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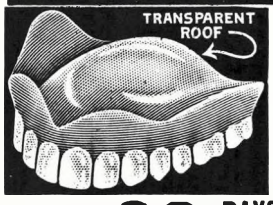

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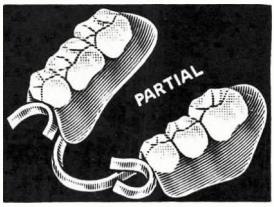

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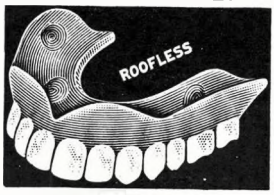

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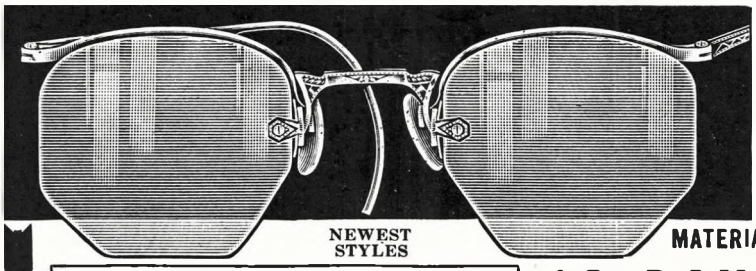

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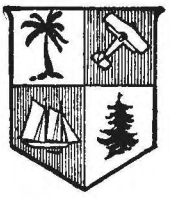

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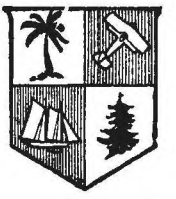

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Kenneth S. White, Editor

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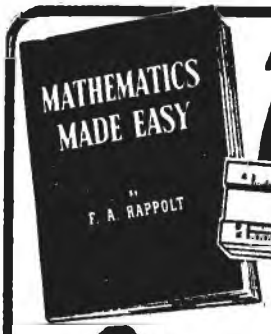

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Information you can't get elsewhere

FISHING and hunting in the land of wild guanaco.

Request:—Recently I applied for a position in Peru at a fairly decent salary. I'm taking along my wife and three children and I intend to stay down there indefinitely, if everything works out right.

For many years I have been a hunting and fishing fan; in fact, they are my only hobbies, and I've acquired quite a lot of fishing tackle and sporting firearms. Would I be permitted to bring these things into the country, and if so is there sufficient sport to warrant taking them?

Looks as though I'll be stationed in the mountains about a hundred miles from Lima, and I thought the streams might produce something comparable to trout or small mouth bass fishing here. Any information you can give me on either fishing or hunting will be gratefully received.

—Curtis Robinson
6053 Angorra Terrace,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply by Edgar Young:—Peru has always been rather strict on firearms of over .38 calibre, and due to war conditions these are a bit more rigid than formerly; and while I think you will have no trouble with the fishing gear, I believe you will have to place all large bore guns in bond, as they call it, when you pass through the customs; and possibly now they will require you to place the smaller calibres in bond also. It has formerly been the custom of Americans when landing there to deposit their guns at the custom house, then after finding some local American who is onto the ropes, getting him to make arrangements to have them passed through in a few days. Usually some official of the company where the newcomer goes to work will either go or send someone to do this, or some local American or Englishman can be found somewhere in the city who will do it as a favor. Otherwise it may be a case of selling your guns here and re-buying down there after you arrive.

Game is scarce on the Pacific side of Peru and throughout the uplands until the eastern slopes are reached, and about all one will ever see to shoot at is a wild guanaco, or perhaps a rare vicuña. Also, due to the fact that the western side is mainly desert, the rivers are few and far between, and very short. Sea fishing, however, is excellent. On the eastern slopes, on account of the heavy rainfall, dense jungle, there is more game of the tropical sort and two or three of the big cat tribe may be found. Under *fauna* in the Encyclopedia Britannica you will find most of the animals listed, and this article will give you a good general idea of Peru as a whole if you read it thoroughly. The Pan American Union, of Washington, D. C., will send you a booklet on Peru if you send them a 5 cent coin. They also sell good maps at cost of printing. The Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Latin American Division, Washington, will furnish you with a list of what you are allowed to take into Peru free of customs duty.

It has long been a moot point among sportsmen whether the South American fish will bite on flies and bait; because the Indians usually take them by means of poisonous roots and berries thrown into the pools, or by driving. As a matter of fact these trout-like and bass-like fish in the numerous rivers and streams, will bite on flies and bait, and some of them are extremely gamy when hooked. This whole eastern section is likely to be quite

(Continued on page 8)

15 Minutes a Day!

Give me just this and I'll prove I can make you

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I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them. *Right now* I'm even training hundreds of soldiers and sailors who KNOW they've got to get into shape FAST!

How do YOU measure up for the defense of your country? Have YOU the strong shoulders and back that can haul for miles Uncle Sam's standard *61 pounds* of Army man's equipment? Or if home defense presses you into service, have you the he-man strength and tireless energy that double-shifts of working and watching may call for?

Charles Atlas

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Now as Never Before You Need a Body That's Ready for ANY Job in National Emergency!

Are you ALL MAN—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? *Or do you want the help I can give you*—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, 97-lb. weakling. And NOW it knows I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of other men in such quick time? The answer is *Dynamic Tension!*

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that *Dynamic Tension* can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you *inside*, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

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Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."* It tells you exactly what *Dynamic Tension* can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. RESULTS it has produced for other men. RESULTS I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a NEW MAN, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83V, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

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I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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(Continued from page 6)

a distance from where you may be located, if you are just a hundred miles from Lima. Nevertheless, it is not hard to get over there. There is a post road with post houses and accommodations all the way from Oroyo to Puerto Bermudez, from which place one can go all the way to Iquitos by launch. It takes about eight days to make the Oroyo-Bermudez trip by mule. You possibly would not want to go to Iquitos, and by heading upstream, or following some local tributary of the Yucayali, you could reach good hunting and fishing country. If you should be stationed at Cerro de Pasco, there is a sort of trail by means of which this same river may be reached further down. I heard this trail mentioned quite a bit when I was at Cerro but I never travelled it myself.

It is an excellent plan for one intending to go to any South American country, to first read the article about that country in the encyclopedia, get the booklet covering the general features from the Pan American Union, study the maps in Rand McNally's Library or Commercial Atlas at the library; then read a number of the books written by men who have travelled in the less accessible portions of these countries. Some of these books might be rated as classics and the dates run clear on back into the 70's, but as a rule this entire literature is almost unknown to the average American. By knowing what the other fellow was up against makes it easy for the next man if he has read the account. Your library will doubtless have these books on their shelves and I assure you there is hardly a place where someone hasn't been on a trip, and has told about it in a book. Also, after you arrive at your destination, you will perhaps find at the camp some tropical adventurer who has been there personally.

THE much-maligned Chow Chow.

Request:—Having recently come into possession of a Chow dog I should like to get some information about the breed. The one we have is an altered female, twenty inches high at the shoulders, thirteen months old, and has had one litter of pups. We have heard that this breed is vicious and untrustworthy; that is, an individual dog may be gentle for some time and then suddenly turn on a member of the family in a savage attack. Do you know of any reason for this rumor? Is the care or feeding any different from any other dog, for instance, Airedales? We feed it twice a day. Is that all right? About how many ounces of feed per day? Are they easily trained?

What about the history? Have been informed that it is a wild dog of China. Are there any hooks obtainable on Chows and where can one he had? What care should the coat have? Do you advise frequent washing? Is it advisable to clip the hair in hot weather, and how close? Are they considered good watch dogs?

—Weytus E. Dewey,
1419 North 40th Street,
Omaha, Nebraska

Reply by Freeman Lloyd:—As you are perhaps aware, the Chinese eat well-fattened dogs—hence the name *Chow* or Food Dog. He is not less vicious than any other breed of dog which is kindly looked after and treated as other dogs kept around the house. It is the man who makes his dog even-tempered or otherwise.

Your bitch is of correct size. Around 20 inches is the standardized shoulder height of this breed; and the weight may be around 50 pounds. The colors are black, red, yellow, and blue—all solid colors—the fluffy hair at the back of the hind quarters being usually lighter in shade than the body color. The tongue should be black, or blue; likewise the lips. The color of the tongue is a distinctive characteristic of the Chow Chow breed.

Your feeding schedule appears correct. Give more meat—canned or otherwise—than farinaceous feeds.

Chows are as trainable and well-mannered as other house dogs. Brush the coat every day with an ordinary stiff-bristled brush of the kind you would use for your own hair. Frequent washing is not advised; but an occasional tubbing is recommended.

You may clip off the hair in hot summer weather, but not so during the cold season.

If you write to Dr. Henry Jarrett, Box 4372, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pa., Secretary of the Chow Chow Club of America, I feel sure he will be pleased to send you a printed description of the breed.

For a list of dog books on sale, communicate with the Popular Dogs Publishing Co., 2009 Ranstead Street, Philadelphia.

(Continued on page 123)

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RIVERMEN

By

HELEN von KOLNITZ HYER

END DECORATION BY I. B. HAZELTON

"*Crack!*" went the ice on the edges of the river bank.
"*Splash!*" went the logs where the teamsters pushed them down.
"Yo-*ho!* Hi-*ho!*" sang the seven singing rivermen,
Brandishing their peavies as they rode the logs to town.

"Paul, Paul, we'll meet you at Negaunee.
Paul, Paul, we'll beat you to the Soo.
Paul, Paul, bring Babe, the Big Blue Ox, along—
Down Escanaby way we've got a job to do!"

"*Snick!*" went the hob nails, digging in the pine bark.
"*Snack!*" went the logs where they nosed each other out.
"Yo-*ho!* Hi-*ho!*" sang the seven singing rivermen,
Shoving with their peavies as they raised their heads to shout:

"Paul, Paul, there's a black-eyed minx in Seney.
Paul, Paul, there's a blonde in Grand Marais.
Paul, Paul, bring Babe, the Big Blue Ox, along—
My pink-cheeked gal has copper curls, down Escanaby way!"

"Crunch!" went the ice cakes, swirling in the shallows.
"Scrunch!" went the logs as they slid a rock-lined chute.
"Yo-*ho!* Hi-*ho!*" sang the seven singing rivermen,
Waving of their peavies in a riotous salute.

"Paul, Paul, there's a million feet of Norways.
Paul, Paul, there's a hundred miles of spruce.
Paul, Paul, bring Babe, the Big Blue Ox, along—
We've got to git that timber out—so don't make no excuse!"

"Cr-aash!" went the ice cakes down St. Mary's rapids.
"Br-aam!" went the logs as the big rocks spun them 'round.
"Yo-*ho!* Hi-*ho!*" sang the seven singing rivermen,
Stabbing with their peavies at the logs that ran aground.

"Paul, Paul, tear up them rotten skidways.
Paul, Paul, jug some Ramble Town moon.
Paul, Paul, bring Babe, the Big Blue Ox, along—
We're headin' Escanaby way an' can't git there too soon!"

★ ★ WE LICKED

WHEN a certain high Japanese official informed our press, just a short time before the Pearl Harbor affair, that Japan had never been defeated in war, the boastful man left out of his calendar the year 1863. That was when WE licked the Japs. That was the affair at Shimonoseki when *one* American steam sloop of war, with only six guns, destroyed three heavily armed Japanese vessels, wiped out a number of land batteries, and silenced a fort which attempted to sink her.

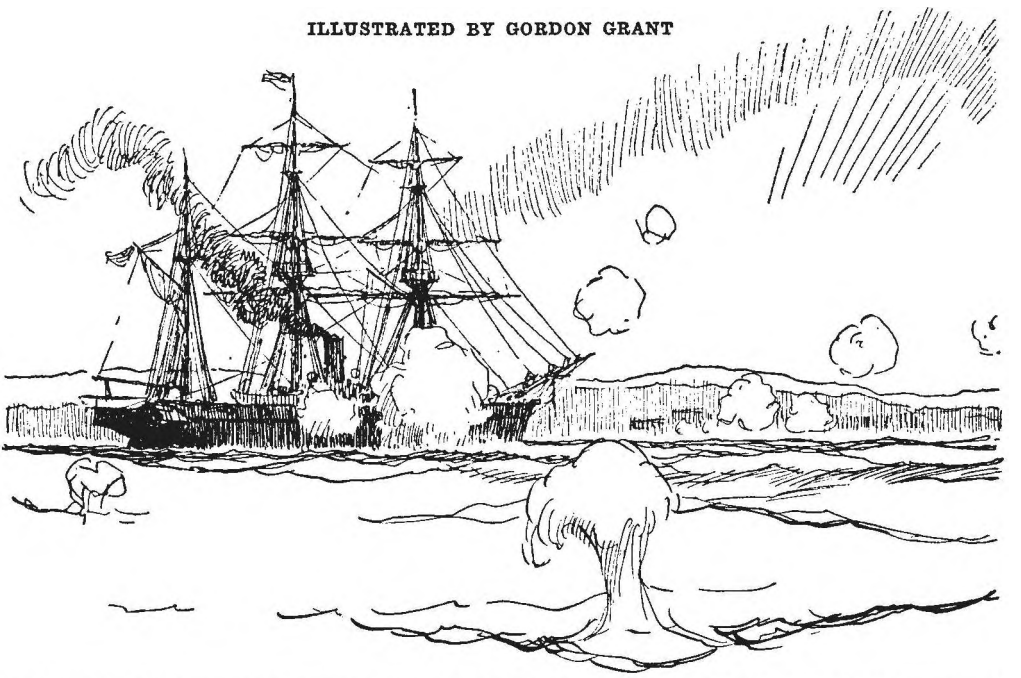
In 1863 we were at war—Civil War. Out on the Pacific, searching for the Confederate raider *Alabama*, was the U.S.S. *Wyoming*, armed with two heavy Dahlgren pivot guns and four small broadside cannon. Her hunt was fruitless, and her commander, David McDougall, was following orders to return home, when, off the coast of Japan, he received an urgent dispatch from the American minister to protect American lives and property at Yokohama.

Various factors had contributed to a state of affairs where hostility existed between our country and the Japanese. The opening of Japan to the outside world, through the Treaty of 1858, had caused great dissatisfaction in Japan, particularly to the large warlike clans of Satsuma and Choshiu. These clans had surrounded the Mikado at Kioto, and persuaded him to issue an edict setting June 25th, 1863 as the date on which all foreigners should be expelled from Japan. (Japanese who feel "hurt" at our immigration exclusion laws, please note.)

The Tycoon who had signed the edict to expel foreigners, was bound to enforce it, although opposed to it himself. He sent in his resignation as Prime Minister to the Mikado, but it was rejected. He was helpless.

However, the exultant Chief of the Choshiu clan quickly got into action. He fortified the Strait of Shimonoseki, the entrance to the Sea of Japan, and placed a number of land batteries there to

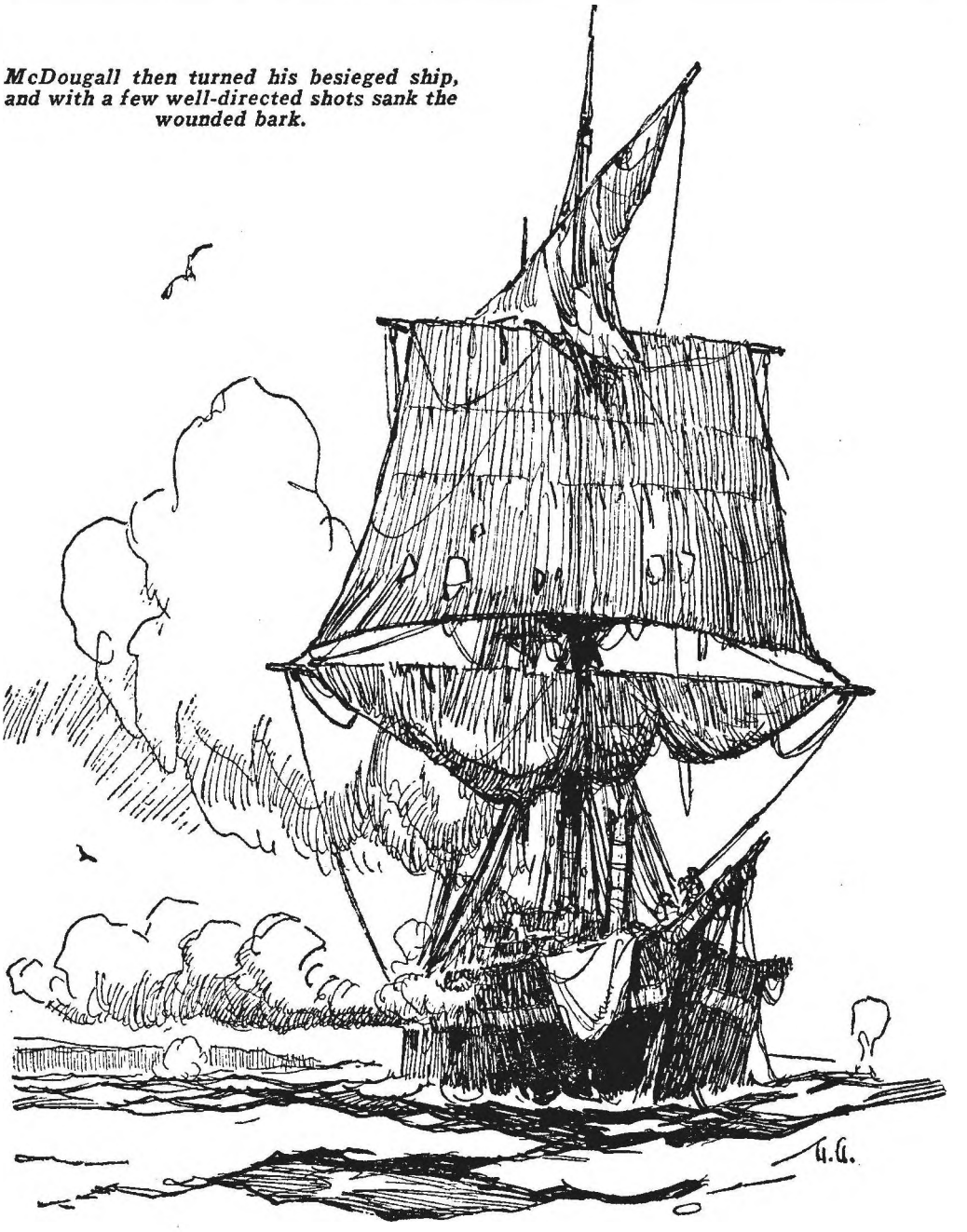
ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT



A FACT STORY

'EM ONCE! ★ ★ ★

McDougall then turned his besieged ship, and with a few well-directed shots sank the wounded bark.



By MAJOR ANTHONY FIALA

cover the approaches. Two large sailing vessels and a steamer lurked around, ready for action.

BEFORE McDougall and the *Wyoming* came upon the scene, the Japanese had everything under control. They fired without warning upon the American steamer *Pembroke* and damaged her; they attacked successfully a French dispatch boat; they launched a terrible barrage against the friendly Dutch ship *Medusa* of 16 guns as she attempted to enter the Channel, and forced her to leave with a badly damaged hull and many killed and wounded; they chased a French gunboat out of the harbor at full speed; and, ironically, they sank one of their own vessels, mistaking it for a foreign ship.

The reports of the Japanese successes only inspired McDougall to hurry to the scene of battle. On July fifteenth, in the evening, he arrived off the eastern end of the Strait of Shimonoseki. There he waited until morning. At five A.M. the next day, he sent the *Wyoming* at full speed into the Channel. Now the Channel was about three miles long, and between one half and one mile wide, and the tides ran through the narrow waterway swiftly. Many sunken rocks skulked under the surface of the water, and had been the cause of severe wrecks. So McDougall had not only guns to avoid, but the treacherous waters themselves.

As the *Wyoming* entered the Channel at full speed, signal guns blasted, and then the batteries opened a terrific fire. McDougall wisely did not answer these volleys, until his ship had reached the narrowest part of the strait. Before he got there, his alert eyes had picked out a line of stakes in the Channel, which he correctly assumed to be range markers. Avoiding these aids to the Jap gunners, he steered the *Wyoming* inshore, directly under the batteries, whose dreadful fire would have been powerful enough to sink several ships, but due to his clever maneuvering, only passed through the ship's rigging. An ironic note introduced itself into that minor war with Japan, which has been repeated today. The batteries that punted shells into the *Wyoming* possessed heavy guns "made in U.S.A." The very shells that were directed against our ship, came from five eight-inch Dahlgren cannon that the United States had presented to Japan.

McDOUGALL then steamed away from the Narrows into more open water. At this, three heavily armed Japanese merchantmen, one of them a steamer, opened fire, and added their whistling shells to the bombardment from the land batteries.

Now that he was in the open sea with more room to maneuver, Commander McDougall gave orders to sail his ship in between the Japanese sailing vessels (a bark and a brig), and take over the steamer. The Yokohama pilots on the *Wyoming* who had been furnished by the friendly Tycoon, loudly protested against these orders because it meant going into shallow water. But McDougall refused to yield to them, and the ship went forward into this dangerous position, with instructions that she must be blown up with all on board, if the venture failed. To die in this fashion would be far pleasanter than to fall as prisoners into the cruel hands of the Japanese torturers.

But just as the *Wyoming* started for the enemy's ships, a new battery opened fire—a raking charge. The *Wyoming* answered from one of her eleven-inch Dahlgren guns and answered so accurately that the entire battery was destroyed by this single shot. Steaming ahead, then, she passed by the Japanese brig and bark at close range, exchanging broadsides. The Japanese handled their guns so rapidly that they slammed three broadsides right into the *Wyoming* as she passed.

But if McDougall's ship had suffered from the onslaught, the Japs were much worse off. The brig was rapidly sinking, and the bark bore huge gaping holes in her side. Still the bark kept on shooting.

However McDougall was after much bigger game—the steamer—so he maneuvered for a position against her, while the steamer weighed anchor and looked as if she were preparing to ram. At this moment the rushing tide swooped under the *Wyoming's* bow and grounded her

on a shoal. In this precarious position, she was fired upon by six land batteries.

The exultation of the Japs over this mishap to the American ship was short-lived. After several tense minutes, the ship's engines succeeded in pulling her off. Then, ignoring the fast-firing land batteries, firing so rapidly they resembled volcanoes, McDougall placed two eleven-inch shells into the hull of the steamer, and a third through its boiler. With a loud explosion and a hiss of steam, the unhappy ship sank beneath the waters.

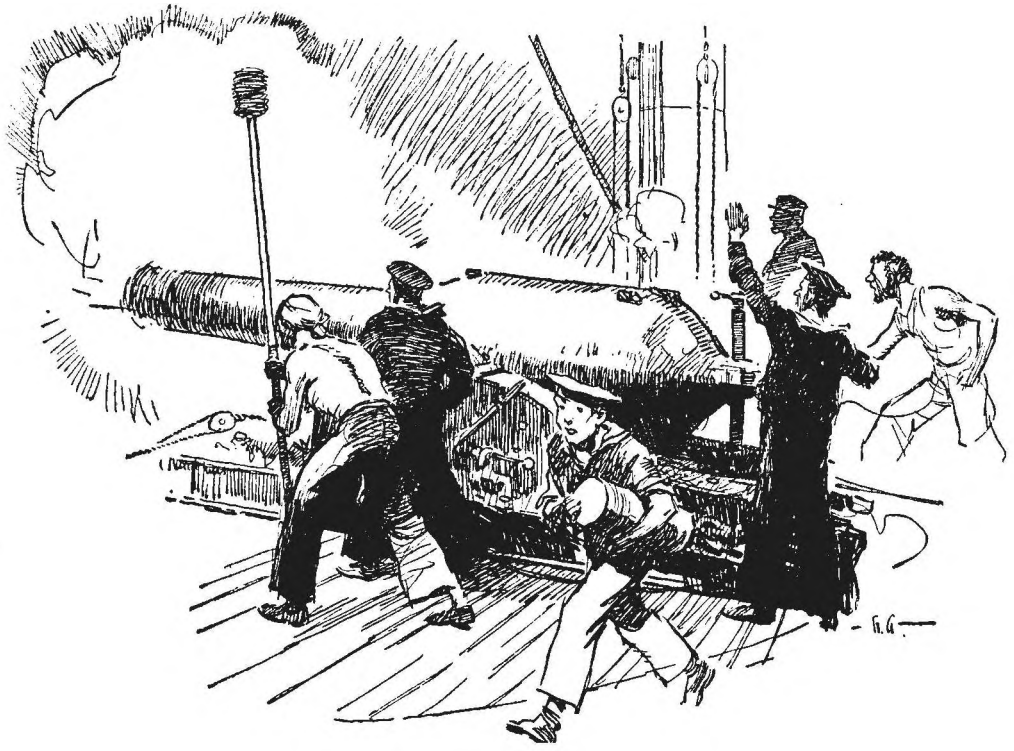
All this time, the Japanese bark and land batteries were hurling screaming missiles from all directions at the *Wyoming*, and the ship was under heavy fire; still the American sailors, most of whom had never been in actual battle before, stood coolly at their guns and worked like veterans.

McDougall then turned his besieged ship, and with a few well-directed shots sank the wounded bark. Then, he picked out one land battery after another until he destroyed them all. With all enemy guns silenced, he sailed out of the Channel unmolested.

THE entire action had taken place in one hour and ten minutes. The *Wyoming* came out of the scrap with ten holes in her hull, her smokestack perforated, her rigging badly cut, five of the crew killed, and seven of them wounded. When we consider that this lone ship had been attacked by three others, plus six land batteries, plus a fort, the wonder is that she survived at all.

It is rather sad that the gallant commander and his crew received little or no recognition at home, for we were in the center of the maelstrom of the Civil War and more interested in the home front than in some far flung battle. On the other hand, the captain of the Dutch frigate *Medusa* which had successfully escaped from the Jap attack, was knighted for saving his ship. All his men were rewarded with medals.

Reading about this remarkable battle, the late Theodore Roosevelt remarked: "Had that action taken place at any other time than during the Civil War, its fame would have echoed over the world."



5,000 TROJAN

ILLUSTRATED
BY
HAMILTON GREENE

Steve half expected to get a slug in his own spine as he dove for the big man in uniform.

HORSES

By LESLIE T. WHITE

THE nostalgic howl of the big wolf-husky rang through the cold Canadian air with the clarity of the Memorial bells on Parliament Hill. It stopped Steve Patterson cold in his tracks, tearing open the raw wound he had tried to cover up with an artificial skin of belligerence. He realized abruptly that he should not have come out here to the MacGillivray home again. The past was dead, and to wallow among the ghosts of other days could only result in

pain and trouble for everyone. Yet, admitting these things, the old embittered stubbornness prevailed. He clamped his bear-trap jaws, ducked his big rust-thatched head a little as though the opposition he knew he was going to face was a tangible storm of wind and snow, and trudged doggedly through the deep drifts.

Other dogs had taken up the clamor, and by the time he topped the rise, the whole compound below was in an uproar. He paused a moment in the shelter of the spruce-lined road to fill his mind with these scenes from which he meant to exile himself forever. The little brown farmhouse squatted snugly on the land that sloped gently to the high, sheer banks of the Ottawa River. Northward, on the Quebec shore, the River Gatineau cascaded its frozen silver out of the blue Laurentians to join the Ottawa on the inevitable march to the sea. Handsome stands of spruce and balsam, flanked by towering jack-pines and perfumed by tamarack, checker-boarded the landscape. Like proud chessmen, a home stood starkly in each snowy square. Steve stared at the little house below with hurt and angry eyes, while the wind sighed as it lifted powder snow from the surface crust and neatly piled it around the kennel runways. The feed-house, behind the yard, looked like a white-frosted cup-cake.

THE scene was as typical of Canada as the beaver and the moose. It symbolized peace and diligence, and the quiet strength that is born of these things. There was no evidence of war in this pastoral countryside, yet in these snow-banked farmhouses, as in the fir-covered hills purpled by distance and in all the lands drained by these mighty rivers, lived a peace-loving people who, like the moose and the beaver, preferred their quiet, hard-working way of life, and would fight to the death to preserve it.

Steve shut out these thoughts as he left the road and cut across the field toward the house. The dogs saw him, and fought and jostled one another at the wire enclosures. Old Emperor, the black monarch of the compound, stood alone in his private yard. Unconquerable, he shared quarters with neither the sullen malamutes nor the wiry little Siberian huskies. They were only dogs, while he was the whelp of a husky bitch and a wild gray timber wolf who had never felt the touch of man.

When Steve whistled softly, Emperor stopped his howling and at once the other dogs tapered their noise to a disgruntled growling. As Steve started around the feed-house, he came face to face with two men. The first, tall and fair-complexioned, Steve had never seen before; the other was the last man on earth he wanted to meet at this moment—Sergeant-major MacGillivray, R.C.M.P., retired.

MacGillivray was a barrel-chested fighting bantam who stood as if he had swallowed a ram-rod. A full head shorter than Steve, he was as explosive as a hand-grenade, and he invariably reminded Steve of a pugnacious Scottish terrier. His eyes had taken on the icy glitter of his beloved Northland. His skin was rough, his face chipped and furrowed as though chiseled out of a chunk of gneiss. He was just as hard and unyielding. He impaled the younger man with a frosty stare.

"What are you sneaking around here for, Patterson?"

Steve bit his lip. "I came for a word with Laura."

"Didn'a I forbid you to—"

"Oh, drop it!" Steve growled. "You're not bullying a mounted troop on the drill ground. I came to say good-bye to your daughter, for I'm leaving for Australia with Corporal Austin, who's resigning from the Force to go back to his home to fight."

"I care naught for your explanations!" roared the old man. "Get out!"

Steve tried hard to control his temper. "Now look here, Sergeant, I may not get back—ever. You've no right to keep us—"

"Get off my property before I turn the dogs on you!"

Steve couldn't suppress a bitter smile as he glanced sideways where the dogs he had known so well now regarded him with friendly eyes.

"That wouldn't get you a damn

thing," he said. "I can do more with those dogs of yours than you can. And you know it."

The sergeant-major's mustache bristled until it stood out from his face like a pair of horns.

"Patterson," stormed the old man, "you're a disgrace to the Force, and a drunken traitor to all the decent traditions of your country! Once you were welcome here at my home. But no longer! No boozing lout who'll strike an officer of the R.C.M.P. can come here. I ordered you to stay away from my daughter and from my home. Now go! If you ever show your face around here again, I'll put a dog-whip to you, though I'm twice your age!"

"Why you pompous old bully—" Steve began, then stopped abruptly, conscious that a stranger was listening.

"O.K., I'll go," he grated. "I'm going to put as much distance as possible from you and your precious Force and all the ancient, out-worn, traditional rot that goes with it. Good-bye!" He wheeled abruptly and tramped off through the snow.

As he reached the crest of the hill where the road began, he heard Emperor's wild lament. But he steeled himself against turning, for he wanted to remember the scene as it had been when he arrived. His feet instinctively sought out his old tracks as he started the long hike to the end of the bus line which would carry him back into the city.

Steve was angry with himself for coming now. He might have known it would be like this, for even Laura, sure as he was that she loved him, felt he was wrong. Yet Steve could not accept the unanimous verdict. The trouble had all started years ago over some prank in his training days when Inspector Barnett, then acting as instructor in police procedure, had disciplined him severely. Steve had been a hard colt to break, and discipline rankled. He had bucked Barnett consistently through the years that followed because he was satisfied that the inspector bore him a grudge. Unlike Sergeant-major MacGillivray, who had been riding master in the old days, Barnett never blew up and spoke his mind. He was stiff, cold and unapproachable. Strangely enough, most of the troopers admired him. Despite his strictness, they believed him just. Only Steve stubbornly disputed that. Every set-back he received, he credited to the inspector, and during his long sojourn in the wilderness of western Ontario, he had brooded over the situation until it had become magnified out of all proportion. Then when he had come to Ottawa on a furlough, a few drinks had gone to his head. The unexpected appearance of Inspector Barnett at the party had seemed to Steve's bleary mind like a frame-up. He had started a brawl, which resulted in his dismissal.

That had been the turning of Steve Patterson's personal tide, and now his luck was on the ebb. Pride kept him from offering either defense or excuse. The story of his disgrace had permeated the government services until no other branch would accept him. Opposition only stiffened his obstinacy. He beat his head against the stone-wall of officialdom in vain. He was through.

THE sharp note of an automobile horn startled him. Steve hadn't even been aware that he had reached the main highway. He stepped off the road into the drifts to let the car pass. Instead, it stopped beside him.

"Want a lift into Ottawa?" the driver shouted.

"Why, sure!" Steve said, and circled the car to get in beside the driver. "This is luck for me," he commented, and spread his hands down close to the heater.

The driver started the car. "I was out there with MacGillivray," he chuckled. "Obviously I couldn't help hearing what was said back there. Tough old buzzard."

Steve glanced sideways. "I didn't recognize you. Yes, old Mac has made a regular fetish out of the Force. He was like a father to me till I got kicked out of the service. That ended me with him." He tried to make his remarks sound final, but the blond man was genial and talkative.

"Forgive me," he said with a friendly laugh, "if I found it rather exciting. I'm

an American, and we have a great deal of admiration for the Canadian Mounted, who always get their man and all that sort of thing."

"You Americans gave us that tag," Steve observed drily. "The Force loathes it."

"No offense intended," chuckled the driver. "We Americans are great hero-worshippers, y'know. Say, MacGillivray's girl is sure for you. She came home right after you left. Whew! How she blistered the old Trojan when she learned he'd run you off. Fine girl, that. Said something about your spending eight years in the wilderness. That must have been an exciting experience."

"On the contrary," Steve told him, "it was unutterably dull. Much of our back-country is completely uninhabited except for Indians and trappers. I was stationed at Moose Factory for three years as a constable, then as a corporal in the Algoma and Thunder Bay districts of western Ontario."

"Hey! Isn't that the wild country up north of Sault Ste. Marie where those three German fliers recently escaped from an army concentration camp?"

Steve shrugged. "Hadn't heard about it. There's an internment camp in there near Pagwa on the Canadian National."

The man laughed shortly. "Your Canadian papers censor that stuff pretty closely I reckon. Hell, maybe I got it wrong. By the way, you said you were going to Australia?"

Steve was getting weary of the conversation. He hated to discuss personal affairs with a stranger, but he didn't want to appear rude. "Frankly, I don't know what I'm going to do," he said crisply. "The government howls enlist, enlist, enlist, but none of the services will touch me because of my row with the R.C.M.P. Well, I've had enough. To hell with 'em!"

The driver took the rebuff. "I know how you feel," he offered.

Steve didn't bother to answer. He slumped in his seat, staring moodily through the windshield at the tiny star-flakes of new-falling snow. When the stranger asked where he wanted to go, Steve told him the post office. When they got there, the man offered his hand.

"Good luck, Mounty!" He grinned.

Steve shook hands. He had not even asked the man's name.

There was no mail in his box, so Steve cut down Elgin to Queen Street where he had a small room in one of the cheaper hotels. The streets were crowded with men in uniform, from cocky youngsters of the R.C.A.F. with their shining wings to gray-haired veterans of the Home Guard. It was ironical that for the first time in eight years, Steve found himself in mufti. He quickened his pace to get off the streets. From the direction of the drill grounds came the skirl of bagpipes. That, Steve knew, would be the Ottawa Highlanders on parade. He turned his back to the sound and tramped into his hotel.

JIM AUSTIN was waiting in Steve's room. It made Steve feel like a bum just to look at the tall, military figure of his Australian friend, so crisp and immaculate in scarlet tunic and gold-striped breeches.

"I say, Steve!" laughed the lanky corporal. "You look like the wrath of God! Where have you been all afternoon?"

Steve shook the loose snow off his overcoat and threw it carelessly over a chair.

"Look, pal, take off that damn red monkey-jacket before I heave you t'hell out of here!" he grumbled. "Lord—am I sick of hearing about the Force! Jim, I need a drink."

Austin unbuttoned the neck of his tunic and sprawled onto the sagging bed. "You need a good kick in the breeches, Steve. In a bit of a funk, aren't you? Old Mac must have been raking you with his golden spurs again."

Steve sank into a chair and lighted the cigarette Austin tossed him. "To the quick," he admitted wryly. He leaned over to throw the burnt match in the wash-basin, then paused, scowling at his friend. "Say, what's on your mind? You don't look so hot yourself. Look—if you're bearing bad news, watch out! I'm about ready to run amuck!"

Austin stared at the smoking tip of his cigarette. "I'm afraid—" He hesitated.

"Come on, come on, get it over with. I

suppose you can't go to Australia?"

"That's it. No releases at this time, says they. I suppose you know Barnett's in charge of Intelligence and—"

"God a'mighty! Barnett again! Jim, you don't mean that old buzzard's stuck his beak in our—"

Austin spread his hands in resignation. "I was afraid you'd take it that way. But we are busy, y'know. As a matter of fact, I just stopped by to break the news. I'm off to your old stamping ground above the Soo."

"I wish to hell I was going along," Steve sighed. "You looking for those three German fliers?"

Austin sat up slowly. "Where did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"That three Nazi aviators escaped?"

"Oh, that. Why down on the street. Some guy from the States who gave me a lift. He said something about reading it in the American papers. They print about anything they damn please, y'know. Why?"

"That's a ruddy mess," growled the Australian. "You sure he specified that particular area, Steve?"

"I suppose he did, but I didn't pay much attention. He was rather a mouthy cuss. Why all the excitement?"

Austin stubbed out his smoke. "It's supposed to be extremely confidential. Barnett assured me not half a dozen men in Canada know about the escape. We believe they'll try and head for the border, and we want to keep their accomplices from learning that they got away. I can't understand how the American press could have got it. Damned if I can, Steve. You sure he said *three* of them escaped?"

"He said three. Why?"

Austin swung his legs to the floor. "Bloody strange, that! Y'see, while three of them did break away from the camp, only two really got away. The third sprained his leg. He was later found within ten miles of the internment camp. His companions had shot him."

"Shot? Where in hell would they get a gun?"

"That, m'lad, is the reason yours truly is taking over. I'd like to meet up with the precious pair. By the way, did your informed Yankee tell you exactly who these men were?"

"He was no Yankee," snorted Steve. "Looked like a big Swede to me. No, he didn't say. Were they big shots?"

"The biggest we had," admitted the corporal. "Baron von Wolfgang—"

"Holy cow! He was the nearest thing to Richtofen the Nazis had in this fracas!"

"Right you are. Wolfgang was a top ace, very close to Goering, I know. Insolent blighter, too. Thought it was a frightful come-down to be captured by the aged Home Guard when his Messerschmitt was shot out of the air over England. Jolly well put up a fight until one of the old lads konked him. Well, he and a bomber pilot and a Heinie mechanic managed to break out of the internment camp up on Talking Woman Lake and got away in a storm."

"Hm! Shouldn't get far. That's a lousy country for a foreigner, Jim. I've been lost there myself."

Austin took a slow turn around the

room. "That's the strange part of it. The break had been carefully planned. That's plain now. But I'm blowed if I can see how. Funny thing, too, instead of heading south toward the border, like other escapees, Wolfgang and his partner went *north*. According to the army report, the guards trailed them until the tracks were lost in the snow. We hope they're still wandering around in the bush somewhere. I must ask you not to mention this, Steve."

"I'm not interested enough in the damn thing to give it another thought," Steve growled. "Damn! I'd counted on our going to Australia together."

Austin snapped the catch on his tunic. "Sorry, Steve. I wish—" He shrugged, and reached for his Stetson.

"You wish . . . what?"

"Steve, why in hell don't you make your peace with Barnett? Damn it, man, you were wrong, y'know. Barnett's tough as steel, but by God, he's fair. The Force could use you now when every man—"

Steve flung his cigarette away. "I'd wallow in hell first."

Austin shrugged and walked to the door. "As you will. Well, cheerio. I'll look in on you when I get back."

"So long, Jim," Steve said grimly. "But I'll be out of this hole before then if I have to rob a bank to do it."

WHEN Austin was gone, Steve kicked the battered rocker into position by the window, sank into it and hoisted his feet to the sill, got his pipe going. Never in his twenty-nine years had he felt so utterly miserable. His country was at war, but he was not wanted. He listened to the sounds of the city. A battalion of soldiers marched down from Parliament Hill, their boots crunching rhythmically on the hard snow. Slowly darkness came. The pale rays of street lamps began to shine through the fast-falling snow. The carillon in the tower chimed the hour. The city stopped work. and the tide of workers started to flow homeward. Car chains beat impatiently against fenders; honking automobiles and clanging street cars disputed the right-of-way on narrow Sparks Street. Somewhere in the distance, a bugle note sounded sharply. . . .

The room was dark, his pipe cold, but Steve did not move. He forced his thoughts from himself and mused over his talk with Austin. Perhaps he should have swallowed his pride and gone to that damned martinet Barnett in the beginning. It was too late now. Yet, if it had not been for his row with the inspector, he would have been up there in the woods hunting Nazis, instead of Jim Austin. Certainly he knew that district as well as any man on the Force.

He stoked his pipe again. Funny, he reflected, how that American should have known of the escape. The man had mentioned something about the press, but the more Steve thought about it, the less sense it made. The Canadian government was mighty close-mouthed about information of that kind. The man had even known the actual number. . . .

Steve whistled softly and removed his feet from the windowsill. The stranger had said that *three* got away. Three had tried it, but only *two* had succeeded. Jim Austin had noticed that point when they discussed it. Steve turned on the light and began to pace the room. Something was fishy about the whole thing. It looked on the surface as though the American must have had advance information. A m e r i c a n? Steve said "Hmmmn!" and scooped up the phone.

Laura MacGillivray herself answered the phone. She was obviously startled to hear his voice.

"Take it easy," he cautioned her. "Just pretend you're talking to some girl friend, Laura."

"Oh, Steve! It's you—I can talk all right—Dad's out feeding the dogs. I'm terribly sorry about what happened this afternoon. I got back just after you left. Oh, Steve, what's this about you going away?"

"That's right. There's nothing for me here. I've tackled the army, the air force, even the navy. They won't take me even as a private. They've hung the Indian sign on me, Laura. I'm just not good enough to fight for my country."

He heard her gasp. Then, "But, Steve, you didn't go to Inspector Barnett, did you?" When he didn't answer

right away, she went on: "You're just too darn stubborn to go to the one man who could perhaps change all this. You won't admit you were wrong!"

"You keep throwing that up to me," he grumbled. "There's no use hashing it out again. Suppose I was wrong! All right, I'll bloody well admit it! But do you expect me to go groveling to Barnett and give him a chance to crow in my face? Not me. Old Barnett's had it in for me the whole eight years I was on the Force."

"My dear, you're a blind fool!"

"O.K. But I didn't call you for another lecture, hon. I want to know something about that big blond guy who was with your father this afternoon."

"You mean Mr. Ernest? Why, he's a mining man representing a syndicate in Detroit."

"What was he doing out at your place?"

"He came to buy some dogs, Steve."

"But why buy 'em from your father?"

"And, why not, please? It's a rather well known fact, Mr. Patterson, that we sell the best sled dogs you can buy in this part of the country, not only to the R.C.M.P. but to anyone else."

"Yes, I know that, Laura. But I'm terribly serious about this. It's important. What did he want with sled dogs and where is he taking them?"

"Why, Steve, I'm sure I don't know Mr. Ernest's business. Up north, someplace, I suppose. He bought that fast mail-sled that you and I used for racing."

