Talbot's relief, called a boy and ordered drinks.

And down at the end of the short cement path, Bella was standing near to John and looking up at him and saying:

"Ye'll not let them put Mr. Calvert out, will ye, John? It was because o' me that he got into trouble wi' MacConnachie and I couldna sleep if——"

"Never mind it," John said placatingly. "Calvert doesn't need any help o' mine. But if he does, he'll get a' I've got to give. Ye'd better run in now, or they'll be wonderin' what's keepin' ye so long."

"Aye, I suppose so," slowly. "But it's just for two 'r three days, John? Ye're sure it's just for two 'r three days?"

"Maybe no' that long," John growled, and hastily kissing his wife good night, mortally afraid of being seen doing it, he added:

"Run in now. And go straight to your bed and sleep. There's no need o' you sittin' up like government folk a' hours o' the night. Guid nicht."

And he strode methodically away, without a backward look, leaving Bella to go up the short cement path at her leisure.

She took her time about it, and halfway up she stopped altogether. For a moment perhaps, she was actually on the verge of turning about and racing helter-skelter after John.

Then with a sudden stiffening from head to heel, and a distinct and most lamentable "Ugh!" she walked resolutely up to the bungalow door.

Fighting Akka-Chuku would be as nothing compared with this.

CHAPTER XII

REBELLION

CALVERT was not at all sure where his violent industry was taking him, even though the canoe's nose continued to point in the direction of his own beach.

All he did know was that he was no longer under government supervision; that his paddle strokes, every now and then, were just a little more strenuous apparently than Lali wanted them to be, and that, if there happened to be any tomorrow, he was going to be one solid ache from head to foot.

But aside from respectfully heeding Lali's occasional words of instruction, and trying to see to it, with a kind of grudging patience, that she did not have too much complaint to make, he really thought very little about anything during the first mile of what was probably the strangest journey he had ever made.

He scarcely thought even of a drink, though he was bathed in perspiration, and his throat was becoming foggier and stuffier every time his arms lifted and fell. Certainly he did not think, apart from the change in his status physically, that anything else had happened to him as a result of Madugu's rifle going off at the wrong moment. He did not even take time to ask Lali what she had done to the man.

Thus, Calvert was still "just going," and at the end of a mile, having avoided a suspicious looking oil canoe and several smaller craft that seemed equally anxious to avoid them, Lali's eyes had a look in them that said she was somewhat afraid she might have made a mistake.

For more than five of the ten years she had known him, she had been satisfied to regard this white man, Calvert, as a fool who, though filled with wisdom that dripped from his tongue as carelessly as water from an overflowing rain barrel, was nevertheless a fool whose master was a little gin in a glass.

Now, she was not so sure of this. There was power in the arms that wielded the paddle behind her, and what was still worse, there was decision, too. She felt, with a growing sense of disillusionment, that she was no longer leading, but was being led.

And this, of course, so altered the whole complexion of the situation as she had conceived it, that she began to think it might be advisable to get her knife back. All because a foolish Hausa man in a uniform had

allowed his gun to speak without reason!

It was at that time, as she had not failed to observe, the so sudden change had taken place in Calvert, and though he had said little or nothing since then, Lali could not rid herself of the sensation that, just as if she were standing in the doorway of Walter Kenley's office, she was in the presence of authority.

However, hugging the bush on the government's side of the river, they had reached and passed the Oil Rivers Company's beach, which was then in total darkness, before Lali made any effort to bring the matter, after her own fashion, to the point of conversation.

"You tire, li'l bit?" she queried simply with a slight turn of the head. "Maybe so you besser lef' um. Paddle no be white man fash'."

"Go on! Don't chatter. *Animol!*" Calvert ordered, just as if she were a crew boy.

And Calvert did not realize how thick and harsh and altogether untractable his voice sounded.

Lali faced front again. Her arms rose and fell mechanically, but her eyes stared in sudden fear, and for fully half of the remainder of the distance to Paller & Co.'s beach, she devoted herself to concentrated thought; this, when she had succeeded in restraining an impulse to capsize the canoe and drown Calvert on the spot.

Presently, however, in the shadow of a particularly dark, murder-inviting stretch of overhanging bush, she turned to him again and whispered—

"Maybe so, gov'ment man live foh you beach?"

"Rubbish! gov'ment man done go long time. Be so D.C. say. No talk. Make quick!"

Once more Lali faced front obediently, but in less than a minute, though she did not turn her head or stop the lift and fall of her arms, she persisted plaintively—

"I fear foh gov'ment man."

"You lie. Them time gun shoot, you laugh all same you be fool. I *savez* Lali, too much. Make quick and shut up!"

This was no way to talk to a lady, and particularly to one who had made him a gift of both life and freedom, and Lali resented it as any lady would have had a perfect right to do.

But Calvert simply became more domineering and insulting, just as he seemed to

become less and less tired as the weird little journey drew rapidly to a close.

Of course, there was going to be a reaction, but he was not thinking of that now. A kind of nervous excitement that was evidently capable of generating a tremendous amount of energy was driving him back to his own beach; perhaps just for a drink; perhaps for the independent feel of his own veranda under his feet. He was not bisecting sensations or causes or effects.

But he had a fairly well decided conviction, as they dodged a leisurely moving twenty-paddle canoe on its way up-river, that he was Paller & Co.'s agent and that if he chose to return to his own beach and remain there, it was none of Kenley's or Talbot's or anybody's — business.

What the — right had Kenley to order Ferguson and the Kroo-boys removed to the government beach without consulting him? None. What right had Kenley to order him to report to Talbot just as if he were one of his triple—ed, multicolored, Sierra-Leonese clerks, or a pop-eyed, heel-catching fool like Madugu? None. And what right had MacConnachie—

Calvert grinned savagely. His arms lifted and the paddle stabbed the water with a sudden excess of energy that made Lali grumble angrily:

"What's matter? You go craze foh you head. Whiteman be fool for canoe-side all same so-so chicken."

But Calvert merely laughed, and as the spectral outlines of his own kernel store came to meet him out of the dark, he spun the canoe's nose straight for it without giving Lali's inclinations in the matter a thought.

Even the unbelievable circumstance that she had actually kept her word about taking him back to his own beach, did not strike him as being remarkable just then. On the contrary, according to his present frame of mind, it would have been unbelievable if she hand't!

Such thoughts as Lali had, were expressed in Ibo. They were not nice thoughts and they would not translate into English very well. Calvert, however, did not have to translate them. He was not the kind of linguist who spoke in a foreign tongue and thought in his own. Perhaps this was why Lali had such respect for his wisdom and why Zatta the Pure feared it. Thinking black is not an everyday accomplishment in a white man.

When the canoe at last bumped gently alongside the gig-wharf, where the absence of the customary watchboy with a lantern gave somber evidence of complete desertion, Calvert was the first ashore.

Unless Lali decided to desert by water, this move gave him a slight advantage in the control of her movements on land, inasmuch as he thought it would be advisable to keep her in sight at all times. And three yards to Lali, in the dark, evidently supplied enough disappearing space.

But the girl made no immediate effort either to desert or to follow him. When Calvert looked down at her, he found her slumped in her seat, a vaguely etched picture of savage dejection or sulkiness or disappointment; something, in any case, that had evidently come to stay.

"What's matter?" Calvert asked. "You no like my beach?"

Lali had nothing to say. But after a little while her hands reached up to her head and, slowly removing the silk handkerchief that was wound about it, she tossed the gaudy symbol of pride down at her feet with a gesture that expressed her complete contempt for every and any kind of vanity.

Then, folding her hands over her head, she bent forward until her forehead touched her hunched up knees; and in this posture of apparently complete submission to the will of fate, without uttering a sound and altogether minus the usual swaying motion that accompanied sorrow she seemed prepared to continue indefinitely.



CALVERT tipped his sun-helmet to the back of his head, mopped the copious perspiration from his forehead and face and neck, then stuck his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and stood looking down at the girl as if he thoroughly appreciated her point of view but did not quite see how he could mend it.

"Trouble live?" he asked unnecessarily, and wondered what manner of man it had been who had driven Lali into such desperate straits as her government-beach adventure and her present rather amazing attitude so strongly hinted.

For, if Calvert understood the girl at all, the only cause she ever fought for was love, and of late her appearances upon the white men's beaches had been few and quiet and suggestive of an amorous explosion in a new direction.

Just why she had assisted him to escape from the government beach he could not guess, but, having accomplished this much of her promise, she did not seem to have much further use for him. And though Calvert did not accept her pose as final, or even as altogether genuine, he knew the girl was in serious difficulties of some sort.

Failure was written in every drooping line of her finely curved and usually swaggering body, and the bend of her back was not unlike that of one who submissively awaits the lash. She did not commit herself on the subject of trouble except to hold the pose that expressed it so plainly, and when he had waited a minute or two, Calvert said abruptly:

"I go for my veranda. Suppose you want come talk palaver li'l bit, maybe so I fit to make trouble small-small. But if you want go way, be all right. Palaver set."

And without waiting to discover what she would decide to do, he dropped the long, thin knife into the canoe, turned sharply and walked up the lime-bordered path to the house.

The beach, of course, was in complete darkness, but this seemed to make no difference to Calvert, either in the matter of where to put his feet, or in his attitude toward his something-like-divine right to be there at that time.

There was nothing of hesitation or even of caution in his step. This was his own domain. Here he was the law. And the faint rising and falling of drums down river did not appear to enter into his calculations at all.

He swaggered up to the short flight of steps leading to his veranda and cleared them almost at a bound; entered his battered looking little office, found a box of matches and lighted the standlamp that at once became a beacon of defiance to government and rebel alike.

Then, immediately rummaging in his old black desk, he found a revolver wrapped in an ancient piece of chamois, and, having loaded the weapon and weighted down his pockets with a liberal supply of extra charges, he remembered that there was a rifle at the bottom of one of his trunks.

So he dug it out, wiped the oil off it, looked over his supply of cartridges, loaded the gun and carried the whole arsenal out to the veranda in the most business-like manner.

With his sun-helmet tipped farther back than ever, his face streaming with perspiration, his shirt thrown wide open at the neck, his white shoes watersoaked, his sacred trousers smeared with mud and water and streaked with spots of green as a result of his crawl on the government beach lawn, this Calvert was as different from the Calvert of the late afternoon as that one had been different from still another.

All of the preliminaries attended to, the revolver in his belt, the rifle leaning casually against the veranda rail, the cartridges thrust under his chair out of sight, Calvert scanned the black length of the mangrove-bound river up and down for a few minutes and waited the anticipated appearance of Lali. Then, since the girl seemed to be in no hurry about it, he thought he would like to have a drink.

There was no boy handy, so he went out to the dining room—being a trader, Calvert knew it as the saloon—and having no trouble in finding bottles and glasses, served himself and carried the bottle out to the veranda just in case, later on, he might like another drink.

Thus, seated once more in the tumble down Madeira chair, his good right hand gripping a tall, amber-filled glass, Calvert had, with the aid of a woman, "black but comely as the tents of Kedar," come back to his own.

This was his kingdom. Here, by all the gods, he was king and prime minister and colonial secretary—the whole kit and boodle. And he was going to defend his kingdom as long as he could fire a shot and say, "Go to ——" in understandable English.

What right had MacConnachie or Kenley—?

Calvert's red-rimmed, drunken eyes narrowed in an ugly fashion. He *was* drunk, though he had barely touched the brandy in the tall glass; drunk with a savage indignation that had not given voice in many years; and the strenuous trip up-river had served only to increase this seething desire for the kind of action that would allow him to assert himself in real earnest.

He did not analyze it in this way. The thing was there, boiling inside his head just as if the thunder of Madugu's wholly unexpected rifle shot had awakened from a long sleep all of the forces capable of arousing a sluggish ego to life.

The blow he had struck MacConnachie

was as nothing in comparison. Not until the shot had so suddenly placed him in a position demanding instant and commanding action, but Calvert really become aware of something approximating his true situation.

Being called a swine had been simply an insult. He had become accustomed to those. But, being shot at with indiscriminating bullets like a stray dog among sheep in the dark—that kind of thing was altogether too much noise to make over a man who just wanted a drink. And Calvert's nerves did not like sudden and tremendous thunders in any case.

So he sat, narrow-eyed, glass in hand, scowling most unpleasantly at the vague and scanty lights down river; a big, powerful and uncanny man with several lively—s leaping in each blue eye.



AND then he heard a step that scraped and dragged its way upstairs and along his veranda; a step that seemed to carry the weight of a thousand years upon his shoulders.

Presently he saw Lali making her way toward him, gripping the veranda rail at every step, her head bent far forward so that she gave an appearance of being ready to sprawl upon her face at any moment. Her overcloth, which had formerly been wrapped around her waist like a belt, was now bunched limply in one hand, most of it trailing sloppily upon the floor.

Calvert was on his feet in an instant.

"What's matter?" he demanded, moving toward her with heavy strides. "Here! Drink this."

Lali's head came up a little. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the stony stare in her eyes and of the ghastly baring of her teeth in a smile.

"I no—*savez*—drink gin," the good girl in Lali said in thick and whispery politeness; then, allowing her hand to release its grip upon the veranda rail, she slipped into a black little heap at his feet.

"—!"

CHAPTER XIII

A DECISION

CALVERT stepped back a pace and looked down at the girl for a few silent but expressive seconds, then drank at least half of the tall glass at a gulp. After which,

when he had put the glass carefully down upon the table, he gave his attention exclusively to Lali.

Picking her up, he carried her into his office, where he laid her upon a couch that, in spots, was evidently not ashamed to show what it was stuffed with; and when he straightened up he noted that his right sleeve and shoulder, which had supported Lali's back, were daubed with blood.

This, when Calvert had said what he thought of the mess, led to the startling discovery that Lali, the daughter of Okpari, had not only been soundly flogged with a hippo-hide thong, but also, that some one with an eye to some kind of future effect, had maliciously deepened, with a knife, the lacerations made by the hippo-hide; crude, savage slashes that, if Calvert guessed aright, had been a hurried afterthought.

Why whoever had done this thing had not finished the job and killed the girl outright, Calvert could not imagine. But he did know that unless the unsightly cuts were immediately attended to, infection would probably set in, and his situation, as well as Lali's, would promptly become still more desperate.

Therefore, for the succeeding fifteen or twenty minutes, Calvert worked even harder than he had done on the journey up river.

His attitude toward the wielder of the hippo-hide and the knife was not at all amiable when he began. When he finished it was hardly short of murderous.

Hot water, iodine and bandage cloth, most of it a bed sheet cut in strips, were his principal external ingredients; brandy and quinine the best he could do internally. But in a very little while and with scarcely a moan, Lali was asleep, looking not at all unlike an Egyptian mummy from shoulders to waist.

A steamer rug served to blot out this effect, and Calvert, having reviewed his handiwork with lowered brows, passed thoughtfully into his bedroom to remove his blood-smeared shirt and put on a clean one. This, before he went out to the veranda to finish his drink.

However, he finished it, and once more staring heavily at the river, which told him nothing at all, he absently poured himself another.

It would be several days, perhaps several weeks, before Lali would be able to leave his beach with any kind of reasonable chance of

using a paddle. And this was too long; much too long.

So he thought the best thing to do would be to take her down to Dr. Allen and have him—and then he remembered that Lali, being one of the enemy, would not be in the least likely to want to do this, and he did not care for the idea of lugging her down there by force, when she was in such shape as to be unable to make much of a fight against it.

After all, she had given him the help he needed to get away from the government beach, when she could, much more simply, have cut his throat. So he concluded it would probably be better to come to no decisions until Lali awoke and gave an account of herself.

It puzzled him not a little to guess where the dastardly attack the girl had suffered had happened. Certainly there had been no time lost. The whole business could not have taken longer than half an hour.

Calvert's mouth had a thoughtful droop and his eyes were almost closed; and his expression did not change as he rose slowly to his feet and walked along the veranda to the stairs. He descended in a slow and measured fashion, making no effort to step quietly or in any way to shield himself against possible attack if there were any prowlers around.

When he turned in the direction of the gig-wharf, there might have been a watch-boy with a lantern showing him the way, for all the difference the lack of one made in his manner. Only when he reached the gig-wharf and stood looking down at Lali's canoe, which was carefully tied up to the wharf-rail, did Calvert's eyes snap open.

The canoe's position had not changed since he had stepped out of it, and a second and closer look discovered the silk handkerchief Lali had taken from her head lying just where she had thrown it in her startling fit of dejection. Also the girl's knife.

Calvert did not care for this at all. To him, it meant that the flogging had taken place on his beach, right under his figurative nose; and while it was bad enough for a P.W.D. man to call him a swine, and Kenley to order him about like a house boy, it was infinitely worse for a — head-chopping Ibo to use his beach as a flogging post and a butcher's block!

He took possession of the handkerchief and the knife, which, together with Lali's

overcloth, he laid upon a camp chair beside Lali's couch; then went slowly back to his chair on the veranda.

He did not think there was much chance of him being disturbed by any more callers either white or black; not this evening. As a matter of fact, in spite of whatever information Kenley may have had, Calvert did not believe that the gentleman who answered to the name of Akka-Chuku was as yet quite ready to begin the slaughter.

And the more he thought of Lali's case, the more he became convinced of this. It spoke too loudly of a marked absence of harmony in the enemy's camp, and of Akka-Chuku's probable inability to hold together whatever forces he had.

Just how far this disaffection spread, Calvert had no means of knowing, but he was reasonably sure that Chief Otobo, when he heard of it, would not approve of the glaring folly of flogging a girl of Lali's standing upon a white man's beach. And without the wholehearted approval of Otobo, Akka-Chuku might as well shut up shop and go back along the street of N'ri and try out his gods in the making of kings, elsewhere.

Probably Calvert was the only man on the river who knew enough to mock and grin at Akka-Chuku in this disrespectful fashion; and the only man who was aware of the circumstance that, in all the far-scattered Ibo country, no man might become a chief or a king until a son of N'ri has made him so.


Whether Otobo or Oku, his son, was desirous of becoming a king, instead of a mere chief, Calvert had to leave to conjecture. But since there were no more kings being created in Iboland with the consent of the government, it was as logical a reason for strife as any.

However, regardless of what the true cause of the rumpus really was, it was, quite evidently, not being conducted in unison; and Calvert disposed of his second drink rather heartily on the strength of this most encouraging sign.

Comparatively speaking, the night was young yet; just past twelve o'clock. But he hoped Ruth Kenley and Bella Todd and John were as fast asleep as Lali, and that the drums, which seemed to be moving up river a little at a time, were not disturbing them.

And as he looked into the amber heart of his third drink, he wondered what Ruth

Kenley would say tomorrow at four, when he did not put in an appearance.

 SOMEHOW or other, it did not seem altogether right that a girl of Ruth's sort should have Walter Kenley for a brother. They did not talk the same language. And if he, Calvert, were to call upon Ruth the following afternoon, Kenley was just the kind of rule-book fool who would throw him out. Or he would have to hit MacConnachie again—something, at any rate, that would spoil Ruth's whole afternoon and probably make him want to get drunk.

This always had been his kind of luck. There was always some one or something interfering.

Lali moaned and called out something in Ibo which he did not catch. So he put down his glass and passed into his office where he found that the girl had become restless in her sleep and had thrown the steamer rug upon the floor.

He picked it up and covered her with it again, watching her for a minute or two until he was sure she was asleep, then tiptoed back to his chair. But just as he was on the point of sitting down, he thought he heard a sound that was familiar to him; the click of oars in the row-locks of a gig-boat.

That they were near enough to be heard so distinctly suggested an immediate visitor and Calvert had not long to wait to learn who it was. As the gig swept dimly into sight past his oil wharf and, with a final flourish and shipping of oars, discovered the unexpected opposition of Lali's canoe along side the gig-wharf, Calvert heard an exclamation in Kroo, and then a white man's voice ordered broadly—

"Shove it out o' the road."

Calvert's eyebrows lifted sharply and slowly fell again. His mouth drooped thoughtfully, a grimace really, and in spite of the distinct query in his eyes, there was a twinkle behind it.

Evidently John had brought a lantern with him, and as Calvert went to the head of the veranda stairs to meet him, the Scot, at his usual methodical pace, came up the path preceded by a boy, who carried the light.

"Hello, John. What brought you up here at this time of night. All decent married Scotchmen should be in bed before

midnight. Particularly when the wife's away."

Evidently John did not care for this facetious reference to his married state. At least, he made no answer to it, not even when he reached the foot of the short flight of steps and began to climb.

"Wait here," he said to the Kroo-boy with the lantern. "I'll no' be long."

"Just a short visit, eh?" Calvert asked, and feverently hoped Lali would not do any moaning within John's hearing. "What's the trouble?"

"Oh, no' a thing," John answered and followed Calvert along the veranda. "Hunh! I see ye're drinkin' again."

"Again?" Calvert laughed, but not as heartily as he would have liked. "Wait till I get you a chair."

"Never mind. I'll not stop. This'll do fine."

And he leaned against one of the veranda uprights.

"What did ye strike MacConnachie for?"

"Why?"

"I was just wonderin'," John said cannily. "They're speakin' a lot about it down on the government beach and wonderin' where ye are."

"Haven't seen my light yet?" Calvert demanded resentfully.

"It's no' very distinct from the government wharf, though it was distinct enough to me from the middle o' the river. What did the MacConnachie man do to ye?"

"He called me a swine."

"And ye hit him?"

"Of course."

"With what?"

"My fist. Why?"

"How often?"

"Just once."

John nodded sagely.

"That's what I told them."

"What does that mean?" Calvert asked with an expectant grin, and John's long face became a little shorter in the briefest of smiles.

"MacConnachie swears ye hit him with a cooper's hammer or something o' the kind. And, of course, he says he gave ye no offense. But Bella, my wife, ye know, was explaining to me some wee bit o' trouble ye had wi' him when you took her across in your gig, and I was just wonderin' if I could be of any help to ye."

"Why, that's — decent of you, John—"

"No' a word," John interrupted shortly. "And if ye think ye'd like to stop at my beach for a day or two till this thing is settled, I'll be glad to have ye. I'm not stoppin' at the government beach, ye know."

Calvert knew and appreciated that this invitation was the kindest of impulses, even if he did not know that he had made a friend of John for life by hitting Mac-Connachie, and that John was inviting him down to his beach in open defiance of Kenley's threat to deport him; a threat John was most careful to say nothing about just then. But, of course, with Lali on his hands —

"Thanks, John. That's kindly meant, I know. But the firm's property —"

"Tut, man. Ye needn't go to the bother o' lyin' to me. My brandy stock's as good as yours."

Calvert straightened a little in spite of the evidence of the glass on the table and the knowledge of the two drinks that had preceded it.

"I know it is," he said, and his voice held a quieter note than usual. "But I wasn't thinking of that."

"What then?"

Calvert's large, right hand went out and closed about one of the veranda uprights, and his eyed strayed over John's shoulders to where, beyond the vague outlines of his oil wharf and kernel store, the darkly flowing Allobar River crept silently on between its eternal mangrove walls. And for the better part of a minute, John just watched him with a solemn kind of interest, waiting to hear what he would have to say.

"This is my beach, John," Calvert said simply at last, and kept looking at the water as he spoke. "Just as your beach is yours, and whatever the worth of it, or of me, it's all I've got. And if — does break loose. it may find me drunk or it may find me sober, but however it finds me, it will find me here!"

Curiously enough, even to John Todd, who detested braggadocio and overcharged sentimental expression above all things, this decision of Calvert's was not offensive, principally because Calvert could not have asked for a cup of tea with greater simplicity.

So John, knowing when a man's mind was made up, did not argue the point. But

after a rather long and awkward pause, he asked indifferently—

"How did ye get away?"

"From the government beach?"

"Aye. They're wonderin' about that. One o' their sentries was near put out o' his wits by somebody takin' a good bite at his heels. His gun went off and he left it behind him when he bolted for the barracks. They tell me the gun is missin' and—" peering at Calvert's rifle which he could not see distinctly—"no, that's not it."

Calvert saw the direction of John's glance and had no trouble defining the implication. Also, he knew now what Lali had done to Madugu. But he did not know who had taken the rifle he had so carefully leaned against a shrub.

"No, John, that's not it," he said, thinking rapidly the while. "And I haven't taken to biting Hausa sentries yet."

"No? But maybe—oh, well, that's your business."

A pause, in which John seemed to be considering the advisability of giving a man like Calvert any kind of advice.

"Still, if ye can find it convenient I think ye'd be better to be sober when Kenley comes lookin' for ye the morn. Ye'll not be a very convincin' talker if——"

John stopped short.

His long chin lifted with a jerk, then swung with slow deliberation in the direction of Calvert's office.

CHAPTER XIV

THE THIRD DRINK

"WHAT was that? Who's that groanin' in there?"

This time Lali had not cried out. But the moans that escaped her in her tortured dreams were too long drawn out and too persistent to be concealed or lied about. Calvert made no attempt to do either, principally because John was stalking to the office door at a gait that, though not much quicker than usual, was altogether too decisive to be restrained.

There was nothing for Calvert to do but to follow, and he was biting his lips just a little nervously as he trailed the Scot until the latter came to a halt beside Lali's couch. John peered down at her for a brief and awful instant.

"Eh?"

The exclamation, though short and sharp enough, was at best a kind of throttled whisper.

"That one!"

He swung upon Calvert, his eyes flaming wide in stupefied amaze and anger.

"Are ye mad!"

"No," quietly. "Not altogether."

John did not seem to hear this. He kept staring at Calvert, trying to make his senses and his eyes agree with each other.

"Her!" he whispered unbelieving, and rolled the "r" most violently in his indignation. "That one! And ye told me—ye—ye told me ——"

John did not seem to be able to finish it. He stepped back a pace or two as if he thought this would help, glanced quickly and somewhat fearfully at Lali who had moaned again, then found the words he wanted with a rush.

"And ye told me this was your beach—a' ye had—with *that* one lying there, not a dozen feet from the sound o' your voice!"

The impertinent, as well as the appallingly unmoral audacity of the thing, made the thunder clouds of wrath sweep down upon John's brows like a tornado.

"Your beach! A' ye had! And ye told that lie to me!"

Calvert did not attempt to defend himself; not in words. He simply stooped over the couch and gently threw back the steamer rug, revealing to John's still more startled gaze the mummified appearance which the bandages had given to Lali.

"What's this? What's wrong wi' her?" John demanded when he found his voice again. "What have ye got her wrapped up like that for?"

"She landed on my beach—you saw her canoe—with her back cut in strips," Calvert said simply, telling the truth in part. "Who did it or why, I don't know. But I couldn't throw her out. Of course, I can't prevent you telling Kenley she's here, or very well prevent him taking her down-river if he comes up tomorrow and finds her. But there she stays for the present."

"Hunh!"

John stroked his chin and a certain nervousness was taking the place of his contemptuous anger. Plainly he was realizing that his deep-rooted antipathy to Lali had led him headlong into a false judgment, which, of all things, John least liked to be guilty of.

"Hadn't ye better cover her up?" he suggested abruptly.

Calvert did this, as carefully as any woman, and John, looking on, wondered greatly in the depths of him how a man like Calvert had ever managed to make so neat and clean a job of bandaging the girl's wounds. John was quite sure he could not have done it. And with something of apology and awed admiration mingled, he said, when Calvert straightened and faced him again:

"I'm sorry I spoke so quick. Aye, I am that. But ye see—" with a strained grimace—"she's no' exactly a frien' o' mine, or o' the government's. And when I saw her——"

"That's all right, John," Calvert interrupted. "Our eyes have a trick of making rotten judges of most of us. But the main question is, what are you going to do about it?"

"Aye. That's so."

John glanced at the couch, at Calvert, then back to the couch again, and he remembered without any effort that this woman, whose queer and dark mental workings he did not in the least understand, had sworn by all her gods, upon beach after beach, that a child born to one of her younger sisters, was his! His!

Why she had done this awful thing, John could not imagine. And the circumstance that, for many weeks prior to the spreading of the story, she had surreptitiously spent most of her days and a considerable part of her nights on or near the stairs leading up to the white men's living quarters on the A.P.A. beach, had suggested nothing to John principally because, most of the time, he had not bothered to see her there.

And when he did, particularly one night when he was returning from a dinner engagement at Perkins & Gray's, he ordered her to go home, indicating at the same time in no uncertain terms that she had no business to be prowling about his beach at that time of night.

He did not altogether appreciate all of the fluent Ibo curse with which Lali had cursed him then, but it was not difficult for him to see that she was a woman of violent passions who did not take kindly to the kind of discipline he preserved on his beach. And later, when her sister's child was born, a poor, broken, misbegotten thing, that shortly died, Lali chose the opportunity,

since John and the infant were both accursed in her eyes, to clear up the mystery of its rather obscure parentage on its father's side.

And, in Allobar, the things that Lali whispered were usually listened to and believed. Although but a woman, she had acquired the knack of being regarded as a power in the land.

The younger sister did not enter into the controversy at all. Apparently she was as willing to accept Lali's solution of the mystery as any other; and so the story, which every white man in Allobar grinned at and none believed, spread from beach to beach until, upon a certain Christmas morning, together with well-nigh every Ibo in Allobar who flocked that way in pursuit of Christmas "clashes," Lali had the effrontery to appear in John's office to wish him a merry Christmas.

Zatza the Pure was John's guest at the time, and it so happened that she was telling John of the continued spread of Lali's perfidious lie, which she, Zatza—the morning being Christmas morning—had ever done her utmost to suppress.

So the moment had been ripe for drama, which, in Lali's torn and tempestuous heart, would have taken the shape of crawling on her hands and knees to John's feet and possibly imprinting utterly stupid, penitential kisses upon the broad white surface of his generous buckskin shoes. As it was, Zatza shuffled quickly between John and any demonstration Lali might have had in mind to make; and John, using Zatza as a willing witness, had thrust the nefarious lie down Lali's throat and ordered her once more to leave the beach.

The immediate result of this denouement, if she had been given even half a chance, would have been that Lali would have severed Zatza's wizened little head from her inconsequential body then and there. John, however, prevented his office being messed up in this fashion, called for all the house boys he had and bodily removed the kicking, biting, scratching, fluently cursing girl from the premises.

John had a vivid, mental picture of this as he stood looking down at Lali, moaning so plaintively on the couch in Calvert's office; and, of course, as she had never forgiven Zatza, this served as a simple, self-explanatory reason for Zatza accompanying Bella Todd wherever she went. There was

no danger of the story Lali had told reaching Bella's ears as long as Zatza the Pure acted as a kind of muffler between Bella and the whispering tale of John's unorthodox fatherhood.

John became cold all over whenever he thought of the possibility that Bella might hear of it. And as he looked down at Lali, he could hardly help remembering what a most uncomfortable time of it her evil woman's tongue had given him, particularly since he had been so rash as to bring his wife out to Allobar with him.

So he weighed the whole matter in the scales of his own ever-cautious judgment and stroked his chin slowly the while. It was not an easy decision to make and Calvert, appreciating this, did not attempt to influence it in any way. Finally, John, as if he had grown tired of his inability to make up his mind, grunted abruptly:

"Please yourself' what you do wi' her." Then he coughed and cleared his throat. "But ye'll understand, though I haven't seen her, I'll hold ye responsible for keepin' her out o' this Akka-Chuku business."



CALVERT smiled. He understood perfectly and, turning with John away from the couch, quite as if Lali did not exist, he asked as they passed out on to the veranda—

"I suppose you'll find it necessary to tell Kenley that you saw me?"

"There'll be no need," John answered. "He'll soon find it out for himself'. And if ye need any help about the MacConnachie business, or anything else, just call on me. I'll settle that."

Calvert glanced quickly at his visitor to try to learn why John should be so decisive about the MacConnachie affair, but the Scot had turned toward the stairs leading down to the beach as if the presence of Lali, even in her present helpless state, made him nervous. At the top of the stairs he stopped.

"But mind what I said about your drinkin'. Ye'll need a clear head for the queer business you are handlin'."

And when Calvert, making no reply to this, seemed ready to go down to the gig-wharf with him, John waved the courtesy aside, with a furtive and altogether expressive glance in the direction of the office.

"Don't bother. I've got a lamp. Guid nicht to ye."

"Good night, John. Thanks for coming up."

What John said to this was unintelligible. Though he tried to recover his customary methodical poise, he went down to the gig-wharf considerably faster than he had come up; and there was no time lost in getting under weigh.

Calvert watched the gig until the spectral swish and sweep of the oars had faded into the pocket of almost jet black darkness immediately beyond his oil wharf, and for a little while he stood gripping one of the veranda uprights with altogether unnecessary tightness. Presently, an eavesdropper might have heard him mutter rather thickly, but not at all uncertainly:

"Drunk or sober—here! Here, — them, here! — them! — them! — them!"

The veranda rail shook and the knuckle bones of Calvert's large right hand, clutching the upright, showed white and whiter under the influence of this most unusual outburst. His normally somnolent blue eyes came out of the shadows beneath his bushy eyebrows and hurled lightning flashes of defiance down river. And whatever his defiance was worth, there was no mistaking its sincerity.

Then, with a gesture of impatience with himself for self-revelation of this kind, he turned his back upon the river and returned to his chair.

Here, he sat for a long time, his chin drooped upon his chest, his hands resting limply on the sagging arms of the chair. Occasionally Lali moaned and every now and then the sound of the drums came rumbling in crescendo up river. But Calvert, for more than an hour, paid no attention to either. Neither did he touch the glass that stood upon the table beside him.

He was not trying to reform; nor was he conscious of any fight to refrain from passing the border line of the third drink. Nothing like this entered his head. He was sullenly but simply trying to decide whether Kenley should find him drunk or sober.

For himself, he did not care how Kenley found him or what he would think about it when he did. But with Lali on his hands—well, as John Todd had casually remarked, he would need to have his wits about him.

Of course, he held no brief for Lali's de-

liberate and malicious effort to rob John of his priceless reputation; neither did he condone the girl's association with the head-chopping Akka-Chuku. These were crimes and offenses altogether reprehensible, to be squelched and punished without any quality of mercy whatever.

But he did not think this was quite the time to do it. For the present, Lali was as effectually squelched as was necessary, and a little later on, Calvert thought, would be time enough to give Kenley a chance to consult the printed page to see what should be done about it. Besides, there was just a bare chance that Lali could be induced to tell him the story of the flogging.

Therefore, there did not seem to be anything for it but to keep sober.

However, he did not presume to make a decision. Decisions were too arbitrary. He had already made one decision for that evening and its effect upon his nervous system would probably be felt for hours, perhaps days, depending upon how much he had to fight for it. So that one decision in an evening was enough. Tentatively—the matter later to be taken under further advisement—he would remain sober. But in case he should happen to want to change his mind—

He glanced at the third drink and hurriedly glanced away again, rising abruptly from his chair and stalking in long, nervous strides into the office.

There was no need for this. Lali was not moaning now, but had evidently passed the stage where the pain was affecting the character of her dreams. Calvert thought, however, it was just as well to look into the office once in a while to be sure she had not kicked the steamer rug on the floor. But, finding she was sleeping rather peacefully, he stood looking down at her as though he resented the fact that she needed no attention.

Then, because it gave him something to do, he fell to wondering what strange impulse or scheme had led her to conduct him back to his own beach, only to become so suddenly and startlingly overtaken with such a profound sense of defeat and the general uselessness of all ambition and vanity.

Also, who had cracked the twig on the other side of the lime bush? And who had made off with Madugu's rifle?

Calvert felt that the answer to the first

of these latter questions would also be the answer to the second. But this was a simple problem, a mere matter of identity. Whereas Lali's plight, judging by her attitude when he had left her in the canoe, had its roots embedded in passion and hate and heaven only knew what dark and bloody history.

He ambled out to the veranda again, feeling certain that a drink would help him to think more clearly, but when he was a step or two away from his chair and the little table beside it, he stopped, paused a second or two, rubbing his chin, then turned and walked with an assumption of nonchalance toward the stairs.

Passing down to the beach at a leisurely gait, he ambled to the oil wharf and stood on the outermost edge of it looking glumly out upon the forbidding face of the sluggishly flowing river.

There were no trade canoes drifting past to do business at the various beaches in the

morning. The beach bells, usually rung ship fashion, every half hour, and which had kept Calvert mournful but welcome company through many a sleepless night, were as voiceless as the dumb shadow of the mangroves.

And under Calvert's feet, the ink-black water creeping by, lapped the oil wharf piles with a whispering little slap that seemed afraid of making itself heard.

The drums had quieted down to a mere murmur. Often, for minutes at a time, they could not be heard at all. And finally the few vague and scattered lights down river had vanished one by one, and the night of promised thunder and of blood, seemed to have given way to a night of silence and of sleep.

So, after a while, Calvert took the hint.

He was not at all sure he would sleep. But everything, with that confounded third drink still standing on the little table beside his chair, was worth a trial.

TO BE CONTINUED

Plants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Life and Beauty

I

QUEER things happen daily on the road through life, don't they? There seems always to be some one to learn patience, to try to gather courage from, does there not? And much more often than not, it seems to me, one may learn those things best worth knowing from the simplest people. It is amusing to me always to hear highly educated men speak of the things that to them seem of such importance—and often folk who think themselves to be cultured strike me, who live amongst the simpler people, as sadly barbaric—barbaric as old emperors of Rome, seated in curtained halls to eat the breasts of nightingales; while outside ripe fruit was hanging and the live birds sang.

Tastes and opinions may vary, but beauty does not change, and is, I think, found best and brightest in the lives of the common

folk. There are no flowers more beautiful than wild flowers; none sweeter scented. Hot-house plants call for hot-house treatment and wither and fade in the cold clear light of the open sky. The thing that the wise call "culture" was a wildflower once, and still is; but the fancy gardeners have taken it within doors and made it an exotic bloom—or tried to; but they will fail, have failed; as all man's efforts to depart from simple truths will for all ages fail.

II



I WISH you might have seen my homeward ride yesterday. Like many another every-day happening it was filled with pathos, much of the humor, and much of the haunting beauty that seems to lie always just beyond our full understanding.

As, emerging from the hills, I came to the Livermore Valley, I saw ahead of me the

usual sight—a lone man trudging afoot, bundle in hand. He was a little man, limping somewhat, like a lame bird at the side of the road, evidently foot-weary. He climbed in with a burst of talk so sudden and so exuberant that he seemed not to be a grown man at all, but rather a number of children all rolled up into the frame of a grown-up.

He took no heed of the place I made for him on the seat behind me, but knelt at once on the floor beside my seat, his eyes on the road ahead, and his hands clasped together like the hands of those painted saints one sees upon the great stained windows of cathedrals. Before he spoke my mind flew back to the wonderful east window of a cathedral through the aisles of which I wandered near to sunset time one evening when I was a boy. It was not yet sunset, though the sky was golding, when I picked my tramp up yesterday.

He was a thin-faced little party; a brown-skinned man from one of the Latin countries. His eyes were exceedingly bright; a remarkable light in them. I liked his genuine face at once, and wondered who he would turn out to be—scissors-grinder, milker, cobbler or tailor out of work? His old clothes showed the marks of poverty, and were dark colored; matching his complexion.

"I preach—" he said; his voice so thrilled with ardor that its quick lightness matched the light within his eyes.

I said nothing. One does not talk in the presence of preachers. One harkens to see of what it is they preach; keeping silence and thinking one's own thoughts.

His face quite pitifully eager he asked me a sudden quick question as to my religion.

I made no reply; but I think he must have known that I had sympathy with him for he did not start to preach to me; evidently taking it for granted that we were two of a kind—which, since I had not spoken, put him on a level infinitely higher than the usual preacher who must forthwith hear an oral confession of a set faith, an instant admission of belonging to some sect—preferably his own.

"I 'ave ze peace, ze lov'," he cried, his hands clasped before him, his eyes on the open road ahead.

"Ah, I cannot preach 'nough—cannot praise 'nough," he added. Then, kneeling at my side he told me, in swift broken En-

glish, of how ill he had been, how weak; of how of late he had been getting better and of his gratitude.

It was easy to see that he was ill, very ill.

I sat silent, trying to puzzle out life's puzzle.

He was going down into the country to look for a job. He told me that he worked at whatever he could find to do, and spoke of many jobs that he had done; mixing concrete amongst them! Work for a giant; not for a frail wayside missionary.

"I 'ave to 'ave 'nough monay—just 'nough so can eat, an' some clothes—just 'nough to get along, mister—zen I preach," he said, and added, all in a breath, "Ah—I 'ave ze lov'—ze peace."

It was very pleasant companionship; a preacher so unusual, so willing to accept for his comrade one who made no confession of any faith at all; who only smiled and tried to understand.

Presently he fell silent. On a stretch of bad road I was preoccupied with my driving; but, looking presently, saw that, still on his knees, he leaned backward against the seat, his hands still clasped. He was smiling, though with pain in every feature, and asleep. He slept for many miles. Remembering the old blood-stained battle-flags that used to hang in the cathedral corridors I felt that I bore brighter banners with me. Looking back at him, a dying Portuguese, with but at most a brief time to live, I recalled a church service in a fashionable church of that cultured preacher, who from his pulpit asked for money for his vicarage—needing a warm carpet for his library, a table lamp for his study.

Give, for me, the roadside warrior, the warrior frayed, simple, and sick, and still speaking gratitude to that Spirit whom he has found in some mysterious manner by himself; whom he valorously serves without either book, carpet, or comfort—a little uncultured fellow trying as best he knows to speak of—

"Ze peace—ze lov'."

I have no religion. As long as the roadside evangelist is willing to take me for a comrade on the road toward the sunset, while the sky is golding, I am well-content.

Life is fair and beautiful—what comes after may wait.

Driven



By
Royce Brier

Author of "Burro Bells," "White Challenge," etc.

THE matter of Knut Hedlund from the beginning was like the steadfast movement of the mercury, driven upward when the spring-time comes to the Mojave, like a whisper, like a kiss, yet with a power all merciless. In the beginning there was a woman, and then there was something more compelling than the most beautiful woman in the world.

Some who should know had called her precisely that—the most beautiful woman in the world. Perhaps had she been less, Knut Hedlund would forever have abided as a spiritless gray shadow drifting forlornly for a little hour across the desert's old face. For only a poignant flame could have set him afire; though once he was afire the poignant flame was straightway engulfed and lost.

This day Knut Hedlund was sprawled in ungainly posture upon a rock, in Goldbar Cañon. He was as inert, as stolid as the rock itself. A gaunt, big-framed lad of nineteen with overalls of gray, tattered shirt of gray, ragged shoes of gray, shapeless hat of gray. His hands were black with days of accumulated grime, his lip corners stained with tobacco. His heavy-lidded eyes, the mold of his countenance possessed that curious, sleeping quality of a Buddha statue that is a little terrible as well.

Only his hair had color, and it was so bright a yellow as it strayed in unruly bunches from beneath his hat that it ap-

peared conspicuously false, like an ill worn and too gaudy stage wig.

He chewed tobacco deliberately and regarded with expressionless eyes the lazy wheeling of a buzzard, or the sweep of the desert beyond the cañon portal glowing and quaking in the heat waves of noontide. Occasionally with parted lips he gazed down upon a tourist party passing on the transcontinental highway far below, but for three months now they had been detouring the travelers, and even this had lost its flavor for him.

At length he arose and circled down into the little mining town of Goldbar, past shacks with tar-paper roofs curling in the relentless sun, past tiny fenced yards where valiant women fought that sun, denied it with sick and feeble flowers. He entered the shoddy little main street of the town with mindless eyes straight ahead, until he reached a pool hall.

The stench of moonshine whisky drifted like a vapor in the air, and Knut gazed listlessly through dirt-filmed windows.

A young man scarcely older than Knut emerged, produced a pipe and sat down upon a bench outside the pool hall. He was a big, homely fellow with hair hardly red, hardly brown, and a certain intangible benignity about his face. His eyes were that pale blue presumed to connote a mildly flavored nature, yet they had that rare and disquieting quality of screening what lay behind them.

His name was Hink McKay, and many times when Knut had been drunk, and the sport of the Goldbar rabble, had he spirited Knut away to such peace as a drunkard may know. He said, now, with a slow and singular resonance—

"Knut, old chap, how goes it?"

"H'llo, Hink," returned Knut in a tone as colorless as the desert mountains about them.

They might have said more, but a huge car swept up the street. Even as Knut turned, the car drew up, and the boy never completed that involuntary movement on the ball of his foot.

Rather he froze, stirless, a ragamuffin statue, nor could he move though a fire sprang to life in his eyes, a fire like a blue gas flame.

In the rear seat of the car sat an elderly woman, and a supercilious young man, and a girl. Despite stains of desert travel the girl was a vision of pink and cream, child-like and enthralling. Even there, a few feet from the bewitched boy, she seemed as remote, as impersonal, as incredible as a solitary desert star in an ocean of night.

He had seen her before, but he did not know her name, for Knut could not read, and only three or four of the brightest names had grown current among those who patronized the little corrugated iron theater when some ancient film arrived in Goldbar every Saturday night.

Knut only knew that she was a personality of the screen and quite the most astounding thing in the world.

"I say, old man," said the young fellow seated beside the girl, "is there a garage here can handle a MacFarland oil pump?"

Hink arose indolently and stepped to the side of the car.

"Yeah, Cal Hamon, quarter of a mile up the highway, is rather adroit in a pair of jumpers," said Hink quite ceremoniously.

But he still had that resonant voice, and he even smiled at the girl, who accorded him but an inscrutable stare.

The car with a soft *shshshsh* glided on up the highway.

For only a twinkling Knut stood watching it. Then with a half frightened glance at Hink, who was himself intent upon the car, Knut turned and sped down a pathway beside the pool hall. Past the great reduction plant of the famous Tom Jackson mines and the mountains of white tailings glaring in

the sun he pursued the burro trail up Leaning Wall Mountain to Gaylord's Crest, where he could lie and watch Cal Hamon's garage, breathlessly, eyes no longer bleak and vacant, but gleaming like a child's on Christmas morning.

Until the motor car, seeming small as a brilliantly painted toy, emerged from the garage and wound up the highway toward the east and vanished, bearing Patria Sainden to wherever photoplay princesses go when they leave Los Angeles. It is doubtful whether she for one instant had been aware of the existence of Knut Hedlund.



HINK MCKAY sat in his little shack. It was twilight, that hour of witchery when the desert relents and smiles its lilac smile upon wearied men. When footsteps sounded from the trail below, Hink's hand went without volition to his hip. Then he gazed from his tiny window pane and his thin lips curled as he beheld the plodding boy. He stepped to the door.

"Hello, Knut," his voice boomed.

"H'llo, Hink. I ain't gonna git in jail no more."

The boy's face was wistful, wondering, there in the half light, as if his own words were alien to his ears.

"Good news for the deputies," smiled Hink. "You were headed for San'Quentin, Knut."

"I knowed it."

"So few do," murmured the other, staring at the lad curiously.

"Hink—you learn me how to read an' write? Huh? Yer the only one here as knows much. I gotta learn how to read an' write."

"What's got into you?" inquired Hink, but he knew what had got into Hink. He had felt that same thing within him once, in those bright, vagrant days beyond regaining.

"Nothin'. You learn me, huh?"

"Well, what's got into you? What's driving you?"

"Nothin' drivin' of me."

"Yes. Everybody's driven. Maybe it's love, or hate, or gold, or ambition. Mostly, though, it's just fate."

"What's that, huh?"

"Luck," rejoined Hink, and there was a trace of bitterness in his tone. "Just luck. Know that sand drift country down toward

Needles? We're like that—grains of sand. Wind comes east, wind comes west, we go east, we go west. Everybody's driven, Knut."

"You mean we're all like sand; can't do nothin' but go which way the wind goes?"

"Just about that," said Hink, gazing off into the falling evening.

"I ain't like sand," said Knut.

"You can't tell."

"I ain't like sand," the boy repeated doggedly. "You learn me how to read an' write, huh?"

"Sure—if you'll work. Don't like to see you headed for San Quentin, Knut. Prisons are—prisons are bad for the digestion. You come down tomorrow."

"Naw. You start learnin' me now, huh? I know one word—cat. It's on the fence down to the mines. I'm puttin' me up a shack down to the side of Second Claim Gulch, Hink. My ol' man, he's too drunk alla time. I ain't gonna drink no more 'moon,' Hink."

"What the — is eating you?" smiled Hink, seeking to draw Knut out.

But Knut declined to be drawn out and said wistfully:

"Nothin'. C'mon, you learn me some words."

Who can set his finger unerringly upon the hair that divides humor and pathos? Both were in Knut's first use of a safety razor, in his first begging of lumber to erect a shack, in his first refusal of a drink of moonshine whisky.

"To — with this primer," he told Hink a few weeks later. "Ain't you got something harder?"

"You haven't got that correct yet," admonished Hink.

"Ain't got time. I c'n pick it up later. Ain't you got somethin' that tells somethin'?"

Night after night, while the stars glowed and paled and a thread of dawn unraveled in the east, a feeble light burned either in the shack of Hink McKay or Knut Hedlund.

"A man name' Columbus come over the ocean," he astonished Hink one evening. "Say, the Col'rado runs into the ocean; you know that?"

In the months that followed he out-distanced Hink. He told Hink incredible things gleaned from Hink's own books. He started working four days a week in the mines, then each week end would beg a ride

with a tourist into Needles, where he bought more books and paid a little brown-eyed school teacher three dollars to tutor him an entire day and sometimes far into the night.

Soon she saw in him that which made her reluctant to accept the three dollars, but in the two years that followed she knew that as long as they were together she must always accept it. She had never dreamed of such a brain. It was like a dynamo in a great power house, which, whirring through the day, through the night, seems to say it can never cease. He was as incapable of fatigue as he was insatiable—he tossed books aside half finished, yet mastered, but he consumed three more before the dawn.

"We haven't so—we have so little time," he was yet somewhat uncertain in diction, discovering irritating little holes in the dikes of his learning, neglected in his headlong soaring. "You ever read Conrad's 'Youth'—those old men around the table, looking back upon yesterday, which can't—which is beyond recall?"

"But you yet have youth," wistfully said the little school teacher, who would soon be thirty. "You, too, will be sitting at the table some day."

"Yes, but I won't be kind of unhappy. They let something inside of them die, or get to be a—a hollow mockery. I won't. So far, I've only learned this much—that when you aren't any longer driven by something inside of you, you're driven by something outside of you."

With characteristic facility his thought vaulted.

"I'm going to drive the gold from the mines to here two times a week. It's a position of trust. If you didn't have any trust, gold wouldn't be any good. A funny circle."

Eighty or ninety thousand dollars he took each trip, with a queer little old pensioner beside him for a guard. One night Patria Sainen was in a film showing at Needles, and he went to see her.

"A countenance devoid of character," he told Hink. "Do you know, that day I saw her I had seen few but Mexican girls. The main highway was closed that summer, you recall, and the traffic was detoured through Goldbar. It is singular how things inconsequential can profoundly sway one's life."

"Sure," agreed Hink readily. "Look

what finding gold has done. Look what mere chance has done always."

"Yes, gold. That stuff I drive to Needles. Place it upon a desert island, and it is pretty; that is all. It is preposterous that men should hold it so high, should let it drive them."

"Do you still figure men aren't driven like sand?" asked Hink, a burning match poised above his pipe bowl in the milk-warm evening.

"Like sand?" Knut lit his own pipe. "Bunk! Men are driven like sand only when they permit themselves so to be driven."

"But supposing you can't hang on to what's inside of you?"

"The greatest achievement in life is to hang on to what is inside you. If you can do it, you can laugh at the damndest trickery ever conceived by fate."



BUT while these men talked that horrid afternoon, other men issued from a tunnel in the cañonside with white faces, fevered eyes, scarce daring to think their own thoughts. Yet they could as well have shouted them to the world, for still other men with keen eyes wondered, suspected and were convinced, and before nightfall many were posting claims, each crouching with fixed, possessive eyes, like a hound over a bone.

This was gold, not the lean gold of the big mining company, but rich quartz—so went the word. The big mining company did not delay, and a dump cart track went down the cañon in one night. The big company cared nothing for a small, rich load, but it did not contemplate having its nearby low-grade ore property ruptured by dynamite blasts set off by petty prospectors.

Where it had thought to let this ore lie idle ten years, the mining company was forced at least to make a showing of sinking a shaft and drifts for the possible future benefit of some myopic judge. The mining company thought in millions while the prospectors thought in San Diego bungalows and a competence—and in the somnolent desert there was war.

"You going to run that dirty gold into Needles?" asked Hink, who was sent with a committee to Knut Hedlund's shack.

Knut stood in his doorway, a huge, blond figure, his pipe sending a serpentine wisp of smoke up in the sleepy evening, his eyes

narrowed. He knew these men, knew he had attained in four years an astounding new state in their esteem, yet he saw, with a tinge of melancholy, that they anticipated enmity, that they lived in a new and un-governed world of hate and savagery.

"I don't know," returned Knut slowly, evenly. "I'll have to consider it. Come back tomorrow, men."

"Yer so — eddicated," flared a big prospector. "yer don' know the diff'rence a'tween right an' wrong"

Knut laid his pipe down on the bench outside the shack.

"Knut!" cautioned Hink sharply.

"C'mon." roared a little prospector. "Yer lookin' fer trouble, by — ye'll git it!"

"Get to — outside of that fence!" Knut said in a cold and level voice.

"Ye — right ye'll git it!" from the large prospector.

Knut took one shuffling step. His huge fist fluttered like a ghost in the twilight and, the big man, with a prodigious grunt, staggered backward and carried ten feet of the flimsy fence with him.

Three were about to rush Knut, but Hink intervened, the long lean barrel of a .38 floating darkly in the twilight.

"Mitts up!" came Hink's staccato voice, and he meant it for any hereabout.

But Knut said evenly:

"I won't put my hands up for you, Hink. Your friends may do as they please."

This, Hink's friends were doing, with their hands held high.

"Come back tomorrow, men," Knut repeated, and with no other word turned, and closed his door.

