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NOVEMBER 1944

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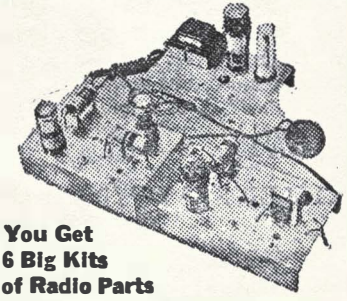

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(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 112, No. 1 for Best of New Stories

November, 1944

NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

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BE OUT ON NOVEMBER 10TH ◆ ◆ ◆

THE SERIAL

THE FACT STORY

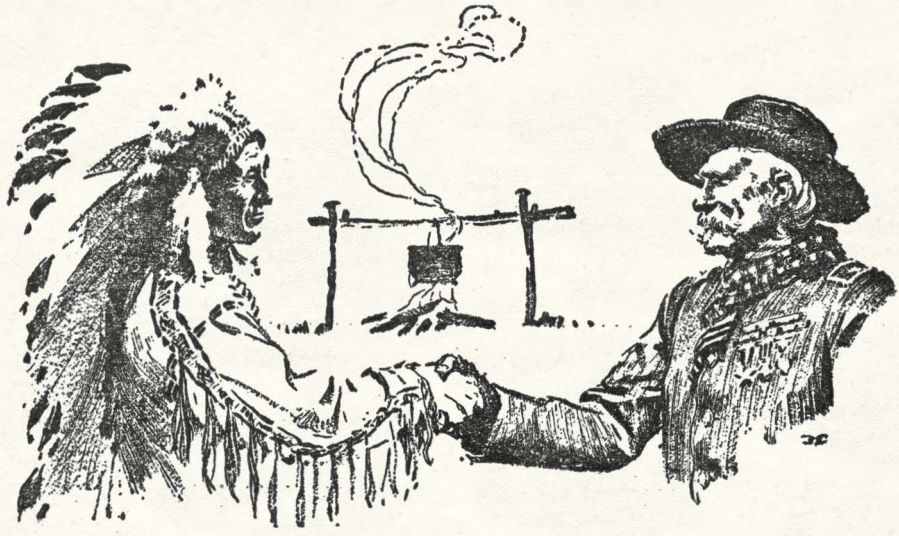
DEPARTMENTS

Cover painted for Adventure by Rafael DeSoto
Kenneth S. White, Editor

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

THE authors of "The Army Way" collaborated on the GI yarn which marks their first appearance on our contents page while they were stationed at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, for several months. Before Norman Rose got his "greetings" he was a radio writer in Hollywood. Since then he has been writing training films for the army. Corporal Len Zinberg is now in Italy with a bombardment group.

R. dela B. "RUFIJI" BARKER, the third recruit to our Writers' Brigade this month, writes from Singida, Tanganyika Territory, where he is caretaker of the Sekenke Gold Mine, closed down for the duration. Introducing himself at the *Camp-Fire* the author of "Old Ironhides" writes—

I was living in New Zealand when I joined a regiment coming to East Africa in May 1915. Learned Swahili on the boat and got jobs working with native scouts throughout East African Campaign of 1914-18 War which, in East Africa, cost 100,000 lives and more money than Boer War. Few know that.

At end of war was administrative police official out on safari much, but when the good going ended and work began to turn such into office men, resigned and hunted elephants professionally. Government made licenses tighter and put elephant control measures into hands of game rangers with native cultivation guards who shoot elephants daily at about one shilling per day pay. I then began hippo control, selling hide, fat and ivory tushes for a living. This war has yanked me away from my beloved river to caretake a gold mine closed down for war but in big game area. My leave I take in Rufiji's waters, forests and grasslands of big game. A game ranger now shoots up the hippo.

War has affected this territory in that so much of our food stuffs sell that we run short ourselves. More money is in the native areas than ever in history because of native soldiers discharged, or home on leave, bringing wealth. Very small percentage of adult man-power among Tanganyika's natives is fit for soldiering, medical tests show. Improvements in diets and living conditions and medical attention is afoot some years and American missions—Lutheran from Minnesota here—help.

Around me are all kinds of birds and big game. I have seven houses and also quarters for fifty folk and no visitors to speak of. Very lonely but I get out now and then on business of the company, selling some of the machinery and stores they don't want to keep till after the war.

Forty miles south of here several small native herd-boys and girls were recently found with their heads bitten off, and two women who looked a bit different from other natives around were denounced as witches and pegged out on the ground till all but dead. Police officer from provincial headquarters came and made an exhaustive inquiry into this strange business. He commented that the only effort the elder

(Continued on page 8)

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"Your bawth is drawn, m'Lord!"

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(Continued from page 6)

natives made over this killing of children by a lion or lioness gone queer, was to lift hands against the children on strike. Dogs will sometimes kill and bury fowls in out-of-the-way places and a lion might easily take to biting off childrens' heads, especially herd-children who are found alone with no one near them to raise an alarm. A giant hyena in Kenya thought, to be the mythical Nandi Bear, bit 7 other hyenas on their heads and devoured their brains. Spoor is very plain and I hope to get this lion with such a morbid taste, but am very busy just now. For there is now fresh news of more depredations on children.

DR. WILLIAM P. BARRON, whose "prose-poem" tribute to Adventure appears on page 83, hasn't been with us since the October 15, 1928 issue, in which appeared his novelette "The Treasure of Lafitte." A surgeon in charge of a dressing station unit during World War I, wounded and awarded a Purple Heart, he is now back once more in service as a medical officer expert in the Civil Service with the Veterans' Administration.

IN the August issue in this department, to accompany his Crazy McIntosh story, "Petticoat Trouble," we printed a note from Keith Edgar which read in part—

> Incidently, I write about Crazy McIntosh now with a copy of *Grimshaw's Locomotive Catechism* at my elbow so that there will be no slight point on which a reader can argue. (Oh, they'll argue, all right, but they'll be wrong!)

We had our own ideas about what sort of reaction that might get from railroad experts who would be sure to read future yarns in the "Crazy" series, but if an author wants to stick his head in a noose who are we to say him nay? So now it starts and here we roll! Witness—

> Brother, if you hadn't put that chip on your shoulder and practically dared someone to knock it off, you might have got away with it, but let's "look at the record."
>
> First: What did "Crazy" do about the ninety-nine or nine hundred and ninety-nine (I never counted 'em. But there's one hell of a lot of 'em) nuts around the front end door?
>
> Second: You say, "I would sure hate to fall onto our thrashing DRIVERODS." then, later, "It bounces once off the DRIVESHAFT and spins into the ditch." (Evidently a very unusual type of locomotive. Rod engine on one side and Shay, gear-driven type on the other. Well, well! Live and learn. (As the rocker arm SHAFT and the tumbling SHAFT are the only two I ever heard of on a 'gine, I'd be glad to learn just what said DRIVESHAFT is. Thank you.)
>
> Third: As it is considered to the company's benefit to pull all the tonnage possible and as an engine can pull more "down in the corner" than hooked up near center, the *company notch,* dear Keith, is way down 'midst the oil-cans or at least I have heerd it thataway from steen thousand rails in the fifty years I played around 'em.
>
> Fourth: On this one I may be wrong. Do they call 'em JETS in Canada? If they do, Okay, but in these here Yewnited States we call 'em NOZZLES.
>
> Of course this letter is all in fun and Keith wrote a darn good story and I liked it and, still further, hope to read some more of the same but when Keith stuck his neck out I just hadda take one swing.
>
> —W. F. Knapke,
> 118 South Main St.
> East St. Louis, Ill.

We passed the above along to Author Edgar with instructions to squirm out of the Knapke knots as best he might and not tc expect any aid and comfort from headquarters. We'll leave it to you whether he's pulled his Houdini or not—

> I always am delighted to get a letter from someone who really knows railroading even if he has an "I've-got-you-with-your-pants-down" lilt to his writing.
>
> Now, Brother W. F. Knapke, have you never seen an engine with dogs on the smoke door rather than bolts? You know what I mean? You hammer them back and it makes it much easier to get into the front end. Well, that's the kind of an engine that Crazy McIntosh had, and if you still don't believe it I'll try and dig up a picture of the damn thing.
>
> Item 2: When I read that paragraph, I gasped with horror. Now, anyone, even the world's worst brakeman, knows that a rod is something that pushes and a shaft is something that turns, so that I would *never* call a driverod a "driveshaft." It must be a printer's error. So I dug out my carbon copy. So help me, that is what I wrote. There it was—"driveshaft." Brother Knapke, you've got me. However, I do hope that you will give me credit for knowing better. It was just a slip of the old typewriter and I'll speak sharply to it about it.
>
> Item 3: Lissen, fella, up in this neck of the woods the *company notch* is back at the centre of the quadrant where the dog runs fastest on the shortest valvestroke, thus using the least steam and coal and water to get over the line, thus saving money for the company all round. Your company notch envisages a creeping crawl-

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

ing bumbling freight who is puffing and panting along at ten miles an hour. No sir, we call it the *company notch* when the hogger is beating her tail and running all the water tanks and coal chutes with the Johnston bar hooked *all the way back* and the tallowpot thinking about having enough time to go across the border and see a hot burlesque show before he gets the turn-around. That's *our* company notch.

Item 4: Well, have it your own way. Properly speaking, a *jet* is what comes out of the *nozzle*. We always seem to call them jets, but what's the difference? I can't be wrong on that one, and neither can you, if you want to argue about it. Splitting hairs, I call it.

So the score seems to be: one for you and one for me and two draws.

I liked your letter very much, and hope you'll drop me a line again.

JAMES VALE DOWNIE'S "Bells of Breakbone" in our July issue prompted the following anent the ferocity of the Bloodhound breed of dog—

Whether it started with "Uncle Tom's Cabin" or not, the bloodthirsty proclivities of bloodhounds have been exposed many, many times. In reality they are sweet-tempered, harmless animals. The same mistake goes for James Vale Downie's "Bells of Breakbone" in which the owners of bloodhounds, upon being questioned, say: "They'll chew him to pieces if they catch him."

If Mr. Downie will go deeper into the subject he will find that bloodhounds are trailers—expert ones; they catch up with the hunted and wait for the hunters. That is all, and quite enough. Never do they bite or act vicious.

With old "Tom" shows, as they were called, they always had bloodhounds for the chase-across-the-river scene. There was an old stage joke about the manager with a "Tom" show running away with the company money. They sent the bloodhounds on his trail. The dogs caught up with him and he started another "Uncle Tom's Cabin" show of his own.

A second point is that the dogs, after catching up, did no harm to the man pursued—and the truth was told in jest.

Even fictional license can't make bloodhounds vicious animals and with habits of particular breeds you can't yank in exceptions. It is contrary to nature.

—Lloyd Emerson Siberell,
P. O. Box 83,
Cincinnati, Ohio

An Irish-terrier man ourself we attempted to utter no dictum but hastened Reader Siberell's bark along to Author Downie. Here's the bay that came echoing back—

It may be that I have over-stated the case against bloodhounds in "Bells of Breakbone" and if so I apologize. But can you imagine a story of a runaway slave without a bloodhound? I expect an answer. And if you wrote such a story would any editor buy it? I expect a Gallup pole on that. But why wait? The answer is *no*.

Seriously, I do not know of any breed of dogs that is naturally vicious. Aggression against mankind, so far as my personal observation goes, is the result of madness or training. The chow and police are generally considered dangerous tribes, but my best-loved dog friend is a hyphenated bitch of these breeds. I have been dog-bitten, but always by small animals.

I am ready to admit that all dogs, including bloodhounds, are by nature "sweet-tempered, harmless animals;" but I should like to raise the question whether their expertness as trailers" is not the result of training, and if a dog can be trained to *trail*, why can he not be trained to "*chew his quarry to pieces*" when he catches up with him? I don't believe you realize what a thoroughly malevolent and ingenious character the Virginia planter, who chased his "property" from the Shenandoah to the Slippery Rock, really was. I insist that he trained his bloodhounds both to sniff and chew. . . . But I am willing to leave the decision to Mr. Freeman Lloyd, *Adventure's* dog expert.

Meanwhile I am disturbed to note a spreading propaganda on behalf of creatures up to now considered deadly, or dangerous, and for long the indispensable properties of writers of fiction. First we learn that toads are not poisonous; they won't give you warts; the worst you can get from handling them is a slight skin eruption. Now what does that do to the story of the princess who had to go to bed with one of them? . . . And man-eating sharks, I hear, do not eat men. They won't even eat fat little girls in bathing suits. They are, I suppose, "sweet-tempered, harmless fish." Well, you can have them—and the bloodhounds too.

By the way, if you know anything good about pythons, old man, be a sport and keep it to yourself. I am writing one about a mining engineer who has some dealings with a large snake in the valley of the River of Mud in Venezuela. Hold the whitewash on pythons until I have a chance to—well—never mind—. But they do squeeze like the michief, don't they?

We've relayed the two above letters to Freeman Lloyd, our arbiter of controversial canine matters, and will pass along his adjudication when it arrives. Bow-wow!

—K. S. W.

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GUERRILLA FURLOUGH

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

By

E. HOFFMANN PRICE

A Jim Kane Novelette

Japs were scrambling up the trail, hastily and without caution, toward the man on the beach.

MALARIA, long marches, short rations: these had whittled him down, but what really hurt Kane was counting the guerrillas. He walked up to the long, lean man who wore four silver stars and a gilt hat cord and reported, very formally, "All present and accounted for, sir!" Then his irony cracked, and with it, his heart and his self-control. "Look at what's left—*look!* Get off your pratt, quit being so blissful. Maybe you can take it, but I can't!"

Datu Eric Ryan spat out his cud of betel nut and grinned tolerantly at the one-time cadastral surveyor. "Don't blow your top, Jim. We'll be eating again, we'll be shooting again. Feeling low, eh?"

"Uh-huh." Kane grimaced, sheepishly. "You look as if you'd eaten your dish of Crackly-Wheaty, and chewed your spinach down to the last grain of sand. And me—well, look." Kane thrust out a twitching hand. "How do you do it, *datu?*"

Ryan sat down on his heels, Moro style, under the yellow-fringed parasol which an attendant held for him. Number One wife offered him a fresh chew from the silver betel box she always carried. She wore a junk jewelry tiara, a scarlet formal gown, and high-heeled red shoes, as did this de luxe sunshiner's other three wives. Number Two stood by with a stone jug of nipa gin, but Ryan, the self-made general, ignored refreshments and concentrated on Kane.

"We wiped them out to the last man. Think of how it hurt *them.* You can't make an omelet without cracking eggs. Buck up, fella, buck up!"

But Kane still felt low. He listened moodily to the three pie-faced Hong brothers, who were vivisecting the two-way radio, which had gone haywire again. Their frightful cursing was made even more outrageous by the Buddha blankness of their faces. Two at a time they held forth, with antiphonal effect. When the silent member regained his breath, he resumed and one of the others paused. The Black Bishop laid down his big Bible and listened. Haji Maulana, the ex-schoolteacher, stopped honing his *barong,* and murmured, "Verily, that is the grandfather of all cursing!"

Kane began to feel like a freak. No one else was griping about the losses, the shortage of chow, the shortage of ammunition, the shortage of everything but Japs. He finally said, "It's more than the shellacking we got. It's a question of where are we going."

"We're going to murder the little stinkers, that's where we're going. Say, what's hit you, except hard luck and malaria?"

Kane shrugged. "Some of the missing aren't casualties."

"Want me to try 'em for AWOL? They'll come back."

"If this keeps up, we'll be nothing but a pack of bandits. We'll be making as many enemies among the natives as among the Skibbies. First thing you know, people will figure the Constabulary ought to clean us up!"

Ryan grimaced ruefully. "Maybe so, maybe so. Chow was a bit too good the last couple days—I bet they didn't buy it."

RYAN, cashiered from the regular army for striking his superior officer in the course of a purely personal argument, had gone native in a magnificent way, by marrying the four daughters of four Moro princes, and just for luck, he'd made himself a general and assumed the title of *datu,* the rank held by his fathers-in-law. With Pearl Harbor, however, Ryan had begun to regain his badly battered soul. Though he "drank the forbidden," prayed with his boots on, and ate pork, the Moslem Moros overlooked his blasphemy for the man had neither fear nor heart nor mercy; they loved him, feeling that Allah must love him, else he'd have been blasted long ago.

"Running a bandit roost," Kane muttered.

"What you need is a furlough," Ryan snapped. "Climate's getting you down. Tell your wife I said you're entitled to a rest."

"I could have, while she was in Australia, but a smuggler's prahu can't make it to where she is now."

Kane did, technically speaking, have a wife. By the flare of Japanese artillery, Bishop Jackson had married him and Diane to ease the qualms of her dying father. Having lost her birth certificate in the shelling of Davao, she might well have had trouble in getting through Java and thence to Port Darwin alone, or so her father had feared.

Now she was in Tarawa, an army nurse, he had learned by radio. Where a swift running prahu, making fifteen knots from dusk to dawn, could reach Port Darwin in a week, sailing to the far-off Gilberts was something else. And Kane rebelled at quitting his comrades when they were at an all-time low due to the fact that something had happened to the last prahu which had set out for Australia to get medicines and cartridges.

Chow that evening was unspeakable. The Skibbies, seizing every *cavan* of rice they could, left the villagers with little enough for themselves, and commercial fishing was a Jap monopoly. Already, farmers had clashed with Kane's foraging parties, claiming that the guerrillas were as rapacious as the enemy.

"*Camotes!*" Kane groaned, and dipped into one of the pots. "Bury me and I'll sprout sweet-potato leaves. Bishop, they'll be eating your horse pretty soon."

The big Negro affectionately regarded the shaggy little stallion. "No, suh, that's agin regulations! The old colonel, he used to say, take care of your hosses afore your men, and take care of your men afore yourself. Hmmm . . . I'll sure hate to leave Daniel-Come-to-Judgment when I get on the boat."

"What boat?"

"When we get our furlough. I been having miseries." He twisted his unlined purple-black face and shook his white head in mock distress. "I'm getting old, I need a rest."

Kane reddened. "We're going to Apo for sulphur, we'll make more powder for rockets, we'll start fires in Davao—"

And then Ryan's brazen voice rang out, "You're going to hell, to Tarawa, or wherever that red-headed lady of yours is, or I'll try you for mutiny!"

"I'm sticking. I was just feeling low."

"You're going. You rate a rest, and you're getting one."

Kane got up. "Yes, sir, very well, sir. And if this gang turns bandit, it is your baby, do you understand?"

But General Datu Eric Ryan wasn't listening. Explaining to his wives that it would be a long time before any more red shoes came to Mindanao kept him busy.

THE Bishop guided Kane's furlough party over the high ridge between Cotabato and Davao Province, and down steep trails which ran through the country of the pagan Mandaya tribesmen. Progress was slow, for at each settlement he preached to the mountaineers and held palavers with them, getting word of what lay ahead; and long before they reached the Lasang River, Kane knew that but for the black missionary's presence, spear traps and ambush would have given him a permanent leave of absence.

At a village near the river, Kane sized up the long, narrow dugout which the mountaineers had furnished, and said to the Bishop, "That's a nice *banca*, all right. And with these fellows raising horses of their own, they'll take good care of Daniel-Come-to-Judgment."

"This is as far as I go," replied the Bishop. "From here on you got nothing to worry about, 'cepting a few Jap lumber camps and later on, the Jap farmers."

The Hong brothers said nothing. Neither did Haji, though his eyes widened. Kane demanded, "What's the idea?"

"Well, I been neglecting my preaching, and some of these here pagans have been backsliding, setting spear traps, and doing a bit of head-hunting. They're good people, only it's mighty hard keeping 'em converted. You jest go right on. You got nothing to worry about, an' I'm too big and black—won't help you none having me along when you get close to the coast."

When they reached the coast there would be Japs on every side, and natives who from years of association with pre-war immigrants would be friendly toward the Japs; all that the Bishop said was true enough. However, Kane felt that despite his native dress, he himself would be almost as conspicuous as the big Negro.

"Oh, nuts! Turban, sarong and everything, I'd not fool anyone. I'm too tall, and my nose is all wrong."

Haji cut in, "*Señor*, when you sit in the boat, you are not taller than we are. Your length is in the legs, which is where we have the shortness. You walk like we do, and Moros with Arab blood are your height and have the thin nose. But the Bishop—by Allah, there is a mountain of a man!"

In the midst of the discussion, the Bishop

Kane felt that despite his native dress—turban, sarong and everything—he would not fool anyone.

rode out, vanishing between one moment and the next, and leaving no hint as to his direction.

Hong Li said, "Don't get morbid, Jim. He wouldn't know what to do with a furlough if he had one, and he's afraid Daniel-Come-to-Judgment'll get seasick. That horse has made the rounds so long I bet he could preach a sermon."

"Huh! He can't sing like the Bishop, and that's what converts the pagan tribes. Well, let's shove off!"

The *banca*, speeding downstream, passed nipa-thatched villages and rice fields. Kane sat amidship, with Haji and Hong Li in front of him, and the other two Hongs behind him; they furnished all the camouflage he needed on the run to the mouth of the Lasang, and thence to Samal Island, just across from Davao Town.

There Haji's friend, a retired pirate called Datu Ali, was to outfit and provision a seagoing boat for the run to the Gilberts.

Presently the valley narrowed, and forested mountains swooped up from the bank. For some minutes, Kane had been watching the smoke which rose from a wooded area. Presently, he heard a thin, bleating whistle.

"Narrow gauge railroad. Peanut roaster."

"Lumber camp," Haji agreed. Then, "Sawmill—hear it?"

The whine and snarl of a circular saw became plainer, intermittent stretches of sound. Hong Tien observed, "Passing rafts of lumber won't be so good. Sons of bitches might try putting us to work."

The three Hongs, former San Francisco radio repairmen, had the hatchets with which they'd

made "service calls" until their final coup had forced them to take to the jungle and join the guerrillas. Kane carried a service .45 and three clips.

Haji, though preferring his leaf-bladed *barong*—because it was silent and because no amount of surgical attention ever saved its victims—had an officer's 7-mm. Nambu automatic stuffed into his sash. Rifles were too valuable to risk on a furlough.

Kane suggested, "Better lay over till nightfall."

So they made for the bank opposite the nearby lumber camp. A game trail led from the water's edge. There were no human prints, nor hoof-marks of horse or buffalo; only wild pig and deer. Haji, after sizing things up, said, "Look good, even if close to virgin forest being raped on opposite bank."

There were no paths paralleling the bank, but the undergrowth was light enough so that working downstream was not difficult. Haji climbed a tall *lauan,* while the others made camp.

From his observation post, the schoolteacher could see the stream which joined the Lasang. "Also, sawmill, and Americans under guard," he informed them.

Unbelieving, Kane scoffed. "How many prisoners need a shave?"

Haji craned his neck a moment before replying solemnly. "Age affects my eyes. But fixed bayonets gleam is plain, also color of prisoners. Some come nearer now, poling raft down the creek."

"Come down and eat. I'll watch a while."

When the exchange was made, Kane confirmed Haji's observations, though he lacked the old man's advantage of far-sightedness. He could not see whether there was a stockade for the prisoners, but he did note a dirt road along which prisoners might be driven between stockade and camp.

The thought of working under Japanese taskmasters took a bit more of the edge off Kane's taste for the furlough. "Compared to them, we've led the life of Riley." He spat, grimaced sourly. Then he gasped, "Oh, good God!"

Somehow, the far-off picture was enlarged as though by psychic binoculars. Actually, he caught little more than the mere fact of sudden and non-routine motion among the prisoners who were working a raft of squared beams into the Lasang. The bamboo bent under the thrust of the crew. The twinkle of steel indicated a butt strike, or a flick with the point to prod the drooping captives. Suddenly a pole came up, made a sweep, smacking a soldier. Another prisoner, moving as if by signal, duplicated the move. One of the Japs splashed into the river. Before the first soldier regained his balance, the rebels had vaulted out into the current of the Lasang.

THEN Kane heard the thin, far-off whack of a 6-mm. Arisaka. This was the shot which the soldier must have yanked at the first sign of revolt. A second or so would have to pass before he'd hear the shots which now kicked up water just beyond where the fugitives had landed.

Two privates and a non-com kept the dozen or more prisoners under control. The fugitives appeared above water for an instant. Bullets spatted about them. Kane yelled, "They're making a break!" just as Hong Tien demanded, "Who's shooting?"

A whistle shrilled in the camp. Steam plumed up. A motorcycle, judging from the sound, was hightailing from the mill.

One man did not come up. Whether dead, or making a long swim under the surface, Kane could not guess. Having marked the fugitive's drift, he climbed down.

"Then one of 'em got away!"

Haji cocked his head. "Motorboat putting out. We can get there first."

They plunged through the underbrush, ignoring the thorns of *julat anay.* If the rise of startled birds betrayed them, it was just too bad. The whack of bullets gave a good indication of where the fugitive had landed, and the cessation of fire, combined with the growing sound of the motorboat, convinced Kane that at least one of the pair had made cover.

He was ready to drop from his struggle to keep up with the wiry Moro, who fairly danced through the brush. It was just one degree short of bucking a barbed-wire entanglement. Then the launch throttled down. Over the water came a shouted question and answer. Hong Kua cursed and said, "Can't get a word of it. They're talking too fast!"

Haji found an abandoned trail which, despite its uphill zigzagging, offered an advantage. Kane half stumbled, half crawled along. All that kept him going was the thought of two men who were in worse shape.

Finally the nightmare ended. Haji halted, head cocked. He jabbed his *barong* into the ground, a sacrilegious act warranted only by emergency, and caught the blade with his teeth. "Man running, falling, uphill, not far off," he announced, picking up earth sounds by this means in spite of the growing sputter of the launch.

From then on, he moved stealthily, with scarcely a sound. Presently Kane began to catch a crackling of brush and a scuffling. They huddled there, and after some moments, the sound of stumbling and scrambling became clear. The launch had landed. The five prowlers eyed each other in the dusk.

"Let him—them—keep going," Kane whispered. "The Japs won't notice us. Then—"

At the last word, Haji grinned and fingered the abused *barong.*

Using the fugitives as bait was cruel business, but there was no way out of it. Finally, having wormed and inched along for painful yards—"following a contour," as Kane would have put it—they caught a glimpse of the prisoner.

Though nearly six feet tall, the man could not have weighed a hundred pounds. Remnants of O.D. shirt and breeches were all that remained to show he was a soldier. He stumbled, lifted himself to his knees, resumed his crawling. He left a little trail of blood. Kane wanted to yell, "He's still got blood in him!" for except for the red trickle, he could not have believed the man either alive or human; and then the fact that this was a living man made Kane cry out, "Hold it, buddy! We'll give you a hand."

"That was wrong, but it is good," Haji said, and nudged Kane forward. "You talk."

The fugitive turned, crouching as though to defend himself. Wild-eyed, his teeth bared, he snarled.

Kane brushed off his Moro turban. "O.K., soldier," he said, and straightened up.

Height and voice made an impression.

"Jesus Christ," the man mumbled, and fell on his face before Kane could give him a hand.

The wound in his thigh wouldn't have been much to talk about had there been any flesh on his bones. His bare feet were raw, his bare legs were raked and slashed by thorns, his sunburned back was crisscrossed with whip marks.

Men were scrambling up the trail, hastily and without caution. Kane looked at the soldier. "Let him lie there."

The others nodded. Gestures took the place of words.

Three and two, they crouched beside the narrow trail, a yard or so downgrade. The soldier stirred, mumbled, slumped again. His troubles were over. He had heard friendly voices. Nothing else mattered.

It was not until the pursuers were very near that Kane was aware that he had not bothered to wonder how many would be sent, nor figure how many could be jammed into a launch. But the plan could not be changed. He drew his *bolo*. He wasn't a bit tired. He hoped the soldier would not rise. They might fire if he did.

Six men in mustard-green uniforms, bleached and sweat-stained, came plodding up the zigzagging trail. They had fixed bayonets and held their rifles at the ready. While they weren't barging blindly into anything, they were not as careful as they should have been. They depended on their reputation, and to a degree, they were doubtless justified.

The leader jabbered, pointed, looked over

his shoulder at those who followed. He probably meant, "Here's the guy!"

There were answers, and the others stretched their bowlegs to crowd up. Perhaps, having got away with that mistake before on jungle trails, they had become careless.

Haji's yell was as shrill as the lumber camp whistle, and he was in motion before he made a sound. Kane, slicing out with his *bolo*, got a glimpse of three Chinese faces, expressionless as the dead. The Hongs shingling hatchets twinkled. They moved with mechanical precision.

One Jap yanked the trigger. He was the odd man. He did not shoot a second time. As he whirled, still not quite sure that it had not been the exhausted fugitive who had screamed, Haji's *barong* made an eye-tricking backhand, this time swooping upward. The diagonal slash across the stomach paralyzed the Jap, and he doubled up. There were sounds, but they would not carry far.

Haji grinned, wiped his blade on the enemy's shirt. "If men wait at the launch, they think one shot was to halt escape. Also accounts for my yelling one time."

As though at a signal, the three Chinese decided to smile, rather smugly, inviting comparison between hatchet technique and the *barong*.

Haji turned to Kane and gestured toward one of the hatchet victims. "Nice work, but more practice is indicated. This one will recover sufficiently to make noises." He attended to that detail. "Now see how the soldier feel, I am busy." He darted into the brush.

Kane went to kneel beside the fugitive, who was trying to sit up. The man muttered, "How long was I out? Who are you? What's this?"

Hong Tien beamed. "Only took a second. You get to like it when you learn how."

"Where's your buddy?" Kane demanded.

"Went down and didn't come up."

CHAPTER II

PRAISE TO ALLAH—AND DATU ALI

SOMEWHAT after dark, Haji returned to announce that the Japanese launch was not guarded. Kane frowned and remarked, "Funny they'd not leave at least one man."

"They left one man. Me, I did not."

The soldier, whose name was McKenzie, ate a bit of rice, with some cooked meat from the Mandaya village. He took a few drags at a dobe cigarette, then dropped it, and said, "Not used to smoking—not used to eating. God damn it, not used to being alive. Who are you guys?"

Kane told him, and not caring to speak of furlough, he concluded, "We're heading for the coast to raise a bit of hell. Mac, you're in tough shape, but you'll stand being moved into the hills to rest up till you can get to our camp."

McKenzie wanted more chow, but they wouldn't give him any. Then, while he was still protesting, he toppled over and went to sleep.

Kane said, "If we take this guy to the Mandayas, we'll be trailed. And he can't move fast. Anyone going upstream in a boat will be flagged down. Planes with flares to cover things at night. A squad missing will make it look like a revolt. We've got to go downstream."

"Even so," Hong Li insisted, "you'll sweat getting from here to Samal. You can't ever figure what a fool Jap'll do."

"That launch," Hong Tien said. "It'd be fun if we had enough gas."

Hong Kua picked it up. "Being too smart is bad. We ought to have the Bishop here, he's got sense."

Kane looked at McKenzie. "The Bishop has a yen for preaching at funerals. I'm afraid he'll miss one."

Haji quit fingering his *barong* and stroked his chin. "A Moslem funeral is what this man deserves. I see from his dogtag that he was with a regiment at Bataan. Allah will accept him, he fought the fathers-of-little-pigs. And the way he said 'Jesus Christ' shows that be believes in the prophets of the Holy Qur'an. But wait, I found something back there." He pointed toward the river.

"What?"

"An ant-hill." The schoolteacher's glance shifted to the six Japs.

Hong Li spat. "Huh! What good is an ant-hill? The pigs are dead."

Hong Kua added, "And if they were alive, they'd make too much noise, you could hear 'em across the river for the next couple hours."

Hong Tien said regretfully, "Been nice if we'd caught one alive."

"All right!" Kane grumbled. "Ant-hills, what for?"

Haji fingered the dozen straggling hairs of his beard. "Digging is conspicuous. Leaving carrion around is conspicuous. But the ants, *ay, wallah!* Very quick, very clean. They have strong little stomachs, even Jap meat is not giving them dyspepsia. Searching parties find nothing. So they search and search. We'll leave the putt-putt boat and go downstream, while the pig-lovers question empty jungle. And we take this Señor McKenzie with us. A rest is what he needs."

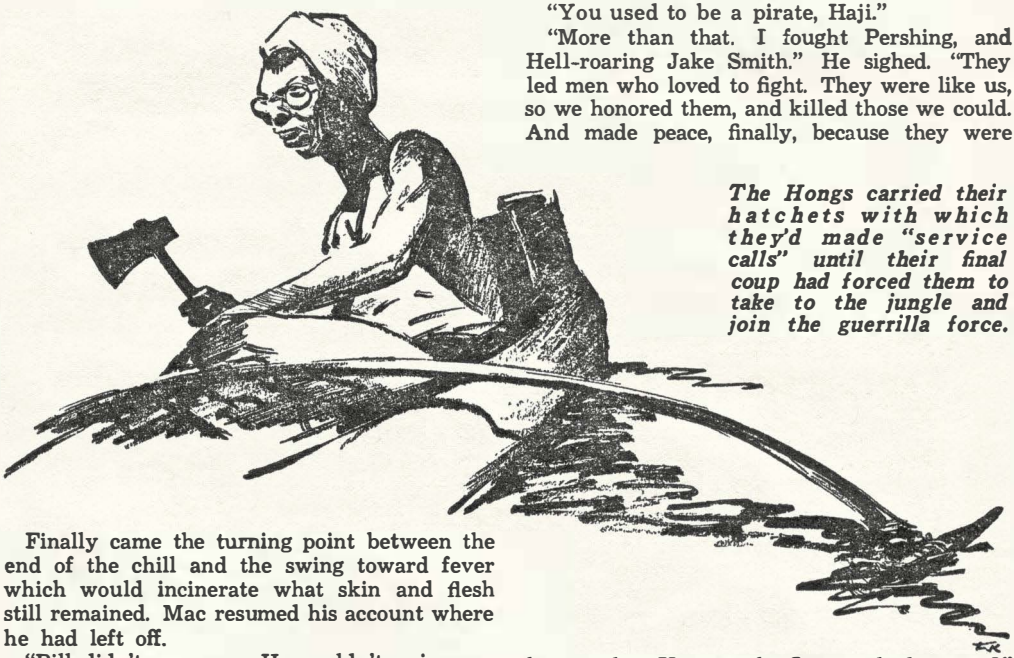
Haji leading, they carried McKenzie up the game trail until it joined the branch which led back to the river. Rain and the hooves of deer and pigs would confuse the signs sufficiently to puzzle the Japs. As for the rifles and

bandoliers no longer needed by the Mikado's soldiers, they would come in handy.

Keeping well to the bank, they paddled the *banca* downstream. McKenzie's feverish mumbling worried Kane. Worse than the fresh wound were the old infected sores made by mangrove swamps, leeches, *bejuco* thorns; starvation diet and savage taskmasters had whipped down the soldier's vitality until a gnat's bite would start an ulcer.

"I'm a pretty bastard, crying about guerrillas mowed down in their tracks," Kane told himself.

Hours later, he gave Mac more food and water. He put his jacket on the soldier, and Haji put his sarong over him. The man was shivering from a malarial chill.



The Hongs carried their hatchets with which they'd made "service calls" until their final coup had forced them to take to the jungle and join the guerrilla force.

Finally came the turning point between the end of the chill and the swing toward fever which would incinerate what skin and flesh still remained. Mac resumed his account where he had left off.

"Bill didn't come up. He couldn't swim under water, so a slug caught him."

Then Mac began to curse in a dry, horrible monotone that made Kane shiver. Finally the soldier laughed.

"God damn fools back home! Dad was one, so was Ma. So were the teachers. Everyone pacifists. Raising little snot-noses who thought fighting was vulgar and that it was smart going on a sitdown strike against an hour of drill a week at junior high."

"You fellows fought."

Mac tried to spit. "Didn't really love to kill the stinkers until they had us in a corner. Squatting there at Bataan, hearing the radio tell us all kinds of crap about how we'll beat the Skibbies and educate 'em, free 'em from their warlords, enlighten 'em—Nothing nasty, mustn't hate your enemies—"

"Easy, Mac, you're all in."

Mac choked and began to cry. Kane felt like a fool, and gave him a drink.

"You know why only Bill and me jumped?" Mac demanded, fiercely. "The others couldn't swim—"

Kane laid a hand over Mac's mouth. "They'll hear you a mile away! Buck up, you'll get your chance to fight back—"

"Couldn't swim," he muttered, and began to giggle until Kane's skin crawled and twitched. "Couldn't jump—"

When Mac crumpled up across the captured rifles and nearly capsized the *banca,* Haji murmured, "Your people will not this time forget that paradise is in the shadow of spears and that no man is fit to live unless he is ready to fight. You know who I am?"

"You used to be a pirate, Haji."

"More than that. I fought Pershing, and Hell-roaring Jake Smith." He sighed. "They led men who loved to fight. They were like us, so we honored them, and killed those we could. And made peace, finally, because they were honest also. You say the Jap sneaked on you?"

"Um-huh."

"That was good. If they had not, your people would have become in twenty more years men with the hearts of women. I beg pardon of God! Not even women. Our women stayed at Bagsak when Pershing warned them to leave before the jackass batteries fired into the crater. They killed some of your soldiers."

Kane had nothing to say.

BEFORE dawn, they made for the jungle. They were near the edge of fertile bottomlands, where hemp grew, tall and broad-leafed, with its banana-shaped fruit, golden and lovely to see, but bitter and woody to taste. Japanese land, two-thirds of it; twenty thou-

sand pre-war Japs, unwelcome yet admitted because of the very complacency McKenzie had cursed, had come in to spread and take root in Davao Province until the native became a peon, working at a peso a day for a taskmaster whose invisible government made the helpless Filipino officials dance to whatever tune was whistled.

Kane understood as never before the ferocious humor of Datu Ryan in sending raiding parties into stolen Davao to snatch the Japanese "farmers" and hang them with hemp from their own plantations. McKenzie would love that.

But that night, when they were ready to embark on the next leg of the increasingly perilous river voyage, Kane touched McKenzie, and then shook his head. He took the dead man's dogtag, and set to work cutting strands of wiry *bejuco*.

"How dig, *señor?*" Haji asked, and turned to getting rocks to weight the body. "The river also belongs to God."

Once in midstream, Haji said, "The Black Bishop is not here to pray. That is now for you, *señor.*"

Kane gulped. "Give him a fighting man's funeral, make it Moro style. He'd break loose and float if I spewed any of the bellywash he and I learned!"

So Haji recited from the Holy Qur'an, which Allah revealed to men who loved the sword, who did not despise it.

ON reaching the mouth of the Lasang, Kane camouflaged the six Arisaka rifles under a cargo of *camotes* and bananas, and then ran the gauntlet of *bancas* which were coming from the seaside market village.

The overloaded dugout, shipping water every inch of the way, made Hamal Island an hour after sunset. It was not until the following day that Kane skirted the shoreline to make for Buri Barrio, Datu Ali's settlement, sprawling for half a mile on either side of the mouth of a stream.

Five miles westward was the mainland, and Davao Town. Samal sheltered the roads in which lay Japanese freighters and the barges they were to tow home; the wharf was not big enough for wartime traffic.

As they beached the dugout, Kane looked at the city lying low about the river's mouth, and remembered how, coming down from the mountains of Agusan to get a bath, a skinful of whiskey, and a trip home, he had arrived just ahead of the Japanese landing parties. Fugitives and soldiers retreating to the hills had swept him back. And in that pale foreshadowing of the hell to come, he had met red-haired Diane and her father in their stalled Packard. Now as Kane helped put the *banca* near Datu Ali's boats, his eyes searched vainly to pick out the spot from which he and Diane had started.

He tried to remember how she looked, and he could not, except that her skin was clear and smooth, and that a few freckles set off her pert nose and added something to her green-gray eyes; soft hands, and a smooth voice, a laugh when things got nasty, and a temper that was something to remember—all that, but still no real image, for the memory he had carried during the months after she had left for Australia was built up of wishful thinking.

Davao blurred before his eyes. He was good and homesick. Lacking a prahu, he'd swim to Tarawa.

He stumbled after Haji, ignoring the yapping village dogs. The settlement was perched on stilts, overlooking the beach with its nets and the fishing prahus turned bottom up on the sand.

Once at the head of the bamboo ladder leading to Datu Ali's main floor, Kane bowed to the bitter-eyed man who sat there under a yellow parasol, chewing betel and spitting into a silver cuspidor. This was Datu Ali, who no longer looted ships. His fiercely-lined face made Haji seem a model for a Byzantine saint.

The *datu* offered his five visitors a chew of betel and asked them to sit on the veranda with him. Haji nodded to Kane, who said, "We have brought you some presents, but it will be better to leave them under the *banca* until after dark."

The thin face puckered in a smile of understanding, and Haji said, "Yes, Highness, Japanese guns."

And Kane knew that dead McKenzie had been the means of winning him the respect of a sea-rover who had become thin from eating his own futility.

"How is it with you, my friend?" Haji went on. "How is your health?"

"Well, and the praise to Allah! And you, O pilgrim?"

"Well, and the praise be to Him!"

This went on, repetitiously, until each member of the group in turn had several times expressed his deep interest in the *datu's* health, and had received the *datu's* inquiries. The greater the number of inquiries, the higher the esteem indicated.

But to leave the rifles on the beach until dark was, after all, out of the question. So half a dozen of the nets spread out to dry were carried up as though for repair, and each camouflaged an Arisaka.

"These," Kane said as they were presented, "are not as good as the Krags and Springfields Moros used to take from American soldiers, but they are all we could get."

The *datu* was pleased at what was distinctly a compliment to a fighting man.

His eyes twinkled when he asked, "You

started with other presents not as good?"

"No, we planned to buy on the way, and we bought."

"By the mercy of Allah," Haji piously interpolated.

"You came for a sight of the sea?" Datu Ali asked.

"The sea belongs to Allah, and the sight of His work broadens the chest," Kane answered, and rather liked his own words, for Ali seemed to approve of them. Then, sensing that it was time to explain the purpose of his visit, Kane flashed Haji a pointed glance.

The schoolteacher made a small gesture and drooped one lid. It meant, "He thinks you're all right. Take it away, Kane—you're the chief."

THIS was not what Kane had expected; Haji was to have asked for supplies and a boat. Now that Kane had to carry the ball, McKenzie's dogtag burned his chest and the greasy cord began to choke him.

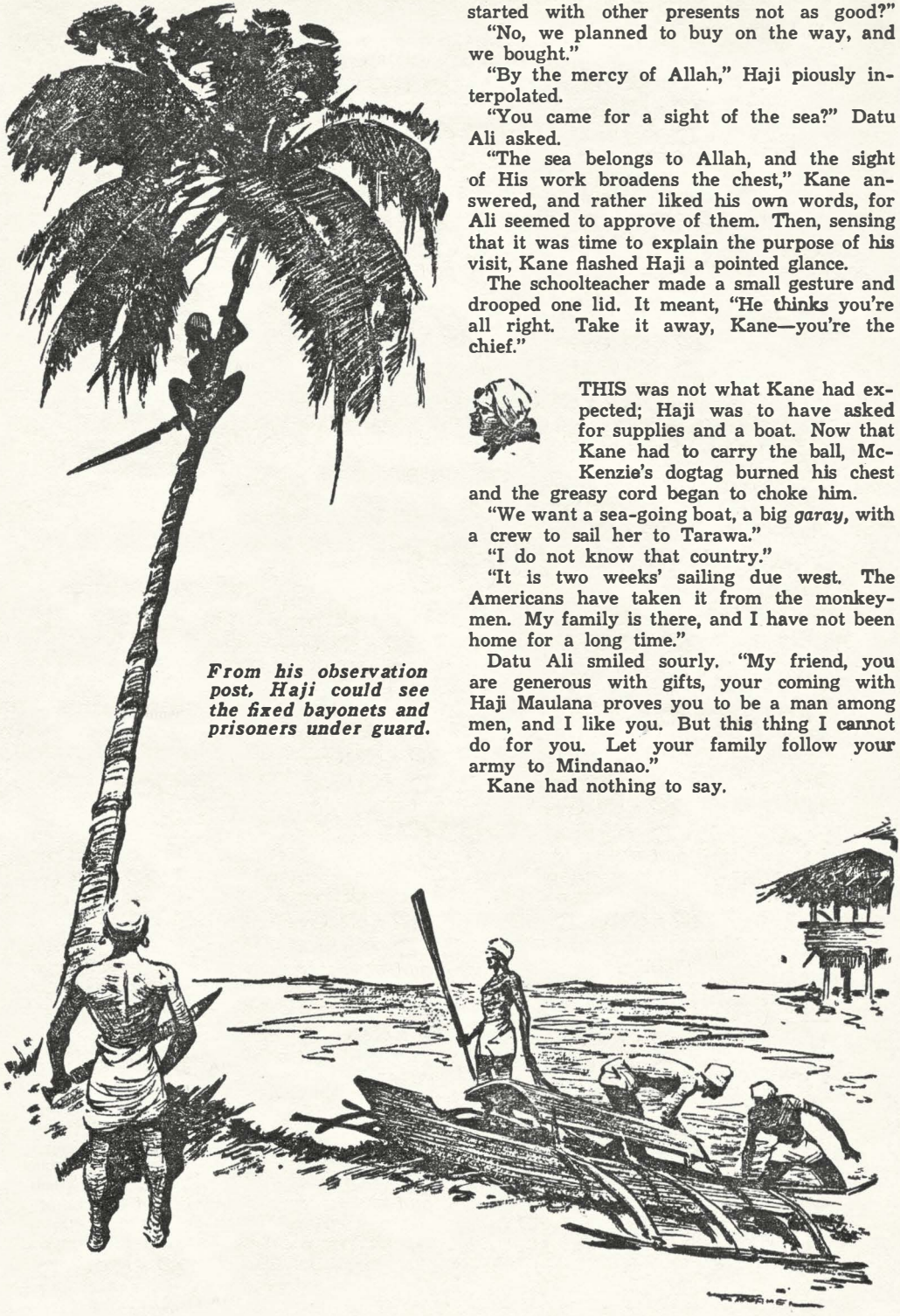
"We want a sea-going boat, a big *garay*, with a crew to sail her to Tarawa."

"I do not know that country."

"It is two weeks' sailing due west. The Americans have taken it from the monkey-men. My family is there, and I have not been home for a long time."

Datu Ali smiled sourly. "My friend, you are generous with gifts, your coming with Haji Maulana proves you to be a man among men, and I like you. But this thing I cannot do for you. Let your family follow your army to Mindanao."

Kane had nothing to say.



From his observation post, Haji could see the fixed bayonets and prisoners under guard.

Haji caught the blade in his teeth in order to detect earth sounds. "Man running, falling, not far off," he announced.

Haji picked it up. "This man has become one of our people. He has led us in raids, he has made gunpowder for us, and he has shown us better ways to make *lantakas*. Allah loves the generous!"

"I honor him as a man," the *datu* said, "but because of his people, I must refuse. Listen, O Haji! Am I fat from eating rice? Or are my people feeding the Japs and eating what the dog-lovers are kind enough to leave? And whose fault is this?"

"In the name of Allah, whose is the fault?"

The *datu* took his carved stick and jabbed the floor as he spoke. "For twenty years, the Americans forbade the sea Moros and the men from the hinterland to cut down the monkey-men who came here, and even before this war, we were the servants of the cut-off ones! Christian Filipino and Moslem Filipino, they saw and they cried out—and who said, 'Peace, thou fool'? Who was afraid to offend the Japs? So we endured our lice and now they eat us, and where can we go from them? Verily, my family lives under the muzzles of ship's cannons."

The *datu* pointed with his stick. A transport was standing out to sea, towing a line of barges. A destroyer wallowed in the Roads. Far up, a plane circled. "O man! See what your people invited after they pulled our teeth and promised us protection."

Though this was all too true, Kane had soaked up all he could hold. "A thing done has an end, and the power is with Allah! Now fit out a *garay* and I'll provision it with rice from one of those ships! We'll take nothing from you people. We five will gut a transport before it sails—or else there won't be any of us wanting a trip."

Though Datu Ali's eyes flamed up at the challenge, he sighed and shook his head. "I believe you, but a raid would make the sons of short-haired mothers shell every fishing village along the Gulf, just to be sure that they got the right one. I am afraid. I have become as a bird without feathers, and the shame lies between my people and yours."

"Then I'll get the rice from the warehouses along the waterfront, a *cavan* at a time."

The *datu's* lips tightened over betel-blackened teeth. "It is true that I have a *muallim* who can sail over the wide sea you name, but how would that whiten our faces?"

"We'll make a raid on the way, a raid so far from home that your people will be safe enough. In the old days, you looted many a ship when some steamed slowly and many sailed slowly. This time there will be something that no Moro sea-rover has ever done!"

"There is a long *garay*," the *datu* said, after a silence which made Kane's throat tighten. "When she is fitted out for service, you will get provisions. I will see, I will be thinking. I must know Allah's will. Maybe it will seem good, who knows?"

Kane couldn't believe what he heard until he saw that the three impassive Hongs were nodding their approval, and Haji said, "Thou hast spoken, and Allah loves the generous!"

But Ali would not be trapped. "I have not yet spoken. And now let us say *bismillahi* and dip into the pot, for you are hungry."

As they followed their host to dinner, Haji said to Kane, "That tag you wear at your neck is an *anting-anting*—it will bring you luck. He will finally do as you ask. He has changed much since I knew him. Do not worry, eat with good appetite."

CHAPTER III

GUERRILLA STEVEDORES

THE *garay*, fitted with new outriggers and mast and black sail, was waiting in a narrow inlet canopied by mangroves. The furlough party, in separate *bancas*, crossed Davao Roads to get rations from Japanese warehouses.

Kane came ashore with a fisherman's net whose weight made him stoop, disguising his

height and making it natural for him to keep his face averted. Letting Haji and the Hong brothers do the job would have been more sensible, but Kane had become touchy on the matter of unearned furloughs—and then there was the bitter eye of Datu Ali. So he went and mingled with the crowd, making the daylight prowl before the midnight stroke. For a while he was aware of his companions, two trailing him, two going ahead; and then he lost track of them, though they would not let him get far out of sight.

Of Davao Town's hundred thousand population, one in every ten was Japanese. Women with oiled hair, elaborately heaped in gleaming coils and buns, minced after their men. Wherever the reek of saki billowed into the street, Jap soldiers and civilians were swilling the stuff. There were no military patrols, for from pre-war habit, the Filipinos had become resigned to the Japanese. The sight and smell of it justified Datu Ali's bitterness.

The river made an S-shaped curve to debouch almost parallel to the coastline. There was a nucleus of buildings, some modern, some dating back to Spanish days—the business and administrative center of the province; the rest, comfortably tucked away and shaded by palms, reached far inland, sprawling as shapelessly as any nipa *barrio.*

Kane smelled the copra stench of one warehouse and the fish odor of another. Bit by bit, he got the lay of the land, noting places which favored silent looting and a quick getaway, and those which would be dangerous to tackle. As he skirted the waterfront, he observed the barges and lighters putting out to load transports which, unable to berth at the dock, lay out in the Roads. He turned back to meet the others, to compare opinions and wait for darkness. And then, for the first time that day, he saw soldiers in formation.

SQUADS blocked the street ahead. Behind him, the jabber and gesticulation of porters and pedestrians, of *cocheros* and shopkeepers, made it clear that something was happening. Women scattered so hastily that they spilled mangoes and bananas and papayas from rattan baskets balanced on their heads. *Taos* in knee-length pants darted for alleys. Others headed for the entrances of public buildings, hoping to dash through to the street on the other side.

Police booted and clubbed most of these quick thinkers back into the open. While Kane dared not make himself conspicuous by haste, there was still a chance for escape. As he edged for a narrow passage separating two buildings, he shifted the wadded net for a heave, just in case.

A cop yelled at him. Somewhere, a soldier cracked down with a rifle butt. No shooting yet, but this wasn't play. Kane wheeled, for he could not risk either pursuit or a shot in the back, and demanded, *"Qué pasa?"*

"Get over there with the others! *Arriba, hombre!"*

He had left his pistol at Buri Barrio, as had the others, for a man might forget and try to shoot himself out of a jam. He had only a dagger.

"Porqué?" Kane stalled. *"Qué hay?"*

Then, coming from nowhere, it seemed, Haji was beside him, saying, *"Amigo,* what can we do? Let us go."

That satisfied the cop, who prodded Kane with his truncheon and turned to yell at someone else. His job was like trying to plug the leaks in a broken net, as when one is not too badly damaged, quite a few fish can be held and not too many escape. Still bent L-shaped under his burden, Kane went with Haji.

"Wait till dark," the little schoolteacher said.

"Where are the Hongs?"

"I think Li is near us—about the others, I do not know."

Presently someone jeered, *"Ai, ya!* Who rides your back?"

Hong Kua was sidling up, covering Kane's open side, for the crowd had become thicker as the Filipinos and Chinese halted against the line of soldiers. A civilian wearing shoes and a white suit sounded off, "This is voluntary labor for public good. All *cargadores* get free food. Loyal cooperation is expected. Everyone to be at liberty in two days."

The collaborationist's voice was not music to Kane.

No one asked about pay, and all seemed resigned. Since others kept the burdens they had been carrying, Kane retained his.

"Where's Li and Tien?"

Hong Kua didn't know and wasn't worrying.

At the dock, which was being worked to capacity, the stevedore gang was jammed into a small barge and towed out to a freighter anchored in the Roads. A cargo port opened from the side of the *Tenyo Maru.*

Already, lighters were coming alongside. Kane and Haji managed to join the stevedores who would work inside the hold, rather than the group which was to unload the succession of barges. A Jap in merchant marine uniform shouted, gestured, and emphasized his orders by striking and prodding with a bamboo staff.

For Kane to stay bent double proved to be no problem at all. After an hour of trotting back and forth with packets of rice, he doubted whether he could ever straighten fully. Murky incandescents in tin reflectors furnished light for the outside gang and for those who worked on the main deck, where cargo was being stored. The hold was a cavern with splotches of yellowish twilight.

"This isn't getting us rations," Kane mut-

tered to Haji, during a brief pause. "Maybe I can cut a cable and while the lights are off we can duck to an empty barge and go ashore. It's too far for me to swim—I'm all pooped."

The schoolteacher grinned. "Oh, no, no, *señor!* Better stay. I promise, you like staying soon."

No time for explanations. Once he'd got a glimpse of Hong Kua, but never the sight of Hong Li and Hong Tien. Funny they'd not stuck with him, just in case. . .

AS THE night wore on, Kane noted that another stevedore gang was unloading a compartment with strange cargo: 77-millimeter shell-cases, bags of empty 6-millimeter cartridges, scrap-iron, and scrap-aluminum from engine blocks. An odd business, discharging salvaged metal at Davao, where the stuff couldn't be converted into munitions. Then Kane got it: The *Tenyo* was not bound for Japan. She had come from somewhere in the Pacific and she was returning to the outer perimeter with rations.

After six hours of hard driving, chow was dished out. As Kane picked a corner into which to collapse and eat his handful of rice, Haji appeared again. There were peculiar lights in his eyes and a twitch at the corners of his mouth. Kane became uneasy. The schoolteacher looked just as he always did when, after a one-man raid, he came silently back to camp and forced himself to tell his story with dignity and dramatic pauses instead of blurting it out like a schoolboy. Usually, the story had to do with the gutting of a Jap sentry.

Tricks of that sort aboard the *Tenyo* would complicate matters.

"I smell gasoline," Kane observed, uneasily.

"Topside, *señor*. Barges on other side bring shells, some big ones. They go below."

Kane sighed. "Too bad they aren't being packed together. Though it'd be too much of a temptation. Keep your shirt on, you hear?"

"Oh, yes, my *camisa* stays in place. You see, we must get more rice, plenty more."

"Get more?"

"*Si, si!* You missed two Hongs, I missed one Hong. We have been worrying, have we not, we two *pendejos!* But those marvelous Chinamens, you know what they were making? In *bancas*, they paddled up alongside the barges, silently, silently. Pockets of rice were falling over the side, but not into the water."

Hong Kua came up with three soggy cigarettes. "Ration issue is under control, Jim," he announced, confirming Haji's observations, and he didn't need to explain why rice had been falling off a barge. "When they come back, they'll pick us up. All we got to do is go over the side. Blow a fuse or something and there's nothing to it."

All of which left Kane an innocent bystander. He wasn't earning his furlough. Three Chinese and a Moro were carrying the ball. Unless he carried some of the load, he'd be unworthy of the risks they had faced on his behalf.

"You understand Nippongo," he said to Hong Kua. "Where's this tub been, where's she going?"

"These pig-lovers haven't been discussing such things. They have saki and gals on the brain—except the chief engineer, and his grief was hot bearings."

Haji's eyes had enough animation for a dozen men when he heard this. Kane went on, "Could you read entries in the log?"

"Numbers and such like. Maybe words, too. Some are written exactly like Chinese."

It was time to go back to work. A petty officer was yelling instead of blowing his whistle. Kane said, "I'll sneak topside and cover the door of the charthouse while you go in and look."

"What for?"

There was no time to explain, for the slaves were booted into action. It might take Hong Kua some time to fake the necessary activity to get him out of the line of coolies, but the Chinese would make it. Kane's job was to do as well.

He grabbed a case, contents unknown, about the size of those which were being stowed on the main deck, and made for the nearest companionway. Emerging near the after hatch, he mixed with the men who worked on deck. Skimpy illumination and the slackening vigilance of the boatswain gave him his chance to size things up.

There was too much activity and too little light for one man's idleness to be noted, as long as he kept up a pretense of being busy. The critical moment came when, with the way apparently clear, he emerged from shadow and trotted across three yards of lighted space.

The companion leading to the quarterdeck had only eight treads, but they seemed like a hundred. Scaling the steep slope of Apo's ten thousand-foot cone to get sulphur for gunpowder had been play in comparison. Sweat splashed to his bare feet. Each step brought him nearer the zone where he would be conspicuously out of place. He began to feel eyes boring into his back. It was increasingly hard to keep from looking over his shoulder.

He finally reached the sacred space where no one except an officer was allowed, unless required by duty to be there. Kane stumbled over a heavy cable and noted that the shadows danced crazily. He had snagged the line which fed the floodlights of the main deck. No one hailed him.

Aboard a windjammer, shrouds and ratlines would have offered cover, but here he had only the rail.

The thud of hard shoes warned him. A few seconds later and he'd have barged headlong into an officer; the brisk, decisive tread indicated the approach of a person who held command.

Kane stretched his legs to a length entirely out of keeping with his simulated Asiatic stature. He darted past the door of the charthouse and won the shadows at its farther corner. Interminable seconds dragged sickeningly. He tightened up and crouched there, ready with his stubby dagger.

The man in white uniform, however, had missed the movement and the faint jarring of the contents of Kane's case. He looked straight ahead, making an almost military "to the left flank" when he was abreast of the charthouse door. Without knocking or hesitation, he stepped in and shut the door behind him, making a smart slam and a sharp latch-click. His behavior betokened the skipper, or someone very close to him.

KANE drew a deep breath. Well, that was blown up. What the hell, maybe it was a crackpot idea anyway. What would he have done with the information? Facing the issue, and seeing things with the abnormal clarity which comes from a tense moment, he admitted he'd digressed. He'd committed his usual military sin of wandering from his mission and improvising. Getting the *Tenyo's* destination and origin might, of course, suggest something useful to a sea-raiding party, such as gumming up the nearest lighthouse on her course, but after all, the idea had just been a hunch—

Then he tightened up. He couldn't let himself crawfish out of it that way. Those flashes of intuition were good.

Kane edged toward a port from which light came, and looked in. He saw only the back of a man in white, with a short, yellowish neck and bristly black hair. The officer was bending over a table on which lay an open book the size of a ledger. That must be the *Tenyo's* log. The paper reflected the light of a goose-neck fixture sufficiently to show the clock face, the barometer and thermometer tubes on the bulkhead, the bells, the phone and the speaking-tube mouthpiece.

Meanwhile, no sign of Hong Kua, who should have arrived. Worried, Kane began to develop a purely imagined migration of red ants all over his skin, which made him ignore until the final instant the actual danger at hand.

A stevedore was saying to a ship's officer, "He went that way. . . Yes, I saw him—he had a box on his shoulder—but I could not yell, some of the others would have heard me."