Steve tightened his grip on the telephone. "What kind of harness did he buy, Laura? That will give me an idea what kind of country he's planning to use the dogs in."

She paused a moment. "He talked to father about that," she admitted finally. "I don't think Mr. Ernest knows very much about dogs himself, but some friend had told him what was wanted. I don't know what was said between him and father, but he did buy a tandem hitch."

Steve whistled softly. "That's a timber country hitch," he said. "If he was going in open country, he'd use the Baffin Land hitch."

"But why are you asking, Steve? Is something wrong? Goodness, I hope he's all right? He bought six of our best dogs, including Emperor."

"Emperor! I didn't think your father would part with that brute."

"I don't think he quite meant to," the girl said. "But Mr. Ernest was fascinated with Emperor's strength. I'm so afraid he's going to have trouble. He doesn't know a thing about dogs."

"Has he got the dogs yet?"

"Not yet. Emperor ran him out of the pen when he tried to make friends, so Mr. Ernest said he'd hire himself a dog handler. He's going to call tomorrow when he's made arrangements about the man and the train times."

"I see," Steve said softly. "I think I begin to see."

He tried to say good-bye, but she cut him short. "Steve. . . . Can't I go with you to Australia? I don't care what you've done, I—"

"Trust me just a little longer, hon," he pleaded. "I don't think I'm going to Australia after all."

He hung up quickly and reached for his coat.

CHAPTER II

"TO HELL WITH THE FORCE!"

THE orderly on duty was nonplussed when Steve Patterson stalked grimly into the dingy little office that housed the Division of Intelligence of the R.C.M.P. He shot a quick, apprehensive glance towards the closed door of the inner sanctum, then moved from his desk to intercept the visitor.

"Why, hello, Patterson. Quite a stranger. Are you . . .?"

"Hello, Nealy. I want to see Barnett!" snapped Steve.

"Well, now, he's pretty busy," stalled the orderly. "Sure it isn't something I can handle?"

Steve swung through the gate. "Damn sure!" He was halfway to the private door when Nealy caught his arm.

"Whoa, Patterson! You can't just . . ."

Steve shook his arm clear. "The hell I can't!" He had the inner door open before the orderly jumped him again.

They wrestled their way into the office before Steve was finally halted.

"What's going on here?"

Nealy straightened himself and saluted. "I beg pardon, sir, but Patterson . . ."

Steve looked at the steel-eyed man behind the desk. "I've got something important to say to you, Inspector Barnett."

The older man stared at Steve a full two minutes, and Steve could feel the starch melting out of his spine.

"Say it and get out!"

Steve scowled at the orderly. "Duck, Nealy! This is personal!"

Nealy hesitated, glancing at the inspector. Barnett nodded, and Nealy went out. When the door closed after him, Steve walked over to the desk. Barnett pyramided his fingers and waited.

"I barged in here deliberately," Steve said finally. "It's part of an act." He paused, disconcerted by the other's direct stare, choosing his words.

"Inspector, you've never had any use for me. I wouldn't come here now if there was anyone else I could deal with. But I've stumbled onto something . . . I happen to know that two Nazi fliers escaped from the army internment camp up at Talking Woman Lake, north of Pagwa." He paused to note the effect of his words.

Barnett's eyes never wavered. "Go on, Patterson."

"If I was to deliver that precious pair, neatly trussed—well, would that wipe out my record?"

"Do you realize what you are saying?"

Steve nodded. "I'm neither drunk nor crazy. I'd like a shot at it." He leaned over the desk. "What I want to know is this—if I can put this over, will you give me another chance on the Force?"

Barnett flattened his palms on the desk top. "Patterson, you know better than that. I have nothing to do with recruiting."

"You had me kicked out!" Steve snapped bitterly.

"I'll not argue with you." Barnett pondered a moment. "I might say this: that if you succeeded in such an undertaking, strictly on your own responsibility, of course, I should not oppose your reinstatement."

"O.K.," Steve said. "That's good enough for me."

"Before you go any further along this line," Barnett said coldly, "I want it clearly understood that you're not working for me or for the Force. If you get involved in any trouble, you'll have to get out of it as best you can."

"I understand," Steve said. "Will you hear me out?"

Barnett nodded. "Go on."

STEVE briefly told of his encounter with Ernest, of the quarrel between MacGillivray and himself in the man's presence, and of his later talk with Ernest himself, and finally of his suspicions. It sounded nebulous and fragmentary when he tried to phrase it in words. Barnett thought the same, for when Steve concluded, he shook his head.

"The circumstances are a bit peculiar, Patterson, that I'll grant you," the inspector agreed. "But we couldn't make an arrest on any such casual supposition."

"I don't want him arrested," Steve argued. "I want him to hire me to help him get those men out of the country. I'm willing to gamble that's what he's buying the dogs for."

"Why should he buy a team in Ottawa?"

"Because he'd never find a team for sale in that district," Steve reasoned. "If he did, it would immediately excite suspicion. Right now he's trying to find a man to handle the team. I know that. He doesn't know dogs and he doesn't know the country. I know both, and Ernest knows I do."

Barnett shook his head. "Patterson, you're not using good sense. If this man is a German agent, he is much too smart to engage even an ex-officer of the R.C.M.P., to help federal prisoners to escape."

"That's where you come in, sir."

"I told you I can have no part in your venture," Barnett said flatly. "You're on your own."

Steve's smile was mirthless. "Thanks, I'll risk that. But I need a kind of

cooperation that only you can give me, to make my contact stick. It's pretty generally known about our row. God knows I run into it everywhere I turn; even this man Ernest knows about it. Nealy believes, from the way I charged in here, that I'm looking for a fight. Well, I am. I want some bad publicity. I want to be thrown in jail. I'm going to get it by beating hell out of you!"

Barnett stared deep into Steve's eyes, then slowly pushed himself erect. He was nearly as tall as Steve, and just as fit.

"You can try, son," he said grimly. "You've been itching for this for a long time."

old man, too, had wanted to do this before. "Eight years!" Steve whispered softly, and caught Barnett high on the cheek and sent him sliding over the desk. As Barnett came charging back, he heard the office door slam open and Nealy's excited voice. Nealy grabbed him and he thought the fight was over. Then the

Steve caught Barnett high on the cheek and sent him sliding across the desk.

"Eight years," Steve admitted.

As Barnett circled the desk, Steve threw the first punch.

"Make it look good," he suggested.

"I intend to," growled Barnett, and drove a straight right into Steve's mouth that set him reeling into a chair.

"A beauty!" Steve panted, spitting blood. He tried a roundhouse left that missed.

The way Barnett carried the fight to him, Steve had a sneaking hunch the iron-jawed inspector straight-armed his orderly out of the way and slammed Steve a right to the mid-section that nearly jack-knifed him. Steve buried his chin against the other's chest and drummed with rights and lefts. He heard Barnett grunting under the punishment, but suddenly the older man wriggled clear. As Steve swung confidently to follow, Barnett caught him flush in the eye with a hook that spilled him right into the orderly's arms. Nealy

hung on, bellowing until two other troopers rushed in and pinioned Steve's arms.

Barnett wiped away a little blood from his mouth. "Take him down and throw him in the city jail, like any other common drunk!" he ordered his men. "I'll prefer charges in the morning. Nealy, you can testify how he forced his way in here."

"Yes, sir!" stammered the orderly.

"I'll get you yet!" Steve swore.

Barnett ignored him. "And Nealy," he said coldly. "If you ever let another maniac in here, I'll break you!"

"The bloke was certainly looking for trouble," breathed Nealy. "It won't happen again, sir."

"To hell with all of you!" shouted Steve, as the troopers jockeyed him out of the office.

Constable Nealy flushed. "The ruddy bloke's inebriated," he apologized to the reporters. "I wouldn't print that statement, lads. It's bloody well treason."

But the papers did print it. It was news, and news was scarce these days with the censors bearing down. The next morning, when the turnkey brought the first edition to his cell, Steve winced to see what the press had done to him. His photograph, squarely in the center of the front page, was bad enough. His right eye was nearly closed and a trickle of blood drooled from his scowling mouth. But the accompanying story really stopped Steve. It was headed with his own quotation: *"To hell with the Force! To hell with Canada!"*

"To hell with the Force! To hell with Canada!" he shouted at them.

WHEN Steve was finally ushered into the booking office at central police station, the reporters and photographers were waiting. That meant Barnett intended to play ball.

Steve lunged savagely when the flash bulbs winked in his face, and when the newspapermen sought to learn the reason for his assault on Barnett, he shouted at them: "To hell with Barnett! To hell with the Force! To hell with Canada!"

He sat down on the edge of his bunk and read the story through. Barnett's version of the brawl was a masterpiece. While the inspector had roundly castigated Steve, he had subtly insinuated the facts of Steve's long experience in the western bush country of Ontario and his

well-known skill in handling sled-dogs.

"This man, Patterson, has become a renegade," Barnett was quoted, in conclusion. "As he had obviously been drinking, no federal charge can be made against him because of his seditious remarks. Nevertheless, Patterson's bitterness toward the Force he served for eight years may have undermined his loyalty to his country."

Steve whistled softly. "That's one hell of a high-priced bait," he mused ruefully. "I only hope it lures the game."

But as the morning passed, he began to wonder if he wasn't just a plain damn fool. The whole scheme looked, in the cold gray light of day, preposterous. No wonder Barnett had told him he wasn't using good sense. Steve bit his lip. Well, he had put himself out on a limb and started sawing this time for sure. How could he ever hope to undo the adverse publicity he had so deliberately courted? Who would believe that his fight with Barnett and his treasonous statements were just part of an act? He shook his head numbly. Perhaps even Barnett himself thought Steve's wild tale was just an excuse to start a fight.

He stood up and began to pace the narrow confines of his cell. "Hell, I was sunk anyhow!" he reasoned with himself. "I had nothing to lose. There's still a chance I may make a contact."

Shortly before noon he was taken before a magistrate and the city prosecutor read a brief résumé of the case. Steve listened stoically, as he had listened to this procedure so many times in the past. It would be a simple case of battery, a fine, and then he would be free to look up Ernest. The pattern was shaping as he had planned it.

The reporters had gathered in the little courtroom. Steve didn't care now. It would soon be over here. Funny, he thought, to be sitting in the prisoner's dock. He listened to the dull voice of the prosecutor ramble on.

If Steve Patterson was not concerned with the presence of the press, the magistrate was. He became incensed over Steve's reckless statements, and after making a patriotic speech aimed squarely at the political bull's eye, he changed the crime from a common misdemeanor to a felony. Steve was charged with felonious assault on a police officer with intent to do bodily harm, and bound over to the high court with bail set at one thousand dollars.

It might as well have been a million as far as Steve was concerned. He was ushered back to his cell in a daze. This was a contingency he had not anticipated. He felt a touch of panic. If convicted now it would mean not a fine, but the penitentiary at Kingston! There flashed across his mind the thought that perhaps Barnett had double-crossed him, but he discarded it at once. It was just the old Patterson luck. All he needed now to complete the failure he had made of his life was a term in prison. Nobody was to blame. The change from a misdemeanor to a felony had been the mere whim of a politically conscious magistrate. It was as simple as that, yet it wrecked Steve's entire scheme. If he stood convicted, nobody but Inspector Barnett could rescue him. What irony!

The evening editions carried the story, high-lighted by the magistrate's blistering harangue.

"We must make an example of men of Patterson's stripe!" the court had declared. "When our country is locked in a death struggle with the Hitlerian forces of evil, a man is either for his country or against it. There can be no private quarrels. For a man to say 'to hell with Canada' is synonymous with saying 'Heil Hitler!' Drunkenness is no excuse. I mean to. . . ."

Steve flung the paper aside and strode to the window. He felt nauseated. Across the Rideau Canal, a train was just backing out of the Union Station. Steve glanced at his watch. That would be the International Limited, leaving Ottawa for Toronto, Detroit, Chicago. He turned and threw himself face downward on the bunk. His swollen eye still throbbed.

A LONG time later, the turnkey opened the cell door. "Come on, Patterson. You're out."

Steve sat up. "Out?"

"That's what I said," grunted the jailer.

"Good old Barnett!" Steve breathed.

Aloud he said: "Judge change his mind?"

The turnkey looked at him in disgust. "Changed his mind, hell! Your lawyer just posted bail."

"My . . ." Steve caught himself. "Oh, sure, my lawyer." Climbing into his coat, he followed the turnkey out to the booking office. He signed a receipt for his money and papers and the desk sergeant noted it in the blotter.

"That's all, Patterson," grunted the sergeant. "Mr. Trudel's already posted your bail."

Steve glanced at the swart, stocky man standing near the door. He had a hazy recollection of having seen the lawyer around the criminal courts at one time or another, but he could not recall ever having spoken to the man. Steve growled his thanks to the sergeant and walked out with Trudel. A cab was waiting at the curb.

"O.K.," Steve said. "Now what's this all about? Who put up that dough?"

The lawyer gave him a sharp, predatory glance. "What do you care?" he countered with a shrug.

Steve was feeling too good to argue. "All right, all right. Where do we go from here?"

"It's none of my business where *you* go, Patterson," Trudel said. "I carried out my commission. Good-day." He jumped into the cab and waved the driver on.

Steve had half a notion to pile in after him, but contented himself with making a mental note of the license as the cab rolled away.

After the taxi passed out of sight, Steve stood where he was, completely baffled. Magically, he was free, and if there were any strings attached to the bargain, he couldn't see them. He finally trudged up the Drive toward Sparks, wondering what his next move should be. If he had been released on his own recognizance he would have credited it to Barnett's influence. But the inspector would not have posted a thousand dollar bail, nor would he have acted through a lawyer like Trudel. No, it was obvious that someone else had put up the money.

A penetrating wind was sweeping down from the Gatineau Hills. Steve burrowed his chin deeper into the collar of his overcoat and crossed the Plaza to pause on the bridge. Beneath him, the venerable locks stepped the Rideau Canal down into the Ottawa River. He stared meditatively at the Interprovincial Bridge stretching from the Capital to the little city of Hull. Steve had about decided to telephone Inspector Barnett, when he became conscious that a man was loafing at the opposite end of the bridge rail. He remembered having seen that same man when he walked out of the police station.

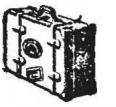
Steve re-crossed the Plaza and went down into the Union Depot. He purchased a can of tobacco at the cigar stand, and when he turned, the man was stalling at the information desk. Steve walked through the station and out the Little Sussex Street exit and ran the gauntlet of hack drivers. As he turned the corner into Rideau, his shadow was right behind him.

Steve grinned and hummed softly: *Don't ever leave me, sweetheart!* Perhaps his luck was due to change. He kept in the open to make it as easy as possible for the tailer and sauntered back to his Queen Street hotel. Entering the lobby, he stopped at the desk and instructed the clerk to have his bill made up, as he was checking out. As he stepped into the elevator, he caught a glimpse of his shadow sidling into the phone booth near the door.

Take your time, buddy, Steve chuckled soundlessly. *I'll be waiting.*

CHAPTER III

—AND NO QUESTIONS ASKED



STEVE divided his possessions into two piles on the bed. In one pile were his city clothes; the other his trail gear. He was packing the former into an old leather suitcase when a sharp knock brought him erect. Crossing the room, he opened the door. Ernest walked into the room.

"Hello, Patterson. Remember me?"

Steve hesitated. "I can't say that . . . Oh, sure! You gave me a lift yesterday."

The man chuckled and pushed shut the door. "Read about your latest escapade. You certainly have the courage of

your convictions, I must admit." He gestured toward the stuff strewn over the bed. "Going someplace?"

Steve shrugged. "I don't want to seem rude," he grunted, "but I'm pretty busy. Was there something particular . . . ?" He paused significantly.

"Oh, don't mind me." Ernest laughed and sprawled in the rocker. "What are your plans, Patterson?"

Steve riffled a cigarette paper and started to build himself a smoke. "That's rather personal, mister."

Ernest grinned. Steve reflected that if it weren't for his blond hair and perfectly round blue eyes, the man's on-and-off smile would make him look like a Jap.

"No offense," Ernest placated him. He unfolded a small slip of paper, held it so Steve could read it. It was a police receipt for one thousand dollars. "You can see why I'm interested," said the blond man.

Steve scowled. "You put up that money?" he asked incredulously.

"I was quite impressed by you, Patterson."

Steve gave an embarrassed laugh. "Well, I don't quite know what to say." He wet the edge of his cigarette and twisted the end. "Do you mind telling me why?"

"Not in the least. I'm a mining man. My syndicate wants me to look over some property in western Ontario. You know the country and you're experienced with dogs. That's a combination I need."

"You must need it pretty seriously to post a thousand dollars cash to bail me out of jail."

Ernest flashed his ready grin. "I'm sure I can trust you, Patterson."

Steve lighted his cigarette and studied his visitor for a long time. Ernest was a big man, not as tall as Steve, but bigger boned. He was, perhaps, in his middle thirties. It was impossible to be sure. His racial strain was equally uncertain. He wasn't pure Swede, and he wasn't pure German. One instant his eyes seemed cold and treacherous; the next they danced with friendliness and amusement. Ernest was, Steve decided, a man you could like very much, or hate with equal ardor. You could not ignore him.

"Look," Steve said abruptly, "let's not play games. You're no fool; neither am I, not entirely. People don't wander around the bush in the dead of winter looking for mines. Nor do they bail a damn fool out of jail for nothing. Now—what's this all about?"

"That's right," the other admitted frankly. "When a man's flat on his back any direction is up. You've made rather a mess of yourself. You're through in Canada."

"I told you that yesterday."

Ernest grinned. "Ah, but yesterday it was talk, today it's happened. I had a lawyer examine the charges against you, Patterson, and the way they dish it out on this side of the line, you haven't a Chinaman's chance. Your bail is good for thirty days. If you're still in this country one month from today, you face the penitentiary."

"So what?"

"It gives me some control over your movements," Ernest remarked drily. "For instance—" he nodded at the bags on the bed—"if you had any idea of jumping bail, I'd be a sucker not to have you locked up again at once."

Steve inhaled deeply and let the smoke dribble out of his nose. "Now that you've jockeyed me squarely behind the eight ball and we understand each other, come to the point."

"Don't try to hurry me," laughed Ernest. "I want to present the sunny side. As it stands now, at the end of thirty days you're right back where you are now . . . unless."

"Unless what?"

Ernest made a clucking noise with his tongue. "You Britishers are so damnably blunt! I'll speak plain, too. *Unless* you handle my dogs and take me wherever I want to go, without asking questions. If you do, we'll be down in the States before the thirty days have expired, at which time I will hand you another thousand, and you can go your way."

"And if I don't play stooge, you'll dump me back in jail at once?"

"I'm a business man, Patterson."

Steve ground out the remains of his cigarette and walked to the window. Somewhere in the distance, a train wailed mournfully for a crossing. It made Steve think of old Emperor, the big wolf-

husky. He wished he could call Laura and tell her the truth. She was going to be badly hurt by the newspaper stories. Old Mac would be hurt, too, but he would cover it with bluster. Steve sighed, swung to face Ernest.

"You've got me by the short hairs," he said without bitterness. "When do we leave?"

Ernest made no effort to conceal his satisfaction. "How soon can you be ready?"

"Anytime tomorrow."

Ernest glanced at the half-packed bags on the bed and then looked steadily at Steve. Steve mentally cursed himself for his clumsy effort to gain time. He could sense the other's distrust now.

Ernest shook a cigarette out of his pack. "I think we shall leave tonight," he decided finally. "At once. Take only those things you will need in the woods."

Steve laughed. "As you wish. I had an idea I might slide out and tell my girl good-bye."

Ernest settled down to wait. "Don't worry about your girl, Patterson. I'll explain things to her when I call about the dogs. Finish your packing."

IT had stopped snowing when they reached the street, and the temperature had dropped to zero. Ernest seemed to hate the cold, as a cat hates water, but he refused to take a cab. Steve shouldered his duffel and they started to walk. Ernest hunched up his shoulders and stalked along in silence. Steve wondered why the man insisted on walking until he discovered that they were being followed. Steve decided Ernest was taking no chances. He wondered idly if it was the same shadow who had dogged his footsteps after he left the jail. Well, it didn't make any difference now.

He was curious what Ernest meant to do about his own luggage. He had the sensation of being on a kind of escalator, of moving along under the power of invisible machinery. He shrugged. There was nothing to do but drift.

They went into an arm-chair lunchroom near the station. Steve had not realized how hungry he was until he started on a plate of beans. He felt pretty good by the time he'd finished eating.

Ernest rose suddenly. "Do you smoke cigars, Patterson?"

"When I can afford 'em," Steve admitted.

"You wait here," Ernest told him, and walked over to the tobacco stand near the door.

Steve watched him. Ernest seemed very choosy about the cigars he wanted. Finally another man sauntered in from the street and stood beside him at the counter. The meeting was very casual. When the clerk turned to wrap up the box of cigars, Ernest spoke rapidly to the newcomer. Steve turned his head so they would not see him watching them. The stranger, he noted, was the same man who had been tailing them. The picture was dovetailing at last.

Ernest finally came back and sat down beside Steve. The other man completed a purchase at the tobacco stand and entered a phone booth across the room. Steve could see him calling a number.

Ernest produced a couple of cigars and gave one to Steve. By the time they had them drawing, the stranger came out of the phone booth. He carefully removed his hat and wiped the sweat-band with a handkerchief. Then he left the restaurant.

Ernest consulted his wrist-watch. "Our train will be made up by now," he remarked. "Let's get started."

Steve again had the feeling they were being followed when they left the lunchroom, but this time it was a pure hunch, for he could see no one. When they finally entered the station, the riddle of Ernest's luggage was answered. The man had cached it in the baggage room. Whether it was his regular bag, or an emergency outfit, as Steve suspected, was not clear. They picked it up and walked over to the ticket window, where Ernest purchased a drawing-room to North Bay.

As they started across the huge trainshed to the gate, a short, chubby little man came staggering toward them. He weaved uncertainly as if not quite sure which way to turn, then tripped over his own foot and almost dove into Ernest's arms.

Steve snorted. *Pretty crude,* he sneered

to himself. *Any chump could see that was a deliberate contact.*

Ernest shoved the little man away from him. The latter babbled an apology, and tried to get his legs lined up. He started around Ernest and reeled into Steve. He acted discouraged, and hung on as if Steve were a lamp-post. Steve pushed him erect. The little chap balanced precariously, then sat down hard on the floor. A railway policeman started across the platform toward them.

Ernest scowled. "Come on," he said sharply. "We don't want to get mixed up with some damn drunk."

Steve nodded and they moved toward the gate. When he glanced back the policeman was ferrying the drunk out the street door.

"That was pickpocket technique," Steve commented. "Better see if you lost anything."

Ernest shot him a sidelong glance. "And you?"

Steve slapped his pockets facetiously. "I didn't have anything"—he almost faltered, but managed to finish in the same tone—"to lose."

While Ernest was depositing their tickets with the train-master, Steve stole a quick glance behind. The little drunk was gone. Steve pursed his lips thoughtfully and slipped his hand into the baggy pocket of his coat.

In addition to a small, vest-pocket automatic pistol, the chubby little drunk had contrived to leave a folded piece of paper.

Later, after the train had left the station, Steve got a chance to examine his strange gifts in the privacy of the washroom. The gun was a competent little 25-caliber automatic with a full clip of cartridges. The note, scrawled hastily on plain paper, read:

Good luck. Contact me personally when and if you need help. No one else aware of your plan. Keep your eyes open.

It was signed with a *B*.

Steve suddenly felt like a swine. Barnett had covered him all the time he was making his contact. Barnett trusted him. Well, he'd make it up later.

Steve debated preserving the note, for indefinite as it was, it remained the only evidence of his deal with Inspector Barnett. Finally he decided against it and shredded the message into fragments, flushed them down the toilet. There was only one way to play a hand of this kind—whole hog or nothing!

THE temperature dropped steadily the following day as they rolled westward. At North Bay, where they changed trains, it was twenty-six below; at Cochrane it was thirty-two, with the sun shining. Through the frost-starred windows of a third train, heading west, Steve watched the old familiar landscape unfold. Only a few short months ago he had been satiated with this timber-studded region. Now he was glad to get back to it.

Ernest had picked up a telegram at Cochrane. He did not divulge the contents to Steve, but the news, whatever it was, put him in excellent humor. He opened his box of cigars and passed them to Steve. Steve rolled the tip between his lips to savor the quality.

"You can really appreciate one of these after years of nibbling home-mades," he remarked.

Ernest sank luxuriously into the opposite seat and laughed. "Can't the Mounted afford cigars, Patterson?"

Steve removed the cigar from his mouth and looked at it. "Not this kind," he admitted.

"Tell me: how does the Force, as MacGillivray calls it, hold such a large body of admittedly fine men to such a stark, impoverished existence?"

"It doesn't hold them all."

"Granted," Ernest said with a smile. "But men like old Mac revere it as if it were a religion."

Steve turned his face to the window. "It is a religion with most of them," he said after a pause. "Something they believe in without question; something they *feel* rather than analyze. Sergeant-major MacGillivray served for nearly forty years. Most of that time he spent in a God-forsaken wilderness where even the Eskimos wouldn't stay."

"What in hell would he do in a place like that?"

"He'd keep the Union Jack flying

every day of the year," Steve answered.

Ernest's eyes lost their friendly glow, and once again Steve realized that he had stepped out of character.

"That sort of cropped out, didn't it now?" Ernest observed drily.

"What?"

The blond man chuckled without mirth. "That dear old flag business. You English are all alike, I'm afraid."

"I'm not English," Steve countered. "I'm a Canadian."

"Is there a difference? I hadn't noticed."

Steve forced the belligerence out of his voice. "Quite. We're proud of our association with England, but we're a distinct country. You Americans . . ." He paused when he met Ernest's cynical gaze, and ended with a short laugh.

"You're a poor actor, Patterson." Ernest's manner suggested the matter was too trivial to quibble over. "Of course I'm German. You've known it for some time. So let's stop pretending and understand each other."

Steve jarred an inch of ash off the end of his cigar. "I see," he said slowly.

"I don't think you do," the German retorted. "You underestimate me. I'm afraid you thought me gullible to take an ex-copper into my deal. I know what I'm doing, Patterson." Ernest smiled. "For instance," he said patiently, "I took the precaution to remove the cartridges from that chummy little pistol you carry."

Steve shrugged. He didn't trust his voice at the moment.

"I have taken various other precautions," Ernest continued, "which will manifest themselves as we proceed with our venture. But I have not lied to you, Patterson. Play along with me and you'll be well rewarded in more ways than you can imagine. If you don't . . ."

"I told you I was in," Steve growled. "Quit harping on it!"

Ernest laughed. "Good. We understand each other." He consulted his timetable and looked at his watch. "Better get into your trail outfit." He took the *Please Do Not Disturb* sign off its hook and hung it outside the door.

Steve opened his duffel. His trail gear was simple and practical. A light parka of khaki colored sail-cloth, trimmed around the hood with wolverine fur; heavy woolen pants; and fur-topped mukluks.

"Where's your gear?" Steve asked. "Or does that come under the head of *no questions?*"

Ernest grinned. "It's waiting for me." He leaned back, lazily watching Steve change clothes. "You're a pretty hefty customer, Patterson. You weigh two hundred?"

"One ninety," Steve said. He sensed Ernest was gauging him carefully in case of trouble that might develop. His respect for the German became tinged with something akin to admiration. Ernest overlooked no bets. Steve realized abruptly how dangerous this game had become.

He began to keep accounts of the stations. They rolled through Hearst, then Ryland. It was dark now. Ernest kept looking at his watch. He seemed nervous.

Suddenly the train whistle shrilled excitedly, then the cars shuddered as the emergency brakes were applied. Ernest jumped to his feet and grabbed his bag.

"Come on," he said brusquely. "This is where we get off."

Steve rose, stole a glance at his own watch. Ten minutes out of Ryland.

As they opened the stateroom door, a brakeman was heading toward the front of the car. Ernest waited until he had passed from sight, then with a nod to Steve, ran in the opposite direction. The train grated to a stop, then began to move cautiously forward. Ernest opened the vestibule door and stepped aside. Steve nodded, and jumped. An instant later, Ernest dropped into the snow beside him.

CHAPTER IV

THE BARON

TOGETHER they stood in the roadbed and watched the red tail-light of the train melt into the blackness. When it was gone, Steve drew the cold air deep into his lungs. It was heady as wine. A storm was brewing in the northwest, but the wind had not yet swung around to that quarter. Steve tested it with his cheek. Forty below, and dropping. It

was a bad night to be standing around.

"I sure hope you picked the right spot," he told Ernest.

The German grunted and pointed to the scattered remains of the fire on the roadbed that had been used to halt the train. He produced a small flashlight and blinked it several times. In a few moments a lantern glowed back in the timber, and came bobbing toward them.

Steve felt his senses quicken as the yellow light moved closer, glinting on the polished tracks. He had no illusions regarding the task ahead. Ernest was no fool; he was smarter than Steve had first surmised. But Steve had a premonition that even Ernest was only small fry in the game.

A short, stolid figure loomed out of the shadow thrown by the lantern which he held in one hand; the other cradled a 30-30 Winchester carbine. As the man drew close, he raised the light so that it illuminated the faces of the two who waited, and his own. He was a middle-aged man with a heavy, walrus mustache. His deer-skin parka was frayed and dirty. He wore a pair of Indian-made snowshoes on his feet, and two more pairs were strapped to his back.

"Heil Hitler!" barked Ernest, so suddenly that Steve jumped.

The man with the lantern stole a furtive glance at Steve.

"Heil Hitler!" he muttered thickly.

Ernest glared so hard at Steve, the latter couldn't help grinning.

"Relax," Steve advised. "I was hired to run dogs, not join the Party."

Ernest made an impatient gesture. "When in Rome . . ."

"We're not in Rome," Steve reminded him.

As they adjusted the snowshoe thongs, Steve felt the wind begin to shift. Snow would follow. The man with the rifle turned his face to the wind. He sniffed a couple of times and jogged off down the track with the lantern. Ernest nodded for Steve to follow. Steve stamped to test the lacings, then followed the short man. Ernest plodded along in the rear.

They followed the track for nearly a mile before swinging north. There was an

old, well-packed trail under the light, unbroken surface of top snow.

After about fifteen minutes of travel, Ernest called for them to reduce the pace. He was having trouble with the wide, semi-bearpaw snowshoes.

"How much farther?" he growled.

"Not far," muttered the guide. "Maybe two mile." His accent was not *habitant,* and it was too thick for German. Steve guessed he might be Austrian.

They slogged ahead. While Steve would have preferred his own narrow Ojibway coasters to these wide clumsy bush snowshoes, even they felt better underfoot than the hard pavements of the city. He jogged along with a tireless rhythm, pondering the situation. In emptying the little automatic, the German agent had completely disarmed Steve, but they were still a long, long way from the border, and he still retained the best weapon of all—his knowledge of the woods. He drew the clean, pine-scented air into his lungs and exhaled slowly. This was his land! Tricky and dangerous as they were, these men were aliens. Steve began to glow with a sense of new-found power, with the exhilarating sensation of coming *home.*

THE hellish clamor of sled dogs started up somewhere in the darkness ahead, and in a few minutes they broke out of the timber into a small clearing. Under the dark canopy of sky, the snow lay bluely around a small cabin in the clearing. The guide cursed the dogs in a foreign tongue and they subsided. As they came closer, Steve noted that the cabin was very old. Its huge, hand-hewn timbers were carefully dovetailed at the corners and chinked with moss and clay. It gave him a friendly feeling for the little house. He was sure no foreigner had built it.

They shook off their snowshoes and stacked them in the lee of a small storm porch. Their guide stood his rifle in the porch to keep it from sweating, and tramped into the cabin. Steve followed, taking a good look at the gun. The man had left the hammer at safety, which indicated that he carried a cartridge in the chamber. Ernest hustled inside after Steve, stamping his feet to get the circulation going.

The air in the cabin was insufferably close. Steve looked around. It was typical of most bush homes for they are all adapted to the essentials of life and that allows very little variation. A huge wood range glowed redly at one eend; a double-decked tier of bunks, padded with bulging straw mattresses, stood at the other; and in the middle of the room rested a large planked table, with benches along either side.

Steve swept his mukluks clean of snow with the broom near the door. He sniffed the air. Unseen bannocks in the oven sent off a sweetish odor to blend with the rabbit stew boiling in the kettle, and with the steaming woolen socks dangling from a clothes line above the stove.

The guide shouted, and at once a tremendous Indian woman waddled out of an adjoining room. A shotgun was balanced over the crotch of one arm. She stopped just inside the room and looked solemnly from Steve to Ernest, and back to Steve again. The guide snatched the gun away from her and in Cree dialect, ordered her to set out food.

As she crossed to the stove, she spoke to her man in the same tongue. "Are these the precious ones you expected? Those others from over the great lake mentioned but one coming."

"They serve the same master," he growled. He glanced sideways to see if Steve understood.

Steve pretended complete disinterest.

"And the dogs," persisted the woman, reaching for the kettle. "Where are the dogs?"

"They follow on the next train." the guide told her sourly. "Now hold thy tongue, woman. This is the business of men."

The woman shrugged and put the lid back on the kettle. The man started to put the shotgun back on its pegs above the door, then changed his mind and tucked it under his arm. He looked inquiringly at Ernest. The agent nodded, and the man picked up his lantern and went outside again.

"Filthy hole!" Ernest observed, shaking out of his overcoat. "These people exist like swine."

"You get used to it," Steve said, grinning.

"I don't intend to get used to it," the agent retorted. He threw his overcoat on the bunk. The fat woman's eyes darkened a little as the snow fell over her blankets, but she made no comment. Steve wondered if she could speak English. He sensed she did not like Ernest, and that she was displeased with the thing her man was doing. Without knowing just why, he felt it was an important discovery to make.

She took a stack of tin plates from a ledge above the stove and padded back to the table. Methodically she set out four plates. Knowing that under no circumstances would she sit at the same board with visitors, Steve knew that company was expected. A moment later, Ernest verified it.

His eyes were bleak and amused. "A distinguished countryman of mine will be here presently," he told Steve. "Let me do the talking. To be frank, you are not expected, and the Baron is—how shall I phrase it?—inclined to be blunt. When I have explained the situation to him, I have no doubt that he will approve."

"What are you trying to say?" Steve demanded.

The agent shrugged. "Nothing, only don't cross him. Trust me. There are some points about this affair about which you know nothing."

"I'm beginning to see that."

The dogs set up their unholy chorus again. The squaw glanced toward the outside door and her mouth tightened perceptibly. After another quick peek into the kettle, she shuffled into a back room and slammed the door. Steve edged over so that his back was against the wall. Snow crunched on the stoop. The door opened, and a man strode into the room.

He was swaddled from head to foot in a shaggy bearskin coat which he wore like a cloak. He stamped into the center of the room and threw the coat off his shoulders, as though used to a servant behind him. His eyes found Steve at once, and held him. Steve kept his own gaze steady.

Another man stepped in out of the night, followed by the guide, who closed the door. For a space of time, no one spoke.

THERE was no doubting which was Baron Wolfgang; his own bearing indicated it as clearly as the respectful attitude of the others. He was a young man, perhaps only thirty, and although he dominated the scene, he was not a big man physically. He stood very straight, not with the military crispness of old MacGillivray, but with an arrogance, as if he stood in the presence of inferiors.

Ernest came smartly to his feet and threw up his arm. "Heil Hitler!"

The Baron and his two companions extended their arms and echoed: "Heil Hitler!"

Steve leaned back and rested his elbows on the table. He kept watching Wolfgang, but out of the corner of his eye he saw the guide break both shells out of the double-barreled shotgun before racking it above the door.

Wolfgang exploded in a long and violent harangue, and Steve sensed he himself was the bone of contention. For the first time in his life, he wished he understood German. As Ernest had forewarned him, the Baron was furious. He stomped up and down the room, waving his arms at Steve, and stopping every time he passed Ernest to shout in his face.

To give the devil his due, Steve had to admire the diplomatic way Ernest handled it. Eventually his wheedling persuasive argument began to take effect. Wolfgang's rage wore itself out, like a blustery thunder shower, and he sulked into silence. Finally he stopped his pacing, and with his back to the radiance of the stove, appraised Steve.

"Do you realize just who I am?" he demanded in perfect English.

Steve shrugged. "German aviator, I suppose."

Wolfgang drew himself stiff. "I am Baron Heinrich von Wolfgang!"

"My name's Patterson," Steve said, grinning.

The Baron said "*Bah!*" as if something had offended his nostrils and sat down on one end of the bench Ernest was on. Steve glanced at the latter. The agent's

Ernst was intelligent and ruthless . . .

eyes were alive with amusement now.

"Patterson," Ernest said, nodding toward the third German. "That is Adolph Dagor."

Dagor bowed from the waist. He was a heavy-set, stolid man, with a dark, scarred face and large, calloused hands. A peasant type. Compared to the sharp, fair complexions of both his compatriots, his features were coarse and heavy. He looked cunning, rather than intelligent. He had small reddish boar-eyes. He walked over and sat down near Steve.

"This country very cold," he said in broken English. "Cold like Russia."

"This is just comfortable," Steve chuckled. He pulled out the makings. "But I've never been to Russia."

"Russia cold too. I go to Finland—"

Ernest cut him off. "Let's get down to business," he suggested. "Hey, Vasha! Get a bottle and that box of cigars out of my bag. Some glasses, too, then get out with your squaw!"

Vasha, the guide, brought the cigars and a bottle of whiskey, and four tea pans. Then he went out.

Ernest poured drinks all around and passed the cigars. While the men were lighting them, he said to Steve: "I've explained the circumstances to Baron Wolfgang. Patterson. He agrees that you might be invaluable to us—er—as long as you coöperate. I gave him my assurance that you would."

Steve lit his cigar. "O.K. Will you start right away?"

"The dogs will be along on the next train—early in the morning." He produced a regional map and spread it out on the table. "You are familiar, I suppose, with the location of the concentration camp?"

"Sure. It's about northwest of here. Where do you want to cross the border?"

Ernest exchanged glances with Wolfgang. Dagor smiled crookedly. The agent turned back to Steve and shook his head.

"We have other plans," he told Steve.

Patterson opened his mouth to ask a question, then closed it and shrugged.

The Baron drained his dish of whiskey and swept the tin aside.

"Ernest has brought you here," he said coldly. "He assures me you will obey orders. I am sure you will. Tomorrow the dogs will arrive, with proper equipment and supplies for twelve."

"Twelve?"

The German inclined his head. "Twelve. First we will go north."

"Go on," Steve suggested. "This is over my head."

"It is not necessary that you understand anything except to obey orders," the Baron reminded him. "Keep that always in mind. But you will be useful in getting the other men out of that rotten concentration prison."

STEVE looked around at the others in surprise. They were watching him closely, gauging his reactions. He spread his hands in a gesture of protest.

"That wasn't the deal," he said slowly. "I agreed to carry out Ernest's wishes, but I don't think you know what you're up against. It's over two hundred miles to the United States border, through about as impossible a country as you'll find on this continent. Even a dozen experienced woodsmen couldn't hope to carry sufficient supplies for themselves and dogs on one sled."

Wolfgang grunted. "You were told we are not going to the border."

"All right," Steve said. "I'll go along anywhere you want. Have you figured out how you're going to engineer another break? If you have, that's O.K. Only remember that getting out of the camp is

a minor detail compared with getting out of the woods."

"That's your opinion," Wolfgang sneered.

Steve started to get his back up, but Ernest shook his head and he subsided.

"O.K.," Steve growled. "If you've got a better idea, that's fine."

"We have," the Baron snapped. "You will handle one team, Vasha will handle another. After we get the others, we will go not south to the border, but *north*."

Ernest leaned towards Steve. "Don't misunderstand, Patterson," he said pleasantly. "I told you you would be well repaid. That still goes. Just trust me." He had the good grace to smile. "This is no time to quarrel among ourselves."

He shouted for Vasha to serve the food. The bannocks were too sweet for Steve, as Indian women go heavy on the sugar when they can get it, but the rabbit stew was excellent. The Germans conversed in their own tongue, so Steve ate in silence.

Dagor was just a big animal, probably a peasant trained to do some mechanical work automatically, but Wolfgang and Ernest—the Baron always addressed him as Ernst—were intelligent and ruthless. That they had some carefully thought-out plan was obvious, yet for the life of him, Steve couldn't imagine what it could be. The Ontario wilderness was no place for greenhorns. Cold, bleak, unsettled, there were still vast areas as yet unexplored. Wolfgang and Ernst were too smart to hope to hide in there for any extended period. The very elements would defeat them. The Royal Canadian Air Force maintained a patrol over the region, and the R.C.M.P. policed the surface after a fashion.

Steve's naive optimism began to wane a little. A straight run for the border would have been comparatively simple. Somewhere along the route, he could either have contacted headquarters in Ottawa, or at least won control of the group. But with twelve escaped Nazis to herd into the arms of the law, the picture changed. He began to wonder how he was going to extricate even himself from this dilemma.

After the meal, Ernst rose and flexed his muscles.

. . . Dagor just a big animal.

"How about a little sleep?" he asked Steve. "We've had a tiresome day and those damn dogs will arrive about daybreak."

Steve agreed, and Vasha ushered him into a small room that was built off the big house like a lean-to. There were two bunks built into the wall. Steve was assigned to the upper, and Dagor took the one below. The way his stuff was laid out, Steve assumed the man had already spent several nights in this house.

Steve climbed into his bunk without any more talk, and after the lights were out, he folded his hands behind his head and listened to the murmur of voices in the adjoining room. Finally that stopped, and for a while there was silence. Then far, far away, a young wolf howled. When its lonely song had faded, an old one lifted his strong voice, another joined, then another, until the whole vast forest seemed to swell with their wild lament. Steve relaxed and closed his eyes. It was the familiar anthem of the wilderness.

CHAPTER V

BREED OF THE BRUTE

SOMETIME before daylight, Steve heard Vasha moving around in the main room. A door creaked open and then closed. Snowshoes scuffed softly over the snow, and then there was quiet again.

Steve lay where he was until he heard the others moving around, then he swung out to the cold floor and dressed.

During the night, Steve had made up his mind. When the dogs arrived, he would start off with the Germans. Vasha was apparently going along with another team. But Steve wasn't afraid of the squaw man, or what he might do. Somewhere between this place and the concentration camp, Steve would make his break. With any sort of luck he could outdistance Vasha. Then it would be a simple matter to get word out to the officers at the camp and to the district police.

The temptation to string along with the Germans was strong. They had some carefully laid plan, but to risk it would be foolhardy. They would keep him until his usefulness was over, then . . . Steve grunted. He had no illusions regarding the fate in store for him.

When he walked into the big room, the squaw had fried up some salt-pork and mush. Wolfgang and Ernst had their heads together at the table. The Baron merely frowned as Steve entered, but Ernst waved genially.

"How'd you sleep, Patterson?"

"Fine. You?"

Ernst made a grimace. "Those damn wolves. They kept ice on my spine and goose-pimples over the rest of me. Have a cigar."

"Thanks," Steve said, taking out his own sack of tobacco. "But I'll build one of my own. I can't afford to develop expensive tastes, y'know."

"Eat, drink and be merry. . . ." quoted the agent.

"I know," Steve said. "But this is still today."

They ate the stuff the squaw set out in silence. When Ernst finished, he leaned back and re-lit his half-smoked cigar.