That night Knut hardly paused in his ceaseless seeking for knowledge to note that a crimson glow lay against the indigo sky, that the power house of the great Tom Jackson reduction plant was burning.

"I will not join you," he told a sullen Hink in the morning.

"I knew it—gold!" said Hink.

"You err when you let a matter like this affect our friendship. Because it is a great friendship, it hits me between the eyes to see you losing yourself. I owe you much, dim pay for countless hours you spent with me in drudgery."

"That wasn't drudgery," faltered Hink. "I was proud of you. I wanted to see you go on up. You seemed to be starting toward what I would have been—though my brain

never was like yours. But you're letting gold get the better of you."

"No!" declared Knut.

"Then why? You know the company's getting special deputies in today. Armed guards, too, a pack of wolves from Frisco."

"Might doesn't always make wrong, Hink. Who opened with violence? And what are you men fighting for, but gold?"

He smiled faintly.

"But that isn't the point. I care less for gold than any of you. I am going to the University of California next year, and I shall go through it, law course and all, in two years. When I am governor of this State, shall I care about these moments, save having knowledge I was not driven by passion?"

"What's driving you now, Knut?"

"I am driving myself, man. If I were being driven like sand across the Mojave I would join you. I would flood the mines and burn the concentrators. But I am not. No one can drive me but myself, not even you, Hink, though I think more of you than any living man."

"And I think more of you," Hink faltered, a catch in his throat. "— it, man, I am thirty, but you're like a son. Four years ago you were a kid of five. Now, you're—"

"But you're wrong—wrong—"

"No."



EXISTENCE was not too safe for Knut Hedlund after that. He would not take himself inside the stockade of the mining company. He knew the hunted sense of the man moving through enemy lands. Eight men armed with rifles and sawed-off shotguns now convoyed him to Needles. Three times snipers fired upon them, and once a guard toppled dead from the tailboard of Knut's truck, a bullet cleanly through the guard's forehead. The mining company acted with a restraint rare in such conflicts.

One evening a prospector spat tobacco juice upon Knut's boot while he was passing the pool hall with an arm load of provisions. It was patently intentional. A titter arose. Knut whirled and collared the other, forcing from him a surprised apology, but a dozen men were upon him. Nor did Hink intervene this time with a .38, though he was there. It would have been useless.

Knut was fearfully mauled. Naked from the waist up, blood streaming from a score

of slashes, he dragged himself down the street followed by a crowd of gamins who shrieked in glee and pelted him with sand scooped up from the roadway.

"Git up to the mines, you —; git into yer rat hole; we'll git the whole nest;" jeers came from a hundred men, but in Knut's ears their harsh cries were blended and unintelligible, and he smiled a twisted smile and groped from fence to fence, falling and stumbling again to uncertain feet.

And as he perceived dimly the desire of the mob, he smiled again and stumbled toward his shack. The mob, like all mobs recreant, did not destroy him for his defiance, but its members straggled, and some went back, while Knut crawled on, still beset by a wretched few, to his shack, which crackled and burned in the gathering evening.

Knut cared nothing for the shack, but he nearly lost his life attempting to save his books.

It was Hink, who, having followed the mob silently, saved Knut while a score of womenfolk stood by with toil-worn but relentless faces illumined by the mounting flames. Knut stood swaying a moment, red like a demon with blood and firelight, looking at the women wonderingly, looking at Hink.

A chemistry text book was clutched under his arm.

"—!" he muttered with a strange smile. "Knew all was in 'em, anyway."

He sank to the ground, nor did Hink dare to minister to him while those others stood there with graven faces, with mysterious faces, with the faces of womenfolk at war.

And the mine guards came.

Even while his books were burning, other books he had ordered were awaiting him on the station platform at Needles. While he recovered within the stockade, and devoured the books, there was another gold strike farther down the cañon, and the war died, and there were only black memories and white headstones in the forlorn little cemetery on the hillside.

Knut was back with his old pensioner of a guard on the gold truck, and many old faces vanished from Goldbar Cañon as beaten prospectors wandered off into the desert on their everlasting quest.

Of these was Hink McKay, grubstaked by Knut after days of persuasion.

"You are deeply bitter," said Knut. "You

have always been so. Set down among your many high traits it has always loomed darkly. Where did you get it? It will wreck you—it will wreck any man!”

“I know it,” Hink said huskily, “but it’s inside me. I can’t beat it. I still believe what I told you about driven sand. I can’t beat it.”

“True—no man can prevent your being a grain of sand if you are determined to be a grain of sand.”

Hink stared at the floor. Knut paused, then said:

“Good-by and good luck, Hink. Six months from now I shall be gone down into the world.”

They clasped hands, and Knut watched Hink from the doorway of his new shack. He had a poignant sense of gazing upon a friend for the last time. Hink it had been who had guided his first groping steps. Hink it had been who had labored with him in the deep of the night, always kindly, always patient, always comforting when Knut’s winging thoughts soared too near the sun.

Hink, always Hink!

Yet the line of demarcation was clear to Knut. Hink believed himself to be driven by fate, and he was driven by fate. Knut believed himself to be driven by a something within himself, and he was driven by a something within himself.

“I ain’t a grain of sand,” he had insisted to Hink one evening long ago, because the thought was dimly repugnant.

He smiled now sadly, in the golden morning, as he beheld the diminutive black figures, Hink and his burro, winding slowly up Leaning Wall Mountain, like grains of sand, driven onward, driven always, to a destiny unseen.



IT WAS ten months before Knut Hedlund was free to go down into the world.

The Mojave in August sometimes smiles, sometimes glowers. Today an unwonted gray stood across the sky. Where there had been saffron sands growing pallid with distance, where there had been flame-blue mountains, the desert lay stark and gaunt, brutal in outline, desolate and malevolent of mien.

Knut and his little old guard started out this morning with gold worth eighty-eight thousand dollars contained in seven locked

leather sacks each weighting about fifty pounds. The trip to Needles consumes the better part of a day. The old guard, stone deaf and taciturn, drowsed beside Knut as the truck wound down through the defile issuing from the north spur of the Chocolate Mountains.

Then there is a ten-mile stretch of lava flow with stark cinder cones on either side, and a drop into the old beach line of the Pacific Ocean when the Colorado River debouched much farther north than it does today.

This is sand drift country, one of those seldom encountered spots where the Mojave lives up to popular conception of desert arising from the Sahara picture in the old school geography. It is treacherous country, too, and one is oftentimes obliged to seek one’s own road after a desert storm. The mining company has established in the sand drift several provision shacks, though these are now and again quite buried in some marching dune.

As Knut’s truck wailed its way across the lava flow, he noted that there was threat in the sky. At noon they paused at the verge of the flow and ate their luncheon. Knut decided to push his motor through the fourteen miles of sand drift, that he might escape gorging of sandy washes at the big river. Rain, if it comes to the Mojave, is no gentle shower.

He swung from the plateau down a winding road, with the illimitable basin before him, a basin brimming with an imponderable gray that screened the Black Mountains across the river in Arizona and seemed pensively to fill the world.

At the bottom of the grade they dropped behind a dune, and progress became but an interminable winding in and out among the dunes. The old guard slept. Knut was like a man ever in the trough of a wave, with only the circumscribing wave walls and the sky in his eyes. The roadway lay on rotten lava wiped clean by the wind, but after a few miles of this a light breeze sprang to life and dusted the road with a fine coating of yellow dust.

So armored was Knut in pulsing thought that when he vaguely noted a black daub several dunes ahead, its significance did not at first penetrate. As it came back to him, after a moment, his foot without volition left off its pressure on the throttle. He knew this to be an utterly barren land, without

the thousand and one little fur-bearers that infest the open Mojave. He slowly came to a stop and stared ahead.

To his astonishment the air had within a short span become yellow with dust, and the breeze seemed to have increased. He donned his water mask, a dampened gauze cloth, and aroused the guard to do likewise. He drove on, feeling the black daub had been a figment.

But he had scarce gone a hundred feet when he saw a black hat ill concealed, and his hand went to his automatic in the seat beside him and jabbed the guard in one movement. He pressed savagely on the foot throttle and the truck shot ahead, but three masked men spread across the little breach between two dunes.

He at first thought to run them down, but when it appeared to the bandits that the driver would charge them, a bullet was sent crashing through the windshield. A splinter of glass struck Knut in the cheek, but the bullet struck the old guard in the temple, and he toppled from the truck without a quiver, without a sigh.

As another bullet sang, Knut saw they would get him, and the big truck shivered to a stop a few feet from the band of three.

"Outa there!" one of the men gruffly commanded.

Knut hesitated, wondering about his automatic, which he had not yet found time to pluck from the seat. But the man who had spoken started toward the truck with a step of fury. So Knut stepped down with his hands upraised.

"You picked a bad time," he said slowly. "There is a sand storm coming."

"Yer funeral," growled the spokesman. "Here, frisk this bird."

Then, for the first time through the congealing air Knut noted the man at the right, noted that his revolver was drooping, as if its owner were bludgeoned with abrupt doubt, as though he beheld something which he had never thought to behold.

And in a twinkling Knut knew who it was, that form, that carriage, those hands. Hands that had crept before Knut's eyes along the printed lines of a primer so long ago. In another twinkling Knut had taken one step and had stripped the mask from the man, and gazed upon the face of Hink McKay.

Hink, with a hollow loyalty to his confederates, who seemed themselves mo-

mentarily perplexed, raised his revolver. "Stand back!" he commanded in a mechanical tone.!

"I thought you quit—I—" he faltered suddenly.

"What the —!" snarled the leader of the trio, and the man who had been searching Knut halfway straightened in alarm.

"An old friend," smiled Knut, "who must go through with it, now. But I tell you, men, you are going to die."

He hoped to detain them, and the air, as if conditioned upon his very words, grew suffocating, and suddenly a soft swishing sound arose as the wind whipped sand as well as dust into the atmosphere. The four were blurred to one another. Knut fell to a fit of coughing, and the leader of the gang shook his head and closed his eyes. Knut leaned over easily and snatched Hink's gun from a nerveless hand and whirled and shot the man who was searching him through the heart.

He ducked, then, and the explosion of a gun seemed within his brain. There was a savage sting beneath his arm pit. As he arose spasmodically, his elbow struck the fender of the truck, and Hink's revolver flew from his hand and beneath the vehicle.

Knut's upward spring carried the leader from his feet, and his revolver flew high in the dense, swirling air, as beyond recovery as if it had been dropped in a fathomless lake. The sand was drifting with a terrible finality, stinging like white hot sparks, swishing like fine rain on a paper roof.

Even as Knut delivered a smashing blow that left the bandit leader unconscious, the sand was at work, and as Knut slowly arose, the drift crept upward on the windward side of the prone man with incredible velocity.

Knut groped backward to his truck, to meet the dim, swaying outline of Hink, who had seized a weapon from the bandit Knut had shot. Knut drove at him, and once again a weapon flew high and beyond retrieving. The impact hurled Knut sideways, and he struck his head on the running board of the truck. He rolled over, shaking himself like an underwater swimmer emerging, and scrambled up one side of the truck while Hink darted around and scrambled up the other.

Almost coldly, knowing Hink must follow the road he had chosen, Knut strove to get the truck started, while Hink grasped his leg and struggled against him.

"No good," gasped Knut. "Won't kill you—but, by —, this truck's going out! Going out!"

"Yeah—dirty gold!"

"Going out!"

Two old friends, gasping there, striving there, each driven and at last face to face, for ever beyond a reconciling!

"Dirty gold!"

Hink's fingers closed on Knut's throat, and Knut shook him off and again stepped on the throttle. The truck slid ahead. Hink reached for the switch. It was arm against arm. Knut thought dimly of the automatic in the seat and tried to reach it. Hink caught his purpose, and again it was arm against arm. Knut got the weapon, but it slipped from his hand and clattered to the running board. Hink's hand again flew to Knut's throat.

"G-going out—" a sob, a prayer.

"D-dirty gold—" a sob, a snarl.

Knut got free and with a sweeping blow catapulted Hink from the cab, but the very force of it carried him along from the barely creeping truck. They faced one another, spent and wavering in the eerie gloom, while the truck motor coughed and died.

Knut drove at Hink and caught him on the chin. Hink's head snapped back; he staggered and slid far underneath the truck.

Knut swayed drunkenly and stumbled to the truck cab, and perceived dizzily that the few rods forward the truck had traveled

during that desperate struggle in the cab, had brought up against one of the mining company's provision sheds, looming like a great and dismal mountain, now visible, now lost in denser clouds of sand.

Methodically, Knut went about hauling the fifty pound gold sacks from the truck to the rear of the shack, where sand was swiftly piling. Each trip seemed an eon. With the seventh sack he took a shovel from the truck and helped the drifting sand, until there was no mark to reveal where the riches were concealed.

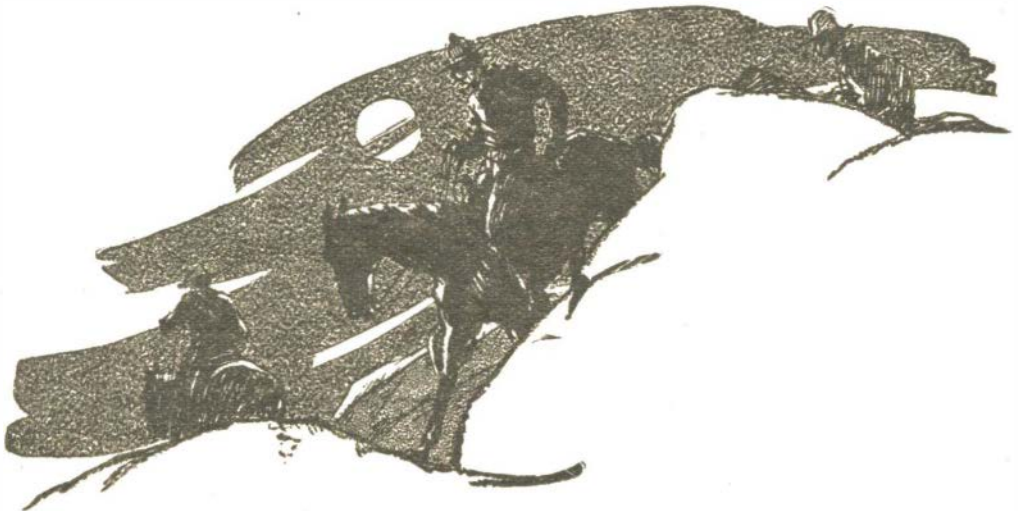
Obsessed with saving the gold, he took some time at this. He returned to the truck but only the cab was in sight. The truck had stopped in the path of a marching dune, and nothing could save it now.

Knut clawed feebly at the sand in an effort to reach and extricate Hink, but his work was futile. Ten men could not have dug out the truck as swiftly as it was being overwhelmed. The wind was working its will, driving each grain of sand to its inevitable resting place to fill for ever the bitter cup of Hink McKay.

And the next morning, when the members of the searching party broke in upon the cabin, they found Knut delirious from a gunshot wound in the side.

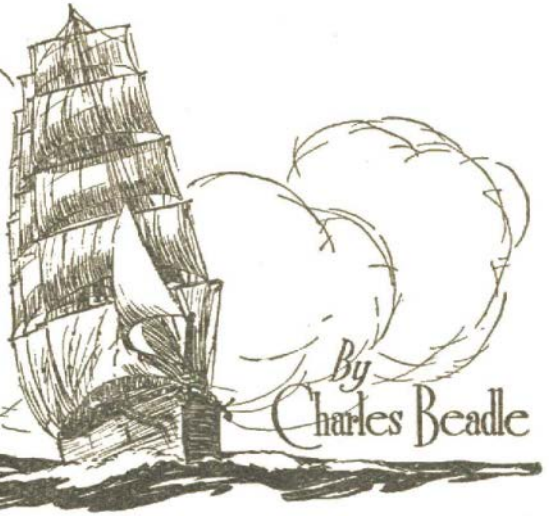
"The gold's—going out—going out," he whispered.

Nor did he know that whisper was the thunder of the inner might by which he was driven.



Romance

A Complete
Novelette



Author of "The Blond Spiders," "The Land of Ophir," etc.

O Give me the lass whose eyes are as green
As the pout of a roller in mid ocean seent
O Give me that lass! Ho! Give me that lass!
O Give me that lass whose voice is as sweet
As the song of the gale and the rain and the steelt
O Give me that lass! Ho! Give me that lass!
O Give me that lass whose tears are like brine;
As bitter, as icy, as cruel as thine!
O Give me that lass! Ho! Give me that lass!
—BRADDEN HARDY.

AS INCONGRUOUS as a hen swimming in the middle of the ocean and seemingly as pathetically aimless in her actions was a black freighter, the *S. S. Ryecroft*, in the center of a vast marsh rimmed by the inverted bowl of the sky. Squatting lower than her Plimsoll mark in the fresh water she appeared to nose her way timidly as one in an unaccustomed element, down the windings and twists of the Danube which, like the Mississippi, was surprizingly narrow for one of the mouths of so mighty a river.

About her wooden decks moved deckhands plying hose and broom to remove the débris of the grain which covered hatches and winches in a gray coat of dust. On the upper bridge the stockily built Russian pilot, wearing a black beard and an astrakhan round hat, smoked a cigar as he continually grumbled directions to the man at the wheel behind him.

Leaning over the starboard canvas dodger, staring across the wilderness, was a man about thirty odd, of medium height, whose weathered complexion was clean and fresh; whose eyes, beneath an old peak cap

set rakishly on one side of his fair head, rather suggested the dreamy Celt than the sterner visaged Anglo-Saxon. Presently he straightened up and sighed as if reluctant to return to the mundane world of his duties as first mate of a tramp. He strode to mid-bridge, glanced from force of habit at the compass and remarked—

"D'you think we'll fetch it before sun-down, Pilot?"

"Yass, I dink so," returned the Russian and, pointing aft over the port quarter to a speck newly come upon the horizon from which they appeared to be steaming away, added: "Dere is him. We make big bend and come back, yass. Leetle more bort," he said, gesturing to the man at the wheel.

"Ah, zo. Steady! Your cabdain," he added politely, "he iss fery bad, yass?"

"Yes, I think he is," answered the mate. "Much better have gone to hospital in Galatz, I think."

"Yass, oh, yass," agreed the pilot. "Then he die comfortable, yass."

"That's exactly why he wouldn't go into your hospital," retorted the mate slightly amused. "The old man won't die. He's too tough. Besides," he muttered to himself *sotto voce*, "the idea that I would have the command for half a trip would keep the old — alive!"

Just after one bell clanged out a wispy bearded elderly man mounted the bridge.

"They've finished number four, Mr. Hardy. Shall I start 'em on number three after dinner?"

"All right do, Mr. Simmins," responded Hardy and leaving the bridge went below.

His cabin gave in to the starboard alleyway, as most officer's berths do on old-fashioned boats, and contained the customary washstand and locker seat; over the curtained bunk built above the drawers was, instead of the usual group of family photographs, one of a young woman whose eyes turned coquettishly. The lips, parted in a conventional smile, were contradictory, for the upper was full and looked mobile while the lower was straight and hard. Across the arrangement of chifton about the bare shoulders was scrawled, "With love, Irene."

As Bradden Hardy strode over the stern step into the cabin his eyes rose to the photograph on the wall, a gesture as perfunctory as the glance at the compass upon the bridge when the ship was in midriver, yet betraying the same sense of devotional duty.



AFTER he had washed his hands and combed his hair he made his way on to the lower bridge and down into the saloon. On the locker seat to the right of the swivel chair at the head of the little table, beneath the swinging tray slung below the skylight, he took his seat alone and ate rapidly and absent-mindedly. Several times he suspended a fork in midair at the sound of muffled complaints which arose from beyond the partition between the saloon and the captain's cabin.

"How's he?" Hardy demanded of the steward.

The melancholy man with long drooping mustaches and a dirty apron shook his head pessimistically. In the low tones of one in the presence of death yet with an air suggesting some secret pleasure the steward replied:

"Pretty bad, if y' ask me, sir. Oughter stopped in 'orspital at Galatz, if y' ask me. More 'ash, sir?"

"No. Give me some more coffee and some cheese. Is he suffering much?"

"Seems ter. 'E kin swear orl right, but 'e ain't got the same guts, if y' know what I mean. Seems sorter like a hecho o' what 'e was."

He paused meditatively, staring at the cabin from which came an irritable sound. Once more he shook his head despairingly.

"Gawd's will be done!" he added piously.

"Get my coffee and some cheese," retorted Hardy sharply.

The steward reluctantly withdrew his eyes, glanced skeptically at the dirty plate in his hand, and then at the mate as if to confirm his eyesight, puckered his lips which quirked his long mustaches and repeated dismally—

"Gawd's will be done!"

Then he walked slowly to the pantry. However, before he had returned with the coffee and cheese Hardy arose with a quick decisive movement and knocked at the captain's door. The only reply was an inarticulate sound. Hardy entered. Lying in the bunk in a cabin more commodious than the mate's was a man with ragged gray beard and disheveled gray hair, who glared at the intruder.

"Who the — are you?"

The tone of the voice was like a child's imitation of a rasping saw.

"Hardy, sir," responded the first mate halting by the bed.

The sick man swallowed and turned wearily upon his pillow. For a few seconds the feverish eyes wandered aimlessly around the ceiling and came back to the watching man. He snapped weakly—

"Is number one bulkhead closed, Mr. Hardy?"

"Yes, sir," responded Hardy soothingly.

The captain convulsively attempted to sit up.

"Who the — told you?" he panted harshly. "What the —'s the matter with you, eh? Are you in command of this ship or am I? You'll do as I tell you, do you hear, you leather-headed — dago? D'you think the — ship's ashore or what? You open that bulkhead at once or I'll —"

He collapsed upon the pillow, stared at the wall and muttered peevishly,

"Where's that — steward?"

"All right, sir," said Hardy gently. "I'll send him."

"What the mischief is he worried about the bulkhead for?" he commented as he closed the door.

He sent the melancholy steward to the captain and went up on the bridge to relieve the elderly second mate.

"The Old Man looks pretty bad," he remarked to him. "Wish I knew what was the matter."

"His own fault. Always was that pig-headed," muttered the second unsympathetically. "He could ha' gone ashore at Galatz and got proper medical treatment."

Some kind o' Asiatic fever I reckon. Cholera maybe."

When Simmins had had his dinner, Hardy left the bridge for his watch below. He filled and stoked his pipe and, smoking, leaned upon the bunk regarding the photograph.

"How long, I wonder, little girl?" he asked her solemnly and pulled her last letter, received in Galatz just before sailing, from behind the frame.

Lying on his bunk he read slowly. Now and again he frowned at the sentences. The letter was warm and loving, yet between the reiterated phrases of affection and fidelity crept another note:

Oh, darling, wouldn't it be better to get a billet on shore? . . . When do you think that you'll get a command? Dearest, don't you wish that you had never gone to sea? . . . Father says that the sea's no good now. There's no money in it. . . . Bert Hammond is to be manager next month and they're going to be married in April. . . .

Hardy frowned again. The Bert Hammond person he loathed in the natural way that a sailor detests the home stayer swaddled in cuffs and collar; he despised one also who stuck to the counter adding up life in terms of money; the putty, smug face of the man who was engaged to Irene's sister irritated him. Holding the envelop slightly crumpled in his hand he fell into reverie.

Ever since he had been engaged he had been unhappy. Why? Somehow, that seemed to him to be wrong. He recalled the fervor with which he had defied his parents and insisted on going to sea; the wonderful days of his apprenticeship in the *Letterewe*, one of the last of the Australian clippers. They had been wonderful days; days of bitter cold and hardtack, of heat and monotony; yet so amply repaid by acquaintances with strange lands and people, and more than ever by the mystery of the sea; of the volume, the power and dazzling beauty which intoxicated him.

By some tangled reason of association he recalled vividly how in a nor'westerly gale half frozen and drenched he had clung to the gasket on the end of the fore royalyard, hypnotized by the grandeur of the immense seas, which had appeared to him like some passionate monster trying to ravish the quivering ship away beneath him; he seemed to have attained an illusion that he was

either nonexistent or was part of the spirit of the storm.

How long he had remained in that dream he did not know. Merely he could recollect the feeling of bitter resentment toward the man farther along the yard who was shouting soundlessly in the wind for him to continue his job. And such experiences had not been rare. Almost any spectacle of the sea moved him to a state of ecstasy.

Later he had begun ashamedly to scribble verses after such moments of drunkenness, as he termed it; to his bewilderment words and whole phrases flitted into his head. He would scrawl them on odd scraps of paper and afterward destroy them. At times he was actually scared of this strange phenomenon; considered that he was a bit "queer" and never dreamed of revealing these crazy fancies to another.

Later, much against his wish, he had gone into steam, sick and sorry with the perpetual dirt and noise, longing for the rush and swerve, the quiver and rear of the ship to the soothing song of a slapping breeze. Yet there were occasions when these glorious moments had come back to him, but rarely, and ever when they spoke a wind-jammer.

II



BY FOUR bells the *Ryecroft* had passed through the lines of shipping and great barges nigh as big as ocean-going steamers and was swinging in the muddy waters a couple of miles off Sulina at the mouth of the river. As soon as the pilot had cast off Hardy brought down the lever of the engine room telegraph to "full steam ahead," with a longing eye on the blue waters ahead.

Slowly she swung her nose round and gathering way, headed for the open waters of the Black Sea. After setting the course for the night and seeing that the log was out, Hardy went below to sup on the interminable hash. The melancholy steward informed him that the captain was sleeping, or appeared to be.

As he paced the bridge after the second had gone down for his meal and listened with satisfaction to the throb of the engines, watching the smoke smother the marsh land and muddy waters of the Danube delta, Hardy sighed with relief and muttered to himself—

"Lord, how I hate fresh water!"

When he reappeared on deck again after one bell to begin his watch from eight to twelve the western sky was still flushed with light illuminating the still waters with a faint rose glow. Just as he was about to mount the upper bridge the steward appeared and dolefully informed him that the Old Man wished to see him. He haled the second on the upper bridge, requesting him to remain on duty until he returned, and followed the steward below.

In the light of the swing lamp, for the ship was too old to have electricity, Captain Melton, slightly propped up on his pillows, appeared of a greenish hue, but the sunken eyes had lost the feverish gleam.

"Sit down, Mr. Hardy," said the captain in a voice that was appreciably weaker.

"Yes, sir," responded Hardy, thinking as he sat on the broad locker seat, "my God the Old Man's going."

The shaggy gray head turned feebly as if to see the mate the better.

"We're all clear, aren't we, Hardy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Hate fresh water, don't you?" Hardy started at the echo of his own thoughts upon the bridge. "Seems different, don't it?"

The mouth opened in the silent grimace of a laugh.

"I'm going, Hardy. I know it all right," he added as the mate made an inarticulate sound. "Feel kind of quiet. My body is paralysed or something. Don't know what was the matter and don't think I care. Wasn't going to die in that hole. Better in deep water where the little woman went. But it won't be the same."

He sighed and his sunken eyes wandered to a group of photographs above the mate's head. He remained silent so long that Hardy become uneasy. At last he appeared to be conscious of the mate's presence.

"You there, Hardy? Oh yes, I recollect. Are you married, Hardy?"

"No, sir," responded Hardy in a low tone.

"Want to be?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know why they call me the 'Wrecker?' Well, it's true. Wasn't always bad luck. I'm not a fool, Hardy. Sailor's life's a hard one. They sweat us and sit at home and drink it. Want to be careful though. Keep in with 'em. Make it look all right and you can usually fool 'em—underwriters I mean. Made money, too.

What's the good? The little woman went—just same as I'm going. That's why I came back to sea again. What else was there to do? Sit at home and drink? Too old to play women and wine again. Think I've been a hard master, eh? Discipline. Dogs—deck-hands most of 'em. No sailors left these days. You were in sail, weren't you?"

"Yes sir."

"Knew it, of course. You're a sailor. I like you. Wouldn't have thought it, would you?" Again came the silent grimace. "Wish I had a son like you. Daughter. She gets it, but married, — white-livered land scut. Still daughter, y'know. She's old, man. Look at the draft she takes for capacity. Can't compete. They want more steam barges like the *Farncroft* and the other new boats. Built like a biscuit box. But that's where the money is. Sides have an interest myself now. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Hardy as the old man seemed to expect an answer.

"Well, if you want the command you know what to do. Owners looking for it this trip. Heavily insured. Grain going down fast. Wants refitting—boilers gone—dry-docking. Understand? But be careful! Watch 'em. All owners are alike. Watch 'em. There's the Marmora Islands. Treacherous currents. Unfortunate. Maybe suspend your ticket as they did mine for a few months. Watch that the owners see to that. Understand?"

"I'd decided on the Islands. But anyway you're in command. Choose your own way. Don't try it more than three times—unlucky number three. Then chuck the sea. Pay idiots to write us up as heroes of the sea and all that — twaddle."

There came a ghost of a glare in the old man's weakening eyes.

"Romance," he muttered. "Romance, bah! Get youngsters to run away to sea—just as I did—and be caught in the net to sweat life out—not as a sailor. We ain't sailors, — deck-hands, that's all. That's what you are and what you'll remain unless you take my tip, my man— D'you hear, Hardy?"

"Yes, sir."

"No good, man, these days. Make some other — fool sweat his guts out to drive yours team barges. That's the game. Give me some water, Hardy, will you?"

Hardy rose and poured out a glass of

water. Unused to sickness he felt a quiver when he found that the captain could not raise his hand. Rather clumsily he tipped the glass between the livid lips and was distressed that he spilt some upon the beard. The old man sipped slightly and moved his head in token of sufficiency. Hurriedly Hardy sought for a napkin and finding none used the sheet end.

"Thanks," whispered the old man. "Now go. I feel tired. You understand what's expected?"


"Yes, sir. Can't I do anything else for you, sir?"

"No. Leave me in peace. That's all."

"Very good, sir."

"Good-by, Hardy."

"Good— good night, sir."

 HARDY mounted the bridge in a state of bewilderment. That this man, the "Wrecker" as they called him in secret, a bullying, foul-mouthed type approximate to the bucko mate of the fifties, could now be so gentle, sentimental, could ever have had a wife whom he still mourned and, again, could ever have had the love of salt water as even he, Hardy, had, seemed incredible. He grieved in some way, yet there was another part of him that exhilarated in the knowledge that he would at last have command; then the terms on which he could retain that command, as well as again what at least would be a nest egg for the future, depressed him.

"The Cap'n seems to be passing, Simmins," said he to the second.

"Oh?" mumbled the other. "Won't be much loss, I'm thinking. We'll have a quieter trip home, anyway. Make place for some body else. What he wanted to come to sea at all for I dunno. He must have plenty of brass."

"Perhaps he liked the sea," suggested Hardy.

"Like —," growled the other. "He ain't crazy and nobody but a lunatic would like the sea. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Simmins."

The second clambered down the bridge ladder, still grumbling to himself. Hardy listened to the shuffling steps of the elderly man making his way below. He appreciated well that for a young man to put up with the erratic temper and language of Captain Molton was trying, but for a disappointed junior officer who had had his

own command in days gone by and was within a few years of the same age, it was nigh unbearable.

On the starboard quarter the Sulina light blinked lazily. The engines had settled down into their normal rhythm. Only an engineer could have detected a certain hesitation which bespoke the condition at which the captain had hinted. Now and again came the clang of iron from down the fiddley or the rasp of an ash hoist at work. The mast, with the rake and taper of the old-fashioned ship, swerved over so slightly against the stars set in the black velvet of the sky.

Automatically Hardy walked to either side and peered over to see that the side lights were burning, glanced at the compass in passing to verify the course, and in the shadow of the wind dodger lighted his pipe and, leaning over the rail, fell to pondering the new situation.

His first impulse had been to reject the proposition. The idea of wrecking a ship, even if she were merely a steam tramp, went against the instinct of a sailor. But instantly floated across his mind the image of Irene and certain phrases so often repeated in substance. "When are you going to get a command?"

Ah, when? As most men, before this new temptation had been thrust upon him, he had unconsciously refused to face the situation in reality; refused to answer that honestly, lacking capital to invest and influence, he could not see a ghost of a chance of getting a command for an indefinite period of years; refused to see Simmins, old and disappointed, pointing like a ghastly finger of Fate to his probable future. Always there had seemed vaguely that something might turn up, a miracle presumably merely created by the ardency of his desire.

Now the expected miracle had happened; the chance for which he had prayed and hoped. But one had to be careful, as the Old Man had hinted.

Why, he reflected indignantly, more than half the successful shipowners were ex-shipmasters, who owed their initial start to just this same age-worn trick. No doubt poverty stricken or greedy Phœnician masters of the galleons of Tyre and the fleets of ancient Venice had been guilty of exactly the same crime.

Why not? Who was he that he should virtuously refuse to stoop to what great

men of the world had not hesitated to do? Besides, consider what the result would mean! In imagination he saw himself in the saloon of a large well found boat, with Irene sitting opposite to him beneath the electric lights in the skylight.

There would be a risk, but very slight, he thought. Yet as he leaned on the bridge rail he felt the vibration of the old engines of the old *Ryecroft* throbbing like a sentient being, as if protesting against the contemplated murder.

He turned away uneasily and began to pace the bridge. Dreary visions of the future pranced before him. The dismal grubbing and mean life of Simmins became magnified. He saw himself as an old man, possibly married at last to Irene, and with children, yet still the mate of a tramp, facing the everlasting eight hours on and eight hours off, day after day, year after year, developing as many lines of worry on his features as the furrows he was compelled to plow across the seas—all because once he refused to take the chance that Fate had thrown to him.

"Mr. 'Ardy!" the voice of the steward startled him.

"Yes, what is it?"

"The Captain's a dead un, I think. You'd better come and have a look at 'im. Gawd's will be done!"

"Shut up!" snapped Hardy.

III



IN THE morning mist Constantinople looked like a Rackham drawing of the Fairy Prince's Castle. Minarets and domes sparkled in the sun rays amid charcoal cypresses. Even the old *Ryecroft*, surrounded by bumboats selling shawls, fruit and Turkish sweetmeats, seemed transformed by the magic of sunrise.

About seven-thirty, looking rather incongruous in shore-going togs and the hard bowler hat usually affected by merchant captains, Hardy stepped into one of the numerous caiques, whose besashed owners were clamoring for his custom, and was rowed ashore—or rather shoved ashore, for the Turkish boatman rows standing up and pushing the car like a Venetian gondolier—to a quay in those days reeking with filth and litter and covered, as were all the streets, with numerous dogs.

In a barnlike office attached to a ship

chandler's store Hardy found the firm's agents. The junior partner, smoking a cigar which appeared and smelled stronger than he was, waved a fat beringed hand toward a chair.

"How'de do, Captain!" he greeted Hardy suavely, for he had heard of the death from the ship chandler's runner who had boarded the *Ryecroft* as soon as she had arrived the previous evening shortly after sunset "Very terreeble dat poor Captain Molton must die so soon. A very nice man, strong man, eh? Ah, so sad. He wass my very goot friend. Ah, yes."

"Indeed," commented Hardy, eyeing the Armenian with open disfavor of which that individual appeared oblivious. "Where are we for, Mr. Tjemdjian?"

"Ah, yes, of course. Well, Captain, the orders are for London. Ah, yes. That wass the home of the poor Captain Molton, wass it not?"

"Yes," assented Hardy.

"Ah, he would have been so pleased; ah, yes. Terreeble death, Captain. We all must go. Terreeble." He ceased fiddling with the large cigar to push a glass of whisky and brandy across the table. "Just a leetle, Captain? The morning air is very fresh."

"Thanks, no."

"Too early? Ah, yes. Me, I never drink until the sun ees over the yard arm as you sailor say, ah yes." He leaned slightly on the table. "Ah yes, the poor Captain Molton. What did he die of, Captain?"

"Peritonitis," said Hardy who, unable to diagnose the captain's disease, had chosen to log this as being free from obligations of quarantine.

"Ah, it ees terreeble," assented the Armenian perfunctorily. "Did he suffaire very much, the poor Captain Molton?"

"A good deal, I think."

"Ah, terreeble. Ah, yes. Now tell me, Captain, wass he conscious that he wass to die. Yes? Did he talk with you to give you instructions, yes?"

"Yes," admitted Hardy.

"Ah, so?" The big, soapy eyes peered meaningly. "Ah, so. Den, of course, Captain, you understand?"

"I understand my duty," retorted Hardy sharply.

"Your duty?" repeated the agent as if he had never heard the word before. He stared inquiringly at the cold blue eyes of

the new captain and then smiled cunningly. "Ah, yes, of course, Captain, ah, yes. I quite understand too, ah, yes. Now before you go won't you perhaps take breakfast with me?"

"Thanks, no," returned Hardy. "I want to get aboard and get under weigh immediately."

"So sorry, Captain, yes. But you are quite right. Duty first, ah, yes." He smiled broadly as if at a splendid joke and held out his pallid hand. "Well, good-by, Captain. Good luck and so very fine voyage! Ah, yes, very fine voyage, yes?"

Hardy's powerful fingers deliberately squeezed the rings into the fat flesh until the man winced.

"Good-by, Mr. Tjemdjian," and added as he strode out of the office into the sunlight: "I'm — if I do, you — rat!"

But although he stated his decision vigorously the motive had rather been the irritation caused by dislike of the Armenian's personality and the fact that he represented one of the ambient emotions that were torturing him.

As he mounted the gangway of the *Ryecroft* he was in such an irritable frame of mind that his bellow to the second to get up the anchor immediately startled him by its resemblance to the late Captain Molton's manner. However, the necessity of piloting the ship clear of the shipping and other multifarious duties distracted his mind, so that when he came to hand over the bridge to the elderly Simmins he was courteous as usual.

Yet, no sooner had he retired to his cabin and looked upon the image of Irene than all the temptation and arguments began over again with greater persistence and force than formerly. Sleep he could not nor did he require any as he had had an all night 'in' while the ship was off the Golden Horn. Against his will his mind reverted to the words of Captain Molton. All his repressed desires for Irene and an assured life with her argued strenuously in favor of taking the old sinner's advice.

Why be a fool? As the old man had warned him he would not get the ship even if he brought her home; what he would get would probably be official thanks and a bonus of five pounds with the additional pleasure of serving under a new master. Even possibly not that, he reflected angrily, recollecting that the agent would probably

report that the temporary master had quite understood what was expected of him and, should he not follow out these orders by inference, than in all probability the owners would be furious and take revenge by sacking him instantly.

Bitterly conscious of the injustice of the situation Hardy bit his pipe stem in two and swore violently, flung the bowl into a corner and, leaping from his bunk, made for the lower bridge where he fell to pacing rapidly up and down.

"There's the Marmora Islands. Treacherous currents. Unfortunate." Detached phrases spoken by the dying captain floated before his mental retina like liver spots before the eyes.

The Marmora Islands were a group of islands lying a trifle to the south of the normal course with many submerged reefs around them in the deep water of the volcanic formation of the Ionic Archipelego. They would pass them the following night. No moon was due. A slight error in calculation —

Involuntarily he shuddered at the image impact of the old *Ryecroft's* sharp bows against an outlying reef— Then chuck the sea. "Make some other — fools sweat their guts out to drive your steam barges. The old man had been right. The silhouette of the moth-eaten Simmins on the bridge against the blue sky seemed a symbol.

"There's no money in the sea." He could see the hypocritical business face of Irene's father. He detested the man, yet the idea of his congratulations on getting a command, of possibly buying shares, tasted sweet in anticipation. Yet incongruously enough he immediately added a rider to the effect that, by —, he would invest in a real ship, not a steam barge.

He was sure that there was money still in sail as the Americans with the fore and aft schooners knew. He forgot Irene, although he was not aware of the fact, in a vision so intense that it seemed true; an illusion that the deck was lifting beneath his feet and his hands were upon a spoked wheel which, instead of clattering and grumbling, needed a masterful grip, tugging in loving contrariness at the drive of the green sea astern.

Dawn, like a sudden conflagration upon the eastern horizon, startled him from his moody brooding. To his disgust he had not arrived at a decision. Distracted somewhat

by the glory of the sunrise, which never failed to fascinate him in storm or calm, he thought that he had found the strength to refuse. He threw out a hand over the dodger in the fresh air toward a sepia streak of the smoke against the glitter of the sky and muttered once more—

"I won't!"


Immediately a sense of despair and misery settled upon him. Irene and a ship seemed swallowed by the dark of night rushing away to the west; sneers of the father and the fiancée of the sister tautened his lips; injustice and the interminable sordidness of the life of a mate on a tramp steamer appeared to darken the sky. He found himself muttering:

"I shall never marry. How can I? Poor Irene!"

Throughout the morning this lugubrious sense of renunciation dwelt upon him like a sickness. Try as he would he could not escape the dismal forebodings. At noon he "took the sun" and, descending to the chartroom, worked out the calculations. After he had marked the position on the chart he fell to staring at the dots upon the linen, which marked the islands, as if fascinated. He sighed once and then, with an image of Irene in his mind, walked to the step of the upper bridge and as if directed by another personality or so he felt, and called out:

"Seem to be making a bit of northerly setting, Mr. Simmins. I think you might haul her up half a point."

"Very good, Mr. Hardy," responded Simmins mechanically. "Half a point it is, sir!" and repeated the new course to the man at the wheel.

 HARDY turned away, startled at himself and vaguely wondering at the dim sense of elation which arose, not as he was inclined to imagine from the decision in itself, but from the fact of having made a decision. But this emotion was short-lived. Smoking his pipe and leaning over the starboard rail, watching an outward bound steamer on the horizon, he became curiously sensitive to the life noises of the *Ryecroft*; the distant clang of shovels, the labored beat of the engines, the clatter and mutter of the steam steering gear and the sizzle of the passing waters. They blended into one harmony, forming, it seemed to him, the voice of the ship.

He was conscious of a sense of betrayal and a fear that the voice would presently shriek to the heavens protesting against the traitor. A dull roar behind him made him face about nervously, and he turned the active terror, awakened into a curse, against the chief engineer for wasting coal by allowing the boilers to get such a pressure of steam that she had had to blow off.

That night at dinner, to the mild surprise of the melancholy steward, he drank a considerable quantity of whisky. Brooding over his cheese he came abruptly upon the problem of whether she would be due upon the islands in his watch or the second mate's. Should the approach to the islands be in the middle watch the latter might take alarm at the proximity to them and draw his attention to the fact. Then, should he refuse to pull her out, at the inevitable Board of Trade inquiry afterward they might elicit the unpleasant incident and bring a charge of culpable negligence.

Perturbed, he rose and hastened aft to the log. Apparently she was making good time which would bring the islands due about the middle of the morning watch. He breathed a sigh and returned for one more whisky before he relieved the second.

During the four hours of the first watch he did not cease pacing the length of the bridge for more than a second. As a criminal, waiting for the sunrise to bring the end, he longed for the critical hour to come and walked as if every hurried step speeded the ship toward her doom. Yet as he pondered the matters over he knew well that there was no certainty in the case.

As with all these islands of volcanic origin, there was such deep water than an ocean-going ship could frequently pass close enough to pitch a biscuit ashore. By no remarkable chance of fate she might steam right through a cluster of knife-edged rocks without as much as taking the paint off her hull.

When Simmins came on the bridge another steamer was passing away out on the starboard beam. Hardy became so nervous that he could scarcely speak normally, dreading that Simmins would remark the fact. Fortunately, he reflected, Simmins was neither observant nor quick witted.

He retired to his cabin for the last time he told himself.

Once he started up in bed, thinking that the engine room telegraph was ringing which

would mean that Simmins had discovered something, but it was only the first stroke of four bells. About now the Island of Marmora, fairly large, should begin to blot the low stars on the port bow. Would Simmins notice that she was too far in?

He rose and peered over the bulwarks on the fore maindeck. From that angle he could not make out anything. He crept up on to the lower bridge and skulked in the shadow of a boat, scanning the horizon anxiously. At one bell, feeling like a sneak thief he stole back to his berth so that the man coming to call him would find him there as usual. On mounting the bridge he almost held his breath when he saw Simmins was about to speak.

"Fine night, sir," said Simmins. "Often wish I could get a shore job in these latitudes. Fog and cold begins to get you when you get on."

"You're right, Mr. Simmins. By Heavens, so do I!" responded Hardy, amazed at his own enthusiasm. "Wonderful climate. Wonderful."

"Yes, it is that. 'Fraid my old woman wouldn't take to it though and the boys, too. Take — good care they don't go to sea, Mr. Hardy, that I will."

"Quite right, quite right," agreed Hardy, suddenly depressed and hearing the dead captain's voice saying, "Chuck the sea. Make some other — fool drive your steam barges," and started at the first words as Simmins continued: "Marmora about a point on the port bow, sir."

"Ah?" he heard himself saying. "Rather close in. Think we'd better haul her out a half point," and knew that he was thinking, "that'll be — good evidence, — good evidence."

He turned about, wondering whether the new man coming up the ladder to his trick at the wheel had overheard, or if he would recollect, the remark.

"Good night, sir," he heard Simmins' voice.

"Good night, Mr. Simmins," he replied with relief and listened intently to the change of watch mumbling over the instructions.

He stood motionless by the binnacle, waiting until the last patter of feet of the sailor and the firemen going below had ceased. For some reason he desired silence. Then stealthily, as if stalking some animal, he approached the port corner of the bridge

and extracting the night glasses took a long look at the vague smudge of the Marmora Islands.

When he fell to his usual pacing up and down the bridge he was faintly conscious of surprize that he was not so perturbed as he had been; in fact he felt as calm as a philosopher in the presence of the realized inevitable. He saw neither the images of Irene nor the ideal ship. Nor did crazy fancies return, at least not with any strength.

Once he stopped and deliberately regarded the sepia outline of the boats and stern against the water, the mass of the funnel and tapering mainmast against the stars and sighed with a vague regret as a lover regarding the photograph of a mistress of the past, yet who is very conscious of the charms of her successor.

Four bells clanked. Within another quarter of an hour the island seemed almost under the port bow of the *Ryecroft*. He expected a warning shout from the lookout. Then a mental vision of the chart came to him. He recollected that the scattered reefs ran away out from the lip of the main island, and something suggested still better evidence.

He walked up to the binnacle, glanced at the course, and remarked casually to the man at the wheel.

"We seem a bit farther in than usual. Better not take any chances. Haul her out half a point."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the man.

The clatter of the gear seemed like mocking congratulatory laughter. He watched the stars swing slightly past the glow of the masthead light and just as he began to fear that perhaps he had been too clever, that she would after all miss the reefs, or find by the chance he had feared, a clear passage, came a slight shock followed by a low grinding wail ending in a swirl of waters and a more violent jerk which threw him off his balance.

IV



ON A dull Saturday afternoon in September Irene Shapford was seated in the bow window of a semidetached brick house of the late Victorian period. Reluctantly glancing up from her embroidery for the fiftieth time, she rose and, taking a spill from a small vase, stuck it in the glowing coals and lighted two globes of the glass chandelier.

The glare revealed a fairly large room papered with a gross and intricate pattern of gold flowers upon blue-green. Across one corner, upon a thick carpet with a similar floral design, was an upright piano. Glancing at the white marble clock on the mantel before a gilt framed mirror she pulled out the form of a telegram from the lining of her bodice and reread the message:

Will be with you four thirty.

BRADDEN.

She pouted and, returning to the window, drew down the blinds. As she sat beside a wicker table already set for afternoon tea the door opened and a short man of prosperous dimensions with fleshy nose and straggly gray mustaches entered the room.

"Where's ma?" he demanded.

"I'm sure I don't know. In the boudoir probably."

"Wants to leave the love birds alone?" he queried with ponderous amiability. "Where is the ancient mariner then?" he added, staring round the room pretending to expect to find him hidden somewhere.

"He's late," retorted Irene, embroidering industriously.

"Ho!" snorted Mr. Shapford, walking heavily across to the fire and spreading his coat tails. "What I want to know," he continued, as if warming up to a favorite discourse, "is when you're going to come to your senses—and ma tells me now that the fool's been and lost his ship the first time he got a command. Is that right?"

"So far as I know, it is," retorted Irene bending over her work.

"Fine young feller he is, I must say. S'pose his people sack him—that's what he deserves—what'll you do then, heh? If he wasn't a fool he'd never have gone to sea. That's what I say and what any one knows. If he'd been sensible like young Bert now——"

"Oh I'm sick of Bert," snapped Irene.

"You'll be sick of your young feller before Mabel's sick of Bert, I'll bet!" Mr. Shapford chuckled and flapped one tail as if in admiration at having scored a bon mot. "Now ring for some tea."

"I shan't," snapped Irene. "Ma said I could have the drawing-room this afternoon."

"You ma's far too soft, I tell you. This is my house and——"

"Look here, Pa, stop it or I'll go into the kitchen."

"Best place to see him, I should say. All right——" as Irene jumped to her feet as if to carry out her threat— "I'll go to the smoke room. But look here, me girl," he added from the door, "just you remember that I won't let any girl of mine waste 'erself on a feller who hasn't a cent. See?"

Irene sighed. As he left the room came a *rat-tat-tat-tat* on the front door. Dropping her embroidery on the chair Irene started up, hesitated, and sat down. A maid's foot-step sounded, and the mumble of a male voice. When Hardy entered the room he found Irene busily embroidering.

"Hullo, Bradden dear," she said, looking up. "You *are* late!"

"Sorry, I couldn't help it, Rene," he replied and, bending, kissed her on a proffered cheek.

"You're looking wonderful. Oh, Rene, it is good to see you!"

"That's nice of you! But I don't feel it. I'm frightfully worried."

"Worried why?"

"About your letter. Is it *really* true? Did you loose the *Ryecroft*?"

"Yes," said Hardy, slowly frowning.

"But, Bradden, they'll never offer you a command now."

"Oh, I don't know. As a matter of fact I expect they will."

"Oh, but pa says they'll sack you and then what ever will you do?"

"Well, if your father knows more about it than I——" he began scowling. He moved restlessly and rose as she continued.

"But, Bradden, pa's a business man and no firm would want to keep a man who had lost property like that. It's——"

"Oh, she was well insured," said Hardy. "But never mind that now, dear." He stood over her with a longing in his eyes. "Rene dear, don't you want to kiss me?"

He bent over her imploringly. She tossed her head aside.

"Oh, don't be silly! I mean can't you see how worried I am?"

He swooped suddenly, caught her chin, kissed her on the lips and released her.

"Oh you're clumsy!" But she pouted. "Sit down and be a good boy now!"

He frowned and obeyed thinking.

"I wish she wouldn't say that—it sounds like a barmaid."

"You know, Bradden, it's awful the way they go on at me. Pa, only this afternoon——"

"Don't take any notice of them."

"But I can't help it. And they're right, Bradden. How can we marry when——"

"All right, all right. I tell you I'm going to get a command this time. Then we can——"

"But after you have lost the ship! Bradden, you're dotty!"

"I'm not," he assured her. "I can't explain all these details, but that is so."

She stared at him for a moment and then said slowly:

"You know, Bradden, it's awful! Oh, why won't you get a *respectable* job and on shore? Why not?" She moved impatiently. "Mabel and Bert are taking one of those new houses in Acacia Avenue and we could have done that if only you hadn't gone to sea. Oh, Bradden, it's maddening!" He gazed at her dumbly. "Bradden couldn't you give up the sea and take a job in an office and perhaps pa could——"

"An office!" exclaimed Hardy as if he were choking. "Me?" And after a pause, "What in heaven's name could I do in a office? And besides I've fought for a command for ten years and now I'm about to get one—at a price, my ——! At a price!" "At a price. What do you mean at a price?"

"Oh nothing. Merely— Oh I was just thinking of—of the difficulty to get a command in these days, that's all. Come, Rene, let's talk of something else."

She stared at him resentfully, pouted, and then said:

"Oh, all right, I suppose so. Ring the bell and we'll have some tea."

With the burden of ship murder upon his mind the man longed for her more than ever; felt that he deserved some extra petting. Several times he nearly blurted out the whole story, but a half admitted dread that the deed might win her approbation deterred him. He sought to excuse the possibility by condemning her upbringing in the house of one whom he classed vaguely with shipowners.

She insisted, of course, on an account of "how the accident had happened," but elicited little more than a brief description of a perfect night, the sudden striking on the reef, the fact that the ship filled and sank very slowly, giving ample time to take to the boats; that on the island they had procured a felucca to take them to Constantinople.

When, sometime afterward, her mother, a matronly woman with a temperament as comfortable as was her figure, and her sister Mabel, blonde, talkative and giggly, joined them they began to clamor for another account of the wreck.

Then at dinner the privileges of prospective relationship were interpreted by the mother in an embarrassing interest in underwear and meals; by the father in the right to cross-examine Hardy upon his professional duties and his employers; by Mabel in a general appetite for asking silly questions; and by her fiancée in the liberty to make asinine remarks accompanied by guffaws about ancient mariners and sea serpents. Looking like a bewildered seagull amid a crowd of hens, Hardy bore this torture with an unusually saintlike expression of resignation, momentary irritation merely revealed by a twittering of the eyelids.

Mr. Shapford demanded to know exactly what the firm had said. Hardy replied quietly—

"Nothing at all."

"Did you see the Guv'nor?" demanded Mr. Shapford. "What did he say?"

"Nothing, beyond good morning."

Then Mr. Shapford announced brusklly that he knew better; that no man would put up with the loss of property and say nothing. Thereupon Hardy very patiently repeated that on arrival, according to the regulations of the Board of Trade, he had drawn money to pay off the crew and himself at the Government Office and that now he was engaged in drawing up his report for the official inquiry.

"Then they'll suspend your ticket," demanded Mr. Shapford, proud of his technical phraseology, whereat Irene exclaimed,

"Oh, pa!" Mabel giggled, Bert guffawed, mother murmured, "Oh, dear!" and Bradden refused a second helping of chicken.

