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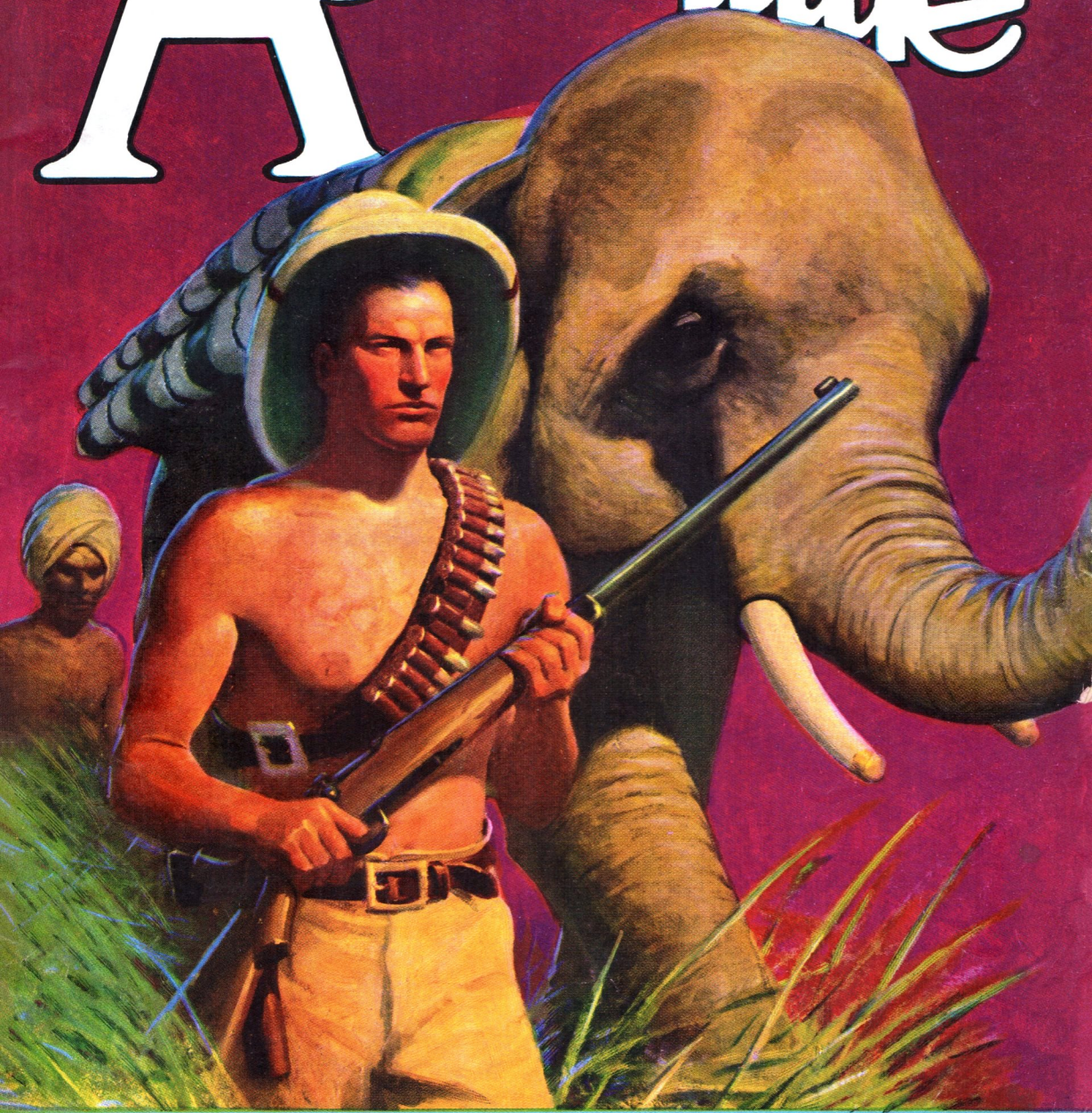

Distinctive Stories By

GORDON YOUNG · ERNEST HAYCOX · GEORGES SURDEZ

JAMES B. HENDRYX · GORDON MacCREAGH · EDMUND S. WHITMAN

ARED WHITE · RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

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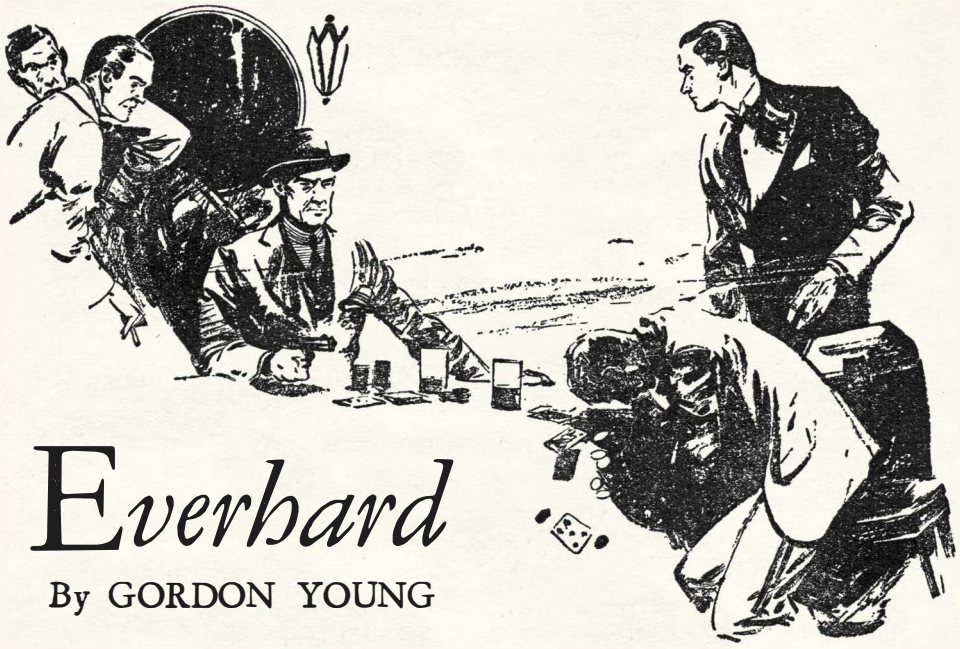
By the Author of "The Devil's Passport"



Everhard

By GORDON YOUNG

THE Pandora Club, on the outskirts of Hollywood, was owned by Benjamin Ivar—a tall, aristocratic fellow, much interested in music and art. Ivar was cold and calm as a dead fish; utterly imperturbable. And whoever had business with him knew that his word was good.

His wife was a vivid woman—dark, always heavily bejeweled, with tawny, deceitful eyes and a smooth, sweet voice that left echoing memories in many a man's ears to make him sleepless. It was said that if Ivar had known half as much about her as did some other people he would have strangled her.

Don Everhard, who had been introduced to the club by Ivar himself, stood inconspicuously in a private room where three or four other men watched a big stud game between a nervous, dark eyed boy and a big, flashy fellow —bad tempered and slightly drunk—to whom the ratty looking kibitzers kowtowed, calling him Chief. Everhard eyed the so-called Chief's face with distaste, although, in its evil way, it was a rather handsome face. Everhard recalled that the Chief was one of those men with whose name rumor had persistently connected Mrs. Ivar.

The dark eyed boy had fool's luck and the nerve to play the limit. He had thinned down the big fellow's roll until nothing was left but a pencil-like core. This went too, as the boy drew a king on the fifth card and paired with the hole.

He was laughing, feverishly excited, as the big fellow, without a word, shot him. The boy collapsed across the table and slid downward, lying supine on the floor.

"Clean 'im," ordered the big man as he swayed a little, resting one hand on the table edge for support. Then, stooping, he dropped the gun beside the boy. "Suicide, see? He lost his pants and took an out. No picture punk gyps *me* out o' twenty grand an' gets away

with it! Hep, you guys?"

"O. K. by me, Chief!"

"Goes here!"

"Anything you say, Chief!"

His satellites crouched in a clawing huddle, robbing the dead boy; the big, slightly drunken gangster chief glowered at them in approval. Then, hearing running feet, he turned and, with a surprise that sobered him suddenly, saw Everhard, inconspicuous and motionless against the wall.

"What the hell? Say, who are you? Listen and get this, damn you, and get it right! He croaked hisself, see? Me, I'm George Bardeley. I run this damn town! Keep your so-and-so mouth shut, and I'll do the right thing by you. Two grand, yeah! If you keep your trap shut! An' a one-way ride if you peep, see?"

Everhard said nothing and did not move. Bardeley was glaring with mystified uneasiness at the glint in his cold, blue-gray eyes when the people who had heard the shot crowded in at the door.

Bardeley swore compassionately.

"Can you beat it? 'F I'd known money meant that much to the kid I'd 'a' give him a couple o' grand. Lost his last dime, outs with a rod and plugs hisself!" More oaths, compassionately, and woeful shakes of the head.

Also, furtively, he glanced at Everhard's lean, muscular face and did not know how to interpret what he saw. All of Bardeley's hangers-on were vowing, with sad headshakes, that the fool kid had croaked himself. They'd 'a' chipped in and filled his pockets; hell, yes—if they'd known.

PEOPLE crowded into the room. Women, in evening finery, thrilled by the horror; their eyes wistfully pitying, for the boy was young and handsome. Men said—

"Tut-tut."

They looked curiously at Bardeley, the big shot in the vice racket. Some spoke to him respectfully, a little proud of the moment's contact with the notorious racketeer.

Bardeley edged near Everhard, gave him a withering glare and spoke from a corner of his mouth.

"See here, you, you goin' to try to shake me down? Two grand 'r flowers! Say somethin', you!"

Everhard said:

"That's my deaf ear. Get around on the other side, and speak louder."

Bardeley gulped, feeling razzed, but certain that no man would dare razz him.

Benjamin Ivar pushed his way through. Tall, slightly gray, thin of face, aristocratic; as unhurried as if suicides and murders were every night's happenings. He glanced about keenly, listened to Bardeley's story and asked—

"Who was with you?"

Ivar had the room cleared of everybody who was not there when the tragedy happened. He stood with the tips of his slender fingers resting on the table's green baize and said:

"The police will be here soon. Now I want the truth. When we have the truth, we know how much to cover up." He waited inscrutably.

Bardeley glowered toward Everhard and bit at the end of a cigar. He kicked the shin of a weasel-snouted youth, signaled with a glance, spat and said:

"That was just the way of it, Ben. You know me an' stud. I got the money, an' I got the guts to play 'em. Why, hell, you an' me, Ben, we're friends. Them police dogs I give you —nothing much, but it shows I'd do anything for you!" With oaths, "An' why 'd I lie to you 'r anybody? You know I can get away with anything in this damn town. I don't have to cover up!"

The weasel-snouted one had pulled at the coat sleeve of a companion, and the two of them edged close to Everhard, glared, curled their lips, looking tough—throwing a scare. Weasel-Snout put his hand to his breast, moved the coat and

showed a shoulder holster.

Ivar turned.

"How did it look to you, Don?"

"Murder," said Everhard.

The tough guys snarled like pinched rats. Bardeley cursed him.

"Why, you lousy mug! You know—Ben, this guy told me it would cost me money. He's tryin' to shake me down."

"Listen, you," said Weasel-Snout. "Why I—I'll—you'll—"

"Tried to shake you down, eh?" said Ivar.

"He sure as hell did!"

"Said he'd be fixed for life."

"Wanted ten grand. I heard 'im!"

Bardeley and his men talked fast, with loud, indignant anger.

Benjamin Ivar eyed one after the other, smiled slowly and spoke in a low, even tone.

"Bad break. You are lying, and I know it. For one thing, he owns a thousand acres of oil land. For another, if he wanted to shake you down, nothing you could do would stop him. You fellows don't know it, but you are talking to Don Everhard!"

Every man there for a moment looked as if he had been kicked in the belly as he stared at Everhard, notorious gambler and gunman, a national—even international—figure.

"And," Ivar went on, his tone as cold as the clink of ice, "if you or anybody else want to put him on the spot, you had better think up some clever way to do it. He's got friends. I'm one. You put him on the spot, Bardeley, and I'd kill you myself!"

That was like another kick in the belly. Ivar was a man of his word.

Bardeley chewed nervously on his cigar. Tobacco oozed out the corners of his mouth. He rammed a forefinger inside his shirt collar and worked it about, uneasily. His tough guys didn't look very dangerous now. They were gaping at the famous gambler, who was said to be—and by many people believed to be—the country's kingpin racketeer.

"Listen," said Bardeley. He spat, wiped his face and looked about as if for a hole to crawl through. "A man like you ain't goin' to—the dicks—Ain't they some way to square it?"

Ivar nodded ambiguously, looked at Everhard and waited.

"I don't make a good appearance on the witness stand," said Everhard to Ivar, ignoring Bardeley. "When lawyers get through with my record, my word's not worth a damn with the jury. But first I've got a right to every dollar that was in the game."

Ivar lifted his eyebrows. Bardeley half growled, half whined—

"Ben, I thought you said he wouldn't shake—"

"That dead boy went broke on roulette. I rather liked his looks. Handed him a bill and said, 'Try that.' He popped the ten on a zero, and collected. He won quite a lot and offered a fifty-fifty split. I told him to keep on playing, then we'd talk it over. He wanted some stud, came in here, cleaned Bardeley and got murdered. I'll collect!"

"B-but—" stammered Bardeley. He swore with a kind of blustering timidity, for the cold glint in Everhard's eyes was on him. Bardeley dodged the eyes and almost groaned. "But, Ben—hell—he just says—who's to know—"

"I know, if he says it," Ivar answered coldly. "Bank my life on him. Have banked my life on him in the past." He tapped the table. "Put it here. Every dime!"

Everhard pocketed the money. Some of the bills had a moist red stain on them. The men glowered, afraid but hoping for another chance. They believed he was grabbing off the money with a ribbed-up story.

"Explain to him," said Everhard with a flip of his hand, "that this hasn't bought him a damn thing. I never saw the boy until tonight. Don't even know his name. But the only way this—" Everhard used an expressive word—"can square himself with me is to blow

out his brains."

Everhard turned his back on them and left the room. When the police came no one mentioned that he had been present at the shooting.

EVERHARD had been Ivar's house guest before he settled down in the Cardiff Apartments with a fat Chinese boy for a servant. It was outside of Ivar's window that he had one night caught sight of Bardeley, talking intimately to the beautiful and exotic Bernice Ivar. Everhard knew that Ivar—foolishly, in Everhard's wary opinion—had forgiven quite a lot in her past when he married her. She had a way of holding even Everhard's hand, with little throbbing squeezes, and of calling him "dear" in a tone that seemed to promise as much as he wanted to ask for.

Everhard was too worldly wise and cautious to repulse her, since she might —as did Madame Potiphar with Joseph —angrily tell the wrong sort of story to her husband. But if Bernice Ivar had known men as well as she thought she did, she would have known that the woman did not live who could make Everhard doublecross a friend. Ivar was his friend.

After the police left, Ivar talked with Everhard in his private office. Ivar placed the tips of his slender fingers together and leaned back in his chair.

"Bardeley's afraid of you. But he will try, somehow, to kill you. If you want to settle with him, be quick about it. He's going into hiding."

"Never a more brutal murder! Let him hide. He'll come up for air sooner or later. Then, we'll see. Something will happen—always does to his kind. Why are you even halfway friendly with him? Nice police dogs he gave you."

Ivar smiled coldly.

"The watchman's a fellow he recommended, too. As for being friendly—money is money with me. I don't ask, any more than a banker, where it comes from. Like the banker, I'm glad to see it come. I know you won't touch a dollar that comes from dope, women or booze, but—"

Everhard tossed the huge roll of bills to the table.

"There. That kid had a sister. He told me of her. Name's Mary. She's getting married. He was trying to make a big winning so as to buy her something fancy for a present. See that she gets it."

Ivar looked at the money, then at Everhard's lean face.

"I know why you're so damned hard to kill. There are too many people praying for you—like that kid's sister will, all her life. But look out for Bardeley. He's tricky and cunning. Thinks deep."

"Um-hm. Wonder what women see in him? They like him, don't they?"

"Oh, yes, yes. But not any of the type that you or I would care about."

"Let us hope so!" said Everhard enigmatically.

A FEW nights later, about two o'clock in the morning, Everhard put the key in his door, opened it slowly and felt for the black silk, gossamer-like thread that his boy Toyo attached every night. Of course, Toyo might have forgotten; but the round cheeked Chinese boy was not forgetful.

Somebody, entering, had broken the thread in opening the door; and perhaps was still waiting inside.

Everhard hummed a little to indicate that he was in a pleasant and unsuspicious mood. He switched on the light in the small entrance hall. No one was there. The door of the living room was closed. Everhard kept an eye on it as he took off his topcoat and hung up his hat. He turned out the light, then opened the living room door, stood to one side, reached in and turned on the light.

"Let 'im have it!" said a voice.

When the shooting was over two men, whom the police and newspapers called

burglars, were dead. They were identified as crooks from the East. They had rung the bell early in the evening, put Toyo in a closet and waited.

"I thought you told me," said Everhard later to Ivar, "that Bardeley was clever—a deep plotter?"

"Some of his gang hired those fellows, Don. I don't believe he knew about it—don't believe he'd risk it. Knows your friends would pin it on him. By the way, he's supposed to be on a trip to Honolulu, but doesn't dare leave. Too much business that needs attention."

"Needs police attention," Everhard suggested.

ONE morning about a week later the roly-poly Chinese boy who attended Everhard eyed a girl at the apartment doorway. He thought her pretty, knew she was angry, saw that she was dressed expensively, bowed low and lied—

"Missa Evalar' he not in, missy."

"I'll wait," she said and walked by him, passed through the small entrance hall and into the big sunny room where Everhard, in dressing gown, stood with hands in his pockets.

She was about twenty-six years old, with hard, dark eyes and a look in them that made him think of dope. Her complexion was shadowed with Latin blood, and there was a bitter twist to her mouth. She held a folded newspaper in one hand and a small leather shopping purse in the other.

She tossed the purse on to a table without taking her eyes off Everhard and stepped close to him, with the newspaper advanced as if to call attention to some story there. The newspaper dropped, disclosing a small automatic, and she jabbed it against his breast.

Everhard's nerves were said to be shock proof, and he had a lot of pride in never showing surprise. He stood stock-still, not flinching, and wondered if the woman was merely crazy or had been sent to kill him.

She cursed him, called him vile names.

"I am Jeanne Valpy!" she said and glared with an expectant look. Her name was rather notorious.

Everhard's face was as hard to read as a closed book. He knew the name, Jeanne Valpy; but had no glimmer of a guess as to why she was in so murderous a rage. Not a nice woman, this Jeanne Valpy, so he had heard and, from her language, knew. A bad one, if stories were true—blackmail and other things. Some years before she had killed a Hollywood playboy, and the newspapers called her beautiful; the jury, innocent.

Undoubtedly she meant to kill Everhard; but, somehow, something seemed wrong. He felt that she was acting, even overacting—using too many cuss-words.

He spoke mildly.

"Just a moment, please."

She swore luridly.

"I'd be willing to hang for killing you, but I won't! Nobody would, you —" Her words were as unladylike as any in the language, and pitched as if she wanted them overheard. "You've got away with everything, but now, rat, this is—"

Everhard pivoted, turning sidewise as he whipped one hand from a dressing gown pocket, striking her arm. The first bullet went through a fold of his dressing gown and struck the wall; the second went into the ceiling, for his hand was clasped to her wrist, holding it overhead.

"No use, my pretty maid!" he said and twisted her arm, not gently.

She cursed him, struggling, and kicked. She drew back her lips like an angry cat and struck, clawing at his face. The fat Chinese boy came running, flapping in his padded slippers, and peered saucer-eyed through the doorway.

"Just rehearsing for the movies, Toyo. Miss Valpy has a part. I'm showing her how not to handle a gun. We'll have tea."

The round faced Chinese boy sucked in his breath, amazed but not deceived. He backed away slowly, shaking his head. It was too much for him to understand.

"Now," said Everhard, pocketing the automatic, "sit down. Tea is coming. Be good for your nerves."

The girl, now terrified, cursed and begged, struggling. She jerked free and ran from the room as if for her life, slamming the door with a great bang.

Everhard shrugged one shoulder, picked up the newspaper and crossed to the table where the purse lay. He called:

"Never mind tea, Toyo. Miss Valpy couldn't wait."

He opened the newspaper, half expecting some headline that might give him a clue; but it was a *Times* that he had read over his coffee, and he knew there was nothing in it that would help him understand.

He took up the purse. There was very little in it: a rouge case, powder box, cigaret case, coin purse, a business card and a crumpled note.

He looked at the card. It read: International Alliance, Detective Agency, M. Richards. M. Richards, from all accounts, was a real person, and not likely to be associated in any way with a blackmailer like the Valpy person. As he was smoothing out the crumpled typewritten note, the doorbell rang insistently. Toyo started for the door, but Everhard sent him back.

"It's the manager, of course!" he said, and opened the door.

"Oh, Mr. Richmond!" said the anguished manager. "Now what has happened?"

The manager of the Cardiff Apartments was a slender, pale, suavely obliging fellow, extremely sensitive about disorderly conduct. He had leased the apartment to Mr. Donald Richmond only to discover that Mr. Richmond was the notorious Everhard.

"A woman walked in and tried to shoot me. I suggest that you call the police. I'd like to find out why you—or your office force down there—let her get by you! Thought you didn't allow women to come to bachelors' apartments. Looks queer. Let's have the police in!"

The manager did not want the police, did not like having the exclusive Cardiff in the papers; and so, on the defensive, protested and apologized, but wanted to talk of the terms he would make to persuade Everhard to give up his lease.

"Not now," said Everhard and went back to the table.

He smoothed out the crumpled note and read with eyes narrowing intently. He read it again, muttered, "I'll be damned!" He studied the note and said to himself, "I really can't blame the lady if she believed it. Hm." He flipped his fingers backhandedly against the note. "She'd never this side of hell have been convicted!"

"Toyo?" he called.

"Lesuh."

"I'm going out. If anybody telephones, tell 'em I am still in good health. That'll make 'em feel bad."

EVERHARD got out of his car before a Hollywood office building, left the elevator at the top floor and entered a door marked: International Alliance. A sharp faced girl said brightly:

"Good morning. To see Miss Richards? Have you an appointment? What is your name?"

"Richmond."

She turned to the switchboard, talked a moment and then reported:

"Sorry, but Miss Richards can't see you this morning. She is very busy. Would you like to talk to—"

"No one else, thank you. Tell her I want to talk about something that's happened to Jeanne Valpy. If that doesn't mean anything to her, then—"

"Oh, wait!" said the girl excitedly, and plugged in again. Then, "Right this way, please. Miss Richards will see you!"

The girl led the way to a private office.

Marie Richards was more than middle aged, rather fat, gray eyed, with a brilliant red frizzled wig. She lolled in a deep leather chair with stocking feet on a window sill and a sheaf of typed papers in her hand. A siphon, glass and decanter were on the taboret near her elbow. In her lap was a package of cigarets, the very strongest kind. She was wearing what had once been a fine kimono, now frayed and not clean. She took off horn rimmed glasses and looked hard at him, with no liking.

Everhard, a fastidious fellow, drew a handkerchief and flipped cigaret ash off a chair before he sat down.

Miss Richards impatiently said—

"Well?" She had a husky, not unpleasant, voice.

He looked her over with some amusement and liking.

"My name is Richmond, but I am better known as Everhard."

Miss Richards sat up as if stuck with a pin, staring hard.

"Yes, yes. Go on." Somehow, she seemed to know just why he was there. Or thought she did.

He said:

"I am guessing. Correct me when I guess wrong. You have been engaged by Jeanne Valpy to—um—find her sister?"

Miss Richards nodded.

"You've come to the right place, brother. Name your price. But be reasonable, that's all. Be reasonable!"

Everhard grinned.

"Nothin' to laugh at!" she snapped.

"From my point of view, there is. Hope to make you see it."

Miss Richards grunted.

"Jeanne Valpy's kid sister has been kidnaped?"

"Aw, come to the point," she said impatiently. "How much do you want?"

"It's been kept from the papers and police?"

"Sure has. There's no doublecross angle to this. You're safe."

"And Miss Valpy has engaged you to contact the kidnapers, if possible, and pay the ransom?"

"That's right," said Miss Richards.

"When is the last time you talked with the Valpy person?"

"On the phone this morning about nine."

"She mention my name?"

"Nope."

Everhard eyed her much as he eyed men across the poker table when they shoved in a big stack of chips.

"All right. Now we'll have a showdown. Take a look at this and tell me what you think."

He held out the crumpled typewritten note. Miss Richards started to read, missed her glasses, snatched them from the table and bent toward the window.

> Dear Miss Valpy:
>
> I am risking my life to tell you that Don Everhard rung in on you the chauffeur that carried off your sister while she was coming from the convent to visit you last Thursday. As always, he has covered up his tracks so he couldn't be hooked up with the deal. But you don't need to worry. Friends have got the girl away from where he had her hid and just as soon as he is taken care of, so we won't be afraid of what he will do to us, we will see that she comes home. This is God's truth, Miss Valpy. But he will rub us out if he finds what we have done. So find some way to take care of him.
>
> —A REAL FRIEND

Miss Richards blinked at the paper, blinked at Everhard, ran her fingers into her wig as if to pull it off, turned the paper over and reread it.

"How did you get this? Is it true? I can't figure you—here—this."

"Has Miss Valpy a sister?"

"Daughter, really. But the child is gone."

"No doubt," said Everhard, nodding pleasantly. "Has disappeared, um? The Valpy person engaged you to contact the kidnapers, of whom, until this minute, you had no trace. Right?"

"Right," Miss Richards answered cautiously.

"Good. We are getting on. The

Valpy person said she wanted it kept from the police and newspapers so the kidnapers would be more ready to do business. Less suspicious. That right?"

Miss Richards nodded warily.

"Now I'll tell you what happened. She wrote this note herself, crumpled it up to show emotion, put it in a purse with your business card, and came to my apartment about an hour ago. She threw the purse on a table, where she expected the police to find it, and poked a gun against my breast. Supposing she hadn't missed?"

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Live and learn, Miss Richards! Now listen. If she had killed me, she would have told her story to the police. They would have found it confirmed by the crumpled note in the purse. She would have said that, just as soon as it came, she, in a desperate fury, had hunted me up and plugged me. And lo! Tomorrow, mysteriously, the child would have been returned. What jury would have doubted?"

"How 'd you know to come to me?"

"She had put your card in the purse, that's how. The police would have come too. That's what the Valpy person wanted. You then would have backed up the story that the child had been gone for almost a week. Fine layout. Perfect crime, eh?"

Miss Richards frowned.

"Yeah, maybe. You're smart. I don't know what to think. But if she had it in for you, why didn't she ring me and—"

Everhard stopped her with a lifted finger and smiled.

"That would have thrown the plot out of gear. Don't you see, her whole defense before the jury was to be that when she got the note she went emotionally crazy? If she had talked with you about it first, that would have been out."

Marie Richards swore and yanked her wig this way and that.

"You tryin' to tell me she used me for an alibi—that the child hasn't been stolen? That she played *me* for a sucker! I don't believe it. And see here, why'd she want to kill you?"

"I suspect the whole thing was suggested to her, and arranged, by a gentleman named George Bardeley. Ever hear of him?"

Miss Richards grimaced and grunted.

"But why?"

Everhard told her of the murder at the Pandora; then, as she continued to eye him with a skeptical scowl, pointed to the phone.

"Call Ben Ivar."

"I sure as hell will! I know Ben. And if that Valpy hophead has put something over on me, I'll choke her."

"That's likely to happen to her. Bardeley will be nervous. She muffed the play, and can squeal."

AS MISS RICHARDS talked on the phone she kept lifting her eyes to Everhard; and when she hung up she took a cigaret, hunted for her lighter, swore, broke the cigaret and said impulsively:

"Ben Ivar says if I don't want to make a fool of myself I'd better bank on whatever you tell me. I know Ben!"

"And Mrs. Ivar?" Everhard inquired blandly.

"Yes, and I know her too!" Miss Richards said with a peculiar inflection. "Now, see here, what do you say to you and me walking in on Jeanne Valpy and talking to her like a pair o' Dutch uncles? I'll choke it out of her and—"

"You go if you like. I believe I know everything she could tell me. Remember this: Bardeley furnished the chauffeur who took care of the child. Give her the works. She'll break. I'll call you this evening to hear how you got on."

"She'll come through, or there'll be extras out—'Old Marie Richards bites woman to death!' Now I got to put on shoes that hurt my feet and squeeze into a corset. And she's had me and my staff runnin' round in circles for almost a week just to build up an alibi

for herself. What I won't do to her!"

That evening over the phone Marie Richards said to Everhard:

"I knocked her jittery by saying I'd tell reporters she had confessed Bardeley framed it. Did she beg—and on her knees? She couldn't figure how we'd hooked Bardeley up with her till—now listen close and get this, 'cause I won't repeat it—till she said she'd bet Bernice Ivar wised you up. I don't know what that means in your young life, but it tells me plenty!"

"Thanks," said Everhard. "Mrs. Ivar, being a smart woman and disliking Bardeley, guessed that—"

"Oh, yeah?" said Miss Richards. "Watch your step. 'By." She hung up.

EVERHARD squirmed out of two invitations by telephone from Mrs. Ivar to dinner; then Ben Ivar himself called up.

"See here, boy. It isn't fair to stay away from people who think as much of you as we do. Counting on you for Tuesday night. Come?"

Ivar was a wealthy man and lived luxuriously, but with an aristocrat's lack of ostentation. Bernice Ivar had a Gypsy's love of gaudy things, and this night, even more than usual, was bedecked with jewels. At the first chance she patted Everhard's hand, pressed his fingers and whispered furtively—

"I must see you alone tonight!"

At dinner a butler and footman passed noiselessly about, while Ivar talked in his low, modulated voice about Italian art; and Bernice Ivar, under the table, pressed Everhard's foot with a light toe and smiled with laughing eyes.

After dinner, Everhard, not wanting to be alone with the beautiful lady who seemed to have got the wrong sort of idea into her head, surprised and delighted Ivar by his interest in etchings, and thus lingered over the portfolio.

Bernice went away and, returning, slipped a note into Everhard's hand; and he, walking across the room to look at a framed etching, read it.

> Dear, I must—simply must—see you tonight, if only for a minute. There is a ladder by the door of the greenhouse and my window will be open. The dogs know you, and I will tell the watchman to expect you. So please, you must come! Won't you?
>
> —BERNICE

He pressed his thumb against the writing and rubbed hard, looked at the paper, pulled an ear and smiled. The ink was not in the least smudged, indicating that the note had been written some time before, probably in the afternoon. He turned toward her and nodded. She smiled radiantly, as if rewarding his promise. Later he whispered—

"At twelve, promptly."

Everhard left the house a little after ten, drove about two blocks, parked his car at the curb, locked it and walked back.

Ivar had quite a large estate surrounded by a high brick wall, with two police dogs running loose and also a night watchman. Ivar did not intend that bandits should walk in on him, as they had in many Hollywood homes, and carry off jewels.

Everhard walked to a corner of the wall, crouched and then jumped. He was curious to know just what Bernice wanted, but had no intention of letting the night watchman catch sight of him. That fellow carried a shotgun, with orders to use it on prowlers. Also, Everhard remembered that he was a friend of Bardeley's.

Everhard, being an athletic fellow, easily got to the top of the ten-foot wall. He flattened himself out on top and peered down into the shrubbery. When he was a house guest, he had made friends with the police dogs—big, alert, intelligent fellows. They were trained not to bark, but with a swift rush to down a prowler; then, standing over him, to yap sharply. He hoped they would remember him as a friend

of the family.

He lay quite awhile, listening; then, hearing no sound at all, cautiously lowered himself. He found a graveled footpath, but kept off it, walking at the side so his feet would make no crunching noise.

Suddenly there was a swift movement nearby—a kind of pattering rush—and the next instant a great police dog had both feet against his breast, almost shoulder high, and the dog's muzzle was as close to his face as if the beast were peering to identify him. Everhard stroked the dog's head and neck, saying softly—

"It's all right, old fellow!"

But he felt that it was damned near not quite all right.

The dog hesitated about dropping down, as if sensing that something was not quite as it should be. He was no sooner down than the second dog appeared, smelled of Everhard's heels, nuzzled his hands, and seemed to ask its mate, "What about this fellow?" Then both of them fell in close behind Everhard, just as if they had said, one to the other, "We'll follow this chap; seems all right, but it is hard to tell about men!"

Everhard was a little puzzled what to do with these dogs. He liked dogs, particularly these, but he couldn't have them tagging him. They could not be locked up—they'd have made a terrific racket—yet he must get rid of them.

He moved with as little appearance of stealth as possible, because he knew the dogs would sense any furtiveness and probably do something about it. He went to a gate beside the garage, drew the heavy bolt, opened the gate and said quietly:

"Go on, Rex! After him, Queen!"

Both dogs bolted. Everhard then quietly closed the gate.

It was not yet more than eleven o'clock. The next thing was to find the watchman who, most likely, was smoking his pipe somewhere and waiting.

There was an outdoor fireplace with hammock swings under an overshadowing oak. Everhard knew the watchman often lingered there. He approached cautiously and, still some distance away, heard the murmur of low voices. Everhard worked around so as to come up through the shadows behind the swing where two people were sitting. He crouched low and moved soundlessly, got near and listened. And as he listened, he half absently put his fingers into his vest pocket and felt of the note Bernice Ivar had given him.

Nearby was a miniature garden made of volcanic rock. He felt about and got hold of a fair sized rock, stood up and, with a high overhand swing, pitched it through the air so that it fell with a crash in the shrubbery toward the back of the house.

The voices were hushed. Then one said—

"What the devil's that?"

"Don't know, but something. Where's them dogs?"

A whistle followed. Pause, then another whistle.

"That was something."

"Sure was. Why don't them dogs come?" Another whistle.

"Don't whistle so much. You'll have Ivar out here."

"I know it. But they always come. I'll have to look around."

"What could that have been? He couldn't have made that noise, could he? Sounded like somebody fell."

"Oh, he'll come to the front gate. Ring the buzzer. Rings three places out here. But them dogs always come. I'll take a walk around."

"Don't be gone long. 'Leven-thirty now—a little past."

Both men arose, stood together for a moment in the shadows; then one, with shotgun in hand, walked in the direction where he had heard the sound.

The other lighted a cigar and began walking up and down nervously on the grass. Suddenly, out of the darkness, a hand fell, hammer-like, and the weight of an automatic .45 was in the hand.

The man dropped without a sound.

Everhard was down on him in an instant, jerked a gun from the fellow's shoulder holster and put it into his side coat pocket; then he explored the man's pockets, and in so doing felt something soft and silky. Everhard drew from the pocket a large black silk handkerchief, studied a moment, then grinned in the darkness and nodded to himself.

"Thinks deep, eh? Hm!" Everhard put the handkerchief into his own pocket.

The man groaned. Everhard clapped a hand over the fellow's mouth, bent low and whispered:

"I'm Everhard! Not a sound or you're through!"

The fellow stirred vaguely, struggling, not yet quite conscious enough to understand. Again the whisper, and still again. The last time the dazed man understood and jerked himself upright as if in a nightmare.

"On your feet, and no noise—or it's curtains! Come along!"

The man begged in whispers with a sound as if half gagged:

"Oh, my Lord! Give me a break—a break!"

"Shut up. No noise. Do as I tell you and I won't shoot you; but one false move and I will. Remember that kid—what a break you gave him!"

Everhard knew the grounds. The greenhouse door was within fifty feet of Mrs. Ivar's bedroom window, and in the direction opposite to the way the watchman had gone.

The ladder was there, as promised. A long, light one.

"Take it," said Everhard, "and put it over there below her window. You've done it before—often, haven't you?"

"Y-yes. Oh, give me a break!"

"Don't make a noise when you set it against the house, or you'll get it right in the back."

The ladder was set up soundlessly below the dimly lighted open window. Beneath the ladder was a bed of tall snapdragons.

"Listen," said Everhard in the lowest of whispers, "put a foot on the bottom rung and wait till I tell you. You've got a chance—a slim one, I hope—more than that boy got! But I'll risk it. Keep your eyes up—right on that window. Don't move—don't look around—or it'll be right in the back of the head!"

Everhard had one hand on the back of the fellow's neck and could feel him shiver, almost senseless with fear. Everhard, with his head half turned, stood alert, peering into the darkness and listening. Suddenly he pushed and whispered:

"Go! But don't look back!"

As the man started in a frantic scramble up the ladder, Everhard pitched a gun near its foot, crouched low, got close to the house and moved off quickly, screened by the tall flowers. There was the faint sound of running feet on turf. The feet paused. A shotgun boomed. Overhead in the dimly lighted room a woman screamed. A bulky shape toppled off the ladder, dropping with a jarring thud into the bed of full blown snapdragons.

Everhard went out of the gate near the garage, paused, wiped his hands on a handkerchief, brushed at his clothes and walked to his car. As he was driving off, a radio police car with screaming siren roared past him on its way to the Ivar home.

THE next morning he sat in Marie Richards's private office. Her shoes were off. She lolled in her deep, worn leather chair with a newspaper spread out in her lap.

"Lord, but I'm sorry for Ben Ivar!" she said with deep emotion in her husky, not unpleasant voice. Then she lighted one of her fearfully strong cigarets. "That Ivar dame's a twister, but no out for her now. Not with that note in her own writing telling Bardeley to come! Bardeley's gun right there at the foot of the ladder like he wanted to make a fight. Didn't know

the skunk had the guts. Funny case—damned if it ain't—all the way round. It was Bardeley who recommended that watchman, too. But I guess, at that, Ben Ivar's glad to find out just what he's been married to."

Everhard leaned back, murmured a vague assent and looked at the ceiling.

"Woman like that could make a fool out of any man. I was just thinking, suppose she had wanted to help Bardeley put *me* away!"

"Wonder she didn't!" Miss Richards growled, and sipped whisky. "She was crazy in love with him, and he had things on her. And her kind don't stop at nothin'!"

Miss Richards emptied the glass and wiped her mouth; then she reached for another cigaret.

"Oh, no, she was always nice to me," said Everhard. "But supposing she had given me a note like that. I might have been climbing up that ladder when the watchman dropped me. Against the house, he couldn't see whom he was shooting. Then supposing—I've got a pretty doubtful reputation, you know—supposing somebody had gone through my pockets and removed the note. Why, then everybody—even Ivar himself, I suspect—would have had to think I was after his wife's jewels. Especially if somebody had thought to tie a black silk handkerchief over my face. Something like this, for instance."

He drew a big black silk handkerchief from his pocket and tossed it to her lap.

"You keep it. I oughtn't to carry a thing like that—not with my reputation. Might be misunderstood, sometime. A fellow like me can't be too careful, can he?"

Fishertown

By HARRY KEMP

THEIR life 's the sea's. By following any street
Your feet will find the waves at either end.
Old fish-nets serve for fences. The land is shaken
Like a ship's deck by all the storms that waken,
Darkening from sky to sky. There 's a calm seat
Where captains sit who sail the sea no more—
Aged, but hale and oaken to the core:
To whom the ocean was a trusted friend.
About the long-wharved, huddled fishertown
Men's talk assumes the ocean's undertone;
Their motions go like gradual nets let down;
And each man stands as on a deck alone.
Even when they group in waiting idleness
The sea's tang stays about them; they confess
In every mood they are the ocean's own.
Their girls who tread the walks go trim and neat
Like ships whose sails and pennants gleam, complete.
Their wives, too, serve the sea, who stay at home
While the men's dancing vessels urge the foam.
The very earth 's a ship, and they its crew!
Their life 's the sea's . . . Sometimes their death is too!

Wild Jack Rhett

By ERNEST HAYCOX

Author of "Winds of Rebellion"

ONE evening in late June, Tod Mallon brought his boys across the Bent River bridge into White Cloud and stopped before Lou BeauHelen's saloon at the intersection of Antelope and Custer Streets. It was all very quiet, but everybody knew why Tod Mallon had come—even that fine old man, Jim Speed, who walked calmly from the saloon to meet Mallon.

Mallon only said—

"You damned fool." Then he fired one shot from the saddle, dropping Speed instantly.

Somebody then began shooting from the courthouse tower. A Mallon rider plunged to the dust. The rest of the crew burst into BeauHelen's place, wrecked it and tore back through the O.K. Stable. Fifteen minutes later the party had recrossed the Bent River bridge, leaving behind five dead men, another who died at midnight, and a slightly injured dancehall girl who had been struck by a stray slug.

Within half an hour six of the leading citizens of the town had met to settle on Jim Speed's successor as marshal; and on the first day of July Wild Jack Rhett rode into White Cloud to see the committee. It was a curious interview. These men were too shrewd to be fooled by a reputation built on fear and a few lucky draws; nevertheless, the moment Rhett entered the room they felt the challenge of his personality; and even Lou BeauHelen, a tough customer himself, straightened and studied Rhett through narrowed eyelids.

Wild Jack Rhett was then thirty-eight, and known wherever the trail led—a professional town-tamer to be employed when all lesser methods failed. He stood before them now at the peak of his reputation—well over six feet and more than two hundred pounds of plain sinew. His hips were slim, his chest wide. His tawny blond hair grew long in the frontier style, and his features, fair and tinted like a girl's, were boldly aquiline and set off by the mustache which skirted his full mouth. He

seemed, without exaggeration, a picturesque man. Then one looked at his eyes, which were large and indigo blue and had the disconcerting trick of remaining too steadily on people and objects. One could see in them, behind the reserve, a lurking suggestion of cold inhumanity. But he had a cool, courteous voice.

"My name is Rhett," he said. "I have your offer."

Lou BeauHelen's attitude continued increasingly thoughtful. Mayor King did the talking.

"We've had a little trouble," said King. "Speed liked to let the boys have their fun, but Tod Mallon mistook it for weakness and got him. Peace officers don't last long here. Either they crack, or they get too chummy with the roughs. This is a difficult town."

Rhett only nodded, as if the story were very old, so King went on:

"White Cloud is a trail town and it gets its money from the boys passing through with the beef. We want them to have a decent play for what they spend. We don't want too much raw graft pulled, and we don't like too much fighting. You've got to use judgment drawing a line tight enough to keep order and still allow liberty."

Rhett nodded again, seeming to listen for more than the mayor's words said; and his big eyes traveled speculatively over the group. When his gaze reached BeauHelen it halted and became more heavily interested. After awhile he said:

"I have always been accustomed to complete authority. I presume to know my job, and I don't want interference."

King thought of another point.

"Speed had a rule that riders were to leave their guns at the stores. He had trouble enforcing it."

Wild Jack Rhett's reply was tinged with contempt.

"A poor rule. Let them pack their hardware."

"It gives the toughs a fair chance at you."

Rhett's jaws tightened. Arrogance faintly stirred behind the established chill of his features.

"I never give a man a fair chance at me. Is that all, gentlemen?"

The group watched him stride away, very solid against the sunlight; and it was Peter Wain, dealer in hides, who at last broke the meditative silence.

"I think," said Wain, "we've got our man."

The meeting broke up then and they all went out, except BeauHelen, who tapped the table with his fingertips and followed the new marshal along Antelope Street with his enigmatic eyes.

AT TEN the next morning Jack Rhett entered BeauHelen's saloon and took a corner table. He said to the floorman—

"Bring me a cigar and a glass of rye." Then he laid both of his black, wooden-butted .44's in front of him.

He drank his rye, lighted his cigar and proceeded to clean and reload his pieces. When he had finished he sat there with both heavy arms idle, very sober and seeming to see nothing.

BeauHelen, counting out the change for another day's business, looked across the length of the room with a glance that was very sharp and curious. It was his pride to know men, his profit to know them. He had no illusions, this saloonkeeper, no scruples or belief in the goodness of any human being.

The scene across the room, he realized, was a bit of showmanship to impress White Cloud, a part of the gunslinger's trade. In the beginning these authorized killers made their displays out of pride; afterward they couldn't stop. A man grew great, and then his greatness was challenged; and he kept on building that formidable air to protect himself. This much BeauHelen understood well enough. What he sought for now in Wild Jack Rhett was some show of weakness behind the heavy wall of solemnity.

Rhett got up and walked deliberately

to the bar, his insistent glance on Beau-Helen. He said emotionlessly—

"You've got something to say to me."

"You're smart," said BeauHelen. "I recognized that. My influence can make you or break you. I didn't want you. Your record is too severe, and my business depends on an open town. The reform element got you. All right, I'll go along. But don't clamp down the lid as hard as the reformers want. Just bear in mind I'll be here when the white ribbon folks have lost their sudden burst of energy."

"I was waiting for that."

"I guess we understand each other," agreed BeauHelen gently. Then he turned with a great show of affability at the sudden entrance of a tall young man, somehow keyed to hurry.

"Any luck, Matt?"

"Just the ride," said the latter.

A sudden grin splashed light across his gray eyes and his dark cheeks, now coated with riding dust. He was weary, yet the ferment of an insistent restlessness was in him. He was tall—even taller than Wild Jack Rhett—with a sense of swiftness about him and a deep faith in himself that took away some of the youth. And as he stood there the difference between those two seemed like that between a free-running fire and a fire nursed within stone walls.

BeauHelen said:

"Matt, here's Jack Rhett, new peace officer for White Cloud. This is Matt Tavener, U.S. deputy marshal for the district, Rhett."

Tavener's glance whipped Rhett with an abrupt, cool interest. He put out his hand.

"Glad to know you."

Rhett's hand brushed Tavener's and quickly withdrew. His air of listening was real and heavy; his slurred drawl might have meant anything.

"You're young," he said.

"Don't be misled," drawled Beau-Helen.

Wild Jack Rhett nodded and without further talk left the saloon. He looked sharply to right and left—a gesture White Cloud was to remember—and went down to the marshal's office. Here, fifteen minutes later, young Matt Tavener found him.

"We might as well get this clear," said Tavener bluntly. "Your job is in town. Mine is everything outside. I have found that town officers seldom like to work with Government men. I'll back you up, or I'll leave you strictly alone."

"I'll handle White Cloud," said Wild Jack Rhett in a monotone.

"Well, you know how I stand. One more thing: I want Tod Mallon. If he comes to White Cloud again he'll have to be taken. Will you do that, or shall I?"

Rhett said idly—

"What is he?"

"Beef and horses for a main suit, with side line in plain robbery. He catches the buffalo-hiders bound out of town with money. He gets an overland stage when there's anything solid on it. He'll rob the beef issue off the reservation or dry-gulch a cattle buyer bound south with specie. I've had nothing to pin on him so far, but I want him now for killing Jim Speed."

Rhett's body filled the office chair. Tavener studied the still face, the wide and fathomless eyes, and a faint doubt touched his forehead. He curtly said—

"Silence won't do, Rhett."

"There's a time for silence," said Rhett. "Never play the other man's game."

"I have no patience for waiting."

"I notice." Rhett's indifferent tone shaded subtly off to a faint, strange echo of kindliness. "How did you come to get into this business?"

"It is a way to make a living."

