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Volume 253 CONTENTS FOR MARCH 2, 1935 Number 6

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(Classified continued from page 4)

The Drums Roar

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Heads to Win," "Land of the Sword," etc.

International War threatened the world again—but that was not the only reason John Monk wanted to suppress revolution in the West Indies

CHAPTER I.

BAD ACTORS.

GIULIA LONDESI stood near the tall windows which looked out upon Central Park, and where, now, the snow gale whipped in from the sea with a heavy, constant booming. She faced toward John Monk, her small, delicately formed and lovely body quietly held within its closely fitting sheath of her silver evening dress, but her dark eyes intense with a blaze of light as she watched him across the wide room.

"Is that all," she asked him, her voice almost openly hard and rapid, "that you have to tell me—that you're sorry you're late?"

Just a very little bit, John Monk smiled, keeping silent a moment more as he advanced across the room, stood beside her and looked intently down into her eyes.

He had loved this girl, he told himself then. For her he had left his home island of St. Von in the West Indies and come North here to New York. For a year now he had worked for her father, Victoriano Londesi, and that man's corporation, one of the greatest holdings in the Caribbean. He was engaged to Giulia; in a few months, right up until this night, this moment, it had been understood between them that they were going to be married. And yet he did not trust her now, somehow.

"Yes," he said, his voice slow; "that's just about all, Giulia."

She made a motion with one of her long, jeweled hands toward him, indicating his stiff shirt front and well-cut dinner jacket, the top hat he had forgotten to give the butler when he had entered a few moments before, flung onto a side table.

"Let me tell you, then," she said in that same hard, deep voice. "Your grandfather's old schooner, the *Jupiter,* came in from your home island of St. Von this afternoon. It's anchored down in the channel now. You rushed back to your flat to dress for dinner here, after having been down aboard it all afternoon long. You saw your old friends there, that funny little

John Monk clipped him on the side of the throat

man, Tom Devrars, and the big negro, Bouqui. They must have brought you a lot of news of the islands, of St. Von at least. . . . Didn't they tell you of your grandfather and of that—girl you call your cousin—Rosemary Canniston?"

John Monk moved his head in a motion he kept calm and deliberate.

"Yes," he said, driving back from his voice any of the sudden, gripping tensity that had come to him with the knowledge that she was aware that his family's schooner was in port, had brought aboard it old Long Tom Devrars, and Bouqui, the big St. Von negro who served the ship as bosun. "They brought up a load of sugar, and they had news of those folks, all right. Grandfather's pretty well, and still flying the Confederate flag over St. Von, still thinks the South didn't lose the war. And Rosemary's only my cousin by family title and not by blood at all."

He stopped speaking, clipping his words short, feeling her intense gaze flick again from his eyes over his face, trying to read it, he knew, read him and what he might be holding from her. Then she turned from him, swung to the window and stared down, into the sweeping of the snow over the city. He was glad for that, eager for the moment she allowed him to stand alone and think over all that he had been told by those St. Von men this afternoon, and had not yet told her . . .

For little Tom Devrars and Bouqui had come North with news of war, war more terrible and awful in its way than any John Monk had seen in his four years in France: a war between whites and blacks, a revolt of all the blacks in the West Indian islands against their employers, and all white men in the Caribbean.

How that thing had started, exactly why and when, John Monk did not know. For the first time in his life, those two men, Devrars and the big negro Bouqui, had been strained and odd with him, only reluctantly told him that one terrific fact just as he left the schooner. And, standing here, he only knew that he wished to be back on St. Von now, with his grandfather, the Commodore, who had taken the island as his home after leaving Virginia at the end of the Civil War, and with Rosemary Canniston, whom he knew he loved more than any other woman in the world . . .

BUT Giulia Londesi had turned, come right up to him, put her hands upon his shoulders, brought his face close to her lips. "I'm sorry," she said, "and I'm very jealous, John, of that girl Rosemary. I think she and your grandfather think that dad and I all but shanghaied you away from St. Von on the yacht last year. And I'm all strung-up tonight. The evening papers are full of war talk in Europe. You know what that would mean, don't you, if anything were to set that off? How it would affect dad's corporation, and him, you and me, all of us?"

"I was through one of those," John Monk said softly, staring beyond her, pondering again what he had learned this afternoon, of that other war, a war which would recognize no truce and no other objective except the complete annihilation of all white men in the islands.

But, he thought then, swiftly, Victoriano Londesi was her father, and had made his wealth, kept it now in the islands. And he thought of the year he, John Monk, had been here in the North and worked for him, how he

had come more and more to mistrust that man, and now looked upon him strangely as a hidden enemy and not as an employer and a friend and the man who was supposed to be his future father-in-law. He was not surprised when, behind him, he heard low, soft footfalls, turned and found Victoriano Londesi advancing into the room.

Londesi's face was dark, heavy, usually expressionless. But now a light smile rested upon it as he eyed his daughter and John Monk.

" Giulia talks of war," he said in his deliberate voice. " But, as yet, there is only talk of it, and I doubt that it will arrive. What I want to tell you two right now is this: that I wish to see you married as soon as possible and on your way to Europe. I want John to immediately take over the London and Paris offices for the corporation. War scares jerk the market up; all the big business now is over there. . . . And I've just had the *Nouranhai* reconditioned so you can sail aboard her, have your honeymoon that way. How does that sound to you, John?"

Slowly, with a calmness he forced sharply upon himself, John Monk shook his long, lean head. " I'm sorry," he said, " but if I catch any ship soon, it's the *Jupiter,* and for the South, St. Von. You'll excuse me, I hope, for being so abrupt, and I must ask you to allow me to leave you right after dinner. Devrars and Bouqui are in from St. Von—as Giulia already knows; I've got an appointment with them tonight."

Victoriano Londesi answered him, but he had gone first to stand at Giulia's side, slowly place one of his broad, thick hands restrainingly upon her arm.

" Yes," he said then, " of course we will excuse you, John. We—let me say that I believe we understand. Now, shall we go and dine?"

HEAD down, walking quickly, quite lost in a bitter confusion of thoughts, John Monk was nearly at the door of the big apartment house an hour later when he saw Kerro Savol, only a few feet from him. Savol's thin, extremely long body was contained in a heavy, rough ulster which came right down to his heels. Snow was white upon its shoulders and had beaded the crown and brim of his hat.

Seeing John Monk, he stopped and raised the hat from his head and bowed very informally.

" Good evening," he said with that odd and slurred accent which Monk had never been able to place accurately.

" Hello," John Monk said, and then with an instinctive shrewdness which was afterward to surprise him, held out his hand, forcing the other man to come forward and take it. During several seconds they stood so, their hands locked, frankly studying each other.

In the West Indies, the melting pot of all the nations, the races and the colors of the world, John Monk reflected, he had seen many men with strikingly strange countenances, manners and personalities; but never such a man as Kerro Savol. The man before him now had a head which was shaped like that of a model for an ancient Greek coin. But, in every feature, in the cast of the eyes so deep brown in color as to be nearly black, the formation of the long, powerful nose, the lips and brows, even the growth of the black, bushy hair, there was something a little wrong, a little

out of correct formation. The man might have been a North American Indian, a high caste Hindu, or a Spaniard, although he claimed none of those bloods—in fact, never spoke of his background or his profession, even of his nationality; although, Monk knew, he spoke a number of European languages fluently, and also several West Indian dialects; seemed quite wealthy.

John Monk had met him the spring before, when he had left St. Von and come North to New York for the first time to go into the employ of Victoriano Londesi. He had met Savol here, in the Londesis' apartment. Savol, John Monk had found, had been Giulia's very constant companion and suitor right up to the time of her departure with her father aboard their yacht on Londesi's semi-annual inspection trip to the West Indies.

Finding himself deeply in love with Giulia and deeply jealous of any other man that might attempt to pay her court, John Monk had discovered a strong dislike for Savol. That feeling, which contained in it somewhere a kind of innate distrust, was still with him now.

"You're going upstairs?" he asked Savol, the lines of his jaws hard.

Savol gave him a slow and inclined nod.

"Yes," he said. "To the Londesis'." Then, swiftly, his widely pupiled eyes held a brief gleam of light. "But, to call upon the Signor Londesi." Savol held his hat in his hand, was brushing it, knocking the crusted snow from it. The stuff fell in little, solid scales, plopping as it struck the carpet and the toes of Savol's carefully fitted shoes. "Not the daughter," he said, as if he found humor in those words but was capable of restraining himself from laughter. "I wish you a good night, sir."

"It's a terrible night," John Monk said, "and you'll find the daughter there. Repeat to her my love." Then, forcing himself to grin, he turned, went on and out, not looking back, where, he was aware, Savol still stood staring after him.

SNOW whipped in stinging veils along the street, and there were no taxis in sight, had been none for hours, the doorman told him, asking him to return inside while he telephoned for one. But John Monk, thinking of Tom Devrars and Bouqui, already waiting for him in the noisily confident and packed crowd around that weirdly built ring up in Harlem, where the two St. Von men planned to fight a prize mongoose against a deadly little *fer-de-lance* snake smuggled in from Martinique, waved his hand at him and started down the block toward the subway.

He had gone, though, only a few hundred feet along toward the Avenue and the subway station when he saw a taxi. It was moving slowly through the snow, and headed in the same direction he had taken. He had waved at it twice, and gone out into the middle of the street before he saw that the flag on the mileage clock was up, and that a passenger, a man dressed in dark clothing, with his hat brim pulled far down and his coat collar high, sat pushed back very unobtrusively in the rear seat.

Standing there in the street, with the hard, wet pellets of the snow sliding down inside his scarf and collar and with the wind gusts yanking at the brim of what he considered to be his preposterous hat, John Monk had the dim recollection that he had

seen that same taxi and the same occupant parked at the entrance to the apartment building when he had gone in to dine with Giulia Londesi and her father. Now, he did nothing but curse at the driver's bent head for not answering his shouted question, then turned and rammed on against the wind.

But, just as he started down the steps into the subway kiosk, he saw that the same machine was there, already pulled up at the curb, and that its occupant was out, coming rapidly toward him. Beneath the down-turned hat brim John Monk caught a glimpse of the other's face: it was broad, hard, firmly purposeful. For some reason that was part of the instinct he had learned perhaps in the West Indian jungles or the trenches of the war, John Monk stopped and lifted his hands from his coat pockets, spread his feet so that his balance was right and his footing firm in the snow.

"Hey, Billy," said the recent occupant of the cab, and held forth a hand which swung up from a big and powerful body. "Just a minute, will ya?"

"No," said John Monk, shifting his body away from the grip of that hand. "I'm not Billy, and I'm in a hurry."

Then he made as though to go on down the steps, and the big man wheeled closer, sent out both hands. John Monk clipped him on the side of the throat with a left jab, spun the thick head around so that the lantern jaw was out and ready for the straight right to the jaw.

In what had something of the effect of a back swan-dive, the big man landed in the gutter, but with his feet considerably higher than his head. He started to get up from there, cursing and rather waveringly, and then saw John Monk's new position, and that if he rose now he most undoubtedly would be knocked immediately back again.

He sat, instead, in the snow, and tried some of his teeth with his finger tips before he spoke. Then he saw that John Monk, who never before had fought in a top hat, was picking that object up from the snow and returning it to his head.

"Listen," ventured the man in the

JOHN MONK

gutter; "now, listen to me, will ya, mister?" He was fumbling inside his clothing as he spoke, and when he drew his hand out there was a gold badge in it which John Monk could see by the rays of the arc light on the corner. "Ya force me to it," he said. "It's against orders that I flash it, on a screwy job like this, but there it is."

JOHN MONK turned his head. The taxi driver, he saw, was down from his machine and making motions very much like going under the front seat for a tire iron. "I'll kick your ribs through your ears," John Monk advised him. "Get back in that cab!"

The taxi driver, who was a man of slight stature, obeyed silently and at once.

Out of the corners of his eyes John Monk studied the machine that man had stood beside. The wind, he remembered, was blowing from the east. The avenue upon which the Londesi apartment faced ran north and south. In that section the avenue was confined to one-way traffic: a machine entering it could only come in from the south, park facing north. A cab parked there, then, would have its right side exposed to the brunt of the storm, its left side sheltered. This cab had snow thick on its right side, the left in comparison quite bare. And, remembered Monk, snow had reached only to the waist of Kerro Savol's coat, very much as if that man had leaned forth for quite a time from the window of a cab parked on the avenue before the Londesi apartment, with an excellent view of the lighted windows above.

"LISTEN to me again, will ya, mister?" asked the man holding the bright shield. He was scrambling to his feet as he said the words, and looking slantwise under the shelter of his shoulder at the taxi driver. "You're John Monk, all right. But you ain't the only guy I got to put th' finger on and bring around tonight. Wait a minute."

His eyes now pensively on Monk's face, he took a notebook from his pocket, thumbed its pages. "Yeah," he said. "Two other guys. One name o' Tom Devrars, and a black boy name o' Bouqui. You seen them fellas today; we know that, an' that you come from down on St. Von. But, you ast me, whose orders am I workin' on. Well, it's on the orders o' the guy who is runnin' all this show—all o' it."

John Monk stared at him, slacking his mouth wide.

"Who—me?" he said. "You mean that"—he pronounced a n a m e—"wants to see me?"

"You," said the man who had recently returned from the gutter. "An' I g u e s s you're ribbin' me. Because Devrars an' the black boy must ha' told you about—"

"What?" snapped John Monk, finding it difficult to act, to keep up any further semblace of gawping, half-pleased, half-frightened surprise.

The big man shook his head. "Mister, I just can't tell ya. But, the fella we been talkin' about, the fella you just named, he will, an' can. You seen th' papers today; you know he's in town. He come in from— But, all ya got to do is get in th' cab, right here, without no more sockin' or argyin', an' go right across the town here, on th' other side of the Park. He's there now. He's waitin' to talk with you, and with them two other fellas."

With all the histrionic powers that he possessed, John Monk brought to his face what he believed to be a fairly perfect expression of pleased vanity and excitement.

"I don't know what this is all about, I guess," he said. "But if I can help—"

"You sure can, mister." The big man was making a tentative turning motion toward the cab, then stared up and down the snow-blanketed Avenue. "I been tailin' you all afternoon, and I got to find them other two guys yet. You know where they are now?"

"I don't see how that's important now," John Monk said, slowly moving forward toward the cab, allowing the big man to get behind him and the driver right in front. "Seeing that you've found me."

"That's right," the big man said. Quite solicitously he was holding the cab door open, and John Monk got up and in, first.

For several blocks after the driver had got the machine in motion they did not speak, there in the rear of the cab, John Monk and the big man sitting rather far apart on the seat, the big man with his body swiveled around on something of an angle.

"You can never tell what's going to happen, can you?" John Monk asked then, reaching with a very slow movement down inside his coat for his cigarette case and lighter. The big man, he noticed in that moment, was almost certainly right-handed, carried his pistol in the right-hand pocket, had swung on the seat so that side was free.

"Cigarette?" John Monk asked, just as though his previous question had been answered, then held one out. The big man took it with his left hand, noticed John Monk, also noticing that the sliding window into the front of the cab was open, despite the sweep of cold air and snow, and that the driver sat in a kind of sidewise, oddly taut position as he drove.

WITH his thumb, easily, John Monk flicked over the firing apparatus of his big lighter. The flame leaped up, blue and wide, nearly a quarter inch in height. It gave light in the darkness of the cab's interior; it allowed him a chance of once more studying the big man's eyes: they were hard, intently watchful again, not veiled with a blinking expression of stupidity . . .

John Monk lifted the lighter, his left hand cupped about its flame, toward the cigarette pendent between the big man's lips. Then, his feet braced hard against the other side of the cab, he lunged. He jammed the flaming lighter with his right hand right past the cigarette end and toward the big man's face and eyes. With his falling, stabbing left he grasped for the pistol the big man was already trying to free from the right overcoat pocket. The heavy-caliber weapon roared three times before John Monk could get possession of it; the second shot, fired slanting downward as they struggled, had torn through the fleshy part of the big man's right thigh.

The man at the wheel was around by then, was beginning to jab his pistol muzzle in the window. John Monk shot him point-blank in the face. The driver turned right around, sliding sidewise. He fell screaming from sight, the pistol unfired in his hand. The taxi, still slowly rolling, jounced against a curb, mounted it, ground a fender whanging against a doorstep, and stopped.

"The only thing I can tell you," John Monk said to the big man, who was slumped in his corner of the seat but was still fully conscious, "is that you and your partner there were even lousier actors than I am. I've never known a secret service operative in my life, and not many New York taxi drivers. But the acts you two put on certainly overplayed the extremes of stupidity in both those honored professions.

"Now, get to hell out of there before I throw you out. I want to frisk you, and I want you to ride up in front with me to the nearest station house. Try any more of that bum acting and I'll beat what's left of your face in. Shove off!"

The big man, thought John Monk a couple of minutes later, driving down another deserted and snow-lashed street toward the dim green

blobs of a precinct station house's lights, might have been miscast for his part as an actor by whoever employed or directed him, but he seemed now to be either a complete fatalist or a man of supreme courage. No moans had come through his lips when he had got out from the cab as he had been ordered and put his full weight on his torn leg, then stood while John Monk had frisked him, and afterward aided in rolling the form of the driver from the front to the rear seat.

"You got anything to say to me now," John Monk asked him, pulling up the machine directly in front of the twin green lights, "before we go in to see the law?"

The big man slowly unlocked his lips. A kind of smile came over his seared face.

"Guy," he said, "nothin'. Except that you ever give me th' chance, I'm goin' ta kill ya."

"A fair promise," John Monk said, the pistol level in his hand. "Honest men in your calling are few. But, now, you go in first."

CHAPTER II.

SNAKE VERSUS MONGOOSE.

TWENTY-FIVE minutes later John Monk came into a place in Harlem where, across the crowd, instantly, he could see the cone-shaped head and immense shoulders of Bouqui, the *Jupiter's* bosun, and knew that Tom Devrars must be standing right beside the huge black. He, Monk, had come north from the station house in a cab, another cab, but with a lieutenant of detectives riding with him, a detective driving, and a big police car unobtrusively ahead and behind them. But, here, he had come alone.

"That's the one place I'd like to go right now. But it's the one place I should stay out of," the police lieutenant had told him as he left the cab. "And there's no reason; not if your two partners are really in there. But, don't forget that rod I gave you, and to use it how and when you want. We'll be here when you come out, or anybody else comes out. Good luck!"

There was a cock fight going on in the ring now; from the heavily shielded walls the crowd's cries boomed and cracked in constant echoes. The room was filled with men, all of them black and yellow men except himself and Tom Devrars, and mostly all from the West Indian islands. As he pushed deftly through them, going toward the corner where Devrars and Bouqui stood, the big negro holding the mongoose's cage high above his head so that the animal would be free to breathe, John Monk heard the harsh gutturals of half a dozen island French dialects, the bastard, cane-brake Spanish of Cuba, Puerto Rico. In the air was the reek of cheap rum and grenadine, the familiar smell of sweating black bodies, and in a corner, softly, a man was beginning to tune up a *bongo* drum.

The cock fight was suddenly over. The winner was collecting his debts, the loser in the ring picking up his dead bird. Around Bouqui and Tom Devrars a score or more men were milling, yelling quotations of bets that were really meant as insults, waving wads of dirty money above their heads eagerly.

"But the longer they wait," John Monk said silently, "the flatter they bounce . . ." He was through then, and at Tom Devrar's and Bouqui's side.

Tom Devrars' wide blue faded eyes

blinked just once, and he said, " We been lookin' for you, Johnny. You got money; these guys are givin' five to two now."

Bouqui's great mouth gaped as he grinned. " Yes, sar, Missa John," he said. " This 'ere lot o' boys think we was scared."

JOHN MONK grinned back, wadding out into his hands every dollar he had in the world. " Slap it down," he told Bouqui. " I'll take anything up to and through even money. Where's this snake that can whip a St. Von mongoose?"

Wordlessly, Tom Devrars pointed behind him, and caroling with joy at the sight of the fresh funds of the opposition, the supporters of the snake got back. The little snuff-brown *fer-de-lance* lay as if asleep in its basket cage. When the man who handled it, a yellow-skinned Martiniquan boy with a face like a kicked pannikin, pulled the cover carefully back, the snake turned slowly and writhed sinuously in the downpour of light.

"Me'ci," John Monk said to the Martiniquan. Then he put his hand flatly upon Tom Devrars' shoulder, looked with a slow, steady glance down into the older man's eyes. During the Twelve Years War of the Cuban revolution against Spain, Tom Devrars had worked as a filibuster, and after the American intervention and declaration of war had carried on the same task aboard the *Jupiter,* serving under John Monk's father as mate. He and John Monk's father had mounted a long-barreled four-inch Krupp rifle on the poop deck of the *Jupiter,* and Devrars had been in continual command of that piece. The Cubans first, and then the other filibusters, then the American landing forces, and, last, the Spanish, had come in time to refer to him as " Long Tom." The others had meant it as something of a joke, referring both to Devrars' lack of height and his association and perfection with the big gun; but not the Spanish. Outside of Santiago de Cuba, one night, anyhow, a Spanish torpedo boat had loomed upon the gun-laden *Jupiter* from a fog, fired four shells, and gone. Three of them missed; the fourth struck the poop where Devrars handled the long gun, and John Monk's father stood at the wheel.

John Monk's father had died right there, beside the wrecked gun. Tom Devrars had almost died, lived to land the precious cargo and get the schooner back to St. Von. It was legend in the islands that he had not been seen to smile since that night. But he was smiling now.

" We thought," he said to John Monk in a voice like a whisper, " that you wasn't comin', maybe."

" You mean," John Monk said, equally as low, " that you didn't trust me any more; you didn't rate me as a St. Von man."

" That girl," said Devrars with instant honesty. " She may be all right; I dunno. But her old man certainly ain't. An' then . . ."

" Listen!" John Monk's face and eyes were hard. " I had to drill a man just now; blast him quick. Why didn't you tell me a hell of a lot more than you did this afternoon?"

" Didn't trust you," Devrars said, with the same lack of hesitation. " Bouqui an' me talked about it, on th' way runnin' North. Th' Commodore an' me talked about it, down on th' island. But, this here was my idea. A young buck like you leaves a girl he loves as much as you say you love that one, an' comes away up here to a Har-

lem ' bee-hive ' t' see a mongoose fight a snake, why, there just ain't no more reason to doubt him. But, you got a gun on you now, ain't you?"

" Sure!"

" All right . . . An' you prob'ly got a flock o' cops out at th' door. But, that there boy, Bouqui, is all hot over fightin' that mongoose o' his, an' every bit o' cash we could beg, borry er convey is down on its long nose now. After, we'll talk, Johnny. There they go. . . ."

BENT to his hands and knees, Bouqui had just opened the mongoose's cage, let the brown, squat little beast out, then backed leaping from the high-walled ring. On the other side, the flat-faced Martiniquan boy had tapped open his basket, leaving behind him the *fer-de-lance* as he jumped for safety.

A hush was on the crowd. The scratching of the mongoose's tiny feet over the canvas of the ring could be heard. It was turning, a rigid, small, brown lump, to face its proverbial enemy and of one of the fastest and most venomous snakes in the world. The *fer-de-lance* seemed to have heard those sounds, somehow sensed the mongoose. It had coiled, uncoiled, was sliding forward with immeasurable swiftness, rearing slightly up as it advanced.

But the mongoose sprang. It went right into the air, up and over the snake, then dropped. John Monk believed he was able to see the small white teeth glint before they took hold. Then there was only a flashed, unbelievably rapid blurring of movement. The mongoose was turning around and around on the canvas, spinning like a top; there were ribbon-like flutterings of white, the pale underside of the snake, flung high as it writhed to get free, then writhed in death.

The mongoose was still. It backed from the snake. The snake was still, and dead. A shriek which was nearly insane came from the crowd. Bouqui and the flat-faced Martiniquan were leaping down into the ring, Bouqui holding the mongoose's cage. The Martiniquan held a knife, and some of his friends and followers brought a

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phial and a dish; solemnly, they went through the ritual of slitting the snake open, emptying the glands of poison into the phial. Bouqui had the mongoose back in its cage. He was roaring with laughter. Then he turned towards the crowd. " Pay me!" he bellowed in English and in three dialects, " Pay me!"

" All right," Tom Devrars said; he was stuffing money into all his pockets and into all John Monk's pockets. " Where do you want to go now, Johnny?"

" Out of here," John Monk answered him slowly. He was staring

about him as he spoke. "Right now, I've got the idea I don't like the looks of this outfit at all. We've got to get downtown, and in a hurry."

"*Bueno.*" Devrars was already moving, as though without haste, but steadily, towards the one doorway in the room, and Bouqui also was in motion, a great grin of triumph on his face, the mongoose cage held shoulder-high before him. "But," Devrars said, close to John Monk's ear, "let Bouqui go ahead, and me behind. You know . . ."

John Monk smiled wryly at that, and nodded just a little bit, telling himself that he knew, all too well, and although he did not yet possess the knowledge held by Devrars and the big bosun, he had more than enough to make him strainedly intent now. But, laughing, calling out cries of approbation, the crowd parted for them, gave back, allowing the three to pass through, and it was only as they reached the closely sealed and guarded door that they stopped.

BOUQUI stopped first, although he kept his body and eyes forward, upon the owner of the establishment and his two hulking assistants at the door. Behind him, John Monk could sense Devrars slowing to a halt. Then he heard the small, flat, smacking impact of the projectile which Devrars and Bouqui had heard coming through the air. He wheeled, just able to keep his hand from the borrowed pistol in its holster under his left armpit. There had been nothing but that barely perceptible, sibilant passage through the air; then the little smacking sound of impact. But the entire room and every man in it was silent now. Tom Devrars was silent. Using his fingers so that only the edges of his heavy nails touched the thing, Tom Devrars was drawing the three-inch-long blowgun dart from the back of his coat. His light coat sagged open as he lifted his arm, and John Monk could see that beneath it the little man wore a thick leather reefer jacket, through which that dart had not penetrated.

In his fingers, Devrars held the dart up, allowed the whole room to see it. In a calm and low voice, measuring the English words thoughtfully, he spoke to the room:

"You shouldn't ha' done that. You should ha' known me better than that. Now I got to find the guy who done it." His eyes, the color of ice between his lowered lids, ran obliquely and swiftly over the room full of shuffling, deeply breathing men. With his free hand, watching the room as if casually, he reached into his back trousers pocket. "That's a *Brujo* job," he said, to the room. "Cuban. From the eastern side o' Cuba. A Lucumi man made that . . ."

He let his voice break off. He glanced half around. John Monk had stepped on, to the wall by the door, where Bouqui already stood, the mongoose cage set at his feet. Tom Devrars nodded shortly to them, almost as if in salutation. The two men's hands were already on their guns; they brought them out and up instantly. Tom Devrars turned back. "I want the man who fired that dart," he said to the room. "An' I'm coming to get him now."

Without haste, yet without stopping, he walked through that crowd. He moved silently, his hand upon his gun in his coat pocket, but not obviously, in no way really menacing. The men he passed and walked around gaped at him blinking, their lips working soundlessly over words of anger and protest

they wished to say. Devrars only looked at them once, never looked back, and, behind him, they did not move, except to turn their heads and watch his passage.

In the right rear corner of the room, he found the man who had fired the poison dart. He was a small-boned, brown negro who stood erect with his broad shoulders back, but keeping his hands out before him. He wore cheap cotton drill clothing under a threadbare overcoat. His eyes, small and close-set in his face, burned like blown flames as Devrars came to him.

DEVRARS moved very swiftly: one of his hands ripped in, caught the collar of the old overcoat, rent the garment right down the back. The released folds of material fell sliding down, confining and for the moment denying the motions of the Lucumi man's hands. There was another ripping sound—Devrars had just torn bodily the whole front out of the Lucumi's thin jacket and shirt, so stripped him nearly to the waist.

The Lucumi made a muttering cry, attempting to get back, get his hands free. Devrars had the big .44 caliber Colt revolver out from his pocket, placed the cold steel ring of the muzzle against the sweating, dark skin over the Lucumi's lowest rib, and below the cleverly contrived and strapped little blow-gun of varicolored wood which had been concealed there. Two other darts were in the small palm fiber case beneath the blow-gun. Devrars left them there, and left the fifty dollars in small bills he found in the lining of the Lucumi's ragged overcoat, no longer bothering now to keep the revolver muzzle against the man's rigid side.

With the Colt muzzle, Devrars indicated the religiously symbolical lines of vertical tattooing up and down the man's arms and the sides of his chest. "*Verdad Lucumi brujo,*" he said in the *nanigo* dialect of the Cuban cane fields, his voice clear enough for every man in the room to hear him. Then, low-voiced, with great rapidity, he broke into several sentences of the real Lucumi tribal talk. If the Lucumi answered him at all, it was in a voice so low that none of the men in the room could hear his words, even those right beside him and Devrars; they strained forward, their faces and eyes blank in failure. Devrars spoke once more, the words an incomprehensible whisper to the rest of the room. The Lucumi answered him; surprisingly, he smiled and nodded.

With a stub forefinger, Devrars tapped the Lucumi, exactly over the heart. The fiercely tightened nerves of the crowd gave then; men in the crowd yelled out, understanding the gesture, and that Devrars, by it, had just told the Lucumi his life was his own, that he, Devrars, now would not take it. . . .

Devrars was moving back through the crowd, walking as if he did not hear the crowd's yells and questions, and very much like he was quite alone here. He came to where John Monk and Bouqui stood; their own guns were gone from sight, Bouqui had picked up the mongoose's cage again. Devrars nodded to them, and then to the Harlem negro who ran the place and who stood with his assistants still guarding the door.

"You ain't goin' to make any more trouble, Mister Devrars?" the proprietor asked him, his face a kind of dull grayish color above his chromatic suit.

"Not here; no," Tom Devrars said mildly. "Open up the door."

The proprietor sprang to open up the door. He and his assistants stood flanking it and facing inwards towards the room as Bouqui, then John Monk, then Devrars filed out. Instantly, the door shut behind them, and the three stood in the cold, richly smelling shadows of the long, bare hallway, hearing outside the blaring of taxis and traffic on Seventh Avenue, and no other sound.

"We're lucky," Tom Devrars said in a low, mild voice. "An' we needed to be." He inclined his head in a forward movement, indicating the stairhead leading down to the street. "That a cop there, Johnny?"

"I brought cops with me," John Monk said, still feeling the sweat from that room cold on his forehead. "I came from the cophouse when I came uptown."

CHAPTER III.

RUMBLES OF REVOLUTION.

THE officer at the head of the stairs was the lieutenant with whom John Monk had ridden uptown. He shook hands quickly with Tom Devrars and Bouqui. "I didn't know about you guys," was all he said as he accompanied them downstairs and to the taxicab waiting at the curb.

"I guess you'd better talk first, Tom," John Monk said when the three of them were in the taxi with the lieutenant and rolling south along Seventh Avenue. "You're the man to talk."

Tom Devrars sat on one of the little folding front seats of the cab, his short knees pulled up. He stared out of the window of the machine for several minutes before he answered. Lights from the street fell, flickered and passed across his face; with a kind of odd, cruel insistence, they showed the pouches of weariness and relaxation about his eyes, the haggardly deep lines at the corners of his mouth. He seemed, sitting there, to be an old and nearly spent man. Then, abruptly, he spoke:

"Why, hell's breaking in the South. All through the islands—all the way from Bermuda to Trinidad. Somebody's been working on th' blacks, stirring up a revolt among 'em. A revolt against all th' white men livin' in and governing the islands . . . I don't know how it started, or who started it, or even how long it's been goin' on. But, it's about ripe to break, an' when it does, it's goin' to be bad, just about as bad as anything can be . . . A couple of weeks ago, we heard about it, down at St. Von."

He stopped talking. He sat still, staring fixedly, in that strange posture of weariness, out the window again. The lieutenant of detectives spoke. "You guys, all three of you," he said, "come from St. Von, don't you?"

Tom Devrars looked at him, then made a sign with one hand towards John Monk, in entreaty. "Yeah," John Monk said. "My grandfather, who's a Virginia man, went out there, right after the Civil War; he and a couple of other families from the Virginia shore. St. Von's a small island, about eighteen miles square. Britain has possession of it, but my grandfather, James Canniston Monk, and the folks who came with him, brought up all the land on it, and we've had it to ourselves for three generations now. Of course, we brought our—what my grandfather calls his negroes—with us. This man, here," he tapped Bouqui on one broad knee, "is a descendant of one of them, one of the original Vir-

ginia slaves. St. Von is a family affair; the British governor for that group of islands never bothers us as long as we pay our Crown taxes; nobody does. My grandfather still flies the Confederate flag down there. Just because," John Monk paused to shortly smile, "it pleases him."

"All right," the detective lieutenant said, scowling, "what's the pay-off on all this show? What do you birds figure?"

TOM DEVRARS answered that; was ready for it:

"Europe's about set to jump into another war. All those countries want all the troops they got, and all the battleships, at home, where they'll be needed. And, they're pullin' almost all of them back there. They don't know about this hell-raisin' down in th' islands yet, and if they do, they don't understand, or care enough, t' do anything about it. But the guys who are proddin' those island blacks are right smart. They've showed th' field-hands how, since th' sugar market hit th' the bottom after 1920, all the blacks been poor and almost starvin'. They've showed 'em how a lot o' whites has got out o' islands where white men ha' been since 1600, an' before. They ha' told 'em how Haiti and Santo Domingo broke loose from th' French an' from the Spanish, an' been runnin' free-like since. They've whipped up all th' black religions, th' *vaudou,* an' the *obeah,* th' *nanigo* an' all the rest. They give 'em a slogan—'the islands for the blacks.' Next, they'll be slippin' 'em guns, and free rum, an' a little more canned hate. Then—" Tom Devrars lowered the window and spat forth, into the snowy street. It was an emphatic and expressive gesture.

In a soft voice John Monk cursed.

"You could," he said to Tom Devrars and to Bouqui, "have told me this before . . ."

"No," Devrars said. "We didn't know, before, and, like I said, not up until just now was we trustin' you enough to put that kind o' stuff up t' you. But, who's the guy you drilled?"

"A bird who gave me to believe he was a government secret service man. He had a gold badge, and a rough voice, and a pistol. There was another guy with him who was supposed to be a taxi driver. When things got hot, I had to kill the other guy."

"Why?" Tom Devrars asked, quietly.

"BECAUSE the big bird, the one playing detective, told me vaguely that things were wrong; he said that 'the guy who runs it all was in town,' and wanted to see me. He said he was looking for you and Bouqui, too, and seemed surprised when I said that you and Bouqui hadn't told me anything out of the ordinary this afternoon. It was all kind of funny."

"The funny thing," the detective lieutenant broke in, "is that the 'guy who runs it all' *is* in town. He came in tonight. He's over at that town-house of his in the East sixties. All the evening papers carried the story. But, I've been in touch with the station since I've been up here, waiting for you fellers to show back, and it seems that your friend with the phony badge is a pretty tough number. He hasn't talked yet, anyhow, no matter how they put it to him."

In the uneven light and shadow of the cab, John Monk's gaze met with that of Tom Devrars for a moment. With a slight and gradual movement, the little St. Von man had just put his

hand down, behind him, and upon the tobacco tin in his rear pocket. "Maybe," Tom Devrars said, speaking only to John Monk, " th' lieutenant, here, will be good enough t' let me go in an' have a little parlay alone with that guy . . ."

The lieutenant of detectives was far from being an unintelligent man. He slowly smiled. He said, " Yes, I guess that is one turkey I could let you talk to, alone. I had the precinct on the

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phone about ten minutes before you guys came out, up there, and maybe it's funny, but one of those real Washington agents did come into the station-house. He had a look at that phony shield, and he had a talk with the guy Mr. Monk caught. But, all he got was deuces and treys, too."

Where he sat, Bouqui's huge and perfect teeth flashed in the darkness. " Mista Devrars, he always plays aces —aces, an' then more aces. Ain't so, Mista Monk?"

" That," John Monk said, " is most fortunately so. But, how about you, you big donkey?"

" Me, sar?" Bouqui sat forward a little in his corner, stirring the cage between his knees, arousing faint chittering sounds from the restive mongoose inside.

" You," John Monk repeated. " Isn't your great-uncle 'Ti Panache, and isn't Panache one of the biggest witch-doctors in the islands? If these men who are raising up the blacks are making the drums roar and the black gods walk, he should know about it."

Bouqui was briefly swaying the mongoose cage back and forth, gentling the little animal again to dormancy by a low-voiced, mumbled chanting. He raised up his head and looked fully into John Monk's eyes. " Yo' is right, sar," he said, in almost the same sort of register he had used with the mongoose. " 'Ti Panache was mon who tol' us; tol' Commodore an' Missis Rosemary, an' Mista Devrars, an' me. He tol' us come up here, fin' you, fin' some mon who can stop them fellers raisin' hell-like in th' islands. 'Ti Panache, he's give me *garde-corps* charm fer good luck." Quite proudly, Bouqui lifted up and touched his shirt at the throat, where, John Monk knew, the precious little charm-sack rested on its cord. " He's tell me I'm no-good boy unless I fin' them fellars an' snap they heads, like mongoose snaps that *fer-de-lance*. Damn me, damn me, too," Bouqui's eyelids had narrowed and his teeth no longer showed, " if I ain't goin' do it. . . ."

CHAPTER IV.

'TI PANACHE.

IN the precinct station-house, the four men from uptown found quite a group of officials, the inspector for the district, the captain of the precinct, and the Washington secret service man, who said his name was Drake and that he wanted very much indeed to

talk with John Monk and Tom Devrars. "There's an awful lot to say," John Monk told him. "And it'll take us quite a time. How about this man who convinced me to take a taxi ride from the Subway station; has he talked yet?"

"No," said the man named Drake, "he hasn't yet—despite all the pressure we've put on him. But, don't you think that right now we're wasting our time, trying to overcome such a really minor obstruction as he must be?"

"I don't know about it's being so minor," John Monk said. "And, I don't think we'll be so long in getting him to talk, if you let Tom Devrars go in and see him alone. An awful lot of what is half-truths and hearsay for us now should be fact, after he's through talking."