"They'll suspend you," repeated Mr. Shapford, pleased with the applause, "and then the firm will sack you, and what I want to know——" glaring at Irene—"is what are you going to do then?"

"They can't suspend my ticket," responded Hardy quietly, "unless they find me guilty of negligence and I don't think that they'll be able to do that."

"H'm," snorted Mr. Shapford, "then they're not business people. I would, I tell you straight, young man."

"Oh, pa!" chorused Irene and her mother to a giggle and a guffaw.

Afterward when Hardy and Irene were left alone in the drawing-room, while Bert and Mabel occupied the dining room, with mother in her boudoir and pa in his smoke room, Hardy, the disconsolate and irritated lover, apparently found consolation in kisses spiced with lamentations that, "pa might be right."

V



THE possibility of an adverse decision by the board of inquiry, queerly enough, did not occur to Hardy. He felt apparently that, having committed this "sin," he should be rewarded. The reaction to the persistent gibes of Mr. Shapford was one of a prophet's sense of contempt. Before he had felt impotent, mocked before his beloved; but now these cheap sneers were broken upon the buckler of his confidence.

The day came at last, a raw autumn day, when Hardy put on his hard hat and stiff collar. In the gloomy corridors while waiting until his case was called, one of many, he encountered Simmins, looking more moth-eaten in his shore-going togs than at sea, and if possible more pessimistic, and several of the crew who had been on duty at the time of the "accident." Their presence invoked an uneasy feeling that the voices of the *Ryecroft* would be heard in court crying the truth against him.

He became embarrassed, yet remained buoyed by the confidence that he would succeed. After all, bar endangering their lives, which meant little enough to a seaman, he had done them no harm whatever; he had been in command and even on duty at the time so that the responsibility was wholly his own. Yet, moved by a feeling of shame at having done an underhand deed, he was conscious of an irritation at having to continue to dissemble. He remarked to Simmins that should he succeed in getting a command he would take pains to secure him as first mate. The pale eyes of Simmins regarded him wonderingly.

"Very kind of you to remember me but, good heavens, Mr. Hardy, probably they'll suspend you for this. They're mighty hard on us poor seamen, that they are."

"Oh, I don't think they will," responded Hardy uncomfortably. "It wasn't—it wasn't—" Like most amateurs he was un-

able to meet those pale eyes and repeat the lie. "Oh, I don't think they will," he said lamely and turned away.

However, perhaps his personality impressed the board, and always a man's previous record is consulted. Unconsciously his feeble little maneuvers were favored too. Old Simmins conveniently forgot that Hardy had altered the course the noon of the previous day to the occurrence of the wreck, and insistently commented upon the fact of Hardy's anxiety, which he ascribed to a slightly exaggerated sense of new responsibility.

One of the members, a jovial-faced ex-skipper, nodded approvingly. The man who had been at the wheel also aptly recollected Hardy's anxiety on approaching the island and related how, immediately after being ordered to "pull her out a bit," they had struck the submerged reef. Upon another point luck was with him. In the Admiralty there had happened lately to have been some dispute about the reliability of the chart of these very islands.

Details were not gone into; possibly the board wanted its lunch or there was a pressure of cases on the list. They acquitted Hardy; even proffering sympathy that such an unfortunate accident should happen to a young man upon his first command. Hardy mumbled his thanks and walked out into the foggy street conscious of conflicting emotions; one impulse which bade him to return and confess, and of another to laugh idiotically. He was aware of Simmins solemnly shaking hands with him and offering his congratulations, adding in his disconsolate fashion something about it "being good to be young and lucky, too."

Hardy looked at his watch. There might be time still to see the firm before lunch. He bade Simmins good-by, promising not to forget him should they offer him a ship, and hurried eastward, quite oblivious to a sudden new light in the pale eyes of Simmins who muttered:

"Seems thundering confident of them giving him a new ship. Funny. I wonder. Now I come to think of it—the old man was a wrecker too. Funny."

In an old cul-de-sac off Leadenhall Street was the office of Hacket and Sheldon. Old man Hacket, ex-captain, had practically retired, leaving the business in the hands of his former chief clerk, whom he had taken

into partnership, for thirty odd years of experience of the inside of shipping transactions had made him a very good partner from a business point of view. At the counter of the large outer office Hardy beckoned to the chief clerk who happened to be passing.

"How de do, Mr. Hardy," he greeted, heartily proffering a limp hand. "To day, wasn't it? How did you get on?"

"Oh, they acquitted me," responded Hardy.

"Now that's great!" exclaimed the clerk, "but, lord, won't the underwriters swear. Oh, my!" He grinned. "'Bout time she went though 'tween you and me. Old and—well you know, what, eh?"

"Perhaps," said Hardy shortly, feeling the same nauseating sense of complicity as he had done with the Armenian in Constantinople. "But is Mr. Sheldon in?"

"Mr. Sheldon?" queried the man, as if unable to imagine what Hardy could want with the head of the firm. "Yes, I think so, But I think he's engaged."

"See, will you?" responded Hardy curtly.

"Oh, well, yes." As he turned away uncertainly a short, broad-set man came through the mahogany door at the far end of the office, smoking a large black cigar stuck in his black beard. "Ah, yes, he must be. There's Captain Crumbell just coming out, I'll see."

As Captain Crumbell, whom Hardy only knew by sight, of the *Tarncroft*, the largest and newest of the fleet, passed him he gave a sharp inquisitive glance. Hardy shifted his ground thinking—

"He knows, — him!"

Presently the clerk reappeared and beckoned. In the comfortable office, with a large section model of the *Tarncroft* over the mantel under which was a blazing fire, sat Mr. Sheldon before a big mahogany desk. As Hardy came in he pretended to be reading a document and left him standing. Hardy waited one second and then sat down in an armchair evidently just vacated by Captain Crumbell. As the junior partner raised his head he revealed a long, bony face, bespectacled, with a mouth half hidden by mustaches the tangled droop of which seemed to suggest that secretly he was smiling, a smile which registered the hidden thought of, "Ha! got you that time, my boy!"

"Well, Mr. Hardy?"

The tone and word took Hardy aback. He fumbled for a second and said—

"Oh, I came to report that the board has acquitted me."

"So Mr. Underhill has told me. You were *very* lucky, I must say."

Hardy frowned quickly.

"I don't understand, Mr. Sheldon."

"Don't understand! Why, merely that I think you were lucky to be acquitted. They're usually very strict, you know."

"Oh."

"Of course, as far as we're concerned the loss was not very great. Fortunately we are very careful to insure. Still—" slowly—"we should have preferred to keep the old ship, y'know, just for reasons of sentiment. She was one of our first—"

"What!"

The word was crushed out of Hardy's lips.

"However that won't interest you, I suppose. What I was about to say was that unfortunately we have no other berth vacant at the moment." The eyes behind the spectacles seemed to smile sardonically at Hardy as he sat gazing at them like an astonished child. "You might," the man continued, tapping a pencil on the desk reflectively, "arrange with Captain Grant when the *Wycroft* comes in next month. He's not very satisfied with his second mate. Of course I can not promise. Some captains don't care for a man who has lost a ship recently—there's a certain stigma attached, y'know. Unfortunate Mr. Hardy, but what can one do? Very regrettable, Captain Molton's death. Splendid man. Been with us a long time, too. Oh, yes. You might have had the command if only this regrettable accident had not occurred." He sank back in his chair. "However, we shall always be pleased to see you, Mr. Hardy, and if anything turns up—"

Hardy stirred as one awaking from a nightmare.

"But I understood," he began, "from Captain Molton before he died that—"

"Understood *what* from Captain Melton?" demanded Mr. Sheldon sharply bending forward on to the desk again.

"Why—that—" the sailorman literally blinked like an animal entering into sunlight from a cave. "That—well, it was agreed—expected that—that—"

"Continue, please. *What* was expected?"

The tone of the voice awakened Hardy

completely. He ceased to blink and stumble as he saw the mean trick.

His right fist clenched and for a second he scowled. Then controlling his anger he said quietly:

"Do you mean, Mr. Sheldon, that you do not know what I am talking about?"

"Most certainly I do," asserted the junior partner. "How can I possibly know? What was expected that the captain told you?" he added with a distant taunt in the timbre of his voice. "You couldn't possibly," he suggested suavely as Hardy did not reply, "have paid attention to some delirious ravings of a sick man?"

"My God!"



HARDY'S fist crashed on the desk as he rose. The next moment he was striding through the outer office. Down crowded Leadenhall street he hurried, bumping into staid business people, some of whom cursed and others turned to stare after this impetuous stranger with the wild stare of a sea gull in his eyes, muttering:

"Watch 'em, man, watch 'em! All owners are alike. Oh God!"

When the first gust of passion had passed he stopped to take his bearings. He found himself in front of the Three Nuns Hotel. He went in, ordered a drink, and stood with the glass in his hand, still trying to realize what had happened. Yet it was clear enough. He had acted like a simple country bumpkin. These sharpers—of whom he was now one, he reflected bitterly, by the act of complicity—had merely thrown him over for the sake of the few pounds he should have had and the disadvantage of giving a command to a master without capital. He had been such a pitiful tool. Soiled his hands, soiled his soul, ruined himself to put a few more pounds in the pockets of these business men.

He saw the sneering face of Shapford, and association recalled the fear he had had that Irene might have approved of the crime had he told her. Of course, she would have, he muttered bitterly. What else could she do, the daughter of such a breed? Then startled at the apparent injustice of the remark he placed his hand to his head, muttering that he was going crazy.

"I must have been crazy already," he continued, "to have ever done such a thing.

And, oh, my God, I've got to go and tell her!"

Unable to control the swift turmoil of his thoughts he gulped down his drink, took the first tram in the Whitechapel Road and, sitting on the top, in the raw fog, battled to realize his position.

At five that afternoon he arrived at Cazenova Road. On the drive he paused to stare at the light in the room, went slowly up the steps and made three dirge like strokes with the knocker. To the maid's surprize he refused to take off his overcoat but walked directly into the drawing room.

"Bradden!" exclaimed Irene looking up from her embroidery "what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing very much," he said, sitting down wearily opposite to her. "I——"

"Oh, whatever have you been doing! You're simply covered in mud and you're dripping wet and the carpet——"

"Oh, never mind the car— I mean, I beg your pardon." He stood up. "Rene, I've got bad news to tell you."

"Oh, heavens, the board has suspended you? Pa said——"

"No, no. The Board hasn't. They acquitted me. But I can't—the firm won't give me a command. They——"

"Bradden!" She stared at him. "They've sacked you?"

"Oh, it amounts to that."

"That's exactly what pa said," she snapped angrily. "Oh, Bradden, I am cross! I'll never forgive you."

She walked across the room and stood by the mantel shelf, plucking at the embroidery. He stood clutching his hat, which was dripping upon the carpet, watching the furious lines of her back.

"Didn't you do it then?" she demanded over her shoulder suddenly and harshly.

"Do what?" said he surprizedly.

"Sink the ship."

"What!"

"Pa said that probably you might be cleverer than we thought you were, and sank the ship so that they could get the insurance money, just the same as they do by burning houses. Didn't you?"

"No," he said angrily. "I did not."

"Well, you're a fool then."

"I know that very well, thank you."

He paused and began stiffly—

"Irene, I know you're disappointed in me so perhaps it's better if——"

"Disappointed." She snatched at the word scornfully. "Disappointed!"

She wheeled about confronting him and with a rising note of hysteria said:

"Bradden, you've been unfair to me all along. You have! We've been engaged four years now, and it isn't fair, and now look what you've done! It isn't fair to a girl." He shuddered. "What ma will say I don't know—and pa! Oh, Bradden—and Bert and Mabel! They'll all laugh at me. They will. You'd never— Oh, we can't go on like this. It's got to stop. Bradden, it isn't fair——"

"I was going to offer to release you. I have to," he said slowly. "I'm ruined now." As he gazed at her he appeared to be begging for something, but she did not or could not see. "I'm a ruined man now," he repeated slowly. "You don't want me when I'm ruined do you, Irene?"

In a gesture she flicked the embroidery like a duster.

"How can I?" she demanded furiously. "Can't you see it's impossible? You've cheated me all along. You ought never to have asked me. Four years and now— What will pa say? And Bert and Mabel are going to be married next April! Oh, oh!"

She collapsed upon a chair and began to sob.

"Oh!" she gasped, tugging at her finger. "Take it! take it!" The ring glittered as it rolled on the hearth rug. "Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do! Bradden——" she turned a tear-smudged face up at him in the light—"why didn't you sink the beastly ship and then you'd have had money and pa wouldn't have— Oh, Oh!" she buried her head and sobbed anew.

"Yes, *why* didn't I?" demanded Hardy grimly of the fire. "Good-by!" He paused while she continued to sob. "Oh, this is awful!" he said. "I'm going. Good-by, Irene!"

A sob answered him. He opened the front door. The rain was pouring. He heard Irene's voice once more—

"Oh, the carpet! What *will* ma say!"

The door slammed.

VI



HARDY had taken a room in the Poplar district, the parish of sailors and firemen, and of those born under the British flag at sea; an ancient parish, once the respectable abode in flagged cause-

ways and modest curtained houses of retired captains and merchants, of seamen of all climes and colors, parrots, monkeys, tarred ropes and oilskins; but now overflowed with gin palaces and eating houses, reeking of the succulent bloater and the haddock mingled with the shuffling, sweated Jew and odd samples of humanity from central Europe.

From this aerie had he set forth upon the weary round of looking for a ship. In ordinary times the task was no light one and soon he found the blatant truth regarding the properties of ill news. Twice had he a mate's berth almost beneath his signature, but at the evil breath of the rumor that he had newly lost a ship the chance was gone in favor of another man.

Humbled and very conscious of the landlady, he haunted the vicinity of the docks from Gravesend to Wapping Stairs, willing so he told himself, to start anew in a second's job, furiously lashing himself with the conclusion that it served him right for having been such a criminal fool. But weeks dragged on with nothing gained save vague promises that always were as gray and proved as evanescent as the dank and foggy days.

As Christmas day deprived him of the solace of wearing out more boot leather hunting from dock to dock or standing in the rain around a Board of Trade office he did not rise until late. Just as a writer can not resist reading any odd scrap of printed matter that he may chance upon or a busman naturally takes a holiday up on a bus, so may a sailor never lose his interest in ships.

After breakfasting at midday at an eating house, Hardy turned toward his old haunts, remarking the blunt funnels peering and the tapering spars soaring above the closed warehouses and high walls. Through the wicket gate of one of the entrances he turned, strolled along the dock, regarding with envious eyes the lines of steamers lying moored so placidly beside the silent sheds, with an air of being dressed up in their shore-going togs, yet in their shirt sleeves enjoying the quiet of a holiday.

Little life stirred upon their decks, most of the crew, as good workmen, had gone to their respective homes; even foreigners were somewhere lost in London seeking devious pleasures. Now and again down the gangway of some ship came men in

blue duds and hard hats, smoking pipes stuck in their tanned faces. A lonely ship dog on the poop of an old-fashioned steamer barked irritably at everything that dared to move. From the galley stove of a Norwegian bark smoke ascended lazily in the still, foggy air toward the copper disc of the sun.

Idly turning to the right he halted and exclaimed inarticulately. Had a stranger remarked his countenance he might justly have imagined him to be a lover startled by the unexpected joy of meeting his mistress. But the wide, blue eyes were staring as if spellbound at a full-rigged ship. There she sat regally like a mother albatross among a flock of ducks, and marked on her proudly curving slender bow was the enscrolled name *Letterewe*, the ship upon which he had served his apprenticeship.

The man's gait as he ran down the plank gangway was that of a boy released from school. He stepped across a coil of rope and stood rapt, gazing at the deckhouse where he had spent so many hours below when the thud of the seas had even stirred him from his weary sleep into thinking that the whole caboose was going by the board. Through the second starboard porthole over his bunk he had once, for a joke, trying to scare the 'doc,' thrust his head and had found himself unable to withdraw, which, of course, had turned the laugh upon him.

Well could he recollect the men themselves. Pengelly, a tall red-haired — always full of mischief, who had sat on the deck doubled up with laughter while he struggled vainly to release his imprisoned head; and the cook, a bald-pated, pot-bellied old scamp, showing his high toothless mouth with merriment. Then had come the mate, a tall raw-boned Scot, who had merely stood and grinned and with grim delight ordered him to be left there for half an hour. And he recalled with a reminiscent grin how, becoming reconciled to his temporary purgatory, he had made his body as comfortable as possible in the narrow bunk and had put out his tongue at Macdougall, who had delightedly pulled his nose until he had squealed for mercy.

As Hardy stood there he stroked his nose almost feeling the pain inflicted by the mate's fingers. He sighed with delight and he allowed his eyes to soar upward along the tapering mizzen and, turning on his

heel, gazed ecstatically at the very fore royal yard on which he had hung, drunk with the glory of a gale. How real those days seemed!

There was not a body to be seen. The door of the deckhouse was locked. He could not resist trying to peer through one of the closed ports. Then he walked forward to the galley and smiled at his own knowingness to find the watchman stretched asleep upon the locker in front of the galley stove. Unceremoniously he awoke the man who grumbled and was appeased with the contents of Hardy's tobacco pouch and a coin.

Of course there was nobody aboard. The crew had been paid off. His old skipper, Captain Goldie, under whom he had served his apprenticeship, had long since left the sea, he knew; had indeed become the owner of the *Letterewe*. Now he learned that he was dead and that the firm was owned by the son and daughter. He recollected the spindle-legged girl well, for she had often accompanied the old widower at sea. The news saddened him; the bluff old man had always appeared to him more like a father than a master.

From description, for the watchman did not know them personally, not one man remained of the old crowd. Naturally enough they had gone their ways as even had he. He stared out across the dock with a queer sense of a dream. The old watchman rambled on, informing him that the ship was for sale.

Hardy resented the news and became depressed. Sell her! Sacrilege, he felt. His own state and condition came back to him. He sighed and ceased to listen to the garrulous old man. Sell her! Oh, well, he could understand. Goldie's son, doubtless like all the rest of the world, was crazy on money making; was going into steam.

If he could only have bought and run her himself! She could make enough to satisfy a man who wanted a living merely. Hardy rose, he thanked the watchman and walked out of the galley. He stood on the poop conscious of reminiscent awe as he thought of the cozy cuddy.

Why had he not a little money enough to buy her, to sit in state in that cabin where he had never sat, to have command, feel her leaping to his will? He would sooner have the command of the *Letterewe* than

forty liners glaring with lights and shrieking with passengers.

As he stood on the poop by the wheel his hand stole out gently and caressed those brass-tipped spokes. Aye, they were the same as of yore. They built ships in these days with craftsmanship and pride, he thought bitterly; not steam biscuit boxes or steel hotels. The deck seemed peopled with dim, shadowy figures—those he had known so well. Those with whom he had played and worked, sweated and frozen. He walked slowly up the gangway with shoulders bent and tears in his eyes.

That evening through the cheap festivity looming fantastically along Poplar High Street strode Hardy and, turning to the right, came to a small eating house in a flagged alley whose yellow lights struggled dimly with the sulfuric fog. Opposite him at the table which he chose by hazard was a thick set man with a grizzled beard. Hardy ordered a steak and onions. He ate mechanically. The stranger watched him. As Hardy drew out his pipe and began to drink a mug of coffee and milk, the man remarked:

"You'm a stranger, bain't you, mate?"

"What's that?" demanded Hardy absent-mindedly.

The man repeated the question.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so."

The bearded man thumped on the table with his pewter mug, saying amiably:

"'Tis Christmass. Have a mug wiv me?"

Hardy stared for a second, saw that he was obviously a seafaring man, and accepted.

"Ah'm a stranger. What ship be yew to?"

"Well, I hav'n't got a ship at the moment," replied Hardy listlessly. "That's what I'm looking for."

"Ha' ye a ticket?"

"Extra master's."

"H'm." The man gazed at him speculatively. "Ah'm the *Janette Tregellis* out o' Falmouth. Ma mate's on the droonk and un's gotten in the lock-up and ah'm sailin' wi' the tide. Youm seem likely mate. ' If ye ha' a mind ye can ha' the job."

"Thanks," said Hardy dully. "I'm be glad of it."

"That's a bet, mate. Here's to ye!"

"Good luck to you," responded Hardy vaguely.

VII



HER stern lifted like a sleepy yawn, timber creaked lazily, ending in a squelching sigh, as the summit of the oily roller passed beneath her bows. The dim yellow of the binnacle on the poop and the smudge of the cabin skylight were like incense bowls set before the nebulous statue of her canvas, towering into the darkness of infinity. Sails rapped tiredly against a mast.

As dazzling to the ears as lightning is to the eyes came a hoarse bellow. The world of dank murmurings seemed to throttle the sound with clammy, murderous hands. She courtesied, yawned and sighed. A rudder chain clanked dispiritedly. Once more came the roar, like some forgotten behemoth bellowing in Silurian darkness and mud. Four bells rang out like the agitated squawks of frightened birds. With the creak of a door opening a shaft of light dashed eagerly out of the companion way and was smashed against the wall of fog.

"Mr. Hardy?"

The stocky figure of the captain stood in the aureole of light, blinking.

"Yes, sir?" came Hardy's voice from the gloom.

"No sign of un lifting?"

"No, sir, getting thicker, I think."

"H'm. No shipping about?"

"There was a fellow blowing away on the port quarter about an hour ago, sir. But a long way off, and nothing since."

"H'm. Come below and have a grog wi' me. Dirty night."

Captain Tregallis turned and clattered down the companionway followed by Hardy. The cuddy of the brig *Jeanette Tregellis* was small but cozy, rather like a yacht; for the old man, who was captain and owner, made his ship his home. A kettle clamped on the mouth of the small stove looked comfortbly soothing after the raw Atlantic fog on deck. On the bunk seat was lying an accordion.

"Dirty night," repeated the old man setting two glasses and a bottle of Old Tom on the table rack.

"Yes," assented Hardy, unbuttoning his oilskins. "Unusual, too, this time of the year in these latitudes."

Amusedly Hardy watched Captain Tregellis preparing the grog, according to a recipe he had invented himself, with the

tender care of a mother washing a baby. He liked the Cornishman who reminded him in certain traits of old Goldie, the late skipper of the *Letterewe*. He, too, had the faculty of commanding men and getting work out of them without bluster or oaths.

He had owned the brig for some twenty years, content to win a fair living. Apparently he had no ambitions except to live as long as possible; to play and sing, for like most Cornishmen he had an excellent ear and voice. He found life very good indeed, he had inferred once, and had no patience with folk who were not satisfied. He never talked much, and only in odd confidential moods over a grog did Hardy learn that he was unmarried, that the *Jeanette* was his daughter and the sea his wife.

"A cruel mistress," he would add, "but I love her."

"Never marry," he was fond of advising Hardy, who would smile and respond that he was not likely to be able to do so.

That night in Poplar when he had dispondently accepted the stranger's offer he had had a vague idea that the *Jeanette Tregallis* would prove to be some dirty little steamcoaster, and when he had found that she was a brig his spirits had brightened. The wages of course were even less than what a tramp steamer pays, but with Hardy's state of mind and temperament that did not worry him at the time. What did it matter, he asked himself, whether he were badly paid in steam or sail, for the latter at all events would give him more spiritual satisfaction?

And he had been right. The comparatively long voyage, although she only plied between French and Spanish ports and England, had given him more time to indulge in his favorite vice of dreaming; now there was no continual bustle and dirt in getting in and out of port.

When the weather was good he had time to lie and brood over the past. The voices of the ship obsessed him occasionally; he would experience a mild panic that the *Jeanette* knew his crime, was discussing and conspiring revenge. Yet at times when he would take the wheel he would laugh out loud in sheer joy of power as she raced, plunged and bucked beneath his hands, feeling that he had in some way regained his early youth.

The unambitious contentedness of the

old man seemed to have influenced him. He had by no means forgotten Irene nor ceased to long for her, particularly in periods. There were moments when she appeared a vague but deep sorrow in his life, yet intangible; others when the vision of her lips and body, the scent of her, haunted his senses.

When the next chance came, he told himself in optimistic moments, he would do something or other extremely vague and eventually secure her. But for the moment as the mate of a small brig what was the use of worrying about the matter? True he suffered in the keener moments; to counteract the longing for her he would attempt to be cynical by reminding himself that she would be soon engaged to some one else, yet the intended consolation was immediately evaporated by a spasm of jealousy.

"Di ty, dirty," commented the old man thrusting a tumbler of steaming punch before the mate. "Don't like fog."

"Aye," agreed Hardy. "Like a young man blinded."

"'Tiss so, 'tiss so. Mebbe she'll lift afore mornin'. In a gale now 'tiss fine. A man can see what he's doing."

"A drunken green god," muttered Hardy.

"What's that?"

"Oh, I thought sometimes that a gale looks like a drunken green god," repeated Hardy timidly.

The old man quirked his head toward him.

"Aye, 'tiss so, mebbe," said he. "Strange fancies do come to a man when he's to sea." With his eyes on the glass before him he added, "I mind me once in a nor'easter I was playing the 'cordion there in ma berth and, if ye'll know what I mean, it seemed somehow as if the sea had taken the thing away and was playing un herself."

They gazed at each other queerly.

To Hardy something extraordinary seemed to have happened, as if the old man had suddenly taken his soul out of his pocket and presented it to his astonished gaze, a soul, too, which was beautiful and produced a thrill in the likeness to his own.

As from a distance came the creak of timber, the heave and squelching sigh. The old man sat silently with his grog before him, puffing at a cigar. Hardy, with his elbows on the table, remarked vaguely the rhythmic movement of the lamp and the changing colors of the light upon a


water bottle in the tray, slung beneath the skylight, to the motion of the ship. He was awakened by the five-minute roar of the fog horn on deck, sounding below dim and vast.

Hardy gulped his grog and rose to his feet, embarrassed, as if they were sitting naked before each other.

"Better get on deck, sir."

"'Tiss so, 'tiss so," muttered the old man. "Um?" he glanced up at the mate who stood buttoning his oilskins. "All right. Call me if you hear any traffic or if she lists."

"Very good, sir."

 HARDY climbed the companionway conscious of vague wonder, an eerie sense, as if the dense fog had isolated them upon some uninhabited planet. As he closed the door and stood in the clammy air waiting for his eyes to focus he heard the first chords of the accordion rising from below. The primeval bellow from the tin horn of the sailor on the lookout annihilated the music. When the sound was throttled by the dank hands of the fog the notes darted up like a flock of diving birds emerging from the water onto the wing in the rollicking strains of an old sea chantey.

Hardy walked to the man at the wheel, standing in the faint aureole of the binnacle lamp, and asked whether he had heard any sign of traffic. He had not. Hardy glanced at the compass automatically. She was swinging many points off her course. He walked to the wooden poop rail and stared out into the darkness. The old skipper's voice rose in a clear tenor above the accompaniment of the accordion, the creak of the timber and spars, the gentle sucking sigh of the waters.

"As if the sea had taken the thing away and was playing un herself." The image invoked by the old Cornishman fascinated him. He could not distinguish the words but, as he listened to this strange revelry in the heaving primeval silence, phrases wandered into his mind until he found himself chanting softly to the chantey played below:

"O Give me that lass whose eyes are as green
As the pout of a roller in mild ocean seen!
O Give me that lass! Ho! Give me that lass!"

"O Give me that lass whose voice is as sweet
As the song of the rain, and the wind and the sleet!
O Give me that lass! Ho! Give me that lass!"

"Cruel," the old man had said was the sea. He saw the image of Irene.

"O Give me the lass whose tears are like brine
As bitter as icy as cruel as thine
O, Give me that lass! Ho! Give me that lass!"

The song came to an end in crashing chords simultaneously with another roar from the fog horn. Then the noises of the brig became once more living voices. He shuddered and turned as if expecting the ghost of the *Ryecroft* to rise from the dim ocean, and to cure himself of this morbid illusion threw his burning cigar over the taffrail, watching the small glow eagerly snatched by the damp hands of the fog before it reached the water.

The skipper's mood had changed, for through the cracks of the skylight and companionway door into the dank blackness rose deep chords in slow measure, mournfully, followed at the end of every few bars by a crash of deep notes which suggested the boom of muffled drums. At every impact Hardy shuddered from head to foot. Unconsciously he bowed his head over the water, entranced and yet in pain.

He had never heard such music before; so that he did not know, nor did the Cornish captain, who had picked it up from ear, that he was listening to Chopin's "Funeral March." The awful solemnity, accompanied by the creak and the mutter of the ship and the gentle sucking sigh of the waters in the muffled immensity of the fog, gripped and hurt him with exquisite pleasure. The music developed into a terrible chorus chanted by the souls of all the sailors and the ships the sea had taken. On the beat of the muffled drum came the roar of the horn.

Then began the second passage.

To the listening mate the sadness of the waters seemed to be lifted from him as if dawn were breaking. He raised his head expecting to find that the fog was lifting. Away up in the immensity that had no form he saw vague lights. A faint throb and what appeared to be an echo of the music came to his ears. For seconds he stared in ecstasy.

Then a shout from the lookout man made him start violently and paw at his eyes. The lights were real. A colossal form of dense blackness towered over them as high as the foremast. The heavens seemed

lighted up. Hardy sprang toward the companionway, yelling—

“All hands on deck!”

Came a rending crash. The brig appeared to be raised on high. As she was riven Hardy was thrown from the rearing poop into the water.

VIII



FORTUNATELY Hardy was able to swim. He came up in a turmoil of water, was sucked down in a swirl, and after a prolonged struggle reached the surface again in time to see the stern light set in an aureole of the liner's ports melt into the blackness. Around him as he trod water with difficulty in his oilskins and boots he could distinguish nothing.

The commotion of the steamer's wake settled into the oily swell. Once, close to him, he heard a cry. He shouted and swam toward the sound. He came upon a piece of wreckage. As he clung to the spar, he was aware of the vibration in the water of the propellers which appeared to cease. Perhaps they were returning, as they should do, to search for survivors.

He listened intently. Save the gentle sucking caused by the motion of the spar as it rose and fell on the swell he could not hear a sound. Several times he shouted with all his strength but the fog strangled the voice in a void of dank blackness and increasing cold. He appeared to be alone in the middle of the Atlantic. Then he felt the vibration of the propeller once more, becoming more and more distinct. He strained his eyes in vain and continued to shout at intervals.

The vibration became a throb. He was certain that the liner must be steaming round in a circle, presently confirmed by a dull roar repeated at intervals which sounded like the melancholy lowing of a lost calf.

“Why the — didn't the fool blow before he struck us?” thought Hardy bitterly.

Although they were a little to the westward of the customary shipping lane possibly the steamer's captain might have pulled out a couple of points in order to minimise chances. Any way she must have been traveling at full speed, probably sixteen to eighteen knots per hour, as passenger or mailboats frequently do, preferring to take a risk than loose time.

The brig's sidelights low upon the water would not carry far in such a thick fog; neither would the man-power trumpet. From the position at which he had first seen the lights, he reckoned that the steamer must have struck the brig at an oblique angle a little abaft midship. Laden with iron ore she had probably sunk like a shot. The Cornish skipper and all the hands below deck must certainly have been drowned.

Again came the distant horn which was now merely a dismal bleat. What chance had they of retrieving even approximately the exact spot of the catastrophe in the dense fog? The faint vibration faded.

Hardy heaved one leg over the spar to take the strain from his arms, which were already stiffening with the cold. He had begun to wonder whether he could resist the exposure and hang on until morning when he perceived a slight lessening in the opaque blackness. Then like a slowly moving curtain the fog rolled away to the south. On the starlit horizon of the north-west were the stern light and glare of a steamer.

Moved by the sight Hardy shouted desperately and cursed savagely as he realized the futility. Whether or no she was the vessel which had run down the brig he could of course not know. Peering round as he floated on the summit of a swell he caught a glimpse of something solid and dark. From the shape it might be a hencoop. After a moment's hesitation doubting whether he could use his half numbed limbs he swam off. To his surprise and delight as he approached the object rose on the sea, and he saw silhouetted against the stars the form of the ship's boat floating right side up.

To clamber into her in sodden clothes and boots was a difficult task which, however, he accomplished after hanging onto the counter for a rest. Once aboard he set about examining her. As far as he could fumble and see in the dark night she was sound. She had been lying bottom up lashed to the deck abaft the mainmast, and evidently by hazard the concussion had burst the ropes and thrown her clear on to the water.

The mast and sail bound to the thwarts were there and the rudder, but there were no oars. He found in the locker of the stern sheets a lantern and a can of oil, but the only matches he happened to have

in his pockets had been destroyed by the water. But there was neither food nor water.

Standing up on a thwart he could see around on the sea the dark forms of odd pieces of wreckage. He noticed too that from the north was a slight breeze springing up. He shipped the rudder, stepped the mast and hoisting the sail, tacked around the spot hoping to find another survivor. The one cry he had heard must have come from the lookout or the man at the wheel who, like so many sailors, had probably been unable to swim. Finding no sign of any living creature he set a course by the stars in the direction of the French coast.

Squatted on the stern sheets, keeping a sharp watch for lights, with a numbed hand on the tiller and the other vainly attempting to extract some warmth from a damp pocket, he held on steadily through the night. He noticed that the freshening wind was shifting to the northeast, forcing him to sail a couple of points more to the eastward.

Soon the sea began to rise slightly, slapping spiritedly against the bows and, uneasily, he observed by the rack obscuring the sky to the northeast, that a gale was brewing which, running at an angle to the swell, would be likely to make a very awkward sea for a small open boat.

He hove to long enough to reef his lug sail. Twice he saw, to the eastward, the light of steamers but too far away to have any chance of obtaining succor. Chilled and soaked he was to the bone. However, the oilskins kept out the wind and organic heat began to regain force.

Dawn broke with a dirty scud flying overhead. Up to windward he could make out a smudge of smoke of a steamer. With the unseen sun the wind rose appreciably and the sea began to show her fangs. He held on as long as he could, but when the spume began to fly followed occasionally, in spite of his seamanship, by the lip of a sea and he saw that the gale was increasing, he watched his chance to put about and run before the northeasterly gale, too well aware that every league in a southwesterly direction took him farther away from the shipping lane.

All day long he fled up and down the interminable Atlantic swell running at an oblique angle to the snarling seas in a world of dirty gray and green.

As he squatted in the stern with his arm over the tiller his mind began to work as a little of the numbness left his limbs. The last scene on the brig returned vividly; the old Cornishman in the cosy cabin playing on the accordion, the solemn chords rising from below punctuated by the melancholy blare of the horn which had fascinated and saddened him.

He recalled the illusion that all the sailors and ships that the sea had taken were chanting some terrible dirge, a dirge that seemed, somehow, to be a prophecy of the tragedy that had been then racing down upon the brig; began to hear again in the hungry moan of the wind and the snarl of the sea comrades of the *Ryecroft* so busily conspiring to complete the revenge.

But why, then, had they taken all hands save himself? He looked up at the remorseless gray of the sky and across the heaving ocean before him. Perhaps they knew, these souls of murdered ships, that at last they had gotten him; had handed him over to the sea, so icy, so bitter and cruel.

He glanced back in a flush of panic at the serried ranks of white fangs pursuing, licking their foaming lips in anticipation. Fast as the little boat fled before the wind the side swell flung her contemptuously and the racing seas behind seemed like ocean demons trying to tear the rudder from his control.

Every now and again one faster than his brothers succeeded in almost licking the mate's arm protruding a few inches over the stern, only to sink beneath the counter with a chuckling sigh, confident that the next one would do the deed. All day they pursued the flying, tiny boat, sometimes about to devour her, and then, like a cat, lifting a white clawed paw to enjoy the sport of watching her stagger and rush madly forward.

He thought, too, of Irene and her warm body sitting in the drawing room, embroidering. She seemed to look up expectantly toward the door. He wondered vaguely whether she had any idea where he was now—or cared, rejoicing in the consoling bitterness, yet vaguely conscious that it was untrue. If only he had had a little money to obtain a command, if Irene had not had such a father—if— Oh, what was the use of "iffing"? he reflected wearily. Yet he could not refrain from entertaining the opinion that had they been able, or

should they ever be able to be together that they would be happy.

If only he had not committed that foolish crime! Ah, that was why he was here scudding in a small boat at the mercy of the Atlantic. The *Ryecroft* had known, the *Jeanette* had known and they—he glanced back again at the snarling seas—they knew too. Was he doomed to join that vast company of sailors and ships to chant that terrible dirge until the sea gave up her dead?

As he wondered he was aware of a conviction that that dirge-like music had never been played by the mortal hands of the old Cornish skipper. "Took the thing out of ma hands and was playing un herself!" the old man had said. Perhaps! Who knew the mysteries of the sea? The idea comforted him. Like a bitter caress, flying spume stung his half-turned face.

He chanted:

"O give me a lass whose tears are like brine!
As icy as bitter as cruel as thine!
Ho! give me that lass! Ho! Give me that lass!"

Indeed, he had gotten her and, with the thought, fear left him and instead arose a lover's desire for mastery. He turned and stood clinging to the tiller in the plunging boat and hurled kisses in the face of the gale crying half hysterically—

"I'll master you, by—I'll master you!"

IX

THROUGHOUT the afternoon the gale continued with about the same intensity beneath the gray scudding sky. After his frenzy of emotion Hardy became calmer, although the loss of the excitement permitted him to pay more attention to physical conditions. Hunger began to awake, but the need of food was not so imperative as that of water. He strove not to think upon the subject and, aided by his avowed desire to conquer, became confident that succor would appear in time to save him.

No longer had he anxiety. The ranks of foaming lips seemed now, instead of angry fangs, to be laughing like the gleaming teeth of green tigers at play with their master. Huddled in the sternsheets with his arm hugging the tiller and feet braced against a thwart the exhilaration of the flight across a world of green and gray ap-

peared to warm the numbness of his damp limbs and body. To the tug of his playful demons at the rudder or the swerve of the oblique swell which seemed determined to twist her stern so that she should broach to, he answered almost automatically.

His mind wandered about a peopled plain of images. Now he would feel once more the warmth of Irene's kisses upon his mouth, scent the odor of her hair and see her closed eyes beneath his own; again he was walking with her upon the golf links at Chingford, pleasurably conscious of a wisp of blond hair sporting against her rosy cheek; the *Letterewe* sailing like a white swan past the bluffs of Sydney Harbour. Then he imagined that he heard in the song of the gale the chords of the old Cornish captain's accordion, but the morbid vision of dead seamen did not accompany the illusion; he had a queer exterior view of himself in brass-bound cap and uniform as an apprentice newly home from the long voyage loaded up with curiosities for his parents who were still alive.

When the sky like a smoking lampglass toward the east began to thicken, thirst became more insistent and he was compelled to tighten his belt. The gale began to freshen with the coming of night and he noticed that either the wind had changed or the swell had altered slightly to the same direction. Hurling from behind the little boat seemed now to fly swifter.

Darkness came like a dense, wet counterpane lowered over the ocean. Now he was steering solely by the sense of touch. Weariness began to overcome him. He dozed. Yet his limbs, directed by his subconscious mind, continued to act, as a sleep walker prowling with immunity upon a roof top, with as great or perhaps better delicacy of reaction to the tug and swerve in the darkness than when he had been awake.

From the timeless he straddled into the spaceless amid a crashing world of light and sound. His senses had no object upon which to seize to orientate save the feel of the straining tiller beneath his arm. The boat appeared to be turning a somersault. The tiller nearly jerked him overboard. The lip of a sea swept over him. He felt a jar. The boat seemed to flutter and then once more he was hurled forward in the void, roaring with unseen demons of force.

Lightning blinded him; sound stunned him. He grew conscious that rain was

stinging his face and that in the flash he had seen that the sail had partly gone. While struggling to recover his weary senses he realized that both facts were in his favor; for the rain would tend to beat down the sea and the parting of the sail had saved her from broaching.

He could discern neither water nor sky; could not realize whether he was traveling or standing still; whether he was in the boat or overboard save by the hardness of a thwart and the tiller beneath his arm. The rest of the boat was merged in the elemental riot. He seemed to be dancing like a drunken god in chaos, caressed and bitten by roaring furies whirling about his head.

At last the bewilderment of his senses abated sufficiently for him to become faintly aware of a bodily need revealed by the automatic licking of the rain drops which were running down his face. He had lost his sou'wester in the first catastrophe and dared not release even one hand from the tiller but, hunching his shoulders, he contrived to suck the rain as it streamed down his oilskin.

The stimulation brought a keener sense of impotency, yet did he even extract joy in an idea that at last the sea had claimed him and was playing a mightier funeral dirge than ever honored man before. But another flash close before his eyes, which seemed literally to have severed the universe, evoked a desire to live if only to see such stupendous beauty once again.

He braced himself afresh and stared with longing eyes into the void, waiting for the next flash to reveal the glory as it was in the beginning.

X



AS IF the thunder and lightning storm were the crashing chords of a *finale*, the wind died as the dawn sang like the second motif in the "*Marche Funèbre*." Under a swabbed sky the chastened rollers became opalescent. The ribbons of the sail fluttered lazily as the boat wallowed.

The tiller creaked and stirred impatiently over Hardy's head as his exhausted body slumbered in the stern sheets. The glare of the polished sun, as the boat rode over the dancing crest of a roller, awoke him. He sat up alertly and grabbed the tiller then, observing that there was little wind,

he stood up on a thwart, holding on to the mast.

As the boat swung high he glanced around the clear horizon toward the west and when she again came up gazed toward the rising sun. No sign appeared in the desert of tumbling waters. He looked down at the boat whose floor boards were swishing to the motion. He realized that he had no sail, nor oars, nor food, nor water.

As he blinked in the glare of the sun he exclaimed and, peaking his eyes with one hand, peered again as he rose. Against the red glory of the sun appeared a speck which was instantly swallowed by the sea. Fully five minutes passed before he could distinguish the object again. Then he knew that as the lift of his boat had coincided with the rise of the object on a roller, that she must be a small boat too.

He clung to the swaying mast, waiting, as the sun rose higher, to reckon how far she was away and in which direction she was sailing. At length, puzzled, he had to conclude that she was drifting as aimlessly as his own boat.

He sat down and surveyed the heaving waters about him. Here was the succor in which he had so confidently relied. But was it? Where could she have come from and how? Were they castaways like himself who had been overcome by the gale? If so they probably had oars. If there was anybody alive aboard he would be as glad to see his little white chicken swimming in the middle of the ocean as he was to see them.

He found the baler in the locker of the stern sheets and methodically baled her out, wishing that he had somehow contrived to gather rain water during the storm. Then he took one of the floor boards, after locating the stranger once more, and began to paddle. He was numbed, tired and cold, but the exercise quickened his circulation. But it was very slow work; indeed he could only know that he was progressing at all among the green hills by observing that the boat had a perceptible wake.

Conscious that his usual strength had been severely tried he paused, wondering how he could devise a swifter means. There was scarcely a breeze, but he rigged his oilskin in a practical fashion on to the mast to do duty as a sail. To his relief she gathered weigh, slowly, but swifter than the arduous paddling with a piece of board.

The sun was several hands high above the horizon before the stranger was within hailing distance. He left the tiller and hanging to the mast made out that she was a fore-and-aft lifeboat and distinguished several forms within her. On each roller he shouted and waved, but there was no response nor movement.

He went back to the tiller and sailed on slowly. When he could see the boat from the stern sheets he mounted once more on the thwart and began to hail her again. A form moved, but as the figure stood up the boat sank into a trough. On the next rise he saw that the man was standing up on the forward thwart gesticulating and then, distinctly, Hardy saw him jump overboard.

He continued to cling to the mast striving to gain a clear view, but by coincidence the other boat persisted in wallowing in a trough of the sea every time his boat was on the crest. What, wondered Hardy, could the man be doing? He couldn't possibly be crazy enough to try to swim to him? For what reason?

He leaped back to the tiller swiftly, for experience of the ways of the sea had suggested that the man was possibly crazy with hunger or thirst or both. However, no matter how urgent the case appeared, he could do nothing to increase the slow speed of his boat. He sought vainly to discover the head of a swimmer on the sea.

At length he was within a few fathoms and could distinguish five humans in the lifeboat; a dark-bearded man was in the stern sheets; beside him were two other forms swathed in rugs, and forward were two more, one apparently waving a hand in the opposite direction to which Hardy was approaching. He came up under the counter and started as he made out the black letters *Tarncroft-London*.

"*Tarncroft*," he muttered incredulously. "Good God!" and, glancing anew at the figure lolling over the side, recognized the black beard of Captain Crumbell, whom he had last seen in the ship owner's office in London.



THEORIES leaped into his mind; the *Tarncroft* had foundered in the gale, had struck a derelict; had been sunk days or weeks ago and these were the last of the survivors. But speculation was obliterated as soon as he came alongside.

The emaciated faces, yellow as a Chinaman's, shouted two words—

"Yellow Jack!"

As Hardy swiftly moored alongside the *Tarncroft's* boat, which was half full of water, the man in the bow, mumbling and gesticulating deliriously, vomited black liquid. At a glance he saw that Captain Crumbell was newly dead. The two figures wrapped in blankets beside the corpse were women, an old lady with white hair and a blonde woman about thirty-five. They were emaciated, feverish, and either asleep or unconscious, but they were alive. The other sailor who was huddled beside the mast to the waist in water was also dead.


For a moment Hardy thought apprehensively that want of water had quickened the end, but a hasty investigation disclosed two boat's kegs, one of which by the weight was full and the other not quite empty. He dragged back the corpse of the captain in board and spoke to the mumbling creature in the bow, but the fellow was too far gone to recognize anything.

Searching hurriedly in the capacious lockers he found half a case of brandy, several tins of biscuits, ship's and fancy cabin, canned meats and fish; an ample store, revealing that whatever had happened they had had time to stock the boat and get away. Perhaps the ship's crew had been wiped out or nearly so by yellow Jack, and Captain Crumble with his wife and daughter, he supposed, had abandoned the ship in panic.

But he had no time to speculate on what had caused the tragedy. He knew a little but not much of the treatment for yellow Jack, picked up as a sailor may. He found a bottle half full of brandy and, mixing it with water, administered a dose to each of the ladies, took a deep swig himself and considered what next he should do. He tried to persuade the delirious sailor to take some but the man dribbled the liquid out of his mouth and collapsed.

Hardy sat on the thwart amidship, staring at the heaving swell, green in the sunlight, contemplating the position. Yellow Jack is particularly infectious. The dead must be got rid of immediately. He had no means of making any attempt at burial. After reassuring himself that the captain as undoubtedly dead—apparently having lasted long enough to control the boat through the storm—he toppled the corpse

overboard. The other man, lying in the swishing water at the bottom of the boat, he swerved in a similar manner and, dragging the unconscious figure of the sick man into the bow, made him as comfortable as possible. Then, after a hasty meal which he badly needed, he sat to work to bale her out.

 FORTY hours he remained in the life boat with the dying. He found a small medicine chest, but he could do little save administer stimulants constantly, in the attempt to keep their hearts going, and perform crudely the services of nurse. The sailor died before evening. At sunset a slight breeze sprang up. But he had no sail and what use was there in rowing painfully? He could not take his bearings and could only guess his position.

Squatting on the thwart beneath the lantern fixed to the mast head, like a sun against the stars, smoking gratefully a little tobacco he had found, dividing his attention between the two sick women and the horizon for lights, Hardy meditated much. If another gale should spring up he knew that he was lost. Yellow Jack is infectious yet he had no fear and, anyhow, he knew that the disease takes about fifteen days to develop, and that they would have been rescued or be dead by that time.

Sometimes when he dozed, for he was desperately tired, uneasy dreams of wailing voices chanting that dead sailor's dirge haunted him; although he feared they had come to claim him he was conscious of an infinite joy and peace; and, awake, queer thoughts born of that night of terrific splendor startled him.


When the pallid dawn was illumining the rolling sea flecked with modest waves Hardy discovered that the old lady had died. To the deep he committed her body, too, relieved that the younger woman was still unconscious. The sun continued to rise in a summerlike sky above the two boats rocking and squelching on the indifferent swell. During the day Hardy felt the sick woman's pulse and took her temperature. The former was not so fast nor the latter so high as he had expected. During the afternoon she revived a little, but not sufficiently to be aware of her environment or the loss.

The sun set in a blaze of scarlet, tinting the tossing boats as if with blood; but Hardy was thankful, for the sign meant

probably another fine day. Sitting beside the sole survivor of the unknown tragedy Hardy tried to keep awake in case she might become conscious, but nature was too strong for him. When he awoke the breeze had dropped and the half moon was rising through a field of thistle down.

At noon, just after he had anxiously examined his patient, who seemed much in the same condition, he saw what at first he supposed was an hallucination—the *Let-terewe* in full sail sweeping like a majestic albatross upon them. But a second glance revealed that her hull was as white as her sails. She was no vision, but Lord Twyford's four masted yacht *Valhalla*, homeward bound from Valparaiso.

XI

 THE sole survivor of the *Tarncroft* was no relation, as Hardy had supposed, to Captain Crumbell, but the wife of an Englishman settled in South America. When Hardy heard the name of the old lady who had died in the night he was surprized and, moreover, could scarcely suppress a sardonic smile; for she was Mrs. Sheldon, mother of the part owner of the *Ryecroft*.

Fortunately the *Valhalla* had a doctor aboard who, with the aid of the comforts and conveniences of a well found yacht and the lady's powerful constitution, pulled Mrs. Mendell through the fever. By the time they reached an English port she was out of danger and strong enough to give a coherent account of what had occurred.

Ten or twelve days out from Rio de Janeiro Yellow Jack had broken out. Many of the crew succumbed within a few hours and, when half of the survivors were down, the ship struck a derelict and slowly foundered. Until Hardy had made his report, this was supposed to be the same derelict, encountered by the *S. S. Manilla* in the fog half a degree to the eastward.

In order to give the better chance to the passengers the captain had purposely manned his own boat with selected men who still remained healthy. During the thirty-six hours the boat kept company many more men died; the third day several of the seamen in the captain's boat and the ladies had fallen sick. During the gale the boats became separated. The fate of the others may easily be imagined. Apparently

Captain Crumbell himself had been stricken during the storm, but obviously had stuck to his post until he had collapsed.

While in quarantine some journalist had heard the tale and had secured an interview with the master of the yacht from a boat in the river. On the following day the story appeared garnished to taste, with copious references to the traditional heroism of British sailors of the mercantile marine. Of course Hardy saw the papers and was disgusted, and when a reporter smuggled himself on board and tried to interview the "hero," Hardy swore and locked himself in his cabin. However, that enterprising young man after the manner of his tribe, did not suffer that to spoil a good "sob story."

On the following day after the publication Hardy received a letter addressed to the yacht. As he held the envelop in his hand he missed the thrill that the sight of the well-remembered handwriting should have afforded him. He sat down on the locker seat and slowly read the letter.

Using the superlative endearment as if nothing had ever happened to sever their relations, Irene began by somewhat extravagant expressions of admiration for his "heroism;" termed him "my hero," hinted at the praise that pa had given and asserted that ma was heartbroken to see him. Then, jumping off at a tangent, she went on to say that she supposed that now he would be given a command immediately by the old firm, as he had done so much to save Mrs. Sheldon; inferred that she hoped Lord Twyford would help him and might possibly give him command of the yacht which she had read was magnificently furnished.

"Wouldn't that be lovely," she wished to know, for then she would really be able to go to sea with him. Farther along she was constrained to refer to the last scene in the drawing room and begged him to forgive her, pleading that really the fault was the result of pa's nagging which had upset her so, and after all—oh, she was sure he would understand, and enlarged upon how much she had missed him.

She concluded by saying that he was to send a wire as soon as they would let him off the ship and come straight to her. In a postscript on the other side of the page, she added that she had come down to see him on Lord Twyford's yacht, but that the horrid people would not let her on board.

As Hardy finished the letter he sighed and wondered vaguely whether the storm had washed his love away. The words "drawing-room" were associated with Mr. Shapford and the family. Then, as illuminating as the flashes of lightning in the gale, he grasped in one vision the whole life of the Shapford family—the petty sordidness of their minds, the mean gossip and scandal of their suburban lives. They, their friends and their interests, were shriveled by the experience of that night of terrific splendor.

Like a mocking knell echoed Irene's last words:

"Oh the carpet! What *will* ma say!"

"The carpet!" he thought bitterly. That was the dimension of their life. As he was wondering vaguely why it was that only now could he see so clearly a knock came at the cabin door. To his invitation a man about forty with a clean-shaven, jovial face and body slightly inclined to corpulence entered.

"Mr. Hardy?" he inquired holding out his hand. "Ah! I'm very glad to meet you! I'm Goldie, you know, and I want —"

"Goldie!" echoed Hardy, staring at him bewilderedly. "Goldie!"

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Herbert Goldie of the Ewe Line, you know. You know the Ewe line, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," assented Hardy and smiled like a pleased child. "You must be Captain Goldie's son then?"

"Of course I am. Did you know him?"

"Why, yes. He was like a father to me! I served my apprenticeship in the *Let-terewe*."

"Did you, now! Well I'm more than ever glad to meet one of my father's lads. But that's not——"

"Won't you sit down?" interrupted Hardy.

"Oh, thanks."

As Mr. Goldie sat on the locker, Hardy, still holding Irene's letter, sat on the bunk:

"Well, as I was about to say, I've come to offer you my most sincere thanks for——"

"Me?"

"Yes, to be sure. Couldn't get on board before. This — quarantine, you know. Useful to be a shipowner sometimes, what? Well, as I was saying, I'm thankful to find that my sister's pretty convalescent now and——"

"Your sister?"

"Mrs. Mendell. Why, of course she's my sister. Has been ever since I saw her, ha! ha! I'm so delighted to find her safe that I—well, — it, man, don't you understand?"

"Not quite," said Hardy slowly. "Yes, I mean—that— But Mrs. Mendell is your *sister*? Then she must be the daughter of Captain Goldie?"

"Naturally, naturally."

"Good — Why, she used to come to sea with the old man. I remember."

