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SWORD FOR HIRE
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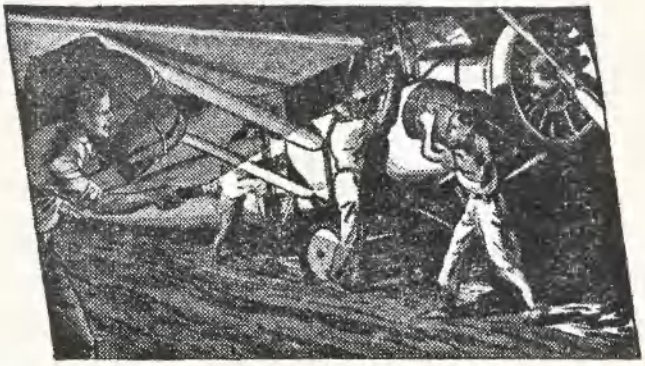
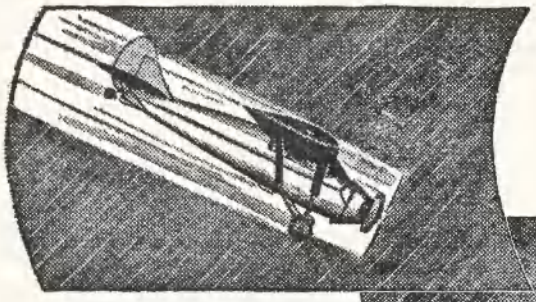
Flying Blind—4 FEET from DEATH

TROPIC DOWNPOUR BRINGS ADVENTURE TO ROUTINE FLIGHT

OLEN V. ANDREW



❶ "I had flown four friends over to Lihue, on the island of Kauai, for a weekend of camping on the beach," writes Olen V. Andrew, P. O. Box 3295, Honolulu, T. H.



❷ "We broke camp at three o'clock Monday morning, packed our dunnage in the plane and crawled in for the 100-mile hop back to Honolulu, all of it being over water. There was no moon, but the night was clear when we started. Five minutes later...

❷ "...we ran into a driving rainstorm. I couldn't fly over it, I didn't have proper instruments for flying through it, so the only th.ng to do was to get down low and keep visual contact with the water. But it kept getting darker, the rain fell harder and harder, till we couldn't see the water below us. I handed my big 'Eveready' five-cell flashlight to the fellow in the co-pilot's seat, told him to hold it out the window and flash it below...

❶ "...and there was the sea, only four feet below us! Those long Pacific rollers were almost lapping at the wheels! My heart skipped a beat to think how I had brought five people within inches of their doom! Certainly it was the power of those 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries that saved us all, and that kept us safe above the sea for the next half hour till the storm lifted. You can take it from me, I don't fly without 'em.

(*Signed*) Olen V. Andrew"

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or the fates. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name and full address if possible. All inquiries along this line, unless otherwise designated, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, every inquiry addressed to "Lost Trails" will be run in three consecutive issues.

Roy Miller who served on U. S. S. Martha Washington during World War. Word wanted by shipmate Arthur L. Cummings, Lake-Michigan, R. 3, Clare Co.

Louis Meyers, last heard of aboard merchant ship. Write Herbert H. Heater, 879 Baseline, San Bernardino, Cal.

Fred Hull, formerly of Winterset, Iowa, last heard from at Albuquerque, New Mexico, also was ship's carpenter in Pacific waters. Information appreciated by his son, Fred Hull, P. O. Box 17, Covington, Ky.

Peter Barran last heard of at the Seaman's Home, New York, about eight years ago. Word wanted by his sister, Mrs. Mary A. Ryan, 347 Lookout Ave., Dayton, Ohio.

Word wanted of Robert Taylor, formerly of Seattle, Washington, and now somewhere on the West Coast—5 feet, 9 inches, blonde hair and smokes a pipe. Write Alec Hoyer, 990 Geary St. No. 106, San Francisco, Calif.

Wanted: Word from Arnold Wood. Last heard from U. S. M. C. Write "Irish", Box 1925, Juneau, Alaska.

H. K. Van Alen, P. O. Box 96, Champion, Michigan, would like word of John Edward Sylvester Schaeffer More who left his home in San Diego, Calif., about 13 years ago, saying he was going to the oil fields in Texas.

S. Senster of Cucumber, West Virginia, would like to know the whereabouts of Elmyra Edwards, last heard from at Winston-Salem, N. C.

Word wanted of Earl S. Stephenson, Canadian who served in North China, in 1927, 1928, in 15th U. S. Inf. Write J. W. McLaughlin, c|o H. Palmer, Route 1, Box 4, Pocatello, Idaho.

Captain Arthur Carl who served in the Machine Gun Corps, British Expeditionary Force in France during the World War, last heard of in Florida 1924, please communicate with Colonel G. Gauntlett, c|o Grindlay & Co., 54 Parliament Street, London, England.

Ninety degree section of Mexican Peso bearing initials AT would like to contact other 270 degrees. Address E. Stanton Brown, 4331 Woodland Avenue, Western Springs, Illinois, U. S. A.

Chester E. Baumgardner, 1020 E. Olive St., Bloomington, Ill., is anxious to get in touch with any former members of Co. "E," 51st Infantry during the World War.

Otterson. Word wanted of any of my mother's relatives who went to America from Ireland. John M. O'Callaghan, P. O. Box 50, Mossman, Queensland, Australia.

The following were all yeomen in Flag Office of Vice Admiral of the Pacific Fleet from 1919-1922:—Emery Dobson, "Spick" LaChance, Carl Dudding, Tom Girty, Roger Sherman, John Frew, Frank Bertin. Word wanted by former shipmate, Harold P. Gilmour, 22 Worcester Street, Boston, Mass.

Floyd Maby, last heard from in Seattle, Wash., about 1933. Home originally at Plymouth, Pennsylvania. Word appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Ida Maby, 191 N. Division St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Herbert Roig, 37, originally from Texas, last heard of in 1928 living at Marquette Apts., 965 Geary St., San Francisco, Calif. Was working for the San Francisco *Examiner* circulation department in 1928. Please write Stanley Jones, 1146 Webster St., San Francisco, Calif.

Dudleigh R. Wickham, 61 Holmes Court, Albany, New York, wants word of "Clifford Ogden" or "Clifford Cochrane," formerly of Oakland, Calif., undertaker, who served with him in the 63rd Infantry, also helped build the railroad from Seward to Fairbanks, Alaska. Also Bob Baker of San Francisco, who left Seward with him on the *Alameda*, who still has the Indian pestle Wickham found when they were shipwrecked near Vancouver, B. C. Understands Baker shipped to China.

SWORD FOR HIRE

A novelette

By MAJOR MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

...the tall mountaineer flashed forward suddenly

THE watchman in the tower of the white-walled village studied the road that wound past the village gates. The road flowed with travelers; Arabs on slender-legged horses, Jewish merchants with mule carts, grave desert men on camels, wolfish Turcomans, avid eyes on the loot so near at hand, and strange nomads from beyond the barrens, afoot and on horseback, all traveling steadily to the west, away from Merv, the Jewel City of the Sands.

For fear hung over the Persian lands, like the shadow of a naked sword. All men who could, fled from before the menace of that shadow and from before the hoofs of the Mongol Horde, even now rolling back the armies of the

shah from the valleys of the River Syr, far to the north and eastward across the barrens.

And because of this, men fled out of Merv, down this road to the west, away from the conquering Horde of Genghis Khan, who the *imams* said was a scourge sent by God to punish Islam. That is, all fled save two groups that the watchman sighted and wondered at, two groups that were headed toward Merv instead of away from it.

One of these groups, most likely nomads from the northern foothills, eight or ten slant-eyed men with high cheekbones, herded several pack horses towards a stone watering trough by the side of the road and paused a space, some of them dismounting. He who was their leader did not dismount, and the watchman noted him as being taller than his companions and of commanding mien.

This leader was glancing curiously at the other group which straggled on the opposite side of the road, a group composed of a mule litter which evidently contained an occupant, for a young man in peach-colored silk, and wearing a turquoise and gold hilted dagger in his belt, rode at its side, solicitous and watchful. A huge Negro with an enormous flat nose rode behind the litter, while two other Negroes rode beside the mules.

This little group halted on the far side of the road and at command of the silk clad youth, the huge Negro drew forth from somewhere a heavy silver pitcher and crossed over and made his way among the nomads at the trough to fill it with water.

There appeared suddenly out of a dust cloud, coming from towards the city, the flash of steel. The dust cloud thinned and out of it appeared the gray-damascened helmets, the round shields and flowing sleeved *khalats* of a patrol of Seljuk Turks, soldiers of the city garrison.

Their leader was of huge frame, and cruel and bony face. His eyes caught the gleam of sunlight on the silver pitcher being carried back, filled, across the road to the mule litter.

The Turk, reining in his horse sharply, pointed out the silver pitcher to one of the gray-helmeted figures behind him and barked a quick command. The Seljuk soldier spurred his mount with the edge of the heavy stirrup and brought it up standing above the Negro. The Seljuk reached down a lean brown hand for the prize, when suddenly the silken clad youth by the mule litter made sharp protest and rode at the despoiler.

The impact of the youth's horse and his sudden clear-voiced shout distracted the Seljuk for a second. In that second the Negro dodged to the far side of the mule litter with his burden.

The bony face of the Turkish leader twisted with anger. He drew his curved sword and flung his horse about, with the plain intention of cutting down the silk clad youth.

From the opposite side of the road the strange horsemen from the hills watched the scene with impassive faces.

"Ho!" called the tall leader of these, his voice deep with contempt, "are ye soldiers, or are ye highway robbers preying upon the sick and helpless?"

The leader of the Seljuks halted his horse. Angrily he turned on the speaker and of a sudden signaled to his men.

"Cut me down that barking dog!" he shouted.

THERE came the sudden soft *wheet* of swords drawn from the scabbards and the Seljuks launched their horses at the forward stranger. The silken clad youth turned away to avoid seeing what was about to occur, and then as suddenly turned about again. Quick wonder smote him as he watched.

For the tall mountaineer lashed forward suddenly, snakelike, a heavy straight blade in his hand, the point piercing the throat of the foremost Seljuk, so that the man coughed and slid from the saddle. The long straight sword recoiled and became like a ring of steel about the stranger, steel against which the blades of the two following Seljuks rattled harmlessly.

Panic came into their eyes as the long straight blade whistled downwards and in a single stroke, slashed through the light shield and bit deep into the thin

chain mail of one Seljuk, so that his right arm suddenly hung by a shred of flesh. Up come the sword again and flashed as quickly to the other opponent, where it bit deep into the jointure of neck and shoulder, half severing the fellow's head.

This one's horse reared in sudden fright and half turned, blocking the approach of the other two Seljuks; but nonetheless the tall mountaineer thrust forward, standing high in the stirrups, and brought his great sword down on the helmet of one—cutting through the light metal as though it were naught but butter. The man swayed and fell from the saddle, his head cloven.

There now remained none but the one Seljuk, who drew back in afright, and the Seljuk commander, who gazed on this sudden furious onslaught in amazed and growing uncertainty.

The eyes of the tall mountaineer were blazing. Spurring his horse at the remaining Seljuk, he rose in his stirrups, the great blade flashing about him, and shouted forth a strange battle cry:

"Dieu lo veult!" (God wills it!) His voice rang forth like a trumpet. And coming from such a one in such a place, it was a passing strange thing. For the tall mountaineer, out here on the far edges of the Persian desert, had shouted forth the battle cry of Raymond, of Tancred, of Richard Coeur de Lion, and of all that noble company of Crusaders, so much of whose blood had splashed on the sands of the Holy Land.

And with that mighty shout, the great sword flashed downwards, slashing the last Seljuk soldier from shoulder halfway to waist.

The Seljuk officer, he of the cruel, bony face, suddenly swung his horse about on its haunches and was gone, whirling back toward the city, plying whip and spur until he was naught but a dust cloud disappearing in the distance.

THE men of the mountaineer's train busied themselves capturing the riderless horses and stripping the dead Seljuks, going about the business methodically. They took their leader's victory for granted and made no great stir over it.

The silken clad youth, his face wrapped in his head-dress, forced his nervous, slender mount across the road, the horse shying at the bodies of the slain.

The tall mountaineer could see only slender eyebrows and clear gray eyes.

"It was well and nobly done," said the youth, his voice clear as water running over pebbles in a mountain brook, "and of your great courtesy I cannot find words to requite you—"

"It was nothing," said the tall mountaineer. Leaping lightly from his horse, he carefully wiped the blade of his great sword on the grass, running down its channeled length with an oiled rag before slinging it again in its sheath. "The fellows were quarrelsome and in grave need of a lesson in manners."

"You knew not, then, that their commander who fled was Malik al Kotan, the captain of the guard of the governor of Merv? Nor knew that he is the most famed of all the Seljuk Turks of the garrison of Merv for his bravery in battle?" The young man was insistent.

"Neither knew nor cared," responded the mountaineer shortly, intent on tightening the girth of his saddle. Then, seeing that the young man looked down upon him with startled hurt in his eyes, he added, grinning, "maybe he was smitten on a sudden with remembrance of an appointment with the court barber." The young man's gray eyes suddenly crinkled up in an answering smile.

A voice came from the mule litter.

"My father would fain thank you in person for that you have so nobly aided us," said the young man. "By what name do you call yourself, so that I may inform him—he hath never met a man of the Franks before this." The grave eyes of the young man were unwavering as the mountaineer looked up sharply.

"And how do you know that I am a Frank?" asked the tall stranger.

"First, the strange sword you carry; second, the strange battle cry which I remember from the tales told me by my uncle in Damascus; and thirdly the fact that your eyes are strangely blue for a man of the mountains."

The stranger laughed shortly.

"It is not likely that, having sought to save your life, you will endanger mine. Aye, I am a Frank, a landless knight, heir to a baron's fief, but doomed to wander with my Crusader's sword for hire. And I am known as Alan—Alan de Courcey." The voice was bitter, but he returned with the young man and strode across to the litter.

An old Arab with grave bearded face greeted him as the curtains were drawn back.

"We came on this road carrying too great store of trust," said the old man, "and not great enough store of men. In battle one spear shaft is worth a hundred thousand sugar canes. And thou hast been that spear shaft, O Stranger; and I, who am known as the Sheykh Kasim al Bakir, render thanks to Allah that he hath sent you! But thou hast overcome the evil captain of the evil governor of Merv. And it is not safe for thee to travel on to Merv, for most undoubtedly Malik al Kotan will have thy head severed and hung above the main gate. Therefore great honor will be mine and will rest upon my house which is hard by, here away from the road, if thou and thy men tarry with us. Already the shadows grow long."

The young man added his entreaties to the words of the old man.

"It is great honor that you do me," said Alan gravely, "and it is true that it might not be wise to travel into Merv this night, and for the kindly invitation I thank you, O Sheykh, and you, O daughter of Kasim, who weareth man's clothing with modesty and grace." And he smiled into the gray eyes of the youth.

The old man inclined his head gravely towards her.

"Having no son," he said, "my daughter Laila strives to be both son and daughter to me and weareth man's apparel when journeying, the better to serve me."

THEY turned off the main road, into a grove of willows out of which thrust the slender spire of a minaret. They passed through a lane of poplars, coming at last to a gate set deep in a white stone wall and into a courtyard wherein a fountain murmured. Servants took the horses and led Alan's men to quarters behind the kitchens.

Alan himself was conducted into a high cool room, where a slave brought him basins of water in which floated rose petals and laid out for him a silken robe and soft slippers.

Refreshed as he was with the dust and stain of travel washed from him, yet was he troubled as he entered the cool porch off the courtyard, where he found the old sheykh resting upon a couch and Laila near him, dressed now in flowing Syrian robe of white, with small slippers of gold brocade and a scarf of gold embroidered silk flung loosely about throat and mouth so that only the gray eyes showed. A Persian cat purred and rubbed against her. A slave brought a silver platter; there was Arab bread upon it, heavily salted. Alan broke it and ate it with the two, realizing well its import.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful!" intoned the old man, and thereafter they were served with golden pomegranates and silvery green melons, and honey cakes colored with saffron, and figs and dates and milk from silver pitchers until Alan's hunger was slaked. But still he was troubled.

Alan looked about him—at the cool portico, the fig trees and the grape arbor, and turned to the old man.

"Dost tarry long in this garden of delights, O Sheykh?" he inquired gravely.

"Nay, only so long as our guest tarries with us. It was my intention, Allah willing, to remain here only so long a time as it takes to pack such treasure as is here and to journey eastward to Bagdad, fleeing before this horde of Mongols coming down upon us from the north."

Alan nodded, "I can but remain here the night and must be gone by cock crow. And it is well that there be no delay in departing, for the Mongols move swiftly. It will be of great comfort to me to know that the Sheykh Kasim al Bakir and his daughter Laila are safely on the way to Bagdad, for so far as that I do not think the Mongols will come yet awhile."

But the troubled look had not left

him, and Laila, stroking the cat absently, watched him with inquiring eyes.

"There is one thing more," said Alan at last. "The man Malik al Kotan, he who was in such haste to return to Merv, mayhap he hath noted down your equipage and station, and may return here with many armed men to exact revenge—"

"Who knoweth the will of Allah?" The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Heavy to the back of the ant is the foot of the locust; and the lord, whom this despoiler of the road today serves, Merkit, the Governor of Merv, is as a devouring locust. The river of his avarice can not be dammed up with the one brick of my treasure, yet he doth desire it. My fear of him is even greater than my fear of the Mongol hosts.

"But let us return to things of graver moment. It is of thee and thy plans that I would speak. Wherefore dost thou insist upon thrusting thy head into the tiger's mouth that is Merv? Were it not better to flee with us to the westward?"

"Far better," agreed Alan, "but it can not be. Know then, O Sheykh, that I have a friend, a Frank from overseas like myself, who is prisoner of this same Merkit, Governor of Merv, and that my friend dies at the setting of the moon, two nights hence, unless by the favor of God I can rescue him from that foul place."

Both the sheykh and his daughter pondered on this in silence.

At last the old man cleared his throat and spoke.

"I can well understand," said he gravely, "we of the Beni Iskander—" It came to Alan suddenly that he had been puzzled by the gray eyes of the sheykh and of his daughter, it was now clear—they were of the Arab tribe that calls itself the Children of Alexander, Greek in origin. "We of the Beni Iskander," the old man went on, "cherish well the value of friendship, but there is certain death awaiting thee in the city of Merv, and thy death in no way will aid thy friend. Were it not better to go on thy way, especially as thou art known now and hated by the captain of Merkit's guard? There is a saying in the bazaars, 'Better it is to close the shop in the morning than to sell the stock at a loss'."

The gray eyes of Laila, grave and concerned and with something of questioning in their depths, sought and held Alan's eyes.

A horse neighed in the stable. There came a clang of steel as one of Alan's nomads moved to quiet the animal.

Alan raised his head.

"Nay, it may not be!" he said briefly.

The old sheykh nodded with understanding. Something akin to a faint sigh came from Laila.

A shadow drifted across the face of the moon. From far off a dog howled dolefully. A chill wind came up and they drew their robes about them and went indoors.

CHAPTER II

A KNIGHT AND A KING

MERKIT, who by favor of Ala-eddin Muhammad, Shah of Kharesm, was governor of Merv, had been fathered by a Persian and came of a Seljuk Turk mother, so that he combined within himself the suave manners and culture of the Persian with the cruelty and rapacity of the Seljuk Turk.

It was typical of him, therefore, that he should quote the golden words of Sa'di while watching his executioner torture a rich merchant from the bazaar.

"O man!" he quoted to the groaning victim, "fifty years of thy life are gone, and thou art still in a dream; perhaps thou mayest avail thyself of the remaining five days . . ." And Merkit calmly moved a knight on the ivory chess board before him, checking his opponent.

There came a laugh from the divans where sat Maruff, the drunken poet, and Khwajah, the Syrian spendthrift, his chess opponent, and Nezzer, he who had sold his castle in Khorassan and followed a dancing girl, while Magrabin and Salim, the feminine-mannered youths from Nisapur, slept drunkenly on the rugs.

The first faint rays of the morning sun came weakly through the arrow slits of the room, high in the north tower of the

citadel, and strove with the murky beams of the tall candles, now guttered down to one-third their length. All night the flutes had whimpered and the zithers strummed, and a heady and monotonous little drum throbbed forth, while the dancing girls had swayed and twisted with a jangle of golden bracelets and turquoise-studded anklets, and the wine had flowed freely—in spite of the admonitions of the Prophet, for had not Maruff, the drunken poet, hiccoughed that quatrain after the manner of the inimitable Omar:

"This Paradise they promise us, at least,
Hath Wine and Women; let us make a feast,
And live as we shall live in Paradise,
And Heaven make on Earth, ere Earth hath ceased!"

And now the music was ended and the dancing girls had gone and the fumes of wine were heavy in their heads, but their friend and patron, the magnificently humorous Merkit, was furnishing fresh sport for them by reciting the verses of Sa'di while the beard of the merchant trembled and his eyes rolled back in agony and the sweat broke forth on his forehead as the huge, impassive executioner squatted by his brazier, the tools of his craft neatly spread out on a square of linen beside him, and expertly drew forth another finger nail from the hand of the writhing merchant, bound half naked on the bare floor.

" 'Let the means of future enjoyment precede thee to the grave'," quoted Merkit in his soft, well modulated voice, his face calm and urbane. " 'Dispatch them before, for no one can send them after thee; life is like snow, and the sun is burning hot; the vanities O sir! of the present day soon melt away'!"

Maruff giggled drunkenly, Khwajah laughed and moved a pawn; Nezzer's nostrils flared in eager interest, as the merchant groaned and writhed, while the two youths from Nisapur, curled delicately, like cats on the rugs, slept on, unaware.

The merchant fainted of a sudden, sighing and going limp, and Merkit looked annoyed and dipped his hands in a bowl of rose water and wiped them on a square of fine linen, before moving his king on the board.

There came a knocking at the door and a Seljuk Turk of the guard, carrying the drawn scimitar that showed he was on duty, announced that there was a messenger waiting with important news.

Something like a flash of fear come into Merkit's eyes.

"He beareth no ill tidings of the Mongols?" he asked.

"Nay, my Lord, he is the spy employed to watch the dwelling of the Sheykh Kassim al Bakir, and he hath tidings of the return of that one to his dwelling."

Merkit sank back, relieved.

"Admit him!" he ordered.

There came in, obviously frightened, one who was clad as a stable boy and who prostrated himself before Merkit and made salutation.

"Know ye, O Lord," the man said, "that these past three moons I have zealously watched the dwelling of the Sheykh Kassim al Bakir, relaxing not my watchfulness, neither by day nor by night—"

"Get on with thy tale," interrupted Merkit impatiently.

"As my Lord commands. And at last, at the time of the setting of the sun of yesterday, my zeal in my Lord's service was rewarded, for there came a mule litter wherein rode the sheykh with his daughter riding beside it, clad as a man in men's clothing, and followed by a tall barbarian from the hills and other barbarians to the number of eight, and packhorses. These all entered the gates of the house of the sheykh. This morning the tall barbarian and his men, at cock crow, came forth from the gates and rode on the way to Merv. Being diligent in the service of my Lord, I came straightway to report this matter—"

"Yes, yes, I know!" Merkit was impatient; he reached into a purse beside him and flung the man some gold pieces. "Hath the captain of the guard, Malik al Kotan, been apprized of this?" He cut short the voluble gratitude of the spy and motioned him away, addressing himself to the Seljuk guardsman.

"Aye, Master. Even now he comes!"

There was the ring of steel on the stone threshold and Malik al Kotan, he of the cruel, bony face, made swift entry, breathing heavily with satisfaction.

"It is even as I hoped!" he exulted. "Already have I told thee of the barbarian who set upon my soldiers with his pack of barbarians and slew all my men, and how I single-handed threw them into confusion, and how the tall barbarian fled before me so fleetly that I could not catch him—"

"Such was thy tale as I recall it," returned Merkit dryly, studying the chess board.

"Even so." Malik paid no heed to the tone. "And now mine enemy is about to be delivered into my hands. Even now he is about to enter the Lion Gate of Merv, and I have a trap set for him. I have commanded all the guards to watch for him. A slinking jackal could not escape them, much less this great barbarian, who hath blue eyes so that he can easily be found—"

"Ye have done well," nodded Merkit, plainly uninterested. "Now as to the matter of the Sheykh Kassim al Bakir—"

"Ten men on swift horses have already been sent to seize the sheykh."

"And his daughter—and his treasure?"

". . . and his daughter and his treasure."

"Good! Send them to me so soon as they are arrived in the city, also that blue-eyed barbarian. I am curious concerning him, seeing that we already have another blue-eyed barbarian, a Frank, in the dungeons underneath the Vultures' Tower. Mayhap thy blue-eyed fellow may turn out to be another spy of Genghis Khan, may Allah destroy him! Take thou this dog of a merchant back to his cell and we will have sport of him another day. And bring these new captives to me so soon as they are seized." And Merkit moved a knight, threatening Khwajah's pawn.

ALAN DE COURCEY had esteemed it best to approach the gates of Merv in the hour just before dawn, knowing that the men of the night guard, tired and sleepy, were liable to be less alert than the men of the morning guard come to relieve them.

In the dim mists of early dawn, country carts filled the roads, bringing fruits and grain and milk to the city. They drew up at the Lion Gate, waiting for the time of the opening of the gates, staring up to where the bowmen of the watch, arrows on string, peered down from the narrow loopholes upon the crowded countrymen and their carts waiting patiently beneath.

Above the Lion Gate, Alan noted a row of small objects that looked to be of the size and shape of melons. It was only in the better light afforded by the rays of the rising sun that he saw them to be severed human heads, their sightless eyes staring at the dawn.

While waiting for the gates to open he moved his horse along the walls, noting the strength of them and the towers jutting out, a bowshot length apart, with arrow slits covering the ground between them.

It grew lighter as he moved along; in the better vision afforded by the rising sun, he noted a small postern gate set close in under the walls at the base of a tower. Curious, he rode nearer.

From somewhere he heard a sudden "Twang!" and with the quickness of thought he leaned low on his horse's neck and spurred his mount so that it leaped forward.

An arrow whizzed so close to him that the wind of its passing fanned his neck.

It seemed best to him to return to the gate after that, and he rode back, keeping safe distance from the walls, to lose himself among the country carts. His men were scattered here and there, having previously had instructions to enter separately and to assemble with him at a certain inn hard by the Street of the Silversmiths.

As he waited, there came the calls of the muezzins from the minarets, strange cries coming from high within the city; and shortly thereafter the great gates creaked and clanked open and the countrymen with loud cries and the crack of whips began to enter, each pausing by the guard of bowmen for a quick inspec-

tion and the payment of the tax, while a scribe made note of each passing cart and man and horse.

Alan's turn came in due course and he rode up, impassive enough in outward seeming, but strangely tense. The bowmen glanced indifferently at him. Alan paid the copper coin, and the scribe, without looking up at the horseman above him, noted his passing and the payment of the tax with a brief stroke of his reed pen.

At last he was out from under the gate tunnel under the wide walls, noting the two great towers that flanked the gate as he gave a backward glance.

There seemed to be, amongst the throngs that filled the narrow street inside the gate, an unusually large number of Seljuk Turks, riding arrogantly through the press of men and animals. The street narrowed as he made his way farther in, and the overhanging balconies above nearly touched. Under one of these balconies, a clump of Seljuk Turks sat their horses, as though waiting for something.

They eyed him incuriously as he approached. His attention was taken up by sight of them, so that he did not observe the balcony overhead.

It was only when he felt rather than saw something snakelike coiling down towards him that he pressed spurs to his horse.

It was too late then, for the coiled rope caught him in its noose, tightening about his shoulders and jerking him from the saddle.

There came a rush of men above him as he strove to rise from the ground and free his arms. Strong hands grasped his elbows; his wrists were knotted securely with cord and he was jerked to his feet, amongst the group of Seljuk Turks.

Not until then did he see their leader, a Seljuk with a cruel and bony face, a face that smiled down at him, a smile that was a sort of hardening of the eyes and a grimace of the mouth.

THE candles in the room high in the tower of the citadel had been extinguished. The room was the same as it had been, save that the drunken revelers had lurched off to slumber elsewhere. Slaves had brushed up the evidences of the night-long party and taken away the silver wine flagons.

A scribe sat near the governor. Seljuk Turks, statuesque in damascened coats of chain mail, stood on either side of the door, round shield on the left arm and curved sword in the right hand.

Back in the corner, leaning impassively on a great keen-edged sword, stood the burly executioner, naked to the waist and with the light from the charcoal brazier behind him casting fitful gleams on his coppery torso.

Alan took all this in swiftly as he was led in, hands bound behind him and a Seljuk with drawn sword on either side, with Malik al Kotan, the Captain of the Guard, his eyes glowing with satisfaction, bringing up the rear.

Merkit, the Governor of Merv, to do him justice, showed little of the effects of the all-night debauch, if one excepted the faint shadows under the eyes. His slender, well bred face expressed naught but boredom, and his faculties seemed to be concentrated on nothing more serious than in polishing the nails of one shapely hand.

After the prisoner had come to rest before him, forced to his knees by the Seljuks, Merkit looked up at last, stroking his beard.

"This is the one that fled before you, O Malik of the Lion Heart?" Merkit smiled lazily.

"It was even as I have related the tale to thee," returned the captain of the guard gruffly, casting a sidelong glance at the prisoner, who said nothing.

Merkit studied the lean face of the Crusader, the firm jaw and steady eye, and plucked reflectively at his beard.

"Thou art a Frank, a warrior, and a man of rank in thine own land?" said Merkit.

"All of that," returned Alan quietly, "and more than that."

"More than that? What more art thou than that?"

"I am a *gur-khan,* the bearer of a tiger tablet, and leader of a Thousand Chosen Ones of the Imperial Bodyguard of Genghis Kha Khan, the Master of Crowns and Thrones and the Emperor

of All Men!" Alan said this simply and with quiet dignity.

There came a sudden silence over the room. The guards at the door turned in amaze, peering at the prisoner on his knees; the two guards on either side of him edged away imperceptibly; the Malik, astounded, stared open-mouthed at the man kneeling there so quietly.

Only Merkit betrayed no sign. He concealed a yawn with one slender hand.

"I seem to have heard that there was a Shah of Kharesmia, one Ala-eddin Muhammad," he said gently in the manner of one only faintly interested.

"Ye have also heard of last year's snow," returned Alan, "but where is it today?"

Merkit glanced up at him swiftly, and then as swiftly dropped his eyes.

"What mean ye by that?" he asked.

"I mean that Kokhara is taken, that Samarkand the Great is fallen, and that the Shah is fled into the desert!"

An even more intense stillness fell on that room. Merkit's face went pale. He leaned forward as though to question Alan further, then with an effort repressed his anxiety and became once more indifferent.

One of the soldiers by the door whispered:

"Samarkand the Golden hath fallen, hath fallen!" The words came clearly in the silence of the room. Merkit frowned at the man and he grew silent.

"Ye have proof of these things?" Merkit's voice was almost contemptuous in its bored carelessness.

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"Proof will come before the day is finished. It will come in the form of a *tumen* of ten thousand Mongol warriors, questing swiftly across the barrens and knocking at the gates of Merv to demand knowledge of the fleeing shah!"

SILENCE again fell upon the room, a silence that lasted until suddenly it was disturbed by the throbbing of a great drum overhead in the tower above them. Malik, the captain of the guard, hurried out of the room.

There came a sound of running feet on the stairway outside, and through the narrow slits there welled up from below the hoarse blare of the long, battle trumpets of Islam and the throbbing of many drums, the alarm drums from the towers about the city walls. Above them the great drum of the citadel kept up its steady, deep and terrifying booming, under which there could be heard the tramp of hurried footsteps, the clash of steel as men hastily donned armor and seized weapons, and the shouts of command. Malik al Kotan, the captain, returned from above.

"My Lord, there comes a multitude across the barrens, from the north, traveling swiftly towards Merv. They are as many as the sands of the sea, and the sun glitters from the steel they carry! They can be seen from here!" The captain of the guard pointed to the overhanging balcony which opened out on the north side of the room.

Merkit, composed and still, picked his way to the balcony, accompanied by Malik, who pointed excitedly to the desert. Merkit said something to Malik; Malik called to the men beside Alan. They grasped his elbows, somewhat gingerly and with something of respect, and aided him to rise from his knees, leading him toward the balcony.

"Are those thy friends?" Merkit pointed to the desert face, his eyebrows raised in question.

Alan at first saw naught but a great cloud of dust sweeping across the sands. Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the bright light, he picked out the glint of steel, flashing through the dust, steel that glittered from a veritable forest of lances. Staring intently, with eyes shaded, he saw that they were in two great columns, each column a compact flowing river of lances at least five hundred paces in width and extending back until its end was swallowed in the distant horizon. The two great columns came on resistlessly like a great storm cloud.

"That would be at least two *tumens*," said Alan, his eyes reflective, "the *tumens* of Chepe Noyan, the Arrow Prince, and Subatoi Bahadur, the Valiant. It is as I have said."

"Thinkest thou that they will storm this city?" asked Malik, staring out over

the streets below, where people ran hither and yon like ants, and at the walls, where steel clad men rushed to their posts and groups of men clustered about the ballistae and flame throwers on the towers.

"Nay, *that* I do not think," returned Alan, raising his voice above the clamor below. "They will seek only tidings of the shah and pass on—behold how smoothly they maneuver!" He pointed to the semi-circle of scouts, men riding in twos, flung out in a great arc ahead of the heavy squadrons of the main body. Now the two columns were dividing, one turning off to the left to encircle the walls and the other to the right, so that they were like two great pincers that opened to enfold the walled city.

The swift, implacable silence of the Mongol horde had evidently chilled the hearts of the men watching on the walls, for despite the fact that the fringe of the great columns were within bowshot, no man drew string or launched arrow.

Now the head of the left hand column was up to the Lion Gate. There came a raising and sudden lowering of queer horned standards, starting from the head and traveling swiftly along the column. In prompt obedience, the huge column suddenly halted in place and the dust cloud thinned and lowered so that men could see the fur clad riders on shaggy mounts, slender horse hair, tufted lances aloft and lacquered leather armor beneath.

Over to the right the second column was still in motion, and the wind brought the echo of the thunder of its passage, a steady thrum of multitudinous hoofs and the creak of leather and clank of weapons, merged into a single resistless roar of sound that came across the sand and over the walls and high up in the balcony of the citadel tower.

In front of the Lion Gate, officers of the Mongols, men wearing sable furs and cloth of gold, sent forward some of their number to parley. The captain of the gate could be seen waving his hands and gesticulating. At last he threw his arms in the air and shook his head violently. A swift murmur of sound ran along the walls, and men clustered in groups with high excitement pervading them.

THE Mongol officers conferred together as the heralds galloped back to the column. There came a sudden galloping of gold-clad officers to head their squadrons.

A single horned standard was lifted aloft and moved rapidly up and down. In swift imitation, other horned standards rose and fell, one following the other so rapidly down the length of the great column that it seemed almost simultaneous.

And as suddenly as it had halted, the whole huge column was in motion again, like a great serpent coiling by the walls, but now moving away, out into the desert again, to the southward. The other column met it on the far side, and the two moved off as one, although it seemed hours before the last horseman disappeared in a cloud of dust, and great herds of riderless horses continued to gallop past under charge of herders until it seemed that there would be no end to the immense horde.

A messenger came galloping up to the citadel from the Lion Gate. Merkit dispatched the captain of the guard to see what the message might be. Thereafter he ordered the two soldiers who were guarding Alan back out of earshot and stood alone with the tall Crusader on the balcony above the city.

"It seems that thou hast spoken truly," mused the governor, drumming on the balcony rail, his eyes thoughtful. "We will know soon whether truly they seek the shah. But it is certain that they have passed on, as thou didst predict. How long, thinkest thou, before they return to storm the city?"

"They?" Alan pointed at the snake-like column still coiling past the city walls, unending. "*They* may or may not return, certainly not until they have captured the shah and made him prisoner. But they are only part of the Horde. Others will follow."

"How long, thinkest thou, before the others follow?"

"That I cannot say. It may be a week,

it may be a month, it may be two months. There be many cities in Kharesmia to overcome, and each will await its turn; when the turn of Merv comes, only God can tell."

Merkit continued to drum thoughtfully with his fingers on the balcony rail.

"Ye stand in high honor with the Mongols," he stated at last.

"They hold me in some little esteem," said Alan simply.

"But they pass on by Merv for the time. What is there to prevent my calling the executioner and ordering him to sever thy head from thy body?"

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"Naught. Except that—" He became silent.

"Except what?"

"That the Mongols will hunt thee down as they are hunting down the shah. And no doubt thou hast heard what they did to the governor of Otrar? No? He, as is known, ordered the death of some Mongol emissaries, on plaint that they were spies. Thereafter the Mongols sacked Otrar, putting everyone to the sword, man, woman and child, and slew the governor by pouring molten silver into his eyes and ears. They take not kindly, the Mongols, to the putting to death of their emissaries."

"Thou art an emissary of the Mongols?" Merkit turned, startled in spite of himself.

"But surely!" returned Alan as if surprised in his turn.

"And what do the Mongols require of me?"

"I am sent to demand of the governor of Merv that he immediately free from prison and deliver up to me the person of one Baldwin de Neville, a Frank in the service of Genghis Khan, now laying under sentence of death in thy prison." Alan heard some sound from within the room that puzzled him and he half turned. Unseen by Merkit, who stared out over the city, Alan peered into the room. Suddenly straightening out, his face showing a second's savage anger, as quickly concealed, he added, "And there is further demanded from thee safe conduct and passage from thy city and jurisdiction of the person of one Sheykh Kasim al Bakir, and of the daughter of Kasim, known as Laila!"

Merkit looked up in surprise.

"And why these two?" he asked.

"Because they have befriended and sheltered an emissary of the Kha Khan, and as such are under his protection!"

"For which," said Merkit flatly, "the sheykh should die a death by slow torture and the woman be thrown to my Seljuk guards to do with as they will!"

THERE came an interruption then, as the captain of the guard returned.

"It is even as the Frank hath said, my Lord," he reported, panting. "The Mongols demanded word of the whereabouts of the shah, telling the men at the gate that Bokhara and Samarkand are fallen. On being assured that we knew naught of the shah nor had seen him, they went on."

"To hunt the shah down day and night like a pack of wolves, as they will hunt thee down," Alan said, low voiced.

Merkit turned, leaning on the balcony rail, thoughtful.

"It may be as thou sayest," he seemed to be thinking aloud, "that this city is foredoomed." He glanced at the Mongol tide, still flowing past like a river of warriors.

"In which case it behooves a cautious man to make provisions for the future. There is my own life to consider and some small store of treasure that I have accumulated during my service as governor. Now it may be that bargain could be made with thee, O Frank, whereby thy life and the life of the other Frank, now under sentence of death—"

"And the lives and safe conduct of the sheykh and his daughter," interrupted Alan.

"And the life of the sheykh and the honor of his daughter as well," agreed Merkit, "could be assured, providing that thou couldst secure assurance from Genghis Khan or someone high in authority with him, that this city and its inhabitants could be spared—or, failing that, that my life and the small store of treasure that I have accumulated would be spared to me. Thinkest thou that this would be possible?"

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"No man can read the mind of the Kha Khan," he said, "nor foretell what he will do. I can only try."

"And if thou shouldst fail? What then?" Merkit's voice was gentle. "Thou wouldst then return to me, of thine own will, thy life forfeit?"

Alan stared out calmly over the city, keeping silence for a space. At last he turned.

"That would depend somewhat on the time in which I have to attempt this thing," he said.

"From today until the time of the rising of the full moon, thirty days hence, should be time enough," said Merkit.

"Be it so," said Alan.

"And thou wilt swear on thine honor as a Frankish knight and by the Cross which thou holdest sacred that thou wilt seek out Genghis Khan or one holding authority under him and seek to secure from him assurance that my life and property shall be held inviolate, and failing to secure this, thou wilt return here after thirty days with thy life forfeit to me?"

"Upon my honor as a knight and by the Cross I do so swear, providing that thou guardest inviolate the lives and persons of the Frank knight in thy prison, and the lives and honor of the sheykh and his daughter!" Alan's eyes were sombre but his voice was steady.

Merkit's sharp eyes gleamed with sudden satisfaction, which he as quickly veiled.

"There is one thing that we have not counted upon," said Alan thoughtfully. "Suppose that it should come about that the Mongols set siege to this place before the thirty days are finished—how then would I gain access to the city and find thee?"

Merkit studied him carefully. Certainly there was no sign of guile in the Crusader's face.

"There is," said Merkit at last, slowly, "a secret way leading underground from a certain garden, hard by the Street of the Silversmiths and thence under the walls to a rocky cave three bowshot lengths on a hillside outside the city. When thou returnest, show this to the guardian of the exit in the garden near the Street of the Silversmiths, and he will permit thee to pass." So saying, Merkit drew forth a small silver seal made in the likeness of a lion's head; seeing that the Crusader's hands were still tied, he drew his dagger and cut the bonds, and Alan took the seal and placed it in his pouch.

"Restore to me now my sword and cloak and my horse and I will set forth," said Alan, "but first I would have speech with my friend, the Frank who lies in prison." Merkit nodded, giving assent.

MALIK AL KOTAN was none too pleased when ordered to restore the long sword and the horse and cloak, but he gave orders none the less, and Alan and the governor returned into the room.

Again the Crusader's eyes became angered as he saw the old sheykh, his hands bound behind him, kneeling resignedly upon the floor. His daughter, from whom some one had snatched the head covering, so that her face was bare to all men's eyes, sat proudly beside him, her eyes scornful of the Seljuk Turks who gaped at her.

And Alan was troubled by the sheer Grecian beauty of the girl, her golden hair and slender, golden eyebrows setting off features as delicately carved as a cameo out of Byzantium.

"It troubles me that I have brought misfortune upon your house, O Sheykh," said Alan, low-voiced, the while that Merkit ordered the old man to be unbound and the daughter's veil restored to her, as was seemly.

"Let not your heart repine, for all things are ordained," returned the old man as he was helped to his feet. "If it be the will of Allah that I suffer, who am I to seek to change my fate? For a time I feared for my daughter until I remembered that, though a jewel be cast in the mire, it still remains a jewel; while dust, no matter how high unto heaven the wind may whirl it, still remains dust." And he glanced across at Merkit.

Alan had little time, but told them swiftly and low-voiced of some of the things that had occurred, and that he was going forth to attempt to encompass their release.

"So far, I have promise from this

Merkit that he will treat you with all courtesy, but I mistrust me this same smoothly talking Merkit, and if aught of danger should threaten I would that some token be sent me—" He glanced at the gold embroidered silk scarf that the girl had now flung about her throat and mouth—"Do thou, daughter of Kasim, send me a corner of that silken scarf, getting it into the hands of the Cathayan dealer in silks who hath his shop just off the Street of the Silversmiths, and he will see that it is swiftly brought to me!"

Malik came up, stating with ill grace that all was ready and a Seljuk soldier of the guard, keys in hand, waited to take Alan to see the prisoner in the Tower of the Vultures.

"May Allah guard thee on thy jour-

neying," whispered the old sheykh, "and make to prosper all thy undertakings."

"And bring thee safely back," said Laila, her eyes looking bravely into his and following him as he went out of that room.

There was little time granted him to talk to Baldwin de Neville who, with matted hair and worn face, bore faint resemblance to the gay and careless youth who had ridden away four months previously.

But there was hope in Baldwin's eyes and a half sobbing thankfulness in his voice as the two men gripped hands through the bars. And Alan left him with words of cheer and left moreover a handful of gold coins, so that the harshness of the gaolers might be softened.

HIS horse awaited him by the prison entrance, and he rode almost unnoted through the press of people who thronged the streets, most of them having come from the house tops, where they had watched the dust of the Mongols disappear in the south.

He made his way to the shop of the Cathayan merchant of silks. Under cover of bargaining for a hooded cloak of camel's fleece, lined with silk, he found occasion to show the slant-eyed man a tablet of bronze no longer than a man's hand and no wider than the two joints of a man's forefinger, upon which, raised in gold relief, was the likeness of a tiger's head and some engraved lines of Uighur script. The eyes of the Cathayan opened wide at sight of it and he bowed low and listened with deep respect to Alan's whispered words.

Thus, between the time of first fingering the material of the camel's fleece coat and the time of payment, Alan, by virtue of the authority of the Tiger Tablet, which carries the power of life and death, made known his wishes to the Cathayan, arranged for the duties of the men he was leaving behind him and found how to reach the first station of the *yam*, that marvelous system of horse posts that Genghis Kahn had established to keep his headquarters in touch with the farthest flung outpost of his empire.

Alan, returning the Tiger Tablet to its abiding place on the string around his neck, enfolded himself in the new hooded cloak, dropped the sack of provisions given him by the Cathayan into his saddle pockets and vaulted onto the horse's back.

