ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 10-1

OCT. 1

10¢

COMBINED WITH THE WEEKLY

All-American Fiction Magazine

C. S. Forester
Frank R. Pierce
Bennett Foster
Walter Ripperger

THE MATCHLESS MR. MALLET

in a Hilarious Short Novel by

JUDSON P. PHILIPS

Man!

HOW THAT LUSTER-FOAM ($C_{40}H_{37}O_5N_0$) GETS AFTER TOBACCO STAINED TEETH!

Energizing agent in the new formula Listerine Tooth Paste an amazing cleanser . . . sweeps away surface stains and accumulations unbelievably fast . . . freshens entire mouth

If you are troubled with dull, dingy, or tobacco stained teeth, don't fool around another minute. Start with the new Listerine Tooth Paste with amazing Luster-Foam, the dental discovery of the century.

Luster-Foam detergent has remarkable penetrating power, hence cleans teeth so much better. The first touch of saliva and brush energizes it into a fragrant, lively foam which surges into tiny cracks and pits on tooth enamel that ordinary dentifrices may never reach.

It actually performs four benefits:

1. Sweeps away food deposits. **2.** Obliterates dull, stained film. **3.** Combats dangerous acid ferments. **4.** Reduces the number of decay germs.

And while it is performing a miracle of cleansing, Luster-Foam detergent gives the mouth a feeling of freshness that will simply delight you. Try the new formula Listerine Tooth Paste with Luster-Foam. In two sizes: Regular 25¢ size, and big, double-size, extra-economy tube at 40¢. At all drug counters—now!

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

THE *NEW* FORMULA

Accepted and Approved 4602 Good Housekeeping Bureau

ARE YOU JUST HOPING TO LAND IN A GOOD JOB?

HOPE without foundation is pretty futile in this competitive age! But hope plus training is a winning combination — and all over this country today, in all kinds of professions and trades, men are getting ahead — landing in good jobs — earning more money — because of serious and systematic study of International Correspondence Schools' courses. These courses are giving them the training they need. Investigation will not put you under any obligation. Mail the coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2214-F, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Commercial Refrigeration	☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Boilermaker	☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Building Estimating	☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation	☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio	☐ Air Conditioning and Cooling	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Mechanical Engineering	☐ Steam Engineer	☐ Coal Mining
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Steam Electric Engineer	☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Bosses
☐ Management of Inventions	☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker	☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Navigation
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Patternmaker	☐ R. R. Locomotives	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Diesel Engines	☐ R. R. Section Foreman	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen	☐ Agriculture
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ Auto Technician	☐ Highway Engineering	☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals	☐ Auto Electrical Technician	☐ Civil Engineering	☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Service Station Salesmanship	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Secretarial Work	☐ First Year College Subjects	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Spanish	☐ Business Correspondence	☐ College Preparatory
☐ Accountancy	☐ French	☐ Stenography and Typing	☐ Illustrating
☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Salesmanship	☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier	☐ Cartooning
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Advertising	☐ Railway Mail Clerk	☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

☐ Home Dressmaking	☐ Advanced Dressmaking	☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing		☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name..... Age..... Address.....

City..... State..... Present Position.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
If you reside in England, send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Combined with All-American Fiction

Volume 285 CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 1, 1938 Number 1

Cover by G. J. Rozen

This magazine is on sale every Tuesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD.
3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C., 4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE
111 Rue Réaumur

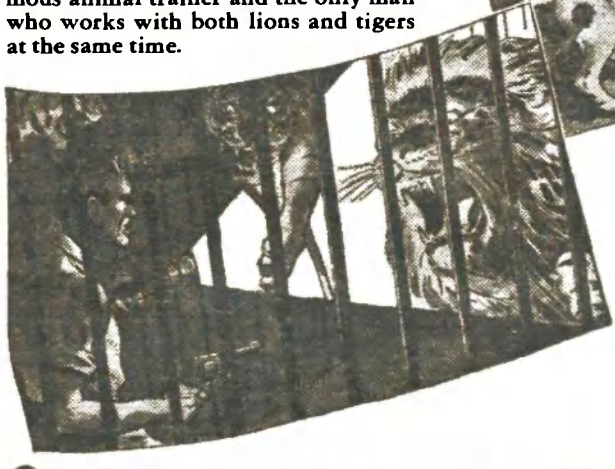
Published weekly and copyright, 1938, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies 10 cents. By the year $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, $5.00; Other countries, $7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A.

Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

"MURDEROUS 'JUNGLE-FEVER' WAS IN THEIR EYES"

CLYDE BEATTY, CAGED WITH SNARLING JUNGLE CATS, FACES BLACKEST MOMENT OF DEATH-DEFYING CAREER

❶ "It was one of those days when you know something's going to happen," writes Clyde Beatty, world-famous animal trainer and the only man who works with both lions and tigers at the same time.



❷ "The animals had been sullen during the matinee. They came tumbling into the big cage for the evening performance with that murderous 'jungle-fever' still in their eyes, squalling, spitting and making passes. If they once drew blood it would be just too bad!

"And then, with that cage full of mixed cats raging at me and each other ...the lights went out!

❸ "In the flicker of an eyelash the huge, glaring big-top went dead black! In the dark the snarls of the beasts sounded twice as loud. Green eyes glowed. In an instant they would leap for me!

"I jumped back, pressed hard against the steel bars of the cage. I whipped out my flashlight, flung the beam square in the startled face of the nearest cat, then gave it to another and another.

❹ "In a moment (a mighty long moment), the trouble was repaired, the lights flashed on again and a tremendous sigh rose from the crowd. I was still alive. The power of *fresh* DATED 'Eveready' batteries had held at bay the fury of the jungle!

(Signed) Clyde Beatty"

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation

Classified Advertisements

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the HOME, OFFICE, FARM, or PERSON; to offer, or seek, an unusual BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Forms Close Two Months in Advance.

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Spare Time*

FOR A GOOD RADIO JOB

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 1914

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays as much as $200 to $500 a year—full time repair jobs pay as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full time or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to $6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained at home have good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money—$200 to $500 a year—for hundreds. I send Special Radio Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical Radio experience. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP FIX SETS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste it on a penny postcard —NOW! J. E. SMITH, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, DEPT. 8KK, WASHINGTON, D. C.

J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 8KK, Washington, D. C.

Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your method of training men at home to be Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME ..... AGE.....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE.....

The Matchless Mr. Mallet

Move over, Medusa, stand back, Mr. Frankenstein, and you and you, Messrs Hyde and Dracula—gangway for Avery Mallet, the synthetic man. A delirious short novel . . .

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS

Author of "Pardon My Glove," "Grand National," etc.

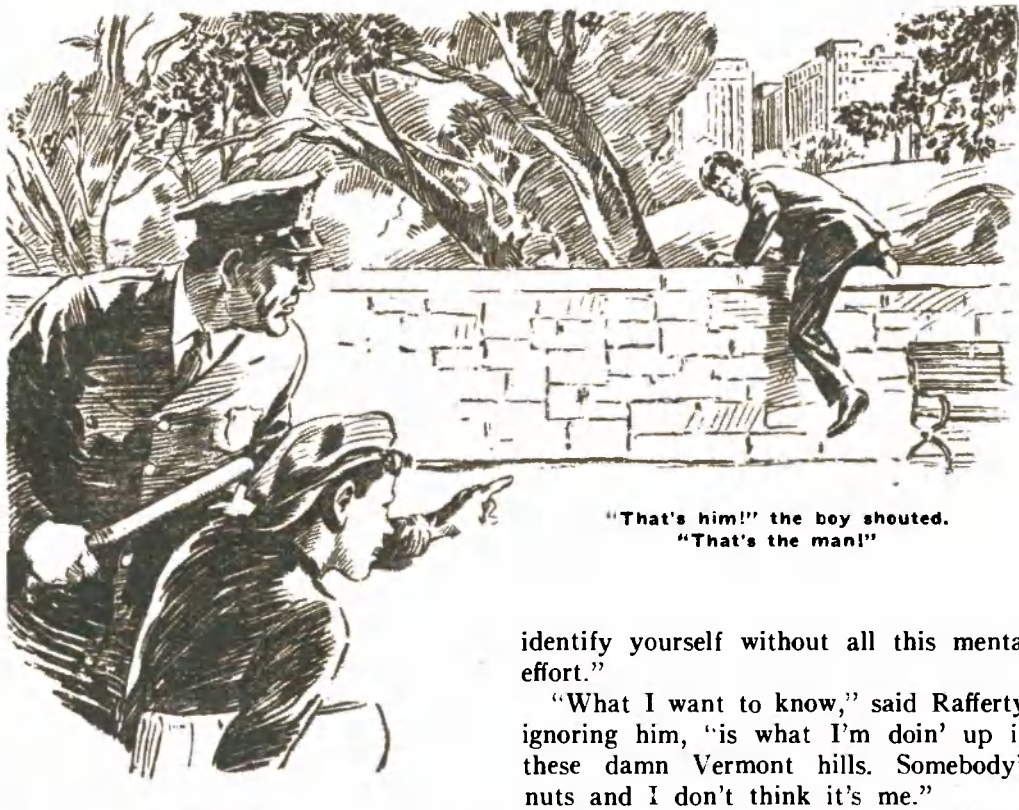
I .

IT WAS nine o'clock in the morning. Bill Porter lay on his back under a lilac bush. He was a broad-shouldered slim-waisted young man who, in years gone by, had raised particular hell with Ducky Pond's boys in the Yale Bowl. He wore a well-tailored Harris tweed jacket, carefully pressed gray slacks and custom-made cordovan shoes. His brown snap-brimmed hat which sported a little green feather in the band was pulled forward over his face so that only his square jaw and the carefully trimmed black mustache on his upper lip were visible.

"Wake me up if the dame comes out," he said.

Mike Rafferty was squatting on his haunches, looking through a pair of binoculars at an old graystone house which nestled in the valley about two hundred yards away. A garden, bright with all the colors of midsummer, lay at the back of the house, and two huge maple trees shaded a stone terrace on which were bright green and white porch chairs.

An unlighted cigarette dangled from one corner of Rafferty's mouth. He spoke to Bill Porter out of the other corner. "If this goes on much longer," he said, "I won't be here to wake you up. I'll be cut-



"That's him!" the boy shouted. "That's the man!"

ting out paper dolls in some nice quiet institution." He turned suddenly and looked at the reclining Porter. "Say, do you know who I am?" he asked.

"Sure," said Bill, "you're Mrs. Rafferty's favorite son."

"Keep my mother out of this," said Rafferty. A black leather camera case was hung over his right shoulder. His gray flannel suit had not seen a tailor for weeks and there was a bulge in his hip pocket created by a pint of rye. "I'll tell you who I am," he said. "I'm the guy that nearly got his ears shot off takin' pictures of Dillinger's arrest. I'm the guy that got his clothes burned off takin' pictures of the Hindenburg before it hit the ground. I'm the guy that got his head split open durin' the coal riots in Harlan County so that all the Republican twerps in the country could have a nice set of pictures of how the law is enforced. That's who I am. Now, I'll ask you another question."

"Maybe if you've got your driver's license with you," said Bill, "you could identify yourself without all this mental effort."

"What I want to know," said Rafferty, ignoring him, "is what I'm doin' up in these damn Vermont hills. Somebody's nuts and I don't think it's me."

"We're covering what is potentially the greatest news story of all time," said Bill, unmoved. "It's eminently fitting that *Globe's* best reporter and best cameraman should be on deck when it breaks."

RAFFERTY took the unlighted cigarette from his mouth and tossed it with a vicious gesture into the bushes. Then he took another cigarette from his pocket and stuck it in the same corner of his mouth. He did not light this one either. "All this pussyfootin' is screwy," he said. "Either that old moke down there has discovered something or he hasn't. All we gotta do is walk up to his front door, knock on it, and say, 'Grandpop, what about it?' "

"He won't talk," said Bill. "Gosh, this lilac bush stinks!"

"Why don't you go home and go to bed?" said Rafferty irritably. "Nothing's goin' to happen. Somebody's had a pipe dream . . . or they've seen too many Karloff movies or something. Synthetic

man, my foot! Listen, if that guy'd been able to create a human being, he'd be shouting it from the housetops."

"My dear Mike," said Bill patiently, "scientists are not like other people. They haven't yet discovered the value of publicity. Professor Landis is a scientist. Q. E. D."

"I think the whole thing is nuts," said Rafferty.

Bill waved his hand vaguely at a bumblebee. "Don't forget the speech Landis made at the Academy," he said. "He as much as told the boys that he had succeeded in his experiment. That's why we're here. That's why we've been playing up this story for two weeks. Something may break any day. Anyhow, we're getting paid for it, aren't we?"

"I'm just about ready to quit," said Rafferty. "Do you realize that there isn't a single decent stand-up bar in the state of Vermont? You gotta go sit at tables with a lot of old ladies, or else buy a pint and drink it out in the woodshed."

"You could vary the monotony," said Bill, "by buying quarts."

"It's an idea," said Rafferty.

They were silent for a while except for occasional mutterings which Rafferty indulged in under his breath. Then suddenly the cigarette in the corner of Rafferty's mouth stood straight out from his face as he riveted the binoculars on the garden below.

"Something stirrin'," he said.

Bill Porter did not move. "Don't bother me unless it's the dame."

"It ain't the dame," said Rafferty. "It's the professor and that assistant of his."

"The hell with 'em," said Bill.

Rafferty kept his binoculars fixed on the garden. An old man with silvery white hair had appeared on the terrace. With him was a young man, tall, thin and stoop-shouldered, who wore a pair of rimless spectacles. The sleeves of his blue suit were a trifle too short, giving the appearance of great length to his bony wrists and hands. His attitude toward the older man was deferential in the extreme. They engaged in earnest conversation for a moment.

"Cripes," said Rafferty, "he's takin' off his clothes!"

"I'll take Gypsy Rose Lee," said Bill.

"It's the assistant," said Rafferty. "He's stripped to the waist. You know, Bill, I've been wondering. . . . Say, you'd better have a look at this!"

THE young man with the glasses had in truth taken off his coat, shirt, and undershirt. Now he started down the garden path, running, lifting his knees high like a track man warming up for a race. His long arms moved in regular piston-like arcs at his sides.

He ran to the end of the garden, turned and ran back to the old man, turned again and ran back to the end of the garden. He continued this until he had completed about five laps. Then he stopped by the old man who instantly clapped something that looked like a blood-pressure gauge on his arm.

Rafferty pushed back his hat. "This is the goofiest yet," he said. "Do you suppose that old moke has been givin' us the runaround?" He frowned thoughtfully. "He denied that he'd created a synthetic man in the one shot we had at him, but do you suppose that guy he's been passing off as his assistant—"

"Don't you go haywire on me," said Bill. "The assistant is a young scientist from Chicago, named Mallet."

"How do you know?" said Rafferty, still staring at the professor and his assistant, through his glasses.

"The dame told me so the day I tried to pick her up at the post office," said Bill.

"She's the professor's daughter, isn't she? She'd string along with her old man if he was tryin' to put something over, wouldn't she? You'd better have a look at this Bill."

Porter groaned and sat up. He crawled on his hands and knees to where Rafferty was squatting, took the glasses from him and focused them on the garden. The pro-

fessor was jotting something down in a notebook now and Mallet, the assistant, had started running up and down the path again.

"He'd make a good hurdler," said Bill without interest. "Got the legs for it."

Rafferty had opened the leather case which hung over his right shoulder and taken out his camera. "I've got a hunch about this," he said. "I'm going down and take a closeup of that guy . . . just in case."

"You're way off base," said Bill.

"I tell you, I've got a hunch," said Rafferty. "Suppose the professor has created a synthetic man and don't want to talk about it. It would be simple to cover it up, wouldn't it, by claimin' that guy's his assistant. Are you comin' with me?"

Bill Porter sighed. "I suppose I've got to keep you out of trouble," he said. "And maybe the dame'll come out."

"If we go down this side of the hill, we can get to the bottom of the garden without 'em seeing us," said Rafferty. "Come on."

The assistant had completed his second five-lap run and the professor once more applied the blood-pressure gauge to his arm. The old man's pale blue eyes were very bright.

"Exactly as I predicted," he said with enthusiasm, "to the decimal point. Now, once more, Avery, my boy, and we'll be done."

Avery Mallet took a carefully folded handkerchief from his hip pocket and wiped his spectacles which had become fogged by perspiration. Then he replaced the glasses on his nose, the handkerchief in his pocket, and started off again, running slowly and methodically. When he had completed five more turns, the professor once more applied the gauge and jotted down his readings in the notebook.

"Excellent," he said, "excellent!" And then he turned and faced the end of the garden. The lines at the corners of his mouth and eyes contracted, giving to his withered face an expression of weariness. He spoke in a slightly louder voice. "You might just as well come out of the bushes now, gentlemen," he said.

LOOKING decidedly sheepish, Bill Porter and Rafferty came out into the open. Bill smiled disarmingly at the professor.

"I didn't think you'd spotted us, Professor Landis," he said.

"It isn't customary," said the professor, glancing at Bill's cigarette, "for rhododendron bushes to give off clouds of smoke. Gentlemen, you are really making great nuisances of yourselves."

"A job's a job, sir," said Bill.

"Do you realize," said the professor. "that I cannot work here or in my laboratory without you and hordes of other reporters staring at me through binoculars or sneaking up to peer through my laboratory windows? Do you realize that I cannot go for a quiet walk along the country lanes without all of you traipsing after me like a pack of hounds? Do you realize that I have had to have my telephone disconnected because your persistent ringing has made concentration impossible? Do you realize that my daughter cannot even go to the village for the mail without being subjected to . . . ah . . . a pickup, I believe the phrase is. You have atttempted to bribe my housekeeper, Mrs. Hilton. You have tried to pass yourselves off as officials of the electric company. By Jove, it's got to stop!"

"Life would be much simpler for all of us, if you'd break down and give us an interview," said Bill.

The professor pursed his lips and rubbed a hand, which looked as transparent as white ivory, along the side of his jaw. "Perhaps you're right," he said. "You all seem to be working under some sort of misapprehension."

During this exchange between Bill and the professor, Avery Mallet, the assistant, had gone hastily over to the chair on the terrace where he had left his clothing. As he wriggled into his undershirt, Rafferty's camera clicked.

"Just in case," said the photographer, under his breath.

Avery Mallet blinked with surprise as he realized what had happened. He slipped on his shirt, picked up his necktie and coat, and beat a hasty retreat into the house.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the professor to Bill. "If you can get the rest of the press to agree to it . . . if you will get them to promise to leave me strictly alone . . . I'll give you the whole story. Round up the lot of them and bring them back here in an hour."

Bill gave the old man what he imagined was a winning look. "Did you ever hear of an exclusive story, sir?"

"I have, but this is going to *all* the papers," said the professor grimly. "I'm going to put an end to the nonsense they've been printing."

"Swell," said Rafferty. "We'll be able to get the noon train for New York."

"That, gentlemen, is my fervent hope," said the professor. "In an hour, then." And he turned and went into the house.

II

AVERY MALLET was struggling with his shirt tail when Erika Landis, the professor's daughter, came into the living room. A dark flush suffused his high cheekbones.

"Please, Erika," he said. "I . . . ah . . ."

"Don't mind me," she said "I'll turn my back."

Hastily, he tucked in the shirt, and adjusted his suspenders He picked up his necktie and struggled frantically with it for a moment. Erika came over to him. Her golden head reached just about to the tip of his chin.

"Let me," she said.

He went on fumbling with the tie for an instant and then dropped his arms helplessly to his sides. "I owe you an apology," he said, "for being so informal. I should have gone to my room. But I . . . ah . . . wanted to be on hand in case your father needed me."

"I see the reporters finally got him," Erika said. She patted the tie into place, and for an instant the tips of her cool fingers touched Avery's cheek. "There."

He picked up his coat and slithered into it. "The whole thing is outrageous," he said. "Do they realize what they're doing? Do they realize that they are hampering a great man in a great work? Sometimes," and his lips tightened, "I wish I knew more about the art of rough and tumble."

"Mr. Porter was an All-American halfback," said Erika.

"I know," said Avery, glumly. He looked at her. "I don't know how you can take this so coolly," he said, "when you realize what this means to your father. All this stupid sensationalism. . . ." He waved toward a pile of newspapers that were stacked on the living room table. "That picture on the front page of the *Globe*. That's Porter's doing."

The *Globe* lay on the top of the pile. Over Bill Porter's by-line was a headline in black type: "PROFESSOR LANDIS SILENT ON SYNTHETIC MAN." To the left of the article was a black and white drawing. Its caption read: "GLOBE ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF SYNTHETIC MAN." The picture looked like a cross between a deep sea diver and a knight of the Round Table. An adjoining article was headed: "LABOR CHIEF PROTESTS SCIENTIST'S INVENTION. SYNTHETIC MAN WOULD THROW MILLIONS OUT OF WORK."

"It's all very silly," said Erika, "but I don't see that there's anything we can do about it. It will die a natural death when something else exciting happens in the world . . . like another set of quintuplets."

"It's the principle of the thing," said Avery. "Cheapening years of work with this . . . this travesty on the truth."

ERIKA looked at him and there was an almost wistful expression in her eyes, which were blue like her father's. "Don't you ever think of anything but Father and your work?"

"Never," he said flatly.

"There was one night," she said. "Do you remember, Avery? I drove you up to the lake. The moon was out . . . and you almost . . . well, you almost. . . ."

"I remember the occasion very distinctly," said Avery. "I was to have taken some bluing capsules so that your father could make some X-ray pictures of me in the morning. I forgot to take them and it delayed the work a day."

"Wasn't there anything else memorable about it?" she asked.

He was standing with his back to the mantelpiece and he looked for an instant as if he would like to escape. But Erika was standing so close to him that he couldn't get away without actually pushing her. He drew a deep breath and swallowed hard.

"Yes, there was something else," he said. "You proposed to me."

Erika laughed softly. "Don't you think you could be a little less brutal about it, Avery?" she said.

"Darn it," he said. "I'm just stating the facts." The color in his cheeks remained high. A wisp of Erika's golden hair was disturbingly close to his lips.

He drew back unhappily.

Erika reached up and straightened his necktie once more, although the job had been perfectly done in the first place. "You're leaving on the afternoon train for New York, Avery," she said. "This may be the last chance we'll have to be together. And I'm afraid, Avery. . . . I'm afraid I'm going to have to reopen the subject."

"Erika, please . . . I mean . . . well, the situation hasn't changed any . . . I mean . . . oh, darn it!"

"I don't see why it wouldn't be a very good arrangement," said Erika. "After all, I do understand the scientific point of view, having lived with Father all my life. I can cook . . . really quite well. My sewing is a miracle. I would see that your shirts always had buttons on them. And I would promise never to touch any of your papers with a ten-foot pole."

"The advantages seem to be distressingly one-sided," said Avery.

"I've thought of that," said Erika, blandly. "But I find that, for some reason which is quite beyond me, I'm in love with you. Perhaps it's the maternal in me."

"Erika," said Avery in a pained voice. "I find this very distressing. I mean . . . the situation seems to be embarrassingly reversed. It places me in a kind of position which . . . well, darn it, I ought to be the one to do the asking."

"But you'd never get around to it," she said. "It would take you months to think up the proper words for a proposal speech and then when you got around to making it, you'd remember in the middle that there was a test tube you had to look at. Maybe you don't think this is quite orthodox, Avery, but it's the only way to get it done."

AVERY gave his tie a nervous yank and Erika calmly replaced it in its proper position.

"Avery, have you ever kissed a girl?" she asked.

"Really, Erika! I mean . . . I've always understood that men didn't talk about that sort of thing."

Erika sighed. "I was afraid you hadn't," she said.

"But I have!" he blurted out. "Quite definitely . . . emphatically. I mean . . . I did a darn good job of it!"

"How old were you, Avery?"

"I was twelve," he said unperturbed. "It was in dancing school. She was a nice girl from a very good family on the North Shore. But it taught me a lesson, Erika . . . a lesson which has stood me in very good stead ever since."

"Let's see," said Erika. "You're twenty-seven now. That makes a lapse of fifteen years. Don't you think you ought to renew the experience? It might give you a different slant on things."

"No," he said, hastily. "No, I don't think I should. I started to tell you that I had learned a lesson from my one ex-

perience. A man can only concentrate on one thing at a time. After I had . . . ah . . . kissed the girl I spoke of, I found myself making no progress with my dancing lessons. I gave up any idea of repeating the adventure . . . although I don't mind saying I had the opportunity. Shortly after that, I turned to science. I have devoted all my energies and all my time to it ever since. That is why, Erika, I feel that any consideration of romance would be . . . well . . . darn it, when I get married, I don't want to have anything else on my mind!"

"Don't you think you might devote certain hours of the day to your work and certain hours of the day to your wife?"

"No, Erika! If I . . . if you . . . if we were to embark on anything of the sort, it might put off the completion of your father's work indefinitely."

For a moment, her fingers touched his cheek again. "I don't know whether you realize it, Avery, but you've just paid me your first compliment. Do you really think I would be so distracting that your work would suffer?"

"The whole thing is unthinkable," he said.

"Well, Avery, since I know it would embarrass you to have me do it in broad daylight on the station platform, I'm going to kiss you goodbye now."

Before he could protest, she put her hands on his shoulders, stretched up on tiptoe, and pressed her bright red lips against his firmly-drawn mouth. At that precise moment, the professor walked in from the terrace through the French doors.

AVERY clutched the mantelpiece for support and his face was scarlet. But if the professor had heard or seen anything, he gave no sign of it.

"I was looking for you, Erika," he said. She turned to face him and her own cheeks were a little brighter than usual.

Avery made a strangling noise in his throat.

"I . . . ah . . . I assure you, Professor, that I . . ."

The professor looked up, as if a line of thought had been interrupted. "Eh? What is it, my boy?"

"I wanted to tell you . . . I mean, the fact is . . . my intentions are really . . ." He floundered completely.

The professor looked at Erika blankly. "What is he talking about?"

Erika smiled. "His intentions, Father. Go on, Avery."

"Oh," said the professor, "your plan to take the afternoon train. I'm afraid you'll have to make different arrangements, my boy. I have just agreed to meet with the reporters here in an hour and show them the results of our work. It will delay the start of the last experiment we had to do until the middle of the afternoon. I should like you to stay over until the midnight, if you don't mind."

"Of course, sir," said Avery.

"Erika won't object to driving you to the train, I'm sure. The reporters will be gone. There will be no one to molest her."

"I'd love it," said Erika. "It will give me a chance to talk over certain matters of importance with Avery again."

"Eh? Oh! Quite," said the professor. He had returned into his shell of concentration. "Have Mrs. Hilton prepare some sandwiches and coffee for the reporters. They'll need something to sustain them on their trip back to the city."

"The reporters are not going to like the true story, Father," said Erika.

Her eyes were bright.

The professor looked up at her, his eyes wide with astonishment. "Not like it?" he said incredulously. "Why, it's the most exciting story since . . . since . . ." Words failed him

"Well, I'll see Mrs. Hilton," said Erika, and she started toward the kitchen.

Avery cleared his throat. "Erika, would you mind reminding Mrs. Hilton that I never have anything for lunch but raw celery and carrots?"

Erika glanced at him and there was mischief in her blue eyes. "Why, Avery, I know all your habits by heart. That's why I'd make such an excellent—"

Avery had had enough.

"There's something I must see to in the laboratory," said Avery hastily.

III

THE professor had a quiet dignity, Bill Porter thought, which was rather moving. He stood behind his desk in his study, facing about fifteen reporters and photographers, including Bill and Rafferty. His fine, silvery-topped head was held high and there was excitement in his eyes.

"I've called you together, gentlemen," he said in a clear, steady voice, "because we seem to be working at cross purposes. There is an old saying that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.' I have refused up to now to talk about my experiments because I felt they were not sufficiently advanced to be of interest to the public. But you have forced my hand by dealing in a kind of sensationalism which has missed the truth by a wide margin. And so, gentleman, I'm going to give you all the facts . . . withhold nothing."

"Now you're talking, Professor!" said someone in the crowd.

"Since the beginning of time," said the professor, "scientists have been trying to unearth the mystery of creation. Thousands of men before me have attempted to discover the secret of producing and preserving life synthetically. I have discovered that secret, gentlemen, I believe. I am going to show you the results of my experiments . . . a lifetime of experiments . . . so that you may see for yourselves exactly what I have accomplished."

"At long last," said Rafferty. He unlimbered his camera from the leather case. The professor smiled at him indulgently. "I am afraid," he said, "that you are not equipped with the proper sort of lenses to take pictures of the thing I am going to show you."

Bill Porter felt excitement surge over him. This sounded like the business. The old guy had really done it, he thought.

"And now, gentlemen, if you will follow me into my laboratory," said the professor, and his voice shook slightly, "you will see something that only two other people beside myself have ever seen in the history of the world. . . . Synthetically created life!"

They crowded after his, pushing and shoving each other in their anxiety to be first through the door on his heels.

The laboratory looked just as Bill Porter imagined a laboratory should look. There was a skylight overhead. The walls were lined with shelves upon which stood glass jars and bottles. On a long workbench were a mass of retorts and tubes. In one corner was a little brick oven and a glow of red fire showed through the open draft in its iron door. In the center of the room was a large square table and on it stood what Bill took to be a very powerful microscope.

Rafferty glanced around the room and saw another door at the far end. He stationed himself so that his camera would cover that door. When the synthetic man staged his entrance that was the direction from which he would most certainly come.

"If you crowd around this table, gentlemen," said the professor eagerly, "you will be able to see for yourselves. . . . one at a time."

He crossed over to a white enameled cabinet that looked something like an icebox. He took something from its cavernous depths and brought it back to the table. Bill Porter saw that what he held in his hand was a small glass slide. The professor slipped it into the microscope, glanced down for a minute through the eyepiece, and then stepped back. There was a bright flush of excitement on his faded old cheeks.

"There, gentlemen," he said triumphantly, "You can see for yourselves."

THERE was a moment of dead silence. Bill Porter wanted to laugh, but somehow it choked in his throat. Then, since no one else made a move, he stepped forward and looked down through the eyepiece of the microscope. It took him a moment or two to adjust his vision

to what was there. And then he saw a small, round, yellowish object, which even through the powerful lens of the microscope looked no larger than a drop of water. He looked up at the professor, bewildered.

"Watch it!" the professor urged him. "Watch it!"

Bill adjusted his eye to the microscope again, and studied the little yellow object. And then he saw that it moved, that it was pulsating slowly, rhythmically, like a miniature heart.

"That," said the professor, in a ringing voice, "is a life cell which I have created synthetically. I have kept it alive now for three years . . . three years, gentlemen! Let the rest of them see for themselves, Mr. Porter."

Bill turned away and looked at the blank faces of the rest of the group. Then he shrugged.

"It looks like you've got something there, Professor," he said dryly.

One by one, the others came up to the microscope, looked down through the lens, and turned away in silence. The professor watched them and a curious, hurt expression crept over his face. He looked like a man who has told what he thinks is an extremely good story only to have everyone miss the point. Finally, he could stand it no longer.

"Well, gentlemen? Well, what do you think?" he asked.

"We're still waitin' to have a gander at the synthetic man," said Rafferty, in a voice that sounded strangely harsh in the silent room.

"That, my friend, is still a dream," said the professor, "the dream toward which I am working. We have gone further than anyone has ever gone before. We are making all kinds of tests and experiments and I believe the day will come . . . I *know* the day will come . . . when we shall succeed. But we must have peace, gentlemen, and quiet. We must be undisturbed. That is why, gentlemen, I have shown you this great miracle . . . the greatest miracle that human eyes have ever seen . . . so that you could know the truth and tell it to the world."

There was another dead silence and then Bill Porter moistened his lips. "We're very grateful to you, sir," he said. "I'm afraid we've already taken more of your time than you can spare."

The professor looked anxiously from face to face and saw nothing but disappointment. His shoulders drooped. "My housekeeper has prepared sandwiches and coffee for you, gentlemen. I . . . I never eat anything in the middle of the day myself, but I'm sure that my daughter will see that you're all properly cared for. If you will excuse me. . . ."

"YOU'RE a hell of a reporter," said Rafferty. "Yeah," said Bill Porter, absently. He was looking across the dining room at Erika who was pouring coffee for the press from a slarge silver pot.

"You're supposed to be the one that's bright," said Rafferty. "I just take the pictures."

"I'll pay you five bucks," said Bill softly, "if you'll take a picture of that dame for my own private consumption."

"You're losing your grip," said Rafferty. "The whole bunch of you is losing your grip . . . letting that old geezer pull a fast one like this."

Reluctantly, Bill looked away from Erika. "Would you mind not talking in riddles? What's eating you?"

Bill's intelligent eyes narrowed ever so slightly. He frowned.

Rafferty flipped one unlighted cigarette into the fireplace near which they stood, and placed another one, also unlighted, in the corner of his mouth. "He's been tryin' to get rid of you for two weeks, hasn't he?"

"So what?"

"Well, he has got rid of you, hasn't he? You're all going back to New York with your tails between your legs, aren't you? I tell you, he's pulled a fast one on you and you fell for it. He's spent maybe fifty years on this job and he gets you to believe that all he has is a piece of

egg yolk that you could put on the head of a pin."

Bill sighed. "You haven't got the scientific approach," he said. "That was quite a thing he showed us . . . only it won't make much of a news story after all the tripe we've been handing out."

Mrs. Hilton approached with two cups of coffee. "Sugar or cream?" she asked, forbiddingly.

"Black," said Rafferty.

He took the coffee cup from her and put it down on the mantel. From his hip pocket he produced a pint of rye and proceeded to lace the coffee with it until it brimmed over into the saucer. "I tell you there's something phony about that assistant," he grumbled on. "Look at him. Does he eat like anyone else? No. All he's got is a plate of raw carrots and celery. Didn't you see him this morning running up and down in the garden with the professor tying gauges on his arm? I tell you, I got a hunch about that guy."

"Have you noticed her figure, Mike?" Bill asked.

"The hell with that!" said Rafferty, angrily. "There's a million of 'em just as good on Forty-fifth Street . . . better, on account of they might give you a tumble. This one is laughing at you. Her and her old man will be laughing themselves sick after you're gone. They've trotted out their synthetic man right under your nose and you ain't bright enough to see it. Only poor old drunken Mike Rafferty had the brains not to fall for that microscope gag."

Rafferty picked up his coffee cup and drained it. Then he poured the overflow from the saucer into the cup and drank that. Then he filled the cup from the pint bottle without bothering about more coffee. "When this story really breaks, don't forget I was the one that tipped you off to a beat."

"I think I'll go over and talk to her," said Bill Porter. And he left Rafferty nursing his cup of rye and crossed the room.

ERIKA looked up at him, smiling. Bill felt a fine set of prickles develop along his spine.

"More coffee, Mr. Porter?" she said.

"And a sandwich," he said, eying the plate of man-sized slabs of roast beef on rye bread. He glanced at Avery who was standing at Erika's elbow. "One for you?" he asked.

"No, thank you," said Avery, stiffly.

"On a diet?" Bill asked, looking at Avery's plate of celery and carrots.

"Raw foods are live foods," said Avery. "Cooked foods are dead foods."

Bill stared at him. "Is this all you ever eat?" he asked.

"I find certain broiled meats," said Avery, "and certain cooked greens are beneficial."

"What do you do for fun?" Bill asked.

Avery blinked at him uneasily. "I . . . ah . . . perhaps I'd better fill the coffee pot for you, Erika."

He picked up the silver container and walked sedately out through the swinging door into the kitchen.

"Your friend," said Bill to Erika, "is not exactly the social type."

"He's more at home with test tubes," Erika said.

Bill didn't want to talk about Avery. "I guess I was pretty fresh the day I tried to pick you up at the post office," he said to Erika.

"It's too bad we haven't been receiving reporters socially," said Erika. She looked up at him, amused. "I gather from the look on all your faces that you were a little bit disappointed with what Father had to show you. I warned him."

"Well, it wasn't exactly what we expected to see," said Bill. "I guess from the scientific point of view it's pretty colossal, but, as a newspaper story . . . well, two sticks on page 24. Say, do you stay here all year round or do you ever get down to the big city?"

"I stay here," said Erika. "Father needs looking after until he's through with this experiment."

"Well, figuring his present rate of speed," said Bill, "I'll see you in fifty years."

At this moment, Avery returned with the coffee pot, put it down on the table, gave Bill a coldly hostile look, and began passing the plate of sandwiches to the others. Bill shook his head.

"You know, if I were to see much of that guy," he said, "I might tumble for Rafferty's theory about him."

"Tell me," said Erika. "I'm collecting theories about Avery."

"Rafferty's my photographer," said Bill. "Sometimes I think he's a borderline case. He's got the notion that your father pulled a fast one on us and that your anti-social pal there is really the synthetic man."

Erika laughed and her eyes followed Avery as he passed the sandwiches with stiff formality. "Maybe your Mr. Rafferty has something there," she said.

"What Rafferty has," Bill laughed, "he carries on his hip." He sighed. "My luck is definitely bad. Just as we're getting places, it's time for me to catch that train. But if you ever do come to town, call me up at the *Globe* office, and I'll show you the Aquarium or Grant's Tomb or any place you want to see."

"They say the Museum of Natural History is nice," Erika said.

"Seriously, I've felt for a long time that there was something missing in my life," Bill said. "Maybe you're it."

"I bet you tell that to all the girls," said Erika.

"But I only mean it once in a while," said Bill. "Well, much as I regret blighting your life, I'm off. No kidding, call me up. I'll behave."

"Now you've spoiled everything," said Erika, as she held out her hand.

•

GEORGE ZIMMERMAN, city editor of the *Globe*, eyed Bill Porter and Rafferty with displeasure. Rafferty was definitely drunk. Bill was sitting on the edge of his editor's desk, nonchalantly flicking cigarette ashes onto Zimmerman's private correspondence.

Zimmerman, Bill thought, must have seen a great many movies about newspaper editors and modeled himself after the accepted type. He wore a green eyeshade which helped to distract attention from his shiny bald head. He was perpetually mutilating a cigar between strong white teeth. His shirt collar was always undone at the throat and his loosened necktie twisted around in the direction of one ear. He never wore a coat, but left his vest on, unbuttoned. Gaudy pink sleeve garters decorated his upper arms.

At the moment, Zimmerman was writhing in his chair, evidently struggling masterfully to control an explosion. "And so, gentlemen," he said very softly, "you spend two weeks basking in the country sun and come back with *nothing*." The "nothing" escaped Mr. Zimmerman's iron control. It was a raucous bellow.

"I wouldn't say that, George," said Bill Porter. "We've come back with the truth and it's really quite a big thing."

"The hell with it!" said Zimmerman. "For weeks you've been playing up this synthetic man story until everybody believes it. Now you've got to tell 'em it was all a pipe dream. What kind of reporting is that?"

"I'm paid to get facts," said Bill, "and make them too, too fascinating for your readers. I'll do my best with the professor's ectoplasm or whatever it is."

"Maybe you will and maybe you won't," said Zimmerman. "I know what you guys have been doing . . . chasing dames and drinking liquor on the paper's dough. You could've got this story in a half an hour and you take two weeks to do it."

"The professor wouldn't talk."

"And why wouldn't he talk?" It was Rafferty who spoke, solemnly. He sounded like a voice from the beyond. "Because it took him two weeks to figure out how dumb reporters are. It took him two weeks to figure out a way to put one over on you."

Bill Porter grinned at Zimmerman. "Mike is unwell," he said. "You'd better send him somewhere where they make black coffee in large quantities."

"Sure," said Rafferty, a break in his voice. "Send ol' Mike Rafferty away. Don't listen to what ol' Mike Rafferty has to shay. Ol' Mike Rafferty is a drunken bum."

"Well, what has ol' Mike Rafferty got to say?" said Zimmerman, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Plenty," said Rafferty. "Plenty."

"You'd better say it in a hurry," said Zimmerman, "before I fill out this pink slip."

Rafferty made a lordly and sweeping gesture with his right arm. "You can't fire me," he said. "I'm washin' my hands of the whole profession. C'n no longer associate with these people and retain my self-respec'. 'Sh very sad. Learn to look up to a man like Bill here and then he falls apart in li'l pieces . . . in a thousand li'l pieces. Let's a mold oke . . . should shay an ol' moke . . . pull a fast one on him. Whole profession disgraced."

Zimmerman looked at Bill. "Can you tell me in English what he's getting at?"

"Mike thinks we slipped up on the story," said Bill. "The professor has a young assistant who's definitely on the strange side. Mike thinks this young assistant is the synthetic man and that the professor was pulling a fast one on us."

Zimmerman scowled. "Is there anything to it?" He had been sweating blood ever since Bill's return, trying to think how to let the reading public down easily.

"Oh, no, there's nothin' to it," said Rafferty. "Nothin' . . . except, of course, this guy doesn't eat food like other people. Except he runs around naked with machines tied on his arm."

"What?" Zimmerman spun around toward Bill.

"THIS guy's name is Avery Mallet," said Bill. "As far as I can make out, he's on a diet of raw vegetables . . . which isn't very startling. We did see him running up and down the garden, stripped to the waist, but the professor was making some kind of test. The machine that Mike's talking about was a blood pressure gauge. The professor was evidently trying to find out something about blood pressure variations after exercise."

"Did the professor tell you that?" Zimmerman asked.

"I didn't ask him. It was obvious."

"Did you talk to this Mallet?"

Bill chuckled. "Yes, and I can quote him. Memorable words, George. Mr. Mallet said, 'Raw foods are live foods. Cooked foods are dead foods.'

"What the hell!" said Zimmerman.

"Oh, there's nothin' to it," said Rafferty. "Ol' Mike Rafferty is jus' on another binge. But ol' Mike Rafferty has exclusive pictures . . . very, specially exclusive pictures . . . which he is savin' for his memory book"

"Pictures of what?" snapped Zimmerman.

"Pictures of this man, who is *not* the synthetic man," said Rafferty. "Pictures of this man, who is jus' a pigment of ol' Mike Rafferty's imagination. Pictures of him eatin' celery . . . pictures of him runnin' up and down naked with machinery on his arm . . . pictures of him puttin' on his clothes without the aid of human hands. All wasted. The great and glorious profession of newspaper reporters is much smarter than ol' Mike Rafferty."

Zimmerman bit the end off a cigar. He was thinking. Rafferty barged on. "Gentlemen, here is the result of a lifetime of experiments. Here is fifty years of work . . . but you can't see it with the naked eye. Got to import special microscope from Switzerland, made by special Swiss watchmaker, to see it. Oh, there's no synthetic man, gentlemen. That's jus' the pigment of ol' Mike Rafferty's imagination. This naked celery-eater is jus' my young assistant. Everythin' on the up and up."

"Rafferty, have you had those pictures printed?" Zimmerman demanded.

"Waste of time," said Rafferty. "Got 'em right here, but it's a waste of time."

"Take 'em down to the lab at once," said Zimmerman. He picked up the phone on his desk. "Composing room," he snapped. "Hello, Pete? Hold the front page for a new lead story . . . pictures . . . whole new spread" He hung up the receiver and turned to Bill. "Get to work!" he said.

Bill stared at him, wide eyes. "George! You're not planning to—"

"I ought to fire you, but I'm not going to," said Zimmerman. "Here you've got a story under your nose and it takes a dumb photographer to point it out to you. If I'd had anybody else on the ground up there, you'd be pounding the pavements right now."

"But, George, there's nothing to this story. It's the bunk! This Mallet is no more a synthetic man than you are."

"So you're developing ethics after ten years," snarled Zimmerman. "It's a story, isn't it? You've got pictures to back it up, haven't you?"

"But, George, there isn't an ounce of truth in the whole idea. They'll deny it . . . we'll wind up behind the eight ball!"

"Have I got to stand over your shoulder at this time of life and teach you to write a story that isn't libelous?" Zimmerman asked. "Here's your headline: IS AVERY MALLET THE SYNTHETIC MAN? GLOBE REPORTER SUSPECTS PROFESSOR LANDIS OF HOAX. Now, get started!"

Bill shook his head. "George," he said, gloomily, "this is going to make newspaper history."

"That's what I hope," Zimmerman rapped.

IV

BILL PORTER crushed out a cigarette in the ashtray on his desk. He stood up and stretched wearily. It was nearly midnight and he had been on the job ever since his interview with Zimmerman, the city editor.

The *Globe* had already been on the street for a couple of hours with an extra which had panicked the rest of the newspaper boys. Bill had done his end of the job up brown and Rafferty's pictures were exactly what the doctor ordered.

Bill's telephone had been ringing incessantly for hours. Since Professor Landis had wisely had his telephone disconnected as a result of weeks of pestering by the press, there was no possibility of getting an immediate confirmation or denial of Bill's story. Telegrams had been dispatched, but either the professor did not read telegrams or he was not in the mood for making any further statements.

New York, sweltering in summer heat, was tired of the Spanish revolution, the war in China, and the alarmed cacklings of harried senators. The synthetic man was its dish. Smart columnists had prepared wisecracks for their morning portions. The labor chief who had previously announced his fears that the synthetic man would create a critical unemployment problem announced that he was going direct to the White House for a conference. A hundred cranks had called the *Globe* office with questions.

Bill had answered them all, patiently and evasively. He denied that the synthetic man was controlled by radio; he assured an anxious caller that this was not a Communistic plot to increase the size of the Party to the point where it would have a majority vote.

Then, just as he was about to leave, the phone rang once more. It seemed to Bill that even the bell had grown a little hoarse in the last few hours. For a moment he thought, "The hell with it!" And then he sighed and picked up the receiver.

"Porter speaking."

"There's a collect call for you from Winset, Vermont," said the switchboard operator. "Will you take it?"

"You're damn tootin'!" said Bill. "Put 'em on!"

A somewhat cracked male voice came over the wire. "Hello. Mr. Porter?"

"Right. Who is it?"

"I dunno as I ought to trust you with-

out havin' the money in my hand," said the voice.

"Maybe you shouldn't," said Bill. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Harwood, the station agent in Winset. Remember, you said before you left, if I had any news for you, you'd pay twenty dollars for it?"