"Of course she did to be sure! Then she married Mendell—of Mendell and Mendell you know. Awfully ripping chap. You'll like him. He cabled me. But, by the way, that's what I want to talk to you about. I'm a business man." Hardy's face stiffened. "And I believe in sincere thanks for such a thing, you know. More than words. Too cheap, you know. Now will you permit Mrs. Mendell's husband and her brother to make some sort of—er—acknowledgement of our gratitude? If it hadn't been for you she—"

"Please don't. As a matter of fact their boat saved my life and I—"

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear boy. It's only fair that we should—er—do all in our power to—er—make some acknowledgement."

"Oh, I don't want that," said Hardy.

He stared at the light of the porthole. Mr. Goldie watched him with a puzzled frown.

"Come, Mr. Hardy, you will surely give

us the satisfaction of—er—I mean, of course, there's no question of price regarding my sister—of course not. But—"

"No, thank you!" Hardy turned his head again; there was an eager light in his blue eyes. "May I ask you a question?"

"Why certainly."

"Have you sold the *Letterewe*?"

"No, not yet. But why?"

"I will accept the command of the *Letterewe*—if you can see your way to keep her in commission."

"Good Heavens, yes, with pleasure. But surely you'd rather have steam? We have a new eleven thousand tonner on the slips now and if you'd care—"

"Thanks very much," replied Hardy smiling, "but I'd prefer the *Letterewe*."

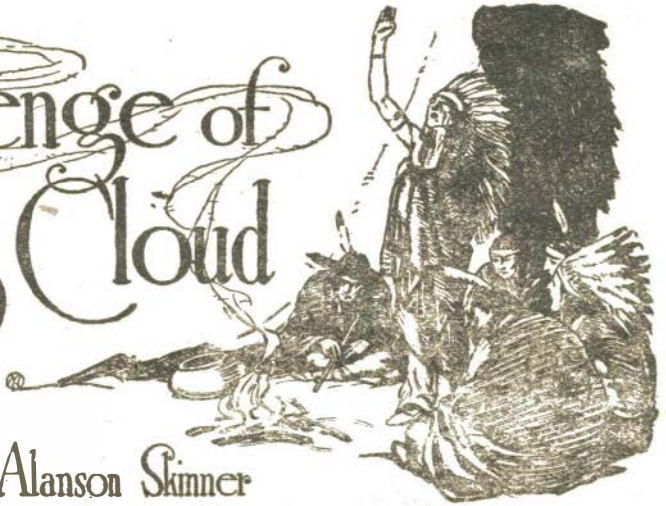
"As you like, my boy. Only too jolly glad. Now—"

Captain Goldie's son continued to talk. But Hardy heard him not; the thunderous march played by the old Cornish skipper in the cuddy of the brig was ringing in his ears; and as the music changed to that uplift like a breaking dawn it seemed to assure him that he had passed the ordeal of the sea which had purged him of his crime, that no longer would he be tormented by the accusing voices of sailors who have been drowned and ships that have been wrecked—and absorbed in a vision of the cosy cabin of the *Letterewe* in which he had never sat, he felt the quiver and rear of her as he dropped the crumpled letter from Irene into the spittoon.



The Revenge of Jingling Cloud

By
Alanson Skinner



Author of "The Honor of the Sioux," "The Quest of the Red Elk," etc.

IT WAS quite like olden times. On the summit of the *Coteau des Prairies*, the great plateau that rears itself across northern South Dakota, looking away into Minnesota and Nebraska, like some vast crouching monster, was a huge camp of the Sioux or Dakota nation. The teepees were pitched in a great circle, with the Soldiers' Lodge in the center, and here, each occupying its own sector of the huge wheel, had gathered Wahpeton and Issanti, Mdewakantowan and Wahpekute, Sisseton and Yankton of the woods or eastern branch of the tribe, and not a few Ogallala, Brule, Sans Arcs, and other members of the Tetonwan, or Prairie Dwellers.

The occasion was political and peaceful, but many an old-time dance was revived, and the merry makers were tricked out in gorgeous costumes. Here and there the glitter of beads and silk ribbons was relieved by the duller but warmer glow of buckskin and porcupine quills, where some old-timer had donned his ancient war-dress, and the beautiful war-bonnet of snow-white eagle feathers with jetty tips, once worn only by a distinguished few, was now conspicuous on many a head, for in recent years it has become a sort of Tuxedo, worn on all public occasions.

Holy Face Bear and I lay on the clean turf before his teepee and smoked. In a dozen different lodges drums were throb-

bing. Near us a party of strapping young warriors was making an hilarious round of raids upon the feasters.

Agreeable to an ancient custom of the Sioux, they would proceed to any lodge whence the thumping of a drum or the bustling of the women proclaimed that a feast was going on and, boldly entering, their leader, a youngish man who had achieved some distinction in war, would come forward, count his coups—that is, recite his honorable achievements in battle—in a loud voice, and pounce on the most promising looking kettle of food and bear it off. Sometimes the raided host was a man of greater prominence than any of the marauders, and he would rush out, recite a greater coup than any of the party could claim, and retrieve his food. Again, if unable to do this, he would dash to the teepee of some renowned elder, present him with a horse or some other good consideration and send him after the young warriors to recover his meal by the greater weight of his coups.

At all events, every one was happy, and Holy Face Bear, whose reputation in battle made him immune from molestation, and I, who have sometimes lost my dinner and sometimes taken another's, enjoyed it all hugely until the twilight faded out and the glow of the lodge fires illumined the scene. Then we arose and wended our way to the teepee of Jingling Cloud.

When we had stooped, lifted the door covering and entered, we found a goodly company of the ancients gathered there.

Here were no young upstarts, born since the buffalo days and wearing their hair short, but lean, hard faced men, with long, lank, grizzled locks. Here were warriors who had earned the right to wear the war-bonnet in deed and who had taken the hair to fringe their scalp shirts. A memorable gathering, the like of which will not be seen again, for each year sees more and more of these brave old men gathered to their fathers, and with the passing of each vanished another link between the America of today, sodden with the drippings from the cesspools of Asia and southern Europe, and the America of our forefathers, white and red, that will never be again.

Jingling Cloud motioned us to our places, and a graceful young man lit the pipe and started it passing, after the customary offering to the Powers. As it circled, one by one the old men rose, and each in a high pitched, singsong voice began to recite his coups, acting out each incident with dramatic gestures. It was a great event, and the stories that were told that night were worth the hearing. They ranged from exploits on the war-path against the Crow and Blackfeet, the Sauk and Ponca, to stories of the defeat of Custer and the Massacre of Wounded Knee.

Nor were they all concerned with slaying, or with battle and escape. Some boasted of the rescue of wounded comrades, of the saving of little children from fire, snow, and famine, and more than one told how he had saved the women, the children and even the men of the enemy from the vengeance of overwrought fellow tribesmen. No one received greater applause than a visiting Crow, who told a most appreciative audience of his exploits against the Sioux in his younger days, and there were present Dakota warriors who had measured their wits against him on several hard fought fields.

And so the pipe passed, and the hard old men recited. At length it reached our host the Jingling Cloud, who waved it aside, and it was handed the man beside him. For a moment there was some confusion, for several of the elders sprang up and hastened over, and then I saw that the man they had given the pipe to was blind and could not rise alone. As the youth who acted as Jingling Cloud's pipe-bearer lead him out into the center of the teepee in the firelight, and I saw the stranger's face for the first


time, I was astonished to note that he was a white man, a Long Knife, dressed, indeed, as a Sioux of distinction.

His thin, gray hair fell, neatly brushed, over his shoulders, his face was wan and wrinkled, and as he stood there with his sightless eyes staring blankly about the company it was plain to be seen that here was a man who had once been somebody among his own people, a man of education and refinement. Jingling Cloud, with agility startling in one so large and heavy, sprang to his feet, threw one arm about the shoulders of the stranger and said something in Dakota, inaudible to me, in the old man's ear. The other started, and then smiled. A look of comprehension seemed to cross his face. He strode forward firmly for a pace or two, squared his shoulders, raised one hand dramatically and recited in a ringing, masterly voice.

For a moment I wondered whether I was dreaming; then I wished to laugh hysterically; but somehow that proud expression, that powerful voice, and the solemn faces of the old Dakotas forced me to contain myself, and the rising mirth within me gave way to great pity, for I saw that the stranger was insane as well as blind. The words he said took on a new dignity.

"Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take,
And this I ask, for Jesus' sake."

The old man finished, and Jingling Cloud lead him proudly to his seat, amid the applause of all those present. Knowing, as I did, that many of these old braves were Christians, and that all, or nearly all, had at least a fair knowledge of English, I marveled, but I controlled my curiosity, knowing full well that Holy Face Bear would enlighten me in his own good time.

 THAT time came that very night, after the meeting had broken up, and we were again lolling on the prairie before his teepee.

"Well, brother," began Holy Face Bear, "I suppose that you are still wondering about that old Long Knife who spoke tonight at our meeting. Well, that is Iron Heart, and this is the story.

"A long time ago this white man came to a camp of the Ogallala out on the prairie.

He seemed to be a rich man among his own people, for he had the best of horses, and the most wonderful firearms we had ever seen. He was made welcome, according to our custom, and lived with High Backbone, who was then a chief. With High Backbone he went on buffalo hunts, ventured far into the Bad Lands to kill grizzly bears and wandered everywhere. He was popular with every one, because he was brave and generous. It was apparent that he was not afraid of the enemy. And then came his trouble with Jingling Cloud.

"Of course, Jingling Cloud is an Eastern Dakota, but he was visiting some of his relatives among the Ogallala at the time and of course he had to fall in love with Beautiful Day Woman. Women cause trouble enough at home, but it is a mistake to become crazy over one in a distant place and among strangers. But Beautiful Day Woman was handsome and had lots of suitors, and Jingling Cloud had many against him. However, he was doing well with his suit when this white man came along and saw the girl. From that time on Jingling Cloud was forgotten, and her smiles were all for the newcomer. So Jingling Cloud decided to kill his rival, being, in those days, young and without much sense.

"One evening, when it was still very light, Jingling Cloud rode up to High Backbone's teepee, and challenged the white man to come out and fight him before all the camp. It had been whispered about that there was trouble afoot, and almost at the moment that he arrived the prairie was covered with Sioux who were anxious to see the battle. And, although the white man had been very popular, we are Indians, after all, and there were few who did not wish one of their own race and color to be the victor. High Backbone knew this, and he would have restrained his guest, but the white man was young and hot-blooded too, and he might as well have talked to a whirlwind.

"'No, no, my friend! It will not do for you to fight Jingling Cloud! If you lose, you will be despised, and if you win, it will make you many enemies. You are my guest. I will give the young man outside twenty ponies to go away, and that will be no dishonor to you. Nay then, I will go out and do him battle. I am a Dakota, and it will be Indian against Indian, and our people can not murmur at the outcome.'"

"But it was useless, the white man was determined to go, and small wonder, since Beautiful Day Woman lived not far away, and Jingling Cloud was riding back and forth and calling him a coward, openly, in a loud voice. So High Backbone sent for the members of his Warrior Society, The No Flights, to come and hold back the multitude. You know it is our custom for the various warrior societies to act as police when called upon by the chief, and the No Flights, who never turn their backs upon danger, are the most respected of all. They came, and with their long feathered lances they cleared a place on the open plain, and the white man rode out on his best horse to meet Jingling Cloud.

"Neither had any firearms, nor bows and arrows. Jingling Cloud had come with only his lance and his small round shield of buffalo hide, and the white man had borrowed a lance and spear from High Backbone. Jingling Cloud wore only his breech clout and moccasins, and his *wotawe* or war-medicine tied to his scalp-lock, so the white man was stripped too.

"A fine sight they made, and the women began to exclaim in pity when they saw them ride toward each other. The dark shining skin of Jingling Cloud rippled over his muscles. He was lean and well built then, and with the grace of a panther. The white man was of fuller figure, but perfect. His color was pink and white all over, save for his blue eyes and his long yellow hair. Indeed, he was very handsome also.

"They dashed up to each other once and then reined in their horses, so that the animals stood up on their hind legs and pawed the air. Then they swung back at full speed and ran the full length of the opening that the No Flights had cleared for them, and charged down, with their shields covering their vitals and their lances straight out in front of them. *Crash!* They came together in a cloud of dust, and it was a full moment before we could plainly see what had happened. Then, as the dust lifted, we saw that Jingling Cloud was unhorsed. The white man was heavier, and had overborne him when the tip of his lance struck the Dakota's shield.

"The Indian was rolling in the dust, and a groan went up even from the No Flights to see the champion dismounted. But the white man showed himself to have heart like a Dakota, for no sooner had he whirled his

pony about and seen Jingling Cloud lying there than he sprang down and drove away his mount. Jingling Cloud was up again, now, and, whipping out his knife, leaped under the white man's guarding lance and aimed a blow at the other's heart. Women shrieked aloud again, but the blow never fell, for the white man, jumping aside like a cat, struck out with his clenched fist, and sent the Dakota flying to the earth once more, where he lay as if dead. Again the crowd groaned, for, according to our custom, Jingling Cloud had forfeited his life. The white man ran up to him and bent over—

"'Ah, now he will cut a Dakota throat,' some woman shrilled, and it was all that the No Flights could do to hold back the mob again.

But the white man did not harm Jingling Cloud, instead he raised him up on his feet, and told him to live. Then he turned on his heel, and walked away to his horse, mounted it, and rode back to the lodge of his host, High Backbone.

"'My friend,' said High Backbone, 'you should have slain that man. Now you have only made things worse than they ever were before. He will be your enemy forever. You have counted coup on him and disgraced him in front of his sweetheart. You do not know how deeply our Dakota people resent an insult or you would not have let him live.'

"'It does not matter,' replied the white man. 'My friend, I belong to a society among my people even as you do among the Dakota. I am one of those who are called "Gentlemen" and we do not hit a man when he is down.'

"Of course High Backbone understood that the rules of a society are very strong, so he said, '*Washtay*—it is good!' and did not refer to the matter again. Jingling Cloud went back to his people that night, and Beautiful Day Woman, just because she was a woman, I suppose, ran away with a handsome young man of no importance who had never even been counted as among her leading suitors.

"Well, my friend, the years passed on. The trouble with the white people came to us. We had battle after battle, and sold our lands only at the price of blood. This white man remained with us. It is true that he would take no part against his own people, and interceded with the chiefs and

warriors for the prisoners, and bought off many and set them free.

"Yet he was willing enough to take part against our other enemies on many a war-path. He earned his name of Iron Heart by his very stoutness against the Crows and Blackfeet, and in time it was even forgotten by us that he was not an Indian and a Dakota. Where his real home was he never said.

"What his Long Knife name was, we never heard. It is not good to ask in such cases, especially when a man is your guest. No doubt he would have told us, had there been any reason. He never married among us, and, after a time his money became used up, and he was just as poor as the rest of the tribe.



"IT WAS some time after the Dakota had defeated Custer on the Little Bighorn that we were encamped together, the prairie and the woods Dakotas, just as you see us now. It was on a high prairie, and the time was the fall, when the grass is without moisture and yellow, and the winds are high. In the middle of the night a party of Crow and Shoshone ran off some of our horses and fired the prairie to cover their retreat. It was successful, that trick, and before we knew it we were cut off on all sides but one, where the Missouri ran deep and swift.

Terror and confusion seized everybody. People ran about aimlessly, and the flames bore down on us swiftly. I think we should all have been wiped out right there but for two men. One was Jingling Cloud, who for the first time in all these years was among us once more with his band of Wahpetonwans. The other was his old-time enemy, the white man, now called Iron Heart. These two put strength into the hearts of the warrior societies. They rallied the No Flights and set the White-Horse Owners to making bull-boats, small, round boats of buffalo hide, to ferry across the Missouri with. They collected the women, the children, the sick and the aged and sent them all over first. Then the warriors labored to save what they could and finally retreated, some in the bull-boats, others by swimming, and still others clutching their horses' tails. In the end, all the great Dakota encampment was ferried over in safety, or so we thought.

Then, as we stood on the safe side of the

Missouri, watching the flames eat up our teepees, there came a faint cry, and, behold, there were two tiny boys, who had been left behind, wailing to us! The light of the fire was strong enough so that we could recognize them, even at that distance. One was the eldest son of Jingling Cloud himself, and the other the favorite grandson of High Backbone.

"For a moment our hearts were turned to water, for a little child in danger is a pitiful thing. Then there was a commotion and a splash, we saw some one dive into the swift waters of the Missouri, and a head and arms could be seen in the streak of firelight that shone like oil in the inky blackness of the river. We all knew that some one was attempting a rescue, but none knew who, and the warriors of the Fox society, always arrogant, assumed that it was one of their number, of course, and struck up their ancient song to hearten him:

"I am a Fox!
I am supposed to die!
Anything that is difficult—
Anything that is dangerous—
That is mine to do!"

"I tell you, my friend, that was a thrilling sight! Sometimes the swimmer seemed to forge ahead; sometimes he was out of sight, sucked under by the swirling current, which is very treacherous in the Missouri. And all the time he was racing against the fire on the other side. The flames were coming closer and closer, licking out their hot red tongues like Iya, the god of gluttony himself! And speaking of Iya, it is a mercy that none of the Unktehi, the underworld monsters, dwelt in the river at that point, for they are accustomed to devour mortal swimmers from time to time.

"Well, my brother, the swimmer made it. We saw him stagger up the slippery bank, gather the two little ones in his arms, and stagger, sliding, back. It was almost too late. The flames had reached the lodges nearest the water, and a wall of fire leaped out. We saw him turn and catch the hot breath of the fire in his face. He staggered, but hugged those babies close to him. He had already dragged off his wet shirt and thrown it over their heads. Again and again the fire seemed to scorch him. He could not escape it, so he flung the little ones in the mud, and lay over them, with

the heat searing his naked back to a crisp. But there were other swimmers and bull-boats on the way, and the flames were already waning when Jingling Cloud and High Backbone had the man and the children in a bull-boat and were starting back again.

"When they got ashore no one could recognize the swimmer at first, he was so badly disfigured. The children were unhurt, except for a little scorching and wetting and a great fright. But the man we thought would not last the night out. We raised a lodge there for him, and he was attended by the old men and women who had the most skill in doctoring among us. When they had cut off his legging from him and saw the color of his skin, then we knew it was Iron Heart, the white Dakota.



"THAT white man was certainly stout! Never once did he cry out, though it was a long time before he became conscious. He talked a little, in his own tongue, about his mother, mainly. I forget now what he said. We thought of course he would die, and it would have been better for him if he had, but he won through, and lived.

"When it was certain that he would live, and he began to show signs of knowing his friends, he said to me, for I was one of the watchers:

"*Hau, kola*, why does not the sun rise? Here I have been lying awake these many hours, and it is not yet light. The night is long, *kola*."

"My friend, there were tears in my voice so that I could not say anything for a long time, then I managed to say—

"*Kola*, friend, it is midday!"

"I could see Iron Heart start and shudder and pass his hands over his eyes. He knew now what I suppose he had been fearing in his heart for a long time. He would never again see the sun, nor the carpet of flowers on the spring prairies, nor the birds, nor the young people in their gay garments. He was silent for a long time, then he said to me:

"Bring High Backbone."

"So I went out, and found High Backbone and fetched him in, as I was bidden.

"O High Backbone, my brother-friend, are you there?" asked Iron Heart.

"Hau," said High Backbone, and I could see that he was trembling.

"Come here, old companion, that I may clasp your hand. So, that is better. Are you indeed a brother to me?"

"*Hau, hau, kola!*"

"Oh High Backbone, I am about to ask a great thing of you!"

"It is good, it shall be granted.

"Behold O Hunka, my close comrade, here is my knife, strike me, I pray thee here, under the left breast, that my spirit may be freed to go to my ancestors! Behold, my eyes are sightless, and it is not good that I should live longer!"

"Then I saw High Backbone quiver like a flag-reed by the river, and I perceived that this brave old man, who was even a chief, was weeping like a woman. After a while he controlled himself, and spoke to Iron Heart:

"My brother, you have indeed asked a strong thing of me. I must have time to think it over. I am going."

"And High Backbone passed out of the teepee.

"Presently we heard an old man crying some news about the encampment:

"You are bidden to assemble before the lodge of High Backbone! High Backbone is about to do a brave thing!"

"When the people were all gathered there, High Backbone appeared before them. He was mounted on his best white buffalo running horse. On his head was a great eagle feather war-bonnet with trailers that nearly dragged on the ground. He had on his deerskin shirt embroidered with dyed porcupine quills and fringed with scalp-locks. In his hand was the feathered lance of the No Flight society. Indeed, he looked like a chief.

"O people" he cried out in loud tones, "I have called you here because I am about to do a brave thing! You all remember who and what I am. I am High Backbone, a chief of the Ogallala. When I was as yet a boy I went down into the country of the Pawnee and killed a warrior, counted coup on two others, and brought back five horses. In the year of the Doubly Hard Winter I went into the Crow country with a war-party under my leadership, and brought them all back safely with many honors. I was the first to count coup on the Bluecoated Soldiers of the Long Knives in many battles. I will not tell you everything I have done to you, if there are any of you who do not know the story, enquire of our enemies! I am a brave man!

"But now, O people, my friend Iron Heart, who has shared my teepee with me, and eaten out of my wooden bowl these many years, has asked me to do a strong thing for him! He has even asked me to strike him to the heart that he may pass to the land of his ancestors, because his eyes are closed forever! You all know what he has been to me, and what he is now. You all saw him save my little grandson, who will bear my name, perhaps, when I am gone. Am I a dog to kill the man who has done this for me? And yet, how can I refuse him?"

"Behold! To you, Jingling Cloud, who are his enemy, I give this horse that I am riding on, and all my herd of thirty-six, save only one, the piebald pony, that one I give to my little grandson along with my name! I appoint you, Jingling Cloud, to strike this blow for me against my friend!"

"Before any of us had time to guess what was coming next, High Backbone had snatched out his knife from its sheath. For a moment we saw it glinting in the light, and then it was buried in the heart of High Backbone! The old man had weakened in the end.

"Hardly had he fallen to the earth when some of the No Flights, who were on guard in his teepee came running out to tell us that Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, had taken away the mind of Iron Heart, so that he knew nothing, and babbled like a child. And while we were still stunned by this, the wife of High Backbone came forward, pulled the knife from her husband's heart, and carried it to Jingling Cloud.

"*Hau, Jingling Cloud,* she cried. 'Here is the knife of Iron Heart, by which my husband died, see! It is still wet, and red with his blood! Take it, and carry out his command, and slay thine ancient enemy!'

"Then all faces were turned towards Jingling Cloud, who took the knife.

"O Dakotas, my people!" he shouted, "Jingling Cloud is a man! Behold, once, long ago, Iron Heart had it in his power to take my life, but he counted coup on me, and bade me live. And again, a few days ago, Iron Heart swam the river and saved my little son! Up to that hour he was my enemy, but my mind and heart are wiped clear of hate! I see plainly, and what is mine to do, I shall do! I am not afraid to kill a friend, if he desires death! But Wakan Tanka has freed me of the obligation laid

on me by High Backbone. The horses that High Backbone has left me, I give to his little grandson, High Backbone the second, in honor of two brave men, his grandfather, and Iron Heart! And as for Iron Heart, I take him as my brother! While grass grows and water runs, as long as the earth shall stand. **Wherever he goes I shall go!** If I have to wait on him like a woman, so be it! I am a man, and when I have a debt to pay, I pay it! **That is the way that I am accustomed to do!** My name in Jingling Cloud, and I have spoken!



“SO JINGLING CLOUD has waited on Iron Heart from that day to this. He dresses him; he leads him by the hand; he feeds him from his own wooden bowl with his own carved spoon. And when the warriors meet, to talk over the old times and count their coups, Jingling Cloud may always be found there with his enemy, Iron Heart. Sometimes it seems as if Iron Heart understands a little; sometimes light streams into his mind, and he is able to remember his deeds

and tell about them; but usually it is as tonight, he walks as in a dream. Then when it is his turn to speak, as it is only right, seeing that he did so brave a thing, Jingling Cloud comes up and whispers in his ear, and he recites that little piece in his own language, which we know to be only a little prayer for children. But he thinks that he has counted his coup and told about the time that he defeated Jingling Cloud in battle, and all of us, old warriors, know what he means and give it our approval.”

“But, *kola*,” said I, “it is a deadly insult to count a coup like that on a man, in his presence, and before all the warriors.”

Holy Face Bear inhaled a deep draught of smoke and expelled it through his nostrils.

“As for that,” he said, “How can the man who first spared his life and then saved his only son insult Jingling Cloud? It is in my heart that therein lies Jingling Cloud’s revenge. He knows that Iron Heart thinks that he is insulting him in what is left of his mind, and it pleases him, for he knows that it gives his ancient enemy the only happiness he can have in this world.”

THE INQUEST

by R. E. Alexander

“DEAD, ain’t he? All right, might as well
Set on him now. Hey, Billy, tell
Ted t’ come ’round. Now, gentlemen—
Hey, wait a minute; ain’t but ten
O’ you. I got t’ have two more.
Now, lis’n, Dave, don’t you git sore
’Cause you ain’t on th’ jury. *Tough?*
Y’ shot th’ cuss—ain’t that enough?

“H’lo, Ted. Yeah, Dave done it. *Sure!*
Ted, you’re foreman. Hold up your
Hands, gentlemen. Stand up, Sam Lee.
Put that dog out! —do solemnly
Swear— Shut up, Sam, y’ needn’t cuss!
S’help y’ one an’ all. Now, Gus—
From New York, hey? H’m. Is that grave
Dug? Hurry up them Chinks. Now, Dave—

“H’m—yes— I see— He wasn’t ‘tight’?
Crowded right out loud—New York, all right!
Sure— I reckon— He drew *two?*
I’d bet *my* shirt; that’s what he’d do!
He said his ‘full house’ beat your ‘straight’!
Maybe it does—in New York State,
But *not* in Texas! Said y’ *lied!*
All right, boys—*it was suicide!*”

The Pool of Execution



By William Westrup

SERGEANT MERRIVALE of the South African Police, clad very unofficially in an ancient suit of pajamas and a pair of gum boots, looked up sharply from his usual early morning prowling round the stables. He could hear the muffled *tap-tap, tap-tap* of a horse approaching at a quick canter over the unmade road, and it was unusual for any one to be out and about when the sun was only just struggling over the horizon.

When he first came to the district it was different. Mapusana was a "bad" station, and alarms and excursions were of constant occurrence. It was adjacent to a big native reserve, and the scattered whites who farmed near the boundary had become distinctly jumpy owing to a long series of thefts and raids on their property. No murders, or even attempts at bodily injury, for the native has long realized the utter futility of actual violence; but impudence and petty annoyances, loss of sheep and burning of outlying grass lands.

Sergeant Merrivale had soon stopped all that. He and Trooper Van Vuuren were usually sent together to the bad stations and left to work out their own salvation and everybody else's. It meant hard work, but the compliment was very real; and they had had many unofficial words of thanks which they valued much more than the brief official recognition of their services.

So at Mapusana eighteen months of endeavor had transformed the natives of the reserve into comparatively good children, and the district had sobered down and be-

come pleasant enough. Merrivale was expecting every day to hear that he had been transferred to some other spot of ill repute.

He smiled a little as he listened to the thudding hoofs. It was quite like the old days, when nearly every morning brought some farmer at a gallop with a tale of theft or outrage. But now—he walked out into the road—a queer figure with his unbrushed hair and his unconventional garb.

A man on a small, ungroomed pony rode quickly up, swung himself from the saddle and nodded to Merrivale. It was Hugh Johnson, one of two brothers who owned a small farm close to the river, three hundred acres of what had been just veldt till their ingenuity and unremitting toil transformed it, by means of irrigation furrows, into the most valuable holding for many miles.

"Morning, Sergeant," Johnson called out.

Merrivale noticed that the man looked anxious and unkempt, as though he had not been to bed the previous night.

"Nothing wrong I hope," he replied.

"I'm afraid so, though I hope not. It's my brother Jack. He rode into the reserve yesterday afternoon, and—he hasn't come back."

Merrivale stiffened and immediately became the official.

"Come into my office," he commanded briefly.

Sibulani, native chief of the reserve, had been a bit of a rip in his time, but he had passed his word. Merrivale did not think for a moment that the old savage would go

back on him, but you never knew for certain. As a matter of fact he quite liked old Sibulani, with his fat laugh and little, twinkling eyes. Indeed, in three cases out of four he had found that he had a sneaking regard for the erstwhile badman of a district, which probably accounted for his success. In the fourth case he was ruthless and achieved results by stern methods.

In the office—a bare, whitewashed room about twelve feet by ten in the shabby wood and iron house that was dignified by the title of police camp—he sat down behind the official table and indicated a second chair to one side.

“Now tell me about it,” he ordered. “That chair is all right so long as you don’t lean back.”

“You know we’ve been having some trouble with the cattle from the reserve?” Johnson began.

Merrivale nodded. It was the end of the dry season, and grazing was scarce. The Johnsons had about fifty acres under lucerne, green and infinitely enticing compared with the bare, yellow veldt all round. And their fences were very poor. They were making a lot of money, but they worked for every penny of it, and grudging any outlay on proper fencing.

“Their beasts are in a very poor state,” Johnson resumed, “and though that rain we had last week has started the veldt growing, there’s precious little feed yet. I know what native herds are, and I expect a beast or two to stray now and again, and break down my fences.”

“What fencing have you got round your lucerne?”

“Four strands—barbed.”

“Any iron standards?”

“No, just native wood poles. They’re plenty good enough so far as animals are concerned. But yesterday morning we found that someone had deliberately knocked down one of the poles, so that the wire sagged. About two dozen cattle had got into the lucerne and done ten pounds’ worth of damage before we saw them.

“I’d have pounded the lot, but they got away through the gap, and were back in the reserve before we could saddle up. So after lunch Jack rode across to have it out with Sibulani, and he didn’t come back. I didn’t think much about it when he didn’t return at sundown, for I thought he might have come on here. But when time passed,

and it drew on toward nine o’clock, I began to feel worried. It was as dark as blazes—no moon—but I saddled up and rode over to Sibulani’s kraal.

“Managed to rouse them after a time, and saw Sibulani himself. He told me Jack had been there, and they had had a long *indaba* about the cattle. He had promised to look into the matter himself, and if any boy was guilty of letting the beasts get into the lucerne, he should be punished and fined. I dare say Jack went up in the air a bit then, because there was no question of guilt, you understand—the damage was done. But Sibulani wasn’t giving anything away; just looked at me with his little pig eyes. Anyhow, Jack had left about five o’clock.”

“And then?”

“I went back home. It’s a good two hours to Sibulani’s kraal, and by then it was midnight. Couldn’t do anything except wait for daybreak. But when I got back I found Jack’s horse waiting by the stable. There was nothing wrong with the saddle or bridle, no sign of violence; but Jack has just disappeared. So I came on here.”

“Don’t you think he may have had a toss, and be lying somewhere by the trail?”

“No. Unless he’s dead, and that’s not likely from a fall. He would have called to me as I passed. At daybreak I sent one of our boys to follow the track to Sibulani’s on the offchance, but I thought I’d better see you as soon as I could. I’m — sure there’s some dirty work, Sergeant. Sibulani looked all ways except at me, and that infernal old witch-doctor, Mafush, was grinning and nodding to himself as if he had a good joke on. They’re always been up against us, and now—what are you going to do?”

“I’ll be in the saddle as soon as I can wake Van Vuuren and have a bit of breakfast. Get back to your place, Johnson, and have a little sleep and something to eat. You look just about done up, and you’ve got to keep going. Leave this to me, and sleep till noon. I’ll come over to your place about then.”

Johnson laughed harshly.

“Sleep!” he exclaimed bitterly. “When those black swine have got poor old Jack! But I’ll try. I don’t want to crack up till we’ve solved the mystery, and collared the men who—but perhaps you’re right after

all. D'you think I'm making a fuss about nothing, and Jack is still alive?"

"Sure of it. Now go and have that sleep, and leave this to me. I hope to have cleared everything up before you know where you are."

He followed Johnson out, watched him mount his pony and ride away and then went quickly back to the house.



IN A small room opening out of the office he found Van Vuuren sitting on the edge of his bed and yawning prodigiously. Van Vuuren was a huge man over six feet high and very deep-chested, with an egg-shaped head and a red face devoid of all expression except that of triumphant good humor. In most ways he was astoundingly dense, but he could talk half a dozen dialects as well as the natives themselves, was a certain shot with a rifle, and could read every trifling sign of the veldt like an open book.

Natives everywhere nearly worshiped him, with his great strength, his absolute lack of fear, and his eternal good humor. Indeed, his mentality was very nearly akin to that of the native—his simplicity of outlook, his peculiar obtuseness, his ideas of humor. But with it all he was unswervingly and unquestioningly loyal, a staunch comrade and a most useful man in an emergency.

"Man," he said reproachfully, "it's rotten when a fellow can't get enough sleep. Why didn't you talk to Johnson outside?"

"Enough sleep, you—you slug! You turned in before ten last night, and it's after six now. Did you hear what we were talking about?"

"Of course."

"And yet you sit there talking about sleep! There's work afoot, Van, and we must get a jerk on."

"Listen here, old Sergeant," Van Vuuren replied with an entire lack of respect. "What's the good of hurry? If the chap's dead, it won't make any difference to him."

"But we may be able to follow his spoor, you prize idiot."

Van Vuuren reached hastily for his shirt.

"Why didn't you say that before?" he demanded. "Man, why don't you get into your clothes? If we are on the spot in less than an hour there will still be the dew, and that tells a lot. I shall be on the road in ten minutes, so if you're coming with me you'd better hurry."

Merrivale grinned as he went to his room. When any question of veldt work cropped up, Van Vuuren was likely to take the lead as a matter of course. But they understood each other, those two, and there was never any friction. Even now he could hear Van Vuuren's tremendous voice calling for the native orderly, demanding coffee and bread, and ordering the immediate saddling of his horse.

They started at an easy pace, too old campaigners to bustle their horses until they were thoroughly warmed up. The air was still fresh and cool, and where the veldt had been burned off the new grass was beginning to show green.

"Sibulani's all right," Van Vuuren remarked. "You've got the old boy so as he will eat out of your hand."

"But he had a pretty bad reputation, remember."

"Man, those are always the best. The chief who has always been good can never hold his men. Sibulani keeps his men in order, I can tell you. Even now—I could tell you some stories. But he's straight."

"And what about Mafush?"

"Mad. Like lots of their witch-doctors when they get old. Nasty old bird, but I don't think he has the pluck or strength to do harm. Of course, all the niggers are scared of him except Sibulani. We'll cut the trail just beyond those wattles, and then you can ride on to examine Sibulani and leave me to find out what I can."

They came to the spot where the native footpath branched off from the road, and Van Vuuren dismounted and walked along the side of the path, trodden hard as iron by the passage of many bare feet. It told him nothing, but he had endless patience, and there was a lot of ground to cover.

And Merrivale swung his horse to the right, and eased it a little where the path wound round some rocky kopjes. But where the going was level he urged it into a gallop, so that the morning was still young when he came to Sibulani's kraal. A village of perhaps two thousand natives, their round, beehivelike huts scattered over a considerable distance. And Merrivale rode in alone, knowing well enough that even had the tribe been hostile, he was absolutely safe. Such is the legacy of respect left by the old Nongqai, forerunners of the South African Police of today.

But as a matter of fact Merrivale was

greeted with marked friendliness as he rode through the village to Sibulani's own hut. Or rather house, for this was a stone building with two rooms and real windows.

Sibulani saluted punctiliously, told one of the natives to hold the horse and commanded his head wife to bring native beer. Then he ushered Merrivale into his house, much to the disappointment of the crowd that had gathered round.

"This is a bad business," Merrivale began without preamble.

"Then it is true Baas Jackie has gone?" Sibulani replied, making no pretense of ignorance of the reason for the visit, and thereby, incidentally, showing his complete trust in Merrivale.

"Yes. Only his horse has returned. Did you quarrel, Sibulani?"

"No, truly no. Baas Jackie is not like his brother. He began with hard words, but that I understood. If an animal gets into my lands I also use hard words; only first I catch that animal. It was Nolati's cattle that ate the green stuff, and him I have summoned to me. But I do not think he broke down the fence. As you know, 'nkos, a hungry beast will follow a fence till he finds a weak place. Nolati will pay because they are his cattle, but he will be very sad."

"And you spoke thus to Baas Jackie?"

"Truly, 'nkos. He is not an angry man, and I think he was content. We spoke a while on other subjects, and when he left we were all as friends."

"And that was five o'clock?"

"How shall I say? It was two hours before sundown."

"Had he a quarrel with Mafush?"

"It may be. Baas Uisi—Hugh once thrashed him for going to their farm and throwing the bones, thereby inducing two of my children to leave their service. Which was just, because it is well known that it is an order the bones shall not be thrown for money."

Merrivale grinned, knowing perfectly well that despite the law, the profession of a witch doctor was still a profitable one. Sibulani knew it, too, and knew that Merrivale knew; he was merely being polite.

"But Mafush is old," he went on, "and his powers have left him. He hates many, but I do not think he harms them. Now 'nkos, we have tried each other, and I know you for a good man. You have

dealt fairly with me when my heart was sore and my young men were angry. Therefore you know me. I tell you it is none of my children who have done this. They would not do it because my orders are known.

"The justice of the white man is very good, but it is slow and troublesome. The justice of Sibulani is swift, and there is no fuss. It may even be—you see I speak frankly—that if one of my young men did such a thing I should say nothing to the white man, for their justice is puzzling and there is much delay and talking. But most surely that young man would die, either from an illness in his belly or from falling down a krantz, and his cattle would be taken by my herd boys. That is the truth, and you who understand our minds, know it is so. Therefore I say to you that no man of Sibulani's did this deed."

"Are there any strangers in the kraals?"

"That is a good thought. I will send my young men out, and they will know tomorrow. A man of Dabumanzi's, for instance. They are all jackals, and would steal the pap of a child. And yet there is one thing, 'nkos. The police, as I know, are very wise, but——"

He hesitated, glancing at the sergeant with a sly glint in his little eyes.

"There is no offence where none is meant," said Merrivale.

"True. Well, I remember that in the old days when I was a young man and went hunting with other young men, each would tell how he had slain here a duiker, and there a bushbuck, and there even a lion. But when the kill was counted there were many stories to spare. So is it never sure a kill has taken place until the dead body is seen."

"We do not say Baas Jackie is dead; we say he has gone. We know nothing further, but we must find him. What you have said I believe, Sibulani, for there is no snake in your heart. And now call together the men of the kraal, for I must speak with them."

FOR two hours Merrivale conducted an impromptu court in the bright sunshine just outside the chief's house, hearing the willing stories of every native who had spoken with Jack Johnson the previous day or had seen him after his departure.

It was a long business, for your native must give his evidence in his own way, or he becomes flurried and useless. And when the mass of useless information was sifted, all he had learned for his pains was that Johnson left the kraal two hours before sundown, he had drunk much native *twala* and was in a friendly mood, and he had followed the direct route from the kraal till it crossed the main road, which was only a matter of three miles or so from his farm. One of Nolati's herd boys, who had come to the chief's kraal, that morning, had seen him at the road as he was driving in the cattle.

Sibulani was ordered to make his report as to any strange natives in the district as soon as possible, and Merrivale rode back to camp, very thoughtful, but by no means discouraged.

Van Vuuren came in soon after four, whistling unmelodiously and entirely unperturbed.

"Any luck?" the sergeant queried.

"Luck! Man, but I'm hungry. We shall feed well to-night, old Sergeant, because I shot an inkonka. Luckily it is a buck, for I only got a snap view as it went through the bushes. I mean it is a ram. That's right, isn't it? But had it been a doe—ewe! I should have had to leave it till dark, because they are strictly preserved. What it is to be a policeman!"

Merrivale laughed, for Van Vuuren could never overcome his old and reprehensible habit of shooting first and remembering the game laws afterward.

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"In the bush below the Execution Pool."

"And what the deuce were you doing there?"

"Oh, just looking round. How can a man follow spoor when the ground is hard like iron and every one has walked over it too? But this I can tell you—Jack crossed the vlei south of the road, which brings him within two miles of the farm. After that there is hard ground again, and—I lost the tracks."

"Keeping something back?"

"I don't know. There were the same tracks I picked up again swinging off the path toward the pool, but they may have been made some other time. So I thought I would have a try for a buck."

The Pool of Execution was a sinister hollow set in the side of a bush-clad, rocky kopje. According to ancient legend it had

played an important part in the earlier history of the native population, long before the coming of the tribe of which Sibulani was now chief. Not only was the pool intimately involved with the rites of the witch doctors, but any captives taken in war or any men convicted of evil doing were disposed of satisfactorily and permanently by being pushed into the pool.

The hollow was some distance from the river and was evidently fed by underground streams, for it never dried up. Indeed, it was reputed to be bottomless. On all sides the rock rose sheer from the water, smooth and glasslike, without any crevices or projections to which a drowning man might cling.

On the upper side the walls towered up for over a hundred feet, but on the lower they fell away abruptly, till in one place they were only some ten feet high. And though in places the sides were not sheer, from the water itself they were everywhere perpendicular higher than a man could reach. From the highest point of all there was a nice clear drop into the black water, and the dusky despots of old had not been slow to appreciate its obvious advantages.

Of course the pool was *tagati*—bewitched. Not a native in the district, except old Mafush, and one or two of his kidney, cared to approach it in the daytime, and at night nothing would have induced them to pass within half a mile of the dreaded spot. Occasionally one of the younger generation of natives, greatly daring, would head a venturesome little band to gaze down into the still water on a bright, sunny afternoon, but these expeditions, though productive of much glory, were very few. It was a very pretty spot but unaccountably eerie.

Of course a little matter like the ghosts of Heaven only knew how many natives did not worry Van Vuuren; he got most of his good shooting in the bush that surrounded the pool and extended down the valley on either side.

They fell to discussing the strange disappearance of young Johnson, Van Vuuren obstinately maintaining that it was all a hoax, and would be cleared up in a few days, while Merrivale held that it had a sinister significance. They went over the evidence they had collected, but Van Vuuren took no interest in any evidence that did not center around spoor and broken bits of twig and similar interesting objects.

Just before dark Hugh Johnson rode up. They had forgotten all about their promise to let him know the result of their inquiries, and he wanted to know what had happened.

There was no doubt at all of his views. He was convinced that Jack had been done to death, and was in a fever of nervous determination to track down the murderers. His eyes were unnaturally bright, and he could not keep still for a minute. Up and down he strode, upbraiding the police for their lack of success, offering advice, demanding vengeance, imploring them to do something, anything.

But there was so little they could do. Natives were out all over the district trying to find some trace of the missing man, and the only considerable stretch of bush had been gone through by Van Vuuren himself. It was quite likely the brothers had had a row, and Jack had gone off in a temper. He was not nearly so engrossed in work as his elder brother, and more than once had defied his authority and gone to town for a few weeks. You never knew with people like the Johnsons.



MERRIVALE was just lighting the lamp when an orderly brought word that a native was waiting to see him. The boy was brought in at once—a youngster of fourteen or so, plainly scared, and half inclined to make a bolt for it.

"Leave him to me," Van Vuuren said quietly, and began to joke with the boy in his own tongue, gradually winning his confidence and banishing his fears. Then the boy began to talk, quickly and in purest kraal Zulu. All three of the white men in the room spoke the language, but only Van Vuuren could follow accurately the quick sentences of the present story.

Translated, it appeared that after the departure of *Nongqai*—Merrivale—that morning, Mafush had boasted that death had come to one of his enemies, as it would come to others in due time. He had made the most of the disappearance, and had finally got himself up in the regalia of his calling and conducted a little *séance*. Beginning by throwing the bones, he had worked himself into a frenzy, till he lay still in the dust, and strange voices spoke over him. The voices said that Baas Jackie was dead, and was floating in the Pool of Execution.

Such, considerably abbreviated, was the

story. When it was finished, for the first time Johnson kept quite still. His eyes were shining feverishly, and it was he who broke the silence that had come over them.

"The old devil has overreached himself," he said exultantly. "In his anxiety to impress the niggers, and regain some of the old power, he's given himself away. You see, Merrivale? He knew, and he's pretending his magic has solved the riddle. That is clear enough, isn't it? Oh, the filthy, murdering swine! You'd better rope him in tonight."

Merrivale shook his head slowly.

"What for?" he demanded. "Can't you see there's absolutely nothing against him except a sort of guess reported at third hand?"

"If you don't there'll be trouble," Johnson said tensely. "He's murdered my brother and you won't arrest him! Nice outlook for the whites in the district! I'll stir things up till you wish you were dead! You always were a bit of a nigger lover and if—"

"That 'll do!" Merrivale commanded brusquely. "I make allowances for your feelings, Johnson. I do my duty my own way, and I don't want any lessons. I'm not new to the game."

"He's got some brains," Van Vuuren explained quite sincerely.

"I'll ride to the pool at daybreak," the sergeant went on, "and if we find—anything, it will be time enough to act."

Johnson got up heavily.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but—well, you know how I feel. Jack was not much more than a youngster. I'll look out for you in the morning."

He went out into the darkness, and they heard the hoofbeats of his horse gradually grow fainter and die away.

"That leg of buck ought to be cooked just right in about ten minutes," Van Vuuren remarked.



ONE look into the still waters of the pool told them that Mafusha's revelation had been accurate. A man's body was floating close to the lower bank, just awash, and seeming to quiver strangely. Merrivale knew there were big barbel in the pool and felt suddenly sick.

"We must leave our horses here and work round," he said. "One of the boys will hold them."

"Tell him to keep well back with them and not come here," Van Vuuren requested quietly. "There are some tracks I want to look at presently, and I don't want them messed up."

Johnson said not a word, but followed as they skirted the rocky side of the kopje, to plunge into the bush at the head of the pool and work their way round. Half a dozen natives had drawn near, for word had evidently gone round, and these followed the white men closely. A police orderly had a long coil of rope, and improvised grappling hooks, for Merrivale was not the man to come unprepared.

They came out at last on the bare rocky lip that formed the lowest point of access to the pool and found the body was close beneath them.

"If I could swim I'd go in with a rope round me," said the sergeant quietly. "As it is we must make a running loop and try that way."

It was a dreadful, sickening business. Later a rough litter was made from saplings, and four natives took the body to Johnson's house. But first they paused on the top side of the pool while Van Vuuren examined the tracks in a narrow expanse of ground.

There were old cattle tracks, but there was also the spoor of a horse, and beside it the prints of bare feet. Even a novice at the game could have seen that the print of the right foot showed a peculiarity—apparently the second toe was missing. It was well known that Mafush's right foot was so maimed.

"As soon as you're through," Merrivale commanded Van Vuuren, "take a native orderly and ride over to Sibulani's. Mafush must be arrested at once."

But Mafush had vanished. Evidently he had got word of what was afoot, and his hut was empty. The death of young Johnson had naturally increased the superstitious dread in which the natives held Mafush, and Merrivale knew well enough that no one would tell even if they knew his hiding place. And yet, though Johnson raved and cursed him incoherently, he did not seem greatly perturbed.

That night, after a long and exhausting day, he and Van Vuuren were together in their mess room, and Merrivale had just finished the bald, official report that was to be dispatched to headquarters.

"Thank Heaven, that's done!" he ex-

claimed. "And now Van, you blighter, talk! At the pool I could see you had acquired a headful of information."

"Well, there was a lot to see," Van Vuuren replied, beaming happily. "But what made you say you couldn't swim?"

"Oh, that! Just a sort of inspiration, because we had an audience, and I felt the case wasn't as simple as it seemed."

"Artful old devil! Well, old Sergeant, Jack never went over the edge where those tracks showed. There's some bush on the face of the cliff, it's had about eighty years to grow since they used to heave niggers over. Of course a body might swish through without doing much damage, but it would be pretty sure to break a few branches. And there is always the clutching hand of a man falling. No, I'm sure he didn't go over just there.

"And then the tracks—man, that was easy. They were new, not a day old. Only a few hours I should say. And the footprints were those of a man who usually wears boots. Any fool could see that. If Mafush hadn't legged it, I could get a cast of his foot and show you it's quite different."

"Splendid! That clears up a point that has been puzzling me. But what about the missing toe?"

"Oh, that was easy. You get a pencil, and put it over your big toe, under the next, and over the rest. D' you see? If you walked like that, your second toe is in the air, and wouldn't show. Mafush is a silly owl to leg it, for the stump of his toe would make a mark, and there was no mark at all in footprints we saw."

Merrivale got up and patted the big man on the shoulder.

"Considering you've got absolutely no brain, it's marvellous what you see," he said kindly. "You've cleared up one or two points that were worrying me, and I feel much better."

"But what have you found out?"

"That's another story, my faithful slug. I have gathered a few straws, but whether I shall be able to fashion them into a rope is a moot point. Get out the cards and we'll have a go at sundown for tickies.



NOTHING happened. Mafush seemed to have vanished into thin air though the whole country was being scoured for him. Even so, the evidence against him was at the best

circumstantial, and very thin at that. He could certainly prove an alibi up to sundown on the day of the murder, if murder it was.

The district surgeon reported that there were no signs of violence on the body. The lungs showed that death had been due to drowning, and he estimated that the body had been in the water for thirty-six hours, which agreed with the generally accepted idea of when Jack Johnson met his death.

Ten day passed, and much of the excitement occasioned by the affair had died down, when it received a sudden and unexpected fillip. The native boy who had brought the news of Mafush's séance to the police camp also disappeared, and two days later his body was found in the Pool of Execution. Found by relatives who went there expressly to look for it, maintaining that Mafush's vengeance would take that form. The cry after the old witch-doctor broke out afresh, and now the police received real support from the relatives of the drowned boy, whose anger drove out fear.

And then at last, just one week later, Mafush was found by Merrivale himself. The old man was floating in the pool as those others had floated, and he was dead beyond all doubt.

The natives said that the toll of death was now complete, three being a recognized number in witchcraft—and lost interest. The white inhabitants said that Mafush must have been hiding in the vicinity, and finding there was no hope of escape, had taken his own life. Justice was satisfied.

Van Vuuren, little affected by long days and nights in the saddle, ranging their scattered district from end to end, remarked feelingly that he was glad the chase was over and the incident closed, because it was rotten never getting proper meals.

Merrivale looked at him with a grim smile on his lips.

"All right, Van," he said. "You may go on a week's shooting trip."

Van Vuuren did not display any signs of joy. He knew the sergeant, and suspected the trap.

"What is it now? he demanded fretfully.

"A lovely trip, dear old slug. Tomorrow you spread the glad tidings and then ride forth. And when sweet darkness has fallen you trek back on foot to the Execution Pool. You carry with you provisions for a week, a

rifle and a length of rope. You hide yourself by that cave we found on the south side in that thick bush and all day and every day you keep a strict watch on the pool. Nerves all right—you don't mind?"

"Don't mind! What am I going to eat? If you mean do I mind the funny stories about the place, that's all right; but man, I shall be hungry."

"Only a week, old man, and if my theory is correct it will be a feather in our caps. Take plenty of biltong to chew. You can light a fire in the cave at night and make coffee and fry bacon. Sooner or later you'll see me in the offing, and remember this—don't fire, whatever you see, till I give the word."

"Of course if there's something in it," Van Vuuren replied, mollified. "I'm not trying to dodge. Did I tell you, by the way, that the original tracks of young Johnson's pony did not lead toward the upper side of the pool at all, but the lower?"

"So I suspected," said Merrivale.

So Van Vuuren departed on his trip, and much publicity was given to his going. But Merrivale, usually the most reticent of men, let it be known to one or two of the whites that he was not satisfied with the apparently complete ending to the case. He thought there was something more to be discovered, and the place to look was the Pool of Execution.

They did not agree with him, but his reputation was too well-known for them to scoff. If there was anything to find out, Merrivale would find it.

The only man who agreed with the sergeant was Hugh Johnson himself. That is, he admitted the possibility of a solution other than the obvious one. If the man who had brought about his brother's death was not Mafush, then he wanted to have a hand in solving the riddle. He couldn't rest until he was absolutely sure that the murderer was either dead, or had been brought to justice.

A changed man was Hugh Johnson these days—older, and with a look of savage misery on his face. He took no interest in his wonderful farm and seemed to live only to avenge his brother. He joined the sergeant in making a thorough investigation of all approaches to the ill-omened pool, and they spent two days examining tracks and searching the surrounding bush. From his hiding place Van Vuuren watched them,

wondering a little just precisely what rôle he was supposed to be playing, but carrying out instructions. He was a man of infinite patience once he was on the trail, and the gruesome legends of the pool did not affect his night's rest in the slightest.

On the third day action came. Johnson came to the lower lip of the pool, and something seemed to catch his eye. Lying flat on the smooth rock, he peered down into the black water and then hailed Merrivale.

The sergeant came thrashing through the bush and joined him.

"Don't know quite what it is," said Johnson, "but it looks like a hand. See what you make of it. Just to the right there."

He stood up, and Merrivale stretched himself out on the rock. Johnson took a couple of steps back, and then the slab of rock on which the sergeant lay tipped smoothly up, till it was almost perpendicular. There was no grip whatever on its polished surface, and Merrivale slipped forward and went head first into the water.

"My ——!" Van Vuuren exclaimed softly, and half raised his rifle.

But he remembered his instructions, and waited.

Johnson stood on the high bank, unmoved.

"Now you've found out what you wanted to know," he cried. "I hope you're satisfied, 'you interfering bloodhound. What——"

He broke off abruptly, for it suddenly occurred to him that the sergeant, despite his boots, was swimming easily and without flurry. He had thought the man couldn't swim.

"Better make a rope of your clothes and haul me out," said Merrivale. "You've supplied the missing clue, Johnson, and I've got my case against you. You won't improve it by trying to murder me as well. Hurry up, the water's cold."