It was a Filipino speaking—a collaborating native who either liked Japs, had a gripe against his own country, or else was trying to buy advantages for himself or his family. There weren't many, but the existing few always turned up at the wrong time. He was barefooted and the Jap in whites wore rubber-soled sneakers, so that there had been no warning until the two were within a couple yards of Kane.

He crouched, frozen and motionless. His swarm of red ants disappeared. They always did when he got in a pinch, forgot that he'd ever been a surveyor and became all guerrilla. Immobility seemed about to save him, for the Skibby shifted his weight and made as if to go forward. Kane held his breath, for when a

man prepares to move and doesn't, he's getting ideas. Unwittingly, the Jap had telegraphed in universal code, yielding a shred of advantage.

Kane sweated and waited.

The Jap saw something wrong in the shadow, and thrust his informant aside. "You there!" he snapped. "What means—"

Kane deliberately pushed the case into view. He moved with disarming clumsiness, and his answer matched his action. "The officer, the chief one, he told me—but I am lost—I do not know— It is not my fault—he said hurry, but —It's is not my blame—"

While a landlubber can go astray aboard ship, he can't get away with a breach of etiquette. The Jap, indignant, snarled, "Stand up when speaking, you *babui! Puta 'ng-na-mo!*"

He'd been learning the language's nicer bits of abuse, and he liked the sound. Eloquence, however, proved an error. If he had paid more attention to business, he might have noted that Kane was a bit too tall for a native. As it was, the lunge was on the way, with a swift change of pace from fumbling *tao* to a man with the speed of desperation. For a split second, the monkey-man was as incredulous as the cat attacked by a mouse.

This had to be quick, final, and silent—a tough contract for a man who still needed a lot more food and rest before he regained his punch, but Kane gambled on headwork. Being caught off limits would cost him his head. He landed at an angle, knocking the amazed Jap against the collaborator, and he followed through. Surprise and weight and speed took all three to the deck. They rolled, and all that kept them from going over the side was an upright through which was strung the guard-chain. They could have yelled, but they didn't. They weren't afraid; it was two to one, and the *taos* of Jap-dominated Davao Town were easy meat.

Though Kane used his knee, and not for prayer, he was raked by the knife the collaborationist had drawn before Kane's blow folded him up. The Jap went for his gun, rather than trust to judo. Having landed on his pratt, he had perhaps lost confidence in his lessons in self-defense.

Kane got the Jap's wrist. For a moment, the weapon was frozen between the opponents. He butted the officer under the chin, laying him out cold.

And then the door of the charthouse jerked open, spreading a fan of light on the two who lay and the one who crouched on the quarter-deck. The man in white stepped out. This time, there was no standing pat. Silence had lasted as long as it could.

Kane snatched the officer's pistol. On the main deck, crates thumped, cans clattered, stevedores jabbered, and the boatswain cursed and booted them. But the lid would blow off at the first smack of the automatic. No dodging the long swim ashore, the impossible swim to the mainland, or to Samal Island.

"Hold it, Jim!" said the "officer" in a calm, almost languid voice, accompanied by an airy gesture. Hong Kua's tone was as conversational as if he were unaware that a finger twitch would give him a gut-load of slugs.

Coolness saved him. Kane lowered the weapon. "For Christ's sake!" he gasped, and nearly fell on his face. Einstein couldn't have computed the width of the sliver of time which had made the difference between a dead friend and a live one.

The Chinese in borrowed uniform looked at the prostrate forms and remarked, "Got kinda tough, huh? We better get out."

That pulled Kane together. Hong Kua knew how narrowly he had missed being blown back over the threshold, but the knowledge didn't make his voice shake.

"This has to look right," Kane said, and picked up the unconscious collaborationist's knife. He slashed the Jap once across the forearm, and then drove the blade home. He dropped it to the deck, recovered his own knife, and hacked the cable. The lights blinked out. Below, men exclaimed and muttered. Then the dead Jap officer's pistol whacked, *one-two-three,* riddling the Filipino informer.

Hong Kua chuckled. "Nice work, but shake it up!"

Kane thrust the weapon into the Skibby's limp hand. On the main deck, the mumbling swelled into an uproar. He followed the Chinese over the side. Darkness covered the dive.

IT WAS a long way to Samal. Kane knew he had not a chance of making it. Bobbing to the surface, he saw that he was thus far unobserved. Everyone aboard the *Tenyo* was too busy scurrying about. Then Hong came up beside him.

"I got to head for town" Kane sputtered. "Can't make Samal. Pick your way."

The Chinese had peeled out of the white uniform coat. "There's a *banca* waiting. Take it easy."

A moment later, a low, lean dugout glided from the side of the transport. Instead of trying to board her, Kane and Hong Kua got a hold and trailed after. She was deep in the water, loaded with rations. The other Hong boys, Tien and Li, paddled away with never a ripple. Their slow, sure strokes gave the most drive with the least disturbance.

Minutes later, the *Tenyo* was still a howling confusion, but no searchlights played over the water. Hong Kua asked, "How do you figure that play?"

"Saw it in a movie. Filipino knifes Jap, Jap pulls gun, they kill each other. Unless they got a master mind aboard, they'll never get wise.

Datu Ali sat under a yellow parasol, chewing betel and spitting into a silver cuspidor.

It's a dead end. What happened to Haji?"

"He knows his way," one of the boys in the *banca* answered.

The tide favored them and an hour later they made Samal, where the earlier lots of loot were cached, some distance away from Datu Ali's village.

"Say, where was the *Tenyo* bound for?" Kane asked.

"I wrote it down. Lucky, passing an open

"For twenty years we were forbidden to cut down the monkey-men," said the datu. *"Now where can we get away from them?"*

stateroom I got a look at some monkey's clothes and put 'em on."

"Damn fool trick! Someone might've barged up in the dark and asked you for orders."

"He'd have got 'em, without asking twice. I figured it for fun, and it was, except for a second."

"You knew I was there?"

"Oh, sure. I was looking for you, saw you squatting, didn't see any point stopping to *habla.* You didn't know me?"

"Lord, no! But where is the old can heading for?"

"Palau. Got that from the log. She goes back and forth between here and there. Now you know it, what of it?"

"I got to think about it. How much rice have we got?"

"All we need."

So they went to see Datu Ali.

The old man listened, not knowing whether to scowl or grin. Kane, after telling his story, concluded, "They think a collaborationist and an officer killed each other. Your people are in the clear. Sail with us! We'll loot the ship, we'll nail her on the way to Tarawa!"

In the midst of the discussion, Haji came up from the beach. The five-mile swim had winded him, but otherwise he was all right.

"My friend," he said to the bitter-eyed *datu,* "Allah has given me a sign. The *Tenyo* cannot make port. Whether we loot her, or whether the sea drinks her, it makes no difference. The wrath is upon her, and what has happened tonight is an omen. This man—" He reached for the string about Kane's neck, and brought out the dogtag. "He wears an *anting-anting.* In it is the soul of a fighting man. He has brought us luck, he has brought us food, he has brought us blood, he opens the way for us to pay the debt to him and those who died before him."

Datu Ali sat there in the light of flickering lamps. His grudge fought with his old memories of a swift-running *garay,* packed with armed raiders. Though he now approved of Kane, stubbornness checked him. Americans had asked for this thing, let them settle it.

And then the dogs began to bark. Awakened women and children stirred and whispered. Men snatched rifle and *kris, barong* and long-bladed *kampilan.*

The *datu* spat. "You have pulled them down on us, but victory comes from Allah!"

Haji said, "He does what He will do! There is no might and no majesty save in Allah!"

Kane did not move. If this was it, then very well. The three Chinese, chewing their betel, looked wooden.

From somewhere in the gloom, a voice rose clear and strong, blotting out the rumble of the surf. A man was singing, telling land and sea of his approach; an African voice, full-throated, deep-chested, ringing as though trumpets and war gongs had combined their resonance. Kane knew now why head-hunting pagans had put up their choppers to listen to that man. And now the Black Bishop had come to Samal. Kane rose and turned to the *datu.*

But Ali's face had changed. "If he comes, then it is well. He is the Friend of God, speaking with trumpets and drums. He has walked alone among wild men and none have taken his head. What he says is good for True Believer and good for infidel."

CHAPTER IV

NAVAL WARFARE—MORO STYLE

THE sail of Datu Ali's long *garay,* black as the Bishop and just as square, was rigged slantwise. Thirty Moros manned the sweeps as she raced into the Gulf, outriggers kicking up spray. Seamen clambered along the struts, moving inboard or outboard to keep her balanced. Their oiled bodies gleamed in the starlight. Riding the struts took the agility of a monkey, and the ability to take a pounding such as few rodeo stars ever got forking an outlaw.

Ali called her *Najm-ud-Din, Star of the*

Faith, but Kane called her *Flying Doom,* for the terrific hammering made his head ache at the end of the first fifteen minutes. The polished hull vibrated like a bowstring. She danced over the waves, a slim, fierce creature, as wild as the men who urged her on.

Bishop Jackson groaned in Kane's ear, "I thought I knew something about prahus! This one's big enough for Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, but I thank the Lawd I left him with the pagans—this ain't for any Christian hoss! My skull's fixing to bust open like a melon hit with a *bolo.*"

"*Oooow!*" Kane pressed his hands to his temples, which was a bad move, for the frenzied pitching knocked him headlong against a thwart. "Anyway, I'm putting out thanks all around that you showed up, whether on horse or afoot! Ali had us whipped."

"Naw, he's a good man, he jest hollered a little so's not to lose face. Me coming up jest made it easier for pulling in his horns."

Once well out in the Gulf, the rowers shipped their oars. It had been hard work without chanting or drums to set the cadence. The wind freshened and the sail bellied out and the shrouds began to sing from tension.

Eyes reaching into the darkness, one hand on the silver grip of his damascened *kris,* Datu Ali stood there, keeping upright by some miracle of balance, some instinct whereby he rode the *Flying Doom* across the pounding sea, much as a horseman goes with his mount across hurdles. Spray drenched him, spray whipped him, but the ancient bird of prey faced it until finally he turned to Kane to say, "I have been away from this so long that I had forgotten how good it is."

Far ahead, they saw the lighthouse on Cape Saint Augustine, which the *Tenyo* would round to steam almost due west for Palau.

"If that's really where she's bound," Kane said.

They were not going to extinguish the light and put out a false one to wreck the *Tenyo,* because that plan could too easily fail if the transport played safe. And Haji, not having known of Kane's urge to learn the *Tenyo's* destination, had made good use of the time spent at forced labor.

"I helped the man who took tea to the engine room, and when the oiler was not looking, I put emery dust into the oil. Maybe not enough, maybe they find out too soon. But if Allah is with us, she'll be crippled. It will be like that American sport, shooting fish in a barrel."

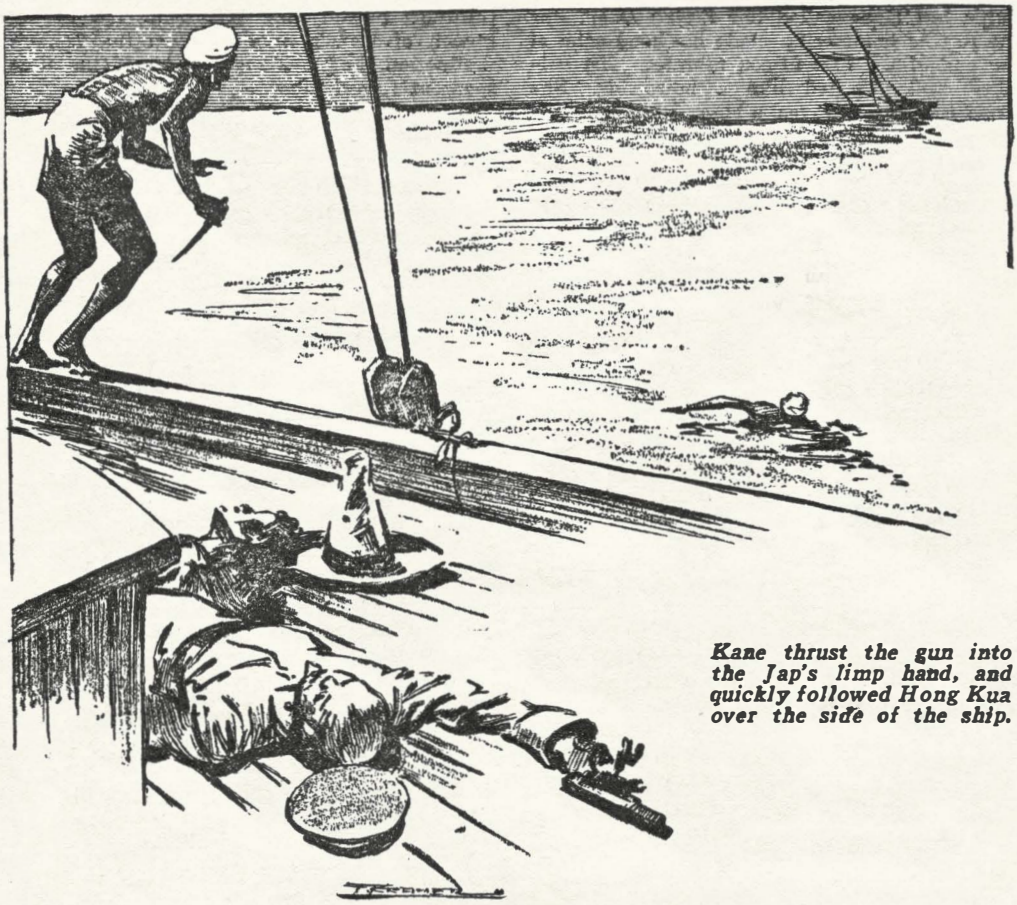
If her bearings and engines burned out, she couldn't be lured afoul of shoals off Cape Saint Augustine. And there was no predicting when she'd be in trouble. That worried Kane, for the old *datu* demanded infallibility, not alibis. At the first lagging of confidence, at the first cooling of his present glow, the temperamental pirate could decide that it's a long way to Tarawa, profitless and monotonous.

"I did not know, *señor,*" Haji said later. "Maybe I spoiled things. But do not worry, your *anting-anting* will help."

The *Flying Doom* tacked into a cove, where she found cover. There she lurked, waiting for her prey to come up from the opalescent horizon. Dawn had broken over the finger-shaped eastern cape. The Moro pirates arranged their grappling hooks and the coils of rope. There were Chinese stink-pots, loaded with sulphur and resinous combustibles—the ancestor of the modern smoke-screen.

Considering that the Moros had been disarmed, there was a surprising number of pistols and rifles among the crew, and two bronze *lantakas,* whose greatest range was perhaps six hundred yards. Kane didn't ask where they got the powder. For all his long retirement, Datu Ali had, for purely sentimental reasons, kept his supplies from running out. Instinct, rather than hope, had motivated the seemingly useless, childish, senseless play of preparing for a day which reason told him would never come. Disgust, Kane now saw, was all that had kept the sea-rover from putting out; he, Kane, had contributed nothing but the drive.

They waited, hour after hour. Kane fidgeted,



Kane thrust the gun into the Jap's limp hand, and quickly followed Hong Kua over the side of the ship.

Haji honed his *barong* and recited from the Holy Qur'an; the three Chinamen slept, and the *datu* scanned the horizon with fierce impatience. Bishop Jackson's purple-black face became beaded with fine gleaming sweat. " 'Bout time I begin to pray," he finally said to Kane. "It's going to break his old heart if there ain't some cutting and shooting mighty soon."

So the big Negro got on his knees and raised his voice. Though reverence made him restrain its volume, it surged and rumbled, and the seamen ceased chattering and chewing and spitting. As they listened, their brows beetled and ferocity flamed in their eyes. They didn't understand the words, but the sound got them.

Datu Ali's yell was little short of an explosion.

"Amen!" the Bishop intoned, and twisted about with the others.

There was smoke on the horizon. Presently, the far-sighted *datu* said, "There she is, her shape is clear! Friend of God, you pray well!"

"The Lord knew without my asking." Then the Bishop saw to his single-action Colt .45 and the long *kampilan* slung across his back.

THE *Tenyo* was towing a string of barges. This, according to the *datu's* men, she had never before done. The enemy must be urgently in need of supplies. Or perhaps something had happened to her sister ship on the Palau run.

Nearer, nearer she came, steaming at perhaps twelve knots. From the clotheslines on the barges flapped Japanese laundry. Each hulk had a cabin, and a small crew to handle the tow-line.

Nothing wrong with the *Tenyo's* engines; Haji looked downcast, and avoided Kane's eye.

"Don't take it that way!" Kane told him. "Gumming the lighthouse wouldn't have worked by daylight."

She had anti-aircraft and pedestal-mounted guns on her forecastle deck and poop; but these, like the machine guns along the rail, had canvas covers on the breech. Trouble was improbable on this grocery-wagon run.

Datu Ali spat. "She is slow, slow. They wouldn't suspect, they think we're fishermen. For thirty years not a pirate has worked these waters."

So they made sail, keeping the oars shipped and the paddlers crouching out of sight, concealed under *suali* matting, the fishing nets brought for camouflage and to use for clambering up the side and over the *Tenyo's* rail.

The whole notion seemed crazy, now that Kane faced the fact instead of the theory. It didn't take long to get the *Tenyo's* guns into action. Sitting in that open hull made him feel as naked as a jaybird. He wondered why he'd ever cursed the jungle, which for all its pests, at least offered concealment. The bare exposure of the sea dismayed him.

He grinned weakly and said to the Bishop, "I'm scared sick, you understand, not sea-sick. It's a mile from the water to the rail!"

"The Lawd helped Jonah. Lookee here, Mistah Jim, you allus get scairt until it's time to quit shaking." He held out his monstrous black hand; it jittered in three directions at once. "I bet I'm losing my complexion. Getting scairt turned my hair white, fo'ty years ago."

He rolled his eyes and cut a lugubrious face. Kane chuckled, and swallowed his heart.

The wind was right. The *Tenyo* ignored the *Flying Doom,* which, overhauling her from the port quarter, could hardly have given any evidence of her goal. No betraying oars were needed, for under sail alone the racing *garay* could almost run circles about the wallowing freighter.

Men squatting in the bilge fanned glowing punksticks, and waited to touch off the muzzle-loading *lantakas.* The three-inch balls wouldn't do any damage, but the noise would increase the impact of the surprise. Already, stink-pots fumed. Rockets were set along the bulwarks, ready to rake the rail. Unimportant weapons; nothing counted but surprise.

"She's losing way!" Kane yelled. "Tow-line dipping way deep!"

"Praise be to God, Lord of Both Worlds!" Haji intoned.

They were eating the sea. Little groups of Japs on each barge squinted into the glare; they were interested, curious, not alarmed. One waved as the *Flying Doom* swooped into hailing distance, coming up at a sharp angle to catch the *Tenyo* almost astern. Though the height was greater here than at the sides, it was offset by the advantage of swarming over her poop and sweeping her deck before the machine guns could get into action.

Then Hong Li began to curse.

His brother shouted, "Look what's been sneaking up—a Goddamn destroyer!"

It could not have come in response to any alarm from the *Tenyo.* In an easy sea, no skipper would send for help just because some bearings had burned out or an engine was close to useless.

"She's been patrolling just outa sight!" Hong Tien screeched. "Use your head, Jim!"

The *garay* swerved, her starboard outrigger in the air. Datu Ali, riding the bulwark, shouted to the Japs at the rail, "Sons of short-haired mothers! Pig-lovers! Cowards!"

Wind and distance swallowed the words, but he had accompanied them with a gesture which was far easier to understand than to describe. The insult registered instantly. A Jap snatched the breech cover from a machine gun amidships and sprayed a burst. Kane, furious at seeing the end of his chance to give Datu Ali a run for his money, snatched a rifle and fired.

It was an expression of vain defiance, of helpless wrath. It was a sheer waste of ammunition. The shot would have made the finest marksman balk. From that pitching, heeling *garay,* it was impossible—and yet, before their startled eyes, the machine-gunner lurched to the scuppers, clawed vainly for the rail, and dropped over the side. Before he even came to the surface, shark fins, like the sails of Dyak prahus, cut the water.

Whether the *garay* could make a cove before the destroyer, racing at better than thirty-five knots, could overhaul and run them down, or blow them out of the water, became a big question. The rowers broke out their oars. The drums thumped, and after the shrill chant had set the beat, the Bishop's great voice swelled it. Then Kane saw that Datu Ali had stopped scowling.

"*Wallah!* Who ever saw such a shot!" he exclaimed.

Maybe he would stick. And if the destroyer's captain had missed the exchange of fire, there'd be no pursuit.

THE *Tenyo* had broken out signals. So had the destroyer. That was odd, unless the radio had failed. And presently, the armed racer was was wallowing alongside the transport.

Before the *garay* reached shoals into which the destroyer could not venture, it became plain that she would not pursue. She was passing a tow-line to the *Tenyo.*

Kane sighed, and mopped the sweat from his face. "Her engines are shot. They'll fix 'em while they're being towed." But it was far from clear why haste was so important, why a patrol ship should keep her moving.

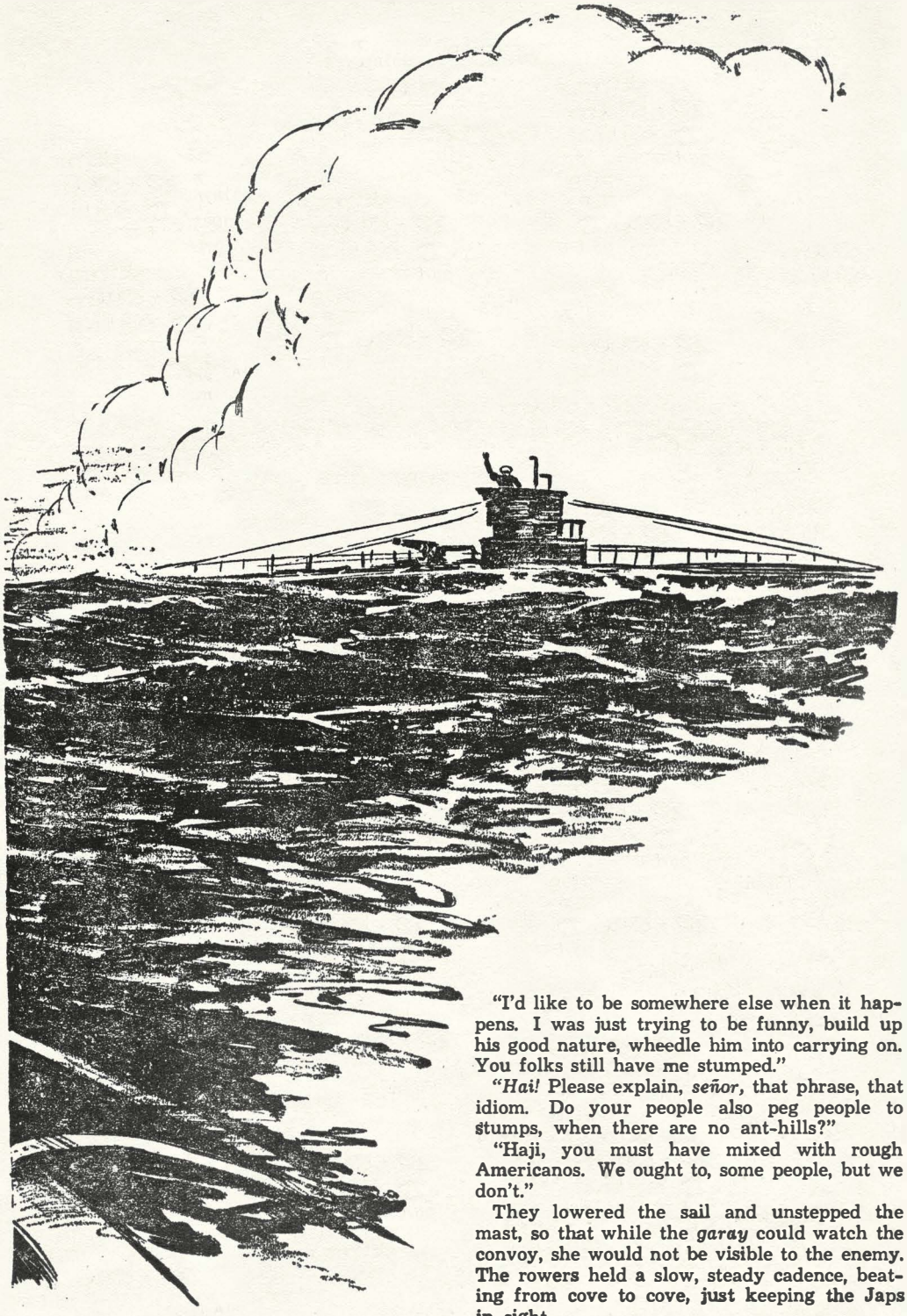
Datu Ali, skirting the pininsula, ignored one cove after another of the wild coast. His sailing showed how well he remembered the waters he had so long forsaken. Kane finally asked, "We're going back after dark to take them both?"

The *datu* answered, "*Ay wah!* How do we do it?" He was level-eyed, matter-of-fact and plainly wondering at the query.

Kane turned to Haji and said, "God a-mighty, he means it! He's worse than you are."

"*No le gusta, señor?*"

A man popped up out of the conning tower and wig-wagged with his hands. Despite the distance, it was obvious that he was white.



"I'd like to be somewhere else when it happens. I was just trying to be funny, build up his good nature, wheedle him into carrying on. You folks still have me stumped."

"*Hai!* Please explain, *señor,* that phrase, that idiom. Do your people also peg people to stumps, when there are no ant-hills?"

"Haji, you must have mixed with rough Americanos. We ought to, some people, but we don't."

They lowered the sail and unstepped the mast, so that while the *garay* could watch the convoy, she would not be visible to the enemy. The rowers held a slow, steady cadence, beating from cove to cove, just keeping the Japs in sight.

"She is slow, slow," the *datu* said, "pulling that tub and her family of lice. And just before dark, we make sail."

The stubborn pirate was going to wet his *kris*, regardless of odds. Maybe he wasn't crazy.

The sound of a Diesel made Kane first incredulous, then apprehensive. The lookout yelled. Men pointed at a low-lying hulk.

"Submarine," Hong Li observed. "I'll be damned!"

Hong Kua contributed, "Guy's crazy, wasting a torpedo on us."

Hong Tien concluded, "Cost twelve thousand dollars apiece. We ain't worth it."

Identification wasn't so simple. As far as the guerrillas were concerned, a sub was a sub. This one did not have her deck guns cleared for firing.

"Funny," Kane grumbled. "They recharge batteries at night and stay down by day."

"That one's moving," the Chinese decided. Then, "Can they run and recharge at the same time?"

"By Allah, I have heard of those things!" Datu Ali exclaimed. "There is no God but God! It really swims under water?"

There was talk of asking for a demonstration; of trying to sink it; of the advisability of making tracks before being torpedoed. When it came to surface craft, the old *datu* knew the answer, or was willing to take a chance; but this metal monstrosity, an invention of devils teaming up with infidels, was baffling. While he didn't say it could not exist, he implied that it shouldn't. And, surreptitiously, he fingered his rosary, skipping not one of the hundred beads.

A man popped up out of the conning tower and wigwagged with his hands. Despite the distance, it was clear that he was white, but Datu Ali muttered, "I take refuge with Allah! He may be a prisoner."

The sub lost way. The man came to the deck. Others followed. All were white. Finally one waved a flag. The Bishop scowled, "No, suh, ain't the American colors."

Kane couldn't make it out.

"She got red and white and blue, only jest one of each, running the length, with the red on top."

"Hell, it's Dutch!"

Datu Ali frowned. "If they were the sons of Satan, the liars and the fathers of dogs, they would fool us with American colors. Let us talk to them, and the power is with God!"

So the *garay* changed her course and darted for the sub.

She was small and battered; she was long overdue for the drydock. From the conning tower came the choking fumes of Diesels, the fumes from batteries, the stale, stinking air of overcrowded humanity. This was far from a modern sub.

"Tanbay!" a man shouted. *"W'as-salaam as'salaat!"*

"Peace on you, too!" Kane answered. "Can you talk English?"

"Well, fer Cri'sake!" the man answered, in a rich Brooklyn accent. "We're all Dutch, but I was raised in the States. Wait till I get the skipper."

Like many Hollanders, Lieutenant van Houten spoke English. His speech was correct, easy enough to get, but self-conscious, and a bit stilted. Kane wondered how that big ruddy man could possibly fit into a sub.

"We are having mechanical difficulties, Mr. Kane," the lieutenant began, after courtesies. "We cannot submerge. Our Diesels do not give us sufficient speed to cope with destroyers. And they are noisy. Our electric power naturally is silent, but we move even less rapidly."

"So you're having a tough time getting home?"

The Dutchman's prominent blue eyes blinked, he gulped, then he got it. "Yes, yes. Tough, difficult to masticate. Ha! Aptly stated, sir. But you do not comprehend. While we must to our nearest base get—I am not at liberty to say where that is—please do not consider that a reflection on your integrity—we have a torpedo left, in addition to one wedged in its tube. So—" He pointed. "We would be more content if we sank that destroyer. After all, lightening our load would increase our speed."

Kane translated, and then explained to Datu Ali, "These men are from the Malay lands, from Djawa. The captain apologizes, saying he does not speak enough seaman's Malay to deal directly with you."

The *datu* nodded. "Malay speech does not have words for that Satan's boat. Say to him it is well." And he clinched it by ceremonious phrases in Moro, whose general drift van Houten got readily enough.

"The old gentleman," van Houten said to Kane, "seems to be a man of personality. I wonder if we can induce him to help us."

Kane grimaced. "W can kick up twenty knots, probably a bit more, with sail and oar. But damned if we could haul your torpedo—we're not a PT boat!"

The Dutchman chuckled. "You have fraternized with wild men a long time, or that would not have occurred to you! No, no! Nothing so unreasonable do I suggest. Though dangerous enough. Together, we can get transport and destroyer. Are you—will you help us? Frankly, I do not know who takes the greater risk—pardon me, does one say, greatest risk?"

BEFORE answering, Kane waited for van Houten to get out a reference book, and was surprised that the man did not do so. "Hell, Captain, you know more English grammar than I do. Tell you the truth, Datu

Ali was thinking of tackling the works single-handed."

"Eh? Will you please say that again?" the Dutchman asked, incredulous.

Kane repeated.

"Do you mean that he planned such an attempt?"

"I suggested it as a gag, and the old devil took me up—I've been sick ever since. See here, Lieutenant, we have a tougher brand of Malay up here than you have in Java."

Van Houten made a formal little bow. Then Kane told Datu Ali how the Dutchman proposed a double play. The old man heard, and he exulted. "O God! by the One God! by the One True God! Those the sharks do not eat from the water, we'll chop from the water! And then the transport, and then the barges!" He referred to the crews he was going to *kris*, and the loot he would take before setting fire to what remained afloat.

As the *garay* made sail, Kane felt that he had things under control. Datu Ali's growing enthusiasm was a good omen. Finally, there was a decent chance of success.

The *Flying Doom* raced out in full defiance. The destroyer, digging her props deep to pull the heavy tow, rode high at the head. Compared to her normal speed, she fairly crept. The *garay* cut across her bow, and without drawing a shot. Not even a Jap would let spite or sense of humor trick him into wasting good shells on such a contemptible target.

A wide loop, and she skated on her starboard outrigger, now making for the tail of the towed column. Sail down, drums beating, oars twinkling, she maneuvered without heed of wind. Gunners aboard the *Tenyo* raced to yank the breech covers from the machine guns.

The *lantakas* coughed flame and smoke, and raked the destroyer's rail with balls of stone and cast iron. Rifles whacked, rockets whooshed. Five stink-pots reached the transport's deck. They were harmless, no more than stifling pests, but being mistaken for bombs, they caused confusion and panic among the merchantman's crew.

The *Flying Doom* was now astern of the *Tenyo*, whose men still peppered the dense smoke which billowed alongside. *Lantakas* and rifles raked the leading barge. Blazing pots of nipa gin, little more than low-proof alcohol, spattered over the deck and the high-heaped cargo.

At such short range the three-inch rifles on the *Tenyo's* poop were as useless as the anti-aircraft guns. Machine guns and automatics, however, set to work. Slugs spatted against the hull, zinged from mast and shrouds, ricocheted screeching from the water. Whenever a rower was hit, a howling companion snatched his oar. Bishop Jackson, cuddling an old Mauser, picked off two machine-gunners.

Like many Hollanders, Lieutenant van Houten spoke English.

Floating smudge-pots were flung over the side to make a screen. In a moment, neither side could aim at the other, so the shooting became blind, furious, and purposeless.

The destroyer, as long as she persisted in towing, was useless, for the *Tenyo* intervened and masked her armament. The raiders had only to head for the rear, heaving more stink-pots which, shattering on the other barges, started fires. Water only served to scatter the burning pitch and sulphur. Choking fumes hampered the defenders, who had no gas masks to protect them.

Then the black sail went up, and the *garay* raced with the wind. She zigzagged, she pitched, she wove. Datu Ali crowded on extra sail, bending it to the shrouds, crazy little bits unknown to western seamanship, yet they suited his peculiar vessel, and she squeezed out another knot or two.

But now the destroyer's gun could bear, and hastening before the insane raider got too far off, she swung out of line of her tow, which had lost way.

The forward guns blazed. Kane guessed that it was a five-inch shell which kicked up a tall column of water a hundred yards astern. Another missed as widely, but this time ahead of them. The *garay* feverishly darted back and forth.

The next two rounds were closer. The sun was just right for the Japs.

Rigging crashed to the deck. Shrouds and ratlines flapped in the wind. Seamen clambered nimbly up what remained and repaired the damage.

"If she cuts the tow-line and makes for us,"

Kane muttered, "we're sunk. That son of a bitch is the best shooting Jap this side of hell!"

The gunnery was good, far too good. Considering that the target was a cigar-shaped *garay* with not more than two feet freeboard, the man was marvelous. Barring the first two ranging shots, every shell had, according to the conventions of target practice, been a hit; that is, it had landed in the area which a normal target would have filled.

A geyser fairly swamped the *garay*. Flying fragments of wood and bamboo slashed Kane. An outrigger had been shot in half, and virtually knocked out of action.

The struts held, however, and Datu Ali lost not an instant in howling for repairs. Men swarmed out with rattan looped about their necks and knives clenched between their teeth. Half in, half out of the sea, they worked splices of bamboo into place and made them fast.

The whole business was crazy, impossible, fantastic, yet it was happening: a pirate *garay* giving a destroyer a good time. Only, it couldn't last long. Once the destroyer cut the tow-line and set out to make an example of what had turned out to be a target worth shooting up, there'd be no competition.

"By God, she must've cut loose! Bishop, can you see?"

Glare blinded him. He shaded his eyes against the western sun. "That Dutch gentleman sure done left us in the lurch! I think they're going to take after us, they quit shooting till we're a better mark— Glory be! She's swinging back, quick like—I'm sure my eyes ain't crazy!"

The enemy's heaviest guns rumbled. She was firing from port, not starboard. She'd sighted the Dutchman.

"Now they'll blow those poor guys right out of the water!"

Datu Ali heard that and said, haughtily, "Sir, we go back to help them."

Kane nearly collapsed.

The *datu* explained, "To pick up any who swim away from the wreck. That poor, slow, under-the-water thing, what can it do, when behold what even we could not do to those sons of short-haired mothers!"

They put about. The men yelled, frantically, fiercely, except for a few who intoned after the manner of an *imam* conducting prayer, "Praise be to God, Lord of Both Worlds!"

Black smoke laced with red flame rose from the destroyer. Seconds later came a deep, sullen rumbling, prolonged—a note far more like an earthquake's voice than a gun's. One torpedo, but well placed. Internal explosions rent the Skibby can. Her own smoke all but hid her.

"Save van Houten, hell!" the Hong boys said. "Congratulate the Dutchman! He musta snuck up and stuffed it right in her girdle, to tear her open that way."

CHAPTER V

IT'S A LONG WAY TO TARAWA

BEFORE they came within smelling range of the rapidly sinking destroyer, Datu Ali stopped blessing van Houten. "*Ai*, the dog, the son of dogs, the father of many little doglings! He lied to us, O God!"

A second blast shook the sea.

The *Tenyo* broke in half. Flame from her hold reached up to touch off the deck cargo of gasoline. The barges were smartly ablaze. The stolid Dutchman lost no time when he got going.

Datu Ali was too disgusted to pause to *kris* the few Japs who clung to life-rafts, though he did have a moment of contentment when he saw a few trapped in pools of blazing fuel.

Van Houten was apologetic. "Gentlemen, I did not lie to you. One torpedo tube was—how do you say, jammed? Whether the glancing hit on the conning tower"—he pointed at the fresh scar on the battered sub—"jarred it loose, I do not know. So, I made the best use of it. And why not?"

Kane explained that as a point of personal honor, Datu Ali had wished to board the *Tenyo*. "It's his comeback! He's beginning to feel like prizefighters who've tried it. Something always slips. Breaking the old man's heart."

"One might salvage something from that last barge."

"That's not it. He's just sensitive."

"I understand. A fragile, delicate spirit," van Houten said, and so seriously that Kane never could decide whether the Dutchman was ribbing him or whether he meant it.

"Give him a present. A personal present."

"That is a good idea. What do you need?"

"Easier to tell you what we do not need."

"Pray, what is that?"

Kane hesitated. "I was going to crack off, 'sympathy.' But they do need that. Not for their hardships. I mean, assurance that this won't go on forever. The knowledge that'll keep them from throwing up the sponge and becoming plain bandits. Up to now, they've raided and killed because they still believe in the U. S. Once that belief is gone, the *kris* will still swish, but—well—"

"You like these people?"

"Plenty. Say, are you the menace that brought that destroyer helling up from Davao? So they didn't dare radio the *Tenyo*?"

The Dutchman smiled and wouldn't answer. Instead, he gave Kane a quantity of antiseptics, some anesthetics, bandages and quinine, and even vitamin tablets.

"Thanks, but we get more sunlight than you boys do!"

"I'm no doctor, but every submarine commander has to practice medicine unofficially.

Moro diet has undoubtedly weakened you."

Then he gave Datu Ali a pistol, a rifle, and a hundred rounds for both weapons. The old man relented enough to say, "Welcome to Samal. There is good hunting, and you have friends there. These men whose wounds you dressed thank you. As for robbing me, *wallah*, a man has his duty. Doubtless Allah will give me loot when He pleases."

The prevailing wind from the northeast kept the starboard outrigger buried. Having no keel, the *garay* did not make the headway which the wind justified, yet she did surprisingly well as she bore a little south of east.

"Simple navigating," Kane sized it up. "Three thousand miles, and if we sight land on either hand, we know we're off our course."

A page torn from Haji's school atlas was a poor substitute for a chart. Despite the computed distance, the real meaning of three thousand miles of unbroken sea had just begun to register on Kane. This stretch, about the distance from New York to Liverpool, would little more than bring him out of what was to the Pacific proper a mere tidal inlet or a minor estuary. As he watched the flying fish break from the blue water, he pictured the armchair strategists at home, bending over a ten-inch globe and showing how easy it was to hop from here to here.

Datu Ali, Kane reflected, was too resigned about the fiasco, for while being a crippled sub's stalking horse would give any Moro sea-rover all the prestige he needed, presents did not give one the sense of completion to be acquired from looting and toe-to-toe slashing with the *kris*.

At dawn, and with almost indecent haste, for a few of the crew had not yet completed their prayers, the *datu* came, long-faced, to speak to Kane.

"Look! The water cans. Yes, Satan the Stoned is here, and we are delivered into his hands, and help comes only from Allah."

Haji sized it up. "Flying splinters and bullets."

The three Hongs remarked casually, "Going three thousand miles without a drink is going to be tough. Camel can't even do that."

KANE'S empty stomach played tricks. He felt old and tired, and he looked it. Whatever he had gained from van Houten's gift of coffee, preserves, American cigarettes and canned ham, he lost from considering how short a run it was back to Mindanao, and how many days to Tarawa.

If Datu Ali put about, the jig was up, once and for all. The old man would consider the trip hoodooed, and that Allah was plainly expressing disapproval of frivolity by permitting every Shaitan of the sea to discourage him.

Kane snatched the chart and put on a bold front. "See, we are here. At the speed we make, we are at least here."

Haji had very crudely checked the position by noting the hour of sunrise. He had a good watch, and had set it against Davao sunrise.

"That is right, *datu.*" He flashed Kane a furtive wink of encouragement, which meant "May Allah bless every honest liar!"

The *datu* consulted with the *muallim.*

There was a wrangle about drift caused by the wind. Instead of using a log, the Malay seamen estimated speed, just as they did almost everything else, by rule of thumb. Yet the odds in favor of their reaching their destination were high enough to tempt a venturous race.

"We're here!" Kane reiterated, boldly. "And there is the nearest place to get water. The Palau Islands. Two, three of them."

There were, he had heard somewhere, a good many more than two or three; something like twenty or thirty. The *Tenyo's* trips between Palau and Davao made it clear even to the Moros that the group was a Japanese stronghold.

"Sure it is," Kane admitted, referring to the map. "The radio mast—that's what that mark means—shows it's important. I've heard a lot of times it's a naval base, and there's a big airfield. They used to fly from there to Timor, probably still do."

He looked at the tight, wrinkled faces, the eyes beneath beetling brows, and carried on, "They can't fortify every little atoll or island or whatever the Palaus are. There's lots of places where we can slip in and get water, some repairs we need, and slip out."

"*Owa!* You say it is not all one cota?" asked Datu Ali.

"Of course it isn't all one fort. There's bound to be jungle, or cogon, or trees of some kind. Lots of natives. Not Malays, but big stupid brutes, not fighting men at all. They got sore when the Japs kick them around, only they do nothing about it."

"That is good. We will get more than water in Palau. I will get there, *inshallah,* what Satan took from me each time I tried for that accursed boat, that pig of a boat, that lewd and stinking Japanese boat!"

They changed their course.

"You did it again," Hong Li remarked. "Where'd you ever learn so much about the Palaus?"

"*Shhh!*"

"I knew you were a damn liar," Hong Tien cut in.

"Shut up! Don't spoil it!"

"Happy vacation," Hong Kua contributed. "Inside the first five hundred miles, you sink a convoy, then you go a hundred miles off your course to get water. Whatever's left after thirty men tackle a Jap airbase, they got twenty-five hundred more miles to go."

"Furlough," Kane grumbled, wryly. "It's wonderful. When you earn it."

But McKenzie's dogtag cord no longer choked him. This cruise was making jungle warfare seem a calm and placid business.

BY guess and by God, they reached the southernmost island of the Palau group, a tiny speck of land from which a distant Japanese lighthouse was just visible. Fishing villages, perched on stilts, overlooked the water. Outrigger canoes skimmed across the sea. Tall palms, and broad-leaved banana plants gave the final touch to assure the furlough party that going five hundred and fifty miles east had not brought them into an outlandish place.

Since the villagers were descendants of ancient Malay sea-rovers, Datu Ali was quite content. After parley and an exchange of presents, there was nothing to do but plug the punctured water cans and refill them.

The white-haired *penghulu* who ruled the settlement said to his visitors, "My great-great-grandfather said that his great-great-grandfather had told him how in the times long past, our people came here in a long, long prahu like yours, and now we see what manner of boat and what kind of men made the cruise."

There was much curiosity when Datu Ali led the seamen in prayer. The headman said, when the final prostration had been made, "We do not understand, but it sounds good. What manner of god is Allah? Our ancestors did not know him."

From this Kane knew that the colony had been founded before Moslem missionaries had come to Mindanao and the Indies. It seemed that their faith was what remained of the one they had brought from the ancient days of Majapahit. Datu Ali's Moslem zeal flamed up.

The Bishop, whose great bulk aroused almost as much interest as his black skin, nudged Kane to one side and said to him, "I'm worried, plumb worried. Datu Ali's fixing to convert these here heathens, and we've got no time for dallying around with revivals and preaching. These folks say there ain't no Japs snooping around this here bit of an island, but I jest don't like it."

"Heck, Bishop, he hasn't said anything yet."

"I know the signs, I been in the business mo'n fo'ty years. It took me a long time to learn when to proclaim the Gospel and when to hold my peace and steal away like the A-rabs, and I knows Datu Ali ain't got any judgment!"

Silence. The big black man sat there, looking glum as only an African can; though it rarely happens, when it does there is nothing like it. Somberly, the Bishop went on, "You been worrying. Ever since we done plugged them cans with gum and stuff, you ain't looking right."

Kane grimaced. "All right, Bishop. Flying splinters didn't make those holes. There weren't any shell fragments, either. And it wasn't machine-gun slugs. It was knife work."

"You sure?"

"Too damn sure. The leaks in the hull, they

weren't in line with the cans anyway. You noticed how the water came out right to the drop—just enough, and no more. Luck, or figuring?"

"You s'ppose we got a fifth column aboard?"

Kane didn't know. No one had acted like a Jap-lover during the futile attacks on the convoy. It just didn't make sense, but there was no disputing his deductions.

The Hong boys sensed something was wrong, and edged away from the palaver between Datu Ali, the *penghulu,* and the village elders. They listened, then they said, "Chinese humor don't work that way. And it's not the crew. They'd swim a mile to knife a Jap. Heck, it was gremlins."

Kane shook his head. "My way of figuring, someone is getting cold feet. Homesick for Mindanao."

"And you're homesick for Tarawa. Love does the damnedest things."

What made the quip so blasting was the unruffled blankness of those three deadpans. As long as the hatchets hadn't been abused, the Hongs were not perturbed. Kane did his best to squelch the idea that they had done the job, because, serious-minded chaps that they were, they might have figured that a guerrilla who could fight at sea was able enough to turn back to the jungle and fight there some more.

Then he saw that Datu Ali was giving a slow-motion demonstration of a four-*rukka* prayer. The *penghulu* was imitating him and having the devil's own time with the Arabic words, which when properly spoken, originate somewhere south of the collarbone. Haji Maulana watched intently, though apparently he was not participating. Suspecting him of trickery was also unthinkable. Still and all. . .

You spend two weeks in the far east, and you know all about the native mind. After a couple years, you are no longer so sure of yourself. Kane was able to admit any possibility.

HE wanted to get under way. Uneasiness made the anticipated overnight stay a torment. The grapevine would spread the news of the arrival of a party which included a white man and an outsize Negro. This probably would not be funneled directly to the Japs, but there was always the chance that someone on another island of the group would talk out of turn.

When the huddle broke up and Datu Ali rejoined the crew, he said to Kane, "These be good people, but pagans. I am an old man, and not many years from 'achieving the fullness.' So I am making a convert to Islam, and Allah will be more pleased with me."

Kane began to think of the bridge which, reaching from earth to heaven, passes over the Moslem hell. It is as narrow as the edge of a sword, and only the righteous can walk it. He knew precisely how evil men must feel when they face the test. Applauding Datu Ali's pious purpose would be bad, but opposing it would be worse.

Haji Maulana's eyes twinkled with malicious enjoyment, for he fully appreciated Kane's position; he was challenging him to extricate himself. The schoolteacher meant no harm. He merely had a sense of humor.

"There is no doubt that Allah will be pleased," Kane said, after courteous pondering.

"Especially since I have never made the pilgrimage."

So the retired pirate was trying to raise his prestige to the level of Haji's? That made things far worse than if mere piety had been behind it all. Kane felt helpless and beaten. The converts would carry the news to neighboring islands and then there'd be discussions with the Melanesians, big *kanakas.* One might as well send an engraved announcement to the Japanese airbase.

"I'm afraid we'll get into a mess of trouble," Kane declared, being desperate enough to admit fear.

Datu Ali smiled, politely skeptical. "Who has ever heard of your being afraid? Will not Allah protect servants of Islam?"

"But I'm not one."

"Then testify, *la ilaha illa Allah, wa Muhammad er-rasoul 'ullahi.* And you are one."

Though nothing in the testimony of faith was unacceptable to Kane, becoming a Moslem would only make the predicament worse, so he argued, "Since I'm in danger, my sincerity would be questioned. It wouldn't look like an honest conversion."

Haji cut in, "That is well said, Datu Ali."

Kane carried on, "You have done good work. Now let us leave quietly, then we can come back on our way home, and you can preach again. If we stay too long—"

"Allah is the Lord of Time. His throne is wide as Heaven and earth, and the guarding of them does not weary Him. He is the One, the Sublime!"

And that made mincemeat of furlough. With a bevy of houris waiting in Paradise, what's one red-haired wife, more or less?

A plane droned over at high altitude. Judging from its course, it was bound for Portuguese Timor. To the north, the lighthouse made a bright spot on the horizon. Any measure, no matter how desperate, would be worthwhile, if it only got Datu Ali's mind off the missionary beam. So Kane set to work.

He said to Haji Maulana, "Remember that airfield, up in Agusan near the pineapple plantation—the time Ximenes made a forced landing, right while we were mopping up the Japs?"

Haji remembered.

Datu Ali wanted to hear about it, and he

heard how, just as the guerrillas set fire to several grounded planes, Lieutenant Ximenes of the Philippine Army bailed out of the stolen plane in which he'd escaped from captivity. And the Bishop tuned in, giving his bit.

"They didn't know we were there till I slashed a fuel tank and touched it off, and then we had light to work by," Kane continued.

Datu Ali became interested.

Haji took over. "It was Ximenes who got some of them off the track. A lookout heard him and started shooting. They had their minds in the air, not on the ground."

The possibilities of three-dimensional strategy got Datu Ali still further from preaching. The man was practical, after all.

Kane took courage, and proposed, "There's a big airfield on the island beyond the lighthouse. Suppose I take the *garay* and look things over. We might even make a raid while you're preaching."

The *datu's* nostrils twitched. "No, by Allah! Let these good people meditate while I go along. What happens will prove that True Believers prevail over the infidel, *inshallah!*"

CHAPTER VI

PALAU POWWOW

RECONNAISSANCE was over. Leaving the *garay* under camouflage, the guerrillas had worked their way across Babelthuap Island, the largest of the Palaus, toward the Japanese installations on its east coast. As the night wore on, Kane became homesick for Mindanao's vast reaches of jungle, volcanic ranges, and unlimited room for retreat.

However hard a guerrilla hits, however complete the surprise, he has to find cover afterwards, and find it quickly, or else—

And here it was, the airport developed by the Japanese as the pre-war base of their commercial line to Dilli, in Timor, a touch of "progress" which the Portuguese had not been able to decline; and those who could have nipped it in the bud had not tried to do so.

The sight of the runways, the hangars, and the tall radio masts just visible in the starlight made Kane think of Private McKenzie. For luck, he rubbed the *anting-anting*. He was earning his slow progress toward Tarawa, and he resolved that the next time the question of furlough came up, he'd think twice before he tried to wheedle Moro madmen into line.

The wind, coming from the northeast, was tainted with gasoline, the ethereal tang of high-octane fuel, very likely imported from the States. As he crawled nearer the edge of the clearing, he caught the aluminum glint of the storage tanks.

Palm fronds rustled. Insects buzzed. Somewhere, in an outlying native settlement, a dog yapped. The sound was cut off abruptly; he wondered if Hong Li's hatchet had done the job.

Steel winked. A sentry was walking a nearby post. There were others, plenty of others, and all too few had been spotted during the daylight reconnaissance. This wasn't a bit like raiding familiar Mindanao.

A mile or two offshore, a thin line of phosphorescence marked the reef which guarded the lagoon and ran the entire length of the island In the mirror-smooth water, destroyers, cruisers and transports rode at anchor. He wondered where the *Tenyo* would have berthed, and whether her failure to make port had put the enemy on the alert.

Kane whiffed the air, and now that a slight shift of the wind had deflected the gasoline exhalation from the storage tanks along the waterfront, he caught the scent of Japs. They had a reek all their own when they were quartered, and in force. At his right, he heard the Bishop sniff, and then he felt the touch of the big black hand.

Kane halted, crouching, motionless. After a moment passed, he caught the pounding of feet in cadence. There was a challenge, the sound of arms, a mumble of voices, and the march was resumed: a relief of the guard was being posted. Whether the troops were rookies or veterans, they could not possibly be as vigilant as they would have been in an active sector, for here a raid was beyond imagining. Service here was a cross between a military formality and a police patrol, plus a touch of fire warden.

Then came a stretch of swifter progress, hugging the darkness of trees which skirted a road. It led directly toward the fuel reservoirs and the low, dark bulk of the warehouses along the waterfront. The hangars, the capital prize, had been passed up; the odds were too great.

The tanks were of sheet steel better than a quarter of an inch thick. Nothing short of a blast would cause a serious break. The Bishop, however, had come prepared with a substitute he had fashioned—a prodigious hammer, made by lashing a block of stone to a stout length of wood. This weapon, so heavy that an average man could only with difficulty raise it to shoulder height, was tied to his back.

They crawled, they snaked, they inched their way to the lip of the embankment which surrounded the storage tank. This earthwork was to keep the gas from spreading if unusual heat caused it to boil up through the vent. Once over the top, and inside the saucer, they worked over to the big cast-iron outlet valve and began digging. The Bishop used a *bolo*, and Kane scooped the loosened earth with a big seashell.

At the sound of the sentry's brisk, aggressive pace, they flattened and waited for him to pass. "That man makes me nervous," Bishop Jackson whispered, as he resumed his digging. "We're going to spend most of our time squatting and waiting."

A dark shape came from behind the shelter of the valve house. The blade which hit the Jap was as black as the hands and face of his assailant.

The man's beat was short. Following Japanese army principles, there were sentries all over, not because there was even a remote reason to anticipate surprise in this isolated and sea-guarded outpost, but because it is good for soldiers to become accustomed to losing sleep.

A PEBBLE rattling against the storage tank just as the sentry passed it made him wheel. A second one flicked against the shell. He took one pace and lowered his rifle to the ready.

Silence. He relaxed. He may have felt sheepish about his wire-edged nerves. Then a dark shape came from behind the shelter of the valve house which directed the flow to all the tanks of the "farm." The blade which bit the nape of his neck was as black as the hands and the face and the bare feet of his assailant. He made not a sound. The only noise was that of his collapse.

The Bishop dragged the remains to the storage tank and resumed his digging. The soldier should not be missed until the posting of the next relief.

Finally Kane said, "This looks like it."

"You better get going," was Jackson's advice. "Jest in case."

The big Negro picked up the improvised sledge whose head was the size of an anvil. He was not visible in the gloom, even though close at hand, but Kane could picture the ham-sized hands and the long arms almost the thickness of the average man's legs, the prodigious shoulders and the broad back getting set for the task.

It had to work the first time. Neither the stone head nor the crude handle could endure a second shock. Besides, there would be the noise.

"Get going," he repeated. "Things are going to fly."

Kane obeyed the urgent whisper, and crept to the rear and over the embankment. There he crouched, waiting for Bishop Jackson to listen, to pray, to gather himself for that one blast of energy.

Babelthuap Island, the largest of the Palaus, lay north and south. Unlike the tiny southern members of the group, it was volcanic and thickly-wooded. It was shaped like a long-necked squash. From bud to stem-end was about twenty-five miles, while the width was a bit more than one-third that distance. And the *garay* was waiting at the further shore.

Once they struck, the guerrillas would have to cross the island in order to make their getaway. Even with a shallow-draft boat, no stranger could hope to escape through one of the few openings in the reef which guarded the entire west coast of Babelthuap; and passing the Japanese shipping which lay at anchor in the lagoon would be impossible. As Kane waited, he wondered whether recklessness had not for once gone too far.

He heard an exhalation of breath, then a crash. Gurgling followed. The brittle cast-iron shell of the big valve had yielded. One mighty swing, shattering hammer and target alike, had done the work. High-test gas was gushing out.

The Bishop, splashed with fuel, cleared the bank. Kane clapped him on his shoulder, and felt the tremor of muscle. He had put everything into the arm sweep which had given the fragile stone maul the great momentum it needed.

Kane waited. When you sabotage trucks in a motor park, you slash the tires and let them go flat, he thought. The louder sound of sudden deflation causes less alarm than the prolonged soft hissing of a slow leak. And now it seemed that that one ferocious impact, the smash of rock combined with the ring of metal, had been trapped by the other tanks of the farm. Or it might have been heard, and mistaken for some trick of metal contracting under the cooling breeze. Maybe someone was wondering, but not enough to give an alarm. Perhaps a sentry waited for a repetition of the unclassifiable sound.

Kane got out his matches and the weighted wad of rags he had brought. It had been oil-soaked, just on the chance that there would be no time to dip it in gas.

The Bishop's breathing was now scarcely audible.

Somewhere a man yelled. The call was repeated from a more distant post. Whatever the trouble was, a noncom would be investigating.

Kane struck light to the rags. The vegetable oil did not catch at once. Echo-distorted voices seemed to be coming nearer. A sound as of feet pounding blended with the rumble of surf.

He heaved the little fire-ball.

There was a flash, a gust of heat. The fumes had caught fire before the fuse reached the surface. By the explosive burst of flame, he saw the Bishop taking long, staggering steps.

A rifle whacked three times. A siren screamed. Kane followed the fuel-scented Negro headlong through a row of banana plants. Red light reached between the stalks. The fugitives flung themselves into a drainage ditch, completely submerging, except for upturned face.

A motorcycle hammered down the road. Once the enemy got over the shock, there'd be a yard-by-yard search. The tower of flame made motion dangerous. As for panic-stricken natives, no telling what they'd do.

Then came the rattle of volley fire. Haji and Datu Ali were raising hell at the further edge of the airfield. Thirty men, distributed in threes and fours, were peppering the Japs who raced across the runways. Machine guns answered.

The fusillade from the further quarter gave Kane and the Bishop their chance to duck.

The eastward race was faster than the westward crawl.

IT WAS not yet dawn when the raiders embarked. Five men were missing. Haji explained, "They went to the mercy of Allah. But from where we fired, we could see the burning gas run down to the warehouses. The whole waterfront was ablaze."

There was no loot, yet Datu Ali was content. "This was different, this was the like of which I have never seen, and it was good to see, the grandfather of all fires, and the monkey-men running to it with their backs to us."

"No chance for hatchets," the Hongs grumbled.

Then, in the first dim gray of dawn, someone yelled, "I take refuge from Satan!"

Above the humming of the shrouds, there was a sullen rumble. The upper air was thick with planes. Datu Ali said, "If they look, they will find, and with so many of them, there is nothing too small to be seen."

Spotting a *garay* in the open sea is very much like hunting the well-known needle, but with sufficient observers, the job can be done, and quickly enough. The *garay* put about. Better dive for the cove and hide out, now that the Japs had decided that the raiders had come by sea; the five fallen, it seemed, had given the answer.

But the *datu's* desperate strategy was checked before it had fairly started. The planes circled back toward the western shore of Babelthuap. Long, rumbling explosions made the air shake. Sheets of flame were now clear against the sky.

Anti-aircraft guns hammered away. Oily black fumes billowed up from the harbor. The flames which now towered made the guerrilla's results seem trifling.

A plane, trailing fire and smoke, crashed into the jungle. Heavy guns kept up their incessant roar and grumble. Harbor installations were being shot up from air and sea.

"Lawdy, Lawdy! Them's American bombers!" the Bishop yelled. "Praise the Lawd! They're finishing what we started."

Kane laughed wildly at the thought of thirty-odd guerrillas having started that mighty show, though they had by their land raid made it triphibious, in theory at least.

Then as the light became stronger, Kane and the *datu* recognized the wing insignia of the bombers as they swung back for another pass. They were American, all right.

Bombing Truk had been a stroke entirely lacking in significance to the Mindanao men. Truk was just a name of a cluster of atolls lost in a waste of ocean, but the Palaus were only a short jaunt from home.

"*El hamdu lilahi rabb il alamina!* First they strike here, and next they hit Davao!"

It was just that simple to the reckless raiders who had with little more than bare hands unplugged plenty of hell; but while Kane knew better, he also knew that no logic of his could convince them that it would take more than a few additional days for MacArthur to land in the Philippines.

He looked eastward, into the red sun which was just breaking above the horizon. Then he turned away from it and Diane and furlough. Seven men had died in action since the departure from Davao. He said to Datu Ali, "Let's go home. I've got to tell my boys in the jungle that this really happened. I've got to tell them I saw it. The Japs will say it didn't happen, but people will believe us. We can't go to Tarawa —we can't waste all that time. I've got to tell Ryan's men right now that the big day is closer than they know."