The marshal's long, tough fingers spread across the desktop. He said abruptly:

"Get out of it. This is a killer's trade. The man that practices it soon dies. One day he makes a mistake."

"You expect to die in the harness?"

asked Tavener, puzzled.

"This is my trade. The man doesn't live who is sly enough to get me. There is no crook in the West whose mind I can't turn inside out at fifty paces."

"You are contradicting yourself, Rhett."

Rhett's broad shoulders moved with slight irritation.

"Perhaps. A marshal's luck is like a bank account. Some day he comes to the end of it, and then it is only a question of time. I have seen a lot of fast and clever men die. Their luck ran out, and quickness and cleverness was no good after that. I had half a dozen friends who took the same road as me. The last one died three years ago in a saloon alley at Fort Worth. I'm the only one left. Find yourself another job, Tavener."

"I don't understand you," remarked Tavener, still puzzled. Then he said, "We were discussing Tod Mallon."

Cloudiness touched Jack Rhett's fair skin; and when he glanced at Tavener the corners of his eyes held a lurking intolerance, as if he had grown tired of being courteous.

"Let *me* handle Tod Mallon."

THERE was peace for a full week, the longest calm since White Cloud's frame buildings had mushroomed beside the Chisholm trail. For a time it seemed that Jack Rhett's reputation—the stark and intangible quality that went with his name—would insure the peace indefinitely; and certainly the Texas men coming up the trail with beef rioted more discreetly in the evenings before returning to the glow of camp-fires across the river. Reverend Sammis mentioned Rhett with approval in his Sunday sermon.

"Sodom," he said, "has its master."

Hearing that, Lou BeauHelen smiled ironically and repeated the phrase one morning to Rhett in the saloon. Rhett received the reported phrase with a shrug of his great shoulders.

"Reformers always expect too much," he said indifferently. "Before another Sunday comes there'll be a party along that doubts my ability. Did you ever hear of human nature changin'?"

BeauHelen's hard amusement deepened as he agreed. They were alike, both schooled in a gray and material world, wasting no hope, believing little. In the cold, lonely isolation of Rhett's life no faith or friendship could enter; as for BeauHelen, nothing mattered but that his cards fell profitably.

Rhett's prediction came true within three days. It was on a Thursday evening, and along Bent River the thickening fires of the Texas herdsmen burned like vivid war signals. Curfew had rung on a street where punchers restlessly tramped in the constant dust. Jack Rhett walked from the hotel just as the Wolf Creek stage swung around the corner of Antelope street; and at that precise moment three riders loped off the Bent River bridge. They came swiftly and turned violently near BeauHelen's saloon. Light struck the tall and shifting body of the foremost of the three, whose quick voice knifed the weltering noise.

"Where's this Rhett that used to be at Abilene?"

White Cloud's people were accustomed to trouble, and the sense of it was very clear here. The stage-driver got off his seat, watching Rhett's body stiffen against the hotel wall. Sound diminished; a piano's quick melody briskly threaded the growing silence. The tall rider said in a louder, more peremptory tone—

"Where's that great man?"

The stage-driver turned to Rhett again, but Rhett was not there. Rhett had quietly gone. Then his voice struck out of another angle of the street, and the driver, deeply astonished, whipped around and saw the marshal stationed a hundred feet from where he had been, still indistinct against a shadowed background. His words were utterly echo-

less in the hush.

"Hello, Sam," he said.

The newcomer started. He was off balance and unprepared, and he never fully turned. Rhett's gun kicked up a detonating crash that swelled like a wave along the building fronts. The tall man cried faintly and fell out of his saddle. His two companions, deep in the blood-lust of the moment, spurred at Rhett. But Rhett had faded once more. Their bullets crashed against the wall of BeauHelen's saloon. After that Rhett's guns boomed out of another angle, his bullets making chaos of the night.

The second of the trio sagged, but clung to his saddle with a desperation witnessed by every soul crowded against the buildings. But he could not hold. He was through, and cried his terror to the remaining partner as he dropped. The last man wheeled toward the Bent River bridge and Rhett, never fully visible during the fight, disappeared altogether.

The thing was so swiftly merciless that it tainted the night. One young rider walked into BeauHelen's and called for a drink, after speaking his mind with a shaken bitterness:

"The damned butcher! I wish I had—"

"Shut up."

Rhett stood in the doorway, his big eyes full of dull fire. A crouched savagery was unmistakably there; and all that he was—all the naked, inhuman coldness of him—affected the saloon strangely. Silence came to it—a silence that was an admission of subservience to the pure flame of Rhett's will. The young rider's sun blackened face gradually turned gray.

"This was my game," said Rhett, "and they were suckers to play it. Never buck a man who's spent his life learnin' to kill, kid. Get out of town and get out now."

The rider tried to match the stare, and for a little while it was a toss-up what he meant to do. Then BeauHelen came along the bar and, knowing the madness that sometimes destroys men, quietly touched the rider's arm.

"Drift, son."

"To hell with your town!" yelled the rider. He lunged toward the door, stopped, turned and yelled again. "This business will go a thousand miles up the trail! Mark this, Mister Marshal. Don't think you can buck the trail! We'll go around this town and let it dry to powder and blow away." And he was gone, leaving behind a reflective quiet.

BeauHelen removed an empty glass from the counter and turned a scrupulously passive face on Jack Rhett; but in his flat, gambler's eyes was mirrored the controlled temper of a man who wasted no emotions and never changed his views.

"It won't do, Rhett," he said, and walked away.

Another man swung through the doors and stopped, staring curiously at Wild Jack Rhett. He said, not to Rhett but to the saloon, in a strange voice—

"It's Tod Mallon."

Outside, the deliberate pacing of a big outfit drummed in the street. BeauHelen slowly came around the long counter.

"Close the games," he said, "and open the back doors."

Wild Jack Rhett stared at BeauHelen with no visible emotion and vanished in the rear.

Tod Mallon had returned. But there was something queer about it. All his twenty riders stopped in the street, not dismounting; and they remained posted there, suggestively quiet. Tod Mallon, a wide, short shape on a jet-black pony, broke from his party and cantered on to the marshal's office. He went in, closing the door. One townsman, curious enough to take the risk, slowly sauntered past that office and looked through the window as he passed. In BeauHelen's he reported later that he had seen Mallon and Wild Jack Rhett standing with a desk between them, talking.

After fifteen minutes Mallon came out, called to his men and left White Cloud as deliberately as he had entered, the Bent River bridge throwing back the hollow reverberation of their passage.

OLD Hack Crow stood in BeauHelen's with a seven-shot Spencer beside him, drinking up a three-month thirst and slowly going crazy. Old Hack was a buffalo hunter, past seventy, gaunt and gray as a wintering wolf. In his day he had followed the fur brigades with Bridger and Bill Williams into lands no white man then had seen. His day was past and he was a little queer; but he could never forget the cunning that had so often saved his scalp. Living on the plains, traveling like a shadow, he hunted hides for Peter Wain. In his pockets were a season's profits.

At ten Wild Jack Rhett, entering BeauHelen's, found him there; at eleven Peter Wain stopped Rhett by the Jeff Davis hotel to speak a warning.

"He'll drink till he sees a band of Arapahoes, and then he'll fort up and start shooting. Jim Speed always laid him away in the jail to sober."

Rhett merely nodded, and Wain went on. It was Sunday, with White Cloud's people parading through Antelope Street to the Reverend Sammis's church where he, deeply indignant, would speak again of "this modern Gomorrah." Wild Jack Rhett had on his best suit—black broadcloth swelling around the big, uncompromising shoulders—and a hard white shirt and Windsor tie that made him a striking figure. Posted there at the hotel, his face expressionless, he looked at the crowd with his strange blue eyes half concealed by cigar smoke; a man somewhat isolated by the rigid social stratification of the town, a paid servant classed little better than the gamblers and toughs he was supposed to subdue. Tavener and his girl found him thus.

"Rhett," said Tavener, "Mary Luray."

Wild Jack Rhett removed his cigar and hat; and across the sober face spread an odd air of respect. There was a grave, still courtesy about him as he bowed and said in a gentle voice—

"Miss Luray, I'm very proud."

"Abilene, Forth Worth," Tavener said to Mary Luray, and the two exchanged glances, as if the man's history had been discussed between them.

Mary Luray was a slim girl whose hatted head reached as far as Matt Tavener's shoulder. Her carriage was quite proud, her crisp features alertly responsive. She had on long white gloves, and the ruffles of her dress set off her white, modeled neck. A little gold watch was attached to her shirtwaist by a fleur-de-lis pin.

"I wanted to know you," she said.

"To meet him," amended Tavener, agreeably, "not to know him. Marshals live in a closed world. It has to be so."

"You see that?" said Wild Jack Rhett in the same inflexibly soft tone. "Peace officers have no friends. Trust is a thing that can't be. He's young for the star, and I observe he still smiles. When he quits smiling it will be too late."

Said the girl, sudden and frank:

"We are to be married on Thursday. I should like you to be there."

Wild Jack Rhett remained motionless, the hot sun glinting across his tawny mane and the pinkness of his cheeks. His eyes changed slightly.

"I'd be most happy, thank you. Tavener, get out of this game."

They went on, Mary Luray lifting a white cloth parasol against the burning light. Ewald Bay, one of BeauHelen's gamblers, walked from the saloon, lighted a cheroot and sauntered along Antelope toward the Bent River bridge, counter to the tardy ones bound in the direction of the Reverend Sammis. A girl came out of Marble John's to join him. Wild Jack Rhett's glance followed them briefly, then swung back to Mary Luray, remaining on her until she disappeared into the church.

Old Hack Crow suddenly appeared

from BeauHelen's and stopped on the walk, one thin arm cradling the seven-shot Spencer. His head made a complete half turn, from the church to Ewald Bay, with the girl from Marble John's, strolling toward the bridge; and he wheeled and went toward the bridge in a shuffling Indian walk, his shoulders swaying ahead of his legs. Wild Jack Rhett's cigar canted upward between his teeth, and his muscles seemed to become more solid. Hack Crow reached the corner of Antelope and Custer. There, beside a water barrel, he dropped swiftly, nothing but his legs revealed to Rhett.

A long, curdling yell shocked the town —the mountain man's wail from a constricted throat. Every soul in the street halted. Ewald Bay whirled in his tracks and flung the girl from Marble John's against a building. The seven-shot Spencer roared out from behind the barrel, shaking the Sunday calm; and Ewald Bay shuddered, took a false step and fell, rolling off the sidewalk. Hack Crow yelled again, pumping his bullets wildly down Antelope, each bit of lead ripping up a track of yellow dust.

Both arms idle at his sides, Wild Jack Rhett watched all this with aloof and cruel calm, while the last report of the seven-shot banged into the startled air and died out. He made no move; he showed no change. The girl from Marble John's was screaming; at the other end of Antelope a crowd stood and watched. Hack Crow rose like a cat from the barrel's shelter and raced along Custer, away from Rhett; he got to his horse and in another moment had left town.

Peter Wain ran out of the church to confront Rhett. He said:

"I warned you of that. Bay's dead, and you refused a fair shot at Crow."

Wild Jack Rhett looked down at Wain with iron indifference.

"Which is the more useful citizen, friend Wain, Crow or Bay? The world is full of gamblers."

Turning abruptly, Rhett walked to the marshal's office.

Death was no novelty to White Cloud, and Boot Hill was full of gamblers. It mattered very little; but a kind-hearted sympathy was expressed for the girl from Marble John's who had, in her own fashion, loved Bay. There was some talk of taking up a purse for her, some talk of the kindly Speed who would have foreseen Hack Crow's madness, and a puzzled curiosity over Wild Jack Rhett's condoning a shooting that had occurred under his very eyes, within reach of his formidable guns.

Then, at five o'clock, a rider came up from the prairie and reported finding Old Hack Crow dead in a coulee, his horse gone and his pockets turned out. White Cloud thought it saw the answer; and that night at the evening services the Reverend Sammis darkly hinted of the paid servant turning against his master.

"The ruffian Crow carried a season's wages in his pocket. It was known he always did that. But he could not be killed and robbed in town, so he was allowed to go to his death in the coulee, where Tod Mallon's men waited. Why did not Marshal Rhett seize Mallon the other night when Mallon rode brazenly into the same street Jim Speed died on? Because it was a meeting of thieves. The business arrangement between Mallon and Jack Rhett is painfully clear."

THAT evening in the saloon BeauHelen said the same thing in a soft, flat voice that held none of the Reverend Sammis's moral indignation. During the quiet hour following supper, Wild Jack Rhett sat isolated and pondering at his customary table, drinking one glass of rye. BeauHelen came over and sat down, laying both his flexible hands on the table top.

"It won't do," he said.

Wild Jack Rhett lifted his heavy chin from his shirt front and stared.

"The game," he murmured, "never changes. I know what you're about to

say."

"I told you I could break you."

"Mallon," said Wild Jack Rhett, "used to be your man. It's an old story to me. Every town's got one insider who plays ball with the wild bunch. I knew you to be that one here when I first saw you. Mallon was your man and you took your profits from his enterprises in return for such useful information as you supplied him. But there was a quarrel, which is always the way, and when he raided your saloon that was the end of the arrangement."

"Very shrewd," breathed BeauHelen.

"It is a very old story. I know it by heart."

"Very shrewd," repeated BeauHelen, exquisitely civil. "But you can not play the same game. You can not be marshal and make your bid for the profits I discarded."

Rhett said—

"All marshals are supposed to be crooked."

"Why else should you be agreeable to Tod Mallon?" challenged BeauHelen.

Wild Jack Rhett's changeless face lowered slightly.

"It might be to keep you two split, friend BeauHelen. I always try to break up the opposition's solid front. It might be that."

BeauHelen rose and called on the floorman for drinks. But Rhett, also rising, shook his head.

"One is my limit."

"I have seen marshals come and go," said BeauHelen. "I didn't want you, for I knew you'd make me trouble. A lot of your predecessors lie yonder in Boot Hill. It is a chancy trade."

"Marshals die," agreed Rhett, unmoved. "They all die. It is only a question of time."

"You're a hard one," BeauHelen said, momentarily admiring the man.

"You might make your peace with Tod Mallon," reflected Rhett. "It would have to be that way. You have little chance at me otherwise."

"It may be that way," BeauHelen drawled; he was almost confidential.

"I would not be surprised. I always expect the worst and am seldom disappointed."

It was nearly dark when Wild Jack Rhett left BeauHelen's, and the odors of the burnt earth were fading before a light breeze from the south. Crossing the street, he walked into his office, but continued on out through the back door; and thereafter he turned about the town until he stood in the gathering shadows opposite the O.K. Stable. Within fifteen minutes he saw Lou BeauHelen ride clear of that dark alley and drift into the prairie. Recognizing this shift of a dark and ancient game, he slowly returned to his office. Matt Tavener was there.

Tavener began:

"I do not question your reasons. The threads of a peace officer's life are considerably more tangled than people know. I should not wish to judge you right now as White Cloud is judging you. Men seem to be what they are not. It is hard to distinguish between the good and the bad of all these people walking down the street."

"A wisdom you ought not to have at your age," said Wild Jack Rhett. "It will not be long before you look at a man's face for the things you shouldn't see. Trust is a fine thing. When you lose it you've got very little left."

"I'm leaving tonight to hunt Mallon. You had your chance and let him go."

"Wait."

"I'm a poor hand for patience."

Rhett said:

"You have a fine girl. If it is not presuming, let me congratulate you, and compliment her. But get out of this. Leave it to men like me, who have no trust. You might get Tod Mallon. But there's a thousand Mallons riding the plains, and one day you'll put your faith in some such man just long enough to turn your back. That will be the end."

"Is that all?"

Rhett said with finality—

"I'll take care of Mallon."

Tavener made a complete turn of the room.

"You let him go the other night. But I believe you, Rhett."

"No man wearing a star should believe anybody," countered Rhett, heavily. "It's a weakness. Haven't I told you?" He stopped speaking and stared up at Tavener's thin face; and the expression in his eyes was turbulent and old. "Kid, you'll never make a killer. You like people; you make allowances for them. Never mind. I'll take care of Mallon."

"Rhett," said Tavener, "I'm blessed if I understand you."

"Every man has his time," Rhett said. "When it comes he knows it, and there's no turning back. Nothing makes any difference then except to stand up to the finish and go out in decent style."

"Yet you're the man that believes in never giving another man a break," said Tavener in wonder.

Rhett spoke curtly.

"Don't try to understand a gunman."

"You want help with Mallon?"

The pale, rough light strengthened along Rhett's eyeballs. Cruelty sparkled there, and a dogged relentlessness.

"I have no faith in help," he said.

His head whipped suddenly around toward the doorway and he slowly stood up, seeing a person waiting in the darkness outside.

"Coming in a moment, Mary," called Tavener.

"Wait," said Rhett and stared at Tavener until the silence grew oppressive. Then he spoke again. "I shall suggest this much. Take one man and ride due north to the first coulee on the cattle trail. Do it now."

"Why?" asked Tavener. "Who would be there? And how do you know it?"

Rhett's reply was dismally grim.

"I am supposed to be in league with Tod Mallon, am I not? If that is so, I ought to know where he is to be found."

"I'd hate to oppose you," mused Tavener.

"If you did, you'd lose," said Rhett, quietly. "I've been fifteen years at this, which is five years beyond average luck."

BY NINE o'clock the soft prairie darkness had fully settled across White Cloud. Faint mist rose from the river. Along Antelope Street the saloon and store lights threw yellow beams through the powdered dust, thickening the shadows in alleys and recesses. Curfew had rung, seeming by its last bronze echo to reverse the character of the town. Beyond Antelope a decent citizenry rested; but on Antelope a wilder element—trail driver, teamster and buffalo hunter—formed a turgid, animated stream. It was something unquenchable rising out of a raw earth, broad and lusty and headlong.

The night marshal, a gray and sadly silent man, found Wild Jack Rhett sitting in a chair on the porch of the Jeff Davis Hotel, obscured by the shadows and impenetrably calm behind his cigar smoke.

"All right," said the night marshal, meaning that he was relieving Rhett.

Rhett rose, but he shook his head.

"Not yet. Get yourself a cup of coffee."

He was looking, over the night marshal's shoulder, across the street where saloon doors were now wide open. BeauHelen stood there. The night marshal moved away at a weary slouch. Rhett remained still, great head taut on his flaring shoulders, exhaling in long, slow gusts. A man went into the saloon, pressing BeauHelen slightly aside; then BeauHelen moved back to the full glow of the doorway, becoming immobile, a signal of trouble to the marshal's narrowing eyes.

The slow trampling of ponies at once became audible, the sound traveling from Custer Street's unlighted end at the eastern edge of the town. BeauHelen heard this and began searching the dimmer banks of gloom for some reaction to the sound of the ponies. Wild

Jack observed him and understood, and his poker face hardened. He took the cigar from his mouth and laid it on the porch rail as the arriving ponies debouched from Custer Street's gloom and turned, halting at the corner of the saloon.

BeauHelen's hand lifted toward the mounted group, implying a definite command to halt; and at that order the horsemen spread out in one deliberate motion until they were elbow to elbow across Antelope Street. Tod Mallon advanced from the line and stopped, his chunky torso square and alert above the saddle. From his location on the obscure porch Wild Jack Rhett, unseen so far, looked on impassively. The street had silenced, and men recoiled from the lights. In another moment the telegraphed warning had passed back, through BeauHelen's, Marble John's place and the hotel, hushing all sound inside those walls. Behind Rhett, in the hotel doorway, a few men whispered together. Tod Mallon, in an even, solemn voice, said—

"Well?"

Wild Jack Rhett stirred, and a shorter, rougher gust of breath came out of his throat. He took two backward paces toward the hotel door. Then he stopped and turned his head. The little crowd in that doorway had vanished, and only one man stood there now; but he stood as if he meant to remain—as if this was his station. Wild Jack Rhett's formidable eyes flashed hard fury at him, and in one fragile, balancing moment the man's fate was decided.

But BeauHelen, who had not yet located Rhett, was calling in a thin, ironic voice:

"Rhett, come out of your hole and meet your friends. What are you afraid of?"

Rhett slowly, very slowly, turned away from the man in the doorway. He stood thus while BeauHelen's echoed talk sank into the soft, warm shadows, looking neither at BeauHelen across the way nor at Mallon slightly to the right of the porch—looking, in fact, at the crystal strip of starlight above the jagged saloon roof. The quiet of the town became unbearable. He reached for his cigar on the porch rail, drew in one last breath of smoke, dropped and crushed the cigar beneath a boot. It was a final gesture. Afterward he went to the edge of the porch and stepped down to the street, the lights instantly catching his tall, rigid frame.

BeauHelen's body seemed to grow thinner against the lamp glow behind him. He said, tonelessly—

"Hello, Rhett."

It was a warning meant to throw Tod Mallon into action. But Rhett's pale eyes were glowing on Mallon; and all the great, brutal rage of this town-tamer flamed on Mallon and held him indecisive for a moment. Rhett's talk rolled through the strung stillness.

"Crooks fall out, but the smell of profits brings them together again. It is an old story."

"You should have known it," droned BeauHelen.

"Nothing surprises me," said Rhett.

"It is a surprise," added BeauHelen, gently, "to find you exposing your great reputation out here in the light."

"Every man has his time," said Rhett. "How are you, Mallon?"

"So long," said BeauHelen, and then lurched out of the saloon doorway into the side shadows.

From the corner of his practiced eye, Wild Jack Rhett saw the man raise his gun. Rhett swung his big body around until he no longer faced Mallon. He aimed his gun with a terrible deliberateness at BeauHelen. Instantly the singing tension of White Cloud was torn apart, and shuddering gouts of sound slammed against the town walls—the combined echoes of two shots close together. But it was Rhett's lead that hit home, catching the gambler's swaying figure. BeauHelen said no more; his body fell into the cushioning dust.

Then Wild Jack Rhett pivoted sharply to cover Mallon, and as he did so he

took Mallon's bullet squarely in his chest. He sighed weakly, but found a last fragment of tiger-like energy that carried his weapon on up against Mallon. It was his second shot, and his last. Mallon dropped from his pony with a great, raging cry, and became a blur on the earth. BeauHelen was down, and Mallon was down. Wild Jack Rhett slowly wheeled and took one step, then dropped as if hit by a sledge.

All the Mallon riders went mad then and began to slash the earth around Rhett with a brutal, unnecessary fire—but only for a moment. A man—the night marshal—began firing from the courthouse tower with such effect that Mallon's men, no longer disciplined, gave ground. There was a fierce final volley from them, and a streaming retreat to the prairie beyond.

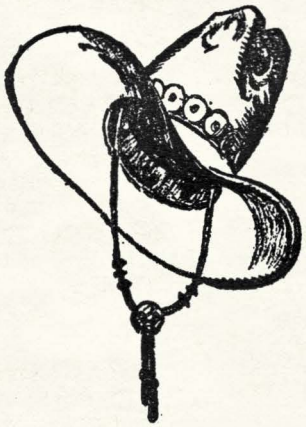
Drawn back five minutes later by the sound of the fight, Matt Tavener found the scene untouched. BeauHelen lay within the shadow of his own saloon. Mallon was a crumpled figure in the heavy dust. And Wild Jack Rhett, more of a mystery now than when living, stared sightlessly at the brilliant prairie stars with an expression faintly ironic, faintly disbelieving.

Matt Tavener stood above him, deeply moved. He said afterward to Peter Wain:

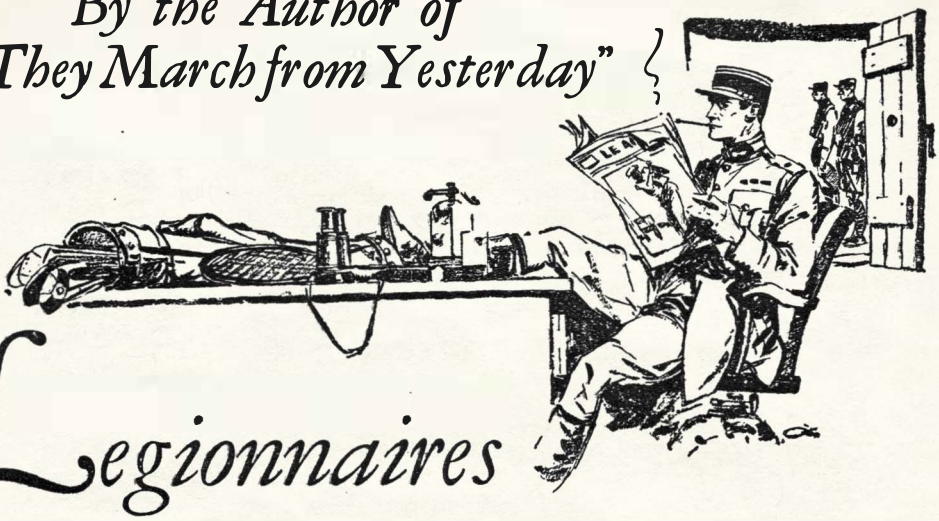
"Nobody knows a peace officer's world. There wasn't any room in this man for much kindliness. But he sent me away, to get me out of what he knew was coming. I think that was kindness."

"He walked into it," reflected Wain. "Why? It was always his style to stay out of the light."

"You don't get it," replied Tavener. "As long as he was sure of himself he never gave anybody an even chance. But he felt that every peace officer had an end like this. You don't get it, Wain. Killers live purely by feeling, like animals. Sometime during the evening he got the warning. After that it was just a matter of pride—to go out standing up and in good style. That's a sort of greatness, ain't it?"



By the Author of "They March from Yesterday"



Legionnaires Must Fight

By GEORGES SURDEZ

SOME claimed that Lieutenant de Monfort did not take his job seriously and did not need to; others blamed him for lack of military dignity. At Bir-Radir, which is nothing more than a growth of masonry on the surface of the Sahara, sixty miles east of the railroad, civilians predicted that he would end tragically, slain by his own Legionnaires.

De Monfort was in command of four scores of the breed, barracked in the redout—a quadrangle of loopholed walls topping a rocky hill a short distance from town. But the burden of responsibility rested very lightly on his shoulders. Whether in town or inside post limits, he paid no attention to his soldiers beyond returning their salutes. They were reputed a particularly rough and rowdy lot—the scrapings of the battalion; but so far as he was concerned they did not exist. He was frankly bored with them and their problems; he admitted that they misbehaved, but refused to consider complaints.

"Talk to Sergeant Loffelhardt; he handles them."

The lieutenant's principal occupation seemed to be to kill time until he was recalled, transferred or ejected. He played billiards, poker, bridge, manille and belote—all equally well—for he was interested in all the activities of the born idler. He rode superbly—he had won ribbons in France—and ordinarily spent the afternoon in the saddle, unless it happened that he was off shooting antelopes. At night he could be located at the Café des Méharistes, where he drank like a gentleman, copiously but never to excess. He affected to avoid the captain commanding the auxiliary native cavalry, and associated with civilians.

At times, when a drunken Legionnaire would peer from the bar's doorway into the room to shout an insult or howl his name with bitter scorn, and his partners would stare at him in embarrassment, a

thin smile of amused scorn would pass over his handsome face. He was aware that the men hated him and that most of them would have given a full month of their meager pay to play him a nasty trick; but he never voiced resentment or wonder. He did not even shrug; he smiled.

Naturally, his attitude aroused curiosity; and when the manager of the local branch of the Société Nationale's bank went to Paris on a flying trip, he was asked to investigate the lieutenant's record.

Upon his return he brought a rather complete oral biography. Armand Henri de Monfort was twenty-five years old, Count of Maverel and baron of something else. Not only did he bear an illustrious name, but he was connected on the paternal side with all that was noble in France, and on the maternal side with all that was important in finance. Both his parents had led a tempestuous existence, had been divorced, and remarried.

De Monfort as a boy had gone from tutors to private schools in France and England. At eighteen he had entered the Military Academy, for there had been a clause in his father's will that he must wear a uniform until thirty, to keep in check his naturally impetuous, undisciplined character. Handsome and clever, he had been very popular in a certain set, had aspired to all the qualities and faults of the romantic cavalry officer.

A resounding scandal had driven him from his regiment; and high connections had saved him for a time by obtaining an assignment for him with the general staff in Paris. He had held this all of two months.

Later he had received an appointment, obviously due to the rankest favoritism, as aide to the French military attaché in a Balkan capital. Careless and impulsive as always, he had attached himself to a beautiful young woman who was discovered to have revolutionary affiliations, and his removal had been demanded from the Ministry of the Interior.

While his conduct in the affair was under investigation, De Monfort had whiled away the nights in gambling. Nine hundred thousand francs had gone in less than a week. This last exploit led to a family council, which in turn resulted in his being given his choice between disgrace and the colonies.

His stay in Sidi bel Abbès, his training periods in other centers with the Foreign Legion, had brought nothing startling. De Monfort had made himself somewhat ridiculous by trying to stir up an interest in polo and golf, both deemed somewhat beyond the means of the average French infantry officer. He took chaffing badly, and in retaliation made it plain that he liked even the shabby night clubs at his disposal better than the somewhat provincial entertainments afforded by local society. He had repeatedly plagued the colonel for a post in the advanced zone, and had been dumped on Bir-Radir not wholly without malice.

De Monfort, as Bir-Radir came to know him, was conceited and something of a snob, but amiable enough. But he had a cold, biting sense of humor, and permitted no one to step within certain reservations he established for himself. Soon after his past became known, one of his customary partners in games of cards remarked jokingly as he raked in a few francs—

"This can't mean much compared to nine hundred thousand."

The lieutenant had picked up the cards, shuffling them slowly.

"You've found out about me, I see."

"Yes, of course, we—"

"Odd," De Monfort stated musingly as he flicked the cards. "Now, it never occurred to me to find out about you."

There was nothing offensive in the words themselves, but his intention was so clear that the other man hated him later quite as intensely as the Legionnaires, whom he had antagonized from the beginning, perhaps unconsciously.

SERGEANT Loffelhardt, German born, thirty-five years old, and a Legionnaire for ten years, had been informed by wireless that the new officer was on his way. He was eager to put on a good show for him, first as a matter of Corps pride, then because gala occasions were rare enough. Barracks, offices, kitchens and stables were scoured, scrubbed, dusted, polished and adorned. Feverish activity reigned for a couple of days; and on the date set eighty Legionnaires were drawn up in the yard of the post, ready for inspection.

The majority were mature soldiers—robust, tanned, egotistical. They made powerful martial silhouettes — muscles showing clearly under the thin stuff of their light uniforms, narrowed at the waist by the blue sash—with leathers spotless and bayonets scintillating. De Monfort was expected to arrive in one of the military automobiles from the railway station. An hour after his departure was reported by radio the men were already sweltering under the fierce sun.

At last a small sport car sped across the plain, up the incline, hurtled through the gate without slowing and ground to a stop near Loffelhardt. De Monfort alighted, introduced himself briskly. He wore civilian garb—a suit of an odd, silky, cream hued fabric, and a soft felt hat. The back of his automobile was piled with luggage—beautiful leather cases, rolls of blankets, a portable gramophone, a tennis kit. He stood for a moment, stick under one arm, dusting his clothes with a handkerchief, then looked up casually at the small tricolor hanging against the leaden blue sky.

"Still on French territory, I see," he remarked.

"French since 1878, Lieutenant," Loffelhardt replied without humor. He did not like the newcomer's tone.

"Then the roads might be better." De Monfort indicated the expectant troopers with a lift of the chin. "Is it the Fourteenth of July down here?"

"No, Lieutenant."

"What's the parade about?"

"Waiting for you, Lieutenant," Loffelhardt informed him, with a note of regret in his voice.

"In this heat? Rather silly, isn't it? I presume you expect me to speak a few words?" De Monfort was ironical.

"That, *mon Lieutenant,*" Loffelhardt said, his face scarlet and his large body stiff in his white uniform, "is as you desire."

De Monfort tapped him on the shoulder with visible kindliness and understanding and faced the Legionnaires. He was tall, slender, younger than their average age. There was something indefinably irking in his pose, an awareness of superiority. To begin with, they were soldiers in uniform, and he had not paid them the compliment of appearing with his ranking evident. Then there was the car, the baggage—all the display of wealth, of luxury.

"Gentlemen," De Monfort said with a politeness, an affectation that made their hair bristle, "you have been wondering what I would be like, hoping against hope that the new broom would not sweep too clean. Be at ease. Your routine shall not be disturbed; I shall not interfere with your honest pleasures. Your excellent sergeant will continue to give you your orders. As for me, my program is simple: Live and let live. That's all."

"Shall I dismiss them?" Loffelhardt asked.

"That might not be a bad idea. By the way, if you have a brace of intelligent chaps in that lot, will you send them to unpack my stuff and fix up my quarters? I understand that, according to regulations, I have to live within post limits."

"All right, Lieutenant. Any orders?"

"None. I'll sign the necessary documents with both hands and my eyes shut, my friend. My horse is coming tomorrow. Have some one to take care of it. Valuable animal. Needless to say,

orderlies and grooms shall be adequately paid."

Loffelhardt was sulky as he escorted his new chief across the sanded yard to the row of low buildings along the northern wall. Legionnaires like to be paid for services rendered outside the strict line of duty; but the bald mention of money was tactless from an officer so freshly come. The sergeant decided that he would not repeat the remark—not that he cared greatly whether De Monfort was hated or not, but a detachment with a grudge against any particular leader becomes difficult to handle. The lieutenant granted the rooms a casual glance.

"Not very comfortable," Loffelhardt apologized.

"I didn't expect it would be," De Monfort said dryly. "Really, I had some idea that Bir-Radir was not in the least like Paris."

"Not bad inside," the noncom thought. "Nervous; doesn't quite know by which end to pick things up and doesn't want to show it."

Aloud he remarked:

"Machine gun two is in bad shape, Lieutenant. I was waiting for you before writing—"

"Once and for all, I'll sign anything, Sergeant."

KNOWING that the desert affects different men in different fashions, the Legionnaires waited for De Monfort to change. In search of an interest, they felt, the young man would soon pay more than enough attention to them.

But they were wrong. The lieutenant remained impersonal in his relations and contacts with them, performing like a machine the strict routine duties exacted from an officer by army regulations. When he chanced to be humane, he was still like a machine. For instance, Loffelhardt having informed him that the wine supplied the sick was of poor quality and further spoiled by too long exposure to the sun, he paid out of his own pocket for a barrel of excellent Macon for the ambulance.

"Gets it over with. No papers to sign," he told the sergeant.

Those who suspected him, because of this, of trying to buy his way to popularity, soon saw their mistake. De Monfort spent his money for his own purposes, that was all. His indifference to what occurred at the post was extraordinary to Legionnaires accustomed to a different type of leader. On pay night De Monfort would enter his quarters as usual, and nothing would bring him out again.

There were near riots, shots were fired on occasion, all with the secret desire to bring him out again. But his door never opened and no light appeared at his window. The next day he asked no questions.

His orderly, a middle aged, bandy-legged Bavarian named Rogge, suffered from his indifference. His was a difficult problem. He had his pride as a valet as well as pride as a Legionnaire, and deemed it unsportsman-like to arouse anger by doing slack work. In desperation, Rogge tried a classic Legion stunt. He took bottles from his chief's personal provision—costly vintage wines and liqueurs—and got drunk in the officer's quarters.

He was sodden, helpless, sprawling on the rugs when De Monfort returned. The young man paid no attention to him, but undressed and went to bed. The following morning Rogge had a terrific headache and a sense of defeat. He offered an apology, in an embarrassed murmur. De Monfort nodded slightly as he went on with breakfast, and did not look at him. Loffelhardt, who knew of the episode from barracks' gossip, asked his chief whether he would not like a new orderly.

"As you wish," De Monfort agreed gently. "But it is a waste of time. The next one would get drunk the same as this chap. Legionnaires are alike, I believe."

As a result, the prideful Rogge never

touched another drop of the officer's liquors.

De Monfort displayed an unshakable, inhuman calm when dealing with Legionnaires. One day, having absented himself from the office for two minutes, he returned to find one of the scribes reading an unfinished personal letter left on the table. He said nothing but, after signing the last page, casually dropped the whole before the private.

"Will you read that aloud, please?"

The poor devil flushed and stammered. In his excitement his foreign accent reappeared. But he had to conclude his reading before his convulsed comrades. He gave up the easy office job and went back to drilling and patrols, unwilling to face the silent De Monfort after that.

Some Legionnaires tried to get at him by mistreating his horse, Gringoire. But the groom, a former Uhlan, had fallen completely in love with the beautiful *barbe,* and guarded him with rifle and bayonet.

Despite Loffelhardt's efforts, the whole detachment leagued on one occasion to make a mute and telling protest against the chief. A major arrived from Ain-Seffra on a tour of inspection. De Monfort escorted him through the barracks, kitchens, infirmary and stables, aloof and calm, immaculate in a white uniform. The Legionnaires, rather deft at that sort of manifestation, had not made the blunder of showing their hand obviously.

There had been no sabotage, nothing of importance could be reproached; but fifty minor details had been purposedly neglected, to plant themselves in the major's consciousness like so many festering barbs. The veteran soldier grew redder and redder, peered oftener and oftener at the lieutenant, blowing through his gray mustache. It was obvious that he was controlling himself only to avoid a public explosion.

He was purple when he led the way into the office for a private conference with De Monfort. Within ten minutes they reappeared, the major with trembling hands, white as a sheet. The younger man had not turned a hair. He escorted his superior to his car, bowed, shook hands and saluted gracefully. Then, without a word of reproof to the sergeants, without a glance at the Legionnaires, he went to his quarters and changed into civilian garb for the rest of the day.

Men on town leave reported him in the café, playing cards as if nothing had occurred. The plotters felt foolish. Of course, De Monfort would not care about a few poor marks on his record. With his connections in high places, he could become a captain when the time limit was reached—if he cared to become a captain, which was doubtful.

IT WAS two months later when Sergeant Loffelhardt doubled from the radio office with a slip in his hand. Territorial headquarters at Colomb-Béchar had wirelessed that a raiding band from Tafilalet had been driven northwest by the Saoura Company of the Camel Corps, that it was reported by the military aviation less than fifty miles from Bir-Radir, and would probably keep on in a northerly direction to reach the hills and safety.

The operator communicated the news to a comrade as soon as the sergeant was out of hearing; and within a few minutes expectant silence wrapped the barracks.

The Legionnaires hoped against hope that they would be ordered out; against hope, for the territorial commander seemed to have forgotten the existence of the Legion in general and of the Bir-Radir detachment in particular. He was from the cavalry, deemed infantry useless in the desert and considered even mounted infantry an offensive anomaly. Probably he would order the native mounted forces to seek the enemy and suggest that the infantrymen keep behind their walls to drill. But there was a chance—a slim chance—that the emergency would change his usual course.

Loffelhardt laid the paper before De Monfort with quivering fingers and waited. The officer was signing documents, which he did not read; and a scribe stood at his left elbow to dry the ink with a big blotter. He brushed the slip aside with the little finger of his left hand, carelessly.

"What's that? Anything concerning this detachment?"

"The military broadcast, Lieutenant. Doesn't concern us directly, but—"

"Does it need acknowledgment, an answer which I can supply better than you?"

"No, Lieutenant. Nevertheless—"

"I'll sign whatever is needed when you get it ready."

Loffelhardt withdrew, discouraged. He was back within twenty minutes. De Monfort had finished his signing, was ready to depart.

"About that message, Lieutenant—"

"I gather you wish me to read it," De Monfort said calmly. "Well, no orders for us here. Nothing I can do."

"The men think that if you wired Béchar and asked permission, the commander might send us after those slobs."

"I make no suggestions to my superiors," De Monfort declared coldly. "It seems I am an exception around here. Is my horse saddled?"

He swung into the saddle, leaving the post seething. He rode all afternoon, returning only to change into civilian garb, then went to town for dinner and a game of cards. Luck was with him that evening.

"Hear there are raiders nearby," one of his partners remarked. "What do you know about it, De Monfort?"

"Just that. Three no trump."

He drank a good deal of Scotch as he played, using champagne as a chaser instead of mineral water. When he rose, at midnight, he felt the liquor in his knees. But the walk to the post would mend that. He took leave of his friends and walked rapidly. Even from a distance, he heard shouts, which increased as he drew nearer the walls. In the clear moonlight of the Sahara he discerned a large group near the main gate. He stopped short when he heard a rifle report, followed immediately by two others. He walked on, resolved to heed nothing.

Within twenty yards of the gate Loffelhardt met him.

"Trouble, Lieutenant. You mustn't go nearer."

"I'm going to bed," De Monfort announced. "Settle it as best you can." He tried to move forward, but Loffelhardt, to his astonishment, held his ground. "I beg your pardon, old chap!"

"You'll be killed in there, Lieutenant."

"Interesting."

"Gownica, the big Pole of the first section, was on nine o'clock leave in town. He came back raving drunk, locked himself with his rifle in supply shack No. 4, and he's waiting for the Lieutenant at the window."

"Touching," De Monfort stated. "But, unless I am mistaken, that is far from novel or original. Classic Legion stunt, eh, like measles in young children."

"He means it, Lieutenant. I was out there a moment ago trying to reason with him. He fired around my feet. He's raving. He says, 'I'll kill the lieutenant!' Better give him a chance to cool down. Might mean two or three men injured, maybe killed otherwise, and a trial later."

"What about getting to bed?" De Monfort wondered. "Being hoisted over the rear wall isn't dignified. And as for walking by and getting myself killed, you must excuse me, Loffelhardt. That would be foolish."

"It would be, Lieutenant. He yells, 'I'll kill the lieutenant for you!' "

"That 'for you' is delicious," De Monfort agreed. "So I'll go back to town and come around in the morning when Monsieur Gownica is asleep."

"I was afraid maybe you wouldn't see it that way."

"Regret your worry, Loffelhardt. Are you sure he commands the entire yard from where he is?"

"You can step inside the gate and see for yourself."

"Twice that lad's left out 'lieutenant'," De Monfort thought, sobering up somewhat. "Does he believe me afraid?"

The idea annoyed him, then he laughed at himself. Why should he risk injury from a drunken man to parade courage before these louts? He had not been born to be slain by a drunken Pole at Bir-Radir. It would be—it would be inelegant.

NEVERTHELESS, he went to see for himself as the sergeant suggested. The yard was deserted—a white flood of moonlight; but there were armed men swarming on the walls, others in the barracks windows or crouched in doorways. The small loophole airing the supply shack stared out like a dark eye.

De Monfort hesitated a moment, surrounded by a group of soldiers. Then he stepped back out of sight of the shack and was about to turn away to go back to town, when a stentorian shout came from the madman:

"I saw you, Monfort, I saw you! Come out alone, you cowardly dog! I'll shoot your guts out for you!"

The lieutenant started.

"You hear," Loffelhardt said. "He's beyond reason."

"Yes, I hear, Sergeant." De Monfort grasped the noncom's arm. "But I note that you misinformed me on one point."

Loffelhardt's muscles twinged.

"About what, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"That chap of yours is not addressing himself to 'the lieutenant', which might not concern me personally. He calls me by name, and abbreviates it, which I tolerate only from equals. Therefore, I am going to bed as usual, *across the yard.*"

"That's crazy, Lieutenant," Loffelhardt said, rubbing the arm released by De Monfort. He suggested hastily, "Talk to him from here, offer to meet him in the open. Then some one can get him from the walls."

"Trick that idiot? I forbid it. Good night."

"You can't chance it, Lieutenant," Loffelhardt protested, seriously this time.

"So far, I have made only requests of you, Loffelhardt. This time it is an order. No one is to move, to interfere in any way until I am in my room or killed."

"He'll shoot, Lieutenant," a Legionnaire warned.

"I should hope so," De Monfort retorted. "Otherwise this would make us all ridiculous."

He straightened the lapels of his coat, stepped out into the yard. De Monfort was brave. No man of his blood had ever been known as anything but brave; courage was considered as normal as bodily cleanliness. But there was the physical cringing from hurt which no man can claim to ignore. His spirit had greeted the challenge placidly, but it had to drive a reluctant body forward.

This simple walk across the yard called for a very special sort of courage, for a steadiness of nerve hard to achieve. To begin with, there were witnesses; and to be worth doing, this stunt must be perfectly done. It was not a question of running the gauntlet of shots at top speed, dodging, ducking, active every second—too active to think. De Monfort had to walk as usual, at his ordinary gait, not too slowly, not too rapidly. It would be difficult not to exaggerate deliberation or haste, but to appear as a man going to his quarters to retire for the night without any thought of peril.

Before he had taken three steps he had weighed his chances. The range was very short. But he recalled that Gownica was not a very good shot. The moon's glow would make accuracy difficult, for it supplied a clear but deceptive light, distorting outlines and distances. The fellow was drunk, excited, with nerves jangling. Allowed to run, De Monfort would have bet on himself and

offered odds. At a walk, he had one chance in ten of escaping injury, five chances in ten of escaping death.

The night wind suddenly felt chilly on his forehead, and De Monfort realized that he was sweating as he strode —sweating like a scared horse. Something pulsed in his throat, inside the crooks of his elbows, pounding and leaping. A thousand thoughts whirled in his brain—that he was stupid to have started out, that the exhibition was not worth the price, that it was too late to turn back.

A third of the way across a new agony gripped him; for Gownica did not shoot. His terror sprang from something that would not occur! Step followed step, even, easy, with his head erect—but not too erect—with the feeling of all those eyes fastened on him. Not a sound came from within the walls, and he heard jackals howling in the dunes far away. His hands seemed to feel the air, as if his fingers were quivering with a new sensitiveness. His sense of smell was extraordinarily sharp. There was the faint drifting odor of moldy grain and a stronger reek of burnt coffee beans.

If only Gownica would start shooting! De Monfort smiled. The yokel had lost his nerve at the last moment, picturing court-martial, imprisonment, execution. Perhaps Gownica dreaded degradation more than anything else; for such chaps are peculiar and hold true to bizarre fetishes of honor and worthiness.

In the seconds consumed in reaching the middle of the yard De Monfort knew he had been mistaken. Gownica was not afraid. He was biding his time, tasting the minutes to the full, lingering gratefully. He would permit De Monfort to reach his door after parading all the way, and drop him as he reached for the handle. Yet the officer must not stop, must not hesitate, must do nothing to gain time or precipitate the issue. He must move toward the door which loomed plainly, a quadrangle of blue shadow in the snowy white of the wall, an oblong of darkness against which his white silhouette would act as a perfect target.

He must walk to that door, relentlessly, inexorably. When he reached it, Gownica would fire, emptying his magazine. And the door appeared to be sucking him forward at that crazy, even pace. Nearer and nearer, until it was so near that three long leaps would bring his hands to the handle, another leap would mean utter security. Three leaps that could not be taken, two leaps that must not be taken, then three steps only, two—

AS HE stared at the door the gun cracked loudly—once, twice, three times. He heard the shots on his left. Men were running now, shouting, but he was held by that door and moved for it as before. His hand was on the doorknob, which yielded. The panel swung back. He had lost count of the multiple impacts against wood, against stone.

Then he was inside with the door closed, unhurt.