From this place he made his way to the Street of the Silversmiths hard by and located the only garden on that tortuous street, noting the high walls that enclosed it and the Seljuk Turk who guarded the heavy gates.

From there he went to the Lion Gate, nor did anyone seek to inquire of his passing, and it was with a breath of relief that he found himself ouside the walls once more.

There was one thing left to do. Three bowshot lengths, Merkit had said. And in truth there were few hills around Merv and it took very little time to locate the cave mouth, inconspicuous as it was and shaded by a clump of poplars.

Then he turned his face to the north, and his steed settled into the steady gallop of the nomad horse, that eats up distance as a wolf devours meat.

Back in the tower room, Merkit, bending over the chess board, worked out a play involving a knight and a king.

"That Frankish knight is a fool," he told Khwajah, "to put faith in the word of a king or any other ruler of men."

"Especially the word of the governor of Merv!" said Khwajah.

"Especially the word of the governor of Merv!" repeated Merkit, "for rulers of men can not be bound by word given to ordinary men."

CHAPTER III

SUMMONS OF DOOM

THAT first *yam* post was hidden under the lee of a hill, hard by a desert well, with what would seem to a casual observer to be only a group of nomad Turkomans scattered about.

Men looked up indifferently as Alan came galloping down the hill in a rattle of gravel and stones and brought his horse to a halt, leaping off.

Flinging open the cloak, he showed the Tiger Tablet.

"Kai!" the nearest man cried, and bowed low, then leaped to his horse's head.

Others came running, with their leader bowing hand to mouth, one bringing water and another dry curded milk and a piece of boiled mutton, while a fresh horse was brought up, saddled and bridled.

In another minute Alan was mounted and away, the fresh horse forging sturdily up the rocky slopes and lengthening out into a tireless steady stride on the level going.

Thereafter the successive halts at one *yam* post after another became a blurred memory of hurrying figures, of stiffly dismounting from one horse and swinging onto the back of another, and of steady and relentless galloping hour after hour, with the sun dropping out of view and the chill of the desert night coming on, and the stars wheeling in their courses above while the earth flashed by beneath.

He noted as he raced to the northeast that the Mongols were no longer disguised, but appeared in their lacquered armor and wolf skin coats. Mostly he rode alone, but where the way was devious a rider would accompany him to the next post. Just before dawn he snatched an hour's deep slumber upon a pile of sheepskins near a fire and then went on.

As he approached the edge of the barrens, the *yam* posts became more commodious affairs, set at the edge of villages and with *darogas*, military governors, in charge; but there was no difference in the enormous respect paid to the Tiger Tablet and the quick service its bearer commanded.

In his swift gallop he began to pass compact clumps of Mongol warriors, parties hunting down the remnants of the armed forces of the shah—grim and wolf-like men, seated high in their Mongol saddles, the horse hair tufts of their slender lances streaming in the breeze behind them.

Nearing Bokhara he saw groups of prisoners, working under guard on the roads and at the *yam* stations, and other groups being driven in herds across the fields for what destination or purpose he knew not.

Smoke still rose from the ruins of Bokhara as he passed its walls and kept on the road to Samarkand. By now he was riding like a man in a dream, nor scarce knew when he changed from one horse to the other.

It had come to him that thirty days was all too short a time to do what he had to do, and the time of the coming of the full moon drew nearer with every day. And he still had the long ride back. When his heavy eyelids refused to stay open he swayed in the saddle, snatching what sleep he could as he was borne along.

It was in nearing Samarkand that he ran into the first evidence of the power of Genghis Khan, when he saw the hills and plains covered for miles by the black *yurts* and the boundless horse herds of the Horde.

They were the Yakka Mongols, and they knew him and hailed him as the Iron Man, and he began once more to feel among friends.

THE number of the captives increased—stoic and fatalistic bands of craftsmen for the most part: carpenters, brick makers, sword smiths, rug weavers and silver smiths, being collected for the long trip ahead of them into the high uplands of Asia and to Karakoram, the capital of the Kha Khan.

Nearing the *ordu* of the Kha Khan outside of the walls of Samarkand, Alan passed the heaped up treasures secured from the sack of the Islamic cities—long rows of stuff piled up carelessly on felts under sheds and scantily guarded, there being no thieving among the Mongols. There were plates and goblets of silver; there was ivory and gold and crystal, and finely tempered steel swords and jeweled daggers, damascened armor of chain mail so fine that an entire coat of it could be doubled up in a man's hand, and great store of rubies and pearls. Staring at the heaped up treasure wistfully were some of the captive women, wives and daughters of slain or captive *emirs* and *atabegs*. Silken clad and dainty creatures, they were, some of them weeping.

Somewhere near here he knew that he would find his own men, and he inquired for the *tumen* of Tuli the Orluk, Tuli the Eagle of the Imperial Blood, the youngest son of Genghis Khan. He was directed to a meadow near the great white pavilion of the Kha Khan.

The meadow was covered with the black, dome-shaped *yurts* of the Mongols; and he soon spied a cheerful Mongol face, that of Toukta, one of his own officers. At his own *yurt* his servant welcomed him and brought out fresh apparel. Shortly he appeared again, dressed as a Mongol *gur-khan*, save that his long blue coat covered the chain mail of a Crusader.

Striding through the *yurts*, he found his men busy oiling weapons, repairing quivers, sharpening arrows with the file that each of them carried, and testing the spare bow strings for each of the two bows that each of them bore.

Being members of a shock division, they were equipped with heavy, red lacquered leather armor, both man and horse, and being the heavy cavalry of the Horde, each man carried axe as well as sword.

The squad leaders, the commanders of tens, were checking the arrows, of which each man carried sixty, half of which were light with small sharp points while the other thirty were heavy, with larger heads, for fighting at close quarters.

His inspection finished, Alan called for a horse, for although the *ordu* of Genghis Khan was not five hundred paces distant it would have been lacking in Mongol dignity to have made his way there on foot.

The pavilion of Genghis Khan was of white felt lined with silk and vast enough to have sheltered several hundred men. A silver table stood at the entrance, so that any who came might eat of the mare's milk, meat and fruit that it held. The captain of the night guard, splendid in black lacquered armor and silver wolf cloak, bowed to the tall *gur-khan* and raised hand to lips.

"*Ahatoul*" Alan greeted him and strode into the tent. There was a coming and going of officers. Two of them, bearers of the ivory baton, *orkhons* or generals, went out as Alan entered and there were many other officers seated on benches around the walls. A fire of aromatic woods crackled and glowed in the center space.

On a dais at the far end of the pavilion, on a low bench, sat a squat, heavy-set figure dressed in a long sable coat and a girdle of gold plates. The face was seamed and lined and bronzed by the dust and sun of the Gobi, but there was an impress of calm power about it, and keen, intelligent eyes that missed no movement of the incoming and outgoing men, nor any word of the decorous conversation that went on about him. Genghis Khan gave one the impression of being the war-scarred and wise old

wolf, the leader of the pack, that he was.

No sooner had Alan entered the pavilion than the old leader noted his approach and nodded grave greeting as the Crusader bowed before him.

"What of Merv, Iron Man?" asked the Khan in a slow, deliberate voice, as though each word were precious and none might be wasted.

"It is garrisoned by twenty thousand Seljuk Turks, O Khan. It hath food in plenty to withstand siege. Its walls are well guarded. Around it there is plentiful pasture and water for the horses of the Horde. Its walls are strong and will need engines and time to break down or scale. It hath a plentitude of strongly built towers—"

"Walls are no stronger than the hearts of the defenders," interrupted the Khan. "What of the hearts of the defenders?"

"They are fearful, O Khan."

"And the governor? What manner of man is he?" asked the shrewd old warrior.

"Avaricious and lacking in both faith and honor. He hath granted me my life if I will make plea to thee, O Khan, for his life and goods—"

"And if I do not?"

"I am pledged to return to him before the time of the full moon with my life forfeit."

The Khan deliberated upon this in silence, his eyes closed in thought.

At last he opened them.

"I cannot promise him security in life and goods. Circumstances which I cannot foresee might make me break my word. Word breaking is hideous in a ruler," he said flatly. Then after another silence: "Is it your intention to return, then, to him, with your life forfeit?"

"It is my intention, O Khan. I have promised."

"That is well, for what shall it be said of a man who makes a promise in the morning and breaks it before night? And what of the other Iron Man, your friend?"

"He lies imprisoned in the citadel of Merv. His life is also forfeit."

"That may be. It will be as God wills," said Genghis Khan gravely and made sign that the interview was finished.

There could be no further word said. When the Kha Khan had spoken the subject was closed and no man might reopen it.

Alan made his way out of the pavilion, giving it a final look as he turned at the entrance, as a man might look who is gazing upon a familiar scene for the last time.

And then he went out into the darkness.

HE rode slowly back to his *yurt,* his shoulders bent. It had all seemed so simple when he had made that promise to Merkit, the Governor of Merv. It had occurred to him only as a remote possibility that the Kha Khan would refuse the boon he asked. And yet the Kha Khan had been just and reasonable and he could not complain. It seemed, however, a harsh thing to have to die. He was a soldier, and meeting death was part of his work. But there is a difference in dying in the exultation of battle, swiftly and with the riot of combat ringing in one's ears, and dying ignobly, kneeling, and with hands tied, under the sword of an executioner.

And Baldwin and the sheykh and Laila would suffer by his failure and be dragged down in his downfall—

Of a sudden he felt very weary and spent. He slid down from the horse's back. Someone took its reins, and he entered his *yurt.* Doffing long coat and coat of mail, he sat on the pile of sheepskins that was his bed and pulled off his boots, finding the act an effort.

A fire of dried dung glowed in the center of the *yurt* and lighted up the interior. It was bare with all the bareness of the dwelling of an ascetic, or a soldier, there being naught but his camp chest, his best saddle with its red leather and silver trimmings, his helmet and its nasal piece, the chain mail of his body armor, his long triangular shield with the leopard's head *gules* painted upon it with the ancient motto of his house "I keep faith!"

He repeated that motto, bitterly. It was costing him his head to live up to it.

His long sword rested against the

chest, his gilded knight's spurs atop of it. There was that short, powerful, Mongol horse-bow, reinforced with horn, in the use of which he had made himself proficient, with its quiver of arrows, including two of those strange signalling devices invented by the Mongols, whistling arrows which, when shot into the air, emitted a shrill, penetrating, whistle dying out on the ascent only to break out anew on the downward flight —a shrill clarion which called the Mongols to aid or assemble or to be wary of danger whenever its notes were heard.

Within the chest, he knew without looking, was a solid and heavy bag of gold pieces, a statue of gold, shaped very cunningly by some Arab goldsmith after the fashion of a horse at the gallop, a handful of emeralds fit to buy a baronial fief and some store of silver flagons and heavy silver plates, his share of the spoil of cities, for Genghis Khan was notoriously generous to his able lieutenants.

It was all so much dross so far as he was concerned. He would distribute it amongst his men before departing in the morning, for it would be no good to him where he was going, he reasoned.

The *yurts* of his men had been quiet as he came in, with no sound save the occasional tramping of the night guard. But now he heard a stir and the mutter of voices and a growing clamor of talk. Idly he wondered what this might portend, when there came a voice outside of his *yurt* calling his Mongol name.

Someone bent low at the entrance and came in, and he saw a momentary flash of cloth of gold and silver fox skin and a jeweled eagle's feather before he recognized the commander of the *tumen*, the leader of the ten thousand horsemen of which his thousand warriors were a part, and Tuli, the *Orluk*, the Eagle of the Imperial Blood, Genghis Khan's youngest son, was greeting him, his eyes dancing with excitement.

"Hast heard, O Iron Man, that the Kha Khan, my father, hath bade me take the field, commanding my *tumen* alone and far from the Horde?" Tuli the youngest had been kept with the center of the Horde, near his father's side. He had chafed at this, wanting like any youngster to ride on his own.

"That is indeed good news, O Tuli, and where doth he send thy *tumen*?"

"To the southward, to seek out and destroy a force gathered hastily by Jelal ed-Din, the son of the shah. Thereafter we ride on to Merv, besetting that place—"

"To Merv?" Alan rose, uncomprehending, wondering if he had heard aright.

"Aye, to Merv. The Kha Khan, my father, commanded me to be outside of its walls before the night of the full moon!"

Sudden swift comprehension, like a blinding flash of light, came to Alan.

"Now for this thing, God be praised!" he said, sitting down very suddenly.

Tuli went on, his guttural voice joyous, but Alan was thinking of Tuli's father Genghis Khan and the good heart of him and how he had never intended that the Crusader should lay down his life but had come to aid in his own way and time. It was no wonder that men willingly gave their lives for the old Mongol leader, Alan thought, and turned his attention to Tuli again.

"And we start at the dawn drum roll," Tuli was saying, "for there is need for haste if I am to be there before the time of the full moon!"

IT seemed to Alan that he had scarcely touched head to pillowed coat when the drums of the dawn muster thundered in his ears. The impassive Mongol soldier who served him brought hot tea and a steaming bowl of parched millet flour boiled with mutton, while men were already rolling the felt strips from the frame of the *yurt*.

Even as he finished donning his mail coat and helmet of steel, the lathe-like strips of the frame of the *yurt* were taken down and lashed together, his bed of sheep skins and his chest were carried away for loading upon the pack horses and his first mount was saddled and bridled, while his four spare horses were galloped up before him.

All about him, as far as his eyes could reach, men and horses were boiling in what seemed to be hopeless confusion, the lean, sharp-boned faces of the men covered with grease to protect them

against the sun and wind, their squat frames draped with wolf skin cloaks, beneath which glinted the red lacquered armor worn only by the heavy cavalry of the bodyguard. Sharp, yelping cries arose from the mass, the muster rolls of the tens and hundreds being called and the quick commands of the squad and troop leaders.

Imperceptibly order come out of the chaos. Clumps of ten men and horses drew together; these small groups began swiftly to coalesce into greater groups of hundreds, and the hundreds grew more solid and massed into the squadrons of five hundred and these into the regiments, with heavy columns of a thousand men and horses each, with a breadth of fifty horsemen and a depth of two hundred solid ranks. Alan's long triangular shield and his heavy steel-tipped lance had scarcely been handed up to him when his regiment of Yakka Mongols was formed up, ten troops deep.

There came a sudden jingling of bells and a calling of his name and he looked up to behold a Mongol on a panting horse, the man carrying a wide belt set with jingling bells about his middle, by which Alan knew him to be a courier of the *yam*.

The man handed him a packet done up in sheepskin. Untying it there came out into Alan's hand a small triangular piece of gold-embroidered white silk.

It was the silk of the scarf worn by Laila.

Some danger threatened her. Alan's face grew grim as he tried to think of some manner in which he might aid. He could do no more than he was doing, setting forth with his *tumen*. For the *tumen* galloped eighty or eighty-five miles in a day, and he could arrive there just as quickly by remaining on duty with his regiment.

And his regiment was waiting.

AS he rode to the head of it, a thousand slender lances, which had been held, points to the ground, rose up in silent sweeping motion, their red-dyed, horsehair plumes fluttering in the keen, cold, air of the dawn and all down the length of the heavy column. The right arms of the troop and squadron commanders shot upward, held rigid to show that all was in order, until his own arm acknowledged the signal.

A clump of fifteen horsemen rode up behind him, one carrying the yak-tailed regimental standard, and the others two black-and-white signal flags each, which they broke out for his inspection and returned to their cases when he nodded. In their quivers these men carried whistling arrows as well, and tied to their saddles were the lanterns which would show red and white lights for night signaling. With his sign of dismissal, ten of these men galloped away, dropping off two by two to take place behind the leader of each troop, while four men and the standard bearer remained behind him.

A quiver of expectancy came over the whole mass, squadron by squadron and regiment by regiment, ten thousand lances and ten thousand armored horsemen and armored horses extending back until the end of the column was lost in the half light of early dawn.

There came a jingle and clank and the swift galloping into place of Tuli, the *orkhun*, and his staff with the yak tails of the horned standard streaming in the breeze. Alan made a swift upward motion with the palm of his hand to his own standard bearer, who immediately raised the pole with its cross pieces and fluttering yak tails as high as he could reach. Rippling back through the column, the standards of the regiments in rear rose upward in turn until all were poised and waiting.

Tuli's horned standard suddenly was lifted, and then was raised and lowered, quickly, twice. With the last downward motion the other standards dropped down and ten thousand horses moved forward in one great mass.

It was a strange thing, and proof of the training and discipline of the horsemen of Genghis Khan, that after the calling of the rolls of the tens and hundreds, not a single word was spoken. The huge body of cavalry moved out in silence, save for the thudding of thousands of hoofs against the sod and the creak of leather and clink of metal.

In the regiment that preceded Alan's,

there was a sudden flurry and five squadrons galloped out ahead. Three of the troops remained in mass and slowed down to a trot after advancing some two thousand paces, while the two leading troops kept on until they were far ahead, when they extended out into a great arc, a wide-flung semi-circle of scouts riding two by two.

And Alan knew, without looking back, that a flank guard was sent out on either side and that in the rear, behind the great herds of spare horses, there was a rear guard following. It would have taken an extraordinarily alert enemy to have surprised the Mongols on the march.

Thus guarded, the Mongol cavalry division settled into its marching gait, galloping to the southward, pausing only from time to time that men might change to the spare horses, and eating up the miles steadily, hour by hour. Throughout that day Alan sought for some opportunity to speak to Tuli, riding ahead of him, hoping to acquaint the Mongol prince with the situation in Merv and his own problem in that city, but the ceaseless forward surge of the Tumen gave him no opportunity. Late afternoon came and they were galloping along a river bank, fringed by poplars and willows, with white-walled villages sheltered among the trees.

Farther back the trees thinned out and there were hills bare and dusty and gleaming redly in the sun. It was while galloping toward these hills that Alan, sensing some stir and movement of the scouts up forward, peered through the dusty haze and saw, on a hill crest far to the front, the sparkle and flash of sun on naked steel.

AT sight of that enemy steel, a quiver went through the galloping host, the quiver that goes through a pack of hounds at sight of the quarry.

There was no slackening in the steady gallop until there came a sudden upward motion of the horned standard in the lead, followed by a fluttering of black and white battle flags, starting from the head of the column and rippling down its length. The squadrons which had been galloping in a long column of troops fifty horsemen in breadth, smoothly extended their fronts to a breadth of one hundred horsemen, five files deep, the battle formation of the Mongol cavalry.

There came then another uplifting of the battle signal flags. This time Alan checked his horse down to a walk. The squadron behind him followed his example, while the rear squadrons kept up the gallop, swinging out to right and left until they were up on line, whereat they slowed to a walk. In the space of a few seconds his regiment extended out on either side of him in a long, solid line. Behind his regiment he heard the thunder of other regiments closing in, thickening their lines, and galloping in solid masses to the right and left, until in a bare few minutes the Mongol host had galloped up from column of route into line of battle, and was moving forward at a walk.

There were more flurries up forward, and scouts came galloping back out of the dust, reining in their horses sharply to report to the officers.

Far ahead, rounding the base of one of the hills, Alan caught other flashes of sun on steel and the flicker of a green silken banner, the green standard of the Prophet, the battle flag of Islam.

There came a sudden drumming of hoofs from behind, and pouring through the interval between Alan's regiment and the regiment next on the right, came a solid clump of five hundred Mongol horsemen, the lean and bony faces of the men set and tense, with eyes looking neither to right nor left. Alan raised his ten foot lance aloft in salute as they went by for they were the *manguidi*, "the God-belonging,"—the suicide squadron, foredoomed to cast themselves wolf-like upon the enemy center and to fight and tear an opening through it without thought of turning back.

As they rode forward Alan settled into his saddle, twitching his shoulders to bring chain mail more smoothly into place and loosening sword in scabbard. The Mongol battle line moved steadily forward like a steel-tipped wave, rising and falling as it dipped into hollows and breasted hillocks.

It came to him then that if he were to meet death in the ensuing battle, his word to the governor of Merv would be broken. But then, he reasoned, death is no respecter of pledged words and no man can be held in dishonor if he has died trying to keep faith.

There came to him now, borne faintly down the wind, a thin, high-pitched sound, like the yelping of many hounds, and his nerves and muscles tightened to the familiar shrill ululation of the Mohammedans.

"Allah il-allahu! Allah il-allah!" The words now came more clearly, rising out of a great cloud of dust moving towards the Mongol host, a cloud of dust that extended across the plain and rolled down from hillside and swept forward from valley mouth.

The flash of sun on steel broke out of it, and as the dust eddied, dimly seen figures of horsemen emerged from it like armed wraiths out of mist. The enemy was seeking battle.

IT was never the Mongol tactics to wait to be attacked and suddenly the *manguidi*, the "God-belonging" squadron, was launched at the center of the dust cloud like a grim arrow.

There came now from the dust clouds ahead the heady, exciting throb of battle drums. Above their hollow thunder sounded the clash of cymbals and the savage blaring of the long battle trumpets of Islam, which, blending with the shrill yelping from thousands of throats, made the very air quiver to the savage clamor.

In contrast to the pulsing roar of the hosts of Islam, the Mongols moved in terrible silence. The *manguidi* was now nearly upon the center of the advancing dust cloud, and in another second it whirled through it and out of sight. From where it had struck, came a sudden savage rending sound, such a sound as is made by the trampling and screaming of fighting stallions. The center of the advancing dust cloud wavered and halted.

In response to a silent droop and sudden lift of the horned standard, twice repeated, the heavy line of Mongols broke into a trot. Tuli, the commander of the *tumen*, with his staff, had dropped back on a line with Alan and suddenly the horned standard was passed between the files and galloped to the rear, but Tuli and his staff remained.

There was no fear in either of them...

They were almost up into the dust cloud now. A black and white signal flag flashed once to the left and once to the right from beside Tuli.

In compliance with that signal, Alan's right arm swung once in a complete circle and came back to grasp his lance once more. In swift obedience to his gesture which his officers flashed right and left along the entire line, the three rear ranks of his regiment galloped through the intervals between troops, the horsemen with reins looped over left elbow and holding the heavy, close-order bow with broad-bladed arrow notched on bowstring and quiver at knee. They rode in loose order, like a mob of wild nomads from the desert, but there was system in their disorder and they galloped straight at the foe, who could now be seen emerging from the dust cloud.

The enemy were lithe, wiry men with dark faces gleaming under silvered helmets or white turbans, carrying flashing curved scimitars and round shields and mounted upon slender, spirited horses who danced and reared at the clamor.

The silent, seemingly disorderly mob of Mongol bowmen flung themselves at the enemy, only to check and turn just before the shock of collision. And from the Mongols came a sudden vibrant twanging of bow strings, and the silent wasp-like flight of a multitude of swift arrows that thudded and bit deep into quivering horseflesh and sheered through thin chain mail and *khalat* and quilted cloak until horses screamed and men rocked in the saddles. But still the pitiless rain of sharp-bladed arrows filled the air and thudded and sank home, until the first line of the enemy was thrown into confusion and wounded and dying men and riderless horses threw confusion into the second line. With a final deadly flight of arrows the Mongol bowmen turned and galloped to the flanks of their advancing squadrons, reforming behind the two ranks that now came on at the gallop, lances low at the charge in the first rank and swords at the ready in the second.

ALAN laid lance in rest and his men behind him thundered into the thick of a milling group of Kankali Turks, who loosed a few arrows at him which glanced harmlessly off his chain mail. There was a flash of heavy scimitars, a glancing upward blow of a *yataghan*, a curved stabbing knife; and his lance drove home, overbearing a bearded Turk and driving man and horse against their fellows in rear until he had scattered the group and was through on the other side. From behind him he heard the snarling, screaming rage of his men, fighting like mad gray wolves, but there came a sudden rush of a howling mob of Seljuk Turks, with their high-damascened helmets and broad-sleeved *khalats* twirling, flashing scimitars and battle maces, driving directly at him. He dropped his lance to earth and drew his great sword, whirling it about his head as he drove at the center of their onset.

"Dieu lo veult!" he shouted exultantly, the while he deflected a mace blow on his shield and then sheared off the arm of the mace wielder with one whirring blow. He drove into the press, his great sword biting deep, slashing into chain mail and shearing through light shield and into bone and flesh until the Turks were appalled and gave ground fearfully before that long slashing blade. And suddenly the men of his regiment were up and boiling about him, screaming with rage, stabbing and hewing at the Turks like a pack of starveling wolves, and every Turk seemed to have four or five vicious Mongols tearing at him, snarling with blood lust.

But there were other dust clouds rolling up from the rear of the Turkish and Persian host, and Alan remembered his Mongol battle training.

Behind him was one of his two signalers. He motioned to the man, who flashed a black and white flag and emitted a high pitched, long drawn yell, which was taken up by the nearest Mongols and carried from one to the others so that each of them drove a final blow at his nearest antagonist and swung his horse about and followed Alan back out of the dust and confusion, galloping out in loosely knit tens which swiftly sought and found the three lines of bowmen of their own troops. Wheeling like swallows, the heavy armored swordsmen of the two front ranks veered in behind the formed ranks of bowmen and swiftly reformed anew into solid lines.

Again the bowmen launched themselves at the enemy, now looming up in masses wearing the white turbans and black burnouses of the desert riders with a thickening of Kankali and Seljuk Turks.

There came a sudden twinkling of battle flags in the formed ranks of the Mongols waiting for the charge of the bowmen to spend itself, and Alan, reading the signal, stared off to the left and rear where a hill rose behind the enemy forces. Standing out clear and defiant, in the last rays of the setting sun, rose the horned standard, with a veritable forest of lance points gleaming behind it.

That terrible Mongol maneuver, the *tulughma* or "standard sweep" was about

to take place. The nearest men in the enemy ranks noted that standard at the same time and a shout of dismay rose and gathered force as the horned standard, followed by a torrent of avid lances, hurled itself down that hillside upon the undefended flank and rear of the enemy host. A hail of arrows poured in from the clouds of bowmen that now beset the Islamic host in front, and broke what little fighting spirit remained.

When the mailed ranks of the Mongols galloped in to complete the task, the enemy was in full flight, streaming from the battle field in panic and plying whip and spur in desperation.

CHAPTER IV

PAWN OF BATTLE

THE Mongols were as methodical and disciplined in victory as they were in battle. Even before the pursuit squadrons returned, the *tumen* was reformed under a hill on which stood Tuli and the horned standard, and long lines of dismounted men went thoroughly over every inch of the battlefield. The enemy wounded were dispatched with bow string or sword; the Mongol wounded were cared for if only lightly wounded. If too gravely injured, they stoically accepted the mercifully quick death granted them. Weapons, chain mail, helmets and horse gear were systematically gathered from fallen friend and foe.

There was a short halt made that night, time for fires to be made and food cooked and horses watered and for men to snatch a short slumber.

The long roll of the assembly drums broke forth at moonrise, and for this Alan was glad.

For the silver crescent that flooded the desert was fast approaching the time of fullness, and there were many weary leagues yet to go before the white walls of Merv came into view. And that triangular piece of gold-embroidered silk that he carried in his pouch was cause for increasing disquiet.

But there was little time for worry. The *tumen* swiftly rose and shook itself into marching order and there began again that monotonously restful thudding of tens of thousands of hoofs, the cadence of which wove itself into a man's thinking and lulled him into short periods of slumber in the saddle, with recurrent periods of sunlight and starlight and the necessity of halting and dismounting and mounting again on to fresh mounts, as the Mongol force steadily ate up the leagues, making from seventy to eighty miles a day.

It was in the early evening of the night of the full moon that the scouts of the Mongols came to Merv and circled the city, while the *tumen,* like a dark flood, poured across the desert and flung itself against the white walls.

The Mongols leaped off their horses; while the bowmen kept up a steady cloudflight of arrows against the ramparts, the attacking warriors ran forward with ropes, to which iron hooks were attached and hurled the hooks up to catch on the battlements. Up these ropes they attempted to swarm; but the Seljuk Turks, aided by the men of the town, dislodged the hooks, and hurled down beams and great stones and pots of boiling oil along with javelins and arrows. The first wave spent itself in a litter of wounded and dying Mongols, and Tuli realized that Merv had to be reduced by more methodical means.

Witness of this attack, leaning on his great sword, Alan stared at the citadel and at that north tower with the balcony where he had held that fateful speech with Merkit. To the right of it was the Tower of the Vultures and he wondered if Merkit had kept faith and spared Baldwin's life, and what had happened to Laila and her father that had caused the sending of that token.

It was the night of the full moon, and before midnight he must make good his word. Even now the Mongol attack had ceased, and Tuli, with his officers, was sending out guard posts to encircle the city.

NIGHT came swiftly, with the *yurts* and horse lines stretching into the velvety blackness and the sparkle and glow of thorn fires reflected in stray gleams on helmet and coat of mail, and here and there an armorer's torch flare melting

on steel and the subdued hum and murmur of a host of men floating out over the oasis of Merv.

A fire, brighter and larger than the others, its rays lighting up the horned standard and the coming and going of many officers, marked Tuli's pavilion. Toward it Alan made his way. There was a chance, he reflected, that Tuli might grant his boon, and spare the life and goods of the governor of Merv.

He drew a deep breath and entered the pavilion, seeking out Tuli as he sat listening to the report of the master of the trains.

The slant-eyed young prince looked gravely into Alan's eyes.

"Ho, Iron Man," he said. "I saw that great sword of thine slashing mightily in the combat. Break me down these cursed walls of Merv with it and I'll beg of my father, the Kha Khan, to make thee an *orkhun!*"

"Thy father the Kha Khan, O Tuli, said very wisely that walls are no stronger than the hearts of their defenders. And in saying that, he thereafter asked me concerning the governor of Merv and what manner of man he might be and I gave answer, saying—" and Alan spoke briefly to Tuli, the *Orluk*, concerning the governor of Merv and the pact that he had been forced to make with him, then stood silent while Tuli gravely considered this matter.

"And what said my father, when thou didst tell him that thy head and the head of thy friend were forfeit? Did he not grant the life of this Merkit?" Tuli looked up, his eyes shrewd.

"He said that he could not grant a promise such as that, not knowing what circumstances might arise to prevent his fulfillment of that promise. And he said further that promise breaking is a hideous thing in a ruler of men," Alan said steadily.

Tuli nodded as one pleased with the result of his own test.

"Verily, Iron Man, there is naught but truth in thee, for he said those self same words to me concerning this matter. And he commanded me to so act concerning it as mine own judgment bade me."

"And thine own judgment, O Tuli?"

". . . bids me tell thee that thou art at liberty to keep thy word to this Merkit, surrender thyself to him before the moon hath set this night."

Alan's face changed not one whit.

"So be it," he said, and turned quietly to make his departure.

"But wait!" called Tuli, and Alan turned back. "I have this to say further. Thou hast my leave to tell Merkit that Merv is doomed, and we take it by storm —but it may be that I will spare his life and goods, providing he doth so manage the affair that he and I shall meet face to face to agree on the terms thereof, but in no case can I bind myself by my word until we shall meet."

"I shall inform the governor of thy words," said Alan at last, and left.

THERE yet lacked two hours before the setting of the moon as Alan left his *yurt*. A wide-sleeved *khalat* concealed his coat of chain mail and sword. He had a bow and quiver of arrows on his back, an iron hook spliced to one end in his hand, and in his mind, a firm intention not to render himself up to Merkit until the last possible minute.

It was for this reason that he did not seek out the cave mouth on the hillside which gave on to the tunnel under the wall, but sought instead that tower not far from the Lion Gate, wherein he had seen that inconspicuous postern gate sunk in the dark angle of the wall and tower.

Because they were the heavy cavalry of the center, his own regiment was encamped opposite the Lion Gate, the main entrance to the city. And as was within his right, he ordered that a hundred of his bowmen should advance swiftly as near to the gate as they could approach and from there launch several volleys of burning arrows at the roofs of the towers, at the wooden gates and through the slits on the abutting walls, each man retiring from the position so soon as he had discharged his arrows.

While these men were preparing for their task, Alan made way to a point opposite the tower of the postern gate and crept forward under cover of strag-

gling bushes and hillocks until he was within fifty paces of the wall, unseen in the velvety darkness of the shadows.

There came then a sudden outcry and the beating of an alarm drum from the top of the Lion Gate and the darkness around it was quickly illumined by the fiery trails of innumerable flaming arrows.

Alan paused not, but moved swiftly under shelter of the shadow of the tower of the postern gate. As he had foreseen, there was vast excitement on the walls, with guards running to the threatened point, while those few left on duty elsewhere kept their attention on the excitement at the Lion Gate.

Alan cast his iron hook above to the battlement and it fell inside and caught as he pulled it tight. Grasping it, he went up hand over hand, gaining some support and aid from the arch of the postern gate and above that from outjutting stones and beams of the walls. He quickly hauled himself through the battlement port while yet the noise and clamor of the false attack on the main gate was at its height.

Half through the port, he froze silent and still.

For his eyes fell upon the sandalled feet of a sentry not five paces from him. The man was leaning over the parapet, watching the flaming arrows dropping over the Lion Gate.

Alan edged forward inch by inch until at last he was clear of the port. Then from his half crouching position he flung himself at the sentry, seizing him by the throat and jerking him backwards.

The man's helmet flew off and his head crashed against the raised edge of the slight stone platform on the opposite side of the tower. Whether he was dead or unconscious Alan knew not, but he worked swiftly, jerking off the distinctive gray *khalat,* the high,damascened helmet and exchanging his own Mongol bow for the Seljuk bow of the fallen sentry.

Quickly shifting his own Mongol arrows into the quiver of the Seljuk, he shoved the inert form out through the port of the battlement and heard it rebound on the rocks below.

In a trice he had doffed his own *khalat* and had donned the helmet, the *khalat* and the quiver of the sentry. To all outward seeming, he was but another Seljuk Turk sentry upon the wall, bow in hand. Coiling his rope with its iron hook, he slung it on his belt, inside the *khalat.*

From the tower platform three steps led down to the barbette of the main wall along which men were grouped, all intent on the fire spectacle at the main gate—so intent that Alan walked behind them and none accosted him until he set foot upon the steps leading down to the street below the wall.

"Hai!" one called him from behind on the barbette. "Tell Selim that if he sendeth us more of those wormy dates we will assuredly strangle him with our bowstrings when we come off watch!"

"Aye, that I will! May he burn in Gehenna!" returned Alan with the required degree of vehemence.

The street below was filled with nervous townsmen and with oxen wains bringing supply of great stones and stores of beams for casting from the battlements; but none paid heed to a Seljuk Turk.

The Cathayan silk merchant at the Street of the Silversmiths jerked his head up in alarm at the sudden appearance of a tall Seljuk in his shop, but bowed low so soon as Alan spoke.

"The man in the Tower of the Vultures? He is still alive and imprisoned. The sheykh and his daughter? The old man has been put to torture by Merkit in effort to make him disclose the hiding place of his treasure. Nay, he has not perished under the torture, but has weakened, and now Merkit is but awaiting his recovery to put him again to the torture. Men said that Merkit was giving the daughter this night to Malik, the captain of the guard, or to some other one of his boon companions."

For some minutes Alan talked, low voiced and forceful and then rose, and with a nod to the Cathayan strode forth from the shop, bending his steps toward the citadel.

THERE was much coming and going of Seljuk Turks from the vaulted entrance gate of the citadel, and Alan had little difficulty in entering the court-

yard. It was only when he essayed to ascend the inner staircase leading up to the apartments of the governor that he had difficulty, for a Turk barred his way with his bared scimitar.

"Allah forbid that I should harm thee, brother," said the Turk, "but none may ascend that staircase without order, under pain of death!"

"None save a trusted messenger of the governor," returned Alan quietly. "Behold!" and he held something up to the gaze of the sentry.

The man examined it, puzzled and muttering under his breath.

An authoritative appearing Seljuk, an under-officer of sorts, strode over to see what the matter might be.

"Tell this spawn of Eblis to make way quickly," Alan's voice was crisp and impatient. "And take care how he holds up the bearer of the governor's seal!"

The under officer examined the small silver seal made in the likeness of a lion's head, and motioned for Alan to pass.

Outside the door of the governor's apartment two Seljuks were squatting comfortably, their weapons against the wall.

They rose alarmed at the swift arrival in their midst of what they esteemed to be the officer of the guard.

Alan brought forth the silver seal. Even with the evidence of it before their eyes, they were fearful.

"It is at thine own risk," they said, "that ye open that door, governor's seal or no. We were forbidden to permit anyone to enter save the captain of the guard himself. Allah forbid that we should prevent thee from entering, only we will neither prevent nor aid thee—go in if thou darest, but thy blood be on thine own head and we will have no part of it!"

Alan pushed them aside and quietly opened the door.

THE rays of the full moon drenched the balcony and part of the room in molten silver, fading only when they encountered the rose-hued light from the hanging lamps of silver which glowed upon the divans.

Above the click of ivory dice, delicate and clear came the trills and runs of a zither's silver strings, and a voice rose in song;

"Your fawn-eyed face entrancing,
The autumn moon enhancing. . . ."

The voice stopped as though seeking for the next line of verse.

"Hath shot love's arrows in my heart," suggested another voice.

"Hath shot love's arrows in my heart," sang the first voice and then went on;

"Hath sped love's sorrows with each dart," and then meditatively murmured "Entrancing . . . enhancing . . . I have it now."

"And set the stars to dancing!" sang the poet Maruff, drunk with wine and triumphant with song, and exceedingly pleased with himself, although the others, it was plain to see, were unimpressed and intent upon their dice.

"A six!" cried Nezzer, he who had sold his castle in Khorassan to follow the devious path of a dancing girl. "Another lucky throw and Laila is mine!" Khwajah, the Syrian spendthrift, watched the dice with hot and eager eyes, while Magrabin and Salim, they of the delicate features and feminine manners, looked faintly bored.

"She is thine—*if* the Frank returneth not before another hour is past," said Merkit, sipping his wine and casting a glance at the moon. It's full effulgence even now was lowering itself toward the distant curved rim of the desert.

"Laila's face entrancing,
The desert moon enhancing,
Hath shot love's arrows in my heart,
Hath sped love's sorrows with each dart,
And set the stars to dancing!"

sang Maruff, oblivious of the dice game, making his zither fairly sob with poignancy, the delicate throbbing overtones of the silver strings yearning with the faint sadness of desire.

"Another six!" cried Nezzer. "Laila is to me!"

There came a clink of steel against stone and a voice from out the shadows by the door.

"The hour is not yet up!" said Alan, and came forward into the glow of the hanging lamps.

"I have kept faith, O Merkit," he said. "The full moon is not yet set."

Merkit toyed with the wine cup, gazing up at the tall Crusader.

"It is plain to be seen that thou hast kept faith," he said. Then softly, "But what is not evident to me is whether or no thou hast brought back the word from Genghis Khan which I await."

"Aye, I have brought such word. I have kept faith, Merkit, but it troubleth me that thou hast not kept faith with equal rigor."

"And what dost thou mean by that?" asked Merkit lazily.

"I mean this matter of the putting of the old sheykh to the torture in my absence," said Alan flatly.

"It comes to my mind that I pledged only the life of the sheykh and the honor of his daughter," returned Merkit. "And if the life of one and the honor of the other be still secure, how then can it be said that I have not kept faith?" A gleam of amusement lighted Merkit's eyes.

Merkit shrugged his shoulders.

"And now," he said, "concerning this word that thou hast brought?" There was no trace of eagerness nor the faintest note of curiosity in his voice.

"It comes from Tuli, the son of Genghis Khan, he who leads these Mongols even now encircling thy city. And his word is this—that he will take Merv by storm and that he will *not* pledge safety for thee nor thy goods before meeting thee. But it may be that he will spare thy life and goods, providing thou dost so manage the affair that he and thee shall meet face to face to agree upon the terms thereof."

MERKIT thought upon this at some length.

"That is very little upon which to spare thy life," he said at last, then added musingly, "*providing that I manage the affair so that we shall meet face to face!*" There came a faint gleam into his eyes. "Mayhap, he will come here to the citadel if I give him safe conduct through the gates and the city?"

"Nay, I do not think so. I would suggest that a feast be made for him in that garden that lies in the quarter of the silversmiths, and that he cometh secretly through the tunnel that ends there."

Merkit drummed thoughtfully with his finger tips on the edge of the tabouret that stood beside him. Alan, watching his face, detected a gleam of eagerness.

"I will have naught to do with any plan that hath for its object any treachery to the son of Genghis Khan," said the Crusader.

Merkit looked up sharply. His eyes narrowed.

"It seems to me that there hath been too much talk of what thou wilt or will not do," he said, and his eyes grew hard. "There will be nothing required of thee save to sign a tablet which I will have written, addressed to this Tuli, stating that Merkit, the Governor of Merv, invites him, with no more than three companions, to dine with him in the garden of the silversmiths quarter tomorrow night after sundown."

"And if I do not sign this tablet?" Alan asked quietly.

"Then thy head, the head of thy friend the other Frank, and the head of the sheykh shall be flung into the Mongol camp tomorrow at dawn, and the daughter of the sheykh given to Nezzer. And it is my intention to see that thou art kept under honorable restraint here in the citadel until such time as Tuli doth appear— Nay, I had thought of that," he interrupted as Alan made sudden swift motion of sword hand to sword hilt. Merkit no more than flicked his hand at a silken rope hanging beside him whereat the door burst open and men with drawn swords leaped into the room.

Merkit halted them ere they rushed upon Alan and ordered them back to the door, all save Malik al Khotan, the Captain of the Guard, and to him he gave low-voiced command. Malik grunted in pleased fashion, and with a sidelong glance at Alan, hurried out.

Soon there came a scribe with quills and ink and tablet. He sat cross-legged below the divan and wrote what Merkit bade him in low voice, the scribe staring curiously at Alan between flourishes of his quill.

Merkit took the finished work and read it, then offered the paper to Alan. In beautiful Arabic script the letter conveyed the invitation to Tuli, son of the Kha Khan, with three companions to feast with Merkit, the Governor of Merv, after sunset the day following, at the place shown by the bearer of the letter, who would lead the guests to the feast.

Mutely the scribe offered quill and ink to Alan for signature.

The Crusader drew back hotly, turning upon Merkit.

"What sort of dog dost think I am," he cried, "to deal treacherously with mine own commander?"

"Better be a live dog than a dead lion," returned Merkit and crooked his finger. Men rushed forward and seized Alan from behind. The shadows of the men at the door parted and with soft tread, like some night-prowling cat animal, there came the huge form of the executioner flitting in, his great sword in hand and the corded muscles of his heavy shoulders and back moving smoothly under his bronzed skin.

Alan laughed harshly.

"Dost think, O Merkit! that I have fear of the edge of the sword when my being here is proof itself that I dread dishonor more? Thou wilt have to think up more than that to get thy letter signed."

"I have thought of more than that!" returned Merkit softly.

There came a clank of chains and Baldwin de Neville was herded into the room, eyes blinking at the unaccustomed light and emaciated frame staggering from the weakness of long imprisonment. He was flung to his knees. After him there came, tottering pitifully, the old sheykh, his skin translucent as parchment but his eyes burning and unafraid, as he was forced to his knees.

The executioner wiped his blade with a square of silk and thereafter wiped his hands and tucked the square of silk in his belt, grasping the sword in both hands and lifting its weight to loosen his muscles. This done, he waited, impassive, for the word from Merkit.

That one sat, chin in palm, staring at Alan.

Alan's face had gone white, his eyes haggard. The eyes of the two kneeling men raised themselves to him. There was no fear in either of them, only a questioning and something of confidence and trust. And it was that look that gripped Alan by the throat.

"Thou hast won this move, O Merkit," he said wearily. "I sign!"

"Note that I have not yet played the queen," said Merkit smoothly.

"AYE, and what of the queen?" Nezzer's voice was impatient. The room had been cleared of all save the governor and his boon companions. The prisoners had been sent back to their cells.

"Aye, what of Laila of the gazelle-like eyes?" echoed Maruff. "Nezzer hath won her in fair rolling of the dice."

"Hath he then lost her, that ye are so importunate?" Merkit broke the current of his thoughts to reply. "Look ye, friends of my soul, there is more in this than the cast of dice to win a woman's fair body. . . . I am moving the iron chessmen of destiny to win the person of no less a one than the son of Genghis Khan, himself, who cometh alone to my board no later than tomorrow night. . . ."

"The fly bidden to the feast of the spider. . . ." commented Maruff.

The others stared in amaze.

"Wallah! but thou art wise, O Merkit!" they breathed and were silent in flattering silence, gazing upon him.

There came to their ears then a sound that made them raise their heads.

It was a shrill, eerie, penetrating whistling sound, stronger at first and ever growing weaker until at last it ceased, only to commence again, from far off and steadily to strengthen its shrill whining note until at last it ceased abruptly.

Some among them ran to the balcony, peering out at the desert face and at the ground beneath and the sky above, but none could give answer and the talk soon turned to other things and the matter was forgotten when the wines and meats were brought. They feasted gaily and Maruff made some verses extolling the wisdom of Merkit and his ruse to take the son of Genghis Khan as hostage; and the heady throbbing little drum pulsated through the night.