Drake nodded at that. "I can tell you and Mr. Devrars now," he said, "that the 'man who runs it all' is very deeply interested in this situation, and so are a number of European and Central American governments; if this is what you, and we, believe it is—if a general revolt of the blacks should break throughout the West Indies, every possession in the islands would of course be immediately endangered in a very serious way, and it might mean—"

"—The international war which is threatening now in Europe," John Monk finished for him. "We know that, too. But, are you willing to have Devrars talk with this guy?"

Drake was gazing wide-eyed at little Tom Devrars. "A number of men have worked with the prisoner already," he said. "But, go ahead when and if you want to, Mr. Devrars."

"Now," said Tom Devrars. "An' I want to, one hell of a lot. Where is this *hombre?*"

"He has been returned to the cell-block. But, we can have him brought to the back room used by the detectives."

"Do that," Tom Devrars said quietly. "An' just leave 'm there with me alone fer a little while . . . No," obliquely glancing, he had just caught Drake's and the district inspector's nervous stares, "I won't kill the guy, er maim him. Get 'm in there!"

Two policemen carrying their .38 revolvers in their free hands, their other hands shackled to the hands of the prisoner, brought the big man in from the cell-block in the rear of the station-house. The big man staggered a little as he walked, and his face was blood-splotched and bruised where he might have fallen and hit himself, since John Monk had seen him last, but his eyes were clear, alert and hard, and there was a grim smile of derision and mockery about his wide mouth. He even laughed a little out loud when he saw John Monk in the group of men in the front room of the station-house. "Hello, ducky," he said to him. "How they comin'? I see you went and carried out me orders after all, an' brung Devrars an' the black boy to see me. . . .' But then, cursing him, his accompanying officers whirled him on into the back room, banging shut the door.

"You know him?" John Monk asked Devrars and Bouqui.

"No," they said in slow chorus, looking at each other for confirmation. But then Tom Devrars took his .44 gun out, handed it to John Monk, wiped his faintly tattooed hands down the sides of his trousers with an easy, familiar kind of gesture, as John Monk had seen him do a thousand times aboard the *Jupiter,* when he had been about to go aloft and perform some

particularly expert seamanly job. "Don't want no rods in there," he said. Then he nodded to the group, opened the door to the back-room, waited until the two policemen there had left it and he was alone with the big man, then slowly shut the door behind him.

THE men who stayed outside attempted to talk for a short while. That was impossible for them; they were brought to silence by the silence inside the shut door. They stood stiffly, looking at each other, looking at the door, in all their minds very vivid images of all what that big man with Devrars might say, were he to talk, and what that would mean to them, and to the world. Then they heard one small sound, a muffled and thick cry, which rose, they knew, out of absolute fear and horror. Then again there was silence, then a short, rapid series of bumping sounds, as though a body were falling, or being tossed heavily to the floor or walls inside the room. Drake, the Washington man, made a step, to go forward and open that door. John Monk and Bouqui were at his sides instantly, their hands on his shoulders, hauling him back. "Let that man be," John Monk said. "Devrars, I mean, and maybe the other guy, too. Devrars is getting what he wants and what you all want —I can tell you that, right now . . ."

They had hardly stood back, rejoined the others, when the door opened. Tom Devrars stood there. He had a small, harsh smile about his mouth. He was slipping a red tin tobacco box back into his hip pocket again. Behind him, on the floor of the room, they could see the big man. The big man was on his hands and knees. He was sobbing, with relief and completely unstrung nerves. His face was a dough color, and all the strength, all the vicious toughness, had gone out of it.

"You want t' go in the captain's room an' talk?" asked Tom Devrars.

But John Monk had the door of the captain's private room open already, and the others filed in. They stood about the captain's big table as Tom Devrars swiftly talked to them.

"That guy's name is Younger," he said. "He was a cop out West once, got busted for bein' crooked. He's been a stick-up artist and a strong-arm guy ever since. Savol, Kerro Savol, hired him for this job; he's been in on it for weeks. Savol is the guy leading all this bad business in th' islands; so this Younger says. Anyhow, Savol was the guy who made the contact direct with him, paid him, told him what to do. The job for Younger was to get the three of us, or any one of us, an' our schooner, th' *Jupiter*. Because, down on the island we come from—St. Von—there's a *vaudou* witch-doctor, a *hougan,* who packs more black magic than any other guy in his business in the islands. Monk, here, and his grandfather, ain't ever bothered this witch-doctor, 'Ti Panache, because he's a fine old black, and ain't ever used in a bad way his powers or the 'magic' he's got; never sold no bad charms, or poisons, or anythin' like that. He lives back up in a little valley on th' hump o' the island, in what used to be an old volcano crater. But, he's got a lot of young fellas, priests, sort of, who're workin' for him and studyin' under him, and they know a lot o' his tricks, which would help gettin' the black folks in the other islands whipped up enough, crazy enough, to go after the whites . . ."

"I saw Savol tonight," John Monk broke in with a hoarse voice. "Just

before I met that man, Younger. Does Younger know where he is now, where he lives?"

"No, he don't." Silently, Tom Devrars had borrowed a cigar from the police captain, was shredding half of it up into chewing tobacco.

JOHN MONK was gripping the table edge hard when he spoke again. "But, I don't quite figure yet, Tom, why Savol wanted us—and the schooner."

Tom Devrars said a very profane word softly. "Ain't one of the three of us always in constant radio talk from th' *Jupiter* with St. Von when we're away from there? Ain't us, and Miss Rosemary, the only folks who know our own code? Couldn't Savol, with th' schooner, an' one of us t' use as a front, slip in a lot o' false messages to Rosemary, even come right into th' cove at St. Von, an' land, without bein' stopped first by th' few boys you put under arms an' trained down there? It's the only way they could get to 'Ti Panache quick, without it bein' known outside, an' get th' *vaudou* stuff they want. Hell, th' way Savol is playin' it, St. Von and th' *Jupiter* 're the key to all the islands an' all this job. Younger says that Savol planned t' use th' *Jupiter* for runnin' guns into the other islands, an' St. Von itself as his base. Ain't the schooner one o' the fastest down there? Ain't St. Von located right in th' middle of th' big string o' islands, an' almost all o' it unmarked an' unknown by anybody who ain't lived there a long time? Miss Rosemary, an' the old Commodore, an' a dozen black boys you armed and drilled after you come home from the War, that's all there is against Savol."

John Monk turned from his fixed staring at Tom Devrars and looked at Drake and the inspector of police. "That's a lot of what you want to know, I guess, gentlemen. Now, inspector, I'd be rather obliged to you if you sent a big patrol of marine police down to go aboard and guard the *Jupiter;* she's a three-mast, black-hulled schooner anchored in Buttermilk Channel. Then, if you'll also be so good, I wish you'd send this message I'm going to write now, by short-wave radio immediately, to my cousin, Miss Rosemary Canniston, at St. Von. That will protect us on both ends, until we're ready to start South."

"Wait a minute!" It was Drake, the bulky Washington man, who spoke. "I've made an appointment for you across the town; men, big men, from about nine governments, are waiting to see you and Devrars and Bouqui. The 'man who runs it all' is really waiting now. You can't move from New York without orders from the Department of State, or from the President himself."

John Monk quietly smiled at him. "I'm shoving South, and aboard the *Jupiter,*" he said, "within six hours, orders or no orders. And I've got one hell of a lot to do first. Savvy that? All right; let's go see these guys!"

"Fine—fine!" Drake spread his hands expressively. "But, tell us one thing first, before we leave here; I, and all these men of the Police Department, will have lengthy reports concerning all this to be made out, naturally . . . Just how did you finally break through Younger's resistance, Mr. Devrars, and get him to talk so freely?"

Tom Devrars had his hat on, was at the door. "I let him see," he answered softly, "somethin' I found in a tobacco tin; somethin' this fella, Savol, gave by mistake to another guy . . .

You *hombres* comin', or do Monk an' Bouqui an' me go an' see all these big shots alone?"

CHAPTER V.

WAR CRISIS.

THE man who "ran it all" sat at the head of a long, dark table in the softly lit study of his own house and spoke with slow, incisive words. His big, finely molded head was erect, his hands calmly before him on the table, rising in an occasional gesture, or as he reached for one of the detailed maps and charts of the West Indies that had been laid before him. Down the table, John Monk, Tom Devrars and then Bouqui sat, where they had been placed close to him when they had come into the room and had been introduced by Drake, the Department of Justice agent. Briefly, Drake and the inspector of police had reported when they had entered with the three island men, now stood silently against the door at the far end of the room.

It was Drake who spoke when that slow, incisive flow of words was over; Drake said that John Monk was the man who contained the most information, should speak now. John Monk smiled at that, a little wryly, then in a low, direct voice, began to talk, fully facing the big man at the end of the table:

"What we know, sir, or what I know, is really very little indeed. Because this seems to be a very big job. A job without parallel. Never has anybody tried to pull off a highly organized, concerted revolt of the blacks, in the islands or anywhere else, on a scale like this . . . But, I can only impress upon you that the leaders of the revolt have gone about it in the most skillful way; slowly, from within. They've appealed to the field-hands and hill peasants, the men and women in the back districts who can hardly read or write, and consequently are still influenced mightily by the black magic, and will do what their *obeah* and *vaudou* and *nanigo* priests tell them to. The intervention of armed forces of white men can't stop them without great bloodshed now.

"They must be stopped as they've been started, through the influences of their black religions."

John Monk stopped and stared around him for several seconds. He looked at Tom Devrars, and at Bouqui. Quickly, with unconscious dramatic power, he pointed at Bouqui.

"It's men like Bouqui, here, blacks, who understand how much good, in the main, the white men have brought the islands, that can stop this. They really are the only ones who can do it, and working from within, against the black witch-doctors and *agents provocateurs* who have been hired or gulled into inflaming the blacks. Bouqui's grand-uncle is a man named 'Ti Panache. 'Ti Panache is one of the most learned and intelligent men I have ever met. He is a profoundly powerful witch-doctor, but an honest one. He is the leader of a cult, a whole sect, of the *vaudou* religion. He lives in the interior of our island of St. Von; he's spent his whole life there, studying his religion and training a group of young neophytes who are really his assistant priests. He possesses all sorts of charm powers and religious *vaudou* relics of immense significance in the eyes of all West Indian blacks. 'Ti Panache is the principal man to help us, help the world now, if any man is. Tom Devrars knows the islands as well as

any white man; I know them fairly well. With 'Ti Panache and Bouqui, and other men like them, I hope that we can stop this thing. But there cannot yet, no matter how desperately we need it, be any overt intervention from outside, or from 'the top.' It must be checked and stopped from within. . . . And that's about all that I can tell you now."

THE man at the head of the table gently smiled. He looked down the polished wood past the three islanders and at the representatives of the more than half a dozen nations he had called here to this sudden and secret meeting. "I," he said, "and these other gentlemen, can only thank you... Before you three came in, I had a brief time to discuss the problem with them. They agree with me, after reviewing the actually small amount of information the sources of our various governments so far have been able to bring us. It is already our joint belief that the situation cannot be handled openly; a thousand complexities, hatreds, and dangers would arise from that. Because, as yet, for no reason we can make public to the world, has any demand for such action been shown. And, practically all available troops and war vessels and planes are demanded otherwise—in the face of the European crisis." For a moment, he stopped speaking, and his strong fingers spread on the outstretched maps and charts, a look of rigor, of truly implacable determination and decision came into his face. "But, even if those men and ships were available, the position would be far better handled as you say."

John Monk's voice was harshly vibrant with emotion, sharp, as he answered, "Absolutely, sir. I believe you can imagine what would happen if it were done any other way."

"I can most vividly and readily imagine," the man at the head of the table said. "There would be the most terrific and awful bloodshed of all time. It would parallel the revolution of the Haitian blacks against their French colonial masters a hundred and fifty years ago, when not one white man was left alive in the island. But, it would be immeasurably worse, because on a far more huge and comprehensively planned scale—a scale planned by white men for the aggrandizement of their own fortunes and personal ambitions. And not for the 'freeing of the blacks from the yoke of white rule.' But, all of us here know those things. It is for you three from St. Von to act now. These gentlemen from the various governments here have already given their consent; if you three will accept the—I really am forced to call it a most desperate responsibility—you may leave immediately for the islands, to stop this as soon as you can, and how you can. All our common, united resources are behind you; you have only to call on us, in any way that we may help you. Now allow me, simply, to thank you. Mr. Drake will arrange any details of communication or coöperation with you. When will you leave?"

John Monk had come erect, and Devrars and Bouqui. They stood stiff and straightly behind their chairs. John Monk spoke for them. "May we thank you, sir," he said. "You and these gentlemen. We'll be leaving right away, in a couple of hours at most. The place for us to be now is South, in the islands, as soon as we can get there. But, I am sure that we cannot let Savol or anybody allied with him know that we are aware of any part

of his plans, fear him in any way. So we'll go South on the *Jupiter,* the old schooner we St. Von men own. Just push off for the islands in the usual way, go down the bay with the tide. Tomorrow, we'll just be gone, and the *Jupiter* will be gone . . ."

The man at the end of the table had just made a short but somehow magnificent gesture with his head. John Monk, Tom Devrars and Bouqui had been waiting for that; went forward swiftly.

" Good luck," the man at the head of the table told them, his hand grip strong and firm. " Good luck and good weather."

" Yep, sir." Tom Devrars grinned as he held his hand out. " Bum weather will be good weather for us right now —just a pocketful o' wind in this snow t' get us south o' Hatteras unmarked."

" The old gun-runner talking?" the man at the end of the table asked, grinning back.

" Yep, sir, the old gun-runner," Tom Devrars said.

IN the lower hall of that house, alone again with the secret service man, Drake, the three slowed for a moment, looking out through the cleverly drawn blinds of the windows into the snow-crested street. " That fella, 'Ti Panache," Tom Devrars said to Bouqui, " up an' give you a real good luck charm when he give you that one, boy; she's still blowin' an' snowin' out there . . ." But then his shrewd, quiet glance came around to John Monk's face. " You shovin' off aboard th' *Jupiter,*" he asked, " in that plug hat an' boiled shirt?"

" No," John Monk told him, still intently watching the other's eyes. " Not unless I have to. But, the wind and snow look like they're going to hold; there won't be a vessel moving in the bay until after dawn, and we're clear of the light-ship. There's a general police alarm out for Savol, too."

" That's so," said Devrars. " An' it's so that you seen Savol tonight, before you was taken fer your excursion trip in th' taxi by our tough friend, Younger." Devrars raised a thick, scarred thumb; he pointed with it towards the secret service man. " You go an' get yourself some reg'lar clothes," he told John Monk. " Bouqui an' me will have a parlay with Drake, here, an' figure out just how much th' folks upstairs can help us in the islands. You meet us at the Marine Police station at South Ferry before five o'clock. O' course, Younger's in the brig, an' that guy who drove for him is dead; neither o' them is goin' to talk. But, this Savol must be a right smart guy."

" I'll go alone," John Monk said, understanding very well just what words Devrars had chosen not to say out loud. " And I'll meet you at the South Ferry station before five o'clock. So long!" He nodded to the three of them, to the guard at the door, stood back, flat against the wall, as did the others, as the door was opened for him, then was gone rapidly out into the blanketing thickness of the snow.

AT the corner of the Grand Army Plaza, he found a night-hawk taxi drawn up at the curb, the driver nodding half awake over a cigarette and a blare of radio music from a Chicago station. " Take me there," John Monk told the driver, after he had given him the address of the Londesis' apartment house, " then go down the block about half way, and park. If I'm not out in fifteen minutes, go to the Fifty-first Street Station-house and ask for a guy with a mongoose. You

get that—a mongoose. And, you get that this isn't any gag."

"Yeah!" the driver said, very awake now, and shoved his machine into gear.

The only person in the lobby of the big apartment house on the other side of the Park was the night-man, a skinny youth with flatly greased hair and a tight blue suit. John Monk shoved the pistol muzzle right against his ribs as soon as he came and opened the heavy glass door. "Say—" he began.

"Have you seen the Londesis?" finished John Monk for him.

The youth stared, trying to wince back from the black pistol muzzle, his face and eyes gone dull. "No," he said, "no. An' . . ."

"Pipe down then!" John Monk advised him. "Or I'll rap you with this. Get in there!"

The youth stumbled before him and the pistol muzzle back into the glass-walled cubicle of the office, muttering incoherent words that meant to say that if this was a stick-up, he only had a few dimes, and there was no money in the office safe. To that, John Monk nodded, seated him in a chair before a desk marked *Renting,* used his white silk evening scarf, the youth's handkerchief, tie and belt to gag and tie him securely to the desk. Then, with a pair of scissors taken from the desk drawer, he cut the telephone wires to the switchboard, returned the scissors as the youth stared, locked the drawer holding them, put the key in his overcoat pocket and took from a rack on the wall a pass-key which bore the number of the Londesi apartment.

For several minutes, after he had let himself into the Londesi apartment with the pass-key, John Monk stood still in the paneled hallway, just listening. Low wall lights burned here and there in the other interior rooms, and, very faintly, probably from the far end of the apartment, he could hear small and hurried sounds. John Monk slid open the magazine plate of the pistol, counted the bullets remaining to him within, let the slide click softly back. He smiled as he walked soundlessly down the thickly carpeted hall, the pistol in his side pocket; Savol, he thought, would not possibly be here now, but his own ex-employer, Victoriano Londesi, might be, or that man's daughter, Giulia.

But the living room was empty, darkened, the fire dead a long time on the hearth. Whoever was here still in the apartment was beyond, in one of the several bedrooms. His grip very steady and sure, John Monk turned and opened a door leading into a bedroom. Lights burned broadly there. The closet doors were open, as were the drawers of the two magnificent mahogany bureaus. John Monk saw that it was a man's room, that of Victoriano Londesi, obviously. And, obviously also, Victoriano Londesi did not plan to return to it for some period of time: gaps in the shoe racks within the closets, and in the lines of suits hung there, a slight disarray and lack of quantities of shirts, ties and socks in the bureaus, showed that the owner of this place had gone, recently and rather hurriedly.

JOHN MONK nodded, and turned back into the hall. He went along it, rather more slowly than before, clearly hearing and recognizing the sounds from the further bedroom, and just a little self-conscious now about the big pistol he held. The door to that bedroom was partly open. Giulia Londesi was within it.

She almost ran as she moved from the closets and the bureaus to the

opened suitcases on the bed and chaise-longue. She was dressed in a short under-garment of lace and rose-colored silk. Her feet were encased in flame-colored mules that had huge pom-poms of ostrich feathers upon the toes, and high heels which slapped over the bare floor between the small, soft carpets as she walked. She might have heard him, or seen part of his image in one of the many mirrors, for she swung almost at once, stood still, her hands gripping tightly the two gayly printed sports dresses she had just taken from a closet.

"You," she said then, almost quietly. "That's right; I should have thought about you."

"Yeah, me," John Monk said, taking up a kind of oblique position beside the door, so that his back was not fully towards it, and he could look out, at the same time watching the room. "Where're you going, and where's papa gone, Giulia?"

Giulia Londesi let drop the dresses to the floor. Her hands lifted and clenched, then opened and went relaxedly down to her sides. "Really," she said, "you are the most impossible and impolite man I ever knew. I think you're beginning to border on the imbecile; coming here like this, at this time in the night. What do you want, now?"

"I wanted," John Monk said, "to see your father. And if not your father, another man. A guy named Kerro Savol . . . You know—Savol—the man who was your constant suitor and companion until I came North, and you gave me the idea you were in love with me. . . ."

"You're a fool!" Giulia Londesi said in a low, hoarse voice. "An utter fool!" She had begun to move forward as she said the words, and her position was such that John Monk saw she blocked his vision of the second door in the rear of the room, a door which led either to the bath or to another bedroom. "All right," John Monk said quickly. "You can stop right there." He lifted the pistol in his hand a little bit. "These things have been known to go off unexpectedly sometimes."

GIULIA LONDESI stopped, stood staring at him for an instant, her big eyes darkly luminous, narrowed. Then she gradually turned around, her back fully to him. "Margaret," she said. "Margaret, come out here!"

The second door swung open, and John Monk, stepping rapidly aside and bringing Giulia Londesi out of his range of possible fire, saw that the other room was a bath, and that Giulia's personal maid, a small and old, leather-skinned woman of South American blood, stood there, and had just put down clattering jars of facial cream and toothpaste. "I wish you to show this gentleman out, please, Margaret," Giulia Londesi said. "Show him to the door right away, and be sure that he goes down in the elevator. Then you had better call the desk downstairs."

Giulia Londesi turned around to again face him when she was through speaking. The little maid, the stiffly starched folds of her black uniform dress crackling as they brushed against the foot of the bed, started to edge past her mistress and toward John Monk. Her head was down and on one side in a peculiar position which reminded John Monk of that of a frightened jungle bird, and her hands were held closely together underneath her small, stiff lace apron. "If you

please, sir," she said to John Monk, looking obliquely up at him. "You've heard Miss Giulia . . ."

Then both her hands came out very suddenly from under her apron, and in one of them was a small ugly-nosed revolver, which she held aimed precisely over John Monk's heart. "She'll shoot you dead and all full of holes," Giulia Londesi said from behind her, "before you could even begin to fire off that big horse-pistol of yours. Drop that gun!"

John Monk cursed in a thick voice, and blinked his eyes. "I never thought—" he began, watching the maid fascinatedly. But the maid's revolver muzzle was unwavering, and her fingers steady on the weapon. John Monk measured carefully, inhaled a breath slowly, hearing the footsteps along the hall—the thoughtfully placed paces of a big and heavy man, Andrews, the butler. "All right," he said, seeming to look at Giulia Londesi. "You win—and I lose . . . But the safety catch is off this thing, and if I drop it, why—"

He changed his weight under him; he kicked, and lunged aside at the same time. The blow of his varnished shoe toe caught the little, slight-figured woman squarely upon the shin bone. It knocked her flat on her back, deflected the smash of lead from her revolver high into the cream-colored wall paneling. He was up against that wall, his pistol swung, when Andrews jumped into the room.

The butler moved with amazing swiftness for a man of his weight, but so swiftly that he could not swing in time to bring the automatic he held to bear on John Monk. Wheeling nimbly but too late, he allowed the island man a split second's advantage: John Monk brought the big barrel of his pistol down upon the other's tautened pistol-wrist, smacked the blue steel automatic spinning from the involuntarily relaxed fingers.

JOHN MONK hit him then with a crossed left jab to the throat, and Andrews, dressed in his panoply of butler's green broadcloth, brass buttons and striped waistcoat, did a most undignified backward, parabolic spin over the bed and to the floor beyond.

Giulia Londesi had her hand within inches of the little revolver Margaret, the maid, had dropped, when John Monk spoke. "These .45 slugs are big," he told her. "I'd probably knock a couple of your fingers right off, or rip a chunk in your shoulder. Stand back; I want that gun!"

SHE stood back, staring into his eyes, and he went and got it, slid it into his pocket as a companion piece for Andrews' big German automatic. Then, for a moment, his eyes upon the three of them there, he stood at the door of the room, listening. The rest of the apartment was still: all of its occupants finally were here now, he knew. He shut and locked the door into the hall, turning the lock with the master-key he had taken downstairs. As he slid the key back in his pocket, he swung, and faced the three in the room with him.

"Nobody heard those shots Margaret fired," he told them. "Not with the snow and wind outside, and these thick, steel-lined walls. It won't do you any good if either of you women scream, or Andrews shoots, and that phone is dead; I cut the wires downstairs, when I got the key I just locked that door with. So get back in that corner, Giulia, and take Margaret with you. Andrews, get up! You're the one

who's going to get the heat here . . ."

The heavily built butler was already up off the floor, flexing his numbed wrist and fingers. " I don't know anything, sir," he said in a low voice

" Bilge!" John Monk corrected him. " You know plenty—or you'll know plenty before you and I have finished our little act here . . ."

Where she stood in the corner, supporting the semi-stunned and sullen woman who served her as a maid, Giulia Londesi spoke suddenly and sharply. " I repeat," she said to John Monk, " what I said before. You are an utter fool; either that, or you've gone out of your mind. What should we 'know,' any of us? We know nothing; Andrews knows nothing. And, if you wish to speak to any one, speak to me."

John Monk laughed at her. " Andrews will tell me what he knows, or else . . . And, stand still over there—absolutely still. I'm supposed to be an excellent shot with a pistol, but if I had to shoot hurriedly I might seriously wound or kill either or both of you. Andrews, you're going to spill what you know about Londesi's departure from here tonight, and what Savol told him while Savol was here. If you don't, I'll beat the head off you."

FOR answer, Andrews wheeled at him, and sprang striking with both hands. He was a bigger and heavier man than John Monk. In that limited space the islander had constantly the hazard of being pinned against a wall or the bed, being overcome by sheer superior weight and force. He kept Andrews out in the five or six square feet of open space between the bed and the wall on one side of the room. He met the butler's initial charge with a charge of his own, dancing forth to keep free space at his back, and to flick the thick, pallid face with two jolting jabs.

Andrews at one time possibly might have been a professional fighter: his tactics in that room for the first two or three minutes were quite excellent. But he was an older man than the one he faced, and the recent confinement of his duties as an actual butler had done his wind and general condition no good. Following the first couple of exchanges, John Monk began to rip him apart, blocking his long, smashing blows on his shoulders and elbows, cutting in with short, savagely applied jabs and uppercuts.

He laid open Andrews' eyes and the corners of his mouth, pulped his nose, and felt two ribs crack beneath his smacking body drives before the big man went stumbling down. He got up twice then, each time more slowly and blindly, and the third time, half off his knees, his hands stupidly over his head and face against what he knew he would get when erect, he began to talk.

" Louder," John Monk said. " Just a little louder, Andrews. I see no reason why Miss Giulia and Margaret should not be in on this, too . . . Where is Savol now?"

" Gone, sir." Andrews sobbed the words.

" I could figure that. But where's your boss, Londesi—with Savol?"

" Yes, sir."

" They're together, then. And have gone South. Right?"

" Right, sir . . ."

Sidewise, John Monk gazed over at Giulia Londesi. " They've gone South, to the islands, to break that revolt of the blacks wide open?"

" That's so, sir."

" How? Why?"

"On some ship whose name I don't know, sir. And because Savol got news tonight that was bad for some reason —something about plans being found out, and that the show must be started right away, or it would be too late. I'm not properly in on all that, sir; Londesi just picked me up in London. I'd just come out of stir, and he knew that, and he hired me 'cause of that, and that I used to be a bruiser, in the ring.

"And that's all, sir; s' help me. You can call the coppers now, and I'll tell them the same thing; I'll tell any man the same thing. But, that's all I know . . ."

"Yeah," John Monk said, "I guess it is." He was leaving Andrews, and going around the end of the bed. He came to stop before Giulia Londesi where she stood, straight, fierce and silent, before the crouched maid. "Don't touch her!" she cried out at him. "Don't you dare put a hand upon her! Haven't you got enough now, or do you want to torture and cross-examine me, too?"

"NO," John Monk said. His voice sounded very weary in his own ears. "I guess not; I've got all I want now . . . Your father's yacht, the *Nouranhai,* was just reconditioned and practically rebuilt up at New London, wasn't it? All ready to take you and me on our honeymoon to Europe, or your father and Savol and you South to the islands, to create one of the greatest crimes in the world. You—you were packing to go there and join them, or to sail by some other ship and meet them in the islands, when I came in. Don't speak; there's no reason for you to lie. I know that, without your telling me. I don't want anything from you, Giulia, not a thing now. All I want is your father and Savol."

"Not even this?" Giulia Londesi said, her hand up, out and then in, flat-fingered in a stinging slap against his cheek. "To take away as a little souvenir of me—before you go to find that sun-faded fool of a girl in the islands?"

"Yes." John Monk nodded, trying to smile. "I'd forgotten, and that does help. Thank you, Giulia. If, when you get out of here, and the police let you go, and you see your father before I do, tell him he can have his job in the Amalgamated Fruit, and that he's trying to sell his soul and the islands for too cheap a price, and we won't let them go. So, so long . . ."

"But you're going South?" she said, staring, trembling openly now.

"That's right," John Monk said, backing toward the door. "South, to where that girl is. Where I belong."

CHAPTER VI.

SECRET GUN.

OUT of the northeast, roaring as it came, the wind still whipped, wild with that half-gale force it had possessed during the snowstorm in New York. But New York and snow were far astern now, the sky the flat steel shade of a bayonet blade, the vastly rolling, white-topped combers of the Atlantic making a flashing blue and white flecked plain before the rearing bow of the *Jupiter*. Yesterday, lying on the far outward course to catch the full force of the nor'easter, and to head to the eastward of all ships on the regular Caribbean track past the Florida capes and through the Windward Passage, John Monk had put the Bermudas under the *Jupiter's* lee, fig-

ured his position at noon today some one hundred and fifty miles to the south of them. The *Jupiter,* under all her spread of topsails, jibs and stay-sails, was flying home. "She smells the islands," Tom Devrars had said the night before, when at the beginning of the after dog-watch he had come topside from the saloon to relieve John Monk for supper.

Here in this clear, wind-swept brilliance of sunlight and sea, the familiar leap and swing of the lovely old ship right under his feet, John Monk felt a freedom, a confidence and a desire for action that had not been his for months. Forward in the waist, big Bouqui had already stripped his body to island style, wore a tattered singlet and faded dungaree trousers, walked across the sheer white of the deck planks barefooted as he aided and guided the deck hands in their forenoon tasks and the trimming of sail. From the main cabin below him, rising up through the transom and skylight, John Monk could hear Long Tom Devrars muttering softly as he checked the chronometers for the coming noon position sight, then the whining of the super-chargers of the short-wave radio set.

He was speaking with St. Von now, John Monk thought, talking with Rosemary Canniston, making the hourly call in code that had been kept up without fail with the little island since the *Jupiter* had dropped down on the dawn tide out of New York harbor four days ago.

The almost inescapable exuberance brought about by the wind, sun and sea and the gracefully swift old ship left John Monk. He halted his quick, forceful pacing 'thwartships across the poop, stood stiffly a little in front of the bare-armed island negro at the wheel, both his hands out and gripping hard at the transom coaming of the companion-hatch leading down into the cabin where Devrars sat at the radio key. In the days since the ship had pushed off from New York, he, Devrars and Bouqui had been standing watch-and-watch about, on deck and then with the receiving radio head-phones on in the cabin. For reports from Washington, from various capitals in Europe and from all over the Caribbean basin had been coming into them here nearly incessantly. And, so far, all of them had been reassuring; almost too reassuring, John Monk meditated now.

FROM Kingston, in the big British colonial possession of Jamaica, one message had come the day before of a minor outbreak among the blacks upon a large sugar company's plantation in back of Montego Bay, but native, black constabulary had been able to quell that easily; and the only other disquieting news had been from Cuba and Haiti, where forces of field-hands, laid off while several sugar, tobacco and coffee plantations arranged their financial difficulties, had been found as suddenly owning quantities of small arms, rum and money, and the big *vaudou* drums had been beating constantly for several days in the hills. Cuba, though, and Haiti, Devrars had pointed out, reviewing those messages, had always been known as the centers of black dissatisfaction and labor troubles among the blacks, due to the uncertain government conditions of the two republics. St. Von and an abrupt, swift attack upon that little, solitary and almost wholly unprotected island were the things to be feared.

From below, through the cracked roaring of the wind, the slatting of

sheets, the working of the ship and the staccato beating of tight, full canvas, John Monk could hear the clacking sound as Devrars hung the radio headphones back, then that man's steps as he started up the companion-ladder toward the deck. Devrars grinned as he came topside, but John Monk's highly strung nerves belied him, and he spoke swiftly:

"How's it going down there?"

Devrars looked aloft at the canvas, back at the way the man at the wheel handled his helm, forward at Bouqui and the sailors at their work 'midship, before he answered. "All right," he said then. "Quiet as a chandler's shop. Rosemary sent you her best, and spliced th' Commodore's onto that. She said she'd sent one of the house-boys, Tonio, up into the hills, and 'Ti Panache had told Tonio the same old thing: that Panache and those boys up there with him in the valley didn't know the outside world was there, until some *hombre* broke in upon 'em with a lot o' foolish questions. O' course, I talked to Panache before we shoved off comin' North, an' I think that Panache, knowin' us three 're bound home now, wouldn't want to worry Rosemary er the Commodore. But, just before she signed off, Rosemary said, 'Tell John I shall be very glad to see him' . . ." Long Tom Devrars paused to spit, and watch the course of his tobacco juice out in a wind-flattened curve over the lee rail.

"O' course," he said in a very low voice, "that might be love." His head was down, he did not seem to be looking toward the taller and younger man. "But I dunno."

"You're right," John Monk told him forcibly, "you don't know. And, absolutely it might not be—at all."

Devrars did not answer that. He had half turned and was gazing astern to the northwestward. "Ain't many planes," he asked mildly, "flyin' out in these lines, is they?"

JOHN MONK knew his man, and Tom Devrars' noted sharpness and length of vision. He stepped to a gear-box made fast to the side of the companion scuttle, drew from it a pair of nine-power binoculars, raised them to his eyes, focused them and swept the blue, clear area between sea and horizon astern. "No," he said, trying to hold the glasses easily in his hands. "And that one's bound smack on our course—smack for trouble. I don't know where he comes from, or how he got here, and I've given up making bum guesses. There must be something in clairvoyance, Tom."

"Must be," Tom Devrars said, watching John Monk return the binoculars to the gear-box. "But it ain't all on one side. Because that fella flyin' that plane has made a mistake; he's comin' up on us from astern."

John Monk brought himself to smile. "I saw a little flying in France," he said; "from the ground. I guess you don't know how fast those babies can come around—how fast they can whip down, sweep something like this one fore and aft with machine-gun fire, then come right back and drop a couple of bombs."

Devrars was still staring astern, at the yet very small and black speck low above the heaving sea horizon. "Yeah, maybe I don't," he said. "But, you see that gadget with the canvas hood on it, over there in th' port corner by the taffrail—what I told you was a deck-telegraph for th' engines we put in last month down in the island? That ain't; ain't no deck-telegraph. It's th' mount

for a two-inch automatic firer. Bullet belts feed right up through that mount shaft, through th' deck. Th' guy who sold it t' me and the Commodore said the piece would fire five hundred rounds a minute, an' he showed us he wasn't any liar. They's a kind of continuous belt arrangement on th' piece; she'll feed about two thousand rounds right up, from them ammunition cases I got shipped in under the deck-head in the cabin. Right down here—" Gently Tom Devrars tapped the deck within two feet of the canvas-shrouded steel mount. " Salesman said it would take about fifty seconds to mount the piece and get her ready for firin'. I beat that, though; I got it down to forty-one, startin' flat from here."

Speaking, Tom Devrars started, was down the companionway and into the cabin below and back before John Monk could more than whip the canvas from the mount. In his arms, almost caressingly, the little man carried the flat-breeched, black gun and the steel adjustment upon which it turned and operated. " You been too long North, young fella," he told John Monk quietly as he set, adjusted and made fast the quadrilateral shaped scarf and the gun itself. " You think most all th' smart boys sell their best lines o' goods outside the islands. But the *hombre* who sold this one knew better, hah?"

" Hah, yourself," John Monk said in a whisper. He was watching the oncoming plane, a black and small shape in the full white sunlight as it started to wheel up and go into a climbing bank which would bring it right over the straining schooner, now only a short quarter mile ahead. " You let me handle this; you handle the ship. I savvy now—how to handle the gun, and just how smart you and the Commodore are.

" You might have put this for'ard, on the fo'c's'le-head."

"WHERE guys usually mount a gun in a fast sailin' ship," Long Tom Devrars said, stooping tenderly to draw the canvas cover back over the gun and mount, masking them from sight from above. " Thinkin' because, when a man puts a helm over, a ship's bow swings first. But you got headsails, jibs an' stays an' all up there, and, in a ship like this one, th' stern swings fast enough, too. . . ."

He turned then, spoke to the man at the wheel, who was gaping rigidly up astern at the beautiful, rapid climb of the plane:

" You, boy, lay for'ard and tell Bouqui I'm taking the wheel now, an' when I holler ' Let go,' let go. Savvy that? Shove off; that's all."

He took the spokes from the man's sweaty hands, set his small feet on the grating, looked once more aloft, at the set and draw of the canvas, and at the plane. " How many bombs she got?" he asked John Monk in a conversational voice, palming the wheel down another spoke.

" Four, that I can count; on automatic rigs set in the bottom of the fuselage." John Monk had driven himself to move away from that exquisitely compact and evil two-inch automatic rifle, stood several feet from it and quite close to Devrars. " The guy in that plane has got his orders, all right—to get us, or not to come back."

" He ain't goin' back," said Devrars. " He's comin' now . . . Get on your job, Johnny. Just shove down that trip on th' left side of th' breech when you haul th' canvas off; that

feeds her, an' after that she feeds herself. Watch it, though, when I tell Bouqui t' let go; two thousand rounds, fer that piece, ain't one great big hell of a lot . . ."

John Monk hardly heard those words; above, the clean-winged little biplane was already slanting precipitously down in its power dive. Wind tore wailing over the leading edges of its wings, a thin, high accompaniment for the flailing, slammed tumult of its motor and the ripped beginning of its twin machine-gun fire.

To John Monk, crouched at the stripped two-inch rifle, the leather-padded traversing grips in his hands, his eyes strained at the cross-sights, it seemed to leap at him right from the immense and flaming eye of the sun. The core of the sun gave it silhouette, brought it darkly, sharply into prominence. Then, certain of his aim, John Monk let smash his first series of shots, and laughed, just at the sheer bravado and daring of that pilot, matching his skill and his speed against theirs here below so wantonly.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Fatal Ivy

POISON ivy may seem a comparatively harmless plant to people whose skins are not sensitive, but not so when the ivy is burned. So dangerous is the smoke, in fact, that there are cases of people having been knocked unconscious or killed outright by breathing it.

