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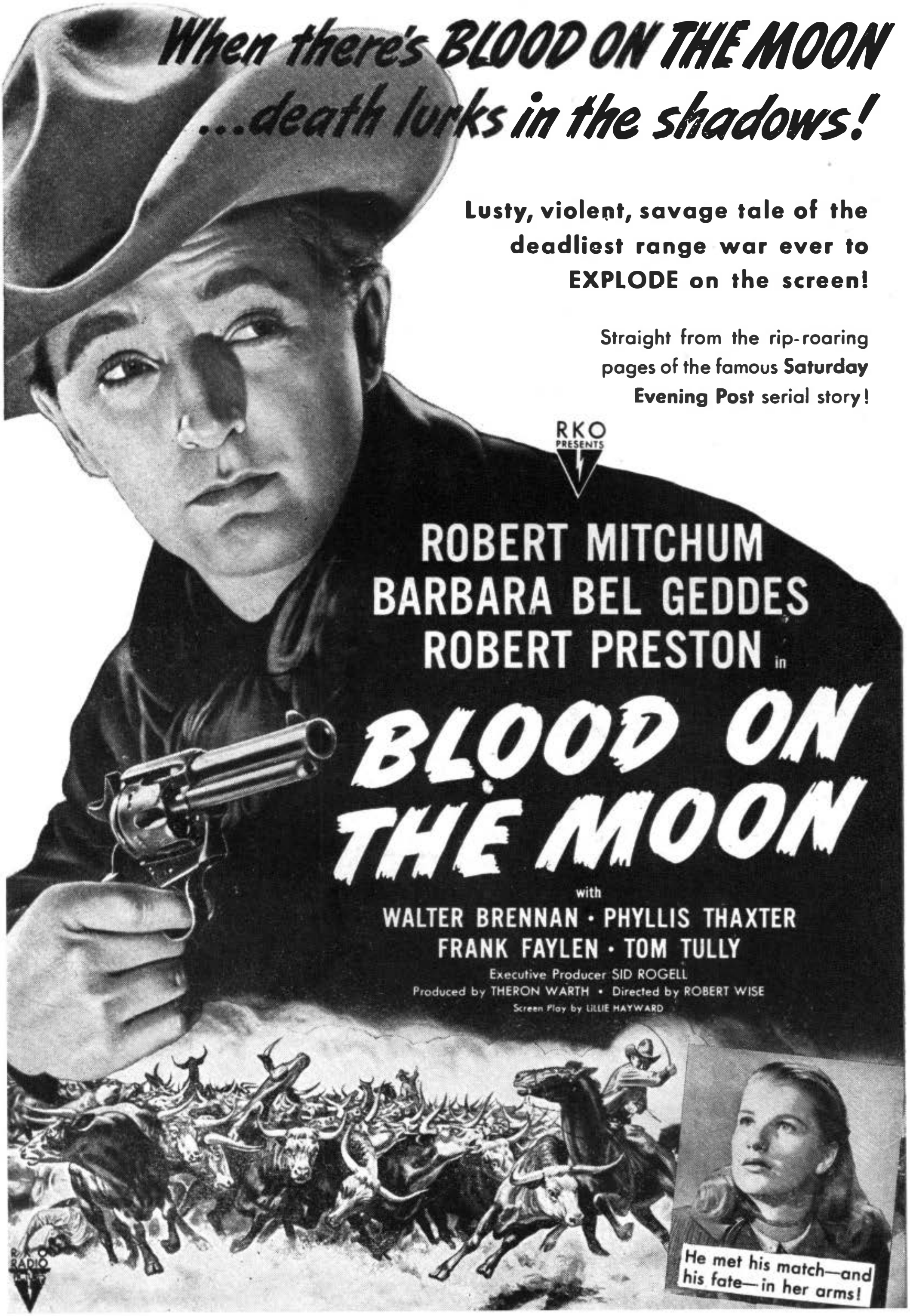

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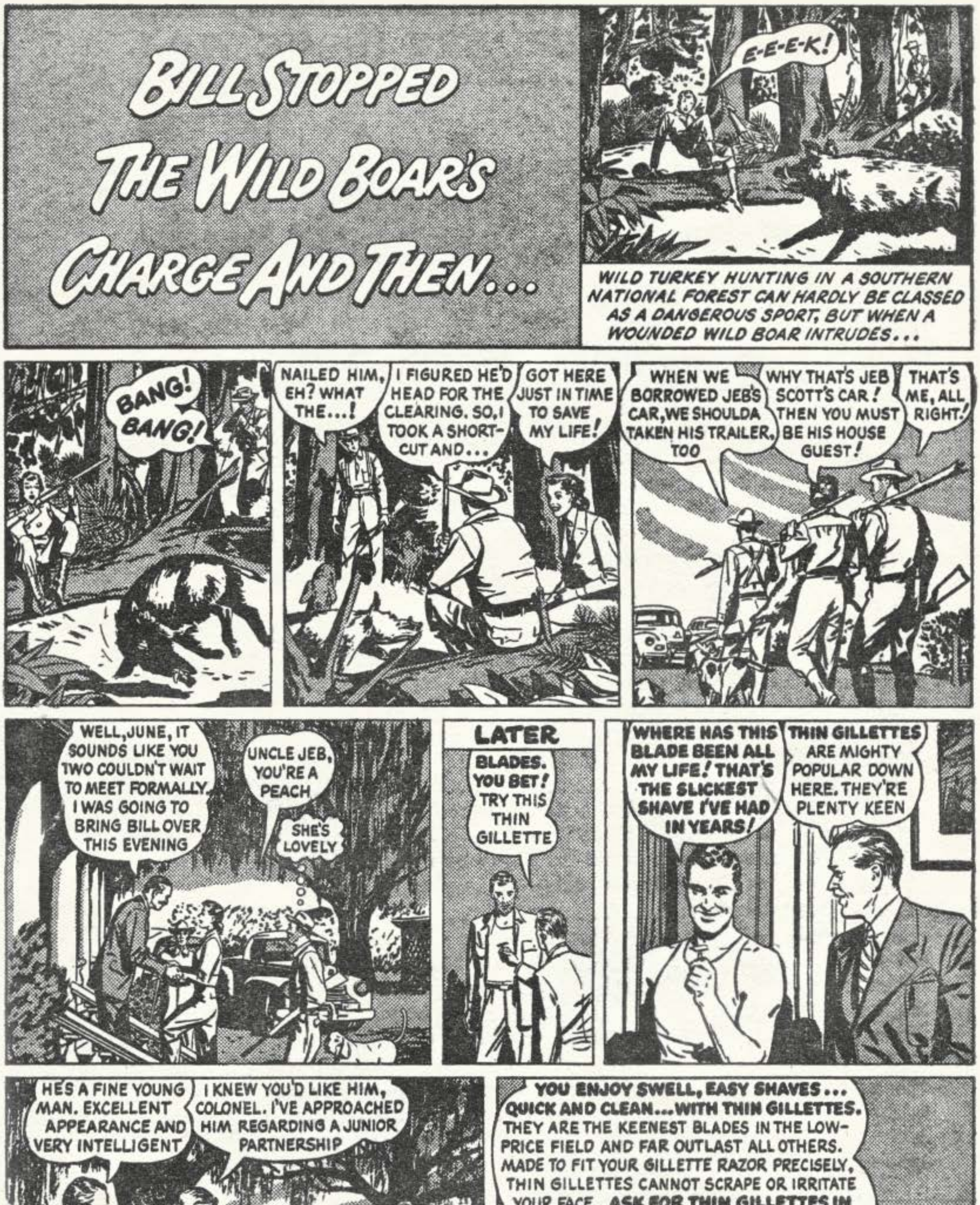
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(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

January, 1949 Vol. 120, No. 3

THE NOVELETTE

Renegade .... **HAL G. EVARTS** 10

For five days Danny Laird had been guiding Colonel John Gordon, military attaché to the American Embassy in Nanking, up and down and around and behind the 18,000-foot range that climbed along the Chinese-Tibetan border west of Kang-ting. They were supposed to be hunting blue sheep but to date the colonel hadn't fired a shot. And why, Laird wondered, was Gordon so interminably curious—about everything but the game they were stalking?

SHORT STORIES

The Squall .... **ERNEST FULTON LYONS** 32

Captain Carlson was a solitary sort of man and the incessant chatter of his mate Louie nearly drove him mad. He was worse than the juke box in Maisie's Place where they sometimes had a beer between shark-fishing trips on the ugly 55-foot *Orion*. But when the squall came up, for once Louie was struck totally dumb.

Rockabye Baby .... **WILLIAM HEUMAN** 42

In all his years in the ring, Rocky Kerrigan had never got into the big money—and now he had a chance to pick up a nice piece of change at last. And it was no trouble at all for a guy who had been in the fight racket as long as Rocky. It was easy—as easy as falling into a tank.

More Than Man-Size .... **WALT SHELDON** 62

It was a galling thing to take when that young whippersnapper, Lieutenant Brulette of the First Dragoons at Fort Marcy, ordered Carew to take the supply wagons through the pass that marked the point where the Apaches stopped murdering in secret and began it in the open. But a mountain man's pride would not let him protest.

Ducats on the Three-Notched Trail .... **LESLIE BIGELOW** 92

When I was a boy, I sailed my imaginary galleon around capes and promontories in perilous lands. But no casket of treasure I fancied then could compare with the Tuscan ducats and burnished pieces of eight spilling out of Etheredge's teak chest on the ravaged shores of Florida.

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BE OUT ON JANUARY 7TH ◆ ◆ ◆

The Runt .... JOHN PRESCOTT 102

He was the result of a shocking indiscretion on the part of Dixie Belle—and he wasn't much of a dog. And yet in the eager eyes of the flop-eared, wooden-nosed puppy shone a pitiful anxiety to please, to compete with the other dogs of the hunting aristocracy into which he had been born.

The Moon of Slatted Ribs .... JIM KJELGAARD 110

For five days the timber wolf had coursed from Plain Lake to Chute River in search of food. Before the snow had come and the cold set in, the whole region abounded with snowshoe rabbits, deer, caribou and moose. And now there was only the gaunt gray wolf, a lone and hungry cougar and one disconsolate jaybird in all that bleak and deserted land.

THE SERIAL

Bargain in Bombers (Conclusion) .... M. V. HEBERDEN 70

In which Paul Weston, unofficial agent for Uncle Sam, winds up his investigation into the attempted purchase of surplus Navy amphibian bombers by a revolution-ridden Central American "banana republic"—and finds himself sitting right in the middle of target as the plot to overthrow the regime blows up.

THE FACT STORY

The Yankee Blockade of Britain ...... ROYAL ORNAN SHREVE 50

Monocled London merchants gaped in astonishment on that morning in September, 1814 as they perused the Proclamation posted at Lloyd's and signed by Thomas Boyle, Captain of the private armed brig *Chasseur*—declaring Great Britain and Ireland in a state of strict and rigorous blockade. One little Yankee vessel to blockade the whole United Kingdom!

DEPARTMENTS

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Cover painted for Adventure *by Malvin Singer*
Kendall W. Goodwyn, Editor

IN THE NEXT ISSUE . . .

A stark suspense-packed story you will not want to miss—"Say It With Pearls," by Allan Vaughan Elston. . . . *For ten long years the scheme had proved flawless, as flawless as the ten great pearls Shawn, the fugitive—exiled and buried alive in a remote lagoon in the Marquesas—had turned over one by one to Carr, skipper of the Dolphin, as annual tokens of his undying love for the wife who had never forgotten him. . . . Ten years, ten pearls—and every one of them locked safe and sound in Carr's cabin. There was no risk—Carr had thought of every contingency. The fraud was perfect. But of course in this imperfect world nothing is ever that. . . .*

THE CAMP-FIRE

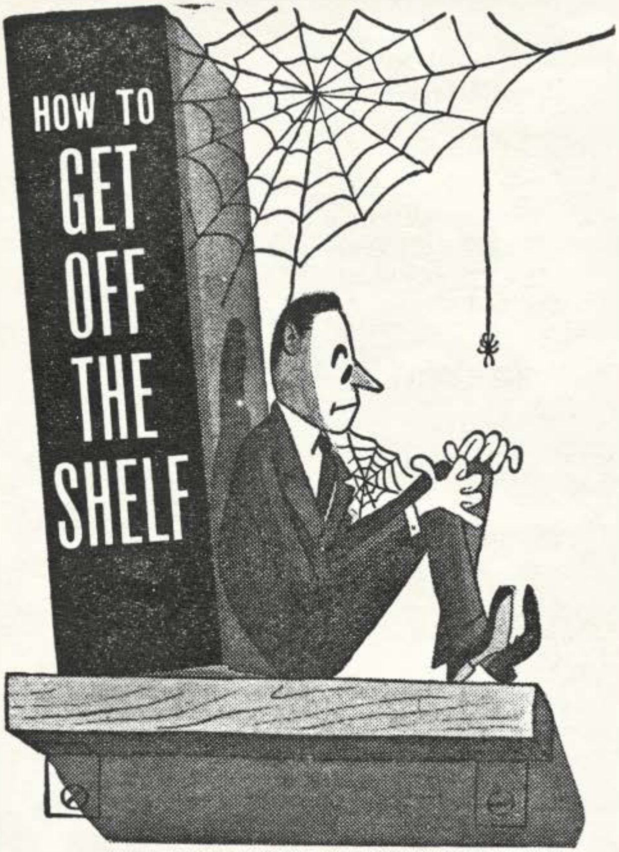
Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

THREE new recruits on hand to add a bit of fuel to the *Camp-Fire* this month. The first member of the trio to sound off is Leslie Bigelow, author of the unusual story of the Florida panhandle, "Ducats on the Three-Notched Trail" in this issue—

> I am 38, an associate professor of English at the Iowa State Teachers College. Divorced, I live in a trailer at the edge of town with my police dog, Loki. During the thirties I had the good luck to spend a year prowling about Europe, and during almost four years of service in the Air Forces, I had the good luck to receive several interesting assignments, among them that of defense counsel on the courts at Eglin Field, near Pensacola, Florida. I defended well over 100 men and I am very proud of the number of acquittals I secured.
>
> Here's a bit of "background" for the setting of "Ducats on the Three-Notched Trail": The Choctawhatchee National Forest, though transferred to the War Department by Act of Congress for the use of the Air Forces Proving Ground Command, is still substantially a national forest, with fire guards. But it is a barren one, and soldiers stationed there during the war had never seen anything quite like the ragged settlements, and they luridly said so.
>
> Some timbering and turpentining used to go on there, the logs rafted to Pensacola—the greatest pitch-pine port in the world late in the 19th century—and the turpentine handled by Pensacola factorage houses. Tung nuts, satsuma oranges, blueberries, kumquats, and Italian grapes have all been tried, and all have failed.
>
> Behind this present emptiness there is a fair amount of history and legend which I had reason to check on when I was myself stationed at the Proving Ground. The earliest inhabitants were a race of primitive fish-eaters; they prowled the Gulf and Bay shores and left great mounds of shells.
>
> The next Indians of this area were a small tribe called Euchees, peaceful and intelligent. They had the range to themselves until early last century Scotsmen entered. They had first of all settled in North Carolina, but sent an agent to Pensacola to check on land, and finally all came to the region around De Funiak Springs. A little town south of De Funiak is called Euchee Anna for the Indians and Anna McLean, the first child born of the Scotsmen.
>
> I have an interesting artifact of the area, almost certainly of Mexican origin, and brought there by the wanderers. It was found near Fort Walton when a road was driven through in the 30's. Originally it was a statue of a priest, some 20 inches high. The body was smashed by a laborer's shovel, but I have the head. Most primitive art is merely symbolic; that is, it represents only a certain *kind* of person. But this little head, with a half-moon ritual scar over an eye, certainly represents an actual person, and a very remarkable person, too—melancholy, and yet determined. It is done in terra-cotta with accomplished art.

AND William Heuman, who tells the tale of Rocky Kerrigan, the ageing but dead-game leather-pusher in "Rock-abye Baby" introduces himself succinctly thus—

(Continued on page 8)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(Continued from page 6)

I hail originally from that most populous of New York City's boroughs, famed for churches, homes, and baseball fans—Brooklyn—but I am now living in the comparatively rural atmosphere of Huntington, Long Island. Been writing full-time professionally for a half dozen years, and a good while before that, selling stories (at $2 per story) to the religious juveniles. To date, I have stuck pretty close to sports yarns and westerns, but have an eye directed toward a less specialized market.

Am married, with one boy, five rabbits and nine chickens. Hope some day to be able to send the boy to the boy's school briefly mentioned (by a fictitious name) in "Rockabye Baby" where I witnessed a cross-country run—and got the inspiration for this fight story.

WALT SHELDON, who writes a mighty nice yarn himself—see "More Than Man-Size" on page 62—drops a valuable hint on writing technique for aspiring authors, and relates a few sidelights on his "checkered career"—

After trying to sell stories of one kind or another to *Adventure* for nigh on to ten years it pleases me immensely that grade should finally be made by one of my big enthusiasms, New Mexico in the 1840-50 decade. Met New Mexico during the war by being stationed there; have lived there several times since and am going back again shortly. Got interested in its history in Taos while living in practically the same house where Governor Bent was assassinated in 1846. Everything I like—riding, flying, exploring, looking at scenery—enjoys optimum conditions in that country. Hope to settle permanently there now that the writing business is finally breaking after a fair struggle since my first sale in 1939. I guess the checkered careers of writers have been mentioned so many times that the idea is hackneyed by now, but that's the way it's been in my case. Never lived more than three years in one place yet, not since I was born in Philadelphia in 1917. Was raised then in New York City, Montreal and Lord knows where all. Went to art school, was a cook on a fishing schooner, a strolling troubadour in night clubs, a cooking utensil salesman and a radio announcer. Came the war and I lugged a wire recorder all over China, Burma and India doing play-by-play accounts of combat missions for the official AAF network program back in the States.

For aspiring writers (and who isn't?): I've had best luck with things I really know, with locales that have made a definite *individual* impression, such as the northern New Mexico country. No amount of technique or talent can take the place of actually believing that your story's happening as you write it.

AND here's a letter from Ernest Fulton Lyons, who writes about the men who go down to the sea to fish for sharks in "The Squall." Incidentally, Mr. Lyons is definitely *not* a newcomer to these pages—his byline having first appeared in *Adventure* 'way back in 1925!

I am very glad to know that *Adventure* will publish "The Squall." Every writer has a warm spot in his heart for the magazine which published his first story—and I still remember the thrill with which I heard from Arthur Sullivant Hoffman in 1925 that *Adventure* was publishing "Ashes of the Sun" and "The Broken Derringer."

That was long ago. I remember that I used the check to outfit myself for a winter spent trapping otter and raccoons in the cypress swamps and mangroves of the sea islands. The day has passed when I would hurt any living thing—except for fishing, which I love—although I would not trade for anything my memories by pitch-pine campfires when Florida was young. As a boy of fourteen, hunting in the lonely Allapatta Flats, a wilderness area of sloughs, palm islands and grassy prairies—all ranchland now—I remember seeing a band of Seminoles fording a wide slough. First to hit the water was a pack of nondescript dogs. Racing on his pony to catch up with them was a laughing Indian boy of four or five, stark naked. Then came half a dozen bucks on horseback in their rainbow shirts, and behind them the squaws and little children and old folks in gypsy-type wagons laden with furs and 'gator bellies. They were a happy lot on their way into town to trade. That nomad freedom has vanished, but it is good to have seen it.

If you would like to say anything in "Camp-Fire" about "The Squall," it is based on the shark fishing industry which accounts for some 30,000 sea tigers annually out of this port. Fictional as to characters and story, it is based on an actual incident which occurred some eight years ago when one of the shark boats was last seen "on the chain" as a violent tropical squall swept down. When the squall passed the ship was gone and no trace has ever been found of it or of the two-man crew which, perhaps, "waited a little too long" to slip the chain and face the storm. *Adventure's* readers may be interested to know that every part of the shark is processed: the skin for leather, the meat for animal and poultry food, the backbones for novelty walking canes, the great tooth-studded jaws for wall ornaments, individual teeth for watch fob pendants, the fins dried to form the base of a soup cherished by the Chinese, the eyes crystallized and set in stick-pins where they resemble moonstones, and the liver rendered for vitamin-laden oils valued in pharmaceutical use.

For your personal information, I am the

(Continued on page 124)

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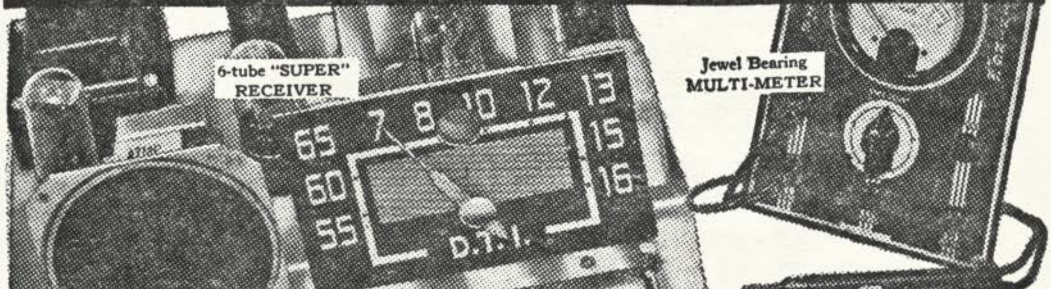

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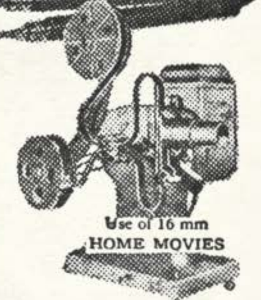

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HAL G.
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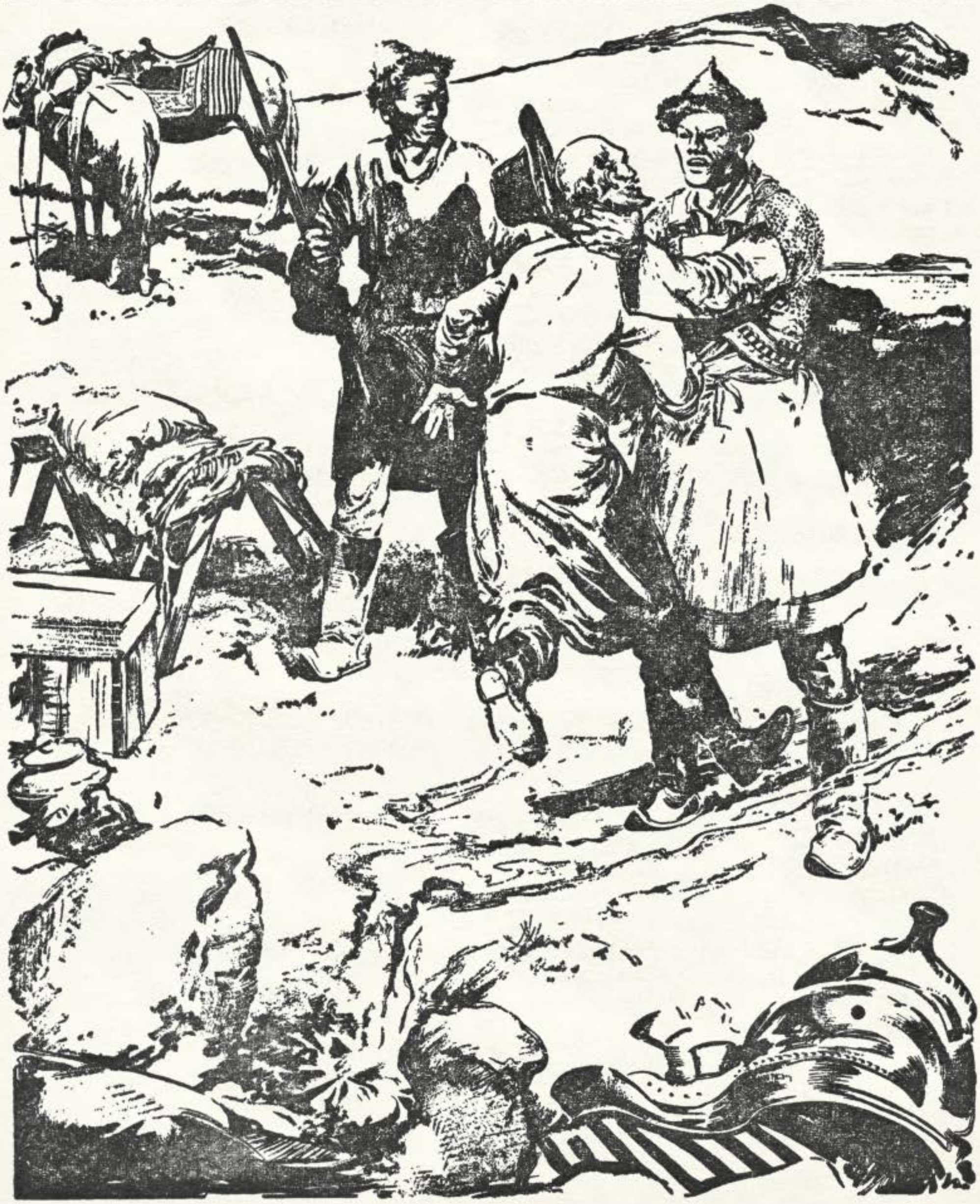
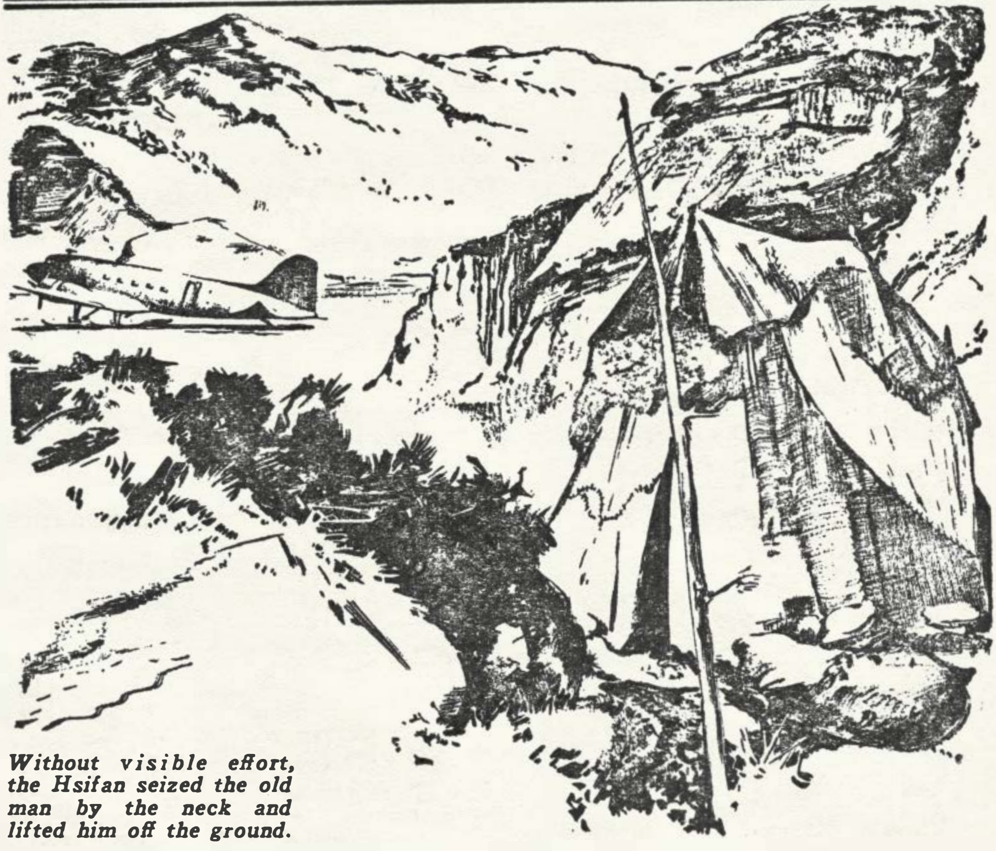


RENEGADE



Without visible effort, the Hsifan seized the old man by the neck and lifted him off the ground.

EYES SQUINTED against the snow glare, Danny Laird lowered his binoculars. Snow lay in patches along the lower face of the ridge, and the slopes above were solid white, packed into ten-foot drifts that would linger till mid-summer. In a sag some thousand yards below, three blue sheep, slate gray against the morning sky, were grazing on tufts of early spring grass that had pushed up between the wind-scoured rocks. It, was, Danny Laird thought, a better chance than the colonel deserved.

He felt a nudge and the Tibetan guide hissed, *"Pan yang!"*

Laird nodded at the dark stocky youngster sprawled beside him among the boulders. "Hand me the colonel's rifle, Shu."

"Pan yang?" the colonel said. "What's that?"

Lair turned an exasperated glance on the slim ruddy-cheeked man lying to his right. For five days he and Shu had been guiding Colonel John Gordon up and down, around and behind the eighteen-thousand-foot range that climbed along the Chinese-Tibetan frontier west of Kang-ting. Colonel Gordon, U.S.A. assistant military attaché to the American Embassy in Nanking, V.I.F. and sportsman extraordinary. To date he hadn't fired a shot.

"Blue sheep, Colonel," Laird said. "The local Tib name. What you came after."

He had made allowance for Gordon's age, inexperience and lack of acclimatization. For fifty dollars a day, plus expenses, he was prepared to put up with a good deal, even from a colonel. But several facts, trivial in themselves, had begun to puzzle and irritate him. Why, for instance, had Gordon chosen to make the difficult expensive trip into Sikong out of season? Why had he insisted that they hunt alone, without the customary crew of horse wranglers and camp servants? Above all, why was he so interminably curious? Curious, it seemed to Laird, about everything but the game they were stalking.

John Gordon said, "Oh," took his M1 from Laird's outstretched hand and shoved in a clip.

The terrain below was a gentle downward pitch without natural cover, but traversed in a more or less diagonal direction by a shallow winding water course, now dry. Laird pointed. "You can make out the black and white markings on the flanks. Zebra stripes. That big ram's a beauty."

Shading his eyes, Gordon said easily, "Sure thing, Danny. I'm zeroed in now. But he's out of range."

"I'd suggest," Laird said, "that you crawl down that draw into range. The wind's right and the blue sheep is one of God's more stupid creatures. If you miss they stand waiting for the next shot."

Gordon chuckled. "I can take a hint."

Laird shrugged. "It's your party, colonel. But I'd get going. They won't wait forever."

"Wish me luck." Gordon snubbed out his cigarette and checked the safety.

"Wait." Laird stared at the colonel's battered red felt hat, a souvenir, he supposed, of some opening day of deer season back in the States. "If they get a flash of that hat, hell won't hold 'em."

Gordon pulled off his hat and ran a hand over his bald spot. "Hate to get a chill on top. How about switching with you or Shu?"

Laird glanced at the Tibetan's conical hat of gray sheepskin, rancid with yak butter and accumulated grime, and winked at Shu. "Colonel," he said, "your wife wouldn't recognize you in that."

He watched them exchange. Grinning, the Tibetan pulled the red felt down over his ears. Gordon sighed and put on the sheepskin. "I have a better idea," Laird said. "Shu, you slip around back of the ridge and work down to the far side of the sag. With that hat maybe you can fan 'em right into the colonel's lap."

"Oh I say," Gordon murmured. "I'm not that helpless."

"You want a trophy, don't you?" Laird demanded.

THE Tibetan grunted and squirmed off on his belly into the open. Laird watched him creep down into the draw and stand upright behind a protecting shoulder of rock. At that instant a rifle cracked somewhere on the slope above and behind them. Laird flattened instinctively. There were three more shots, evenly spaced, and as Laird lifted his head he saw Shu take one step, stumble and pitch forward. Even in that split-second of shock and confusion he was conscious of the distant sheep, silhouetted against the skyline, heads upraised, motionless.

"Get down!" Gordon snapped.

Laird threw off his restraining arm and scrambled into the draw on his knees. Shu lay face down, one hand clutching at his throat. Gently Laird turned him over and stared at the spreading stain on his cloak. The boy gave a spasmodic shudder and was still. Laird felt for his pulse and straightened slowly, peering back in the direction of the shots.

His gaze traveled up the slope, shifting along the crest, and back again. He saw nothing but bare rock against the white dazzle of peaks. A lone salt bush stirred in the wind. Unbelieving, he looked once more at the Tibetan.

Gordon shouted "Down!" as a fifth shot whined past his ear. Then he saw a dark form break from the rocks far above and run at an angle for the ridgetop. At that distance all he could distinguish was the conical cap and flapping ankle-length *chupa*, before the runner disappeared over the skyline.

"Don't move him!" Gordon said. "There's a sulfa bandage in my pack."

"Give me that gun!" Laird wrenched the M1 out of Gordon's hands and pounded up the slope, swearing as he ran. Gordon shouted, his voice trailing off in the wind. Ten minutes later Laird topped the crest, badly winded, and threw himself behind a boulder. He lay panting while he studied the valley below, until a speck far off against the horizon caught his attention, rising and falling with the unmistakable rhythm of a hard-ridden horse. With a groan he remembered his own horse, hobbled in camp miles away.

He retraced his steps toward the band of rocks he had marked earlier from the draw. Gordon was already there, on hands and knees, searching among the crevices. The colonel glanced up gravely and met his eyes. "I'm sorry, Danny." His voice was gruff. "Sorrier than I can tell you."

"You're sorry?" Laird rubbed a hand over his face, staring at the tiny spot of red in the draw below. A vulture already was circling down in tight spirals. He recalled Shu's grin, as the boy had pulled on Gordon's hat, not half an hour ago, and his throat tightened. "Colonel," he said, "Shu was a friend of mine. A real friend. Don't tell me you're sorry."

Gordon rose to his feet and put a hand on Laird's arm. "Listen to me, Danny. In my time I've had to order thousands of men into combat, but I've never sent a man into a trap, knowingly."

Laird snorted. "Don't give me one of those canned War Department regrets. I put some time in the Army too, Colonel."

"I know." Gordon regarded him steadily. "Major Laird, wasn't it, Purple Heart with a cluster? Flew with the A.V.G. till Pearl Harbor, commissioned in the Air Force, shot down seven Zeros in the Burma theater, transferred to Chennault's A-2 staff because of native fluency in Mandarin."

"So what?"

"After V-J Day," Gordon went on quietly, "instead of shipping to the States, you returned to Kang-ting, where your father had been a missionary, and went into business for yourself guiding tourists. Bachelor, twenty-nine—"

"O.K., that's enough." Laird frowned. It occurred to him that a change had come over Gordon in the past few minutes. He was no longer the inquisitive easy-going staff officer on a vacation sheep hunt. There was about him now a certain tough composure, an air of authority, which Laird thought he recognized. He said, "Intelligence?"

Gordon nodded. "G-2, attached to C.I.G. I thought you'd guessed."

Laird eyed him bleakly. "I'm dumb that way, Colonel. But if you'd told me in the first place, Shu wouldn't be lying down there."

"If I'd told you," Gordon said, "you wouldn't have taken me out. And if I'd known what I do now, I wouldn't have stepped into this. Don't forget—I was the target, not Shu."

Laird bit his lip. It had been his idea to maneuver Shu into the open. Inadvertently, he was as responsible as Gordon. For that matter, he himself might have traded hats. He said, "You know the guy?"

Gordon shook his head. "Haven't the faintest. You saw him?"

"A Tib. Dressed like one anyhow."

Gordon pointed down the draw. "Nine hundred yards if it's an inch. Our friend had a high-powered rifle, not one of these black powder Tib muskets. And, I'll bet, a telescope sight. That's shooting, mister."

"Look, Colonel," Laird said, "I don't know what you're doing up here. It's none of my business. But don't give me any hush-hush top-secret routine. My man's been shot and I'll have to explain, plenty, to the Chinese commandant."

"General Wang?" Gordon gave him a faint smile. "I'm acting under his orders." Stooping abruptly, he pawed aside some gravel. Puzzled, Laird saw him scoop out a half-buried empty cartridge case. Gordon rubbed it on his sleeve, held it up to the sun, then scraped it with his pocket knife. Straightening with a grunt of satisfaction, he held it out to Laird.

"Thirty caliber?"

"It's seven-point-nine-two millimeters," Gordon said. "For a Mauser, a standard German Army issue."

"Mauser ammunition's common enough."

"Not in ersatz cartridge cases."

"Ersatz?"

"This one comes from a Krupp subplant in Silesia. The Nazis ran short of copper and alloys during the last year of the war, and developed a pretty fair substitute. This plant is still producing—for the Russians."

"The Russians?" Laird blinked. "You're not trying to sell me a Red scare?"

Gordon spun around. "I want a look at that ridgetop."

SILENTLY Laird followed him back up the slope. On the crest they separated, working methodically down the back side. After a brief search Laird found a circle of recently pawed earth and some fresh horse sign, and a hole where a picket stake had been driven. He was on his knees, hunting for boot prints, when Gordon joined him.

"Nothing," he said. "The guy was smart. Avoided snow and kept to the rocks mostly."

"Track him?"

"By the time I got my horse," Laird said, "and worked out his trail, even if I could, he'd be halfway—to Moscow."

Gordon glanced around sharply. "All right," he snapped. "It may sound fantastic—"

"Fantastic? Colonel, it's a cockeyed pipe dream. What would the Commies be doing in this God-forsaken neck of the woods, right in the middle of nowhere?"

"Quite a story," Gordon said. Squatting, he smoothed a patch of snow with his palm. With a forefinger he sketched a outline map of China. "The nearest pocket of Chinese Communist troops is here, in Kansu, five hundred miles airline northeast of us. Altogether the Reds have two million troops in North China poised for a spring offensive. They're being supplied with German-made small arms ammunition shipped overland through Siberia. Now the stuff is turning up here, along the frontier."

"Doesn't prove anything," Laird said. "These Tibs live off the country. A lot of 'em have foreign rifles, Jap Arisakas, French Lebels, anything they can pick up in the bazaar."

"This stuff never went through a bazaar. It's coming in by the case, along with hundreds of German rifles the Russians grabbed all over Europe. General Wang's troops found two caches back in the hills the past month. But how it's coming in, we don't know."

"And you figured I might."

Gordon grinned. "I thought I'd better sound you out first. You know the country, the language. I want you to comb this area for possible landing sites. We check every incoming caravan, but we can't watch the air."

Laird gazed at the map, rubbing his chin. "It's possible of course, with skis. But it doesn't make sense. Why would Uncle Joe be peddling rifles to a bunch of nomads who never heard of him?"

"I'm surprised at you, Danny." Gordon's voice was patient. "The Tibs and the Chinese get along like two alley cats. Been fighting over this strip for centuries. The Tibs' hate Chinese military occupation, and the Chinese don't dare pull out. Meanwhile, just one incident could touch off the damndest holy war you ever saw."

"What kind of an incident?"

"I don't know that either."

"Seems to me," Laird said, "you have a mighty thin case for the facts. Smart operators have been running guns into Sikong for years to beat the taxes. Big money in it. Chip Malone, for one."

"We're watching Malone," Gordon said. "But don't take my word for anything. Go talk to Barski."

It was Laird's turn to be surprised. "Igor Barski, the White Russian? But he works for Malone."

"And for us." Gordon rose and kicked out his map in the snow. "Been sending reports to the Embassy for months. And he thinks something will blow up any day."

Laird frowned. "Barski would. He fought the Bolsheviks in '18." He shook his head. "I'll find the party who got Shu, one way or another. But I don't want any part of your job, Colonel. The reason I came back here was to get away from all the post-war jitters and mud-slinging. I had five years of combat duty. I'll take my peace where I find it."

"You won't find it by sticking your head in the sand, Danny," Gordon said soberly. "Shu was only the beginning."

Laird turned and looked once more at the shape down in the draw. Where a single bird had been circling before, now a dozen hovered, black wings outspread to the sun. The *pan yang* had long since gone. "I'll take care of Shu," he said.

Gordon's brows drew together. "Your privilege. Hadn't we better bury him before we go?"

"You don't bury a man in this country," Laird said. "It's an old Buddhist custom. You just—leave him."

CHAPTER II

CRISIS IN KANG-TING

SHORTLY after noon the following day, Laird rode down from the hills to the North Gate of Kang-ting. Dismounting, he led his pack string forward to the sentry box, where a detail of soldiers in the old-style blue uniforms of the Chinese Nationalist Army was inspecting the pannier-loads of an inbound caravan. A string of yaks blocked the narrow trail behind, and their Tibetan drivers milled about the barrier in a sullen grumbling knot, cursing the soldiers and the delay. It was a situation, Laird recognized, that could flare into violence without provocation, but hardly one that would touch off anything such as Gordon imagined.

Gordon, he had decided, was a professional worrier. It had been Gordon's idea that they return separately and avoid each other thereafter in public, a precaution that struck Laird as unnecessary. Shu's murder would soon be gossip in every tea house in Kang-ting.

A big pock-marked Hsifan, one of the Chinese-Tibetan half-breeds, armed with rifle and sword, was wrangling with the Chinese captain in charge. He broke off the argument, scowling, as Laird passed through the gate without stopping.

"Enough! Enough, *yeh-tzu!*" Laird heard the captain shout. "The American has a permit signed by the general himself!"

Laird grinned—"wild pig" was not exactly a compliment in any dialect. The cobbled street which led down to the river was crowded with Tibetans—short swarthy Drokwas from the north, traders and hunters from Batang with their women in tribal finery, and a sprinkling of lamas trailing their long red robes. Most of the Chinese shops, he noticed, were shuttered. Tomorrow, he recalled, was *Ya-chiu,* Holy Week. Always a time of tension in this hair-trigger crossroads town, where two cultures met and clashed.

Under the circumstances, he felt a little sorry for John Gordon.

Three hours later, bathed, shaved and rested, he knocked on the *yamen* gate of Igor Barski across the river. A servant raised the bar and led him across the compound to a low slate-roofed house set back in a formal Chinese garden. As Laird entered a tall slender girl in European skirt and blouse rose from a straight chair.

"Natya!" he said. "You're here."

"Yes, I am here, Danny." She spoke quietly, with an almost imperceptible accent. "I was expecting you."

She wore her ash-blonde hair in a soft bun at the nape of her neck. She had a long oval face with deepest gray eyes and a full-lipped mouth. She was standing stiffly behind the chair, her fingers laced together over the back. Uncertainly Laird said, "But the job in Chungking? What happened?"

"I changed my mind."

Hearing the husky low-pitched voice again, Laird felt a coldness slip away from him. He smiled. "I hoped you would." Stepping forward, he held out both hands. "Natya—"

She shook her head. "Not that, Danny. That hasn't changed."

Laird dropped his arms slowly. He stared at her, his smile fading. He had been in love with Natya Barski ever since he'd come to Kang-ting. There had been a time, he felt sure, when she had loved him. And then, suddenly, inexplicably, she had gone. The letters, the telegrams—she'd ignored them all. Until today. He said, "Why did you come back then, Natya?"

She looked away toward the window.

"It's my father. He hasn't been well."

"That's not true." Laird advanced on the chair. "You know that's not the real reason."

Her head snapped up. "Leave him alone!" she cried. "Leave him alone, all of you!"

"Hey," Laird said. "Wait a minute—"

"Don't pretend with me!" Her voice was suddenly passionate, shaken. "I came back to take him away, to Chungking, to Shanghai, anywhere away from here. He's an old man. He's suffered enough. I won't let you use him, you and your colonel of intelligence."

Laird opened his mouth but she cut him off. "You and your promises. Oh, I know the story. If he gets certain information he will be given an entrance visa to America. He's like a child. He dreams of dying in America one day, the Promised Land. So he takes chances, foolish unbelievable chances, a harmless old man who knows only books. And one day his body will be found in the river."

Laird regarded her soberly. "You don't believe this cloak and dagger stuff, Natya?"

"Somebody killed Shu," she said tonelessly. "The colonel was here this morning with the news."

Laird drew in a breath. "Somebody killed Shu. And Gordon thinks your father can give me a lead. That's all. I'm doing this on my own."

Natya sank into the chair, her lips compressed. "Don't ask him, Danny, please, for me. Something could happen—to you."

He raised her chin in his hand. "Whatever that means, you're not going away again."

"Yes," she said, "I'm going." Her eyes softened and wavered under his glance. "We've said it all before."

"I know. You're Russian. I'm American. We belong in two different worlds. You're a woman without a country, and I'm a restless guy without any roots. You were born in Inner Mongolia and I come from Kansas. East is East, West is West." He snorted. "Bunk."

"Please, Danny." She brushed his hand with her fingertips. "It's true all the same. Father may have his dreams, but I'm a realist."

LAIRD paced across the room and stood peering out the window. He could see the gracefully curved Chinese roofline of the town, the arched bridges, and on a high ridge behind, as though in stubborn contradiction, the square massive lines of Kashi Gompa—not unlike, he thought, the contrast between Natya Barski and himself. He saw the meadow below the lamasery, dotted with tents of visiting pilgrims and monks. An enormous banner of orange silk, unfurled from the central *tiau-lu* tower, caught his eye.

"That Sambhava banner? What's the occasion?"

"Some visiting dignitary," she said. "The Avatara Lama, I think."

"He's here now?"

Natya shrugged. "He comes tomorrow from Dongsar, I heard. For the *Ya-chiu* ceremonies."

Laird frowned, trying to recollect the complex ritual and hierarchy of the Tibetan Nyiamaba Church. The Avatara Lama, His Most Sacred Holiness, reincarnation of Pedma Sambhava, who from his remote Dongsar capital ruled the spiritual lives of a million Tibetan fanatics under the Chinese flag. An inaccessible legendary prince of the Church, seldom seen by his subjects, and never by Europeans. Tomorrow he would be in Kangting.

Laird turned at the whisper of footsteps along the corridor. Natya was on her feet. "Leave him alone," she said. "I warn you."

Igor Barski limped into the room, a frail gray man with red-rimmed eyes behind a pince-nez, and a short neat beard. He held out a thin bony hand. "Please overlook an old man's indiscretion," he said. "But you children can talk another time."

Natya blushed. "Danny came to say goodbye, Father."

"Not before tea." Barski smiled. "Will you tell the houseboy, *dotchurka*."

When she had gone Barski shook his head and sighed. "The very young," he said. "They are headstrong." He shot Laird a shrewd glance. "You too, my friend."

Laird shifted uncomfortably. Igor Barski always affected him that way. This broken old man who, in his youth, had been professor of Oriental languages at the Petrogradski Universitet, who for thirty years had lived in exile in what for him was a squalid barbarian border town, surviving on memories and bitterness. "Natya tells me you may leave Kangting," Laird said.

"Natya. She mothers me like a hen." Barski smiled fondly and rubbed his pince-nez. "She is all I have left. When the time comes I will go as she wishes. But not until my work here is finished."

The houseboy glided in with a steaming brass samovar. Barski poured out two cups and set them beside a dish of watermelon seeds. "That samovar," he said, "I carried across Russia in 1918. It belonged to my mother. She and my father were shot and dumped in a well. My wife and I escaped. That samovar I carried when I fought under Kolchak in Siberia. I had it with me when Natya's mother died of typhus in Harbin in 1920. I keep it as a reminder."

The color had risen in the old man's dry cheeks, and his voice trembled. "I knew the Bolsheviks then. They have not changed. I live only to see them brought down in ruin!"

Laird had heard the history of the samovar before, several times, and he wondered at Barski's retelling it now. Perhaps, as Natya thought, he was getting senile. "Sure, Professor," he said soothingly. "Sure."

Barski subsided then. He handed Laird a cup. "I ask you to forgive me. It is a subject about which I cannot speak calmly. But do not underestimate their ruthlessness."

Eyeing him over the rim of the cup, Laird said, "Did Chip Malone kill Shu?"

Barski spread his hands. "Ah, if I knew that I would know the answer to many things."

"Malone approached me a while back," Laird said. "But to handle opium, not guns."

"He is clever, that Malone. I am only his interpreter. I draw up his documents and customs declarations. But one day—" Barski tapped Laird's knee with a finger— "one day he will make a slip. Then we pounce like cats on a rat."

"He's the only man in the province who could finance gun-running on a major scale," Laird agreed. "If Gordon's right about planes."

"With the help of the Kremlin, my friend, I assure you."

Laird leaned forward in his chair. Had a shadow flitted across the open window behind Barski's back, he wondered, or was he merely on edge? Nothing the old man had told him threw any additional light on Shu's murder. He lighted a cigarette, rose casually and tossed the match through the window. The courtyard outside was empty. A bough of a juniper tree scraped against the eaves. It could have been that. He glanced up at the lamasery on the ridge behind town and at the orange banner, flame-like in the late afternoon sun.

"You're expecting trouble?"

Barski tugged at his beard. "That is the difficulty. Anything might happen during Holy Week. Some brawl in a tea shop, a knife fight on the streets. General Wang has stationed patrols on twenty-four-hour duty, but they cannot be everywhere at once."

"How's this for a hunch?" Laird swung back from the window. "The Avatara Lama is your incident."

"The Lama?" Barski set down his cup. He removed his pince-nez, polished the lenses on a cloth and blinked at Laird near-sightedly. "You joke."

"If you and Gordon are right," Laird said. "If the Reds are planning to move in—they won't play penny-ante. That would be roughly comparable to shooting the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem during Ramizan, or the Pope on Easter Sunday."

The old man smiled. "The first danger we thought of. Every precaution has been taken." He shook his head. "Impossible."

"Well," Laird said, "thanks anyway, Professor." He backed to the entrance. "If you learn anything about Shu, let me know."

"Wait." Barski's voice was sharp. "Where are you going now?"

"To see Chip Malone." Laird closed the door. Striding across the compound, he pushed through the gate and stepped into the street. At the first turning he slowed and looked back. The gate was shut tight, as he had left it. Or was it slightly ajar? He stood undecided, feeling sweat form under his hat band, then walked on toward the foreign quarter . . .

CHAPTER III

TEA HOUSE BRAWL

AN HOUR after sundown Laird shouldered into one of the big stone tea houses that sprawled along the north bank of the river. He paused inside the door, surveying the crowded smoke-filled room, and crossed to one of the split bamboo tables in a far corner. A flight of stairs at the rear led up to a door, beyond which lay Malone's office. He caught the sleeve of a passing Chinese waiter and handed him a card.

The boy's face went blank. Then he nodded as Laird slipped a wad of currency into his hand, and disappeared up the stairs. Laird settled back to study the crowd—mostly Tibetans, noisy and boisterous, shouting at the waiters who scurried back and forth with bowls of *chung* and *ara*. At the next table three men were singing in a maudlin off-key, heads bent together. One of them, the big pock-marked Hsifan half-breed, the "wild pig" he had seen earlier at the North Gate. The other two were nondescript Tibetans. Caravan drivers, he supposed, on the town with a purseful of rupees, ready to fight or frolic for the night.

Once more he ran over in his mind the scraps of information and conjecture Barski had passed on to him. But it was Natya who puzzled him. Why had she come back to Kang-ting? Why had she warned him? To mind his own business. Well, Shu was his business. And so far he had discovered exactly nothing. He scarcely expected Chip Malone to enlighten him.

He glanced toward the entrance and his eyes widened. John Gordon had stepped in and was crossing the floor toward his table. With some amusement Laird saw that he had abandoned the pretense of non-recognition. Gordon pulled up a stool and sat down. "Colonel," Laird said, "you're breaking your own ground rules."

Gordon mopped at his face. "Never mind that now."

Laird looked around at the stairs. There was no sign yet of the boy who had taken his card. "For a man on somebody's list," he said, "aren't you sticking out your neck, especially in this place?"