Datu Ali looked at him, and made him say it over again. Kane repeated himself. He went on, "Without any hope, the guerrillas will become bandits, pests, doing more harm than good. They'll clash with the Constabulary and that will turn some of the people against us. But this will straighten things out. We won't be calling ourselves fools for sticking, and the *políticos* won't convince folks that we're outlaws."

There were no Jap air patrols and no destroyers. The width of the island kept Kane from seeing the destruction. He could judge only from the drifting black smoke and the tall flames. And later, as the *garay* swooped ahead of the wind, he saw the smoke smudge of the battleships which had hammered from beyond the reef while the bombers were overhead.

A few hours later, they cleared the lighthouse, which was some miles off the starboard bow. Kane turned to Datu Ali to say, "I'm afraid there'll be no chance to convert them."

The *datu* grinned. "My friend, what has happened will make them True Believers. I told them we'd raid, and that Allah would give us victory, and lo, there was even fire from the sky. Those people will now wonder what sort of men we were, so it is better they do not see us again. They might find out we are only men like themselves."

"I hope the water cans don't leak."

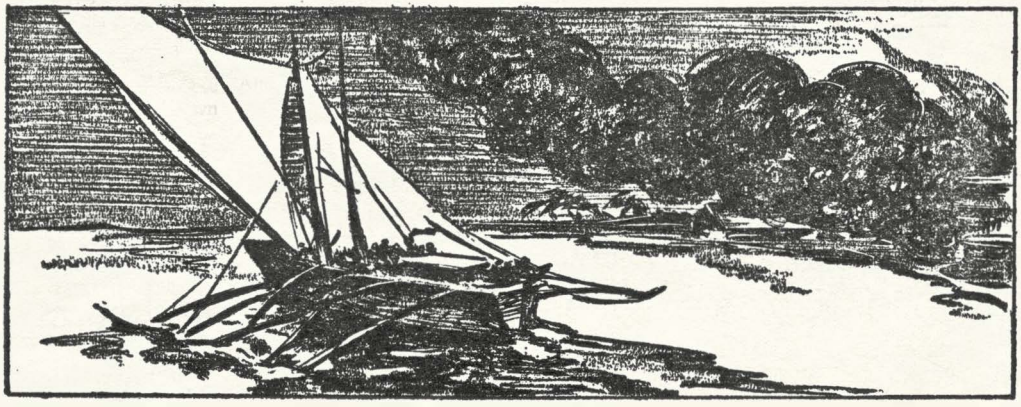
"*Inshallah,* they won't," the *datu* promised. "And now that it is over, I tell you something. I poked holes into them. I was afraid you might change your mind about a raid on Palau. Thinking of one's family is bad for valor."

"You began preaching so I'd blow my top and start something?"

"Quit asking fool questions," Hong Li cut in, "and use your bean. All you got to worry about is whether Ryan'll try you for direct disobedience of orders, not taking your furlough."

"The hell he will! Look at the mail carriers who go hiking on Sundays. Anyway, a few days at sea are as good as a vacation."

He was glad he was heading for Mindanao. He was glad he wouldn't have to explain, in captured and quiet Tarawa, how his furlough had cost seven lives.



THE ARMY

THERE'S this old gag about there being three ways to do a thing—the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way. Sometimes, the way regulations keep coming up, it seems it isn't a gag at all.

I'm a corporal, and barracks chief at this Signal Corps replacement center, and I know what it means to get a new batch of rookies to keep their toothbrush on the left side of their razor, sheets turned down exactly six inches for white collar inspection, and all the rest of the GI. You tell them to do it, talking sort of tough because they're new in the Army and expect it that way, and they look kind of blank and do it—but always they have to ask "Why? Why?" And what can a guy tell them? There isn't any reason except that's what the Army book says, and somehow later they seem to find it works out, and then they're soldiers.

Like with this Cantren kid I'd just about given up. I'm in on the Cantren thing the whole way because the C.O. doesn't tell me to leave the orderly room when I bring Cantren in.

He's a big rangy kid, nice looking if it weren't for that bullheaded crease he's always got across his forehead, like now. He stands in

Cantren smiles. No matter what anybody says, that was one hell of a shot and he knows it . . .

WAY

By NORMAN ROSE and LEN ZINBERG

front of the captain's desk stiff, but not at attention. The captain looks up at him and asks quietly, "Don't you know how to report yet, soldier?"

The kid salutes after a little wait and says, "Private Jacob Cantren, reporting as ordered," in his slow soft drawl. I was afraid he wasn't going to, but after another little wait, he tacks on a loud, "Sir."

THE captain returns the salute and says, "At ease." He lights his pipe and after a couple of puffs opens up. "Private Cantren, you've been in the Army a little over fifteen days and I've been in nearly fifteen years—and I've never seen anybody do so damn many wrong things in so little time! Corporal Givens here informs me you were picked up by the M.P.'s in town last night—without a pass, no necktie, wearing an O.D. shirt with a blouse—and to top things off, you had a little trouble with the M.P.'s when they stopped you. That right?"

Cantren doesn't say a word, but his lips make a tight hard line.

"You're new. I can allow for mistakes," the captain says, "but I don't think these were mistakes. Were they?"

The kid still doesn't answer. He's looking over the old man's head out the window back of the desk, like he doesn't even hear. So I figure it's all up with Cantren. The captain is strictly a good Joe in getting the M.P.'s to drop their charges against the kid because it would sour the captain's record plenty if Cantren gets

"Who fired that round?" our C. O. asks, his voice flat. I never saw him so damn mad.

ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES SCHUCKER

in another jam. And now the kid doesn't even answer him.

The captain waits a moment and then goes on, his voice calm. "I've been looking at your record," he says, picking up Cantren's 201 file from his desk. "Farm boy—West Virginia. Know where Sackett's Junction is?"

This brings Cantren's eyes back to the captain. "About thirty miles from our farm," he says.

"Remember the mill there?"

The kid nods. "All tumbled down now."

"I know," the captain tells him. "I was born there. I think I know how you feel. Here you have to live by a book of regulations, and I bet they still haven't even a 'No Hunting' sign where you come from."

That brings the kid to life. His eyes light up. "Hunting!" he repeats. "I can hit a squirrel's eye at three hundred paces. I joined up to kill me some skunks!"

The captain smiles. "The Army can use marksmen, son."

"Then why don't they let me fight?" Cantren blurts. "Instead of some old sassy-mouthed corporal makin' me fix my bed with fancy corners, got to wear *this* shirt with *that* pants, cap like this, salute like that! That ain't fighting!"

The captain studies Cantren for a second, then he says, "I know you won't believe it—took me time to learn, too—but there's a reason even for the little petty things. Get the idea out of your head that war is just grabbing a gun and running out to shoot somebody. War is a science of teamwork and cooperation. Every soldier has a part and must do it exactly the way he's told, or he not only endangers his own life, but—"

The captain stops. Cantren is staring out the window again, watching some pigeons circling down out of the clouds. The old man doesn't jump the kid. He just turns and looks at the birds, then back at the kid.

Finally the kid asks, "What kind of birds are them, Captain?"

The captain's jaw tightens up so I'm afraid he's going to bite through his pipe stem, but he answers him. "Pigeons—homing pigeons. And not for hunting," he says. Then he lays his pipe on his desk and asks, "Cantren, did you hear what I was saying?"

"Never saw no old bird like them," the kid says, still looking at them.

I cross my fingers for what's going to happen next, but the captain only turns around and looks at the birds, too—just as though he's seeing them for the first time like the kid is. Then he gets up and puts on his cap. "Come with me, soldier."

The two of them walk out of the orderly room and cross the company street, me following along. The kid walks on the right side of the captain instead of the left, and he's still holding his hat in his hand, as if he never had a class in military courtesy. The Old Man never said a word, though.

Down the way a little is this pigeon training loft and we turn in there. Pavlik, the gray-haired old master sergeant, is standing outside the door and he snaps to attention and salutes the captain. The captain returns the salute—and so does Cantren.

"You don't have to salute," the captain says dryly. Me and Pavlik grin, but the kid gets red in the face and says nothing.

"I'd like to see the old bird," the captain says and we walk down a long line of cages and stop at the last one. Inside there's a bird that looks a million years old, with one eye and leg gone, its feathers rough and a little thin. It's Bon Soldat, as the polished brass plate on the bars will tell you. Pavlik feeds the bird some seeds, right into its beak. In a way Pavlik almost looks like the bird, all dried up and wrinkled.

"Sergeant Pavlik," the captain says, "this is Private Cantren. He seems interested in birds. Tell him about Bon Soldat." He turns to the kid. "The sergeant and the bird were in the last war."

CANTREN shows a flicker of interest as he looks at the bird. The pigeon stares back at him with its one good eye, in that funny way birds have of looking at you.

"Sure an old bird," the kid says.

"But out flying every day!" Pavlik tells him, a happy look in his eyes. I guess there wasn't anything he liked better than to talk about his bird. "Yes, son, this is a hell of an old bird. Ripley had a cartoon about a pigeon that lived to be thirty-two, but Bon Soldat's going to break the record. Five more years to go, and I bet he lasts another seventeen. Some bird, the Bon."

Pavlik stands back and looks the bird over as if he hasn't been looking at him every day his armful of hash stripes show. "Feathers a little thin, but he can fly with the best of them."

"Tell Cantren about what the Bon did at the front," the captain says.

"Yes, sir," Pavlik answers, as if he was going to, anyway, and who's telling the story. I always notice an old soldier can say "Yes, sir," and make it mean anything he wants. I guess that's when you really know how to get along in the Army—when you can follow regulations and still do just about what you want.

Well, Pavlik goes into his story—I've heard it enough times and I guess you have, too. The Bon was sent up to the front lines with a platoon, somewhere in France. The platoon gets cut off by the Germans and they're in a spot. Our artillery don't know that the platoon is in this section and starts laying down a creeping barrage that gets nearer and nearer to the men. Soon they will be wiped out by their own artillery. They try sending runners

through, but the Germans knock them off.

"That was when they released Bon Soldat," Pavlik says. "Didn't have none of these walkie-talkie radios in them days—Bon was their last chance. He ain't even finished circling around to get his bearings when the Heinies spot him and start firing. The boys see Bon do a flip-flop in the air and start falling, and I guess their hearts went down, too—it looked like it was all over. But Bon has a fighting heart, yes, sir, the Bon's a real soldier." Pavlik stops, looks over at the old bird, and you can see the pride in his eyes.

"Was he hit?" the kid asks, excited.

"Hit?" Pavlik snorts. "Kid, just before sunset, I was back of the lines at a pigeon loft we had and I hear this noise. It's coming from some bushes and I walk over. There's Bon Soldat—he'd been hit three times, one wing is busted, an eye gone, a leg is hanging by just the skin. But the message capsule is still there and we got the news to the artillery in time to save the platoon. I backtracked his marks in the dust—it was easy to follow the blood—and we find that Bon has hopped the last hundred yards on his one good leg. That's a bird for you!"

Pavlik finishes his story and I'm watching the kid. He keeps staring at the bird and then picks up some seeds and feeds Bon Soldat. The old bird pecks at Cantren's hand and the kid smiles—the first time I've seen him smile since he hit camp.

The captain says, "The Bon is a regular soldier—he even carries a sort of dog tag."

"Sure," Pavlik says, and reaches in and gently picks up the bird. He pushes aside some of the dark feathers and shows the kid a number stenciled on the white feathers.

Cantren reads the number, *0179*. "A mighty fine bird," he says.

"Don't forget he's a hero, too," the sergeant says. "As much a hero as any general with a chest full of medals."

The captain looks at his watch and says we have to go, and Pavlik puts the bird back. We say good-by to the old sergeant and walk back to the orderly room. The captain stops outside.

"I wanted you to see the Bon," he says, "because he was a wild bird, full of all the free instincts, like you, and yet even the Bon has learned the Army way—become a GI bird. He flies straight and fast to where he's supposed to go, doesn't even stop if wounded. The bird learned." The captain pauses. Cantren is looking down the road.

"The Army may seem hard at first, Cantren," the Old Man continues. "You're in a world full of new things, new rules, new men. The men probably ride you, make fun of your ways and drawl, because you're new to them. But in a month you'll have forgotten all about it—you'll be a part of the Army. But you have to try to—"

The captain stops. Cantren is still looking off down the road. I can't tell if he's heard a word the C.O. has said. The captain walks into the orderly room. I wonder if he's sore.

I nudge Cantren and say, "O.K., sleeping beauty, let's get going."

WE GET back to the barracks and the guys are all crowding around the bulletin board looking at the new gig list. The top-kick has just posted it and is standing there, waiting for any beefs. As usual, Cantren's

name is on top of the list. Next to the gig it says, "Shoes." Cantren doesn't say a word, just goes to his bunk, but I know he put in a lot of time getting a high shine on his shoes.

"What makes with the shoes?" I ask the top-kick.

He walks over to the kid's bunk. "Best shoes in the barrack—but they're in the wrong order. You got them before the overshoes instead of after them. And how many times I got to tell you to tuck the bow of your laces inside the shoe?" The top-kick has a nasty way of talking, but really he's a good egg and means well.

Cantren don't say a word, just starts undressing.

"What you doing?" the top-kick asks.

"Getting my fatigues on. Do I get K.P. or fireman for the afternoon?" the kid drawls, his voice angry.

"You don't get nothing today. We're going on the range this afternoon."

Cantren wheels around. "You mean I get to shoot?" It's like somebody told him he's up for a three-day pass.

The top sarge nods. "Yeah, and we could use some Expert Marksmen in this company. And look, Daniel Boone, you'll find an Enfield will kick like a dozen of them squirrel guns you're always talking about. Say, where were you yesterday when we were practicing dry shooting, and two days ago when we showed the boys the different shooting positions?"

"K.P." Cantren says. And it's so. His gigs have been keeping him going in and out of the kitchen like he was in a revolving door. "But that's all right, Sarge," the kid begs. "I can shoot. Just let me get on that range and I'll show you all some shooting."

"Maybe. Only most guys that talk most about shooting, it turns out the only thing they can shoot off is their mouth. But you must be good at something. Hey, give me a butt."

The kid don't smoke, so the sergeant bums me for one—which makes at least a carton for the month.

Cantren is pretty nervous during chow and when we get out on the range the boys are kidding him a little, calling him Daniel Boone and Dead-Eye Dick. A guy asks him if he wants the target put back an extra thousand yards to make it fair competition, and for once the kid just grins at their cracks. He's holding his gun tightly, licking his lips nervously, trying to hide the inner excitement he feels—this is *one* thing he can do right.

I'm busy with the first squad when the range officer gives us the usual yell—which makes you tighten up inside no matter how many times you've heard it. "Ready on the right? Ready on the left? Ready on the firing line?"

The boys are stretched out, tense, their first time on the range. I'm holding up my hand—my guys are ready—when I hear the top-kick yell, "Cantren!" and we all look over at him. He's stretched out, and the rifle almost looks like a part of him the way it snuggles to his shoulder.

The top-kick is standing over him. "You got everything cockeyed, as usual! Hold the rifle in your left hand—and don't you know how to make a loop sling? I said left hand!"

The range officer bawls out, "Take that man out of the line! Ready? Fire at will!"

The boys start shooting and I haven't time to watch the kid. But when the noise dies down I hear the sergeant still talking. "I don't care if you *are* left-handed. You got to learn to shoot the way the GI book says—and that's right-handed! And look, this ain't a pea-shooter, it's got a kick, so you use a loop sling like this." He bends down and fixes a sling around the kid's arm. "Now hold your elbow under the gun—like this. . . . Yeah, I know, it's uncomfortable, but it's the best way to shoot. Spread your legs more, sides of your feet flat on the ground." He pulls the kid's legs apart and presses the heels to the ground.

"But—" Cantren begins, and he seems a little desperate. All the other men are watching him, the louie's yelling for the top-kick to hurry up.

"No buts about it," the sergeant says. "You shoot the way I tell you. Now go ahead and fire!"

I feel sorry for the kid, the other soldiers are saying "Daniel Boone" and laughing. I know how the kid feels. The one thing he likes to do the Army is spoiling for him.

Cantren is sweating a bit, but he takes aim and squeezes the trigger. The gun kicks back so hard his body shakes, and the guys laugh all the harder. The kid is red in the face and he pumps the bolt back and forth, firing as fast as he can. You can see he doesn't aim, just wants to get it over with.

The red flag, for cease firing, waves in front of the targets and Cantren sits up, a little pale and sick looking. He's holding his empty rifle firmly, his eyes on the sky. I guess he doesn't want to look at the other men.

THE top-kick is at the portable phone, getting the scores from the pit. Most of the boys were pretty fair shots. The last one was Cantren's.

The top-kick says in a loud voice, "Hey, Dead-Eye Dick, you got five! All bunched together—bunched fine—but all in the outside ring. Five out of a possible fifty."

The guys repeat it down the line—five out of fifty, the lowest score of the platoon. Everybody is grinning and laughing and Cantren's face goes pink and red. I want to go over and tell him that it isn't too bad—he *had* bunched his shots, that was the important thing. But I never get a chance to talk to him. Cantren suddenly stands up straight, eyes on the sky. Then, before anybody can stop him, he grabs a shell out of the ammo box, jams it into his rifle—and points upward with his finger.

There's a speck up there in the sky, a little black speck—a bird. The kid flips the gun to his shoulder, aims and fires.

The speck starts getting bigger, dropping fast, finally landing out of sight behind the hill at the end of the range.

For a moment there's a deep silence, with everybody staring at Cantren, who is very stiff and erect, his eyes proud. None of them ever saw a shot like that!

Then the top-kick comes to life. "You'll get the guard house for shooting out of turn!" he yells. "You'll get. . . . Holy mackerel, what a shot!"

I don't know what to say. He shouldn't have fired out of turn, that's a serious business—but what a shot! I guess you could say the kid fired in self-defense.

Then the top-kick lets him have it, calls him every kind of a jerk, and the language isn't exactly restrained. But Cantren just stands there, still very proud, and he doesn't get red in the face—he smiles! No matter what anybody says, that was one hell of a shot and Cantren knows it.

Our C.O., the captain, comes through the ring of guys around Cantren and we snap to attention and salute.

"Who fired that round?" he asks, his voice as flat as though a steam-roller went over it. I never saw the C.O. so damn mad.

"I did, sir," Cantren says in that soft clear voice of his. "*I* fired *that* shot!"

The captain is up to him before he's finished. He shoots out a hand—for a minute we think he's going to slug Cantren—but he only tears the rifle out of Cantren's grip. Then he stands there, getting hold of himself before he'll trust himself to talk.

Before the captain can say anything, old Sergeant Pavlik comes busting through the crowd. "Who did it?" he asks, and his voice is shrill. The old guy's face is dead white.

Everybody's staring at Cantren, standing so stiff and proud. For a moment the old sergeant stares at the kid, then he rushes in, swearing and screaming. And then he swings. It's a roundhouse smack on the kid's jaw. It doesn't shake Cantren more than a flea-bite, except his eyes go hard and cold. He's staring like that as a couple of guys drag Pavlik away.

"What'll I do, sir? Guardhouse?" the first sergeant asks the C.O., who is picking something up that Pavlik dropped. I see for the first time the little bundle of feathers and blood, and all of a sudden I feel a little sick.

"What do you want me to do with the great hunter, sir?" the top-kick asks again.

The captain shoves what he picked up into Cantren's hands, and walks away. The feathers are clean enough for Cantren to read *0179* stenciled on them before he slumps to the ground, crying.

"Nothing," the captain says quietly to the top-kick. He's looking down at the kid. "Just leave him alone, Sergeant."

The top-kick is puzzled. But I know what the Old Man means.

Like I say, it's funny sometimes what it takes to make a soldier out of a guy.

THE SECRET OF ST. LUCIE

By

WILLIAM DU BOIS

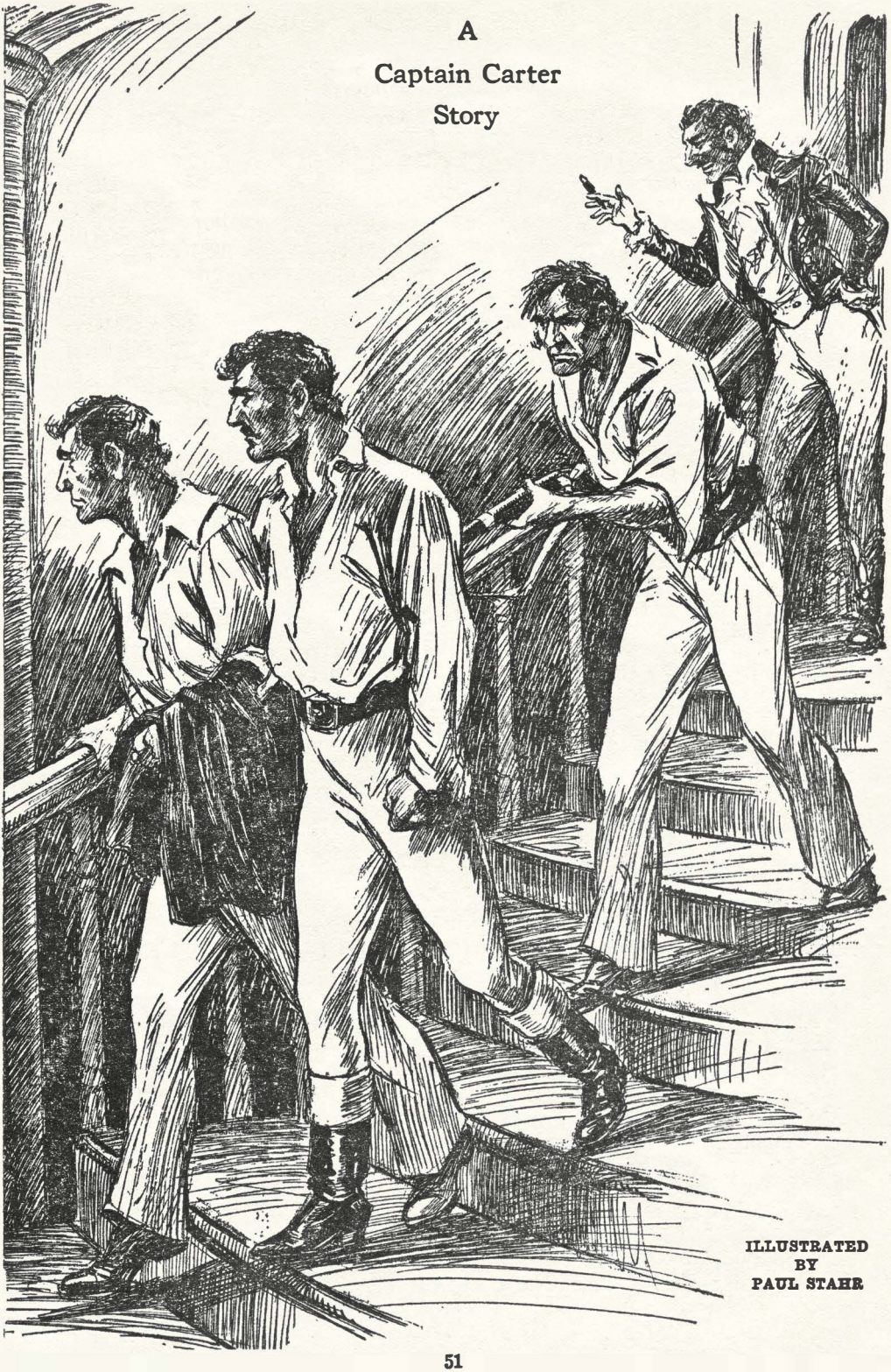
TO CARTER, it seemed hours since his telescope had picked out the two horsemen across the heat-shimmer of the savanna. Master and slave, they had emerged from the cypress along the St. Mary's in that precise order, the tall Georgian riding arrogantly across the boundary that separated his state from the Territory of the Floridas; the Negro slave, hunched and gnome-like, urging his mule to eat the white man's dust. Carter could see them clearly now, where the corduroy road wound out of dry swampland and leveled into pine-barrens. They looked very lonely against that back-drop of wilderness. Once again, he cursed the grotesque mission that brought him here, thirty miles north from the St. Johns, to arrest a lone slaver without witnesses.

Above all else, he hated the need of an ambush. The bitter need that kept him here—secure in his nest of palmettoes—while Sergeant Grady sat in the cleft of the big water-oak beside the road. Grady—and the corporal's guard hidden in the scrub—would make the capture. He could trust Grady anywhere, of course. It was no less galling to remember that this same arrest might have been made, with equal legality, on the bank of the great river thirty miles to the south.

At least, the scrub was quiet now; he let his mind linger on that fact with a certain grim pleasure. Today, a corporal's guard—or a lone slaver—could ride at will between the Georgia border and Cowford crossing on the St. Johns.

No one touched them as they went down the stairs side by side to where Yancey waited.

A
Captain Carter
Story



ILLUSTRATED
BY
PAUL STAHR

The commanding general in St. Augustine had done an excellent job on the Indian hostiles. This spring, at least, the Seminoles were still pounding their corn in the shelter of the Cypress. The Creeks to the north were actually on army pay, helping to extend the sutler's road into Tallahassee, the territorial capital. But Brevet Captain John Carter knew how easily war could blaze along this uncertain frontier.

Between campaigns, he took other jobs—and other risks. You could hardly put it more simply than that. Take the slave-trader who was riding so blithely into ambush. Carter let his mind review Yancey's plans, as those plans had been reported to him in St. Augustine.

Yancey was bound for St. Lucie Island, the great plantation at the mouth of the St. Johns. By nightfall, Yancey had planned to present his credentials to Cyrus Lane's boatman. Lane—the owner of St. Lucie—would be glad to receive a good customer. A trader's bill of exchange—from Yancey's buyers in Georgia—called for the transfer of twenty prime hands to cotton-gins around Brunswick; Yancey himself would select the blacks, and return with them by water. So far, all this fitted the pattern of territorial law. Lane was perhaps the most prosperous of all the Florida planters. If he chose to breed slaves as well as work them, and if those same blacks seemed amazingly productive, it was hardly the army's affair. The army could never interfere openly, even if it guessed that the master of St. Lucie was running slaves from Africa.

Bart Yancey's gelding whinnied in the piney-woods ahead, and Carter held his breath as the trader rode into view.

The man sat high in his saddle with all the relaxed ease of a bull—a barrel-chested man in a linen duster, with a carbine riding in his saddle-boot. Even from his ambush in the palmettoes, Carter could see the white zigzag of scars on Yancey's cheek and jowl. The trader was down in the army's books as a gouger of the worst sort: his appearance bore out the description amply. Thank God we're beginning to stamp out the breed as we move the Indians west, thought Carter. As we smoke out die-hards like Cyrus Lane.

He made himself count ten before he raised his fingers to his lips—and gave the signal that Sergeant Grady had waited for since morning.

The effect was explosive. Grady dropped from the oak like an over-ripe fruit. The derringer in his fist seemed to graze Yancey's midriff before the sergeant's feet could hit the ground. Corporal Simpson had already darted from the palmettoes to seize the gelding's bridle. On the far side, a private whisked the carbine from Yancey's saddle-boot as the trader slowly lifted his arms. In the dust behind, four other privates had already boxed the Negro and the mule.

The maneuver had been accomplished in the space of seconds. Carter drew another deep breath, and walked out to the corduroy road to take command.

"Mr. Bart Yancey?"

"The same, sir."

"This is a military arrest. You'll come quietly?"

The Georgian nodded, with a slow grin. Despite the pouchy face, Carter saw that the man was sharp as a satyr, with the same knowing leer. He's all muscle under that loose duster, the captain added privately. Steel springs, coiled and waiting. The hands on the saddle-horn curled lazily as the man sprang down to the road. Carter pulled his thoughts away from the tensile strength of those hands. The report on Bart Yancey had been a thorough one; it wasn't at all pleasant, remembering how many eyes those two stumpy thumbs had sprung from their sockets.

Yancey said easily, "Just where are you taking me, Captain? And if I ain't being unreasonable, what's the charge?"

But it was Carter's turn to grin now. "Remove the gentleman's coat, Simpson. His papers should be in the pocket."

The trader offered no protest when Corporal Simpson stripped off his ulster; his manners said plainly that he had been arrested before—and found lawyers to defend him. Nor did he lose his smile when Grady marched him into the thicket where the squad had tethered their mounts.

Simpson came up at Carter's nod, and held out the coat for inspection. "Wallet's right here, sir."

The trader's papers were in perfect order, save for the negligible fact that a license was missing. The bill of exchange, with a bank-stamp from Brunswick, was folded neatly across a letter from Yancey's Georgia buyers. Carter broke the seal without compunction, and read it through. Then he pocketed both letter and wallet—and held out his arms to try the ulster.

It fitted smoothly enough, when Simpson dropped it over his shoulders. So did the broad straw hat that Yancey had worn—and the starred gauntlets which Grady brought out from the thicket.

"Don't strip him down too far, Sergeant. He has a long ride ahead."

"So have we, Captain. I wanted you to be comfortable."

Carter perceived that Grady was taking this tour of duty in his stride. Blue eyes twinkled in the sergeant's round, tanned visage; the grin that cracked his dust-caked cheeks when he opened Yancey's saddle-bags was mischievous as a boy's. Carter accepted it in silence. After all, he thought, we've been spies in other corners of this peninsula. Is it im-

Grady dropped from the oak like an over-ripe fruit, the derringer in his fist.

portant that we've never posed as blackbirders before today?

Without words, he knew that his sergeant could handle this job with the same routine detachment. He wondered if Grady had ever been genuinely afraid, since he began his army career as a clerk in Ordnance. His own heart was pounding as he took out a pair of the trader's nankeen trousers and stepped into the palmettoes to try them on.

IT HAD begun just two days ago, in a St. Augustine garden. To be exact, in the patio of Don Esteban de Vega, merchant and army contractor, whose home on St. Francis Street combined elegance, comfort, and the best Madeira north of Havana.

The Spaniard had spread brown eloquent hands when the general outlined his scheme. Carter, standing in the shadow of a date-palm, had understood Don Esteban's concern.

"How can you arrest the man, General? What reason can you give?"

Carter's commanding officer was in a good humor that afternoon. He and the Spaniard had been friends since the start of the long Indian war; de Vega had been one of the few Castilians to remain in the old territorial capital after the annexation. He owed much of his prosperity today to army orders; the army owed much of its information to Don Esteban's agents and sub-agents through the Floridas. Now, when the general rumbled with laughter, the Spaniard could join easily. The laughter told him that the dossier he had offered on Bart Yancy had been digested thoroughly.

"Be frank, *señor,*" said the general. "Can you name one of these border hellions I *couldn't* arrest, if I had the time? Yancey is wanted in three states for gouging, and in at least one other for murder. Here in the Floridas, he's been trading without a license for years. I know he's made himself respectable now. Greasy lawyers in Brunswick. Ten witnesses to swear he was in another county the last time the knives were out. I'm arresting him regardless, and talking to his lawyers later. That'll give Jack here the time he needs."

Carter stirred uneasily as he heard his name. It was quite like the general to keep him in suspense while he sparred with Don Esteban. He ventured a question now.

"Suppose Yancey suspects what we're really after, sir?"

The general snorted. "Grady will hustle him into the briers, the moment you've made the arrest. Box him, while you go through his papers and his bags—"

"Pardon me, sir, but I understand we're to commandeer his horse and mule as well."

"You'll have to be thorough, Jack. Lane may have a description of the fellow, even though they've never met. That means you must fit into his shell, and stay fitted. The *señor* here will tell you how to pick a field man, when it comes to the bargaining."

Carter said patiently, "What if Don Esteban is in error? If Lane does know Yancey—"

The Spaniard shook his head. "My own agent in Brunswick has looked into that. It is Bart Yancey's first trip to the island."

"They could have met outside St. Lucie."

"The island is Cyrus Lane's world, Captain. He leaves it only to visit his other *haciendas* along the St. Johns. Like a good planter, he enjoys his own acres. Like a good husband, he is faithful to his wives—"

"Never mind Lane's wives," said the general. "You know what your job is, Jack."

Carter clicked his heels. "Following your orders, sir. I'm to present myself at St. Lucie as a Georgia slave-trader. I'm to buy twenty hands, and pay for them with Yancey's bill of exchange. Beyond that, I can't see too clearly."

"Don't even try, Jack. You'll be put up for the night at the plantation-house. Old Cyrus does that much for anyone who gives him a large order. Grady will be quartered with you as your servant. In the morning, I expect you to bring me proof that Lane has been running gunpowder and rifle-bores into Florida, as well as slaves."

"Grady may have been a burglar before he signed the Articles of War, sir. I still can't see him exploring the storerooms of St. Lucie without Cyrus Lane's consent."

"Don Esteban tells me that Lane keeps his arsenal in an attic above his docks." The general banged fist to palm. "Bring me proof of that, boy. By Heaven, I'd invest St. Lucie tomorrow, and to hell with the governor."

The Spaniard entered the discussion gravely. "The general is right, Captain. Cyrus Lane has lived too long outside the law. Take this endless Indian war. . . . Of course, it is to Lane's interest that it go on forever. That the frontier of the Floridas remain a wilderness. For that reason, we think he sent guns to Osceola. That he sends them now to Coacoochee—"

"The slavers in the cotton states are on his side, too," said the general.

"Only the money-grabbers, *señor.*"

"Be honest, my friend," said the general. "Haven't you bought slaves at St. Lucie yourself?"

"In the past, yes. Black men fresh from the Gold Coast. Six-foot bucks with bone-rings in their noses. Trained in Cyrus Lane's own cotton and indigo fields. . . . That is his method, you see. First he breaks them in his barracoons. Then, he puts them to work for as much as a year—feeds them well, trains them perfectly. It is a system that pays, when they go on the block. I own perhaps fifty slaves today. Twenty of them came from Lane's pens. Those twenty are worth the lot."

The general drummed his chair-arm. "It's well that you see the light, *señor*. I'd break you tomorrow, if I thought you were on this blackbirder's side."

The Spaniard dismissed the challenge. "I am a compassionate man, General. In my heart, I know that slavery must go in America—if not in our time. Today, it flourishes in the South as never before. Today, I have work for those black hands to do."

He faced the general's scowl, and Carter's cold Yankee stare, begging them to understand. "Fresh blacks will always come in from Africa, while there are traders like Bart Yancey to falsify the records, and a wilderness like ours to hide the slavers' entry. In that I am a realist, gentlemen. But realists will not support brigands who behave like kings. When a man like Lane stands in the way of peace, it is time to remove him. Therefore, I suggest this means of trapping him. I offer it to you gratis."

"Suppose we find nothing at St. Lucie?" said Carter.

"Suppose you don't?" snorted the general. "I've told you I'll be following another scent in the meantime. Only *scent* is a mild word."

Don Esteban took up the story with his faint smile intact. "The general is pleased to make jokes about the *Lady Ebony*. The best barkentine in Lane's fleet, Captain—a thing of beauty, if you keep her well to leeward. She was sighted off Matanzas yesterday and my guess is that she'll keep offshore and wait for a cloudy night. Lane's skippers can bring in their cargoes blindfolded, of course. I can only offer you another rumor that she had taken on guns in Cuba. The rest is in the army's hands—or should I say the marines'?"

"Call us any name you like, *señor*," said the general. "Names don't matter, if we get results."

THEY had shaken hands formally in the sun-dappled garden. When Carter had walked into St. Francis Street, Grady and the mounted corporal's squad were already waiting, ready to ride.

Now, forty-eight hours later, he stood in another light-and-shadow pattern to watch that same corporal's squad canter past, with a captured slave-trader roped neatly to a saddle-bow. Bart Yancey was riding Carter's calico mare, now. As he passed, he turned his head to speak, then spat in the dust instead. Carter and Grady accepted the gesture in silence. After all, they were standing shoulder-deep in palmettoes; from Yancey's point of view, they were still in uniform. He could hardly see that Grady was wearing a pair of his pantaloons; that his best nankeen trousers fitted Carter perfectly.

Yancey's slave brought up the rear of the military procession—hunched on Grady's shaggy pony, still breathing the white man's dust without complaint. After a moment, Carter stepped out to the corduroy road, and watched his command take the next turn into the pine-barrens.

"To make things complete," he said, "you should appear at St. Lucie tonight in blackface."

"Glad to oblige, sir," said Grady. "Somehow, I don't think I could fool old Cyrus."

"Suppose we don't fool him as we are?"

"That's your detail, Captain," said Grady. "I shouldn't worry, if I were you. Remember, he's selling, and you're buying—"

"Very well. Let's say I keep him so busy haggling he doesn't even notice when you climb into his boat-shed. What comes next?"

"Couldn't we just leave that to inspiration, sir?"

"Now *we*, Grady—*you*. My job is to distract Lane, yours is to play burglar. You know that boat-shed will be guarded."

"We've gotten past guards before, sir."

Carter sighed, and ripped open the ten bullet buttons of his tunic. As always, it was both a relief and a shock to get out of that stifling garment. He had worn his country's uniform for seven years, now, in war and out. This would not be the first time he had served his country in civilian garb.

He felt his flesh crawl as he slipped into Yancey's linen duster. Had the trader's dark business infused his garments with his shame? Carter shrugged off the conceit bravely, and vaulted to the saddle of Yancey's gelding. Just how did a slave-trader look when he rode about his business? The captain struck a tentative attitude while he waited for Grady. He could hardly suppress a shout of laughter when the sergeant stepped into the brazen light of noon. Yancey's worn homespun pantaloons were an acceptable fit, but Yancey's second-best coat was another story.

"Speaking of tramps in search of a haystack—"

Grady heaved ponderously up to the mule's back. They rode down the corduroy together, side by side; Corporal Simpson had orders to make for Cowford at a canter, so there was no danger of exposing themselves to Yancey now.

"Just how will I explain you to Lane?"

Grady considered. "Yancey's letter says he's bringing a servant. Doesn't mention color, sir. Why can't I be your bodyguard?"

"Does Yancey look as though he needed one?"

"Lane's never seen him, sir."

"He must know the fellow by reputation."

Grady considered that too, but only for a moment. "Meaning no offense, sir, you could pass for a gouger in these parts. You're case-

hardened enough. As for me, couldn't I be a family heirloom that's gone to pot? Or even a friend who's working off a debt?"

"You'll be background, for once," said Carter. "The sort of background I hope no one will notice. Especially when you explore that boat-house. How soon do you plan to try?"

"When I'm laying out your clothes for dinner, sir?"

"Did I bring a change of linen?"

"Yancey did. I looked in his saddle-bags." Grady clucked cheerfully to his mule. "The master of St. Lucie will be showing you around by then, if you haven't settled down to bargaining. D'you think he'll introduce you to his favorite wife?"

"Surely he's too circumspect for that."

"Some say he has a dozen," said Grady. "I've heard he keeps most of them in separate harems down the river, and visits each in turn. Look at him from any angle, sir, Cyrus Lane leads quite a life."

Carter nodded grimly. "As an abolitionist, do you approve?"

But Grady was still painting a word-picture. "They say all of them are Gold Coast princesses, and he's supposed to have married 'em all, according to their tribal laws. Maybe I *am* an abolitionist, Captain. I never quite thought it out. But I expect to enjoy this visit, even if you don't."

"Suppose you're caught snooping in that boat-shed?"

"Suppose I am, sir? You can always disown me."

"D'you realize what'll happen to us, if we're found out?"

Grady nodded, with perfect aplomb. "We won't be the first to be curious about Cyrus Lane. Or the first to be shipped out, if he catches us."

Carter glared at the sweep of powder-dry wilderness ahead. They were five hours' ride from the St. Johns, but he found that he could already picture St. Lucie island quite clearly. There were too many stories current about Cyrus Lane, that was all. Too many rumors of men who had gone to St. Lucie on the wrong errand, and never came back. With a barkentine due from the Gold Coast every fortnight, Lane could deport people from his kingdom at will. There were rumors of quiet death at sea. Other rumors insisted that he sold too-ardent investigators direct to the Arab dealers, at his depot in Africa.

Grady said easily, "The general will come looking for us with all he's got, if we're late in reporting. 'Course, that won't be much help, if we're halfway across the Atlantic."

It was a remark that required no answer; on other occasions, Grady had shown ability to echo Carter's unspoken thought, to frame terror in his own sturdy cheerfulness and rob it of its bite. Today, Carter could find no solace in the sergeant's warm chuckle. A chill that had no relation to the blazing afternoon had invaded his spirit, now their task was under way. He lifted his eyes to a notch in the pines ahead, where the trees fell away to allow the first glimpse of the distant estuary of the St. Johns. A buzzard circled here, a lazy symbol of death against the pale blue of the Florida sky. He felt that the scavenger-bird was watching him, and spurred Yancey's gelding on to meet the challenge.

CHAPTER II

THE MASTER OF ST. LUCIE

SIX hours later, with the sun already low at their backs, the Captain and his sergeant reined in on the shore of a great, blue bay with chocolate at its heart. This was the tidal estuary of the St. Johns, the strangest of Florida rivers, which insisted on flowing due north from the outskirts of the big Cypress, losing itself in a maze of lakes, and settling into a mile-wide channel just before it made a right-angled bend at Cowford. Grady and Carter had ridden east of Cowford in the declining day: the crossing that was later to become the town of Jacksonville had its complement of army in these times, and it was not to their advantage to be seen without uniforms.

Now, as they let their mounts cool their pasterns in the lazy flow of the river, Carter shaded his eyes against the reflected sun-glare for his first glimpse of St. Lucie. None of his campaigning had brought him this near the river's mouth. He had expected to find an extension of the barren wilderness to the north. It was a pleasant shock to find acres of tilled fields instead, and a wide dock a hundred feet beyond, where a well-graded road ended. St. Lucie itself seemed merely an extension of the river's left bank, a solid mass of yellow pine that blocked a view of the sea. Remembering his maps, Carter knew that the Atlantic was scarcely a mile beyond. That the windbreak of yellow pine only sheltered a thousand-acre sweep of Sea Island cotton and the plantation-house itself.

"It seems we're expected sir," said Grady. "At least, here comes the ferry."

The broad-beamed craft lumbering out from the heavy shade of the island's bank looked sinister in the fading day. Sinister, and a bit magical, in spite of its unwieldly form. Then Carter saw the cables strung taut from a great cypress bole beside the dock; he heard a shouted command across the water, as black muscles strained at the ropes, warping the craft into its berth.

Carter nodded to the sergeant, and kneed the gelding up to the road again, just as an

overseer sprang out to the dock and swept off his hat in a bow. "Mr. Yancey?"

"The same, sir." Carter wondered how his own voice could be so calm. For a crazy moment, he wondered if the principal of metempsychosis (which he had studied at Harvard long ago) was really valid. Could he *be* Yancey for the next few hours? Go through the motions of buying human flesh from this merchant who fancied himself a king as well? He came back sharply to the present, while the overseer looked through his papers. He could not doubt that the man was completely convinced: his gesture of welcome said so plainly.

"Ride aboard, Mr. Yancey. It's a good two miles to the plantation. Is this man your servant?"

Carter managed a convincing chuckle, and glanced carelessly at Grady. "You might call him that. He's working off a debt."

The barge had swum away from the bank almost before Grady could urge the mule aboard. Carter dismounted to look down at the water coursing under their keel. Seen at close range, the St. Johns was a rich brown that shaded into indigo as the sun disappeared behind the ragged sweep of pines to the west. A last ray splintered in the windbreak on St. Lucie, showing the dusty rows of cotton beyond. So far, thought Carter, I might be riding out the Tocoi road for an evening with de Vega. Or making a routine check at an outpost. . . . He remembered to let his shoulders slump a little in the duster. A man with Bart Yancey's shambling ways would never snap to attention as he thought of his work.

A white ribbon of oyster road split the cotton fields. Beyond, another windbreak shut off the eastern horizon. The overseer rode beside Carter at a sharp gallop as they left the barge, Grady, doing his best with the tired mule, brought up the rear of the procession now.

There was enough light to show the slaves' quarters at the edge of the cotton-fields; a geometric pattern of cabins, each with its patch of truck garden, each echoing with dark laughter now that the day in the fields had ended. To the right, where the shore of the island curved with the St. Johns, Carter saw the bulk of a dock or two, and the raked masts of a ship. . . . He needed no questions about her trade as they clattered by. He had seen Lane's barkentine before now, hull down in a northeaster off the Tortugas. This one was slim as a racing yacht, and black as the subtropic night closing in about her. Almost as dark as the stench that swam up from her hold, tainting the air with a reminder of her months at sea, of death and slow despair under those iron-bound hatches, of a brutal traffic that worked in terms of cargo space, not in human lives. When Carter looked again, he saw that the decks were swarming with workers. Most of them seemed absorbed in the thankless business of painting the ship with lime, from martingale to taff-rail.

"The *Lady Ebony*," said the overseer. "Came in this morning with the tide. They must hurry, if she plans to leave tomorrow."

Carter swallowed his surprise with an effort. After all, he was in Lane's empire now; evidently the master of St. Lucie made no secret of his profession this close to home. It was a bit of a shock to realize that the very ship the general had hoped to intercept was already safe in her berth—and planning to slip out again with tomorrow's tide. He wondered how much Lane had paid along the coast to make that black hull invisible at certain moments.

Wondering, he crowded his curiosity a little. "Don't tell me they unload right here at the dock?"

The overseer laughed. "We drive our cargo overside at the Boca," he said. "Most of them can do with a wash, you know. The pens are on that corner of the island. When we've herded them ashore, they get a real currying before they're locked up for the night. . . . Keep your ears open, Mr. Yancey. You'll hear them singing when the moon is up."

The overseer had said it all quite casually. Exactly as though he were talking of cattle, not of men. "How long are they kept in barracoons?" asked Carter.

"That depends on the hand himself. Those who can be broken easily are sent up-river to work in cotton or indigo. The more difficult cases are kept here, to work the marsh. Right now, Mr. Lane is trying to divert the salt-water, and lay out rice-fields. . . . Of course, the great demand is for cotton-pickers. Your own clients, for example—"

Yancey was really expected, then, thought Carter. Aloud, he said, "I hope you've a good selection for me?"

"I think Mr. Lane will prefer to answer that, sir."

Carter turned abruptly, realizing that Grady had vanished in the dark. They had ridden around the second wind-break while they talked. He was conscious now of the vast, white mass of the plantation-house to the east. A spruce Southern dandy of a house, with a three-story portico complete with pillars, a fan-lighted doorway that had come straight from a Neo-Greek architect in Charleston. At the moment, Carter was only vaguely conscious of the magnificence. His ears were straining for the sound of the mule's hooves on the road, he let out his breath only when he heard Grady's chirrup in the dark.

"Coming right along, Mr. Yancey. This brute tried to cast a shoe."

Carter kicked his gelding into a gallop to keep pace with the overseer. He wondered if his own voice held the same nasal twang as Grady's.

A black boy, diminutive as a jockey, ran out

to catch their bridles when they rode up to the portico. A Negro major-domo, with gray wool and the muted manner of an old, well-trained monkey swung open the great mahogany door. Carter strode into a foyer that would have done credit to Paris or London—white, tall panels, a spray of golden candlesticks on a highboy, a waxed parquet that gave back their reflections dimly. . . . Again, he found he had spoken his thought aloud.

"It seems this business pays."

The overseer smiled. "You will sleep in the east wing tonight, Mr. Yancey. Sampson will show your man where to unpack your saddle bags." He crossed the hall softly, tapped on a gleaming door. "Mr. Lane will see you now, sir. Will you go straight in?"

AFTER the looming magnificence of the house, the study into which Carter walked seemed almost snug. There was nothing expansive about the ledger-loaded desk in the corner, nothing in the least Southern about the gilt eagle above the mantel. Carter stood blinking as the door sighed shut behind him. For a moment, he could have sworn he was back in his grandfather's office in Salem. The same books seemed to frown down from the shelves: records of damnation, from the Old Testament to Cotton Mather. The same air of tight-fisted authority brooded here, wintry and righteous and self-assured.

Carter forced himself to note the burst of purple bougainvillea at the window, the metallic whisper of a date-palm just outside, to bring back the reality of his background. The small, snuff-colored man who was rising from his desk-chair to greet him could never have grown fat on human flesh. If this was really Cyrus Lane, he looked more like a deacon than an ogre. A deacon who doubled in brass in the choir, and spoke feelingly of Biblical miracles in the Sunday School.

Then he saw that the little man was also a mincing dandy, in high-heeled riding boots, skin-tight doeskins, and a waistcoat that would have done credit to a racing earl. He saw that the hot little eyes boring into his were crafty as a pig's, and almost as small.

"Are you disappointed in me, Mr. Yancey? Most people expect to find me a little larger than life."

Cyrus Lane waved his visitor to a chair as Carter presented his credentials. The slave-merchant barely glanced at them as he whisked behind his desk again.

"Naturally, my assistants would not have brought you this far if your papers weren't in order. We have lived in a state of siege on St. Lucie since this Indian war began. Will you believe me when I tell you that I have sentries on all sides after dark, even today?"

Carter found his voice. He kept it soft, almost silky. "Do they fire at Indians only, Mr. Lane?"

"A good question, Mr. Yancey. My men have orders to fire at anyone they do not know. A sensible precaution on a frontier, I find. Especially when your business is as precarious as mine."

The hot little eyes had not left Carter's face. But the hands on the cluttered desk-top had relaxed now. Carter noticed those hands for the first time. Without knowing why, they reminded him of Yancey's paws. The comparison was absurd, of course, for Cyrus Lane's digits were scrawny as an ancient bird's claws. Perhaps all slavers have the same hands, thought Carter. Perhaps it's the intent in them that matters, not their shape.

"Precarious, and extremely illegal," said Lane. "I can say that frankly, Mr. Yancey, since you are a partner in my illegality. Fortunately, we are living in a world where this sort of activity pays well. Cotton is only beginning to come into its own in the South. When Texas and the West are open to us, there will be no limit to the planters' needs—nor to the price they'll pay us." He fingered the bill of exchange on his desk. "Today, I am getting one thousand gold dollars for each field hand I deliver. In ten years time, I expect to demand thrice that sum for a prime black—and get it."

Carter settled in his chair, and let the alert voice purr on. The man's lonely in his sin, he thought abruptly. So lonely, that he'll let a small trader stay the night, just to talk his credo out.

He put the thought into words, as cautiously as he could. "Will they let us live that long, Mr. Lane?"

"The South will let me live forever," said the master of St. Lucie. "The Yankees are another story, of course. The Yankees have always kept an ideal or two at the back of their cash registers. . . . Unfortunately, it is Yankees who are slowly winning this Indian war in the Floridas. Take this abolitionist general in St. Augustine. Would you think that he has been after my scalp for years, now?"

Carter kept his voice soft, forcing the drawl. "He's been after mine, too, you know."

"It's only natural, Mr. Yancey. To these minds, we are left-overs from a feudal age. They do not see that the South, as we know it, must go on being feudal to survive. Actually, I am only a business man who must do my work on the fringes of a frontier because I am no longer respectable." He got up briskly. "Speaking of business—shall we begin our own?"

The door of the study swung open as Lane moved toward it. Carter blinked again, when he saw the cat-foot major-domo, waiting with a tray of tall glasses in the hall. Lane clapped his hands and the butler advanced, with a bow that just escaped being a grovel.

"I can recommend this swizzle," said Lane. "The cane that produced the rum was ground on my own land. South Hundred, on this same river—a day's journey upstream." He led the way through tall double doors that swung wide under the pressure of black fingers. "One of my training-schools for my slaves. You will notice that I use the old-fashioned word without fear. In my dictionary, Mr. Yancey, the word has but one meaning. Most flesh—white or black—was born to labor for others."

They walked through French windows together, into a long portico sweet with jasmine. To the left, a lawn rolled down to the river in the deepening dusk. To their right, a lamp glowed in another French window, across a strip of formal garden. Lane made a precise gesture in that direction.

"Some flesh—white as well as black—was born to rule. Strong-muscled flesh, with a brain to give the signals. If I had my way, the breeds would be crossed for the good of mankind." He drank deeply from his glass as they walked on. "Take that house across the garden. My wife's residence. Must I tell you that she is the daughter of a Gold Coast king? Yet even at St. Lucie, she cannot sleep under my roof-tree. If I allowed this liberty, my overseers would desert me. In my time, I have entertained governors and millionaires here. Officers who spoke French and Spanish. Filibusters who would like nothing better than a chance to start a republic, with my island as the capital. Rich men who would like to buy in on my enterprise. None of them has met my wife, Mr. Yancey. You will not meet her tonight. You see, my wife is also proud. Her religion does not permit her to look on another white man's face."

They had crossed the garden now, to enter a low-roofed shed open to the air on four sides. A brace of house slaves rushed forward with cane-bottom chairs. As Lane sat down without a backward glance Carter noticed that Sampson, the impassive butler, had followed with the tray of swizzles. He accepted another tall glass mechanically, ignoring the faint buzzing at the back of his brain.

In the dark beyond, an overseer cracked his whip. Carter saw the leaded point writhe out of darkness, to stir a faint whorl of dust on the floor of the shed. The blacks had already begun to shuffle forward in a disciplined file. Fifty broad-shouldered bucks, tall and strangely proud, naked as Adams cast in ebony.

"Make your selection, Mr. Yancey," said Lane. "All of them have worked my fields for a year. That means I'll trust them anywhere that cotton is picked."

The first Negro had already stepped up to the auction block. Arms folded, chin high, he did not even glance down as Carter approached. Lane was watching him—not too intently, now; after all, this was a routine moment for the master of St. Lucie. Carter set his jaw and reached out to flex a black bicep that rippled like a python under the gleaming skin. Remember to test their backs and calves, he told himself. Remember to count their teeth. . . . He stepped up to the black, and turned back the Negro's eyelid. Remember to look for ophthalmia, yaws, and bad hearing. Don Esteban had taught him the routine well. He got down and nodded to the overseer. The black man stepped to one side with his dignity intact as another ascended the block.

Give me ten more minutes, Carter prayed. Give Lane a chance to get outside a third swizzle, and I'll be safe for a while. Safe enough to be classed as an overnight guest while Grady does his job.

CHAPTER III

THE GOUGER

HE permitted himself to let down in earnest after Sampson had shown him to his bedroom in the east wing—a wide-windowed room done in pure Empire style, including the imperial eagles on the bed. His white linen was spread out here: Grady, he gathered, had gone to the wash-house to sponge the stains of travel from his riding-clothes. It was pure heaven to relax in Yancey's immaculate planter's garb. To sit at the window with one of Yancey's cheroots between his lips, and listen to the emptiness echoing all around him.

So far, the general's stratagem had gone like clockwork. Lane would surely allow him an hour to dress before dinner; he would not be troubled again, now that Yancey's bill of exchange was locked away, and twenty prime hands ticketed for transport to Georgia. There was even time to ask himself what he thought of this strange house and its bizarre master.

Certainly, the Biblical comparison of the wicked to a flourishing bay tree could apply at St. Lucie. And yet, Carter reasoned, the wicked were sometimes lonely, too, if they lived long enough. Trading in slaves is an ancient profession, and society had paid Cyrus Lane well for his enterprise. But society changed, too—and despite the cynics, the change was usually for the better. Even the South was changing. Given patience enough, the planters would see the light in time. Most of them frowned on operators like Lane today; if they dealt with him at all, it was only from the bitter need enforced by the die-hards—the men who drove their blacks in gangs, gutting the rich red clay of Georgia, moving always westward to new lands and fortunes.

Wiser heads would prevail in time. Though he was an abolitionist to the core, Carter still believed in the alchemy of change. The South

The first stepped up to the block and Carter remembered to count his teeth.

must cure its own evil in its own way. . . . Of course, if the army could scotch a Cyrus Lane now and again, that would speed the process. The growing century demanded that blackbirding must go. A complacent territorial government might ignore Lane's barkentines as they ghosted down its coasts; the army could burn those same blackbirders to the waterline if they found guns aboard.

Pounding out these facts with a fist on the window-sill, Carter watched the moon swim up out of the Atlantic—a dim silver immensity, sensed rather than seen beyond the last windbreak to the east. A low ululation began to throb in the velvet darkness, just as the overseer had predicted. Lane's human merchandise, fresh from the stifling 'tween-decks of the barkentine, had begun to grow restless in their barracoons. The moaning complaint blended perfectly with the background—as natural, thought Carter bitterly, as the howling of beasts in a zoo.

The sound underscored the futility of his thoughts. St. Lucie might be a lonely place today. Governors and generals of colonial Spain paid no court to Cyrus Lane in these times. Lane might be lonely enough now to waste his feudal credo on a trader like Yancey. . . . Even though no one visited St. Lucie now but an occasional wildcat slaver from Georgia, the empire of St. Lucie was still powerful. That throbbing despair in the darkness was mocking poor. The master of St. Lucie, and the ancient wrong he had foisted on the South, must be wiped out—in blood, if need be.

Carter turned as Grady came in softly from the hall. A well-mannered Grady, with his master's nankeen trousers folded neatly over one servile arm.

Grady said, in the barest of whispers. "Good evening, sir. I hope you've finished your business. *I've* finished mine."

Carter felt his heart bounce. He kept the excitement from his voice with an effort. Grady, he knew, would tell this in his own way.

"Not at the wash-house, I'm sure?"

"Why not? The wash-house is on the river bank. A quarter-mile downstream from the docks. It was quite empty when I went in. Why shouldn't I take a little swim while your clothes dried?"

"Don't tell me you've swum to the docks and back?"

"When I was a boy in Brooklyn, I thought nothing of swimming to Manhattan," said Grady. "This was easier—and quieter. Fact is, sir, I didn't even have to come up to the string-piece. They were unloading that barkentine by moonlight, neat as you please—"

"I thought the slaves had been brought ashore."

"Not slaves, this time, sir. Guns."

Carter swallowed hard. He could picture the whole scene clearly now: Grady, nose-deep in the chocolate-dark water, silent as an otter, circling the barkentine warily. Lane's sweating blacks, filing down the gangways with their burlap-masked loads. . . .

"How could you be sure they were guns?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, I began my army career as a private in Ordnance. There were old Hall breech-loaders, and carbines, and rifled bores. If you ask me, Lane bought the lot of them in Europe, or Port of Spain. There's more in the storehouse, of course. I saw a man with a tally-board, taking inventory as those black shoulders heaved up the ladder."

But Carter wasn't listening now. Pacing the room exuberantly, he wondered if he would dare to leave St. Lucie tonight with this nugget of information. The mere presence of an arsenal on St. Lucie land was enough. The army could move in tomorrow with that evidence at hand, smash Lane's rotten empire wide, pack Lane and his overseers to Moultrie for court-martial. . . . Of course, speed was of the essence. Tomorrow, this same arsenal could be loaded in smaller craft, and shipped upstream to another of Lane's plantations. Obviously, the guns were feeding into the backcountry by just such a route. Most of them would be in Coacoochee's hands in the next few weeks, now that good fighting weather was coming again. And yet (here, Carter pulled his mind sharply down to reality) slavers were not in the habit of riding through the back country after dark. He must take a chance, and linger till morning. Even if Lane sent the guns upstream with the first light, he could cut through the barrens to Tocoi and snub them off. It would be worth the army's while, now, to search every river sloop. . . .

He came back to Grady with a penitent smile. "Some day, Sergeant, I'll thank you as you deserve."

"All in the day's work, sir," said Grady. "Didn't I say this job would be easy?"

"A bit too easy, if you ask me, gentlemen."

They turned in unison to see Cyrus Lane framed in the hall door. A spruce little man even when he was drunk. Swaying a little, and smiling at them both in utter content. Behind him, an overseer loomed with a cocked carbine on one arm.

Lane said easily, "Do come downstairs, both of you. Mr. Yancey is waiting to ask you a few questions. The *real* Mr. Yancey, if you don't mind, Captain Carter—"

NO one touched them as they went down the wide, formal stairway side-by-side. No one spoke as they walked into the white shadow of the portico where Bart Yancey waited, an uncouth giant against that graceful background of carved pillars—an angry giant with kneading fingers.

Carter forgot Grady and the circle of faces in the moonlight as Yancey charged with a bull-like roar. He felt fingers claw at his cheek and anchor there.

Lane walked out ahead of them as they faced the slave-trader, and sat down in a chair against the wall of the portico. Even now, he looked like a spectator at an impending crisis. Watching him from the corner of one eye, Carter guessed that he meant to play one man against another, for the love of it. It was apparent from his words that he knew everything now—and expected a certain bluff from Carter none the less.

"Must I introduce you, gentlemen?"