The sudden clamor of the dogs broke in on what he was going to say. The squaw grabbed the broom and waddled outside. They could hear her curses, but as the dogs quieted, another chorus of howls rose in the distance. The Baron glanced at Ernst, and the latter nodded.

"That's our team," he said relievedly. "They got off the train at Ryland." He studied his smoke a minute or two, then looked up at Steve. "Well, Patterson, we'll soon be on the trail. Have you given the matter further thought?"

Steve shrugged. "What's for me to think about? You supply the equipment, I run the dogs. Isn't that it?"

The dogs had started up again. They yelped as the squaw belabored them with the broom-handle, but the other team was close now, and she couldn't keep them quiet. Steve could hear the sharp crack of a whip, and the scrunch of sled runners on the packed snow outside.

Ernst rose at once. "Excuse me a moment," he offered. "No, don't get up, Patterson. I'll be back."

Wolfgang leaned over the table, his head propped up by his hand. "As a matter of fact, Patterson," he drawled, "you're not particularly enthused about this venture, I take it?"

Steve hesitated. There was no sense in trying to fool these men, he decided. They were both veterans at lying and double-dealing, and Steve felt like a small dog with a couple of wolves.

"I don't believe you appreciate what you're up against," he told Wolfgang. "But, as you pointed out last night—that's not my concern."

"Precisely! But in the event you had any silly ideas about running out on your deal with Ernst, we have taken precautions to dissuade you."

"Quit threatening me!" growled Steve. "That gets you nothing."

Wolfgang sneered. "You think it a boast? Look—" He straightened and faced the door.

Steve swung around. He heard the men outside stacking their snowshoes and stamping their feet. Then the door swung in, and Ernst strode inside, beating his hands together to keep the circulation going.

"Well, Patterson," he said heartily, "here's a pleasant little surprise package for you!"

As he stepped aside, a small figure in a fur parka stepped into the room and brushed back the hood. Vasha and his squaw crowded behind, closing the door. But Steve Patterson didn't see them. All his control wavered as he stumbled to his feet.

"Laura! Good God, what . . . !"

She was a tall, clean-limbed girl of twenty, and she moved with the healthy competence that characterizes Canadian women.

"Steve!" she gasped. "You . . . here?"

He could only stare. Her dark brown hair and black eyes were a heritage from her French mother's strain, but the firm, straight back, the cut of her jaw, and the direct, frank lights in her eyes were as Scotch as her name.

Ernst laughed again. "Come, come you two! I planned this to be a surprise. You see, Patterson, I felt sure you'd work to better advantage—our advantage—if your girl was along. We've found the hostage system very effective in Europe."

STEVE stood braced against the table, slowly comprehending the full implication of Ernst's statement. Vasha and the three Germans formed an irregular ring around Steve and the girl. The big squaw leaned against the door. The sled dogs were snarling outside, but there was no sound in the room. Steve could feel the sardonic stares of the men appraising his reactions, but he couldn't take his eyes from Laura.

Finally she drew off her mittens and looked around with a little laugh of embarrassment. "What's the matter with everybody? Did I interrupt at the wrong time?"

Steve pulled himself together. "Why did you come here, Laura?"

She flushed at his tone. "What's the matter with you, Steve? Mr. Ernest arranged for me to bring up the dogs, that's all. I—well—I didn't expect to find you here."

Ernst rubbed his hands briskly and held them in front of the stove. "As I pointed out to Patterson—I think of every detail." He laughed and winked at Steve.

Steve swung on him. "She gets out of here at once!" he raged.

"I'm afraid that's impossible," the agent said. "Under the circumstances."

"The hell it is!" Steve shouted. "I'll damn soon show . . ." He started down the room toward the agent, then pulled up short. For Dagor, standing behind and to the right of Laura, had unholstered an automatic pistol. He pointed it, not at Steve, but directly at the girl.

Ernst laughed again and spread his hands to indicate the inevitability of the situation.

"Come now, Patterson. Use your head. This is an ill-tempered way to receive Miss MacGillivray—after she has been kind enough to agree to go with us to my mine."

Laura laughed nervously. "Oh, Mr. Ernest, I didn't understand you wanted me to go to the mining property with you." She paused, biting her lip. "And if Steve objects—"

"Don't say any more, Laura!" Steve snapped. "You can't go, and that's final!"

"I'm afraid she must," Ernst said very softly. "You can understand that, Patterson."

The gun in Dagor's calloused hand took on a new significance. Steve knew he was beaten. Ernst had outsmarted him all the way down the line. The simple truth of it now was that he had to go forward with their plan. Dagor, with animalistic directness had shown the bitter facts: if Steve got out of line now, Laura would be shot. That he, too, would be murdered at the same time was no longer important. He had to agree to anything to protect her. All his carefully thought out plan of escape was swept away in the face of this new complication. Any violence now would be suicide.

"It's no trip for a girl," Steve growled finally. "You put us both in a very embarrassing position."

Laura smiled in relief, and Steve realized that she had taken his first objection to mean simply that he did not want her along. She glanced at the stolid, blank face of Vasha's squaw.

"Are you going?" Laura asked the Indian.

The squaw heaved her shoulders. "Me no go," she grunted.

Steve played a hunch. Ernst reacted, he had learned, to opposition.

"A squaw is no company for a white girl!" he objected.

Ernst's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "On the contrary, my dear Patterson," he drawled. "Miss MacGillivray's suggestion is excellent." He turned to Vasha.

"Can your woman keep up with us?"

"She travel like the moose," admitted the guide.

Ernst slapped his thigh. "Then it's settled," he chortled. "Vasha, have your moose fix up something to eat. We want to get started at once." He seemed suddenly to remember something, for he turned and bowed to Wolfgang.

"Does this suit Your Excellency?" he asked smoothly.

Steve was surprised at the look on the Baron's sharp face. Wolfgang nodded slowly, then turned his back on the others and sat down.

Laura padded over and stood looking up into Steve's frowning face.

"Something wrong, Steve?" she said worriedly. "Why do you act as if you hated the sight of me?"

Steve met Ernst's amused glance. "It isn't that, Laura," he managed huskily. "I just wasn't expecting you, I guess."

"But aren't you glad I'm going?"

"Yes," he lied, "I'm very glad."

"If you will take care of the dogs, I'll help get something to eat. I'm famished." She turned happily to the squaw. "What's your name?"

"Me Alice."

Laura laughed. "We are going to travel many sleeps together, oh my sister," she said in Cree. "We shall begin now by sharing tasks. I can cook, so tell me what to do."

The squaw's face lighted, like a pumpkin with a candle in it. "Are my ugly ears lying to me, little white sister, or do I dream that I hear my own tongue."

"You do not dream, Alice. I was raised by one of your people."

Dagor had unholstered an automatic. He pointed it, not at Steve, but at the girl.

Vasha was blinking in surprise. He shot a sly, suspicious glance at Steve.

"Laura," Steve said querulously, "I wish you wouldn't speak that gibberish in front of the rest of us. Only the squaw and her man understand it, and we've enough foreign tongues rattling as it is."

She looked so startled, he was afraid she would give him away. But she took her cue without faltering.

"I'm sorry, Steve. I was only telling

her I'd be glad to help with the cooking. She understands so much better in her own language. I shan't use it again."

He made a disgusted motion with his hand. "Oh, go ahead! I'm going out to look over the team."

THE brief run from the train had barely warmed the dogs and they were itching for travel. Unlike the beaten, snarling native dogs in the corral, MacGillivray's animals were as eager and friendly as pups. Only Emperor, at the head of the team, lay full length in the snow, his black muzzle resting on outstretched forepaws.

At Steve's voice, he rose with dignity and waited.

Steve dropped to one knee and put his arm around the brute's powerful neck. Emperor laid his ears flat and squirmed in delicious embarrassment.

"I wish I could make you understand how important you are to me," Steve whispered to the big half-wolf, wooling his head affectionately. "We've got to work this thing out together, Emperor, you and I."

Emperor made a rumbling in his throat and nuzzled Steve's hand. Steve lifted each of the big fellow's paws in turn and examined them. So intent was he on his task, he did not hear the man approach. Emperor's deep growl was the first indication he had. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Ernst watching him.

The German grinned. "Tell me, Patterson? How do you force a half-wild brute like that to submit?"

Steve stood up and brushed the snow off his knees. "You don't *force* him. And he doesn't *submit*. You win him over, and he likes it. It's coöperation, not submission."

"Aren't you sentimentalizing? You can't make a dumb brute understand anything but physical force, and you know it."

"Like hell I do. You Nazis believe anything can be gained by force and terror. I grant you it seems to work among your own people, but it fails with others. This dog, in a small way, proves my point. He's powerful, intelligent, and most important of all, he's proud. He'll die fighting before he'll submit to force alone."

"Go on," Ernst urged, smiling.

"It's the reason your Nazis will never win, or hold what you've already taken," Steve growled. "Force is the substance of your training. You figured to browbeat England by ruthlessness, by bombing women and children, leveling old, well-loved cities. You got away with that in small, Central European countries

"You don't force *this dog, Ernst. And he doesn't* submit."

whose psychology is similar to your own. There are mongrel dogs who will submit to the whip, as there are peoples. Emperor, I might point out for your own safety, isn't one of them."

The German looked steadily at the big wolf-husky. Emperor's mighty fighting hackles began to stand.

Suddenly Ernst laughed, and backed away. "Between us, Patterson," he said, "you have a point there. For my own part, I prefer logic, where indicated. You have applied it to dogs. You have convinced that brute that his own personal interests are advanced by going along with you. Am I right?"

"I'm not sure I follow you," Steve said warily.

"It's elementary. The brute is smart; he doesn't give a damn if you beat or starve the rest of the team, just so long as you pamper him. He's an individualist. So am I, Patterson."

Steve scowled. "You're going around a hell of a lot of corners to say something," he countered. "Come to the point."

Ernst glanced casually toward the house. "The Baron is the nominal head of this expedition. We are all under his orders, for he has been carefully schooled by headquarters. Now I'll make you a wager, Patterson. The moment the Baron realizes that this wolf of yours won't bow to his first order, he'll never give up until he has the brute grovelling on his belly, trying to lick his hand."

"Not while I'm handling this team, he won't!"

Ernst grinned. "Ah, that's my point, my dear Patterson. We are all expected to submit."

Steve scratched his jaw. "I'm listening."

"The smart thing to do in a case of this kind, is to recognize your friends. You and I are individualists—the Baron is part of a great machine. He has, since birth, been taught that there is no greater honor than to die for his cause. An admirable philosophy, Patterson, no question. But you and I and that big wolf know that life is sweet. Do you follow me?"

"I'm not sure that I do." He paused as Dagor stuck his head out of the cabin, and shouted: "Food!"

Ernst laughed. "So direct—the perfect animal. Not breakfast, or mealtime—no, just *food*." He turned and started for the cabin. "No doubt you have had moments of regret since joining me," he said as they walked to the door. "You may even be thinking of a double-cross. Don't try it, Patterson. Trust me and we'll see this thing through together."

There was no further time for talk. The food was waiting, and they sat down in silence. Laura and big Alice, the squaw, served the table. The Germans

conversed in their own guttural tongue.

Laura leaned over his shoulder to put another serving of pork on his tin plate. "Steve, it's fun being with you!" she whispered.

CHAPTER VI

BLUE BREECHES—GOLD STRIPE

AFTER breakfast the men carried the gear out of the house and dumped it in the snow beside the sleds for Steve and Vasha to pack. To Steve's surprise, the stuff had been skillfully selected by someone familiar with winter travel in the Canadian wilderness country. Certainly Ernst could not have done it on his own, nor even the squaw man, for it was one thing to run a trap-line, but arranging the supplies for an expedition was quite another. There was an even dozen Woods arctic eiderdowns, of the kind in which a man can sleep with comfort in the snow at fifty below zero. There were duffel bags of clothing, of food, ammunition, and strange cases Steve guessed might hold navigational or surveying instruments, from the careful way they were handled. There was a long, heavy box that Vasha made certain went on his sled. Steve suspected it harbored rifles for the additional escapes, and he had a mounting presentiment that he was up against a combination that was going to be desperately hard to beat.

When the gear was finally stowed compactly, Baron Wolfgang came out of the cabin dressed in a knee-length parka, the hood of which was trimmed in skunk fur. Carrying a high-powered sporting rifle mounted with a telescope sight, he walked slowly past the sleds. From the Baron's actions, Steve knew the man was no novice to northern travel.

Vasha's dogs had stopped snapping at each other and were howling and jumping against their chains in their anxiety to get underway. The guide seized each dog in turn and dragged him to the sled and into harness. They were rangy brutes, known locally as wolf-huskies, which was a misnomer, for they had very little of either wolf or husky in their make-up. To a tyro, these mongrels looked much faster and more powerful than the smaller Siberian huskies which made up the other team—with the exception, of course, of old Emperor. But Steve knew that the MacGillivray dogs could outpull, outrun and outlast the squaw man's mongrels.

"We are ready!" barked Wolfgang. "Vasha—go ahead and break trail!"

The guide nodded. He shot a quick, distrustful glance at Steve, slipped his feet into a pair of tremendous track-beater snowshoes, and with his Winchester crooked in his arm, padded off to the westward.

The Baron walked over to Steve. "To what tongue are your dogs trained?" he demanded. "English or French?"

"Neither," Steve told him. "They were raised for Indian country. They get their orders in Cree dialect."

"*Hmmnnn!*" grunted the German thoughtfully. "You will follow Vasha. Ernst will accompany you."

"And the girl?"

"She will assist Dagor and me with the other team. The squaw will go with you, of course. If we meet with anyone, you will be expected to cope with the situation so as to allay any suspicion."

Steve nodded. "I understand." He looked hard at the Nazi. "I'd prefer, however, that Miss MacGillivray traveled with me."

Wolfgang smiled coldly. "No doubt. But forget the girl, Patterson," he advised, with malignant relish. "No harm will come to her—so long as you behave yourself. Now trot along and leave suggestions to me."

Steve saw there was no point in further argument. He chose a pair of fast tripping-shoes from the stack by the cabin, and went back to his dogs. Ernst was waiting for him.

He took a look at Steve's set jaw, and chuckled.

"Take it easy," he advised softly. "I told you to trust me."

Steve made no reply. He went up to Emperor and patted his head. "Up, boy!" He came back along the team, checking the harness, speaking to each dog by name. They jumped in their harness. Steve tramped to the back of the sled

and threw his weight against one side to break out the runners.

"w-HEAT!" he shouted. "w-HEAT! w-HEAT!"

The sled creaked, slid into motion, then sailed off across the snow. Steve jerked his arm to the squaw, and jogged along behind the sled. As the trail veered sharply to the right, Steve shouted: "Owk-Owk!" Emperor swerved, and they tore off towards the timber.

Big Alice, the squaw, hit a tireless stride at once, and Steve recalled Vasha's remark that she traveled like a moose. Ernst, on the other hand, had trouble right away.

"For God's sake slow down!" he panted. "I can't keep this pace."

"You won't have to," Steve said, with a trace of malice. "The dogs are fresh and cold. They'll steady down in a few minutes." He glanced back.

Laura was standing with Wolfgang and Dagor beside the other team. She waved. As Steve waved back, he saw the Baron shift his rifle from one hand to the other. There was a grim significance in the gesture. Then the dogs galloped into the forest, and the little group were cut out of sight.

ERNST fell behind rapidly, but the squaw kept up. As the trail bore westward again, Steve called to Emperor.

"R-R-RAH, boy! R-R-RAH!"

Alice chuckled softly. "The *wymistikoshu* speaks the language as if the tongue of my people has long fitted his mouth," she commented in Cree dialect.

Steve opened his mouth to reply, then caught himself. When he did not speak, the big squaw grunted approvingly.

"My little white sister has spoken," she went on, as though talking to herself. "You are a *kippa-wasso* (policeman) and unfriendly to those who journey from far over the big lake to corrupt my man, who becomes like the rabbit before the lynx."

Steve glanced over his shoulder. Ernst was still plodding along well out of hearing.

"It is true I speak the tongue of my friends the Crees," Steve admitted. "I am no longer a *kippa-wasso*, my sister, but these men come with evil in their hearts, as you say. Why does your man obey them?"

"His pride is swallowed by fear," the squaw said.

"And you?"

Alice gave him a sidelong glance. "I am an Indian," she reminded him with dignity.

"Forgive me," Steve said humbly. "I do not wish these men to know I speak your tongue, my sister. Except enough to command the dogs."

"They will not learn from me," Alice promised with conviction. "The *kippa-wasso* is wise, so he has already seen that the big, dark one is dull and stupid, like the cow, while the one who flounders behind us is shrewd, as the fox is shrewd. But the other one—" She made a sucking noise with her teeth. "He is both shrewd and cunning, like the wolverine, and therefore the worst of all. But as you know all these things, Alice will say no more."

The temperature was rising and the going became heavy. The dogs slowed to a more normal pace, and Steve threw his weight on the trail-line to slow them further. After a few minutes, Ernst caught up with them. He was almost exhausted, so Steve urged him to climb onto the load and ride awhile.

"This isn't much like the movies," the man complained. "I thought these damn sleds were made to ride in."

"You can't sit still long in this climate," Steve told him. "You'll get so stiff you won't be able to walk. Look here—what's the matter with Wolfgang?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't like the girl back there with him."

"Don't worry about her," Ernst said. "She's safe enough. When will we reach the concentration camp?"

Steve shrugged. "Vasha's circling to avoid trap-lines apparently. Maybe tomorrow night. How in hell do you expect to engineer a general break? The army's got that place protected like a fortress."

"Baron Wolfgang and Dagor got out."

"They planned it from the inside," Steve argued. "This is a different problem."

Ernst grinned up at him. "No," he said. "It is the same. You wait."

Steve looked down at the agent. The man's face was covered with a two days' stubble of beard and purple with cold. *He looks like the fox the squaw says he is,* Steve thought. *If it wasn't for Laura, I could kill him with pleasure.*

"I don't like it," Steve insisted.

Ernst laughed at him. "You're worrying like an old woman," he jeered. "Forget it. In case you're suffering from a change of heart, remember what's behind you and the freedom ahead. Hell, man, you've got a girl to think about now —thanks to me."

"Is that a threat, Ernst?"

The agent shrugged. "Be realistic, Patterson, my lad. You can't change a dive in mid-air."

Steve's retort was cut off by a grunt from the squaw. He looked ahead. Vasha was loping back along the trail, with his carbine held above his head.

"Stop these dogs!" snapped Ernst. "Something's wrong up ahead!"

Steve halted the team, and strode up to meet the guide.

"Men an' dogs!" panted Vasha. "Man carry rifle!"

"How many men?"

"Two. One very big; other maybe Indian, maybe breed."

As they walked back to the sled, Wolfgang's dogs came running down the trail. Steve took his dog-whip off the sled and took his stand beside Emperor to ward off a fight when the second team whirled alongside. But Wolfgang ran his leader off the trail and kept the two teams apart.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Vasha saw another team ahead," Steve explained. "The men were armed."

"Why wouldn't they be in this wilderness?" Ernst asked.

"At this season of the year," Steve told him, "there is only one reason to carry a gun."

"Men?"

"Men!" growled Steve.

He heard a little gasp, and glancing over his shoulder, saw Laura staring at him. It was a look he did not like; a mixture of horror, of fear, and of anger. He bit his lip and turned away. She was beginning to guess the truth, part of it, at least—the worst part.

Wolfgang nodded. "We'll have a look. Patterson and Vasha will come with me. The rest of you wait. Make no noise." At his nod, Steve dropped in behind Vasha and they jogged back up the slope to the top of a knoll. From a grove of spruce, they could look down without fear of detection.

UNDER the brilliant sun, the frozen lake below shimmered like a vast counterpane of sequins. A mile away, a six-dog team was laying a straight wake across

Big Alice, the squaw, traveled like a moose indeed.

the snow. Steve put his hands over his eyes and peered between his fingers to cut out the glare. The dogs were good ones—Siberians, like MacGillivray's. Up ahead, a small, lithe runner was beating trail, and behind the team, a tall, hooded man jogged tirelessly, with a rifle slung across his shoulders. Steve had a sickening sensation in his stomach. He glanced sideways, where the Baron was observing the team through a pair of binoculars. An instant later, the German lowered the glasses and met his eyes.

"What do you make of it, Patterson?"

"Can't tell much. He's bearing northward."

Wolfgang smiled. "Perhaps the glasses will help—or do you need them?"

Steve shook his head. There was little sense attempting to fool Wolfgang, he decided.

Vasha remarked: "That is not hunting rifle, I think."

"After a fashion," the Baron sneered, watching Steve. "It's a Lee-Enfield. The blue riding breeches with the gold stripe . . ."

"The Mounted Police!"

"Precisely! Am I right, Patterson?"

Steve nodded. "It's the monthly patrol," he suggested.

"On the contrary," Wolfgang corrected him. "It's a special patrol for our benefit. The regular patrol went by last week. That policeman is heading for the concentration camp. You know, Patterson, I could pluck him neatly with this rifle of mine."

Steve watched Jim Austin's tall, familiar figure swing along behind his dogs.

"You could," he said bitterly, "but what would you gain?"

"Nothing—yet. He is undoubtedly expected, and it would only stir up trouble. We'll cross his trail, bearing westerly and circle through the woods. Come on, let's get back."

Steve nodded, anxious to get away. His years of training, of discipline, of pride in service, of uncompromising honesty, were working against him now in his effort to play the part he had elected. He tried to reason what he would have done if Wolfgang had decided to kill Corporal Austin now as he jogged along behind his team. It would have been a tough decision, with Laura at the mercy of Dagor and Ernst. He blotted the thought out of his mind and hurried back.

"We'll eat here," Wolfgang decided, when they returned to the others. "A police patrol crossed the lake below. Vasha, tell that squaw to rustle up a little food. No fire. We can't risk it."

Steve glimpsed the expression on Laura's face, so he turned and walked over to his dogs. He adjusted the harness and examined their feet. Laura brought him over a chunk of cold pork and a couple of bannocks. For a moment they were out of hearing of the others.

Her face was white. "Steve! Why are we hiding from the police?"

Steve was tempted to tell her the truth. He knew he could trust her, of course, and he could trust her discretion as well. But she was moulded of the same clay as her father; blunt, direct, honest to a fault. This was a gambler's game. As the squaw had put it: he was faced with foxes and wolverines. Laura would rather die than sell out her country. It would take time to convince her that it was necessary to play a double game. There was no time now.

"You'll just have to bear along for a while, Laura."

She searched his face for some fragment of reassurance, and failing, her eyes snapped in anger.

"*Steve!*" and there was disbelief in her voice. "What's happened to you? These men are Nazis! Wolfgang boasted of it! He and that dark pig are fugitives from the government."

"I know all that, Laura."

"You knew it! You deliberately joined to help—"

"Believe that, if you will," he growled, "but don't start any trouble. Any one of them would cheerfully cut your throat. Remember that!"

"What else can I believe? Steve, I even stood up for you when you assaulted Barnett a second time. I thought perhaps. . . ." Her lip quivered, and she turned hurriedly away.

Steve cursed softly, and divided his bannocks up among the dogs. Ordinarily, a piece of cold pork on the trail was a delicacy, but today it tasted like—cold pork. He tossed it to Emperor who swallowed the morsel without batting an eye.

Baron Wolfgang had a map spread out atop the long sled. He fixed their present position and talked over the route with Vasha in the latter's language. Steve tramped up and down the trail to keep his muscles flexible. He wondered, if Wolfgang and Vasha were so familiar with winter travel, why they had wanted him. Had Ernst made a blunder in hiring him? The feeling persisted that there was something more behind all this than the mere escape of a few prisoners. He would have to wait, and in the waiting know that Laura must be hating him.

Finally Wolfgang folded his map. "Let us go!" he commanded.

ONCE they topped the crest and started the descent to the lake, the men removed their snowshoes and hung onto the trail-lines to keep the sleds from sliding into the dogs. The heavy loads made it difficult to control them and finally Steve was forced to zig-zag downhill leaving a wake like a giant herring bone. Everyone was hot and breathless by the time they sailed out onto the level. The lake, that from the hill above had looked so smooth and flat, now resembled a rough, storm-tossed sea that had suddenly frozen. The snow had drifted into strange, weird shapes, sculptured by the wind, but it presented a good fast track for the sleds.

They crossed the tracks of the police patrol at an angle and raced westward

where the sun was already touching the distant tree tops with its gold. Wolfgang ordered as many as possible to ride the sleds in the crossing so that a following team would not know the number of men in the group. When they reached the fringe of timber again, they all took to their snowshoes.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, Wolfgang called a halt. They had just traversed a muskeg, whose grassy hummocks, capped with snow, looked like giant mushrooms. The dogs were weary and hungry, and it looked like a good place for a camp. The German sent Vasha and Dagor into the woods to cut firewood and balsam boughs, then he called Ernst and Steve to one side.

"We're getting close," he told them brusquely. "In the daylight, there may be patrol planes out. We can't chance it. The moon will rise tonight before midnight, so we will rest until then and travel on until daybreak. Tomorrow we will stay quiet in the forest. Perhaps some of us can proceed then without the dogs."

Ernst glanced sideways at Steve, then asked a question in German. Wolfgang scowled and spoke rapidly. Then in English, he said: "Make very small fires so there will be no smoke. You understand, Patterson?"

Steve nodded without speaking. He was incredibly weary of Wolfgang's constant reminders, and he began to wonder if the German were heckling him in an effort to provoke an open break. He decided not. The Baron would need no provocation when the time came; a quick shot in the back with the sporting rifle in the hands of an unsporting, but efficient Nazi, would be sufficient.

Steve unhitched his dogs and chained them to trees as far as possible from Vasha's mongrels. He gave each dog a couple of handfuls of the concentrated rations in the stores. The dogs bolted their food, then tramped out a bed in the snow and curled up, plume tails wrapped around their noses. Steve strung the harnesses from the branches of nearby trees, and looked around for Laura.

She had moved away from the circle and with Alice, the squaw, was making a bed of evergreen boughs. When Steve walked over and offered to help, she turned her back on him.

"Better get all the rest you can," he said anyway. "We're moving again at midnight."

She glanced at him in surprise, but he turned away and tramped over to his dogs. Laying small, even balsam twigs shingle-fashion, so that the branch stems faced down, he wove a bed that was both mattress and spring combined. Then he dragged a dead log and laid it on the windward side, and threaded in a few stems of tamarack to perfume the bed. Over the whole he spread a tarp, and on it unrolled his sleeping bag. After that, he built a small, tepee-style fire of small sticks slanting upward.

Ernst came over and hunkered down beside him. "My God!" he panted. "I ache all over."

"You'll feel worse tomorrow," Steve said. "Once you stiffen up."

The agent sat down on the log and rubbed the calf of his leg. "I thought for a while I'd broken my leg. It just quit on me."

"That's *mal-raquet*," Steve told him, "or snowshoe-ache. It comes of stretching the tendons when cold. It can cripple you."

Ernst glanced nervously over his shoulder to where Wolfgang was unrolling his eiderdown.

"Look!" muttered the agent. "I can't afford to get crippled—not on this jaunt. Tell me what to do for it. You know everything about this woods business."

Steve took out his pipe and slowly thumbed tobacco in the bowl. The terror mirrored in the agent's eyes gave him a new sense of power. *Yes*, he told himself, *I know these woods.* Suddenly he realized what a weapon he held in his hand, a weapon infinitely more deadly than all the puny guns strapped to the long sled. *These men are aliens*, he reminded himself. *Let them go, give them time enough, let the very country herself spin the web, and all I'll have to do will be to clear out myself and let them die.*

Only Wolfgang and Laura complicated the picture. The Baron obviously had an intellectual understanding of the Canadian wilderness; that he had had some experience was also evident. But it was

Laura's presence that gave Steve a sinking sensation. The squaw man was of small importance. He was a foreigner who had learned enough of the woods to trap for a living. He could be disposed of when the time came.

Nor was this the time to lose Ernst. "You massage those muscles and keep 'em warm," he warned the German. "How are your feet?"

"Blistered!"

Steve smiled. "O.K., Ernst. If I let that go another day, you'd be through."

"*You* let it go?"

Steve shrugged. "Perhaps the Baron will recommend a remedy."

Ernst winced. "You fix up these legs, Patterson, and I won't forget it."

Steve got up. "I'll see what I can do," he said, and wandered off into the bush.

He found a maze of tracks laid down by the snowshoe rabbit, and where these entered a thicket, he hung a couple of snares. When he returned to camp, Alice had warmed up some bacon and beans and made a pan of tea. Meanwhile, Ernst had made himself a bed in poor imitation of Steve's.

"My God!" he complained. "We'll freeze!"

"Not if you strip naked," Steve told him. "In that way, your body heat will keep the bag warm."

"What about my feet?"

"I promised you a break," Steve reminded him. "Now, to use your own words, quit worrying about it."

He loaded his pipe for a good-night smoke. Laura had already burrowed into her bag. Wolfgang put on his snowshoes and started a big circle of the camp. Steve was already in bed when he heard the German come creaking in an hour later. Somewhere in the distance, a lynx screamed. . . .

CHAPTER VII

DEATH IN THE SNOW

A BRIGHT, cool moon slanting over the trees cast shadows like a morning sun. Steve glanced at his watch, and saw that it was close to midnight. He dressed in his bag, then crawled out into the cold and put on his moccasins. After the closeness of his bag, the air was heady as champagne. He flexed his muscles, and trotted soundlessly into the brush.

Each of the snares he'd set now held the taut, frozen carcass of a large white rabbit. Steve cut them down and started back. The dogs were awake now, and their howls brought the whole camp awake. Wolfgang was standing on his bag with his rifle in hand when Steve broke out of the woods.

"I wanted a little fresh meat for my dogs," Steve explained, holding up the rabbits. "It's about time to roll out anyhow, isn't it?"

The German lowered his rifle. "Turn out, everybody!" he called.

Steve went over to Ernst. "How do you feel?"

The agent was plainly frightened. "I'll never make it!" he whispered hoarsely. "My feet are swollen, and my legs have wooden splints thrust through the muscles."

Steve smiled and showed him the rabbits. "These will fix you up," he said.

"I'm not hungry." Ernst dressed nervously, then sat on his bed and stared at his blistered feet. "Look—my socks stuck to them yesterday!"

Steve made no comment. He slit the rabbits between the hind legs and peeled the skins forward off the carcass, as he would pull off a sweater. After lopping off the legs and ears, he offered the moist pelts to the German.

"Here, pull these onto your bare feet," he ordered. "Put the skin against your skin, with the fur out."

Ernst grimaced. "Is this a trick? Those damn things are wet, cold and greasy."

"I know that," Steve said. "I know, too, that they are the best socks nature provides. Put your socks over them, then your duffels, and finally your moccasins. Before the day is passed, not only will the blisters melt away, but you'll feel as if you've a hot-water bottle underfoot."

The German did as he was bid. By the time he had the outer gear on his feet, the pelts had warmed to body temperature. He stood up gingerly, experimentally, put his weight on each foot with distrust.

Steve ignored him. A quick fire, a pan of tea, and a bannock with the chill taken off, and he was ready for the trail. It was a grand night. The stars were dazzling, and over the trail ahead, the northern lights cast three ruddy rainbows across the tree fringed horizon. The dogs came up eager, but faintly surprised, as though wondering where the night had gone. Steve patted each in his turn, then gave the great wolf-husky an affectionate cuff on the muzzle. Emperor turned his head, like a gruff old lion, and took the man's whole hand in his mouth. But the slight pressure he exerted was like the extra squeeze of a hand clasped in friendship.

Ernst limped over, and Steve asked: "How do the feet behave?"

"Better. Better already." The agent stared steadily at Steve. "The peculiar thing, Patterson, is that I trusted you."

"Funny?"

"It would have gone badly with me, if I had become crippled. You knew that. I don't understand you."

"It's not me you fail to understand, Ernst," Steve said without rancor. "It's the woods. People act a certain way out in this country, not because they're kind or generous, or good or bad. This Canadian wilderness has its own code, like the sea has its code, or the desert. A sea captain turns to another ship in distress, not because he likes the other master—he may even be an enemy—but because it's been bred into him. Any Indian, or breed, or white man of this woods country will perpetuate the code by instinct."

Ernst said nothing and Steve turned away. As he started to twist his foot into his snowshoes, Laura came over.

"The Baron wants you to go ahead with him and break trail," she said tartly. "I'm to follow with this team."

Steve glanced to where Ernst was rolling his eiderdown. "Keep your eye on that one," he cautioned the girl. "Let him ride occasionally, but not enough to get cold."

"I'll be good to your friends."

He bit his lip. "Don't be a little fool!" he said impatiently. "It was no fault of mine that you are here. Now that you are, I'll try to see that you get out of it alive."

"Don't trouble yourself at all."

He stalked away, angry with her, angrier with himself. He wanted to reassure her, and she wanted to be reassured, but they were like two radios, futilely trying to communicate on different wave-lengths. He did not look back again as he drew up with Wolfgang, and together they tramped off through the moon-shadowed woods.

It seemed almost as bright as day, with this difference—that the snow was a delicate blue, and the shadows of the trees that corduroyed the trail were richly purple. Distance became a vague, uncertain quantity, that was difficult to estimate. In the muskegs, the hummocks were capped with snow, like mushrooms in a fairyland of giants. The magic of it drugged Steve Patterson, and for a time he was lulled into forgetfulness. Even the German seemed touched by the same wand, and the miles slipped by with no sound save the rhythmic creak of snow-

shoes and the whispering crunch of snow.

At the top of a small hill they paused —and the spell was broken. Wolfgang shook off a mitten and took out his map. Steve was amazed at the accuracy with which the alien oriented himself.

"I have been thinking," the Baron said meditatively. "If we continue along this arc we have traveled, we will eventually bisect the trail followed by that tall policeman we saw yesterday afternoon. Is that not so?"

Steve studied the map. It was obvious that Jim Austin, having no reason to do otherwise, would follow the regular winter trail along the lakes and swales.

"In all probability—yes," Steve admitted. "Since he would hardly travel at night, we're probably ahead of him now."

Wolfgang nodded. "So I calculated." He spaced off a distance on the map, using his fingers as dividers. "By dawn we should reach this spot, at which we should re-cross the main trail, about ten miles below the prison camp. Right?"

Steve shrugged. "I reckon so." He realized abruptly that the German was making one fatal mistake, which so far had not caught up with him. Wolfgang, as an aviator, was working on the principles of aviation and navigation—of thinking of distance in terms of *miles*, instead of *time*. Barring wind or storms, distance in the air was calculated solely on a basis of speed, but in the woods country, ten miles on the level, in good fast snow, might take only two hours, or less, whereas another *single* mile of hard going through the hills might take three or four hours of back-breaking travel. It was an important discovery to Steve, and he felt that another weapon had been added to his defenses when the break came.

Baron Wolfgang folded his map. "March!" he ordered.

FOR over an hour, Steve and Wolfgang waited in a little grove of stunted spruce and warped jack-pines. Below a long arm of Talking Woman Lake reached off to the northwest, with just the faintest evidence of an old trail visible, like a long, curving sinew beneath the skin of snow. The winter trail!

Her face was white. "Steve! Why are we hiding from the police?"

Silent, his eyes fixed rigidly on the hollow, Baron Wolfgang reminded Steve of a great lynx; patient, cruel, deadly. Steve tried to reassure himself that the Nazi's concern over Jim Austin was merely that he didn't want the policeman behind him. But as the sky paled, and the northern lights slowly disappeared, as if some weary God had dimmed the celestial rheostat, Steve commenced to wonder why Laura and the others had not caught up with them.

Then came the northern dawn! Like soft organ music, the colors crept out of the southeast. The surface of the lake changed from blue to mauve, which in

Wolfgang shook off a mitten and took out his map.

turn blended into pink, and finally gold. The whole southeastern sky began to flame, with great jagged spears of colors that resembled frozen lightning. Then came the suns, not one, but three, flaming one above the other. The mock suns of the north country! For a while it lasted, like a lovely bubble, only to merge into one large, red sun.

"Here they come!" said Baron Wolfgang.

Steve nodded grimly. Far down the lake crawled the tiny figures of dogs and the two men. *That should be me down there,* Steve told himself. *If I'd been half a man, I'd be back in that uniform, and Jim would be on his way to his homeland in Australia to fight Japs.* The team was close now. Steve could see the wide gold stripe on the blue breeches. Austin had discarded his parka for his official fur jacket. Jogging along with the tireless stride of a trained northern man, he looked like a big, top-heavy bear. The breed breaking trail ahead of the team, was having trouble holding his pace.

"Get down as close to the trail as possible without being seen," ordered the German. "If they stop, it's up to you to handle it. Remember. . . ." He patted the butt of his rifle.

"We're O.K. up here," Steve growled. "We're down wind so that the dogs can't scent us, and that man's in a hurry."

Wolfgang gave him a cold stare. "Have you never learned to obey orders, Patterson?"

Steve felt his temper rising, but he held it back and turned down toward the flat. A long point of willows stretched almost to the edge of the lake, so that he could crawl to a point within fifty yards of the trail.

The track-beater had almost reached him. Steve could see the man's dark, sunburned face; the lacings of his snowshoe thongs, the pattern his breath took rising from his nostrils. Steve was looking straight at him when the runner swayed sideways, as if jolted by some invisible force, and tripped on his face. The dogs had to swerve to miss him.

Steve instinctively started to his feet, then sank back where he was. He waited for the man to rise, yet somehow, even then, he knew the breed was dead. He had heard no sound of gunfire, yet he knew.

Austin bellowed at the dogs and the leader swung off the trail and floundered to a halt. The officer ran forward and knelt by the breed. As he rolled the man over, Steve could see the black stain on the latter's parka. Austin let the guide gently back into the snow and stood up, looking around in surprise. As he started to jerk his rifle from his shoulder, Wolfgang's voice came clear and deadly from the grove.

"Do not move!" the German shouted. "You are well covered! Throw down that gun and lift your arms!"

Steve saw Austin's face darken. The big Australian hesitated a moment as he tried to orient the voice. Steve knew he was going to make a fight of it, and before he realized what he was doing, he jumped to his feet, and cried: "For God's sake, Jim—*don't try it!*"

AUSTIN was taken completely by surprise. He stood undecided, looking from Steve, who was racing toward him, up to the stand of trees, from which the German's voice had emanated.

Steve half expected to get a slug in his own spine as he got between the grove and Austin.

"Don't, Jim!" he called again. "You haven't a Chinaman's chance!"

Austin's face was flushed with anger. "Steve! What in hell are you doing here? Who shot . . . ?" He stopped suddenly, and started to wrench the gun from his back. "Why you dirty, traitorous. . . ."

God help me! Steve breathed grimly, and dove for the big man. Having the advantage of surprise, he swept Austin off his feet, and ripped the gun from his shoulder.

"Listen to reason!" he begged, but Austin surged and struggled beneath him. The policeman was handicapped by his fur coat which he had donned to pay his official visit to the prison, and Steve pinned him down with his own body. He was still fighting gamely when the German's cold voice came from directly above them.

"Very neatly done, Patterson. Now get away from him. I'll blow what little brains he has out of him."

Steve glanced over his shoulder. Wolfgang was standing less than three paces away, his gun to his shoulder. Even in that quick look, Steve saw the vicious little black cylinder of the silencer attached to the muzzle. Austin would never surrender, Steve knew, as long as he could fight.

Steve struggled free, then as Austin started to rise, he swung his right. He felt the explosion in his knuckles. The big Australian sank back unconscious.

Steve rose slowly, keeping himself between the German and the man on the snow.

"Put down that damn gun!" he said coldly. "There's no need to kill him."

Wolfgang met his eyes, and after a moment of hesitation, very slowly lowered the gun. Steve relaxed.

"What in hell did you shoot the guide for?" he demanded, fighting to control his temper. "Haven't you brains enough to realize that the army officers in the internment camp will have been notified that this corporal is on the way. When he fails to show up on schedule, they'll comb these woods for him! Why you damn fool! If anything happens to him, every constable in the Force will be on your tail!"

"The policeman will arrive on schedule," the Baron sneered. "There will be no alarm."

"You don't know R.C.M.P. constables," Steve snapped. "I know this one very well. You'll never bully him into playing traitor to save his hide."

Wolfgang appraised Steve as if he were some kind of animal. "I have shot men for saying much less to me," he said icily. "You British swine have no imagination. Well, for your information, I repeat the officer will arrive at the prison and carry out my instructions to the letter, for the very good reason, my bad-tempered friend, that *you* will play the part of that officer."

"Me? You're insane!"

"When you cool down, you will be glad to go," went on the Baron, "in order to keep that silly girl and this thick-headed swine policeman from having their throats cut. Now—I see the fool is reviving."

He tramped quickly over and picked up Austin's rifle. Removing the clip, he tossed it on the sled. "Carry that carrion into the brush and cover him with snow," he added, indicating the breed guide.

Steve hesitated, judging his chances. He had a crazy idea of trying to provoke a melée among the dogs so that he could jump the German in the excitement. But as he started forward, he saw Laura's team top the crest of the hill and come rushing down the slope.

Sick with disgust, he tramped over to the little guide. He removed the snowshoes and heaved the limp body over his shoulder and started for the willows.

It was not the first time Steve Patterson had buried a man in the loneliness of the great woods, but this time he felt that he had, in part, contributed to the murder. He kicked off his snowshoes and fumbled around for rocks to protect the body from wolves. When the cairn was completed, he made a vow.

"I'll come back, friend, and do this right someday. You'll get a military funeral, for you died in action, like an R.C.M.P. constable should."

JIM AUSTIN had recovered consciousness when Steve returned to the group. Dagor and Vasha were standing behind him, with guns on his back. Austin looked hard at Steve, but said nothing. Steve avoided Laura's eyes after one brief glimpse.

Wolfgang said something to his compatriots in German, then drew Steve to one side.

"Now let's have no senseless bickering," he warned Steve bluntly. "You can't back out now, so you will obey orders. First, you will change into that policeman's silly uniform, and continue to the concentration camp. You will spend the night with the army officers and learn what plans have been made for pursuit and our capture. In the morning, you will leave the camp as if in search of us, and make a circle to join us.

"Already, you may be planning some double-cross," he added, with sardonic malice. "Forget it. We will keep this policeman with the girl as hostages. I promise you what will happen to them will not be pleasant, if you should make any mistakes."

"I'll play it through," Steve said between his teeth.

"I'm quite sure of that," Wolfgang agreed. "But as an added precaution, Vasha will go along as your dog-handler. Although you will carry that Lee-Enfield rifle, it will not be loaded. On the other hand, Vasha will be supplied with grenades, so that if anyone attempts to grab him, or in any way interfere with my plan, he will sell his life at an excellent price for the Fatherland. Is that perfectly clear to you, Patterson?"

"Clear enough," Steve grunted.

Dagor and Vasha rough-housed Austin into the willows and forced him to strip. Steve slowly climbed out of his own clothes, and as he pulled on the familiar uniform, Austin cursed him.

"You filthy rotter!" he said with loathing. "You're not fit to touch that uniform, much less wear it!"

"Oh, for God's sake, pipe down!" Steve growled.

Austin set his jaw. "I stuck by you a long time," he said grimly. "A long time, while you made an ass of yourself. But I never thought you'd come to this. You're a disgrace to that uniform, and to the country it represents. I can't think of anything worse to say than that, Patterson!"

Steve buttoned the tunic, and pulled on the big fur coat. "There's nothing worse you could say," he grumbled, and stalked away.