Even when the ivy stalks are dead the smoke is dangerous. To get rid of poison ivy safely is an elaborate job; it means killing the plants with spray, later burning the dried plants in a stiff breeze. Even the clothes worn have some poisonous effect for weeks and should be burned. In a breeze.

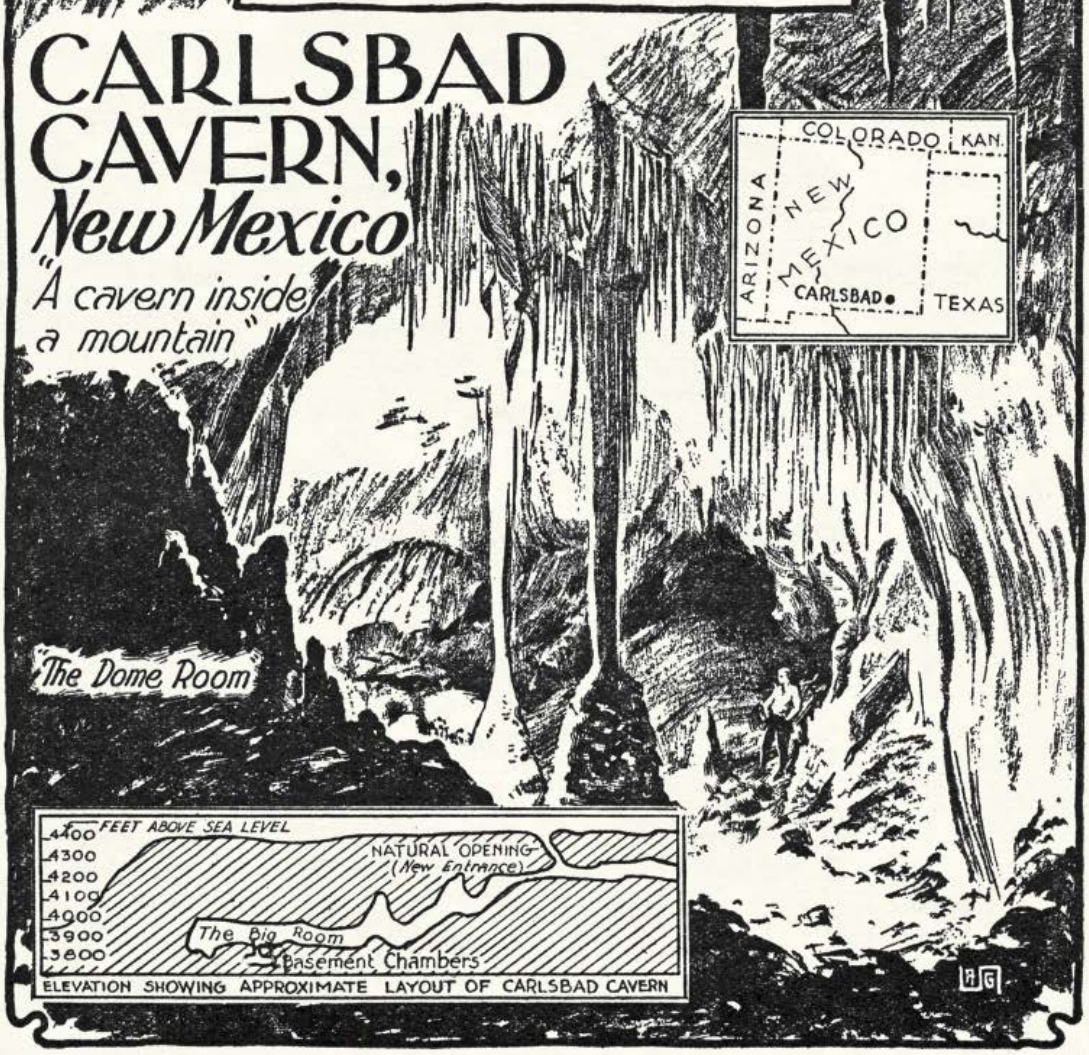
—*T. T. Rockel.*

Wonders of the World

FOR variety and beauty of natural decoration in its spacious chambers, the Carlsbad Cavern is the most spectacular of underground wonders in America. The entrance, which is 4,400 feet above sea level, leads down through some eight miles of corridors and chambers to a depth of nearly 1,000 feet below the surface.

Each chamber is decorated in forms which baffle description. In the "Dome Room" two slender pillars rise from a fountain basin of crystalline onyx to support a ceiling of pendants. For the "Nectar Fountain" white stalactites act as water-supply pipes. And a theater curtain of dripstone marks the entrance to the "Music Room." Such are the wonders of these fantastic underground chambers.

To assure its preservation, Carlsbad Cavern was declared a national monument in 1930.



Crazy Rhythm

By MAX BRAND
Author of "Scourge of the Rio Grande,"
"Brother of the Cheyennes," etc.

Novelette—
Complete

Jimmy Geary, Western jailbird, was determined to go straight —and the world was determined that he shouldn't

CHAPTER I.

BACK FROM PRISON.

WHEN Jimmy Geary came in sight of Yellow Creek again he sat down on a pine log beside the road and stared at his home town, from the old mill at one end to the house of the Bentons on the hill, with its thin wooden spires pointing up above the trees. Best of all, he could mark the roof of Graham's Tavern beyond the rest of the houses. It was still painted red but the wave of climbing vines had thrown a spray of green across the shingles since he last sat in the cool of the bar room and smelled the pungencies of whisky and the pleasant sour of beer.

Behind him, following taller than the

A card up the sleeve had started it

mountains, around him thicker than the trees, before him more obscuring than the morning mist, he felt his eight years of prison. Eight years out of twenty-six is a long time.

Prison monotony had made everything about those years dim except their length; the distinct moments of his life, so clear that he felt he could mark them in every day of his past, continued to that moment when he had seen the card come out of Tony Spargo's sleeve. Of course he knew that there were card cheats, but it had seemed impossible that big, beautiful Tony Spargo, so rich in eye and color and song, could actually be doing dirt for the sake of a fifteen dollar pot. Gus Warren, at the same table, too magnificent of brow and manner, or the Mexican with the wide face of a Chinese idol, might have been suspected, but never Tony.

He had shouted in a voice that tore his throat and cast a redness over his eyes; then he had grabbed the Colt that Tony had flashed and pulled his own gun. The weight of two bullets jarred Tony Spargo in his chair like two blows of a fist. But they were all in cahoots, the three of them. Oñate came in with a knife; Gus Warren's gun had stuck and came out only with a sound of tearing cloth. He turned

his shoulder to the knife thrust and got Warren right in the middle of the face. Afterwards he had to shift the gun to his left hand to settle with Oñate. But the greaser and the dago didn't count very much; he got fifteen years for Gus Warren, and murder in the third degree. But the warden was a fine fellow and for good behavior there is time off.

Thinking of the past cleared the mist from his mind so that he began to see what was around him and found that his hand was stroking the smooth of the log on which he sat. There were a lot of those barkless logs waiting to be dragged away and they were still yellow-white with the blaze of ax-strokes glittering like metal here and there. He looked about at the standing trees, the lower trunks mossed over on the north side and spiked with the stubs of broken branches; then came ragged, down-hanging boughs and finally the fresh green of the top. On the opposite slope all he could see was the ranged and compacted mass of the tree tops.

Men were like that, for the daily crowds of them seemed strong and happy and it was only when one got underneath the first impression that the mold of time and the scars and the breakings of the years could be seen.

SOMETHING disturbed Jimmy Geary. He found that it was the noise of wind in the trees and water in the creek, both exactly the same and both trying to hurry him away, as it seemed, into some unknown expectancy of action. He looked along the scattering line of logs that so many hand-strokes of labor had laid there and down the hills he stared again into the valley. There was plenty of open country with little rusty spots of color scattered over the green. Those were the cattle.

"You've got a good, clean pair of eyes in your head," the warden had told him, "but the only way for a man to keep clean is to work. In the old days you worked with a gun. You'd better find different tools now." Well, he knew the feel of the tools he wanted to manage—the rough of a forty-foot rope and the braided handle of a quirt and the oily sleekness of bridle reins. He knew cows pretty well, and now he would work with them. Finally he would have a herd of his own, and on the fat of this land the cattle would multiply.

"I'm going to punch cows," he had told the warden, who answered: "That's good. Anything's good, but don't try it at home. You'd better not go back there. Home towns are bad for bad boys, Jimmy. You know what I mean by that. And it's bad to get a wheel into an old rut."

Well, the warden was a wise man and he meant that it was best for a man with a past to try a new deal at a new table; but now the eyes of Jimmy Geary were taking hold on the picture of Yellow Creek so confidently that he felt a sort of kind recognition shining back to him from the whole valley.

He got up and walked on with the loose and easy action of a very strong man whose weight has not yet become a burden. He could feel his strength pull up the calf of his leg and bulge along his thighs, and he kept partially gripping his hands to set his arm muscles in action. His eyes shone with the glory of his fitness. Fifteen years of hard labor had been his sentence but eight years of daily companionship with a sledgehammer had been enough. He had been pretty soft, in the old days, and now he felt that softness of

the body was like poison in the belly or fool ideas in the head, a thing to be purged away. As he swung down the last hot slope into Yellow Creek, he realized that from his sixteenth to his eighteenth year he never had dared to enter any town without at least the weight of one gun under his coat. Now his hands would have to do.

HE went happily down the main street's windings. The roar of the creek was off to the left, the music for which he had wakened and harkened vainly through the dark of so many nights. Slater's barn was there near the road, the brown-red of the paint peeling off it in larger patches than ever. The building was a grim outline to him because he had had that half-hour fight with Jeff Wiley behind the barn till Mexican Charlie was frightened by the great splattering of blood and ran yelling to bring grown-ups to end the battle. From that great, crimson moment, Jeff and he had felt that they were set off from the rest of the boys in Yellow Creek with a greater destiny in promise for them. It was a sign and perhaps a prophecy when Jeff was thrown by a bucking horse and broke his neck on a Monday; for on Friday there had occurred the triple killing in Graham's Tavern that sent Jimmy up the river for eight years.

Beyond the barn, the houses were closer together. He knew them all by their own faces and the faces, the voices, the characters of the people who passed through the front doors. Another twist of the way brought him in view of the central section of Yellow Creek, the irregular " square," the flagpole in the middle of it, the board walk that ran around the square in front of the buildings. Everything in Yellow Creek was here, from the newspaper office to the Hay, Grain and Coal sign of Thomas Masters, the old crook! Not very many people were moving about. There never were many people in Yellow Creek except for holidays, and it was hardly strange that no one noticed young Jimmy Geary when he returned at last, not until after the sheriff had greeted him.

It was the same sheriff, on the same roan horse. The sheriff had been quite an old man of forty, those eight years ago, but by a strange chance he seemed younger than before to Jimmy Geary. He pulled up his mustang so hard that the water jounced and squeaked in the belly of the broncho. He waved a silent greeting; Jimmy's salute was just as still.

" Staying or passing through?" asked the sheriff, and all the calm virtue of Jimmy vanished at a stroke.

" Whichever I damn please!" he replied. The sheriff said nothing; he simply took in Jimmy with a long look, then jogged on down the street.

RIGHT after that a shrill sound approached Jimmy Geary. It was almost like the barking of a dog, but it came from the lips of a thirteen year old boy who was capering and yelling: " Hey, everybody! Hey, turn out and look sharp! Jimmy Geary's back! Jimmy Geary's back."

Other boys heard the cry; they came in swirls of dust; as they gathered in numbers they got closer to Jimmy; they began to laugh because crowds of boys have to do something, and that laughter was acid under the skin of Jimmy. The youngest of children can make the oldest of sages wince if it keeps on laughing long enough.

Someone burst through the crowd. He was in such a hurry to get to Jimmy that he kept on sidling and prancing

after he reached him. This fellow represented the *Morning Bugle,* he said. But he could not have represented it long because he had been in the West only long enough for its sun to redden the end of his nose. He looked incomplete and wrinkled and uncomfortable like a man on a picnic. He wanted, he said, a few good bits from Jimmy Geary.

"I'm not talking," said Jimmy. He had learned at the penitentiary to say that.

"You're not talking?" cried the reporter. "But you've *got* to talk! Outside of the waterfalls and the lumber mill, you're the only thing in Yellow Creek that's worth writing up. If you don't talk for yourself, other people are going to talk for you."

"How did you know me?" asked Jimmy.

"Hey, look at the spread we gave you five days ago," said the reporter. He was so proud of that "spread" that he carried it around with him, and now unfolded the front sheet of a *Bugle.* It was not a very big paper but the headline could be read easily right across the square.

JIMMY GEARY FREED

Underneath it ran the long article. Jimmy's eye picked out bits of it and put the bits away in his memory. He was "the hero of the famous triple killing at Graham's Tavern." He was "dangerous"; he was "a youthful and a smiling killer." But above all, the question was, what would his career be when he got free from the prison to his home town? Or did he intend to return to it?

"What're you gunna do?" asked the reporter. "What's the career ahead of you?"

"Cattle," said Jimmy. Then he turned his eyes from the sun-burned nose of the other and went off down the street. He had a vast desire to take the yipping boys two at a time and knock their heads together. He had been almost overcome by an intense need to punch the red nose of the reporter.

People were hard to take, and that was perfectly certain. In a prison one's fellow humans are not so free to be annoying.

WHEN he came to the Hay, Grain and Coal sign of Thomas Masters he got away from the growing crowd by stepping into the office. Old Masters sat in his usual corner with the same white whiskers bulging out of the same red face. It looked like a picture surrounded with the smoke of an explosion. He put out a fat hand, tentatively, for Jimmy Geary to grasp.

"Well, James," said Masters, "what can I do for you today?"

"Tell me where to find a job," said Jimmy.

"There are only a few good jobs and there are a lot of good men," said Masters.

"Sure there are," admitted Jimmy. "I don't care what I get so long as there are horses and cows in it."

"And guns?" asked Masters.

"I'm traveling light," smiled Jimmy.

"You try the Yellow Creek air on yourself for a week and then come in to see me," answered Masters, and raised his pen over a stack of bills.

Jimmy went out without a good-by because a good-by was not wanted. When he reached the sidewalk, Reuben Samuels got hold of him out of the increasing mob of boys and took him into the Best Chance saloon. He said: "I'm going to do something for you,

Jimmy, and sat him down at a small table in the back room. Samuels ordered two whiskies; Jimmy changed his to beer and then looked across the foam past the red length of Samuel's nose into the brightness of his little eyes.

"I've got a good break to offer you and you're going to have it," said Samuels. "I've got a place up the line that used to make big business for me. Faro, roulette, or anything the boys want. But I had some trouble up there. Some of the roughs thought the faro layout was queer, one night, and they started smashing things up. What I need is a headliner to draw the crowd, and a bouncer well enough known to throw a chill into the boys that go around packing hardware. Well, you're the man for both places, so I could pay you double. I mean something big, Jimmy. I mean fifty or sixty a week."

Jimmy Geary shook his head. "Not interested," he said.

"Or seventy," said Samuels.

"I'm not carrying any hardware, myself," said Jimmy.

"Make it eighty, then, for your health."

"Not for me."

"Ninety dollars a week for an easy job, a sitting job, most of the time; and when the work comes, it's the sort of thing that's play for you. Don't say no. I'm not pinching pennies. I'll call it a hundred flat!"

Jimmy looked hard into the little eyes.

"Aw, to hell with you!" said he, and arose.

"Wait a minute," said Samuels, hastily. "How did I know what you are taking in your coffee? Don't run away in a huff. I'm going to do you good, I said, and I meant it. Sit here for five minutes. My cousin Abe is right here in town. One of the smartest men you ever met, Jimmy. He wants to see you."

ABE was like Reuben in face but his clothes were fitted to the sleek of his body more carefully. They seemed to be painted on him. His collar was so tight that his neck overflowed it and rubbed a dark spot of sweat or grease onto the knot of his tie. At the same time that his fat fingers took possession of Jimmy's hand, his eyes took brotherly possession of Jimmy's heart and soul.

"It's something big," he said to Jimmy. "I got the idea when I heard that you were turned loose. I burned up the wires to New York. You see, I know Lew Gilbeck of Gilbeck and Slinger. They've put over some of the hottest shots that ever burned a hole in Broadway. They're reaching around for a big musical comedy spectacle to put out this fall, and I shoot them this idea over the wires. Jimmy Geary, hero of three-man-killing eight years ago, just out of prison. Big, handsome, loaded with it. Did his shooting eight years ago when phonograph record was playing 'Crazy Rhythm.' Give him a number where he does the thing over again. "Crazy Rhythm" for a title. Booze. A girl or two. A real Western gunfight in the real Western way done by one who's done it before. I shoot this idea to Lew Gilbeck and he wires back, 'Yes, yes, yes; get him.' I wire back, 'How much, this baby won't be cheap.' He hands me back: 'Offer one fifty a week.' And there you are, Jimmy, with one foot already on Broadway and the other ready to step—"

Jimmy Geary went with lengthening strides out of the cool shadows of the

Best Chance saloon and in the dazzling brightness of the outer sun, he fairly ran into the stalwart form of Lowell Gerry, the rancher.

"Mr. Gerry," he said, blocking the way, "You've always got a place for a man out on your ranch. Let me go out there and try to earn my keep till I'm worth real pay, will you?"

The sun-lined and squinting face of Lowell Gerry did not alter a great deal; one expression had been cut into that brown steel long before and it could not change.

"Step aside a minute, will you, Jimmy?" he asked, quietly.

Jimmy stepped aside, and Gerry walked straight past him down the street with an unhurrying stride.

Time was needed before the fullness of that affront could be digested; Jimmy was still swallowing bitterness when he got across Yellow Creek to Graham's Tavern. Even the trees around the Tavern threw shadows ten degrees cooler than those which fell in any other part of Yellow Creek. Ivy grew around the watering troughs; ampelopsis bushed up around the wooden columns of the veranda, swept over the roof of it, almost obscured the windows of the second story, and so poured up on in thinner streaks across the red shingles above. It was all just as pleasant as before, but there was more of it. Therefore it was rather a shock when he found in the saloon an unfamiliar face behind the bar instead of the fat, pale, amiable hulk of Charlie Graham. This fellow was the red-copper that a man picks up on the open range. He looked as if he had exchanged chaps for a bar apron hardly the day before. In the old days the hearty voice of Charlie was always booming, making the echoes laugh, but the new man had reduced his conversation with three or four patrons to a mere rumble.

"WHERE'S Charlie?" asked Jimmy.

"He's in hell with Tony Spargo," said the lean bartender, and his eyes fixed as straight as a levelled gun on Geary's face.

"They don't have the same hell for men and rats," answered Geary. "Give me a beer, will you?"

JIMMY GEARY

The bartender paused as though about to take offense; slowly he drew the beer and carved off the rising foam as he placed the glass on the perforated brass drain; slowly he picked up Geary's money and made the change.

"Have one yourself," said Jimmy.

"Yeah?" queried the other, in doubt. But he saved the change and took a small beer.

"The Grahams are out of this, are they?" asked Jimmy.

"The girl's got it. Kate runs it," answered the bartender. He gave a somber nod of recognition and swallowed half of his drink. Jimmy rushed

his down with a certain distaste; he wished it had been whisky because coming into this room had brought about him all the past and all its appetites.

"Where's Kate now?" he asked, thinking back to her. At eighteen, a lad cherishes his dignity; he had only a dim memory of red hair and spindling body, for Kate had been only about sixteen and therefore hardly worthy of a glance.

She was out back, said the bartender, so Jimmy went through to the rear. He stopped in the small card room. It was just the same. The little phonograph stood on the corner table where it had played "Crazy Rhythm" eight years before. The same pair of colored calendars decorated the walls. On a chair rose the pile of newspapers from which men helped themselves when they were tired of cards or growing a little world-conscious. Then he crossed to the table at which he had sat. It was even covered with the same green felt; he could remember the V-shaped cut on one edge of the cloth. Behind the chair where Tony Spargo had sat there was a half-inch hole bored into the wall. Until he saw it, he had forgotten that the first bullet had drilled right through Tony's powerful body. It was strange that life could be knocked out by a flash of fire and a finger's-end of lead.

Then he went out behind the house and saw a red-headed girl of twenty-three or four peeling potatoes. She had three pans for the unpeeled, the peelings, and the peeled. She wore rubber gloves through which the flesh appeared duskily. She should have been very pretty but there was no smile about her. What a man sees first is the light behind a picture; after that he sees the picture itself. Well, you had to look closely at this girl before you saw that she was pretty.

"You're Kate Graham?" he asked.

"Hello, Jimmy," said the girl. "Welcome home. I've got your old room fixed up. Want it?"

She slid the pan of peelings onto a chair and stood up. She had plenty of jaw and plenty of shoulders but her strength remained inside the sense of her femininity as in a frame. She had a smile, too, but it was no glare for heavy traffic; there were dimmers on it; it invited you close and promised to keep shining, for a long time. A door opened in Jimmy and something like a sound moved through him.

"Yes, I want the room," he said, looking at her. "Tell me how about Charlie, if you don't mind?"

"A whisky bat and pneumonia did the rest," she answered.

"Whiskey's hard on the eyes, all right," said Jimmy. "I was mighty fond of Charlie."

"Were you?" asked the girl.

"Yeah, I sure was."

He kept hesitating until it suddenly occurred to him that he had no words for what he wanted to say; he hardly knew what he wanted, either, except that he wished to see that faint brightening about the eyes and mouth. He said he could find the way to the old room, so he left her and went off up the stairs, which creaked in all the familiar places. It was wonderful that he should remember everything so well. From sixteen to eighteen he had written himself "man" and kept a room here and lived—well, without too much labor.

WHEN he got up to the room he heard snoring inside it. He backed off and looked at the number to make sure. It was Seven-

teen, all right, so he opened the door softly and looked in. A long man with a jag of beard on the chin and a sweep of mustaches across his mouth was lying on the bed with his mouth open. It was Doc Alton!

That sight brought up the past on galloping hoofs. He crossed the room. Doc opened his eyes and shut his mouth.

"Hello, Jimmy," he said, quietly. Doc was always quiet. Perhaps that was why he had been able to open so many safes without bringing on the vengeance of the law. He had been one of those aging men of forty, eighty years ago; now he looked to the altered eye of Jimmy Geary even younger than in the other days, as the sheriff had. Doc sat up and shook hands.

"How's everything?" he asked.

"All right," said Jimmy. "Thanks for the letters, and the cash."

"They wouldn't let me send much," answered Doc. "Feeling like work?"

"Listen to me!" said Jimmy, fiercely. "Wake up and listen! When I brace people around here for an honest job, they give me the eye and walk straight past. But the thugs come and hunt me up—Samuels, and that sort, and a safe-cracker comes and waits in my room. I say: What the hell?"

Doc Alton yawned. "You feel that way about it? All right. I'll take a snooze here. I'm kind of tired. If you ain't changed your mind before you're ready to go to bed, I won't argue with you any, but I've got a sweet layout fixed up. It's a two-man job and it's fat. There ought to be fifteen, twenty thousand in it."

"No! and be damned to you!" said Jimmy. "I'm going out to get an honest man's job."

"Take a gun along with you, then," said Doc Alton. "Let me tell you something. A lot of people around here remember Tony Spargo."

"A dirty dago of a card-sharper!" answered Jimmy Geary. "To hell with him, too, and the crooks that remember him."

He strode from the room and had sight, from the door, of Doc Alton yawning again, his eyes already closing for more sleep. At the stable he hired a saddle horse and hit out over the rough trails to the ranches. He put in the rest of that day getting to eight ranch houses and he collected eight refusals.

Two of them stood out. Old Will Chalmers said to him: "What sort of a plant are you aiming to fix on me out here? No, I don't want you or any three like you, either." But at the Morgan place, the girl he had known as Ruth Willet opened the kitchen door for him. He had gone to school with Ruth and he put out his hand in a pleased surprise. She simply slammed the door in his face and screeched from behind it: "I've got men in this house, Jimmy Geary. You get out of here or I'm gunna call 'em! I got men and guns here. You get off of this place!"

That was his last try. He got off the place and went slowly back to the Graham Tavern, letting the cowpony dogtrot or walk, letting the evening gather off the hills and slide unheeded about him. Darkness, also, was rising out of his heart across his eyes.

He put up the horse in the bar and went into the saloon. There was no one in it except the bartender, though voices were stirring in the back room.

"Whisky!" he said, looking down at his watery reflection in the bar varnish.

"How's things?" asked the bartender, cheerfully.

Jimmy Geary lifted his eyes with

deliberation across the shining white of the bar-apron and over the lean face of the other. There he rested his glance for a moment, drank the whisky, and lowered the glass to the bar again without changing his gaze. "You take a run and a jump and a guess at how things are," said Jimmy Geary.

"Yeah?" said the bartender. But he worked a smile back onto his face. "Look here," he murmured. "There's somebody to see you. Right out there on the back veranda. Been waiting for you."

"With a gun, eh?" sneered Jimmy Geary.

CHAPTER II.

THE AMBUSH.

BUT the whisky had hit through his blood and the sour fume of it was in his nose and his brain. He had eaten nothing since morning. So the danger of guns meant little to the vastness of his gloom, with this red fire blowing up in it. He knocked the rear door of the bar open. Three men were playing poker at the table which was placed most clearly in his memory; a pair of them had dark faces.

"Take a hand, brother?" said this man cheerfully.

"I've got nothing but chicken-feed," said Jimmy.

"Yeah? All we're spending is time!"

"I'll be back, then."

He stepped onto the rear veranda, letting the screen door bang behind him. A woman got up from a chair and came slowly towards him. As she moved through the light that slanted out of a window he recognized Juanita Allen. She was the half-breed daughter of Mac Allen.

"Hello, Jimmy," she said. "I heard you were here. I came on over. That all right? I wanted to see you."

"And knife me, too, eh?" said Jimmy. "You used to be Tony Spargo's girl, didn't you?"

"Tony Spargo? That's so long I wouldn't remember!"

She put back her head a little and smiled at him with professional ease. True, he had been eight years out of the world, but he knew that gesture. She backed up into the light and he saw what the years had done to her. Well, the Mexican blood fades fast.

"How do I look, Jimmy?" she said. "Like hell, eh? Come here and let me take a slant at you, too."

She pulled him forward into the light. That would be easy for an accomplice lodged in the dark of the brush.

"My God, the time's only made a man of you!" said Juanita. "But look how it's socked me eight times in the face. You remember, Jimmy? I'm just your age. My birthday comes on Monday before yours. Take a look and tell me what I'm good for now, will you?"

There were some straight lines up and down on her lip. Her smile pulled her face all out of shape and let him see the blanched whiteness of some false teeth. And soap and water would never help her; there was grime in her soul.

"You don't have to tell me; I'll tell you: I'm done," said Juanita. "I don't mind about the men. To hell with them! But I can't even get a job slinging hash. You'd think I might get a finger in the soup, or something. I'm not good enough for the people around here. Listen to me, Jimmy!"

"Yeah. All right. I'm listening," said Jimmy. "Quit crying, will you?

I like you fine, Juanita. Please don't cry."

"Take hold of my arm," she said.

He could feel the two bones of the forearm.

"Look at," said Juanita. "I'm sunk; I'm done. I've gotta get a break or something and pull out of here. Jimmy, you were always a good kid. Give me a break, will you?"

"I'll give you a break," he heard himself say. "Will you quit crying, Juanita, please? I'm going to give you a break. What d'you need?"

She stopped the crying and started gasping, which was worse. She held him by the wrists with shuddering hands.

"I wouldn't need much. There's a little bill over at the boarding house. It's only forty dollars, Jimmy. They'd sock me in jail if I didn't pay that. And then a little bit more. Carfare, someplace. Jimmy, you were always a good fellow. You were always kind. I was sorry when they slammed you for those three crooks. I knew Tony was a crook. He was a dirty crook to me, too. I kind of loved him, damn him. You see how it is, Jimmy. I wouldn't need much money, if only—"

"You wait here," said Jimmy Geary. "I'm coming back."

She kept a grip on him all the way across the veranda. "I'm going to wait right out here for you," she kept saying. "I'll be expecting you back. I'll wait right here—if it takes you all night, I'll be waiting right here."

HE got away through the outside door and up the stairs to Number Seventeen. When he got inside, he wanted a drink.

"Hey, Al!" he said to the snorer. He lighted a lamp. Electricity had not been brought out to Graham's Tavern.

"Yeah?" said Alton, turning on the bed. "What time is it?"

"Time for a drink. Where's your flask?"

"Under the pillow."

Jimmy put his hand under and found a gun. Then he found the flask and pulled it out. He unscrewed the top, poured a long shot down his throat. The whisky horrors choked him. He took another drink to kill them and put the flask down.

"Want some?" he panted.

"Not till I eat."

"Got any money?"

Doc sat up, suddenly. "Yeah, sure," he said. "Sure I've got some money. Help yourself."

He pulled out a wallet. Alton's wallet was always full. Now the bills were packed into a tight sheaf. He pulled out some fifties. There were seven of them.

"Three hundred and fifty," he said.

"Sure, kid, sure," said Doc. "Take some more. Take all you want." He took two more.

"A lot of dirty bums is all I've been able to find since you stepped out of the picture," said Alton. "A lot of dirty, yellow-bellied rats. You and me will burn up the highway, kid."

Jimmy looked down from the long mustaches of Doc and saw the face of the warden in the shadows at his feet. He saw the prison yard, and the pale eyes of Barney Vane, the lifer who was head trusty. Even the best warden in the world has to use trusties, and a trusty is, you know what. So Jimmy reached for the flask and unscrewed the top of it again.

"You sure you want that?" asked Doc.

"Aw, shut up," said Jimmy, and drank.

"Sure," said Doc Alton. "I'll get

on my boots. I'll be waiting for you while you spend that stuff. I suppose that's what you want to do?"

Jimmy said nothing. He got out of the room and down to the back veranda. He heard the girl rise—the whisper of her clothing and the sound of her drawn breath, but she kept back against the wall. He went to her and stood over her, looking down at her.

"Aw, Jimmy," she moaned, suddenly. "Don't say you couldn't get anything. Don't turn me down flat. I swear to God I haven't eaten. I'm hungry. Give me the price of a square meal, will you, Jimmy?"

"Here, here!" said JimmyGeary. "I've got enough for you. Where's that bag? Here, open it. There's three hundred and fifty in that bag, now. You pay the damned board bill and get out to a better part of the world. This is the rottenest part of creation. Nobody can go straight here—"

JUANITA

JUANITA caught her breath, started to laugh, choked, sobbed, and then uttered a queer screaming sound that was sob and laughter in one. She wobbled like a hopeless drunk, staggering with hysterics. Well, a man can't very well handle a thing like that. He took her down to the kitchen door and threw it open. Kate was inside drying dishes that a big Negress was washing and putting out on the drain.

"Here, Kate," said Jimmy Geary. "Juanita's hysterical. Get her a drink or something. Quiet her down, will you?"

The face of Kate Graham smiled, as stone might smile. The Negress turned slowly and put her chin up into the air. "That thing!" she said.

Jimmy wanted to kill Kate Graham. Instead, he took Juanita across the room to her and caught her by the wrist and shook her arm.

"You—take this girl—and be good to her! Haven't you got any more heart than a toad? Take her — now —and let me see you!"

Kate, with a look of fear and wonder, took that weeping burden in her arms. Jimmy got out of the room onto the veranda. He leaned against a pillar there for a moment, and the stars wavered a little in the sky. Afterwards he went up to Seventeen and found Doc Alton pulling on his second boot.

"Ready, old son?" asked Doc, smiling till his mustaches spread out thin.

Jimmy lifted the pillow, took the gun and passed it out of view under his coat. "Wait here a while," he said, and went down again. He would play a round or two of that poker, as he had promised to do, for that would show whether or not luck intended to favor him in the old ways.

The three were not impatient. Instead, they greeted him with three different sorts of smiling, so that he had a very odd and vivid feeling that he

had known them before. They opened with a round of jackpots, the man with the lofty brow dealing. The Mexican had openers. Jimmy held up a pair of nines and drew another. He won that pot and six dollars, but it wasn't the money that made him feel better and better. He had a genuine kindness for these strangers.

"I haven't met you people before, have I?" he asked.

They had not had that luck, they said.

"I've taken on a little liquor," apologized Jimmy. "You know how it is."

They knew how it was, and it was all right. Two more hands went by before the dark-faced, handsome fellow opposite Jimmy got up, revealing the bullet hole in the wall. He said they ought to have a bit of music, so he wound up the squeaking phonograph and put on a disk. The very first bars of the tune poured the consciousness of Jimmy far into the past.

"You know," he said, when the fellow with the big black eyes sat down, "it seems as though I've been right here before, with all of you. It's a queer feeling."

THE three exchanged glances, quietly, and Jimmy made sure that he was quite drunk. If that were the case, he ought not to be sitting in at a poker game, but the music from the scratched and cracked old record on the phonograph held him fascinated, not because it was pleasant but because it hurt like the ache of old wounds.

It was like air-hunger, the sickness of Jimmy. It was like wakening from a nightmare with the vision gone but the fear remaining. He could feel the eyes of the three on him. The game ought to go on, of course, but they seemed to understand a mystery that was closed to him and they remained half-smiling, watchful.

Jimmy looked up, not out of the past but deeper into it. Time closed like water over his head. He leaned a bit forward and the three leaned the same trifle toward him. They were not smiling, now; not with their eyes, at least.

The music went on. It thrust a

DOC ALTON

knife-pain into his right shoulder, into his heart, though he was not following the words, just then.

He pointed with his forefinger.

"You're Oñate's brother!" he said to the Mexican.

The man nodded and smiled like a Chinese idol.

"You're the brother of Tony Spargo!" said Jimmy Geary to the man across the table.

"I'm his kid brother," sneered Spargo.

"And you're the brother of Gus Warren?"

"Sorry. I'm only his cousin. But maybe I'll do to fill out the hand?"

"Aye," said Jimmy Geary, "you make the three of a kind."

The needle was scratching with every whirl of the disk; and yet Jimmy wanted the record to continue endlessly, for he knew that he was to die before the song ended. Spargo had out a gun and laid it on the edge of the table, leaning so far forward that Jimmy could see, over his shoulder, the hole in the wall. He had an insane feeling that his own soul would be drawn through that same gap in the wall and whistled away into nothingness. And there would be nothing in the way of an inquiry, even; for the gun of Doc Alton would be found on him. Perhaps that was Alton's part in the plot—to see that the victim went heeled to the fight. But there would be no fight. The music poured icy sleep over his hands.

THEY were going to get him on the down strain of that weary sing-song. He could see the murder tightening in the hand and the eyes of Spargo. Then Kate Graham spoke out of the doorway, deliberately, as though she did not realize that the song was running swiftly to its end:

"The thing's off. He hasn't got a gun. It's murder if you turn loose on him—and I'll give the testimony to hang you."

The Mexican uttered a little soft, musical cry of pain. Spargo's lips kept stretching thinner over his teeth. He said the words through Jimmy to the girl: "Are you gunna be the blond rat? Are you gunna run out?"

"You fixed this job and got us here!" cried the cousin of Gus Warren. "Now what's the idea?"

"Look!" moaned Oñate. "I have the same knife for him. Look, *señorita!* It is the same!"

"What did I care about your brother, Oñate?" asked the girl calmly. "Or about four-flushing Gus Warren? And I've just been getting some news about Tony Spargo. It made me send for the sheriff. Are you three going to be here to shake hands with him?"

They were not going to be there. They stood up, with young Spargo running the tips of his fingers, absently, over the bullet hole in the wall. They all looked at Kate as they went out but they said nothing to her.

That silence continued in the room until after the first pounding and then the departing ripple of the hoofbeats. Jimmy stood up.

"The sheriff's not coming, if that's what you mean," said the girl.

"Sit down here," said Jimmy. The whisky was gone. Inside him there was only emptiness, with a throb in it.

"There's no good talking," said the girl, but she came to the table and slipped into the chair where Tony Spargo had once sat. She was only calm from a distance; at close hand he could see the tremor as he leaned across the table.

"You were only a kid," said Jimmy. "That's what I don't understand."

The song had ended; the needle was scratching steadily in the last groove, and a nick in the disk struck the needle-point at greater and still greater intervals.

"It was Tony Spargo, was it?" said Jimmy.

"I was nearly sixteen," she said. "He used to talk to me and look at me with his greasy eyes. I never saw the grease in them till this evening. I didn't know till after she'd talked to me."

She folded her hands. The fingers were smooth and slender. She wore

rubber gloves around the kitchen and that was why. But in spite of her double grip, the hands would not stop quivering.

"What are you afraid of?" asked Jimmy.

"You know what I'm afraid of. You're going to say something. Go on and say it and get it over with. I can take that, too."

"Hello," said the voice of Doc Alton from the doorway.

"Go on away, Doc," said Jimmy. "Wait a minute, though. Come and take this."

He kept holding the girl with his eyes as he held out the gun to the side. Doc Alton took it.

"I owe you some money," said Jimmy Geary, "and I'm going to keep on owing it for a while."

"That's all right," said Doc Alton. "Are you — are you staying around here, Jimmy?"

The mournful wistfulness of his voice left Jimmy untouched.

"I'm staying around here," he answered. "So long, Doc."

Doc Alton went out.

"I mean," said Jimmy, "I'm staying around unless you say no."

She drew in a breath and closed her eyes.

"Wait a minute," she whispered. "In a minute—I'll be able to talk."

He knew that if he put his hand over hers he would stop their trembling, but he sat up straight and waited. The needle bumped for the last time on the disk and the scratching ended. Another sound rose and moved forward in Jimmy, a rushing and a singing like wind or like mountain waters that go on forever.

THE END

Three Seconds to Live

THE working life of a big gun's inner sleeve is about three seconds, as the bore loses its accuracy after 300 rounds and each discharge takes only a small fraction of a second.