Carter said, by rote, "I think you should, Mr. Lane. I'm certain I never saw this man before."

"He says you stopped him in the scrub this morning, and turned him over to a corporal's guard. He says he escaped a half-mile down the road, and took every short-cut he could nd to reach St. Lucie ahead of you."

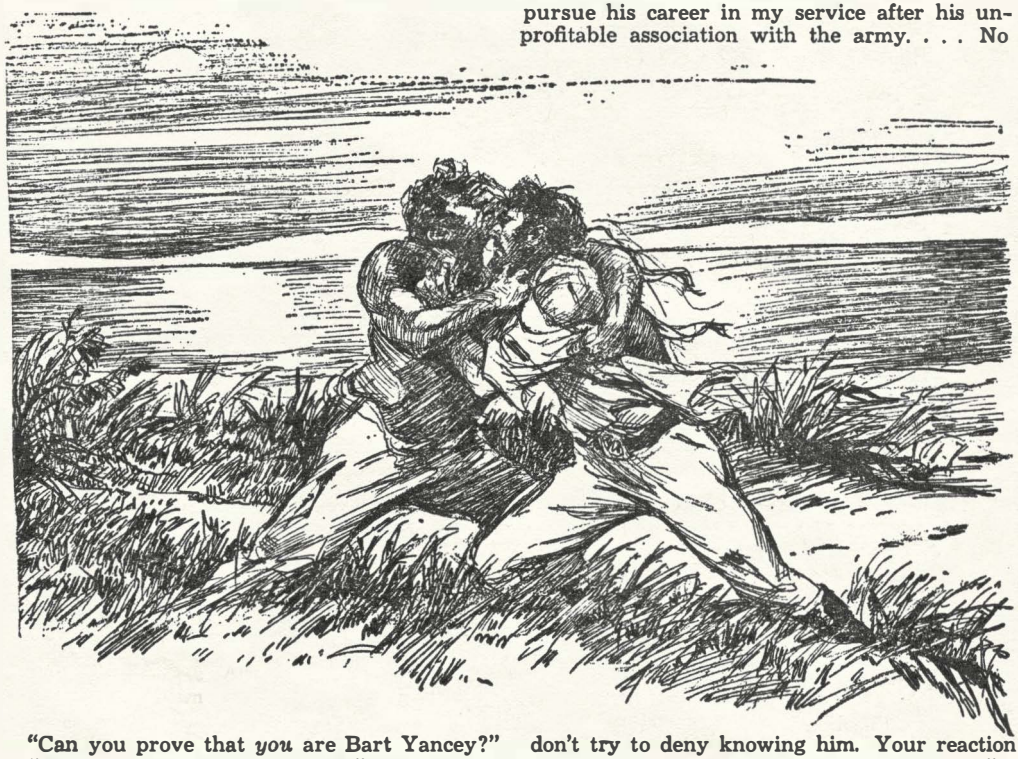
Carter cursed Corporal Simpson silently, as he held Yancey's narrowed eyes. Aloud, he said, "Can he prove a word of this?"

of Yancey's prowess as a gouger. A glance at the brutish face across the portico bore out those reports with interest. He looked round the unsmiling circle. All of Lane's overseers seemed to have assembled, at every point of the compass. A silent ring, awaiting this frontier proof of courage.

Grady said, "You got your names mixed, Lane. It's *me* that's the gouger in the Yancey family. What say I prove it?"

Cyrus Lane spoke coldly. "I am not accustomed to discussions with servants—or sergeants." He faced Carter directly. "Naturally, the gentleman's idea of justice is somewhat rough-hewn. He might best you at gouging, and *still* be an impostor. Fortunately, I've another means of checking on you. Tarbell!" A wisp of a man sidled up at the call. Carter started as he recognized the fellow, a thieving sutler he had ejected from the headquarters post the year before.

"I perceive you're old acquaintances," Lane said smugly. "It was fortunate Tarbell chose to pursue his career in my service after his unprofitable association with the army. . . . No



"Can you prove that *you* are Bart Yancey?"

"You accepted my credentials."

"At least, the bill of exchange was valid." Lane smiled thinly. "Mr. Yancey—or the impostor, as the case may be—has suggested another proof. Being renowned as a brawler, he suggests that you step out to my lawn and attempt to put your knuckles on his back."

For a moment, Carter found he could not speak. He remembered the story he had heard

don't try to deny knowing him. Your reaction of surprise at seeing him here was obvious."

"And now he's all mine, Lane?" Yancey's question came in a hoarse rumble.

"All yours, Mr. Yancey," said the master of St. Lucie, with perfect aplomb. "I shall take pleasure in witnessing your triumph."

He settled back in his chair with a polite little sigh. Carter turned on his toes to face the trader, as Yancey whipped off his shirt,

and tossed it on the lawn. So it's to be a gouging after all, he thought. God knows what's coming after, even if I win. If I lose, it won't much matter. He wondered what it was like to be blind—and steeled his mind against the wonder. Yancey was circling warily now, his curling palms almost brushing the grass, heavily alert as a gorilla, and quite as hideously sure of his power.

Carter didn't even look up as Grady tried to charge into the impending combat. Without turning his head, he knew that a brace of overseers had pounced on the sergeant and hammer-locked him, there on the edge of the intent circle. . . . In that flash, he remembered that Grady, at least, had done his part in this job. So far as Lane knew, the army had not yet cracked the secret of that boathouse-shed. If Grady could break free, and get word to the general—

He forgot Grady and the circle of faces in the moonlight as Yancey charged with a bull-like roar. Limbs locked, chests heaving, they tumbled to the lawn together, straining for purchase with knees and elbows. Carter felt the trader's fingers claw at his cheek and anchor there. As a man might watch a nightmare come alive, he watched a tensile thumb bear down on his eye-socket—sure of its anchor, now, and ripping madly for a second anchor in the living body of the eye itself. . . . He scissored his legs in a great effort, and sent Yancey spinning just in time. On his feet again, he made hammers of his fists while he waited for the man to rise. Yancey came at him with another careless, bull-like charge—and Carter, swinging an overhand punch with all his weight behind it, connected squarely with the trader's jowl.

Yancey rolled with the punch, just a second too late. When he went sprawling backwards, Carter crashed down on his chest with both knees flexed—driving his heels into the man's ribs, using the trader's body as a springboard to flip him aside. Yancey's breath wheezed through his teeth, as though a bellows had cracked in the great barrel of his chest. He came to his feet again, red-eyed and apparently unhurt, for all that sudden upset. Carter backed off warily, fighting to get back his wind. If this was a Homeric combat, it would be fought without rules. Yancey was the sort of fighter who could deal out the most brutal punishment—and take it, too.

Once again, he rushed Carter, with those simian arms swinging. This time, the captain side-stepped, leaped full on the trader's back, and whipped one arm into a half-nelson. Straining with all the brawn he could summon, Carter tried to bring the man's head back. His free hand fastened on Yancey's windpipe, but the trader did not budge. Instead, he tensed his own muscles, braced—and threw Carter clear—a back-flip that sent the captain crashing wildly against the knees of the watchers.

He felt Yancey land on his back like Nemesis itself, and braced against the punishing fists that tortured his lumbar muscles in a series of rabbit-punches. A few seconds more, and it would be over—if he couldn't get that incubus off his back. He knew how Yancey would roll him on the grass, as his strength ebbed. Already, he could feel those terrible fingers ripping into his cheek—a hand on either side, anchored like giant crabs, while the thumbs bored for his eye-sockets.

The crowd bellowed as Carter arched his body in a supreme effort. This time, it was Yancey's turn to sprawl. He was up in a flash, just as Carter stumbled to his feet. Again they went down, limbs locked, heels clawing at the grass. Carter heard Yancey's lungs crack a second time, as he sent a knee crashing into his midriff. On his feet again, he had no sense of relief—only a red, consuming anger that flung him on the trader again, with both fists flailing. Yancey rolled with the punch, and came up to one knee just as Carter's boot cracked his jaw.

This time, the trader was caught between breaths, as it were—his neck-muscles relaxed for the fatal split-second that spelled disaster. The bone breaking was sharp as a pistol-shot. Yancey's neck seemed to snap, and his head banged the top step of the portico, almost at Cyrus Lane's feet.

Carter was on him again for good measure—rolling him face down to the lawn, smashing twice at the base of his skull with a hard-heeled fist. He got up slowly without looking down at the unconscious trader, and let his eyes roam down the circle. Hazily, he thought, it pays to learn war in a hard school. To combine the best tactics of the hooligan with a dash of the French savate. At his feet, Yancey sobbed once through his broken jaw-bone, then lay still. He'll live to cheat his fellowmen again, thought Carter. But he won't do another job of gouging for quite awhile.

"Well, gentlemen? Who'll come bite with me? Who'll put his knuckles on my back?"

He let his voice trail as his eyes met Cyrus Lane's. The little man had risen from his chair; the look on his face went beyond fear. Carter knew that he had touched the slaver at last. By striking down Yancey, he had struck at all that Lane stood for. This was the army's answer to bribery, gun-running, and the last stand of evil on the frontier. With his fists, if not with his cunning, Carter had told the master of St. Lucie that his days were numbered.

But Lane said only, "Take him aboard, Enrique. Take them both—"

Carter did not move as an overseer tossed a coat over Grady's head, lashed it tight with Grady's own belt, and pinioned the sergeant's arms. Strong hands had fastened on his own

arms now. He took a last breath of the clean night air, just before another stifling garment blotted out the stars. Feeling the bit of leather across his bloody cheek as the covering was lashed tight, Carter stumbled across the lawn with a carbine boring into his back. As he marched dazedly forward, he realized that he was muffled in Bart Yancey's ulster. Somehow, that seemed vastly appropriate now. The trader had a right to avenge himself on the army, even in defeat.

CHAPTER IV

SEA CHANGE

WHEN the ulster was snatched away at last, Carter knew he was lying on foul-smelling planking, with the stench of lime-wash all but choking his nostrils. Grady, he guessed, was somewhere nearby. At least, he heard a familiar Celtic snort, joined to the bad language that only sergeants can summon for such a moment. He put out a hand to discover that his wrist was manacled. That was his last coherent memory for hours. . . . Once, he knew that he was dimly awake and moaning for water. Again, he had a sense that Grady was snoring peacefully at his side, for all that charnel stink around them. He raised himself on one elbow to curse a little on his own, and let his head drop back in a stupor that went beyond any cursing.

When he opened his eyes in earnest, a little pale light showed in a grating above his head. Now he knew that he was chained at both wrist and ankle; that he could raise himself to a half-kneeling posture before his head collided with the slimed planking of the 'tween-decks. . . . Strange, that he should know he was on a ship, even before his senses could swim back to complete wakefulness. He let his hands roam over his bruised body, and realized that he had been stripped naked in the night. Lane is having a quaint revenge, he thought, remembering, in the same flash, that they'd been planning to send the *Lady Ebony* out with the tide.

It made a pattern now, even though he couldn't bring his mind to face its full import. Grady had said that Lane's slave-running worked both ways, as it were. That more than one citizen of the Floridas had vanished into this same fetid hold, when it was to Lane's advantage.

The irons and the nakedness were only the first step in that peculiar barbarism. He'd have time to grow a madman's beard on the voyage back to that station on the Gold Coast. To forget that he was a man at all, when he stood in the compound under an African sun, and heard the Arab traders bid for what was left of him. . . .

Grady spoke easily out of the darkness, and Carter let his mind spin back to normality again, if not to hope.

"All in one piece, Captain?" He felt the sergeant's hand on his shoulder. A strong, soothing hand in the dark. "Sorry I couldn't jump that gouger ahead of you last night—they moved too fast for me. 'Course, I knew you'd cool him your own way—"

"Never mind that now. Is this the *Lady Ebony?*"

"Right the first time, sir," said Grady cheerfully. "If you ask me, we're just casting off now. She'll steer herself in this tide-suck, till we raise a breeze in the Boca—"

"Tell me what you're thinking, man. Are they taking us to Africa?"

"On a one-way ticket, sir. Where else would they be taking us? Not back to headquarters in Augustine. *That's* too close for comfort." Grady dropped his voice to the barest murmur. " 'Course it's pure cussedness on Lane's part. He can't have guessed what we know about him. If you ask me, Captain, he thinks we're just a pair of snoopers who got caught in time."

"And just how do you arrive at that conclusion?"

"First off, we were brought aboard with our heads covered. Second, we were kept under hatches till we cleared that dock. Now that Mr. Lane knows just what we are, he's taking no chances of our guessing that there's guns in that boat-shed." Grady's chuckle was as serene as the morning sunlight beginning to filter through the hatchway. "Enough guns to hang him at Moultrie, if the general only knew."

"How can he know, now?"

"That's one question I can't answer, Captain. Maybe he'll come traipsing into St. Lucie with all he's got, after Simpson admits he lost Yancey. Maybe he'll be hanging about outside the Boca in one of de Vega's yawls."

Carter raised himself on an elbow. As always, Grady was bringing his world into perspective again, reminding him that there was a purpose to every army maneuver, no matter how badly it might turn out for some of the detail. He had quite forgotten how the general—with assistance from Don Esteban—had planned to pursue the *Lady Ebony*. Failing that miracle, of course, the general was bound to descend on St. Lucie like a thunderbolt to rescue his own. Perhaps he'd uncover those guns after all—even if his two favorite swamp-fighters were some leagues at sea by then.

Grady spoke the thought aloud, with his usual bluntness. "We did our job, sir, as we saw it. 'Tain't our fault if Simpson never could tie a prisoner's knot. 'Course, it isn't much pleasure—being a hero on a slave-ship—"

The hatch burst open, choking the sergeant's whisper. Neither of them stirred when a sailor dropped into the 'tween-decks like a monkey

Carter stumbled across the lawn, muffled, a carbine boring into his back.

and knelt to unlock their fetters. Even in the half-light, Carter recognized the overseer who had met them at the St. Lucie ferry. Evidently a hard-worked apprentice in this trade, who doubled in brass at sea.

Grady spoke up cheerfully as the man herded them toward the hatchway. "What'll it be, mate? Breakfast or exercise?"

The overseer's voice was almost gentle. "The captain has a kind heart, gentlemen. He thought you'd like a last look at Florida."

The deck was another world, holystoned and shining. Carter saw at once that the barkentine was well underway, gliding seaward in the great river estuary, riding smoothly in the suck of the morning tide. The helmsman babied his wheel for now, letting the *Lady Ebony* set her own course in the channel while the crew braced the yards for the first whiff of sea-air. . . . This much Carter noted automatically before he let his hungry eyes turn to the land. Already, the St. Johns was more wide-open bay than river: the wall of scrub on either side was too far-off to seem quite real.

Grady spoke softly at his elbow. "Funny, isn't it, sir? We hated that fever-trap while we were fighting the Seminoles for a toe-hold. Now it's dropping astern, I hate to leave it—"

He let his voice trail as Cyrus Lane stepped out of the neat after-house. The slaver was spruce as ever in his tall beaver and his doeskins. He looked grotesquely out of place on deck; yet there was authority in the way he barked an order, before he came easily down the deck to Carter.

"Don't look so surprised, Captain. I've often acted as my own skipper."

Carter kept his voice composed. It is rather hard to summon dignity when you are stripped of your last garment, and dragging a fetter at your ankle, but he managed that, too. "Just where are you taking us?"

"Come now, Mr. Carter. Must I explain that I'm paying my African agents a long-overdue visit? I'm so glad that you and the sergeant can come along. The quarters below *are* a little cramped. Most of the 'tween-decks are full of trading goods; but we always save space for a passenger or two."

Cyrus Lane had spoken with perfect good humor. His eyes flicked Carter lazily as he continued. "You're a gentleman, Captain. I think I've the right to ask for an honest answer to my question. Just what did you hope to accomplish by spying on me?"

Carter shrugged, turned toward the land.

ON THE starboard bow, the great Boca, that gave to the tidal marshes of the Guallo was already a misty memory. Blue water had begun to snore under the cutwater, as the *Lady Ebony* reacted to the first puff of sea air.

Lane's voice caused Carter to turn. "You were spies, both of you. And you found precisely nothing to use against me. For a while last night, I even considered returning you to your barracks, with a reprimand. And then, I realized that your general must be discouraged more firmly. When you fail to return with your report, he will assume that I have murdered you."

"Is that your plan?"

"Far from it, Mr. Carter. Your prowess with Yancey convinced me that you would make a good bodyguard for an Arab prince I know. Frankly, it will help my trading position on the Coast if I present you to him outright. . . . I haven't quite decided about your sergeant."

Carter felt his voice grate in his throat. "And how long will you last here—when the army moves in on you?"

"The army will never move without proof. Who can say that you ever reached St. Lucie? For all your general knows, Yancey trailed you both in the scrub, and shot you down. . . . Of course, he'll demand an investigation. Tallahassee will give in to that extent. I may even have to submit to questioning when I return."

"Excuse me, Mr. Lane, but you'd better get ready to answer questions now," Grady broke in.

All of them turned as the sergeant pointed

across the choppy tide-rip to North Point, a scant half-mile off their port bow, now that the *Lady Ebony* was bracing for her first long tack into open water. At first, the yawl's sail seemed part of the hump-backed dunes that fringed the point on the river side. Then they saw the serried heads along the gunwale, and the white beard at her bow, as she ran toward them with the sweet following wind. The whiskered troglodyte kneeling just behind the bowsprit to study their course through a telescope might look unmilitary to a sailor's eye. But both Carter and Grady knew that it was their general—defying most of the rules, as usual—the sort of general who thought nothing of commandering a keel from his friend Don Esteban, and giving a score of hand-picked regulars the temporary status of marines.

Carter looked hard at the yawl's brave run before he turned aside. Let him go upstream to St. Lucie and crack that boat-shed open. Let him burn the slave-pens to the grounds, when he found that cache of ordnance earmarked for Coacoochee. The general was too late to snub off the *Lady Ebony,* now she had picked up the full momentum of her sea-way. Already, the strip of blue water was widening between them; even a landlubber could see that much. With snug sailing, the barkentine could stay on that starboard tack until she grazed the marsh-grass of the Boca, clearing Florida without changing a stitch of her canvas. . . . . Carter raised his hand in a gesture of thanks for his general's last move in his behalf. He appreciated it none the less because it had come too late.

Rifles barked from the yawl, as though in answer to his wave. Carter dove for the shelter of a bulkhead with Grady beside him. . . . And cursed his impulse, when he saw that Cyrus Lane was still standing above them.

"Don't you want to watch the show, Captain?" asked the slaver. "I think I've the right to answer them now, don't you?"

Orders had already gone down the deck when Carter scrambled to his feet. He stared open-mouthed as the old swivel-mount on the after-deck was unlimbered by unhurried hands.

"If you fire on the United States Army—"

"Your army is a wildcat this morning, Captain. That yawl flies no flag; if your general is in uniform, I fail to recognize it. The *Lady Ebony* is registered as an armed merchantman —with full authority to repel pirates. Permit me to demonstrate."

The match had already flared on the after-deck. Carter, with his eyes riveted on the yawl, was totally unprepared for Grady's tackle. They rolled in the shelter of the bulkhead as the charge exploded above them. A crazy detonation, like no cannon-shot in the world. Carter heard the rip of timbers before he realized what had happened. When he looked again, there was a great, ragged tear in the planking where the swivel-mount had stood. The gun itself was gone—a swirl of bubbles in their wake marked the spot where it had kicked itself into the sea.

"Someone fouled the muzzle," said Grady, in the hoarsest of happy whispers.

Cyrus Lane had already stormed up the ladder to the after-deck. Two of the gun-crew lay tumbled in the debris, dead as blackened monkeys. The mate who had touched off the charge still stood at the far rail with the match in his hand, staring with imbecile surprise. Above them, the helmsman had managed to cling to his wheel, and his course. The *Lady Ebony,* shivering like an embarrassed racer, was still heeled accurately into the long tack and running sweetly toward the marshy sand-spit of the Boca, now less than a hundred yards from her creaming cutwater.

Grady said softly, "If the god of sailors will send us another miracle—"

They rose in unison to look back at the yawl. The general was dancing on her foredeck and shouting orders to the men behind him. Carter could not quite choke down a shout of laughter. The general was behaving as though he had personally engineered the back-fire. As though anything under heaven could prevent the barkentine from showing him a clean pair of heels, once they had cleared that last marshy finger of Florida sand.

Grady had spoken of miracles. It was a miracle in any language. One moment, they were sailing smoothly into the last balanced leg of their tack, with acres of sea-room; the next the *Lady Ebony* shivered, like a racer that has tripped on an invisible obstacle. Carter saw the helmsman somersault above them, as he tried vainly to anchor the madly spinning wheel; he saw Cyrus Lane run to his aid, just as the bucking spokes sent the pair of them sprawling on the deck. The barkentine, with the discipline of her rudder gone, heeled violently to starboard. White water spilled down the length of her trim deck as she righted angrily—a scant second before her bow plunged into the sandspit of the Boca—where the Florida sand shoaled off into the Atlantic.

The yawl came on, taking the wind on her port beam with cheerful confidence. Carter stole one more look over the bulkhead. The general was at the stern now, shouting one final order. Twenty army carbines barked; the volley slapped every head down on that long deck—every head but Grady's, for the sergeant's bulk already towered above the crazy wheel before the smoke whipped away.

The deck of the barkentine was really empty when Carter looked again. No rats had ever left a lost ship with more celerity than the crew of the *Lady Ebony.* Carter rushed to the port rail in time to see his friend the overseer flounder wildly into the tidal marsh—and scramble, just as wildly, toward the safety of

the dunes beyond. Then he ran up the deck to join Grady as the sergeant came toward him with his best smile—throttling the protests of Cyrus Lane with one arm while he disarmed the blackbirder with his free hand.

"Sorry I couldn't give you the honor, sir," said Grady. "As it was, he almost got overside."

BACK at St. Lucie that same morning, the general sat with his boots off, and his feet on Cyrus Lane's desk. Grady stood at his elbow, refilling his glass. Carter, a bit more respectable now in a pair of army trousers, completed the audience.

"First-off, Jack, we *were* waiting for the *Lady Ebony*. Waited outside all of yesterday, then anchored in the Guallo to nab her when she ghosted through. When I guessed she'd come in early, I was mad enough to follow her right up to Lane's own dock."

The general held out his glass to Grady. "And that's just about what I did—after Simpson sent word that he'd lost your prisoner."

Carter said mildly, "But you still had no right to land a force on St. Lucie, sir."

"Rights be blowed! Wasn't I practically sure that old Cyrus was holding you a prisoner?"

Carter opened his eyes wide to the light. Perhaps he had been a pawn in the general's game. For all that, the general was willing to risk his career for his sake. If their spying expedition had gone on schedule, well and good. If it miscarried, the general would have moved into St. Lucie in force, to rescue them.

The general's whiskers vibrated with laughter. "Suppose Cyrus *had* sold you to the Arabs. Wouldn't it be easier than working for me?"

"Much easier, sir. Still, I'm glad I could serve as a reason for your call. I know you've wanted to visit at St. Lucie for a long time."

"I did visit at St. Lucie, Jack. Right in this office three months ago, when you and Grady were doing that last job for me in Key West. Cyrus and I let down our hair. I told him that his name was down on my list for an early funeral. Advised him to sell out here, before we stretched his neck. But he only laughed at me—and admitted everything in the book, except gun-running. Knowing damn well that was all *I* could hang him for. Defied me to stop him, with his friends in Tallahassee getting rich at the same trade."

The general's grin invited questions, but Carter was following a line of his own. "You've already counted the rifles, sir?"

"Five hundred first-class Hall models, right in that boat-house. Proof that a sloop-load of ammunition is heading upriver now, to make contact with Coacoochee in the Oklawaha. We'll head 'em off this side of Tocoi—and hang Lane next month at Moultrie."

"One question more, sir," said Carter. "I'm sure you can win this war without Grady and myself, but—"

"Nonsense. I'd resign and go to Texas."

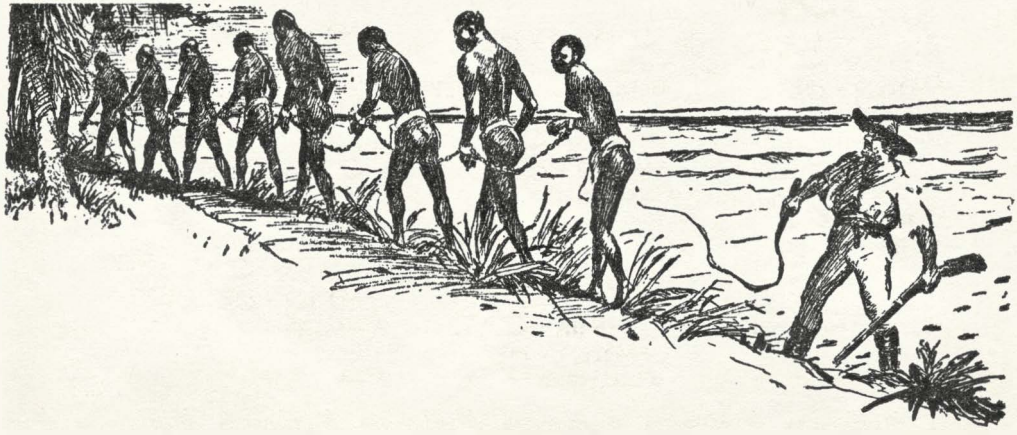
Carter took the accolade with proper reserve. "In that case, I should tell you that Lane was quite serious about that voyage to Africa. If his tiller hadn't fouled—"

"Lane's tiller didn't foul," said the general. "You'd better tell Jack why it didn't, Grady."

Sergeant Grady addressed Carter with his customary modesty. "Two things I'm sure you noticed, sir, when we made that run for the Boca. Point one, how that old swivel-mount missed fire. That's simple: I just happened to slip over the taff-rail of the *Lady Ebony* last night, when I took my swim. Doesn't take much to foul an old-fashioned cannon."

"Damn the cannon," said Carter. "Did you have time to foul the rudder, too?"

"*File* is the word, sir," said Grady. "That is, I pared down a link in each rudder-chain. Just enough to make sure they'd snap at the first real strain, once we had seaway." The sergeant picked up one of Cyrus Lane's swizzles, and toasted his superiors. "After all, Captain, you hinted that I was a burglar from Brooklyn. I wanted to prove I could handle my tools."



TIRE TROUBLE

By
KEITH EDGAR

When I finally boost myself over the rail fence, dog and all, Crazy grumbles sourly, "Cripes, Bub, what took ya so long?"

ILLUSTRATED BY J. CAMPBELL FARREN

WHEN I was a kid in high school, they made us read a lot of stuff by some English guy named Shakespeare. Most of his stories are kinda depressing, but the saddest of all is about two characters named Romeo and Juliet. It seems that they are in love, but are they happy? No, indeed! This tear-jerker finally ends up with all and sundry lying cold in their tombs. As I remember, the last lines go like this:

For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

It reminds me of myself and pretty Peggy McIntosh.

Dark-eyed Peggy is my intended missus, and we would have been wedded long ago if it wasn't for her ornery old man.

Crazy McIntosh is positively the meanest, sourest, worst-tempered old ghoul between St. Louis and Boston. I wouldn't know about the rest of the country, because that is as far as our railroad runs.

The fact that the lanky old coot is the best damned hogger on ten divisions is neither here nor there. The main point is, he claims that his lovely daughter will marry none but a real railroader, same being an unjust slur upon my ability as a brakeman.

I detest the horse-faced old goat.

He don't like me, neither.

Why, just the other night, me and Peggy are all fixed up to go to the Trainmen's Ball, and

I have got my soup-and-fish out of the moth-balls and am struggling with the second white tie (I ruined the first one trying to knot the danged thing proper) when the phone rings. I am ordered out on a run, on mighty short notice.

Well, I was going to pass up the trip, but you can't do that and save money too, so I say O.K. If I'd known at the time that Crazy McIntosh was the hogger I would have said I was sick, but all I was thinking about was my pay check.

Naturally, Peggy don't like me calling up and saying I am going to work instead of taking her dancing, but she is a railroad man's daughter, so she isn't as snooty about it as an ordinary dame might be.

Just the same, she is far from enthusiastic about it, and I am feeling none too cheerful when I sign out in the yard office and see that our conductor is Fussy Nolan, a wizened old granny, and the hogger is Crazy McIntosh. It depresses me.

Well, I trudge down through the yards to our caboose, stow away my basket, get a lantern and some fusees and wander back up to the depot, looking for our locomotive.

We have 2458, a big hog with eight drivers and lots of power. I find her standing by the switch at the depot, waiting for our train, which is just whistling for a crossing a mile or so west of town.

There is Crazy McIntosh, his bony frame draped in clean overalls, denim cap on backwards and goggles shoved up on his forehead, torch in one hand and long-spouted oilcan in the other, grumpily inspecting the engine. A lugubrious expression occupies his gaunt face as he sighs and groans and pokes among the drivers, looking for some bearing that the hostlers might have missed.

He sees me, straightens up, grunts sadly, and bends over his driverod again.

Me, I ignore him and climb up into the cab to stow my fusees. The fireman, Dirty Dolan, is laying his fire, and he don't even look up to greet me. I ain't hurt by his hearty welcome, however, as he don't know no better, being just as dumb as he looks.

The big ox, with his placid, bovine face and huge shoulders, has just one good quality. He can fire a hog to suit Crazy. And, being stupid, he can get along with the old ache-and-pain.

Crazy swings up in the cab, takes a gander at the steam gauge, and plunks himself up on his seat just as our train rolls in from Detroit.

The other engine cuts off and trundles over to the roundhouse. We back down to the train and I couple on.

CRAZY is testing the air when Fussy Nolan bustles over with our orders and clearance. He hands them up to the hogger and shrills, "Hey, McIntosh! This is a hot train! We're going on from here as a special! We got twenty-five cars of airplane engines and fifty cars of munitions that the Army wants in a hurry at the coast! Invasion supplies!"

Crazy leans out of his cab and looks down at him, expectorates, and says sadly, "Ya don't say?"

He gets up and digs the white flags out of the locker, goes out on the footplate and sticks them in the sockets by the headlight to denote we are running "special." Then he comes back to the cab.

He looks down, sees Fussy still hopping around, and hollers, "Listen, you old bonebag! If ya wanna ride this here train ya better git the hell back to the crummy and climb on!"

"Don't you worry about me, dang ya!" shrills Fussy. "Highball!" Then he turns and scoots back down the train as fast as he can travel. He's made many a trip with Crazy and knows what to expect.

Crazy grins sourly, stands up, swings the Johnson bar back into reverse, jerks the whistle cord three times and yanks on the throttle. 2458 snorts, belches, and heaves herself back against the train, piling several car-lengths of slack into it before she stops.

Crazy throws the Johnson bar forward, turns on the sand, whoops the whistle twice and eases open the throttle. The big hog slides forward, bellows heavily. As the slack pulls out of the train, her drivers start to slip. Crazy eases off on the throttle, gives her more sand, then more steam. Old 2458 lunges ahead like a willing horse, takes up the load, and, her exhaust thundering, *Whump! Whump! Whump! Whump! Whump!* we start to roll.

I look back just in time to see Fussy's lantern going up the side of a boxcar. He ain't taking no chances on catching the caboose as it goes by.

Crazy sees it too, and brays gleefully, the mean old mule. This is a favorite stunt of his—he gets a big kick out of making the conductor walk over the train. It just shows you what kind of a character he is.

As soon as the whole train is rolling, Crazy hooks up the Johnson bar a little, shortening her valve stroke, and as we clear the yards, our exhaust has sharpened to a quick hammering *Wham! Wham! Wham! Wham! Wham!*

Crazy fumbles in the pocket of his overalls, digs out a dirty old plug of McAndrews "a strong chew for strong men," bites off a good chunk and rolls the nasty stuff into his leathery cheek. Then he settles back, pulls down his goggles, glances at the steam gauge, and hooks the Johnson bar up a few notches. The beat of our exhaust quickens perceptibly.

Crazy leans out the cab window, wiggles himself into a comfortable position and pulls the throttle back some more.

I climb up onto my seat on the opposite side of the cab and watch Dirty Dolan stoking the old girl. He is swinging with an easy motion,

timing his stroke exactly so that his big foot presses the compressed-air treadle just at the right instant to open the firedoors as the scoop hits them, letting the minimum amount of cold air into the firebox along with the coal.

By now the Johnson bar is riding in the company notch, the throttle arm is against the back of the quadrant, and old 2458 is thudding fast and furious.

I am very fond of these night runs, with the husky cough of the exhaust pulsing, *Chung-a-chung-a-chung-a-chung-a-chung-a-chung-a-chung,* in racy rhythm and the engine rocking and pitching in time to it; with the hiss of the compressed-air treadle and the clang of the coal scoop making accompaniment as Dirty Dolan keeps her hot.

Our headlight makes a brilliant path through the dark, the telegraph poles slip by with increasing speed, and the scream of our whistle sounds like an eerie banshee as we thunder down on Aylmer, over the long trestle and through Tilsonburg, around the long curve through Courtland, past sleeping Delhi and Nixon, Crazy McIntosh pounding her tail for all she's got.

There are times when I feel kinda badly about the Army turning me down because I am classified as an essential transport worker —and you know how women like to see a guy in a uniform.

But, after all, here we are, thundering through the night with seventy-five cars of badly needed munitions and airplane engines. A few hundred miles to the east, a convoy is waiting for this last load to start its dangerous way across the Atlantic. Every hour we save, every mile we push under our drivers, means that much less time our boys in France—throwing everything they've got at them Nazis—will have to wait for these supplies.

I look across the cab at Crazy McIntosh. He's hunched over in his seat, one hand gripping the throttle, head and shoulders leaning out into the night, quid moving thoughtfully up and down in his cheek, peering steadily through his goggles at the track ahead. I wonder if he realizes just how important his job is, how essential he is to the battle being fought three thousand miles to the east.

As for Dirty Dolan, steadily swing his scoop, he has nothing to think with.

IT IS nearing midnight when we roll down into Simcoe, halfway mark on our run. Since there is a grade down into the town and another stiff grade up out of it, the usual procedure is for the hogger to stop the train on the hill, cut off the engine and run down to the depot for water. Then he backs up, couples on and gets a run at the other hill. But Crazy don't bother with such fancy stuff tonight. He just coasts the train down to the station and spots the tender under the waterspout as slick as you please.

While Dirty Dolan is putting water in the tank and Crazy is going over his drivers with the long-spouted oilcan, I hurry into the operator's office to get our clearance. The dispatcher is giving us a straight shot straight through. There's a lot of traffic on the road east of us that will have to get out of our way, so I figure they must want this train pretty bad.

I get our clearance and mosey back to the engine. Crazy and Dirty are examining our front right driver by the light of the torch, and Crazy is swearing something awful.

Me, I don't see nothing wrong, so I ask him what is the matter.

"Dang, ya, Bub, are ya blind?" roars the hogger. "Take a gander at that cussword tire!"

It seems all right to me, except that there is a little oil seeping out between the steel tire and the wheel itself.

"The dirty skunks!" screams Crazy. "Sending me out with a loose tire! I'll break every cussword neck in the cussword roundhouse when I git back!"

"Aw," I soothes him, "It'll take us in all right. It ain't loose enough to give no trouble."

Crazy snorts, expectorates, and eyes me in a surprised manner. In the flickering light of the torch he looks like one of them there gargoyles.

"Bub," says he mournfully, "I kin see yer gonna be a comfort to me in me old age."

"Oh, come now," says I magnanimously.

"If we ain't all kilt first," adds Crazy hopefully. He gives the driver a last disgusted glare and climbs up into the cab.

Well, the old girl barks us up the grade out of town in fine style and soon we are settled down again on the last leg of our run, with the hog breathlessly panting, *Chung-a-chung-a-chung-a-chung,* rocking and rolling, straining her iron heart out to get us over the road, with Crazy McIntosh coaxing the last ounce of performance out of her.

At Jarvis we pass westbound Ninety-three, and a few miles west of Cayuga we highball past an eastbound drag that has pulled into the siding to let us go by.

In his usual style, Crazy takes the Cayuga hill by just ignoring it. We bellow down the grade without shutting off, pitch and rock over the trestle at the bottom, and cannonball up the other side like the hill isn't there at all. This gives me the willies, because only a week ago one of our engines blew up just at the crest of the hill, killing the whole crew. Only Crazy doesn't make the mistake of shutting off at the top of the grade when the load goes off the hard-working hog, and Dirty Dolan has his firedoors hooked open to help the pop valve cool her down.

The full moon has come up by the time we shriek through Nelles Corners, and I am dreamily leaning out the cab window on my side

thinking romantic thoughts about dark-eyed Peggy McIntosh.

The smooth staccato drumming of our exhaust, the steady *hiss-clang* of the firedoors, and the swaying roll of the straining engine have a soothing effect on my nerves, and kinda help me forget my troubles—meaning Crazy McIntosh.

Then it happens.

There's a grinding, clashing, smashing, ringing bedlam of noise and our engine lurches and bumps sickeningly. For a desperate second or two I think we are off the rails, but a blast of profanity from Crazy McIntosh reassures me somewhat.

He gives her the sand, he gives her the air, and he slams the throttle shut. With a shrill screeching of iron brakeshoes, we bump and slide to a stop—still on the rails and right side up. I swallow my heart, which had stuck up in my throat, and jump down the gangway.

Crazy leaps off his seat and grabs the torch. He shoves Dolan, who is standing there with his stupid mouth open, out of the way, kicks the firedoors open and ignites the torch. Then he disappears out the gangway.

I grab my lantern and slide down to the ground after him. He is running up to the front of the engine, cursing something dreadful.

In the glare of the torch I can see what is wrong. The loose tire has worked off the front driver, smashed itself to pieces against the thrashing driving rod, and disappeared. So here we are, stalled on the main line with a vital train, and going to hold up a lot of other important traffic until the wrecking crew gets out to us from Niagara Falls.

Naturally, we can't run with the front driver dropped down about three inches lower than the others. It would just wreck the whole undercarriage of the engine to try it.

I am standing there feeling kinda helpless, when I become aware that it is awfully quiet around here. Crazy has stopped swearing.

DIRTY DOLAN has joined us, and the two of them are examining the driver, Dolan with his stupid eyes bugging out from his head, Crazy poking the torch here and there around the axle and snorting to himself.

Suddenly Crazy straightens up, turns to me, sticks out his scrawny neck and hollers, "Bub, git me an axe!"

"Huh?" says I.

Crazy sighs, kinda disgusted, and says pleadingly, "Listen, Bub, ain't you never seen an axe? It's one of them things ya cut wood with."

"Yeah," says I. "We ain't got an axe, except back in the caboose."

Crazy expectorates out of the corner of his mouth and glowers at me. "Bub, me boy, I'm just gonna ask ya oncet more, then I'm gonna wring yer stupid neck. *Git me an axe!*"

Realizing that he really wants an axe, I tell him politely to go to hell and start back along the train. It is over half a mile to the caboose and I don't relish the walk.

I have only gone a few car-lengths when, quite clearly in the moonlight, I see a farmhouse over to my left. It is only a few hundred feet from the right-of-way. So, I thinks, now why trot all the way back to the caboose when every farmer has an axe? I'll just mosey over and borrow it.

Well, I jump across the ditch, climb over the rail fence and go cautiously through a field of half-grown corn to the farmyard. Walking quietly around to the back of the house, I raise my lantern to see better, and sure enough, there is a nice axe sticking in the chopping block. Then two things happen at once.

A big dog sneaks around the corner of the house, gives one short bark and comes a-running. Now, dogs usually like me, but this mongrel don't seem to know that. In fact, he don't even stop to consider the matter. He just flashes up and fastens his teeth in my leg. Fortunately, my overalls protect me somewhat, but while it don't hurt much, it is mighty inconvenient.

At the same time, an upstairs window in the house goes up and a guy hollers, "Who's there?"

"Me," says I calmly, trying to ignore the dog, who is shifting his hold for a better grip.

"What the hell do you want?" hollers this guy, who is just a gray blur in the dark opening of the window.

"Mister, I merely want to borrow your axe," I tell him politely. "I'll bring it right back."

"Axe be damned! Get the hell out of here before I fill you full of buckshot!"

Well, I consider a moment, decide that of the two, Crazy is the more dangerous, reach down and grab the axe from the block.

I then turn and start to run, but find that the pooch is a pretty heavy drag. So I swat him with my lantern, which promptly goes out.

The dog lets go and I spurt for the cornfield. There is a belching roar behind me and a load of shot swooshes over my head. I shift into high gear and start zig-zagging. Then I trip over something and fall flat on my face.

The dog bounds up and I get set to swat him again. But he circles around me, muttering to himself, decides I ain't such a bad guy after all, and licks my face.

So I pat him and tell him what a nice doggie he is, scramble to my feet, pick up the axe and my lantern and start running towards the right-of-way again. The dog promptly changes his mind about me and grabs the seat of my overalls, hanging on grimly.

When I finally boost myself over the rail fence, dog and all, and hand the axe to Crazy, he says sourly, "Cripes, Bub, what took ya so long?"

I am too badly winded to tell him what I think he is, and occupy myself with prying the

dog loose. The fickle cur immediately decides that all is forgiven and jumps up to lick my face.

Crazy has been examining a pile of old ties stacked across the ditch and he hollers to me, "Hey, Bub! Quit playing with that danged dog and come here!"

So I cross the ditch to see what the hell he wants now. The dog wags his tail and sits down to watch us.

Crazy says quietly, "Now, look, Bub, I want you should cut me a wedge about four feet long and eight inches deep at the wide end. We got to raise that driver up."

"Listen," I tell him, "you can't lift that engine with a piece of wood."

Crazy groans, sets down his torch and shoves his ugly face up to me, hollering, "You elongated hunk of misery! Did I ask you to lift me injun up for me? Did I? All I want is a wedge four feet long and eight inches deep. Now do I get it, or do I strangle ya right here and now?"

Ignoring his rudeness, I take the axe from him and start to work on one of the ties. Well, the darned things are made of oak, and I am doing a lot of sweating and not much cutting, when a voice behind me says, "Ha! There you are!"

I LOOK over my shoulder and blessed if it ain't the farmer, a great big bozo with his nightshirt tucked into his pants, and his suspenders hanging down. He is leaning on the rail fence with that long shotgun pointing in my direction.

Crazy hollers, "Now what in the hobs of hell do *you* want?"

The farmer looks Crazy up and down and says calmly, "I was just wondering what you were doing with my axe. Is your fire out?"

Crazy sighs wearily. "No, me cussword fire ain't out! Me cussword injun's broke down, that's what! All I want is a cussword wedge four feet long and eight inches deep!" His voice rises to a shrill scream. "That's all I want! Why in stinkin' hell can't I git it?"

"Shucks, mister," says the farmer quietly, "why didn't you say so?" He leans his shotgun against the fence, vaults over it and takes the axe from me. Then he examines the tie, turns it over and starts swinging.

This guy, he don't look like he is working at all, but in practically no time he has a nice wedge, four feet long and about eight inches deep, as clean as if it was cut with a saw.

Crazy grabs it from him without even a thank-you and takes it over to the engine, where Dirty Dolan is waiting with a sledge-hammer. Crazy gets down under the piston rod, shoves the wedge tight against the driver along the top of the rail and tamps it with the sledge. Then he crawls out and runs back to the cab.

The engine snorts, puffs and slowly eases forward. The crippled driver rolls up on the wedge and stops. It is now well clear of the rail.

Crazy swings down out of the cab and runs up with a hammer and a cold chisel. Dirty Dolan holds the torch for him and he starts pounding at the oil cellar under the bearing.

Me and the farmer and the dog watch closely while the hogger gets the oil cellar out. Now there are two gaps under the axle—one where the oil cellar has been, and another between the pedestal brace and the journal, since the wedge has shoved the axle up off the frame by several inches.

The farmer suddenly says, "I guess you want blocks to put in there, don't you, mister?"

Crazy turns and looks at him kinda surprised-like. In the moonlight, with the flaring glare from the torch flickering over his sour face, the old sinner looks like Satan himself.

"Mister," sighs Crazy, "it is a pleasure to meet somebody around here with a few brains."

So the farmer nods and jumps across the ditch to cut some blocks.

He comes back with several pieces. The hogger selects a couple and pounds them in tightly with the sledge. There are now two wooden blocks between the axle and the pedestal brace. Crazy pounds another in between the back spring and the equalizer. He drops the sledge and runs back to the cab.

2458 belches once and eases back. The farmer knocks out the wedge. Crazy jumps down again and runs up to examine the driver.

The axle has squashed down a little on the blocks, but the crippled driver hangs suspended about three inches clear of the rail—about the width of a tire—so that she is pretty well in alignment with the other drivers.

Just then I notice a lantern bobbing towards us from the rear of the train. It is Fussy Nolan.

He bustles up and yammers, "What's this? What's this? What are we stopped for? What's the delay?"

"We *was* broke down," leers Crazy. "But now yer just in time to take another long walk over the top of the train," gleefully adds the mean old buzzard.

He turns to me and hollers, "Come on, Bub, gather up them tools and let's get to hell on our way!"

So I bend over to pick up the tools which the untidy old fool has dropped on the roadbed.

The four-foot wedge is lying across them, so I just pick it up and heave it over my shoulder towards the ditch. There is a dull *clunk!*

Crazy lets go with a burst of lurid profanity.

I straighten up and look around. Darned if Dirty Dolan ain't stretched out on the cinders —cold.

It seems the oak wedge caught him right between the eyes. The halfwit didn't even have sense enough to duck.

Crazy, swearing something awful, stoops down, grabs the wedge, waves it over his head and comes for me. "You cussword idiot!" he screeches. "I'm gonna bash yer cussword brains out! Killin' the only cussword fireman on the whole cussword division!"

I back up hastily. The dog, which has been watching all this with considerable interest, snarls and leaps at Crazy. Crazy yelps and kicks out at it.

The farmer roars and shakes a fist under Crazy's nose. "Mister, you touch my dog and I'll skin you alive!"

Fussy Nolan bustles over to Crazy McIntosh and shakes a finger under his nose. "Mr. McIntosh, control yourself! Remember, we got to get this train in. Business before pleasure, you know," cackles the old fool.

Crazy sighs mournfully and drops the wedge. "Fussy," he groans, "how'm I gonna run an injun without no fireman, huh?"

"Why," soothes Fussy, "Bub here can fire for ya."

Crazy eyes me grimly. "*Him*? Why, he's a murderer! I ain't havin' no murderer on me injun—not me."

Just then Dirty Dolan groans and tries to sit up.

"Aw, he ain't killed," says I. "And anyways, he shoulda ducked."

"Listen, McIntosh!" hollers Fussy Nolan. "You pull on down the line and stop the caboose here. I'll take Dolan in with me. You can't carry a injured man on the injun."

Crazy snorts and leers at Fussy. "Now, Mr. Nolan," he sneers, "ya didn't by any chance shove Dolan in the way of that there wedge jest so ya wouldn't have to walk back over the top of the train, did ya?"

"I'll bet he did," I puts in hopefully.

Fussy hauls out his watch, holds up his lantern so's he can see it better, and squeals, "Dang ya! We already lost twenty-two minutes!"

CRAZY jumps like he has been stabbed, scoops up his torch and sprints for the cab, hollering over his shoulder, "Come on, Bub! Make some steam!"

Me, I clamber up into the cab after him, in such a hurry I forget and leave the tools lying on the roadbed. The fool dog, who now thinks I'm his pal, tries to climb up after me, but I chase him back down again.

Crazy heaves old 2458 back against the train to get a little slack, throws the Johnson bar down in the corner, whoops the whistle twice to let the rear-end brakeman know we are going to move, and yanks on the throttle

The engine thunders mightily and strains forward. As we pull away, I see Fussy and the farmer and the dog watching us. Dirty Dolan is sitting up, holding tight to his stupid head.

I stand in the gangway and watch for Fussy's lantern to flag us down. When the signal comes, Crazy eases to a stop with the engine brake only, so as to let the train pile its own slack into us.

Then, looking back, I see a lantern rise in a long arc, twirl and come down again.

"Highball!"

"Dammya," hollers Crazy, tugging on the throttle, "get ahold of that cussword scoop and give me some cussword steam!"

I grab the shovel and start slinging coal into her gut.

Well, as we pick up speed, the engine develops a very lopsided gait, due to the fact that the right front driver is spinning free of the rail, not giving any traction. This makes it hard for me to keep my feet under me, because the cab bounces so. Furthermore, having lost one eighth of our tractive effort, she finds it harder to pull the train.

But Crazy coaxes her, and I slug coal into her, and shortly I notice that the motion has settled down into a steady jiggle. I straighten my back, which is starting to ache, and see that Crazy McIntosh is occupied with gnawing another chew off his nasty old plug, which is a sign we are steaming all right.

The Johnson bar is back in the company notch, the throttle arm is at the back of the quadrant, and the big hog is determinedly whamming, *Chung-a-chung-a-chung-a-chung*, rocking madly from side to side, but getting us there with the old vim and vigor.

Now, I ain't an expert fireman, so naturally I don't keep such an even fire. This means I got to keep raking her with the long firerake to hold the needle on 210. But I do it.

I hear a gleeful bray from Crazy, and cautiously straighten my protesting backbone.

He is leering down at me, contentedly chewing his cud. He squirts a brown stream at a whistle post and yanks the cord. When we have thundered over the crossing, he turns to me and cackles, "Haw! Dolan sure did look funny! I bet he has a helluva headache by now!"

There—you see what a mean old weasel he is? Now that he finds he don't need to worry about his steam, he don't give a darn about his injured fireman. He thinks it is funny. I go back to my scoop in disgust.

I am starting to get tired, and once in a while I miss my swing and toss coal all over the cab. Every time I do this, Crazy howls like I'd bit him, and calls me all sorts of unpleasant names.

Time ceases to exist for me. I live in a fog of fatigue and rocking cab and glaring fire and relentless steam gauge. If I stop to rest for a second, the needle drops and I have to rake her hard to get the darn thing up again. Crazy McIntosh is living up to his nickname and pounding her tail with mad, reckless speed, forcing a crippled engine to do better than the average sound locomotive could perform.

I am staggering all over the cab, just hoping

I can last long enough to get the train through. This will mean a promotion for me, because without my help we would still be stalled back down the line. For once I am going to be appreciated on this railroad. That is all I live for, to see the expression on Crazy's face when I get a promotion. Then he will have to give his consent to my marrying Peggy. It gives me strength.

Then, just when I am ready to drop, the whistle shrieks four times, and I incredulously force my broken back into a perpendicular position.

Sure enough, we are entering the yards at Niagara Falls. I flounder to the gangway and gulp my aching lungs full of sweet cool air. As we coast along toward the depot, I can see the big mogul waiting to take over our train and whip on to the coast.

I look at my watch and don't believe my eyes. Crazy has made up the twenty minutes we lost in the breakdown! Well, he couldn't have done it if I hadn't give him the steam.

He slams the throttle shut and starts easing her down with the air. He ejects his quid and grins sourly at me.

"Bub," says he, "sometimes I think yer gonna make a railroad man one of these here days, that's what."

H-m-m.

WELL, since our engine has to go in shop, we deadhead back to St. Thomas on a passenger. I am feeling good now, since Crazy is starting to appreciate me, and I can almost hear those wedding bells ringing.

When we get back to St. Thomas, we are all summoned up to the superintendent's office. I wait outside while Crazy McIntosh and Dirty Dolan enter first.

Peeking through the half open door, I can see Crazy standing there on the rug, still wearing his dirty overalls, denim cap on backwards and goggles shoved up on his forehead. His cheek bulges with McAndrews plug and he has an embarrassed expression on his goaty face as he absently wipes his hands on a piece of cotton waste and rolls his eyes in a vain search for a cuspidor. Dirty Dolan is holding his cap in his hand, since he has his head all bandaged up, and still looks as stupd as ever.

White-haired Scotty Leyland, the super, is praising them to their dirty faces, telling them what fine fellows they are for getting the crippled train in, what an asset they are to the war effort, and how proud he is to have such men working for him.

Now I realize why I am asked to wait outside. Being the *real* hero of the episode, I deserve special praise. Why, maybe he will even give me a steady run. Then yours truly and dark-eyed Peggy will get married right away.

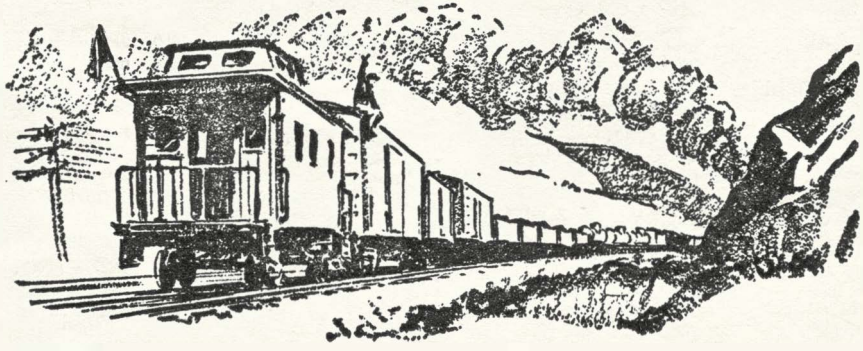
Crazy and Dirty mosey out looking sheepish. When they see me, they look at each other, then get awful interested in some pictures of old engines on the walls of the anteroom. Well, it won't hurt Peggy's old man to go home and tell her how he heard the super praise me to my face, so I leave the door open when I go in.

I take off my cap in a gentlemanly manner, walk right up to the desk and say politely, "You wish to see me, Mr. Leyland?"

Scotty runs a big hand through his white thatch, glares at me and bounces out of the chair to shake a finger under my nose.

"Wise guy, huh?" he roars. "Think you own this railroad, huh? Throw away our good tools, huh? Lose your temper and half kill Dolan, huh? Sick a vicious dog onto your poor old engineer, huh? You need a lesson, me smart fellow! Just for that you can take two weeks holiday without pay!"

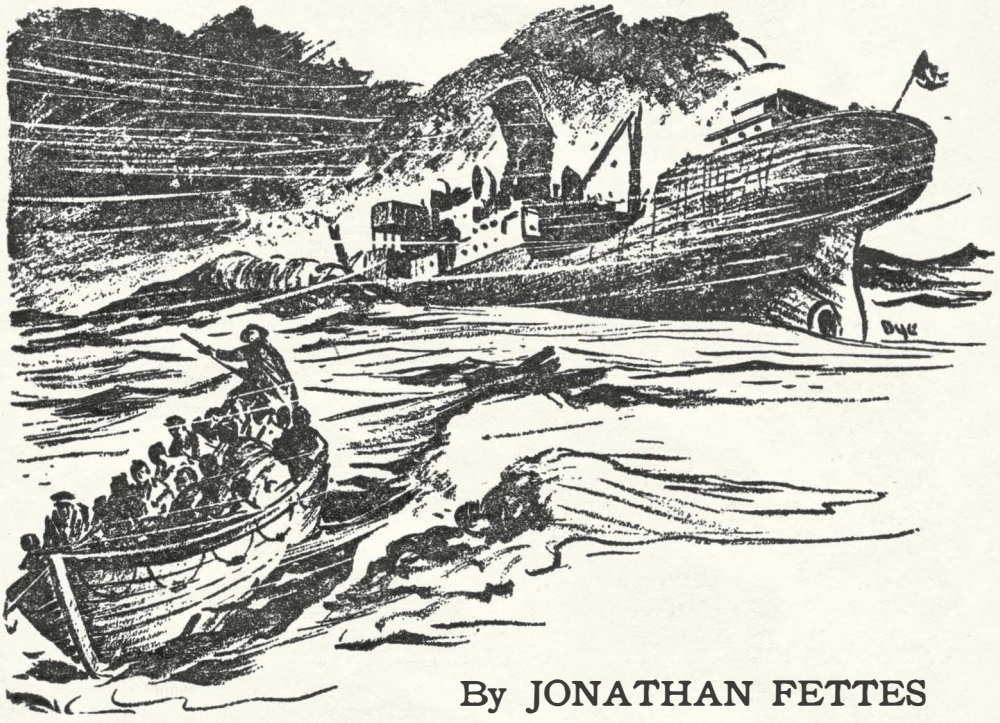
I guess Shakespeare had the right idea.



Across six hundred feet of boiling sea the lifeboat full of Nazis came crawling toward us, inch by inch, foot by foot.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

NOT FOR GLORY



By JONATHAN FETTES

THE wind whistling down from the bleak Iceland hills has a bite you'd feel even if you was wearing red flannel underwear. It searches into every corner of the ship and makes a man shiver just to listen to it. Then through two inches of teak chartroom door comes another sound, a sound of singing. An outsider would say it had warmth to it.

"The sun and the flying fish weather,
Night and a fiddle's tune—"

I look across at Tom Price, the mate of the ship, a dark, brooding kind of man, long and thin. He's no dictionary. If Tom can get by with one word he'll never use two. Just now he's fitting a lanyard to a fire bucket. He looks up, wrinkling his nose.

"Not so good," I say, meaning the singing and not the bucket knot Tom's working on. "If he'd only finish it. If he'd only even finish the first verse—"

"Bad," Tom says.

And it is bad. However, I don't get time to worry much about the badness of it just then, for the chartroom door opens suddenly and the Old Man comes out with a naval lieutenant close on his heels.

"Watch out for a raider calling herself the *Orinoco*?" Captain Junius says. He's a big square-built man and the hooked nose set in his red face gives him the look of a benevolent eagle. "Hell, Mister, there ain't been a minute going on two years now we haven't been watching! Last voyage we picks up a lifeboat from a ship that's been blasted. They was watching all right. But they never saw what hit them. What the hell's the world coming to?"

The lieutenant says he doesn't know.

"'Course you don't know," the Old Man says. "Once the sea had a tradition that gripped every man that ever sailed on it, Germans included. Leave a crew to drown? Not on your life! Thank God, *we* still got that tradition. But them Nazis . . ."

The lieutenant nods and says he'll have to be going. At the foot of the ladder he gets into the boat that'll take him back to Reykjavik. "'By, Captain," he says.

"'By," the Old Man growls and walks over

to the for'ard rail and looks down at his ship.

Not that the *McGillicuddy* is much to look at. Five thousand tons of rusted steel topped by two stumpy masts and a funnel, she's a contrary, cantankerous brute in any kind of a seaway and harder to handle than a woman in liquor. But she's Junius' ship. He knows her inside out from anchor davit to quadrant, and when he looks her over his eyes light up and he breaks into that song of his. When affairs is going good, and mostly they is with Junius, he'll sing it right through to the end. Eight verses, maybe. But when things is the other way and he's feeling fit to take a bite out of a sea boot, he'll break off somewhere in the first verse like it was a warning. Just now he's making the end of the second line—just making it.

"Git up for'ard and bring the anchor home," he says to Tom Price. "It'll be dark in an hour."

So while the mate goes for'ard and the Old Man busies himself with a chart in the lee of the windbreak, I takes up my position by the engine-room telegraph.

There's dirt in the clouds ahead, plenty o' dirt. Junius studies them a time. Once he goes into the chartroom where I hear him tapping the glass. That barometer's old, like the ship, but Junius trusts it.

"The hell with them," he says, and I know he's talking about the clouds. "We'll keep her straight for Boston." He gives the helmsman a course. "Maybe we'll get a weather report later if any ship's damn fool enough to break radio silence."

IT'S dark next evening when Tom Price comes up to take over the watch. "Listen and weep!" I says. From the other side of the bridge comes the sound of singing. Just two lines and then a break. After a pause it comes again. Just two lines.

"Old Man's brooding," I says. "Weather, d'you think?"

Tom shakes his head. He's been with the Old Man longer than me. "Tradition. The Nazis slapped it to hell. Old Man hates to see it go. Been telling me the China Sea yarn."

"Well, well," I says, and thinks back to the story the Old Man tells most often and tells best.

The thing happens, according to Captain Junius, when he's a boy on a clipper out of New Bedford. They have cleared the Sunda Straits and they're racing up the South China Sea, Shanghai bound, when they sights a dismasted junk with nine starving Chinese on it. It's blowing a clear weather gale at the time and the clipper has a record passage all tied up nice and safe.

It's here Captain Junius always breaks off when he's telling the yarn and glowers at whoever's listening. "Do you think our skipper hesitates a minute? Like hell he does! He puts his ship about and loses a couple of days waiting for the sea to go down. Then he rescues those Chinese. That's tradition for you. And let me tell you, Mister, a nation that don't make tradition as it goes along will never make anything. Look at America. Been making it for over a hundred years and she'll go on making it for hundreds more."