"Listen, Danny." Gordon hunched forward. "Caravan from Jyekundo checked in an hour ago. Last night they sighted an unmarked plane, flying low, about ten *li* west of Dorju Peak."

"Dorju?" Laird frowned. "That's near where Shu was killed."

"They lost the plane in the dusk. Twin engine job. Flew on a northeast course over the mountains."

"Landing?"

"Can't be sure. But probably taking off." Gordon's voice dropped. "I want you to go out there—tonight—and scout around."

Laird took a pull at his drink. The country around Dorju was isolated at this time of year, before grazing season, chopped up into high snow-packed valleys, any one of which might serve for a field, provided a hot pilot knew the tricky air pockets. A man could search for days and find nothing but ski tracks. Any operator running such risks would be smart enough to shift his base after each flight.

"You saw that country," he said. "Like hunting a needle in a haystack."

"Barski thinks he can narrow it down," Gordon said. "Something he found in Malone's safe."

"I take it," Laird said, "that you don't think much of my pet theory."

"The Lama?" The lines around Gordon's mouth relaxed. "I'm not quite that simple-minded, Danny. A full battalion of troops is escorting the holy party from Dongsar. He'll be guarded every second he's here. Nobody can get near him."

Laird grinned. "That's the trouble with G-2—no imagination."

"How about it?" Gordon gripped his arm. "We'll cover Malone while you're gone."

Laird glanced up, suddenly aware of the hush that had fallen over the room. A pair of Chinese soldiers, entering from the street, stood by the door nervously fingering their rifles. It was a routine check, part of the Holy Week garrison alert, but the tension struck Laird as unnatural. He watched the two Chinese move across the floor, edging between tables.

Gordon half rose from his chair, but Laird flagged him back. "Keep out of this."

THE soldiers came on slowly, their faces impassive. Their orders, Laird knew, were to make a circuit of every tea house in the district, effect a show of authority, and leave—not an enviable job. His gaze shifted to the adjoining table. The Hsifan was still singing, waving his empty bowl, apparently oblivious to the approaching Chinese. Either the mulled wine had hit him all at once, Laird decided, or he was staging an act.

What happened next was so fast, and yet so clumsy, that he could be sure it was not accidental. The smaller of the two Tibetans hiccoughed, lurched to his feet and stumbled against the nearest soldier. The Chinese tripped and bumped into the table, overturning it with a crash. The Hsifan jumped clear and swung his bowl at the second Chinese. In the ensuing moment of stunned silence, before either soldier could recover balance, Laird was moving. He hooked the short Tibetan in the face with an elbow and took the Hsifan from behind.

Grabbing his collar with one hand, his seat with the other, Laird propelled him toward the door as the crowd made a path. The big breed stumbled and tried to shake free. Laird boosted him along with a shoulder, through the entrance, outside into the street. As he loosened his collar grip the man whirled and kicked. A boot grazed his knee cap, and he felt himself slammed back against the wall. He saw the flash of steel, and then, as the door burst open again, the Hsifan pivoted and ran, vanishing into the shadows along the river.

Laird took a few steps and stopped. Behind him the two Chinese peered off into the dark. "Let him go," Laird said. "Only make more trouble."

Muttering, the soldiers moved on down the street. Laird wiped his face. It might have been accidental at that, he told himself, a typical bar-room fracas that misfired. Or, it could have been the calculated incident Gordon was expecting. Or, more likely, it could have been a convenient pretext for slitting his throat. He seemed to have joined Gordon on somebody's list.

Shakily he reentered the tea house. The room buzzed with excitement. He saw Gordon beside the overturned table. The two Tibetans had gone. Then the waiter was at his elbow, beckoning. Laird followed him up the stairs, through a heavy steel door and along a darkened corridor. From behind the closed doors on either side he caught the faint sweetish smell of opium smoke. This was the profitable end of Malone's business. Tea was a side line.

He stepped into a small carpeted room, furnished with lacquered screens and period porcelain. The man facing him across the pearl-inlaid ebony desk was strangely beefy against the exquisite fragile background—red-faced, bullet-headed, with thick sloping shoulders. He waved Laird to a chair. "Fast thinking," he said. "Might've been a real dustup downstairs."

"I just happened to be handy," Laird said. "And neutral." Watching the man's expression, he realized how little he, or anyone, knew for fact about Chip Malone. An Australian, Malone had turned up in Kang-ting shortly before the war and started an export trade. From that he had expanded until he owned every caravan in the province. It was an open secret that he controlled the opium monopoly, officially outlawed by Nanking, but thriving nevertheless, with squeeze and protection reaching down to the poorest poppy coolie.

"Save my furniture." Malone opened a drawer, drew out a bottle and two glasses.

Laird read the label and whistled. "You do all right."

"Like you Yanks say: It's a living." Malone poured a drink and held out the glass. "Cheer-o." He downed his own at a gulp and flicked Laird's card with a finger. "Reconsider my proposition?"

"Not tonight." Laird smiled. He didn't

trust Malone in any respect, but he admired the man's bluntness. Twice within the past year Malone had offered him jobs at staggering pay. "Now I'll ask you one: You know a big pock-marked Hsifan, yak driver?"

Malone refilled his glass. "Sounds like Ran-chin-lu. Smart, too smart. Used to work for me. Bugger."

"You didn't rehire him tonight, or maybe yesterday, for one of those special jobs of yours?"

The good humor left Malone's face. He began to drum softly on the desk top. "Why would I do that, laddy?"

Laird considered. He would get nowhere fencing with a man like Malone. Malone knew his way through the politico-military labyrinth upon which his existence depended; his payroll was padded with informers. "My guide," he said, "was shot in the back yesterday. Somebody made a mistake."

Malone's eyes hardened. "And you're jumping at me?"

"Not yet," Laird said. "But you might as well know now, if you don't already. Certain parties think you're flying in guns for some undesirable friends—comrades of yours."

"Comrades?" Malone snorted. "That's a bloody laugh."

"You think so? Your name's gone out to Canberra, to Washington, London. Not to mention Nanking. You're not dealing with petty squeeze-hungry officials this time. Every Allied counter-intelligence bureau will dig into your record. You're on a hotspot, Malone."

Malone measured him deliberately. "I've been on spots before. What's the game, laddy?"

"First," Laird said, "I think my friends are wrong about one thing. You're too slick to mix in a deal like this. You make too much money the way things are."

Malone smacked his fist on the desk and broke into a laugh. He threw back his head and roared. "Laddy," he gasped, "how right you are! I'm a capitalist, status quo. Free enterprise, that's me. Last thing I want is a bloody revolution."

Laird grinned. For a guarantee of ninety percent Chip Malone would finance a revolution in Hell; his economics were something never imagined by either Karl Marx or Adam Smith. "Second," he went on, "I want information. You have an organization that can get it, fast."

"Sounds like a bit of the old double squeeze."

"Call it that," Laird said equably. He was bluffing, and an instant later he knew that Malone knew it too.

The Australian shook his head. "I don't like threats, laddy. I don't like competition. You hire out to me and maybe we can deal."

"It's too late for that."

"Work for me and you'll make a pile." Malone leaned across the desk. "Go it alone and I'll push you off the map. Your permit to hunt, supplies, incoming tourists—there're plenty of ways."

Laird drained his glass and put it down. He was positive that for a second Malone had been frightened. Something had changed his mind. Was Malone trying to buy him off? Or was it a bona fide offer? Barski had said the Australian probably was running guns, as well as opium, but it would be hard to prove, if not impossible. Or was this Malone's smoke screen because he, Laird, had stopped a potential riot a few minutes earlier—a riot engineered by Malone himself on his own premises, to mis-direct suspicion. Certainly the man had been casual about it.

He said, "You'll have a fight on your hands, Malone."

"But I'll win."

Laird stood up. "Any idea who killed Shu?"

"You heard my offer. Think it over."

"I have," Laird said, "and my answer still goes."

Malone's lips twitched. "I'll be here tomorrow noon. Goodnight, laddy."

OUTSIDE the office, the waiter, hovering in the corridor, led Laird down another set of steps to a rear door. Laird stepped into the deserted street, breathing deep of the clean frosty air. On the ridge behind town he could see the great yellow flares in the lamasery courtyard, casting their flickering light on the sacred orange banner of Pedma Sambhava, patron saint of the Church. Tomorrow, the Avatara Lama would arrive. Was it coincidence that Malone had given him a tomorrow deadline?

He stood listening to the murmur of the river. Then he stiffened at another softer, muffled sound. Pressing back against the wall, he peered toward the bridge. A small shapeless figure in a Tibetan cloak came toward him. "Danny? Danny Laird? Is that you?"

Laird let out his breath. "Natya! What—"

She linked an arm through his and gave him a shove. "Later. But hurry now, please."

Silently Laird followed her back across the bridge into the foreign quarter. Chinks of light showed through shutters as they crossed the bazaar, but the windows of the American Mission were dark. Natya kept her head averted but he could feel the rise and fall of her breast against his arm, sense the near-panic in her. When they turned into Barski's street he drew her into the shadows before the gate and caught her by the wrists. Her hair had fallen loose around her face and her eyes held an almost hostile look.

"I've been waiting for you to come out," she said. "Father sent me."

"Why didn't he come himself? Or send the houseboy?"

"Not so loud." She glanced over her shoulder at the gate. "He thinks the house is being watched. He wouldn't trust anyone else to go."

Laird frowned, recalling his own feeling earlier, the shadow at the window, real or imagined. "Natya," he said, "this afternoon you told me not to come back, to leave him alone. Now you practically drag me home by the ears."

"Oh, Danny, I'm afraid—" Her voice faltered and she swayed against him. "It's an obsession with him. You've got to help me."

"And if I do?"

He heard her breath catch, and her head jerked up. She stepped back. "You don't believe me."

"Why should I?" He drew her to him suddenly and pressed his mouth down on hers. For the instant that she clung to him he could feel the trembling of her shoulders, smell the faint fragrance of her hair. Then she pushed him away.

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Her eyes were wide and she was breathing rapidly. "Is that the American way—business as usual?"

Laird made it brutal. "Strictly business," he said. "C.O.D."

For a second he thought she was going to slap him. Her face was white, expressionless. Then she turned and walked through the gate.

He waited until a light flashed on in the house beyond the wall, then pushed open the gate and crossed the garden. Barski met him under the trees, an overcoat thrown over one arm. "Quickly, my friend," he called. "Quickly."

Laird stopped. His feeling about this house had returned, a sense of something not quite right, as though a net were closing over him. A net of rumors, half truths, evasions, and warnings. There was nothing tangible, nothing he could put a name to. The one concrete fact was Shu's murder. He said, "Gordon tells me you found something."

"Here. See for yourself." Barski held out a sheet of paper and fumbled in his coat for a flashlight. "After you left I searched Malone's office again. I found a map. Later I made this sketch."

Laird smoothed the map against his thigh. It was crudely done, but decipherable. He identified the contour shape of Dorju Peak and a valley that fanned out to the north, where he had hunted often before in summer. On what corresponded to the south slope, and right for the prevailing wind, Barski had traced an X, and across the bottom, a date—tomorrow. "Not like Malone to be so careless," he said. "Could be a plant."

Barski rubbed his hands together. "He suspects me, yes, but he does not know that I have the combination to his safe."

Laird checked his watch. It was six hours' hard riding to Dorju; by night, in the snow, it would take longer. "If this thing's on the level," he said, "we've wasted a lot of time."

"I know. I know." The old man's voice was querulous. "That is why I sent Natya to hurry you."

Laird let that pass. "Another thing," he said. "A Hsifan name of Ran-chin-lu, picked a fight in Malone's place. It was a put-up job."

"Ran-chin-lu?" Barski pinched his beard. "The name is a strange one to me. But they are like weeds. Destroy one and another sprouts up to take its place. We must destroy the roots." He took Laird by the arm. "Come."

Barski led him toward the back of the compound, into a small musty building that had once been a stable. Two ponies, saddled and bridled, blinked into the light as they entered. Watching Barski slide into his coat, Laird said, "This won't be any picnic, Professor."

"My young friend." Barski drew himself up. "My very obstinate friend. For thirty years I have waited for a moment such as this. Do not imagine that I will neglect the opportunity."

Laird saw he could not very well refuse. It was Barski's show, after all. But he had a hunch the old man would be more nuisance than help. "Suit yourself," he said, and swung himself into the saddle.

They rode out into the street, clattering on the cobblestones, and crossed the silent darkened town. A sleepy-eyed guard waved them through the North Gate and they entered the main trail. For more than an hour they rode without speaking, climbing steadily toward the first dip in the pass. Besides a *zih-da* cairn at the summit they stopped to blow their horses, and Laird glanced back.

The town lay cupped in the canyon below, a cluster of deeper shadows in the night. The flares at the lamasery were distant yellow pinpoints. He trained the binoculars, which Barski had provided, on their back trail, and presently, satisfied no one was following, returned them to the case. He had no clear idea what the situation ahead might require. Reconnaissance and observation only, he hoped. But he wished he had stopped for his rifle. For this kind of a job a service automatic was impractical.

"How many people in on this, professor?"

"Three," Barski said. "You, Colonel Gordon and myself."

"And Natya," Laird added.

"Yes, and my daughter," Barski said. "She arranged for the horses."

"General Wang?"

Barski shook his head. "Gordon ruled

against it. He was afraid the general would send out troops and Malone would be warned in advance."

Laird prodded his pony into the trail that forked to the right. Gordon had been right, of course. Word of a troop movement order would leak. And a detachment of Chinese cavalry was hardly the force to scout exposed treeless country like this. As he climbed on toward the bleak frozen skyline he wondered if he would be back in time to keep his appointment with Chip Malone . . .

CHAPTER IV

THE WILD PIG

LONG before they reached the base of Dorju Peak Laird knew that the trail had been traveled far more heavily than its trade importance merited, and recently, by both horses and yaks. In places the track was crisscrossed with trails that branched off across the hard-packed snow. He had known beforehand that it would be simple to distribute guns and ammunition to Tibetan nomads from any one of a dozen possible points along the range, by-passing Kangting altogether. So simple, the Chinese had been helpless to prevent it.

Invariably he came back to the same question: why? Was it merely a modern twist to the illegal traffic that flourished along every frontier—in this case guns, guns needed by the Tibetans for legitimate peaceful purposes? Or was it, as Gordon believed, part of a larger coordinated plan?

He turned out of the wind, glancing back at Barski. The professor clung grimly to the saddle, his teeth chattering against the cold. Laird thought to stop, to send him back, and decided against it. Thirty years, he thought, entitled any man to one or two illusions.

The sky had begun to pale in the east and the first pink flush of dawn crept across the mountains. The wind died and the snow took on a crystalline sparkle. They crossed the lower shoulder of Dorju and Laird swung out of the trail, bulling a path through the drifts. Finally he dismounted, left the horses belly-deep in snow, and crawled up to the crest of a hogback ridge.

From there he had a clear sweep of a narrow gently-shelving valley nestled between two spurs of the range. He flattened among the hummocks and brought up the glasses, methodically searching the south slope for tracks or sign of movement. Frowning, he peered toward a gap between the peaks that would be the natural, inevitable choice of any pilot. As far as he could tell there was no indication that anyone had crossed the valley since the last snowfall.

"Let's take another look at that sketch, Professor."

"Do not move, please. Stay where you are."

It was Barski's voice, and yet it was not. It was a voice Laird had never heard before—flat, controlled, faintly ironic. He raised his head and said, "What's wrong?"

Then he saw Barski's mottled face, the automatic gripped in his right hand. The old man's eyes glinted behind his glasses. "Keep down. On your stomach."

Laird opened his mouth. "Put that gun away."

Barski took a step and raised the automatic. The safety clicked. "At this distance even a feeble old man cannot miss. Do as I say! Quickly!"

As Laird pushed up on one elbow, Barski fired. The bullet ticked his cheek. Dumbly Laird put a hand up to his face. His first impression was that Barski had snapped, that the old man's mind had cracked temporarily under the strain. He shook his head to clear the ringing in his ears, and heard Barski shouting. Then, dimly, he began to understand.

Barski gave him a queer fleeting smile and called again. An answering hail floated up from the valley. Two Tibetans came running up the slope, out of nowhere. In a daze, Laird saw they were the same pair, the drinking companions of the Hsifan, who had disappeared the night before. "Face down," Barski said. "Cross your wrists behind your back."

A boot toe prodded Laird in the ribs. Someone slipped the automatic from his holster and lashed his wrists together. They worked swiftly, expertly, without talk, as though every detail had been rehearsed. The short Tibetan jerked him to his feet and poked a muzzle into his back. "Follow him," Barski said. "Do not try to run."

Laird grunted. The second Tibetan gave him a shove. He went stumbling down the slope, floundering for balance in the snow. It had happened so suddenly that even now he could not believe that Barski—this sentimental doddering White Russian—was responsible, or capable of deceiving him so completely. He had been dubious before they started, reluctant to leave Kang-ting, but he had never questioned the old man's sincerity. He would have doubted Natya sooner than her father.

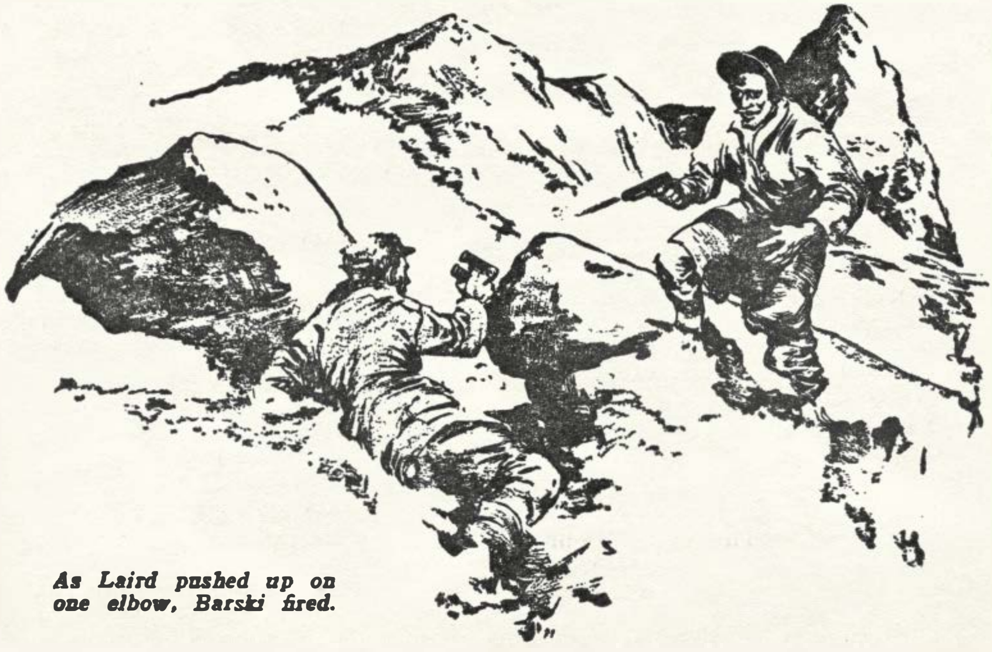
Remembering the scene at the compound gate, Laird winced. She had been part of it too. Natya, the bait, the lure, the—he groped for the absurd old-fashioned phrase—the *femme fatale*. "It's an obsession with Father," she'd said. "You've got to help me, Danny." So he'd climbed on a horse and gone charging off to catch the villian. The oldest most obvious trap in the world, and he'd jumped in head first.

The tracks dipped into a pocket that lay in a sheltered V, invisible from the rise above. A circular tent of black yak skin had been pitched to one side and a feather of smoke curled up from a fire in front. Two horses were tethered to a guy rope. They could not have been there more than an hour, Laird knew.

He was the first to hear the faint distant drone to the north. A speck flashed in the gap beyond Dorju Peak, caught the morning sun, disappeared against the wicked dazzle of snow, then reappeared, growing larger and more distinct as it swept in over the far end of the valley. Barski stopped and held up his hand. The Tibetans watched stolidly.

THE pilot came in low, as though hunting for landmarks, banked in a sharp steep turn, skimming the peak's western face, and swung back into the wind. He reduced air speed and went into a glide. The skis touched, the ship hopped twice and sat down with a shower of snow. She taxied back, fishtailed to a stop two hundred yards below the tent, and the engine died. A man in a helmet and bulky knee-length Red Army Arctic *shuba* climbed down from the cabin.

A good man, Laird conceded. Only a veteran could have jockeyed the heavy C47 in that narrow valley and put her



As Laird pushed up on one elbow, Barski fired.

down smoothly. Only the best could fly this country at night, on instrument, and over enemy lines. Laird was sorry he had to be Russian in a lend-lease plane. Behind him came the co-pilot, a Tokarev tommy gun slung over one shoulder.

One of the Tibetans pushed Laird inside the tent and motioned him onto the floor. Quickly he tied his ankles together and stepped outside, closing the flap behind him. Laird lay still for a while, feeling the chill bite into him, then squirmed forward to the front of the tent and butted the fly with his head. Through a crack he could see the Tibetans squatting over the fire a few feet away, boiling tea. Barski had walked out to the plane to talk to the Russians, waving his arms in explosive gestures. There seemed to be no passengers, and evidently, no cargo. This was a special flight.

He had part of the picture, but only the unimportant part, confirmation of what Gordon already suspected. They were flying guns by night, across five hundred miles of Nationalist-held territory, with a safe cruising range of fifteen hundred. The real danger was a crackup, not detection. There was not another plane in the province, nor a field. All the Reds needed was snow and a ten-foot tent for a marker. And somewhere at the Kang-ting end an underground transmitter to send out weather reports and the next designated rendezvous point. If an outsider happened to spot the grounded plane it would be gone before the Chinese could send a patrol to investigate. As Gordon had said, they couldn't blockade the air.

Then why had Barski been so eager to bring him here? And now that he was here, why keep him alive? Or was Barski following orders? For some reason unknown to Laird his presence had become dangerous in Kang-ting. The tea house brawl had been a diversion, a trick to shift his attention from the real effort. Whatever that effort was, it would materialize in Kang-ting, not here in the mountains, and almost certainly within the next few hours.

He saw the two flyers climb back into the ship. The co-pilot crawled out on a wing with a tool bag. For the first time Laird noticed the snout of a machine gun, mounted in the nose compartment forward of the cockpit. Just in case, he thought, a Chinese pursuit jumped them enroute. Presently Barski limped back up the rise and into the tent. He looked down at Laird with feverish bloodshot eyes.

Laird propped himself up against one wall. "You're a sweetheart, Barski," he said. "Grade A-1, prime."

Barski turned his back and began to pace.

"The Chinese give you a home for thirty years," Laird said, "so you sell them out."

The old man shrugged.

"Not that it matters," Laird said, "but I'm curious. What was it, Professor—money?"

"Money?" Barski snorted.

"Did you hear about those White Russians in Shanghai, the ones that got themselves repatriated last year? Friend of mine had a letter from one of them —from a labor camp in Siberia."

"Today," Barski said, "I hear Russian spoken, true Russian, for the first time in many years. You would not understand."

A breeze had blown back the tent flap. The co-pilot, the one with the tommy gun, had disappeared on the far side of the plane. One Tibetan was crossing the snow with a churnful of buttered tea. The second was hunkered over the coals, toasting his hands. "You can't do business with them," Laird said. "Nobody should know it better than you."

Barski stopped. "Tonight I will be on my way in the plane. In another month I will be back in Petrograd, my citizenship restored." His voice was shrill now, petulant. "Thirty years, my friend."

"Petrograd?" Laird laughed. "They've changed the name, or didn't you know. Don't let them sucker you, Professor."

The old man resumed his pacing without reply.

"And Natya?" Laird said. Her acting had been perfect—the sudden return from Chungking, the story of a U. S. immigration visa, the appeal for sympathy—so perfect it had fooled a professional agent like John Gordon. But Laird found no consolation in that. "I suppose she goes right along with you?"

"Natya?" Barski blinked at him through his glasses. "But of course. She is Russian."

Through the open tent fly Laird could see the Tibetan by the fire, curled up on his saddle blanket now. It was a chance, a wild improbable one, but still a chance. He said, "Listen to me, Barski. They've used you and now you're through, washed up. They'll never take you back. You're not Russian any longer, not their kind of Russian."

The old man gave no sign that he heard.

Laird lowered his voice. "I'm not passing judgment on you. Maybe I'd do the same. But it's not too late to switch. I'm the only one who knows. I won't tell Gordon. You can take Natya to Shanghai, in the clear. Cut me loose, give me the gun." He paused, watching the effect of his words. "They'll liquidate you sure, Professor."

Barski turned. His face was drawn, haggard; the feverish look had faded from his eyes. For an instant Laird's hope lifted. Then the old man's shoulders stiffened at the sound of a nickering horse outside. Laird heard the crunch of boots and the flap was thrown wide.

The Hsifan stood framed against the snow. Even in the first start of recognition Laird felt the intensity of the man. There was a set implacable expression around his eyes, some nameless drive that reminded Laird of a Jap *kamikaze* pilot he had once interrogated—a look that went beyond discipline or loyalty or fanaticism. He saw the rifle, the beautiful hand-forged Mauser, target model. He saw the blask tapered telescope sight. He saw the cartridge bandoleers looped across his chest. And then he knew.

Barski said, "You are very naive."

The Hsifan brushed Barski aside and crossed the tent toward Laird. He stood over him, head thrust forward, thumbs hooked through his belt. His face was wooden, remote. Softly Laird said, "Ran-chin-lu. *Yeh-tzu.* Pig."

A boot caught the pit of his stomach. In a blur of agony he saw the Hsifan lift his foot and kick again. Laird moaned and rolled over on his face. The Hsifan rolled him back, systematically booting his ribs, his chest, his groin, with full deliberate swings. Laird doubled up, gagged and twisted his head. He saw Barski's horrified face, and a heel crashed against his jaw. The force of it snapped back his neck. Lights pinwheeled, and he sank into darkness.

CHAPTER V

TRAITOR'S END

THE first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was a spatter for blood. He struggled to sit up, retched and fell back on his face. His hands and feet were numb, his whole body ached. He washed the awful brassy taste from his mouth with snow and spat it out. The tent was empty. From the bar of sunlight slanting through the fly he judged he had been unconscious for only a few minutes. Raising his head, he heard an indistinct hum of conversation.

One voice was Barski's, speaking heated Russian. The other, he assumed, belonged to one of the pilots. He caught a few words, an occasional scrap—*"zalojnik"* and *"informatsia."* He tried to recall the fragments of Russian he had learned in an intelligence language course during the war. His mind drifted away and came back with a jolt. "Hostage!" "Information!" He was the hostage!

Laird moistened his lips. One more piece of the picture: they were holding him for information. They might fly him north into Communist territory, a standard Kremlin practice.

Painfully he dragged himself back to the flap. He saw Barski, back to the fire, arguing with the Hsifan. The other voice had been Ran-chin-lu's. Which meant that he too spoke Russian, not the imperial Russian of Petrograd, but a practical vernacular acquired in one of the Marxist finishing schools of Red China. Ran-chin-lu was—must be—a trained native revolutionary sent home to do spade work for the cause.

Barski was shaking his head from side to side, as if in violent disagreement. The torrent of language came too fast.

Laird caught two words—"Natya" and *"dotchurka"*—before Barski broke off abruptly. Laird saw him cringe and take a backward step. Without visible effort the Hsifan reached out with both hands, seized Barski by the neck and lifted him off the ground.

The shout froze in Laird's throat. The old man's legs kicked out, thrashing the air, and jack-knifed under him. The Hsifan held him at arm's length like an empty sack. Barski gave a strangled cough, clawing at the big man's arms, and his pince-nez flew off. His legs straightened and went limp. The Hsifan held him a few seconds longer, shaking gently, and dropped him. Barski twitched once and was still.

Laird turned his face away. He felt no pity, none at all. Barski had made his choice. Barski had known the risks. In the end it was Barski himself who had underestimated their ruthlessness. But a wave of cold fury shook Laird.

The Hsifan strode out to the plane without a backward glance. The pilot came to the cabin door. Ran-chin-lu said something, gestured toward the tent, and the Russian reached behind him and handed out a flat bulky package wrapped in brown paper. The Hsifan examined it briefly and walked back to his horse. He rode up the slope in the direction of Kang-ting, accompanied by one of the Tibetans.

Quiet descended over the camp. The flyer disappeared once more inside the ship. The remaining Tibetan rolled Barski's body away from the fire and settled down on his blanket, rifle within reach. Peering up at the sun, Laird estimated it must be nearly ten o'clock. By four, or five at the latest, Ran-chin-lu would reach Kangting. And sometime after dark he, Laird, would be taking off with the Russians, F.O.B. North China.

Wearily his mind ranged over the possibilities. Only two persons—Gordon and Natya Barski—had any idea where he was and neither would come with help, although for different reasons. He was on his own. He knew now that the Hsifan had killed Shu. But the package worried him—something important enough to bring Ran-chin-lu on a hard twelve-hour ride to collect in person. What, Laird could not guess.

A dead weight of fatigue washed over him. His lids drooped. He rubbed his face into the snow and shifted position, fighting off sleep. Presently he dozed . . .

SOMETHING woke him with a start. He saw the plane outside, his guard lying beside the ashes of the fire. Afternoon shadow purpled the opposite rim of the valley. He twisted to one side and peered across the darkened tent. The back wall bowed in slightly and the crack of light at the bottom widened. He heard breathing, and a head and shoulders poked under the flap.

Laird stared. Under his breath he said, "Natya!"

She frowned and shook her head. Squeezing under the tent, she closed the gap behind her and bent over him. Her front was plastered with snow where she had been crawling, and her face and hands were blue. She saw the blood, the welt on his face, and her mouth tightened. She put her lips against his ear.

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"Can you walk?"

Laird nodded. He did not try to understand. So much had happened the past few hours, and he had been wrong about most of it. He was too confused, too tired, to think. She had come for some reason, and that was enough for now. If this was another trap he had nothing to lose.

She knelt, fumbling at the rawhide on his wrists. He felt the blood pulse back into his numbed fingers and bit back the pain. While she worked at his ankles he massaged his hands, flexing and unflexing his fingers. Fresh pain flowed into his feet. He stood up, leaning against her for support, and his vision cleared slowly. He took a few tentative steps and stamped his feet.

"My horse," she whispered. "Back of the ridge."

"No good. Too slow."

Somewhere outside a boot creaked. Motioning her back, Laird peered through the fly slit. The Tibetan had come to his feet, fully awake, his head cocked, listening. He picked up his rifle and stepped toward the tent.

"Water," Laird croaked. "Water."

The man scowled and threw open the fly. As his head thrust in, Laird brought the edge of his palm down on the back of his neck in a short hard chop. The Tibetan grunted and went down. Laird chopped him again, rolled him over and wadded a handkerchief in his mouth. Grabbing the rifle, he stared out at the plane.

The big Douglas squatted two hundred yards away, sleek and silver-bright against the snow, cockpit deserted, silent.

"Strip him," Laird whispered.

He peeled out of his coat. Natya helped him into the ankle-length Tibetan *chupa,* pulled the hood up over his head. The boots were too small but he managed to squeeze his feet into the yielding felt. He pulled the sheepskin hat down over his ears, checked the rifle and slung it over his shoulder. Natya stepped back to inspect him. Her gaze held his, direct and grave.

"Don't try it, Danny."

"You've done your bit," he said. "Now clear out. I'll give you a five minute start."

She flushed. "I'll stay."

Laird muttered, "Watch him then," and stepped through the flap. The glare blinded him momentarily and his legs were still shaky. He blinked at the dead fire, noticed the tea churn and picked it up. Glancing once more at the tent behind him, he began to walk slowly toward the plane.

The snow crust had started to freeze and he slipped once, skidding to his knees. He picked himself up and went on, his eyes fixed on the cabin door. He did not walk like a Tibetan, nor resemble one, not even remotely. If either flyer happened to look out he would be trapped on the flat open drifts.

Halfway. One hundred yards. He began to count his steps, fighting down the wild panicky urge to run. Seventy-five yards. Fifty. Still no sound from the plane. He could smell cold metal now, and gasoline. Close enough to rush. But he continued to walk, lifting one snow-clogged boot after the other. He thought about Natya, wondering why he had trusted her even now, and put the idea from his mind. Twenty-five yards. Twenty. Fifteen. He eased the rifle sling toward the point of his shoulder, ready for anything.

The door banged open. The co-pilot stood in the opening, the Tokarev cradled against his stomach. Laird licked at his lips and called in Tibetan, "Hot tea. I bring you hot tea." He held out the churn.

The flyer shrugged, called over his shoulder and hopped down. The pilot appeared in the door behind him, yawning and stretching. Laird took one more step before the pilot shouted. Laird threw the churn at the first man, but he ducked and dropped to one knee. The tommy gun ripped off a burst, spraying the snow in front of Laird, and then he was firing the rifle at point-blank range. The co-pilot threw up an arm and collapsed. The pilot grabbed for the holster at his belt, thought better of it, and raised his hands, staring glumly at Laird over the rifle muzzle.

"You speak English?" Laird demanded. "Chinese, Minya Tibetan?"

The flyer hesitated and shook his head. He was young, fair-haired, pinkcheeked—only a kid. Laird was conscious of a profound relief that it hadn't been necessary to fire again. He had respect, regardless, for any man who could handle a ship like this pilot. Without turning his head he shouted for Natya.

When she came running up, a moment later, he said, "Take his pistol and tie him up. Tell him he won't be hurt if he cooperates."

The boy burst into a babble of Russian as Natya tightened a thong over his wrists. Laird knelt beside the co-pilot. He was dead, the blood already congealing over a hole in his leather jacket. Laird felt inside his pockets for identity papers and recovered the tommy gun. He felt sickened, spent.

"He says he doesn't know anything," Natya told him. "He follows orders."

"They all say that," Laird said. "We'll work on him later." He took her by the arm. "Let's have it now. All of it. Straight."

She looked off toward the tent and Laird felt her body grow rigid. "Father—they—" She took a step but he pulled her back.

"You don't want to look, Natya."

She tried to pull away and then went limp against him. Laird slipped an arm around her waist. When she lifted her face to him her eyes were bright with tears. "I knew it would end like this, someday."

Laird said, "You knew yesterday."

She nodded. "I've suspected for a long time. That's why I went away. You and I, Danny, it wouldn't have worked out. It's hard to explain. It was like a disease with him. He dreamed of serving the Fatherland, going home, as he called it. I argued with him, pleaded. I thought I could change his mind. And then when I came back to Kang-ting—"

"Gordon was there."

"I was terrified Gordon would learn the truth. And then you. I lied to you both. He never wanted to go to America. He thought you were fools. I kept praying that nothing would happen, that he would wake up, face reality. It was a nightmare, Danny. I knew I was wrong, but I had to choose. He was my father."

Laird said, "How did you get here?"

"I knew you were going to Dorju Peak, but I didn't know the rest of it. He never told me his plans. But when I couldn't find his Nansen passport in the drawer where he always kept it, I got panicky. I left early this morning, hoping to stop him. I wasn't sure, of course, but I had a feeling."

"Didn't you pass the Hsifan?"

"Yes, but he didn't see me. I was up on some rocks, trying to get my direction, when he rode by. So I followed his back tracks for miles, right up to the ridge. But when I saw the plane, the—his—body, down in the snow—I knew—" She clutched at his arm. "You believe me, don't you?"

"God knows I want to," Laird said. He led her over to the door and helped her into the cabin. He pushed her onto a cushion and broke out a bottle of brandy from an emergency kit. "Don't talk. Try and get some rest."

CHAPTER VI

THE AVATARA LAMA

HE RETURNED to the tent, shook the Tibetan into conciousness, marched him back to the plane and tied him in the cabin beside the pilot. He had to act quickly, decisively. They couldn't spend the night in the valley. Ran-chin-lu, or some of his men, might return any time. He was still in the dark about their plan, the master plan, toward which all the evidence pointed, one which had been built up carefully and elaborately over a period of months. He could only guess, and that was not enough.

He glanced at Natya. She had been crying but some of the color had returned to her face. He patted her shoulder. "That pilot? What were his orders?"

She asked a question and the answer came back volubly. "He was to take off at dusk, with one or two passengers, and return to his base in Kansu."

"You think he's lying?"

"I don't think so," Natya said. "Always before he carried cargo, guns and ammunition. He slept during the day while it was passed out to the natives. But this trip all he brought was a bundle."

"Bundle?" Laird stared around the cabin. Then he was ripping away string and coarse brown paper. He held up an armful of blue uniforms, complete with billed caps, wrap-around leggings and rubber-soled canvas sneakers. There were over a dozen, ranging in size from small to large. His finger smoothed out a blue and white starred sleeve emblem of the Chinese Republic.

"Pre-war stuff," he said. "No organization insignia. The Army hasn't gotten around to replacing them in posts like Kang-ting. This is the outfit Wang's boys wear."

"But why—"

"Your father must've known," Laird said. "Didn't he drop a hint?"

"If he did I missed it." Natya bit her lip. "He did tell me that you had either the luck or the cunning of the Devil himself."

Laird swallowed. He remembered the old man's shocked reaction. No wonder Barski had hustled him out of Kang-ting. Gordon had ridiculed his suggestion. Laird hadn't taken it seriously himself. But Barski had, and acted on it.

Something else Gordon had said occurred to him: "The damndest holy war you ever saw." It would be that. All Sikong rising against Chinese authority, burning and butchering clear to the plains of Szechwan. Enough to bring Nationalist China down in a bloody shambles. Fantastic? Laird asked himself. Yes, but no more so than Czechoslovakia. Or Greece. There was a common pattern, he saw now with terrible final clarity.

He threw down the uniforms. "The Hsifan? How was he dressed?"

"Dressed? Why, cloak, boots—"

"He's changed by now. He's at Kashi Gompa, in garrison uniform, guard duty. He's a breed so they'll never spot him."

Natya brought a hand up to her mouth. "The Lama?"

"What else? Ever see a *Ya-chiu* ceremony? About sundown the highest ranking lama comes out on a balcony, sprinkles holy water, blesses the crowd. Only in sight a minute or two, but that's enough. The Hsifan's a trained sniper."

"But the mob would tear him to pieces."

"That's the idea. A Chinese uniform. In other words, the Chinese government. You don't argue with a mob."

"But can't we stop him?"

"How? It's six hours by trail." Laird stepped through the passageway into the cockpit. "And the radio isn't on the right frequency."

Natya said quietly, "But fifteen minutes by air. And you're a flyer."

"Sure," he said. "Fighters—40's and 38's, but not transports. Four years ago."

"The pilot—he could help."

Laird stared at her, his mind racing over objections. A strange ship, strange controls, taking off cold at this altitude, flying some of the world's worst terrain. Assuming he did make Kang-ting, what then? He couldn't land within miles of the lamasery. Possibly he was already too late. But any other alternative was worse than futile.

"Tell that pilot—" Laird broke off with a grin. "No use telling him. He'll think I'm crazy."

HE HOPPED to the ground and with a knife hacked away some of the snow that had frozen around the skis. Back in the cabin, he shut the door, dogged it tight, and dragged the pilot forward into the cockpit. Easing behind the wheel, he sat for a moment studying the unfamiliar lettering over the dials and instruments. He wiped his hands on his pants and snapped on both magneto switches.

"Natya," he said, "I think I know what you'll say. But you have a horse, you know the trail. There's no reason for you to come along."

"Isn't there?" She gave him a level sober look and slipped into the co-pilot's seat.

Laird smiled. Then he leaned sideways and kissed her. "That," he said, "would depend."

He straightened and snapped the safety belt. The details, the seat-of-the-pants technique for an emergency takeoff came back to him in a rush. No time to hook up oxygen masks. Leave cowl flaps shut to heat the engines and lessen drag. Watch for oil lock. Check rudder action. Pray.

He pressed down the toggle switches on the inertia starter and booster magneto. The right engine caught, exploded into a ragged coughing roar. Then the left. He adjusted the mixture, coaxed the big 1200 H.P. Pratts into something like steady pitch, and shoved the throttles and prop controls all the way forward. The ship was shuddering, bucking the drag of the snow. He caught a glimpse of Natya's profile and jerked up a thumb. The plane lurched and swerved to the left. He kicked the right rudder pedal, pulled back the right engine, fighting her back on course. Then both skis pulled free and they were gliding down the valley.

They hit a hummock, bounced, slapped down with a jar, and were airborne. The snow field dropped away under the wing. Laird nosed her up, shooting for the notch at the north end, and held his breath. The great jagged spine of Dorju's northwest shoulder swirled toward him out of the mist. They were climbing, as fast as he dared on two cold engines, but it would be close. An updraft caught him, hurled the ship up, above the rocks. Laird shinned through the gap and brought her into the clear on the far side of the range.

He heard the Russian let out a sigh. He said to Natya, "Ask him if he carries any message or drop chutes."

"None," she told him. "If he crashed, alive, he was supposed to burn the ship and shoot himself."

"Happy thought." Laird pointed to a flight log clamped to the compartment wall. "Better write out a half dozen messages. Attention General Wang, or Gordon. We'll drop 'em over."

"The tool kit?"

"Good girl. Tie 'em to wrenches, hammers, anything. Wrap 'em tight. It's a million-to-one shot, but—"

While she wrote, he brought the plane down gradually from seventeen thousand, swinging southeast, until he picked up the meanders of the river. They had left the high snow-filled valleys and were entering the canyon that led to Kang-ting. He made out a few patchwork farms and the thread of a suspension bridge. In another five minutes he would be over the town.

He felt more confidence at the wheel now, but he knew he had been lucky, incredibly lucky. The tricky part was ahead. Step by step he had been drawn into a situation over which he had no control. What had been Gordon's responsibility, Gordon's problem, had become solely his own. There was still a great deal he didn't know, too much guesswork and too much surmise. He was an amateur, thrust without warning or preparation into a deadly power game where a wrong decision or snap judgment conceivably might affect the lives, and deaths, of millions.

"Chip Malone?" he said. "Where does he fit?"

"He doesn't," Natya said. "Because Father worked for him, he convinced Gordon that Malone was the man to watch. Gordon thought he was getting valuable reports on Malone's activities."

Laird smiled. He was glad somehow the Australian was not involved. Malone's threat had been a bluff. That much he had guessed right.

He throttled down as the canyon began to widen. The skyline of Kang-ting slid into sight, nestled between bare rocky hills. From the air it looked flat, gray, ridiculously small. The ridge behind was a solid cluster of black—Tibetans waiting at the foot of Kashi Gompa. At two hundred feet the banner of Pedma Sambhava was an orange splash against the mass of the lamasery.

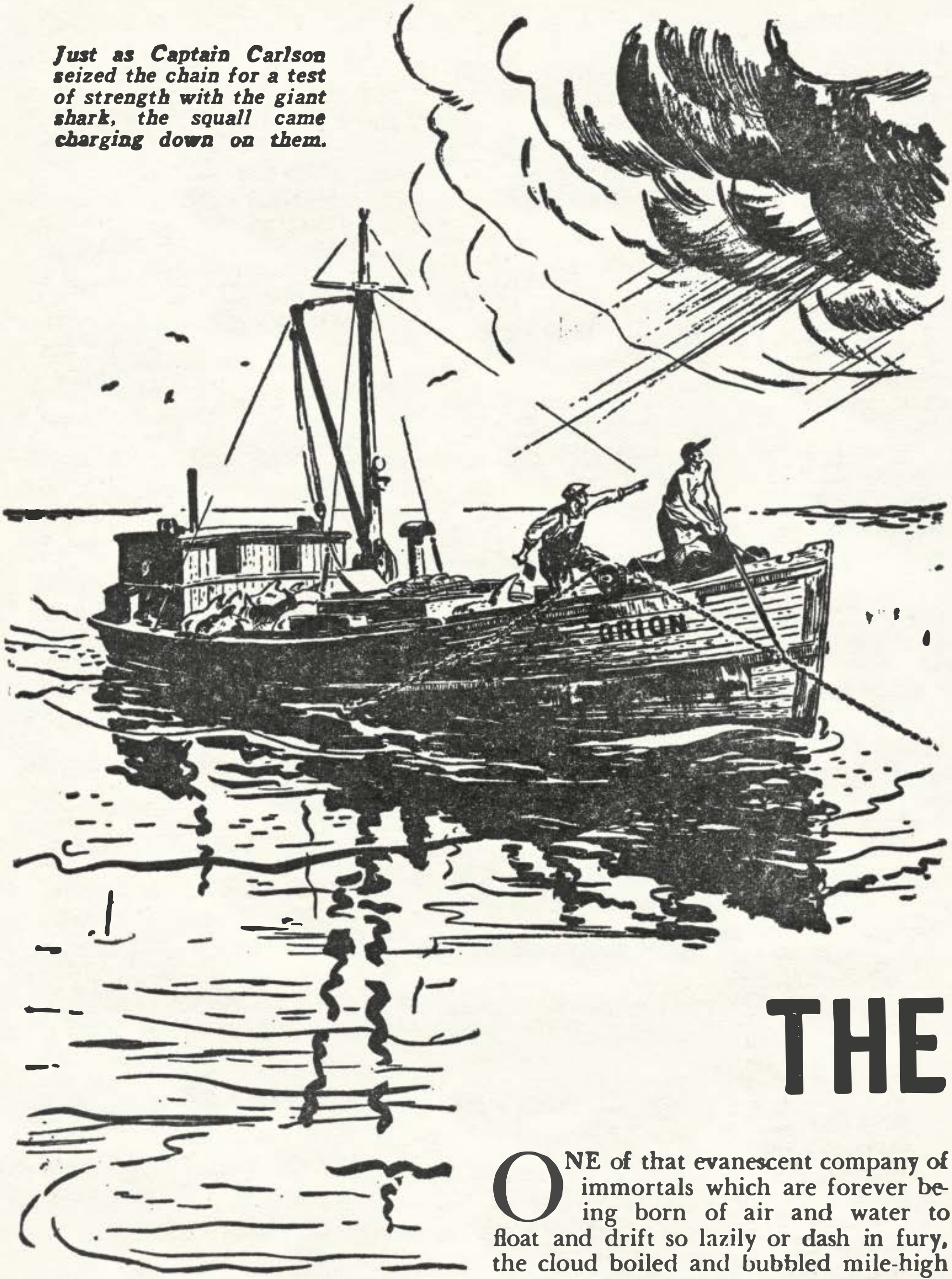
He went in low, lower than his airspeed and the canyon angle justified. He could picture the consternation and fright the racket of his engines would inspire on the ridge below. This was a sacrilege. Some hotheads would open fire. Most of them had never seen a plane. What Gordon might be wondering at this moment he did not like to think. And down there, somewhere, the Hsifan would see him.

"I'll circle and run back over the target. Set?" "Ready," Natya said.

HE FOLLOWED the plane's hurtling shadow up the ridge, recording the layout on his memory. The scene below etched itself in sharp microscopic detail

(Continued on page 129)

Just as Captain Carlson seized the chain for a test of strength with the giant shark, the squall came charging down on them.

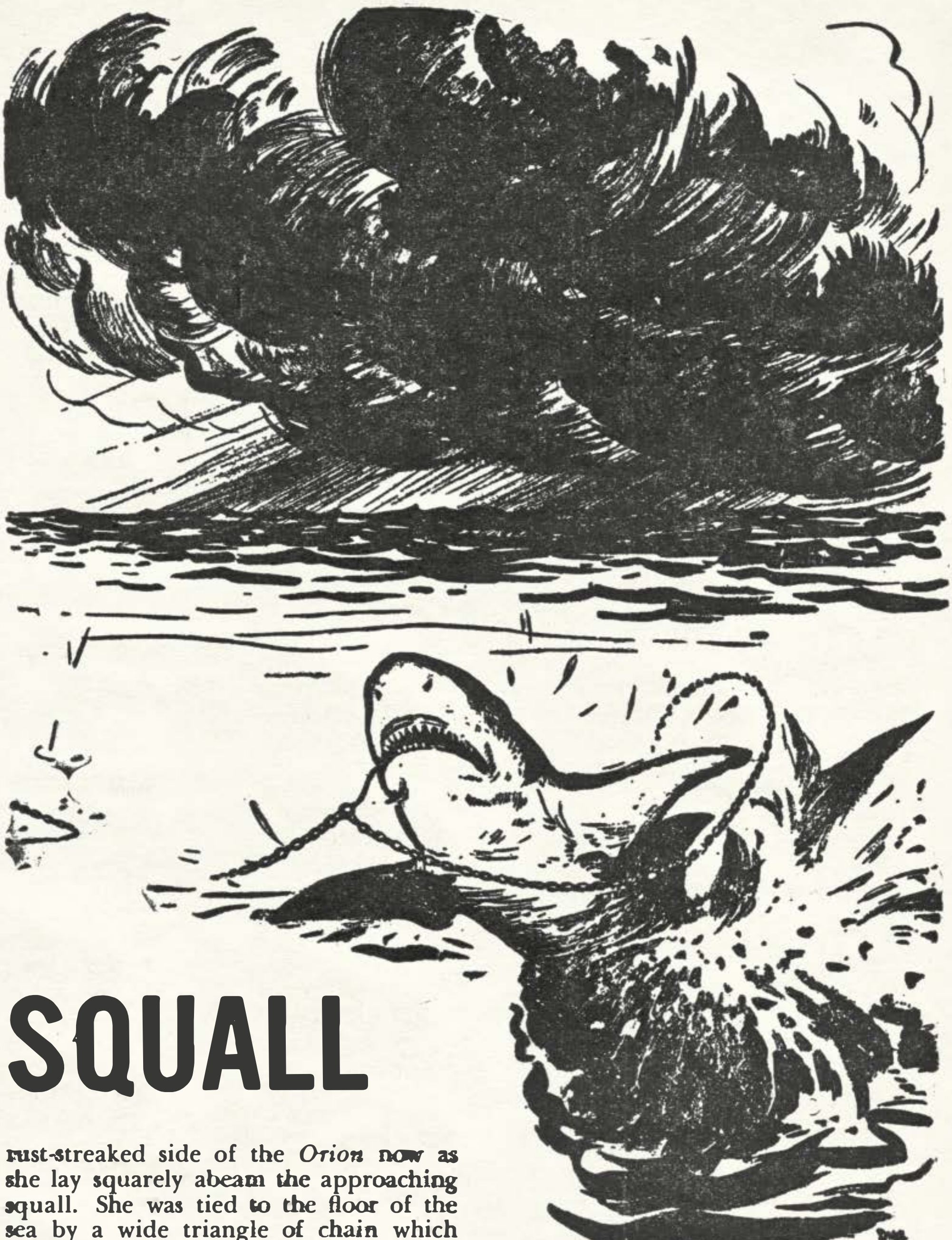


ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES DYE

THE

ONE of that evanescent company of immortals which are forever being born of air and water to float and drift so lazily or dash in fury, the cloud boiled and bubbled mile-high above the Florida coast, heading south by east toward the Gulf Stream where Captain Carlson awaited it with pleasure.

He was an uncommunicative man. In truth, he thought unnecessary those little babblings of the water, the sighs and whispers that the ocean made along the



SQUALL

rust-streaked side of the *Orion* now as she lay squarely abeam the approaching squall. She was tied to the floor of the sea by a wide triangle of chain which snaked in over her bow, crossed a steel roller, and disappeared astern. Her position was untenable. In the eyes of a less capable man, it might even appear dangerous—which whetted his anticipation all the more. Clouds, he reflected, were magnificent opponents. Like the sharks which were grist for the *Orion's* mill, they were timid or savage, helpless

By

ERNEST FULTON LYONS

in his hands, or requiring strategy and every ounce of strength to master them. Clouds and sharks were of so many different kinds, of such varying character—like kittens, cats and tigers, full of unexpected potentials—that each required sober calculation. It took move and counter-move to handle them. Good judgment. Silent thought. Personal attention.