—*J. W. Holden.*

Animal Man

By THEODORE ROSCOE

" Bring 'em back alive!" was John Stanley's slogan—but there were two denizens of India who didn't want to be brought back

YOU have seen him—the likes of John Stanley—in ports wearing such names as Mombasa, Makassar, Negapatam, Kuala Lumpur; outstanding in whites amidst the colors of Joseph's Coat, gesturing a palm leaf fan and talking trade figures in whatever huggermugger dialect may come to hand, or grinning up at the big mail ship as she eases away from the bund, watching her departure without envy. You have seen him (if you venture that far from home) up on the border of Nepal, quietly bossing a batch of Ghurkas; or over in Britsh East, breaking brush at the head of a licorice-hued *safari;* or in the Million Dollar at Shanghai, taking them straight and smiling in content amusement at nothing in particular on the table-top.

The pith helmet and that way of

lighting a cigarette. The unhurried stride and leisurely gesture of command. A coppery tinge to the little creases on throat and neck-nape, burnt there by exposure, and swift blue eyes that are not nearsighted from close-hemmed city streets, but sharpened by sun and wind and the look of far places.

"How are things in New York?" he will ask you, friendly; but while you are telling him he is watching the mountain range pictured beyond the window's frame.

"Business in the States?"—but as you speak of the latest in the news he has stooped to pet the gray barroom tabby against his legs.

Here is a man, you feel, who has not been lured by the satisfied pavement to the narrow fireplace, the easy cushion and the echolalia of ticker-tape. Here is a man whose roof is the sky, whose doorstep the horizon; who mines his gold in an Asian sunset, and who, hearing of the recovery of the dollar, had rather commune with a tabby. But you know he has had to prospect the gold of understanding. There is, for example, the scar on his left forearm, purple as a wound stripe, running from wrist to elbow.

WHEN John Stanley was just under thirty he was going somewhere. In the New England he had hailed from he would have been labeled "go-getter" or "boy making good." In India he had won for himself the title, "*pukka shikari*," which loosely means "dam' fine big game hunter." John Stanley was all of those, if business acumen, determination, unbounded confidence and expert marksmanship mean anything.

He had been a hunter, a crack shot since boyhood. Military academy, shooting in Maine, rifle and pistol teams. His brown, lean frame, brought up on discipline and proverbs, was powered with the stamina of Puritan granite, as many a football enemy of college days could have mournfully testified. And he had taken the Orient, jungle, natives, hardships, heat, the same way he had swept through zoögraphy and zoölogy majors in his scholastic career—that is to say, in one self-assured stride, best clubs, head of the class.

"I'll show them *how* to hunt wild animals."

He did. He had that make of chin. The term wasn't around in those days, but John Stanley was one of the first to "bring them back alive." In a big way, that is. There were naturalists and trappers in the hills (collectors with butterfly nets, John called them), but they didn't get the goods the way John Stanley did. Hunting was more than a business, a sport to John Stanley. In a way, it was a challenge to his convictions.

He would have told you that progress came only through struggle. That Divine Providence had scattered a lot of stumbling blocks (tropic jungles, for example) in the path of man, and every time man had the courage to eradicate such obstacles, chalk up an extra cubit to the stature of his soul. If, meanwhile, it chalked up an extra dollar to the bank account, why that was only the Lord's practical way (this was in 1906, and John was from New England) of rewarding virtue. Thus figuratively, John Stanley went after wild animals in much the manner of St. George going after the dragon or Tancred after the Turk.

"That boy's a winner. Tougher the order the better he likes it."

John Stanley to his toes. He went

after them in droves, in flocks. He drove one of the first automobiles in the *terai*, and to speed up operations he fastened a circus cage to a trailer and dragged them out of the forest by the car-load. His reputation traveled the animal marts from Port Said to Singapore. Cobras, black leopards, buffalo, grist for his mill. He shipped monkeys by the crate, leopards in clawing dozens, elephants in herds.

Surmounting a whole pyramid of stumbling blocks, he captured the largest white rhino on record, tied it horn and hoof, and hustled it from Bhutan to the London Zoo. He won commissions from museums, circuses and societies all over Europe and America. His collection of skins and trophies was finest on the river, bar none. His bank account was a matter of pride. All this in a handful of years; and he could well afford to write Molly Breadon and her father, back in the States, inviting them for a season's shooting (and something more for Molly) at his place in the foothills.

JOHN STANLEY was not unaware of his own impressiveness, that day he went to meet Molly and her father at the riverfront landing in Indapur. Smart drill and spotless sun helmet, automatic loaning glamour to his belt, pipe in teeth, he swung up the wharf among the snarling specimen cages, giving low-voiced orders to salaaming coolies and tapping a leather crop on his polished riding boots. Brown and manly as the open could make a fellow. And wait till Molly saw the country estate he had carved for himself in this wilderness. Old Man Breadon (the Breadon Knitting Mills) would know big business when he saw it. And Molly, little Molly who had promised to wait—

Molly was something, too. Somehow she had kept her frock starchy on that mildewed jungle backwater; and the sight of her smiling down from the steamer's rail set John Stanley's pulses thumping.

The ride to the bungalow was a tremendous success. John and his guests in saddle on his best mounts; the house boys pattering along with the luggage, all wearing flowers behind their ears, in such a colorful procession as Aladdin might have commandeered; the jungle in its brightest hues. Molly must exclaim and pause and ask a thousand questions. Old Man Breadon nodded and said, " Well, well, Stanley, you've certainly made something here."

After a brief siesta and tea served as only a house boy named Wing could serve it, John led them in a tour of the grounds, the trophy and gun rooms, the animal house. The compound, massed with rhododendron and traveler's palm and azalea. The trophy room, a pageant of leopard skins, tiger robes, elephant tusks, buffalo horns and gavial heads. The gun room with its shining racks of Winchester 30-30s, Mannlichers, Enfield specials, .475 elephant guns. The garage with the car and the cage trailer, models of efficiency in the limberlost. Lastly, the animal house filled with beasts waiting shipment. The elephant that had nearly trampled John Stanley to a pulp, docile in chains and ticketed for Comstock's American Circus. Monkeys boxed up like chickens going to market. Panthers for Copenhagen and wild boar for Rio. A black leopard bound for the Antwerp Zoo.

Returned to the bungalow and changed for dinner, John Stanley entertained with cocktails and stories of the East. Molly must clasp her hands

and listen wide-eyed to tales of desperate encounters and last-second shots, told with proper modesty but desperate none the less.

"And the natives. Molly, you should have seen them when I first bought my car. The men are Bhils, some of the best trackers in the country, hired from across India. Brave as they come, but superstitious as children. When they heard the engine they were panic-stricken. Deodar, the old headman, is the only one I could ever persuade to ride."

"But a motor car hardly seems to belong in the jungle—"

HE grinned at the little pucker in her forehead. "Why not? Some day there won't be any jungle. There'll be highways and grain fields. Maybe factories."

"Oh, John—"

"Why, surely," John Stanley declared. "We whites, some day we'll reclaim the East. Won't be any more of these fool superstitions. These Bhils, frightened of the car, that's not half. Worship snakes and all sorts of outrageous things. Think tigers turn into men and men turn into tigers, all that sort of rot. But on the hunt—absolutely fearless."

"Trader on the boat coming up was telling Molly and me you were pretty fearless yourself," Breadon admired over a cigar. "Said you'd bagged as many as ten tigers in a single day."

John Stanley shrugged. "Woods are full of the devils. Speaking of tigers—I was going to save this for Molly—but I just got a wire yesterday morning, a commission to catch the biggest specimens I could lay hands on. The order is from Luckenback—"

"Luckenback?" Breadon's eyebrows went up.

John Stanley nodded, trying to keep elation out of his smile. Luckenback, of course, was known the world over. "Tigers for the Berlin Zoo. And yesterday afternoon my men found just the trail. Never saw such tracks. Monsters. Perfect pair. I've got to go after them tonight, and ought to be back in time to hunt with you tomorrow."

Molly turned from the window, eyes bright. "Where—where do they live, this pair?"

"Worst sort of jungle. Drive about fifty miles up the valley on an old plantation road. Then off to Nowhere. Only the Bhils could have found such a trail. Biggest tigers I ever heard of. Listen, Molly. If I get these brutes, Luckenback's promised me the rest of his orders, and he's king of the business. It'll mean a fortune for me, for us. Another five years out here, with me supplying the animal market—"

It should have been a gay evening, lovers reunited, beautiful girl and "boy who made good," prospect of hunting days in the hills, Luckenback's prize order—yet somehow it didn't get across. A little tug of disappointment somewhere in the atmosphere, somewhere John Stanley couldn't put his finger on. Surely Old Man Breadon was won over to a prospective son-in-law. John had the ring, a canary diamond fine enough to have once caparisoned the finger of a Punjabi princess; but he wouldn't ask Molly to wear it until Luckenback's order was filled and the future assured. Was she disappointed because he hadn't asked her yet? She ought to know how things stood between them. Or was she disturbed at his leaving on business the night of her arrival? But he had explained how Luckenback could not be

kept waiting. She couldn't be offended at that.

HIS departure that evening would be dramatic, John Stanley admitted in secret pleasure—to drive off with guns and natives, car and cage-trailer under the moon. Breadon strolled across the compound to admire the outfit, leaving John and Molly in the garden. Molly fixed a silvered face to the jungle that rose like a whispering purple wall in the moonlight. Far beyond the jungle-top the mountains lifted in the silhouette of a caravan, mysterious and silent, trooping down the sky. The night breeze whispered of distances. That way was Nepal. Beyond was Tibet. Below swept India. For a moment the couple stood in silence. Vines made a nocturnal rustling, then distant, somewhere, echoed a soft, throaty cough, once repeated. From the animal house behind the bungalow came a faint reply of whines, a chorus of furry snufflings, uneasy little barks.

"Brutes are restless," John Stanley jerked a thumb. "Sounded like a tiger out there. Say, Molly, I'm sorry as anything I have to pull out tonight. If it was interesting I'd take you and your father in no time. But the traps are already laid, nothing to see at night and the dickens of a trail. When I get back we'll go after them on elephants; that's the sport. Tonight it's just business. Harness 'em out of the pit and lug 'em back in the cage." He grimaced, patting the automatic on his hip, the hunting knife on his belt.

"But, John." She looked up at him, then, brushing a wavy strand of chestnut hair from her temples. "John, it does seem cruel."

"Cruel?" He looked down at her, mouth open a little.

"To make a living by hunting those wild things. To capture and shut them up in cages."

"Those—those brutes?"

"I hadn't thought of it before, John. But those spotted cats down at the dock in your cages. There wasn't any water. And the elephant chained in your stall. He looked at me so—almost pleading. And that black leopard cooped up like a common hen—" She turned from him, absorbed in the crystalline distance of moon-painted peaks. "When I see their home, like this, away off here in the hills—those poor creatures—"

"Poor creatures?" John Stanley had to be amused. "Savage man-eaters, you mean. Ruthless jungle killers who'd tear you limb from limb."

"And wouldn't you be savage, John? Invited to a banquet only to find yourself in a trap. Torn away from your home and—and loved ones; sent like a slave to a foreign country to be stared at by strange foreign beings?"

John Stanley was frankly amazed. "Now, Molly, what in the *world!* You talk of those murderous brutes as if they were humans."

"But don't they have the same feelings, John? Hunger and thirst and pain—like we do. And hate and love and pride, too. We ought to know because we—after all, men are animals."

"Men are animals!"

Her warm blue eyes, seeking his, were more articulate. Her lips trembled. "Men wouldn't like it, either. How would *you* like to be in a cage?"

IT was too much for John Stanley's imagination. He was corseted in too much of that whale-boned New England Yankee work-and-win soundmindedness. Give an animal the attri-

butes of a human? Put the two-legged Lords of the Universe on the same footing as sabre-clawed jungle quadrupeds? Cause for mirth. Cause for: "Molly, what *are* you talking about? Why, it's a blessing to rid humanity of these pests!"

"To lock them in cages and—tame them?"

"So must every irresponsible, wanton impulse in life be tamed, overcome. How can you worry about the capturing of some thieving, red-eyed, savage beast?"

She regarded him gravely, her face misty in the translucent night-shine. "These creatures, the tigers, the magnificent pair you want to imprison. John, it doesn't seem right, somehow. I wish you wouldn't."

"Wish I wouldn't?" he almost cried. "Why, it's my business!"

"That's just it," her low voice went on. "I don't like it because I know what it's like to be in a cage. Father's held me in one—all my life. Girls' schools. City apartments. Nasty little parties with people I didn't like. Everything schooled and trained. Traditions and prohibitions. A certain time when you must do this and a certain way you must do that. I thought out here with you, I—we'd be free to—"

"But we're going to be free as the wind," he told her in amused impatience. "Five years filling Luckenback's orders and I'll have an honest to goodness fortune. There's a mint in this business, Molly. Then we can live anywhere we like. Paris. London. New York. Anything you—"

"And we win this freedom by putting others in cages. By killing and stuffing and taming and — making slaves of something else that's free. Those little homesick monkeys, and that leopard—pacing, pacing the way he was. No, I couldn't feel right about it, John. I wish you'd give up this Luckenback business. Couldn't you be a planter or—a grower? Create things instead of—of destroy? If you could put yourself in an animal's place—"

DRIVING off into the jungle's moonlight and black, John Stanley choked down his annoyance. What in the dickens had come over Molly back there in the garden? Where'd she get all this nonsense from, staring off at those confounded hills? Rather have him a dinky tea planter than a successful big game hunter; that, in effect, was what she had said. Give up his animal business, the contract of a lifetime, for some maidenish sentimental whim. Hardly the reception a chap had the right to expect for his manful achievements in a profession too venturesome for most.

And her admonition to put himself in an animal's place. Those brutes! As if there was anything in common between Man (well, to make it personal, a college-schooled sportsman and gentleman of tradition and breeding, like himself) and a snarling carnivore. It had come to that. "But don't you think a monkey could suffer the same heartache as a philosopher?" she had insisted to the last. "And the other way around, a scientist can be just as savage as—as a beast. We think we're so far above the other creatures—"

"Molly, you're tired," he had assured her in masculine tolerance. "Tomorrow you'll see things differently."

Hold on, it wasn't worth thinking about. She was all in from that river trip, of course. Ride across India excited her imagination. Girls were like that. Molly was, of course, a darling child. Feeling sympathy for a batch of

wild beasts. Ho! After they were married he'd have to humor her out of such silly ideas. Perhaps with a bit of firmness.

Tooling the car down that ancient jungle roadway, John Stanley chuckled and, because his was the nature of mind that pushes trivial harassments easily aside, turned his thoughts to the business at hand.

"The traps set out as I ordered?"

"As you ordered, Sahib." Deodar, jouncing on the seat beside him, touched his turban and made the lucky sign. "The pits are waiting, the goats staked out. It is a fine night, Sahib; the beasts are certain to take the bait."

John Stanley's pulses quickened at the mental picture. By the reported spoor, these tigers should be gigantic. He had sent his best men to lay the snares; now he found it difficult to stem impatience. Hauling a cage-trailer on so difficult a road slowed the car to twelve miles an hour, and the engine protested with heat. The naked Bhils, jogging along barefoot, ghosts in the dark and dust, began to lag. John Stanley read midnight on his watch, and there were yet twenty miles of journey.

"Tell the bearers to keep up," he snapped at the headman. "We want to get back by morning."

The road, however, took its own good time. It was not for hurried travel. A dim road, abandoned by forgotten colonists to dissolution; treacherously gone in places; its narrow corridor close-pressed by the vegetal walls on either side. Here it was tented over by skeletal arches of liana and leaf. There the sidewall had collapsed across the path, spilling a mound of brush and the wreckage of vines. The thickets looked tigerish in the moonlight. The chugging, clatter and squeal of car and trailer made a racket in the stillness that clung among the trees.

THEY came to a bend where the corduroy planking gave way to the wheel-ruts of a bullock cart, a wagon track grassy under the headlamps. John Stanley saw his men were hanging back, heads together in whispered confab. He fumed at Deodar. "What now?"

Eyeballs rolled in the old man's parchment face. "Sahib, the tigers will be waiting, surely. And my brothers are reluctant to go thus far in the forest at night."

John Stanley growled in new irritation. "Why not?"

"It is the valley, Sahib. Natives, who know it better than we, have told us it is charmed. It is the home of the were-walker, Sahib. Man's soul, in death, becomes that of the beast. Tigers have been known to become as men. Must we proceed at night, Sahib?"

The hollow tone from the old Bhil's beard started to creep up John Stanley's spine. The jungle, black and silver, steeped in the moon's silence, could be uncanny. Shadows, exploring through the trees, sent back a leafy rustling; and there was a smell of roots and mold.

John Stanley would not permit himself nerves. "Are you low-caste pariah sweepers that you fear the forest dark? We must proceed at night because there are guests in my house and I wish the job over with. No more of this nonsense. *Jaldi karo!*"

Unfortunately he could not give orders which the old headman could translate to the car. Five miles farther in, the road made trouble. John Stanley struggled at wheel and gears, the car skidding and pounding over

gravelly ruts. Leagues from Nowhere the front wheels swivelled over a rock, and the car stalled with a fractured steering rod. John Stanley's restraint came from years of self-imposed training, and was admirable. Unpacking a tool kit, he calculated a repair job that might take hours, and called to one of his bearers.

"Gungoo, take the trail back to my house. You should get there easily by morning. Tell the Memsahib and her father I am delayed, may be late in returning from this trip. They are to make themselves at home and under no circumstances are they to worry."

REPAIRS were finished sooner than he had anticipated. But the moon was down, and he drove with wearisome caution, a drag of two more hours until car and trailer chugged from timber into an open glade hedged by night-blue cliffs. John Stanley braked down a steep descent of grass and rock. At the foot of the hill the road petered out, halted by a sere, bone-white peepul tree that blocked further progress like an uplifted hand. As if to say man could go no farther. Beyond belonged to the wilderness.

Old Deodar pointed. "The pits are there, Sahib."

And occupied, by the sound. John Stanley laughed an excited laugh when he heard the roars that came funneling through the starlit gloom. Parking the car under the ancient tree, he leapt from the seat, distributed rifles, started the processional through belt-high grass. The Bhils set up a cry. "Tiger! Tiger!"

There were the jungle cats sprawled in the deep-dug well, shattering, the night's hush with a din even Stanley found appalling. But he shouted when his carbide flares revealed the captives. Male and female, they were far away the biggest tigers he had ever seen. Yellow-eyed, orange and black monsters of muscled rage, each a good twelve feet long. Luckenback would pay a price for this couple. What a rumpus they were making in that pit-bottom! What a fight John Stanley had on his hands, lassoing them out of the mine and across the field to the cage.

A battle of volcanic fury, roar and danger; the sweating Bhils hauling on nets and tackle, leaping to dodge lightning claws and snapping fangs. The darkness shaking with the squalls of men and animals. Dust boiling underfoot. But the tigers were no match for John Stanley's crafty harness and runways; and the stars were only beginning to pale when the cage door slammed on the raging pair.

Ordinarily the Bhils would have started a celebration, a whooping ring-around-the-rosy about the cage, but tonight they hovered in a wilted group near the tree, eyes averted. John Stanley was too occupied with his catch to notice. He mopped his face, drew an exultant breath.

"Man, what beauties! Wait till Luckenback sees 'em! Wail till Molly sees! Scare some of the nonsense out of her." He grinned, nursing a fingernail bashed in the struggle at the pit. "Some specimens! Nothing human about *them!*"

Time to be off. John Stanley lined up the natives and passed water canteens; collected and stowed the rifles in the front seat of the car; cooled his own throat with a long drink; cranked the engine. Deodar swung into the place beside him, and he let in the clutch for the pull uphill. At the sound of the exhaust, the tigers caged behind

the automobile began a tremendous scrap. Lathering in fury. Leaping insanely at the bars. Bounding around and over each other; hurling their contorted bodies at the steel door. Dynamite bursting in a box. The trailer rocked on its wheels. The car panted, dragging the convulsed vehicle up the ruts.

Looking over his shoulder at the storming beasts, John Stanley laughed. Something like a Roman circus, this catch. When Molly saw this parade come across the compound—

THE laugh curdled in John Stanley's mouth. Turned to a yell. The car was nosing over the forehead of the rise. *Crrrang!* Metal tearing astern. Jolt-worn couplers parting with a gun-like report. Runaway! Trailer and circus cage rioting downhill.

He jammed the brakes, and was out in the road on the bound. Automatic in fist, he sped after the escaping cart.

"Stop it! Stop that cage!"

He never looked around to notice the exodus of his men. At the first clang of trouble from the car, the Bhils had scattered forty ways through the dark, Deodar taking the forty-first. They had never trusted that mechanical magic carpet for a minute, and it needed no Asian intuition to tell them something had wried with the magic. John Stanley, who knew it was nothing but a broken coupling, chased the cage downhill; sprinting in the dust-swirl to catch the wagon tongue where the hooks had snapped.

He never caught that wagon tongue. The whipping bar caught him instead. The cage reeled, bounced along the roadside, and the flailing draw-bar slapped John Stanley across the thigh to knock him flying. Pale stars pinwheeled about his head as he spun and went flat. Struck from his hand, the automatic capered across gravel and vanished in dark grass. Tumbling breathless out of his somersault, his mouth jammed with dismay and dirt, John Stanley heard the crash. He never quite knew how it was. But the trailer smashed into the tree at road's end; he was empty-handed on his feet, yelling; there was a stunning concussion and just enough light to see the cage door, sprung wide by the shock, wham open.

Streaks of orange and black lightning exploded through the door; rocketed past John Stanley's head. The wind from those soaring animals almost threw him to the ground. And tigers are the world's fastest acrobats. The beasts revolved in mid-flight, the tigress going one way, the tiger going another, landing resilient as rubber balls not two yards from John Stanley and facing him. There was only one way for John Stanley to go, and he went. A spine-cracking leap, straight into the cage. *Smash,* the door slammed; *clack,* the lock held.

"Deodar! Mukerjee Lal! Putarb! Haaaaay! Here!"

No answer. The Bhils might have seen him in the cage, but the Bhils knew the country was bewitched. Tigers turned into men, and men turned into tigers. If any swung back to look, they gave no sign.

Rose streamers were igniting a puff of cloud behind the cliffs, and John Stanley saw the wilderness empty of men. He saw his car, his rifles, his lunch and water canteen at the top of a misty hill. He saw a red coin burn through the fired cloud, the sky take flame with a rush. He saw, in the grass beyond a pattern of bars, two tigers crawling belly to earth, ears pasted to

their heads, fangs bared, eyes like yellow candles in the sun. Morning left him no doubt. They were the biggest tigers he had ever seen.

BY evening John Stanley could still laugh at the joke on himself, but the laugh hurt his throat a little. He shouldn't have shouted so insistently throughout the afternoon; it had started to swell his tongue. Happily the day's heat was waning; there were clouds rolled against the sunset, and a bit of rain wouldn't go so badly, because—well, he'd have all the water he wanted as soon as those tigers vamoosed and he reached the car. No denying the violence of that sunlight, though. A real blast. Those cliffs, blue at night, had turned to copper. Certainly was dry, all right.

John Stanley rubbed at soreness on his thigh and looked around. They were still there, confound them. When he lifted a hand the huge male sighed to its feet and made a lazy, circling turn around the tree. The female arched up in the grass and blinked. Then she ran a pink tongue, large as a ham, over her whiskers; swung to a stand and quietly sauntered off. He could see her path parting the tall stems. She faded without sound, although John Stanley knew she could not be a jump away. Those silent feet were uncanny, made a fellow feel as if someone were standing behind him.

"Go on!" John Stanley shouted at the male. "Follow her! Get along! Scat!" His voice was growing hoarse, he realized. Unconsciously he passed a hand across his forehead; then noticed the gesture. Come, come, man. No use fussing. Naturally the brute would sit there for a while, reasonably a few hours. Then the wretched beast would get hungry and sneak off. Then it was only a matter of picking the door-lock with the hunting knife and making a dash for the car up the hill. If only the animal would quit staring like that and turn its back.

The tiger refused to turn its back on John Stanley. Sitting by the tree, staring, he might have been a painting in the dry twilight. His eyes were motionless as those of a photograph. No hair stirred on the Queen Elizabeth ruff under his white throat, on the glossy striping of his coat, on his cream-colored vest and shaggy belly. Only the tip of his tail moved, curling and wagging in a secret movement independent of the body; a release for the high-strung nervous system in that taut frame. Or he might twitch one of the white horsehair whiskers to chase a teasing insect from his black leather nose.

The wagging tail-tip had fascinated John Stanley at first; and they used to say if you stared a beast in the eye it might scare him off. The biggest tiger John Stanley had ever seen didn't scare. He sat. John sat. After a while the game could become definitely tiresome. Mustn't let the thing prey on his nerves the slightest. Now if he edged up on the door and started his knife fiddling with the lock the tiger might stay where he was.

JOHN STANLEY crept toward the door. Slowly and more slowly. Ha, the cat wasn't going to move. With stealth, John Stanley drew the hunting knife from its sheath. The tiger yawned a mouth of scissors, and leaned toward the cage with a menacing *fffffgggggh!*

John Stanley shrank back from the door, sat down, flushing angrily. Too early yet. All right, any day he couldn't outwait this devil. No use losing his

temper. If his throat didn't feel like leather for lack of water—thirsty—wait, better keep his mind off that.

To keep his mind off that, he fumbled in his pocket for something to read, and found Luckenback's telegram. Hell, it was too dark to read, anyway. He'd get these tigers, yet; get the two of them. If those cowardly Bhils hadn't deserted like a batch of rats. If—but damn it! He'd sent a message to the bungalow and told them not to worry. Molly and her father, probably sitting down to dinner right now. Molly all in white—

Woof! John Stanley whirled at the sound. The tigress was back, nosing around the cage wheels. The tiger had blinked and vanished. The landscape was blotting out in the thickest dark John Stanley had ever known. A moment's dusk, then the valley was invisible, swept away in a vanishment so complete that a man would wonder if he'd gone blind, had he not been able to see the glowing, disembodied, sulphur-yellow eyeballs watching from night outside a certain cage. John Stanley stared at the eyes to show himself he was calm, and the yellow bulbs circled the cage without sound.

"Beat it!" The cry soured foolishly in his throat. Another set of eyes appeared. All right, let them sit there. Might as well take it easy and they'd forget him. He found the center of the cage and lay on his side, gingerly, because the boards were not soft. Instantly a humming particle shot out of nowhere and drove a needle into his cheek. John Stanley clapped a mosquito. Now the blackness was alive with a bedeviling orchestration, a tuning-up of tiny wings. Hmmmmmmm! Zzzmmmmmm! The cage was like a hive. He batted and thwacked furiously while welts grew to bumps of fire on throat, wrists and forehead. He wrapped his head in his coat, fought against scratching and was, all at once, smotheringly thirsty. The floor ate into his hip. He dozed. He jumped awake. Every time he woke he saw the yellow eyeballs staring.

HE wanted the sleep he did not get that night, for the day broke hot as a morning on Mercury. Heat on his eyelids roused him from a doze to see daylight like white flame and the big tiger sharpening its claws, cat-fashion, on the tree. When the cat saw him stirring, it padded towards the cage, making sounds in its throat. John Stanley sat up and rubbed weary hands over his bitten face. His cheeks were raw sandpaper. Dry dust smoked off his fingers. He yelled at the tiger, "Get away!"

He had to laugh at that; a strangely uncontrollable chortle that died for lack of merriment, tearing at the lining of his windpipe. The tiger was laughing, too; sitting at the cage door with a massive grin. The beast even covered its mouth with a paw to hide amusement; then said, "Huff!" and walked behind the tree. In a queer blaze of anger, John Stanley jerked out his knife, jumped forward and dug the blade at the spring lock. The scraping of metal brought the tiger around the tree at a skipping gallop; and to John Stanley's fright the door lurched wide. With a croak of terror he yanked the casement shut. That door wasn't locked. Merely jammed.

Made the roots of his scalp ache to know the door was unlocked, and at the same time it was a taunt. It was not the cage, but the tiger which held him incarcerated as helpless as if there were a thousand locks.

The tiger slid at the door, touched

a bar with an inquisitive paw, then sprang backwards, snarling. John Stanley had recoiled to the front of the cage; the clicking he heard was the sound of his own teeth.

"Stop it!" he whispered at himself. "They can't get in. You'll be all right. The Bhils will come back, or—"

Rustling in the grass, a breath among the stems, and the tigress stepping into the road. John Stanley rubbed his prickling eyes. A flurry of bright color in the female's wake, and there were four striped, half-grown, clumsy cubs. Tiger, tigress and cubs ranged themselves in the shade of the peepul tree and proceeded to regard John Stanley. With an oath that got away before he could stop it, he saw by his watch it was only seven o'clock. He bent stiff legs, and sat down. He would have given a thousand pounds for his automatic, right then.

A trio of buzzards cruised up from the cliffs and loafed in the sky overhead, like airplanes observing. The glade was a well of heat. The only shade in the cage was made of narrow bars, shadow-striping John Stanley's legs. Far to the north the mountains looked blue and cool.

BY that second afternoon John Stanley was really tired of the thing. Tired of sitting, standing, carving initials in the cage-floor. Tired of scratching at lumps on his neck and the smarting sunlight and the unchanging landscape. Tired of the iron framework before his eyes and the dirt in his linen and all the things with which he tried to divert himself. That was when he took to darting at the bars, peering up the scorched hill to where his car sat burning in the sun; peering and squinting in a hope for help. His eyes were like little pins, seeking sight of rescuers who did not come. Desolation pressed silence on his eardrums until he thought they must burst of listening.

But when he did listen he heard nothing but the sound of soft pads in dust; the snuffles and coughing of cubs playing tag about the tree; the reproving snaps of the tigress. Wait, there was somebody! No, merely the shadow of a bird crossing the slope. Again! Merely baked earth cracking in the heat.

The tiger lay on its side in the grass, paws outsprawled, ears alert, and considered John Stanley with heaving flanks. John Stanley tightened his belt and tried to spit. All at once he was cursing. "G'wan! Go away! By God, you dirty—" His voice was a caw in his own hearing; he stoppered the outburst of obscenity with a hand clapped over his mouth. The two great cats contemplated this gesture with grins that might have been scornful amusement but more probably were hunger.

John Stanley rubbed his wrists, and took a turn around the cage. The tigress, annoyed by the mauling of her litter, swatted the cubs and led them with dignity into the grass. Then she returned to sprawl beside her mate and pant up at the cage, her tongue lolling. How long had those two striped fiends been staring at him? Hours or years?

John Stanley's legs were suddenly trembling. When had he eaten last? If he could only wash that scum out of his mouth. He took another turn, watching the hilltop, the mountains, the sky, the hilltop again. He walked in a circle. The sun, the blazing green of this landscape was giving him a headache. God, why didn't somebody come? Molly. The Bhils. Take it easy, man. They'll come. Now there were fifteen steps around the cage,

three steps across. One, two, three, four—

"Oh, my God!" John Stanley panted against the bars, an arm pressed over his blistered eyes. Two tears rolled down his cheeks. "Stanley! Stop it, man! Oh, my God! You're—you're *pacing*—"

That was the second afternoon.

THERE were moments that night when he ran up and down bawling hoarse imprecations. Other times he crouched in darkness against the iron palings, sick, drained of energy, shuddering from the emptiness under his belt, too weak to strike at insects clouding at his face. A time, during that rainshower in the dark of midnight, when he scrabbled on the floorboards, begging the drops to pelt his cheeks, mouth yawned wide in his uplifted face, hands frantically wringing the dribble from his cuffs into the upturned bowl of his sun helmet. The silence after that black rain was the hush at world's end. The night was a year.

But the third day was eternity. Eternity born on a pillar of fire. Sometimes John Stanley curled his fists around the cage bars, cursing them, shaking them until the whole wagon seemed to rattle. Sometimes he lay on the floor, turning, heaving with dry, uncontrollable sobs. Then it was the landscape he hated, the sameness, the bated quiet, the burning green, the white shine slanting off the dead tree. Again, the daggering dayshine blinding his eyes, he was filled with a craft that made him giddy, agile as a shadow, light-headed as a balloon, strong as a band of steel.

Hunting knife in fist, he would crawl to the door, fling it open, make as if to jump. But then, as always, as a thousand times before, omnipresent as fate, there were the tigers. Giant, twelve-foot cats waiting with grins and fixed yellow eyeballs. Then he was weak and sick and the knife was a trifle in his hand. Those fangs would devour him in half a crunch. They knew it. They sat. They watched his slightest move, studying his face, waiting him out in cocksure, famished confidence. They had him—

"You have not! Dirty, wretched brutes! Think you can get me! *Me!* Ha! Ha, ha, haaaa—

He spraddled on his hollow belly and grinned at the cats, cursed them in a whisper as fierce as their snarled replies. "Waiting, are you? Hungry, are you?" But then his eye could see the stalled car not fifty yards uphill, the car with its lunch basket, guns, promise of freedom, water canteen. There it was, just beyond the bars. Damn the bars!

There were intervals, in that intolerable third day, when John Stanley ran at the bars, brandishing the knife, trying to stab one of the beasts as it ambled past. Intervals of whirlwind rage when he tottered about the cage calling soundless cries, threatening in furious pantomime the sentinels stationed at the door. Finally there were moments of glass-like lucidity when he sprawled flat on his face, breathing the hot dust, and knowing he could stand it no longer.

Those tigers weren't going away, they were part of the landscape like the dead tree and the green-blazing grass. They were hungry and, like the silence, they knew how to wait. Molly wasn't coming. Nobody was coming. And he was thirsty, shriveling, going to rust. Going to rust in a trap of shining bars that gave him no room to turn, to think, to breathe.

Better make the dash before sun and thirst robbed the final will from his mind. Better make the break before those shadow-bands pinned his legs for good, before the framework fastened him in forever. They wanted him, those rotten, murderous brutes. They had him. But they were going to fight for the morsel. Time to go.

St. George was going after the dragon, now! John Stanley must have been pretty light-headed by that time, but the weakness was his last bid for strength. He strapped his belt until it was a vise that hoisted him to a stand. He disciplined his legs. The hunting knife did not tremble in his first, nor did he waver at the door. He thought of water—

The barred gate swung and crashed. John Stanley's leap took him blowing across the ground. His visual impressions were not clear, but he knew the way. Sunlight sprang off the blade in his hand, and shadows orange and black reared like flame in the green before him. In that hazed second he saw the tigress tower on her haunches against the sun; saw the tiger fly sideways like a convulsion of colored light. Screaming, he struck with the bright knife.

"Fight then! Take it! Yaah!"

The knife cutting sunshine—a roaring snort in his ears. A great paw lashing past his nose, dragging ribbons of fire down his arm. John Stanley whirled under the sky, saw the cliffs go wheeling and the hill come into view, and sat up, *bump!* against the dead tree. He stopped his screaming with fingers in his mouth. The landscape was silent and empty. Far from the road two soundless furrows were racing like wind through the grass. The grass flowed together and the furrows were gone.

John Stanley went plunging up to his car. That was where Molly and Old Man Breadon and the house boy found him, unconscious.

I MET this man Stanley in Naini Tal. It was the year after the war, and business was bad in tea. Stanley, who owned a big plantation, had been hit particularly hard, I knew. But when I asked him how he was getting along, he told me he was rich.

"Always rich," he told me, "long as you're free."

Then he pointed to the scar on his left arm, and gave me this story. At the end, he laughed. "If you want your ego set straight just watch a jungle cat turn up his nose at your valuable self. Those tigers didn't want me for dinner. No! They watched me because they were *curious!* Like visitors in any zoo. And were just as scared when I broke loose. The way they turned tail and made for home—"

He chuckled at the memory, and I saw he was watching the mountain pictured beyond the window's frame. "They have feelings, too."

It was some time later I asked him how his wife was.

"Hospital just at present," he told me quietly. "That's why we're up here. Molly was pretty badly mauled when she got in the way of a tiger in the hills last week." Then, seeing the shock on my face, he nodded expressionlessly and turned his glance into his glass. "But she's getting better, now," he said dryly. "And tigers don't know any better."

THE END

"Here's how we make 'em squawk!"

Death Game

Novelette—Complete

By TOM CURRY

Author of "The Sacred Sword," "Escape or Die," etc.

Only the wily, the resourceful, the strong can escape from the French Colonial prisons—and they have to have luck with them

CHAPTER I.

"TELL OR ELSE—"

THE death game was forced on Barry. He did not know what horrors lay ahead, though, in Guiana, death from guns, from jungle and sea, from disease, is an intimate of the condemned.

Barry stared into Commandant Gros's sharply angled face. "Go to hell," he growled. "I'm no stool pigeon."

His broad mouth twisted, long

form, copper from tropical sun, tensed.

"You'll do as I say," roared Gros, "and watch the wooden-legged Pierre and his rat pal, Marcel. It's not a polite request, American, but an order—from me, Commandant Gros of the French army. I hold absolute power over you and may shoot you dead; nothing would be said if I killed a rebellious dog."

He patted the pistol at his belt.

The commandant's black eyes went to the big Irishman who watched. Gros strutted up and down before Barry and his small friend, Hanson, the Canadian—strutted with shoulders thrown back, eyes blazing with pride as he showed off his authority. He wore whites, tunic, army pants, belt filled with cartridges; on the table was a solar hat.

Hanson, a recent transfer from the Cayenne prison, a hundred miles east of St. Laurent, was wiry, with keen blue eyes, long hands. Common language had drawn Barry to him at once.

Gros bellowed ferociously, sticking his face within a few inches of Barry's as he banged on the table. "I want what I want, that's all, *c'est tout!* No more argument, or I'll send you to Joseph, solitary. And M'sieu' Murphee and I agree to give you only two days to get results; then I'll tie you in a black cell and beat you every hour."

He turned to the Irishman. "*Voyez,* see, Murphee, how we must treat these *bagnards.* They're dangerous beasts, ready to slit your throat at the least opportunity. They must be terrorized continually or our lives wouldn't be worth a sou."

Murphy nodded his sleek head, removed the cigar from his thick lips. "Sure, *Musheer,* I get it. We have the same problem in N' York. Here's how we make 'em squawk and keep the fear of the law in their lousy hearts." He whipped a length of rubber hose from his pocket, and, seizing Hanson before the little man could duck, whirled him around and slapped the hose across his spine.