At dawn there came the throbbing of a greater drum, the huge alarm drum atop the citadel tower, and the hoarse blare of trumpets and clash of cymbals drowning out the plaintive wailing of the flute.

Only the zither kept up its silvery tinkle, for Maruff was moved to compose a war song and staggered to the balcony, where flashes of fire and the gleam of steel showed from the walls, and there arose a great clamor of many voices above which ascended a savage, snarling, screaming chorus that overbore the rest with its sheer savagery and lust to kill, like the chorus of a multitude of leopards scenting blood.

Maruff composed a very creditable song, in which the meter was true and the lilting of the words made music, but unfortunately, its melody was lost in the smashing crescendo bayed by the iron mouths of the trumpets of war.

For the Mongols had started the terrible Mongol storm, the attack that persists day and night without cessation. Great swarms of them, under the cover of thick clouds of arrows that thudded and hurtled and stung wherever a defender showed his head, ran forward with sacks of earth and emptied them under the walls, successive lines of them following, wave after wave, each of them ebbing but leaving behind the debris of their flowing and then a sloping ramp began to creep upwards towards the battlements, rising higher almost imperceptibly with every hour.

The Mongols had brought up their siege train. Twisted and riven wood crashed and creaked. Thick ropes hissed and whined and grew taut to the breaking point while the great beams of the stone casters flung themselves against the walls. Clouds of arrows hissed and some of them tipped with fire, whirred against walls or against siege engines.

Great beams of wood slung in leather and tipped with iron, thudded steadily against tower foundations, their steady pounding never ceasing.

But the walls of Merv were solid. It would take many days of pounding to breach them. Already Tuli had lost a thousand of his best men and was not averse to making other arrangements with the governor of Merv, were that possible.

It was not unwillingly that with three companions, he followed the messenger of the governor of Merv into the cave mouth on the hill side and plunged into the tunnel.

THEY came out in a fair garden, set about with high walls which deadened a little the sound of the war engines and the battle cries and the eternal *thud-thud* of the rams battering below the ramparts.

Merkit was a gracious host, seating his slant-eyed and incurious guest at his right hand at the long table set with silver and bright with fruits and groaning under weight of meats. Maruff was there and Nezzer, Khwajah, the Syrian, and the two delicate youths from Nisapur, Magrabin and Salim, seated next to Malik the Captain of the Guard. By Tuli's side sat Alan. Merkit had gently but firmly insisted that the Crusader leave his sword near the garden gate while they sat at the feast.

Alan was distrait and ate little of the food placed before him, but his eye, ever and anon, swept swiftly about the garden, coming to rest on that summer house of latticed stonework, wherein was the mouth of the tunnel leading from outside the walls.

Torchlight gleamed upon Seljuk helmets and scimitars clustered about that tunnel's mouth, but there were no other guards in view save these and the scene was peaceful enough.

It was through Alan that Tuli held converse with Merkit, Tuli in cloth of gold and fur edged cloak and Merkit in white silk *khalat*, gold embroidered, and white turban with a slender aigret held in place with a single great ruby of Badakshan as clasp.

The exchange of gifts had taken place, a bar of silver and some priceless jade from Tuli and a damascened and jeweled sword and shield from Merkit, when Tuli, putting down the pheasant bone which he had thoroughly gnawed, leaned towards Alan.

"Hold speech with the governor, ask-

ing what of this pact for his life and treasure that he wishes to make with me, O Iron Man," he said.

Whereat Alan addressed Merkit, as he was bade. The governor was long in replying.

"Tell thy leader that the walls of Merv are strong, and its defenders many, and that something more than just my life and fortune should be granted for its yielding."

"I hear, O Merkit, but the young Khan will demand what more than thy life and goods thou wilt demand." Alan waited.

"I have in mind that he shall grant the lives of these boon companions of mine and grant me the property of the one hundred richest dwellers in Merv."

Alan turned to Tuli, speaking in Mongol.

"The man hath grown more avaricious. He now demandeth his own life and property, the lives of these boon companions of his, seated now about the table, and that thou render unto him the property of the hundred wealthiest dwellers in Merv!"

Tuli bit reflectively into a spiced honey cake and drank a full flagon of wine before replying.

"Tell him, O Iron Man, that this is not impossible of accomplishment," he said at last, "but tell him that we require, first, the names of the one hundred wealthiest inhabitants of Merv."

Merkit called for tablets and quills. They were quickly supplied. Each of his companions, from Maruff the poet to the two gazelle-eyed youths, was called upon to refresh his memory and between them all the lists were made and passed to Alan.

"Keep them, O Iron Man, they will be of use. What more doth he demand?"

"He will ask now that he be given thy word that all will be granted him as he has requested."

"Delay upon that but a little while," commanded Tuli, "discuss thine own affairs with him for the moment."

"Is there aught more, O Merkit?" asked Alan.

"Aye, a little matter, affecting thee in some small degree. My companion, Nezzer, hath pressed me that I shall give him the girl, Laila, daughter of the sheykh, and I would fain grant him that small boon. So I have commanded that she be given to him this night."

Alan's face hardened.

"That I cannot permit," he said stiffly.

MERKIT smiled.

"Do not delude thyself, my friend," he said, his tone indulgent, as though explaining matters to a child. "There is naught that thou canst do to prevent it. Look ye, O Frank, I hold thee and thy leader in the hollow of my hand. My Seljuks are outside the wall of this garden in force. If I but say the word they swarm in and seize thy Tuli."

"Why then dost thou withhold thy hand?" asked Alan.

"If it happens that I can gain my ends by parleying, it were better than to hold Tuli captive as hostage against his father. And it seems that Tuli will grant me all that I ask. I need only his pledged word that he will so do and he can depart in peace."

"And I? What of me and of the other Frank and the sheykh? It was thy pledged word that they should go free, and already that word has been broken as regards the daughter of the sheykh."

Merkit nodded.

"These high matters are above thy head, I fear me," he said. "It is not always politic that a ruler should keep his word to underlings. I have esteemed it best that thou, the other Frank and the sheykh remain with me yet awhile as some sort of pledge for Tuli's keeping his word. Remember, friend, that high matters are like a game of chess. It needs thoughtful playing and the possession of some pieces. Now I hold two knights, a pawn and a queen . . . and in one more move I can gather in a king, should it be necessary," and he glanced at Tuli. "It is high time that the matter came to a conclusion. Demand of your chief that he pledge his word regarding me, my companions and the wealth of the leading dwellers in Merv. I would go hence from here before the setting of another sun, and he may have the city to do with as he pleases."

"Hold him yet a little while, Iron

Man," returned Tuli, and glanced around the garden, restless, like some trapped animal.

"Prince Tuli would fain ponder on this matter somewhat, O Merkit," said Alan, and sensing the quick impatience arising in the governor he went on, hurrying his words, "suppose that I should tell thee, O Merkit, that there is lost to thee one knight, one queen and a pawn already of thy store of pieces?"

"What meanest thou?" Merkit looked up sharply suspicious on the instant.

"I mean that thy signet, the silver seal thou didst give me, hath power to open doors. And that between dawn and daylight this morning, Baldwin my friend, the sheykh and his daughter Laila were liberated by the magic of thy seal. . . ."

Merkit leaned forward, his pale face flushed with anger.

"Malik!" his voice carried to the captain of the guard, who rose and came swiftly, "is this thing true—that the Frank prisoner, the sheykh and his daughter have been released?"

"One came at dawn . . . bearing thy seal . . . and command from thee. . . ." Malik grew frightened under the mounting anger of the Governor

"Where are they now?" Merkit's voice trembled with rage.

Malik shook his head.

"They are without the walls, safe in the Mongol camp," returned Alan calmly.

"And for that thy head is forfeit, O Frank!" Merkit's eyes were deadly. "Ho, Malik, truss me this fellow and have his head lopped off within the quarter hour!"

Malik would have laid hands on Alan, but the Crusader looked up at him with a twisted, bleak smile and Malik gave back a step.

Before the captain of the guard could call for the Seljuks there rose from somewhere a shrill, penetrating, eerie whistling sound strong at first and ever growing weaker until at last it was lost high in the heavens.

"A djinn! a demon!" whispered Malik hoarsely.

Alan turned to Tuli.

"It is the agreed signal, O Khan!" he said. "Shall we make an end of this game of chess?"

TULI, emptying a goblet of wine, wiped his lips and nodded.

Merkit was berating Malik for his tardiness. The captain of the guard, obviously shaken by the strange wailing portent, called to the gray clad bearers of the scimitars about the entrance of the summer house.

They looked at him incuriously, out of slant eyes and bronzed faces that certainly bore no resemblance to Seljuk Turks. They made no move to obey, but gave back to make room for men who came suddenly from within the summer house, men who began to stream out into the garden, squat, slant-eyed men with high cheek bones and lean bony faces, wearing cloaks of fox and wolf skins underneath which was the glint of lacquered leather armor.

Tuli made a careless motion with one hand, pointing out certain ones at the table, and then a horrible thing happened.

For the Mongol warriors who had ranged themselves about the table appeared suddenly behind the backs of Nezzer, of Khwajah the Syrian, of Magrabin and Salim, and of Maruff the poet, the boon companions of Merkit. Each Mongol carried a bowstring in his hand. The Mongols, their eyes incurious and their faces impassive, tightened their bowstrings about the necks of the doomed guests and before the horrified eyes of Merkit, they strangled all of his boon companions.

It was not a pretty sight. Malik, the Captain of the Guard, had little time to sicken at the view, for Tuli's eyes lighted upon him and he made another gesture and powerful arms grasped the staring-eyed Turk and applied the bowstring to him in turn.

"These things of high policy are evidently too deep for thy comprehension, O Merkit," said Alan to the horrified Governor of Merv. "For they would not have happened hadst thou kept faith!"

Merkit tore his eyes away from the horror that was going on and sought Alan's eyes.

"What is to be my fate?" he asked, striving to keep the quaver out of his voice.

"That I do not know, but I will find out," and he called to Tuli in Mongol. "What, O Khan, is to be the fate of this one?" he asked.

Tuli turned indifferent eyes upon the governor of Merv and spoke.

Alan turned back to Merkit and translated:

"The Khan says that he hath made some half promise to spare thy life, O Merkit! And it is better that he keep faith, for word breaking is hideous in a ruler of men. But as ye have broken faith with me, ye are no longer fit to rule men and ye shall be a captive and a servant of servants of the Horde!"

And Merkit, the Governor of Merv, was bound and led forth.

The Crusader rose as someone brought him his sword and shield. There was now fighting along the garden walls, for the Mongol bowmen had loosed a sudden shower of arrows down at the Seljuks lurking outside and had thereupon leaped upon them from the height of the wall, sword in hand.

With the loosening of that whistling arrow, the battle along the city walls had suddenly deepened in its angry note and flames were breaking out in the city.

A man clad in yellow wool cloak came up to Alan, and the voice of the Cathayan seller of silk fell upon his ears.

"My Lord's commands have been obeyed," he said. "So soon as I heard the whistling arrow from the citadel tower I came to the foot of the tower where my Lord had let himself down with a rope, bringing with me the men whom my Lord brought with him thirty days past. And as my Lord knows, one of those men got word to Tuli the Orkhun and others of them slew the Seljuks on guard at the summer house; and all was prepared as my Lord directed whilst I took the silver signet that my Lord gave me and released the Iron Man from the Tower of the Vultures and the sheykh and his daughter from the citadel tower, all this by my Lord's orders and by virtue of the power in that signet. . . ."

They stepped back, for there came another rush of men from the tunnel mouth, these ones in heavy red lacquered armor and Alan saw that his squadrons were forming, preparing to assault the city from within. As they paused there came a great shout and outcry from the city walls.

"That will be the Lion Gate," said the Cathayan, composedly, "the city is fallen and my work is over in this place."

"And the other Iron Man and the sheykh and his daughter?" asked Alan.

"As my Lord directed, I led the other Iron Man to his own regiment and gave him to the care of his officers. The sheykh and his daughter I placed in the *yurt* of my Lord, and saw that they were attended and they now await the return of my Lord to render him thanks."

"Thou hast done well," said Alan and drew his sword, prepared to lead his force of Mongols into the streets of Merv, where the battle was now raging hotly. His men handed him his shield, that shield with the ancient motto, "I keep Faith!" and well protected by that trusty shield, he led his yakka Mongols into the battle now raging in the city streets.

MEN UNDER THE SEA

The Salvage of the Egypt

By COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG

AMONG achievements of men under the sea, the salvage work on the *Egypt* will always shine as of the first magnitude. Death and disaster, the weary waiting that wears down the heart, legal entanglements, the terrors of the deep sea, and glittering bars of gold are woven into that story as in none other.

For me the story began in New York

and ended in Rome, with six years between, during which time death had taken grim toll of many of the actors in the drama, and finally and ironically laid hands on the man—himself an expert in deep water diving—who first called my attention to the *Egypt,* the deepest salvage job ever undertaken.

I found on my desk one day in early June, 1929, a foreign letter. It read:

Paris, June 1, 1929.

Sir:

I am trying, by this letter, to introduce myself to you, as an Italian navy lieutenant, in charge of some experiences for submarine salvage and rescue works.

I have just now read your book "On The Bottom" and some articles of yours in the *Saturday Evening Post,* and I have very much learned from your vast experience.

I should be most grateful if you would let me know what books have been written by you and other experts, by reading which I may complete my own experience.

I am going now to see the rescue work on the British Steamer *Egypt* which lies at the bottom in a deep of 360 feet, off Brest (France). Let me know if there is some interesting for you in that job.

Sending you my best regards and thanks, believe me

Yours sincerely,

Alberto Cuniberti, Lieut. I.R.N.
c/o Italian Naval Attache
Italian Royal Embassy
Paris.

Commander Edward Ellsburg,
Bureau of Navigation
Navy Dept., Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

Something interesting for me in a salvage job at 360 feet? There certainly was, though I was incredulous. I smiled a little at Cuniberti's English, but after reflecting that I couldn't do a tenth as well in his Italian, I hastened to write him. And so commenced a correspondence lasting some years, which kept deep diving, the *Egypt* and what went on regarding her, before my eyes.

Cuniberti, I found, was the leading expert in deep diving in Italy, and well worth knowing.

THE S. S. *Egypt,* as I soon found out, had been a P. and O. liner of some 7941 tons, plying between London and India. She sailed on her last voyage for Bombay in May, 1922, carrying a passenger list of 44, a crew of 291, mainly Lascars, and a cargo of bullion in her strong room consisting of 1089 bars of gold, 37 boxes of gold coin, and 1229 ingots of silver, amounting altogether to about five and one-half tons of gold and forty three tons of silver. The whole was valued and insured—mainly by Lloyd's—for a total of £1,058,879, or approximately $5,000,000.

On the evening of May 20, 1922, while traveling slowly south-south-west in a dense fog over a perfectly calm sea some twenty miles southwest of the island of Ushant, the *Egypt* heard a steamer whistle on her port side. Before the *Egypt* could do any maneuvering the bow of another ship struck her amidships between her two stacks, tearing her side wide open, and then faded from view again into the fog.

Immediately the stricken *Egypt* heeled to port and began to sink on her side. While her panic-stricken Lascar crew struggled desperately to lower the boats from her rapidly listing decks, a continuous stream of S.O.S. calls went out from the *Egypt's* radio room, followed soon by her position as hastily computed by her captain.

"S.O.S. S.O.S. S.O.S. position 48° 10′ North. 5° 30′ West. Egypt."

Twenty minutes after the collision the *Egypt* was gone, taking with her 17 passengers and 71 of her crew. Very few boats were ever launched; only the fact that the ship which struck her, the French freighter *Seine,* succeeded in finding her again in the fog before she vanished, prevented a much larger loss of life.

Twenty wild minutes, and the *Seine* floated alone in the fog and the night. The *Egypt,* her radio calls suddenly stilled, lay with her five millions of dollars in gold and silver at the bottom of the sea in sixty-six fathoms of water, a depth far beyond any to which man had ever gone before.

Lloyd's paid the losses. To the original owners of ship and bullion, the *Egypt* soon became only a memory. But to Lloyd's, legal owners now of that bullion, she represented their sole hope of recouping part, at least, of a very heavy

loss, and it was not long before they had entered into a contract for salvage, undeterred by the fact that the wreck lay 100 feet deeper in the sea than men had ever before plumbed, and at a depth twice as great as any in which divers had previously done any real work.

Compared to the problem of the *Egypt*, salvaging treasure from the *Merida* or the *Lusitania* would have been child's play; but where the *Merida* and the *Lusitania* were immediately abandoned as worthless by the underwriters, the seemingly impossible task of recovering the bullion in the *Egypt* was promptly taken in hand. No real treasure of $5,000,000 is relinquished by its owners without a fight.

Two problems were involved—one, to find the wreck; the second, to remove the treasure from her. Oddly enough, it was the first problem only which really seriously worried the ultimate salvagers—the recovery they felt sure of accomplishing, if they could ever locate the wreck.

IN 1923, work started, with a Swedish company engaged to locate the wreck, while two British engineers designed the diving apparatus for recovery. Further search was conducted in 1926 by a French contractor, but in 1928, in spite of an active dragging campaign, the wreck had not been found, and there was little need for diving gear of any kind. Then matters took a different turn.

In Italy, the *Societa Ricuperi Maritima,* Sorima for short—The Society for Maritime Recovery—had demonstrated exceptional ability in deep water work. Formed, financed, and directed by Commendatore Giovanni Quaglia to salvage wrecks in Italian waters, Sorima, using the Neufeldt & Kuhnke metal diving rig, had successfully salvaged from the wreck of the English steamer *Washington,* torpedoed near Genoa, several thousands of tons of cargo in the form of steel and copper bars, locomotive boilers, and railway trucks. This venture, carried out at a depth of about 300 feet, was especially profitable in Italy, where raw materials are expensive and labor is cheap, but it disclosed above all an exceptional executive ability in the man at the company's head to direct practical work in deep water.

In the light of Sorima's demonstrated strength, British engineers recommended to Lloyd's that the contract be turned over to Sorima. In August, 1928, this was done. The terms of the contract were not unusual—Sorima was to stand all the salvage expense and was to receive in return 50 percent of what it recovered.

Sorima banked heavily for success in its use of the Neufeldt & Kuhnke metal diving armor. In 1928 it was impossible for men using the flexible diving rig to go much below 300 feet, or to do any tangible work even at that depth.

The record for depth was 306 feet, reached by four men, Crilley, Drellishak, Loughman, and Neilson, in the salvage operations on the F-4 off Honolulu. At that depth, owing to the tremendous pressure, a dive was limited to twenty minutes on the bottom, and the divers acted merely as observers to check the position of the steel hawsers which were swept under the bow and the stern of the submarine and by which she was eventually dragged into shallow water under the direction of Lieutenant Furer, Salvage Officer.

Armored diving rigs had for long endeavored to eliminate the dangers of pressure—"the bends," the effects of highly compressed air on the diver's mind, the long rise necessary for decompression—by shielding the diver completely inside a metal suit strong enough to withstand the pressure of the sea at its designed working depth, leaving the man inside to breathe air under normal pressure. Under such conditions, regardless of the length of dive or of its depth, a man might be hauled to the surface as fast as a winch could haul him up, then could emerge at once from his shell, no worse off than if he had been down inside a submarine, for instance.

BUT while building a shell strong enough to resist the sea is within the capacity of any capable engineer, there were new problems involved in making a practicable diving rig.

First, no part whatever of the diver's body can protrude from the suit. Here enters the first inescapable defect of the armored rig, its inability to allow a man to use his hands.

For if the hands project from the armored suit, they are then exposed to the sea pressure outside, which, at 400 feet, amounts to putting a load of five tons on each hand. With no balancing internal compressed air pressure to be transmitted through the lungs to the blood in the hands to offset this sea pressure, the hands will promptly be "squeezed" into jelly, and will as a practical matter promptly be rammed back through the joints into the suit, to be followed instantly by a torrent of water which will drown the diver.

In short, a diver using any armored rig is deprived immediately of the major feature which has enabled man to rise above the beasts—his hands. All he can do is to substitute for them outside the suit mechanical claws, hooks, or similar makeshifts, to be manipulated from inside.

A second drawback is that lack of flexibility and freedom of movement. In a rubber diving dress, a man can walk, stoop over, lie down, twist himself about, and maneuver arms and legs with nearly as much freedom as in his street clothes, restricted in his ability only by the enlarged size of his bulky helmet and the need of keeping his lead weights and his life-giving air hose clear of entanglements.

All this flexibility is lacking in any rigid dress. To withstand the enormous pressure outside with no balancing pressure inside, the shell must be made of cylindrical and spherical shapes, with as few joints as possible, for every joint is a source of dangerous leakage.

Here comes in another difficulty. Regardless of mechanical ingenuity in designing the joints, as the depth increases the external pressure forces the two faces of the joint more firmly together, increasing the friction of movement, and making it harder and harder for the man inside to move either an arm or leg.

No description can portray the fatiguing effort necessary to secure even moderate movement erect in this rig in deep water. It requires a physical giant inside to be able to get about at all, and then motion is possible only to a slight degree as compared with ordinary bodily freedom.

Tightness of joints Neufeldt & Kuhnke secured by an ingenious rubber sleeve sliding over a spherical joint, with the pressure tending to hold the rubber edge firmly against the metal, and always in contact with it.

To permit long continued breathing inside the Neufeldt & Kuhnke rig, the diver wears a breathing mask with a soda lime cartridge to eliminate the carbon dioxide formed by respiration, while fresh oxygen can be supplied as needed from a small cylinder carried in the rig.

In spite of its limitations, the armored Neufeldt & Kuhnke suit had some value. It could go deeper than a man might go otherwise; inside it, a man could at least see and act as an observer. If he were lucky enough to land on a level surface, he could shuffle about a bit; and if he were really expert, he could even pass a line about wreckage and perhaps tie simple knots.

But as for the diver himself doing any real work from it, that was hopeless. A diver in a flexible dress within the range to which he could descend, could get into compartments in a wreck and perform more work there in thirty minutes than a man in an armored suit could hope to accomplish in the same spot in weeks, perhaps even in months.

In the end, long before Quaglia finished with the *Egypt,* he found his faith in armored diving dresses unwarranted and quit using them. But his faith in himself and his men never wavered, in spite of death and long drawn out discouragement.

In early June, 1929, Quaglia set out to recover the *Egypt's* treasure. His salvage ship, the *Artiglio,* carried as an interested observer for the Italian Navy, its diving expert, Lieutenant Alberto Cuniberti.

THE first step, naturally, was to locate the wreck. Where was she? The *Egypt's* captain had sent out his position as latitude 48° 10′ North, longitude 5° 30′

West. He might ordinarily have been expected to know just where his ship was, but for some time before the accident he had been traveling in a fog at reduced speed in an ocean area swept by strong currents, and his computed dead reckoning position might easily be erroneous. Moreover, with the little time he had after the crash to run his last known position on the chart up to his position at the instant of collision, an added error might easily have crept in.

What made all this seem more probable was the fact that two different radio compass stations in France, as the *Egypt's* frantic S.O.S. calls filled the air, took directional bearings on her from those signals.

These two stations, one on the island of Ushant, the other on Point du Raz, on the mainland south of Brest, were nearly at right angles with respect to the wreck and excellently located to get good cross bearings on her.

Their radio compass bearings, when plotted on a chart, placed her in latitude 48° 6′ North, longitude 5° 29′ West, roughly one mile east and four miles south of where the *Egypt's* captain had reported himself.

Further to complicate the matter, a British torpedo boat destroyer had picked up a few hours after the wreck a mail sack belonging to the *Egypt* in latitude 48° 14′ North, longitude 5° 30′ 30″ West, some four miles north and half a mile west of where the *Egypt* had reported herself.

To start with, as may be seen, Quaglia faced the puzzle of where to begin searching for the *Egypt*. No two positions agreed within four miles as to where that ship had gone down. In whose position should he have most faith—the *Egypt's* captain, the French radio compass stations, or the British destroyer?

He had one independent report to guide him. Hedback, captain of the Swedish ship which had searched for the wreck in 1923, reported that practically coincident with the position established by the radio compass bearings his drags had hooked an obstruction he took for the *Egypt*, though he had then aboard no diving means of verifying his strike.

So in that location, called thereafter Hedback's Point, in lat. 48° 6′ N., long. 5° 29′ W., coinciding with the radio compass location, the search started. Quaglia had two ships—his main diving vessel, the *Artiglio*, and a somewhat similar vessel, the *Rostro*. Between the sterns of these two ships he paid out a steel wire cable somewhat over a mile long, held down near both ends by weights. The idea, of course, was that the wire, dragging along the smooth ocean floor, would catch under or on the wreck, thereby indicating its location.

Sweeping started. One end of the wire cable was passed from the *Artiglio* to the *Rostro*, and the two vessels slowly diverged as the cable was paid out. Then, over a mile apart with all the wire paid out, they headed on parallel courses at slow speed with the lengthy wire dragging along the bottom between them. It was not long before the sweep made a hard strike, and excitement rose to a high pitch. Had they caught the *Egypt* so soon?

But the sweep slipped free again, dashing their hopes. Soon the sweep was catching frequently and just as constantly slipping free, which indicated that the bottom, instead of being flat, was strewn with pinnacle rocks, perhaps thirty or forty feet high, a complication not foreseen on a bottom which the charts showed as practically a level plain some sixty to seventy fathoms deep.

A doubt began to grow as to the value of Hedback's original find in that location. If they had caught not one but many times on obstructions which a diving inspection showed to be only rocks, it was highly probable that what Hedback had caught, but never seen, was simply another rock.

Weary weeks dragged along while the Italians swept the bottom of the sea, hopefully dropping a diver over the side whenever the sweep caught, cursing fluently each time he reported only another rock.

They buoyed off an area six miles wide by ten miles long with its axis south-south-west, including all the reported positions of the wreck, and set about sweeping that area of sixty square miles systematically.

The task was enormous, the difficulty beyond belief. There was no certainty that the sweep might not slide right over the wreck without catching. Stranger things had happened in sweeping. The British, some years before, searching one of their bays for a submarine mysteriously lost, swept time after time the whole bay, only finally to locate their submarine sticking up like a lighthouse almost vertically from the mud in a spot that their sweeps had gone over many times.

DIFFICULTIES multiplied. Bad weather and strong currents made it impossible to keep location; the constant rubbing of the sweep on the rocks frayed and broke it, and more time was spent repairing sweep wires than was spent in sweeping. The tempers of the men grew short; all hands were ready to clutch at any straw that might help to find the *Egypt*. The wreck was a 10,000 ton mass of steel only 400 feet beneath the surface. Weren't there other means besides sweeping that might indicate where she lay?

There were indeed. Who in the *Artiglio's* crew had not heard of water and minerals being located beneath the earth's surface by certain psychic persons with divining rods? An idle superstition, perhaps, but the searchers on the *Artiglio* clutched at that straw. There might be something in it. Forked sticks of hazel have a long and weird record going back to antiquity; even scientists have sought to explain their somewhat mysterious accomplishments. In Italy especially, their history is ancient, mentioned by both Cicero and Tacitus. If ever the descendants of those old Romans needed help in locating something, the Italians looking for the *Egypt* were those people.

They sent back to Italy for an exceptional practitioner with the divining rod —a friar, Padre Innocente da Piovera. Lieutenant Cuniberti speaks very highly of Father Innocent, whose incongruous figure he guided about the *Artiglio* while that monk "felt" over the ocean with his forked stick. Of course neither Father Innocent nor his divining rod were of the slightest benefit in discovering the *Egypt*, and back he went to Piovera.

The black arts having failed, modern science had a trial. An English engineer named Brooks, who had done considerable work with electro-magnetic apparatus for locating subaqueous masses of metal, such as wrecks and enemy submarines, was next given an invitation to find the *Egypt* with his device.

Brooks and his electrical gear were far more impressive than simple Father Innocent and his hazel twigs, but whatever the reasons, the results were no different. Neither ancient magic nor modern electricity could point its finger at the spot where lay the elusive *Egypt*.

So there was nothing left to do but to keep on sweeping by hand, so to speak, and the summer finally wore away with the *Artiglio* and the *Rostro* still wearily dragging a wire along the ocean floor. Finally the autumn storms came to drive them off; sweeping became impossible in the turbulent seas and they had to quit. The fall of 1929 found the *Artiglio* driven into port with the *Egypt* still unfound.

SICK at heart over their difficulties with the unexpected rocks, Quaglia and his men spent the winter designing and testing a new type of drag to minimize their troubles. They had to have something that would go high enough above the bottom to miss catching on the innumerable rocks, but still low enough in the water to be reasonably sure of catching a ship's hull.

They produced a new sweep, made as before of a wire a mile long, but supported at hundred yard intervals by buoys, so that when extended the sweep wire no longer dragged along the bottom. Instead, it floated twenty-five feet above it.

With this new sweep, as soon as the weather permitted, in 1930, sweeping recommenced. The sixty square mile area to be searched was carefully buoyed off again; the sweepers were rigidly instructed to go over it systematically mile by mile, missing no part. The major difference from the year before was that, having lost faith in Hedback's Point at

the southeast corner of the field, the search was started diametrically opposite at the northwest corner, near where the British destroyer had found the mail-bag.

Grimly they stuck to their task, marking out with buoys a small section of that vast checkerboard of ocean which they had to search, sweeping it carefully with the drag, then moving the buoys to the next section to repeat the operation.

The summer dragged along. The *Egypt* remained undiscovered. Day after day, whenever the weather permitted, the *Artiglio* and her consort put out their sweep, and worked over a new section of the sea, in the morning sweeping it from northeast to southwest, in the afternoon reversing direction and going from southwest to northeast in the hope that if the sweep slipped over the wreck in one direction, it would catch when going the opposite way.

In the midst of this, science was brought in once more. Another electromagnetic finder, this time developed by Swedish electrical specialists of Stockholm, was brought aboard together with the Swedish engineers, and again delicate electrical instruments were towed over the ocean, while Swedish engineers and Italian seamen gazed hopefully at flickering needles as the finders bobbed about the sea astern. But nothing resulted, and the Swedes and their electrical gadgets went back to Stockholm, while Quaglia and his men, disillusioned in everything but their own ability as seamen, went back to their sweeping.

JUNE, July and August of 1930 slipped away. Two wrecks indeed they had found —one the Greek steamer *Demetrios Inglessis*, sunk during the war, and the other an unknown ancient wreck. Each, hooked hard by the sweep, caused every heart on the *Artiglio* to beat madly while a diver went down to see if it might be the *Egypt;* each proved to be a worthless hulk.

August dragged away. The second year's work was nearly over, and still no *Egypt*. The *Artiglio,* having covered practically the whole area in which the wreck might be, was nearing the last corner of her rectangle for search, approaching again Hedback's Point where she had started work the year before. Quaglia faced a dismal prospect—out of pocket the terrific cost of two years' search, he was approaching the end of the possible area in which he should have found the wreck. Had he missed her, and would he have to sweep the whole sixty square miles again? Or was the *Egypt* perhaps after all completely outside the area he had dragged? If so, on which side should he extend the search, east or west, north or south? Or was the *Egypt* perhaps lying on her side or even bottom up, so that his new sweep slid harmlessly over her flat side or curving bottom, catching on nothing? It might be possible—who knew?

Finally, toward the end of August, in lat. 48°6′ North, long. 5°30′ West, one mile west of Hedback's Point, the sweepers caught something. Not too hopefully, in view of previous disappointments, a diver was cased in an armored shell and dropped over the side to peer in the dim light of the deep sea at what they had caught. Pandemonium broke loose on the *Artiglio* when from 400 feet down the diver reported over the telephone,

"The *Egypt!*"

And so, after two years' search and huge expense, they had found her. On the decks of the *Artiglio,* they cheered and sang. The *Egypt!* $5,000,000 in gold and silver lay there below them! They danced, they hugged each other, intoxicated by success after their long months of discouragement. Two years, but now they had her! Yet had they known what lay ahead, there would have been no cheers. For compared to what was to come, what had passed was child's play.

CHAPTER II

DEATH UNDER THE SEA

FORTUNATELY they found the *Egypt* right ride up, on an even keel, practically intact. She lay on a smooth bottom, unlike most wrecks, little damaged by currents during her long submersion.

Her stacks, her masts, her light superstructure were still in place, all covered by a fine marine growth.

For this good fortune, the great depth was mainly responsible. The ship was known to be on her beam ends as she disappeared from the surface, but the unusual depth gave her a chance to right herself again before she hit bottom, and it had also saved her from the battering action of the currents, which had collapsed many another wreck.

But there the luck of the salvagers ended. For the bullion room was located three decks down in the hull of the *Egypt*. In a flexible rig, an expert diver might easily have walked down the three flights of stairs leading from the superstructure to the treasure room, but in the Neufeldt & Kuhnke armored suit it was out of question. In that a man could hardly shuffle along on the level, to descend stairs or get down the confined loading shafts leading to the strong room was impossible.

There was nothing for it but to blast away the whole ship down to the plating over that bullion room, so that the diver in his metal rig could be dropped vertically into the hole made as the blasting proceeded.

Carefully they studied the plans of the *Egypt*. The bullion room was a narrow athwartship compartment, twenty-eight feet wide, four and one-half feet long, eight feet high. A queer shape for a room—athwartship it was half the width of the ship; fore and aft it was very narrow, only a yard and a half; vertically it was a full deck height, nearly eight feet from orlop deck to main deck.

To get into that room, the whole ship, a section of superstructure and steel hull fifty-four feet wide, thirty-three deep, and perhaps sixty feet long would have to be torn away down to the main deck—an immense task.

Quaglia and his divers went at it. He had for divers three men, Gianni, Francheschi, and Bargellini, physical giants all. They had to be, to move about even slightly inside that armored suit when the deep sea started to squeeze the joints tightly together. Of these three, Gianni, chief diver, was also a mechanical genius, responsible for many of the queer devices used by Sorima in its salvage exploits.

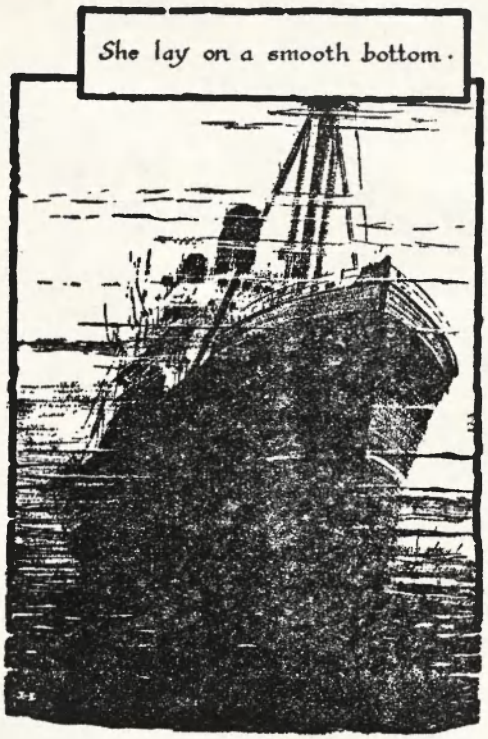
But long before now, Gianni, Francheschi, and Bargellini had had enough of Neufeldt & Kuhnke's armored diving suit. Their long months of undersea work had convinced them of its trifling value in getting about on the bottom. At most, it protected them only from the sea pressure while they peered out its faceplates through the dim water. But if the rig were useful to them only as an observation case, they didn't need its joints, which were both nuisances and points of potential danger from leakage, nor its claws, which might get entangled in wreckage. They might just as well abandon it altogether, and do their observing from a smooth cylindrical shell which had no joints at all nor any projections.

AND that they were ready to do. They had built themselves a cylindrical steel shell, somewhat resembling an Egyptian mummy case, with five glass ports near its top, thus getting back generally to the original conception on which the two English engineers who originally designed diving gear for the *Egypt* had concentrated. Inside their shell, or "eye," they were wholly incapable themselves of locomotion, but at least they were comfortable and safe, and the ship above them could more easily move them about than it could the armored rig.

This observation shell reduced the diver to an observer only, but over the telephone, he could guide and direct the men from the ship above while they grappled, fished, used grabs and clamshell buckets, and planted explosives.

In its previous sense, diving was thus completely abandoned. The salvage on the *Egypt* became the most gigantic fishing job on record.

And so they started. The divers said from their previous examinations that the wreck was the *Egypt*. But was it? Quaglia had to know. The divers might be mistaken. It was dark down there; they could not see far. More definite proof was necessary before the tedious



work of blasting a wreck to pieces could begin.

For this purpose, nothing could be better, nor more easily obtained, than the captain's safe. It would have unmistakable documents in it, and the captain's cabin was on the very top of the superstructure, directly exposed to action by grappling hooks from the *Artiglio*.

With an observer on the superstructure of the *Egypt*, the men on the *Artiglio's* deck went fishing below with a grappling hook. A queer sight. Against a bulkhead on the *Egypt's* superstructure leaned the motionless observation shell, its painted sides a ghostly white in the dim twilight of the depths. Inside it, nose and mouth covered by the breathing mask, was the diver. A few feet away, swaying gently in the current, was the grapnel, hanging from a cable at the end of the *Artiglio's* boom.

In a stream of staccato Italian, the orders of the diver were telephoned up.

"Forward a little! Down more! A fathom to starboard! Forward again!"

Obediently the boom on deck was trimmed in accordance with the orders relayed from below and repeated in hoarse shouts to the men at the winches. Slowly the hook, invisible in the water below to those who were moving it, groped its prongs toward the overhanging roof of the captain's cabin in the still depths, rubbed finally against the cabin side, scraping away the thin growth of seaweed there.

Excitedly from below came an order, "Good! Heave in!"

The winchman threw in his clutch, reeled in the cable. The hook, bumping the cabin bulkhead, rose up, dug its prongs into the overhanging ledge. The *Artiglio*, heaving steadily, heeled down a little as the strain came on the cable; then the canvas covered roof of the little cabin tore free of its light fastenings and came clear in one piece, exposing the room below.

The observation shell was hauled up a few fathoms, then dropped down again inside the unroofed cabin. There, in plain sight in the water-filled room, lay the captain's safe.

Again from the surface the fishing commenced, this time with a large pair of jaws for all the world like a huge lobster's claw. This was a harder fishing job. Directed as before, the men on the *Artiglio* groped around the cabin with their claw, trying to poise it over the safe, hampered mainly by the motion of their own ship, which kept the jaws swaying unevenly on the cable.

Patiently the observer below guided their efforts; each time the jaws came over the safe he ordered them dropped sharply in an effort to seize it. Finally he succeeded. The jaws were snapped shut by a heave from above, gripping the safe hard, and gently the lift commenced. Squeezed between two steel claws, the little safe was hoisted to the surface, swung inboard, landed on deck. With that trophy in its possession, the *Artiglio* hauled up its observer, cast loose its moorings, and steamed for Brest.

There, in the presence of numerous dignitaries from Lloyd's and the British consulate, the safe was burned open with acetylene torches. Inside it were nothing but papers, but they were enough. En-

velope after envelope proved to be diplomatic correspondence on its way from London to Bombay, consigned via the *Egypt*. The British consul promptly identified the confidential documents, took them in his charge. There could no longer be any doubt. The wreck was the *Egypt*. All that was necessary now was to blast a way through three decks down to the bullion room.

BUT the salvagers got little farther that year. It was September. The weather at sea was getting bad; the *Artiglio* could not be held over the wreck. So the second season ended with the *Egypt* found and positively identified and that was all.

Nothing of value had been recovered. Sorima was out the cost of two years work, and was still facing a staggering demolition job before it got a cent back. To help out his finances in the interim, Quaglia contracted with the French government to demolish several wrecks which lay in the more sheltered and shallower water around Quimberon, where they constituted obstructions to navigation.

The *Artiglio* and her consort, the *Rostro*, moved shoreward and started the work of demolition. The *Artiglio's* job was to cut down to a point so low that any ship could pass over her at low water, the wreck of an American steamer, the *Florence H.*, sunk accidentally during the war off the island of Houat, near St. Nazaire.

The *Florence H.* was a ticklish wreck. Loaded with high explosives for the American army in France, she had lain submerged for thirteen years. Presumably the waterlogged TNT filling her holds had become harmless, but of that there could be no certainty. So when in September, 1930, the *Artiglio* and her divers tackled the job of blasting away her upper works, they tackled it gingerly. One after another, Gianni, Francheschi, and Bargellini went down on her in regulation diving rigs to plant the first charges, then moved the *Artiglio* a long way off before exploding them, lest the *Florence H.* go up in one vast detonation and blow them out of the water.

But except for their own moderate charge, nothing went off. Back to the wreck they went to plant a second charge. Again nothing happened. Gianni, chief diver, gained more confidence. The explosives on the *Florence H.* had evidently been too long in the water to be dangerous any longer. He ceased moving the *Artiglio* so far away between blasts.

So through October, November, and into December the divers worked, bit by bit tearing the *Florence H.* to pieces. After each blast they scanned the damage done to the hull, noting how much steel each charge tore away, within what range the exploding powder acted. As the weeks went by, they forgot all about the *Florence H.'s* cargo, intent only on getting through before the weather got really cold.

December 7th came and the job was practically completed. Cut down almost flush with the mud line, the *Florence H.* was no longer recognizable as a ship. One more blast and the task was done. The last charge was planted; the *Artiglio* moved off a short distance to fire it, and the firing circuit was closed.

Hell broke loose. Like a volcano erupting on the sea floor, the entire cargo of the *Florence H.*—thousands on thousands of tons of TNT—exploded with an earth-shaking roar. A vast cloud of smoke and spray rose skyward; the waters surged back, as if thrust apart by a titanic hand, then in a huge wave rushed in to fill the void in the ocean caused by the detonation.

When the smoke cleared and the sea had calmed a little, the *Artiglio* was gone. When the nearest vessel—fortunately for nearby ships, none was really near—reached the scene of the disaster, it picked up a few dazed survivors clinging to bits of wreckage.

Gianni, Francheschi, Bargellini, the three divers, were dead, together with the captain of the *Artiglio* and most of his crew. The seamen who for two heartbreaking years had struggled with the ocean to find the *Egypt*, and the divers who had gone to depths never before plumbed to get down to her and start the work of salvaging her millions, lay dead in the waters of the sea—not so far from those tons of golden bars and shin-

ing sovereigns and massive silver ingots filling the strongroom of the *Egypt,* which no longer meant anything to them.

IN THE blast that destroyed the *Artiglio,* Quaglia lost not only his salvage ship but practically the whole organization he had built up since entering salvage work. Worst of all, he had lost the friends and associates of years.

There was nothing he could do to salve that wound, but one thing he could do for their memories—show the critics who had laughed at their efforts for two years that the job to which his lost assistants had given their whole souls could be done. With grim determination, he set about it.

Getting a replacement vessel for the *Artiglio* was not difficult. A similar vessel was soon purchased, and after a winter's hard work, refitted with salvage gear equal to the *Artiglio's.* But his divers he could not replace. Gianni, Bargellini and Francheschi had been giants, men so large they filled completely the metal armor they had used for years. It had required their brawny bulk to maneuver with any success the 700 pound armored shells in which they had originally worked. But there was still a chance. No longer were such giants required if he could make a success of the observation chamber. So from the crews of his other vessels, mainly the *Rostro,* he selected four substitutes: Raffaelli, Mancini, Lenci and Sodini, all smaller, far less experienced men. These, together with a new crew, he assembled on the new *Artiglio,* and at the end of May, 1931, they moved out to continue the work on the *Egypt.*

To hold his ship for working, he planted six five-ton concrete blocks as anchors in a circle some six hundred yards in diameter centering over the wreck. To six buoys secured to these anchors the *Artiglio* always moored, with six wire hawsers, one to each buoy.

So expert did the *Artiglio* become in handling lines that she could steam into her circle of buoys and moor to all of them in less than twenty minutes. When the weather became so bad that she could no longer hang on against the seas pounding her, she would let go five buoys, and ride to the sixth head-on to the waves.

In thick weather, to avoid being herself run down and sunk on top of the *Egypt*—for she lay in the main traffic lane from England to the Mediterranean and Africa—her radio kept sending her position and every three minutes her wailing siren shrieked out a warning to nearby ships. The nearest land was thirty miles away; the salvagers could not afford to run to it for shelter and lose precious time. Consequently, through fair weather and foul, the *Artiglio* and her company tossed in their little vessel on the bosom of the wide Atlantic.

So commenced the work of demolition. Working with hooks, with grabs, and with claws, the *Artiglio* fished from above while the divers in the shell below directed the work. The light superstructure was torn away and tossed clear of the *Egypt's* side. Then came sterner stuff, the steel plates of the hull itself.