"Anudder line squall," Louie said disgustedly from amidships. "Dat's all we get dese days. Bad wedder. And just when we latched on to de chain. We ain't been livin' right."

The comment of the mate annoyed Captain Carlson indescribably. Standing in the bow watching the cloud, he mused that it, at least, like every shark, was majestically voiceless. Still some five miles distant, its tumbling sunlit forepart was not yet obscured. There, at its very top, snowy masses rolled toward the afternoon sun and gray streamers danced like spirits; its forehead tossed in grandeur, but the face of the cloud was dark, and all the way down to the land its shade changed from grayish blue to a sullen, ominous black like the backdrop on a stage.

Man-sized, all right; it might be a real one. Funny, he thought, about clouds and sharks: some of the largest were just babies full of bluff, and some of the smallest were wicked, savage things. All that morning little squalls had streamed out from the land, dragging their trails of rain across the sea, to disappear as completely to the east as the sharks that he and Louie piled upon the company dock each night. What happened to them when they left his ken was none of Captain Carlson's business. He viewed them, as he did everything, from a purely personal vantage. He made his own decisions; no cloud, or shark, or circumstance ever did his thinking for him.

And now, although it was a foregone conclusion as he well knew—weighing the size of the disturbance, judging its direction and power—that this creature so intangibly made of mist and whirling air would cause him to command the *Orion* to release her prey and turn to face it, still he thought bitterly, Louie Swenson could have kept his mouth shut. Just this once. One time.

"We hadn't better take no chances, Charlie," came the man's offensively familiar voice again. "Wind in dat one. She's a whopper."

No, the man couldn't keep silent five minutes—not five, he told himself. Talk. Talk. Talk. Why, he was worse than the phonograph in Maizie's Place, wound up to last a lifetime. The little enthusiasms, abortive tries at humor, and worst of all the helpful hints and offers of assistance which ventured out of the mate's mouth day after day and all the day, as regularly as the shark boat put to sea, as certain as the breakers on the reef or the turning of the tide, disturbed him more than words could tell. Indeed, the cries of seabirds and the soughing "ahhs" of porpoises and blackfish as they blew were aggravating, but those things were unavoidable. Every time that Louie spoke he added another drop of water to Captain Carlson's head in the slowest sort of torture.

* * *

TODAY it had started before dawn with prattle about how the *Orion* stank. "Worse dan any o' dem copra schooners in de magazines, I betcha," Louie had said. "If we smart, we cut up dis stink an' sell it. Wort' a million dollars."

Admittedly she stank, with the effluvia of many a thousand sharks caught in her years of fishing—but why talk about it? They filled her hold right now and overflowed upon the deck, white sharks and lemon sharks, nurse sharks and hammerheads, and even a small leopard shark or two, with cold, remorseless eyes. Sprawled still in death, they filled him with a sense of pride—eighty-seven, Captain Carlson figured; not so bad for two chains with the third yet to come up—sharkin' was a good, stout, honest business, nothing to poke fun at. Frankly, he liked the smell. Had it not been for the squall, this might well be the biggest catch of the season, worth a bonus from the management—but the storm, he observed, remained on course. He would have to let the giant chain slip overboard. But Louie said, "You hear me, Charlie. I t'ink we better drop away.

Remember what happened to de *Midget*."

It made Captain Carlson mad.

"Yust a puff of wind," he said, with a contemptuous scowl at the squall, flipping the diesel into gear. "Not nutting. We got work to do." He turned to observe the effect on Louie. It was comical.

The mate's pug nose quivered with alarm. His small brown eyes were opened wide so that the whites showed all around. Standing by the bait board in his dirty overalls, a cleaver in one hand and a dead stingaree in the other, this secondary personage of the Orion, with a ragged gray cap surmounting a soup-bowl haircut, and his overly wide, quizzically human mouth, squawked like a toadfish.

"Don't let's do it, Charlie. It's temptin' fate. *Dat's* what happened to *dem*. Tied to de chain when a line squall hit. Hell, Charlie, let's pull clear. Dat's what we got dis," he tapped his forehead, "to t'ink wid."

Amusing. Captain Carlson's clear blue eyes twinkled like sunlight on the sea Naked from the waist up, with a mat of reddish blond hair across his barrel chest, a yellow oilskin apron tied around his waist, he flexed his arms and yawned. It gave him a sense of power and emotion, too, to feel the Orion nuzzle forward so obediently along the main chain which began slithering across the deck like a giant centipede. She trusted him; she never said, crossing the reef of a morning, "Watch out for dat one, Charlie," but breasted every comber, dug her teeth into the big ones and knocked the little ones aside. He loved the ugly fifty-five footer with an affection some men reserve for inanimate things, and she in turn gave him unquestioning loyalty.

Of all the sounds in the sea, there was one that did not bother Captain Carlson, and that was the beating of her heart, so steady and confident under his hand. "Thump . . . Thump . . . Thump," it went, in a slow cadence like his own, never alarmed at anything he wanted her to do. She tackled the chain now with businesslike efficiency; when the time came to slip it and face the squall, he had no doubt that she would do so at his order with equal competence. The first hook went by, dangling empty from a length of smaller chain like the barbed leg of a centipede.

"Louie," he said patiently, kindly, "sharkin' is *business*." He arched a thumb at the company flag, a pennant streaming blue and white from the mainmast with the shark factory's initials on it, the only touch of sentiment which he approved upon the Orion. "Your business," he reminded him, "is batin' hooks."

"Aw, don't be dat way, Charlie," the mate protested. "You an' me is buddies. I tol' my wife last night dey ain't anudder man I'd radder shark wid. Ten long years togedder, t'rough t'ick and t'in. First on de *Mystery*. Remember her? Afraid to kick, we was, fer fear we'd bust a rotten rib, an' nuttin' in her but a old auto engine. An' den de *Mako;* dat was a better boat but not so good as dis. An' now dey're buildin' de new *Sea Tiger* fer *us*, Charlie. De company," he snorted, "is all right. But we're de bes' shark team dey ever had," he finished proudly. "We get de bes' boats dey got and we catch de mos' sharks; ain't dat enough? You want us to drown for dem? What good'll dat do?"

The empty hook slid by the mate and down into the ocean, forgotten in the intensity of his argument.

"You missed dat one," said Captain Carlson coldly. "Wasted it. Bait up!"

UP FROM the Gulf Stream bottom where it lay among the corals and the sea ferns in the still recesses of the tropic current, half a mile long, the shark chain came. Link by link, the *Orion* took it in and spat it out behind while Louie mechanically baited empty hooks, and Captain Carlson prepared to pit himself against the sharks. On the seventh hook the first one showed, a ghostly, glimmering shadow fathoms down, seeming no longer than a man's arm at first, growing larger every minute. Captain Carlson loved them. He held one-sided conversations with every shark that came aboard.

"Yus' be quiet, baby," he chuckled as

the lead-chain reached the bow. He reached for it and hauled. The muscles of his back stood out with strain as he brought the shark closer and closer to the gunwale. "Poor faller," he took another hand-hold, gave another heave, "we have dat hook out purty soon. Yus' be patient, now . . ."

It was "sweet talk"—soothing as a mother's lullaby—until the shark's head loomed alongside. The chain ran through the captain's hands, the *Orion* gave a delicious little shiver of anticipation, and his purling notes of sympathy died away. Captain Carlson pulled the shark back in again by main force—it was no match for him—reached with his left hand for a sharp steel gaff on the business end of a hawser attached to the *Orion's* derrick boom, and sank it with an overside swoop through his victim's jaw.

"Haul away!" he ordered.

Louie jumped to the winch. The hawser tightened with a whiplike crack; Captain Carlson disappeared in a cloud of spray as 'midships was deluged by water from a flailing tail. Up from the sea came a white shark—seven hundred pounds, he judged, as the spray cleared—rolling and twisting, its tooth-studded mouth agape. He put an arm around the shark, turned it face to face, and struck it savagely on the nose with a length of pipe. It wilted and hung motionless while he cut the hook out. Louie cranked the winch and swung the defeated creature onto deck where it collapsed atop the rest—not too big a shark, thought Captain Carlson proudly, but big enough. Almost man-sized. He waited for the usual annoying approbation from the mate—"Whooiee, whatta shark! Betcha he weighs a t'ousand pounds!" Louie always said fool things like that. It made Captain Carlson tired. Kid stuff. Always exaggerating. The mate's enthusiams pained him. Little sharks were always big ones to the man, the medium-sized ones whoppers, and of course the really big ones, those genuine encounters with opponents worthy of his mettle which came along only once a month or so when a big leopard shark was hooked, always evoked such fantastic romanticism as, "Betcha we got Old Leopard now, de biggest shark in all de sea . . ." It was disgusting.

But Louie just baited the hook, dropped it overboard, and chopped more bait. Captain Carlson sneaked a look at him. The man's wide lips were tight and white. His face was pale. The sloppy overalls seemed to hang looser on him than they ever had before, as though his body had shrunk inside them. The cap was sidewise on his head, and a crayoned rag—which had caused a scene only yesterday—flapped dejectedly from a rear pocket of the overalls. Sloppy. The man was scared. This circumstance made Captain Carlson happy; he noted with satisfaction that the squall, which had been approaching steadily, had halted two miles off.

The *Orion,* too, seemed exultant over Louie's discomfiture and the squall's respect for Captain Carlson. She purred like a kitten "walking the chain," and up came the sharks on the steel trotline while the captain hauled them in, giving each one his personal attention.

The red flag marking the westward buoy toward the squall slowly marched away, and the east flag showed. There had been a hundred hooks to start with on this last line—Captain Carlson counted—and they had tended thirty now; by a stroke of luck it might be that the squall would change its course. The land was blotted out by a white wall of rain, and a soft wind began blowing from the east toward the cloud which sent a tentacle their way, as if testing the strength of an opponent.

The sharks upon the deck behind were piled hip-high. A good day's work, indeed. Better still, if he could harvest the whole crop. A bonus, maybe. Praise from Mister Hobbs, the manager: "The best shark captain in the fleet." Captain Carlson looked idly overside where the little pilot fishes swam in schools about the twisting heads and bodies of the sharks in a sort of gay Gulf Stream dance of death for them. There were remoras, too, with sucker-like plates atop their heads, clinging like leeches; but Captain Carlson liked the pilot fishes best. Such dainty things. Brightly colored little creatures, they came with their captured gray companions right to the *Orion's* stem and danced away again. They didn't look behind as their old friends were hoisted into air; they didn't seem to care. The *Orion,* their every action said, as they played before the bow around the rising links of chain, was far the best shark in the sea. They didn't cling like the remoras to die so foolishly on deck. They knew the time to leave.

And a shadow fell across the sea where the shark boat lay, while the cloud came forward somewhat, blotting off the sun, as though it might be speculating on Captain Carlson's judgment.

CLOUDS are strange beings. Like men, they are made of nothing much, are forever being born to be reborn again; they come from nowhere and vanish without a trace—yet there the similarity ends. A cloud cannot be likened to a man; their spirits differ. Of all the clouds that have risen from the waters of the earth since time began and fled their way across its face, beneficently casting shade and rain, or savagely causing floods below, gleefully ripping, tearing and drowning, not one, it can be truthfully said, has ever felt the necessity for self-importance. They are strange creatures. No one really understands them.

"I gotta wife an' family. Two kids!" Louie blurted, throwing down the cleaver. He reached into his overalls pocket for the rag to wipe the cold sweat from his forehead—but changed his mind, hastily stuffing the cloth back without using it. He folded his arms defiantly. "To hell with sharkin'. I'm through."

Amusing. Really funny. That crayoned rag was Louie Swenson's personal flag, Captain Carlson knew. The mate's little girl had drawn it, a crayoned picture of a boat on a white square of cloth. A silly, sentimental thing, a sailboat supposed to be the *Orion*—the grimly practical *Orion* with her efficient diesel—and, of all childish things, the smudgy pennant bore the initials *L. S.* crudely pencilled across the sail. So like the man to treasure it. Childish.

"How 'bout me runnin' *dis* up on de mast—" Louie had laughed, winking—"under de company flag?" when they had returned to port the day before. At first Captain Carlson had hardly believed his ears. "Helena get a big kick outa seein' it dar. She t'inks I'm de captain of de *Orion."*

The scenes at the dock always bothered Captain Carlson. Louie's wife and kids were sure to be there every time. The boy was a replica of his father, "stuffed full of bunk as a Christmas turkey," Captain Carlson put it, running around in excitement tripping over things, yelling over the size of sharks and getting in the way, but the little girl was shy and beautiful. Took after her mother, a serene, quiet, modest woman. Captain Carlson secretly admired her with the purest feeling of appreciation. Nothing wrong about it; she was not his kind. Why, she had never even looked him in the eye. It beat the Dutch, though, he often thought, how so fine a woman could have any use at all for half a man like Louie Swenson.

He had shaken his head gravely about the flag.

"I'd like to let you do it, Louie," he

Next time try...

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had patiently explained, "but times has changed. Mister Hobbs see dat rag, he laugh his head off. Not *proper*. Dis is a *real big* company now. *Respectable.* Next t'ing you wanta do is fly some floozie's panties from de *Orion.*"

Little incidents like that were occurring all the time these days. Disturbing. No business on a boat. Louie talked about his boy, Louie talked about his girl, Louie talked about his wife; Louie talked, and talked and talked. Full of hot air as a cloud.

"Get back to work," commanded Captain Carlson firmly. "We settle dis t'ing at port. Or are you de captain now?"

The man's confusion was a sight. He let his arms drop and looked around at the squall—how big and fierce and terrible, how utterly beyond the man's ability to match its gusty power, Captain Carlson thought, it must appear to a softie like Louie Swenson, who always exaggerated everything. The man had so many objectionable habits. He would, while bating hooks, place his hand upon the main chain as it went by him and pretend that he could tell by the thrumming feel of it how big the next shark on the line was going to be. Like this: "Leetle hammerhead, five hooks to come," or "Big Leopard, ten hooks ahead." Ridiculous.

"Now, don't get me wrong, Charlie," the mate struggled with embarrassment. "You give de orders here . . ." He was almost inarticulate for once, Captain Carlson noted with satisfaction. "But, well—you know, I promised my wife ever since de *Midget* never come back dat you and me would never stay tied to de chain in a squall. Man dear," he spread his hands, "I *promised* her *dat.*"

Captain Carlson laughed. It pleased him to see that Louie really believed he had the nerve, the impudent effrontery to leave the *Orion* on the chain through such a savage blow as this might be in its center—no competent man would ever think of doing it. That was plain suicide. With the Gulf Stream current pushing against her, and the great chain holding her down, the stoutest craft could swamp with counter-waves against her. No wonder the company agreed with him that Louie could never be the captain of a boat. It was just pity, he told himself, that had made him keep the man so long. Too big a heart. When the *Sea Tiger* was commissioned, he decided, Louie could stay as mate with whoever was selected as captain of the *Orion,* while he got another man to mate for him on the new ship. He wouldn't insist of course, on the company keeping Louie at all—that was their business—but he was certainly going to make a point of demanding a new mate himself. "Somebody who don't talk too much," he would tell Mister Hobbs tonight.

The squall had come perilously closer, but was obviously on a circling course. It was going to be close, yes, but still . . .

"We stay right here," he said.

"Damn you, Charlie Carlson, drop dat chain!" yelled Louie. "You dumb squarehead!"

That did it.

HOW sweet, how wonderful the human voice, when it is your own releasing pent-up hate. Captain Carlson felt them coming from way down within—the words he hadn't used, the things he hadn't said—and he liked them in advance.

He was a solitary man. Each evening when his work was through, he walked over to Maizie's Place in the fishing port and had a glass of beer, sometimes two. Occasionally, about once a year, he went on terrific drunks, but never around home among the people that he knew. He saved his energies, and he spent them, like a squall, on furious benders in Jacksonville or Miami, throwing his money to the girls like a wind blowing paper down a street, busting up the furniture in cheap saloons like a tornado wrecking shanties, but never picking fights. He knew his strength. He could take an ordinary man like Louie Swenson and kill him with his hands. He made it a point never to strike with doubled fist; even in his angriest moments, he remembered that. He fancied that the village knew nothing of his terrible indulgences, and guarded his reputation carefully.

Like most strong men, he rarely talked about himself; it was a source of acute embarrassment to him when Louie prattled about things that happened on the boat.

The fishermen at Maizie's were merciless in their kidding. They had no finer sensibilities. Just because he had smashed Louie's car one time, on a bender—the fool had talked about it—they insisted that he thought he owned the man. "Next time it'll be Louie's wife," a seiner in his cups had said. Captain Carlson had slapped the man clear across the room. They even joked about his skill at handling sharks. "Louie says you won't never let him give a hand . . . What you gonna do when you hook that one he's always talkin' about—Old Leopard?"

"Kid stuff!" he had brushed them off. "De man's bug-eyed."

There had been that embarrassing occasion when he had slipped and fallen overboard. Not much of a dip; he had grabbed the gunwale and climbed right out again, although he could not swim a stroke. Louie had to talk. The bag of wind.

Maizie's had shaken with laughter as the fishermen had whooped and slapped their thighs. "Louie says you popped out so fast you didn't even get wet. What was the matter, Charlie? Afraid you'd make shark bait?"

Captain Carlson had smiled weakly.

"All in de day's work," he had said.

But the frightening incident had been the worst of all his experiences with Louie. It reminded him too much of what had happened to the *Midget,* came too close to exposing his Achilles' heel. He was deathly afraid of the water.

He flexed his arms, took in a chest of air, and quietly began.

Slowly, methodically and thoroughly, he cursed the man. Louie had the effrontery to stare straight at him. He put his sheath knife on the cabin top and walked over to the mate.

"You'd like to take dat cleaver," he said, "an' chop me wid it. I know. Pick it up an' try. You yust ain't got de guts. Louie," he said, "you ain't no good," and slapped the man across the face. "You're yaller. I've looked out fer you; I've babied you; I've stood your infernal talkin' all I'm gonna. Go getcha a job at de cannery—wid de women," he said contemptuously.

Grabbing the shirt under the mate's throat, he shook him like a shark tossing a mackerel.

"Who de captain on dis boat?" he snarled.

Louie wilted like a captured shark. Captain Carlson, indeed, was greatly tempted to strike him on the nose—he was so offensively in his grasp, so submissive and resigned—but the mate gasped, "You are, Charlie."

Captain Carlson shook him again savagely, so that the ragged cap fell off, while the squall came edging over, peering, hiding the eastward flag in rain, definitely now on the circuiteous advance which could take its center past the *Orion,* or as easily roar down upon it. The wind was blowing strongly now toward the cloud.

"Who?" demanded the captain.

"Mister Carlson, I mean," Louie admitted.

It was a refreshing victory.

THE *Orion* shuddered, and the wind from the east died away. All was calm, and still, and peaceful—and a few small raindrops fell on deck in innocence. She shook again, compellingly, and her bow swung slightly over as if pulled by an unusual force from below. Captain Carlson did not turn. He wanted to make sure. He released the mate and said, "Go on, pick up de cleaver. I let you. Go get de knife," he pointed at it. "I fight you wid my bare hands."

The mate looked down at the *Orion's* deck. It seemed to move perceptibly to the south. The main chain tightened with a powerful pull.

"Go on an' say it. We gotta big sark hooked up dar ahead," Captain Carlson taunted. "What's de matter? Cat got your tongue? Let's hear it. 'Whooiee!' " he mimicked. " 'Man dear, whatta shark! Betcha it weigh two t'ousand pounds. Betcha we got Old Leopard.' Say it."

Louie shook his head.

"I don't talk so much no more," he said, "Captain Carlson. Sorry dat it boddered you."

"Get back on de job," Carlson ordered.

Strange, there wasn't too much satisfaction when the man silently obeyed. He turned, all business now, back to the bow— a little shaky, sure, with the aftermath of anger, but supremely sure that he was right. As though she had waited for him to end the scene, the *Orion* shook impatiently again, and earnestly went back to work. Slowly the great chain came up and with it, rolling back and off, a huge yellow shape, straining against the lead chain. Man-sized. A real shark at last. Twelve—maybe fifteen—feet of leopard shark, the first real shark of the whole month, Captain Carlson told himself, regarding it expectantly as the *Orion* brought it closer and closer to the gunwale, and the squall closed in.

Just as Captain Carlson seized the chain, preparing for a tentative test of strength with the giant shark—feeling it out, figuring the strategy he would have to use to exhaust the creature—the squall came charging down on them, supremely sure and boisterously bold. A cold gust of wind, great raindrops and a scattering of hail pelted the deck. The Gulf Stream turned to raging, savage chop; and the squall seized the *Orion* jubilantly, raised her up and smashed her down again in a beamside assault of wind and sea. The first attack was swift and terrible. It knocked Captain Carlson down, pushed the shark boat forward on the main chain, bringing the leopard shark amidships, and left the *Orion* reeling.

He jumped to his feet. Louie was missing. Rubbing skinned hands along his dungarees, the captain lumbered astern, his yellow apron flapping. The mate was overside, clinging to the main chain.

"Overboard yourself," he said, with both hands upon his hips. "How *you* like it, huh?" It was a moment he had envisioned many times. "I oughta leave you, yes I should. You are a careless fool," he said, looking for a rope. Another vicious gust of wind struck the *Orion*. "Get on back in here," Captain Carlson roared. "Dis time we gotta go."

Louie went dripping down into the sea, and up again, like a drowning doll, while the *Orion* lurched up a little way on a strong swell, but sickeningly stopped while the water climbed her gunwale and lapped over it.

"You hear me, Louie!" Captain Carlson shouted. "Don't waste no time."

Louie looked up from the indigo-blue Gulf Stream, pale as death. He mutely held up his left hand. Impaled through the palm and extending through the back was a shark hook. A length of chain dangled from it, one of the legs of the centipede. The mate had been about to bait the hook when the first gust of wind had thrown the *Orion* ahead; as it lurched forward he had hooked himself and had been pulled overboard like shark bait by the receding main chain. The enormity of the situation took a moment to penetrate Captain Carlson's mind. He cursed. Of all times for an accident, Louie, of course, would choose the very worst.

"Cut the hook out!" he shouted. "We gotta let de main chain go! Remember what happened to de *Midget,*" but Louie obviously had no knife, and in just a moment it was apparent, too, that no human power could release the *Orion* from the great iron chain that bound her.

Captain Carlson was to discover that there are more terrible opponents in this world than squalls and sharks.

A cloud soon passes and is gone, leaving a little scud to vanish, too. No shark lives which cannot be mastered by some man; but the things that master men in moments of crisis are the most awesome things on earth. They are not like clouds, having forms you can see, or like sharks, with teeth that bite and tails that flail. They float and drift through every human soul, or dash in fury, invisible and incalculable. There is no mercy in them.

Such a squall of the soul seized Captain Carlson. He had felt the little winds of fear before, but nothing like this irresistible desire to flee and survive which had him now as the squall struck with full force and the *Orion* staggered drunkenly.

A wall of water came sweeping across deck, sending dead sharks sprawling. He was alone, so terribly alone; himself against the silence of eternity. When the *Orion* came down, and the chain should have been slack, he did a shameful thing—he pulled on the release lever with all his strength, but the force of the wind and the straining of the leopard shark held the cable taut. There was no freeing it. The great chain held the *Orion* securely down for the kill.

Sheets of rain came streaming in almost solid mass. Water, how he hated it—and feared it, too. A licking blue wall headed for the *Orion;* in desperation he slammed her into gear, plunged the engine lever "full speed ahead," and up she climbed, a loyal, battling creature, trusting him. The links of main chain began moving through the roller, slower, slower, till they stopped, with the full force of the ship bearing on them as she did her best to break them. She strained like a living thing, but slowly her bow went down; the giant sea crunched down on her like a club on the nose of a shark, her propeller raced madly for an instant, and the force of the wave smashed her engine hatch and drowned the diesel.

Captain Carlson had always loved the silent beauty of clouds and the quietude of stars. But the *Orion* without her beating heart was terrible. If Louie had only yelled for help, perhaps he might not have done the futile, foolish little act which was his real undoing.

It was such an inconsequential, thoughtless deed of panic. Louie Swenson's cleaver lay in the scuppers at Captain Carlson's feet. No sane man would have done it. Despite the fact that every ounce of his strength had been insufficient to budge the release lever and force the main chain off the roller, despite how he had seen the *Orion* with her great strength die in the attempt to break it, he seived the cleaver and ridiculously tried to chop the chain in two.

EVERYBODY knows today how Captain Carlson, despite the fact he could not swim, rescued Louie Swenson in the storm. They know because he often sits in Maizie's place over a beer and painstakingly relates with detail how he pulled himself hand over hand down the main chain, past the leader where the leopard shark was straining, to cut the hook from Louie's hand and help him.

Somehow Captain Carlson always manages to imply that the ship would not have been in danger had it not been for the accident.

"Me an' him was buddies," he says with dignity. "Nuttin' else to do."

When he took over the new *Sea Tiger,* he gave Louie the highest recommendations as captain of the *Orion.* It puzzled Mister Hobbs somewhat.

"Frankly," the manager said, "you and Louie form the most efficient team we have. Confidentially, we hate to break it up. In fact, we had just about decided that Louie was too careless and too garrulous for a position of authority—"

"Belief me," Captain Carlson had been deadly serious, "dar's times when dat man don't open his mout' for nuttin'. You got him wrong."

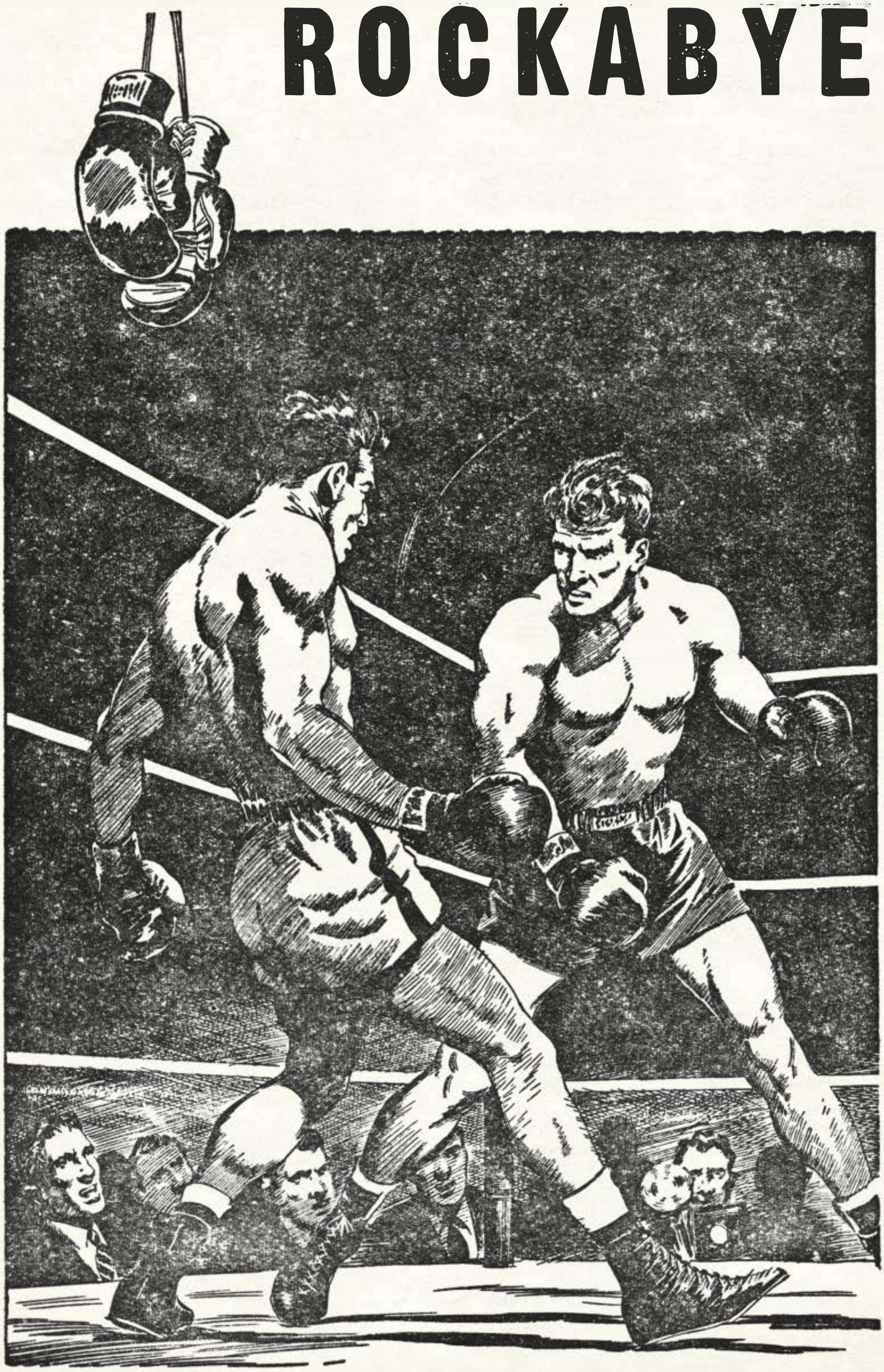
Talk was an anodyne. There were moments when the sound of the human voice, just the presence of a soul nearby, even Louie Swenson, was the most comforting thing on earth. So long as he lived, Captain Carlson would never forget that moment when he had found himself hacking so foolishly at the chain —completely, entirely, ridiculously alone. There had not been the faintest, slightest hope in his mind that he would live, but facing death he had sought companionship. There is no need to paint his action as a noble thing; it was as simple as the brightness of a day when a storm has passed. He had just felt it better to die with Louie than without him; that emotion alone had led him down the chain before the squall moved on.

For clouds are peculiar things. They march in glory through the sea of air; without them there would be no life upon the earth. They have about them the magical power of being able to do as they please, so if it was the whim of one to drown the *Midget* and the pleasure of another to let the *Orion* go free, the reason is beyond our knowing.

Certainly the event changed Captain Carlson. Even while they pumped out the *Orion* on the quieting sea, he had been most considerate of the mate, offering to wrap his wounded hand for him.

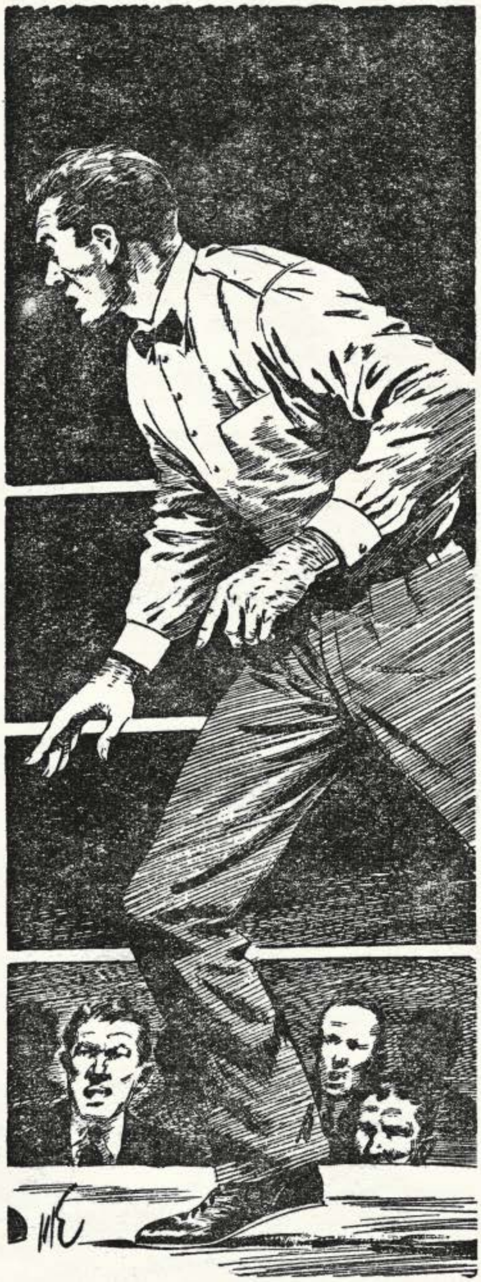
(Continued on page 128)

ROCKABYE



BABY

By WILLIAM HEUMAN



ROCKY KERRIGAN, who at thirty-four should have known better, sat on the porch, fumbling with the little Golden Gloves watch charm he'd received so many years ago. He'd carried the tiny emblem in his pocket for seventeen years, and it was supposed to have brought luck. It had—all bad.

Mosquitoes were buzzing around outside the screens, and occasionally a big moth or night bug slammed up against the screening over near the lighted floor lamp. Frogs honked along the shore of the lake, and far across the two-mile expanse of water, Rocky could see the headlights of cars dipping down through Crowley's Notch, swinging along the main highway. There was nothing else to see here. This was Maxie Greenbaum's training camp in the Poconos.

Joe DeKalb, the manager, was talking in that same monotonous voice, repetition upon repetition, beating around the bush, never coming quite out with it, but leaving little doubt in Rocky's mind as to what he was ultimately arriving at. It was the "fix."

"Even if you was to beat the guy," DeKalb laughed, "where do you stand, kid? The champ don't want nothin' to do with you. He'll stall around till you fall over your beard goin' after him. An' every other guy in the division will duck you like you had the measles."

Rocky shifted his feet on the porch railing and rubbed the little watch charm between the palms of his hands. He was thinking that he didn't like the way DeKalb laughed, even though DeKalb had a right to laugh. The match with young Lennie Scarone had been a joke to begin with. Scarone was twenty-three, and he'd slaughtered everything in sight. He

As Rocky's right connected, there was a sharp spat like the sound of a baseball meeting a bat.

needed a warm-up for his tilt with the champ, and someone had gotten the happy idea of dragging Rocky Kerrigan, the trial horse, out of retirement.

Twelve months before, after breaking his left hand, he'd thought he was through with the ring forever. He'd been plagued with injuries and illnesses all during his fighting career, and although once he'd been ranked as a leading middleweight, he'd never come close to a title match.

He'd made some money—enough to send young Jimmie to a good prep school—and that was something. Not every guy from the East Side was able to send his kid to the Westbrook School for Boys.

"So we'll look at it this way," DeKalb was saying. Joe was a sawed-off man with a flattened nose and small, pale blue eyes. He'd been in vaudeville in the old days, and the boys along Forty-ninth Street were saying that he should have stood in vaudeville with the kind of fighters he'd had in his stable. He'd handled Rocky the final two years of Rocky's career, when he'd been over the hill. "You win this fight," DeKalb said, "and you make money."

"That's tough," Rocky murmured.

DeKalb grinned. "You lose, kid," he finished, "an' maybe you make it double. Get what I mean?"

"I got it two weeks ago," Rocky said.

DeKalb's grin broadened. "Smart boy," he said. "Now you undertsand this ain't like fixin' a fight, Rocky."

"I understand," Rocky said.

"Maybe eight—ten years ago," DeKalb told him, "you could have danced rings around this kid. Now we got to be smart about it. Chicago Phil Healy is comin' down tomorrow night, Rocky. He wants to have a little talk."

ROCKY had known for a long time that Chicago Phil, the gambler, would be coming down for a talk. DeKalb had mentioned Healy's name before in a roundabout way, which meant that Healy was in on the deal, and that it was big.

"It's like this," DeKalb went on. "Scarone will be seven to three at ringside, an' no takers, but nobody figures he can knock you out in ten rounds."

"He won't," Rocky said. Nobody ever had in seventeen years of fighting, and he was proud of that. He had a hard jaw; he'd broken about everything but the jaw and he had never quit. In the later years he'd started to get cute, too, which made it all the more difficult for them to tag him.

His hands were brittle. He didn't remember how many times he'd finished fights with one hand completely out of commission, bluffing with it, swinging wildly with it, deliberately missing, knowing that he would faint if he ever landed a punch with that bag full of broken bones.

"If Scarone should happen to win, say in two or three rounds," DeKalb said, "the guy in on the know would stand to clean up."

Rocky Kerrigan had known that was going to be the proposition, too, and during the early hours of the night, sitting on this porch, listening to the mosquitoes and crickets, watching the car lights across the lake, he'd thought about it, knowing that he was a dog even to keep such thoughts in his mind. But he didn't chase them away.

He was thinking, *How many years does a man have to wait for a break?* He'd never made a real clean-up in the ring; he'd never gotten the big purses other fighters had pulled down. He'd had to save and scrimp; he'd had innumerable doctors' bills, bone specialists' bills which came very high; and now putting the kid through the prep school, getting him ready for college, was costing him plenty too, and there wasn't any coming in.

The purse from the Scarone fight might reach six or seven thousand. The odds would be four or five to one that Scarone wouldn't knock him out. If he had that six thousand on Scarone the night of the fight . . .

"It's not like a fix," Joe DeKalb said, "because this guy is supposed to take you anyway, kid. We got the match because it's a little gravy. You unnerstand?"

"I unnerstand," Rocky said gravely.

"So when Chicago Phil comes tomorrow night," DeKalb advised, "you be nice to him. Phil is able to do you a big favor."

"What am I doing for him," Rocky asked, "knifing him in the back?"

"Ha—ha," DeKalb laughed.

Rocky Kerrigan didn't laugh. You don't laugh when you're going into the tank for the first time. He said, "I think I'll take off tomorrow, Joe, and run up to see the kid. I feel stale."

"Sure—sure," DeKalb nodded. "You gotta stay in shape, Rocky."

A rocking chair was creaking at the other end of the porch, but the gray-haired man sitting there didn't hear anything they said even though he was less than a dozen feet away. Dummy Smith, the trainer, had taken too many punches around the ears in his day, and his hearing was gone. Dummy didn't miss much with his eyes though, and Rocky was convinced the deaf man knew what was going on in this camp.

"I'll take a run into the city in the mornin'," DeKalb said. "These damned bugs are drivin' me nuts."

Rocky watched him go into the house, and a few moments later he could hear the little man mixing himself a drink. He sat there in his chair, looking across the darkened lake, and then he glanced in Dummy Smith's direction. The deaf man stopped rocking to look at him for a moment, and then he started to rock again.

The light was not good on the porch, and Rocky couldn't see what was in Dummy Smith's eyes. He was glad that he couldn't. Smith had been a fourth-rater all of his life, but an honest fourth-rater.

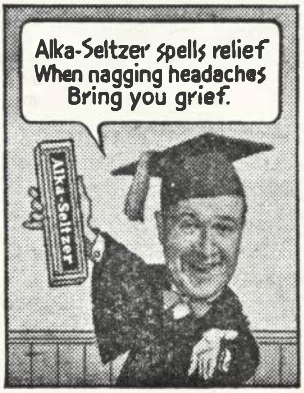
Rocky Kerrigan scowled. He slapped at a mosquito which had gotten inside the screening, and then he got up and went into the house. He could still hear Dummy Smith rocking as he went up the stairs to his room. He tried to console himself with the thought that it was still five days before the fight, and he hadn't committed himself as yet.

Several times he'd found himself wondering how he would make out against the tough Scarone. The middleweight contender was supposed to be a windmill in the ring, and he hit hard, too. He was no novice in the ring, and he had ten years less to carry with him when he came from his corner. He didn't have to worry about smashing brittle bones in his hands every time he threw a punch. Weighing the matter carefully, Rocky Kerrigan had to concede that his chances of taking Scarone were very slim indeed. The smart man would consider other possibilities.

Far into the night Rocky could hear the chair creaking. When he got up in the morning he did not feel rested and he was glad that he wasn't doing any training today. He'd worked hard for the fight because he'd always worked hard for a fight. For his age he was in good shape.

It was a two hour ride up to the school, and Rocky went up alone, leaving Dummy Smith in charge of the camp. This was to be a surprise visit; usually he went up about twice a month to see Jimmy, and he'd been up only a week before. The kid would be surprised and delighted. Rocky grinned as he drove the little coupe up the wide, tree-lined street toward the administration building. He always felt good when he came in here; he felt as if he'd accomplished something,

Joe Kelly of the Quiz Kids
N·B·C
SUNDAY AFTERNOON



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and Margie, had she lived, would have been proud. Margie had died when Jimmy was three. The kid was fourteen now, and he was crazy about the school, crazy about athletics.

Rocky Kerrigan listened to him talk as they sat together in the big party room. Rocky had been here in the winter when they had a huge fire in the fireplace, and there had been other parents present. He'd felt uncomfortable because this wasn't his crowd. He hadn't told anyone that he was Kerrigan, the middleweight fighter; he looked old for a fighter, and they didn't suspect. Jimmy was just another boy at Westbrook—a rather tall boy for his age, gangling, sandy-haired, nice blue eyes. He'd start putting on weight pretty soon. He'd shot up overnight and his frame hadn't filled out.

"You'll have to stay for the meet this afternoon, Dad," he urged. "We're running against Coe Academy and Newton."

"Meet?" Rocky asked.

"Cross-country," Jimmy explained. "I'm on the cross-country team, Dad. Everybody in the school has to go out for a sport."

"Oh," Rocky said. He remembered Jimmy writing about that in one of his recent letters. The kid had been excited about it. "Sure I'll stay," Rocky said. "We'll run the legs off this Coe and Newton bunch."

HE SAT in the little wooden bleachers. It was September now, the weather still very warm. There weren't many spectators, and the cross-country run was not much to watch. You sat there and you saw a swarm of boys suddenly dash across a field, heading for the woods on the other side. There were tall boys with long legs and short, chunky boys who ran grimly, doggedly, shoulders hunched. There were dark-haired boys and light-haired boys and red-headed boys, and they all wore track suits with big numbers on them.

Rocky had a hard time finding the kid at first, and then he spotted him with Number 87 on his shirt. He was running out on the edge of the pack, and he'd said that he didn't expect to do too well this meet. He was the new boy on the squad, one of the youngest. This kind of running was new to him and he wasn't trained for it as yet. Most of the other kids had been running the event before.

"Don't expect too much, Dad," Jimmy had laughed before he headed for the gymnasium to get into uniform. "I don't expect to win this one, but I'll be trying every minute."

Rocky said, "O.K.," carelessly. He grinned and slapped the boy's shoulder as he trotted off, and then as he started to walk toward the bleacher seats that remark hit him between the eyes: *I'll be trying every minute.*

Up in the seats Rocky sat there when the pack had disappeared into the woods. He looked across the big empty field. There were only about a dozen men and women in the stand beside himself, and some of the men started to pack their pipes or light up cigars and cigarettes, preparing themselves for the ten or fifteen minute wait until the kids reappeared on the other side of the field, near the football goal posts, and rounded the track to the finish line.

Rocky Kerrigan sat there, looking at the opening in the woods through which the kids were supposed to come. He saw his own boy fighting it out over hill and dale, fighting against handicaps, his body still undeveloped; his body not trained for this grueling run as were the bodies of the other kids in this race. When the other kids were still running smoothly, strongly, he would start to feel it where it hurt, but he'd be trying.

For what, Rocky thought. *Maybe for a little medal they give to the winner; for a blue letter to sew on a white sweater, worth probably twenty-five cents!*

That was what kids fought for; that was what they tore out their hearts for, and Rocky Kerrigan was thinking how very, very lucky they were; how good that was! His own shame hit him like a right swing to the stomach.

They started to come out of the woods after awhile—two tall boys in the lead, far in the lead, running easily, strongly, a Westbrook boy and a Coe boy. They swung out onto the track and they battled it out for the lead. The kids watching on the grass started to go slightly crazy. Everybody was watching the two leaders, but Rocky Kerrigan was watching that opening in the woods where other boys were coming out now—straggling out one at a time, in pairs, groups, the short boys still running doggedly like little bulldogs, the tall boys, loose-jointed, hair flopping, turning onto the track, coming down to the finish line.

Rocky Kerrigan waited for Number 87. He prayed for it to come through, but he didn't see it. The two leaders had passed the finish line, the Westbrook boy winning by five feet. Ten, fifteen, twenty boys had come out of the woods, and now three more, but still no 87.

Rocky was standing up, hands clenched at his sides. There were no more. They were all out of the woods now, and the last kid had crossed the line. Rocky was the only spectator still in the bleacher seats; the other parents were down with their kids, happy, smiling. Rocky watched that opening. The Westbrook coach was looking that way too, now, a little anxiously.

Then Number 87 came out of the woods. He was wobbling as he ran; he weaved from side to side and his head was jerking. It was only when he came onto the track that Rocky saw the blood—on his scraped knees and on his elbows. He'd taken a bad fall somewhere—far in the rear where nobody had seen him, but he'd gotten up again and he was coming to the finish line.

One of the boys spotted him when he was two hundred yards away. He was running from side to side on the track as if he couldn't see the path clearly. There had been a lot of noise down at the finish line, but it died down. Everybody was watching him come in. His coach had started out as if to help him, but he stopped and waited now. The kid was going to finish on his own power.

They started to cheer then—all the kids, the kids from Coe and the kids from Newton. They gave him the biggest hand of the afternoon—bigger than they'd given to the winner.

Rocky Kerrigan stood there, hot tears in his eyes. The kid stumbled when he was a dozen yards from the finish line, running between yelling lines of boys who were cheering him on. He got across the line and the Westbrook coach caught him as he fell.

CHICAGO Phil Healy was a small man, a dapper man. He was all business and he had little time for amenities of life. He said, "I'll give it to you on the line, Rocky. I think we'll get along better if we know what we're talking about."

Joe DeKalb had been beating around the bush again as they sat on the porch with the mosquitoes humming and Dummy Smith's chair creaking as he rocked back and forth.

"I want a Scarone win," Chicago Phil said evenly, "under three rounds. In renumeration I will advance the six grand you will get for this fight and place it on Scarone at three to one odds for a quick knockout. I will also lay out five grand of my own money at the same odds, the proceeds to go to you after the fight. Follow me, Rocky?"

"You got any kids, Healy?" Rocky asked him.

"Two," Chicago Phil said.

"Ever see a cross-country run?" Rocky wanted to know.

"Don't know as I ever did," Healy smiled.

Joe DeKalb was leaning forward, mouth open, looking at Rocky, looking at Chicago Phil Healy.

"I saw one yesterday," Rocky said. "There were forty-five runners in it. My kid finished last. He *finished*, Healy."

The gambler lighted a cigarette and looked out across the darkened lake. He said, "You don't want to play ball, Rocky?"

Rocky got up and stood by the door. He noticed that Dummy Smith's chair had stopped creaking, and he was thinking to himself, *How can the guy know what's going on. What's he listening for?*

"Scarone won't knock me out," Rocky said slowly, "not in three rounds, Healy, and not in three hundred rounds. That's a hot tip for you."

He went into the house and as he passed Dummy Smith's chair, the old-time fighter looked up at him and smiled.

IT WAS outdoors, the last big fight of the summer, in the ball park. It was cool coming down the aisle, the maroon and gray robe draped over his shoulders, his head encased in a towel. Joe DeKalb was following him, with Dummy Smith and two seconds. DeKalb was through talking, but he'd said plenty in the dressing room. He'd said, "How much is six grand after you pay me my cut, you take out your taxes, and you pay the trainin' expenses? How much is it?"

"Not too much," Rocky had admitted.

"So it's smart?" DeKalb wanted to know, "givin' Chicago Phil the cold eye?"

Rocky Kerrigan smiled. He said, "You have to be smart all the time in this world, Joe. You're smart."

DeKalb didn't argue any more. He said, "I'm your manager, kid, but I'm no sucker. I got my dough ridin' on Scarone at seven to three odds."

"Don't bet on fights," Rocky said.

Lennie Scarone was in the other corner, dancing around, a white body, perfectly proportioned for speed and for mayhem. He had the speed in his legs and he had the hitting power in the slope of his shoulders. He came over and he said, "Good luck, Rocky. I wish I could have gotten at you when you were in your prime."

"I'm in my prime tonight," Rocky said. "Don't be ashamed to hit an old man, Lennie."

Lennie Scarone wasn't. He slapped Rocky to the floor after thirty seconds of fighting, and Rocky Kerrigan didn't know what had hit him—a left, a right, or Scarone's foot. He felt as if he'd been run over by a Mack truck.

Scarone was usually geared to go fifteen rounds, and tonight it was only for ten so he opened up early. He came out of his corner, a veritable mass of gloves.

Rocky blocked a left; he ducked a right, and then he went down, and the clock said thirty seconds. It said thirty-eight when he got up patiently and held his gloves for Referee Tommy Hackett to wipe.

He was bleeding a little from the mouth, but it was not bad. The gloves came at him again—wine-colored, moving like horizontal pistons. Rocky held his ground, right fist cocked. When he spotted a tiny opening between those rapidly whirling gloves, he threw the right hand.

It was leading with the right which surprised Scarone more than anything else. The right landed solidly against his jaw and he staggered back into the ropes, mouth open, the red rubbed mouthpiece dropping to the floor and bouncing around crazily.

Rocky Kerrigan walked after him, the right hand cocked again, but he didn't use it. Scarone, young, vigorous, was in good shape and he'd recovered rapidly. Rocky could see that in the kid's dark eyes as he went on his bicycle and sped around the ring.

Rocky threw lefts, lefts and more lefts, and once before the round ended he nearly dropped Scarone with a left hook to the chin. It was his round by a wide margin, and the crowd gave him an ovation.

He came back to his corner, still holding the right hand against his chest, and then he let it drop. Dummy Smith looked at him and shook his head. One of the seconds, a fat-faced man by the name of Blimp McNeil whispered, "It's broke, ain't it, Rocky? I could hear it crack out there."

Rocky didn't say anything. He sat on the stool, looking across the ring. Scarone's handlers were watching him more than they were watching Lennie Scarone. They were talking excitedly.

Rocky took a drink of water and spat it out. He held up his face and let Dummy Smith work on the cut on his mouth. A little adrenalin, a few daubs with cotton. Then the warning horn sounded.

Scarone was a little cautious, knowing that Rocky could hit now. He watched the right hand and he kept his distance, still moving very rapidly, working a nice left hand to Rocky's head. Eight seconds before the bell rang, ending the round, he threw his right, dropping Rocky to his knees.

Rocky looked up at the clock and waited for the bell to ring. He got up then and walked to his corner. He hadn't used the right hand at all that round.

He'd feinted with it; he'd thrown a wild right which was a foot short of the mark.

Blimp McNeil said, "How do you feel, kid?"

"I'll take him the next round," Rocky said.

McNeil gulped. He said weakly, "Sure —sure, Rocky."

Across the ring Lennie Scarone was smiling, talking with his handlers. Dummy Smith worked on the mouth cut which had opened again. He looked into Rocky's eyes and he smiled at what he saw there. He squeezed Rocky's shoulder warmly just before the warning horn sounded.

Rocky came out of the corner, left hand thrust forward, the right cocked as before. He jabbed a few times with the left and he watched Lennie Scarone's eyes. They followed the left; he kept watching the left, circling, jabbing with his own left, ready to dart in with a flurry of punches.

Rocky blocked a left hook to the body. He went under a short right and he dug his left in Scarone's midsection. He started a right and then he drew it back, and he was waiting for Scarone's charge. Lennie fought like that. He came in very swiftly with a fusillade of punches, and when he had his man going he didn't stop hitting.

Carefully, Rocky circled, jabbing with the left, and then Scarone feinted with his own left, and drove in with a left hook to the body. For a fraction of a second his jaw was exposed.

Rocky leaned back, letting that left hook slide by, and then he threw his right for the jaw. He put every ounce of strength behind it and he followed through.

There was a sharp spat like the sound of a baseball meeting a bat. Lennie Scarone seemed to come apart. He went down awkwardly like a marionette collapsing when the strings are released.