"That's right, Mr. Harwood," said Bill. "What's up?"

"I dunno as it's very smart of me to tell you without havin' the money in my hand," said Mr. Harwood.

"Don't you think you'd better risk it?" said Bill. "If you don't tell me, there isn't any chance at all of your getting the money."

"Wal, I dunno," said Mr. Harwood.

"LISTEN," said Bill, "I'm folding up a twenty dollar bill right now and putting it in an envelope. If you've really got any news for me, I'll mail it the minute you hang up."

"Wal, I dunno."

"Listen," said Bill. "I'm folding it now. Can't you hear it?" He picked up a piece of yellow scratch paper and crumpled it up in front of the mouthpiece. "Did you hear that, Mr. Harwood?"

"Wal, it's risky," said Mr. Harwood. "But I guess I got no choice but to take a chance on you. He's leavin'."

"Who's leaving!"

"That Mallet," said Mr. Harwood. "Him and the girl's out on the station platform now waitin' for the sleeper to pull in. She's five minutes late already."

"Do you know where he's going?" Bill asked eagerly.

"Yep, I know," said Mr. Harwood.

Bill drew a deep, patient breath. "Would you care to tell?" he asked.

"Sure," said Mr. Harwood. "He's got Lower 12 in Car 46 for New York City."

"Great!" said Bill, scribbling down the information. "Do you know what time the train gets into New York?"

"Yep," said Mr. Harwood, "I know."

"Is it a secret?" Bill asked in an exasperated tone.

"Nope."

Bill's knuckles showed white on the telephone receiver. He spoke with elaborate politeness. "Would you mind very much telling me what time it does get in, Mr. Harwood?"

"Nope. Seven-thirty in the morning at the Grand Central Depot."

Bill wiped perspiration from his forehead. "Your twenty bucks'll be in the mail in ten minutes, Mr. Harwood. If anything else happens, call me."

"I will if you pay up," said Mr. Harwood.

Bill pressed down the receiver hook for an instant with his finger and then released it again. "Get me the night city editor. Hello, Bob! Hold everything. The synthetic man's arriving in New York, seven-thirty in the morning. You'll be able to spring it in your home edition. I'm working on a piece for you now. Sure . . . we'll arrange a reception for him. Better dig up a photographer for me, in case Rafferty isn't sobered up. Sure . . . how the hell do I know whether he'll make a statement or not? How the hell do I know whether he *can* make a statement?"

•

AVERY looked at his watch. "It's six minutes late," he said.

"Perhaps it's Fate," Erika said, "giving you a chance to change your mind before you leave."

Avery nearly dropped his watch and had considerable trouble getting it back in his pocket. "They say they make up lost time between Troy and Poughkeepsie," he said.

"Avery, I don't think you've been listening to a word I've said. Do you realize that I've been proposing to you again?"

Avery looked anxiously up and down the platform as if he were afraid someone had overheard. From the distance came the melancholy sound of the train whistle. Avery let out his breath in a long sigh of relief.

"Erika," he said, in an uncertain voice, "I think you know how deeply . . . deeply honored I am, but I . . . I simply don't trust my reactions. My . . . my experience is so limited. I . . . oh, darn it, if I weren't all tied up in this work I'd—"

"Wal, here she is," said a nasal voice at his elbow. It was Mr. Harwood, the station agent. "You're figgurin' on goin' straight through to the city, ain't you? Not plannin' to stop off any place?"

"No."

The train came thundering into the station. Avery bent down to pick up his bags, an old straw suitcase held together with a heavy leather strap and a dilapidated Gladstone. Erika was suddenly very close to him, and he was quite defenseless when she kissed him, since he had a bag in each hand.

"Goodbye, Avery," she said softly.

"Erika!" For an instant Avery nearly put down the bags. But Mr. Harwood wrecked the impulse.

"This is your car right here," he said. "Number 46. Better step lively. He's got Lower 12, porter."

A sleepy looking white-coated porter took the bags from Avery.

"Erika," Avery said, "I think I ought to tell you that—"

"This way, suh," said the porter.

For a second Avery's slender hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. Then he said, almost desperately, "Goodbye, Erika."

The porter led Avery to Lower 12. Avery felt a curiously empty sensation in the pit of his stomach, which was quite novel to him.

"Shall ah call you at seven o'clock, suh?"

"Thank you," said Avery, "but I can wake up the exact minute that I set in my mind before I go to sleep."

"I'LL be through here in a second, buddy, if you want to shave," the traveling salesman said to Avery.

"Thank you," said Avery, "but the light is so imperfect I think I shall wait until I get to my hotel. It seems to me there's considerable danger of shaving unevenly."

"You must be figgering on getting pretty close to someone," said the traveling salesman waggishly.

"Not at all," said Avery, and a faint flush tinged his cheeks. "It seems to me that it's a waste of time to do something imperfectly when it may be more advantageously performed later."

The traveling salesman looked at him sharply. "Say, what's your line?"

"I . . . er . . . my line?"

"Sure, what do you do?"

"It seems to me," said Avery stiffly, "that my personal and business affairs are a matter of private concern."

"Okay, Jack," said the traveling salesman. "No offense."

A moment later, he had gathered up his things and left the washroom to Avery. Avery very carefully wiped out the basin with a clean towel. He washed his hands, wiped out the basin with another clean towel, and then washed his face. He wiped out the basin for a third time and then went back to his berth. The porter was waiting for him to close his bags.

"Right on time, suh," he said. "Ah'll have yoah bags in the vestibule."

Avery took a small leather purse from his pocket, opened it, and selected a dime with great care.

"Thank you for your attention," he said, handing it to the porter.

"Yassah," said the porter glumly.

Avery was the first one off the car, and he picked up his bags waving aside the proffered assistance of a redcap. He had taken only a few steps when he saw a familiar face. It was Bill.

"Hi, Mallet!"

Avery stopped, frowning. "This is a coincidence," he said.

"I don't know that I'd go that far," Bill said. "Have you seen the morning paper?"

"No."

"Well, you will," said Bill. "Come along."

Avery held his ground. "I . . . er . . . I'm not going anywhere," he said. "That is today, I'm stopping at the Commodore which, the professor tells me, is right here in the station."

"All that's been changed," said Bill. "We've taken a suite for you at the Waldorf. The *Globe's* paying all expenses. There are a lot of people who want to see you and talk to you, fella."

"I don't think I follow you," Avery said.

Bill took him by the arm. "You follow me now," he said, "and you'll soon catch up with things. There are . . . er . . . one or two people waiting at the gate to see you."

"If the press expects me to make any further comments on the professor's work . . ." Avery began.

"I have a hunch," said Bill, "that it would be much better if you made no comments at all. Let's get moving."

RELUCTANTLY, Avery followed Bill along the platform toward the gate. He was distressed by this meeting and Bill's cryptic remarks, but he was utterly unprepared for the situation which confronted him as they walked through the gate.

Literally thousands of people, held off by ropes and a special squad of police, strained forward as Avery appeared. At the same instant, a dozen flashlight bulbs exploded. Bill had adroitly stepped away from Avery for a moment and left him standing alone, clutching his two bags, his mouth gaping open in surprise. There was a rumble of excitement from the crowd. Then reporters who had been permitted inside the ropes descended on Avery.

"Have you any statement to make?"

"Is this the first time you've been away from the professor?"

"Why have you been sent to New York?"

"Is it true the professor is preparing thousands more like you to push into the labor fields?"

Avery could not hear his own voice when he spoke. "What is the meaning of this?" he asked feebly. "I don't understand."

Somebody thrust a newspaper at him. "Can you read?"

Avery stared stupidly at the newspaper. He felt the muscles of his throat contracting as he read the headlines: AVERY MALLET, SYNTHETIC MAN, ARRIVING GRAND CENTRAL SEVEN-THIRTY. MISSION A SECRET. Beside the article, Avery recognized a picture of himself, stripped to the waist, running.

The station began to turn slow cartwheels before Avery's blurred vision. He put down his bags and reached for the neatly folded handkerchief in his breast pocket. His spectacles were blurred with perspiration.

"Take it easy, Mallet," said Bill Porter's voice at his elbow. "I realize this is something of a shock. Just make some sort of statement to them and we'll whisk you off to your hotel."

"But this is madness!" Avery said breathlessly. "These are lies . . . all lies!" He looked about him, desperately, for some avenue of escape. There was a little roped-off passageway which had been kept free for the other passengers.

"Darn it, I'm not going anywhere with you!" he said to Bill in a high-pitched voice. He reached out one long arm and gave the astonished Bill a quick shove.

And then he ran, forgetting his bags, forgetting everything but the necessity to get away.

Flashlights exploded again as he raced toward the stairway leading up to the street. He had caught everyone off guard, and he ran with long terrified strides, his coat flapping out behind him. Bill had once made the remark that Avery had the build of a hurdler. Avery was proving the point now, flying up the stairs three at a time. A police whistle shrilled behind him. He wrenched open a door and rushed out into the covered taxi stand. A cab stood there, waiting. Avery dove into it.

"Quick!" he said. "Quick."

"Where to, mister?" asked the astonished driver.

"Anywhere," Avery said, a sob in his voice, "only hurry!"

Reporters were already at the station doors, fighting with each other to be the first one out. The cab pulled away just in time to avoid the winner who made a flying leap for the running board and missed. Avery leaned back in the leather cushions, gasping for breath.

"What is it, pal, the cops?" the driver asked.

"No, the newspapers. Please hurry."

The driver glanced up into his mirror. "They're tailin' us," he said. "Want me to shake 'em?"

"I'll pay you . . . I'll pay you anything, if you do," said Avery.

"Okay," said the driver.

AVERY had been lucky in his choice of cabs and the driver evidently took him at his word because he ignored traffic signals recklessly for the first several blocks.

"They can't do worse than hang me," said the driver.

Avery had no idea where he was being taken and he didn't care. He kept his eye fixed to the back window of the cab, watching the pursuers. It was a good fifteen minutes before the driver finally slackened pace.

"Well, I guess we done it, buddy! Where to now?"

"Any hotel," said Avery. "Any quiet hotel."

"Oke." A few moments later the driver pulled up before a hotel on upper Broadway.

Avery got out and fished for his pocketbook. "Would . . . would five dollars over the fare be all right?" Avery asked.

"It's okay, unless I find a flock of tickets waitin' for me when I get home," said the driver.

"You'll find me here, if there are any expenses to defray," said Avery. And he began counting out the fare.

"I guess I got no business bein' curious," said the driver, "but what's it all about?"

"The newspapers wanted me to make a statement," said Avery hastily. "I didn't choose to make one."

The driver's eyes suddenly narrowed. "Say, you ain't—"

"No, I'm not," said Avery, and he turned and ran into the hotel.

"Hey, Jack, wait!" The driver scrambled out from behind the wheel and started after Avery. Then he turned back to the cab and picked up a newspaper which had been folded back of the driver's seat. He opened it and scanned the front page hastily. "Holy Judas!" he said under his breath. He lit out for a cigar store on the corner and a moment later he was in a phone booth, talking earnestly. . . .

V

AVERY, because of his lack of baggage was forced to pay in advance for his room. But nothing mattered to him, so long as he could find sanctuary.

When the bellboy had left him alone, Avery locked the door and then sank wearily down on the bed. This was fantastic, incredible. Those fools had paid no attention to the professor's statement of the truth. And now they thought that he . . . he, Avery Mallet . . . was the synthetic man. He must get in touch with the professor at once . . . have him make a denial.

He picked up the telephone beside the bed.

"I want to put in a long distance call to Winset, Vermont," he said.

"I'm sorry," said the operator, "but without any baggage, you'll have to pay for the call in advance."

"That's all right," said Avery, "only I must get the call through at once. I—" Then he groaned. He had forgotten that the professor had had his phone disconnected. "Never mind the call," he said, "send me a telegraph messenger."

"It may take a few minutes."

"All right. But hurry, please hurry." He stretched out on the bed and closed his eyes. His bags . . . heaven knew what had happened to them. They contained all his notes, all his private possessions. He shuddered. Probably the reporters were clawing over their contents at this very moment.

It seemed to take an interminable length of time for the messenger to arrive. Avery kept glancing at his watch. Ten . . . fifteen . . . twenty minutes. He was just reaching for the phone to make inquiries when a knock came at his door.

"Who is it?" Avery demanded cautiously.

"The telegraph messenger you sent for, sir."

Avery stood bolt upright, a cold chill running along his spine. He recognized that voice. It was Bill Porter's.

Avery turned and looked at the windows of his room. He was on the ninth floor. There was no escape that way. The knocking on his door became more insistent.

"Hey, Mr. Mallet. This is the telegraph messenger you sent for," Bill said urgently.

Avery didn't answer. He hurried into the bathroom and opened the window there. A little exclamation of relief escaped him. An iron fire-ladder led perilously down to the alley below. It had never been intended that anyone should leave in a hurry, but Avery scrambled over the bathtub and onto the window sill.

A moment later, he was out on the fire-escape landing, gripping the iron rail tensely. For a moment, a wave of dizziness swept over him as he looked down and then he gritted his teeth and began the descent backwards. Bill was pounding on the bedroom door in earnest now.

Avery kept his eyes turned upward . . . it didin't get him quite so badly in the pit of the stomach that way. As he passed the fourth floor, a frowsy-looking gray-haired man stared out at him.

"What's the matter, buddy," he asked anxiously. "Fire?"

Avery didn't answer. Before he reached the third floor, he heard the gray-haired man's voice raised in a shriek of alarm.

"Fire! Fire!"

And then the gray-haired man himself, clad in a bathrobe, appeared on the fire escape above Avery, also descending. He pounded on windows as he passed them.

"Fire!" he shouted.

BEFORE Avery reached solid ground, there were half a dozen other people coming down the iron ladder, all shrieking. Someone who looked like a porter or janitor came running along the alleyway to arrive at the foot of the ladder simultaneously with Avery.

"What's wrong?" he demanded. "Where's the trouble?"

"Fire!" yammered the gray-haired man, from the second floor landing.

The porter grabbed Avery by the arm. "There's an alarm box on the corner!"

Avery shook himself free and ran. As he reached Broadway he saw a policeman and several excited passersby making for the front door of the hotel. They reached it at the same moment that Bill Porter, Rafferty, and half a dozen other reporters were attempting to come out.

The resultant jam gave Avery the few precious seconds he needed to reach the corner and turn east toward Amsterdam Avenue. There he plunged headlong into the arms of a policeman.

The burly Irishman held him firmly. "Hey, what's the hurry? What's up?"

"Fire at the hotel over there," Avery said breathlessly. And even at that distance, the hysterical voice of the gray-haired man lent him confirmation.

The cop started immediately for the corner, forgetting Avery. Avery darted across the street and down into another alleyway separating two buildings. At the end of this alley, he scaled a board wall into the backyard of a brownstone house. Here he crouched amongst a mass of tin cans and trash, waiting and listening for sounds of his pursuers.

About half an hour later he emerged. His heart was pounding against his ribs,

but he walked calmly now. To run would be to attract attention. An occasional glance over his shoulder told him that Porter and the rest had not yet picked up the trail.

He began to wander aimlessly along Amsterdam Avenue, trying to decide what to do. Obviously, he must get in touch with Professor Landis. A telegram would be unsatisfactory now, since he had no address to which the professor could reply. The professor would be wild when he knew that the newspaper sensationalism about his experiments had been redoubled. Perhaps the best thing would be for him to try to catch a train back to Vermont and explain matters to the professor.

He passed a corner newsstand and saw papers with huge black headlines stretched out on the counter. He paused to buy one and read with unbelieving eyes. "SYNTHETIC MAN AT LARGE. ESCAPES REPORTERS AND POLICE AT GRAND CENTRAL STATION. AUTHORITIES UNCERTAIN WHETHER PUBLIC IS MENACED. ATTEMPTS TO REACH PROFESSOR LANDIS FAIL."

"For gosh sakes!" said Avery.

The newsdealer looked up at him. "That Landis oughta be arrested," he said. "Turnin' a thing like that loose on us. We might be murdered in our beds."

AVERY moved hurriedly away. He wanted a quiet place to read the paper where he would be undisturbed. At the same moment, he realized that he was hungry. He had had no breakfast. In the middle of the next block, he came upon a small restaurant. There were only one or two other customers at that hour of the morning. He went in and sat at one of the marble-topped tables in a corner. A waitress approached him and stood with order pad and pencil poised. Avery looked up at her.

"Do you have any raw celery?" he asked.

"Celery and olives is ten cents extra with a meal," she said.

"I don't think you quite understand," said Avery. "What I want is a large dish of raw celery and, if you have any raw carrots, I would like them too, sliced thin. And a glass of milk, if it isn't too much trouble."

The waitress looked at him in astonishment. "You mean all you want is a dish of raw celery and carrots and a glass of milk?"

"That is exactly what I want," said Avery patiently.

"Well, for Pete's sake!" said the waitress and she started for the kitchen.

Avery picked up his newspaper and began to read. There was an account of his arrival at the Grand Central Station and of his escape. As he turned the page, he was confronted by pictures of himself which made him shudder. One of them showed him standing with his bags in his hands and his mouth gaping open. Another showed him in the act of pushing Bill Porter, just before he had made his break for freedom. Avery came to a part in the story which was news to him. It read as follows:

In his anxiety to get away, the synthetic man left both his bags on the station floor. The police immediately took possession and examined the contents which were significant, to say the least. One bag contained a few odds and ends of clothing. The other was packed with a mass of undecipherable papers, apparently written in code. It also contained several bottles of capsules which were immediately taken to the City Chemist for analysis.

As we go to press, the Chemist had only been able to report on the contents of one bottle. The capsules in this bottle contained a mixture composed of turnip greens, watercress, bone flour, pumpkin, fish liver oil, and wheat germ oil. There were also traces of calcium and phosphorus. Each capsule, the Chemist said, contained a thousand International Units of Vitamin A and five hundred International Units of Vitamin D.

Apparently, these capsules are the concentrated food upon which the synthetic man subsists. They evidently form a supplementary portion to the diet of raw celery and carrots which is

already known to be his customary meal.

It is significant that neither toothbrush nor razor were found among his effects.

Avery groaned. He had discovered that morning on the train that he had left his toothbrush and razor on the bathroom shelf in the professor's house. As for the papers in code, they were his notes, made in his own particular shorthand, of work he expected to do for the professor when he got back to Chicago. If the police had messed those up, it might take him weeks to get them in order and decipher them.

THEN another picture caught his eye, a picture of a familiar face which he could not quite place. Over the top of the picture was the caption: TALKS WITH SYNTHETIC MAN. Underneath it was a name: J. Horace Wilmerding. Under the picture was a story.

The only person known to have had conversation with the synthetic man, since the latter's escape from the laboratory of Professor Landis, is Mr. J. Horace Wilmerding, traveling agent of the Kupperman Hosiery Mills. Mr. Wilmerding, making a trip from Montreal to New York, was actually in the next berth to the synthetic man on the train.

"And to think I slept like a log all night," said Mr. Wilmerding. "I guess if I'd known he was in the berth next to me, my hair would have turned white like people I've read about. But that's only the beginning of it."

It seems that in the morning, after he had been roused by the porter, Mr. Wilmerding repaired to the washroom to shave. There he noticed a peculiar-looking young man, apparently waiting to avail himself of the wash basin.

"I told him I'd be through in a second," said Mr. Wilmerding, "but he said he considered it was a waste of time to shave. I tried to get a little chummy with him, never dreaming of course who he was. I asked him what his line was, just trying to make conversation, you know. He said that his business was his own private concern and he gave me a look that I'll never forget! Boy, when I think of it, it makes my blood run cold!"

Mr. Wilmerding has promised the police that he will be available to identify the synthetic man, when and if he is caught.

Another interesting piece of information about the synthetic man was supplied by Andrew J. Washington, porter on Car 46 of the Montreal Flyer, the car in which the synthetic man traveled.

"I asked him if he wanted to be called at seven," said the colored porter, a native of Winooski, Alabama, "but he said no, that he could wake himself at the precise moment that he chose."

According to Washington, it was just twenty seconds past seven o'clock when the curtains of Lower 12 parted and the synthetic man made his way along the corridor to the washroom.

Avery was still staring at the press reports in utter bewilderment when his composure was shattered by a piercing scream. He half rose from his chair to confront the waitress who stood trembling beside the table, a platter of celery and carrots in one hand and a glass of milk in the other. Simultaneously the glass and the platter clattered to the floor and broke into a thousand pieces.

"It's him!" she cried in a terrified voice. "It's him . . . the synthetic man!"

Avery reached out a protesting hand toward her. "Please," he said, "please, it's really not so. I—"

"Don't you touch me!" the waitress screamed.

Avery looked around him. The other customers had risen and were staring at him, panic in their eyes. Two burly-looking countermen were coming toward him uncertainly from the other end of the restaurant. Avery's lips moved in what might have been a silent prayer. And then he turned and went hurriedly out the door onto the street. The chase was on again.

VI

THAT was just before noon on Friday. By late afternoon, the snowball of publicity had grown to huge propor-

tions. Avery had disappeared from sight completely after his unsuccessful attempt to get food at the little restaurant on Amsterdam Avenue.

The afternoon papers, scooped by the *Globe* and the other morning sheets, were now playing it up to the hilt. The rumor had spread until it was now accepted for fact that the synthetic man had escaped from the professor's laboratory.

Where was Mallet . . . ?

The fact that there was no possibility of reaching the professor directly and that he paid no attention to telegrams if he received them led to the further unconfirmed rumor that the professor and his family had fallen victims to his own creation. The word, "Frankenstein," was linked both correctly and incorrectly with the professor and Avery.

Out of this fantasy grew alarm for the citizens of Greater New York. The synthetic man somehow began to bear a strong resemblance to Jack the Ripper, although the only known violence in which he had indulged was a mild shove directed at Bill Porter before five thousand witnesses in Grand Central Station.

Whether or not the authorities had fallen for the story and were looking for Avery because he was a menace to public safety, or whether they simply realized that Avery himself was in danger as long as the story kept boiling, the fact remained that every plainclothes man in New York and every cop on the beat had been supplied with a description of Avery and orders to arrest him and bring him in the moment he was spotted.

Mothers in the Bronx and Brooklyn and Richmond and Queens and Manhattan kept a weather eye on their children as they played in the streets during that evening's twilight. And as darkness closed in on the city, shrill voices called the youngsters in to safety.

Radio news commentators were inclined to scoff at the story, but nonetheless, until the facts were known, the public was urged to keep a weather eye out for Avery Mallet.

AT NINE o'clock that night, it was raining very hard in Winset, Vermont. Professor Landis sat at the desk in his laboratory poring over a stack of notes. Erika sat by the open fire in the living room. She had been reading a book, but now it lay face downward in her lap and she was looking thoughtfully into the embers of the fire. There was a knock at the front door.

Mrs. Hilton had always retired by eight o'clock, so Erika rose from her chair and went to answer it. Mr. Harwood, the station agent, stood there, water dripping off the dilapidated umbrella which he still held over his head.

"Say, Miss Landis, there's a telephone call for the professor down at the depot. It's a personal call for him and I guess it's mighty important. They told me to get him down there if I had to carry him on my back."

"Well, I'm afraid, Mr. Harwood, there isn't any chance of getting Father away from the laboratory tonight."

"Wal, I guess this is mighty important," said Mr. Harwood. "I guess he ought to be told about it. I guess if he knew who it was, he might change his mind."

"Who is it, Mr. Harwood?" said Erika. She had learned long ago that you had to go through this procedure to get any information from Winset's station agent.

"Wal, sir, I thought they was kiddin' myself at first. I says to him, 'You can't get away with that stuff,' I says to him. 'Wal,' he says to me, 'wal, if you don't believe it,' he says, 'just hang up,' he says, 'and get the operator to call my office and see if you don't get me back,' he says. 'All right,' I says, 'I will.' So, I hung up and called his office, and I'm a son of a gun if it wasn't him all right,"

"Who?" said Erika patiently.

"Why, the Mayor of the City of New York," said Mr. Harwood.

"What?" Erika stared at him, dumbfounded.

"Oh, it was him, all right. 'Harwood,' he says to me, 'I've got to get Professor Landis on the phone,' he says. 'You'll

never get him out on a night like this,' I says. 'You've got to get him,' he says. 'There's about seven million people down here scared right to death,' he says. 'I've got to hear the truth from the professor's own lips,' he says. 'Wal, I'll go out to his place and tell him,' I says, 'but it won't be no use,' I says." Mr. Harwood rubbed his chin. "Say, Miss Landis, is there any truth in this story that young Mallet is the synthetic man?"

"Mr. Harwood, what on earth—?"

"Wal, there's been a lot of telegrams for the professor askin' him about it," said Mr. Harwood, "only they was comin' so fast that I decided that I wouldn't deliver 'em till there was a good bunch of 'em. Then I got so excited about the Mayor and all that I left 'em all at the depot. They say as how the whole police force of New York is lookin' for Mallet."

Erika's lips tightened. "Come in out of the wet, Mr. Harwood. I'll get Father."

She walked across the living room and went through the laboratory door without knocking. The professor never paid any attention to knocks. He looked up from his notes with a pained expression on his face.

"Erika, you know very well I told you I was not to be disturbed! This is the first night in weeks that I've had any peace. It seems to me—"

"FATHER," she interrupted him. "I'm sorry, but something has gone very wrong in New York. I don't know precisely what it is, but Avery's in some sort of trouble. The Mayor of New York City is trying to get in touch with you on the telephone and you've got to come down to the station with me and talk to him. It seems there've been a lot of telegrams for you which might explain the situation, but Mr. Harwood has neglected to deliver them."

"I'm not going anywhere," said the professor. "I'm not going to talk to the Mayor of New York. Avery's an adult and if he's in trouble he can get out of it himself. I have work to do."

"I'm sorry, Father, but you're coming with me at once."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort," said the professor.

"Father, Avery's in trouble. We can't let him down."

The professor looked into her blue eyes and saw a determination there that was unusual. He sighed and got up from his chair. "All right," he said, "but I'm not likely to forget this in a hurry, Erika. Just when I have freed myself of annoyances—"

"Apparently you didn't do a very good job of it, Father," said Erika.

She took him to the front door, helped him into a raincoat and a battered felt hat, and they followed Mr. Harwood out to his ramshackled Ford.

Mr. Harwood let in his clutch with a suddenness that sent Erika and the professor hurtling back against the seat.

"Is there anythin' to it, Professor?" Mr. Harwood shouted over his shoulder.

"Anything to what?" said the professor grumpily.

"They say Mallet is the synthetic man."

"Who says so?" the professor snapped.

"Why, the whole city of New York, I guess," said Mr. Harwood.

"Bosh!" said the professor irritably. And it was all he would say until they arrived at the depot.

"You're supposed to call Operator 21. She'll put you right through to the Mayor," said Mr. Harwood.

The professor picked up the phone and gave his instructions in a disgruntled manner. While he waited for his connection to be made, Erika began glancing through the telegrams which were stacked on Mr. Harwood's desk. As she read them, her face was a study. She looked up from one, signed by the Police Commissioner of New York, at the professor.

She was frightened now.

"This is serious, Father," she said gravely.

"Nonsense!" said the professor. And then his connection was made. "Yes, this is Professor Landis. What do you want?"

"WE'VE been trying to reach you all day, Professor. Don't you ever answer telegrams?" New York's Number One official sounded reproachful.

"I haven't had any telegrams," snapped the professor. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, I'm relieved to know that you're safe and sound," said the Mayor. "Down here, the rumor has been spreading that your synthetic man had done you in and escaped."

"What kind of damned gibberish is this?" the professor demanded.

"I had to get the facts from you direct, Professor. The main point is, is he dangerous?"

"Is who dangerous?"

"Why, the synthetic man, of course!"

"What synthetic man?"

"Good heavens," said the Mayor, in an awed voice, "are there more than one, Professor? Down here, we're concerned about the one who uses the name of Mallet."

The professor drew a deep breath. "I want to say," he said, his voice dangerously calm, "that I consider this the damndest outrage I ever heard of! Do you realize that it's raining up here and that I've had to come two miles to this telephone? No, you probably don't. Well, you can depend on it that the public will know about this. The *Times* will have a letter from me tomorrow. When public officials descend to playing practical jokes on people whose time is valuable, something had better be done about it. Goodbye!" And the professor hung up the receiver with a bang.

"But, Father," Erika protested, "you didn't explain to him. I don't think you understand. The papers have decided that Avery is the synthetic man and the whole city believes it. Avery's in real trouble! You've got to call the Mayor back and tell him the whole thing is untrue."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said the professor. "But you can count on it that I will expose those fat-headed officials publicly."

"Father, I understand your irritation, but Avery needs your help."

"Damn Avery! He isn't a child, is he? He can talk the King's English, can't he? He doesn't need me to tell them they're crazy, does he? Are you going to drive me home, Mr. Harwood, or do I have to walk?"

Erika turned to the station agent. "Will you please reserve a berth for me on the midnight to town, Mr. Harwood?"

"You're staying right here," rapped the professor. "I need you."

"If you'll let me borrow your car, Mr. Harwood," said Erika coolly, "I'll bring it back at train time."

VII

JOHNNY PULASKI, aged fourteen, was whistling as he walked along Central Park West near Ninety-sixth Street. The rain which was drenching New England had not yet hit the city and it had been a good night for Johnny, who sold papers for a living. Johnny was thinking about the synthetic man. If only this guy would stay loose for a few days, there'd be a boom in the paper business. People had been buying 'em like hot cakes tonight. Why, this Mallet had even crowded Joe DiMaggio's two homers against the Browns off the front page.

Just as Johnny approached the Ninety-sixth Street entrance to the Park, a shadowy figure vaulted over the stone wall and came toward him along the sidewalk. As he approached, Johnny saw that he was a tall, thin young man, bareheaded and wearing rimless spectacles. As he came abreast of Johnny, he spoke in a low, hurried voice.

"Would you be interested in earning fifty cents?" he said.

"Sure, as long as I don't have to murder me grandmudder," said Johnny.

"It won't take you a minute," said the tall, thin young man. "I . . . ah . . . I have an engagement to meet a friend here and he's late. I find myself in dire need of something to sustain me."

"Come again?" said Johnny.

"I say I find myself in dire need . . . I mean . . . darn it, what I'm getting at is, I'm hungry!" said Avery Mallet

"Dere's a one-arm lunch between here and Columbus Avenue on Ninety-eighth Stree and dere's a delicatessen in de next block."

"I am well aware of both those facts," said Avery gravely. "But I . . . ah . . . I'm afraid, if I leave here, I may miss my friend entirely. I wondered if you would go to the delicatessen for me and bring me back something to eat."

'Sure," said Johnny. "Dey put up a swell liverwurst on rye over dere."

Avery shuddered. "I don't think I want anything of that sort," he said, "but you might get me a bottle of milk and a plain bread and butter sandwich." He hesitated a moment, and then he added, with a note of longing in his voice, "If they happen to have any celery, you might bring me a bunch."

JOHNNY PULASKI suddenly stood very rigid, staring at Avery. "Yeah, yeah, I'll get it for you," he said. He turned and started away.

"Wait," said Avery. "I haven't given you the money yet." He took his leather purse from his pocket and produced a one dollar bill which he handed to Johnny. "I'll be waiting right here for you," he said.

"Yeah, don't go anywheres so I can't find you," said Johnny. This time he started on the run across the street.

Avery leaned against the wall. He felt exhausted and discouraged. Since noon that day he had been dodging around in the Park, avoiding people, not daring to go anywhere for food, though he was famished. Every newspaper in town was plastered with his pictures.

He had thought of going to a phone booth and calling the station agent in Winset and then he realized that any telephone call to that Vermont town would attract attention. They would probably trace the place he was calling from and delay making the connection until someone caught up with him. A telegram would be equally dangerous and apparently ineffective, since the professor was not answering telegrams and since there was no place he could send a telegram which Avery could get.

Food was essential. After that, he thought, in the early hours of the morning when the city was quiet, he would start walking for some place in the country . . . some place where people would not be looking for him.

And then Avery knew despair. Across the street he saw Johnny Pulaski. Johnny was not alone nor was he carrying milk or food. Instead, he was pointing a shaking finger at Avery and yelling at the top of his lungs at a policeman and several other men in civilian clothes who were with him.

"There he is, just like I told you!" Johnny shouted. "You can't make no mistake. I seen his picture plastered all over de papers all day. It's him, all right."

Grimly, purposefully, the policeman and the other men started across toward Avery. Avery felt his knees sag under him for an instant. Then he pulled himself together, climbed to the top of the stone wall, and dropped down into the Park on the other side.

"Wait!" the policeman ordered. Avery did not wait. There was a sharp crack and something went whistling and whining past Avery's ear.

"Good gosh!" said Avery in a choking voice. He plunged through the bushes and ran again, as fast as his weary legs would take him.

•

SATURDAY morning the telephone on Bill Porter's desk rang. Bill inhaled deeply on his cigarette and blew out the smoke in long, feathery streamers. This was the beginning of another cockeyed day.

He picked up the receiver. "Porter speaking."

"Mr. Porter," said an unexpected voice, "this is Erika Landis."

"Well, hello!" said Bill. "I've been wondering when you'd pop in. As I understand it, the Museum opens about ten o'clock."

"I'm not here to see the Museum, Mr. Porter. I want to see you . . . at once."

"Better and better," said Bill. "Where are you?"

"At the Hotel Commodore. I got in at seven-thirty this morning and have been calling you ever since."

"Busy reporters don't get in till nine," said Bill. "You're the first caller of the day. I can be at the Commodore in ten minutes."

"Don't ask for me at the desk," said Erika. "I'm not registered under my own name."

"Aha, law-breaker!" said Bill.

"Thanks to you," said Erika.

"Tell you what," said Bill. "I'll meet you in the Commodore bar in fifteen minutes. They have a wonderful cooling system there. The manager's a pal of mine, if you're interested in seeing how it works. I say fifteen minutes because I think I'm going to need a drink before I see you. I have a feeling you don't like me today."

"You're psychic!" Erika said dryly.

"DOUBLE Scotch and soda," said Bill to the bartender. "And damn little soda."

"It's hot again," said the bartender, pouring the drink.

"Yeah," said Bill, "but it's going to get colder any minute. Wait and see."

He had just downed the drink and was about to order another when he saw Erika come through the door. She was looking very cool and smart in a navy and white printed frock and a large navy straw hat. She was carrying white gloves and a dark blue leather bag. Bill was reminded again that she had a figure which did things to him.

"Hi!" said Bill. "Will you draw up to the mahogany or do you prefer a table?"

"A table," said Erika. Her blue eyes were frosty. Bill took a five dollar bill from his pocket and put it down on the bar.

"Keep sending over double Scotches until this runs out," he said. He crossed over to a table and pulled out a chair for Erika. They sat down. "Well, well, well," said Bill.

There was something ominous about the way Erika put down her bag, placed her gloves neatly on top of it, and folded her hands in front of her on the table.

"I suppose you know you're a Grade A heel," she said.

"I've been working up to it for years," said Bill. "But, personally, I think it's a pretty tough way to begin a conversation. Personally, I think you look very cute this morning . . . and you're the one girl I know that I could call cute without it's being an insult." He picked up the Scotch which the bartender had brought him. "That, by the way, is supposed to be a very devious and subtle masculine compliment."

"Where is Avery?" said Erika.

"Darling, if I could tell you that, I could afford to take you on a real bender," said Bill. "I understand the City is about to offer a reward for his capture. But who am I to know where he is when the whole police force have failed to get their hooks on him?"

"I've read the papers this morning," said Erika, a trifle unsteadily. "They shot at him last night. He may be badly hurt for all we know. I suppose that comes under the head of a first-class joke to you, Mr. Porter."

"It is pretty funny when you know the facts," said Bill. "But I wouldn't worry."

"You started this," said Erika. "If you have an ounce of decency in you, you'll put a stop to it!"

"Those are fighting words, lady," said Bill. He turned to the bartender. "Hey, Mac, you're running behind schedule here. Maybe you'd better bring 'em two at a time." He smiled at Erika. "You wouldn't want me to stop now," he said. "Why, I might even get the Pulitzer Prize for this."

"I wonder," said Erika coldly, "if you realize exactly what you've done. Do you realize that Avery has been in New York for two days now, unable to go to a hotel, unable to communicate with us, with the whole city looking for him as if he were some kind of monster? Do you realize that he may be hungry and sick? He must have been in pretty desperate straits last night when he tried to get that boy to buy food for him!"

BILL shrugged. "Aren't you being unreasonable, lady?" he said. "After all, all he has to do is walk up to a policeman and surrender. He shouldn't have much difficulty proving to them that he's a normal guy."

"Do you think they'd believe anything he said?" she asked. "Why do you suppose I registered at the hotel under a false name? Because I knew that the moment I signed my own name to the register all the reporters in town would come swooping down on me. I'd have welcomed that, Mr. Porter, if I thought they were interested in believing the truth. But they're not. Father gave it to them and look what happened. You started this ballyhoo and the only way Father and Avery and I are going to have any peace is for you to stop it."

"You can't always be thinking of yourself," Bill said lightly. "Why, millions of people are having the thrill of a lifetime. Our circulation departments are in heaven."

"And Father's work has been completely disrupted. Avery is being hunted through the streets like an animal. And I . . . I . . ."

"You look very cute," said Bill. Then he leaned forward. "Hey," he said, "none of that!" There was a suspicious brightness in Erika's eyes. "I didn't know you were taking it as tough as that."

"How do you expect me to take it?" Erika said unsteadily.

"Why, publicity never did anybody any harm," said Bill "It's what makes the wheels go round. Take your father, for example. Nobody ever heard of him until this story broke. Now he's better known than Einstein. And young Mallet . . . you ought to come over to the office and see some of the letters that have been pouring in. Movie companies want to hire him; advertising agencies want his endorsement for their products; he's had thousands of proposals of marriage. Why, when this blows over, there isn't a scientific laboratory in the country that wouldn't hire him at a big salary, just for his publicity value."

"Avery isn't interested in anything except his work with Father," said Erika. "As for proposals of marriage . . . well, it so happens that I'm going to marry Avery, although he doesn't know it yet. Does that make the situation any clearer to you, Mr. Porter?"

Bill drank a double Scotch without speaking. "So that's how it is," he said slowly.

"That's how it is," said Erika. "Avery's an important man to science. He's not a cheap clown looking for newspaper headlines. You can never repair the damage you've done him. The least you can do is to stop this thing before he comes to some serious harm."

Bill crushed out his cigarette and lit a fresh one. "Look," he said finally, "come on over to the office and we'll talk to Zimmerman. He's my boss and this was really his idea. He isn't going to like it, but maybe I can sell him on the idea that he can scoop the other papers by printing the real truth ahead of them."

"Then you are going to help me put an end to this?" Erika asked eagerly.

"Yeah, but against my better judgment," said Bill. "Liquor and women before lunch always warp my judgment!"

ZIMMERMAN pushed back his green eyeshade and the cigar in the corner of his mouth bobbled up and down. He looked Erika over approvingly from head to foot.

"So you're Miss Landis," he said. He reached out and pressed a button on his

desk. "We'll get the studio photographer to take some pictures of you."

"Hold everything, George!" said Bill. He had taken up his customary position on the edge of the editor's desk. "I've been having a talk with Miss Landis. We've got another beat for the *Globe*."

"That's great!" said Zimmerman. He reached forward and picked up a pencil. "Let's have it."

Bill inhaled deeply on his cigarette. "Well, you know, George, sooner or later, you're going to have to spill the truth about this business. Why not beat the other papers to it before the police catch Mallet and the story explodes in all our faces. Now, Miss Landis here can give you the straight dope . . . an exclusive interview. And I guess she wouldn't mind a few pictures either, if we were to put an end to this business."

Zimmerman dropped the pencil and leaned back in his swivel chair. His fishy gray eyes were narrow. "Oh, so that's it!" he said. "Now, look here, Miss Landis, I know you and your father have been trying to keep this thing under cover, but it's no go."

"But surely, Mr. Zimmerman," said Erika earnestly, "you can't want to go on playing up a story that has absolutely no basis in fact."

Zimmerman chuckled. "You kept the reporters at bay for two weeks up in Vermont," he said. "I don't know just why your father wasn't ready to break the story, but now it's broken. Frankly, I don't see why it doesn't please you." He leaned forward and picked up a sheaf of papers on the desk. "Why, look here, your father's a made man. The minute the police catch Mallet, we have arranged for a group of the most eminent scientists in the country to examine him and put him to tests. Your father won't have to go before the Academy to prove his discovery. It's going to be proved before the whole world!"

"But Mr. Zimmerman—"

"Now, Miss Landis, it's too bad that Mallet escaped from your father's laboratory before he was willing to present him to the world, but that's your fault. You should have kept a better watch on him. But now he is out and you can't hope to cover up an invention which is going to affect business and labor and science and, yes, by heaven, art! Why, only today a famous Hollywood producer had me on the long distance phone. If your father can produce these synthetic human beings in sufficient quantities, it will revolutionize the whole moving picture business, he thinks. It means an end to high-salaried stars. Why, damn it, Miss Landis, the possibilities of this invention of your father's are endless! You're going to be front page news for the next ten years."

"FOR gosh sake, George!" said Bill. "Now that you've finished delivering your lecture to the Rotary Club, let's get down to facts. You know as well as I do that this whole thing is the bunk. Mallet is no more a synthetic man than you are . . . maybe less. Miss Landis is determined to stop this thing and she can do it in a few days. Now you've got a chance to break the truth ahead of the rest of the papers. Hell, it's a great story. An innocent guy chased all over New York City with seven million people thinking he's a Frankenstein monster—"

"Nuts!" said Zimmerman. "They kidded you for two weeks up in the country and now she's kidding you again."

"George," said Bill, "the cement companies have missed a great bet in not taking samples of your head. Do you mean to say you've actually sold yourself on this thing?"

Zimmerman ignored the insult. He was smiling a tight-lipped, self-satisfied smile. "If Miss Landis can prove it isn't so," he said, "let her go ahead and prove it. It won't be enough for her or her father to deny it, though. They've been doing that from the start."

"Mr. Zimmerman, I can prove that Avery Mallet is a plain, ordinary human being. But it may take a little time to

produce the proof. I'd have to go to Chicago, get his birth certificate, and produce people who have known him since he was a child. And my father can prove to any scientist in the world that he isn't within miles of creating a synthetic man."

Zimmerman relighted his cigar and rocked contentedly back and forth in his swivel chair. "There's nothing holding you up, Miss Landis, as far as I know . . . . *if* you can prove it."

"It's the time that's important," said Erika. "It might take days. And meanwhile, Avery is in danger. You've put him there. He has no place to eat, no place to sleeep; he can't contact his friends. Believe me, Mr. Zimmerman," and her voice rose angrily, "if there are any laws against persecution, I shall see that they are invoked against you!"

"If he's so darn human," said Zimmerman, "why doesn't he give himself up?"

Erika's eyes glared.

"Because he's frightened . . . because the whole thing is so preposterous!"

"Come on, George, use your head," said Bill.

"That's what I'm hired for," said Zimmerman. "Just because you've fallen for a dame and let her kid you out of believing this thing doesn't say it isn't so."

"Well," said Bill, and he crushed his cigarette out on the shiny mahogany of Zimmerman's desk, "You're going to have to carry on this show without me from now on. I'm through!"

"I decided that the minute you walked in here," said Zimerman. "I'm promoting Mike Rafferty to your job. He's shown that he has a real nose for news."

"Maybe there's a newspaper in town with an editor who isn't a screwball who'll listen to the truth," said Bill.

"Not from you," said Zimmerman. "I'm blacklisting you."

Bill's lips tightened for an instant and then he laughed. "I'll be seeing you in bankruptcy court," he said, "after Mallet gets through suing you."

"I never heard of anybody being sued by a machine," said Zimmerman. "Now get out of here and let guys who know their job go to work."

VII

NEITHER Erika nor Bill spoke till after they had descended in the elevator to the lobby.

Then Erika said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Porter."

"Don't you think," he said, "now that I'm no longer a newspaper man, that you could get informal enough to call me Bill?"

Erika said that she was very tired and that it would probably be easier to call him Bill. "But what's the next move?" she asked. "Somehow, I've got to find Avery. I've got to get in touch with him."

"The next move," said Bill, "is to go to Hymie's, which is my favorite bar and which is only one block away. There we will outline a plan of campaign."

Erika reminded him that he had already had four double Scotches.

"That," said Bill, "is scarcely a warm up. Come on."

They started toward the revolving door, but just bfore they reached it, somebody came through it and face to face with them. It was Mike Rafferty, his leather camera case slung over his shoulder. He took a look at Erika and his face brightened.

"Just what I need, Miss Landis, is a picture of you," he said. "I've been goin' crazy takin' shots of a lot of little boys named Pulaski."

"What you need," said Bill, "is a drink because you are no longer a photographer. You have scaled the heights. You are now a reporter."

Rafferty said that he had always suspected it, but that nobody had notified him officially of the fact.

"I am notifying you officially," said Bill, "and we are going to Hymie's to have a drink to celebrate your success and my success." He looked at Erika gravely. "We are taking Mike with us," he said,

"because it is very important to have an in with the newspaper boys."

Rafferty said that he didn't care what reason they had for taking him as long as they didn't delay too long.

They walked to Hymie's, three abreast along the sidewalk. Bill tried out the shoulder block, that had been so successful in the Yale Bowl, on several unsuspecting pedestrians. He discovered that he could still dish it out.

Erika began to wonder if Bill was going to be any help at all . . . if it wouldn't be better for her to get away from both of these men and think this thing out for herself. But Bill was gripping her arm firmly and the course of least resistance seemed to be to go with him and attempt to get him to concentrate on the problem.

Hymie's was just a bar. There were one or two tables, covered by stained red tablecloths, which were apparently seldom used. Rafferty took Erika to one of the tables and Bill went directly to the bar. Without a word, Hymie poured him a double Scotch. Bill put a ten dollar bill down on the bar.

"Keep sending them over, Hymie, till this runs out," he said.