The Canadian cursed, hands coming up to grapple with Murphy. The Irishman slung him around so violently that Hanson's feet left the floor, but still he hung on for moments till Murphy put his hands on his throat and shoved Hanson back against the wall. The detective broke from Hanson's grip, knocked him down, and kicked him twice before resuming his cigar.

Gros had his gun out. "If one of them touched me," he promised, "I'd shoot him dead. To strike an officer is a mortal offense here."

MURPHY dusted off his hands, hose stuck under his arm.

"Lemme do some real work on 'em, and I bet they agree to anything."

Gros frowned at the convicts. "I had you two brought here to my quarters because you speak the English. Those rascals you're to spy on were once in New York; committed a crime there. Watch them day and night; report to me any move they make."

"No," Barry shouted.

He was starved, worn out from forced labor in the enervating climate. He hated Gros, a man who relieved his own feelings by torturing, killing prisoners.

Gros demanded fawning obedience. Barry's defiance irritated him, and he hit Barry in the mouth with his open hand. The goaded man cursed him, sprang in, fist lashing out. But Gros was quick, leaping back, so Barry's

knuckles simply grazed the sleeve of his tunic.

Gros turned beef-red under his tan, cocked his pistol.

Hanson jumped between them, shoving Barry back.

"We'll do as you say, M'sieu' le Commandant," cried the Canadian.

He turned toward Barry, one eye closing in a swift wink.

Gros was bursting with rage.

"He put his dirty paw on me," he gasped. "I won't forget, Barry."

"He's sorry," said Hanson. "Sure. We'll watch Marcel and Pierre, sir."

"*Bien,*" muttered Gros, controlling himself by an effort. "Do so, and report to me."

"It's common talk in the prison there's an American detective down here," Hanson said. "But no one could say what he was after. If we knew it'd make it easier for us to spy on Pierre and his pal."

"Better tell 'em," grunted Murphy. "It's like this, boys: Last year a diamond necklace was stolen from a very rich and important man in New York. The trinket's worth around half a million dollars. The thieves got away without a rumble and there was hell to pay.

"I run a detective agency in New York and was hired to get it back. 'Twasn't till a month ago word came that the necklace had been shown in Paris, France—but not sold—by a pair of rats, Pierre and Marcel, weeks after the job. It took months for the tip to leak back to me. They'd slit the throat of a son of the family, and a servant had been killed too. So if the necklace is pinned on 'em, it means they croak. Now go get 'em."

Gros stared first at Barry, then at Hanson. "If either of you gives them any warning, it's the end for you. Barry, your bunk's next Marcel's, Pierre's next his; Hanson is on your other side. They've been very friendly with you."

"And don't forget we want that necklace," growled Murphy, "and we're givin' you two days. If you can't deliver the goods by that time, we'll put the screws on the four of you."

Barry kept his mouth shut, let Hanson do the promising. He regretted having struck at Gros, for the commandant was not the sort who forgives.

After further warnings to say nothing that might alarm the thieves upon whom they must spy, Barry and Hanson were shoved out into the baking courtyard. They started across to the barred gate of the long, low barracks. The whole place broiled in terrific heat. Beautiful as the surrounding South American jungle might look in pictures, actually it choked, crushed the whites forced to hard labor in Guiana. There was little hope for friendless, penniless men exiled on the equator.

But every man cherished till he died the idea of escape from that man-killing trap, where half of those sent from France and her colonies each year died of fever or were shot down as they ran in the jungle for freedom, or were driven mad in solitary pits.

OUT of earshot of the commandant's quarters, Barry swung on his comrade.

"Damned if I'll cross Pierre and Marcel, not if Gros kills me."

"No need to," Hanson replied. "We had to promise anything, why not? If we hadn't, Gros would have killed us or thrown us in a rotten cell. Then how could we escape?"

"We must show results or it'll amount to the same thing. We can't stroll off through a thousand miles of bush, and we can't swim the six hundred miles to Venezuela. We have no money."

"Who says so?" Hanson answered, and chuckled.

Surprised at the sound of mirth in that dreary place, Barry glanced at him quickly. They were in the shadows of the whitewashed barracks, unobserved.

Hanson touched Barry's sleeve.

"Look," he whispered. "I told you I was a pickpocket. That dumb American dick had a roll as big as an elephant's foot in his pocket. I got it while he was slinging me around."

Squeezed between Hanson's fingers was money, plenty of it, cash that would mean a chance to get away from Guiana.

"You mean to take me along?" Barry gasped.

"Sure. We've been pals. And no one wants to hit the sea alone. We'll buy a sailing canoe and head for Venezuela, get out of this hell. The Frogs sent you here for beating up an officer in their Foreign Legion; they caught me picking pockets in Paris, where I'd run after damn near killing a man in America. Now we'll fool them."

Around the corner, a keeper unlocked the gate into their dormitory. It was long, with low roof held up by rickety rafters, barred windows. Along the sides stretched rows of canvas and board strips, forty to a wall. Half the beds were occupied now by malarial, sunken-eyed miserables; stronger men, apaches from Paris, tattooed devils from the African battalions, Arabs, black men, and mixed bloods from the far-flung possessions of imperial France, sat around smoking, playing cards, bickering. They glanced up as Hanson and Barry went to the end where their strips were.

A stocky, bright-eyed apache leaped up to greet Barry.

"What happened?" he asked quickly, of the American.

"We're back, Marcel," Barry replied evasively.

On the next cot to Marcel's lay a huge hulk of a man, in shapeless cotton trousers across which was stamped his prison number. The great muscles of his arms bulged as he rested with hands folded on hairy chest that showed under the coarse blouse. His hair was black as coal, clipped short, his face broad, ugly, with tiny eyes.

Criminal was stamped upon him. One foot stuck inches from the cuff of the trousers.

But where the second should have been was the very thick stub of a wooden leg running to the knee stump, where it strapped on.

Pierre, the peg-leg, was taciturn, let his pal Marcel do the talking.

"Who wanted you, Barry?" Marcel asked.

Knowing the hopes and fears of the condemned, Barry couldn't act the spy, bring himself to cheat them even to save his own skin. Pierre and Marcel had been decent to him, shared food, played cards, talked his native tongue to him.

He glanced around. "Lie down and keep quiet," he whispered, "and listen."

HANSON went and threw himself on his strip; he knew Barry meant to warn the two thieves. Now Barry knew why Pierre and Marcel had been so careful about their friends in Guiana, close-mouthed re-

garding their past, for a murder charge awaited them in New York, and there was the diamond necklace, worth a fortune. He spoke from the corner of his mouth as he lay facing the apache.

"Gros sent for us, ordered us to spy on you. That American detective is after you. He says you pulled a murder job in New York, got away with a diamond necklace. I don't know if that's true, but Pierre and you watch your step. Gros means to put the screws on you in two days. And if he finds I warned you, he'll kill me, and Hanson."

Marcel began cursing violently in French. Red stained his face, nails dug into his palms.

Pierre heaved up his mighty body, stood by his friend, wooden stump clicking on the floor.

"What's wrong?" he rumbled.

"*Tais-toi*—not so loud," snapped Marcel. "The Yanqui says it's as we feared: that American flic is down here on our trail. We must leave at once."

"How?" demanded Pierre.

"We have only a few francs," Marcel explained to Barry, "and Pierre can't run through the jungle; he'd bog down. We need a boat. Maybe we can steal one, though they're well guarded here. Not many leave boats around, with thousands eager to swipe them."

Barry looked across at Hanson. Marcel placed a shaking hand on Barry. "You don't think we have the necklace now? No, it's in France. Too big to sell; once we went to a fence, who offered us a measly ten thousand. Said he'd have to cut it up, the dirty thief."

"That must be how the news leaked through to America," Barry said. "The fence was sore because you wouldn't let him have it, and squealed later. So they traced you here."

CHAPTER II.

PLANS FOR ESCAPE.

THE siesta hour over, the gate was opened. Guards stood ready to take the convicts back to work at various tasks, some on road gangs, others to the sawmill, or shops. Marcel was nervous as a cat, lips twisted, eyes rolling. Pierre looked furiously sullen.

Hanson went with Barry and they lined up, were counted off, marched through the penitentiary gate along littered streets of the river town. Commandant Gros, cigarette clipped between his thin lips, umbrella up to ward off the killing sun, strode along close to Barry. They were walked up the river to the outskirts of St. Laurent and set to work clearing a nasty snarl of logs, heavy hardwoods rafted down the Maroni from the upper jungle. Hundreds had piled in a jam against the forward ones, stuck on a sand bank.

Hanson waded into the water beside Barry.

"See those bush Negroes," Hanson whispered. "I'm going to work up to them, bribe one to bring us a canoe tomorrow night. You keep Gros busy."

Barry nodded, edged toward the commandant, who had thrown himself down in the shade of a palm, back to the trunk. Hanson pretended to be trying to free the upstream logs, but gradually got farther away, near the group of indolent black men with their boats.

Barry strolled up the bank to Gros, saluted.

"*M'sieu'*," he said, "we're working hard to help you."

Gros steadily regarded him. "See that you succeed," he said at last. "I don't forget you hit me today." Lowering his voice, he added eagerly, "If you bring me that necklace, Barry, I'll reward you well. Half a million dollars! It's a great fortune, *hein?* This Guiana is hell for me as well as you; I loathe it. But don't stand talking, you fool; it might scare Pierre and Marcel."

Gros had his back to the Negroes. Glancing that way, Barry saw Hanson bent over as though working at a log, in reality addressing one of those slouched on the bank. He walked downstream slowly, aware Gros followed him with his eyes.

Soon Hanson returned.

"Okay," he whispered. "See the big dugout canoe with the mast—that's it. Paid fifty francs, and he'll bring it to us below town tomorrow night. We'll slip away in the afternoon and meet at the mulatto's near the pier."

"How about food and water?" Barry asked. "It may take us a month to reach Venezuela."

"We'll get all that at the mulatto's store," Hanson replied.

Barry was greatly excited. He was deeply grateful to his friend for offering a chance at freedom. Escape was close now, and the prospect of leaving Guiana sent a flood of joy and new power through him.

"I'll never forget this, Hanson," he murmured. "If I can do anything for you later on, I'll go the limit."

Hanson was embarrassed by his gratitude. "That's all right," he said gruffly. "Don't mention it, Barry. I need you to help with the boat. Maybe we better take a couple more in case we have to paddle; that canoe's big."

"Why not Pierre and Marcel, then? If we leave them here, Gros will kill them."

Hanson shrugged. "But Pierre has a wooden leg."

"In a boat, that won't hold him back. His arms are stronger than most men's, so he can paddle and steer."

"Well—tell them tonight, and have 'em meet us at the mulatto's after dark tomorrow. It means we need twice as much food."

THAT evening in the dormitory, for, Barry hoped, the last time, he told Marcel that Pierre and he might go in the canoe. Tears sprang to the apache's eyes, he grew volubly grateful. "It's our only chance," he whispered. "I knew you were a good man to trust."

Next afternoon, still up the river at the jam, they resumed work. To Barry's relief, Commandant Gros had not gone out with them. The guards were lax; they lay in the shade napping, smoking, while their charges labored. It was not difficult to slip away from the squad; the authorities counted on the natural prison formed by jungle and sea to prevent the *forçats* from escaping.

At four o'clock Barry saw Hanson step into the bush, disappear. Barry signaled Marcel, edged up-river himself, and, after a glance to make sure none of the sleepy guards was watching, jumped for the trees, was at once out of sight. He walked rapidly inland, heart thumping with excitement at starting the long-hoped-for escape, feet traveling faster and faster as he left the river. Soon he reached the outskirts of one of the numerous mangrove swamps, dark, evil smelling, full of land crabs; the bush was so thick

he could see only a yard or two, and he lay hidden till darkness clapped down over the jungle.

The mulatto's shop was at the lower end of town, close to the water front. All the convicts knew of it, for the mulatto outfitted escape parties; would even hide men for a time.

St. Laurent squatted beside the muddy Maroni, up from the turbulent sea. Yellow street lamps cast ineffective glows here and there; on the main wharf was a light. In the homes of the mixed population people ate, and prepared to retire; there was little to do after dark. Only a few figures showed in the streets. Like a shadow Barry hurried on to the store, went to the side door and rapped. The coffee-colored face of Sam, mulatto storekeeper, stared out at him.

"Come in," ordered Sam, holding the door back. "Yo' friend's here." The mulatto was tall and stringy, dirty, with light kinky hair covering his yellow skull. His eyes were black, lips thick; he wore rags. But to escaping, desperate men, ready to perish for freedom, he was a savior.

Sam led Barry through a short hall and a chamber used to store stocks of goods, through another door into the main store, shuttered up in front. A small candle burning under a perforated coffee can cast flickering light rays. By it squatted Hanson, who rose to greet Barry. The Canadian's legs were covered with mud, his clothes were torn, lips grimly set.

"SO it's you, Barry," Hanson said. "Have you seen Marcel and Pierre?"

"No. They should be here soon."

"Fools," Hanson growled, "to keep us waiting. I wonder if they changed their minds about going."

"No. But Pierre moves slowly, with his wooden leg. You're sure the boat will be ready? They'll start the man-hunters after us early in the morning. Gros will be furious when he finds us gone."

"The canoe'll be there. That black man will want the rest of the money I showed him."

"And food, and water—we need plenty. And a compass?"

Hanson waved his hand. "Sam's packed knapsacks and filled canteens for us all." He lit a cigarette, gave one to Barry.

They smoked for a time in silence, Barry looking around the store. There were two counters, one crammed with foods, canned goods, preserved meats, eatables of every sort; the second, on the other side, was piled high with wrinkled clothing, shoes, straw hats and a large array of cheap trinkets, strings of wood and glass beads, bracelets, knives and ornaments to attract the barbaric eyes of the bush Negroes, lords of the jungle, when they majestically strolled through St. Laurent.

"Hanson," Barry said at last, "I want to tell you how grateful I am to you. I was ready to die, at the end of my rope, when you gave me this chance of freedom. You know the awful despair the exiled and condemned feel here. I hit Gros because I half hoped he'd kill me; I was mad, but so tortured I couldn't stand any more. I'll lay down my life for you, and that goes the rest of my days." He held his hand out, looking into his comrade's eyes.

Hanson cleared his throat, said, "No need to thank me, I tell you, Barry. I need you in the boat." The sound of a low tap interrupted them, and they rose quickly. Mulatto Sam showed as he went to the side door and

opened it; over Hanson's head Barry glimpsed the bright eyes of Marcel and behind him the great head of Pierre.

"At last," Hanson said. "Now we can get going."

Sam led Pierre and Marcel into the store.

Marcel greeted them effusively. Pierre said nothing, looking around the room.

"The provisions, where are they?" asked Marcel. "We'll carry a lot. Pierre is strong as a bull."

Pierre was at the counter. He picked up a long, sharp-pointed knife, tested the blade with his thumb, glanced at Hanson.

"There are knives in our sacks," Hanson said.

The whites of Sam's eyes rolled excitedly. Pierre stood by the counter, looking at the array. Hanson, Barry at his side, turned to the mulatto, and Hanson handed Sam a roll of bills. "Here's your pay," the Canadian said. "We'll start now."

"Good lu-ck," stuttered Sam.

Marcel joined Hanson and Barry. "Come along, Pierre," ordered the apache, and Pierre's peg leg clicked on the wooden floor.

Tense exhilaration held Barry, his heart was lighter than it had been for years, since his unfortunate slip which had resulted in condemnation to Guiana. A bulging knapsack awaited each man, and they strapped on several metal quart canteens, cylindrical, covered with brown canvas. Pierre shouldered a heavy wooden box of canned goods.

The way was clear. They had but a few hundred yards to go before they would be outside town and in the woods, headed for the spot on the river where the boat waited.

"Have we got everything?" Hanson asked. "Last chance."

There was a murmur of assent.

CHAPTER III.

TRAPPED.

HANSON walked with fast, short strides beside Barry. Behind were Marcel and Pierre. Barry could hear the swift breathing of his comrade. They entered the woods and took a faint path which led toward the Maroni, on the left. Through a vista of leaves Barry stared eagerly, saw the moonlight shining on the rippling water, and a long, dark shape near shore, surely their canoe.

But sudden sounds smashed his dream of escape, sent panic streaking through him. A flashlight was switched on them, in their eyes, the brilliant ray blinding them, bringing the four out in relief as they froze in their tracks. There was a metallic click as a gun was cocked, and a hated voice bawled, "*Halte lá!*"

For an instant Barry gazed at the half circle of rifles covering them, cutting them off from the river and their hope, the canoe.

"Put up your paws, *bagnards*," Commandant Gros shouted triumphantly. He took a step forward, big pistol in his right hand. There were four guards with him, his underlings, armed with Lebel rifles. A hoarse curse apprised Barry that Detective Murphy was also among those present.

Marcel began to swear in a high-pitched voice. Barry heard a low, animal-like growl from Pierre as the guards eagerly bunched in on them. Something fanned past Barry's head, struck Commandant Gros squarely in the stomach. Gros doubled up with a

heavy gasp; Pierre had thrown the wooden box with all his might and a corner had hit Gros.

A guard fired a wild shot that sang past Barry's head. But they were crowded together, and Pierre tore Barry aside, leaping past him, the light flashing on the long knife in his hand. In under the rifle barrel of a guard Pierre plunged, blade ripping up. A red smear showed on the torn cloth, and the keeper fell with a scream, Pierre leaping on him, driving the wooden leg into his body.

Barry jumped into the fight, though he saw little hope of winning it. Gros had recovered himself, crouching a yard from Barry, raised his pistol, aiming at Hanson. With a shout Barry launched himself at the commandant, bowled him back, stamped the gun from his hand.

The quarters were so close that rifles could not be brought into effective use. Marcel fought with feet and nails, grappling with a guard. Pierre seemed everywhere; his knife worked again as he bore a soldier against a tree, and cut him down without hesitation.

Murphy was in, pistol in hand; he fired pointblank at Pierre, but the pegleg whirled, turned aside as the detective pulled the trigger. The slug tore through Pierre's shoulder, stopping him for an instant; then, with an awful roar, Pierre lunged in again, whirling the knife he had stolen from the mulatto's store. Barry, at Murphy's right, saw the detective taking aim once more at Pierre; Barry hurled himself at Murphy, caught him a terrific smack alongside the head that sent him stumbling back. Pierre at that moment cut another keeper, and then Marcel screamed, "Run, run for it!"

Pierre and Marcel leaped into the bush. The two remaining guards, one of them wounded in the arm, fired their rifles after them.

"Come on, Hanson," ordered Barry, and, seizing his friend's arm, pulled him to cover. Gros was up on his knees, reaching for his pistol. Murphy took a few steps after Pierre and Marcel, discharging his revolver, bellowing angrily.

"Run," Barry gasped.

"No use, no use," muttered the Canadian.

BUT Gros, seeing Barry and Hanson through the trees, began to fire at them, and the sound of the slugs whistling so near electrified Hanson. Turning inland, Hanson ran with Barry and cut over away from the town. Ahead, Barry saw Marcel and Pierre running a short distance ahead, the pegleg traveling at amazing speed in spite of his handicap. Barry ducked out of the straps holding his knapsack, tossed it down. Hanson was cursing violently; he seemed dazed by the shots. Shouts, more bullets came from Gros and his men as they took up the chase.

Barry knew they were doomed, they could never get away, but he ran just the same from the man-hunters; he wanted to help Hanson, his friend. Up in front he saw Pierre's leg sink into a soft spot of earth, and the big man nearly fell. With a curse of hatred, Pierre swung his huge body, crouched beside a large tree, knife in hand.

"Come on, come on," whimpered Marcel.

Then Murphy's tall form appeared, close on them, Gros at his heels. Pierre was half hidden by his tree. Marcel took a few hurried steps on, then called again to Pierre. Barry saw a chance, pulled Hanson aside, and

dove into a heavy thicket. The other two keepers had run over to the other flank and were out of sight, but could be heard crashing through the wood.

Murphy turned a flash toward Pierre's tree. The pegleg suddenly reached in his pocket, tossed down a long, snake-like string which flashed in the light. Then he ran after Marcel.

Murphy shouted in triumph, stopped and squatted beside the necklace. Gros paused, standing over the American. The commandant glanced quickly after Pierre, looked all around.

Hanson and Barry stared at Murphy and Gros. Barry whispered, "We'd better cut out of here fast." He grasped Hanson's shoulder to raise him.

Murphy was bent over the necklace lure cast away by Pierre. Peering through the bush, Barry saw the flash of the Frenchman's eyes. Then Gros raised his pistol, stuck the muzzle a few inches from the back of Murphy's head, pulled the trigger. The big detective fell over on his face without a sound. Gros quickly picked up the shining necklace and pushed it into the inside pocket of his tunic.

"Murderer!" gasped Hanson.

"Sh," warned Barry, gripping his friend's wrist. "Don't let him hear or he'll shoot us. Quiet, he's going on."

Gros ran on, yelling to his men. They heard shouts, shots from the other guards.

"We've got a chance," Barry said eagerly. "Come, maybe we can make the river yet."

Hanson's breath came in terrible gasps; his eyes were wide, staring. He pulled himself together. "I can't," he said stupidly.

Barry shook him. "We must. Gros will murder us if we stay here. No one will believe he shot Murphy; he'll lay it on us."

HANSON licked his lips. Barry shoved him back toward the river. They looked through the vista at the spot where the canoe had been. Two guards, those stabbed by Pierre, were groaning on the path, but they circled them. The canoe was no longer there.

"The shooting must have scared the Negro off," groaned Barry. He sank down, exhausted, put his head in his hands.

Hanson, with trembling fingers, drew out cigarettes, and they both smoked. "We must keep away from Gros," Hanson said at last.

"Of course. He wants the necklace for himself. Figures he'll go back to France and live in luxury the rest of his life. He has a lot of power here; no one but us saw him murder Murphy. The Governor won't believe our story." Barry rose, with new courage, helped Hanson up. "I haven't forgotten, Hanson. I owe you that chance, it wasn't your fault it was ruined. Gros must have been watching us, laid that ambush. But we'll keep on till they catch us. There's just one thing for us to do now. We can't stay here. But we can return to Sam's, and he'll hide us till tomorrow. We can get in touch with the man who has the boat, and start again."

Hanson shrugged, followed him silently. At the edge of the woods they peered toward the store. There was a light in the back. Far off they heard the noise of Gros and his men.

They ran across the open space to the mulatto's door, knocked. Sam came to answer, terror in his eyes. "I heard de shootin'," he gasped.

"They nearly got us," replied

Barry. "You'll have to hide us till tomorrow."

Sam gulped. "Aw—aw right."

He led them to the store; his face was pasty under the yellow skin. He was scared out of his wits. "Yo' stay here," he muttered, and went out, closing the connecting door.

They lay on the floor, regaining their breath. "We've still got a good chance, Hanson," Barry said cheerfully.

But a short time later they heard the tramp of feet outside, and cursing, the gruff voice of Gros. There was a banging on the side door, and Sam went to answer.

Barry crawled behind the counter, pulling Hanson with him. They crouched in the dark, hearing the murmur of voices. Hanson reached up and picked a knife from the counter, held it in his hand. Then the store was flooded with light, the door opening, and Gros's harsh voice snapped, "Come out of there, both of you."

There was only a thin wood partition between them and the commandant's gun. Gros took a quick step to the side, was able to look along the rear of the counter and cover them. Hanson had hidden the knife up his sleeve, and the two fugitives stood up and raised their hands. Gros kept his pistol up, cocked, glaring at them.

"I've got you, murderers," he crowed. "You shot and killed Murphee. For that you go to the guillotine."

"Liar," exploded Hanson. "We saw you kill him."

"Shut up," shouted Gros. "Everyone knows you *bagnards* are liars as well as killers. *I* saw *you* kill him."

"We'll tell the Governor exactly what happened."

Gros laughed, whole body shaking in mirth. "The Governor'll back me up. Come, you're going back to the blockhouse."

IT was plain that Sam had betrayed them; they saw his frightened face looking in from the other room. Faced by Gros's gun, he had told the commandant where they were hidden.

But then Gros began swearing violently. Barry, following the officer's eyes, saw that the commandant was staring at the piles of glass beads and trinkets on the near-by counter. Gros strode over, picked up several strings; with a terrific oath he dashed them to the floor, and turned.

"Jean—Louis, bring in the peg-leg!" he shouted.

The two guards, survivors of the battle in the forest, shoved Pierre through to the store. The huge form of the convict was battered, a long bloody gash in his cheek, bleeding from many cuts, his right arm lifeless at his side. But he had a snarl of defiance for Gros.

"Wait outside, boys," ordered Gros. "Take the mulatto dog to the rear. Understand, I want no interruptions." He slammed the door on his two men.

Revolver ready, Gros swung on Pierre. "Where's that necklace?" he demanded. "I want it."

A slow grin spread over Pierre's evil face.

"Why, M'sieu la Commandant has it there in his pocket!"

"Fool!" gritted Gros. "It was only a string of these glass beads. You picked it up when you hid here tonight, that's plain, and tossed it down to turn me aside." He drew forth the necklace and slung it beside the others on the floor. "I'm going to give you ten seconds to tell me where the real one is."

Pierre still grinned, smashed lips spread back over his yellow teeth.

"I finished Marcel," boasted Gros. "You know I'm not afraid to shoot you, Pierre. But if you say where that necklace is, I'll let you go free."

Pierre simply laughed silently again.

Gros snarled, "Turn out your pockets." Pierre obeyed with a shrug; nothing was disclosed save matches, cigarettes, odds and ends. Gros was beside himself; to have commited murder, only to find himself cheated, was too much. He stood scowling at the stoical Pierre. Then his eyes flashed. He stepped in, seized Pierre's blouse, tore it off, looking for a belt. But Pierre had nothing hidden under his clothes.

Gros was shaking with excitement. He brushed his dark forehead with his left hand. Suddenly he uttered a strangled cry. "I have it, I have it," he shouted. Pointing to Pierre's wooden leg with his pistol muzzle, he ordered, "Take it off, the pegleg—quick!"

As Pierre did not obey, but sneered, Gros impatiently stooped, seized the wooden leg, and tried to trip Pierre. Pierre hit Gros a terrific blow in the chest, staggering him back. Gros's teeth bared, his gun came up, trigger back.

"He's going to shoot," gasped Hanson.

Barry threw himself in, arm outstretched, reaching for Gros's wrist. Hanson, the long knife appearing from his sleeve, was right behind him. But even as they leaped, Gros pulled his trigger, putting a heavy army slug into Pierre's belly. The great body, grin frozen on the face, slumped in the corner.

Eyes wild, Gros, hearing them coming at him, swung his gun. But Barry was there, had his wrist, twisting it up. The second bullet bit into the ceiling. Hanson was crouched behind the commandant, and, black rage in his eyes, drove his knife into Gros's back, slashing away with the uniform lacerating the flesh. Gros screamed in mortal anguish.

BARRY was sure now that Pierre had the necklace hidden inside the wooden leg and that Gros realized it. Gros would therefore want to put both Barry and Hanson out of the way, so he could keep the necklace without fear of them telling. The commandant squirmed in agony as the knife excoriated his back; Barry had a glimpse of Hanson's clenched teeth as the Canadian struck again. Barry was lashed about by the frantic struggles of the tortured Gros, but prevented the commandant from effectively using his gun. Shouts from the rear of the building warned them that Gros's two guards were coming, alarmed at the racket.

Hanson, with a desperate hiss, plunged the blade into Gros's side, twisted it up under the heart. Gros quit fighting, collapsed on Barry. Hanson held the gory knife poised over Gros, but the latter's eyes were already glazing over. The little man sprang to Pierre's body, slit the straps of the wooden leg, quickly pulled it loose. Barry saw him dig out a wooden plug from under the leather rest. There was a long, circular hollow inside the thick wood stump.

"Empty," Hanson gasped.

"Watch it—here they come," warned Barry, and leaped for the door, throwing his weight against it.

Jean the guard called to Gros. "What's wrong, M'sieu le Commandant? You ordered us to keep

away, but tell us if everything is all right."

Receiving no reply, Jean called louder, rapped hard. "Open up," he shouted. When he tried the door, Barry held it.

"Open or I'll fire!" cried Jean.

A bullet tore through the panel close by Barry. Hanson, pulling his shaking body together, reached up, smashed the electric light bulb. Barry jumped away, and the inner door burst in, showing Jean and his mate Louis, guns ready.

The store was quite dark. Jean switched on a flash, held it turned on the horror of the two dead bodies. Hanson slid the bolt of the front door. The noise attracted Jean, the beam of light swinging to the fugitives as they ran out. Barry, behind Hanson, felt a searing pain shoot through his head, and his left ear began to sting as though bitten by a hundred bees. But he was outside, and running full speed along the street.

The only near shelter was the wood and Barry headed for it, head buzzing madly. Jean and Louis were in full cry. Off to Barry's left was Hanson. It was the guillotine for them, Barry knew, once they were captured.

They reached the forest. Barry ducked into the bush, zigzagging as bullets sang past, breath coming in great gasps. He was too confused to keep track of Hanson. He ran on and on, came to the spot where Pierre had bogged down. There, hearing no one on his trail, he looked back over his shoulder. Hanson was not in sight. Barry cursed, fearing his friend had been shot down. But then, as he hurried on, casting glances back in the hope he might see Hanson, his foot caught in a root and he fell heavily, his wounded head striking a sharp rock. Shoots of terrible pain seared his brain. And sudden blackness seized him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NECKLACE.

BARRY came to with lips burning, feverish. His head ached. He was so thirsty he crawled several feet before getting to his feet. Dawn was breaking over the forest. He pushed on into the swamp land, looking for a clear pool from which he might drink; he knew the danger of the muddy liquid. Perhaps he could find a spring.

Then ahead of him he saw the silent, glassy gleam of a large pond. Crabs slid away from the left bank, and several green parrots scolded at him from the trees. He veered toward the water, feet sucking in the damp earth. Suddenly he stumbled over the awful remains of what had been a man. The prison garments, the general form, told him it was Marcel.

Barry's eyes caught the khaki-covered canteen close to the corpse. He stooped, picked it up. But he found the cork out, the cap unscrewed, the bottle empty, and with a curse flung it into the mangrove-rimmed pool. It floated on its side for a few moments before it filled and sank. He stared at the little lake; he must have a drink, if it meant malaria—his eyes widened.

Nearby noises startled him, and he stepped aside, lay flat in a thick clump of bush near Marcel's body. Hanson appeared from the trees toward the river and came swiftly to Marcel. The Canadian ran his hands over Marcel, then dropped a revolver by the corpse, and began walking in widening circles with the body as a center.

Barry softly hailed him. Hanson jumped, raised the gun he held. But he recognized Barry, and helped him to his feet, staring at him. "You're hurt," Hanson said gruffly, at last.

Before Barry could answer, a second man stepped from the trees, coming after Hanson. Barry froze, hissed a warning to his friend. The newcomer was a tall Frenchman, clad in a white uniform with Legion of Honor decoration. He wore a black spade-beard, and gold-rimmed spectacles. There was a Ruby pistol at his belt.

Hanson gripped Barry's wrist. The Frenchman looked curiously at Barry.

"M'sieu the Governor," growled Barry.

It was all up, Barry knew; there would be a guard with the governor, whom Barry had seen at reviews and inspections.

"Any luck?" inquired the governor quietly.

Hanson shook his head. "No. And we've searched everywhere. It's simply disappeared."

"I'll call my men," the governor said.

"No, wait, sir," Hanson ordered —Barry was astounded at Hanson's coolness, watched the little man as he spoke on. "Gros double-crossed Murphy; shot him dead because Gros believed he had the necklace. Gros meant to keep it himself; it's worth a fortune and he could get away with it, he was sure. Gros also killed Pierre and Marcel."

The governor frowned. "It's a terrible mess," he agreed. "The scandal will ruin me, do us great harm. The newspapers will hold me responsible for Gros's actions, show one of my commandants was a murderer and thief."

."I've failed," Hanson said wearily, brushing his lined eyes with the back of his hand. "Yes, after months of work, I've lost out. I was certain they had it here, but we've searched every inch of the ground. Escaping, they'd have carried the necklace with them had they brought it to Guiana. I, too, guessed Pierre might have it hidden in his wooden leg; though there was a place for it, and they evidently brought it from France that way, it wasn't there when I looked."

The Frenchman shrugged. "I regret the whole affair. Your government put a great deal of political pressure on us to allow you to come here, Hanson. And it's turned into a terrible scandal."

"It must be covered."

"But how?"

BARRY was trembling violently. Though the new light of day flickered before his eyes, he could see clearly now. "Hanson!" he muttered.

"Yes, Barry, I'm the American detective," Hanson answered grimly. "Murphy was a blind, to keep eyes turned from me while I bored in. No one but the governor knew who I was —Murphy did, of course, but we feared leaks. I spent a few days at Cayenne prison, then had myself transferred here. I've tracked that necklace ever since Marcel and Pierre stole it. I knew I could never work in with them directly, so I chose you to throw them off guard, since they trusted you implicitly.

"Every move I made was carefully planned. I pretended to pick Murphy's pocket. You remember we were given two days to get results? That was to stampede Pierre and Marcel, since I knew you'd warn them. If they had the necklace in Guiana, as I believed

they did, they'd surely carry it with them when they tried to escape. I didn't dare make an open search in the barracks for fear they had it hidden outside and that would make it impossible to trick them into showing it. When we were on our way to the canoe I'd hired—I played the whole game through, carefully—I had instructed Murphy to wait till I gave a signal before grabbing us. But Gros wanted to get the credit, and started the attack. And after all that, I'm beaten." There was bitter dejection in his voice.

The blood flushed Barry's face. "It was all a trick," he declared thickly. "The freedom you offered didn't exist, it was a trap, and you made a fool of me to betray Pierre and Marcel. In other words, I never had a chance to escape Guiana." He laughed shortly. "When I think how grateful I was to you it becomes comical! And all the time you were a lousy spy! All right, then. I'm ready for solitary or even for death. To hell with you!"

Hanson was staring at him. He took out a cigarette, lighted it. Enraged at his indifference, Barry raised his fist. Hanson stood motionless, waiting for him to strike. Then Barry shrugged, dropped his arm.

Hanson swung to the governor. "There's a way to beat this scandal, *m'sieu*. You can say Gros and his men killed Marcel and Pierre, escaping prisoners. Barry, with them, killed Gros at the store—that'll check with the story of Jean and Louis. I shot Barry dead as he tried to swim the river last night—the stream carried away the corpse. Write D.C.D., deceased, on Barry's record."

"But Barry will still be here."

"Not if you let him go with me today. I'm through with this rotten place. With Pierre and Marcel dead, I haven't got a chance of tracing the necklace. But I'd hate to think I'd brought trouble to you. So I'll dress Barry in new clothes, fix him up easily so he won't be recognized as a convict, and we'll slip him aboard a steam launch and make Paramaribo, where we'll catch a plane for home."

THE governor sighed with relief. "It's a cheap price to pay for covering this scandal up," he agreed. "Barry goes with you, then."

Hanson turned to Barry. "I'll see you're dressed and you can bathe; then we'll start." And he added, in a low voice, "I *was* sorry for you, Barry. Marcel and Pierre were thieves and murderers, after all. But you're loyal and honest, and you'll get a new start in America." He bent his head, sadness in his stooped shoulders as he started away. He had failed.

Barry had forgotten the thirst that had burned him, but now he remembered it. He tried to brush the dried blood from his wounded cheek. The governor was walking back toward St. Laurent.

"Hanson!" Barry called.

"Yes?" asked the detective, coming back to him. "Better for you to wait here, hidden, till I return with clothes."

"It's not that," stammered Barry. "Look."

Hanson stared curiously out on the pond. A small brown object floated there, pushed against the limb of a mangrove bush. "What? It's only a canteen, Barry."

"But—there's no water in it. The cap's screwed on, so it floats. If it had been emptied, no one would have bothered to replace the cork, you know. The empty one I threw in sank—"

Hanson plunged into the water, waded to the canteen. He picked it

up and shook it, holding it close to his ear. Barry saw his eyes widen. Eagerly Hanson unscrewed the cap, took out the cork. Barry, weak-legged on the bank, watched him draw out a paper-wrapped heavy string. Taking off the covering, Hanson held up for an instant a scintillating necklace that caught the rays of the fresh morning light. He scrambled back to Barry, face alight with victory.

"Marcel had it, not Pierre," Barry said. "When Gros shot Marcel down, Marcel tossed the canteen out on the pond to keep Gros from getting it. When I saw that canteen floating, it puzzled me. Then I figured perhaps Marcel had emptied one of his canteens as we walked through the wood to the boat, and slipped the necklace into it. But before I could go after it, you came along, Hanson. I'd have never spoken if you hadn't saved me."

Hanson clapped him on the back. "You win, Barry; reward and freedom!"

THE END

The Tomb Deaths

WHAT seems like a curse has followed those who discovered the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922, or who have studied its remains. You may recall that the following inscription was said to have been found over the entrance, by the Earl of Carnarvon and Mr. Howard Carter: "Let the hand raised against my form be withered! Let them be destroyed who attack my name, my foundation, my effigies, the images like unto me!" Within five months Lord Carnarvon took ill and died. He is reported to have dipped his hand into a narrow vase and taken a pin scratch.

The story of the curse, told by *Pearson's Weekly,* is that during the past twelve years no less than nineteen of those who have been connected with the explorations or the treasure have died "mysteriously or by violence." Among them were two X-ray experts who, at different times, were preparing to photograph the mummy. In 1930 a scholar who had studied the tomb shot himself, and three months later his father died in a similar way.

Quite recently the death of Sir Ernest Wallis Budge, a noted Egyptologist, has occurred. But Mr. Howard Carter, archæologist, who took part in the original discovery, is still living and pooh-poohs the "curse." It has been suggested that poison left about the tomb may have done the damage even though it would have been 3,300 years old.