Rocky Kerrigan walked to the far corner, looking at his right hand numbly. He stood in the corner, holding the hand against his chest, and he watched Tommy Hackett start his count.

Scarone lay on his face, one glove under him, the other extended. He seemed to be twitching as he lay there. Then for the first time Rocky heard the noise. He looked into the blackness beyond the lights—and he saw a kid coming out of the woods, a kid who weaved as he ran, and who had blood on his knees and elbows.

Lennie Scarone had both knees drawn up, but his face was still on the canvas floor when Tommy Hackett reached "ten." It was a curious position. He couldn't get up any higher.

Suddenly the ring was full of people. Blimp McNeil was pounding Rocky's back, howling, Dummy Smith was there with the robe and the towel for his head. McNeil yelled in Rocky's ear, "I thought that right was broken, kid."

Rocky smiled. "It wasn't," he said. "But it is now."

HE WAS in the dressing room when Chicago Phil Healy came in. The little gambler was smoking a cigar, smiling complacently. Joe DeKalb said sourly, "Some guys can smile about the damndest things. You lost a pile out there tonight, Healy."

"I made a pile," Healy chuckled. "I had a barrel full of dough on Rocky at seven to three odds. Played a hunch, after our little talk the other day." He turned to Rocky. "And I had five grand riding for you, kid," he added carelessly.

Rocky Kerrigan stared at him. He said weakly, "I don't get it, Healy."

"The guy's nuts," DeKalb mumbled. "Every smart operator on the street had his dough on Scarone."

"Maybe so," Phil Healy said. "Myself, I like to go for a long shot every once in a while."

Rocky Kerrigan looked down at the broken hand which meant the end of his fighting career. He said, "Much obliged, Healy. I can use the money."

"Forget it," Healy said. "You paid off plenty for me tonight." He chewed on his cigar for a moment. "Say hello to that boy, Rocky."

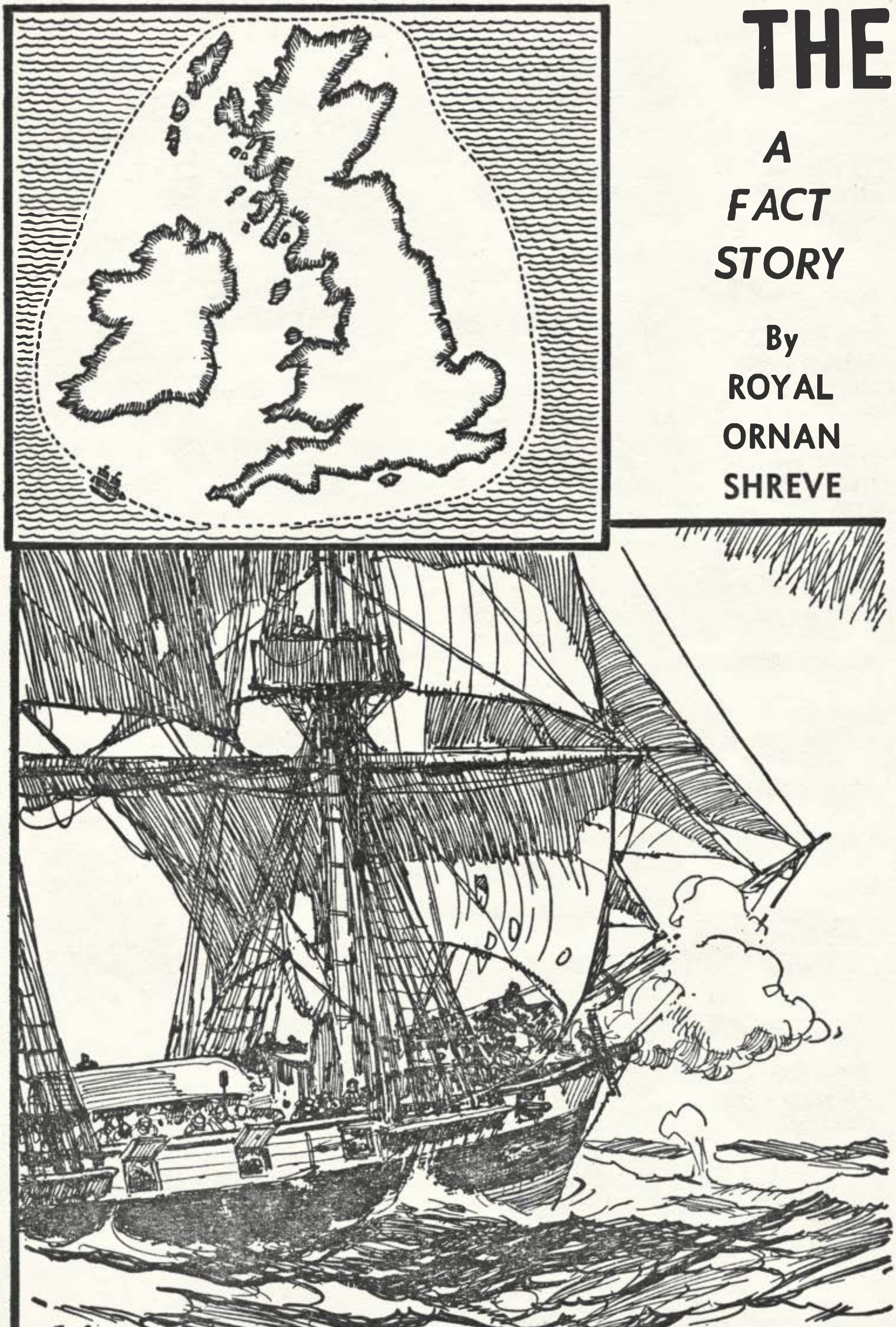
"Always do," Rocky Kerrigan said. "My regards to yours."

When Healy went out he lay back on the rubbing table and looked up at the ceiling. He knew how it felt to come out of the woods.

THE

A FACT STORY

By
ROYAL
ORNAN
SHREVE

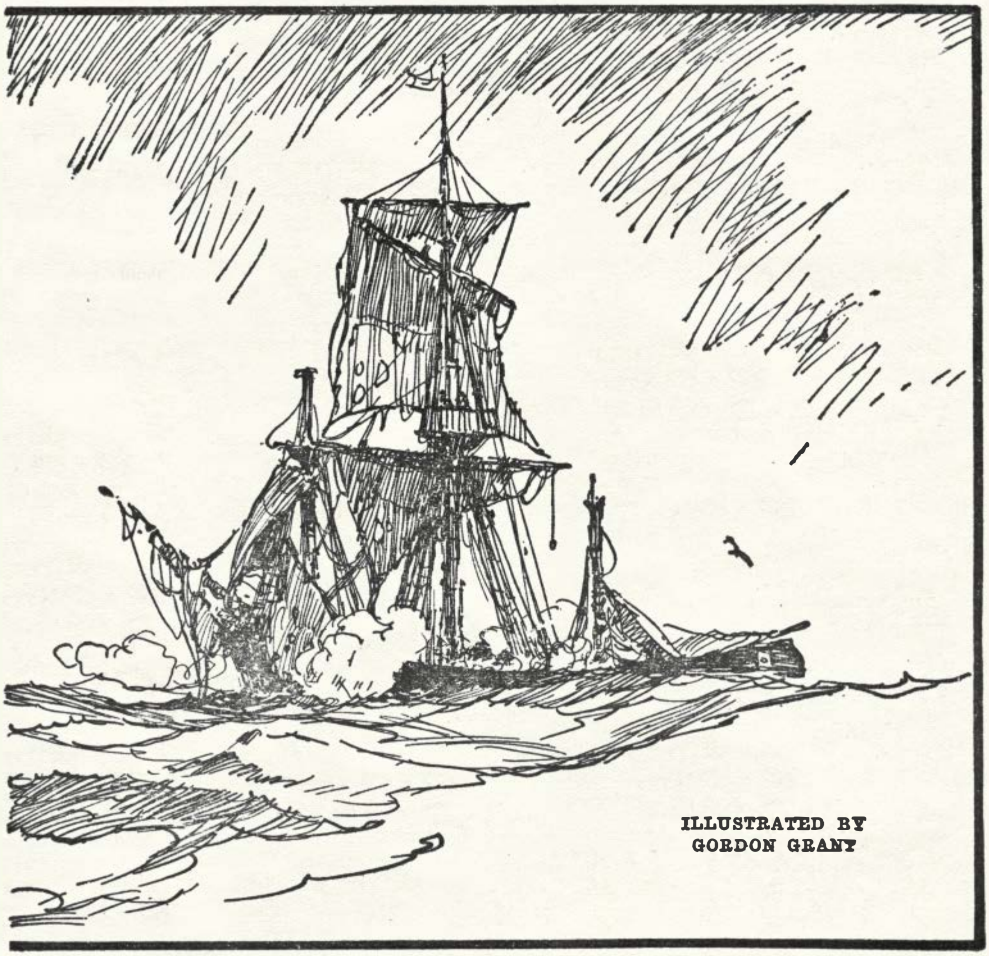


The next quarter hour witnessed a fight the equal of any in that war . . .

YANKEE BLOCKADE OF BRITAIN

ONE morning in early September of 1814, when the second war between the United States and England was entering upon its third year, merchants and ship-owners seeking to insure their ventures with Lloyd's of London, found posted upon the bulletin board of that famed organization a paper on which the word *PROCLAMATION,* in bold letters, demanded attention.

Not a proclamation of His Majesty's Government—it was in florid script instead of the well-known type of the Royal Printer—but would-be insurers who paused to screw the then fashionable monocles into their eyes promptly dis-



. . . Broadsides were exchanged as rapidly as the guns could be served.

covered that it followed closely official form and the pompous official verbiage. Dated August 27, 1814, it read:

> By Thomas Boyle, Esquire, Commander of the private armed brig *Chasseur,* etc., etc.
>
> PROCLAMATION.
>
> Whereas it has become customary with the Admirals of Great Britain, commanding small forces on the coast of the United States . . . to declare all the coast of the said United States in a state of strict and rigorous blockade, without possessing power to justify such declaration, or stationing an adequate force to maintain said blockade;
>
> I do therefore, by virtue of the power and authority in me vested (possessing sufficient force) declare all Ports, Harbors, Bays, Creeks, Rivers, Inlets, Outlets, Islands and Sea Coasts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in a state of strict and rigorous blockade.
>
> And I do further declare that I consider the force under my command adequate to maintain strictly, rigorously and effectively the said blockade.
>
> And that no person may plead ignorance of this my proclamation, I have ordered the same made public in England.
>
> Given under my hand on board the *Chasseur* that day and date as above.
>
> THOMAS BOYLE.
> (By command of the Commanding Officer.)
> J. J. Stansbury,
> Secretary.

OPINION of perusers differed. "Blasted impudence," said some. Of course the blockade of the United States was not airtight; if it were the *Chasseur* would not be in the Narrow Seas. But if two hundred of His Majesty's ships could not maintain a rigorous blockade of the American coast, how could this Yankee skipper expect his one little ship to blockade the United Kingdom? His so-called "Proclamation" was an example of the wild exaggeration that passed for humor in the former colonies. But a few sober-minded individuals shook their heads. Why then had Lloyd's complied with his order to make the damned thing public in England? Better inquire inside before dismissing it as a joke.

Inquiry promptly brought information that squelched any disposition to mirth. The proclamation had been delivered by the captain of a British merchantman that morning arrived in London, Captain Boyle's *nineteenth* prize in little more than as many days—the *Chasseur* had run the blockade off New York on the twenty-eighth of July. He had made a cartel of this nineteenth to relieve him of his prisoners, more than two hundred in number, whom he could no longer accommodate. This information, vouched for by the skipper of the prize, had been contained in a letter addressed to Lloyd's, in which the proclamation was enclosed with the request that it be made public and the promise of another cartel and more prisoners within a reasonable period. Under such circumstances rates for marine insurance could not remain at present levels. The committee was in session.

That was a shock to the well-known "pocket-book" nerve. It roused both interest and anger. Was it possible that Lloyd's expected this bumptious Yankee to make good his threat?

No, no. Of course not. One swallow did not make a summer and one Yankee privateer could hardly maintain a blockade of the United Kingdom. But unfortunately the *Chasseur* was not the only Yankee privateer loose in the Narrow Seas, and nineteen prizes taken by one in less than a month was something to think about.

What was the British Navy doing that these audacious Yankees dared to invade Britain's home waters?

The best it could, under the circumstances. Yankee ships were faster than the King's ships. Yankee skippers possessed the ability to make them do weird tricks. And this Captain Boyle was especially tricky. Clients were not familiar with his past record? Well, Lloyd's were—to their sorrow—and so was the Admiralty.

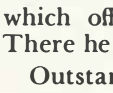
In truth, about all Lloyd's and the Admiralty knew of Thomas Boyle was that he was rated about the best privateersman out of Baltimore, that "nest of pirates" that sent to sea more and better privateers than any other port. Fellow Baltimorians seem to have been not much better informed concerning his career previous to his appearance in that city in 1794. From the few books on Baltimore, two or three on the privateersmen of 1812 and *Niles' Register,* the weekly news magazine published in that city which kept an amazingly accurate record of the activities of the private Navy, we glean the following.

He was an Irishman who hailed from Marblehead, Massachusetts, but whether a native of that town or of the Emerald Isle is uncertain. That he took to the sea as a lad and figuratively cut his teeth on a sextant we may assume to be true: the busy ports of New England all but robbed cradles to man their ships. Probably true also is the tradition that he was given command of a ship when only *sixteen:* it is repeated by several authorities with the qualifying phrase, "it is said."

He was probably in his early twenties when he appeared in Baltimore, attracted by the fact that it was a boom town where merchants, once content to supply planters of the neighboring countryside, had suddenly taken to building ships for which officers and crews were needed. There he "found a job and a wife."

Outstanding for seamanship even among the able captains who then commanded America's merchant ships, he had also managed somehow to acquire education above average. An old chronicler describes him as "almost a learned man," possessed of "courage plus discretion and the art of imposing discipline and inspiring affection at the same time."

A positive distinction, that art, for lacking a populace bred to the sea, Baltimore's swelling fleet was manned by "a motley set of all nations, scraped together from the lowest dens of wretchedness and vice"—ruled, on most ships, by the ham-like fists of captain and mates.



WHEN, mid-summer of 1812, the United States declared war against England, Baltimore owners transformed their ships into privateers with enthusiasm exceeding that of any other American port. Boyle was given command of the *Comet,* a top-sail schooner of 187 tons, fourteen guns and speed to justfiy her name, with a motley crew of one hundred and ten men whom he inspired to "acts of daring and desperation." His first cruise, a brief one, netted four prizes, worth half a million dollars.

A few days before Christmas he sailed on his second cruise, which Lloyd's and the British Admiralty had good cause to remember, for he then first displayed the initiative and audacity that won the grudging respect of both. Instead of dogging the heavily guarded British convoys that followed the Gulf Stream homeward from the West Indies, he laid his course for the South Atlantic where British merchantmen were fairly numerous and British warships few because the Admiralty had not guessed that Yankee privateers would invade such distant waters.

The ninth of January, 1813, found him cruising off Pernambuco, in the track of Europe-bound shipping. From the lookout in the fore-top came the long drawn cry: "Sail Hoooool!"

Welcome, that cry, after three monotonous weeks. It brought visions of prize-money to the crew, Captain Boyle from his cabin.

"Where away?" he shouted.

"Off the starboard bow. Four sail. Two ships and two brigs."

"English?"

"Can't make 'em out yet."

"We'll have a look," said Boyle.

The crew were sent to quarters, topsails shaken out. The helmsman put the wheel over. At full speed the *Comet* headed for the strangers.

"Ahoy the deck. The brigs are English, by their rig, and one ship. T'other ship looks like a man-of-war but I can't quite make her out."

"How armed?"

Practically all ships were armed then. The lookout reported that the brigs showed five guns on a side, the smaller ship seven. The supposed man-of-war showed ten, which rated her a large "sloop" or small frigate. Fifty-four guns to the *Comet's* fourteen. Long odds.

But the *Comet* had speed. Boyle could fight or not as he might choose. He held on, hoisted the "grid-iron" flag.

The warship responded by setting Portuguese colors. A ruse? False colors were often resorted to, even by warships, to gain temporary advantage. Boyle resolved to make certain by running down within hailing distance.

The man-of-war proved to be the Portuguese frigate *Libra.*

The three merchantmen?

English, the Portuguese captain admitted. For Lisbon with wheat. But he had orders to protect them and would do so.

Boyle drew off to consider a fine point of international law: the United States was not at war with Portugal.

That British ships in the South Atlantic should sail under Portuguese convoy was not surprising. Portugal was Britain's ancient ally. The French had invaded the Peninsula, seized Lisbon, compelled the Portuguese King to flee to Brazil, then a Portuguese colony. England had landed an army that was fighting against heavy odds to expel the invaders. But the three Britishers were fair prize. Boyle decided to have a go at them, leaving the question of Portuguese belligerency to the captain of the *Libra.*

He did not much fear the Portuguese. True she could throw a broadside more than twice as heavy as the *Comet's,* but her guns were of short range and the Portuguese Navy ranked at the foot of the class in gunnery, seamanship and the intestinal fortitude that wins naval battles. Neither had he much to fear from the guns of the Britishers, undermanned by untrained crews. The *Comet* had speed and part of her armament consisted of "long nines," the crews of which were well trained.

Nevertheless, Boyle faced a tough tactical problem. So long as the convoy kept close company, the Portuguese could prevent him manning out a prize —he dare not take the lightly-built *Comet* within range of the smashing power of those heavy guns. To cut out a prize he must scatter the convoy.

How? Keeping distance, he picked the dullest sailer, one of the brigs, went to work on her rigging with his long nine. Gradually she lost speed, fell behind.

Result: a tough problem for the Portuguese captain. If he turned back to succor her the nimble Yankee would be after the other two Britishers. He decided to abandon the cripple to her fate. Boyle ran in close, took her people out, put a prize crew aboard. And the Yankee prize crew not only made repairs in record time, but proceeded to get more speed out of the brig than her English crew had thought possible. Before nightfall she had faded away over the northern horizon, bound for Baltimore instead of Lisbon, where her cargo would have gone to feed a British army.

Meanwhile, Boyle had taken up the chase again. But the foe was wary now. The merchantmen kept close to the Portuguese which managed to keep between them and the Yankee, shielding them from the latter's deadly long guns. Darkness found Boyle still striving vainly to separate them.

Throughout the night a running fight continued. Dawn showed the enemy in sorry plight—broken rigging, riddled sails, smashed bulwarks. Boyle risked running in close enough to hail the Portuguese. In bad English a junior officer informed him that she had six men killed, more wounded, including the captain who had lost a leg; that both merchantmen had been hulled several times and were making water. Boyle proffered assistance which was declined. So, leaving the Portuguee to shepherd her battered charges, now worthless as prizes, back to Pernambuco, where they arrived in sinking condition, the *Comet* sailed on southward in search of other prey.

SHE found it a few days later —a large ship that showed English colors and fight but hauled down her flag after a brief experience of the privateer's speed and long guns. The prize proved to be the *Adelphi,* three hundred tons, out of Aberdeen, with a valuable cargo. With a Yankee crew aboard, she too headed for Baltimore.

A few days more and the cry "Sail ho!" again resounded from the fore-top. Boyle clapped on sail, gave chase. But when the stranger's hull came into view he discreetly took in canvas. She was a Britisher and a big one, but a "King's ship," the frigate *Surprisa,* to which the tiny *Comet* must give a wide berth.

But not too wide. Here was opportunity to teach a captain of the Royal Navy respect for Yankee ships and seamanship and Thomas Boyle was a willing instructor. He set the "grid-iron" flag and keeping the *Comet* at half speed, under only fore-and-aft sails, tempted the frigate to chase her. The British captain took the bait. But half speed for a Baltimore topsail schooner was better than the frigate's best—British warships were then as bluff-bowed as a canal boat and not much faster—"built by the mile and cut off in chunks," as a disgusted Englishman would presently describe them. For hours the chase continued, the privateer always just out of range of the frigate's bow-chasers whose crews wasted good gunpowder and bad language. Then, with the setting sun gilding them, Boyle shook out topsails, dipped his flag in mocking farewell, leaving another of His Majesty's captains to wonder how the damned Yankees did it.

Southward beyond Bahia the *Comet* cruised without sighting another English ship. Deciding that the Portuguese had spread the news of a Yankee privateer loose in the South Atlantic, he turned back. Past Pernambuco again, round the eastward bulge of South America, the *Comet* cruised without sighting a British sail. Even among the Lesser Antilles, where hunting should have been good, ill luck continued until the sixth of February, just four weeks after the encounter with the Portuguese.

At dawn of that day, off the southwest coast of the then Danish island of St. John, the lookout sighted two small brigs which he judged to be English. The *Comet* overhauled them easily. One surrendered promptly. Her people were taken out, a prize crew put aboard.

While this was being done a third sail lifted above the horizon, a sail that looked like a man-of-war. It was, the skipper of the captured brig admitted with patent satisfaction—His Majesty's sloop-of-war *Swaggerer,* guardian of a convoy out of Demerara for St. Thomas, of which the two brigs were part. The convoy had become scattered during the night; the sloop had turned back to round up stragglers.

Sight of the King's ship coming to his rescue with a bone in her teeth, put courage into the skipper of the other brig. He clapped on sail, headed for her protection.

Vain hope. Captain Boyle estimated distance and speed expertly, decided that there was time to take the fugitive before the *Swaggerer* could come up. A brief chase and a broadside destroyed her skipper's new-found courage. Boyle put a prize crew aboard her—and found himself in the middle of a ticklish situation: two slow prizes on his hands and a British warship almost within range.

Fight? Take on the sloop while his prizes got away? Free to choose, Boyle might have done that—against the sloop the *Comet* could give a good account of herself—but owner's orders were that save in a desperate pinch, their captains were to avoid hostilities with warships—a lousy Portuguese might be considered an exception but not a King's ship.

And not yet was the pinch desperate. Captains of the Royal Navy also had their orders—to go after Yankee privateers—and this one might not have discovered the utter futility of chasing a Baltimore topsail schooner.

So Boyle ordered his prize-captains to take the brigs through the narrow strait between the Islands of St. John and St. Thomas, while he tolled the sloop away.

Dutifully the *Swaggerer's* captain abandoned the brigs to chase the privateer which edged away along the southern coast of St. John. Until past noon the game continued, the *Comet* always tantalizingly just beyond range of the sloop's bow-guns. Then Boyle began to widen the gap. By six bells—three o'clock—his dogged foe was hull down, his prizes safe. Up went topsails; the *Comet* faded away round the eastern end of the island to join them. On the way she picked up another prize, the schooner *Jane,* out of Demerara.

With five prizes to his credit, Boyle decided it was time he turned homeward —his prisoners were more numerous than his depleted crew; to man out more prizes would be risky. Prizes were without value until they reached a home or friendly port. To reach Baltimore they must run the gauntlet of the British blockade at the entrance to the Chesapeake where it was especially tough—rarely were there less than half a dozen Britishers on station off the Virginia Capes. Boyle felt considerable anxiety for his first two prizes, deemed it wise to convoy the remaining three.

Again luck and Yankee seamanship worked in his favor. He out-guessed, out-witted, out-maneuvered the blockading squadron, brought his four ships safely into Baltimore.

News that the *Comet* was in port with three more prizes—the *Adelphi* and the wheat-laden brig had preceded them safely—brought a sea-minded city to the docks to give captain and crew a rousing welcome. The names of the prizes went into the column of Mr. Niles' *Register* devoted to English ships whose capture by Americans had been reported during the previous week.

MORE than a twelvemonth elapses before we hear of Captain Boyle in an outstanding role again. There is a vague account of a third cruise in the *Comet* interesting as illustration of the precarious nature of the privateering business. It credits him with twenty prizes captured of which he was compelled to destroy nine. Of the remaining eleven four were ransomed, four managed to make the port of Baltimore, leaving three unaccounted for, presumably recaptured or victims of weather.

In late July of 1814 he appears as commander of the *Chasseur*.

She was the largest "clipper" built in Baltimore up to that time—three hundred and fifty-six tons, one hundred and sixteen feet on the water-line, rigged as a brig instead of a schooner, but Captain Boyle displayed his ingenuity by carrying extra spars with which she could be altered to schooner rig should a change of appearance seem desirable. She too mounted fourteen guns but they were heavier than the *Comet's* long nines.

Already she had made one cruise, under Captain William Wade, who had been First Officer of the *Comet*, a cruise on which she had taken eleven prizes.

That she was in New York is proof that Boyle stretched the truth considerably when, in his Proclamation, he declared the British blockade of the American coast ineffectual. Wade had taken her into New York because he had found the blockade at the Virginia Capes so tight that he could not get into the Chesapeake.

So closely was that 'scape-hole watched that the frigate *Constellation*, caught in Norfolk when war was declared, never did get to sea. For months the *President*, commanded by the redoubtable Decatur, was similarly penned in New York. During the latter half of 1814 the *Constitution*—"Old Ironsides"—ever lucky, was the only heavy ship of the American Navy at sea.

True the swift little sloops-of-war the Navy was hurriedly building managed to slip in and out; so did the speedier privateers, if well captained; but otherwise American shipping had disappeared from the ocean and with it an important class of ships whose absence constituted a severe hardship seldom mentioned—the humble little coasters that had carried the nation's domestic commerce from port to port and up the rivers to inland towns. Their place was taken by long trains of wagons that, from New England to Georgia, jammed the primitive roads and supplied the newspapers with basis for jokes.

Under such facetious headings as "Shipping News," and "Horse Marine News," domestic commerce was described as "thundering on a thousand wheels." The wagon trains were "convoys," teamsters "skippers" or "captains," boss teamsters "commodores." The "Atlantic Charter" of the war, the slogan "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights," became "Free Trade and *Teamsters'* Rights." Doggerel, then popular, was in the same vein—for example:

Tho' Neptune's trident is laid by,
From North to South our coasters ply;
No sails or rudders have these ships,
Which freemen guide with wagon whips.

Arrived in New York the *Chasseur* was put up at auction, because, we hazard the guess, her owners despaired of getting her out again. She was bid in by a group of Baltimore capitalists who cut Captain Boyle in for a share and put him in command with orders to take her out.

That proved no easy assignment even for Thomas Boyle. He tried, on the night of July twenty-fourth, only to find the channel blocked by four of the blockading squadron—a "74" and three frigates. He turned back, waited for better—that is, worse weather, a gale that would compel the Britishers to leave their stations and seek safety in the open sea. It came four days later. The *Chasseur* slipped out, laid her course for the Narrow Seas about the British Isles where a few enterprising and venturesome privateers had preceded her with satisfactory results.

This change of hunting grounds was the direct result of the blockade. The British convoys that plodded homeward tantalizingly close to the American shore carried principally bulk cargoes of West Indian products—sugar, molasses, rum—of value to privateersmen only if a prize could be run into a home port, a feat which the blockade made increasingly difficult. In the Narrow Seas and along the coast of Europe to southward were British ships aplenty, outbound with the products of British factories, inbound with the tea, spices and silks of China and India, for all of which there was a hungry market in the ports of France and Spain, if a prize could be run into them. And if not, crews and the most valuable and least bulky cargo could be removed, the prize burned. As prizes also supplied food, water, gunpowder and shot, a privateer could keep the sea until the fouling of her bottom reduced her speed to that of the lumbering King's ships.

Just thirty days after he slipped out of New York found Boyle in the Narrow Seas with the crews of nineteen prizes of which he must rid his ship. The obvious solution was to make a cartel of the nineteenth. And while he was about it why not avail himself of the opportunity to give the Lion's tail another twist. How? We may assume considerable hilarity in the tiny cabin of the *Chasseur* as her captain, with First Officer Stansbury doubling as "Secretary," discussed pros and cons and hit upon the gorgeous idea of proclaiming a blockade of the United Kingdom.

Gorgeous but probably not wholly original. Suspicion will not down that Captain Boyle's idea was inspired by an exceedingly neat bit of tail-twisting perpetrated by his fellow Baltimorian, Editor Niles.

Following the smashing victories of

"Riley Grannan's Last Adventure"

This is the classic of funeral sermons—the sermon delivered in a burlesque theater in Rawhide, Nevada, by Herman W. Knickerbocker, the busted preacher-prospector, over the body of Riley Grannan, the dead-broke gambler.

ADVENTURE has ordered a large reprint of this famous booklet. Now available at ten cents a copy.

Adventure
205 East 42nd Street
New York 17, N. Y.

Please send me .... copies of "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure." I am enclosing .... cents. (10c in stamps or coin for each copy desired.)

....
Name

....
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....
City or Town State

Nelson which had made England "Mistress of the Seas," the official *British Naval Register* had inserted in its heading the arrogant slogan:

The winds and waves are Britain's proud
domain
And not a sail but by permission spreads.

When their number climbed into the hundreds, Editor Niles had appropriated that slogan as sub-head for the column in which he listed the names of British ships taken by American men-of-war and privateers who were asking no permission from Britain to spread their sails.

THERE was no merriment at Lloyd's that summer, nor in the counting rooms of merchants and ship-owners, at the Admiralty, nor at "No. 10 Downing Street." Watchers on the shores of the Narrow Seas reported pillars of smoke by day, of fire by night, and every pillar marked the end of a British ship, spelled loss for owners and Lloyd's, trouble for the Admiralty, anxiety for His Majesty's ministers, who were deluged with complaints and protests from the shipping interests.

Typical are a set of *Resolutions* drafted by the merchants and owners of Glasgow before September had run its course.

> Resolved:
>
> That the number of American privateers . . . the audacity . . . the success which their enterprise has atained are alike injurious to our commerce, humiliating to our pride and discreditable to the directors of the naval power of Britain, whose flag, until recently, waved over every sea and triumphed over every rival.
>
> That there is reason to believe that within twenty-four months over eight hundred vessels have been captured by this power, previously held in contempt. That . . . when the maintenance of the Navy costs so large a sum, when mercantile interests pay convoy duty for protection and we have declared the entire American coast under blockade, it is distressing and humiliating that our ships cannot traverse our own channels with safety and that insurance can be effected only at excessive premium; that a horde of American cruisers should be allowed, unheeded, unresisted and unmolested, to take, burn or sink our own vessels, in our own inlets, almost in sight of our own harbors.

Similar protests came from other ports, one from Halifax, *on the east coast,* which asserted that the Royal Navy had managed to capture only one Yankee privateer and that by stratagem. With help of his fellows and an occasional swift sloop of the American Navy, Captain Boyle was making his blockade exceedingly uncomfortable if not exactly rigorous. Proof: Lloyd's upped their rate for marine insurance to the excessive figure of "thirteen guineas in the hundred pounds"—13.65 per cent—more than they had demanded at any time during twenty years of war with France—and presently refused insurance on ships and cargoes bound to or from Ireland!

We detect a touch of hysteria which caused the Glasgow protestants to be decidedly unfair to the "directors of the naval power of Britain." Far from allowing "a horde of American cruisers, unheeded, unresisted and unmolested, to take, burn or sink," the Admiralty, alert to the danger, increased the fleet in the waters between England and Ireland to seventeen sail, which was probably twice the number of the alleged "horde" of Yankee cruisers there at any one time. But Yankee privateers dodged expertly, and the Yankee sloops-of-war, while perforce dodging Britishers of greater size, took on British sloops willingly—several of the minor naval battles of the war were fought in the Narrow Seas.

As author of the outrageous Proclamation, Captain Boyle was, of course, chief object for British vengeance. Not a British captain assigned to duty in the Irish Sea but would have given an eyetooth for the honor of ending his career. They hunted him singly and in packs and once thought they had him. A pack caught him in one of the inlets he had declared under strict and rigorous blockade, sailed confidently in for the kill—four ships, two frigates and two sloops, in line abreast across the narrow inlet, with the wind in their favor. "Now is thy death day come," Mr. Yankee.

Not yet! Boyle, sailing the *Chasseur* into what appeared to be the very teeth of the wind, slipped between two of his foes, did another fade-away with damage no more serious than three men wounded, a few shot holes in sails and hull, leaving four British captains to explain to the Admiralty and wrathful merchants.

Some credit the disgusted captains could claim, however. This affair, toward the end of the year, did write "finis" to Boyle's career in British home waters. So narrow an escape forced him to take stock of his situation. The *Chasseur* was crammed with the loot of two score prizes. Owners would not approve jeopardizing so valuable a cargo by continuing to play hide and seek with the British Navy. It was time he sailed for home.

But not too directly. If he followed the branch of the Gulf Stream that is deflected southward from the coast of Ireland to the Azores, before turning westward, he would be in the world's busiest shipping lane, and might pick up a few more prizes.

Instead he escaped capture only by another display of his marvelous seamanship.

A GALE blew away the *Chasseur's* topmasts. Then, before the damage could be repaired, one of the ubiquitous British cruisers came over the horizon, sighted the crippled Yankee, gave chase. Instead of thumbing his nose, Boyle was forced to cut away his anchors, start his water tanks, finally to throw overboard most of his guns before he could shake off his determined pursuer.

The remaining guns—and audacity—sufficed however to make prize of the next British merchantman encountered. From her the *Chasseur* was rearmed, after a fashion—her guns were lighter than those heaved overboard and the supply of shot for them was meager. Boyle turned homeward.

Again he slipped through the blockading squadron off the Virginia Capes and a day or two after the New Year of 1815, sailed triumphantly into Baltimore.

In *Niles'* Register for January 7, 1815, you will find a brief account of his blockade of the United Kingdom, the text of his Proclamation and the names of his prizes previously unreported. As they are numbered 1304 to 1310 and other captures listed swell the bag to near 1350, it appears either that the Yankees had taken a disheartening toll of British shipping since September or that the Glasgow merchants had then leaned well to the conservative side in their estimate.

At any rate the commercial interests which then exercised a controlling influence on the British Government, were well fed up with a war that was bringing no glory and heavy losses, not only of ships but of trade with the former colonies who were their best customers. The Government had accepted friendly overtures of the Czar of Russia, appointed Commissioners; American envoys had sailed to meet them, at Ghent; that a negotiated peace would result was a practical certainty. If Yankee privateers were to reap more profit they must not dawdle in port. So, without waiting to rearm his ship, Captain Boyle sailed on his fifth and last cruise.

The first days of February found him hovering off Havana. A ship came out. Pretending lack of interest, he studied her through his telescope.

Ten ports. That meant twenty guns, heavy armament for a merchantman. No colors but assuredly not Spanish, her rigging was too well set up for that—Spaniards, like the Portuguese, were slovenly sailors. Nor a British man-of-war—she cut cleanly through the water instead of piling it up in a white "bone." A packet? The British merchant marine boasted a few ships of more than average speed, purchased from American builders or modeled on American lines. These, called "packets" or "running ships," engaged in traffic where speed was a consideration, hence their cargoes were likely to be of uncommon value, perhaps specie.

Well, there was one sure way to find out. Boyle followed leisurely until the stranger was too far off the land to make a run for port, then clapped on sail and took up the chase in earnest. The *Chasseur* proved the faster, drew abreast of the ship, which ran up English colors. Boyle gave her a broadside—and received one in return that made the *Chasseur* stagger.

Boyle had caught a tartar, a foe able and willing to fight, and the way her heavier guns were served roused suspicion that they were not manned by an untrained merchant crew. Suspicion was confirmed from the *Chasseur's* tops, who reported the enemy's deck crowded. Boyle had made the error that had ended the careers of several Yankee privateers —mistaken a British warship for a merchantman.

Discretion—and owners' instructions—told him to break off the fight. He refused to listen. The next quarter of an hour witnessed a fight the equal of any in that war. Broadsides were exchanged as rapidly as guns could be served. Both ships suffered, the *Chausseur* the more—the heavy British shot inflicted damage she could not repay with the wretched little guns taken from her last prize.

Well, there was an answer to that too. Boyle ordered his light guns directed at the enemy's rigging.

"Aye, aye, sir," his gunners replied and proceeded to "take the sails off her." In ten minutes she had hardly speed enough to answer her helm.

Still Boyle despaired of forcing her, with his light guns, to strike the flag that still snapped defiantly—the more so when report came that the meager store of shot was about exhausted.

"Lads," he shouted, "our guns won't do the trick. We'll try cutlasses."

Again his crew responded with cries of "Aye, aye, sir," and "Serve 'em out."

That the quartermaster did, while the helmsman headed the *Chasseur* directly for the enemy. Hulls ground together. Lashings were passed. Privateersmen, cutlass in hand, swarmed over the bulwarks, were dropping onto the Britisher's deck when her flag came down.

The prize proved to be the former American privateer *Atlas,* out of Philadelphia. Captured by British cruisers, she had been taken into the Royal Navy under the name *St. Lawrence.* That accounted for Boyle's mistake, and her unusually large crew was accounted for by the fact that she was carrying replacements for Admiral Cockburn's fleet—the fleet that had attacked Baltimore unsuccessfully and convoyed the British expedition against New Orleans.

To take a King's ship was something of which few privateers could boast. Captain Boyle had taken one of superior force and by boarding, a feat unique in the annals of American privateers. To return to Baltimore with such a prize in his wake, the "grid-iron flag"—the "Star-Spangled Banner" since the attack on Baltimore—flying above the Union Jack, would be a proud climax to his career.

But that could not be. To repair the damage the *St. Lawrence* had sustained would require days—she must be practically re-rigged. So near Havana, which the British were using as a naval base, another of their warships big enough to retake her was likely to appear at any moment. Too risky.

Take out her people and destroy her? That too was risky—her people outnumbered the *Chasseur's.* And Boyle was influenced by the plight of her wounded—despite her heavier guns she had twenty-two casualties to his thirteen. The wounded needed medical attention he could not give aboard his little ship. So he stood by while his men aided their recent foes in contriving a jury rig that would get them back to Havana and sailed for home without his showiest prize.

HE FOUND Baltimore agog with news that put his triumph in deep shade—at New Orleans the long rifles of General Jackson's backwoodsmen had administered a smashing defeat to Packenham's veterans who had driven the French out of Portugal and Spain.

In fact he felt compelled to apologize to his owners for his triumph. His report read in part:

> I hope you will not be displeased with what I have done; there was no other alternative but to make a cartel of her or destroy her. I should not willingly, perhaps, have sought a contest with a King's vessel, knowing it was not our object; but my expectations were at first for a valuable ship and a valuable cargo also. When I found myself deceived, the honor of the flag entrusted to my charge was not to be disgraced by flight.

Then a courier on a jaded horse with greater news. Peace had been signed at Ghent on Christmas eve. A British dispatch boat, under flag-of-truce, had reached New York with the joyful news, on the eleventh of February, after battling winter storms for seven weeks. But it would be summer before the last shot was fired—by an American sloop-of-war, in the Indian Ocean.

The war—the family quarrel between the Mother Country and her former colonies whose claimed independence was a wound to the mother's pride—the war that perhaps should never have been fought, was over at last; ended, on paper, in a draw, by a treaty that merely re-established the *status quo ante*.

An American victory? Yes. But not in the sense upon which our older, boastful history books insist. England had not been licked. True she had twice failed in attempts at conquest—at Lake Champlain and at New Orleans. But the United States had failed to conquer Canada, the prime object of the "War Hawks" of the expansionist South and West who had forced Congress to declare the war and who knew little of "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights" and cared less.

True we had made a remarkable showing at sea of which we are justly if long boastfully proud. Our tiny Navy—in the beginning only twenty ships which the Washington Government planned to keep in port—had managed to keep the sea against Britain's fleet of a thousand sail which had triumphed over every Navy of Europe—France, Spain, Russia, Sweden, Denmark—and though it suffered some losses it won a series of brilliant victories. But bad weather inflicted more losses on Britain than did the Yankee Navy. The hurt was to her pride, as confessed by the plaint of a noble Lord in Parliament: "The charm of our invincibility is broken."

Real victory for America was that the *status quo ante* was modified by an unwritten pledge—a "gentlemen's agreement"—that the Mother Country would abandon the role of hurt and angry parent, cut the apron strings and accept the daughter as an adult worthy of full membership in the family of nations, a pledge on the whole faithfully kept. True there have been bickerings, family spats, but always they have been settled by compromise. Result: a hundred and thirty years of peace and a growing conviction that the family of English-speakig nations, like the Signers of our Declaration of Independence, "must hang together or hang separately"—a conviction without which hope of world peace must prove vain.

For this happy result the privateers deserve great, perhaps preponderant credit. They inflicted greater loss on England's merchant marine than it had previously suffered in any of her long list of wars, greater than it would suffer again until Germany essayed the task of driving it from the sea.

Among those little ships the *Chasseur* ranks high if not actually at the top, and the same is true of Captain Boyle among their captains.

The *Chasseur* was nicknamed "Pride of Baltimore" and a model of her is treasured by the city. After peace she was put into the China trade where she won the reputation of being the speediest ship on the ocean.

From the file of *Niles' Register* for 1824 we learn Boyle then commanded the brig *Panopea* and beat off an attack by pirates in the China Sea.

"It is said" that he died at sea the following year.

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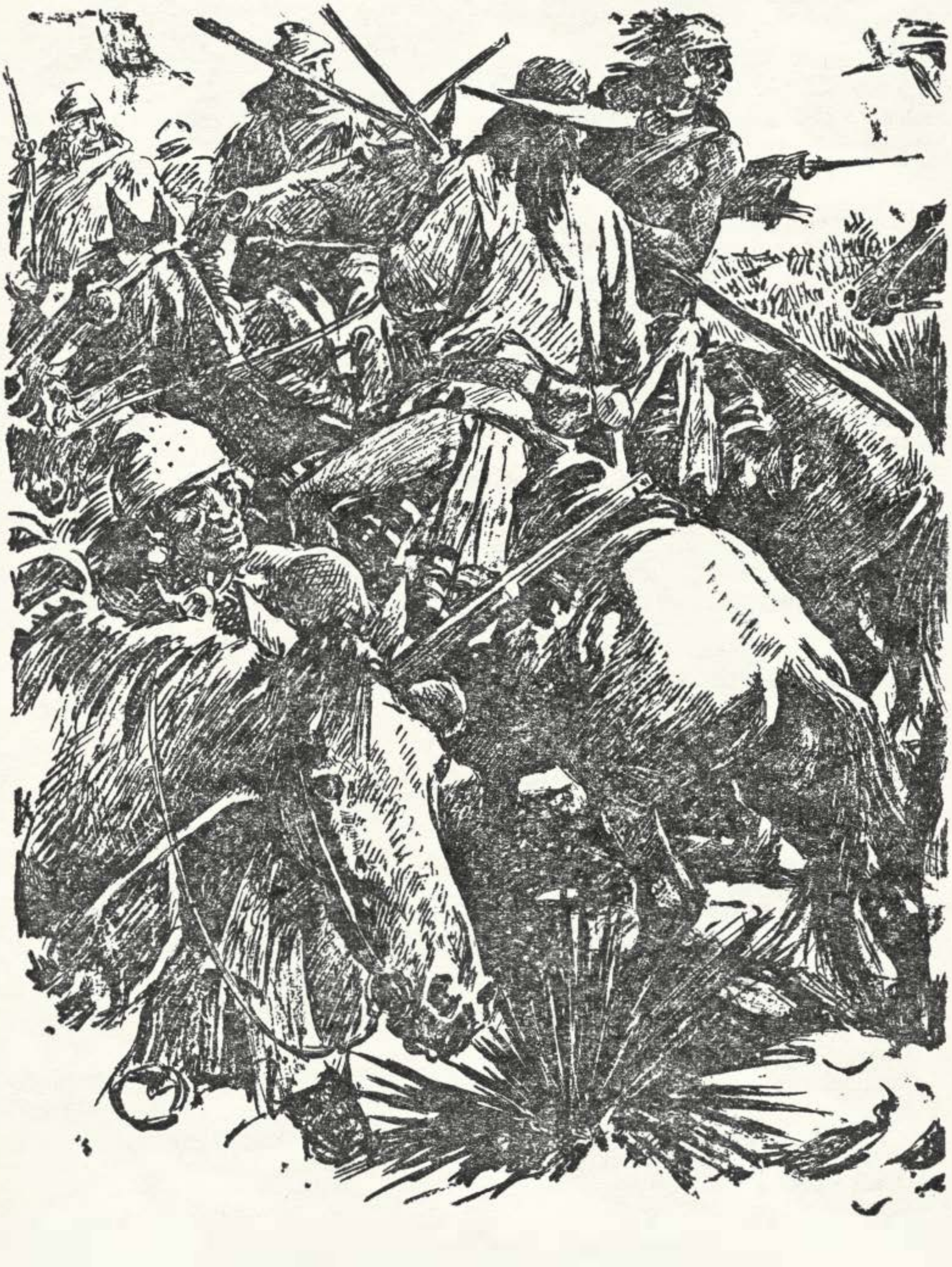
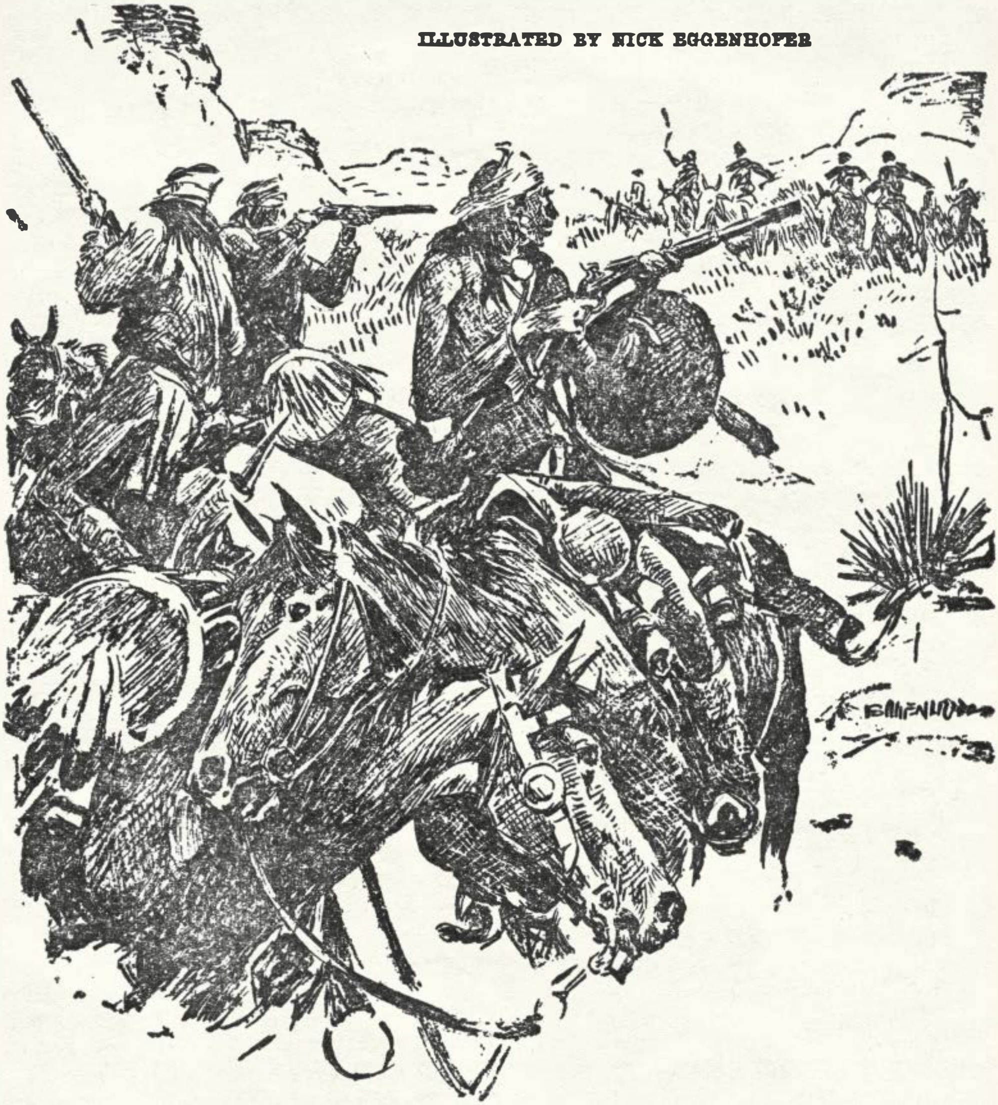


Hooves pounded downhill with a terrible thunder, straight for the mass of Indians blocking the pass.

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EGGENHOFER



MORE THAN MAN-SIZE

THEY topped a boulder-strewn rise, and then they could see the pass, as it was called. It was really a notch separating two mesas, marking where the Jicarillo Apaches stopped murdering secretly and began it in the open.

"All right, Mr. Carew," said the young lieutenant. "You will proceed through the pass, note the terrain, then determine if enemy opposition lies beyond."

"*Through* the pass, Lieutenant?" The civilian guide blinked mildly. His hand tightened on the rein which was knotted Indian-fashion to the pony's lower jaw. But he kept his face admirably calm. An angry young lieutenant's report was enough to hold up pay and bonus, and for pay and bonus alone Carew had taken this six-month trick guiding and spying for the blue-back Neds. The money would see him and Consuela and the boy through the next winter. They'd just about keep the ranch with hay sixty dollars a ton, lumber sixty-five a thousand, sugar fifty cents a pound—everything high as a Crow's scalp lock since the Mexican War. So Pitt Carew said easily, "Don't you reckon I better ride round the hills? A man could get mighty trapped in that pass."

He saw the lieutenant's smile form. Second Lieutenant Narcisse M. Brulette, commanding M Company, First Dragoons, United States Army, Fort Marcy, Santa Fe. That was his full, rolling title. "Mr. Carew, we've lost enough time already. Surely you understand that. And Sergeant O'Keefe will accompany you in case there's any danger."

That was the lieutenant's way—chide a man so's he couldn't object. Protection from danger, was it? The whippersnapper knew full well that Carew had walked trap lines from Taos to Three Forks, from the Popo Agie to Flathead country when the beaver still ran. He knew why Carew's lithe frame looked younger than his thirty-odd years, and his face older. He knew how that crinkled, horizon look had come to his dark yellow eyes—eyes the color of willow bark. But to talk back, with mountain man's pride, might mean signing as guide and interpreter with a caravan back to the Missouri, leaving this big country. Without money he'd be able to do nothing else.

He didn't answer the lieutenant.

HE watched O'Keefe come from the rear of the column where the wagon plodded. Thirty men in that column—none too many to guard the supplies for Price Redoubt, the outpost. Young men with still-pale faces. Some not yet steady in the government saddles. They had been joshed and bullied and swindled into filling the gaps left by departing veterans of the Mexican War. They had come for adventure, haven, jobs, or they knew not what—but they had found none of these. Just a big land of parched desert, glowering peaks and terrifying splendor. Death in all of it for those who didn't belong; death in Apache arrows, the knives of pelados, the burning juices of reptile's mouths, thirst and the lethal sun. Facing it for fifty cents only a day.

O'Keefe was not of them. He was big in the saddle; his flushed, grinning head seemed top-heavy, but still it moved as part of his mount. When he would, O'Keefe could play stirring war tales on his bugle tongue. He listened to the lieutenant's orders, saluted smartly, and boomed, "Very well, sir!"

They were loping ahead, Carew and the sergeant, while the column paused on the crest of the big land wave and rested. Nearly an hour's ride out and back—though it seemed one might reach out and touch the pass. It was like that in Carew's country. The land rolled on in vast, piñon-dotted sweeps from the red and black gorge of the Rio Grande, turning to rock finally, and then climbing to where the continent touched the sky. He wanted to stay. He wanted to stay part of it.

"Sergeant, what day is this here, anyway?" They had slowed to a jog.

"Why—first o' June. I believe."