Hymie had slick black hair, black eyes and a dead pan. "For the lady, too?"

Bill turned to the table. "What are you drinking, Erika?"

"Nothing," she said.

"You've got to drink something," Bill said.

"Lemonade, then."

"Keep sending lemonades, Hymie," said Bill. He poured himself another double Scotch and went over to the table. His face had a fine red glow to it now.

"There doesn't seem to be any reason why you should have had a head start," said Rafferty.

"There is every reason for it," said Bill, "because you are a working man and I am not."

HYMIE evidently had a fine understanding of the situation because he brought six double Scotches and put them down on the table. "I'll have your lemonade in a minute, lady," he said.

"We're never going to get anywhere," said Erika to Bill, "if you keep drinking double Scotches."

Bill said that if Erika was distressed about him, he would make an agreement with her to drink only half of each double Scotch at a time so that, as a matter of fact, he would only be drinking single Scotches. He looked at Rafferty. "The problem," he said, "is to find Avery Mallet."

Rafferty said that was quite a problem. "The police have been turnin' the town upside down for him," he said, "without any luck. After he escaped last night, they fine-tooth-combed the Park, but evidently Mallet slipped through their cordon somehow."

Bill said that he was afraid Rafferty would never be a success as a reporter. He said the first requisite of being a reporter was to have a firm grasp of the English language. He said that anyone, with any education at all, knows you don't fine-tooth-comb the Park. He said he was surprised Rafferty did not know that what they really did was to fine-comb-tooth it.

Rafferty said, "Nuts!"

Erika said, "Please, Bill! We came here to discuss some method of getting in touch with Avery."

Bill said he was well aware of the fact. He said that Avery was very close to him. He said that Avery was closer to him than any of his men friends. He said he considered that, at this point, it would be an admirable notion to drink a toast to Avery.

"To Avery!" he said. And he drank two double Scotches one on top of the other, explaining that that was the only way to make it legal.

Rafferty, who was usually a pretty good workman himself, was running a bad second. In fact, he was still concentrating on the problem. "The thing to do," he said to Erika, "is to give out a statement to the papers where you are staying.

Mallet will be sure to read it and he'll get in touch with you."

"And then I'll have you and all the press and all the police down on my head," said Erika.

"That's right," said Rafferty.

Hymie put some more double Scotches down on the table and a glass of lemonade in front of Erika.

Bill said he thought it was a pity that a man of Rafferty's fine sensibilities couldn't forget for a moment that he was working for the capitalist press. He said that their mission here was very secret and very private. He said that, in fact, they were engaged in the business of aiding a lady who was in distress and that Rafferty was no gentleman if he insisted on thinking of duty before he thought about a lady in distress.

"WHAT we have to do," said Bill, "is to think of some way of contacting my friend, Avery, which the police have not thought of. We have to be smart. We have to prove, Rafferty, that the degrees we took away from the old Alma Mater were not fraudulently obtained."

Rafferty said that the only degree he had was a letter of dismissal from the principal of P. S. 56, handed to him during his third year in the sixth grade. Rafferty was warming up.

"We could hire a sound truck," said Bill, "and go through the streets saying, 'Avery, Avery! Wherefore art thou Avery?' The only thing is," he added seriously, "we might run up against a suit for plagiarism."

"Maybe Miss Landis has a family whistle," said Rafferty, "that Mallet knows. We could try attractin' his attention that way, if she'd teach it to us."

Bill said he thought that was a splendid idea and would Erika please whistle for them at once.

Hymie came over to the table with another tray of double Scotches.

"Your ten bucks has run out," said Hymie.

Bill said that he was astonished to hear it. He said that there must be something wrong with Hymie's Scotch because as yet he couldn't feel a thing. He said that, furthermore, he was pretty sick of ten dollar bills that ran out. He said that what this country needed was a ten dollar bill that would run in. In fact, he felt it would be a great thing if there were a ten dollar bill that would sneak up on you when you weren't looking.

Rafferty said he thought Bill had something there.

Erika stood up. "Goodbye," she said.

Bill said this was the screwiest thing that had happened to him for a long time. He said things were coming to a pretty pass when people said goodbye when they were just arriving. He said that, if this state of affairs continued, life would begin to look like a moving picture run backwards.

Rafferty said that would suit him fine because after a while he would be back in P. S. 56 in the sixth grade and that this time he would know how to make passes at the girl who sat next to him without getting kicked out for it. He said the only guarantee he wanted was that when he got back in the sixth grade they would start running the film forward again.

Erika had reached the door of Hymie's as Bill, enthralled, continued to unwind the film backward through childhood, through birth, and through the Spanish-American War. He was taking up Sherman's march to the sea, backwards, when Erika's attention was attracted by a blaring radio across the street:

"The police are still searching for Avery Mallet, the synthetic man. He has not been seen since he escaped into Central Park last night, after Officer Muldoon had fired at him in an attempt to capture him. All railway stations, ferry terminals, bridges, and highways leading out of the city are being carefully watched. Police say Mallet is still definitely in the city and they expect to announce his arrest momentarily."

Erika took one last despairing look at Bill and Rafferty. Bill was telling Rafferty that, since he had been elevated to the high rank of reporter, it was eminently fitting that the next ten dollars should come from him.

Erika knew that she was going to have to go it alone.

IX

AVERY'S escape from the Park was not so much a matter of good tactics as of speed. With the reports of Officer Muldoon's gun ringing in his ears, Avery really did some fancy running. Long before Officer Muldoon made his report to headquarters and orders were given out to surround the Park, Avery had emerged on the Fifth Avenue side.

This, Avery told himself, was getting darn serious. Most serious of all were the pangs of hunger which were gnawing at his interior. Restaurants were impossible. Everyone had been warned that the synthetic man was desperate for food and already a score of innocents had been seized by well-meaning restaurant proprietors and turned over to the police. There was an open season on tall, thin young men with glasses. Avery himself would almost certainly have been spotted.

Avery kept walking aimlessly about the streets because there was nothing else to do. He remembered hearing that if you loitered, you were arrested for vagrancy. It was after midnight when he paused for a moment in front of a small grocery store which had been closed for the night.

Avery's saliva ducts began to work overtime. The window was filled with edibles—fancy loaves of Italian bread, stacks of fruit, and, worst of all, a crate of fine-looking celery, with thick fresh green leaves.

Avery's familiarity with fiction was limited, but in one of his lighter moments he had read Victor Hugo's immortal saga of Jean Valjean. Valjean, faced with the same dilemma, had broken the window and stolen a loaf of bread.

For a moment, a cold chill ran along Avery's spine. He well remembered the penalty for such a crime—twenty years as a galley slave. He remembered, as a boy, seeing William Farnum chained to a massive oar while a hideous-looking individual in a cocked hat applied the lash to his raw and bleeding back.

Then reason came to Avery's aid. There were no more galleys, he told himself, and, unlike Valjean, he had the money to pay for the food and the window, too, if he were caught. Just the same, his conscience warned him, it was vandalism.

"But I'm darn hungry!" Avery said, out loud.

Practicality weighed in for a moment. It would be less expensive to break the plate glass of the door and go into the store than to demolish the window.

Avery took his carefully folded handkerchief from his hip pocket, wrapped it around his right hand, hesitated for an instant, and then drove it at the glass of the door. There was a resounding crash as the whole thing fell apart.

Avery glanced hastily over his shoulder, saw no one on the street, and went in. He was just reaching into the window display toward the crate of celery when a door at the rear of the store opened and a little man, barely more than five feet tall and clad in an old-fashioned nightshirt, appeared. He took one look at Avery and began to shriek at the top of his lungs.

"Police! Crooks! Robbers!"

Avery turned to him in desperation. "Calm yourself, my good man," he said. "I have the wherewithal to pay for any damage I have done. I will be more than happy to—"

"Police!" shouted the little man. "Police!" Nor did he lack courage. He rushed at Avery and seized him by the lapels of his coat. "You loafer! You bum! A thousand years in jail this is costing you. Police!" The little man was trying to shake Avery, but was only succeeding in rattling his own teeth together violently.

"Please calm yourself," said Avery.

"I'm sure we can straighten everything out."

"Taxes I'm paying for protection," the little man screamed. "Where are the *PO-LEECE!*" The last word was a piercing wail. He reached up one clawlike hand and raked at Avery's face. His fingernails left red marks on Avery's unshaven cheek. But, worse than that, Avery's glasses came off and before he coud recover them, the little man, who was jumping frantically up and down, had crushed them to bits.

"Now you've done it," said Avery bitterly. He caught the little man under the armpits and lifted him, kicking and struggling, off the floor. He deposited him in a half empty barrel of apples. Only waving feet and arms remained visible, but the screaming for the law was unabated.

"Darn it!" said Avery. He snatched up a loaf of bread which was near at hand on the counter, stuffed two oranges in his pocket, and ran for the door. The law, if any, was nowhere to be seen.

AVERY sighted a subway kiosk and, with his loaf of bread tucked under his coat, hurried down the steps into temporary safety. Luck was with him because, just as he reached the station platform, a train pulled in. Avery boarded it and sat down at one end of the comparatively deserted car. He heaved a great sigh of relief as the train pulled out with the law still conspicuous by its absence.

Avery squinted at two sleepy-looking passengers seated at the other end of the car and then he took out his loaf of bread from beneath his coat and began to chew on it. Ten minutes and four stops later, Avery had demolished the bread and the two oranges, and he felt better.

A discarded newspaper lay on the seat beside him. He picked it up, his eyes squinted narrowly. The headlines he would be able to read but the small print in the story would be beyond him without his glasses.

"Hmm!" said Avery, slightly astonished. He stopped squinting. He found himself able to read the small print just as well as ever. He had been wearing those glasses for fifteen years because the oculist had told him he couldn't read without them. He had never tried to read without them, as a matter of course. Well, he could see all right now. Avery reminded himself that the human body undergoes a complete change every seven years. That must account for this astonishing phenomenon.

Then Avery forgot all about his eyes. Erika was in town! It said so right here in the paper. He read the story eagerly. She had denied that Avery was the synthetic man. That ought to fix everything. Then Avery groaned. They didn't believe her . . . they still thought she and the professor were stalling for some reason. The last paragraph threw Avery into a state of complete despair.

After making her statement to the press, Miss Landis disappeared. All attempts to find ont where she is staying in New York have failed. It is thought that she is registered at some hotel under an assumed name.

Avery's hopes, which had risen, were completely dashed. He had thought that if he could only get in touch with Erika, everything might be straightened out. His thoughts were interrupted by the conductor.

"This is the last stop, bud."

"Oh . . . ah . . . thank you," said Avery. "Can you tell me how I can get a train back downtown?"

The conductor eyed him suspiciously. All-night riders on the subway were nothing new to him. "There ain't no way," he said, "without paying another nickel."

"Oh, I assure you, I have nickels," said Avery.

"Yeah?" said the conductor, still suspicious.

"Yes, indeed," said Avery and, misunderstanding the reason for the conductor's attitude, he hurried out of the train and through the exit gate to the street above.

He was still clutching the newspaper when he descended to the downtown platform a moment later. The best thing for him to do was to keep moving and at least he could sit down in the subway.

THE trip from the Bronx to Brooklyn is a long one. When Avery had finished reading all the items in the paper that had to do with him, he began casually to peruse world affairs. By the time they reached Brooklyn Bridge, he had been reduced to studying the classified ads. Suddenly his fingers gripped the paper tightly and it rattled in his grasp as he read an item under *Personal.*

If the boy who kissed a girl in dancing school when he was twelve years old would order pork chops and fried potatoes instead of his customary diet, he would be less conspicuous.

Erika! She was showing him a way to communicate with her! He jumped up from his seat and looked frantically around him. He saw a sign which read, "In case of emergency, pull this cord." Avery pulled it. The train came to a screeching stop that sent Avery hurtling into a corner. Trainmen came running.

"What's wrong?"

"I want to get off," said Avery.

The trainman's jaw dropped open. Then he looked at his fellow workers. Then he said to Avery, very politely, "I'd like to accommodate you, bud, only we're right in the middle of the East River and it'd be murder. Not that I'd give a good hoot in hell!" he added hastily.

The motorman, in blue overalls and carrying his airbrake handle, looked in from the end of the car. "What's wrong?"

"Just another souse," said the trainman. "Give us a little extra time at the next stop, Ed. He wants to get off and we'd like to accommodate him!"

The motorman disappeared and a moment later the train started. Four trainmen remained standing by Avery, looking dangerously casual. Avery moistened his lips.

"I assure you, I meant no harm," he said. "It was just an automatic reaction."

"It's all right, bud," said the trainman softly. "Our slogan is *Service.* You wanna get off and we're gonna see that you get off!"

The train came to a stop. The doors opened. Burly arms seized Avery and lifted him off the ground. With incredible speed, he was carried through the door and across the platform. They hoisted him high over the turnstile gate and dropped him with a bruising thud on the other side. The trainman dusted his hands together.

"We aim to please," he said.

Avery felt himself gingerly to see if he was all in one piece. Then he picked himself up, and, limping slightly, climbed the stairway to the street. He saw the lights of an all-night drugstore across the way and made for them. A sleepy clerk looked at him from behind the counter.

"I would like," said Avery, "to buy a box of writing paper and envelopes. Anything will do."

The clerk was not too sleepy to produce the most expensive box he had in stock.

"And now," said Avery, "if I may borrow your fountain pen, I'd like to write a letter."

THE clerk looked at him in astonishment for a minute and then he started to laugh, as he handed Avery a pen. "Say," he said, "did you ever hear the story about the guy that wanted to have a cake baked in the shape of a letter S?"

"No," said Avery, "I never heard it."

He took a sheet of paper from the box and uncapped the fountain pen.

"Well, it seems a little guy went into a bakery and said that he would like to have a cake baked in the shape of the letter S. The baker said he could do it and. . . ."

But Avery wasn't listening. He was writing:

To the New York Daily Globe,

Will you please insert the following item in your Personal Column. I am enclosing

five dollars to cover all expense. This is the item:

The boy who kissed the girl in dancing school when he was twelve years old will be eating pork chops and fried potatoes at. . . .

Avery looked up at the clerk. "Where's the nearest eating place?" he asked.

"Well, there's Pete's Coffee Pot just around the corner . . . twenty-four hour service," said the clerk.

"What's the address?" said Avery.

"Seven sixty-two Jeroloman. Well, as I was saying, this little guy come back for his cake at four o'clock. The baker was very proud of his job, but the little guy looked disappointed. 'What I want,' he says. . . ."

But Avery was writing again.

. . . will be eating pork chops and fried potatoes at Pete's Coffee Pot at 762 Jeroloman Street, Brooklyn, at noon on Monday.

It had to be Monday because the ad might not appear in the paper until that morning.

"Have you got a stamp?" Avery asked.

"Yes," said the clerk a little grimly. He wasn't holding his audience. He produced a stamp from the drawer and handed it to Avery.

Avery licked the stamp and put it on the envelope.

"When the little guy seen the second cake baked in the shape of an Old English S, he says, 'That's exactly what I wanted!' 'Shall I wrap it up?' says the baker. 'No,' says the little guy, 'I'll eat it here.' "

Avery looked at him gravely. "Thank you for everything," he said. He turned and started for the door, clutching his letter.

"Hey," the clerk called after him, "you forgot your writin' paper."

"I have no further use for it," said Avery.

As he disappeared through the door, the clerk scratched his head. "Gee, what a dumb cluck!" he said.

X

THE organ music had a soothing effect on Avery. He leaned back in the cushioned pew and closed his eyes. He had had almost no sleep for two nights. The few moments of rest he had snatched on park benches or down alleyways had been filled with nightmares. He had awakened each time with a start, expecting to find himself surrounded by the police or an angry mob of citizens.

On this Sunday morning, upon passing the church of the Reverend St. Elmo Bradbury, he remembered that as a boy he had done a lot of unmolested sleeping through the church services to which his mother had taken him with grim regularity. It occurred to him that a church would be a pretty safe place to spend a couple of hours. And so he had gone in and slipped into a pew near the back.

He heaved a deep sigh and the organ music seemed to grow fainter . . . to drift away.

Suddenly he sat up abruptly as the result of a sharp dig in the ribs delivered by a lady who was sitting on his right. He opened his eyes, blinked, and unconsciously reached for a coin in his pocket. Must be collection time, he thought. But there was no collection plate, and as Avery looked around he became uncomfortably aware that people were staring at him . . . staring and scowling ominiously. And then Avery became conscious of the voice of the Reverend Mr. St. Elmo Bradbury raised in a ringing and thunderous climax.

". . . . and so I say, my friends, the synthetic man must be found and he must be destroyed! And the man of science who has brought him into being must be kept from any further blasphemous attempts to imitate the divine Creator!"

Avery felt damp beads of perspiration break out of his forehead. The Reverend St. Elmo Bradbury was pointing a finger dramatically . . . and it seemed to Avery that it was being pointed directly at him.

People close at hand were still scowling at him, too. Avery could not know that the reason for this was that he had been snoring vigorously through some of Mr. Bradbury's very best oratory.

"The man of science," thundered Mr. Bradbury, "will receive his just punishment when he comes face to face with the Creator on the Day of Judgment! The creature which he has turned loose amongst us must be wiped out before he multiplies, before he becomes a blight upon and a menace to our very civilization!"

Avery stood up. "Pardon me," he mumbled to the lady on his left. He managde to wriggle past her.

"Pardon me," he said to the gentleman on the aisle. The gentleman looked at him with very little of Christian charity in his gaze. And then as Avery inadvertently stepped on his foot, the gentleman indulged in a loud exclamation which was, to say the least, out of place.

The Reverend St. Elmo Bradbury paused in the midst of a sentence to stare angrily at Avery's retreating form. Avery was walking on tiptoe, but taking such long strides that he gave the effect of a wire walker scurrying to the safety of his platform. And then, just as he was two paces from the door, a woman's voice was raised in a terrified scream.

"It's him!"

Avery ran.

It is a matter of record that the Reverend St. Elmo Bradbury never did finish his sermon that morning. It is further a matter of record that subsequently the vestrymen commented adversely upon the fact that the entire congregation had left the church before the moment for the passing of the collection plate.

It is also written on the police blotter at the neighboring precinct station that they were called upon to quell a riot at the church of the Reverend St. Elmo Bradbury. One of Mr. Bradbury's more irreverent parishioners said that he'd been expecting something of the sort for years, but this was not considered funny by the persons to whom he addressed the remark.

And, finally, it is also a matter of record that once more Avery Mallet, alias the synthetic man, escaped his pursuers, and that the editors of the metropolitan newspapers blessed him for providing headlines for their Monday morning papers.

•

IT IS not recorded anywhere, but is nonetheless a fact, that while Avery was dashing madly about the streets of Brooklyn looking for sanctuary, Bill Porter and Mike Rafferty were still drinking. True, they had left Hymie's some thirty hours previously, but they had repaired to Bill's apartment where the supply was ample.

Bill, clad in a pair of batik pajamas, was sprawled in an inelegant attitude on the couch. A bottle and a glass were within easy reach of his right hand. There were an unmentionable number of deadheads lined up on the floor beside the couch.

Rafferty sat in an armchair also within easy reach of the bottle. His gray flannel suit was more wrinkled than ever. The inevitable unlighted cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth.

Rafferty said he had come to the conclusion that the world was a pretty disappointing place to live in. This, he explained, was on account of the people in it. More particularly, it was on account of George Zimmerman and Bill Porter.

"Zimmerman," said Bill, "is a fine fellow. I owe him a great deal." He elaborated on this. He explained that he owed Zimmerman as much as he owed his mother and father. In fact, he said, Zimmerman was both a mother and a father to him . . . particularly a mother. He at once became enthralled with this idea and proceeded to enumerate to Rafferty the qualities which Zimmerman possessed which to Bill spelled Mother and Home.

He was no mother to Rafferty.

"Zimmerman is a heel!" said Rafferty.

He ignored Bll's remonstrance that, in speaking of Zimmerman, Rafferty was speaking of the one Bill loved.

"Zimmerman is a heel and I'll tell you why," said Rafferty. The reason why, it developed, was because Rafferty had phoned Zimmerman only a few minutes before to tell him he was working very hard on the story of the synthetic man and Zimmerman had coarsely replied that if he was working on it, he was working for some other paper. He had explained to Rafferty that part of the duties of a reporter was to come to the office now and then. Rafferty had explained patiently that he had not come to the office because he was following a clue . . . that he couldn't telephone because he was being shadowed.

Rafferty was pretty indignant because Zimmerman didn't believe this. He was even more indignant because Zimmerman insinuated that, at that moment, he, Rafferty, was drinking somewhere with that good for nothing, Bill Porter. However, it gave Rafferty an idea.

"He's right about that," said Rafferty. "Bill Porter is no good. He won't help a friend in need."

Bill hiccoughed thoughtfully.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed," said Bill. He wanted to know what Rafferty, as a friend indeed, wanted that he. Bill Porter, ex-newspaper man, could give him.

RAFFERTY wanted information. Rafferty wanted to know where Erika Landis was staying because Rafferty had a bright idea. If Rafferty knew where she was staying, he could catch up with her and she would eventually lead him to the synthetic man, thus making it possible for Rafferty to scoop the town again.

Bill said that if he were to tell, he would be no better than Benedict Arnold. Bill said that Benedict Arnold was a general in the Revolutionary War who betrayed his pal.

Rafferty said that Bill was already no better than Benedict Arnold because he had already betrayed a pal; namely Rafferty.

Bill said he was honored to be considered a pal of any Rafferty. He said he had never considered it from that angle. However, he said, to be propertly treacherous, you had to be paid for it.

"How much?" Rafferty asked.

Bill said he thought a pound of flesh would square up the account nicely.

Rafferty said he didn't think it would be worth it.

Bill said there was another traditional price for treachery which was thirty pieces of silver.

Rafferty stood up. "Excuse me," he said gravely and walked out of the apartment.

Bill finished a half bottle of Scotch and then he slept a little. It was two hours before Rafferty returned. He came back into the apartment, carefully unwrapped a handkerchief, and deposited thirty nickels on the table beside Bill.

"Your price," he said.

Bill remarked that it had taken him quite a while to get it.

"And it was very expensive," said Rafferty. "I spent eleven dollars and sixty-five cents before I hit the jack pot."

Bill said the thing he liked about Rafferty was his sporting blood. He said any man that would pass by the Automat on the corner where he could get a dollar and a half of nickels for a dollar and a half and spend eleven dollars and sixty-five cents in a slot machine was a man after his own heart.

Rafferty said it was no time to mince matters. "Where is the girl?" he asked.

Bill looked at him blankly. Bill said it was very odd, but suddenly he couldn't remember.

Rafferty reached down and took Bill by the ankle. He gave Bill a pull, so that he landed very heavily on the floor on his back. He picked up the soda syphon and held it poised over Bill's face.

Bill said that he must have been suffering from temporary amnesia because now he remembered very well where the girl was staying.

XI

THE young man who walked into Pete's Coffee Pot on Jeroloman Street at five minutes to twelve on Monday morning was a very different Avery Mallet from the one who had stood gawking in the Grand Central Station three days before.

One of the strangest man hunts in the history of time had done things to his appearance. The neatness and precision of dress which had been characteristic of him were missing. His suit was wrinkled and dusty. His coat collar was turned up to conceal the fact that this shirt collar bore the marks of three days of perspiration and city grime. Without glasses, the studious look which had been his was somewhat dissipated.

The expression of his eyes had changed, too. The Avery Mallet of Friday had looked at the world with a sort of bland detachment . . . there had been a veiled concentration in the expression of his eyes which suggested he was thinking thoughts that were beyond the grasp of the common man. The Avery Mallet of five minutes to twelve on Monday eyed the world sharply and suspiciously.

Three days' growth of beard had eliminated the delicate and almost classic line of his jaw and turned it into something rugged, even belligerent. The Avery Mallet of five minutes to twelve on Monday looked without timidity at the waitress who approached his table.

"I'm waiting for a friend," he said. He said it almost aggressively.

And then, at precisely twelve o'clock, Erika appeared.

Avery rose from his chair. His disheveled appearance lent a touch of the ridiculous to the courtly gesture he employed in pulling out the other chair for Erika.

Erika stared at him. She could scarcely believe her eyes. "Avery!" she said in blank astonishment.

"I must apologize for my appearance," he said, "but I . . . ah . . . the . . . ah . . . circumstances of the last few days . . . What I'm trying to say, Erika, is that I've had one hell of a time!"

"Avery!" Her tone was one of awe.

"Please sit down, Erika," he said, a trifle anxiously. "People are staring."

Erika sat down and Avery took the chair opposite her. The waitress appeared before they could have any further conversation. Avery started to speak, but Erika interrupted him.

"Pork chops and fried potatoes for two," said Erika.

Avery looked dubious. "I'm afraid you'll find the cooking here rather greasy."

"Will you mind very much, Avery?"

"I've got to admit I'm pretty darn hungry," said Avery Mallet.

The look of amazement had not faded from Erika's eyes. "But, Avery . . . Avery, you're positively filthy," she said, as though it was a great compliment.

"If you had been sleeping in ashcans and on subway trains," said Avery grimly, "you'd be filthy, too."

"And your glasses, Avery? What happened to them?"

"The grocery store," said Avery. "I presume you've been reading the papers."

ERIKA reached out impulsively and covered his hand with hers. "Darling, you have had a dreadful time," she said, "but it will all be over soon. I've wired to Chicago for your birth certificate and for affidavits as to your . . . well, I hardly know what to call it, Avery. I've asked the president of the University to send a wire to the papers testifying that you're a real person."

"I've almost begun to doubt it myself in the last few days," he said. "But what happens in the meantime?"

"I'll help to get you into some hotel," said Erika, "where you can hide out until everything is cleared up."

"It would hardly be proper for you to . . ."

Erika couldn't conceal the laughter in her eyes. "You'll need somebody to vouch for you, darling, the way you look."

At this point, the waitress appeared

with the pork chops and fried potatoes which she placed before each of them. Avery picked up his fork and knife hurriedly.

"You'll pardon me, Erika?" he said.

But Erika was not looking at him or the pork chops. Instead she was staring over his shoulder at the door of the restaurant. "Oh, Avery!" she said, a despairing note in her voice.

"What is it?" he asked and then he turned and followed her gaze.

Coming through the door of the restaurant, camera unlimbered, was Mike Rafferty. Several other members of the press were at his heels. There was a stir of excitement in Pete's Coffee Pot. Pete himself hurried up to Rafferty.

"What's up, Mac?" he asked.

Rafferty leered at him. He imagined that he was smiling a friendly and knowing smile. He jerked a thumb toward Avery.

"The synthetic man!" he said.

There was instant excitement in the little restaurant. Customers stared. Erika jumped up from her chair.

"Quick, Avery! We can get out through the kitchen!"

But this time Avery Mallet was having no part of flight. He looked for an instant regretfully at his pork chops. Then he rose slowly from his chair and started across the room toward Rafferty. There was a baleful light in his eyes. As he approached, Rafferty's flashlight went off.

"You started this," said Avery. Then he raised his right foot with all the vigor of a punter kicking out from behind his own goal line. The camera ascended, smacked against the ceiling, and clattered to the floor. Then Avery started a haymaker from the outfield. Rafferty took it flatfooted, and sat down very hard on the linoleum.

"How," said Avery Mallet, "do you like that?"

RAFFERTY was not feeling well, anyway. He got laboriously to his feet and pointed a finger at Avery.

"Stand right where you are," said Rafferty. And then Rafferty started a haymaker. Avery stepped back and the impetus of Rafferty's swing carried him down to the linoleum once more. Rafferty looked up at Avery from a reclining position. He shook his head sadly.

"You moved," he accused Avery.

Then people began to close in.

"Quick, Avery, this way!" Erika called.

Avery saw that discretion called for an immediate retreat. He turned and ran toward the kitchen, the sound of pursuing feet in his ears. In the kitchen, the chef, who had just dished up an order, seized a large meat-knife and backed into a not too practical position against the stove. Avery paused in his flight and glanced at the order. It was a steak.

"Is that rare or well done?"

"W-w-well done," the chef stammered.

Avery seized it in a grimy hand and hurried out the back door on Erika's heels. Luck was with them and Erika had already hailed a taxi as he reached the pavement.

"Quick! Get away from here as quickly as possible," Erika said to the driver. "I'll give you an address to go to, later."

Avery leaned back against the upholstery with a sigh as the cab pulled away from the curb. He took a large bite out of the steak which he was clutching firmly in his right hand.

Erika looked out through the back window of the cab. "I'm afraid they've picked up a taxi of their own," she said. "They're following us. We've got to think of some quiet hotel where we can get you in."

Avery took another bite out of the steak and swallowed hard. He was looking down at the slightly grayish knuckles of his right hand with a sort of wonderment.

"Boy," he said softly, "did you see that . . . ah . . . sock? He fell right down on the floor, Erika."

Erika was still thinking about hotels. "If the driver can shake off that other cab, Avery, he may know some place we can go. I'll ask him."

"Wait!" said Avery, as she leaned for-

ward. "There is something I'd like to ask you, Erika. The . . . ah . . . editor of the *Globe,* who started all this . . ."

"Zimmerman?"

"Yes," said Avery. "Is he a . . . ah . . . a large man, Erika?"

Erika looked puzzled. "Why, he's a sort of medium man, Avery. He . . . What are you getting at?"

Avery was still looking at his bruised knuckles. "I think I'd like to have a little . . . ah . . . conversation with Mr. Zimmerman," he said. He spoke to the driver. "Take us to the office of the *Daily Globe.*"

•

ZIMMERMAN looked up from his desk. There was a sudden startled expression in his eyes as he saw Erika and Avery.

"Ah, Miss Landis," he said, "and Mr. Mallet. Well, well, well." It was a rather feeble attempt at joviality. "I've been hoping you'd turn up."

"No kidding!" said Avery. Erika stared at her young man in bewilderment. Avery did not sound like Avery at all.

"This whole thing," said Zimmerman, "seems to have been a dreadful mistake. I am in receipt of a flock of telegrams from Chicago, Mallet, testifying to the fact that you are not . . . well, synthetic . . . at all. Now, naturally, you have a grievance—"

"Who, me?" said Avery blandly.

"Why, yes, my dear fellow, quite naturally you have a grievance? And the *Globe* means to satisfy you. The *Globe* means to withdraw its story that you are the synthetic man."

"The *Globe,*" said Avery, "is very magnanimous. But the *Globe* needn't bother."

"Now, now, Mallet, no hard feeling," said Zimmerman. "Lawsuits aren't going to do any of us any good. The *Globe* is going to make everything all right. The *Globe* is prepared to pay you, Mallet, twenty-five thousand dollars . . . think of it, twenty-five thousand dollars . . . for your exclusive signed story of your adventures during the last three days. That ought to act as a salve for any hurt feelings, eh, Mallet? Ha! Ha!" Zimmerman's laughter sounded a little hollow.

"What would I do with money?" said Avery. It was at that moment that Avery locked the door of Zimmerman's office from the inside and put the key in his pocket. "You see," said Avery, "the truth is that I *am* the synthetic man!"

Zimmerman's jaw dropped open as Avery approached the desk. Avery reached down and took hold of the wires that connected with the buzzers which were close to Zimmerman's reach. He pulled them out by the roots.

Zimmerman started to rise. "Now, look here, Mallet, you can't get away with—"

"No?" said Avery softly. He reached forward and took hold of Zimmerman's eyeshade and gave it a sharp yank so that it came down around Zimmerman's throat like a necktie.

"Now, Mallet!" Zimmerman cried.

"I am the synthetic man," said Avery, in a sepulchral voice. "I have no control over my actions." Avery swung the second punch of his lifetime and it caught Zimmerman squarely on the button. The editor and his swivel chair went over backwards in a heap. Avery looked gravely at Erika.

"I am the synthetic man," he said. "Have you any orders to give?"

Erika's face was equally grave. "I am not very fond of the pictures Mr. Zimmerman has on his wall," said Erika.

"I am the synthetic man," said Avery, "and I am not supposed to know about these things, but I, too, find them an offense against good taste."

HE TOOK down the nearest picture from its hook on the wall and smashed it over his knee. Then he proceeded calmly to take down all the rest of the pictures and treat them in the same fashion. They made a lovely pile in the middle of the rug.

"Do you suggest a bonfire?" said Avery.

"I think not," said Erika solemnly. "We would endanger other lives besides Mr. Zimmerman's." Erika seemed to have caught the complete spirit of the affair. "But I do think," she said, "that Mr. Zimmerman would look very handsome if the wastebasket were turned upside down on his head."

"I am the synthetic man!" said Avery. "I obey orders." He turned the wastebasket upside down on Zimmerman's head. Zimmerman made strange muffled and unintelligible sounds.

"I am not supposed to know about these things," said Avery, "but it seems to me that it would be fun if all Mr. Zimmerman's papers and the contents of his desk drawers were to be emptied out the window."

"You have to consider the innocent passersby," said Erika. "No pastepots or inkwells!"

"It seems a pity," said Avery, "but I suppose you're right." He took all the papers from the top of Zimmerman's desk and all papers from his desk drawers and threw them out the window. "It's too bad," said Avery, "that Lindbergh isn't passing." He looked at Erika. "Do you think we've done twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of damage?" he asked.

"No!" said Erika.

"Then I think the time has come," said Avery, "for us to take our leave." He unlocked the door and he and Erika went out. Then he locked the door from the other side and tossed the key casually out the nearest window.

Neither one of them spoke until they had descended in the elevator and reached the lobby of the *Globe* building.

Then Avery said, a gleam in his eye, "Do you know where that Porter lives?"

"No," said Erika. "We should have asked Zimmerman."

Avery shook his head sadly. "It seems a pity to pass him by," he said. "Come on!"

"Where are you going?" said Erika.

"To see the Mayor," said Avery grimly.

Erika stopped dead. "Avery! Fun is fun, but . . . I mean . . . well, you can't go beating up the Mayor of New York!"

Avery looked at her gravely. "Don't," he said surprisingly, "be a sap. The Mayor marries people."

"Avery!"

"I am no longer the synthetic man," said Avery Mallet. "There is an experience which I have not had since I was twelve years old which I am very anxious to renew because I never felt less synthetic in my life."

Erika looked at him for an instant and then she seized him by the hand. "Hurry," she said. "We can get a taxi outside."

"That," said Avery Mallet, "is too long to wait."

And Avery Mallet then and there renewed an experience which he had not had since he was twelve years old.

The Captain's Cup

Translated by
GEORGES SURDEZ
from the French of
ALEXANDER
t'SERSTEVENS

Hesitantly, we clambered aboard

"It's always like that," the mate said. "There's something stupid—and funny—about most horrible stories, and this is as horrible as anything you'll ever hear . . ."

"WHAT the hell's wrong with them?" the captain growled without lowering his binoculars.

The second mate, Godfrey, laughed. "They're probably all below, taking a beauty nap." And nodded at the black hull of the freighter dead across our course.

Although we had been steadily nearing her for the past twenty minutes she had remained immobile. There she lay in the open sea off the Moroccan coast, her position roughly 35°N 13°W. She had seemed to be headed for Porto-Santo des Maderes when we had first sighted her at ten that morning.

We had thought that we would pass far astern of her, but as we drew nearer and nearer, we saw not a ripple at her bow, no trace of a wake at her stern, no smoke rising from her stack.

"Engine trouble most likely," decided the Old Man, and turning to me: "Saunders, tell Desmond to contact them. They'll probably need help."

I found the radio man seated before the set, cigarette smoldering in the corner of his mouth, his usual mystery novel in his hand.

"Blast!" he growled past his cigarette after hearing the captain's orders. "Can't I get a minute to read this book in peace?"

Still grumbling, he cut in his juice and twisted dials. Standing in the doorway, I had an impulse to laugh at him as I saw

the expression on his face as he began working at his panel.

"If they need anything why can't *they* say something?" he muttered.

"Perhaps they haven't seen us?" I offered.

This drew a short bark of a laugh from Desmond. "If they can't see us, they'll never hear us. We're right on top of them, aren't we?"

"Well, try 'em anyhow."

Under Desmond's hand the dots and dashes flowed so rapidly from the key that I was unable to decipher his message.

"There we are," he said. Cutting the current over to another frequency and raised his hands, he pressed the phones firmly to his ears. As the answer seemed slow in coming, I sat down on the battery-case.

"They must be deaf over there," growled the radio-man. Not a sound save the rumbling of our engines, the rustle of water along the side of our ship. A moment later, Desmond rattled out the call once more.

"Well?" It was the second mate. Coming in, he inquired: "What's wrong with them, did they say?"

Desmond having the phones clamped over his ears, I answered for him. "They haven't answered yet, can't seem to raise 'em."

Desmond confirmed this a moment later, as he removed the phones from his ears.

THE second and I went back to the wheel and found the Old Man with the glasses still clamped to his eyes.

"I can't see a soul aboard," he told us. "No one on the bridge or the poop." At that moment the ship swung slowly so that we could read the name on her starboard bow. It was the *Rapid*.

"Some name for that monument," Godfrey said with a laugh. "Get the *Register*, Saunders."

I returned with my copy of Lloyd's and we quickly found her.

"*Rapid*—2,000 tons, fruit ship. Silvers Company, Portsmouth. G. M. A. S. 1932." She was a practically brand new boat.

"G.M.A.S.—give Desmond those call letters and have him call her again," said the captain to the second mate, and, passing the glasses to me: "You look her over, Saunders. Your eyes may be sharper than mine."

Barely a mile from her, the powerful marine-glasses put me almost aboard her, and I could distinctly see every part of the ship. There was no one at the wheel, the bridge was deserted, the decks empty. The anchor was in place, no sign of smoke anywhere, no water spurting from her sides. She was a lovely ship, fresh and sparkling, neat as a new electric refrigerator.

I said that the entire crew must be below decks, merely for the sake of speaking.

"Have you ever seen that in all your time at sea?" said the captain sarcastically. He resumed his inspection through the glasses, muttering to himself: "Unbelievable. Shameful. Disgraceful."

At that moment, Godfrey returned. "No answer," he cried, throwing his arms in a spreading gesture of negation.

"But that's impossible," protested the captain.

"Well, there you are."

"Ring slow ahead!" I swung the handle of the engine-room telegraph, while the captain pulled the siren. Its raucous scream brought the crew boiling up on deck.

"What's up?" asked Romero, the cook, coming out of the galley.

We approached the *Rapid* slowly, sending out her call repeatedly, blowing ear-splitting screams on the siren. But as we drew nearer at half-speed over the glassy sea, no sign of life could be discovered aboard the ship.

"They must all be drunk as lords," remarked the captain.

"Or they've abandoned her," I suggested.

The second mate laughed shortly. "In what?"

True. I looked again and saw that all

her boats were in place, the gangway hoisted and lashed to the rail. We were circling her slowly now, less than a hundred yards away, our siren howling madly —and uselessly, for no one appeared on the deck of the other ship.

"Stop," shouted the captain. Once more I swung the telegraph and we glided slowly to a stop opposite the *Rapid*. All of the crew who were not on duty crowded the rail, staring at the deserted ship silently.

"Put a boat over."

Five of us were chosen to go to the other ship—Godfrey, Hansen the bosun, two seamen and I.

"It might be a good idea to arm yourselves," suggested the captain.

The second and I went to our cabins, slipped pistols into our pockets and returned to the deck. Hansen was waiting, with a grappling-iron and a rope ladder. They all stood around the boat as we swung it overside, even the Old Man.

"If there's no one aboard," he said softly, "let me know immediately."

Catching the hopeful gleam in his eye, I whispered to him: "Swell piece of salvage—" for this would really be one of the biggest prizes ever to fall across a captain's path.

But he did not seem to hear me, and gazed steadily at the other ship. "Well, get moving!" he snapped finally, and we swarmed into the small boat. As we slid down the side of the ship he leaned over the rail and said in parting: "Don't forget. Let me know right away!"

ROWING across that calm, extraordinarily smooth sea, we took little time in reaching the *Rapid*. Soon the high black wall of her hull loomed over us, seemed to encompass us with the silence of death itself. Not a whisper in that huge hull usually alive with vague noises, even when moored to a pier. In the cool shadow of that soundless ship, I felt that same vague terror that had gripped me on my first trip into a tropical forest.

Suddenly, one of the sailors pounded heavily against the hull with his oar, making a terrific clamor in that quiet setting. But when the echoes within that still hull died, there came no answer whatsoever. From our bridge, someone called out that no one had appeared on the decks. We slowly rowed around her, alternately pounding her metal sides, or shouting in unison.

"Well, do we board her?" said Godfrey. I shrugged, looked at the high, smooth hull rearing darkly above us. Hardly a scratch on her paint, not a hand-hold on her plates, not the least bit of cordage hanging down her sides.

"I've got the grappling-iron," said the bosun almost bashfully. I told him to go ahead, and he hooked it over the railing on his fourth try.

Hoisting the rope ladder, we made the boat fast to the lowest rung and the five of us went up, Hansen first, Godfrey next, myself third, followed by the two seamen.

When we were all on deck, the bosun cupped his hands trumpet-wise around his mouth and shouted: "Ho! Anybody aboard! Hello!"

Dead silence . . . such as I never want to *hear* again—for I believe that hear is the word. It buzzed in my head, thumped in my temples, oozed coldly into my brain.

I admit it. I was scared. I know positively, for I've been scared before—twice. Once in a hurricane and another time on a sinking ship outside of Caravellas. But never had fear gripped me as it did on the deck of this deserted freighter, before a silence I could not fathom.

"Let's be moving," said the second somewhat hoarsely, and we marched at the head of the others, pistols gripped in our hands.

We found the wheel-house empty, no one in the cabins, whose doors all stood wide open. We shouted down the speaking tubes and heard the faint echo of our voices below decks, then the same, eerie silence.

Going below we found the same absence of life in the engine- and boiler-rooms. The fire boxes and the boilers were barely warm, the coal heaped neatly in the

bunkers, the slice-bars and shovels hung from their hooks.

Everything on board seemed in perfect order, no sign of catastrophe, no indication of the confusion caused by a hasty abandonment. No, everything on board was in its customary place, beds well made, clothes hung in the closets, places set in the mess hall.

We looked at each other silently, dumbstruck. Finally Godfrey spoke, his voice unconsciously hushed: "What do you think this means?"

The others shook their heads, not speaking and as I looked at them I realized they were all as scared as I.

•

NO USE going into detail as to how we finally put half our crew aboard the *Rapid*.

They went grudgingly.

Godfrey was in command, and with a promise of a share in the prize money, we fell to and got her under way. After all, we simply had to light her fires and wait for steam to generate. The engines were intact, nothing seemed out of place, and the two ships steamed for Cadiz, the nearest port.

It could hardly be called a rest cure, for there were but fifteen of us to handle the work of twice that number. No attempt was made to assign watches, no one could leave his post. I had full charge of the bridge, for the second mate poked into every corner of the ship, trying to solve the mystery that filled us all with uneasiness approaching sheer terror.

He had told us to disturb nothing until he had concluded his investigation, and aside from what we necessarily had to move to carry out our duties, we followed his orders.

He took possession of all the keys, even the one for the galley, leaving us only tinned foods that he had taken out of the cabin stores. He inspected the officers' cabins first, then went over the ship from stem to stern, stopping occasionally to make notes or add a line to a sketch he was tracing.

We could get nothing out of him, but I learned from the steward that he had seen the second mate pick up a revolver by the opening of the spardeck rail and disappear in the captain's cabin for a half-hour. Later, I saw him go forward and down towards the stokers' and oilers' quarters, emerging shortly afterwards with an armful of clothes which he examined piece by piece and immediately after that, as the helmsman pointed out, he had turned deathly pale. Seeing him abandon the heap of clothes on the deck and go up to the spardeck, I stepped to the end of the bridge and watched him.

He was squatting on his heels, gazing at a rope ladder heaped on the deck. Then he rose, hooked his foot in one of the rungs and tugged strongly toward the opening of the rail, without budging the ladder in the least. It was then he looked up and saw me.

"What are you doing now?" I called out.

He simply shook his head at me like a man in a daze.

He didn't answer, but turned and disappeared into the saloon, and as he half-lifted his hand for a moment, I saw that it trembled.

A few moments later he joined me on the bridge, taking a huge gulp from a half-empty whiskey bottle he was carrying. No doubt the drink helped steady him, for he said in a voice that was almost calm: "I know just what's happened."

"You what?" I stammered. "What was—"

"I'll tell you, but not here," he said quietly. "Come on into the chart-room." He stumbled a little as he started away.

I FOLLOWED him, and he bolted the door after us. I looked at him anxiously, waiting for him to begin. Without speaking, he handed me the bottle, then: "Take a good swig of that," he advised, "you'll need it before I'm finished."

I took the bottle and looked at him dumbly, without the least desire to drink.

"Sit down," he went on. "You won't be able to stand all the way through this. And remember, my friend, I'm sober. Yes, I took a good deal out of the bottle to steady my nerves, but it takes more than this to get me tight—

"I'm telling you this because the story is as stupid as it is horrible, and you're liable to think my brain's slipped a cog. But it's always, yes, always like that. There's something funny in the most horrible stories imagined, and this is as horrible as anything you'll ever hear."

Stopping, he looked at me intently, and I said impatiently: "Get on with it, man, for God's sake."

"Sorry." He shook his head. "That was just a preparation for what I have to tell you. Of course, I may be wrong and there may be a simpler, saner answer to all this, and if you can think of another explanation with the facts I'm going to give you, go ahead. I'm willing to change my mind. You know, I haven't much of an imagination. All that I'm going to tell you just worked itself out from what I found aboard."

I looked at him and some of the awfulness that was in his mind communicated itself to me. My lips felt thick as I said: "So?"

"Well—" he stopped again, and wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "The first thing that put me on the scent was this Swimming Cup I found in the captain's cabin. Silver, with the crest of the City of Portsmouth engraved on it. There's a drawer here in the base, and in it, a paper giving the names of the swimming crew that won the cup. I checked it with the names of this ship's crew and they're the same. You get it? This cup was won in the last championship match at Portsmouth, won by the crew of this ship, led by it's captain."