His fingers were steady as he lighted the lamp and hung up his coat. He sat down to pull off his shoes, moving as if hypnotized. This was what he had come for—to undress and go to bed. But when he sank on the chair he started to breathe hard. He was faint. There was an odd, hot, prickling sensation at the nape of his neck. He had felt this way the day before coming down with scarlet fever.

There was a knock on the door, and De Monfort mumbled a vague invitation. He was not himself, or he would have resented the intrusion. Loffelhardt entered, white but steady. He granted the officer but one glance of complete understanding before searching in a cupboard for the decanter of brandy. He poured out a half tumbler, which De Monfort drank after motioning for the noncom to help himself.

"Beginning to feel it, eh, Lieutenant?" the sergeant said, smacking his lips

knowingly. "Always gets you pretty hard after it's all over."

"I've heard that," De Monfort agreed.

"I got worried when he didn't shoot, Lieutenant. Knew he was waiting for the last moment."

"I knew that too."

Loffelhardt snapped open two buttons of his tunic, poured two more drinks.

"He gave in like a lamb after that, opened the door himself and came out. He's crying. I have him locked up. Tomorrow morning I'll draw up charges and you can sign them at the usual time, Lieutenant. He's good for eight years on this business."

"Means a lot of fuss, doesn't it, Loffelhardt?"

"Sure. Papers, witnesses, Lieutenant."

"No one was hurt, anyway. Is he fairly sober now?"

"You bet."

"I am a little nervous still, Loffelhardt . . ."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"You know regulations, Loffelhardt?"

"Pretty well, Lieutenant."

"I'm not in uniform. Wouldn't it be possible to pay Gownica an informal visit now?"

Loffelhardt looked at his chief curiously, as if he had never seen him until that moment. Then, for the first time, the two exchanged grins.

"It can be arranged, Lieutenant," the sergeant concluded. "Come on."

The door opened, revealing half dressed Legionnaires crowded before it. A murmur greeted the appearance of the officer. Loffelhardt waved his hands.

"Clear out! The lieutenant's unhurt! The swine missed him six times."

There followed a confused chorus of unmistakable relief. De Monfort was surprised that these fellows, who hated him, had been concerned about him. Then he sensed that a new feeling reigned in the post—they were not hostile; they liked him. And he realized suddenly that they understood what he had done, why it had had to be done. In their eyes it had not been a foolhardy, melodramatic exhibition of courage, but a necessary risk accepted.

They had watched him; and because all of them were familiar with danger, with death, they had known his inner doubts. Walking away from them, across the moonlit yard, De Monfort had walked among them for the first time.

"Glad you're all right, Lieutenant," a hoarse voice volunteered.

"Thank you, Legionnaires."

GOWNICA rose when the two entered his cell. Although his head was bare, he automatically brought up his right hand in salute. He was no longer weeping, but was manifestly aware that he was in grave trouble. De Monfort hesitated, feeling his rage dwindling. During his stroll Gownica had loomed as a formidable figure crouching at the loophole behind his rifle. Wide as a door, five feet eleven inches in height, he was nevertheless a pathetic chap now, with his wide, flat, stupid face, the tiny blue eyes peering on either side of his broad, moist nose.

Loffelhardt locked the door and stood in one corner.

"The lieutenant's kind enough not to make charges. But he's going to give you a good hiding. You've earned it." Gownica nodded, waiting for the blows. "You can fight back. That's your right. The lieutenant is not in uniform."

Gownica shook his head slowly. Perhaps he judged that he had sinned enough for one night; perhaps this business of fighting a superior with a husky sergeant standing by was not to his liking. De Monfort, before the passive private, felt foolish and would have liked to spin on his heel and get out. Hoping to stir Gownica, he slapped his face hard. The big yokel's head snapped back, came forward and he was at attention again.

"Useless," he grumbled, wiping his smarting palm with a handkerchief.

He pushed Gownica down upon the

sloping plank serving as a bed.

"Why did you want to shoot me a few minutes ago, and refuse to hit me now?" he challenged. "You're not afraid of me, I know. You're a brave Legionnaire, Gownica. But what made you do what you did?"

"Drunk, Lieutenant."

"There was something else, also. You weren't alone. Somebody told you I should be shot, that's sure. Why did you get drunk tonight?"

"Because I wanted to go and fight. All the comrades want to go and fight. You don't want us to." Gownica's eyes lighted at the thoughts he had mulled over during the evening. "You're rich and you have influence. You came here to let people forget what you did at home—the way we all did, maybe. But you think yourself too big to take chances or fight in a small war like this. So long as you are with us we'll never fight, because the commander-in-chief has orders and won't let you get hurt."

De Monfort laughed, then broke off short.

"Loffelhardt, do the men believe that sort of rot? That my connections in France keep me from being sent into action? That I'd accept that arrangement?"

"They do get funny ideas, Lieutenant."

"Do you believe that?"

"Not any more, Lieutenant."

De Monfort unlocked the door.

"Gownica, get back to your barracks. It's quits. You forget that slap, and I'll forget about you."

He walked outside with Loffelhardt, contemplated the empty yard a moment, then glanced at his watch.

"It's 12:45. How long would it take the detachment to be ready to start, fit to take the field, with cartridges, supplies, everything?"

"We timed it in thirty-four minutes last drill, Lieutenant." Loffelhardt added, "Packs are ready. Question only of loading the mules, distributing ammunition."

"I'll be ready in thirty minutes. Get going."

"Assemble the detachment?"

"Everybody, to the last man—for a long march."

"But your orders, Lieutenant—"

"You know nothing of my intentions. I'll take care of my orders if you obey yours. You remember the last location given by wireless. Forty-odd kilometers. Get going."

DE MONFORT waited in the yard until the buglers trotted out with their instruments and awoke the echoes. Then he went toward his quarters. Orderly Rogge met him halfway.

"Captain of Spahis inside, Lieutenant."

"He *would* select this time for a visit," De Monfort said.

But he concealed his annoyance when he greeted Captain Lavoine, who commanded the auxiliary tribal cavalry in the region. The cavalryman was round faced and jovial, a brisk man of thirty-four. He did not like De Monfort, who had avoided him somewhat obviously and had paid only strictly polite visits to the Spahis' quarters on the other side of the town.

"I was awakened and told that there were shots fired here," the captain offered. "I came immediately. If you need help—"

"A thousand thanks, Captain. I won't need help."

"Serious trouble?"

"You'll forgive me if I dress in your presence, Captain? I thank you." The lieutenant changed from riding boots to leggings and slipped into a military tunic. "No, nothing serious."

Lavoine chuckled and indicated the holes in the door, centering sheaves of small splinters.

"Moths?"

"An accident, Captain."

"Bullet holes, and rather recent. However, it's your private affair." Lavoine smiled and rose. "I vanquish my

curiosity. Count on my absolute discretion, Lieutenant." He hesitated. "You have excellent buglers; they blow as if the breath of hell was in them."

He stopped at the door.

"Ammunition mules? Are you going out, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, Captain."

"That's odd. General orders tonight were for troops to stand by ready for the alarm. There are raiders in the vicinity. All practice marches are curtailed for the time being. Sorry to remind you."

De Monfort did not answer. He verified the loading of his service revolver, snapped the cylinder into place.

"You must excuse me, Captain. I have to leave."

"On what mission? For what purpose? I have a right to know." Lavoine flushed. "I know you're crazy enough to undertake anything, De Monfort; but I have the territorial commander's verbal promise that I would have a chance at the next gang that came this way. As soon as the aviation reports in the morning, I am taking the *goumiers* of the tribes out. I want to see your orders."

"Secret, Captain, most secret."

"Rot! Nonsense! You have no orders."

"None from the commander, Captain. But some from my own conscience. As I gather, you gentlemen of the cavalry have a private arrangement. And the Legion has not been considered. I am taking an initiative. I have been lucky twice tonight. At cards to start with, then in that case—" De Monfort indicated the holes in the door. "As you have been informed, I am a gambler. And an unreformed gambler. A third stroke of luck is due me within less than twenty-four hours. I am playing a hunch."

"This is something your family can't fix for you, young man. You know what it will mean?"

"Perfectly. Six months' imprisonment in a fortress."

"And your resignation. That ends you with your family!"

"And loses me money. Say it. That's where the gamble rests. Pardon me." De Monfort tried to pass the door.

"Listen," Lavoine said, almost in tears, "why do you do this?"

"Fulfilling the agreement of the French Republic with nearly one hundred trusting men. Men who, tired of monotony and cheapness in their homes, came to seek purification by fire or death. They get no pay to mention, they work hard, they drill, they learn to accept discipline. Why? For the food given them? There are soup kitchens for the poor in almost every civilized community, and no work asked in return. Legionnaires are not paupers, Captain.

"I know that, because I know I am one of them. I drink and gamble to kill time; they drink and carouse for the same motive, to kill time until their real purpose is granted them. Legionnaires are lured by the promise of fighting. Legionnaires must fight. It is not a privilege but a right for them to have first turn, always."

Lavoine could scarcely wait till the speech was concluded.

"As your superior officer, Lieutenant, I order—"

"Stand aside." De Monfort smiled. "Aside, or I shall have my men lock you in a cell until our return. That's the idea. Now, Captain, as soon as my detachment is in the field, all riders approaching it in the darkness shall be considered foes and treated as such. Do I look as if I were joking?"

"No. You look perfectly insane, and you're acting insane."

De Monfort smiled.

"No offense. My own people have had the same opinion of me for twenty-odd years." Then he laughed. "You can wait for the aviation reports and orders, Captain. We may leave some for you. Good night."

"And good luck, you fool," Lavoine shouted after him.

THE peculiar exhilaration which had swept De Monfort when he had found himself alive and sound behind the closed door of his room vanished after two hours of walking. He could no longer comprehend clearly what had motivated his defiance of authority and made him run the risk of considerable annoyance. He merely recalled that when he had seen the Legionnaires massed before his quarters, rejoicing because he was unhurt, he had felt that he should do something very splendid for them—grant them their desires. He sobered up, just as Gownica had sobered up from his spell of Legion *cafard.*

As he walked at the head of the detachment, he computed the odds automatically. There were certain factors in his favor. He had left on sudden impulse, at night. There was no chance that the raiders could be warned by a spy. His men were better armed than their prospective foes and better disciplined.

On the other hand, De Monfort had only a vague indication of the raiders' location. He was playing a hunch that he would find them—that hundredth hunch which will be right and compensate the persistent gambler for ninety-nine false hunches. But the Occidental Sahara was a mighty spacious area! Odds were one hundred against one of their finding the enemy's tracks in time to overhaul and engage them. Whether it was right to gamble with the bodies and lives of human beings was another finely drawn question of ethics, useless at present. Common sense as well as pride forbade him to turn back.

Throughout the night the detachment kept on behind him at a rapid gait. Near morning De Monfort noted that the excitement of the men had died out. They were unusually silent. When he permitted a long halt at dawn the Legionnaires sank to the ground and slept. Only then did De Monfort remember that these unfortunate fellows had not slept since five the preceding morning, with the exception, in some cases, of the brief interval between nine o'clock and Gownica's shots.

He grew aware of his own fatigue. In two hours the sun would be high, the desert hot as a furnace. Lacking sleep and hot food—for it was out of the question to light fires and thus doubtless warn the raiders—there was suffering ahead for all.

De Monfort looked at his men with sullen resentment. They had got him into this scrape with their unreasoning lust for action. They wanted to fight! For the first time he had allowed their wishes to sway him, and a splendid mess had resulted. He did not mind hardship or danger; but ridicule was bitter. They wanted to fight? The opposition must be discovered for them. He cut the stop short, in a quick rage, and blew his whistle stridently.

"Up, everybody! Up!"

Sergeants with bleary eyes shook the laggards awake. The Legionnaires assembled wearily, buckling their equipment as they were shoved and jostled into formation. At the order they shouldered their rifles and plodded on without enthusiasm. Keenly conscious of his inexperience, De Monfort constantly looked to Loffelhardt, who discreetly signaled when to change direction to avoid narrow lanes and deeply cut gullies which invited ambush. Groups were detached to trot ahead and occupy flanking dunes, to return when level stretches were reached, sweating, disgusted from the long tramps on the crumbling sword's edges of the dunes.

"Looks sort of hopeless, Lieutenant," Loffelhardt admitted.

"I'll keep going, alone if necessary," De Monfort snapped. "I thought you were Legionnaires!"

By eleven o'clock he grudgingly admitted that he could not drive them much longer without respite. He halted them in the shadowy lee of a dune. They were in a maze of low sand hillocks, the golden flanks of which refracted the heat. Every step was like

pushing one's feet into a bucket of warm meal. De Monfort forced himself to swallow a crust of bread, a few mouthfuls of canned beef, washed down with trooper's red wine. For Rogge, in the excitement, had forgotten to bring his chief's provisions.

An hour later the detachment was still motionless. De Monfort knew he must resume the march, but could not decide on a direction. He had called the sergeants to talk the situation over, but they were as puzzled as he. Loffelhardt interrupted himself in the middle of a sentence:

"Hear that, Lieutenant? Explosions —shots."

The lieutenant had been aware of an unusual vibration in the atmosphere.

"Might go and look. It's keeping up. Where does the sound come from?"

"Can't tell. With all these dunes, there are echoes."

One of the sergeants lifted his hand. "An airplane."

A DISTANT drone increased swiftly; and within a few minutes a big military machine was circling the detachment at long range to ascertain its identity. Then it swooped low, directly overhead, to drop a weighted message. De Monfort shrugged when it was brought to him. This would mean the end of his foolish exploit. As he ripped off the rubber band he knew that it was an order for him to return to Bir-Radir without delay. What annoyed him most was the fact that Captain Lavoine had been right—that precise information was needed in the Sahara.

But the paper showed a rough sketch map of the immediate vicinity, a penciled cross under which the observer had scrawled:

> Armed band approximately one hundred and twenty rifles camped here. Many camels and sheep. Investigate.

De Monfort unfolded his own map and compared it with the sketch. Loffelhardt and the other sergeants were bending behind him.

"We know the spot, Lieutenant. A well. Five kilometers away."

"Signal the plane that we have understood," De Monfort said.

While two men were displaying the white canvas pattern employed in communication with aviation, he outlined a simple plan of attack in a dull voice:

"Loffelhardt, take Groups 1 and 2 to flank the right. Givry, you take Groups 7 and 8 on the left. I'll give you fifteen minutes' lead. Start shooting and closing in when they shoot."

The flankers marched away. The plane had vanished southeast. Probably the first thudding explosions heard had been the small bombs it had dropped on the native camp. After waiting a quarter of an hour, De Monfort led his men forward. The prospect of action had braced them up. They walked rapidly, but with no show of enthusiasm. They were bringing tired bodies and sleepy brains to the desired combat. At the end of an hour the officer discerned the low crests hemming in the saucer-like depression around the well occupied by the raiders. As in a dream, he heard the first shot fired as a lookout spotted the line of Legionnaires plodding toward him.

"By combat groups—forward!"

De Monfort was leading Legionnaires under fire for the first time, but he experienced no elation. The suspense was over for him. He knew that success is never condemned; that successful disobedience becomes praiseworthy initiative. That he might fail did not occur to him, for he had the conceit of birth and blood. Moreover, a Saharan defeat leaves few survivors, and seldom is the commander among these.

He glanced right and left to assure himself that his order had been obeyed. He was startled to see the change in his men. They had been shuffling, stupid from weariness. Now they had sloughed off fatigue and discouragement, going ahead with set jaws and blazing

eyes, and were revealed to him fully, for the first time, as Legionnaires.

An irregular fire crackled from the crests. De Monfort did not order his men to cover until resistance was broken by the automatic rifles. It was not that sort of fighting they had craved.

"Fix bayonets!" he shouted.

He heard the familiar rasping of the blades out of scabbards, the peculiar rustling, and the multiple clicks as the Lebels were tipped with steel. The sunlight licked the bright metal greedily.

De Monfort was rewarded by an odd, raucous, hoarse yelp of excitement as the men understood his intention. They knew that the flashing bayonets had served notice to the fellows across the way that the fight would be carried to them at once.

The raiders held on longer than expected, waiting for the shock. No doubt the skirmish line facing De Monfort's groups had orders to sacrifice itself to allow the captured animals to be taken away. The fusillade spread, breaking out with intensity to right and left. The automatic crews halted and covered the advance of the fusileers.

Berbers emerged as if out of the sand, hacking and clubbing. They sprang into sight from all sides. De Monfort had drawn his service revolver, but did not have to use it until Gownica went down, having exchanged lunges with a native. The big Legionnaire did not catch up later; and De Monfort, turning during a brief lull, saw him sprawled where he had fallen.

"Oh," he thought, foolishly, "people are getting killed around here."

The combat had gone beyond his control.

His two score Legionnaires were scattered on the face of the slope, struggling to gain the crest. A warrior darted at the lieutenant from the flank. Calm as if he never done anything else in his life, the officer pushed the revolver under the native's lifted left arm and fired. His képi fell off and he bent to pick it up.

FINDING the fight going against them, the raiders had called for reenforcements from the well. A skirmish line was waiting behind the first line, occupying the exact crest. De Monfort hesitated to give the order to halt and open fire; yet a direct attack at such close range would be foolish and costly. The question was decided for him when the detonations of Lebels crashed right and left in the distance. The flankers had arrived.

The resistance ahead melted as the Berbers raced back to fight for their loot and hold back the newcomers, who were closing in on the well like the jaws of pincers.

De Monfort reached the top of the dune, looking down at a scene of wild confusion about the water-hole, where hundreds of animals were being driven off. The Legionnaires did not linger on the skyline, but dropped on the other side.

"Lie down, Lieutenant," Rogge urged. "They're shooting at you."

But De Monfort was a bit drunk with the joy of achievement and the elation of his first victory. He wanted to see the junction of the flanking groups behind the raiders.

"In a moment," he retorted.

He went down in a moment, quickly and hard. All was still for a time.

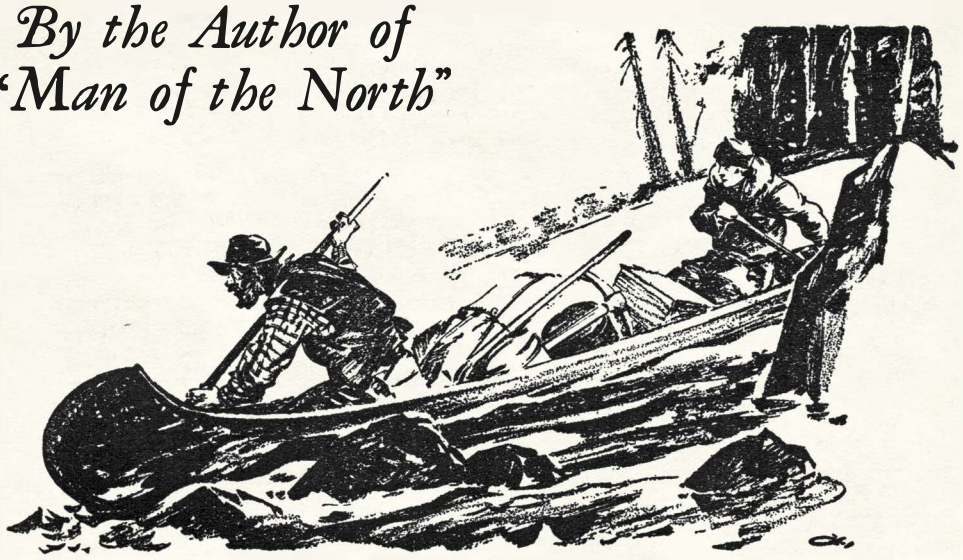
"You'll be all right, Lieutenant. The doctor will arrive soon," he heard Loffelhardt say, much later. The sun was low, the heat dwindling. "We licked them for you, Lieutenant. You've done it; you've won!"

"Leave him alone," another voice said. "He can't hear you. It's too bad, but I think he's done for, just when he was getting easy to live with!"

De Monfort opened his eyes. The old expression of aristocratic disdain, which the Legionnaires were already forgetting, reappeared on his handsome face.

"You're altogether wrong, Givry," he said weakly. "No man in my family ever died of his first wound."

By the Author of "Man of the North"



Beginning

The YUKON KID

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

CHAPTER I

GOLD

BIG TIM McGUIGAN shared in the general skepticism of Forty Mile when Carmack and Skookum Jim and Kultus Charlie paid for their drinks with coarse gold and bragged of their strike on Rabbit Creek, which Carmack called Bonanza. Nor were the doubters impressed when the three filed their claims.

"It's a townsite sell," rumbled Big Tim, and the men of Forty Mile agreed.

In vain Carmack reiterated his tale of how Skookum Jim, whiling away an idle hour, had panned more than a dollar from the dirt at the roots of a birch tree, and of how he himself had panned thirteen ounces before dark.

"You never panned thirteen ounces in thirteen months, Carmack." Old Bettles grinned, returning his glass to the bar and wiping his lips on the back of his hand. "Not when a fishhook an' rifle'll git you a livin', you didn't."

"Here's the gold," replied Carmack, thumping the bar with his sack.

"Yeh, Larue's gold," jeered Camillo Bill. "Larue's slick—but we wasn't made in a minute, neither. He figures on totin' us up there to buy lots on his townsite."

"Larue don't even know about it," denied Carmack. "We didn't see him comin' down."

"It's Larue's gold, all right," opined Moosehide Charlie. "Who in hell ever heard of Carmack blowin' his own dust fer a drink?"

"I never had none before but what I needed," defended Carmack. "But now

I got plenty. I'm buyin' another. Licker up, you frost hounds! I'll see you all on Bonanza by spring. Only there ain't room fer you all—an' them that's too late will be cussin' theirselves out fer fools."

"Frost houn's—hell!" cried Old Bettles with a drunken grin. "We're the wolves an' the foxes what can't be trapped. Come on, boys. We'll swaller Larue's bait while the swallerin's good—but we won't leave nary foot in his trap. Drink up. Here's to his townsite."

They drank, and drank again when Carmack bought another round; and as they drank they laughed in rough good nature and jibed and twitted the squaw-man, who, half drunk now, held stoutly to his tale.

Only young Tommy Haldane did not laugh. He drank sparingly, and from his place at the end of the bar he watched Carmack's face. As the bartender weighed in the gold from the squaw-man's sack, young Haldane spread his handkerchief on the bar beside the scales, at the same time tendering his own sack.

"Give me that gold," he said, "and weigh in out of mine."

The bartender grinned.

"What's the matter, kid? Want to change yer luck? Want to carry some stampede gold in yer poke? Don't let his talk fool you none. The boys has got him pegged right. Larue picked a hell of a man to start a stampede with—he ain't convincin'!"

He obligingly dumped the gold from the scales into the outspread handkerchief and dribbled a like amount from Tommy's sack on to the scales. Nobody noticed the little byplay. Old Bettles was singing and the others were joining in. Knotting the handkerchief about the gold, Tommy Haldane pocketed his sack, and presently he strolled out of the door and made his way to his own little cabin near the bank of the mighty Yukon. For a long, long time he lay prone on the floor and stared intently at the play of the sunlight that streamed through his little window upon two little piles of gold.

In the twilight that lingers long even in the shortening days of late August over aurora land, he walked to the cabin of Big Tim McGuigan at the farther side of the camp. The door of the Antlers Saloon stood open, and from the interior sounded the tin pan notes of the dancehall piano, the raucous laughter of many men, and the voice of Old Bettles raised in drunken song:

> "In the days of old,
> In the days of gold,
> In the days of forty-nine—"

Kitty McGuigan looked up from her little plot of transplanted wild flowers as the voice of her father boomed hearty welcome from the doorway:

"Hello, lad! Why ain't ye helpin' Carmack spend Larue's gold?"

Tommy Haldane's lips smiled as his eyes involuntarily sought the eyes of Irish blue that had lighted with quick gladness as the girl rose from her knees and tossed away a handful of weeds.

"I'd rather be here, wouldn't I, mavourneen?" he answered as he reached for her hand, brown and hard like a boy's, with the earth of the flower bed still upon it.

White teeth showed as the girl smiled.

"Well, if you hadn't rather be here you'd better travel long and travel far, Tommy Haldane. I didn't know you were in from the crick."

"Cleaned her up yesterday. Sixty-seven ounces. Hit camp this afternoon."

"Sixty-seven ounces!" cried the girl. "That's more than a thousand dollars."

"Yup. But I've been eighty days gettin' it. That's not so good—with everything high as it is. It's cost me better than four hundred."

"But even that's good, Tommy. Dad hasn't panned that much sniping the bars this summer, have you, daddy?"

"No. But another summer I'll be takin' to the cricks meself," said Big Tim. "You'd ought to been in the Antlers today an' heard Carmack braggin' about a strike he claimed he made upriver."

The big Irishman scratched a match on the lintel log and puffed blue clouds from

his pipe. He grinned fondly as he pointed at the girl with his pipestem.

"I've helt to the bars this summer on account o' not leavin' her. Back in camp every night like a hen wid one chicken to look after. But the shoe'll be on the other foot next summer, ye spalpeen. It'll be ye herdin' the chicken an' snipin' the bars, an' Big Tim McGuigan off to hell an' gone on the cricks. Ye're saddlin' a load on to yerself, lad. 'Tis what's brought the stoop o' age to me own shoulders."

HAND in hand, the boy and girl laughed as their eyes rested affectionately upon the huge upstanding frame that completely filled the doorway of the little cabin. At fifty Big Tim McGuigan was counted the strongest man on the river. Then the laugh faded from the lips of Tommy Haldane and the eyes that met Big Tim's were grave.

"I was in the Antlers this afternoon and I heard Carmack. I guess next summer there won't be any of us snipin' the bars."

Big Tim frowned.

"What d'ye mean, lad? Sure, ye ain't givin' serious heed to the brag o' the squaw-man! Us old-timers—we know the game. It's a trick o' Larue's to start a stampede to his townsite. Ask Old Bettles, or Moosehide Charlie, or Camillo Bill, or Swiftwater Bill, ef ye won't take my word. Them's men that knows."

"I know what you all think. I heard Carmack, and I heard you all. And I suppose I'm the only man in Forty Mile right now that believes Carmack's right and you're wrong. Call it foolishness, if you want to. Call it ignorance. Call it a hunch. Anyhow, it's what I believe and I can't help it."

Blue eyes glanced anxiously into the face of the speaker.

"What are you going to do, Tommy?"

"I'm goin' to play my hunch. I'm goin' upriver."

Big Tim snorted his disgust.

"An' when ye git there ye'll find Larue waitin' to sell ye a nice corner lot in his townsite!"

The younger man nodded.

"And if the townsite's located right, and the price is right, maybe I'll buy it. A man might do worse than own lots in the right townsite."

"Ye talk like a fool, Tommy Haldane! An' how ye goin' upriver? Ye'll have to take yer outfit—even yer grub, fer Carmack says game's scarce. That'll mean a polin' boat an' anyways one pardner. Ye'll find no one in Forty Mile damn fool enough to go wid ye."

"I figured maybe you'd go," answered the other.

"Me! Ye'll not ketch me kihootin' off upriver on the word av a drunken squaw-man an' two lousy Siwashes! Be reasonable, lad. Peck away at the bars till the freeze-up. When the priest comes along ye two can git marrit, an' I'll move over into yer cabin an' ye can have this—it's bigger. Then ye can settle down an' winter like a white man should."

Tommy Haldane felt the girl's fingers tighten about his own. He noted the sparkle in the blue eyes and the slightly heightened color of the tanned cheeks. But there was a stubborn set to his lips as he shook his head slowly.

"There's plenty of men in Forty Mile right now that won't winter in cabins this winter," he said. "You don't know it—and they don't—but I do. Better come along and help me ride my hunch, Tim. She's big. The biggest thing this river ever saw."

The girl's fingers suddenly released his own and she took a swift step backward.

"You don't love me, Tommy Haldane, or you'd stay."

Her cheeks were a deep red, and Tommy smiled into her eyes that flashed dangerously.

"Love you, Kitty! It's because I love you so much that I'm goin'. It's because I love you that I won't see you cooped up all your life in a ten-by-twelve log shack while I snipe bars an' hardly average wages. It ain't dollars I want—it's millions."

The earnestness of the tone rather than the words carried conviction. The angry

flash died in the blue eyes, and Kitty stepped close and laid her hand on Haldane's arm. She smiled wistfully as she spoke.

"I know you love me, Tommy. I didn't mean it. But, upriver and winter coming on—anything might happen. And I'd rather have you, Tommy, than all the millions."

"It's the luck of the game, girl." Tommy laughed. "I want you to have both."

"Aye—the luck o' the game," echoed Big Tim. "A man must ride his hunch, lass."

His face was genuinely grave, and his eyes were now regarding Tommy Haldane searchingly.

"Ever since—" He paused abruptly, cleared his throat noisily and proceeded in a tone that sounded unwontedly gruff. "Fer a long time it's been my job to mother as well as to daddy Kitty. I've done the job as best I might. When I seen how things was shapin' between ye, I watched ye closer than ye know. Ye're a good lad—an' the makin's o' a fine man, Tommy Haldane. Ye're good enough fer Kitty. I could not say more than that of any man.

" 'Tis not that I want to discourage ye, lad. If your hunch says upriver—upriver ye go. An' ye'll be right—whether there's gold there or none. A man must ride his hunch. But, knowin' ye as I do, 'tis hard fer me to fathom how ye gathered a pullin' hunch from the drunken mouthin's o' Carmack."

Tommy looked squarely at Big Tim as he answered—

"Light the lamp, Tim, an' I'll show you."

The voice was tense with suppressed excitement. Only for an instant did Big Tim hesitate as his shrewd glance searched the face of the younger man. Was it possible that this mere boy had tumbled on to something that the sourdoughs in the Antlers had missed?

Abruptly Big Tim McGuigan turned and held the flame of a match to the wick of the tin bracket lamp.

CHAPTER II

"I HATE YOU!"

THE three gathered close about the rude table as Tommy Haldane removed the lamp from its bracket and set it before them. From his pocket he produced a knotted handkerchief and his own sack of dust.

"Get a couple of pieces of paper," he said. And when Kitty hastened to comply, he turned to Big Tim. "You know gold," he said. "You've panned it on Birch Creek and Beaver and a dozen others. And you've sniped the bars on the rivers. You've handled gold from Circle and Mastodon and Forty Mile, and you've seen it in the blowers. You've seen nuggets and flour gold, too. But you never saw gold like this."

Unknotting the handkerchief, he poured its contents on to one of the squares of writing paper which Kitty had placed on the table, while upon the other he shook a like amount from his own sack. Then he sat back and watched as Big Tim and Kitty bent their heads close over the two little piles of gold that glowed with a soft sheen in the dull yellow light of the tin lamp.

It seemed a long time before Big Tim raised his head.

"Well, what about it?" he asked. "It's coarse gold. But I've seen coarse gold before."

"That color?"

"Color!"

Big Tim's head once more bent over the two squares of paper and for many minutes the only sound in the little room was the ticking of the clock on its shelf as the girl and her father studied the yellow grains, moving the lamp a bit to that side or this, prodding, separating the grains with their fingers. The girl was the first to look up.

"They're darker," she said. "But what difference does that make, Tommy?"

Big Tim was on his feet, his eyes shining with excitement; and suddenly Tommy Haldane felt his hand crushed in a mighty

grip.

"She's right, lad! 'Tis new gold! New to the river! Where'd ye git it? An' what's this got to do with Carmack?"

"That's the gold Carmack is shoving over the bar at the Antlers to pay for the drinks he's buying. The gold you fellows said was Larue's."

"But how come ye to have it?"

"I traded with the bartender as he was about to dump it off the scales. I stood where I could watch Carmack's face and, drunk or not, squaw-man or not, I figured he was tellin' the truth. I stood at the end of the bar, right by the scales. It was late afternoon, and a streak of sunlight slanted in through the window. I was watching the blue smoke with the little dust particles floating around in it when the bartender shook the gold into the scales from Carmack's sack."

"In the bright sunlight the gold looked dark—almost red—different from any I'd seen. So when he had weighed in, I paid out of my own sack and had him dump Carmack's gold into my handkerchief. He thought I wanted to carry around some stampede gold for luck. He still thinks so, and he warned me not to count on what Carmack said—same as you did."

"I know'd ye was smart, lad," the voice of Big Tim boomed proudly. "But I didn't know ye was that smart—the only man in a roomful o' sourdoughs to notice the difference in the color o' the gold. Come on—we'll go an' tell the boys!"

But young Haldane shook his head.

"Not yet, Tim. We don't know for sure whether there's anything in this or not. They wouldn't listen to Carmack, but a lot of 'em'll listen to you. There's no use startin' a stampede till we're sure. Let's you an' me throw a light outfit into a canoe and hit upriver and look around a little. We can stake and be back in a month—twenty days, if we're lucky. Then we can get a polin' boat and a winter's outfit and hit back up again. And believe me, we'll go back on the head of a stampede. Polin' boats are goin' to be worth what a man'll pay for 'em a month from now."

"Why don't you wait till spring?" asked Kitty. "If no one believes Carmack, the gold will be there in the spring."

"Spring, hell, lass!" cried Big Tim. "If there's a crick where gold lays so thick that a lazy loafer like Carmack can pan out thirteen ounces in half a day, it ain't goin' to stay hid long! Carmack's headin' down to Circle. There'll be some one there'll believe him. Even if they don't, what's to hinder some one else from happenin' along jest like Carmack done?

"There's good men upriver right now—Bob Henderson an' plenty more—an' if one o' them comes bustin' downriver wid word of a strike they'll be a different story to tell. The lad's right. We'll go while the goin's good an' stake in ahead o' the rush. Then we'll drop down an' let 'em all in. I'm like Tommy—I got a hunch, an' my hunch says they'll be history made on the Yukon this winter; an' we'll be in on the makin'."

"Take me with you," urged the girl.

BIG TIM shook his head. For a long time he sat smoking, his eyes on the two yellow piles of gold.

"Ef this thing is as big as it well might be," he said at length, "hell's goin' to pop on the Yukon. The stampede from Forty Mile an' from Circle won't be nothin'. When word o' the strike reaches the outside they'll be the damnedest stampede o' chechakos the world ever seen. Good men will come—an' mixed in wid 'em'll be the scum an' the riff-raff o' the world. In such case a woman's goin' to be a care an' a hindrance to a man. He couldn't take her the places he might have to go—an' he wouldn't leave her behind.

"Ef the strike peters out things will be about the same by spring as now. The two av ye are young; ye've plenty time ahead o' ye. Ef the gold lays thick as Carmack says, the next two, three years are goin' to be hell on the rivers—an' no place fer a woman. An' ef it lays that thick, two, three years will make the everlastin' for-

tunes of them that get in on the head of it."

Big Tim's eyes rested affectionately on the girl.

"Ye'll not be the one, lass, to wilfully stand in the way o' yer man. Ye've an aunt in Seattle—Kate O'Brien, a widdy woman—yer mother's sister. She never thought much o' me—never got over hatin' me fer takin' yer mother 'way off to the North country. But she won't turn down her own kin ef ye ask her to keep ye awhile, ef I pay her good. She's a long eye fer a dollar, has Kate. They's a party goin' to start fer the outside a Saturday—the Government geologist an' his wife—an' I can arrange fer ye to go wid 'em. Give Tommy an' me a year, two years, Kitty, widout hindrance, an' ye can live where ye like, an' as ye like anywheres in the world, fer the rest o' yer life."

"But I don't want to wait a year or two years!" cried the girl impetuously. "We're going to be married this fall, aren't we, Tommy? And I wouldn't hinder! I'd help! I've always lived on the Yukon! I'm no chechako."

The blue eyes that had flashed defiantly as Big Tim talked now sought Tommy's in swift appeal. Surely Tommy would side with her. They could be married and— Clammy fingers seemed clutching at her heart. Her cheeks paled and the light of confidence faded from the appealing eyes. The red lips drooped wistfully, and the little room seemed suddenly shrouded in a misty film.

Tommy Haldane's lips were closed and there was a set she had come to know to his stubborn jaw. When finally he spoke his voice sounded far away and hard.

"Tim's right, dear. We'll be most likely winterin' in a tent, and if game's scarce it's goin' to be a hard winter—too hard for a man to expose the woman he loves to if there's any other way. We can't leave you here because every sourdough in Forty Mile will be winterin' on Carmack's creek. And I wouldn't winter a dog with the scum that'll be left behind. You go to your aunt, and when I make my pile I'll come for you. If there was a priest here we could be married now—then I could pay for your keep—"

"Marry you!" The girl's eyes flashed black—thunderheads obscuring a blue sky. She had backed against the table, a hand on either side of her gripping its edge tensely, as the words fairly hurled themselves from her lips. "I won't marry you, Tommy Haldane, now or any other time! Not if you were the last man in the world, I wouldn't! I hate you! Who are you to think you could winter where I couldn't? I was born in the North! I've lived in the North for nineteen years. And you're a chechako. I'll go outside if dad sends me—and I'll stay outside. I hate the North and the camps and everything about them. I'll go where people live.

"And you never need to come for me, either. Go pan your red gold! And then come back to Forty Mile and spend it. There'll be girls here—girls that couldn't winter in tents, and wouldn't if they could. They'll help you spend your red gold, Tommy Haldane!"

CHAPTER III

KITTY GOES OUTSIDE

TWO days later a gathering of sourdoughs crowded the river bank to bid Kitty McGuigan goodby. There was an indefinable pain at her heart, and her breast seemed a vast empty void. There they were, these men she had known since babyhood—her men; the men she loved almost as she loved Big Tim McGuigan. She loved them for their virtues and for their faults.

"Goodby, Kitty!"

"Goodby!"

"Don't you go marryin' no chechako an' fetch him in here!"

"Goodby! See you in the spring, Kitty!"

"Fetch me a dozen oranges!"

"An' a necktie, Kitty—a red one!"

"An' a pair of yeller shoes—size nine!"

"Goodby, Kitty!"

Why was Old Bettles dabbing at his eyes with his scarf as he called goodby in

a voice husky with whisky? Old Bettles, who three years before when she lay sick unto death with appendicitis, in the little cabin, with the thermometer at sixty below, had harnessed his ten big dogs and put them over the ice fifty miles to Eagle in a non-stop run. It was forty below with a forty-mile gale roaring down Eagle Creek when, after a rest of three hours, he again harnessed his dogs. When the doctor demurred against starting, Bettles knocked him unconscious with a drive of his fist, trussed him with robes and *babiche* line, loaded him on the sled, grabbed up what instruments he could see and made another non-stop run to Forty Mile.

And there was Swiftwater Bill—he who demanded the red necktie. Kitty remembered that it was he who found her and brought her into camp tucked warm and snug against his own body underneath his parka the time she had toddled off and got lost down the creek.

And Moosehide Charlie, who craved the yellow shoes. And Camillo Bill who had shot the hooch runner dead when he wouldn't quit furnishing rotgut to the Indians of Joseph's Village.

"Goodby, Kitty, goodby—" The words rang in her ears, as they were to ring in her memory through many a long day to come.

The sourdoughs' faces blended and swam together into a gray blur. She blinked rapidly to clear her eyes as she sought in vain for a face that was not there. Then Big Tim was kissing her. Her arms closed convulsively about his mighty shoulders. And then he had turned away and was walking slowly up the bank.

In his little cabin Tommy Haldane was drinking grimly — savagely — drinking alone. He did not like whisky, but one of the quart bottles on the table before him was nearly empty and Tommy Haldane was very drunk. He had never been drunk before, and the room reeled dizzily. Shouts from the river bank reached his ears and their import percolated to his befuddled consciousness. Clumsily his fingers closed about the neck of the bottle and he conveyed it uncertainly to his lips and swallowed two huge gulps, choking and gagging as the fiery liquor burned its way down.

Big Tim McGuigan found him later in the evening asleep in his chair with an empty bottle in his lap. Removing his boots, he carried him to his bunk and left the room, closing the door behind him. Until dark he worked at the stowing of a two-man outfit into a canoe. At daylight he was back in Tommy Haldane's cabin. Tommy lay as he had left him, breathing heavily. Big Tim lighted the fire and put on the coffee pot. Then he roused the sleeper, a task that called for much shaking and the proper dashing of ice cold water. Finally after much half coherent mumbling and demands to be left alone, Tommy swung his feet to the floor and sat upon the edge of the bed with his head in his hands, the picture of dejection and physical misery.

"Oh, God, Tim," he moaned, "I think I'm goin' to die."

"Don't ye wisht ye could?" Big Tim grinned. "But ye'd make a hell of a lookin' corpse with yer eyes like two coals in a gob o' dough."

"Give me a drink, Tim. I could drink a gallon—I'm burnin' up."

Reaching for a glass, Big Tim splashed it half full of whisky from the bottle that remained on the table and held it close under the other's nose.

"O'Rourke!" exploded Tommy Haldane. And again, "O'Rourke! O'Rourke!"

"McGuigan's the name—not O'Rourke, though 'tis a good Irish name, at that—"

"Get that damned stuff out of here! It's water I want—a whole bucketful!"

Big Tim's grin widened.

"Sure, the hair o' the dog is good fer the bite, they claim. Ye'll never make even a middlin' drunkard ef ye can't swaller a pint or two before ye get up."

WITH a moan Tommy lurched across the floor, seized the water pail in his two hands and, raising it to his lips, sucked in its cold contents in great gulps. When he had finished Big Tim handed him a cup of

black coffee.

"Drink four, five o' these, lad. 'Twill set ye up fine. I'll have breakfast ready in a minute."

"Breakfast!" cried Tommy in disgust. "I couldn't eat any breakfast. I never want to see food again."

"It ain't sea food—it's pancakes." Big Tim chuckled as he refilled the other's cup with coffee. "Come on—eat a bite, lad, an' wash it down wid the coffee. It'll settle yer stummick. We'll want to be startin' pretty quick."

"Startin'? Startin' where?"

"Why, upriver, of course. Where d'ye think we'd be startin'?"

"Get some other pardner, Tim. I'm not goin'. I don't give a damn for the gold."

Big Tim did not answer, and the meal proceeded, Tommy managing to eat a sourdough pancake or two and drink numerous cups of black coffee. When it was over and the dishes washed, Big Tim glanced about the cabin.

"Throw what clothes ye'll want in yer pack sack, an' we'll be goin'," he said.

"I tell you I'm not goin'."

"Ye may think ye ain't—but ye are. Ef I have to lick ye first, it won't take long—but ye're goin'. Ye're a welcher, an' a piker, an' a tin horn—"

"You lie!"

"That's better."

"It's because I don't want the gold. I don't need it—now. What I've got'll last longer than I will if this is how that damned whisky makes a man feel."

"Don't fool yerself, lad. Ye'll be needin' all ye can git. The McGuigans can spend money. An' Kitty's a chip off the old block."

"Kitty? She'll never marry me!"

"No?"

"You heard her tell me to my face she wouldn't."

"Sure an' I did. An' I heard her mother tell me the same thing forty or fifty times. But she married me—an' neither ever regretted it. An' I heard Kitty tell ye to hell wid ye—but ye don't have to go. Show 'em who wears the pants to start out wid. Do what they *ask* ye to, lad, but never what they *tell* ye to. Ye've made a damn fool o' yerself once wid whisky—let that do ye. Git yer hands on all the gold ye can in the next year or so and then go outside after Kitty McGuigan. An' ye'll bring her back ef ye have to knock her down an' drag her back. Where's yer guts, lad? D'ye want some damn chechako to git her? I don't."

"But she said—"

"Said—hell!" snorted Big Tim in disgust. "Ef ye give heed to what they say, ye'll be at war all yer life. Them tantrums is the pop valve women's got to keep 'em from bustin'."

A slow grin twisted the lips of Tommy Haldane. Without a word he collected a change of clothing and dumped it into his pack sack. Then his eye fell on the bottle of whisky from which Big Tim had poured the nauseating draught. With a shudder, he seized the bottle by the neck and hurled it out through the door.

"Come on," he said. "I'm ready."

CHAPTER IV

A PRESENT FROM BIG TIM

FOR eleven days Big Tim and Tommy Haldane prospected the Bonanza moose pasture. Then they staked adjoining claims that preempted a thousand feet on the creek and extended from rim to rim. On the evening before they were to start back for Forty Mile the two sat long over their pipes and their tea.

Big Tim's eyes regarded the little sacks of dust that lay on the blankets.

"Two hundred ounces if there's a grain," he murmured in an awed voice. "Two hundred ounces fer two men in eleven days—an' the prospectin' we done besides. An' it all come out o' the grass roots! She's big, Tommy. She's so big they can't no one see the end of it. Carmack didn't know the half—not the hundredth part of it, nor the thousandth. Bed-rock will tell the tale."

"We panned it from the creek, and we panned it from the rims," said Tommy.

"The whole valley's rotten with gold."

"Aye, lad—but she's spotted. Some will win, an' some will lose. 'Tis the luck o' the game. Buy claims, Tommy. Buy claims, an' buy options. She's the biggest game ever played—an' the claims is the chips in the game. A man can't win every time he throws in a chip—but he don't have to. An' this ain't the only crick. A year from now every crick an' feeder an' gulch an' pup an' draw will be staked fer miles around. 'Twas a grand hunch ye had, lad.

"There'll be a stampede like no other stampede ever was—an' we're on the head of it! From up the river, an' down the river, an' over the hills they'll come. An' fer one that wins, there'll be ten that loses. They'll drown, an' they'll freeze, an' they'll starve, an' steal, an' murder. 'Tis every man fer himself, Tommy—an' the devil will git his share."

"There'll be a different story when we hit the Antlers." Tommy grinned. "They won't think *we're* toutin' Larue's townsite."

"They'll tear out the front gittin' to the river," Big Tim said, laughing.

"A man might do worse than get a corner on polin' boats."

"Never stop to shoot skunks on a moose hunt, lad. But we'd do well to buy us a pick o' them before we spring the news. An' mind ye, not a word to any one till we hit Forty Mile. We'll collect all the boys an' spring the word in the Antlers. This first stampede will be a stampede o' sourdoughs—an' they'll all start from scratch. An' the damn chechakos can fight amongst themselves fer the tailin's."

That night it snowed, and it was snowing furiously next day when their canoe shot out on to the Yukon. Tommy, being the better canoeist, paddled the stern with the bulk of the outfit loaded abaft of midship to balance the weight of Big Tim in the bow. Insofar as possible they held close to the shore as an occasional rift in the wind-whipped snow gave them their bearings. Rains in the hills had swollen many of the feeders; and time and again in passing creek mouths the two found themselves surrounded by a clutter of drift logs and the branches of uprooted trees.

Tommy felt a sudden jar as an uprooted tree rolled in the current beside the canoe. Placing his paddle on the trunk, Big Tim gave a mighty shove. There was a nasty scraping sound as the light craft shuddered throughout her length. Then the voice of Big Tim shouted through the storm:

"Hell an' damnation! We've punched a hole in her."

Tommy felt ice cold water about his knees.

"Plug her!" he yelled. "Plug her with your cap!" At the same moment he swung the canoe toward shore.

"There's a hell of a hole in the bow!" called Big Tim, and Tommy could see that he was pulling off his blanket coat.