Carew nodded. "Two more days, then. That'll be the end o' what I signed up fer."

"So you'll be leavin' us, now!" grinned O'Keefe. "To the mercy o' the redskins!"

"No, I'll see the column t' Price Redoubt, I reckon."

"Glad you'll stick it," said O'Keefe, still grinning. "We can't be leavin' the fine troops at Price Redoubt without their brass buttons, now!"

"Their brass buttons?"

" 'Tis what's in the wagon. Uniforms. Oh, there's flour and pork, too—but mostly them poor, sweatin' mules is haulin' uniforms."

Carew grunted. "Should be a dear cargo to yer lieutenant."

"Admire the uniform he does," sighed O'Keefe. With his right hand he adjusted the balance of his saddle-slung Jenks carbine. "But you've got to be makin' allowance for the lieutenant. His brother was a big hero at Chapultepec, and him still studyin' his books at West Point. Guess you know about that. The lieutenant's bound to try hard to show he's a soldier."

"Maybe he is." Carew squinted to where the mesas dropped blue, sloping skirts to the land. "But he sure ain't no Indian fighter. Look at that there pass, Sergeant. A mile long, maybe. Not more'n hunderd yards acrost—just enough t' let the crick go through. Them red villains could bottle a man in there tighter'n a 'coon's fist."

"I was thinkin' that, now."

"How'd you like t' do some hard ridin', Sergeant?"

"The long way? Around the mesa, you mean?"

"Sure. We can save plenty time enough fer yer precious lieutenant if we make beaver."

"I'd be disobeyin' an order, Mr. Carew."

"Yep." Carew spat over the near side of the wagon.

"Well, now," said the sergeant, "there's orders as is mistakes, and there's some as is not. That is the Dragoons. Don't obey none of 'em, and you won't be havin' Dragoons."

Carew smiled and said nothing. The sergeant looked at him and then sighed suddenly. "The long way round it is, then."

They heeled and spurred. The sergeant's horse, which had been an Indian racing pony, made three long leaps before it galloped, and it was only the big man's weight that kept it from outstripping Carew's piebald.

Carew's ears were rich with the pounding of the hooves, his skin tingled as the wind went by. Big country. The sun had long since ordered all the clouds from the sky; it was retiring to the west, a chief of many tribes. The shapes of things were clear and sharp, from the knots of dry grass and the red-tails underfoot to the embroidery of juniper on the horizon. The horses reached for it—ears back, nostrils grasping, manes and tails in flight. They left sweat behind.

"Hold it—easy!" said Carew finally. They had reached the northern end of the double mesa; they were crossing its trailing skirt, blue-green sage gaskin high on the animals. They dismounted and crept slowly up to the backbone of the slope.

Sergeant O'Keefe's eyes widened, and Pitt Carew's mouth became a sudden, tight line.

THE Indians were spread all over the flats beyond the mesa. Swarms of them. They sat, or stood if dismounted, none making a sound, none moving a lash. Waiting. Waiting for Second Lieutenant Narcisse M. Brulette, thirty men, and a wagon.

Carew knew Jicarillo Apaches; they'd mutilated settlers within a day's ride of his own *jacal*. Since Carson, the new Indian Agent at Taos had quieted their Ute enemies, they'd needed new mischief. Here they were—nearly two hundred of them; squat, spade-shouldered men with flat foreheads and broad bangs. Eyes small and dark, seeking to meet at the bridge of the nose. Bits of red flannel, buckskin shirts and calico shirts, bare torsos and bright silk. Moccasins with circular toe-shields to guard against sharp rock and cactus spine. Horses plain —not braided and decorated like the horses of Kiowas, or Cheyennes. When pursuit was hot, the Apache shot his horse and ate it; drank the blood.

They could live in this big country, because like the sage and barrel cactus and Carew, himself, they were part of it.

BANG—WHEEEEEEE!

A shot—loud enough to flake the mesa walls; tiny, dancing echoes and the medicine song of ricochet. It came from their right, from the group of man-high boulders at the foot of the slope. They ran, swung to their horses. O'Keefe's mount wheeled twice, then started out with its three long bounds. Carew's pony simply laid back its ears and shot away.

He looked back. Five of them, horsed, emerged from the rocks. Their mounts were fresher and they knew it. They were circling slightly northward to overtake their quarry from the side. He heard the heavy drumbeat of O'Keefe's dragoon pistol. He thought for a moment of loosing his own St. Louis Hawken from the sling, but decided against it. He curled his small frame to the horse's neck, out of the wind.

Another shot came from behind and to the left. It was loud, much too loud, much too close. Carew heard an angry whirr and knew that an arrow had passed over him.

O'Keefe's pistol boomed again.

Chattering cries from the Apaches. Still Carew didn't look back. He pounded on, and O'Keefe pounded with him, sometimes swaying so close that their knees bumped, and at other times swaying away, hoofbeats diminishing. The piebald's neck was wet and warm, hair plastered, sweat ammonia strong in Carew's nostrils.

How long they galloped like that, Carew didn't know. Not as a matter of minutes and seconds. In such moments he forgot time, all that had gone before, all that was about to happen. He pushed away the things that meant continuity . . . a willow-eyed, runty boy tending cavvy on a westward wagon train . . . beaver traps in a cold, loping stream . . . races, fights and searing Taos liquor at the Rendezvous . . . Consuela's warm shoulders and olive skin; young Pitt's tiny, flower petal hands. He concentrated his body and brain on immediate survival. This was the way of a mountain man.

But presently he saw the rise and the soldiers, the big boulder clump and the silhouette of the wagon with its high fore-and-aft Pennsylvania wains. He knew then that they'd escaped.

LIEUTENANT BRULETTE didn't even wait for Carew to get his breath. He rode his black charger—a creature as nervous and high-stepping as himself—a little way down the slope, and swung it alongside the blowing piebald. Carew saw the telescope in his hand. And that pasted-on smile. "Now, Mr. Carew, beyond stirring up several Indians your ride hasn't accomplished very much, has it?"

Carew, chest heaving slowly, stared back. Wearily, he regarded the narrow face, the small, red lips not altogether concealed by the soft-haired black mustache, carefully combed from the center to make it bushier. The lieutenant's first, no doubt. And the pride of a mountain man raked Carew inside. Before he could remember that pay and bonus, he spat—just missing the officer's stirruped boot.

Brulette was close, then, talking in low tones. Their horses' rumps were touching. The officer's words came neatly, precisely, none hesitating to step into line. "Mr. Carew, perhaps it does not seem important to you to deliver a supply wagon with all possible despatch. But I assure you that it is most important to me. I have already lost considerable time—"

"There's two hunderd Jicarillo Apaches over th' other side o' the mesas as'll cost you considerable more time, I'm afeard."

"A circumstance which neither surprises nor disturbs me." Brulette's dark eyes never stayed still; they were glory-hunting eyes. "My men are well-armed and I trust well-disciplined. It is regrettable that experienced hands such as yourself and Sergeant O'Keefe should set them the example of breaching discipline."

The black charger swung away suddenly, and as Carew stared, it circled over to Sergeant O'Keefe. Carew had known the fear of ambush, of stampeding buffalo, of wounded bear—but this fear in him now was of a different kind. An unclean sort of fear. What would the lieutenant's report say? Would they hold up that money in Santa Fe? He had never dreamed that he would know fears like this.

He kept watching. As the lieutenant approached, the big sergeant was puffing and dismounting.

"Sergeant O'Keefe!"

"Yes, sir!" The veteran came to attention, curbing the heave of his chest.

"Apparently you cannot carry out a simple order to reconnoiter directly ahead. I'm sorry about that, Sergeant. I'm afraid I'll have to assign you to driving the wagon for the rest of this march."

Only the sergeant's eyebrows moved. Upward—painfully upward. For a moment Carew thought he would say something. But then he stiffened even more, held his hands tight at his sides, and said only, "Very well, sir!"

Brulette turned from him without another look.

Carew followed the officer. The men, not mounted yet, turned their white faces as one. Some of them had seen their first warring Indians in the five that chased the scouts halfway to the rise, then turned back again. Some of them would now see their first insubordination. "Lieutenant," said Carew, "you had no call t' do that. I was the one drug the sergeant with me. But, mainly, he ain't no experienced mule driver. You'll slow yerself up more'n ever—"

He knew all the time just about how Brulette would answer him. He knew how the report would surely read, now. Yet it wasn't quick anger which made him speak. It was something stubborn and burning inside him. Something the mountains bred.

Brulette turned slowly toward him. Smiling, of course. "I assure you that discipline is a necessary function in a military command, Mr. Carew. I don't ask you to understand—I merely assure you. And I also remind you that your duty is not yet accomplished. In ordering you to reconnoiter the pass, I had in mind to know if water and rainage were suitable for bivouac."

Carew couldn't control his surprise this time. His mouth parted, and his eyelids uncovered some white. *"Bivouac? In that there pass?"*

"Oh, I can see your objection, all right." Brulette ran a gloved thumb along the under side of his mustache. "The Indians will undoubtedly attempt to besiege us there. But I daresay Company M knows how to fight its way through a pack of savages. I daresay it may be one of the only ways to establish contact with them. Besides, Mr. Carew, it doesn't seem right, does it, that a few howling naked aborigines should spoil the only likely campsite in this devilish country?"

"Lieutenant"—tight words, barely escaping Carew's lips—"I reckon I'll just head on back t' Santa Fe."

"Well, if the much vaunted courage of the mountain man has failed you—"

Carew heeled his still-panting horse away, and left the lieutenant in mid-sentence. He dismounted halfway down the column near where a semicircle of boulders formed a kind of high corral. His cheeks felt like drumheads, his temples throbbed. He'd thrown six months' work away, maybe, and part of that belonged to Consuela and the boy. Still—still there were some things a free man couldn't abide. He paid no attention to the sudden activity, the clanking, the squeaking of leather, the bawled orders. The Company was getting ready to ride again. *"By fours—fall in!"* Carew was unsaddling the piebald and trading it for the black on the string. Dusting the 'pishamore, checking the hooves. One foot would need a rawhide bag before he reached Santa Fe. His equipment: blanket, extra moccasins, powder horn and bullet pouch. Tobacco sack and clay dudeen. Cotton lighting wick in twisted calico. All tight.

The last thing he heard before he rode away was rich, bellowing profanity. O'Keefe with the mules. Twelve of them; eight on the wagon, four strung. And they hadn't budged yet. Fool, blue-back Neds—only way to break a wagon mule was to starve him twenty hours first. Any bugeway could tell 'em that.

He waved to O'Keefe and then the boulder pile cut off his view.

PLENTY of stars that night; moonlight, too. The trail back to Santa Fe was marked as a river. Away, you rolling river, but swing back now in time and tide—head east. We'll turn our spines to

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the blue battlements of the divide; we'll drop our moccasins the other way in every step made coming here, and at the stage we'll trade 'em for a pair of store-bought shoes. Leave the country, the big country, to the marching Neds, the close-eyed Apache, the gutted settler and the rattlesnake.

Consuela would be waiting to be soft and warm in his arms, to bathe him in the adoration of her deep, dark eyes. Little Pitt would prance about his head and beat his shoulders with tiny fists. That much he would still have.

"*Como, carito?* We are going east? *Por que?* They did not give you the money, those soldiers? *Que lastima*—but I do not understand!"

Another kind of pride lay wounded inside him. There was a pride a man had in his job, and to be driven off before it was finished, even by a whippersnapper soldier—

He shook his head and kneed the black to a livelier jog. Toward Santa Fe.

It became at once dark and quiet in the big country. A thin layer of milk cloud covered the sky and the moon bled through it. Mesas and volcanic hills were sentinels. A lizard rustled in a bush, then no more was heard from him. Carew hobbled the steeds and rolled into his blanket.

Carew dreamed that night. He seldom dreamed, and always remembered when he did. The big country was its own dream, but now that he was leaving it he had to take some of it to sleep with him. He dreamed of rock-edged mountains lancing the sky; of whistling beaver streams, of painted rocks and canyons, dust clouds on a trail. More than man-size, this country, and when he knew that, it let him live. Bigger than a man and all his possibles—gun, blanket, moccasins, pipe, friends, wife, children. Bigger than his feelings maybe.

Bigger than pride?

He awoke fully and at once the next morning bounded to his feet and stared about him. His eyes were burning dry, his cheek greasy and with a stubble of beard. There was the sun again, big and reddish where the earth fell away.

And Pitt Carew turned his back to it. He stared into the west, from where he'd come, squinted at the rolling piñon as though to see beyond it. To his ears came a faint sound, not louder than the dropping of shot on a blanket. He made his decision. He ran to his horse, saddled it, and headed back to where he'd left the column.

It was as though he'd unshouldered a pack. His head came up and his eyes brightened. He felt big—with a light sort of bigness. The black loped happily, the piebald came along behind, and the endless piñon went by.

Far ahead, he saw the blue smoke hanging flat above the narrow pass. He wrinkled his eyes and saw the moving figures—leaden dolls—swirling about before the mouth of the defile. He caught flashes of color; red, green and yellow. Once in a while he could make out a naked torso. He knew that there would be more of these figures at the other end of the pass. The lieutenant had been wrong. Company M *didn't* know how to fight its way through a pack of savages.

"Good mornin', Mr. Carew."

The voice nearly threw him from his skin. He whirled to face it, hand beating his brain and drawing his Green River knife even before he realized that it was Sergeant O'Keefe who stood there, by the boulders, grinning at him.

"O'Keefe! You gimme a fair start, you did!"

"First thing I've done all night, then. Me—O'Keefe—twiddlin' his thumbs with the company fightin' out there! Rackin' my brains, now. And not a thing I can do about it!"

"But how'd you get here?"

"Get here?" The sergeant threw his arms out. "Faith, I was never anywhere else! It's them mules. They *still* won't move!"

"What?"

The sergeant beckoned, then led Carew around the boulders and into the space enclosed by them. He pointed silently. The twelve mules turned their heads and looked back just as silently. "I cannot budge these heathen animals, I tells the lieutenant. And this after whippin' 'em till my arm is sore. 'Well, Sergeant,' says the lieutenant, smilin', 'I guess I'll have to *order* you to budge 'em. I'll be expectin' you at the bivouac soon!' "

CAREW stared for a moment, and then he began to laugh. He laughed slowly and softly at first, but that was the leak in the floodgate. Presently he was stamping and holding his sides. It had been long since he'd laughed like this.

"Where you goin'?" he finally said.

"To join my company, Mr. Carew," said O'Keefe in a tired voice.

It stopped Carew's laughter. It clouded his dark yellow eyes. For just a moment. Then he put his foot on a rock, and a fringed elbow on his knee. "Sergeant," he said, "as a soldier, I reckon that's the thing you ought t' do. And I reckon as a man I better finish a chore I took on myself. But I also reckon both of us better do them things together."

" 'Tisn't your company, Mr. Carew," said O'Keefe, a little stiffly. "You've no need, now, to—"

"Hold on. I ain't told you how we're gettin' there, yet." He straightened, jerked a thumb at the wagon. "There's boxes and barrels in there, Sergeant, as can be made into sticks. And there's mules. Ever see a pack tree afore the possibles is thrown on it and diamond-hitched, Sergeant? I've knowed 'em to scare crows—"

"Now, what are you talkin' about, Mr. Carew?"

"Come along, and I'll show you."

It took them twenty minutes to get ready. In that time the firing from the mesas continued, scattered and occasional. Siege fire. The sun was higher into the morning, already clearing the sky. A light breeze came from the south. Once in a while an Apache yell would drift across the long stretch to the pass.

Carew mounted. He had backed away from the crest, and was still out of sight. O'Keefe, on the piebald, joined him. His dragoon pistol was drawn. Carew held the borrowed Jenks carbine, stock to thigh, finger on trigger—the Hawken was no good for this; he wanted a fast gun.

The mules were just ahead of them, up the slope, on picket pins driven loosely into the ground. Some were quivering a little in joy at being unharnessed. Others tried to nip the things on their backs.

"Ready?" asked Carew.

O'Keefe nodded.

Both men fired their guns and began to yell. Fourteen mounts, altogether, charged over the crest of the rise. Whooping and blue gunsmoke. Hooves pounded downhill with a terrible thunder, straight for the Indians blocking the pass. Sergeant O'Keefe's voice, born in the cavern of his chest, was almost louder than the guns. He roared commands —any that came to his head. "Left front into line! Guide centorrrr! Chaaaaarge!" He roared them over and over again, and discharged his pistol between times.

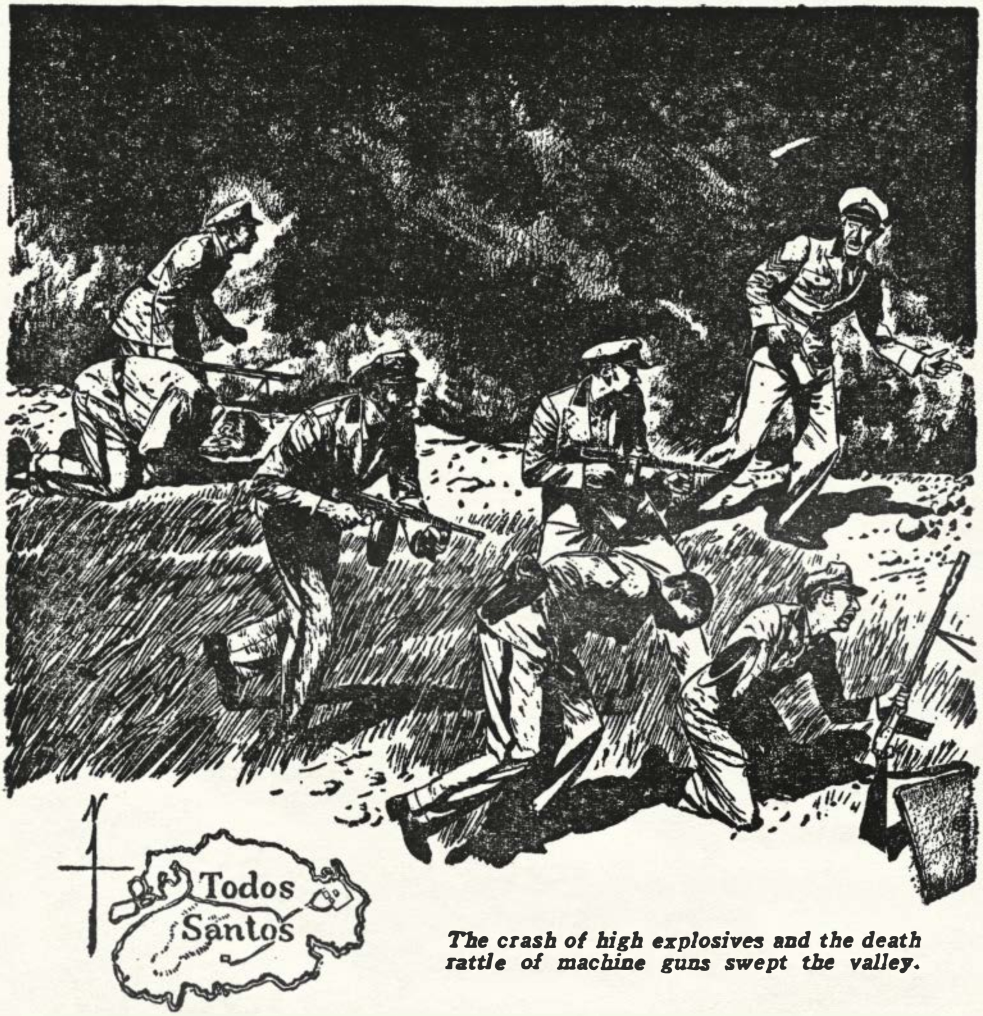
Ahead the Indian mass stirred. Bits of it moved, like soup meat in a simmering kettle. Horses appeared from piñon and the shadow of piñon, and on them naked, or half-naked riders. A few threw hasty shots before they fled, making blue puffs that blossomed then rolled away into flat layers. Some stared, puzzled. It was all that Company M needed. The mass split. Through the split came Company M, the bats of hell on horseback. At their head a young lieutenant held his saber.

Later, on the crest, Lieutenant Narcisse M. Brulette's lip trembled as he said it. But say it he did. "I was entirely in error, Mr. Carew." The smile was gone, and he looked much more pleasant without it. "I must entreat your pardon for any disparaging remarks I have made. And I defer to *your* suggestions as to our immediate course."

Carew grinned. "Nothin' t'do now but round up them mules and take the scarecrows and uniforms off their backs. Funny thing about the Apache—he can't stand surprise. Not even from twelve dummy dragoons."

"A delicious stratagem, Mr. Carew, a delicious stratagem." There was a faraway look in the lieutenant's dark eye—he was, of course, wishing that he'd thought of it himself. But he sighed and was sportsmanlike about the thing. "I shall see that there is a letter of commendation on it. They'll no doubt be clamoring for your services—"

Carew waved his hand. "Nope. No more guidin' fer me, lieutenant. I'll be tendin' t' the ranch from here on." He looked off toward the mesas, and then back again. His smile was a queer, hovering one. "Fer a spell, I thought I wasn't big enough fer this country."



The crash of high explosives and the death rattle of machine guns swept the valley.

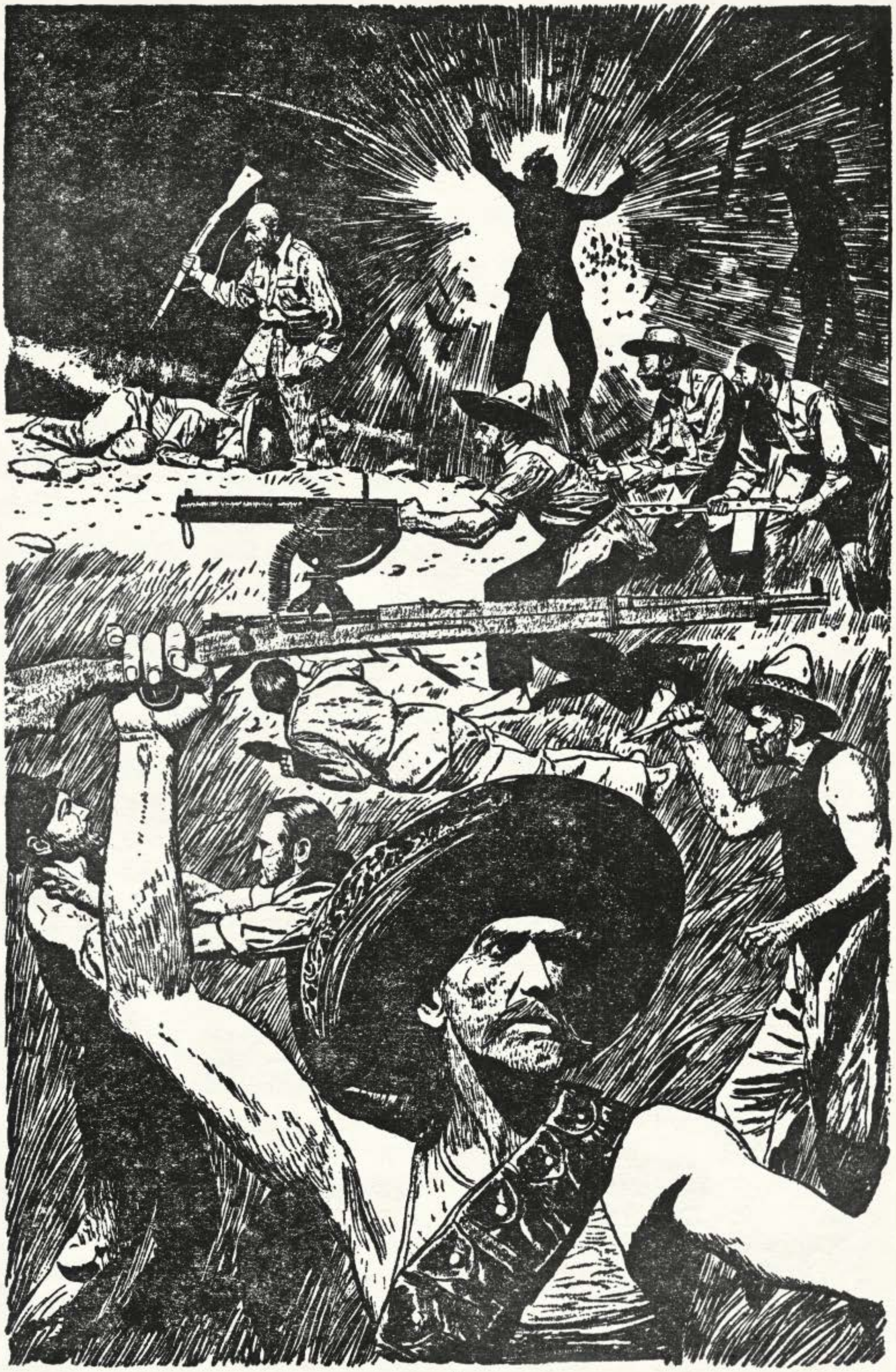
Bargain in Bombers

By M. V. HEBERDEN

THE STORY THUS FAR:

PAUL WESTON, unofficial agent for the U. S. State Department, arrives at the airport in the capital of one of the Central American "banana republics" immediately after the fatal shooting of a fellow-American, DR. JOHNS—a geologist who had come to the little revolution-ridden country to investigate certain radio-active mineral fields in the mountains nearby. Weston shoots down the gunman—a youth named GARCIA—as he is attempting to kidnap the American consul, MR. ROBERTS. Roberts drives Weston to the American embassy, where he meets the ambassador, HIRAM GENSEN, and the first secretary, JAMES HOME. The detective learns that another geologist, DR. BOWDITCH, in the country for the same purpose as Johns, has been killed recently in the mountains north of Tagalpa, when his mule inexplicably slipped off a precipice. And Weston tells the ambassador of his mission: COLONEL GERARD, of Army Intelligence, having learned that a revolution is in the making, has sent

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL EUGENE MAYAN



Weston down to investigate the attempted purchase, by an agent of known Communist connections, of war-surplus Navy amphibian bombers. CAPTAIN JEFFRIES, appointed by Gerard as Weston's assistant, has flown one of the big Navy bombers to Tegucigalpa in nearby Honduras and is waiting there for instructions from the detective.

That evening, at the home of HUGH DAYTON, owner of the local airline, Weston runs into an old acquaintance, STEFAN RADETCH, a man of uncertain nationality and loyalties, whom he had known in Spain during the Civil War. Radetch claims to have an interest in one of the big local coffee plantations. Weston arranges with Dayton to charter a plane to fly to Tagalpa the next day, and then goes to the Cafe Antigua where he has been informed he can contact an old friend, FREDERICO CALDERON, exiled leader of the PRS—*the Partido Republicano Socialista.* He leaves a message for Calderon and returns to his hotel. But, shortly after, he is picked up by the police and taken to Headquarters for questioning. Lieutenant TERCEIRA shows Weston the body of the man he had shot that morning at the airport and questions him about the incident. Weston insists he did not shoot to kill and voices his suspicion that Garcia has been disposed of by someone who wished to silence him. The American then talks with Police Chief RIOS who accuses him of working with the revolutionaries. Weston denies the charge and counters with an offer to find the rebel leaders and turn them over to the police chief, for a price—$10,000. Rios accepts . . .

In Tagalpa, Weston interviews the local police and MIGUEL ORLANDO, the interpreter who witnessed Dr. Bowditch's fatal accident. Later, at the Hotel Gran Bretaña, Weston is accosted by a man who says he will take him to Frederico Calderon. He drives the detective to a small airfield outside Tagalpa. There, waiting beside a sports plane, is Stefan Radetch. Weston permits himself to be blindfolded and after an hour's flight they arrive at the headquarters of the revolutionaries. Here he finds Calderon, but he is disillusioned to learn that the old man is only a dupe of BUSTELLOS, the actual leader of the Communist-backed exiled party. It is Bustellos who wants the Navy bombers for use in overthrowing the present regime. For a high price, Weston promises to deliver six of the big amphibians. That night, Weston pretends to retire, but, determined to gather evidence against the revolutionaries, he waits for the others to go to sleep, eludes the sentry and heads for Bustellos' headquarters office.

PART III

WHEN he reached the end of the shadow made by Calderon's little house, he could see that a lantern hung from the roof of the veranda in front of Bustellos' office and that a sentry was standing some twenty feet away. After some time he started to walk up and down.

Weston waited until the man was at the farthest point with his back turned and then ran the short distance that brought him to the rear of the mess hall. The back door was not locked. He entered and closed it silently behind him. Something squelched under his bare foot and he realized that it was a cockroach. Using his torch sparingly, he made his way across the kitchen, through the mess hall, to the office door.

That also was open. Crouched down below the level of the window, he reached the desk. He was grateful now for the lantern outside. It would make his flashlight less noticeable. He waited for the sound of the sentry's feet and when they did not come, he went to the window and, keeping well to the side, peered out. The man was sitting at the far end of the veranda.

Weston went back to the desk. The papers on top were mostly lists of supplies. The left-hand drawer yielded more lists. These were numbered and contained names. Shading his flashlight with one hand, he hurriedly scanned them. At the end of one list a paragraph said: *NOTE: The families of the deportees above marked with an asterisk shall be permitted to join them at the end of six months.* Among the names were most of the office holders under the present regime.

In the right hand drawer was a series of notes. One was a rough draft for a proclamation which the police chief had told Weston had been distributed clandestinely. It was written in what he recognized as Calderon's handwriting but bore corrections in another hand. A separate sheet contained notes for a speech, all in the hand that had made the corrections in Calderon's script.

A torn half sheet attached to it interested Weston more than the speech, for it was one of the same forms that had been among Dr. Johns' papers. The note on the back read: *Foreign policy: Stress need for friendly relations with all peace-loving democratic nations without mentioning countries and afterwards mention "our powerful neighbor to the north" separately.* At the bottom of the drawer was a sheaf entitled quite honestly, ***EXPANSION OF POLICE***

FORCE and in brackets under the title, *(For operation after purge is completed.)*

There were no maps and no correspondence. Weston closed the drawers silently. Evidently Bustellos kept other documents elsewhere—or someone else kept them. He slipped back into the mess hall and through the cockroaches across the kitchen. As he closed the back door behind him, he heard marching footsteps. For a second he froze against the side of the building. He could go back to the darkness of the kitchen or make a run for the undergrowth across a fifteen foot strip of cleared ground. His instinct was to stay in the open. He ran for a clump of bamboos and stood motionless behind it.

At last he started to edge along in the direction of his dormitory. To his own ears he sounded like an elephant but there are many noises in the jungle at night. The group of men who had marched to the front of the office noticed nothing. They were changing the guard. Weston looked at the time—11:40. Who but a Latin revolutionary army would change the guard at 11:40?

The going was not comfortable barefoot. He regretted not having his shoes. He couldn't make more noise with hobnailed boots. So far, he hadn't stepped on a snake but he was convinced he'd walked on every spiny palm in creation. Outside his window, his neighbor's thunderous snores were music to his ears. He hoisted himself in and knew an instant of panic as the bamboo creaked ominously but the rhythm from the next cubicle didn't falter. The marching footsteps were coming this way, now. He hung his coat on a nail and lay down on the cot.

Voices were speaking outside but he couldn't hear what they said. A heavy footfall shook the veranda and a second later a light shone full on his face. Knowing that he had winced, he opened his eyes and sat up. "*Que—*" he began.

"Pardon, señor. Guard." The officer passed on. The footsteps went to the end of the veranda and returned. There was a bit more conversation outside, then retreating footsteps and silence.

Weston tried to sleep. The need for action had, for a while, banished thoughts out of his mind. Now the need for action was passed for the moment, and they crowded back.

CHAPTER IX

TROUBLE AT TAGALPA

WESTON was still awake at four-thirty when Radetch stuck his head in from the veranda and said, "Coffee in the mess hall before we start."

Alfonso was on hand with the blindfold when he reached the plane. "No bread to eat with my coffee," he was complaining, "and I could find nothing to bring with me for the journey."

It was ten past five. The detective looked at the none too clear pre-dawn grayness and said, "Can't see much even without a blindfold."

However, they took off without difficulty and an hour later, Alfonso's voice said, "If the señor would care to take off the blindfold, now—"

Weston looked down and saw mountains below him.

"We'll be in in about ten minutes," said Radetch, "and when we get in, remember, we stay together. Alfonso is an excellent shot though he prefers a knife because it's quieter. So don't try any tricks."

"Are you still worried? Hasn't it occurred to you that it is in my own interests to get these planes delivered safely and get my cash?"

"So you say. As I told you before, Weston, I don't believe anything you say or do—even when I see you do it. However, this time we hold an ace."

"Which is?"

"Frederico Calderon."

"It'll kill the old man when he finds out what he has been fronting for," said Weston slowly.

"Did you tell him?"

A slightly crooked smile twisted the detective's lips. "Would he have believed me?"

When they had landed and Radetch had given some instructions about the plane, he said, "We'll task Dayton to use his office phone. It's a direct wire that doesn't go through the switchboard. I don't much like hanging round this town," he said as they started to walk towards Dayton's office. "Every now and again the police get an idea that they'd like to pick me up and question me. They let me go because I have French papers and the French Consul squawks—when he finds out. But it takes time and it would be very inconvenient right now."

"What nationality are you actually?" Weston had never known.

"My four grandparents were variously Russian, German, French and Czech. It adds up to what?"

"I've often wondered why you stuck to the Communists—or why you ever worked for them in the first place. You don't believe in it."

Radetch shrugged. "They offered me a job when I was hungry. When that was finished there was another. I liked traveling round. I liked fighting in those days." Again he shrugged. "I never got together enough money to get out comfortably."

"If they'd let you."

"They don't approve of me but they find me useful," laughed Radetch. "I think I'm the only human being who has been connected with the Politbureau because of efficiency and in spite of what they term an 'unsatisfactory ideological orientation.' I've got away with it so far. But for how much longer? One never knows." Again he gave his expressive shrug. They had reached the office now and Dayton himself came out.

"Where have you been off to?" he asked Weston after he had greeted them. "My wife wanted you for some do she's having tomorrow and said your hotel always reported you as out."

"May we use the phone?" asked Radetch. "That booth in the waiting room is like a broadcasting station."

"Sure. Help yourself." Dayton waved to the desk. "Your job in for the night, Radetch, or will you be wanting it later?"

"In an hour. I told the boys."

"I'll be back in a moment." Dayton was tactfully gone.

"Another advantage is that this phone has an extension." Radetch went over to a desk in the corner on which there was another instrument and picked it up. "Dial 09 and ask information for the number unless you know it."

Weston smiled a bit crookedly as he obediently dialed. The service was good and in less than five minutes he had Tegucigalpa and a few seconds later the Palace Hotel. As he waited for Jeffries to be fetched to the phone he asked, "Do the police listen in at Central here? How careful does one have to be?"

"The less you give away, the better, of course. But I don't think they have many English-speaking operators."

At that moment Jeffries' voice answered. Weston identified himself and asked, "Everything O. K.?"

"Yes." The line wasn't very good.

"Here are your orders. Got a pencil and paper? Leave so as to arrive at 2 P. M. today." He produced the sheet on which Radetch had written the position and directions and read them off. "Got that?"

"Right."

"Can you make it?"

"Sure. May have to charter a plane from here."

"O. K. if you have to."

There was a click on the line and a voice said, *"Haga el favor de hablar Castellano."*

"See you at two, then. 'Bye," Weston finished rapidly and hung up. "They do listen," he obsedved.

THERE was a knock on the door and when Alfonso opened it, Jacoves appeared with some papers in his hand. The operations manager looked round and said, "Where's the boss?"

"He'll be right back," Radetch told him. "What's new?"

Jacoves shrugged. "Not much. I did not expect to see you back so soon."

"Is there something to eat around here?" Alfonso demanded plaintively.

"Go in the main waiting room and eat some of the Pan-American sandwiches," Jacoves told him.

As Alfonso went out on the trail of food, Dayton came in.

"These are the figures on the gasoline stores at Tagalpa," Jacoves told him, handing him the papers.

"What in hell does Hollis think he's doing down there? Getting set for a siege?" rapped Dayton, looking at them. "Why did you let all this go down?"

"He figured in case of trouble he'd better have a little extra on hand."

"Little extra! Hell! He's got enough to run the whole line for a month. I'll talk to him tonight when you call him." Dayton remembered Radetch and Weston suddenly and asked, "Did you get your phone call?"

"Yes, thanks. I've a bit of business to do in the town, then I'll be back. Come on, Weston." As they went out, Radetch said, "We'd better make a reservation for your pilot to go back to Tegucigalpa tomorrow."

They negotiated the ticket and found a taxi at the bus entrance. Alfonso rejoined them, producing two sandwiches from his pocket which he munched happily as they drove towards the town.

"That fellow, Jacoves," asked Weston, "he's not an American, is he?"

"He's got naturalization papers, I believe," answered Radetch with a grin. He told the driver to stop at a corner in the business section; as he got out, he said, "I'll only be a few minutes. You and Alfonso amuse each other." He walked rapidly back along the block, turned in somewhere in the middle and disappeared.

Alfonso was hissing violently. Weston looked at him in momentary alarm and found that he was only trying to attract the attention of an old woman seated on a doorstep with a tray of sticky looking cookies on her lap. She came over and sold him a half dozen wrapped in a twist of dirty newspaper.

As Alfonso was contentedly eating so that he didn't want to talk, Weston was visualizing the block down which they had passed. He was looking, as it were, at his mental photograph and he decided that one of three doorways in the center of the block must have been where Radetch had entered. There had been the bar "Fe en Dios" with a dangerous looking pyramid of bottles: the Casa Milagrosa, containing a display of dried meat, strips of wizened sausage and bags of corn. Sandwiched between the two was the place where the telephone line went: Antonio Munjoz—*Agencia de la Lotteria Federal.*

Radetch returned and directed the driver back to the airport. The plane was ready. Radetch sent Alfonso to find Jacoves and told Weston to get in. "We'll stop at the *finca* for lunch. It's on our way."

After a few minutes Jacoves came. Weston heard the operations manager say, "I've cleared you—" and then they moved out of earshot. Radetch nodded several times then came and climbed in. After flying for about twenty minutes, he turned and said, "I'm going down at Tagalpa. Need gas."

"Practically a commuter!" Shorty Hollis grinned cheerfully at Weston as he saw him climb out again on the field from the plane.

Radetch said he needed fuel and Shorty gave some orders. "Come and have some coffee while you're waiting." He hailed them into the office.

Alfonso asked if there were anything to eat, as if he had forgotten the conglomeration of sandwiches and cookies he had eaten during the last two hours.

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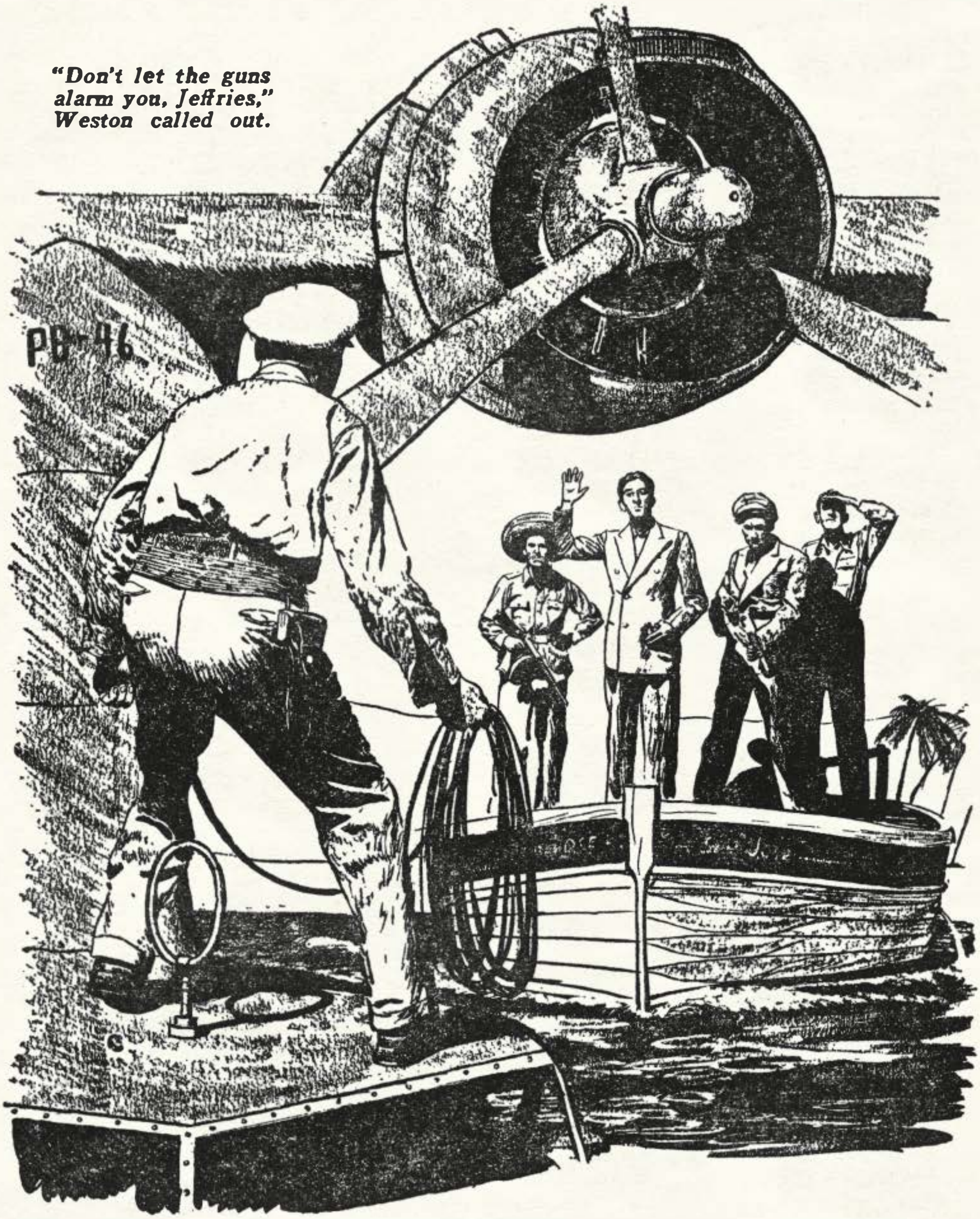

"Don't let the guns alarm you, Jeffries," Weston called out.

Hollis and Radetch talked about the weather prospects.

"There was something funny about your starboard wheel as you taxied," Shorty said a little later. "Better come and take a look at it."

They went out to the plane. Weston watched them as they squatted down and examined the wheel from all angles. Presently they straightened up and stood for a few minutes talking. Then Radetch came over. "Seems O. K. Let's go."

"Shall I see you tomorrow, Weston?" inquired Shorty. "I'll miss you if you don't drop in."

Less than fifteen minutes later they put down on the little strip at the bottom of the terraces for drying coffee. Halfway up the slope to the house they were met by the middle-aged *finquero* who proudly drew Weston's attention to various improvements that had recently been made. "No changes had been made since my grandfather's day but since Señor Radetch has come, everything is different. We have our own dynamo. After lunch, if the señor cares—"

"Ah, lunch—" beamed Alfonso.

"Won't have time today," Radetch said.

During a heavy but good lunch accompanied by excellent Chilean wine they discussed coffee, the prices of coffee and the markets for coffee. Nobody had mentioned politics by the time they took their leave.

TWENTY minutes' flight from the *finca* brought them over the coast. Radetch put the plane down to a neat landing on a long beach of hard-packed sand. A number of men were standing near a motor launch which was drawn up on it.

"Conveniently deserted spot for gun running, smuggling, murder or what have you," commented Weston as he climbed out.

"Nobody for miles round," agreed Radetch. "No roads. Someone told me one time that nothing will grow here."

"San José's the nearest port? Do they send out patrols from there?"

"Not often. They have two fast patrol boats there but they don't go out often."

"Why not?'

Radetch laughed. "Not enough appropriations for buying fuel oil."

The heat was astounding. There was no shade and no breeze. Weston counted fifteen men, all armed with sub-machine guns. Radetch brought over a young man and introduced him as, "Antek Wishnesky, the pilot who'll take over. Doesn't speak much English or Spanish."

"Saw you in the mess hall last night," said Weston as he shook the pilot's hand. He pointed to the machine guns and said, "Radetch, if my pilot sees all that armament, he's liable not to come down."

"Huh?" Radetch thought for a moment. "Maybe you're right." He gave some orders and the men stowed the machine guns less conspicuously.

Weston wandered along the beach. He stood for a few minutes playing ducks and drakes but it wasn't satisfactory. The stones weren't the right shape. He ambled back to the tiny patch of shade afforded by the wing and fuselage of the plane.

"Two o'clock," said Radetch.

"Arrives it!" exclaimed Wishnesky who had had an ear strained to the north.

Seconds later Weston heard the hum of motors, then a speck appeared that gradually grew larger.

"We boat." Wishnesky was getting into the launch. "I do not love that it climb the sands," he explained.

The plane was flying low. It came over the boat, passed and made a wide circle to the north. Then it came back and down. The launch chugged forward, the men holding their machine guns ready.

Captain Jeffries had no idea what he was walking into. Colonel Gerard had added little to Weston's laconic intructions that he was to be an out of work pilot who'd fly anywhere for cash, asking no questions and answering none. "I never ask Weston his plans," the colonel had continued, "and in this case, I doubt whether he has any at the present time. He'll have to make them up as he goes along. But remember that officially, we know nothing of him—or of you. If you get in a mess, we will not be able to help you. From past experience," he had added, "it seems probable that Weston would do all he could to get you out of any jam you got into."

Jeffries had seen Weston in the boat as he flew over. He had also seen the long beach and would have rolled the plane up on it, but as the launch was obviously coming out to meet him, he taxied to a halt, got the door open and waited, rope in hand, ready to throw. Then he saw the machine guns. There was still a chance to take off.

Weston was standing up in the launch. He was near enough to see the slight tautening of his body which was the only indication Jeffries gave that he had noticed the guns. He called out, "Don't let the guns alarm you, Jeffries. They aren't trusting folk around here."

"Doesn't look it." He threw the rope

to one man who stood up to catch it.

"Are you alone?" asked Radetch, as the launch made fast alongside.

"Sure."

The transfer took some minutes. Wishnesky needed to be told one or two things about the plane and his curious English rather defeated Jeffries. Weston stowed the pilot's bag on the seat of the launch and said, "There's your first plane, Radetch, delivered on time."

"I still haven't decided what your game is."

"Cash," replied Weston laconically.

Radetch reached into the pocket of his shirt. "Here it is."

Weston opened the envelope Radetch handed him and counted the U. S. currency inside. Then he nodded and put it into his pocket.

"We'll go to the *finca* for the night," Radetch was saying. "In the morning, I'll fly Jeffries up in time for the Tegucigalpa plane."

BEFORE they reached the shore, the plane was off. Jeffries watched approvingly. The pilot couldn't speak comprehensible English, but he could fly. He seemed headed southwest by south. Jeffries was visualizing the map when he realized that Radetch was addressing him.

"If you've a gun, Jeffries, hand it over, please."

"As you said, not very trustful." The pilot glanced at Weston.

"Never argue with an army." Weston nodded towards the machine guns. Jeffries handed over an automatic.

"I just believe in keeping temptation out of your way," Radetch observed. The launch was ashore now. "Did Weston tell you there's a passage booked for you on the morning plane to Tegucigalpa? It'll get you there at 8:30. You will be able to bring the second plane down at the same time tomorrow?"

A second plane was news to the pilot but he only said, "Ask the boss. I just fly."

"Same time tomorrow. Same place," said Weston. "O.K.?"

"If you say so, boss." Jeffries was doing frantic mental arithmetic to work out whether there was any possible way that he could beg, borrow or steal a plane of that type between 8:30 and 2 the following day. Perhaps the naval base at Balboa—

Radetch was giving instructions to the launch captain. Alfonso was complaining about his stomach. "It is my liver which acts on my stomach and upsets it so that I am always glad to be out of a boat," he explained, not thinking to blame his woes on a surfeit of sandwiches, cookies and lunch.

The launch was ready to leave. Radetch started to walk to his plane. He asked casually, "Where did you take off from, Jeffries?"

"All I know is how to fly planes," said the Texan.

"You're among friends now," laughed Radetch.

"My friends don't usually meet me with machine guns," drawled Jeffries easily.

"There is a proverb about—how does it go in English? A gram of precaution—"

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," suggested Weston.

"There's another about least said soonest mended," retorted Jeffries.

Radetch laughed and said, "Sit in the back with Alfonso. Weston, in front with me."

They got in. It was only a twenty minute flight to the *finca* and something had to be done quickly. Weston wondered just how proficient Alfonso was with his gun or the knife that he "preferred because it was quieter." Alfonso was behind the pilot. Weston knew he must wait until they were a bit higher. His hand was in his pocket on the stone he had picked up from the beach.

When he did move it was with a beautifully coordinated precision. He had his left hand on the back of the seat. His right came up in a semi-circular sweep that ended on Radetch's head. It was a vicious blow. He knew he wouldn't get another chance. Almost before Radetch slumped forward, Weston was facing Alfonso.

With an expression of incredulity on his fat face, Alfonso had whipped out his gun. Jeffries grabbed his gun arm. There was a report as the Texan wrenched his arm around, a yelp from Alfonso and Jeffries had the gun.

Weston had taken Jeffries' gun from Radetch's pocket. "Keep still, Alfonso, and you won't be hurt," he said. Already he was dragging Radetch's limp frame from the pilot's seat.

"Get that guy's foot off the right rudder, sir," said Jeffries.

As he hauled the unconscious man by the shoulder, Weston looked down at his hand. It was bloody. He looked more closely at Radetch's jacket. So that's where Alfonso's bullet had gone.

"I don't think he's going to be pleased when he finds that you've shot him," he said.

"Ai—ai—ai—" Alfonso started keening like an Irish peasant at a wake.

Jeffries slipped into the pilot's seat. "Instead of wailing, try to do something for him, Alfonso," ordered Weston.

"Where am I to go, sir?" asked Jeffries.

With a sudden unbearable weariness, Weston sat sideways in the co-pilot's seat, the gun in his hand covering the two in the back. "Hell," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the pilot cheerfully. "Is there anywhere you'd like to stop first?"

Weston managed a tired smile and said, "I wish I knew what to do."

"There's gas for about two hours' flying," Jeffries told him.

Weston looked down. Already they were over the foothills of the Pacific range. Radetch and Alfonso had got to be kept on ice at least until the following day. Where? His brain was tired. The last twenty-four hours had not been restful, with the knowledge that one little slip would topple the whole structure he'd built. "I want to get back to the capital," he said at last, "but I don't want to come in at the airport."

"This job doesn't need much space to land," replied Jeffries. "We could take a chance on a field."

Weston shook his head. "I particularly don't want to attract attention. Is there any small airport near?"

The Texan unfolded one of the maps he'd brought. "Air training field the other side of the town from the regular airport," he announced.

"How far out is it?"

"There's a road marked into town. Looks as if it would be about fifteen minutes."

"Make for that."

ALFONSO had managed to plug Radetch's wound with handkerchiefs. The bullet had entered from the back, just above the level of the armpit and there was no way of telling what damage it had done. A frown of pain crossed his face and he opened his eyes. Recollection and understanding dawned. He tried to put his right hand up to his head and winced. Alfonso went into a spate of almost tearful words. Radetch listened without comment. He got his left hand up to his head and asked, "What did you hit me with?"

"A stone."

"Ah—ducks and drakes," he murmured. "I should have known. You can't get away with it, though." He obviously had to make a great effort to speak and against the noise of the motor it was hard to hear his voice.