"But— I don't understand—"

He said:

"You will, you will. I also found this revolver and a rope ladder. The chronometer's missing. That's what laid the foundation for the whole reconstruction of the story. It's horrible!"

He shuddered—took another huge swallow of whiskey and went on—his lips stiffly set:

"It's a broiling hot day, like today or yesterday, for this happened yesterday. There's a heat that scorches the decks and welds an iron band around your skull. Not a breath of wind, and it's just a few minutes 'till lunchtime. The steward has set the table in the mess hall and the crew will eat in about a quarter of an hour—when the captain gets an idea. He tells the first officer and they both laugh.

"A sporting idea—and a crazy one. Remember this—the crew of this ship had won this cup. Well, they're going for a swim before lunch, the whole bunch of them, five hundred yards around the ship. A race . . .

"The ship is stopped and the crew shows up on deck to a man and the announcement is made. A swimming match.

"They all rejoice, the firemen and oilers most of all, for they've been standing under the ventilators trying to get a cool breath of air. In a moment, whooping and yelling, the entire crew dives overboard, stark naked probably. I found their clothes where they'd tossed them on the bunks.

"Naturally, they leave one man on board—the cook, for he has to watch the meal cooking in the galley. He'll give the signal to start, a pistol shot.

"He is given the gun and the chronometer to time the race. A rope ladder is tied to the rail of the spardeck by that opening and he'll let it down to the men when the race is over.

"The whole crew is already overboard and lined up. The cook looks at the chronometer, raises the gun and fires. The race is on!"

GODFREY stopped, took a revolver from his pocket, the same the steward had seen him pick up. Opening the

cylinder he showed me five fresh cartridges, one empty shell.

"The swimmers are cutting through the water," the second mate went on. "They have to go around the boat once, twice, maybe more. The cook watches them for a while, then remembers his meal in the galley. He puts the gun on the deck where I found it and returns to his stove. He still has the chronometer with him, looks at it from time to time—the end of the match is near and he runs out of the galley. The rope ladder is piled on the spardeck by the opening in the rail, ready to be let down. In his eagerness the cook tangles his foot in a rung—and falls overboard."

He stopped—and we looked at each other, seeing the same lividity in each other's faces.

"Imagine!" The second mate's voice was hoarse. "Naturally, they all laugh at first, even the cook, for he's as good a swimmer as any of the other members of the crew. He still hangs onto the chronometer and the captain bawls hell out of him for being clumsy."

Godfrey's voice grew hoarser, and his eyes distended.

He went on:

"Suddenly a howl goes up from one of the men. He's suddenly realized their predicament. The others look up, and the black, vertical hull of the vessel rises smoothly from the water and the ladder—is on deck. They can't get back!

"They know they're trapped . . .

"Then mad panic. Hands clawing wildly at the iron plates, nails ripping against the metal—bloody fingers clutching for a crevice, a seam, anything. They swim hopelessly around the ship searching—

"But there is nothing—not a chain, not a piece of cordage that will get them back to the deck. One of them painfully climbs the rudder, falls back just before he reaches the overhang of the stern.

"For hours they struggle—against the sea, one another, against death itself, hoping for a ship to come in sight. But night falls and the sea is empty and, worn out, they finally sink, one by one . . ."

I felt that I was ready to break down and shouted madly, "Shut up! For God's sake let's go back, at once. Maybe . . ."

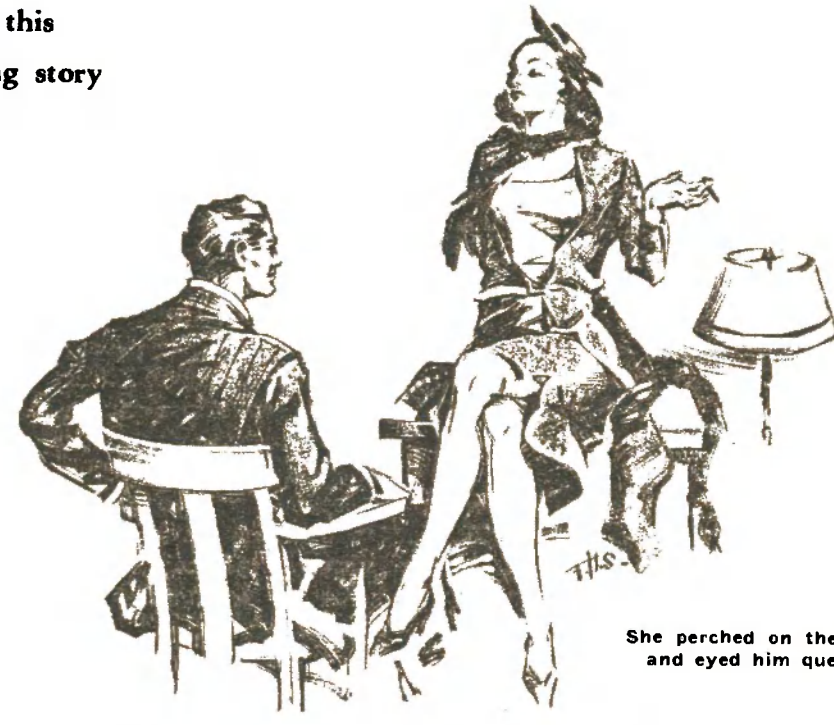
Godfrey shrugged hopelessly. "I thought of that, but what's the use? Even if the bodies have come to the surface, all we can do is tie a piece of iron to their feet and drop them overside again."

A terrible coldness oozed through my veins, and my teeth rattled as sweat started over my whole body.

"Better have a drink," said the second mate in a queer voice.

Never having heard his voice with just that tone in it, I looked up at him, startled. He was holding the bottle out to me almost pleadingly, and his face contorted horribly as two huge tears welled from his eyes and ran down his cheeks.

Begin this exciting story now



She perched on the desk and eyed him queerly

It's Hard to Die

By WALTER RIPPERGER

WHEN Arthur Squire dies of a gunshot wound, his brother Bill suppresses one bit of evidence: a note saying that Arthur had killed himself because he had juggled securities entrusted to the firm, principally those of the two-hundred-thousand dollar Dale Fund, trading them in for worthless stocks supplied by one Max Wax. Bill has no way of knowing that the note was forged by Gil Gleason, an escaped convict working as the Squires' clerk, but in reality taking orders from Max Wax; nor that the missing securities were stolen by Gleason for Wax.

Bill, however, goes to Wax in an effort to collect on his brother's insurance policy—enough to restore at least the Dale Fund in its entirety. Max reminds him that insurance firms do not pay out on suicides occurring before two years after the date of the policy.

"Just in case," he adds, "you're thinking of pulling something funny yourself—remember you've got six months to go on your policy, too."

"There are other ways a man can die," Bill says grimly.

So Max sets one of his men, Butch McGuinness, to trail Bill Squire and keep him alive.

THERE are three women involved in the affair: Gloria Dale, whom Bill had persuaded to entrust the Dale Fund to the Squire firm; Miss Smathers, Arthur's secretary, who has loved Arthur, silently, for years; and Carmen Gomez, daughter of Pearsonville's leading citizen, with whom Arthur had been infatuated. While Bill is reassuring Gloria that neither she nor her father will suffer any loss because of the Squire Company's debacle, he delegates Miss Smathers to break the news to the Gomez girl. Facing her rival and ignorant that it is Bill, not Arthur, that Carmen Gomez wants, Miss Smathers undergoes a hysterical collapse and has to be removed to the hospital.

That night the forger Gleason does his last job for Max Wax—endorsing for sale a batch of the Dale securities in Jeremiah Dale's signature. Then, apprehensive that Gleason may yet spill the apple cart, Wax

This story began in last week's Argosy

calmly bashes him over the head with a paper weight and drops the body out the twelfth-story window of his office. Summoning the police, Max tells them the death was suicide and glibly explains Gleason's presence in his office.

Captain Beak Toll, who is also investigating Arthur Squire's death, frowns, and says: "Another suicide. Well, that's the end of one case . . . and the beginning of another."

Knowing that Toll had previously guessed that Gleason was an ex-con, Wax is worried about Toll's enigmatic manner. Nothing can have gone wrong—nothing. And yet Toll plainly is suspicious. Why? Where was the slip? What mistake had Gleason made in the Squire business?

CHAPTER VI

HOLDUP

BILL SQUIRE didn't go to the office the next day. He couldn't bring himself to, especially since he knew that nothing very vital waited on him there. Gleason and his clerk could take care of anything that came up. Even Miss Smathers could attend to most things.

Bill Squire didn't know that there was no Gleason and that there was no Miss Smathers either. Emily Smathers had been taken to a sanitarium, suffering from a severe mental shock. No one seemed to know, not even her family, what had happened to her.

Bill Squire fixed his own breakfast in the little kitchenette. After he had finished he went out and bought a paper and spent part of the morning reading it. Geoffrey Miles of the *Chronicle* had handled his brother's obituary with consideration; he had made quite a hero out of Arthur, dwelling on the fact that Arthur Squire, as far as the *Chronicle* could ascertain, had never let anyone know or complained of the serious ailment that had finally led Arthur to take his life. There wasn't even a hint of possible financial difficulties in the Squire firm.

Bill Squire put down the paper. He wished he didn't feel so damnably cold inside, so empty; he wished that he saw even a glimmer of hope, but there wasn't any—certainly none that would enable him to recoup and make good the losses which Gloria Dale's family had sustained through his firm. He poured himself a drink of whisky and downed it at one gulp, and still felt cold.

The telephone rang. At first he didn't recognize the voice of Carmen Gomez telling him that she had heard the news about Arthur. She hoped that she'd see Bill Squire soon, would like him to come out to Bellaire Heights for dinner, perhaps stay a few days. Mechanically, Bill Squire said:

"No—no thanks," and, "thanks very much for calling," and hung up.

He thought of telephoning Gloria Dale but he couldn't bring himself to do that, and he hoped she wouldn't telephone him. What could he tell her, what was there to talk about? He had done a hundred percent job of ruining the Dale family and that was that.

Right after lunch, Carmen Gomez telephoned again. She had a wonderful idea. Bill Squire needed to get away from it all. There was that palatial yacht of her father's. It was his for as long as he wanted it. She'd go with him and they could read and talk and forget what had happened to poor Arthur. Bill Squire, scowling into the mouthpiece, said:

"You're very kind. Thanks . . . but I guess I won't. There's some—there are a lot of things that I've got to do."

He slammed the handset down. He was rude and he knew it, but he couldn't help it.

Funny, he reflected, that Carmen didn't seem much upset about Arthur's death. A few minutes later he took the telephone off its cradle and left it. He didn't want any more calls. For a little while he could hear a patient operator faintly asking what number he wanted, then the phone went dead.

HE SPENT the rest of the afternoon wondering what he was going to do, toying with a thousand schemes, none of which was worth anything. He had a couple of drinks. After the fourth, he saw

everything very clearly—the only way that he could get any real money quickly was to die. He was a little drunk now and realized it but he was coldly aware of the fact that he didn't want to die. He rose uncertainly to his feet and looked in the gilt-framed mirror that hung between the windows. His lean face, now haggard, stared back at him.

"What's a little dying, Bill?" he said to himself in the mirror. "You're no good anyhow. You can't let Gloria down. Even if she'd marry you now, Bill, what kind of a life would that be? Could you make enough to support the two of you?" He tried to look determined but the reflection in the mirror showed him only grim bitterness. "You know damn well you couldn't, Bill Squire," he said dully, "and you certainly couldn't make enough to take care of her family, nor the doctors they need and the car and a chauffeur and all that. What's a little dying, Bill?"

The figure in the mirror shook its head, and momentarily it startled Bill Squire. It seemed a separate entity. For a fraction of a second he was unaware that it was only his own reflection, that it was he who was shaking his head because he didn't really want to die.

He went back to his armchair and fell asleep. It was after nine when he woke up and his throat felt dry and he was still cold inside, colder than ever, so he finished the last of the whisky.

Then he went out and walked along Broadway, totally unconscious of the man who was shadowing him. He wasn't paying attention to anything, when suddenly he became aware of a commotion about a block ahead. A woman shrieked; men were running in every direction for cover. Far in the distance he could hear the wailing sound of a police car siren.

Instinctively Bill Squire ran toward the scene of excitement, then he stopped short and ducked into a hallway for shelter, just as most of those who had been about had done. There was a dark sedan parked halfway up the block. A man was at the wheel, the engine was running, and the man was leaning out of the car bent over the wheel. In his hand the man held a wicked-looking long-barreled gun that he kept moving up and down the street. But that wasn't all. Across the way on the steps of Denningham's Jewelry Store stood two men, a little man with a bag in his left hand, and a snub-nosed automatic in his right. Next to him stood a second man who, at first glance in the light of the street lamp, gave Bill Squire the uncanny feeling that he was a figure made of stone—rigid, immovable. He wore no hat and under the dirty red close-cropped hair there was a face of chalk-white clay. There seemed to be no color to the rigid eyes; the mouth was a thin, bluish line. In the crook of his arm he held a machine gun.

The siren of the police car sounded nearer. Someone crowded into the doorway beside Bill Squire. He didn't notice who it was, and even if he had he wouldn't, in the darkness, have recognized Butch McGuinness.

"It's Finger Gannon!" the man beside Bill Squire whispered in an awed voice.

Bill Squire didn't have to be told which of the two men was meant. It could only be that white-faced man with the frozen eyes, holding the machine gun—Finger Gannon, the most cold-blooded, ruthless killer that had ever looted a Pearsonville bank.

Now, at last, Finger Gannon moved. He made a short, jerky motion with his head and his companion with the loot in the bag made a dash for the car. He climbed in, and while the man at the wheel covered one side of the car, he covered the other, Finger Gannon, still on the steps, looked up and down the street, moving his head slowly as though it were some mechanical thing operated by clockwork.

The police car came racing down the street. Finger Gannon brought it to a sharp stop with a hail of bullets from his gun. The police car slewed around sideways. The driver and Beak Toll climbed out and ducked down behind the car. Bullets came flying from the policemen's

service guns, but they were not effective at that distance, and anyhow Gannon gave them little chance to take aim. As he walked slowly across the street toward the black sedan, he kept spraying lead from his gun.

Bill Squire watched. For some reason he felt his pulses throbbing madly.

PEOPLE were huddled in doorways, behind ashcans, in every imaginable place of concealment. They were all afraid . . . all of them, afraid. And then something snapped in Bill Squire's brain.

He wasn't afraid, he was the one man in that whole street who wasn't afraid!

It didn't matter in the least whether or not he was killed. In fact it would be fine if he was. There'd be that money that Max Wax would have to pay Gloria Dale and everything would be all right and his own troubles would be over. Bill Squire laughed out loud.

By now Gannon had reached the sedan. His foot was on the runningboard, his gun was blazing away, directed at the tires of the police car. Now he had cut two of them into ribbons. Bill Squire laughed again and started to run toward Finger Gannon.

Someone behind him let out a startled cry, but he paid no attention and kept going. Not even the sound of Butch McGuinness's pounding footsteps behind, made any impression on him.

McGuinness was in a tight spot. He thought fast. Finger Gannon's back was toward Squire but if the killer turned and saw him, he'd mow him down on the spot. Butch didn't like the idea of stopping a slug himself, but what could he do? Even as he ran he could visualize what Max Wax would do to him if anything happened to this nut he had been told to guard. To be sure, Butch felt safe enough for the moment, shielded by Bill Squire in front of him, but how was he going to stop the fool?

Squire was within twenty feet of Finger Gannon, when the man at the wheel of the sedan fired. Something hot burned Bill Squire's left arm. He kept on running for a few steps more—then he went down. Butch McGuinness had thrown him with a flying tackle about the knees.

Finger Gannon turned. The man at the wheel was on the point of emptying his gun into the two bodies rolling on the ground, when a sharp order from Finger Gannon led him to toss his gun on the seat beside him and throw the car into gear. It pulled away the instant that Finger Gannon leaped inside.

Butch McGuinness helped Bill Squire to his feet. Butch was scowling. The full magnitude of the risk he had run in saving this dope came to him only now. He started to give expression to his feelings. A small group was gathering about them wanting to know if Bill Squire was hurt. There was blood trickling down on the inside of Bill Squire's sleeve. He remained standing in the shadows and stuffed his left hand into his pocket.

"I'm all right," he said shortly.

Somebody in the little crowd muttered, "Boy, that feller's got guts." Somebody else had a different opinion. "Nothing but a lunatic."

Beak Toll and his man went tearing by in a borrowed car, hoping to overtake Finger Gannon. The man who had first spoken said to Bill Squire:

"If it hadn't been for your friend here, son, you'd have been a goner."

Bill Squire turned and looked at his "friend." Butch had a foolish, abashed expression on his face. The role of being a hero was something new to Butch. Bill Squire was white and shaken.

It had taken him only a split-second to make up his mind to embrace death. He had literally dashed toward his own doom and it hadn't been hard at all because he hadn't had time to think about it. And it had all been spoiled by this ex-pug he had met in Max Wax's office, this interfering bruiser who chanced to be there and wanted to play the hero.

There'd never be another opportunity like that and even if there was, he, Bill Squire, would never again have the courage

to try it—or would he? He had read of a man being condemned to die in the electric chair and being reprieved at the very last moment only to be condemned again at a later period. How had the man stood it without going mad? The mere thought that he wasn't dead when he had fully expected to be was enough to set Bill Squire's whole body trembling. It made him physically ill. The insane wish that Finger Gannon might come back this minute flashed through Bill Squire's mind. He'd like to try it again *now*. In his present state of mind, he thought he could do it.

The crowd had slowly melted away. Bill Squire eyed Butch, then he said:

"Come on."

THEY walked for a few blocks in silence. When they came to a badly lighted side street, Bill Squire turned. Butch McGuinness didn't quite get the idea, but maybe there was some dive in that street of which Butch hadn't heard. He followed without protest.

In the middle of the block Bill Squire came to a stop, facing Butch. He took his left hand out of his pocket and flexed his arm; it hurt like the devil but he could move it freely enough. Just a flesh wound, he guessed, gloomly. . . .

Without warning, Bill Squire struck Butch squarely in the mouth with his right fist.

Butch reeled back, his expression a mixture of astonishment and almost comical indignation.

"What's the idea?" Butch said. What kind of a way was that for a guy to behave after you'd saved his life?

"Have you got a gun?" Bill Squire asked.

"Sure I have," Butch growled. Instinctively he reached inside his coat toward the shoulder holster.

"You'd better get it out," Bill Squire said, "because I'm going to knock the insides out of you." He took two quick strides and chopped Butch across the cheek.

Butch fell away, his clumsy brain vainly trying to grapple with the situation. He had his orders from Max Wax. He was to look out for this guy, was to see that nothing happened to him. On the other hand, he wasn't going to let himself get knocked silly for anybody. Butch drew his gun and pointed it at Bill. He had, of course, no intention of shooting him—he only wanted to scare him.

Bill Squire smiled. He walked right up to the gun and slapped Butch twice across the face. Butch let out a roar of rage. For the fraction of a second he was on the point of forgetting himself, but he remembered Max Wax in time. He made a harmless punching gesture with his left hand, only trying to ward Bill off. Bill brushed the hand aside and hit Butch twice more, rocking Butch's head from side to side.

"What's the idea?" Butch growled.

"Shoot, curse you, shoot," Bill Squire said through clenched teeth.

Butch gaped at him. Bill Squire hit him again and stood there with his arms at his side, waiting for the gun in Butch's hand to speak.

Nothing happened. Butch started to put the gun back. Bill Squire didn't want that. He leaped savagely at the big bruiser, raining blows right and left. Ordinarily, despite the fact that Bill Squire was tall and strong, he would have been no match for Butch in a brawl. But Butch was so completely bewildered that he was helpless. And before he could make up his mind, he went down.

Bill Squire frowned down at him, then walked away. At the corner of Broadway, a policeman who looked him over suspiciously directed him to a doctor. It turned out to be only a flesh wound. The bullet had gone through cleanly. The doctor asked:

"How did this happen?"

Bill Squire said nothing. He was thinking. He could do it, he could do it any time. He wasn't afraid to die. Just a short while ago he had tried it again and done his utmost to provoke it. He hadn't

flinched, had experienced not the slightest feeling of dread. Bill Squire gave an inward sigh of relief. He no longer felt helpless, hemmed in.

"What's the mater?" the doctor asked.

Bill Squire was smiling wryly. He shook his head without answering. It was funny, he thought, how hard it was to get killed if you didn't mind getting killed.

MEANWHILE, Max Wax ensconced in an armchair, was listening to the radio. The telephone on the library table rang. Max Wax lumbered to his feet, picked it up and said, "Hello."

"Listen, boss," Butch McGuinness's voice came back to him, "you was right. This screwball you set me to tailing, his brains is all addled. He tried to get himself killed twice tonight." In an injured tone Butch McGuinness went on to describe what had happened, placing particular emphasis on the punishment he had had to absorb at the hands of Bill Squire because of his, Butch McGuinness's, loyalty to Max Wax. "I've got to have help. This is too much of a job for one man. After I took the count and looked around for him, he was gone," Butch concluded.

"All right, all right," Max Wax said testily. "See if you can pick him up again and stick to him, and I'll find some other way of handling this."

He hung up, went and turned off the radio. For a long time he sat lost in thought. This was bad business. Bill Squire was a difficult proposition and it wouldn't do to have a third "suicide." Beak Toll already seemed to have his suspicions about the first two. Beak Toll was a nuisance. There was no room for an honest guy like that in a well-oiled, smoothly running political machine.

Max Wax had brought that up before down at the City Hall, but unfortunately Captain Toll knew too much and whereas he had a good deal on the boys that ran the city, nobody had anything on him. The worst of it was Max Wax couldn't spend the rest of his life protecting Bill Squire. As a matter of fact in six months or so the guy could commit suicide and he, Max Wax, would have to pay. It was terrible, terrible.

Suddenly Max Wax straightened in his chair. Why hadn't he thought of that before? It was a wonderful idea, and Heinemann, with a little help, ought to be able to manage it. Max Wax went back to the telephone. He got the number of City Hall.

"Max Wax speaking," he said. "I want to talk to District Attorney Heinemann." While he waited he said to himself, "With a little coöperation and the right kind of a judge, Bill Squire should be in jail for six years at least. They don't give you much chance in a jail to get yourself killed."

CHAPTER VII

"I COME HIGH"

BILL SQUIRE went home. He unlocked his door, pushed it open, stood still. A girl was sitting in a chair beside the little leather-covered desk in the middle of the room. Bill Squire closed the door. The girl turned so that he could see who it was. Carmen Gomez smiled.

"How did you get in here?" Bill Squire asked.

"I told the superintendent who I was," she said, "and he let me in."

Bill Squire could believe it. Her father's wealth was a legend in Pearsonville. Even without that, the superintendent would probably have let her in. What with her proprietary air and her obviously costly outfit, she wouldn't have had much trouble. She wore a short dark green skirt with a jacket to match, over a lemon-colored waist, open at the throat. A twin scarf of silver fox hung about her shoulders down to her knees. The little hat perched far back on her head was the sort of a hat which, on anyone else, would look as though it had come off the pile for a dollar and a half, but on her it looked as though it had cost forty or fifty, which it had. The hat did nothing for that lovely face

of hers, except give one the impression that she had chosen it deliberately for that very reason.

Bill Squire stood there gazing at her stupidly. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"I wasn't going to wait much longer," she told him. Smoke drifted gently upward from the cigarette in her hand. Now she dropped it in the ashtray without putting it out.

Bill Squire sat down in the chair at his desk, facing her.

"Was there anything special you wanted to see me about?"

A veiled look came into her dark eyes, her vivid scarlet mouth widened into a smile. "I thought perhaps you needed a little sympathy, although father thought—" She paused, scrutinizing him more closely.

"What did your father think?" Bill Squire demanded. For some reason he felt suddenly alert, on guard.

Carmen got up. She walked around the room, looking at this and that, then she came back and perched herself on top of the desk in front of Bill Squire. She crossed her long, slim legs carelessly, then she put both hands in back of her making a proud arch of her magnificent body.

Bill Squire watching her, understood for the first time what his brother had seen in her. She had a strange exotic glamor that was all her own. Arthur had always loved everything that was different. With his peculiarly sophisticated mind, she would have a fascination for him that she couldn't have for the ordinary man. That sleepy, physical appeal that was plainly hers must have proved extremely provocative to Arthur. That, coupled with the dash and the added assurance which her unlimited wealth gave her, might well have been irresistible to a man of Arthur's temperament. Yet for him, Bill Squire, she had no appeal whatsoever; she left him completely cold, all but repelled him.

She straightened up, her languorous eyes flamed up for an instant, then softened into an expression of veiled triumph.

"Father saw it in the paper," she said, "I mean about Arthur's committing suicide. Father's a business man. He didn't believe a word of that business about Arthur's ill health. 'I guess the Squire boys are in trouble,' father said. 'They're probably busted. Maybe it's worse. Maybe some of the customers' money is gone.'"

Bill stiffened in his chair; his hot, tense eyes were stormy; then he slumped back. After all, what her father had said was perfectly correct.

"Is that true?" she asked.

He had a feeling she hoped it was.

"You don't bother much," he said bitterly.

For a moment she appeared not to comprehend.

"Oh, you mean about Arthur. Of course I'm sorry, terribly sorry. I liked him a lot. I was with him a good deal, as you know, but he never—never interested me much. I wasn't really his type. He only thought I was because I was different. I am different," she declared.

She cocked her head a little to one side as though challenging him to look at her and daring him to admit that she wasn't irresistible.

BILL frowned. Carmen troubled him. He still couldn't quite understand why she had come. He shifted restlessly in his chair.

Carmen smiled enigmatically.

What in blazes was she grinning at? If she had any idea—no, that was absurd. What would she see in him.

"Is it true?" Carmen asked softly.

"Is what true?" he snapped. His nerves were getting more edgy by the minute.

"About your business being in bad shape."

"What if it is?"

"That's what I came for," she announced calmly, "to help you out. You know I've got plenty of money."

"What do you want to help me out for?" He made his voice as ungracious as he could.

Carmen Gomez uncrossed her legs. She

put them together as straight as a couple of bayonets. She studied the tips of the narrow pumps that encased her high-arched feet. Then she slid off the desk and stood over Bill Squire. He started to rise, but she asked him not to.

"It's old-fashioned for women to be modest, isn't it?" she said, "I mean about expressing their feelings. If a man loses his head over a girl he tells her so. He tells her that he wants her, that he can't get along without her, and he'll move heaven and hell until he's got her. . . . Why shouldn't it be the other way around sometimes? The man is supposed to woo and win a girl; why can't a woman woo and win a man—if she wants him badly enough?"

Bill Squire glared at her. He couldn't believe what her words implied, that is, if she were referring to him. From her jeweled case, Carmen Gomez took another cigarette, lit it and let the smoke curl upward.

Bill Squire tried to think of an answer and couldn't. In a way this was more bewildering than anything that had happened to him in the last two days. Was she actually trying to tell him that he, Bill Squire, was the man she wanted?

"Sometimes," Carmen said, her voice a little throatier, "a man wants a girl that he couldn't possibly get if he wasn't very rich, so he buys her, convinced that she'll love him in due course. Sometimes that works."

"I don't know what you're driving at," Bill Squire said fretfully. He scowled past her.

"The girl's self-respect isn't damaged. In fact generally she's rather flattered to think she's worth millions to a man. Why can't it work the other way? Why can't a woman, one of the wealthiest women in the world, buy a man, especially when she's sure that she'll make him love her in the end?"

Carmen bent down a litle. The strange perfume she used seemed to sweep over him like a wave, confusing his senses.

"Most women don't know what love is," she whispered. "But I know." She straightened up, half turned away from him and laughed softly.

Bill Squire rose and confronted her. He bored into her eyes with his own brooding ones.

"Are you meaning to tell me that it's me you want, are you talking about me or am I crazy? I feel sort of crazy. A lot's happened to me in a very short space of time. Why would *you* want me? You don't even know me. We've seen each other often but never alone, not more than a half dozen times alone maybe—"

He broke off abruptly. Now that he came to think of it, on those rare occasions when Arthur hadn't been present, it had been she who had arranged it, had contrived it so that the time was inconvenient for Arthur to be there, had managed it somehow.

"Just ten minutes alone with a man would be enough for me to make up my mind." Carmen said, and it was plain that she meant it.

Bill Squire shook his head. There she was calmly offering to buy him as though he were something on the hoof which she wanted in her stable. He experienced briefly a seething inner rage, then s quickly he calmed down. She had never in her life come across anything that her money couldn't buy. Why should she feel differently about a man to whom she had taken a passing fancy?

"Let me get this straight," he demanded harshly. "You want to buy me."

"Put it that way if you like," she said calmly. "I prefer to say that I want you and that I love you, and loving you, that I want to do things for you. Money isn't anything to me unless it brings me what I want."

"I come high," he said even more harshly.

"How high?" she asked lightly.

"Two hundred thousand dollars."

FOR a moment she looked at him, disbelief in her enormous dark eyes. Then she laughed.

"Two hundred thousand dollars, darling? You can have two million! You can have more, much more."

Bill Squire never heard anyone say "darling" just like that, in a lingering, caressing husky tone. It made him hate her more.

"I only want two hundred thousand dollars."

She shrugged.

"Whatever you say," she said.

"And supposing I were to tell you that I want that money for the girl I love, to make up her family's losses in my firm?"

She remained unmoved.

"You're referring to the Dale girl, I suppose, the one you introduced me to one time. The Squire brothers seem to have rather simple tastes in women. In your case, I think it's lack of experience, darling; in Arthur's it was a matter of his taking what came along. The little Smathers girl for instance—"

"Let's leave Arthur out of this."

"I'm sorry."

"And you still want me knowing that I don't really want you, that I'll be just selling myself to square up a debt to a family, to the family of the girl that I really love, that every time I think of her I'll loathe and hate you, that I'll never think of myself as long as I am with you as anything but a piece of property that you bought, when I ought to belong to someone else for nothing?"

She put out her long slim hand and placed it on top of his.

"You're wonderful, darling. I think that's what I love about you. You're so naïve, so simple and direct in your ways and there are so many things that I can teach you."

Bill Squire felt an icy shiver travel up and down his spine. He snatched his hand away, went over to a window and stared out into the night. This was horrible, ghastly, right within his grasp—he needed to say only one word—and there was all the money he required. But he couldn't get it that way, he couldn't. He'd hurt Gloria enough already. That wasn't the way to get the money. There was that other, simpler way. To be sure, Death had passed him by twice that night. But Death wouldn't be defied forever. All he had to do was to tempt him once too often . . .

"I don't want your answer now," Carmen Gomez said softly. She had come up in back of him. "You can let me know when you've made up your mind."

He could feel her soft, warm breath on the back of his neck, he could smell her insidious, overpowering perfume. He held himself stiffly, without turning. She patted him lightly on the shoulder, already a possessive gesture, he thought, and gritted his teeth. When in the end he turned, she was gone.

CHAPTER VIII

FRONT PAGE

BILL SQUIRE spent a restless night. Sometimes he was asleep, sometimes awake. Half asleep he saw himself in expensive motor cars, on board a yacht; he saw himself on the Coast, down South and up North skiing, enjoying winter sports; he saw himself on the Riviera, in the Orient, in every part of the world, with Carmen Gomez by his side—a leisurely life—with no peace. Then came another picture. He was being carried away in a plain wooden coffin and there was no Carmen Gomez. There was just a tall, slim girl with wide blue eyes and ash blonde hair that glinted in the sunlight, walking beside the hearse crying—crying, crying, crying. He groaned and then woke up, his body drenched with sweat.

He got out of bed, and sat by the window until dawn broke. By then he had reached a conclusion. It would hurt Gloria far less to see him dead than to think he had abandoned her for someone else, for someone else's money.

It only remained now to hit upon some simple, infallible way out of this tragic situation. The next time there mustn't be

any slip-up, not like last night. He wasn't afraid to die—he was sure of that now, but he couldn't keep on trying forever and ever, or he'd go mad and they'd lock him up, and he'd go living on for years, and Gloria would never get her money—never.

Right after breakfast Bill Squire took a cab to narrow Barbary Street where the *Chronicle* had its printing plant. Bill Squire looked like a wreck. There were dark circles under his eyes and the lines in his face looked as though they'd been put there by a plough.

Geoffrey Miles was in. He looked at Bill Squire's face and wondered.

"Sit down," he said gently. "I suppose you saw what I said about your brother in the paper. I hope it was all right."

Bill Squire said:

"Yes, it was all right. Thanks—"

He stopped, trying to decide just how to tell Geoffrey Miles what was on his mind; how to tell him so that Miles would help him. He couldn't tell him the truth, couldn't possibly tell him the desperate step on which he had determined.

"You've been running a campaign in your paper, Miles," he said at last, "not only against the grafters and politicians, but against the gangsters and racketeers. Take this fellow Finger Gannon, and his mob. They've stuck up two banks and grabbed half a dozen payrolls all within a couple of months. Last night they broke into a jewelry store. I saw it—I was there. What does that mean to you?"

Geoffrey Miles took off his thick glasses and polished them. He put them back on and said: "What does it mean?"

"It means their hideout isn't far from here," Bill Squire said. "In fact I think I can dig them out."

Miles leaned forward in his creaky old swivel chair.

"If you could—"

"I need your help," Bill Squire broke in. "An article on the front page of the *Chronicle*." He stopped and waited.

"What sort of an article?" Geoffrey Miles said.

For an answer, Bill Squire reached for a pad in front of Geoffrey Miles and a pencil. He began writing; he wrote for a long time. When he was through he pushed the sheets across for the editor of the *Chronicle* to see. Geoffrey Miles read:

William Squire, a well-known broker of this city, has given certain information to the *Chronicle* that leads us to believe that he is acquainted with the hiding place of the gang headed by Finger Gannon who has terrorized our city for months. He stumbled on the information by accident and while he has given us certain details which indicate conclusively that his information is authentic, he refuses to disclose the exact spot where Finger Gannon and his mob are hiding unless the citizens of Pearsonville will raise a fund of twenty-five thousand dollars to be paid over to him if his information proves correct.

Mr. Squire feels that he is entitled to this reward, if for no other reason than the fact that he runs a considerable personal risk. The *Chronicle* will start the ball rolling by subscribing five thousand dollars with the idea that the big business interests and the banks of Pearsonville will stand ready to make up the balance to rid Pearsonville of a ruthless gangster and killer.

It is suggested that a committee be appointed to meet at the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the matter and make the necessary terms with Mr. Squire.

Geoffrey Miles put down the sheets and studied Bill Squire.

"It makes you out a sort of a heel, doesn't it?" he said tentatively.

"What of it?" Bill Squire answered shortly.

"Couldn't you—couldn't you do it without getting a reward?"

"I don't want a reward and I don't want the money. Twenty-five thousand dollars would be no good to me."

Geoffrey Miles stared with his mouth apart.

"Then why do you want me to run this? Why do you make yourself out to be a cheap informer? I don't get it."

"It's intended to smoke out Finger Gannon," Bill Squire said stolidly. "When he

or one of his mob sees that, they'll be after me. They'll find me."

Geoffrey Miles shook his head slowly.

"I can't let you do it," he said. "You're right, they'd be after you. The chances are we'd find your body the next day floating in the river, or perhaps we wouldn't find it. They might plant your feet in a tub of concrete and you'd be at the bottom of the river."

Bill Squire, his eyes stark, said:

"I'll take that chance. I know how to take care of myself."

Miles shook his head again.

"Damn it all, Miles," Bill Squire said, his tone faintly hysterical. "Don't be a fathead. You're not the only public-spirited citizen in this town. I want it cleaned up just as much as you do and I know what I'm doing."

Geoffrey Miles hesitated. He was a real crusader, and Pearsonville, where his father and his grandfather had lived, meant a lot to him. He was sure that Bill Squire was biting off more than he could chew, and yet . . . After a long time, he said:

"All right. I'll run it—on the front page."

"What time will the paper be on the streets?"

"The noon edition will be out in a few hours."

Bill Squire got up preparing to leave.

"That was funny about that bookkeeper of yours, Gleason," Miles said pensively.

"What about Gleason?"

"You mean you don't know, haven't heard?"

"No, I haven't heard," Bill Squire said irritably. Furthermore he didn't really care. He had just finished taking an irrevocable step and here was Miles wanting to chat with him about something in connection with Gleason. "Well, what about Gleason?"

"He killed himself last night," Geoffrey Miles said, "jumped out of a window. We can't get any particulars or anything out of the police. Captain Toll's orders. You wouldn't by chance know any reason for Gleason's killing himself?"

Bill Squire stared at the other, dumbfounded. He hadn't the faintest notion why Gleason should kill himself. He couldn't conceive of any good reason Gleason might have had for committing suicide. In fact when he came to think of it, nobody had a good reason for wanting to be dead . . . except himself.

BILL didn't go back to his office. In a few hours the *Chronicle* would be out and then Finger Gannon would come for him or send some of his men. Bill Squire felt as good as dead already and dead men didn't go to offices. Half-heartedly he wondered why Gleason had killed himself, and gave it up.

Back in his apartment he picked up the telephone and called Gloria Dale. He wanted to see her just once more, wanted to tell her everything that was in his heart. He wasn't going to let her know of course that he had deliberately set out to take the one course that seemed to him the only way out. She must never know that, must go through life convinced that his was an unavoidable tragedy, the result of an impulse he'd had to help Geoffrey Miles clean up Pearsonville. She'd give him credit for something for which he deserved no credit. Dead, he'd bask in a sort of false glory, a man who had given his life to rid his home town of a menace.

He didn't get Gloria on the phone. She was out. He called back twice before noon, without success. Gloria was still out. Then he went to lunch. He didn't feel like eating, but he enjoyed two cocktails and nibbled away at the steak the waiter brought him. When he had finished, he found that the *Chronicle* was out. He bought a copy and went back to his apartment.

The story was right on the first page, just as Geoffrey Miles had promised it would be. It was in boldface type; nobody could miss it. Beak Toll couldn't have missed it if he had read the *Chronicle*, and unquestionably he would have been right over to find out what it all meant. But Beak Toll's force was small and he had his hands full. He usually never looked at a paper until late at night. If he had, per-

haps things might have gone differently.

Bill called Gloria again at two, and once more at half past three, but she hadn't come home. He began to grow restive and nervous when it occurred to him that he might never see her again. It seemed to him now that that was all he asked of life, just to say goodbye to Gloria Dale, without letting her know that is was goodbye.

Late in the afternoon he toyed with the idea of calling up Carmen Gomez to tell her that for once she had lost out, that there was one thing she hadn't been able to buy, but he abandoned the notion. There wasn't any point in doing that. He was tired, very tired, and went into the bedroom and flung himself onto the bed. A few minutes later he was asleep. He must have slept for more than an hour, when the insistent ringing of the doorbell awakened him. He got up quickly, conscious of a mad throbbing at his temples. Had they come for him? Was it Finger Gannon? It was already dark outside. He stumbled around. fumbled for the switch, then went to the door, unlocked it and opened it wide.

"You!"

GLORIA DALE came quickly inside. He had never seen her look so white, so terrified. He shut the door and took hold of both of her hands; they were icy cold. She looked as though she had seen a ghost.

"What is it?"

The look of terror in her eyes changed to one of misery.

"You've got to get away, Bill," she said. "Quick, tonight."

"Why?" he asked, "What's happened?"

"I didn't tell father," she said, "about the money being gone. I really didn't, Bill . . . but somebody else did. Early this morning a man from the district attorney's office came to the house, someone who said that they had had information that the Squire firm was insolvent, and had embezzled their clients' money. It was awful, Bill, terrible.

"At first I though father would have another stroke, but somehow he rallied. He flew into a rage. He wanted you arrested right away. The man from the district attorney's office told father not to worry, that that would be taken care of as soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through. Father wanted to know what I knew about it, if you had told me." She stopped to wipe away the tears that coursed slowly down her cheeks.

Bill Squire put his arm around her and held her close.

"Now don't worry," he said, "don't worry. Nothing's going to happen to me. I didn't take the money."

"I know, I know," she said, "but you don't understand. Something *is* going to happen to you. I can tell, I am sure of it."

He looked at her without comprehending.

"Listen," she went on quickly, "they took me up to the district attorney's office to sign a complaint. The district attorney himself, Heinemann, talked to me. He seemed to think that that was what I wanted. that I wanted to see you thrown into jail, and he kept assuring me not to worry, that he'd take care of you all right. When I told him that I thought that there might be some mistake, that you hadn't stolen anything, that it might have been someone else—I didn't want to mention Arthur—he said that that would be all right. If the money was gone, he'd see to it that you got ten years at least. 'When it comes to throwing people into jail,' Heinemann said, 'I'm the tops.' And then he laughed." Gloria shuddered.

A faraway look came into Bill Squire's eyes.

How had it happened? Who could possibly have given that information to the district attorney's office? Had Gleason done it, and then in remorse killed himself? No, that was nonsense. Then who had done it? Had it been Max Wax? Would he have started an investigation like that which might end up in disclosing the fact that he had tricked Arthur Squire into buying all those worthless securities that had ruined the firm? No, Max Wax couldn't have done it.

And then his arms fell away from Gloria and he stared at her without seeing her. Every vestige of color left his face, his eyes seemed to recede, but they flamed high with anger—Carmen Gomez!

What a fool he had been to tell her that he wanted that money in order to reimburse the Dale family for their losses! She had done it to knock every last prop out from under him. There was nothing left for him now, except to turn to her. Absolutely nothing. He couldn't even wait for Finger Gannon. The killer might not be here tonight, or tomorrow, or the next day. He might bide his time, wait for a suitable moment and in the meantime he, Bill Squire, would be lodged in jail. Nobody would be able to get at him there, and he could visualize the prohibitive bail that would be set for his release. There wasn't a chance in a thousand of his being able to raise it. And in due course he'd be tried and convicted and sent to prison. There was no use telling himself that they couldn't convict him, that if worse came to the worst, he'd just have to tell them about Arthur having taken the securities. He'd have to do it for Gloria's sake, so that he would be free—free to die. That was a funny thing, a man wanting to be free to die.

"What are you saying?" Gloria said, the fear again back in her eyes. He had unconsciously been mumbling the last of his thoughts out loud.

"Nothing—nothing," he said in a distracted way.

NO, there was no use in trying to put the blame where it belonged, on Arthur Squire. In this incredibly corrupt city, they could do anything they wanted to. If they had made up their minds to send him to prison, they'd do it if it took a dozen perjured witnesses. And there'd be money enough to buy all the witnesses they needed, money enough to buy the district attorney, and a judge, if necessary. Carmen Gomez had all the money in the world.

How swiftly, how surely she had struck, and how effectively! He could almost find it in his heart to admire her for her insight, how with one deft stroke she had snatched him away from Death himself, to claim him as her own. There wasn't anything he could do now, except to give in to her.

Gloria was watching him, trying to read the meaning of that stunned expression in his face.

"There's still time, Bill, time for you to get away. I didn't sign the complaint. I said that I wouldn't run the risk without knowing that the money was actually gone, that I wasn't going to lay myself or my family open to a charge of false arrest. Heinemann laughed at that. He said not to worry, there wouldn't be any false arrest."

Slowly the color came back to Bill's face, the stark look went out of his eyes. He took hold of Gloria's hand and drew her over to a chair and pulled up another one for himself, directly beside hers. Then he took hold of her hand again.

"I'd like to tell you something, Gloria," he said very gently. "Forget about this arrest. It won't happen. Nothing's going to happen. Your family's money is going to be all returned, every cent of it. They'll be all right . . . everybody will be all right except you and me, I guess. I've got us into a sort of a mess. In order to get your family out of it, I'm going to have to do something that you won't understand. You'll probably never understand. Don't try. Just always remember—that nobody ever loved anybody more than I love you. I always will. No matter where I am—no matter with whom I am . . ."

"What are you trying to tell me?" she whispered. "I don't understand."

"I've told you all I can, dear. Don't try and make me say any more. I can't say any more. And don't cry. I couldn't stand it if you cried."

Gloria Dale stood up. Her lips quivered. She held herself bravely and not a tear came.

"I won't cry, Bill." Her voice was small, but wonderfully steady. "Is this—is it good-bye?"

He nodded once.

Despite her courage, her best efforts, she shivered.

"Good-bye, Bill."

She kissed him quickly and was out of the room before he could say another word.

He stood there for many seconds, his lifeless eyes fixed on the closed door. Then slowly he turned and went into the kitchenette. He took a fresh bottle of whisky from the cupboard and a glass, and went back into the other room. If there ever was a time for him to get drunk this was it.

Carmen had won after all.

He poured himself a drink, tossed it off neat. A few minutes later he had a second, and after that many more. It wasn't until around ten o'clock that the liquor began to have an effect on him, and then it didn't make him sleepy, only rendered him incoherently alert. There was something he had to do, something he had to do right away and what was it? Hell, he'd thought of it a little while back. He was just going to have one more drink and then do it. What the devil was it? Oh, yes, of course. He was going to call Carmen and tell her that she'd gotten a bargain, that she'd bought herself Bill Squire.

HE WAS all hers now for a mere two hundred thousand. He fumbled through the book and after a while managed to decipher the Gomez number. He gave it to the operator. His speech was high, excited, but not indistinct. When eventually he heard Carmen's voice at the other end, he said:

"It's Bill Squire, darling." He tried to say "darling" with the same inflection that she said it. "It's your fiancé calling. I thought you'd be relieved to know that the price hasn't gone up. It's still two hundred thousand."

Carmen's voice came back to him soft, husky and even.

"You're a little drunk, darling," she said, "but I don't mind. I knew you'd telephone. I knew just what your answer would be."

"Of course you knew," Bill Squire said boisterously. "You're wonderful, you always know, and you always get what you want, don't you?"

She laughed softly. "If I want it badly enough," she said.

"I'll be out tomorrow," he said, "the first thing in the morning. Have a check ready. I'm coming C O. D."

He hung up, shutting off her laughter with its note of triumph.