For this blasting powder was used. It was tamped into small metal cylinders, with the cylinders themselves lashed to a wooden framework of a size to cover the plates to be torn free. Here came a problem requiring great skill and involving considerable hazard — each charge had to be powerful enough to blast loose the adjacent steelwork, but never so strong that an explosion should so jar the *Egypt* that the floor of the strongroom, with twenty tons of bullion pressing it down, should give way and drop the treasure into the hold below, thus making its recovery vastly more difficult.

THE blasting commenced. Raffaelli, as befitted his position as new chief diver, was cased in the observation chamber, and lowered into the depths until he was poised over the Egypt's hull. Then, more gently, he was lowered the remainder of the way until his shell could be dropped on deck and leaned against a bulkhead to hold it erect.

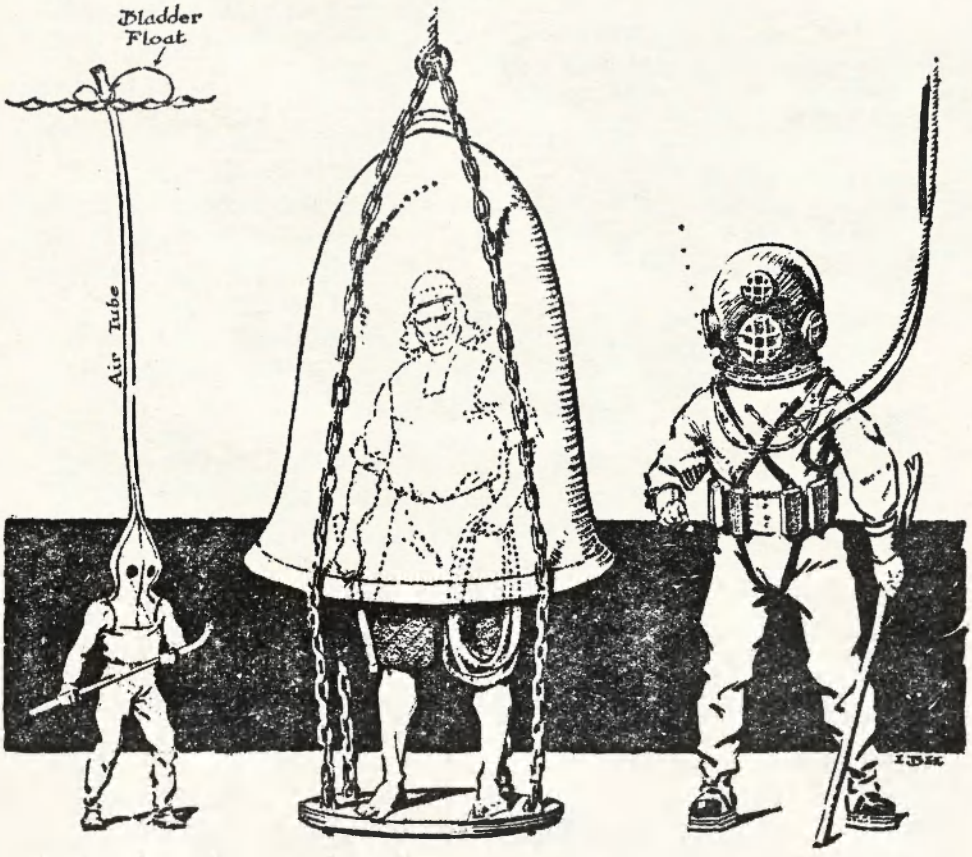
Never could he be left suspended in the water, for the motion of the *Artiglio*

would make observation by him then impossible. When finally Raffaelli had been landed to his satisfaction near the working point—within a few yards, because beyond that he could not see through the water in the dim light—his lifting cable was slacked somewhat, and the second step began. Down through the water came the wood framework with its string of blasting charges; when he sighted it, the real job commenced. Carefully maneuvered from the ship above, in accordance with his directions, it rested over the plating first to be removed. Then a quick "Good! Let go!" from Raffaelli, and on deck the winch was swiftly slacked off.

A last look to make sure the explosives had landed properly, and Raffaelli's job was, for the moment, done. Hurriedly, through sixty fathoms of water, he was hoisted up, his shell opened, and he emerged to breathe and rest awhile on deck.

On the *Artiglio*, the electrician completed the firing circuit, and the switch was closed. A sharp shock vibrated the *Artiglio*. The charge had fired. What was the result on the *Egypt?* In spite of the natural anxiety of the salvage crew, long minutes must drag before they could close Raffaelli in the "eye" again and send him down to look. For the water below would be so roiled by the explosion that some time must elapse before it settled enough to make vision possible again.

Half an hour later Raffaelli went down to inspect. Landed again against a side bulkhead after some maneuvering, he



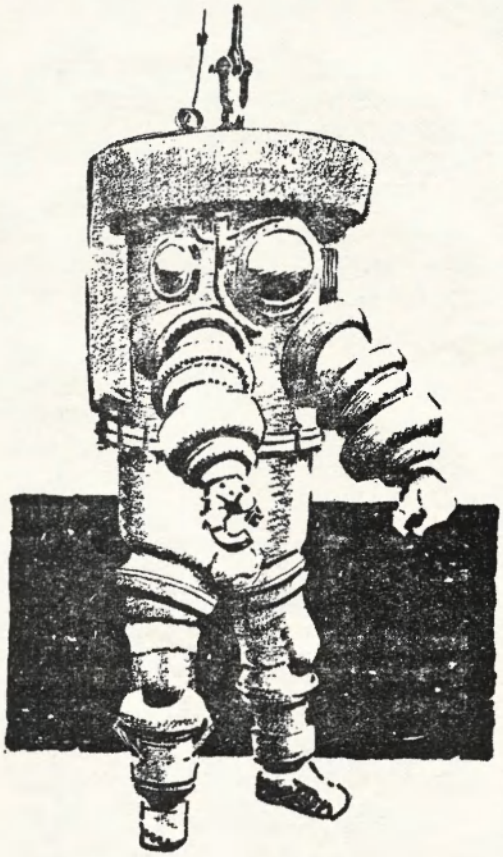
Vegetius's—1553 Sturmius — 1678 Modern diving-suit.

Drawn to Scale of ½ that of other cuts.

peered anxiously out the port. The blast had been successful. Broken rivets lay all about; dished in amidships but curled up at the edges were several broken steel plates. He ordered the grab sent down, a heavy gadget with eight sharp steel claws which closed in on its center when its hoisting cable tautened.

Again the fishing started, the broken plates being the object. Time after time the swaying grab was moved over the edges of the shattered plates, dropped, heaved sharply up again. Finally the claws closed about a curled up edge, hung on, bent it up a little farther. Hastily Raffaelli was hauled aboard, and between *Artiglio* and *Egypt* a tug of war commenced.

The winch on the *Artiglio* groaned as its pistons spun the drum, heaving in the cable. More and more the *Artiglio* heeled over as the strain increased until her starboard rail was awash, and then the heaving stopped. She dared go no further lest she capsize.



Suit for great depths.

Like a terrier with its jaws clenched on a bull, the *Artiglio* hung grimly on, a fifteen-ton strain holding the steel cable tense as a piano string. Below, rivets started to give way under the pull; as each one snapped the *Artiglio* shivered a little, straightened a trifle. Finally the remaining rivets tore loose. The *Artiglio* rolled wildly to port, oscillating back and forth until she came to rest, still heeled to starboard from the load hanging on her boom there.

Once more the winch heaved in until the grab came above the surface, clutching in its teeth, a bent steel plate torn from the *Egypt's* deck. Hurriedly the *Artiglio* was hauled to port, well clear of the wreck below, and the grab was opened, letting the deckplate fall with a splash back into the sea. The first opening had been made in the three decks shielding the bullion room. The *Artiglio* was moved back into position, another diver, Lenci this time, put in the shell, and once more the fishing recommenced.

THROUGH June, July, August and September, Raffaelli and his mates worked on the hulk of the *Egypt,* groping with strained eyes in the murky water of the depths to place explosives, and direct grabs, while from the tossing *Artiglio,* seamen fished about in the depths for the wreckage, seized it with steel jaws, plate by plate tore the *Egypt* apart. The work went slowly, interrupted often by bad weather, but doggedly they clung to the task.

Fall came, the working days between storms grew scarcer, but they kept on. The boat deck, the promenade deck, the upper deck of the *Egypt* were all torn out, twisted heaps of junk lying on the ocean floor nearby.

Only the thick main deck lay now between them and the bullion room. Frantically, as autumn slipped away, they labored to get through that before winter put an end to their efforts. Five hundred tons of iron had been torn and blasted out of the *Egypt,* which lay now

on the bottom with a yawning gap in her structure one hundred feet long, fifty-five feet wide, and thirty-three feet deep. After each blast, tons of other debris—cabin furniture, bedding, innumerable fittings—fell from wrecked staterooms into the chasm and had to be removed before the broken steel was again exposed for grappling.

And now at last the main deck lay exposed, with the gold beneath its thick plates. Throughout October and November the divers worked between storms, praying for enough good weather to let them tear away those last few plates, and recover a few pigs at least of all that gold before they had to quit. For three long years had gone by since Sorima started; well over half a million dollars had been spent on the job, and the sight of even a slight amount of bullion would have a tremendous effect on heartening everybody for the future.

But as they tore away at those last plates, they had to work gingerly. Now, if ever, the explosive charges must be small; just one violent blast and the bullion room might lose its floor. Should that disaster happen, heaven alone knew where the money might come from, on top of the half million already gone, to finance blasting the ship apart down to its keel.

By the middle of November, they had succeeded in tearing one plate off over the bullion room. The way to the gold was open at last. Cased in the armored shell, a diver was lowered down to explore that room, but it was too late in the season. Not enough light penetrated the depths for him to see anything, nor to permit further work. After one more attempt on the next good day, December 1, which similarly ended in a failure to see, Quaglia gave up, and work ended. Three years gone by and nothing recovered. Quaglia was personally out over $500,000. Would he ever get it back?

CHAPTER III

SIX-YEAR GOAL

MAY, 1932 arrived, and once more the *Artiglio* was back on her station with faster hoisting winches and a rest crew. They had with them also a very special grab, a sort of orange peel affair that would go inside an opening a yard wide and scoop together whatever lay beneath its jaws. But since what they hoped to recover was gold and silver bars and sovereigns, all small stuff, they took special pains that none be lost from the grab on the long lift through the water, to which end they provided a second clam-shell grab ten feet above the first. When the main grab and its contents were hoisted ten feet, they nestled inside the clamshell, which thereupon closed beneath, to form a tight receptacle into which anything which dropped from the orange peel would surely be held.

Immediately the task of tearing off the remaining plates began. Carefully the final plates were loosened, seized in the grab, and torn away. The strongroom was soon completely uncovered. The bulkheads had not collapsed; despite the high explosives used in blasting away the *Egypt's* hull, the room was still intact.

Its bulkheads were bulged inward slightly, making a narrow room still narrower, but at least the room was still there. To Raffaelli's surprise, he saw that it was full nearly to the top, whereas he had every reason to believe that the bullion in it took up not a third of its capacity. That was a puzzle to him, and even more so to Quaglia when he reported it. But the way to the strongroom was open, and its contents were still there. Nothing else mattered. Hurriedly he ordered the treasure grab sent down to haul out the first load of gold.

Peering from his armored "eye" he watched in the unearthly stillness of the depths as the two halves of the clamshell opened wide, the inner grab dropped clear, and commenced to oscillate gently up and down, its four orange peel sections spread wide apart in the water.

Magically those hungry jaws began to move over the distorted main deck of the *Egypt*, searching for the narrow opening, as the winches on the *Artiglio* spun round and its boom swayed obediently to the will of the diver sixty fathoms down. The grab plumbed the thin athwartship black streak showing in the midst of the broken plates.

"Good! Let go!"

The grab dropped into the hole, came to rest. Another sharp order and the four jaws snapped shut, crunching their way through what lay below. Then slowly the treasure grab rose up, disappeared ten feet above into the larger clamshell. The two huge halves of that came together, and Raffaelli gave his final order,

"Hoist away!"

The grabs shot upward, in a few seconds disappeared from his sight, carrying to his shipmates above their first catch of the long-sought treasure.

Unsuppressed excitement gripped the *Artiglio*. As that grab broke surface and swung in over the rail, the entire crew gathered expectantly around the dripping buckets. Their heart-breaking search was at its end.

The outer clamshell opened; the grab dropped clear, hovered over the *Artiglio*. Another jerk on the winch throttle; the orange peel opened out and a rain of dripping yellow metal fell on the deck. Eagerly the cheering seamen rushed in, clutched at the golden shower.

And then their cheers choked in their throats. Blankly they fingered what the drag had brought up—brass cartridges, the waterlogged stock of a broken shotgun. None of it had the slightest value.

Cold fear clutched at their hearts. What was such valueless cargo doing in a treasure room? Was it, after all, the treasure room they had reached, or merely some hold filled with worthless baggage like the trash before them? The jubilation suddenly died.

Listlessly Quaglia picked up the largest object, the shotgun stock, examined it. There he got his first sight of gold, but it gave him little comfort—it was only a gold nameplate set in the walnut, with the initials M. B. S. surmounting a princely crest—Mohinder Bahadur Singh, Maharajah of Patiala. He tossed it aside, waved silently to the winchmen to send the grab down and try again.

THE days grew into weeks. Favored by exceptionally good weather, their grab made shot after shot into that room, only to come up and pour out on their decks a varied assortment of worthless trash—innumerable cartridges, rifles, shotguns, miscellaneous baggage.

Their hopes died and their brows grew sullen. What kind of compartment were they rifling anyway—one of the many baggage and storage rooms? Had the divers, in spite of all their care, made a mistake, at the cost of half a million dollars?

It looked so. Over the waterfront in Brest, whence came their supplies, that rumor spread; from thence it went to Italy, losing nothing in transmission. The *Artiglio's* men hesitated on their few trips ashore to show themselves—jeers and ill-concealed derisive gestures greeted them everywhere. Would they ever again be able to hold up their heads back in the little Italian seacoast villages whence they had come?

For a brief time the clouds lifted and gave them hope. Mixed with small arms ammunition, the grab began to bring up bundles of small watersoaked rectangular sheets, which on examination turned out to be brand new currency; 5, 10, and 100 rupee notes marked with the seal of the Indian State of Hyderabad. Soon they had over a million dollars worth aboard, littering their decks everywhere, drying in the June sun.

It was not the hoped-for gold, but at least it was money. Quaglia looked at it with interest. No mention whatever of those banknotes had ever come to him in the list of treasure which the *Egypt* was carrying.

Over a million dollars in rupee notes! Perhaps after all they must be delving in the treasure room, for where else would so much money be carried? And his half of it would at least balance his staggering expenses, even if they never found the gold.

But swift disillusionment followed. In reply to excited radiograms sent to London reporting the recovery of the rupees, came the chilling answer that the notes were worthless. Immediately upon the sinking of the *Egypt* the State of Hyderabad had cancelled them all and had printed and put into circulation a replacement issue. Moreover, an essential signature, that of an Indian dignitary, was missing from those rupee notes. Both London and Bombay agreed that

the rupees were simply beautifully engraved waste paper, which might just as well be burned.

But Quaglia did not agree as to the worthlessness of those banknotes. Carefully he had all the rupees gathered up and locked safely below. Money was money wherever found, and neither Britain nor Hyderabad was going to repudiate it, so far as he was concerned, without a legal struggle.

Nor did he lose hope, in spite of all the sarcastic jibes flying about ashore. He had firm faith in his divers—they had followed his directions in ripping apart the *Egypt*, and the room they had reached *was* the bullion room. Why that room was so jammed to its top with miscellaneous junk he could not explain nor did he try—it was simply one of those idiosyncrasies of the English. The bullion was aboard; for that he had Lloyd's word and indisputable evidence in bills of lading. Under all the rubbish sixty fathoms down *must* be that treasure.

THE monotonous labor went on. A month had gone by since the *Artiglio* had started her fourth year's work. Apathetically the men on deck watched as each shot of the grab deposited more rubbish on their decks. Then on June 22nd, came a change. A seaman, perfunctorily rummaging through the latest mass of soggy debris dumped from the jaws of the grab, came upon two shining golden sovereigns! They were worth only $10, but they were gold! It began to look as if perhaps after all they might be working in the treasure room.

Like magic the entire crew of the *Artiglio*, except a solitary fireman tending the boiler below, gathered round the boom as the grab went overboard to hover again over the *Egypt*, far below. Raffaelli, chief diver, poised at the rail, signaled the winchman who moved the grab slowly about in answer to his diver's orders. In an agony of suspense they waited while the swaying grab in the depths was maneuvered about. Finally it hovered again over the gap in the *Egypt's* main deck.

"Good! Let go!"

Down dropped the grab, closed its jaws, and to the rattling of the winches, started up again. Hardly daring to breathe, the men on deck watched as it broke surface, swung inboard. The outer clamshell opened, spraying water on everyone, while the heedless Raffaelli, tensely silent, signaled by opening his clenched fists to drop the load. Now they would see.

The orange peel jaws spread apart, dropped the usual load of trash. But that was not all. With a clatter, two heavy bricks rattled down on deck, gleaming in yellow splendor amongst the debris!

With an unbridled rush the *Artiglio's* seamen flung themselves upon those two golden bars, caressing them lovingly, passing them from hand to hand, irrefutable proof at last that the treasure was theirs! For a few minutes, the *Artiglio* was a madhouse of gesticulating, shouting sailors.

Then Quaglia took charge, held his hand up for silence. Were all hands there? No. Below was one fireman; in the depths still the diver. Swiftly both men were brought up on deck to join their comrades. Then, led by Quaglia, all bowed their heads in memory of their dead—Gianni, Francheschi, Bargellini —those giants who first had led the way to that treasure of the *Egypt*, and to their other shipmates of the first *Artiglio*, all of whom they felt must somewhere be looking down on them, rejoicing with them in their success.

And then they went to work again. Down into the sea went the diver, after him the grab. Each shot at the treasure room now brought up ingots and showers of gold coin.

When on June 25th, three days later, the weather forced a suspension of work, they had on board bullion to a total value of nearly $1,000,000!

LLOYD'S insisted that the gold be landed in England. So to Plymouth, from which Sir Francis Drake had sailed to ravage the treasure ships of Spain in the great days of Elizabeth, the *Artiglio* sailed with the treasure of the *Egypt*. As the flag-bedecked *Artiglio* steamed in, the dock was alive with cheering ad-

mirers, waving heartily to Quaglia on the bridge.

But when the ship tied up and Quaglia came down on deck, the first person over the side was none of his admiring friends but a sheriff with an attachment to seize, not only the *Artiglio* herself, but all the gold she carried!

One of the French expeditions that six years before, on some previous understanding with Lloyd's, had searched unsuccessfully for the *Egypt,* had secretly sued Quaglia, claiming a share of the bullion.

In shocked silence Quaglia turned from the sheriff to Sir Percy Mackennon, president of Lloyd's, who was trying to edge past that officer of the law. Sir Percy tried to soothe him. Lloyd's would put up the necessary bonds, see that ship and treasure were released, and fight the case in court.

And so that much was done, but the edge was completely off the *Artiglio's* celebration, and with much trepidation, Quaglia sailed again to resume work. Would the harpies of the law finally rob him of the gold? Who knew? After all, in England he was a stranger in a strange land, and months would pass before he would know what England's laws would do to him.

The *Artiglio* went to Brest for coal and supplies before returning to her diving station. But between bad weather and a sudden call to help out the French navy on an emergency diving examination of the French submarine *Prometheus,* sunk near Cherbourg, it was not until August 8, over a month later, that the *Artiglio* could again moor over the *Egypt* and send down her observation shell and her grab.

Between late June, when the first gold came up, and early November, the *Artiglio* was able to moor over the wreck for a total working time of only 188 hours. Her longest stay over the wreck was eight days in late August.

The weather that year was continuously bad. On November 3, 1932, Quaglia had to cease for the year. But when, for the last time, the *Artiglio* sailed that year for Plymouth, she had recovered 865 bars of gold out of a total of 1089 on the *Egypt;* she had retrieved 83,300 gold sovereigns, and hoisted aboard 6 tons of silver, to a total value of $3,700,000. And on his last trip into Plymouth, Quaglia learned to his intense relief that the claims of the French, after a bitter three-months legal battle, had been dismissed by the admiralty court as without merit.

In 1933, the fifth year, the *Artiglio* went back to recover the remainder of the treasure, consisting now mainly of some thirty-seven tons of silver bullion at the bottom of the strongroom. She got most of it, but another year, 1934, was spent in a final cleanup, and not till then, six years after the start, was that $5,000,000 in gold and silver sunk in the *Egypt* finally retrieved by the second *Artiglio.*

THERE was one more tragedy, for me at least, connected with the *Egypt's* gold. Lieutenant Cuniberti, Royal Italian Navy, had first informed me of the expedition, and as it progressed had occasionally kept me in touch with what was going on, though after the first year, his duties in Italy had called him back there, where he continued his deep diving experiments. In 1932, when from 360 feet down the ingots were beginning to come up from the *Egypt,* he was startling his late shipmates on the *Artiglio* by going down himself off Portofino to a depth of 650 feet in a special diving shell.

In 1936, I was in Rome. Desiring to thank Cuniberti for his previous information and to learn more about his later experiments at great depths, I wandered over to the Italian Ministry of Marine and enquired for him.

I made little progress at first, for my Italian was exceptionally poor, but soon an officer, a commander, was brought in who spoke excellent English; and after introducing myself I got down to business. Where might I find my friend Lieutenant Alberto Cuniberti, Italian diving expert?

"Cuniberti?" The naval officer looked at me in astonishment. "Why, Lieutenant Cuniberti is dead!"

"Dead!" I repeated, shocked. "Cuniberti dead! Since when and how?"

"He died a few months ago, in a div-

ing accident. We were all much saddened; he was a fine officer. He was a friend of yours? We have in our records a report on his death. If you wish, I shall send you a copy of the report through your embassy here in Rome. Would you like it?"

Sadly I nodded and left.

Next day our Naval Attache sent me a report transmitted through him from the Italian Ministry of Marine. As I read, I could hardly believe my eyes. Cuniberti, who had dived several years before to 650 feet, had been killed in less than six feet of water.

A few months before, off Portofino, he had taken out for trial a newer armored rig with the intention of testing it to a depth even greater than the six hundred and fifty feet he had already reached. But bad weather prevented his going overboard, so, as stated in the report,

"He postponed the experiment for ten days, and meanwhile went to Turin to continue his practice and studied at the local swimming pool, at the same time training some pupils to dive with submersion masks. This apparatus had been tested by Professor Herlitzka and other persons, and consists of a kind of airproof hood covering the head and neck.

"To the hood is attached a small reservoir containing oxygen at high pressure. The oxygen is released into the hood by turning a key, thus ensuring respiration. This artificial feeding of breathable air can continue for over one and a half hours. This mask has been found very useful in leaving submerged submarines and has never given any trouble whatever.

"Cuniberti, who had some pupils with him, dived in wearing the mask about 2:40 P.M. As usual, he swam about on the surface for a minute and then let himself sink to the bottom, lying down on the cement floor of the tank in a place where the water is less than six feet deep.

"This was an experiment he often made, often remaining in this position for a quarter of an hour, and therefore the pupils felt no anxiety at seeing him remain motionless for some minutes.

"It was only after some time that one of the swimmers approached Cuniberti and noticed that he gave no sign of life. Without delay he freed the officer of the weights which held him down and brought him to the surface. On taking off the mask it was seen that his face was already of a deathly color.

"Doctor Aglesio, on duty at the pool, immediately gave an injection of adrenalin and performed artificial respiration for a long time. But everything proved in vain. Cuniberti had died of suffocation."

What had happened? Nobody really knows; something queer had occurred to knock Cuniberti suddenly unconscious and he had suffocated in the sight of numerous onlookers before he ever turned on the oxygen.

So, ironically, in six feet of water, perished the man to whom deep diving was a passion and who first brought to my then incredulous eyes the information that he was going out with his countrymen to salvage the *Egypt's* gold, over sixty fathoms down.

In the next issue Commander Ellsberg tells of the handful of British divers who fought icy water to rob the sea of the* Laurentic's *$25,000,000 in a spot patrolled by German submarines!

He could do nothing now—except this.

SABOTAGE

An Off-the-Trail Story

By STEVE FISHER

HE AWAKENED with the faint warmth of engine room fumes touching his cheeks and sucking into his throat and nostrils, and he lay there on deck feeling the heat and yet not sweating; aware that his mind was clouded with the suffocating vapor of the heavy air that pressed over his brain like a cap, robbing him of both the inclination and ability for clear thought.

He did not move, for when he slept like this in the bull ring it always took time for the laziness to leave him and full reason to return. He lay listening to the deep hum of the turbine engines, deafening in his ears, and yet so steady and constant that, like the air, they paralyzed and held him in this acrid bliss.

It would be all right to die in the

bull ring, he thought, because, overpowered by the fumes, he wouldn't care; but it did no good to sleep in it because it made him feel that he didn't want to do anything.

He was like the dog that sat on the thorn, howling because of the pain but too lazy to move.

He felt the gentle lurch of the ship; gradually his eyes became accustomed and he counted the blue stanchion lights, and saw in their dark shadows the sleeping figures of other men sprawled across the deck, on a blanket, or a mattress; above him, looking up, he saw one or two hammocks that had been strung on the overhead beams and contained sleeping men, although iron bunks were now standard on the ship.

He waited for somebody to open the door, either from the wardroom or the communication office so that there would be a breeze to revive him; but no one stirred, so that he knew it was deep in the night, past the midnight watch shift. He knew that this was the time, just as he had known he would awaken, as he had now awakened, at just the right time.

Thoughts, coming slowly, pumped life into his veins, not by bringing coherence back to him, but by the intensity of their subject. He rose to a sitting position and rubbed his cheeks until the blood began to circulate, and now he was wide awake, already half trembling with fear.

He put a cigarette between his lips and the feel of it helped him a little. He lighted a match, and puffed, and then, mechanically, as though it were any other night, he reached for his shoes. He had learned in the training station that you must always put your shoes on first. He laced these up, and then he rose, reaching for the blue trousers, which he slipped into without difficulty. In pulling the jumper over his head he was awkward, as always, and this maneuver took him some little time. But he was ready now and he dropped and stepped on the cigarette, rubbing his face again so that he would be fully awake.

He wandered down the corridor, breathing fresher air, but still feeling the heat that is on the lower, the fireman's decks, when the ship is underway.

He reached the scuttlebutt and got a drink of water. This completed his awakening. He could now think in not only the present, but the past and future. At the present he had The Job to do, and that was all important. In the future—the immediate future at least—there would be a terrible explosion on the ship and he would be lost in the milling confusion of men leaping from their bunks and rushing to fire quarters. In the past—ah now, this was different. He steadied himself on the scuttlebutt because it was much harder to think of the past.

AS A matter of fact, the past eclipsed the future. Mary would never see him again. No matter what he ever said or did, he knew that she would never see him, she would never speak to him. Nothing he could do would ever regain her.

During the argument, while they were fighting, there might have been a chance, but not now. He had slapped her.

He remembered he had slapped her very hard, knocking her halfway across the room, and that she had put her hand up to her cheek and then had looked at the blood that was on her fingertips.

He had been ashamed; he had acted as any normal man would act after slapping a girl, but he had not grasped the significance of the thing he had done.

Even coming back to the ship in the motor launch he had been dazed, but not angry. But now that hours had passed he was beginning to realize what another might have seen at once, and he was struck cold with terror.

He moved forward, reaching a ladder and climbing it, going the roundabout way they said he must go. He walked through the dimly lit second division compartment, hearing the whisper of the sea now, because the portholes were open.

The fresh air made him shiver and he was glad to take the opposite ladder

and go back below. He was now in the signalman's compartment, and he turned, swinging through it, past the small stores door, and on to the iron door of the sail locker. One dog winch lay carelessly across it and he pushed this back, opening the door.

It was dark inside and there was no light at all, but he could hear them breathing; he could hear the three of them, the sailmaker sitting on the bench, maybe his cold pipe in his hands; the big second class seaman who worked on the master-at-arms force crouched in a corner, as always, with his chin in his hands; and the lithe little third class fireman here at the door nearest him. Now he could even distinguish the fireman's figure.

"It's me, Red," he whispered.

"All right," the fireman answered, breathing quietly. "Everything is set, eh?"

"I'm ready, if that's what you mean."

"Okay, Ben. Here's the bomb. Remember, just pull off the cap and leave it there. It'll explode five minutes later. Got it?"

"Got it," said Ben.

"All right. Here's a loaded automatic. If anybody stops you, if you're stopped with the bomb, they'll ask questions and we'll all get it. So in case anybody *does* happen to get in your way—"

"I'll shoot him," whispered Ben.

"Right. Here's the key Harris had made from the impression he took of that one that was in the master-at-arms shack. Go quickly now!"

Ben put the key in his pocket; then, holding the bomb in one hand and the loaded gun in the other, he stood there as the iron door closed again. For a moment he did not move and he felt desolated.

It was all so easy now. If he could tap on the door and say, "Red, I've changed my mind, you'd better get somebody else," and then go back to the bull ring and sleep until morning. If he could present any logical excuse for backing out and thereby wash his hands of this he would feel much better.

But he knew that he could not. He must enter the place they had designated, go through the lower handling room of number two turret and unlock the door to the powder magazine and pull the cap off the bomb and leave it there.

He had to do that, but it was all he had to do, and it was easy enough, considering all they had done for him, all that they were going to do for him.

HE MOVED down the corridor, carrying the bomb in one hand, the gun in the other. He felt no fear. He was not afraid that somebody would pop out at him. He knew what to do if they did. Consequences didn't remotely occur to him and he therefore knew no conscience. He even lacked the foresight to see that the moment he pulled the cap off the bomb it would explode in his face and that a moment later the powder magazine would be a screaming and roaring inferno.

They had told him it was a time bomb and it had never once entered his mind to question how the mechanics of such a bomb worked.

What was in his mind was that he owed it to them to do this favor. He had had a hard time at the training station. He was naturally dirty, and he could neither wash nor roll his clothes in the manner prescribed. To get by inspections at all he had to pay other recruits to do his washing and rolling. In spite of this they had ridden him. They called him "Dirty Neck".

It had been like that at school too, only worse. He couldn't seem to fit himself in with anybody. He'd had no real friends.

He was only seventeen, and in all his seventeen years the only genuine companion he had known had been Mary Wright. He never knew why she had liked him; he had been grateful. He had taken her his troubles; he admitted to her that bigger boys beat him up and that he was afraid of them; he had told her all his faults, and she would take him in her arms and comfort him.

It had been Mary who for a solid month worked to keep him clean, had straightened him up, and had drilled him in examination questions night after

night, so that he could get into the Navy at all.

And then he had gotten by only on the skin of his teeth and because there was a service shortage in the office where he had signed up. He never knew why she took this interest, because he was aware that there was another boy whom she called her "steady", though she actually saw him less often than she saw Ben.

When he was transferred from the training station aboard ship he thought perhaps things would be different, but it was the same story, and he was beginning to find that wherever he went he had himself to take along, and once everybody was down on him it seemed futile to try and change.

Then *they* had found him. Two of them had come aboard from the training station a month after him. Red, the third class fireman who immediately qualified as a bantamweight fighter and became very popular with the crew; and Harris, who worked on deck but was so tough and disagreeable that the other men were almost afraid to look at him. Harris' ability as a bully had landed him in the master-at-arms police force before three weeks went by and with this new authority he was both loud and terrible.

The third member of the trio was Sails, who was bald and very bitter because once he had been a warrant boatswain and busted by a court martial down to sailmaker.

He entertained a rough crowd in the sail locker and when Red and Harris came aboard took to them at once.

These three adopted Ben. They cleaned him up. Red once found a man picking on him and knocked him out with a punch. Harris threatened to sock extra duty on every blue-jacket who so much as gave Ben a sour look. He was saved.

No one dared touch him. He even got a little cocky and was bold at the table, yelling loudly when he wanted something passed, and bawling out the mess cook, who had been one of his tormenters. This was defense mechanism, because although he was protected there was still no one besides Red, Harris and Sails who would talk to him.

AT FIRST he had been suspicious, and then baffled, and at last grateful to them. They took him ashore and spent their money on him. Once he became loop-legged drunk and got into a fight which Red finished.

They took him to basements in San Pedro, where he heard stirring speeches, the essence of which never touched him, because it was beyond his comprehension to understand the words that were used. Afterward they always asked him, "What did you think of that, Ben? How did you like it?" or "That was certainly the God's truth, wasn't it, Ben?" and he would always say: "It sure was, Harris; you damned well know it was." Red talk like that. Big, smart, tough talk.

Then one day they had started talking to him about making money. "Easy, Ben." They had not told him at first; they just took him to the outside of the powder magazine and said: "Know what would happen if a time bomb was put in there?" And then, a few days later: "Bet you'd be scared to death to put a time bomb in there, Ben." Of course he would deny this fear, because he must appear big in front of them. They made him deny it for days. They kept harping on the subject; it was the only thing about which they rode him, although Harris had once said: "Don't talk so fast, Sails; he only thinks one word at a time. I don't know how he ever got in the Navy."

Sails snapped: "Shut up, you dope," and, looking at Ben: "He's a good kid; don't be saying things like that about him."

Ben knew that he wasn't very smart, but that had bothered him for days; it was so different from everything else they said to him. But when it came down to that, he would have overlooked a lot more to keep their friendship. It had been everything to him on board ship. It had been living and dying.

When they had finally laid the proposition in front of him he had been proud that they thought enough of him to want him to do a thing like that. He asked: "But what of the ship?" and they had talked him down, offering a thousand excuses.

Sails said: "Why do you suppose Red and Harris *really* enlisted in this man's navy, Ben?" Talk like that he did not understand, and some talk that sounded ridiculous, even to him. Once the horrible thought came to him that they themselves were afraid to carry a bomb through the decks at night, but they said no, it was that they wanted to test out his friendship and courage, and that if he went through with it he would be definitely one of their little crowd.

So, although it was a new ship on its trial run, and he winced at the idea of anything so new and costly being eaten by explosion and flame, they finally convinced him, as he had known from the beginning they would.

He was likewise assured that the bomb would not go off for five minutes, unaware that what shred of his body or uniform was discovered later by the officials would in all probability be evidence to an inquest board that he alone, although now dead, had been guilty of setting off the bomb.

He did not know that his shattered corpse was to be a pawn by which Red, Harris and Sails would completely escape suspicion.

All he knew was that they wanted him to do it, and he would. This he did not think back on as he walked. It was ancient stuff; he had to think of Mary. Last night he had told her. They had warned him about keeping his mouth shut, although they knew no one would be convinced of anything by him, and were aware that he had no companions aboard ship except themselves; but because he had confided in Mary about them, he told her this too. And now, as he walked, the bomb in his hand, he thought about that.

SHE was not pretty. He did not delude himself that she was pretty. Her hair was muddy blond, and her complexion was bad, but she had the clearest, the most honest blue eyes he had even seen; and she had a small body, well shaped, that even looked nice in the print house dresses she wore most of the time.

They had been in her living room, and her mother had gone to bed, when he told her. She had been incredulous and he had explained all the details. She asked him about the San Pedro basements where he heard the speeches.

Suddenly then, she had leapt to her feet.

"You fool!" she cried. "This is no joke!"

He sat there on the divan. "I didn't say it was."

"But how could it be anything else? Oh, you fool!"

He was hurt, and said: "But they want me to do it, Mary, and they're good guys."

"Do you know what that is?" she said.

"What?"

"Sabotage."

He laughed. "Oh, it couldn't be anything that bad."

"Listen," she said, "you go right back to the ship and tell the captain."

"I couldn't do that!"

She walked the length of the room; at last she came back and flung herself on the divan and cried. He sat petrified, without the strength to touch her. He couldn't understand why she wanted him to betray his friends. It made him uneasy, and for the first time in his life he felt irritable toward her. He thought she was unreasonable. She stopped crying and faced him. She stared at him, straight into his eyes, for a minute, and then she laughed, though a little hysterically, and told him to tell her it was a joke.

"But it isn't," he said.

"Then you're a moron!" she half screamed.

He stood and tried to pacify her, but she shook herself from him. For half an hour they moved up and down the room, arguing violently. She broke down most of his points with what he thought sounded like insane laughter. She said that she had known he was limited and stupid and that the maternal in her had somehow made her love him, that she had intended to keep on loving him in that way even if someday she married someone else, but that it was incredible that he should suddenly lose all sense of reason.

"Don't you know anything about your country? Don't you know what your ship is? Haven't you read the papers? Don't you know what these men are?"

"They're my friends."

"Oh God, stop saying that!"

He hated lying to her, but he saw now that this was the only way out, so he had said:

"All right, then, I won't do it."

"You won't?"

"No," he said.

"And you'll report those men?"

"Yes, I'll report them."

She spent another twenty minutes making him promise this over and over, as though he were a little boy. Then: "Good! Now get out of the house, you idiot! I don't want to have any more to do with you. To think, if it wasn't for me you would have— Oh God—*get out!*"

This had struck him like the lash of a whip. He stood there, mouth open, and when he got his breath, said: "What do you mean, calling me an idiot?" That was all that he could think of saying.

"Because you *are* an idiot! You're a craven, filthy moron! I never want to see or hear from you again. If you come near me I'll call the police! Get out!"

It was then that he had struck her, knocking her halfway across the room, and she had put her hand to her cheek, and afterward she had looked at the blood on her fingertips. For a moment she just stared at him, and then she went over and opened the door.

He didn't go. He tried to apologize. He cried, with big tears rolling down his face. But it was no use. She called her mother. Her mother said if he didn't get out she would have someone come and throw him out. So he went. He left, but he was in a daze. He did not realize, or comprehend that this situation, being on the outs with Mary, was more than a temporary thing. His mind went no farther than the scene through which he had just been.

BUT now, as he neared the ladder to the lower handling room of number two turret, as he heard the soft hum of turbine engines in his ears, and felt the wetness of sweat on his cheeks; now that time was behind him, minutes and hours, his mind was coming around. He would never see her again. He had lost her.

He was beginning to realize what that meant to him. All his life, all through school, through the naval training station, she had been the only one to whom he had been able to turn. Motherless, she had been both girl and mother to him. She had been his harbor when the sea was rough.

They had hiked in the mountains, gone to dances, spent Saturday nights riding in an open roadster and singing songs. She had listened to his stories.

She had heard things about him for which men would have beaten or razzed him, but always *she* had forgiven, *she* had helped him, *she* had lifted him out of his depressions. There was no life without her. She had always been there. Now she was gone.

He was on the brig deck. Back in the shadow of the bars he saw a marine guard, but he could not tell whether he was awake or asleep. Through the darkness he slipped past and down another ladder, the gun and the bomb still tight in his hands.

He was aware of the sway of the ship, conscious of the bow lifting and falling in the waves, of the sound the distant engines made.

His mind was working again then, slowly, doggedly, yet working, going on, for he was now obsessed with his loss. He wasn't thinking of the job that was here before him on the ship. He was thinking of Mary and thinking that she was gone. About what had they argued? What had parted them? What blind, foolish thing had caused him to lose her?

His friends, Red and Harris and Sails. He could never do without them on board ship. Gradually the screen of his mind was clearing. That is, he saw that he had had to choose between them and Mary.

He had heard of that. Of friends separating a man from his girl, or the other way around. He had read it somewhere. If he had actually had the choice, he wondered which he would have taken? And then he knew.

He felt the deck tremble beneath his legs. He felt the vibration of the whole ship. He sucked air into his aching lungs.

If it hadn't been for Red and Harris and Sails he would never have lost Mary. He would have her, he would always be able to go to her when he was in trouble, all his life through. She had made his misery endurable with her consolation, and he could have survived the ridicule of the ship from which Red and Harris and Sails had saved him. He could have survived that and more to keep her. But she had been taken away from him by a slap that had knocked her across the room and brought blood to her cheek.

His own countenance became set, and his lips tightened. He was moving faster now, with the bomb in his hand, he kept moving, feeling the sway of the ship and hearing the hum of the engines. He remembered everything now; it was all in a jumble, going around and around in his mind.

Fragments, pieces, conversation, time, scenes, events.

"Bet you'd be scared to put a bomb in there, Ben," and: "Do you know what that is, you fool! It's sabotage!" That, and: "Leave the kid alone, we're his friends," and: "Now get out of here, you idiot! Get out! *Get out!*"

The hum of the engines, the sway, the lift of the ship, and then he was at another door, standing before it, lifting the dog winch, shoving it back.

He was opening the door and he saw that the sail locker light was on. He saw Red, and Harris, and Sails; they had been waiting. He saw them and lifted the gun that was in his hand.

He saw the terror on their faces. He heard Harris call out; he saw Red cringing, and Sails biting his fingers. He saw them doing this, but in his mind he saw Mary falling halfway across the room and putting her hand up to her cheek and then looking at the blood on her fingertips.

When he pulled the trigger of the gun and it jerked three times in his hand, the only thing he remembered was that slap, about which he could do nothing now—except this.

PEACE MARSHAL

Conclusion

By FRANK GRUBER

HARD fighting, hard dying, the old West was yielding to a new and implacable master—the influence of Eastern capital. Already, in 1872, Eastern railroads were creeping toward the setting sun. It would not be long before Texas cattle would be driven up the Chisholm Trail, shipped from a Kansas depot, and sold scant days later in seaboard markets at fabulous profits.

Towns and cities were changing overnight. Mushroom cities sprang into being, flourished until the railroad had pushed beyond them, and then settled down into sleepy villages. And people in the know could anticipate the boom trend and make a tremendous killing.

Such a man was Jeff Barat, gambler and gun-fighter. With his brother, a New York financier, he planned to buy up land in Broken Lance, Kansas, block the cattle trail to the railhead by cornering real estate in the vicinity, and assess a charge on every Texas herd that came up the Trail.

It was a sound idea, but another man had thought of it also. John Bonniwell,

"Sorry, hell!" snapped Kelso.

famous throughout the West for his single-handed fight against four notorious killers, had recovered from serious gun wounds and was back to try his luck again. With Tom Waggoner, a friend, he bought up land before the Barats could corner it—and the start of a feud began to flare.

A few short days in Broken Lance convinced Bonniwell that the peaceful ways of business held no future for a man such as he, who had worn a marshal's star. He would still have to fight on the side of the law, or be killed by friends of men he had shot down defending it. The four men he had killed were Texans, and Texas men were pouring into Kansas by the day.

The Barats proved surprisingly tractable rivals at first. They had bought heavily into Broken Lance after their original setback, controlling the gambling and dance hall interests, and outside of importing several known gunfighters to act as bodyguards, evinced no outward desire to bring about trouble. But the signs were ominous. Jeff Barat was making a strong play for the hand of Eleanor Simmons, an Eastern girl who had attracted Bonniwell's interest.

Day by day the railroad came closer to Broken Lance. And daily the Barats grew more powerful, even as they seemed to accept their defeat with more than human mildness. They even proposed

that Bonniwell be elected marshal, which he was in due time.

And then suddenly they showed their hand. Kelso, the number one gunman for the Barats, was elected county deputy sheriff, nullifying most of the good work Bonniwell had been able to accomplish in Broken Lance. The Barats disobeyed a gun ordinance, and Bonniwell promptly gun-whipped one and threw the other into jail. But it was a losing fight. There was a showdown due in the immediate future, and when it was over, someone was going to be badly hurt. John Bonniwell waited and wore his guns. It was his last gamble to go on living.

CHAPTER XIII

FRAMED

"JEFF," said Ferdinand Barat, "we're licked."

Jeff was startled. "Licked? What do you mean?" He held up his hand, palm upwards, the fingers crooked like claws. "I've got Broken Lance like this. Anytime I want to I can close my hand on it."

"And what'll you get?" The older Barat pulled a slip of paper from his pocket. "I was doing some figuring today, Jeff. Let me read this to you. We got beat on the building lots in Broken Lance. What we own cost us in the neighborhood of $75,000. The two or three building lots we own outside cost us another $25,000."

"Sure," exclaimed Jeff. "But they're worth all that or more."

"Are they? You bought up a bunch of Waggoner's leases. I loaned money to folks we figure we can squeeze. All right—we're two hundred thousand dollars in the red. In the credit column we've got a lot of scattered holdings. We can push around a lot of people who don't amount to anything. We've practically ruined the cattle business for Broken Lance. *You* did that, Jeff. In a month, the cattlemen will stop coming here. Chances are they won't come next year. So we'll have a lot of property with no chance to make anything off of it."

Jeff Barat gnawed at his knuckles. "There are just three people who've spiked our plays right along. Waggoner, Bonniwell and Ollie Simmons."

"That's what I was getting to," said Ferd Barat. "We need Waggoner's holdings in town. But even more than that we need those five thousand acres of Simmons'. Remember that business you told me about in New York—charging these cattle people for grazing permission? That never worked at all. And yet that's one of the things we counted on most."

Jeff Barat sulked. "You've made Simmons a dozen propositions and he's laughed at all of them."