Laura turned her back as he came up, and he was just as well pleased for he dreaded the contempt he knew would be in her eyes. Vasha padded up and transferred his feet to the snowshoes of the murdered guide. Wolfgang handed over the Lee-Enfield rifle, which Steve slung over his back by the shoulder-straps. The squaw-man broke out the sled and trotted ahead of it. Wolfgang jogged along beside Steve for a half mile.

"I don't see what you're going to gain by this," Steve complained. "You know already that they'll be searching for you."

"Perhaps I wish word of some friends of mine."

Steve recalled the argument he had had the first night in the cabin. "You can't pull a break," he insisted. "Even a policeman hasn't any authority with the army officers running that camp."

"You can get the lay-out," Wolfgang said.

"But you already know more about that camp than I can learn overnight."

"Argue, argue, argue!" flared the German. "That's the trouble with you crazy English and Americans. Bah! You are a nation of fools! Every man must have

his silly talk, talk, talk! Nobody makes decisions. As our *Fuehrer* has so explicitly pointed out: only one man is fit to order, the rest must follow. No single individual is important!"

Steve shrugged, and held his peace. He knew he'd be able to think more clearly once he was alone. Until then, he'd take it.

"I leave you now," the German said finally. "Vasha has his instructions. He also knows where to meet us after you leave the prison. Good-bye, my sullen Britisher. Go now, and remember that you have the lives of your friends in your own hands." He turned abruptly and stalked back over the trail.

Steve trudged along in silence. The guide kept well ahead, so as not to be surprised from behind. After a while, Steve glanced back. Wolfgang had stopped and was watching him. Shortly then, the trail swung easterly, and the stiff-backed figure of the Nazi flyer was blotted from view.

Steve glanced at the sun. A haze was forming that portended snow. Even the elements seemed to be conspiring with the Germans to cover their trail. It would take several hours to reach the camp, and then . . . Steve stopped right there. Somehow he couldn't think straight beyond that point. His duty to his country was clear: he should report the incident at once, and have Vasha seized. But then there was Laura, and Jim. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

NOBODY HEARD A SOUND

FROM the top of the hill, viewed through a curtain of fast-falling snow, the prison camp looked like a small town —a hastily thrown together boom town. There were about two dozen buildings, some still in the process of construction, grouped together on the edge of the lake. Around the whole stockade was a high barbed-wire fence, and inside of that was another compound, with a double fence around it, and a two-story sentry-tower at each corner. Somehow it looked bleak and unreal to Steve, for it was unlike any prison he had ever seen.

Vasha paused at the head of the team and looked back. "You will have a care," he called warningly, and patted the slight bulges in his pockets.

Steve nodded curtly and cracked the long driving whip to vent some of the passion that kept welling up inside him. He hated himself for the part he was forced to play, forgetting that it was the thing he wanted, that in the end, by the grace of God, it might turn out well. But he couldn't blot out the image of the breed guide he had buried beneath the rocky cairn.

With the trail's end in view, the dogs tore at breakneck speed down the incline to the camp. Steve grabbed the tail-line to slow the sled, then jumped aboard and they came pell-mell up to the gate where a sentry stepped out of his lodge and covered them with a rifle. Vasha pulled off the trail and let Steve and the dogs swing past him.

As Steve climbed off the sled, the sentry spotted his uniform.

"Oh, it's you, Corporal!" said the soldier. "The commandant's expecting you, sir."

"Thanks," Steve said. "Where'll I find him?"

The sentry indicated a long, unpainted board building just outside the compound. "Colonel Baldwin's in the adjutant's office, sir, with Captain Wire. They said you might be in time for a late luncheon." He looked at Vasha, standing beside the restless dogs. "Your driver can take his team around back of the mess-hall," he added. "The cook'll have a hand-out for him."

He gave the all-clear signal to the rifleman in the tower, and unlocked the gate. Vasha drove the team inside and with a knowing nod to Steve, swung them toward the mess-hall.

Steve watched him go, thinking what a pleasure it would be to jerk the rifle off his shoulder and send the alien renegade kicking in the snow. But that was not the task to which he had set himself, so controlling his rage, he kicked off his snowshoes and strode over to the adjutant's office.

Colonel Baldwin was a tall, spare sol-

Vasha was a trifle camera-shy . . .

dier, an officer of a Highland regiment. He greeted Steve warmly, calling him Corporal Austin, and introduced him to his adjutant, Captain Wire. Wire was a dark, clean-cut youngster, very little older than Steve himself. They seemed almost unusually happy to see Steve, and at first it puzzled him a little, but as time passed, he found the reason. The camp was completely isolated from all activity, and other than supervision and routine administration, there was little for the officers to do. Meanwhile, their own regiment had gone first to Iceland, and had subsequently seen service in the Middle East and, as Wire wistfully phrased it, "God knows where all!"

"We'll show you around the place after a bite," the colonel suggested, "but I suppose you'll want the details on Wolfgang and Dagor? Have you seen pictures of them?"

Steve winced. "I know what they look like," he admitted. "How did they manage to escape?"

An orderly interrupted to announce lunch, so they went over to the colonel's quarters. When they were seated at the table there, Baldwin answered Steve's query.

"How they actually escaped can only be guessed at in a general way," he explained. "You see—before the United States entered the war, the German Bunds had a well-oiled 'underground railway' operating across the border, with headquarters in Detroit, and they were responsible for the escape of perhaps a hundred and fifty Nazis from our prison camps stretched between Quebec and Alberta. As you may know, the technique operated both inside and outside the camps. The escapee was supplied with a compass and instructions where to find caches of maps and food outside."

"Hm! That took a lot of organization," mused Steve.

"If nothing else," Captain Wire said ruefully, "those Nazis are damned efficient. Personally, I feel we're too easy on the blighters."

Baldwin shrugged. "It's not serious now. Your men, Corporal, have nipped most of the fugitives on this side of the line, and those splendid American F.B.I. agents have made many a Nazi wish to high heaven he'd stayed in our comfortable camps here."

"But just how did Wolfgang get away?"

Baldwin toyed with his tea cup. "We let him go outside the grounds with one of the work parties. They overpowered the guard. You see—it's like this. We've a large number of internees; men who have lived here in Canada but who the government felt should be locked up for the duration. They give us very little trouble. Of the three hundred prisoners, they make up nearly two thirds. We've a number of soldiers, sailors, and a half dozen or so aviation mechanics. Very few flyers, fortunately. Frankly, the ordinary German soldier and sailor isn't a bad chap. We let them work outside, chopping trees and doing roadwork—under guard, of course—and pay them for it. But the Nazi flyer is an arrogant pest. They actually believe that superman rot, y'know. They won't work, and they're so insolent they try the patience of the guards. So when Wolfgang came and asked me to let him work to get a little money, I agreed. Perhaps I shouldn't have, as things turned out."

"Oh, come now, Colonel," laughed Wire. "Wolfgang's probably frozen to death by this time. I almost sympathize with the blighter, roaming these blasted forests with that ape, Dagor. Y'know, Corporal—it's a funny thing that a flying officer of Wolfgang's rank would fraternize, even in escape, with a mechanic

like Dagor, an ignorant chap at best."

"Whoa, Captain," chuckled Baldwin. "Dagor wasn't a mechanic—he's a bombardier. It was Gross, the one they killed, who was the mechanic."

Wire shrugged and spread his hands. "I still don't comprehend it," he insisted. "You'd almost think they planned to try and steal an aircraft of some kind and start another war. A pilot, a bombardier, and a mechanic! Eh, Corporal?" Both officers burst out laughing.

Steve felt the hair rise up on his neck. He joined the general laugh, but his own had a hollow ring. *Don't be a damned fool!* he told himself. *Can't you take a joke? This is Canada! You're four thousand miles from the war front!*

The others were rising from the table. "Come on," urged the captain. "Let us show you around the bloody place while it's light enough to see something."

AS THEY walked out of the quarters, Steve glimpsed Vasha hanging around the prisoners' compound. Wire and the colonel kept up a rapid-fire description of the camp and its operation. Steve was especially interested in the protective measures. The inner compound had two fences around it, separated by a ten foot space which was efficiently covered by the guns in the four sentry towers. During the hours of daylight, this was a snowy moat, and at night it was brilliantly illumined by floodlights, so as long as the sentry in the tower was on duty, no living thing could cross that space unseen.

"It's neat," Steve admitted grimly. "But what about an outside approach?"

Wire chuckled. "Come now, Corporal. We're a long way from civilization."

"A very long way," grunted the colonel.

"And those sentries have sharp eyes. At the first sound of trouble, a shot, or the like, we've enough soldiers on duty to stand off a small army. No, old chap, we'll see to it that no more escape, and we'll be obliged if you'll return that pair who did make it. I imagine they froze to death, eh, Corporal?"

"We can't be sure of it," said Steve drily. "Although I wish it were true."

. . . and Steve was reluctant to pose.

Colonel Baldwin pulled a miniature camera out of his pocket. "I say, Corporal, stand over by the gate with Wire, won't you. I'd like to get a picture of you."

Steve started involuntarily. "I'd rather not," he said. *My God!* he thought. *That would be a rope around my neck!*

Baldwin insisted goodnaturedly. "Oh, come now. My boy is Mounty-crazy, y'know. He's dreamed of becoming a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted ever since he could talk. Never forgive me if I didn't get your picture. He's heard of your name, calls you Austin, the Northern Man. Bloody well knows more about you chaps than I do."

Steve hesitated. He couldn't refuse without bad grace, and he began to wonder if they suspected that he wasn't Austin at all. Wire gently pulled him over to the gate while Baldwin fiddled with a light-meter. As the colonel adjusted the focus, Steve saw Vasha watching from behind a shed. He had a hunch.

"Say, Colonel," he called, so that his voice wouldn't carry to the squaw-man, "why don't you get that guide of mine in the picture. He's a picturesque sort of chap with quite a background. Pretend it's your own idea. He's a trifle camera-shy."

"Excellent," laughed Baldwin. He glanced around, spotted Vasha, and called him over. The fellow came reluctantly, and when he found what was

wanted, he became quite excited. But, like Steve, he was trapped, and he couldn't think fast enough to avoid it.

As Vasha sulked away after the picture was snapped, Steve said: "Take good care of that particular negative, Colonel. I want to get a few copies of it, just in case anything happens to my man."

"I'm going to send it out to be developed in the next mail," the colonel promised. "I just finished the roll."

Steve could not recall a more difficult day. The very friendliness of the officers, their desire to make his stay pleasant, their confidence in his ability to recover Wolfgang and Dagor if they were still alive—all these factors contributed to make Steve Patterson thoroughly miserable. He tried to think the matter through to a logical conclusion, but could not. All reason urged him to reach for the telephone and get Inspector Barnett on the wire and tell him exactly what had happened. Yet he was afraid to. Barnett was cold and rational. He might order Steve to seize Vasha, and have the soldiers throw a cordon around the woods to capture Wolfgang. He might say that it was more important to prevent further escapes and capture the fugitives than to worry about Laura and Corporal Austin.

And Steve Patterson was haunted by another thought; a half-formed, nebulous suspicion that tormented him. It was elusive, almost a hunch. He kept asking himself, *Why did the Baron want these other men freed?* Baldwin said there were no more flyers in the camp; only mechanics. He recalled Captain Wire's goodnatured remark that, "You'd almost think they were going to steal an aircraft and start another war! A pilot, a bombardier, and a mechanic!"

And now Wolfgang wanted another half dozen mechanics!

They called in the camp doctor and played bridge during the evening, and it was after midnight when Wire jumped up with a laugh. "By Jove, it's later than I thought! You'll want to get some sleep, Corporal."

"Yes," Steve said. "I want to get away early tomorrow."

They urged him to stay another day, but when he insisted, they showed him to his quarters. When he was alone at last, Steve sat on the edge of his bed and held his head tight between his hands.

What should he do now? It boiled down to just two alternatives; either call Barnett and stop the show at once, or play it through. Barnett was the only living person who knew that he was acting in the interests of his country. Not even Laura knew that. And then

he recalled that once before—when he had been undecided whether to preserve the note Inspector Barnett had surreptitiously sent to him—he had faced a similar cross-roads.

Finally he stood up and began to undress. His decision would remain the same. Play the cards as they fell—whole hog or nothing. There was only one difference; then he was gambling only his own life, now he gambled with the lives of others.

IT WAS past three in the morning when Steve was awakened by the banging of the general alarm. He shot out of bed and into his clothes. Men were shouting, and every floodlight in the camp was on. Steve ran over to the colonel's quarters and met Captain Wire just coming out.

"Good God, man! I'm glad you're here!" cried the captain. "Worst thing yet! Three sentries shot dead, yet nobody heard a sound!"

Steve felt a nausea rising in him. "Three! Was there a break?"

Wire was moving toward the compound. "Yes. We don't know yet how many escaped. Baldwin's taking a roll-call now. I can't understand how those men could have been shot without anyone—*anyone,* mind you—hearing it!"

"A silencer could do it!" Steve said bitterly.

"Pshaw! Where would anyone get a silencer in this God-forsaken hole!" scoffed the officer. "It was the sentries in towers two and three, and one of the boys out near the bush who got it. The damned Nazis cut the fence then with wire-shears, and took off into the woods. With both tower-men dead, those swine could walk right through the lighted space. I tell you, Corporal, I can't understand it!"

They met Colonel Baldwin at the gate. His face was pale and grim.

"It's bad," he said, shaking his head. "Very bad. Made a careful check. Five men escaped. They had guns and wire-cutters, and, would you believe it, when some of the others wanted to go out with them, those five kept them back with guns."

Big Alice

"Were they soldiers or internees?" Wire asked.

"Strangely enough," the colonel said, "they were mechanics. Funny thing—we were discussing those blighters only a few hours ago." He glowered up at the snow fall. "Damned tracks'll be covered before daylight. We'd better get a searching party out at once. Glad you're here, Corporal. This is your line, y'know."

"I wonder where my man is?" Steve growled.

"Saw him a few minutes ago," offered the colonel. "He was getting your team out. Efficient beggar, that."

Just at that moment, three men staggered past, carrying the body of a dead

sentry on a stretcher. Steve saw the man's face, and his fists balled. He couldn't risk the game any longer.

"Take me to your telephone," he said grimly. "I want to call headquarters in Ottawa."

STEVE followed the adjutant into the little office. As he picked up the phone, he paused and glanced up. "I wonder if you'd excuse me," he asked the officer.

Wire flushed. "Why, of course." He turned and closed the door behind him as he went out.

Steve sat staring at the instrument for a long time. Finally he pulled the receiver from its fork, and told the operator: "Get me Inspector Barnett, R.C.M.P. Intelligence, Ottawa."

As he listened, he heard the call being relayed, and the indistinct hum of voices. *You're doing the right thing,* he assured himself. *You've tried to play a lone hand too long as it is. Barnett can give you the backing of the entire Force.* Yes, it was the right way to play it, probably, but there was Laura and Jim out there in the snow. Five mechanics! Could it be possible. . . . ?

The operator said: "Will you talk with anyone else?"

"No, it has to be Barnett," Steve told her. He had difficulty suppressing a grin.

Anyone else would certainly be surprised to hear Steve Patterson's voice coming from a government concentration camp. The lines would hum then, for sure.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the operator coming back on the wire. "Inspector Barnett cannot be reached."

"He's got to be reached!" snapped Steve. "I don't care where—"

"I'm sorry, sir," the operator said, and then her voice lost its official crispness. "I have police headquarters on the phone now. They inform me, sir, that . . . that Inspector Barnett was shot and killed two days ago! Will you talk with . . . ?"

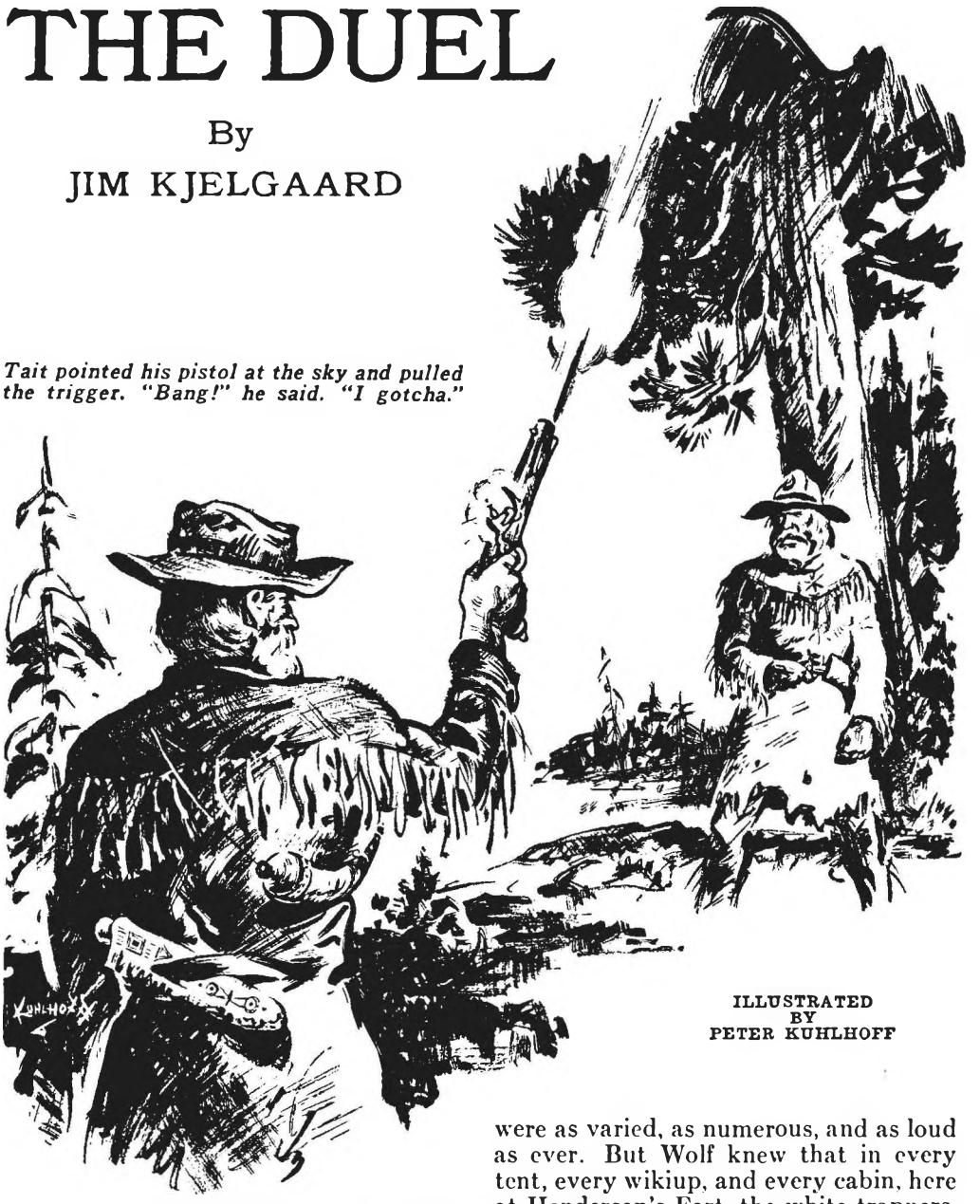
Very slowly Steve put the receiver back on its hook.

(To be continued)

THE DUEL

By

JIM KJELGAARD



Tait pointed his pistol at the sky and pulled the trigger. "Bang!" he said. "I gotcha."

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

WOLF LARABEE took the flintlock pistol from its elkskin holster. He gripped it in his right hand, drew the hammer back, and tightened his forefinger on the trigger. A shower of sparks flew as the flint descended on the steel. Wolf took a drop of semi-liquid bear oil from a box and carefully worked it into the pistol's trigger action. He put the gun back into the holster.

Outside the noises of the rendezvous were as varied, as numerous, and as loud as ever. But Wolf knew that in every tent, every wikiup, and every cabin, here at Henderson's Fort, the white trappers, Indians, and half-breeds were talking of the duel that was going to take place tomorrow between Wolf and his partner, Tait Greer.

Wolf walked to the flaps of his tent, parted them, and looked across at the wikiup where Tait was sleeping. It was dark and quiet. Tait had had so many fights, and flirted with death so often, that the prospect of facing his partner in a death match tomorrow wasn't robbing him of a night's sleep. Wolf lay

down on the buffalo robes that covered his bunk.

He and Tait had been partners for ten years, ever since Wolf had come into the mountains. They had trapped beaver in unknown ranges, far beyond where even most mountain men dared go. They had invaded hostile Indian country where other trappers had been killed. As a team, their feats were already legendary, told around campfires wherever mountain men stopped to cook their venison.

This evening they had fought over a mule. Tait had gone crazy-drunk and gambled recklessly, when they brought their furs to rendezvous this year. Wolf had barely salvaged enough to buy next year's outfit. Broke, Tait had wanted to gamble one of their three remaining mules against fifty dollars in cash. Wolf had stopped him, and Tait had immediately drawn a knife. Since Wolf had no knife, the mountain men standing by had stopped the fight, and all had agreed that it could be settled with pistols in the morning.

Wolf sighed, and pillowed the back of his head on his hands. Nobody knew better than he that the team of Greer and Larabee owed its success solely to Tait. He had taught Wolf all the tricks. Without the older man's mountain wisdom and Indian lore, Wolf's hair would have been lifted years ago. It was Tait's boast, and every mountain man knew it, that, "The red devil as kin slide a arrer into me ain't been whelped yet."

Wolf closed his eyes, and tried to imagine what it would be like without Tait back in the impenetrable fastnesses where they set their beaver traps. Sleeping in wikiups, lean-tos, or on the ground when these weren't available, soaking wet from morning to night—and sometimes from night until morning, playing tag with the warrior Blackfeet who savagely resented all intrusion on their hunting grounds. The first requisite for surviving the life was physical perfection.

Wolf opened his eyes to stare at the top of the tent. All mountain men were fools, he decided. Himself, Tait, and all the rest who endured bitter hardship for a season's fur—and then traded the fur for a new outfit and a few days' hell-raising at the rendezvous.

Still, the mountains did get a grip on a man. The mountain men fought the mountains, and all the enemies they met in them, with a reckless, savage abandon that was joy in itself. Every man among them was fiercely jealous of his reputation, his ability to cope with the situations he encountered. All of them backed those reputations to the limit, defended them at all costs.

Wolf knew more than one who had chosen death to losing face.

DAWN broke over the rendezvous, revealing the scattered tents and wikiups of the mountain men, the stockade and fort, and a little apart from all the rest, the Indian encampment. Horses or mules were picketed in front of most of the camps. Spare animals were in the fort's corral. Stray dogs wandered at will up and down the lines of camps.

The holstered pistol on his belt, Wolf stepped through the tent flaps. He stood quietly in front of the tent, looking neither to the right nor left. But he knew that he was being watched. Every man in the camp had his eyes on Wolf's tent and Tait's wikiup.

Five minutes later Tait Greer, dressed in his best fringed buckskins and like Wolf carrying a flintlock pistol on his belt, came out of the wikiup. The two turned, and started walking out of the camp towards a fringe of pine trees. Wolf sensed the eyes of those who had remained behind, on his back, and knew what they were thinking. This was right, this was just. Two men had a fight to settle. Let them go off and settle it. If both came back, fine. If one came back, obviously he was the best man. In either case the fight would be settled.

The two came to the patch of pine woods. Wolf looked aside when Tait stopped just within the pines and stood grinning. He strode around the grove to its other end, walked a hundred feet into the trees, and sat down. A pine squirrel chattered nervously, and flattened himself on a branch. A flock of black-capped chikadees hopped cheerfully from twig to twig. Wolf sat unhearing, his eyes straight ahead, and he

saw Tait Greer when his partner was in the middle of the grove.

Tait was slouching lazily through the pines, making not the slightest effort at concealment. His old felt hat was jauntily tilted on his head, and his black pipe hung from whiskered jaws. Wolf stood up. Tait saw the motion. He came straight towards Wolf, stopped twenty feet away, pointed his pistol at the sky, and pulled the trigger.

"Bang!" he said. "I gotcha."

Wolf backed against a tree. His right hand dropped to the butt of his pistol.

"Now looka here, Wolf," Tait Greer said plaintively, "you know as well as I do that this hull thing's a foolishness. You'n me's partners. You know I was a little off when I started that ruckus over the mule. I—"

Wolf drew his pistol and shot Tait Greer through the shoulder.

THE next morning, at daybreak, Wolf led his three pack-laden mules down to the stockade and picketed them at the gate. He entered the trading-room, presided over by a sleepy clerk, and made his way through it to a small room at the back. Tait Greer lay on a pile of bearskins there.

Wolf hesitated. Then, "I'm goin' back to the mountains."

Tait Greer stared icily up at him. Wolf fidgeted a moment with his fingers.

"I was crossin' from Harker's Creek to Dobie's Well just before we started for rendezvous," he said deliberately. "I was aimin' to meet you at Sweetwater; we'd been separated twenty-eight days then. I come across three Blackfoot warriors as aimed to lift my ha'r. I lifted their'n instead. They had this."

He held up a buckskin possible sack with the initials T. G. worked across it in colored porcupine quills.

"I don't know whose it is," Wolf continued. "I ain't said nothin' about it to nobody an' I'm never gonna. Any man keerless enough to let three Injuns slide a arrer through his chest, an' who laid up in a camp as long as he could, hopin' even his partner wouldn't find it out, sure wouldn't want anybody else to know it. Likewise, any man with a hole in his lung, who's been coughin' an' layin' awake by the campfire all night every time he got his feet a little damp, wouldn't last a season in the mountains. What he'd need is about eight months' restin' up. Of course, if he was a whang-doodlin' fool an' aimed to go back with his partner anyways on account he didn't want nobody to get curious. . . ."

Tait Greer's frozen features melted. He grinned. "Some people would be that much of an ornery fool," he murmured.

"Wouldn't they though?" Wolf asked. "Tait, I'm right sorry that I couldn't see things yore way yest'day. I was mad, an' all I wanted was to crack you one."

"Fergit it," Tait grunted.

"Aw right. I will. I told Henderson I'd pay your winter's keep from next season's catch. That bullet hole's gonna keep you down long enough so's you won't git into the mountains this season. I'm takin' the whole outfit anyway."

"I'll be seein' you in the spring," Tait said. "Watch out fer the Blackfeet."

"Huh," Wolf snorted as he started through the door, "the Injun as can git an arrer into me has yet to be whelped."

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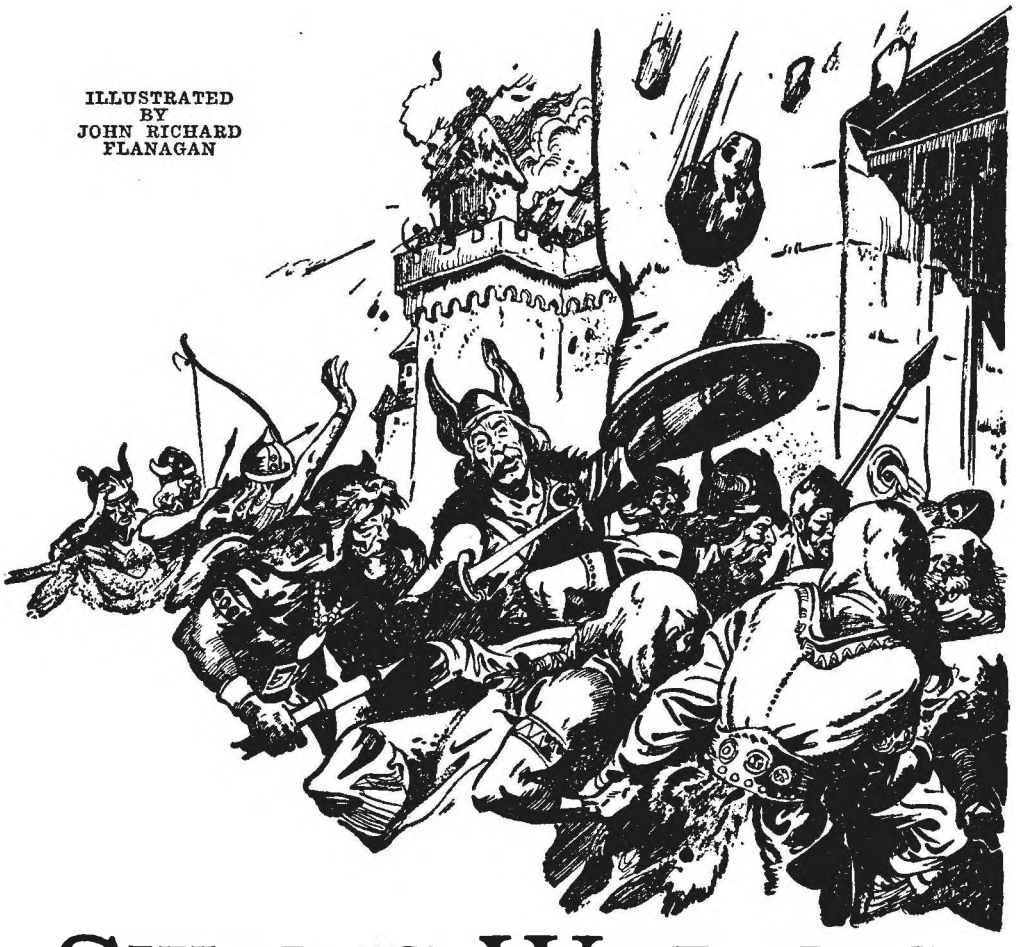


SWAIN'S WARDING

By
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

IN THE days when the Norsefolk were farfarers, before the Black Plague smote the Greenland colonies and when the keels of their longships rived Ran's Bath from Furdurstrandi—the Long and Wonderful Beaches beyond the Western Ocean's rim—to Miklegard, the Constantinople of the Greek Emperors, there was a man lived in the Orkneys whose name was Swain Asleif's son. He was a famous man for the deeds he had wrought in many seas, and for the plunder he had taken. Men called him Jarlmaker and Kingsbane for tribute to the power he had gained, but he called himself Asleif's son because he was wont to say that his mother had been the best man that he ever had known.

He was a simple bonde, of no hereditary rank, yet he held wide lands in Pomona and on Ronaldshay and across the Pentland Firth in Caithness, and he could launch three longships at need. He was regarded as equal in authority with the Orkney Jarls, and when he came to Nidaros or Oslo the Norse kings bade him up to the high table and matched horns with him. Of all who went viking in those days it was said

Stones commenced to drop from the walls, and men collapsed in the serried ranks. "Shield to shield!" shouted Swain.

that none matched him for seaskill or weaponskill or for shrewd thinking; no, not since Magnus Barefoot had his bane in Ireland.

Now, this was a night when the spring storms were breaking, and the wind blew warm and wet out of the southwest. Swain sat at the ale, of which he was a moderate drinker, in the hall of his skalli on Ronaldshay, listening to the sough of the wind overroof and twisting his alehorn and frowning to himself. Beside him at the high table sat Eric Bitling, his forecastle man, a short, stocky, swart carle, with a dry, humorous face. Also, a Laplander called Loge, who was so short as to be almost a dwarf, with a flat, yellowish face and slanting dark eyes. He was a notable archer, and some men claimed he had the evil eye and the secret of Lapland magic; but Swain had stilled such talk by having Father Peter, the priest from Kirkwall, make the Sign on his chest.

"You see," Swain had said. "He does not wince or shrivel, so the devil is not in him. And after Eric he is the best man of his wits among you."

Below these three, on the benches lining the long tables, sat Swain's house carles and hirdmen, full sixty strong. For he liked to keep many men about him, seeing that he had made many enemies in his life.

"It is to be seen, Swain, that the west wind heats your blood," remarked Eric, draining his horn and waving it at a footboy.

"That I will not deny," Swain rejoined heavily. "It has been overlong since the oar-tholes sang for us, little man."

"When the wind and the oar-tholes sing together there is white magic in the air," rumbled Loge in a big voice.

"Why should we be housebound, then?" challenged Eric.

"That is a question my wits have been fumbling," rejoined Swain. "The plans are set for the planting. We have ample store in the barns. There is peace in the Islands. The longships are sound and ready, but—"

The skalli door banged open and Vorlief, one of Swain's tenant carles, trotted up the rushes.

"A strange longship on the shingle, Swain," he said. "And two have landed from her, and climb the hill."

Men stirred on the benches, and glanced towards their weapons hung on the walls behind them. But Swain continued as though no one had spoken.

"—the truth is, carles, I know not which course to sail. Bjorn"—to the footboy—"a horn for Vorlief. It may be he brings good news."

The tenant carle grinned and accepted the ale, splashed a drop for luck and drained it.

"We could do with some good Irish horse stock for the breeding," Eric said tentatively.

Swain laughed shortly in his ruddy beard, which spread like a mat over his mighty chest.

"No, no, Bitling," he replied. "I have had my fill of hard knocks without plunder. Horses? We can send a crew of the young carles after them. I am of a mind for something—"

Again the door opened, and the warm, wet west wind sent the smoke skirling to the venthole, and men turned to see who was entering.

TWO stood there in the doorway. One, a man as tall as Swain, in seacap, unarmored; the other, a cloaked figure almost as tall. Swain, peering down the hall, saw something which brought him to his feet. He could not put a word to it, but he rose and stepped from the dais.

"Welcome, strangers, who come in peace," he said courteously in his resonant voice. "Here are food and drink, if you seek it."

The cloaked figure cast off her cloak, handing it to the giant beside her.

"No strangers, Swain," she answered in a clear voice as ringing as his own.

Swain started as he identified the stately shape, the serene beauty of the sea-blue eyes, the coronet of honey-golden hair which crowned the proud head. The house carles and hirdmen on the long benches stumbled to their feet at the expression on his face. Some of them knew, too, as their eyes followed his.

"No, stranger, you, Kristin King's daughter," Swain assented. "Thrice welcome, you, daughter of Sigurd the Jerusalem-farer. And your companion," he added as an afterthought. "What luck fetches you to us?"

"Ill luck, Swain," she retorted, a thought bitterly. "The ill luck that I am King's mother as well as King's daughter. But manners come first, the skalds teach. This with me is Grim Gusli, of Horderness in Norway, and we walk together, Grim and I, since Erling Skakki has forgotten that I am wife, no less than of a King's blood and the mother of a King."

"I give you greeting, Grim," Swain said, offering his hand. "If you walk in company with Kristin, you are welcome, whoever your enemies. Come, be seated. I will bid the bower be readied for you two."

Kristin's smile was as warm as the wind which blew at her back.

"I have told Grim you were one not to be hindered from aiding us by all the might of Norway," she answered.

She walked with him up the rush strewn floor, nodding a greeting to carles whose hardbitten faces she remembered from the past.

Swain called to the men on the benches.

"We have much to talk of, here on the high place," he said. "Break out ale and meat, and carry it to Kristin's people, carles. And then find sleep, for it may be there will be work for us in the morning, the kind of work we know, eh?"

The men's responses were tinged with eager laughter. They knew Swain in this mood, and they were weary of the long winter months and the security of the land. Trooping out the door, they cracked each other's backs and muttered happily: "Hah, it was coming, young-

ling!" "I saw the look in his eyes." "It is Kristin! She has wearied of Erling's pleasuring." "Ah, but do you mind her after King Inge died? There's a woman, carles." "Aye, aye, this Grim Gusli has the luck." "A sword-wielder, that one, if Kristin chose him."

On the dais, Swain presented Eric and Loge to Grim, drew back his own chair for Kristin. He was eyeing Grim, in a way he had, stealthily alert. He had given the man fair greeting as Kristin's companion, but Swain was one to form his own estimate of a man he might have to stand beside in shield wall. And Grim impressed him doubly—in the first place, for that Kristin had chosen him; in the second, because the stranger had a straight eye and thews that Swain could respect. He was dark, and sturdily slender, his features high-beaked, his hair blue-black as a raven's wing. There was Irish blood in him, Swain guessed, and perhaps that accounted for the fact that, while he bore himself proudly, his eyes were merry and his wide mouth readily smiling.

THE three drank together, Eric serving them as he would have served only Swain and a King's daughter. Kristin's eyes brightened somewhat.

"You would have my tale, Swain," she said. "It is soon told. You know that I must still call Erling Skakki husband. It may be you know, too, that he does not call me wife. Not these several years. Yet am I foul to look upon?"

Swain, who had small use for women since his own had died, caught his breath. There was not a lovelier woman in the north than Kristin.

"If things had been different, Grim would have found me contending for you," he answered. A smile took the edge off his words. "I know how headstrong is Erling. A wise man, and crafty; but he steps without heed of others. Yes, I would say to his face you have been ill used, Kristin. But what has happened? Magnus, your son and Erling's, is King. So much, besides all else, you have done for him, seeing that it was your father's blood led the Jarls and lendermen to accept a child of four."

"You say true," she agreed swiftly. "It was my blood which crowned the child. But having obtained this advantage, Erling preferred to share his bed with four other women." Her face shadowed, then lightened. "I am not one to be jealous of such as they, Swain—of them all, Aasa the Fair merits how they call her. And I would do nothing to harm my child. But Erling was not satisfied so long as I was within reach of Norway. He feared lest I should use my father's name to rally the people to aid me in taking what was my right. He spoke spitefully of me—the more because I, a lonely woman and not unused to being loved, had taken Grim in his place."

Her fingers strayed to Grim's arm. She smiled proudly.

"I know men, Swain. Grim is such a man as you would honor. Or my father, the Jerusalem-farer, who gave you favor."

Swain looked from one to the other of them, his blue eyes, harder than hers, stabbing relentlessly.

"That is to be seen," he said curtly, "but if you say so much for a man I am ready to believe."

"It may be you *shall* see," Kristin returned, her head high as Grim smiled upon her, "although that is not— But my tale is unfinished. It fell out that Erling sought to slay Grim to intrench himself in certain lands in Norway. Forth we had to flee so came we here, Swain, for counsel as well as sanctuary. Else death for Grim and a nunnery for me would have been our portion."

"The Orkneys are not far enough," Swain replied, frowning. "Here, doubt not, you shall have my warding; but it is to be questioned how sure that may be, if Erling raises the Norsefolk and comes after you. For Erling will consider that, with my protection, you will be still more of a menace to him."

KRISTIN slapped her hand upon the high table. "Said I not how Swain would answer, Grim?" she exclaimed.

"You did," he assented, his black eyes twinkling as though it were all a jest of life. "But to say truth, Swain, I did not

need to hear her. I have heard of you, although you have not heard of me, for since I came to man's age I have fared eastward against the Swedes and the Russian folk."

"Poor plunder that way," Swain commented.

"Even so," agreed Grim Gusli. "And so, if Kristin wills, let me take up our tale. For I have an idea of how we may gather happiness, we two." She pressed his arm, and he continued. "First, Swain, we two may not wed in the North, for Erling has set the Bishops against us, and they will not, by any offer, agree to dissolve her ties with him. He would keep her in the banns to make sure she cannot overcome his hold on the child King. We must go farther afield."

He paused, and the twinkle in his eyes became hard and shrewd, so that Swain felt closer to him than before. "It is my thought," he proceeded slowly, "that we must go even so far as Mikklegard, where the Pope of Rome does not rule, and where, if what I hear be true, we may procure the help of the priests to set Kristin free. Then we can marry, and our sons may take their place rightfully, and not as though they were born on the larboard side of the bench. Also, it may be that I can find service with the Greek Emperor's Varangians, and so attain to an estate which will be more fitting to Kristin and our sons. I am not one to be backward in the sword-hewing and the arrow-storm, Swain."

"Humph," growled Swain. His eyes flickered from Eric's to Loge's. They were staring at him with a fixity which brought a grim smile to his lips. "And what would you have of me?"

"Why, this," Grim answered easily. "You have fared to Mikklegard, Swain. We would have your counsel of the seas and lands we must traverse to gain it."

"And that is all?" Swain pressed. "What force have you?"

"One dragon of sixty benches, and six score men as good as I would ask to stand with me."

"So!" Swain drained his horn, at a gulp. "St. Olaf aid me, but you ask little, my friend." Kristin's eyes kindled as he spoke. "It may be that we shall do more for you. You have come in a lucky hour, Kristin. There is a sea-itch in my feet. Even as you came up the hill from the strand we were talking, Eric and Loge and I. For we are for farfaring, we and our men. How say you, if we launched two longships with you?"

"Swain!" cried Kristin.

"It may be I shall be a hindrance to you," Swain warned. "The last time I fared to Mikklegard I had some small dispute with the Emperor Manuel. We may be outfriends, for all I know. But if you would chance it with me, you shall have our company for what it is worth."

Kristin sank back in her seat.

"Now, do I know all will be well with us, Grim," she said. "For there is no man in the North I would rather have beside me in viking faring than Swain Asleif's son." She raised her horn as Eric stooped to fill it. "Swain Jarlmaker! Swain Kingsbane! Little he cares for Jarls and Kings. Ho, carles!" And there were bright tears in her eyes that did not mirror fear. "I see a red seatrack, I see the Norns weaving and the valkyrs ahorse! Whatever betides, we shall know the fever of doing. We shall not bide drearily for the torturers' eye-iron, and the Blood-eagle to our backs. Aye, or a nun's wimple . . . Skoal!"

When Swain returned from lighting Kristin and Gusli to the bower, Eric and Loge were dousing the torches in their sconces and the hall of the skalli resounded with the snoring of the house carles in the wall-bunks. He took his sword, Skullbiter, from where it hung on his chair, spilled whaleoil upon a hone and sat down to whet the blue-gray blade.

"Kristin and the west wind were too much for the anchorstone, Swain," observed the Laplander.

"The wind was enough," Swain said briefly.

"But what of Erling after we have gone?" suggested Eric. "It will not go well with a rough carle like Erling to hear that you are fostering his wife and the man she walks with."

"It may be long before he knows," Swain returned. "So soon as the ale and

water and salt-fish are stored we will shove keels. It will make talk that we are Mikklegard-faring, but who will suffer Erling to blame folk who take advantage of company upon such a venture?"

"But Erling Skakki is the greatest man in the North these days," persisted the forecastle man. "You slight him sorely, Swain. It is not for nothing that a woman like Kristin flees him."

Swain's blade hissed like an adder on the hone.

"Did you ever know me not to take thought of the future?" he answered presently. "By the White Christ and Odin's self, Erling will have his hands full in Norway! It will be enough for him that I am taking Kristin where she cannot make weapon work for him." He slashed a tuft of hair off his wrist with the razorsharp blade. "It is my thought, Bitling, that he will be in my debt. And if he is not, shall I fear him? I have hewed this sword through a king's neck. What is Erling but a Jarl? *Phaugh*, it was Kristin who made him by giving him Magnus for son, with the Jerusalem-farer's blood in his child's veins. Let us not speak of Erling. He is of small account to me."

Loge chuckled. "Heh, heh, Eric," he said. "There will be blood on the sea path because of Kristin. It rouses my heart to hear Odin's name. This Christ men bow to! He is well enough for women and monks, but I would feel better if we sacrificed a horse—oh, an old mare, Swain, if you choose."

Swain cuffed him lightly. "Let be, dwarf," he commanded. "I have given a solemn promise to Father Peter. In my young days—once—but there are dread laws on such things. Think, if you please, and back oars. And do not belittle what is ahead. Eric can tell you. We shall plough seas where all are enemies, and in the end is Mikklegard. And let me tell you, Loge, you have never planned such evil as can the Emperor's folk. I think well of Grim Gusli that he would risk his eyes in their keeping. They worship the White Christ, but that means nothing. Give me an Iceland bareserk before one of the Emperor's eunuchs!"