He reached for the bottle and the glass and then there was a knock on the door. He said:

"Come in."

The two men that entered were small. They walked with lithe, soft steps. They seemed to resemble each other, although actually they didn't look alike, except for the fact that both had pinched, sallow faces, and quick furtive eyes. Their resemblance was due more to the fact that they both wore dark blue suits, tight at the waist, and the way they carried themselves, as though they were forever ready to spring. The one on the left had his hand in his pocket; his pocket bulged. The other carried a short length of rubber hose. The ends had been plugged and the hose was filled with water.

"You Bill Squire?" the one with the hose asked in a flat, disinterested voice.

Bill Squire said:

"Yes, certainly I'm Bill Squire. Will you join me in a drink?"

The man with the hand in his pocket, said:

"Finger Gannon wants to see you."

CHAPTER IX

IN THE HOUSE OF GANNON

BILL SQUIRE blinked. He wished his brain was a little clearer, but he didn't feel nearly as drunk as he had a few minutes ago while talking to Carmen. And thinking of Carmen he felt an irresistible desire to laugh, and gave way to it. The joke was on her. She wouldn't get him after all.

The two men looked at each other, then back at Bill Squire. The one on the

left brought his hand out of his pocket, exhibiting a compact automatic.

"What's the joke?" he snarled, softly.

"Never mind," Bill Squire said. "You're probably like me. You probably don't understand women and so you wouldn't appreciate the joke."

"He's full of booze, Butts," the man with the hose said.

Butts Crimpey eyed Bill Squire. Then suddenly he spun around searched every corner of the room through slitted eyes.

"Go through the joint, Joe," he ordered his companion. "Maybe there's somebody else in this place."

Joe nodded. He shifted the hose from his right to his left hand and took out a gun, then he disappeared into the bedroom. Presently he was back.

"Nobody here, Butts," he declared tersely.

Butts Crimpey relaxed.

"Are you gonna be nice and come along quiet," he asked Bill Squire, "or are we gonna have to work on you?"

Bill Squire was watching him now, trying hard to remember where he had seen the man before. Somehow he seemed familiar.

"Yes, of course I'll come along. I want to meet Finger Gannon. He's a very, very interesting character," Bill Squire said with semi-drunken gravity.

Butts stiffened suspiciously. This was too easy. Perhaps they had been led into a trap. Joe shifted on his feet uneasily.

Bill Squire, still watching Butts in a puzzled way, suddenly said:

"Aren't you the chap who was driving the car last night when you broke into the jewelry store, the one who took a shot at me? You didn't do much damage." He pointed to his left arm. His sleeve concealed the bandage the doctor had applied. "You're a rotten shot. You just scratched me."

Butts Crimpey's eyes widened. He half turned to Joe.

"It's the dope who tried to tackle us last night, the one I plugged and almost missed." There was relief in Butts Crimpey's eyes. After all, they hadn't walked into a trap. It was just that this guy was nuts or else full of hop or something. That's why he was so ready to come along—wanted to *meet* Finger Gannon.

Bill Squire got up, looked around and found his hat.

"I'm ready," he said.

"All right," Joe said, "start. I'll be right behind you. One wrong move and I'll conk you with this," he said waving the hose.

Bill Squire nodded and with the two men behind him, he led the way out and down the one flight of stairs to the ground floor. The sleepy elevator man on a bench saw nothing strange in Bill Squire's walking out between the two short men. The gun in Butts' hand was out of sight and so was the rubber hose, for the moment.

There was a dark sedan parked at the curb. Joe motioned him to get into the back seat, then climbed quickly in beside him.

"If we pass a cop or get stopped by a light, buddy, don't try anything funny," Joe warned.

"I won't," Bill Squire promised. "I should have brought along the rest of the whisky."

"You've had plenty, buddy," Joe said.

Bill Squire was a little surprised that they didn't blindfold him, but then they probably saw no point in that. They headed north on a back road and kept on for ten miles or so, then turned sharply into a lane just wide enough for one car. They reached a small wooded stretch. Here Butts turned left picking his way carefully between the trees, going deep enough so that the car wouldn't be visible from the lane; then he came to a stop.

"All right, buddy," Joe said.

The rubber hose was still in his hand, and Butts had his gun out but he was holding it by the barrel. Obviously Butts had no intention of shooting him, no matter what he did. They'd simply club him into submission. Butts led the way along

a narrow path until presently they came to a dimly lit shack. Joe rapped a signal on the door with the hose. After a time the door was opened. A slatternly old woman stood there holding an oil lamp. She had gray, straggly hair and a wrinkled face, and her eyes were bleary. Half her front teeth were missing.

"Okay, Ma," Joe said.

SHE pulled the door wider and stepped aside. With Butts Crimpey behind him, Bill Squire followed Joe along a short hall until Joe pushed open a door and Bill Squire found himself in a sort of a parlor, shabbily furnished and unclean. There was a plain wooden table in the middle of the room at which a man sat, leaning back in an upholstered chair with his legs stretched out to their fullest. It was Finger Gannon.

His coat was off. There was a gun in a holster strapped diagonally across his chest. But it wasn't that so much that Bill Squire noticed. It was again Finger Gannon's face that held him—a young face in a way, but a dead face—a face that looked as if made of chalk-white clay. His hair was a dirty red, cropped close; his rigid eyes were the color of oyster shells.

Finger Gannon's left hand was resting on the table. His middle finger was at least two inches shorter than the adjoining ones—shorter than his little finger. It hadn't been amputated; it was simply a curious deformity that accounted for his name, Finger Gannon. He sat there immobile. Not a muscle in his face or in his whole body moved, as he stared at Bill Squire.

Despite the fact that Bill Squire didn't care what happened to him, that he wanted to die, he couldn't ward off a feeling of sudden fear. There was something unnatural, inhuman about that rigid figure sitting there. After a long time Finger Gannon, in a voice that was no more than a whisper, said:

"How did you find out about this place?" His lips hardly moved.

Bill Squire hooked over a rickety wooden chair with his foot and sat down.

"I didn't find out," he said. "I hadn't the faintest idea where you were. That stuff I gave the *Chronicle* was the bunk."

Finger Gannon's expression didn't change.

"What was the idea? Some sort of a racket?"

Bill Squire shook his head.

"Just an idea I had."

"What was the idea?"

Bill Squire wondered whether the man ever blinked, whether he ever raised his voice above that penetrating whisper.

"I thought you'd send for me," Bill said, cursing inwardly because his voice wasn't as steady as he wanted it to be. "I thought you'd do me a favor." He felt stone sober now.

"I don't do anybody a favor," Finger Gannon said.

"You're going to make an exception," Bill Squire declared. Now his tone was more steady. "You're going to do me a favor and you won't mind doing it. You're going to kill me."

"The guy's got bats in his belfry or he's full of hop or somp'n," Joe broke in.

Finger Gannon turned his head. It seemed as though he had to do that if he wanted to see anyone not within the direct line of his vision—as though his eyes were frozen in their sockets.

Joe shifted uneasily on his feet and subsided. Then Finger Gannon turned back to Bill Squire.

"Why do you want to be killed?"

"Because I'm tired of living—because I've *got* to die," Bill said fretfully. He was suddenly afraid that he might crack up, that the whole weird situation would prove too much for him.

"Why don't you kill youself? Why don't you jump off a building or lock yourself in your garage and start your car? That's a nice easy way to die," Finger Gannon said.

Bill Squire leaned forward in his chair. He bored with his tense, hot eyes into Finger Gannon's.

"What's the matter," he rasped, "are you afraid to shoot me? That wouldn't surprise me a bit. You fellows are all yellow at heart. You haven't any nerve. You only fight when you're cornered—like rats. You know what I think? You're afraid of me. You've got two of your gang here and still you're afraid of me because you're a lousy cheap heel." Bill Squire kept piling on the abuse without disturbing Finger Gannon in the slightest.

Faint ominous growls came from Butts Crimpey and Joe but there was nothing to indicate Gannon's feelings, save perhaps one brief faint gleam deep down in his murky gray eyes.

"Maybe I'll turn you loose, maybe I won't kill you."

"You can't!" Bill said. "That was part of my idea. You can't turn me loose. I know where this place is now. I could bring the police here in a half hour. Even if you escape before I get back with the police, you'd be traced with the description I could give them. I've seen your hand. They'd get you in no time at all."

For the first time Gannon made a move. Unconsciously he closed his left hand. After a long time he said:

"All right, pal. You want to be killed. I guess we can oblige you. I'm interested. Why do you want to be killed?"

"That's my business," Bill Squire said.

"There's different ways of dying," Gannon whispered slowly. "Some ain't so pleasant."

Bill Squire shut his lips tight and said nothing. Again that faint gleam deep down in Gannon's eyes. Gannon settled himself more deeply in his chair.

"If you won't talk . . . you won't die." He suddenly sat up straight. "You're going to live, but you won't bring anybody any place and you won't tell anybody anything, because you're going to live with your eyes and tongue out."

BILL SQUIRE felt his heart turn over. This cold-blooded creature was capable of carrying out that threat without the slightest compunction. Clammy perspiration broke out on Bill's forehead while he thought fast.

He sprang to his feet and turned on Butts Crimpey, striking the shorter man savagely on the jaw, sending him staggering backward. Butts leveled his gun, was on the point of pulling the trigger when Finger Gannon's soft voice stopped him.

"Don't shoot him," Finger Gannon murmured.

A sort of insane madness swept over Bill Squire. So Butts wouldn't shoot! All right, he'd see about that. He sprang at him, reached for Butts' gun, missed it, and Butts held it behind his back. Bill Squire threw his arms around him trying to reach the gun in back of him. If he could get the gun, he'd point it at Finger Gannon. He'd see then whether or not Gannon would shoot. But it wasn't as simple as it seemed. Butts squirmed and wriggled. Out of the corner of his eye Bill Squire could see Gannon still sitting there rigid as though nothing was happening. Now Bill Squire's fingers closed over the gun. He was twisting it. Butts brought his knee up sharply into Bill Squire's stomach and Bill gasped, but he hung on, trying to catch his breath—and then it was all over. Joe had come up from behind. He struck only one blow with that heavy piece of hose and things went black for Bill Squire. . . .

WHEN he came to, Bill discovered that he couldn't move his hands or feet. His feet were tied together, his arms were securely lashed to the back of a light wooden chair. His face, the back of his head, and his clothes were dripping wet. An empty pail a few feet away indicated that somebody had thrown water over him to bring him around. The three men were still in the room.

Gannon was sitting as before at the rickety table. Joe and Butts Crimpey were at the far end crouched on the floor shooting craps. There was no sign of the slatternly woman who had let them in.

"Ready to talk?" Gannon asked in his penetrating whisper.

Joe and Butts picked up the dice and money and came over. Bill Squire tried to think and couldn't. The top of his head ached and throbbed horribly. He felt something trickling down the back of his neck that wasn't water. It was thick and sticky—blood from the place where Butts had laid open his scalp.

Gannon took the tin shade and the chimney off the oil lamp on the table in front of him. From his pocket, he fished out a knife, opened a long thin blade, and twisted the blade idly in the flame of the lamp. Bill Squire watched him fascinated with horror, certain of what was to come.

"Listen, Gannon," he said hoarsely, "if I had any money I'd pay you to kill me. But I haven't; I'm broke."

Gannon kept twisting the blade in the flame without looking at Bill Squire. After a while he took it away; the blade was a dull red, but evidently not hot enough to suit him.

"When it's right it don't take long to take out an eye with this," he whispered almost to himself.

Bill Squire felt his throat tightening; in another moment he wouldn't be able to speak. "I'll talk," he croaked.

Gannon put down the knife, turned his head so that his rigid eyes were full on Bill, and waited.

"I want to die so that I can collect on a life insurance policy I've got. I can't kill myself; the policy isn't old enough."

"What good will the money do you when you're dead, pal?" Gannon said ever so softly. "How much is it?"

"It's—it's two hundred thousand dollars."

Gannon made a soft sound with his lips.

"Who's gonna cash in on it, a Jane?"

"What difference does it make?" Bill said wearily. "All I'm asking you to do is to take that gun out of its holster and put a half dozen bullets in me, then have your boys throw me out on the road some place where they'll find me. Listen, Gannon, I thought I could make you kill me. I've called you names, tried to fight with you, tried to do everything I could so you'd shoot me. It was a mistake. I wasn't strong enough for that. I take back what I said about your being yellow and a coward, but for God's sake, shoot me."

"What's the rush?" Gannon said. "I'll kill you, don t worry, and as for me being decent, I'm a pal—a real pal to a guy like you. What company are you insured in?"

Bill said shakily:

"The Pearsonville Life Insurance Company."

For a moment, Finger Gannon's face seemed to grow more stony. Then:

"Did you bring the policy with you?"

"No. It's in the safe in my office."

For seconds Finger Gannon was lost in thought.

"What's the name of the Jane, pal?"

"Let's leave her out of it," Bill Squire said.

Tired shadows came briefly into Finger Gannon's eyes.

"You're quite a guy," he said, "but you're awful dumb. I promised you I'd kill you, but look at it this way. It won't be any trouble at all for me to send a couple of the boys over to your office. and they'll get that policy out of your safe in no time. Then if I felt like it, I could tear it up or I could go to the insurance company and make a deal with them; it would be cheaper for them to pay me a hundred grand than this girl friend of yours two hundred. Then you getting yourself killed wouldn't do you or her any good at all." He fell silent as though exhausted by the length of his speech.

BILL SQUIRE, as he listened, felt the last of his courage go. Yes, he was dumb, he told himself. His whole scheme from the beginning now appeared so futile.

"I'd like a drink," Bill said.

Finger Gannon nodded imperceptibly. "Get my pal a drink," he ordered Joe.

Joe fetched a bottle of rye, uncorked it and held the neck to Bill Squire's lips. Bill Squire drank; the raw liquor almost choked him. When he had finished, Finger Gannon said again, so softly that Bill Squire almost missed it:

"What's the name of the Jane?"

"Why do you want to know?" Bill asked.

"I don't like to see a woman done out of her money," Gannon said slowly.

"And you promise to kill me if I tell you?"

Finger Gannon nodded.

"You got my word, pal."

"Her name is Gloria Dale."

"Okay, pal, we'll send for the policy in the morning and when it's properly endorsed," Finger Gannon said, "I'll give you the works—and it won't hurt."

"You can give me the works now. The policy's already endorsed."

Finger Gannon ran the short finger of his left hand back and forth across his bluish lips for many seconds, then in his deadly whisper he said:

"Yeah—but not to the right party."

An unholy stillness seemed to fill the little shack. At last Bill managed to croak:

"What do you mean?"

"I told you I was decent," Finger Gannon said without raising his voice in the slightest. "I got feelings. There's me mother out in Montana. Who's gonna look out for the old lady if anything was to happen to me? She's got to be taken care of, pal, and as I said before, I don't like to see a woman done out of her money, so we'll just get the policy and you endorse it over to her, nice and proper, and then I'll let you have it the way I promised you. You won't even know its coming; it won't hurt a bit."

Bill's lean face went ashen. The veins on his forehead stood out thick and purplish.

"You doublecrossing—" he began with a roar.

He went momentarily mad. He rose to his feet, chair and all, cursing, screaming. He couldn't straighten up, just stood there doubled over, the legs of his chair sticking out behind him, grotesquely. He couldn't walk because of the rope around his ankles, but he could hop in a way, and he hopped toward Gannon, managing to keep his balance in some incredible fashion. He strained in vain to free his arms. What he was going to do when he got to where the gangster sat he didn't quite know. Vaguely he planned to fling himself at him somehow, to do something.

Gannon watched him with clouded eyes. Squire was within a foot of him when the gangster reached out with his hand and spread his fingers across the top of Bill Squire's skull; he sent him backward so that Bill sat down, then turned a somersault and lay on his back, his legs up in the air across the chair.

Butts Crimpey laughed.

Bill Squire rolled over onto his face, then struggled to his feet and started hopping, madness in his eyes, in the lines of his face. He had an inspiration. This time he was going to lurch hard against the table; he was going to get his head under the edge of it and tilt it and send the oil lamp crashing to the floor; maybe the place would catch fire.

Gannon watched him. He tensed a little at the moment when Bill was close to him and turned sideways. Gannon's instincts and his reactions were unbelievably swift. At the instant that Bill bumped against the table, Gannon moved. His arm went around the lamp and he stood up. The table slithered away. Bill pitched to his face.

Joe, comprehending now what might have happened, scowled.

"How about letting me work on him awhile with this, chief?" he said, hauling the rubber hose out of his hip picket.

Gannon shook his head.

"He's a pal of mine," he said softly. "He's gonna do something nice for the old lady back in Montana. Take him upstairs and put him to bed."

"I'll never sign that policy over to you," Bill screamed, "never. I don't give

a damn what you do to me—never, never, never!"

"You'll sign it," Gannon whispered imperturbably. . . .

EARLY the next morning Finger Gannon told Crimpey and Joe that they were to change the license plates on the car and then go to town. His instructions as to what they were to do were specific. Before they left he had them bring Bill down. They sat him in a chair and in response to an order from Gannon they untied his hands, but not his feet. They did one more thing. They brought a little table out of the kitchen and put it down in front of him. Then they left.

Bill glanced at Gannon. It was as though the man hadn't moved since last night. He was still sitting there at that old rickety table, with his coat off and the gun strapped across his chest. Without looking at Bill, he said:

"Ma'll bring you some breakfast." Then he lapsed into silence.

Presently, the slatternly woman came in. She put down a tin tray containing oatmeal, coffee and bread, in front of Bill. As she bent over, he noted that she reeked of gin.

Bill drank the coffee and ate some of the oatmeal. Gannon never looked up, only sat there staring into space with those eyes of his that were the color of oyster shells and rigid as if set in concrete.

The interminable silence got on Bill's nerves.

"What's going to happen?" he said at last.

He thought Gannon hadn't heard, his answer was so long in coming. At last the gangster looked up, turned his head slowly, and looked at Bill.

"Nothing, pal—not right now." He turned his head back and again stared straight ahead.

Later, Ma came in. She picked up Bill Squire's tray and started out.

Bill Squire said:

"Can I have a cigarette?"

Finger Gannon, scarcely moving his lips, said:

"Give my pal a pack of cigarettes, Sadie."

Ma fumbled in the pocket of her wrapper, fished out a crumpled package of cigarettes and a pad of matches, and dropped them on the table in front of Bill Squire. She stood for a moment looking down at him, faint contempt in her dissipated old face, then she walked out.

The hours dragged by slowly. Twice Bill said something without getting any reply.

Shortly before noon, Finger Gannon got up from his chair, went to the window and stood looking out. He stood the way he sat—motionless. After a while he turned, went over to some shelves that held all sorts of odd things and found a greasy pack of cards. He brought them over to Bill and tossed them on the table.

"Play yourself some cards," he said, "then you won't talk so much."

Shortly after that, Ma came in with lunch, some sort of a stew. There was a bottle of whisky and a glass on the tray that she put down in front of Finger Gannon. The gangster poured himself a small drink. He said:

"Give my pal some. Give him all he wants."

Bill Squire had two drinks, using the coffee for a chaser. He ate some of the stew. Dimly, he felt that he'd have to keep his strength up just in case there was a chance, which didn't seem very likely.

Ma came and cleared the table; Bill Squire started playing solitaire. His mind was worn out from trying to think of some way of escape. He had said the night before, bravely enough, that nothing would induce him to endorse that policy, but now he wondered. He remembered Finger Gannon heating that knife in the flame of the oil lamp.

"When it's right, it don't take long to take out an eye with this," Finger Gannon had said.

BILL remembered that now as he laid out the cards. He was no coward, but he was no storybook hero either. He knew well enough Finger Gannon could make him sign that policy, could make him do anything he wanted. Bill kept playing solitaire. Surreptitiously, he kept twisting and straining at the ropes that held his ankles, but nothing happened.

In the afternoon, around four, Finger Gannon got up and went to the door. He called Sadie without raising his voice much above its customary whisper.

"Stay in here," Finger Gannon said. "I'm going out."

She nodded, went over to a corner where a sawed-off shotgun stood, picked it up and sat down in Gannon's chair. For a time she studied Bill.

"You're a fool, young man. Whatever made you do it?"

Bill was startled by the quality of her voice, her diction. It was the voice of an educated, almost a cultured person.

Ma must have read his thoughts. She smiled, showing her gums with their missing teeth.

"You seem sort of out of place here," Bill said. "I don't know exactly how, or why." He wondered if there was a slim, an outside chance of making a friend out of her?

The woman laughed maliciously. "You're wasting your time, young man. I haven't any intention of helping you. You think I'm out of place here, out of character. That's only because I was something else when I was younger. You've never heard of Sadie Lasalle, have you? She was a pretty good actress in those days. I'm Sadie Lasalle and I'm still a pretty good actress. For instance, I can act sober when I'm very very drunk. I'm a little drunk now. I'm always more or less drunk. It's the nicest way of dying I can think of."

Bill picked up the cards and fiddled with them, purposely clumsy, so that a few dropped on the floor. He pushed the table back and bent down; he started picking the cards up one at a time. He might get a chance to work on those knots with his fingers, if this woman were even slightly befuddled. Maybe she was and maybe she wasn't. At any rate, she was no fool.

"Sit up straight," she said in a chilly tone. "and stay straight. I gather you don't mind being killed, but you might not enjoy a couple of whacks across the face with the barrel of this thing."

Bill Squire straightened up.

Gannon came back. He motioned Sadie out of the room, then stood over Bill Squire.

"If Crimpey and Joe ain't back by six o'clock," he whispered, "if this turns out to be some fancy kind of a plant that you worked out, it's just going to be too bad for you, pal."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

MEN of DARING

by Stookie Allen

Rattlers for Pals!

Day after day he climbs into an arena containing deadly rattlesnakes, and bats them about as if they were kittens. He's been bitten over 500 times yet he's still alive!

HE KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE THEM.

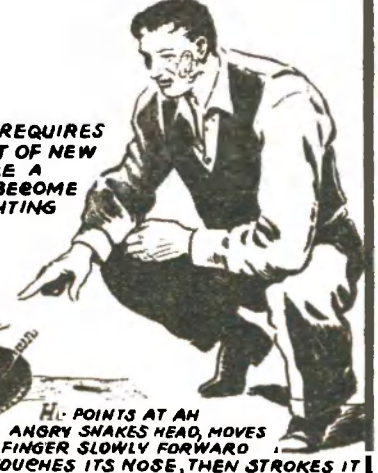
JOE SHOWN PLAYING WITH TWO PETS. NOTE THE MISSING FINGER ON THE LEFT HAND AND THE SCARS ON THE ARM. ALL FROM RATTLER BITES.'

"HAWAIIAN JOE"

HIS REAL NAME IS CHARLES CHILLINGSWORTH AND HE FEARS NOTHING THAT CRAWLS. HE SAYS PEOPLE DIE OF RATTLER BITES BECAUSE THEY BECOME EXCITED AND THE BLOOD RUSHES TO THEIR HEARTS, CARRYING THE DEADLY POISON.

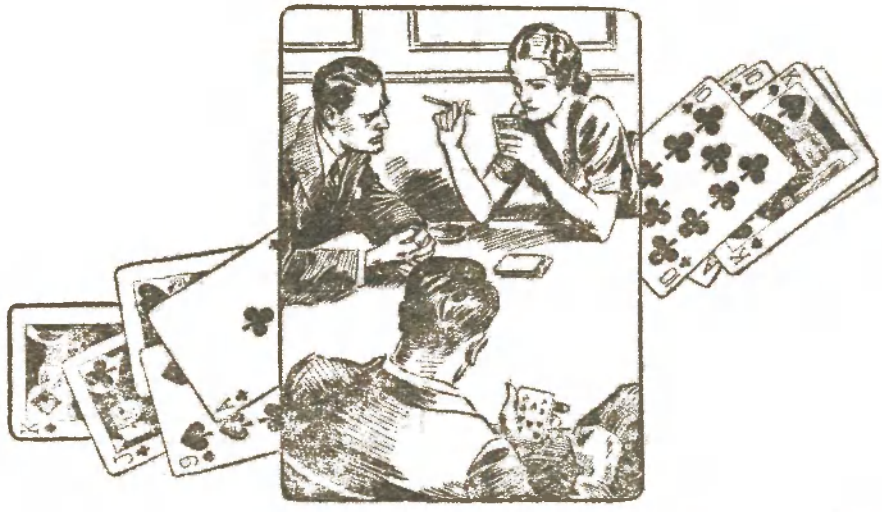
WHEN JOE IS BITTEN HE CALMLY CUTS OPEN THE BITE, RUBS A BIT OF POTASH INTO THE WOUND AND THEN TAKES A NAP FOR AN HOUR. HE NEVER FEELS ANY ILL AFFECTS.'

JOE'S ACT REQUIRES A SHIPMENT OF NEW SNAKES ONCE A WEEK. THEY BECOME LISTLESS FIGHTING WITH HIM.



HE POINTS AT AN ANGRY SNAKES HEAD, MOVES HIS FINGER SLOWLY FORWARD UNTIL HE TOUCHES ITS NOSE, THEN STROKES IT GENTLY BETWEEN THE EYES. THE SNAKE GOES TO SLEEP! (THE SLOW MOTION DOES IT, HE SAYS)

A True Story in Pictures Every Week



She looked at the card, then spoke

Clara Knew the Odds

By D. L. CHAMPION

The weird parable of a dame who figured all the percentages—down to the tenth decimal place

THE little man in the loud suit was getting drunk. He munched disconsolately on a pretzel, poured himself another double scotch, and fixed the bartender with a dark and brooding eye.

"Woman is without honor," he announced hollowly. "Woman is a snare, a delusion, a cheat." He picked up his glass and stared at it. "You think I drink whisky," he went on somberly. "You are wrong, my friend. I drink wormwood. I drink gall."

He drank it darkly. The bartender deftly scooped up seventy cents and clucked sympathetically.

The little man refilled his glass. "Mine is a tragic tale of disillusion," he said, "a tale of shattered faith, of bitterness and sorrow."

The bartender, whose ears had absorbed more tales of tragic disillusion than those of Dorothy Dix, moved hastily away.

But the hand of the little man stretched out and held his apron. "You shall hear my story," said the little man. "You are a man of the world. Yet you may learn with profit of my bruised and broken heart."

There was an alcoholic determination in his voice. The bartender recognized it and surrendered. He sighed, drew himself a short beer and settled down to listen. . .

UNTIL this afternoon (said the little man) I would have bet my life on Clara at the prohibitive odds of 1 to 5. Clara was one woman in a million; and I am very familiar with the intricacies of percentage. For twenty years my livelihood has depended directly upon my mathematical knowledge.

But do not confuse me with the ordinary tinhorn sharper. I am an honest gambler, known to my colleagues as Honest Oscar.

I have never descended to duplicity. I have never resorted to dishonest methods. My sole edge is my superior knowledge of the correct odds. Thus, after examining the situation with a professional eye, I repeat Clara was a woman in a million.

Clara possessed a gift unique among the other sex. She had a mathematical mind. I do not imply that she kept her checking account in order. That is too much to ask of any woman. However, she could figure a three horse parlay in twelve seconds flat—including the odd pennies they used to give you in Chicago. She was quite aware of the fact that no one above the grade of cretin ever beat the slot machines, the numbers or drew to an inside straight. At a bridge table she knew the finesse odds to the fifth decimal place. Clara, my friend, was good.

For the past three years, Clara and I attended to the horses in the afternoon and waded through the bridge clubs at night. Now, mark you, my friend, I have never used a cold deck in my life. Though I admit, upon occasion the temptation has been maddening. But in the bridge clubs there was not even temptation. There is no sucker like a bridge sucker. Clara and I knew our arithmetic. And that was enough. I repeat I have never been guilty of underhanded practice in my life.

Neither had Clara—until today. . . .

The little man refilled his glass. "Wormwood," he said as he picked it up. "Gall," he said as he set it down. The bartender eyed him dubiously and decided two more drinks would be his outside limit.

. . . Brick by brick (went on the little man) we had built beautiful dream castles, Clara and I. Our plans included matrimony—a state I had heretofore avoided as being riskier than a claiming race at New Orleans. But with Clara my viewpoint changed. Our honestly won money was in honest bonds. We had decided on a little cottage in the South—preferably near Hialeah Park. Ah, we were happy, my friend. Our future was assured.

Then that dark day dawned when she met Richard Harrison. Harrison had all the money in the world, and he was never compelled to invest two dollars in the mutuels to get it. Millions, he possessed, in conjunction with a glib and treacherous tongue. He went for Clara like the Revenue Department goes for a sweepstakes winner. Of course I was aware of this, but never until this afternoon, did I realize the dire peril to my own happiness.

TWO hours ago, I met Harrison in Clara's apartment. I sensed the electric tension in the atmosphere. I knew something was amiss. Harrison's first words proved me correct.

"Now see here, Oscar," he begah abruptly. "I love Clara. I am mad about her. I want to marry her."

I could not answer immediately. I was deluged in the crashing debris of my dreams. Harrison kept talking.

"You know my financial position, Oscar. I can give Clara the luxury she so well deserves. I can lay a fortune at her feet. I—"

I held up a hand to stop him. With the aid of a stiff snorter I had taken from the brandy bottle, I had somewhat recovered.

I looked at Clara. It had been my intention to ask her pointblank whom she favored. But a single glance at her told me what the terrible answer would be. She was staring tenderly at Harrison; and there was a light in her eyes that I had never seen there before. Yet, I could not find it in my heart to blame her too much for that. From sheer habit, Clara was in there figuring the old percentage.

I thought rapidly. Never had my keen wits functioned as rapidly, as shrewdly as in that awful moment. I walked to the desk where the cards were kept. Carefully, I selected a deck.

"Clara," I said gravely, "we shall leave this to the Fates. I am a gambler, a gambler of probity and integrity, who can win or lose with a philosopher's smile. Clara, you, too, are a betting woman. I shall place these cards upon the table. You shall cut them. The Gods of Chance, not we, shall decide. Are you agreed?"

Harrison turned pale. "You can't do

that," he began. But Clara cut him short.

"Precisely what is your proposition?"

I put the cards on the table. "Here is my proposition," I said. "We shall divide the deck in half. If you cut a nine, or a card higher than a nine, you shall marry me. If you cut an eight or less you shall go with him. The ace, of course, is high."

Clara met my eyes steadily. "Agreed."

I was proud of her in that moment. Mentally, I revised my figures again and was prepared to wager that Clara was one woman in *three* million. There she had a million dollars for the asking, yet she was willing to gamble for it.

And now, my friend, if you know your percentage table, you will observe that I was magnanimously giving Harrison a seven to six edge. But what of that? He had edge enough as it was. He had his money, his established position in society. I had nothing save my wits and my unsullied reputation of integrity. Still, I gave him seven to six and remained confident of the result.

"Cut, Clara," I said. "Cut. A nine or higher, you marry me. An eight or less, you are his."

Clara's slim steady fingers cut the deck in half. She looked at the card, concealing it from us. Then she replaced it on the pack. Harrison sat on the edge of his chair.

Clara looked at me and there was a peculiar expression in her eyes.

"It was a four," she said. "I'm sorry, Oscar. It was a four."

HARRISON uttered a vulgar cry of triumph and clasped her in his arms. I rose with dignity. I gave no hint of what turmoil was in my heart.

I have not complained, I have not protested until this moment, my friend. You are the first man who has heard the story of her abominable perfidy.

The little man poured himself another drink. His eyes were wet and miserable. The bartender waved the bill away.

"This one's on the house," he said. "And you might tell me why you're squawking. She didn't do nothing."

The little man laughed bitterly. "Nothing?" he repeated. "She did nothing? You don't know women, my friend. They are devoid of honor. They know no truth. They will sell their souls for gold. Clara lied to me. She lied when she said that card was a four. She cheated like the lowliest sure-thing tinhorn."

"But how do you know she lied?" persisted the bartender. "You didn't see the card, did you?"

"I did not have to see it," said the little man, and now his words were slurred, his legs unsteady. "That was a pinochle deck I gave her to cut, my friend. And in a pinochle deck, there is—no card lower—than a nine."

Again the little man drained his drink. The glass dropped from his nerveless fingers. His elbow relaxed upon the bar. He slid slowly to the floor and came to rest quietly and resignedly upon his face.

Hornblower tried to keep his coolness

Beat to Quarters

By C. S. FORESTER

CAPTAIN Horatio Hornblower has accomplished the nearly impossible in navigating H. M. S. Frigate *Lydia* from England to the Gulf of Fonseca, a seven months' voyage, without touching at a single port. To arrive at that practically unknown spot on the Pacific coast of Spanish America has required amazing seamanship, as Hornblower's officers realize; yet Hornblower himself is unimpressed. The things he *can* do leave him indifferent. Seriously troubled about the welfare of his ship and crew, by nature a warm-hearted and companionable man—still Hornblower cannot permit himself to confide in his officers, who idolize him; he must, he believes, appear silent, emotionless, and assured. Because of his compelling sense of discipline, Hornblower has not revealed the Admiralty orders even to his sailing master, Bush—orders to assist one Don Julian Alvarado in a revolution against Spain. Such a move will greatly benefit British trade.

TO REACH Don Julian's palace Captain Hornblower must pass men bound to stakes, dying of thirst in the terrible sun. These—General Hernandez, aide to Don Julian who now calls himself El Supremo, explains—are the unenlightened. The interview with the dictator is fantastic. For Don Julian Alvarado is a madman who believes that, by lineage, he is divine; the king of England, he explains, is of a lower caste. He demands the arms which the *Lydia* has brought to attack the Spaniards at once. But Hornblower, astutely, refuses to deliver them until his ship has been revictualed. That is accomplished under constant threat of the arrival of the *Natividad*, the one Spanish warship in these waters. When the *Natividad* puts in an appearance Hornblower is ready, his carefully laid plans are executed with precision; and the 36-gun frigate captures the 52-gun two-decker without losing a man, a feat without precedent in the long annals of British naval history.

THE victory leaves Hornblower lord of the South Sea. Northwest lies Acapulco whence depart yearly Spanish galleons bearing a million sterling in treasure. The capture of a galleon would at one stroke make him a wealthy man and his wife Maria a great lady—although he can not imagine Maria, snatched from her middle-class lodgings, playing the part with any grace.

This story began in the Argosy for September 17

But visions of prize money, even on the *Natividad*, vanish when El Supremo orders his army aboard the two vessels for an attack on La Libertad and El Salvador. The dictator's vice admiral, Don Cristobal de Crespo, takes command of the *Natividad* and after a particularly cruel bit of business enlists its mongrel crew under El Supremo's standard. Hornblower, meanwhile, has saved the officers' lives by hiding them below decks. The dictator comes aboard the *Lydia* and the ships sail with Hornblower now confident he can handle the situation. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

NEWS FROM EUROPE

THE voyage up the coast was completed, La Libertad had fallen, and El Supremo and his men had vanished into the tangle of volcanoes surrounding the city of the Holy Saviour.

Once again in the early morning Captain Hornblower was pacing the quarterdeck of His Britannic Majesty's 36-gun frigate *Lydia*, and Lieutenant Bush as officer of the watch was standing by the wheel rigidly taking no notice of him.

Hornblower was gazing round him, and filling his lungs deep with air at every respiration as he walked. He noticed that he was doing this, and grinned to himself at the realization that what he was doing was to savour the sweet air of liberty.

For a space he was free from the nightmare influence of El Supremo and his cutthroat methods, and the feeling of relief was inexpressible. He was his own master again.

The sky was blue, the sea was blue and silver—Hornblower caught himself making the old comparison with heraldic argent and azure, and knew that he was himself again; he smiled once more out of sheer high spirits, looking out to sea, nevertheless, so that his subordinates should not see that their captain was walking the deck grinning like a Cheshire cat.

There was just the gentlest wind abeam pushing the *Lydia* along at three or four knots; peeping over the horizon on the port side were the tops of the interminable volcanoes which formed the backbone of this benighted country.

Perhaps after all El Supremo might accomplish his wild dream of conquering Central America; perhaps after all there might be some solid foundation in the hope that good communications might be opened across the Isthmus—by Panama if the Nicaraguan scheme proved impracticable.

That would make a profound difference to the world. It would bring Van Diemen's Land and the Moluccas into a closer relation to the civilized world. It would open the Pacific to England by evading the difficulties of the journey round the Horn or by the Cape of Good Hope and India, and in that case the Pacific might see squadrons of ships of the line cruising where hardly a frigate had penetrated up to that moment.

The Spanish Empire of Mexico and California might acquire a new importance.

Hornblower told himself hastily that all this was only a wild dream at present. As a kind of punishment for dreaming he began to take himself to task regarding his present movements, and to subject himself to a severe examination regarding the motives which had brought him southwards towards Panama.

He knew full well that the main one was to shake himself free from El Supremo, but he tried to justify his action in face of his self-accusation.

If El Supremo's attempt upon San Salvador should fail, the *Natividad* would suffice to bring off what few might survive of his army.

The presence of the *Lydia* could in no way influence the land operations. If El Supremo should succeed, it might be as well that while he was conquering Nicaragua there should be a diversion in Panama to distract the Spaniards and to prevent them from concentrating their whole strength upon him.

It was only right that the *Lydia's* crew should be given a chance of winning some prize money among the pearl fishers of the Gulf of Panama; that would compensate them for their probable loss of the prize money already gained—there would

be no screwing money out of the Admiralty for the *Natividad.*

The presence of the *Lydia* in the Gulf would hamper the transport of Spanish forces from Peru. Besides, the Admiralty would be glad of a survey of the Gulf and the Pearl Islands; Anson's charts were wanting in this respect. Yet for all these plausible arguments Hornblower knew quite well that why he had come this way was to get away from El Supremo.

A LARGE flat ray, the size of a table top, suddenly leaped clear of the water close overside and fell flat upon the surface again with a loud smack, leaped clear again, and then vanished below, its pinky brown gleaming wet for a moment as the blue water closed over it. There were flying fish skimming the water in all directions, each leaving behind it a momentary dark furrow. Hornblower watched it all, carefree, delighted that he could allow his thoughts to wander and not feel constrained to keep them concentrated on a single subject. With a ship full of stores and a crew contented by their recent adventures he had no real care in the world. The Spanish prisoners whose lives he had saved from El Supremo were sunning themselves lazily on the forecastle.

"Sail ho!" came echoing down from the masthead.

The idlers thronged the bulwark, gazing over the hammock nettings; the seamen holystoning the deck surreptitiously worked more slowly in order to hear what was going on.

"Where away?" called Hornblower.

"On the port bow, sir. Lugger, sir, I think, an' standing straight for us, but she's right in the eye of the sun—"

"Yes, a lugger, sir," squeaked Midshipman Hooker from the fore top gallant masthead. "Two masted. She's right to windward, running down to us, under all sail, sir."

"Running down to us?" said Hornblower, mystified. He jumped up on the slide of the quarterdeck carronade nearest him, and stared into the sun and the wind under his hand, but at present there was still nothing to be seen from that low altitude.

"She's still holding her course, sir," squeaked Hooker.

Mr. Bush," said Hornblower. "Back the mizzen tops'l."

A pearling lugger from the Gulf of Panama, perhaps, and still ignorant of the presence of a British frigate in those waters; on the other hand she might be bearing a message from El Supremo—her course made that unlikely, but that might be explained. Then as the ship lifted, Hornblower saw a gleaming square of white rise for a second over the distant horizon and vanish again. As the minutes passed by the sails were more and more frequently to be seen, until at last from the deck the lugger was in plain view, nearly hull up, running goose-winged before the wind with her bow pointed straight at the *Lydia.*

"She's flying Spanish colours at the main, sir," said Bush from behind his levelled telescope. Hornblower had suspected so for some time back, but had not been able to trust his eyesight.

"She's hauling 'em down, all the same," he retorted, glad to be the first to notice it.

"So she is, sir," said Bush, a little puzzled, and then— "There they go again, sir. No! What do you make of that, sir?"

"White flag over Spanish colours now," said Hornblower. "That'll mean a parley. No, I don't trust 'em. Hoist the colours, Mr. Bush, and send the hands to quarters. Run out the guns and send the prisoners below under guard again."

He was not going to be caught unawares by any Spanish tricks. That lugger might be as full of men as an egg is of meat, and might spew up a host of boarders over the side of an unprepared ship.

As the *Lydia's* gun ports opened and she showed her teeth the lugger rounded-to just out of gunshot, and lay wallowing, hove to.

"She's sending a boat, sir," said Bush.

"So I see," snapped Hornblower.

Two oars rowed a dinghy jerkily across the dancing water, and a man came scrambling up the ladder to the gangway —so many strange figures had mounted that ladder lately.

This new arrival, Hornblower saw, wore the full dress of the Spanish royal navy, his epaulettes gleaming in the sun. He bowed and came forward.

"Captain Hornblower?" he asked.

"I am Captain Hornblower."

"I have to welcome you as the new ally of Spain."

Hornblower swallowed hard. This might be a ruse, but the moment he heard the words he felt instinctively that the man was speaking the truth. The whole happy world by which he had been encompassed up to that moment suddenly became dark with trouble.

He could foresee endless worries piled upon him by some heedless action of the politicians.

"We have had the news for the last four days," went on the Spanish officer. "Last month Bonaparte stole our King Ferdinand from us and has named his brother Joseph King of Spain. The Junta of Government has signed a treaty of perpetual alliance and friendship with His Majesty of England. It is with great pleasure, Captain, that I have to inform you that all ports in the dominions of His Most Catholic Majesty are open to you after your most arduous voyage."

Hornblower still stood dumb.

It might all be lies, a ruse to lure the *Lydia* under the guns of Spanish shore batteries. Hornblower almost hoped it might be—better that than all the complications which would hem him in if it were the truth.

The Spaniard interpreted his expression as implying disbelief.

"I have letters here," he said, producing them from his breast. "One from your admiral in the Leeward Islands, sent overland from Porto Bello, one from His Excellency the Viceroy of Peru, and one from the English lady in Panama."

He tendered them with a further bow, and Hornblower, muttering an apology—his fluent Spanish had deserted him along with his wits—began to open them. Then he pulled himself up, on this deck under the eye of the Spanish officer was no place to study these documents.

With another muttered apology he fled below to the privacy of his cabin.

THE stout canvas wrapper of the naval orders was genuine enough. He scrutinized the two seals carefully, and they showed no signs of having been tampered with; and the wrapper was correctly addressed in English script. He cut the wrapper open carefully and read the orders enclosed. They could leave him in no doubt. There was the signature—Thomas Troubridge, Rear Admiral, Bart. Hornblower had seen Troubridge's signature before, and recognized it. The orders were brief, as one would expect from Troubridge—an alliance having been concluded between His Majesty's Government and that of Spain, Captain Hornblower was directed and required to refrain from hostilities towards the Spanish possessions, and, having drawn upon the Spanish authorities for necessary stores to proceed with all dispatch to England for further orders.

It was a genuine document without any doubt at all. It was marked "Copy No. 2"; presumably other copies had been distributed to other parts of the Spanish possessions to ensure that he received one.

The next letter was flamboyantly sealed and addressed—it was a letter of welcome from the Viceroy of Peru assuring him that all Spanish America was at his disposal, and hoping that he would make full use of all facilities so that he would speedily be ready to help the Spanish nation in its sacred mission of sweeping the French usurper back to his kennel.

"Ha — h'm," said Hornblower — the Spanish viceroy did not know yet about the fate of the *Natividad,* nor about the new enterprise of El Supremo. He might not be so cordial when he heard about the *Lydia's* part in these occurrences.

The third letter was sealed merely with a wafer and was addressed in a feminine hand. The Spanish officer had spoken about a letter from the English lady in Panama—what in the world was an English lady doing there? Hornblower slit open the letter and read it.

The Citadel,
Panama.

Lady Barbara Wellesley presents her compliments to the captain of the English frigate. She requests that he will be so good as to convey her and her maid to Europe, because Lady Barbara finds that owing to an outbreak of yellow fever on the Spanish Main she cannot return home the way she would desire.

Hornblower folded the letter.

The woman was asking an impossibility, of course. A crowded frigate sailing round the Horn was no place for females. She seemed to have no doubt about it, all the same; on the contrary, she seemed to assume that her request would be instantly granted. That name Wellesley, of course, gave the clue to that.

It had been much before the public of late. Presumably the lady was a sister or an aunt of the two well-known Wellesleys —the Most Hon. the Marquis Wellesley, K.P., late Governor General of India and now a member of the Cabinet, and General the Hon. Sir Arthur Wellesley, K.B., the victor of Assaye and now pointed at as England's greatest soldier after Sir John Moore. Hornblower had seen him once, and had noticed the high arched arrogant nose and the imperious eye.

If the woman had that blood in her she would be of the sort to take things for granted. So she might, too. An impecunious frigate captain with no influence at all would be glad to render a service to a member of that family.

Maria would be pleased as well as suspicious when she heard that he had been in correspondence with the daughter of an Earl, the sister of a Marquis.

BUT this was no time to stop and think about women. Hornblower locked the letters in his desk and ran up on deck; forcing a smile he approached the Spanish captain.

"Greeting to the new allies," he said. "Señor, I am proud to be serving with Spain against the Corsican tyrant."

The Spaniard bowed.

"We were very much afraid, Captain," he said, "lest you should fall in with the *Natividad* before you heard the news, because she has not heard it either. In that case your fine frigate would have come to serious harm."

"Ha—h'm," said Hornblower. This was more embarrassing than ever; he turned and snapped out an order to the midshipman of the watch. "Bring the prisoners up from the cable tier. Quickly!"

The boy ran, and Hornblower turned back again to the Spanish officer.

"I regret to have to tell you, señor, that by evil chance the *Lydia* met the *Natividad* a week ago."

The Spanish captain looked his surprise. He stared round the ship, at the meticulous good order, the well set up rigging. Even a Spanish frigate captain could see that the frigate had not been engaged in a desperate action lately.

"But you did not fight her, Captain?" he said. "Perhaps—"

The words died away on his lips as he caught sight of a melancholy procession approaching them along the gangway. He recognized the captain and the lieutenants of the *Natividad*.