He'll finish the yarn and begin singing. Not just two lines, but going clear on to the end. He'll be feeling good then.

But to get back to Tom Price, who don't talk much but sees near everything. "I guess you're right," I says. "Anyway, tradition or no tradition, tell the quartermaster to call me good at one bell."

Only the quartermaster don't call me. He don't have to. It's two ack emma when the whistle of a shell screaming out o' nowhere tumbles me outa my bunk, all sprawling arms and legs. On the bridge I has trouble getting my bearings owing to the dark. From one wing comes the sound of someone singing low: two lines and a break. Then I sees the thin shadow of Tom Price just as another shell goes screeching between the radio shack and the funnel.

"That was close," I says. "What the hell's happening?"

"Sub," Tom says, without elaborating.

The Old Man roars out something about maybe a light is showing. A quartermaster goes rattling down the ladder. Then his voice comes back up to us. "No lights," he says. "Everything dark down here."

Someone musta woke up the engineers, for the *McGillicuddy's* fair laying down to it now. Her rusty old hull throbs to every racing thump of her engines. An occasional sea plops over a bulwark rail. And from back there out of nowhere, as it were, every few seconds, like the gunner's timing himself with a stopwatch, a shell whistles out of the darkness. They come up lazy, with a rising howl like each shell has a man's number on it, making his shirt stick to his back. Then when they go overhead with a loud *whoosh,* every man draws a deep breath.

The Old Man breaks off his singing. "They're bound to hit us sometime," he says.

Just like he'd called the shot, a shell rips into us just aloft the bridge and explodes with a crackling roar. When the dust settles down a bit, I goes over and examines the damage.

"Will you look at that!" I says.

There's a big hole in the deck. I peers down and there's Tom Price lying on his back at the bottom of the hole.

He opens his eyes. "Two ribs, leg broke," he says.

Well, we gets him out. Strange enough, we gets him out through a door for he's fallen into the saloon, which is right below the bridge. When we get him into his bunk I tell him to

lie quiet. "I'll be back," I says. "Just now I'll have to up and help the Old Man."

On the bridge everything's quiet. No shells. No shooting. Nothing. If you leave out the hole in the deck, everything looks like it did a day ago. Even the Old Man. He opens his mouth.

> "The sun and the flying fish weather,
> Night and a fiddle's tune—"

He breaks off. Just the two lines. Nothing more. Just the two lines; and I get the impression he has trouble making even that.

"Well," I says, taking a deep breath and thinking what a queer place the world is. "Well," I says, "here we get clear away from a submarine bent on blasting us and except for the damage to Tom Price no harm done if you leave out the hole—"

The Old Man turns and I see his great hooked beak of a nose sniffing the wind. He looks around him careful into the darkness. The hunch of his shoulders tells me he's worried. That, and the way he breaks off his song. "You damned fool," he says, "to believe we got clear away! They allowed us to go. They had to."

WELL, I don't like to be called a damned fool and I shuffle my feet to show I don't like it. But the Old Man takes no notice. I shuffle my feet some more. "Maybe I better go down and see about fixin' the mate," I says. The Old Man don't even answer that one.

Down in the mate's room, the steward's fussing about with bandages and splints. "Outa the way," I tells him.

Tom Price ain't feeling so bad. He's got some color back in his cheeks. I tell him about the Old Man.

"Getting away like that," I says, "you'd think Junius would be singing his song clear through to the end."

"Didn't get clear away," Tom Price says. "They had to let us go. Old Man thinks so. I think so."

"Look!" I says, and I'm getting indignant. "Maybe you and the Old Man has a line piped through to Goebbels—"

"No line," Tom says. "You just use your head. You think it out," he goes on. "Nazi U-boat can do twenty knots; the *McGillicuddy* only ten. Sub doesn't chase us. Reason? She's short of oil." Tom Price leans back. It's been a long speech for him.

"Even so," I says, "we still get clear away. Ain't that good enough for the Old Man? Ain't it good enough to allow him to get on with his song?"

"You keep on thinking," Tom Price says, feeling tenderly at his busted leg. "Submarines must have oil. *Orinoco* lets slant a line she's a raider. Navy searches for her off the shipping lanes. She slips up here under their noses."

"God's trousers!" I says, seeing plain the reason I'm only a second mate while Captain Junius and Tom Price . . . "You mean the *Orinoco* ain't a raider at all?"

"Mainly a refuel and re-store ship. And once she has refueled that sub and a whole lot more—" Tom Price shrugs his shoulders.

I don't walk back to the bridge. I mainly creep there. I'm feeling lower than a bucket in a well. Maybe the Old Man guesses how I feel. After asking about Tom Price, he takes me out to the wing of the bridge.

"There's only you and me now," he says. "Most times I wouldn't worry about that. But with the weather that's making—" He glances around him at the heavy bank of clouds. "The glass is tumblin' fast, Mister, and you know what a brute the *McGillicuddy* is in any kind of a seaway. Tom Price and me, we can handle her. But you, Mister, you've only been months in the ship. It takes years to get to know her quirks and turns." He breaks off and sucks at a cold pipe. "Take over now," he says. "Call me at the first sign of weather."

So I keeps the rest of the watch on my own. And I ain't feeling so good, either. The Old Man and Tom Price has set me to thinking. We got away from one submarine. But ahead of us there's a long string of them lying waiting for oil . . . I can see 'em plain in my mind. A whole string of 'em lying dotted in a straight line like stepping stones from here to Boston. It's a queer feeling. Lonely, too. I quit whistling at the dark and go stare at the compass. The helmsman has the same feeling I do. He don't say anything, but he has it.

The tumbling glass cheers me a bit. The hell with the *McGillicuddy's* cantankerous steering in a seaway. A gale will keep the submarines fathoms down.

Of course we don't get the gale. Not that night. All we get is the worst swell ever I sees in my life. It comes rolling up from the s'uthward, catching the *McGillicuddy* full abeam.

Now, the man that ain't seen the *McGillicuddy* roll ain't seen anything. Her stumpy masts describe forty-five degree arcs across a dirty sky and everything loose in her rattles like peas in a can. She lies over on her side like she thinks it might be a good idea to go to bed and have done with a nasty life. Then, thinking better of it, she reverses herself and does the same thing on her other side. And wet! Outside of whatever lies on the bottom of the ocean, she's the wettest thing in this world.

But nothing lasts forever, not even a lonely middle watch. By and by, the Old Man comes up. There's crows'-feet at the corners of his eyes as he studies a weather report. He sniffs the wind. "Reckon there's a hurricane somewhere to the south of us. If we keep the weather on the starboard quarter . . . Make the change, Mister."

When I come out of the wheelhouse, the rain is coming down. Great lashing sheets of it like you'd see in a cloudburst. Then comes the wind, a whole gale. The *McGillicuddy* slips into the trough of a sea, yawing badly. From the wheelhouse the helmsman yelps a complaint. Captain Junius fights his way across the bridge.

"Aye, she'll steer," I hear him say in his deep voice. "But you got to feel when she's going to swing and be ready to meet her."

For over an hour his voice rumbles on, conning the ship, steadying the helmsman.

And out in the wing of the bridge a kind of peace comes over me. The rising weather'll keep the submarines the hell out of it. The hurricane don't bother me none. Not with the Old Man in charge. With him up here, the *McGillicuddy* will be kept on her best behaviour.

"Yes, what is it?" I says irritably, and grabs at someone tugging my sleeve.

"An S.O.S.," Sparks says.

I GRABS hold of the message and struggles over to the wheelhouse, feeling the wet flimsiness of the paper in my hand. It's a hell of a night for a ship to be in trouble.

Inside the wheelhouse Captain Junius holds the paper under the light from the binnacle. The yellow glow throws up a couple of lines.

A ship's name and a position. Then, "Disabled. . . Engine-room flooded. . . Breaking up fast. . ." But it's the name that holds me.

Orinoco!

I goes charging out on deck after the Old Man. He's sniffing the air like he's looking for a change. Only there ain't any change except that the wind's blowing harder and steadier than ever. And a sea running mountains high.

Cupping my hands, I puts my mouth close to his ear. "Remember that boat we picks up?" I roars. "Twenty-three days adrift, she was. It's them Nazis' turn now."

The Old Man don't even ponder that one. He goes into the chartroom where I finds him plotting a course on a chart of the Atlantic spread out on the table. He looks up at me over his great hooked beak of a nose.

"What we fighting for, you and me?"

"Well," I says, thinking back to the last poster I sees, "we're fighting for freedom—"

"We're fighting for the right to be decent," he says. "For the right to remain decent. Here's a ship only a few miles away . . . in our own back yard, you might say. Rouse the hands," he goes on. "Get lashings over everything. When we go about—"

"But—" I says.

"And do it now!" he roars.

Down on the foredeck hazing the hands about storm lashings, I get to thinking about the Old Man and how it might be he could be right. The Nazis have played it dirty over every ocean there is. But come the peace and we know we acted—

"Look, bosun!" I says, "do I have to tell you every little thing like I was a damned nursemaid? Get them ventilators unshipped and stowed below!"

And of course I knows the Old Man ain't out for any glory. There's something tugging at him, something old, something going back hundreds of years; tradition, call it what you like. Captain Junius has his own name for it: fighting for the right to be decent . . .

"All hands off the deck!"

It's the Old Man roars out that order, and when I go up on the bridge I finds him playing the *McGillicuddy* like she's a fish on the end of a line. For a minute or two he lets her have her head. Then slowly, watching his time and the piling seas, he slips the helm across her. Like she's sulking, the *McGillicuddy* thrusts her nose deep into a comber and holds it there. A bulwark threatens. Captain Junius eases her. A solid wall of water smashes a lifeboat. He don't even mark it. Just stands there, coaxing, cajoling, threatening. And always the helm. Slipping it across her, taking it away from her.

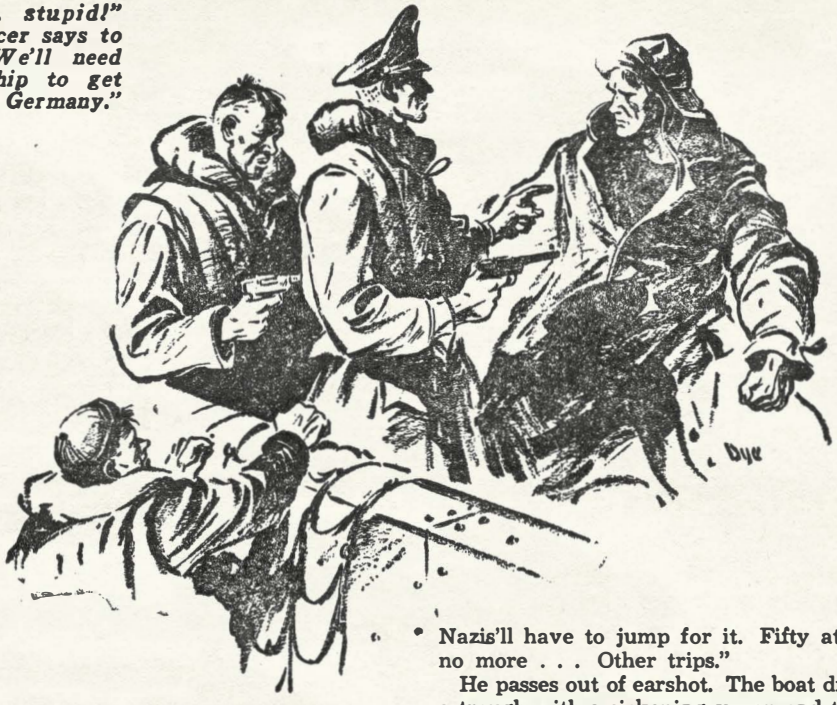
Slowly, fighting every point of the turn, the *McGillicuddy* comes about. A sea slaps her down. With a powerful thrust, she sticks her nose into it and comes out the other side, the spray flying. Again and again the Old Man sends her against the storm. And inch by inch, handled beautifully, the *McGillicuddy* bores her way into the mark, closer to the center of the hurricane, nearer to the disabled ship. It's seamanship of a high order. Years of training has gone into it, years of a man knowing his own ship, knowing her every quirk and turn. Hour after hour the battle goes on.

It's something after dawn when the Old Man raises his arm. His great hooked beak of a nose is thin and pinched. The circles under his eyes are big as dollars. "Off there!" he croaks. "The *Orinoco*. And looks like we were just in time."

I focus the glasses. There to the northward of us, across half a mile of boiling sea, a great black hulk that was once a ship rises sullenly on the crest of a wave. Her decks are caved in, her masts and funnel gone; it's plain she's reached the end of her road. And high up on a splintered boat-deck, a crowd of men stare out of straining eyes at the sea sweeping their feet: Nazis looking at death and not liking it.

"In time for what?" I says. "You ain't going to get any boat to pull against that sea."

"Don't aim to ask one." Captain Junius touches the telegraph. The *McGillicuddy's* engines slow to a walk. "We'll go in close to weather," he says. "Lower a lifeboat, drift it down wind on a line, haul it back with a winch."



"Quiet, stupid!" the officer says to me. "We'll need your ship to get back to Germany."

He talks like it's something simple, like it's going to be nothing at all to hold the cantankerous *McGillicuddy* in one place while we goes about the job of getting those Nazis off the wreck.

I wants to argue about how the wind's blowing like it was out of hell, and no time to rig a sea anchor—

"No, not time," he barks. "That damned ship'll under water before you get the slack outa your pants. Away aft with you and get a coil of four-inch manila broke out. I'll look out for the *McGillicuddy*."

DOWN on the afterdeck we gets the full force of the gale. Seas leap on board to pound at our hatches, then roll on to sweep clear over the wreck laboring a bare six hundred feet astern. It's the wreck worries me most. The McGillicuddy's being tossed like a cork. Each time a sea slaps her it sends her crowding close. Too close . . .

Number Two lifeboat kisses the water. A good boat, clinker built, she comes racing down the *McGillicuddy's* side on the end of her painter. Standing on her floorboards, the bosun fends her off with a boat-hook.

"Stout man!" I yells, and drops him the end of the four-inch. He grabs it, catches a turn around a for'ard thwart and motions for us to pay out.

"And watch it!" I yells after him. "Don't try to go alongside. Smash for sure . . . Them Nazis'll have to jump for it. Fifty at a time, no more . . . Other trips."

He passes out of earshot. The boat drops into a trough with a sickening swoop and the four-inch tautens where it curls around the drum of the winch. The man tending it turns a curse to a prayer. Then the line slackens as the boat bobs to the top of a wave, unhurt. A chip, a handful of wood, fighting a hurricane.

The telegraph on her bridge jangles. A gust of wind howls through the rigging. As if to offset the wind the engines take on a more hurried beat.

"If only the Old Man can hold her," I says out loud.

"Hold her for what?" an A.B. says sullenly. "To save a bunch of no-goods."

"For other things too," I says. "It ain't only them Nazis. It's the Old Man, the bosun, you —me. Hell! I don't want to preach. Look, get cargo nets over the side. Ladders is no good. Them Nazis'll want something to claw up on."

Somewhere up on the bridge, the Old Man's handling the *McGillicuddy* like she's a delicate instrument, holding her in place against the storm, holding her for all he's worth.

And over at the wreck the Nazis has begun leaping into the boat. They lift their arms above their heads and jump, in twos, in threes. It reminds me of a movie I seen once with paratroopers jumping from a plane. Beside me, a man begins to count. "Forty . . . fifty," he says. "And another hundred left behind."

"Two more trips," I says, wondering if the Old Man can hold the *McGillicuddy* that length of time, wondering how he's held her this long.

"All right!" I yells. "Let her come!"

The winch on our poop begins to chatter.

In the stern sheets of the boat, the bosun throws his weight on the steering oar. The boat's head swings, checks. Then from across six hundred feet of boiling sea, she comes crawling toward us. Inch by inch, foot by foot—

"Easy!" I yells to the man at the winch. "Easy as she comes alongside!"

With death and the sea reaching for the seats of their pants, them Nazis come swarming up the cargo nets. The first one over the rail is a young officer with a face like a hard green apple. As his feet touch the deck, I walks toward him and grins a welcome.

"Looks like we was just in time," I says.

"Quiet, stupid!" he says, and looks at me coldly across the top of a gun he pulls from an inside pocket. He says something in German and his men spread out a bit. They all have watchful faces and each of them has a gun or knife in his fist. In a daze I watches a group cross the deck at the double and make for the engine-room. Two more go after the radio shack.

"Hi!" I says. "What the hell—"

"Quiet!" the officer says, and crosses over and prods me with his gun. His hard, lumpy face has no more expression than a duck's. "From now on, speak only when I ask you a question." He looked sharply at the *McGillicuddy's* crew. "The ship's officers?"

"The mate's injured," I tells him. "The bosun's in the boat. Excepting the Old Man and myself, there ain't any others. But what the hell goes on?"

"Quiet!" he roars. "My men will look after the bosun. And now we will go up on the bridge and talk to your captain. We will need your ship to get back to Germany." He taps the gun in his hand softly. "Don't forget about this!"

On the way up to the bridge, hemmed in by Nazis and with the gale howling in my ears and the sea pounding the ship, I has time to think. But somehow my thoughts is all jumbled up. Maybe Captain Junius should never have gone to the aid of the Nazis in the first place; or maybe he should have warned me to be ready for them jumping us. . . Then the jumble clears up and I see how it is: Captain Junius, being the kind of man he is, it would never occur to him that a bunch of men, even a bunch of no-goods—

AS our feet touch the bridge, the Old Man turns. His face hardens as he looks at us over his great hooked beak of a nose, looks at the gun in the Nazi officer's hand. Then he touches the telegraph, and under our feet the throb of the engines dies down to a whisper. Now there's only the noise of the wind and the sea.

All tensed up, I waits for what the Nazi officer's going to do. For a minute it seems he don't know himself. Twice he glances back at his own ship. Then he brings his gun up and points it at Captain Junius.

"Go on with your work," he says harshly. "There are a hundred more men on that ship."

"No!" Captain Junius says, and there's a hardness in his voice I never hears there before. "If I'm captain I give the orders. If I'm no longer captain—" He turns and walks to the chartroom.

I'm thinking of the courage it musta took for the Old Man to turn his back on that gun and waiting for the sound of the shot when suddenly the Nazi officer gives a silly little laugh and drops his arm. "This kind of thing can wait," he says, and his eyes flicker. "You, too!" he says suddenly. "Into the chartroom with your captain. Later . . . Just now there is work to be done."

So I goes into the chartroom and a Nazi seaman slams the door shut. There's only me and Captain Junius in there. And not a weapon in the ship. The Old Man's discipline ain't been that kind. He hums a line of his song and it don't sound so good.

"The rotten dirty swine!" I says.

The Old Man don't say anything. He's looking out the port window at the heaving seas. I looks over his shoulder and there's the Nazi wreck almost abeam of us. The telegraph bell jangles. Under us the engines break into a slow beat. "They've sent one of their own men to the wheel," Captain Junius says suddenly.

It's then I become conscious of something happening to the *McGillicuddy*. A sea slaps her and she lies far over on her side. Another sweeps her decks. Next minute she comes upright with a jerk that threatens to knock the sticks out of her.

"Now they've done it," the Old Man says. "They've let her fall to leeward of the wreck. I think maybe things aren't as bad as they look." And he hums another line of his song. It's as if he's waiting for something he knows is coming. He peers out the window and gives a little chuckle. "The old *McGillicuddy!*" he says. "She'll lick the lot of them single-handed!"

Just then the chartroom door bangs open. "This ship!" the Nazi officer says angrily. "She won't steer!" His face has changed from green to red.

The Old Man don't even trouble to look at him.

"You hear?" the Nazi says in a louder voice. "She won't steer." Then suddenly he loses his temper. "Do something!" he yells. "While we're standing here, there are men drowning."

Captain Junius turns slowly and looks at him like the Nazi is something of a kind he's never seen before. Then, as though somehow satisfied at what he sees, he walks to the door and points at the wreck that's fast breaking up a mile or more to windward.

"There's a hundred of your pals over there," he says fiercely. "You tried to save them and you couldn't do it. I'm willing to make you a fair swap."

The Nazi opens his mouth like a fish. "A swap?" he says.

"A fair exchange," the Old Man goes on. "My ship against their lives. And don't get to fiddling with your gun," he says irritably. "You ain't got no choice. If you shoot me, you're still where you were—in a ship you can't handle. Now, get going," he says, and shoves the young Nazi out the door. "Send your men up here and tell 'em to pile their weapons. After that, the carpenter'll put you safe under hatches."

So the Old Man and me, we sits there in the chartroom and waits while the sea has its own way with the *McGillicuddy*. And after a time the Nazis begin coming up. They come in ones and twos, some of 'em sullen, some of 'em sheep-faced. It don't make no difference to Captain Junius how they come. He don't even look at them. Just sits there and waits until the last of them's come and gone and he hears the sound of Chips knocking wedges out of Number Two hatch. Then he gets up and walks across to the telegraph.

"And now for them other Nazis," he says. "We done it once and we got the know-how. We can do it again."

So we does it again, just as I tells Tom Price two hours later when the last Nazi's been stowed below hatches and the *McGillicuddy's* headed again for Boston.

"And now, will you listen to that!" I says.

From topside comes a sound of singing—

"The sun and the flying fish weather—"

"Just the one line," I says.

"Them Nazis!" Tom Price says. "What more could you expect?"

I WAS at the beginning. Lured by me, old Red Hair crept out of his cave, club in hand, to make his fearsome way across the paleolithic marshes.

Since the early dawn of time men have followed where I beckoned, deeming the world well lost for sake of me. Abraham sought me and I led Moses into the wilderness.

I am not for all men . . . but to those of high heart I am the first mistress of their desires. For love of me these rise up from marriage beds. They leave banquet halls; they spurn the money-changers and the marketplace. Soft arms cannot hold them; nor riches tempt—nor power or place; nor the bright lights of all the cities of the plain.

Seeking me they wander over windy steppes, sit beside jungle fires, or sail the gray wastes of uncharted seas.

I tempted Odysseus from his island home—and neither the song of sirens nor Nausicaa, nor Circe, nor all the fair daughters of men could stop him from following after me.

Alexander wept because he believed I could no more be wooed by him. Caesar gladly left luxurious Rome to seek me on the bleak frontiers of his world; Columbus in his frail bark sought me across unknown seas.

Captain John Smith, Père Marquette, Pizarro, Cortez, Coronado, Balboa, DeSoto—all my tribesmen these. High hearted men! Leal and true, whose homage never failed me. I lured them on and on, always toward the frontiers of the world. Before them danger and gaunt despair. Behind them peace and plenty—yet they never turned back from seeking after me until they died.

Now that my tribe has over-run the earth, what remains? The frontier of the stars! The mighty deeps of astral space! In years to come, who knows? On backs of fleet-winged birds of their own making, these men of mine may seek me in the worlds glowing beyond the sun.

I am Adventure!

—William P. Barron.

PRIVATE DYNAMITE

By

RAY MILLHOLLAND

"What's all the commotion about?" demanded Major Carnine. "Where did this mule come from?"

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARVE STEIN

AT THE time of Dynamite's arrival on foreign shores, the battalion had been bogged down in Italy by three weeks of bone-chilling rain. The relentless downpour had turned the never very passable roads around Cassino into impassable quagmires and boulder-infested gullies over which Private Ashby could not even drive the major's jeep, to say nothing of the big trucks being able to haul ammunition up to the front lines. Eventually, Private Ashby rammed a sloping rock with the front differential housing of the jeep and got quite effectively stalled—and at the very time Major Carnine was most anxious to get to his front lines and make a personal check on the lack of progress for which regimental headquarters was pouring the acid of disapproval down his already raw neck.

"Sir, we just ain't going to make it," said Private Ashby, ankle-deep in sloppy mud as he peered under the jeep and then up the road toward the front. "What this army needs is mules. And good Busanbark Indiana mules at that."

"What this army needs are fewer Hoosier plow jockeys and better mechanics," snapped Major Carnine.

He got out and assisted Private Ashby to

hoist up the front end of the jeep and free it from the sloping rock. Then he slid in behind the wheel and motioned Private Ashby to climb aboard as a passenger. The major in his younger days had been a daredevil test driver for one of the large Detroit motorcar builders and had very little, if any, patience with the sort of mentality which held to the theory that a four-legged animal could negotiate any terrain impassable to an internal combustion engine vehicle, especially when the latter had power on all four corners.

"I'm going to show you how to do this just once," said the major, admirably restraining his disgust for the inefficiency of his personal chauffeur. He juggled the gearshift levers into low and flung the jeep at the obstacle ahead, giving the wheel a savage wrench at the proper moment to dodge the sloping rock.

Private Ashby clung to the handrail of his seat with the tense alertness of a man prepared to leap for safety only at the last desperate moment, while his head snapped violently as the jeep bounded forward for another twenty-yards. Those twenty yards looked like miles to Private Ashby, for he was in a position to spit straight down some five hundred feet into a rocky ravine and he was not relishing the prospect of winding up down there with the jeep resting on the small of his back.

But not even a jeep driven by an expert proving-ground pilot can travel where there is no road at all. At the end of the twenty yards of boulders and pools of slimy muck, the road went completely A.W.O.L. where a recent washout had occurred. Not having the responsibility of driving on his mind, Private Ashby saw what was coming first. He yelled at the major to unload, and jumped. The major not a split second later did likewise, and both of them clinging by their fingernails to an almost vertical wall of rock, watched the jeep go tumbling end over end down into the ravine.

"Don't tell me a mule would have made it," grunted the major in no socially bantering tone as he dug for a toehold before daring to shift his handhold on a two-inch rock ledge.

A German sniper from clear across the valley started taking pot shots. The range was too great for accurate shooting, but he managed to hit the ledge to which they were clinging and shower them with rock chips.

"Sir," said Private Ashby. "I think we had better get out of here."

"I think you had better shut up," growled the major. Nevertheless he did not disdain the helping hand Private Ashby offered, and he permitted himself to be dragged on his stomach over the brink of a sheer drop of some five hundred feet.

They stumbled and slid the two miles of twisting trail back down to battalion command headquarters, where the major pounced on the telephone and demanded the assistance of a company of engineers to repair the road. Private Ashby stood outside scraping mud from his stomach, while the major's tone grew less and less imperious.

"But, Colonel, I've got men up there. They haven't enough ammunition to stand off even a light patrol action . . . Very well, sir, I'll try sweating it up by manpower."

At this juncture, Private Ashby discreetly removed his person from the immediate vicinity as a simple precaution against being the first man detailed to shoulder a load of ammunition and carry it to the front. He continued on around behind battalion headquarters to where the field kitchens were set up. It had occurred to him that he was three meals behind schedule and that it was time to do something drastic about it.

But neither the cook nor the mess sergeant were mounting guard over the steaming kettles. Naturally, the kitchen police were not present either. Private Ashby brazenly appropriated the cook's personal mess kit and lifted the lid of one of the kettles for a hungry sniff. Down went the lid again with a disappointed sigh. The cook was boiling his undershirts in that one. The next contained nothing but clear hot water. There was no padlock on the compartment of the field kitchen truck where the mess sergeant was wont to keep a few personal dainties, such as a cold roast of beef tenderloin and a loaf of fresh bread, for making himself hearty sandwiches between meals. Private Ashby lifted the steel lid and peered in anyway, but did not even sigh when he gazed upon its emptiness. He knew it was going to be that way.

Only then did Private Ashby become aware of the shouting in not too polite language coming from around the back of a little stone barn. Suddenly there burst into view an army mule, doing a most vigorous and scientific job of bucking off an inexpertly lashed packload of K-rations. By the time the mule had bucked his way abreast of the field-kitchen truck, his pack saddle was empty. Immediately the animal relaxed, dropped his head and leered knowingly at Private Ashby.

"Hi, mule. Where did you come from?" inquired Private Ashby. He approached the animal and gave its nose a friendly pat. "Don't like this GI duty, do you?"

"Hey, you, Ashby!" came a warning shout from the mess sergeant. "Stand clear of that man-eater before he bites off your arm."

Private Ashby continued with what he was doing—pulling down the mule's lower jaw and studying its teeth with an expert's eye. The mule accepted this gratuitous invasion of his privacy without the slightest display of resentment.

"Between six and eight years old," announced Private Ashby for the benefit of the mess sergeant, if he were interested. "And a Busanbark-bred Indiana mule at that. How much you want to bet I'm wrong?"

"Nuts! All mules come from Missouri," snapped the mess sergeant, avoiding the extreme range of the animal's posterior batteries by a good five yards. "You Hoosiers don't raise nothing but white chickens and hogs. I know because I drove a truck clear across your state once."

"This," repeated Private Ashby, slapping the mule a blow on the neck that made the mess sergeant jump back another two yards just in case, "is an Indiana mule, bred on the Busanbark farm not twenty miles from where I come from. Bet you five against three, next pay day, that I've plowed corn with a span of his half brothers."

"What's all the commotion about?" demanded Major Carnine, appearing on the scene before the mess sergeant could think up a suitable reply to Private Ashby's statement. "Where the devil did this mule come from?"

"Sir, from where I wish he was now," answered the sergeant, with feeling. "He has kicked Private Thompson into a stretcher case and has bit a hunk out of the cook. All because we was trying to load some K-rations on him for L Company."

"Where did this animal come from?" reiterated the major.

"From brigade headquarters, sir," answered the mess sergeant. "They come by with a string of these hard-tailed hayburners and said account of the trucks not being able to make it, account of the roads being washed out, we was to pack rations up front on this—this stubborn hunk of perpetually exploding dynamite."

The major turned a reminiscing and somewhat vengeful glance in Private Ashby's direction.

"Ashby, it seems to me you were singing the praises of mule transport a short time ago. Well, there's your mule. But don't load him with rations this time. They need ammunition up there. Put on all this beast can stagger under, and get going." The major frowned at his watch. "I'll expect a radio report back in—ummm—two hours that the ammunition has arrived."

Private Ashby would have very much liked to remind the major that he had already missed three meals and was feeling uncomfortably empty inside. But the major had already turned on his heel and was striding for his headquarters.

"C'mon, Dynamite, let's get this thing over with," he sighed, taking the mule's lead rope and trudging off for the cave in the hillside where the ammunition was stored. He dropped the lead rope at the entrance to the cave and said, "You stay right there. I gotta find Sergeant Duffy inside."

Dynamite came to a relaxed halt and gave no sign that he had any intentions of deserting his post and duty. But as soon as Private Ashby's back was turned, he cocked a knowing eye at a tall slim-necked bottle standing on a flat rock beside the cave entrance. He approached it, sniffed the uncorked bottle, then closed his lips over fully half of its length and raised it skyward, blissfully blinking his eyes as the sour red wine trickled down his throat.

PRIVATE ASHBY found Sergeant Duffy and announced that he had come for a load of ammunition. A mule load, in fact.

"O. K., call in your detail," said the sergeant. "I got fifty-pound packs already made up. Knew they'd never get even a half-track over that road after last night's rain."

Private Ashby blinked at the sergeant. "Bring my mule right in here, you mean?"

"Now listen, soldier," said Sergeant Duffy, rasping an eye over Private Ashby. "I put in two hitches in this man's army before Pearl Harbor with the last hard-tailed machine-gun outfit to be mechanized. So quit telling me the Army's still got mules and call in your detail."

"I got a mule outside," insisted Private Ashby without putting any more energy into the statement than necessary. He had long since learned that arguing with old-time sergeants from the Regulars was that much wasted effort.

The sergeant brushed him aside and strode to the cave entrance, muttering to himself, "If I see a mule out there, I'll kiss the first pig I meet."

Private Ashby followed. They arrived just in time to see the last of the contents of the wine bottle vanishing down Dynamite's throat.

Sergeant Duffy snatched the bottle from Dynamite's mouth and shook it close to his ear.

"This ain't your first hitch," he said accusingly to the mule. "It takes at least two hitches to teach a jughead to swig from a bottle like that."

Dynamite, who had taken violent exception to being loaded with K-rations by the mess sergeant and his kitchen police, submitted with the utmost docility while Sergeant Duffy and Private Ashby, both experienced mule handlers, lashed the cases of ammunition to the pack saddle.

"Take this up to Sergeant Cohen of L Company," said Duffy, handing Private Ashby the bottle which Dynamite had emptied a few minutes before, but now refilled and encased in a long shapeless heavy woolen sock. "And don't you or the mule go drinking none of it on the way, either. It may smell something like hooch, but it's rank poison. Antiseptic for killing trench foot, which Sergeant Cohen has got bad."

WITHIN the two-hour time limit set by Major Carnine, Private Ashby and his mule-load of ammunition arrived at the front.

"Stay down off the skyline," somebody yelled, "or you'll get your fool can blowed off! The Jerries has this ridge taped to an inch."

Private Ashby waited below in the cold driving rain for a detail of gaunt men to slide down the hillside and assist him in stripping the ammunition cases from Dynamite's pack saddle.

"You're just in time, soldier," grunted the corporal in charge, opening a case then and there and sending up a runner loaded with bandoliers. "We're down to our last clip apiece and them monkeys have been getting set to rush us for an hour."

"I'm supposed to get a receipt from Captain Smith," said Private Ashby.

"You'll have to get it from Sergeant Cohen," said the corporal. "The skipper went out on a reconnaissance patrol and is pinned down between two big boulders, out there some place. We couldn't cover his withdrawal with fire until we got more ammunition. You'll find the sergeant up there behind that bush."

Private Ashby crawled up to the designated bush, arriving in time to hear Sergeant Cohen reporting over a portable radio the arrival of ammunition. "Yes, major, a mule-load just arrived. But we'll need as much again to stand off the next attack. We're short of hand grenades, too, case they try it again after dark. . . O.K., sir, we'll be counting on it."

Sergeant Cohen looked back over his shoulder and saw Private Ashby holding out a long woolen sock. The sergeant snatched it from his hand and crept over to a wounded man.

"Here, take a good slug of this and you won't give a hoot how long it takes before the medics get you out."

Private Ashby started down the steep winding trail for battalion headquarters. Dynamite followed at his heels, calm and unmoved except for the almost mechanical reversal of the fore and aft position of his ears when a German .88 shell burst above them on the flank of the mountain. The trip consisted partly of wading knee deep in cold, soupy mud and partly of stumbling over jagged ledges of rock. All the time the icy rain drummed on Private Ashby's battle helmet and ran down the back of his neck.

When they reached the washout in the trail, Private Ashby looked again for some way to avoid detouring down the slide to the creek bottom and then climbing back up the other side. But there wasn't even a foothold for a squirrel along the sheer face of the cliff. With a bone-weary sigh, he dug in his heels, leaned back, and with an eye over his shoulder to make sure the mule wasn't going to lose its footing and come tumbling down on top of him, he worked his way down to the creek bottom.

He paused to examine the battered jeep which he and the major had been forced to abandon so abruptly that morning. Maybe he could salvage the major's carbine. He found the carbine, but the stock was smashed and the barrel bent. He tossed it into the stream and started the long hard climb up the face of the washout again.

Just then a German .88 shell slammed into the wrecked jeep and hurled it end over end in the air, showering both Private Ashby and his mule with mud and water.

"We'd better get out of here and quick," said Private Ashby to the mule, and started scrambling up the slide toward the trail leading back to battalion headquarters.

Halfway up the slide, another .88 shell exploded. Shell fragments buzzed past, reminding Private Ashby of a covey of quail flushing from a blackberry thicket back home. He lay flattened for a minute wondering whether he had been hit or not. Dynamite stepped over him and continued climbing until he reached the trail, where he paused only for a curious glance over his shoulder at Private Ashby and then continued on toward headquarters.

Private Ashby started crawling again, with a lump of ice in his stomach and an unsoothing feeling that he must look as big as the Methodist Church at Steam Corners back home to those German gunners. Another shell slammed into the face of the slide within ten yards of him, but it hit on the other side of a six-foot boulder. All the damage it did was to loosen the boulder and send it crashing down onto the tangled mass of steel which had once been the major's jeep.

They now had his range taped to a whisker, he decided, and he lay perfectly still, a muddy blur against the slide. He counted intervals of ten seconds, waiting for the next shell, and stared out across the further side of the valley to a notch between two hills. That was the only place from which a gun could be trained on the trail, and the Jerries weren't missing any bets.

He looked up. Dynamite had disappeared around the shoulder of the hill. There were just fifty yards more to go. If he could make that, the German .88 could not reach him. Safety seemed miles away, though. Just one wiggle, and— Private Ashby dug in his toes and climbed as fast as he could. He landed on the trail on his hands and knees and scrambled to shelter.

An .88 shell burst on the slide, exactly where he had been lying a few seconds before. Private Ashby sat down on a rock and wiped the rain from his helmet, then put it back on and trudged on toward headquarters. Just before reaching the last turn in the trail, he met Sergeant Duffy and a medic coming toward him.

"We heard the shelling. Then the mule came in without you," said Duffy in a relieved growl. "Did they get you any place?"

"I don't think so," said Private Ashby dully.

The medic said, "Cripes, look!" He lifted Private Ashby's gas mask bag and ran his fist through a jagged hole.

"WHAT'S to eat?" Private Ashby wanted to know, wasting no concern on the fact that a shell fragment had missed his body by the merest fraction of an inch.

"K-rations is all," answered Sergeant Duffy. "The field kitchen took a direct hit from upstairs while you was gone and got scattered all over a ten-acre field."

"Well, there's one thing you can say for K-rations," remarked the medic, philosophically. "They sure stay with a man. What you eat on Monday you can still taste Wednesday. Of course, if you swallow it still in the can—"

"You ain't being funny," said Sergeant Duffy. Then to Private Ashby, "You're bushed, kid. Soon's you report to the major, look me up in the cave. I found a small keg of something buried back in there that'll make you forget the country-cured ham you was raised on. For a few minutes, anyways."

"I ate country-cured ham once," remarked the medic, significantly.

"Yeah, nice feeding when you can get it," retorted Sergeant Duffy.

They arrived at battalion headquarters. Private Ashby went in and reported to Major Carnine.

The major pushed a message pad off the battle sector map on his field desk and handed Private Ashby a pencil. "Now show me where you think that German .88 was shelling you from."

"From off to the right, about two thousand yards. About here," said Private Ashby.

"You're mistaken," said the major. "That's the exact location of one of our own 105 batteries supporting L Company."

Private Ashby was bone-weary. And hungry—hungry for anything in the way of food that wasn't labeled K-rations. Besides, if it was a waste of time to argue with corporals and sergeants, it was even less use trying to tell a major he was off the beam about the location of the enemy gun. Then there was the fact that muddy water was dripping off his clothes and forming a pool on the cleanly swept flagstone floor, right where the major could see it. He saluted mechanically and left.

The major's eyes followed him. The major shook his head and turned to his adjutant. "There must be six million warm and dry soldiers in this man's army right this minute. And my men have been out in this for three days and nights, without even a mouthful of hot coffee."

"I've got an extra dry shirt, sir," said the adjutant. "It might prevent that cough of yours from turning into something worse."

"When you find three hundred slickers to replace the ones my men have torn to shreds up there on the rocks of that ridge. I'll borrow it," growled the major and stalked out into the rain, coughing.

In due time, Private Ashby entered the ammunition cave. He was carrying a large chunk of rain-soaked bread he had found near the twisted wreckage of the field kitchen. Sergeant Duffy was making up an ammunition requisition by candlelight with the air of a grown man writing to Santa Claus and not expecting anything to come from the effort. He gestured with a pencil stub toward his mess cup on a box of hand grenades.

"Take a shot of that, soldier. Then try to catch yourself a little bunk fatigue. It's homemade cognac the farmer who owns this place left behind when he lammed, so watch out."

Private Ashby poured most of the contents of the mess cup on the chunk of rain-soaked bread in his hand and took it out and fed it to Dynamite. The mule ate it ravenously, then sniffed hungrily for more.

Private Ashby pulled from under his jacket a coarse, dry grainsack he had found in the cave and spent the next fifteen minutes giving Dynamite's legs and back a brisk rubdown.

He was still at it when the major passed on his way back to the farmhouse from the field dressing station tents.

"Get inside, out of this confounded weather," barked the major and went on.

Private Ashby led Dynamite to the gate of the fence around a sodden haystack, opened it and gave the mule an encouraging slap on the withers. "Don't founder yourself," he said, and went splashing back to the cave. In a few minutes he was curled up on a tier of machine-gun ammunition cases with Sergeant Duffy's blanket over him, snoring.

There were less than two hours of daylight remaining when Sergeant Duffy wakened him.

"I wouldn't do this to a dog, soldier. The major wants you outside."

Private Ashby groped his way to the mouth of the cave, to find the major and his adjutant and three kitchen police tugging at Dynamite's lead rope. There was a full load of ammunition on the pack saddle, but Dynamite was sitting down on his hams with his forefeet braced and not showing any signs of changing his pose even for a brigadier general.

"Either get this mule up on his wheels and into gear," said the major to Private Ashby, "or take him back in the woods and shoot his brains out."

Sergeant Duffy's fingers nipped Ashby warningly, above the elbow. "There's a classy comeback for that, but don't spring it," he whispered out of the side of his mouth. "The Old Man is

running better than a degree of fever and his sense of humor has soured."

Private Ashby walked around the squatting mule and appraised the load on the pack saddle. The ammunition cases were well lashed and properly distributed for balance. But on top of the load loomed a bulging mound covered with tarpaulin.

"What's in that?" he asked.

"Two dozen loaves of bread," answered the mess sergeant. "And that's the last L Company will get until we get a replacement for our field-kitchen truck."

Private Ashby loosened the lashings of the bread issue and dumped the tarpaulin bundle out where Dynamite could see it.

"Now get up, mule," he said, wearily.

DYNAMITE looked back over his shoulder at the pack on his back and seeing that almost half the bulk of his load had been removed, waggled a grateful ear at Private Ashby and stood up.

"What stupidity!" exclaimed the major, but not making it clear whether he meant the mule or the mess sergeant or himself. He waved vaguely toward the front. "Get this ammunition up there as soon as you can, Ashby."

Sergeant Duffy had disappeared inside the cave. He came out and stood close to Private Ashby as he passed over another tall-necked bottle covered by a thick woolen sock.

"This is for Sergeant Cohen's corns. But if you take a slug yourself before you get there, I won't hold it against you."

Picking the lead rope out of the mud and coiling it loosely, Private Ashby said over his shoulder, "Come on, mule," and went plodding on numb, chilled feet across the vineyard. Dynamite followed at heel as docilely as a well-broken bird dog.

Dynamite's behavior continued to be most exemplary until they reached the sharp bend in the rocky trail where it was necessary to detour down into the ravine to get past the washout.

At first, Private Ashby thought the mule had stopped to gather strength for the heart-bursting effort of getting down into the ravine and scrambling up the other side. He sank down on a rock, his tattered elbows resting on his knees, the lead rope coiled over one wrist.

Then from up at the front he heard the dull flat report of a rifle, then another and still another. It was something like corn beginning to pop in an iron pot on the kitchen stove back home—faster and faster, until the individual reports blended into a continuous hoarse crackling sound.

"Well, mule," sighed Private Ashby getting to his feet, "we better be on our way. The gang will be needing what we're bringing pretty quick now."

Dynamite flung up his head and emitted a long, raucous bray of protest that echoed back from the ridge on the far side of the ravine with the carrying power of a bugle.

"Shut up, you jugheaded fool!" said Private Ashby, and silenced the braying by closing Dynamite's nostrils with a firm grip of his hand.

As if in answer to his warning, a German .88 shell slammed into the face of the washout, just around the turn in the trail.

"See? Now you put them Jerries on the alert," said Private Ashby, disgustedly. "Why can't you keep your big mouth shut?"

But Dynamite refused to budge when Ashby gave a tug on the lead rope. Another shell blew out a ton of loose rock and mud from the washout slope and sent it cascading down onto the major's wrecked jeep at the bottom of the ravine.

"Maybe you got more sense than us two-legged ones at that," said Private Ashby. He fumbled inside his jacket, pulled out the sock-covered bottle and took a long swig, then politedly wiped the mouth of the bottle with the palm of his hand and inserted it in the side of Dynamite's mouth. "Just a short slug, remember. We gotta save some for Sergeant Cohen's corns."

But a short slug did not satisfy Dynamite's craving for refreshment. He watched with avid eyes, his tongue hanging from the side of his mouth, as Private Ashby tapped the cork back into the bottle and tucked it back inside his jacket.

"No seconds for you until we get across to the other side," said Ashby, and started on.

Two-thirds of the way down the slope, the world seemed to explode under Private Ashby. He cartwheeled through the air and landed with a soggy splash in the shallow creek at the bottom of the ravine. He lay on his back, not too certain he was alive.

Then gradually he felt the chill of the water. He sat up and felt his arms and body in dazed wonder. Then he noticed that the current downstream from his legs was turning a murky pink. He could move his left leg, but the right failed to respond when he tried to draw up his knee.

It took several minutes for him to recover from the concussion of the bursting shell sufficiently to drag himself out of the stream and out of sight of the German gunners. There was no pain, only the steady seepage of blood from a jagged shell-splinter wound in his thigh just above the knee. He could see the wound plainly for there was hardly a shred of his trouser-leg left.

For perhaps five minutes he stared at the bleeding wound, unable to coordinate his hands and open his first-aid kit. It didn't seem to matter much one way or another. He felt no pain, only a numb weariness.

Then from up near the front he heard the dull popping of rifle fire, which swelled into a steady hoarse crackle—only to start dying down again.

The gang is running out of ammunition, was the thought which finally aroused Private Ashby from his drowsy lethargy. *You gotta do something about it before it's too late.*

Then his hands began to work on his wounded right leg. Compress and tight bandage above, to restrict the flow of blood through the artery. . . Sulfa powder on the wound and a gauze pad over it. . . It wasn't bleeding so bad now. . . Where the hell was that damn mule?

Private Ashby looked up. There at the top of the slide with just his head and ears showing around the shoulder of hillside stood Dynamite.

"Get down here!" yelled Private Ashby.

DYNAMITE cocked one ear down at Private Ashby but gave no indication that he had any intention of obeying the command. Even a coaxing whistle could not shake his resolve not to risk that steep slope.

Private Ashby fumbled inside his jacket. Out came the sock-covered bottle, still unbroken. He pulled the cork and took a long swig. The fiery homemade brandy scorched his throat as it went down.

Up above, Dynamite cocked both ears downward and inched forward until his neck and foreshoulder came into view.

"If you want some," called Private Ashby coaxingly, "you'll have to come and get it." He held the bottle as high as he could, adding, "Your last chance, Dynamite, before it goes into the creek!"

With a thirsty snort, Dynamite advanced, braced his forefeet on the slide, sat down on his rump and came plowing down to the bottom.

Stuffing the bottle back inside his jacket, Private Ashby reached up and caught the pack-saddle lashings and pulled himself to his feet. Dynamite kept wheeling and sniffing thirstily.

"Stand still," gasped Private Ashby as the first stab of pain shot through his wounded leg. "You'll get your drink." He gripped the mule's neck and worked his way to the animal's head.

Out came the bottle again. Dynamite's teeth clicked over the slim neck.

"You don't get all of it. Not yet, anyway," gasped Private Ashby, wrenching the bottle away and batting in the cork. "Look, I'm sticking it under the strap on this side. See?"

Dynamite, whose eyes remained fixed on the bottle, watched avidly while Private Ashby jammed it securely in place. Then he fished in

his pocket for a pencil stub and the snapshot of his girl back home. On the back of the snapshot, he wrote: *If this mule delivers the ammo O.K., give him another drink out of this bottle. If he don't, blow his damn head off for me.*

The last thing Private Ashby remembered was tucking the note securely in beside the bottle, giving Dynamite a feeble slap on the shoulder and pointing toward the front, saying, "That way. Same place we went before. Get going, mule."

It was dark when Private Ashby regained consciousness. A few stars had come out and the air was crisp with frost. A rifle popped with that flat sound far up the trail. Then another rifle popped, and another. By the time the volume of firing increased to a steady crackle, it had already begun to fade in his ears. Then he fainted again.

The next time Private Ashby came to, the sun was shining. He lay on a field dressing cot, staring up at the golden glow of the tent fly over him. He heard a blubbering, blowing noise and looked down his wounded leg, over the foot of his bed and outside the tent.

There stood Dynamite, poking his long head inside the tent fly. On either side of him stood Sergeants Cohen and Duffy.

"Much obliged, soldier, for that second load of ammunition," said Sergeant Cohen. "We were down to our last clip apiece when your pet mountain canary showed up. We knocked 'em for a loop when they made that last rush, thinking we were sitting ducks."

"Did Dynamite get his seconds on the hooch?" inquired Private Ashby.

"Seconds, hell," said Sergeant Duffy. "He's a four-bottle mule. And look, he ain't even staggering yet!"

Sergeant Duffy swung Dynamite broadside to Private Ashby's view. On the animal's shoulder, just where a chevron would be worn on a uniform, gleamed the single inverted V of a private first class.

Suddenly, Sergeants Cohen and Duffy froze at attention and simultaneously snapped salutes.

"This is the pair that saved our position, General," came Major Carnine's voice from the other end of the hospital tent. "This young man, and that whiskey-guzzling mule outside."

Friendly gray eyes looked down at Private Ashby. A pair of bronzed hands pinned a purple heart on Private Ashby's hospital shirt.

"Good job, soldier," said the general. "You got us out of a nasty hole, getting that ammunition up there in time."

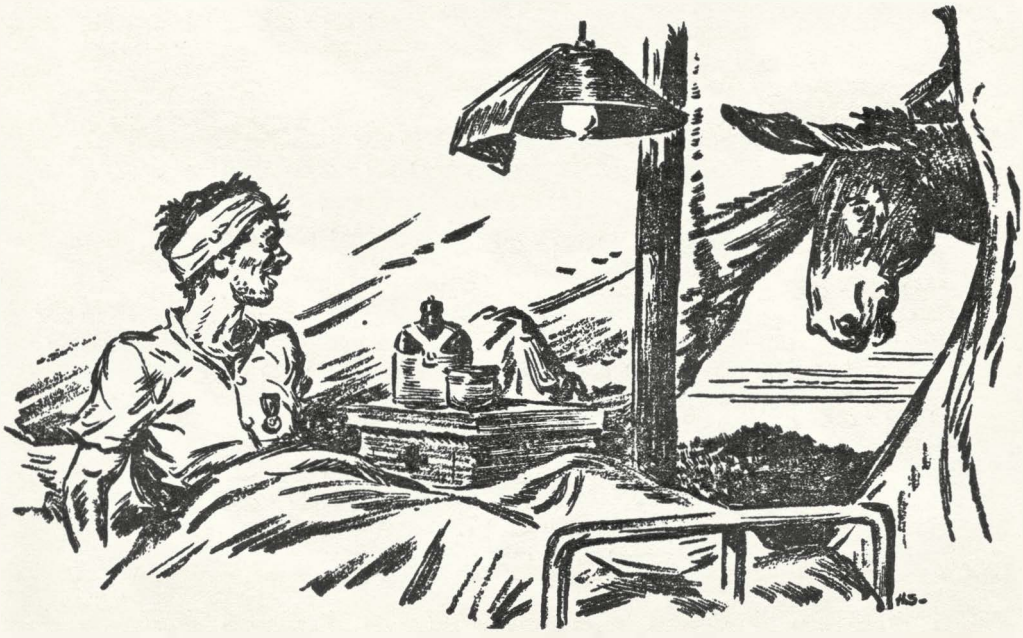
"It was Dynamite, not me," said Private Ashby. "I got no further than the washout."

"Don't let that worry you for a minute, soldier," said the general. "I doubt if there is another man in the Army who has done a better job at using his brains than you did. . . Well, Major, I'll have to be going. I'll see that you get those half-tracks you were yelling your head off for."

"Never mind those half-tracks," said Major Carnine. "I'll take mules. They're the only kind of transport in this godforsaken country."

Dynamite, being an old-timer from the Regulars, was careful what he did until the brass hats were safely out of sight. Then he shoved his long head under the hospital tent fly and leered knowingly at Private Ashby.

And Private Ashby winked back.



I wished I could have seen him when he threw a loop over that tepee and put his horse to a run.

NEXT TO NOTHING

By L. L. FOREMAN

IN THE ordinary run of things it wouldn't have been overly noticeable, but standing there in the doorway Shad looked tall and tough, and the yellow lamplight sharpened him out so you couldn't help thinking suddenly of some of the wild tales they told about him. Maybe it was because of the spotless white cover on the supper table, and the high genteel company we had on hand. These things weren't ordinary and they made everything seem different.

Shad was dirty, fresh in from the branding ground. His heavy bullhide chaps were blotched with grease and burns, and his shirt hung all torn and bloodied in front. He was a sight, and I only lived for the day when I'd be man-sized and look like him. Take any ranch kid of that time, all he ever wanted to be was a

top-hand cowpuncher. The world didn't hold anything bigger.

Across that high-toned white tablecloth Trace moved to get up, and she seemed different, too. But when she found me staring at her she put the mask on—you know how girls do. I wished I knew what was wrong with her, acting so strange lately, as if she'd taken a whipping. I liked having Trace home again, except that she did make me clean up more than necessary. "Father," she'd call, "if you can spare time to haze Pinto out to the trough. . . ." And Cap would pin a look on me, which was plenty enough to send me to the pump.

Since our high genteel company had come, I sometimes felt I wasted half my life under that pump. They were English, brother and sister—the Bart and the Honorable Lass, so named by the bunkhouse crowd. The Bart represented the English syndicate that owned the ranch, and he had come on an inspection visit and brought his sister along for the trip. Cap was ranch manager, a big job but not too big for him, for he'd bossed a good outfit of his own, back in Texas, before blackleg wiped him out. They didn't have cattle serums in those days.

So there were five of us, if you count me, sitting down to supper at ranch headquarters when Shad stepped in. Shad was light on his feet and suddenly there he stood, about as tall as the doorway and quiet as an Indian. And Trace looking at him, her eyes half frightened.

"What is it, Smith?" the Bart shot at him. He talked odd, but he had a voice that could hit you. Maybe he thought Shad should have knocked.

Shad generally waited a spell before speaking, but now he didn't bother to answer. In that soft, flat voice of his he said to Cap, "I guess it won't surprise you to know Mr. Jim's played out. I'll need the buckboard to bring him in." Then he drifted his eyes over the Bart's stone-smooth face, while the Bart sat looking at him. Shad had his hat off, out of courtesy to the house, but there was something wicked in the way he studied the Bart.

Cap's eyes, cold as ever I'd seen them, cut from one man to the other, so I reckoned I wasn't the only one feeling a tingle in my scalp. Shad was a special kind of man, with a special reputation.

There was a lot behind all this that was pure black mystery to me, but there was one part I did have the *sabe* of, the part that had to do with Trace. I'd been there on hand when it cropped up, when Cap let me ride with him into Sanburn to meet Trace at the depot. It was Sunday morning and we ran into Shad in town. He'd ridden in for the Saturday night, and he had a weary look on him that morning. He came over to the buckboard and said he guessed he was quitting the outfit. Although he'd only been with us a couple of months, I hated to hear him say that, for I thought he stood first cousin to the Almighty or thereabouts. He'd worked cattle everywhere, Canada to Old Mexico, and everybody allowed he was the best top-hand we'd had for a long time. But Cap only nodded, watching the train pull in, and he went over to hug Trace as she stepped off.

THAT Eastern school had bleached Trace some, but she was prettier than ever in spite of it. Whatever she'd done to her hair, it looked as soft as the coat on Sorrel Girl's new foal. She sniffed the air, gave a satisfied sigh, kissed me, and we walked to the buckboard, her arm around my shoulders. Shad stowed her baggage away, and Cap made him known to her.

Shad bowed, solemn as a preacher. He didn't look weary any more. He looked the way he did the day he topped off old Tetanus, our outlaw horse that nobody could ride till Shad showed how. As we were getting started he made mention of two cattle buyers putting up at Fly's Hotel. Naturally, Cap couldn't pass up the chance to set two buyers bidding against each other, so off he went to bait them, leaving me to drive Trace home. He could borrow a horse to get home on, later.

You know I thought a heap of Shad. He never grinned or lifted his lip when he talked to me, or treated me as just a freckly button that rated next to nothing. There was only one thing of his he wouldn't let me handle, and that was his horse, his own personal traveling horse, a big grulla he called Wampus. But now he let down. Damned if he didn't hand me the reins and say soft and easy, "Like to try him, bub? I'll drive the buckboard, if it suits you."

Was I proud!

What they talked about all the way home I don't know, for I rode behind with my hands full of Wampus. That big horse took his time getting acquainted. He whiffed me, worked his ears, and let me see by his rolling eye that he wouldn't stand for any funny business. He was letting me stay on strictly from courtesy, and it was up to me to be just as polite. By the time we'd swapped notes and got everything understood, Trace and Shad were talking and laughing in the buckboard as if they'd crossed the whole territory together. It came to me then that Shad probably wasn't as old as the Bart, who was shading thirty. Somehow I'd got to thinking Shad was older. He seemed sort of old sometimes, particularly when he got that weary look on him.

We dusted into the ranch yard, all of us feeling good, and Shad nearly ran down the Bart. The Bart raised his head, sharp, but he looked first at Trace and somehow he was right there on tap when Shad drew up at the house.

He sure could move fast without seeming to. Those long legs of his helped. Come to think of it, I never saw him sweat. He always looked cool.

He stood by the buckboard, smiling, holding up a hand to help Trace down. Innocent as you please, Shad reached back into Trace's baggage and tossed a grip to him. The Bart had to catch it, and it was Shad who helped Trace to step down. Shad had a way with him, all right.

I talked about him to Trace that night. I told her how Shad was a top-hand and a king of the earth, till I ran out of breath. She said, smiling, "You sort of like him, don't you?"

And I came right back, "Sure—don't you?"

It seemed she did. She went riding with him the next evening, and I shook hands with myself. I sure didn't want Shad to quit the outfit. He was about the only one who appeared to think I might have the makings of a grown man in me, and you know it's mighty comforting to find somebody who agrees with you. I guess I was lonely till he came along.

But from then on, things went all out of kilter. The spring roundup got under way, and Mr. Jim—he was foreman—sent Shad away off down the river to comb the roughs. One Sunday evening Shad rode all the way in from his camp, and when he asked for Trace I had to tell him she was off riding with the Bart. He cracked an awful thin grin, nodding his head slowly, and paced off, his high heels hitting hard and solid for once, Wampus following him.

I feared he'd quit, but he turned aside and went onto the porch where the Honorable Lass sat. Soon he was sitting by her, and the murmur of their voices reached me where I sat marveling at his nerve. The Honorable Lass was right handsome in a tall, smooth way, but she didn't thaw out easy. They were still there when Trace and the Bart rode in, and I was long abed before I heard Shad start back to camp.

It was still later when I heard Cap walking up onto the porch, saying, ". . . but a good hand, regardless. If Mr. Jim plays out, I swear I don't know who'd make a better one."

And then the Bart's quiet, carrying voice said, "I see your point. But if the fellow's a drifter, and a blackguard to boot. . . ." The front door slammed and the rest was muffled down below in the house.

And now Mr. Jim had played out, sure enough. He was old and little, and he'd come up from Texas with Cap. Like everybody else, Shad must have known he was the one who could fill the job. But he didn't expect to get it, and it was plain he didn't give a damn. He wouldn't bend his neck to anybody, least of all to the Bart.

The Honorable Lass spoke up, her supper napkin to her mouth. "But look—you have blood on you!" You'd have thought she might know that when calves get branded their ears get cropped at the same time. It was nothing but a little ordinary calf blood on Shad's shirt.

As gentle as he talked to Wampus, Shad said to her, "It's all right, Miss Lascela—it's not my blood."

Called her by her first name, with just the Miss tacked on and slurred over. Even Cap called her "Ma'am." Her face got pink, and the Bart's nose got a pinched look at the nostrils.

AFTER a minute, with nobody saying anything, Cap told Shad to pull up a chair and eat, just as if nothing was wrong. And right there the Bart passed a remark I'd never heard before.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Greathouse," he said, cool and pleasant, "I believe I would rather not set that precedent." Cap squinted at him, puzzled, and the Bart enlarged. "My sister and I would hardly care to establish a practice of eating with the hands."