Ferdinand Barat folded his hands and cracked his knuckles. "There's one way to get to him, Jeff. A bullet."

Jeff snapped, "How're you going to shoot a man who's always got fifty of the toughest men in the country around him? When he comes to Broken Lance there are never less than a dozen men with him."

"There is only one way to get to Ollie Simmons, and that's through that niece of his."

Jeff grinned wolfishly. "Do you think I've been asleep? Don't you think I've tried to make love to her?"

"Have you?" asked his brother. "I haven't heard the sound of wedding bells."

Jeff scowled, "Bonniwell again. She's crazy about him. She talks to me and all the while she's thinking of John Bonniwell. When she's walking down the street with me she's looking around to see him. Every time there's a shot goes off in Broken Lance she's afraid it's Bonniwell getting hurt."

Ferdinand Barat stabbed his forefinger at Jeff. "Ah, that's something. Work on it a minute."

Jeff worked on it, but he didn't like it.

"I'm not afraid of many things in this world," he said grimly. "But I don't mind telling you I'm not awfully happy at the thought of facing Bonniwell's guns."

ELEANOR SIMMONS came into Broken Lance with her usual escort of Mose, the driver, and Jack McSorley. She would just as soon have done without

McSorley. The foreman had been acting strange lately. He spent altogether too much time about the ranchhouse, and the moment Eleanor moved away from it more than fifty feet he somehow materialized and managed to get into her path.

As yet he had made only the barest advances, but Eleanor was a woman and understood McSorley by instinct.

He was a rather noisy man in the company of the cowboys. Eleanor knew from things her uncle had let drop that McSorley was a reckless sort of a man, quick to fight and a formidable man when roused.

Yet when he rode behind Eleanor's buckboard he was glum and silent. He was unusually morose today, not speaking a word during the entire eight-mile ride.

Eleanor left him at the buckboard and went into Hudkins' store to make some purchases. When she came out, McSorley was still at the buckboard.

"I won't be ready to go home for another hour, Jack," she told him. "Why don't you enjoy yourself in the meantime?"

"Nothin' much I enjoy doin' in Broken Lance," he replied.

"What?" she exclaimed laughingly. "Have you reformed?"

He grinned feebly, but was quickly sober again. "A man gets tired of drinkin' and gamblin' after a few years. Besides, I been doin' a lot of thinkin' lately."

She could see his face tighten suddenly and knew what he was leading up to. She backed away, hurriedly. "Don't—think too much, Jack!"

She turned and walked quickly to Lou Sager's millinery shop. At the door she looked back and caught his eye. He was still standing by the buckboard.

Lou Sager took her hands when she entered the store.

"I wish you could get to town oftener!" she exclaimed.

"So do I, Lou," Eleanor replied. "Uncle Ollie doesn't like me to come in too often. He worries, as it is."

"It's safe enough," sighed Lou. "Or it has been. That's one thing about those wild Texas men. They don't molest women, anyway."

"At that, I feel safer at the ranch," said Eleanor. "If it only weren't so lonely out there."

"It's just as lonely here. That's why I wish you lived in town. But next week we're going to have a real celebration. The Reverend Fellows—remember that minister who came to Broken Lance on the stage with us? Well, he's going to build a church."

"For who?" exclaimed Eleanor.

Lou laughed. "Strangely, there are a few people in this town who'd like a church. Anyway, the Reverend Fellows is having a bazaar next week. A regular old-fashioned church bazaar. He hopes to raise enough money to build the church. Tom Waggoner has given him the land. You *must* come to the bazaar, Eleanor. All the elite of Broken Lance will be there."

"The elite?" asked Eleanor mockingly. "Mr. Buckshot Roberts, the Honorable Buffalo Tom, Squire Cherokee Bill—"

"And perhaps Snake Thompson and One-Shot Mulligan," Lou added. "But it will be fun. Our first real social event. It's Wednesday evening."

"I'll make Uncle Ollie bring me," said Eleanor. "Is Tom Waggoner going?"

Lou's eyes wrinkled a little. "He's asked me to go with him."

"That's fine." Eleanor smiled. "Uncle Ollie thinks a lot of Mr. Waggoner. Says he's the sort of man this country needs."

"Yes," agreed Lou. "Tom's fine. He's manly, he's got initiative and he's handsome. His disposition is wonderful. He's everything a woman could want—I guess."

Eleanor inhaled softly. "Guess?"

"No, I don't guess," Lou said soberly. "I know he is. I'm proud of him. He's asked me to marry him."

"And you haven't accepted him?"

"I haven't accepted him. Ten times a day I call myself a fool. Three or four times a day I see him passing this store and every time my heart twists—and I can't say yes to him."

"Why not, Lou?" Eleanor could have bitten off her tongue for asking the ques-

tion, yet no power on earth could have prevented her.

Lou Sager's eyes met Eleanor's steadily. "I can't marry Tom Waggoner, because I'm in love with John Bonniwell. I—I guess you knew that, Eleanor."

Eleanor's face was white and she scarcely breathed. "Yes—I knew."

"And John's in love with you."

Eleanor did not reply. She wished suddenly that she had not come in to see Lou today. But she couldn't retreat now.

"*You* love John," Lou said steadily. "Why don't you take him?"

"He hasn't asked me."

"You haven't let him. You've kept him away. Eleanor, it'll probably kill me if you do, but why don't you—"

"I can't!" The words were torn from Eleanor's throat. "It's true. I love him and I think he loves me, but—I can't marry him. It's as much as I can bear now. I think if I was married to him I'd go crazy. I'd die a little every time he went out of the house. Every time I heard a shot or saw someone running past my window I'd think it was him. I don't think I could stand it."

"He'd give it up," said Lou. "He doesn't like it any more than you do."

"He wouldn't give it up!" exclaimed Eleanor. "No more than the Reverend Fellows would give up the cloth and don a bartender's apron. I've seen it in John. Those first few weeks in Broken Lance. His eyes were dead all the time. He saw things happening here and knew that they shouldn't happen, that he should stop them. And he didn't. Now, he's doing it, and he's alive. He's in danger every minute of the day and night. He may be killed any hour—but he's *alive.*"

Lou nodded slowly. "I believe you're right. I didn't think you'd noticed it. John feels he is destined for his task. He has the utmost confidence in himself. He knows he's doing the right thing. His job."

"I talked to him in the hospital last winter," said Eleanor. "I didn't know then why he was there and I couldn't understand him at all. He was so young and yet—so old."

Lou smiled wryly. "Well, it's pretty much a mix-up all around. Tom Waggoner loves me and I love John. John doesn't know I'm alive, because of you. And you won't take John because he's a law officer."

The revealing confidences had brought them closer together than they had ever been. Lou was jealous of Eleanor and wasn't ashamed to admit it. And Eleanor had bared her heart to Lou. They talked of the bazaar the next week and Lou promised to make a new hat for Eleanor.

IT WAS three o'clock when Eleanor left the millinery shop. Since his escapade of the last visit to town, Mose had learned his lesson. He was in the buckboard when she approached it.

"I'm ready to go home now, Mose," she told the Negro. "Have you seen Mr. McSorley?"

Mose scratched his head. "He done went into Mr. Barat's saloon, 'bout a half hour ago. Hain't seen him since."

Eleanor didn't want to summon the foreman, but she realized her uncle would be worried about her if she wasn't home for supper. So she said to Mose: "Run over to the saloon and tell him we're leaving. But he doesn't have to come yet if he doesn't want to. I just want him to know we've gone."

Mose ran across the street and entered Jeff Barat's main saloon. He came back two or three minutes later, scratching his head.

"I dunno, Miss Eleanor," he said. "Mistuh McSorley, he don't feel so good."

"He's drunk?"

"Well, I don't rightly know. But he's sittin' by a table and he's got his head on it and he don't seem to know what I was sayin'."

So he'd gone and gotten himself drunk. Eleanor was slightly annoyed, but then realized she couldn't blame poor McSorley. He hadn't wanted to go to the saloon. She'd practically forced him to go.

"All right, Mose," she said. "We'll go home alone."

"Yassum," exclaimed Mose. He untied the lines from the team of broncs

and backed the wagon out to the middle of the street.

"Miss Simmons!" called Jeff Barat, from the sidewalk.

"Wait, Mose," Eleanor ordered.

Jeff Barat came out to the street and stopped with one boot on the hubcap of the buckboard. He doffed his black silk hat and showed his teeth in a wide smile.

"I've been looking for you, Eleanor," he said.

"Yes?"

"Yep. Town's havin' a church bazaar next week. Wanted to ask if you'd be my guest."

Eleanor was annoyed. She wished she could have got away without Barat seeing her.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But I haven't decided yet if I'd go."

"But if you do, you'll let me take you?"

"I'll let you know later," Eleanor replied evasively.

Jeff Barat's eyes glinted a little. But he backed away from the wagon.

"Fine, Eleanor, fine," he said.

Mose let out the broncs and they galloped down the dusty main street of Broken Lance. When they were out of town they slowed to a trot and kept that mile eating pace until they were halfway to the ranch of Ollie Simmons.

Then, from a small grove of cottonwoods rode three men: Deputy Sheriff Kelso and two men Eleanor had never seen before.

"Howdy, Miss Simmons," the deputy sheriff said.

Eleanor looked coolly at him.

"Good afternoon."

She nodded to Mose and he shook the lines. The horses started forward. Kelso's horse was in the way of the team and had to shy to one side.

"You damned dog!" Kelso exclaimed, angrily.

Mose winced.

"Sorry, boss!" he apologized.

"Sorry, hell!" snapped Kelso.

He whipped out a Frontier Model Colt and deliberately sent a bullet through Mose's head.

Eleanor screamed in horror. The dead body fell sidewards off the seat of the buckboard, struck a wheel and thudded to the sun-baked earth. The broncs, startled by the shot, plunged forward.

Kelso and his riders yelled and clawed at the bridles of the horses. They clung to them and dragged the horses to a halt. Kelso meanwhile rode up beside the pitching buckboard and reached for Eleanor Simmons. She tried to evade him, but he leaned far from his horse's saddle. He caught hold of her arm and tore her cruelly from the buckboard. She fell to the ground and he let go of her.

OLLIE SIMMONS had Emily hold the dinner until six-thirty. When she didn't show up then, he ate, but his appetite was small. When he finished eating he came out of the house and stood on the veranda, where he could look down the road that led to Broken Lance.

He knew that Jack McSorley had gone with Eleanor. He knew, too, how McSorley felt about his niece. He wasn't blind. She was safe, therefore. As long as Jack McSorley was alive.

Yet it wasn't like Eleanor to stay in town so late. He looked at his stemwinder and saw that it was ten minutes after seven. He sighed and muttered under his breath.

Russ Coe strolled from around the rear of the house.

"Eleanor get back from town?" he asked.

Ollie Simmons looked coolly at his hired gunfighter. "What business is it of yours?"

"Maybe none," said Russ Coe easily. "'Cept that Jack's been shinin' up to her. Maybe they eloped."

Ollie Simmons cursed roundly. "Russ, I've taken your pap once too often. Get your horse and clear off this ranch."

Russ Coe did not move. "You can't fire me, Ollie. On account of I already quit you. Yesterday."

Ollie Simmons' eyes became slits.

Russ Coe grinned. "I been workin' for Jeff Barat since yesterday."

"Get your horse!"

"In a minute. I'll get yours then, too. Because—Eleanor isn't coming home this evening."

Ollie Simmons made a swift move and a gun leaped into his hand. "Talk, Coe!

Talk quick or I'll blow your head off."

"That'd be the worst mistake you ever made in your life, Ollie," said Russ Coe easily. "If you killed me, Eleanor would *never* set foot on this ranch again."

"Where is she?" Simmons demanded thickly.

Coe looked down at his hands. "Some fellas have got her. They won't let her go unless I tell them."

Simmons actually trembled with the effort he made to keep from squeezing the trigger of the gun in his hand. "What do you want?"

Coe drew a sheet of folded paper from his pocket. "Like to have you write your name on this."

"What is it?"

"What diff'rence does it make? You sign it or you don't. If you don't you never see the girl again."

Through Simmons mind ran the thought of what he would have done, if this had happened to him two months ago. It was a repugnant thought. He slipped his Frontier Model .44 back into his holster.

"I'll sign."

"Good. Then I'll take you to the girl,"

ELEANOR SIMMONS sat in the home made chair and stared at Kelso, the deputy sheriff of Baker County.

"You know you can't get away with this," she said.

Kelso chuckled. "Mebbe not. Mebbe John Bonniwell will come and rescue you."

Eleanor's chin went up in the air. "Perhaps he will."

A bearded ruffian came into the room and said, "They're comin'."

"How many?"

"Just two. Coe an'—"

"Bonniwell?"

The ruffian cleared his throat. "Yep."

"All right, stay in here. Keep your mouth shut." Kelso went swiftly out of the room.

OLLIE SIMMONS knew they were headed for Jeff Barat's ranch long before they came in sight of the buildings. He was surprised however, when he and Russ Coe approached, to recognize Kelso leaning against the door.

The door was closed.

Simmons dismounted.

"Where's my niece?" he demanded.

"Inside," replied Kelso. "You sign that paper?"

"He signed," said Russ Coe.

Kelso nodded and stepped away from the door. "All right, you can go in, Bonniwell!" He yelled the name. Russ Coe had compelled Simmons to take off his gunbelts before they'd left the ranch, but he hadn't noticed, when Simmons had put the pen and ink away, that the rancher had scooped a short-barreled derringer from a drawer and thrust it inside his shirt.

Now, the instant Kelso yelled, Simmons whirled, clawing at his shirt. It was a slow draw. Kelso's gun was out and thundering before Ollie Simmons cleared the derringer.

Simmons gasped and stumbled to his knees in front of the door. Kelso shot him again, through the chest. Simmons pitched forward on his face.

Russ Coe came forward. "The old—" he said. Then Ollie Simmons' hand lifted a couple of inches. The fingers contracted and the little derringer barked.

Coe screamed and clawed at his throat. For a horrible moment he swayed, then plunged to the earth, his head striking less than a foot from Ollie Simmons'.

His teeth parted in a snarl, Kelso stepped forward and placed his Frontier Model against Simmons' head. He pulled the trigger.

A moment later he entered the house. Eleanor Simmons was struggling in the embrace of the bearded ruffian.

"The hellion bit me!" the ruffian snarled.

"Let her go!" Kelso ordered.

Released, Eleanor stared wild-eyed at Kelso. "What've you done to him?"

"Him? You mean Bonniwell?" Kelso shook his head. "He got away, damn him."

He saw the relief that flooded Eleanor's face and said, brutally: "But your uncle and Russ Coe were just comin' up. Bonniwell killed them both."

Eleanor's hand flew to her mouth, but could not quite suppress a scream.

"He's a hellion, that Bonniwell," said Kelso. "I'm gonna have to arrest him."

"I don't—believe you!" whispered Eleanor.

"You can go outside and look. And there're a couple of horses out there, too. You can climb up on one of 'em and go on home."

"What?"

Kelso scowled. "Say, what're you tryin' to make out—that I *kidnaped* you? Hell, Miss, I'm the deputy sheriff of this county. Your damn man pulled a gun on me and I killed him. You were afraid to go home, so I brought you over here. Then your uncle and Bonniwell came here and got into a fight. That's my story, and I got witnesses. You try to prove anythin' different!"

KELSO rode into Broken Lance and sought out Jeff Barat.

"McSorley still here?" he asked.

Barat showed his teeth. "He's drunk. Maybe he'll say he got knockout drops. He's a liar. You got the paper?"

"Yeah. And you know what—Russ Coe and Simmons killed each other!"

Muscles stood out on Jeff's jaws. "That's too bad. What are you going to do now?"

"I got witnesses to prove Bonniwell killed Ollie Simmons, outside of Broken Lance. I guess I'll have to arrest him. Uh, you got it fixed here?"

Barat chuckled. "Do you know, that fool Josh Hudkins believed all that stuff about Broken Lance being a city, and bought a heluva lot of stuff for his store. Even laid in a big line of farm implements. And he borrowed the money from our bank."

"That's fine, that's fine!"

Ten minutes later, Len Kelso, Mayor Josh Hudkins, and two of Kelso's cohorts called on John Bonniwell, in Tom Waggoner's office.

"Mr. Bonniwell," said Kelso. "Where were you between four and eight o'clock this evening?"

Bonniwell's eyes darted about the group. They lingered on the face of Josh Hudkins. The mayor of Broken Lance seemed agitated about something.

"I was sleeping in back here most of the time. Usually do from about three to six, because I work nights. Why?"

"Well, I think you rode out of town, down to Jeff Barat's ranch. You met Ollie Simmons there, with his man, Russ Coe. You had some words with him and —well, they're both dead."

"You lie, Kelso!" said Bonniwell.

"I saw you. So did these boys. We heard Simmons call you by name. So did Miss Eleanor!"

Bonniwell tensed. "Eleanor Simmons?"

"Yes. I met her on the road. Her boy'd gone wild and I had to shoot him. I was takin' her home when—when the rest happened."

"She said she saw me shoot her uncle?"

"She heard you and her uncle. I got a warrant here for your arrest."

Bonniwell took a quick step back.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"Judge Olcott issued the warrant," said Josh Hudkins, his lips twitching.

Bonniwell stared at him. "You've thrown in with them, Josh?"

Judkins was silent for a moment. Then he half whispered. "No, but—"

"All right," said Bonniwell. "What do you want?"

"Yore guns, first," said Kelso. "Then we'll take a walk down to see the judge."

Bonniwell had never thought he'd surrender his guns to a Len Kelso. But he did now. There wasn't anything else he could do. Kelso was a deputy sheriff. He was backed by the county judge and the mayor of Broken Lance. And Bonniwell was himself an officer of the law.

Judge Olcott was in the courtroom in the chair that Judge Stone had formerly occupied. Bonniwell saw the little fat man and remembered how he had once saved his life. There was no gratitude in Olcott's face, though. Men who have been shown up as cowards seldom like brave men.

"This is a serious charge, Mr. Bonniwell," Olcott said.

"It's a frameup!"

Olcott shook his head. "These men swore out the complaint. All I can do now is remand you to the custody of the sheriff's office, for an early trial."

"Meaning—"

"That you go to jail," said Kelso.

Bonniwell sighed. He had put other men in the jail downstairs. He could stand a night in it, himself.

"Let's go," he said.

WHEN Tom Waggoner came in from showing a prospective settler a half section of land south of Broken Lance, he learned what had happened. He went wild. He rushed down to the jail and was promptly headed off by Len Kelso, who was lounging outside the place.

"Prisoners can't talk to people outside!" he said curtly.

Waggoner swore at Kelso, then turned and dashed up the street to Josh Hudkins' store. The merchant was gray in the face.

"Wasn't anythin' I could do 'bout it," he said. "The warrant was legal."

"But they're murderers!" cried Waggoner. "You know damn well that Bonniwell never killed Eleanor Simmons' uncle. Russ Coe, perhaps, but not her uncle."

"The girl said he did."

"How do you know she said that? Did you hear her?"

"No, but they said she—"

"And you believed them in preference to Bonniwell." Waggoner's face blackened. "You've gone to the other side. You—" he choked and rushed out of the store.

At the livery stable he hired the best horse, mounted it and rode out of Broken Lance at a full gallop.

The animal was about ready to drop when he reached the Simmons' Ranch. There he found a score of sullen-eyed men congregated outside the main ranchhouse.

Waggoner walked past them and pounded on the door. Emily, the cook, her eyes red and swollen, came to the door.

Waggoner brushed past her. He found Eleanor in the newly furnished living room. She was sitting by the window, a handkerchief in her hand. But her eyes were dry.

"Eleanor," said Waggoner. "I know how you feel at a time like this and I'm sorry, but I must know—*did you see Bonniwell do it?*"

She shook her head. "No, but they called out his name."

"Did you hear *his* voice?"

She was silent for a moment and he saw her biting her lips. Then the word, came, whispered: "No."

Waggoner strode out of the house.

CHAPTER XIV

FINISH FIGHT

ON Kansas Street eighteen saloons were roaring full blast. Raw whiskey was being tossed down throats, sore from whooping and yelling. Fiddles scraped and pianos tinkled and boots pounded the rough floors. Texas men were making up for lost time. Tomorrow or the day after they'd be riding down the Chisholm Trail, their pockets empty, their heads thick and befuddled.

And over on Church Street, the real citizens of Broken Lance were having a church bazaar. There was entertainment, too, but it was tame compared to that which could be had on Kansas Street.

There were women and children here. There were a half dozen unmarried ladies, too. Lou Sager was easily the most attractive of them. She was also the most popular woman at the bazaar, if the swarm of men that surrounded her was any criterion.

Tom Waggoner, coming late to the bazaar, had to wait ten minutes before he could get even a word with Lou. But finally, when practically every man present was rushing to buy the numbered paddles for the raffle of the gorgeous Spanish shawl, Waggoner caught Lou's arm.

"I've got to talk to you, Lou."

She searched his face and went quickly to a corner with him. "What's the trouble?"

"John. I've had a report that there's a plot to get him, tomorrow."

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed Lou.

There was no mistake about it. The tension of her, the look on her face. It told Tom Waggoner. He would have given his soul if all that were for him.

But it wasn't. It was for John Bonniwell, Tom Waggoner's best friend.

"They won't let me to him," he said. "It's to be sometime either before or during the trial. He ought to be warned."

"I can get to him," she said. "They won't forbid me to see him for a minute. I can wind that Kelso around my finger. I've seen it in his face."

"Yes," said Tom Waggoner. He looked at her and smiled a little. "You love him, Lou."

She started. "Who?"

"John, of course."

Her fine eyes came up and looked bravely into his. "Yes. But he's in love with Eleanor Simmons."

"And I'm in love with you. You know that?"

She nodded.

There was a scuffling of boots coming toward them. Men with paddles they'd bought for her. Waggoner said. "Tell him—"

Impulsively, she reached to take hold of his arm. But he was gone. Men were talking to her, pressing paddles on her. She managed to peer through the ring and saw Tom Waggoner stop at the door. She thought she caught his eyes for a moment, and then he was gone.

Waggoner walked down the south side of Kansas Street, with his hands in his pockets, his head slightly bent, studying the uneven sidewalk. And not seeing it.

He came to the Broken Lance Saloon and Dance Hall, Jeff Barat's headquarters, and looked at the rectangle of light that came through the window. He heard the dull roar of sound that came through the batwing doors. He went in.

The only law in Broken Lance tonight was Barat law. Texas men could do anything they liked, provided it didn't interfere with Mr. Jeff Barat's personal views. You could drink and curse, shout and gamble in Mr. Barat's saloon. You could shoot your guns into the floor or ceilings. Bullet holes didn't hurt much.

The only thing you couldn't do was cross the minions of Mr. Barat, who were here and there, on raised perches, the lookouts who protected Mr. Barat's interests. There was a big game going on tonight. Mr. Pearson of Texas had sold a herd of four thousand choice beeves to a Chicago buyer, at the very nice price of thirty-one dollars a head. It was a new high. Mr. Pearson had paid off all his cowboys. They were celebrating in their own way.

Mr. Pearson was playing poker. Naturally such a game required the presence of Mr. Jeff Barat himself. To make it good, the deputy sheriff, Mr. Kelso, was sitting in. Also the leading banker of Broken Lance, Kansas, Mr. Ferdinand Barat.

The game was probably the largest that Broken Lance had ever seen. And big games were the rule in Broken Lance.

TOM WAGGONER stopped at the table. Jeff Barat looked up at him.

"Mr. Waggoner," he said. "How come you're not at the church bazaar?"

"The games are too small. And too honest. I like them big and not so honest. Like this one."

"You talk too much, Waggoner!" snarled Len Kelso.

"Perhaps you'll shut my mouth sometime, Mr. Kelso," retorted Waggoner.

"Maybe I will," said Kelso, half rising from his chair.

"Kelso!" exclaimed Jeff Barat. He looked up at Waggoner and a sneer twisted his mouth. "Why don't you get in the game, Mr. Waggoner, and keep it honest?"

One of Barat's men rose quickly from a chair and Waggoner sat down.

"I haven't much money with me," he said. "Is my credit good?"

"It is, Mr. Waggoner," offered Ferdinand Barat.

Cards came to Waggoner. Pearson, the drover, on Waggoner's right opened the pot. "Fifty dollars."

Waggoner's eyes slitted. It *was* a big game. Waggoner had a pair of fours. He called the bet. Ferdinand Barat, on his left, raised the opening amount by two hundred. Kelso dropped out. Waggoner had expected that. Jeff Barat, of course, stayed.

Pearson drew three cards and bet two hundred dollars. Waggoner looked at his three card draw and discovered to his surprise that he had been given three

tens, which gave him a full house. He called Pearson's bet, guessing that one of the other players would raise.

It went to Jeff Barat. He kicked it up five hundred dollars. Pearson called and raised it another five hundred. Ferd Barat dropped out. Waggoner merely stayed.

It was up to Jeff Barat now. He counted out one thousand dollars, pushed it into the pot, then played with a thick stack of bills for a moment and suddenly tossed it all to the center.

"And three thousand!"

Pearson licked his lips and studied his cards. He exhaled heavily and tapped the table, "I pass."

Waggoner looked coldly at Jeff Barat. "I drew three very good cards, Mr. Barat. I'd like to play them. How good is my credit?"

"Very good, Mr. Waggoner. You name the amount."

"All right, Mr. Barat—shall we say twenty thousand?"

The sardonic smile went from Jeff Barat's face. He looked at his brother, whose face remained impassive.

"You drew three cards?" he asked.

"You're the dealer, Mr. Barat."

A tiny glint came to Barat's eyes. "All right, twenty thousand it is. And I call you. I drew only one card and it gave me five black spades."

"Which are not quite good enough," said Waggoner, steadily. He spread out his hand.

"Damn!" swore Len Kelso. "On a three card draw!"

"A very nice pot," said Ferdinand Barat.

It was. A fifty thousand dollar one. It made Broken Lance history. Jeff Barat sent a man for money. The game went on and Jeff Barat played savagely. Kelso borrowed a thousand dollars from Jeff Barat and lost it in ten minutes. He dropped out of the game.

That left the two Barats, the drover, Pearson, and Tom Waggoner. And Tom Waggoner, playing tonight with an indifference he had never possessed before, found Lady Luck perched on his shoulder. He won a ten thousand dollar pot, two or three smaller ones and then, with four kings against Jeff Barat's four jacks took the gambler for another thirty thousand dollars.

JEFF'S face was white and taut. His brother's eyes were alarmed and he leaned over to whisper to Jeff. The latter listened for a moment and shook his head angrily.

"Got enough, Mr. Barat?" Waggoner taunted.

"My I.O.U. is good, isn't it?" snapped Jeff Barat.

Waggoner smiled thinly. It was his deal. He dealt the cards out deliberately and looked at his hand. It was a complete bust.

"I open for two thousand," Jeff Barat said savagely.

Pearson dropped out, followed by Ferdinand Barat.

"I'll stay with you, Mr. Barat," said Waggoner. He discarded two cards, retaining a jack, an eight and a five. It was the worst kind of poker, but Waggoner was no longer playing poker. He was playing himself against Jeff Barat.

Barat drew one card and looked at it only briefly. Waggoner believed he had two pairs, his openers. He looked at his draw, discovered that he'd given himself another five and a nine.

"Yes, Mr. Barat?"

Jeff scribbled on a slip of paper. "Five thousand!"

Waggoner smiled. He counted out five thousand dollars and continued. The others at the table watched him. When he got to twenty thousand Jim Malachy exclaimed softly. Waggoner glanced up, saw a fine film of perspiration on Jeff Barat's face and continued counting. He stopped when he reached fifty thousand.

Jeff Barat's eyes were bulging. His breath came hoarsely, from deep in his throat. His brother stared at him.

Slowly Jeff shook his head. "You win!"

Deliberately, Tom Waggoner flipped his cards, face up. "I think I bluffed you that time, Mr. Barat!"

Jeff Barat's chair crashed over backwards as he leaped to his feet. "You—" he said.

Slowly, Tom Waggoner got to his feet.

"I'm going to let that pass, Mr. Barat. I'm going to give you a real bet. I have eighty-five thousand dollars on this table. And here—" he stooped and quickly scribbled on a slip of paper "—is my I. O.U. for one hundred thousand dollars more. Mr. Barat, I'll cut you high card—"

"Don't do it, Jeff!" cried Ferdinand Barat.

Jeff Barat was choking with rage. For years he had prided himself on being a gambler. And tonight this amateur had shown him up. Half the men in the saloon were listening now and watching. Barat had to accept whatever challenge Waggoner made. But a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars—Jeff knew that he and his brother did not have that much money. If Waggoner should win—and the devil was riding with him tonight—they would have to give him half the real estate they owned in and around Broken Lance.

And while Jeff Barat was thinking it over, Waggoner said it all, in plain words. "—and I don't want you to put up one cent of money against this hundred and eighty-five thousand. I want you to do just one thing, instead—call off the killer you've got planted to get John Bonniwell tomorrow!"

Jeff Barat gasped. Then he did the only thing he could do. He whipped out his gun.

"Waggoner, you've gone too far!" he choked.

"I'll arrest him!" cried Kelso, the deputy sheriff. "He can't talk like that in public!"

TOM WAGGONER sneered in Barat's face. "This is showdown, Barat. You can't kill me here. Not after the bet I've made." He jerked his head toward the saloon in general and Barat knew that Waggoner was right. The way Waggoner had put the proposition, eighty-five thousand dollars in actual money, plus a note for a hundred thousand, which everyone in Broken Lance knew was as good as money, removed the stigma of insult. No man insulted another with that much money.

It was direct challenge. Jeff Barat had to accept it, or be through in Broken Lance.

He fought for control, and when he won, put his gun back into its holster. "You're talkin' crazy, Waggoner, but I'll take you up. If you win, I'll take every one of my men and go with them personally to guard Bonniwell."

Waggoner shook his head. Barat swallowed hard and said: "My word he'll live through tomorrow."

"All right," said Waggoner. "They've heard that promise."

He stooped and riffled the deck of cards quickly, pushed them to Ferdinand Barat to cut. The banker's face was black. He cut the cards carefully.

Jeff Barat cut and showed the queen of hearts. A triumphant look began to spread on his face, and then Waggoner cut and turned up the king of spades. His luck had held to the end.

Murmurs of awe ran through the Texas men in the saloon. Waggoner's face relaxed. His eyes became bleak. He took off his hat and swept into it his winnings. Carelessly, he walked out of the saloon.

Jeff Barat sat down at the card table.

"Well," said Pearson, the drover. "Shall we resume?"

"After that?" exclaimed Ferdinand Barat. He got up, shook his head. "I think I'll go home."

After a moment, Jeff Barat caught Kelso's eyes and got up and went into his private office. Kelso came in a minute later. He sat down and waited for Barat to speak to him. Barat poured out a stiff drink from a bottle on his desk, then took a thin cigar from his pocket and lighted it. When he got it going good he had control of himself.

"There was a man in Montana once who bluffed me," he said. "He's dead now."

Kelso nodded. "Any particular way you want it?"

"Yes. He shot his mouth off. It's got to look right. And there's a damn good way to make it look right. He walked out of here with a hatful of money. A hundred thievin' Texans saw him go out. If a couple of them should rob him—"

Kelso's face broke into a huge smile. "Say, that's great!"

"It's got to be perfect, Kelso! You can't just kill him and say a Texas man did it. You've got to *prove* it. Here's how. Waggoner's not going to give up his money without a fight. He kills one of the thieves—better make it two."

"You mean—"

Barat shook his head impatiently. "Of course not one of our boys. There are a dozen men out there who've spent their last half dollar. Get two of them. Tell them you'll split four ways with them and give them a free ticket down the trail. They'll go with you."

For a moment Kelso stared at his chief. Then he nodded slowly. "All right, Barat."

"Can you and Slingerland handle it?"

"Waggoner isn't Bonniwell. I'll take Cassidy along to make sure."

THEY left the Broken Lance Saloon and Dance Hall separately and met in the alley at the mouth of Texas Street.

"Got your horses, boys?" Kelso asked the two Texas men.

"All saddled," replied one of them.

"Fine. Here's the plan, then. He sleeps in a little room behind his office. You boys will tie your ropes on the back wall—it's only inch planking. When I give the signal, you pull. The whole back end will give way. The rest of us'll jump him, then."

"Why don't we do it the easy way?" one of the cowboys asked. "Just call him to the front door and buffalo him. Then we can go in and look for the money. He might have it cached."

"He has. He's got a tin box in there. chained to the wall. The back wall. That's why we ought to tear it down."

They agreed, of course, to Kelso's plan. But when they got to the alley behind Waggoner's office, Kelso changed the plan.

"On second thought, you boys want your horses ready to roar the minute we get the money. Better if you, Slingerland and Cassidy, get your horses and do the pulling and the rebs help me with Waggoner."

In five minutes they were ready. Kelso remained in the shadows with the cowboys, while the others crept up to Waggoner's building and did what they had worked out with Kelso.

They came out of the shadows, carrying black ropes. They tiptoed to where their horses were in the darkness. After a couple of minutes a voice said cautiously: "Ready."

Kelso slipped his two Colts out of their holsters. He gestured to the Texas men. They drew their own guns, started toward the building. Kelso stepped behind them and put his guns to within three inches of each bobbing head. He pulled the triggers of both guns.

The roar of the guns was almost drowned by the terrific wrench and tearing of the rear wall of Waggoner's building.

The moon revealed Tom Waggoner, fully dressed, springing up from his cot, a gun in his hand. It also gave Kelso light enough to direct his fire. His gun crashed and Tom Waggoner tripped and plunged to his knees. Kelso fired again and again.

Then return fire came from the spot where Waggoner was lying. Kelso yelped and jumped backward. Waggoner's gun crashed again and Kelso pitched to his face. Back in the alley, Slingerland and Cassidy rushed their horses forward. Their guns began a deadly fire. Flame lanced toward the open end of the frame shack. Bullets whacked and thudded.

"He got Kelso!" cried Slingerland. He slid his horse to its haunches and bounded down from the saddle. He dropped to examine Kelso and a last bullet came from Tom Waggoner. Slingerland cried out and fell across Kelso.

Cassidy whirled his horse and dashed away.

The gunbattle had been too prolonged and vicious not to arouse Broken Lance, which ordinarily, paid no heed to an occasional shot. Someone ventured into the alley behind Waggoner's office. He stumblem over a body and ran away. He returned later with many men.

JOHN BONNIWELL slept through the night. Long ago he had schooled himself to sleep through blizzards and blazing sun, with worry gnawing at his heart.

Broken Lance was quiet in the morning. He felt a strange tingling in his veins while he smoked a cigarette. And then Mike, the jailor, came to ask what he wanted for breakfast.

He avoided Bonniwell's eye and stood half turned away while he asked the question. Bonniwell was an observing man.

"What's up, Mike?" he asked.

Mike cleared his throat noisily. "You heard the shootin' during the night, maybe?"

A sudden chill swept over Bonniwell. "What happened?"

"Why, uh, yore friend Tom Waggoner won a lot of money playin' poker down at Barat's place. Some damn thieves tried to rob him—"

Bonniwell stared at the jailor. "Tom —not Tom!" he said.

"The town's buzzin' this mornin'," Mike continued. "They ripped away the whole back end of his place. He got four of them. Uh—the dep'ty sheriff was one o' 'em. Can you imagine that!"

A strange light came to Bonniwell's eyes. He turned away from the jailor and sat down on his cot.

Mike looked at him and kept his mouth closed for a moment. Then he asked: "What'd you like for breakfast?"

When Bonniwell did not answer, Mike walked softly out of the room.

So they had got Waggoner. Tom Waggoner, the best friend he had ever had in his life. The biggest man in Broken Lance; a man who would have risen far above Broken Lance.

He was dead. His blood had gone to feed the thirsty soil of Kansas.

They told Lou Sager about it when she entered the restaurant for her breakfast.

The light went out of her eyes and she turned and walked out again. She walked to her little millinery shop, went in and locked the door behind her. She sat down in a wooden rocking chair and stared at the rows of hats.

"He didn't want to live," she whispered aloud. "I saw it in his eyes last night. He loved me and I didn't love him. The cleanest, finest man I'll ever know. He's gone!"

JEFF BARAT, of course, heard it first. Cassidy galloped his horse straight from the scene of the crime to the rear of the Broken Lance Saloon and Dance Hall.

He slipped into Jeff Barat's private office and found the gambler biting his finger nails.

Barat tried to show an indifferent face to Cassidy.

"Where's Kelso and Slingerland?" he demanded. "I heard the shooting."

"They're dead," said Cassidy. "The thing went wrong."

Jeff Barat sprang to his feet. "What happened? Waggoner didn't—"

"He's dead, all right. We gave him a pound of lead. But he got Kelso and Slingerland."

Quickly, Cassidy described the awful thing that had happened in the rear of Tom Waggoner's quarters.

When he finished Jeff Barat cursed roundly. "You blundering fools, you should've all been killed."

"I didn't see you riskin' your hide," retorted Cassidy angrily.

"I'm risking my hide right now," snapped Jeff Barat. "They'll say I was behind it when they find Kelso and Slingerland there. Here, you've got to leave. Fork your horse and ride as far south as you can."

He thrust a handful of bills at Cassidy. The latter took them and shook his head. "Not enough for what I went through."

Jeff Barat swore and his hand started for his gun. But Cassidy had been expecting that. He was a split second ahead of Barat. The gambler's hands came up.

"You saw me lose almost all the money I had last night," snarled Barat. "What more do you want?"

Cassidy sneered. Jeff Barat pulled open a drawer of his desk and with Cassidy watching closely snapped out a handful of bills.

Cassidy took them and went to the alley door. He slipped out. That was the last anyone in Broken Lance ever saw of him.

Jeff Barat bolted the alley door, took a shotgun from a rack and saw that both barrels were loaded. He laid it on his

desk, lit a thin cigar and dropped into his chair.

He was sitting there with the stub of the cigar in his mouth when Ferdinand came in some time later.

"You fool!" Ferdinand said coldly. "You've got the whole town roused. They say you sent Kelso and Slingerland to kill him."

"I don't care what they say," retorted Jeff Barat. "They haven't got a leader. They're afraid to do anything about it."

"They'll have a leader in the morning!" snapped Ferdinand. "That man Bonniwell. Don't you see—Kelso's dead. He was the chief witness against Bonniwell. The judge'll dismiss the charge."

The stub of the cigar fell from Jeff Barat's lips. His jaws went slack.

Ferdinand regarded him in disgust. "You've gone all to pieces since last night. We're not licked yet, but from now on I'm running things."

"You're going to try to stick it out?"

"We've got to. Do you think I'll run from a cheap, clap-trap little town like this without a profit?"

"You've got a plan?"

"Of course I have. I always have. I've already told a half dozen people outside that you fired Kelso and Slingerland last night. I hinted one of the reasons was because they'd thrown in with some thieving Texas men."

"How'd they swallow it?"

"Not so good. But I'll hammer it home. There're too many other things happening around here to keep their thoughts very long on one thing. If you lay low for three or four days we can bluff it out. I'm sure of that."

"Where'll I stay?"

"The ranch. You've got a small army of men there. Keep them close to the ranch and you're safe. I'll run things here and keep in touch with you."

AT eight o'clock Judge Stone and Mayor Hudkins came to see Bonniwell.

"The witness against you is dead," said the justice. "No need your appearing in court."

Bonniwell got up from the cot on which he had been sitting for two solid hours.

"What are you going to do?" asked Josh Hudkins.

Bonniwell went to the door and said to Mike, the jailor. "My guns, Mike!"

Mike got them promptly. Bonniwell buckled them about his waist. He started for the door.

Hudkins ran after and caught him by the shoulder. "John, I know I sold you out. I couldn't help it. I was forced to do it. But to hell with the Barats. I'm with you again."

Bonniwell looked bleakly at him.

"Hudkins," he said, "I don't trust men who've backed down once. But I need something from you. I need the job of marshal of Broken Lance."

"Of course, John. I meant—"

Bonniwell walked out of the jail. Men were standing on the sidewalks in small clumps. They scattered, or were silent, when Bonniwell walked by.

He passed Lou Sager's shop and his jaws tightened. He did not look into the window. If he had, he would have seen Lou still sitting in the rocking chair, staring blindly at her shelves.

Somehow the front door of Waggoner's office was still locked. No one had thought to open it. Bonniwell left it locked and walked around the corner. When he got to the alley behind the flimsy building a half dozen morbid sightseers scattered before him. He waited until they had all gone.

Then he moved forward. He picked up an end of a cut rawhide riata and looked at it. It was easy enough to figure out how they had ripped the back of the building away. It had been built of flimsy lumber. You could have kicked the boards away from the inside.

The bodies, of course, were gone. But there were congealed pools and spots of dark colored stuff. Bonniwell examined them all. Slowly he reconstructed a story. After a half hour he left the alley.

Out on the street, Judge Stone stopped him.

"Mr. Bonniwell," he said. "I've got Mr. Waggoner's things at my office. There's quite a lot of money, and some notes—"

"I wasn't his partner," said Bonniwell. "It'll have to be sent to his relatives. He's got a cousin or uncle somewhere in the East."

"You're through, Barat! I'm takin' over!"

"We found some addresses in his effects," said the judge. "But, Mr. Bonniwell, we found something else, too. A will, made out by myself only a week ago. He left everything he owned to you!"

CHAPTER XV

SHOWDOWN

BROKEN LANCE had expected things of Bonniwell. He had been framed and publicly humiliated. He had been thrown in jail and while he was there, his best friend had been murdered.

Broken Lance knew John Bonniwell and it expected him to do something about things.

He disappointed Broken Lance. He did nothing. After his examination of the alley behind Waggoner's office, he went straight to the county jail and slumped into the swivel chair behind his desk. He stayed there all day, not even going out to eat lunch. One or two citizens ventured to come in during the day, but when he looked at them, they mumbled an apology and quickly retreated.

Broken Lance was very quiet that day. It was counting its broken bones and

licking its wounds. Bonniwell was the key man to everything—and he did nothing.

At five-thirty Bonniwell finally left the marshal's office. With slow, deliberate step he walked to Lou Sager's millinery shop. The door was locked and he started to turn away, but Lou Sager saw him through the window and came and opened the door. He went inside.

Lou was dry-eyed. She moved like an automaton.

"Broken Lance licked us," he said.

She nodded. "We'll miss him more than anyone else. We loved him."

"*You* loved him, Lou?"

"Yes," she replied simply. "I loved him and I didn't know it until today. Yesterday he asked me to marry him. I told him I was in love with you."

His eyes bored into hers, but he did not speak. She smiled wanly. "Today I know it was Tom. He was good."

"The best man I've ever known," said Bonniwell. "A far better man than I."

"He would be alive today, if I hadn't been so brutal to him. I saw it in his eyes when he went away from me. He wanted to die."

Jack McSorley came in.

"Miss Simmons is outside," he said. "She sent me to see if it's all right—"

"Of course," said Lou.

Bonniwell cleared his throat awkwardly. "I—think I'd better go."

"Please stay here!"

Jack McSorley slipped out and Eleanor Simmons came in. She went straight to Lou and they embraced. There were no words they could say to each other. Each had lost a loved one.

Bonniwell would rather have faced a spitting gun than this situation.

The girls stepped away, and then Eleanor turned and looked at Bonniwell.

"He was a friend to be proud of," she said.

Lou Sager had two living rooms in the rear of her shop.

"I'm going in back," she said. "I'll give you five minutes."

Bonniwell saw the flush sweep from Eleanor's throat to her face. His own pulses suddenly pounded.

LOU walked firmly to the rear of the store, and Bonniwell felt like a schoolboy being called upon to recite before a classroom full of girls.

Eleanor's long lashes completely covered her eyes. She would not raise them. They were quiet until Bonniwell could stand it no longer.

"Eleanor!" he blurted. "You must know how I feel about you."

At last she raised her eyes.

"Yes, John," she said. "I know."

Bonniwell knew very well that he didn't move. He would have sworn, too, that Eleanor hadn't stirred an inch. Yet suddenly she was in his arms. Her face was buried in his shoulder and he thought she was sobbing.

And then her arms were up around his neck. He released her a little and her face turned up to his own. Their lips met in their first kiss.

Presently, though, she disengaged herself. Her face was scarlet, but her eyes looked honestly into his.

"I knew in St. Louis," he said.

"So did I. And—I thought I'd lost you."

"You know why I let you go?"

The shine in her eye dimmed a little. He saw it and said quickly: "It doesn't make any difference?"

"No," she said, but he knew it did.

Yet Bonniwell knew himself. Some men go all through life, too busy to ever take time to understand themselves. Not Bonniwell. He was by instinct a lonesome and thoughtful man. He had gotten to know himself.

He said: "This is life. It's you and I and the people like Tom and Lou who'll make this country. Every one of us is necessary. Someone must plow the earth so you and I can eat. I must make it possible for someone to plow. It's my job. The only one I can handle."