Eric crossed himself, and for surety made the Sign of the Hammer.

"Mikklegard," he murmured. "I would know fear there, if Swain were not with me. Ho, you Laplanders think well of yourselves. Your warlocks are nothing beside the falseness of the Greeks."

CHAPTER II

KING'S DAUGHTER—SKOAL!

THE Orkneyfolk stood on the strand, and marveled as the benchmen ran the ships off the shingle, calling out to one another how well they were bound, with good store of provisions, and arrows to spare in the lockers, and stones for close-fighting in the ballast, and two sets of sails and spare rigging and the best men in the crews the islands could produce. Father Peter had said mass, as the three dragons put forth, blessing their voyage, but he did not know that two thirds of the men who ducked heads to him were signing the Hammer and not the Cross upon their chests. For that was the spirit of men in those days. They were torn between Paganism and Christianity, and they were never quite sure whether they should trust to the Old Gods, who had carried their fathers to prosperity, or to the White Christ, who had permitted Roman soldiers to nail Him on a cross, in despite of the habit of a real warrior.

The oars bit deep into the foam-crested tops of the green combers, and the midship men swarmed about the masts to raise sail. Kristin, happy beyond most women, stood beside Grim Gusli between the steersmen who manned the larboard and starboard sweeps.

She murmured to him laughingly: "It is well we are not so proud as my father, Grim. Men say he bided weeks for a quartering wind before he would head up for Mikklegard because he wished the Greeks to see the silk with which his sails were lined."

They were standing to the southeastward out of the Pentland Firth when Eric hailed from the forecastle of Swain's dragon, *Farfarer*.

"Two longships, Swain, under oars—a

dragon and a snekke. . . . Ho, they see us. They wear. . . . They are making sail to take our course."

Swain bade the steersmen luff, so that he might see around the great bellying sail. The strange ships were approaching from the northeast.

"They are one and a half to our three," he commented. "Down sail. We'll bide for them."

He turned to hail Kristin's dragon, and her men lowered sail as the *Bokesuden*—which is to say *Barksides*—drifted alongside *Farfarer's* larboard quarter, his own second dragon, *Vatn-Orm* or *Water Serpent*, backing oars to starboard of him.

"Now, who can they be?" queried Loge, atiptoe to see the better from his dwarfish height.

Swain shrugged, and hailed Kristin, who stood on *Bokesuden's* after-deck, mailed like a valkyrie, sword at her side and winged helm crowning her golden hair.

"Would that be Erling, by any chance?"

"Too far for my eyes, Swain," she answered. But Grim Gusli spoke up. "That dragon's prow is loftier than most. It has a look of Erling's pride. Look closely at the sail, Swain. What does it bear?"

Swain frowned into the level sun's glare for several moments.

"I may be wrong," he said finally, "but it seems to me a red hand gripping a sword."

"That is Erling's *Reindeer*," exclaimed Kristin. "None swifter."

"That is of no account," retorted Swain, "unless we see fit to seize her, and put back for a fourth crew. Be at ease, Kristin, and you, Grim, be content to leave the handling of this matter to me. I have had some small traffic with Erling."

"It was a good thought that brought us to the Orkneys," she replied gratefully. "Shall we boun our carles?"

"It will do no harm," Swain assented. "Eric, you heard. Open the arrow chests." And to Horvald Geir's son, *Water Serpent's* farman, a lean, beak-faced, ruddy giant, he hailed likewise: "Boun your carles, Horvald, and stand fast."

Reindeer and her attendant snekke came bouncing over the moderate waves, the light twinkling on helms and spear-points. their bulwarks shieldless.

"Erling was ever a cautious man—for one so bold," Loge remarked drily.

"He still has his head," said Swain. And then all were silent.

Dragon and snekke rounded to in front of the three longships, held in position by half a dozen oars a side, and drifted broadside on to within spear-cast. Erling's stalwart figure was easily recognizable on the after-deck of *Reindeer*. He was a well-made man, but short-necked, and he carried his head a little on one side from an old arrow-wound. His face was ruddy and long, and long, too, was his nose. His blue eyes were as piercing as Swain's. His manner was haughty, and all could see that he was holding his temper on a short leash; but Swain hailed him before he could speak.

"Well met, Erling Skakki! You have grown gray since last we stood in shield wall together. Is it burdensome to be father to a King, and hold Norway in thrall?"

Jarl Erling scowled across the water at Kristin's lovely face, but Swain saw that his men gaped at her with a touch of almost superstitious awe. Herself, she met her husband's glance without fear, even with contempt. Grim Gusli was humorously indifferent, his eyes twinkling as merrily as usual. Erling wrenched his eyes from the pair with an effort.

"So it is you I have to thank for undertaking to return my wife to me, Swain," he answered sourly. "Yes, if I am gray it is as much for her as for Norway."

"You row overfast," interrupted Swain. "I am not returning Kristin to you."

"You said we were well met," Erling reminded him. "I have an account to settle with her—and the wasteling beside her."

"By what I hear, it is she who has an account to settle with you," Swain retorted. "It was you who put her from her bower for a band of chance wenches after she had brought your son the crown of Norway." His features hard-

ened. "I had thought better of you, Erling. I know you for a brave man, but you let pride run away with you as a wolf carries a sheep from the fold. Aye, pride and stupidness." His voice rang like a war-horn. "Do not interrupt me! I have taken her in my ward—also, Grim Gusli, who, to my thinking, is a better man than you. He would make Kristin happy. You would set her in a nunnery."

ERLING'S long face writhed with anger. His fingers plucked at his sword-hilt. He tried to speak, but could not for the passion which choked him.

Swain called to the Jarl's house carles, who crowded the dragon's waist.

"Ho, ravens' meat, would you seek a fairer queen, or a braver, to swing blades for?"

Erling's folk started to grin, but a roar from him set them to shuffling about imaginary duties.

"You do ill to treat me as niddering, Swain," he snarled. "You must be mead-drunk to think that all the Orkneyfolk could save you, if I demand Kristin and Grim. By Olaf's name, I will raise the might of Norway, if I must!"

"You should have brought with you your son's—and Kristin's—might on this venture," Swain retorted coolly. "Ho, carles, out oars! Kristin, hook his forecastle—Horvald, take him astern. Lay our bow against his waist, Eric."

There was a rattle of oars, and before Erling could draw sword his dragon was helpless. The sweat dribbled from under his helmet rim as he fought for self-control. He was no fool, Erling.

"Let be, Swain," he said haughtily. "It will gain you no fresh lands to slay me."

"No?" challenged Swain. "But it is in my mind that I might do much with the Norwayfolk if I held you for hostage. I could foster Magnus as well as you."

Erling swallowed his pride. "What will you have?" he asked. "And remember, I will pay you well for Kristin and Grim. There are reasons—"

"Reasons which concern you, never me," replied Swain. "There is no price you could pay me. Not for all Norway would I sell folk I take in ward. Not for the might of Norway, and a crown for my son, would I cast my wife from her bower. It is in my mind, Erling, that you are, in truth, niddering, for all the rich lands you have gained through Kristin's name, for all the gold armbands I see you wear."

His fierce eyes smote Erling's until the Jarl looked down at the deck, his fingers twitching at his beard.

"In that case, will you have ransom?" he mumbled.

Swain laughed. "And give you a chance to set the Norway folk against me for one who kidnaps the King's father for profit? *I* have learned sense, Erling. No, all I ask of you is for Kristin—and your own honor."

Erling gave him a sly glance. "If it is the divorce she craves, I might—"

Swain laughed again scornfully. "Aye, you would promise her, and trick her into your hands. There are others than your bishops who can suit her will."

"What then?" Erling pressed eagerly.

Swain studied him thoughtfully. "I could slay you where you stand," the Orkneyman remarked, as if to himself. "See you, Loge, here, is the best archer since Einar Tamburskalve. He could drive a shaft through your throat before your men could raise shield for you." Erling stepped backward involuntarily. "Aye, you have had one arrow in the throat," Swain mocked. "Doubt not, Loge's would rive the life from your windpipe. But that is not my intention."

He turned to hail Kristin, standing proudly beside Grim on *Bokesuden's* after-deck.

"Have I your goodwill in what I say, Kristin?" he asked.

Her answer came clearly over the lapping waves.

"We shall tell our sons of it, Swain, Grim and I."

He bowed to her—and Swain bowed seldom to man or woman.

"I ask this of you, Erling Skakki," he said, and for the first time his voice was harsh with menace. "And you will do what I ask or die where you stand. And after, if I must, I will slay all your carles so that no man can say how Erling

died." He paused so long that Erling's sweat commenced to dribble down into his beard.

"Yes? Yes, Swain?" the Jarl prompted.

"Unhelm," commanded Swain. "Bow your head and salute the finest woman you will ever know. Say: 'I hail you, my wife, for loyal and just. I hail you, Kristin King's daughter, King's mother.'"

ERLING'S fair complexion became dark with congested blood. He gulped twice, and thrice. He darted an eye at his house carles, and they looked away from him.

"You ask much of a man whose wife has left him for another," he answered sullenly.

"Must I call you false as well as niddering?" demanded Swain. "All your folk know that you put her from you. Shall I ask them if they do not? What think you the Jerusalem-farer would do, in my place?"

Erling's fingers clenched, and unclenched. He fumbled at his helm, it fell clanging on the deck. He turned toward Kristin, and his voice was thick, but all men heard him say: "I hail you, my wife, for loyal and just. I hail you, Kristin King's daughter, King's mother."

There was no sound, except the whispering of the waves against the ships' sides, and the wind in the rigging. Men looked at one another. Here was a punishment which would be talked of about the skalli tables as long as any there lived, aye, and for generations afterward.

Kristin broke the silence.

"Try to make of Magnus such a man as Swain, Erling," she said. "Be at your ease. I shall not vex your plans. I sail to make my life anew. And illdoer, though you be, I wish you luck for Norway's sake. There is trouble enough in the land without that Grim and I should seek to contrive more."

"Well-spoken," called Swain, and he commenced to drum with his sword-hilt on his shield. And all along the crowded decks men echoed his shield-music. "Skoal," cried Eric Bitling, and the house carles took up his salute. "Skoal, King's daughter, King's mother!"

Erling stood, glowering, so that his own carles, who watched and listened, smiling, dared not carry farther their approval, for the Jarl was known for a hard man, albeit in men's affairs a just one.

It was Swain who put an end to the din. "Out oars," he commanded. "Up sail. Erling. If we have put shame upon you, it was your own doing. I wish you luck, and I do not envy you the task of settling firm a crown on a child's head."

And now, Erling Skakki showed the shrewd courage which had made him the strongest man in the North. He straightened, his features cleared, his eyes met Swain's with a glow of appreciation.

"And I give luck to you, Swain Asleif's son," he called back. "You are one man who has called me niddering. Come to Norway at your pleasure, and judge me then by what I have done. It may be, my son—" he smiled wryly—"and Kristin's, will have need of such as you."

But he did not look again at Kristin, who stood watching him with her arm on Grim Gusli's mailed shoulder, for it was wisely said of Erling Skakki that he could be just with a man, if he must, but he reckoned little of the noblest woman, save for what lands or children he could have from her.

So the ships drifted apart. Erling headed into the Pentland Firth in search of food and water, and Swain's three dragons bore away to the southeast, the hills of Scotland dwindling behind them until there were only the hillocks of Ran's Bath, gray-green and ever changing, for the eager crews to gaze upon. But none aboard knew unhappiness, for it was the habit of the Norsefolk to be most content when the land was beyond their ken.

"Heh, heh," chuckled Loge. "This should be a good faring. We could not have gained more luck, if Swain *had* sacrificed that scrawny old mare in the Houghsness pasture."

CHAPTER III

THE TASTE OF ODIN'S MEAD

ALL shipping fled from the three grim longships, with their shield-hung bulwarks. The men were for an onfall at the Humber's mouth to blood their swords, but Swain would have none of it.

"There is scant plunder to be gained on the eastern shores of England," he told them. "And were we coasting to the westward, I would ask thrice our company to risk a jolt with the men-at-arms and archers their Jarls would bring against us. They are overmuch like ourselves to be easily plundered, the English. By the Hammer, carles, some of you know how their archers shoot with those bows that are helm-high."

Yet he could not resist Kristin when she pleaded, at least, for a glimpse of the fabulous land which had been ruled by the great Canute, her ancestor, and when they came to the Narrow Seas he steered a course which brought them to the verge of the outlying shoals, so that the white cliffs towered above them, and they could see the clustered villages, snugly built, and the turreted castles, and an occasional walled town, with gates closed in token that there was no welcome for such as they.

The wind was offshore, and the men's nostrils quivered at the smells of the gardens and pastures it wafted them. Fishing boats scurried for harborage. At one place, a knot of mounted men in armor rode down to the strand, and steel twinkled in the scrub by a port-gate. "You see?" quoth Swain. "It is not of these folk we shall take pay for our oar-toil."

After they cleared the Narrow Seas, an easterly storm drove them far westward to within sight of the lonely Scillys; but this was a stroke of luck, for it cast in their path a stately buss-ship—the younger men marveled at its two masts and peculiar rig, which enabled it to sail closer to the wind than the longships—bound out from Cornwall for the Italian free cities with a cargo of tin. Again, Swain restrained his wild carles.

"Let be, let be," he bade them. "Why spill blood without need? We lack stowage for all she carries in that pot gut of hers. Leave this to me."

And he compounded with the buss's sullen company for enough of the shiny blocks to replace the ballast-stones under the waist-planking of the three dragons.

With a favoring wind abaft, they regained the Valland coast and bore off to the southward, sometimes inshore, more often out of sight of land—Swain was a man who was not dependent upon a shoreline to know his bearings; he steered by sun, moon and stars, the feel of the wind and currents and a sixth sense which aided him when all else failed. But the ships they encountered were either humble fishing boats or else hugged the shore so close as to be able to flee their approach in creek-mouths or estuaries. By the time the three dragons had passed well south of French Bretland their stores were running low, and Swain gave his assent to a landing.

They beached their keels in a shallow inlet one starlit night, appointed ship-keepers and fared inland, Kristin leading her own company with Grim Gusli, shield on arm, sword on thigh, spear in hand. Barking dogs led them to a collection of hovels too poor to yield even serfs or thralls worth the selling, but from these people Loge, who had the gift of tongues, gained knowledge of a castle a few miles farther on beyond a belt of forest. They took two of the peasants for guides, and pushed forward as fast as they could over a rutty track, hoping to be able to surprise the castle's folk before dawn. In this their luck failed them. They came on the castle at sunrise, as its folk were driving forth the cattle to pasture, and the sight of the mailed Norsemen was sufficient to send the herders running for the gates.

"We might have had worse luck," said Swain, after he had counted the lowing kine. "Here is provision for a rich strand-hewing. We shall not go hungry."

KRISTIN looked up at the castle, which stood on a mound, its circle of walls topped by the thatched roofs of the inner keep and other buildings,

its battlements and turrets already thronged with men whose weapons flashed in the sunlight, and whose derisive shouts were answered by the hoarse threats of the Norsefolk.

"Is there no way we could carry it, Swain?" she asked regretfully.

"If we paid a fair blood-scat, yes," he rejoined.

"There should be goods and treasure worth the taking, within that castle," she pressed.

Swain gave her one of his rare smiles.

"No man who knew him could doubt you for Sigurd's daughter," he said. "But I am not one to pay more than I must. Still—" His eyes shifted to the battlements, swept their contour, raked the approaches. He smote his thigh. "Aye, it might be done," he exclaimed. "Eric!" The little man trotted up to him. "Bid those carles tether the cattle in the wood. Send them and a few more to seek what stores may be outside the castle. Then hew me a tree will be a burden for two score men to swing by its branches."

"Ho, ho," cackled Eric. "Bar the door to a hungry bareserk, and the skalli shakes under his club! But those folk are well-husked, Swain."

"Do as I say, and we shall strip them," Swain answered. "Make a show around the walls, but do not waste an arrow or let a man take hurt."

More he would not say, even to Kristin, except once when Horvald and Grim Gusli begged him to let them try to beat in the castle door under protection of a shield wall. "Bide until night," he advised them. "We are a long way from Mikklegard."

So the hours passed. Eric had discovered several granaries, which he looted thoroughly, and his axemen had felled a sturdy trunk within the forest's borders, and trimmed its limbs to make easy hand-holds. Dusk had fallen when Swain led Kristin and Loge into a grove of pines near where they had been sitting, watching the futile skirmishing of their men in front of the castle.

"Take knives," he bade them, setting the example, "and cut splinters of fat touchwood, such as we use to lay a fire." And when they had collected a heap: "Now, Loge, bind me a few of those slivers to a dozen arrows."

"The thatched roofs," exclaimed Kristin. "I do not wonder men forget their own deeds, and turn to yours when the bragging-cup goes round."

"No, no, Kristin," Swain protested. "Any skald would tell you I had the thought from Harald Hardrade. He took a castle in Sicily, over against Italy, by daubing pitch on the feathers of birds which came from its roofs, and setting them alight, so that they kindled the thatch when they flew back to their nests. But here I see no birds, and arrows will do as well or better. We may be sure where Loge's shafts will strike, and that is more than can be said for birds in flight."

The men became more impatient as the word of Swain's device was passed from lip to lip. They had drunk heavily of the Valland wine, and now they clamored for deeper draughts of the bodn that was Odin's mead. They were bloodthirsty, restless from inactivity.

Swain treated them with firm good humor. "Here is fire," he said. "Hew down a brace or more of the kine, and eat, carles. We must let the Valland folk grow drowsy before we choke them to sleep with wolf Fenri's gag. Eh? A sword quiets all tongues, as wolf Fenri learned."

So he curbed their fierce tempers, and set them to boasting and bragging, one with another, until they were surfeited with meat and wine and talk, and fell over and slept on the ground, which was the end he had sought. He had been careful to keep a score or two of oldsters in control, lest the castle folk should grow bold and venture a sally. But he need not have bothered. The castle folk hoped only that the dreaded Norsemen would weary of their watch and retire. Not a sound had come from the dark circuit of the walls or the buildings within when Swain said to Kristin and Grim, "Rouse your carles. It is time."

THE three ships' companies mustered in a compact column a short arrow-shot from the castle entrance. The stoutest men of Swain's *Farfarer* carried the

tree-trunk Eric had felled. Off to one side stood Loge and a score of other archers, with torches from which to kindle their fire-arrows. A low word from Swain, and the bows twanged. The shafts rose like shooting-stars, and curved down upon the castle. Some struck the roofs, some in courtyards. But more followed them, and presently a rosy gleam flowered above the battlements. Cries and shouts split the night. The flames were spreading. The arrows kept dropping everywhere. Roof after roof caught.

Swain nodded his satisfaction.

"Swords out, carles. We'll push in. You, on the flanks, cover the bearers of the ram with your shields."

The Valland folk were so fearful of their burning roofs, and the arrow hail Loge's archers loosed ruthlessly across the battlements, that they did not hear the clanking march of the column until the butt of the great tree first thudded against their iron-bound doors. A wail rose above the crackling of the fires. But the doors stood secure.

"Harder, carles," growled Swain.

Stones commenced to drop from the walls, and men collapsed in the serried ranks. But the ram never missed a beat. The doors cracked with a whine of drawing bolts. They bulged, gaped and suddenly split apart. And the Norsemen charged into the castle courtyard, with a hoarse clamor of war-cries, their weapons already blood-red in the fire glare. Kristin ran between Swain and Grim, and Eric and Horvald guarded the two leaders' backs.

"Shield to shield!" shouted Swain. "Keep together."

A confused array of folk, armed and half-armed, confronted the invaders. From the buildings under the burning thatch came the frightened wailing of women and children. A knot of men-at-arms, led by a spurred knight in chain-mail, drove through the smoke at the tip of the Norse wedge; but Swain gave the leader his bane by a shrewd slash in the armpit, and the Valland folk split asunder in a panic of half-hearted resistance. Swain plucked the war-horn from his belt and blew a strident blast. He was of no mind to lose more men than he must, simply to give them their glut of killing.

"Hold, carles!" he bellowed. "Hold, Swain's carles! Drink not too deep of Odin's mead. These folk are beaten."

He laid about him with the flat of Skullbiter, and the Norsemen reluctantly stayed their onslaught. In that brief rush they had littered the courtyard with bodies, and all around them the castle's defenders were dropping to their knees or running for shelter from the raiders' merciless steel. The babble of outcries died away until only the roaring of the flames vied with the wailing within doors.

Kristin laughed excitedly. "How did I, Grim?" she exclaimed. "How did I, Swain? See!" She thrust out her dripping blade, clashed it on her dented shield. "Am I fit to stand in shield wall with warriors like you?"

The men chuckled approvingly.

"I would Sigurd might see you," answered Swain. "To think that Erling Skakki would part with your like! But the slaying is finished. Now, for the plunder. We have gained more than meat for a strand-hewing by this night's work."

THE three longships were loaded to the gunwales when they shoved off southwards again, although lighter for a dozen men lost in the bicker at the castle and in making good the company's retreat to the coast. Two more men died in a foray for food in Serkland, but Swain held them lucky to be able to pass through the Norvesund into the Middle Sea without having paid a stiffer price for such rich spoil. He avoided a fight with a fleet of Serkland rovers, and set a course for Palermo in Sicily.

"Why spill blood for what we cannot use?" he said. "In Palermo we will turn our goods into broad gold pieces. We shall need gold in Mikklegard. If we are to do business with the Emperor we cannot harry his farms."

The viking-farers received a warm greeting in Palermo. Swain was known of old to the merchants and nobles, and Sigurd, Kristin's father, had fought beside the great Roger, who had been King

of Sicily before the island went with his daughter to the Emperor of Rome. The island merchants paid with clinking bags of gold for the Norsemen's tin and the plunder of the Valland castle, and the Jarl who ruled for the Emperor offered to buy their service as well; but Swain declined courteously, explaining that they were on a venture of purpose to Mikklegard, and when some of the youngsters grumbled, heady with wealth and luxury they had never known in the bleak North, he dealt out a few buffets with the flat of his hand, and talked to them as a father to sons.

"Men who sail with me do as I bid them," he growled. "Also, I shall not suffer you to make fools of yourselves. You talk like boys who have won a stick battle, and think to fight with spears. Here, in Palermo, there is wealth, but this is a small burg beside Mikklegard, where there are more people within the walls than in the whole of Norway."

From Palermo they sailed through the straits between Sicily and Calabria, and then eastward toward the Grecian Sea. In these waters, out of sight of land, Swain had no objection to looting a gaudy Pisan galley, bound home with a cargo of fine stuffs from Alexandria, in that part of Serkland men called Blaaland where the black folk dwelt.

"I never had friends amongst the Pisans," he said, "and they are more merchants than fighters. We should be niddering to let pass a ship so wastefully painted. Also, they traffic with the heathen, which Father Peter told me was a sin."

So they slew her folk, for not having fought manfully, and set her afire.

In the Greek islands they were beset by a storm which drove them into a harbor Swain could not put name to. The people of the island cast stones at them from slings, and loosed arrows weakly; but Swain forbade his carles to make reply, since these were subjects of the Emperor at Mikklegard. Instead, he bided until night, and then went ashore in a small boat and left a handful of gold pieces upon a stone by the water's edge. In the morning the islanders found these, and brought sheep and corn and wine to the strand, but they made it plain that they would resist an attempt by the Norsemen to land in force.

"Heh," quoth Eric in his dry way, "it is plain to be seen that these folk are more choice of their women than those in the Emperor's town."

"They have little worth the taking in these parts," rejoined Swain, "and if we have not won a bargain with our gold, at least, Bitling, we may fill our bellies, and wait out the storm."

After this they had no misadventures, plying eastwards amongst islands, large and small, purchasing their needs with fair words and gold, until they came to the westward entrance of the Saevidsund, where the waters narrowed between rocky headlands, the one to larboard being the outpost of the lands owning Christianity, and the one to starboard of Asaland, whence came Odin and the Old Gods.

Swain bade them steer close under the starboard headland, and he and Kristin and Grim Gusli and many another of their company did not fail to sign themselves with the Hammer, and pour a tribute into the sea for memory of all that the Old Gods had wrought.

"I say nothing against the White Christ," observed Loge, "but we should do ill not to show respect for the Old Ones in their own place."

Before the end of that day the narrow waters widened into a sea, its shores rimmed with villages and towns so fair and prosperous seeming that the carles drooled in their beards, the more so at sight of the deep-laden busses and dromonds and galleys which plied it in great numbers, without any show of fear of the shield-hung longships.

"Why should they fear us?" Swain replied when Kristin brought *Bokesuden* alongside *Farfarer* to ask him. "There has not been a moment since we sighted those headlands they have not watched us. Look!"

A fast galley came dashing out of the harbor of a castle to larboard, double-banked oars moving with the precision of slave rowers, decks crowded with men in gleaming armor.

A man hailed them from this galley, and Swain—with help from Loge—made shift to satisfy him in the Greek tongue.

The officer presently raised his arm in a gesture of salutation, shouted an order, which was echoed by a blast of trumpets and rolling of drums, and his galley spun on her oars and returned to the castle as fast as she had emerged.

"He will send messengers by land to announce us to the Emperor," Swain said with satisfaction. "All is well—so far. They are rich and proud, these Greeks, but even they do not often receive a King's daughter, who is also a King's mother."

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN HORN

BEFORE them, where the waters of the Saevidsund narrowed again, there was a loom of lofty gray walls, and the blazing sunshine fell on masses of mighty domes and towers and shining buildings which seemed to stretch endlessly into the distance. The Norsemen were awestruck. Palermo was a village beside this vast place. Even Kristin and Grim Gusli were uncomfortably impressed. Only the oldsters, who had journeyed once before with Swain to Mikklegard, laughed indulgently at the gaping mouths of their fellows. But Swain set himself at once to discipline his folk. He maneuvered the longships together, stern to stern, so that all three companies could hear his voice.

"Look you," he said curtly. "There is no city in the world like Mikklegard. You might put Trondhjem or Nidaros in the gardens of the Great Palace—which is but one of many—and there would be room to spare for shipyards and warehouses. But I would not have any of you show awe or fear at its riches or the miracles you behold, for that way you would cheapen yourselves with the Greeks, who would account you ignorant folk of no worth."

He addressed himself directly to Kristin.

"I am reminded of a story of Sigurd, your father. When he made his entry into the city he bade his carles shoe his horse with gold, and one shoe not too securely. In the midst of the city his horse cast this shoe, but he rode on as if nothing had happened, and one of his men kicked the shoe into the gutter. The Greeks thought much of this because they are like all people who have much gold in that they have respect for its worth. They said to one another: 'Surely, this is a great and wealthy King. He must have power in the North.' Now, I would not have you waste our gold, for we come as followers of Sigurd's daughter, and the older Greeks will remember him; but I would have you put on your best armor and your Valland cloaks, and each comb out his beard and hair."

He paused, eyeing Kristin thoughtfully.

"And you, King's daughter, I counsel you to put on your armor, too, for the Greeks have never seen a warrior Queen; but instead of your helm wear the crown we had made for you in Palermo. And be of good heart, all of you. We Norsefolk have high repute in Mikklegard. Remember, we shall find sisters' and brothers' sons, and old shipmates amongst the Varangians. For the rest, leave it to me."

All the Norsefolk did as Swain bade, for they had confidence in his wit. They hammered their sheathed swords on shields as the midship men hoisted sail and the dragons stood into the narrow waters, under the gray walls to larboard, which were thronged with curious people, fantastically dressed in garments of every color. But they had difficulty in keeping their faces blank at sight of the marvelous spectacle which unfolded for them, hour after hour, and all who could clustered around Swain or Eric, asking eager questions.

"These sea-walls are nothing," Swain explained. "On the landside there are three, one behind the other, with a ditch of water in which we could float *Farfarer*, and they top our masthead by another length. Those engines on the towers? Carles, they cast stones one of which would sink us, and javelins as thick as a housebeam. No enemy has ever taken this city, albeit many have tried. Now we come to the Palace gardens, which stretch to the point where the Golden Horn makes in."

A bedlam of sound echoed over the

water, hoarse and menacing. The younger men could not help crossing themselves—or signing the Hammer. Swain smiled indulgently.

"Those must be certain of the Emperor's wild beasts," he explained. "They are called lions, and they come from Blaaland. He keeps them in cages, but sometimes they fight with other beasts in the Hippodrome to amuse the Greeks." He stroked his beard, regarding his listeners appraisingly. "You must not show surprise when you are taken to see those creatures," he continued. "They are stranger than aught else in the city. Some of them are as large as a small hut, and have noses which hang before them to the ground. And there is another which has a neck as tall as a small snekke's mast. And still a third which is like a huge pig, with horns on top of its snout. One of the games of the Greeks is to set it to fight with lions. But to your posts now, carles! Here comes one to welcome us."

A police galley shot around the fortifications at the tip of the Palace gardens, and ranged alongside *Farfarer*. Beside the group of officers on its after-deck stood a yellow-haired giant in a red cloak and winged gilt helmet. Swain started at seeing him. "Ho, Rolf Arne's son," he hailed. "Is it you, in truth?"

"Your sight is as good as your memory, Swain," replied the yellow-haired giant. "The Emperor sent me with the Prefect of the Port to greet you, and make sure there was no misunderstanding. Follow us. All is made ready for you in the city. The Emperor is pleased that the Jerusalem-farer's daughter should come to visit him." And then he grinned. "And he is also glad to be able to have some talk with you, Swain."

Swain quirked up his eyebrows inquiringly, looking from Rolf to the Greek officers beside him. Rolf shook his head.

"I cannot say more," he replied, "but if your wit is as fast as used to be, why, you have nothing to fear, Swain."

THE Golden Horn opened before them, a long, watery corridor, rimmed by the same gray walls they had been traversing in the Saevidsund. To larboard loomed the bulk of the city, to starboard a smaller quarter, where, Swain said, the outland folk dwelt, folk of all the races of the world, brown, black and yellow as well as white. The walls, in turn, were fronted by a constant procession of wharves, which reached out into the channel of the harbor like fingers clutching at the vessels, which blurred the shoreward scenes with the tangles of their cordage and their myriad masts and sails.

As the proud longships and their attendant galley approached, a trumpet blew from a tower, and a chain as bulky as a man's body was lowered into the water behind them with a splash which tossed the ships about, like logs in a spring tide.

The longships followed the police galley up the Golden Horn to a pier where the harbor walls joined the land walls, and the Norsefolk clucked in their beards at the first glimpse of the gigantic fortifications, which had thrown back the attacks of a score of peoples as valiant as themselves.

Swain told off a few of the older men for ship-keepers, and climbed to the pier to join Kristin and Grim Gusli. They were staring at the crowds under the walls and a group of officers in gold and silver armor, who stood at the pierhead, backed by two companies of horsemen, one in complete armor, horses and riders; the other composed of squat, swart, slant-eyed men, in fur caps, with short bows, crooked-bladed swords and round shields of brass-studded horsehide.

"It seems we are honored," Swain remarked, "or, at least, you, Kristin. The Emperor has sent the cataphracti and Hunnish archers of the Imperial Guard to meet us."

And as the brilliant-armored group of officers advanced, led by a giant who topped Rolf Arne's son by a head: "And may Odin watch over us, that great carle with Rolf, in the purple cloak, is of the Emperor's family! Aye, they have not forgotten your father, the Jerusalem-farer."

Rolf left his band midway of the pier, and Swain went to meet him between the two groups. The giant Greek, Swain perceived, could not take his eyes off

Kristin's tall, skirted figure, her body molded perfectly in its corselet of scale-armor, raven-blazoned shield on her left arm, her golden hair floating free under the crown which encircled her queenly brow. A handsome carle, aye, noble in manner, but with a queer, straining look in his face. Too handsome, Swain decided. Yet the biggest man he had ever beheld, with the seeming of a warrior.

"God save you, Rolf," said Swain. "You are not grown less in bulk for lack of meat and wine."

"I might say the same to you," returned Rolf, as they hand-fasted. "But what? Were those Christian words you spoke?"

"This is not a heathen country," Swain answered. "How do we stand here in our welcome?"

"Well enough," said Rolf. "It is not everyone the Emperor sends his brother, the Caesar Alexius, to meet without the gates." He lowered his voice. "To say truth, Swain, the Emperor is glad of a diversion for his folk, who are like children and complain if they do not have a different spectacle once in so often. Also, there is a warfaring expedition soon against the heathen beyond the Danube, and we can use a few Norsemen more in the Guard. But you and I will have serious speech at another hour. Now, I must make known you all, one to another."

He presented Swain to the Caesar and the other Greeks, and Swain was dumbfounded when Alexius spoke to him in Norse.

"You wonder that I should speak your far tongue?" Alexius said in an oddly gentle voice for such a giant. "I have been a wanderer in many lands, Swain, and I have served often with our Varangians. Eh, Rolf?"

Then Swain conducted the Greeks to Kristin, and named them to her, with help from the Caesar and Rolf, also to Grim and Eric Bitling, Horvald and a few more. But Alexius was only polite to the men. He still could not take his eyes off Kristin's face. She blushed when he said, in his curiously soft, warm tones: "Ah, Exalted One, many times have I wished to visit your Northland. At last, I know why! Surely, there is not another lady so beautiful in all of Christendom. I see you are a sword-wearer. I would that you might do battle with me that I might suffer the bliss of perishing beneath your blade."

Swain glanced sideways at Grim Gusli, one of whose twinkling eyes drooped slightly in acknowledgment. But Kristin, despite her blush, answered the Caesar calmly and level-eyed.

"I thank you, Lord. But I do battle with my enemies, not my friends."

"A perfect answer," murmured Alexius, stooping to kiss her hand. "Staying your sword, you slay me with your tongue."

PRESENTLY, the two companies were mounted on horses waiting at the pierhead, and a procession was formed. First, rode the cataphracti with a band of trumpeters and drummers, after them Kristin and the Caesar Alexius, then Swain and Grim, with Rolf, at the head of the Caesar's staff. Eric, Loge and Horvald led the compact body of the Norsemen on foot, and the Hunnish archers closed the procession.

They traversed a bridge over the harbor end of the moat, and turned left into a road which skirted the stupendous bulk of the landwalls, as thronged with curious onlookers as the seawalls, except for the double tier of towers, each topped by glittering knots of guards, grouped around the mysterious shapes of the war-engines, which lifted their ponderous arms above the battlements with a sinister hint of powers beyond the Norsemen's ken. The walls continued on as far as they could see, undulating with the contour of the ground; first, the broad moat with its sloping approach; second, the outer wall, man-high; third, a second barrier lofty as the spire of St. Olaf's church in Nidaros; fourth, the massive bulk of the inner wall, with its great towers, each a fortress, lifting even higher.

"A score of times a tall man's height!" the carles muttered to each other. "Surely, the Old Gods laid those stones."

Swain scowled at Rolf, gesturing to the escort troops. "We are well-guarded," he said.

Rolf laughed. "You are too suspicious, old steel-biter," he returned. "These fellows are no more than a tribute to Kristin. No, you have come in a good hour —providing you can make him forget your last leave-taking with him."

"Humph," growled Swain. "Who is this Alexius?" He motioned to Grim Gusli, riding silent but attentive on Rolf's other side. "Kristin is Grim's woman. One reason for our coming to Mikklegard is to buy a divorce for her from Erling Skakki, who has treated her ill and put her from him."

"Whoever he is, you may leave him safely to Kristin to handle as pleases her," Grim interposed, his perpetual twinkle taking the edge off his words.

Rolf turned in saddle, and stared at Grim with interest.

"Now, that is well-spoken," he applauded. "But you will be wise, Grim, if you and Swain take heed to Alexius. I have known many evil men since I came to Mikklegard, for there is no such evil in the North as is common here. But I have never known one so evil as the Caesar. Soft-tongued—and hard of heart. Choice of food and drink—but depraved. A brave man, skilful with weapons—but always a loser of battles. Learned, shrewd in counsel—yet no man trusts him. No, not even his brother the Emperor."

"Why does the Emperor let him live?" demanded Swain.

Rolf shrugged. "The devil is in the rogue," he answered. "Men say he has the evil eye. He has spent years in exile and in prison. He sold two armies to the Serkland folk. He sold a city and a province to the heathen beyond the Danube. But whenever the Emperor punishes him, he makes a good end for himself by talking Manuel into forgiving him. So I say to you and Grim, watch him closely. Women are his weakness—aye, and he is theirs."

"I will watch him," Swain said.

THE column topped a rise, and swung left toward a gateway which reared its bulk above the loftiest towers of the inner wall.

"The Golden Gate," Swain exclaimed involuntarily. "I see that, indeed, the Emperor does honor to Kristin."

"She enters as becomes a Queen," Rolf answered with a smile. "But then, Swain, the Emperor honors anyone who has you for sponsor."

"So?" queried Swain.

The gatekeepers ran to unhook the golden chain which barred the echoing cavern of the central archway. A half-century of Isaurian spearmen came to attention, their officer rendering the old, stately Roman salute as Kristin and Alexius passed in. The column emerged from the gate into the brilliant sunlight and the babbling, colorful splendor of the Mesé, the city's principal street, leading through the markets, which were the heart of its life, to the Great Palace sprawled beside the waters of the Saevidsund. At the sound of the martial music, people poured from the shops lining the colonnaded sidewalks to add their numbers to the street throngs.

The Norsemen stared with ill concealed amazement at Slavs in tight linen trousers; Greek mountaineers in short, fluted skirts; Serkland folk in flowing robes and turbans; Persians in high peaked hats; plump, stave-bearing eunuchs shepherding beautiful blond Georgian. Circassian and Island women; black men from Blaaland, carrying heavy burdens on their naked shoulders, gaped at Kristin's mailed figure, her honey-gold hair rippling down upon her saddle-cloth.

Mail carriers trotted by in the gutter, their pouches heavy with dispatches and letters for the distant Danube and Adriatic provinces. A procession of monks paced across the Mesé, voices booming a solemn accompaniment to clashing cymbals and strumming cithara, clouds of incense wreathing their bearded faces. Racing drivers from the Hippodrome stables, in blue and green liveries, jested and laid bets on the stature of different Norsemen. But the Norsemen paid no more attention to such incidents than they did to the domed churches, the ponderous magnificence of public baths or the city-dwellers who leaned out of windows, five or six stories overhead, to peer down at the stalwart strangers. The Norsemen had eyes only for the women

on the curbs, who reached out to stroke their flowing hair and beards and called bold greetings or invitations to them. They were shocked and fascinated.

The street throngs swelled and became more vociferously admiring as the column traversed the Forum of Arcadius. By the time it had reached the Forum of Constantine, the center of the city's business district, cohorts of police were required to force a passage, and then only by dint of shoving a barrier of staves against the bystanders' bellies.

"The Emperor will be toasted deep tonight," commented Rolf. "He has given the citizens their best show since the last triumph, which was too long past for his own popularity."

They were entering the Forum of Theodosius, and Swain raised his arm in a gesture of instinctive respect towards the pillared majesty of the Capitol, the civic center of the Eastern Rome. Statues of togaed statesmen and armored Emperors glared down upon the Norsemen with blind eyes which belied their proud mien.

"I cannot understand these Greeks," he said. "They have such a mighty past. They are so wise. And yet"—he snapped his fingers—"they are as feather-light as green maids. I do not think your Empire will last overlong, Rolf."

"It will last my time," parried the Varangian. "But I have felt as you, Swain. They do not deserve their power." He sighed. "I would give half the gold in my chest for a breath of snow-wind off the Nidaros hills or to see the smoke over Hekla jokul—I fared for Iceland once in my youth. But what is that to you who have seen Furdurstrandi?" He straightened in saddle, and bellowed an order in Norse over his shoulder. "Firm ranks, Swain's carles! Shields level, eyes front!" He lowered his voice apologetically to Swain: "Your pardon, old friend. We are entering the Augustaion. I want your folk to impress my own wineskins at the Chalcé Gate. They are soft for lack of fighting. Manuel spoils them—and by Olaf's name, so do the accursed women of the Greeks! Women and wine, they will founder the best viking who ever stood in shield wall, Swain."

"Speak for your own carles," growled Swain.

THE broad expanse of the Augustaion opened before them, in its midst the equestrian bronze statue of the Emperor Justinian and the Milion, the monument from which were measured all distances by stadia in the Empire, north, south, east and west, even though many of the provinces listed on its sides had been lost to barbarian enemies, as Sicily and Southern Italy to Norman cousins of the Norsemen, Carthage and Alexandria to the paynim heathen along with the lands beyond Jerusalem.

On the south side of the forum the matchless glory of Hagia Sophia piled dome on dome to a soaring peak of aspiration beneath a golden cross. The porticos of the Senate House bordered the eastern side. Westward, the mass of the Hippodrome's walls, dotted with memorial statues, dominated the solid dignity of the Law Courts, the steps of their portico aswarm with lawyers whose togas aped the appearance of their predecessors of the Elder Rome. Southward stood the Chalcé Gate of the Imperial Palace, the roofs of its innumerable buildings glittering with sheathings of gold, silver and bronze in the midst of groves of trees and acres of gardens and shrubberies. The Palace buildings were in three main groups, Swain knew of old: the Sacred Palace, the Palace of Chalcé before them, with the reception rooms and halls of audience; and the Palace of Daphne giving upon the Imperial Tribune of the Hippodrome. Beyond the Daphne was the independent Palace of the Bucoleon, a part of the ancient Imperial group, but outside its cincture of walls.

Groups of tall warriors in winged gilt helmets and scale-mail, long scarlet cloaks draped on their shoulders, were clustered about the Chalcé Gate. No need for Swain's curious carles to ask who they were as they raised long-hafted battle-axes in salute with a thunderous "Skoal!" Some of them called greetings, friendly or bawdy, to men they recognized in the column—"Ho, Borge, what of that wench in Hedda's tavern by Sta-

vanger strand?" "By holy Olaf's beard, yonder is Eric Bitling, still without his growth!" They swarmed around as the mounted folk yielded their horses to palace grooms, eager for a close look at Kristin, a word with Swain—"A proper daughter for the Jerusalem-farer!" "Swain, Swain! Do you remember Arnulf was with you in Ireland?"

Rolf waved them back. "Peace, guzzlers," he commanded. "The Emperor awaits us. You shall have time soon to pass the bragging-cup and compare deeds. Let us through."

"And yourself," pressed the Emperor. "Have you no amends to make to me, Swain?"

Even Kristin and Grim Gusli were awed by the wonders which awaited them, and as for the carles in their train, these were glad of their beards to cover gaping jaws. Court after court, hall after hall, the column traversed, between lines of courtiers in shimmering garments, bodies of the Varangians, soldiers of the Imperial Household in plate armor from head to toe, who scowled at the Norsemen down their beaked noses. In one hall they came upon a golden lion, which suddenly jerked up its head and bellowed a lifelike roar which drew an involuntary gasp from Kristin. On the porch of the Emperor's hall of audience, a tree of silver foliage, its branches laden with a multitude of gemmed birds, as abruptly gave voice to a chorus of twittering notes. Within the portals, two gigantic brazen figures brandished spears in salute as the strangers entered. And there, before them, thirty paces distant, sat the Emperor of the Eastern Rome, himself a giant, like his brother who conducted the visitors, behind him grouped a half-circle of senatorial counselors in togas, and military commanders in the garb of the innumerable races which composed his army.