Johnson laughed, a horrible laugh, not quite sane.

"What, supply the rope to hang myself?" he jeered. "I shall light my pipe, and watch you as I watched Mafush."

"Please yourself. It will be a long business, for I'm a good swimmer."

"Not so very long," Johnson replied. "I shall say you must have fallen over from the high side and struck the rock in your descent. Like this."

He reached for a loose lump of rock, and

laughed as he tossed it outward. He made no attempt to hurl it swiftly, but even so Merrivale very narrowly escaped, and the rock grazed his shoulder. He turned and began to swim toward the center of the pool, and Johnson reached for another rock.

"Hold him up, Van!" the sergeant called out.

On the instant Van Vuuren showed himself, his rifle ready, and hailed Johnson. The man looked up, snarled like a trapped beast and dropped the rock he held. Then he grabbed his own gun, and brought it instantly to his shoulder, aiming at the man in the water.

Van Vuuren was always a man to shoot first and think afterward, and he was very fond of Merrivale. Consequently he did not attempt a fancy shot at the arm, but aimed for the heart. Johnson lurched forward, clutched nervelessly at the rock and then slowly rolled over the edge into the water.

"——!" said Merrivale.



"IT WAS just like one of those old rocking stones," Merrivale explained that night. "We'll have a good look at it tomorrow. The stone that anchors it is very ingenious, and must have been cut and fixed up as much as a hundred years ago. Just like one of those handles with a tongue. Pity you killed him, but much the best thing that could have happened from his point of view. Still, I'd have loved to get him alive."

"If he'd gone on heaving rocks," Van Vuuren explained, "I'd have taken a chance on your dodging; but no man in the water can dodge a shot from a rifle. I said to myself, 'Man, this is where one of 'em gets it quick.' And as we've sort of got used to each other, I made a cert of Johnson."

"Oh, you saved my life all right. I saw his gun come up, and I was trying to dive; but my beastly boots upset my balance. What do you make of Mafush's revelation, and his subsequent flight?"

"The first was probably genuine," Van Vuuren replied slowly. "Man, those old witch-doctors know all sorts of things, I give you my word. Then he got the wind up. I'm pretty sure he had a hiding place down by the pool, and probably he was there when we found Jack. Or else one of his relatives sent word in that queer way they have which we whites have never

discovered. You remember there were a few natives there? Once a nigger gets frightened he loses all reason. He thought you were really after him, so he lay low."

"And the boy?"

"I don't think that was Johnson. Mafush wanted vengeance, and he probably worked some magic. We laugh at it, but it's there all the same. Sort of—what d'you call it?—hypnotism. Either that or his family. Got the boy down on some pretext, and just pushed him in. I don't think Mafush knew the secret of that stone, and goodness knows how Johnson got on to it. My idea is that he spotted Mafush lurking by the Pool."

"Yes. I had already found out that Johnson spent a good deal of his time there."

"That's it. Mafush would go there to draw water, and as soon as he stepped on the stone, up she went. Well, he's no loss to the district, anyhow. But what made you suspect Johnson?"

Merrivale smiled quizzically.

"Perfectly simple, my dear Watson," he replied. "As I have so often told you, one suspicious detail may mean nothing; but if you have three or more, it gives you a direct indication.

"Firstly, we knew that Johnson and his young brother were always having rows, and pretty bad ones; hence his sudden anxiety, before we knew Jack was dead, was surprising.

"Secondly, he alleged that Jack left Sibulani's at five o'clock; said Sibulani told him so. Our evidence proved conclusively that he left a little before four. That extra hour made all the difference to a man establishing an alibi.

"Thirdly, he only discovered Jack's horse when he returned from Sibulani's after midnight; therefore the horse wasn't there when he left at nine o'clock. Yet we know the murder took place round about six, and within two miles of the house. A riderless horse would have been back to the stable before seven. So it was perfectly plain Johnson was lying.

"Later, of course, those faked tracks clinched it. Johnson was the only man who knew we were going to the pool at day-break; even our own native orderlies did not know till the next day. Johnson was the only white man who could know, and those tracks were made by a foot which had always worn a boot. Obvious, eh?"

Van Vuuren drew a deep breath.

"Man, but you're wonderful," he exclaimed admiringly. "Only why didn't you arrest him straight away?"

"No actual evidence. Suspicions don't count in a court of law. Even if we could have proved he made those tracks, that didn't prove he was connected with the murder. You see? I guessed he was a bit mad—the look in his eyes, you remember? Perhaps it only gripped him after he had a row with young Jack—there must have been a row—and saw him drown before his eyes. No evidence at all, so the only thing to do was to trap him."

"You took a mighty big risk."

"Oh, not so much. Not with you hiding close by. You see, in each case it had been a death from drowning pure and simple, and I'm a fine swimmer. With the others, even if they could swim, the trouble was that there was nobody to help them out. I guessed there was some secret, for that man Tracey—you remember him?—who came prowling up here last year to find out all about the pool, told me that the ceremonial sacrifices always took place on the lower side.

"Jack was a much more powerful man than his brother, and I guessed he must have been tricked in some way. I felt pretty sure that if I kept messing about round the pool, sooner or later Johnson would lose his nerve and would try to dispose of me in the same way. Heigho! It will be the ——'s own job putting all this in an official report and explaining the finale."

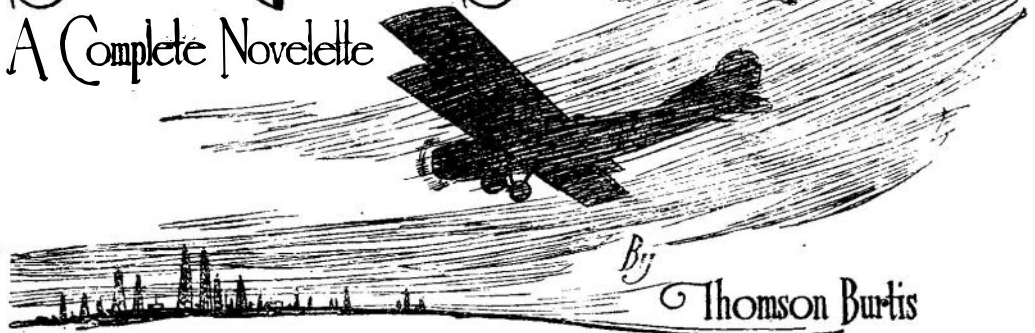
Van Vuuren stood up, grinned amiably and filled his pipe.

"Your own job, in fact," he said, and made an unhurried exit.



Slim Grabs Some Grease

A Complete Novelette



Author of "Groody Among the Gushers," "The Indomitable Dub," etc.

TAKING it by and large, I am a fairly even-tempered individual. Life is too short to rant and rave, according to my notion, except when it is absolutely unavoidable. Of course, once in a while one has to drain off the spleen and get it out of one's system, but that happens only when the moon is at the full in connection with a strong northeast wind as far as I'm concerned.

However, I have my moments when it seems as if the world is vain and there is no merit in it. At those moments there are certain things which cause me sharp, shooting pains in the vicinity of the esophagus. One thing in particular, when I'm off my feed, which causes me to become gloomily philosophical is the sight of an interview or article by some successful bloke describing how he did it. Working all day, studying all night, eating nothing and saving four dollars more a month than you make—that's the recipe, according to them.

Now, as a matter of fact I know a few of these successful birds. And nine out of ten of 'em still don't know quite how it happened. They were more surprized than anybody else when they started to make money. And if they finally opened up the mouth and yelped a few well-chosen words which came right from the heart they'd probably say that they were lucky as —. If they didn't recognize opportunity old "Op" came right up and pasted them in the beezee so ther'd be no mistake.

These reflections have descended upon me because I am now worth fifty thousand bucks—count 'em, fifty—and said simoleons simply coagulated in my vicinity through pure, dumb luck. The only difference I can see between myself and the average man, and positively the only thing whereon I pride myself at all, is that I refuse to kid myself about myself, if you know what I mean. "Slim" Evans, to himself, is a — funny freak, and he doesn't care who knows it. That's why I know I'm a fool for fortune.

Why should I have got by so long, and moderately successfully? Luck, children, luck, and nothing else. By all ordinary standards I, although holding down a job as a flyer in the Air Service, am a bum.

That goes as it lays. I love a drink, and love two of 'em still more; I gamble every chance I get; I'm so lazy I'd throw a kiss to a girl, and, while I do not consider ambition an unmitigated evil, still I am glad that I don't suffer with it myself. I'm a long, lean, lanky, loose-jointed and homely boll-buster from the wilds of Utah who got his High School education cooking for a cow outfit in Wyoming, and topped it off with a college education as a private in the Mexican trouble under "Blackjack" Pershing.

Nevertheless, I horned in with the college boys in the Air Service because I had an uncle who happened to be a senator, and since that time have got by through equally fortuitous circumstances. I'm one of the

boys who could fall off the Woolworth tower, land without a scratch, and then find out that if I'd been a second later on the street I wouldn't have had a chance to find the ten thousand dollars in the gutter which a careless bandit had just dropped.

I've told you about a few things that happened to me—every one of 'em put me in more solid in the Air Service, and yet in every case I muddled through to a reasonably successful conclusion because I didn't know any better, not because I knew so much. I helped squash a conspiracy to put all the bombing ships out of commission purely because I'd figured everything all wrong; I once captured a famous hijacker up in the wilds of the Great Lakes because a woman crook fooled me completely and — near had me in love with her; and I'm worth fifty thousand bucks today—I undoubtedly won't be by next week—because one time back in a mining town called Hightown I got so sore at a smalltime thug that I wouldn't get out of town when I should have.

Instead I risked government property worth several thousand, and my own neck, worth a lot less, and as a result here I am, a bloated plutocrat. That is, I am that until my leave comes through. What I'll have left after that is a matter which even my bosses in Congress don't pretend to know, and what they don't *pretend* to know must be a highly complicated matter.

What I'm trying to get at is that forty years of hard work isn't worth a nickel alongside of buying a strip of brush that has oil under it, and that often **twenty** years of prayerful and godly toil doesn't stack up with one rabbit's foot. By carefully steering my course in the most useless, unambitious channels, dubbing along making all the mistakes possible, I, "Slim" Evans, am now in a position to give advice to all young men.

I might as well give it before I illustrate with the yarn about how I made the fifty grand. The motto I would have you remember, boys—the foundation of my success at thirty years of age—the burning words which have been an inspiration to me in my present climb to the heights—the magic sentence which I wish could be hung before the eyes of every man cursed with the desire and ability to work, is simply this:

It's a great life if you *do* weaken.

II



I'D BEEN back from Langham Field about a week, I guess, and I was — glad to lounge around the McMullen flight of the border patrol once more. Langham, what between bursting bombs and visiting big bugs and the ravings of Major Lamb Jackson was a ten-ring circus with a continuous performance and free admission.

Back down on the sun-baked border, with the corrugated iron hangars throwing off heat waves that made the whole world dance and the little sandy airdome as hot as a frying pancake—and just about as big, too, from a flyer's viewpoint—I felt a great peace descending on me. Nothing had been doing along the Rio Grande, according to Cap Kennard, our C. O., since we had been gone. From the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of California the land had been in the grip of a great calm. The corporal's guard of flyers left down there, while the bombing up in Virginia was going on, had had a vacation.

On the particular September afternoon to which I desire to draw your attention, ladies and gentlemen, the dozen or so airmen of the McMullen flight were **taking** their after-lunch siesta on the porch of the recreation building. There were three of these gatherings a day—before lunch, after lunch and before dinner, and more applesauce was put out at them than in any other congregation I know of, except a political convention. But we knew it was applesauce, which is the difference.

Russ Farrell was beefing mildly because he had to climb in a D. H. with George Frammer and take the western patrol to Laredo before long; and Pete Miller, who's about as big as a minute, was pretending that he enjoyed the prospect of making the eastern patrol to the Gulf. It was so hot that conversation was at a pretty low ebb. Then a Ford taxi, well-known to all McMullenites, hove into sight and chugged down the road in front of the line of frame buildings of which the recreation building was one.

I had been lying flat on my back, but by gathering all my strength for one mighty effort I raised myself far enough to cock a snook at whoever was foolish enough to travel in the middle of the day. Two looks, and I was sure who it was—none

other than Malcolm Cary, the mining maggot of Hightown, Texas, accompanied by his superintendent, Mr. Cecil Lansdale.

The driver brought the Ford to a stop with a great flourish, and I was at the foot of the steps to meet them.

"How does it happen," I inquired, "that you are eight hundred miles from Hightown with the only reliable man you've got in your employ?"

"I've sold the mine," grinned Cary, which was somewhat of a stunning surprise to me.

He's a huge chap, big even for Texas, with a full face, keen gray eyes, and thin black hair that just covers his scalp. At first he looks sort of fat, until you get a chance to find out that his flesh is as hard as a rock. The boys were glad to meet him—I'd told them plenty about him.

Lansdale was a short, slight little man of about forty, with a thin mouth, a small mustache, and nose-glasses which shielded a pair of very cold and very sharp blue eyes. He was an Englishman, and had drifted into El Paso for his health, taken a job with Malcolm and become his right bower.

I'd run into Cary when I was on duty at Donovan Field, and we'd got pretty friendly. He owned a little mine about forty miles north of El Paso, in the mountains, and at that time was just about getting by on the skin of his teeth. Later, when I got to the border, "Sleepy" Spears and I made a flying visit to Hightown over the weekend and ran into a lot of trouble with the border scum which worked for Cary, and which was all he could get for that kind of labor around the Rio Grande. Spigs, breeds, white outlaws and cheap thugs—they were about the prizest collection of riff-raff ever gathered in one bunch.

Sleepy and I helped him out a lot, and incidentally learned how well Malcolm could handle himself. To hear his soft drawl and see his slow, sunny smile you'd figure him a harmless sort of a coot, but when he's in action, gentlemen, he makes a tank look like a velocipede.

"Wait," Cary ordered old Bill Eastland, the fiercely be-mustached chauffeur, and forthwith seated himself on the steps.

Funny about him—big and fleshy as he is, he never seems to suffer with the heat.

"Now what about that mine, and how did you happen to blow in here?" I reminded him.

"I'm on my way to the oilfields—or one of 'em—and just aimed tuh stop off and say howdy," Cary drawled. "I heard you were all back from Virginia."

"So you're no longer the mining maggot of Hightown, Texas?"

"Nary a maggot am I," chuckled Cary. "I'll tell yuh. Pardon me—you gentlemen heard of the weekend Sleepy and Slim spent up in my town, I reckon?"

"Plenty," grinned Captain Kennard.

"Well, aftuh you left, them hunkies o' mine was quiet and peaceful as so many ewe lambs, and I got along fine. Then, a week ago, up comes a dude from a big eastern company, and witho't so much as hesitatin' buys me out fur fifty thousand simoleons—cash money now in the El Paso National Bank, "Slim"—and there I was. So me and Cecil here, we both decided we'd like a little fling at the oil game. Friend o' mine ovuh in Hastings, Texas, where there's a boom on, wrote me a letter and there may be some money there for menow that I've got some capital."

"I think I shall return to the city, old chap, and dash off those letters," said Lansdale, getting to his feet spryly and caressing his microscopic mustache.

"Sure—I'll meet you there. If there's a telegram for me from Hastings, call me up here, will you? Blake didn't reckon there'd be anything poppin' for a couple o' days, though, so there prob'ly won't be."

"I'll ascertain. I am delighted to have met you, gentlemen. I shall see you all again, of course, during our short stay here. You will return to the hotel for dinner, Malcolm?"

"Not on your life," I interjected. "He'll stay out here. When you finish your letters come on back and we'll chow out here."

"Chawmed, I'm sure," he returned with a bow, and pattered off down the steps and into the car.

He had on a heavy tweed suit of faultless cut, and a Panama hat twice too big for his lean face, and a low stiff collar a bit too big for his neck. But he'd been a good man up in the toughest town and against the biggest odds I'd ever known a man to fight over a long period, and I had to give the cold-blooded little Britisher credit.

After a bit of conversation hither and yon, including Cary's drawling resumé of his four years pulling that mine out of the fire, he turned to me and inquired:

"What's chances o' seein' you in private a few minutes, Slim? Yuh say Sleepy's on leave, eh?"

"Yeah. I guess chances are good. Cap'n, how about allowing this plutocrat here and I to clutter up your office for a few minutes?"

"Shoot. Send the office force out," grinned Kennard.

The office force consisted of one orderly, so we shipped him and Malcolm got down to brass tacks.

"Got any money, Slim, or weren't the cards and dice good to yuh up in Virginia?"

"So-so. I got about six hundred, which is more than I've had in one lump for a couple of years. Why?"

"Well, it don't make much difference one way or the othuh. How's yore chances o' gettin' a leave through for a month if it should be necessary?"

"Pretty fair. I've got two months leave coming. But what are you aiming at? Speak up, mister."

"Well, I'll tell yuh."

He hesitated, his big, smooth face serious for a minute. He'd changed some during my little tour up north. While he never talked about his troubles much, he'd been worried to death all the time I'd known him over finances and one thing or another connected with that hole in the ground he had owned. Now he looked ten years younger, and actually looked as though he was enjoying life.

"Slim, you onregenerate heathen, whether yuh like it or not, I'm heuh t'tell yuh that you and Sleepy kind o' saved my bacon that weekend up in Hightown. Corny Connor kind o' had my hide nailed tuh the wall."

He talked with some difficulty, as though it was embarrassing for him to get it out.

"Go on, Malcolm, go on," I told him. "Want to present me with a silver shaving mug or something?"

He grinned.

"No, but I'm aimin' tuh cut yuh in on somethin' that looks like it might be good, and if yuh kick I'm plannin' on knockin' yuh unconscious and forcin' it down yore throat. That fifty thousand is due to you and Sleepy, and he's cut in, too. Now listen, and don't say a word till I explain it to yuh, and then go on out and get yore leave started.

"This heuh Hastings is a town about a hundred miles southeast o' San Antone,

and they've had a pretty fair oil boom. I got a friend theuh named Blake—'Highheels' Blake, they call 'im.

"Now the field in this town is all north of it, so far. They sunk a couple o' wells south, but both of 'em was dry holes. Well, there come intuh Hastings, dead broke, a felluh that Blake knew some time ago when Highheels was runnin' a saloon up in Smackover, Arkansas. This bird's name is Upton, and Blake says he's about as good a oil man as there is this side o' — when he's sober.

"Well, Upton and Blake get tuhgether, and Highheels kind o' takes care o' Upton for a few days—Upton's just gettin' over a drunk—and then Upton takes a look around. Five miles, more or less, south o' Upton there's a little stream named the Grange Rivuh. Upton, he figures after lookin' around that there's a good chance o' there being oil on the land south o' the river. Some geologists figured thataway, too—just a chance. But when them two dry holes come in north o' the river, tradin' in the acreage between town and the river dropped to nothin', and there never had been no tradin' south of the river on leases and such fur two reasons.

"One is that oil men know that even a little brook or somethin' often marks the limit of a field. Geology is a weird and wonderful thing, Slim. I've known there tuh be a ten thousand dollar well on one side of a creek and a dry hole on the other. Happened at Mexia, and I owned the lease on the dry hole, too."

"No wonder you hid in a mine for a while," I commented.

"When that ten thousand barrel beauty come in on the land right across this little puddle from mine, I was richer'n I've ever been since," Malcolm admitted. "I was so — foolish I wouldn't sell my lease, but had to go dig a well on it myself. Oh, boy!

"But that ain't neither here nor there. Now the second reason there'd been no tradin' to amount to anything was that the five hundred acres extending for a half a mile along the south river bank is part o' the old Howard Ranch, and old man Howard owns about all the land there is south o' that stream. He's a crusty old cuss. He won't bother with no oil dealin's. He made a flat price on his land two months ago. He'll lease any part of it fur a hundred an acre. That's a prohibitive price,

especially after two wells nearest to his land have come in dry and it looks like the field is north o' town.

"Well, it so happens that Highheels Blake owns about four acres and a cabin south o' that creek, but moren' a mile east o' what the geologists say is the place where oil is, if any. Now this Upton snoops around, and figures there's a chance there might be oil as far away as Blake's place. Upton, yuh understand, is a practical oil man—no geologist except what he's picked up.



"TUH make a long story short, Blake, who never's got a dime, mooched around Hastings and raised thirty-five thousand bucks from roughnecks and one kind o' felluh or another who'd won gamblin' the night before or turned over a lease or somethin'. There's seven of 'em, and Blake throws in his land. They got a rig, Upton's chief driller, and the stockholders themselves are roughneckin' it tuh save payin' five or seven bucks a day for hired men. Likewise, to keep any news private-like.

"Now, here's the situation. Blake ain't in the company. He gets double royalty, which amounts tuh one quarter instead o' one eighth on any oil they get. These felluhs are aimin' tuh save all they can o' their thirty-five thousand so that if the well looks good they can lease as much surroundin' territory as they can pay for before the well actually comes in. This old Howard naturally wouldn't lease for a hundred after a well comes in. They got to grab the land before the well comes in, merely on the strength of it lookin' good, and keep how good it looks to themselves."

"I know about as much about oil as I do about the Einstein theory, which means that my mind is a total blank," I told him. "How are they going to know whether the well looks good or not?"

"A lot of ways—none of them absolutely sure," Cary answered. "In the first place, there is a certain formation which will hold good all the way down, figured tuh scale. Oil runs in streaks. What they call faults and all that technical stuff there's no need of goin' into. In fact, I don't know so damn much about it myself. But a good oil man'll figure that the formation means it's possible there's oil there. The paysand will be at a certain depth—around nine-

teen hundred feet in Hastings—and the rock and the rest of it above will go in layers figured out from the log of the payin' wells, if you get what I mean."

"I may possibly have a slight glimmer," I admitted.

"Well, so far—they were down to twelve hundred last time I heard from Blake—the formation was holdin' good. Now then, when they reach the pay sand, or where the paysand ought to be, they go slow tuh keep from gettin' through the sand and bringin' in salt water, which absolutely ruins the well."

"I know that."

"Now what these babies are plannin' tuh do is this, wait till they take a core. Takin' a core means draggin' up a hollow iron cylinder on the end o' the drill stem with a sample o' sand, and findin' out whether she smells of oil. Then have it analyzed by a chemist. Meanwhile they'll pretend they've dropped a tool in the well and are fishin' for it, or some other thing that's held up work. And none o' these lease hounds or land sharks smellin' around 'll even know they've took a core or are too close tuh the paysand. If there's oil in that core, then step out and lease all the land they can."

"That won't be a—of a lot—" I started, when the telephone rang.

I slid over to the Captain's desk and answered it.

"I should like to talk to Mr. Malcolm Cary," came over the wire in the precise modulations, accents and syllables of Mr Cecil Lansdale of Birmingham, England.

Cary took the phone, and I could hear what Cecil was saying as well.

"I've decided to toddle on to San Antone, old chap," he stated. "You'll have to go through there on the way to Hastings anyhow, and you can pick me up at the Menger Hotel. Don't mind, do you, old boy?"

"Not a bit in the world, Cease," drawled Downs. He always called Lansdale Cease. "I'll wire you when I start. No word from Blake, I suppose?"

"Not a whisper. Well, say ta-ta to the boys for me. I'm off on the four o'clock."

Which he needn't have added, inasmuch as the four o'clock is the only train out of McMullen for San Antone. It takes twenty hours to negotiate the two hundred and fifty miles. If there's a fence post it misses stopping at I never saw it, and the engineer

often stops and has a chat with various riders he may spot perambulating through the mesquite in search of cows.

"Cease is bound for San Antone. I'll, or rather, we'll pick him up when we go through. Now what was it you were about to make talk about?"

"I was saying that they couldn't lease much acreage at a hundred per after they deduct the cost of the rig and the well from thirty-five thousand."

"No, and that's where Malcolm Cary, in person, joins the procession."

"An inkling steals o'er me."

"Here's the lay. Blake's share of whatever is made is one-fourth of all the oil that spouts on his land. The legal royalty is one-eighth. And he don't share in any other profits. That is, the seven men each put in five thousand apiece, and if the well comes they, and they alone, buy up and share in the profits of the leased land. Blake, of course, gets his one-fourth royalty on all the oil flowin' on his property, but he has the option o' sellin' all his land and this flowin' well any time he sees fit, givin' the seven men o' the company one-half what he gets. But they've got nothin' to say as to whether he sells or stands pat—he decides it for himself. In other words, Blake ain't really in the company at all for all practical purposes. Kind of a peculiar arrangement, but then there were peculiar circumstances, yuh see."

"Now, if I may address so rich a man in a tone of familiarity, get right down to hardpan and give us a look at what you and this Highheels Blake are up to."

"Highheel's has got the run o' the well, of course, and he wrote me, thinkin' I had some money inasmuch as I had a mine, and suggested this:

"He'll put me wise how things are lookin'. I take my money and buy all the close-in acreage off of old man Howard I can swing, and Blake and I'll split the profits. The company can only handle around a hundred and fifty acres, and I'll take the rest. If he gives the word, it's a ten to one shot there's some oil gonna flow out o' that hole they're diggin'. Of course, there may not. But it's a better gamble by a good way than the average oilfield deal, and the stakes, of course, are a fortune."

"I see. Blake wants more than his profits from his own land in return for confidential information. But say, why wouldn't those

other birds do the same thing—get some capital interested in return for confidential information, and at least get a share in acreage which they haven't got money enough to buy themselves?"

"Just ain't thought ahead that far yet," was Cary's answer. "Yuh see, there may not even be any oil, and if there is—well, thinkin' o' just what they can make out o' what they got's got 'em dizzy, I reckon. But not Highheels Blake. When he's sober he can see a dollar pretty near as far as he can throw it when he's drunk.

"But, whatever they do, that doesn't alter the fact that I'm going to shove my oar in that oil pool some way, if there is one. And here's what I want tuh do with you and Sleepy, if yo're willin'. And if you ain't willin' yo're just infestin' the earth because nobody's got around t' realizin' that yo're dead and ought tuh've been buried long ago."

"Just a minute. Before you start on me, where does Cease Lansdale come in on this?"

"Oh, I just let him in out of gratitude. He's a great little Britisher, Slim. He's got a few thousand—had some money when he hit Hightown, and he hasn't spent a nickel since, that I know of. He's stuck by me through thick and thin—times when that scum that worked for me wanted tuh lynch me and all that, and he lent me three thousand one time when I needed it bad. He'll use his own capital, but I'm givin' him the inside dope I get free gratis. Wish I could do more for him."

"I see. All right, what are you going to hand my colleague, Sleepy Spears and me?"

"Just this. I aim to invest thirty thousand if things look right. No more, not if the Angel Gabriel makes a special trip from Heaven and tells me through his trumpet that there's oil enough under that land to keep the descendants of all the Fords in the world lubricated forever. I worked too hard these last few years to leave myself flat broke again. And if we hit an investment o' thirty thousand'll give me all the dinero I need."

"No kiddin', Slim, you and Sleepy made that fifty thousand possible. What I'm gonna do in return is this: in addition to my thirty thousand, I'm gonna invest five thousand apiece for you and Sleepy, if things look right. If we hit, you pay the five thousand back out o' yore profits. If

we don't hit—you flyers get around three hundred a month, don't yuh?"

"That's close enough."

"If we don't hit, you pay back the five thousand, each o' you, at the rate o' fifty dollars a month per each, tuh me. And yuh so arrange yore insurance policies that in case yuh happen tuh kiss the ground too hard, or land inadvertently on yore beans, I get what's due me. It's an arrangement where I don't take any risk whatever, and the reason I'm so hidebound about it is that I don't want to leave any loophole whatever for you tuh back out because yuh think yo're gettin' something for nothing. How about it?"

His big sombrero—the only unusual article of attire he wore—was pushed back over his broad face, and he was as serious as a Chautauqua speaker saving the country.

I TOOK a few seconds to revolve the proposition in my mind. Not for myself—from Sleepy's view-point. Speaking seriously, I knew — well that, all this fake modesty stuff to one side, Sleepy and I, by more or less luck, had assisted Malcolm in pulling his burned bacon from the fire a few months before, and we nearly fried our own hands, personally and officially, in doing it.

So Malcom wasn't handing out any charity to us. I could see no reason whatever for not accepting the offer without expostulation or any simpering protestations that he didn't owe us a thing. And Sleepy Spears is the kind of a bird who'll pile all he owns in the middle of a room any time, including his bank balance, and high-card, flip a penny, or shoot craps for the works. So I spoke for him without any qualification.

"It's — nice of you, Malcolm, and I'll speak for Sleepy. The deal is on, and if he kicks I'll take his share myself."

"That's the stuff," sighed Malcolm, and that wide, slow, sunny grin crinkled up his eyes and dented his cheeks. "Now you get yoreself a leave, *pronto*, so's you'll be ready to navigate, and we'll trickle on down tuh Hastings in a couple o' days—or before, if I hear from Blake that things are comin' to a head."

We left the office, and I got very busy. The leave was all right with Kennard, but I had a few odd details to clean up if I was going to be gone as long as a month.

I couldn't see how business would take that long, but of course, if business should turn out successful there'd be a lot of money crying to be spent which would pleasantly occupy my spare time for the rest of my leave.

Malcolm poked around—he's more or less of a nut on the subject of flying—talked with the boys, and in general occupied himself pleasantly until it came cocktail time, and then his time was spent still more pleasantly; and then dinner time, which, for Malcolm, is really the crowning point of the day. It's positively a pleasure to see him stoke that big furnace of his.

After dinner, just before the card games got under way, he said suddenly—

"I believe I'll call up and see whether any message has happened to come in for me."

"I'll do it—got to go over to the office anyway," I told him, and shortly had the hotel on the other end of the line, and was asking—

"Has a telegram come in for Mr. Malcolm Cary, room 423?"

"Yes, sir. It's here—no it isn't, either! I gave it to Mr. Lansdale, sir."

"What?" I barked.

"I remember it distinctly now, sir. Of course Mr. Lansdale was in the same room, and I gave it to him when he asked for it. It was in the box——"

"That's all right, Mr. Lansdale checked out, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right."

I got over to the recreation room in about three strides. When pressed, my long legs can span considerable acreage at any given leap. A thousand surmises were swarming in my belfry. It looked to me as though there was a distinct flavor of cheese somewhere in the business.

The boys knew what was up between Cary and myself, so I didn't call him outside. He was shuffling a deck for the black-jack game—he's a fiend on that particular brand of card-playing—and kidding the bridge and poker players on what he called their kindergarten diversions. Tables were out in the middle of the big room, magazines had been put in the corners, and it was a serene and carefree scene.

"Listen, Malcolm," I interrupted rudely. "Didn't Lansdale tell you over the phone that there had been no message for you at the hotel?"

"Uh-huh."

Cary glanced up as he said it, and I could see his eyes grow cold all of a sudden.

"Wasn't his trip to San Antone without warning? He hadn't said anything about it, had he, before he called up?"

"No."

"Well, I just had the clerk on the phone, and he said there had been a telegram come in for you this afternoon, and he had given it to Lansdale because you shared a room!"

The room was quiet as the grave for a minute. Cary, his full face suddenly very hard and his eyes seeming to grow smaller, somehow, took a deep drag on his home-made cigaret. Then Tex MacDowell, speaking in a soft Texas drawl which was closely allied to Cary's usual method of speech, said—

"Looks like your friend figures on beating you to it, Cary."

"That wire had somethin' important in it, otherwise it wouldn't have been sent," Cary said very slowly, as though formulating his thoughts. "Lansdale got it, read it—"

He stopped as though he did not want to say the next thing that came into his mind.

"And there isn't another train out of here for San Antone until tomorrow," I reminded him grimly. "He's got twenty-four hours' start on you, remember that! Has he got money enough to swing the whole deal himself?"

"I don't know," Cary returned. His calmness was more menacing than ranting would have been. "By —, I can't believe he'd doublecross me thataway! He come into Hightown three years ago, all dressed up right to a cane, and went to work for me and he's been my ace ever since. He's let his small salary slide when I needed money, and once he lent me three thousand. He's got nerve, and he stuck to me when anybody else'd left like a rat from a sinkin' ship. I can't believe it, but I know it's so. Must be so. And there's nothin' to stop him gettin' the dope some way and buyin' all that Howard acreage. He must have plenty o' money or he wouldn't be wantin' tuh beat me in there and grab it all for himself!"

"Wouldn't a wire to Blake keep him from getting the news?" demanded Captain Kennard.

"For a while. But an hour after the first acreage is bought by the company, the

news'll be out anyway—and that may be right now!"

"Evidently the wire had something very encouraging in it or he wouldn't have left," I put in. "He's probably got enough to go on now."

"And there's no way we can beat 'im in," Cary said, as though talking to himself. "I let Lansdale in on it two weeks ago. He takes himself a ten-day vacation down in Mexico, and says that when he returns he'll be all ready to follow me into Hastings and help swing the deal. Why, that scrawny, dried-up, pin-eyed little rat—"

I was figuring, meanwhile. All of a sudden the whole enterprise took on a balmy shade of pink which the mere chance of making some money had lacked. Right off the bat the whole proposition became more attractive, with little Cease doing his stuff like that. Grabbing the land in a matter-of-course way was fine, and all that, but a little monkey business on the side added interest.

I turned to Captain Kennard.

"Captain, there's a regulation on the books saying that a 'distinguished visitor' is eligible for a ride, isn't there?"

"Help!" yelled the stocky, square-faced, little C. O.

"If I could fly Cary over to Hastings tomorrow we'd beat that little runt in by several hours—"

I left it unfinished, because all had been said that needed to be said. I could see Cary's gray eyes begin to glow as I talked. Kennard, the squarest-shooting C. O. a man ever had, was not one to allow miles of red tape to keep him bound and helpless all the while. So he squinted at me humorously, and then at Cary.

"If you make money, does this whole flight get a party in Mexico which'll make the eyeballs of Central America click until they can be heard in Washington?" he demanded. "Bribe me, big boy, bribe me!"

"Cap'n," grinned Cary, "if you-all let me and Slim beat that Cease intuh Hastings, I'll put gold plate on yore flyin' wires!"

Kennard laughed his rasping, throaty laugh.

"Go to it, Slim," he chortled. "Better get Harburg on the job and have your ship all fixed up tonight. You've got a — of a stretch of mesquite to get over, and a lot of money at stake. Don't break Cary intuh flyin' with a wreck!"

III



AT NINE-THIRTY next morning we were half way to Hastings. In order to reach the town by railroad, one had to make the trip to San Antone and then get another train southeast. I was cutting the triangle, naturally, with a ship, and the course lay over a solid hundred and fifty miles of mesquite. Lansdale wouldn't reach San Antone until early afternoon, and couldn't possibly reach Hastings until five o'clock or so.

Never in my life have I made a trip like that, where the twelve-cylinder Liberty was bellowing away without a miss and every needle read correctly, which was such a nervous strain. It wasn't that the far-flung desert of gray-green mesquite below, stretching as far as the most perspicacious peeper could peer, meant a sure wreck if the motor gave out.

It was because I knew that if anything at all went wrong we wouldn't reach Hastings that day, if ever. So I crouched down in the front cockpit like some — green amateur, my eyes roving from oil pressure to air pressure, from voltmeter to temperature. Every time we hit a bump and the four hundred and fifty horsepower engine skipped a beat I jumped as though somebody'd pinched me. I wanted to get to Hastings worse than I'll ever desire to hit Heaven.

It was no cinch to make the trip, either. There were no landmarks in the mesquite, and I'd never been to Hastings. I wanted to hit it right on the nose, without landing somewhere else to find out where in — I was. So I watched the compass like a hawk. I was flying a course which was several points northwest of the direct line to Hastings. I figured I'd make sure of hitting the railroad from San Antone to Hastings, then turn down it and pick up Hastings, which should be easy because of the many derricks in the field itself.

In the rear seat Malcolm Cary was having the time of his life. It was his first trip, and his eyes glowed with enjoyment constantly. Like all amateurs, there was no fly in the flying ointment as far as he was concerned, because he didn't realize the possibilities of disaster before we got there. As far as he was concerned, we were already in Hastings, the villain was circumvented, all was well and the gushers sprayed high.

Well, he was nearer right than I, at that. Somehow I figured that with so much at stake it'd be just my luck to have the old Liberty commence to pop, spit, miss, or any one of the other unconventional things a motor is liable to do, but it didn't.

When we picked up the railroad, at ten-thirty by the alarm clock on my wrist, there were a good many open fields around, and part of the worry was over. In a few minutes more there hove into sight a town, and north of it there was a forest of derricks. Gentlemen, I haven't felt so good since I threw a seven for six hundred bucks one time.

I took a minute or so to gaze down on the panorama below. That town of Hastings was a sight in itself, like all boom towns. The main street was so thick with vehicles of all kinds that it was hard to see the ground. A man could have walked a mile without touching earth. The sidewalks were crammed with people, and everybody seemed to be in a wild rush to get somewhere. There were tents, unpainted shacks, booths—about every known type of temporary structure to fill in between the permanent buildings of the town. Not an inch of space was uncovered. Northward was the field—a scene of wild industry. On the derrick floors roughnecks were either working like mad or lounging around while the drillstem went down. From the boilers, set a hundred and fifty feet from each conical derrick, puffs of steam showed whitely.

Roads and pipelines gridironed the field, and everywhere, over roads rutted so deeply that a small man could have drowned in any one of 'em, a large variety of funny vehicles bumped and crawled along. Trucks spewed out heavy smoke as they tried to haul huge loads of drillstem here and there, and six- and eight-horse teams dragged lumber wagons with everything on 'em from boilers to tools. There must have been two or three thousand men at work in that field. Way north a gusher was shooting over the crownblock of a derrick, and here and there there were great pools of oil laying in holes dug in the ground. Storage tanks, round and black, were placed here and there for keeping oil from wells that no pipeline had been connected to as yet.

I started looking around for a landing field after I'd got a temporary eyeful, and got a considerable surprise. Without exaggerating, I may say I was astonished.

South of town everything was serene, right on down to the river which ran along a considerable distance from town. There were the remainders of the two dry holes Cary had told me about, but otherwise nothing but open fields. And in one of them—a big, smooth mowed stubble field—I spotted a ship and a temporary canvas hangar.

That was my destination, naturally. There were a few men around said Jenny, and they, in common with about everybody else in Hastings or parts adjacent thereto temporarily laid aside all other matters to gaze at our De Haviland.

I threw her into a bank, and started spiraling down. As I was engaged in this pleasing occupation—a spiral is always fun at the end of a trip—I took a good look around and saw what I was sure must be our well, so to speak. It was a long distance down the brook they called a river, and was very close to the edge of the stream.

This field had only a low fence around it, and was very smooth and even. I dropped the D. H. over the fence, gliding toward the ship and hangar. I made a pretty fair three-point landing, and stopped well short of an interested audience of about eight men. I taxied on up to the line, swung my ship around to face down the field again, pushed up my goggles, turned off the gas, and then cut the switches.

By the time I had done all this heavy work and was resting a moment preparatory to getting out, a short, squat, much begrimed man with goggles pushed up on his greasy brown hair came toward me. He was dressed in army breeches, wrap leggings, and a very dirty O. D. shirt.

I was out by the time he led his gang up to us, and inquired—

“This is your ship, I suppose?”

“Yeah. Army, eh?” he returned in a harsh voice.

He had a very broad face, with high cheek bones and narrow eyes that sloped upward a trifle, like an Oriental's. His face, down to the cheek bones, was a sleeper jump from one side to the other, but down around the mouth and tapering to the chin it got narrower and narrower. The bottom of his chin was so pointed he needed a chest guard to keep from stabbing himself when he put his head down.

“I just dropped in for a day or so. Any

objection to my stabling my ship here?” I inquired.

“Not a bit in the world. This ain't Lieutenant Evans, is it?”

“Sure thing,” I returned in considerable surprise.

“Ex-corporal Malley,” he told me, sticking out a hand covered with grease. “I was at Donovan Field a few weeks during the war when you were there. Remember you on account of you bein' so tall. I'm carryin' passengers down here. Gents, meet Slim Evans.”

He introduced me around to the hangers-on. Sort of gave me a laugh, his introducing me as Slim as though he'd known me all his life.

“How about getting a guard for the ship?” I asked him after I'd introduced Cary. “What do you do?”

“I'm out here all day, and I don't bother about it at night,” he told me.

I took a quick look-see around. His ship was about as superannuated and ill-cared-for a crate as I'd ever seen. The whole layout breathed carelessness, and not too much prosperity. He himself was as dirty as a dove hut after a large and flourishing family of Mexican peons, including their livestock, has moved out. So I felt safe in saying:

“If you'll sort of guard the ship and see that nobody climbs all over it, there's a ten spot in it for you, Malley. We may get out tonight, and maybe not for a day or two.”

“Sure, I'll watch her,” he returned, and I could see that the money was not unacceptable.

“Business good?” I asked him casually as I unstrapped our suitcases from the wings. They'd been wired close in to the fuselage.

“Rotten,” he said briefly.

A battered Ford tin-canned into the field at this point. Cary took one look.

“Here comes Highheels,” he said briefly.

He had wired Blake from McMullen that we would arrive by airplane.

“See you later,” I told Malley. “Glad to've met you all.”

As I lugged the suitcases after Cary, I heard a burst of laughter behind me. I had Malley figured, I thought. One of those fellows who always had it in, in a mild way, for any officer, and now tickled to death to sort of pretend he'd been one himself. He'd said he was a corporal in a very low

tone of voice, and then called me Slim in that familiar way very loudly.

MR. HIGHHEELS BLAKE was a small, wiry man with a melancholy, mahogany countenance, the principal feature of which was a large broken nose. It looked as though something very large and very heavy had hit it and spread it all over his face. His small blue eyes were screened by dropping lids and surrounded by a million little wrinkles, and he sported a discouraged, wispy moustache. His eyebrows were faded from the Texas sun, and his tan was so deep that it wasn't tan any more. His skin was chuck full of sun, as it were.

"Some style yuh travel in," he commented morosely as we climbed in the car.

"What was in that telegram you sent me to McMullen that I never got?" demanded Cary without preamble.

"Yuh didn't get it?" drawled Highheels. To indicate surprise he chewed his tobacco a little faster.

"No. Lansdale, that was going to come with me, doublecrossed me and he's on his way here now. We had to beat 'im in by plane," said Malcolm, and then explained what had happened in detail.

"I jest said 'come quick' or words to that effect. There's — tuh pay, Mac."

"How?" demanded Cary softly.

For a minute Highheels devoted his exclusive attention to nursing the Ford across a wash, and then said sadly:

"I dunno, quite. This here Upton's doublecrossed me, I reckon. Day before yestiddy, when I went out tuh the well, he picked a fight with me fur no reason, an' I didn't have no gun with me. Him bein' pretty near as tall as yore friend here, and a lot bigger, I couldn't do nothin'. Anyway, he ordered me off my own land, told me not tuh come back on it again, either, long's his lease run. And them squint-eyed, scabby mavericks that I went out an' rustled up tuh put up the money, they backed 'im up. I'm out, Mac. That is, I git my one-fourth if they hit, because that's in black and white. But they're keepin' me away from the well, like everybody else, and won't tell me nothin'!"

"Well I'll be —!" stated Cary quietly. "Who are the other men?"

"Jest a bunch o' roughnecks and such that I run into and got in. All of 'em would

dynamite an orphan asylum tuh git at the penny banks, I expect. They're strangers tuh me, except since the boom heuh. No old friends or anything like that."

"How do you account for it?" Cary demanded.

I was naturally listening with all my ears. It looked as if prospects for action were looking up and prospects for money disappearing.

"Dunno. No reason. Unless them fellers've got some capital interested to buy up the Howard acreage in case the well looks good, and've got wind o' me communicatin' with you."

"That sounds reasonable," Malcolm ruminated. "So Upton New Yorked you, eh? And Lansdale did it to me. Why did you wire me to come?"

"Figgered, knowin' you, that yuh might find some way o' gettin' news or fixin' it up," Highheels said mournfully. "They're aimin' tuh take a core tuhnight some time, unless they changed plans. Day before yestiddy that's what Upton figgered, and I don't reckon they run intuh any hard luck since then on the drillin'."

Malcolm remained buried in thought. Finally he said:

"As soon as we get our bags set somewhere, Slim and I'll take a trip out there and see what's doing, eh, Slim? We might make some arrangement of some kind. Now listen to my tale about this — skunk Lansdale."

He told it, and Highheels listened attentively, handling his car skillfully the while. We were now on the main street of Hastings, and we progressed at the dizzy rate of fully two miles an hour. The street was a mass of vehicles, a lot of them horse-drawn. And every driver was a fluent and expert exponent of the art of blasphemy. That street was bedlam, even to the sidewalks. Stores were crowded as well as sidewalks, and the numerous saloons were doing a landoffice business even that early in the day. On the curbstone men were talking business like mad, and roughnecks swaggered up and down the street, some of them drunk as hoot-owls. I saw more joints on one block—gambling, women, liquor—than I'd seen in all San Antone. This Hastings was no town to come to for a quiet rest.

At the conclusion of Cary's brief recital Highheels said gloomily:

IV

"When there's big money in sight, Mac, yuh kain't even trust yoreself. Looks like you and me and Slim here's got a lot tuh fight, and if we git anywhere I'm surprised.

"Well, here's that there domycile I wrote yuh about. Yuh're lucky, too. They're givin' ten bucks a night fur a cot in this town now. Mrs. Baker let yuh in because I asked 'er pretty. I even saved a room fur that Cecil o' yor'n."

As we got out with our grips Highheels, who appeared to be such a cheerful person that he'd pick a graveyard for a picnic, added further news.

"By the way, Mac, this here Howard, off in Houston, has been bothered so much by every two-fur-a-cent leasehound for options, cheap leases, and the rest of it that they say he's got plumb tired of it, and has jacked the ante to one fifty an acre, take it or leave it."

Malcolm threw back his head and laughed. Then he smote the melancholy Highheels a most powerful smite between the shoulders.

"Got any news about Europe or the government in Washington?" he chuckled. "— if I won't be shooting myself to put myself out of my misery in another minute!"

We were greeted at the door by a stout, comfortable-looking old lady who acknowledged an introduction by a tiny, charming, sedate, little curtsy. The old-fashioned, shadowed interior was unutterably cool and restful after the sun-flooded, roaring scene a few yards away on the main stem. As Highheels led us upstairs I got a glimpse, through the door from the hall into the kitchen, of just about the best looking girl these old optics have ever come to rest upon. And I've looked over some prize-winners, here and there. She was in an apron, bending over the stove, and gents, she made all the bathing beauties and complexion ads and magazine covers look like chorus girls in a burleycue.

"Gosh, what a good looking girl," I breathed as we entered a big, two-windowed bedroom with two single beds in it.

Highheels gave me a mournful look.

"You ain't the first that's said that," he opined slowly. "Just about every two-legged *hombre* which was free and unbranded, and some that wasn't, have chased her, and nary one got an inch!"



THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later we were on our way out to Blake No. 1, which was the official cognomen of the wildcat well on Blake's property. He wasn't with us. We had hired a jehu who charged us two bucks apiece for the ride. We didn't know what we were going to do exactly, except look over this Upton and see what we could see. Malcolm might have had some plan in his head. To me, it looked as if we were somewhat up against it. It seemed plain to me that Upton and his crowd had interested capital, and that if the well was any good whatever they themselves wanted to buy up the entire Howard tract.

There was one puzzling facet to the situation which neither Cary nor I could figure. Blake swore by the bones of the heroes of the Alamo that he had not mentioned to a soul the arrangement between himself and Malcolm, and that Cary's name had never even passed his lips under any circumstances.

Granting that, why had Upton deliberately picked a fight with Blake to get rid of him entirely, and as an excuse to keep him so far away from the well that he could not discover anything at all about it? Certainly Upton must have had some inkling of the fact that Blake had a backer with whom he planned to bite off a big chunk of the Howard tract. Somebody had found out something some way, which meant a lot of sums to figure out at that. But, as Malcolm said philosophically—

"In an oilfield news travels so fast that the whole gang knows yore business sometimes before you know it yoreself."

We crossed a small wooden bridge about a quarter of a mile above the Blake acreage, and from then on we bounced and skidded along on a road which was good to fly over, but not for riding. It had been simply constructed by running trucks over the grass in the same tracks. Every Texas road has drainage ditches on each side of it. This road had 'em right in it, and they were made by wheels.

"Oh, oh, look there," grunted Malcolm, and my eyes took in a crude sign:

Positively No Admittance To This Tract

The driver looked around inquiringly.

"Go on!" ordered Cary, and as he leaned over in his seat the flesh sort of closed around his eyes.

We didn't proceed over twenty feet toward the big 112 foot derrick when a man in overalls and straw sombrero came running toward us, gesticulating. The boiler was under a full head of steam, the little engine was puffing away, and I could see the rotary rig sending the drillstem screwing down into the hole. Everything was going full blast.

"Stop the car," directed Cary, and we both got out.

"What the — is the matter with you? Can't you read?" was the sociable beginning of the conversation.

"I got business with Mr. Upton," drawled Malcolm gently.

"Well, he ain't got any business with you!" stated the roughneck forthwith and without hesitation.

He was a man of medium height, with a scarred face and a piece chewed out of one ear and a cataract in his eye. His red hair and moustache were both too long, and he had a mean, bulging eye and a tough look.

"Get out!" he went on.

The roughnecks on the derrick floor were watching, and a giant of a man at the throttle of the engine, to one side of the derrick, was turning to look.

"Get out nothing'," stated Cary easily. "You go tell yore boss, Upton, that there's a man wants tuh see him on business."

"He done sent me over here tuh tell you, like I've told a thousand, that he craves tuh see nobody *whatsoever*."

"Tell him, — you!"

Malcolm does that once in a while, after he's been driven about so far. All that gentleness just disappears like a rabbit in a magician's hand, and he snarls out something like that which blisters the foliage for miles around. This roughneck sort of shrank back, hesitated, and then turned around.

"C'mere, Kit!" he bellowed.

Then he turned to us, and there was a very peculiar smile on his face.

"Go to it, big boy!" he sneered, and moseyed on back to the well, stopping for a second or so to converse with "the best oil man this side o' — when he was sober."

I watched his leisurely approach with great interest. He was within an inch of

my height, which means several inches above six feet, and he had the queerest and most impressive shoulders I've ever seen. They didn't slope at all, but projected out horizontally at right angles to one of the longest and thinnest necks ever seen outside of an ostrick farm. These aforementioned shoulders were so wide that he looked as though he'd have to stick each one out of a window in order to ride in a railroad coach. He stooped slightly forward. His body, which tapered all the way down from those tremendous shoulders to thin ankles and small feet, was big-boned, but very spare. The whole ensemble was crowned by a long, thin face. And decorating that face was a beezor to which, alone of it's kind, I doffed my dandelion-covered derby and made obeisance. Hitherto secure in the knowledge that I had the world's champion nose, the one which loomed ever larger and more distinctly before me, shook my confidence.

His whole face was thin—narrow eyes, lean cheeks, a slit of a mouth. And that nose swept forward toward the world, so thin that it did not seem as if there was room for two nasal passages, and curved like the beak of a bird of prey.

And yet, somehow, it added to his face, and his face was about as arresting a front-piece as ever masked the thoughts behind it to the pop-eyed world. He looked like a bold, cold, reserved grenadier. There was a certain hard-boiled audacity—a daring of the world to do its worst—in those long, thin eyes and the set of that gash-like mouth.

As I mentioned, he walked with a slight stoop, his very long arms hanging at his side as though the weight of them was too much for his shoulders. As he got within ten feet of us, not a word having been spoken, it seemed to me that he looked like a man under a tremendous strain. There was a certain ferocity which seems to become implanted in the face of a man who stands on the edge of a big drop, fighting a whole world that wants to shove him off.

"I'm giving you about one minute to state your business, stranger," said Upton casually, but his look wasn't casual. And he spoke with an absolute precision in a whisky-roughened voice.

"Seems tuh me you-all are pretty uppity," stated Downs. "What the — is all this business o' givin' a man one minute,

orderin' 'im off the place before yuh talk to 'im?"

"None of your business," came through those thin, tight lips. "What do you want?"

"I want to make a deal with yuh," Downs said, studying his man intently. I was merely standing five feet to one side of him, watching.

"What kind of a deal?"

"I've got capital enough to swing the whole Howard tract," stated Downs in his gentle, slurred speech. "At the price he's holding it. I know yore bunch haven't got much money left. Give me the real dope on how the core of this well looks and how the log shapes up, an' I'll grab the acreage. And give yuh ten per cent o' the net profit, if there is any. Yore company, I mean."

"Talk fifty per cent. and I'll talk business," came that husky, deep voice. He never shifted his cold eyes, nor did a muscle of his lean, boney face move as he said it.

Cary laughed.

"Think I'm crazy, man? Risk thousands o' dollars merely on the strength of a prospect, lose it all prob'ly, and if I win, give away half? I ain't any philanthropist, Upton—I'm an oil man."

"Listen before you get out," Upton said calmly. "I know who you are. You're Malcolm Cary, aren't you?"

I was stunned with surprise, but my surprise was as nothing to the body blow he had dealt the mining magnate of Hightown, Texas. Somebody'd talked.

"Some more of Blake's work," Upton went on coolly.

Although he had shown no external signs thereof, I felt instinctively that he was holding his icy calm by a strong effort.

"You and Blake figured that you'd buy up all the Howard acreage in sight if Blake found out the well looked good—and leave the company out in the cold. For the last two weeks every crooked Tom, Dick and Harry has been sneaking around here, trying to find out something to beat the men that have put in the money and the time for this well. I'm telling you as I've told the rest: I know the oil game, I wouldn't trust any man but the man I've dealt with, as far as I could drop-kick that derrick, and the only reason I trust him is because we've got a contract and he's giving me forty per cent. of the net profits, if any!"

I wondered swiftly how he knew about Blake and Cary and what their scheme was. Highheels had sworn that he hadn't talked.