The water was inches deep about his knees now, and a sudden rift in the storm showed the shore a full quarter of a mile away. The current had swept them, unaware, well out into the river, and Tommy saw at a glance they would never make it at the rate the water was pouring into the canoe. Dropping his paddle, he slashed the pack lashings with his knife and, grabbing up the coffee pot, ripped the lid off and began to bail furiously.

"I've got my cap an' my coat rammed in, but she's still leakin' like a sieve!" cried Big Tim.

With his free hand Tommy tossed him the frying pan.

"Bail! Bail like hell!" he cried. "If we can gain on her I can paddle in a few minutes an' we'll make shore."

But despite their best efforts the water slowly rose in the canoe.

"Can ye swim?" yelled Big Tim.

"Not a lick," answered Tommy, throwing water as fast as his arm could move.

"'Tis up to me, then," called Big Tim. "She's gainin' on us, but with my weight out of here the bow'll rise so the hole will be clear o' the water."

"Stay where you are!" Tommy screamed, as he saw the big man shifting his weight. "By God, we'll both go down together!"

"Ye're a fool! 'Twill be child's play for me!" The man was on his feet, now, balancing precariously, the snow driving into his wind tossed hair. "But ef anything should happen, an' I didn't make it —look after Kitty, lad! An'—in the Antlers—tell the boys that word o' the strike is a present from Big Tim McGuigan!"

"Sit down!" yelled Tommy, and the next instant he was using everything he had in the balancing of the waterlogged canoe.

As Big Tim dived clear the craft careened and rolled drunkenly. There was a rush of water toward the stern as the lightened bow rose clear of the water, and as the canoe steadied Tommy bailed with redoubled fury. In vain his eyes swept the surface of the rushing current for sight of Big Tim's head. Only a few yards of water were visible, the whole vast surface of the river being obscured by the long slanting lines of wind-driven snow. Once he called out loudly as an object bobbed up alongside. But it was only the end of a log spinning slowly in the current. He was gaining rapidly on the water now. As Big Tim had figured, the hole in the bow was lifted above the surface of the river.

When the canoe attained some semblance of buoyancy Tommy tossed aside his coffee pot and, picking up his paddle, made all haste for shore. Pulling the canoe clear, he built a fire and, picking up his rifle, made his way upriver for a half mile or more.

"He couldn't have landed above here," he reasoned after several minutes of shouting and rifle shooting. "If he made shore, he's below."

Replenishing his fire as he passed, Tommy proceeded downriver, searching the shore, shooting, shouting. Nearly two miles he walked, until a swollen confluent forced him to turn back.

Toward evening, when the storm ceased, he dropped down a short distance to a point that jutted out into the river. Here he collected wood and built a fire whose light would be visible from several miles of shore. All night he tended his fire, sleeping fitfully, calling and shooting at intervals. At daylight he again patrolled the shore upriver, searching the waterline, alert for tracks in the snow. Breakfasting hurriedly, he plugged the hole in the canoe as best he could and proceeded slowly downstream, close in, searching the shore.

Ten miles below he gave it up. Surely Big Tim would have landed before this. No matter how strong a swimmer a man was he could not have remained in that icy water long enough to have been carried so far down, and lived.

Hot tears filled the lad's eyes as realization of the fact of Big Tim's passing forced itself upon him. It was more than the loss of a partner; it was a personal loss—the loss of a loved one.

"It will kill Kitty," he croaked in a voice that was half a sob. "Lord—how they loved each other!"

Grimly, with tight pressed lips, he drove his canoe toward Forty Mile. The vision of Big Tim rose before his eyes—Big Tim as he stood in the bow of the canoe, his hair flying in the wind, and the slanting lines of snow beating against him. His lips had smiled, and his kindly eyes had seemed to glow with a strange fire—and then he was gone.

"They'll drown, an' they'll freeze, an' they'll starve, an' thieve, an' murder—" he had said, back there on Bonanza. And now he was gone—the first fulfilment of his own prophecy.

TWILIGHT was deepening and the sourdoughs had foregathered in the Antlers Saloon. Camillo Bill thumped the bar with the bottom of the leather box and, with a twist of the wrist, spread the five dice on the board.

"Four fours," he read. "I'll leave 'em."

Moosehide Charlie gathered the cubes and shook.

"It's on me," he announced. "Three sixes is all I can find. What's become of Big Tim McGuigan?" he asked as Camillo poured his liquor. "I ain't seen him since

Kitty left."

"Off on a prospectin' trip with young Haldane. I seen him that night, an' he said they was goin' up to look over this here Bonanza Crick."

"Hell! Big Tim wouldn't fall fer nothin' Carmack said!" opined Moosehide. "Here's luck."

Camillo Bill grinned.

"I guess 'twasn't so much what Carmack said, as gettin' the kid out of camp fer awhile. Big Tim didn't let on much, but it seems Kitty turned young Haldane down. Leastwise he wasn't there to say goodby when she left, an' Curley said he sold the kid a couple bottles of hooch that day—an' bein' as he ain't much of a hand fer liquor, it ain't so hard to figure."

"Funny. I've seen 'em go plumb to hell that way, on account of women. What did she turn him down fer? Haldane's a damn good kid."

Camillo Bill shrugged.

"Women's women, Moosehide," he answered sagely. "They take notions. It don't have to be fer nothin'."

"In the days of old,
In the days of gold,
In the days of forty-nine—"

Old Bettles got as far as he ever did with his song, forgot he was singing, and laid a hand upon a shoulder of each.

"What you two shorthorns prongin' about? Figurin' on beatin' Carmack out of his strike?"

"Talkin' about Big Tim—him an' young Haldane pulled out the day after Kitty left."

"Damn fine gal, little Kitty McGuigan. I can remember when she wasn't no more'n so high." Bettles demonstrated vaguely, with a sweep of the arm that started as high as he could reach, and ended an inch from the floor.

"You saved her life once, all right, old-timer," said Camillo Bill with approval.

"Betcher life I did. Do it again, too. Betcher that damn doc'll come nex' time. Knocked him cold as a wedge. Knock half a dozen doctors cold as a dozen wedges any day fer Kitty. She's more sourdough'n we are. She was born here—an' we wasn't. Damn fine gal. Goin' to bring me thousan' oranges. Goin' to have orange punch on my birthday."

"Birthday hell!" Moosehide grinned. "You just had your hundredth birthday last week."

Bettles blinked owlishly.

"Hun'reth birthday? How'n hell I had a hun'reth birthday when I ain't only sixty-two? Anyway, I never had no orange punch that birthday. Goin' to have 'nother birthday in the spring. Hell's fire! I'd shove Christmas six months ahead fer orange punch!"

All eyes turned toward a newcomer who had entered the door and moved swiftly across the room. It was young Tommy Haldane, and he halted directly before Camillo Bill, Moosehide Charley and Old Bettles. His face looked white and drawn, and the words that fell from between his stiff lips sounded wooden.

"Big Tim McGuigan's dead," he said.

"Dead!"

"Big Tim—gone!"

"God Almighty, kid—tell us about it."

Camillo Bill shoved the whisky bottle toward the lad, but he shook his head. He leaned for a moment against the bar, while men crowded about as the word passed from lip to lip. The dance hall piano was stilled and the girls hovered curiously about the edges of the crowd and listened as Tommy Haldane recovered himself, and with every eye in the house on his face told the story from beginning to end—thudding the little sacks of gold on to the bar as he proclaimed the richness of the strike.

But not one eye glanced toward the gold as the sourdoughs followed his words to the moment of Big Tim McGuigan's plunge from the bow of the sinking canoe—they were living those moments themselves, those bearded men of the North—they saw Big Tim, hatless, coatless; the snow beating into his wind-tossed hair; they heard his words, saw the smile on his face; and they heard the splash with which the mighty Yukon swallowed this comrade of many a long trail.

"And," concluded Tommy, "he said to tell the boys in the Antlers that word of the strike is a present from Big Tim McGuigan!"

There was a silence, broken here and there by queer sounds. On the outer edge of the crowd a girl was sobbing aloud.

Camillo Bill was the first to find his voice.

"Line up, boys," he said, in words that sounded husky and strange. The tension was broken and men eagerly lined the bar. "All filled? Well—here's to Big Tim McGuigan. He couldn't swim a damned stroke! Me—I *know*."

CHAPTER V

AN ASSAULT AND BATTERY

WHEN Big Tim McGuigan told Kitty that her Aunt Kate had a long eye for a dollar he had stated the case mildly. The Widow O'Brien had avidly clutched at the money Kitty tendered as advance payment for six months' board and lodging. But the six months were up. It was April and Big Tim had neither come in person, nor had he sent money for the girl's further maintenance.

For two weeks Kitty had listened to the whining plaint of her aunt anent the overdue board bill. At last, in sheer desperation she fled the house and tramped the streets looking for work—any kind of work that would silence the flint hearted virago who daily waylaid her in the hall and hounded her to her very room.

Thus it was that one day she saw a man enter a store. A gunstore it was, and he was a bearded man dressed in a blanket coat and mukluks. A vast wave of homesickness swept her. Visions of the ice locked Yukon lying grim and silent between its snow clad hills; spruce spires; windswept headlands; smoke rising lazily from cabins half buried in snow; dog teams and the shouting of men.

"Goodby, Kitty—goodby—"

She walked past the store into which the man had disappeared—turned and walked past it again. She had seen blanket coats in Seattle—but mukluks! Only a man from the North—her North—would wear mukluks. She hesitated, then entered the store. The man was looking at rifles. Several lay on the counter before him. He would pick one up, work the action, throw it to his shoulder, lower it and meticulously examine the sights, discard it, pick up another. The girl edged closer, fascinated, unnoticed by either the man or the clerk behind the counter. His choice seemed to have narrowed to two weapons. Finally he seemed to settle upon one of the two. It was then that, to her utter confusion, Kitty heard her own voice speaking:

"It'll jam in the cold," she said. "The oil gums it."

Both the clerk and the man stared, and Kitty felt the blood flood her cheeks in a fiery wave.

"Camillo Bill had one," she said in desperation, "but—"

"Camillo Bill!" cried the man, his eyes lighting. "What do you know about Camillo Bill?"

"Oh, I know him well, and Moosehide Charlie, and Swiftwater Bill, and Old Bettles—"

A huge hand thrust out impulsively.

"Put 'er there, miss! You sure talk my language. I hail from Circle."

"I live in Forty Mile."

"Sure; I know'd that when you started reelin' off them sourdoughs. Ye're a long ways from home, miss. An' of course you know there ain't no Forty Mile no more; no Circle, neither, you might say—"

"No Forty Mile! No Circle! What do you mean?"

"Why, the big strike upriver jest about emptied them camps."

"You don't mean Carmack's strike?"

"I sure do. That damn squaw-man jest nachelly raised hell with them camps when he begun pryin' gold out of the grass roots on Bonanza."

"We can't permit that kind of language in the presence of a lady," protested the clerk.

The big man favored him with a single pitying glance.

"Yer bib's wet, sonny," he said. "Man's talk might be too strong fer you—but not fer her. She's a human bein'."

"You mean they've all gone up to the new diggings?"

There was a note of disappointment in the tone. She had been so sure that Carmack's strike would not amount to anything. Who ever heard of a squaw-man doing anything worthwhile? Her father had said that if the strike did pan out big it would be a year—maybe two years.

"All of 'em that's worth a damn has gone," said the man. "You know the kind that wouldn't—an' even they'll move up this spring. She's big! An' there's goin' to be a stampede when the news hits the outside. Me, I'm takin' in two ton of flour an' pork. Grub's worth what a man'll pay fer it a'ready. Wisht I could buy forty ton, an' I wouldn't never have to do another tap all my life."

Kitty asked—

"Do you know Big Tim McGuigan?"

The man seemed to welcome the question; for he raised his voice even louder than before to reply:

"Big Tim! I can't claim I know'd him, personal. I wisht I had. By God, miss—there was a man. Big Tim is history on the Yukon by now. All up an' down the river you can hear it—wherever moose meat's chewed an' round oaths is swore—how Big Tim McGuigan couldn't swim a lick, an' how in the thick of a whirlin' snowstorm he dove out of a canoe plumb in the middle of the big river so his pardner could make shore. He wasn't never seen again, miss, but up in the Big Country the sourdoughs will be tellin' about the passing of Big Tim till the Yukon runs uphill."

Kitty McGuigan never knew how she got out of the gunstore, nor did she know that more than one pedestrian turned for a second look at the beautiful girl who, with tight pressed lips and white, tense face, passed them on the streets, her blue eyes staring straight before her. She realized nothing until she found herself seated in a little park, staring dry eyed out over the waters of Lake Washington.

HER world had suddenly crashed about her ears. The big lovable man, who had been both a father and a mother to her almost ever since she could remember, was dead. Never again would she see the laughter light his blue eyes, or hear his big booming voice expound the tenets of his homely philosophy. All that was gone—and she was down here while up on the Yukon the bearded men who had loved him were telling the story of his passing. Then came the tears—hot scalding tears, and sobs that shook the very bench on which she sat. Why had Tommy Haldane not written of her father's death? How long ago had he died? It must have been before the freeze-up, for the man said he had dived from a canoe—and the breakup had not yet come to the Yukon.

Her funds were pitifully low. There would be no more money from her father. And Tommy Haldane would never come. She remembered the look on Tommy's face when she told him, back there in the little cabin, that she would never marry him. No—he would never come. In the excitement of the big strike he had probably forgotten her very existence.

It was midafternoon when Kitty finally reached her boarding house. She had eaten nothing since breakfast and she suddenly realized she was hungry. She was about to ascend the stairs when her aunt beckoned her into the parlor.

"The mail's here," she said pointedly, "an' there ain't no word from your pa. I don't like to be hard on no one—'specially my own kin. But business is business, an' it's goin' on three weeks now that you're behind. Last time I let any one get behind it was Miss Lambert, which she was copy clerk down to the railroad. She always paid up till they switched over to men, an' she got fired. She hunted another job, but she couldn't seem to find none, and when it had run along two weeks I jest told her she'd have to go, what with me turnin' down folks 'most every day that could afford to pay for the room.

"A few days later they found her floating in the bay down by the ferry, an' when the time come to bust into her trunk that I'd held fer her board, I could only git 'leven dollars fer the stuff—trunk an' all—an' she owed me eighteen! You've helped around quite a bit, so I'll keep you till the end of the week, an' in the meantime you better git out an' rustle you a job. You can't depend nothin' on Tim McGuigan—"

Kitty felt herself growing strangely cold, and when she spoke her voice sounded unfamiliar and hard.

"My father," she said, "is dead."

"Dead!" cried the woman, as though striving to grasp the import of the word. Her voice rose in a tone of outraged bitterness. "Dead! An' him owin' me fer yer two weeks' board! Ain't that like the dirty loafer. Good riddance, I'd say, what with—"

Kitty McGuigan's right arm shot out with incredible swiftness, and her doubled fist landed squarely upon the Widow O'Brien's mouth with a force that sent her reeling backward.

"That," the girl found herself saying in a voice of deadly calm, "is for the girl they found in the bay. And these are for Big Tim."

The blows landed in quick succession, each clean from the shoulder in the approved manner of Forty Mile—one to the eye, the other to the nose, and to the point of the flabby chin. And the Widow O'Brien crashed backward on to the stuffed haircloth sofa and slid peacefully to the floor.

The girl whirled at the sound of a shriek to see the face of Ellie, the housemaid, staring wide eyed through the parted portières. Kitty took a step forward, and then she heard Ellie run shrieking up the stairs.

Sudden panic seized Kitty. Seattle was not Forty Mile. She could doubtless be arrested for what she had done—much as her aunt deserved it. And it seemed to the excited girl that every policeman from the hilltops to the bay must hear Ellie's terrified shrieks. Swiftly she crossed the hall and let herself out the door. The next moment she was hurrying down the street.

Without thinking she turned toward the waterfront. She wondered whether any of the ships were northward bound, and suddenly realized that the four dollars and ninety-six cents in her purse would not finance a journey. Tears filled her eyes as she gazed longingly at the ships lying in their slips. "Goodby, Kitty—goodby—"

If she could only see one of the boys—any one of them would gladly toss her his whole sack of dust. Then she could go back—back to Forty Mile—back home—back to—no, not back to Tommy Haldane! Tommy didn't care; he hadn't even come down to the beach the day she had gone out of the North—out of his life forever.

She felt no slightest sense of compunction for the attack upon her aunt—rather a warm glow of satisfaction for a deed well done. She shuddered as she thought of the girl they had found floating in the bay. The water looked gray, greasy and cold. And the water of the Yukon—ice cold it must have been the day it closed forever over the body of Big Tim McGuigan as he had dived from the canoe in the whirling blizzard.

She realized that her eyes were eagerly scanning the docks for sight of the blanket coated figure in mukluks who would be loading two tons of flour and pork on to one of the ships. He was a sourdough, the man from Circle. He was homefolks; he would see that she got back—back where? He had said there was no more Forty Mile, no more Circle. Anywhere on the Yukon would be home to her—up on Bonanza where Carmack had made his strike. Old Bettles would be there, and Camillo Bill, and Moosehide Charlie, and Swiftwater Bill, and Tommy—yes, and Tommy Haldane. She'd show Tommy that she could live in a tent and chew moose meat with the best of them. Only it would never be his tent. She hated Tommy Haldane.

But she sought in vain for the man from

Circle. A policeman passed, and the girl found herself eyeing him furtively. A blatant advertisement announcing a cheap excursion rate to Tacoma caught her eye. She bought a ticket. In Tacoma she need not fear the police.

CHAPTER VI

THE YUKON KID

IN THE Antlers Saloon not an eye had shifted from Tommy Haldane's face for so much as a glance at the little sacks that he had tossed on to the bar in confirmation of his story of the strike, until the last word that told of the passing of Big Tim McGuigan had been spoken. They were taking his measure, these men; and not a word, not the flicker of an eyelash or the movement of a muscle escaped them.

During the long, tense moments of his recital Tommy Haldane had stood on trial for his life. The lad was no chechako. His two years on the river had been in the nature of a novitiate. But Big Tim was of the cult. And when Tommy finished speaking not a sourdough in the room but knew he had spoken the truth. From that moment Tommy Haldane, too, would be reckoned a sourdough—a man to rub shoulders with such men as Camillo Bill and Moosehide Charlie and Old Bettles.

Camillo Bill had voiced the sentiment of the group when he had ordered the round of drinks. Reverently and in silence they had drunk to Big Tim. As he returned his glass to the bar Old Bettles, himself dean of the sourdoughs, thrust out his hand—a hand that would have been the first to grasp a rope if the story had not rung true.

"It was hell, kid, we know. But it's the luck of the game. Big Tim McGuigan was a man."

Then others were crowding close, all talking at once—and the talk was of gold. Forty Mile did not go to bed that night. Huge fires lighted the beach where men swore and jostled each other and threw heavy packs into poling boats and canoes, and others built rafts and rigged them with tracklines.

Tommy Haldane sought out the gold commissioner and recorded two claims in his own name and Kitty McGuigan's. He bought a poling boat, hired a breed to help him, and with the gold he had shaken from the grass roots of Bonanza, he bought supplies at the Alaska Commercial Company's store and helped his breed pack them to the boat. By morning the A. C. Company's shelves held little except squaw cloth and silk dresses for the dancehall girls.

In the gray light of early morning a group of sourdoughs foregathered at the front end of the bar. Tommy Haldane was among them. Old Bettles bought a round of drinks.

"How about lettin' Kitty know?" asked Swiftwater Bill, his eyes traveling the circle of faces. "It's sure goin' to be hell on her."

"I can't write," said Moosehide Charlie,

"I don't know where she's at," admitted Camillo Bill.

"It's up to you, kid," opined Old Bettles, as the eyes of all focused on Tommy Haldane's face. "You must know where she's at; an' then, besides—"

"She'll come bustin' back, hell bent, when she hears," predicted Camillo Bill.

"She never had no other home. She's a sourdough clean down to her mukluks."

Moosehide Charlie nodded affirmation.

"We're her folks. She'll come back to us when she hears."

Old Bettles drained his glass and motioned to Curley behind the bar.

"Fetch a pencil an' paper," he ordered, and turned to Tommy. "It's hell, kid, but it's up to you. Not only was you the last to see Big Tim, but seems like she'd ruther hear it from you. She'll come back quicker fer you than—"

Tommy Haldane shook his head gravely.

"No. Kitty hates me now. The last thing she told me was that she'd never marry me."

Swiftwater Bill laughed.

"Where's yer guts, kid? I'll bet two to one she—"

Tommy interrupted him.

"You could bet ten to one, or a hundred to one, Swiftwater, and win. She's going to marry me—but not now. She'd come back, all right, as soon as she heard. But she'd come back to you boys—not to me. She loves the last man of you. But do we want her back? Big Tim and I foresaw this stampede. That's why he sent her outside. She appealed to me, but I thought like big Tim. That's why she hates me. What'll Forty Mile be like in a week? You wouldn't winter a dog here—neither would I. It's goin' to be tough up on Bonanza, livin' in tents. And grub's goin' to be short before the breakup. Next summer the whole damned country's goin' to fill up with chechakos.

"As Moosehide says, you boys are her folks. You want to do the best by her, same as Big Tim and I did. She's winterin' with her aunt in Seattle. In the spring I'm goin' down there and tell her. And I aim to bring her back. She'll be Mrs. Tommy Haldane then, and we'll come back to our folks on the river. That's how it looks to me. But I won't set up my judgment against yours. We'll take a vote on it. Seems like I just couldn't write about it, boys—but, if you-all say so, I will."

"The kid's right," said Camillo Bill, and the others nodded.

"But that ain't no sign we shouldn't have another little drink," opined Bettles. "Fill 'em up, Curley—an' git that pencil an' paper off'n the bar; it's in the road.

"In the days of old,
In the days of gold,
In the days of forty-nine—"

"Here's gold in yer poke, you frost hounds!"

As they filled the glasses the bartender eyed them sadly.

"It's goin' to be mighty lonesome round here when you boys is gone," he said. "The boss is goin' on up an' stake fer me an' him; an' then he's goin' to try to git some kind of a shack together up on Larue's townsite so we can move up."

"We'll all pitch in an' roll his shack up fer him," said Moosehide Charlie. "It's goin' to be gosh-awful lonesome fer us, too, what with the long nights, an' livin' in tents most likely, jest a-waitin' fer the breakup."

Tommy Haldane spoke up.

"I'm goin' to try my hand at winter mining," he said.

The others stared in astonishment. Swiftwater Bill laughed.

"You'd ought to do good at it, kid. I rec'lect one time me an' Bettles, here, we winter mined up on the Koyukok. It was the year of the two winters—the time spring come in hind end first an' April backed clean up into February. So me an' Bettles, we figures that if we're goin' to do any minin' at all it'll have to be winter minin', so we goes at it. An' we done fairly good, too—panned out sometimes as high as eleven ounces of snow to the pan, not to say nothin' of a lot of ice nuggets in the way of coarse stuff. It was eleven ounces, wasn't it, Bettles?"

"W-e-l-l," said Old Bettles doubtfully, "the way I rec'lect it, you're a little bit high, Swiftwater. Seems to me that the pure snow we panned never run higher'n around seven ounces to the pan. It was ice nuggets an' all run her up to eleven."

Tommy Haldane grinned into the serious faces of the two sourdoughs.

"Have all the fun you want. But, if my scheme works, I'll bet you'll all be winter mining, and pannin' out gold—not snow."

"What is this here scheme you got, son, fer beatin' the devil at his own game?" queried Camillo Bill. "Tell us about it—an' we'll tell you why it won't work."

"Why, it isn't much of a scheme—just common sense. Suppose you scraped away the snow and built a cordwood fire on the ground. It would thaw the gravel a few inches deep under the fire, wouldn't it? Then suppose you got busy an' shoveled out that thawed gravel and built another fire when you got down to the frost again—you could keep that up all winter, couldn't you, an' go down as deep as you

wanted? Take it where the dirt is as rich as I know that dirt on Bonanza to be, a man could make good money at it."

Moosehide Charlie looked at Swiftwater Bill, and Camillo Bill looked at Old Bettles. The latter was the first to speak.

"Sounds reasonable, kid," he said with a perfectly straight face. "Yes, sir, reasonable an' easy. 'Course, they was one little item that bothered me, first off—but I see, now, how you could fix that. Havin' shoveled this here dirt out they wouldn't be no water to sluice it with. But all you'd have to do would be to go up on to the headwaters an' build a big fire an' thaw out the crick. That could be a kind of a community fire—a big un—every one havin' claims on that crick bein' assessed a certain amount of cordwood to keep it goin'.

"Of course, them that had claims quite a piece down from headwaters, they'd be kind of out of luck, on account the water'd be half froze—kind of thick an' gummy like. But they could sort of mix their dirt into it, an' then sort of work the gold out by pullin'—like these here taffy pulls the girls has around Christmas. Another way would be to have a string of booster fires all along the crick to keep it thawed the hull length."

Tommy Haldane joined in the roar of laughter that greeted Old Bettles's suggestions.

"Drink up, boys. It's on me," he said. "Then I'll tell you another one. I don't figure to sluice out till spring. Just throw it on to a dump an' in the spring sluice her out when I've got the water. You could pan out enough in a pan or an old piece of canvas inside a tent if you wanted to, to keep an eye on how she was runnin' —an' plenty for expenses, too. That way you'll be workin' in a dry hole. An' in the spring, instead of sloshin' around in ice water, you'll be sluicin' a dump that's high an' dry."

Once again the sourdoughs looked into one another's faces. But this time there was no laughter in the shrewd eyes. After a silence Camillo Bill's lips twisted in a slow grin.

"That sort of a squeaky, gratin' sound we hear is caused by four set of brains bein' called upon sudden to do the onexpected phenomenon of thinkin'. Fer my part I admit I ain't got no comeback to the kid's proposition. The only thing I can think of to say is if winter minin's as simple as all that, why in hell ain't it been done before?"

"Which ain't so much of an argument, when you come to think about it," said Swiftwater Bill, thoughtfully. "A wheel looks simple as hell to us, now. But I'll bet folks drug their stuff over the ground fer a long while before some son of a gun figured out it would be easier to roll it. Boys, maybe winter minin's come. It was the kid, here, that first noticed the difference in the color of Carmack's gold. Looks like our heads runs more to whiskers than brains. Me, I'm a-goin' to try it jest like he says."

"I'm feelin' in need of another jolt of brain oil," said Bettles. "Boys, it sure looks from here like our winter vacation is all shot to hell."

"It's plumb daylight," announced Moosehide Charlie, glancing toward the windows. "Come on—let's go!"

As the sourdoughs turned from the bar after a last drink on the house the bartender proffered Old Bettles a quart bottle.

"Better stick that in yer pack," he said.

"What fer?" asked Bettles, in surprise.

The bartender explained:

"Well, you been hittin' her up pretty strong since you hit camp, an' you ain't so young as you was onct. I thought maybe a little hooker in the mornin' an' evenin' would kind of let you down a little easier."

"Lookahere, son," said the old man, "I'm obliged to you. But don't never ask no one to take no liquor on the trail. It's all right in a camp. A camp would be a damn poor place without it. But it ain't no good on the trail. When I git to where I need any lettin' down that I can't git out of b'iled tea an' moose meat, I'll quit the trail an' git me a job curryin' the pyanner in some dance hall."

THAT winter the snow clouds that hung low over Bonanza reflected back the red glow of a hundred fires. Winter mining had come to the Yukon. Men working in pairs, and in threes and fours, chopped cordwood by day, tended their fires by night, and shoveled the dirt into dumps to wait the coming of spring. The sound of axes and the creak of rude windlasses carried far on the keen air to mingle with the shouts of bearded men.

As Big Tim McGuigan had said, the valley was spotted. Not every claim showed pay. Test panning showed some fabulously rich claims, and there were many that showed richer than anything heretofore uncovered in the North. Those whose claims showed lean prospected other valleys and feeders and draws, or worked awhile for wages on the better claims.

Fifteen dollars a day was going wages, and young Tommy Haldane worked five men beside himself on his claims, which were among the richest in the whole valley.

On the first run of water he sluiced his dump and the cleanup netted him four thousand two hundred and forty ounces—nearly sixty-eight thousand dollars; and, because of the crude construction of his sluice, a great deal of the flour gold had got away.

His deepest shaft was less than twelve feet below the surface, bed-rock no one knew where. It was then he realized that he and Kitty McGuigan were rich beyond their wildest dreams. Kitty McGuigan—fondly he recalled each little mannerism and trick of expression, each glint in her eyes of Irish blue. He would go to her, now; would tell her of the death of Big Tim, assure her of his own great love, steadfast and undying; and then of the gold that was theirs.

It was the fourteenth of May that year when the ice went out of the Yukon. That evening Tommy sought out Camillo Bill and Old Bettles, whose claims adjoined his above Discovery.

"I'm goin' outside," he announced. "Goin' out to fetch Kitty."

"That's the stuff, kid. Good luck," said Camillo Bill.

"Tell her not to fergit my oranges," reminded Bettles. "We'll have a proper saloon here, I hope, agin you git back; an' then I'll pull a birthday party worth remembering."

Early next morning Tommy pulled out amid the yells and farewells of the assembled miners.

"Hooray fer the Yukon Kid!" cried some one.

The nickname immediately struck the fancy of those bearded men of the far North. Others took up the cry, and as the Yukon Kid he was destined to be known ever after—a sourdough among the sourdoughs. For not a man among them but knew of his part in the success of Carmack's strike, and that the beardless youngster was the father of winter mining. And for many a year to come the word of the Yukon Kid was to be eagerly sought upon matters of importance.

Tommy went out upriver, and over the Chilkoot.

It was two months after the door of the vindictive Widow O'Brien's boarding house had closed for the last time upon Kitty McGuigan that he arrived in Seattle.

For a month he searched for the girl, enlisting the services of the police and the newspapers from Los Angeles to Vancouver; but no trace of her was he able to find.

With a heavy heart he turned his face northward after posting rewards in all the Coast cities—his only ray of hope being that she would some day return to the Yukon.

"It's the only home she's got," he kept repeating to himself. "She's bound to come back."

Then Kitty's own words would rise to disquiet him, uttered as she stood facing him that last time in Big Tim's cabin in Forty Mile.

"I'll go outside—and I'll stay outside. I hate the North and the camps and everything about them. I'll go where people live! And you need never come for me, either."

CHAPTER VII

$1000 REWARD

IN TACOMA Kitty found work as waitress in a hotel. Fearing that an account of her attack upon her aunt would appear in the newspapers, she took the name of Flannigan. It had been her mother's name, and she reasoned she had a right to it. A month later she was made cashier of the newly opened grill room, and her salary raised in accordance with her new position. She was happier now than she had been since that day in the gun-store when the man from Circle told her of the death of Big Tim McGuigan. For, at her present salary, it would not be long before she could save enough to go back to her beloved Yukon.

Then one day Miss Burns, the head waitress, stepped smilingly to her desk, a folded Seattle newspaper in her hand.

"Ain't you glad your name ain't Kitty McGuigan instead of Kitty Flannigan?" she asked, indicating the advertisement that headed the personal column of the paper:

$1000 REWARD

One thousand dollars in gold will be paid for information as to the whereabouts of Miss Kitty McGuigan formerly of Forty Mile, Yukon Ty., Canada, who disappeared from her boarding house at 2202 Blankenship Rd. this city, on April 9th.

Followed then a description that would have applied to one out of every four young ladies on the West Coast, together with a request that any information be immediately communicated to the chief of police of the city of Seattle.

Kitty knew that her heart was racing wildly. She wanted to scream. She locked her ankles together beneath the desk for fear Miss Burns would see that her knees were trembling. But she managed to register little interest in the notice and even laid down the paper with a smile.

"I wonder what she done?" said the interested waitress. "Must of been something important or the police wouldn't be offering no thousand dollars' reward. Gee, I wish I could lay my eyes on her."

Kitty strove to think coherently. What had happened? Why should the police be offering a thousand dollars' reward for her? Had her aunt died? And were the police seeking her to hang her? Her lips pressed tight in horror as she remembered the man she had seen hanged in Forty Mile when a miners' meeting found him guilty of robbing a cache.

The grill had emptied when Kitty left her desk at three o'clock and hurried to her room. She counted the cash in her pocketbook and found that it amounted to sixty-two dollars and some loose change. She had been paid the day before. Hastily she dressed for the street and threw her few belongings into a suitcase. At the station she bought a ticket to San Francisco and spent an hour before the departure of her train in the waiting room, her face screened by the newspaper in which she appeared deeply absorbed.

She bought all the Seattle, Tacoma and Portland papers, and as the train rushed southward she scanned them eagerly. Each carried the notice of the reward.

In the larger city she found a cheap lodging house and answered a garment manufacturer's advertisement for help wanted. She breathed easier when she found that neither her landlady nor the manager of the shirt factory recognized her as the thousand-dollar Kitty McGuigan.

The San Francisco newspapers carried the reward notice, but Kitty felt a comparative sense of security in the fact that she came into daily contact with but few people. It was not like being the cashier of a well patronized grill room.

Within the month the reward notice was dropped from all papers simultaneously, and shortly thereafter Kitty quit the shirt factory to accept a more congenial and lucrative position in a candy store and ice cream parlor. As a pastime she took up dancing and so came to the notice of Mr. Hertzbaum, a connoisseur of dancing ability and a producer and backer of road shows.

He made an offer which Kitty accepted.

If she could turn a congenial avocation into a profitable vocation, why not?

Thereafter she devoted herself assiduously to dancing under the more or less able tutelage of a master of specialty, and the critical eye of Mr. Hertzbaum himself; and to such good purpose that the obese and optimistic producer unblushingly predicted Broadway, for sure, and smacked his thick lips in anticipation of the golden harvest to come.

But it is a long way to dance to Broadway. A number dropped out of a vaudeville road company, and Hertzbaum replaced the act with:

NADU THE SUBLIME

Genuine Nautch Girl from India
Favorite of the Late Rajah of Rammikan
Who has appeared before all the Crowned Heads
OF EUROPE

SO KITTY McGUIGAN, alias Kitty Flannigan, became Nadu the Nautch Girl, with a darkly hinted Rammikan past; and as Nadu the Nautch Girl she danced from the mining towns of the Far West, through the tanks of Kansas and Nebraska and Iowa, and the sticks of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, at the salary of forty dollars per week—if and when. But there were many *ifs*, and many *whens*—and with the passing of the months Forty Mile seemed to sink farther and farther into the past. Yet, somehow, it always remained a goal.

Yes, sometime she was going back. The boys would be glad to see her. She'd show Tommy Haldane!

When the road show disbanded in northern Minnesota, Kitty, a seasoned trouper now, found that her funds were just sufficient to take her to Winnipeg, where she secured a minor rôle in a stock company.

A year had passed since she had fled in terror from her aunt's boarding house in Seattle. The newspapers were beginning to print more and more news of the Yukon gold strike; and the names Klondike and Alaska were on every one's lips. Kitty eagerly devoured every scrap of news that came her way, winnowing the true from the false with the understanding of a sourdough. Many a laugh she had over the feature stories of the Sunday newspapers—preposterous, distorted tales of snow and ice and famine, and beasts that never were. She had long since become disillusioned. It was a long, long way to Broadway. It was a long, long way to Forty Mile. She despaired of ever seeing either.

Jealously she guarded her small savings—hoarding her pennies and her dimes against the day when her little bank book would show enough to pay her passage to Forty Mile—or to Dawson, rather, as the new camp was called that the papers said had sprung up in the shadow of Moosehide Mountain.

Then it was that one evening at an after-theater supper in the grill room of a hotel, she was introduced to Mr. Jones, of Edmonton.

Mr. Jones was an old acquaintance of Mrs. Palm, leading lady of the Olympic All Star Stock Company—that is, he had met her upon the occasion of a previous visit to Winnipeg, some six months before. And it was upon the invitation of Mr. Jones that a half dozen of the Olympic Thespians had foregathered after the performance to partake of what the hotel had to offer in the way of food and drink.

In the matter of food and drink Mr. Jones did himself proud. But it became pointedly apparent to the little assemblage that, after his introduction to Nadu the Sublime, there were exactly five too many stars twinkling in the immediate firmament to suit the fancy of Mr. Jones of Edmonton.

The next evening after the theater Mr. Jones dined again with Nadu the Nautch girl with the eyes of Irish blue—just the two alone at a little table in a far corner of the grill room. And the next night. And the night thereafter.

That night after their late supper Mr. Jones boarded his train for home, promising to return in a month as his business

would surely require his presence in Winnipeg at that time—only he said it with smiling eyes and a tone that conveyed to the girl that it was she, and not the business, that would be responsible for the promised visit.

After Mr. Jones had gone Kitty realized that his sojourn had been the one bright spot in her life since that day so long ago when she had stood facing Big Tim McGuigan and Tommy Haldane in the little cabin on the Yukon.

She found her thoughts dwelling upon this young banker who had paid her such ardent court. She remembered the smooth, suave manner of his speech, and the fact that, if not actually handsome, he was distinguished looking with his gold pince-nez, and his carefully trimmed imperial.

And she remembered how pleased he had seemed when she had told him that the Nautch girl stuff, and the Rajah of Rammikan, and her appearance before the crowned heads of Europe had been creations of the fertile brain of Mr. Morris Hertzbaum of San Francisco.

She knew that she did not love Mr. Jones. The question she was trying to decide was, could she ever love him? What of Tommy Haldane? But—she *hated* Tommy Haldane. Tommy Haldane had not made good. He had turned out a weakling among those big men of the high North. Of this she was sure, for never in the Sunday feature stories from the Klondike, syndicated all over the United States and Canada, had she ever seen mention of his name. Swiftwater Bill and Moosehide Charlie and Camillo Bill and Old Bettles, and a new name she had never heard, the Yukon Kid—these names had been blazoned from coast to coast as the elder heroes of the land of ice and snow.

BUT the name of Tommy Haldane had never even been mentioned. Even though she had convinced herself a thousand times that she hated him, she knew that his failure to make good had been a disappointment so bitter as to amount to poignant pain. If he had risen to the heights and crashed in some mighty battle for gold—even though he came out penniless—she knew that her heart would have swelled with pride. If he had, even as Swiftwater Bill had done, scattered a fortune to the four winds in epic, hell roaring debauch, she could have loved him for it and have cheered him on as he plunged back into the wilderness to rip new fortunes from the beds of new creeks.

But to fail, when he had gone in among the first, that she could not forgive. Look at this Yukon Kid—the youngest of them all and the most talked of! Scarcely a newspaper that did not spread his doings and his sayings before an admiring world. He had amassed millions. Had waged and won titanic battles. Held the North at heel! And Kitty had never even heard of him—some chechako, probably. The one chechako in thousands, who, by the indomitable force of him, had made good.

There was a wistful droop to her lips. She drew a long breath that seemed, somehow, to catch in her throat.

Soon again she was dining alone in the grill room of the hotel with Mr. Jones of Edmonton. He seemed more ardent than ever and, in some way, more serious. They talked long of the Yukon and of the great stampede to the Klondike. Every day the newspapers were carrying news of the new North, of the jamming throngs that fought for place on the Seattle docks, of overcrowded steamers, of the vast army of pack-laden men that crawled like a never ending snake over the passes.

Suddenly the man leaned toward her, and his hand closed firmly over her own as she idly toyed with a spoon. She noticed that his hand looked strong and capable and brown against the snowy linen.

"Kitty," he said, "do you want to go back?"

"Back?" she repeated dully, her eyes lifting to his, which burned with an eager, devouring fire. "Back—where?"

"Back to the Yukon. To the Klondike. Forty Mile—anywhere you want to go."

TO BE CONTINUED

Today's Raw Bronc

(*The Roadwork Specialist*)

AS TOLD BY GIL STRICK
TO FREDERIC MERTZ

SOMETIMES you find a horse that doesn't want any of these accomplishments you are trying to give him. He seems to think it is plum affected to walk and gallop and slide and neck-rein. He aims to spend all his young life just trotting—this is his natural gait—and shying at stumps or rock piles, with his mane and tail blowing free.

If he can bluff you at this stage of his training, he will never step up into the cow horse class at all. He will have missed the foundation work that makes him easy-handling and dependable when he is sweating under leather. There is plenty of hot and dusty going at close quarters in the cow business.

Maybe you have noticed that our roan colt hasn't even passed the time of day with a calf so far. This is because he will make a better start if he puts in a couple of months training as a cow horse before he finds out exactly what it is leading up to. I figure that if he gets some of the other fears out of his system first, he won't be so likely to shy at beef on the hoof.

In a horse's life there are always two kinds of boogers—those that move and those that don't. A colt needs practice first in getting used to the boogers that don't move. When he has lost his fear of them, it's time enough to show him the moving boogers that he'll be tussling with for the rest of his life as a cow horse. And the best place for him to learn about them is an abandoned road, say ten miles long, where he will meet such things as rocks and bushes and maybe even a dismantled automobile.

In his early roadwork, the colt should be turned and twisted to get him acquainted with the pull and the neck rein. If he won't turn by neck-rein, bring the quirt into action. Look out for the jump and whirl on these occasions; and remember that cow country is full of people, myself included, who have had to walk home a long and dusty way after their first session on the road with a half-educated colt.

But even supposing you ride him out, you may find this horse a little unruly as he gets back within a half mile of the corral. You should have no trouble with him now, if you have used the hackamore to good advantage in his earlier training. But if you haven't, there is likely to be some argument when the fuzztail gets to tossing his head and running sidewise.

You have no choice of action here. Stop him immediately, turn him around and ride back the way you have come. Spin him several times, then start home again; and if he still tries to race on the home stretch, use the quirt or spurs or both. These generally cool him down until he is ready to walk like any sane-minded cayuse should.

From here out, his training in roadwork is just a matter of getting used to doing three things. First, he must show a nice walk that breaks into a run without any trotting. Second, he must slide to a stop when you pull him. Third, he must turn on his hind feet when you rein him—and by this I mean turning

both left and right. When these tricks are worked into his muscles, he still has some preliminaries to go through before he's ready to meet a cow; and one of these preliminaries—learning how to pull by the saddle-horn—is about as important as anything he will ever have to learn.

A cow horse spends a big part of his time holding a cow critter down by pulling on a rope that's tied solid to the saddle-horn while the rider gets off to do any little job that may be necessary on the roped animal. And, of course, our roan colt doesn't start practicing on livestock right away. Just like when he took up roadwork, he exercises his ignorance on a dead weight that won't kick or bite at him while he gets used to being in the same quarter section with it.

First you have to break the news to this colt that you expect to do a certain amount of roping from the saddle. When he understands that, catch yourself a light log or rock that the colt can pull easy, and back him up so that he will pull the weight toward him every time he steps away. If you have trouble backing him up now, don't cuss the horse; cuss yourself, because you are paying the penalty for having slipped up somewhere on his earlier training.

If a colt has learned to back easy and to like his work, it is surprising how quick he gets the idea of holding the rope straight from the saddle-horn to the log. But if he doesn't take to this job, he can still be tricked into learning. One of these tricks is done with a sackful of tin cans. Tie a rope around the sack and pull it toward the horse with one hand while you are backing him with the other.

This is a good plan, but it doesn't work any too well if the horse gets turned around with a sack of cans dragging behind him. At such times he is more than likely to stampede, and the fear in him will be greater than the soreness of his jaw from being pulled around. Ditches, washes, trees and fences will mean very little to him when he has that slam-banging devil of a sack bouncing along behind him.

For a colt that has begun to understand rope work, a good practice job is hauling limbs that will be cut up later for firewood. This gives the colt quite a pull on the saddle-horn.

If he can't pull, let your rope slip. This gives him the idea, as he backs away, that he has already moved the load. Now if you tighten down on the rope he will pull with twice as much energy as he showed before. Thinking that he started the log to moving, he actually gets it to move.

All this practice in pulling and hauling has another advantage. A good-pulling horse can be used quicker than a shovel in budging a cow out of a mudhole; and this talent works right in with the sensitiveness of cowboys, who would hate to pack a shovel and degrade themselves by excavating livestock from a puddle when a strong-pulling horse could do the work for them.

Another accomplishment a cowboy respects in his horse is a certain amount of good sense about gates. It is downright disheartening to see how some horses get all worked up over the fact that gates open and close. Big wooden gates with slide bars are something that even a simple-minded horse can learn to understand.

But wire gates, which fall down when your horse backs away as you try to ride through, are 'most too complicated.

The best advice anybody can give you about them is to keep them away from half-educated horses entirely. Just figure that when your cayuse has mastered the simpler gate tests and the other tricks we have been talking about, he is ready for a little practical experience.

He can go out now with the other horses on his first day's real work in the business he is being brought up for. In other words, he is ready to face a cow.

Captain Flood

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "Hurricane Ship"

DANIEL FLOOD, master of the old three-thousand-ton cargo ship *H. W. Crosbie,* was snoring in his bed while the *Crosbie,* on the long salt trail from New Orleans to Liverpool with cotton, slogged up the Gulf Stream.

A heavy swell, left over from the latest October gale, ran under her. It failed to disturb the captain's sleep. But suddenly he was swung in an awkward heap to the floor of his cabin. The whole ship groaned and staggered under a tremendous blow.

Captain Flood scrambled to his feet. He heard shouts from the bridge above him; and fainter, but even more disturbing, cries from the forecastle. He caught up his shabby greatcoat from its hook and ran out into the passage. In another instant he was up in the wheelhouse.

"We—we hit something, sir!" shrilled Haskell, the young second officer, in the master's ear. "I saw no lights—no lights at all!"

Daniel Flood, grim faced, nodded. He stared ahead into complete opacity. The night was black enough to exonerate any watch officer. His eyes gave him no inkling of what had happened. But there is no land to be struck some two hundred miles east of Cape Hatteras.

"Keep her going ahead dead slow, Mr. Haskell," he instructed the officer. "We've got to jam our stem into whatever we've struck in case we've holed somebody."

The second mate, brought back from the edge of panic by a definite command, leaped toward the engine telegraph.

"It didn't show any lights, I swear it!" he insisted.

Again Captain Flood nodded. He was a sandy haired, stocky, unimpressive looking man, fifty-three years old. For nine uneventful years he had commanded this small freighter, and he had hoped to command it for seven more

equally uneventful years.

Men were pouring from the forecastle on to the well deck. The iron walls of their quarters had been crumpled by something unknown out of the blackness ahead. Driven by blind instinct, they ran aft and came up the ladders toward the two boats that rested in chocks on the bridge deck.

"Shall I get your gun, sir?" asked the young Second, watching the rush of the crew with startled eyes.

"Calm 'em down," Dan Flood replied. "No guns."

He turned to find Pete Sunstedt, his morose, elderly chief mate, at his elbow.

"Go forrard, Mr. Sunstedt," Flood said to the silent officer. "Try to find out something."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the old mate, with no more than dreary obedience in his voice.

Captain Flood directed another glance forward at the black void of the night. He gave vent to something like a grunt and turned toward the frightened mob who threw themselves at the starboard bridge boat. He did not oppose the rush; he sidestepped it carefully.