"D'you want to fill in the gaps for me?" asked Weston. "I know most of it."

"You ought to know me better than to ask."

The detective didn't persist. He did know Radetch too well. He asked Jeffries suddenly, "What's the speed of this plane?"

"Cruising speed? Hundred and ten."

"Will he have traveled at that speed?"

"Yes, unless he was climbing."

"Hour and a half—one hundred and sixty-five miles. Seventy minutes—hundred and twenty-eight miles. Hundred and sixty-five miles from the capital and a hundred and twenty-eight from Tagalpa." Weston was talking to himself. Suddenly he said, "Jeffries, find a place that is a hundred and sixty-five miles from the capital and a hundred and twenty-eight from Tagalpa."

"Large planes that carry navigators who want to do these things have tables to work on," grumbled the Texan as, having found a pair of dividers, he was having trouble juggling the map. "D'you need it accurately or approximately."

"It'll be an island."

"How did you know?" asked Radetch.

"Water for the bath was salt. Obviously sea level. Amphibian plane takes off toward open sea. It wouldn't have to land on the strip you used—" Weston listed various things.

"If this place is southwest of the capital, it would be the island of Todos Santos. There's nothing but empty sea for miles around," reported Jeffries. "If it's northeast, it would put you on top of a range of mountains with no available landing field."

"Todos Santos," repeated Weston. "What d'you know about it?"

Jeffries was wrestling with another map. After a while he said, "Mountainous, apparently. Uninhabited and it says no place to land. Seems to be about six miles long and three wide."

"What are you going to do?" asked Radetch.

"Stop it," Weston told him.

"You'd make more money playing along with us."

"Perhaps."

"But why? What's it go to do with you?" Radetch's face was twisted with pain. "Have you thought of Calderon?"

Weston didn't answer. Some time later, Jeffries said, "There's the field."

Weston looked down and nodded. "When we land, I'm going to telephone to the police chief. You stay here and keep a gun trained on these two. Try to avoid having anyone get into the plane."

The personnel of the training field was distinctly surprised by the arrival of a private plane but from the group of officers who hurried over, Weston unerringly picked the one with authority and explained that he urgently needed a telephone. The man whom he addressed looked curiously into his gaunt, haggard face and without further questioning, said, "Come with me, señor."

As he followed the man towards a building, Weston was wondering what in hell he could do if he couldn't locate Rios. It was by no means sure that the chief would be in his office or his home and if he wasn't . . . The officer had taken him into a small office and was pointing to the telephone on the desk; he withdrew and closed the door. Weston dialed, then gave the private extension number which the chief had given him and experienced a sharp relief when Rios' voice answered. He identified himself and went on curtly, "I'm at the Military Training Field and I must talk to you at once."

"I'll wait here for you. Come."

"Can't. You must come here. I don't want to talk on the phone."

There was a instant's hesitation, then Rios said, "Very well. I'll be there in ten minutes."

IT WAS exactly ten minutes later when the police chief's powerful car which was said to have shatterproof glass and specially reinforced steel plates, drove onto the field. Weston, who had returned to the plane, climbed out again, saying briefly to Jeffries, "Keep your eyes on them and use the gun if you have to."

"Ai, señor—he dies," wailed Alfonso. "Get a doctor."

A faint smile twisted Radetch's white mouth. He said, "Silence, Alfonso—"

"I'm going to get a doctor as soon as I can," said Weston as he went rapidly over to the police chief's car.

Rios had not got out. Now he opened the door and motioned Weston to get in. He said, "You were extremely peremptory, señor."

"I can show you how to get Bustellos and Tamis," Weston said evenly. "I can tell you where their headquarters are, where they are training their men and manufacturing their arms and who is directing them."

The chief was studying Weston's face; he gave no expression of surprise. "Where?"

"There is a condition."

"I am listening."

"The life and freedom of Frederico Calderon. Let me get him out of the country."

After a pause, Rios said, "While Calderon is alive and at liberty, he will never stop fighting. He will always be a rallying point, a symbol for malcontents."

"He is an old man now, Rios, and a sick man. He has been used by these people. He has no idea what is behind all this."

"What is behind it?" asked the chief sharply.

"Do I get his freedom?" A faint smile touched the detective's gaunt face.

"Why should I bargain with you?"

"Because I know what you want to know."

"I could have you arrested and find out."

Weston shook his head. Again the faint smile which didn't reach his eyes touched his mouth. "You couldn't make me talk, Rios, and you know it."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Have you forgotten telling me that your government was generous?" countered Weston.

"Perhaps for a little more generosity you might forget Calderon. There's a reward for him, you know. Another five thousand." Weston shook his head. "Ten thousand?"

"Those are my conditions. Take them or leave them."

Rios was puzzled. He'd dealt with all kinds of informers, mercenaries and opportunists and there was something here that didn't fit into the picture. He hadn't a high opinion of human nature, but he knew men and he knew with an instinct surer than reason that it was useless arguing and that no power on earth would make this gaunt-faced man talk on anything but his own conditions. "Very well," he said at last. "Unofficially, I'll do all I can to help you get Calderon out."

Weston spoke rapidly for almost ten minutes. At the end of it, the chief said, "It could very easily be so but you've no proof."

"If I can satisfy you that he was involved in the murder of Johns, which is tied in with this thing, will you keep him out of circulation, incommunicado, until it's over and you have the rest of the proof?"

"Agreed."

Weston explained about his prisoners. "Where can they be kept out of the way? If it's known that I'm back and Radetch is wounded it will tip them off that something is wrong."

"I'll find out if Camacho is in his office," said Rios.

"The air minister?"

"He has an office here, where he usually is. We can depend on him. There's a hospital here, too. They could stay under guard here. Incommunicado."

When the police chief once made up his mind and decided to move, he moved fast and got things done. The tall, youngish air minister did not seem to find it in the least peculiar that people arrived at his training field with wounded prisoners. Radetch was removed to the hospital. Weston called Jeffries from the plane and spoke rapidly for a few minutes. Jeffries nodded once or twice and finally said, "Can do."

Weston said, "Don't get caught. I'll get you transportation."

As soon as Jeffries had gone, Weston joined Rios in the air minister's office.

"How long will it take you to get all your planes in the air?" Rios was asking.

"All that can fly," Camacho answered ruefully, "which is eight, can be ready in an hour."

"Is there a good map of the island of Todos Santos?" asked the detective.

The air minister produced a large-scale map and Weston studied it. The hills on

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the west were marked by an unbroken line; on the east, the range had one pass. That would be where he had seen extra sentries.

"I've flown over there once, ages ago," Camacho said. "It's uninhabited. Sometimes fishing boats put in for a night and camp. There is one good beach, here in the east. Is there smuggling going on there?"

"You might call it that." Rios was reaching the telephone. "I'll have the men you'll need meet us at the corner of the market."

Weston stopped him. "That assistant with the curly hair and pinched-in waist—"

"Terceira?"

"He's in with them."

"Terceria! He hasn't the—" began Rios and broke off. "I'm sure you're wrong."

"Just don't tip him off."

CHAPTER X

LONG SHOT

"WHAT road," asked Weston a few minutes later as the chief's powerful black car sped back to the city, "in a poor district is in bad repair, cobbled for about two miles from the market place, then dirt further out where repairs were started on Monday or Tuesday?"

"Poor district where repairs were started Monday or Tuesday." Rios thought for a moment. "I can find out from the Ministerio de Hacienda." They had reached the corner of the market now. A police car was waiting. "I'll send Cabral to cover you. I'll wait in the telephone building. You know where it is? Just behind here."

Weston nodded and got out. He went around the corner and walked down the street where Alfonso had eaten cookies while they waited for Radetch. He came to the Bar "Fe en Dios" and looked for a moment at the dangerous pryamid of bottles. He could see into the small office where the telephone line went, next door; the *Agencia de la Lotteria Federal* —Antonio Munjoz.

Weston went in and addressed the man who was working behind the one high desk. "Señor Munjoz?"

Antonio Munjoz, a thin, narrow man in an overpadded coat rose and said, *"Si,* señor."

"I will wait." Weston looked significantly at a shabby man near the door who was shifting from one foot to the other in apparent indecision.

"Vaya se," ordered Munjoz. "I've told you if you lose tickets it is no good coming here. Anyone could say they had lost their ticket." As the man went, he said, "No brains."

"I am a friend of Señor Radetch's," announced Weston, "And I have bad news. The police know that you sent Garcia to kill Dr. Johns."

Weston had been playing a long shot and the effect was even more than he had hoped for. Antonio clutched the desk for support. Color disappeared from his face as if it had been wiped off with a cloth and a film of sweat took its place. He looked as if he were about to collapse completely which was not what the detective wanted. "Better sit down," he suggested.

The man sat. "But—but—Garcia died," he stammered at last. "He did not talk."

"Perhaps it wasn't taken care of soon enough," said Weston carelessly. "Perhaps they learned it from another source."

"Not from me, señor." Fear of the police changed into more immediate fear of the unknown quantity in front of him.

"They have learned it somewhere from someone."

"What am I to do? My wife? My children—"

"This is just a friendly warning." Weston turned to the door.

"I must get out of the country—hide—" Antonio looked around his office as if he hoped to find a hiding place there. Then a shrewd look came to his face. "They must get me out. They can, can't they? They will, señor, won't they?"

"I expect they can if they want to."

"But they must. I—" Another thought struck him. "What else do the police know?"

"No way of telling until the arrests

begin," said Weston ominously. "I shouldn't waste time if I were you."

Before the shaking man had recovered from that, Weston had gone out and closed the door behind him. He saw Cabral, Rios' plainclothesman, in the doorway of the "Fe en Dios" as he walked quickly up the street and round the corner. A few doors along, he turned into the offices of the telephone company. A man said, "*Por aqui, señor*" and led him to the back.

The police chief was standing at the end of a long switchboard, a phone to his ear. He held up his hand for silence. An operator was writing down a number. After a minute or two the chief put down the phone. "He called the Dayton airline, asked urgently for Jacoves and spilled your story to him. Jacoves told him to keep away from his house, office and friends for a few days and everything would be all right. He warned him not to talk."

"Don't allow any of Dayton's planes to take off," said Weston.

"They haven't any flights scheduled at this hour of night. Nothing until daylight."

"They can send a plane up which isn't scheduled," said the detective irritably.

For a moment the police chief looked at him and Weston thought he was going to refuse. Then he shrugged his shoulders a trifle and picked up the telephone. "Perhaps I am a fool," he said, "but I will play the cards as you have dealt them, señor, for the present." A minute later, Weston heard him give succinct orders to the police post at the airport, and add, "I am coming out at once."

As they walked back to the car, Rios said, "You understand that, while you aren't under arrest, señor Weston, you would be very unwise to try to—shall we say, disappear?"

Weston got into the car and said wearily, "I do understand it. When will you understand that I want to stop this revolution as much as you do?"

"Why?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Señor, you are not very polite."

Weston's tired brain did not follow his meaning. He said, stupidly, "How?"

"To take me for such a fool."

OUTSIDE the hangar used by the Dayton line, it was quite obvious that something was wrong. Four or five police were surrounding a young man who was blaspheming in a variety of middle-European languages with bits of English and Spanish obscenity thrown in. It seemed that he had been about to take off in a plane when the unmentionable, unprintable so-and-so's who composed the equally unprintable police force had prevented him.

The police chief's Indian features were as phlegmatic as ever but his bright black eyes were speculative; for a second before he descended from the car he looked at the detective and said, "You knew a plane would take off."

Weston shook his head as he followed him.

"I thought it probable."

One of the airport police hurried up to Rios. "The plane was warming up to take off as you telephoned," he explained. "The pilot is not one of the regular Dayton men. Also, *Señor Jefe,* the Señor Dayton is trying to communicate with you."

"Hold that pilot. Find Jacoves and bring him to the office," ordered the chief laconically.

As they neared the office, Dayton's angry voice could be heard through the open door. "I don't care where he is. Find him." He looked up and saw Rios. "Never mind. He's here." Dayton slammed down the phone. "What in hell's the meaning of this? My radio's sabotaged—the control panel's stripped—looks like someone cut everything in sight—take hours, if not days to repair—and when I try to get the police a man comes with a lot of nonsense about my flights being grounded until morning. As if they didn't know that I didn't have any flights scheduled."

"What was that plane taking off for?" demanded Rios.

Dayton glanced casually out. "That's not mi—" he began and stopped. "By God, it is. What the— Jacoves!" The last was a roar. "Who the hell was taking it up?"

"Bring that pilot in," ordered Rios sharply.

The young man's stream of profanity seemed to have dried up and he looked sullen and wary. Before Rios could ask a question, Dayton roared, "I've seen you hanging around the last couple of weeks. What in hell were you trying to do? Steal my plane?"

In a Spanish that was so bad as to be three-quarters incomprehensible, the man began.

"Can't understand you," snapped Dayton. "For heaven's sake, talk English."

His English was worse.

"Documentos—" demanded Rios and was handed a Czech passport.

"D'you speak German?" asked Weston. The man nodded and the detective said, "Tell your story."

He told it. He was an out of work pilot. He'd bummed a ride on a cargo plane in the hope of getting to Colombia, where, he heard, there were some jobs. But he'd got stuck here. He'd hit Jacoves for a job and hung around the airport. Tonight, Jacoves had told him to take the small plane to Tagalpa. He had never landed there, even in the day, but he needed the money and was willing to try a night landing.

"He's lying," said Rios calmly, when Weston had translated. "His passport shows our tourist visa which means that he produced evidence of the possession of at least a thousand pesos and he arrived on a passenger plane which he had boarded at Mexico City."

"Jacoves told him to take the plane to Tagalpa?" repeated Dayton. "There's something wrong here. Jacoves!" He gave forth another roar like an embattled lion.

"Some information that I have received," said Rios, picking his words carefully, "suggests that Jacoves may have been implicated in the murder of Professor Johns."

Dayton's face hardened. "Is this another frame? You know, Rios, I've never been satisfied that Joe Hills wasn't framed."

"It seems odd that Jacoves is missing," observed Weston.

"Where the hell do you fit in?" demanded Dayton, and went on stubbornly, "There's something crooked—"

A report cut his speech. The back window which looked out to the rear of the hangar shattered, sending a shower of glass into the room and the bullet whistled through to lodge in the opposite wall at a level of about twelve feet. From outside came an unmistakably Texan drawn saying, "Why you low-down no-account bas—"

At almost the same instant that the glass had shattered, Rios, who was standing near the switch, put out the light. Weston swung over to the window, gun in hand. He collided with something solid which he knew was Dayton. In the gloom outside he could make out two figures swaying back and forth, then there was a grunt of pain and one fell. Dayton switched on a torch. Its circle of light showed Jeffries doubled up on the ground, a gun pointing at him. Even before the circle of light had picked up the figure holding the gun, Weston had fired. The gun dropped and a heavy figure pitched forward on top of it.

Dayton was swearing. "Jacoves—" he muttered.

Two police, attracted by the shot, were already bending over the fallen man. *"Muerto—"* one of them said.

"Pity," observed Weston, laconically. He followed Rios round the side of the building and went to Jeffries. "Are you hurt?"

The pilot turned a white face up to him but shook his head. "Hit me in the groin—" he gasped. "O.K. in a minute."

"What happened?" Rios was asking.

"Saw him outside—pointing gun—threw his arm up—he knew some judo."

Weston translated and asked, "Who was he aiming at?"

"Hard to say—might have been you or the little guy between the two police—"

"Afraid he might talk," murmured Weston. "Like Garcia." With the aid of one of the police, he helped Jeffries to his feet. He said, "Thanks, Jeffries."

"Seems like we're even," answered the pilot. He was obviously still in pain as they walked slowly round to the front of the office.

"There's a hell of a lot I don't understand," Dayton was grumbling.

Rios was looking at Jeffries. He said, in a low voice to Weston, "I had been wondering who stripped the panel."

The detective didn't comment. "We've no time to waste," he said. "Too many people know about this."

"Not so many. The main switchboard is—ah—temporarily out of order," Rios told him. "No one may leave the field. There's also a man in Pan American's radio station."

"Now, Rios," Dayton was saying, "suppose you explain this?"

They spent another ten minutes persuading Dayton to submit to the proposed controls until morning without going to his friend, the President, and making a fuss. When they left, he was still muttering, "No later, though. There's something fishy going on and I don't like it."

CHAPTER XI

RAID ON TODOS SANTOS

AS THE police chief entered his office at Headquarters, a man handed him a memorandum. "From the Ministerio de Hacienda."

"Calle Cinco de Mars is a cobbled road for three miles from the Parqué Palacio," Rios told Weston. "Then it is a dirt road. It passes the market. Repairs were started on Monday." He went to the side of the room and pulled down a wall map. "No other repairs in a poor district have been started recently."

The fashion plate of an assistant appeared in the doorway, looking worried. "The general is here," he said, "and he says you asked him to come. I didn't know anything about it."

"Ask him to come in."

The general had hardly waited to be bidden. A slight, gray-haired man who, in spite of erect shoulders and a flat stomach, never managed to look military, he said, "What's gone wrong now?" as he came in and then stopped when he noticed Weston.

Terceira was lingering in the doorway. He started to sneeze and whipped out another of his elegant handkerchiefs which dispensed perfume throughout the room.

"What are you waiting for?" snapped Rios.

"He really should do something for that hay fever," said Weston. "I meant to recommend some injections when I heard you the other night in the Calle Cinco de Mars."

"I've never been in the Calle Cinco de Mars." A sneeze cut it off but the reply had been much too quick.

"Remarkable! It's such a long street and you a policeman in the town!"

"I was home by eleven o'clock on Wednesday night and entertained friends until after three." Terceira rushed to his destruction.

"How do you know when I was in Cinco de Mars? How did you know what hours you needed an alibi for?" demanded Weston.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Have you an alibi for the time when you were stabbing Garcia?"

"I—"

"So that there was still blood on your handkerchief when I saw you hours later?"

"There wasn't—"

"You weren't very careful." Weston got up from his chair. "How else did your pals know that I talked to Rios in secret if you hadn't told them that I'd turned off the dictaphone? Who telephoned Radetch on Monday night before the raid on *Lo Noticia*? Who knew about it?"

"Did Radetch know about that beforehand?" asked Rios.

Briefly Weston recounted how he'd followed Radetch. The general was watching the increasingly nervous Terceira with hard, alert eyes.

"Besides myself," said Rios slowly, "you were the only man who knew about that raid. Even the armored truck commanders were not told until they were assembled ready to start."

"It's all lies—lies—made up by this—this—"

"I shouldn't say it if I were you," interrupted Weston. "If you want to be a conspirator and hide behind flimsy curtains, get your hay fever cured and don't use a perfume like some little fourth-rate tart."

Terceira leaped forward, his hands reaching for Weston's throat. As he moved, the unmilitary-looking general reached out a beautifully booted leg and tripped him up. As Weston sidestepped, Terceira measured his length on the floor, a flow of obscenity coming from his lips. Rios pressed a button on his desk. "We can deal with him later. We've no time to waste now."

Two men came and removed the crumpled fashionplate. Rios explained the situation briefly to the general, taking down another of the wall maps which showed the island of Todos Santos as lozenge-shaped, running roughly north and south with two spurs of hills, the western one unbroken, the eastern with a gap. Weston marked in the location of buildings.

"You have a plan," said the general. It wasn't a question; it was a statement, though the general was curious about the only partially explained foreigner.

"How soon can the two patrol boats at San José get under way?"

"Two hours. Perhaps less. They're Diesel-powered," said the general.

"And their speed? When would they have to leave San José to be off Todos Santos at 4 A.M.?"

"Midnight."

Weston looked at his watch. "Not much time," he said and rubbed his eyes wearily; they felt as if they were full of sand. "They must have a number of boats at the island," he went on, "as all supplies have to be brought from outside. They have at least one airplane; an amphibian bomber. There is a radio station here." He pointed to where he had marked it on the map. "If you don't want them to get away, the raid has got to be worked with split-second timing. It's light at five-thirty." He went on talking for some minutes. "Can that all be done in the time?"

The general thought for a few minutes, asked several questions and then said, "Yes." And Weston was satisfied.

"I can't spare one of Camacho's planes to take you to San José, Rios," said the general a few minutes later. "Can you commandeer a civilian one?"

"There's Radetch's four passenger plane at the training field," said Weston and looked to Jeffries who had remained silent throughout the conference. "O.K.?"

"Sure. Need gas, though."

"And Radetch goes with us," said Rios grimly. "I've some questions to ask him. We've had him watched," he continued, "ever since the day he arrived, because of his record. And he's never made a slip. He had an interest in Davos' *finca* and he's worked hard on it. Made modern improvements. And all the time—" He ended with a shrug of disgust.

IN THE 4 A.M. darkness the Pacific was magically calm, which was just as well, for the sailors from the patrol boat, burdened with sub-machine guns and automatic rifles, did not make a very snappy job of loading the small boats. Rios ordered Radetch brought along. "I shall send him to give them our terms," he said.

Two sailors shoved the prisoner roughly into the little boat. His face was gray and streaked with sweat but he made no complaint; he'd never given quarter and he did not ask for it now. Weston saw that his hands were bound behind his back and frowned; to a man shot through the armpit and shoulder that is calculated torture.

"Rios, don't you think that you've enough men to prevent Radetch escaping?" the detective inquired mildly.

The police chief's glance rested for a moment on the prisoner's bound hands. "Squeamish, Señor Weston?" he asked quizzically.

Weston shook his head. "Nor sadistic, either."

Rios shrugged. "He can't get away," he agreed and gave an order to one of the sailors.

Radetch said, "Thanks, Weston," as the man released his bonds and Rios gave the signal to pull away from the patrol boat.

Time passed. Weston couldn't have told how long. He had reached a stage of physical exhaustion when he was only aware of a dogged determination to do certain things which must be done. A voice gave orders to stop the motor and after that there was only the splash of oars. They were approaching the southernmost tip of the island.

So far there had been no sign of a light on the dark mass that loomed up in front of them. Now a man spoke from the prow, in a low voice. "Light ahead."

"Sentry on the beach," said Rios.

"One of my men could get him quietly," said the lieutenant in charge of the landing party.

A few seconds later a man slipped over the side, a knife between his teeth. He disappeared into the blackness, swimming noiselessly. They waited in silence. Then the light they had been watching was waved back and forth. The command was given to row again.

Wet but triumphant, the man who'd swum ashore waded out with the lantern. "But there's more of them sleeping under a shelter about twenty meters along," he whispered.

Rios gave his orders. "—and no shooting," he finished. "We don't want to warn the whole island."

The eight men sleeping under the palm leaf shelter were so completely befuddled on being suddenly waked by sailors armed with machine guns that they put up no fight whatsoever.

"There's our plane," said Jeffries as they waded ashore. Weston saw something that looked like the gray ghost of the amphibian through the gloom. "Ready to go, too," added the pilot.

"Stay with it, Jeffries," Weston told him. "Have it ready but don't start the motors until the first wave of planes has gone over. When Calderon's on board, if I don't come with him, wait for me—" he hesitated— "half an hour. If I haven't come by then, get going and take him to Honduras. Leave him there and go back to the States."

The pilot nodded. "O.K., sir."

Rios came over and said, "That is the amphibian you mentioned."

"It's mine," said Weston calmly. "Jeffries will look after it."

Rios looked at him for a moment and said nothing. Finally he grunted. "It's five to five. That's the trail leading through the hills. It doesn't appear to be guarded this end. Ready?"

As they marched along the uneven path, objects gradually grew clearer until they didn't require their torches. They had gone uphill for nearly half an hour when the path started to slope sharply down. Weston, who was walking with Rios at the front of the little column, stopped. "I should think that in another hundred meters we should come to the sentry."

But Rios was listening to another sound, his Indian face turned upwards. "The planes," he said.

In another minute, the hum of motors was quite clear. The men the chief had sent ahead to scout returned to report, "Two sentries."

The hum of the motors was a roar, now. While the sentries were staring at the sky, transfixed, they found themselves surrounded. One of them managed to let off his gun. It did no damage, except to a neighboring tree, but it made a noise. Not that that mattered now, for the first two planes were sweeping over the little valley.

"I'm posting six men here to stop anyone who thinks of making a getaway in one of those boats—or the plane," said Rios. He looked at Weston for a moment, seemed about to say something more, then changed his mind and was silent.

Camacho had sent his two bombers in first. The crash of high explosive shattered the early morning quiet. Men poured out from the flimsy buildings; men in pajamas, men in loin clothes, naked men, but all grabbing their weapons.

"Bustellos!" Rios cried triumphantly, as he spotted him running out of his quarters.

"Making for the radio," said Weston.

"Radetch—go ahead and give him our terms," ordered Rios.

Radetch looked across at Weston. "Pity we were never on the same side," he said. "Adios." He walked forward, erect, steady and somehow defiant. The first two planes had zoomed up and over to the north. Through the din of shouting men and futile firing, Radetch's voice called, "Bustellos!"

The leader of the Communist party turned. The two men of his bodyguard who, as always, were at his heels, turned also. Several other men nearby halted. They watched Radetch coming towards them.

WESTON had been standing behind Rios. The police chief was issuing sharp orders. Weston dropped farther behind. No one noticed him. Two buildings along, to his right, he recognized the dormitory where he had slept. He slipped along behind the backs of the buildings. As he ran, he heard the roar of the motors of the other planes and the nightmare rattle of machine gun bursts. He had reached Calderon's shack now.

The old man was standing in the doorway, his tired eyes mirroring the horror of the scene before him. The stricken look on his transparently white face stopped Weston for a minute.

An explosion from the south warned that the bombers had made their circle and were back again. He ran forward and thrust the old man down on the ground as another shattering crash brought a shower of dirt, spiders and some pieces of wood on top of them. "There's a plane on the beach," he said, "which will take you directly to Honduras."

"How did they know?" asked Calderon. "Why are you here?" Suspicion was replaced by accusation in the tired old eyes. He got to his feet, ignoring Weston's proffered assistance. "If we are to fall again, I would rather die here with the men who have fought for our freedom."

"These men are fighting for Moscow, not for you, whether they know it or not," Weston said in desperate urgency. "Can't you understand that?"

"I trusted you once," answered Calderon bitterly, "and you—" His voice failed. The blue lips tried to frame another word, but couldn't. Weston caught him as he swayed.

"Tomas—" Weston ordered curtly, "there are men at the sentry post guarding the trail to the beach. If you cut through the undergrowth, behind them, you won't be seen. The plane is on the beach. Get him into it."

"Don Pablo, I do not understand." The powerful Indian stood, holding Calderon in his arms as though he were a child, and looking with unhappy puzzled eyes at Weston.

Again the death rattle of machine guns swept the valley.

"You don't need to understand. Obey."

He stood until Tomas had disappeared with his burden behind a stand of bamboos, then hurriedly swept the papers off the desk and stuffed them into his pockets. He turned to go when an ivory statue of Our Lady of Sorrows caught his eyes and next to it, the portrait of a woman with a gentle, sad face—the Señora de Calderon who had died many years ago. He picked them up gently.

The uncomfortable nearness of an explosion roused him from his semi-trance of exhaustion. Men were rushing about shouting. The wounded were screaming. The mess hall was in flames. One man with a little more brains than the others was yelling, "Scatter! Don't bunch up!" A machine gun crew had finally got their gun pointed upwards. Nobody noticed Weston. For a minute longer he watched. There would be no revolution for the present. His job was done. He felt sick.

Then he plunged into the undergrowth, flanked the sentries and emerged far along the trail to the beach. He thought he heard firing coming from the direction of the sea and increased his pace. The roar of the motors came clearly to his ears. He came round the last bend and saw the two patrol boats, close in to the shore now, disembarking more men. Jeffries was standing by the plane which had the motors running; he had a somewhat embattled look, and there was a group of men standing watching him.

"Any trouble?" asked Weston, joining him.

"There will be when we want to take off."

"Calderon?"

"Aboard. I managed to persuade them that the plane could not possibly move unless I was inside it to make it move. But they don't intend it to take off."

Weston looked thoughtfully at the watchful men. Near them were stacked the arms which had been captured from the eight men who had been sleeping under the shelter on the beach. "Move those arms higher up," he ordered, curtly. "Near that tree there."

For an instant they hesitated. They

had seen this man with the police chief, who was in charge of the expedition and furthermore, the habit of command was strong in Weston. He was used to being obeyed. Subconsciously they responded to his sureness of himself. They turned and started to pick up the assorted weapons.

"Get in, Jeffries, and get going—"

The pilot was already climbing up. Weston waited, gun ready. The men had reaced the tree with the first load of arms; when they turned to fetch the rest, then there'd be trouble. There seemed to be some kind of argument as to how they should be stacked. Weston felt a jerk as the brakes of the plane were released. He climbed up. They were moving before he was inside. He made his way forward to the co-pilot's seat. They were taxiing past one of the patrol boats. Some men on the bridge shouted but they did not fire. Then they were climbing. Jeffries leaned over. "Not enough gas to reach the frontier. We'll have to put down somewhere."

"Can we reach the mainland?"

"Yes. I can make San José or possibly Tagalpa. But Honduras—no."

"Not San José. They'd arrest him there," Weston said half to himself. "Tagalpa would be best."

"If Tagalpa is closed in, we won't have enough gas to get anywhere else," warned the pilot.

For a moment Weston looked at him; Jeffries was young. He didn't want to give a straight order. He said, "D'you mind taking a chance on it, Jeffries?"

"No, sir. Just figured you ought to know."

"Good." The Pacific slipped by underneath them and Weston slept.

AN HOUR later, Jeffries woke him. "Coming into Tagalpa, sir. The old man's safety stay had better be fastened."

As he got up, Weston said, "Can we land?"

"Hope so, sir," said the pilot cheerfully. "We only have gas for five minutes."

Weston went back and as he bent over Calderon after fastening the belt, his fingers found the old man's pulse. He could feel Tomas' questioning eyes on him. The detective looked out and could see nothing. They seemed to be going down through swirls of mist. Then there was a bump as the wheels touched; the long low building came into sight and men were hurrying out of it.

"What in God's name did you bring that here—" began the voice of Shorty Hollis as Jeffries got the door open. Then he broke off suddenly as he saw the pilot. "Who are you?"

Before Jeffries had time to answer, Hollis saw Weston. His blue eyes narrowed with perplexity in which there was a dawning of suspicion. "What's happened? Where have you come from, Weston?"

Weston ignored the question. He said, "Frederico Calderon is dying. He wants to stay here."

"Calderon here!"

Red Byran had appeared and was speaking to Jeffries. "You took a hell of a chance coming in through that." He pointed to the clouds. "Why didn't you go back to San José? It was clear there."

"Out of gas," Jeffries told him laconically.

"What's this baby doing here, anyway?" asked Red and then stopped. Tomas was carrying Calderon across to the long narrow building. He wouldn't allow anyone to help. "I don't get all this," complained Red Bryan and followed.

Tomas laid Calderon down on a canvas cot. Occasionally the old man murmured something. Weston leaned closer to hear. Then Calderon opened his eyes and spoke distinctly. "Why did you do it, Paul?" As the detective was silent, the old man's eyes lighted with a sudden flash of understanding. "Did your government send you?"

Would it matter to tell him? A dying man. But Shorty Hollis was there and Tomas and Red Bryan and a radio operator, standing behind. Then Weston saw that it didn't matter anyway. Frederico Calderon was dead.

Tomas got to his feet slowly. Tears were struggling down his rough-hewn face. For a long time he looked at Weston, then quite deliberately he took a heavy gun from his belt. "You killed him," he said.

Weston made no move to defend himself. He said, in a flat, toneless voice, "Yes. I killed him, Tomas." The utter indifference, the complete lack of defense, either verbal or physical which might have been contempt or sheer fatigue, puzzled Tomas. He lowered the gun a trifle. "Why did you betray him, Don Pablo?"

Weston remembered Tomas' words on the little path two nights before: *"These men do not believe what Don Frederico has taught us."* He said gently, "He was betrayed by men who used him for their own ends. I wanted to save him."

Shorty Hollis' eyes had narrowed to twin points of blazing blue as suspicion had given way to certainty. He snatched the gun from Tomas' hand and said, "If he hasn't the guts to do it, I have."

Weston's lips curled back and for a second his queerly hooded black eyes were wide open. "You?" he said softly. "No." His hand hardly seemed to move and yet his shot was a fraction ahead of Hollis'.

"Why you—" began Red Bryan. He started forward, only to find himself confronting Weston's gun over the fallen body of Hollis, while Jeffries held him from behind.

"He isn't dead," said Weston, kicking Tomas' gun out of Hollis' reach.

"But what in hell's it all about?" demanded Red with enraged exasperation.

"They'll get you," Hollis gritted through set teeth.

"Your Commy pals? Perhaps." Weston shrugged. He was looking at a safe which stood at the far side of the desk.

The shot had brought men hurrying from the field. They were standing, crowded round the door, their faces a picture of perplexed stupidity. The radio man, who so far had not seemed disposed to interfere while these foreigners fought between themselves, started to edge towards them.

Without seeming to see anything, Tomas gathered Calderon's body into his arms and started towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Weston.

"He had friends in the hills," answered Tomas.

The men at the door parted to let him pass. He did not turn in the direction of the town but crossed the runway and walked straight into the mist that still clung to the foot of the mountains.

"Will somebody tell me—" came Red Bryan's exasperated voice, "what's going on? What's the connection between Calderon and Shorty? Why did Shorty try to shoot you?"

In very bare outline, Weston explained, and ended, "Obviously a convenient airport where he's been piling up supplies of gas, is very handy for a revolution. Also the use of radio telephone without incurring suspicion."

"But Shorty of all people . . . " Red stared in amazement. When he'd recovered a bit from the shock, he said, "That's why he's been stewing and sweating since last night. I got down here yesterday afternoon and it closed in. Then he couldn't raise the main office on the radio last night. He talked with Jacoves every night.

"He was stewing around like the world was ending and I couldn't figure out why. I knew he'd been cut off plenty of times before. Then he talked about trying to take off and I told him it would be suicide—and he knew it. And all morning he's been stewing." Red took a look at the weather. "It's only just beginning to clear now."

"We'd better patch him up and get him to the capital," said Weston.

"Hell, that means—" Red broke off and scratched his head. "Why can't you give him a break? He can't do any more mischief."

"I think he framed your friend, Joe Hills," said Weston, "and I'm sure he ordered the murder of the late Professor Johns."

CHAPTER XII

BLUEPRINT FOR TYRANNY

AT EIGHT o'clock that night a rapping on his bedroom door brought Weston to unwilling consciousness. As he called out, "What is it?" he looked at Jeffries, sleeping on the other bed. Neither of them had done more than re-move their shoes. The rapping hadn't even waked the pilot.

"Telephone, señor," said the voice.

Weston put on his shoes, went out to the telephone in the hall and heard Rios' voice. The police chief was back in the capital and wanted to see him. Weston grumbled but said he'd come.

When he reached the chief's office, he found the air minister, the general and Dayton. Rios was tired but satisfied.

"From something that Hollis said in the prison hospital," Rios was finishing explaining to Dayton, "I think that this revolutionary zeal was prompted more by hatred of you than by love of the Communists, though they appealed to his ambition."

Dayton nodded. "He wanted to be a partner. I've always known that. That's why, when Hills had to go, I was surprised that when I offered him the job of operations manager, he didn't take it but pushed Jacoves in instead."

"He was after bigger game," said Rios. "Some papers we found show that he was slated for air minister when they got in." He turned to Weston. "They were in that safe you brought from Tagalpa. My men got it open."

"Didn't have much trouble on the island, did you?" asked the detective.

"They hadn't the stomach for bombs and machine guns," Camacho told him. "It was all over within an hour."

"I left men behind to round up the stragglers who had escaped into the undergrowth," said the chief. He paused a moment, then said, "Radetch is dead. Bustellos shot him in the back, after he'd given them our terms."

Weston nodded. "He knew they'd do that," he said. "Did you get Bustellos and Tamis?"

"Yes. Bustellos died—resisting arrest. A pity."

"Good," said Weston so savagely that Rios opened his eyes.

"We found some more papers at Todos Santos. Very interesting. You might care to look at them."

"I'd better get back to the airport and see how Red's making out," said Dayton and left.

Weston read minute and detailed instructions about policies, purges, taxes, police, army; there was a complete blueprint for a police state. "And they thought they were fighting for freedom," he murmured.

"These came down from Mexico by various pilots," Rios explained. "My men have also brought in Antonio Munjoz, the lottery agent. He has talked. He was responsible for recruiting men for minor jobs. Delivering messages, shadowing, sabotage—" He paused, then added, "And murder."

"You made a pretty good clean-up of everything."

"We got all the important people except Frederico Calderon."

"He's dead," said the detective quite shortly.

Rios raised his eyebrows. "My information is that he and his servant, Tomas, were aboard the amphibian when you left."

"Your information is quite correct. He died at Tagalpa. Heart." Weston got up. "I'm leaving in the morning."

"Aren't you forgetting something, Señor Weston?"

"What?"

"This." Rios took a wad of bills and put them on the desk.

Weston's whole instinct was to say "Keep your blood money" but he didn't. He picked it up with an expressionless face. "I was sure you wouldn't forget it . . . "

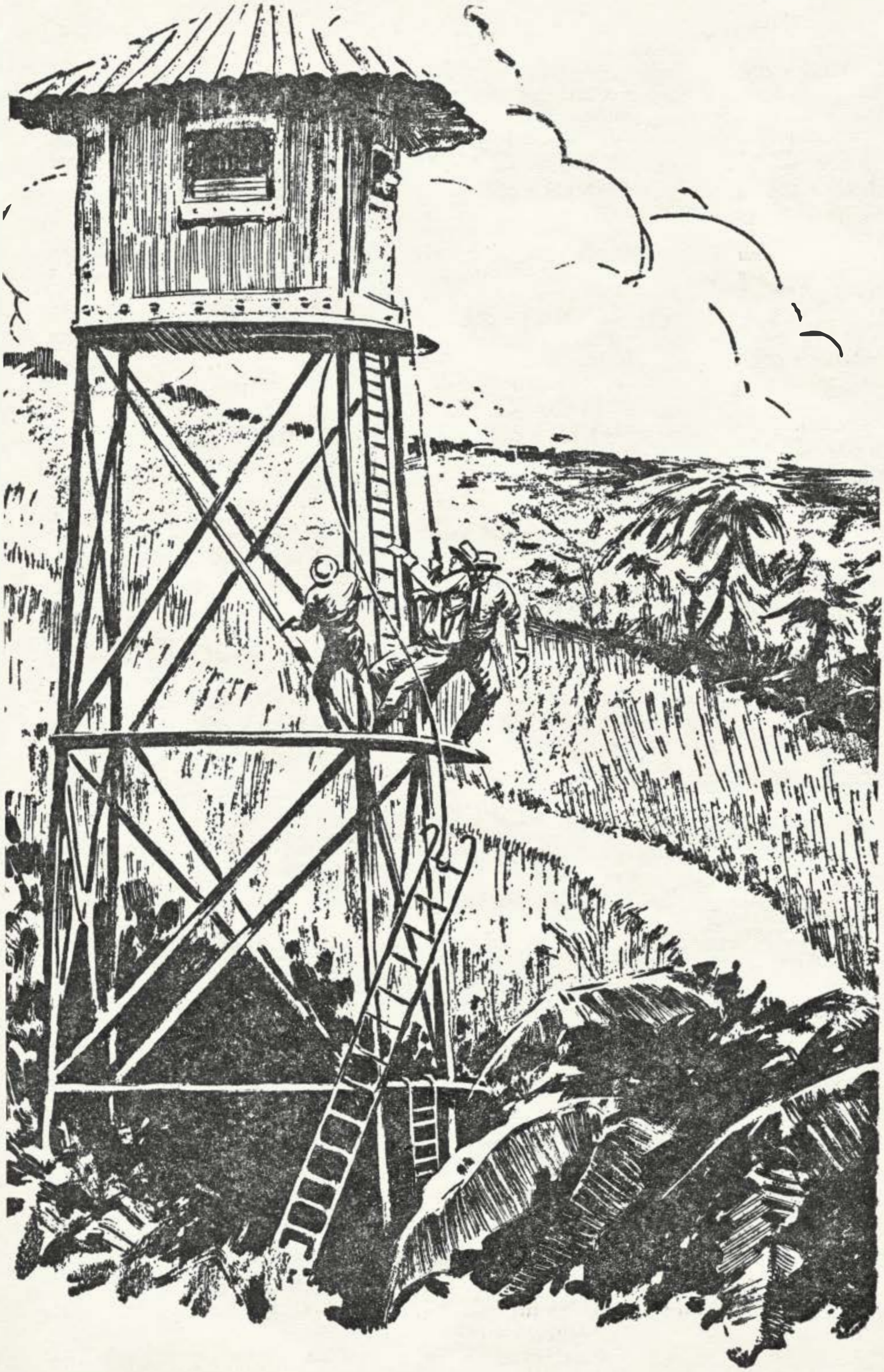
While they were stopped for fuel and lunch the following day at Gautemala City, Jeffries said, "There's still a lot about this that doesn't make sense to me, sir."

Briefly Weston recounted the death of Bowditch and the episode of Professor John's psychic mule. "It was all a highly improbable yarn. Shortly Hollis denied recommending the interpreter, Miguel Orlando, to Johns. But in Johns' briefcase, there was a form with Orlando's name written on the back in Hollis' writing.

And when he gave me the address of a hotel in Tagalpa, he tore off a similar form and used the back of it. I found another among papers in Todos Santos, with notes for a speech.

"Hollis knew, too, that I was inter-

(Continued on page 127)



We jerked up the line and quickly dropped the hook—the ladder fell with a crash.

DUCATS ON THE THREE-NOTCHED TRAIL

By

LESLIE BIGELOW

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

WHEN I was a little boy, I found that wet yellow copypaper dried with dark lines wandering over it. Such sheets were maps to me, and by them I sailed my galleon around capes and promontories in perilous lands, with eagle eye patroling the sinister horizon. The caskets of treasure I found were a little boy's afternoon dream. They belonged with Camelot and Troy; had never been and could never be.

And when I saw Etheredge's coins, dully gleaming in the afternoon Florida sun, it was almost a dream still—as though I watched Merlin prophesying before me, or rode the enchanted Arabian steed which flew through the air at the touch of a button, or saw a rosy cloud of carrier pigeons crashing through the elms of a small Nebraska town. The coins were there, but how could I believe it? The ecus and doubloons glittered greenly, but I was sure I could not touch them, lest they vanish and I find myself a little boy again, dreaming in the afternoon. I touched a Tuscan ducat. I touched a rose noble. I touched a piece of eight. But I could not believe I touched them.

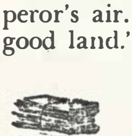
In the August late afternoon, Etheredge and I stood on the Iron Mountain fire tower of the Choctawhatchee National Forest. One of the leanest of national forests, the Choctawhatchee is mere "sandy scrub land", as a Florida congressman called it, to Etheredge's indignation. It lies in the Florida panhandle 50 miles east of Pensacola; some 600 square miles lying against the Gulf of Mexico; a level territory of sandy pineland, rising to gentle hills or falling away to swampy bottoms; dry, tinder-dry, yet watered by many streams. The planes of the Army Air Forces Proving Ground Command, which uses much of the Forest, scarcely trouble the occasional bear and wolf and panther, the deer and alligators.

From the tower we looked south toward the Gulf of Mexico, over Choctawhatchee Bay, whose landlocked waters could berth the navies of all nations in 30 square miles of 26 foot anchorage. Toward the west we saw the slim pencil of Santa Rosa Island, a barrier island 44 miles long, pointing east from Pensacola, separated from the mainland by Santa Rosa Sound. The water of many bayous and branches curled bluely among hills softened by longleaf pine and turkey oak, and the bottoms were darker with gumwood, swamp maple, holly, and magnolia.

Turning to the north we saw Andrew Jackson's trail wandering through the pines, the Three-Notched or Three-Chopped trail, cut in 1818 in his westerly campaign against the Indians. Named from its oak markers with three blazes, the trail was so cut that wagon axles might pass over; and each tree was felled, as the bevel of the chop shows, by a right-handed and a left-handed axeman, swinging together.

Over all this pineland hangs a thin veil of legend—Spanish, Indian, military, and pirate—and Etheredge knows it all. Like a wise man, he thus lives in many decades simultaneously, and in the present listens to all the whispers of the past.

He swung his arm wide with an emperor's air. "A good land," he said, "a good land."



ETHEREDGE is that splendid fellow, a southern Anglo-Saxon countryman, neither inbred into a stunted, sneering recklesness nor soured by poverty into animal malice. He is the sort of man who cheerfully helps you out of a ditch in Missouri, or sells you country hams in Arkansas, or services your car at a north Louisiana crossroads; his own master,. kind, shrewd, and humble; a descendant, if it matters, of Sir George Etheredge, the Restoration dramatist.

Three years before, stationed at Eglin Field, headquarters of the Air Forces Proving Ground, I'd been obliged to begin a history of the Command. To do so, I talked with men who knew the early days; and having found Etheredge, I talked with him a great deal more than was needed in line of duty. After my discharge, we played chess by correspondence, insulting each other on the postcards which carried our moves. But his last card (moving his queen hastily away from my rock) added this: *Your vacation's coming up. There's something I want to show you.*

"Something I want to show you!" Indeed there was something for me to see. It lay on the tower floor beside us in two little hills, one silver and one gold, next the little teak box, standing with an air of daintiness, for all its crude carpentry, on its four brass balls.

Four days ago Etheredge had sputtered in his little motor boat down Santa Rosa Sound almost to Pensacola. On the island he wished to inspect the site of the first "national forest", a 30,000 acre oak preserve which John Quincy Adams withdrew from the public domain, whose acorns were set in 1828, and whose mature timber, water-seasoned in Commodore's Pond at the Navy Yard, helped reconstruct Old Ironsides. Audubon described the live-oakers: "hale, strong, and active men" he called them; and much of their cutting, buried to season, was burned by the Confederates.

But of the preserve nothing remained, and Etheredge cruised slowly back along the Sound. At the little town of Mary Esther, where Lafitte and Billy Bowlegs careened their craft, he idly watched three porpoises describe their lazy arcs; and then he saw something barely afloat. He watched the porpoises nudge and harry a five-foot alligator from a swampy mainland slough. His eyes barely afloat, like two baleful periscopes, the 'gator threshed to Santa Rosa Island.

Once ashore the 'gator crawled to a freshwater lake, the temporary souvenir of a cloudburst. Etheredge prodded him once or twice with a long bamboo, driftwood from who knows where. Then he cast aside the pole into a pile of jetsam. It landed like a spear beside a broken fragment of breakwater, on which enormous rusty bolts clotted like fungus, and rebounded with an iron clang. Where it lay, Etheredge saw four brass balls, perhaps two inches in diameter, in an oblong. He remembers that he thought at once of the three balls of a pawnshop, the Medici arms; somehow the thought of a pawnshop window, littered with a small boy's treasure, keyed his mind to the next sum. Idly, he dug; the brass balls were at the corners of a little teak chest.

No, no rubies from Burma, no diamonds from Golconda, no emeralds from Bogota; instead the universal coinage of the 18th century. The find was partly dated by the Maria Theresa dollars, first minted in 1780. In gold, I saw angels, ducats from Italy and Austria, and a few louis d'or. But I saw only three doubloons; for the doubloon, though standard pirate pocket money in legend, was scarce, worth some 50 dollars of our present money. In silver, I saw crowns, half crowns, Maria Theresa dollars, thalers from Wurtemburg and Baden, and many pieces of eight, the "hard dollar", the universal Spanish trading coin. I saw a few shreds of golden chain, valued probably by weight, like the gold dust of a California miner, but no pearl necklaces ravished from the alabaster throats of Spanish princesses.

Roughly built by a ship's armorer, the little chest was teak, perhaps two and one-half by two, and eight inches deep. The wood was bound with brass strips, and each corner ended in a ball of brass, like the brass balls at the corners of an old-fashioned bed. In the tower house, for all its crudeness the little chest sat clear of the floor, poised upon its brass balls with a sturdy grace.

Here of course was no emperor's ransom, no purchase price of a province in Cockaigne. Here, instead, was spree money for an honest crew, perhaps, or for Lafitte's or Billy Bowleg's shady ruffians. I could see Billy, marrying the Choctaw in New Orleans in 1828, whispering to her, "Only three days sail from here, Queenie . . . "

Or the money might even have been earnest money for a business deal, the money, say, of an agent of that Panton, Leslie and Company which produced William Panton, the first North American millionaire, and carried a stock of $50,000 (a half million at least today) in 18th century Pensacola.

So the chest is casually buried for recovery a week later. Tidal waves sluice across the thin island, leveling old dunes and raising new ones; and the roisterers, thinking of Mobile, are defrauded; or William Panton's agent wonders whether to return to Pensacola or try his luck in the east at Tallahassee. I think I see him decide on Tallahassee; a promising town, "a grotesque place," as Emerson remarked, "rapidly settled by public officers, land speculators, and desperadoes."

"What's it worth?" I asked.

"Well, there's about thirty pounds of gold and fifty of silver—say, twenty thousand as bullion. I don't think the coins are rare. They're the usual trade stuff; but still they're worth more as coins than in bulk. Say, twenty-five thousand at the most."

"What's the Florida law on treasure trove? Does the state take half?"

"Santa Rosa Island is a national monument. Federal law governs. The money's mine—that is, less income tax."

"Good God! Income tax on a pirate's party money!"

"I know. It sounds like television at the siege of Troy."

I looked and looked at the dully glistening and blackened coins, and Etheredge looked at me with satisfaction. The coins and little chest distilled into the air the very fume of romance; and we sat still for a long while. Great Raleigh himself might have spent this half-crown for tobacco; and this Tuscan ducat might have left Italian blood.

"You're a lucky goat," I said finally.

"Yes," he said, "Yes, I'm a lucky goat. And you know"—pointing toward Andrew Jackson's trail—"and you know, I think you're a lucky goat, too. I think we have visitors. I think we may have some excitement."

"Visitors?"

"Yes, visitors. You don't suppose I asked you here just to goggle at some money?"

ETHEREDGE and I watched them a quarter-mile off, stumbling along Andrew Jackson's Three-Notched trail. They were decipherable at any distance: sinister animals in cheap suits; pool-room haunters on the fringe of the big-money rackets, just the boys for a beating; three men to one, or a fixed fight.

Etheredge tried his phone and set it down without surprise. "Cut."

"Well?"

"Don't worry."

I was a little annoyed. "Don't worry! And just what about these three lads?"

"Don't worry," he said apologetically. "I half expected this."

"Oh. I see. You half expected this."

"You see," Etheredge said, "when I found the money, I went to Pensacola for a little celebration at Jack Haberkorn's bar."

I remembered Haberkorn's bar with affection. It is one of the last male sanctuaries in the western hemisphere; no women ever, except the handsome, hard cashier, who sits in profile behind the bar at the cash register, to whose veteran cheeks not even a combat soldier, not even a pig-boat sailor, can ever tease a blush.

"There's a lot of gossip about treasure in Pensacola," Etheredge said. "One of the main business blocks there was paid for with treasure. In fact, ten years ago treasure almost began a little war. Some fellows here figured out where a treasure ship lay in Garniers Bayou; and then they heard that a Pensacola expedition was going for it with a dredge. The Valpariso *Star* predicted bloodshed."

"And I suppose there's a lot more talk now."

"Well," he said, "Well, you know how it is. I had a few, and I suppose I talked a little."

"Oh, you had a few and I suppose you talked a little!"