All the majesty and might of fifteen hundred years were centered in Manuel's person, but Kristin, meeting the arrogance of his scrutiny, was pleasantly

aware that Swain, beside her, had also met the Imperial gaze with a calm indifference which encouraged her to lift her chin with equal hauteur. So, side by side, and as if they were not accompanied by Alexius, Rolf, Grim and the others, these two paced up the length of the hall to the accompaniment of a murmur of voices and the sturdy footfalls of the Norsemen at their backs.

CHAPTER V

EMPEROR OF THE EAST

MANUEL, surveying Kristin's mailed beauty and her stalwart attendants, smiled with a sudden, tight-lipped satisfaction. Swain, secretly amused, saw that the Emperor approved his guest, as the Orkneyman had expected he would, for Manuel, with his faults of pride and intolerance, had an instinctive understanding of all things brave, wise and beautiful.

"A fair greeting, Queen Kristin," the Emperor boomed in the broken Norse speech he had learned from the Varangians, who guarded his bedroom's door and the tent in which he slept in the field. "You are well attended. But you are thrice welcome—once for your valiant father's sake, once for yourself in so honoring us, once—" he paused, and his narrowed eyes met Swain's—"for securing us a second opportunity to speak with Swain, who, to say truth, once left us hastily and without the courtesy of farewell."

"I thank Your Splendor," Kristin answered evenly. "As for Swain, I doubt not he will speak rightly for himself."

"For that reason am I come to Constantinople, Emperor Manuel," said Swain. "The more promptly, perhaps, because Queen Kristin sought my guidance on the way. But in any case I should have come to make certain of your friendship and understanding. I left, as you will remember, in pursuit of my enemy, Olvir Rosta."

The Emperor frowned slightly, and the people in the hall, soldiers and officers of state, priests and eunuchs and women all stared in surprise at the Orkneyman's bold and forthright manner.

"But that was years since," objected Manuel. "You have long delayed in explanation to us. Have you slain him at last?" The Emperor leaned forward in his chair, the interest of a warrior in his face.

"I have followed him far beyond the end of the world, as your people know it, Emperor," Swain answered. "To the world beyond the Western Ocean, beyond Furdurstrandi, the Long and Wonderful Beaches, aye, into the land of the Red People and the forests that stretch as far as time."

The Emperor sank back petulantly. "But you have not slain him?"

"I shall slay him in the moment appointed," Swain said placidly. "In the meantime, I am come to Mikklegard to make known to you Queen Kristin, who is my ward, seeing that her father was my King and friend—also, your ally. With her she brings Grim Gusli, a stout sword-wielder, who commands her house carles and would serve you."

"And yourself?" pressed Manuel. "Have you no amends to make to me, Swain?"

"Must there be talk of amends between two men such as you and I, Lord of Rome?" Swain countered, smiling frostily. "It is in my mind that I fought a good fight for your pleasure with Olvir Rosta, here in your Hippodrome. And if things are not changed more than my memory reckons you should have use for one who can serve you honestly with sword and wit—as can I."

The Emperor frowned down at him, then burst into a bellow of laughter. The tension in the hall eased into a subdued whisper of voices. Steel tinkled again as men moved; the women's rainbow-hued garments rustled.

"By the Eternal Ones, you are still the same Swain," boomed Manuel. "Yes, I can always employ such men as you, and those you trust. You shall be my guests, all of you. The Palace of the Bucoleon has been set aside for Queen Kristin and your people. Present me your officers. There are war-clouds in the north. My Varangians need recruits. Aye, you are come in a good hour, my stiff-necked friend."

Alexius clanked forward and bade eunuchs place a chair for Kristin, a step lower than the Emperor's throne. The Caesar was a shade officious, Swain thought. He would rather that the Queen should stand rather than accept a depreciation of dignity; but he was anxious to make known Grim and the others to the Emperor, so he offered no protest. The Emperor, as usual, had veered from a capricious mood of dignity to one of warrior friendliness. He made much of the Norsemen, inquired details of their voyage hence, of their connections with members of his Guards, asked Swain to outline the story of his ventures in the intervening years.

Swain was pleased to see that the Emperor had taken a fancy to Grim. And ever and again Manuel's eye swerved to Kristin's gracious face above which Alexius bent with flattering interest. There was a hint of speculation in Manuel's scrutiny of his brother which Swain could not fathom at the moment. They were a strange pair, these two, Swain mused, jealous, unstable, ever bent on devices to their own advantage; soldiers who fought as often with intrigue as with weapons. He was relieved when the audience was ended, and he might step to Kristin's side to escort her to the quarters assigned them. Alexius led the way, preceded by stave-tapping eunuchs in absurd, tall caps and billowing skirts.

"How was it?" she whispered eagerly in Norse. "Does he favor us? Grim—"

"All goes well," Swain told her with a gentleness rare to him. "Grim shall go far. And you—well, my wardling, if it were not for him you might look to another Queen's throne in the East."

THAT night the Great Palace was loud with gayety. The Varangians feasted the newcomers from the North, and the Emperor gave a banquet for Swain and Kristin and their officers. Swain sat at Manuel's left hand, Kristin at his right with Alexius beside her. The Caesar was devoted in his attentions, as was the Emperor, and Swain, regarding the luxury of their surroundings with veiled distaste, reflected grimly that Erling Skakki would have writhed with resentment to behold the popularity of the woman he had discarded.

Grim, sitting at another table with Rolf and the commanders of the various Imperial Guard regiments, was scarcely less favored, and Swain chuckled in his beard to perceive the lightning glances the pair interchanged — particularly, when the languorous Greek women of the court bent their proud heads to catch the Norseman's lightest word. He could not have wished things to go better.

But even so, he was surprised to be summoned to follow the Imperial party as Manuel left the table. Nothing was said until they had reached the Emperor's private pavilion, remote in the gardens above the dark waters of the Bosphorus. The household officers were dismissed, only Rolf remaining. The Emperor flung himself into a chair, and motioned the Norsemen to be seated.

"Be at ease, my friends," he said with the geniality he reserved for his Varangians. "Swain, I have had talk with Rolf. He has told me how matters stand between the Queen and Grim. Grim pleases me. I can make use of him, and she is a relief from the harem-bred women we raise here in Constantinople. I shall give orders to the Patriarch in the morning. Kristin's divorce suit shall go forward. No thanks—" as Swain started to speak—"this is part of the price I pay for favors I seek of you."

"But thanks I must offer, Ruler of Rome," Swain insisted. "If not for myself, then for Kristin and Grim, and Kristin's father. As for what you seek, when you speak to me as now—one man to another—it would be difficult to deny it."

The Emperor smiled and drew toward him a map drawn on a broad parchment.

"As I have said, there is trouble in the North. The King of Hungary and the Princes of Gardariki have bribed the Patzinaks to cross the Danube and harry our lands. I sent my brother, the Caesar, to repel them some months since." He shrugged, scowling moodily. "He failed. A good fighter, but he always fails. Perhaps it is for gold. I do not know. But I tell you what all know in Constantinople, Swain, when I say

that wherever I send him—against the Armenians, the Saracens, the Hungarians, the Slavs—he fails. His armies melt away. Rolf knows."

The commander of the Varangians nodded assent. "Indeed it would seem the Caesar has ill-luck," he added, half-humorously. "Yet he never lacks for funds."

"He is my father's son," growled Manuel. "I have exiled him, imprisoned him. My spies say he plots against me. Some day I may blind him, put him in a monastery. If I listened to my counsellors, I would have done it before this. Well, we shall see. But you are come in a good hour, Swain. I must lead the army against the Patzinaks. I must have with me a sufficient Guard of my Varangians for the last shock of battle. That means I must have Rolf and other good men at my back. And I must have one I can trust beyond my Greeks to hold Constantinople behind me, and keep watch on the Caesar. It is my thought that that shall be your duty."

His eyes flicked warily over Swain's face.

"Am I become too old for battle?" the Orkneyman countered.

"Too wise to waste on a battle which will earn us scant glory," Manuel rejoined. "I would not go, myself, but that my best commanders are guarding the Saracen and Armenian marches. But it is not only for my own sake that I would leave you in Constantinople. I can read my brother when he casts his eyes upon a woman. He has looked on Kristin, and found her desirable. For that reason, it is likely that he will not find time for stirring trouble with the factions in the city; but I would not leave her unwarded, and there is none so wily as you, Swain, at checkmating his kind."

"So," grunted Swain. "She is to be the bait to keep Alexius in play."

"We use her for bait," corrected the Emperor, "but it will be you who keep him in play."

Swain, glancing over Manuel's head, caught Rolf's nod of approval.

"It was not for this I came to Constantinople, Emperor Manuel," he answered grudgingly; "but you do me a favor, and you talk to me sensibly. I shall not say no to what you ask."

"Kristin's pleasure is not the price of what you do for me," retorted the Emperor. He stripped a signet-ring from his finger. "Here! Let this be an earnest of my debt. You will find that all doors open to it, and all men bow the forehead when it is shown. By rescript tomorrow you shall be named Governor of the Palace in our absence. The Redeemer walk with you."

Swain bowed his own head for the first time as he slipped on the ring.

"Spoken like an Emperor, Ruler of Rome," he exclaimed. "Doubt not your Constantinople shall be safe as Kristin."

KRISTIN was proud that Grim had won the Emperor's confidence, but she was all for riding forth with him and taking her place in the Varangians' shield wall, until Swain explained to her that she must bide in the city to press her suit for divorce with the Patriarch. "And so you shall be free to wed him when he returns," the Orkneyman concluded.

This satisfied her, and she was content to ride in the Emperor's train with Swain, Alexius, Eric Bitling and Loge, and a handful of the older Varangians, who were left to keep the Palace, to the fields beyond the walls where the army was reviewed as it took up the march for the frontier. She had never seen anything like this spectacle, and it stirred her, as it did not Swain, whose saturnine humor was tickled by the sparsity of Greeks in the long columns of cataphracti and horse archers, armored infantry and light troops, Tartars, Huns, Slavs, Armenians, Capadocians, Isuarian mountaineers, Ghegs, Syrians, Island slingers, Saracen mercenaries, Frankish knights and Norsemen, with here and there the Eagles of a Legion which had fought at the Trebia, at Philippi, in Britain on the Wall, or at Adrianople; legions which had all but forgotten the glories of their pasts, marching quick-footed in a mockery of the old Roman pace behind the outlandish music of kettledrums and cymbals, and the horse-tail standards of barbarian cohorts their forefathers had scorned.

Swain knew nothing of the Legions,

and cared less for them, save that they were spindling men, who might be relied upon to leave the issue of battle to the Emperor's valiant mercenaries—especially, the Varangians.

"It is the Red Cloaks, who always make the final push," he told her. "Your father knew it. We all know it, as does the Emperor. He pays us well for it. This campaign should bring our carles the equal of a Polota-svarv, which is the Varangians' right to the plunder of the Palace when an Emperor dies. Heh, Grim will be a rich man soon. You should bear him many sons."

"I shall," Kristin answered proudly.

CHAPTER VI

THE VANISHED QUEEN

THEY settled themselves easily in the unwonted luxury of the vast range of buildings assigned to them. Swain chafed secretly, grumbling only to Eric of his enforced idleness, fussing about Kristin's business with the Patriarch's people through the medium of a Genoese merchant, who had traded to Trondhjem. But Kristin found much to amuse her. She had a staff of tiring women at her disposal, with whom she talked by means of the wife of one of the older Varangians.

Alexius made much of her, and was constantly arranging outings for her diversion, for many of the more effeminate nobles had ignored the Emperor's campaign, preferring the excitement of the races in the Hippodrome, which had to be continued to entertain the city's restless population, and the endless routine of the shadow court maintained in Manuel's absence. There were hawking parties in the countryside, visits to outlying palaces, excursions by boat to the Sweet Waters of Asia. A beautiful woman was never at a loss for amusement in Constantinople. And Kristin was not only beautiful, but popular.

Swain and Eric and Loge, on the contrary, spent their spare time with the mariners along the Golden Horn, gossiping of far places; reminiscing of old wars with the few Varangians who hung about the Chalcé Gate; or inspecting the colossal fortifications and the mighty engines on the battlements.

So the days passed, and dragged into weeks. The army, couriers reported, had passed the Danube. The Patzinaks were gathering in its path. Soon there would be a battle. Meantime, Swain's Genoese adviser was making progress with the Patriarch's prothonotaries. Kristin's divorce might be expected any day. To tell the truth, the Patriarch was pleased to have a communicant of the heretic Western Church appeal for his judgment. It was a triumph for the Eastern Church. Synods would debate the case. It might be expected to create echoes of dissension in Jerusalem and Rome.

Alexius was faultless in his behavior. He treated Kristin with the respectful admiration of a man who might justly feel himself her equal in birth and rank. She liked him. He was gay and unpresuming. He told fascinating stories of adventure, hinted sometimes that his brother was not unreasonably jealous of his prowess in foreign countries. She was impatient of the contrary versions of these stories which the Varangians told Swain. "He is a man such as you or my father should admire," she exclaimed. "Except you, Swain, I know none who has ventured so far afield."

"It may be," Swain admitted, "but I smell brimstone in his pocket. He is of Hecla's brood. Aye, by the Hammer, so he is!"

Toward Swain the Caesar conducted himself with the bluff friendliness of a warrior, who felt that he could ignore the privileges of his Imperial rank in association with a comrade of the Orkneyman's prowess. There were times when Swain felt almost ashamed of his doubts, and grumbled to Eric and Loge of his position. "Let the carle but do something, and I will hew him down. By Thor, I have hewn down better men! But it passes bearing that he should treat me so gently while I must spy upon him in his brother's place."

Eric and Loge were troubled by no such misgivings, for they did not share Alexius' intimacy, and were saturated with the blunt gossip of the Varangians.

"When men talk of another like maid-

ens weaving by the women's door you may be sure there are embers under the ashes," Loge said. "But he can do nothing. All our carles are watching him, and keep watch upon him, too, through their Palace women. Let him but try a fall, Swain, and we will truss him tight."

Yet even so, Swain was not surprised that it should be Alexius, himself, who brought word that Kristin had disappeared from the palace and been absent since nightfall. The Caesar stalked in upon the Orkneyman as he sat talking with a group of shipmasters in a wineshop by the Golden Horn. Alexius' handsome features were taut with anguish, and his deep voice quivered with anxiety.

"Where is the Queen Kristin, Swain?" he exclaimed.

"Why, in her bower, I suppose," Swain returned.

"Not so! She went forth at nooning, alone with her Norse tiring woman, and in haste. None has seen her since."

Swain regarded him thoughtfully. "It may be she is with friends," he suggested.

"I have inquired wherever she might have gone. None has seen her. Nor can the police find track of her."

Swain shook his head. "I see not who could wish her evil." His manner evinced a discouraged bewilderment which amazed Eric Bitling and Loge, who were with him. "Here in Mikklegard the stones do not carry footsteps as do Norse earth and snow. We must put our wits to this. Our idleness is ended. By the Old Gods, what will Grim say to us?"

"I have horses waiting," urged Alexius. "Let us ride—and search. The Emperor will take it ill if harm should have befallen her."

"Aye, we must search," Swain agreed heavily. "But I know not which way to turn, Caesar. You must guide us."

And again, Eric and Loge marveled at his lack of fire. The giant figure of Alexius loomed larger in the lamplight, taking on added assurance.

"Of course," he answered. "Who but I should guide you? Be of courage, my friend. We shall find her."

IT was towards morning when at last Swain sat alone in his chamber in the Bucoleon with Eric and Loge. With the help of their friends amongst the Varangians, they had questioned the myriad inmates of the Great Palace. They had been impressed by the startled honesty of the Prefect of the City. They had searched the brothels, the slave marts, the caravanserais, every nook and cranny of the fourteen quarters within the walls. But not a trace had they found of Kristin. And nobody had been more persistent than Alexius, who had not hesitated to demand entrance to the palaces of the nobles Kristin was known to have visited.

"If only I had not chosen the day to hunt in the Hebdomen preserves," he had groaned as he left Swain's room. "I could curse the bear they loosed for me!"

Eric and Loge stared curiously at Swain, slumped down in his chair in an attitude of dejection.

"There is no doubt of his hunting," Loge growled. "Erland Skule's son swears to that."

Eric leaped to his feet. "What maggot gnaws at your brain?" he shouted at Swain. "Are you niddering? That wolf tells a whole tale, but it is false, and you know it. Kristin is not a woman to disappear like a witch in one of Loge's tales."

Swain walked over to the door, opened it and peered into the corridor.

"Well said, little man," he replied, closing the door behind him. "There is but one man in Mikklegard who had reason for Kristin to disappear. Yet it would be ill to let him know that we suspect him." The Orkneyman was again his usual self. His beard bristled; his eyes flashed cold fire. "Heed me! This is my thought. Kristin is within the walls. The guards at the gates, the crews of the police galleys, would have seen her had she gone forth, for she is the best-known woman in the city. And the police did not lie. They were in fear of the Emperor's wrath as we talked with them. Also, Alexius would not have dared to place his trust in them for any bribe. He plays for too high stakes. No,

Kristin was taken by his own people."

He paused, grinning sardonically.

"Now tell me, you two, what would you do to seek her out?"

Eric and Loge looked at one another and wagged their heads dolefully. Swain chuckled.

"Quick to chide, and slow to think," he derided his henchmen. "First, she must be fed. Second, Alexius will itch to be certain that she does well, wherever she is hidden. It is not alone that he is mad for her, man-fashion. She is a stake in a greater game. I was a fool not to have foreseen that temptation for him." He gestured impatiently for silence as Eric would have interrupted him. "No matter for that. We have work to do—or, rather, Loge has."

His fierce eyes demanded the Lap's attention.

"You have the gift of tongues, Loge. You can change your looks at will. So you will become a beggar without the palace gates. But first you will make sure of the appearance of all the Caesar's familiars, especially his eunuchs. You will watch as they come and go. You will follow any who carry bundles. I never made a landfall, if I guess wrong that Alexius will see to it that Kristin is daintily fed. He has his weaknesses. He will be thinking to win her favor, for that will make his end the easier. And he knows little of our Norse women, who will not suffer any man to wreak his will with them, however high the price he offers."

"And then?" Loge prompted.

"One or other of the Caesar's household will lead you to Kristin's prison. It will be strange if we three cannot break down its door."

It was Eric's turn to chuckle. He swept an arm around to encompass the silken luxury of the chamber, with its bath tinkling silvery music in a room adjoining.

"Heh, heh, Swain," quoth the forecastle man. "It seems I spoke you ill. I began to think you had softened in Mikklegard like some of those wineskins in red cloaks by the Chalcé Gate. But there is none to match you for seeing through a skalli wall into the black truth within a man's heart. You make the sun rise out of Asaland, and my eyes see clearly again. I pledge a mare for this, whatever the priests may say."

"It will cost me—and others—more than a mare if aught of harm befalls the Jerusalem-farer's daughter," Swain answered grimly, as he drew back the curtains for the sunrise. "Be about your work, you two. Help Loge as you may, Eric. I must play niddering again to keep the Caesar smug in his confidence."

THE days dragged by, as Eric said, like an anchor-stone in a wind off the Iceland jokuls. Loge plodded the streets after the eunuchs, men-servants and maids of the Caesar's household, all of whom seemed to be occupied with regular duties or harmless concerns of their own. Alexius swooped about the city, as Eric said again, like a falcon free of the lure. Swain continued to assume the bearing of a man crushed dumb by misfortune. He suffered the Caesar to lead him around by the nose, even to the extent of crossing twice to the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus and beating up the nearby towns and villages for tidings of Kristin.

But Swain had his eyes open. He did not fail to notice that the Caesar had set the troops of the Anatolian, Thessalian and Macedonian Themes marching on the pretext of the search for the Emperor's vanished guest. This brought some thirty thousand men within striking distance of the capital. And he was conscious likewise of the extraordinary interest shown by Alexius in the daily dispatches from the Imperial Army beyond the Danube, which was pushing farther and farther into the wilderness of the ancient Dacian March, where the Eagles had been shown only at rare intervals in centuries of time. Alexius was curious about the progress his brother was making. He studied maps, eagerly questioned the older Varangians as to the contour of the country, the fighting tactics of the Patzinaks.

Eric saw as much, too, and was puzzled.

"What does the Caesar seek?" asked the little man.

"The day the Emperor makes battle," Swain rejoined absently.

"Why? What advantage will that gain him?"

"Advantage?" roared Swain. "It will gain no advantage for Kristin, if we do not find her before the shield walls clash in the North! Go, you, and find Loge. Tell him I must have word of her. I must!"

Eric scurried off in despair, signing the Hammer on his chest, and then, lest that be not enough, crossing himself in the doorway. "Holy Olaf! Holy Olaf!" he muttered. "In Thor's name, have these wastrel Greeks cast a spell upon Swain? He is like one demented."

When he found the Lap, lurking in an appointed doorway, he repeated his fears, to which Loge listened with saturnine amusement.

"Swain sees more than most," Loge observed. "I have heard men say he is fey, but I do not think so. He uses his brain, and that, Eric, is work as much as sword-swinging or ship-handling. As for this task he has set me, it may be my bane, for already I have killed two carles who would have tracked me for tracking them. This is an evil town." He tugged reflectively at the scanty hairs of his beard. "Tell him I am not sure, but I am following one of those fat-bellied half-men who tracks a certain path every day—and so far has cast me off before he reaches his den. Give me two days more. I may have word for Swain—and I may be dead in the gutter. I will do what I can."

SWAIN was in a foul humor when Eric found him. The Patriarch had just sent him the parchment decreeing Kristin's divorce, which he was trying to read bottom-up—and could not have read rightly, in any case, since he had forgotten most of his boyhood's priest's learning.

"Look to this," he growled. "The poor lass had all against her before. And now —this! But I will have the blood of this villain, though it drain my veins to come at him. Aye, though I forfeit the vengeance I have sworn against Olvir Rosta."

"But if this be Kristin's divorce, I see not why you should be so unsettled by it," objected Eric. "Surely, it is for that we came to Mikklegard."

"You are clever in your way, Bitling," returned Swain. "But there are some things you do not foresee. What of Loge?"

Swain listened morosely to Eric's report.

"I think well of the Lap," he said when the forecastle man had concluded. "He has done all he might, but I say to you it will go ill with all of us, Eric, if he does not track his quarry in the two days. For, as if this were not enough"—he smote the parchment lying on the table beside him—"we shall have word any day that the Emperor has joined battle with the heathen. And then, as Eindride Unge said in the Steinavaag fight: 'Too near to the nose,' said the peasant, 'when his eye was knocked out!'"

Eric could make nothing of Swain's meaning, so he held his peace. The more so because Alexius was announced by the servant at the door, and the Caesar made a great bother over the granting of Kristin's divorce, pleading with Swain that they should redouble their efforts to find her, and Swain had to be at pains to wring his hands and protest his helplessness.

CHAPTER VII

OUT SKULLBITER!

THE next afternoon a mail courier posted in over the Adrianople road, with tidings that there had been a skirmish with the Patzinaks' rearguard; Rolf had been wounded and the Emperor had made Grim Gusli commander of the Varangian Guard. Swain wrung his hands in earnestness. What could he say to Kristin's lover, returning triumphant, if the woman he had sworn to ward was missing or misused? Nor was this the full of the day's misfortune, for Eric could not find trace of Loge in the city. If the Lap had been killed or imprisoned. . . . Swain strode the floor of his chamber, refusing wine and food.

In the morning came a second courier.

The army's Hunnish scouts had discovered the main body of the enemy, fortified after their habit within a circle of the strong-walled, loopholed wagons in which they moved their womenfolk and gear. The final battle was a question of hours. The Imperial Army was immensely outnumbered, but the Emperor wrote that he had confidence in the discipline and valor of his troops. "Tell Queen Kristin," he advised Swain, "that I think much of the man she shall marry. If I have my will, they two shall never quit Constantinople while I reign."

He had not yet heard of Kristin's disappearance, which gave Swain fresh cause for worry. It was plain that the dispatches the Orkneyman had sent after the army had been intercepted. By the Patzinaks? Swain doubted it. And Loge was still missing to make a bad day seem worse. Two days, the Lap had asked for, and at eventide two days had elapsed. Swain listened in silence to Eric's sorrowful report, stroking the blade of his word Skullbiter, which he had honed to a fine edge.

"The Norns have spoken, Bitling," he said. "With the morrow we must make steel music, we two by our lone, if we cannot achieve aid in the guardroom. The time will have come for Alexius to strike his stroke, and we may not let him strike first."

Eric heard him with relief at his calm determination.

"So it be fighting, and not idling in bower," answered the little forecastle man. "What is a stark stroke to us, Swain? I would fight all Mikklegard, if it were to keep your back. We have fought odds before, we two."

Swain smiled one of his rare smiles, the cold fire in his eyes burning bright, as it did for men he loved.

"And who better can keep my back than you, Bitling?" he rejoined. "Heh, it was Kristin's father, who said that a man's heart was not to be measured by its sheath. If it come to the last we will make a good death, and take with us some of these traitorous Greeks. Aye, and the most traitorous of them with us, first."

His eyes flashed fire again, cold and blue as the steel under his hand.

"For I swear the Caesar shall not live to possess Kristin, come what may!"

BUT matters did not fall out as he had expected in the morning. When he sought Alexius he was told that the Caesar had gone abroad, whither the servants pretended not to know.

Swain clanked back to his chamber in a fidget, half-minded to take the Red Cloaks into his confidence, but loath to risk their lives if he might avoid it. He was striding the floor when Eric flung open the chamber door.

"Swain, Swain," shouted the forecastle man. "Here is Loge at last! All shall be well."

The squat Lap was pallid and weary, but dressed in his accustomed garb, sword on thigh, winged cap on head.

"Wine," he croaked. "Food. I think we must hasten, Swain, but if you will use me—I am weak as a maiden. First —wine."

Swain held the beaker for him, while Eric gathered bits of meat from the table, and Loge talked as he devoured the scraps like a starved dog that has run the bear to its lair.

"I was right," he panted. "The eunuch I suspected—but not until an hour since was I sure—a mean place—in a tangle of mean streets. He went in—carrying his bundle—came out empty-handed. I tarried only—for my clothes—to enter palace—"

Swain lifted the beaker to his lips again.

"Drink deep, Loge," he said kindly, "for weary or not you must come as you are. The time is short. We may not even stop for aid. This is the Caesar's moment."

And he drove the two before him from the chamber.

They ran through the lofty corridors past occasional prowling eunuchs, who thumped staves with paunchy dignity and stared after them, popeyed and dubious. In the courtyard water sprayed up from the gaping jaws of the bull and lion tussling in the basin of the central fountain. Swain caught a glimpse of a stately war-galley, nosing into the Imperial harbor from the Bosphorus. He

Swain was on them in a flash, Skullbiter whistling in the gloom.

ran on, unthinking. At the gate, the sentries grounded spears at attention.

Loge turned right along the façade of the Palace of Daphne. They traversed the colonnade connecting Daphne with the Imperial box in the Hippodrome across the wide avenue, swung left by the stables where horses stamped and whinnied, and their noses were assailed by the effluvia of the caged wild beasts, and drivers in the colors of the Blue and Green factions exchanged bets on the afternoon races. The pile of the Law Courts loomed on their right. Loge ran on into a narrow alley which separated the Palace of the Prefect from a monastery.

Swain and Eric followed him blindly. More stables and slave quarters. Another alley, and they found themselves in a warren of mean streets, flanked by crazy wooden tenements, four, five and six stories high. Their course trended downhill. The sky was a strip of blue overhead. The air became dank and oppressive, suffered with the stenches of people dwelling in close-packed squalor.

"It is not far," Loge panted as they came to the foot of the hill, and a second of the city's seven hills reared above them—for Constantinople, like Rome, boasted its seven hills within the walls.

The Lap turned right, and slowed to a walk. They were in a blank alley, closed by the wall of a churchyard.

"There," he gasped, pointing to a one-story stone building on the right.

It was windowless, its one door shut fast. Swain, without a moment's hesitation, drew his sword and drove his shoulder against the door. It bulged, with a rending of wood, and ripped from its bolts. Lamplight gleamed dimly. Four men, lounging around a table over wine-cups, started to their feet, fumbling for weapons. Swain was on them in a flash, Skullbiter whistling in the gloom. One of the four screamed and died. Eric hewed off the arm of a second, and Swain drove his blade to the hilt through a third. The fourth ran, gurgling in his throat, and dodged past Loge, who nicked him as he leaped the threshold.

"Bide," Swain commanded when the Lap would have followed. "That carle can do no more harm than is done. Where next? Here is no sign of Kristin."

The square room was empty save for pallets along the walls, the chairs and table, the two dead men and one whose life was ebbing with his gushing blood. But opposite them was a low, arched opening, barred by an iron gate, locked fast. From it issued a stream of cool, damp air, in striking contrast with the fetid atmosphere of the alley beyond the doorstep.

Eric stooped and unfastened a heavy iron key from the belt of one of Swain's victims.

"It may be this is the answer," he said, fitting it in the lock of the gate, which clicked to his pressure.

The gate swung inward, and a lightless passage gaped before them, descending at a steep angle into the ground. Swain took one of the lamps from the table.

"A safe place," he commented. "I was a fool not to have thought of this. Follow on, carles. We should be near the end of our task."

HE led the way warily down the passage, which continued to descend deeper and deeper into the foundations of the city. A complete and clammy silence enveloped them. Their footsteps echoed and reëchoed hollowly. Then the silence was shattered abruptly by a challenge ahead of them. Lights flickered as they emerged upon a platform giving upon a vast emptiness of water, which twinkled darkly before them, its perspective dotted by a forest of columns stretching away and away as far as they could see.

"Who is here?" demanded Swain.

The echoes distorted his voice, and hurled it to and fro in shattered dissonance. A startled screech, shrill and falsetto, responded. Two figures started up from the stone floor, scattering dice and coins. Swain, peering closer, recognized them for palace eunuchs, who cowered before his menacing face.

"Mercy, mercy," babbled one in broken Norse.

"Where is the Queen?" snapped Swain. "The Queen Kristin, where is she?"

"We were commanded," shrieked the other. "It was the Caesar, Lord Swain."

"Where is the Queen?" Swain repeated, involuntarily lowering his tones to curb the echoes.

The man pointed into the darkness of the watery void before them. So far in the distance amongst the columns that they could barely see it, the Norsemen perceived a prickle of light.

"Kristin," bellowed Swain, and as the rioting echoes died and ceased to clamor her name again they heard faintly, at first, then louder, as the echoes seized upon the sound and reiterated it, the well-known timbre of her voice, exultant in a glad cry.

"Swain!" And over and over again: "Sw-aaa-iii-iin!"

Swain made an impatient gesture to Eric and Loge. Their swords hummed joyously, slashing through the screamed protests of the kirtled half-men. Swain raised his lamp, shoulder-high, and peered around him. Steps descended to the water's edge. At their foot a boat was moored to an iron ring.

"Here is work we require not to be taught, carles," he said. "Come!"

Eric and Loge took the oars, and he guided them through the maze of pillars toward the light that beaconed them onward. It came, Swain saw, from a raft moored between four of the pillars. A tent covered part of it, and there was an ample show of lamps upon a table.

And in the light stood Kristin, her Norse tire-woman weeping beside her.

"I told him you would come, Swain," she said calmly. "When he told me that you were a man befuddled, thinking of naught save wine-bibbing, I knew you played a game with him. And I knew that no man you game with can win."

"Good lass," exclaimed Swain.

He leaped to the raft, and kissed her on the brow.

"Grim?" she asked.

"He commands the Varangians. The Emperor is pleased with him. Your divorce is granted. All is well."

"How else could it be for a woman who has your warding?" she answered, her eyes for the first time misty. "Ah, Eric and Loge! Two more stout friends. But how could one such as Alexius contend with our giants of the North?"

"Now, Kristin, tell me of this game the Caesar played," Swain said.

"He did not crave me alone," Kristin answered. She smiled. "Many men have craved me, Swain. I think that is one reason why I resented Erling's treatment. And so the Caesar wanted me, yet not for my body alone. He plotted to wed me. With a Norse Empress, he believed he could win the Varangians to his cause. Then he would have summoned the city to revolt."

"It was as I thought," said Swain. "We found you in the last moment before the pot boiled. Today, I think, the Caesar planned his stroke. As for our Varangians"—he sighed—"they are human. It would have flattered them to have a Norse Empress."

"It may be, Swain," she said, "but it would have been a dead woman he showed for his Empress."

"That is beyond his brain to grasp," replied Swain. "How did he trick you from the palace?"

She looked at him shyly. "In the one way that he might—by sending word that one of two men, who have the right to summon me, lay sorely hurt of a horse's kick in the city slums. I went without thought. It was a simple trick, Swain. I am ashamed. I should have heeded your doubts of him."

Swain patted her shoulder with clumsy gentleness. "Why should you think any man could hold you lightly, Kristin King's daughter and King's mother?"

THE red-cloaked guards at the Chalcé Gate exclaimed in amazement as they recognized the cloaked woman who walked beside Swain.

"Call the Guard, carles," he ordered. "It was the Caesar took the Queen. He plots revolt against the Emperor."

They obeyed instinctively, as all men

did when Swain spoke in that tone, recking little that it was the Emperor's brother against whom he spoke.

"Where is Alexius?" Swain challenged a sentry.

"We know not. He left the palace in the early morning watch."

"To his quarters then!"

With Kristin still beside him, he tramped up the stairs of Chalcé, at the head of the column of Varangians, eunuchs and palace women fleeing for cover at sight of the glittering axes and stern, bearded faces. A eunuch at the door of Alexius' apartments would have stayed them with leveled staff. Swain grasped him firmly by the neck, pinching him until he squealed.

"The Caesar?"

"Ay, ay, ay, Lord," the half-man moaned. "The Harbor of the Bucoleon. He takes ship. I know no more."

Swain hurled him to the floor.

"Speed," he rasped. And the column broke into a trot. They traversed corridors and gardens, threaded a pillared colonnade and emerged upon the fountain courtyard of the Bucoleon. The war-galley Swain had noticed edging in, as he had left, was backing out from the pier, drums beating a rhythm for her threshing oars. On her poop stood the tall figure of Alexius, gleaming in silvered mail. He raised an arm in what might have been a derisive gesture of farewell. The galley spun on her keel and started to row out past the harbor breakwater. But at a signal from the Caesar the oars were backed. She hung poised. Alexius put cupped hands to his mouth.

"You are a better gamester than I guessed, Swain," he hailed. "It was a good main. I congratulate you—and Kristin—and Grim. But most of all my amiable brother. Tell him I will cozen him again when I have leisure. If you would follow me—Massoud, the Sultan of Iconium, is my friend. You shall hear of me on the Eastern Marches."

The drums resumed their beat, faster, ever faster, and the galley headed eastward toward the Black Sea and the shores of Asaland.

Swain mopped his brow.

"May Fenriswolf gnaw his bowels," he said, with an odd lack of passion. "There is one neck Skullbiter has missed. Fetch me the Prefect, carles. And bid the tormentors heat their irons. If Alexius is safe, there must be those of his friends who can be made to sing for us." He paused, staring after the galley's dwindling hull. "Aye," he went on, more to himself than to his followers, "there is a man I would joy to clash blades with. Thor send the day while my strength is in me. A foul villain, but he puts me in mind of Olvir Rosta. Aye, two rogues who have drunk deep of Odin's blood."

ON the day that Emperor Manuel returned victorious, Swain sat his horse at the head of his escort of Varangians, with Kristin mounted beside him, outside the Golden Gate. At the Emperor's right hand rode Grim Gusli, and behind them strode the solid ranks of the Varangians who had guarded the Emperor. The ranks were not so full, and the red cloaks were tattered and torn, but the Norsemen marched with the careless, easy swing of men who had proven themselves once more, who had borne more than their share in the battle which had won the train of captives and plunder-laden carts symbolizing another triumph for the Eastern Rome.

The Emperor dismounted to embrace Swain before all the dignitaries of the city and the crowds upon the triple walls, towering overhead.

"Norseman," he said gruffly, "you are the one man to whom I have had to say: I owe you my throne, and it may be, life, itself. I am in your debt."

"It was naught," mumbled Swain, "and I all but lost for you, Emperor."

Manuel smiled. "And you are also the one man who does not stoop to the belittling titles men wish upon me," he added.

He beckoned to Grim, whose eyes were fixed hungrily upon Kristin, resplendent in helm and mail, a warrior queen out of the old Saga tales.

"What?" cried the Emperor. "Are Swain and I the only folk to embrace? Kristin awaits you—and I doubt not His Beatitude the Patriarch has the

service all planned for you twain in our holy Church of the Divine Wisdom." He smiled as Grim tumbled from saddle, and hastened to Kristin's side. "Well, Swain," he continued, "what will you have of me?"

Swain tugged at his beard.

"Why, to say truth, Emperor Manuel," he answered hesitantly, "there is the sea-itch in my feet, and I—there is naught here to be done—and—"

The Emperor's face fell.

"I might have known how it would be with a man like you," he said. "A task to be done is a task done. Kristin no longer needs your warding. My throne is safe. So—whither now?"

"I know not," Swain admitted. "Jorsalaland, it may be. The Caesar threatened trouble."

Manuel's brow darkened.

"The curse of heaven on the scoundrel," he rasped. "After all I have forgiven him. But we will not talk of that. You shall go where you will—when you will. But you shall not go empty of purse, Swain. Your galleys lack stowage for the treasure I owe you for what you have done. And your people with you." He clapped Swain on the back so that the Orkneyman's harness rattled. "But come! The city awaits us. This is a triumph my father would have cheered. You shall ride beside me, you and Kristin and Grim. It is seldom an Emperor has folk to ride with him upon whom he may look with trust. To horse!"

The trumpets blew as he vaulted into saddle, and all along the dense column of Legionaries and alien foot and horse the music began to play, kettledrums and trumpets and cymbals and shawms, wild and heady with the wine of victory. The people on the walls commenced to shout. The Patriarch led out a procession of clergy, chanting the Kyrie Eleison. Grim led Kristin to her place at the Emperor's right hand, himself riding beside her, and Swain pushed his horse to Manuel's left. Eric and Loge and the Palace Guards fell in with the warworn Varangians at their backs. And so they rode in through the Golden Gate, with the sunlight bright upon their mail.

INDIAN TRANSFER

By HARRY BEDWELL

THE sun drifted reluctantly below the flat desert rim like a dull red clinker, and the white fervor of day lapsed into the oven-smother of evening. In that scorched atmosphere Mel Hatch had been trying to locate a purchaser for his north country wardrobe. Back in his room in the railroad men's clubhouse, he stowed the rejected garments neatly into his huge telescope

ILLUSTRATED BY I. B. HAZELTON

A huge form arose beside him, and stood over him as if seriously considering if this were a morsel worth sampling.

suitcase. There were double-breasted woolen shirts, and great lengths of underwear, bright-hued and almost heavy enough to stand alone. But there was no item in all his apparel sufficiently flimsy for the immediate temperature.

"I remain in the sub-Arctic," Mel informed himself bitterly, "long enough to earn wages with which to buy clothing suitable for that climate, and then I wind up where just enough to cover you is more than plenty."

He scratched flakes of peeling gently from his nose. A belated blizzard had caught him braking on the smoky end of a hotshot out of Billings, and frosted that projection. Then he'd added the net of novice luck at poker in the stalled crummy to the two paychecks he already had in his pocket, and thereafter his youthful and radical tendencies couldn't be restrained. He pulled the pin on the Great Northern and turned southward in search of the sun.

"And then that Indian had to cross me up," he reflected.

He perspired more freely. He still felt uneasy, even bewitched, about that encounter. He'd loitered along the way, jingling gold coin in his pocket. He now fancied himself a gambler, and at Little Grande he fell into a blackjack game with an apparently simple-minded Indian. His slight acquaintance with native Americans had caused him to consider them dull fellows, and he was slow to recognize genius at making twenty-one. He barely escaped with enough small change to rub together.

He felt that nothing short of witchcraft and black magic could have cleaned him so quickly. Hereafter, he'd avoid the Indian people. There was no telling from appearances which of them were the magicians.

HE CAUGHT a job on the trainmen's extra board of the High Desert Division as summer broke furiously. Boomers avoided the desert summertimes, but he had no other choice after he'd been made a sucker by sorcery. Yet even a job, in his present estate, didn't solve any of life's immediate problems. He had only that bit of change left from the blackjack game, payday was a long time away and meanwhile he'd have to eat and obtain hot weather clothing in order to exist during the interval. He regarded his substantial wardrobe with distaste. It was his only asset. And he was going to have a time marketing it in this climate.

"Like selling refrigerators to the Eskimos," he hinted darkly.

The raw light from the single electric globe fell on him like a thin blast of hot sand. The brick structure retained and intensified the daytime heat. You couldn't sleep in that furnace. He abandoned every thread of his unwarranted clothing, wrapped himself in a sheet and wandered like a disturbed spook out upon the dark lawn. A number of other sheeted forms had preceded him. He selected a spot that had recently been sprinkled, and for a moment the moisture from below dampened and cooled the cloth. But immediately it became parched and rasped his skin. The listless heat crawled into his pores like acid.

A man with a hose moved about, watering the lawn and sprinkling the figures that fretted there, spraying them with thin jets. He came near and drenched Mel's neighbor on the left. He stooped slightly to identify Mel, then passed on without touching him with the cooling rain. He wet down the man on his right thoroughly.

"Hey, fella," Mel complained, "you missed me. Come on, give us a douse of that water."

The man turned back and flicked Mel briefly. The tepid water sizzled and bounced on his scorched skin.

"It'll be ten cents," the man said.

"What!" Mel sat up. "A dime to keep me wet down? You're paid to water the grass anyhow."

"It'll still be ten cents," the man assured him.

"I'll give it to you when the ghost walks," Mel promised.

The man's head blurred in the dark as he shook it. "Boomer brakemen ain't usually good at rememberin' what they owe," he pointed out politely.

"Listen," Mel invited, "I got a swell green and yellow shirt I'll put up that I do recollect."

"Well," the man hesitated. Then he inquired sharply, "What kinda shirt would it be?"

"It cost me eight bucks," Mel explained, "and it's as good as new."

"Would it be silk—or wool?"

"It's a kind of flannel," Mel conceded.

"Then you better keep it till the climate changes," the man advised him, and the sound of the consoling spray dribbled away in the dark.

The heat tightened a dry suffocation about him. The sheet felt like a fine grade of emery paper. After a period of glowing semi-consciousness, the call boy wandered among the tortured forms, chanting softly. Mel's name was repeated with petulant abuse, and he responded. The youth drew near.

"Wantcha for Eighty-six at 11:15," he chirped. "The swing man's sick all of a sudden with his 'pendix. And bring your keyster, 'cause it'll be a hold-down and you live at the other end."

Mel signed the book under the glow of a match, and trailed the sheet back to his room. Desperately he got into his fiery red underwear and wool shirt, corduroy pants and laced boots. He heaved the huge telescope to his shoulders and departed down the silent streets.

YARD lights made stark, ruddy points under the low stars. A switch engine sneezed and strangled down by the coal chutes. Eighty-six was all coupled up on the makeup track, and there was the dull explosion and grunt of brake-shoes as the car man and the hogger tested the air. The taste of engine smoke was flaky and brittle in his mouth.

Eighty-six's two other brakemen were hunkered against the yard office, glum and static. They'd been dehydrated to the withered toughness of jerky. They considered Mel and his baggage and his garb with arid astonishment.

"Didn't you forget your overcoat?" Bevan, the parlor man, inquired. He was a heavy-shouldered old-timer, despondent about all impending events. "It's easy to catch cold in weather like this," he pointed out.