She shook her head sadly. "You no longer have to argue with me about it, John. I've thought of it, hour after hour, day after day. I know it's so, but it doesn't make it any easier."

"I know," he conceded. "There's probably no one in all the world who's gotten less out of life, or who's hated it more. Don't you know I was sick for

days before I met Doug Sutherland? And afterwards, but I had to get him. There wasn't any one else."

"Did he *have* to be killed?"

"Of course. It's the law of our civilization. The mad dog must be exterminated. Jeff Barat killed your uncle and Tom Waggoner. He must pay for that."

She took two full steps away from him. "You're still going to kill him, even after—this?"

Miserably, he shook his head back and forth. "I've got to. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't."

"But you can't, John. I won't let you. I've just found you now, and I won't take the slightest chance of losing you."

"I've got to do it, Eleanor. It's my duty."

"Before everything else?"

He loved her more than anything in the world, yet he turned away from her and stumbled to the door. As he opened the door, Lou came out of her living quarters in the rear and called to him.

"John, wait!"

But he went out. On the sidewalk, leaning against the hitching rail, was Jack McSorley. He fell in beside Bonniwell and walked with him for a hundred feet. Then he said: "You going to get Barat, John?"

"Yes," Bonniwell replied shortly.

"I should have got Kelso yesterday," said McSorley. "I promised myself I would. I waited too long."

IMPATIENTLY, Bonniwell left McSorley. He crossed the street to the Golden Prairie Saloon.

"I want to rent a room for a while," he told Sheidler, the proprietor.

"Number three, at the right end of the hall," Sheidler said. There was no key. Bonniwell went up to the room and stayed there until it was dark.

Then he came down and had supper at the restaurant across the street. Finished, he lit a cigar and walked across to the Broken Lance Saloon and Dance Hall. He found Jack McSorley at the end of the bar, with a bottle before him.

He walked up to him.

"Sorry, Jack," he said.

"S'all right. You got things on your mind. I know. Have a drink?"

Bonniwell shook his head. "Didn't you take Miss Simmons home, Jack?"

"She's stayin' with the girl in the hat shop. Don't blame her. Ollie gets buried tomorrow, and I'm gettin' drunk tonight." His face twisted tragically. "He changed when the girl came. I don't give a damn what they used to say about him —he was all man."

"He was, Jack."

McSorley poured another drink. "Couple free-state militiamen were going to hang me. Ollie saved my life. And I couldn't do a thing for him."

Bonniwell clapped him on the shoulder and turned away.

Ferdinand Barat, for some reason, was occupying the raised lookout's platform. He had a silk hat on his head and he was watching Bonniwell quietly.

Bonniwell walked over. "Jeff's at the ranch?"

Not a muscle moved in Ferd Barat's face. Bonniwell knew that what he'd always suspected was true, that Ferd Barat was by far the most formidable of the two brothers.

"You know, of course, that I'm going to get you both," Bonniwell said.

"We've still got a few cards," Barat finally said. He got up from his raised chair and stepped down to the floor level. "You're wrong, Mr. Bonniwell," he said. "I give you my word that you are. Jeff had nothing to do with what happened."

"Your *word,* Mr. Barat?"

Muscle rippled along the Wall Street man's big jaws. "My word." His word wasn't worth a Confederate paper dollar and Bonniwell knew it. He went to the bar, at the opposite end from Jack McSorley, and ordered a beer. He sipped at it slowly while he examined the idea that had popped into his mind while talking with Ferdinand Barat. He turned it over and looked at it from all sides and finally he nodded.

He walked out of the saloon and crossed the street to Lou Sager's shop. It was dark, but when he pressed his face to the window he saw a thread of light shining under the door between the store and the living quarters.

He knocked on the door and waited. After awhile a rectangle of light appeared in the back, and after a moment, Lou's face was pressed to the window.

"It's me, Bonniwell!"

She unlatched the door and pulled it open. He saw that she had a long-barreled Frontier Model Colt in her hand and gave her a sharp look.

"Is Eleanor here?" he asked. "I must talk to her."

LOU stepped aside and let him into the store. She locked the door and followed him to the rear. When he stepped into a lighted living room at the rear, Eleanor exclaimed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I had to talk to you about your uncle's affairs. Do you know in what condition they are?"

She looked at him strangely; then she shook her head. "No. There's a lot of cattle out there and I know he had money in the bank."

"That may be it. I've been trying to figure out why the Barats killed him. If he was dead, they couldn't expect to take over his ranch, unless—No, that isn't—"

"What?"

He bit his lip. "Jeff and you."

"I refused him two weeks ago. I made it sufficiently clear, I think."

"Then they had some other scheme."

Lou had come into the room and Bonniwell turned to include her. "Judge Stone told me this morning that Tom made a will awhile ago, leaving everything to me."

"You were his best friend," said Lou, steadily.

"I don't want it, of course," said Bonniwell. "But I think I can beat the Barats with it. I don't imagine Ferdinand Barat had more than a couple of hundred thousand dollars when he came here. He spent it pretty recklessly for awhile. I remember his bank statement said only $100,000 capital. He's bought up a lot of Tom's leases, paying big prices, and he's made loans on pieces of property he figured he'd get later on. He must be pretty near the bottom of the bin.

"Eleanor will you work with me? Will you go in the first thing tomorrow morning and find out what your uncle had on deposit at the bank? If it's a very large amount I want you to draw it out. Insist on getting the money. There are some notes in Tom's effects that Jeff gave him. I'm going to force payment tomorrow."

"You think you can break the bank?" Eleanor asked.

Bonniwell nodded. "I've an idea. Without money the Barats are no more powerful than any two cowboys in this town. Less, even. A cowboy can live without money. They can't."

"Very well, John. I'll do as you say."

He flashed her a wan smile. "Thanks. Good night."

BONNIWELL sat in front of the Golden Prairie Saloon the next morning when Eleanor Simmons went to the bank. She was inside no more than five minutes before she came out and returned to Lou Sager's shop. Bonniwell waited ten minutes, then got up and walked carelessly toward the courthouse and jail. He went inside for a few minutes, then came out and walked back up the street on the side of Lou Sager's shop.

He passed the place a few feet, then, as if struck by an afterthought, returned and went into the store. The girls were relieved to see him.

"John!" exclaimed Lou. "Eleanor just learned something shocking. Ferdinand Barat holds a mortgage on the ranch."

Bonniwell smiled grimly. "How much?"

"Thirty thousand dollars," said Eleanor. "And he—he said the bank would have to call it."

"And there's no money on deposit?"

"Just a few hundred dollars."

"You saw the mortgage? When was it dated?"

"July 16th of this year."

"July 16th was one week after the bank started. I don't believe it," said Bonniwell. "Your uncle was pretty sore at the Barats at the time. Anyway, why would he mortgage the ranch?"

"He had a heavy payroll."

"But he had plenty of stock. How many head, by the way?"

"Something like twenty thousand."

Bonniwell whistled. "Will you trust me, Eleanor—give me your power of attorney to act for you?"

"Of course."

Bonniwell went to the courthouse and spoke for several minutes to Judge Stone, after which the justice put on his hat and went out. He returned in ten minutes and handed a sheet of paper to Bonniwell.

A half hour later, Bonniwell walked into the Broken Lance Hotel, which was a part of Barat's Broken Lance Saloon & Dance Hall. A florid, middle-aged man with a huge gold watch chain strung across his paunch was reading a Kansas City newspaper.

Bonniwell sat down beside him.

"Mr. Colby, would you be interested in five thousand beeves?" he asked quietly.

The newspaper dropped from the cattle buyer's hands. "Who's got them to sell?"

"I have."

"You? Uh—ain't you Mr. Bonniwell, the town marshal?"

"Yes. But I have power of attorney from Eleanor Simmons, who owns these five thousand beeves. They're right here near Broken Lance and we can start delivery tomorrow."

"The market's down this week," Colby said cautiously.

"What's your price?"

Colby scowled. This was being thrust at him too unexpectedly. "Uh—twenty-one, no-no, nineteen dollars a head. Straight through."

"Your price is too low," said Bonniwell. "But we'll accept it, if you can pay for them right now."

"Now? What do you mean?"

"Within an hour."

Colby cleared his throat. "It's a deal. Most of the drovers insist on cash on the line, and I've got it, right across the street in Barat's bank. One hour it'll be."

"Do me a small favor. Don't go to the bank for a half hour."

"Eh? Why not?"

Bonniwell smiled disarmingly. "You know bankers. They're all Shylocks at heart. Friend of mine wants to play a trick on him."

The buyer laughed. "This Barat don't like jokes, they tell me."

"That's why it'll be funny."

BONNIWELL went back to the courthouse. When he came out he carried a small bundle wrapped in a piece of paper. He carried it to Lou Sager's store and handed it to Eleanor.

"Take this to the bank and pay off the mortgage on the ranch," he said.

Her eyes widened and she shoved the package back at him. "I can't take—" she began, but he cut her off.

"I'm playing the last hand with Barat. The mortgage is a forgery, of course. Your uncle was killed, so Barat could make the mortgage stick and take over your ranch. He made a slip. He didn't make it big enough. Go down right now and bring the paper back with you."

Eleanor looked appealingly at Lou Sager, who nodded. When Eleanor had left the store, Lou said to Bonniwell: "I think you'll lose her if you kill again."

"I know," said Bonniwell. "There's been too much. But I think I've got Ferd Barat."

Eleanor returned, her face flushed angrily. "He didn't want to take the money. I had to threaten to go to Judge Stone. Here's the mortgage."

Bonniwell's eyes lit up in triumph. "I've got him."

He left the shop and walked directly to the bank. Ferdinand Barat's face was still red from his encounter with Eleanor.

"Well?" he snapped at Bonniwell.

Bonniwell laid several slips of paper on the desk.

"Like to cash in this paper of Jeff's," he said softly.

Barat stared at the notes. "Where'd you get those?"

"Here's a slip of paper from Judge Stone, stating that Tom Waggoner made me his sole heir. So I'm collecting on these—sixty-five thousand dollars!"

Ferd Barat's big underjaw was slack. "Those are Jeff's, not mine."

"It says 'Brothers' on the window.'

"All right," snapped Ferd Barat "What of it? Jeff'll pay those sometime

I haven't got time to go into—

"You've got time. You'll pay me sixty-five thousand dollars right now!"

"Those are gambling debts. They're not legal."

"In Broken Lance, Kansas, they are," said Bonniwell. "No one welches on a gambling debt out here. It's not healthy."

"You're threatening me?"

Bonniwell shook his head. "No. If you refuse to pay these notes I'm not going to press it. All I'll do is tack these pieces of paper up inside the Golden Prairie Saloon."

Jeff Barat licked his lips.

"All right," he said savagely. "I'll pay."

He went off and brought back a thick stack of bills, plus a smaller one. Bonniwell knew the thick stack was the one that Eleanor Simmons had brought in a few minutes ago.

WHEN Bonniwell came out of the bank, it was just a half hour since he'd talked to Colby the cattle buyer, and Colby was coming across the street. Bonniwell nodded as they passed in the middle of the street.

Bonniwell's mouth twisted into a sardonic smile. Colby stopped three men before he came across the street. Every one of the men immediately dashed off, two of them to the bank. By the time Colby reached Bonniwell, there was a small stampede in the direction of the bank. Bonniwell didn't need Colby's words to tell him what was happening, but he listened, anyway:

"The bank's broke. Barat hasn't got ten thousand dollars in it!" Colby cried. "That's a heluva business."

"Shucks," said Bonniwell, easily. "Barat's got a lot of holdings. He's just temporarily hard up. He can realize a half million on his property."

"Can he?" cried Colby. "Who's got that much money?"

Bonniwell shrugged. "The deal's off, then?"

Colby groaned. "I dunno if the main office can raise that much money."

"Tell you what," said Bonniwell. "You make the price $21.00 a head and I'll take your order on the bank, in payment."

"*This* bank?"

"Yeah, sure. I got confidence in Broken Lance."

Colby caught hold of Bonniwell's arm and rushed him into the hotel. Bonniwell came out inside of three minutes and again took his customary seat.

There were a hundred men jammed about the entrance to the bank. More were converging upon it from all sides. Bonniwell saw one of the bank clerks rush out of a side street and scoot for the Broken Lance Hotel & Saloon. To get all the available cash, no doubt.

But the clerk didn't stop there. When he came out he rushed up the street to The Texan Bar.

Bonniwell smoked a long cigar down to less than two inches before Ferdinand Barat pushed his way through a howling mob in front of the bank. Most of the mob followed him across the street.

Barat was disheveled. His forehead was bathed in perspiration and there was a wild look in his eye.

"Bonniwell!" he cried, when he was a dozen feet away. "You've got all the ready cash in Broken Lance. I need it. Those fools think I'm broke and want their money, today. They won't believe I can get a million dollars from New York in three days."

Bonniwell put the stub of the cigar in his mouth and took a couple of quick puffs. "New York's a long ways from here. What security have you got here?"

"Half the property in this town. I'll give you a thirty-day mortgage on the whole works."

"No," said Bonniwell. "I knew a person once who got stung with a forged mortgage."

Ferdinand Barat showed his teeth in a snarl. He turned toward his frantic depositors. "He's got a personal grudge against me. He won't loan me the money under any circumstances."

The roar that went up in the street could have been heard two miles away. When it quieted down somewhat, Bonniwell said loudly: "I will loan the money, on certain conditions."

"What conditions?" grated Ferdinand Barat.

"Outright sale, no mortgages."

Barat staggered back. "Everything?"

"Uh-huh. I'll let you keep the bank. But everything else I take."

It was a bitter bargain for Barat. He swore and fumed, but the depositors behind him were threatening. He knew that he could not refuse to pay them their money and live. He ended by signing over everything to John Bonniwell. Everything but the bank.

At two-thirty in the afternoon the run on the bank stopped.

Everyone who'd had money in the bank and was in Broken Lance had drawn it out. Then Bonniwell strolled over to see Ferd Barat. He found the banker with a bottle of liquor on his desk, rapidly getting drunk.

"I'll never forget what you did to me, Bonniwell," he said coldly.

"Things I haven't forgotten, either," said Bonniwell. "You got money left over from your run?"

"Forty thousand dollars, if it's any satisfaction to you."

"It's not enough. I've got a letter on you for one hundred and five thousand, written by Colby, the cattle buyer."

Ferdinand Barat knocked the whiskey bottle from his desk and jerked open a drawer. With his hand on a gun, he looked at Bonniwell—and saw the Frontier model already thrown down on him.

"You're through, Barat!" Bonniwell said coldly. "Get your hat and get out. And if you're smart you'll keep right on goin' when you hit the street."

Barat didn't pick up his high silk hat. He went out, bareheaded. Bonniwell spoke to the clerks in the bank.

"Mr. Colby's given me a draft on this bank for one hundred and five thousand dollars," he said. "There isn't that much here, so I'm takin' the bank. Any objections?"

"Mr. Barat didn't make any," said one of the clerks.

"All right, then. Lock what money there is in the safe, then put the padlock on the door. The bank's closed."

FERDINAND BARAT got a horse and buckboard from the livery stable and kept the animal at a solid run all the way to the ranch where Jeff was making his stand. But as fast as he traveled, Jeff already knew—about the run on the bank.

His eyes were like coals as he listened to his brother's account of the final, crushing blow.

"We're finished, then?" he asked when Ferdinand concluded.

"I've got a hundred dollars in my pocket. All the money I've got in the world. I closed out everything in New York. You said we'd make millions out here in Kansas."

"I've got one more card to turn over," said Jeff Barat. "An ace."

He went to the door of the house and called to a man hunkered on his heels a short distance away. "Lafe, get every man in the saddle."

Ten men, including Lafe, showed up in the ranchyard a few minutes later. Jeff Barat looked them over. "Where're the rest of the boys?"

"That's all, boss," said Lafe. "The others figured you were through. They beat it."

Jeff Barat cursed roundly. He walked to one of the horses. "Come on, Ferd!"

Ferdinand's broad forehead was creased into deep wrinkles. "What are you going to do?"

"What we should have done in the first place. Take over Broken Lance."

"What!"

"Most of the Texas men will throw in on our side when the showdown comes. Anyway, the town'll be disorganized. We'll get Bonniwell first of all. We'll *take* back what we lost."

"You can't, Jeff!" cried Ferdinand. "You can't fight that way!"

"The hell I can't. It's all I can do. Come on, boys!"

They left Ferdinand Barat. He watched them trot out of sight; then he climbed into the buckboard. He turned his horse due south. He knew when the game was lost. He was broke, poor, the first time in many years. He was heading down into a vast wilderness of which he knew nothing. Without a gun. With just a horse and buckboard—and a hundred dollars.

He didn't know that there wasn't a single store between him and Austin, Texas. He was a greenhorn from Wall

Street, New York. His knowledge of high finance would not be of practical use to him when he encountered a band of Comanches, or Choctaws, or Creeks. A Texas cowboy could have made the trip with only a horse and a gun. Barat couldn't make it with a million dollars. And he had only a hundred.

TEARS were in the eyes of both Lou Sager and Eleanor Simmons when Bonniwell told them of the coup. "Tom Waggoner made it possible," he said. "He did more in one evening than I could have done in a year."

"They've gone away now—the Barats?" asked Eleanor Simmons.

"Broke, Ferdinand Barat is nothing. Jeff, without his brother's backing, is no more than a gun-slingin' Texas man. It's all yours, Eleanor. Here—" He tossed papers into her lap. "You own Broken Lance, lock, stock and barrel."

"But what would I do with it?" she cried, bewildered. "I don't want it. Half of it was Tom Waggoner's."

"If you don't want Broken Lance," suggested Bonniwell, "keep your uncle's ranch and give the town to those to whom it belongs—the citizens of Broken Lance."

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "But you —you handle it."

"If you wish..." His eyes went to the window of the store. He saw the cavalcade riding past and his nostrils flared. Eleanor looked past him and inhaled sharply.

"Jeff Barat!"

"I didn't think he had the nerve," Bonniwell said. His hands dropped to his sides and he smiled at Eleanor, but it was an empty smile.

"No!" she cried. "No, John!"

"I'm still the marshal of Broken Lance."

"I don't care," she sobbed. "You've done enough. You've risked your life too many times. You can't win always."

"Maybe it's in the cards once more."

She made a helpless gesture. "Not for me, it isn't. If you go out there now, John, I'll never—"

A gun roared outside. Then another and another.

"I'm through," Eleanor said. "It's all gone in me."

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it's my job!"

The yell of a dozen men rolled over Broken Lance. Guns thundered.

Bonniwell ran to the door of the millinery shop. He opened the door and leaped out to the street. The rear of Jeff Barat's forces were just storming into the Golden Prairie Saloon.

He cut diagonally across the street. Only one shot was fired inside the saloon, while he walked. But when he got to within fifty feet of it he could hear Jeff Barat's raucous voice.

He quickened his step, hurdled the sidewalk and put his shoulder against the batwing doors. He went through with his hands at his sides.

"All right, Barat!" he said.

Jeff Barat was by the bar. There was a gun in each of his hands. The muzzles were slightly depressed, but he was facing directly toward the door. He had only to tilt up the guns and squeeze the triggers.

"Right into the trap, Bonniwell!" he yelped.

Eight of Jeff Barat's followers were spread out fanwise, facing the door. The other two were caught behind the bar, near the till. Jeff Barat had come to open holdup and robbery. There were others in the saloon, twenty or thirty men. But they were at the tables. Most of them were Texas men. It wasn't their fight. If they were drawn into it, they'd just as soon side with Barat. He, at least, was against organized law.

Jack McSorley sat at a table, closest to the bar. He had a half empty glass of whiskey in his hand, and there was a bottle on the table before him. Bonniwell had a quick glimpse of the foreman of the Simmons' Ranch and guessed that he had been at it ever since the night before, with little if any sleep. He was in bad shape.

Jeff Barat snarled: "You're not handlin' my brother now. It's me, Jeff Barat, you're up against." Slowly, imperceptibly, the muzzles of his Frontier Models crept up.

He was going to shoot without any warning at all. Bonniwell knew that. He wasn't going to give him any chances.

Bonniwell said: "Even if you shoot me first, I'll live long enough to kill you."

"You will like—" began Barat.

And then Jack McSorley let his glass of whiskey slip from his hand and crash to the floor. He followed the glass. In the infinitesimal fraction of a second that Bonniwell took to glance at the falling foreman he saw the eyes of the man bright with purpose, saw his hand sneaking for his gun. Bonniwell knew then that McSorley wasn't as drunk as he had been pretending. That he was making his last play—avenging Ollie Simmons.

BARAT was distracted by the breaking glass, by the catapulting of McSorley's body. His guns swiveled involuntarily; one of them roared. Frantically, then, he was throwing the guns back toward John Bonniwell. And it was too late. The Frontier Models were already in Bonniwell's hand. The right hand gun roared and Jeff Barat jerked.

The bullet didn't kill Barat quickly enough, but it spoiled his aim. He was only able to shoot Bonniwell in the left thigh.

The Golden Prairie Saloon exploded to a crescendo of gunfire. Guns thundered and boomed. Men screamed and yelled and rushed about. There were too many men shooting at too close range. There could be no accuracy.

Bonniwell knew only that he was alone, that all men were against him. He was down on one knee because of Jeff Barat's bullet in his thigh. He fired methodically and with aim.

Red fire seared his ribs; an invisible fist smashed him high on the right side of the chest, bowled him over backwards into the rough hewn bar. He came out of that, propped on his right elbow, his left hand gun ready to fire.

But there was no one at whom to shoot. There were still men in the saloon, but they were crouched behind overturned tables and chairs, seeking to dodge flying bullets rather than to throw them. A veritable hush hung over the interior of the saloon.

A crooked smile played over John Bonniwell's lips.

He heard galloping horses outside, then the pound of many hurrying boots. Josh Hudkins, Jake Sheidler and a half dozen men, rifles, shotguns and revolvers in their hands, swarmed into the saloon.

"Bonniwell!" cried Josh Hudkins.

Bonniwell let his gun clatter to the floor.

"From now," he said, "you can hire a policeman with a stick to patrol Broken Lance."

And then he fainted.

FROM the cot that had been arranged for him next to the window, Bonniwell could look over Broken Lance. It annoyed him that he could scarcely move. His left leg was in rigid splints, his waist was tightly taped and his right shoulder so wrapped in bandages he could only wiggle fingers of that hand.

But by twisting his head, he was able to see Kansas Street. Strangely, a farmer's wagon, standing in front of the Golden Prairie Saloon, caught his eye. A gleaming plowshare stuck out over the tailboard. A little boy of seven or eight was sitting on it. There were, in the wagon, four or five other children. And a woman with a huge sunbonnet.

There was a footstep on the left of him and he rolled his head back. Eleanor Simmons looked down on him, her face as he had seen it only once before.

She was wearing a green velvet traveling costume.

Bonniwell's nostrils flared a little. "You're going—"

"Not going," she shook her head. "I'm coming—with you."

"All the way to St. Louis?"

"To that very same hospital. But you're not going to stay there as long as you did the last time."

He was an understanding man. He didn't require even the pressure of her soft warm hand over his own, to know. But he liked it. He liked, too, the lips that came down to meet his own.

The officer's sword swung in a short, bright circle.

A Friend in China

By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

AN ALTIMETER face exploded into tiny fragments of glass. Bob Bentley watched for a long instant while machine-gun bullets ate a jagged line across his instrument board, upward toward the reserve center-section tank. By reflex he jammed stick to the left and kicked upper rudder. This might very well be his last trip over the Japanese lines.

That was what he had told Major Clark the night before. "Tomorrow's my last job of flying here." But he hadn't meant it to be like this. It was after their return from the early dinner at Chang's.

The stumpy little Englishman, unimpressive in his ill-fitting, Chinese-tailored business suit, spoke Mandarin, like a native, to the office clerk.

"Sit down," he invited Bentley. He knocked his short-stemmed briar out against the edge of the map-strewn table and rammed it with tobacco. The Chinese clerk pulled the black muslin bomb raid curtains and switched on the lights. Major Clark waited until he left the room.

"What's on your mind, Bentley?" He

searched the pilot's face, thin and nervous and tanned to mahogany by sun and by the whip of propeller blasts.

"I'm fed up with the whole rotten layout," Bentley exploded. He stopped then. He hadn't intended to say that. There was no sense in flying off the handle.

"Easy does it, Bonus," the little Englishman cautioned, using Bentley's nickname. He sucked on his pipe, quick and nervous. Just like he talked, with clipped, jerky words. "You've been flying too much."

"And getting nothing for it," Bentley retorted. Anger overrode his intentions. "I came here thinking that I'd get five thousand gold for every Jap I knocked down."

The cold blue eyes probed him. "Who told you that?"

Bentley shrugged. "Look here. It costs anyway ten thousand to train a flyer, even a Jap pilot. And fifty thousand more to put him in the air over here. Sixty thousand. And I wipe that Jap out, ship and all."

Clark was about to speak.

"Say you did pay me five thousand a ship," Bentley stopped him. "The Chinks make fifty-five thousand on each one of my victories. Your books say I've knocked down fourteen. Mine says twenty-one. But at fourteen the Chinks've made close to a million dollars on me."

Major Clark rubbed the bowl of his pipe with thoughtful fingers. He looked up at Bentley with something like distaste.

"No nation makes anything from war, Bonus," he said wearily. "I say that, even though fighting is my business."

Bentley knew that he was talking more than he should. But something drove him on. He'd made his decision that night at General Chang's dinner.

"China's a long way from broke," he stated, nodding. "Look what we had at Chang's dinner for the Americans. Four or five cold dishes, four preliminary courses and eight main dishes. I counted 'em."

"Maintaining face, Bonus."

"They'd make better face, paying me what they owe." Bentley had been thinking of these things for a long time. "Look how they ate. Watermelon seeds scattered all over the floor, seeing who could make the most noise sucking their tea and food, playing that kids' game of fingers, and belchin' like a herd of fat steers."

"If that's your four-thousand-year civilization, you can have it. I'll take a tile bathroom in the States. And water you can drink out of the tap without getting a bellyache."

"Different people, different customs," Clark recited. "We'll see that you get out of the country all right. The line's still open to Canton, though they're bombing the railroad pretty heavily between Canton and Kowloon. I can't make any definite promises on your pay."

This mention of pay threw Bentley on the defensive.

"It's not money altogether," he objected, not quite sure of the other things. "But look at these pot-bellied generals and officials. Got to drink tea, plenty, and confab an hour before making one simple decision. And all over China you see these husky highclass Chinese who won't fight. Let John Coolie do it. Sure. And these coolies and farmers—a bunch of dirty, lazy cattle. Fight rather than work."

Major Clark was suddenly, unaccountably angry.

"That's enough, Bentley," he snapped. "What d'you know about that class of Chinese? They've been waiting on you hand and foot the last ten months. Doing it so unobtrusively that you've been unaware of their existence. *They* are China, Bentley."

"Then I'll herd hogs on another farm," the tall man said.

Clark's voice had a jabbing insistence. "Is that why you're leaving us, Bentley? Pay and strange manners. It that why?"

Bentley's record was beyond that question. He laughed in the Englishman's face.

"Sure," he mocked. "I've got my wind up, you're hinting. Scared . . . 'fraid I've used up my luck. Put it that way if you want, Clark. Tomorrow's my last trip."

AND it seemed pretty definite now that this would be his last trip. He was thirty miles east of the lines and the Jap pursuit had boomed down on him out of the noon-day sun, machine-guns making a trail of bullets over his right shoulder.

He wasn't afraid. He had never known fear in the air. He pulled out of the left sideslip and jerked his stubby pursuit up in a climbing turn to the right. He got the choking odor of raw gasoline. The Jap overshot him and turned above.

Bentley held the nose of his plane up, stalling, control stick slack in his hand. He pressed the two gun-trips and caught the Japanese pursuit full in the belly, both guns raking it from landing gear to empennage. Then his own head slammed against the back pad. The heavy motor whipstalled his plane as though a giant hand had clubbed it over the nose.

He ruddered out of the first twist of a tailspin. A mass of flaming debris passed him, slowly, because of his own downward speed. The Japanese pilot, his opened parachute entangled in the rudder counterbalance, seemed to float in a void, without gravity. He was kicking frantically with arms and legs. Then a sheet of flame wrapped itself around Bentley.

Bentley side-slipped, nose high, jerking the clasp of his safety belt. He held his breath, got his feet on the seat cushion and stood up, the fire swirling about his head and shoulders. One breath of that and his lungs would be seared to cracklings. He dove forward and out, straight into the plume of red heat.

The cold upper air struck in about him and he breathed again. The world and sky swung in dizzy gyrations around his tumbling body. He saw the yellow thread of a canal grow swiftly in size. He saw the Jap plane, a mere skeleton of framework now, cast a quick shadow against the green of a rice field before it struck. His own plane made a high, whimpering sound beneath him. He jerked his rip-cord.

The parachute harness gripped his body with a sudden pull and the ground swung to its proper place below. The canal curved around a small clump of trees. Beyond these a water lift stood quiet, deserted by the treadmill coolies who were running toward him. He slackened his body to take the impact, sprawling full length as a puff of wind dragged the parachute. He hauled the upper shrouds to him to collapse the chute and got up, working slowly with the harness snaps.

The coolies, gathered around, watched silently for a moment while he cleared himself of the shroud lines. Then suddenly they all started talking at once. A wizened little man ran to him, clutched his sleeve with a yellow hand and pointed to the north.

"*Yapun! Yapun! Dih-gun!*"

"I'm not Japanese," Bentley repeated, over and over. Something about these men frightened him. They were like animals who had just come from the earth, still more earthen than the mud on his hands.

The wizened one gestured, commanding. Two of the coolies gathered the folds of silken parachute into a bundle and ran with it as though pursued by devils. The one in command had an old, wrinkled face. A few straggling gray hairs sprouted from his chin. Naked to the waist, scrawny, filthy, he hopped about Bentley's lanky form like a small boy at play. But he was deadly serious and evidently friendly. He showed this in a dozen ways, smiling, shaking hands with himself, bowing over his clasped hands in front of the American and each time pointing to a cluster of buildings. He ran a few steps toward them, waved his hands, motioned away from them. In the Chinese manner that meant that he wanted Bentley to follow him.

Bentley followed. The old man seemed frantic with haste and kept pointing to the north "*Dih-gun . . . yapun!*"

Bentley understood then and broke into a run toward the buildings. The Japanese were nearby and the old man wanted to conceal him from them. Bentley had a small 7.65 Luger. He wouldn't be taken alive. But he didn't want to die. There was nothing very heroic about Bentley. He had a certain amount of daring in the air and a certain skill in flying. He had come to China to trade these for gold.

A HALF dozen mangy dogs came out, circling, growling, snapping at the empty air. They were living bags of bones. The old man shouted at them and his voice sounded much the same as their animal yelps. They cringed and ran. Bentley saw that one of the coolies followed behind him with a split bamboo broom, erasing the prints of his leather shoes.

All of the Chinese were bare-footed. Most of them were naked except for breechcloths and a sweat band around their heads.

They passed the main building, perhaps fifty feet long by half as wide. There were four bamboo doors in it. Women squatted about these, their black hair hanging in untidy braids. The buildings seemed to grow out of the ground and be a part of it, except for spots where the mud had peeled away from the laced framework. Fifty feet beyond this building, they came to a smaller one of identical construction. Bentley saw the square, stolid face of a water ox. He thought they would hide him in the manger or the small stock of fodder in a lean-to.

A man came running toward them. He was completely naked and in the last stages of exhaustion. He tried to shout, but instead reeled to the ground at their feet and lay there, heaving for breath and pointing.

Bentley looked down the narrow, trodden path between fields, where the man pointed. He saw another man coming toward them, clad in black city workman's pajamas. He was riding a crazy looking old bicycle.

"Hallo," he said to Bentley. "I speak velly fine English. Har'you?" He wheeled the bicycle over to lean it against a forlorn looking tree, one of three that stood in the bare, dusty house grounds. The tree looked a hundred years old.

Bentley felt a great wave of relief at the sound of his own language. Before that he couldn't even be sure that these filthy, jabbering creatures were friendly toward him, though everything they did seemed to indicate their friendliness.

"What's the plot here?" he asked.

"Yeah," the young man agreed.

The old man was commanding the coolies. They were clawing something out of the ground.

"That fella Sun Cho-yiu," the young man pointed. "Me Tsoi Lee-kok. All friends for you."

Sun Cho-yiu's wizened hands fluttered like dead oak leaves. He pointed to a hole they had uncovered. A terrible stench filled the air. Bentley could scarcely comprehend their intention. They wanted him to go down into that loathsome pit, the cistern for fertilizer tankage. It was the drainage from the barn, and there were evidences that that was not the only kind of excreta stored there.

Tsoi Lee-kok saw his hesitation.

"Fast quick," he barked. "Jap fellas come this side too quick. No good for you."

Bentley protested, desperately. "I can't. I can't breathe down there, Lee-kok."

"My cousin for Army catchee arm gone," Lee-kok motioned to indicate an arm blown off at the shoulder. "Stay this side two day. I show you."

He lowered himself quickly down steps notched in the side wall to a small platform. The old man, Sun Cho-yiu, handed him a length of bamboo, which Lee-kok placed in his mouth. They lowered the woven split-bamboo and mud-plastered cover. The upper end of the breathing tube was concealed in a wilted clump of grass. Cho-yiu made motions that all of this would be brushed over with dust.

They removed the cover again. Lee-kok stood beside him, bringing the stench of the pit with him.

"No good for eyes," he said, shutting his eyes to show Bentley what he must do. "No good for nose." He pinched his nose. "You go now."

They stood around him, silent, curious, wondering why he hesitated. Though Bentley was too much engrossed with his own horror to realize, all of these men would face a firing squad if he were discovered now.

Yet they stood there, silently passive. The foreign barbarian must make his own decision.

With slow steps Bentley moved to the

pit's edge and slowly descended the notched steps, trying to keep his mind off the knowledge of what was a few feet below him, trying to ignore the sliminess that met his fingers. He placed the bamboo pipe in his lips. Lee-kok motioned for him to close his eyes. Then they lowered the cover into place and he was in darkness.

Fine dust sifted down on him. Bentley knew they were obliterating all traces of disturbance. He opened one eye tentatively and the scalding fumes blazed across it so that the tears dripped down his cheek a long time after he had blinked it shut.

He had a fight to control his mind. He tried to fix it on the outside world. In a couple of hours the boys would be gathered at the canteen for lukewarm Scotch-sodas. Duke Thomas would be there. Duke, who usually said one thing when he meant another, a young-old man, a man who had no word to say of his past. And Ted Wright, who had been flying since they put wings on airplanes. Ted had a big gold medal that had been presented to him by the President of the United States for saving mail from a burning ship. Two months afterward the airline company had fired him for taking a drink twenty-four hours before his trip was due out. And Hal Swevers—all of them good fellows, all of them hard ridden by their pasts or by something within them.

BENTLEY heard sounds above him — sharp, hissing commands and the clatter of stacking arms. The Japanese had come. After that he could hear them occasionally but could know nothing of what they were doing. An idea came to him. It was so beautifully clear and logical and in keeping with things he'd heard, that it became a certainty in his mind. If the Japanese discovered the pit and found him there, the pit would be his grave. They might question him, torture him a little to gain information, but in the end they would pitch him, still living, down into that noisome filth.

The fumes were biting into his nose and the air that came to him from the tube was heavy and lifeless. He considered this and knew the reason. The tube was at least four feet long. When he exhaled only a portion of the devitalized air was expelled, the rest remaining in the tube to be breathed again. After that he sucked fresh air through the tube and expelled it through his nose.

He heard a sound of chattering protest above, the muffled thud of a pistol shot and then a bawling noise that he was unable to identify, but there was the sound of death in it. After that the minutes seemed to stretch into hours and days, weeks and years. It was dusk when they lifted him out of the pit.

Cho-yiu brought him a bucket of water. Lee-kok squatted on the ground, watching him with that curious, impersonal intentness of a Chinese servant.

"No soap," he replied to Bentley's request. He seemed to repeat the request in Chinese to the other men about. They all laughed hugely at the idea of them possessing such a luxury.

Bentley washed his hands and face. He was thirsty or, rather, was burning up inside with thirst and with something else that made the muscles of his stomach twitch and writhe into knots. They gave him boiled water from an earthen crock. There was an air of gaiety about them now, and occasionally one would point with laughter at old Sun Cho-yiu, who squatted a distance from them over a bloody object. His body rocked back and forth and he was moaning with anguish. It was the head of the water ox.

"That Jap fellas kill him for eat," Lee-kok explained.

Bentley wondered that they should laugh at the old man and his wife. He had yet to learn of the curious sense of humor possessed by this class of Chinese. Later he was to see them laugh at a friend who had had his hand chopped off at the wrist.

"Do they do that?" Bentley asked. "Take things without paying?"

Lee-kok explained. When there were officers with the soldiers they maintained a pretense of honesty by going through the form of confiscation and payment. They paid in the new puppet government currency—flimsy, poorly printed stuff, which would be of value when and if the Japanese made good their con-

quest. The possession of this currency was a subtle urge for the farm people to help the Japanese in making it good.

That night Bentley slept in the community house which, he estimated, must be the home of four families, plus a crowd of refugee relatives from the city. He was unable to eat any of the dirty colored rice that was offered him in a small wooden container.

IT was pitch dark when they awakened him, after what seemed but a few minutes of fitful slumber. He was glad that the time had come for his escape. He wanted action. Anything to get away from this awful, helpless feeling of being tied to the earth and to these animal-like people. They stripped him naked, under Lee-kok's directions, and smeared his body with some kind of sticky, greasy dye. They gave him a dirty breechcloth and a coarse, blue coolie coat, and Lee-kok showed him how to wrap a sweat rag, turban fashion, around his head.

They started, with a group of the coolies. Bentley was unable to walk barefooted without wincing, so Lee-kok went back for sandals, slabs of flexible material, tied on with twisted raffia thongs. Then they went, single file, down a narrow path to the canal. Daylight was just coming. Bentley and Lee-kok sat down under one of the willow trees. The other men took their places on the waterlift treadmill and the thing came to creaking life. Bentley learned that the time for escape had not yet arrived.

"Maybeso three-flou days," Lee-kok said.

It was good to lie there in the damp, clean grass and have the warmth of the morning sun wrap itself about him. A bird chirped a little song in the branches and Lee-kok pointed and looked at Bentley as though they were sharing some infinitely good and secret understanding. Bentley felt himself drawn to the Chinese, as though he had known him for a long time. Later, when one of the older coolies had gathered twigs and boiled water for tea, Lee-kok showed Bentley how to suck the boiling, bitter brew across his teeth to cool it.

Lee-kok told Bentley that he had been a clerk for some foreign oil company before the invasion. He boasted a little of his pay. Eight dollars a month. But most of this must go to his family relief, as he called it.

The day before, he told Bentley, they had taken the body of the Japanese pilot and thrown it into the inferno of Bentley's ship, along with Bentley's parachute. The Japanese soldiers had accepted the charred remains as that of the American. Their search had been for the Japanese pilot. They suspected the Chinese. Of what?

Bentley looked at the gaunt, starved bodies of the workmen and at Lee-kok's deep-set eyes and hollow cheeks. The knowledge came to him with the shock of a physical blow. They suspected the Chinese of cannibalism.

Lee-kok smiled, shaking his head.

"No can eat Japanese," he said and spat the unclean word from his mouth.

Bentley slept and woke and this time, when they offered him rice, he ate it greedily, two of the wooden bowls, heaping full. And then, abashed, he saw the others staring at him, hunger in their eyes. Their rice bowls had been filled but once, half full.

THE sun was throwing long shadows and Bentley's ears had become accustomed to the steady squealing of the unoiled wheel so that they caught the low, throbbing note of a conch horn. The wheel stopped instantly. Lee-kok urged Bentley to a place on the treadmill that was vacated for him. Bentley understood. He grasped the smooth, worn bar that served as a support. The wheel started again. He watched, frantic, to step on each spoke as it came within reach of his foot. A squad of short, khaki-clad soldiers came into view at route step and halted on the other side of the canal.

Bentley stooped down to make his tall body seem smaller and to keep them from seeing his face. He missed one of the spokes and would have fallen through the framework, but for the support of an arm behind him. Instantly Lee-kok jumped onto the narrow sidewalk, grunting and hissing with Chinese curses. They were directed at the man ahead

of Bentley. Lee-kok struck him repeatedly across the bare shoulders and struck so hard that Bentley could see the red bruises of his fists after they had the treadmill working again. But attention had been diverted from the American.

The Japanese non-com crossed over on a small, wooden bridge and questioned Lee-kok. The other Japanese leaned on their guns, talking and smoking. One of them was armed with an automatic rifle. He raised the gun, laughing, and called over to the non-com. The non-commissioned officer replied and the private raised his gun and sighted.

For a bare instant the American thought they would all be massacred. The gun kicked back like a riveting machine and splinters flew from the axle of the main wheel. It sagged and broke and fell into the sluggish, yellow stream. The non-com re-crossed to the other side and the squad of soldiers marched away, out of sight behind the willows. The Chinese left their places on the ruined water lift. They gazed silently at the diked rice fields that must be kept flooded at this stage. Then, at an order from Lee-kok, they started a slow file back toward the farm house.

That night Bentley learned that the waterwheel was forty years old and that it lifted the water for six of the small farms. And it sank deeper into his consciousness that these people were slowly starving to death.

He examined Lee-kok's ancient bicycle. Many of the spokes were gone from the warped wheels; it had tires made of some kind of twisted fiber. He rode it, evoking the screech of unoiled bearings. The men sat around in the dusty yard, watching him. There was something in their faces and in the face of Lee-kok. Some question. And then Bentley understood. He leaned the bicycle against the ancient, scrawny tree with the same care that Lee-kok had used.

"That is a very fine machine, Lee-kok," he complimented.

Lee-kok turned to the others, repeating Bentley's comment in their language. His face was bright, with a quiet pride of ownership, and this was reflected in the faces of the others.

"It is a poor thing," Lee-kok said modestly. His eyes thanked Bentley.

It came to Bentley that, three days before, he wouldn't have understood. He felt as though a curtain had dropped from his eyes. He wanted to appear well before these people.

The next morning at daybreak they returned to the canal and built a slanting path from the water to the top of the embankment. They passed skin water bags up from hand to hand to spill them in the upper waterway. In an hour's time they had the cadence of the swing and looked as though they had been doing this for ages. The Chinese had that faculty of sinking into the picture of labor and making it appear effortless.

That night Lee-kok returned Bentley's wristwatch, a small penknife and his pocket lighter.

As though to exchange confidences, the Chinese showed Bentley a small oblong of dull lead, stamped with Chinese characters and with a chip of inferior jade set in it. Bentley examined it, pretending admiration.

"For catchee good luck," Lee-kok explained. "Savvy? No catchee sick, no catchee hurt. Allee time good luck."

Bentley nodded his understanding.

After a pause Lee-kok inquired: "You likee?"

"Hell no," Bentley exploded. "I wouldn't take your good luck piece. I take it, maybeso Jap fella shoot you."

Lee-kok was visibly relieved.

"Maybeso," he admitted. But he held the lead thing in his hand. He spoke slowly: "All Chinese people velly glad for know you. Velly proud. So brave fighter for Chinese. Maybeso you take it. No can get hurt."

Bentley refused shortly. He felt guilty and a little ashamed. He didn't tell Lee-kok that he had no intentions of ever flying another Chinese ship.

TWO days later, since there had been no more visits from the Japanese, they decided it was time for Bentley's escape. That night old Sun Cho-yiu disappeared from his family circle. He returned an hour later with an old silver piece, still sunk in a mud-crusted sheath of wood.

One at a time the elders from the other Chinese families came, each one talking for a time, sucking noisily at a small bowl of hospitable tea and then departting with ceremonious bows. Each one of them left a piece of money that had been dug up from some hiding place. The wealth of their family. Hu-dièh, the daughter of Cho-yiu, was busy with her needle, sewing the money into Bentley's coolie coat.

They left the next morning in gray daylight. There were two coolies and Lee-kok and Bentley. All of them carried their scantly provisions of cooked rice and back loads of *yanghoe,* the star-shaped fruit of the markets. They covered thirty-eight or forty *li* the first day and were unmolested.

They were stopped twice the next morning by Japanese patrols, but were allowed to continue with their loads. By mid-afternoon they had reached the north bank of the Yangtze.

Lee-kok strode to a riverman's houseboat as though he were in familiar territory. He talked to a short, apelike man, who bowed to him repeatedly over his clasped hands. They drank tea in an evil-smelling hole of a room.

"This is Leung Tak-kwong," Lee-kok told Bentley. "He is brother-in-law for me. He will row you closs river, Chinese side." Lee-kok paused, embarrassed. "You fliend for me," he said huskily. "You catchee good luck, I know true." He tapped Bentley's coolie coat. "You catchee money for pay travel to Hankow. Goo'bye."