Hornblower plunged feverishly into an explanation of their presence; but it was not easy to tell a Spanish captain that the *Lydia* had captured a Spanish ship of twice her force without receiving a shot or a casualty—it was harder still to go on and explain that the ship was now sailing under the flag of rebels who had determined to destroy the Spanish power in the new world.

The Spaniard turned white with rage and injured pride. He turned upon the captain of the *Natividad* and received confirmation of Hornblower's story from that wretched man's lips: his shoulders were bowed with sorrow as he told the story

which would lead inevitably to his court-martial and his ruin.

Bit by bit the newcomer from the lugger heard the truth about recent events, about the capture of the *Natividad,* and the success of El Supremo's rebellion.

He realized that the whole of the Spanish overlordship of the Americas was in jeopardy, and as he realized that, a fresh and harassing aspect of the situation broke in upon him.

"The Manila galleon is at sea!" he exclaimed. "She is due to arrive at Acapulco next month. The *Natividad* will intercept her."

One ship a year crossed the wide Pacific from the Philippines, never bearing less than a million sterling in treasure. Her loss would cripple the bankrupt Spanish government hopelessly.

THE three captains exchanged glances —Hornblower was telling himself that this was why El Supremo had agreed so readily to the *Lydia's* sailing southwestward; he had doubtless been pleased at the thought of the *Natividad* to the northeastward acquiring this wealth for him. It would take the Spaniards months to bring round the Horn a ship capable of dealing with the *Natividad,* and in the interval El Supremo would enjoy all those advantages of sea power which Hornblower had foreseen for the *Lydia.*

The rebellion would be so firmly rooted that nothing would put it down, especially as, apparently, the Spaniards of Spain were engaged in a life-and-death struggle with Bonaparte and would have neither ships nor men to spare for America. Hornblower could see where lay his duty.

"Very well," he announced abruptly. "I will take my ship back to fight the *Natividad.*"

All the Spanish officers looked their relief at that.

"Thank you, Captain," said the officer of the lugger. "You will call in at Panama to consult the Viceroy first?"

"Yes," snapped Hornblower.

In a world where news took months to travel, and where complete upheavals of international relationships were not merely possible but likely, he had learned now by bitter experience to keep in the closest contact with the shore; his misery was in no way allayed by the knowledge that the present difficulties were occasioned merely by his strict obedience to orders—and he knew, too, that the Lords of the Admiralty would not allow that point to influence them in their opinion of a captain who could cause such terrible trouble.

"Then," said the captain of the lugger, "I will bid you goodbye for the time. If I reach Panama first, I will be able to arrange a welcome for you. Perhaps you will allow my compatriots to accompany me?"

"No, I won't," rasped Hornblower. "And you, sir, will keep under my lee until we drop anchor."

The Spaniard shrugged and yielded. At sea one can hardly argue with a captain whose guns are run out and whose broadside could blow one's ship out of the water, especially as all Englishmen were as mad and as domineering as El Supremo.

The Spaniard had not enough intuition to enable him to guess that Hornblower still had a lurking fear that the whole business might be a ruse to inveigle the *Lydia* helpless under the guns of Panama.

CHAPTER IX

LADY BARBARA COMES ON BOARD

IT WAS not a ruse at all. In the morning when the *Lydia* came stealing before a three knot breeze into the roadstead of Panama the only guns fired were the salutes. Boatloads of rejoicing Spaniards came out to greet her, but the rejoicing was soon turned to wailing at the news that the *Natividad* now flew El Supremo's flag, that San Salvador had fallen, and that all Nicaragua was in a flame of rebellion.

With cocked hat and gold-hilted sword ("a sword of the value of fifty guineas," the gift of the Patriotic Fund for Lieu-

tenant Hornblower's part in the capture of the *Castilla* six years ago) Hornblower had made himself ready to go ashore and call upon the Governor and the Viceroy, when the arrival of yet one more boat was announced to him.

"There is a lady on board, sir," said Gray, one of the master's mates, who brought the news.

"A lady?"

"Looks like an English lady, sir," explained Gray. "She seems to want to come aboard."

Hornblower went on deck; close alongside a large rowing boat tossed and rolled; at the six oars sat swarthy Spanish Americans, bare armed and straw hatted, while another in the bows, boat hook in hand, stood waiting, face upturned, for permission to hook onto the chains.

In the stern sat a Negress with a flaming red handkerchief over her shoulders, and beside her sat the English lady Gray had spoken about. Even as Hornblower looked, the bowman hooked on, and the boat closed in alongside, two men fending off.

Somebody caught the rope ladder, and the next moment the lady, timing the movement perfectly, swung onto it and two seconds later came on deck.

Clearly she was an Englishwoman. She wore a wide shady hat trimmed with roses, in place of the eternal mantilla, and her grey-blue silk dress was far finer than any Spanish black. Her skin was fair despite its golden tan, and her eyes were grey-blue, of just the same evasive shade as her silk dress.

Her face was too long for beauty, and her nose too high arched, to say nothing of her sunburn.

Hornblower saw her at that moment as one of the horsefaced mannish women whom he particularly disliked; he told himself that all his inclinations were toward clinging incompetence. Any woman who could transfer herself in that fashion from boat to ship in an open roadstead, and could ascend a rope ladder unassisted, must be too masculine for his taste. Besides, an Englishwoman must be unsexed to be in Panama without a male escort—the phrase "globe trotting" with all its disparaging implications, had not yet been invented, but it expressed exactly Hornblower's feeling about her.

Hornblower held himself aloof as the visitor looked about her.

He was going to do nothing to help her. A wild squawk from overside told that the Negress had not been as handy with the ladder, and directly afterwards this was confirmed by her appearance on deck wet from the waist down, water streaming from her black gown.

The lady paid no attention to the mishap to her maid; Gray was nearest to her and she turned to him.

"Please be so good, sir," she said, "as to have my baggage brought up out of the boat."

Gray hesitated, and looked round over his shoulder at Hornblower, stiff and unbending on the quarterdeck.

"The captain's here, ma'am," he said.

"Yes," said the lady. "Please have my baggage brought up while I speak to him."

HORNBLOWER was conscious of an internal struggle. He disliked the aristocracy—it hurt him nowadays to remember that as the doctor's son he had had to touch his cap to the squire. He felt unhappy and awkward in the presence of the self-confident arrogance of blue blood and wealth.

It irritated him to think that if he offended this woman he might forfeit his career. Not even his gold lace nor his presentation sword gave him confidence as they approached him. He took refuge in an icy formality.

"Are you the captain of this ship, sir?" she asked, as she came up. Her eyes looked boldly and frankly into his with no trace of downcast modesty.

"Captain Hornblower, at your service, ma'am," he replied, with a stiff jerk of his neck which might charitably be thought a bow.

"Lady Barbara Wellesley," was the reply, accompanied by a curtsey only just deep enough to keep the interview formal. "I wrote you a note, Captain Hornblower, requesting a passage to England. I trust that you received it."

"I did, ma'am. But I do not think it is wise for your ladyship to join this ship."

The unhappy double mention of the word "ship" in this sentence did nothing to make Hornblower feel less awkward.

"Please tell me why, sir."

"Because, ma'am, we shall be clearing shortly to seek out an enemy and fight him. And after that, ma'am, we shall have to return to England round Cape Horn. Your ladyship would be well advised to make your way across the Isthmus. From Porto Bello you can easily reach Jamaica and engage a berth in the West India packet which is accustomed to female passengers."

Lady Barbara's eyebrows arched themselves higher.

"In my letter," she said, "I informed you that there was yellow fever in Porto Bello. A thousand persons died there of it last week. It was on the outbreak of the disease that I removed from Porto Bello to Panama. At any day it may appear here as well."

"May I ask why your ladyship was in Porto Bello, then?"

"Because, sir, the West India packet in which I was a female passenger was captured by a Spanish privateer and brought there. I regret, sir, that I cannot tell you the name of my grandmother's cook, but I shall be glad to answer any further questions which a gentleman of breeding would ask."

Hornblower winced and then to his annoyance found himself blushing furiously. His dislike for arrogant blue blood was if anything intensified.

But there was no denying that the woman's explanations were satisfactory enough—a visit to the West Indies could be made by any woman without unsexing herself, and she had clearly come to Porto Bello and Panama against her will. He was far more inclined now to grant her request—in fact he was about to do so, having strangely quite forgotten the approaching duel with the *Natividad* and the voyage round the Horn.

He recalled them just as he was about to speak, so that he changed at a moment's notice what he was going to say and stammered and stuttered in consequence.

"B-but we are going out in this ship to fight," he said. "*Natividad's* got twice our force. It will be d-dangerous."

Lady Barbara laughed at that—Hornblower noted the pleasing colour contrast between her white teeth and her golden sunburn; his own teeth were stained and ugly.

"I would far rather," she said, "be on board your ship, whomever you have to fight, than be in Panama with the *vomito negro.*"

"But Cape Horn, ma'am?"

"I have no knowledge of this Cape Horn of yours. But I have twice rounded the Cape of Good Hope during my brother's Governor-Generalship, and I assure you, Captain, I have never yet been seasick."

STILL Hornblower stammered and hesitated. He resented the presence of a woman on board his ship. Lady Barbara exactly voiced his thoughts—and as she did so her arched eyebrows came closed together in a fashion oddly reminiscent of El Supremo although her eyes still laughed straight into his.

"Soon, Captain," she said, "I will come to think that I shall be unwelcome on board. I can hardly imagine that a gentleman holding the king's commission would be discourteous to a woman, especially to a woman with my name."

That was just the difficulty. No captain of small influence could afford to offend a Wellesley.

Hornblower knew that if he did he might never command a ship again, and that he and Maria would rot on the beach

on half pay for the rest of their lives. At thirty-seven he still was not more than one eighth the way up the captains' list—and the goodwill of the Wellesleys could easily keep him in employment until he attained flag rank.

There was nothing for it but to swallow his resentment and to do all he could to earn that goodwill, diplomatically, wringing advantage from his difficulties. He groped for a suitable speech.

"I was only doing my duty, ma'am," he said, "in pointing out the dangers to which you might be exposed. For myself there would be nothing that would give me greater pleasure than your presence on board my ship."

Lady Barbara went down in a curtsey far deeper than her first, and at this moment Gray came up and touched his cap.

"Your baggage is all on board, ma'am," he said.

They had hove the stuff up with a whip from the main yardarm, and now it littered the gangway—leather cases, ironbound wooden boxes, dome-topped trunks.

"Thank you, sir." Lady Barbara brought out a flat leather purse from her pocket, and took from it a gold coin. "Would you be so kind as to give this to the boat's crew?"

"Lord love you, ma'am, you don't need to give those Indians gold. Silver's all they deserve."

"Give them this, then, and thank you for your kindness."

Gray hurried off, and Hornblower heard him bargaining in English with a boat's crew who knew no tongue but Spanish. The threat of heaving a cold shot hove down into the boat compelled it at length to shove off still spattering expostulations. A new little wave of irritation rose in Hornblower's mind. He disliked seeing his warrant officers running to do a woman's bidding, and his responsibilities were heavy, and he had been standing in a hot sun for half an hour.

"There will be no room in your cabin for a tenth of that baggage, ma'am," he snapped.

Lady Barbara nodded gravely.

"I have dwelt in a cabin before this, sir. That sea chest there holds everything I shall need on board. The rest can be put where you will—until we reach England."

Hornblower almost stamped on the deck with rage. He was unused to a woman who could display practical commonsense.

It was infuriating that he could find no way of discomposing her—and then he saw her smiling, guessed that she was smiling at the evident struggle on his face, and blushed hotly again.

He turned on his heel and led the way below without a word.

LADY BARBARA looked round the captain's cabin with a whimsical smile, but she made no comment, not even when she surveyed the grim discomfort of the aftercabin.

"A frigate has few of the luxuries of an Indiaman you see, ma'am," said Hornblower, bitterly. He was bitter because his poverty at the time when he commissioned the *Lydia* had allowed him to purchase none of the minor comforts which many frigate captains could afford.

"I was thinking just when you spoke," said Lady Barbara, gently, "that it was scandalous that a King's officer should be treated worse than a fat John Company man. But I have only one thing to ask for which I do not see."

"And that is, ma'am—?"

"A key for the lock on the cabin door."

"I will have the armourer make you a key, ma'am. But there will be a sentry at this door night and day."

The implications which Hornblower read into this request of Lady Barbara's angered him again. She was slandering both him and his ship.

"Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" said Lady Barbara. "It is not on my account, Captain, that I need a key. It is Hebe here whom I have to lock in unless she is directly under my eye. She can no more keep from the men than a moth from a candle."

The little Negress grinned widely at this last speech, showing no resentment and a good deal of pride. She rolled her eyes at Polwheal, who was standing silently by.

"Where will she sleep, then?" asked Hornblower, disconcerted once more.

"On the floor of my cabin. And mark my words, Hebe, the first time I find you not there during the night I'll lace you so that you have to sleep on your face."

Hebe still grinned, although it was evident that she knew her mistress would carry out her threat. What mollified Hornblower was Lady Barbara's little slip in speaking of the "floor" of her cabin instead of the deck. It showed that she was only a feeble woman after all.

"Very good," he said. "Polwheal, take my things into Mr. Bush's cabin. Give Mr. Bush my apologies and tell him he will have to berth in the wardroom. See that Lady Barbara has all that she wants, and ask Mr. Gray with my compliments to attend to putting the baggage in my storeroom. You will forgive me, Lady Barbara, but I am already late in paying my call upon the Viceroy."

CHAPTER X

THE ANCHOR

THE Captain of the *Lydia* came on board again to the accompainment of the usual twitterings of the pipes and the presenting of arms by the marine guard. He walked very carefully, for good news just arrived from Europe had made the Viceroy pressingly hospitable while the notification of the first case of yellow fever in Panama had made him apprehensive so that Hornblower had been compelled to drink one glass of wine too much.

A naturally abstemious man, he hated the feeling of not being quite master of himself.

As always, he looked sharply round the deck as soon as his feet were on it. Lady Barbara was sitting in a hammock chair on the quarterdeck—someone must have had that chair made for her during the day; and someone had rigged for her a scrap of awning in the mizzen rigging so that she sat in the shade with Hebe crouching at her feet.

She looked cool and comfortable, and smiled readily at him as he approached, but he looked away from her.

He would not speak to her until his head was clearer.

"Call all hands to weigh anchor and make sail," he said to Bush. "We leave at once."

He went below, checked himself with a gesture of annoyance at finding that habit had led him to the wrong cabin, and as he turned on his heel he hit his head a shattering crash on a deck beam. His new cabin from which Bush had been evicted, was even smaller than the old one.

Polwheal was waiting to help him change his clothes, and the sight of him reminded Hornblower of fresh troubles. He had been wearing his best gold laced coat and white breeches when Lady Barbara came on board, but he could not afford to continue to wear them lest they should grow too shabby for use on ceremonial occasions.

He would have to appear before this woman in future in his old patched coats and cheap duck trousers. She would sneer at his shabbiness and poverty.

He cursed the woman as he stripped off his clothes, all wet with sweat. Then a new trouble came into his mind.

He had to leave Polwheal to keep watch while he had his shower bath under the pump lest she should surprise him there naked.

He would have to issue orders to the crew so as to make sure that her fastidious eyes would not be offended by the state of undress which they habitually affected in the tropics. He combed his hair and cursed its curliness as drawing additional attention to the way his hair was receding from his forehead.

Then he hurried on deck; he was glad that the need for looking after the ship saved him from meeting Lady Barbara's

eyes and seeing her reaction to his shabby clothes.

He felt her gaze upon him, all the same, as he stood with his back to her attending to the business of getting under weigh.

Half of one watch were at the capstan with all their weight upon the bars, their bare feet seeking holds on the smooth deck while Harrison bellowed encouragement and threats, and stimulated the laggards with cuts from his cane. Sullivan the mad fiddler, the two Marine fifers and the two drummers were playing some lively tune—to Hornblower one tune was much the same as another—on the forecastle.

THE cable came steadily in, the ship's boys with their nippers following it to the hatch-coamings and scuttling back immediately to take a fresh hold on cable and messenger. But the measured clank-clank of the capstan grew slower and slower and then came to a dead stop.

"Heave, you ————! Heave!" bellowed Harrison. "Here, you fo'c'sle men, bear a hand! Now, heave!"

There were twenty more men thrusting at the bars now. Their added strength brought one more solemn clank from the capstan.

"Heave! Damn you, heave!"

Harrison's cane was falling briskly first here and then there.

"Heave!"

A shudder ran through the ship, the capstan swung round so sharply that the hands at the bars fell in a tumbling heap to the deck.

"Messenger's parted, sir," hailed Gerard from the forecastle. "The anchor's foul, I think, sir."

"Hell fire!" said Hornblower to himself. He was certain that the woman in the hammock chair behind him was laughing at his predicament, with a foul anchor and the eyes of all Spanish America on him. But he was not going to abandon an anchor and cable to the Spaniards.

"Pass the small bower cable for a messenger," he shouted.

That meant unbearably hot and unpleasant work for a score of men down in the cable tier rousing out the small bower cable and manhandling it up to the capstan.

The calls and curses of the boatswain's mates came echoing back to the quarter-deck—the warrant officers were as acutely conscious of the indignity of the ship's position as was their captain. Hornblower could not pace the deck as he wished to do, for fear of meeting Lady Barbara's eyes. He could only stand and fume, wiping the sweat with his handkerchief from his face and neck.

"Messenger's ready, sir!" hailed Gerard.

"Put every man to the bars that there's place for. Mr. Harrison, see that they heave!"

"Aye aye, sir!"

Br-r-rm. Boom! Br-r-r-rm. Boom! The drum rolled.

"Heave, you sons of lubbers," said Harrison, his cane going crack-crack-crack on the straining backs.

Clank! went the capstan. Clank-clank-clank.

Hornblower felt the deck inclining a trifle under his feet. The strain was dragging down the ship's bows, not bringing home the anchor.

"God ——" began Hornblower to himself, and then left the sentence uncompleted. Of the fifty-five oaths he had ready to employ not one was adequate to the occasion.

"Avast heaving!" he roared, and the sweating seamen eased their aching backs.

Hornblower tugged at his chin as though he wanted to pull it off.

He would have to sail the anchor out of the ground—a delicate manoeuvre involving peril to masts and rigging, and which might end in a ridiculous fiasco. Up to the moment only a few knowing people in Panama could have guessed at the ship's predicament, but the moment sail was set telescopes would be trained upon her from the city walls and if the operation failed everyone would know and would be amused—and the *Lydia* might be de-

layed for many hours repairing damage.

But he was not going to abandon that anchor and cable.

HE LOOKED up at the vane at the masthead, and overside at the water; the wind was across the tide, which gave them a chance, at least. He issued his orders quietly, taking the utmost precaution to conceal his trepidation, and steadily keeping his back to Lady Barbara.

The topmen raced aloft to set the fore topsail; with that and the driver he could get sternway upon the ship. Harrison stood by the capstan ready first to let the cable go with a run and then second to have it hove in like lightning when the ship came forward again. Bush had his men ready at the braces, and every idle hand was gathered round the capstan.

The cable roared out as the ship gathered sternway; Hornblower stood rooted to the quarterdeck feeling that he would give a week of his life for the chance to pace up and down without meeting Lady Barbara's eyes.

With narrowed eyes he watched the progress of the ship, his mind juggling with a dozen factors at once—the drag of the cable on the bows, the pressure of the wind on the driver and the backed fore topsail, the set of the tide, the increasing sternway, the amount of cable still to run out.

He picked his moment.

"Hard-a-starboard," he rasped at the quartermaster at the wheel, and then to the hands forward, "Smartly with the braces now!"

With the rudder hard across the ship came round a trifle. The fore topsail came round. The jibs and fore staysails were set like lightning. There was a shuddering moment before the ship paid off. Her sternway checked, the ship hesitated, and then, joyfully, began slowly to move forward close hauled.

Up aloft every sail that could draw was being set as Hornblower barked his orders. The capstan clanked ecstatically as Harrison's men raced round with the bars gathering the cable again.

Hornblower had a moment to think now, with the ship gathering forward way. The drag of the cable would throw her all aback if he gave her the least chance. He was conscious of the rapid beating of his heart as he watched the main topsail for the first signs of flapping. It took all his force of will to keep his voice from shaking as he gave his orders to the helmsman.

The cable was coming in fast; the next crisis was at hand, which would see the anchor out of the ground or the *Lydia* dismasted.

He nerved himself for it, judged his moment, and then shouted for all sail to be got in.

ALL the long and painful drill to which Bush had subjected the crew bore its fruit now. Courses, topsails and top gallants were got in during the few seconds which were left, and as the last shred of canvas disappeared a fresh order from Hornblower brought the ship round, pointing straight into the wind and toward the hidden anchor, the way she had gathered carrying her slowly forward. Hornblower strained his ears to listen to the capstan.

Clank-clank-clank-clank.

Harrison was driving his men round and round the capstan like madmen.

Clank-clank-clank.

The ship was moving perceptibly slower. He could not tell yet if all this effort was to end ignominiously in failure.

Clank-clank.

There came a wild yell from Harrison.

"Anchor's free, sir!"

"Set all sail, Mr. Bush," said Hornblower; Bush was making no attempt to conceal his admiration for a brilliant piece of seamanship, and Hornblower had to struggle hard to keep his voice at the hard mechanical pitch which would hide his elation and convince everyone that he had had no doubt from the very start of the success of his manoeuvre.

He set a compass course, and as the ship came round and steadied upon it he gave one final glance of inspection round the deck.

"Ha—h'm," he rasped, and dived below, to where he could relax and recover, out of Bush's sight—and out of Lady Barbara's, too.

CHAPTER XI

MORE NEWS FROM EUROPE

STRETCHED flat on his back in his cabin, blowing thick greasy wreaths of smoke from one of General Hernandez' cigars toward the deck above him where sat Lady Barbara, Hornblower began slowly to recover from the strain of a very trying day. It had begun with the approach to Panama, with every nerve keyed up lest an ambush had been laid, and it had ended so far with this trying business of the fouled anchor.

Between the two had come Lady Barbara's arrival and the interview with the Viceroy of New Granada.

The Viceroy had been a typical Spanish gentleman of the old school—Hornblower decided that he would rather have dealings with El Supremo any day of the week. El Supremo might have an unpleasant habit of barbarously putting men to death, but he found no difficulty in making up his mind and one could be confident that orders issued by him would be obeyed with equal promptitude.

The Viceroy, on the other hand, while full of approval of Hornblower's suggestion that instant action against the rebels was necessary, had not been ready to act on it. He was obviously surprised at Hornblower's decision to sail from Panama on the same day as his arrival—he had expected the *Lydia* to stay for at least a week of fêtings and junketings and idleness.

He had agreed that at least a thousand soldiers must be transported to the Nicaraguan coast—although a thousand soldiers constituted practically the whole of his command—but he had clearly intended to postpone until the morrow the issuing of orders for that concentration.

Hornblower had had to use all his tact to persuade him to do it at once, to give his instructions from his very banqueting table, and to put his favourite aides de camp to the pain of riding with messages under a hot sun during the sacred hours of the siesta.

The banquet had in itself been trying; Hornblower felt as if there were no skin left on his palate, so highly peppered had been every dish.

Both because of the spiciness of the food and the pressing hospitality of the Viceroy it had been hard to avoid drinking too much; in an age of hard drinking Hornblower stood almost alone in his abstemiousness, from no conscientious motive but solely because he actively disliked the feeling of not having complete control of his judgment.

But he could not refuse that last glass of wine, seeing what news had just come in. He sat up on his cot with a jerk. That business with the anchor had driven the recollection out of his mind. Good manners compelled him to go and communicate the news to Lady Barbara, seeing how closely it concerned her. He ran up on deck, pitched his cigar overboard, and went toward her. Gerard, the officer of the watch, was in close conversation with her; Hornblower smiled grimly to himself when he saw Gerard hurriedly break off the conversation and move away.

SHE was still seated aft by the taffrail in her hammock chair, the Negress at her feet. She seemed to be drinking in the cool wind against which the *Lydia* was standing out of the gulf close hauled. On the starboard beam the sun was nearly at the horizon, a disc of orange fire in the clear blue of the sky, and she was exposing her face to its level beams with a total disregard for her complexion which accounted for her sunburn and, presumably, for the fact that she was now twenty seven and still unmarried despite a trip to India.

Yet there was a serenity in her expression which seemed to show that at the moment at least she was not worrying about being an old maid.

She acknowledged his bow with a smile.

"It is heavenly to be at sea again, Captain," she said. "You have given me no opportunity so far to tell you how grateful I am to you for taking me away from Panama. To be a prisoner was bad enough, but to be free and yet to be confined there by force of circumstances would have driven me out of my mind. Believe me, Captain, you have won my eternal gratitude."

Hornblower bowed again.

"I trust the Dons treated your ladyship with all respect?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well enough. But Spanish manners can grow trying. I was in the charge of Her Excellency—an admirable woman, but insupportably dull. In Spanish America women are treated like Mohammedans. And Spanish-American food—"

The words recalled to Hornblower the banquet he had just endured, and the expression on his face made Lady Barbara break off her sentence to laugh, so infectiously that Hornblower could not help but join in.

"Will you not sit down, Captain?"

Hornblower resented the suggestion. He had never once during this commission sat in a chair on his own deck, and he disliked innovations in his habits.

"Thank you, your ladyship, but I prefer to stand if I may. I came to give you good news."

"Indeed? Then your company is doubly pleasant. I am all eagerness to hear."

"Your brother, Sir Arthur, has won a great victory in Portugal over the French. Under the terms of a convention the French are evacuating the whole country and are handing over Lisbon to the English army."

"That is very good news. I have always been proud of Arthur—this makes me prouder still."

"It gives me great pleasure to be the first to congratulate his sister."

Lady Barbara contrived miraculously to bow although seated in her hammock chair—Hornblower was conscious of the difficulty of the feat and grudgingly admitted to himself that it was well done.

"How did the news come?"

"It was announced to the Viceroy while I was at dinner with him. A ship has reached Porto Bello from Cadiz, and a messenger rode express by the waggon road. There were other news as well—how true is more than I can say."

"To what effect, Captain?"

"The Spaniards claim a victory, too. They say a whole army of Bonaparte's has surrendered to them in Andalusia. They are already looking forward to an invasion of France in company with the English army."

"And how true do you think it is?"

"I distrust it. They may have cut off a detachment by good luck. But it will need more than a Spanish army to beat Bonaparte. I can foresee no speedy end to the war."

Lady Barbara nodded a grave approval. She looked out to where the sun was sinking into the sea, and Hornblower looked with her. To him the disappearance of the sun each evening into those placid waters was a daily miracle of beauty. The line of the horizon cut the disc now. They watched silently, as the sun sank farther and farther. Soon only a tiny edge was left; it vanished, reappeared for a second like a glint of gold as the *Lydia* heaved up over the swell, and then faded once more. The sky glowed red in the west, but overhead it grew perceptibly darker with the approach of night.

"Beautiful! Exquisite!" said Lady Barbara; her hands were tightly clasped together. She was silent for a moment before she spoke again, returning to the last subject of conversation. "Yes. One gleam of success and the Spaniards will look on the war as good as over. And in England the herd will be expecting my brother to lead the army into Paris by

Christmas. And if he does not they will forget his victories and clamour for his head."

Hornblower resented the word "herd" —by birth and by blood he was one of the herd himself—but he was aware of the profound truth of Lady Barbara's remarks. She had summed up for him his opinion both of the Spanish national temperament and of the British mob. Along with that went her appreciation of the sunset and her opinion of Spanish-American food. He actually felt well disposed toward her.

"I hope," he said, ponderously, "that your ladyship was provided today during my absence with everything necessary? A ship is poorly provided with comforts for women, but I hope that my officers did their best for your ladyship."

"Thank you, Captain, they did indeed. There is only one more thing that I wish for, which I should like to ask as a favour."

"Yes, your ladyship?"

"And that is that you do not call me 'your ladyship.' Call me Lady Barbara, if you will."

"Certainly, your—Lady Barbara. Ha—h'm."

Ghosts of dimples appeared in the thin cheeks, and the bright eyes sparkled.

"And if 'Lady Barbara' does not come easily to you, Captain, and you wish to attract my attention, you can always say 'ha—h'm.'"

Hornblower stiffened with anger at this impertinence.

He was about to turn on his heel, drawing a deep breath as he did so, and he was about to exhale that breath and clear his throat when he realized that he would never again, or at least until he had reached some port where he could get rid of this woman, be able to make use of that useful and noncommittal sound.

But Lady Barbara checked him with outstretched hand; even at that moment he noticed her long slender fingers.

"I am sorry, Captain," she said, all contrition, "please accept my apologies, although I know now that it was quite unforgivable."

She looked positively pretty as she pleaded. Hornblower stood hesitating, looking down at her. He realized that why he was angry was not because of the impertinence, but because this sharp-witted woman had already guessed at the use he made of this sound to hide his feelings, and with that realization his anger changed into his usual contempt for himself.

"There is nothing to forgive, ma'am," he said, heavily. "And now, if you will forgive me in your turn, I will attend to my duties in the ship."

HE LEFT her there in the fast falling night. A ship's boy had just come aft and lighted the binnacle lamps, and he stopped and read on the slate and traverse board the record of the afternoon's run. He wrote in his painstaking hand the instructions with regard to calling him—because some time that night they would round Cape Mala and have to change course to the northward—and then he went below again to his cabin.

He felt oddly disturbed and ill at ease and not merely because of the upsetting of all his habits.

It was annoying that his own private water closet was barred to him now so that he had to use the wardroom one, but it was not just because of this. Not even was it merely because he was on his way to fight the *Natividad* again in the certain knowledge that with Vice Admiral Cristobal de Crespo in command it would be a hard battle.

That was part of what was troubling him—and then he realized with a shock that his disquiet was due to the added responsibility of Lady Barbara's presence on board.

He knew quite well what would be the fate of himself and his crew if the *Lydia* were beaten by the *Natividad*. They would be hanged or drowned or tortured to death—El Supremo would show no mercy to the Englishman who had turned

against him. That possibility left him unmoved at present, because it was so entirely inevitable that he should fight the *Natividad*.

But it was far different in Lady Barbara's case. He would have to see that she did not fall alive into Crespo's hands.

This brief wording of his difficulty brought him a sudden spasm of irritation.

He cursed the yellow fever which had driven her on board; he cursed his own slavish obedience to orders which had resulted in the *Natividad's* fighting on the rebel's side. He found himself clenching his hands and gritting his teeth with rage. If he won his fight public opinion would censure him (with all public opinion's usual ignorance of circumstances) for risking the life of a lady—of a Wellesley. If he lost it—but he could not bear to think about that. He cursed his own weakness for allowing her to come on board; for a moment he even dallied with the notion of putting back to Panama and setting her on shore. But he put that notion aside.

The *Natividad* might take the Manila galleon. His crew, already discomposed by all the recent changes of plan, would fret still more if he went back and then went to sea again. And Lady Barbara might refuse—and with yellow fever raging in Panama she would be justified.

He could not exercise his authority so brutally as to force a woman to land in a fever-stricken town. He swore to himself again, senselessly, making use of all the filthy oaths and frantic blasphemies acquired during his sea experience.

From the deck came a shrilling of pipes and a shouting of orders and a clatter of feet; apparently the wind had backed round now with the fall of night. As the sound died away the feeling of oppression in the tiny cabin overcame him.

It was hot and stuffy; the oil lamp swinging over his head stank horribly. He plunged up on deck again. Aft from the taffrail he heard a merry laugh from Lady Barbara, instantly followed by a chorus of guffaws.

The dark mass there must be at least half a dozen officers, all grouped round Lady Barbara's chair. It was only to be expected that after seven months—eight, nearly, now—without seeing an Englishwoman they would cluster round her like bees round a hive.

His first instinct was to drive them away, but he checked himself. He could not dictate to his officers how they spent their watch below, and they would attribute his action to his desire to monopolize her society to himself—and that was not in the least the case.

He went down again, unobserved by the group, to the stuffy cabin and the stinking lamp. It was the beginning of a sleepless and restless night for him.

CHAPTER XII

LADY BARBARA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

MORNING found the Lydia heaving and swooping lightly over a quartering sea. On the starboard beam, just jutting over the horizon, were the greyish-pink summits of the volcanoes of that tormented country; by ranging along just in sight of the coast the *Lydia* stood her best chance of discovering the *Natividad*.

The captain was already afoot—indeed, his coxswain Brown had had apologetically to sand the captain's portion of the quarterdeck while he paced up and down it.

Far away on the port side the black shape of a whale broke surface in a flurry of foam—dazzling white against the blue sea—and a thin plume of white smoke was visible as the whale emptied its lungs. Hornblower liked whales for some reason or other; the sight of this one, in fact, led him on his first step back toward good temper. With the imminent prospect of his cold shower bath before him the prickle of sweat under his shirt was gratifying now instead of irritating.

Two hours ago he had been telling himself that he loathed this Pacific coast, its blue sea and its hideous volcanoes—even its freedom from navigational difficulties. He had felt himself homesick

for the rocks and shoals and fogs and tides of the Channel, but now, bathed in sunshine, his opinion changed once more.

There was something to be said in favour of the Pacific after all. Perhaps this new alliance between Spain and England would induce the Dons to relax some of their selfish laws prohibiting trade with America; they might even go so far as to try to exploit the possibility of that canal across Nicaragua which the British Admiralty had in mind, and in that case this blue Pacific would come into its own.

El Supremo would have to be suppressed first, of course, but on this pleasant morning Hornblower foresaw less difficulty in that.

Gray, the master's mate, had come aft to heave the log. Hornblower checked in his walk to watch the operation. Gray tossed the little triangle of wood over the stern, and, log line in hand, he gazed fixedly with his boyish blue eyes at the dancing bit of wood.

"Turn!" he cried sharply to the hand with the sand glass, while the line ran out freely over the rail.

"Stop!" called the man with the glass.

Gray nipped the line with his fingers and checked its progress, and then read off the length run out. A sharp jerk at the thin cord which had run out with the line freed the peg so that the log now floated with its edge toward the ship, enabling Gray to pull the log in hand over hand.

"How much?" called Hornblower.

"Seven an' nigh on a half, sir."

The *Lydia* was a good ship to reel off seven and a half knots in that breeze, even though her best point of sailing was with the wind on her quarter. It would not take long if the wind held to reach waters where the *Natividad* might be expected to be found. The *Natividad* was a slow sailer, as nearly all those two-decker fifty gun ships were, and as Hornblower had noticed when he had sailed in her company ten days back—it might as well be ten years, so long did it seem—from the Gulf of Fonseca to La Libertad.

If he met her in the open sea he could trust to the handiness of his ship and the experience of his crew to outmanoeuvre her and discount her superior weight of metal.

If the ships once closed and the rebels boarded their superior numbers would overwhelm his crew. He must keep clear, slip across her stern and rake her half a dozen times.

Hornblower's busy mind, as he paced up and down the deck, began to visualize the battle, and to make plans for the possible eventualities—whether or not he might hold the weather gage, whether or not there might be a high sea running, whether or not the battle began close inshore.

•

THE little Negress Hebe came picking her way across the deck, her red handkerchief brilliant in the sunshine, and before the scandalized crew could prevent her she had interrupted the captain in his sacred morning walk.

"Milady says would the captain breakfast with her," she lisped.

"Eh—what's that?" asked Hornblower, taken by surprise and coming out of his day dream with a jerk, and then, as he realized the triviality for which he had been interrupted, "No, no, no! Tell her ladyship I will *not* breakfast with her. Tell her that I will *never* breakfast with her. Tell her that on *no* account am I to be sent messages during the morning. Tell her you are *not* allowed and neither is she on this deck before eight bells. *Get below!*"

Even then the little Negress did not seem to realize how enormous had been her offence.

She nodded and smiled as she backed away without a sign of contrition. Apparently she was used to white gentlemen who were irascible before breakfast and attributed little importance to the symptoms.

The open skylight of the after cabin was close beside him as he walked, and through it he could hear, now that his

reverie had been broken into, the clatter of crockery, and then first Hebe's and then Lady Barbara's voice.

The sound of the men scrubbing the decks, the harping of the rigging and the creaking of the timbers were noises to which he was used. From forward came the thunderous beat of a sledgehammer as the armourer and his mate worked upon the fluke of the anchor which had been bent in yesterday's misadventure.

He could tolerate all the ship's noises, but this clack-clack-clack of women's tongues through the open skylight would drive him mad. He stamped off the deck in a rage again. He did not enjoy his bath after all, and he cursed Polwheal for clumsiness in handing him his dressing gown, and he tore the threadbare shirt which Polwheal had put out for him and cursed again. It was intolerable that he should be driven in this fashion off his own deck.

Even the excellent coffee, sweetened (as he liked it) to a syrup with sugar, did not relieve his fresh ill temper. Nor, most assuredly, did the necessity of having to explain to Bush that *Lydia* was now sailing to seek out and to capture the *Natividad*, having already been to enormous pains to capture her and hand her over to the rebels who were now foes.

"Aye aye, sir," said Bush gravely, having heard the new development. He was being so obviously tactful, and he so pointedly refrained from comment, that Hornblower swore at him.

"Aye aye, sir," said Bush again, knowing perfectly well why he was being sworn at, and also knowing that he would be sworn at far worse if he said anything beyond "aye aye, sir."

Really what he wanted to utter was some expression of sympathy for Hornblower in his present situation, but he knew he dared not sympathize with his queer-tempered captain.

AS THE day wore on Hornblower came to repent of his ill humor. The saw-edged volcanic coast was slipping past them steadily, and ahead of them somewhere lay the *Natividad*. There was a desperate battle awaiting them, and before they should fight it would be tactful for him to entertain his officers to dinner.

And he knew that any captain with an eye to his professional advancement would be careful not to treat a Wellesley in the cavalier fashion he had employed up to the present. And ordinary politeness dictated that he should at this, the earliest opportunity, arrange that his guest should meet his officers formally at dinner, even though he knew full well that she had already, in her emancipated manner, conversed with half of them in the darkness of the quarterdeck.

He sent Polwheal across to Lady Barbara with a politely worded request that Lady Barbara would be so kind as to allow Captain Hornblower and his officers to dine with her in the after cabin and Polwheal returned with a politely worded message to the effect that Lady Barbara would be delighted.

Six was the maximum number that could sit round the after cabin table; and superstitiously Hornblower remembered that on the eve of his last encounter with the *Natividad* Galbraith, Clay, and Savage had been his guests. He would never have admitted to himself that it was for this reason that he invited them again in the hope of encountering similar good fortune, but it was the case nevertheless.

He invited Bush as the sixth—the other possible choice was Gerard, and Gerard was so handsome and had acquired somehow such a knowledge of the world that Hornblower did not want to bring him into too frequent contact with Lady Barbara—solely, he hastened to assure himself, for the sake of peace and quiet in his ship. And when that was all settled he could go on deck again to take his noon sights and pace his quarterdeck in his consuming restlessness, feeling that he could (after this exchange of polite messages) meet Lady Barbara's eye without the embarrassment that would previously have prevented him, unreasoningly.

The dinner at three o'clock was a success.

Clay and Savage passed through the stages of behaviour that might have been expected of boys their age. At first they were brusque and shy in Lady Barbara's presence, and then, when the novelty had worn off and they had a glass of wine inside them they moved toward the other extreme of over-familiarity.

Even the hard-bitten Bush, surprisingly, showed the same symptoms in the same order, while poor Galbraith was of course shy all the time.

But Hornblower was astonished at the ease with which Lady Barbara handled them. His own Maria would have been too gauche ever to have pulled that party together, and in a world where he knew few women Hornblower was prone to measure the ones he met by Maria's standard.

Lady Barbara laughed away Clay's bumptiousness, listened appreciatively to Bush's account of Trafalgar (when he had been a junior lieutenant in the *Téméraire*) and then won Galbraith's heart completely by displaying a close knowledge of a remarkable poem called "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" by an Edinburgh lawyer—every line of which Galbraith knew by heart, and which Galbraith thought was the greatest poem in the English language. His cheeks glowed with pleasure as they discussed it.

HORNBLOWER kept his opinion of the work to himself. His model author was Gibbon, whose "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" was to be found in the very locker on which he sat, and he was surprised that a woman who could quote Juvenal with ease should be so interested in a barbaric romantic poem with no polish about it whatever.

He contented himself with sitting back and watching the faces round the table—Galbraith tense and pleased, Clay and Savage and Bush a little out of their depth but interested in spite of themselves, and Lady Barbara completely at ease, conversing with a fearless self-confidence which nevertheless (as Hornblower grudgingly admitted to himself) seemed to owe nothing to her great position.

She made no use of her sex, either, Hornblower realized, and yet she was, marvellously, neither cold nor masculine. She might have been Savage's aunt or Galbraith's sister. She could talk to men as an equal, and yet could keep from her manner both invitation and hostility.

She was very different from Maria. And when dinner was over and the officers rose to drink the health of the King, stooping under the deck beams (not until twenty-five or more years had passed would a King who had been a sailor himself give permission to the Navy to drink his health sitting) she echoed "God bless him!" and finished her single glass of wine with exactly the right touch of lighthearted solemnity which befitted the occasion.

Hornblower suddenly realized that he was passionately anxious for the evening not to end.

"Do you play whist, Lady Barbara?" he asked.

"Why, yes," she said, "are there whist players on board this ship?"

"There are some who are not too enthusiastic," replied Hornblower, grinning at his juniors.

But nobody had nearly as much objection to playing in a four with Lady Barbara, the more so as her presence might moderate the captain's dry strictness.

The cut allotted Lady Barbara as the captain's partner against Clay and Galbraith. Clay dealt and turned up a heart as trump; it was Lady Barbara's lead. She led the king of hearts, and Hornblower writhed uneasily in his seat.

This might well be the play of a mere tyro, and somehow it hurt him to think that Lady Barbara was a bad whist player. But the king of hearts was followed by the king of diamonds, which also took the trick, and that by the ace of hearts, followed by the seven. Hornblower took the trick with the queen—

his last heart, making a total of eleven played, and returned a diamond.

Down came Lady Barbara's queen. Next came the ace of diamonds, and then two small ones to follow. At his first discard Hornblower dropped the seven from his suit of four clubs headed by king and knave. His opponents each discarded small spades on that remorseless string of diamonds.

From doubt Hornblower changed instantly to complete confidence in his partner, which was entirely justified. She led the ace of clubs followed by the three, Hornblower finessed his knave, played his king, on which his partner discarded her singleton spade and then claimed the last two tricks with her remaining trumps.

They had made a slam even though their opponents held every single trick in spades.

Lady Barbara had shown that she could play a good hand well; later she proved that she could fight out a losing hand with equal brilliance.

She watched every discard, noted every signal, finessed boldly when there was a chance of profit, returned her partner's leads and yet resolutely ignored them if her hand justified the risk; she played low from a sequence and led high. Not since the *Lydia* had left England had Hornblower had such an excellent whist partner.

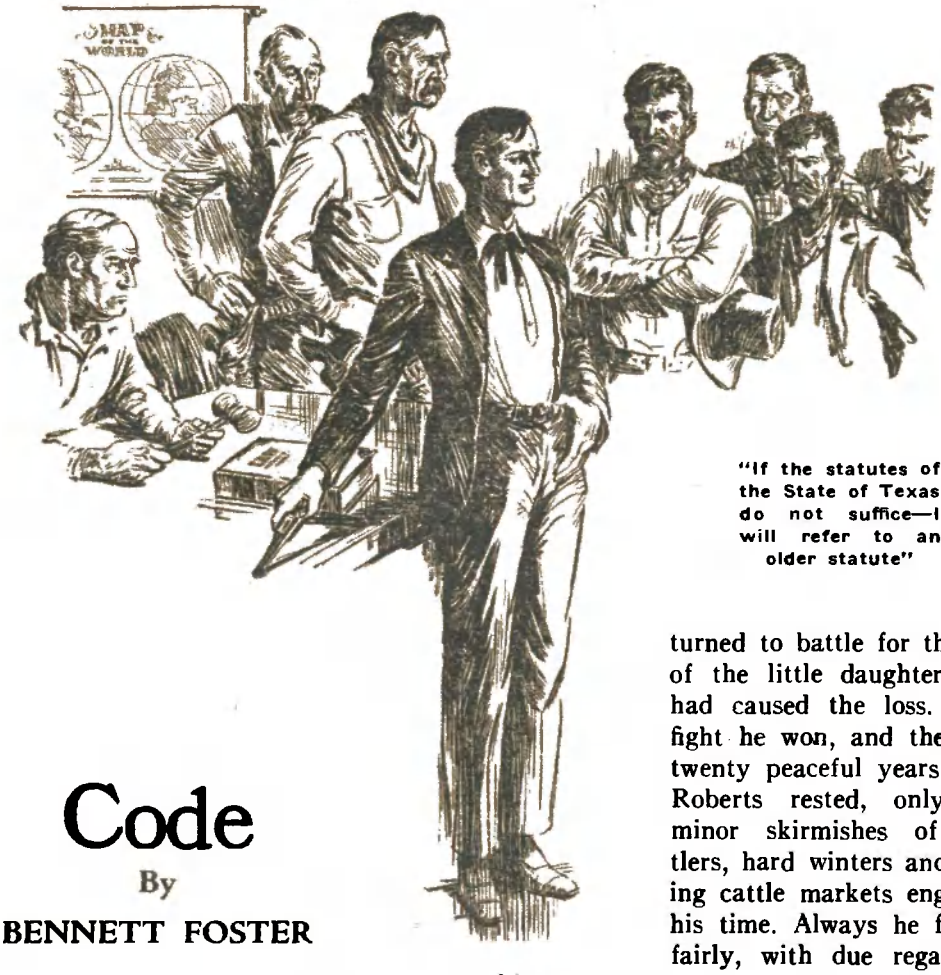
In his pleasure at this discovery Hornblower quite forgot to have any qualms at the fact that here was a woman who could do something well.