He did, however, utter a few curt, decisive orders that gradually straightened out the sailors' confused efforts to rip off the cover and get the boat lifted and swung out on the davits. They obeyed him, for his words opposed no barrier to their panicky desires. He gradually worked them into the routine of preparing a boat for lowering. But when the boat was out on the davits he did not give the command to lower. He called two of the most frightened men by name.

"Go down and help the steward bring up provisions and fresh water," he commanded. "The rest of you—over to get ready the port boat! Jump!"

The rush was stopped. The men followed him across the deck. The port boat was still the focus of a mad swirl of uncontrolled action. The falls were tangled and the gear jammed. The second mate was fighting the frenzied men like a hero, with swinging fists and split knuckles.

Daniel Flood deluged the crowd with sharp, individual orders. He quieted the young officer. He had the boat swung out on the davits. When his orders ceased to flow, the shamefaced seamen shuffled their feet nervously and stood by.

Captain Flood laid hold of the shoulder of the carpenter and sent him to sound the wells and bilges forward. He dispatched the Second with several men to bring out any injured still in the forecastle.

The third mate, a huge bewildered youngster, hung at his heels clamoring to do something—preferably something heroic.

"Go back to the radio shack and sit on Sparks's head if he tries to send out anything, Mr. Elliot," Captain Flood instructed.

The Third bounded away to execute the order.

Captain Flood went back to his room and mixed himself half a glass of bicarbonate of soda and water; excitement sometimes gave him a touch of indigestion.

In eight minutes the master had a fair idea of what had happened. The mate reported that the thing they had hit was apparently the forward end of a capsized and deserted wooden vessel.

"Maybe a lumber schooner cut in two," Mr. Sunstedt suggested in his weary monotone. "She's low in the water an' covered with weed and shell. She's still hanging together, as well as I can see with a flashlight, and we're still badly afoul of her below our waterline."

As Captain Flood had guessed, the *Crosbie's* bow plates had been crumpled by the impact, and she was taking in water at a dangerous rate. The collision bulkhead was pierced. A fireman had been killed in his bunk and three others severely injured. The derelict continued to crash and work against the bows.

ONLY a few of the black gang on duty in the engine room had joined the rush to the boats. Barney Rusk, the taciturn chief engineer, had gone below in his nightshirt and seen to that in person. Mr. Rusk now reported succintly that the pumps were busy.

The carpenter came back to inform the master shakily of the swiftly filling hold forward.

Dan Flood chewed his pipestem. Then he had a look at the barometer. It was high, but falling fairly rapidly. There is no Indian Summer at sea. Not off Hatteras—not even two hundred miles off Hatteras. This approaching low would have wind in it, half a gale or more.

Captain Flood sent orders to Sparks to broadcast a radio call for immediate assistance. Then he spoke to the chief and second mates.

"We've got to get clear of the derelict," he said. "We've ridden up on her a bit, but our stem's not buried solidly enough to keep any water out of us."

The mate wagged his head in shaky agreement.

"This swell is battering her against us now, and if the wind comes up—" he began, but Captain Flood interrupted the dismal prophecy.

"I'm going to reverse the engine and swing her stern to the sea. If we can't drag clear of the wreckage under power, we'll try something else. Mr. Haskell, you break out storm canvas and have a gang standing by to lower a sail over her bows. Try to get it tight against the twisted plates so it will suck in with the water. We've got to plug her up somehow."

"Aye, aye, sir," Mr. Haskell replied with exaggerated briskness.

He ran down the bridge ladder to muster his party. Mr. Sunstedt crouched in the wing of the bridge, looking forward without hope.

Daniel Flood, with a word to the helmsman, gripped the handle of the engine telegraph. Slowly the *H. W. Crosbie* swung her stern around, rolling wildly in the trough. Then, as the stern came into the wind, she resumed her pitching. But the derelict still clung to the bow of the steamer when the vessel went into reverse. There was little buoyancy left in the waterlogged derelict, but there was still strength in her wire shrouds and stubborn timbers.

Twelve minutes later the third mate returned from the radio shack.

"Sparks has an answer from the freighter *Tamroy,* sir," he reported. "He wants our exact position."

"The *Tamroy!*" The wrinkles on the face of old Pete Sunstedt deepened until they seemed like creases in his skull. "Did you say *Tamroy?*"

"That's the ship," Elliot replied, staring with wonder at the aroused chief officer.

Sunstedt spat over the side.

"That's Carveth, then—Captain Ronald Carveth, the blasted, fourflushing hero!" Mr. Sunstedt snarled. "Lord help you!"

Captain Flood looked searchingly at his elderly mate. Sunstedt was not usually either so talkative or so emotional. The angry mate required no questioning. He spoke in a flood of bitter words.

"He lost my ship for me!" he raged. "We were on fire—a bunker fire, but we could have saved her—and had water lines going. But the *Tamroy,* on this same Atlantic run, sighted our smoke. Carveth was mate then and he was in charge of the lifeboat she lowered. The sea was rough. He came alongside and yelled to our crew to jump while they had a chance. The decks were hot and the smoke was pretty bad. The wind was kicking up a rising sea.

"They left us like rats, damn them! There was nothing I could do with the few officers who stuck. So we had to abandon. Carveth got his picture in the papers for his bravery in taking off men in a small boat in a rough sea."

He jerked his grizzled head and his

yellow teeth showed in a snarl.

"His picture in the papers!" he snapped. "But I lost my ship—lost her because he played the hero."

Captain Flood continued to chew his pipestem. His eyes examined the embittered ex-shipmaster before him with thoughtful attention.

"That's the man who's coming to your rescue!" Sunstedt shrieked, waving his fists over his head. "That's the man!"

Daniel Flood pulled a tobacco pouch out of his pocket and pushed it toward the mate.

"Give yourself time to fill a pipe, Mr. Sunstedt," he advised gruffly.

Slowly the mate lowered his clenched hands.

IN THE chartroom of the modern, oil-burning freight ship *Tamroy,* Captain Ronald Carveth, in watch cap and gray woolen dressing gown, bent over the chart. He laid a straight, well kept finger upon the vicinity of latitude 37 degrees, 5 minutes N; longitude 72 degrees, 10 minutes W.

"A bit of luck for us, Groehl," he said cheerfully. "We can reach them in four hours. We'll advise the New York office at once that we're running our best. You can imagine the headlines yourself."

Captain Carveth shifted his gold laced cap a trifle to the side of his head and grinned at his plump mate. His voice became confidential.

"If I got my command over the heads of a lot of hungry, grouchy old senior mates by saving life at sea, you can too, Groehl. This line knows the value of publicity."

"And if you got command of a freighter that way, sir, you can certainly make 'em give you a mail boat by saving more life at sea," the broad visaged mate predicted.

The sleek *Tamroy* was trembling under them as she thrust through the blackness toward the *H. W. Crosbie.*

Captain Carveth nodded approvingly at his mate's acute remark.

"I sometimes feel that I'm wasted on a freighter," he admitted, again adjusting his cap. "After all, any old barnacle can push a cargo of pulp wood from the Gulf of Bothnia to Norfolk; but it takes —ah—a different type to please passengers."

"And would you please 'em, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Groehl with unrestrained admiration.

"I might," admitted Captain Ronald Carveth, closing his right eye just enough to be jocular while still maintaining proper discipline.

WHEN dawn came the *H. W. Crosbie* was still afloat. But she was unpleasantly low in the water forward, for the derelict bumping under her gave little support and much battering.

The red dawn, together with the weather news that the radio operator had picked up, was not reassuring to Captain Flood. Although they were given no inkling of the prediction of another northwesterly blow, the older seamen of the *Crosbie* did not like that rosy, breezy dawn either. But they were too busy to spend much time in the observation of cloud effects.

Captain Flood was fighting hard to free his crumpled bow from the submerged tangle of wreckage that pounded ceaselessly against the ship. Not until she was clear could they get more than the roughest sort of patch around her crumpled plates.

The mates, carpenter, boatswain and men wrought mightily but without success with hawsers, wires, canvas and other gear. And the water came flooding in faster than the pumps could throw it over the side.

There were no ballast tanks to empty, for the *H. W. Crosbie* had a good cargo under her hatches. It was just a toss-up whether the next bulkhead aft in the old ship would hold against the pressure of that slowly rising water and the re-

peated shocks of the wreckage under her forefoot.

Though the ship when whole had not been troubled by the heavy swell, she now labored with ominous sluggishness. But her propeller had not yet been lifted out of the sea by the submerging bow; she could still keep her stern to the swell. Down in the engine room Chief Engineer Barney Rusk kept one hazel eye on the main engine and the other on the humming auxiliaries which were pumping the water out of the hold.

"Steam's no use to a dry screw," the chief had warned the master over the speaking tube as the ship settled slowly by the head.

"No time or weather to open hatches and heave cargo overside," Captain Flood replied. "If the stern rises high enough to lift out the wheel we'll lie to a sea anchor. I have one ready. It's the pumps you've got to keep running, Chief; we'll do without the engine if we must."

Barney Rusk voiced professional doubts with a grunt, and Daniel Flood closed the tube.

Their nerve shattered by the sudden crumpling of their quarters, the men of the *Crosbie* nevertheless worked hard and well under the eye of Daniel Flood. The boats on either side of the deck house were now well provisioned, with the plugs fitted. The captain paid no more heed to those boats than if they were mere ornaments.

Out of the air had come encouragement from the Coast Guard cutter *Iroquois*, which had picked up the *Crosbie's* call. She was many hours farther away than the *Tamroy*, but was cutting that distance under forced draft.

About the end of the morning watch the black smoke of the *Tamroy* showed over the edge of the troubled northeastern horizon. She was coming fast. The red eyed, weary men of the *Crosbie* gave a discordant yell when she was sighted. She grew swiftly in size and finally swung around in a safe position about two hundred yards to windward of them.

One of the *Tamroy's* boats hit the water with business-like precision. The men in it knew what they were about.

The wind was coming out of the northwest now, a puffy breeze and rising in the puffs. Already it had built up the swells which came from the same quarter and put a hissing, feathery crest on the huge combers. But there was still no raging fury about the seas. Not yet too rough to launch a boat.

Somewhere below the water-line the derelict clutched the *Crosbie* with the steel shrouds of her stumpy foremast or with some other stubborn tentacle. Its blows had become heavier as the sea increased in violence. Captain Flood took some of the punishment out of the battering by steaming slowly, stern foremost, into the weather; but he could not break that hellish grip. Now, fingering his pipe, he looked from his own racked, sluggish craft to the trim ship that rode those mountainous swells like a seagull.

Mr. Sunstedt, too, turned his deep sunken blue eyes, with hot fire in their depths, upon the *Tamroy* and her boat.

"The same old game!" he snarled to Dan Flood. "Carveth will steal your crew off your deck for the good it'll do him and his line in the newspapers. As for you, Captain, he'll rescue you, too, if you want. And then you can spend your life on the beach cursing him, for all he cares."

Dan Flood had filled his pipe but he had not lighted it. His strong, uneven teeth were tight on its stem, but his face was placid. His eyes traveled from one man to another on the busy forward deck. He looked them all over. The men were stopping now to watch the boat.

After that scrutiny Flood again inspected the barometer. There was nothing spectacular about its fall, but it was definitely sagging, nevertheless. And though the toiling men on the foredeck had accomplished something toward the saving of the ship, half a gale of wind

might undo it all. Or, if another bulkhead carried away, the sea might sink her too fast for boats to be of much account.

Captain Flood went into the radio shack and wrote out a message to Captain Carveth of the *Tamroy*.

GOOD CHANCE TO SAVE SHIP STOP CAN YOU STAND BY FEW HOURS UNTIL CUTTER REACHES ME

The answer from the *Tamroy* came back before the lifeboat had pulled down the cresting seas to the *Crosbie*.

YOUR SHIP PLAINLY SINKING STOP IMPOSSIBLE TO STAND BY STOP FALL OF BAROMETER INDICATES FULL GALE ON WAY STOP STRONGLY ADVISE YOU ABANDON AT ONCE TO SAVE THE LIVES OF YOUR CREW

—CARVETH

Captain Flood soberly put this literary message in his pocket.

The lifeboat from the *Tamroy* rounded the derelict at the stem of the *H. W. Crosbie* and came up on her lee bow. The boat swung in swift, violent motion from crest to hollow of the heavy swell. Mr. Groehl, Captain Carveth's plump mate, brought his craft close to the salt-caked side of the *Crosbie* and bawled for a line. The boatswain of the *Crosbie* had one ready and, without orders from the bridge, snaked an end down to the bowman of the lifeboat.

"Make it lively!" roared Mr. Groehl, as his craft surged high up the side of the *Crosbie*. "If you're coming, take it on the jump!"

Captain Flood descended from the bridge and gave instructions for the three wounded men to be lowered in a boatswain's chair. When this order had been executed a sailor, unbidden, dropped a Jacob's ladder over the bulwark and let its length unroll. Captain Flood leaned against the ladder, looking down at the boat.

"We're sticking it out till the Coast Guard cutter gets to us," Flood called down to Groehl. "Your skipper will have a big hand in saving our ship if he'll stand by."

There was a growl of complaint from some of the men of the *Crosbie*. Then came another call for haste from the *Tamroy's* mate. The boatswain, a stocky Dane, took a step forward to confront the shipmaster.

"The carpenter says she's still taking water faster than the pumps will handle it, sir," he said slowly. "And there's a blow coming, too."

"We're going to stick and earn our salt, men," Daniel Flood said to the hesitant group. "It's just a matter of hard work and seamanship to ride out a breeze of wind and get her to port. She's old but stout. There have been ships make port after they've been cut in two. And there's nothing wrong with her engine."

"We've earned our salt chipping the rust off her!" the boatswain flared. "We don't have to sink with her too."

He flung a leg over the rail defiantly.

With a quick movement Dan Flood laid hold of the man by the scruff of his neck and the seat of his pants. In one powerful heave he lifted him over on to the ladder.

"Your kind's no use in a jam, anyhow, you sea lawyer!" Flood said with contempt. "Into the boat, you! And if there are any others of your ilk aboard, in they go with you!"

Before any one could take advantage of this challenge the red faced boatswain had flung himself back over the rail on to the deck. He whirled toward Captain Flood and shook a frenzied, dirty fist in his face.

"Damn you, I'll stay for the fun o' seeing you drown!" he raged. "I've got more sense than you, but I've got more guts, too. I'll show you up!"

From below came the deep throated roar of Mr. Groehl—

"Abandon or be damned to you!"

"Make up your mind, Bosun," Daniel

Flood demanded. "Over the side or back to work!"

Cursing, the boatswain stamped forward. The men followed him. Captain Flood himself cast off the sea painter that held the lifeboat alongside.

"I'm asking your master to stand by," he shouted to the scowling mate in the stern sheets. "Sheer off!"

The bowman shoved the boat clear, and she dropped downwind toward the *Tamroy,* which now waited several hundred yards to leeward. Captain Flood watched her go. Then he went into his room for a bit more bicarbonate. He rubbed the small of his back, which ached abominably, and massaged his chest around his heart. His face was as wrinkled as an ape's, and stubble bristled from his chin and cheeks.

WORK on the *Crosbie* went on. Though it was no shipyard job, the shattered bows of the ship were reenforced with canvas, ropes and timbers down as far as the derelict would permit. At the risk of his life Mr. Haskell had swung over the bow at the end of a spar and cast a running bowline of heavy manila rope over the capstan of the timber-laden derelict. With infinite labor they worked the eye splice of a hawser down over the drum of the capstan, then brought this line back outboard along the starboard side of the ship and around a bitt to the wire of a cargo winch. The anchor windlass forward on the twisted deck plates was useless.

The winch, clattering mightily, dragged the slimy, barnacle-studded wreckage a scant foot around the shattered stem of the *Crosbie,* but could not haul it clear.

They brought the line around the port side of the ship and tried again. Again the wreckage shifted; then held immovable.

"Open her up!" said Captain Flood to the man at the winch. "Rip her off the plates if you have to."

Grinning, the winch man slacked away a bit on the taut wire; then the winch clattered thunderously. Once more the after end of the derelict lifted sluggishly in the water, grating against the buckled stem. And then with a groan the stubborn, rotted timbers of the old schooner parted. The deck and side quickly disintegrated. Timbers filled the water alongside as the sailing ship's solid sustaining cargo broke into its original pieces.

The men cheered hoarsely. The clutching incubus was releasing its hold on the *Crosbie.* A long steel shroud, red with rust, thrust up suddenly into view; then it whipped down under the surface.

Steadily the waterlogged remnants of the schooner drifted downwind. Still moving dead slow astern into the weather, the *Crosbie* widened the gap. As Captain Flood waited to hear whether the buckled plates had opened wider in the bows of the ship, there was thrust into his gnarled hands another radio message from the *Tamroy.*

> WILL PUT LINE ABOARD YOU WITH GUN STOP DESIRE MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO SAVE LIVES DESPITE YOUR ATTITUDE
>
> —CARVETH

"Send him this," Dan Flood told the Third: " 'Request that you stand by. Have broken away from derelict. Keep clear.' "

"Carveth will drive 'em into a panic yet!" Mr. Sunstedt predicted with dour certainty. His red rimmed eyes turned from the men on the foredeck to the *Tamroy,* leeward. "Here he comes! When he lets go that rocket he'll jerk the string right out o' the backbone of these men. They know well what a gun and line means. It's the last resort. You'll have a rush for the boats on your hands, Captain."

Captain Flood nodded wearily in response to this dire prophecy.

"Meanwhile we have a chance to get more canvas around that bow, Mr. Sun-

stedt," he said. "Now that she's clear, we may be able to do a better repair job."

"Aye, sir," mumbled Mr. Sunstedt. "But maybe hauling that wreckage away has opened her up to the sea."

He moved forward with uncertain steps. Daniel Flood beckoned to the third mate when he returned from the radio shack.

"As soon as that ship shoots a line over us with a projectile, Mr. Elliot, I want you to cut it away," he said crisply. "Watch her! She won't shoot until she's steamed to windward of us."

Mr. Elliot nodded belligerently and pulled an old-fashioned sheath knife out of its leather guard.

"Stand by to cut away the line, sir," he said with relish.

The carpenter stuck his head up the bridge ladder.

"Coming in a little faster, sir," he yelled. "We must ha' strained her worse!"

"Lend the mate a hand," Captain Flood said, nodding forward.

He studied the descending man intently. He was blue around the lips, but whether from exhaustion or fear Captain Flood could not tell.

He walked out into the starboard wing of the bridge. The aching hollow in the small of his back seemed to be getting deeper. The hardening wind chilled him through all his clothes—chilled his bones through his flesh. He gazed intently down the timber strewn blue water toward the *Tamroy*.

That ship had picked up her boat and now was headed almost directly toward the *Crosbie*. Captain Flood's weary eyes narrowed as he noted her course. The contrast between the safety so plainly offered by that magnificent, high-sided and powerful ship as she swept toward them and the danger so evident on the low, rusty deck of his own riven craft would be deadly disheartening to his exhausted men.

Suddenly he spread his elbows on the bridge rail and supported his head with his hand to get a steadier look at the *Tamroy*. Plunging through the tops of the heavy seas, she was driving on with contemptuous disregard for the scattered wreckage from the *Crosbie's* bow. But there were greater menaces than mere balks of timber in those waters. Though the forward end of the schooner was breaking up, sizable parts of the derelict, barely showing their slimy green bulk on the surface, still hung together.

Captain Dan Flood, after one more glance at the *Tamroy*, ran to the lanyard of the whistle and jerked it. He blew two short and one long blasts—the warning to a vessel standing into danger. Then he rushed out on to the bridge again for another look at the *Tamroy*.

The *Tamroy* was in trouble. She was turning sharply to starboard. Along her side just aft of amidships there was sliding up into view a long, submerged section of the derelict. That weed covered, shell encrusted piece of wreckage looked like a huge sea monster lifting its snout toward the bright buff superstructure of the ship. Her very turn to avoid it had thrust the ship's quarter against the waterlogged mass, and now it ground inexorably along the plates toward her stern.

Captain Flood uttered a groan.

"Put your helm over!" he whispered. "Swing her or—"

THE thing happened. The wreckage, scraping aft, brought up hard against rudder and propeller. The *Tamroy* suddenly ceased to turn. She rose high on the ridge of the swell, and Dan Flood saw how strongly that heavy mass of timbers had crashed against screw and rudder of the ship.

In another instant the wreckage had dragged past, but with it went the rudder of the *Tamroy*. And as the ship wavered and slid nose-first off the broad backed sea, Dan Flood perceived that the blades of the *Tamroy's* swift turning propeller had been sheared away too by contact with the submerged timber.

In one instant the sea had stripped the big freighter of both power and guidance. But the sea was not yet through with the ship. The helpless *Tamroy* rolled in the trough of the mighty swell as if she were about to dip her rails under. She could not help herself. Twice she recovered from those tremendous rolls. Then, during a momentary smooth, she lay on the sea with a terrible list to starboard. She did not come up. It seemed impossible that a man could stand on her deck.

"Cargo shifted," Dan Flood muttered, "and a bad shift at that. Fine stowage they gave her."

For a moment longer he stared out across the mountainous swells, but the *Tamroy* did not recover herself.

She rolled to meet a cresting comber, and the wave surged up on her inclined deck and broke in white, thunderous might. As the sea roared back down the deck it carried with it the splintered fragments of a quarter boat.

From the foredeck of the *Crosbie* Mr. Sunstedt came running toward the bridge, his cracked old voice discordantly upraised.

"A boat!" he shrilled as he clattered up the bridge ladder. "Launch a boat —blast his mean soul to hell, I'll rescue him! A boat, Captain!"

"Steady!" cautioned Daniel Flood. "Easy, Mr. Sunstedt."

"We've got him!" the old mate shrieked, clutching at Captain Flood's arm. "Don't you see? Carveth's disabled. He'll be swept. He can't launch a boat with that list. We've got him—got the sneaking hero between our fingers! I'll take him off. Give me a crew to man a boat!"

Mr. Haskell had followed the mate up the bridge ladder. He stood waiting eagerly for the master's word, with his eyes turned downwind toward the wallowing freighter.

The wireless operator shot out of his shack like a terrier out of a kennel. He rushed to Captain Flood with a scrawl in his hand. It was an incoherent call for rescue from the *Tamroy.*

CARGO SHIFTED ON BEAM ENDS IMPOSSIBLE TO LAUNCH BOAT REQUIRE HELP

"Carveth wants to be rescued!" Sunstedt shrieked, guessing at the message from Flood's taut face. He raised clawing, exultant hands to the sky. "The Lord's delivered him to me! I'll take him off. He'll see his ship go under before his eyes!"

He whirled around to face the men on the foredeck and drew his breath with an audible sound. Before he could shout another word Captain Flood jerked him away from the rail of the bridge. Flood's gray eyes were hard as agates as they fastened on the mate's distorted face. His fingers gripped the mate's arms.

"Mr. Sunstedt, go forward and resume work or I'll confine you to your room," he said in a dry, level voice. "Buck up! This is no children's squabble. Go forward!"

Under the grip of those hard fingers and the impact of Daniel Flood's eyes frenzy left the mate. He sagged in the master's grip and staggered when Flood released him. His feet dragged on the planks of the bridge as he stumbled toward the ladder.

Mr. Haskell's eyes slid from that pathetic, deflated figure to the *Tamroy.*

"Sunstedt couldn't handle the boat to take 'em off, but I can," he said with eager confidence.

Captain Flood's adamant gaze shifted to his second mate.

"Take a tuck in yourself, Mr. Haskell," he snapped. "Carveth is as tight as a drum and in better case than we are—still. Get on with that work forward."

"No boat, sir?" stammered the Second. His eyes lifted accusingly from the radio message in Daniel Flood's fingers to his face. "No boat?"

"No boat," confirmed Captain Flood. "It's no steadying experience to carry

away propeller and rudder and be swept all in about sixty seconds. We'll give the man leeway to think of his ballast tanks and chance of trimming cargo."

He pointed a stubby finger toward the crumpled bow of the ship.

"There's your job, Mr. Haskell, if you're interested in saving human life," he said grimly. "Dirty, hard work. Get on with it. The wind's stiffening fast."

With an expressionless face Mr. Haskell descended and moved forward. Dan Flood leaned over the bridge rail and hailed the big third mate down on the well-deck.

"Mr. Elliot, break out a rocket and fit a stick to it," he commanded.

The third mate came bounding up the ladder.

Captain Flood put the handle of the engine telegraph from slow astern to slow ahead. Gingerly the *H. W. Crosbie,* alternately hurled high and dropped low by the surges under her, edged downwind toward the disabled *Tamroy.*

Dan Flood gave the other ship two chances to take a line. One line, tied to a lifebuoy, he slung overboard. A man carefully paid out the rope as the buoy bounced over the seas in snail-like progress toward the ship wallowing in the trough. But it soon became evident that the buoy would drift down forward of the *Tamroy's* bows.

But meanwhile Elliot had prepared one of the ship's distress rockets. The end of a ball of marlin was made fast to its stick. The rest of the light line was flaked out on a clear bit of deck.

Foot by foot the *Crosbie* crept closer to the big ship that lay in the trough like a half tide rock. Through the *Crosbie's* scuppers gushed a stream of oil to flatten out the leaping tops of the combers which assailed the *Tamroy.*

From his corner of the bridge Captain Flood intently eyed the frothing gap between the two ships. This rocket must close that gap. It must not miss or fall short. He waited until it looked as if the next mountain of water would hurl the *Crosbie* down on top of the other ship. Then he nodded to the tensely waiting third mate.

The rocket hurtled skyward with a roar. The lifeline leaped after it in swift, snake-like coils. The rocket was curving, dropping. It fell into the sea beyond the *Tamroy.* The line dropped across the ship on the main deck aft of the superstructure. A thread joined the two ships.

A man on the *Tamroy* darted toward the line. Three strides away from it he slipped on the wet, slanting deck. A wave, roaring up that slope, engulfed him and dragged him downward. Another sea flung him up on the deck, but his clutching hand touched nothing he could grasp. The sea, subsiding, swept him down over the side and he vanished in the welter of water. Even if those two pounding surges had left life in him, he was beyond human help.

Another man, higher on the sloping deck, ran as recklessly toward the line. He seized it and got back to safety.

At a word from Dan Flood every man on the *Crosbie's* deck did his part in paying out over the starboard side a heavier line fastened to the thin marlin connecting the vessels. That heavier line was bent on to a hawser. The master himself stood by the engine telegraph. With occasional movements of the small brass handle he maintained the gap between the two ships.

FOUR times, despite the oil, the deck of the *Tamroy* was swept by a curling sea. Only the height of the forecastle head saved the toiling men who had brought the line forward and now were hauling in. There was no steam in the windlass to help them. They were drenched and battered, but they held their place on deck.

It was a slow job. Many minutes passed and many waves pounded before the stout manila line was at last hauled in through a hawsehole. They made it fast around the drum of her windlass. Swiftly they rigged springs to ease the

strain.

A man with a gold braided cap on the side of his head had come down from the bridge into the danger lurking on the forecastle head to direct the work.

Captain Flood grunted.

"He's caught his breath," he muttered to himself.

When the hawser had been secured on the *Crosbie's* foredeck, Captain Flood gave a long look toward the helpless hulk in the hollow between two mighty swells. Mr. Sunstedt had come up and now stood motionless at his elbow.

"We've got to do what we can for her, Mr. Sunstedt," said Captain Flood, "but it looks as if we might go to hell in bad company."

His hand tightened on the telegraph handle.

"If he goes, it's all right with me," replied the vindictive Sunstedt.

Slowly the *Crosbie* surged astern. The hawser lifted out of the sea, sagged and lifted again. The *Crosbie's* thrashing propeller, racing as every swell lifted it into the air, yet managed to get a grip on the water.

Almost imperceptibly the bow of the big freighter behind them was pulled to windward. It was a long, ticklish job. Captain Flood nursed the hawser with as much solicitude as if it were a pack thread. His ship did no more than exert an occasional pull upon it. But the *Tamroy's* nose gradually came around. The *Crosbie* was little more than a sea anchor, but she served.

In twenty minutes the *Tamroy* was no longer reeling helplessly in the trough. Her head was to the weather. Every comber washed along the lower side of her slanting deck the full length of her, but there was safety on the high side.

"Now, Mr. Sunstedt, we'll go back to work after our holiday," said Captain Flood grimly. "We've got to get her patched forward before the strain of holding this ship drags us under. Or maybe—"

He laid a hand on the rail to feel the terrible vibration of the racing propeller and was silent.

The mate departed. Leaving Mr. Haskell at the telegraph, Captain Flood slipped into his cabin for a swig of bicarbonate and water to ease the gripping pain in his chest. For just a minute he sat on his bed; then he ironed out his face and returned to the bridge.

That day and that night there was no rest for any man on either ship. But the battle with the gale and the sea was fairly joined. On the *Crosbie* men fought against the lashing seas that sought to fill her. On the *Tamroy* the battle was in the holds and between decks to trim that treacherous, badly stowed cargo which, slipping, had so nearly sunk her.

The gale beat at them and piled up seas to overwhelm them. But the *Crosbie* managed, as she was swept downwind, to keep enough strain on the hawser to hold the *Tamroy's* head to the weather. From the cutter *Iroquois* came the news that they had been compelled by the heavy seas to slow down.

"Can hold out," Captain Flood replied.

By midnight the wind had eased, but the sea was worse. When the first gray light crept over the black water the seas, though still tremendous, had lost some of their furious weight. Pumps ground on and on.

At 5:30 Captain Flood at the telegraph saved her when a cross sea knocked her stern almost around into the trough. He gave her full astern and the clanking, stricken engine of the *Crosbie,* under Barney Rusk's own hand, pulled her back before another sea could do for her. The hawser held; the sea had slacked it as it beat the ship almost under.

But that was the last alarm. The peril was melting slowly and undramatically away.

The *Iroquois* came up over the horizon a little after eight o'clock that morning. She was cutting through more seas than she leaped over. Daniel Flood saw her first. He was standing young Elliot's

watch for him. Sunstedt and Haskell were also turned in. Down below Barney Rusk had relinquished command to a junior engineer.

Captain Flood, alone on the bridge, was sensing the state of his ship. He was listening to the thump of her engine and the gush of her pumps, feeling her vibrations under every sea, watching her low bow and studying the dip and lift of the hard pressed hawser.

The cutter circled once around that strange sight—a small freighter with a crumpled and patched nose, down by the head and stern to the weather, towing behind her an imposing ship with a bad list and no propeller.

It was plain that the master of the cutter was in some doubt as to where his duty lay; but the *Crosbie,* plunging valorously over the formidable swells, soon enlightened her.

REQUIRE NO ASSISTANCE NOW STOP PUMPS HOLDING LEAK STOP EXPECT TO MAKE PORT OF REFUGE UNDER OWN POWER STOP CAN YOU RELIEVE US OF TOW

—FLOOD

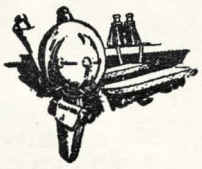
Having sent that message and received an assent from the *Iroquois,* Captain Flood thought of something else. He took a long gulp of his soda and water and went into the radio shack himself.

"Tell Captain Carveth that we'll be standing by until the *Iroquois* tows him to port," he said with studied casualness to the operator.

Slowly he returned to the bridge, hooked his elbows over the rail to take the strain off his back and feet, and stared at the *Tamroy.*

"And if you still feel in need of a bit of rescue work, my lad, we'll try it, though it's not in my line at all," he added.

But not even the helmsman saw his lips moving.



Doctor Auld and Malay Street

By JAMES W. BENNETT

THE Messageries liner, en route from Saigon, was but an hour out of Singapore. Doctor Auld, professor of comparative literature at the University of Christiania, beckoned me into the smoking room. Beaming at me through his thick-lensed spectacles, he said:

"My young friend, I will ask you to let me give you the one word of advices. But first, we shall have just a little champayner water. Which it loosens the tongue and releases the inhibitions. You will that favor do me?"

"No!" I answered bruskly. "No and no and no!"

Doctor Auld looked so hurt that I hastened to give the reason behind my refusal:

"We'll drink a farewell cup, yes. But you're not going to sign the chit. This entire voyage you've bought champagne for Riddick and Fox-Wells and me—and for at least fifty high-pocketed Frenchmen. When we get ashore, you're going to be *our* guest; we three will insist upon it!"

The doctor was now smiling.

"But, my boy, would you not an old man humor? It is my pleasure to do this. For my stomach, my physician

directs me to drink one glass daily as an apéritif—"

"And so, each evening, you buy a magnum which *we* drink! Doctor, can't you realize that we've had a unique experience, knowing you, hearing you talk?"

"Hearing me talk, *ja!* An old man falls into talk very easily," he said wryly. "Think you not that I, too, have gained some pleasure from talking with you three? That most delightful Irishmans, Riddick, that so sound English fellow, Fox-Wells—"

The wine appeared. I peremptorily reached for the card, forestalling Doctor Auld with some difficulty. We drank in silence. The doctor was voyaging around the world as a gift from a grateful university, a small enough payment for years of brilliant scholarship. A lion—with the smallest, gentlest roar I have ever known—yet a lion.

When our ship had nosed into Saigon five days before, a regiment of Annamite soldiers had been drawn up on the pier—as a guard of honor for the doctor. He had been whisked away as the guest of the governor-general. He had returned to the ship the next morning, so ill that Riddick, Fox-Wells and I had held a council and forced him to go to bed. In nightgown and nightcap the doctor had sat up in his berth and told us of his visit with the governor. The two had talked Vedic philosophy the entire night through. Auld concluded:

"The governor, he was in such grave error. A fine man but filled with wrong conceptions. I drank too much champayner water as we argued. Three glasses I drank and it has upset my miserable digestings. Now I have bilious spots before the eyes. But it was worth a hundred indigestings, for at last I persuaded him to see the truth."

After dosing Doctor Auld with castor oil, we left him. Outside his cabin, Fox-Wells demanded of Riddick—

"What is Vedic philosophy?"

"Vedic philosophy?" returned Riddick with prodigious scorn. "Do you mean to tell me, Major, that you don't know that? Very well, I'll tell you. Ved was the son of Magog and of a gray woman whose morals were no better than they should have been—"

But the major had thumbed his nose at Riddick and walked away.

Now, as the low red roofs of Singapore on its gentle hills were swinging ever closer, Doctor Auld and I drank a farewell toast. He said gently:

"I fear I can not accept your kind invitatings to join you ashore. Some peoples, unfortunately, are to meet me and with them I must go. Now, may I say a thing very difficult? You are young. I have heard that nowhere in the world is there so much sin as in Singapore. Not even in Paris. Singapore is the Paris of the East . . . Easy it is for me to say this: I am old; my blood runs slowly. For me there is contentment in talking all night of the Vedas or collecting coconuts and bits of ivory to take back to my fellow teachers.

"For you it will be much more difficult. Youth, I think, is not a happy time. Too much is it a longing for the flesh potzes, for houri that turn out to be only women of low intelligence and deploringly commercial. Now I have preach enough. I am dismal to think that our group breaks up here. In an hour it is goodby."

Doctor Auld was met on the dock by a large group of his compatriots and by a gorgeously caparisoned gentleman who was aide to the governor of the F.M.S. In the midst of the formalities, however, Auld broke away to throw his arms around each of us who were leaving the ship here. I can still remember the rough hug he gave me and the eyes, so beautifully serene, that smiled into mine. Riddick, the most mercurial of our trio, was unashamedly allowing the tears to roll down his cheeks. He muttered after the doctor's retreating figure:

"There goes a *man!* I feel better for having known him!"

Yet it was Riddick, that evening, as we sat over a gin-and-bitters in the lobby of the Europe, who asked—

"Did the dear old doctor warn you about the wickedness of Singapore?"

The major and I each nodded a trifle sheepishly.

"Well—?" said Riddick.

"Well—?" echoed Fox-Wells.

"We can at least see it, can't we?" suggested Riddick softly. "Malay Street, I believe, is hell's crater."

The major rose. Firmly he paid the chits; firmly he called three rickshaws; firmly he enunciated—

"Take us to Malay Street!"

"Dis b'long Malay Street," said the rickshaw coolie who led the van. "W'ere you want to go, here?"

"We want to get out," said Riddick, skipping from his rickshaw and setting forth at a brisk pace down a strange, enticing, half lighted thoroughfare.

Chinese lanterns glimmered red and gold before barred doorways. Above our heads, a *bi-bo,* a Chinese fiddle, whined eerily. About us drifted Tamils, Indian outcasts; Hindus with the caste mark painted on their foreheads and wearing white robes, none too clean but picturesque in draping; Malays in their batik sarongs, their khaki tunics and fezes; Ceylonese men, too, proud and haughty in spite of their hair being caught up in an effeminate knot and fastened with a tortoise-shell comb.

A few fruit stalls were open, displaying mangosteens with their snowy, unforgetably delicious centers hidden by a purple, fibrous rind; fresh lichees, reminiscent of South China; and huge, vile smelling durians.

For the rest, the shops were closed. We peered through dingy windows. We could distinguish bolts of cloth, indicating a draper's or the conglomeration of objects found only in a ship chandler's store. The signs before the doors were in Chinese, Malay, Arabic, only occasionally in English, thus indicating that the street purveyed to Lascar rather than European seafaring trade.

There were very few women abroad. Those we saw moved quickly and furtively as though fearing to be accosted. Where, I wondered, were the Sadie Thompsons of this street? The bold, brassy eyed, hip swinging females?

A Malay theater announced its presence by the weird and lovely notes of the *gamelin,* that collection of hollow drums which when struck give a soft, bell-like tone. I bought tickets and we entered. To the incessant accompaniment of the *gamelin,* Malay actors were giving a Western play. We arrived near the end of one performance—but we did not stay for the next. We had hardly reached our seats before we heard declaimed passionately—

"Eeet ees a far, far bett'r s'ing I do now, dan I 'ave ev'r done before!"

"Oh, I say," whispered the major, "this is a bit thick! The blighters are playing a 'Tale of Two Cities'!"

Once again in wicked Malay Street, we actually came upon vice—vice unadorned. It appeared in the form of a very furtive pedlar, who whispered:

"Postcard? Beau-ful womans!"

The major waved him away, saying:

"We don't want your postcards. But, tell me, isn't there *any* place on Malay Street where they perform the Nautch dance?"

The pedlar shook his head.

"Not in Singapore. Police very strict. Very stern. Now, in my native Cairo! Ah! *It* is wickedest city in worrld! It is Paris of the East!"

Riddick burst into wild laughter, so ribald that a Malay policeman materialized and came rapidly toward us.

"Shuuush!" implored the major. "We'll all be arrested, what? Disorderly conduct. One can not even laugh here."

Riddick desisted. But, as he climbed into one of our three rickshaws that had persistently dogged our footsteps ever since we discharged them, we heard him say:

"Dear old buzzle-headed Doctor Auld! So this is the Paris of the East, is it? So *this* is Paris!"

The Wizard in Bonanza

By EDMUND S. WHITMAN

Author of "Old Hutch"

BONANZA—land of promise, green pasture of enterprise! Hutch recalled how he had been thus enthusiastic in discussing his prospective trip with his friends. Now he stood by the rail as his steamer slipped along the glittering Central American coast. Ahead he could see a rickety wharf projecting into the Caribbean. And nestled down under the palms and sprawled up along a steep hillside was the village in question.

"Why, that's the town that got blown down by a hurricane," one of the office men had exclaimed the day Hutch modestly announced his intention of pushing off.

"Hardly the place for the Great Wizard of Finance," another interposed. "Or does Hutch have to get 'em while they're down nowadays?"

"Ideal for a consignment of phony roofing or a cargo of worm-eaten lumber," offered a third friend.

Hutch smiled as he recalled this exchange of small talk. He did not blame his associates for thinking he was crazy. They would have been still more inclined to doubt his sanity had he told them that he had acquired options on twenty second-hand slot-machines which had just been outlawed by the police and which he was, therefore, able to pick up for a song. All twenty were at this moment below decks, waiting to be discharged as soon as the steamer docked.

"Yes, yes," Hutch consoled himself, "the boys would never forgive me if they knew I was spending my money so thoughtlessly."

He hummed a few bars of the "Peanut Vender" and breathed on his immaculate nails. Then he buffed them against his lapel.

"I really should have told them more. Inquisitive chaps. But they would be certain to make unkind remarks if I

had explained that a friend of mine in the insurance business tipped me off that a large number of accident policies had recently been written in Bonanza; and that these policies specifically covered losses by wind, tidal wave and revolution. Yes, yes. With hurricane premiums being paid last week, Bonanza qualifies. Good American dough is just the dish for my twenty ambassadors of good will, concord and prosperity."

Hutch moved carefully around to the shady side of the deck as the vessel warped into her berth. The merciless sun that drew moisture out of others like pop through a straw left Hutch as sweet and spotless as new linen.

Scorching rays beat down into the exposed hold of the boat from which a squad of dock-wallopers struggled with the slot-machines. Even the tar between the deckboards was soup, while the metal ship fittings were hot as steampipes. Heat waves pulsated across the glittering bay, over the ramshackle open wharf, over the wind-tossed buildings ashore where metallic gray buzzards roosted in patient expectation that something good and moldy might turn up. Everybody on the job was wringing wet with perspiration—everybody, that is, save Hutch.

"Take it easy now, boys," he counseled in his bland voice, directing the activities from the lee side of the upper deck. Not a spot or a wrinkle marred the crisply laundered white linen which swathed his worthless carcass. *"No bumpo estos slot-machines, savvy?"*

"Slot? Que es slot?"

It was a voice of authority—the petulant voice of an official who would vastly prefer the dim recesses of a cantina to the glare of this uncovered dock. Hutch turned and calmly surveyed the speaker standing beside him.

"Who wants to know?" he challenged.

A crumpled party, with a weasel face and a propensity to blink perspiration out of his eyes, thumped himself on the chest and rose to his full five feet four.

"Me," he thumped, "Carlos Catharro, *Jefe de los Inspectadores de Custom, carajo!*" He blinked, watching Hutch narrowly to see if he had managed to convey any sense of his own importance. "And I desire to know about thees slot. What is slot?"

"Hot," Hutch explained patiently, taking a folded handkerchief from his pocket and deftly mopping a perfectly dry brow. "Not slot. Hot."

Catharro snorted, scooped the sweat from his own beaded brow and blinked at the machines now lined up on the wharf below to await his clearance.

"Hot machines, no?" he sneered.

"Personally I don't know what you're talking about."

Hutch was guarded in his language, suspecting that the man was trying to learn more than might be advisable. But before he got any farther a handsome, well dressed Indian with a derringer strapped on his hip stepped up and slapped the little native a jovial blow on the back.

"What passes?" he inquired arrogantly.

"These machines, I hope " Hutch put in.

"I am the *Comandante de Armas* of the port of Bonanza," the newcomer boasted. "And, while the function of customs inspection is out of my jurisdiction, I come out anyway to welcome the Americano visitor. Don Carlos, here, nearly prevented an insurance man from landing last month. That man brought great wealth to Bonanza. Now I visit every ship. I take no chances." He eyed the twenty machines curiously. "Yes," he went on, "I think you will be an asset to Bonanza, and I give you welcome."

THE customs inspector glared sourly at them both. He was still bitter because he had declined the insurance taken by others; with the result that when the big windstorm hit Bonanza it cleaned him out and he had nothing to show for it.

"Thees machine," he grumbled, "they look like the gamble. And that, my frien', is *contra la ley.* Your declaration—permit I should examine him, no?"

"I haven't made any declaration," Hutch explained. "Fact is, boys—er, gentlemen—I don't know how to write the Spanish for these machines."

"Machines of gamble, is no?" The little one glowed triumphantly. "Ah, no matter. You can not enter them."

"But they aren't machines of gamble. They are vending machines. Machines of sell. You savvy?"

"*Máquinas de venta,*" translated the *comandante* contemptuously.

The half-pint inspector hopped up and down like a sandpiper on a beach.

"No, señores! No, no, no! Thees machine sell nossing. Show me."

"He means for you to demonstrate how they work," the general explained. "He is suspicious, the poor what-you-call-it—"

"Sap?" suggested Hutch. He sensed that the general was more powerful than the customs man. "Well, come with me. I'll show you how they work."

Together they disembarked and moved over to the machines. Hutch produced a quarter and hastily slipped it into the aperture.

"You drop your money in here—so. You pull the lever—so. The three wheels then revolve—so—and finally come to rest."

"See?" the general said in a superior voice.

"No, I do not see," the little one snapped back at him. "And I thank you not to bozzer me." It was plain to Hutch that there was bad blood between these two. "I do not see what is sell."

"Why, there is no merchandise in the machine yet," Hutch put in desperately. "But you can observe for yourself what the goods are by the symbols on the wheels. Cherries, you see; oranges, plums, lemons—"

As he spoke he entered the cargo on his declaration as *máquinas de venta.* Meanwhile the inspector was groping about in the mouth of the machine as if he doubted that an orange could be disgorged through that space.

"He is looking for bananas," roared the general. "A great booster for his national fruit is Don Carlos!"

A sizable crowd had gathered about the spotlessly dressed white man and the two officials. They laughed at every gibe the general made while the little inspector puffed, hopped and protested. But his sensitive nature shrank from the publicity, and accordingly he grudgingly initialed the declaration sheet and ordered his men to put the clearance stamp on the machines.

"If I find you no sell the orange and the grapefruit from thees machine, you watch out."

But nobody paid any further attention to him as the crowd swallowed him up, milling about in curiosity to study these strange machines. It was a great sight to see Hutch and his new acquisition, the general, swinging along the dock, bound for the hotel, followed by a string of hot slot-machines!

IN BONANZA everybody eventually wound up in the Cantina El Ultimo Adios. It was not centrally located; on the contrary, it was well up the hillside, facing the Caribbean and flanked by the cemetery. This proximity to one of Bonanza's most popular municipal departments accounted not only for its name, "The Last Goodby," but also explained the popularity of the place. What more natural respite from the ardors of burial and sorrow than a casual visit to this bar for the cup that cheers? And what more natural than to return again—and again—to this hospitable scene of tender memories?

Inevitably Hutch planned to install his test machine in this popular saloon. Beforehand, however, he adjusted it to pay more generously than ever a slot-machine was intended to! Any one who stuck with it would more than break

even—not including an occasional fat jackpot!

Having loaded it to the craw with quarters, Hutch took it to the Ultimo Adios and let the proprietor know that his establishment was to be honored with the first machine. All he asked was that it be kept out of sight until the evening crowd was at its height, at which time Hutch would signal for its introduction into Bonanza's social scheme of things.

"*Muy bien! Sí, señor!*"

Actually Old Hutch was merely exercising caution. He wanted Bonanza to go for his machine in a big way—the bigger the better, for after all he had twenty to install—but he didn't propose to spoil his chances by giving that little customs inspector a peg to hang his hat on. So he waited to be sure Don Carlos wouldn't show up to crab his first act.