I nearly choked. A top-hand like Shad was fit to eat with anybody. As he turned and left, I caught the flash of his eyes, shining like quartz in the lamplight, and I had to scratch that tingling in my scalp. Trace picked up her own supper and followed him out fast. She was a mystery to me, the way she blew hot and cold on him. In a little while she came back, her supper not touched, looking like she was going to cry. The Bart hadn't much to say, the rest of the meal. Maybe he was sorry. I was willing to bet he'd be sorrier before long.

What had me going was, Cap didn't take up for Shad. From the porch the smoke of his cigar came up to my open bedroom window that night, where I knelt listening, and I heard him say, "I had my reasons for warning you, Trace." He sounded sad, almost.

I couldn't catch what Trace said, she spoke so low, but it was some kind of question. By leaning out a bit I could look down and see the light of Cap's cigar. It went bright and dull, bright and dull, as Cap drew on it. He was smoking faster than he generally did.

"I grant he's a good cowman," he said. "It's the other side of him that I don't like. His reputation ain't built on wind, believe me. He's dangerous. There's a thing behind him that haunts him, prods him on, gets him in mischief. I've known men like that, and I can't recall one that didn't drag hell on himself. When a man's fighting something that's inside him. . . ."

There was a murmur from Trace, and a long silence. At last Cap said, "You can't do it, baby. You can't help a man lick himself. He does it alone, if it's to be done." He raised his tone. "You bear that in mind, Pinto—I know you got an ear bent over that window. Durn

kid! Come in the house, Trace. I got something else to tell you."

Next day I couldn't get a word out of Trace about Shad, and when I got sore she jumped on me for swearing, when all I let slip out was a little old "damn." She wasn't lively to have around any more, not a bit. She said a weight on me with her whipped look, and I mooned along by myself, sorry and miserable, wishing I was old enough to take a riding job in Argentina or some place.

With old Mr. Jim laid up for good, Cap went out in his place as foreman. The Bart said he wanted to see the work, and he moved out to the branding ground, too. It took a spring wagon to get his gear shifted. Waterproof tepee tent, folding cot and mattress, camp table. . . . He sure was fixed up for housekeeping. On my offer to keep up the cook's woodpile, Cap let me trail along. I had a strong hunch something was due to pop when Shad and the Bart got together again.

As to that, any branding camp kept a constant supply of excitement on tap, of one kind or another. What with the smells of blood and burned hair, and the bawling calves and their wild-eyed mammas charging around, and the horses all savage-tempered, and the men cussing and carrying on rough and reckless, it was always a good place not to start an argument.

I laid out my bedroll by the roundup wagon, because there wasn't space left around the cookfire. The Bart pitched his tent quite a distance from the big gather of mixed cows and calves that was being circled by Shad and another rider. That new tent looked exclusive and interesting out there all alone with its tepee top pointing up at the sky. Long past sundown a slashing rain came on, and soon a crazy big wind came booming at us from all directions. Not having thought to bring a good tarp with me, as the others had, I crawled under the wagon. So I missed the first part of what happened when Shad rode in off watch at midnight.

First I knew of it, a horse went pounding by the wagon. Some fellows began whooping and laughing, and next a bundle of new canvas and tent poles bounced past, ropes and pegs trailing behind. I came out in a hurry, for I wanted to see the Bart.

He was worth seeing. The night was pretty dark, but we could make him out. He stood where his tent had been, in the pouring rain, dressed in a baggy silk sleeping suit that flapped in the wind. His cot lay upside down, and a white bedsheet—sure, he'd brought a pair of them—sailed up over his head and kind of hesitated there as if trying to decide whether to drop on him or go ahead and quit the country. It dropped over him and there he was, fighting it. I laughed so hard I hurt.

"If he don't spook them cows," somebody hollered, "it's 'cos they got a sense o' humor!"

The horse circled back, dragging that tent, and it was Shad riding it. I wished I could have seen him when he threw the loop over that tent and put his horse to a run. It must have been a pretty sight.

The cookfire was still burning. They'd managed to keep it from drowning out. In the light of it, Shad's eyes had that shine in them again. He drew up near the fire and stepped off, coiling his rope, and he was the only one not laughing out loud. Pretty soon, though, nobody was laughing, for you could tell by the Bart's walk that he was coming on business.

The Bart padded through the fresh mud in his bare feet, into the firelight. He and Shad laid long looks on each other, and without a word they pitched in, slugging, right there in the rain and mud.

THAT was the last rain of the year, and along through summer everything got so hot and dry you were almost scared to strike a match for fear the air itself would catch light and set fire to the world. Cap took on deep wrinkles around his mouth, and the speech was sparse. He had to set out fire watchers, which left the crew short-handed. What with overwork and that night-and-day fear of fire, everybody was on edge.

"Sometimes," Cap said one midday at table, "I make up my mind cowpunchers are the orn'riest knotheads Satan ever slipped past the Lord to plague the earth." Which meant he'd been trying out another hand as foreman and got no satisfaction. Trouble was, all the hands knew one another's vices and weaknesses too well.

"Perhaps you had better engage an outside man," the Bart suggested. The Honorable Lass had left, but he was staying on till fall. Except for the scar over his right eye, he was the same as ever, cool and smooth. But I could always see him sagging on his knees, plastered with mud, trying to get up. And Shad, blood on his face, glaring down at him. It wasn't a short or easy fight. I couldn't believe, though, like some, that the Bart might have whipped him if he'd had boots on.

"If I knew where to pick up a good man out of a job this late in the summer," Cap answered shortly, "I wouldn't be sitting here so saddle-sore."

Thinking I was bright, I piped up, "I know one!"

"Where?" asked both Cap and the Bart.

"Just across the river in the Beggary Bosque," I said. Trace sent me a warning look, but I went on, "I hear he's staying in that old shack near the bridge. He's hunting mavericks in the brush, and—and—"

I stopped. Cap took his stare off me and said to the Bart, "Shad Smith, he means. One o' these days we'll have to clean out that nest over

there. Getting to be a hangout for too many *malos hombres*. Long as they kept to hunting wild cows it was all right, but lately we've seen their signs this side o' the river."

"Do you think Smith would—er—rustle from us?" the Bart inquired.

I couldn't hold in any longer. "Just because you fired him is no reason to call him a—"

Cap put his look back on me. "I fired him for good reason," he said, "and if I run him out o' the Bosque it'll be for another good reason. Now you keep still!"

Trace blinked her eyes and suddenly left the table. But I was all wound up. "If that's good reason, firing him for whipping the Bart in a fair—"

"Leave the table!" Cap told me, and he spoke like thunder. "Get out!"

In the harness corral I roped out Old Maid and rigged her with the cast-off saddle Mr. Jim had once given me. Old Maid was a whistling, mule-hipped, flea-bitten old skewbald mare, too slow to carry a man and too knot-headed to work. It wasn't as if I was stealing anything.

I led her out and rode her down the slope behind the house, and although I tried not to, I kept looking back. For I was quitting the outfit where there wasn't any justice and where I rated next to nothing.

But I could have wished for a better horse to ride out on. Old Maid had peculiar ways. She'd amble along with her head hanging and her lower lip out, then every once in a while she'd toss it up and look around as if coming out of a snooze. Her gait was a ragged one-two-three-four, and she whistled with every breath. Then during her snoozing spells she had the damnedest habit of getting into a sideways walk, picking up her legs so's not to fall over herself, for all the world like an old squaw sidling up a stepladder. But on we went, the pair of us, me sighing and her whistling mournfully, across that big Sunrise Ridge and down to the river. I tell you I felt pretty damned low, knowing as I did that I was homeless and not wanted.

Crossing the bridge, Old Maid perked up some. The hollow boom of her hoofs on the planks surprised her. The sound echoed along the river, which the dry spell had turned mostly into quicksand, and she was so dumb she didn't *sabe*. After she caught on that it was her own hoofs raising all that noise, she threw up her head and cocked one ear as much to say, "My, ain't I the big, snortin' hell-raiser, though!"

I got to laughing at her and I felt better, my main worry being she might trip on the loose planks and toss us both in the quicksand. It was on account of the quicksand bottom that the bridge had been built, long ago when the Penasco mines were running and the ore wagons used to come through. The bridge wasn't used much now, except by the Beggary Bosque folks at odd times.

IN THE Beggary Bosque the brush was so thick it looked solid. Nobody knew how many wild cattle it hid, and not many cared to find out. Those horny mavericks provided the excuse for fellows who occasionally took to living in the thickets for their health. Quiet-spoken gents they were, generally, those who sometimes came out with a few mavericks to sell to Cap. One of them gave me a little horsehair lariat, once. After he left, we heard he got killed on a train, trying to blow open the express car.

The shack Shad had moved into stood back off the rutty, narrow old road. No answer came to my hail, but I heard movement farther back and found about forty cows penned up. While I was looking them over, Shad spoke behind me. "Howdy, bub."

He was thinner and his clothes were worn out. He wore a gun belt, and something told me he'd just now slid the gun back into its holster. I gave my hello and we agreed it was dry weather, and in a minute he said, "You brought me any message from—uh—somebody, bub?"

"No," I told him. "I come to throw in with your gang."

He pulled out makings and built a cigarette, and after he'd lighted it and carefully stamped on the match he said, "My gang. So that's what. . . ." He broke off and stuck his chin toward the pen. "They're mavericks, bub. Not a brand in the bunch."

I nodded. "I see that. You mean you got no gang?"

He blew a spear of smoke and watched it thin out. "I got nobody," he said. "Nobody. Now you go back home."

"I'm never going back! I'm through!"

He looked away. "You can't quit your folks like that."

"They ain't my folks," I told him. "Cap took me in when I was a yearling, after my own folks died."

"All the more reason you should stick," he claimed.

"No, it ain't," I argued. "He only took me in 'cos he owed it to me, kind of." I went on to explain how my folks had been homesteaders, near Cap's place in Texas, and one night the stove caught the house afire. There was a new young cowhand of Cap's there, staying the night because he'd lamed his horse and lost his way back to the ranch. He saved himself. He didn't do anything about saving my pa, who was laid up with a broken leg, or my ma, who was sick. I would have burned with them, only my ma, being sick as she was and having my pa to tend to, had got another homesteader to take care of me.

"So you see," I pointed out to Shad, "Cap only took me in 'cos it was one of his men who let my folks die." Shad turned and walked to the pen, and I followed him. "If that new cowhand hadn't quit the country soon afterward, Cap likely would've made him shoulder the load."

Shad kept his back to me.

I went on, "Cap don't care nothin' about me. Nor Trace, I guess. I ain't their kin. Hell, I ain't got no kin anywhere, far's I know."

"Shut up," he said, like he was holding back a sneeze. I prodded him with my elbow. "Aw, come on, Shad—how about letting me stay with you? You and me can get along."

He swung around, slow, and he had such a sore, crazy look on him I backed up. "Get out o' here," he said softly. "Blast it, kid, shut up and get out o' here!"

I got back on Old Maid and rode away. You know how I felt—so sick at heart I was weak. At the road I turned east, away from the bridge.

Nobody wanted me around, that was sure, not even Shad. Hell, Shad least of all! And I'd been so certain he liked me.

Dusk came on before I got far, and I drew off the road to coyote out for the night. I made up my mind to hunt up some of these shy Bosque gents in the morning and ask to join them.

I off-saddled Old Maid, and lay down nearby, but I couldn't sleep. First I was too sore, then I got hungry, and finally I began hearing all kinds of little noises around me in the dark. I gathered a good heap of kindling and lighted a fire, and after a while I fell asleep.

It was the heat woke me. That damned fire. I thought I'd cleared a clean space around it. It must have jumped. There was fire everywhere. A dry thornbush caught and flared up with a sizzling roar, and I took a leap at Old Maid.

She, the knothead, had been standing there with her legs spraddled and her long head stuck out, eyeballs big as silver conchos, but as soon as I moved she let out a squeal and took off. I heard her go crashing through the high brush like a steer, and when she hit the road her hoofbeats faded out faster than you'd have thought possible. She was headed for home, leaving me afoot, and what little sense I had left exploded.

My boots were under my saddle, and the saddle was burning, but I wasn't thinking about boots. All that rode my mind was the thought of being a good two miles deep in the Beggary Bosque, with a brush fire and the brisk night wind to favor it. I was scared. I must have hit a hole through that thick brush, for when I finally found myself limping along the road and in need of something to bind up my feet, I discovered I hadn't much shirt left.

QUEER about stones. You ride over a road and it seems dirt and clay. You run back over it in your bare feet and it turns to a rocky track with sharp stones cropping up everywhere. Before long I was crippled and hobbling, my feet gashed raw. I tried going on my hands and toes, but that was too slow. That fire was out to get me.

You can't tell me fire hasn't got intelligence—sinful, black intelligence. It raced along the top of the brush, abreast of me and spreading out to the road, trying to blind and choke me with its smoke, and trap me. It jumped the road to the other side, crackling and screaming in the wind, and got ahead of me, closing in on me. I kept falling. I looked back and the road behind me was a tunnel in a furnace. All the sky was red and savage, the sparks pouring up against it. The road ahead lighted up as the fire broke through it, and now there wasn't any smoke around me. The fire was sucking up the smoke and spewing it after the sparks, and I was being cooked to death.

The battering roar of it was so loud I couldn't hear myself shouting and screaming. And I didn't hear any hoofbeats, but all at once up that blazing road came Wampus like a ghost, plunging along and making no sound that I could hear. He didn't like it and he was fighting to turn back, but Shad was laying the quirt on him, the only time I'd ever seen him whip that big horse of his. I stood up waving and yelling bloody murder, and damned near got trampled to death instead of cooked.

Shad swung Wampus broadside, all legs stiff, and grabbed me up. Wampus only stopped there long enough to get himself turned around and he was off back along the retreat, his ears laid flat and his belly about dusting the ground. He could go, that Wampus, and he was one scared horse.

The fire chased us all the way to the river and tried to beat us to the bridge, but we thundered across to the bunch of riders gathered on the far side, kicking those loose planks all out of style. I dropped off when Wampus shook to a halt, and rolled over, nursing my feet. Cap and the Bart picked me up. They both cussed, seeing my feet, and Trace called for water and rags.

I must have looked pretty badly used up, for nobody jumped on me when I admitted starting that fire. Cap only said, "Well . . . that nest needed cleaning out, anyhow. The fire won't jump the river. No special harm done. The kind of wild men and critters that are in there, they don't get caught in any fire. How'd you know where to find him, Shad?"

Shad was tending to Wampus, and as usual he didn't answer at once. "That old mare he'd ridden came slamming by without him, while I was turning loose my mavericks," he said, after untying the cinch. "So"— he lifted off

the saddle and put it down—"I went looking for him."

We were all quiet then, watching that raging fire across there, while Trace washed and wrapped my feet. Some of the hands rode up and down the bank, looking for sparks. Cap kept staring at Shad where he squatted on his heels, smoking, and moved over to him. Shad said to him in a careful way, "I didn't know you were here, when I came for a job. When I did know, I wasn't going to quit till I got ready. A feller gets ornery like that. Gets the habit, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah," Cap said. "I know."

"But I didn't know about the boy, till he told me today." Shad shifted and I saw his eyes were half closed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't see any occasion to," Cap said. "I did tell Trace who you were, when I saw how things were going. Maybe I was wrong, but I didn't like what ailed you."

"I figure I got that licked now. It rode me a long time. Twelve years." Shad turned his head to the Bart. "Sorry about that tent," he said.

And the Bart said, "Rather humorous, I've thought since. I say, will you join us at breakfast? I think Mr. Greathouse may have something to talk over with you."

Shad said, after a spell, "It all depends." He got up and came toward me.

Trace said, "No, Shad—let me tell him!"

He shook his head. "No, I'll do it." They were all looking at me and it was mighty mysterious. "About twelve years ago," Shad said to me, "when I was beginning to act man-size, I woke up one night in a house that was on fire—"

"You!" I gulped. He didn't need to say more, and he knew it, for he turned quick and went to Wampus. He was picking up his saddle by the time I'd found my voice again.

I called to him, "Listen—the way it's always looked to me, my folks would've burned anyhow. I mean if that feller—you—hadn't been there. Ain't that right?"

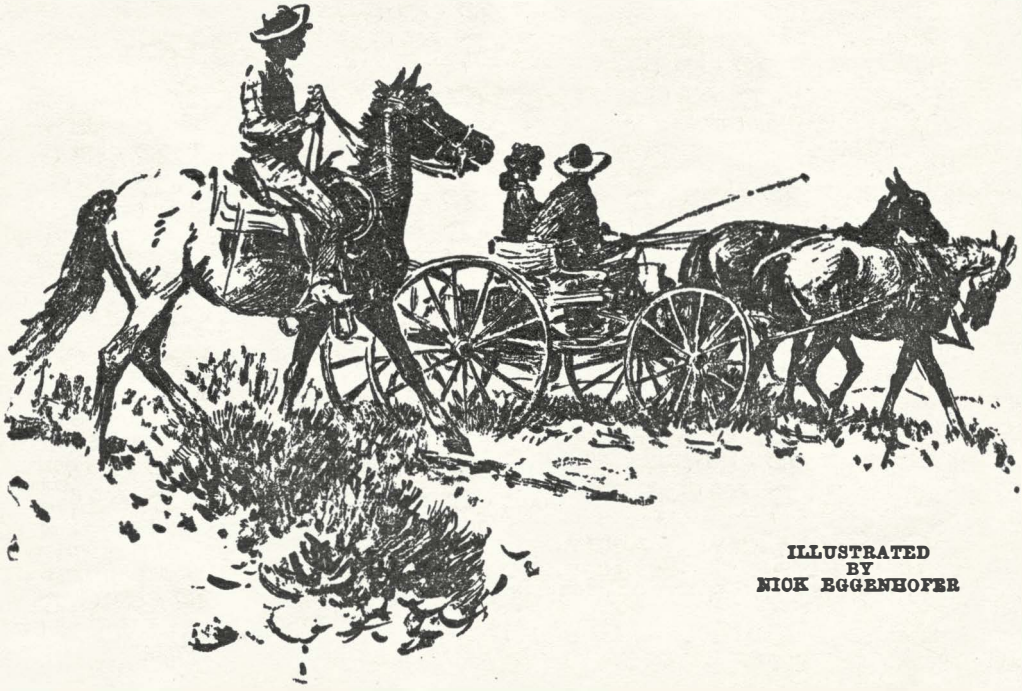
He didn't answer. Trace went to him. "Don't go, Shad!" she said. "Don't you see—he's trying to tell you it's all right!"

That gave me the whole *sabe*. I could hardly believe it, but there it was. It was on account of me that Trace had dropped him and Cap had taken the first good chance to fire him, even though they both wanted him to stay. They would have let him go, as long as they thought I'd hold the grudge against him after I found out who he was. On account of me, mind you—little old good-for-nothing Pinto!

I laughed and said, "Sure can scare a feller, waking up in a fire! When I woke up over there and found that damned fire all 'round me—"

"Don't swear," Trace broke in, as if I was still only a kid that rated next to nothing.

But I didn't mind. I tell you, I felt pretty damned important.



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TO BE CONTINUED

By

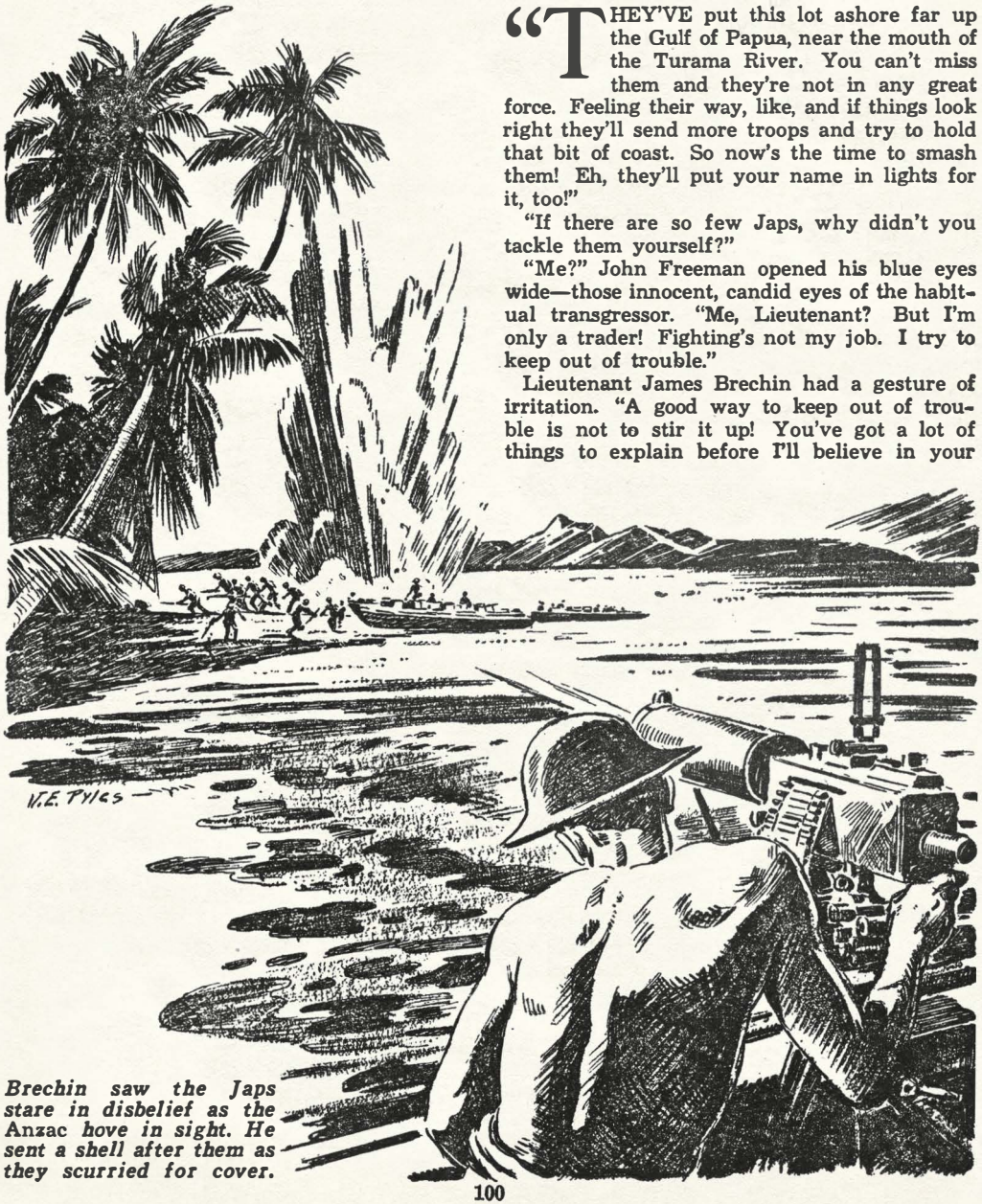
WILLIAM ARTHUR BREYFOGLE

"THEY'VE put this lot ashore far up the Gulf of Papua, near the mouth of the Turama River. You can't miss them and they're not in any great force. Feeling their way, like, and if things look right they'll send more troops and try to hold that bit of coast. So now's the time to smash them! Eh, they'll put your name in lights for it, too!"

"If there are so few Japs, why didn't you tackle them yourself?"

"Me?" John Freeman opened his blue eyes wide—those innocent, candid eyes of the habitual transgressor. "Me, Lieutenant? But I'm only a trader! Fighting's not my job. I try to keep out of trouble."

Lieutenant James Brechin had a gesture of irritation. "A good way to keep out of trouble is not to stir it up! You've got a lot of things to explain before I'll believe in your



Brechin saw the Japs stare in disbelief as the Anzac hove in sight. He sent a shell after them as they scurried for cover.

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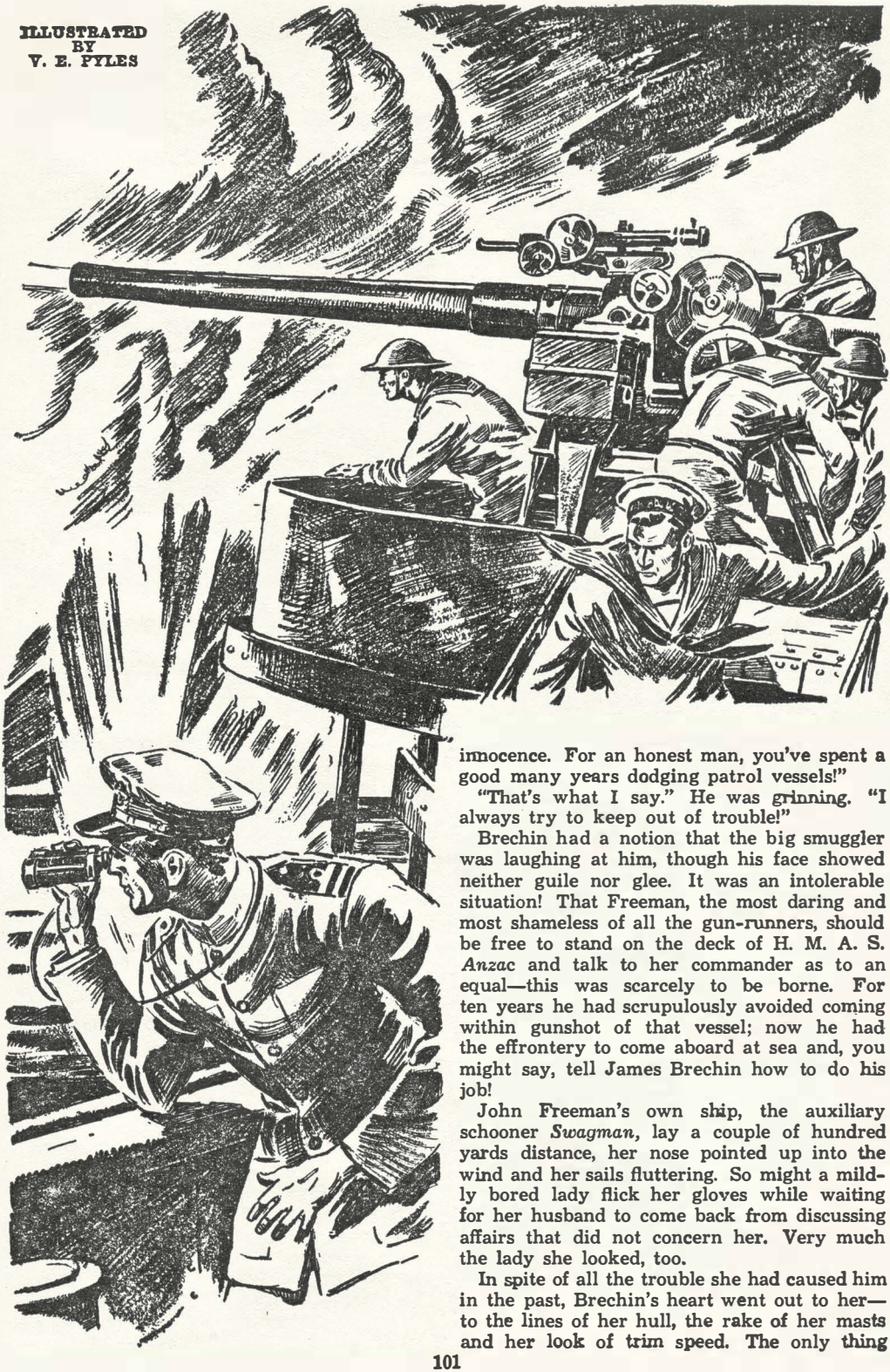


innocence. For an honest man, you've spent a good many years dodging patrol vessels!"

"That's what I say." He was grinning. "I always try to keep out of trouble!"

Brechin had a notion that the big smuggler was laughing at him, though his face showed neither guile nor glee. It was an intolerable situation! That Freeman, the most daring and most shameless of all the gun-runners, should be free to stand on the deck of H. M. A. S. *Anzac* and talk to her commander as to an equal—this was scarcely to be borne. For ten years he had scrupulously avoided coming within gunshot of that vessel; now he had the effrontery to come aboard at sea and, you might say, tell James Brechin how to do his job!

John Freeman's own ship, the auxiliary schooner *Swagman*, lay a couple of hundred yards distance, her nose pointed up into the wind and her sails fluttering. So might a mildly bored lady flick her gloves while waiting for her husband to come back from discussing affairs that did not concern her. Very much the lady she looked, too.

In spite of all the trouble she had caused him in the past, Brechin's heart went out to her—to the lines of her hull, the rake of her masts and her look of trim speed. The only thing

that was not admirable about the *Swagman* was her commander. The little schooner had, so to speak, married beneath her. And yet, like many other marriages deplored for the same reason, this one appeared to be happy. Freeman indulged her with new sails and good paint, kept her as neat as a yacht.

Instead of thinking about Japs, Lieutenant Brechin found himself reviewing what he knew about Freeman, an older, if less formidable opponent. Brechin supposed that he knew as much about the fellow as most.

Once he had been a shark-fisherman off the north coast, a trade as perilous because of the men who plied it as because of their prey. He had sought for pearls in waters not always open to him by law. He had done a variety of things, most of them forbidden and all of them risky. But for a long time now he had pretty well confined himself to New Guinea or, as some call it, Papua. No one knew how much he had made by his efforts, but it was enough to let him buy the *Swagman* and to keep her crew paid and contented. Beyond that, "Black Jack" Freeman kept his affairs to himself.

He hadn't been entirely successful in this, of course, for rumor had been busy with his name ever since the fact of his prosperity first became apparent. What he brought back from Papua was gold and sandalwood and shell and sponges. What he took there, almost certainly, was gin and tobacco and rifles—especially rifles. That was why James Brechin had been trying for ten years to lay him by the heels. There were other gun-runners, but none so astute and successful as Freeman. And none whom the mop-headed, demonstrative natives of Papua so liked and trusted. Freeman dealt justly with them and they remembered it to his credit. That his dealings, however just, happened to be illegal bothered neither them nor him.

IT WAS rubber that had brought John Freeman his war-time immunity from molestation by the authorities. There were not a great many rubber-plantations on New Guinea and when the Japanese came, the stocks were hidden to keep them from falling into enemy hands. But the natives knew where those stocks were and they were quite willing, in the absence of planters and overseers, to turn them over to Freeman, their friend. The supply was small but it was precious, and Freeman was the only trader willing and able to deliver it to Australia. So the order went out that he was to be allowed to come and go freely, to worry about Japanese patrols instead of Australian. If he could outwit the one, probably he could outwit the other. Certainly he had had experience enough. But Brechin, who knew his man as a determined hound knows the wiliest of foxes, was outraged by this order. He thought it idiotic. You might as well induct a man into the army because he had displayed, in civil life, an aptitude for murder.

He came to himself with a start. Freeman, having waited patiently, was repeating what he had said a few moments ago, "I always try to keep out of trouble." His eyes were fixed on Brechin, who thought he could discern a glint of malice in them. Black Jack was enjoying himself, and Brechin would have given much to know what his thoughts were.

"Those Japs," he said abruptly. "How many were there?"

"At a guess, fifty or sixty. The natives said they came ashore from a small transport and then the transport turned and steamed away. The natives watched, of course. They always do."

"What about them, if I engage the Japs?"

"Bless you, they'd take no part! A native doesn't think much beyond his own village. They'll have taken to the woods before this, and they'll stop there till the show's over."

"Near the mouth of the Turama, you said?"

"Behind the island. You'll be able to take them by surprise, for they don't know they've been reported. But there's no time to waste. In a day or so they may land more troops."

"You're bound for Australia, are you?"

He nodded. "The rubber won't wait. But I thought it right to tell you about those Japs. It's your show, not mine. You can have a go at them if you want to."

He turned away then, without ceremony, and clambered down into the canoe waiting for him alongside. Ten minutes later, the *Swagman's* sails filled; she lay over and headed for home. James Brechin was alone with the problem that had been dumped in his lap.

Not that the Japs were any great problem, if they had been reported aright. A few shells from the five-inch gun forward and then a landing-party ought to take care of them. The Japs might be an opportunity, in fact, a long step toward official praise and promotion. But if that were the case, why had John Freeman gone out of his way to tell an old enemy about this opportunity? Wasn't it much more probable that Freeman had some deep-laid scheme in the back of his mind? Suppose the Japs had a destroyer covering that landing? Suppose there were not fifty of them but five hundred? Then Freeman would be rid of an adversary he had no cause to love, and no one but Freeman would know how that riddance had come about. And yet—

And yet, if there were Japs ashore near the mouth of the Turama, it was Lieutenant Brechin's duty to investigate and, if possible, destroy them. If Freeman's report was true, time was of the essence. He had to move quickly and secretly, without waiting for help or ad-

vice. Only thus could he hope to catch the Japs unawares. Certainly, if this was a trap, Freeman had baited it very shrewdly! To go in might be folly, but to stay out would be cowardice.

There was something that intensely annoyed him in the way Freeman had left him to make his decision alone. Freeman had, so to speak, shrugged his broad shoulders and turned away, as if not caring to know the outcome of deliberations that must be painful. Brechin had been given the chance; if he decided to rat now, it was no concern of Freeman's. And James Brechin knew that he had no choice. He called his chief officer and told him what was in the wind.

"You can take her in by the mouth of the Turama, in back of the island there. If the Japs are there in force, we'll have time to get a message out by wireless, anyway. And there's just a chance that Freeman was telling the truth. I suppose even he must stumble into it sometimes!"

The jerky, half-humorous remark was so foreign to his nature that the chief officer glanced at him in surprise. The Old Man had the wind up—but why? It wouldn't be the first time they had poked the *Anzac's* nose into the vicinity of trouble. Brechin had never been a nervous man, either. Never, until now.

JAMES BRECHIN felt better when the decision had been taken and they were on their way. They had nearly a hundred knots to reel off —say, six hours' steaming. Out here there was a steady wind, but back of the island it would be calm and, he calculated, they ought to come in at the ebb of the tide. Not that depth of water mattered a great deal to a sloop like the *Anzac;* you could take her almost anywhere. He got out the scanty charts of that section of coast and pored over them, chiefly to have something to do.

A little excited now, he was reflecting that if all went well this affair might be reckoned to his credit. Even in time of war, the commander of a patrol vessel had little chance to distinguish himself. He did his job and the big-wigs were officially pleased, but he kept the same job and the same rank for weary years. He applied for transfer to a destroyer or a cruiser and was told that he couldn't be spared from his present duty. His wife stayed on in lodgings instead of taking the cottage they had talked about, and other chaps got the promotions and the pay. But if he managed to throw a few well-placed shells into a Jap landing-party, it might be different. They might make him lieutenant-commander, and give him a move somewhere. He might see Rose in that cottage yet.

They had the sea to themselves, and the coast, when they made their landfall, looked deserted. At the mouth of the channel Brechin ordered the engines cut to half-speed and sent the gun-crews to their posts. They nosed in, scanning the wooded shore through glasses. Nothing moved, except the brilliant birds that flew up, screeching. They made another cautious mile, rounded a corner of the island and there were the Japs!

Two power-barges lay beached like monstrous turtles that had crawled up to sun themselves. Little men in steel helmets swarmed about them, unloading stores and weapons. Brechin saw them turn to stare in disbelief when the *Anzac* came in sight, then break and scurry for the woods. He sent a shell after them and it burst just where the trees marched down to the sand. The barges were surer targets and he blew them both up before he went back to shelling the woods. The Japs would scatter, of course. He had to get in closer, where his rapid-firers could come into play. It was late afternoon, and he wanted to finish this business before dark. He turned the sloop for the mouth of the river.

A coast only sketchily charted, the hot excitement of his first brush with the Japanese, the changing, unpredictable formations where the current of a river meets the action of the tides—all these could be pleaded to excuse what James Brechin did to his vessel. He set her aground hard and fast on a bar that gripped her keel like an octopus. Her bow thrust upward a little, and she listed slightly to port. The ebb had still nearly an hour to run.

Before he could order the engines put hard astern a shell whistled out of the woods and burst beyond them in the channel. In a matter of minutes another gun spoke, a half-mile from the first, off their starboard bow this time. James Brechin's face was white. But even in that first moment of their acute peril, he found time for the conviction that Black Jack Freeman had known all about this, that he had walked into the trap Freeman had baited and set.

The *Anzac's* engines could not possibly pull her off until flood-tide. Brechin convinced himself of that and ordered them stopped; they were shaking the sloop's hull to pieces. With the stopping, the life went out of the *Anzac.* She lay helpless and exposed, and a sloop's construction stresses speed rather than armor. Brechin left the bridge and hurried down to the foredeck.

The shells flung at them by the Japanese had come from field-guns light enough to be dragged along jungle-trails. They were no match for the sloop's five-incher, but their shells could easily pierce her thin plates, and they were firing from cover. Unless they could be knocked out, there might not be much of the *Anzac* left to float off the bar at flood-tide. Where they lay, the Japs couldn't board them

but might destroy them. There was plenty of time to establish the range before darkness fell. After dark, if he had to, Brechin could put a landing-party ashore, come to grips with the enemy, but in this light it would be murder. He had to do the best he could with his own fire-power, the five-inch gun and the two quick-firers.

He gave a few hurried orders—not many, for the gun-captains knew as well as he what had to be done. Then they waited, and that was the hardest part of the job. They waited with their eyes straining toward the woods and their muscles tensed until they ached. Yet even at such a time, a man's mind could wander. What price that cottage for Rose now? What rank did they advance you to for letting the Japs blow your sloop to bits? What chance of ever settling accounts with Black Jack Freeman?

Then the next shell came over. The snouts of the quick-firers swung toward that burst of smoke and sound from the woods as quickly as terriers and the muzzle of the five-incher followed at its leisure, as if in more dignified curiosity. Brechin gave the order to fire.

Except that a tree sprang suddenly upward from among the other trees, its boughs tossing as if in a high wind, they could not tell the effect of their shots. The next Jap shells came in a burst of three from a point off the starboard bow and one of them exploded on their afterdeck, sending a shudder through the whole ship. They turned their guns that way and blasted away at the enigmatic cover. Then there was a long interval of silence, and a gun-captain said, "They're changing position, sir, depend upon it! We won't get any sitting shots this time; we've got to get them on the wing, like."

"They've tried us from both sides," Brechin reasoned aloud. "Next time, one of them's apt to line up dead ahead. Sight the five-incher straight over the prow. They say that the Jap mind runs to orderly, geometrical patterns. If that's so—"

It was so, and the Japs' aim had improved. Their first shell carried away the port wing of the bridge. Deafened and half-stunned, the gun-crews clung stubbornly to their posts. It was tit-for-tat. The loud explosion in the woods made up for the wreckage of the bridge.

"There's a limber gone west!" said one of the men, on a note of deep satisfaction. "Took the gun with it, let's 'ope, and the gunners! Now, where's the mate o' that one? Where's that other field-gun, before it comes on dark?"

AN orderly came forward to tell Brechin that two men had been killed and the chief officer, gravely wounded, had been taken to the sick-bay. Brechin nodded. There should be a few dead Japs by now, too!

Nevertheless, he was badly worried. In an hour it would be dark, and darkness would fight on the side of the enemy, as the Japs well knew. Their one field-gun was silent now, and it would be hopeless to try blasting the whole area of the forest within that gun's range. There was nothing to do but wait. The little *Anzac* had taken a cruel mauling already. A few more shells and the flood-tide would have no meaning or message for her. Still they waited.

At the worst, Lieutenant Brechin told himself forlornly, he could lead a landing-party ashore after dark. But it would be a very bad worst, and probably it wouldn't save the ship. Unless a miracle happened now, Freeman had done for them. When the war ended, someone else must toil along after the fleet little *Swagman*. Lord, would the damned Japs never fire?

The place was preternaturally still. Even the gun-crews stood silent, as if conscious of some tremendous event impending which it would be profanation to anticipate by so much as a whisper. Brechin was aware of this undefined suspense himself, though he couldn't account for it. It wasn't just that they were waiting for the Japs to fire so that they might answer; it went far beyond that. Whatever it was, it was out of their control. They had nothing to do with it but to wait and watch. They would not be consulted.

It began with a far-off, sharp sound like the hesitant tearing of heavy paper. Then a sustained, shrill chatter was added to that first tentative note. The gun-crews blinked at each other.

"Rifles!" a man said, in a tone of incredulity. "Rifles, and them others is machine guns! Eh, but we're a mile out o' range! 'Ave they gone dotty, then?"

"'Tisn't coming our way. That lot's for the 'ome-market, like! They're firing inland."

"There goes the field-gun! And that's aimed inland, too. Now, what the blazes—"

"Try them with a shell," Brechin said. "Try to drop it on that gun. I don't know what they're up to, but we'll take a hand. And get the quick-firers trained on the beach. There's just a chance that we may need them. Ready?"

He was as bewildered as the others, but there was hope in his bewilderment. It might be that the natives, drawn by the sound of the firing, had attacked the Japs from the rear. Lord knew, Freeman had kept them supplied with firearms! The natives resented any intruder, white or yellow, and they sometimes showed their dislike directly and violently, to the point of devouring the choicer portions of their enemy's anatomy when they had caught him. Well, if they could stomach Japs—

It was still light enough to show them their shells bursting in the edge of the woods. But their fire drew no reply, though ashore the uproar died and rose a little and died again.

Brechin went up on what was left of the bridge and trained his glasses on the woods that covered this riddle. If only he could be sure of what was happening!

Then suddenly he gripped the twisted bridge-rail with one hand and the other, holding the glasses, shook a little. Tiny figures ran out from among the trees and made for the shelter of the wrecked barges. Brechin saw one of them fling up his arms, drop his rifle and fall with both hands clutching at the beach. There must have been twenty or thirty, and most of them reached the barges. He shouted down to the gun-crews to find that range and open fire. Now to see what had forced the Japs out from cover!

But their mysterious allies were slow to show themselves. The fire from the woods dropped away to scattered single shots as the quick-firers opened up. Brechin let them pound the barges for a steady quarter-hour, while the rapid darkness was falling. Then he ordered them to cease fire, and the dead silence came back, the uncertainty returned. It might be victory, or only a respite. Lieutenant James Brechin waited for a sign. In another hour or so they could try floating the *Anzac* off the bar. The flood must be making by now.

An ejaculation from one of the gun-crew made him turn sharply. The man pointed astern. "Ship coming up, sir! A schooner."

BRECHIN stared. There was no mistaking those trim lines. But the *Swagman* should have been nearing Australia by now. What the devil!

The schooner anchored near them, but ignored them. She dropped a boat that pulled toward the beach, tarried there briefly and returned, heading for the sloop. A voice bellowed, "*Anzac*, ahoy!"

Brechin shouted, "Who are you?"

"Freeman, of the *Swagman!* You can drop me a ladder. I'm coming aboard."

He did that, with all his old assurance. "They're dead," he announced, as soon as his feet touched the deck. "Dead, all but a few wounded ones that you can pick up for souvenirs. Half of them there in the woods where we caught them, half of them by the barges, from your fire. Look here, Lieutenant, I didn't try to sell you a pup; I didn't know they had anything heavier than machine guns. The natives know nothing about such things. They only told me how many Japs there were."

Brechin asked, "What brought you here? You said you were for Australia."

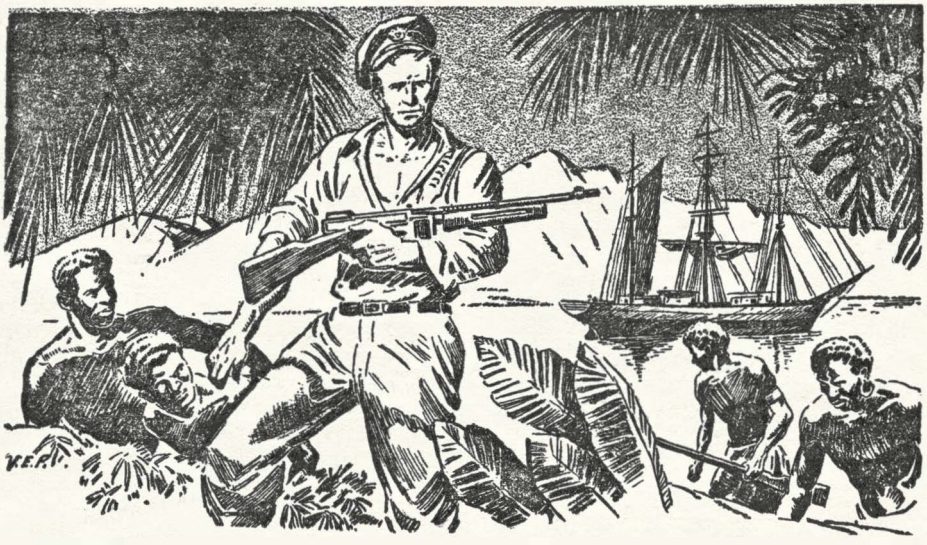
The big man laughed. "And miss the fun? No, I was bound I'd slip back, land a few miles down the coast and take them in the rear. All these natives hereabouts know me, and they're generally spoiling for a scrap. I knew I could get all the volunteers I wanted. But when I heard the guns, I can tell you I hurried! I didn't know they had guns! I wouldn't have played you the dirty like that!"

A little of the boisterous confidence had gone out of his voice. He looked uncomfortable, as if he thought he might not be believed. But then a thought struck him and he cried, "See here! Why didn't you stand farther off? That guns of yours had them outranged!"

"We ran on the bar," said Brechin, grateful for the darkness on deck.

"Ran on the— But what do you expect at a river's mouth if it isn't a bar? Besides,

(Continued on page 144)



OLD IRONHIDES

By "RUFIJI" BARKER

I HAVE lived for nineteen years, off and on, about the lakes, ponds, swamps, tidal creeks and shores of East Africa's largest river, the Rufiji, whose tributaries reach over half the continent. The lakes are nearly all old bits of former courses of the river—horseshoe bends which became lakes when the river burst through in seasonal spate.

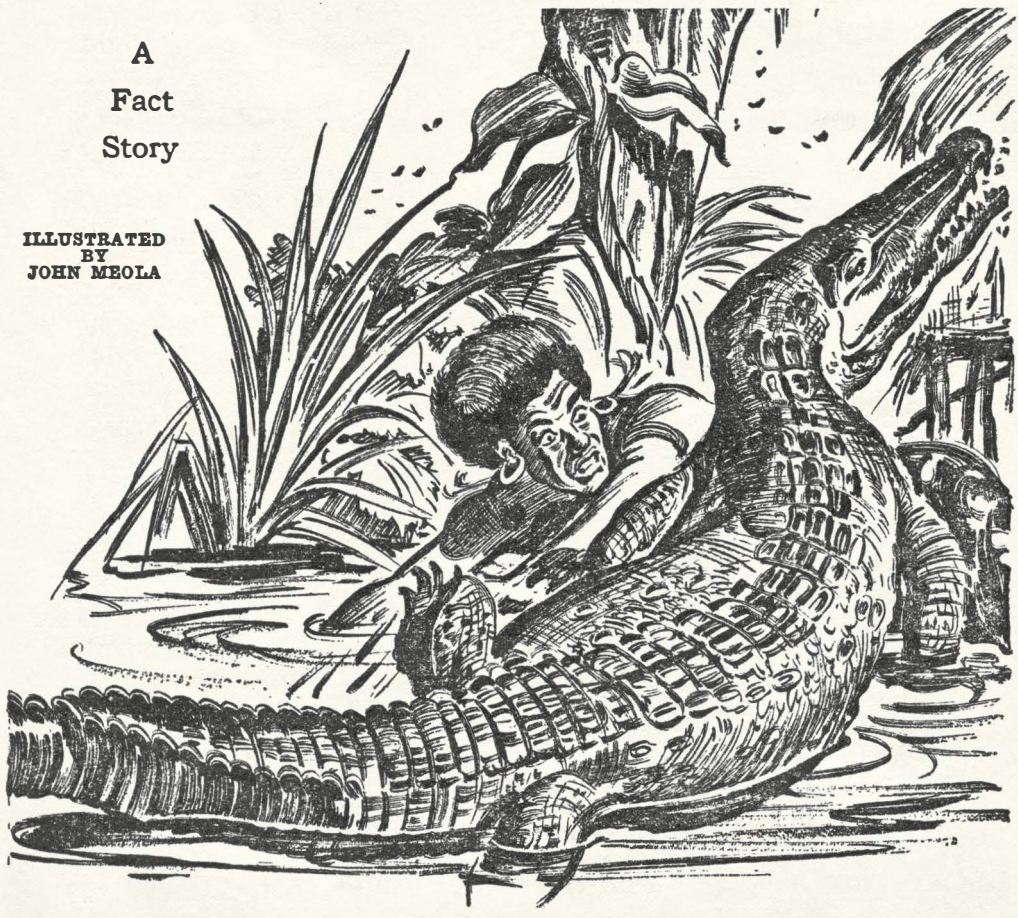
Every year about a score or more natives are killed by crocodiles in this area. Many others are rescued from them and recover. The rescuers, sometimes women, are heroes indeed. A cross section of the crocodile menace in this area may be seen from the following four deaths which occurred within five miles of my hippo-hunting camp at Utete-Rufiji, in Tanganyika Territory.

One morning Abdala Singizi—a native whom I had knicknamed "Sleepy," years ago because he had fallen asleep in the grass while posted to watch for a shot hippo to rise in the lake—along with nine other Bantu natives brought ten heavy loads of toasted fish to the ferry, which was to take it across the twenty yard wide Bunju (Taboo) Channel connecting Bunju or Lue Lake with an old course of the river.

Abdala seized the palm-plaited rope and hauled the small ferry canoe across from the far bank. The ten wicker baskets of fish to be sold in the hills to the north were loaded into the canoe. To hasten the journey into the pleasant, mosquitoless casava and coconut country where all had relatives, Abdala and one Salim

A Fact Story

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN MEOLA



Saidi swam for the opposite shores. From the deep muddy water the head of a crocodile rose behind Abdala, seized him and dragged him under. He gave one cry as he sank. In relays of three, his relatives and friends dived about in this fathom-deep channel until at four that afternoon they found him. He had been buried in a mud grave or "oven," into which the crocodile had shoved and plastered him to become soft, or "cook," for reptilian consumption.

The reason for this "cooking" arangement, by the way, is that the teeth of crocodiles are brittle and they break on the bones of mammals. Each tooth has a spare-part tooth in and beneath its hollow to replace broken teeth quickly. The seizing and holding of slippery fish, the crocodile's staple diet, requires the hard, needle-pointed teeth they develop.

A native woman gathering wood was seized by a crocodile near my house in water only a few feet deep. Her companion slashed at it with a machete.

A cheerful lad I knew well was once given the honour of propitiating the devil-dog of a certain water that was to be fished. Ali Miaka put nugmeg and other spices, which the Indian traders sell to the diving and swimming fishermen of these perilous waters, before him in a small canoe. Accompanied by another man, he started paddling for the far bank where, in a little clearing, a miniature temple had been erected to the devil of these waters.

Halfway across the small lake, the man in the front of the canoe felt the craft behaving strangely and, looking 'round, saw Ali had disappeared. The whole "fishing-bee" then plunged into the water and searched for him. A crocodile was discovered and speared under its foreleg but managed to escape. Not till next morning was Ali found, floating on the water with a minor part of his body bitten off by, it was thought, a small crocodile.

The native fisherfolk—like the Indian merchant who offered a bribe to a British general and was publicly flogged—deplored that they had offended the deity by offering the wrong presents. They bought more expensive gums and seeds from the Indians for their next offering.

In this gallant community, which pays its taxes from fish sales in the native settlements to the north, I dare not remark that crocodiles do not like fishermen who compete with them for their food. It is a fact, however, that my hippo cutters are never touched. I make them throw bits of skin and meat quickly to the ring of crocodile snouts which gathers round my men, who sometimes work in water up to their waists.

Those periscope eyes in their bony, scaled settings can see far; how far, too, they can smell humans around a bend in the river, their distant splashes tell. It is the fishermen, who have no rifles, that are selected by those green, periscope eyes from cover and are then hunted and taken at disadvantage at the most favorable moment. But the fishermen retaliate with courage. They do not accept death as Indians do in their land where tigers and muggers are considered sacred takers of life by certain primitive, superstitious natives.

Binti Salem, a girl much in the social news of this ridge spent a busy morning hoeing in her rice-field and at noon went with another woman to draw water from a pond amid high grass and reeds, connected by a channel to another lake. Setting her earthenware pot on the bank, she filled it with her longhandled ladle, a coconut shell fixed on a pole.

Then Daughter-of-Salem proceeded to bathe in twenty inches of water. Scarcely had her companion warned her not to do so when a ten-foot crocodile seized her by the waist and dragged her screaming into deeper water. The other woman called for help, but no one came and she had to run to the village to bring the men. They dived about in the water and found the body, its entrails torn out.

In the pretty Uba lake in the wooded hills four miles north of here, Machinjiri, an expert builder of fish kiddles, was diving one day with a companion to examine the bottom of one of these reed meshes. They wanted to see if there was a gutter left open through which fish could escape while the closing barrier was being pushed and pulled to the kiddle. Machinjiri did not rise.

All the men of the fishing party then plunged into the water and in an hour recovered the body. Machinjiri's neck had been seized and terribly torn and bitten.

THIS year six natives were drowned thirty miles upriver from my camp by the high river rise at the end of the rains. None of their bodies were devoured by crocodiles, which seems to suggest that crocodiles, like lions, will only eat prey they have killed themselves. A drowned native lay all night on a sandbank opposite the Mpanganya agricultural experiment station on the Rufiji in 1926 and was not touched by crocodiles, of which the river at that place had hundreds. Or did the crocodiles want the body to ripen or cook first? In 1938 I saw a big crocodile swimming by and nosing to a bank the drowned body of a native which had drifted miles in the current. I shot the crocodile and the man was properly buried by relatives.

Down near the delta, a native crossing a small lake on the north bank of the river was seized by a crocodile. His wife ran screaming for help and when she returned bringing men, found the crocodile spread over her husband in three feet of water, drowning him. It fled and the man was rescued and resuscitated by having handsful of wet sand thrown on his chest—the Bantu method on this river. The weight of the sand drives the water out of the lungs, and when removed, allows the lungs to fill with air.

Crocodiles walk long distances across country by night, usually in search of better water places when ponds or swamps dry up. Down by the Ruvuma River, native women going to hoe their field early one morning saw two crocodiles hiding in some grass. They called their men-folk who killed the reptiles with machete and spears.

An enormous crocodile once got halfway from a swamp to an arm of the Rufiji delta by daylight, in 1938. There he was seen by a native who had recently built his dwelling hut on a high bank overlooking the deep, grassy channel through which the big saurian was trying to reach the river. A musket soon killed him and he was covered with earth and grass by way of burial. I wanted to measure him but the uncovering looked too much of a task. His girth must have been about seven feet—he was a walloper! He had gone back to the river every dry season via this grassy channel, until that new pioneer spelt his end.

Two seventeen-foot crocodiles I killed with brain shots off Salale foreshore on two consecutive mornings in 1933 were decoyed close by driving cattle to the water's edge and putting a stinking buck's skull on the beach. Only the scaly tops of their skulls were above water as they stole up on their prey. I hid in the roots of a casuarina tree and made their skull-tops fly off with my bullets (two), sending their brains scattering over the surface of the calm morning sea. No natives would go into the water to get the carcasses for skinning and measuring until I myself—having seen their brains fly—went in and dragged them out by the tail. There was not much chance of others being about in that half-fresh water, especially after the shooting. One had coral and date seeds in his belly and the other contained fragments of large bones—possibly bucks' bones.

In the semi-governmental publication, *Handbook to Tanganyika*, it is stated that at Mwaya, a port on Lake Nyasa, six women are taken every month by crocodiles. This is because women are the drawers of water and also are inclined to take fewer precautions than men. Yet I know of a man, wanted by police at a canoeless village by Victoria Nyanza, who used to swim into that crocodile-infested inland sea and keep on swimming about until the police got tired or until dark, when he would come ashore and escape into the hills.

When I lived at Mohoro, the dhow port on the blind southernmost arm of the delta of the Rufiji River, there was a reign of terror by a public enemy No. 1. A number of laborers disappeared one by one while bathing in the shallow water of the ford by the remains of a bridge which had gone with the last flood. When the telegraph linesman disappeared mysteriously, the police investigation showed that he had wandered down to the ford in the night and never returned. It is thought he was washing himself when he was taken. I remember him well, having often met him out in the elephant forest, where he used to go on his rounds, replacing iron poles bent by the elephants who liked rubbing against them.

While the administrative officer was holding an inquiry on the spot into the disappearance of this linesman, a huge crocodile scrambled in amongst a number of natives washing themselves in shallow water, grabbed one of them, dragged him off into deep water and hid. The

tide being out and water less than a fathom in most places, this maneuver took deliberate cunning. A hue and cry rustled and a three-foot crocodile was shot, though it obviously was not the culprit.

A ranger once told me of a time when he had been called to kill a crocodile in Lake Victoria. The natives drove a cow into shallow water to attract the reptile within range of his rifle. The sly periscopic eyes and snout which broke the surface of the water a few inches apart looked very quiet until, with devilish suddenness, serrated jaws closed on the cow's nose with a sickening crunch, dragging the poor beast out into the deep part of the lake. The ranger followed in a canoe and was able to kill the crocodile, but at the cost of that cow.

I have never heard crocodiles "roaring," but one of my hefty black lads one day hooked and played to exhaustion a ten-foot crocodile which he hauled to the bank on my shark line. It kept crying *ah-ah* quite loudly until I shot it.

In 1930 a man fording a creek below Mohoro was grabbed by a crocodile and struggled with it from nine in the morning until two in the afternoon when, the tide being low, he and the reptile were exposed on a sand bank. In their struggle, the reptile flung his victim down and the man managed to get hold of his knife. He attacked the crocodile with it and managed to escape.

A native woman breaking dry wood from a branch which overhung a small lake near my house, fell into a few feet of water and was seized by the leg. Her companion, a strong woman, slashed the crocodile so hard with a machete that the blade stuck in the scaly head like a comb as the reptile made off. The injured woman's wounds, which I treated with antiseptic lotion, were not serious.

Eighty miles upriver a very big crocodile (when I say that, I mean one about fifteen feet long) grabbed a youth on dry land and began walking over a mile of sand toward the river. Game Preservation Scout Suna shot the crocodile about ten times through the body, but it did not drop the boy. Not having been hit in the spine or the brain, it just went on to the river. Having, in my youth, emptied six .38 bullets from a Harrington & Richards revolver into an iguana and then watched him scale a tree with no apparent injury, I can understand this. My iguana on the top of the tree dropped lifeless from a .22 short bullet in the brain, an experience which put me onto the right way of killing all animals—including, eventually, elephants.

ON SAND banks in this river I have seen large crocodiles chasing smaller ones into the water with much noise and spray. Maybe these were females keeping marauders away from their buried eggs. A man who used to collect crocodile eggs for me—which I fried and ate with tomatoes—told me he found the nests by following the line of vision of big crocodiles who lay not so much sunning themselves as mounting guard over their eggs.

The Germans used to buy crocodile eggs from the natives on Victoria Nyanza with the hope of reducing the lake population of these fish-eating saurians. They bought thousands and thousands and smashed them till all Mwanza township stank, and still the crocodiles showed no depletion. Robbers of crocodile nests are legion, from birds to reptiles.

A crocodile cannot stay under water long and I have heard quite a blast and seen the spray from a crocodile letting out the air from his lungs as he surfaced to get fresh air in quickly. In one lake in East Africa, natives drive crocodiles out into deep water and frighten them under every time they come up for breath until they are drowned. They float to the surface the day after they die. Many tribes eat crocodiles, the small ones being the tastiest.

Crocodiles usually eat on the surface, holding their heads straight up so that gravity helps the swallowing. They have no tongues.

One day I was creeping among some boulders in the shade of lakeside trees to shoot a bushbuck eating lily-pads, or drinking among them. One of those boulders looked a bit queer, and turning to it, I saw that it had scales. I clambered hastily away from it and it in turn rose and entered the water as far as its neck, leaving all the rest of its barrel-like torso out of the water.

I saw then it had no tail! Perhaps that had been bitten off in youth. It was a very big fellow, the biggest crocodile I had ever seen. Seeing no vital target I let it be.

Years before, I had shot a hippo in that lake and the natives had all refused to enter the water to retrieve it, saying the lake was a "devil lake" and that when natives entered it to fish they were seized by the devil. Now a crocodile without a tail would be at a disadvantage in catching fish and maybe this big fellow lived by grabbing antelope when they came to drink, much as a water-python I once killed in a small pond used to seized drinking buck.