Bentley swallowed and cleared his throat.

"I'll be seeing you, Lee-kok," he said. That was the best he could think of.

They concealed him, full length, on the floorboards of a small sailing skiff. He could see outside, but couldn't be seen unless the boat was searched.

Lee-kok spoke once more. "Goo'bye," and bent over to loosen the mooring line. A Japanese officer came into the view of Bentley, followed by three soldiers.

Lee-kok loosened the rope and gave the boat a great shove.

The officer barked a command. He had a short sword in his hand. He pointed it toward the boat and shouted at Leung Tak-kwong. The boatman stood there in the stern, uncertain.

Lee-kok turned toward the shouting officer. He walked to him deliberately. His right fist swung sharply against the officer's face. The boatman dropped his oar blade to the water and shoved.

Bentley watched that drama on the narrow ledge of the boathouse. The three soldiers, their attention diverted from the boat, were trying to get past the officer to Lee-kok. One of them raised his bayonet to jab. Lee-kok lifted an arm to fend the blow. The officer's sword swung in a short, bright circle. For a moment Lee-kok's bare bronzed arm was still extended, blood spurting from the severed wrist. And then Bentley heard the sharp, high, senseless laughter of the two coolies.

BENTLEY didn't need to use the concealed money for travel. A Chinese launch stopped them in midstream for searching. He was back in his quarters at the Hankow military field the next afternoon, bathed and fed and a little drunk. He sat down on his bed and stared a long time at the dirty breechcloth and the coarse blue coolie coat that lay draped over his wardrobe trunk. He'd take them back to the States with him, just as they were.

He got up, on sudden thought, and took out his penknife and slit open the lower hem of the coat and felt for the money that Hu-dièh had stitched in. He sat there for a long time, staring at what he found.

Someone knocked on his door.

"Come in," he called.

Major Clark entered, his ruddy English face filled with good humor.

"Cheerio, m'boy," he spoke in his jerky, clipped manner. "Happy you got away from those beggars. Damned lucky, eh? Good news for you, too. Everything fixed for you to leave."

Bentley spoke, soberly. "If you don't mind, Major, I'd like to stay on. I—I'm going to have good luck." He choked a little. "All the time very good luck. See." He held up a small oblong of dull lead with an insert of cheap jade. "From a friend," he said.

Ever so slowly, Carnera inched up...

ALL THE KING'S HORSES

By ALLEN JAYNE

TWO weeks from the time I talked Rudy Taylor into starting a racing stable of his own, with me as trainer, I decided it was a mistake. Among my reasons, two were very prominent.

One was that at twenty-six Rudy is a movie star of considerable proportions, and for this flicker work he has a contract with Mammoth Productions which rewards him at the startling rate of five thousand a week. Not that this has gone to his head, because he is still a Democrat, which tells all, but to be getting this kind of money at his age and to be wide of shoulder and to have a profile that has ladies from Maine to Mexico moaning in despair has given him the idea life is a series of pushovers.

Which from the beginning creates between Rudy and me a clash of temperament, because I am a practical-minded guy and I know nothing in life is a pushover.

Particularly do I know the racing game is not a pushover, so when Rudy carries this idea into our stable it becomes trouble number one.

The second was that my idea of the stable in the first place was to get him so interested in a horse or two of his own that he would not have time to make so many foolish bets on horses he knows nothing about, but this did not work either.

He not only continues betting at the same mad pace, and I mean chucking it in, but he is so taken with thoughts

of becoming a stable owner that by the time the Santa Anita opening is fifteen days away we have five stalls filled and the gleam in his eye has not lost one speck of its luster.

Of the five there are two, Pharon and a little mare named Tillie, which are not so bad. The other three do not choose to run.

So I know whatever Rudy does, he overdoes, and I know his attitude toward money is measured in seven-day intervals, which is how long it takes for a further five thousand to fill the hole remaining from the one that went before.

Which is a philosophy causing me no end of worry.

LIKE I said, I have followed horses for many years, and this pursuit has taught me many things. I have learned the world to be a place in which eight balls can rain from a clear sky, so I fear for Rudy, who is a sort of grasshopper guy who instead of storing acorns against the time when winter comes, is leaping from bush to bush, or at present from horse to horse.

One of my troubles is I cannot hold Rudy still long enough to pick up even one really decent horse. Not that I figured we should in two weeks come up with our stalls filled with Seabiscuits and Rosemonts and Top Rows. That cannot be done. But I do want one nag that will give us a chance at the smaller added money races, such as the San Pasqual and San Felipe Handicaps, which is as high as we dare aim.

But holding Rudy down is like holding back the suds in a bottle of hot beer. So I strain at the business of keeping both eyes on Rudy while holding my nose on the trail of a couple of horses I have in mind, and it is while I am in this condition a guy named Henry Durkin gives us a very vicious treatment.

Durkin is also in pictures, being a director or producer or something, and he has at Santa Anita a considerable stable, including a horse called Catnip that for two years has been something of a joke among racing men and which he unloads on poor Rudy.

I did not like Durkin since our first meeting. I did not like the way he grinned when he looks over the horses Rudy has bought. It was a smirk he was wearing that day, and I do not like people who smirk. But this Catnip affair was the finish.

When news of our purchase gets around it creates quite a stir, the stir being a laugh, so when we are but a couple of days from the start of the meet, all the friendliness has gone from my nature and I lust for the hearts of guys like Durkin for taking advantage of Rudy, who, as you may have suspected by this time, was just a very nice fellow.

It was the Thursday before Christmas I got Barge On, one of the horses I have been after, and on Friday I feel so good I am whistling as I help the stable boy with his tasks. Rudy had called in the morning, saying he would be out about one o'clock, and it is about time for him to appear when I hear outside a booming sneeze from a horse, so I step out to investigate.

A horse and rider were there, and they were a very strange looking outfit to be knocking on your door at Santa Anita.

The horse was the longest and highest I had ever seen. From the ground to where the red hair and freckles perched he measured at least six and a half feet, and he was muscled smooth and deep, with a great chest tapering beautifully to huge rear drivers. And as I looked at him, the horse looked at me, and there was in his yellow eyes a light I had never seen in a horse before.

My first glance at the rider had caught nothing but the red hair and freckles. Now I saw he was young, just a kid, and he looked very tired. On his head was a big cowboy hat and from dirty jeans stuck a high-heeled boot, also cowboy, while from somewhere near the middle of the freckles comes a very friendly grin, so that I am somewhat taken by him.

"Howdy, mister," he says, which goes with the boots. "I ain't aimin' to bother you none, but I was just lookin' for a place to light in this here Santa Anita."

"To light from that high perch," I says, "I can understand might require some looking around. You ought to carry a ladder." And I steps over and makes a move to pat the big nag's neck.

I came close to losing an arm. The air seemed suddenly to fill with horse teeth all aimed at me, so I left there very quickly.

"Gee, mister," the kid was saying, "I sure am sorry. I plumb forgot to tell you Carnera don't take to strangers."

"He took after me," I puff. "You ought to hang a red flag on him, or muzzle him. It isn't so easy to fill up holes in people."

"I'm sure sorry, mister," the kid repeats. "But he'll like you after he gets to know you."

"I have all the acquaintance with him I want," I announce. "Now I wish you would scram out of here so I can relax. I don't like the way he is still looking at me."

A change comes over the kid when I say this. He wilts a little, pushes the big hat back on his head, and looks out over the pack in a puzzled sort of way.

"I guess Santa Anita ain't like Texas," he says, heaving a big sigh, which reminds me of how tired he looks. "I just got in, and not knowin' nobodyI figgered to maybe bed down in somebody's corral for a night or two 'til I sort o' got acquainted. But I'm right sorry to have bothered you, mister. I wouldn't a' done it except for a feller over yonder tellin' me here was where I was to come."

"Just a minute," I says as he starts turning the big horse. "Who sent you here?"

"Feller named Manton. Found him over there a spell."

Which explained all, because Manton is Durkin's trainer, so I know this to be a rio. But the kid's talk about needing a place to sleep brings out the best in me, so I tell him to get down and we will talk this thing over.

HIS name is Phil Jackson, he tells me. He is from some wild place in the Texas Panhandle and the total of his worldly goods consists of this jumbo horse which, in honor of the big Italian fighter, he calls Carnera. Kind-hearted truck drivers figured largely in the miracle of his trek from Texas without money, with the last hundred miles being done on Carnera's back, and as I suspected they had not eaten recently.

We get Carnera in a stall and give him oats and I take Phil across to the eating shack. He absorbs steak for twenty minutes without loking up, then continues his story.

"Ever since I been a little squirt I've hankered to come to California, but I never could figger a way o' doin' it 'til Carnera was foaled on my daddy's ranch and grew into such a good runner. When I beat all the horses in the rodeos I got the idea o' comin' out here to beat 'em at Santa Anita."

He was that simple.

I didn't have the heart to tell him what he was up against. I wondered how I could break it to him that all things at Santa Anita are in terms of money, and he should have stayed with his rodeos even if Carnera can run fast, which I doubt, because of his extra length legs.

On the way back to the stable I am very glum. It is not fun handing out the kind of a welcome I am about to hang on Phil. The fact is, I have taken quite a fancy to him. I like his quiet enthusiasm, and honesty peeps from every freckle.

We find Rudy waiting for us. He is standing before Carnera and on his face is a look of intense admiration.

"What a beautiful big horse," he glows. "How much is he going to cost us?"

"He is not going to cost us anything," I answer, taking him to one side. "Look here, Rudy, we already have eight horses, not counting Catnip, which I do not consider a horse, and five of them will do nothing but eat our oats. Rudy, it is for your own good we do not buy this Gulliver of a horse."

While I am talking he does not take his eyes off Carnera.

"Ed," he says, "get this horse for me. Get just this one more, and then we will go out of the market."

I didn't argue. Rudy has both feet in the way he says this, so I turn back to Phil.

"Young fellow," I says, "Mr. Taylor has decided to buy your horse. What do you think he is worth?"

The kid looks at me, then at Rudy.

"Listen, mister. I don't aim to hurt your feelin's, but nobody buys Carnera. Carnera is mine for keeps, because him and me is pals."

Well, that takes Carnera off my back, which was a great weight indeed, so I turn my best shrug to Rudy, who is looking very sad.

"All right," he says to Phil. "I would like to have him, but I don't blame you for wanting to keep him."

Phil then gives Rudy a long study.

"Mister, I won't sell Carnera, but I will make you a proposition. I come all the way from Texas to race Carnera because he runs over horses that get in his way, and I don't aim to give up the idea. So if you will let me stay here and if you will fix it so I can race him I will give you half of what he wins."

I didn't blame Rudy for making it a deal. Phil's talk about the way Carnera runs sends a little fever raging in my blood, and I guess Rudy felt the same way.

WE WERE several days getting around to giving the big horse a speed test. Not that we weren't curious, but the start of a meet provides many chores, and then Rudy was busy at the studio, so we postpone the trial until he can be present, which is finally arranged.

A quarter of a mile will tell us what we want to know, so we set Phil and Carnera at one end and Rudy and I and a stop watch at the other, and I give Phil the sign.

For a furlong it looks like we have something, because Carnera opens up with a burst of speed that makes the breath stick in my throat. I am about to congratulate Rudy, when suddenly Carnera's long propellers go into a tangle and down he goes into the turf. Phil does a couple of ground loops, but seems to come out of it all right, because he is on his feet and back to Carnera before we arrive.

Carnera also gets up and much to my surprise appears none the worse for his experience. Phil goes over him very carefully, then announces everything is okay.

"A very lucky thing," I says. "I have seen easier falls result in a busted pinion. This proves what I said about legs," I tell Rudy. "Legs can only be so long on a racehorse. After that they are a handicap."

"I guess I let him out too much," Phil offers. "We have tumbled before, but I thought I had learned to check him just right. Seems like he always tumbles when he gets goin' too fast."

Rudy is looking very troubled.

"I guess I have made a mistake," he says. "I have already entered him in the big race, and if his habit is falling down I don't see how he can win."

"Just a minute," I say. "What big race have you entered him in?"

"The Handicap. The Santa Anita Handicap. Also," he goes on, "I bet a hundred on him in the winter book. I guess that was a mistake too."

"The Santa Anita," I sputter, thinking of the laugh to go up when it becomes known, "you have entered this Humpty Dumpty in the Santa Anita?"

"He is so big," Rudy defends, "it looked to me like he ought to beat all those little horses. And I got a thousand to one in the future book. That is really a price."

So we leave it like that, because fate arranged it like that.

THE next six weeks can be passed over very lightly. In that time we won three races and though the San Felipe was included it made a very disappointing total, so Rudy has taken a great shellacking.

With Carnera, I had done nothing except wonder what I should do with him. Phil has kept him in perfect shape, but I resist all arguments that we run the big hay-burner in minor races, my thought being we should take no chances on breaking him up before his start in

the big race for which Rudy has paid so dearly.

Not that I gave him a chance.

I was eye to eye with the sports writers on that. With one accord they pick Carnera as the comedy relief in that affair, and the boys really go to town in wisecracking about Rudy and his horse on stilts. So when the race is ten days away we have a ringing in our ears from being laughed at so much.

It was then a great crack appeared in our situation.

Edwards, our feed supplier, called one morning and suggested I remind Rudy the bill had not been paid, which surprised me, because Rudy has a horror of owing people. So I called him at the studio and mentioned the thing.

"Ed," he says, "over the telephone is no way to discuss the bad news I have. I am coming out so we can talk face to face."

I hang up with my imagination cutting some fancy capers. Because of Rudy's hollow tone I know something in the nature of a Chicago fire is striking our village, so I huddle on the bench in front of the stable like a Chinaman waiting for the locusts to eat his rice field too.

I am still there when Rudy comes and sinks down beside me and heaves a big sigh.

"The studio has gone out of production," he says. "I no longer get five thousand a week. This means I cannot pay Edwards or anybody else. You, for example."

"You have been paying me twice what I am worth," I tells him, "so don't worry about me. But do you mean that after drawing five grand a week for a year and a half you have no money saved up?"

"I have no money," he says. "I have been a fool."

"That is a very conservative way of putting it," I admit. "I don't see how one guy could spend all that dough."

He gives me an unhappy grin.

"It wasn't so difficult. You figure expensive cars, and clothes, and a lot of entertaining, and the slice Uncle Sam took, and what my agent got, and it goes fast. Then there has been this horse business. I have no way of knowing, but I think horses have cost me a lot of money. Also I have loaned a lot of money. About forty thousand, I think."

"Who to?"

"Friends. Friends in the picture business."

"Rudy," I says after some thought, "like you say, you have been a sap, but now I have hopes for you. You have had a bath which cost a couple o' hundred thousand, but you are rid of the fleas which infest the newly rich. You don't know it yet, but you are. Also you have gotten rid of the lice, among which I list guys like Durkin. From now on you will hang on to your dough."

"Durkin," Rudy repeats in a hollow way. "Gosh, I forgot all about him."

"Now what?" I ask.

"I have a bet with him. Durkin invited me to bet him ten thousand Carnera would beat his Mercurio in the big race. Ed, I don't know what I am going to do."

"He invited you," I repeat, charmed by the simplicity of it. "Well, I wouldn't worry about it. When a guy is tied to a railroad track it doesn't matter if he makes a date to get his head chopped off. Come on, we will get a drink while we discuss ways and means of getting along on the little chunk I have saved."

We have several drinks, so I become somewhat scientific in my attitude toward Rudy, deciding there is in him some place a strain of wild jackass.

WE WERE up and out to the track early on the big day, and neither of us had a very good night, Rudy because he is used to softer beds than my joint boasts, and me because I am so nervous.

The smell of the ground was still in the air when we arrive, and Phil was there, working over Carnera, and he was as cool as a cucumber in a spring.

"Phil," I says, "do you really think you got a chance in this thing?"

He gives me a brief look.

"Why not? Carnera is a horse just like them other nags."

"There are things pulling garbage trucks," I snort, "which are also horses. I mean there is a horse named Tornado in this race that has equaled the world's record for a mile."

"Them record figgers don't mean nothin' to me," Phil says. "All I know is Carnera is opposed to havin' horses in front o' him. There is only one thing worries me. That is if we tumble."

I go away mooning over that. I know Carnera can run, but I also know he can fall down, which Phil himself admits, and there is the further fact he will be carrying a hundred and forty three pounds, which seems to put a ribbon on the thing.

Something comes over Rudy about nine-thirty and he rushes off in great excitement, saying he has forgotten a matter. So I mill around with my temperature mounting by the minute wondering what is going to happen to us, when I see Ted Grant of the *Globe* coming across the lot.

"Ed," he greets me, "I am worried about this Carnera thing. I can't get rid of the idea maybe you are preparing for a killing."

"I am," I says, swallowing a laugh. "I am preparing for maybe two deaths. But I am the one who is dying."

He ignores that.

"Almost nobody has bet on Carnera, Ed. Everybody is laughing at him, and his price is holding steady at about fifteen hundred to one. Did you hear that? Fifteen hundred to one. Now listen, Ed. Has Carnera got a chance?"

"None," I says. "He won't know which way those other horses ran."

Ted gives me a long study.

"That settles it," he says. "I am going over and lay me a little wager right on Carnera's puss."

Watching him recede, I go into a ponder of my own. No entry in an important race, I realize, ever went postward at such a fancy price, and fancy prices have a terrible effect on horseplayers.

I find myself reaching for my wallet in which a count reveals forty-two chickens and presently I am in a very disturbed condition of mind. It is in the midst of this tussle that Rudy arrives.

He rushes up and in his fist is a clutch of currency.

"A savings account," he pants. "A thousand bucks in it and I forgot all about it until this morning. I got it, a thousand bucks."

"A thousand?" I questions. "There isn't a thousand there."

"A hundred and four. I paid our bills on the way back."

"Nice going," I says, an idea taking shape in me. "Now you shove that dough in your jeans and leave it there. We got to eat, and I am almost out of what it takes to be regular in that matter."

AN HOUR passes before I have a chance to get rid of Rudy. We are at the stable talking to Phil who is climbing into his jockey suit when I snap my fingers and dash out the door, muttering I will be right back.

Once out .I streak for the ticket booths. It is close to one o'clock and the park is half jammed already, so there is a line at even the ten dollar window. I shove four tens across the board and ask for tickets on Carnera.

The ticket guy looks at me.

"Did I hear you right, Ed?"

"I dunno," I answer. "I said Carnera."

"A very loyal thing to be doing," he says, and gives me the cardboards.

I turn from the window with the tickets still in my hand and find myself staring into the sheepish face of Rudy, four places behind me in the same line.

"What are you about to do?" I says.

"What have you just done?" he counters, peeping at my tickets.

So I wait while he buys ten tickets and we leave there in a very frozen condition, and with me thumbing over the idea that outside of running the race we have done all horse players can do.

Rudy is too nervous to eat so he beats it for the stable while I duck into the shack for a sandwich and a cup of coffee. When it comes I cannot handle it, my stomach being in a bad mood, so I head for the stable thinking very poorly of myself.

I brood over being the kind of a guy who bets forty dollars on a horse and then worries over spending forty cents for lunch.

There is such a wrong side up in this performance I am sure I will die in a gutter some place, and I am also sure the last act over me will be performed by a street cleaner, which makes me feel very dismal.

At the stable I give Phil a few last words of advice. I tell him to watch Gold Fly and Tornado and Lady May and of course Mercurio, Durkin's entry, which is really the only hope I have.

"We have had one break," I tells him. "Drawing number one gives us the inside rail and the best shot for position, so if you can keep Carnera on his feet maybe we have a chance. But the main thing, Phil, is to wind up in front of Mercurio. You have got to do that much."

So we sit and stare at each other during the last half hour and I marvel at how calm Phil is. He might have been going for a ride in the park for the nervousness he showed. He even yawned once, a performance I cannot understand.

Rudy and I had a good spot from which to watch the race, and we felt the hush come over the sixty thousand customers when the nags come out and the handlers begin backing them into their starting stalls. Then what little hope I had, got picked right off the vine.

Carnera wouldn't go in the starting stall. Partly because he was so big and partly because he was so ornery they give up after five minutes and move him over outside the stalls, so he winds up seventeen places from the rail, which to me spells the end. I explain to Rudy why this longer run is called the Overland Route and tell him all is over.

"I see what you mean," he says sadly. "Maybe Phil will think of something."

"It is no longer a matter of thinking," I says. "It has been reduced to an affair of running, which is strictly up to the horses."

They were off then.

IN CASE there was a shred of hope lingering in me, Carnera did not get a good start. He reared slightly just before the takeoff, so he was a split second delayed in getting away, and in this business split seconds count. They are important, for example, in the matter of position, which Phil seemed not to worry about.

It is this early struggle for position which accounts for the first half of a race generally being run in faster time than the finish. The first quarter sees this struggle pretty well over and the flights established. There is a grouping close on the heels of the leaders. Behind this is another in which very often lurks the eventual winner, then comes the final bunch, consisting usually of horses not fast enough to be anywhere else.

At the quarter Carnera was near the center of this final flight and I was thinking of what a bad place this was to be when Phil turns him out a little and the big nag begins to move up. At the half mile marker we was well into the second flight, still on the outside and running easily, and Rudy is going crazy.

But other things have changed too.

Lady May and Gold Fly and Tornado, for example, are now leading this second flight in the order named, and I can feel they are getting set for their joint move against the leaders that by this time are a cinch to fade, so Carnera's progress has just brought him to the worst of it.

Mercurio, because of great early speed, is in fourth place, and this worries me because it puts nine horses between Carnera and him and all are running, so it looks pretty hopeless. Things hang like this until about the three quarter marker, which means we have half a mile to go, and then the fireworks really begin.

The stands roar when Lady May cuts loose and makes her move for the big money. Another roar comes when Tornado does the same thing. Gold Fly tried but couldn't, so was out of it. Then Carnera starts moving too.

He goes by a couple of horses that are good horses and he goes by them with ease, his long legs flashing so nicely my

heart sets up a great clamoring with hope he will take Mercurio.

When the stretch is entered Lady May and Tornado are about three jumps behind the leader, which is still Mercurio, and it is obvious they have the situation well in hand, but to me a great possibility begins to unfold because of the way Phil has brought Carnera up.

Lady May and Tornado begin their stretch drive with Carnera fifty feet behind and I begin to see the kid has run a very cagey race. Also, and more important, I feel Carnera has something left, which Phil proceeds to demonstrate.

When Carnera straightened out into the stretch Phil reared up in his stirrups, pulled off his cap, and let out the most blood-curdling yell ever to ricochet about the somewhat dignified environment of an American racetrack.

It was Comanche and rodeo and cowboy all rolled into one, and its effect on the general situation, and particularly on Carnera, was tremendous. It rose and fell, it rose again to waver and break and fall once more, and Carnera ran like a horse's hell was at his heels.

He passed Mercurio when a furlong from the wire, and he went by him like a Diesel streamliner goes by a water tank, and that left the three of them. Tornado had passed Lady May and was leading by a length. Lady May was second by a half a length, which put Carnera's whiskers somewhere near her mid-section. Then Lady May faded and Phil went on by.

SLOWLY, ever so slowly, Carnera inched up on the flying Tornado. The stands were hushed as Phil made his bid, and with the wire two hundred feet away he was a head from even, and at a hundred feet he was even, and there he seemed to hang.

The feeling came Carnera had done his all, that he couldn't go faster or longer. He gained no longer and I knew Carnera had slowed, not Tornado. It sickened me to think Carnera was losing after the race he had run, but it was that way.

Then it happens.

A few feet from the wire, Carnera stumbles. His long legs go into that same funny tangle which occurred once before, and I feel the break in his stride and see the effort the big animal makes to catch himself, which is a sort of lunge like a person makes when his center of gravity gets shifted too far forward, and he goes under the wire in the middle of that leg trouble and once across he goes down and Phil goes hurtling away and pandemonium breaks lose.

My eyes are filled with tears, of which I am not at all ashamed, so I am a moment or two discovering Rudy is passed out.

He is lying at my feet quite unconcerned about what is going on, and I stoop to make sure he is okay, but make no effort to arouse him.

So I stand there, sort of on guard over Rudy, and listen to shouts that Tornado is the winner, and I hear other shouts that Carnera has won, but I do nothing except keep my wet eyes on the little room way high above the finish wire where they keep the camera, for I know this is a photo finish.

I know that in a minute a guy will stick his head out of a little window and he will fasten a film to a little carrier which will go shooting down a wire into the judges' stand and they will look at the picture and then they will post the number of the winning horse.

So these people who yell and holler their opinions seem very foolish to me. They should fold their arms and calmly wait, and while they wait they should develop a philosophy which may be needed when they are through waiting for that number to go up.

It came then.

The guy up above stuck out his head. He fastened the film to the carrier and I watched it scoot down the wire to disappear in the judges' stand, and I watched the board. In just a few seconds the number popped into place. It was number one, which was Carnera's number.

I shake Rudy until he wakes up and I tell him Carnera has won and he is owner of half a hundred thousand dollar

purse, that he owns half the hide of the winter book, that Durkin owes him, and I cry like a damned baby.

Rudy shakes his head, tries feebly to smile, and says he doesn't believe it, so I hoists him to his feet and we snake our way through the mob milling around the board on which is now posted the picture.

"There," I yells so he can hear above the din. "Maybe you will believe that."

It is clear in the picture Carnera is the winner by about the thickness of his lower lip, and another thing is clear too. It was the stumble and the lunge he made to catch himself that got that lower lip ahead of Tornado, so I vow to never again mix myself into things arranged by a bigger hand than mine.

Another battle with the crowd and we get to Phil and Carnera, still on the track and both all right, and both blinking at the flash of cameras, and then I see Durkin. They grab Rudy into the picture circle and I step in front of Durkin and tap him on the shoulder.

"Make out a check for ten thousand," I tells him, "only make it for eleven thousand. You are buying back Catnip." And I shows him my fist, a very large, unlovely thing.

I have just gotten the check when Rudy comes up.

"Boy oh boy," he gushes, clapping Durkin on the back. "What a day, what a day. All right, Hank, pay me."

Durkin tries a grin which is very lame and points to the check still in my hand. Rudy looks at it, then at me, and I explained Durkin has bought back Catnip.

"Well, that's all right," he says, the Taylor grin showing at its best, "but there is another thing we ought to thank Hank for, Ed." His eyes ply back and forth between us. "Carnera, I mean. Manton sent Phil and Carnera over to us. I think we ought to buy Hank a cigar or something."

Durkin did not collapse right there, but he must have soon after. He turns the color of dirty linen and waddles away from what is causing such pain, and I feel satisfied.

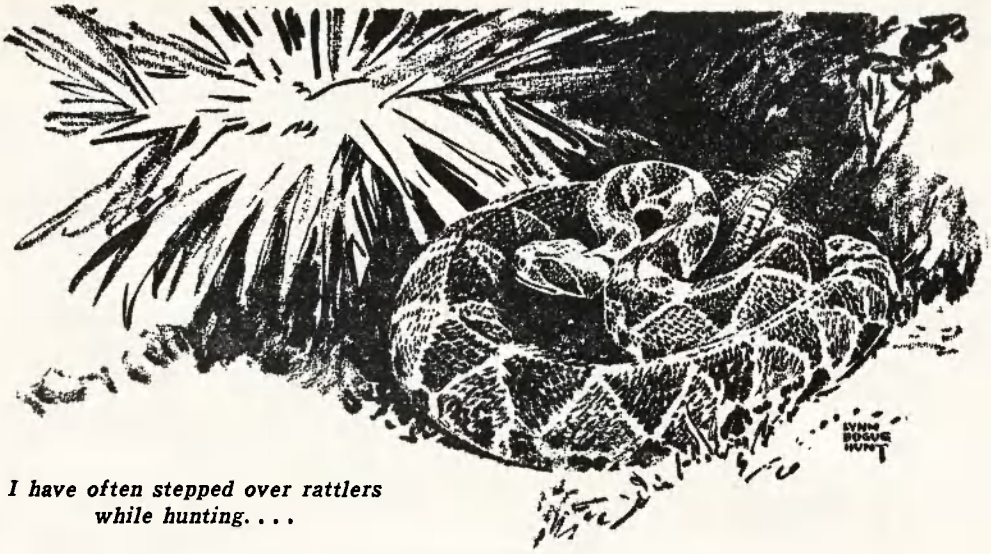
Phil left two days later, bound for Texas, and in his pocket is a draft for something over a hundred and thirty thousand dollars, his share of the winnings, which we split down the middle all the way through. He was heading for his daddy's ranch and his mind is full of fences and things which his old man had not been able to afford, and up ahead is Carnera, riding like the king he is.

When the train pulled out Rudy and I put our arms across each other's shoulder and walk toward our car, and Rudy says to me:

"I just knew Carnera was a good horse. I knew it from the very first."

"You can say that again," I agree. "But he fell down just like I told you he would. Legs can only be so long on a racehorse."

I am entitled to the last word, because I am an expert.



I have often stepped over rattlers while hunting. . . .

RATTLESNAKES I'VE MET

A FACT STORY

By JOHN B. THOMPSON

I DO NOT believe that I am very much afraid of rattlers, copperheads, or the true southern water moccasins, which are usually referred to as cottonmouths below the Mason and Dixon Line. In a way they have been kind to me, kinder than to most persons, judging from the tales I have heard about their terrifying experiences with them.

I have been bitten twice by rattlers without suffering much. Doubtless there were reasons for my lack of great suffering other than mental reasons, which I do not entirely comprehend. But I have so often stepped over rattlers while hunting — copperheads and cottonmouths, too—that I have a wholesome respect for their good nature and their tendency to give a fellow a square deal if he minds his own business.

Nor do I feel terror or great annoyance when I come upon a rattler, though I am very careful to give him what I think is his right of way.

For over fifty years I have prowled out of doors between Canada, the Ozark mountains and the Gulf. That can be made to take in considerable territory. Yet during that entire time I only knew of one person who died, or was supposed to have died from the bite of a rattler.

This was a girl nine years of age, the daughter of a swamp angel who lived far back in the cypress brakes of southeast Missouri near Black River, very close to the Arkansas line. She had attempted to drive a huge diamond back rattler off the porch with a switch. Eventually the rattler struck her on the big toe of her right foot.

When I arrived to offer what assistance I could, I felt sure no human could be of help. Very shortly the child died. It had been forced to drink, within an hour's time, a quart of local-made whiskey in which tobacco had been steeped. The combination of the remedy and the bite was too much for the child to survive.

Twice I have been bitten by large rattlers, yet I am still a fairly lively customer despite my sixty-six years. Now the queer thing about my first experience was that I did not suffer in the least, nor was I even afflicted with the slightest inflammation, and yet my mule was bitten by the same snake and died two hours after the bite. Mules are reputed never to die!

WHILE returning on my mule to camp from a quail hunt in south Georgia, I chanced a shot at long range at a single blue wing teal duck that crossed over me. To my amazement my twenty gauge brought the bird down. But it was only crippled, and ran to escape, finally scurrying into a large hollow sweet gum log.

Without thought of consequence I reached into the log with my left hand, as I heard the little duck fluttering.

Two sharp points with the force of pliers behind them sank into the end of my left thumb. For an instant I felt I was hooked on to something very heavy and very active. I pulled and drew out the head of a big rattler on my thumb. All at once the thumb was released, as the snake beheld me, but it followed on out as I began my getaway and, immediately, without coiling, the rattler struck the fetlock of my big white mule, which stood close by. Why the fool mule had also to investigate what was going on in that log I will never know.

The first thing I did was to get my gun and blow the head off the snake. It was as large as any Florida rattler I had ever seen. Badly frightened, I cut the wound and sucked it for several minutes. For a while blood continued to ooze from the wound, but I experienced no other pain than that caused by the cutting process.

When I arrived at a turpentine camp I was mighty nervous, although my hand had not swollen. That mule's leg, however, had swollen to unseemly proportions.

Finally the mule shuffled off its mortal coil, notwithstanding all our ministrations.

Authorities on the subject of snakes tell me frankly that in my case, the rattler did not run true to form. Its lethal apparatus did not function properly on me, but it sure got to going right when it hit that mule. Maybe hitting at the crippled teal might have, for a second or two, bothered the working of the fangs and sac.

My second experience did not treat me so kindly. While pulling tall swamp grass for my bed one night close to Cane Creek, near Nellyville, Mo., a very large rattler struck me on the same thumb which had been bitten previously. I must have barely taken hold of that big fellow's head when I pulled at a clump of grass. My thumb felt as though someone had suddenly driven a coarse needle through it with a hammer. I got only a glimpse of the big rattler as he moved on into thicker grass, where he disappeared.

The local doctor was available within fifteen minutes, as a Negro who was attending to my camp hooked up the team and drove me to his place of business in a jiffy. His office was in an unlicensed saloon which he conducted, and the doctor was usually on the verge of intoxication. Strangely he refused to give me any whiskey, the onlookers declaring that he wanted it all for himself.

He lanced the wound crosswise, then squeezed it continually, after applying two bandages on my upper arm as tight as they could be tied. To these he attended most of the evening and that night.

He administered nothing internally, but toward morning gave me a shot of morphine which made me sleep until ten o'clock. During the night I suffered some pain in the arm and hand very much like that caused by blood poisoning. Then there were intervening spells of numbness all over the arm, even to my shoulder blades.

After I woke up next day all pain had ceased, and none returned. My arm and hand were somewhat swollen, and for several days the skin looked very much like that of the breast of a baked chicken —dry, crisp, and somewhat blue near the wound. Except for being plenty nervous for several hours, I had no more ill effects.

Thereafter rattlers and water moccasins were always extremely courteous to me, though I have heard so many stories about them that, if true, the number of people they have killed would have taxed the limits of pretty good sized cemeteries. I have walked over them several times; one or two have brushed my hunting boots as I passed by without flaring up.

One year when I was hunting near Pretoria, Ga., the weather turned exceedingly warm after three days of steady rainfall. Cottonmouths seemed to be everywhere, driven to the open by the floods. I stepped across them time and again before I knew it and was only aware of it when my companion shouted at me. On two different occasions I actually walked across diamond back rattlers, and would never have known it had I not heard them moving in haste through the short sedge grass.

ONCE when I accidentally invaded the breeding lair of thousands of cottonmouths, I certainly got a real lasting scare. It happened shortly before the migratory bird law went into effect. I was wading through the heavily timbered swamps in the southeastern part of Missouri. I wanted to arrive at an opening in the timber called Open Pond, because all day long a hunter stood an excellent chance of having shots at passing mallards. While crossing a very shallow bay in the backwater, I suddenly realized I was in the midst of thousands of water moccasins. They were wrapped around each other in sickening thick bunches. Afterwards I was told that they were breeding.

Everywhere I looked for a safe passage to land I was confronted by the appearance of big rusty looking fellows. They made every haste to get away from where I was, rushing for deeper water, after they uncoiled from their mates. Some touched my wading boots as they wriggled away for other parts.

For a long time I stood in one place almost frozen with trepidation, and only gained courage when I felt positive that all the cottonmouths had departed from that reddish colored bit of backwater.

One particularly large rattler caused me almost to die from fright, granting such a thing can occur. It happened about two miles west from where I encountered the breeding of moccasins. An old native had promised to pick me up at a certain place along the road to Bethel's bridge which spanned Little Black River, after I returned from killing a few ducks. I reached the designated meeting point in advance of the time we had agreed upon. It was during a rather hot dry fall in the year 1910. I was very tired from wading in the swamp. Finally I lay on my back on a bunch of Johnson grass growing close to the road. There was a small log there that I used for a head rest. Very soon I fell asleep.

Before long I began to feel something heavy on my chest. I opened my eyes, both of my hands being under my head. Instantly I beheld impending death. A large swamp rattler was commencing to move across the lower part of my chest. This was the only time in my life I have ever tried to keep from breathing.

I do not think I could have made an effort to move had I wished to do so. Fear gripped me too much for me to attempt the slightest act to save myself. When the rattler's head rested about halfway up my chest, the snake stopped and regarded me curiously with round, expressionless black eyes.

In my state of fright its head seemed to be of enormous size and poised for a wicked thrust. Yet I sensed nothing loathsome about the rattler, nor was there the strange odor which most people report after they have been in close contact with snakes. Nor was there the least hissing noise to be heard during any of its movements. The only sound it made was that of its scaly body scraping my canvas coat and vest.

Evidently things about me and my visage did not disturb its serenity, for once more it resumed its leisurely traverse, at the start jerking itself together as if it were in linked segments like a long train of boxcars until it made headway. Gradually it began to move faster, though its weight seemed most oppressive. It was the largest swamp rattler I had ever seen, and the time it occupied crossing my chest seemed an eternity.

Shortly the native met me. "You'ns sick?" he asked. "Pale as a sheet."

I told him of my harrowing experience.

The Ozarker trailed it through the dust in the road, then into the woods, but he never got sight of it.

"From the marks hit made in the dust, hit sure must have been a monster!" he declared.

"You're out, old man. I'm in!"

TIMBER'S FALLIN'

By WALT MOREY

CALKED boots, woollen shirts and overalls don't belong in front offices, in chrome and leather chairs. The man knew it, yet sat there, twisting the weather-battered hat in his hands.

Chris Bond's thirty years of logging showed in his white hair, his stooped shoulders, in the thoughts that churned deep within him. Maybe they were going to give his camp to the Kid, tie a can to him. Maybe after today he'd be trading his calks for carpet slippers, doing whatever woods bosses do when they get too old to deliver.

The door swept open. The sounds from the outer office spilled into the room with the incoming man. He was small, sleek, in business gray. He snapped a short, "Hello, Bond," and sat down at the desk.

Something, Chris didn't recognize it at first, wrapped cold fingers around his heart.

Heller had been after his scalp for a year. Since the time he'd been promoted to field manager and had gone to camp four to show Chris how to log. He'd told him off and Heller had left. But in the smile he favored him with now Chris knew he hadn't forgotten.

Heller said: "I suppose you're wondering why I called you in? You just missed the Kid."

It was coming now. Chris felt the muscles tighten across his stomach. For the moment he forgot his dislike of the man. He nodded, "Yeah." His voice was like the rustle of dry straw.

"We bid against Timberline on a thirty million foot order," Heller said. "They outbid us, but we got it."

Chris said, "Swell!" He tried to sound enthusiastic, but he knew he hadn't been called in for that.

"There's a choker in it. We had to guarantee delivery in thirty days or forfeit—well, so much it'll put a padlock on the front gate. You and the Kid'll have to get out most of the footage. You've got the biggest camps. You'll each have twenty-five more men in the morning."

Chris felt that he could breathe again. "It'll take some humping, but we'll make it. I'll need some new gear. That old stuff won't stand the hell it'll have to take."

Heller was smiling again, a cat-playing-with-a-mouse smile. His next words were like smashing fists that caught Chris with both hands down and stepping in.

"Not a chance, Bond. We're closing out one of those camps the end of this cut. They're too close together to keep both running."

Chris just sat there. Finally he said, "Oh!" The next words were pried from his dry throat. "Which camp stays?"

"We're leaving that to you and the Kid. The one that puts the most footage in the pond."

Chris Bond rose stiffly, planted knotty fists on the desk top, glared into Heller's pale eyes.

"Making a name for yourself. Getting a race on, flooding the pond with cheap logs. Your way of tying a can to me. You know damned well I can't keep up with the Kid with that pile of rusty junk. You know I'd rather fight anyone else in the world than him. I ought to plant these calks in your fat face, you pot-bellied, swivel-chair lumberjack."

Heller flushed, kept smiling. "Very touching sentiment, after what you've done to the Kid. Too bad he doesn't feel that way about it."

"Why don't you wait till the finish?" Chris said quickly. "Pick the best men from both camps, the older men—"

Heller said: "If you don't like the set-up you don't have to stay. I can get younger men, good men. Blacky Schuler would be glad to take it."

Chris straightened. "You'll get your footage, punk. But don't ever stick your nose in the woods." He whirled, calks ripping a palm-sized patch in the smooth floor, stalked out.

He swung towards Andy's Front Street Bar. The Kid would be there if he was still in town. He hadn't seen him in a year; they hadn't spoken in six. It was time they had a talk.

SIX years. A long time to remember, for hate to live like a searing flame. An age-long time, back to the day when Red, a choker setter, hit him for a job with his kid at his elbow because he hadn't any place to leave him. A long-boned kid whose wide eyes popped at sight of his first logging camp.

It wasn't a week before he was at Chris' heels like a pup. "Mr. Chris, what's that for? Why did they do that? What do they use this for?" At first he didn't like it. But this one was different. He was a lumberjack's kid. There was sawdust in his blood. The *zing zing* of a cross-cut, the *clop clop* of a double-bitt was music. The whole camp jokingly called him Chris' Kid.

Camp four was his college, Chris Bond his teacher. Red would shake his pipe at the Kid, who sat wide-eyed at night, drinking it in, and say, "Yuh do like Chris says, always. He's th' best damn loggin' man on Wilson River." His diploma? A pair of calked boots that Chris bought him, and a job—whistle punk of camp four.

At nineteen he was falling; could swing an ax with the best and knew all Chris Bond had learned in twenty-five years. A swell kid.

Then it happened, with brutal suddenness, and the story never died. Red was setting choker; Swede, the hook tender, stood in a clearing, passing signals to the whistle punk on a jutting rock.

At the signal the log went off fast,

ripped through loose limbs, brush, cracked solidly into a six foot stump. The lines in the whistle punks hands attached to the whistle, jerked. Back at the donkey the whistle squalled:

"Whaheee!"

The cable slacked off. But Chris, standing behind the log, saw that a single jerk would bounce it loose. He signaled to take it away.

Red was running forward to reset the chokers when the whistle blasted again:

"Whaheee!—whaheee!" and the cable whipped taut. Chris yelled. The sound was smothered in the thundering crash of a tree. The log quivered, lay solid. The cable dug into the ground. stretched, held for a year-long second. Then, with a rifle-sharp report, it tore out the choker eyes.

Red stopped, started to turn, run. He seemed to stand there, a horrified statue caught in the middle of a lunging stride. Then the cable, slashing the air like a hundred foot broadsword, caught him.

He screamed once, thin, piercing, as the cable cut him half in two, flung him fifty feet into the brush without a whole rib in his body.

The ashen-faced whistle punk froze to the lines, tried to tear them out of the whistle.

"Whaheee! — Whaheee! — Whahee! — Whahee!" The blasts, ripping through the woods, brought the whole falling crew in a swarm.

The Kid was among the first. He just stood there, ax in hand, and looked.

Someone had snatched the lines from the punk's hands. Silence dropped over the clearing like a shroud. Silence, broken finally by Swede's low voice.

"She'd stopped. Red was goin' up to change settin' when Chris give th' punk th' signal. Red was watchin' me. He didn't have a chance."

The Kid's head snapped up. His face was pain-twisted, he fought back the tears.

Words formed in Chris Bond's mouth. He hadn't seen Swede because he'd stepped behind a scrub tree where he was still visible to the whistle punk and Red. Red had been in the clear, would have been all right, but the punk had been slow relaying the signal. And the knot on the stump that held the log solid was hidden until the cable broke and the log rolled away. The words were there. But the sudden flaming hate in the Kid's eyes, his half yelled, half sobbed, "That was murder! Murder! You killed him!" jammed them back in his throat.

The Kid was on him like a madman, swinging the ax in a gleaming arc. Chris caught it by the helve with one hand, ripped the other to the Kid's jaw. He held his sagging body from falling, slapped him out of it, tried to talk to him. It was no use.

Two fallers held him while Chris walked away. He heard his voice long after he was out of sight: "Murderer! Butcher!"

They brought Red in an hour later. The next day he went down on the logging train, six feet of bundle wrapped in a canvas tarp, and the Kid went with him.

For a year now he'd been crowding hard on Chris' heels—on the things Chris had taught him. The youngest woods boss on Wilson River.

HE SWUNG into Andy's, pushing the ancient doors wide. Smoke lay in the room thick as river fog. A half dozen lumberjacks lounged at the long bar. At the far end, alone, scowling into a half empty glass, was the Kid. He looked the same. Tall, big-boned, with tight lines around his mouth, a good square chin.

Chris walked straight to him, felt eyes fasten on him as he did.

"Listen, Kid," he said in a low voice. "I want to talk to you."

The Kid looked up, chilled, black eyes locked with Chris'. For seconds they held. The sudden silence in the room thundered against his ears.

Then the Kid's lips twisted in a sneering smile, muscles bunched along his jaw. "Gettin' cold feet, eh?" His voice drilled to every corner of the room.

Chris said patiently, "There's no sense in our trying to run each other out of Wilson River, riding our crews and ourselves to death. It's a stunt. Heller's the guy who'll collect."

The Kid spun a coin on the counter. "I'm th' guy collectin'." He walked away into the adjoining card room.

Chris called for a drink, then stood there looking into the mirror of the back-bar, at his own white head, stooped shoulders.

It was minutes later. The room was noisy again, the full glass of beer still sat there, when he heard the loud voice a few feet away.