AND the next evening she displayed another accomplishment, when she brought out a guitar onto the quarterdeck and accompanied herself in the songs which she sang in a sweet soprano—so sweet that the crew came creeping aft and crouched to listen under the gangways and coughed and fidgeted sentimentally at the close of each song.

Galbraith was her slave, and she could play on his musical heartstrings as on her guitar. The midshipmen loved her. Even the barnacle-encrusted officers like Bush and Crystal softened toward her, and Gerard flashed his brilliant smile at her and made play with his good looks and told her stories of his privateering days and of his slaving adventures up the African rivers.

Hornblower watched Gerard anxiously during that voyage up the Nicaraguan coast, and cursed his own tone deafness which made Lady Barbara's singing not merely indifferent to him but almost painful.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



"If the statutes of the State of Texas do not suffice—I will refer to an older statute"

Code

By

BENNETT FOSTER

The nesters came to Tortugas Flats with their plows and their barbed wire and Tom Roberts, cowman, won the first battle he ever lost

TOM ROBERTS had fought all his life. At fourteen, long-haired and tattered, he fought his way from kid horse-wrangler to the job of full-fledged hand. At twenty he bucked against the problem of range and grass on the Tortugas Flats, six years' wages bet on the outcome, and a scrawny herd of cows making the going hard. At thirty he fought against the weakness, the lassitude, the wanness of the one person he loved, his wife, and losing that fight had turned to battle for the life of the little daughter that had caused the loss. That fight he won, and then for twenty peaceful years Tom Roberts rested, only the minor skirmishes of rustlers, hard winters and falling cattle markets engaging his time. Always he fought fairly, with due regard to his opponents.

"It ain't," he told Butch Kennedy, caught with twelve head of R. Cross T steers, "that I blame you, Butch. It ain't even that I'm sore at you. It's just that a cowthief is a cowthief an' a caught cowthief gets hung. No hard feelin's?"

Whereupon Butch Kennedy, knowing the code, took the hand that was extended, and said, "No hard feelin's," and walked over to an adjacent cottonwood where dangled a rope. It was all in the game and, so Butch knew, Tom Roberts had been fair.

Now with fifty years on his shoulders, Tom Roberts beetled his bushy gray eyebrows, squinted down his fierce hawk nose and let the fires of battle kindle in his blue eyes. For the nesters had come

to Tortugas Flats, had come with their plows and their rawboned horses and their ramshackle buildings and their barbed wire. The coming of the nesters brought Tom Roberts a fight.

As always he fought fairly, forcing the other cattlemen to follow his lead and relying on his allies of blazing sun and bitter cold. Riders of the Tortugas, haughty in boots and with the arrogance of the horseman, passed by the shacks of the plodding nesters. R Cross T men, subsidized by R Cross T money, settled on water holes and filed claims. Cattle were held to their own domain, away from the sagging, one wire fences of the interlopers. The other cowmen, at first, cut fences and threw herds of hungry cows on freshly sprouted crops, but Tom Roberts stopped that.

"We can beat 'em fair," he argued.

The fair tactics were slow to take effect. The preliminary skirmishes were lost and the nesters consolidated their gains. A little town sprang up at the Logán Creek crossing, a street beaten through the dusty grass and flanked by frame buildings. A gaunt, big-overalled dry farmer was given the appointment of deputy sheriff, and the nesters elected a fat and phlegmatic storekeeper as Justice of the Peace. Fresh furrows, glistening in the sun, were turned in the sod that had nourished R Cross T cattle, and more wire was strung. The cowmen held a meeting.

"We got to stop this," said Jake Ellman, rising before that booted group. "This is cow country an' nothin' else. These people come in an' break the sod an' raise a crop or two. Then we'll get a drouth an' they'll starve out. I been in this country thirty years an' I know, but you can't tell 'em. They laugh at you. What are we goin' to do?"

THEY looked at Tom Roberts then, Jake and Mitch Ellman and Bert Johns and Long Williams and Con Turner and the rest. They looked to their leader. Roberts made no move or answer and Johns, always hot headed, spoke swiftly.

"There's ways of stoppin' it!" he declared. "Up in Wyomin' there was Tom Horn an' . . ."

He let the words trail off. All knew what he had suggested: A paid killer and a reign of terror in the Tortugas.

"What about it, Tom?" asked Jake Ellman, putting the matter squarely.

Tom Roberts shook his head. "There's got to be another way, Jake," he answered.

At the conclusion of the meeting the cowmen parted, still undecided, still not knowing how to combat this menace. Riding back to the R Cross T, Tom Roberts came to the Hondo Bottoms. The bottom land was fenced and behind the thin strand of wire that forced Roberts to detour, there were furrows in the vega, in the sod that had raised so many tons of good vega hay for R Cross T cattle. Each furrow was a raw, red wound across Tom Roberts' heart.

There was a strange horse standing at the hitch rail in front of the long, low building that was R Cross T headquarters. Releasing Headlight to find his weary way to the corrals and a man that would unsaddle him, Tom Roberts stumped up the steps to the porch. Juana, twenty, and a blonde, red lipped, blue eyed replica of her mother, was coiled in the hammock, and stiff in a rawhide bottomed chair sat Bob Childress, a book opened on his knees. Tom Roberts slumped down in another chair and spoke to Juana.

"Get me my slippers, honey."

For three years Juana had been learning the niceties of life at the Loretta Academy in Las Palmas. She reminded her father of this learning. "Here is Mr. Childress, Father," she said.

"I seen him," answered Tom, gruffly. "Get me my slippers." He leaned forward and fell to tugging at a boot.

Juana smiled at Childress, paying for her father's gruffness, and rising went into the house. When she returned, carrying the slippers, Tom had his boot off and Childress was standing with his book in his hand.

". . . and furthermore, I like to listen to poetry," the cowman's daughter said

"Thank you for a pleasant afternoon," he said to Juana. "I must go now. Goodbye."

"You'll come back?" questioned Juana, giving Tom the slippers. "I love Tennyson, Mr. Childress, and I like to hear you read."

Bob Childress looked uneasily at Tom Roberts who was tugging at his other boot. Twenty-five years had not taught Bob Childress how to deal with silent disdain for himself. "Perhaps . . ." he answered. "Goodbye, Miss Roberts."

There was a loose board on the steps of the R Cross T house. Childress stumbled on it as he descended and the stumble did not make his leavetaking impressive, for Childress was rawboned and awkward at the best. Roberts, his aching feet relieved, snickered as Childress regained his balance and he was grinning derisively as the youngster took the fat-barreled mare from the hitch rail and, mounting, rode through the ranch-yard gate.

"Granger!" said Tom Roberts. "Look at the way he sits that horse."

"Dad!" Juana was outraged. "You weren't polite to him. You didn't even speak to him. I've never seen you—"

"Granger!" said Tom Roberts again. "A dry farmer."

"He is not!" Juana hotly refuted the imputation. "He teaches school at Logan. He's not a granger."

TURNING in his chair Tom Roberts confronted his daughter. "He might as well be," he accused. "They got him in here. He's with 'em, hand in glove. Maybe he ain't a granger really, but he's worse. At least a granger works, I reckon. But that . . . that damned he-schoolma'am—"

Juana had a temper as hot as her father's own. She was stiffly erect as she interrupted. "He did teach school!" said Juana. "He taught school so that he could study law. He passed his bar examinations last week and he is going to practice in Logan. I admire him . . ."

Tom chose another battle-ground. He had not won fights all his life by being stubborn. "What's the matter with all these other young sprouts around here?" he demanded. "What's happened to Mitch Ellman and the rest? You used to go riding with Mitch, and Carl Merchant was going to teach you to heel calves. What's happened to the boys around here that you'd be sittin' on the porch listenin' to poetry?"

"I can ride by myself," Juana answered, "and I already can rope as well as Carl Merchant. I *like* to listen to poetry." And with high heels tapping, she swept across the porch, as haughty as a two-year-old thoroughbred on bluegrass pasture.

Tom Roberts settled back in his chair and with the slippers a balm to his aching feet, and the warm Texas sun soothing his old body, he relaxed. After all, Juana was young. She would learn.

Riding back toward Logan, awkward on the ungainly mare, Bob Childress grinned ruefully. After all the old saw had the truth: True love does not run smoothly. Bob Childress knew that he loved Juana Roberts and adversity was

to be expected. He would go back to the R Cross T, but—and here his rueful grin became more rueful—he would be just as happy if Tom Roberts were not at the ranch when he returned.

Engrossed with other and greater troubles, for two weeks Tom Roberts gave no thought to the visitor that had come to the R Cross T. The cowmen of the Tortugas Flats looked to him for leadership in their fight and the cowmen were desperate. Still seeking a fair way to combat the growing menace to the range Roberts was constantly under pressure. The cattlemen met again. Long Williams had lost two colts, one a registered stud, cut to pieces by nester wire. Jake Ellman reported a freshly fleshed hide found on his range; and Bert Johns, squat and direct and forceful, spoke for action.

"I know a man in El Paso," said Johns. "We could get him. He comes high but he does the job. The Katy outfit had him over in the Tonto basin an' he cleaned that business up for them. I could get him."

Tom Roberts shook his head. "No, Bert," he said. "No. There's women and children here. We can't do that."

And so that meeting, too, adjourned without a plan. Roberts went back to the R Cross T and wrote letters to friends in Austin and in San Antonio and in Fort Worth. Wrote to men of prominence, to politicians in the legislature, and to the State Land Office, and others. He waited.

One by one his letters were answered. One by one his friends wrote expressing sympathy, politely sorry for the conditions, and offering no help. One more letter Roberts wrote, a letter to the Governor of the state. He rode in to mail the letter himself, unwilling to trust this last attempt to hands other than his own, and when he returned to the ranch that evening he found a copy of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, opened and lying on his chair. Tom Roberts called for Juana.

WHEN the girl came she found her father standing on the porch, the book in his hands. "Whose book is this?" demanded Roberts, knowing the answer to his question from the name written on the fly leaf.

"Bob's," said Juana, fearlessly. "He left it here today."

Roberts snapped the book shut and holding it, spoke again.

"Bob's?" said Roberts. "Bob's, huh?" and with a sweep of his arm he sent the *Idylls* flying. "So it's come to that, has it? You call him Bob?"

Juana's blue eyes were steady. "Yes," she answered. "I call him Bob."

For an instant there was silence between father and daughter. Tom Roberts' eyes, Tom Roberts' will, clashed with eyes as steady as his own, with a will as adamant. "Don't have him here no more!" ordered the old man, heavily. "Don't see him no more."

With no word Juana turned from her father and went into the house. Tom Roberts sat down in the chair, and unseeing, looked at the *Idylls of the King* that lay, torn, where he had thrown it.

It took a week for the Governor to answer Roberts' letter. During that week there was strain at the R Cross T ranchhouse. Juana went silently about her duties, speaking to her father only when spoken to. During that week, too, Tom Roberts interviewed Bob Childress. He stalked into the little shack in Logan where Childress had set up an office, his boot heels thumping the rough pine flooring. Childress rose from behind the dilapidated desk that, with two chairs comprised the sole furniture of the room. The two men, one old and rawboned and fierce, the other young and awkward and determined, faced each other.

"You been comin' to the ranch," grated Tom Roberts, when he had finished his inspection. "You been sneakin' out to see Juana. Don't come no more."

"I love Juana and I haven't been sneaking," Childress answered.

"Stay off the R Cross T."

"You can keep me off the ranch," agreed Childress, slowly, "but you can't keep me from loving your daughter."

Blue eyes stared into blue eyes. "You . . ." began Roberts, "you . . . let my girl alone!" He turned blindly then and went out of the room, not seeing the hand that Childress half held out, not hearing Bob Childress' voice beginning a sentence.

"Juana and I—"

THE answer came from the Governor. Bunk Harper brought it out from town and delivered it to the boss in the living room. Bunk stood by while Roberts read the letter. The return address: "Office of the Governor, Austin, Texas," had looked important to Bunk and he waited, for he was curious. Roberts read the letter through, read it through again. His last appeal had failed. The Governor, so the letter said, could do nothing. Perhaps an explanation to the State Land Office . . .

Tom Roberts stared blankly at the waiting Bunk. Bunk stirred uneasily. Was the boss mad?

"I didn't know Miss Juana was goin' to town," said Bunk, making talk to avoid that uneasy stare. "If I had I could have saved a trip."

"Juana?" said Tom Roberts.

"She was talkin' to that schoolma'am," explained Bunk. "I seen her in Kellermans store, talkin' to him."

Tom Roberts came out of his chair. "Saddle Headlight for me," he ordered.

"Headlight?" questioned Bunk.

"Damn it! Saddle him!" roared Roberts. At a bowlegged run Bunk left the living room.

Later at the corrals, when Tom Roberts had sent Headlight loping toward the north, Bunk commented to Pete Sorrell, the grizzled foreman, who was loitering close by.

"The boss is sore an' he's in a hurry. He got a letter from the Governor today. Wonder where he's goin'?"

"Headed for Johns'," answered Sorrell. "Come on, Bunk. You loafed all day. Let's get to work."

Bert Johns was in the corral at the J Slash when Headlight pounded up. Bert Johns came out through the gate, closing it behind him, and made his visitor welcome.

"Hello, Tom," said Bert. "You're most in time for supper. You . . . what's the matter?"

"Turn loose your wolf!" snarled Roberts, leaning from the saddle. "Turn him loose, Bert."

"What do you mean, Tom?" asked Johns. "What—?"

"Write your man in El Paso," ordered Tom Roberts. "Write him an' tell him to come."

Grim anticipation spread across Bert Johns' face. "Tonight," he agreed. "Light down, Tom. We'll eat an' talk. We got—"

Headlight was reined sharply around. Bert Johns, startled, had a view of Headlight's black tail and bunching haunches. Then Headlight was gone, pounding off toward the south again. Puzzlement wrote itself largely across Johns' face. Then he shrugged.

"What the hell?" said Bert Johns as he walked toward the house. "What's got into him?"

At the door of the house, lifting his voice, he called to his wife. "Mary," called Bert Johns, "where's my pen an' some paper? I got a letter to write."

TORTUGAS FLATS felt the difference. There had been unpleasantness before, minor flareups, quarrels between cowmen and nesters; and an occasional cowboy, drunk to drown his troubles, making a fight of it, warming up to some granger kid and venting his spleen with his fists. These things ceased. There remained a grim tension with the cowmen meeting each other when they were in town, standing together, talking in undertones, and their eyes hard and baleful as they singled out some granger.

Then a stranger arrived in Logan, a small, quiet-faced man that in a more crowded country would have attracted no attention. Bert Johns met the stranger and whirled him away in the J Slash buckboard. At the J Slash the cowmen came

together once more, Long Williams and Con Turner and the Ellmans and Tom Roberts.

"This is Frisco," said Bert Johns. "He's come up from El Paso. I reckon we better lay our plans."

Frisco nodded his mouse-brown head. "Pleased to meet you all," said Frisco.

Tom Roberts took no part in the talk that followed. He listened as Johns, assuming leadership, went over the ground with the newcomer. He heard young Mitch Ellman and his bit, and old Jake Ellman, slow and stolid, put in a word or two. Tom Roberts watched Frisco, watched the man's lifeless, pale gray eyes.

When the cowmen finished their explanations, finished airing their ideas, Frisco spoke. "There ought to be trouble to start it," said Frisco, musingly. "We've got to know the leaders. With them out of the way the rest will pull out. I want to know who to work on."

"You can work on any of 'em," flared Johns. "You—"

Frisco shook his head, his gray eyes hard and lifeless. "Just the leaders," said Frisco. "They're the ones. We'll have to start something."

Expert opinion delivered here. Orders given. Bert Johns subsided. "All right," he said. "Then we'll start trouble."

IN LOGAN Bob Childress waited for his first client. He had visitors in his office, men and sometimes women who came in to talk. Children, gangling youngsters in bib overalls and girls in gingham dresses, now and again came shyly to see him, remembering days in the little frame school. Of paying business Bob had none, consequently he was surprised when Elder Havey, the president of the school board and stanch supporter of the church, arrived at his office door, breathing fire and demanding vengeance. Seating the old man in a chair Bob Childress calmed him sufficently for coherent explanation.

The Elder, so Bob learned, had been on his north forty working in the corn, laying it by. There, sitting his cultivator, the Elder had witnessed a surprising sight. Bert Johns, the cowman, owner of the J Slash, had appeared at the fence. He had seen the Elder, no question as to that, but, deliberately, Johns had clipped the two strands of wire that protected the corn, had cut them between a half dozen posts. Then Johns had disappeared again only to return driving cattle. These he had put through the break in the fence, driving them through the wire and past Elder Havey who had tried to impede their progress. The cattle had trampled the corn, damaging it. As for Johns, he had laughed at the Elder's expostulations and had ridden off the way he had come. Elder Havey demanded justice, he demanded retribution, he demanded vengeance.

"Do you," asked Bob Childress, "want to sue Bert Johns for the damage to your crop?"

The Elder shook his head. Money would not assuage his hurts. Bert Johns had flouted him and, more, had laughed at him.

"Then," said Bob Childress, "you must go to Justice Blatt and swear out a warrant for Mr. Johns. You can charge him with a misdemeanor. The deputy will arrest him and he must appear in the Justice court."

"You come with me, Bob," pleaded Elder Havey. "You know what to do. An' I want you to go to court an' prosecute him, too. Why, dang him, he laughed at me!"

Bob Childress got up from his chair. "I'll go with you," he said. "I'll act for you, Elder. But this means trouble, you know."

"I want trouble," shrilled the Elder. "The Bible says an eye for an eye an' a tooth for a tooth, an' dang it, I'll have his teeth for my corn he spoilt."

And so the uncertain young man who held the deputy sheriff appointment, rode out of Logan to the J Slash to serve the warrant which had been sworn out. In Logan there was increasing tension, talk in the stores and on the corners, in the poolroom and at the saloon. And late that

afternoon Bob Childress had another visitor, a small, undemonstrative, gray-eyed man who walked into Bob's office and, unbidden, sat down.

"I hear," said the gray-eyed man without premliminary, "that you've agreed to act for Elder Havey. How about it?"

Bob Childress' lips were thin as they curved in a smile. "I've been expecting you," said Childress. "Yes, I've agreed to act for Elder Havey."

The gray-eyed man shook his head. "That's trouble," he suggested.

"That's trouble," agreed the lawyer.

"Don't do it." The counseling voice was gentle. "Leave town. There's nothin' here for you."

"Except trouble?" suggested Childress.

"Except trouble," agreed the gray-eyed man. "What do you want to be killed for?"

"I suppose," Bob Childress answered, "that if I'm killed I want to be killed for doing what is right. For fighting fairly. You can take that answer back with you."

THE gray-eyed man shrugged and got up. "You've picked it," he said, and walked out of the office. When he was gone Bob Childress studied the backs of the five leather-bound books that comprised his legal library. Apparently they did not answer the question that was in his mind for he searched his pockets and brought from them his scanty store of money. Sitting at his desk he counted it and again was dissatisfied. There was not enough. Slowly Bob Childress returned his money to his pocket and picking up his hat he too left his office, intent on trying his credit at Kellerman's general store.

That night another advocate of the cowmen visited Bob Childress. The young lawyer had eaten his supper and was sitting alone in his office when the door was thrust open and Juana Roberts came in. She paused a moment just inside the room, her hand behind her holding the door closed.

Then, with a little gasp she came across the office in one swift motion. Her lips were soft, her breath warm and sweet on his cheek and he could feel the beat of her heart. "Bob! Bob!" she sobbed. "They mean to kill you."

For a time Bob Childress held her so, his hand stroking her hair, his voice a low croon of comfort. "Now honey. Now sweetheart."

Juana was Tom Roberts' daughter and Tom Roberts had fought all his life. After a time she released herself from the strong arms that held her. After a time she seated herself in the other chair and rearranged her hair with deft touches.

"You know what's happened, Bob," she said. "It's Bert Johns and that man, Frisco. They were at our house for supper. I heard them talk."

"Yes," Bob Childress nodded. "I know what has happened, Juana. Some of it, at least. I know that Elder Havey swore out a warrant for Bert Johns this morning. I know that Bill Riley went out to serve it and Johns told him he was too busy to come to town now, that he would come in tomorrow. I know that I was told to leave town and that the Elder has asked me to represent him in court. I know those things."

"You've got to go, Bob," Juana was deadly serious. "They mean to kill you. Johns and Frisco were talking at the table tonight. Johns was laughing about the warrant and Frisco said he had been to see you. He said you were a trouble-maker and Johns nodded his head. I hate Bert Johns. I've known him all my life and—"

"But they don't mean me any harm," lied Bob Childress. "I'm just a lawyer representing a client."

"That man Frisco!" Juana shuddered. "Have you seen his eyes?" Silence for a moment then: "He said you were in the way and Bert Johns said they would have to attend to that. They mean to kill you, Bob!"

"And what did your father say?"

"He looked at his plate and kept still." The girl left her chair and came to Bob's side once more. "You've got to go, Bob. You've got to get out of this town."

Bob Childress laughed. "They won't

hurt me, sweetheart," he reassured her. "What would you think of me, a lawyer, running off from his first case? There isn't any danger." He paused and then added shyly, "I'd intended asking the Elder to marry us. That would be my first fee."

Juana kissed him then, holding him with a fierce possessiveness, and for a time there was no more talk of danger. Then Bob Childress asked: "How did you come to town, Juana. What did you tell your father?"

"I told him I was going to see Elsie Turner," the girl answered promptly. "But I'm not. I'm going—"

Bob Childress got up. "You're going right on to Turner's," he said. "I'll take you there. And honey, you mustn't worry. Everything will be all right." He spoke with authority and conviction and Juana Roberts, reassured, allowed herself to be kissed again and lifted from her chair and escorted from the office.

IN THE morning Logan was tight as new-strung wire. Word had gone out from the town and before eight o'clock the men who had homesteaded along Logan Creek and on the rich bottom land, were coming in, some in wagons with their wives and families, others mounted on big plow horses freed from labor for the day. With these came others: lithe-limbed riders, leather-chapped and booted, joined the men in Logan's streets. These wore six-guns at their hips, or where their weapons did not show visibly, unwonted bulges under coats or shirts told of concealed armament. They avoided the gathering farmers, clinging to their own society and staying close to the saloon.

At ten o'clock Bert Johns, flanked by two J Slash riders and accompanied by the gray-eyed Frisco, rode in and went directly to the general store where Herman Blott, Justice of the Peace, had his office. With his advent there was a general movement toward the store, the farmers coming from street corners and from the livery barn; the cowmen moving in a group from the saloon. Herman Blott, fat and perspiring, pushed his way through the crowded store, his voice shrill as he announced:

"There ain't room in here. We're goin' to hold the trial in the school house."

The crowd left Blott's store, following the fat man. Bert Johns accompanied them, swaggering a little with the attention attracted to himself. Frisco, quiet and unobtrusive, walked at Johns' side.

Up the street toward the school building trooped the crowd and as they walked, Tom Roberts rode into town. With Roberts were Bunk Harper and Pete Sorrell. As they rode down the street Roberts noted the women, sunbonneted and anxious-faced, standing on the porches of the stores, sheltered by the awnings. Here and there a small, grimy hand clutched a woman's skirts as though the children, too, felt the tension that filled Logan.

"Well, Tom?" said Pete Sorrell, veteran fighter in his own right, and second in command in many a battle.

Tom Roberts rode grimly ahead, making no reply.

"There's a pretty gal," announced Bunk. "Wonder who she is."

"Nester!" spat Roberts.

Before the school house the trio dismounted and leaving their horses ground-tied, crowded in. They forced their way up the aisle between the small seats where now sat big-boned men.

In the front of the room, behind the teacher's desk, was Blott, wiping his bald head with a gaudy red bandanna. To Blott's right, Bert Johns leaned nonchalantly against a window; Frisco, small and silent and alert beside him. Across from them on the other side of the room, Elder Havey, flanked by two stalwart sons, glared defiance at Johns. Cowmen stood along the walls, some leaning back, others restlessly shifting their weight from booted foot to booted foot. There were no women in the little room. Bert Johns grinned at Tom Roberts as Roberts stopped, just at the end of the aisle.

"This court will come to order," shrilled

Blott, nervously. He knew what was coming, did Justice of the Peace Blott, knew it and feared it and dreaded it. Frisco had called on Herman Blott, had talked to him in no uncertain terms. "Where's Bob Childress?" the Justice's voice went on.

THERE was a stir at the door and men made way in the aisle. Tom Roberts stepped aside. Bob Childress, a leather-bound book under his arm, came through the crowd and stopped before the teacher's desk, where he had sat so long.

"This court is called to order," Blott began. "Bert Johns, you have been arrested for a misdemeanor. You are charged with cutting fence and driving cattle through on growing crops. How do you plead, guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," answered Johns, grinning.

Elder Havey's voice sounded from where he stood, a harsh cackle of words. A cowman, close beside him, growled a warning and the Elder's sons closed in on their father, protecting him.

"If it please your honor." Bob Childress' voice was calm and low. Somehow it carried through the room. Men stopped their motions and voices that had been raised were stilled. Standing there before the teacher's desk Bob Childress was a little pale. His skin was stretched tightly across his cheeks; the muscles bunched at the angles of his jaw.

"I have been retained to prosecute this case," said Bob Childress in the quiet that had come to the schoolroom. Carefully then he laid on the teacher's desk the leather book he carried. From the pocket of his coat he produced a short barreled, blue steel, heavy caliber gun and laid it beside the book. His credit had been good at Kellerman's store.

"I intend to do so," continued Bob Childress. "I intend to prosecute this case to the limit and extent of the statutes of the State of Texas." His long-fingered hand touched the leather cover of the book, lingered a moment and moved on. "And if they do not suffice," said Bob Childress, "I will refer to the older statutes of the state." The fingers rested on the gun and stayed there.

It took courage—more than courage.

There was silence in the schoolroom as Bob Childress' blue eyes held the gray eyes of Frisco. Bert Johns, his swagger gone, stood tense and ready. Along the wall the cattlemen waited, needing a sign, and in the aisle and at the desks the grangers sat wide-eyed and still.

Pete Sorrell was watching Bob Childress intently. Sorrell's hand rested on his belt buckle. There was a Colt just behind the buckle. Pete Sorrell was surprised by an elbow shoved forcibly into his ribs. He grunted and turned his head.

Tom Roberts had started to move. Deliberately, steadily, he walked across the cleared space in front of the teacher's desk until he was behind Bob Childress, with the young lawyer between himself and Bert Johns. So a man takes position when he means to back the play of another. So does a fighter's second take his place.

"C'm on, Bunk," ordered Pete Sorrell in a harsh whisper, and he too moved across the opening until he was beside Tom Roberts.

Still the silence held in the schoolroom. Herman Blott wiped the top of his glistening head.

"I would like to hear the plea," said Bob Childress.

Mechanically Blott echoed the words. "How do you plead?"

Frisco had reached up and was whispering in Bert Johns' ear. Frisco's face was impassive. Bert Johns shook his head. He glared at Tom Roberts. Straight and stiff behind Childress, Tom Roberts met and held Johns' gaze, and beside Roberts were Pete Sorrell and the wondering Bunk.

"Guilty," Johns blurted suddenly. "Tom, you've . . ."

IN THE confusion that broke in the room, Justice Blott could scarcely make his voice heard. When order came he ran his words together as he pronounced sentence.

"Ten dollars and costs," said Justice Blott. "Court's adjouned." The fat man could hardly walk as he came from behind the desk. Bert Johns pulled a bill from his pocket and flung it down.

"Tom," said Bert Johns again. "Tom, you . . ."

But Tom Roberts had taken two steps and was looking down at the man, Frisco. "Pull out," ordered Roberts. "You'll get your money."

"Suits me," returned Frisco.

It took time for the schoolroom to empty. Bob Childress leaned against the teacher's desk, shaking hands with now one man, now another. He talked little, replying in monosyllables to the words of praise and congratulation that showered upon him. There was a gone feeling in his chest as though some vital part had been removed. Tom Roberts and Pete Sorrell remained standing close beside the wall. Bunk had departed. Bunk remembered the good-looking girl in the sunbonnet and had gone to find her.

When all but a few had left the room Tom Roberts walked over and stood looking at Childress. Childress returned the look and Roberts spoke suddenly.

"You won your case," he said.

"Thanks to you," answered Childress.

For another moment their eyes met and locked and then the cowman turned abruptly and stalked down the aisle Sorrell following, faithful as a dog, at his heels. Bob Childress watched them go and then, suddenly, he turned to face the desk and his head went down on his hands and on the Statutes of the State of Texas.

At the door of the schoolhouse Roberts paused. A girl was running toward him, her eyes dark with terror, her face blanched and white. Juana. She caught Tom Roberts' arm as she reached the single step and looked up at him.

"He's inside," growled Tom Roberts. "It's all right. Go ahead."

He stepped aside and Juana, mounting the step, went into the building. Roberts heard her little glad cry. Very slowly he stepped down and squatted with his back against the schoolhouse wall. Pete Sorrell settled down beside him.

The nesters were drifting off down the street. Out in the road a little knot of cowmen looked curiously at the men beside the schoolhouse door. After awhile Tom Roberts would have to conciliate those cowmen who had looked to him for leadership. But not yet. He had time now, time to squat there by the wall and to listen to the murmuring voices that came through the school-house door.

Pete Sorrell fashioned a cigarette between thick, work-worn fingers. Sorrell put the cigarette in his mouth. "He's got what it takes," said Pete Sorrell.

"Yeah," growled Tom Roberts.

"You won't have to look back to see if he's followin'," Sorrell went on musingly. "And it was fair, anyhow."

Tom Roberts nodded. It was fair. The fight was not won; it was not lost. There were still the allies of wind and cold, of heat and drouth. He, old Tom Roberts, might not live to see the finish of his fight, but he would know that it had been fair.

"Yeah," said Pete Sorrell suddenly, giving final judgment. "I reckon he'll do to take along, Tom."

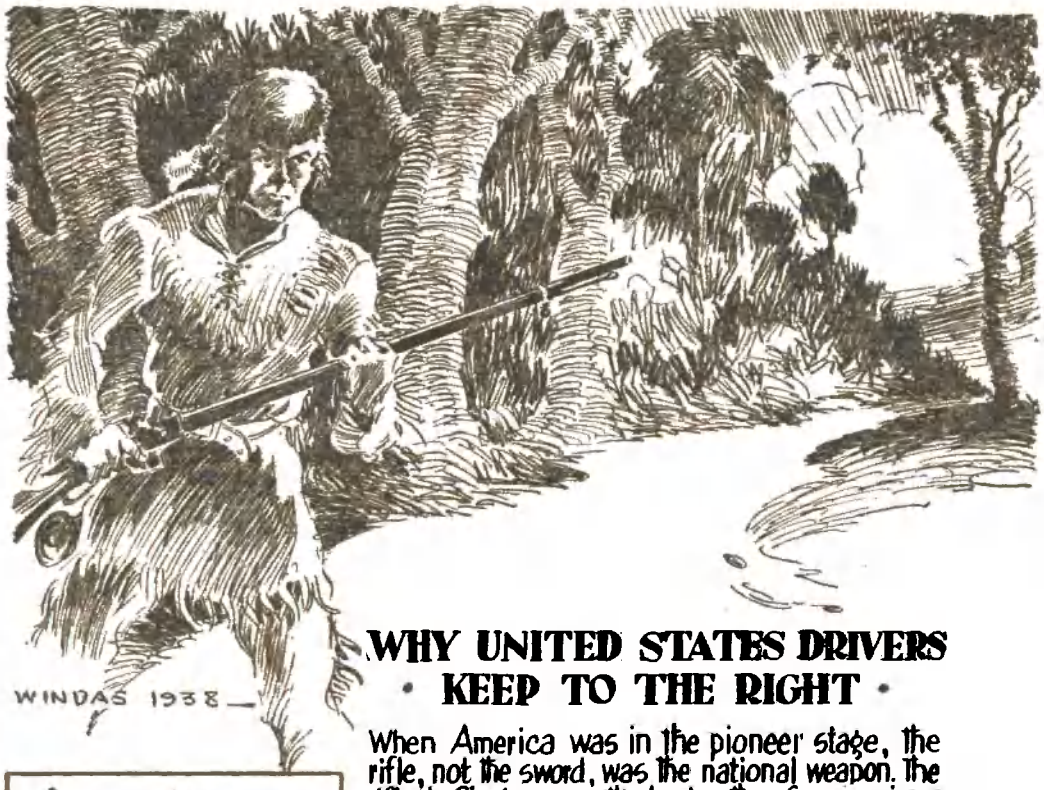
Tom Roberts grunted. The cowmen were moving off, one or another of them occasionally looking back. There would be a heap of explaining to do to those men, to those neighbors of his. Tom dreaded it. Still he could explain. He was the leader and the others followed, accepting his judgment. His mind drifted back to the range, to the good gramma that had been plowed, to the straggling fences, to the long years that were coming with the range growing less and less and the farms more and more.

Out of a clear sky Pete Sorrell spoke once more. "They both got blue eyes." said.

Again Tom Roberts grunted. Perhaps those years might not be so hard after all, he thought. There is a lot of comfort in blue-eyed grandchildren.

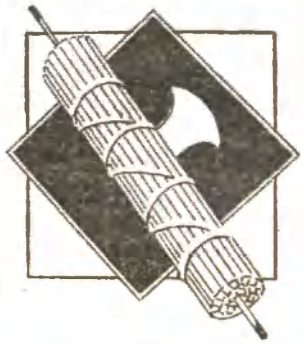
LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS



WHY UNITED STATES DRIVERS · KEEP TO THE RIGHT ·

When America was in the pioneer stage, the rifle, not the sword, was the national weapon. The rifle is fired across the body; therefore Americans on the alert in hostile country instinctively walked on the RIGHT of the trail.



· FASCINE ·

A bundle of wood bound together, used in sieges etc. Its name is derived from the Roman fasces, a symbolical bundle of rods and an axe, carried by a general's lictor, signifying authority to have men flogged or executed.

· *The* 'FLASH' ·

This device, worn on collars of present-day Royal Welsh Fusiliers, is a relic of the time when queues were worn. The "flash" kept the queues from staining the coat.

· BATTLE of PARIS ·

Soldiers who served in France during the war, but saw no action at the front, were said to have fought "the battle of Paris."

David heard the cold voice say: "Put them up, please"

Lost House

By FRANCES SHELLEY WEES

XXV

Lost House;
June 22;
10.15 P. M.

DAVID beached the canoe at the front gate and unlocked the gate cautiously with Mrs. Leighton's keys. The three of them moved softly up the grass at the edge of the cobbled walk. The drawing-room windows were open, and the light from them lay in bands across the grass. Most of the guests were still in the living room; everyone was there but Lord Geoffrey and Shane Meredith. The juxtaposition of their two names gave David something to think about.

David led them silently through the shadows around the end of the south wing and in at the area door. The servants' staircase was deserted; he switched on the light and preceded them to the upper hall. At the top he glanced momentarily down the hall and then moved toward Doctor Mayhew's door. He put out his hand to the knob.

The door was locked.

"What's the matter?" Pamela asked anxiously. "What is it, David?"

He took Mrs. Leighton's keys from his pocket without remark and began to search among them. But, under his eyes, the knob had already begun to turn, slowly, soundlessly. The door moved back half an inch. Then, as if the person opening it were reassured at sight of them, it opened wide, and Shane Meredith stood just inside the room with a faint smile on his lips at their obvious surprise. David stared at him.

"Come in," Meredith said in a low tone. His eyes went over Red and Pamela. "I see you were successful," he went on.

Pamela stared at him. His face was no longer that of a petulant invalid, but strong and full of purpose. He pulled the door shut after them. "I suppose this is rather a shock," he said, his eyes on David's face. "Sometimes one has to be a bit melodramatic."

The first installment of this six-part serial, herein concluded, was printed in the Argosy for August 27

David did not answer. His eyes went to Doctor Mayhew.

The old man was propped up on his pillows, his face full of color, his eyes brighter than they had been since before he was ill. But they did not meet David's squarely in answer to his questioning glance. Instead the old doctor looked at Pamela, at her disheveled hair, the streak of dust across one cheek, her torn and ragged stockings. "My dear child," he said in tenderness and extreme relief. "You're all right? You're quite all right, Pamela?"

"Perfectly all right," she assured him, and sat down beside him with her hand in his. "It was wretched, of course, but it's all over now, thanks to David."

"And this is the boy?" Doctor Mayhew inquired. He smiled at Red. "Sit down, my lad," he commanded. "I'm afraid you've had a bad time. David, this is more than splendid." He looked strange, as if his mind were wandering. Then he seemed to pull himself together.

"You are wondering about Mr. Meredith," he said. "You are just in time to hear his story. He had only begun to tell it to me, after startling me with the news of his identity. Perhaps I had better—or will you tell Doctor Aylesworth what you have just told me, Mr. Meredith?"

MEREDITH'S eyes, for some reason faintly amused, went over David's face. He glanced at Pamela, gazing at him with such obvious expectation. He smiled. "These two youngsters are pretty sharp," he said. "Perhaps they have already ferreted out the truth." He turned to David, and waited. David's lips did not move, but Pamela cried out.

"Oh, I know it!" she burst forth. "And I made such an idiot of myself over the Archdeacon," she mourned. "You must have thought me a dreadful silly. But I couldn't have dreamed that you were the man from Scotland Yard, could I? You didn't intend anyone to guess."

There was a long whistle from Red, standing wide-eyed behind Pamela. "Scotland Yard!" he whispered. "Well, gee! I thought that was just a place they had in books!"

"It's real enough," Meredith replied, his eyes still on David's face. "Sorry I've been apparently such a useless tool," he said. "But I hadn't counted on this series of accidents, all happening so quckly. I thought I had the whole summer before me, and my orders were, as you may have guessed, to proceed with the utmost caution."

"You *are* the man from Scotland Yard?" David asked him directly. Pamela looked at David, questioning.

"Good lad," Meredith laughed. "You want to see credentials, don't you? Absolutely right, too. I'll get them for you. But we've got to decide on a course of action now, at the moment. I think you'll agree to that?"

"What do you propose?"

Meredith looked at him. There was a little silence. Then Meredith said quietly, "Do you, by any chance, know who it is we are dealing with?"

After a moment David said, steadily, "Yes. With a cheap crook who calls himself, grandiloquently, The Angel, and who has managed to get by, so far, because he very carefully leaves all the positions of danger to somebody else."

"My word," Meredith said, laughing. "I wish Lord Montana could hear that! I'm afraid he doesn't share your opinion."

"Lord Montana has perhaps seen only the results of The Angel's schemes, and doesn't quite understand what a very small part The Angel plays himself."

"David," Doctor Mayhew said sharply, "sit down, my boy. You are tired out, and no wonder. Mr. Meredith—your plan, then? We need something and at once, if what has happened is to be turned to your account in capturing The Angel."

"Right," Meredith agreed. "But I must assure Doctor Aylesworth that what he has to say about The Angel is perhaps unduly biased by his own coup tonight. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that such a thing does not happen twice. The Angel is too clever. He is the cleverest

criminal Scotland Yard has had any dealings with, and has given them more trouble than any other half-dozen men together. He sees everything, The Angel, knows everything, and acts on the third conclusion while others are just approaching the first one."

"I won't deny that he's clever," David said. "That's how he got Red this morning."

Meredith turned to face him. "Exactly," he said. "Yesterday Gifford disappeared. He was nowhere else on the island, and he hadn't got off the island. Therefore he must be in the one place The Angel couldn't get into, these rooms. Gifford's first anxiety would be to get his information to headquarters.

"Since he could not send it himself, he must try to get it through by someone he could trust. Miss Leighton comes at once to mind. She did not attempt to leave the island in the evening; presumably she did not know about Gifford in the evening. But in the morning she must be watched. A more ordinary man would have been willing to trust to the obstacles he had already established, his absolute control of the post and telegraph. Not so The Angel, who leaves nothing to chance. Had he trusted to chance this morning," Meredith said with a grimace, "he would be trapped now."

"Well, if I'd known he was somebody Scotland Yard wanted," Red breathed, "I bet I could have tackled him, or something."

"I'm certain you would have tried," Meredith assured him in his quiet voice. Red swelled visibly with pride.

Doctor Mayhew lifted his eyes. "What do you think he intends as his next move?" he asked.

Meredith hesitated. "There is in your mind no longer any question as to his identity?"

"Not any longer," Doctor Mayhew replied.

"And you?" he asked David.

"Naturally, I am sure, now," David answered.

PAMELA spoke after a moment. "Mother will be horrified, I wouldn't have believed it myself if I hadn't seen that it has to be Lord Geoffrey," she said. "Think of Lady Montana warning us against strangers; why, she sent us the Revels herself."

She asked Meredith directly, "In Lady Montana's circle, does one meet them? The Revels?"

"Constantly."

"He isn't, then, an imposter?"

"He is certainly Lord Geoffrey Revel, if that is what you mean."

"Then I don't understand. They have so much money. I don't see why—"

"Ah," Meredith said with a smile. Then, "No, you would not understand. The thrills of being successfully the great criminal are intense. To hoodwink the police of four continents, to be hunted by highly trained minds, and yet always to be able to be the close friend of the king of all the hunters, Lord Montana himself, head of Scotland Yard. It must indeed be a tremendous thrill. The man is more than clever. He is a genius. There is no niche in ordinary life which he is not too big to fill. There are in orthodox society too many restrictions for a brain such as his, a brain which sees individuals as insignificant pawns, to be swept aside without compunction if they threaten the project. As for money—the Revels as a family have had no money for years," he said. "They could not manage even such a modest affair as a trip to Lost House if Lord Geoffrey were not what he is."

"Well," Pamela said at last, "he may be able to hoodwink the police of four continents, but he doesn't really get very far with David."

Meredith smiled genially. There was a multitude of fine lines in the corners of his eyes. He looked years younger than Meredith, the singer, had looked.

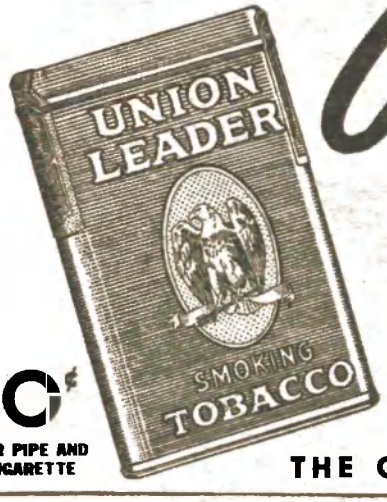
"No," he said. "He doesn't seem to get very far with David, does he? The Angel attacks Doctor Mayhew to keep him from talking, and David restores him. The Angel

(*Please turn to page* 112)

A kind friend
Then..and now

IN 1910—"I first smoked Union Leader when Joe Winders, who ran the general store over at the Forks, gave me some to try. 'Long as you live,' says Joe, 'you'll never meet up with a sweeter pipe tobaccy.' And after 28 years of smokin' Union Leader, I still think Joe was right."

TODAY . . ."Here I am 28 years later, still smoking Union Leader. When a tobacco is friendly and gentle and satisfying as long as that . . . it comes pretty close to makin' good."—Harry C. Bratt, Box 58, Hoosick, New York.



Union Leader

ALWAYS...For a third of a century UNION LEADER has been famed for its richness of flavor and freedom from bite! Choice, hill-grown Kentucky Burley gives Union Leader that appealing taste. Long aging in oaken casks adds smoothness and mellowness. A *special* process removes all harshness! Let a dime introduce you to a big tin of Union Leader, America's friendliest tobacco.

IC
FOR PIPE AND CIGARETTE

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE

whisks you two away so that he may have control of the situation, and David whisks you back."

"Where is he now?" Doctor Mayhew inquired. David glanced at him briefly.

Meredith pursed his lips. His eyes were clear and cold. "In the drawing room," he said, "lounging about with that inane and stupid smile, probably feeling thoroughly content with himself. My identity he does not suspect, the representative of the Canadian Police is unconscious and stowed away in a cupboard, Miss Leighton and the boy here he supposes to be his secure captives, and you, Doctor Mayhew, are also still paralyzed. It would give The Angel something of a shock to walk into the room at this moment. I got rather a shock myself to discover you conscious."

"What do you want us to do?" David pressed him, after a moment.

"Nothing," Meredith replied. "Absolutely nothing. It is imperative."

"I don't quite understand."

"This is where I come into the picture," Meredith explained. "Now that I know who is The Angel, I can lay my plans. But I must lay upon you four people here, and upon Mrs. Leighton, the ban of absolute silence until I have carried out my intentions. They may take some time. It will be simple enough. We can give out that Doctor Mayhew has recovered. Miss Leighton will appear among the guests tomorrow morning and we will make no explanations. None will be requested, since it is not known she was away.

"Your brother has come to visit you. The Angel will not understand. He will be uneasy. He may even decide to disappear, but I shall hold the trump card since he does not know of me. I imagine his suspicions are directed against the Archdeacon. If he disappears, and I with him, you will still keep silent. It is in my hands, now, and I want to make sure of every thread."

"Gifford?" David asked.

Meredith considered. "We'll have to get hold of Gifford, somehow, and have him brought up here. It will possibly be quite simple, and can be done through Jackson. Jackson does not know that Doctor Mayhew has recovered?"

"No."

PAMELA moved on her chair, but no one looked at her. Meredith went on. "Then they will be quite willing to bring him here for you to care for. I will communicate with his chief in Vancouver."

David stood silent, his eyes on Meredith's face. Doctor Mayhew spoke.

"There is one difficulty," he said carefully. "These children, Mr. Meredith. They are not safe. Here in these rooms, I suppose David and Gifford and myself will be able to guard ourselves from injury, invasion. But the boy and Pamela cannot stay here. What is to prevent The Angel from capturing them again and so putting us exactly where we were half an hour ago?"

Meredith smiled. "What is to prevent?" he asked. "I will prevent. I have—resources."