—*Delos White.*

Trader's Itch

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

The pitchfork was less than a foot from Surcingle Scruggs

Bill Scruggs had a yen for trading but not the knack—so he lost two ways on a deal which cost him his wife

"BILL SCRUGGS," demanded Adeline, his wife, "have you been trading agin?"

There was a low, ominous note in her voice: it made Surcingle Bill Scruggs think of the rumble of distant thunder under a dark and lowering sky. He let down gently the handles of the wheelbarrow that he was pushing, mopped his perspiring brow, and regarded with pride and affection the object that he had just trundled over five miles of mountain road.

"Adeline," he beamed, trying to dissipate the storm, "this wasn't trading. It was just kind of changing one kind of property into another kind of the same thing, only better."

Adeline left the kitchen door and advanced with the air of one who goes bravely to face the worst. She was a comely woman, well padded with pleasing curves, but there was a deep line of anxiety up and down her white forehead.

"What is that there contraption you

got on the wheelbarrow?" she asked.

"It's a inkabator," Bill told her, expanding. "A patent chicken hatcher. It hatches two hunnerd and sixty eggs to once. Better'n any hen that ever see the light of day! It's jest as good as a whole flock of setting hens!"

"What," asked Mrs. Scruggs, "did you trade off for that there inkabator?"

"Why, I traded our flock of hens, of course! We don't need them hens no more with a inkabator. We'll have two hunnerd and sixty hens, you might say, after the first hatching—"

"Shut up!" At this moment there was something about Adeline Scruggs that compelled obedience. She breathed like a laboring locomotive. "If we don't have no hens where be you going to get the eggs to put into that inkabator to hatch them chickens that'll grow up into hens to take the place of the nice flock we had?"

Bill sat down weakly on the wheelbarrow beside the incubator. He was deflated. His amiable blue eyes widened and filled with astonishment. "By gosh, Adeline! I never thought of that!"

"You never thought of nothing!" his wife told him. "Leastways, not that I know of. What for do they call you Surcingle Bill Scruggs from one end of Bildad Road to the other?"

Bill hung his head. His wife answered her own question.

"Because you started out trading one day with a hoss and when you come back that night you didn't have nothing but a surcingle, and no hoss to go into the surcingle. Ain't that so?"

"I was kind of unlucky—"

"You be! It was unlucky you was born! Unlucky for me! Didn't I tell you last week when you traded a bushel of beans for a broken raisin seeder that if you traded agin I'd leave ye?"

"But, Adeline, I kin fix that raisin seeder—"

"Can you buy raisins for to be seeded? What good is a raisin seeder if you ain't go no raisins? Bill, if you ever had any brains they've settled and went to your feet! I'm a-going to pack up today and get out! I've stood a man with trader's itch for twenty year, and that's a fair trial. I can't stand it any longer!"

She turned away and marched into the house.

UNCLE TOBEY BOLLIVER drove very carefully, with a hard, skinny hand firm on the reins. Betsy, his thirty year old gray mare, was hitched to a light box wagon. She was as old for a horse as Uncle Tobey was for a man, but she was inclined to be a little kittenish, even now. Perhaps it was because of lifelong association with Tobey Bolliver.

Beside Uncle Tobey on the driver's seat Surcingle Bill Scruggs moped with head bowed and shoulders slack. From time to time he sighed. His eyes were clouded, but he was not so absorbed in melancholy that he did not glance back now and then at a large box that rode on a straw bed in the body of the wagon.

Uncle Tobey's white whiskers flared in the breeze. His was no drooping, dejected beard. It was as aggressive as a juniper bush. His mustache lanced out on each side and he was suspected of putting beeswax on it. As he pulled up in front of the Scruggs home he turned to Bill.

"Here we be, Surcingle," he announced briskly. "You got to do the

talking, because it's a powerful aggravating story we got to tell, and I aim to have you take the consequences, if any."

Adeline came to the door. She regarded Uncle Tobey with an impersonal eye and her husband with a look that silently called him a worm of the dust.

"Be you ready to leave, Adeline?" asked Bill. "I hate to see you go, but I figgered I'd ought to help ye all I could. So Uncle Tobey is going to take your things."

Mrs. Scruggs started to come out, stopped to get the broom, and then advanced toward the wagon.

"What kind of skulduggery is this?" she hissed as she peered up at the two men.

"Adeline!" exclaimed Uncle Tobey. "Don't you dast to hit me with that broom! Leastways while the eggs is in the wagon. I dunno as I'd mind a little skirmish with a good looking woman like you if it wasn't for the eggs!"

"What eggs?" asked Mrs. Scruggs through clenched teeth. "You old reperbate!"

"Why, Surcingle's eggs, of course!"

"For my new inkabator," explained Bill.

"How did you get them eggs?" demanded Adeline. "Was you lying when you said you didn't have no money? Or wasn't you?"

"Why, no, Adeline! I mean I wasn't. I traded for them eggs with Uncle Tobey. Got two hunnerd and sixty."

"What did you trade?"

Her knuckles grew white on the broom handle.

"It was what you'd call kind of a deal instead of a trade, Adeline. You see, I knowed that Uncle Tobey had been trying to get a housekeeper for a good while, and I figgered if you was going to leave anyway I might jest as well make a trade with him—"

The broom jarred the rest of that sentence back down the throat of Surcingle Bill.

Uncle Tobey Bolliver dived over the arm of the seat. Betsy loped around the house and stopped by the barn.

Scruggs spilled out, but the box of eggs rode through the heavy weather right side up.

"Adeline," said Uncle Tobey, moving beyond reach of the broom, "I'm an old, old man, and if it ain't respecterble for me to have a housekeeper, then I don't know what is respecterble. I'm jest as harmless as a butterfly."

"If you was going to leave me anyways, Adeline, I don't see no harm in making a trade out of it!" exclaimed Surcingle bitterly. "Them eggs ain't no more than damages for being left to cook for myself."

"All right!" cried Mrs. Scruggs, with a sudden change of mind. "I'll go, and I'll keep house for Uncle Tobey. You can have your inkabator in place of a wife, if you want to! And talk to your chickens, Bill Scruggs! See if they will keep you fed the way I do, and wash your clothes, and darn holes in your socks! I don't go away wishing you nor nobody no harm, but I hope you turn black in the face and choke to death!"

THE dooryard was full of homemade brooders and little chickens that had only an incubator for a mother. Surcingle Bill had more chickens than he knew what to do with, but he was lonesome nevertheless. One elbow was out of a shirt sleeve. His stomach did not feel right.

Bill got up from the doorstep with a groan and turned into the house. A sinkful of dirty dishes met his eye. The kitchen fire was out and there was no hot water. He kicked a chair the length of the room and went back outdoors. With sudden resolution he started along Bildad Road.

"Can't do no harm to see how she's getting along," he muttered. "Mebbe she's got over being mad."

Nobody was in sight outside the Bolliver place. Surcingle went up to the door and looked in. Adeline was on her knees in front of the stove, taking a pan of cookies out of the oven, and she neither saw nor heard him. He tiptoed in and sat down, and cleared his throat loudly.

Mrs. Scruggs sprang up. She looked at him in silence for a moment and something that made a funny feeling up and down Bill's backbone came into her ordinarily mild and worried eyes. She set the cookies down with care and took the poker from the stove hearth.

"Now, Adeline!" exclaimed Bill. "I jest dropped in to see if you wanted that patchwork quilt you made last winter—"

"You're a liar!" she told him. "Your stomach has sunk in a good three inches and you come to see if I wasn't ready to go home!"

"Adeline," he grinned, "I allus said you was a smart woman! I got a lot of nice chickens. We could kill and eat all we wanted soon as they get to be broilers."

"You come here and grin like a Chessy cat and expect me to go home with you!" She laid the poker down with a shake of her head. "No, killing's too good for ye! I want you should live and suffer!"

"Ain't you all right here with Uncle Tobey, Adeline?"

She laughed hysterically and stabbed him with a glittering eye.

"Did Uncle Tobey say he was an old man? Old? Old enough to be respecterble and harmless as a butterfly? Ha! Ha! Ha! See them extry mop handles in the corner? I average busting one a day over his head! He's the sprightliest old man on Bildad Road!"

"The old buzzard!" yelled Surcingle. "You come along home with me this minute!"

"Home?" echoed Adeline. "I ain't got no home. Even if I did have a home, ain't I been traded off fair and square to Uncle Tobey for a mess of eggs?"

"Only for a housekeeper!" cried her husband.

"He wants me to get a divorce," she said. "Uncle Tobey does. Sometimes I think them old men is the only ones that knows how to be good to a woman!"

"Lemme at him!" shouted Surcingle. "Where's he went to?"

"I guess he's currying off Betsy out to the barn," replied Adeline. "If you are going out there, tell him that they's a fresh batch of cookies."

"I'll give him an invite to his own funeral!"

"Now don't you go out and hurt an old man!"

SURCINGLE was already on his way to the barn. He saw Betsy hitched to a ring, and plunged through the doorway. The next thing he saw was a flash of light that exploded painfully on the end of his nose. He sat down. The agony subsided.

That figure standing over him with a pitchfork was Uncle Tobey Bolliver. The bright steel tines were less than a foot from Surcingle's shirt front. He felt his stomach muscles crawl.

"I must of run into something," he said weakly.

"You run into my fist with the end of your nose, gol durn ye!" ejaculated Uncle Tobey. "I heard ye hollerin' in there! When I was a young sprunt we hit first and argered afterwards! That's the kind of a clawin' cattermount I be! I'll fight ye with pitchforks, axes or shotguns, daylight or dark!

"Let's each of us take a butcher knife and go down cellar and lock ourselves in! Best man gets the key!"

"Wait a minute, Uncle Tobey! Lemme up! Let's us talk!"

"I be talking! I ain't going to let ye up! Not ontil we get this here business about Adeline settled!"

"She's talking about a divorce—"

"Can't blame her, can ye?"

"I'm—I'm kind of lonesome for Adeline!"

"Serves ye right! You made a fair and square trade with me and got rid of her!"

"She said she was going to leave me anyways!"

"Probably that served ye right, too. Man that can't trade no better'n you kin can't even keep a wife."

"Do you—do you want to marry Adeline?"

Uncle Tobey's pitchfork wavered. A shrewd gleam came into his bright eyes.

"What you offering, Surcingle?"

"Me offering? What for?"

"For me to get her a divorce, and then me and her get married. What you think I'm talking about? Last year's apple crop?"

"I ain't offering nothing that way!" cried Scruggs. "I was going to see if we couldn't make a trade for me to get her back again."

Now Uncle Tobey did lower his pitchfork. He had to have it to lean on while he laughed.

"Honest, Surcingle!" he gasped. "You tickle me something awful! I'd 'a' been willing to pay you to take her!"

"Well!" cried Bill, brightening. "If that's the way you feel—"

Uncle Tobey shook his head and his chuckles subsided.

"No, Surcingle! You got the trader's itch, but you ain't got the trader's knack! Now I know how the land lays I'll stand fast. Come on! What'll you give me for my housekeeper?"

Bill Scruggs' spirits were dampened, but he remembered how lonesome he was.

"Uncle Tobey," he said, "I'll give you a hundred chicks, all in good condition!"

"Done!" cried Uncle Tobey Bolliver. "And now I don't mind saying you could of had her for fifty! That woman is rampageous.

"She's broke nineteen mop handles over my head since she's been here. Yes, sirree!"

Surcingle turned to go back to the house and suddenly halted, with a kind of paralysis taking possession of him.

Adeline had stepped around the corner of the barn and she stood considering them with folded arms and a man-eating look in her eye.

"You two partners in crime ain't took me into account at all," she said in a low, menacing voice. "Bill, what kind of a trade are you going to make with me to go back home?"

"Trade?" moaned Surcingle. "Has a man got to make a trade with his own wife?"

"I left ye, didn't I?" she demanded. "That's the excuse you had for trad-

ing me off and it had ought to work both ways. What's sass for the goose is sass for the gander! I can get me a job somewheres else."

"Don't do that, Adeline?" pleaded Bill. "What'll you take to come along home?"

"You quit this fool trading and go to work long enough to earn me a new cookstove and I'll come home," she said, "and if you try to crawl out of it I'll pound up a lamp chimney and feed it to ye in your johnnycake!"

"I'll do it, Adeline," he promised; "and I'll split wood so the woodbox won't never get empty!"

Mr. and Mrs. Surcingle Bill Scruggs walked hand in hand up to their own doorway.

"Adeline," said Surcingle, "I'm awful glad you got back, but I can't figger Uncle Tobey wanting to get rid of you and at the same time wanting to marry you! It somehow don't make no sense at all to me."

"That's because you don't know the inside story," beamed Adeline. "I made him pay me a week's wages every Saturday night and he figgered you'd beat him terrible—he give you two hunnerd and sixty eggs for the privilege of paying a housekeeper wages. He thought them eggs was my wages. So the only way he could get out of it was to marry me or pay you to take me off his hands. If you'd been a real trader, Bill, you could have got a flock of hens out of him for taking me home!"

Surcingle Bill drew a long, deep breath of resignation. He squeezed his wife's hands.

"Adeline," he said hoarsely, "I'm cured!"

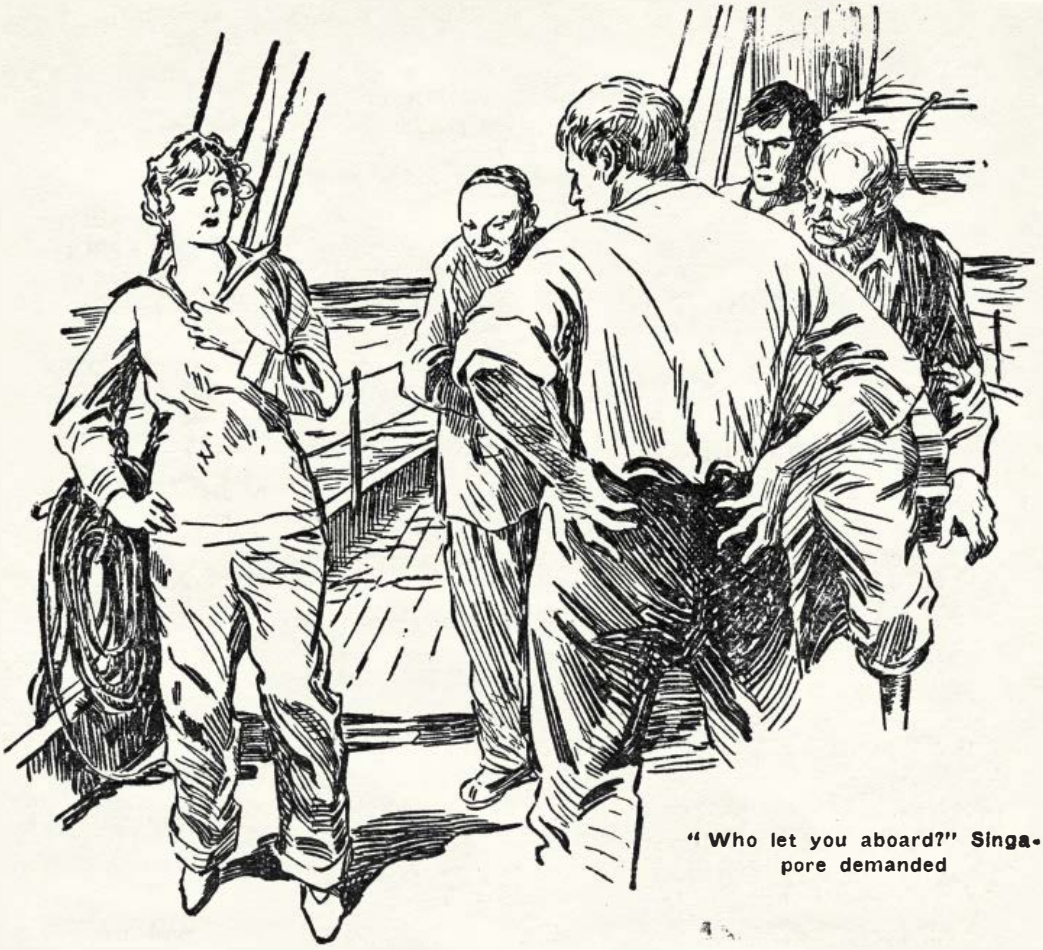
THE END

Food from Insects

MANY bugs are good to eat. Indians used to scoop up ants by the handful and swallow them alive. In Mexico they eat the eggs of a big aquatic bug; sheets of matting are sunk into a pool, and when the eggs are laid on the water they are lifted off and dried. They go into cakes. Jamaicans consume tastily broiled crickets by the plateful. In Arabia it is red locusts, to be "gathered in the morning while the dew is still on their wings," as a traveler explains. And what a dish! "In taste it resembles green wheat, having a very delicate vegetable flavor."

Natives of Australia collect the bugong moth in bags, to be roasted over hot coals—they "taste like nuts and abound in oil." Two authorities on insects, C. L. Metcalf and W. P. Flint, even go so far as to say that we, too, might enjoy a rich insect sandwich now and then. White grubs and May beetles have been analyzed by chemists; they are as nutritious as corn. "It would, in fact, be difficult to give any sound reasons why we should consume quantities of oysters, crabs, and lobsters," they point out, "and disdain to eat equally clean, palatable and nutritious insects."

—*T. S. Retlaw.*



"Who let you aboard?" Singapore demanded

The Monster of the Lagoon

By GEORGE F. WORTS

What was the mysterious inhabitant of Little Nicobar lagoon? Singapore Sammy didn't know, but he was prepared to meet the Devil himself

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

SUCH an evil name had the South Sea island of Little Nicobar that few white men had ever gone there. Legend said that a terrible monster, which no man had ever seen and lived to tell of, lived in the lagoon on the island. One man, Gurt Vandernoot, had built a stone house beside the lagoon, but he vanished in 1907.

Sammy Shay, known as Singapore Sammy, and his partner, Lucifer (Lucky) Jones, owners of the schooner Blue Goose, learned that Vandernoot was supposed to have found many valuable pearls in the lagoon and concealed them there before he disappeared.

Singapore and Lucky were headed for Little Nicobar when they made a brief stop at Penang There they met a remarkable character, Laughing

Larry McGurk, "the guy who can't be killed," a young fellow who had been given six months to live by a doctor and who had already spent four of them in trying to die—without success. Larry joined up with the two adventurers.

Also in Penang was Professor Bryce Robbins, who had just inherited seven million dollars and wanted to do something big for science—such as bring back alive the monster on the Little Nicobar lagoon. Sammy and Lucky agreed to take him along. They also signed on, as quartermaster, Pegleg Pyke, an old sailor who had lost a leg in a night encounter with the monster.

Lying in the harbor at Penang was the Wanderer, palatial yacht of Hector Barling, rich American, who was cruising the world with the socially ambitious Mrs. Mabel Farrington and her beautiful daughter Julie. They also heard of the monster.

CHAPTER V.

ANCHORS AWEIGH!

PROFESSOR BRYCE ROBBINS came aboard the Blue Goose early the following morning to discuss with Singapore Sammy the special equipment which would be needed for the expedition to Little Nicobar.

He inspected the schooner from cutwater to counter and expressed his approval of her slim lines, her staunchness and the shipshape condition in which her owners maintained her.

Captain Jones followed the tall, lean-jawed man about, listened to his remarks and scowled continuously.

The young scientist was crisp and decisive. He knew just what he wanted, and he did not hesitate to speak his mind. When he learned there were two tons of dynamite in the forward hold, with which Singapore and Lucky Jones had planned to blast the lagoon and shock the monster to death, the professor decisively ordered that the explosive be set ashore—or thrown overboard.

He let it be known that he was financing this expedition, chartering the Blue Goose, for the sole purpose of bringing the monster back alive.

"It must be brought back alive, and we must prepare to bring it back alive."

"Sure," Sammy agreed. "But I've got to look after the lives of my crew."

Professor Robbins asked him what steps he was taking to safeguard his crew.

By way of answer, Sammy told the Malay *serang* and a deckhand to open the 'midships cargo hatch. Stacked in neat piles at the bottom of the hold were steel bars about a yard in length which resembled bayonets. At one end they were sharply pointed. The other end was flat and contained holes.

Singapore explained that these bayonets were to be fastened all about the deck rail, with the pointed ends sticking out about two feet over the water. The flat ends were to be lugged to the rail. The bayonets were to be spaced about six inches apart.

"I heard from an old pearler," the red-haired man explained, "that pearling luggers have gone into the lagoon—and never came out again. That's why, when we go into that lagoon, this old hooker is going to bristle with steel like a porcupine. If any deep-sea fish tries to wrap itself around the Blue Goose, it won't get far."

The professor was reluctant to approve of this arrangement. He seemed to have more solicitude for the monster than he did for the schooner's crew. He had found, in a Penang shipyard, a diving suit which he thought might be useful. It had been left there by an outfit that had gone broke trying to salvage a sunken treasure ship in the Strait of Malacca.

"It was made for deep-sea work," the professor said. "It's steel—and uncrushable. It has articulating joints, a face plate of glass almost two inches thick, a steel armored air hose—and it looks like a man from Mars. Shall I buy it?"

"We might use it," Sammy said. "I'll show you the arms locker."

He took Professor Robbins down into the main salon. Laughing Larry McGurk, the man who couldn't be killed, was at work with oiled rags and cleaning rods. The Pelican's mate was oiling and cleaning a sub-machine gun.

"We've got six of 'em," Sammy said, "also some sawed-off shotguns, plenty of small arms and a dozen cutlasses."

They discussed ways and means of capturing the monster of which nothing was known regards size, shape or weight. They

agreed, however, that the strongest tackle available should be purchased.

The professor, Singapore and Lucky Jones went ashore to attend to tackle and to inspect the deep-sea diving suit. Larry McGurk remained aboard to check off supplies from the supply boat which had just come alongside.

THE rest of the morning he spent reclining in a Bombay chair, studying the beautiful white yacht that was anchored a half mile astern—the Wanderer. He saw men holystoning her decks and polishing her brightwork. He saw a man and two women descend her accommodation ladder and enter the immaculate white tender alongside. All three were in white. The man was a chunky little figure who wore a snow white sun helmet. Of the two women, one was slim and young and one was stout and middle-aged. Both were blond.

The slim, young one stirred vague memories, but McGurk could not distinguish her features because of the distance. But he wondered, sighing, if she was the girl, the dazzling little beauty, who had come into the Blue Grin last night.

He watched the tender proceed to the landing stage at the foot of Beach Street, and he watched the trio disembark. With binoculars he confirmed his suspicions that the girl had beautiful legs. The trio vanished.

Early in the afternoon a motor boat brought out the tackle, the armored diving suit, and the professor's dunnage, including a dozen large and small chests containing scientific apparatus and supplies.

Pegleg Pyke, flashing his gold-tipped fangs with excitement, arrived in a sampan shortly before dark with his sea chest and a case of Demerara rum.

The Blue Goose, completely outfitted and manned, was ready to start, but Captain Jones waited for the night wind and ebb tide. At eight bells, midnight, he ordered sails up and anchor aweigh. The sails filled to the steady breeze from the north, masts strained against the slim and beautiful hull, the schooner slipped through hissing water, aflame with the green phosphorus, and passing the yacht Wanderer, with its rows of glittering white lights, started down the Strait of Malacca—toward what dark and ominous destiny!

CHAPTER VI.

GONE OVERBOARD.

HECTOR BARLING was in a beastly temper. He was peevish and disgruntled. He was indignant. He had been grossly mistreated and he resented it. He was, indeed, so upset that he had been unable to sleep all night.

His guests were responsible. He had spent most of the day with Julie Farrington and her impossible mother in the bazaars of Penang. He had bought Julie every *sarong,* every trinket she had expressed a liking for. And he had done almost as well for her mother.

The day had been very fatiguing to Mr. Barling. The strong tropical sunlight had given him one of his headaches, and he had acquired another bad sunburn—one that would certainly blister. And his personal physician, Dr. Nelson Plank, who always accompanied Mr. Barling on his cruises, had rather coldly informed him that if he continued taking veronal for headaches he would have something worse than headaches to contend with.

As a consequence of all this, Mr. Barling's dinner had not agreed with him. He shouldn't have had that third serving of golden pheasant casserole, or drunk that fifth glass of champagne.

All in all, it had not been Mr. Barling's day. Nor his evening. It was really the evening that rankled and kept Mr. Barling awake throughout the night.

In the evening he had gone looking for Julie—this had been shortly after dinner—and found her again standing in the bows, staring across the magical moonlit night at that little tub of a schooner.

Perhaps because of the accumulating vexations of the day, he gave way to the

impulse which he had stifled so nobly the previous evening. He swept Julie into his arms—and tried to kiss those sweet, soft, seductive lips.

A punch in the nose had been his reward. It spoiled his maneuver and sent him backward with such force that he tripped over a neat pancake of rope and sat down so heartily that his headache almost leaped out of his head. But it returned like a thousand white-hot spears. And the other extremity of his spine hurt even worse.

But that wasn't the worst of it. The worst of it was that Julie had gazed down at him with the utmost abhorrence and said, slowly and distinctly, " You pig! I detest you! "—and had walked away, leaving him sitting there, stunned, as it were, before and behind, and pouting as his indignation kindled.

" A pig! " he panted. " So that's how the land lies! So that's how the wind blows! "

He remained in the bows, glaring malevolently at the blue schooner for almost two hours, trying to adjust himself to the finality of this disappointment. But Hector Barling was not a man easily discouraged, or he would not have been the multi-millionaire he was today.

He made up his mind to tell Julie just what he thought of her. He went to the door of her suite, intending to tell that high-handed and ungrateful young lady a number of things calculated to benefit her. He found a note on the door, saying that she was not to be disturbed. Angered by this, he pounded on the door with his fists. But Julie did not answer.

MUTTERING to himself, the owner of the Wanderer retired to his own suite, undressed for bed, and attempted to sleep. Sleep was, of course, impossible. His kindnesses to Julie kept flowing through his mind, while in a parallel channel flowed her acts of ungraciousness.

Mr. Barling leaped from bed presently, switched on the lights, and began to pace up and down his luxurious parlor. He didn't see the moon go down. He didn't see the Blue Goose slip past in the night. But he did see the sunrise.

The glow of salmon-pink at portholes and windows seemed to give him an inspiration. He lit a cigar—a dollar cigar, made to his specifications in lots of five thousand, kept at the proper degree of moisture by an electrical humidifier—and tasting this morning like burning sheep's wool—he lit this cigar and went storming into his captain's quarters.

" We're getting under way at once," he informed Captain Milikin, who was too sleepy to grasp the importance of his owner's pout. " We are starting for New York immediately! "

" Not Johor? " the captain said, knuckling his eyes.

" Not Johor," his owner shouted. " New York! At once! Now! This instant! "

" Very well, sir," the captain said, and did as he was bid.

Mr. Barling went to the bridge to take personal charge of the departure. His red-rimmed eyes saw the awakening tropical world with hatred and disgust. Stamping up and down the bridge, as the Wanderer spurned it all with her beautiful white-enameled stern, he felt a species of mean pleasure stealing over him.

Julie would be sorry. Ah, yes, indeed! How she had been looking forward to that visit with the Maharaja of Johor! How she had been anticipating the fun they would have in Singapore! How keenly she had been wanting to see the old temples in Java!

A pig, was he? Well, he'd show her! He'd make her suffer for calling him that. He'd make her suffer for that punch in the nose! He touched the nose. It was tender and swollen. The Wanderer wouldn't, he decided, stop anywhere on the way home. They'd only pause. They'd hesitate only long enough, when it was absolutely necessary, to take on oil for the Diesels.

Thinking of Julie's disappointment made him feel better. He almost smiled, thinking of Julie's disappointment. It was what she needed and richly deserved. He de-

cided on his new attitude toward her. He would be haughty and aloof. He would treat her coldly. He would smile at her suffering.

His pleasing reveries were suddenly intruded upon by a woman's scream. The scream came closer. A moment later, Mrs. Farrington, with her hair in kid curlers, her complexion blotchy and unhealthily inflamed, came screaming onto the bridge. In her pink dressing gown she was awful to look upon.

"Julie!" she screamed. "She isn't on board!"

"What's this?" Mr. Barling squealed, after a moment of dreadful silence.

"She isn't aboard! She's not in her suite! She's gone! She packed a suitcase! She left a note saying not to worry but to go on and forget her! Forget her! I'm going to have one of my heart attacks! Why don't you do something? Why don't you say something?"

"Hell," Mr. Barling said.

CHAPTER VII.

STOWAWAYS.

UNDER a morning sky of dazzling blue, the Blue Goose was bowling down the Strait of Malacca with sails tight as drumheads, with a wake as straight as an arrow feathering out astern. Off to port, the Malayan Peninsula was a sharp green line on which whipped cream clouds were piled. Off to starboard, the island of Sumatra was a thread of misty heliotrope.

Mate Larry McGurk was at the wheel, bare-headed and bare-footed, his rough blond hair spilling about in the spanking breeze, his feet planted wide apart against the roll of the deck. He was getting the feel of the schooner, and deciding that she was a perfect lady. Now and then he glanced off to the weather horizon, which looked a little squally.

Singapore and Lucky Jones were below, checking off stores in the lazaret. Professor Robbins was in his cabin, unpacking his boxes of scientific paraphernalia. And Pegleg Pyke was stumping about forward, coiling down ropes, singing an old chantey, happy to be at sea again.

It was Senga, the *serang*, who found the stowaway. Larry heard his hoarse yell. Then Senga and Pegleg Pyke came aft with the stowaway between them. He was hardly more than a boy—a thin, homely, black-freckled boy of nineteen, with a button nose, bright little black eyes which danced with derision, and an insolent young mouth.

His black hair was shaggy and flecked with bits of oakum and straw. The suit he wore was shabby, shiny and out at knee and elbow. His denim shirt was in rags. He was grinning impudently.

Pegleg said, "Caught him hidin' in the for'ard hold, mate."

"Take the wheel," the mate said. He looked the stowaway over and the boy's grin slowly faded. Larry McGurk's sapphire Irish eyes were cold and unwelcoming. But the little black eyes stared without wavering.

"WHO the hell are you?"

"Who, me?" the boy retorted. "I guess I'm just a bird o' passage, mate. I ain't afraid o' nothin'. I'll work my way."

Professor Robbins, Sam Shay and Captain Jones came up from below. Lucky's blue-black brows met in a fierce scowl.

"What's this?" he asked.

"A stowaway," Larry McGurk said. And: "What's your name?"

"Pete Cringle."

"Where you from?"

"Who, me? Most everywheres, mate. I'm a deep-sea diver by profession. I was in Penang yesterday when this guy here"—his dirty thumb indicated the scowling scientist—"bought that deep-sea divin' outfit off of Hin Jok. I was figgerin' you might want the guy who went inside it."

"Keep on talkin'," Lucky advised him. "You ain't said nothin' yet."

"I'm an American citizen, mister, if that's what you mean," the boy said. "I

was in Australia, but I didn't like them Limies. An American don't stand a chance there. I bummed my way on a copra boat from Sydney to Macassar, and I stowed away on a Chinese trader from Macassar to Penang. That was six months ago. Since then," with dignity, "I've been associated with this salvagin' bunch that was tryin' to salvage the gold ingots off the old City o' Benares. She went down off Cape Tamuntalang somewheres, but we didn't even find her. That's how come I was on the beach in Penang and saw this guy here buy my old suit."

" How deep water did you work in in that suit? " Lucky asked.

" Ninety fathoms."

" You're a liar."

" I ain't. That suit's good for more pressure than that."

Sam Shay said sharply, " Do you know where we're headed? "

" Who, me? Yes, sir. We're headed for Little Nicobar."

" Who told you that? "

" A guy in The Mudhole—a souse. Little Nicobar is okay with me, Mr. Shay. I don't care where we go. I'm the best deep-sea diver on the Indian Ocean and I ain't afraid o' no monster in no lagoon. I'm lucky. And you guys can use plenty o' luck."

"How'd you get aboard? " Pegleg growled.

" I swum out last night while you was eatin' and snuck aboard."

" Put him to work, Larry," Singapore said, "chippin' anchor chain. Professor, it looks like this expedition is about as secret as an active volcano. When did you eat last, mutt?"

" I can't remember back that far," Pete Cringle said.

" Tell Ah Fong to fix him some breakfast," Sammy instructed Pegleg.

" You can use me in that divin' suit, cantcha, Mr. Shay? " the ratty-looking youth eagerly asked.

" I'll wrassle with the idea," Sam said. Lucky Jones, a diver of long experience, questioned the stowaway and reported his talk to Sammy with the recommendation that the " fresh little mug " be enrolled in the crew.

" He knows divin' and he seems game," Lucky said, " even if he has got a lip a mile long." Thus did Pete Cringle, who had run away from his home in Hoboken at the age of eleven and been wandering since, become a member of the schooner's crew.

FOUR bells in the morning watch had just sounded when the presence of another stowaway was announced. Singapore Sammy was taking a turn at the wheel when the shriek of terror rang out, muffled, from the forward end of the ship.

The shriek was long and lusty. It was followed by muffled yelps and howls.

Gripping the wheel, Sam stared forward at the point from which these disturbances seemed to originate.

Hidden by the jibs, a woman was hysterically saying, " It was a spider the size of an eagle! "

Accompanied by Pegleg Pyke and the best deep-sea diver on the Indian Ocean, the second stowaway appeared. Pegleg Pyke was in a state of blustering anger. Pete Cringle was grinning evilly. This stowaway was as trim a figure of a girl as ever graced a quarterdeck. She wore a sailor's suit of white duck which was rumpled and smeared with green and buff paint.

" She was hidin' in the paint locker, Mr. Shay," Pegleg Pyke remarked in the voice he might have used to say, " She was openin' the sea-cocks, Mr. Shay."

"Take the wheel," the red-headed man growled. With fists on hips he slowly advanced on the slim girl in ducks. She had recovered from her alarm and was smiling radiantly. Her hair was blonder than blond. It was silver-golden fleece. Her eyes were of the rich reddish brown of autumn leaves. And her color was golden-brown. She was quite as dazzling as he remembered her.

As if mocking him, she placed her small browned hands on her hips and grinned up at his stern face.

" Good morning, Mr. Shay! "

Professor Robbins, Larry McGurk and Captain Jones came up the stairs, followed by Ah Fong, the cook, ordinarily the most imperturbable of men. The stowaway disbursed her smile among them.

" Another stowaway! " Sammy grimly announced.

" Good morning! " the girl laughed. " Good morning, everybody! Fancy meeting you gentlemen in the Strait of Malacca! I think it's simply tur-rific! "

" Who let you aboard? " Sam asked.

" Nobody. I just came aboard."

Singapore was glowering from wriggling red brows. A girl named Sally Lavender had been the latest to destroy his faith in women. Professor Robbins was staring at the blond girl with dazzled gray eyes.

" You're the girl in The Mudhole! " he said triumphantly.

THE stowaway mimicked his astonishment and said, " Yes, indeed! Mudhole Queenie! Will somebody be big and give Queenie some breakfast? Queenie is starving."

" Come 'long," said Ah Fong. " Can fixum."

" Wait a minute," Sam said. " What are you doing here? "

" Escaping," she answered. And her brightly tanned young face became grave. " Escaping from a life of boredom on a yacht."

" What yacht? "

" Wanderer."

" That big white Diesel yacht that was anchored astern of us in Penang? " Singapore asked.

" Yes, Mr. Shay."

" You ran away from *her?* "

" I certainly did, Mr. Shay! "

" You mean you ran away from your husband? "

" Dear, merciful heaven, no," the stowaway said. " I merely ran away from the man who wanted to be my husband. I heard you men discussing this cruise and the monster at Little Nicobar. I was carried away! I was spellbound! It was tur-rific! "

" Pegleg," Sam said, " take a look around this ship and see how many more deadheads we've got aboard."

"Women," Pegleg muttered, " bring bad luck to a ship. And women stowaways is the unluckiest of all."

" But I'm terribly lucky! " the girl cried.

" Stowaways always sing that song," Singapore said. " What are we going to do with her, Lucky?"

" Put her ashore in Singapore," Captain Jones promptly answered.

" Oh, no! " the girl wailed. " You wouldn't be so brutal! You wouldn't let me fall into that little beast's clutches again! "

" Oil," Lucky jeered.

" Oil? " the stowaway cried. " Oh, really? " She was angry now. There was a pink flush under the golden tan. The wonderful brown eyes were snapping. The gay smile was gone. "Maybe you'd like to be dragged off on a cruise around the world by a revolting little pipsqueak like Hector Barling! "

" Who is the other dame? " Lucky interrupted.

" My mother! She engineered it all! Dying to have me marry that pompous little squirt! Having heart attacks if things didn't go just her way! "

" Who is this Barling? " Larry McGurk said.

" You've never heard of Hector Barling —the patent medicine king? The Emperor of Dyspepsia? Barling's Elixir? Barling's Tummy Tabs? Barling's Liver Livener? Why! People cry for it! "

" Never heard of him," Sammy said.

" We will," Lucky growled, " if we run off with his girl. A guy like that would hire a navy. And maybe she's lyin'. Maybe she *is* his wife. Lady, if you think you're goin' to Little Nicobar with us, you're nuts."

For a moment the wonderful eyes became misty. Then this cleared and she smiled. Sammy sensed that she was putting up a game fight—and trying not to let them see that it was a fight.

" I can pay my passage—or I'll work,"

she said. " I'll be delighted to do the most menial work! I can cook! "

SAM glanced at those small, beautifully-kept hands, with their long, shiny, pink nails and said, " I'll bet you never cooked a meal in your life."

" I can scrub floors."

" Or scrubbed a floor."

" I'll bet," Lucky said scornfully, " you never did a lick of any kind of work in your life."

She whirled on him. That whirl verified Sam's guess. It went with music.

" Watch me," she said. " If you think this isn't work, try it."

She snapped her fingers and, raising her elbows, swung into a lively tap dance. Her small slippers twinkled and clattered in the steps of a fast and smooth routine. She flung her arms. She whirled. She stomped. She was as abandoned, as graceful as a young palm tree in a gale.