Lying doggo on a bank one morning, I saw a greenish yellow crocodile come gliding by, three feet below me. Her eyes shone red with the rising sun in them and I remembered how the Egyptians revered the crocodile's eye as the symbol of sunrise. At Thebes a crocodile was reared in a temple from youth, fed on sacred food, adorned with rings and bangles (gold must have harmonized nicely with the green and yellow shades of its clean skin), worshiped with divine honors, and after death its mummified body was preserved in the catacombs.

CAPTAINS DON'T CRY

By EDMUND GILLIGAN

THE STORY THUS FAR:

CAPTAIN DAN HARDEGON brings the *Moon Hawk* home to Gloucester with her catch—he has skippered the dragger for one voyage to the fishing banks while her regular captain recovers from an accident—to find himself in the middle of a tense situation.

The *Golden Hind*, last topsail schooner out of Gloucester to fish by hand from dories, returns after an unlucky voyage with an almost empty hold. Her captain, JACK ROADES, reports to the owner of the *Hind*, NORA DOONAN, whom

It was plain that the harvest had been good. The dories rode deep.

he expects to marry, that one of his crew, JAMES CORKERY, has drowned on the Banks. The dead man's brother JOHN, also of the *Hind's* crew, blames the death on Roades, curses captain and ship and refuses to sail aboard her again. Hardegon, who ill conceals his own love for Nora, tries to persuade her to convert the *Hind* to power but she and Roades rebuff him and refuse his gift of a large-mesh manila net he has woven. Hardegon tries to tell them that such men as PARRAN, who skippers the big dragger *Doubloon* for a Boston firm, are ruining the fishing grounds with their small-mesh nets, but Nora won't heed him because she owes Parran money and must borrow more from him if her schooner is to make even one more voyage. She knows also that Roades wants her to sell the *Hind* to Parran.

However, Nora has an ace up her sleeve in the rotting hulk of the old *Western Star* which lies in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. There is a fortune in lead in her keel which the government needs and Nora determines to get it by hook or crook to pull herself out of the red. She enlists the aid of AMBROSE CAMERON and four other old dorymen who love the *Hind* and served aboard her under Nora's grandfather. She tells Hardegon of her plan and he persuades her to keep it secret from everyone, even Roades to whom she is engaged, but particularly Parran whom he knows will stop at nothing to doublecross her.

Making ready for the voyage to Shelburne, the *Hind* is berthed beside Parran's big dragger. Nora manages to borrow again from the *Doubloon's* captain but has trouble getting a

crew together. John Corkery, still nursing his hate for Roades, goes after the *Hind's* skipper with a knife but Hardegon stops the fight and attempts to persuade Corkery to sail, offers to go dorymate with him if he will—a startling offer for a captain to make but Hardegon has made up his mind he must be on the *Hind* at any cost to protect Nora. Corkery seems about to change his mind and sail when Parran intrudes to make a suggestion.

He offers to take Corkery on his own vessel in exchange for one of the *Doubloon's* crew, BILLY ATKINS, who has a none too savory reputation now, after his association with Parran, though he used to be a good fisherman. Nora is reluctant to hire the man but Hardegon realizes that it will mean getting a friend aboard the *Doubloon,* for he knows that despite Corkery's hate for Roades, he is essentially loyal to Nora and the *Hind.* Hardegon says he'll go dorymate with Atkins and the man comes aboard the *Hind.*

The schooner sails for Nova Scotia and after she's left port old Ambrose Cameron and his four mates, whom Nora has hidden aboard, make their appearance. Roades is furious with Nora for her secretive attitude and tries to pump her about her plans and why she needs five extra men and an extra dory but she heeds Hardegon's warning to tell him nothing. When they dock at Shelburne, Roades thinks it is just to take on bait. He goes ashore and Nora starts out, after giving Ambrose his instructions, to beard the money-shark, BANNISTER, who doesn't realize he has a fortune in the keel of the old *Western Star* that lies rotting in his yard.

With the help of old Ambrose, who pretends to be an aged multi-millionaire yachtsman wanting to buy the *Western Star* for sentimental reasons, Nora makes the purchase before Bannister knows he's been taken. The crew of the *Hind* quickly puts the ancient hulk in shape and Ambrose and the four old dorymen start to sail her back to Gloucester as the *Hind* puts out for the Grand Banks. Both Parran and Roades ill conceal their fury at the way Nora has made her first step to get out of debt by acquiring the *Star's* keel.

In the meantime, the LISBON, an old Portuguese doryman on the *Hind* who is completely loyal to the schooner and Nora, tells the girl of an episode in Roades' past. He and Parran, years before in Yarmouth, have shared the same woman, a waterfront slut who was later found murdered with a bonehandled knife in her back. The implication is that Roades' committed the murder and Parran is covering up for him because Roades owes him money. Nora, sickened by the revelation, turns more and more from Roades to Hardegon, the man she is beginning to realize she really loves.

A terrific storm blows up and it's all the *Hind* can do to weather the gale. At its height the lookout, between flurries of snow, sees the helpless, drifting wreck of the *Western Star,* blown far off her course, and Nora realizes that she has lost her chance to salvage the old craft. The *Star* is doomed along with the old men aboard her.

The *Hind* finally reaches the fishing banks, with the *Doubloon* following on her trail. Hardegon and Atkins, whom the crew regard as a Jonah, go out in a dory to set buoys and Hardegon baits Atkins about a dream he says he's had in which he's seen Parran, Roades, Atkins and Corkery all hanging from a yardarm, and warns Atkins about the penalties of committing crimes at sea. The superstitious Atkins is terrified and reveals that he knows of criminal plans aboard the dragger, though exactly what form they may take, Hardegon doesn't learn.

Excellent fishing is found and it looks as if the *Hind's* luck has turned at last as her pens begin to fill. Instead of being glad, however, Roades is obviously sore about it and sulks. Nora tells the crew of the *Hind,* all but Atkins, that dirty work from Parran is bound to be in the offing and that Roades is Parran's man, and she declares open war on the *Doubloon.*

PART IV

ROADES had already given the order for the rigging of a mark-buoy. Despite the tragedy which had attended the setting of the *Hind's* last buoy by the Corkerys, he understood that one was required for the Middle Ground tides.

When Nora came down into the cabin, he was lying in his bunk. Atkins was seated on the locker near him, a set of dry cell batteries before him. Either he or Roades had picked up a lot of junk at Shelburne for just this purpose. There was a good supply of old lifebelts and electric bulbs handy.

They greeted her with cheerful nods. She answered by hoping that Roades was feeling better.

He replied, "The truth of it is, Nora, that when I fast—as I did during the blow—it takes me some time to get back on my feed. I'm all right and I'm obliged to you for your kindness."

This was said with such perfect grace that at once she wanted to disbelieve all that she had heard of him and all that she feared.

She sat down on the locker opposite them and gazed idly at Atkins' clever hands working the gear. She knew he had a good reputation as a rigger of such buoys. It was the only good thing she ever had heard of him. He made them in such a way that they stayed upright and didn't sag. They stayed put, too, over the fish.

She watched him closely, yet she lifted her eyes frequently to trace the changes in Roades'

handsome face. He seemed to be more than usually interested in Atkins' task, and kept hustling him on with impatient exclamations. His listlessness had gone and this new animation obliterated the unpleasant droop of his mouth which she had seen earlier in the lamplight of the foc'sle. He kept running his hand through his matted yellow hair—an old familiar gesture. Suddenly, and without a reason that she could hit upon, Nora remembered with violent intensity the times when he had made love to her; times when she, with willingness, had reciprocated. She hadn't felt this way for a long time—not since the mystery of his secret doings had drawn him into himself and away from her.

She instinctively let her eyelids fall halfway and kept her gaze a while on her boots. The nearness of this once-loved man, despite the barrier of mistrust that now separated her from him, and the knowledge that, at any moment, she might find herself alone with him in the cabin, brought her swiftly to her feet.

He delayed her smoothly. "Stay a while, Nora, please. I've something to say to you."

He gave his voice the quality of weary frustration that often marked it after a long, fruitless voyage.

If she had had her wits about her, she might have seen that this was an act he was putting on. But the image of Dan Hardegon, at the helm above her head, flashed through her mind and she couldn't be hard. She had wavered between the two men so long that, even now, knowing all she knew of Roades' evil past, she hesitated. But only for a moment.

One decisive physical movement would get her started up the companionway, she supposed. She made the effort and stretched out her hand for her oilskin, hung near the locker. The schooner rolled briskly just then and before she could stand straight, Atkins was scurrying up the steps with his buoy gear and Roades was at her side, hands raised in a sort of supplication.

The image of Dan Hardegon vanished from her mind, to be replaced by a magical reproduction of the Yarmouth beauty Roades and Parran had shared—if the Lisbon were to be believed—flung down bloody into a drift of snow.

"Snow?" she asked herself. "No one told me there was snow! Why, it was June!" She was puzzled within, yet she wanted to hear Roades talk of this woman. If he dared.

She began to tremble and Roades mistook this for something in the sweet surrender line. He moved to put his arms around her and she stepped aside. Something in his manner made her sure now that his impetuosity was a fraud, that he had quite another purpose than the old one of exciting her.

Well, she'd had some lessons in duplicity lately and could pretend a passion, too, if it meant an advantage in the defense of the *Hind*. She forced herself to melt a little, let Roades brush her lips with a kiss.

This, apparently, was the signal for him. "I'm in awful trouble, Nora," he said. "Awful trouble." Theatrically he struck his hand against his mouth. "I'm the first skipper of this vessel that ever took whiskey aboard her. I can't help it, Nora. I lied to you a moment ago about being off my feed. I'm in trouble."

She backed away from the ring of lamplight in order to clear the way for her eyes. "I know you're troubled. What is it, Jack?"

"Parran!" He sent a wild glance toward the blackened skylight, as if he might see the glare of the *Doubloon's* deck lamps there. "I didn't want to tell you but—well, Nora—I'm like the *Hind* herself. I owe him money. Lots of it. I owed him money the day I first saw you three years ago. More now. And he's putting the gaff on me."

"How come you to owe a man like Parran so much money?"

"The same way you do!" he replied swiftly. "I haven't earned any aboard this vessel for a long time. You know that too well, Nora. And I needed it. Badly."

"You've a reason for saying this to me, Jack. You know I haven't any money. I'd have given some to you, if I had any. The vessel owes you plenty. You'd have gotten it all if the *Western Star* thing had worked out. Why do you tell me this?"

"There's no beating him! No beating Parran. Your grandfather owed him too much. You do, too. Sell the *Hind* to him! He told me—he'll give you as much as the syndicate offered, a hundred thousand—and more. He can't build a vessel now and he can't buy one. He's mad for the *Hind*. Give it to him, Nora dear. And let's clear out of this mess!"

"No!"

PLAINLY he hadn't had much hope when he began, because he at once changed his tune. At first he begged her to say that she would at least consider giving up the vessel to the *Doubloon's* captain. But now he had become aware of the intensity of her gaze. Knowing her shrewdness, he hid his desperate eyes from her by turning into the shadow beyond the lamp.

There he attacked her with reckless words. He accused her of sending the *Hind's* men to the risk of death in winter fishing in order that she might meet the whim of her grandfather. He straightened her up with, "Worse than that, you killed five good dorymen in that crazy venture with the *Western Star!* You didn't trust me. You shamed me in front of my men. A secret from me! Had you said one word to me—I'd have fixed it for you. You could have

gotten your money right there in Nova Scotia."

His allusion to the drowned Corkery enraged her, especially because the Lisbon's version of that death was uppermost in her mind. She stopped him with a scornful gesture. "You are calling me the murderer of five good men! Well enough to say so now!"

She took a stride toward a bucket of drinking water by the stove. "Let me show you something, Captain Roades!" She lifted the pan to her lips, filled her mouth, and then spat the water out at his feet. "Know what that means, don't you? You have made me disgusted with myself!"

This unseemly action startled him. He said nothing.

"There may yet be something to be said about the *Western Star,*" she went on. "Those were men on that hulk!" She gave him another portion of her scorn by a stress on the word *men.* "As for keeping the *Western Star* in Shelburne a moment longer than was necessary—why, you know damn well that old fox Bannister would have dragged me through every court in the Dominion! Years! Years! Oh, you're an ass, Captain Roades!"

She struck her hand harshly against her jacket. "I've got her papers here. And that's all there is to it. All, do you hear? I've lost my faithful friends, my fifteen thousand dollars that I hoped to make, and the five hundred I gave that filthy crook. But I was right. Right all the time!"

Nora could now see that her anger had taken her off her course. She returned to it by saying in a calmer tone, "I stayed below just now because you asked me to. You started to tell me what your trouble is. Your other trouble. It isn't only debt that Parran holds over your head. Is it? After all, he can't do too much to you on that score. What is this other thing?"

His response, by shifting eyes and fumbling hands, was so genuine in its terror that she became convinced he had, indeed, been led into some frightful danger by Parran. She became certain that there was truth in the Yarmouth story, even believed that there were other matters of life and death which held him in thrall. Thereupon, she put him down forever in her books as a weak, ruined man, who could not help being her enemy. She said to herself bitterly, "He will destroy me to save himself. And he can do so!"

Since he again failed to reply in words, she lied to him once more by saying, "I don't know what the story can be. But tell me this—is that the reason why John Corkery hates you and Atkins and Parran? He cursed you for a murderer when he left the *Hind* at Gloucester and we thought it was because he laid the death of his brother to you. It wasn't only that. What was it?"

At mention of Corkery, Roades became savage again. He shut off the quick blaze as soon as he could, but before he could get hold of himself, his hand flashed to his belt and his shaky fingers flicked against the ivory hilt that lay there. This dirty habit of keeping a killing knife so handy, a trick he had picked up in the French cod fleet years before, had always distressed Nora. A hot impulse almost drove her to break him out of the captaincy then and there. Yet she remembered, in time, the Lisbon's warning: "Keep an eye on him!"

She shivered in a new revulsion and left him there.

CHAPTER X

THE LISBON'S GAFF

ON DECK she found Hardegon and the watch anxiously gazing into the west. The *Golden Hind* was jogging back and forth across the Middle Ground. The month had taken a bite out of the moon, yet it shone with such force that she had difficulty, at first, in making out the mark-buoy. It was one star of many shining low on a jagged horizon. She joined them at the weather rail and asked what was up.

The watch replied, "It's that *Doubloon.* Parran's out there, dragging over our fish. Couldn't find them for himself."

Hardegon said, "Now I make him out. No, he's not dragging. He's just nosing around." He lifted his hand.

Nora saw a star blocked out by a shape beyond. A moment later, the mark-buoy vanished.

Hardegon said, "He drags at three knots. He's making eight or nine now. What's he up to? He makes me nervous."

Nora watched the *Doubloon* move on. Its port light twinkled and faded in the vapor.

The watch said, "You're right, Dan. He's going on. There! He's coming around."

The red light gleamed, then the hull went dark. Soon the green light shone.

They kept watch for an hour or so. Just before they turned in, a war vessel went by to the eastward. The watch changed again and Nora and Hardegon went below. They slept several hours.

Toward dawn, Nora was awakened by the *Hind's* horn baying. The fog had thickened and the watch was cranking the horn to keep off passing vessels. The sun scoffed up the vapor for a while and the dories were dropped off after breakfast to make a set. All had gone well during the night. The mark-buoy had served well, so that the *Hind* now fished where she had such good luck the day before.

Because of the danger that the fog might close in again and cut some of the dories off, the men were picked up after the set, so that they could spend the waiting-time in the safety

of the vessel. She kept sailing up and down the line of buoys, now and then letting out a blast of her horn.

They ate dinner two hours before noon and twice during the meal their fog signals were answering by passing vessels. The second gang had just finished dinner when a horn yelped at them close at hand. It was the *Doubloon.* She fooled around beyond the hedge a bit, as if she weren't quite sure of herself; then she came right up. Her bow watch hailed the *Hind.* The dragger slowed down and stood vaguely seen in the mist.

A flurry of snow rolled over her house and darkened up the *Hind.* Hardegon had the helm. When he answered the hail, they heard some loud talk on the *Doubloon.* Her engine idled and she came closer.

Parran himself hailed the *Hind.* "That the *Golden Hind* there?"

"Aye, 'tis she!" Hardegon growled over the spokes. He said to a doryman, "Tell the captain the *Doubloon* is talking to us."

Roades came on deck. He cried out, "You the *Doubloon?"*

"Right you are the first time!" They could hear Parran's boisterous laughter. "How you making out, Captain?"

Roades gave him the customary wary answer that there wasn't a fish to be had for love or money. "Killed a few here yesterday and marked them."

The wind and sun suddenly cleared that space. They could now see Parran filling up the door of his pilot-house, his black eyes gleaming in the black bristle of his face. He wore a sea-blue cap. He bellowed, "That your mark-buoy I saw last night, Captain?"

"Aye, 'twas ours! We've made a set here just now. Mind you don't drag over our trawls."

"What an idea!" Parran laughed again. "I'll clear out." He laughed once more, this time a mirthless laughter. "You still got your company aboard, Captain?"

"I have."

"You'll want the news then. Market cod is sixteen cents. Large is eighteen. Nothing much coming into Boston. Redfish at Gloucester, as usual. Three hundred thousand pounds yesterday. So the Gloucester station says." He waved and closed the door. The *Doubloon's* engine started to speed up. The dragger steered westward and vanished into a new spread of vapor. Her horn began wailing.

That same wall of vapor now rolled over the *Hind.* This time it was so thick that a double watch was set in the bow. Fresh flurries of snow came up; the sea began kicking the *Hind.* Such conditions were always hard to bear. The news of fair prices at Boston didn't make waiting any easier. The Lisbon kept his temper, as usual, and made light of the choppy sea.

"It won't come to anything," he said.

Just the same, he kept a sharp watch for the trawl buoys. When one rolled by, he brightened up considerably and said a cheerful word about it.

This particular action, common and useful though it was, began to get on Roades' nerves. He had been hard hit by Nora's talk. He really wasn't fit to live with; which wasn't to be wondered at in view of the things he had lost. At last, he shouted at the Lisbon, "What in hell you fidgeting around for? Don't you think I know where my trawls are lying?"

He didn't wait for an answer. He went below and stayed there, after leaving word that he should be called if the weather cleared.

The Lisbon stared after him. He made no reply, of course. He didn't have enough respect for Roades to enter into kindly talk with him. None of Roades' words or actions escaped him; nor did he fail to catch their subtler meanings. One thing could be said of the Lisbon—he never missed a trick. There were men aboard the vessel who could be misled by a lie or a gesture, but nobody could fool the Lisbon. A falter in a sentence, or an eye turned away too soon, was enough to sharpen him. His earnest affection for Nora made him even keener now.

He made it clear that he had snuffed up a taint. He said to nobody in particular, "Me—I would put dories over now and haul. That's what I'd do!" He spoke loud enough so that all the men—and there were twenty on deck—could hear him.

THEIR very presence at such a time of day indicated that their rebellious mood hadn't really waned. Parran's talk had dulled their cheerfulness. His laughter was a gaff to them.

Nora understood why they had gathered near the helm, crowding the quarter. In a way, they were helpless; because they actually didn't know where their trawls were lying. At least, not precisely. Had the day been blue, they might have acted on their own. In such thick weather, the captain was the only man who would have exact knowledge of the buoys' whereabouts. It was his part to keep that account in his mind, to add up the miles of jogging, to subtract the turns and returns along the line of buoys. Roades was the man who should be standing there, ready to thrust an arm into that rolling mist and say, "Number One dory is here!" Other men were expected to take a kink at such idle times in order to store up strength for the labor of hauling. Even Hardegon, although he was acting as first officer, couldn't be expected to watch the sailing so closely.

These were circumstances that Nora had never heard of before, despite all her experi-

ence and all the talk she had taken in. She was baffled. The shock of her quarrel with Roades had slowed up her thinking. She could only keep her silence and watch them stamp up and down to keep off the chill. Often she saw them put their shaggy heads together and exchange words that brought new looks of wonderment and anger.

At last, in her desperate need to say something, she asked Hardegon, "Has it cleared at all?"

"No!"

At this, old Clem turned from the rail where he had been peering into the obscure flow. He said, "It'll grow no worse. We can haul all right. We've hauled in worse than this. And him, too. He's drowned men—he has—in a sea worse than this!" He faced Hardegon and angrily asked, "You know where them buoys are lying?"

Hardegon, not liking the taste of mutiny, hesitated.

Nora saw him falter. She repeated the question. "Do you know, Dan?"

Hardegon thrust out his arm. "Number Four lies there!"

All their heads changed to follow the direction. Somebody said, "That's what I reckoned, Jack." Another, "That's about it, Clem. Four or Five's there."

AT that hour, which was later than noon, the *Hind* was sailing back to the beginning of the set. It wasn't long before she came to the place where Number One's buoy had heaved over. She sailed on that course until they brought her around again for the trip up the line. The tail-end of a squall swished across the *Hind's* deck. In moving off, the squall breached the wall beyond. It was one of those remarkable changes that make the Middle Ground an odd place to fish. You might have thought that one all-powerful sun ray had been set to work on the mist; because the squall and sun carved open the upper thickness and made a path into the southwest. Flashes of sunlight spun off black seas. Near at hand, Number One's buoy swam up. Every man at the rail gave it a hard scrutiny.

Nora, standing away from the rail, looked into the path of pearly light. She saw the *Doubloon* dragging across its farther end. Without giving much thought to it, she noticed that two *Doubloon* men were standing on her pilothouse. They were working on a dory that she carried as a lifeboat. They were either getting ready to swing it over or had just hauled it up.

She might well have gone further in this observation. It was stopped by a fierce outcry among her men. Three or four of them had shouted together. Loudest of all, she heard Hardegon's voice. Whatever his words were, they were uttered in a piercing tone. Many hands were jerked upward in wild gestures.

Out of the jumble of shouts and oaths, she heard old Clem shout, "It is! It is! Don't tell me, lad! Your own buoy, Dan. The blackball! The blackball!"

The helmsman shouted in vain. "What say? What say?"

Hardegon pushed a man or two out of his way and cried, "Atkins! Atkins!" He found him and thrust him forward. "Get into that dory!"

Atkins let out a yell. Nora saw a savage look of malice and harsh joy twist up his face. Hardegon roared and struck Atkins. Atkins ran forward toward the dory-nest.

"Dories away! Throw them over!" Hardegon bawled out the order. Before he, too, ran forward, he seized Nora by the arm, spun her and cried, "Take the helm until cook comes up!"

She was not one to be handled so freely. She grasped his arm and demanded, "What's wrong, Dan? What's happened now!"

He had no time for her and struck her hand away roughly. "You'll find out soon enough, my girl! Get that man to his dory!"

She ran to the wheel. The helmsman stepped away, still shouting his question. "What say? What say, Dan?"

Nora put her hands on the spokes and cried out, "Call the captain! Go to your dory!" She glanced into the binnacle to put the course in mind.

The helmsman pushed back the slide and sent the alarm down the companionway. In his furious words, he summed up his knowledge that a new disaster had befallen the *Hind* and that the captain was the source of it. He didn't use the word *Captain*. He shouted, "Roades! Roades! Tumble up, damn you! Lively now!"

Number One dory dropped off.

Hardegon, crouched in the bow with his gaff in hand, bade Atkins put his beef into the oars. The dory sped across the widening space of clear water and bore down on the buoy. That buoy was acting strangely. Its blackball dragged in the sea. The buoy itself whirled freely and tipped this way and that.

Hardegon knew what the story must be, even before he actually saw it. He cursed his luck and struck at the buoy with his gaff. He brought the keg up and lunged to seize it. He swung the keg high out of the water and held it clear, so that the water dripped and splashed upon his face. Stricken to silence now, he held it aloft in such a solemn pose that the buoy became a symbol of all the evil that had come the *Hind's* way.

The trawl line had been cut. It hadn't merely parted. It hadn't chafed and worn away. It had been cut.

"Cut!" He tossed the word onto the wind. And the wind blew it back at him, blew the word into his mouth again, and the word bowed him down over that black keg.

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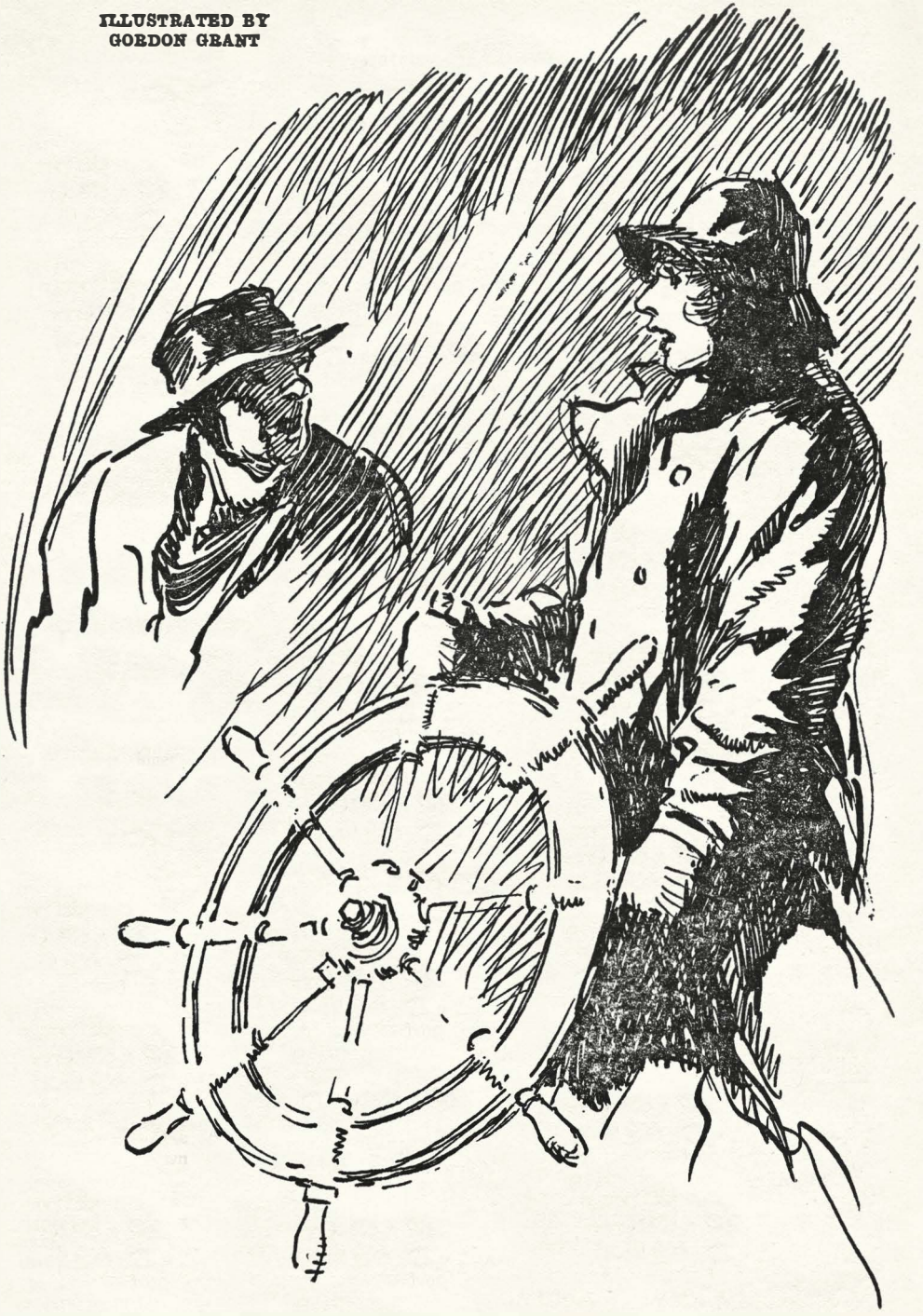


The helmsman stepped away shouting, "What say! What say!" Nora put her hands on the spokes and cried out, "Call the captain! Go to your dory!"

"Hey?" said Atkins from his thwart. "Hey?"

Hardegon let the buoy fall from his hands. It tumbled to the bottom boards and rolled with the roll of the dory. He stared dumbly at the severed line, stretched out his hand and fumbled at the strands where a knife in an enemy's hands had sliced deftly through. "Cut!"

"Hey?" repeated Atkins over his oars. "What's that you say?"

Hardegon looked at him in hate and scorn. He spat and looked away.

The vapor had drifted off; the sea lay clear. He saw the *Hind* sailing down the line. All her dories were off. And then the clamor of conch horns burst into the silence of the sea. The horns roared and raged and cursed. Men's voices mingled with the accents of the horns; and these voices sang out the end of the *Hind,* her final loss. Hardegon knew, by these complaining horns and the wild, despairing cries of the dorymen, that every trawl had been cut, that the last of the *Hind's* precious gear had been ripped from her. All her miles of trawl were gone, all the thousands of Norwegian hooks, all their hopeful labor, and the wealth of fish that were to save the *Hind.* He heard the Lisbon's sweet-toned horn blowing and he heard the hoarse strain of old Clem's horn, each telling the same tale of loss and destruction. He reached for his own conch and blew into it, cupping it in his great hands. He filled his cheeks and blew clamorous, grieving notes to tell the *Hind's* people that his story was the same one.

It seemed in vain to try for a rescue of the gear. There was no question that the job had been done thoroughly. By now, the strong current had washed the trawls far to southward. Yet, for the sake of the vessel yonder and the unfortunate girl at her helm, he turned to his grinning dorymate and cried, "You bloody Jonah! Row! Let me see your sweat! If there's such a decent thing in you!"

Hardegon found the outer buoy. It, too, had been severed from the trawl line. He drew the keg into his dory and sat down, heavy with this new misery.

Atkins rowed back into the path of the schooner. Soon the *Hind* turned against the long light of the afternoon and came up the line, picking the dories out of the stream as she came.

Hardegon stood amongst his shipmates again. He took one long look at Nora and turned away. She was crying.

No man said a word. They knew well enough that there was hardly a full tub of new trawl left on the schooner. They knew, too, the burden of debt that Nora had undertaken to fit out for this last voyage. Yes, it was the *Hind's* last.

All aboard came to this judgment. It was left to the Lisbon to make the gesture of surrender, the signal that their hardy struggle had come to an end, that they could go below now and sleep, while the *Hind* sailed home to Gloucester, never to come out again as her own self.

The Lisbon held his gaff in his right hand. It was a stout, beautiful instrument that he had made himself many years before at his own forge. Its barb shone in the evening light. No counting the cod it had struck, the halibut it had drawn up from the green. It was a gaff that had earned much money, fed many mouths, fed Nora's. No other thing could be a better symbol of the pitiless conflict between the new and the old, between the men who killed fish with hooks and the men who swept them up in huge dragging nets.

The Lisbon raised the gaff above his gray head. He sent his eyes a-roving among the men. To each pair of eyes, as his encountered them, he gave a glance of pity. To Nora, gazing at him while she swayed to the *Hind's* sway, he gave a look of tenderness, mixed with his despair. It was only when his eyes met Atkins' stare that their light changed. And when he looked at Roades, sagging half-drunk by the wheel, all tenderness and despair vanished before his anger. His lips twitched in a Portuguese phrase. He jerked his arm. The gaff whirled high, flew over the sea, and vanished into a pool of foam.

NOW the *Doubloon* came on. She sailed at her dragging pace, her wire cables cutting the water on this side of her slight wake. At that distance, the men of the *Golden Hind* could scarcely make out her crew of eight or nine. They were all on deck, except the old hand off the *Hind,* John Corkery. Two men were standing at the gallows. Two others were at the winch, ready to release the brakes and throw the clutch in when the dragging was finished. The wire-steerers, crowbars in hands, stood by the midship gear to guide the heavy cables onto the drums in even windings.

Soon the men in her pilothouse could be made out dimly behind the panes. They steered straight toward the *Hind.*

Despite her glitter and her spankiness, the dragger threw a long shadow before her, a shadow to be sensed by men's minds and hearts. There was no good in her. There was much evil. There wasn't a man aboard the *Hind* who didn't know that the criminal blow against them had been struck by the men who now approached. Yet no word was uttered on the *Hind,* even when Captain Parran himself came out of the house and lifted his glasses.

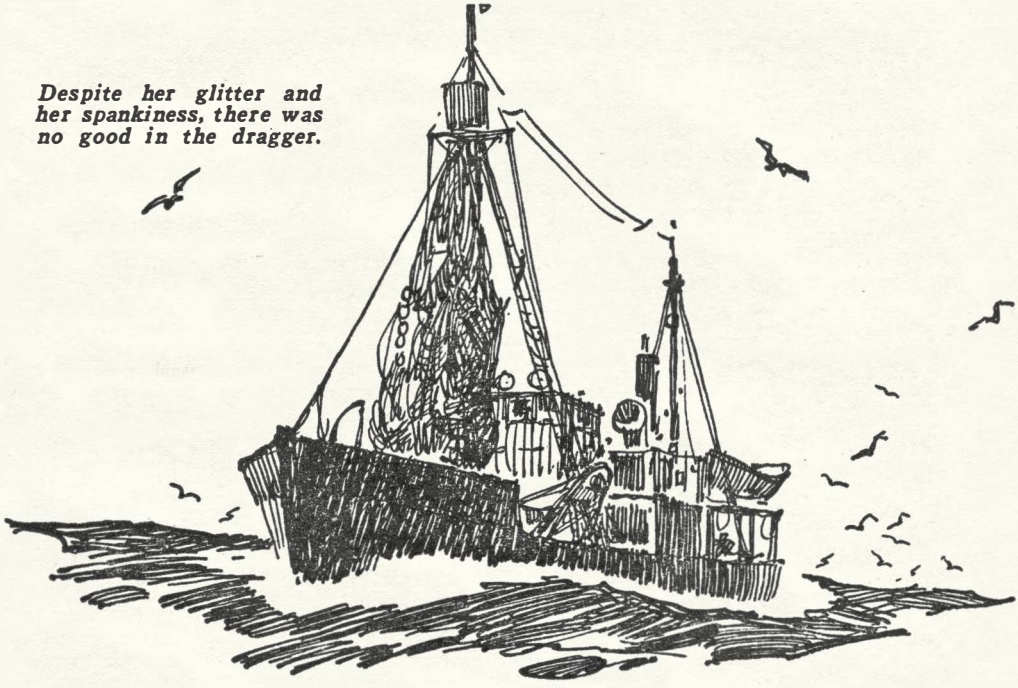
Nora stirred in anger by the mainmast. She could feel the impact of those eyes. She could imagine the thoughts that must now be rolling through Parran's mind. He had accomplished all that he had set out to do; had done it, moreover, in so cruel and subtle a manner that he could escape all punishment. Just once in

her life had she heard of a raid against a schooner's trawls and that had been long, long ago in her grandfather's youth. A feud between brother and brother, the Barbers of evil memory.

She spoke bitterly to herself. "I'll sell the *Hind* to the syndicate and pay him off both ways. He'll never set foot on her. Never!"

She wished to say this to her men and thus give them a satisfaction to save them some sorrow. Yet another and a better instinct stopped her. For a reason she could not fathom, her indomitable heart, then and there, refused to surrender, to give up all her hopes. By this she knew that she, at least, hadn't flung her gaff down.

Parran's face became clear to the watchers. She hated that face; hated, even more, the



Despite her glitter and her spankiness, there was no good in the dragger.

thought of witnessing its inevitable grin of triumph. She looked among her own men. She found Roades and Atkins apart, Atkins whispering, Roades slobbering. The dorymen had drawn away again from their Jonah and Jonah's master.

It was hard to say what the *Hind's* men were waiting for. Their hearts were surely wild for the want of something to curse to hell and back again. Every man there, hunched against the rail or clinging to the standing gear, had a new life and a doubtful one before him now. The elders would be on the beach for good. Others had a strange row to hoe somewhere. All had lost their sea home; many had lost their only one, there being some who hadn't slept

off the *Hind* for years. Had they burst into moans, Nora would not have wondered greatly. Yet there they stood like men of bronze and yellow brass.

Even the insults that now blew their way failed to stir them.

Parran came down from his pilot-house step and stood at the rail. He raised a hand to his mouth and brayed across the water. "How's things going, boys?"

His men broke into laughter. One clanked his steering-bar in a deep tune.

Without facing his crew, Parran jovially chided them from the corner of his mouth. To the *Hind,* he cried, "You boys lost anything? Your tongues maybe?" He himself roared at this sally and beat his hands against his oilskins.

The *Doubloon* surged a length nearer. Nora could now see the slightest changes in their expressions. There was nothing much to hope for there. Birds of a feather flock together. Yet one face among them gave her a compassionate look. It was John Corkery, the man who had once cursed Roades solemnly and had sworn a revenge.

Corkery had been working on the *Doubloon's* starboard net, laid in thick folds along the weather rail for use when the bottom had torn the port gear badly. There, out of the way, he kept himself aloof, as if he knew what shame his old shipmates had to face. Nora was shocked by the change that had come over him since the day when, grieving for his lost

brother, he had stepped off her own vessel and had boarded her enemy's. He was even gaunter. His cheeks had been thin before. Now they were sunken. Since he hadn't shaved in that time, he seemed more like a mad creature than ever. Only his eyes were alive. These burned in deep, shadowy sockets. They stared at her, singled her out; because only she, of all on the *Hind's* deck, seemed to have any life left to her. She kept her head up.

"Catfish took your tongue, Cap'n Nora?" Parran made his inquiry in a gentle, maddening voice.

She wasn't man enough to take it. She spat.

This delighted Parran. He whispered something aside and, without really breaking off his attention, looked aft at his towing wires. They were taut. The net had taken all that it could take. He nodded to the helmsman. The horn blared and the *Doubloon's* bow swung sharply toward the *Hind.* Then men at the brakes pushed. The winch howled and began grinding the cables inboard. The *Doubloon* leaned a little toward the net, which was rising heavily.

Captain Parran then tried out Billy Atkins. He ignored Roades, pretended he didn't even see him. He said, "How you, Billy? Billy, you talked yourself back into a dory, didn't you? You sorry now, chum?"

Atkins wanted to break the silence of the *Hind.* He looked slyly about, wet his lips, opened them wide, and then thought better of it.

This amused Parran. He said in mock aggrievement, "Why, Billy, don't you like us any more? You lose something, too, Billy?" He put his hands together on his front and let his belly shake heartily. "Can't you teach those greenhorns how to fish, Billy? Better bring them all aboard and we'll show them how to make some real money."

The draggermen forward, ready to handle the doors of the drag, jeered and beat their icy mitts together.

Parran glanced at them reprovingly. "Or better still," he shouted, "maybe we could fix the old *Hind* up a bit and all go aboard her, eh? Why not? The *Doubloon* ain't my own, you know."

At this prediction of the *Hind's* certain fate, his manner changed to frank hatefulness. He spat over the rail.

THE space of water between the two vessels now flattened strangely, grew dark, and began to bubble, as if some monster were struggling up from the ocean slime. The winch groaned and stopped. A vast disturbance took place below the surface.

This under-sea working caught all eyes. The men of the *Doubloon* stared greedily. So did Parran.

On the *Hind,* there was a barely perceptible movement of heads. Atkins even dared, in the growing excitement, to move gingerly to the rail.

Bubbles burst in circles of foam. The *Doubloon's* net surged loudly out of the water, a vast hamp. Bigger than a bull whale, and wallowing like one, the cod-end came heaving up. Pinkish brooks flowed off it. Amidst cries of gulls and a tremendous rustling of crushed fish, the bag burst into the twilight.

Bound in the long curves of its small mesh, thousands of fish, great and small, fought in a gleaming mass. Blood and foam and guts oozed out of the folds. Green and beautiful, a shark fought against the binding strands. Its ivory belly shone. Hundreds of young cod, their heads protruding through the mesh, gasped with distended mouths. A curious squeaking noise, rather kittenish in character, came out of the net. This was caused by the bursting of bladders.

The men of the *Doubloon* roared with joy. This was an easy harvest and a big one. They had earned more in that hour-and-a-half of dragging than the *Hind* had earned in a month of hard sailing and cruel labor. And the draggermen had done nothing, except to heave the net over the side. They cheered themselves nobly and bellowed fresh insults to the *Hind.* "How do you like that, you pick-up bums?"

Hardegon, bent over the rail, seemed fascinated by the slaughter of baby fish that took place before his eyes. It was the thing he hated about the draggers of this kind. However, he said nothing on that score. He merely stared.

Suddenly he thrust out his hand. Loath, even at a new turn of events, to break the self-imposed silence on the *Hind,* he held his hand out toward the *Doubloon's* bag. His shipmates leaned outward likewise and, at one and the same moment, a fearful expression came over their faces. They seemed like a chorus of strange masks, a row of gargoyles on a balcony by the sea.

"The trawl!"

Hardegon thus broke the silence.

This was the signal for the undamming of their wrath. They raised their fists and roared at the *Doubloon.* For the dragger's net, now fully revealed, bore an extraordinary outer burden. This burden was the *Hind's* own lost gear and the *Hind's* own harvest. Strung along the edges of the mound and across its top, four or five trawls lay tangled and twisted. Some of the bare hooks had caught in the mesh when the net had struck them drifting on the bottom after they had been cut away. Other hooks bore the struggling bodies of huge halibut and cod. Haddock and cod and catfish by the hundreds lay in the long, looped vines of cord. Fish were there by the penful.

Nora lay over the rail, stricken at the horror of this new proof of Parran's brutality and trickiness. Speechless in her rage, she lifted her fist and shook it at him. He was laughing

again. Laughing so hard that it was plain he had never imagined such a stroke of luck, no matter how he might have tried to drag up the trawls after he cut them.

Hardegon shouted, "Dories away! Take the gear off him!"

The men ran forward in a stumbling rush. It was of no use. Parran laughed louder than ever. He leaned backward against the side of the pilot-house and bent over in his laughing. He managed to nod to his men. The winch started again and the bag, bearing both harvests, began swimming slowly toward the *Doubloon's* hoisting gear.

Parran cupped his hands and shouted, "Hey! You boys lose something in the vapor?" His loud brays of laughter drove them into a frenzy.

There then took place one of those petty accidents which can catapult a mass of men into violent action. Old Clem, turning in despair from the dorynests, ran full tilt into Billy Atkins. This touching of the Jonah set the old man afire. He clapped both hands on Atkins' shoulders and stared into his face.

Another doryman, seeing this, laid hands on Atkins. Atkins giggled.

Before one could speak to another and say, "Do this!" they had lifted him clear of the deck. They staggered aft a step or two and, with a great cry, hurled him into the water. Old Clem yelled, "Jonah! There's a whale for ye, scum!"

Atkins screamed in his headling flight. He screamed again when he struck the water. He vanished in a welter, rose striking to the top, and, impelled by his terror of icy drowning, flailed with both his hands.

He was no swimmer. Nevertheless, he managed to push along toward the creeping bag. He clawed against it. His first grasp closed on a fish-head. It broke off. He tried again. This time his fingers hooked the mesh. He began to struggle up the mound of writhing cod. His knees sank deep. He lay there for a moment and held his head clear to gasp for breath. He climbed again, digging his boot heels into the bulges.

The men of the *Hind* sent curses and threats after him. They shouted that they would rip and gut him if ever they laid hands on him.

The draggermen returned both curses and threats. They urged Atkins on. "Hang on, Billy! Take it easy, old-timer!"

Parran, running up and down the deck in clumsy rage, shouted orders to the winch-men. They braked the cable. The bag rode slower, rose higher.

Atkins was safe. Stretched out on the hump, hardly daring to move lest he slip down, he lifted his head and spewed forth a good portion of the vile stuff that was in it. He gave Nora a few names that were rather novel to her. For the dorymen, he laid out an astonishing variety of curses. Certain of his phrases and his jumbled words gave them reason to believe that he had known what the *Hind's* fate was to be. He lifted up a curl of laden trawl and screeched, "Who did it, eh?" and laughed.

They took him aboard the *Doubloon.* Working in silence now, they hauled the bag up to the side and began to hoist it. It was so big that they had to split it, take half over at a time. Other men raveled out the *Hind's* trawls. They slatted off all the fine fish and flung them into the great pile that poured out of the net, now hoisted high and opened at the bottom.

CHAPTER XI

DEATH ON THE DRAGGER

NIGHT came on swiftly. A calm flattened the sea. The *Doubloon's* deck lamps were turned on for the dressing of the fish. Now and then, one of her men turned his head from the trough of guts and gills to look at the *Hind.* No more words were exchanged. Soon the net was pushed over again, after the sewing of its rips. The dragger got under way and drifted off on the tide with the *Hind.* For some reason, Parran had no intention to go far from the schooner.

Nora and Hardegon, standing at the break, watched the *Doubloon's* lights. Her continued presence near the *Hind* puzzled them.

Nora said, "What now, Dan?"

He shook his head. "That guy's got lots of news tonight. From Atkins. That's what keeps him standing by, I guess. For what—I don't know."

The cook rang his bell. The first gang went down to supper.

Roades kept to his bunk. He was either far gone in drink or pretending that he was. He made no response to the few words that had to be said to him by the watch. Nor did he take notice when Nora and Hardegon came down and turned in. There was really no reason why the *Hind* shouldn't go home as soon as there was wind enough. There was nothing for her to do. Nora had watched the saddened dorymen overhaul the new and old trawls aboard the vessel. As she expected, there was little more than a good tubful that could be rigged, even with every odd and end patched together.

She fell into an uneasy sleep, raided by dreams of her failure, her coming loss. Lying there, she was seized by anger, a dull, heavy anger that rose out of her helplessness and inability to strike back. Once she rose from her bunk and turned the lamp wick down to dim its glare. The cabin seemed extremely warm and hard to breathe in. She closed the draft of the stove and opened the companionway slide an inch to freshen the air. She closed her eyes again and, at last, obeyed the lulling roll of the schooner and fell into a sounder sleep.

Some hours later, a groping hand reached

into her dream. She awoke. The watch was standing by her bunk. He had already awakened Hardegon, who was yanking on his boots and whispering drowsy sentences.

"What's the story?" As she spoke, she, too, rolled out and reached for her boots.

The watch jerked his thumb toward Roades' bunk. A little while before, he had been lying there, dead to the world. When she now looked for him, she saw that the bunk was empty. A small whiskey bottle lay gleaming in his blankets, as if he had drained it before he left the cabin. His boots were gone.

"Where is he?" she exclaimed.

The watch spoke in an excited whisper. "He came on deck and said he was going into the galley for a mug-up. Said he didn't eat any supper. I saw him go forward and below. The next thing I knew he was sneaking back again. He didn't take no mug-up, Miss Nora. He went to lee side and got to work on a dory. And that's where he is now. Trying to get it overboard."

"Is he drunk?"

"Sober as a judge!"

She followed him and Hardegon to the deck. Hardegon said to the watch, "See if he's off the vessel. Take it easy."

The watch returned presently and, in greater excitement, reported that Roades had put the dory over and was rowing away from both vessels; that is, to the northward.

They went forward. At first, they could make nothing out. Soon Hardegon caught a gleam from an oar. A moment later, the dory showed up, slowly passing to leeward.

This was a frightening action on Roades' part. Often enough, he had revealed an uncontrollable temper and, on one or two such occasions, been guilty of such behavior that more than one man had said he was fit for the looney-bin. He had the reputation of being able to hold his liquor. Just the same, he hadn't carried his load that day with much success; and he was doing worse now.

The doryman said sourly, "He'll wind up in Fortune Bay, at that rate. Or inside an icicle. Well, good riddance to bad rubbish! We can do better without him. And it's about time."

"It's not as easy as that, chum," said Hardegon.

Nora went to the rail. A wash of light out of the old moon gave her a new glimpse of the dory. In that flash, she saw the blond head turn to look ahead on his course. She saw the oars strike under the sweep of his arms.

"Bad as he is," she said, "we can't let him do that!"

"I can!" The doryman spat out some of his bitterness.

Hardegon had other thoughts. "That's not the story."

"What is it, Dan? What's he up to now?" Nora asked.

"Wait a while."

The dory had now vanished entirely.

HARDEGON crossed to the windward rail, where he could see the *Doubloon*. Her deck lamps were still blazing. She had made a short, circling drag and now lay as she had before, a cable length or so off the *Hind's* weather quarter. While Nora and the watch peered into the gloom where Roades had gone, Hardegon fixed his gaze on the farther rim of the *Doubloon's* glow. In about ten minutes, he saw Roades' dory pass beyond the *Doubloon's* bow and run in toward her weather quarter. The *Doubloon* came between him and Roades.

He noted the stir caused on the *Doubloon* by the arrival of Roades. Two men left their work amidships. One took the dory painter. Hardegon saw Roades climb over the rail and cross the brilliant deck. The door of the pilot-house opened for him.

Hardegon added things up. It was a simple sum and he got a simple answer. Atkins and Roades and Parran were together again. More than that, it wasn't hard for him to figure out that these three had some urgent necessity for their meeting. A love-feast was hardly in order. That was something to be enjoyed after the *Hind* had been actually handed over to Parran.

Hardegon gave himself a while for thought. It was certain that there must be some further and immediate gain which drew the thieves together. He couldn't figure out what that gain might be. There was no question that such a gain would be the *Hind's* loss. But what had she left to lose? He could see that Roades and Atkins would want to tell Parran about the disastrous loss of the *Western Star*. He would find satisfaction in such a report, just as they themselves had been pleased when the hulk drove by in the gale. What else was there for the *Hind* to give over, except herself? Nothing!

He crossed the deck and said, "Roades has gone aboard the *Doubloon*, Nora. I saw him plain."

"Ah, Dan!"

"That's the story, Nora. He's in her pilot-house this minute."

This news made the watch jump. Hardegon said to him, "'Tis best for you to turn out a few more men. Keep a double watch aft and forward. Don't let anybody come aboard this vessel. Not even Roades, unless he comes with me."

"With you?" asked the watch.

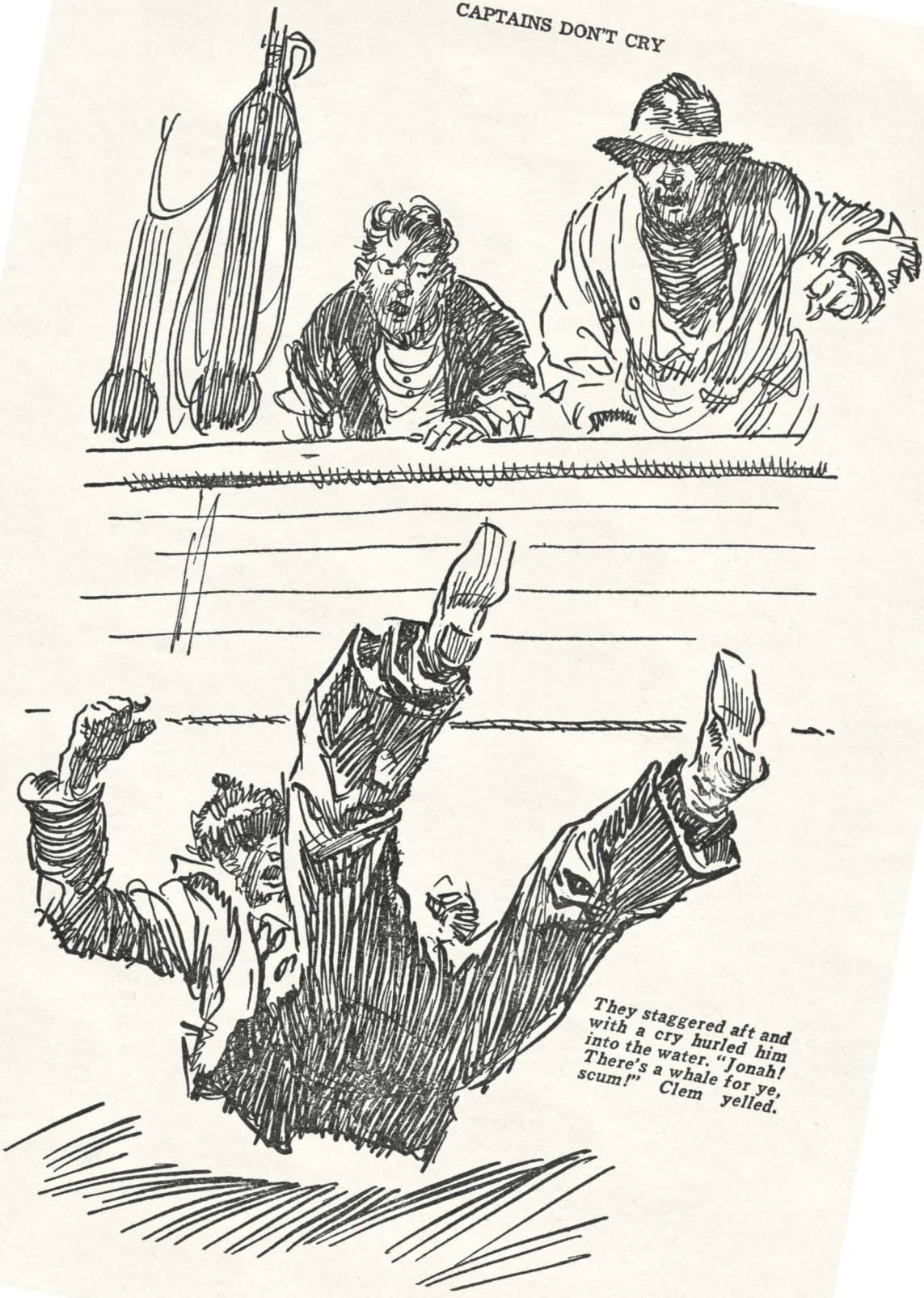
"That's it!"

The watch ran toward the foc'sle companion-way.

Nora said, "What's your thinking been like, Dan?"

"I'm up a tree."

"What more can they do to us?"



They staggered aft and with a cry hurled him into the water. "Jonah! There's a whale for ye, scum!" Clem yelled.

The plaintiveness in her voice stirred him. He held out his hand in the dark and took her hand. He did not yet know how completely she had broken with Roades. He had seen so much of the hold Roades once had on her that he couldn't really believe she had shaken it off, even now. Yet that made no difference to him. Her worn and anxious face was all that mattered.

He replied, "That's exactly what I was just asking myself. There's a pattern in it, but I can't work it out. Not from here."

She pondered the repeated hint in his last phrase and, after a while, said, "Parran's got Atkins back. And he's still got our John Corkery."

"That's so! But what of it? Bear in mind that John put a curse on Roades and swore he wouldn't put foot on the *Hind* again."

"Just the same, things change. Men change. We all do. Maybe John Corkery has. He went on the *Doubloon* because Parran lent us Atkins. He went because I asked him to. I can tell you this—Corkery's a hated man aboard the *Doubloon*. He's got something on them all. Just as his poor brother had. Some knowledge of a crime. And other rotten tricks."

"Is that what you meant by the Yarmouth story? The thing you said below?"

"I'll tell you later, Dan. I'm sure of one thing and it's this—if they had a chance, they'd get rid of him. They'd kill him! And there's more to it. He knows all they've done to us today. He can ruin that beast of a Parran, if ever he gets home."

He struck his hands together. "I tell you, Nora, I must get aboard that *Doubloon* for a few minutes! I'm going to knock Parran's block off when I meet him, anyway, and I wouldn't mind busting him up right before his men."

"His men! There's a trouble for you."

"A crowd of pick-up bums! They'd think twice before they looked my way."

"Just the same, Dan, there's our own captain and he's half-mad. It'll be wise for us to hold a hard hand over them. Wait here!"

She went down into the cabin and pulled out a drawer built into the locker under the captain's bunk. A few rolled charts were there and, under them, a small brass-bound box, its key in the lock. She opened the box. An old revolver lay there, shining on a fold of black cloth.

Nora hadn't seen that weapon for years. It had never been used. She could remember that her father had taken it out twice a year to oil it and polish its silvery barrel. And she had asked, one such day, why he kept it there in that beautiful cabin, to her the most peaceful of all places. He had laughingly replied, "Might have to kill a mad dog sometime. Or something."

She put the revolver into her reefer pocket and returned to the bow.

Old Clem and the Lisbon had been turned out. They had swung up a dory.

She showed the revolver to Hardegon. "You take this, Dan. It's loaded."

He replied, "I'll have nothing to do with such truck!" He held up his clenched hand. "'Tis all I need for them—this!" He stepped toward the rail and said, "Clem and the Lisbon will put me aboard her. I'll slip into her port gear and they'll never be the wiser, until I show myself to take John Corkery off."

He pulled himself up to the rail. She held up her hand to him. When his hand closed on her fingers, she closed her own fingers and jumped to his side.

The men cried out against her intention.

She flung her leg over the dory gunwale and said, "Let her drop, Clem! It's my business to be done and I'll be on hand to do it. Or it won't be done at all. I know more of this than all of you put together. Besides, I'm a smoother worker than this lad here. Him and his fist! And whether you like it or not, I'm going to ask Parran for something!"

"For what?"

"Our trawls! He's got four or five of them. We've the makings of another tub maybe. We've all our bait left. Well, we'll rig for halibut and take a chance."

Old Clem threw up his hands. "For halibut?"

The watch cried, "Here?"

"No! Poor old Ambrose knew. He showed me the note on the old chart. My grandfather made it fifty years ago. This very month." She jumped into the dory. "It's in my bunk. Go down and take a look. Halibut to the east."

THE dory went down. Clem and the Lisbon secured the tackle and came over to the thwarts. They rowed away in the darkness, as Roades had, and then veered in a wide sweep so that the dory glided up to the weather rail of the *Doubloon*. They did this without being detected, because the net was coming in on the lee side and no man on the *Doubloon* had eyes for anything else.

Captain Hardegon slid over the rail and took shelter in the port net. Its long folds hid him, yet he could see the *Doubloon's* men clearly through the mesh. Atkins was already at work. He stood by the main hatch, a pitch-fork in his hands, his back turned.

John Corkery stood a jump away from Atkins. The first harsh thing that struck Hardegon's eye, there in the flood of deck lamps, was the expression on Corkery's face. He seemed like a man in a trance wracked by nightmares. He was alive, yet not alive.

Parran and Roades were in the pilot-house. Hardegon saw them vaguely in its darkness.

The last bag had been dressed and put down. Now the new set was coming up. The horn blew, the winch rolled. The bag came up to

the side. The men reached for the net to sway it to the rail. It was a good set. Not as large as the last one he had seen, but good enough. The men brought it inboard. One of them crept under the bulging cod-end to pull the slip-rope that would open it. He jerked hard and sprang away. An avalanche of fish came down and spilled over the deck.

Hardegon groaned in his old anger. There were fifty thousand fish in that spreading pile. If not more. And they were all baby cod, weighing half a pound or so. He couldn't count a dozen good fish in the lot, except for two or three halibut that had been feeding on the school. Most of the young fish were dead already, crushed by the weight of the catch and the pressure of the bag. It was plain that Parran had been deliberately raiding the nursery ground. Yet even he hadn't bargained for such small fish. They were much too small for any economical use. Had they been left to grow a year, they'd have doubled in size and would have left billions more in spawn behind them. Now they were squandered. Most of them were dead already.

Hardegon himself had once killed fish like that by accident. Now the sight of it griped at his belly.

He heard a roar of anger from the pilot-house. It was a bullish burst that sounded clear above the clatter of gear and the oaths of the disappointed men. Parran cursed the fish and the Atlantic that made them. He cursed his luck and strode across the deck. He aimed a blow at Atkins. He then ordered the men to open the big scuppers. Through these, the dead fish were broomed and forked. This wasn't fast enough for Parran. He picked up the hose and, still railing at what he called his luck, turned the stream onto the fish. Soon the deck was clear and the bag was pushed over the rail again.

Atkins had been made hysterical by the blow and the abuse he had to take. He thrust the tines of his fork into a halibut and hurled the fish toward the hatch. He cursed and shouted, "Bring up the devil himself! Damn you and your net!"

Corkery was turning away from the rail. He laughed at Atkins and flung him a sneering word.

Atkins screeched out a reply that was lost in the shouts of men working on the net.

At that instant, Corkery slipped on the fishy deck. He sprawled and gave a cry of pain.

It may have been this helpless position that excited Atkins in a murderous sort of way. Corkery had sprawled, just as if he had been struck down. He held that pose for a moment and Hardegon could tell by the fierceness of his upturned face that Corkery had been taking a lot of abuse aboard the dragger and wasn't going to take much more of it.