"So this's how she stands. Th' comp'ny's closin' out one of th' camps, an' she lays 'tween the Kid an' the Ol' Man. Th' Kid's got the best cuttin', an' he's way the best logger. The loser's out. An' f'r an ol' guy like him—"

Chris Bond turned, recognized the thick wrestler's shoulders, the bull neck, as the fellow drew a grimy finger across his throat. "Is that a payoff or ain't it?"

Blacky Schuler turned then, scowling. "If it ain't th' Ol' Man hisself. Hear yuh're quittin' loggin'?"

"You can hear anything, Windy," Chris said.

Schuler moved suddenly away from the bar, bullet head sunk between his shoulders. Then he grinned sourly. "Be a crime to sock an ol' man."

"Or to spank a mouthy louse," Chris dropped a dime on the bar, walked out.

But Blacky Schuler's words dogged him, hammered into his brain: "The loser's out. An' f'r an ol' guy like that. . . ." The Kid would be out for blood. There was nothing left to do but fight. Schuler was right.

THE next morning the twenty-five men came in on a flat-car with the logging engine. An hour later they were in the woods.

That night Chris saw to it that they fed big. It was going to be tough cutting the next thirty days. Afterwards, he stood at the end of one of the tables, with tobacco smoke banking thick around him, and told them about the thirty million feet, the race Heller had forced on them, the gang that would stay.

"The Kid's got a tough outfit at camp three," he said. "But no tougher than we are. Most of us have worked together a long time. We know what to do, and what we can do. It's up to you boys whether we stay or not."

A barrel-chested faller laughed: "Th' Kid beat us? Th' oldest outfit in these woods? Like hell! We'll have timber fallin' so thick it'll look like a field of grain goin' down."

And they did. For a week the camp worked smooth as a machine bathed in oil. Every morning a string of flats, logs piled high, sat braked on the down grade. And the three falling crews broke their own records day after day.

Twice reports on the two camps cuts came up with the logging engine. The Kid led—not much, a few thousand feet for the week. An hour, two hours cut, but leading. And a thousand feet was good as a million at the final tally.

Then trouble straddled Chris Bond's sagging shoulders.

A rock-jawed canyon slashed two-thirds of the job, cut cleanly between the railroad, the loading platform and the woods.

A highline bridged the gap. An inch and a half steel cable, that ran from the donkey drum beside the loading platform through double blocks to the top of a ninety foot spar tree, across the canyon to an anchor on the other side.

The logs rode that line, caught in the middle by giant hooks fastened to a two-wheeled dolly. Rusty, short, dark, donkey puncher snaked them over; a thousand feet across, five hundred to the canyon floor, and dropped them feather light on the loading platform.

Chris was standing beside Rusty when it happened.

One was halfway across, coming fast. A giant of a log, that floated sluggishly against the bottom of the clouds, made the guy lines creak, stretch, and put a bow in the highline.

Rusty had just muttered: "That's th' granddaddy of 'em all," when the whip-sharp snap came from over their heads, and the highline sagged in the middle, kept on sagging. The donkey engine raced, clattered. Chris saw the broken end of the highline go out of the bull-blocks at the top of the pole at a tearing rattle. Then tons of log spilled out of the sky, dragged the highline into

the canyon with it, splitting like an over-ripe melon.

The sudden release of pressure whipped the spar pole back against the guy lines, snapped it off with a tearing crack. Fifty feet of spar pole, gear and tangled guy lines crashed to the ground.

It didn't stop the fallers, but the cut of two crews lay in the woods for three days, while the Kid's footage rocketed up and they topped a new spar tree, stretched new cable. Three days of back-breaking, man-killing work, with wide shoulders taking the place of machines. Then the highline was going again. That night Heller called the time office.

"What the hell's gone wrong up there?" he yelled. "Three days and not enough from camp four in the pond to build a bonfire."

Chris gave it to him in a blunt, tired voice. "I told you I needed new gear. But we've been cutting. We're all set to go now."

"I don't want alibis," Heller yelled. "I want logs in the pond. If you're getting too old to turn the trick, I'll get a man up there who can."

Chris Bond's voice was suddenly flat, ugly. "You'll get your footage. But send anybody up here and he'll go back on the logging train in chunks." He banged up the receiver.

THEY worked two days. Then black clouds churned out of the horizon, boiled across the sky, and fell on the bunkhouse roof. Rain came—countless gallons of it, in a gusty, wind-whipped roar that sent the tree tops reeling across the low-hung sky.

It lasted a day and a night. When it quit two sections of pipe that ran from the donkey boiler to the creek a quarter mile away were washed out. They were down another day.

They started at dawn. It was dark when they finished, and again wide backs did the work.

The time keeper met Chris outside the office, gave him the bad news fast. "Heller sent a man up this morning to take your place. He's already taken over and put in his first day."

Chris Bond's tired shoulders lifted a little. "Who'd he send?"

"Blacky Schuler."

"So that's the way Heller wants to play." He strode to the cook shack door, flung it open, took two long steps into the low, crowded room. Halfway down Blacky Schuler looked up, scowled, pushed to his feet.

Chris Bond felt a score of eyes on him. The sounds of eating stopped. Then his voice chopped into sudden silence. "I'll wait for you at the office." He was turning away when Schuler's voice stopped him.

"Don't bother. I won't be there. You're out, ol' man. I'm in. That settles it."

"Not quite," Chris said stiffly. "I'm not leaving. You can go back on the log train in the morning."

Schuler moved away from the table, scowling, lips flat against strong white teeth. "Th' mistake's yours. You're the one's goin' out. I'd just as soon it was feet first." He stood there, legs braced, bullet head sunk between thick shoulders.

Chris hadn't fought in ten years, and his arms and back ached from long hours of work. But he found himself stepping forward, skinning out of his shirt, watching Schuler do the same, watching the play of muscle across his bare arms and shoulders.

He was vaguely conscious of tables, benches being pushed against the wall, of tense faces ringing them in. Then he faced Blacky Schuler across ten feet of bare planking.

Schuler padded forward, calks snicking into the floor. His left fist shot out, landed on the side of Chris' jaw, snapped his head back. The right whipped through behind it flush on his mouth, drove his lips into his teeth.

Chris swung savagely, missed, as Schuler bobbed away. He spat out blood, moved in, took another jarring smash to the mouth. He swung, missed.

Schuler panted, "Feet first it is," leaped aside and his right foot lashed up at Chris' groin. Chris twisted away. The calks slit his overalls like razors from hip to knee.

He leaped in then, fingers crooked like

peavie prongs. His left hand flashed out, clamped on Schuler's corded neck, jerked him close. A right smashed into his face like a sledgehammer, flung Schuler backwards, crashing through the ring of men into the wall. It would have been over then if Chris had his old-time speed. But by the time he leaped in, Schuler, half groggy, was ready. Again his foot lashed up, drove into Chris' charging chest like a spike-tipped battering ram. He stumbled backwards, snatched at Schuler's hand as he fell, dragged him down with him.

Then his own feet swept up. There was a sickening rip of cloth, and Schuler sailed over his head, sprawled with a thump on the floor.

Schuler rolled like a cat, gained his feet while Chris was still on his knees. He leaped in the air, straight at Chris' face. Chris saw the silvery flash of calks, the snarl of rage. Then he lunged upward at Schuler's ankles, missed with one hand, caught with the other, jerked. He felt a searing pain, as if half his face had been ripped away, and Schuler's free foot raked by. Then he crashed him to the floor, rolled over. Both big hands clamped on the ankle, twisted.

Schuler shrieked, a single piercing sound of pure pain. There was a sudden snap, like a dry limb breaking, and he writhed on the floor, foot twisted at a crazy angle.

Chris swayed to his feet, looked at the ring of blurred faces around him.

"That's that," he croaked. The fog began thinning before his eyes. "I'm still boss here. Maybe I won't be at the end of this cut. But till then anybody that don't want to log for me can go down with this guy in the morning." He turned, steadily, walked out of the room.

OUTSIDE the time keeper caught his arm: "Boss, f'r God's sake, use your head! The job ain't worth that much. Heller'll blacklist you from coast to coast for this. Let Blacky have it. There's other outfits."

Chris Bond was thinking of Schuler's words: "Th' loser's out, an' for an ol' guy like that—" He shook his head. "Can't. Got to fight it out right here. If we get the order out, beat the Kid, Heller can't blacklist me."

The time keeper groaned: "The Kid's three hundred thousand feet ahead and going like a forest fire."

Chris nodded, moved away in the darkness.

In his own cabin he slumped in a chair, too tired to wash the blood from his face. The cook shack door banged sharply; there was the sound of voices dying away.

Then the "Pop—pop," of a speeder, the clack of wheels on rails broke the silence.

A minute later there was the quick thud of feet on the step, and the door slammed inward. The Kid stepped into the room, kicked the door closed. The lines of his face were set in stiff planes.

Chris said: "Kid! What're you doing here?"

He laughed, a brittle, ugly sound, began jerking off the mackinaw. "You wouldn't know—not much. I caught your friend plantin' a charge of dynamite under my tressle. You cheap louse."

Chris pulled himself out of the chair: "Still jumping at conclusions. You poor fool. Tidewater did that. They want that order. They'll get it if we don't deliver. They knew you'd be hot-headed enough to figure this way."

"You don't talk your way out of this." The Kid flung the mackinaw down. "I'm gonna do somethin' I should'a done six years ago." He stepped close. "Get those hands up—quick." He ripped out suddenly at Chris' jaw, every ounce of lean-muscled body behind the punch.

Chris staggered back, knees crumbling, caught at the chair back with both hands. He shook his head, straightened. A red stream opened where the calks had raked, oozed down along his chin. He walked close to the Kid, arms hanging loose at his sides.

"Go ahead, Kid, if it helps any. This can't hurt as much as the other did."

The Kid stood rigid an instant, fists clenched, glaring at him from hot eyes. Then his hands dropped. The stiffness went out of his body.

"I don't need dynamite to beat you," Chris said. "I'm a logger." He laughed suddenly, harsh, and a fierce gust of

anger rode his voice. "I'm damn glad Red's not here to see what cull timber his kid is. Now, if you're through with your act, get to hell out of here before I forget I bought you your first pair of calks."

The Kid stood there. His lips opened, but no words came. Then he turned, caught up the mackinaw and left.

THE next morning two men helped Schuler aboard the logging train. He went down alone.

Then they went to work. For the first time in years Chris Bond began driving his crews. The thunder of falling trees made a steady roar in the woods, and logs crowded each other across the highline. Loaded flats stretched along the siding, every ounce the logging engine could pull. Their footage jumped by thousands, shattered all previous records, and the crews dragged in at night, whipped to a man.

Then Heller yelled over the camp phone: "Damn you, Bond. You're done, through, win or lose. But lose and I'll blacklist you with every damn camp in the country."

Fourteen days to go—three hundred thousand feet behind. Chris knew how the Kid at camp three must be pouring it on. Fourteen days, and thirty years of logging hanging in the balance.

There was no laughter in the bunkhouse now, no cards. They ate, fell into bed, slept.

Chris lost track of time. The days telescoped one into another with sleepless, fear-haunted nights between.

Ten days to go. Two hundred thousand feet behind—

Chris reached back through thirty years of experience, used it all. The tricks he'd learned, the short cuts—anything to save a minute, to get another thousand feet on the cars. He fought, bullied, wheedled his crews.

The time-keeper said: "It can't go on, Boss. The men won't stand it. Something'll break. It can't last."

But it did.

Seven days to go. A hundred and fifty thousand behind—

"We're catching up," Chris croaked. "We'll make it, if we can keep the pace." He left it like that, hanging there in the time office.

Chris knew why he had to keep the pace. The Kid's crew was new compared to his. They'd give a killing day's work, but not the kind his own gang would. The strain showed in every man's face at camp four, and a knife-blade ache had stabbed into his own back. An ache that never left, that spread like creeping numbness to shoulder, arms and legs.

Three days to go. Ten thousand behind. They'd catch the Kid the next day, pass him. But they didn't. The Kid's crew came through with a big cut. They drove into the last day five thousand behind.

Chris talked to the crews that night. "This is it. We're behind, not much. So let's show 'em real logging the last day's cut."

They did. Even Chris swung an ax part of the time, and the highline fairly smoked.

When they dragged past the hot, steaming donkey that night Chris know no better cut had ever come out of the woods.

The time-keeper said: "The engine's coming up tonight. Heller wants it all in the pond by morning. Man! What a cut. How'll the Kid beat this one?"

Chris flopped in a chair. How long had this been going on. How long? Pain had numbed his body ages ago. Now it felt like the muscles had lost all strength, gone flabby, sagged away from shoulder bones and legs. He wondered if he'd ever feel rested again, ever sleep without waking suddenly to lie there staring into the dark, feeling the days slip away, the cold ball of fear in his stomach.

An hour later dusk was creeping over the camp when the logging engine chugged up the grade.

The engineer dug thick fingers through his hair. "Cripes! What a cut. I can't take it all this trip. I'll have to come back." He slapped Chris' shoulder. "Well, guy, guess she's all yours. Th' Kid didn't have nothin' like this. One damn good load, that's all. You've got a load an' a half." He climbed aboard the engine.

"I'll be back for the winnin' half about midnight."

Chris just stood there, licked dry lips, couldn't think of a word to say.

The winning load! He looked at it long after the engine had gone. He might lose his job, but he couldn't be blacklisted. When he went into the cook shack, for the first time in days laughter rang along the tables.

Rusty said: "That lets th' Kid out. Kinda tough, at that. First big job, and he gets mopped. Wonder what he'll do now?"

Chris thought of that when he got back to his cabin. Of the Kid tagging his heels—Chris' kid. His first calked boots, first job. Red, a six-foot bundle wrapped in a canvas tarp. He couldn't blame the Kid. You say a lot of things when you're nineteen, when your heart's torn out by the roots.

He knew, suddenly, what he was going to do. He stood a long time, the darkness of the room thick around him, and tried not to think. Then he went out.

The spar pole stabbed into the velvet night. The highline, a thin thread brushing the stars, was lost somewhere over the yawning black depths of the canyon. He moved towards the loaded train; it looked like a giant snake against the ebony backdrop of trees.

He climbed the lead car, put both big hands on the brake wheel. He didn't move for a full minute. Then he began to pull, to loosen it. He went to the next, the next. There was only the faint click of metal as he worked.

The load shivered once, inched forward. "This one!" He twisted again. Then, "This one!" The train jarred again, began moving. He jumped off, stood watching.

The wheels made whispering sounds as the cars moved steadily, gathered speed. A whisper that rose to a rumble, swelled to a roar as they hit the down-grade, hurtled forward into the night.

The bunkhouse door shot open, vomited men in a babbling, crowding stream. Then they saw the empty tracks. Their noise stopped. There was only the sound of the runaway train thundering down the grade.

The crash exploded back up the mountain in rolling, hammering waves of sound that filled the night with a thousand drumming echoes. It seemed to last forever, then, suddenly, it was gone.

The time-keeper said in a hushed, queer voice, "She didn't make the bend. Went clean to the bottom of the canyon, the whole damn train."

Chris Bond felt eyes on him, felt the unasked question like a weight slammed against him.

"Guess the load was too big for the brakes," he said, and turned away.

THE Kid was just going into Heller's office when Chris Bond opened the outer door, threaded between the desks.

Heller wasn't calm this morning. He jerked to his feet behind the desk, face red, and shook a fat finger under Chris' nose.

"I told you what I'd do," he yelled, and Chris didn't bother to sit down. "A hundred thousand feet of good lumber, a dozen flats. Gone, gone! Well, let's hear it."

Chris heard the Kid turn quickly, felt his eyes on him as he looked straight at Heller.

"Brakes didn't hold. Those things have happened before," he said.

Heller shouted: "If I could prove what I know— Damn you, Bond. You'd never get another job."

He swung on the Kid: "And you, tieing the safety valve down on the donkey —a new donkey—burning the bearings out yesterday noon. What's your alibi?"

When Chris swung his head to look, the Kid was grinning, the first real grin he'd seen in years. "I could get more speed that way. It was a rush job. How'd I know she'd burn out?"

"Any jack would know that," Heller shouted. "I might have known you two'd double-cross me." He waved his arms. "You're done. Both of you. Get out and stay out."

They left with Chris mumbling, "There's other camps, Kid."

"Sure."

They went down the street, into Andy's, sat shoulder to shoulder. It was the Kid's two fingers that lifted, his quarter that spun across the bar.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

THIS time there's room at Camp-Fire only to introduce new members of the Writers' Brigade, and publish the exploits of that dog among men, Yukon Jake the Killer. Some good letters from wandering comrades will have to wait for a later appearance, and now we'll get on with the introductions.

WALT MOREY, of "Timber's Fallin'", writes from Portland, Oregon:

Sawdust is in my blood. It couldn't be otherwise when I was born in the Olympic Mountains, the heart of the timber belt. I began school in those hills where I spent three years in a single grade and didn't learn the subjects. But I could spot a logger a mile away, and my one ambition was to own a pair of tin pants that cracked when I walked and some boots with calks that snicked good and loud.

I worried along in first one school and another. But there was nothing interesting there. Usually the teachers didn't like me—and it was mutual. Finally we moved to Montana where we spent four years. There the teachers and I both took a licking. From there to northern Canada, where it's really cold. Where the rivers freeze to the very bottom—and then the bottom freezes.

A year later we were again in the timber belt, in Oregon. The teachers were tired by this time and slid me into high school, hoping, but knowing better.

Long, skinny, and with ribs that stuck out I insisted on playing football. I did for two years. Then one day they packed me off the field with what the Doc termed a broken neck. But I finally did graduate. Rather, there was an extra sheep skin left over and they handed it to me.

Then it was business college, more money wasted and—no sheep skin. From there I went to the mills. Maybe it was the wages I wanted. Maybe it was the sawdust inside me that dragged me there.

My first job was working in a veneer plant where logs as much as eight feet in diameter are shaved into long paper-thin sheets much as you'd peel an apple. From that job I went back to the sawmills, to the clean smell of fresh-cut lumber; to the roaring machines that made men talk in sign language.

It was there I first began writing, eleven years ago at the age of twenty. I wrote about the mill, of course, and the men who worked there. That novel has never been published though I did re-write it fourteen times and completely wore out a typewriter.

Somewhere along there I became interested in boxing. It came quite natural. They even said I had ability. And for a time I had fleeting dreams of a crown, roped rings, and howling mobs. After a lot of fists in all the wrong places at the right time I began thinking of that typewriter gathering dust in the attic. It was a pleasure to dig it out.

And this time I wrote about the woods. Those green stands that march endlessly across the hills, and the men that walk there.

Things happened up there. The bunk house walls are aged with stories, stories like Johnny Dale's Dutch and Whitey's. There I go. Now I'll have to tell 'em.

Johnny and Dutch were parked on a steep, open hillside watching the logs being dragged across by the donkey. One got away, a big one, six feet through and fifty long, and came charging down hill on Dutch like a wild thing alive. It didn't look like any splinter to Dutch standing squarely in its path and no time to jump. He dropped flat on his face in a slight depression. That log went squarely over him, missed him, not much because it almost tore the shirt from his back, and went on. Johnny, out of the log's path, saw Dutch raise his head all smeared with mud and roots. He laughed. Maybe Dutch did look funny; maybe Johnny Dale laughed from sheer relief. Either way it was his last. One end of the log hit something, a boulder, a hidden stump, and swung it straight towards Johnny. There was just time for three jumps before it caught him. What that log was cheated of doing to Dutch it more than made up for on Johnny.

Whitey was a topper. A highclimber whose job it was to top trees for spar poles, to set blocks, rigging, and get the highline going. A sweet job. Working from seventy to a hundred-and-fifty feet in the air where even a low breeze gives the top a sway of from eight to twenty feet. Think of using an ax up there, and a crosscut saw. There's nothing between you and the ground but air.

Think of cutting through two feet of top with the break only inches away from your face when it falls. Those tops have been known to kick back as they go, and there's no ducking up there. A tough way to earn your vittles. But those devils get fat on it.

Anyway, Whitey had topped a big one. A hundred-and-ten feet up she stretched and he looked like an ant against the sky. He set blocks, rigging, stretched guy lines. He'd almost worn a trail to the top of that pole before he signaled the donkey puncher to take up the slack in the line.

The line never went tight. A third of it was still on the ground when, dragging guy wires, highline, and all the rigging, the pole crashed full length. Whitey just stood there, open mouthed, and watched it. It missed him a bare ten feet.

Old loggers in camp said they'd never seen or heard of such a thing. Underneath that tree was a spring of clear, cold water that had hollowed the ground away from the roots. There was but a single six inch tap root holding fast. The spring never showed on the surface because the water sank away too fast in the loose soil. Whitey looked like a ghost. You see, on top of rigging it he'd cut it during a high wind when it was sweeping across the sky like a paint brush.

Why hadn't it come down then? Or while he was setting blocks that weigh better than a thousand pounds apiece? The chances were all against him, just as they were with Dutch. Why should Whitey and Dutch slide through when Johnny Dale looked as safe as a man in his bunk . . . . . ? I asked Red, the donkey puncher. I don't know why. There couldn't be an answer. I just asked.

But he did answer it, and that answer, I think, is the philosophy of the lumberjack: "Johnny Dale's number was up. It was his time to go over the ridge."

Is it any wonder I like logging, like to write about the two-fisted, calk-booted men who walk the timber belt?

ALLEN JAYNE, of "All the King's Horses", writes from San Francisco:

Things began for me thirty-five years ago with a "Tom Sawyer" boyhood in the Columbia River Country near Hood River, Oregon. Moved to Arizona when at least a fringe of the Old West remained. Public school there and in Los Angeles, winding up in San Francisco.

Went to sea when I was eighteen. Signed on as a "Black Gang" member of a tub of uncertain age which wallowed dismally up and down the West Coast. Began as a lowly wiper, was soon promoted (too soon) to the dubious dignity of fireman, and celebrated by almost blowing up the outfit entering San Diego Bay. They forgot to explain one very important valve.

Shipped next on a more modern steamer bound for Manila and East India. Stuttered my poor French in Saigon, was so lured by Singapore I almost missed the ship, then across the glassy Indian Ocean to Ceylon. In Calcutta visited the Temple of the Goddess Kali where I was menaced in approved storybook fashion by angered natives when I mounted the steps of the inner temple for a close-up peek at Kali herself. We sailed East then to keep a date with a typhoon in the China Sea. It was a brief but spirited encounter. Not fun.

Back in San Francisco tried a variety of jobs, studied law for two years, finally landed in the insurance business. Live now in Los Angeles, dividing time between insurance and traveling the coast for an Eastern sales contest company. Married and have two fine kids and a sensible, encouraging wife.

Always interested in writing, a chance came when I authored a series of radio transcriptions which was indifferently successful. Then tried the fiction market. At it for some years. Am sure of only one thing about writing—it's a tough business. Have no hobby except work.

AS FOR Steve Fisher, whose off-the-trail yarn "Sabotage" is his first appearance in our book, we have seen his work for years, and haven't known a writer who worked harder and made more progress. It was a surprise, a few years ago, to learn one day that a certain very excellent editor in this company wasn't working here any more because she had married this fellow! Steve Fisher writes:

"I began writing in a certain military academy in California. The head of the school failed to realize the danger. My first published novel he displayed in the school library for parents of prospective students to see. Finally he got around to reading the book. I have been told that he reached the chapter in which I described the petty politics of life in a private school, and almost passed out. He clapped his hands, and when his Filipino boy came in, the General bellowed: "Burn this book!"

I spent four years in a military academy, until another inmate and I decided we were going around the world.

We ran away, got to San Pedro, and hid out. Half the school was down there looking for us. Eventually the other kid shipped as a cadet on the Dollar Line and went to South America; I ended up in the navy, which was the best four years I ever spent.

Had duty in Honolulu on the submarines, spent a year on the USS Idaho, a battleship, and had as my best friend Pickles Heinz, then the heavyweight champion of the navy. I wrote sports columns about him, and in return he fought back the mob when I took a notion to take a pretty maiden out of a dance hall full of sailors. We had some great times, and made a lot of different ports. My last few months I spent on the USS Arctic, a beef boat that travels up and down, carrying groceries to the fleet. I was writing like the devil by this time and the editor of The Navy Magazine blurbed me "The navy's foremost fiction writer". I must have written almost sixty short stories and serials for that magazine alone and he was still publishing them two years after I left the service. They got out about three issues a month at the time.

My enlistment expired when I was twenty, and filled up with plans to be a writer, I emerged. I damn near starved. I spent two years in Los Angeles, writing every single day; but I didn't sell a line of it.

I came to New York when I was 22, got shacked up in Greenwich Village and began pouring out more wordage. In about eight months more the first check fell my way. About this time I married a very sweet and pretty editor who promptly quit her job, robbing me of a market. I kept writing. That was a little over four years ago and now we have two kids, a boy and a girl, and my stories have been in almost every national magazine published. My writing idol is W. Somerset Maugham, whom I have met, and I hope ultimately, in the course of the writing years, to attain just a small measure of the richness and finish that is in Maugham's splendid prose.

THE request for the poem about the Hermit of Sharktooth Shoal set the Camp-Fire comrades to digging among their old papers and clippings. They sat down chuckling with typewriters and pens and were good enough to make copies, so many copies that we have a large folder filled, and more arrive each day.

One of them expressed misgivings—"I've treasured a copy of this poem for years, but can you or dare you print it?"

The answer to the question appears below, but we want to establish a preliminary understanding that Yukon Jake had a moral elevation that was lower than sea-level, and his Original Sin is sheer fiction and never happened in the congregation of the Keokuk church.

The ballad was written by Edward E. Paramore, Jr., while a student at Princeton when the lusty poems of Robert W. Service were appearing. It was published first in *Vanity Fair* about twenty years ago, and we have negotiated with the author for the right to print it again.

We wish to thank these readers for the copies they have sent us:

Frank Wheeler, Osborne, Kan.; Harry Strong, Dallas, Tex.; E.R.M., New York, N. Y.; Philip Hitchcock, Manchester Center, Vt.; R. E. Ware, Clemson, S. C.; Edwin Lagol,

Seattle, Wash.; H. L. MacNeil, Houlton, Me.; Joseph Shields, Auburn, N. Y.; Geo. R. Bunn, Los Angeles, Cal.; E. P. Trotter, Jr., Nashville, Tenn.; Old Man Koontz, Harrisburg, Penna.; Private O. E. Uzzel, Fort Sill, Okla.; George Lowden, Seattle, Wash.; Howard MacC. Rigler, Portland, Ore.; James Poag, Kirkland, Wash.; P. T. Ayres, Fort Worth, Tex.; Arthur G. Breed, Stockbridge, Mass.; H. B. Atkinson, Chevy Chase, Md.; Frances A. Yeandle, Rockville Centre, N. Y.; Jay Earle Miller, Chicago, Ill.; Harold A. Hendrickson, Dunellen, N. J.; Robert M. Furber, Milwaukee, Wis.; H. M. Mueller, St. Louis, Mo.; Henry F. Stubbs, San Antonio, Tex.; Glen W. Hewitt, Glens Falls, N. Y.; Paul Benton, Philadelphia, Penna.; W. H. C. Mussen, Montreal, Canada; Walter Freebody, Los Angeles, Cal.; Robert P. Pike, Mayville, Wis.; H. Cook, Riverside, Ill.; Bryce R. Dye, Lafayette, Cal.; John E. Bridge, Beckley, W. Va.; William C. Todt, San Francisco, Cal.; S. W. Barr, San Francisco, Cal.; F. V. Reagel, Jefferson City, Mo.; A. D. Maury, Mohawk, N. Y.; Robert A. Williams, Woodhaven, N. Y.; Eric F. Davis, Schofield Barracks, T. H.; C. D. Osborne, Fresno, Cal.; Glendon C. Hodson, Centralia, Ill.; R. W. Yearley, San Francisco, Cal.

THE BALLAD OF YUKON JAKE

Begging Robert W. Service's Pardon.

By Edward E. Paramore, Jr.

Oh the North Countree is a hard countree,
That mothers a bloody brood;
And its icy arms hold hidden charms
For the greedy, the sinful and lewd.
And strong men rust, from the gold and the lust
That sears the Northland soul,
But the wickedest born, from the Pole to the Horn,
Is the Hermit of Shark Tooth Shoal.

Now Jacob Kaime was the Hermit's name
In the days of his pious youth,
Ere he cast a smirch on the Baptist Church
By betraying a girl named Ruth.
But now men quake at "Yukon Jake,"
The Hermit of Shark Tooth Shoal,
For that is the name that Jacob Kaime
Is known by from Nome to the Pole.

He was just a boy and the parson's joy
(Ere he fell for the gold and the muck),
And had learned to pray, with the hogs and the hay
On a farm near Keokuk.
But a Service tale of illicit kale
And whiskey and women wild
Drained the morals clean as a soup-tureen
From this poor but honest child.
He longed for the bite of a Yukon night
And the Northern Lights' weird flicker,
Or a game of stud in the frozen mud,
And the taste of raw, red likker.
He wanted to mush along in the slush,
With a team of Husky hounds,
And to fire his gat at a beaver hat
And knock it out of bounds.

So he left his home for the hell-town, Nome,
On Alaska's ice-ribbed shores,
And he learned to curse and to drink, and worse—
Till the rum dripped from his pores,
When the boys on a spree were drinking it free
In a Malamute saloon
And Dan McGrew and his dangerous crew
Shot craps with the piebald coon;
When the Kid on his stool banged away like a fool
At a jag-time melody
And the barkeep vowed, to the hard-boiled crowd,
That he'd cree-mate Sam McGee—

Then Jacob Kaime, who had taken the name
Of Yukon Jake the Killer,
Would rake the dive with his forty-five
Till the atmosphere grew chiller.
With a sharp command he'd make 'em stand
And deliver their hard-earned dust,
Then drink the bar dry, of rum and rye,
As a Klondike bully must.
Without coming to blows he would tweak the nose
Of Dangerous Dan McGrew,
And becoming bolder, throw over his shoulder
The lady that's known as Lou.

Oh, tough as a steak was Yukon Jake—
Hardboiled as a picnic egg—
He washed his shirt in the Klondike dirt,
And he drank his rum by the keg.
In fear of their lives (or because of their wives),
He was shunned by the best of his pals,
An outcast he, from the comraderie
Of all but wild ani-mals.
So he bought him the whole of Shark Tooth Shoal,
A reef in the Bering Sea,
And he lived by himself on a sea lion's shelf
In lonely iniquity.

But, miles away, in Keokuk, Ia.,
Did a ruined maiden fight
To remove the smirch from the Baptist Church
By bringing the heathen light.
And the Elders declared that all would be squared
If she carried the holy words
From her Keokuk home to the hell-town, Nome,
To save those sinful birds.
So, two weeks later, she took a freighter
For the gold-cursed land near the Pole,
But Heaven ain't made for a lass that's betrayed—
She was wrecked on Shark Tooth Shoal!

All hands were tossed in the sea, and lost—
All but the maiden Ruth,
Who swam to the edge of the sea lion's ledge,
Where abode the love of her youth.
He was hunting a seal for his evening meal
(He handled a mean harpoon)
When he saw at his feet, not something to eat,
But a girl in a frozen swoon,
Whom he dragged to his lair by her dripping hair,
And he rubbed her knees with gin.
To his great surprise she opened her eyes
And revealed—his Original Sin.

His eight-months' beard grew stiff and weird,
And it felt like a chestnut burr,
And he swore by his gizzard—and the Arctic blizzard,—
That he'd do right by her.
But the cold sweat froze on the end of her nose
Till it gleamed like a Tecla pearl,
While her bright hair fell, like a flame from hell,
Down the back of the grateful girl.
But a hopeless rake was Yukon Jake,
The Hermit of Shark Tooth Shoal.
And the dizzy maid he rebetrayed—
And wrecked her immortal soul! . . .

Then he rowed her ashore, with a broken oar,
And he sold her to Dan McGrew
For a Husky dog and some hot egg-nog—
As rascals are wont to do.
Now ruthless Ruth is a maid uncouth,
With scarlet cheeks and lips,
And she sings rough songs to the drunken throngs
That come from the sailing ships.
For a rouge-stained kiss from this infamous miss
They will give a seal's sleek fur,
Or perhaps a sable, if they are able,—
It's much the same to her.

Oh, the North Countree is a rough countree,
That mothers a bloody brood;
And its icy arms hold hidden charms
For the greedy, the sinful and lewd.
And strong men rust, from the gold and the lust
That sears the Northland soul,
But the wickedest born from the Pole to the Horn,
Was the Hermit of Shark Tooth Shoal!

* * * *

Well, that's the poem about the Hermit of Shark Tooth Shoal—shoot if you must this old gray head. One comrade mentioned that this ballad was well known at West Point; and an old favorite there, though he didn't have the words, was "The Pennsylwania Wolunteers Went Charging Down the Walley." We mention this with some diffidence, but if it's a good poem we'd like to have the words, if it's the kind of poem we can print.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

THE laurel crown to the 1939 model of man.

Request:—I quote from a paragraph in our local paper.

> Western Europe shows strong evidence that while the size of men has increased, their strength has diminished. Armour several centuries old is too small for the modern man to squeeze into, yet the swords which these smaller men wielded readily, in some cases can scarcely be lifted, much less wielded by the larger modern man.

What is your opinion of this? I doubt it and base my doubts on experience.

I fired on the old Hocking Valley from Columbus to Toledo when we had hand-fired engines exclusively. We would take a scoop of coal weighing at least eighteen pounds and throw coal to the front of an eleven foot fire box with an easy swing from the coal pile to the tank. That is what I considered "wielding" eighteen pounds. Two handed, I admit, but a number of these swords were two handed.

Next we come to the old time glass blowers. A blow pipe was a iron tube, eight or ten feet long, with a big increase in diameter and weight at the end which dipped into the glass pot. These were wielded two-handed also, but held very close to one end and the weight of pipe and glass was like a scale beam on the other. I do not know what they weighed but they were swung in arcs and handled very easily. Next we have a sheet heater in an old time hand sheet mill. He takes a pair of twelve foot tongs and leans into a hot sheet furnace and turns up on edge a pack of sheets weighing from two to three hundred pounds. He has a certain amount of leverage on the edge of the furnace floor but still wields a good weight.

I cannot think of any operation in heavy industry performed with one hand but I believe any of these men could swing an old time sword with the best of the men they were made for. Few office men or mechanics working on light operations could handle the jobs I have mentioned without long practice, and perhaps the men who try to handle these ancient swords are not the best specimens we could pick to attempt it. I would appreciate your opinion and any weight and dimensions you might have available of these old arms. Thanking you for your past courtesy.

—Thos. B. Swann, Hamilton, Ohio.

Reply by Captain R. E. Gardner:—I know of no sword which the ancient fighting man wielded readily which was of such weight that our modern athlete or manual laborer could not handle as easily. I am familiar with the various state swords of great proportions, but these weapons were symbols

and not intended for combat. The statement that "the swords these smaller men wielded readily, in some cases can scarcely be lifted, much less wielded by the larger modern man" is not in line with the facts.

I have carefully compiled sword data from seventy-eight swords taken from the collections of Henry G. Keasbey and Archduke Eugene of Austria. The average weight of "bastard" or hand-and-a-half swords is three pounds one ounce. The average weight of two-handed swords is but seven pounds ten ounces. In the category of hammers, an eight pound sledge is a sissy size. There are hundreds of thousands of ten, twelve and fourteen pound sledges in daily use in this country and the users could be developed into men-at-arms and would compare very favorably with the old timers.

Certain other facts must be considered. Field and track records are constantly being broken. The modern standards of living as it affects diet, hygiene, sanitation and proper ventilation have had effect in producing a longer, active, life span for modern man. It is hardly consistent to state that the old timer was the stronger in the light of these facts and the admitted difference in measurements of the torso and limbs. Have you ever known a powerful thin man? Physical strength denotes the presence of powerful muscles and such strength as claimed could not be hidden within the narrow limits of existing ancient armour.

A WILD racehorse of a bird-dog that won't point—yet.

Request:—I have a few questions about an English Setter which will be two years old in June. My chief concern is the dog's not pointing. He hunts so fast that he flushes the birds. When the birds go up he runs after them. I have tried weights hanging from the collar, but they keep rubbing down to the dog's skin causing bruises and scratches.

I have been out with fellows whose dogs are trained thoroughly, but my dog will put up, or find, ten birds to their one. I have tried hunting him with another dog, but he won't stay near the dog. He will only hunt faster and scatter birds to the wind.

I have not been able to shoot a bird over him yet. Some fellows say that I feed the dog too well. He likes to chase rabbits, too, but not a serious case, yet. I would appreciate any help on these two faults. I think chasing rabbits will be serious. He loves to run.

—John Carpenter, Taunton, Mass.

Reply by "Ozark Ripley" Thompson:—The fact that your setter outfinds the other dogs which accompany him not only proves that he has great bird sense, but also that he has an excellent nose. The fact that he does not point yet is nothing out of the ordinary. Very often, with the modern bred field trial strain of English setters, the pointing instinct does not appear until the second or third year. They have such a great hunting instinct while young, that for a while it surpasses the pointing instinct and shows up before. But the pointing instinct can be observed in time. You will see the dog draw suddenly high headed to point on a bird or birds, and possibly finish the point by flushing the bird. Now is the time to steady it. Use a long lead and a force collar and snub the dog when he begins to flush or chase. Keep him for a while on a long lead, say of twenty-four or at times fifty feet until you have given him a dozen or so lessons on steadying to wind, which is the thing which makes the dog steady to point, too.

Do not pay any attention to writers or books which advise checking the dog to point while very young, say six months, or when any young dog stops on foot-scent point. Most plugs do it. Taking such advice in the past is the cause of seeing so many ground raking and false pointing dogs of the present day. If you do not check your dog, no matter how long the time may be before he shows signs of body scenting with the wind, you are going to have a great individual. You can cure the rabbit hunting trouble by killing a rabbit in front of the dog and making him carry it around his neck for a while. Only now and then does a dog require two such treatments.

If you feel you have not the time to wait on such a high strung, big going dog, or you think it is going to be too big and wide for you, you ought have no trouble in trading it for a slower close worker.

VICTOR SHAW writes: "maybe some reader has more definite info. on this lost mine."

Request:—I'd like information about a lost mine called the "White Cement Mine."

This story, which appeared in the newspaper about 1928, told of a man who had found gold somewhere in the mountain range about Denver, Col. They described it as white cement, and when assayed, the valuation was extremely high.

This man was forced to take a party of men to the location of the mine. But one night the prospector deserted the party, leaving them to shift for themselves. He appeared later in Salt Lake City with more ore, and was never seen nor heard of afterwards.

—Thomas Wentworth, Sharpsville, Pa.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—I have a vague memory of hearing about this so-called lost "White Cement" mine. I regret, however, that I cannot recall where I heard it, nor any details, including location of the deposit.

I have assembled much data on various "Lost Mines" that have been prominent in the past, but none on this one.

In thinking it over, however, I'll say that since as you say it is supposed to lie in some range near Denver, I'm rather of the opinion that the "white cement" end of it is easily explained.

Most of the vein fissures in Colorado have a soft white, or gray-white gouge matter, on one or both of the vein walls. It is usually caused by a slip along the vein fissure in the plane of the vein, which grinds the wall rock to powder. This when wet, as most such veins become natural water courses, is found in the form of talc, or whitish sticky clay.

Now, if the pay streak in the vein chanced to be on the wall where such a slip, or faulting, occurred, the talcy gouge matter would doubtless run high in that metal that made the pay streak. In this case it would be gold.

I've known of many such mines in Colorado, in various parts of that State, where the wall talc held most of the values, at least the richest values. I mined and prospected some fifteen years all over that State, by the way.

Hence, if this man who found the gold in what he might call a "white cement," which in reality was the white talcy gouge of the vein wall, that would account for the odd name as well as the fact that it was rich—always supposing that this "lost" mine is fact and not fiction, as many of them unfortunately have been, or will be.

You see, most every mining area has its lost mines, even 'way up in Alaska I ran into several; and while some of them are undoubtedly authentic, it is true that lots of them are figments of someone's imagination—or were started by crooks entirely to cause a stampede to a given region, in the interests of making money in one way or another.

A BASKETBALL guard has nuisance value.

Request:—I should like to ask a question about basketball. What is the best way to prevent your check from passing or shooting when he has the ball. I am 16 and play for high school seniors. I just missed getting on the tournament team last year and don't want to do the same this year as it will be my last in high school.

——Richard Kugler, Vernon, B. C.

Reply by Mr. Stanley Carhart:—Successful defensive basketball requires: excellent physical condition; the ability to shift from one position to another quickly; that you remember, "Never Leave Your Feet" (except to block or deflect an actual try for the basket.)

Achievement of physical perfection depends on the individual. You and your coach know best just how much or how little practice and training you need to keep fit.

Ability to shift is developed by constant practice. Get one of your team mates to make and fake shots, passes, and dribbles. You keep your eyes on the ball, your weight on the balls of your feet, using your arms, legs, and body to smother your opponent's efforts. Before you know it, you will be able to anticipate correctly the opposing player's plan and prevent its successful completion.

"*Never Leave Your Feet*" is my first rule on the defense. Faking and shifting on the attack is the offensive player's best weapon to obtain an open shot or pass.

Many young players leave their feet on every apparent attempt of their opponent to set up a shot. Once in the air you cannot shift with the opposing player and he is free, if he has faked, to dribble in for an open shot.

WHERE a fisherman goes, there goes his rod.

Request:—As I am planning to take a trip to Mexico next summer, I should like some information concerning surf-fishing along its western coast.

—Lawrence M. Stump, Berkeley, Calif.

Reply by Mr. C. Blackburn Miller:—I think that you will have the pleasure of acting as a pioneer in this special line on that little known west coast. I envy you your "research."

You will probably encounter some striped bass with whose capture you are familiar. I shouldn't be surprised if you also caught several species of pompano. These fish take a small hook and one of the best baits is dough mixed in cotton and tied on the shank.

If you can find deep water near the shore there is an excellent chance of taking Totuava, which run from fifty pounds to sometimes a weight of two hundred twenty-five pounds. A small fish, such as a corbina, hooked through the back is excellent bait.

The spotted cabrilla also exist in numbers in the waters and are supposed to be one of the best food fishes in the world. They reach a weight of fifteen to twenty pounds.

Many varieties of snappers may be caught in the right season, and some, such as the "dog-snapper," reach a weight of eighty pounds and will certainly give you a fight.

DETTER watch out—there may be a law against blow-guns.

(Continued on page 127)

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, for financial backing or for employment.

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(Continued from page 123)

Request:—I'd like some information on the blow-gun. I have read your book "White Water and Black" wherein you describe this weapon and show pictures of it in action, and I wonder if you could help me obtain one of these strange weapons. Any information you can give me will be appreciated.

—James Goffery, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—A blow gun, from its very nature, is an instrument that just about never comes into the hands of dealers. Used only in the most primitive interiors, the few specimens that come out go to museums. The best contact might be, J. Araujo Companha, Manaos, Brazil. These people outfit traders who go into the interior, and some of the traders come into contact with blow gun Indians.

Still, some traders do have access. Such a one could easily enough trade in a blow gun; but the bother of lugging a long and unwieldy thing would make a prohibitive price.

Another question is, do you want a blow gun just as a collection specimen, or to play around with it for practical hunting?

If the latter, you can easily make for yourself a much better blow gun than any crude Indian craft could ever produce.

Just get a brass tube, three-eighths bore, any length up to ten feet. You will find six to eight feet ample. For additional stiffness encase it in a section of bamboo fishing pole, split down the middle and the knots cut out. For the mouthpiece there can be nothing better than that of any brass band instrument.

For darts, take ordinary sailmaker's needles, those three-cornered things; dip the eye ends in glue, wrap them with darning or knitting worsted to a thickness to fit the tube. Another missile may be clay pellets, easily squeezed to perfect size in a bullet mold.

As to the method of blowing. You cover the mouthpiece with your tongue while you get a pressure on yourself, and snap your tongue clear just at the moment of your explosive breath.

As to aim. Much the same as bow and arrow; by guess and experience. A "sight" placed at the far end of the tube helps to hold the eye. Indians usually stick on a jaguar or boar tooth.

I made a small blow gun in the form of a walking cane, using brass tube and bamboo covering. A screw cap at either end makes it entirely practical as a cane for country walks, and the needle darts are quite deadly enough to knock over squirrels and rabbits.

Go to it, and I'd like to hear what success you have with your munitions manufacture.

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ISOLATED, aloof, in a world torn apart by War, America still said, "It can't happen here." Until the day when enemy bombers droned out of the south, and the first gallant stand became a shambles and a memory, and a rich nation, too long lulled into false security, found itself fighting for its very existence against the most powerful military machine ever assembled—that's the vital, warning drama of what could happen to North America tomorrow, as visualized in General Ared White's new serial, "Attack on America."

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