Mate McGurk cried, "Hot dog!" The girl flashed a grin at him. She ended her dance, and with feet apart and hands on hips said: " Well? "

Professor Robbins yelped: "I know you! You're Julie Farrington, of the Follies!"

" Hey-hey! " the dancer laughed.

" If there's one thing we need in a bad way on this hooker," the sardonic skipper said, " it's a tap dancer."

The girl laughed: " I'm good for raising the morale! "

" How about the blood pressure? " the professor drawled. "Do you do a strip tease? "

Her smile faded. She looked at him wearily and said, "I don't think I care much for that remark."

" How," Singapore asked, "did you wiggle aboard?"

" About an hour before we sailed, Mr. Shay, I rowed alongside in a dinghy from the Wanderer. You were all aft or below, so I went forward, climbed aboard with my suitcase, kicked the dinghy off, and hid in the paint locker. I'd have been there all day if it hadn't been for that spider. Oh, how I loathe spiders."

Laughing Larry McGurk said gravely, " Did you bring your lunch? "

" Only some water."

" Ah Fong," Singapore said, "will get you something to eat."

" A caviar omelette, Ah Fong," Laughing Larry said, "some anchovy hearts, and a bottle of the Nineteen-Twelve Chateau Yquem."

Julie Farrington stopped smiling again. She looked at him with steady brown eyes. " Mister," she said, " I'll bet my stomach has traveled as far on beans as yours has. You're talking to a working girl."

Ah Fong brought her suitcase from the paint locker and installed it in an empty stateroom. Miss Farrington breakfasted and reappeared on deck, more alluring than ever in silk lounging pajamas of navy blue. The deep blue brought out the golden color of her clear young skin and contrasted sensationally with the pale-gold excitement of her hair.

Lucky Jones was at the wheel. She told him she simply adored sailing vessels, and she tried to make him talk. But she made little progress with the black-browed, scowling skipper. Lucifer Jones answered her with grunts, shrugs, and other revelations of an unyielding nature.

He said bluntly, "You're wastin' your time on me, baby. If you think that's oil, take a look at the course."

She looked tired. But she went forward with fresh determination to where Singapore Sammy was sitting on a hatch cover, smoking his calabash, watching the gyrations of a flock of sea gulls off to starboard, and letting the breeze blow through his red hair.

"MR. SHAY," she said, seating herself beside him, " you must have led a terribly interesting life."

" Kid," said the owner of the Blue Goose, " I quit falling for that line before you quit wearing square-rigged underwear."

" You aren't a day older than twenty-seven! "

" I learned young."

She tried persuasion. Singapore Sammy

puffed at his calabash, watched the sea gulls and grunted his answers or made none at all. Her voice became husky with effort.

She said, "When I was a little girl, in Amityville, Long Island, I used to throw pebbles at a granite rock in the back yard, wondering how long it would take to wear it down. Now I know."

"Singapore tomorrow," Sammy said unfeelingly.

She retired to her stateroom to weep. But when she reappeared for tiffin she was her gay, charming, debonair self. She was radiant and she was witty. She poked fun at them all. She poked fun at Ah Fong. She gave a marvelous imitation of Hector Tobias Barling, his pompousness, his pouting.

Her audience was with her every inch of the way, but when tiffin was over, Lucky Jones said, "We hit Singapore early tomorrow morning. Be sure you're packed, lady."

Singapore went to his cabin. Larry McGurk followed him in, and closed the door. He seated himself on Sam's bunk and said, "What are you going to do about the sweetheart of the South Seas?"

"What is there to do?"

"I'm asking you."

"Yeah. I figured you might. As far as I go, she walks the plank in Singapore."

"Sure about that?"

Singapore Sammy was looking out a porthole. He turned and looked at Larry. The blue-green eyes were troubled.

"Are you falling for this skirt, Larry?"

"She kills at fifty rods."

"That makes a way to get killed you haven't tried."

"You're going to have a shipload of corpses!"

"You won't find mine among 'em, Larry. She isn't my type."

Laughing Larry grinned. "I've heard all about your type. Her name is Sally Lavender. They call her Shanghai Sal, and she's given you the run-around so many times you feel like a pinwheel. She's the one who gave Lucky such a raw deal."

"If she wasn't a crook," Singapore Sammy said, "I'd marry her tomorrow. The last time I almost proposed to her, she put knockout drops in my beer and stole the Malobar pearl."

"But you got it back."

"She's the only woman I ever knew I wanted to kill and kiss at the same time. But never mind Shanghai Sal. This little blonde is falling for you. If you want her to stay, I'll let her. What do you say?"

"Put her ashore, Sam. I want to keep on laughing."

CHAPTER VIII.

BOTH BARRELS.

THE wind was falling. By early afternoon the Blue Goose was ghosting along in light airs. By mid afternoon a dead calm had set in.

Because Sammy wished to conserve their gasoline supply, he did not order the engine started.

A merciless equatorial sun beat down on a painted ship on a painted ocean. Pitch softened in seams. The Blue Goose rolled lazily in the ground swell and drifted with antic currents.

After studying the blazing blue furnace of the sky, Pegleg Pyke said to Larry McGurk: "What did I tell you, mate? A woman brings doldrums and trouble every time." And he stuck a dirk into the mainmast and whistled an eerie bar, but no wind came.

Julie came up from her cabin, dressed for hot weather. She wore a soft white shirt and white shorts and was demurely unaware of herself.

Lounging under the after deck awning, Sammy drawled, "Well, the last doubts are cleared up."

"Yes," she said sweetly. "It shows what fate will do to help a deserving girl along."

"Fate or nature?" he asked lazily.

"The minute you say I'm welcome, a spanking breeze will blow. Try it!"

He grinned. "You're a better salesman when you don't say anything. Lucky said

he's going to take you ashore under his own power if we don't find a breeze."

"Some sculptor ought to do a statue of all of you in chromium—to show how soft chromium is by comparison."

"Give Lucky an eyeful and stop talking."

Her eyes darkened. She said, "Oh," coldly and went below. She returned in a few minutes in her blue deck pajamas. Her eyes were still stormy.

"Am I less offensive now?"

"Every little wave is saying, 'She's wonderful!'"

"By the way, Mr. Shay, I'm a terribly nice girl."

"Are you telling me, Miss Farrington?"

"Why can't I stay, Sam?"

"We'd be spending all our time protecting you."

"Would you?" She doubled up her fist, crooked her arm and said, "Feel this!"

The red-headed man grinned and felt it. His grin vanished. The girl's returned.

"Does this girl walk home from a boat ride?"

"The girl snapped at the wrong hook. I was talking about our friend in the lagoon."

"I'd rather be eaten by it than marry the Gaekwar of Gastritis. Sam, it's the first time I've been out from under my mother's thumb. You don't know what courage it took."

"You're wasting time. It isn't my say-so. It's up to Bryce Robbins and the skipper—and Larry."

"If I can persuade them, can I count on you?"

"I make no promises to women after 1 P.M."

"All right, by golly; I'll sell all of them!"

PROFESSOR ROBBINS came on deck. He and Julie talked in low murmurs, but Sammy caught a word now and then, and grinned. Julie was giving him high pressure, with a few hey-heys thrown in. Turning on the personality. He liked the girl and admired her courage, but the Blue Goose, enlarged ten times, would still have been too small.

The dancing lady and the millionaire scientist presently went forward.

Pegleg Pyke came stumping aft from the fo'c's'le.

"Mr. Shay," he said ominously, "that woman's gonna turn this ship keel fer trucks to make you let her stay. Better the rats to leave than a woman to come."

"She goes overboard tomorrow, old timer."

They were startled by the sound of a sharp, small report forward, bouncing off the limp sails. A blue wraith came swiftly aft. She passed the binnacle. Her hair was different. Her eyes were wrathful. She was white. Her lovely mouth was a storm flag.

She passed without speaking, went to the stairs, disappeared.

Professor Robbins came aft more leisurely. Just then Sammy heard a stateroom door slam. Soft, smothered sobbing came up the ventilator. This dwindled. A girl had buried her face, unless he was mistaken, in a pillow.

Sam glanced at the professor. He saw a trickle of blood from the scientist's nose.

"And to look at her," Sam drawled, "you'd think she wasn't any stronger than a kitten."

"Damn her," Robbins said. He didn't sound angry. He sounded sick.

The beautiful stowaway remained in her cabin until Ah Fong rang the dinner gong. She appeared in a slim, frilly white frock, so dazzlingly lovely that the men welcomed her with a stunned silence. She was perfection glorified. She was so radiant that she hurt the eyes.

Dinner began in an uneasy silence, but this ended when Julie went into her performance. There was a light in her soft brown eyes, and Larry McGurk suspected that this was the stowaway's last stand. She was giving them both barrels, the works. She was wittier, gayer, more entertaining than she had been at noon. And Singapore Sammy observed that, throughout dinner, Larry McGurk's face was a dark

and shining crimson and that Lucky Jones looked more sardonic than usual.

Larry McGurk was sitting in his Bombay chair on the afterdeck smoking a cigarette when Julie came up. She saw him sitting there and walked to the taffrail. She sighed, stretched her arms to the stars and said, "Ah, how much sweller it is from this schooner than from that floating penthouse!"

Her voice was that of an exhausted girl. Slim and romantic in the starglow, she looked up at the Southern Cross, an eerie blaze in the sky. "Larry, will you swing your vote if I can line up just one other?"

He was re-lighting his cigarette. In the light of the match he looked at her anxious mouth, her pleading eyes.

"Sure!"

"All right!" she snapped. "Watch me get your vote!"

WHEN Bryce Robbins came on deck, she strolled forward with him. The night was so still Larry could hear the murmur of their voices in the bows. They were there perhaps eight minutes. Then Julie slipped aft. Once again she was pale, her hair was disarrayed, her eyes were wrathful, and her lovely mouth was thin. She stopped near his chair.

"The professor," she said, in a choking voice, "says I can stay."

Larry laughed. "You kissed him into submission."

She seated herself on the broad arm of his chair, with her back to him. The night was as hot as the day, but Julie was shivering.

"How many more people do I have to kiss?"

"You might give Pegleg a whirl."

"All the monsters in all the lagoons in the world aren't worth it. Put me ashore in Singapore!" Her voice was hysterical. "I'm sick of it! I'm worn out!"

"Hold it, baby. My sales resistance might be at a low ebb."

"Not really!" she said, looking around at him.

He got up, clapped his hands to her shoulders, lifted her off the chair arm, and brought her hard against his chest. He lowered his face and kissed her.

Even in the starglow, he could see the wrath in her eyes. But her self-restraint was wonderful.

"That ought to rate a trip around the world," she said huskily.

"You won't need any more votes."

"You don't mean I can stay!"

"Hold everything." He went below. Singapore Sammy was at the desk in his cabin.

Larry said, "Well, Red, it's around to you again."

"I said she could stay if it was jake with you and Robbins."

"When was this?"

"Right after supper."

"So she kissed you out of your horse sense, too!"

Singapore wriggled his carrot-colored brows. "What is this game—postoffice?"

"What does Lucky say?"

"He has been in a daze since he saw her in those little-bitty white pants. He never knew a girl had legs. Tell her to come down here."

Larry went out, leaving the door open. Julie came below promptly and walked in. Her face was flushed, her eyes were brilliant. She looked almost feverish.

Singapore Sammy closed the door and said, "Sit down, sister. There's something I think you ought to know."

And when she had seated herself on the edge of his bunk, Sammy said: "I want you to answer a blunt question with the truth. Are you in love with Larry McGurk?"

Her eyes widened, then narrowed. "I'm not in love with anybody."

"There's something you ought to know. I don't want Larry hurt, and I don't want a nice kid like you hurt. Did you know that he has about six weeks or a couple of months—at the most—to live?"

Julie stared at him. The faint smile vanished. She suddenly went white. And she said huskily, "I hope this isn't a joke."

"No. It isn't a joke. There's something

in his head, some kind of a growth, that is absolutely incurable. A little over four months ago the doctors gave him six months to live. He came out here because he wanted to die in the Far East. And did you hear about the charmed life he leads?"

"No"—faintly.

So Sammy told her about that, too—the sharks and the tiger, the bandits and the cobra. Her eyes were wet.

She cried: "Oh, it seems such a pity! He's so young—and such a fine fellow!"

"But you're not falling for him?"

Julie shook her head. "I like him. I like all of you. You're a grand bunch, but I'm not falling for anybody. And I don't intend to. Can I stay?"

"Yep. You can stay."

SHORTLY after midnight a breeze sprang up. By morning it was blowing a half-gale. The Blue Goose charged down the Strait of Malacca under double reefs.

And with Julie accepted as a full-fledged member of that strangely assorted little company, shipboard life settled into a pattern, as shipboard life on a long voyage always does. The bright central figure was Julie, and her shipmates revealed themselves according to their natures.

Bryce Robbins was so desperately in love that he could hardly eat or sleep. He became more and more irritable and assertive. At every opportunity he made love to Julie, and was indignant when she repulsed him.

Between him and Lucky Jones a lively hatred had sprung up. Lucky, too, had fallen in love with Julie. He turned so sardonic that his former self was, by comparison, a sunny fellow.

Pete Cringle fell victim to a species of puppy love. He thought Julie the most wonderful creature in the world—and told her so. She was so kind to him that he became bold and tried to kiss her.

Only with Singapore Sammy and Laughing Larry did she feel comfortable—and safe. These two treated her as if she were a man. Sam taught her to box the compass and to steer a straight course. But of them all, she seemed to prefer Larry's companionship. Perhaps it was because he had so short a time to live, perhaps because he seemed so immune to her charms.

Little else was discussed these days but the monster of the lagoon: how large the creature was, and how dangerous; how much of the legends they had heard was lies and how much was truth; what its nature might prove to be; how they would go about capturing it.

They agreed—hoped—that it wasn't large enough, powerful enough to sink a hundred and twenty foot schooner.

Lucky came out of the chartroom one morning to announce that, if the wind held, they would anchor inside the barrier reef, off the lagoon at Little Nicobar, the following dawn.

The rest of the day was spent in bolting into place the steel bayonets. They were spaced along the rail from stem to stern on both sides of the ship.

The wind held. Julie Farrington awoke next morning to the rumbling of anchor chain, the flapping of sails, the rattling of blocks, the distant booming of surf on the barrier reef.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ISLAND.

SHE looked out the porthole. Save for bleakly glittering stars and a strange green glow in the distance, the world was still in blackness. The green glow puzzled her, and it made her uneasy. Indefinitely, it was oval in shape—a long, thin oval that seemed to lie mistily on the water about a half-mile away. It glowed and waned and glowed again like an opal or, rather, an emerald with an uncertain pale and mystic fire in its heart.

She heard, in that direction, above the muted thunder of surf on the barrier reef, a low and sustained bubbling.

A breath of sickly-sweet fragrance floated in at the porthole, and she wondered if it was the perfume given off so freely by the

pale-blue monster orchids which Pegleg had mentioned.

The very air seemed charged with uneasiness. Julie shivered and clasped her breast in her arms.

She presently discerned a black mass to the right of the misty pool of glowing green, and she presumed that this was Little Nicobar. She supposed the smoky green oval was the lagoon, and she supposed that it was alive with those mysterious microscopic creatures which are the cause of phosphorescence. She had heard that in some parts of the South Seas the phosphorescent glow is so bright that you can distinguish a face a dozen feet away.

The world was growing light. Soon she could see the dark loom of the island against the burnished black metal of rain clouds. The oval wraith faded and she saw the uneasy glimmer of stormlight on the lagoon and the pale glow of the encircling sand arms and the silhouettes of palm trees.

The sickly-sweet fragrance and the faraway bubbling sounds continued. Wisps and plumes of steam were stealing out of the jungle and floating across the lagoon.

The Blue Goose had evidently made her anchorage under light airs, for there was no wind now. Glassy water, slowly undulating, stretched from the schooner to the island. The dark mirror of the lagoon was shattered by a million dancing feet.

A column of purple darkness stretched from the lagoon to the low-hanging black clouds. The column moved swiftly on the schooner, lashing the calm surface to milky froth. And rain drummed on the deck over the girl's head.

She dressed in her ducks, slipped into the sticky yellow slicker Singapore had given her, and went on deck. The men were standing in a group in the stern, looking at the island. As she joined them it vanished behind a brown curtain that seemed to rise out of the water. The squall whipped the sea into racing white.

Julie went to where Singapore Sammy was standing with binoculars to his eyes, peering at the brownness where the lagoon had been. She glanced at the wet faces of the other men. She was trying not to feel uneasy. Her intelligence said that those old, old legends must be, at least, terribly exaggerated; that Pegleg Pyke's story must have been, in a large part, a product of a sailorman's imagination.

This island was, after all, very much like the hundreds of tropical islands they had passed in the Java and Flores Seas.

Yet she sensed in the very air an uneasiness, a sinister something that could not be defined, and this was not imagination. Studying the intent, dripping faces of the men, she saw reflected the same uncertainty, the same struggle with doubt and skepticism. And when the brown curtain vanished and the island was again revealed under the low-hanging dark clouds, her feeling and the look in the men's faces did not vanish.

A drumlike roll of distant thunder made her jump. She was looking at the lagoon, trying to visualize what manner of creature might live in that inkily blue water, and in her imagination she was picturing a hideous, dragon-like monster of green and yellow, with an enormous head about which lappets and tentacles of awful flesh hung. In actuality, mankind's old conception of a sea serpent. Each ripple, each swift-moving color on the surface of the lagoon made her catch her breath. And she could see in the faces of the men, as they stared at the lagoon, this same wonder and expectancy.

JULIE asked Sam, in an uneven voice, if he had seen anything. And he nervously answered, "Not yet."

"We aren't going in there?"

"No."

The clouds presently lifted a little, the light grew brighter, and the Dutchman's house at the edge of the lagoon became visible in its setting of coconut palms.

Sammy studied it through his binoculars and saw a square gray lump of stone. It resembled a tomb, a very lonely tomb. Until breakfast was ready, he scrutinized the lagoon, raked now and then by showers. He climbed the mainmast ratlines

and perched in the cross-tree. Using the glasses, he saw no sign of life in or upon the lagoon. Sea gulls and flamingoes wheeled above it, but he saw none of them light in the water.

He studied the white coral rim of the lagoon, beginning at the Dutchman's house and moving his glasses slowly until he had completed the circle. He saw no sign of life except for one large, sluggish crab, and he saw only one entrance to the lagoon—the narrow inlet off which the Blue Goose was anchored. The tide was running out in a swollen blue current. He saw a school of porpoises swimming leisurely against the current midway through the inlet. He watched them until they entered the lagoon and disappeared.

At breakfast, Bryce Robbins alone was skeptical. He wanted to take the Blue Goose into the lagoon under power and explore.

Pegleg Pyke said harshly, "Only a fool sets sail for a place where an angel wouldn't dast show a keel."

"Oh, there's no danger," the scientist irritably answered. "It's all in your imaginations."

"That tribe o' head-hunters ain't in our imaginations," the one-legged old sailor retorted.

"Bosh!"

Lucky said angrily, "Yeah! Yeah! You know everything."

"I don't take stock in childish legends."

Sammy cried, "Oh, pipe down. We're on each other's nerves. We aren't going into the lagoon. We will send a party ashore in the small boat and the shore party will take pistols and cutlasses. Pegleg has been here before and will take charge. Who do you want?"

Pegleg looked about the table. He passes Julie's pale, hopeful young face. His glance lingered on the freckled, pug-nosed face of Pete Cringle. "The best deep-sea diver on the Indian Ocean." He glanced at Bryce Robbins, at Larry, at Lucky and back to Sammy.

"I'll take you, Lucky and Larry."

"And me," Julie muttered.

"I'm going, of course," Professor Robbins said firmly. He looked as if he was prepared to add that it was his right, inasmuch as he was underwriting the expedition.

He had said this in settling several other disputes.

Sammy said hastily, "Of course, Bryce."

"How about me?" Julie huskily asked. "I can shoot as straight as any man on board!"

"Don't be silly," Larry said.

She sent him a furious glance and tightened her lips.

Pegleg fixed his sunken, oystery old eyes on the pale, lovely face, the resentful brown eyes.

"They ain't no women in the shore party," he snarled.

"I go if I have to swim!"

SINGAPORE went on deck and instructed Senga, the *serang*, to put the small boat over. He went to his cabin for his automatic pistol. When he returned, a lively argument was taking place between Pegleg, on deck, and Julie, who sat in the stern of the small boat alongside and refused to move.

Julie was saying, "I defy anyone to put me off this boat."

Pegleg implored: "Sam, for God's sake reason with her!"

"But she isn't reasonable," Sam said. "Julie, will you be a good little egg and get out of that boat?"

"No."

"Do I have to grab you by the scruff of the neck?"

"I'll bite!"

"Larry, talk to her."

"Listen, brat," Larry said. "The gentlemen want to *use* the little boat. Will you kindly haul yourself out of it?"

"No."

When the small boat started for the beach, it contained Larry, Pegleg Pyke, Professor Robbins, Lucky, Sam and Julie. Larry took the oars and drove the boat toward a landing place on the beach near a grove of coconut palms.

Julie, in the bows, stared at the island through the drizzling rain. Her heart was thumping. At each surge of the bows her excitement grew. She wasn't using her imagination. There was something in the air that frightened her. It wasn't the low clouds. It wasn't the smell of the jungle. Yet it was as definite as an odor, a sound, a moving object.

The keel grated on the sand. She leaped out, stared through the palms at the white sand dune beyond which was the lagoon and Gurt Vandernoot's old stone cabin. She expected to see something appear at the top of the dune. She tried not to feel so frightened, but her heart was beating against the wall of her chest, and she was as white as a ghost.

She waited for the others to land. She was glad she was so well armed. There had been a moment when it had seemed a trifle ridiculous to be holding a cutlass in one hand, a pistol in the other. But it didn't seem ridiculous now. It seemed eminently sensible.

Even Bryce Robbins, the scoffer, pale and watchful-eyed, carried his cutlass and pistol ashore, although he had said, leaving the ship, that such precautions were fantastic and childish.

And she observed that Larry McGurk, who took nothing seriously, was pale and that a tightness had settled about his mouth.

Sam and the scowling Lucky were grim and watchful. They had spent many years in these islands and they had the look of men prepared for any kind of treachery or trouble.

Pegleg Pyke led the way to the top of the sand dune. The old sailor was still peevish because Julie had come along. In his harsh voice, using his cutlass as a pointer, he told them where he had come through the jungle and out onto the beach.

The clouds had lifted a little, and the base of the black mountain in the middle of the island could be seen mistily. Julie glanced at the mountain, but her eyes were snatched back to the shimmering surface of the lagoon below her. Her eyes roved about, darted here and there over the water. She would have been horrified—but not surprised—to see the water part and a beast of unearthly appearance and dimensions rise up and stare at them boldly from lidless eyes. Her heart beat faster as she pictured it staring at them, then come plunging to shore with great and horrible writhings and lashings. It would churn the water to suds. It would come plunging to shore and up the hill and overtake them, gripped in the paralysis of terror, before they could escape.

Shivering, she stared at the little gray block of stone near the edge of the lagoon, where Gurt Vandernoot had mysteriously lived and mysteriously died. She wondered what his end had been.

PEGLEG PYKE was brandishing his cutlass. "From the base o' that mountain and right down through there is where I run that night—twenty years ago! Right down there past that little stone house I run. The island's sunk fifteen foot since then. There was palms growin' close to the water then. They're gone now. It was one o' them palms I grabbed when the thing grabbed me."

Julie shuddered but said nothing. If she said she was afraid, if she said anything, they would make her wait in the boat.

Sam said, "I suppose it's safe enough to go down there."

"Safe enough in the daytime," Pegleg said.

"How about these natives?" Lucky asked.

"Just keep clear o' the trees."

Bryce Robbins made a sound of impatience in his nose and started briskly down the slope toward the lagoon. He called back, "There's nothing to be afraid of. You can see there's nothing to be afraid of."

Julie glanced quickly at Sammy. He was looking at the lagoon, frowning a little, a doubtful man struggling to be skeptical. He felt her eyes on him, and flashed her a grin.

They followed Pegleg and Bryce down

the slope to the Dutchman's house, but Julie kept wary eyes on the lagoon. She wasn't afraid of the natives, but the lagoon, in its blue innocence, frightened her as nothing had in all her life.

The Dutchman's house was no farther than twenty feet from the water's edge. It had been built of slabs of coral rock neatly fitted together and it had the look of a structure that would last forever. Shaped like a paving block, it was about twenty feet long by fifteen wide.

On the lagoon side, about five feet from the ground, was a row of eight equally-spaced five-inch loopholes. Julie caught the glint of light on them and saw that they were not loopholes but peepholes covered with thick glass.

A whirring sound behind her made her spin about with a cry which she quickly stifled. But it was only the sound of flamingoes circling out over the lagoon from the jungle.

Bryce Robbins said impatiently, "You people act as if you expect to see a ghost. Let's have a look inside." But his voice was none too sure.

They went around to the rear of the stone cabin, where the door was. It was open. It was a narrow door of iron or steel an inch thick, hung on hinges like those of a bank vault.

It was caked with rust. There was a heavy bolt on the inner side, and there was a steel socket set into the masonry to accommodate this bolt.

Singapore said, " Someone had better stand guard."

Lucky said, " Watch out for snakes. It's blacker in there than the heart of hell."

Julie was staring into the darkness, wondering about the mysterious man who had lived here so many years.

Larry said, " That roof was built to last, too." It was reënforced concrete, constructed by laying small iron pipes crosswise in layers, then flowing on cement. Successive layers of pipes and cement made a roof eighteen inches thick.

The cabin doorway exhaled a breath of dampness and mold—the characteristic smell of poorly ventilated stone houses in the tropics.

SINGAPORE flashed on an electric torch. Julie saw a floor littered with rubbish. She saw dust, mold, fungus, spiders, crabs and scorpions. Large nameless shiny insects scurried to cover. Presumably this cabin was, except for the ravages of time, just as it had been twenty-six years ago when Gurt Vandernoot died in it or abandoned it.

Sammy said, " There's two rooms. There's a stone wall down the middle, dividing the cabin. And there's another iron door."

Sammy, Bryce Robbins, Pegleg and Lucky went inside. When they announced that there were no snakes, Julie followed them. Larry remained outside to keep an eye on the lagoon and the jungle.

The door in the stone wall was closed. About five feet from the bottom was a round hole, probably a peephole, three inches in diameter. Below it, near an edge, was a large keyhole.

Sam put one eye to the peephole, but saw nothing. He put his fingers into the hole and tried to pull the door open. He said, " It's locked. When Vandernoot left, he locked that room."

Lucky growled, " We gotta see what's in that room. How do you know the Dutchman's skeleton ain't in that room? I'm goin' back to the ship for the acetylene torch."

" And leave us here, marooned? " Julie cried.

" Maybe you better come along."

" Oh, I'm not afraid! "

" Naw, you don't look afraid," he jeered, but he didn't persist.

When he was gone, Julie said, " How did Vandernoot build this house? He dared work only by daylight. Where did he go at night? "

" He may have had a ship," Bryce guessed.

" Or slept in a tree," Singapore said.

" Why he wanted to live here at all," the scientist murmured, " is a mystery."

" Pearls ain't a mystery," Pegleg said.

They explored the room. They found fragments of books printed in Dutch. They found the spot against the wall where a bookcase had stood. Termites had destroyed all wooden furniture and woodwork.

" This room," Bryce Robbins said, " was undoubtedly his living room and kitchen. That pile of rust was doubtless his cookstove. I presume he lived in this room and slept in the front room."

"At night," Julie said, " he would go in there and lock himself in. Walls a yard thick, that roof and this steel door kept the thing out—if it tried to get him. The thing may have caught him unexpectedly. It may have fooled him and come out in the daytime!"

She started t o shiver and called, " Larry, are you all right?"

His voice answered, " Everything's okay. It's going to stop raining."

They investigated the room until Lucky returned with the oxy-acetylene blowtorch and set to work cutting through the steel door. It took him more than an hour to cut around the massive lock which was riveted inside the steel slab.

He said presently, " Here she goes." With a mechanic's hammer he dealt a sharp blow to the semicircle of steel he had cut with the torch. The steel half-disc fell inward.

He pulled the door open.

The five of them crowded about the narrow doorway and stared into the darkness of the front room. The floor was littered with rubbish. Against one wall were the remains of an iron single bed. The mattress was nothing more than shredded fragments. The legs were columns of red rust.

There was no skeleton.

Pegleg panted: " It got him! I knew it got him! He was careless. He went outside when he should 'a' been locked up in here—and it got him! "

Bryce said irritably, " He may have died a thousand miles from here."

" No, he didn't. He got careless. He was here fifteen years. I've heard tell he was a friend o' the monster's. Mebbe he was and mebbe he wasn't. But it got him in the end."

The one-legged old sailor was puffing with excitement. His voice was shrill. " Sam," he shrilled, " I'm goin' to spend the night in this room! "

CHAPTER X.

PEGLEG'S PLAN.

JULIE uttered a shriek. Sammy growled, " Don't be foolish, Pegleg."

" Foolish? " the old sailor panted. " It's what I've wanted to do for the past twenty years—see the thing with my own eyes! I'll do what Vandernoot did. I'll lock meself in this room. I'll clean off them peepholes. There's a moon tonight. Here I stay! "

Lucky entered the argument. He declared it was damned foolishness.

"You boys don't understand," Pegleg pleaded. "How would you feel if year after year you wondered what kind of a critter it was mashed your leg off? What if it's foolish? Call me anything—but here I stay tonight! "

" The lock's gone," Sam said.

" Lucky can fix another."

" No."

" Fiery hell," Pegleg cried, " ain't I the only man in the world who met the thing face to face—and lived to tell it? Ain't it my right to have first look at it? And it won't be risky. Because *you're* gonna lock me in! "

" Oh, Pegleg," Julie groaned.

" Weld it up," he shouted, " and put a padlock on the outside. There's a good big padlock in the paint locker. I want to be locked in, and I don't want to be let out till tomorrow mornin'."

" Why?" Singapore growled.

" 'Cause I'm scairt o' meself. I don't trust meself. I might give in to temptation and rush out and give battle to it. Once I see it, I might go daffy. So lock me in. I'll bring ashore a cot, drinking water, rations and rum."

"What makes you think you'll see it?" Julie asked.

"Don't it come out o' the lagoon every night?"

"Does it?"

He ignored the question. He looked hopefully at the semicircle of faces in the dimness.

"Am I bein' selfish?" he cried.

Julie gave a hysterical little laugh, and Lucky jeered:

"Maybe the professor would like to stay with you."

"I don't want comp'ny."

"We won't quarrel," Bryce said. "My only request is that you don't kill it."

"I promise you I won't kill it!"

"Then your proposal is satisfactory to me."

But Sammy was reluctant to give his consent. He wanted to size things up first. He went outside. Larry was walking along the beach, shading his eyes against the glare of the clouds, and looking into the water. Sammy asked him is he'd found the cave.

"I think so. But these cloud shadows fool you."

What he believed was the cave was a patch of darkness a dozen feet under water. The beach here was not sand but a solid formation of white coral.

Sam found rocks and threw them in the water. The shadow did not move or change.

Lucky joined them. He studied the shadow and said it looked like a cave to him.

JULIE, coming out of the cabin with Pegleg, saw the three men standing at the edge of the lagoon. She cried hysterically, "Come away from there!"

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. Angrily, she got rid of them. Her nerves, she discovered, were in tatters. Her heart was still racing, her mouth and throat were dry. Not once since she had put foot on Little Nicobar had she been rid of a feeling that a sinister something threatened her and all of them. It evaded her normal senses, yet it remained in the air, and the air tingled with the threat of it.

Not until the small boat was well away from the island did the feeling withdraw from her senses. She was so relieved she could have cried. Her face began to burn as if with a high fever.

Once again aboard, the discussion continued. And Pegleg Pyke remained belligerently determined to spend the night in the Dutchman's cabin.

At tiffin, Bryce Robbins settled the argument by saying, "Pegleg's findings may be exceedingly useful. We must know what this creature is like. If you talk him out of it, I will spend the night there myself."

Pegleg Pyke grinned his evil, gold-fanged grin. He assembled supplies and equipment. He loaded and tested one of the submachine rifles. He stowed a cot, bedding, candles, a jug of water, a bottle of rum, tobacco, a cutlass and the submachine gun in the small boat. Sam and Larry went ashore with him.

Julie did not ask to go ashore. Her morning on Little Nicobar had exhausted her. She felt panicky when the three men started off in the small boat. She climbed to the cross-tree with binoculars and perched there until they returned, but she saw nothing in the lagoon to frighten her, and she saw no unfriendly black faces peering out from the trees at the edge of the jungle.

When the three men reached the stone house, Lucky repaired the door and welded a strong steel ring to the plate that replaced the old lock. He set another ring into the masonry, so that the door could be held shut with the padlock.

Pegleg cleared a space for his cot and placed a grocery box beside it. On the box he arranged the bottle of rum, the submachine gun and an old gin bottle with a candle in the neck.

It was late afternoon when the door was finished. Pegleg was ready to be locked in for the night.

"If you hear me yell," he said, "don't worry. When I clap eyes on the thing, if it's as horrible as I think, I may git scairt

and yell blue murder. But don't pay no attention. Don't come ashore."

" You'll probably be a ravin' lunatic in the mornin'," Lucky said.

The one-legged man laughed shrilly. His oystery old eyes were watery.

" Don't you worry, son," he cackled, and flashed his gold-capped fangs. " I'll be here and, with luck, I'll be tellin' you how it looks. I was never so doggoned excited in all my life. It's like havin' the curtain pulled back and lookin' into the hereafter. Sure you lads ain't jealous? "

Larry grinned and said, " Remember to keep your head on, old timer. No matter what it is, remember you're safe. We'll see you in the morning."

Lucky closed and padlocked the steel door on the old sailor, and the two men returned to the schooner. Julie climbed down from the cross-tree and Sammy took her place. He was uneasy about the natives, he told her. According to all accounts, the Little Nicobar tribe had never been civilized. And there was the rumor of a white chieftain. White chieftains were, as a rule, not to be trusted. But he saw no sign of natives.

He watched Little Nicobar sink into the smoky blue-lavender of dusk. Then the last remaining light ebbed away, and the lagoon became a ghostly emerald glow. Dimly, through the coconut palms, he saw the row of lighted discs in the front wall of the Dutchman's shanty. Pegleg had lit the candle, was waiting.

For what? Sam wished that he had not let that bull-headed old man stay in the stone cabin.

There was very little wind. He could hear the bubbling of the volcanic mud pots clearly above the noise of the surf on the barrier reef. A pale moon in its second quarter rose and floated like a wraith above the mist which now covered the lagoon.

The bubbling of the mud pots, the fragrance of the mammoth orchids, the gleam of the swollen moon in the mist, and the black loom of the jungle shoreline made him definitely uneasy. He had had that feeling, like an unresolved premonition, since the Blue Goose had anchored.

He climbed down the ratlines and joined the group under the afterdeck awning. They were watching the island with the air of people enchanted. It was actually as if that dark and brooding mass was possessed of an ominous, sinister presence which filled the night with the effluvia of menace.

At midnight, Julie tiptoed down the stairs to her room. Lucky, Larry, Bryce and Pete Cringle turned in a little later.

Singapore remained on deck. Near him, in the stern, Senga stood guard with a submachine rifle. Oangi was on lookout forward.

Stretched out in the lazy man's chair, Sammy must have dozed. Senga's brown hand on his shoulder brought him to alertness.

Far away in the night, Sammy heard a dull, slow booming. It was not the surf. It seemed to come from the mountain. He saw, or fancied he saw, a faint, deep-red glow in that direction. It might have been a fire. It might have been the reflection of the moon on a porphyry cliff. The reverberations, low and distant, might have been those of a drum. They presently stopped. He dozed again.

A shrill sound wrenched Sammy from sleep. He sprang from the chair and grasped the taffrail, staring dazedly at the dark mass of Little Nicobar.

Far away, a man was screaming. Muffled as it was, and dimmed by distance, the sound came clear and throbbing. The blood-chilling screams emanated, there was little doubt, from the stone cabin.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.


MEN OF DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
SAMARITAN OF MOLOKAI
IN 1886, WHEN FATHER DAMIEN, LEPER MARTYR OF MOLOKAI, WAS "SHUTTING WITH HIS OWN HAND THE DOOR OF HIS OWN SEPULCHRE," THERE CAME TO THAT PACIFIC ISLAND OF LIVING DEATH A HUMBLE PENITENT, BROTHER JOSEPH DUTTON. THREE YEARS LATER WHEN THE DREAD SCOURGE CLAIMED DAMIEN, BROTHER JOSEPH TOOK UP THE WORK OF MINISTERING TO THE ISLE'S AFFLICTED.
FATHER JOSEPH DUTTON
DUTTON, BORN IRA B. AT STOWE, VT., IN 1843, TRAVELED BY WAGON TRAIN WITH HIS PARENTS AT THE AGE OF 4 TO JANESVILLE, WISCONSIN. HE ATTENDED THE MILTON ACADEMY, AND IN 1861 ENLISTED AS A PRIVATE IN THE 15TH WISCONSIN VOLUNTEER INFANTRY.
WEARING THE BRIGHT-HUED UNIFORM -- SCARLET TROUSERS AND GOLD LACE -- OF A ZOUAVE, DUTTON FOUGHT GALLANTLY THROUGH NUMEROUS SANGUINARY CIVIL WAR BATTLES. HE WAS PROMOTED TO LIEUTENANT, THEN TO CAPTAIN, FOR CONSPICUOUS BRAVERY IN HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING. AT THE WAR'S CLOSE, THE DASHING YOUNG OFFICER, HANDSOME AND TALENTED, PLUNGED INTO GAIETY. HE BECAME A BEAU BRUMMEL AND BON VIVANT. IN STRIKING CONTRAST, HIS WORK FOR THE WAR DEPARTMENT REQUIRED HIM TO COMB SOUTHERN BATTLEFIELDS FOR UNIDENTIFIED DEAD.