Corkery had heard Atkins' reply. He said one word in answer, and again Hardegon couldn't hear it because of the clatter of heavy cables grinding up the deck toward the gallows. Yet he read the man's lips and knew the word was, "Murderer!"

He did hear Atkins' reply to this. Atkins repeated the word in a high-pitched, frenzied way, threw it back at Corkery and added, "You dory bum! Murdered your own lousy brother to save your skin!"

Corkery rose painfully to his feet. His face had now become the face of a man who intends to kill another. It was so deadly fierce that Atkins raised his pitch-fork and yelled in horror.

Hardegon could never tell afterwards whether Atkins really intended to attack Corkery. He thought for a moment that Parran had ordered him to pick the quarrel. In any event, the sea settled the matter. More than once, as the work had gone on, the men at the rail had shouted warnings against freakish seas that suddenly leaped out of the dark and rolled over the rail.

At this moment of Atkins' dangerous poise, such a roller struck the *Doubloon*. It shook the vessel and sent Atkins plunging forward, the bloodied tines gleaming before his distorted face. In plunging, the look of hatred changed to one of simple surprise.

Hardegon's natural impulse to run between the two men was beaten down by a stronger instinct—to save himself from the boarding sea. It was a killer. He reached for a stay and clung to it. He bent his head backward to shout to Nora and the dorymen.

The sea charged across the deck and struck against his hips. In leaning sideways, his head twisted again. Thus his sweeping glance took in the pilot-house. In that split second, he saw Roades and Parran staring through the radiant panes. Their eyes, fearful to see, were fixed on Atkins and Corkery.

Such a small measure of time had passed that Atkins' charge had hardly gone forward a stride. Nevertheless, he was committed to it. He kicked out his leg to keep his balance in the skirt of the sea and thrust his fork directly at Corkery's heart.

Corkery had only time enough to lift himself to his tiptoes. He could not avoid the stab. He pulled his head back hard, flung up his hands in an awkward, fending motion. A tine of the fork pierced the palm of his left hand. He screamed. Nevertheless, he fought for his life. He pushed the pierced hand upward and thus saved his heart. He closed the fingers of the pierced hand on the fork and jerked Atkins forward.

Atkins had no way to stop his plunge. The violence of his movement carried him into Corkery's grasp. Atkins tried to twist away. He let go of the fork, but he could not escape. Corkery screamed again. He struck with his right hand, struck a blow so hard that Atkins'

jaw broke under it. His body fell halfway in a graceful stagger. At this, Corkery struck again. The blow hurled Atkins onto the rushing cables.

Atkins died in the next instant. The ferocious blows may have killed him. In any event, the great cables finished him. His boots became fouled in a link of one cable. His clutching hands, or part of his oil clothing, were caught by the other cable. Both wires whirled him over and over against a set of steel blocks near the foc'sle companionway. The grinding steel crushed him there, broke him and ate him.

ALL this had happened so swiftly that the men at the brakes, who rarely had occasion to check the cables when they were running out, were unable to act. They weren't anywhere near the winch when the horrible screaming put them on guard. As a matter of fact, both of the winchmen testified later that they were at the rail watching the lay of the cables as the net sank down. This was their station and their duty.

Neither did Hardegon have time to think or act. He had hardly pushed the folds of the port net to one side before all the deck lamps went out. He was blinded. At that moment of blinking, he felt the folds beside him stir. He turned and stretched out his hand, called Nora's name and she took her place beside him. A sea jumped across the deck and slapped their faces.

"Atkins dead!" Hardegon had just time enough to say those words when the next act of the drama unfolded before their eyes.

Having come out of the darkness in which the *Hind's* dory lay, Nora had full use of her eyes. At first, she could make out only the opening of the pilot-house door. A cry of anguish came from that place. She cried out to Hardegon, cried loudly so that she might be heard above the roar of water and the shouts of the crew, who, like Hardegon, had been left in sudden darkness, their sight baffled.

She shouted, "Parran! He struck Roades!" She had seen the blond head jerk away, a hard palm slap his cheek, a fist crash against his jaw.

Another boarding sea ran its course over the dragger.

A man at the gallows shouted, "Lights! Oh, Captain, the lights! A man crushed here!"

Both Nora and Hardegon saw Roades rise out of the whirl of foam amidships. In the dark, his yellow head and yellow slicker marked his progress. He fell across the braked wires and rose again. For an instant, he crouched near the stupefied Corkery, who had jerked the tine out of his hand and now stared at his own blood. A crest of foam, full of beautiful light, shot in a smooth, creamy slant from the starboard gallows and spilled over the main hatch, which was open. An intense glare came out of that foam, as if it had been mixed with phosphorescence. It was this light that revealed to Nora and Hardegon the blow struck against Corkery by Captain Roades. They saw the sleeve of his yellow slicker gleam in a backward sweep. They saw the bare, gleaming hand and the glitter of blade and ivory handle. The knife-hand swept over and in.

Corkery sprang into the air, arching his back against the stab. The life ran out of him. Yet he could not fall. He danced grotesquely against the roll and pitch of the *Doubloon*.

Roades' hand came away empty. He stepped back, his empty hands held before him in a groping crazy motion. He seemed to be searching for something.

The same man in the darkness up forward cried, "Lights! Say, Captain, what's the matter with the lights? A man crushed here! Oh, merciful God!"

One of his chums uttered a new warning, a bellow. An even greater sea had spun up in the sudden fashion of the Middle Ground in winter. Its clamor drowned all outcries and made the confusion complete.

Hardegon shouted, "Stay here! Hang on!"

He took a step out of his shelter. The threat of the onrushing sea blocked him. He jumped backward and stretched his hand sideways until it struck against the stay again. He had swiftly judged the force of that sea. It was too much to fight against.

"Hold on, my girl!" He gave the new alarm and swung around to face that tumbling wall of water.

HE SAW the sea pick up Corkery's half-fallen body and swing it clear of the tackle. He saw the sea catch Roades as he fled stumbling. Dead man and living man came hurtling toward the main rigging.

Hardegon braced himself strongly, his hips against the rail. He thrust his arms into the pour of water. He closed both hands on the first body that he found in the uproarious stream, forced the body down against the rail and waited, his own head smothered in foam.

The sea passed. The body that he had saved then began to wrestle. The living man cursed and struggled to his feet. He swayed in the gloom, spat out water, and with the greatest coolness, stared into Hardegon's face and asked, "What in hell's name are you doing off your vessel?"

This was going some. Here was a man saved from certain death—for that torrent would have driven him breathless down into the icy sea—a man whose hands had just been wet with another man's blood. And yet he did not step outside his character when confronted by a man off duty.

The steadiness in Roades' tone frightened Hardegon. There was on denying it. His heart grew weak, as any decent man's heart does when he stands in the presence of a murderer.

This weakness grew out of his awareness that only murder can stop a murderer, that you had to kill if you wished to stay in a game like this.

A crack on the jaw was about the best Hardegon had ever done. Had a good thrashing been in order for Roades, he'd have given it to him then and there, just as he had boasted he would do for Parran. But murder—

Hardegon knew, and Nora knew, that Roades would now hang. They were also aware that he would fight hard and craftily to keep himself free. A hard and crafty opposition was their only course. They both understood this need, and they began in time.

Hardegon replied by a show of natural indignation.

He said sharply to Roades, "Keep a civil tongue in your head, will you? Are you sick? You got a hangover? Is that the way to talk to a man who's just saved your life?" Then, without waiting for Roades to speak, he went on, "Nora and I came over to ask you to bring back our trawls. That's all, Captain. The watch said you'd gone over to the *Doubloon* and we came after you as soon as we could."

Nora moved in the darkness. Roades faced her. He was, of course, trying to figure out the precise moment of their arrival, to determine how much they had seen of what had happened.

She perceived his aim. Therefore, when he said, "Trawls?" she answered, "Yes, our trawls. All of them. And we've also come for Corkery. Atkins can't come aboard my schooner again. Not after what he said to me. We're thinking of trying to rig for halibut. And if we do, we'll need a doryman, Corkery. He'll do what I ask him to."

"Corkery?"

"You heard me, Captain Roades! Parran has no need of him now that Atkins is back on the *Doubloon.*"

"Atkins is dead." He swayed and waved his hand toward the place where Hardegon had last seen Atkin's body lying entangled and a man bending over it.

Nora hadn't witnessed that death. Apparently she hadn't heard Hardegon's shouted words concerning it, either. Therefore, her startled outcry was thoroughly genuine, thoroughly convincing.

Hardegon did well, too. He cried out, "Hey? The Jonah dead!"

This satisfied Roades. He raised his hands in a despairing gesture.

The lights went on.

The three of them now stood in the clear. Each could see the other's face without hindrance. The deceptions that had to be practised so swiftly and smoothly by Nora and Hardegon had to withstand a skilled scrutiny, not only from Roades, but from Parran, who approached at a deliberate pace.

CHAPTER XII

THE JONAH

SUFFICIENT time had passed since the murders to permit both the captains to recover partly from their violent desperation. The first result of that recovery was a fear of themselves, a sickening fear. It was shown by their cloudy eyes and bitten lips. Even if their deeds passed undetected and unpunished, they had to bear their new and old burdens of guilt. These burdens were made almost intolerable by their other burdens of superstition. Atkins' death had not left them untouched.

It was plain to Nora and to Hardegon that both their enemies had the wind up badly. Their nervousness made them doubly dangerous. Nora kept her right hand on the revolver in her pocket.

She cried out, "That poor, crazy Atkins! What happened to him?" She stepped away from the rail and called to the three men who were bending over the body. Shrewdly she noted that they were not touching that broken sack of bones in its oil clothing. "Is he really dead?"

The men acted strangely. They all faced her, their mouths tight with an undeniable terror. The Jonah terror. Without saying a word to her, they hurried to the companionway and went down into the foc'sle.

It was now Parran's turn to satisfy himself that neither she nor Hardegon had seen the murder of Corkery. This was an anxiety that Roades had already discerned in him. He shook his head gloomily and said, "They—they've come for Corkery, Captain. As I did."

"Corkery!" Captain Parran deftly snatched up the lie and repeated the name with mournful gentleness. He was keen enough to do that much, yet not quite smart enough to conceal his relief in Nora's apparent ignorance. He drew his hand over his face, as if he were dazed. "Haven't you told them, Captain?" He was so facile in his acting that Nora couldn't repress a shudder.

Hardegon put in his oar. "Aye, 'tis Corkery we want. And our trawls!" He flung his hand out toward the four thick coils of trawl lying on the deck. One of the men had lashed them to ringbolts.

"Why do you say that, Captain Parran?" asked Nora. "What are you up to now? Haven't you done enough to us? What is it that Captain Roades has to tell us about Corkery? Where is he? Is he sick? Has he—has he killed himself?"

Parran bowed his head in solemn grief. "Corkery is dead, too." He waved his hand toward the illuminated waves to windward. "Yes, Miss Nora. He killed himself! In madness. He struck poor Billy down and sent him to his death in the towing wires. He yelled out

something about his poor brother and—God rest his soul!—he jumped over the rail. He's dead." He struck lightly at his eyes, which had actually filled with tears. "Maybe he's better off!"

Nora let her head droop. She drew closer to Hardegon, who sorrowfully repeated, "Poor John! Poor John!"

They were desperately aware now that they had only one thing to do—get safely off the *Doubloon* and onto the *Hind's* deck again. This would not be easy. If either of the murderers standing before them caught the slightest hint that the noose might yet be his destiny, anything might be expected. It was Hardegon who struck upon a likely course. It was, to him, the most reasonable one; that is, to pick a fight with somebody.

He stood away from Nora and said, "John Corkery's gone! The same way his brother went. Well, he'd have never been happy on this earth until the day of his death and if a man can't live happy he might as well be dead."

"True! True for you, Dan!" Parran said this in preacher style, eyes upturned to the blazing mist, hands near to joining.

"Too bad," continued Hardegon, "that a man like that couldn't have Christian burial. But he feeds the salt! Like his brother. And there's an end to him." He took a swift step that brought him eye to eye with Parran. "Captain Parran!"

"Yes, Dan?" said the preacher.

"I make no bones about it! The first time you come ashore at Gloucester or at Boston Fish Pier, I'm going to give you the worst going-over that you ever thought of. And you've thought of plenty!"

Roades stepped into it. "Are you made aboard my vessel? Or what?"

Parran hastily comforted Roades with an upraised hand. With his speaking eyes, he quoted a verse from Job, and said, "Dan's a good boy, Jack. Over-young for his ideas, but a good boy. He's been under a bad strain, you know. Losing the *Western Star* and all that money first. And then his trawls and now his chance to use his wonderful big-mesh nets on the *Hind.* Too bad!" He waggled his great head and said to Nora, "You can see, Miss Doonan, that after what happened today, I can't run the risk any longer. I—well, I must present my bills against the *Hind* when we get home. I'm sure you see why." He spoke again to Roades. "Don't blame poor Dan. Let him speak his piece."

Nora laughed in his face, a laugh that was not much more than a sneer.

"I'm coming to that," said Hardegon to Roades, "that mate business." He turned again to Parran and tapped him firmly on the top button of his slicker. "Don't you worry about the strain I've been under! It's nothing to the strain you're putting on yourself, Parran. I know you're captain of this vessel and that my own captain is standing here, too. Just the same, those are my owner's trawls and she's ordered me to get them. Which is her right. Now I'm going to take them to the dory. You make a move against it and you'll get it right where you're standing!"

"That's a pretty way to talk, Dan Hardegon," replied Parran blandly. "On a vessel where two good men have died only a little while ago. But if that's the way you want it—you can have it." He faced Roades. "Captain, I haven't any idea whose trawls those are. Lots of trawls are lost this time o' year on the Middle Ground. I saw them first when the bag came up. That I swear. My Bible oath! Do you want those trawls for your own use, Captain Roades?"

"I do. That's the other thing I came for."

"I give them to you. Gladly." He gave Hardegon a sad, sweet smile. "I'll have my men help you, Dan, as soon as we get rid of—that is—well, Atkins can't lie there on deck. I've no room for him in my pens. There's work to be done." He readjusted his bland mask. "Burial at sea. He'd want it that way, don't you think?"

"Put the Jonah on ice," replied Hardegon roughly. He saw now that he had deceived Parran and Roades for the time being. He paid no more attention to them. However, he gave them something to think about by saying to Nora, "Tell the Lisbon to come aboard and help with those trawls. Tell Clem to shorten up on that painter."

He walked over to the first coil of trawl. He lifted a ganging and its hook to the brilliant light. "Norway hooks! 'Tis our gear, all right." He ran his fingers over the ganging knot. "My own gear."

Parran shouted to the men huddled in the lee of the pilot-house. Without noticing that they made no response, he strode to the foc'sle companionway and shouted, "Below there! Tumble up and lend a hand on this poor man! Cook! A sack of coals. Buck, a blanket off poor Atkins' bunk!" He spoke to Nora in his gentle strain. "'Tis a doryman's death and a doryman's burial. After all, that's what he was—a doryman." He waved his hand grandly at the black, heaving sea beyond the *Doubloon's* circle of light. "A sailor's burial, Cap'n Nora! And Christian, too!"

AFTER a long delay, during which much talk had gone on in the foc'sle and galley, the *Doubloon's* cook and several other men came up. They were empty-handed. The other draggermen, five in all, had drifted forward. They shied from the broken body in such a way that Parran was able to read their thought without hearing their words. Nevertheless, he spoke sternly.

"Cook, you heard me ask for a sack of coal?"

The cook shivered because it was cold. And for another reason. He was a thin, small man. The chatter of his teeth shook him to his heels.

His chums glowered at him, shuffled uneasily. He was obviously their sea lawyer. At last, in a piddling tone, he said, "No coal for a Jonah! 'Twould curse my stove. We ain't called upon to touch no Jonah. Boys here won't sew up no Jonah, Captain." He consulted his fear of a bully captain and added meekly, "If you please, Captain."

One of the others spoke up in a slightly bolder strain. "Cook's right, Captain. Besides, he ain't our man. He's a *Hind* man. Signed on regular, he was. On the *Hind.*" He turned his head and then jerked it toward the *Hind,* which was falling behind as the *Doubloon* steamed on with her dragging. "Let them bury him, Captain."

By this time, both Parran and Roades were in a new fury, which wasn't to be wondered at, considering the meaning Atkins had for them. Even in death, he was the keeper of their secrets and they heartily wished him to be where Corkery, that other keeper, was—rolling in the tide. Yet they themselves were so full of fear and guilt that they couldn't turn their own hands to the job of burial, a task which a decent man would gladly do. They couldn't even bear to look at that jumbled face staring at their boots.

Parran soon had enough of this delay and near-mutiny. He shook his head in mock regret and said, "I didn't think of that, boys. Give you my word! Sure he was a *Hind* man and the *Hind* must care for him. Give him the last honors, you know. Christian burial. Why not? Sure!" He then spoke directly and suavely to Captain Roades. "Jack, you agree with us, don't you?"

Roades pressed back an oath. He glanced wildly from one set face to another in order to test their firmness. He looked at Nora and found her flint-hard. He whirled around and shouted to Hardegon and the Lisbon, who had finished the transfer of the trawls.

"Get a move on and put this into your dory!"

Both Hardegon and the Lisbon had figured out what the course of talk had been. Hardegon, for once, couldn't strike on a proper action.

The Lisbon knew exactly what he wanted to do. Without paying Roades the slightest heed, he took Nora by the arm and said, "You come now, dear. We go back to our vessel."

She obeyed him without hesitation, just as she might have obeyed her father in his wisdom.

Hardegon took a few steps by her side and said, "I'll come back with the captain, Nora. Keep an eye peeled for us."

She swung her legs over the rail. She whispered, "He's captain no more. Get him back on the *Hind*—then he's through!" She slid down into the dory.

Hardegon returned to the place where Atkins lay in his blood. He said, "Do I understand that you men just refuse to put him over? Or do you also refuse to have him buried off your vessel? If it's all right with your men, Captain Parran, I'll sew him up and let him go. I've tipped a death-board for a Jonah before now and I'll do it again."

"No, by God!" The added strain of this pother over a wretched cadaver, and the continued stirring of secret fears, goaded Roades into a demoniac frenzy. He cursed hard and long, stamped his boots on deck.

He seemed like a man possessed, which, indeed, he was. He gave himself the lash, raved with such violence that Hardegon also drew off to make ready for a crazier action.

It was, perhaps, this very step away that catapulted Roades into a frightful deed, just as Atkins had been tricked by the sea.

HARDEGON'S boot struck against the fork that Atkins had driven into Corkery's hand. The tines hadn't been washed. Roades howled at the sight of the bloody tines. He sprang forward and seized the fork.

Before any hand could strike him down, he drove the fork deep into the body. He roared and, in a skillful sway of arms and thighs, heaved it dangling to the rail. He heaved again. The corpse vaulted into the brilliant sea, arms outspread, ruined face beseeching. Roades sent a screaming curse after the body and whirled the fork after his blasphemy.

"God have mercy on us!" The cook's tardy piety, bleated in a quavering voice, rattled the men. They stumbled away. One wailed with arms flung up.

Roades had half-fallen against the rail. He cried out pitifully. He held his hands out before him, stared briefly at the palms, and then reeled aft toward the pilot-house.

Parran said scornfully, "There's whiskey there!"

He at once became the draggerman again. "That's that!" He raised his hand. The helmsman blew the horn and the *Doubloon* veered sharply toward the *Hind,* whose port light shone to leeward. She was under way.

Parran walked steadily to the winch, threw out the clutch, released the brakes. The cables began to grind inboard. He left the winch and approached Hardegon. "Cowards, Dan. One and all. This Jonah talk! Ah!" He spat. "Your captain's the worst of all. Think nothing of it, lad. Think nothing of it. There's fish to be hauled. Why not? That's all there is to it. Sure!"

"I'll take him back to the *Hind,*" said Hardegon.

"Right! The moment the bag's over, my boy." He lifted his voice. "Wire-steerers! Tony! Buck! Tumble up now!"

One man came up.

"Ah, Tony! That's the good boy!" Parran laughed genially. "Where's your chum?"

"He's sick."

"Poor fellow!" He spoke to Hardegon. "Dan, I know you don't like me and you don't like my style of fishing. But do me a favor, will you?"

"Yes," replied Hardegon, who was eager to do anything to get off that cursed vessel. "What is it?"

"Watch that bag for me. Pull her rope when she comes in, eh?"

"All right! But get that guy into his dory, will you? Drunk or sober, get him in!"

"Presently! Presently, my boy!" Parran examined the cables and the good strain on them. This cheered him. He loved the easy dollar.

Another man came forward with a crowbar and took over a wire. Two others appeared at the forward gear.

The bag burst through the lighted waves. It was a good one. Yet nobody gave a cheer for it. The heavy doors, which were used to keep the eighty-foot mouth open, clattered against the hull and came banging into the gallows. The bag followed. It swung badly and almost got out of hand because the men were so stricken that they wouldn't shout the usual signals.

Hardegon bent down and crept under the immense cod-end. He had some difficulty in finding the slip-rope. It was poorly knotted. He gave it a jerk. It didn't slip. He got another purchase on it and put such a strain there that the knot broke too violently. He lost his balance and sprawled. He yelled a warning, a cry for help.

THE sudden rush of fish, pouring out of the opened net, smothered his cry. He went down under the blow. He tried to cry out again. Slime and blood and brine choked his tongue. He fought hard to stay on his knees. He let his head go down so that his arms might protect his mouth. The vast weight—tons of fish—pressed against him and under him. He felt the frantic blows of big cod, heard the uproar of their dying. He heaved his shoulders against that writhing, slippery mass.

Twice the fall of fish defeated him. He joined his hands over his head and drove them up to divide the avalanche. His third attempt succeeded. He sucked in air and tried to take a step forward.

By this time, the net had emptied its catch. The force pressing him down lessened. He shouted again and tried to take a step forward. He was as strong as any man in the fleet, yet this was a struggle that sapped him quickly. He went down on his knees and heaved forward an inch or two. There, in one last despairing effort, he thrust out his hands to break through to the mesh, where he could breathe. Even in the last, frantic seconds, his stifling heart cried out, "How I have been tricked!"

It was to Parran and Roades he laid this fate. A crazy thought. Crazy!

His anger and loathing of such a death roused up his heart. He struck out savagely with his hands. At one and the same instant, both hands closed on a man's throat, stiffly straining there in the suffocating dark. Certain now that he had been hoodwinked by men who intended to murder him and make the murder seem an accident, he vised his hands on that windpipe. He put all that he had left in him to press that strangle.

Nothing yielded to his fury. The neck did not bend. The man did not cry out. Nor did he fight. Free now of his burden of fish, Hardegon drove his attack forward in a vicious lunge. Not until he had beaten that body down upon the deck, not until then did he understand that he had fought against a dead man.

"The Jonah!"

In the hurly-burly of his outward fall, this shaking knowledge stayed his hands. Once he had filled his mouth with air, he began to think again. He pulled his right hand away from the unyielding flesh. He drew it swiftly down from the nape, searching with fingers outspread. The fingers stopped on the long, ivory hilt of a knife. He put all his strength into the wrenching draw. He pulled the knife clear of the wound. He pitched away and outward, roaring for help. He slid the knife under his jacket and lay upon it; for he knew that he now had the one thing that would hang both Roades and Parran. The two things! The dead man and the knife that had made him dead.

"The Jonah! The Jonah!" He heard the shouts of the frightened draggermen. In that blaze of light, he struggled to his knees. He dashed the slime and scales from his filthy head. He saw men running. Another man cursed loudly and wailed, "He's back in the bag! Oh, by Christ, we're done for now!"

Hardegon rolled over and crawled away from Corkery's body. When he had gained the shelter of the foc'sle house, he thrust Roades' knife down into his boot and tucked the trouser end over it. He then staggered out into the welter of fish and flung up his hands. "'Tis Corkery! John! Corkery washed overboard! No Jonah! Ah, no!"

Parran and Roades came together out of the pilot-house. Roades had been at the bottle. Yet he had balance enough left in him to shout, "Atkins? Atkins?"

Parran cried, "What's that you say, Hardegon?"

"Corkery! 'Tis John Corkery! Washed overboard and back again. What in blue hell is the matter with you, Parran? Haven't ye ever dragged up a man before?"

The word that then passed from Parran to Roades was a short one. And a savage one, uttered in freedom because the draggermen had fled. Even without hearing it, Hardegon

knew the order that Parran had given to his dog. He had told Roades that the wide net had taken from the sea a thing that nets had taken often enough in those days—a dead man. But this time there was a difference. Here was a dead man with their knife and their knife-wound in his back. And, thereby, a hangman's noose in his hands for them. Hands that were frozen in a gesture of supplication and yet had mortal power.

Weak beyond all saying, Hardegon realized that he never could withstand even one blow. Had he taken the *Hind's* revolver from Nora, had it been lying in his pocket, he would have killed Parran and Roades before they took another step. Guile was again his only resource. His clearing brain shouted a warning to him: "You're alone here, chum! Alone!"

He fell back toward the foc'sle and bent down. He filled his burning lungs again and shouted, "Tumble up! Below! Below! Cook! A mug of coffee!"

An answer circled up dolefully. "What say? What say?"

"All hands! All hands! Lively now!" He looked to Parran.

The two captains had reached the body. Its face, barren of all that had once made the thing a man, stopped them there, and, by its ghostly force, enthralled them, chilled them as if it itself had been chilled by death and the wintry deep. The dark, half-open mouth accused them, offered up an indictment that they must answer. And there could only be one answer to this unuttered cry of murder! That answer was the same word—*murder.*

Roades came around the body. Parran stepped over it. Their hands clenched and unclenched.

Hardegon said calmly, "I'm all right. All I want is a mug of coffee to get the taste out of my mouth. I slipped. Why in hell don't you teach those bums how to knot a rope?" He sagged and let his right hand fall to his boot. He said to himself, "I'll rip that Roades and gut the other one! One more step and I'll take them!"

They didn't take the step.

At that moment, the *Doubloon's* cook came teetering out of the companionway, a pitcher of coffee in one hand and a mug slung on his little finger. He asked, "You call for coffee, Captain?"

He saw the dead Corkery and squealed at the sight. He took half a step backward.

Hardegon caught him by the arm and roared in laughter. He yanked the pitcher out of his hand and kicked him briskly on the buttock. "'Tis nothing, you lousy greenhorn! 'Tis only poor John Corkery. Go take a look at him!"

He pushed the cook forward so that he stood between him and the captains.

Another man came up. Hardegon laughed again in his relief and joy. He said, "It's not the Jonah come back! Only poor John Crockery. Washed overboard he was. Throw something over that face or it'll drive you all mad."

He poured a mug of coffee and dumped it into his mouth. He shook the hot drink back and forth and spewed it. He poured another and let it wash down. He did it again and his belly began to sing out in the old strain. He stepped forward and filled the mug once more. He held it out to Roades. "Drink up, Jack! It'll do you good."

Roades was exhausted. He had fallen into that queer listlessness which had often marked him of late, especially when Parran was near him. Like a child bidden by his father, he drank. He held the empty mug before him stupidly, as if he didn't know what should be done with it.

Hardegon took the mug and handed it and the pitcher to the cook. He then turned back to the body. Somebody had flung a blanket over it.

Hardegon said loudly, "Well, here's one drowned man who won't rest easy until he has the old earth over him." He bent down and heaved the body to his shoulder. It lay there like a man of ice. "One man who'll get Christian burial." He gazed at Parran over the flapping edge of the blanket. "Poor, drowned Corkery!" He let his repeated lie give them what present comfort there was in it. He then added, "I came here for him alive. I take him home dead. This here is my old friend. I'll kill the man who stands in my way!"

He swung around toward the rail, where the painter of Roades' dory was made fast to the chains. He said, "Come along, Jack! Come along home to the *Hind* and take a good kink."

Roades stumbled after him. "Why," he said in thick meekness, "I do need a sleep at that. Yes, I do. That is, if I—if I can." He stumbled forward.

Parran held out his arm. But Roades, unseeing and beyond all caring, pitched past that barrier.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LUCK OF THE *GOLDEN HIND*

HARDEGON had only a shadowy idea where the *Hind* lay. Under less perilous circumstances, he would have waited till the *Doubloon* had blown a call and received an answer. He didn't wait for any such exchange now. He had Captain Roades slouched in the stern-sheets and the body of Corkery under the thwart on which he rowed. He had no fear of being lost. He knew that the thing under the thwart could only be a loadstone to the captain of the *Doubloon.* No matter what course Parran might wish to steer, the true needle in his heart must point him in the

Hind's wake to follow her relentlessly; because the *Hind* could not only enrich him now —she could also rob him of his very breath. The wound in Corkery's back was the mortal tell-tale.

It was no surprise to Hardegon, therefore, that the island of light which the *Doubloon* maintained around her, vanished before he had taken twenty strokes. He saw her running-lights change in position.

He lifted his stroke a peg. The lights settled on his course. He saw that Parran was now pursuing him in order to find the schooner and stay with her until the wretched man in the dory stern-sheets could strike upon an action that would free them.

Hardegon had some hours of darkness left to him. He was not in shape to row around there until the dawn revealed the *Hind's* top-masts. Yet he preferred that exhausting toil to the alternative of keeping an uneasy watch aboard the *Doubloon*. Besides, he had learned enough of Nora's resourcefulness, since their departure from Gloucester a few days before, to be sure that the *Hind* had kept watch over him, as he had asked. There were eyes aboard that schooner that could see through fog. This dark night was nothing to them.

He rowed without speaking for about half an hour. At times, he thought Roades had fallen asleep. He had kept the same pose: his bare head hanging forward, his hands slack between his knees. Once Hardegon had sung out to him. There had been no reply. Yet Hardegon took little for granted. He'd had all he wanted of Roades' artfulness. He wouldn't put it past him to plan an attack right then and there. He wasn't at all surprised when, in an increase of light beyond a sparkling tide-rip, he saw that Roades' eyes were brightly open, that he was apparently staring directly at Hardegon's head.

Hardegon spoke in a cheerful tone. He struck hard with the oars and said, "Feeling O.K., Captain?"

Hardegon's reply startled him. It was, "Vessel on fire!"

Hardegon turned toward the bow. He saw a yellow flame rising and falling to the southward. At first, the flame seemed miles away. He turned his head again to take a look from leeward, where there was less spray. The flame was much nearer than he had first judged. As he gazed, another flame appeared. It was so close to the first that they seemed, at times, to merge into one golden blaze.

"No, Captain," he said, "it's no fire. They're at work on the *Hind* and she's bearing down. Or it's a signal."

Hardegon changed his course to the southward. In a few minutes, he saw the *Hind* in full. All her old-fashioned torches were going, their long handles holding the kerosene fires high over her deck. As she drew near, the sea around her burst into a brilliant flow through which she moved slowly. He hailed her.

"Ahoy the *Hind!*"

He was too far away to be heard. He waited until he could make out the men bending over trawl tubs. He hailed her again. This time, the bow watch answered. Hardegon heard the loud, "Wu-roo-oo!" of discovery.

The schooner was under jib and jumbo. He approached to leeward and flung the painter to the men shouting at her rail. He heard a man calling to Nora. She had been in the foc'sle. She came up and stood at the rail.

A doryman pulled the dory alongside.

Hardegon said, "Give Captain Roades a hand there, chum."

HE SAID nothing of his other passenger until Roades had tumbled over the rail and had gone below, with nothing more than a mutter to the men who met him with wordless stares.

As soon as the slide had closed behind the captain, Hardegon called for the dory tackle. He slipped the hooks into the dory-straps and waved the dory up to the rail and over. There he called to Nora and said, "I've another passenger. The body of John Corkery!"

She came close to him. "What's that you say, Dan?"

He told her what had happened aboard the *Doubloon* and how the body had come up in the net. "I tell you first, Nora, because—well, I'm so far gone that I don't know what to say. What more to do." He halted in weary confusion and then added, "I see you're rigging for halibut. I wish we might have done it by daylight. We might have given the *Doubloon* the slip. Right now he's lying off there." He waved his hand.

"He'll not let go," she said.

"No! Nor Roades either."

He let himself down to the deck, looked sharply at her in that yellow flood. The torch-lights gave her a sallow look. Even without that smoky flatness to dull her face, she revealed the inroads that the terrible night and her prolonged anxiety had made. He knew that the loss of the five men on the *Western Star* was a constant despair to her; and he was sure that her knowledge of all the evil in Roades must be an almost intolerable burden.

Now things were so much the worse. It was hard for him to remember that he had once considered her beautiful; because the beaten look that had settled on her, after the loss of the yacht, hadn't gone away. She had grown visibly old. The visored cap that she had pulled down over her black braids made her seem like a sea-worn captain, wearied beyond his strength by running before a gale.

Nevertheless, the torchlight did one thing for her—it revealed her purposeful eyes, made

them large and golden, made them so beautiful that his own heart roused up again. He learned enough more in that glance to tell that, somehow or other, she had once more found the strength to take up the fight.

Hardegon could tell, too, that she had poured something good into her men. They laughed in the old way over their trawls and their fingers numbly worked gangings and hooks onto the lines.

He saw old Clem and the Lisbon staring at him. He called them to his side and said, "From now on, Clem, you and Terry here are to know all that we know. All that I know, especially. Because if I tell Nora something in your presence, then it's evidence for a court of inquiry. And it's to a court we're going in the end, if we're smart enough to keep out of harm's way."

He stooped and pulled the ivory-handled knife out of his boot, laid it on the palm of his hand so that they could see the Miquelon gargoyle of its hilt and the gargoyle's queer, thirsty stare.

"You know this knife?"

"'Tis the captain's?"

"Come you here!" He made them all climb to the dory. He showed them the wrapped body. "John Corkery! Taken up in the *Doubloon's* bag. Aye, knocked out of the cod-end with this hand he was!"

The Lisbon crossed himself.

Hardegon said, "She's told you that Atkins was killed? And how?"

"Yes, Dan."

"And that we saw Roades kill Corkery?"

"Aye!"

"It was this knife in the captain's hand that did it. Bear it in mind now! I took this knife out of John Corkery's body and I hid it from them all. Bear that in mind."

"We will bear it, Dan."

Hardegon tore the blanket away and shifted the body forward until the back of it was revealed. He pointed at a rent in the slicker.

"It's there the knife went in and it's that wound and this knife and our word that will hang his murderers. All must be watched over until we get home. I'll keep the knife. You put the body into canvas and slide it into Number Three pen. There's no fish there yet."

He jumped down to the deck and gave Nora a hand down. He added, "For the time being, we'll keep this to ourselves. Every man must show all respect to the captain and watch him hard. And they won't do that if they know what we know. They'd iron him."

THE old men called others from the tubs and talked to them soberly, telling them that Corkery had been drowned. And they set to work on their shipmate's body.

Hardegon said to Nora, "I'll turn in below here. The foc'sle. Let me sleep as long as I can. I couldn't sleep back there with him near me. I'll take Atkins' bunk." He laughed at this. "I hope that Jonah's ghost don't board us." He took her hand and asked, "Can you sleep, my girl? You need it."

"I slept a little, Dan, while we were waiting for you." She closed her free hand on his and, after one backward glance along the deck, came closer to him and whispered, "Slip a friendly arm around a girl and tell her that everything's going to be all right!"

He put his arm around her and whispered reassuringly, "Everything's going to be all right, Nora."

"Some girls have pretty faces and gentle hands. Others—"

He laughed gently. "'Some girls have pretty faces and gentle hands.' One I know has an ugly mug and hands like a doryman, but underneath that rough exterior, as the books say, there beats a heart—a heart—"

"Well, say it, Daniel!"

"Why, that's all! There beats a heart!" And out of his own heart, he took something to sweeten that last word, to put such a tender stress on it that the word pierced her heart and made her turn away.

A doryman came by them. He carried two more torches. He rigged one at the hawse-hole and the other on the bowsprit, lighted them. Their flames widened the *Hind's* glare as she blew along. The helmsman shouted and all the men left their trawls and hurried to their stations. The mainsail went banging up and the foresail followed. The *Hind* began to drive to the eastward.

"There's more in this, Dan," said Nora, "than meets the eye. Yes, the Lisbon said we'd do well to stay all dark and pick you up and give Parran the slip. But another notion came into my mind. And I was pretty sure we couldn't drop him, anyway."

"Another notion! That means something bad. I could tell by looking at you that there was some weather making."

"Not this time! Not something bad—no, Dan. I went to work on the old chart with Clem. And while we were figuring out how far east of us that trip of halibut was made—the note says it was on Misaine Bank in one hundred fathoms—well, I figured out something for myself. I haven't told Clem yet for fear he'd think me a greenhorn, but I'll tell you if—"

"Tell it, chum!"

"Ambrose and the *Western Star!*"

"Aye?"

"I thought—I hoped—" She paused and then let her hopeful words rush out. "I thought maybe they'd be alive, Dan, and might see our torches. The gale drove them where we are going. The same course." She halted in dismay. "Ah, I can see you think it's a wild thing to say!"

He took her hand. He started to speak of her hope, but he shook his head and held back his thought. He said instead, "All right! But there's one thing you promised to tell me and you haven't yet."

"What's that?" She remembered at once and said, "About Roades ashore?"

"Yes! The thing that Atkins knew about. He told me that they were together when—well—when they did what they did do. What was it?"

"One of them—Parran, Atkins or Roades—murdered a woman in Yarmouth. A light-o'-love."

"Who else knows?"

"The Lisbon. Yes, and others."

"They will never escape!"

"They cannot."

"Then you'll have to come below with me now. Before you sleep, Dan. I can't face Jack Roades alone. I've waited long enough to do this. I waited because Ambrose told me to. And the Lisbon. Whatever fate Jack Roades meets, he'll not meet it as captain of the *Hind*. He's through. A prisoner aboard the vessel." She took him by the hand again. "Dan, you came on here as mate and doryman. I know now why you came. You are here—and have suffered terribly—because you have always loved me. Now you must do one thing more."

"Say it!"

"You are skipper of the *Hind* from now on."

"All right."

"Call the watch."

The dorymen came up. Old Clem was one of them.

She said, "I speak to you as the owner of the *Hind*. In order that everything shall be done properly. Dan Hardegon becomes captain of this vessel now. Mark the time, you Clem."

"I will, miss."

"Mark the reason. Jack Roades is a criminal and is unfit for duty. Come down now and hear me tell him that he's no longer captain of my vessel. I'll say nothing of the reason to him. But for you all—bear this in mind—he's a prisoner and must be watched as one."

Her voice broke and she thrust her hand against her lips to keep them from uttering a wail for the loss she had suffered. She took a step toward the rail and, in the midst of whirling spray tossed up by the *Hind's* swift passage, she said her farewell to a once-loved image. And when she had emptied her heart of that image she led them to the cabin.

The captain lay sprawled in his bunk. At her command, he came out and stood before them, his desperate eyes twitching from one face to another.

Nora said, "I speak to you as the owner of this vessel, Captain Roades. You are relieved of your command. These men will bear witness to my order."

He swayed in his place. His right hand rose in the familiar gesture and beat back the strands of yellow hair. His lips moved noiselessly. He stared at her, at her alone. At last, he whispered, "Why?"

"You are unfit for duty." Nora saw that he was hardly listening to her. His eyes remained fixed upon her, yet he seemed to be watching other things, things too terrible to be looked at long. She said, "Captain Hardegon is in command. You will obey his orders as he obeyed yours."

She left the cabin.

ALL night long the *Hind* sped eastward with a wind that was fair for her. The sky, though dark, was clearer than it had been since the sou'wester had passed.

Nora stayed on deck. Twice she went down into the cabin to take a kink. She got no more than a Gloucesterman's forty winks. The spectacle of Roades, outstretched and snoring, dismayed her. She was glad that he would never again act as skipper of the *Hind*. Yet she was glad, too, that he was aboard; for she was certain that if she had driven him off the vessel, as she wanted to do, his presence on the *Doubloon* might lead to another union of cunning minds that would produce a newer, more ruthless plan against the *Hind*. Such thoughts as these, and her new hopes, kept her awake. Once, while on the cool edge of sleep, she heard the watch hail a vessel. She hurried to the deck and saw the lights of a Canadian schooner.

She said to the watch, "Ask him if that sou'wester hit him."

The voice came wryly back from the other's slanted deck. "Cost me two days' work and some gear, my friend."

The Canadian slid away.

Nora stayed by the watch. The *Hind* spoke another vessel half an hour later. This proved to her that the vessels which had run before the gale were now retracing the courses into which they had been forced.

The second hail was the *Maureen*, a Nova Scotian long-liner. Her watch told them that she had been fishing on the eastern edge of Canso Bank when the gale caught them and drove them clear over Misaine before it blew out.

Nora shouted, "Did you speak any Gloucester vessels back there?"

The watch on the *Maureen*, who was a little jarred by a girl's voice coming out of that bright deck, laughed and then said, "Nary a one, miss! Spoke the *Polar Star* of Lockport last night. She's all right."

"She's a jump ahead of you, Captain. All well aboard!"

"Ah, thank you! Good night, miss. Good night."

The *Maureen* sped into the darkness.

An hour later, the green began to show in the east. They put out the torches. A double watch was set in the bow and the topmastmen stayed aloft with orders to speak any vessel within sight, even if the course had to be altered.

"Except the *Doubloon*," said Nora. She cast an angry look behind her. Miles away, with the first rays of the sun flashing off her hull, the dragger followed.

Just as if the dragger captain had an occult influence over Roades that could summon him from drunken sleep, he came up out of the cabin at that moment. He didn't take a look around. He turned his face directly toward the *Doubloon* and gazed at it for a long time. He then came forward. He greeted Nora in an off-hand manner and went down into the galley for his breakfast. He didn't take much. He came on deck again, where he acted like an ordinary doryman. He talked of their fishing and spoke in such calmness that Nora wondered at the depth of his evil resources. Old Clem told him quite casually that they had rigged for halibut and were going to make a set on Misaine.

To this Roades said nothing beyond, "It's worth trying if the old chart says so. Though I've never killed halibut on Misaine to any extent. Still, it's a wandering fish, the halibut."

At noon, Hardegon came to the helm. His long sleep had mended him considerably. It hadn't taken the harsh light out of his eyes, however. This dourness, added to his unshaven face, gave him a ruffian air, which wasn't surprising, considering the things he had seen and done. He had just repeated the Misaine course after the helmsman when one of the men aloft sang out his pealing, "Wu-ree-ee! Wu-ree!" which was the *Hind's* way of saying that something of a mysterious nature had been sighted. Another man, going up to relieve the watch, stopped in the shrouds and sang out, too. Both of them thrust their arms to the eastward and held them stiffly so until Hardegon shouted, "Hard-a-lee!"

The *Hind* was then sailing on the windward tack. At his call, the mainsheet and foresheet gangs jumped to their stations. They hauled briskly and the sails roared across. She fell onto the new tack and ran along, guided by the pointing arms of the bow watch, who sent back word that a capsized dory had been sighted. In a few minutes, the schooner came up to the dory and Hardegon brought her into the wind.

In her halting moment, the Lisbon thrust down a boathook and caught the dory in a place where its bottom-boards had been stove in. He leaned over the rail and intently examined the dory. He spoke briefly to a Nova Scotian hand, who was standing by.

The man nodded and said, "Yes, yes."

The Lisbon shouted to Hardegon, "Shelburne dory, Dan! What you say?"

"Let her go!"

The Lisbon twisted his hook out and the dory whirled away. The Lisbon stayed at the rail alone. He gazed after the dory thoughtfully; then he drifted aft and stood there, his eyes fixed on that wreckage. He was watching something else, too, something to which they were quite accustomed now—the tenacious *Doubloon* standing on their course. He saw something remarkable. The *Doubloon* came up to the Shelburne dory, hooked it as he had, examined it closely, and let it go. Then she came swiftly on, still keeping her distance from the *Hind*.

Hour after hour, the *Golden Hind* sped on her course to Misaine. At times, she logged thirteen or fourteen knots because the wind freshened and stayed fair and they had put on all her muslin. At last, Hardegon called old Clem and told him they were not far from the edge of the bank.

"Tell them to bait up, Clem."

Clem grinned and went forward, shouting, "Bait up! Bait up!"

He flung off the cover of the main hatch and went down the ladder into the pens where the herring lay. The full tubs began swinging up. The cutting-boards were set and, not long after mid-day, the trawls were baited and ready for the dories.

Hardegon kept the schooner under jib and jumbo for the slow sailing of the set. He became much livelier as the time for fishing drew near. He considered the venture a questionable gamble, but it was he who discovered a rather unusual sign that the miracle of a good trip might yet be made. He whooped and pointed to the edge of a tide-rip to leeward. For a time, no other man could make out what he had seen; then a great gray shape flashed out of a curl of foam, which had hidden it, and hurled itself across the black water of the rip. It was a halibut—in such good spirits and so hungry that he chased the cod to the surface.

The men saw him thrash and dive.

One shouted, "There goes twenty dollars!"

Another answered, "And here we go after him!"

Hardegon waved his hand. "Buoy away!"

Old Clem flung his buoy over and jumped into his dory. The Lisbon, his dorymate, joined him and they swayed there until Captain Hardegon lifted his hand again.

"Dory away!"

Hardegon gave the direction of the set, toward the tide-rip. Clem shouted, lifted his heaving-stick and began the set that was to determine the old *Hind's* fate. The other dories dropped off.

Hardegon watched the dories anxiously. Far to the southward of them, the *Doubloon* sailed. The sea lay flat between the vessels; and, it being slack water, the dories moved in undisturbed rhythm through the set.

THERE was no great margin of time before nightfall. Therefore, it was determined that the dories should not return until after hauling. One by one, Hardegon saw them finish the set.

Sail after sail rose on the frosty blue until all the dories were on the way back to the inner buoys. There they tied up and waited for the fishing signal. The men lay down in the dories to keep out of the wind, so that their dories seemed manless and whirling adrift.

Hardegon gave the fish two hours to feed. At last, he brought the *Hind* around and began the passage down the line. Halfway down, he blew the fishing signal. No sooner had the dories taken in their buoys than a piercing blast from a conch-horn blew over the water from a dory in the middle of the set.

"Hey!" cried the cook.

"Wait a minute!" Hardegon listened.

It was then that the triumphant chorus began. A clamor of horns and strong voices shouted the good news from dory to dory and on to the anxious *Hind*.

"They've struck in!" The cook danced a heavy step to mark his joy. "Halibut—by the Lord Harry! We're rich men—all of us!" He patted the *Hind's* rail in a fond gesture and said, "You found them, my girl. You found them!"

"Aye!" said Hardegon. "Struck in all right! But is it halibut? Or cod?"

He kept his eyes fixed on a dory. Presently he saw an arm raised. A doryman bent in the gaffing blow and leaned over the gunwale even farther.

A gray, tugging shape appeared under the bow of the dory. Hardegon shifted his gaze. He saw the same picture again and again—the gaff upraised, the strain, and a great fish thrashing against the black dory.

He said, "Cook, it's halibut. Halibut on Misaine. Never thought I'd live to see the day! Fifty cents a pound and full pens—that's the story! And time for it. Lend a hand on the checkers." He turned to the wide boards that formed the deck pens. He then said, "No! You go below and tell Nora that we've got the halibut."

Nora came up. She heard the story and could say nothing. Her heart filled up too quickly with relief and with the great happiness that, here on Misaine, after all the bad luck, a turn had apparently come. She went forward and stood in the bow. Hardegon watched her as she swung away. He could see new life and new hope making her over. Her long arms lifted in a sudden grace when she sidestepped to balance herself against a lurch of the vessel.

They hadn't long to wait for the proof of their luck. A sail appeared, another drew behind it, and a third and fourth rose. It was plain that the harvest had been good. The dories rode deep. Sometimes, in the long slide over the rips, a dory canted a bit and showed the gray giants gleaming. They came alongside and, in a silence that revealed the depth of their happiness, they forked the halibut, great and small, into the pens.

There were fish that weighed two hundred pounds, others of a hundred, and doryloads of smaller fish. There were chickens and fine steaker cod, too, fit to lie alongside the magnificent halibut.

"Five thousand dollars' worth!" Old Clem, first aboard for the icing down of the halibut and the dressing of the cod, was the first to put a figure on their hopes.

Hardegon nodded. At this, the dorymen let their tongues clack. They gave loud praise to Nora and made her go down and bring the old chart and show them the legend written on Misaine fifty years before: *Halibut here—60,000 in two days*, and, in a less legible scrawl: *Told nobody at home.*

"Neither will we!"

They cleared the pens, ate, baited up and rowed away for the second set. It was harder because the tide was running the other way and it wasn't finished until the moon had risen and the north had filled with stars. They did better than before.

One by one, the laden dories sailed homeward and the pitchforks gleamed with the blood of mighty fish whirling in the torchlight. On either hand, port and starboard, the dories came up, two at first then three, then the sixth and seventh.

The last dories tarried a while, for they were manned by younger and reckless men, who swore they'd load up until they had to stand on fish. And, indeed, the last dory did almost that much. One man had a place to stand, but his dorymate lay sprawled on a heap of halibut. He lay there and roared with laughter.

Captain Hardegon passed among them cheerfully, measured the stock with his skilled eyes and agreed with them that they had ten thousand dollars' worth and more. There were some wonderful guesses about the price of halibut at Boston. The replies were more than satisfactory because all fish were selling at high prices. As for halibut, there hadn't been a stock of eastern fish landed since the *Fancy Lady* had been sold to the West Indies syndicate.

In the midst of this salvation, Roades kept his bunk. Nevertheless, Nora and Hardegon did not leave off their watchfulness. They knew much more about him now. They knew that he was as good an actor as Parran; and that his guilt-ridden mind could not possibly give up the treachery he must accomplish to free himself of the body in the empty pen below.

(To be concluded)

THE TRAIL AHEAD

I confess to a special liking for a story which has something of a plot and which issues in a dramatic climax, a type which has had many distinguished exponents from Sir Walter Scott through Stevenson and Maupassant to Kipling and Conrad. To this school Thomas Raddall belongs, and he is worthy of a great succession. He has the rare gift of swift, spare, clean-limbed narrative. And he has great stories to tell.

With the above words the late John Buchan (many of whose own stories appeared in these pages) prefaces his introduction to a collection of Raddall's tales which appeared in book-form in 1939. By that time Buchan was Lord Tweedsmuir and Governor General of Canada but he still found time to read adventure stories and knew a good one when he saw it. Next month *Adventure* is proud to bring you the first chapters of a glorious yarn—

"ROGER SUDDEN"
By THOMAS H. RADDALL

It's in the same fine tradition Buchan mentions above—a tale that would have gladdened the heart of the author of "The Thirty-Nine Steps" and "Prester John," could he but read it. Set in 18th Century England and the colonial wilderness of Nova Scotia, it follows the action- crammed career of a young adherent to Bonnie Prince Charlie who, tired of fighting for a lost and hopeless cause, comes to America to wrest a fortune from the bleak shore where Halifax now stands. This great novel which we will publish in five parts has every ingredient an adventure story should have—and each one is seasoned to the most exacting taste.

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GOLD is where you find it—and isn't where you don't.

Query:—I would like to know if there are prospects of finding gold, silver or other valuable metals—other than iron and zinc—in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. Can you give me any data on this?

—Pfc. Edmund Patnode,
Port Eads, La.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—You've picked a very unpromising region for gold, silver, or other of the more valuable metals or ores, in the Adirondacks of New York State. In fact, none have been found there of commercial importance, although a little lead ore occurs in scattered spots. Iron ore forms the most important metallic, most of it coming from near Fort Henry on west shore of Lake Champlain, north of Crown Point and easterly from Mt. Marcy. It occurs in the crystalline rocks of this portion of the Adirondacks, which also furnish some talc and graphite and that's about all of any importance.

These crystalline rocks are the archaen granites and gneisses that protruded in ancient times above the pre-Cambrian ocean covering most of this part of the continent. It is flanked by Cambrian sandstones and Ordovician limestones and shales, which run on southerly into New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Later on in geological history, the vast Laurentian Glacier spread south from the Hudson Bay region plowing deeply into rocks of eastern Canada, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and parts of Massachusetts, and scoured them slick and clean, leaving great areas of glacial gravels and silts that buried almost everything except the highest mountains, though later erosion altered and reformed it to numerous places. But all this is not the mineral-forming rock formation which forms the promising mineral regions of eastern Canada, most of which are in Ontario and a few in Quebec. These are known as the "Keewatin" and also the "Temiskaming," being contacts of metamorphic sedimentaries with intruded eruptive rocks, which are not known to occur in the Adirondacks.

I have never heard of any belt of serpentine having been discovered in the Adirondacks, so that precludes finding chromite, unless you could be lucky enough to run across it. Serpentine usually alters into talc sooner or later, and since talc is mined commercially there, or has been, it might be a chance worth looking into. But that's about the best I can suggest.

PISTOLS at a thousand paces.

Query:—A friend of mine has been boasting of a pistol he owns. He claims he has shot at—and hit—targets at 1000 yds. When I told him I had never heard of a pistol with any such range—and I have done a lot or rifle and pistol work in the last 60 yrs.—he was very indignant and declined to tell me any more details.

Is there in existence—anywhere—a pistol with any such range? Or near it?

—Albert E. Cass
6236 N. Broad St.,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—Somebody must have a really extraordinary handgun, to be able to make hits at 1000 yds.

On page 417, of McGivern's book on "Fast and Fancy Revolver Shooting," you can see seven hits out of ten shots on the man target at 600 yards, shot before plenty of witnesses, with the .357 S & W Magnum revolver. I know of nothing absolutely to be relied upon for range, other than the above. Elmer Keith, of North Fork, Idaho, writing of long-range revolver work, some years ago in the *American Rifleman,* told of dropping bullets at long ranges, and it seems to me it was about 1100 yards, though of this I can't be sure, as my files are not here, with a .44 Special revolver, which I believe was a Single Action Colt with long barrel. I seem to recall he hit a large tree trunk with some regularity.

These two instances are all I have of record, as to the performance of handguns at long ranges. Some gunsmiths have cut down single shot rifles to handguns, and some astonishing long-range work has been done with them, I think, but no records appear to have been kept.

But it would certainly be interesting, and informative, to see your friend doing some long-range work with his pistol; he may actually have something good.

"Don't tell me you never had a chance!"

"Ten years ago you and I worked at the same machines. We were *both* discontented. Remember the noon we saw the International Correspondence Schools' advertisement? That woke me up. I realized that to get ahead I needed special training, and I decided to let the I. C. S. help me. When I marked the coupon I asked you to sign with me. You said, 'Aw, forget it!'

"I made the most of my opportunity and have been climbing ever since. You had the same chance I had, but you turned it down. No, Jim, you can't expect promotion until you've trained yourself to handle bigger work."

• • •

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

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Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

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★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, T. H.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

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Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Adventure*. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N.C., S. C., Fla. Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 105)

anyone could have told it was there, just by the look of the water! Lord help us, ran on a bar!"

"We'll get off," said Brechin, stiffly. "The Japs are cleaned out, are they? I'm going ashore, to pick up those guns of theirs and any wounded." He paused and swallowed hard. "I'm—very much obliged to you, of course! And you couldn't be expected to know about those guns."

"That's all right," said Freeman, oddly abashed. "Maybe you couldn't be expected to know about that sandbar. Though, how anybody with two eyes— But it's all right, and it won't go any farther. I'll get those guns for you if you like, and the prisoners. You can try floating the sloop off while I'm about it."

"No, I'll see to it, thanks. I want to have a look ashore, in any case."

"Well, I'll stand by, then. You may need a bit of a pull, to get you off."

"As you please!" A sudden impulse of frankness descended upon Brechin, and he said, "Look here! What made you do it? Why go to all that trouble for a chap you had no reason to like? Straight, now!"

Black Jack Freeman considered. "Well, a chap don't like to see those Japs making free with his territory," he offered.

"That isn't it! Straight, I said!"

The big man took a deep breath. "Well, then, it was this way! The war won't last forever, and we've the future to think of. I'd hate to have to learn a new man's ways, now I'm used to yours. If we've got anything to settle, it's between ourselves, and no business of a lot of Japs! I'm saying that the war's just something that breaks in on a man's real, steady business, like yours and mine. But we'll get back to that one of these days, and then I'd be sorry if the Japs had nabbed you. It's like one of them stories in the papers—'to be continued.' I mean, we're not done with one another yet, eh?"

"Quite!" said James Brechin drily, though laughter seethed within him. "I'm going ashore now. If you care to stand by—"

"Yes, I'll see you afloat." Freeman turned away.

In the boat, on his way back to the *Swagman,* he was shaking his big head. "Ran on the bar!" he repeated. "Lord love us, he ran on the bar! Eh, but I'll have to take him in hand, if he's to last out his proper time!"

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Louis Dworak, born July 26, 1919 in Meriden, Conn., left home in Paterson, N. J. in August 1938. Last heard from in Chicago heading West. Had worked in rodeo which went bankrupt in Miami, Fla. Christmas of 1937. Please notify Joseph J. Dworak Cox, Fire Dept. B, Camp Peary, Va.

Would like to hear from Bill Daly from El Paso, Texas. He is a salesman of automobiles and automobile parts. Very important. J. L. Hobson, 633½ West 85 St., Los Angeles 44, Calif.

Any information as to the whereabouts of Rochus Cofer of Smithfield, Va., last heard of eleven years ago, will be appreciated by his brother, John M. Cofer, 124 N. North Carolina Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.

William J. Smith, age 51 years, light blue eyes, dark brown hair, height 6 ft., last heard of in State of Washington. He was born in Montesano, Wash., and spent school days in Grants Pass, Ore. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his brother-in-law, C. E. Baker, 968 Neilson St., Berkeley 6, Calif.

Albert R. Gately—the best pal I ever had—was last heard from in Missouri. I would like to locate him. Anyone knowing his whereabouts write Morton A. Richard, 1213 N. 24th St., Phoenix, Ariz.

Louis Sixt, probably known as Bob Six, last heard of in Gananoque, Ont. and Vancouver, B. C. Age about 26, height 4 ft. 10 in., weight 135 lbs., gray eyes, back-brushed straight brown hair. Scrapper, gambler, seafaring man. Anyone having knowledge of his whereabouts please write his brother Paul Sixt, c/o *Adventure*.

Max Kennison Todd, please communicate with your grandson, Donald Todd, Rt. 13, Box 781 A, Houston, Texas.

NEW SICKNESS AND ACCIDENT PLAN PAYS $25 WEEKLY BENEFITS

Costs Only $12 a Year—Down Payment $2.50 —Hospital Benefit Included

NEWARK, N. J.—The 58-year old North American Accident Insurance Company of Chicago, announces a new plan that pays $25 a week for 10 weeks for both stated accidents and sicknesses. Plus an additional $25 a week for 4 weeks for accidents requiring hospital confinement. Yet the total cost is only $12 a year. The purpose of this new Premier Limited Double Duty Policy is to bring sickness and accident protection within the reach of men and women who do not have large savings with which to meet sudden doctor or hospital bills, or lost income.

This new plan also has a double-indemnity feature covering travel accidents. You receive $50 a week if disabled by an accident in a bus, taxicab, street car, train, etc., and $75 a week if the accident requires hospital confinement. There is another new special feature that pays up to $25 cash for doctor bills, even for a minor accident such as a cut finger. In case of death by a common accident, the policy pays one thousand dollars cash to your family. Two thousand dollars if caused by a travel accident.

In addition, it covers many common sicknesses such as pneumonia, cancer, appendicitis, etc., paying the weekly benefits whether confined to home or hospital.

The entire cost is only $12 a year, and that applies to men and women between the ages of 15 and 64 inclusive. Between the ages of 65 and 75 the cost is only $18 a year. No reduction in benefits regardless of age. No medical examination is required.

North American Accident Insurance Company of Chicago is one of America's great insurance companies, the largest and oldest exclusive health and accident insurance company in this country. It has paid out over $35,000,000 to grateful policyholders when they needed help most. North American is under the supervision of the Insurance Departments of 47 States and District of Columbia.

Men and women who would like full details about this new plan are urged to write a letter or postcard for a revealing booklet called "Cash or Sympathy". This booklet is absolutely free. It will come by ordinary mail, without charge or obligation of any kind. No one will call to deliver it. We suggest you get a free copy by sending your name and address with postal zone number to Premier Policy Division, North American Accident Insurance Co., 830 Broad St., Dept. 1944, Newark 2, New Jersey.

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