"It must be in that keyster he's loaded down with," Fowler, the head man, suggested. He raised a parched grin. He'd been around too, and he wasn't yet impressed with life's complications; a ramshackle kid with a good head. "Seems like he could have it and a lot more in that young trunk."

"Did you ever try wearing heavy clothes to keep out the heat?" Mel asked. "It's a well-known, scientific fact that it does. It works like keeping out the cold. I got some more woolens here, if you fellas want to try it," he suggested.

"I don't want to scientifically experiment with this heat," Bevan decided promptly.

"Me," said Fowler, "I wouldn't like to deprive you of any wraps. We're a long way from the other end of the division, and you can't ever tell what you'll need."

"You can stow your baggage in the crummy," Bevan told him. "You're the swing man on this run," he added.

"How come?" Mel demanded.

" 'Cause it's the swing man that's off," Bevan explained impatiently, "and neither one of us wants to be this conductor's switching foreman. He ain't always agreeable."

Mel considered them shrewdly. The High Desert men would be prankish with boomers. They were hardy and headstrong, and they wouldn't overlook a chance for some barbarous sport with a new man. They at once stuck him with the swing job on which, under the conductor, you managed all the switching. But he didn't know all the yards, and shoving that drudgery onto him was malpractice. But he'd have to stand for these flimflams till the pay car rolled again, or he'd converted his Arctic wardrobe into cash.

"O. K." he agreed. "I get along with most folks."

He labored over to the caboose and struggled up the steps. He was then involved in fitting himself and luggage to the narrow doorway. He reckoned it would be a tight squeeze and went at the task briskly.

Conductor Greenlaw was in the act of using the doorway to leave his caboose as the boomer crowded into it. Mel and

the telescope stuck in the jam, and Greenlaw collided with the two of them. Mel had the advantage of weight and leverage, and the conductor rebounded as if he had hit the wall. He raised his voice at once.

"What in —"

"Excuse me," Mel interrupted politely, and squeezed through and lowered the telescope to the floor. "Are you the skipper of this craft?" he inquired.

Greenlaw replied. He was waspish, and his eyes were bitter. His voice had the whine of a rawhide lash, and his words were hot with reproach.

"I thought so," Mel agreed quickly. "I'm your swing man."

GREENLAW considered him implacably in the dim light of oil lamps. Mel had the tight build of a young man quick on his feet. His nose had a slightly venturesome tilt, but his freckled countenance was as guileless as the open face of a railroad watch.

"What for," the conductor demanded, "are you staggering around with all those clothes? Afraid you'll get sunstruck?"

"Exactly!" Mel admitted. "It's just like refrigeration. You know how an ice box is lined. Remember how they taught you in school about insulation against heat and cold?"

"I didn't go to school that long," Greenlaw snapped.

"Well, that's the way she is," Mel insisted. "Now, I got a suit of long-handled underwear that'll insulate you fine, which I'll sell you for two bucks, and a swell wool shirt for three. Why don't you try 'em and see how cool it leaves you?"

Greenlaw circled him warily and reached the doorway. "If you're my swing man," he warned, "you'd better get lined up. We're on the way in about ten minutes."

He went down the steps and departed toward the dispatcher's office, his lantern illuminating his springy knees.

You'd better be alert to your duties as switching foreman with these High Desert skippers. Mel got a switch list from the yard office and began rapidly making a record of Eighty-six. There were seventy cars, something over a half-mile of freight train. The tenacious heat walked with him the entire distance. His boots dragged as he approached the head end.

Conductor and engineer pondered their train orders together under the cab in the dim flare of lantern and torch. As Mel approached, the engineer climbed the iron steps to the gangway, and Greenlaw turned back toward the rear end.

"The swing man decorates the top when we leave town," the conductor warned Mel as he passed.

"I'll decorate," Mel assured him.

The engineer whistled off and Fowler lounged forward to the switch-stand. The engine stamped and the slack rumbled out. Eighty-six moved out upon the main line. Mel let half the train go by him, and then swung onto the side of a boxcar and climbed aloft to decorate.

The cars rocked and rumbled, and the running click of wheels at rail joints made a brisk cadence in the jangled overtones. He sat upon the running board with his lantern between his feet and watched the dim desert move by.

Some vague blurs appeared on top at the rear of the train and came forward against the stars, shapeless bundles that flapped and struggled over a dozen boxcars, then stopped and became motionless as they reached a gap made by an empty gondola. Hoboes didn't brazenly ride the tops those times, or any place else in the train, if discovered. These people appeared to come up the ladder from the caboose, but no trainman's lantern pursued them. Very mysterious. Mel caught up his lantern and made for the rear.

He approached the figures belligerently, and held his lantern up to three dusky faces. A very large Indian and his broad squaw were seated on the running board, blanket-wrapped and bulging. Beside them sat a stolid, gangling youth. Mel's hasty scrutiny revealed that the Indian boy wore a hat instead of a blanket. The three sat motionless, and blinked stoically at the lantern.

The cold trickle down Mel's spine didn't relieve the swelter of his body.

Since that blackjack game he'd been dreaming of dark-visaged aborigines of nights.

"You got a cigarette?" the buck inquired amiably.

Mel quickly proffered his sack of tobacco. The Indian bobbed his head politely and rolled a cigarette. The squaw suddenly uttered a peremptory squawk and made a swift, rapacious gesture and snatched the tobacco. She rolled a cigarette of her own. Then she stowed the sack some place about her considerable bulk. The youth sat in sullen meditation. The other two lapsed into contented somnolence and drew in tobacco smoke and let it trail back over the train. The buck grinned artfully at Mel, a man-to-man smirk deprecating their womenkind.

But Mel wasn't flattered. There was likely more black magic afloat here. Abruptly he resumed his way back over the tops. He went down the ladder to the platform of the caboose. Greenlaw was at his let-down desk, scowling fretfully at the waybills strewn over its limited surface. The heat wouldn't allow him to concentrate on his wheel report.

Bevan looked down from the dim loft of the cupola. He made a discouraged sound.

Mel said, "We've got three Indians riding the top. What do I do about that?"

"Nothing!" Greenlaw yelled with astonishing vehemence. "Darn their skins, they got a right!"

"Savages got a right to ride our freight trains?" Mel demanded suspiciously. "How come?"

Greenlaw explained with harsh exasperation. "When the railroad built through their reservation, they was granted free transportation within their domain as a consideration for the right-of-way. But that don't mean to me they can ride in my caboose."

BEVAN said mournfully, "That's Chief Waterpool and his wedded wife. They been to town to collect their beloved son just back from Indian school, and to draw their allowance of rations and cash money, which the government hands out to them at stated periods."

"Is that so?" Mel cried. "They got dough and grub, and yet that squaw snatched my tobacco. What do I do about that?"

"Same thing," grieved Bevan. "Nothing. Mrs. Waterpool'd scalp you if you tried to get it back."

"And I'll scalp you if you let them in this caboose again," Greenlaw promised. "They can't keep their fingers off things."

Apparently there was no justice in this arid land. Mel hadn't been more uncomfortable in the cold northland, and there he hadn't been betrayed and robbed. Mel climbed into the cupola and slumped into one of the swivel chairs. The poor were always oppressed. If he ever ran out of this streak of bad luck he'd protect himself with a cash reserve.

As anticipated, he did most of the switching on that run. Greenlaw and Bevan, long familiar with the division, didn't find it difficult to hand him all the hard assignments. There were empties and loads to pick up and set out at all stations, and some blind sidings besides, and Greenlaw rawhided him back and forth over the ragged train till Mel felt like he was weighted down with blistering armor. His resentment expanded in the heat.

At Thunder Creek they took siding to meet Seven. Thirty-two already held the passing track for the same appointment, and Eighty-six nosed down into the yard and onto the empty team track to clear. Mel trailed the conductor over to the station.

Thunder Creek was in a pocket of ridges and the heat of a thousand years had collected here. Eddie Sand, the night operator, read a book under the bland glow of a shaded oil light.

"Seven's on the advertised," he said, and yawned limply. "I've got fifty minutes on Nine, if you want it." He shuffled through the manifolds of train orders and tore off two yellow sheets.

"It gets pretty hot in this swale you live in, don't it?" Mel inquired politely.

Eddie gave him a slow look. "It's usually too warm to wear snow-storm clothes, if that's what you mean."

"That's just where you're wrong," Mel declared. "You ought to try insulating yourself against the weather. Look how cool I am. I'm not even sweating."

"Neither am I," Eddie pointed out. "It's all been boiled away."

Greenlaw took his orders and wandered out, and forward to the engine. Mel followed him.

Seven flung by on the other side of the station, and Thirty-two crept out onto the main line and clanked away into the thin darkness. The engineer climbed back to his seat, and Greenlaw nodded briskly at Mel as Thirty-two's tail-lights winked out in the distant dark.

"Go on up there and open the switch," he ordered, "and let's get going."

"Where's the head brakeman?" Mel complained. "He's the one that's supposed to let us out."

"He went back to the caboose to get some more tobacco," the hoghead called down. "There's his lantern coming back now."

"Has the swing man got to work both ends and the middle besides?" Mel demanded hotly.

"You get up there and open that gate," Greenlaw commanded.

Mel dragged himself up the team track toward the green light on the switch-stand, goggling in the dim flare of the headlight. His boots were becoming a little unmanageable. He wished from the bottom of his blistered soul that he'd held out a twenty on that talented Indian gambler. It'd be just dandy to be able to safely tell Greenlaw to go fry an egg. Even so you could stand only so much. He stopped abruptly at the switch-stand. He appeared to fall into deep reflection, to debate solemnly with himself. Then he turned about and strode back to the engine. There was spring in his step.

"Hey!" sang the conductor. "Why didn't you bend the rail?" He swung his lantern wrathfully in Mel's face.

"Under the circumstances," said Mel, "I've decided against it."

"You've what?" yelled the skipper. "You better think again."

"But it ain't my business to open that switch," Mel protested, "and I'm going to stand on my rights."

The head brakeman, fogging the placid night with his pipe, arrived from the caboose.

Greenlaw said ominously, "O.K., boomer. Guys that always make an issue of their rights don't get along well here." He turned on his head brakeman. "Get up there and open the switch," he ordered. "And next time, you keep your spare tobacco in the cab. Now get going!"

Fowler peered at Mel suspiciously. He opened his mouth, then closed it again. He went forward with some caution. He paused at the stand and stood still in the distant glow of the headlight in a thoughtful attitude as if struck by a sudden misgiving. He backed away. He wheeled and returned briskly.

"Come to think of it," he said, "I guess I'll make an issue of it, too. Me, I don't want to be stubborn, but as long as Mel feels like he does, I'll have to do likewise."

GREENLAW'S jaw came unlatched. It wagged with the sound of a pump that needed priming. It caught at last on his thin voice.

"What goes on here?" he blew off. "We're supposed to be running a freight train, not playing tag. If you guys are trying to be funny, I'll ask the Old Man if he sees the joke when we get in." He peered up at the hogger hanging from the cab window. "You heard what these bum brakemen refused to do?" he asked.

"Yeah," said the engineer, "I heard them."

"Right!" snapped Greenlaw. "Just so you don't forget it when the Old Man asks you. I want you also to take notice that I had to open that switch myself. And if either of these smart car hands makes another crack, I'll tie up the train and send for another crew."

He stamped away along the siding. He had to check sharply to avoid colliding with the switch-stand. He leaned forward and thrust his key into the lock.

Then he straightened more quickly than he had stooped. A huge form arose beside him. It lengthened to a towering height. It stood over him as if seriously considering if this were a morsel worth

sampling. It cast up a gigantic shadow in the headlight's glow, looming like something out of a nightmare. Green eyes glinted an angry fire.

Greenlaw sent up a thin howl and backed off. The switch key at the end of its stout chain had caught in the lock. The chain held at both ends and tore a strip down the right thigh of his trousers as he moved abruptly away. He headed back to the engine at a pounding run.

The hogger grated a laugh. "I kinda seen something, there by the stand, from up here," he said. "What is it?"

"He's a nice black bear," Mel explained. "He'd scratched him a nest in the head-end cinders and was taking a snooze."

Greenlaw plowed to a stop under the cab. He sizzled like a safety valve about to pop.

"You didn't bend that rail either," Mel pointed out politely.

"Shut up!" panted Greenlaw. "Now we got to back this train out."

"Naw, we don't," the hogger decided. "Cut off the engine and I'll show you how to get rid of that black boy."

Mel cut the air behind the tender and raised the coupling lever. The hogger took a quick pull on the throttle and the stack erupted in a deep chuckle. The bear braced himself and studied the locomotive with a cynical eye as it stamped toward him. He moved a little to meet the noisy thing.

"Look out!" Mel shouted. "He'll come up over the pilot and crawl in your lap."

The engineer opened the cylinder cocks. Plumes of steam roared from either side. The stack raged and the drivers spun and howled. The bear's forefect slapped the ground and he backed away reluctantly, his ears set forward. The whistle screeched, and then he turned end for end and ambled away in the darkness.

"Did you notice," Mel inquired, "how cool that bear was? He's insulated, same as I am."

"You shut up!" Greenlaw repeated.

There was a lot of switching at Carbon Canyon, and Mel could scarcely lift his boots to swing onto the rear end of the caboose as they rolled out of town. A gray gloss spread over the desert, and then the sun blazed again. The white light fell like swarms of hot needles. Mel took off his double-breasted shirt and hung it in the cupboard. His bright red undershirt blazed like a torch in the fervid caboose. Greenlaw flinched and shuddered. Bevan shaded his dismal eyes.

"You better dampen it down," the brakeman moaned, "else it's liable to start blazing."

Greenlaw fell to checking his train orders against the time table, delving into the complicated strategy of moving forward on his rights against the flow of traffic, estimating what siding he would have to duck into to let a passenger train by that, by the time table, should be somewhere close behind. He looked up at last and speared Mel with a malicious eye.

"The dispatcher says," he said, "that there'll be a couple of cars of cattle for us to pick up at Black Buttes. If we can snatch them quick, we'll let Eighteen by and follow her right out and go on to Westwater for Nine. Suppose you run up ahead to the engine and be all set to cut off and snare those steers the minute we get in."

"Climb over that half-a-mile of train again?" Mel pleaded. "Why the heck didn't you tell me at Carbon Canyon so I could 'a caught the head end out?"

"Get going, you blamed refrigerator!" Greenlaw ordered.

MEL crawled out on top and lumbered forward over the clanking train. Chief Waterpool and his squaw meditated and smoked on their boxcar. The youth brooded sulkily beneath a flapping hatbrim. There was considerable evidence of color in his clothing, but it had been dulled by the smoke and cinders of freight train travel. The other two were still snugly wrapped and imperturbable. Mel retched as he estimated the temperature under those blankets, and detoured from the running board to the roof to get around the group.

The squaw raised her head and stared at him greedily. She falsettoed a remark and cackled shrilly.

Mel flinched and hurried on. The cold

scurry down his back didn't cool his sweltering, aching body. These blamed Indians had him pegged for a sucker on sight. He dragged his boots over the tender into the cab. The engineer glimpsed his inflamed shirt at the corner of his eye and reached for the emergency air. He checked himself and demanded, "You gonna wear that regular, or are you just showin' us you got it?"

The fireman stared, fascinated. "With that shirt," he declared, "I could keep the boiler hot without the use of fuel."

They nosed into the passing track at Black Buttes. Eighteen pulled up the main and stopped at the station as Mel cut off his engine and swung across the yard and backed her in on the two stock cars. Only one car was loaded. The stockmen were driving the remaining steers up the chute to the open door of the second car as the engine tied on. One scared animal paused at the opening and bawled dubiously at the confined space he was being urged into. The others crowded upon him, and he whirled and lunged down the chute, stampeding the others.

Mel crossed the sidings to inform Greenlaw of the delay. He caught the conductor and rear brakeman on the station platform as Eighteen began to move on again.

"It'll be some minutes before they get them cows loaded," Mel reported.

Greenlaw swore as the rear end of Eighteen slid slowly by him. "How long'll it take?" he demanded.

"Aw, any minute now that steer'll be persuaded," Mel estimated.

Greenlaw snapped suddenly, "Grab Eighteen there and ride her to Westwater and flag on Nine till we get in. We'll follow you right out. Pick 'em up and run!" he yelled.

The rear of the passenger was gliding away ten yards down the main line. Mel swung his boots and slammed them down on the platform. His tread resounded on the planking in the hot silence like a phlegmatic thunderstorm getting under way. His legs didn't bend easily. He threw them forward desperately and pumped his elbows and tucked in his chin and struggled after the placid local. He gained, and the railing of the rear platform was almost within his wildly grasping reach.

Then the mutter of Eighteen's exhaust stepped up. The heat rolled over him like suffocating thin silk. His boots dragged and stumbled and his avid hands fell to his side. He stopped and sobbed hot air and watched the rear platform move quietly into the hot shimmer.

Greenlaw's militant voice turned him about. The conductor was pointing out that now they were stuck at Black Buttes for Nine.

"If you're going to continue to work this hold-down," he gave his lashing ultimatum, "you'd better not show up with that ton-and-a-half outfit on again, or I'll turn you back."

Bevan said mournfully, "I knew darned well you'd never make it, all wrapped up like that."

The engine came out with the two cars of steers, and Mel let her in on top of the train. He wandered back along the long line of cars. His boots kicked up cinder dust. There were so many things in the immediate past that he ought to have avoided that regrets seemed flabby items in this welter of disaster. Either the sun was puncturing his skin with its showers of white needles, or else the woolens were stabbing at a million points.

THE squaw peered down at him over the edge of the boxcar as he approached. She clucked at him like a hen that has discovered a fat worm. Her face was twisted by some strange emotion. Mel returned her a bitter look. She seemed about to go into an incantation.

"How much you take for that?" she wheedled. She pointed at him with an abrupt, inflexible finger.

Mel ducked. He turned as he passed under her and edged backward.

"You give me that," she offered, "and me give you this." A yellow disk twinkled in her dark palm.

He stared. She tossed the disk in the air and caught it. The metal twinkled in the sunlight. It was a gold piece.

Mel rooted himself to the head-end cinders. "What do you want?" he inquired.

"That," she clucked, and the inflexible finger was leveled at his parched chest.

He glanced curiously down at himself and caught the red flare of his undershirt. He took a pinch of it between his fingers and pulled it away from his inflamed body and held it up. "This?" he cried.

She chortled. She grinned and nodded.

Mel said cautiously, "Yeah, but I got the pants attached to it." He added after a whirl of thoughts had subsided, "If you want them both, they'll cost you twice as much."

That was either incomprehensible, or else the amount was excessive. She scowled. He edged farther away under that morose stare.

a bland Oriental and tempted Mel with the coin. "Mighty nice," he crooned.

A sharp commotion developed under the squaw's blanket as she searched her considerable person. At last another coin twinkled in her fingers.

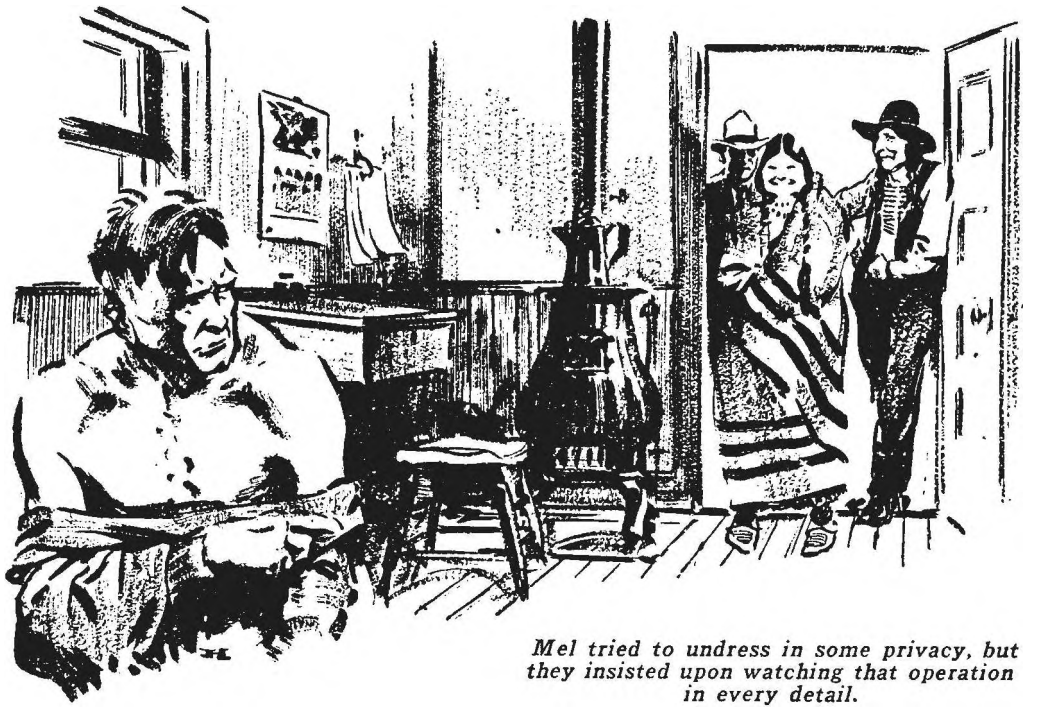
"You sell?" she urged.

"Look," he pleaded, and pantomimed wildly, "they're in one piece—attached —united—all together."

"Cut 'um," the chief beamed. "I chop 'um." He made expressive motions like scissors with the first two fingers of his right hand.

"Sure!" Mel agreed. "I'll separate them. I'll go back to the caboose and take them off and divide them. Wait."

His feet didn't drag as he hurried



Mel tried to undress in some privacy, but they insisted upon watching that operation in every detail.

The benign face of Chief Waterpool appeared over the edge of the boxcar like a dusky moon. He exposed some teeth. "You got pants like that, I give you fi' dolla for it," he offered genially. Deftly, in a legerdemain gesture, he snatched the gold piece from his wife's hand.

She squawked a remark that seemed like a jet of acid. The chief ignored it. He squatted on the edge of the roof like

along the train. He glanced back as he swung aboard the caboose. Chief Waterpool and his squaw were coming down the side of the boxcar like a pair of young elephants. Apparently the two were impatient to claim their bargains, and they were clearly suspicious of each other. They reached the ground and scrambled after him. Their offspring followed with dragging indifference. They crowded into the caboose.

Mel tried to undress in some privacy, but the two insisted upon watching that operation in every detail, admiring the length of red woolens that came to light, the squaw clucking amazed appreciation, the chief making pleased gutturals. Mel peeled to the skin, then slipped into his cords. He anticipated some difficulty in exchanging one piece of merchandise for the two separately held coins, but they paid promptly and took possession.

He got a blackened pair of shears, used to trim lantern wicks, and the two fell to disrupting over the exact point of division. The chief was bested there. He got the legs, and not much more.

Then, to Mel's horror, the two immediately began to prepare to dress in their particular lengths of crimson at once. He raised a hot protest.

"Hey! You gotta get out of here before the skipper comes back. He'll scalp all of us if he finds you in his crummy again."

But the two, absorbed in a gorgeous dream come true, paid him no heed. Mel fled modestly to the cupola to keep a lookout for the possible return of Greenlaw.

HE came down when the two were proudly arrayed in scarlet. The shirt fitted the squaw snuggly in all departments and at some points was ominously strained. But she regarded it in the dusty mirror with wolfish pride. The remainder was little more than leggings, which the chief took time and hard-breathing effort to fit to his person.

The two lounged on the cushioned bench and ignored Mel's efforts to move them out. Mrs. Waterpool searched out his tobacco, put a pinch into a cigarette paper and handed it to her chief. She rolled a fat one for herself.

Mel fretted despondently. Even if he slipped forward and pretended no knowledge of the Indians' invasion of the caboose, those red garments would betray him, and the skipper was already of half a mind to turn him in. Ten bucks would approximately solve grub requirements till payday, but warm weather garments were still essential to his job. The poor were always subject to tyranny.

The young Indian had up-ended Mel's telescope suitcase, and he sat upon it and rocked gently and stared at the caboose fittings. The squaw eyed her son with malignant disfavor. The youth drooped under the scowl. Even the wide brim of the smudged Panama hat seemed abashed. The suit he wore was something in bright tan and pale blue, its radiance slightly dulled by the smoke and cinders of Eighty-six's locomotive. Mel considered vaguely that they were quite extraordinary clothes for an Indian, comfortable and light.

Mrs. Waterpool snapped a biting remark at her son. The youth teetered on the telescope and stared unhappily at the floor.

The chief snickered. "She say they dress him like a squaw at that school," he translated.

She leveled a blunt finger at the telescope. "What that?" she demanded.

Mel felt as if a dismal pressure had been building up in his head. That stress exploded in the hot caboose as a

blinding inspiration swooped in out of the white sunlight and struck him a surprise blow. He leaped under the impact. The startled youth sprawled on the floor as the telescope was snatched from under him. Mel scooped up the luggage in his arms. He set it upon the bench and with nimble fingers he undid the straps. Then like a good dry goods drummer, he laid out in artful display the array of double-breasted shirts and great lengths of vivid underwear that were so heavy they would almost stand alone.

Mrs. Waterpool's eyes dilated. She strangled slightly. Suddenly she pointed a threatening finger at her progeny and her words rattled like spiteful hail.

The youth scrambled to his feet. Dutifully he began to take off his remarkable clothes.

MEL came jauntily down the steps of the caboose and sauntered forward. Halfway along the train he sat down in the shade of a boxcar. He fanned himself with a wide Panama hat. He examined the dulled iridescent suit and tan shoes he now wore.

"I could have made a better dicker with Old Lady Waterpool," he decided, "if I'd known she was going to burn her offspring's school clothes the minute she got him back to the reservation."

The slow, hot minutes moved by until Nine flung out of the east. Greenlaw and Bevan appeared on the station platform.

The whistle yelled twice to their highball, and the hogger shook out the slack. The freight train began to move into the solitude. Mel climbed to the top of the boxcar, a good swing man decorating.

Conductor and brakeman, lounging in the shade of the station, waiting for their caboose to draw up, caught sight of him and froze in incredulous postures as if dazed by a mirage. Their heads turned like compass needles to the pole as Mel passed above them on the moving train. He flipped them a flagrant signal, a brazen affront. The rich could safely be offensive. The two barely recovered in time to swing aboard their caboose as it drew up.

Brilliant figures bulged upward on the caboose ladder and spewed out on top of the rear boxcar. The first was a sliver of scarlet that developed wire legs as it skipped along the running board. It checked where the gondola broke the line of boxcars. It looked like a thin trapeze performer in flaming tights.

"Very nifty," Mel decided. "And it fits him snug. That ought to set the hearts of the maidens afire back home."

Greenlaw's voice had the whine of a rawhide lash as it sang through the hot air above the racket of rolling wheels. But Mel didn't flinch. He chinked coins in his pocket and grinned.

Chief Waterpool and his squaw lumbered forward without haste, and settled themselves on the running board. Smoke of their cigarettes was blown back in thin blue ribbons.

The gray desert drifted by. Mel examined his conspicious apparel shrewdly.

"I'll get these cleaned up and pressed nice," he considered. "Then, should the skipper turn me in, and the Old Man call me on the carpet, I can sure stand them on their ears with this outfit."

He went under with a screech that cut the swamp's silence like a saw biting through hard pine.

SWAMP TRAP

By HUGH B. CAVE

HALLARD'S fists hardened when he saw the round white eye of Carlty's frog-light. Through the dark of the swamp the eye glided toward him, and the black water talked in ghostly small whispers against Carlty's boat.

Hallard's teeth ground together so fiercely that his broken molar, the one he had tried to yank out with pliers, gouged the gum and filled his mouth with a hot rush of blood.

This hate he had known and nursed for as long as he could remember. Most of the time it had slept under an opiate of fear, but of late it had flared up in him like a swamp fire.

Now, hunger and thirst and sleepless nights were nothing any more. The lurking dangers of the big swamp in which he made his living, the giant 'gators and fat poisonous cottonmouths, the swarms of fever-mosquitoes and waiting pits of death-water all around him . . . These

ILLUSTRATED BY NEIL O'KEEFFE

also were nothing. His hate was all that mattered.

The light came closer and he heard now the thud of Carlty's gig-pole against the sides of the approaching boat. He heard the suck and chuckle of the parted waters. Flat on his stomach, Len Hallard parted the clump of hummock grass before his eyes and saw the whiteness of the other man's avid face in the light's underglow.

His fingers curled hungrily over at the gig that lay alongside him. One swift lunge, a bunching of his muscles as he flung the eight-foot pole spearwise at that mocking point of light, and the wickedly barbed hooks in the pole's end would bury themselves in Carlty's skull. But he lay still, guarding his breath. He buried his fingers in the black ooze and jammed the hate back into him.

Death must wait until Carlty gave up his secret!

THREE nights now Len had followed the other man deep into the 'Glades, and lost him, far in beyond the hummocks where the other frog-hunters lit their fires. He knew what they thought, those others. "It's come to a show-down," they were saying. "Once too often Carlty has tore the heart out of Len Hallard. This time he's went too far."

They were waiting, all of them, to see what would happen. Waiting for either Jaime Carlty or Len Hallard to come out of the swamp one night alone. It would be Carlty who came out; every man of them was sure of that, because at one time or another every one of them had felt the weight of Carlty's strength and cunning.

They had seen this coming and in wary silence had waited its culmination. They wanted Carlty killed, but none of them was strong enough in courage to try doing it. So when he'd come back from town that afternoon to find his woman cow-eyed drunk on Carlty's gin, the whispers had started.

"Len Hallard's got to fight now to save his face!" Even the kids chanted that, rolling their eyes at him when he passed the dreary backyards where they skinned the frogs. "Len Hallard's got to fight Carlty!"

They were right. Judy had come crawling back, all tears and pleading, and he'd cursed her out of the house and locked the door on her, as she deserved; but that wasn't enough. Every man, woman and child in the settlement had an eye glued on Hallard, waiting the rest of it.

He shivered now with the dark resolve that surged through him, but stayed flat on the muddy ground and moved only his eyes as the boat slid past. The light affixed to the dented crown of Carlty's battered, broad-brimmed hat burned steadily ahead, dipping with the dip of the big man's shoulders as he poled along. The swamp water sucked at the boat. The pole scraped its sides. The wake it set up lapped softly against the hummock on which Hallard lay.

They were only half right if they thought the fight would be over Hallard's woman. It was bigger than that —though the theft of a man's wife was big enough, truly. This other thing, though, was six dreary hunger-haunted months out of Len Hallard's life. It was half a hundred skulking night-trips to the bean farms, where he had run the risk of being shot, or mauled by dogs, to steal a broken crate or a few feet of rusted bale-wire.

It was days of going with a belly big with hunger pains, so he could buy a blow-torch and scrap-iron and paint and tools. It was nights of lying awake plotting and scheming, or sneaking off into the swamp to work in secret, while mosquitoes sucked him half empty of blood.

Now all this for which he had slaved had been stolen from him, and his brain roiled out the thought hour after hour: "Carlty's got to pay!"

He feared those enormous shoulders even while lavishing on them all the hate and bitterness that flowed out from him. He marveled at the big man's ease of balance. That was a devilish tricky boat, too thin and too long. He'd tried it himself one night. You veered your weight a hairline off the middle, or hiked one foot an inch too far forward, and

she rolled from under you quick as a startled snake. Yet Carlty stood in her as settled and easy as on dry ground.

That was the trouble. Carlty was smart. Carlty was giant-strong, quick as a cat and hellish cunning. That was why the others were certain it would be Carlty, and not Len Hallard, who'd come alone out of the swamp.

The light was past now. Carlty's big shoulders and long, thick arms were silhouetted against the glow-back. The boat ghosted deep toward a neighboring island, where the light whitened moss-hung oaks into spectres with outflung arms.

"It's there he hid it," Hallard thought. "Now I'll know!"

This much he knew already: Carlty had spied on him those secret nights in the swamp. Carlty it was who had stolen the result of those months of back-breaking labor. Hallard had seen the Watlet kids, Ned and Susie, skinning the frogs in Carlty's backyard the past two mornings, and the frogs had told him Carlty's secret.

A gigged frog has holes in it, where the barbed hooks strike home. These hadn't. These had been bashed on the head.

It was Carlty then, without a doubt, who had stolen the trap, the huge wire cage on which Len Hallard had sweated out half a year of his life. And tonight, after three failures, he'd succeeded in trailing the thief to the trap's new hiding place.

HE watched, trembling to his fingertips, as Carlty's boat nosed against the neighboring island. Drops of sweat mixed with the blood on his mouth as he saw the man step out and drag the flat-bottomed craft in through the grass. All about him the swamp was alive with its nightly serenade of frog-voices, yet he heard the sluff of Carlty's feet and the harsh husk of his breathing. He saw the light on the man's hat move up onto higher ground. He watched it disappear among the gaunt dead oaks and live cypresses, toward the hidden far side of the hummock.

"Now!" Hallard thought. "*Now!*"

He made no sound, slipping into his own boat. His bare feet felt through the inch-deep muddy water in the bottom and gripped hard, and then with knees bent, shoulders thrust out for balance, he drove the forked end of the gig-pole deep into the mud and put all his strength into the heave that shot him forward. Like an angry gar the slender craft streaked from its cover of sawgrass and flew toward the mark.

He leaned on the pole but twice, then the bottom dropped out of reach. He spun the pole in his hands and set himself. The boat sped twenty, thirty feet, straight as an arrow across the channel between the two dark islands. It slowed. He was ready when Carlty's abandoned craft loomed before him.

One thrust of the gig, and the barbed hooks bit deep into the boat of his enemy. A savage backward lunge and twist, and the empty boat was hauled from its nest, sent swirling into deep water. He heard it capsize. Now, by God, let Jaime Carlty elude him!

He wrenched the gig loose and poled after his prize. Through the noise he had made, he heard the rush of Carlty's feet, and saw the other man's light weaving weirdly across the hummock toward him.

Hallard threw back his head and screeched like a swamp-cat. He could not help it. "You're trapped, Carlty!" he howled. "I got your boat! I got you, Carlty! Now, by God, swim!"

He saw the light dip and saw the ghostly shape of his foe in a kneeling position at the hummock's edge. His yell was smothered by the breath he sucked up as, seeing the rifle in Carlty's hands, he flung himself to the bottom of the boat.

The rifle cracked, and all the other sounds were as nothing in the maze of crazy echoes that chased through the swamp. Even his own new yell, as the frail boat shuddered and the bullet splintered through within inches of his eyes, was caught up and ripped apart by the gun's second challenge.

This time the bullet caught him. It tore into his leg and bit bone. The shock raced through him like sound along a fiddle-string, and he felt the agony in

his ears, down to his feet, his fingers.

It was a red-edged wave of blackness. His muscles cringed and his teeth came together, tearing his tongue. He rolled in the boat, clawing with both hands at his leg. The boat rolled with him.

If there were more shots after that one, the sound of them was smothered by the black water that sucked him down. He stopped fighting the agony in his leg then. With the swamp man's eternal fear of the water, he thrashed out with both arms.

It was not swimming, exactly. It was more a frantic attempt to keep violently moving, to discourage any slithering, poisonous thing that might take a notion to attack him.

But he had sense enough, too, to stay down. Jaime Carlty was a hellish good shot!

He turned and twisted in the depths of the slough, while his lungs were squeezed and his head rang with torment. At last he felt soft mud under his feet, the sleek coils of a cypress root under his hands. He pulled himself up and drank the air in great gulps. He had reached Carlty's island.

Inch by inch Hallard dragged himself up the roots until the rest of him was out of the water. There he lay peering into the dark that hemmed him in.

The tables were turned now. Jaime Carlty had come out on top again. Now he and Carlty were marooned together on this island, one of them armed with a rifle, the other scared and wounded.

Only one of them would leave; that was a foregone conclusion.

HALLARD weighed his chances and found them slim. He lay still, getting his strength back, breathing deep to slow the thumping of his heart. About the agony that reached up from his leg there was nothing he could do, but he tried moving the leg and found that he could do that without fainting. He thought he could stand, too, if he had to.

First, though, he had to locate Carlty. The man's light was out now. Hallard reached up and found to his amazement that his own hat was still jammed fast to his head, his own light still in place. Queer things happened in the 'Glades.

There was no sound except the frog chorus and the faint lapping of the disturbed waters against the shore of the island. But Carlty was here somewhere. It was a fairly big island, and Carlty was on it.

"But he don't know I didn't drown," Hallard thought. "That's something, maybe." Bitterly he realized how mighty little it was!

He heard a twig snap. Peering in that direction he saw the side of a blackjack oak swell out. It was so much a part of the all-black darkness that he could not be sure, but his eyes were good eyes and used to the swamp at night, and he thought it was Carlty behind that tree. His hand shook as he fumbled for something to throw.

He caught up a short, heavy stick and flung it out into the water. There was a splash, and then a flash of rifle fire. Bullets bit into the water near where the stick had landed.

He'd been right about the tree. That was Carlty over there, a couple of hundred feet distant, taut and nervous as a cat, waiting to shoot him dead.

He heard the man reload. He saw the shape detach itself from the oak and stride down to the shore. He saw Carlty standing there peering into the dark at where the water had splashed. That gave him an idea.

He crawled away from Carlty. He crawled very slowly over the wet slippery cypress roots, through the sinkholes of mud between them, dragging his bad leg. His tongue was dry against the backs of his teeth, and all the moisture on his drawn face was not swamp water; some of it was sweat. If Carlty heard a sound over here, he was finished.

He hunted twenty feet of the hummock's shore before he found sawgrass growing out of the water. Crawling into it, he reared up on his knees, in water to his waist, and then steadied himself.

He was an old hand at this. You caught snakes this way, live ones for shipment to the snake farms. But tonight it was agony of soul and body to

keep still like that. The ache in his leg kept nudging him to jump. Fear of Carlty kept urging him to hike his head up and look around.

It was the longest, meanest three minutes of his life, but he stayed still. The grass whispered around him as the frogs came back. He watched a pair of bright little eyes coming closer, closer. His hand flashed out and the frog was caught!

It was a big bull. It croaked abysmally in his face and he cupped his hand over its head while fumbling in his pocket for fishline. Now he had to crawl again, to find a forked branch that would suck up a noise when dragged through the water. He had to crawl in the inky dark, fumbling. It took time.

He felt out a dozen sticks that were either too thin or too fat, too straight or too crooked. When he got one that suited, he was quivering worse than the frog in his fist, and was drenched and hot with sweat.

He tied the stick to the frog very carefully, so as not to hamper the frog's ability to swim. That done, he stood up, slow as morning mist rising. Then he flung the stick, with the frog tied to it, far out into the water, and hunkered down again, to wait. His lips moved and he realized he was praying.

Carlty heard the stick land, all right. It set up a splash louder than the other one. Carlty's gun shook the swamp's silence with a quick sharp jab of sound, and the echoes rolled. When the echoes died, there was silence again, but not total silence.

Out there in the water something moved. It could have been a man swimming. It could have been a 'gator, or a big snake. In the dark you couldn't see that far, but you could hear the movement of the water. The frog was swimming, pushing that forked stick along, setting up a noise.

OVER by the oak, Carlty spat out a curse and went to work with his rifle again. He fired carefully, doing his best to draw a bead on the sound of moving water. He was a good shot.

After each reloading, he listened. The echoes rolled off into the dismal depths of the slough, and then that other sound would come back, that sound of something swimming.

Now Carlty blazed away with less preparation. He'd lost his temper. His cursing rivaled the angry bark of the rifle. He fired as fast as he could reload. Then, fumbling for more shells in his pockets, he discovered that he had none, and cursed like a madman.

Len Hallard drew a deep breath of re-

lief. *That* phase of the fight was over, and now the deadly fear of being hunted down with a rifle could be discarded. He even smiled a little, wolfishly, baring his teeth. He began crawling again.

His leg had gone dead. He squeezed it and there was very little pain, very little anything. It was swelling, it had stopped bleeding, and it was useless.

Despair almost extinguished the small flame of triumph that had brightened his eyes. He could not stand. How then could he hope to fight and kill a man as big as Carlty, with two good legs and two powerful hands and a rifle that still could be used as a club?

He lay in the dark, thinking about it. He nursed his small flame of hope as daintily as a man marooned without matches would nurse a glowing spark that meant fire and food. He thought of the times Carlty had beaten him and laughed at him, of Judy, cow-eyed drunk on Carlty's gin. Of the trap over which he had slaved and sweated.

The trap . . .

He shivered as he squirmed out of his sodden shirt and trousers. With nakedness came fear again, the fear of defenseless man in a wilderness filled with violent death. There is a feeling of protection in the wearing of clothes; no matter how ragged and poor, clothes are a barrier. He felt white and vulnerable without them, and his teeth chattered.

He emptied his pockets, carefully laying aside his roll of fishline and waterproof box of matches. He stuffed the shirt with sawgrass and shaped it, tied it with fishline to his trousers and stuffed those, too. A rolled-up wad of grass and mud served for a head, and on it he jammed his hat, with its frog-light.

Would the light work after immersion? He was afraid to know the answer, and caught himself praying again.

It looked at least remotely human when he had finished with it, but everything depended, perhaps, on whether or not Carlty would use *his* light. But Carlty was too cunning for that! Not yet sure of his enemy's death, he'd keep to the dark. A live Len Hallard, armed with a gig-pole, might use that light for a target; and even Carlty had a healthy respect for the barbed hooks of a gig!

Hallard dragged his dummy to the water's edge and worked it slowly into the sawgrass. It looked half alive. It looked as though Len Hallard had swum exhausted into shallow water and collapsed there, his arms flung out and his hands gone limp in the act of hauling himself up onto safer ground. It looked —good.

But now came the difficult part. He peered into the dark, at where Carlty had been. Nothing moved over there. The frogs were in full voice and no other sound was loud enough to be audible. Was Carlty prowling the island, creeping up on him?

He went to work, doggedly fighting down his fear. He had no choice. He could not swim away from this place, even if his courage were equal to a trip through the snake-infested water. He could not stand up and fight if Carlty rushed him. This dummy was all he had.

He worked feverishly. Crawling this way and that, through black mud and over twisted roots that wriggled against his flesh, he gathered dead sticks and hag's-hair and grass. He put the stuff in a pile beside the dummy and took up the roll of fishline. He thought of all the nights he had worked on the wire cage, and all the tricks he had learned while twisting scraps of wire together, weaving them and knotting them. This thing he was doing now with the fishline was simple by comparison, but it had to work! It had to work the first time!

He coiled the fishline between two thick roots of a dead cypress that leaned far out over the water. He crawled with one end of the line to a clump of grass and tested it, and crawled back again, dragging his useless leg. Ten minutes later he was finished.

He looked it all over and moved the dummy a little, and then put his thumb against the flashlight switch. Sweat poured out of him then. He held his breath until every beat of his heart was like a frog croaking in his chest.

Would it work, after all he'd built around it?

He clicked it, and the light glowed up at him from the dummy's hat. His

breath rattled in his throat. Relief was an ecstasy of pure pain. He stared at the glow as though it were supernatural.

HE CRAWLED away from it, back to the clump of grass. He lay still, listening to the night-noises in the swamp. He caressed the end of the fishline. Then he picked up a stick and threw it the twenty feet into the slough.

Every second then was an hour, until he heard, or more correctly *felt,* the approaching footsteps of the man who was marooned on the island with him. They were slow steps, infinitely wary, as though Carlty had waked to the trick played on him with the stick and the frog, and was leery of being tricked a second time.