Etheredge looked at me and smiled. "Now wait a minute, old fellow. Treasure, old fellow. Treasure. Not much treasure, to be sure, but treasure."

"Well," I admitted, "I guess maybe I'd talk, too."

The three Pensacola men reached the foot of the tower, two meager-faced nondescripts led by a big fellow, six two or three, a natural leader by extroversion and animal vitality. But when he brayed up at us, you heard the quality of his mind: a man for noise; usually wrong, but always wrong with emphasis.

"Hey, up there! Hey, you! Hey, Jack!"

"Hello," said Etheredge.

"Why, *hello,* Jack," the big fellow fluted, mocking Etheredge's tone. "How *are* you, Jack?" His two men snickered.

"What can I do for you?" Etheredge asked.

"All right, Jack." The big fellow tried on his executive tone, the tone for the numbers-writer short seventy-three cents. "All right, Jack. We know you've got it. We want it."

Etheredge did not answer. To me he said, "Andrew Jackson's men marched that trail, and Neill McLendon marched that trail, and before the trail was cut Spaniards and Indians pushed through the turkey oak and titi; and now Pensacola vomits her sewage along the three-notched trail." Etheredge was angry; this land was his; poor land, true, and therefore doubly loved, as we are specially fond of a crippled child. Even Pensacola was in a fashion his; Pensacola, the Place of the Bearded White Men, the city laid out in 1559 by Tristan de Luna y Arrelano, with 40 plots set aside for a church, monastery, and king's house. It was an old land; no one decade, least of all this dingy one, could claim it.

Then Etheredge shouted bitterly, "Conquistadors, was your journey troublesome?"

The big fellow caught the note of insult. "All right, you smart bastard." He drew a .45, aimed carefully at the trap door leading to the watch tower, and fired five times. Four of the slugs sang harmlessly off the steel floor. The fifth drove through the narrow opening at the trap's edge through which we watched, screeched off the compass table, and ricocheted through the roof. The hole it smashed was not quite round; and an oblong pencil of sunlight slanted instantly through the little room.

One of the others drew a gun. "Hold it, hold it," the big fellow ordered. Then he shouted upward, "Do we get it?"

Etheredge said, "I doubt it."

The big fellow drew on his cloak of movie menace. He lowered his voice and carefully arranged his mouth. He said slowly, "All right, you smart bastard. Do we get it, or do we come and take it?"

"Suit yourselves, gentlemen," Etheredge said.

The three consulted. One of his followers spoke to the big fellow, pointing to Etheredge's little white frame house. "All right," the big fellow said. "All right. Roost in your goddam nest, you goddam sparrows. Roost up there. Think it over. We'll see you in the morning.

He drew his gun again and fired a single shot at the trap door. "Roost, you goddam sparrows." They all snickered, and turned to the little house.

Without trying the latch of the screened-in porch, the big fellow kicked in the screen door. He paused a moment in the middle of the porch. Then he kicked out a screen at each end. "Ventilation, you goddam sparrows."

Etheredge was not enjoying himself. "Look here," I said, "I'm glad you asked me to come, and all that, but what about it?"

"The chief forester will be through tomorrow night; maybe sooner, if somebody calls here and can't raise me."

"So we sit here until tomorrow night?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, what about these jokers?"

"We'll see about these jokers."

From the rear of the little house came howls of laughter and a crash of crockery. Through glass and screen, dishes scaled out the witchen window. The big fellow poked his head out. "A little house-cleaning, sparrows." Furniture was pushed about. Then all three came to the front door, drinking from a fifth of Etheredge's Scotch. The big fellow said something, and the two others laughed obediently.

Now the swift Florida dark came down around us as though we were indeed birds, our cage shrouded by the night curtain. Over the water far-off the witch-fires of a Gulf sunset painted the big sky. We ate a sandwich, dried out already in its paper wrapper, and drank a little water from a jug. We were not comfortable. We were hot and dirty, and there was no toilet.

I asked Etheredge, "Are you sure the forester will come?"

He said, "I'm sorry. It's a little more serious than I expected, and I'm sorry. But I don't think we'll have to wait for the forester."

"Well?"

"Where's your spirit, old fellow? Wait and see."

The dark drew down. After much noisy argument our visitors set a guard. We saw the red point of cigarettes on the porch and occasionally heard the guard patroling below. There was a loud explosion of slaps and curses on the porch. Quite big enough to hunt alone, the Florida mosquito likes company and travels with his family. We heard newspapers crinkle as they tried to patch the screens. Cicadas shrilled, and from a slough came the heavy boom of bull frogs.

"You know," Etheredge said, "these lads down below are the sort of noble fellow who used to come to the forest to hunt deer. Real sports. About twenty of them would drive around the sections until they found a deer slot crossing the road. They'd trailed the slot until they found a section from which it didn't come out. Then they'd surround the section, sit on the running boards of their cars with their guns, turn in the dogs, and wait. Yes, sir, real sports."

AS WE LAY on the floor, we saw through the windows the big Florida sky, the constellations creaming with such stars as shrank this earth into a pathetic pebble. Meanwhile, Etheredge talked of his pineland, and I saw the men march by: In 1528 Juan Diego Miruelo lands from his caravels near the site of Pensacola. In the same year, near Tampa, Panfilo de Narvaez, Captain-General of Florida, who lost an eye with Cortez on the Melancholy Night in Mexico City, lands 400 men and 60 horses. They march toward this forest, harried by famine and by Indians so powerful that birds are "felled with their shouts." In anguish they patch five boats together, with rope of horse's hair and spikes of stirrup iron. But in Pensacola Bay a storm capsizes two of them, and from the expedition only four men return alive who march from Pensacola to the Gulf of California in a formidable eight-year journey, of which Narvaez' secretary, Cabeza de Vaca, leaves an account.

In 1559 Hernando de Soto lands at Tampa with 625 men and 213 horses, his favorite stallion Aceituno among them. They march north and west, toward the forest. In the same year Tristan de Luna y Arrelano plans Pensacola. Gaunt under heavy panniers, the Spanish mule trains venture a few miles north of the tower along El Camino Real, the king's road, called the Old Spanish Trail. From Mexico City it is 160 miles to French Ford on the Rio Grande; 920 to San Antonio; 1220 to Nacogdoches in Texas; 1320 to Natchitoches in Louisiana; 1455 to Natchez; 1730 to Mobile; and 1795 to Pensacola. The mule trains pass us in the eighteen hundredth mile; it is 2042 miles to Tallahassee, and they make home at last in St. Augustine, 2260 miles from their beginning.

Then the explorer: "At the order of the most excellent Conde de Galve, Viceroy, Governor, and Captain-General of the Realm of New Spain"—the titles ring in the hot Florida night—at his order Don Laureano de Torres y Ayala roams westward through the forest with 112 men and 76 horses. Don Laureano reports: "I followed the same course . . . We passed over one little hill which looked to us as if composed of some iron mineral because of the color of the soil . . . " This is our very hill; the fire tower stands on Don Laureano's hill of iron. He goes on: "I pitched camp near a creek as I saw that the men were suffering considerably from the excessive heat."

Don Laureano's priest, Friar Rodrigo de la Barreda, complains of a "vast swarm of mosquitoes, wasps, and ticks," but he admires the "sturdy chestnut trees." Meanwhile, Don Laureano's mariner, Don Francisco Milan Tapia, sails along the shore. In the watches, he fills a notebook with boyish pictures. I have seen a tree which Don Francisco drew; it stands at East Pass into Choctawhatchee Bay.

Then the settlers: Neill McLendon comes with his Scotsmen. They meet the Euchee Indians, and that night I heard the story of the Euchee Indians, which I must set down very carefully one day. The Scotsmen name the heads and branches: Burnt Fox Branch, Little Boiling Creek, Big Red Fish Lake, Mossy Head, Hogtown Bayou, and Tiger Tail Branch.

"So it was," Etheredge said, "So it was in the old days."

At almost precisely eleven, he started up. "Look!" he said. He coaxed my head where his had lain; and through the bullet hole in the roof blazed a great star. Etheredge marked the head place with chalk. "Next August," he said, "I shall punctually await the annual return, just here, of great Betelgeuse."

Then somehow the tough muster of the old decades robbed the Pensacola men of any meaning. As though in sanctuary, we slept. Sometime very early in the morning I awakened to find the moon shining on the piled coins and little chest. Far away to the west a flight of heavy bombers thundered toward the Gulf on a night mission from the Proving Ground. Below I heard a sulky argument: a guard had come on too early or too late, I could not make out which. The city accent was rancid in the moonlight. "At the order of the most excellent Conde de Galve, Viceroy, Governor, and Captain-General of the Realm of New Spain . . . I pitched camp near a creek as I saw that the men were suffering considerably from the excessive heat."

His head upon the chalk mark, Etheredge slept. He loved this empty land, and the little treasure glinting beside us was properly his; he was its natural heir. It was even proper that the treasure be small. A great blazing casket would be merely quaint in this empty woodland; it would even, somehow, be a little scandalous.

And yet, treasure!

I watched it for a long while in the moonlight.

In the morning it was hot soon after sunrise—a still, gasping heat. I felt dirty all over, as though I had ridden all night in a cindery day coach. My face itched. I said, "All right, Etheredge, all right. Break out your parlor tricks. Subdue them with your powerful enchantments. I want a bath."

"Just a minute." He waved his emperor's hand over his pineland realm. "Pretty?"

It *was* pretty. The bays and bayous shone a dappled blue, and the slanting sun made the Gulf a silver plate.

"Poor land," Etheredge said. "Poor land, but I love it. Fires have burnt away the organic fraction of the soil, and on a day like today the soil will reach 140 degrees easily. Seedlings can't stand it."

"All right, Etheredge, I want a bath."

Then the three Pensacola lads came yawning and stretching from the porch. On the stoop they set a pitcher of ice water. The big fellow lifted it until the ice tinkled and gulped noisily. "Hey, sparrows," he said, and waved the frosted pitcher. He drank again. "Good morning, you goddam sparrows." The others tried their wit. "Dry, sparrows?" "Want some birdseed, sparrows?" They all drank and threw aside the water and ice cubes.

The big fellow came closer, arranging his voice for menace. "I want it," he said. "I want it, and we're going to come and get it."

"All right," Etheredge said, "Come and get it."

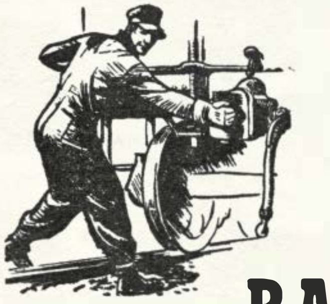
THE tower was sixty feet high, lofted on four steel uprights which came in from a 25 foot square at the bottom to the tower house, 12 feet square, floored with steel and four-by-fours, for solidity in the wind. The watch house was reached by five 12-foot stages; a slanting light steel ladder from the ground to the first landing; another to the second landing; and so on. Each landing had a small foothold at the ladder's foot; the rest was mere steel skeleton.

With steel braces forming a scheme of ladders, the tower seemed a kind of play pen for gymnasts, but it was not so simple as all that. Once a visitor, a Crestview high school athlete, tried to climb down by one of the uprights. But the steel, its right angle outward, three-cornered, was too large to grasp with the hands and too small to grasp with the arms. His body hung inward; agonizing tugs of gravity left him dangling from the burning steel. And though he made one stage, by main luck, he was not anxious to try another.

All three men slowly climbed the tower. As they climbed, Etheredge drew a long green nylon cord from a locker, an army clothes-line for the jungle. With half hitches he secured a shark hook at the end. We'd fished with it often: You start with shrimp, say. You catch sailor's choice, the Florida sunfish. Then you hook the sailor's choice through the tail on the big hook and troll. We'd pulled ashore many a twelve-footer and split his vicious head with an axe, relishing the risk.

The three men gained the landing just

STRATEGIC COUPLING



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beneath us. Etheredge opened a screen, picked up an orange crate of empty fruit juice and beer cans, and threw it out. When it landed with a clatter, the three men crowded gingerly to one side to see.

"Quick!" Etheredge said. "Give me a hand."

He opened the trap door a slit, lowered the hook, and caught the ladder beneath them, the ladder to the top landing.

"Up quick. When the ladder comes free, drop the hook."

We heaved. The ladder came free. We jerked up and quickly dropped the hook. The ladder fell crashing, and Etheredge drew up the hook and bolted the trap.

"You bastards," the big fellow said. He climbed the ladder to the trap. We heard a scratching, and then his .45 hammered the full clip against the trapdoor.

"Sit down," Etheredge said to me. "It's going to be hot today. Take it easy. The soil will reach 140 degrees easily. Steel will be hotter still."

We heard a scuffling noise and a yelp. One of them must almost have missed his footing.

Then Etheredge opened the trap again a slit. "Now the top ladder," he said. We selected full cans of beer and juice and carefully threw them down. Although we could not throw full force through the crack, one hit the big fellow on the right shoulder, and when he raised his gun, he howled and shifted it to his left hand. Then we had the top ladder. It fell crashing through the steel skeleton.

The three men, guns in hand, stood panting with a rage in which something else began to mingle. The cans were heavy. Space was big.

Etheredge said to them, "Did you ever hear of Diego de Miruelo?

"Bastard."

"Did you ever hear of Don Laureano de Torres y Ayala? Did you ever hear of Panfilo de Narvaez?" One of the men fired at the trap. "Did you ever hear of Friar Rodrigo de la Barreda?"

"Poor little fellows," Etheredge said to me. "No education. Listen," he shouted. "Listen to me." And there in the burning cloudless Florida morning Etheredge lectured clearly, as though in a classroom, of Don Laureano and the Old Spanish Trail.

The big fellow cursed savagely and inched his way to one of the uprights. With hands and feet he took hold, his gun in his hip pocket, butt out, and started to climb, wincing when his hands touched the hot steel.

"He wants to shoot in the window," Etheredge said. "Get a can."

I chose an 18-ounce can of mixed orange and grapefruit juice, opened the window, and dropped it squarely on the hurt shoulder. Squealing like a pig, the big fellow slid sharply back. He rubbed his hands together, cursing; they were raw from the fall and burning from the steel.

Etheredge said, "And when Don Laureano burst through a forest of sassafras, oak, and juniper to Escambia Bay, his men cheered."

They all screamed curses.

Etheredge walked to the window. "Now, listen," he said. "Listen." He spoke with a slow exactness and granite authority. "It's nine o'clock. The sun will be on you until five. Eight hours. We have a good many cans, heavy cans. In any case, the steel will fry you. Now, listen. At exactly twelve o'clock, after you've enjoyed the morning air, I'm going to lower a string. I want each gun separately, tied by the trigger guard. When we have the guns, we'll pull up the ladders, and we'll all go down."

"Go to hell."

To me Etheredge said, "I don't want to risk the hook and line. They might catch it when they fasten the guns."

"Go to hell, you smart bastards."

"My friends," Etheredge said, "You don't know what hell is like—yet."

He bolted the trap carefully. There was whispering below. An occasional maddened shot whined off the steel floor. Once we heard a scared squeal. "Jesus, give me a hand." The big fellow had tried to crawl down. But the steel burnt his hands; the sharp corners cut them, and gravity sucked him inward over the sharp steel skeleton below. The two others pulled him up.

At about eleven, they began skipping about, with comical caution, like beetles on a skillet. They touched the steel for support, then jerked their hands away. They shifted feet, like soldiers running in place, to ease the burn. "Hey, you," the big fellow shouted. "Hey, up there. Hey, Jack."

Etheredge said nothing.

"Hey, up there."

Etheredge said nothing.

"For God's sake!"

We were not comfortable. The close air pressed against us like a hot, wet mattress. The thermometer stood at 110. But we had shade.

There were skittering noises below. "For God's sake, fellows!"

Etheredge said nothing.

Then from below came a whimpering noise. The big fellow put his hand on an upright, snatched it away, put it on again, snatched it away, and cried like a baby.

"Hot, isn't it?" Etheredge said. "Really hot. Later on, it will be hotter. After that, it will be still hotter. Then, about four, it will be hottest of all."

I spoke loudly to Etheredge. "Here. Have a drink of water." We made elaborate sloshing noises with the jug, and threw a glassful down the trap. They screamed a gibberish of curse and plea at us.

At twelve Etheredge said, "Five hours more, boys?" The big fellow spluttered something and held up his gun.

"Oh, you want to have your gun?" Then he said to me, "Nobody is altogether bad, old fellow. They don't really want anything from us, do you think?" Then he lowered a string and drew up the guns one by one. Each pushed to be first to fix his at the end. We checked the magazines, and held the two .45's with three and five shots each.

"All right," Etheredge said. "Listen. We're going to pull up the top ladder first. I'm coming part way down, with my friend behind me, and I'm going to hook the other ladder. When it's up, climb down. Climb down slowly, do you hear?"

When we herded then to the house, they were a whipped and shabby lot. Which was more dreary I cannot say, the big fellow emptied of all authority and now meaningless, or his lost followers with no bray to direct them, like unweaned puppies scrambling forlornly for their dam who was not there. Lest they find the afternoon tedious, Etheredge permitted them to saw and plane new screen frames.

At dusk the forester drove in. Etheredge asked him to drive back to the highway for a state patrol, and as the patrolmen started off Etheredge said, "Just a minute."

He climbed to the tower and returned to the patrol car. To each of the three he handed a blackened piece of eight. "One for the road, boys," he said, "One for the road. A merit badge from the three-notched trail."

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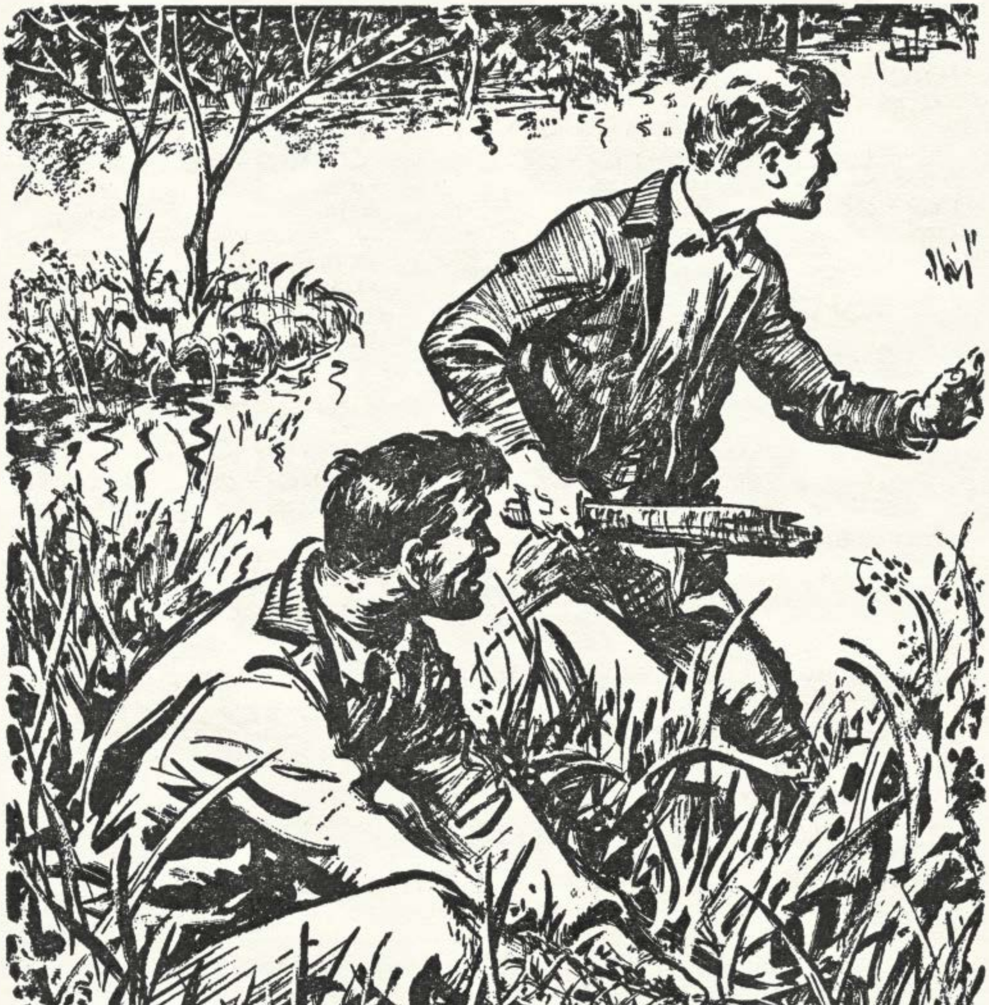
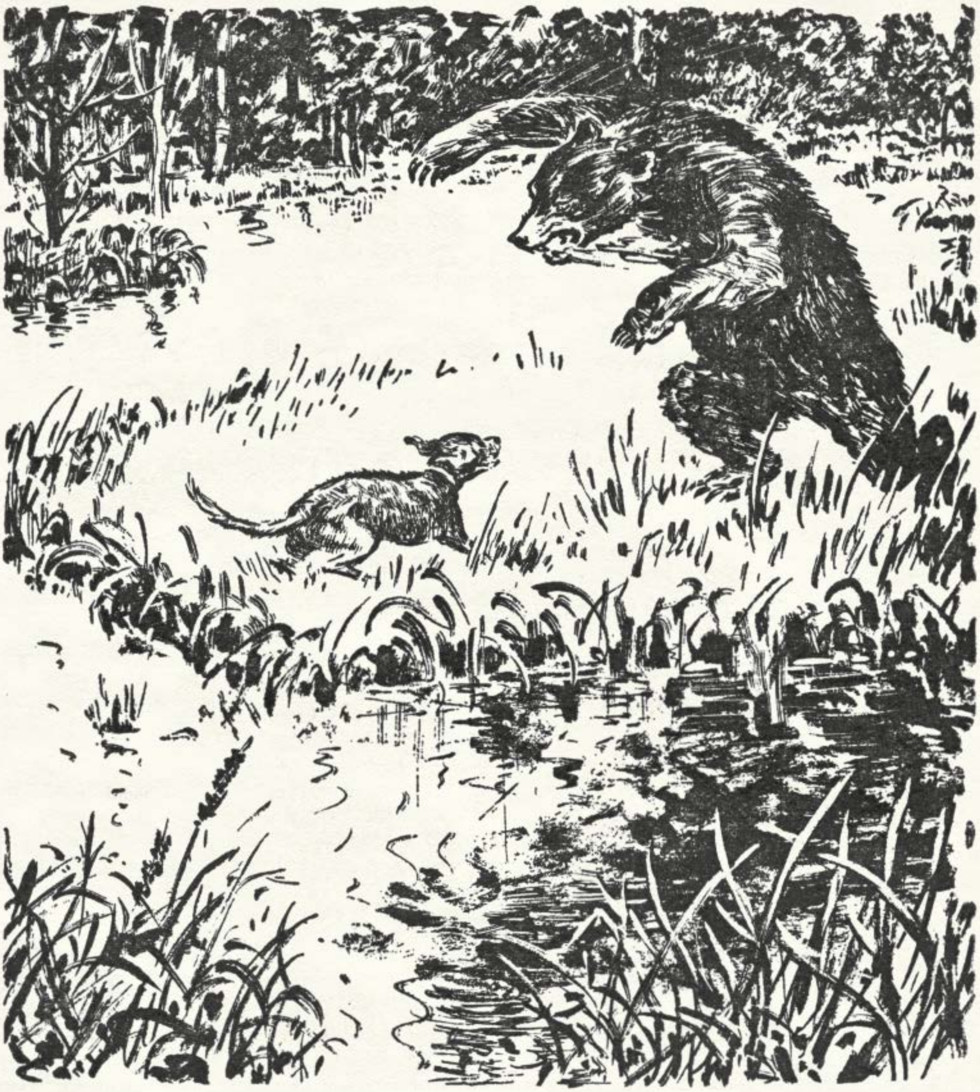


Barry's heart climbed into his throat as the enraged bear bore down on the motionless pup.

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLOFF



THE flat slam of the shotgun died without echo and Barry watched the swift flight of the prairie chicken go earthward in feathered cart-wheels. The nostrils of his freckled nose dilated, and inside his boy's chest he felt the breathless poignancy of the flurried descent. He lowered the gun slowly, and beside him big Hal, his father, murmured approval.

For the short space of seconds that followed the sound of the gun there was the silence of eternity on the knoll and out along the hummocked surface of the cranberry marsh. All existence seemed to pause, as though in so doing it conferred an accolade on the boy's shoulder. The breeze ceased its restless searching of the dried grass on the knoll. Behind them, in the scrub pine, the garrulous chatter of the jays was cut short, as is the music of a symphony orchestra by a single stroke of the conductor's baton. Even the sun, sinking into a crimson bath above the brow of a distant hill, appeared to hesitate.

Before him a few yards, the two dogs, Mutt and Jeff, were rigidly poised, their muscles and tendons gathered tightly beneath the short-haired, mottled coats. And beside him, the Runt quivered with excitement and looked up at him with solemn worshipful eyes.

"Call your dog," Hal said in a low voice.

Barry looked down at the Runt, sensing in those eager eyes a pitiful anxiety to please, to compete with the other dogs for honors; yet somehow aware that the accident of his birth had destined him to linger throughout his lifetime on the fringe of this hunting aristocracy into which he had been born.

Hal, stiffly intolerant of imperfection in men, weapons and dogs could not abide the stubby-legged pup, and only Barry's entreaties had saved the Runt from the pail at birth. It was significant that Dixie Belle's appalling indiscretion, and subsequent whelping of the Runt had been punished by her sale two weeks after the occurrence. No one knew the nature of the sire.

And yet it was this ostracism, indulged in by Hal and the other dogs alike, coupled with a natural pity for suffering or degraded beings that made Barry love the little pup the more. His evaluation of perfection was at variance with Hal's, and he was not so wont to seek it in outward signs. He was sure that the Runt's heart and spirit more than made up for his physical shortcomings.

He scratched the pup's floppy ears and swung his arm off toward the marsh where the bird had fallen.

"Get him, boy," he said. "Get him."

Hal swore, but the dog was gone, his short legs pumping through the deep grass on the crest of the knoll, his elongated setter's body breasting through the rough and his tail waving as gallantly as a regimental guidon.

Mutt and Jeff looked back, a little disbelieving, and in union turned to lunge in the wake of the usurper. But Barry's sharp command brought them up, and they returned to snuffle and whine at Hal's feet, and to look at Barry with reproachful eyes.

"You should have sent one of the others," Hal said with a sour inflection. "That Runt won't bring nothin' back but a mouthful of grass, if that."

The dogs whined in affirmation of this belief.

"He'll be all right," Barry said. He spoke stoutly, more for his own assurance than anything. He could not forget the time the little misfit had wandered all over a cornfield for a pheasant, and had returned without it, to look up at him with shamed and sorrowful eyes.

"Wooden-nose," Hal had scoffed. "Got all he can do to smell his way to his dinner."

Though Hal had not said it outright, Barry knew this was a second chance; and very probably a last one. The Runt would have to come through this time, or there would be no others.

From the crest of the knoll the ground dipped sharply to the marsh, and because of that they could not see the spot where the bird had come to earth. Nor could they see the Runt, though they could hear him. Down below them they could hear his wild thrashing of the grass and brush, the short, excited yelps, and the long silences which told Barry that the dog was poised in trembling immobility as he sampled the air for a fresh scent.

"If he ain't back up here in another minute, Barry, I'm going to send Mutt and Jeff in."

Barry began a protest, although he knew that Hal was probably doing the right thing; but a wild cascade of yelping cut him off, and the sudden hope of vindication for his dog sent him scrambling to the edge of the knoll and down the steep descent to the marsh.

He did not see the Runt at first, because the little dog was nowhere along the edge of the marsh, and the yelping had ceased as abruptly as it had begun. And then it began again, rising to a wail of terror, and following the sound Barry felt little eddies of panic when he saw the Runt's head thrust above the surface of the mire and his short forepaws splashing with increasing desperation at the ooze that was drawing him down.

Hal burst out of the brush and swore again.

"Damn," he said. "He's got himself into the quicksand. Ain't that just like him."

But Barry was not listening. Already he was moving, quickly and with sureness. He knew the marsh well, the whole wide breadth of it; each of the sodden hummocks that thrust above the flat and quiet water, the deep pools and the scattered areas of treacherous sands below the surface.

The Runt was a good ten yards from the edge of the swamp, and a scant few feet from the shaggy bulk of a large hummock. He had, Barry reasoned, swum through the waist-deep water to the hummock and had then plunged into the quicksand. The bird, he considered, had been trod under by the pup in his frenzy.

He knew the way to the hummock, and waded through the water and bottom muck until he could grasp the coarse growth and roll himself onto the sod. It was then a matter of reaching out from the other side to get the dog; which he did, lying flat on the ground and stretching far out to grab the Runt's scruff. He came free with a sucking sound and Barry wrapped the muddy mess in his arms.

On the shore he saw Hal standing with his hands on his hips, glaring across the water. He knew what it meant, but at the moment he did not care. He held the dog tighter and blew softly into the ruff of the Runt's neck. In a moment the pup stopped whimpering and trembling, and Barry felt the warm, wet tongue licking at his face.

THE occurrence hung over the farmhouse dinner table like a thundercloud in the bright morning sky; and Barry knew that Hal's studied preoccupation with the apple pie was building up to something unpleasant. It was not until later though, when Mutt and Jeff reclined with patrician grace before the fire, and they were cleaning their guns in the warmth of the hearth that Hal spoke of it. At the sound of his voice, the Runt's damp muzzle crept into Barry's hand.

"Now, Barry," his father was saying, "that pup ain't going out with us tomorrow. He ain't no dang good for anything at all. Even you got to admit that now."

Big Hal did not say this directly to Barry, but seemed to be speaking to the breech of the gun which he cradled in his big hands. His broad, plain face caught the dancing firelight and Barry saw the scowl deepen as his voice went on.

"Not only was that mutt born without a nose, but I don't believe he'll ever acquire one. All the thrashing and clattering he did down there at the bottom of the knoll probably scared every bird around the marsh into the next county. And all that yellin'. A dog's got to be still."

"He's just a pup, Dad," Barry said. "He'll learn. You got to give him time."

Hal would know that any pup would have to have time, and Barry knew that Hal had always had infinite patience with the other dogs. But he knew too that Hal's statements were an oblique attack on Dixie Belle, whose indiscretion he regarded as a personal thing; and that no amount of reasoning would dilute his contempt for her issue.

"He ain't got no heart in him either," Hal went on. "He went completely out of his head when he landed in the swamp. No *good* dog would do that."

It was an unfair thing to say, and Barry knew that any dog, regardless of blood lines would give way to terror when trapped in a wholly alien environment. He contested the point hotly, a thing without precedent. The two dogs at the fire turned their heads warily at the sound of his anger, and the Runt's tail thumped doubtful appreciation. Only Hal's face, flushed and suddenly hard, stopped him.

"That pup don't go tomorrow, Barry," he said curtly. "Anytime you go huntin' with me the Runt stays in the kennel. Understand?"

Barry had been surprised at his outburst, and now he felt shame that his filial respect had momentarily given way before his surge of feeling. He rarely questioned Hal's word on anything, and he wondered now if he hadn't let his fondness for the Runt run away from him.

"I'm sorry, Dad. I didn't mean to lose my temper." That much he'd concede with grace.

Hal looked up and smiled. His face smoothed out as the anger left it.

"It's O.K. to get worked up, Barry," he said. "But you want to make sure that what you're defending is worthwhile."

His eyes drifted down to the Runt and an expression of distaste came over his face. "Next year," he said, "I'll get you a real dog."

Barry looked down into the Runt's deep and questioning eyes. They were wistful, as though he feared the worst in this settlement of his status and was searching the boy's face for some sort of assurance. Barry grinned and hoisted the pup into his arms. He stood up, then, and spoke to Hal.

"I'm going up to bed, Dad. Five o'clock?"

"Five o'clock's fine, son." His voice was cheery again, and he did not look up until Barry turned to leave the room. His frown came back, then, when he saw the Runt cradled in the boy's arms. He said nothing, but as Barry left the room he heard the sound of his father's gun slam loudly into its case.

DAWN was little more than than a pink blush in the east when Hal and Barry ate breakfast in the morning. They fixed it themselves. Barry's mother had died some years back.

He always relished these hunting breakfasts a great deal. There was an excitement and an anticipation about them which placed them far and above the ordinary early morning breakfasts which he and Hal had every day in the week. They were like feasts preparatory to some great adventure; a meal spiced with speculation of what the woods and fields held for them. They ate well, but they also ate fast.

When they finished, Hal began to load the car while Barry took the Runt down behind the house to the kennel. He followed resignedly, apparently fully aware of what was happening to him. He looked up at Barry once, as the boy was opening the door to the pen; then he walked in and sat down on the chilled ground, curling his tail around his feet. All the way up to the house Barry could feel the brown eyes on his back, but he could not bring himself to turn around.

During the early part of the season Barry and Hal always hunted the cranberry marsh area. It was a fairly wild district, not too well known to outsiders, and it abounded in game of all sorts. There was some good timber to the east of it, fine cover for partridge, while to the south and west the open fields were filled with pheasant. The marsh itself was excellent for prairie chicken, which came in just before dusk to feed on the berries.

In addition to these, it was close by the farm, a matter of a few miles; near enough to walk. And they had done so many times when they were hunting their own fields on the way.

But today they were driving, and when the car wheeled out onto the narrow, dirt road Hal bounced it along to the west of the marsh for the morning shooting. They would hit the pheasant first, then come back into the timber for partridges in the afternoon; and if time and light permitted, work back into the marsh at dusk.

Barry was young and his spirits were resilient, and while he felt badly about the Runt he did not let it ruin his day completely. The thought of the little pup back there alone and forlorn in the kennel dulled the fine edge of excitement, but did not blind his shooting eye.

There had been a good corn crop that year and the wide and rolling fields to the west of the marsh were filled with the dried and brittle shocks, standing row on row like soldiers on parade. And the fields were also full of pheasant.

Barry got his first of the day not five minutes after they'd entered the farthest field. When first sighted, the bird began to run, swiftly and erratically between the shocked corn. but the dogs were on it like chain lightning, scudding low to the ground in silent fury.

When it took to the air twenty-five yards away Barry's automatic twelve brought it down with one round. Mutt retrieved and laid the bird proudly at his feet. Barry patted the smooth head, feeling a sudden acute pang that it was not the Runt, and slipped the pheasant into the slash pocket of his coat.

They got two more in that field, one for each, and kept driving along the southern side of the marsh toward the distant wood on the east. The dogs worked well, sweeping a short radius to the front and to either side of them, remaining close and well within range of the guns.

They were beautifully trained and proudly conscious of their skill and efficiency; machine-like precision in their flushing and retrieving. Hal's penchant for perfection had developed their natural instincts to a point where they were flawless in every rippling motion they made.

And Barry was not without envy. Despite his love for the Runt he knew the little pup could never develop to that extent. But in another sense he did not mind. While he admired the two thoroughbreds he could not help but be aware of a certain automaton quality in their nature; an almost ruthless pursuit of their natural purpose. They were not friendly, for their development had evolved from the instinct of the primitive hunter.

He knew the Runt could not possibly achieve those ends, and for that he was inexplicably grateful. The little pup was a thing to love, and like himself, would perhaps take to hunting with pleasure and even excitement, but would never make a fetish of it.

Towards noon they were on the edge of the timber stand and they rested awhile near a small stream which gurgled on toward the marsh. They had some canned soup in a thermos and some sausage, which they ate; and then pushed on into the woods.

They went in quite deep, working in a wide semi-circle to the east, where, in time, the marsh would lie due west of them. The dogs stayed in closer now, flushing the drumming partridge out at short range. The birds were fast and disconcerting, the sudden beating of their wings becoming a startling racket in the quiet of the trees.

They brought down three on the first flush, and a moment later Barry winged a fourth which canted through the air with half-folded wings and disappeared in a dense thicket over a slight rise in the ground.

Hal gave the nod to Jeff and the proud setter sprang away through the brush, appeared briefly as he topped the rise, paused, then plunged out of vision on the other side.

FOR a long time, it seemed, it was quiet. There was only the wide silence of the woods, which thought in itself emanated soft rustlings and distant chirpings, seemed not to detract from the impression of complete soundlessness. After a moment Barry looked quizzically at Hal.

"He's been gone a long while, Dad. And he ain't making any noise over in there."

Hal started to say something, but at that moment the dog's voice broke over the rise in wild hysteria. It did not pause, but shivered the air with a constant stream of frenzied sound, rising higher in pitch with each passing second.

Without being completely aware of it Barry was on the move, and so was Hal, and the other dog. The brush there was thick and grasping, something they had not noticed when they were going slower, but which, with their increased speed, clutched and dragged at their legs and whipped at the faces and bodies. Only the dog got through quickly, and as they went up the rise they heard his voice joining in with that of the other.

There was another voice then; an angry, coughing snarl that was hoarse and low-pitched, and implied a deep rage held at bay by the dogs. Hal paused and paled, then drove forward with a new, frantic energy. Barry stumbled in his wake, puffing manfully and somehow glad that the Runt was far away and in no way involved in the thing.

When at last he scrambled to the top of the rise he saw the bear. It was not more than twenty yards away, reared up on its hind legs and cuffing wildly at the two dogs which were whirling like insane dervishes about its feet. The bear's thick lips were curled back and the long white teeth were parted and bared. And the small eyes were dangerous and as red as two coals in a grate.

Hal cursed and yelled at the dogs. But they did not heed him, and instead, the very presence of his voice and person seemed to inspire them with a greater bravado. They began to work in closer and with more daring, until a not altogether lucky blow lifted Mutt from the ground and hurled him fifty feet back into the wood. Even as he kited shrieking through the timber Barry saw the sudden burst of red that covered one whole side of him. The dog fell into the bracken and was silent.

Barry saw his father do a stupid thing, then, but in view of what had happened to one of the best dogs he'd ever had Barry did not feel that he could blame him too much. It was a spontaneous reaction, and a thing which he knew Hal would never do under other circumstances with a gun of that sort.

Hal fired at the bear.

A load of six chilled from a twelve gauge can do a lot of damage, even to a bear as big as the one which was down there at the foot of the rise. The bear caught the blast full in its broad chest, and the black, bristly hair abruptly became a sodden mass of crimson pulp. The bear staggered back with awkward, drunken steps and sat down on the ground, stunned. But it did not die.

The shooting of the bear had held such a compelling sort of fascination for Barry that he did not immediately notice that Hal had stumbled backward with the recoil, tripped and tumbled to the ground. And when at length he wrenched his eyes from the awesome specter he saw Hal's face gray with pain and both hands clasped tightly around an ankle.

The whole thing became a sort of woodland nightmare after that. As best he could, he helped his father to one foot, wrapped a heavy arm around his neck and began to drag him down from the rise and instinctively toward the marsh. A vague something in the back of his mind told him that if they could get to the big hummock they might be safe.

He did not know what chance they had of getting there, because behind him he heard the rising tempo of the bear's rage and the thundering of that awful body through the brush. And he was somehow amazed when they broke through to the edge of the marsh and he was carefully making the way through the water and the muck to the hummock.

They had just crawled onto the sodden, brushy pancake when the bear broke through and stood swaying on the edge of the marsh. The sun was low in the west and showed the bloody animal up like a statue of bronze, a living statue which bellowed with pain and rage and groped along the soft ground for a place to cross to the hummock.

Transfixed and staring, Barry felt his father's hand close on his wrist.

"Get going, Barry," he said. "You can get across the marsh all right alone." Hal spoke calmly and with assurance, but Barry somehow knew he could never leave him behind. He did not know how to say it and he only shook his head.

"There ain't nothin' to stop him, son. The guns are back there in the woods and he must have got Jeff too. Go on, kid. He can't get both of us."

But Barry didn't move. He didn't look at his father either, but hunkered down on the wet ground and groped in his pockets for something with which to make a last-ditch fight. There was nothing, of course, his knife had been jettisoned with his pack and gun; only matches and an old forgotten fishline.

All this time he had been watching the shaggy animal grope and fumble along the shore; and then a quick movement in the rush behind it caught his eyes. It was a low movement, deep in the coarse grass and snarled undergrowth. It crackled and snapped loudly, and the bear heard it too, and half-turned his head while the blood fell in the water.

The noise became louder and the tall grass parted and a dog burst out into the open, and as quickly flattened out when it saw the bear. "Jeff," Hal said.

— TO OUR READERS —

We are constantly experimenting in an effort to give you the very best reading surface obtainable. For this reason, there may be occasional slight fluctuations in the thickness of this magazine. Now, as in the past, every magazine bearing the Popular Publications seal of quality will continue to have the same number of pages, the same wordage, the same unparalleled value in top-flight reading entertainment that has been and will continue to be our Popular Fiction Group guarantee—the best reading value obtainable anywhere at any price!

But Barry knew that Hal's eyes were dimmed with pain, because the dog was not Jeff. Somehow, the Runt had got out of the kennel.

THE Runt's face was all question when he saw them out on the hummock and his deep eyes begged advice from Barry. The bear snarled and moved slowly toward the new menace.

And Barry found himself on his knees, shouting at the dog to go home. He sobbed, grubbing in the earth for something to throw, but the handful of mud only carried to the shore in a dribbling stream. The bear turned at this renewed threat from the hummock, and ignored the dog as being of little consequence.

But the Runt did not go. What passed in his small mind, Barry could not guess, but he watched with a feeling of anxiety which was greater than that which he felt for himself as the Runt circled cautiously and darted a lightning attack on the bear's rear. The beast snarled and swung a quick blow behind, but the pup was already moving for another pass.

He caught the bear in the side that time, below the ribs, and sank his sharp teeth in and clawed away fast. There was fur and blood on his muzzle, and again the bear's enraged thrust missed. The taste of blood emboldened the Runt and his agility bore him high up the bear's back where he sank deep into the thick neck. The bear screamed, and when the Runt cleared away the brute turned to face him.

Perhaps the Runt was scheming for just that, but if so Barry could not see where it would lead but to his own quick end. The little pup began to move faster, flicking in and out, snapping at the heavy legs and feet, instinctively going for tender areas. And the bear went wild.

It clawed the air and the ground as it would for a wasp, but always the Runt was away in time. It screamed and raged in bedeviled agony, and the ground beneath its clawed feet was torn and bloody; but even so, it could not lead to anything, and Barry knew it.

The same thing seemed to occur to the Runt, for very abruptly he changed his tactics. It almost appeared as though the preliminary attacks were solely to draw and hold the bear's attention. He began to run from the bear, not away from the marsh, but around the area where the wounded and crazed animal stood; and the bear followed, striking out viciously with unsheathed claws, coming closer and closer, but never drawing blood.

Wtih seeming method, the Runt had worked the bear back about twenty yards from the edge of the marsh, and there he stopped. Barry's heart climbed into his throat as the bear bore down on the motionless pup, and his breath stopped short as the Runt sprang suddenly between the huge legs, down to the edge and launched himself out to the right of the hummock, to volplane through the air with short legs drawn up and wide ears out, and to splash into the center of the quicksand.

And the bear charged after like a tank.

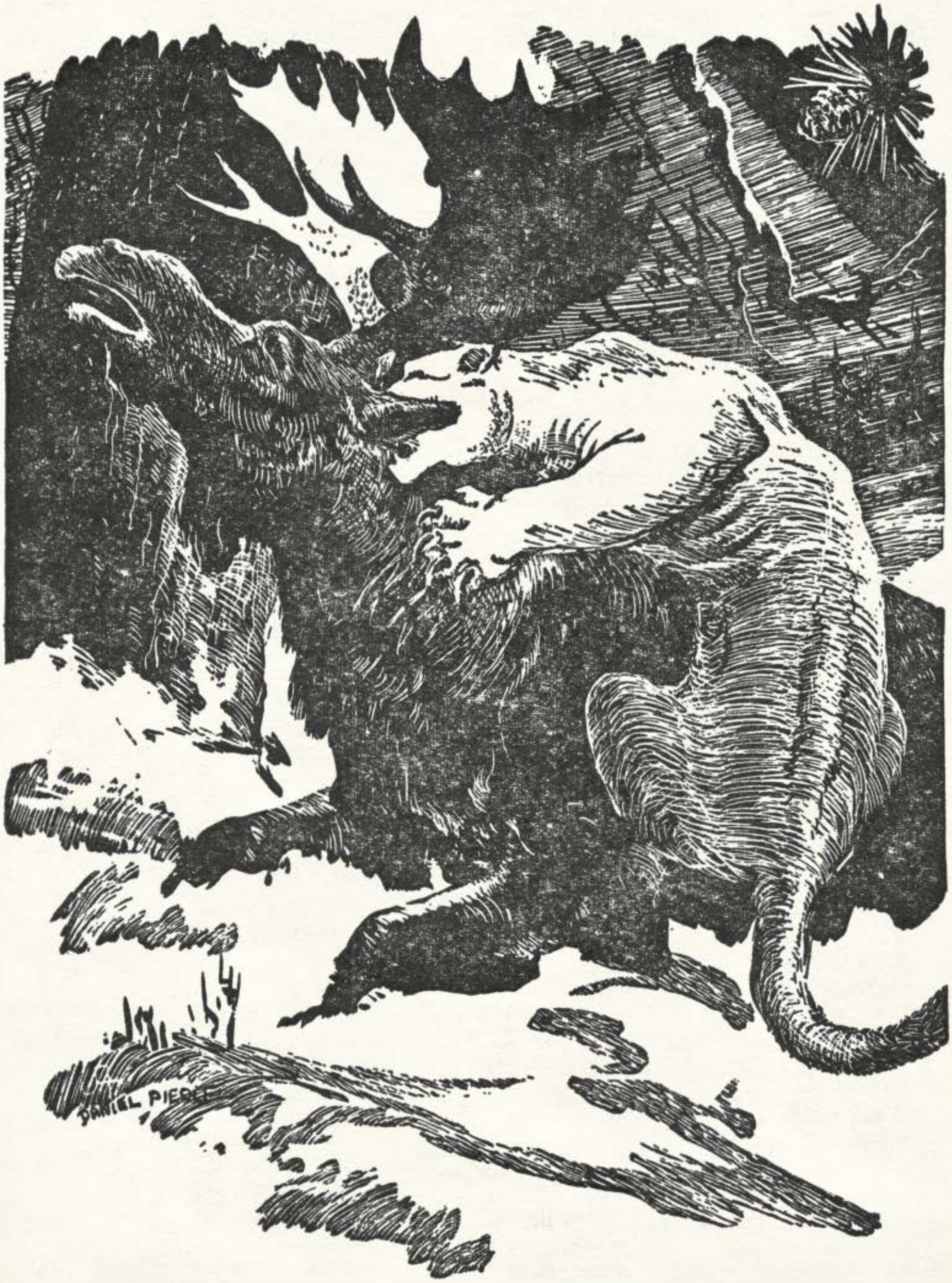
The bear's dismayed caterwauling was a distant sound as Barry's fumbling fingers wrenched to untangle the fishline; and the pup, just out of the mired bear's reach, sank silently with him. When, in desperation, he wrenched the last knot free he slipped off his jacket and tied an end of the line to a sleeve and threw it far out to where the Runt's soft eyes watched him from across the distance.

The sharp teeth caught and held, and the stout line bore the strain as Barry, and then Hal, drew slowly and carefully on their end of the line. The Runt came. It seemed an eternity, and each second Barry expected the line to snap, but it didn't. And the Runt kept coming through the ooze. He kept coming closer, and soon Barry sank his hand into the fur, and like another day he raised him out and held him close along his face.

But the Runt wasn't whimpering now. He lay, supine, as though filled with a quiet pride and a sense of deep worth. After a moment, Hal took him, and Barry turned his head away as the wetness came from his father's face and mingled with the blood on the Runt's muzzle.

It was quiet again, a quiet of great peace; and looking across the marsh, Barry realized for the first time that the raging of the bear had ceased. It was no longer visible, and the shallow water lay quiet and red with the sun over the place where it had gone down.

THE MOON OF


DANIEL PIERCE

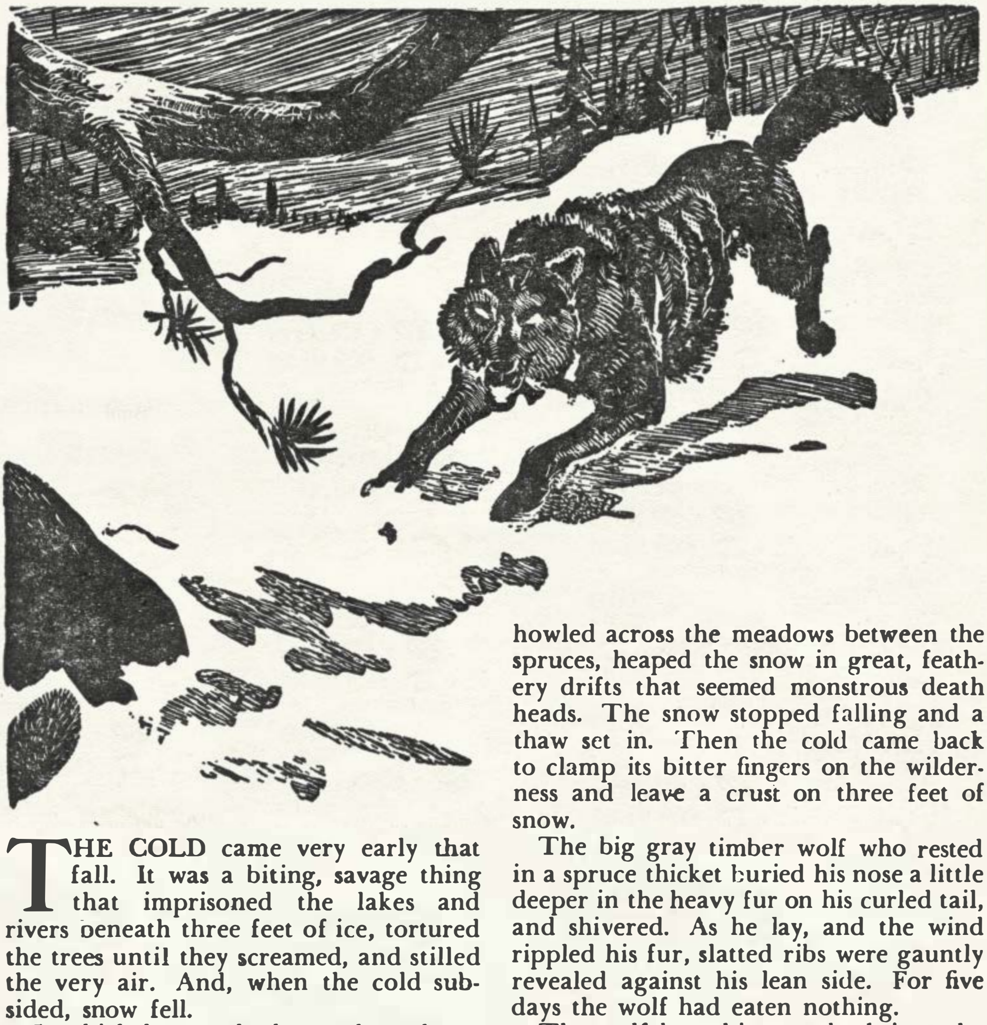
Deeper into the moose's neck sank the great cat's jaws.

SLATTED RIBS

By

JIM KJELGAARD

ILLUSTRATED BY DANIEL PIERCE



THE COLD came very early that fall. It was a biting, savage thing that imprisoned the lakes and rivers beneath three feet of ice, tortured the trees until they screamed, and stilled the very air. And, when the cold subsided, snow fell.