Hutch sat in the dimmest corner where the shadows of the lavender night were not penetrated by the ponderous kerosene lamps overhead. Peons and aristocrats, stevedores, engineers, merchants and municipal gravediggers sat about the scattered tables, chatting and rolling dice for drinks. Business was booming. There was plenty of ready money in circulation. Hutch had already gotten a line on some of the big policy holders benefiting by the windstorm. The *comandante* alone had collected ten thousand dollars for his rickety hotel, which had collapsed before the storm got much beyond gale force. Yes, the general was a set-up for him. Easy meat.

There he was now, just rolling up to the bar for his evening anisette. Hutch waited a moment to be sure no other officials were in his wake. Then, the coast being clear, he high-signed the proprietor.

Bonanza's first slot-machine made its appearance.

There was an instantaneous stampede. The boys got the idea at once. Quarters jangled down the throat of the machine; the lever was constantly grinding; wheels spun and money belched forth with a generosity that was a stab to the vitals for poor Old Hutch.

But it excited the general. For some moments he stood with his back to the rail, elbows cocked up on the bar, five-gallon hat shoved back on his head, while the peons fought for a chance to play the machine. Hutch watched him narrowly and saw his expression go from tolerant amusement to surprise and then to desire.

"One side," the general suddenly commanded in Spanish. "Push over, there. Make way for the *comandante!*"

The men fell back in respect for his authority. Enviously they watched him chance one quarter after another, collecting pots of two, four and sometimes eight quarters, losing little and winning much as he kept the machine busy.

"So! The general buy plenty orange and coconut!"

The inspector! Nobody had seen him arrive in the excitement. Hutch slipped into a dark room where he could see and hear without being observed.

"*Bueno!*" bellowed the general. "Our Don Carlos is here to buy bananas. Come, *amigo*, and try your luck. See? Simple. Just as the Americano showed you. A coin and a twist of the lever—so. And then—"

He stood back, and the wheels came up three plums, obligingly coughing eight quarters into the pay-off cup.

"And the fruit—where is he?" Don Carlos sneered.

"What better fruit could you ask than this?" retaliated the *comandante* derisively, jingling the quarters. "I put in one and get eight."

Catharro dug into his pockets and produced three quarters. These he inserted cautiously one after another, unhappily with no results.

"There! It is a no-good machine. As I say, I am through. Feenish!"

"You just don't know how to hold your mouth," the general teased. "Stand back, you!"

He roared at the peons who edged in with their quarters, like wolves about a trapped animal. Everybody was eager to take the next chance. After three misses there was bound to be a prize.

The general put in his coin and yanked the lever. A gush of silver rewarded him. He was delighted, and the crowd howled down the dejected inspector.

"*Esta bien, caballeros,*" the little man grumbled. "We shall see about thees machine beezness. *Mañana* I make the grand fine. Bah!"

IT WAS midnight when Hutch saw the general swaggering out of the cantina. He hurried up to him, and together they strolled down into the center of town.

"Your machine was very popular, *mi Americano.*" The general worried a great pocketful of quarters. "I cleaned him out. But Don Carlos lose and tomorrow he will assess a fine."

"Has he the right? And on what grounds?"

"Yes. By law he can claim you introduce the machines to Bonanza under false declaration. Vending machines you called them—remember?"

Hutch thought fast. He could wire the owner up North to rush him a supply of the packaged mints which fit the machines, if only he could stall off the inspector for a week until they arrived.

"They *are* vending machines, General. I can wire for supplies to go in them. But how can I stall off the inspector?"

The general roared with laughter.

"Vending machines. Ah, that is good. Money they sell to me. Nothing do they sell to Don Carlos."

"But I tell you they do sell things. These sell candy—mints, you know, rolled up in little packages. Just the thing for the working man. One pops out with each quarter played. That's what the opening's for at the bottom of each machine, don't you remember?"

"Well, then, why don't they work now? All I get is money."

Again he jazzed up the pocketful of quarters. Each jingle was as depressing as a funeral dirge to Old Hutch. The man would ruin him in a week!

"I didn't bring any with me. I never thought there would be any quibbling over a mere technicality. And now I'm to be shellacked with a fine." He slouched along, plunged in gloom.

"You are no more sorry than I, my friend. Think what I would do if you had all twenty machines in operation!"

Hutch shuddered at the thought. All twenty—ye gods! Imagine feeding this lug quarters from them all, and paying twenty fines!

"I've got it! I've got it!" For a second Old Hutch forgot himself and raised his voice in excitement. But immediately he mastered himself. "Listen to me, Gen; I think we can pull off a deal. A deal! Get me?" He nudged the native and was rewarded with the clank of a multitude of quarters. "I'll appoint you general agent for the mints. Then I'll buy them from you, even though I've paid for them in the first place myself. What do you say?"

The general was visibly affected.

"But why? Why should you appoint me the agent?"

Hutch didn't answer at once. He steered the native into the hotel, fortified him with a bottle of beer and drew up papers.

"You will be general agent of the—le's see—Bonanza Mint Company. Swell name. Sounds like big money. It will build you up with the merchants." He could see that this appeal to the general's vanity was up the right alley. The native was swelling like a turkey gobbler on parade. "I'll wire for a few gross of stale mints right away—nobody eats 'em, anyway. They'll come consigned to you, and you can declare 'em as rations for your men so there'll be no duty. And old Busyjaws Catharro won't ever suspect what's going

on. Get it?"

The general was deeply moved at the prospect of a title and a little extra money. Yes, he would string along with this fellow and get what he could out of him. All Americanos, it seemed, wanted to give him money.

"Now, all I ask you to do—" Hutch hurried through the catch in the transaction—"is to go to Catharro first thing in the morning. I'll stay in seclusion until around noon, so he won't be able to get his hooks on me. That'll give you plenty of time to tell him that I don't know anything about his intention of fining me, but that I am so excited over the popularity of the first machine that I plan to install all twenty this week. Just a question of locating the best places for them. Get it?"

"No." The general was puzzled. "How will that hold him back?"

"Why, you tip him off *to wait until all twenty machines are installed.* Then he can seize them all and slap on *twenty* fines!"

Hutch was on his feet, tense with excitement.

A new respect came into the native's eyes. For the first time he was regarding an American with something besides contempt. This sandy haired one with the easy-going ways and the quarter-belching machines might be useful after all. Perhaps some *gringos* had brains.

"Bien!" he said. "I do it tomorrow, early. You stay in your room until I call. Leave it to me, *amingo. Buenas noches.*

Hutch gave the *comandante* a friendly smile and winked.

"Good night, Mr. General Agent!"

Hutch saw him to the door and then sent his wire. This done, he returned to his room, glanced once more at the agreement negotiated with the general, smiled slightly and studied his fingernails.

"And coffee," he whispered gently to himself. *"And* coffee!" Which was an exclamation all his own.

DURING the week pending arrival of the mints Hutch was besieged with importunate messages from owners of saloons, dance halls and clubs. All Bonanza knew there were twenty of these miraculous money machines. All Bonanza knew that the one out at El Ultimos Adios pulled great crowds and lost at least twenty-five dollars a day. Naturally, invitations to install machines poured in on Hutch. These written requests he and the general considered, selecting the most advantageous locations for the nineteen machines awaiting installation.

Hutch was stalling for time. Each day he would set up a few machines about town, taking care to drape them in cheese-cloth to indicate that they were not yet ready for the public. Thus, while they were devoid of quarters, they were nevertheless very much in evidence.

Don Carlos Catharro kept close tabs on the whereabouts of the machines. Every day his men reported on new locations. No public official hovered about a draped statue more lovingly than did the inspector about these machines. What a fine he would impose when all twenty were installed and operating!

The day the mints arrived Hutch and the general made the rounds during siesta, at which time the American revealed some of the mysteries of slot-machines to the native—some, but not all. For, while he showed the general how to put the packages in place, and while he ostentatiously loaded each machine with ten dollars' worth of quarters, he did not say anything about setting them for the pay-off. The general —and all Bonanza for that matter— took it for granted that they were purely mechanical and impossible to regulate.

"You'd better arrange with each proprietor to hold the mints for you as they are dropped out of the machine. Nobody ever wants them. They're just

to keep within the law. And we'll come around tomorrow, and I'll show you what little money-makers they are."

The general was all for playing each one as fast as Hutch filled it with money. It was only by a sustained burst of eloquence that he was induced to leave the machines and make it known to Carlos Catharro that the time was ripe for the assessment of the fine. After all, the machines were there for good—plenty of time to play them later on.

"All you have to do is stir him up a bit," Hutch explained to the general. "Just tip him off that I'm in El Ultimo Adios. Then you keep away so he won't suspect anything, and I'll cook his goose to a turn."

Catharro, hot and disheveled, lost no time in turning up at the cantina. It was midafternoon; the place was almost deserted. He found Hutch placidly absorbing a gin-rickey and amusing himself with a leather cup of dice.

"You!" the inspector burst out. "I have come to assess the fine!"

"Tush, tush, man," Hutch said calmly. "It must be a couple of other fellows you have in mind. The heat has you down. Here; have a drink and relax."

"Bah! Thees machine. Oranges, bananas, bah!"

"Mints today," Hutch murmured. "No bananas today."

"Bah! Thees machine do not sell nossing." The inspector was on tiptoe. He reminded Hutch of a young rooster trying to crow. "I assess the fine. One hunnerd dollars for each machine that is not a machine of sell."

Hutch dipped his nose into his glass.

"Go peddle your papers," he advised. "You're altogether too excitable, Don Carlos. Now, I am telling you there's nothing wrong with my machines. Sit down, why don'cha? Forget your grievances."

At that moment a peon drifted into the deserted saloon and fished in his pocket for a quarter.

"Observe the gentleman buying a package of mints," Hutch murmured to the inspector. "He comes in from his work, hot, hungry, keen for some simple, wholesome refreshment. The answer? Mints, as purveyed by my humble machines. Better for him by far than white-eye, don't you think? Surely these machines of mine are a beneficent influence in Bonanza, for which both you and I can feel pardonably proud."

Two quarters clacked into the cup.

"Ha!" exclaimed the customs man.

Hutch merely held up his hand.

The machine sighed, the whirring ceased, there was a plop. A package of mints rolled out of the aperture. Nobody was more astonished than the peon, who hurried out, crossing himself.

It took some time for Hutch to calm the inspector. It was a blow, naturally, to find that a prospective two thousand dollars in fines had gone glimmering. Don Carlos became strangely subdued.

"Never, it seems, do I make the money," he whimpered. "I do not take the insurance, and then my place blow down. I try the machine, and lose. Now I prepare for the fine and *pouf!* Thees machine produce *dulces.*"

Hutch was properly sympathetic.

"You should play them like the general. Come, we are alone here now. Nobody will see. You play twenty times and see what you do. If you lose, I'll pay you back your losses. Come."

"But why should I win? Why should thees machine pay me?" The little man was naturally suspicious, even though the American had made him a sure-fire proposal.

Hutch winked.

"These machines are being installed for a purpose," he confided in a low, intimate voice. "The general is mixed up in it. There is some reason. Maybe a way to win the support of the people —perhaps it's political."

He waited, giving this time to percolate. Hutch knew that the customs man and the general were of diverse political opinions.

"It wouldn't surprise me if the money were being provided by the Liberals. I don't know, of course," he went on hastily in his hoarse undertone. "I'm just the agent for the machines. All I hafta do is keep 'em filled up and draw more money whenever I need it."

Catharro played twenty times, won twenty packages of mints and got back sixty-three quarters—a net profit of more than ten dollars. He emerged from the session a new man, refreshed spiritually and physically.

"I go to play the others—" he started to leave—"all of them. *Pronto!* I make two hunnerd dollars!"

Hutch grabbed him and clamped him down in a chair.

"Listen here," he demanded. "You can't do that. First place, you'll be seen. That's bad politics. Second place, you haven't time to make the rounds before the evening crowds appear and play the machines, savvy?"

"What to do then?"

"You got any money—about two hundred bucks in cash?"

"But yes."

"Well, I'll change it into quarters for you while you round up twenty dock laborers that you can trust. Give each one ten dollars' worth of quarters—forty of 'em—and tell each to go to one of the machines, play it forty times and bring back the winnings. Then you give 'em a small percentage. Get it? You clean up all twenty machines before the crowds drift in, and you're not even seen! Boy, won't that burn up the general?"

HUTCH called for the general at nine o'clock in Bonanza's most elegant taxi.

"Come for a ride," he urged. "Do you good. Besides, I want to tell you about my meeting with Don Carlos."

Hutch had cautioned the driver to keep away from El Ultimo Adios, his hotel and the inspector's house. He didn't relish the prospect of a meeting.

"He was wild," Old Hutch lied gracefully. "Wouldn't believe his eyes until he tried the machines himself. Lost a few quarters, got three packages of punk mints and went home sore."

The general roared.

"You and Don Carlos!" he bellowed. "One fills them up with quarters by unlocking them, and the other fills them by dropping money down the slot."

This was precisely the trend that Hutch had hoped for. Only it came sooner that he expected.

"General, you were with me when I loaded the machines. How much did I put in them?"

"When I get through playing them tonight you will be out just—let's see, twenty times ten—two hundred dollars!"

"So? You think I will lose. You think they are not silver mines. Well, come with me. We will make the rounds. You shall see how much I lose."

As expected, in unlocking the machines, Hutch found the quarters Don Carlos's men had dropped as well as other coins played by transients. Machine after machine netted in excess of twenty dollars. The general questioned the various proprietors sharply. He was suspicious that a trick was being played. But he learned that different groups had played different machines.

"Four hundred dollars a night!"

"Not bad, is it?" Hutch replied, as he called for drinks at El Ultimo Adios.

It was well past midnight by the time the two arrived on the hill. Nobody was around, and the native was so astonished at the earning power of the other nineteen machines that he didn't notice that this twentieth was barren of quarters, having long since been cleaned out.

"You'll do nicely with that mint concession. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see you net five bucks a day yourself—maybe ten!"

Hutch tilted his glass and studied the other's face as he did so.

"Me? Five dollars! You. four hun-

dred! Humph!"

It was plain to see that the thought of the Northerner making the big money was poison to the general. Not his idea of the way things should be at all. He drummed the table while Hutch let him stick his own head in the noose.

"Nobody can lawfully operate these machines without my help," he was thinking out loud, "for I am exclusive agent for the mints which go into them. So—"

"But I have your written agreement to sell the mints to me on a flat basis," Hutch put in gently.

"You have, yes. But it is not transferable. And if something should happen to you—"

Hutch did his best to register horror. Nor was that difficult. A certain hard, brutal quality in the swarthy general's voice hinted eloquently of a knife in the floating rib practically any dark night.

"You mean?"

"Well, you can always leave," the general snapped back at him. "There's nothing holding you in Bonanza."

"Only a four-hundred-dollar-a-day net profit business," wailed Hutch. "I'll ask my Government for protection. I'll wire for Marines."

Hutch was narrowly watching his victim's face. He knew the general would not relish any publicity, as the outright ownership of the machines was too sweet a proposition to be bared to the rude and curious public.

"I am not saying anything *will* happen," the Indian snarled. "But Bonanza's no place for a white man. I can not be responsible for my hot-headed soldiers when they lose a month's pay in one of your machines. Now if *I* own them I can handle the matter." He gestured eloquently and awaited Hutch's decision.

Back and forth they argued until at length Hutch capitulated.

"Le's see." The white man figured on the back of an envelop. "Four hundred a day—twelve thousand a month. Knock off two thousand for holidays. Ten grand. Divide that by twenty machines makes five hundred."

He looked up.

"Gimme five hundred per machine," he whined. "That'll be earned back in less than one month, you big bully!"

He fished in his coat pocket for pen and paper. As he made the machines over to the general he kept up a steady flow of complaint, stressing particularly the aspect of governmental intervention and the fact that he was being literally robbed of a gold mine.

"Why, there's nothing like it clear to Buenos Aires," he pointed out. "With those machines you can travel all over the country picking up a bountiful harvest."

"You ought to know," crowed the general, reaching for the paper. "Come on and get your money."

THE boat was scheduled to sail about noon. Hutch had his passage already booked, but he was up at dawn. He was worried about the inspector's attitude. And he had promised the general that he would accompany him on an early morning round of his new machines. The native was like a baby with a new toy. He insisted that Hutch watch him load each one with quarters for the day's play.

"That Carlos Catharro is certain to make trouble," Hutch counseled himself. "Almost sure to claim that I cheated him. He might take it into his head to hold up my passage, so I'd better protect the situation in case of a showdown. I want to be in a position to invite him to play these machines once more in case he gets tough."

Thinking thus to himself, Hutch found opportunity to deftly adjust the cotter pin in the back of each machine while the general patiently poured his quarters into the container. The white man chatted glibly as he set each machine for a generous pay-off, distracting the new owner by assuring him that it was good business for him to come out

openly like this and be seen loading his own machines with his own quarters. The proprietors watching the operation would be certain to talk about it, which would add prestige and swell patronage—and hence profits.

"The play on these machines will exceed your wildest expectations," Hutch prophesied.

But he didn't feel the need of carrying the line of thought to its logical conclusion. The general might well become petulant if he knew that as each machine was unlocked the white man was setting it to gush forth quarters like the veritable horn of plenty.

Sure enough; Hutch had no sooner completed the rounds and returned to the dock with the general than Don Carlos screamed down upon them like an indignant fowl whose nest had been violated.

"Thief! Robber! You shall not go. To the *carcel* with you, you hear me?"

"Easily." Hutch replied, trying to brush the man out of his hair. "You're bellowing loud enough to be heard in the next parish."

"So!" The little one rose on tiptoe and glared up at Hutch. "The insult added to the injury." He turned to the general. "*Señor Comandante,* arrest thees man for—"

"Aw, don't get like that," Hutch interrupted.

He would be on the spot if the general should learn that he had induced Catharro to play all the machines. Nor was he anxious to have the latter threaten to seize the machines or assess fines, at least not until he was safely on the high seas.

"Don't get worked up. Tell us now, wha'sa trouble?"

"Trouble? I lose money on those machine. You tell me how to play them and then—*pouf!* I am ruin, you onderstand?" He was fairly jumping off the ground.

Hutch studied the twitching features. He had to do something quickly to get the noisy one away from the unsuspecting general.

"Why blame me?" he said softly. "I showed you how to play the machines, yes. Then, because your technique is not perfect, I am refused permission to board the boat. Is that the human thing to do?"

"Make him show you again, why not?" the *comandante* suggested to the inspector. "If he's so good, make him show you."

Hutch assumed his best scowl, which he turned on the general.

"My pal," he growled. "Want me to lose my shirt, don't you—exacting a toll before I am permitted to sail."

The customs man got the idea at once. He winked expansively at the general and began marching his prisoner down the dock and to the nearest machine in the Bonanza Club. Hutch breathed a sigh of relief as the general, rubbing his hands, returned to his office and left him alone with Don Carlos.

"Now listen, Don Carlos; you aren't going to make me go through with this, are you? Be a sport. Play 'em yourself. I'll guarantee that you win, just as I did before. Remember?"

"So, you make the money-back guarantee. Ha!" Catharro threw back his head and barked as they entered the Bonanza Club and bore down on the first machine. "You are, what-you-call-it, of the beeg heart!"

The little man beat a furious tattoo on the machine.

"Now," he demanded, "play."

"Oh, no. *You* play. You lost, so you play. I insist."

"Ha, you insist. How about me? *I* insist. Play! Play! Play!"

He made such a hullaballoo that the manager came scurrying in.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, can I help?"

"But yes!" Don Carlos was hopping, and his black eyes glittered. "The Americano would like you should change for him a twenty-dollar bill into quarters."

"But certainly." He bowed and hurried away.

"Aw, what's the idea?" Hutch said. "I know all about this game. Why should I play? I haven't lost."

"You get your twenty dollars out and hurry up. We have lots of places to go to yet. Your boat sails at noon, my friend. And see—I sign your papers. But you don't get them until you have played all twenty machines. And then I seize them all because I find that the merchandise they sell was imported but not declared, and so *contra la ley!*"

Hutch shook his head sadly. He felt downright sorry for the general. And for the inspector too, who no doubt planned to get back his own losses by breaking open the machines after Hutch had put twenty dollars in each. But he decided that silence was the best policy, all things considered.

It was 11:30 by the time he had cleaned out the twelfth machine before the bulging eyes of the now inarticulate inspector. Then came the warning blast of the ship's siren.

"Go," he whispered, licking his lips. "I shall feenish thees work. And if you give me the fox you may find it difficult to land again in Bonanza."

Old Hutch stepped out into the brilliant sunshine and headed for the dock. His smartly cut linen suit bulged sadly under the weight of more than four hundred of the general's quarters. At the dock he ran smack into the *comandante.*

"I feel most apologetic about these," Hutch stammered, patting the distended pockets of his jacket.

The general's face fell like the stock market.

"But how—what—who?"

"The inspector," Hutch confided, jerking his thumb back toward town. "He made me play. I'm lucky. I won!"

"*Carajo!*" howled the general. "The worm! I fix him!" He sped up the sunbaked street like a madman.

Weighed down with silver, Hutch clanked aboard his steamer. For the first time since he had come to Bonanza he found himself slightly warm. Touching his hand to his forehead, he found he was gently perspiring.

"Tsk! Tsk!" he reproved himself. "This will never do. Actually in a sweat. Well!"

He looked around for a deck steward.

"Here, son," he said, thrusting a fist into his pocket and flashing a handful of coins before the man, "show me the shower. I'm shaking the dust of Bonanza."

By GORDON MacCREAGH

Author of "The Lost End of Nowhere"

The MAD HAKIM

TWO men looked into each other's eyes — calculatingly, with blood-chilling deliberation. One man was white, with the drawn whiteness of those tropic places where direct sun rays mean not sunburn, but sunstroke. In person and in this place the man was an anomaly. He had the wide shoulders and tight lips of a fighter, the high forehead of a thinker, the bulges above the ears that betoken an observer. In short, he had the face of a man who puts two and two together, deduces his own individual size and shape of four and then pushes his deduction through to its logical conclusion as he sees it. His name was Dr. Curtiss.

The man into whose quick brown eyes Dr. Curtiss looked was brown with the lemon-brownness of the mountains that heave their jungle covered sides out of the tropic plain and stretch away back to the borders of China. He was as shrunken and wizened as the white man was broad. He was seamed and wire-drawn with the enduring, lean vitality of a man who has lived his life in the clean hill country; and his eyes, as shrewd and quick-flashing as a bird's, never left those of the medical man who held the decision of life or death.

Dr. Curtiss was frowning now in worry and perplexity. In his blue veined hands he held at the moment more power than any other human being in a district comprising seven million souls. More even than the commissioner, who was lord paramount of the district and toured his domain holding circuit court in the queer, comic opera, teak-plank-and-palm-thatched courthouse of a mud and bamboo village on the shores of the Upper Irrawaddy.

"Well, Doctor—" the commissioner's

voice cut in impatiently on the man's long scrutiny of the prisoner who was under observation—"what is your verdict?"

Dr. Curtiss was not to be hurried in a matter of this seriousness. He raised his eyes to the commissioner, then again regarded the brown prisoner.

The man was some sort of Shan high priest. A hot blooded, proud people, the Shans, who insist that they are a free people, since their country of dense jungles and mountain gorges is politely called a protectorate of Great Britain's.

The prisoner's crime was heinous. And the more so in the eyes of the white law because the man had dared to lift his hand against the ruling race which, on account of its minority among the teeming brown millions, must remain inviolate. Yet this scrawny, fanatical looking old man of the hills had taken a *dah,* which is a cross between a bolo and a machete, and had waited for a white man in the jungle path that led to his village. When the white man had come along, riding carelessly and whistling, the ancient had jumped out, put the horse boy to flight, dragged the rider from his saddle and hacked him to a ghastly mess.

Those were the counts *against* the man. The physician had heard them all. He had been assigned to examine the man, to observe; for British justice is impartial even in the jungles of the Irrawaddy. Examining, observing and questioning, the arbiter had elicited some confirmation of the counts *for* the man.

The old native was incoherent, furious, reluctant, concealing a personal and intolerable shame. Only the familiar antiquity of the sordid plot supplied any connecting thread: A young girl, the fanatic's granddaughter, possibly—and some of those Shan maidens are a pale lemon color and fair to look upon. A white man—a petty district official with some paltry authority that he could stretch to weigh heavily upon unlettered hill folk. A sorry business . . .

So the observer put his two and two together and deduced his own individual kind of four. Very deliberately he turned to the table that was temporarily endowed with all the majesty of the judicial bench.

"My verdict, Mr. Commissioner," he said distinctly, "is that the man is quite insane."

"What's that?"

Startled, the commissioner stared at the physician whom he had called in to lend a little authenticity to the impartiality of justice by acting as an alienist. The physician unblinkingly returned his scrutiny. His opinion was not what the commissioner had thought it would be, or what he thought it should be. The commissioner believed that these interracial killings ought always to be made a salutary example. But decisions even in the far corners of the British Empire must be disinterestedly just. Since the alienist had rendered his verdict, the commissioner must render his accordingly. And so the court perforce pronounced a merciful verdict of life instead of death.

Twenty years' imprisonment instead of the rope.

The prisoner threw himself to the ground and clutched with his manacled hands at the physician's knees. In an aged falsetto he babbled a gratitude that had the authoritative ambiguity of a priestly benediction. Among other benisons:

"To you who have done a justice that is more just than the white man's law will be given justice and recompense. The gods of the hills—little gods but very wise—" the cracked tones held fanatical conviction of something the ancient knew to be inevitable—"the gods of the hills will give you health and long life and great good luck."

And to the commissioner, as he was led away, he screamed an equally inevitable conviction.

"As for me, I shall escape. You can not hold a free man of the hills. Surely I shall escape. The gods of the hills

will liberate their servant so that he may continue to pass their word to the people of the hills."

He shook his irons high in the air and shrieked. From outside the door his shrill laughter came.

"Crazy," murmured Dr. Curtiss. And he repeated it softly as if to convince himself. "Quite crazy." A third time he said it, to the commissioner. "Quite mad the man is."

The commissioner only grunted, grumbled something about "bally foreigners who didn't understand conditions." The next day he proceeded on his august way to dispense justice at other circuit courts of his immense district.

DR. CURTISS stayed where he was. He was not attached to the commissioner's staff. He was not even an official surgeon. The staff man was sick with some one of the sicknesses that occur in steamy jungle places, and the district civil surgeon was many days distant. Dr. Curtiss just happened to be there because it was the most unhealthful place he could find. He was not even of the race that ruled the land.

A British subject, addressing the commissioner, would have called him sir. This alien's idiom—Mr. Commissioner—placed Curtiss. So nobody paid much attention to him, and he stayed right where he was, making blood cultures and microscope slides, studying men and the baffling sicknesses that smote them so virulently in tropical places.

Time passed. But the reward of health and good luck that had been promised to the doer of good deeds at the hands of the gods did not come to him. On the contrary, it seemed that even the long life had suddenly become precarious.

Somewhere, in some riverside hut as appallingly unhygienic as only an Oriental hut can be, a baffling tropical germ caught the researcher—something that was not in the printed books or yet in his experience. A scratchy internal something that made him cough; that responded to no treatment he knew; that grew worse instead of better; that gripped him in choking paroxysms and left him trembling at the knees.

As a physician he knew that that kind of thing could not go on. Something must be done.

His Burmese servant came to him and squatted with palms joined, waiting to speak.

"Hakim—" (which is an Oriental title for a doctor or a sage) he said, with conviction—"it is a *nat*, a wood devil of the low country, that has entered into you. Here in the river plains is evil country. It is in the hills that the holy man said, 'The hill gods, little but very wise, will give you health and good luck.' "

The doctor laughed with professional materialism. As a man of science he believed in neither gods, devils, nor luck. And that, in the mysterious East, is always wrong.

Yet the advice was not unsound. Hill gods and wood devils were most unscientific rubbish, and luck was a superstition. Yet quite likely he had stayed too long in the steamy river country, working too hard, hoping always to isolate some elusive germ. A change of climate was what he needed. A higher elevation would be more healthful. He wanted to study tropical diseases. But what study could be achieved with the cough that tore him apart? Very well, he would go to the hills.

A research physician, whose sole practice is among Upper Burmese river villages, never sees much money. His payment — when and if any — is in scrawny chickens and catfish and lumps of amber that come from mysterious sources in the interior. But there was enough cash in hand to go up to the ruby mines.

Mogok. Four thousand feet up. There was quite a settlement up there. Whites and near-whites; breeds of all sorts; Burmans; wily Chinamen who plied queer underground businesses,

bought and sold, making a profit with each transaction. And, of course, Shans. Those were the Shan hills where the ruby mines were situated.

There might be some practice at Mogok. There was always plenty of knife wound practice in that place. By all means the ruby mines. River steamer to another ghastly mud village with the repulsive name of Thabeitkyin; then sixty miles up into the clean hills where health might logically be found and where some people fell in with the logical laws of chance they called luck.

THE ruby mines are situated in one of those lovely mountain valleys where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. The valley belongs, under lease from the government, to the Ruby Mines Company, which has excavated a huge crater in the ground and has shrouded it in the bristling secrecy of an impenetrable barbed wire entanglement. From there it takes weekly nobody knows how many pounds of rubies, good and indifferent, and spinels that look like rubies to tourists who buy them from the Chinamen, and a few sapphires, and now and then a prize, a "pigeon-blood Burma" worth a king's ransom.

Nobody ever knows how many pounds are shipped out, because every so often, on odd and unannounced days, a small sealed packet accompanied by armed men travels over sixty miles of winding jungle road down to the river steamer.

Sometimes rumors are rife; and then the armed guard is doubled or trebled. Turbulent people of many races come up into the clean hills of the ruby mines to seek, not health or long life, but purely and simply, luck.

In such a community emergency medical practice is to be found; but not so much as to bring fortune to an alien physician who knows better how to study and observe than to collect fees. That pleasant valley is comparatively healthful. The benevolent government has established a district headquarters there with officials to look after those troublesome Shan hillmen and the wild Kachins who wash gravel clandestinely in the jungle creeks and hidden gullies. A resident civil surgeon has been appointed to look after the officials. He is permitted to take whatever outside practice he can get.

Thin pickings for the non-official newcomer. But Dr. Curtiss laughed and shrugged his broad fighting shoulders. Foolish pride was no part of a research worker's equipment. Quite shamelessly he took a job in Pereira's apothecary shop. Pereira was a Portugee-Goanese halfbreed who had come looking for luck in the ruby mines, but had sensibly reverted to his original trade of selling medicine.

His stock included a few items of the standard pharmacopœia for the white people. For the general run of natives he carried potent substances with Sanskrit names, supplied by Calcutta drug houses. For the hill people he featured an assortment of luck charms to attract the good will of the hill gods, and amulets to avert the ill will of the hill devils, who were almost more powerful and certainly more persistent than the gods.

It was the local witch who supplied these amulets. Nobody knew exactly who the old crone was or where she lived. She had just suddenly come and established herself in some ghost-ridden mountain glen. Certainly nobody would go prowling the upper ravines to intrude upon the fearful privacy of the old lady. But every two weeks or so she would send a lanky boy down to the drug store with a fresh supply of the puissant charms in which native trade was brisk. And certainly nobody of all the turbulent people who found their way to the ruby mines ever dared to waylay and rob the boy of his precious freight.

It made an appropriate combination —drug store and attendant physician. Business began to pick up. But, curiously enough, the supply of greasy, rag-wrapped talismans suddenly ceased.

The lanky boy did not come.

Secretive and mysterious was the old beldame of the mountain, and her ministry was strictly for her own people. White men interfered so didactically in the normal lives of free hill people. Policemen were so unreasonable about established customs such as fortune-telling and luck charms and death prayings. Physicians denounced the most powerful magic as hokum and threw the smelliest talismans out upon the rubbish heap. No truck would the wise old witch have with white folks, under any circumstances.

But Dr. Curtiss, who studied men and observed things and understood how to put together the two and two that comprised the abstruse brown man's four, smiled wisely.

"There is no such thing as luck," he pronounced with scientific finality. "Yet luck charms have a distinct value in curative medicine, whether they be scapulars or verses of the Koran sewed in leather or monkey bones wrapped in a banana leaf. For if a patient has but faith enough to believe that his charm will cure his headache, it probably will."

He illustrated the point:

"If a devil-ridden hillman believes that his amulet will scare away devils, it will stiffen his courage, and he won't see the wicked little wood devils behind every tree."

So the doctor gravely prescribed luck charms and amulets in conjunction with his castor oil and quinine whenever he saw fit; and the little malodorous packets, given a boost by the white hakim's espousal of them, sold out completely.

The white men of the mining company and the officials laughed and spoke of the doctor as "that American quack," and very soon there came no white patients at all.

Conversely, native patients increased. But it is not out of pauper native patients that a physician in the tropics amasses a fortune. And then the lanky boy suddenly came again with his basket of spells. The witch of the hills, as behooved a good sorceress, had an uncanny knowledge of everything that everybody did and thought. The boy turned his basket over to old Pereira, took his money, said nothing and departed.

The doctor laughed happily.

"At least," he said, "I have not made an enemy to undermine my honest prescriptions with insidious propaganda."

"Probably—" the halfcaste pharmacist, who also understood natives, rubbed his hands over good business—"quite probably an ally. You boost her magic; she boosts your pills. Who knows?" His yellow eyes half closed. "Maybe there is something in luck magic."

The doctor's laugh was a trifle worried.

"There is no such thing as luck," he repeated his scientific credo, "yet I'm almost ready to try one of the old lady's lucky pieces myself. This damned cough isn't getting any better, and I'm becoming most unprofessionally frightened. I'm surely needing luck—if there is any such thing."

"Who knows," said the halfcaste seriously, "what there is in the Orient?" But he added prosaically, "Better see the civil surgeon."

And, most prosaically, the doctor did.

THE civil surgeon was laconic in his certitude.

"Better go home for a breathing spell. Complete change of climate out of the tropics. I can find nothing wrong with you—yet. But I don't have to tell you how these countries can knock a man suddenly cold. Better get out and recuperate—quickly."

Home, to the doctor, meant just halfway round the world at the cost of a fortune such as research work had never provided. Yet no words of one syllable were needed to make it coldly clear that if he did not want to pay the price for delving into the hidden sicknesses of the tropics, as many a re-

search worker has paid, he must somehow dig up the fortune to pay the price for a passage out of the tropics. And soon.

So, since fortune lay all round in that precious hill valley, and the little gods of luck—who did not exist—certainly granted it most spectacularly to some people, the doctor laid his last little ready cash upon the altar of fortune and bought a mining permit. The way he phrased it was:

"Logical laws of chance. My chance is as good as anybody's."

The Ruby Mines Company, which owned all the valley, having fenced off the choicest acreage for itself, sold mining permits to adventurous souls, then hoped that they would not find anything of sufficient value to disturb the market. For twenty dollars any man—white, breed, Burman, Chinaman—could stake out thirty square feet of claim anywhere his fancy desired upon unoccupied or abandoned ground and could dig there—or could hire help to dig there—for one full month.

And many hardy adventurers bought and dug. Others, hardier and more adventurous, not having twenty dollars, dug in the surrounding jungle-hidden creek beds and posted lookouts with elaborate signals to give warning against raids by the overzealous mining police. Yet others, hardiest and most adventurous, though not so industrious, hovered at the jungle edges and hijacked the illicit diggers who had the—well, the luck to be in the exact spot where the logical law of chance fell.

It was all a splendid gamble, full of excitement and turmoil and the hot color that to the adventurous is life. And ever the law of chance struck where the little gods of luck saw fit.

Now gamblers, of course, are not scientifically minded; otherwise they would not be gamblers. And they don't really ever gamble. In civilized lands they make sure of the favor of their little gods of luck by purchasing rabbits' feet and horseshoes and radiator emblems. In Mogok—poor unlettered folk—they gave the witch's lanky boy a rupee and asked for an amulet and advice before venturing upon a claim.

The witch always sent both by her messenger boy's next visit. The extraordinary part of her wizardry was that she was always right. Every now and then one of her clients, washing gravel in the place directed, would prove her so by unearthing a carat or two of ruby or sapphire; and, being wise to the ways of Mogok, would say nothing, but quickly sell the stone to the Chinese traders before the hijackers of the jungle edges would hear of it. Once in the hands of the Chinese traders, the stone would disappear and no man would know whatever became of it.

If a client should not find a stone, the witch was by no means wrong. It meant simply that the client had not earned the favor of the gods by digging hard enough or deep enough. She was a most infallible sorceress.

The doctor, hard boiled scientist, laughed at gods and horseshoes and talismans. He talked shrewdly with engineers of the mining company and finally drove his four stakes where, as he interpreted their talk, there ought to be a "squeeze in the byon"; and, between periods of dispensing drugs and luck charms to other people, he dug and washed gravel there.

The more he dug, the more worried became the expression in his eyes. Nobody knew better than he how much some infra-microscopic bug could take out of a man. He was not digging with nearly the energy that the breadth of his shoulders warranted. And he knew the law of the tropics as well as the civil surgeon: Get out for a spell of recuperation, or stay forever!

Anger swept over him, along with a dull hatred of all things tropical. It wasn't fair, this sort of treatment. He had sweated in the tropics. He had given his time and his skill to the people of the land. He had toiled in the deadliest dens. There was no justice in his

affliction. It was the law of the tropics, of course, that those who seek to wrest their secrets must pay. But law, as the doctor had demonstrated in the very beginning, was not necessarily justice. He cursed the law of the tropics; he cursed the dark gods of the tropics, who —if they existed—made that law; he cursed all gods; even the little gods of the hills where his health was not coming back to him.

But in the East it is wrong to curse the gods; for gods exist in the East, as the witch swiftly demonstrated.

The witch, whose business it was to pry and peer and know everything that went on, did not care so much about the other gods; the little gods of the hills were her especial care. It was no fault of theirs if this white hakim were afflicted with something virulent by the fat and ugly demons of the plains countries; and it was a sad blow to their prestige that this certified physician who had prescribed their charms should now speak evilly of them.

A MOST unusual thing came to pass. Dr. Curtiss lived in a quaint little bamboo-frame and mat-wall chalet perched high on stilts in a clearing at the edge of the settlement. Not a very wholesome place, nor very safe; just a lonesome hole in the matted jungle that steamed in the ninety-inch rainfall of the Mogok hills, built long ago by another white man who had come to the tropics to find luck and who had stayed forever. But the doctor had nothing to fear from loneliness. He was well liked by the toughest thugs, and everybody knew that nobody ever paid him, so he had no money.

He was surprised and quite startled one evening to see an incredible old woman standing at the jungle edge peering at him. Shrunken, bent double, rag-wrapped; through wisps of matted hair that quite concealed her face she peered at him with bright, beady eyes. She needed only a broom to make her a witch out of a fairy tale. Under cover of a claw-like hand she looked at him as she cackled:

"Ho, ho, it is the hakim who gets no money for his medicines. To be sure, it would be no other. I know all about the hakim. No money. Heh, heh, heh. Mad, quite mad."

The doctor smiled wearily. Out of the wisdom of the Gautama he quoted—

"The poor man having no money, who will pay his debts?"

The crone shrilled laughter.

"Ho, ho. Service and no money. Wisdom poured out without recompense. Hee, hee, hee!" She flung her arms aloft in eldritch glee. "Colleagues are we in silly service and foolish wisdom, mad Hakim. What do I get for my luck charms? One rupee. One little rupee; and they are worth thousands." Aptly she quoted, "Whose deeds acquire merit, the gods will pay."

Suddenly she pointed.

"Look, White Hakim, the eye of the gods watches you. Do not curse the gods, Hakim. The little gods of the hills will pay. You and me they will pay. Surely the gods will pay."

She shrilled merriment and then with amazing agility she scuttled off under the dark trees.

The doctor looked at the thing to which she had pointed—a pale, fleshy fungus that glowed phosphorescent on a tree limb. The thing would sprout overnight, a tiny speck of green light, and within counted hours would surround the limb with a great spongy football of ghostly fox-fire. In the morning the ball would be leprous. The next night it would be a lifeless lump, and thereafter it would slowly shrink to a hard knot that remained on the limb. But its mycelium threads would crawl darkly under the bark and some night it would glow forth somewhere else. The hill men called the things eyes of the gods. But some said they were the eyes of the wood devils.

The doctor climbed the bamboo ladder up to his stilted house.

A few days later the lanky boy came and gravely delivered a little packet sewn in snakeskin.

"A strong luck magic to draw the favor of the gods," he announced. "And from her colleague she takes no money. It is a gift to the mad hakim who takes no money from the hill people. On no account must you open it to see the magic that is within; for a magic that is known is no magic. And you must without fail wear it round your neck by its thong. Thus will luck come to you." And with that he went gravely away.

Dr. Curtiss laughed superciliously at the grave hokum about magic and sourly at the thought of luck and, instead of hanging the talisman round his neck, dropped it into his pocket and forgot about it. Which showed how scientifically foolish he was.

Had he obeyed the instructions for luck, perhaps the smooth ruffian might not have come.

The smooth ruffian came up from a downriver place by the name of Yen-angyaung, which means bad tasting water. The explanation of which was that an American company was drilling there for oil. He didn't say why he came. But people in the ruby mines never asked other people why they came.

The smooth ruffian came with the quite suspiciously smooth name of Hamilton G. Vance, which somehow hardly fitted in with his big, battered looking figure or his reckless use of the more delicate nuances of grammar. Perhaps Dr. Curtiss ought to have been a little wary of the combination; but he was one of those hail-good-fellow men designed by fate for the benefit of their less inhibited brothers. Hamilton talked smoothly about "back home in the States." He could find no adequate place in which to live, so the doctor open-handedly said—

"Why not camp in my shack till you get located?"

After that it wasn't long before the ruffian invitingly announced—

"Friends call me just Ham." He began to talk smoothly about some sort of partnership in the doctor's diggings.

"I can put in a lot of pick an' shovel, Doc. I'm mebbe not so strong on eddication; but I'm plenty in the back. An'—y' see, Doc, you're not shiftin' much dirt, what with that cough an' all. How about us makin' a deal?"

That didn't sound so unreasonable. So they shook hands on it, quite simply and informally. Half the mines in the golden days of the West were owned on no more formality than that.

"If there were anything in luck—" the doctor laughed—"we ought to find it. I have a powerful talisman; and, look, the eye of the gods is upon us."

Another fungus glowed palely on a dead limb.

Hamilton G. Vance looked at it without emotion. The miracles of botany were only unremunerative learning to him.

"Queer things, ain't they?" was all the interest he showed. "I never seen 'em down to the plains country." He spat carelessly over the bamboo veranda rail.

But Dr. Curtiss, though he did not believe in gods or devils or luck, did believe in miracles; for he found them in his science every day. This fungoid growth was a wonder worthy of attracting the attention of any active mind.

"It's the mountain mists that suit them," the scientist had to explain. "Same as orchids. All sub-tropical flora grow lush here. These things will start from a tiny button of impacted cells that will expand, like a yeast fungus, several hundred per cent, so as to wrap right around their supporting branch overnight. Professor Peters has advanced a theory that they may even belong in the order of carnivorous plants, for insects and large bettles have been found embedded within them. I am rather inclined to the theory that the beetles, attracted by their light, have blundered into them and, being trapped, have just been enveloped by the expanding spongy growth."

"Yeah?" was all that Ham Vance thought about the marvel. "Quite an idea, ain't it? You scientific guys sure know a heap o' things that don't pay no dividends. I'll bet you right now you wish you knew as much about ruby mining."

THE ill assorted partners toiled daily within their four stakes, and without much uplifting conversation. It was the burly Ham Vance who did most of the toiling. He plied a strong shovel in the gravel while the doctor, with his cough, was glad to take on the easier work of rocking the riffle and sorting out the little colored specks that settled behind the cross slats.

Pale pink crystalline shapes as big as peas; some bigger, but mostly smaller; some darker, almost ruby red. Only an expert could tell later which of them were ruby and which spinel or garnet. Nor did it make very much difference; for many carats of genuine hexagonal crystallized alumina, refractive index 1.77, and all the rest of it, unless they have "color", are worth not much more than coolie wages.

A couple of handfuls of little pebbles slowly accumulated.

"Enough to pay for another license next month," said the doctor hopefully.

And then Ham Vance, driving his pick into an impacted mass of detrital limestone, felt the crunch of crystal and broke out a dull lump that showed a sharp glass edge where the pick had hit it.

"Hell!" he complained. "Is this an old pit? Are we suckers sweatin' over some guy's tailings? How'n blazes would a chunk o' blue bottle-glass be this deep?"

The doctor, bending over the riffle above the digger's shoulder, breathed deeply to keep his voice steady.

"It's not an old pit. Let me see. Sapphire is known to occur in rubiferous gravel."

A second passed. Two seconds. Then a hoarse noise issued from Vance's throat; for the bottle glass that he held in his hand was as big as the convex bottom of a wine bottle.

"Jees! Saph—who's an expert? Who can gimme the lowdown?"

"*Me,*" was what Ham Vance distinctly said. Not, "Who can give *us* the lowdown."

Dr. Curtiss scarcely breathed at all.

"The company's lapidary," he said evenly. "Or Hsue Po Lin. Those Chinamen can tell a stone by the smell. Let me see."

The blue thing winked evilly in the sunlight; and on that instant the magic of hidden things that is the attribute of all gems enveloped Vance. From that moment his smoothness left him and he was just plain ruffian. He would not let the thing out of his hand.

"You'll see all in good time," he snarled. "I'm goin' an' see Hsue."

He scrambled out of the pit on the farther side and ran like a crazy man.

The doctor released his pent up breath, and a paroxysm of coughing took hold of him and shook him like a rag doll. Spots swam before his eyes; his legs trembled. He closed his eyes and sat upon the edge of the riffle.

Vance came alone to the shanty where Hsue Po Lin sat behind an iron grille. The Chinaman examined the stone with an expressionless face—for a minute; for many minutes. The white man thrust his hand between the bars.

"What the hell you chewin' over? Hand it across. What is it, I wanna know!"

Out of his yellow mask the Chinaman spoke.

"You want sell?"

Vance snatched the stone. Men began to come in. Wolfish men always gathered when a crazy person raced to Hsue's shanty. Vance, the ruffian, fended them off. His lip curled.

"Why the hell you guys hornin' in? Get away! Lemme outta here!"

He broke through and raced away to the company's office building.

The Chinaman gently put away his scales.

"That one," he said softly, "is very foolish. He has found a very great danger."

Glances passed between the men. Some went out quickly.

AT THE company's office the bottle-glass was subjected to a scrutiny much more scientific than Hsue's — microscopes, acids and specific gravities. At the end of minutes—many more minutes than had sufficed the Chinaman—a grave gentleman said:

"My suggestion to you, sir, is that you leave this stone in our safe—for its sake as well as your own. After proper deliberation we shall make you an offer. It is much too big a thing to estimate offhand."

"Hand it across!" growled Vance. "What kinda sap d'ja think I am?"

The doctor met him coming away from there, the center of a jabbering crowd of men. Men of many breeds gather like vultures in Mogok when anybody is foolish enough to flaunt a find. Vance was loud in his assurance.

"What do those guys take me for? They're business men, ain't they? They're out to make money? Well, I don't trust no business man, see?"

The doctor was saner. With determination he said—

"I vote we deposit the stone in the company's safe."