"Listen, Upton," said Cary, "you're wrong about this business of Blake and I grabbing up all the acreage and trying to beat you boys out of——"

"——, don't cry around here like a sniveling, muling and puling infant!" snapped Upton in that college argot of his.

I didn't waste time cogitating on his syntax, however—for there was a large cloud, so to speak, concealing much lightning, gathering right in front of me. Upton, it seemed to me, was laboring under a tremendous strain which had hardened him into something more or less superhuman. The absolute cold contempt in his words was sublime.

"You'd say anything now, like all the rest of the hyenas waiting around here to pick the bones. I don't blame them. A fight to the finish suits me, but I'm going to conduct my end of it with no reference whatever to the Salvation Army and the Sermon on the Mount. You'd do anything in the world or say anything to get a look-in on this acreage if the well pans out."



CHARACTERISTICALLY the big Texan by my side took this coldly vicious tirade without his calm being shaken. I think he realized, perhaps, as I did, that we were talking to more or less of a freak. Whether the best oil-man this side of ——, when sober, was only temporarily a madman, or whether that was his permanent condition of servitude I couldn't decide. If I could have, I'd have been wrong. That's the kind of a bird I am.

Malcolm, who had been rolling a cigaret without looking at it, now lighted it.

"Mistuh Upton," he said, his voice softer and his words slower than usual. "Yuh have the wrong angle, suh. Now Highheels Blake must 've——"

"Yes, Highheels Blake! That blankety blank blank——"

The stream of fighting words fell like pieces of ice from his lips, and suddenly the narrow eyes were gleaming.

Malcolm's blow was so fast it made radio look like a local train. The solid, bone-crushing smack as his fist drove itself into the oil man's square jaw sounded as though something had given, and Upton dropped like a stone.

Had there been time to think between Upton's speech and Cary's retort thereto, I'd have realized that it was bound to happen. Cary would take a lot for himself, but start in on a friend and he turned into a wild man. And when Malcolm Cary was wild, he wasn't tame.

The roughnecks on the derrick floor, all but the man at the engine, started running. To my intense surprise Upton bounded to his feet. I couldn't imagine a man getting up after that blow.

Then I saw that he had a club in his hand. A piece of timber, about four inches thick, had been lying on the ground where he fell. Upton, his fierce face merely an unemotional setting for a pair of eyes that glinted whitely, leaped forward.

Right here, ladies and gentlemen, John "Slim" Evans enters as the party of the third part. Without conscious thinking I launched myself forward in one of the oldest and best tricks known to rough-and-tumble fighting. Upton's log was in the air, and Cary leaping to one side, as I hit the oil man's knees in a flying tackle. He'd started the club downward toward me, but I swung my body sideways as I hit him.

As his allies galloped forward he hit the ground with a thud. Before he'd dented the ground more than half as deeply as he was going to, I had released him and made a flying leap to take my post athwart his chest. I twisted that club from his grasp and then got up and threw it away.

Two of the roughnecks had guns in their hands, and their faces spelt sudden disaster for us.

"Don't get excited!" I yelled. "It's all over!"

They came on grimly. It was a tense moment, and I think I looked forward to being beaten to death within the next few seconds. The taxi driver was crouching behind his car.

Then Upton got to his feet, but as I set myself, and Cary also, for his onslaught he calmly dusted himself off.

"It's all right, boys!" he told his henchmen, and they chugged down to a walk.

Malcolm, his eyes small and menacing and his face a bit drawn, faced Upton.

"I don't aim tuh let my friends be insulted in my presence, suh!"

Upton looked at him, and laughed. Not an unpleasant laugh, either. Then he turned to me, and looked me up and down

with a peculiar look in his off eye. The near one too, for that matter.

"Ever play football?" he queried, with a slow, sardonic grin on his face.

"Couple of army teams," I said, and, despite the recent unpleasantness, — if I didn't answer his grin.

"Played fullback for Texas University myself a few years ago," he told me, and then bowed with indescribable mockery.

"Permit me to compliment you, Lieutenant—er—"

"Evans."

"—Evans, on your ability as a tackler. You undoubtedly saved Mr. Cary from a catastrophe of the most pronounced dimensions. Now gentlemen, our business appears to be over. I have enjoyed your little call, and hope you'll come again on February the thirtieth, 1983."

He glanced over at Cary then, and for a moment their eyes held as Upton wiped the smile off his face, and thrust his neck forward a trifle over those mighty shoulders. The six roughnecks—a fairly decent looking lot, too, aside from the one man we had met before—were standing in the background.

"Seriously speaking, Cary, don't step on this tract again unless you wear a bullet-proof shirt and a pair of steel breeches. It's mine, the no trespassing sign is up, I don't crave you in my vicinity at all, and I'll shoot you like a rat if you come bothering around again. Any conversation you want with me, which I sincerely hope will be none, can be had in town. I'm not bluffing, Cary, so get the — off this reservation, both of you, and remember that this well is liable to leak a lot of gas which is very unhealthy, so stay away from it!"

V

IT SEEMED to Cary and myself, although we might have been wrong, that this was a hint for us to go. Being the soul of politeness, we went. On the rough ride back to town I was very cheeky, and life was tinted with a deeper shade of pink than it had been when we arrived. It appeared to me, knowing Malcolm, that there'd be something doing. And if there's anything I like, it's something doing.

"He seems easily able to contain his enthusiasm about Blake, doesn't he?" I remarked to the brooding Texan.

"Prob'ly a bluff to back up the trumped-up fight," stated Cary absently. "I wonder how in — the news about Blake and me filtered around and got tuh him? Highheels ain't loose-mouthed, and his word's good as his bond when he says he ain't talked."

"Was Upton right when he accused you of planning to hog all the acreage ahead of the company—not give them a chance to lease all their little capital would let them?" I inquired.

"— no. At the time Blake wrote me he took it for granted we'd give 'em a fair shake—maybe a little five per cent. slice o' ours in return for information. I was gonna talk tuh Upton anyway, and we'd worked together."

I believed this entirely, although it was against the business axioms of the oil-fields. A million dollars has been made on a bad check given for acreage, said acreage being resold quickly enough to cover the check. All's fair in a race for acreage down there, and nobody kicks if he's kidnaped by somebody else, or his tires ripped up, or something, so that he loses out in the struggle to snap up a bargain. Cary was a square-shooter, too much so for a man who aimed to get rich.

Back at the house Highheels listened to our tale, and it was plain to be seen that his soul was steeped in woe.

"Malcolm, I don't see nothin' we can do," he said at length. "This Upton's either gone nuts, or he's got what he says he's got. A backer for the whole acreage that's willin tuh risk a lot o' dough, and give forty per cent. o' what he makes if his gamble works. Outside of a well actually comin' in, yuh know yoreself, there's always a big gamblin' element, core or no core, formation or no formation. If he's got a sucker, all right. And listen, Mac, he ain't a bluffer. He's wild-tearin' and loud-roarin' wolf, and it's always his night tuh howl. He ain't got a dime because he's a — fool—but there ain't a worse man tuh fool with between the Rio Grande an' the Panhandle, and that's a fact. He's funny, but he's poison. Ask anybody."

"I gathered that," nodded Malcolm. "But Upton or no Upton, I'm in the ring fur a piece o' that acreage, and I don't aim to be scared out o' tryin'. Is that the dinner bell?"

It was, and we trooped down. I had a

very zestful appetite, and the sight of the girl I'd glimpsed in the kitchen before, now sitting at the small table, didn't make me lose any of it.

"This is Mary Baker—Malcolm Cary and Slim Evans, Highheels introduced us, and I, trying to bow with much *aplomb*, a great deal of *éclat* and a liberal slice of *savoir faire*, bumped the side of my face on a highbacked chair.

She smiled a gorgeous smile, invited us to take seats at the board, and started serving the peas in vegetable dishes.

I don't often rave over women's looks. Take their artificially curly hair and their pretty clothes and other outside elements away from most of 'em, and all that'd be left would be just another collection of features.

But Mary Baker, from the standpoint of appearance, knocked this particular bachelor right off his pins. She was very small, without being at all skinny, and had probably the largest and best eye-lashed pair of eyes ever seen outside of a magazine cover. Her hair was bobbed, and naturally curly, and an up-tilted Irish nose backed up the sparkle in her eyes to an extent which made her appearance curiously elf-like.

It seemed as though she was always sort of chuckling to herself over something, and that her mirth peeped out through her eyes. She wore a dark band around her hair and there was a certain sweet dignity about her which belied her at first rather flapperish appearance. I wasn't surprised to learn, considerably later, that she was twenty-five years old. Her face didn't show it, but her poise and general attitude did.

"It's very good of you and your mother to let us stay here," I told her. "We appreciate it. Oiltown beds, on the average, aren't exactly luxurious, I imagine."

She smiled, and it was a smile, brethren.

"We are glad to entertain such distinguished guests," she replied, just lightly enough to take any possible sarcasm out of her words. "Mr. Cary, we've heard a great deal about, and a flyer is one of the eighth wonders of the world, always."

I had to laugh at that, and she joined me. The copious Mrs. Baker, ladling out heaping platefuls of mashed potatoes and roast beef and such things, put in her oar here:

"I declare, every time that plane goes up out there Mary runs to a window and watches as though it was the first time she'd ever seen one."

"It's a beautiful sight!" maintained Mary. "I'd love to just sit in one of them for a moment."

If you think I missed this lead, gents, you're crazy. Within five minutes I had made a date to take her out on a personally conducted tour of my De Haviland. I liked the way she accepted. She was tickled to death at the opportunity, and didn't feel called upon to act coy or hesitate or say it would bother me too much or any of that applesauce with which the fair sex is very liable to camouflage their real desires. In fact, the delightful Miss Baker said candidly:

"I was hoping I'd get a chance to do just that. If some one hadn't invited me, I'd have been compelled to invite myself to accompany myself out there."

"Huh!" observed Mr. Highheels Baker. "The only time you went anywhere alone that I know of you held off the man with a shotgun."

She laughed, without self-consciousness.

"I've never noticed you taking much trouble——" she started, and then the hitherto quiet and abstracted Malcolm put in a word.

"Highheels, Miss Baker, had his heart broken some years ago by a waitress in a railroad lunchroom in Phoenix, Arizona. When he lost her he lost more'n the average. She was tall as a telegraph pole, and——"

This drawled reminiscence caused the leathery face of Highheels Blake to flush. I didn't think it could be done. Clearly, Malcolm wasn't kidding entirely.

Mrs. Baker and the girl did considerable chuckling over the embarrassment of Mr. Blake, and the girl asked with mock solemnity:

"Would it—be too heartrending a thing for Mr. Blake if you told us what the—er—tragedy was so that we could sympathize properly?"

"She said she's marry 'im, but in addition to four children which Highheels knew about there come a husband by a previous marriage, as one might say, which Highheels hadn't heard about. He'd give her a ring and some dresses and things, and lost 'em all."

"Shut up, or I'll tell 'em bout Dazzy Goodwin," interjected Highheels grimly, and it was Malcolm's turn to appear slightly uneasy.

Mary and her mother seemed to enjoy

the dinner thoroughly. Highheels had told us that they were well off, having some land on which there were several wells paying them the usual one-eighth royalty. In fact, their income was over a thousand dollars a month. We were there as friends of Blake—guests, and not boarders.



THEY didn't keep a servant, nor had they apparently added so much as a picture to their old-fashioned, comfortable home since their sudden rise to affluence. After the meal was over Mary cleared the table, and then washed the dishes and dried them, insisting that her mother occupy the porch for a rest. To my offer to dry them she replied—

"If I saw a flyer drying dishes, there would go all my illusions!"

As though there were any illusions whatever about flyers. It was — lucky for me, I remember thinking, that she didn't know many. As a matter of personal confession, boys and girls, with every curve of her lips and every sparkle out of her eyes and every word she spoke in her throaty, fascinating contralto voice one Slim Evans was turning more and more into an unadulterated ass.

I don't fall like that usually, really, but she just happened to fit every nook and corner of that funny little ideal woman that everybody thinks about, I guess, even when they wouldn't know what to do with said ideal if it came to life. I'll bet that sculptor guy that brought his statue to life, according to the story, pretty near had heart failure after it was done. Unless he was a marrying man, of course. My policy has been to run away, when possible, whenever I feel myself slipping.

We coagulated on the porch, Highheels, Malcolm and I. Mrs. Baker had gone upstairs. In a moment, before Highheels had anywhere near completed excavation operations with his toothpick, the telephone rang. Highheels answered it, mumbling a few indistinguishable words over the phone. Then he clumped out on his very high heels—he wanted to appear tall, I presume—and announced impressively—

"That was old Adam Burney, and he's on his way tuh see yuh, Mac!"

The name struck a familiar chord in my ears, and apparently Malcolm knew him, for the big Texan looked up in quick surprise.

"Adam Burney! Wants to see me?"

"That's what he said, and he's comin' here to do it. It's seldom Adam Burney goes tuh see anybody, too; they come tuh him."

"What does he want to see me about, how did he know I was here, and how did he know where I was stayin'?" inquired Malcolm oratorically.

"Things are right puzzlin," admitted Highheels. "But then, there's millions up on up that Howard acreage if that well hits, and what goes on in an oil town, especially one run by Adam Burney, when there's that much dinero at stake, ain't what yuh might call limited!"

"That cognomen rings familiarly in my ears—Burney's, I mean," I remarked.

"Probably seen it in the newspapers," Malcolm said, gazing away into the distance. "He's right now the biggest oil man in the midcontinent field outside o' the companies, o' course. He made this Hastings field—"

"By every kind o' work, crooked and straight, a man ever heard of!" Highheels supplemented.

In the next few minutes my newspaper knowledge of the man was made more detailed by certain specifications laid down by Highheels Blake. Burney had done a remarkable thing. He had gambled that there was oil in the Hastings territory, starting on a shoestring, and he'd hit. Then, instead of selling out his acreage adjacent to the wildcat well he'd brought in to the big companies, he'd gambled further, and drilled wells himself.

After they came in—for they did come in—his acreage was worth far more than before, because he proved in each block that there was oil, and consequently did not have to sell merely on the assumption that there was oil there. He got top prices in every case. But the stories about how he got his acreage—his ruthlessness, and the resourcefulness with which he beat out every competitor—were as many as the fleas on a Mexican dog. Highheels declared that he'd even gone so far as to arrange crooked poker games and things of that sort to break his opponents.

"If there's a piece of acreage he wants and the man won't sell at his price, it seems tuh be invariable that somethin' happens tuh him and he's forced tuh sell," Highheels declared. "He runs this town from con-

stable tuh Mayor, and he's a hard-fisted, hard-fightin', slippery *hombre* tuh buck, with all the money in the world behind 'im."

Shortly after these comforting words, and while we were speculating diversely on the meaning of the visit, an ornate car turned out of the main street and came rolling down the boulevard toward us. That purple car must have cost fifteen thousand dollars, being a foreign product, and it made a Pullman look like a wheelbarrow.

A good-looking blonde woman was at the wheel.

"He married his ward a few months ago," Highheels told us, *sotto voce*, as none other than Mr. Adams Burney in person climbed majestically out of his rolling chair, as it were, and advanced on us in company front.

He was a big, stout man with an impressive face despite pauchy jowls and a wide, thin, cruel mouth. He was arrayed like the lilies of the valley in a spotless Palm Beach suit, white silk shirt, flowing black tie, and a Panama hat as big as a tent.

"Afternoon, Mr. Burney," Highheels greeted him. "This here's Mr. Cary, and this is Lieutenant Slim Evans, which flew Mr. Cary intuh town."

"Glad tuh know you, gentlemen," rasped Burney, his prominent, rather bloodshot eyes surveying us quickly. "Lieutenant, are you interested in oil with Mr. Cary?"

"Very slightly," Cary said for me.

"Get out a while, Blake. I want to talk business," stated Burney in a dictatorial manner which was enough to rub my fur the wrong way.

Highheels wandered mournfully into the house.

"Mr. Cary, I understand you're here looking up the Howard acreage oifset from Blake No. 1 well," Burney began.

"That's right funny, how rumors'll start about a stranger," Cary returned equably. "I come intuh town, say nothin' to nobody, and — if they ain't got my business staked out for me all over the place."

"Don't quibble, sir!" said Burney. "You know the conditions, of course. I—"

"May I enquiah where yuh heard about my business?" asked Cary.

"That's neither here nor there!" Burney told him flatly. "I have a hundred ways to find out what I want to know. I even know your capital—a little less than fifty thousand dollars."

He said this with relish, enjoying his power and the mystification apparent on our faces; for a minute, that is. Then I said one word—

“Lansdale!”

Cary nodded. I was wondering how in — Lansdale had let out the news. He must have been in communication with several people in Hastings.

“The conditions are that Howard, a crusty and wealthy old man, has set a flat price of one hundred and fifty dollars an acre on his land. That’s ridiculous, of course. It’s not proven territory. It’s nearly settled, in fact, that it’s dry territory. However, you, I know, are planning, through some method I don’t quite savvy, to get advance information on the well and buy up a lot of that acreage.

“My proposition is this—and you’ll take it. I——”

“How do yuh know I’ll take it, suh?”

That dominating manner of Burney’s had finally broken through Cary’s hide, and his gentle question was the result.

“You’ll take it,” insisted Burney, brushing away the question as though it was a troublesome insect. “You’re not in a position to gamble all your money on a longshot—and anything, short of Blake No. 1 actually flowing—will be a longshot. You’ve got to dub around. I want you to get your information, give it to me, and if conditions warrant it, in my opinion, I’ll buy the lease of the whole Howard tract—nearly five hundred acres—and give you a one-third-second royalty of all oil I take out myself, or one per cent. of what I sell to the Standard for when I do sell. You’ll have a few thousand for your trouble in getting the information.”

“I don’t care tuh entertain yore proposition, Mr. Burney,” drawled Malcolm.

“Think twice,” stormed Burney. “Understand, Cary, I can get all the information there is if I want it bad enough. I’m giving you a chance to work for me and get the information necessary for me. You’re just a little mosquito buzzing around this town, Cary, and don’t forget it. And if you don’t get information for me, very likely you won’t get any at all!”

He said this with those prominent, red-shot eyes of his staring right into the unmoved Cary’s face. I was enjoying every second of it. Business was looking up. You can believe it or not, but this goes as

it lays: the more complicated the situation got down there in Hastings, the more interested I became.

As our chances for ever chewing off a slice of the Howard pie got slimmer and slimmer, I enjoyed myself more and more. That sounds as though I was crazy, doesn’t it? Well, I’ve come to the conclusion, after much prayerful meditation on the subject, that I am.



CARY took Burney’s last words without the flicker of an eyelash.

Then he reached over to the bush growing alongside the porch rail, plucked a twig after much deliberation, thrust it in his mouth, and grinned slightly.

“Is that a threat, suh?” he asked.

“Take it any way you want,” said Burney.

“I aim to go about my own business, Mistuh Burney, and do the best I can. You’ve made me an offer, and I’ve turned it down. That’s final. Yo’re bellowin’ around heuh insinuat’in’ that Slim and I’d better work for you or somethin’ll happen swift and suddenlike. Well, Mistuh Burney, if yuh mess around with me, yuh’ll find I’m somewhat of a messer, maybe, myself.”

Burney glared into Cary’s eyes for a moment, twisting his gray moustache. Then he got to his feet.

“If there’s oil on that Howard acreage, I’ll get it,” he stated, very quietly now. “Yuh’d better take what you can get and don’t buck Adam Burney. I’ve forgot more about oil than you ever knew, I know more about this town than anybody else in the world, and I can knock you higher than a kite by using a telephone about two minutes. I’m talking to you straight, Cary; the offer is open until six o’clock tonight. If it isn’t taken, I shall consider you a competitor of mine, and act accordingly.”

And he stamped off to his blazing barouche, and rolled away in gilded splendor.

“The situation,” I opined, “is what Cecil might call rummy to a degree.”

“Ain’t it though?” grinned Malcolm. “Slim, fur the life of me I can’t figure what we’ve stepped into. But we ain’t gonna step out right away. Boy, you’d think that well was in already, wouldn’t yuh?”

“What’d he say?” came from the doorway, and Highheels’ bowlegged form oozed out on the porch.

We told him, and Highheels considered

the matter with his customary funereal deliberation. Then he broke into speech, his phrases being strung together in this manner, *i. e.*, viz. and to wit:

"Mac, I hate tuh say it, but yuh can't buck Adam Burney. He won't necessarily fight fair, and he's got the means tuh fight foul. I can't afford tuh buck 'im, Mac, and I don't think you can. Take the few thousand yuh can make on his proposition—maybe make—and be thankful."

"That means that with Adam Burney against us, yuh're out, eh?" Cary enquired.

"Got to, Mac. If he found out I was continuin' tuh help yuh, my time might be up in this town. Oh, ——!" And Highheels spit lugubriously. "Havin' been a —— fool, I'll string along with yuh, Mac. Ain't anything I can do, though. That's the reason I got yuh down heuh, believin' you might figure out somethin'. All I've done is put yuh in touch——"

"Our agreement goes as it was arranged," Cary told him. "You couldn't fulfill all your part, but that's neither here nor there. Slim, what's your idea of this mess? Or ain't yuh got any?"

"I can always talk," said I, "regardless of whether I have any ideas or not. In fact, ideas often hold one back in reaching the true heights of conversation."

I brought up short as I heard an infectious gurgle of laughter through the open window behind me. It was Mary Baker, passing through, and my mild facetiousness evidently tickled her funny bone. However, I resumed:

"There's a tremendous fortune in the Baker acreage if there's oil. So naturally our friend Upton and his company want it, and Burney wants it, and we want it, and dozens of others want it.

"It's my idea that Lansdale has spilled the beans. He must have come here when he was supposed to be in Mexico, and he must have a lot more money than we think he has. He must be the man backing Upton, otherwise Upton wouldn't have known where you stood with Blake. Burney, through some leak or other somewhere, had repeated to him what Lansdale told Upton. Lansdale also probably got Upton thinking that you and Blake were planning to hog everything in sight and leave the company out in the cold.

"Burney evidently doesn't know that Blake and Upton have split, and that you

haven't any more facilities for finding out how the well shapes up than anybody else. He figures you on the inside track, and aimed to use you as cheaply as he could and scare you into accepting his niggardly terms."

Highheels Blake here, between his crying spells, sobbed out the information that Burney's method of operation is to use his power, wealth and influence to force men into taking a small price for anything he wants to buy, didn't he? If he knew that you, Malcolm, were sitting here in the midst of your enemies, helpless as ——, he wouldn't bother with you at all, it doesn't seem to me.

"He just preferred to use you, if possible, rather than do any rough stuff of his own to find out anything. He may have tried to get around Upton before, and we've got a good idea what Upton must have told him. If that chauffeur of ours talks about the fight, which he undoubtedly has done and will do further, and Burney hears of it, he'll forget all about you."

"Lansdale'll be in tuhnight, and we'll have a sociable little talk with him," Cary remarked with all the innocent gentleness of a suckling babe on his fleshy face. "He figured I'd be sittin' down in McMullen, waitin' for a wire. Yuh say they plan tuh take a core tuhnight, Highheels?"

"Was, last I knew," returned Blake, tipping his chair back against the side of the house.

"That McMullen train gets to San Antone along about three in the afternoon, doesn't it Slim? I thought so. What's the first train out of San Antone for this place after three, Blake?"

"Gets in here six-ten."

"I see."

For a moment or two there was silence. All sorts and kinds of men and women straggled up and down our street. Every house in Hastings was a boarding house those days. The tiny section of the main stem which we could see was always clogged with men and cars and horses and wagons, and I'll swear the noises of it merged into a sort of faraway roar which made one think of a nice quiet street in New York which is shaded by an elevated line.


Hastings was nothing but a surging, money crazy mob of people who were rushing around like so many waltzing mice on the trail of the elusive gusher. Our post on a side street was comparatively quiet, of

course, but the center of town was not far away, and the influence of it was enough to communicate a subtle restlessness to me. It suited me right down to the ground to be a part of that town.

These reflections caused me to mention a point which had not been discussed hitherto. As points go, this was possessed of a certain importance, as it were.

"Malcolm, just where do we get off?" I asked him. "Are there any nefarious plans in your noodle as to just how we're going to lick Burney, Lansdale, and last, but not least, Upton? Number one, how are we going to get information definite enough to warrant us spending one-fifty per acre against our friend Upton? Number two, how are we going to get said information before Burney, with all his facilities and his two hundred or more henchmen, and before Lansdale, with his inside track, presumably?"

"I don't know, exactly, right now," Cary said reflectively. "There'll be a way we can talk over. This is a shore thing: ethically, we got a right tuh do anything. It ain't on paper, but Highheels here has got every right tuh know everything about that well. Upton is doublecrossin' him out of his chance. Highheels has passed over his interests, so to speak, to us. Consequently, if we fight rough we got a perfect right to without losin' our membership in the Methodist church or bein' shipped C. O. D. tuh —."

 AT THIS point a vision floated on the porch. It consisted of a out pair of patent leather boots, riding breeches and a white silk shirt waist open at the neck, the whole thing being filled to perfection by Mary Baker. She smiled at me, I should say us, and asked lightly—"Does anybody want to go riding?"

Oil or no oil, money or no money, Upton, Burney and Lansdale notwithstanding, I suddenly realized that what I had been needing for a long time was a horseback ride.

"I do!" I said without hesitation. "Malcolm, there's nothing on until Lansdale arrives, is there?"

Cary grinned, and his eyes twinkled as they rested on the girl.

"Not a thing," he stated. "Got a horse tall enough so's Slim's legs won't be draggin', Miss Mary?"

"I think so," she laughed.

"It's easier to find a mount tall enough for me than one big enough to carry you," I told him. And then, to Miss Baker—

"We could kill two birds with one stone, and ride out for our ship inspection, couldn't we?"

"That's what I had in mind!" she told me with the frankness which was one of several things I liked about her.

The horses—it seemed that the Bakers were the owners of three ponies—were stabled three blocks down the street in a stable situated right where the town itself merged into open fields. I was supplied with a good enough chestnut, a big brute, which seemed in fine fettle. However, my apprenticeship in Utah made me a pretty fair rider, cowboy style, and he didn't bother me. Mary was aboard a beautiful little black. That black mare, she confided, had been the only extravagant purchase she had made since oil had made them comparatively rich.

She rode like a Texas girl should. As we circled the outskirts of town to save ourselves from the trip down that swirling, shouting, crowded main street we were riding, for a time, right at the edge of the main Hastings field.

The smell of the gas was strong in the air, and from our road we could see operations on a few wells. Most of them were already in, the pipe attached to the drillstem, and the oil carried, unseen, to the main carrier pipe lines. But on other wells—the derricks were within two hundred feet of each other and seemed to extend for miles directly north—the roughnecks were bending to their toil.

I watched one crew work for a minute or two, and it was uncanny. They were coming out of the hole; that is, they were bringing the drillstem up out of the hole to change bits, take a core, or something of the sort. As each fourble—a length of drill stem—came clear of the derrick floor they sprang into action. Down would swing the huge traveling block to grip the top of the fourble in its iron jaws. One man tended to that.

Another roughneck, with a huge chain wrench, slapped the jaws around the fourble to unscrew it. The tight hold of the rotary rig on the rest of the drillstem below the joint was vitally important, for if the drillstem dropped down into the well—there went that well. The chief driller was at the

motor, another roughneck, derrick man, was high up in the derrick to help pile; still another at the traveling block, and another helping the man with the chain wrench. In less than a minute the traveling block was swinging the released fourble to one side of the derrick floor, there to be piled vertically with the assistance of the derrick man up above; the length of squared piping attached to the drilling machinery had come down and gripped the top of the next fourble and was attached; the little motor at one side of the derrick floor was chugging away in reverse, and the next length of drillstem was emerging out of the hole. The fireman, whose post was at the great boiler a hundred and fifty feet from the derrick, connected with the motor by pipe, stoked busily, and then simply lounged, watching the ant-like activity of the great field with bored disinterest. The roughnecks were stalwart, overalled men whose clothes, faces, shoes were slimy with oil. The ground itself, and the few languishing trees and shrubs which had not been cleared were black with the showerings of various gushers which had spouted free and easy like before being manacled with pipe.

"It's a game that makes your blood go into a trot, at least!" I told my companion. "Especially when you think of the rewards."

"It's marvelous, and sometimes it scares me," she told me. "It seems to make the men in it rather crazy, for a while. With millions all around them they go wild. You have no idea what this town is after dark."

"I will have after tonight," I told her. As I squinted at her from the side it seemed to me that I had never gazed at so luscious a sight.

I'm going to say something right here. I was over thirty, and unmarried, and carried no broken heart around with me. Neither had I been extensively disappointed in matters of the heart. That, it seems to me, is a guarantee that I wasn't exactly an impressionable man where the fair and colder sex are concerned. Consequently, you can take this as I tell it, and explain it to suit yourself.

Just being under the eyes of Mary Baker, and around with her, gave me a persistent, ever-growing, well-defined thrill. I was conscious of it every minute—and every inflection of her low, slightly throaty voice,

every expression on that piquant face of hers, every word she said seemed to hit me harder. If there is any bigger — fool roving this earth than a man in love, I don't know what type of fool it is, and from the time I visited Hastings I've got nothing but sympathy for them.

Because I had been anesthetic to the charms of the fair ladies whose trails had crossed mine hitherto, I set more store by my scrambled mental condition when with Mary than I would otherwise have done. I don't say I was in love, but I'm afraid I was a close relative of the willin' Barkis.

At times I am what is known in the vernacular as a fast worker. So, just before we got to the ship, and after we had indulged in considerable badinage, by and large, I seized my chance when we gave the horses a breather after a brisk gallop down a country lane.

"Miss Baker, I hope you will not misunderstand what I'm going to say," I told her. "Cary and I are down here on some oil business, and it looks as though we were in for a tough fight against some powerful and unscrupulous foes. In fact, there are a couple of boys around this town whose life ambition seems to be to nail our hides right to their barn doors. Consequently, I don't know just how things are going to break.

"I do know this, though—that I'd like to see—more of you, if you'd let me fly in from McMullen now and then—and I hope that what may go on here won't—prejudice you against me if it looks badly at first sight. I—er—don't know quite how to express myself—"

There I was, floundering around as if I had flypaper on my mental feet. I felt as though I was talking like the world's champion idiot at the moment, and the time that had passed since has increased my conviction. Nevertheless, I am a direct and simple soul—far more simple than direct—and I doggedly held to my task. I wasn't going to beat around the bush. What I want, I step out to get, forthwith and without delay. I am as subtle as a charging rhinoceros.

She listened, her eyes gazing straight ahead. I shall always think that the reason I got by was that she herself was so utterly lacking in affectation that she appreciated coming right to the point.

When I finished my stuttering oration, it

was a few seconds before she answered. Then her eyes met mine, and she smiled.

"You are—very direct, aren't you, Lieutenant Evans?"

"Very possibly," I admitted. "Isn't that usually the way when a man confines his conversation to just what he means?"

She laughed.

"I never thought of it in that way," she acknowledged.

And then her face became very serious. Her eyes seemed to be probing mine, as though in an endeavor to turn me inside out and discover what particular kind of fuel had generated my conversation. Finally she said simply—

"I think I should be very happy to have you come to Hastings any time you cared to." Then, with a mischievous smile creeping over her face she added:

"Don't forget to fly in when you come. A railroad train would be so stereotyped."

"I can see that my fatal beauty and my winning ways come in a bad second to an ordinary De Haviland," I told her. "Well, there she is, fair lady. Come and gaze at my transportation, and I'll e'en expose to thee the inner workings thereof instead of leaving it an impressive mystery. But I must be appreciated for myself alone!"

Ex-corporal Malley was sprawled alongside his dilapidated Jenny, having one other man for company. I waved to him, he returned it, and then turned to the man alongside him and said something which caused them both to laugh. I felt my face flush a bit, because I had an instinctive feeling that there had been some ribald remark made regarding my appearance with a girl.


I didn't care so much for the sloppy-looking, unshaven Malley and his down-at-the-heels outfit. No wonder business was bad. That ship looked about as safe a conveyance as a life preserver would be to shoot Niagara Falls in.

I took an hour satisfying her insatiable curiosity about the ship. From altimeter to elevators we covered it, and I was compelled to go into the scientific principles, history, and uses of every separate cottenpin. She sure was interested. And such is the foolishness of a man—or at least, this man—that finally I got to kidding myself, temporarily. Under the spell of her wide-eyed interest and admiration I got thinking that maybe I was one of those poetical aviators.

You know, every once in a while something comes out in some magazine about the rangers of the upper air or the death-defying daredevils who roam the wide upper spaces, laughing in the face of terrific danger and all that whangdoodle. Temporarily I transformed myself from a lanky, big-footed, aerial chauffeur into a hero. It didn't last long—I laugh too easily at myself for that—but it just goes to show what a man can descend to when the planets are sitting in a certain position.

Between riding, talking, and my scientific lecture, the time passed by as if it was running on ball-bearings. It was six-thirty when we had left the horses in their boudoirs and arrived at the house—just in time to greet Mr. Cecil Lansdale.

VI

 MALCOLM CARY was on the porch as we arrived, and Lansdale was alighting from a Ford. It's a tipoff on how regular Mary Baker was that I felt perfectly easy in turning to her and saying:

"There might be a bit of unpleasantness between Cary and that chap Lansdale. Would you mind doing a disappearing act for a minute or two to save yourself from listening in on it?"

"Of course," she said seriously, and for a second or two she just looked at me, and there seemed to be a shadow in those oversized eyes. I think that the wildness of an oil town had sort of bruised her imagination, if you know what I mean.

She threw me a parting smile, and went down the driveway at one side of the house. I followed Lansdale down the walk to the porch. Cary was sitting there in a rocking chair, and his face was as tranquil as though he had nothing whatever on his mind. Except for his eyes, that is. And they were just a few degrees colder than usual.

Lansdale said nothing until he dropped his grips on the porch floor. Highheels had written Malcolm that the Baker home was available for living quarters, and Lansdale had evidently decided to take advantage of it.

"How are you, Cary," he said coolly, in that precise phraseology of his, and then turned to me as cool as a frosted cucumber. "How are you, lieutenant. Flew down, I presume?"

"Yes," I answered.

His lean, bony face did not show the slightest emotion. Behind his glasses his eyes, with pupils as small as pinpoints, seemed unusually bright and sharp.

There was an instant of silence, which Lansdale used to light a cigaret. I didn't know just what was about to happen. I was just waiting. And interested. Cary's eyes were resting steadily on the human glacier in front of us, looking him over as though he was a new freak of nature which merited inspection.

Suddenly, because of that uncanny silence between the two of them, it seemed to me that the tension was growing tighter and tighter, if that's what tension does, and that in a second something was going to snap.

Lansdale threw away his burned match, and turned to Malcolm with a nervous, bird-like movement that was the first indication of any kind whatever that his nerves were affected by the situation.

"I know all you're going to say, Cary," he snapped, biting off his words. His eyes met Cary's fearlessly. "There's no need to camouflage things at all. You evidently found out about the telegram. I deliberately suppressed it, and planned to be here ahead of you. In this particular thing I intended, and do intend, to make all I can. I took advantage of every opportunity. I owe you nothing. I gave you faithful service for niggardly pay. I decided to step in ahead of you in the matter of the acreage down here. In other words, I admit everything.

"I know you, Cary. You might do any one of a number of things. You could get up from that chair and break me in two. You could put me in the hospital for weeks because you weigh two hundred pounds and I'm a hundred and twenty. But whatever you do will mean nothing. I don't even care. My arrangements are made. What are you going to do about it?"

Gentlemen, I looked at that cool little bozo with my eyes popping out. Talk about a matter-of-fact person! He was as unaffected by what he had done, was saying, and might be up against as I would be if somebody told me that the man who invented the permanent wave had just died.

Cary was laughable. Maybe he was going to get tough. If such had been his intention, the wind was taken out of his

sails. He just sat there, huge and calm, and looked Lansdale up and down. Finally he drawled:

"I'm going to do nothin', Cease. Killin' yuh would relieve my mind, but might be inconvenient. Do yore stuff, boy. Yo're a dirty, sneakin', double-crossin' coyote, but I ain't got energy enough tuh try tuh get even with yuh. And yo're so little I couldn't hit yuh. That bein' over, there's one question I want tuh ask yuh. Did you come down here when you was supposed tuh be in Mexico?"

"I was both here and in Mexico," Lansdale told him. "Well, I shall see you both at dinner. I presume you have already found out that there is nothing you can do in connection with the Howard acreage?"

Right then I knew that he was uneasy. More and more, as time went on, I had grown to realize something of the ability of Malcolm Cary. Invariably the men who knew him felt that he had an ace up his sleeve, no matter what the odds against him. And I knew, as Lansdale asked that question, that he was afraid of Malcolm Cary. He wasn't sure that Malcolm wouldn't find some way to beat him, no matter how well he'd built his fences.

"Yes, Cease—" Malcolm started, and Lansdale interrupted.

"Don't call me Cease!" he snapped.

"All right, Cease," drawled Malcolm. "I won't. What I started to say was, I know I'm licked. Of course, you sort of expect that from a — like you. I don't feel bad, because I wasn't licked fair."

"I'll see you both at dinner," Lansdale repeated. "I presume the mistress of the house is at home?"

I nodded, and he rang the old-fashioned doorbell. When Mrs. Baker came to the door he introduced himself. She looked at us in a sort of puzzled way, because we did not introduce him, I presume. Then she said:

"We've been expecting you, Mr. Lansdale. Come right in."

Ten minutes later he came downstairs, and walked up toward the main street.

"If Highheels was here, I'd have him followed," Cary ruminated. "Not much use of it, though. It's a cinch he and Upton've come to an agreement."

"Any ideas about how we're going to proceed this evening?" I asked him.

Malcolm nodded. Mary came out on the

porch then, so he didn't have a chance to elucidate in detail. We talked to her—or rather I did—for an hour. Until dinner time, that is. Malcolm seemed anesthetic to her. He said little, but occasionally he put in a gentle observation that was usually of a humorous nature. It always got a laugh from her, anyway.

Lansdale, however, when we all draped ourselves around the festive board, showed his interest plainly. His manners were really sublime. The man was an aristocrat, in a way. And he showed by every move and word that Mary had knocked him for a row of British balmacans. He talked of three things that got a rise out of even Malcolm, and I had supposed he knew Cecil pretty well. The South Sea islands, the secret service system of the prefect of police in Paris, and the Boer War. And he knew, from personal experience, plenty about all of 'em. Cecil was quite a remarkable little fellow, taking it by and large.

We were just at the cigaret stage of the meal when there came a knock on the door. A loud, vulgar knock. Why the man didn't use the bell, was going through my mind when Mary came to the door of the dining room. She turned her head to talk to whoever was behind her.

"I'll have them come out, Mr. Harwood."

"Never mind!" came an authoritative voice. I looked for a big man, but a bowlegged shrimp clumped in behind the nonplused, wide-eyed girl. The first thing I saw, and after that I didn't notice much else, was a large and shining star pinned to his vest. He had no coat on.

"Who's Cary?" he demanded in that voice which was several sizes too big for him.

"I am," returned Malcolm.

"You're Evans, I suppose? Flew that there airplane in here, with Cary as passenger?"

"Uh-huh," was my mumbled answer.

He had a long horse face, decorated by a bedraggled mustache and a long nose. He looked to me like a man who was pretending to be tough to try to camouflage his weakness. The idea of him raiding the dining-room was ridiculous, of course. Just his idea of being authoritative and hard boiled.

"Well, yo're under arrest. We found a pound o' heroin in yore ship. Douse them cigarets, and c'mon!"



THERE was a moment when a holy hush fell over the assemblage. Mary stood there like a statue, and Cary was like a piece of rock, his face smooth and expressionless except for small, calculating eyes. Mrs. Baker had a cup of tea poised in her hand, half way to her mouth, and it was a good bet that it would never get there. Cecil Lansdale went on eating, but his pin-point eyes flitted from face to face. As for me, I didn't know whether I was afoot or on horseback.

The sheriff stood there, enjoying the sensation he had created. As usual, I was the first to find my tongue.

"Will you say that again?" I asked the sheriff.

"Several thousand dollars worth o' heroin was found hid in the body o' yore ship!" repeated the officer with relish. "We been lookin' around fur dope in this town—there's lots of it. Lots o' people must be bringin' it in. You two had a smart way tuh make yore expenses, didn't yuh?"

"Who found it? You?" asked Malcolm softly.

"No, Malley found it in yore ship when he was pokin' around. C'mon now, get a move on! I got two deputies outside waitin'. Shake a leg, you!"

"Just a minute, suh," said Malcolm slowly. "I guess yuh got me. But there's no use o' arrestin' Lieutenant Evans heuh. He didn't know nothin' about it. I brought that heroin from Juarez intuh El Paso, then up the border tuh McMullen, where Evans is stationed, and put it in the ship when he offered tuh fly me here, without him knowin' nothin' about it. I'm guilty. I admit it. But he don't know a thing about it."

You can imagine how those slow words hit me. I felt as if a Martin Bomber had just dropped a two thousand pounder on the top of my head. Then Malcolm's near eye flickered toward me, and I thought I got the drift.

Anyway, I burst into speech. That's about the only time I ever was an actor, I guess. And I had an enthralled audience. The Barrymores and Booths should hope to hold a crowd as I did.

"I never was so surprized in my life!" I yelled loudly. "Sheriff, if Cary hadn't said what he just has, I'd have called you and Malley liars. Cary, I never thought that a man could be such a skunk as you, taking advantage of friendship.

"You did do one thing, though. You came across to get me out of trouble. But I'm through with you. I wash my hands of you from this moment on. Don't look to me for any help whatever!"

Cecil Lansdale was looking at me with eyes that seemed to bore right through to the backbone. He had quit eating now, and was sitting in his chair as straight as a poker. Mary's eyes were full of tears, for some reason.

Right there, if I had needed any further information whatever, I got the whole lay. We had been framed, undoubtedly by Adam Burney, to get rid of us by the simple method of planting us firmly in the hoosegow, there to wither in total seclusion, far from acreage, wells, and, most of all, the estimable Mr. Howard of Houston, Texas.

The reason even my crippled brain surrounded these excogitations with considerable celerity was the appearance of divers and several people around the board. Number one, the sheriff. When Malcolm calmly admitted his guilt and exonerated me the sheriff's mouth opened into a cave. His eyes bulged and, to quote from the classics, he was knocked for a boilerful of slightly used beefstew. And our dear friend Cease Lansdale—that lean gray face of his twitched a bit around the mouth, and he ceased eating. It was as plain as the nose on my face, which is the utmost in obviousness, that both Cecil and the Sheriff were in on the frameup. Any man who did not have advance dope about it would not be astonished to hear a criminal caught red-handed admit his guilt.

That gave us something to go on anyway. As my mind was revolving the possibilities, there was no conversation, for a moment, to bother my mental machinery. Utter silence had that strained dining-room in its grip.

Malcolm, it seemed to me, had been framed in order to get him out of the way as a dangerous competitor for the Howard acreage. But how had Cecil Lansdale brought this event to pass? Where had he got the money and power to get the Sheriff, Malley, and undoubtedly others into the scheme? One name suggested itself almost automatically, of course, in view of all that had been said to us by Highheels and Burney himself. Yes, that was the name, and you'll perceive that I'm not trying to

set myself up as a detective marvel. It was very obvious.

What inference, I ask oratorically, did that last thought carry with it? Elemental, my dear Watson. That Cecil and Burney had formed a partnership of some kind. Cecil, unless I was as badly mistaken as the time I called four aces for three hundred bucks, was in on that scheme to get rid of the man they were all afraid of.

As to Malcolm, I figured that I saw through his confession right away. He was willing to stay cooped a while, if he had to, providing I was out. It would have been much better, of course, for me to have confessed and let him stay out. But, being an army officer, that would have been unpleasant, too.

The sheriff shattered the peaceful silence with his loud and unpleasant voice.

"Well, c'mon, the two of yuh!"

"Why the two of us?" inquired Malcolm.

Mrs. Baker began to sob very quietly, and Mary was leaning over her, patting her shoulder.

"Yuh both come in in the ship, didn't yuh? Yuh can tell yore innocence to the judge, Lieutenant. I——"

"Tell nothing!" snarled Cary, and his big body seemed to be crouching there in the chair. "I tell you it was my fault, and that Slim is an innocent as a baby!"

"Furthermore, my dear Sheriff," I cut in urbanelly. "You've got to have better evidence than that to arrest me! I'm an army officer, not on leave, and you've got no right to arrest me on suspicion! You might turn me over to the military authorities in San Antonio, but they wouldn't touch me on the evidence you've got!"

That, of course, was largely bluff. No need of going into the regulations about it, but what I said is very effective to prevent too much incarceration in small towns.

"You've got no case against me at all, you won't arrest me, and by ——, if you try it you'll have to carry me to jail dead, and then you and your small town bosses, with all the witnesses I have here, try to convince the big bugs of the army that you shouldn't be convicted of murder, sheriff or no sheriff!"

I didn't say this pleasantly, nor did I say it for effect. Suddenly I had become very much disgusted with the *status quo*, and my temper flashed out. At the end I was

snarling my words right down into the non-plused officer's face, and his eyes wouldn't meet mine.

Before he could answer, Highheels Blake came striding in. He took a wobegone look around, and then his puckered eyes rested on Cary.

"What's up," he asked quietly, and Malcolm told him in clipped sentences.

Perhaps it seems farfetched to you to think of a load of heroin being planted in a ship. If so, that's because you have no idea of the extent of the drug traffic in this country, particularly around the border. Do you know that one out of every hundred and ten inhabitants of this country are drug addicts? And in any oilfield town, along with the roughnecks and outdoor men, there is a stream of parasites—prostitutes, gamblers, crooks, divekeepers of every description—which includes a very large percentage of drug addicts. Dope is bought and sold in those towns more, perhaps, in proportion to population, than in any large city. And the traffic in them over and from the border is tremendous. I was in El Paso when they caught a bunch of peddlers making addicts out of school kids, and any sensible man who rubs shoulders a bit with the underworld soon gets an angle on the thing that pretty nearly knocks him dead until he gets accustomed to it. So the yarn about finding dope in the ship was not as surprizing in itself as it might be to any of us.



NO SOONER had Cary finished his three-sentence resumé of the charge against him than the sheriff stated:

"Cary confessed, Highheels, but says Evans is innocent. Didn't know nothin' about it. I dunno——"

"Lemme talk with 'em," stuttered Blake, so astonished that he could barely filter the words through his mustache.

"No talkin' tuhgether!" sputtered the sheriff. "Gittin' the stories all fixed up, I s'pose. Yuh must think I'm a amateur."

"Oh, pipe down!" said Blake wearily.

To my intense surprize the sheriff did pipe down, after one heavy-lidded look from Blake. As we gathered in the kitchen I had to pass Mary Baker and her mother. Her eyes, still wet, wandered from mine and rested for a long time on Cary's smooth, broad, full face.

"Don't worry," I told her softly, and she smiled determinedly.

Out in the kitchen Malcolm said in low tones:

"I confessed to let Slim stay out and handle things. It was the only thing tuh do. Burney don't run the state o' Texas, and any court I go up in front of'll exonerate me. I know that. They don't even want me in jail more'n about one or two days—just till they know which way tuh jump."

Blake nodded. Then he used one horny finger for emphasis, and started to plead with Cary. He told him what he was bucking in Burney, what they could do to him if they wanted to, and so forth, and so forth and et cetera.

"Yuh ain't got a chance, Mac!" he almost cried. "Mebbe if yuh'd let me I could get yuh out o' this thing, but guaranteein' yuh'd leave right away. I stand good with Burney. Honest, Mac, what chance'd yuh have anywheres if the police and everybody was tryin' tuh frame yuh? I know it goes against yore grain, but it's the only thing tuh do—honest!"

I was considerably surprized to hear the feeling in Blake's voice. His usual melancholy had now deepened until it seemed about to break forth in tears.

"To —— with 'em!" snapped Cary. "But I ain't blamin' you, Highheels, if yuh back out."

As Blake, eyes on the floor, seemed to be thinking, a sproutlet of an incipient thought burst through the rocky mental soil inside my head. It was born of several things I'll tell you about later. It was scarcely a thought, you understand. But I wondered.

Finally Highheels, pulling at his discouraged mustache fiercely, said:

"I dunno what I can do, Mac! I'll swear, oldtimer, yuh're——"

"I don't know anything else yuh can do, either," drawled Malcolm gently. "Maybe show Slim the lay of the land in a little more detail, and then I don't know what in —— he can do. But I do know that I ain't afraid o' their trumped-up charge, or what they can do tuh me."

Again Highheels broke into passionate pleading, which affected Malcolm not at all. Nor me. I didn't know what I could do, or exactly how much we were liable to be up against, but the whole frameup was such that I wanted like —— to buck it, and I wouldn't have laid down to them for anything whatsoever.

"Well," said Highheels finally, "I guess

it ain't no use. I'll do what I can, but what in — can we do?"

In the momentary silence engineered by this question the sheriff made his entrance.

"Through?" he bellowed to Highheels.

To my surprise, Highheels nodded a mournful yes. We could have used a few extra minutes—I was not to realize until later; I usually realize things later—how much we could have used them.

"C'mon!" yelped the sheriff for about the fifth time.

"Do you still have an idea of arresting me?" I asked him, with a copious amount of nastiness.

He hesitated; so to clinch it I went on with even more copious nastiness:

"I hope you do! I'm an army officer, I'm proved innocent by a confession, and I'll get you for false arrest and about every other thing a — good army lawyer can think of! Go ahead, you boy scout, and pull your popgun and try to take me to your funny jail! What the — are you hesitating about? Can't you decide whether to obey orders, or save yourself and your bosses a lot of trouble?"

"Don't git fresh!" he said hesitantly, with less bluster than usual.

"Oh, let's get under way!" I said to Malcolm. "He isn't going to arrest me, but we'll go to the jail with you, any way, and give him more time to make up his mind."

But my main purpose in going to the jail was frustrated from the word go. No conversation between Malcolm and I was allowed by the sheriff and his two deputies. Which caused the sproutlet to sprout still further upward toward the sun of perfect understanding. I heard that from a Chautauqua lecturer out in Utah once. Pretty nice, eh?

To make a long story short, Malcolm was loaded in a Ford and we made our slow way down that thronged, surging, noisy, dizzy main street. The night's revelry was on, and from open doors came the shouts of drinkers, the click of chips, oaths as men got in temporary fights, the shrill screams of dancehall girls. On the sidewalks packed men talked business, greeted friends noisily, washed in and out of crowded stores, restaurants, and offices.

Everywhere one looked were the signs of the leasehounds, and they were doing a land-office business. Painted and powdered women wove through the crowd, and men

in overalls and flannel shirts which were positively stiff with oil rubbed shoulders with trimly dressed big company men. And everywhere the talk was oil; what Burney Number Five was doing, what the Texas had paid for the Grange acreage; how so-and-so had been shot the night before, and similar matters. Here and there a group of oblivious men who watched the swirling scene with bored inattention talked business in low tones. A hundred new fortunes had been made that day, and a hundred more would be made that night. That is, as far as actual deals were concerned. It was an over-stimulated, over-zestful, madly moving panorama, but in every detail of it, right down to the smell of gas which pervaded the air as the breeze drifted it in from the field, there was something raw and untamed and rough which called to all the wild in a man. I felt it, big, lazy bum that I am, and my nostrils twitched, so to speak, as though for the first time I smelt the smoke of battle. If anything was needed to harden my faculties into full determination, those few minutes crawling between prostitutes and roughnecks and leasehounds and gamblers with six-figure talk reaching to us in the Ford, was it.

I tried to get in a few words with Malcolm as to plans, but no go.

"You an' Highheels git busy tuhnight. Maybe—" Malcolm tried to get the rest of it out, but the sheriff intervened.

Well, they clapped him in, and I wasted no time on lawyers. There was plenty of work to be done that night; the rest could wait until the morning. As we walked back to the Baker homestead I said to Highheels:

"Sure they're going to take a core to-night?"

"Was," nodded Blake.

All the starch was out of him, now that Malcolm had gone.

"Well, there's only one method I can see to take, and that's to get a sample of it," I said as though I enjoyed the prospect.

I said it that way because I'm such a — fool that I did have an undercurrent of enjoyment in me at contemplating the future!

Highheels cast a gloomy optic in my direction.

"How?" he asked, and spit to the left.

"Depends," I said blithely. "How do they guard the well? What is the procedure after they get a core? What——"

I asked him a series of questions, and at the end found out this essential matter: That they had, for the past few nights, hired eight men who were armed with guns. These men were thrown around the well in a double line.

These lines loosely encircled the well, the first one about two hundred yards or so from it, and the outer quartette posted at the four corners of the small bit of acreage. The core was to be taken that night.

"The fact that they're going to such measures means that Upton, an expert oil man, figures they'd a good chance for oil. Formation must be looking good. Eh?" I asked Highheels.

"Uh huh. But that don't mean nothin'."

"It also means that Upton figures Cary might use forcible means. Or do you suppose that he's wise to Burney, too? He just mentioned Cary and you to us."

"I duano," said Highheels wearily. "— this oil business anyway! He's got the whole town buzzin' now, with his guards and everything. If it wasn't that a old fool like Howard which don't need the money owned that offset acreage every leasehound in town'd be nibblin'. But that money Howard's askin' means that nobody's interested—'til there's oil flowin'."

"Except Burney and Cary," I amended, as we shouldered our way through the crowd and turned off into the comparatively quiet side street whereon the Baker's lived.

"I ain't goin' back intuh the house with yuh," Highheels informed me. "Gonna drift around a little and see what I can find out, mebbe. Lieutenant, what're yuh aimin' tuh do?"

"Meet me at nine o'clock," I told him. "Or before. They won't get a core before that, will they?"

He shook his head.