It whirled towards the earth, so heavily and so thickly that it was almost a solid snow curtain, and the screaming wind that raced through the spruces and howled across the meadows between the spruces, heaped the snow in great, feathery drifts that seemed monstrous death heads. The snow stopped falling and a thaw set in. Then the cold came back to clamp its bitter fingers on the wilderness and leave a crust on three feet of snow.

The big gray timber wolf who rested in a spruce thicket buried his nose a little deeper in the heavy fur on his curled tail, and shivered. As he lay, and the wind rippled his fur, slatted ribs were gauntly revealed against his lean side. For five days the wolf had eaten nothing.

The wolf bent his nose back into the warmth of his tail, and continued to watch the jay. It was alive, therefore it was food, and twice the wolf had tried to catch it. The jay had merely hopped a little higher into his tree and regarded the wolf with reproachful eyes. Any wolf not made desperate by hunger should have known better than to try catching a jay. As long as he stayed in the trees, the jay knew he was safe. Now the wolf knew it too.

Ten minutes later, restlessly, the wolf raised his head again. He tested the wind with his nose, snuffling deeply while he sought some trace of food. The wolf was haunted by that specter which stalks all wild things in time of want. If he did not eat, he would not live. He could not afford to relax his quest for something to eat and he dared not admit hopelessness in a hopeless situation. Very tired, the wolf lay down once more.

In five days, ranging clear from Plain Lake to Chute River, the wolf had coursed through most of two hundred and fifty square miles of wilderness. Last summer, before the cold came and the snow fell, that two hundred and fifty square miles had abounded with snowshoe rabbits, deer, caribou, and moose. Now, except for a lone and hungry cougar whose trail the wolf had crossed yesterday, and had been half-minded to follow, the game was gone. What had not died had migrated. The wolf had pawed great holes in the snow in a desperate attempt to find mice which he once would have scorned. He had returned to old kills, only to find that other hungry and desperate carnivores had been there before him and had eaten everything. Now the gaunt wolf, the cougar, and the disconsolate jay seemed the only living creatures in what had become a dead country.

The wolf rose, and padded out of the thicket where he had been resting. When he stood up, his gauntness and thinness were more plainly revealed. Almost paunchless, his belly sloped from his ribs to his haunches, lending him the appearance of a greyhound. His head seemed huge, oddly out of proportion to his body. But his eyes still reflected an indomitable courage, and the will to fight on.

Standing on top of the crust, the wolf gazed across a large natural meadow towards another clump of spruces. They were part of his hunting grounds; he had often caught rabbits there. The wolf walked to the other spruces. As soon as he was safely within them, the jay took wing and flew across to find the wolf again.

Snuffling in thickets and tracing snow-covered trails which he knew well, the wolf ranged back and forth through the trees. Faintly from beneath the snow a warm trickle of mouse scent flowed up to him. The wolf stood indecisively; he had tried many times to dig mice out of the snow and had failed every time. Besides, it was hard to dig in snow and his strength had waned. The wolf licked his chops. Slaver dripped down his jaws. He would have liked a mouse, but he knew he had small chance of getting this one.

Besides the mouse, there was nothing in the thicket. The hopeful jay lit in a nearby tree, watching the wolf expectantly, and the wolf glanced once at his self-appointed follower. He stood a moment at the edge of this thicket, planning his next move. Just ahead was a deep woods in which he had often found deer, and he could not afford to overlook the possibility of a deer being there now. If there was one, he would find it.

The wolf stopped suddenly. His head snapped around. For a moment he stood, verifying the scent that the wind had brought to him. Then he started off at a swift run.

He had smelled moose.

THE wolf had seen many moose, and he knew them for great beasts which at times appeared clumsy. The appearance was very deceptive; when it had to do so even the biggest moose could whirl with all the agility of a cat, and they could fade into the spruce as stealthily as a ghost. An adult moose could defend itself so well that even a brace of wolves seldom dared attack them, though this wolf had run with various packs when moose calves were pulled down.

Fully aware of the danger, and of the fact that he was about to challenge a very formidable antagonist, the wolf still raced on. He himself had coursed and searched the whole extent of his range, and he knew that, excepting for himself, the jay, and mice he was unable to catch, there was no living thing in it. Now there was something, a creature that promised food, and the wolf dared not abandon the opportunity offered. Had there been a chance of finding a deer, or even some rabbits, he would not have attacked a moose. There was no such chance.

The wolf came to the moose tracks, reeking hot where the great beast, on his way from the thicket in which he had rested to some willows where he intended to browse, had passed. Wildly excited now, screaming his delight because at last the wolf had found a prey, the jay flew overhead. The jay lit in a tree. The wolf paused beside the moose tracks.

The moose, and the wolf knew from its scent that it was a bull, was making light work of what, to any short-legged and heavy creature, would have been very hard travel. The hoofed bull broke through the crust that supported the wolf, but he still traveled swiftly. The wolf leaped along the trail.

Three minutes later, in another meadow and near another grove of spruces, the wolf found where the bull had caught his scent and started to run. Now the moose tracks, gaping holes in the broken crust, were far apart. The wolf increased his speed and the hysterical jay urged him on. Five minutes afterwards, the wolf saw the bull.

The great black beast with antlers so polished that they cast a dazzling reflection even in the wane sun, the bull was standing and looking back over his shoulder. His legs were so deep in the snow that he appeared to have only a blocky, horse-like body surmounted by a long head which, in turn, was crowned by palmated antlers. The moose snorted. His little eyes glowed red. Four times had he run in front of a wolf pack, and he had never feared them or doubted his ability to conquer them. He was not afraid of a single wolf.

The wolf rushed up, and checked his charge when he was within a few feet of the motionless bull. He was no rash cub, a juvenile that would attack anything, but an old and experienced veteran of years in the wilderness. If he knew moose were dangerous, so did he know exactly what they could and could not do. This would be no wild scrimmage; no snarling pack backed the wolf. He would have to await his chance, and accomplish by stealth and cunning what he could not do by sheer strength alone.

The moose swung to face him, and as though the snow was not there he sprang towards the wolf. The jay, balancing himself on a thin stick of tree that showed above the crust, screamed at the top of his voice and bapped his wings. He looked at the moose, and at the wolf.

Dancing backward on the crust, the wolf swung away. He walked like a cat, softly and easily, and in the fervor of the battle he forgot even his hunger. From some hidden place he seemed to call forth hidden reserves of strength, and not for a second did he forget the problem confronting him. Food he must have, and here was food. His opportunity to get it would come.

The moose turned away, flashing anger from his eyes and breathing defiance through his nostrils. Contemptuous of the puny thing that had dared attack him, he resumed his journey toward the willows where he intended to browse. He did not hurry. The moose felt his own strength welling within him. His sides were padded with fat. He could defend himself.

Thirty feet in the rear, with the hysterical jay flying about him, lighting on such trees as appeared, and screaming encouragement, the wolf followed. Suddenly he saw his chance to strike.

A hundred and fifty feet ahead, the wind seethed across a patch of loose snow. Snow blew into the air, and loose particles whirling against the hard crust formed a rolling cloud across the meadow. The moose stopped, and snorted, and cocked his ears forward the better to hear. For a split second he was intent on the blowing snow, and in that split second the wolf struck.

He hurled himself forward, bounding high as he did so, and slashed with his shear-fanged jaws at the tendon in the bull's hind leg. Had he been well-fed, and strong, he might have sliced that tendon. But for five days the wolf had eaten nothing, and he was not strong. He cut a gaping wound in the bull's hock.

The moose whirled, striking with his front hooves and lowering his head to present the broad armor of his antlers. Retreating to a safe place, the wolf watched while he ran a disappointed tongue from his jaws.

THE wolf's sudden attack changed the bull. He had been an arrogant thing, a creature as big and powerful as a horse and with all the lethal killing power of a lion. Now, in addition, he was a wary beast.

He turned, eyes blazing, ruff bristling, lips curled, and made a deadly rush at his attacker. The wolf retreated, skipping on top of the snow like a bug on the water, while the hysterical jay shrieked at moose and wolf alike. Stopping, the moose swung his long head towards the willows upon which he had intended to browse. He looked back at the wolf, then changed his course to take him into another grove of trees. The bull knew that those trees hid a curving boulder that thrust far above the snow. If he got his hind quarters into the curve and against the boulder, he could defend himself against anything.

Keeping pace with him, the wolf awaited another chance to hamstring the bull and bring him to the earth. That chance did not present itself. Breathing deeply, the bull worked his long upper lip over his upper jaw and ran with his head high in the air so he could watch the wolf. Suddenly he snapped about, striking with his front hooves and slashing with his antlers.

The wolf had edged himself in slowly. Trying to ease the rhythm of his own pace gradually, in order not to alarm the bull, he had come very near and prepared for another strike. When the moose whirled, and sliced with his hooves, the wolf narrowly rolled from beneath them. He tumbled over and over on the crust, getting himself away even while he plotted to strike again. The bull's move had caught him off guard.

A hundred feet outside the grove of trees the bull stopped, and turned a belligerent head to look back at the wolf. Slowly, as though he was again contemptuous of the small thing that had dared challenge him, he walked on. The jay was hovering in the air, beating his wings and screaming advice. The bull walked under the first tree.

A tongue of yellow flame detached itself from a lower branch of that tree and leaped upon the moose. A thick yellow tail, hanging over the bull's shoulder, twitched angrily. The cougar that would not have dared attack a moose unless he was hungry enough to attack anything, strove to bite through the bull's thick neck. Deeper into the moose's neck sank the great cat's jaws. Frantically he strove to maintain his hold.

The moose bellowed, and even before the echo of that bellow died away, he reared. Then he began to run, and crouched beneath a low-hanging tree limb. The bull raised himself, while the cougar strove furiously to stay where he was. Again the bull scraped his enemy on the limb. The cougar fell, and strove desperately to reach a tree. He was not swift enough. The bull overtook him. Great hooves, pounding maces, descended on the big cat's back. The cougar writhed, continued to drag himself towards a tree, and the bull struck again. The cougar lay still.

For one second, no more, the bleeding bull hesitated beside the big cat he had killed. The bull glanced at the wolf and the screaming jay, then started slowly towards the boulder where he had intended to defend himself. He looked back from that, and continued toward the willows. There was no more danger.

The wolf stayed beside the cougar. Here was meat, warm and hot meat, and enough to assuage the fiercest hunger. The wolf ate, and and even as he feasted his thin sides seemed to grow fat again, to take on strength which would permit the wolf to seek more food. After he had eaten, the wolf lay beside a fir tree.

He watched the hesitant jay in a tree near the cougar. The jay hopped to a lower limb, and to a still lower one. For a long while he perched there, mustering his courage. Finally he flew to the ground and began to peck ravenously at a bit of meat that the wolf had discarded.

The wolf lay sleepily and watched him.

Adventure
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THE TRAIL AHEAD

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ON SALE JANUARY 7

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

THE life of a modern Mounty—Hollywood please take note!

Query:—I am writing to inquire just how the Royal Canadian Mounted Police live.

Do they live in rugged environment? Are their living quarters rugged? Do they live together when on duty? I would like to get some idea on this.

—Byron Walters
San Jose, Calif.

Reply by H. S. M. Kemp:—In reply to your inquiry concerning the "ruggedness" endured by the present-day Mounted Policeman, the question and answer is broad. If you mean the boys who are stationed in the cities or in country detachments, they live even as you and I. In the cities their detachments are generally located in a wing or a set of offices in one of the Federal buildings, they have their living-quarters there and they eat at the restaurants. If they're married, they live at home. In the country, they are provided with quarters—a house of a pattern of the rest of the town.

I guess the boys up on Ellesmere Island or at Chesterfield Inlet would consider their environment a bit "rugged," but their quarters are no more spartan than they choose to make them. The buildings are warm, comfortable and up to the high standard demanded of the Police in everything else. The boys are isolated, sure, but they have their radios, and they can provide themselves with entertainment. So you needn't feel sorry for them; if they didn't like it, they wouldn't stay in there.

At the big Depots, like Regina and Rockcliffe, the men live in barracks; but country or northern detachments, where there is more than one man, they live together under the one roof.

Don't fall for this Hollywood stuff—where the poor lone Mounty lives in a squat log shack, cooks his moose-steak, over a tin-heater and shares his bunk with his dogs. The Force demands a high degree of intelligence in its men; and men of intelligence, in this enlightened day and age, wouldn't go for stuff like that!

BLONDE sirens of Algeria.

Query:—Is there a town near Casablanca in Morocco by the name of Bousbie or something close to that name? I am almost sure I spell it wrong, being a foreign name. Is this town an assembly of women expressly for the entertainment of men? Are there no forms of manufacturing or businesses there? Does the French Gov't extract taxes from them? Is it true that once a woman enters this town she must stay there forever, even if she could save herself? Were the American troops permitted to visit or was it out of bounds?

—Philip Raphael
Tennant, Calif.

Reply by H. W. Eades:—I have received your letter requesting information about a town near Casablanca in Morocco by the name of Bousbie. I am unable to give you any information about such a town. The most modern gazeteers do not show it. It sounds to me like a restricted district in or near a town or city inhabited by a certain type of entertainer, but I may be wrong.

The nearest approach to what you have in mind is a reputed settlement in southern Algeria (some distance away from Casablanca). Some years ago there were persistent reports among the natives that a community of blonde sirens lived in the Gara Ti Dhanoum peak in the Hoggar Mountains in Algeria. The people of the surrounding country are mainly of the Touareg race, and these women are supposed to be related to them. They are said to live in gardens of Eden-like beauty high up the mountain. It is supposed they live up there because of the seclusion it affords. The local natives refuse to approach the peak, for fear they will fall victims to the lures of the sirens, and lose their lives or their liberty. They cite cases of natives who climbed the mountain and never returned.

Whatever may be the deadly charms of the mysterious sirens of the Gara Ti Dhanoum, there is nothing impossible or improbable about their existence, for there is no doubt there is a blond race widely distributed over Northern Africa. Among the Berbers, Touaregs and Kabyles blue eyes and fair or reddish hair are not uncommon. Some ethnologists go so far as to say that the Caucasian race originated there. Even if this were not correct, various white races have settled in Africa, including Greeks, Romans, Vandals and crusaders of several nations.

It is fairly certain that the ancient vandals have left many descendants in this part of the world, and this would perhaps account for the alleged dangerous character of the blonde sirens. This fierce Northern European race swept through South Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, founded the kingdom of Andalusia in Spain, and passed into Africa. There they established a very powerful state with many fortified cities and castles. The Vandal kingdom in Africa fell to pieces eventually, but there is no reason to believe the race became extinct. It is not unlikely that they made settlements in the mountains.

This all sounded pretty interesting, so we checked with our expert on the French Foreign Legion, Georges Surdez, who comes up with the following additional information on "Bousbie"—

"Bousbie" undoubtedly stands for "Bousbir", and that's the name of the reserved quarter of Casablanca. Bousbir is officially the reserved quarter and no other business than entertainment is done there. It is an interesting place, clean, orderly, not nearly as picturesquely sordid as the old reserved quarter of Marseille was or even as the reserved quarter of Toulon probably still is. There are medical visits—Thursday used to be the day. If you are interested, here is the way it got its name: More than forty years ago, when the French expedition landed in Morocco, a resourceful Frenchman by the name of Prosper (like emperors, kings and headwaiters, such entrepreneurs use first names) brought out a squad of friendly dames to entertain the warriors far from home. The natives heard the French refer to the establishment as Chez Prosper, and as there is no letter P in Arabic and no sound for it, the P became B—and Prosper was corrupted to Boushir. That name was extended to all such establishments.

I don't know if Le Bousbir was out of bounds to American servicemen, but from letters from friends who say "the Americans spoiled prices," some few must have visited the place. The French Government doesn't extract taxes in Morocco—Morocco is a protectorate, not a colony, but undoubtedly the government in charge does collect income tax from owners. Income tax must be paid everywhere, no matter the source of income, even if the income were illegal—see gambling revenues right here in USA. The owners must also have some sort of a license. It's quite complicated. I could write you a few paragraphs on what elections the proprietor of an establishment of that sort can vote for in France, for instance.

No, the women do not have to stay for life. I am positive about this because in many places in North Africa and the Saharan Territories I encountered women who had 'worked in the Bousbir' for months or years. The inmates are subjected to certain rules, as in all reserved quarters; for instance, they have to get permission to go out of the quarter while working there—a moment of thinking, will sow the motive for this to be commercial rather than moral—no employer in any line encourages retail sales for private profit. They are subjected to the same system as their kind everywhere, kept in debt for board, advances, drinks, etc., but they are financial slaves, not outright slaves. Legally, they are free—but there are cases—you possibly have heard how Captain Lafitte's former native consort murdered a few of her charges (she had been a heroine when with Lafitte, an ace of Native Intelligence) and plastered them up in the walls of her establishment in Meknes.

Captain Eades' letter is interesting. But the Old Hoggar ain't what it used to be, and it is pretty well accepted that there is no colony of blondes in the Mount of Demons. The Hoggar, which is not in Algeria but in the Central Sahara is about as mysterious now as Needles, Arizona. You can get there by bus, and everybody goes there. There's even a British spinster retired there, (not from being a spinster, I hope). Oddly, years and years ago, I believe *Adventure* published the sublimation of all those legends of beautiful women lurking in Saharan fastnesses, *L'Atlantide*, by Pierre Benoit. (August and September, 1920—Ed.)

HUNTING, fishing and health in old Arizona.

Query:—I am 40 years old and a captain in the merchant marine. My wife is 38 years old and is suffering from a persistent bronchial ailment so far not T.B. Our home is in Wilmington, Delaware, and the winters here are rugged. She is able to do all of her housework, and never complains and a sanitarium is not required.

My wife's doctor has advised her to seek a milder climate if possible, so am thinking of taking her out your way for a year or so, and perhaps settle out there permanently.

My financial circumstances are modest, and would not enable me to retire without some work to make a living.

I was raised on a farm in Oregon, so am familiar with stock, and all farm machinery, also trucks, cars and of course, all kinds of boats and the water. I am also fond of hunting and fishing.

I am thinking of buying a Trailer Coach, and coming out there next year (1949) unless my wife's health gets worse before then. I would like to buy a half-interest in a going service station in some small town near some good fishing.

My problem is,

1.) To take my wife to a milder climate, because the winters here are too severe for her.

2.) I would require some work to assist in making a living for us and would do anything that I am able to do.

Would you advise my buying a trailer, or to save the money and depend on finding a place to live when we get there?

—Captain James A. Perry
918 E. 17th St.
Wilmington, 205, Delaware

Reply by C. C. Anderson:—I was in the Navy during the last scrap and they say that all good sailors come from Arizona, Texas or some inland country. and that all good sailors want to settle inland, when they retire. So you're running true to form, except for your wife's health.

Housing, living costs, and everything is way up in Arizona. The population has doubled since 1941 and there are plenty of men for every job. Wages are low but costs are geared to the wealthy who want to come here for their health or just for the climate. Yes, I spent two winters near Wilmington and in Philadelphia, so I know what you mean.

Here are my suggestions: Save your money and when you are almost ready, send a want-ad to the Arizona *Republic-Gazette*. Phoenix, saying you want to buy into a service station. If you get any response, you will know whether or not housing goes with the deal. The paper is state-wide and you should get several good deals.

Then if you get a tentative deal, you can come ahead. If not, I'd say buy a trailer. By all means don't depend on housing in this state, and come ahead. This southwestern climate is very contradictory. Some bronchial sufferers find relief in Phoenix and some Phoenicians must seek higher altitudes, etc. With a trailer you could live cheaply enough to try out the climate as you went along. When you find a place I'm quite sure a man of your versatility can find a job, temporarily, to help you live. Don't forget the employment offices that are run by the various states with branches nearly everywhere.

The best hunting and fishing in the state is right here in the White Mountains, where I'm now living. Some people come here for their health and others go because of it. The altitude averages from 5,000 to 7,000 feet and the winters are quite severe for Arizona. Hunting is not what it used to be, too many hunters and fishing is terrible. I've quit three good jobs in the last three years to find decent rental housing, and am now living in a cabin camp. I had no money to buy after being discharged, and my wages are almost prewar so I've had a hell of a

My financial circumstances are modest, and time, still am, and I'm a native here.

Personally, and that's only my opinion so don't let it influence you, I would get a trailer and come out here and take plenty of time going through New Mexico. Take plenty of time in Arizona, parts of Nevada and California. In other words, the old maxim; look before you leap, and be sure the climate will benefit your wife before you get tied down again.

INFLATION has hit Brazil too!

Query:—For some time now, I have been seeking information on the chances of going to a foreign country to seek my fortune. Up to now my quest seems to have been in vain.

I am 24 years old and an ex G.I., having served three years as an Naval Aviator (single engine). I hold a valid commercial pilots license at present. I am an experienced yachtsman, having lived on the Gulf coast most of my life. I have had only a little college, but have had a good deal of business experience, having grown up in my father's drug business. I have long been active in various social organizations, including the National Junior Chamber of Commerce, and other civic organizations. At the University of Mississippi I was a member of Kappa Alpha fraternity, as well as holding an athletic scholarship to that institution. During my naval training I received training at the University of Texas, University of Georgia and South Western Louisiana Institute. I have always been an ardent sportsman and am an expert marksman.

I am not married and I have no ties to keep me from traveling to any place that I choose. I am very willing, naturally, to work hard to earn my place in the world and if I thought that I could make a nest egg down there, I would work very hard for the chance to make good. Do you think it wise for me to come to Brazil for a career?

—Lloyd S. Hood
Biloxi, Miss.

(Continued on page 121)

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

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SPORTS AND HOBBIES

American Folklore and Legend: *Songs, dances, regional customs; African survival, religious sects; voodoo*—Harold Preece, c/o *Adventure.*

Archery—Earl B. Powell, c/o *Adventure.*

Auto Racing—William Campbell Gault, 4828 N. Elkhart Ave., Milwaukee 11, Wis.

Baseball—Frederick Lieb, c/o *Adventure.*

Basketball—Stanley Carhart, 99 Broad St., Mattawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. Carhart, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—Col. Jean V. Grombach, c/o *Adventure.*

Camping and Outdoor Cookery—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing—H. S. M. Kemp, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

Coins and Medals—William L. Clark, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—Freeman Lloyd, c/o *Adventure.*

Fencing—Col. Jean V. Grombach, c/o *Adventure.*

Fishing, Fresh water: *Fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—John Alden Knight, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. Blackburn Miller, c/o *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournaments—"Chief" Stanwood, East Sullivan, Maine.

Hiking—Dr. Claude P. Fordyce, c/o *Adventure.*

Horses and Horsemanship — John Richard Young, c/o *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—Gerald T. White, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—Charles M. Dodge, c/o *Adventure.*

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *American and Foreign*—Dunegan Wiggins, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns: *American and foreign; wing shooting and field trials; gunsmithing*—Roy S. Tinney, Brielle, N. J.

Skiing—William C. Clapp, The Mountain Book Shop, North Conway, N. H.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—Raymond S. Spears, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—Louis DeB. Handley, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Track—Jackson Scholz, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—Murl E. Thrush, New York, Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—Arthur Woodward, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—Dr. S. W. Frost, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. Carhart, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—Wm. R. Barbour, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—Clifford H. Pope, c/o *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America, Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—Victor Shaw, c/o *Adventure.*

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony history; receiver construction, portable sets*—Donald McNicol, c/o *Adventure.*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. Newman, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling: Hapsburg Liebe, c/o *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—Edward B. Lang, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—Raymond S. Spears, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—Col. R. G. Emery, U.S.A. Ret., c/o *Adventure.*

United States Coast Guard—Lieut. C. B. Lemon, U.S.C.G., Ret., Box 221, Equinunk, Wayne Co., Penna.

United States Marine Corps—Maj. Robert H. Rankin, U.S.M.C.R., c/o *Adventure.*

United States Navy—Lieut. Durand Kiefer, U.S.N., Ret., Box 74, Del Mar, Calif.

Merchant Marine—Kermit W. Salyer, c/o *Adventure.*

Military Aviation—O. B. Myers, c/o *Adventure.*

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—Francis H. Bent, c/o *Adventure.*

The French Foreign Legion—Georges Surdez, c/o *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. Kemp, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

State Police—Francis H. Bent, c/o *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

★New Guinea—L. P. B. Armit, c/o *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—Tom L. Mills, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—Alan Foley, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—William McCreadie, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii, Christmas, Wake, Canton, Midway and Palmyra Islands—Carl J. Kunz, 211-3 Naska, Kahului, Maui, T.H.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—Capt. H. W. Eades, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. 2 *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—Gordon MacCreagh, c/o *Adventure.* 3 *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—Captain Beverly-Giddings, c/o *Adventure.* 4 *Bechuanaland, Southern Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—Major S. L. Glenister, c/o *Adventure.* 5 ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—Peter Franklin, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

★Madagascar—Ralph Linton, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. Windle, Box 813, Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. 2 *Persia, Arabia*—Captain Beverly-Giddings, c/o *Adventure.* 3 ★*Palestine*—Captain H. W. Eades, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. 4 ★*Afghanistan, Northern India, Kashmir, Khyber Pass*—Roland Wild, Savage Club, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London, S.W.1, England.

Europe, Part 1 ★*The British Isles*—Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., London, W. C. 2, England.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile*—Edgar Young, c/o *Adventure.* 2 ★*Argentina*—Allison Williams Bunkley, c/o *Adventure.* 3 *Brazil*—Arthur J. Burks, c/o *Adventure.*

West Indies—John B. Leffingwell, c/o *Adventure.*

Baffinland and Greenland—Victor Shaw, c/o *Adventure.*

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. 2 *Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche*—Captain W. Russell Sheets, c/o *Adventure.* 3 ★*West Coast beginning with State of Sinaloa; Central and Southern Mexico, including Tabasco and Chiapas*—Wallace Montgomery, Club Americano, Bolivar 31, Mexico, D.F.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—William MacMillan, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. 2 *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—Harry M. Moore, 579 Isabella, Pembroke, Ont., Canada. 3 ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario; National Parks Camping*—A. D. L. Robinson, 103 Wembly Rd., Toronto, Ont., Canada. 4 ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. Kemp, 501 10th St. E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada. 5 ★*Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Western Arctic*—Philip H. Godsell, F.R.G.S., General Delivery, Airdrie, Alberta, Canada.

Alaska—Frank Richardson Pierce, c/o *Adventure.*

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—Frank Winch, c/o *Adventure.* 2 *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. Robinson, 1321 E. Tijeras Ave., Albuquerque, New Mexico. 3 *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—Fred W. Egelston, P. O. Box 297, Elko, Nev. 4 *Idaho and environs*—R. T. Newman, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. 5 *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. Anderson, Box 335, Springerville, Ariz. 6 *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2093 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S.—*Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana Swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—Raymond S. Spears, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Maine*—"Chief Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. 2 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—Howard R. Voight, P. O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. 3 *Adirondacks, New York*—Raymond S. Spears, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. 4 *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—Hapsburg Liebe, c/o *Adventure.* 5 *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 118)

Reply by Arthur J. Burks:—Pardon the long delay in replying to your letter. I have spent the last year in the interior of Brazil, cut off from almost all contact with the outside world, and my mail simply piled up. I found conditions in Brazil to be vastly different from those existing during my first visit. During the first visit, my expenses in the Grande Hotel, Belem, for example, amounted to $3.50 a day, room and board. Now a single room is seven dollars at least, and meals comparable to New York prices, but in no wise comparable in quality. Brazilian cities are out of the question for anyone with little money.

I would not advise anyone, now, since so few American dollars are reaching Brazil, to go to Brazil without a contract with some firm doing business there. If, however, you had about a thousand dollars to spend—each of which is worth about 24 *cruzeiros* in the black market—and rode the river boats, on which the food is uniformly bad and accommodations impossible, you could manage to do a lot of looking around, and might land something. But a *job,* in competion with Brazilians, is not advisable.

If you happen to be a good catch-as-catch can chemist, why not write to Dr. Gaston Andrade, Director of the Amazon Valley Program, *Servico Especial de Saude Publica,* Belem, Para, Brazil, and ask him if he could use you? This would be a civil service job, through the Public Health Service, State Department, Washington, D.C., whom you should contact at the same time.

Aside from this, if I were in your place I'd count my money, be sure I had enough to get me there and back, and go have a look. Talk to the nearest Brazilian Consul or Trade Association, also.

BREEDING bulls for the toreadors of Mexico.

Query:—Being one of the freelance writers for *Adventure* magazine, I should like to ask you a few questions pertaining to Mexico which, if you can give me any leads, will help a great deal in the making of a new book-length story I'm presently working on.

My story deals with a bull breeding ranch, the area— Tepeyahualco, near Oriental (SE of Mexico DF). My entire experience with such *vacadas* is limited to Andalusia and Castile (Spain). I should like to know if the Mexican breeding ranches are run like those in Spain? Are the *tientas,* the testing of the three-year old toros held in spring as in Spain, or later in the year.

What is the government policy toward these large ranches? Are they being closed down and broken up or not?

If you have a national railway book handy, could you tell me at what hours the through train leaves the capital for Oriental? I believe this is on the Interoceanic railway, leaving from Estacion de Buena Vista.

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And finally: Sydney Franklin, the former torero, has a ranch somewhere in Mexico, I understand. Is he residing there now?

Of the above questions, the most important to my needs is that one dealing with the breeding ranch practices in Mexico and the season of the *tienta*. I shall very sincerely appreciate any information you can furnish me regarding this. In return, if there is anything I can do for you at this end of the line, please let me know.

—James Norman
Hollywood, Calif.

Reply by Wallace Montgomery:—We are advised that the procedure followed here in Mexico at the breeding ranches is almost identical to that of Spain. In fact, the majority of them got their start from Spain by importing special type bulls. There is one difference, the testing here begins in March and runs through until June. It is more of an occasion for *fiesta* than in Spain. The people from all around gather at the ranches and watch the testing. The bulls that pass the test and that are considered perfect are usually from three to four years old. They are then taken to the *monte* and allowed to run wild for a year or more. It seems that here bulls of six to seven years old are more in demand.

Any of the bulls that do not come up to the high standards or who have imperfections such as bent horns, off-color, etc., are used during the season when the main bull fighters are in Spain; in other words, they are used by the apprentices.

There has been no governmental interference with this business until recently. Due to the epidemic of foot and mouth disease some of these ranches have been having difficulty, all of their animals are being very closely watched.

We are enclosing herewith time tables giving the information you request regarding the hours at which the trains operate to Oriental. We are also enclosing several clippings and parts of a newspaper which will give you possibly a few more points. We are told that the bulls from the Vacada de Santín and the Vacada de Tequisquiapan are very much in demand, as they are particularly high spirited and can always be counted upon for a good performance. It was one of the bulls from Santín that gored Joselillo recently.

The last information concerning Sydney Franklin was that he had a ranch in Chihuahua, and up until a few years ago had been fighting in some of the border towns.

NO profit in dimes.

Query:—Please be so kind as to advise if a Roosevelt silver dime made in the year 1946 is of any value or is it worth saving for anything in the future?

—George E. Combouzou, Jr.
Baton Rouge, La.

Reply by William L. Clark:—Current coins very rarely have more than a nominal premium value. If a coin happens to be of a small issue, it may, in the future, become scarce and develop a fairly good value. In the case of the Roosevelt dime of 1946, there were over two hundred and fifty-five million struck at the Philadelphia Mint, nearly twenty-eight million at San Francisco and over sixty-one million in Denver. In absolutely perfect, uncirculated condition these coins have been selling for seventy-five cents a set. However, due to the great quantity struck, they will never be a rare issue.

GEM-HUNTING in the Southwest.

Query:—I have read and heard it is possible to find semi-precious stones in the South-west around Arizona and New Mexico. I would like to know approximately the best locality. I do not expect to get rich at it, but would like to do it for a pastime and get out in the open and perhaps make expenses.

Would get a kick out of finding the stones and learning to cut them. Am a mechanic and a disabled veteran, World War I.

—Ralph R. Moyer
2311 O'Neil St.
Cheyenne, Wyo.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—Sure, many semi-precious minerals all over the Southwest, not only in Arizona and New Mexico, but also in Nevada, and California. You've also got quite a lot of various types in Wyoming, in a dozen counties and also in Yellowstone Park. I have many listed in Arizona and New Mexico, but while I can type out the long list and *where* to get them it'll take lots of space. But they are listed in a small book, with also most all of the other states as well, so you'll get 'em in print besides instructions on gem collecting, what tools you take in prospecting etc. The book is new just out in 1946 it's title being "Gem Hunter's Guide", by R. P. McFall, priced at $1.00. Get it from Science & Mechanics Pub. Co. at 49 East Superior St., Chicago, 11, Ills. This firm publishes many such technical books, so you might also send for "Book Of Minerals" by A. C. Hawkins, price $1.75 postpaid too. Tells how they're formed, where to find them, how to identify them, descriptions of mineral species, etc. with 62 illustrations. And I suggest you get "Art of Gem Cutting" by H. C. Dake & Richard M. Pearl, about the only lapidary book telling the whole thing on cutting and polishing. One guy using this equipment cut enough stones or ordinary types to net him in 3 months $177.75. *I* know of this chap, and that he is a bedridden cripple.

Now, you'll get in the Gem Hunter's Guide all you'll need to know about where they are in Arizona and New Mexico, *also* in your own state. And if I can help you further, come again any time.

THE END

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(Continued from page 8)

editor of a small-town newspaper, have been a contributor to outdoors and sporting magazines, and am now on regular fiction production schedule. I hope very much that "The Squall" will be the first of many *Adventure* stories. I wonder if you saw the nice play they gave my story, "A Blade of Grass," in a recent issue of *Good Housekeeping*, not so much for the story—but to take a gander at the gal in the red dress in the illustration. I have had a hard time explaining her to my wife.

We too hope that Mr. Lyons will be sending us more stories like "The Squall"—and we'd like to point out to him that if he sticks to real outdoor-adventure yarns he'll be less likely to get tangled up with gals in red dresses and end up unhappily ensconced in the doghouse. (If Mrs. Lyons should read this, of course we are only kidding!)

EFFECTIVE with this issue, Kenneth S. White, whose *K.S.W.* has appeared at the end of this column since 1940, is resigning to assume other duties. Under Mr. White's capable guidance, *Adventure* has followed the traditions established during thirty-eight years of continuous publication. We are mighty sorry to see him go. Having worked on the staff of the magazine for the entire period of Mr. White's editorship (with three years out for Uncle Sam), we have grown to think a lot of *Adventure*. And we're going to do our all-out best to keep it the great magazine it has always been.

Personally, we believe *Adventure* should be 100% a magazine for men who take their stories straight—a man's world from cover to cover—packed with action and color and guts by writers who know first-hand the four corners and seven seas that serve as a thrilling backdrop for their yarns. In short, a magazine that month after month lives up to the slogan we have put on the cover of this issue—"America's Most Exciting Fiction for Men!"

And right here we want to offer you a hearty invitation. Your comments and criticism—favorable or otherwise—on any feature of the magazine, will be appreciated tremendously. They'll help a lot to keep us on the right track.

—K.W.G.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Owen Franklin Alvey has been sought by his son, Anthony G. Alvey, for many years. His description is as follows: Born October 7, 1882, in Evansville, Indiana. About 5 ft. 9 in. tall, slim build, used to have coal black hair, brown eyes (artificial left eye), and for many years was a baker by trade, working in the west and southwest of the U.S. Alvey, Sr., was musically inclined and played a mandolin and guitar. He had a very good tenor voice. Please send any information of his whereabouts to A. G. Alvey, Chief Radioman, USS Noriss, (DD-859), c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif.

I would like to get in touch with M/Sgt Laurence Allan Cross, R.A. 6944209. He is 5'11", weighs about 140 lbs., has a ruddy complexion, thick, light brown hair, and his middle right finger is deformed on the end. He did have a blond mustache, is very artistic and reads quite a bit. Please write to D. E. Cross, 2225 Callow Ave., Baltimore, Md.

Please locate my brother, Harley Raymond Buliher, tall, fair complexion, about 35 or 40. Contact Gerald Buliher, 516 E. Dutton St., Kalamazoo, Mich.

I would like to locate Dock Gainy. The last known address was 213 A Princeton St.. Liberty Homes, North Charleston, S. C. He is now believed to be on a farm not far from Charleston. Please write Joseph LeRoy Landry P. O. Box 111, Napoleonville, La.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur R. Robbins, 37 years old, recently in the U.S. Army, and who was last heard from December 1947, in Arlington, Virginia, please write Walter J. Kennedy, P.O. Box 869, St. John's, Newfoundland. Robbins' forte is music and at one time he played guitar with Eddie Arnold. Hung out in Washington, D.C.

I wish to gather any information about my ol buddy, Walter G. Chandler, nicknamed "Cow Creek." He was born in Cow Creek, Florida, i about 57 years old, 5'6", black hair and eye

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Served two hitches in the 160th C.A.C., mostly at Fort Stevens, Ore. Last heard of at Camp Pike, Ark., 1918-1919. He once belonged to the Knights of Pythias. Contact M. C. Breckinridge, 113-N. Wilson Way, Stockton, Calif.

I would like to locate Thomas A. Jones, last heard of in Gunnison, Colorado, in 1934. He lived in Gary, Indiana in 1933 and part of '34. He was a body and fender man and worked for Sharps Garage in Indiana and Hartman's Garage in Montrose, Colo. Please get in touch with D. G. Johnson, 735 Custer Ave., Billings, Mont.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of John Emil Gabrielson, born in Minnesota 47 years ago. He was last heard from in Roman, Montana in 1934, but has been reported as being in Stockton, Calif., in 1940. He is slim, has brown hair, blue eyes, and has a thumb missing on the right hand. Please write to his brother, Ervin Gabrielson, 28 Randall St., Cortland, N. Y.

I would like to locate Phillip C. Steed, last heard from in or around Chicago, Ill. If he or any person knowing his address reads this, write Leonard Steed, Talbotton, Ga.

Anyone knowing W. C. Allen, age 23, weight around 240 lbs., ruddy complexion, works mostly as a truck driver, get in touch with E. V. Allen, Box 314, Hull, Liberty Co., Texas.

I would appreciate contacting any of the following men: Edward Henry Boudreau who used to work in the U.S. Forestry Office in Portland, Oregon, before the war. When last heard from, he was serving in the 29th Engineers stationed in Portland, Ore., in 1942. Clarence Blanchard was in the Merchant Marine and his last known home address was Seattle, Wash. He was on an oil tanker going overseas in 1943. Paul de Jerld was a soldier in Co. H of the 114th Infantry and last heard of at Fort Lewis, Washington, in 1942. Contact E. G. Sumner, 410 Montana Ave., Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

I would like to find my father, Ferdinand Elijah Wood, about 86 years old, of Scottish descent, and 5'6" tall. The last I heard, he was living in the neighborhood of Bellflower, California, or Maywood. Write Joseph Herschel Wood, 2048 Capitol Drive, San Pedro, Calif.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Walter A. Downer, a native of New York City who moved in the '20s to the southwest and last known in 1942 to be in El Paso, Texas, please communicate with Joseph Davis, Prospect St., Watertown, Conn.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Edward C. Hobaugh, Jr., age 32, height 5'8", 145 lbs., dark hair, brown eyes, medium complexion with MUTT tattoed on one arm, please commmunicate with M. Ball, Mall Road, Ardentown, Delaware. Last heard that he was working for Fruehauf Trailer Co., Los Angeles, Calif.

THE END

(Continued from page 91)

ested in the death of Johns. But he did not mention that the night Johns had slept at Tagalpa, someone had tried to get into his hotel room and that Hollis himself fired a shot in the direction of the intruder and missed.

"If a deliberate effort had been made to kill Johns, first with the mule accident and second by murdering him in the hotel, it would mean that the murderer's chiefs or fellow-conspirators in the capital would expect Johns never to reach it. But they were waiting at the airport with a gun for him. Therefore someone had let them know the previous attempts had failed. No telegram had been sent by anyone concerned and there was no telegram in the local file that looked as if it were in code. But there was a radio telephone at the airfield and morning and evening, Hollis talked to Jacoves. So much for that aspect of the whole deal.

"Then there were the lottery tickets. Johns' murderer had sold lottery tickets. So had Benedito, who shadowed me. A lottery ticket seller brought a message to me. Another accompanied me to a rendezvous. Radetch who, from the beginning, I was almost sure was working for them, went to a lottery agency. The thing was to find the link between the two groups, and Senor Munjoz very obligingly furnished it by calling Jacoves in a panic. A useful set-up, the lottery agency," finished Weston. "Any amount of people come there every day without exciting suspicion and it provides a large pool of badly paid, ignorant workers to draw on. Most of them would cheerfully commit murder for ten pesos."

"But how did you manage to get in with them—to make them trust you?" demanded Jeffries.

They were walking out to the plane and Weston was silent. When he did speak, it wasn't to say any of the things in his mind. What was done was done and better forgotten. "Your plane was an irresistible introduction," he said, and went on lightly. "By the way, it's a highly profitable business selling borrowed Navy bombers. I'm thinking of taking it up."

THE END

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(Continued from page 41)

Amazingly, he had requested Louie's help in hauling the big leopard shark to boatside.

"You can use your goot hand," he had said. "Dis fish too big fer me."

When they had brought the creature into port that night, he had declared in a voice everyone could hear, "We got Old Leopard today—me an' Louie."

But Louie had shaken his head.

"Don't be too sure," he had said. "Dar's bigger sharks in de sea."

The storm changed Louie, too, in some respects. When the dock workers had asked him about his wounded hand, he had scoffed, "Just a scratch," and had acted genuinely embarrassed when Captain Carlson had insisted on telling everybody about the accident.

After he was made captain of the *Orion,* though, the first thing he did was to nail Helena's crayoned flag to the mast. It bothered Captain Carlson a little although it pleased him, too, to see the smile on the little girl's face.

"You got it *above* de company flag, Louie," he gave a friendly hint from the deck of the *Sea Tiger* as the two boats lay alongside unloading one night. "Maybe dat ain't exac'ly proper . . ."

"Maybe it ain't," replied easy-going Captain Swenson. His big wide mouth cracked in a friendly grin, a human, quizzical smile. "It ain't *proper* neither, Charlie—" and to his credit it must be admitted that this was the first and only time he mentioned that he knew—"to put nicks in a cleaver tryin' to chop a main chain. A sledgehammer an' a cold chisel would be better any day."

In time Captain Carlson forgot the squall, but at this particular moment it was very real to him, and in the years that have passed since then, although others are prone to sit in Maizie's Place and gossip about the talkative Captain Swenson—how he brags about catching the most sharks, and is always shooting off at the mouth about bringing in "Old Leopard" some day—Captain Carlson only had good words to say about him.

"Dar's all kinda talk," he defends him. "Dat Louie don't do no harm wid his. You men oughta be ashamed of yourselfs, makin' fun of him."

THE END

(Continued from page 31)

—the cordon of troops around the lamasery walls, the tiny red figures of the monks in the courtyard, the solitary figure in purple cassock on a balcony in the central tower. Then it had vanished.

Beside him Natya breathed, "The Avatara Lama!"

From the corner of his eye he caught the glint of sun on metal, a wink so minute it almost escaped his attention. As he tilted the ship on one wing, banking away from the hills, he swung his head and looked back. Then he caught another speck of color, high among the rocks above the lamasery. He had only a glimpse, a flash impression of blue, before the tail cut off his view. A cold premonition touched him.

"Something wrong?"

It seemed to Laird in that moment that to miss by so narrow a margin had become his trademark. He had been too late to help Shu. Too late to head off Barski. Too late to warn Gordon. Too late now when it counted most. Because where there should have been only bare rock, he had seen a uniform and rifle. He was sure of it.

"On that high point of rock! Must be the Hsifan! Slipped past the guard somehow."

He brought the plane out of her turn and leveled off. Every head would be turned to the sky, watching. He had played right into the Hsifan's hands. He had guaranteed the man's chance for a perfect unobserved shot, even to covering the sound. Nobody was anywhere near him.

"The machine gun!"

He stared blankly at Natya, then at the panel. He found the charging handle, gave it a pull. The belt jammed. He yanked again and threw a cartridge into the chamber. The lamasery was rushing toward him once more, looming through the glass. He jabbed the wheel button, heard a faint spat from the nose compartment as the .50 cleared.

He pulled the nose up, steering for the thumb of rock that jutted above the ridgetop. As he squinted along the nose

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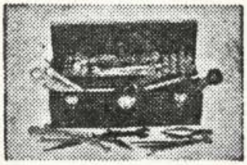

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he told himself it couldn't be done. It violated every rule of combat experience. You didn't dive and strafe a ten-ton C47. You couldn't aim. You couldn't pull out. He told himself that, and then he was firing, short tracer bursts, a thousand yards before he closed the range, responding to several old long-forgotten reflexes.

He saw the Hsifan, an anonymous spot of blue on the rocks. Then he could distinguish the pencil line of a rifle. The figure grew, took on arms and legs. A matter of seconds, he thought, gauging his wing spread to the last split instant when he would have to bank. He saw the man leap to his feet. Time had stopped for Laird. There was for him only the throb of the engines, the black naked rocks, the miniature of a man, suspended in space.

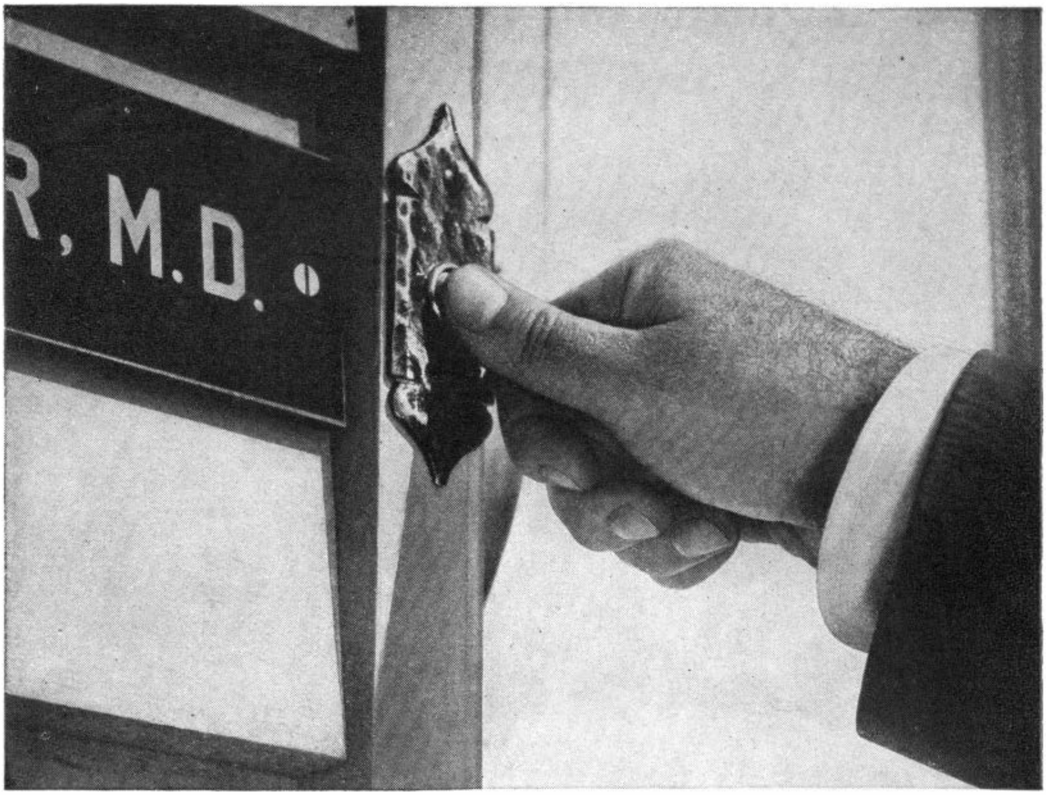
The Hsifan threw up his rifle and shot at the plane. Laird braced himself for the turn. Deliberately he sighted along the skin rivets and fired, knowing it would have to be this run. He couldn't make another. The tracers flowed wide and to the left. He eased up on the nose, squeezed the button and held it down. He saw the Hsifan, outlined for an instant, a deeper blue against the blue of the sky.

Then he saw the man jerk, stagger forward, and fall, almost gracefully, toward the rocks below.

As Laird snapped the ship around he imagined he could feel the brush of rocks against his undercarriage. Then he was skimming the lamasery roof, gaining altitude as he headed back for Dorju Peak.

His grip relaxed on the wheel. For now, at least, he had nothing to explain, neither to himself nor to the authority represented by Gordon. That would come soon enough. He thought of an embittered old man who had waited too many years, for the wrong things, and he thought of a Tibetan boy who had been killed for no reason except that he wore a red hat. He doubted if he could explain adequately, ever. But as he turned toward Natya he was thankful that for this once, at least, he had been on time.

THE END



YOUR FIRST MOVE AT THE FIRST SIGN OF CANCER

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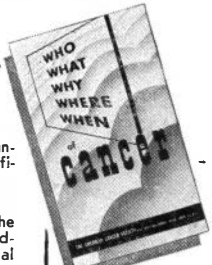
Always be on the lookout for cancer's danger signals. Watch for them in yourself, in your friends and in members of your family.

Remember—you can't *diagnose* cancer yourself, but you can *suspect* it. Be on the lookout. Check up on yourself from time to time.

CANCER'S
DANGER
SIGNALS

1. Any sore that does not heal, particularly about the tongue, mouth or lips.
2. A painless lump or thickening, especially in the breast, lip or tongue.
3. Progressive change in the color or size of a wart, mole or birthmark.
4. Persistent indigestion.
5. Persistent hoarseness, unexplained cough, or difficulty in swallowing.
6. Bloody discharge from the nipple or irregular bleeding from any of the natural body openings.
7. Any change in the normal bowel habits.



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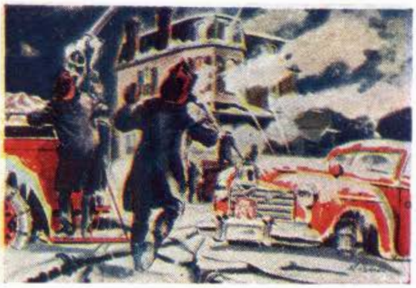
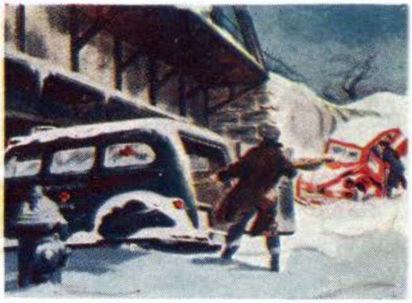
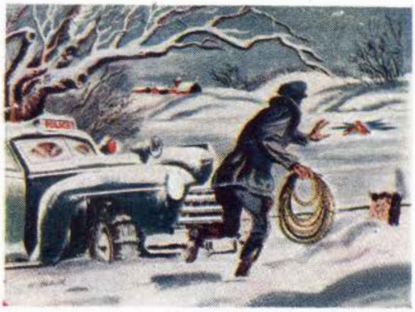


SAFETY'S A MUST with Fire Chief Ivan Curry, of Osseo, Wisconsin. "In my job a freeze-up can be fatal. It pays to have 'Prestone' anti-freeze—the best anti-freeze you can buy!"



SAFETY'S A MUST with Ambulance Driver David Landew, of Muhlenberg Hospital, Plainfield, N. J., who says, "I put one shot of 'Prestone' anti-freeze in my radiator every fall and I'm safe from freeze-ups!"



SAFETY'S A MUST with Police Captain Emerson Payne, of Jeffersonville, Indiana. "No matter how quickly the weather changes, 'Prestone' anti-freeze keeps my car free from freeze-ups."

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