Vance whirled on him.

"What you got to say about it? I found it, didn't I?"

For a space the doctor held his breath, then very quietly he said:

"We are partners, working on my claim, under my license. Half that stone belongs to me."

"Yeah?" the ruffian said.

The doctor carried a gun in his hip pocket; but he was foolish enough never to use a gun when the other man didn't have one in plain sight. He forgot all about his gun: he forgot that evil things of the tropics gripped him; forgot his infra-microscopic bug. He remembered only that a man, in this hard world, must fight for justice, as he had fought many a time before; and that, if he were ever to fight again, he must find the price to get out of that tropical climate. And soon. He made a leap for Vance.

His blow landed true. His movement was as clean and fast as in the days when he was well; but that invisible tropic germ had taken the weight out of his punch. Vance snarled. He growled in animal fury as his return blow smashed home. As the doctor fell Vance kicked at his head.

Men dragged him off. Everybody liked the doctor. Some of the men held the insensate Vance while others carried the stunned physician away to Pereira's apothecary shop. Vance, growling self-justification and warning to all others, walked off with the stone that he intended should be his own. Providence had placed a fortune in his hands and he, a strong, predatory man with no inhibitions, was damn well going to hang on to it. Ferocious in his self-confidence, he did not know how foolish he was in that place where there were many predatory men who, like himself, had no inhibitions. In the supreme confidence of his strength he did not guess how mad he was.

"Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad."

The men who remained behind looked after him under lowered eyelids, sidewise, like wolves.

And then Providence—which some people call luck, or, in the East, the inscrutable gods—moved swiftly along the path that it had laid out.

At dusk a knife whizzed out of nowhere and smacked into the adobe wall of a shack as Ham Vance passed. The ruffian gave a great leap, cursed, ducked low and ran for the little chalet in the clearing to get his gun. There, in the gloom and loneliness, he began to have the first chill inkling of the great danger

that the wise old Chinaman had said he carried. The narrow escape from the knife had set his not overastute mind to working. Pictures came to him out of the dark—faces of men, as hard and predatory as his own. Men, strong as himself, prowled in the dark.

Quickly Vance pocketed the gun and hurried back to seek a place where there were people. The more people, the better. He came racing into Slavin's grog shop and boarding house, panting. A gang of dark figures, he said, had followed him.

He remained fuming in the barroom all night, sitting up, grimly awake, murderously alert with his gun in his hand.

And during the night the shack in the clearing was ransacked. Some one was losing no time.

Day came, and the groggery did a swarming business. Men thrust themselves upon the possessor of the danger. They wanted to talk, to see, to make wild offers of money for the privilege of sharing the peril with him. Vance retreated into a corner and glowered. Telegrams began to come in from away downriver, clamoring for all negotiations to be delayed till the senders arrived. An idle Eurasian telegraph clerk had already flashed the exciting news afar.

WHISPERING groups gathered at the bar. A fight started. Struggling men lurched ominously toward the cornered ruffian. He held them off with drawn gun and edged round to a door and fled. His getaway was complete.

Not till after dark did he show up again to demand a room at the groggery boarding house By no means would he sleep all alone out in that clearing. But he wore a twisted grin of smug triumph on his face.

"I've outsmarted a lotta gorillas around here," he shouted. "I've hidden it—buried it! Go ahead, frisk me, anybody—everybody. I ain't got it on me an' it won't do no tough guy any good to try no more rough stuff against me now."

It did seem as if he had circumvented any covetous move. Hidden, somewhere in the expanse of all outdoors, a thing no bigger than a goose egg. Safer than a safe, for nobody but the hider knew.

Wolfish men drew back, red eyed, lowering, as do wolves that have nuzzled an empty pack. The expanse of all outdoors offered an effective checkmate.

Vance grinned to himself.

But Providence—or luck, or the gods—can not so easily be circumvented. Many roads are open to Providence, which has also been called justice. Terrible ways and swift and, to Providence, so simple, so sudden, so inevitable.

A hard and predatory man of no inhibitions came up from downriver. Flogging a mule over the mountain road, he was in a hurry to be on the scene before other men who had few inhibitions should get into action.

"Which is the man who found the stone?" was the first question he asked of the first person he met.

"That one." The person pointed out the celebrity.

Of course, the predatory newcomer knew nothing about the cunning hiding of the stone—and he was no simple fool to take others to his bosom and discuss plans.

He was a fast and lone-handed worker. No split profits for him. Quietly he spotted his man and then discreetly lay low.

So when Vance walked the dusky road to his home, smugly secure in the well advertised knowledge of his secret, a knife flew with expert precision. No bungling here. No hair-breadth miss smacking into an adobe wall. Out of the silent dark flicked the blade. And Vance, the predatory ruffian, with just one shriek of anguish, took his secret with him to the dark place where angry gods send evil men. All in a second it was over. A flash in the gloom, a yelp, and it was done. Only the silent expanse of all outdoors knew.

OF ALL this Dr. Curtiss knew nothing for a long time. He lay in the little room that had been his in the back of the apothecary shop. Much of the time he was unconscious. His head had been badly cut by the ruffian's boots. When he awakened his mind teemed with vague memories and plans.

He had his share of the stone. At last it had come. Luck did exist. It was real. The reward of his toil and his sweat in the tropic places. He had money. The life-saver. He could go home. Hurry, hurry, hurry! He could get out of that climate. He would shake that cough. He would fill out the shoulders of his coat again. He would *live*—to sweat and toil again and maybe at last learn something real.

And then he would suddenly know that it was a dream, and that there was no such thing as luck; and he would drift again into the blankness.

The stone remained hidden. Safer even than a safe. And the only one who knew the secret was the dead hider.

A roar of anguish and rage went up from the whole mining camp, the duplicate a thousand times over of Vance's last shriek. Lost! The phenomenal stone! Buried! Hidden, who knew where? The camp was in a turmoil. Men with feverish eyes cursed as they jostled one another to hunt for treasure. Men who worked patiently at their diggings left them to dig all around a more hopeful locale. Men who worked not at all watched like hawks the actions of those who did. White men, brown men, half-and-half men, yellow men.

The great blue stone that had flashed into view for a moment like a dazzling meteor *must* be found. What did it matter to these men that the stone had come from a claim belonging to an alien doctor who had ministered to most of them for nothing, who now lay grievously sick in bed?

But the queer old witch, whose business it was to pry and peep and know everything, sent the lanky boy to bring a message of cheer to her invalid "colleague" with another of her luck charms.

"The eye of the gods sees all things," was the message. "Little are they, but very wise; and a wise hakim, even though quite mad, will find their favor. And," added the boy, "this magic is different from other magics. It may be opened and seen." Gravely he took his departure.

Dr. Curtiss was able to laugh at the crazy old woman's persistent faith in such unscientific things as gods and to sit up and open the greasy little package. And it contained just that—the eye of the gods, a tiny piece of the fungus that glowed by night.

"Mad, quite mad!" The doctor laughed. "The only piece of luck in the world would have been if I could have got up in time to take another crack at Vance." He laughed bitterly as he felt the hobnailed boot marks on his head.

And, outside, those who did not have the favor of the gods and special luck charms from the old witch to attract it to themselves tore the earth asunder in their frenzy. The little chalet in the clearing was taken apart piece by piece. Every hole was probed. Every bamboo was split open. Every stick was shredded to toothpicks. The thatch was sorted with combs. The ground was dug up for yards around. Trees were examined for holes; for marks of cleverly removed and replaced bark. Everything that bore signs of recent disturbance was ripped apart.

Men grew haggard in their search, and torn with uncertainty. If any one should already have chanced upon the treasure, surely there was not another such fool in camp as to breathe a word of his dangerous find. Yet nobody dared give up the search. Nobody knew whether his next move would yield the hidden fortune. Nobody knew anything.

Men who had glowered at each other in their quest drew together to combine wits. Where were that fellow's haunts? What had been his private affairs?

What did he ever do? Whom did he ever visit?

The grog shop began to be ransacked. Houses where Vance had loitered were raided. Sober citizens complained. The police stepped in to protect private property.

And the stone that had flashed like a shooting star remained as lost in the darkness as a star that has sped.

But the doctor who had the forehead of a thinker and the preoral bulges of a reasoner pondered. He had much time to ponder. That crazy old woman who knew so much, what did she mean? For some quite insane reason she seemed to wish him well. What was she driving at now? What was the significance of that foolish message, that this particular magic hokum might be opened and examined? It was too unusual not to mean something.

Unremunerative service among natives had at least given Dr. Curtiss an insight into the queer twists of native character. There was surely something hidden behind all that chatter about the luck charm and the eye of the gods.

So the doctor pondered over the charm again—the eye of the gods that would show the way to their favor. And, pondering, the thinker slowly began to put two and two together; and at last he was able to say to the lanky boy:

"Looking through the eye of the gods, I have found the sacred number. It is, of course, four. Upon this, the fourth day of the stone's hiding, I am able to get up and go forth to look for the favor of the gods. Tell the wise woman so."

That was cryptic enough for any witch woman.

THAT same afternoon Dr. Curtiss got up painfully and went to the clearing where his home had been. It was wrecked, deserted. It had ceased to exist. The building was a pile of match sticks; the clearing was a plowed field. But Dr. Curtiss was not looking for a house. He was looking for an answer to the queer rigmarole of a riddle propounded by the witch.

He was looking for nothing other than an eye of the gods; for one that would be—if he had been wise enough to read the riddle—just four nights old. There surely ought to be one that had sprouted and glowed just four nights ago—the night when Vance had cunningly hidden the great blue stone that was too dangerous to carry on his person.

And sure enough, there was just such a one. A leathery ball that was slowly hardening round a limb. Quite an easy little climb too.

Dr. Curtiss cut the spongy mass free and probed into it with his knife blade. And suddenly he was weaker than his grievous beating warranted. For the knife point found a hard something that —his heart pounded—that might be no more than a hard shelled beetle that had blundered into the thing when it was glowing and growing. Yet on the other hand it might be something that had been hurriedly pushed into the soft core and had then been enveloped by the swift growing fungus overnight, hidden without a mark or a trace. Something about as big as a goose egg.

The doctor trembled as his knife went deeper. It was all impossible. Crazy, the whole thing. Luck charms and gods and glowing eyes.

His heart jumped to his throat again as a dry teak leaf crackled. He whirled. At the edge of the clearing, just where he had seen her before, stood the figure of the incredible old witch; shrunken, spookily grotesque, matted hair over beady eyes and chattering lips. In the cracked falsetto of age she cackled crazily familiar words—the very words that the doctor had heard in a circuit courthouse many moons ago.

"The gods, the hill gods—little but very wise—give you health and long life and great good luck."

The doctor's head whirled as he looked at the weirdly familiar figure.

"Crazy, quite insane!" was the murmur on his lips—which were the very words he had applied in that courtroom to the crazy old Shan priest whom he had snatched from the rope by his deliberate verdict of insanity. He stared, fascinated, at the wizened figure.

The ancient with a claw-like hand parted the overhanging gray hair and grinned at him out of shrewd old eyes that he knew. The aged voice cracked in an ecstasy of triumph.

"Was it not promised? And has it not been performed? That day in the courthouse, White Hakim, did I not then swear to the commissioner that I would escape?"

"Good God!" The quite unscientific exclamation burst from the doctor and choked in his throat. "Why I—I thought —everybody thought that you were an old woman."

"So do the police also think," chuckled the incredible old man. "Ho-ho-ho, the silly police! It was an easy thing—with the help of the hill gods—to escape from their foolish prison. And why should a silly policeman then molest the poor old witch of the hills, who therefore remains free to convey the will of the gods to the people of the hills?"

Again Dr. Curtiss took the name of the greatest of all the gods in vain.

"Good Lord Almighty!" he gasped.

And then, all of a sudden, with the mention of gods the old man's voice rose to a crazy, wild, inspired exaltation.

"The gods of the hills!" he shrieked. "Little gods, but very wise! The eye of the gods sees all things; and from them comes knowledge to their servant. Consider, Mad Hakim who does not believe in gods, was it chance, do you think, that on that night at that time I came to this place and saw that evil man? Or did the gods send me? The gods do not forget, Mad Hakim. Did they not promise, that day in the courthouse when you gave to me, their servant, justice that was more just than the white man's law; through the mouth of their servant did they not promise you health and long life and great good luck?"

In its substance and its delivery the statement was in the nature of a benediction, a vindication of prophecy, a divine reward for good deeds well done. Having uttered it, the old fanatic again shrieked with delighted laughter and scuttled away into the jungle that was the home of his gods.

"Whose deeds acquire merit, the gods will pay," the cracked voice floated back. "Little gods, but very wise. Surely the gods will pay."

Dr. Curtiss stood looking into empty space. Then he stared at the priceless blue stone in his hand. The last crackle of dry leaves receded and died down to the eery stillness of the jungle when it is still.

By the Author of "The Spy Net"

Concluding

THE HERR KAPITAN

By

ARED WHITE

The Story Thus Far:

TO CAPTAIN Fox Elton of the American Intelligence at Chaumont came Lieutenant d'Auteuil of the French Deuxième Bureau with a grim rumor that the German High Command had just launched a campaign of execution against certain well known agents of the Allied Intelligence Service. Elton, as one of America's most brilliant and daring agents, needed no reminder that if this audacious retaliation materialized it would include him. He had on more than one occasion been behind the enemy lines.

He was at first skeptical of D'Auteuil's information, which was based on the reports of a French spy—a Russian by the name of Livoff—strategically attached to German headquarters at Spa, Belgium. But when a fast plane sped over Chaumont and dropped a note to Elton, saying, "I have been handed an order of execution against your person. It becomes my unhappy duty to kill you at my earliest convenience," and signed by Herr Kapitan von Poel, Prussian Agent No. 13, Elton knew he was a marked man. The Herr Kapitan was a notoriously successful and elusive foe.

Elton refused to obey the order of his superior, Colonel Rand, to disappear until the scare was over. Rather, he insisted upon meeting the challenge in his own way. He proceeded at once to Paris, and continued on to the nearby village of Courbevoie with Sergeants Walters and Bragg under pretence of engaging billets for officers. He went to Courbevoie because he had a hunch that a taxicab reported to be cruising its roads at night, and an unidentified plane passing over the neighborhood at the same time, might well be the Herr Kapitan's vehicles for entering and leaving France on errands of espionage and vengeance.

Elton's hunch was partly correct. Soon after settling at Courbevoie his two sergeants brought in a man whom they had caught when he dropped from a plane by parachute and missed connections with the nocturnal taxicab. The prisoner, clad in a French uniform, was not the Herr Kapitan, but a poor devil of a Frenchman whose craving for cocaine in a German prison camp had led him into the rôle of traitor to his country. The prisoner's pipe and watch held cipher messages for the Herr Kapitan in Paris, from the Imperial German command, asking for prompt reports on the military situation of France.

Using his expert knowledge of various ciphers, Elton altered the messages to the Herr Kapitan so as to introduce himself as a German messenger direct from the Kaiser. In the uniform of Guerat, the captured Frenchman, Elton waited till another plane passed overhead, then walked down the highway and hailed the strange taxicab. He was accepted without question by the chauffeur. In a short time the taxicab delivered him at the watch-repairing shop of a Monsieur Molin in Paris.

Molin asked for Elton's pipe and watch. Elton

gave the pseudo-watchmaker his pipe, containing the message which he himself had framed for the Herr Kapitan. But he refused to hand over the watch. If he relinquished the watch he might never have an opportunity of meeting the Herr Kapitan in a manner to take him by surprise.

Molin protested:

"Your pipe has been forwarded at once, monsieur; but your conduct is odd. Never before have I failed to receive the watch. Please wait upstairs till instructions arrive."

"My own instructions, monsieur, are very definite," Elton replied with an air of superiority. "Only to one man may I deliver the watch—and that is to Agent 13."

THE clocks in Molin's shop were chiming the hour of midnight when Molin led the way upstairs and showed Elton into a dingy and rudely furnished bedroom. Elton snapped his contempt of the room, saying he would be leaving as soon as his pipe had been delivered. Whereupon Molin apologetically gave him a large, comfortably appointed sitting room in which there were upholstered chairs, a reading lamp and books.

Being left alone, Elton settled down to a book, though his eyes saw no word of the printed page before him. He checked over, as was his habit, every detail of the new development. The taxi driver had suspected nothing wrong. Molin had been suspicious at sight of an unfamiliar face and again at Elton's refusal to deliver the cipher in the watch. But Molin had been reassured by the newcomer's familiarity with the signs and words of identification.

Elton had further disarmed suspicion by his arrogant refusal of the dingy bedroom. Molin's whole attitude now, he estimated, was that of a trained henchman who is out of his depth and awaits instructions from higher authority.

Elton made an estimate of probable developments. The fact that an agent had been in waiting at Molin's since the day before told him that a courier was urgently expected. Therefore, it was likely that the message in the pipe would be passed along swiftly. And in writing that message, Elton had made a bold play for high stakes. He used to the fullest extent the cipher carried by Guerat. When removed from the pipe and decoded it would call for the action of Agent No. 13. By the very wording of the missive, no one else would dare make decision . . .

"THIRTEEN COURIER OF H I M REPORTS TO YOU. URGENT—ONE."

When Agent 13 received the message, it would direct him in the name of the head of the Imperial intelligence service to receive an urgent personal courier of his Imperial Majesty, the Kaiser. If the message itself sounded incredible, there could be no questioning the cipher pellet, the courier brought from the roadside near Bezons, or the passwords given to Monsieur Molin. A perfect chain of circumstances to vouch for the authenticity of the message itself—by far too perfect a chain to have been devised as a trap by the Allied secret service. Agent 13, no matter how wary, would be disarmed. And there was little likelihood that he would dare disregard or delay action upon such a command.

Two hours crept by uneventfully. But Elton rested without evident impatience. He held himself stoutly in hand, knowing that he must remain the master of every faculty and impulse through the adventure to come. Every element of probability told him that when he left Molin's it would be to meet Agent No. 13; and he held no doubt of the identity of that man—the Herr Kapitan von Poel.

Shortly after two o'clock footsteps outside his door told Elton that his cipher pellet had threaded the devious German communications in Paris and that the answer was at hand. A knock at the door, and Elton crossed the room without haste. The slightest tokens were of importance now. The fact that his visitor did not burst impatiently in, but waited politely for his response, was significant. He opened the door to find

Monsieur Molin and immediately behind him a tall, erect young officer in Belgian uniform. The officer saluted and entered at Elton's bidding. Molin disappeared toward the stairway.

"Monsieur has a rare old watch in which I am much interested," said the visitor. "May I trouble you for the details of this heirloom, which a friend of mine may be interested in purchasing from you? I am Monsieur Robillot, attaché of the Belgian Mission to Paris."

Robillot might have passed for Belgian; or his thin, highly intelligent features might have been Prussian or French, since head and face bore no distinctly provincial or national characteristics. His gray eyes were clear, level and emotionless, and there was an easy self-possession in his whole bearing that distinguished him immediately as an agent of importance. Elton studied him with undisguised frankness and replied coldly:

"I have my orders to consider, Monsieur Robillot. I thought that had been made perfectly clear. The watch of which you speak has been pledged to a favored customer. It will be delivered to no one else."

"But I, monsieur, am duly authorized to make delivery on behalf of your favored client," Robillot insisted politely. "In fact, I have been especially detailed—"

"Let us not waste words, Monsieur Robillot," Elton broke in. "You are a soldier and understand the meaning of orders. Mine are of an authority that is not to be temporized."

Robillot sat down and lighted a cigaret. Elton watched him closely. He had weighed in advance the possibility that Von Poel would come himself for the emperor's watch. The Herr Kapitan might be fired by impatience to receive the Imperial communication, or, if the slightest suspicion had been stirred in his mind, he might claim the advantage of dealing immediately and in person with the stranger awaiting him at Molin's isolated little shop.

On the other hand, Von Poel would be busiest at this hour in the evaluation of espionage reports and too fully occupied by important duty to read danger into a message that had come to him through the regular channel of communication with Spa. Robillot might or might not be the Herr Kapitan. On this Elton withheld final judgment, though he had not expected Von Poel here. Robillot bore little resemblance to the photograph of the Herr Kapitan —an inconclusive fact, since the best camera often tells little of such a man.

Several minutes passed in silence while Robillot lolled in an easy chair and smoked. At the sound of wheels on the cobblestones below he rose and faced Elton.

"My automobile, it is here," he said. "I regret, monsieur, that you must construe your instructions so severely. But since you offer me no alternative, I shall escort you to the customer of whom you have spoken."

CHAPTER VI

THE HERR KAPITAN

ELTON hardly expected the automobile that awaited them below —a large American Army sedan. The chauffeur was a soldier in American uniform, even having the features and manner of an American. The driver jumped from his seat to open and close the door of the car for them and drove off into the Avenue de Neuilly, where he turned to the right through the Porte Maillot, past the Arc de Triomphe into the Champs Elysées.

Elton made no attempt to solve the riddle of the American Army car. It hinted at some unexpected coup, some unsuspected entrenchment of Von Poel's mission, which would be apparent later. Nor did he try to guess either their destination or whether he would be taken direct to Agent No. 13. Earlier he had assured himself that the Herr Kapitan

hardly would entrench himself in underground Paris, Von Strindheim's poisonous nest.

When the auto drew up at the Hôtel Crillon, Elton was almost incredulous of his own senses. This semi-official rendezvous of Allied missions, diplomats, important soldiers and war committees was the last place to which he had expected to be taken. As Elton alighted in the wake of Robillot he looked closely at the driver who stood holding open the door. The fellow was not a secret service type, and was plainly an American. His voice emphasized that fact when he spoke.

"Want me to wait, or is that all for tonight?" he asked.

"We will require you no more tonight, Corporal," said Robillot. "We will let you know in the morning at the United States garage when you are to report."

Robillot entered the Crillon and crossed the lounge to the desk of the concierge.

"My keys, monsieur," he commanded; adding as an afterthought, "You will please to ring the chambers of the Major Devore of the American Army. If he is awake, I will speak to him."

The clerk reported in a moment that Major Devore was at his telephone but wished to know who called.

"Monsieur André Robillot of the Belgian Mission," said Robillot, "also a friend of the French service who wishes to pay his respects."

"Major Devore says he will receive you," reported the clerk.

They took the elevator to the third floor, circled through corridors to the rear of the hotel and stopped at the entrance of a parlor suite. Robillot knocked—the identical knock Elton had used to enter Molin's shop. At an invitation to enter Robillot opened the unlocked door and bowed Elton in before him.

At a desk across the room sat a man in American uniform. Elton noted the oak leaves of a major at his shoulders and the insignia of the Signal Corps at his neck. The officer was busy with paper and fountain pen and did not look up until the two visitors were in front of him.

"So, monsieur, you insisted upon seeing me personally!" the man at the desk exclaimed sharply as he looked up.

"I insisted upon what I conceive to be my duty," said Elton.

"The watch, then!" snapped the other. "I will receive it immediately."

"Your authority, monsieur?"

"Thirteen! Come, monsieur, I have no further time to waste upon your indirection."

He snatched the watch with an impatient jerk, opened the case and jotted down the cipher message. Elton, in the brief minute that the masquerader was busy deciphering the message, plotted his next move. Once that message was deciphered, he knew that he would be shown out of the room, the German trail immediately closed behind him. The whole setting, he saw, was as shrewdly adroit as it was bold.

Papers and posters displayed in the room were eloquent of the ingenious entrenchment. No. 13 was secure in Paris as an agent of that vaguely understood but lavishly financed institution known as the Airplane Spruce Production branch of the American service. Among its officials in uniform were millionaires, manipulators, wealthy adventurers who came and went—a puzzle to the American command overseas, but always received with high acclaim by the foreign missions in Paris.

Agent 13 himself was a thin, wiry little man, undistinguished of feature, remote from any type Elton had expected to find in the Herr Kapitan. His features were irregular and commonplace, his eyes small and restless; and, in common with Robillot, he displayed no distinctive national or even racial traits in face or manner.

But only the audacity of a Von Poel would have sought out the Crillon; only the imagination and skill of the Herr Kapitan would have hit upon this mas-

querade, which rivaled his most impertinent visits to the British War Offices in London. The fellow's imperious reception of a courier of the Kaiser disclosed his authority. Likewise it told Elton that, so far, he had cheated the Herr Kapitan of suspicion, and therefore held the weapon of surprise securely in his own hands.

THE man at the desk looked up from the cipher with an oath.

"Stupid ox!" he blurted, glaring at Elton. "Two days ago I received this message from our headquarters. Do they dare think I will not report as directed, that they force upon me another courier?"

"There is another matter, Major Devore," Elton rejoined stoutly.

"Well, out with it!"

"It is a subject that requires the utmost privacy, my Major."

"From my adjutant, Monsieur Robillot, I have no privacies," snapped the other. He glared at Elton again and jerked his hand impatiently. "Therefore, since you have wasted enough of my time, you will confide your message to monsieur, who will repeat it to me or not as he sees fit!"

With finality he turned back to his work. Robillot crossed the floor and stood at the door of the adjoining chamber for Elton to precede him. Elton's mind worked swiftly. The situation had developed; he but awaited the instant to strike. He seized upon the only logical plan in the moment that he was crossing the room. He would attack Robillot at the closing of the door and return to deal with the man at the desk. But on reaching the door his eye caught its interior slip-bolt.

"After you, Monsieur Robillot." He bowed.

As Robillot passed through the doorway, Elton seized the doorknob with a sure hand, slammed the door and slipped the bolt. The man in the major's uniform wheeled with an irritated bark; then, seeing what had happened, he rose angrily to his feet.

"Please be seated, Herr Kapitan," Elton said coolly. "It is my turn to be annoyed if your conduct is not to my liking. It will be especially unfortunate if you should make any commotion."

The Herr Kapitan had difficulty adjusting his mind to this swift turn of events. He seemed unwilling to believe he had been tricked, even with the stark evidence before his eyes.

"Explain at once, monsieur, the meaning of this extraordinary visit!" he managed to say.

"It means, Herr Kapitan von Poel," Elton replied with an easy smile, "that I have accepted your invitation to visit you here at Paris. I am sure," he added, "that your man Robillot will be too discreet to make a scene here in the Crillon by interrupting our little interview. I shall invite him back in presently."

At this taunting explanation the Herr Kapitan seemed to become another person. The irritated little man with cold, weary eyes vanished. He sat down, a light of interested amusement dancing in his black eyes.

"You will pardon my blunder, will you not?" he said with a friendly smile. "I was misled by circumstances and the stupidity of others into thinking you were a courier from our Imperial headquarters at Spa. But you continue to have the advantage of me, monsieur, since I have sent out no less than a dozen such invitations."

"Mine, Herr Kapitan, was delivered by your air service to American General Headquarters at Chaumont."

"Ah, then you are Captain Elton!" Von Poel exclaimed. "It is a great pleasure, my Captain. I had pictured you as somewhat older and of a vastly different sort. But why do you conclude that I am the Kapitan von Poel, if I may inquire?"

"If I had no other reason for thinking so, Herr Kapitan, your own statements would confirm the fact."

"Yes, of course. I do not deny it."

"Let me caution you, Herr Kapitan," Elton declared bluntly. He moved to the desk where he had command of both doors of the chamber, and displayed a small French automatic pistol. "I do not intend to be tricked out of my position of advantage. If necessary, I shall shoot you. This I hope you will not compel me to do. You will keep your hands above the table."

"I read your purpose only too clearly in your eyes, Captain." The Herr Kapitan laughed. "You may be certain I will attempt no violence. I assure you that I am not armed, nor is there a weapon in the room, to my knowledge."

"You will pardon my use of your telephone, will you not?" said Elton.

He took the receiver from Von Poel's desk telephone and called D'Auteuil at the Deuxième Bureau.

"It is important, monsieur," he informed the French operative, "that you come instantly to the Hôtel Crillon. Bring as many men with you as you can gather without loss of time. Dispose your men on the third floor along the corridor of the north wing of the hotel; then come to the apartment of Major Devore. I want you to meet the Herr Kapitan von Poel."

"*Mon dieu!*" cried D'Auteuil. "But you can not mean—" he caught himself. "*Eh, bien, monsieur,* I shall arrive immediately."

"So? The Lieutenant d'Auteuil?" Von Poel smiled. "An interesting fellow and very capable in many ways, though much too timid for one with his responsibilities, my Captain. And I suppose he will be in a fury at me because of losing two excellent operatives of his bureau the week past."

"Two of your—invited guests, Herr Kapitan?"

"Under the circumstances, Captain Elton," Von Poel said gravely, "the most I could do was give them fair warning. The command for their execution was not my affair. As any soldier must, I but put it into effect."

"You will hold no slightest ill will then, Herr Kapitan," Elton rejoined ironically, "against the grenadiers who do their duty at the Fortress of Vincennes."

"I hope you do not infer," said Von Poel with feigned surprise, "that I am to be dealt with in any such barbarous fashion."

"I have reason to believe as much, would you not say? Since I have no intention of letting you out of the trap, I can believe that D'Auteuil will take no chances with you. By common agreement we turn all spies over to the French for action, Herr Kapitan."

"Long ago, Captain Elton, I determined never to submit to capture." Von Poel said this with conviction, a strange light in his eyes as he looked at Elton. "I shall not submit now."

Elton laughed.

SINCE it suited Elton's purpose to keep Von Poel engaged in conversation until reenforcements arrived, he pursued the exchange, the while holding himself alert to the Prussian's every mood and movement. He pointed out the impossibility of escape, his own readiness to shoot if forced, his command of the doors, the impending arrival of D'Auteuil with armed men to cover the hotel during the prisoner's removal.

"I really must compliment you, Herr Kapitan, upon your choice of a masquerade," Elton concluded. "The disadvantage was that in the event of the unexpected, which has already happened, you are robbed of your trick doors, sliding panels, wall scopes and other paraphernalia for the use of your henchmen. If you had chosen a château, I should have been very uncomfortable in making this visit. I might even have withheld our introduction for some time."

"I trust, Captain Elton, that you will not credit this situation to my own neglect," the Herr Kapitan replied quickly. "Unhappily I accepted the

army's ciphers and courier system because I had no alternative. That, it is easy to see, brought you here tonight to find me wholly off guard. Ah, if the world had fewer stupid ones!"

"But if the world were not filled with very stupid people, there would be no war, Herr Kapitan."

"That," said Von Poel feelingly, "would be unfortunate!"

"However, it may interest you to know that the ciphers were only an incident in the preparation of my case against you, Von Poel. In fact, it was your trail that led me to the courier system from Spa and the capture of the messages."

"My trail?" The Herr Kapitan knotted his thin brows over this statement. He added stoutly, "But I left no trail!"

"Your past operations were a trail," Elton elucidated. "They gave me the index to your mental habits, your character, your characteristics. They told me that you depend upon swift movement, audacity, the unexpected. So I worked up my case accordingly, and you may judge for yourself how well it has succeeded."

Von Poel reflected upon this in pained silence, but soon he brightened.

"But I shall extricate myself presently," he said quietly.

"How, please?"

"Your indulgence, my Captain, may I have a cigaret?" he asked absently.

"One of my cigarets. Yes. I will light it for you. Please do not let your vanity betray you, Von Poel. Nothing you can say or do will put me off my guard."

Von Poel took a grateful puff of the cigaret and leaned back in his chair, one hand holding the cigaret, the other toying with his fountain pen.

"You wholly misunderstand," he said, a mellow look in his eyes. "The castle I inhabit here on earth seems to be wholly in your power. But the spirit, Captain, the spirit that is Von Poel, you can not hold." He shrugged a Spartan indifference. "It is but the lot of all flesh, and I shall take the transition into my own hands without remorse. Such is the vow I made to myself months before."

"I credited you, Herr Kapitan," Elton retorted, "with nerve enough to play your game on through to the cold finish."

Von Poel gave a short laugh.

"Do you not credit me with intelligence enough to know the cold finish when it is in front of my nose?" he demanded. "Ah, your French will be here in a moment, their blood boiling in hot vengeance. But I will cheat them, as you shall see!"

A STOUT rap at the outer door interrupted. Elton identified the knock of the Deuxième Bureau as the sound was repeated.

"You will stand up, Von Poel," he commanded. "D'Auteuil is here. You will cross the room with me while I open the door, and I warn you once more!"

On reaching the door, Elton turned the lock and stepped back quickly against the possibility of a trick. The door opened upon D'Auteuil, who entered with pistol leveled. He stood in momentary bewilderment at seeing only Elton and the man in American uniform.

"Messieurs?" he inquired uncertainly.

Von Poel stepped back, his hands at his breast fumbling with the top of his fountain pen.

"Permit me to speak," he said softly, a smile of whimsical resignation on his face. "It is a last message, and therefore a solemn request, messieurs. Will you not please to say of me, when you make report, that I was faithful to my duty to the last, waiting here with you until the Herr Robillot, my adjutant, had time to leave with valuable effects. Adieu, messieurs. I hold neither of you to blame, and fall without malice in my heart. Adieu!"

With a quick movement, Von Poel raised the top of the pen to his lips and

drained its contents. Instantly his body stiffened as if from a heavy voltage of electricity. His arms shot out; the muscles of his face stood out in cords, and his eyes started from their sockets. He groped a moment, weaved to one side and collapsed to the floor. There his body thrashed about convulsively, his icy eyes staring at the wall, the pallor of death in his face, his jaws fallen apart with a greenish froth at his lips.

D'Auteuil sprang toward the body and picked up the fountain pen. He held it briefly to his nose.

"Potassium cyanide!" he gasped. "*Mon dieu,* but he is dead before he leave his feet!"

Elton ran to the chamber where he had left Robillot. He paused at the door.

"Your men are on guard outside, D'Auteuil?"

"Twelve, monsieur! They cover the entire floor."

"You may watch here. Search the room for important documents while I see what is left behind next door!"

The second chamber was empty. An open door led into a further chamber, and beyond that another open door. Elton hurried through the three rooms, throwing open clothes closets and poking behind portières. Robillot had fled. Moreover, he had left behind no indication of his presence—not even toilet articles, garments, or a scrap of paper. Elton made certain of this before returning to Von Poel's chamber.

"They've cleaned out with all their—"

Elton was addressing D'Autueil as he entered, but he did not finish the sentence. D'Auteuil was not in sight. On the floor lay a figure covered with a damask table spread. The figure was moving. Elton snatched aside the cloth to find D'Auteuil at the borderland of consciousness. The Frenchman sat up, blinking his dazed eyes and rubbing his swollen head.

"What is it happen?" muttered D'Auteuil as his wits returned. "I do not understand? I am at the desk. A blow at the head—*voilà!*"

There was a rap at the door. An under-officer of the gendarmes entered from his vigil in the corridor. He handed Elton a card.

"For ze Capitaine Elton," he said, "wiz ze compliment of ze major Americaine."

Elton read the insolent message with burning eyes. The card was engraved in fine script: "Frederik Karl von Elzen und von Poel, Kapitan, Imperial Navy, Kiel, Germany."

Under that was written in an unhurried hand:

> Will return the call of Captain Elton at his American Hq.

CHAPTER VII

A REQUISITION FOR 20,000 FRANCS

ELTON rallied his wits and made a hurried search of the hotel. There was the veriest chance that the audacious Von Poel might claim refuge in another masquerade rather than risk a hurried exit from the Crillon. The concierge was pressed into service. Every floor was guarded and a canvass made of every room without regard to the injured dignity of important guests.

Elton even insisted upon examining the whiskers of a hairy individual who got out of bed to rave that the outrage was a cause of war against a neutral nation. The whiskers proved real, and Elton left with dire threats of diplomatic vengeance ringing in his ears. A dozen less notable sets of whiskers, mustaches and eyebrows were examined before the guests were all accounted for.

But, as the morning wore on, Von Poel's escape and its method became evident. The gendarme who had received the message from the Herr Kapitan thought nothing wrong when an American major left the room, wrote on his card, and asked that it be handed to Captain Elton. The major had entered another room nearby with a friendly salute for the gendarme who

was guarding it. The gendarme at the stairway had seen only one person pass downstairs—a servant in the livery of the Crillon.

The concierge on duty at the desk had seen the servant, bareheaded, step into the street and hail a taxicab. He supposed the man was on an errand for some guest and thought nothing of it when he entered the taxicab and drove off. The taxi driver was located. He had taken the servant into the Rue de Rivoli and had seen him enter a second cab.

Elton and D'Auteuil went to the Deuxième Bureau for council. The Frenchman was nursing a badly swollen head from the blow of a telephone instrument that had felled him from behind. He insisted upon an escort of armed gendarmes.

"*Diable,* but the Herr Kapitan will turn his mind to vengeance!" D'Auteuil fretted. "Two of our best operatives have paid his toll within the week, my Captain. It is the miracle that he did not kill me at the Crillon. At first I could not believe he really was the Herr Kapitan."

"You pronounced him dead," Elton retorted. "But let's not hold a post mortem. We've still got the job of catching Von Poel, and we've got until Thursday to find him in Paris. On Thursday he returns to Imperial headquarters at Spa."

"It is, I fear, impossible that we find him now, Captain Elton," said D'Auteuil with a hopeless shrug. "He may be the gendarme, the *garçon* at the embassy of the English, the padre at the Eglise de Sceaux or at the Basilique de St. Denis. If we hail the taxicab, monsieur, it may be the Herr Kapitan who sits at the wheel. *Voilà!* Until he show his hand, what is there we can do except to have many eyes kept open?"

"I'll agree with you, if we accept that point of view, monsieur! That's the very attitude that makes his operations possible."

"Even the Monsieur Livoff, he will be under the suspicion now," wailed D'Auteuil. "Upon him I had counted for the *coup de grâce* when the hour it is ripe. But the Herr Kapitan will be suspicious. Why? Monsieur Livoff is in Paris. He knows much—too much perhaps."

"Monsieur Livoff?"

"Pardon, my Captain. He is the spy-double of whom I have spoke often."

"Here in Paris, now?"

"From Spa, on a mission from Ludendorff to stir up mischief among Russian agents who are to wreck our munitions factories. But, as I have said, it is France who claims his loyalty. In many ways he has proved his value. Ah, but now they will suspect—"

"They will suspect nothing on my account, Monsieur d'Auteuil," Elton interrupted sharply. "Von Poel knows how I broke his masquerade, and he blames it on the stupidity of their courier system."

"Perhaps —" D'Auteuil shrugged — "but the Germans have many suspicions."

"And as many necessities, monsieur," Elton reminded.

THEY set to work stringing a net, a conventional one of many meshes. Orders went singing out over half a dozen telephone wires. Gendarmes were instructed to seize all suspicious persons and bring them to the Deuxième Bureau for examination. American military police were directed to accost and identify every officer and enlisted man seen in Paris in American uniform. French and Belgian headquarters were asked to make a similar check of their own nationals in Paris. Intelligence officers were detailed to a round of the hotels. French lookouts and stool-pigeons of the underworld were put on the *qui vive.* The shrewdest agents were sent to the air squadrons and landing fields.

Neither Elton nor D'Auteuil worked with conviction that their efforts would

find the Prussian. But there was always a chance, at least, of a timely tip or a hint of the trail. When they had the whole Allied machinery of Paris in motion, Elton telephoned to Corporal Larden at M. P. headquarters and directed him to report at once with the car.

"Monsieur, but you do not intend to go about Paris?" D'Auteuil objected. "It is suicide."

"I'd rather you did not use that word again," said Elton irritably. "It is a disagreeable reminder. Where I'm going is to Courbevoie to look after some of my men and one or more prisoners they are holding for me."

"The prisoners Boche?"

"One I am certain of is a Frenchman —a victim of cocaine. I'll be wanting to turn him over to you shortly. A spy runner; but a better subject for your hospitals than a firing squad, if my recommendation has any weight."

"*Bien.* But you will not object, my Captain, if I send with you the escort of gendarmes."

"As you please, monsieur, but only to take my prisoner off our hands. I accept no bodyguard against Von Poel. In fact, I intend to have him under my thumb at no remote date, and he'll not wiggle out next time!"

"Monsieur is an optimist," responded D'Auteuil with a smile. "The chances of the bet, as you Americans say, are one thousand to one."

Elton protested gravely:

"But I don't intend to leave my case to chance, Lieutenant d'Auteuil. I prefer to work by plan. Out of all the information I've assembled on the Herr Kapitan, I expect to build that plan. When or how, I do not know. It may depend upon further developments. I will be able to reach you here today and tomorrow?"

"At any hour, Captain."

"And if I should wish to question your man, Livoff?"

"At your convenience, yes, my Captain."

WHEN Corporal Larden reported, Elton drove off at once through Paris with the three gendarmes whom D'Auteuil insisted upon sending along. As he leaned back on the cushions, steeped in thought, he wasted no time in self-reproach at Von Poel's escape. Shallow as the trick might appear, Elton saw the mastery with which the Herr Kapitan had worked. No word or gesture had been without intent. He had sketched a deft background for his coup, boasting openly that he would escape in a moment and then revealing his plan of escape by death.

Waiting upon the arrival of D'Auteuil had served a double purpose. It had permitted Robillot to get away, and it was the psychological instant for springing his ruse of suicide. D'Auteuil would not understand the situation, and Elton logically would hurry into the other rooms after Robillot.

Von Poel's mind had reckoned the possibilities well. Even his request for a cigaret had served a purpose, enabling him to slip into his mouth a harmless effervescent that, foaming from his lips as he lay writhing, had convinced Elton of his death. Elton studied the incident in its every detail: not in regret, but in the light it shed upon the Herr Kapitan's methods.

He stopped the car briefly at Molin's shop in Neuilly, to which place the French secret police already had been directed. It had been close to noon when Molin and two assistants were seized, reported the gendarme on guard at the shop. They had found Molin entirely off guard, at work at his bench. Elton went to some pains to establish these details accurately. There was significance in them. The hour of the Herr Kapitan's flight from the Crillon was 3:40 A.M. The fact that he had sent no warning to Molin must therefore have been an intentional oversight—a navy man's reprisal against the army for its blundering couriers who had stripped him of his masquerade. It was obvious

where the Herr Kapitan fixed the blame for his misadventure.

Courbevoie was steeped in its medieval slumber, which even the War disturbed little. But inside Elton's billet at the edge of the village there was tense excitement. Walters and Bragg, with their haul of prisoners, had crowded the old French couple out into a cowshed. Four had been taken the night of Elton's departure—a pilot and three peasants.

"It's little sleep we've had the past two nights, Cap'n," Walters reported dolefully. "Kept us busy herding this tribe and watching the area."

"Just what has happened?"

"The Cap'n hadn't been gone from the house half an hour before a plane lands. We closed in on it and got this Heinie birdman as he was leaving his cockpit. The others was out with lights—that man Bardonne and two hired hands. Bardonne knew what was up, all right. He's a Boche agent, if I know one. Tried to shoot, but I beat him to it. And we've been busy nursing his punctured arm ever since. The other two men I think are just poor dumbbells who thought it was a friendly plane coming down for a visit. Nothing stirring at all last night, sir."

"You've searched them thoroughly?" Elton asked.

"Spent four hours at the job. I'd hate to tell any one how thorough I did the job this time, Cap'n. Found nothing except the usual phony identification papers on that aviator."

"All right. Check them into my room one at a time."

The aviator was brought to him first. He was a man of medium height, well built, and of an Alsatian type which might claim either French or German allegiance. His eyes were a mild blue and his face wore an expression of innocent youth; but his mettle was mature, as Elton found upon questioning him.

He wore the Belgian flying uniform, with the ribbons of the Order of Leopold and Belgian war cross. His orders gave his name—Lieutenant Henri Ourde, 312th Pursuit Squadron—but did not account for his presence near Paris. This he explained naively. He had lost his flying directions and wandered about in the air for several hours trying to orient himself. At sight of landing lights he had dropped down, only to find himself under arrest. Ourde told this yarn obviously with no belief that it would be accepted.

"But, yes, monsieur. But, no, monsieur. It is impossible to judge, monsieur. I have nothing to disclose, monsieur."

Ourde took refuge in a polite repetition of those phrases as Elton plied him with questions. Threats had no effect upon him. His sang-froid was unshakable, his manner seeming to say that, having been caught, he faced the inevitable without whimpering. As for information, he had nothing to contribute.

Le Bardonne lied hopefully but to no effect.

The two peasants seemed to be innocent victims, as Walters had estimated them.

By dark, Elton had satisfied himself and turned Ourde and Bardonne over to the gendarmes for delivery to the Deuxième Bureau.

"Two more valuable prisoners, Walters. You've done excellent work," Elton complimented the veteran noncom. "If I'd done my own job half as well we'd be on our way back to G. H. Q. by this time."

"Didn't the Cap'n meet with any luck in Paris?"

Elton shook his head.

"Three rascals of the courier system. Got them at Neuilly, and one of them a key man. But the one that's worth a thousand of these henchmen slipped through my fingers, so I've got to start out all over again. Come on, we're pulling stakes here. We've wrecked this route. Get your men together and hold them at M. P. headquarters in Paris. If you haven't heard from me by Friday, better return to headquarters."

D'AUTEUIL obliged Elton with a chamber at the Deuxième Bureau. There Elton asked that he be left alone overnight. The Frenchman had a small iron bed installed by orderlies in Elton's office. He was highly elated at the American haul and vowed that the breaking of the courier nest at Neuilly was an achievement for which France would be forever grateful. No trace of the Herr Kapitan had been found through the day; therefore Captain Elton was free to have a night of sleep, D'Auteuil concluded.

But sleep was not Elton's purpose in seeking this retreat. He sat for many hours as motionless as a graven image except for an occasional visit to the immense map of wartime Europe that hung on the wall. The germ of a plan had crystallized in his brain on the return ride from Courbevoie. At first it had startled him by its sheer daring; then had fired his imagination, quickened his blood and taken possession of him. But he knew the decision must not depend upon impulse. He was brooding upon it now with the patient care of a hen hatching a lone egg. His mind was charting every inch of the course, every possibility of success, every danger of failure.

There were two uncertain factors which must be explored, he had decided by midnight. The first of these refused to wait. He left his room to demand of the officer on duty that D'Auteuil be awakened immediately.

"But the lieutenant leave the word that he is very fatigue," said the officer. "He must not be disturb, unless in the greatest emergency."

"It's that kind of emergency, monsieur," Elton replied. "Ask him to come to my chamber immediately."

Lieutenant d'Auteuil reported ten minutes later, slightly ruffled at the summons but displaying a host's politeness.

"An important favor, Lieutenant," said Elton. "I must see your man Livoff immediately, if you can arrange it."

"I regret, monsieur," replied D'Auteuil, "but Livoff we do not billet at the bureau. He is register at the Hôtel Wagram in the name of Monsieur Livane."

"Can't you have him brought here from the hotel? It is now one o'clock and he should be in his room."

D'Auteuil lifted his eyebrows in an expression that said he was being put to much unnecessary inconvenience.

"I have in detail the report of Livoff, Captain Elton. I can answer for him any question you may ask."

"Thank you. But I want to see him as well as hear his report. And without wishing to be unduly insistent, I'd like to see him at once. Also, will you ask your assistant to place a telephone call to Colonel Rand at our headquarters. Have them send a messenger and get the colonel out of bed. I'll take the responsibility."