"I am sure of that," Doctor Mayhew said courteously. But he frowned. "I know you see our position. We four and Gifford are the only ones who constitute any menace to The Angel's schemes. If he gets Pamela and the boy, David, Mrs. Leighton and myself are no longer any menace. Gifford's reports would, if anything happened to him, be suppressed. Gifford himself might be attacked on his way back to Vancouver, murdered. You have resources, Mr. Meredith, but The Angel has strength has he not? He has at least Jackson, and Corder, and—"

"But he hasn't!" Pamela cried happily "That's just it, he hasn't!"

David turned toward her at sound of her voice. "Pam," he said quietly, "you are trembling with fatigue. Will you go to your room and lie down? I will get your mother and a maid and see that you get food at once. Red, you go with her, and you can lie on the couch in her sitting room. And lock the door behind you."

He faced Meredith. "Can we conclude

this discussion, then? If you could manage something about Gifford, it would be as well. And these children need to be cared for."

"Just a moment," Meredith said. "*I* can do nothing about Gifford; you forget, Doctor Aylesworth. I must be kept out of this. And I want to know, before you send her away, just what Miss Pamela means by her last remark? It sounds extremely interesting."

David looked at him steadily. "Pamela was speaking about Jackson and Corder," he said. "They had a slight accident. They're out of commission."

For half a second Meredith stood staring at him. Then his face lit up, and he laughed. He clapped David on the shoulder. "Lord, how perfect," he said. "Tell me!"

In a few words David related what had happened. Meredith listened carefully, understanding every move. At the end he was for a moment silent. Then, in a tense voice, he said, "We've got to act at once. This changes the whole situation."

His face was blank. His eyes were a thousand miles away. "Changes the situation," he said again. "We can't pretend nothing's happened now." He took a long breath. "When he misses Jackson and Corder, he'll go to the mine. We must go to the mine. It looks like the end at last, much sooner than I had hoped." He turned to David. "Will you come with me?"

"I want to go, too," Red put in hoarsely. "Can't I go, too? Oh, gee—Scotland Yard—. I'm not tired, Dave."

Doctor Mayhew broke in. His voice was quiet. He looked up at David, standing beside the bed. He put out his hand and took his water glass from the little table beside him. He held it out to David. "May I have some water, please," he asked.

Meredith's eyes were on Red, considering. "You'd be an extra pair of eyes and ears," he was saying.

David put his hand out for the glass. Doctor Mayhew's eyes did not turn to his, but as their fingers touched David felt a quick firm pressure. "Run the water in the bathtub," Doctor Mayhew said. "It gets cold more quickly." Then he turned to speak to Red, to remonstrate with him, but Meredith had decided. "No," he said. "I think not, lad. You look exhausted."

The water splashed into the tub. David bent past the shower curtain and held the glass for several seconds under the tap. The curtain hung open on the side away from the room. After a time he went back with the glass and handed it to Doctor Mayhew. He spoke directly to Red. "Absolutely not," he agreed with Meredith. "Your place is here, Red. You are to lock the door and let no one enter. Do you understand? *No one,* on any pretense whatever, save Mrs. Leighton herself. Pamela, you go into the hospital room and lie down. I'll see your mother. Remember, Red—no one. It's too late now to take any chances."

XXVI

The old mine;
June 22;
10.30 P. M.

"SO THIS is the hidden lair," Meredith said thoughtfully, gazing into the small room as it was illumined by David's torch. "Rather neat, isn't it?"

"Very neat," David agreed.

Meredith went across to the lamp on the center table. He hesitated before lifting it, and drew a pair of thin silk gloves, rather extraordinary gloves, from his pocket. "One doesn't want to muddle the fingerprints," he explained, and removed the glass chimney from the lamp to light it.

"Lost House will be full of fingerprints," David said, after a moment.

"Ah," Meredith murmured, carefully adjusting the wick. "There you don't know The Angel. You haven't as much respect for The Angel as you will have some day, David. There will not in the whole of Lost House be one clear print which could be singled out and identified as his. It is a simple matter, if one never forgets, always to smudge the print a little when it is absolutely necessary to use the tips of the fingers. And The Angel never forgets."

"Perhaps he hasn't so far," David re-

plied, switching off his torch and thrusting it into his pocket. "But he will. After all, though he may be clever, he's got only a human mind, and that's what the human mind does. Slips. Doesn't it?"

"Not The Angel's mind," Meredith answered calmly. "No, not The Angel's mind."

"I suppose," David answered, equally calmly, "I suppose he holds those opinions himself. He must be a conceited devil. He must be worse—he must have a mania. The insane asylums are full of people who think they're anything from George the Fifth to the Virgin Mary."

Meredith regarded him with an amused smile. "The Angel isn't mad," he said. He turned his attention to the loaded shelves against the wall. "There are several thousand pounds' worth of his stuff to prove that he does what he sets out to do and is no idle visionary." His eyes glinted over the rows of flasks and labeled tins. "That's a treasure trove for you," he said. "And the result of immense and careful planning. The Angel won't go and leave that."

"You think he's planning to go?"

Meredith glanced at him. "Not much else for him to do, is there?"

"Not much," David agreed. "He's licked, and if he's half as smart as the general opinion of him would have him, he knows he's licked and can't do anything but sneak away."

Meredith turned and faced David. He put his hands on the edge of the table and stood for a moment so, head a little bent, his eyes lifted with a curious sharpness in them. "I wouldn't use exactly those terms," he said in a soft voice.

"They're the correct ones," David maintained. "He *is* licked. His plans have fallen to nothing, his men are out of the game. Corder, as you saw, is badly knocked up. The police will come looking for Gifford in a day or two. Jackson's all right, but he's of no further use to The Angel, not at Lost House, even if there isn't enough evidence to stow him away for life. We can have Phelps and Henry out of Dark Forest in two minutes.

"Of course, if The Angel likes that sort of thing, he can gum-shoe up dark passages in the night and jimmy people's doors, and use his paralytic stunt on them. It seems a bit childish, but The Angel *is* a bit childish. All criminals are. They simply aren't good enough to fit into decent life and have to play cops and robbers to make themselves feel big. We know who The Angel is, now. It's only a question of nabbing him. So, if he has any sense at all instead of a good deal of tall talk and cheap bravado, he'll collapse his balloons and try the disappearing act. Yes, of course you're right. That's what he'll try to do."

MEREDITH began to laugh. He laughed until the tears ran down his face, and then kept on chuckling to himself as if he could never stop. "My boy, you're priceless," he said.

Then abruptly he stopped laughing as an idea occurred to him. He looked sharply at David, and then, abruptly, at the grating set into the ceiling of the small room. Through it the stars were faintly visible. Meredith moved across beneath it and stood listening, intent. David watched him with his own heart performing a mad sort of step-dance against his ribs. Then Meredith put up his hand and grasped something David had not yet noticed, a dusty slab of sorts set on runners against the wooden ceiling. He pulled it, and it moved harshly into place, covering the grating completely from below, and giving out the unmistakable sound of metal on metal.

"Rather a convenient little arrangement, that," he said admiringly. "Now we are quite private, David. No one can possibly creep along the ground and listen to what we're saying. I'm sure the thing is bullet proof, too."

He turned. "Now we'll get to work," he said. "We've wasted a good few precious minutes in talking. Those baskets beneath the shelves in the corner—they look as if they were made to hold the flasks. If you'll work there, David . . ."

He pulled a blanket down from the wall in one swift motion and laid it, open, on the floor. "I'll pile the boxes into this," he said. He stood facing the door, facing David. He dropped his hand into his pocket and drew out a small inlaid pistol of beautiful proportions and workmanship.

"I don't think we are likely to be disturbed," he explained, "but, if we are, I'm rather—what is it you Canadians say? Rather quick on the draw."

His eyes met David's.

"Why are you packing?" David asked coolly, after a moment. The pistol was still in Meredith's hand.

"Isn't it logical?" Meredith asked. He dropped the gun into his pocket again, and began to take the boxes off the shelves. David was a good two yards away. He stood watching the other man, watching his quick exact movements, not one wasted, not one false or abortive. Meredith met his eyes.

"The Angel will want to take this with him," he explained, a little impatiently. "If it is moved, he will waste time searching for it. In the meantime, I shall be away with his precious possessions and . . . on my way for the police."

"By airplane?" David asked.

"By airplane," Meredith answered after a moment. "So you know about the plane, too?"

"I knew there must be one. Mr. Gifford's idea." David said.

Meredith's thin hands paused for a moment in his task. "Gifford's idea?" he repeated. Then, "His own conclusion, of course. His headquarters knows nothing even yet of The Angel's connection with Lost House." He frowned slightly at David. "I'm in a hurry," he suggested.

There was a little pause. "I suppose you are," David agreed, and laughed.

MEREDITH paid no attention. "The airplane is at some distance over rather an awkward trail." he said. "I don't care to risk the time necessary to make more than one trip. If you will pack those baskets we can thrust poles through the handles, and I will tie these tins into a long bundle as well. One trip, with two of us, will do the trick, I think."

"Really," David said at last. "Don't you think you are asking almost too much?"

"Too much?" Meredith repeated sharply, and rose. His hand was in his pocket, naturally, on his pistol. His eyes narrowed. He regarded David closely. "So you aren't the young innocent, after all," he said.

"You have the right idea," David assured him. "But your conclusion is not exact. I agree thoroughly that I'm the young innocent, but the catch lies in the fact that one would need to be imbecilic to miss the point of this little game. Surely you realize that you've given yourself away at least a dozen times?"

The two men stood looking at each other for a long moment. "So that's your game," The Angel said at last. His tone was light and carefree. "I'm surprised at you, David. Trying to get me to talk, were you? For what purpose? I suppose you've been reading the melodramatic tales where the arch criminal has to be trapped into giving evidence against himself. Haven't you omitted something? You have to have witnesses, you know. Otherwise my word's as good as yours." Then he said in a soft voice, "You don't expect anything from your clerical friend from Scotland Yard, do you?"

David's heart turned over. But he managed to keep his voice steady, as he said, "Clerical friend?"

The Angel laughed. "He's been walking so cat-footed," he said scornfully, "that he hasn't felt the ground, yet. Now, look here; this has gone far enough. You will pack those baskets. Any childish notion you may have of delaying me is ridiculous. I want those baskets packed, and quickly."

"Just a minute," David persisted. "There's something you've overlooked."

"Overlooked?"

"You are, at this moment," David began, speaking slowly, thinking between his

sentences, "in a very bad position. If you leave Lost House now, if you accept this situation and do nothing about it, it seems to me you lose a great deal. First you lose Lost House as a base of operations, a valuable base. Your organization here will be quite disrupted. Jackson, Corder, Phelps, Henry—the police will get them all. And, from them, dozens more of your—shall we say, assistants? Gifford has a very comprehensive idea of your whole line-up, even to your tropical valley in the north." He stopped.

The Angel's lashes dropped for a tenth of a second, and then he resumed his steady unwavering waiting glance.

"Next," David went on, "you lose your identity. I suppose it's taken you years to build it up, to work your way into the society in England where you move so freely, into the friendship of Lord and Lady Montana. If you leave Lost House now you can never be Meredith again. You will have your freedom, but nothing else. You could not possibly be content to remain an ordinary citizen. You will have to start again and will lose the patient work of years. It must have taken the patient work of years to build up such an organization as this."

"Go on."

"You will not be able to handle a traffic in curihuana again," David said steadily. "The drug will be known. It will be tracked down mercilessly. You will have lost your source of wealth, your base, your advantages as Shane Meredith."

"And?"

"No," David contradicted. "Not and. If."

"If—if you . . ."

"Exactly. If I. You see? I am your mountain, am I not? Scotland Yard has no evidence. Gifford will not recover unless I manufacture the antidote and treat him.

"Of course," David said, "if Doctor Mayhew were to recover completely in the next few hours he would be in time to treat Mr. Gifford himself. But there is always the possibility that Doctor Mayhew might suffer a relapse." He paused to let the words sink in. "And if Doctor Mayhew did suffer a relapse, what he knows would be the property of no one but myself. Pamela and Red know of the existence of this room, but the curihuana will not be here. No evidence, again. Pamela knows of the complicity of Phelps and Henry at Dark Forest; you can easily replace them with others of your own men. Believing that you are from Scotland Yard, she will accept anything you suggest, as will her mother. I can give you a death certificate for Danvers. Jackson—we can build up a legend around Jackson to make it appear that he has been secretly working for Scotland Yard from the beginning and that I made a serious mistake in attacking him tonight. Nothing, I think, remains except the man from Scotland Yard himself. As for him—" David glanced eloquently at The Angel's pocket.

FOR a moment The Angel did not stir.

"So you want—how much?"

"You understand these things better than I do," David replied. "How much is it worth?"

"All this, I suppose," The Angel said evenly, "because you're in love with the girl and haven't got what it takes to marry her?"

"After all, that's my business, isn't it?"

The Angel put his hand to his lips. He looked very thoughtful and serious, but after a moment David became aware that he was laughing, there behind his hand. He could hide it no longer. He dropped his pretense and leaned weakly against the shelves, his eyes wet, shaking with silent laughter. He stopped abruptly.

"Ah, well," he said. "That was a good show, David." He straightened abruptly. "Now we'll pack," he said quietly, and without further words set about it. David stood motionless. He managed a glance at his wrist watch: only half an hour since they had left Lost House.

There was nothing further to be done.

(*Please turn to page* 118)

MAKE THIS TEST and increase your pipe pleasure!

1 If you think you enjoy tobacco flavor chiefly through your sense of *taste*... make this simple test. While you're smoking, pinch your nostrils shut. Note that your tobacco smoke tastes flat... *flavorless.*

2 *Now let go.* The flavor returns immediately, proving that you enjoy tobacco flavor chiefly through your sense of *smell.* That's why HALF & HALF'S distinctive *aroma,* added to its finer *taste,* gives you richer, fuller tobacco flavor. This exclusive quality is called FLAVOROMA.

Why you get FLAVOROMA only from Half & Half

As the test shows, you enjoy flavor *partly* through your sense of taste, *largely* through your sense of smell.

Knowing this, we set out to blend a tobacco appealing partly to your tongue, but *especially* to the keen nerves at the back of your nose.

In HALF & HALF, we got a blend that does just that. A blend with a special quality which we call FLAVOROMA... a perfect combination of AROMA and TASTE that produces finer tobacco flavor.

It is this exclusive quality of FLAVOROMA in HALF & HALF that gives you *more* pipe-smoking pleasure.

Try HALF & HALF yourself. Learn why FLAVOROMA is switching so many pipe-smokers to this tobacco every day.

THE TIN TELESCOPES! JUST PUSH IT TOGETHER... AS YOU USE UP THE TOBACCO...

THE TELESCOPE TIN gets smaller and smaller as you use it, makes tobacco easy to get at all the way down. No scraped fingers as you reach down for the last load. (Patent No. 1,770,920.)

Enjoy the FLAVOROMA of

HALF AND HALF

FOR PIPE OR CIGARETTE

David began to drop the flasks as slowly as he dared into the padded baskets. The Angel finished his tasks and knotted the blanket securely. He did not come to assist David, but stood two yards away, watching, waiting. When the flasks were packed he handed David the long heavy rod in silence, and David, perforce, thrust it through the four handles. He made one more attempt as The Angel gestured to him to grasp the end of the handle.

"Your answer?" he suggested.

"Nonsense," The Angel said shortly. His eyes gleamed for a moment with something that was not humor or good temper. "The play's over," he said, and then, "If men like you could be bought, there'd no longer be any thrill of danger in the game for men like me. To the left, you know. We follow the short passage now."

David lifted the rod in silence. In his left hand he took the knotted end of the blanket. Rather an ignominious business, but this wasn't the finish, although The Angel seemed to think so.

Or was it the finish? There was not a sound on the hill, not a crackling twig, an unguarded footstep, nothing to show that he had not done his part sufficiently well.

The Angel moved slowly along, directing progress from the rear, making David lead the way. David considered dropping his burden and leaping aside in the darkness, to attack The Angel a moment later —foolish plan. At his first move, before he could drop his load and get away, The Angel would shoot; he held his pistol in the hand with the rod. If he missed, what should be gained? David would not dare to move in the darkness lest he be heard. Worst of all, The Angel could steal silently off to his airplane and get away unscathed. Nothing was to be gained in that manner—save, perhaps, David's own safety.

AT MEREDITH'S direction David moved over, once out of the passage, into the bed of the small brook from which Pamela and Red had drunk. The bottom was sandy, and the brook was shallow, but it was not particularly comfortable to walk in. It certainly made an excellent path through the forest for one who wished to leave no track. At every step he listened and hoped—and heard nothing. His heart began to sink. They were away from the mine, now, and if they had come too soon to be followed; the sound of the brook concealed all the sounds of their progress.

But hope did not entirely desert him until, after what seemed an interminable distance, they left the brook again and went off across the end of a small clearing covered with thick soft grass. And then David became acutely aware of his own position. Shortly The Angel would be through with him. And then? But even as his mind offered him the thought, he was busy with another plan.

The Angel could read minds, it seemed. The airplane was nowhere in sight, but it might be within a few feet and still not be visible against the dark background of the trees. "Put down your load," he said sharply.

David dropped the pole and the knotted blanket. The Angel moved up to him. He was a tall and menacing figure in the darkness. His pistol touched David's back. He spoke softly.

"So kind of you to help me, David, until the end. But you have ideas, I am afraid. So I will warn you. You may do all the loading. I will stand by with the torch and the pistol, and one move of your hand toward the controls . . ." his voice fell away.

"I should think that you would have a good many enemies," David said levelly.

"Why?" The Angel inquired. "I think I've been remarkably thoughtful and lenient with you, David."

"I think you've been damned superior." David answered. "Still, I can understand you. You're one of those spoiled children who never had to take a bump. You've never been taken down. Of course, your day will come," he finished philosophically. "If I were you I should be rather worried about a landing place."

"Pile them in neatly," The Angel murmured. "That's the way, David. Neat, isn't it? My own invention. This isn't my plane, of course. It's Corder's. Rather a poor tool, Corder. His murder of Danvers was very crudely done and has caused me a great deal of trouble. Ah—landing place, did you say?" He sighed.

"You're a most apprehensive sort of chap. Just a short time ago you were trying to frighten me about identities. My dear David, I have half a dozen excellent landing places to choose from, and, although it may surprise you, at least three identities, any of which will enable me to be as close to Lord Montana and various other important people as I ever have been in the past."

He moved the light a little to disclose more clearly the padded drawers built so carefully around the inside of the cockpit of the plane. "I suppose it's too much to expect you to understand these things," he said. "You have a very naive and childish mind. It's an attribute of the provinces, this childishness. Very boring."

"Possibly," David replied equably. He moved his hand carelessly along one of the struts. He dropped it and bent to the blanket. The Angel flashed his light down.

"The last load?" he said with satisfaction. "Fold the blanket, then, and drop it in. Throw the baskets to one side. There. Now, move back!" he said sharply. "I will lock the lid down myself."

David moved back a yard. The Angel's light played on him steadily. The pistol was in that other hand, he knew. The Angel laid the flashlight on the plane so that it covered him, and with the gun pointed at David's heart, set to work with his left hand fastening down the hasps.

But there would be a moment when he had to turn to get into his seat . . .

The Angel moved aside, suddenly, like a cat; the light in one hand and the gun in the other. His voice was velvety, soft.

"Now," he said from the darkness, "I am through with you. So obliging, David, and such a fool you are. All this is your fault. From the beginning it has been your meddling which has caused all my difficulties. Did you think you would not pay for it? Fool! You have been useful, until now, but I am through with you at last." His voice dropped. It was a whisper. "Quite through, David," he said.

"I SHOULD think you ought to be," another voice said lazily from behind The Angel, from the cockpit of the plane itself. "You've had a lot of fun, Angel, haven't you? Put up your hands, please. I've got your gun, of course."

There were, suddenly, a dozen lights trained on the plane; a dozen torches directed at The Angel. He stood in the glare like something turned to stone, his face white and terrible, his eyes blazing. His hands were above his head, his wrists gripped already in a clasp of jangling steel. Behind him, in the pilot's seat, was Lord Geoffrey Revel, smiling languidly. And the plane was encircled with a ring of tall khaki-clad figures, broad felt hats at the usual insouciant angle, faces alert and strong and cheerful.

"Do let me introduce you," Lord Geoffrey begged. "Angel, or should I say, Mr. Henry Smith—no wonder you turned to a life of crime, Angel, to get away from such anonymity—let me introudce these young men, who represent the Narcotic Squad of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and who are very glad to meet you indeed. I don't believe you ever reckoned with them seriously, did you?

"Nor, I'm afraid," he said with a sigh, "with Scotland Yard, either. These lads have been hidden in the garden all the evening, Angel, by McQuittie's grace. I sent for them this morning, and do you know how? So simple. When you had the gentleman at the telegraph office leave his post for an hour or so to scour the forest, just to make sure that I was up to no mischief, I climbed a pole and used your wire to telephone through to Corbett. And then I went back to the shore and spent the rest of the morning sleeping on the sand in plain view of your blood-

hounds. You ought to be more careful of these little points, my dear Angel. A good criminal really neglects nothing."

"You think you've got me?" The Angel asked in a strangled voice. His eyes glittered in the light.

"Oh, dear, yes," Lord Geoffrey said mildly. "Don't you agree? Very much so. But I should never have made any headway if it hadn't been for David here, with his naive and childish mind. Provincial, too, didn't you say? Well, it's the same mind as lies in the heads of these charming young men with the hats, Angel, and you'll have every opportunity to show them your superior sophistication."

Then he dropped his hand on the Angel's shoulder, and said soberly, "Allow me to warn you that anything you say may be used against you, won't you, old chap?"

The Angel tried to talk. His teeth chattered. His face was like death. Lord Geoffrey, out of the plane, looked at him. "At least," he said coldly, "try to take it like a man. You've had your music. Now it's time to pay the piper."

XXVII

Lost House;
June 23;
3.30 P. M.

PAMELA sat in the wide swing hammock in the summer-house with her hands folded in her lap and the soft pink ruffles of her skirt spread out around her. One small foot in its laced white sandal moved restlessly from time to time. Except for the tell-tale foot, she was the picture of repose and contentment. Her dark lashes drooped over her eyes, her red lips were pressed only lightly together. In the wicker chair beside the door David sat with his head against the back of his chair, equally calm, with his eyes on Pamela. She looked very sweet—and she very young. And she had always lived s beautiful and sheltered place.

d broke a long silence. "You do have beautiful weather out here, don't you?" he commented politely.

Pamela stirred. "Yes, it is very pleasant," she said. "It is like this nearly all summer."

The afternoon sun spread a golden haze over the garden, broken only by the shadow patterns beneath the roses. Lost House was quiet and serene under its veil. Far to the north the snow-capped mountain peaks were like something one had dreamed against the brilliant blue of the summer sky. Over the tallest peak an impossibly white feathery cloud hung motionless.

"Do you go up to Banff frequently?" David inquired.

"No, not frequently. Three or four times during the summer, perhaps, we take our guests up to the hotel for tea, or dinner. The drive is really lovely, and the hotel always has wonderful music. Banff is a very interesting place, isn't it? It reminds me of a Swiss village."

Their eyes met for a moment, and then David looked away. There was nothing so remote as a thought of a Swiss village in Pamela's eyes. He fingered the strap of his watch absently, and did not speak. Across the garden, against the wall, McQuittie came into sight with Red at his heels. Their red heads flamed like fire in the sun. They had struck up an immediate friendship. McQuittie held no grudge against David for having knocked him down. On the contrary, he had regarded him all day, whenever they met, with his own brand of dour admiration.

"Well," Pamela said suddenly, "I suppose it's all over. The Angel is gone; Lady Revel is swanking it all over mother and saying 'I told you so' and nearly bursting with pride over her son's capturing The Angel, although it seems to me she must be very stupid never to have guessed that Lord Geoffrey was with Scotland Yard. She doesn't seem to think of that.

"And Mrs. Clarkson is gone. I was sorry about Mrs. Clarkson. She seemed to be quite nice. And Miss Josie is having a gorgeous time. She says she'll never get

over being thrilled at having Mr. Gifford step through the window and say she'd got to hide him, and tell her who he was. And she's got her funny note framed under glass already, as a memento, and the bit of ribbon beside it.

"I saw Mrs. Clarkson's luggage," she finished. "Lord Geoffrey showed me. All the trunks had false bottoms, and places between the linings, and where the corners were rounded off inside. I should think we might have suspected her at once, she had such a lot of luggage, and yet she never wore anything but those dowdy black things. She told mother she'd brought ever so many new clothes but hadn't the heart to wear them."

"There are other ways it's been getting into England, too," David said. "But they'll tighten up the Customs now they've got The Angel."

"DOCTOR Mayhew's terribly excited about his antidote, now, and all the letters and the articles he's going to write to tell people about it." Pamela sighed. "Everybody's had a wonderful time, really," she said.

"Payne says he's got Lost House on a long-term lease. I suppose you prefer that to outright sale?"

"I suppose so," she answered forlornly. "It doesn't really make much difference. We'll go to England in the autumn and we won't come back here for years and years . . . and years. But I don't blame mother. It would be even more difficult for her now, without Jackson. He was a very wicked man, but he was a marvelous butler. He managed everything; and mother never did feel safe and happy here, even before all this. She hates the mountains. She doesn't understand Canada. It isn't—it's never been quite *real* to her." She sighed faintly. "And Lord Geoffrey thinks it might be profitable to re-open the mine," she said.

"He says silver is worth so much more now, that we could afford to spend more getting it—or something," she said disinterestedly. She looked at him directly for the first time all day. "You're . . . going away tomorrow, aren't you?"

"Yes," David said, "we're going on up to Revelstoke. Perhaps we'll go down the Oanagan. Red hasn't seen it." He took out his cigarette case and glanced at her for permission. She nodded automatically. "I'd like to write you occasionally, if I may," he said abruptly, and was furious at himself for the formality which he could not seem to break.

There was a little silence. "If you're sure you would like to," Pamela replied politely.

"I'd like to very much. Will you have time to answer?"

"Time?" she repeated. "Of course. Hours and hours every day. I mean, there's just as much time in England as there is here," she said hastily.

"Not by about twelve hours a day," David assured her. "You'll be busy every minute—theatres, and dressmakers, I suppose, and that sort of thing."

She swung her foot. "I shall hate it," she said mutinously. Then, "No, I suppose that isn't true. I shan't hate it. After a while I shall probably get to like it very much—just enjoying myself every day, doing marvelous things that everyone else does. Oh," she cried rebelliously, "not really *doing* anything. Having things done to me and for me, and not doing anything myself. I want to do things."

David pressed his lips together. Up on the balcony at the end of Doctor Mayhew's room a small flurry of people suddenly appeared. Mr. Payne came first, trundling a long chair. He was followed by a maid with her arms full of pillows. She arranged them carefully in the chair. Then came the Archdeacon, supporting carefully the slight figure of the old doctor. He lowered him into the big chair, and Mrs. Mainwaring stalked out a trifle belatedly with a huge rug, which she tucked in firmly about him.

"THEY are having a good time, aren't they?" David said with a grin. "Tomorrow Gifford will be sitting up, too.

He's making first class progress, but he's full of wrath and rage at not being in at the finish. He played his part, as I keep telling him. Heaven only knows what would have happened or how events would have run if he hadn't stopped me talking when he did."

Pamela bit her lip. Her eyes were downcast. "*I* talked too much," she reminded him miserably. "I was an awful little fool, David. Anything might have happened to you."

David left his wicker chair and went across to the hammock. He sat down at the end and looked across at her. "I didn't want you to talk," he said candidly. "But when you did I couldn't help—that is, liking you for it. You're so decent, Pam, so trustful and confiding and . . ." he stopped.

She looked up hopefully, but he did not go on. He sat watching her through the faint haze of cigarette smoke. Her eyes met his.

"I felt dreadful," she said. "I was such a stupid, and you had to go into such danger because of what I said. Sylvia is feeling badly, too, but she's no reason to. She came to me this morning and said she should have had sense enough to suspect Mr. Meredith when he took her for that canoe ride. Not because he took her, of course, but because he was so queer about it. She says he rowed very quickly into the mouth of the little river, and then he moored the canoe out in the stream and waded ashore through such deep water that she couldn't follow, and said he had to post a letter and the current was too swift to row against it.

"And she sat there in the canoe, and she heard Red cry out, too, and then Mr. Meredith didn't really come back for quite a while. I suppose he was running to Dark Forest to get Mr. Henry. And when he did come back she says there were queer lines down from his nose, and he looked so pinched and angry.

"But she was so excited because he'd taken her canoeing that she didn't use her head at all. But she couldn't have known. She couldn't have guessed, but I could. You were queer when we got back to Doctor Mayhew's room. I might have guessed from your manner that you suspected Mr. Meredith. But I didn't. I believed everything he said. Why did you suspect him, David?"

"Because he was there at all," David said. "I'd been afraid of The Angel going up there, and I'd figured that, thinking I was there, that you and Red were in the mine and Jackson and Corder taking care of you, he'd come up to see Mayhew and me to negotiate on his own terms. So the moment I saw him I was suspicious; and then he was so clever about getting all his information out of us without volunteering any.

"*He* didn't say who The Angel was; he merely agreed with you when you said it was Lord Geoffrey, and elaborated on that theme. When he asked for silence I was sure; his game was so plain. He wanted simply an opportunity to get hold of you and Red again, and put you, this time, where we shouldn't find you. Then of course, his change of front when he found out about Jackson and Corder. And, from the first, Doctor Mayhew's attitude toward him wasn't natural. I knew there was something even before I got Mayhew's warning."

"Well," Pamela said, "I didn't get any of those things. Not one. I hadn't a suspicion of him at all. But when he had gone, and the door was shut behind you and Mr. Meredith, and then Lord Geoffrey stepped out of the shower curtain—I'd been thinking of him as The Angel, and there was Doctor Mayhew so ill and weak —I started to run to the door to call you, and then Doctor Mayhew stopped me of course and told me the truth.

"And I was nearly frantic, thinking you'd gone off without knowing, and then Lord Geoffrey said he'd whispered to you there in the bathroom to hold The Angel as long as possible, and that you knew Meredith was The Angel. I felt worse than ever, then, but so proud of you. And then, for hours and hours and hours, nothing

happened . . ." Her voice trailed away.

"I was perfectly safe," David said. "The Angel didn't dare kill me, even if he had any intention of killing me, until the last minute. Matter of fact, I doubt if he intended to kill me at all. Lord Geoffrey says he's never actually had a murder credited to him directly. That's why they call him The Angel."

"But you didn't know that."

"I was sure that Doctor Mayhew wouldn't send me into danger."

"You weren't sure of anything of the kind," Pamela contradicted. "You didn't think of yourself at all. They told you to go, and you went because it was your duty to go. I—I think you were wonderful," she said.

"Absolutely marvelous," David agreed. "I don't suppose anybody was ever half so marvelous in this world."

"Oh, well, if you want to be sarcastic," Pamela said coldly.

DAVID grinned at her. She wouldn't smile back. She looked down at her toe. After a minute she spoke.

"David?"

"Mm?"

"Where are you going to be next year?"

David considered. "Accurate information?"

"Yes. I want to know. And what you'll be doing, and everything."

"Well," he said lightly. "I'll tell you, Pam. I'm going into a hospital as senior interne. I'll be living in the hospital itself, you know. I shan't be doing anything but work and study, because I'll be getting seventy dollars a month as salary and out of that I'm going to save about fifty. That's from September, for a year. Then I want to go to Edinburgh and read for my D.R.C.S. I'll be there perhaps a year, too."

She was watching his face. "Will you go into practice then? Two years from now?"

"No. I want to study pathology first, for about three years. I don't quite know where I'll get the money, but I can work part time and study part time and maybe there'll be a scholarship somewhere. Perhaps by the time I'm thirty I can think about settling down into practise, if I do practise.

"I'm sure I want to practise for a few years, anyway, before settling down into a lab for the rest of my life. To tell you the truth, Pam," he said, hesitating, "it sounds like a very interesting life, to me, but not a rosy one financially. For the next seven or eight years I shan't be quite sure where the third meal from now is coming from, and as for any kind of luxury . . . for myself, of course, I'll be doing what I want to do, but for anyone else . . ."

Pamela's face brightened. "Were you thinking of someone else?"

"Oh, no," David said hastily. "No, of course not. Except that—well, you see the position it puts a chap into. I mean to say, it's got to be a solitary sort of business. Even if—even if one were to meet the girl . . . well, you can see the situation. If one had money it would be different. Then it would be quite different. But—"

"David."

"Yes?"

The small hand moved on the ruffled skirt. "If you happened to meet the girl," she said carefully, "wouldn't you explain all that to her and ask her to wait for you?"

David ran a hand over his ruffled hair. "Under certain circumstances I would," he answered. "Well, I might."

"What circumstances?"

"Oh," David said, harassed, "if she were . . . that is, if I thought . . . oh, hang it! Something would depend on her age, naturally, and on her own plans and prospects, wouldn't it?"

"One's age changes," Pamela said offhandedly, "and she might not like her own prospects a bit."

"If she's young," David said carefully, "she doesn't know what they are, Pam. It's much fairer to leave her free. One can't ask a girl to tie herself down for six or seven years."

"Five years," Pamela said decidedly. "Five years. Then you'd be practising. Where would you be practising, David? Would you still live in a hospital?" She colored faintly.

Fascinated, David watched the slow rose creep up over her cheeks.

"No, I should be in some small town, you know. Some town in Alberta. Alberta's a great province. It's where I belong. There are dozens of little towns—probably I'd be in one of about a thousand people, with electric lights that go off at midnight, and extra current on Monday and Tuesday mornings for the housewives to do their washing, and a lot of little five-roomed houses, and in the winter Ladies' Aid socials and Charity Bazaars, and in the summer Chautauqua for amusements."

Pamela wriggled. "It sounds beautiful, she said dreamily. "I don't know what any of those things are. I never heard of them, but it would be lovely. One could go shopping in the mornings—when the current wasn't on, of course," she said with a twinkle, "and bring one's basket home full of—oh, whatever they have in little towns—lettuce for salad, and steak, the kind you pound.

"And one would know everybody on the streets, and they would be neighbors, and the woman next door would send in half a dozen buns and a person could go and ask her for a good recipe for angel food. I've read all about it in books," she said. "It—I—it would be beautiful," she finished wistfully.

DAVID put out his hand at last and took the small one lying so near his own. He lifted it and looked at it, so unmarred by living. "You're sweet, Pam," he said huskily, and set his lips lightly against her palm. Then, very gently, he put it down again.

Pamela flung herself out of the hammock. She stood before him and scowled at him. "So *that's* the sort of person you are," she said angrily, and stamped her foot.

"Kind of person?" David said weakly. "What kind of person?"

"*That* kind," she said angrily. "Changing your mind all the time. I hate it. If anybody'd told me I wouldn't have believed it."

"But, Pam," David protested, standing, too. "I haven't changed my mind. What do you mean? I haven't changed my mind."

"You have. I hate it. Last night I heard you tell Red perfectly distinctly, if you want to know, that you were going to—to marry me. And now . . ." Her words faltered. Her cheeks flamed. "If you'd never said it," she explained, "it would have been all right. But you *did* say it, and I was counting on it."

"You didn't hear me say that. You were unconscious."

"You *did* say it, didn't you? Didn't you?"

"Well," David admitted, "yes. But it was mostly through relief at finding you, and . . . well, sheer bravado, I guess. I knew it was a dream. Even then I knew it was a dream."

Her eyes, gazing up at his face, softened. "A dream?" she repeated.

"I've explained it, Pam. I've tried to explain it to you just now. I can't ask you to marry me. I can't shut you away from the future you might have. I thought about it all last night, when I knew this was all over and I had to leave you. There, if you want it frankly, there it is. You're such a—you might even say you'd wait for me, if I asked you to. But your mother wouldn't allow it. She wouldn't consider it for a minute," David said unhappily.

Pamela smiled. "Wouldn't she?" she said.

"No."

"Have you asked her?"

"No. It wouldn't be fair to you, Pam."

"Well," Pamela said. "If *that's* all. I asked her myself."

David's startled eyes rested on hers. "You asked her?" he repeated.

"Yes. Rather I—I told her." Pamela's voice fell to a whisper. She turned away.

She stood with her back to him, gazing out over the lawn.

"Told her I wanted to marry you?"

"No," Pamela said under her breath. She turned again to face him, her eyes like stars. David was lost. He didn't hear what she had said. He put his arms out and forgot all about years and poverty and waiting.

"You're so sweet and little," he said. "Could you—do you—oh, all that talk about buns and yellow curtains, I don't know whether you mean it," David said desperately. "I do want to marry you. I'll always want to marry you. But you . . ."

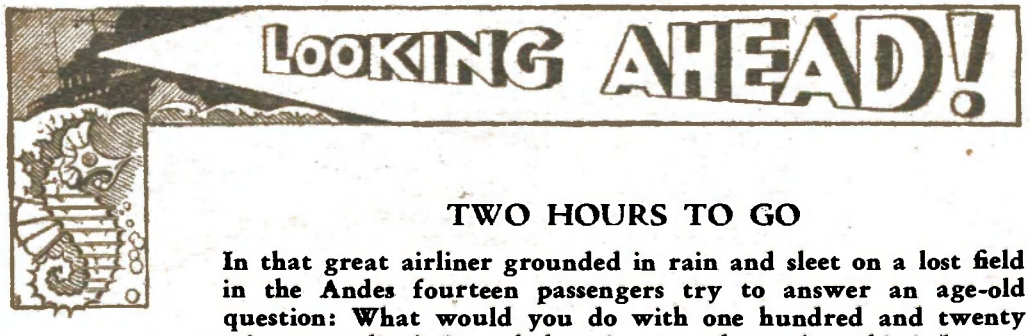
"Oh," she said softly, "don't quarrel and fuss about it any longer, David. I'm tired of it and it's so unnecessary. I knew the very first minute I saw you that I was going to marry you. That's what I told mother this morning. So it's all settled. If—"

There wasn't any if. David held her close at last and put his lips down to hers. The world spun around them. After a long time he realized that something was moving against his ankles, something rough and questioning. He glanced down. Pamela's little dog was there, panting happily, brown eyes sparkling.

"Hi!" David said, startled, "I'd forgotten all about you. Where's he been, Pam, all this time?"

"Buried," Pamela said, slipping her hand into David's. "You know. In sand. He had to be. Poor little dog. He missed everything."

THE END



TWO HOURS TO GO

In that great airliner grounded in rain and sleet on a lost field in the Andes fourteen passengers try to answer an age-old question: What would you do with one hundred and twenty minutes to live? One of them is a murderer; but this is known only by John Enfield, who follows the trail of the foulard forget-me-nots that make a hangman's noose. Beginning a novel of mystery and terror by

THEODORE ROSCOE

RIVER PIG

Fifty miles back in the timber Law ended. But Riley Greer stuck to the lumberjack's code—until a woman made his loyalties look like lightning-blasted pine. A novelet of the Wisconsin woods by

ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Also Fine Fiction by C. S. Forester, Richard Sale, H. Bedford-Jones and Others

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—OCTOBER 8

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

IT'S about time, we expect, to give you some idea as to what your favorite authors are doing these days — how they are living, whether they eat their red-blooded vitamins regularly, etc. . . . At last report, not one of them, within the past year, has been indicted for murder or even jailed for a lesser crime. Even better, more of them are keeping their hands off Hollywood than were last year. They sell their movie rights as regularly as ever, but keep away from the glittering city. True, Max Brand is out there now, and George Bruce is staying on—but Richard Wormser has gotten a good thirty miles away and most of the rest of the lads are fancy free. . . . As for Frederick Painton, he's moved to an island—hiding, we suspect, from any possible invasion of America. Richard Sale has been summering as usual by the sea, tracking down tuna off the Jersey coast, while Charles Tenney Jackson, when last heard from, was about to disappear into a mangrove swamp, determined to bring Mase McKay back alive. As for Richard H. Watkins and Eustace Adams, it's hard to tell whether they'll be in Maine or Florida at any given time, but we do know the latter has just finished a new serial.

Donald Barr Chidsey is still tramping the globe, and may even be in Pongo Mongo now, but not all our writers are such gadabouts. There are C. S. Forester and Bennett Foster, for instance, both sitting quietly at home—the former in England, the latter in New Mexico—hard at work on new serials. And we promised not to divulge the whereabouts of Theodore Roscoe, but he has a new novel coming up in a couple of weeks.

There are others we'd like to talk about but we're always willing to give way to a correspondent with as many variegated suggestions as

MARTIN SULLIVAN

This is my second or third letter to you regarding the magazine in which we are both interested. In my last letter to you I spoke in a clamorous and dissatisfied voice but now you will note that I have subsided a bit and am a bit more satisfied.

However, there are still a few things that could undergo a drastic change. I fully realize the fact, though, that you will not go out of business if I should happen by a remote chance to cease buying the mag.

Before I go any farther I should like to relate some merits of your mag that I've noticed recently. Some exceptionally fine stories were printed during the first four months of the year, but you seem to have fallen down below that standard since then.

Stories such as "Golden Acres," "Ship of the Line" and "Red Star of Tarzan" really make ARGOSY what it is.

I want to compliment you on securing for us a story like "Cut Loose Your Wolf" by Bennett Foster. He is my favorite author. Hold on to him. Another above-the-average story was "Mad Money" but I still prefer Hazeltine to Jim Daniels.

Now for the complaints. Almost all the old-time authors have disappeared. Give us another mystery by Elston, Western by Seltzer, fantastic by Kline, tunnel by Chase, Zorro by McCulley, Hazeltine, Singapore Sam by Worts, Peter the Brazen by Brent, Tizzo by Challis, Corday by Roscoe and all the others that made ARGOSY the best mag on the market.

Didn't "Baby Face" by George Bruce and "Trouble Wagon" emerge as movies under the titles of "The Crowd Roars" and "The Devil's Party" respectively? You said a while back that "Doomed Liner" was going to be filmed. Was it?

Perry, Florida

MR. SULLIVAN has rapped out a pretty large order. Some of it we can manage, some we can't. Allan Vaughan Elston is working for us on a new series of adventure stories, to begin in an early issue (advt.) so the mystery tale will have to wait. Otis Adelbert Kline is polishing up a pseudo-scientific; some of the other writers have become entangled with Hollywood, as noted above, and attempting to outline their plans is next to impossible (at the juncture of Cahuenga and the Never-Never Land). . . . Mr. Sullivan's guesses as to the ARGOSY sources of two recent films are entirely correct. . . . We know no more of the plans for filming "Doomed Liner" than that it has been announced as "bought for the pictures." We have an idea that the current movie economy wave is holding up production of what would necessarily be an expensive spectacle.

. . . Roy DeSomers Horn was in the office the other day and we were talking about a possible sequel to "Southbound to Singapore." Somewhat caustically we referred to the *Dixie* of his tale as a pretty odd specimen. Mr. Horn assured us that, on the contrary, she was pretty typical. Going home, he must have brooded about it some more, for shortly afterward he sent in the following letter:

ROY DES. HORN

Along the China Coast, at Sydney, Australia, and other crossroads of the South Pacific, many a replica of the *Dixie* can be seen, churning in and out. All types and manner of construction they are, and fearfully and wonderfully made, some of them. I remember seeing one of them coming into Sydney harbor, under the Chinese flag. A clipper bow, hay-wire booms and king-posts, and a gosh-awful smokestack where one would have expected sails and a mast. Swede officers and a Chink crew.

Coasters and Yangste boats alike go prepared for trouble. Many of them have protected bridges and metal-sheathed doors wherever they lead to the coolie decks. Too many innocent looking Chinese deck passengers have suddenly dug out arms and rushed bridges and engine rooms, and taken the captured ship into Bias Bay.

New York City

Believe It or Not! by Ripley

RIPLEY'S EXPLANATION: An overall could be made by sewing up the 10 pieces shown above—if you don't care how it fits and wears. But in order to make an overall fit as perfectly as a Lee Jelt Denim, you need 76 parts—and each piece of cloth must be cut as accurately as the parts of a fine suit. This gives you "tailored" fit not only in leg length but in waist, crotch and bib height. Most important of all, Lee is the only overall made of genuine Jelt Denim—sanforized to end shrinking and woven with multiple-twist yarn to meet the test shown here and dozens of other hard wear and working tests . . . believe it or not!

THRILLS from the CIRCUS

FEATURING
ANTOINETTE CONCELLO
TRAPEZE SENSATION
AND
TERRELL JACOBS
LION KING

MISS CONCELLO, HOW ARE CHANCES FOR A STORY ON YOUR BIGGEST THRILL AS AN AERIALIST?

TONY, TELL HIM ABOUT YOUR FIRST TRIPLE SOMERSAULT IN THE AIR

"NO WOMAN, TO MY KNOWLEDGE, HAD EVER EXECUTED A TRIPLE MID-AIR SOMERSAULT. I HAD TO DEPEND ALMOST ENTIRELY ON AUTOMATIC TIMING..!"

"...BUT AS I WHIRLED OFF INTO SPACE.. ONCE...TWICE...FOR A SPLIT-SECOND I PRACTICALLY LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.."

"...THREE TIMES...AND...I MADE IT! THRILLED AND SAFE!"

TERRELL, TELL HIM ABOUT THE TIME SPARKY, OVER THERE, ALMOST FINISHED YOU

"I HAD ALMOST COMPLETED MY ACT WITH 25 LIONS, WHEN SPARKY AND ANOTHER MALE WENT FOR EACH OTHER..."

"TRYING TO BREAK IT UP, I WAS KNOCKED DOWN AND SPARKY TURNED ON ME. THINGS LOOKED PRETTY BAD.."

"BUT I GOT THE UPPER HAND. BEFORE I LEFT THE CAGE, EVERY LION WAS BACK IN PLACE."

AFTER A TURN IN THE BIG CAGE, I NEED A 'LIFT' IN ENERGY, AND I GET IT FROM A CAMEL. I'VE SMOKED CAMELS FOR 16 YEARS. HAVE ONE, TONY?

YOU BET, TERRELL. THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAMELS AND OTHER KINDS - IN MILDNESS - IN SO MANY WAYS!