"I went out to a little rise and took a look through spy glasses this afternoon," he told me, to my surprize. "Jest happened that I seen 'em pretty plain. Unless somethin' goes wrong, they'll get a core around ten o'clock or so. It's kind of a long job, but they're down tuh the sand, I know, and they're ready tuh take a core because they ain't workin', and they wouldn't start before it gits dark. They pretended tuh be fixin' up things, but I know Upton. He was foolin' anybody lookin', like I was. He'll start fur a core when it gits dark, hopin' nobody'll know it. And he'll use — good

means tuh see they don't. So long. See you at nine. Dunno what yo're aimin' tuh do."

"Don't know myself, yet, but we'll talk it over after I get set," I told him.



MARY and her mother and Cecil were still at the table when I came in, and they had a fresh plateful in the oven for me. Nothing was said at the remainder of the meal regarding what had happened. I was silent as the grave, because of Lansdale's presence. When my eyes met Mary's, however, which they did frequently, there was understanding and sympathy in hers, or I thought there was, anyway. Cecil excused himself within a few minutes, and the strain eased.

Mary simply looked a question as soon as Cecil left, and I answered it immediately. I told her the whole lay as we figured it, and concluded:

"I really think there's nothing to worry about regarding Malcolm. The charge against him can't stand up. They just want to get rid of a dangerous competitor for a day or two. His reputation, and all the evidence I and the McMullen boys and his friends can give, will get him out all right. But it leaves me holding the sack, and I don't know quite what to do yet."

I liked the way she comprehended the thing, and yet didn't go into any hysterics about it. She was used to funny things in that town, I presume. What she did say was:

"That Mr. Lansdale is—fishy looking. He's got the funniest eyes I ever saw."

"I've been thinking of that," I told her, but when she asked what I meant I really didn't dare tell her. It was rather far-fetched in the first place, and I didn't want to get too Nick Carterish. But what I was thinking of was that the tiny pupils of his eyes were a sign of a dope user, and wondering whether Cecil had brought the dope in town with him to make a little extra jack, and figured out the scheme to get rid of Downs by using it. That is, if there was any. And there must be, I thought.

At court the next day the stuff would have to be shown as evidence. Of course, they might be figuring on just keeping Malcolm overnight, and then saying that there was a mistake.

There was Malley to figure on, and various other facets if the thing got more serious.

But somehow my thoughts were concentrated on that oil business, temporarily, and I felt as tranquil as a May morning regarding Cary's eventual fate on the dope charge.

I emerged from my momentary abstraction to hear Mary saying:

"If there's anything in the world I can do—that sounds silly to even mention, doesn't it?—I will, Mr. Evans. I'd love to see you beat them at their own game!"

Under the flash of those eyes of hers I swelled up like a pouter pigeon. Ah hal I was the strong, hairy-chested hero of the wide open spaces, about to lick all my enemies, win a fortune and a girl, and all that fluff, as easily as they do it in the movies. —!

"I'm going to send Mr. Cary a nice supper. He didn't have half time to eat!" said Mrs. Baker suddenly.

She seemed to be feeling better under the influence of my optimism.

"That's something you can do, Miss Baker, if you will!" I told her. "They won't let me even talk to him—haven't, since Highheels got us a shot. They're afraid we'll cook something up, I guess. Would you take a lunch to him and give him a message or two for me that I had no chance to get to him?"

"Of course."

Which she did—to no effect. I escorted her as far as the corner of the sidestreet on which the small brick jail was located, and waited there for her. It was an unpleasant promenade, down that street, for a girl like her, but despite all the profanity we overheard, and that sort of stuff, she was as natural and unembarrassed as you please. She was, gents, a regular girl in addition to a good-looking one.

I said she visited Malcolm to no effect.

"They wouldn't even let me talk to him!" she stormed.

And I had wanted her to get his signature on a check I had fixed up. I had to have the use of his money. What in — would I do with information about the well if I had it, with no money to buy acreage, and with Burney laying his plans to know things as soon as I did, or sooner? As a matter of fact, I was pretty sure I'd know it never.

But I decided to muddle along, not knowing exactly where I was going or why or what I'd do when I got there. All I had was a stubborn desire to put something over

on Upton and Lansdale and Burney and the rest of the gang, and my usual interest in a fight of one kind or another. And don't think that money doesn't interest me, either. But I can honestly say that during that little fracas in Hastings the money angle was in the background.

VII



AT TWELVE o'clock that night Highheels Blake and I were flat on our bellies, behind a scrubby little growth a few yards from one corner of Blake's acreage. Ahead of us the lights on the derrick of Blake No. 1 burned dimly, and the noise of the motor came sweetly to our ears. Blake informed me that they were coming out of the hole, and even I could see in the dim radiance of the derrick lights that fourble after fourble was being piled. Casting a professional eye over the heap of fourbles in the derrick, Blake had opined that they must be nearly out with the core.

At this information I shook my thoughts from Mary Baker. I hadn't told her, when I left the house, what I was going to do, but she had surmised plenty. And the sweetest episode in my life had been the way she put her hand on my arm and wished me good luck—with wet eyes!

That's a laugh, too. Me talking about sweet episodes. I certainly stepped out of my character as far as Mary was concerned.

Well, as I said, I came back to life, as it were. Not that I'd been absolutely bound up in mooning over Mary. I'd kept an eye on the armed roughneck who was sitting a hundred yards away from us, his location indicated by an occasional burning cigaret. And I had wondered whether I'd done wrongly by not leaving the house and seeing to my ship. But I didn't think so. I wanted to take no chances of trouble, and I felt that Burney would like to get me out of the way on general principles. A fight on the street, anything like that, would be the simplest thing in the world for some of his hired hands to engineer, and the net result might be almost anything as far as I was concerned.

So I'd laid low in the house, and when I decided I didn't like the looks of two roughnecks who lounged persistently in front of the Baker home I had suggested to Mr.

Highheels Blake that we depart out the back door, under cover of the darkness, for our post near the well.

I was doing one thing more, too. In fact I'd been doing it pretty steadily ever since about dinner time that night. I'll tell you about it in a minute.

"Well, I think I'll get under way," I told Blake. "Coming along?"

Very cautiously he sat up. I hadn't broached the matter of his participation from this point on before. And I waited with great interest for his answer.

He was screened by the bush and the moonless darkness from the eye of the sentry. I was laying about six feet from him. And watching him, as he meditatively drew a gun and balanced it absently. I drew myself nearer to him.

"I dunno," he whispered. "Honest, lieutenant, it's impossible!"

I was very close to him now. I had an idea in my noodle, but I'd never dared think of it, hardly. Until this particular instant, that is. For right then his right arm raised a trifle, the gun in it, and started down at my head like a flash of light.

My left hand moved just about as fast, and I got my fingers on his arm strongly enough to divert the blow that would have knocked me cuckoo. Before he could recover from his astonishment, my right paw joined my left, and I was sitting up. It didn't take me more than a split second to have that gun, and I had it with its muzzle poked in his ribs, too.

"Make just one tiny little movement, and you're going to find yourself in bad shape," I told him grimly.

"What's ailin' yuh?" he asked plaintively, although his voice sounded as though it was hard for him to get the words out.

"Plenty," I told him in a whisper.

We hadn't made much noise; in fact, I didn't think it possible that the guard had heard us. We were well-screened, as I have explained, by some thick, low bushes. For a moment I listened, but the guard was humming a little tune.

"So you're a doublecrosser, as well as Cease Landsdale and the rest," I told him. "I got just a little idea of it when you were so anxious that we capitulate to Burney. It looked a little wrong to me that the news was out all over town as to what we were up to down here, and a — sight funnier when you could walk in the Bakers' house and

make the sheriff let us talk together when he'd just refused.

"And you seemed pretty certain you could arrange for us to get out of town without being jailed. So I've been watching you, and I caught you just as you were about to knock me out so that I'd be out of the way. And I seem to have a slight suggestion of the beginning of an inkling, so to speak, that maybe Kit Upton did have something to fight you about. Sold out to Burney, did you? You and Cease Lansdale and Burney all working together, are you?"

"I'll swear tuh —, Slim, yuh're on the wrong track!" he assured me. "I didn't aim tuh—"

"Who's there!" bellowed the guard suddenly.

Highheels had talked too loudly in his earnestness.

Instantly I decided what to do. All I had just found out, or thought I had found out, had changed my plans tremendously. Originally I had simply had a vague idea that under cover of the darkness I might worm and fight my way close to the well, close enough to overhear them as they talked or possibly get a peek into the toolshed when they were examining the core. Highheels said that they'd undoubtedly carry the cylinder of sand in there to examine it.

The situation I was up against now was a horse out of a different radish, as it were. So I called out promptly:

"Two men, mister! And one of 'em's a friend. Get a couple of men with guns, if you want to, to feel safe, but we've got to see Kit Upton right away!"

For answer, he fired, I'm sure he fired in the air, but I felt uncomfortable. There were shouts from the darkness, and I could hear men running.

"Stand up, and hands up!" snapped the guard, dropping to the ground himself. He acted like a right smart *hombre*.

Highheels was cursing. Slowly, with savage relish, he rolled forth a continuous stream of mournful blasphemy. We stood up. I had Highheels' gun in my pocket but my hands were in the air. I felt like a target.

Rather luckily, there came a break in the clouds so that enough moonlight could filter through. I could see three men, among them Upton, on their way across the ground, and also spot the guard who had challenged us.

Upton, covering the ground like a kangaroo, was first on the scene. My height made my identity plain, I guess, for his first words were:

"So you're back again, are you? And Highheels Blake!"

In a moment, as he walked toward us, he was backed by four men with guns. He walked with his stoop a bit more pronounced, and there was something indescribably menacing in his slow advance.

His gaze, as far as I could see in the wan moonlight, seemed to be concentrated on Blake. He looked as if he was about to put a little salt on Highheels and then eat him. I thought it was about time to rise and make a speech.

"Listen, Upton," I started nonchalantly. "Before——"

"Shut up!"

That little command fell from his lips like a hot coal. Our appearance in the bushes at that hour evidently was the last straw.

"I won't shut up, so you might as well listen!" I yelled, trying to act as if I wasn't scared half to death. Four guns and Upton, on his own land, were nothing to give anybody any pleasant dreams.

"Highheels Blake isn't with me, he's against me, and the noise I made getting him is what got your guard wise to our being here!" I told him before he could speak. "By God, Upton, I'm for you now, and if you don't listen to me you'll be the biggest fool God ever made!"

He looked me up and down slowly.

"Some new dodge, eh," he said slowly.

Those heavy, square shoulders were stooped more than usual, and his hands hung as though ready to spread out and grab me in a bear hug as he leaped forward.

"Well, talk fast, Lieutenant, because you're about to be roped and hog-tied, both of you, and kept until school is out."

"In the first place, when we got here we figured you had trumped up a fight with Blake here, in order to keep him from getting his rightful share of the profits; by that I mean, a chance to gather all the information available to use in making up his mind on leasing other acreage. Malcolm Cary is a square shooter, and there never was any plan on our part to hornswoggle you out of any acreage you had money enough to pay for. A fair field and no favor. Well, I came out here tonight with Highheels to get information by hook or

crook. Then Highheels tried to hit me on the head with a gun, and get me out of the way—as they have Cary by putting him in jail. I know now that Highheels had been doublecrossing Malcolm Cary and me all the time, and if he'd do that he's in league with somebody else, and that means that I believe you had a reasonable grudge against him, and I don't blame you for keeping him away from your well. What did he do, Upton?"

The man had been listening, without moving so much as an eyelash. The strained, haggard, smoldering roughnecks back of him were all ears, likewise.

"Tried to drop a wrench down the hole, pretending it was by accident. I just happened to catch him in time," said Upton briefly.

I knew enough of the oil business to know that a tool dropped down a well hole practically ruined said well. Fishing for it is a long and tedious process, and a ten to one shot to fail. Ever figure what an easy job it'd be to get a tool out of a nine inch hole eighteen hundred feet deep, say? And you can't drill while it's in there.

"I see," said I pleasantly. "Well, Upton, you had a right to keep Highheels from getting information, and that means Malcolm and I are out of the running. But I'm going to tell you something. If Highheels was trying to ruin the well, what does that mean? It means that he knew the formation looked good, that he was and is in league with Adam Burney, probably, and that he was trying to ruin this well in order to make you spend all your remaining money on drilling another well and have none left to buy acreage, doesn't it?"

"In other words, Burney figured prospects on this side of the river good enough so that he wants to discourage you, break you, and then buy in himself. Probably he'd have stepped in with an offer to finance the second well himself, knowing you were about broke, in return for——"

"Everything in sight," stated Upton. "And Burney hates me personally like a rattlesnake."

They were all following me now. Every word was a gem of wisdom to them.

"How about it, Highheels? Sell out to Burney?" I demanded.

Highheels made no answer, but expectorated slowly. Then he said—

"I ain't talkin'."

"All right—for the present," said Upton significantly, and I'd have hated to be on the receiving end of that remark. But Blake never turned a hair.

Then I told Upton and his men about Burney's offer to Malcolm, and the answer he got. Then I proceeded:

"You said you had a man to finance you on a good proposition. Must be he's putting up the money and giving you thirty or forty per cent. according to what you told Malcom and me. That man, I presume, is Cecil Lansdale."

"And if it is?" enquired Upton.

"If it is, you're up salt creek with a broken oar. Because I know as well as I know my own name that Cecil Lansdale has sold out to Burney, and you haven't got a Chinaman's chance to collect your share from 'im!"

"What!"

Upton said it slowly, and there came a long sigh from the roughnecks back of him.

I told them why I thought so. I described the interview with the sheriff back at the Baker home. Curiously enough, there in the darkness in a situation like that, the mention of the Baker home turned my thoughts to Mary, and she was sort of in the background of my mind all the while I was talking.

"If that's the case, and I'm — sure it is, this must be the lay," I summed up at the finish. "Lansdale made a deal with you. I assume that, because you haven't denied it. He was to get all the information on the well, and put up the dough for additional acreage. Blake had made a deal with Burney. He slipped up, which left him unable to get any information. Blake wired Cary to come along, I imagine, on the chance that Malcolm himself might get in touch with you and make a deal direct, knowing that Malcolm would stick to him anyway and he would know all that Malcolm did, and then relay it to Burney. Finally they decided to have Burney make a deal with Malcolm for a ridiculously small amount. That left no openings uncovered.

"Then Lansdale took a hand, the way I figure it. He'd made a deal with you. Maybe he intended to live up to it, first, but I don't believe so. He had the idea all the time, being a crooked little rat, of selling the information he got from you to some one else, letting them risk their money, and give him a split for his pains. He picked on

Burney. And Burney fell for it. I'm sure of that, on account of the way things happened at the house. As it stands, Highheels, Burney and Lansdale are mixed up together, with Burney the lion of the crowd, of course. They got rid of Malcolm by the dope route, and Highheels, acting as a stool-pigeon, tried to get me out of the way when he found out I was going to carry on for Malcolm.

"Upton, doesn't that sound reasonable?"

"Yes, by —! And Lansdale left here not five minutes ago, with a piece of the core."

I snapped to attention.

"You've already got the core?" I barked, and I could see Highheels stiffen.

"Yes, — it, and she smells of oil, and there's oil in this ground! How much I don't know, but it's the best bet an oil man ever had outside of proven territory."

"Listen! Malcolm Cary is a square shooter, and so am I. You're up against a bad break, Upton, fighting everybody in the world. I like the cut of your jib, and I make this offer for Malcolm and me: Let's work together on this thing, and Malcolm will put up enough dough so that you and your company'll have a full half of the Howard acreage. I've got an airplane over there at Malley's field, and we can beat Burney's gang into Houston. Lansdale simply told Burney what he knew, I imagine, and then'll tell you that he, Lansdale, got beaten into Houston by —"

An oath burst from Upton's lips, suddenly, and the other men looked around quickly. It wouldn't have required much imagination to make a man think he saw them prick their ears.

Then I was aware of a stonger smell of gas, and a sort of rumbling down in the bowels of the earth. It became stronger and stronger, and then the two roughnecks left on the derrick floor came running toward us.

"By —, she's comin' in herself!" breathed Upton, his voice raised above the excited yelps of the strained roughnecks.



HIGHHEELS Blake was a study in taciturn melancholy. Pulling on his mustache, he stood and watched, his world cut away beneath him. I had some plans in my mind for Highheels Blake.

Then, plainly discernible in the now unobstructed moonlight, a thick dark column

of oil spurted five or ten feet above the derrick flooring. The crest of it raised and lowered, sometimes only a foot above the floor, then fifteen feet. Always the strength of the gas behind it seemed to increase, and ever higher that nine-inch column of golden grease danced in the moonlight.

Finally the tremendous traveling block, suspended right over the mouth of the well, careened wildly under the battering of that resistless flood of oil. As the flow got to its maximum, I was watching a powerful gusher in full career tossing its hundreds of barrels of oil many feet above the crown-block of the derrick, a hundred and twelve feet above the ground.

Upton turned to me, and there was a white-hot glint in his long narrow eyes.

"By daylight this morning there'll be a second oilrush in this town, and that nearby acreage'll come close to a thousand dollars an acre as an average price. Personally I doubt whether there's a single honest man in the world when there's a fortune stuck up in front of his nose, but I'll talk business with you, Evans. You may be an exception, and I've got to do something."

"And you need my airplane," I told him. "What train was Lansdale supposed to get?"

"Six this morning's the earliest one."

"He'll be out of luck," I pointed out.

I wasn't talking to Upton alone, but addressing the congregation in general. The roughnecks, you'll remember, were also interested in the well. "The fact that this well is in'll be known all over Texas before noon tomorrow, and old man Howard wouldn't sell for a hundred and fifty an acre."

"Right you are," granted Upton. "Call your shot."

He was looking right through me with those narrowed eyes of his.

"If you're game, we'll take off by airplane right now, land at Ellsworth Field outside of Houston, and be at Mr. Howard's office or house before he knows he's out of bed yet. At a hundred and fifty an acre, how much money have you birds got?"

"Fifteen thousand, and whatever this acreage turns out to be worth. And if that there baby ain't a two thousand barrel well, I don't know petroleum from olive oil."

The flow of oil was decreasing now. Most oil wells, you know, flow periodically, when the gas pressure gets strong enough to blow the oil out. Then it dies out again, and

heads again when the gas is strong enough to need escape. Usually the flows are as regular as clockwork, the well heading anywhere from ten minutes to several hours apart.

Then a sudden thought smote me. The fact that it hadn't smitten before shows what a dumb bozo I am. During my sociable chat with those oil men I totally forgot that Malcolm was in jail with all the money! I couldn't draw a check for a thousand dollars.

I threw up my hands, as it were, and snapped out the news to Upton. There was a sign from the assembled oil men, and Upton looked at me silently.

Then he said slowly:

"All you need is Carey's check for fifty thousand or so. And they won't let you even see him at the jail, eh? Would he give it to you, you're sure, and back you up if he knew."

"Absolutely."

"— then, let's go. We can raid that humpty dumpty jail in jig time, get him to sign a check, and be gone. Ralph, you and Jim and Pete stay here; get the pipe on to flow the oil into the storage pool when she quits heading. Cal, come with us. If I'm not back tomorrow, Ralph, get those storage tanks up here pronto. Let everybody that wants to watch her now. C'mon, Evans. Let's proceed!"

"Blake, you're coming with us!" I told him. "You're never going to be out of our sight, because eventually you're going to tell all you know after Malcolm gets hold of you, and that's going to save a long court case before he clears himself of carrying dope. You're going to have a nice, long airplane ride, Highheels, and you've got enough trouble ahead of you to hold any man! You know what Malcolm'll do to you, so you'd better be planning to talk!"

"—, I know when I'm licked," said Blake calmly. "Burney'd squashed me like an ant if I'd fought him. I ain't so — much tuh blame. Lansdale brought that there heroin in, tuh sell it I think, and the scheme was cooked up by him and Burney. I got Malley tuh find the stuff, after I'd planted her there myself.

"I ain't so bad as yuh may think. I'll tell yuh all that Burney could put me in jail fur ten years, and would've done it."

"Well, he won't dare open his mouth about anything after we get through pinning the

works on him," stated Upton with a certain cold, contained savagery which was enough to make the fur on the back of my neck wave gently in the breeze.

"I'm comin' clean with yuh," pursued the wobegone Blake. "In case o' any emergencies, Graham, Barney's head thug, so tuh speak, was plannin' tuh have Malley fly 'im tuh Houston tuh make a quick trip out of it an' beat anybody else. We was sure scared o' Malcolm Cary, and we'd've been worse so if we'd knowed his assistant better. Now that I ain't come back to report, they'll figure maybe somethin' went wrong.

"Furthermore an' in addition, if I ain't mistaken there was Burney's chief tool pusher and three men watchin' off east here, in case o' emergencies. It's plumb possible some o' them got to see this here baby come in, and in that case they'd report, and then I think Graham'll fly down tuh Houston instead o' takin' the train."

"Ralph, take those boys and gallop over to Malley's field, guard Evans' ship till we get there, and if you've got a holy chance bash in that ship of Malley's. We'll pay him for it later, and that bunch of crooked — ought to be hung up by the thumbs. Let the well run wild till we get started. Mike, drive us in in your wagon. You fellows take it on the lope across country. Hustle! Come on, Evans!"

VIII



IT WAS two o'clock in the morning, and our work was really absurdly simple. Highheels went with us, by request. He was willing, though.

"I might as well be hung fur a sheep as a lamb," he opined.

The jail was on a side street, and while the main stem was still roaring with life and liquor, and the musical chiming of dice and chips with overtones of blasphemy and business, said jail street was comparatively serene. I got a blank check and Upton had a fountain pen. We strolled into the office in the front of the jail, and found there three deputies, just lounging around. Mike, a scrawny little runt, stayed outside in his Ford with the motor running.

"We want to see Mr. Cary for a minute," I told the man behind the desk.

"Kain't be done!" he said comfortably, leaning back until his paunch was more obvious than before.

One of the other men was sitting on the edge of the desk, and a third was in a chair tipped back against the wall. He'd been reading.

"All right, but I told you it was important!" I said.

That was the signal. Upton lifted the man in the chair clean off his feet with a sock to the button. I did the same by the man on the edge of the desk while Blake snapped down both window curtains in the front. Then I launched myself at the surprised chief deputy, and with the barrel of my gun massaged him just at the temple.

We did a clean job, our blows having been given without haste and with accuracy. In a jiffy I had the keys from the chief deputy, and while Upton stood guard I went into the tiers of cells, yelling in a loud and unmusical voice for Cary. The jail was as full as George Groody on St. Patrick's day, and the ribald crew stopped snoring and started yelling without delay. I finally picked Cary's voice out of them, and found him standing in his underwear close to the bars of cell number thirteen. He was accompanied by his room mate, a villainous-looking and much bewhiskered hobo.

As I unlocked the cell I told him the story in about four sentences.

"Get into your clothes fast and don't worry," I concluded. "We've got so much on the whole gang that when we get back Burney won't dare peep."

I had changed my mind, as you may perceive. At first I had not intended to actually get Malcolm out of jail—just get him to sign a check and leave him there. But I had decided I'd rather let him handle his own money, and besides, I figured he'd be a better man in a deal than I was.

I had to smack the old hobo down to keep him from running out of the cell. The jail was in an uproar. Malcolm came running out with no coat, vest or tie, his shoes unlaced, and his broad, round face one wide grin.

"Let's go, cowboy!" he chortled, and we went.

Down in the office all was quiet. Upton was on guard, with the melancholy Blake assisting. I returned the keys to the chief deputy. As I laid them on his still unconscious form he came to slowly, so I was compelled to tap him gently once more in order to make sure there was no kick

pursuit. Not a soul had come in the office. We left the jail locked and shipshape, except for the fact that the deputies were of slight service for a few minutes.

As we went out the door Malcolm shook hands with Upton.

"Glad we're together, sub," he said.

Upton merely nodded, and smiled a wintery, thin-lipped smile. But his eyes were expressive.

As we all climbed in the car Cary spoke to Highheels for the first time.

"We'll need you and yore testimony when we come to get out o' this mess, Highheels," he stated slowly as we roared down the side street. "If you run out on us——"

"Don't worry, Mac," Highheels told him. "I—ain't feelin' so good, but I couldn't help myself. Now mebber we can all git loose from Burney. Anyway, —— 'im, if he gits me I'll drag him along with me."

We avoided the main stem, naturally. We circled down a side street which paralleled it, that Ford leaping agilely from bump to bump. As we slowed up for a thankyouma'am so big it looked like one of the Rocky Mountain range, there came a sound unto mine off ear. It was as sweet to said aural appendage as the scream of a buzzsaw would be to you if you had been tied in front of it by Desperate Desmond.

"It's an airplane engine, —— it!" I said piously, and we stopped the car.

It was, and a second later it grew louder as that Jenny of Malley's appeared like a black shadow against the sky. In the moonlight I could see clearly enough to know that it was not my DeHaviland.

"Looks like we're licked," drawled Malcolm.

"The —— we are—if they haven't ruined my ship!" I snapped. "That D.H. can make close to a hundred and twenty miles an hour wide open, and that broken down crate there couldn't make over ninety if it was brand new. I'll bet it can't do over eighty in the shape I saw it this morning."

Once again the car went flittering from rut to rut as we bumped on our way.

"My men didn't get there in time," Upton said through grimly clenched teeth. "Your ship is probably busted all to ——."

"Possibly," I agreed. "But there's a chance it isn't. They won't figure on me now, knowing Cary was in jail and all that. Besides, it's an army plane. Not that they wouldn't have busted it if they'd thought

that far ahead, but I don't believe they did. They went by plane for the same reason that we planned to go, regardless. Because the well came in and they want to get to Howard before the news gets to him, as it were. In addition to getting to Houston, which we can probably do if the plane's all right, it'd be a good plan if we could stop them from being on hand to fight it out on Howard's doorstep."

"There ain't nothin' too strong to work on them after what they done to us," opined Malcolm easily.

"I have ideas," I announced as I hit the top of the car.

I expounded them freely and fluently as we drew into the absolutely deserted field.

I ran for the ship, followed by the others, and in about two minutes had tested the control wires and looked over every inch of linen. As far as I could see, they had not damaged the ship at all. They had simply counted Malcolm and I out of it, trusting to Highheels Blake to attend to me.

After brief instructions to Upton and Cary as to how to work together in spinning the prop, I primed the motor, and yelled "On!"

The third try she started, and I whooped with glæ. The glow of the Jenny's exhaust pipes had now disappeared in the distance, and there was no time to lose. Nevertheless, I figured it was a case of the more haste the less speed. As I warmed the Liberty, which ran like a clock, Upton's huskies came trotting across the field, all out of breath. Malcolm left Highheels Blake in their charge, and they gladly took the job.

Satisfied that my trusty D.H. was all right, I let her idle and stood Upton and Malcolm in the back seat, and strapped the free-swinging observer's belt around them.

"Stand backward to keep the wind out of your eyes," I told them. "And if either one of you are on friendly terms with God start praying now."

Whereupon I gave the D.H. the gun, got the nose down, and we were shooting trails of sparks through the darkness as the ship roared across the field.



TO A pilot, I think there is nothing in flying equaling the wild thrill of sending your ship into dead blackness ahead, feeling her rise safely as you inch back on the stick, and then roaring

along at full speed over a shadowed, moonlit world spread out below you. All is unknown down there in case of a forced landing, and it seems that the motor runs better, the ship goes faster, and that one is a sort of godlike personage thundering along over fairyland.

The oil field was a sight for the gods, with its lights winking from every derrick, and Hastings itself was a splash of light and color and life in the midst of a deserted world. Those crowds still surged up and down the street, and on the roads leading from it automobile headlights gleamed like crawling fireflies. On the Blake tract the well was heading again, and it looked like a tiny bubbling on the surface of a black pool.

Houston was a hundred and fifty miles ahead, and the railroad led straight as a string to it. So at a thousand feet I nosed her down until she was level, left the throttle wide open, and we started for that village like some fire-breathing monster straining to overtake its prey.

In twenty minutes I picked up the glow of the Jenny's exhaust far in front of us. In twenty-five we were close to them, and in a half hour, nearly half way to Houston, we were only a hundred yards in back of them. Malley was flying as straight as a string, but I'll bet that if it had been light he and Burney's right hand man would have left a very obvious trail of blue smoke in their wake.

I came weaving in on them, swaying from side to side to escape any shots they might send at us. Malcolm and Upton, Malcolm with my Colt and Upton with his own six-shooter, were ready.

But nary a shot came from the other plane as I suddenly straightened out and gave my bellowing Liberty full gun once more. Twenty-five feet to the left of the fleeing Jenny I shot along, overtaking it rapidly. And the two men began to shoot, not at our competitors—at the circle of light which indicated the metal tip of their whirling propellor.

Then the man in the back seat of the Jenny got into action. There came a shot. I couldn't hear it, of course, but I could see the gun in his hand and the momentary flash.

As I heard my motor miss slightly there came a wild roar from the Jenny motor, and then it died down below the noise of our own

Liberty as the Jenny started down. Upton and Cary—Cary a wonderful shot, I knew, and Upton probably pretty fair himself—had shot off the prop of the Jenny. Almost anything down to a pebble will splinter a whirling propellor.

Before starting operations I had noted that the ground below us was good for a forced landing—all big open fields. I wanted to give them a good deal as far as landing went. So when the Jenny started circling down I dismissed the passengers from my mind.

I had no room for 'em, anyway. For the Liberty was missing on two cylinders. I wondered where in — that shot had gone. Would the miss get worse, or not?

Then, by pure chance, I saw the trouble. That bullet must have clipped one of the distributor heads, and knocked it off. It was sort of hanging on one clamp. The Liberty has double ignition, you know, two sets of spark plugs for each cylinder and two distributor heads, of course. And it just so happened that two pair of spark plugs connected with the uninjured distributor head were missing. I hadn't bothered to test out each switch separately back at the field. We couldn't have taken time to clean 'em, anyway.

Well, we could hobble along on ten cylinders, but not nicely. Heaven help us if a couple more were cut out. Down on the ground for us would be the result.

I was as worried as a rabbit with a greyhound right behind it and a stone wall ahead. Then I felt a strong grip on my shoulder, and Upton's voice roared in my ear—

"Did they get us?"

I cut the motor and yelled the news, pointing meanwhile. Upton seemed to think a minute as we glided along silently, and then said:

"We can't take any chances. Fly her level, Evans, while I climb all over you!"

Well, it seemed that among other accomplishments like drinking and the oil business and scrapping, Upton was something of a mechanic. At least he knew what I was talking about. He was also an acrobat, and his nerve was cold enough to feel and big enough to see.

For that *hombre* climbed over into my cockpit, kicking me in the face as he did so with a number twelve field-boot; from my cockpit out on the lower right wing, and

then fought the terrific propellor blast forward until he was hanging on the front center-section strut, directly over the motor. At fifteen hundred feet in the air that's no small job for an amateur, gentlemen. It makes a steeple-jack on the top of the Woolworth tower look like a miner.


Hanging there with one arm, feet on the wings, that college gorilla used the other one to hold that dangling distributor head in place. Right away the spitting, popping motor swung into a mighty, even rhythm again, and once more we were galloping along down those gleaming steel rails which pointed to Houston.

For more than seventy miles, without goggles or leather coat or anything much but his pants and his nerve he hung there, and he was still there when the huge bulk of Houston passed behind us and we were gliding down over the huge flat expanse of Ellsworth Field. I made a pretty fair landing, and after I taxied to the line and cut the motor a flock of interested guards watched Malcolm and I pick the oil man off that wing. He was about dead, both arms asleep and a cramp in his side.

I sent a guard after Billy Hawkins, a captain I know who's as good an egg as he is a rotten flyer, and who owns a car. For Ellsworth Field is eighteen miles from Houston, and it was five o'clock in the morning.

They got Billy, and he borrowed clothes enough to make Malcolm decent, and drove us into Houston himself. Just to see what he — it was all about. Billy is a red-headed Irishman who always wants to see what anything at all is about. As far as flying is concerned, he never has found out yet.

IX

 WELL, at two o'clock that afternoon we were back in the wildly excited town of Hastings, and in Malcolm's pocket was an iron-clad contract. He got the land from old man Howard for sixty thousand dollars and a one-fifth royalty instead of only one-eighth.

Cary had some friends in Houston who knew him and identified him, and a wire to the El Paso bank to prove the check was good did the rest. We had an option on the property, contingent only upon the value of the check, by nine that morning. I think the dried-up little Texan, Howard,

sold it to us simply because Cary came clean, and told him that the well looked good enough to make the land a good investment.

We didn't tell him the well was in at all. Howard held out for additional royalty because of the fact that we were so strongly after the property. And Malcolm had to give it to him. He was a crusty little old coot, and he said he'd set the price to keep a thousand leaseholds a day from bothering him and that he was glad to get rid of it. Houston didn't know the well was in when we left, as far as I know, and I know Howard didn't.

Once back at Hastings, we made a wide swing around the town to try to make Burney's house before Cary got pinched again. And three tired, sleepless, but happy *caballeros* finally hove to alongside the ostentatious white mansion of Mr. Adam Burney, and we were fortunate enough to find him in. He was sitting on the front porch, fanning himself, as he talked to his beautiful blonde wife.

When he saw us coming his eyes popped out so far it appeared that they were coming out alone to meet us. His wife got up and went inside, evidently after an order from him.

He said nothing, but his face looked like the wrath of God.

"Afternoon, Burney," Malcolm greeted him gently.

Burney grunted.

"We're here to do a little business," Cary said gently, his oil-spotted face tranquil as a sucking dove's. No, that's a poor comparison. I am entirely unacquainted with the physiognomy of a sucking dove. As tranquil as Sunday in Gorham, Utah, would be better. I am acquainted with that.

"What?" rasped Burney. "Speak quick, before you go back to the pen, along with your friends."

"I'm not going back, I don't think," drawled Cary. "Highheels Blake, for one, has told us the whole — story about how I was framed. We got the dope, from how the heroin was planted right down the line. Why, you — old fool, you've run things so long you've got to be foolish around heuh. Do yuh think fur a moment that —"

"Well, let that go. Listen, what yo're gonna do. Yo're gonna give orders to yore handpicked sheriff tuh let me alone and

drop the charge. And yo're aimin' tuh keep yore hands off all of us from now on. Understand that?

"If that don't suit yuh, put us all in jail. We'll fight the case. I'm known al ovuh Texas, suh, and I got a blameless reputation. We can git witnesses from the sergeant that give us the ship at McMullen on up. And fur a clincher, there's gonna be witnesses like Highheels Blake that'll have a lot tuh tell, and when they git through we'll step off the dock and you'll step on it.

"Try tuh git Blake for tellin' the story, uf yuh want to, and see what happens. This case won't be tried in one o' yore little two-for-a-cent Hastings courts. It's a Federal mattuh, and it won't be tried in one of yore privately owned Hastings courts. So call yore shot, suh!"

For a second or two we all watched the bloodshot eyes of that impressive, heavy-jowled oil operator as he sat silently on the porch. Then Upton horned in.

"Just as an additional entry in the record," he said, "let me recall this to you: I licked you once in Smackover, Burney, when you weren't as big as you are now. Since then you've had it in for me. That's the only — reason you had Blake try to drop a tool down the hole of Blake No. 1.

"I'm not saying anything about that now except to remind you that it's another little matter we've got on you. And right from here out we're not victims for your usual line of operation, remember that. Because the first move you make we'll get you by the thumbs and string you up until you yell for mercy."

Again we waited, while Burney meditated. I expected him to be about one jump ahead of a fit, but he seemed to be filled with a judicial calm, all of a sudden. Then, by all that's holy, he smiled and got to his feet and said bluffly:

"I ain't admittin' nothin', but you-all've got the acreage, I reckon, and I'm licked. Them I can't lick I like to have with me. You boys and Adam Burney can do business, to our mutual advantage."

"Well, we're not going to do it now, anyway," stated Malcolm. "I'm going to bed, and I reckon Slim here wants to see somebody back at Baker's. Tuhmorruh we're open for business."

"And if we do it with you we'll nail you

tight to the mast," added Upton. "So tight you'll have no chance whatever to wjggle out."

Burney laughed. In that, at least, he was an oil man.

As we plugged wearily home I happened to think of that sapient crevice of Malcolm's regarding me wanting to see somebody back at Baker's.

"Just because you're anæsthetic to the charms of beautiful femininity," I started, when he stopped me.

"That's too many syllables for a weary man," he drawled. "Tell it to me after I wake up."

Which was a long time for us all. Mary wasn't home, so I went straight to bed likewise. And I slept right through to seven o'clock next morning.

X



I FLEW back to McMullen next morning to fix up my leave. On the way I got to thinking of my hour's interview with Mary after breakfast. I realize more and more as time goes on how all ordinary rules of common sense go by when a good-looking woman is concerned. — if I didn't get to thinking of myself as a handsome Romeo that morning, and I sang raucous sagas of our deeds to a starry-eyed audience which seemed to like it. I pretty near kidded myself into thinking I amounted to something.

Malcolm and Upton, of course, would take care of all business. Back at McMullen I slung a party that night. When I say that night I don't mean only part of it, either. In fact, it was such a party that I couldn't leave next day, and it took two days of tapering off, which is a complicated process designed to exterminate the jimmys, before I did gallop back.

I found that a deal had been made with Burney, who had made a more advantageous offer than any of the big companies, thus far. In brief, the deal, fixed up in an iron-clad contract, was this: to our credit there was the sum of three hundred thousand dollars cash in the bank, or about six hundred dollars an acre. In addition to this, we were to receive fifty per cent. of all net profit above this amount which Burney's company might make out of the acreage, either by drilling wells and then selling, or turning it over very shortly to a big

company. Blake No. 1 was flowing two thousand barrels a day, settled production.

Burney's plan—he was, as he always had been, a big gambler—was to start drilling operations at practically the four corners of the Howard tract, prove up the entire territory, and then turn it over on a big deal to the Texas or one of the other big companies.

Malcolm Cary was General Manager of the new company which Burney organized to handle the proposition, and Upton was in active charge of all field operations. They were to have every facility to watch every move of Burney's, and to see that there was no doublecrossing indulged in. In view of his position, it did not seem that Burney would dare try anything, and in addition it was plain even to me that Burney valued the spacious and diverse abilities of the two men.

On my five thousand dollar share, I got twenty thousand bucks of the three hundred thousand. Everybody got a three hundred per cent. profit at once, and the division between Upton's men, Malcolm, Sleepy and I was easy to make. The deal for Blake's few acres was a separate one, of course.

Burney took that over, too. He was, of course, a multi-millionaire, and, unlike most of those gentry, practically all his fortune was in cash or investments which could be turned into cash at a few hours' notice. When I saw him he was in his element, swinging another big deal. The big companies were perfectly satisfied to let somebody else prove the tract and then pay through the nose for a sure thing.

Thus, as is the way of the oilfields, the lions laid down with the lambs, and the wolves rubbed noses with the rabbits. At this writing two of the new wells have come in for around twelve and sixteen hundred barrels a day, respectively, and Burney's turned down an offer of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the works. That justifies me in saying I've got a thirty thousand dollar bankroll in addition to the twenty grand I got to start with.

That must make Cease Lansdale sore. At that, the crooked rat got out with a profit. Burney had to buy him off, I think, from spilling beans all over the place.

One thing more. It's a laugh to me now, but at the time my ears flapped with

emotion and my nostrils quivered in the breeze.

Before I had seen Mary Baker on my return trip to Hastings I saw the boys. They met me at the field, Upton and Cary, and explained the deal with Burney in detail. Later, when Cary and I were returning to the Baker homestead, me as excited as those prize fighter shipyard workers were when the armistice was declared, he said to me:

"On the level, Slim, and forgive me fur buttin' in, but where do yuh stand regardin' Mary Baker? By that I mean, are you aimin' tuh try tuh marry her?"


That bald question sort of brought me up short. For about thirty seconds I looked at things cold bloodedly. And then I said honestly:

"I don't know what might happen if I was around her enough. Malcolm, but right now I don't think I've fallen hard enough to knock the prejudice I have against the married state out of me!"

He drew a great breath of relief.

"I'm glad o' that Slim. I've felt like a dirty dog, and I didn't aim tuh do it, but while you was away me and Mary got engaged! Honest, Slim, I even felt rotten when she said yes, and I told her why. And she told me there was nothin' like that with you—that she couldn't ever let herself love yuh even if she could, because yo're the type she figures she'd hold down and all that stuff. So I guess there wasn't no chance fur yuh anyway, oldtimer—good —, what a mess I'm makin' o' this speech!"

XI

 WELL, that's that. And, even though it sounds like sour grapes, I'm glad the question was decided for me. Can you picture me as a husband? —!

So here I am on the border, same as ever. But I'm leaving in a couple of days on a two months' leave. I'm going to hit New York with a thud that'll make the Statue of Liberty shimmy and ships at sea roll in their tracks. I'm getting right away on it, and I'm not taking a plane up before I leave, either. Cakewalking out of this vale of tears is to be expected, sooner or later, and is nothing to kick about, but getting killed with thousands of unspent dollars—that would be a tragedy!

The Camp-Fire



A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of heaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THOUGH not on the occasion of his first story in our magazine, L. Paul follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Ottawa, Canada.

I should begin with an apology. I am not an adventurer. There are some folks who could be locked up in an unfurnished room and find there adventure a-plenty. But not me. I just miss out on excitement. And with those regular adventurers sitting silently around the Camp-Fire it seems out of place for me to talk much. However, here's how.

I WAS born in Toronto, Canada, a bit over thirty years ago. Soon I will have to make it "a bit under forty." I got educated in the usual way at various schools and with various gangs of boys where a chap gets the best education of all, until at

the age of seventeen I figured I knew quite a lot. One week at school-teaching convinced me that I was wrong, but I stuck to it for a year. I think I did most of the learning during that period.

Then came college—three years of it. Again I began to figure I was educated and ever since I left college I have been discovering that I was, again, wrong.

I started out to be a civil engineer. If I last a few decades I may yet become one in fact as well as name. I have been on harbor work, railroad construction, surveys, in brief on the thousand and one jobs a civil engineer runs into. I have been pretty well over Eastern Canada and the State of Maine harbored me for one summer.

WHEN the war came along, after several disagreements with examining doctors, I finally started out in 1916 with the idea of having some adventures *via* the infantry route. When I finished

my transatlantic tour I found I was fated to become acquainted with the art of building railroads. That and nothing more. Whenever our outfit got near a battle the battle stopped, through no merit of ours. The war just up and moved away. However, I did meet adventurers. If Sandy, or the Silver Haired cowboy from Montana, or Jake, or the "Mayor of Waasis" read these lines they may know I mean them.

After the war busted our sergeants' mess up for keeps I came back home, got married and went to work at civil engineering. I started writing, too, and, as usual, had to devote quite some time to discovering how little I knew about it. Turned out forty-odd stories before I sold my first, and only started to make the grade when I realized that the bottom was the place to begin. I've lost my ambition to be a literary light. If I can turn myself into a fair story-teller I'll be satisfied. The amount of work necessary to succeed in this latter aim convinces me that it must be worth trying for.

I LIKE dogs. I'm fond of outdoor sport of all kinds. I put in all the time I can at skiing which is, to my mind, the best winter sport of all. Being a Canadian, I find lots of opportunity for it. My ambition is to own a small place in the Laurentians on navigable water—navigable that is for a canoe, with good fishing close at hand and good shooting within trekking distance. If the shooting were too near I'd not get much work done during the season. However, as the description of my dream-residence reads like the specifications of Heaven I may not attain to it.

I've read *Adventure* from the start, though I missed a few copies while overseas, as so many of us did. I've like it from the start, and have always wanted to write for it. Now that I have succeeded in this ambition I have formed a new one. I want to keep on writing for it. I like to be among friends, for I have been very happy in my friendships. And that is the thing I like about Camp-Fire. You stand up, and in the circle about you are potential friends, thousands of them.—L. PAUL.

IN A past "Camp-Fire" we printed a newspaper article on Death Valley Scotty, sent in by one of the comrades. The returns have been such that my first impulse was never to print another newspaper article. But that, of course, would be foolish. Camp-Fire is a place to hear people talk. It doesn't claim that everything it listens to is sound fact; not even the comrade who sent in this article vouched for it in any way. But he was right in sending it. There is no better way of digging out the truth eventually than by hearing and putting the quietus on mistaken reports and letting them start a general discussion. Often this method will bring out true facts that would not otherwise have come to light at all.

It seems entirely safe to call that newspaper article bosh. But when it comes to getting at the real truth—well, in one city alone there are at least four men who claim

to be the original Death Valley Scotty. Another report has him at present alive and happy in Death Valley; another has him dead a long time in the same place. Nearly every detail of the article is called untrue and most of them preposterous. Even his historic ride is called a press-agent stunt and also referred to as a real feat.

The only solution I can see is that discussion at Camp-Fire be limited to the various Death Valley Scotty's themselves, while the rest of us sit around and listen. In this way we could have plenty to listen to and if the real facts could not be distinguished from the others no great harm would be done in this case.

THESE bits from Royce Brier's story in this issue—I wonder whether they aren't worth sort of thinking over by all of us?

"When you aren't any longer driven by something inside of you, you're driven by something outside of you."

And this, along the same line:

"Do you still figure men aren't driven like sand?" asked Hink, a burning match poised above his pipe bowl in the milk-warm evening.

"Like sand?" Knut lit his own pipe. "Bunk! Men are driven like sand only when they permit themselves so to be driven."

"But supposing you can't hang on to what's inside of you?"

"The greatest achievement in life is to hang on to what is inside you. If you can do it, you can laugh at the —est trickery ever conceived by fate."

AS TO whether Jim Bridger swore and such. E. E. Harriman of our writers' brigade and "A. A." brings forward testimony. Mr. Harriman, of course, is not particularly interested in the question itself or in any way desirous of detracting from Jim Bridger's fame as scout and pioneer.

Los Angeles

My cousin, Mrs. Alvin Leighton of Ottumwa, Iowa, was with her husband and his brother Jim at Fort Buford, Dakota, when the brothers ran a trading-post there. She was a bride when she went there fresh from Baltimore.

SHE tells me that one day she was walking outside and heard a loud voice indulging in terrible language, swearing profanely and, to a large extent, obscenely. Her husband hurried her away.

"Who is that, Alvin, that uses such terrible language?" she says she asked her husband.

"That is old Jim Bridger," she claims he replied. "He is half drunk and when he gets that way his talk is nothing for a decent girl to listen to. Get into your quarters and shut the door."

Happens I know Mary to be truthful beyond most women.

I HAVE schoolmates who have lived in Texas since 1875. I have been in Kansas, away back forty years ago, right near Abilene, and met pioneers of '65 to '75 there, who told me much. Jim Leighton was the man Bridger hired to read Shakespeare to him, after trading a yoke of oxen for the book.

Many nights he kept Jim reading until long past midnight and one night, at two thirty, Jim rebelled and quit, saying he had to sleep.

"— you, Jim Leighton!" said Bridger. "If I didn't think so much of you, I'll be ——— if I wouldn't cut your ——— throat, fer stoppin' right in the interestin' part!"

Nice, mild, Sunday school type, Jim was.

Mary Leighton says he always carried two kegs of whisky away with him, from the saloon at Fort Buford, and usually had two quart flasks in his pockets at the same time.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

SOMETHING from Thomson Burtis concerning his novelette in this issue:

What I tried to do in the story is give a picture of the struggle for acreage. It's the same stuff as a rush for mining claims or anything else. Practically four-fifths of the so-called epics of the oilfields that I happened to hear revolved around desperate races for choice acreage. And in that business all is fair—kidnaping your competitor is all right, or stalling his car, or anything else. And there is a story revolving around almost every large deal for acreage—doublecrossing, shady stuff, secretly representing some one else, and all that. So I tried to set out at the beginning, carefully select my incidents, and set down in careful detail every step leading up to the acquirement of a valuable block of acreage.

THE airplane stuff is more true-to-fact than usual.

The oilfields swarm with 'em. Abe Goodman, now the biggest single operator in the California fields and former partner of my friend Malcolm Towns in drilling, has a private plane which he uses to transport him from field to field. He was using one three years ago between Oklahoma and Texas.

As for one point on which the yarn revolves—the formation and core of a well, if they look good, justifying a heavy gamble. I can relate the solemn fact that on a well in Luling, Texas, where the driller was the son of an oil operator, said oil operator raised a bid on fifty acres offset from the well from \$5,000 to \$20,000 before the well came in. And the bid was refused. And the acreage sold for \$45,000 on the strength of an eight-hundred-barrel well which came in the next day.

You'll notice that old Adam Burney, very prominent in "Oil and the Troubled Waters," once more plays a leading rôle.—THOMSON BURTIS.

DON'T forget that you may receive a printed index of the present volume of *Adventure* merely by applying for it and enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Indexes for other volumes are on

hand also and may be obtained in the same way. They extend back as far as Volume V, covering the issues for November, 1912, to April, 1913, but in asking for indexes for these earlier volumes please bear in mind that the supply of some of them is quite small and may be exhausted by the time this notice reaches you. Please bear in mind also that extra postage should be enclosed if many indexes are asked for.

FROM S. B. H. Hurst something concerning his story in this issue. The Christmas referred to is that of 1923. I've omitted the last sentence of the letter so that it might not betray the ending of the story as written from the material stated in the letter.

Rolling Bay, Washington.

This Alaska tale is composite—incidents extending over more than a quarter of a century of time and many hundred miles of space have been welded to make it; but it is based—I mean the germ of it lies in the heroism or, if you will, folly of a priest who, last Christmas Eve in Northern Alaska, set out against the best advice to keep his promise to his Indian children converts—his promise that they should have a real "white kids" Christmas, and that he would bring them a sled filled with toys for their tree.

HE HAD about ninety miles to go in the face of a certain blizzard. He should never have started. When the storm got him, like a decent man realizing his end had come, he cut his dogs out of the harness to give them a chance. But—and here is the marvel—the lead dog, a husky with no "civilized" dog in him, did *not* hike for safety, but snuggled against the breast of the priest, *apparently to try to keep him warm and so save his life!* They found them together, dead. A rather tough friend from the North told me the details, and cried about it although he is not a Catholic. Of course, however pathetic and beautiful, there is hardly a story in the death of the missionary while trying to keep a promise, so, as I said, I have worked in other people and times and places, and — — S. B. H. HURST.

FROM Dr. John Ashburton Cutter, New York City, comes a plea that the writings of Robert B. Cunninghame Graham should be better known, especially by us of Camp-Fire. While some of the staff know and admire his work, I'm ashamed to admit I'm not familiar with it. Dr. Cutter enclosed a review of Mr. Graham's books by Allan Nevins in the *New York Sun*, which follows in somewhat abridged form:

Robert B. Cunninghame Graham is now 72 years old, and the likelihood increases that only his death will awaken a general interest in his literary merits. Every now and then some one rises to point out that his talents should be far better known. Theodore

Roosevelt did it, but in vain. One American house after another takes a try at the eminent Scotchman's books, but few buyers harkened to the assurances of the elect that these pictures of raw life in South America, in Spain and in North Africa are unique in English.

GRAHAM'S failure to make a wider reputation is really hard to understand. This Scotch aristocrat, "the best dressed Socialist in England," a Spanish grandee in appearance, possesses all the advantage of personal picturesqueness. He was once a Labor politician and had his head broken by a policeman in Trafalgar Square. He was the talk of London when he began riding in the Row upon a Texas mustang with a fine long tail. Few men in England have had a more cosmopolitan experience. The nephew of a lord, he was acquainted in youth with many of the best drawing rooms of England and Europe; he became a successful cattleman in the Argentine and in our American West; he knew the Arabs as well as Wilfrid Blunt, and he long sat in Parliament. As he once wrote, he is familiar with "the music of the wind in the dried grasses of the Southern Pampa, the icy nights upon the frosty Sierras, dank trails in Paraguay and in Colombia through the impenetrable forests." Yet he is equally versed in the sordid, weary life of old-world cities, while many sketches prove the enduring hold upon him of the Scotch moors.

HE IS writing the most interesting supplements to the earlier histories of Spanish America. Everybody knows the romantic record of Cortez in Mexico and Pizarro in Peru. Cunninghame Graham is now engaged in showing English readers that there were other conquistadores who met equal perils and exhibited equal greatness. His "The Conquest of New Granada" two years ago dealt with Quesada, who in adding what is now Colombia and Venezuela to the Spanish realms faced dangers as terrifying, endured far more painful hardships and subjugated an Indian state much more inaccessible. The narrative of his thousand mile march up the Magdalena, through a swampy, pestilential forest and of the victories which his 160 men won over an Indian army of 20,000 is as interesting as the description of the well developed kingdom of the Chibchas, which he found on the tableland about Bogota. Quesada's march was matched only by that of Cortez from Mexico City to Honduras. Now in his new book, "The Conquest of the River Plate," Graham describes the marvelous adventures of Alvar Nunez, the chief figure in the Spanish acquisition of Argentina.

ALVAR NUNEZ has two titles to remembrance; for his extraordinary ten years' captivity among the Indians of Florida is really better known than his later conquest of the illimitable pampas. Cast ashore naked in 1527 with four companions, the victims of a hurricane, he quickly ingratiated himself with the savages and established a position as wandering peddler. That is, he made a business of carrying sea shells, the materials for Indian knives, to tribes far in the interior and brought back skins and yellow ochre to the coastal savages of Florida.

In time he made a wide reputation as a physician and surgeon, and after six years he began an effort to reach his countrymen in Mexico. As a privileged medicine man he passed slowly from tribe to tribe,

his fame ever increasing; nations that were at war buried the hatchet to see him and to bring their sick for healing; until at the end of four years with an entourage of a hundred Indians, he reached the Mexican settlements. This was a wonderful exhibition of Spanish grit and resourcefulness, and it is no wonder that the crown lighted upon Nunez to be its viceroy on the Plate.