"As you please, Captain," D'Auteuil assented, with another elevation of his brows and a bothered shrug.

"Another question before you leave, monsieur. Would your bureau be willing to unmask Livoff if the consideration happened to be important enough?"

"Unmask Livoff? I do not entirely catch your meaning, my Captain."

"I mean, end his usefulness to you as a spy-double because the Germans were given reason to suspect him."

"Already, I fear, will the Germans suspect Livoff. Is he not in Paris when the Herr Kapitan—"

"I've satisfied myself on that point, Lieutenant. But what I want to know is, which is the more valuable—Livoff, or the capture of Von Poel?"

"Ah, for the Herr Kapitan," averred D'Auteuil through clenched teeth, "would we sacrifice all the Russians of Russia!"

"And after I have talked to Livoff," Elton said, changing the subject, "will you please have the fellow, Ourde, held available for interview? Thank you, monsieur. Sorry for all this bother, but

with Thursday morning dawning we have precious little time left if we ever expect to get Von Poel!"

THE telephone summons of Colonel Rand proved more expeditious than the French quest of Livoff. Elton was busy making notes from the wall map when the connection with Chaumont was completed. The colonel's voice was sleepy but cautious until he learned it was not a call from higher authority that had disturbed his sleep in this outlandish fashion. Elton offered no apology.

"This is Elton, sir—a matter of official finance," the captain said bruskly. "Can you voucher a requisition of twenty thousand francs if it's important enough to—"

"Damn it, yes! A million francs if it's worth it," roared the colonel. "But first I've got to know—"

"Thank you, sir," Elton replied and hung up.

He could picture the colonel's fury at such treatment. But the answer served his purpose. As for the colonel's outraged feelings, they were of no moment in the present situation. Elton's plan could have but one of two issues. In the first, anything would be forgiven; in the second, nothing need matter.

Livoff reported in at two o'clock, with D'Auteuil and an escort of gendarmes. The Russian was a man in his late twenties, of medium stature, typical of the Russian middle class. Contrasting with his dark skin were his light gray eyes which had a guileless frankness of expression. His face was not unpleasant, his manner suave and friendly, his voice soft. But Elton caught the cold reserve under the surface—the reserve and polished self-possession of the seasoned gambler in high stakes.

Livoff wore the French uniform, the wings of a pilot and several ribbons at his breast. The fellow's resourcefulness was attested by his success as a spy-double—one who serves two warring masters to the satisfaction of both, each convinced of his loyalty, though dogging his every move.

The Russian spared his words and spoke only when addressed. When the inevitable French amenities had been disposed of, Elton asked many questions—queries that plainly puzzled D'Auteuil since they were mere commonplaces. But Elton was busy estimating this man. Thirty minutes of chatter, and he proceeded bluntly to business.

"Monsieur Livoff," he said, "I am authorized to pay you twenty thousand francs, in addition to any other sums you may receive, for not more than twenty hours of your time. The money will be handed you at our headquarters Friday forenoon. As an evidence of my own good faith, and since I can not give you details at the moment, you will work with me personally on an important case—that of the Herr Kapitan von Poel."

Livoff weighed the proffer without change of expression.

"Very well, monsieur," he said shortly. "If I can be of service you have only to command."

"Done!" Elton exclaimed, rising. "And now, messieurs, if I may excuse myself, I'll turn in for a bit of sleep. You, Monsieur Livoff, please report here at eight in the morning, when you have had your breakfast."

The Russian clapped his heels together, drew himself erect and saluted. D'Auteuil hung back as Livoff left the room.

"Captain Elton," he complained, "not yet have you taken me into the confidence."

"It is merely that I do not wish to be premature, Lieutenant," said Elton. "At the proper time I will lay every detail before you."

"Livoff is the agent of the Deuxième Bureau, and I am required to know of his movements, my Captain. The twenty thousand francs which you promise him, that is not necessary. For five thousand francs he sells his soul.

But twenty thousand—it is the price of five Russians."

"Since his loyalty is gold, I want to buy up his entire available supply," Elton replied. "While I can't tell you now, I promise you that Friday, which is only tomorrow, I will lay everything before you. Pardon me, monsieur, but the roosters will soon be up, and I already have cheated you of much sleep."

CHAPTER VIII

A JUNKET BY HORSECAB

FROM eight o'clock in the morning until early afternoon Elton remained shut in his chamber with the Russian. They pored over maps, sketched plans in pencil, talked together at times in guarded tones. A conference of two hours, in which Elton rehearsed every detail of his plan, ended their session. Livoff offered an occasional suggestion and a few minor corrections and contributed some valuable topographical information.

The Russian evidenced neither enthusiasm nor fear. Elton's plan was sound, he said, though everything must depend upon the technique of its execution, plus an element of chance. His principal interest, his manner indicated, was the twenty thousand francs and a certain professional satisfaction in doing his own part well.

"That will be all then, monsieur," Elton concluded, "until eight o'clock when we meet at Orly."

"At 8:00 of your watch, which is twenty hours of the French clock," Livoff responded. *"Merci bien, monsieur."*

Without pausing for lunch, Elton had Ourde brought in from the emergency cell in the bureau. He spent an hour talking to the prisoner, the while he closely studied Ourde's voice, manner, expression, posture and gait. This done, he sent word for D'Auteuil, who had paraded the corridors several times in impatience.

"If one of your men will bring my luncheon, I'll be eternally grateful," said Elton. "I am anxious to remain under cover until tonight."

"Ah, yes, tonight! But then it is the Herr Kapitan will be gone from France, my Captain."

"We may be certain of that. By order of the Kaiser, eh? I have two other requests, and after that I'll not be a further nuisance, Lieutenant. I'd like to have a photograph hurried through of that fellow, Ourde. Have it ready by three o'clock. If you can borrow from your surgeon a small quantity of gauze, a roll of adhesive tape and a few drops of iodine in a vial, I have need for them; though any time before 7:00 will do. And please have your telephone man call Corporal Larden at American M. P. headquarters. I want my car here at 7:15 sharp, with my locker trunk."

"Of course, Captain Elton. But your mystery—it puzzles me when it is you find the information that Herr von Poel must report tonight back to his headquarters."

"That fact, however, will not prevent his return in the morning to France, monsieur. You must not forget the speed of his planes."

D'Auteuil searched Elton's face with startled eyes.

"Monsieur!" he exclaimed. "You have the information that the Herr Kapitan will return at once."

"I am positive of it," Elton asserted. "Tomorrow I will give you my full report. And now if you'll hurry your man along with my luncheon, it'll save me from starving."

DURING the late afternoon D'Auteuil's aloof politeness told of offended dignity. He asked no further questions, but secured for Elton the photograph of Ourde, the articles from the surgeon, and reported delivery of the command to Corporal Larden. Elton carefully burned his notes before leaving the

Deuxième Bureau. At 7:15 P. M. he left the building to find Larden punctually on the dot.

"Headquarters, full speed!" he ordered the corporal in a hearty voice.

As the auto crossed the Seine he leaned forward. Headquarters of the aviation center at Orly was the point intended, he explained. The car reached the field at dusk and drove to the quarters of the commanding officer. Elton identified himself and asked for living quarters, into which he had his locker trunk taken. He sent Larden back to Paris immediately with directions to take Sergeant Walters back to Chaumont.

"Tell the sergeant I'll be in my office the first thing in the morning," he requested. "Both of you enjoy yourselves in Paris tonight, as I'll not be calling for you again."

Elton selected from the locker trunk his best Belgian uniform, to which he attached the insignia of the flying corps, with pilot's wings. This uniform he exchanged for the French one he had worn since Courbevoie. With the photograph of Ourde at the mirror beside him, he skilfully retouched his face. Since the resemblance at best could be only a remote one, he covered his right cheekbone with a bandage and placed another at his jaw, both with a few splotches from his vial of iodine. Judicious applications of engine grease gave him the appearance of a pilot who had met with hard treatment.

Until five minutes of eight he occupied himself with the details of his disguise, then crossed the field to the point of rendezvous with Livoff. The Russian spy-double was waiting for him, puffing a cigaret as nonchalantly as a man going to the opera.

"Your plane is ready, monsieur?" Elton inquired.

"It is in perfect shape, Captain," said Livoff. "In four hours it shall land us at Spa."

They took off at once in the French two-seater, furnished by the French and conditioned by the Germans. Livoff climbed gradually to a height of four thousand meters and then set his course due northeast. Night slowly settled about them as they passed over France —a night in which there would be no moon until long after they had reached their destination.

Livoff had his motors perfectly tuned and flew at high speed with a practiced sense of direction and control. Below was only the inky void of France until they had been flying the better part of two hours. Then Elton, glancing over the side, saw the dim winks, as of a heliograph, that told of high explosive shells seeking their human toll below.

Soon thereafter Livoff climbed higher into the starlit dome. Elton judged from this that they must be over occupied Belgium. French planes, even though piloted by German secret agents, were open prey in German territory with safety to be found only in altitude.

Four hours had passed when Livoff, as if he had timed his maneuver by the clock, dived downward with the speed of a comet. He straightened out at two thousand meters and flew in a broad circle, gradually dropping. Small white lights winked from the wings of his plane. Several times he circled, his lights blinking, before the black void below winked back at him. There was a cautious exchange of signals, then myriad lights flashed below. The Russian dropped down close, found his bearings over the landing field and brought his plane to the ground.

A dozen figures came running out as his plane taxied up to the hangars. Livoff stood up and saluted a fat little man who came puffing up.

"It is you, Herr Livoff," shouted the fat little man. "The Herr Major is coming to speak with you."

Livoff climbed out of his seat and leaped lightly to the ground. He motioned Elton to follow. Elton descended cautiously, in the manner of an injured man who guards against jolting. He wondered at his own complete serenity.

Had he been landing at Hanlon field, his nerves could not have behaved better. Sight of the ground crew hurrying up gave him no discomfort. His plan, he felt, was too soundly prepared to go amiss here. But in the next moment he saw his whole mission suddenly upon the rocks. The Herr Major rushed up.

"Herr Livoff," roared the major, "attention to your orders! An emergency. You will fly at once to Berlin, where you will receive from Wilhelmstrasse certain papers that his Imperial Majesty wishes brought to him here immediately. By morning—"

The German's words became a jumble in Elton's stricken ear. Fate had turned upon him with sharp fangs. Livoff taking off for Berlin on an errand of the Kaiser's which would hold him until well into the day. Elton saw that only by a miracle could he survive the day in Spa. A sudden suspicion flamed in his brain. Had Livoff staged this trick—betrayed him for some unfathomable motive more powerful than the American francs? He saw the Russian standing in his steel composure. Then he saw him shrug. Livoff spoke presently.

"A great honor, Herr Major," he said. "It long has been my ambition to perform a personal errand in his Majesty's interests. And now that I have the great opportunity, what a pity that I am helpless! Ah, Herr Major, my poor plane, it reached here by a chance. Two of my struts hang by a thread, there is a leak in the gas line and my engines have been missing. I can imagine the emperor's humor at such service."

"There is a chance for you, Herr Livoff," growled the major, "if you can make repairs within the hour. Another plane with a good pilot will not be here from Ostend in twice that time."

Livoff shook his head and groaned.

"It will be morning before I can make repairs to my satisfaction, Herr Major. By then you will have a plane; and I must take off for France with Herr Ourde, whose plane is on the ground in a haystack at Courbevoie. Herr Ourde will fly with me to bring back his plane, if the Herr Doktor does not find his hurts too severe."

"What is it has happened, Herr Livoff?"

"A matter for the information of the Intelligence office, Herr Major. You will excuse us. And please to leave my repairs to my own hands, since I have no taste for an accident in France."

THE resourceful son of the old Czarist police turned abruptly away and went with Elton to the locker room for a change of uniform. Ourde's German uniform fitted Elton indifferently, the cap not at all. Livoff supplied a cap from his own well stocked locker—a vizor cap of the staff—and a set of blue aglets for the left shoulder. An aviation car sped them from the landing field into the village, where Livoff dismissed the car on the Rue Royale and engaged a Belgian horsecab from the curb.

Spa was in darkness, except for dull splotches of light from curtained windows and painted street globes. There were few people on the street at this hour; and these were only soldiers, returning to their billets from their desks, or sentries and military police. Livoff directed the cab to the Rue de la Sauvenière, where an array of waiting staff cars and motorcycles identified the Hôtel Britannique, Imperial army headquarters.

"His Majesty has finished the conference and gone to his billet at the Château du Neubois," said Livoff, as he inspected the curb in front of headquarters. "If he were yet here, many more cars would also be here. Ah, the limousines also are gone; so we may know that no one of rank remains."

The Russian left the cab and entered the hotel. He was gone only a few minutes.

"The billet of the Herr Kapitan," he whispered, "is on the Rue Delhasse, which is to our interest." Aloud, he or-

dered the driver, "Turn to the left, monsieur, and drive ahead until I stop you."

They had traversed several blocks in a street of desolate darkness, when Livoff leaned forward through the open window, gripped the Belgian cabman by the throat with fingers of steel, fastened a ready gag into his mouth and strapped his arms behind him. Stopping the cab, he securely tied his prisoner, lifted him into the back seat with Elton and took the reins.

No word was spoken through this little drama, nor while the Belgian coach horse trotted right and left through darkened streets. Their course was plotted and every move planned in advance, barring the unexpected. When Livoff stopped the cab, Elton got out. The Russian pointed a tense finger at a massive shadow fronted by high elms, and at Elton's nod drove on.

Elton's heels pounded the cobbles at regulation German cadence as he entered the grounds, mounted the steps and swung the knocker loudly. In a few minutes a light glowed faintly through the pane in the door. An orderly in navy uniform responded and, at sight of an officer with the aglet of an aide-de-camp, saluted.

"The Herr Kapitan's adjutant, I must speak with him immediately," Elton snapped.

"Herr Leutnant, the Herr Kapitan's adjutant left an hour since to his residence."

"There is here a representative to whom I can deliver an urgent message?"

"I will deliver the Herr Leutnant's message."

"That will hardly do. If there is no suitable officer to speak for him, then I must see him personally."

The sailor considered this with the pained expression of a faithful servant who protects his master's comfort.

"But the Herr Kapitan has retired and is asleep."

"Then awaken him instantly!" Elton commanded. "Inform him that an aide-de-camp of his Excellency, the Herr Colonel-General, must speak with him at once!"

The sailor snapped erect. Aide-de-camp of the Colonel-General . . . He muttered a confused apology, pivoted and hurried up the stairway that led from the hall. Elton heard a rap at a door and an exchange of voices. His blood raced. The way was clear. Robillot's early departure had spared him the uncomfortable necessity of luring that officer outside into violence. The servant had accepted his masquerade without question. The Herr Kapitan would not dare refuse to receive such a caller as the one at the door. The representative of the Colonel-General was the voice of the general himself.

Von Poel's orderly returned to offer the official visitor a cigaret and glass of wine. Elton guessed that the purpose was to give Von Poel time to dress. He refused the offer, but waited until the sailor was ready to take him up.

AT THE Herr Kapitan's door, he dismissed the orderly, stepped inside, deftly slipped the lock and strode across the room with the gait of an adjutant on parade. Von Poel had seated himself at his desk and was puffing a cigaret fitfully. Elton saw that he was again the irritated little man he had first seen at the Crillon.

"Well, what is it, Herr Leutnant, brings you here at such an hour as this?" Von Poel complained, when his visitor stood before him in silence.

"I have come to remind the Herr Kapitan of his promise," said Elton.

"My promise—of what, Herr Leutnant?"

Elton shifted a chair to Von Poel's side, sat down and leaned close to him with a dry smile.

"Your promise, Herr Kapitan, to pay me a little visit at American headquarters."

The Herr Kapitan's reply came with only a momentary delay, but Elton

caught the quaver in his voice as he rallied himself from the shock of recognition. Von Poel was quickly at ease, though there was a contraction of the muscles about his eyes as his mind grappled with the unexpected danger before him.

"I see it is you, Captain Elton," he said. "I did not at first recognize you in your excellent disguise; and I must admit I was hardly expecting this unusual honor."

"It is only a fitting courtesy, Herr Kapitan," Elton replied, "in view of the many calls you have made to our Allied headquarters. In fact, it was your own example gave me the idea of dropping in on you tonight when I knew you would be found at home. There's a saying, you know, 'Fight the devil with fire.' "

"Yes, yes, but that is not a very polite thing to say to your host, Captain Elton. But now that you are here, what is your pleasure? Am I to expect a cold assassination?"

"That, Herr Kapitan," Elton accused, "is one of your examples I have no wish to imitate. You need fear no violence at my hands, if you are sensible."

"Very well, Captain," Von Poel agreed with a half smile. "I admit your advantage and do nothing I shouldn't do under the circumstances. But, as host, may I offer you a glass of an excellent Rhine wine, one that—"

Elton snapped his fingers and said bruskly:

"Let's spend no time on palaver, Von Poel! I have a busy schedule and no time to waste. Do you wish to walk peaceably from your billet, or must I bind and gag you? The decision is yours."

"Your intention, Captain? You have not explained."

Elton answered in a calm voice, free of any playful irony, his practical manner contrasting with the assumed debonair attitude of Von Poel:

"My purpose is to leave Spa immediately and take you along, Herr Kapitan. Your decision?"

The Prussian debated coolly, but with a fire in his alert eyes that manifested the agility of his brain as he estimated the situation. Elton guessed his mental processes. Escape from Spa must be out of the question by any possible route. If attempted by airplane, even with the aid of a traitor, the ruse would be detected at the hangars as the party was checked out under the lights of the landing field. By automobile, they would be picked up at the first barrier. Even the best of counterfeit orders could not pass the succession of sharp eyes that would scan them through occupied Belgium.

As for a concealed plane in some convenient grain field, that would be equally impossible. The listening network of the German air service, the patrols and sentries in every direction out of Spa, would have detected a vagrant plane landing in the night, thanks to German thoroughness. As for escape on foot through the moors and hills beyond Spa, that was obviouslv out of the question.

The one instant danger, then, must be this mad American, whose grim determination sparkled from his level blue eyes.

"Your face and your pistol are so convincing, Captain," Von Poel decided, "that I feel compelled to follow you in your folly. But I will do you the service of this warning, Captain Elton: You will never leave Spa."

"That, Herr Kapitan, remains to be seen," said Elton.

He warned Von Poel once more against a trick, linked his left arm through his prisoner's right and left the room. The sailor was waiting in the hallway. Elton pressed Von Poel's wrist in silent reminder as they passed the unsuspecting orderly.

"I will be back very shortly, Oberv," Von Poel told his servant, his tone a boast. "See that I have some cold grouse and a bottle of champagne waiting for me."

LIVOFF'S cab was waiting at the curb in front of the billet. Elton thrust Von Poel into the vehicle and stepped in behind him. The Russian whipped the horse into a lively trot, wound his way into the Rue Royale and across the village. Once they were halted by the military police. Livoff identified himself as an officer with a blunt oath, ordered the soldiers to stand aside, and drove on.

Von Poel sat upright and squirmed when the cab trotted on down the street that led to the hangars. The pressure of Elton's fingers on his wrist forced him back into his seat. The cab jolted on into the Avenue du Marteau and turned south on the Boulevard Rener, by which route it left the village.

"You must be mad, Captain Elton!" the Herr Kapitan spoke up. "Do you think the Germans are such fools that you can drive across Belgium in a horse-cab!"

"That, as I have said before," Elton replied indifferently, "remains to be seen."

At a road junction two kilometers out of Spa, Livoff left the main highway for a twisting country road that meandered to the east. He brought up, after a drive of a kilometer, against a low stone fence. The Russian got out, laboriously removed stones enough to make a passageway and drove well out into an open field, where he left the cab a second time to unhitch the horse and strip the animal of harness. Then he vaulted to the animal's back, dug his heels into its flanks and rode off into the darkness at a gallop.

The hour was just short of three o'clock, the moon peeking over the Baraque Michel to flood the fields and moors in silver. The Herr Kapitan sat stiff as a ramrod, without motion or speech, his mind busy with the strange maneuvers of his captors. Half an hour passed. At the sound of a faint hum in the distance Elton left the cab, forcing Von Poel ahead of him. An instant later understanding flashed into the Herr Kapitan's brain. He turned in a desperate lunge and caught Elton's throat in the grip of frenzied fingers. Elton met the attack with a cool deliberation, clutching the Prussian's thumbs in steel fingers and breaking their hold with a force that sent Von Poel to his knees.

The Herr Kapitan rose, in possession of himself, and after slapping the dust from his clothing, bowed stiffly.

"Your pardon, Captain Elton," he said. "I forgot myself for the instant."

Livoff's plane came jolting down the open field from the distant German hangars, a ghost in the moonlight. Elton turned to slash the thongs that bound their hapless Belgian cabman, then seized Von Poel's wrist as he started to the waiting plane.

"The tricks of those Russian swine," sneered Von Poel as he saw the jaws of the trap closed upon him. "Bah, have I not warned our army against their Muscovite scum!"

"On the contrary," said Elton, "the plan is entirely my own, suggested by your own little audacities, Herr Kapitan, and equally as simple as your ruse at the Crillon, don't you think? But come, climb up quickly! Our excellent pilot will drop us at American headquarters in good time for breakfast. After which there's a certain colonel I wish to introduce."

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

IT MAY be worthwhile some time, when we are less limited in space than we are at present, to print more letters on the subject, "How I came to read my first copy of *Adventure*." In the course of a year we receive a good many such contributions, some of them extremely colorful in content. Here is one:

Bernharts, Pennsylvania

I have sat around the edges of the gang for the last ten years or more and been content to sit still and listen, but now I have gotten over that bashful rookie feeling and I feel like spouting, so here goes, and the only way to stop me is to douse me with a bucket.

A lot of you birds have been places that are only heard about by the rest of us, a lot of you have taken the gaff and taken it plenty and come back for more. The places that these things have happened to you have for the most part been a long ways from home or the U. S. A. I'm making the crack that a lot of things can happen to a guy right in his own home town, providing that he gets his feet out of the woodbox once in awhile and goes out for a look-see. As a matter of fact, I never would have become an *Adventure* addict if it hadn't of been for one of these before mentioned happenings and the location was up in the Cape Cod district, or to be more exact, off Nantucket Island.

FORTY or fifty years ago the island of Nantucket was famed for the clipper ships and whalers that were "Island built." The island is about twenty-four miles in diameter; it sits out in the old Atlantic about thirty miles from everything else and it is composed of sand and sand bars that for years have been the bane of ships that were trying to make Vineyard Sound in a blizzard. There are about 3500 natives on the land the year round, and they make their living directly and indirectly from the sea. There is a large summer colony there now consisting of well-to-do people who can afford to pay for the luxury of living near the old-timers. So, some of the younger generation have gone into the store business, much to the disgust of the older ones who still think that the sea is the only honorable place for a man to win his spurs.

The Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company run three boats out of New Bedford with landings at Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard, Oak Bluffs, Edgartown and Nantucket. The captains and crews of these boats are mostly old-timers, seafaring men with a rep, who are

spending these years as close to home as they can and still get salt in their hair. These steamers are of necessity shallow draft, because they have to skirt a lot of dangerous water in high winds; if they were built deep they would hit a lot of submerged rocks and bars in fogs and bad weather that the shallow draft will allow them to clear when making harbors. Now, being shallow and high, these boats roll in a wind, and I for one can testify that when they roll they roll. Put in five hours on one of them in a gale of wind and you will know you have been somewhere. I made the trip for quite awhile, every week. That's how come I read *Adventure.*

AROUND ten winters back I left New Bedford on one of the before mentioned boats headed for Nantucket. It was colder than Greenland and blowing a gale, ice in the bay and snow to come. We bucked ice before we got across the bay and snow blotted out the shore line before we docked at Woods Hole. We left Woods Hole two hours behind schedule and started through the blizzard for the Vineyard. Out into the sound with the siren bursting into a roar every thirty seconds to warn coasting schooners. In and out of the Vineyard harbor without scratching a thing, and off to Nantucket. This was a two and one-half hour trip in good weather, but before we had been out an hour the tide change brought drift ice in so fast that it was useless for the skipper to turn back. The next best thing was to keep heading into the wind for Nantucket. For all he could see he might as well have been blindfolded. However, dead reckonin' seems to be second nature to those boys, and nightfall found us frozen fast, but not a hundred yards off the course. We were lying off a bell-buoy which was frozen silent, and we were due to lie there until help came or the weather changed. The lighthouse keepers and the Coast Guard kept informed as to our location by hearing the siren signals. They would get in touch with the revenue cutter and she would try to break a passage for us. Meanwhile we had a lot of time on our hands, and as for me, I had read everything in sight.

There was not much excitement aboard, as it was the "off season" for passengers and most of us had been through similar experiences. I went up on the boat deck scouting for something to read and got interested in watching sea-fowl flying downwind and going like bullets. Something had stirred them from their bed grounds and, once a-wing, about all they could do was go with the wind and look for open water. Once in awhile there would be a crash, and down on the ice alongside would go some luckless bird that either couldn't see us in the smother or wasn't able to buck the wind enough to veer off.

THE first mate was an old-timer, born in Nantucket, but he had lived on the sea from the Arctic to the Tropics. It happened that he had sailed one voyage with an uncle of mine, and so he used to tell me about the old days now and again. Sailing ships and the men who sailed them were the salt of the earth to Tom. He felt that the man who had learned the art of taking a vessel around the world's ports with the free winds was an artist and a privileged artist. It was pure tragedy to watch his face when he passed the wreck of one of the few remaining six-masted schooners, piled up on Handkerchief Shoals. He would lean on the rail and crinkle his eyes against the sun-glare and follow that hull until she disappeared in the haze. While I was killing time on the boat deck, that winter day, he came down the pilot-house stairs.

"Do you have anything to read?"

"Guess so," says he. "Come on to my quarters and we'll see."

He hauled out a copy of *Adventure* and passed it to me.

"What are you reading now—blood and thunder stories?" says I. He looked as if I had shot at him.

"That's a damn fine book," says he. "Why, a fellow who used to sail limejuicers writes in there, and I'm telling you, boy, he knows what he is writing about."

I probably need not add that Bill Adams was the writer he was talking about. That was my introduction to *Adventure,* and I haven't missed a copy since. I haven't participated in an east coast blizzard for three or four years, but every time I spin a coin over the counter for old *Adventure* I think of the way that old salt friend of mine rose up and hollered when I wisecracked about his favorite book and author. Since then I have learned what a regular old-timer Bill Adams is. May a fair wind carry his ship handsomely into Safe Harbor. —A. C. TAYLOR

INFANTRY vs. cavalry in warfare, and the system of seniority promotion in the Army, from the viewpoint of an ex-officer.

Dallas, Texas

"Honors of War" by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson is a good story despite the personal defence offered by the writer. I served in the Army with this officer, and I know a dozen *Willis Brants*—most of them are on the General Staff.

I am in accord with ninety per cent of what Major Nicholson had to say. However, I differ with his ideas on seniority promotion. In my opinion it is the only way to have an efficient and reliable officer personnel. I saw too many debacles and bad plays in France to ever become convinced that indiscriminate promotion in the American Army will do anything but wreck it.

The Germans adhered to seniority promotion, and the officer personnel is still unwhipped. They never lowered their colors. Yet the Allied officer personnel was as wide apart as the poles. Every little upstart, whippersnapper, poopstick, and lickspittle that could get his work in bootlicking managed to get three or four promotions in the American Army. Some of them went as high as brigadier generals—and such generals!

TO ME it is a sorry sight to see some old Pecksniff in command of troops; still he is more competent than the many false alarms that actually commanded regiments in the Argonne. Some of the Argonne commanders hardly

knew enough to get in out of a well announced precipitation without the proverbial Government transportation, much less command troops. Soldiers are born, not made.

Our Army is honeycombed with super-education —something that Leavenworth, the War College, and like institutions make the dominant and only feature when considering an officer for command, detail, or important mission. No wonder we had, and still do have, such men as *Willie Brant*.

In my active service I was an infantryman. And, oh, boy, wouldn't I have cried with joy to have a cavalry outfit attack me! Horses will not go over men on foot. All infantrymen know this, and they halt for cavalry at no time, at no place, and under no circumstances. Cavalry has its rôle in future wars. It can not be done away with— Still it has no business jumping infantry, and never will again.

With these few "censures," I thank Major Nicholson and shall be on the lookout for more from his pen.

—A. P. WATTS, Colonel, U.S.A. Retired

FAST shooting—five shots in two-fifths of a second?

El Paso, Texas

In the June, 1933, issue of *Adventure*, in the Ask Adventure department, there appears under the heading: "Sid Hatfield" some drivel about pistol shooting signed by Pink Simms, of Lewistown, Montana.

He is by his own admission "Assistant World's Champion Revolver shot", a title I have never heard of before. However, he must be very good, for he says so himself. Let that pass.

But his boss Ed McGivern is better yet—so good that it is impossible to do what he states this McGivern fellow so nonchalantly does, merely as part of the day's work. Or so one would think.

He states that McGivern uses a double-action S. W. revolver, .38 cal. O.K. He states that he, McGivern, using the double-action, in 2/5 of one second places five shots which can be covered with a dime, at twenty feet. Bunk, hooey, balloney.

WE do a little shooting down here and think we are pretty good sometimes. But we do not insult the intelligence of other shooters when we talk about our ability, if we talk about it.

In order to cover five .38 cal. bullet holes with a dime, all five of them would have to go through practically the same hole, as a dime is not even twice as big as a .38 cal. bullet at the base.

A revolver fired from a machine rest at the factory, where there is no variation in light, wind or temperature, and where steadiness of hold does not matter because of the machine rest, will not place five .38 cal. bullets in a space covered by a dime, because of variation in bullet weight, powder charge, shell or chamber expansion, etc., etc. So what?

We will raise a purse of around a thousand dollars, and pay the expenses of the W. C. McGivern, and the Asst. W. C. as well, if he will come down here to El Paso and show us how to do that stunt with a pistol instead of with his mouth or with a typewriter.

—A. CUNNINGHAM

A NOTE from W. C. Tuttle, of our Writers' Brigade, on the same subject:

Van Nuys, California

Enclosing a clipping from the current *Adventure*. There may have been a typographical error in that 2/5 of a second. I'm no six-gun shark, but I'll be hanged if I can empty five shots from my Colt .22—a very short pull, double-action gun—into the air in anywhere near that space of time.

Two-fifths of a second is damn short. Remember that the trigger must be pulled five times. Just try wiggling your trigger finger five times in 2/5 of a second. AND TRY TO PUT ALL FIVE BULLETS INTO THE SIZE OF A DIME —AT TWENTY FEET!

I can't even think of a figure five and a ten-cent piece in two-fifths of a second. I have no doubt that Mr. McGivern is a great shot, but I'll be danged if I believe he can do what that clipping says. I wish you'd take this up with Donegan Wiggins. —TUT

AND finally, a word from Donegan Wiggins, firearms expert for Ask Adventure. Since he is at the moment out of touch with his files, he does not offer figures or settle the question definitely. Maybe Mr. Simms or Mr. McGivern would like to have their say. If so, the floor is theirs. Comments from any others of you are of course welcome also.

Salem, Oregon

As to the letter from Mr. Tuttle re McGivern's shooting, I noted the same statement. I can only say that I believe McGivern is the world's fastest revolver shot today, and while I can't say just HOW fast he can fire, never having seen him, still the last copy of *Burning Powder* shows a group the size of a human hand, covering five .38 Special bullet-holes, made in a half-second. Possibly he may have improved on this. Groups shown of dime size in the same book were shot by an officer with the K .22 S. & W. revolver, double-action, time not stated.

As regards the possible speed, I think that a timing device and a mechanical firing device of a geared arm to pull the trigger when a crank was turned, back in 1918, gave wonderfully fast results with the double-action revolver, but as my files are in storage in the "ketch-all", I can't recall just what time it showed. This was merely to see *just how fast the revolver would operate*, and was of course not a test of human ability to shoot one. —DONEGAN WIGGINS

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Straits Settlements Householding

VACUUM cleaners and electric toasters are not exactly common.

Request:—"1. To what extent is electricity used on the small islands adjacent to Singapore? Is cooking still done by wood fire? I understand electricity is only used for light, and that they don't have vacuum cleaners, toasters or other such things as we take for granted here.

2. What are the houses built of? For how much could a small house be bought? How is the water in such places?

3. How about domestic service? I understand male help predominates. How much are they paid? How do they compare with our colored help?" —MRS. C. ROCHE, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—1. *All* cooking throughout all the East is done either on wood or cow-dung fires. Electricity is available in the larger towns; and vacuum cleaners and toasters can be bought. But more people than you will ever know have worn out their hearts trying to teach the unchangeable East to change its ancient ways and to accept modern mechanical household devices. If you want to use vacuum cleaners and electric cookers, you just sit up and use them yourself. *And* the white man's prestige that you *must* maintain doesn't permit you to use menial tools yourself.

2. Houses may be built of palm thatch and bamboo or matting or adobe. Such a house may cost all of fifteen dollars. But you, as a white lady, *must* live in a "European" house which, to rent or purchase, would cost you anywhere from the same to twice as much as the same house in America.

Water throughout the East is generally vile—except in the mountains. It is contaminated in ways that you, in hygienic America, can not believe. It must *always* be boiled to avoid various kinds of bacterial death that swarm in it. Nor can the fact that a native drinks it with impunity be for a moment accepted as a hope that you may drink it and not die the next day.

3. Domestic service is cheap and plentiful. Male, all of it, except a lady's personal maid or a nurse for a child.

Compared with colored help in this country—there is no comparison. For instance, a very ordinary colored maid might be expected to cook, to wash dishes, to make beds, to clean house and to do a weekly laundry. In the East you *must* have at least three servants to cover that much work, probably four. On the other hand, the pay of all four of them would amount to about thirty dollars a month, depending upon locality.

Baseball

SHORT history of the great American game.

Request:—"Please inform me where the game of baseball originated."

—FRANK LEASK, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Frederick G. Lieb:—There has long been a controversy as to whether baseball is a strictly American game, or whether it is an offshoot of rounders, or a variation of cricket.

In an effort to try to settle it, a commission was appointed in 1907 to go into baseball's origin. It was made up of former Senators Morgan Bulkeley of Connecticut and Arthur Gorman of Maryland; former presidents of the National League, Major A. G. Mills and Nicholas Young; also James E. Sullivan, former president of the A. A. U., and Messrs. Alfred Reach and George Wright, famous early players who became heads of national sporting goods houses.

While the committee said ball had been played in various ways by the Chinese, Japanese, Celts, Britons, Scots, Teutons and early Latin races, it unanimously declared:

First—That baseball had its origin in the

United States.

Second—That the first scheme for playing it, according to the best evidence obtainable to date, was devised by Abner Doubleday, later Major-General of the United States Army, at Cooperstown, N. Y., in 1839. The date of the report is December 30, 1907, and it has been generally accepted as the last word obtainable on the subject.

Mabi Tea

BITTER drink of the Caribbeans.

Request:—"The writer is interested in securing some details regarding a plant called mauby. I believe it comes from St. Thomas. This plant, I understand, makes a drink that is non-alcoholic and a good thirst quencher. Are you in a position to advise me as to where it may be secured and the method used to make the drink, and if there is any possibility that a commercial product may be made from it?"

—HARRISON BUTTLER, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Reply, by Mr. Wm. R. Barbour:—I am well acquainted with "maubi" (better spelling "mavi" or "mabi") which is brewed from the bark of a tree of the same name. Botanically the tree is Colubrina reclinata of the rhamnaceæ or buckthorn family.

It is found scatteringly in the drier parts of Puerto Rico, and in the Virgin Islands; and in both the drink is made and sold in street stands. Personally I do not care much for it, though some people like its slightly bitter and tonic taste. It tastes a little like the drink made from the bark of wild cherry.

Unfortunately, the tree is not plentiful enough to supply bark for any extensive industry. It is more common on St. Thomas than here, and I suggest you write Mr. Harry Taylor, Commissioner of Agriculture and Industry, at St. Thomas.

Swords

ITALIAN blades that came to Scotland, where they were copied.

Request:—"I have a Scottish sword of the type often, though I believe incorrectly, called the claymore. It is a double edged weapon with a deep groove on each side of the blade, which is engraved with thistles, boars' heads, etc. The blade is marked Gardiner, Glasgow, with a small round proofmark. Can you give me any information concerning the maker, or the age of the sword?

It has the large, basket type hand guard usually found on weapons of this type."

—WM. ALLAN MACDONALD, Lorain, Ohio

Reply, by Capt. R. E. Gardner:—Your sword is a typical basket-hilted Scotch regimental, called claymore in error and really of the Schiavona type. This form was introduced by the hired soldiery of Venice called Schiavoni (Slavs) during the 16th century. Its introduction into Scotland can probably be accounted for by the fact that North Italian blades were of the finest—a quality which the Scots early recognized—and in their subsequent importation into Scotland the Schiavona found instant favor. As the claymore was a distinct type, characteristic only of Scotland, all later Scotch swords were termed, by some, claymores.

The true claymore is a simple cross-hilted sword usually of large dimensions. The quillon (cross-bar) was downbent (toward the point end of the blade) and usually ended in pierced ornament of four lobes.

Slight changes took place in the Schiavona, which was almost universally adopted throughout Europe as a broadsword, its period of common usage being from about 1620 to 1770.

California Coast

WHERE the Channel Islands are overrun with wild boars and rattlers. No place for a timid man.

Request:—"I retire from the Naval Service in a year or so and want to get an island off the coast of Southern California (Santa Rosa group) to live on. Don't want to be exactly a hog, but would like to get one as nearly uninhabited as possible. What is the fresh water status of this group? Do they come under California laws?

Who must I contact for any further data on same? I've a copy of the *Coast Pilot,* but it is not quite concise enough for my purpose. I need a place large enough to build on and plenty of leg space to get around in. Water, a plot of ground big enough to grow stuff, keep dogs, chickens, a few rabbits, etc. Let me know as to wild life, snakes or such. I've no love for heavy hunting any more. Want to be peaceful for a change." —H. S. WELSHBILLIG, U.S.S. *Barker*

Reply, by Mr. Frank Winch:—There are about twenty islands lying off the coast of Santa Barbara which are known as the Channel Islands. They are supposed to constitute the only visible remnants of an ancient range of mountains which paralleled the California Coast.

They are scattered for about two hundred and fifty miles, extending southward to Lower California. Santa Catalina Island is the only one of this group that has to any extent been settled, although there are some residents upon the Coronado group.

The rest of the islands are wild and pretty much uninhabited. These and the Santa Barbara Channel were discovered by Juan Rodriquez Cabrillo in 1542.

After trading with the Indians on the present site of Santa Barbara, Cabrillo crossed the channel to the nearby islands upon one of which, the San Miguel, he received an injury which caused his death in 1543.

Santa Rosa Island, and the Santa Cruz Island and others in this group are located about opposite from both Santa Barbara and Ventura—a two- or three-hour ride in a fast launch will put you on the shores—and if you have no passengers with you, you will find yourself very much alone on arrival; for aside from a few sheepherders, and possibly here and there some stray outcast from

humanity, your neighbors will be few and far between. And perhaps just as well that it is so. However, those few men who exist on the island are very hospitable—after they know all about you and just what you had in mind in selecting some such godforsaken place to live in.

The islands' range is about what one would expect in somewhat mountainous country. Plenty of hills; good stands of rugged timber; lowlands with pasture; large open spaces; brush; and a profusion of wild flowers. Good drinking water is to be had. Whether or not this group comes under the laws of California, I can't tell. The very nature of the place would preclude the enforcement of laws of any kind, except that of a six-shooter and a rifle, and these mostly not for humans.

If you decided to locate on Santa Rosa, a tent would be the best style of house for the time being, until you could decide for yourself which of the spots would be most desirable—considerable judgment and good eyesight will be required to find any that are really suitable for human habitation except for a man who likes this kind of isolation. As for a large sized plot, you may help yourself to as big a chunk as you desire without fearing to encroach on a neighbor, who will be found at least two or three miles away. You can raise chickens, rabbits, dogs, vegetables and the what-nots that may strike your fancy.

I AM impressed with one statement in your letter—"Want to be peaceful for a change." The amount of peace of mind you will find there must depend entirely on the status of your mind. If you are not bothered with little crawly bugs, wild boars that are plenty big, and ugly both in looks and disposition, and are willing to share your blankets on some cold night with a rattlesnake—if, as I say, such trifles will not bother you, your peace of mind will not be disturbed.

Just a word about these wild pigs—and a *very* serious word. They are plentiful! You will be taking a genuine chance to go anywhere on the island without always being protected with a high powered rifle, and nine times out of ten, should a boar charge, you will find the gun getting in between your legs and impeding your progress trying to find a tree with a low hanging limb.

Last year some enterprising chap in Los Angeles conceived the idea of organizing a wild boar hunt. Two of my friends went—and they are experienced big game hunters. A week later I visited both of them in the hospital. They had had the thrill of their lives—and were through with wild boar hunting.

A week later two more tried it. They succeeded in getting back to their launch with nothing but the wits scared out of them—and they were picked up three days later by the Coast Guards. Later, a chap was so badly mauled that he died. Dogs of any kind seem to be the one delicacy that these wild pigs love. Horses suddenly determine that they are going back to where they came from, and usually the rider is taken so unawares that he forgets to grab leather—and then it's a scramble for a treetop. The snakes, one of the natives tells me, are not to be feared unless they are rattlers. I asked what other kinds there were, and he stated that rattlers were the only kind that he had found so far.

THERE are many beautiful sights on the islands, however—the sea coast, the cliffs, the caves, the dawns and sunsets. These fire the imagination. There is good fishing. The climate is mild and healthful. There is no way to get on or off the islands except to provide your own transportation, or wait for the supply and sheep boat which comes about twice a year. A sea haze usually hangs between the island and the shoreline, which would give the impression that a long, long road must be traveled before civilization can be reached. I imagine that's what those people think who live there. It was the impression I got after I had been ashore two minutes.

Land Office

NO REFUNDS to homesteaders.

Request:—"After receiving a receipt from the Land Office of your filing fees and before your entry is allowed, is it possible to recall all or any of your filing fees?"

—BUFORD BOSWELL, Ft. Shafter, Hawaii

Reply, by Mr. William Wells:—As far as I know there is no way to get a refund on filing fees paid into a Land Office. All expenses of a Land Office, pay of register, receiver, employees if any, are taken out of these fees and the policy of the Land Office is no refunds. In other words, those who file on land can either go through with the deal until they get their final proof of ownership or lose their money, also whatever time and money they have spent in trying to get title. Why, forty and fifty years ago it was a standing joke in the West that Uncle Sam bet a hundred and sixty acres of land against a man's time and the Land Office fees that he paid, that the man would starve to death before he could prove up. And Uncle won more times than he lost.

So I am afraid that you can kiss those fees goodby. You might write to the General Land Office, Washington, D. C, but I am afraid it would be a waste of time, letter paper and postage.

The only people who seem to have any luck getting back money once paid to Uncle Sam are the rich ones who get refunds on their income taxes, and it begins to look as if that was about over.

The Ask Adventure section on Navy Matters (U.S. and Foreign) is still vacant. Readers who feel that they are fully qualified to cover the subject are invited to state their qualifications by letter to the Managing Editor, *Adventure*, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears on page 126

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelop and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. Ask Adventure covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

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Motor ting GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago, Ill.

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First Aid CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

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Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

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Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ripon, Wisconsin.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, 128 S. Edinburgh Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.

A iation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data schools; foreign activities; publications. Parachutes and gliders. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

Federal Investigative Activities *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK EE, 189-16 Thirty-seventh Avenue, Flushing, New York.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

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Herpetology *General information on reptiles and amphibians; their habits and distribution.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ornithology *Birds; their habits and distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bron , New York, N. Y.

Stamps DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

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Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The New York Evening Post,* 75 West St., New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

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★The Sea Part 2 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

★The Sea Part 3 *Atlantic and Indian O eans: Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.) *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPTAIN DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Arizona, care of Conner Field.

★**New Guinea** L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands** WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

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Madagascar RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Europe G. I. COLBRON, East Ave., New Canaan, Conn.

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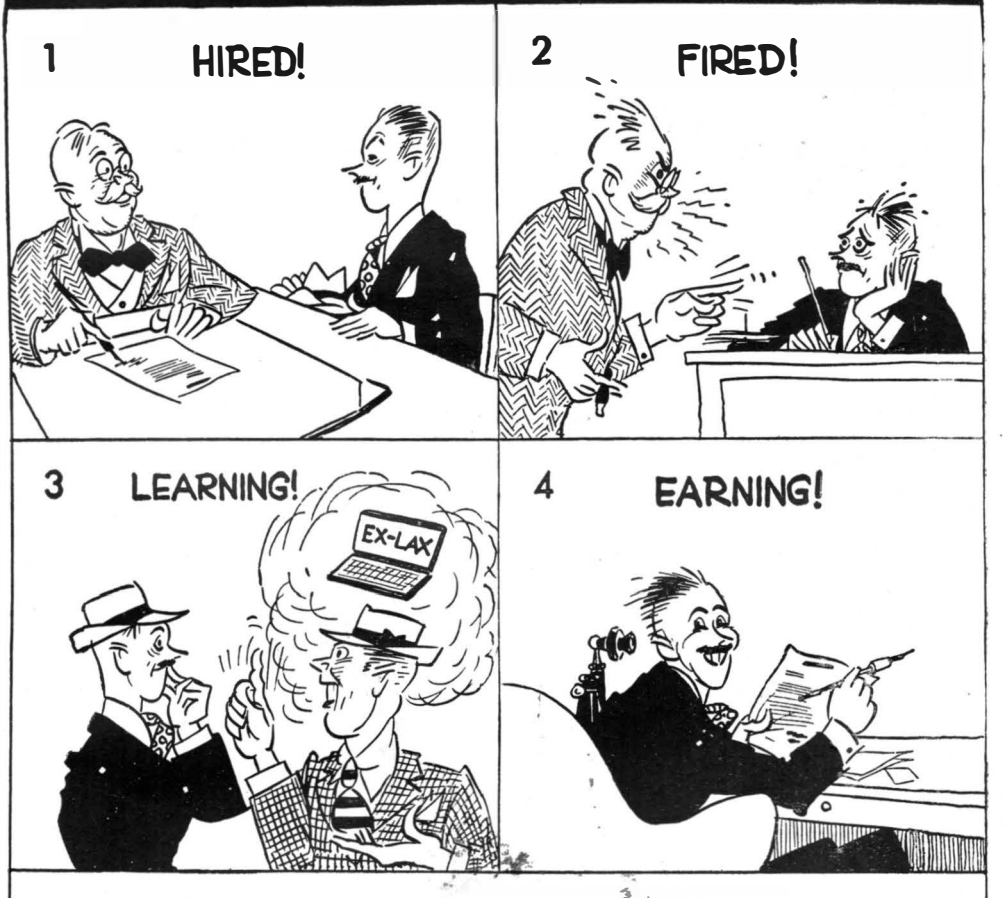

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