The big man passed within two feet of Hallard's hiding place. He moved like a man afraid of stepping into quicksand. Suddenly he stopped and sucked up a breath, and Hallard knew he had seen the light.

It *looked* real enough! The light glowed there in the sawgrass, and the shape sprawled there looked like a man who had come up out of the water but could go no farther. Carlty hissed something under his breath and strode forward, full of eagerness. He didn't need his own light; the glow in the slough was guide enough.

Carlty stepped around the dead cypress. He leaned to grab at the floating shape and tramped on the dead sticks and grass that hid Hallard's trap.

Hallard reared up to his knees and hauled on the fishline. It was stout, that line, stout enough to hold anything the swamp had to offer, short of 'gators. It tightened around Carlty's legs as the big man crashed through into waist-deep water. It yanked the legs up from under him and spilled him. He went under with a screech that cut the swamp's silence like a saw biting through hard pine.

Hallard braced his good leg and hauled, keeping the line taut, keeping the man's legs up high in the water. That kept his head down. The strain set Hallard's muscles on fire and jammed his jaws together, filling his mouth with fresh blood. But he hung on. He hauled. He dug his good bare foot into the soft earth and dragged for all he was worth, while the other man thrashed about like a roped alligator.

It was a good trap. The two sprawling roots kept the snared man from twisting to get at the line with his hands. The water was deep enough. The line was strong enough. The one potentially weak link was the waning strength of Hallard himself.

He had to keep that line taut! It was like playing a huge fish. If the trapped man won enough slack to lower his legs for a footing, he could escape!

Hallard hung on, his eyes popping. The line burned his wrists raw and his braced foot dug a channel in the earth. But he hung on. And presently the other man's struggles were less powerful, the water roiled less and less.

Hallard tugged a while longer, to be sure. Then he crawled down to the water's edge and got hold of the other man's legs and hauled him out. It was hard work, but he did it. He tied Carlty's hands and feet with the fishline. He rolled Carlty over and thumped him, and watched the swamp-water pour from his mouth in a torrent. He dragged him to a log and rolled him over it, and got more water out. It took time, because he could not stand up. He had to hitch along like a crayfish.

After a while he shone the dummy's light on Carlty's face and watched the eyes open. And then Hallard said grimly, "It looks like I won. I could've drowned you, Carlty, but that wouldn't be good enough for you. You got to know who's killin' you. They *all* got to know!"

He saw fear in Carlty's widening eyes and it puzzled him. It disturbed him, too. He hadn't hoped to see fear in those eyes, or in that hard, thick face, ever. But it was there. It angered him.

"You hear, Carlty?" he snarled. "I'm goin' to kill you!"

That should have changed the fear to a snarl of defiance, but it didn't. It altered it to something worse, to a look of terror. The man writhed helplessly and rolled his eyes. He sucked at his lips and tossed his head from side to

side. He strained at the fishline. "No, Len! No!" he whimpered.

It wasn't the kind of reply Hallard had expected. It was a bleak whine for mercy, poured out of a soul that was sick and shriveled with terror. This didn't make sense. Jaime Carlty was supposed to make *other* men whine!

But Carlty did the whining. He sobbed out his terror and begged to be let go. He promised everything he owned, his boat, his house, his woman, everything. "Please, Len," he whimpered. "Please! I won't never lift a hand against you again!"

Len Hallard took his fingers away from the man's throat and wiped them on the ground. He looked away, disgusted. He felt cheated. After a time he crawled away from Carlty and began a tour of the island.

THE thing he sought was not overly hard to find, because of course a rope was tied to it, and the rope snaked up out of the slough and was wrapped around a tree. Getting the trap up *out* of the slough was hard work, though, because he couldn't stand on his two feet and haul. It took time, and it used up about the last of his strength.

He looked the trap over. It wasn't damaged any. It was still the best 'gator trap ever designed in this part of the swamp-country, built light but solid, and strong enough to hold any 'gator that ever swam in the swamp.

It was full of frogs right now. The frogs had got into it by chance and hadn't been able to think their way out again. That was how Len Hallard had known of Carlty's theft of the trap—because those frogs in Carlty's backyard had not been pierced with any gig.

By crawling backward, using his good leg for leverage and hauling on the rope, he dragged the trap across the hummock. He pulled it to high ground and then went back to Carlty.

The whites of Carlty's eyes gleamed up at him, and Carlty's voice was a whine again. "You can't kill me, Len! Please God, Len, I won't never cross you no more!"

"I ain't fixin' to kill you," Hallard said. "There'd be no point to it."

He dragged Carlty across the hummock to the trap and put him into it, paying no heed whatever to the big man's frantic pleading. He put Carlty into the trap and fastened the trap tight. Then he set about lighting a fire that would bring the other frog-hunters to take them off.

Because, of course, there was no need for killing Carlty now. You killed things that were dangerous, like cottonmouth moccasins and diamond backs and black widow spiders. Ordinary loathsome things that could not harm you, you just didn't waste any time on.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

FORTY years ago the author of "We Licked 'Em Once" learned a profound lesson. He had gone to the Arctic as photographer and scientific assistant to the Baldwin-Ziegler Polar Expedition. He witnessed the seriousness of improper outfitting and when, to his own amazement, he was chosen commander of the second Ziegler Expedition, he gave every factor of equipment the utmost care. Such attention proved his wisdom.

Hardly had he reached Franz Josef Land when an unprecedented movement of ice crushed his ship at her anchorage in Teplitz Bay and sank her, giving barely time to get provisions ashore.

Fiala and his men remained marooned two and a half years on that remote archipelago north of 80°, utterly out of communication with the world—no radio then—till finally a rescue ship broke through. The men were saved from cold and starvation by the equipment and food that had been so carefully provided.

Today explorers everywhere know Major Anthony Fiala as an authority on the polar regions and the tropics. As president of Fiala Outfits, Inc., big game hunters, prospectors, surveyors, explorers and adventurers of all kinds come to him for advice and help in outfitting their expeditions.

A private in the Spanish-American War, lieutenant in 1900, honorable discharge in 1901, polar work, 1901 to 1905. Scientific results of expedition published by National Geographic Society in 1907. Narrative of expedition "Fighting the Polar Ice," published by Doubleday, Page & Co. in 1906—and so on—an adventurous life!

Colonel Theodore Roosevelt called on Fiala to equip his Brazilian expedition in 1913, and took him along to make moving pictures of the great Amazonian wilderness.

In 1916-17 he saw service on the Mexican Border as captain of a machine-gun troop, was Captain of 4th Company, 102nd Ammunition Train in '17 and transferred to Ordnance and commissioned major in '18.

He has designed guns, is an expert on firearms and explosives, and during World War No. 1, the army authorities put him in charge of testing machine guns and ammunition for the A.E.F. at the Small Arms Proving Ground at Springfield, Mass. He was honorably discharged in '19 and has since been in the Reserve.

We haven't the faintest idea why a

man with an army career like that behind him has waited so long to join our Writers' Brigade and then decides to do it with a bit of naval history but whatever the explanation we're mighty glad the ice is broken and welcome him to our *Camp-Fire*. Come again, Major!

HARRY BEDWELL, who gives us "Indian Transfer" this month, had cinders in his hair and knew the music of the clicking rails from boyhood. We're glad to welcome him to the *Camp-Fire* and listen to him chin about his story and himself. He says—

You know how it was with a country kid in the prairies, back in those times, hanging around the old CB&Q depot, learning to telegraph, watching the trains boom across those eternal plains and wondering what was over there beyond the long horizon.

Arbitrarily, I added two years to my age to get that first job and go telegraphing for the old "Q" up and down the Missouri River bottoms—Omaha and Kansas City and St. Joe, where the covered wagon trains used to begin their long trek. Night tricks in little stations under the bluffs, where the hotshots thundered through the prairie dark, and yard offices where the messages dripped steadily from your typewriter, and the switch engines raved out there on the web of sidings twenty-four hours a day.

Boomers, those amiable drifters, came and worked till they "got the wrinkles out of their bellies," and moved on. They told of the deserts of the Southwest, where the sun and the silence got inside your head if you stayed too long, and the bland days along the Pacific, and how the big jacks sounded on the savage grades of the Rocky Mountains. A wide-eyed kid had to go and look.

You got your first glimpse of the continental jawbone at Denver, and then there were long, flashing days on the enchanted Denver & Rio Grande, the most fascinating railroad of them all. Salida, where the narrow gage climbs the four percent nine thousand feet and more over Marshall Pass to Gunnison and beyond to fabulous Ouray.

Grand Junction, by the yellow Colorado and Green River, Utah, where the old padres' trail came up from Santa Fe for a crossing of the Green, the first beaten path into Southern California. A long way around, and why did they take it?

From Green River, all the way south to Arizona, the country was mostly unexplored, except by Mormon settlers, and the Robbers' Roost gang. There, you regularly saw Matt Warner playing twenty-one of nights with the Chinese gamblers in the back room of the Mint, across the tracks from the Rio Grande station—Matt Warner, bandit partner of Butch Cassidy. Matt served his term and lived until recently and had his biography written. And there were Indians and cavalry troops riding by, and the mysterious little parties heading into the back of beyond; adventurers in special built boats, headed down the Green for a try at the rapids and the cataracts and the canyons of the Colorado; and the mail rider coming up once a week with his thin mail bag from the isolated settlements far down the river.

Later, you got your first whiff of the Pacific Ocean on the train-ferry crossing the Carquinez Straits; and the first brisk, full-bodied smell took hold of you hard as you crossed San Francisco Bay. It was a bright blue all the way down the coast, and that sullen, restless voice of it among the rocks always saying things to you.

More enchanted days on the Colorado Desert for the Southern Pacific, in a little telegraph station lonely in the blank landscape on the bank of the Salton Sea, a forty-mile long plaque of inland water that the Red Bull had spilled into that sink in one of his tantrums. Those days were spun out in white, hot magic; and of nights the breeze from the Sea of Cortez came in sharp-edged. The trains slammed by, and then the silence would come back and the sun blaze, or the stars come down close. Nothing else—except if you stayed long enough there did seem to be something else that came in, and you maybe started talking to it. That was when the sun and silence got inside your head, and after that they took you away and didn't let you come back.

You give me a little encouragement and I'll keep on remembering the rest of the night. Indian boys, not much younger than yourself, squatted in the sun, quiet and watchful, listening to the telegraph instruments, and you wondered what they thought of the slim kid who worked them. But maybe it was as well you didn't know.

The young chief, drunk and lying on the waiting-room floor, surrounded by

his squatting squaws. He had just received his periodic allotment of rations and cash from the Great White Father, and presently he aroused himself and peremptorily waved the kid night operator to the ticket window. He said in clear, brisk English, that likely came out of Carlisle, "I don't believe I have ever given you anything, have I?" and laid a twenty-dollar gold piece on the counter.

Mexican laborers, walking the desert at night to avoid the heat of the day. Heading back to Mexico, or coming back after a visit home. They'd come into the lonely station if you invited them, and talk, cheerful and gay. They had polite, kindly manners—the kind we seldom showed them. The kid night operator liked them.

Sometimes I'd try to approximate on paper what all this was like to that wide-eyed kid, and some of the magazines printed it. Railroad Magazine, Harpers, American, the Saturday Evening Post. Right now, Farrar & Rinehart has a book on schedule into which I tried to put a little of those bright years. And now I've been invited up to the *Camp-Fire*. You just can't tell what'll happen, if you keep on trying.

We'll let you know when that book comes out, title and so on. It ought to be a swell job.

THE author of "The Duel" also joins our Writers' Brigade for the first time this month. Jim Kjelgaard says—

I think that stepping up to the *Camp-Fire* and meeting the rest of the *Adventure* gang is one of the pleasantest "jobs" I've ever had. Yet, when it comes to telling about myself, I find that I'm singularly thwarted. It seems I should be able to relate hair-raising experiences, exciting adventures, and narrow escapes from this or that. But what actually has happened to me? I can tabulate on my fingers the interesting experiences of my life and murmur to myself, "Well, there was that run of big rainbows in Kettle Creek last year. There was that time when I drilled a big buck and made a clean kill at four hundred and eighty measured yards. There was that wolf hunt, when the hounds tangled with a big timber wolf and nobody dared shoot for fear of killing the dogs. There was the night when that big sheep-killing bear reared against the rail fence with a trap on his foot, and you were at the same time holding the lantern and hoping that Ike knew how to handle a rifle (he did)."

And so it goes, all the intimate little happenings that anyone may look back on, and nothing at all unusual. But I can say that I come by my interest in mountains and mountain men naturally. I was "riz" in the Pennsylvania mountains, where I acquired an extensive education in hunting and fishing, trapping, chewing tobacco, and even learned a couple of mild cuss words. And very often I was chastised by irate teachers because, instead of Ivanhoe, I preferred to read about Kit Carson, Ewing Young, and "Parson" LeBoeutellier, whose justly famed mule could smell out the Blackfeet that would otherwise have lifted the Parson's scalp. They were a special breed of men who sprang up to meet special conditions. The west was really wild then. Lewis and Clark had cut a thin trail through it, John Colter and a few others had branched off from the Lewis and Clark route. But the mountain men, setting their traps in regions never before trod by white men, fighting back and outwitting Indians, and spending the proceeds of a year's trapping in two weeks at "rendezvous," really tamed all that region. "The Duel" was written about such men, and I hope it's worthy of them.

Concerning the rest of my history, I've held down more jobs than I can remember, have been asked to quit some and have voluntarily left others. The jobs include everything from teamster to factory hand. I've put in long stretches at backwoods trapping, and have been a professional hunters' and fishermen's guide. I'm still unable to decide whether I like hunting or fishing best—I guess it depends on whatever season's open. I've been a free-lance writer for three years and have published about a hundred and fifty short stories and articles, and one book. At the present time I'm hard at work on a second.

I'm thirty-one years old, married, and the father of a sassy two year old kid named Karen.

We had read a good many of those hundred and fifty Kjelgaard yarns in other publications before "The Duel" found its way to the *Adventure* office. And each one left us with the feeling that here was a guy who knew the wilderness, loved it and would some day, we hoped, bring a breath of it to these

pages. We're glad he has, finally, and may the blaze-marks he's made point his way often up our *Trail Ahead.*

LESLIE T. WHITE appends the following supplementary material to introduce his two-part story which starts in this issue and concludes with a bang in our next. He says—

I froze both cheeks, one nose and three toes getting the "color" for "5,000 Trojan Horses." To make it more complicated, the editor, in this case, knows this territory quite as well as I do. (The hell he does! *Ed.*)

As to why I chose the "top of the world" this time, instead of the "bottom" (as I did in my last serial "East of the Williwaw")—that's easy! I was born in Ontario and, therefore, the timber country is "in the blood."

The *names* of all characters in the yarn are, of course, fictitious; the characters are not. Outside of Ottawa, there lives a retired sergeant-major of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who raises sled dogs as does "Old MacGillivray." It was from this grand old veteran I got the "feel" of what the Force can mean to a man, and the facts about the Siberian huskies. Here in my study I have a photograph of the sergeant-major and the living counterpart of "Emperor," a half-wolf sled dog. And among my valued friends of past days was Inspector Patterson, who at the time of his death was in charge of Intelligence in Ottawa. To know these men is to understand the greatness of that relatively small body of heroes who protect the vast northern wilderness; to understand the real meaning of the motto of the R.C.M.P.—"*Maintiens le droit.*"

Drug store "trappers" usually ascribe a "grunt" dialect to the Indian, and in giving the translation of the squaw's words from Cree to English, I have tried to preserve the poetic flavor. In truth, the Indian is a born orator and, in his own environment, a fascinating conversationalist. I recall a short patrol I made with a R.C.M.P. constable a few years back across the wind swept salt rime of James Bay, in the eastern sub-arctic. We camped one night along the shore and an Indian and his son paid us a visit. With the temperature hovering at fifty-five degrees below zero, we squatted in our tent and the Indian told of a trip he had made after a moose, how he had traveled northward for "five sleeps" until he caught up with the forest giant floundering in the deep snow, and slew it with a hand axe. For sheer beauty of narrative, I've never heard the equal. And there wasn't a grunt to the story!

Although Hollywood lured me to California, I'll go back again someday to the long trails of the north woods. As I worked on the story with the steady pounding of the Pacific surf in my ears, the pounding faded, and I found myself on the snow trail once more. It's hard to convey the sensation of nostalgia you get after a good dose of the north woods. I left the typewriter and dug out my old Ojibway coasters—the finest snowshoes known to man. Yon can't use 'em here in California (without hoofing it up to the mountains), but I gave 'em a coat of varnish against the day. And then writing about the bannocks made me dig up an old recipe the Mounties gave me, but somehow they didn't taste as good as they did back on the trail.

Incidentally, a mere half inch in height was all that kept me out of the R.C.M.P. about twenty years ago. Instead, I joined the Ottawa Highlanders, and did a hitch wearing the kilt.

The northwoods have been badly maligned in fiction; the animals, the climate, and the dangers. There is no danger, save for the ignorant and the fools who disregard the basic laws of nature. So-called "bad men" don't last. As to the cold, it's exaggerated. I have seen it sixty below on James Bay, it's true, but if you're dressed properly, you won't mind it. Corporal Covell of the R.C.M.P. gave me the secret. *Don't dress too heavy!* A pair of wool pants with a pair of canvas dungarees over them to break the wind, a wool shirt with a sail cloth parka, mittens and proper mukluks, and you're set. The idea is that you should be quite cold the first fifteen or twenty minutes of the trail, and then when your circulation and blood temperature catches up, you'll he comfortable. Only you must not perspire. Unfortunately most novices pile on clothes so they feel grand when they leave the cabin, and after a little exertion, they begin to get overheated.

So someday in the not-too-distant future, when the Japs and the Nazis have been slapped back into place, I'm going to hit the trail once more from the Moose, across James Bay again, into Quebec, along the old, old trail of the *voyageurs.* I'll roll me nights in the eiderdown and in the frosty dawn, I'll dig the

dogs out of the snow and harness them while they howl impatiently, and the ice cracks on the jack-pines. I'll eat moose steaks and arctic hare stew. I'll keep my face to the northern lights, and let the wolves sing me to sleep.

God knows, I may even take the editor along to make it official! (Suits! *Ed.*)

We're pretty crazy about that north country ourselves though we've never seen it in winter. Not that that matters, however. We remember one 4th of July a few years ago when it snowed hard for about an hour in Cochrane and we can imagine what end-of-steel at James Bay might be like in January. At least the black flies and mosquitoes wouldn't be out and that'd be something. We paddled a canoe out to Moose Factory in a sleet storm once with mosquitoes at least an inch long dodging between the hailstones to get at us effectively. L. T. W. says he doesn't believe a word of it but it's true—so help us!

NOT since "The Dead Go Overside" concluded in the August '38 issue has *Adventure* had the pleasure of publishing an Arthur D. Howden Smith story. And not since '25 has Swain gone viking in these pages. It's good to have them both back with us again—a charter member of our Writers' Brigade yarning once more about one of the most popular characters who ever flourished here.

"Swain's Warding" really originated in the brain of Elmer Davis, the well known newscaster, (and ex-associate editor of *Adventure)* who wanted to know what could have happened if Swain ever met Andronicus (Alexius) Comnenus, a rather competent and not altogether unattractive scoundrel, as some of you will discover if you read the story. It was quite a job to determine this, involving substantial researches into Byzantine history—which is nothing if not involved—whereas Swain's early exploits were based mainly upon reconstructions of "The Orkneyinga Saga," dealing with viking days in the Orkney Islands around Scapa Flow, and the mighty "Heimskringla Saga" or "Saga of the Kings." Swain was a very real person. He figured heftily in "The Orkneyinga Saga," first as a thorn in the hides of the ruling Jarls, and afterwards as their friend and mentor.

I always liked Swain, who hasn't been in the picture for a long time. He knew what he wanted, and always got it. His feud with Olvir Rosta is a classic, and old-time *Adventure* readers may remember some stories about it. Now that the Norse people are becoming fighters again, perhaps Americans will be interested in this new tale of men who thought nothing of roving, singly or in fleets, from Hardanger Fjord to Mikklegard or Iceland —where, I hope, some of you will be interested—or beyond, even so far as Furdurstrandi, "the long and wonderful beaches," which some men say were the shores of the Long Island barrier beaches; some Cape Cod's "backside." Anyhow, it's all there in the Sagas, and they prove that Columbus was a well-meaning slow-sailor and thinker.

ABOUT his story in this issue, Hugh B. Cave, who hasn't been with us since he collaborated with Jonathan Eldridge on "Derelict" back in April '37, says—

"Swamp Trap" grew out of a bit of frog-hunting I once did while endeavoring to write detective stories in Florida. Writing detective stories in Florida is a task for a will much stronger than mine. The fishing is too good. There are bass in the Everglades that stomp right up behind a man and peer over his shoulder while he typewrites. At any rate, the idea of hunting frogs in the big swamp at night intrigued me, and I set out to do something about it. Through a nine-year-old lad who used to deliver groceries to the house, I met and talked to some of the frog-hunters, and finally managed to persuade them to take me along one night. I could come, they said, but would be strictly on my own; they were going to be very busy hunting frogs and would have no time to haul a damnfool writer out of the mud or untangle him from a nest of moccasins.

I spent a whole night in the 'Glades, trying to keep up with those fellows. I gigged four frogs and a cottonmouth; the latter was four and a half feet long, and when he fell off the gig-hooks into the boat, I got out of it, but fast. By conservative count, at least twelve thousand mosquitoes fed on me before the night ended. I neither wrote nor fished for a week.

I have since hunted frogs with more

success, however, and am certain it would become as popular as night-casting for bass if more sportsmen knew about it and were able to survive the initiation.

MORE about those fabulous fish that swam through Tom Roan's "Jambi" back in the February issue. The following from an old *Camp-Fire* correspondent from whom we are always glad to hear—

I cannot pretend to be an authority on the subject of fishes; but I have been much interested in the current Roan-Sigmund debate in your columns upon T. R.'s famous man-eating fish. You may recall that a year or two ago you used certain data which I submitted in connection with an argument about the common eel.

The fish under present discussion can, with equal propriety, be designated as piraya, pirana, piranha, pirai or peari, and there are probably several other names quite as serviceable. There is always much confusion about the "correct" popular name for any fish. The common American large-mouth black bass, for instance, has upwards of forty entirely different names, by which it is recognized in various portions of the U. S. As for the pirana, there are a number of different species, of variable violence, to each one of which one of the above names are sometimes given, although even there no definite schedule has been drawn up. The mix-up may also be caused by attempts to arrive at clear phonetic representations of various foreign titles differently interpreted. Unless a writer definitely denotes one given fish by its accepted scientific classification, it is virtually impossible to be sure whether he is correct or completely mixed up. And most amateurs seem to be afraid of scientific names, which are in most cases no more unreasonable or hard to remember than are the titles of racehorses.

From what facts have been given to date in the dispute, I am afraid that brother Roan has worse confounded confusion by bringing up "the Pirate perch of sluggish south-eastern United States waters." This fish has as much connection with the piranha as it has with Fibber McGee. It is a small, modest item often used for bait, found in fresh and brackish waters from Long Island west to Minnesota and southward to the Gulf and the Atlantic coast of Florida. It is voracious; but probably never bit anything bigger than a mussel and lives chiefly upon inseets. Its proper name is Aphredoderus sayanus, which title signifies its interesting shift in anatomical construction as it develops. It has no close relatives.

It is hardly likely—although one never likes to be too sure about such things—that Mr. Roan could have mixed that name up with any true piraya planted artificially in this country. I doubt that they would survive here outside of captivity. They are native only to moderately cool, free-running streams of north-central South America, which does cover a wide range, and by their very nature most of them are extremely difficult to import alive into this country. There are certain mild varieties which can be shipped in groups; but only an expert would associate these fishes with their popularly-known vicious relatives. The blood-thirsty types can travel only one to a good-sized container and they are, consequently, pretty costly when they get here—when their owner's troubles have only just begun. I would not make any promises about the safety of keeping them in company with any other fish; but it might be possible to keep one under control in a large, heavily planted tank with a big, horny-hided South American catfish or some other particularly hard-boiled animal. Occasionally, in a very large container with a great number of other fishes, it is possible to keep a specimen which would immediately murder a single companion; but I'm offering no bets on that boy's behavior.

I do not know whether, in the wild, mature pirai will deliberately pick fights with healthy companions of the same species. They will, of course, slaughter weak, injured or ailing pals with small compunction. In nature they probably spawn in great schools, over heavy aquatic vegetation where the young can find safety until they are big enough to tackle something larger than their parents' more spindly offspring.

Some time ago an acquaintance of the writer's obtained two mature specimens of one of the species which enjoy cavalry horses for lunch. He placed them in a large aquarium, where he nursed them carefully for months, with a sheet of heavy plate glass set securely in the center of the tank to keep them apart. Eventually the presumed female seemed to fill up nicely with roe, while the other

one put on extra bright colors and howled for another hamburger every time you looked at him. They watched each other; but the owner could not tell whether their expression meant intent to murder or was only a toothy smile.

Finally the owner decided to see if they might breed successfully. As carefully as a diamond-cutter, he started to lift out the dividing sheet of glass. Just at that moment a fuel-truck went by, shook the greenhouse and knocked over a flower-pot. As it hit the floor he turned his head for a moment, instinctively. By the time he looked back the tank contained one piranha and a piece of cat-food. To my knowledge, he has never submitted this vain romance to Dorothy Dix. It may be that the falling flower-pot startled the remaining pirana. More likely, it was just its natural, ingrown cussedness that came out quick at the first opportunity.

What the situation may be today I do not know. Before the unpleasantness resumed you could sometimes buy a genuine man-eating pirana from one of the better dealers in exotic aquarium stock if you had the price, sufficient guinea-pigs to keep it in food and space to spare for so anti-social a critter. Anyhow, I doubt that you'll find any loose in the United States—although the alligator-gar is much more dangerous in our Southern inlets—unless some uncommonly ambitious saboteur has started something of which I've not heard. Which reminds me—perhaps some reader familiar with the Far East can suggest a way by which the famous "shooting fish" could be trained to blow drops of poison into the rice-beer of Japanese soldiers feeding along a Burmese or Thailand river.

Yours sincerely,
Henry A. Nichols

233 So. 41st Street,
Philadelphia, Pa.

P. S.—Lest I be letting myself in for a few cracks by emphasizing the importance of scientific terminology in identifying fishes, and then mentioning two species without their proper designations: Largemouth black bass: (Micropterus salmoides), and alligator gar: (Atractosteus spatula).

The latter item, incidentally, is by far the most ferocious fresh-water fish in the Americas; but it is often overlooked as such because much of its activity is erroneously ascribed to 'gators and crocodiles. It is of course, a lone wolf, while the piranha do their dirt in great gangs. Per single fish, there is no comparison.

We hastened the Nichols letter along to Author Roan and back by return mail came the following—

Dear Mr. Nichols:

Hold, thar, Hank, hold! I did not mean to imply that the lowly pirate perch of this country looked at you with a tearful eye when you didn't pitch him a cavalry horse for dinner. I merely intended to number him among the more or less ferocious fish. We did not use them for bait 'way down in Alabama when I was a kid but caught them to eat along with most anything else that was eatchable out of the streams. If my memory serves me correctly they were never larger than a good-sized hand exclusive of the tail—and I might add that the best thing we found to catch them with was fresh bloody liver, any kind. They were not particular.

And I remember this: I once had my foot tangled with the business side of a crosscut saw. I thrust my foot in the creek and sat there trying to stop the blood, and the same little fish you look upon so lightly came up and thought it was time for dinner. Those same little fish would also bite hell out of your finger if you were not careful when taking a hook out of their mouths.

Of course you can still call him a Fibber McGee or anything else when you compare him with those fish of South America. He would also be a pretty mild customer to the barracuda—and not nearly so dangerous looking perhaps as a school of deep sea eels I once saw off a beach in Hawaii running everybody out of the water.

Let the flying snakes take care of the Japs down among the Islands. They're kinfolks, anyway.

Sincerely,
Tom Roan

P. S. And another thing, Hank, don't "brother" me. Does everybody have to know Pa and Ma had ambitions for me to be a preacher, and I backfired on 'em?

We still prefer brook trout (Salvelinus fontinalis) but it's been a lot of fun, anyway, learning about his cannibalistic cousins.

IN THE April *Ask Adventure* we printed a request from Nathan Schupac for information about whips. Walt Coburn had a few things to say about

the bull whips of the cattle country in answer, you will recall. And we asked if any reader could remember an Australian vaudeville or circus performer who used to have a whip-act. C. B. Wales writes from Fort Clark, Texas that he recalls the performer well and that his name was Burt Shepherd. And the following two letters offer additional information on whips and their use.

As a lad at the Pan-American Exposition, I saw Eskimos use dog whips about 20 ft. long to snap coins from a small platform about 2 ft. square. They held the elbow well away from the body with the lash straight out in front of the right (or left) side, gave the forearm a perpendicular back-hand movement to lay the lash behind them. The movement was then reversed with some force.

I made a whip using raw-hide belt lacing 1-inch wide. The stock was a 1-inch round stick, 15 inches long; it was covered with a braiding of narrow lacing. The lash was full width for the body, laid in layers, laced together, tapering in thickness to ¾-inch, 36 inches from the stock and tapering again in width and thickness from there to the end of the lash, or about 17 feet.

Go easy until you get used to the hang of the whip. I got many lashes in many parts of the body including the face.

Walt Coburn brings back the memory of the Australian whom I saw at Shea's Theatre in Buffalo, N. Y. I remember two things he did. He cut a cigarette in two with a short whip (10-ft.). The cigarette was held in the mouth of an attendant of his company. I remember how the attendant's face quivered as he stood waiting. The Aussie also tied up the man's wrists, held out in front of him, with one of his long whips.

—Harry S. Ross
766 Main Street
Worcester, Mass.

Inasmuch as I doubt if Schupac is in the bull driving game, and as I believe he is interested in "target" work, I suggest you pass the following on to him.

I'm no expert but I have done this stuff in shows and carnivals. Bull whip work as we know it is known as "bull waits" (the last word is phonetic) and comes from Australia where teamsters used whips or waits sometimes over 100 feet long. They are of course handmade, and are quite heavy. Each woven strip is made from a full bull's hide cut round and round. It starts off at a narrow 3-ply and may end at 12 or more ply. The handle is wood and short. The "popper" may be weighted if desired. Telling how to use one is like describing how to throw an axe.

I don't care to use up your valuable time in lessons but if Brother Schupac wishes to write me I'll be glad to tell him what I know and perhaps put him in touch with expert authorities.

—Robert S. Rankin
19 Shepard Street
Cambridge, Mass.

We're forwarding both the above letters to Nathan Schupac with a request that if he gets any further details on his hobby he'll let us know about them.

A CONDENSED version of Walter Livingston's "Riders East," which we published in our December issue, appeared in the April "Reader's Digest" with the title "The Great 1000-Mile Horse Race." A few days after the "Digest" came out we received an interesting letter from Mrs. Berrie Bond Van Natta of Casper, Wyoming, part of which we quote herewith—

I was very much interested in the article for many a time I've heard my grandmother tell the same story. The personal interest is that I am a granddaughter, on the maternal side, of John Berry, the winner of said race. Incidentally, his wife and one daughter and four grandchildren survive. I would like to get in touch with the writer of this fine article and would like to have a copy of the issue of *Adventure* containing the original version.

We have forwarded Mrs. Van Natta's letter to Walter Livingston and a copy of the December *Adventure* went with our compliments to Casper, Wyoming by return mail.—K. S. W.

(Continued from page 8)

GALLOPING ivories in the Orient.

Request:—I would appreciate any information you can give me regarding that dice game which is played all through the Orient—"Liar Dice." Anyone who has spent some time in China or the Philippines will know this.

The specific questions which are bothering me are:

1. Does the first roll alternate between the players, or does the winner of the previous roll always go first.

2. The second question can best be explained by an example. Player A rolls a pair on the first roll. He picks up the remaining three dice and rolls them again —unproductively. He says he has 3 aces instead of the low pair he really has. Player B chooses to believe him. In two rolls the best that B can get is a lower 3 than A has disclosed. Here is the question: Can B at this point lie and say, for instance, that he has a full house? If A believes him, he (A) would then, in his remaining roll, have to beat the full house to win.

If you have any variation not covered in the above example, would appreciate hearing it.

—A. M. Balso
220 East 42 St.
New York City

Reply by Seward S. Cramer:—Your game of Liar Dice—incidentally, it has a different name in almost every port (including some that aren't polite)—is one of the screwier moods of the Orient. It got out of hand at a time when people were doing a lot of travelling out there. If anybody was losing, he would make up a new rule and say: "Well, that's the way they play it in Tsingtao, Amoy, or Manila." They'd even make up new rules for the roll. It got to a point where the first man would simply say: "I've got five sixes." What could you do except buy up? Things did get a bit more settled in that absolutely screw-ball ideas were thrown out. But to get to your question:—

1). When two or three are playing, the winner keeps the first roll. When four or more are in the game, all peg one die for high man, ace high. The reason for this is that four or more usually roll for the drinks and it is a process of elimination with the loser buying. This is the usual rule for all five-dice games.

2.) The illustration that you cite was evidently played under some local rule. The general rule in Liar is that only one number can be altered; for instance, if you throw an ace, two two's, a three and a four, you can call it three aces, a three and a four. During the rest of that round, any two you throw will be an ace. If you throw a two, three, four and two fives, the best you can claim is three fives. But if it is an ace, two, three, four and five, you can change the ace to a six and claim a straight.

If A makes a Liar throw of three aces on his first, he can stand on that and all the other players will have only one throw to try to better him. If A uses two throws and chooses to stand on it, and B betters the throw on his first throw, then the rest of the players are allowed only the one toss.

Remember, you have to have some basis for your exaggerated claims. You can't roll five different numbers and claim five aces. The best rule to follow is to play a standard game—and use the dice the house supplies.

TO waterproof a tent and prevent mildew.

Request:—I have a 10 x 12, 12-oz. white canvas tent. I have been told I could waterproof this with a mixture of gasoline and paraffin or that I could use linseed oil. Having regard to the intense heat of the summers here (I intend to place some sort of shade over it during the warm months), which of these methods would you recommend or have you some better suggestion for waterproofing? Would you advise staining the tent a darker color, and, if so, could the tent also be waterproofed, and what would be the best stain to use? Is there anything to prevent mildew? The tent of a friend of mine has been ruined by mildew, and I wondered what was the cause.

—Raymond Clarke
420 East 30th St.
Tucson, Arizona

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—If I had your tent problem, as I have had, I believe I would solve it, as I have done, by the use of one of the commercial waterproofing solutions rather than by trying to make the dope at home. It will cost little, if any, more, will save a lot of mess and will give you a better job. Usually these preparations come in clear and several colors, green, tan, brown,

(Continued on page 129)

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 for 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 for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Would like to hear from members of the Northern Pacific Ry. civil engineer group with whom I served at Trout Creek, Montana, under A. C. Terril, during year 1908. Among them, Leigh Adkins, Henry Aldrich, Carl Bohland. Communicate with D. C. Corle, 600 Ninth Ave., Mount Dora, Fla.

Would like to hear from Eddie Conlon, who was in the infantry in Panama in 1939 and came back early in 1940. L. E. Hilliard, 45 Summer St., Manchester, Mass.

Edward R. Wilson, about 60, civil engineer, mining expert, ex-Ordnance officer. Last heard of, Prineville, Ore., spring of 1940. Word will be appreciated by Jack Horsfoll, Rock Creek Blvd., Nashville, Ore.

Armdie A. St. John, living in Haverhill, Mass. in the summer of 1913. Anyone knowing his whereabouts, kindly communicate with Arthur "Gene" Hicks, Middlesex St., Bradford, Mass., c/o Miss E. Hicks.

Bert Oldham: Major Travis' widow desires to contact Marguerite Bean. Please write, or have her write to Mrs. J. J. Travis, 134 High St., Tonbridge, Kent, England; or communicate through me if you prefer. J. K. Bodler, Lt. (j.g.) U.S.N.R., U.S.S. *Regulus*, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Cal.

Veteran William Daniel disappeared May, 1921, from the home of his parents, 4501-4th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y. Served as corporal, Battery D, 62nd Field Artillery; was honorably discharged Dec. 31, 1918, a private, 314 Cavalry, Camp Owen, Texas. Last seen in Los Angeles, 1921. Was a licensed radio operator, had been a jockey, and had made several trips to Central and South America,

(Continued on page 129)

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure*.

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Boxing—MAJOR JEAN V. GROMBACH, Headquarters, 27th Div., Fort McClellan, Ala.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins: *and Medals*—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure*.

Fencing—MAJOR JEAN V. GROMBACH, Headquarters, 27th Div., Fort McClellan, Ala.

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

Fishing: *fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait; camping 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, care of *Adventure*.

Globe-trotting and vagabonding — ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

Health Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling—*regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, 70 Colonial Sq., Burlington, Vt.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Av., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Old-Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon

★Skiing and Snowshoeing — W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec, Can.

Small Boating: *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, New York City.

Yachting—A. R. KNADER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders* — MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Pa.

Forestry: *in the United States, national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS H. HALL, 446 Ocean Av., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *anywhere in No. America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, 11628¾ Mayfield Ave., West Los Angeles, Calif.

The Merchant Marine. GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

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, care of *Adventure.*

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J

Wildcrafting and Trapping — RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Field Artillery, *the Cavalry Arm, Equitation and training of horses*—FAIRFAX DOWNEY, care of *Adventure.*

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edw., H. S., Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★**New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 89 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, Hawaii.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York City.

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, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia.*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durbin, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon.*—V. B. WINDLE, care of *Adventure*. 2 *French Indo-China, Hang Kong, Macao, Tibet, Southern, Eastern and Central China.*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care of *Adventure*. 3 *Northern China and Mongolia*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3 Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. 4 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. 5 ★*Palestine.*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1 *Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia.*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*. 2 *Venezuela, The Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.*—DR. PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

★West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland — VICTOR SHAW, 11628¾ Mayfield Av., West Los Angeles, Calif.

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, Severna Park, Md.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States.*—J. W. WHITAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. 2 *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche.*—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Prk., Md.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St., Quebec, Canada. 2 ★*Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec. Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.*—S. E. SANGSTER, care of *Adventure*. 3 ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton, Ont., Canada. 4 ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario. National Parks Camping.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 1163 Victoria Rd., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. 5 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. 6 *Northern Saskatchewan. Indian life and language, hunting, trapping.*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501—10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. 3 *New Mexico (Indians, etc.)*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. 4 *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. 5 *Idaho and environs.*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. 6 *Arizona, Utah.*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Adventure*. 7 *Texas, Oklahoma.*—J. W. WHITAKER, 203 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River.*—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. 3 *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis. Arkansas Bottom.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. 2 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. 3 *Adirondacks*, New York.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. 4 *New Jersey.*—F. H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J. 5 *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure*. 6 *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 123)

etc., so you can tint the tent to the desired shade at the same time you are waterproofing it. Get the catalog of one of the big mail order houses and you can find a waterproofing solution for canvas. Or go to the hardware store, awning maker, etc.

Mildew is a sort of fungus growth that attacks fabrics that have been allowed to become wet and remain so, particularly if they are not exposed to the open air. A hot, damp climate is ideal for its ravages. Tenting that is well waterproofed is largely immune to mildew, and further protection can be given by drying it out as soon and as thoroughly as possible.

Most commercial waterproofing solutions cover around 100 square feet to the gallon. In applying them be guided by the directions on the container.

LOST TRAILS

(Continued from page 124)

as a seaman. Anyone knowing his whereabouts, please communicate with Veterans Administration, Washington, D. C., giving reference number XC-2,985,049.

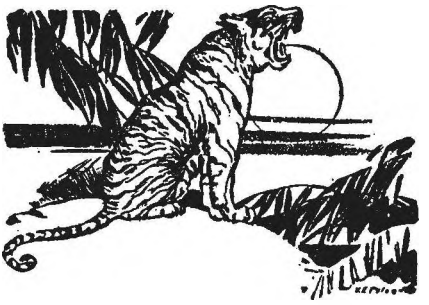
Would like to hear from my son, James E. Richards, and daughter, Genevieve Maxine Richards, whom I haven't seen or heard from since 1924. Last seen in Denver, Colo. Believe they later went to Florida, with their mother. James H. Richards, Elk Mtn. Rt., Box 9, New Castle, Wyo.

82nd Division Veterans contact your Association at 28 East 39 Street, New York City. Elwood C. Ellinger, Secretary.

Would like to contact any members of Battery C, 43rd Coast Artillery Corps from Camp Eustis, Va., from Jan. 1, 1921 to July 2, 1921. My father, Clifford V. St. Clair, was in that Battery, and I am hoping some of the members have seen him or know of his whereabouts. Please communicate with his son, whom he never saw, L. G. St. Clair, 2365 Sutter St., San Francisco, Cal.

Would like to hear from my brother, Charles W. Leach Lewis, generally called Charlie. He left Columbus, Ohio, in 1898 for Dallas, Texas. Had light hair, blue eyes; was painter, paper hanger and lather, also cook. Would be about 67 or 68 years old now. N. F. Leach Talbott, 916 Cleveland Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

THE TRAIL AHEAD



Chanod—Lord Tiger of Tonkin—returns! **Georges Surdez,** in another novelette of guerrilla warfare along the Mekong, takes you hurtling over the dense Cambodian jungle in a 9-cylinder Potez, to prove that it's not so much the size of the dogfight that matters—but the fight in the dog. The canine in the case—Lieutenant Nukai piloting his Nakajima-97—hadn't learned that lesson yet. It wasn't until he dove his plane on the tail of a pair of swooping—

"TIGER WINGS"

—that it was driven home to him. For even in Indo-China, where the Rising Sun had set ablaze rubber plantation and teak forest alike, there were still outposts of Freedom from which brave men fared forth to harry the yellow horde, and point with leaden periods the homely truth that right can make might lose face no matter what the obstacle.

A man named Leland Stanford was building a railroad and becoming a millionaire, and Bill Elder, with seven dollars in his jeans, decided to do likewise. He made his million all right, but wound up without a dime. **Robert Ormond Case** tells us about it in "Hard Money"—and we mean *hard!* **William Rose Benét,** in "Frémont's Cinnamon Steeds," rides to the Bear Flag War on the trail of Kit Carson in an unusual fact story of the fabled '40s. "Black Voyage" by **Harry Oliver,** is a gripping off-the-trail story of the plague ship that carried General Scott's expedition to Fort Dearborn. And "Stowaway," by **Albert Richard Wetjen,** a glorious tale of the men who sail sub-infested seas.

Then there's the final smashing pay-off of **Leslie T. White's** "5,000 Trojan Horses," in which Steve Patterson, renegade ex-corporal of the R.C.M.P., learns just what Baron Wolfgang has up his parka-sleeve, and mushes north alone with Emperor to block the Axis airman's plan. Plus the usual departments and features that can't be found anywhere but in—

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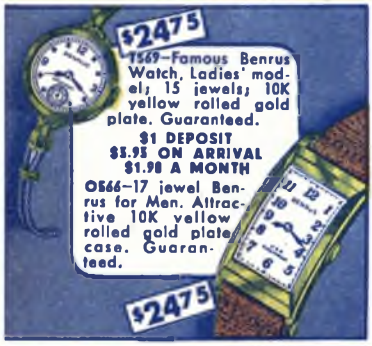

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