But it was well that Nunez was inured to adversity, for his experience as governor at Asuncion, where he arrived in 1542, was one of endless trial. Cunninghame Graham pictures him as a ruler of signal moderation and liberalism. He insisted that the Guarani and other nomadic tribes of the plains be treated kindly, stopped the practise of enslaving Indian captives and restored kidnaped Indian girls to their families. He lessened the taxation of the poor settlers and made crown officers contribute to the treasury. In short, he showed himself three centuries ahead of his time, and the result was an immediate crop of intrigues and plots against his power. Of the campaigns which he led against the Indians, of the expeditions he fitted out to explore the interior and of the civil war which soon convulsed the land, Cunninghame Graham gives a spirited account.

THIS book, the volume on New Granada, and the strange account of a modern fanatic and the war he precipitated, "A Brazilian Mystic," may be recommended to all who like an engrossing and highly colored historical narrative. But the books that should have the largest audience are those earlier volumes of short pieces, "Progress," "Brought Forward," "Faith," "Hope" and "Success." Here are Argentina, Mexico, Morocco, Spain and the author's native Scotland. Even the slightest sketches are the work of a man who has known intimately what he describes.

SEVERAL comrades have been telling us about the man who claimed that he was John Wilkes Booth, assassin of Abraham Lincoln. Other letters have been coming in and it looked to me like the makings of a very interesting discussion and investigation. Then comes a letter from Barry Scobee of our writers' brigade saying: "Of course you've seen the article in *Harper's* for November, 1924." I hadn't, but I looked it up—"Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape."

The author rests his case almost entirely on his belief that the signatures of David E. George and Booth were not written by the same man. Also, he found one man who testified that George's eyes were blue. Booth's were black. Also "evidence from another source which might perhaps be disputed" if it were not for the signatures. Unless handwriting experts very strongly endorse his belief as to the signature—Booth's that of a young man, the other that of an old man broken by drink and not far

from death—I'd say he has made out a far weaker case against the "Enid legend" than is the case of the legend itself.

FROM the first, as stated at Camp-Fire, I was unready to accept the legend that Booth had not been killed as per accepted history, but, lacking strong testimony from handwriting experts, I find little in this article to support my own opinion. On the contrary, it makes out for the "legend" a stronger case than I had previously been able to find for it.

The author calls the evidence against the legend overwhelming, but doesn't even attempt to account for David E. George, probably *alias* John St. Helen, on any other hypothesis. Yet he himself states:

This man told a story which fitted so plausibly into the true and inner account of the movements and experiences of the assassin of Abraham Lincoln that, to this day, it throws into high relief the very elements of the official records which are mysterious and unprovable.

Who *was* George or St. Helen, what was his motive, and how, pray, did he become possessed of such intimate knowledge of events and persons connected with the assassination—knowledge that would come from only one of the participants in those events, or from some one in the close confidence of the participants? Knowledge, so hidden and buried that even special investigators had difficulty in unearthing it? No mere madman or drunk victim could conjure out of nothing a tale so delicately fitting into almost unknown facts.

I do not accept the legend, but still less do I accept this "shattering" of it. We are not yet in possession of sufficient data either to prove or to disprove the legend. Very possibly there will never be sufficient data. Let us, however, accept the article for its information, though not for its conclusions, and begin over again. No opinions considered from any one who has not read and weighed the article; facts, of course, accepted from anywhere. Will handwriting experts give us their opinions?

Incidentally, is it true that eyes sometimes change color after death?

AND how about the high Government official, called Mr. Blank in the article, who was a conspirator and perhaps the chief instigator of Lincoln's assassination? Since it is apparently established that there was

such a Government official, why should the well known *Sh! Sh!* system be invoked to protect his name from the infamy it deserves? Is it our duty to shield the memory of traitors and assassins? Why encourage treason and assassination by demonstrating that we make the penalty as light as possible?

For the "good of the party," doubtless. To — with the party! We need common decency, relentless truth and even-handed justice a whole lot more than we need the two political parties who between them have tried so hard to diddle us along toward forgetfulness of the rotten scandals that have yet to be proved to be—by anything more valuable than *Sh! Sh!*—less ugly than they seem. Why make poor Benedict Arnold do endless duty as the sole traitor in our history when quite probably there are a goodly number of them now strutting pompously across our public stage, rottener and viler and more cowardly than ever Arnold was, yet held by us in what they call "honor"?

Sh! Sh! The President has been assassinated. At all cost keep from public knowledge the name of the esteemed politician who instigated the assassination!

Sh! Sh! A very well known man is suspected of having stolen money from wounded soldiers. Others equally prominent are thought to have robbed the people and their Government of vast sums. Still others have been accused of selling public offices to the highest bidder. Perhaps they did, but at any cost don't let the people find out they did. *Sh! Sh!* The country's only hope lies in the parties composed quite generously of men like that. If you are a true patriot, *Sh! Sh!* And vote the straight ticket at the next election.

WITHOUT blush I pass on to all of Camp-Fire some praise for some of our writers—for two reasons. First, while the magazine doesn't use "Camp-Fire" as a place to blow its own horn, it seems only fair once in a while to share with you a sample of the good words that come our way. There are, I'm thankful to say, a good many thousands of them every year; I pass on to you only a small fraction of one per cent. You like the magazine or you wouldn't read it. Since you like it you'll take a certain satisfaction in hearing endorsements of your own tastes and judgments.

Second, our magazine's chief problem is this: Many people who would like it if they were familiar with it will not even take a look at it because of its name, rough-finished paper and general class. *Adventure* has, I think, the most loyal bunch of readers in all the world of fiction and general magazines. Certainly the most loyal I know, and I've served on half a dozen others and had fairly good looks at many more. You "root" for our magazine and root hard. When you meet one of these condemn-it-unseen people you try to convert him—to get him to enjoy what you enjoy. If now and then "Camp-Fire" brings you a bit of convincing ammunition with which to jolt the unconverted out of their snap judgment on our book, you find your crusading that much the easier.

WELL, then, here are a couple of samples from the New York *World* of the few weeks just past at this writing.

One is a full column devoted entirely to a hearty endorsement of Leonard Nason's war stories, signed by Laurence Stallings, one of the joint authors of "What Price Glory?" now having such a sensational run on Broadway. (Incidentally it is a marine praising a doughboy!) I give you only scraps of what he says:

His mastery of doughboyese is unflagging. . . . These stories should serve throughout time as faithful reproductions of the Yank speech. . . . Mr. Nason's psychology is as good as his dialog, and the soldier's outlook is reproduced with great fidelity. . . . All members of the A. E. F. will know them for one helluva good job, O. D., Mark 1, Complete.

The second sample is from Laurence Stallings' regular column of a later date. I give it with great joy, for it is a sad blow to the many, many Americans who, quite unable to assess real literary values themselves, grow enthusiastic over whatever book or author they are bidden by friends and professional critics equally unable to distinguish real literary merit when they meet it unlabeled. Particularly a sad blow for the many Americans who think nothing really literary can come out of their own country. I'm not talking about *Adventure* in particular but about fiction in general.

It is further said that T. S. Stribling, who won critical estimation here three years ago with a novel of Negro life called "Birthright," has been writing swashbuckling fiction only as a diversion for lighter—and more remunerative—moments. Yet his "Fom-

bombo" and his "Red Sand" (Harcourt Brace) are two of the first-rank thrillers of recent years.

"**FOMBOMBO**" is a story of a Spigotty revolution. "Red Sand" is an epic of the South American bull ring. Long and glowing reviews of these books have been written in *The World*. It is impossible for me to believe that Mr. Stribling is not in earnest about his adventurers. I for one hope that he continues in this vein, and permits a grandson to finish the trilogy of Negro life, which he is reported still to be engaged upon. If he would make this decision we should all happily contemplate about twenty more novels of South American adventure.

IT IS a pity that Mr. Stribling is an American. Naturally we will buy instead the vastly inferior truck of Blasco Ibañez. But all who have read the señor's "Blood and Sand" and who yearn for a fine story of the arena might approach "Red Sand." . . . Last year, at London, the first question asked me by J. C. Squire, the editor of the *London Mercury*, was:

"Do you fellows appreciate this chap Stribling? I haven't met with such excellent writing in a swashbuckling novel in many years." I answered that Americans read Blasco Ibañez instead. "Oh," said Mr. Squire, "but your man Stribling has humor and can write."

If you have not read any of Stribling, I should advise "Fombombo" for Tuesday evening and "Red Sand" for Wednesday.

If the "unconverted" subject you happen to be working on really knows anything about literary values and literary critics, the endorsement of Stribling as vastly superior to Ibañez by the editor of the *London Mercury* will jolt him to his foundations and you can pick up the pieces at your leisure.

"Fombombo," of course, like "The Web of the Sun," "The Green Splotches" and various other novelettes and short stories by Mr. Stribling, was first published in *Adventure*. Indeed, it was through our pages that he made his first bow to readers of fiction or general magazines. A series of short stories by him is at present building up in our safe. You will be interested to know that arrangements are under way for the publication of some of Mr. Stribling's work in various European languages.

"Red Sand," incidentally, was submitted to *Adventure* but had to be rejected because of too much woman interest. And it happens that the book reviewed by Mr. Stallings immediately before this review of Mr. Stribling's books was "Ordeal," by Dale Collins, another of our writers' brigade. And "Ordeal," also, was submitted to *Adventure* and had to be rejected for the same reason.—A. S. H.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map.



A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or ups about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

- Arizona**—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
209—Quartzite. Buck Conner, Box 4.
- Arkansas**—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.
- California**—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Bddy Ave.
80—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
114—Mill Valley. L. F. Goedert, Restawhyle Knoll.
115—Los Catos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sebastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham, Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
186—Santa Ysabel. William Stover, Santa Ysabel Inn.
210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Multikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
211—Pomona. Fred G. Sunley, 480 E. Alverado St.
212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
231—San Francisco. Earl V. Swift, 24-A Brady St.
251—Williams. Joe Lanouette, Opera Pool Hall.
252—Fresno. Mrs. Harriet Church, Echo Gardens, 712 Echo Ave.
257—San Francisco. K. F. Richards, 1807 Post St.
266—Santa Barbara. E. Chester Roberts, 714 State St.
273—Los Angeles. Henry M. Harrod, 6615 So. Main St.
- Colorado**—105—Grand Junction, Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
267—Sugar Loaf. Frank Earnest.
279—Denver. DeForrest Hall, 2531 Bryant St. E.
- Connecticut**—142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.
- Delaware**—232—Delmar. J. A. Aniba, Stone House Hotel, D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Shell, 503 Sixth St., N. E.
- Florida**—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.

- 139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care Call.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
258—Jacksonville. T. J. Eppes, The Hobby Shop.
262—Wildwood. E. M. Dilly, L. B. 114.
285—Tampa. R. Stuart M. ray, Mezzanine Floor, Hillsboro Hotel.
- Georgia**—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.
- Idaho**—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.
- Illinois**—66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.
213—Chicago. Pietro Ferraro, 1007 S. Peoria St.
237—Chicago. Wm. Churchill, 6541 S. State St.
253—Chicago. G. C. Huebner, 2608 Magnolia Ave.
- Indiana**—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschel Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.
287—Vincennes. John C. Maloney, 1004 N. Seventh St.
- Iowa**—238—Atlantic. George Woodbury, 5 E. Third St.
- Kansas**—228—Leavenworth. Ben H. Lukenbill, 315 Shawnee St.
- Kentucky**—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.
- Louisiana**—197—Melville. Wm. P. Stephens.
228—St. Rose. C. M. Elfer.
140—New Orleans. J. D. Montgomery, Navy Recruiting Office.
- Maine**—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 713½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.
243—Winthrop. O. A. Abbot.
274—Augusta. Aubrey S. McLellan, Augusta State Hospital.
- Maryland**—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke, 1200 E. Madison St., at Asquith.
82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer, Frederick St.
- Massachusetts**—56—Watertown Arsenal. E. Worth Benson, Station Hospital.
- Michigan**—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1121 Turner Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.
- Minnesota**—172—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
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268—Pascagoula. C. E. Walter, 239 Orange St.
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94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
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289—Nevada. T. S. Hope, 705 N. Clay St.
- Montana**—240—Fort Missoula, Company C, 4th Infantry.
254—Hamilton. Mrs. Lucy Hyde, 64 N. Second St.
288—Anaconda. R. T. Newman.
- Nebraska**—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart, 119 No. 16th St.
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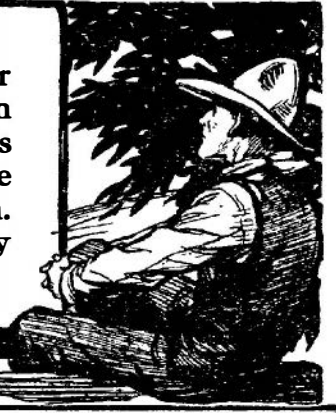
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2. Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.
5. Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do not write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

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- 4-6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
- 7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
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Winter Travel on the Yukon

THE rocky road to Dublin is as smooth as a ballroom floor compared with this trail:

Request.—"What is the state of the Yukon River during the winter months? Is the ice smooth, or is it so rough that it would be impractical to travel on this river with a power sleigh? Is the river generally covered with deep snow? Presuming that it could be traveled on as per above, at what point on the river could the start be made in reference to a passage from, say, Seattle by boat, or on railroad? Or to put it differently, supposing I want to travel from Seattle to St. Michael during the winter, and presuming that I could travel on the river by power sleigh or otherwise, at what point on the river would I leave the boat from Seattle and make the start on the ice?"

If you should publish this in *Adventure*, kindly do not use my name."—J. E. K., Gerlach, Nev.

Reply, by Mr. Solomons:—You put a difficult question to me. The Yukon, like all large northern rivers, freezes in the fall by the making of scum ice and thin ice on its margins and in its tributaries, which moves out and down, getting thicker with each day. Currents and winds pile it thicker still in turns, on bars, in narrow places. Next it jams in places, piling higher. Then it may break, or water run over it. All sort of things happen during the two or three weeks ice is making before the river locks—the ice sticking for keeps in certain places miles apart perhaps and holding the moving ice above until the whole section congeals—for keeps, as I say.

The general result is a very incongruous surface. There will be smooth ice for some miles. In certain seasons a great deal of it. There will be sections a hundred yards long or twenty miles, over which it is almost impossible to push an empty, light Yukon sled, although perhaps the margin, or parts of it, on this same section may offer good sledding. Such margins froze solidly without having been invaded by floating scum ice or subject to current pressure which piles the latter.

Dog-teams have always made a way up and down the Yukon every winter, but the route has invariably had to be tortuous, going around rough sections and jams—and open water or overflows. These détours often oblige the musher to go along the bank, hard and wearisome, and probably impossible to a power sled.

Again, you do not specify the sort of sled. I can imagine a light affair which would be almost as easy to jerk around as a loaded hand sled. That could probably be got to go along somehow, even if the year was one of rough ice on the great river. But if it had power it would be rather heavy even when emptied, and you might find trouble in getting in over lightly frozen overflows or rough ice. There is usually only a foot or so of snow on the middle and lower Yukon, or two or possibly three feet on the upper river.

Speaking of the final depth in say February or March, the more snow the easier the going, of course, provided a trail had been made. This, by the way, is usually narrow—the width of the Yukon sled—eighteen or twenty inches at best. Your power sled if wider wouldn't "track" and

you'd be down to your sleigh bed most of the time if your trip were made after the snow got six inches or more deep.

You could make the start from Bennet (Lake Bennet) after shipping your power sled on the White Pass & Yukon Railroad from Skagway. Or you could ship it on that road clear to White Horse, which is the lower end of the lakes (except Lebarge). That would give you a hundred or two miles the start of Bennet, though the going down the upper lakes and the short rivers between would be comparatively easy work. You would have to take the railroad at least to Bennet.

Another thing, however. There has of late years been a winter road used from Dawson to White Horse. This largely avoids the river, is hard-packed—if still used, as I presume it is, but am not sure—and would give you a good route as far as Dawson. But from there to St. Michael there is only the dog-team trail, and not a very good one these days, I fancy. Your troubles then would be as above depicted. The lower Yukon for a thousand miles or so is wide and comparatively easy, as you are not likely to find many places where the whole width would be rough.

In sum, you are proposing a hazardous and uncertain undertaking. As a sport, and if you had the whole winter. I'd think well of it—for pure sport of the sort that likes difficulties and problems. Otherwise—forget it.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Bait-Casting with Light Lures

USE a bamboo rod:

Request.—"I would appreciate it very much if you would give me some pointers on bait-casting with light lures. Have been doing fine with Heddon's Dowagiac Minnow, using four-foot steel rod, eighty-yard open reel with fifteen-pound silk line; in fact have begun to consider this an unsportsmanlike way to fish and have tried to use several light lures but found that I could not get a fair cast with them and caught only perch and very small bass.

On account of the brushy streams here I have developed into a "side swiper" but am fairly accurate with a Dowagiac and find that in this section the long cast gets the fish.

It is possible that I am using the wrong kind of a rig for light lures or my way of casting is at fault."—A. F. CASEY, Potosi, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Thompson:—For light lures you have to have a longer, whippier rod. In fact I use one of split bamboo for the light lures, even those weighing only one-fourth ounce, and it is six feet three inches long. The regular tournament length. Your rod is too stiff and has not the action. You could get along with a five-and-a-half foot bamboo, but it must be whippy and of light construction.

Also you will have to use a smaller line than a sixteen-pound test. I use nine-pound test, and it will hold any bass in Current River or any of the streams in your State where I fish. In fact I broke in fishing on Current, Black, St. Francis and other streams there.

It is hard to cast a light lure with a heavy line. Don't use one of over ten-pound test.

You can cast with the side swipe if you wish, using a wrist movement to propel bait instead of the uplift. You will find that you can use a longer rod almost as well in a brushy stream as the short one, get more fight out of the fish and develop greater accuracy and distance.

If I can be of further service please advise.

Getting a Farm in Australia

Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

The subjoined *précis* gives an accurate position of Australia today, and it sets out definitely and clearly the position of the American migrant. To crystallize the statements it is merely necessary to add that in this vast continent of wonderful potentialities there is room—and a welcome—for every one who will work hard and chain his wagon to a star—the star of honest toil.

May I say that this *précis* is broadcasted with the full sanction and approval of the Hon. W. Stanley Bruce, M. P., Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia? In that sense, the statements are irrefutable.—PHILLIP NORMAN.

THE average American probably has only a hazy idea of Australia, its size and its variety of resources. That it is a country as large as the United States, and that necessarily within a territory of such wide dimensions there must be a wide range of soil and climate are facts that he must appreciate before he can visualize the opportunities which its land-industries offer. Within this great continent, which at present has a population of only about 5,750,000 persons, there are enormous areas of country suited for practically every kind of commercial crop, and for the raising of almost any breed of livestock.

Australia certainly provides as wide a choice of rural industry as the United States presents. Tropical industries, such as sugar-cane and cotton-growing, flourish in certain areas as well as wheat, oats, barley, etc., in the temperate zones. On the broad, sun-bathed plains lying back from the coastal areas merino sheep have attained to a quality unrivaled in any other part of the world, while in the coastal region the various English breeds (whether long-wool or short-wool) are as much at home in their new environment as in the country in which they were originally bred. It is the same with cattle and horses. There is no breed for which suitable localities can not be found for their perfect development.

Broadly speaking, the farming country extends along the eastern seaboard from a point a little north of 17° latitude to as far south as 41°. It then follows the southern littoral for about two-thirds of its length. In the southwestern portion of the continent there is another occurrence of rich farming lands. It is along this big strip (aggregating about 3,000 miles) that farming development has taken place. Farming occupation extends back from 100 to 350 miles before it is intercepted by mountain range, or confronted with too scanty a rain-

fall. It is here that Australia's wheat, butter and fruits, which are now entering so strongly into competition with similar products of other countries are produced.

Back from this coastal fringe lies the huge pastoral territory, where under natural conditions Australia's flocks and herds are principally raised. Practically the whole of the good farming lands has been alienated and is now in freehold possession by private individuals. Here and there are isolated patches still belonging to the various State Governments, but in the main such areas are either of second-rate quality or have not yet been opened up by railway communication. With the exception of western Australia no State has Crown land available for selection in any large quantity. In the southwest of this State there are still extensive areas of unalienated country, but for the most part it is very heavily timbered, and its preparation for the plow entails considerable expense. The soil in this locality is well suited for mixed farming and dairying, and the rainfall is from 30 to 40 inches a year.

The land-seeker from other countries, therefore, must realize that in Australia there is practically no such thing as land for the asking. There is, however, an abundance of fairly cheap land which, with a little capital, could be brought to profitable production. This surplus is mainly partially improved land which private owners, for varying reasons, have not brought into full use.

In order to attract settlement the various States offer to the prospective settler substantial monetary assistance to develop these areas, but before this can be granted the settler must have some capital of his own in order to purchase. The institutions which operate in the various States in advancing money, although designated by different terms follow the one general principle: *i. e.*, they advance money in proportion to the value of capital spent and improvements effected. Money is advanced for the erection of fencing, purchase of stock and implements, and for expenditure calculated to bring the land into quick production. The migrant from the United States is on all fours with the Australian land-settler in obtaining this assistance. The amount differs in the various States from £750 to £2,000.

In order to increase production the Commonwealth Government is cooperating with the State Governments to bring further areas under settlement, either by way of the subdivision of large, privately owned estates, or the construction of railways into the few agricultural areas which are without transportation facilities. The British Government is also a party to this arrangement, and is joining with the Commonwealth in defraying certain of the interest charges in order that the burden may not fall too heavily upon the States. Three agreements have now been entered into, namely with Western Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales. The activities of the Commonwealth Immigration Office are being directed mainly to the recruiting in Great Britain of settlers under these schemes, in addition to meeting the ordinary requisitions for farm labor. So far as the United States is concerned, no special canvass is being made for migrants, but nevertheless opportunities exist in Australia for men with farming experience and with a little capital, who are prepared to take a hand in the country's development.

IN QUEENSLAND at present the State Government is tackling the development of 3,000,000 acres known as the Burnett Tableland, and as railways are completed the country is being made available on a perpetual leasehold basis. There the land-seeker, as areas are thrown open, will have an opportunity of acquiring good farming country for a small outlay. No special provision, however, is made for the man from overseas. Before a farm can be acquired the applicant must satisfy the Land Board that he has sufficient capital and experience which, when supplemented by a Government advance of £ for £, for improvements effected, will enable him to win through.

No definite amount of capital is fixed, as the examining board relies as much upon the physical fitness and aptitude of the applicant as upon his financial resources. With £300 and some local experience a start should be possible. Cotton-growing is being encouraged in this area, and, combined with dairy or general farming, yields profitable returns. The Under-Secretary for Lands, Brisbane, Queensland, will furnish information when land will be available.

In Victoria a land-seeker from overseas is eligible, under terms of the Closer Settlement Act, to obtain a farm, but his fitness must first be determined by the Closer Settlement Board. Under this scheme a man with £250 can obtain entry to a farm valued at £2,500 in the case of farming lands and to the value of £3,500 for grazing lands. Monetary assistance to the extent of £650 is made available to selectors under farming occupation and up to £1,000 on grazing occupation. The land must be paid off in half-yearly instalments, including interest and sinking fund, over a period of 36½ years. This scheme gives to a man of the right type with small means an opportunity of becoming his own landlord. It is under the control of the Closer Settlement Board, Lands Department, Melbourne, Victoria.

IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA under the Group Settlement Scheme suitable men are accepted without capital. Although the Western Australian Group Settlement Scheme was brought into existence primarily for British migrants, American citizens are not debarred, but they must be approved by a Selection Committee before they can obtain the benefits offered. Under this scheme groups of 20 men are selected, under the supervision of an overseer, to clear sufficient land in a group area to enable each of them to begin to support himself and family on the land. Advances up to ten shillings a day are paid to the men during the preparation of the land, and a house is erected for each settler in addition to fencing and other essential improvements.

No charge is made for the land, but any advances for wages, improvements, etc., become a charge against the settler and must be paid back in annual instalments over a period of 30 years. Preference is given to settlers from Great Britain. It would be desirable on the part of land-seekers in America to make inquiries direct from the Under-Secretary for Lands, Perth, W. A., before taking definite action in the matter.

The advantage which Australia, in comparison with other countries, offers the land-seeker is the cheapness and quality of its farming lands and the variety of rural industry. For the man with substantial capital there is no difficulty, of course, in

obtaining a wide selection of suitable properties, but for the man with limited means there are the schemes outlined above. As personal selection by an expert committee is a fundamental condition prospective land-seekers should write to the officials named, giving them particulars of experience and financial resources.

For the man of average industry and intelligence, who is prepared to work and to save, there are many other ways open to ultimate farm ownership. The wages, on the whole, are good, although a beginner would have to accept whatever position he could obtain at the outset until he became of use to his employer.

Having acquired local experience, it would be a matter for him to sell his services to his best advantage. Good farmhands are paid from thirty to fifty shillings per week with board and lodging, and are fairly sure of obtaining employment, but in the case of persons from the United States no guarantee of an offer of suitable employment is made. The prospective settler will therefore have to rely upon himself to obtain a footing.

In the course of a few years, if he is thrifty, he should be able to accumulate a capital of from £400 to £500, and with this and a knowledge of local conditions he would find an opening. Once having become possessed of a small holding, the settler would have to rely upon occasional outside employment to keep the pot boiling while he devoted his spare time to the improvement of his own land. Thousands of men today who are comfortably provided for began life in this way, and others are following in their footsteps.

SHARE-FARMING is another means by which the man without much capital can make a beginning. In the case of dairy-farming on the share system no capital is required, but the share-farmer must find the labor. The usual form of share-farming is for the owner to provide a fully stocked and equipped farm and for the share-farmer to undertake the whole of the work and management. The proceeds of the sale of cream and pigs are equally divided. In other cases a fixed rate of 2d. to 3d. per gallon is paid, according to the productivity of the herds.

In wheat share-farming a capital of from £400 to £500 is necessary to buy a team and the necessary equipment. In this case the land-owner provides the land, fenced and cleared, ready for the plow and the seed and bluestone for pickling; the farmer provides implements and teams to work the land and labor, and the proceeds are divided bag for bag. There are modifications in these agreements, but the underlying principle is substantially the same. Good wheat-land can be purchased on easy terms at from £3 to £10 per acre. Land suitable for dairying is obtainable at prices from £10 to £30 per acre.

In Australia, however, the quality of the land is by no means the principal factor governing its price. Nearness to a railway or to market, its state of improvement, and other considerations largely influence value. Although most of Australia's best farming lands have been alienated, they are not being exploited to their full capacity. Millions of acres of country are not yet fully improved, and it is land of this nature that the newcomer, who is handicapped for funds, must look to in order to make his start.

THE question, "How will the Australian worker treat a man from the United States?" is sometimes asked. The answer is, it all depends upon the man himself. So far as land industries are concerned there is as a rule good employment to be found. The migrant from Great Britain receives a kindly welcome. The average farmer is willing enough to help a newcomer, so long as he has evidence that the newcomer is a trier.

In Australia there is room for such a wide expansion of land-settlement that to a man who is determined to succeed the only competition he will be up against is that of ability. Where Crown land is open for selection, all things being equal, probably the Australian applicant would be given preference, but as matters exist today the land-seeker from America is on much the same footing as the Australian.

Persons coming to Australia must be in sound health and of good moral character, and must be in possession of a valid American passport. No special concessions are made to the American farmer except those indicated, and the man will be well advised to have some small amount of capital to tide him over until he finds employment.

A man with a wife and family, who is anxious to obtain experience in farming, will have a very great difficulty in finding a situation where his wife and family can be housed, and for that reason he should have sufficient funds at his disposal to make arrangements for their support while he is working on a farm. Hard work is the road to success, and the newcomer must take the rough with the smooth. He can fortify himself with the knowledge that if he sticks to it he will eventually come out on top, and that every year his prospects and advancement will improve.

Wheat and dairy farms and orchards capable of maintaining a family in comfort can be purchased at about £2,000. With half this amount of capital, however, a commencement can be made, as financial assistance can be obtained from Government and private financial institutions.

The services of the experts of various State departments are available to newcomers in all matters connected with the conduct of farming, but rather than to rely solely upon the advice of experts it is far better that each settler should obtain some practical experience of the industry in which he intends to embark.

To qualify for Australian rights of citizenship, Americans require to have resided for five years within the British Empire during the previous eight years, including at least twelve months' residence in Australia preceding the date of application for naturalization. Upon becoming naturalized, the person is entitled to the privileges of franchise.

New Brunswick as a Paradise

TAKE your rod and gun and go:

Request.—"As a boy I spent a good deal of time in the northern part of New England. However, a great many years have gone by since I have visited that part of the country; and this winter I want to, if it is possible, spend a week or ten days farther north than New England and go into Canada for some hunting and also get a chance to get some good photographs.

Now if you will answer the following questions I will be ever so much obliged.

Is it possible for an automobile—Ford coupé—to make the trip from the Canadian border up into either Nova Scotia or New Brunswick at Christmas time? That is, are the roads passable, and can one get anywhere near good hunting and scenery?

If the above is possible what caliber rifle would I need, or if necessary what different types of guns would I need?

What sort of an outfit would be necessary for say a ten-day trip? Can I buy all of the necessary things in the vicinity?

What sort of clothes would I need to wear?

Is it necessary to have guide?

If so, what would the services of one cost?

Where would one see such guide as to hiring him? Can I write, or will I have to wait until I get on the location?

Would it be necessary to pitch tent, or could I rent a cabin?

I feel certain that I can get through to the Canadian border at Christmas time and know pretty thoroughly the country between Delaware and the northern part of New England. Will you also tell me all about license if one is needed?"—GERALD E. YEATON, Dover, Del.

Reply, by Maj. Belford:—I regret that for the past months I have been knocked out and unable to attend to my work, so that this letter will be of no use to you for the trip you contemplate.

Personally I don't think the Ford would get you there. A lot of snow falls near the Atlantic seaboard.

New Brunswick is a paradise for hunters and fishermen. If you wish to prepare for a real good trip next season, write now to the Chief Guide, Provincial Government Buildings, and ask him to send you full information. The province publishes lists of guides and everything necessary to make full preparations. My lists are now two years old, and there would be changes.

Guides provide cabins, food, etc., and you can make all arrangements with him by letter.

You will find wonderful scenery and good sport. Make your arrangements well in advance. If you can go earlier in the season you can make the trip by auto easily.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Iguanas and Alligators

HABITS of reptiles whom evolution has outgrown:

Request.—"Would be pleased with any information you can give me on the following subject. A friend and I are planning to go in the interior of R. de Panama, hunting iguanas and alligators, and doing a little prospecting for gold.

We are both in the U. S. Army, and we shall be soon discharged, so we would like to have a little adventure. Please give me your opinion about that. Do you think we can make anything out of either thing? Here is what I would like to know.

Where is the best place to go to prospect for gold?

Life and habits of the iguanas and alligators?

Would there be any danger in hunting them?

Which is the best way of hunting them, and what

kind of firearms should we have and what caliber?

Which is the best way to skin and prepare them?

What do the U. S. markets or manufacturers pay for these skins?

Enclosed stamped and addressed envelop will be found for reply."—C. E. PAPAGEORGE, Corozel, C. Z.

Reply, by Mr. Emerson:—The iguana belongs to the class or family of the thick-tongued lizards.

This tongue is short and not very much divided at its end, but is covered with a sticky secretion, always moist.

Of these reptiles there are 236 species on record. They belong to the New World, and are found from Patagonia to British Columbia. They are characterized by their peculiar teeth, which are round at the root and are blade-shaped with saw-tooth edges at the tips. Have dewlap beneath head and neck, also crest of slender scales, these growing shorter from nape of neck to tail, which latter is long and slender, but not well-fastened, so that if you pick one up by the tail the tail will be left in your hand and the animal will escape; therefore pick them up by the back of the neck, if they are not too large.

They are generally green in color, which blends well with the tree or other verdure on which they may be resting, thus camouflaging them from the enemy. Those of them that live on the ground are colored to match their surroundings. Under fear or irritation they are almost equal to the chameleon in being able to change color instantly. The madder they get, the darker the color produced.

As to size, they vary from a few inches to several feet. The most common or widely distributed specimen of South America and the West Indies is up to five feet; it is greenish to brownish in color, the tail having alternate rings of these two colors. Its food is vegetable; it loafs on the branches of trees and lays its eggs in any convenient hollow in the tree. The eggs are olive shaped, one and one-half inches long. Some people eat them raw mixed with farna.

The iguana is timid and not able to defend himself except by climbing a tree, blending with the surroundings and keeping still.

The natives consider the meat a great delicacy. They capture this not over-brilliant creature by slipping a noose around its neck as it sits on the branch of a tree.

Some species like the water. One of this class called marine lizard is found only in the Galapagos Islands, very near the shore or in the water, where they swim well by means of their flattened tails, the motion being somewhat like an eel's, for they do not use their semi-web feet but hold them close to their sides. They can remain submerged for a surprizingly long time. When frightened they will not enter the water, and if thrown in will return to the point whence they started.

Another family forms burrows in the ground, thus differing from the general habits of most of them.

ALLIGATORS. This name is from the Spanish *lagarto*, meaning lizard.

The alligator is enough like the crocodile to be one, although the head is broader, shorter and the snout blunter, and its canine teeth receive into a pit formed for it within the upper jaw. Also there is no jagged fringe on the hind legs and feet, and webs only halfway up to the tips of the toes.

I DO not know of any market for iguana skins.

The public is so changeable in its demands for alligator skins that any price I might quote you might not be good in thirty days from now, so will suggest that you look in some trade journal, find some fur company that strikes you as being the one you wish to trade with, write to it to give you a price, find out how long that is good for, also just how it wishes the skins handled—*i.e.* the style of skinning and curing—and then, by the letter, you have something of a more or less agreement with them as to price.

As to your mining, you can go to Province of Veraguas in Darien district for manganese; also in the interior you will find gold—it has been mined for many years—also silver, aluminum, lead, copper, coal and asbestos.

Quite often you will find that minerals other than gold will pay you better returns on your time and money investment.

The local laws of Central America do not allow over .38 caliber rifle.

Enclosed are some memoranda on the mines now going.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Good Guns for Rough Work

REVOLVERS and their peculiarities:

Request:—"Will you kindly advise me as to respective merits of .38-40 Bisley and Model 1917 S. & W.? I have a small hand, and the old D. A. with rod ejector just fits it. I like a S. A. and always cock my O. M. before shooting.

Would like to get me a Bisley with $4\frac{3}{4}$ -inch bbl. if it would fit my hand. Think this style gun is the best for rough work, such as carrying on hunting and fishing trips and the like. I have read something to the effect that the .38-40 is the most powerful and efficient load in this model. Am I right? Will the S. A. .45 handle the Model '17 rim cartridge? I can't reach the hammer on the S. A. Army, hence the Bisley idea. Can get the ammunition through the N. R. A. if it will or if I decide on the Model '17.

Thanking you in advance for any dope you may give me."—F. W. EGGLESTON, Bozeman, Mont.

Reply, by Mr. Wiggins:—I really prefer the Smith & Wesson for the .45 autorim ammunition; while I know the Colt is very certain and reliable in operation, still I have never had the least trouble with the military type Smith & Wesson, and prefer a distinctly revolver load, in place of a rifle cartridge used in the revolver. Also, I prefer the older style single action Army revolver to the Bisley, as I don't fancy the Bisley's model of stock, it being so designed that in a quick shot I generally throw low with it.

One thing I find with the Colt, and the only real fault, is that its grips and frame are separate, held in place by screws that loosen after some firing, mine having to be tightened with a small screw-driver after about every twenty-five shots. The Smith & Wesson is free from this, but is a swing-out cylinder, which is slightly more complicated. I may add that I greatly prefer the Smith & Wesson's grip to the Bisley Colt's.

You are right, the old .38 and .41 D. A. Colt, with all its many shortcomings in the line of mechanism, was a dandy to fit the hand, and I can't praise mine too highly. (It has pearl grips, and went through the Lincoln County War in the early eighties in New Mexico.) It feels just right to me, and I often wish we could get a really properly proportion single action .38 Special revolver.

The .45 autormim will have about the same ballistics as the .45 automatic with 230 grain bullet. I always prefer lead bullets and smokeless powder in a revolver, which is somewhat difficult to manage, being a case of ordering direct from the factory or else loading them yourself. I know both Winchester and UMC factories make the .38-40 cartridge with metal-cased and lead bullets, but dealers only seem to know of the metal-cased ones, either hard or soft points. I can't get the idea of metal-cases in the revolver, and this makes me stick to black powder loads, but they are dirty and noisy, too.

The .45 Smith & Wesson can be used with either the Government issue of .45 pistol ammunition or the commercial .45 autormim with either hard point metal case, or else lead bullet. I prefer the latter, I may add.

And here's something lately arrived that perhaps you didn't know: You can, by a special order to the factory, get the Model 1917 Smith & Wesson revolver bored for the .45 Colt revolver cartridge, not the automatic. I own one, and value it highly, as it's a wonderful shooter, and I really prefer it to any of my three .45 revolvers, the other two being a S. A. Colt and a British Webley.

The Bisley Colt is not made now, but I believe you will be able to locate a good second-hand one from the following firm:

Mr. Wm. R. Burkhard, 143 East 4th St., St. Paul, Minn.

The .45 S. A. Colt will not handle the .45 autormim cartridge. I tried to have one made up in 1917 for the .45 automatic, expecting to take it overseas, but the factory refused to even consider it. Of course, a man could get a .32-20 or a .38-40 or .44 and have it bored up to .45 automatic caliber, which is a little smaller in diameter than the .45 revolver load, by Hoffman, but why bother when we can get the Model 1917 Smith & Wesson or the new Service Colt already made for that particular load?

I trust this will be the desired information.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Gold in Siberia

GET ready for the next big rush:

Request:—"Can you tell me, please, the political conditions as affects American mining men on the Kamchatka Peninsula. Up until 1921 was quite well posted through a few men who were in Vladivostok for supplies. Since that time I have been entirely out of touch and suspect that conditions are radically changed.

I think a company of ex-service men with plenty of backing and a good knowledge of the Russian language have a good gambling chance for a clean-up. It being understood, of course, that the men are well trained in various occupations and know what they are bucking up against.

Have I given you a sufficient idea of what we want?

Remember, we are well acquainted with this territory through direct contact with men who were on the spot in 1921.

Has there been enough political agitation to affect that remote region for better or worse?

Has that field attracted much attention from others who are as interested as I am?"—R. D. A. PENCE, New York City.

Reply, by Capt. Oliver:—The very latest from the Kamachatka and Okhotsk districts is that the Soviets have everything well organized and going smoothly. If you wish to prospect you must register at Petropavolosc and may stake and work a claim by paying the Government an eight per cent. royalty.

I am going to leave Los Angeles shortly for the Okhotsk via Petropavolosc and can give you some good first-hand dope at an early date.

If you fellows intend to go into this thing on a large scale, why don't you let one of the party make a trip and look things over, it might save money and time in the end? The outfit I am going with has a large boat (500 ton) equipped with a crude-oil engine and I'm sure there would be a place for a good mechanic. I have practically completed arrangements for my trip but know very few of the details or whether they have engineers or not, but I do know that they are lacking one radio operator and prefer one who would be handy at something else too.

This is not a recommendation of this transportation company because most of my information was obtained from a news item and you know how much you can depend on that.

If you are interested in going there this spring you may get in touch with this company by writing Siberian Exploration & Navigation Co., 834 San Fernando Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif., or, you could make the trip by going by steamer to Nome, Alaska, and go over with some of the small trading schooners, or it is quite possible you would run into some one right in Nome who could give you all the dope.

Yes, Siberia is attracting quite a lot of attention and there are many who contemplate going there, but it is such a large place that the U. S. could easily move over and there would be room left. I receive many letters for information and many of those canny old sourdoughs are quietly bringing lots of dust out, but it won't be long before some one is going to start talking, then look out for a big rush.

Will be glad to hear from you again any time; I was in the outfit from 1906 till 1914 and know what you are up against, it is all right but not much for a man who wants to get along.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

“ASK ADVENTURE” editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address J. D. NEWSOM, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and IF all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (NOT attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, NOT to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

A NUMBER of old frontiersmen are sending in their contributions to add to our growing collection. Some of these have already been printed, and more are on the way. In many cases, too, valuable information has come in concerning the origin of the songs themselves. The following song I have not met with elsewhere. It was sent in by a friend of the author, who appends some account of the man who wrote it. For obvious reasons I withhold names, using instead the nicknames of my correspondent and of his friend.

Buffalo Song

(Composed by "Whisky" — in 1872. Contributed by "Buckskin Johnny.")

Come all you pretty fair maids, these lines to you I write.

We're going on the range, in which we take delight,
We're going on the range as we poor hunters do,
While those tender-footed fellows do stay at home with you.

Our game it is the antelope, the buffalo, elk, and deer;

They roam these broad prairies without the least of fear.

We rob them of their robes, in which we think no harm,

To buy us chuck and clothing to keep our bodies warm.

The buffalo is the largest and the noblest of the van,
He sometimes refuses to throw us up his hands,
With shaggy mane uplifted and face toward the sky,
As if to say, "I'm coming; so, hunter, mind your eye."

While armed with the Sharps rifle and needle gun so true

We cause them soon to bite the dust, for they send their bullets through.

With nerves that never falter, and belt with forty rounds

We send them up Salt River to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

All the day long we go tramping around
In search of the buffalo that we may shoot them down

And when we come upon them, if our guns have no defect,

We cause them to throw up their hands, and pass us in their checks.

Our house is made of buffalo hides, we build them tall and round,

Our fire is made of buffalo chips, our beds are on the ground.

Our furniture is the camp kettle, the coffee pot, and pan,

Our chuck is buffalo beef and bread intermingled well with sand.

Our neighbors are the Cheyennes, the Arapahoes, and Sioux,

Their mode of navigation is the buffalo hide canoe; (i. e. rawhide saddles)

And if they all should emigrate I'm sure we wouldn't care,

For a peculiar way they have of raising hunters' hair.

The hunters are jolly fellows, they like their lager beer,

The hunters are jolly fellows, they drink their whisky clear.

And now you've heard my song you mustn't think it queer

If I take a drink of whisky or a glass of lager beer!

"Whisky" — was born of wealthy parents and received a college education, but through some indiscretion of youth he, like many of the plainsmen, became a wanderer. He had a one hundred and fifty dollar gold watch, also a testament his mother gave him, which he held as a sacred trust regardless of conditions. On the discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1875-76, most of us plainsmen went there to help exploit the country, as the buffalo were on the verge of extinction. 'Whisky' on arriving at Cheyenne, fell in with a 'fallen angel' of talent and education, and on their arrival at the Hills they each located ranches adjoining on unsurveyed land, each building on their own claim till such a time as they could acquire titles; when they married and afterward raised a family. They prospered, and gave their children the advantages of a first class education. When full of years, they crossed the border (entering the Happy Hunting Grounds) respected and beloved by all. Their children and grandchildren, who knew but little of their early life, may well call them blest. I believe that I am the only one from the country of their choice who knew aught of their former life . . . May the Divine Being forgive their errors, and reward their virtues—for they had many—is the wish of the old scout, 'BUCKSKIN JOHNNY.'"

AND now, for a bit of delightful nonsense picked up by Jackson Taylor, Jr., in the southern part of West Virginia in 1895. The song is well nigh endless. Who can send in more of it?

Frog Went A-Courting*(Text of Jackson Taylor, Jr.)*

Frog went a-courtin', he did ride,
Tum a ring back fishy bonnie kimo,
 Frog went a-courtin', he did ride,
Tum a ring back fishy bonnie kimo.
 Sword and pistol by his side.
Tum a ring back fishy bonnie kimo.
 Sword and pistol by his side.
Tum a ring back fishy bonnie kimo.

*Chorus: Kemo, kimo, fell to kimo,
 Kimo, karo, karee.
 Turn a wrapped up pennywinkle,
 Pom a dooley, yellow buckle,
 Ring back fishy bonnie kimo*

He went down to the mouse's ball,
 And there he paid his regular call,

He took Miss Mousie on his knee,
 Says, "Pretty Miss Mouse, won't you marry me?"

"Oh, what we going to have for the wedding
 supper?"

"Two big beans and a cup of butter."

First one in was the little moth,
 Come to spread the table cloth.

Next one in was the old gray goose,
 Picked up the fiddle and she cut loose.

Next man in was the tumble bug,
 Licker sloshin' in his jug.

Next man in was the bumble-bee,
 Took a seat where he could see.

Next man in was the farmer's son,
 Took off his hat, but he couldn't dance none.

Next one in was a big nigger man,
 Totin' a big stick in his han'.

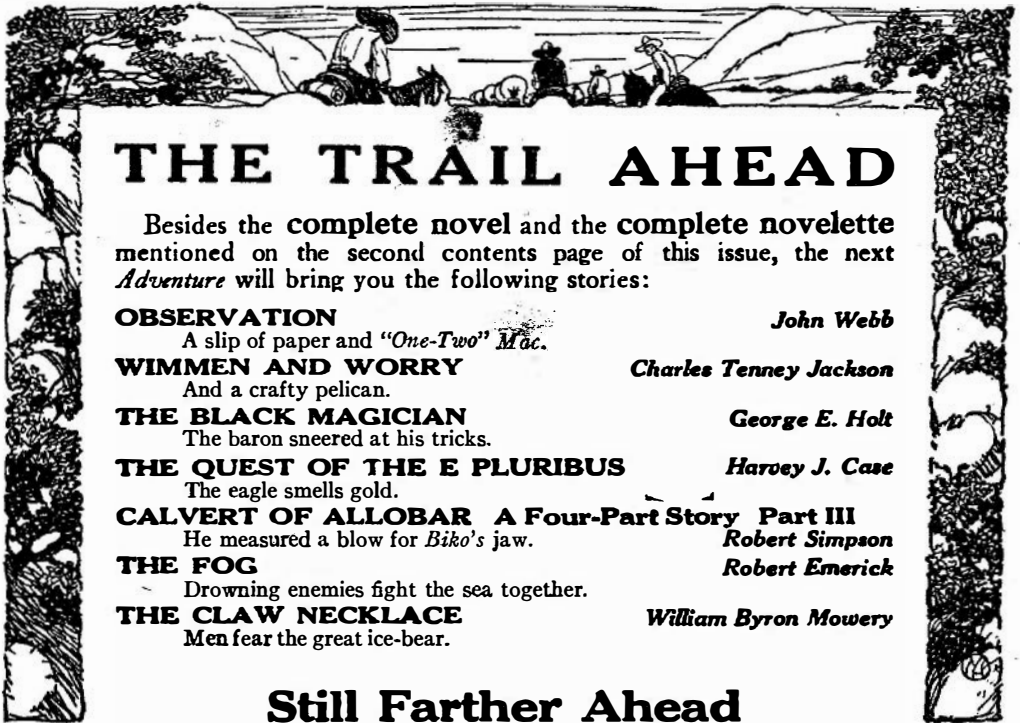
The frog he jumped into the lake,
 And he got swallowed by a big black snake.

Snake went swimmin' to the lan',
 And he got killed by the big nigger man.

And that was the end of one, two, three,
 The frog, the snake, and the bumble-bee.

The song book lies on the shelf,
 If you want any more, just sing it yourself!

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions about them, direct to R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. **DO NOT** send them to the magazine.



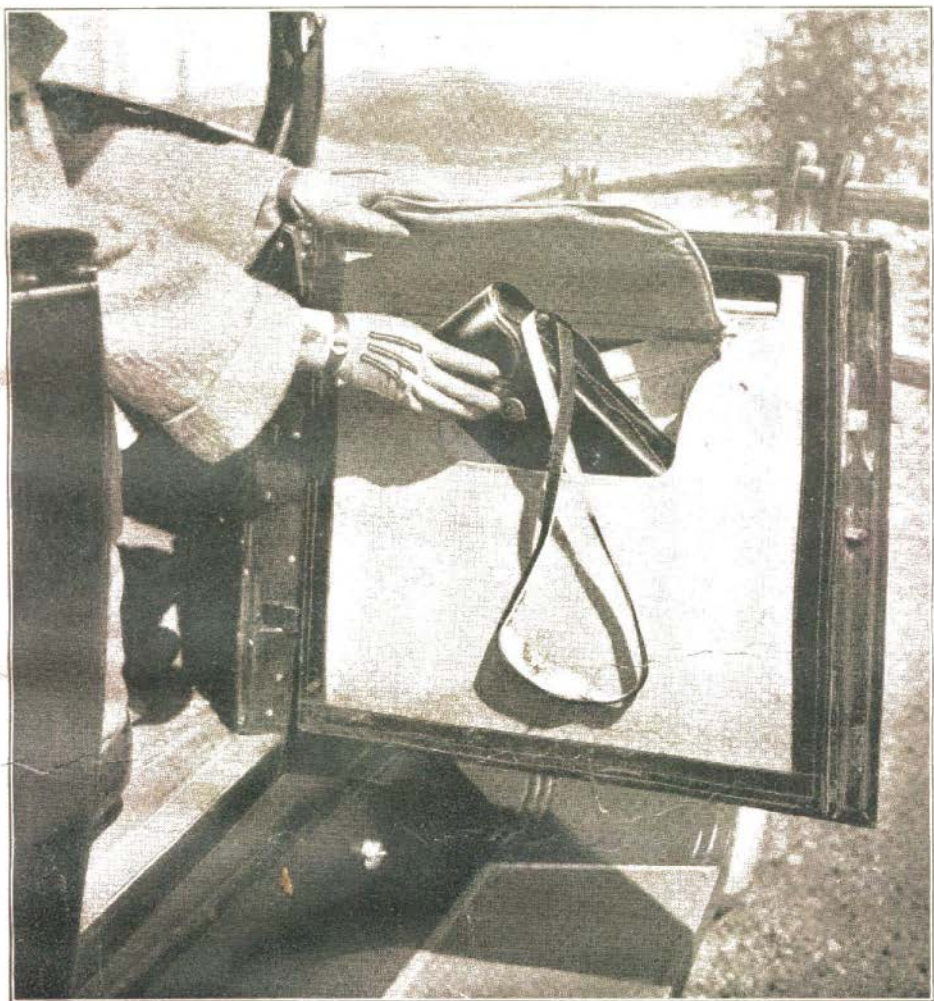
THE TRAIL AHEAD

Besides the complete novel and the complete novelette mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

OBSERVATION A slip of paper and "One-Two" Mac.	<i>John Webb</i>
WIMMEN AND WORRY And a crafty pelican.	<i>Charles Tenney Jackson</i>
THE BLACK MAGICIAN The baron sneered at his tricks.	<i>George E. Holt</i>
THE QUEST OF THE E PLURIBUS The eagle smells gold.	<i>Harvey J. Case</i>
CALVERT OF ALLOBAR, A Four-Part Story Part III He measured a blow for <i>Biko's</i> jaw.	<i>Robert Simpson</i> <i>Robert Emerick</i>
THE FOG Drowning enemies fight the sea together.	
THE CLAW NECKLACE Men fear the great ice-bear.	<i>William Byron Mowery</i>

Still Farther Ahead

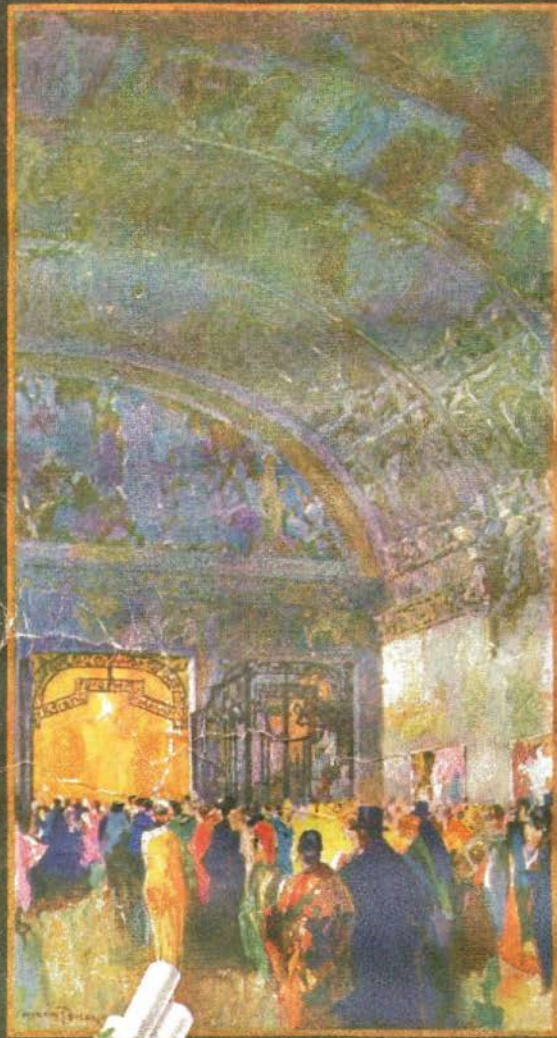
THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Arthur O. Friel, T. Samson Miller, Wm. Byron Mowery, James Aton, George E. Holt, Thomson Burtis, G. W. Barrington, Leslie McFarlane, Hobart C. Montee and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur; and short stories by Raymond S. Spears, Negley Farson, L. Paul, Charles King Van Riper, Captain Dingle, Leo Walmsley, Ralph R. Perry, Fairfax Downey, Henry S. Whitehead, Lewis H. Kilpatrick, Captain Mansfield, Larry Barretto and others; stories of hillbillies in the moonshine country, white men in Africa, hardcase skippers and bucko mates on the high seas, desert riders in Morocco, aviators in the oilfields, deputy sheriffs in Texas, robber barons on the Rhine, fur traders in the snow country, troubadours in medieval France, cowboys on the old ranges, adventurers the world around.



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