Next Week: Melvin D. Purvis, Gangsters' Nemesis

Four men, knowing this fiendish train wreck was impending, could do nothing about it—and died in mysterious silence

"Follow that car!"

Blood on Steel

By WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

Author of "The Bright Forest," "West of Paradise," etc.

Complete Novel

CHAPTER I.

GANGLAND'S HAND.

THE chairman of the board was a banker. He had a gray and frosty eye, and when he centered his gaze on Stafford, the big superintendent of that four hundred miles of main line railroad felt cold in his spine. Stafford met the gaze and returned it with something of hot defiance behind his stiff lashes. He was conscious of the other men ringed around the long table. A spiral of blue gauze from the general manager's cigar drifted across his vision.

The chairman's long, bony finger tapped a large spread of paper. Stafford fumbled in his baggy coat pocket for a loose cigarette. He pulled one out, rolled it between big fingers. He shoved it into the corner of his wide mouth where it hung limp with tobacco bulging out of the end in a fringe.

The chairman said, "All right, Stafford. Here're the figures. Submitted by the accounting department. Gross ton miles for the past three months. Revenue comparisons. Earning comparisons. The board at this special meeting, would like to have the opinion of you and some others on why our tonnage is dropping so sharply, and what remedy might be used."

"I made a complete report to the general manager," Stafford said. A match blazed under the snap of his thumb nail. The glow danced on his lean, strong features. He exhaled without removing the cigarette.

"We have the report," the chairman said. "We've gone over it. I don't mind telling you, Stafford, it sounds preposterous." This last he snapped out like a whip cracking. Never once did he take his eyes from the big super.

"I can't help that," Stafford said. He hunched his shoulders. "As I said, the truck operators on that nice concrete highway, paralleling practically every mile of our main line. They're eating into us. They're going into the small shippers and they're getting the business. And I'll tell you something else that may sound even more preposterous. I purposely left it out of my report so I could tell you gentlemen to your faces."

He paused and looked over that august group. Comfortable, well-fed men in well-tailored clothes. Men whose only contact with the railroad they governed had been between the seats of their pants and the plush they sometimes rode on.

"Well?" the chairman prompted. That long finger still tapped the paper before him with a slow, measured beat.

"If any of you gentlemen," Stafford said slowly, weightily, "would take the time to ride from one end of the line to the other in daylight, and look out the car window, you'd see virtually a parade of trucks. You'd see that most of them looked alike. Unfortunately this state doesn't have any weight, length or width restriction, and so you'd see truck bodies with about the same cubic feet of capacity as box cars. I mean that."

"I think we're all aware of trucks," the chairman said thinly.

"Are you aware of who might be operating those trucks?" Stafford leaned slightly forward, his eyes darkening.

"Trucks should not concern a well managed railroad," the chairman snapped incisively. "If they are an evil—"

"Trucks operated by men like any of us shouldn't," Stafford broke in. His big fist was clenched at his baggy pocket. "But when a gang of ex-beer runners without any beer to run any more goes into the general hauling business—"

"Stafford," the chairman stormed, "you're not trying to tell this board that the reason for a sharp drop in tonnage is because ex-beer runners have usurped the highways and have gone into a legitimate transportation—"

"I'm not trying to tell this board anything of the kind," Stafford retorted. "I'm merely making a statement. That statement is this. Along our line we have a flock of small shippers of one kind or another. Those small shippers have meant dividends to you gentlemen and the stockholders you represent. Three months ago a fleet of trucks under the name of Bow Lines was granted a charter to operate in this territory. Almost immediately other truckers, small fry that never amounted to much anyhow, began to drop out of the picture. There was a story in the newspapers now and then about a wreck, or a fire, or one thing or another. The little independent operators started a howl that they were being ganged on, but the howl, like the operators, was soon hushed up.

"Then the railroad began to feel the inroads of the Bow Line boys. I made it my personal business to investigate. I called on one shipper whose business we had enjoyed for years. A right profitable business. He beat about the bush. He said he was getting a better break on his hauls. He was lying, and he was scared to death. You could tell that. But he wouldn't tell me why, or what had scared him.

"I tried out a couple of other shippers whose business we had suddenly lost. One

man had gone to Florida to rest up and his superintendent said he didn't know anything about the change in hauling methods except that the boss had said the trucks were to have the business. The other bird did a lot of hemming and hawing, but stuck to the story that the trucks were so much cheaper."

"Isn't that a reasonable conclusion?" the chairman demanded.

"But wait," Stafford snapped. "I further made it my business to call on a shipper when one of those trucks was there loading. If I've ever seen a couple of mugs—yes, by hell, a couple of *killers*—in all my life, it was that pair in charge of a Bow Lines truck. That sent me to investigate further and I went to the capital where I got the incorporation data, and everything else I could find out. The president of the lines is a dummy. The real power behind the organization is a gentleman by the name of "Dutch" Jelke—"

"DUTCH JELKE!" An old gentleman at Stafford's right gasped the name, sat erect in his chair and turned fearful eyes toward the chairman. "Did you hear that? Dutch Jelke!"

"Now," the chairman said, "we seem to be getting somewhere." His fingers were clasped before him, his elbows on the table, his shoulders forward. "And so?"

"And so," Stafford barked, "these shippers aren't getting better breaks. They're paying Dutch Jelke and his hoodlums plenty for hauling their stuff and they're paying protection money along with it."

"It looks to me," a director put in weightily, "as though a shipper so approached by a gangster and coerced, would have recourse to law—make some appeal to the police for help—"

"You're not familiar with Mr. Jelke's persuasive methods," Stafford broke in. "You haven't met a couple of Mr. Jelke's salesmen, his soliciting staff. Of course there are shippers who wouldn't take that stuff. Old Man Castrow, for instance, at Pearsall. The man that makes those antique fireplace sets. You know. Andirons, brooms, shovels and the like. Tough old guy, Castrow is. Hard as nails. Little plant, but he ships seventy to ninety carloads a year. Just let one of Mr. Jelke's men, or two of them, say anything to Castrow—"

"Grant that all you say is true," the chairman of the board interrupted. "Grant that this Jelke does have control of the truck lines you refer to. Grant that there is some coercion—"

"*Some coercion,*" Stafford broke in bitterly.

"—this is a railroad," the chairman went on as if Stafford had not spoken, "and it has a certain obligation to the community as well as to the stock holders. You, Stafford, happen to be the operating officer on the ground. You're next to the people we serve. I'm going to look to you, and I think the board will also look to you, to show a marked change in revenue handling. If some gangsters are getting this business away from us by illegitimate methods, and if the law can't help, perhaps there's something else that might be done. At any rate, as long as the railroad is performing its functions well, it deserves an even break with other modes of transportation.

"We can't get the Interstate Commerce Commission to allow us to meet these truck operators on their own ground by meeting truck rates. We can't get any sanction whatsoever from that gang at Washington for any sort of a constructive and defensive move, so we've got to do the next best thing. We've got to depend on the ability of our officers to cope with these situations. If the officers are quite unable to meet these things when they come up . . ."

The chairman's cold eyes met Stafford's eyes and Stafford felt that chill at the base of his spine move upward. The way the chairman left his sentence in the air. He might as well have finished, "we'll have to do something else about our officers." Stafford's big hands knotted. This was his railroad, although he owned not one dime's worth of its common or preferred stock. He had been practically born on the main line. In railroad circles even this pike was

referred to as Jack Stafford's pike because Jack Stafford, the thirty-five-year-old superintendent, had made a transportation record nothing short of miraculous.

"I've taken what steps I've thought wise," Stafford defended coldly.

"You mention a shipper named Castrow," the chairman said. "Perhaps if you'd line up men like this Castrow, and tell them—"

"I've lined them up," Stafford retorted. "I've gone so far as to promise them every protection against any sort of coercion. Take Castrow in particular. I told him what I suspected. He said he had suspected something like that, too. I told him if he cared to defy these people we'd stand back of him. He said he didn't need us, or anybody else, to stand behind him. He said he would stand on his own two feet. He's that way. With the help of Castrow, and some others of the more powerful shippers—"

"What is it?"

STAFFORD saw the chairman's eyes set beyond his shoulder as the gray man spoke. He had not heard the door open. He turned and saw Anne Barrow, his secretary, standing there. He saw her lips partly open, the bar of white behind their redness. But her face was the color of chalk and her full breast revealed the excitement she tried to restrain. Stafford saw her lips move and instinctively took a step toward her.

Anne Barrow said, "Pardon the interruption," quietly. She swallowed visibly. "A telephone call for Mr. Stafford. Would—"

"This, young lady," the chairman said, "is a special board meeting. We'd thank you not to—"

"Wait a minute," Stafford shot at the chairman, one hand held up. "Miss Barrow knows well what this meeting's about. If it weren't an urgent call—"

"It's terribly urgent, Mr. Stafford," the girl said. "Pearsall. The agent at Pearsall—"

"Put it through to me in here," Stafford said. He turned to the desk in the corner. There was an instrument on it. He waited a moment while the board watched him. Then he put the receiver to his ear and barked, "All right."

He heard the Pearsall agent's shaky voice over the seventy-some odd miles of wire. He listened with the white showing at the knuckles of his clenched right hand. He listened with a tightening at his throat, a hardening of the long line of his jaw. Then without saying any more than, "I'll be right along," he slammed the receiver on the hook, stood on slightly trembling knees and faced the board.

"That was Pearsall, gentlemen," he said, trying his best to appear calm, but with flame burning in eyes and cheeks. "The agent at Pearsall. An eastward freight train has just been wrecked on the hill west of Pearsall with the loss of four lives, including that of Castrow, the shipper."

He didn't realize how he was gripping the edge of that table.

The chairman, gasping, said, "My God!"

A director on the left of him said, "Castrow! You don't mean the gangsters—"

"But how, Stafford?" the chairman thundered.

"The agent says he doesn't know just how it happened," Stafford spoke, and his voice sounded strained and hollow. "The agent says all he knows is that two cars loaded this morning in Castrow's spur got away on the grade, rolled out of the spur and down the main line right in the face of the eastward freight train. They hit on a curve. The first the agent knew about it was when the freight's conductor came running into town half out of breath and said the engineer, fireman, head brakeman and another man were killed. The other man seemed to have been riding the runaway boxcars. The conductor described him. It was Castrow."

"But, Stafford," the chairman bawled. "It's—it's incredible—"

A loud wail broke over the division point, a ghostly, eerie cry. Stafford straightened and listened. The wrecker call, the sound all railroaders dread, a sound that

strikes to the railroader's heart as though it might be the echoing cry of the souls gone out in the spill.

"If the board," Stafford bellowed above the rise and fall of the siren, "will please excuse me—"

The chairman waved him off. "The board will expect a detailed report."

CHAPTER II.

BROKEN CHAIN.

ACROSS the cluttered yards at system headquarters, under the summoning scream of the wrecker whistle, men came running, pulling on coats, buttoning shirts. In the roundhouse, the foreman shouted an order which meant sure delay to the eastward passenger train shortly due. Under the flare of glaring torches, the foreman instructed a helper to take a nearby passenger engine and hook it onto the wrecker equipment.

Lanterns whirled along a section of yard track, a switch light changed from green to red, and a yard engine backed in on the big hook and the flat cars and supply cars. The big hook came out, looming grimly in the shadows. The big hook's crew of operators climbed aboard even while the equipment was in motion.

Stafford looked at his watch, compared it with the official clock on his own office wall. It was 7:35 p.m. He started for his overcoat when a small hand on his arm detained him. His pulses were drumming, his nerves in a tight bundle. He turned to meet Anne Barrow's eyes.

"Look out for things," he said. "Don't know how long I'll be down at the wreck. Who were the engineer and firemen killed?"

The girl kept her eyes averted. She said quietly, "Uncle Roger Beekman and—"

"Poor kid," he said quickly, impulsively, as he climbed aboard Slim Baxter's red caboose, and that funereal gentleman tossed his lantern in the highball sign. The flares and the lights along the train fell back. The engine barked twice, throatily, and hissed from its open cylinder cocks hot white vapor in spurting jets. The drivers turned over to the thunder of the sharp exhaust. The wheels screeched into motion. Calls from men aboard to men on the ground. The pulsing of power through the caboose frame. The wrecker roared out to the high line.

Big Jack Stafford stood on the rear platform. His battered hat was tight on his head, the brim flopping low over his smoldering eyes. His mouth was a tight, grim line. He watched the yard lights slip behind them. The wheels, clacking over the joints, slapped out the steely song of speed.

Stafford looked at his watch. Forty miles an hour. The metallic bang of tires on joints told him that. Forty miles. Creeping. He pulled his hat down farther. His mind was on the wreck. Four men died. Three of them innocently. Dutch Jelke! His knuckles in his baggy pockets were white and pink in streaks and the nails of his long fingers bit into his palms.

Front page hero. Always his picture in connection with one thing or another. A wide face with small eyes and thick lips. A shallow face with a sort of fixed, inscrutable smile. Stafford had seen it many times. Stafford had never figured that some day the railroad would feel this mob leader's iron hand.

How did you get at people like that? The question smacked at his harried brain. Yes, how did you? When even the federal government could never get anything on him, too. How did he know it was Jelke? He didn't. There was no way he could prove it. He stalked into the caboose.

IN the caboose, the crew sat in a grim and brooding silence. Stafford looked at these men and thought, "By hell, I've got to protect you. Every one of you. It looks like the first gun's been fired in a real war. Castrow evidently defied Jelke's boys. Castrow's dead and three innocent men with him. That means any one of you is liable to die any minute."

He sat down in a corner of the long cushioned seat and listened to the hammer of the wheels on the rails.

The wrecker left its train at Rocky Point, the next station west of Pearsall. Big Jack Stafford boarded the wrecker's engine there and gave orders.

" We'll have to go up behind the wrecked train and hook into it," he snapped. " Pull all the cars left standing back here and put 'em in the hole so's you can get close to the spill with the big hook. Ready, Slim?"

Slim nodded mournfully. The engine whirled away at the rainy blackness. Stafford crouched behind the engineer, looking ahead with narrowed eyes. Every muscle was tense, every nerve on edge, and he did not relax until a red dot in the black distance suddenly swung widely, and a red flare came to life.

The grizzled engineer blasted out two sharp barks on the throaty whistle, shoved his throttle home, exhausted air from his brake valve port. They were into the long curve when they picked up the wrecked train's flagman who climbed on the gangway steps and hung there.

The flagman yelled up, " About two hundred yards, Mike." And the engineer nodded gravely.

Stafford dropped down to his knees and held a lantern to the flagman's face. The face was white and drawn.

" How bad is it, Ed?" Stafford queried.

The brakeman turned to him wide eyes —eyes that had looked at something horrible and could not get the vision out of his mind.

" Plenty—awful," the brakeman said, blinking. Then, absently, he added, " Poor ol' Roger. He never had a chance."

A quick picture in Stafford's mind of Anne Barrow's grim-jawed uncle, the man who'd pulled the throttle of that ill-fated train.

The wrecker's engine came down behind the freight's caboose. Stafford jumped to the gravel. He waited to give no further orders. These men were all veterans. They would know what to do.

Stafford loped along the train in the soft, wet gravel. He was on the inside of the long bend. He couldn't see the head end from where he ran, but he saw a glow in the sky, and a hand clutched at his heart. Not fire! God, not that!

Then he saw the lights, and exhaled jerkily. No fire, thank heaven. Just a cluster of flares, torches, lanterns, flashlights.

The wreckage. He came up to the wreckage with pounding pulses. He was conscious of people. Hushed voices, huddled, curious people. Rain falling softly. A man came out of a group, carrying a trainman's lantern.

" We got Roger out," the man said. It was the freight's conductor, Bo Little. His voice was tremulous. " He—died quick."

" Scalded?" Stafford jerked out. He was looking into the ditch. He was looking at the helpless wheels of a giant locomotive, pointing to the wet sky.

" Pretty bad. Crushed, too. The doc says he died almost instantly. Mercy. Over here."

A group parted. In the ghostly flicker of light four stiff forms under some grayish covering came into view. A tall man straightened in the rain. The flare on the ground beside him spat and spluttered.

The conductor introduced the superintendent to the medical man. Stafford mumbled his query.

" Frightful," the doctor said. " Especially Castrow's death. Cold-blooded murder. Nothing else. You want to see Castrow? Better not look unless you've got a strong stomach."

" Mangled?" Stafford eyed the doctor narrowly. He had seen wrecks, had been in a few, but never had he faced anything like this.

" The skipper here can tell you," the doctor said.

" How about it, Bo?" Stafford turned to the freight's conductor.

" Musta been hell," the conductor said a little shakily. " Roger an' the fireman. They died quick. Harry, the head brakeman . . ."

Stafford saw the conductor turn away with a shudder.

" Harry who?" The big super put his hand on the skipper's arm.

"Leland," the skipper choked. His lips clamped shut.

ANOTHER family man. A brakeman old in the service. Wife, four kids, three of whom were still in the grade schools. Stafford massaged his nostrils savagely with the back of his hand.

"What about Harry?" he pressed.

"He was alive when I got over, after the spill," the conductor faltered. "Great God! He suffered. One leg wrenched, or crushed clear off. Bleedin' . . . He lived long enough to—to beg me to knock him on the head. That's all, Chief. Harry died with his mouth twistin' from agony."

Stafford turned a white, drawn face to the doctor. "What've you found out?"

"Castrow," the doctor said, "must've been alive. I examined the wreckage with your conductor. Evidently somebody tied this man Castrow to the front end of those two box cars, cut them loose on the grade, and sent 'em down into the freight engine. From what the dying brakeman said, I can't figure anything else. God, what a way for a man to die! Tied to a runaway freight car, heading headlong into a speeding locomotive. If you'd look under that blanket you'd see what I mean. What a fiendish thing—only a fiend could have done it . . ."

Stafford swung on his conductor. "How about it, Bo? Tell me everything you know right from the beginning. You've investigated the best you could. You've been on the ground."

"There ain't much," Bo Little half sobbed. "Just this: I was ridin' in the cupola of the caboose when we headed into this curve an' started the climb into Pearsall. Lookin' ahead, an' not seein' a thing. You can't see around that bend. Bang! It was like the air goin' into emergency. Like the train'd parted, a coupler pulled out, or somethin'. We got a heavy jar back there.

"I waited a minute, then I told the flagman maybe we better protect the rear although the engine didn't whistle out a flag. I—"

"How fast was Roger running there?" Stafford broke in.

"Maybe forty or forty-five when we hit the curve."

"Go on, Bo."

"I figgered, when Roger didn't whistle out a flag, something musta gone awful wrong, so I took my lantern an' hurried over. Everything was black, no headlight, no fire of any kind, an' got me rattled an' I come up on the wreck sudden-like. There it was, just like you see it now. Cars smashed an' splintered, engine turned over in the ditch. Took me a couple minutes to get myself together. I found Roger pinned in, half his body out of the cab. He was—gone. I crawled into the upturned cab an' got half cooked but I got the fireman out. He was dead, too,

"Then I found Castrow, or what was left of him, an' I heard a groan, an' I found Harry pinned under a part of a box car. Well, I just told you about Harry. When Harry gasped an' heaved up an' passed out, I started runnin'. I didn't wait for anything else. I knew there wasn't any more I could do. It was a coupla miles up to Pearsall, but I made it. I found the agent an' got him to call you."

"These wrecked cars," Stafford spat. "The two that evidently came down the hill and plowed into you. Anything about them to tell us anything?"

"Nothin' except a broken brake chain on one. Looks more like somebody sawed it. It breakin' that way would let the hand brake on those cars free in the spur. That spur bein' a slight descendin' grade westward . . ."

Stafford got the picture. A slight descending grade, two loaded box cars with the slightest sort of shove, rolling free. Rolling out to the main, through the switch, down to meet the freight pounding up against them. Castrow strapped, or tied somehow to the head car of the two, looking at death as the freight train's headlight swung to cover him. Too late for the freight to do anything because a headlight will not gleam around a curve.

"You got a car or an ambulance, or anything here?" Stafford asked the doctor.

"Both," the doctor snapped. "I'm hold-

ing the ambulance until the state police show up. But if you want to go to town—"

"I want to go to town," Stafford barked.

CHAPTER III.

"THEY LEAVE NO TRACE."

CASTROW'S widow was one of those calm, quiet-moving women who have lived full lives and who can look at death in latter years with a sort of detached view. She had taken the news of her husband's death with a quick shudder, a slight recoil as if from a blow, a moistening of the eyes. She had asked to be alone a little while, but when Big Jack Stafford was announced to her, she saw him readily.

She held to a crumpled bit of handkerchief while she answered Stafford's queries as best she could. She answered without a falter, without evasion.

"No, sir, Mr. Stafford," she said with that strange quiet in her tone, "he didn't say anything to me about anybody threatening him. He acted this morning like he had something on his mind, like he was in a fighting mood. You know, when you live with a man forty years, you can pretty generally tell his moods."

"How, fighting?" Stafford pressed lightly.

"Well, like it was some deal he had bothering him and a competitor had made him mad, or something like that. You know. Sort of do or die attitude. He didn't say a word, but I sensed it. He went to his factory this morning as usual and came home to dinner. He went back at one and —and—"

Stafford didn't ask her any more. That was enough. Castrow was the type who confided to no one. You could tell that by one look at him. He had lived with this woman for forty years and he was willing to wager Castrow's wife knew practically nothing about the man's business.

Down at Castrow's factory a dozen frightened employees were lined up in the dead man's office. A town policeman was with them. A policeman guarded the loading platform of the factory and others were stationed at the spur switch.

Stafford made a hasty examination of the switch and the derail which should have thrown those two boxcars free of the track before they could enter the main. The derail showed nothing. It had not been broken. It had merely been unlocked and thrown off the rail. The switch, however, had been run through, and sprung, and a section crew was ready to repair it on Stafford's order.

Returning to the factory building he faced Castrow's helpers. One man, clad in shiny, but presentable clothes, and pasty pale, identified himself as the office helper. Bookkeeper, clerk, stenographer, shipping chief. The others were factory men.

It took Stafford but a moment to determine that none of the factory workers had been on the job after four o'clock.

"Under the NRA," the bookkeeper explained, "we've cut hours and hired more. They work from eight to four."

Stafford scratched his long jaw.

"When'd you last see Castrow?" he presently asked the office man.

"Right at five," the man answered. "He said he was going by the post office and asked if I had anything to go. I told him I'd take care of the office stuff when I left. He went out. That door there. He went out and I didn't see him again."

"At five," Stafford said. The wreck had happened at a little after six. He did some mental arithmetic. It would take the conductor a half hour to get up the hill at top speed on foot to report the wreck. Yes, the two cars must have been set loose in the siding at just about six.

"When'd you leave?" Stafford snapped.

"Five thirty," the clerk answered.

"And you didn't see anything or hear anything out of the ordinary?"

He hadn't. He had shut the door, locked it, tried the lock. He had left a small night light in the office burning as was his custom. Yes, the two cars were in the spur. He had noticed them, and had seen nothing out of the way with them. He had gone on to the post office and then to his home.

"How about visitors?" Stafford suddenly demanded. "Anybody call on Castrow yesterday or today?"

"Yes, he had visitors," the clerk responded. "That office there." He pointed to a door. "That was his. That's where he saw people. Visitors seldom came in by here. They entered from that other front door right into his office."

"You don't remember any visitors specifically then?"

"Well, there were two men. I just got a glimpse of them." The clerk's eyes narrowed as if in an effort to help his mind recall. "Couldn't tell you what they looked like except they were pretty well dressed up and drove a nice car. It was the car I noticed. All black and big and shiny. They came in and stayed only a little while. That was close to noon yesterday. After they left it seemed like Mr. Castrow was in—a temper if I might put it that way."

STAFFORD'S lean frame stiffened. "Temper." He mumbled the word. "You didn't get a look at that pair?"

"Not a look. No, sir."

"And he—Castrow—didn't say anything to you about them?"

"No, sir, Mr. Stafford. He never said much about anyone to me. He—"

"Who loaded those two cars?"

The clerk looked at the frightened, shrinking group. He pointed to two men. "Oscar, there. Oscar and John."

"How about it?" Stafford strode toward them. His chin was out. "How about it when you loaded? Anything happen? See anybody?"

The one called Oscar stepped forward. "Not me," he said. "We just trucked the cases into the cars from the factory, like we always do—this mornin'. Two cars. Loaded like usual. Why?"

But Stafford was not there to answer queries. He told the clerk and the others to wait where they were for the state police. "They'll want to ask you some questions, too, if they ever get here."

He went out into the rainy dark. He stood with legs wide apart on the little loading platform. He pushed the brim of his hat up in front so that the rain brushed his face. He tried to see the whole action in his mind. Just how everything was done. Take Castrow, now. He was in his office. He was sitting there when two men came in and—

The state police came with a great blare of sirens and roaring of motors. Two were on motor cycles and there were two automobiles. All wore uniforms except the captain. Stafford heard his name called. He turned back to the office.

"I'm O'Leary," the captain said. "What's it all about?"

"Come in here and I'll tell you," Stafford said. He led the captain into the dead man's office. He shut the door and told his story. He left out no detail, even giving an account of the directors' meeting when the fatal wreck was happening.

"Maybe," he said, "I should've appealed to you birds before. Maybe I should've told you my suspicions and asked for some help but—well, what the hell are you going to do when you can't prove anything?"

The captain, who was a squat man with a red face and a genial eye, twisted his cigar around in his lips, spat at the stove, removed his cigar and said, "You coulda told us, yep! But what the hell good would it have done? Like you say, you can't prove anything."

He walked up and down the room, his eyes on the floor. Suddenly he stopped and looked up.

"Jelke," he said. There was a gleam in his pale blue eyes which was not genial. "My personal meat. I've been laying for him for years. I've almost had him a time or two. And a time or two he's made me look—look like hell." This last, he said bitterly.

"Sure it's Jelke," the captain continued after a deep draw on his cigar. "His boys, like you guess, came in here yesterday. They stood right in this office, an' they probably told Castrow he would ship by truck hereafter, or else. Castrow bein' the kinda guy you say he is, probably said, 'You go to hell.' And then went right on

with his business. He loaded himself two cars this morning. Your railroad train was to pick them up tonight. He was showin' Dutch Jelke how little scared he was. Dutch's boys, however, were waitin'.

" Dutch's boys let him load. Peaceful. Nothin' out of the way. You say there was a broken chain under the first of the two cars that went down the hill. All right, the chain was busted. So what? Dutch's boys did it. Dutch's boys removed the derail from the track so's the cars'd go right onto the main line.

" They took Castrow practically at his office door tonight. Maybe clapped somethin' over his mouth. It gets dark around five, now, so they were safe. This place is out of the way. Nearest street light half a block. Easy. They took Castrow, trussed him up, fixed him on those cars, and right at the right time they let the cars go. Blooie! You got a wreck. You got four dead. What evidence have you got?" The captain paused and his blue eyes were cold steel. They fixed Stafford with their intent stare.

"A BROKEN brake chain." Stafford said it hopelessly.

" Exactly," the captain spat. " There's nothin' layin' around you could hang them by. Not a damn thing. Did anybody find any rope holdin' Castrow to that wreckage?" The question came with the crack of a shot, sharply and suddenly.

Stafford straightened. " My God! I—didn't look. I—"

" Well, I looked, Stafford." He shot his cigar into the coal bucket. " I looked well. I've just come from that wreck. So far as any logical evidence goes, those cars might've moved on their own accord because a brake chain gave away. Castrow might've seen 'em goin', jumped on 'em an' tried to stop 'em. Nobody saw the cars gettin' away, nobody saw Castrow get on 'em, nobody saw the wreck. Three men—yeah, by God, four men—looked at that wreck, saw it comin' an'—died. We got the conductor's version of what the brakeman said before he kicked off. Would that stick with a jury? Yeh, Stafford. We could go out an' bring the Dutchman in, an' try to make a case, but there're a couple lawyers he's got who'd have us lookin' like monkeys before we even got started.

" We could say the dyin' brakeman saw Castrow tied onto those cars, on the front of the first car, but any evidence would end there. No rope. No evidence of bein' tied, what I mean. I hunted that wreckage for rope, high and low. I had two good men helpin' me. If there had been any rope, an' there must've been, somebody was close by when the smash came, watched the conductor investigate, then start for town. This somebody then removed the ropes an' beat it. Castrow wore wool gloves with long wrists to 'em. He had 'em on when those cars hit. He had 'em on when we found him.

" If ropes had been cuttin' into his wrists, the gloves kept it from showin'. Frankly, all we've got is a guess."

Stafford looked at the captain for a long moment. " A guess." He mumbled the words slowly. The captain was right. These gangsters never left anything around. He could see where it would do no good at all even to make a noise about it. His eyes brightened perceptibly.

" We can't take Dutch Jelke in," Stafford bawled. " All right. We won't take him in. But, by hell, these shippers will ship their freight. If we have to have 'em protected by police guard we'll get the guards. Sooner or later we'll find somebody that'll slip. Meanwhile, you do what you can. And I'll do what I can."

Stafford turned to the door which led into the connecting room. He reached for the knob and the door came open in his face. The clerk stood there.

The clerk said, " The long distance operator's been trying to locate you, Mr. Stafford. There's a call—"

Stafford saw the receiver off the hook on the clerk's high desk. He reached it, clamped it to his ear.

" Just a minute, Mr. Stafford," an operator's voice said in answer to his gruff " Hello."

It was a long minute and Stafford was suddenly conscious of an almost indefinable fear clutching at him. He heard the hum and roar of the open circuit. Then a voice, "All right, Miss Barrow. Go ahead."

Invisible fingers stirred within him, touched coldly at his heart as he heard the operator mention his secretary's name.

"Mr. Stafford," Anne Barrow's voice sounded. "Hello—"

"Yes, Anne," Stafford said tightly. "What—"

"How soon can you come?" Anne Barrow's voice was audibly shaking.

"What's wrong?" Stafford knew she was fighting to hold herself calm.

"There's a gentleman here to see you," Anne Barrow said. "A Mr. Winthrop. Do you know—"

"Winthrop of the Concrete Products Company?" Now his mouth was dry. Winthrop was another like Castrow.

"Yes, Mr. Stafford. He says it's very urgent. He's here in the office. He says he can't leave until he sees you. He seems to be—"

Piercing his ear, crashing upon his brain, come the shriek. Through that strand of wire, through the rubber cylinder of the receiver, from across seventy miles of black, wet night. A wild, quick cry. Anne Barrow's voice . . .

Stafford snapped into action. Suddenly he was battering the hook, yelling "Hello! Hello!" and Captain O'Leary was pressing behind him yelling, "What's happened, Stafford?"

But Stafford was answering no questions for the moment. He banged at the hook, a voice answered. The operator.

"You're still connected, sir," the impersonal tone said.

"Police headquarters in the city," Stafford shouted. "Make it quick."

The captain still asking questions over his shoulder. The long pause. The frightful loss of seconds.

Finally a gruff male voice saying, "Headquarters."

"Stafford, of the Central," Stafford snapped. "Something's happened in my office. Rush a squad car. Look for Winthrop—James W. Winthrop, and Miss Anne Barrow. I'm coming right along . . . from Pearsall."

"Something else bust loose?" O'Leary queried as Stafford slammed the receiver and backed away from the instrument with sweat on his brow and his fingers in his pockets fishing for a crumpled cigarette. "If I can give you a lift—"

"I need it," Stafford snapped. "Quick. Your car."

CHAPTER IV.

"CALLING ALL CARS."

THE state police car carrying Superintendent Stafford, of the railroad, and Captain O'Leary, roared into the city with the siren wide open and the throttle almost wide open. The seventy miles from Pearsall was clipped off in exactly one hour.

Stafford found the sergeant in charge at police headquarters, approached him with his heart in his mouth.

The sergeant, who knew Stafford, smiled broadly.

"Hey!" the sergeant said. "What the hell is this? A picnic or a run-around?"

Stafford stared blankly. "You mean—"

"The man at the desk took your call, or what he thought was your call," the sergeant explained.

"We sent a coupla men around to your office to see what the hell," he continued.

"Well?" Stafford pushed the soggy hat brim up from his eyes. He wanted to shout, to grab this calm, impersonal officer by the neck.

"Well, nothin'," the sergeant said flatly. "Nobody there. Nothin' wrong. I tried to call you back at Pearsall, but a man there said you an' O'Leary'd lit out hell-bent for here in a state car, so—"

"You can't mean," Stafford said slowly, "you didn't find Miss Barrow or—or Winthrop or—"

"Nothin'," the sergeant said. "Everything quiet. Nothin' there. Nobody."

Stafford whispered, "Great God!" He clawed for the telephone.

It took him three minutes before somebody at Anne Barrow's house answered. Anne's mother came on.

"Why, no, Mr. Stafford," the woman's voice came through, "she isn't home. She called a little after the wrecker left. She said she was staying at the office until she heard from you again. I've just been over with Roger Beekman's wife—my sister, you know. I—"

"Thanks, Mrs. Barrow." Stafford clicked the hook.

He got through a call to the Winthrop home. He got much the same information from Winthrop's daughter, who answered.

"He said," the girl told Stafford, "he just had to see you. He seemed awfully worked up about something. And since he hasn't come home or we haven't heard from him, Mother's beginning to get terribly worried. He's not been to your office, Mr. Stafford?"

"Probably on his way home now," Stafford evaded. He hung up. He turned to the sergeant. In quick, terse sentences he told the officer what had happened since a little after seven that evening. When he came to the scream he'd heard over the wire the hair on the sergeant's neck seemed to bristle.

"You go on home," the sergeant said. "Or back to your office. You leave this to me. If O'Leary'll gimme a lift, we'll see what we can see."

"I'll give you a lift," O'Leary said.

Stafford reluctantly went to his office. He found the lights burning. For a long moment he stood just inside the door, looking around. His eyes rested on the telephone instrument. The receiver was on the hook. Everything was in place, everything as it should be.

Stafford swung around and studied the phone. The phone was on a table back of his swivel, and there was a chair on the opposite side of the table. Anne Barrow evidently had been sitting in that chair, telephoning. Sitting that way she would naturally be facing the door which opened from the hall. What had she seen at that door to cause her to let out that scream?

He shook his big head savagely. He felt so utterly inane, helpless. Had these gangsters tracked Winthrop to his office, seized the man and made off with the girl? Had they suspected Winthrop of having unburdened himself to the girl? If so, they would take her to find out how much she knew, and if she didn't tell . . .

Stafford shoved a crumpled cigarette into his lips. When he touched a match to it the shreds of tobacco protruding from the end blazed up. He blew on them, sucked deeply, exhaled viciously through his nostrils. If he knew where to find this Jelke—

At midnight the telephone rang and it was Anne's mother. She was worried. Stafford thought to evade her questions, especially since she had the death of her brother-in-law to keep her occupied, but he would have to tell her sometime. He told her enough. He heard the woman gasp.

"Surely nothing can happen to her," Mrs. Barrow pleaded.

"We'll find her, all right," Stafford promised, but there was no force behind the promise.

TWO o'clock, three o'clock and finally, slowly, the hour hand on the dial indicated four. Hollow-eyed, nerves on edge, floor littered with half smoked cigarettes, Stafford went to the telephone and gave the sergeant at headquarters a prodding.

"Nothin' yet, Stafford," the sergeant said. "I got men out tryin' to pick up some trace of the girl an' Winthrop, but apparently nobody saw either of 'em leave the depot. We've tried to find somebody that might've seen 'em, but we can't. I'll let you know. If we don't get a clue by daylight, I'm gonna let the commissioner have it. I'll call in the commissioner an' maybe you can talk to him, an' he can work out somethin' . . ."

They called in the commissioner at eight o'clock that morning after a fruitless night of trying to pick up some clue to the missing girl and the manufacturer and shipper.

The commissioner was a large gentleman, florid of face, calm of bearing, and subject to the whims of politics. He was a man of many friends and contacts, and naturally of many obligations. He was suave and listened attentively, even sympathetically.

He listened without interruption while Stafford, chewing on his nerves, pumped out the facts as he knew them to be. The commissioner sat with his fingertips together and his eyes contemplative.

When Stafford finished a period of silence ensued while the commissioner thought of something to say. Finally he spoke.

" We can do one of two things, Stafford," he said. " We can send out the wagons and drag in all the gangsters in town—every man known to have a record. We can even bring in Jelke. You know how much good that'll do. We can get a big spread in the papers, and the chances are a hundred to one we'll get nowhere."

" But what've we got law for?" Stafford broke in desperately. " This girl may be dead, or undergoing torture right this very minute—"

" I know, I know," the commissioner said. " Then there's the other course," he went on, stroking his mustache. " We can go about this thing quietly. We can put the best men we've got out to run down every possible clue we can turn up. We'll find the girl. Don't fret about that. No gang wants that girl. At least I don't think they want her. If we go about this thing quietly—"

Stafford jerked to his feet. " You're the boss," he said. " You suit yourself. You fellows handle it your way. I'll handle it mine, if I get any break at all. I'm going to protect my shippers. I'm issuing an order now to all station agents, and I'm sending an army of men of my own picking out along the line this morning. They'll protect the shippers with their lives. The shippers who care to use the railroad can do so without fear. And the first attempt Mr. Jelke, or anybody else makes to stop me from carrying out my plans . . ."

Stafford left his sentence suspended. He shoved his hands down into the pockets of his damp, wrinkled coat. His eyes were smoldering in deep hollows. His face was drawn, his lean jaw set. That jaw was covered with the stubble of a beard, giving him an added fierceness of visage.

" Protect your shippers, of course," the commissioner said. " I believe you'll accomplish—"

The hall door burst inward. A uniformed sergeant stood there. The commissioner raised his brows. The commissioner said, " Yes?"

" Winthrop," the sergeant snapped. " Found him. Dead."

Stafford sprang forward, his fingers on the sergeant's sleeve.

The commissioner swallowed. " *Dead?*—Where?"

" In his car," the sergeant said. " Pulled into the thicket off a dirt road about five miles west of town. A farmer phoned in about seven and Cap O'Leary of the state police sent a man out with a medical officer. Monoxide gas—"

" Like hell!" Stafford blurted. " Maybe it looked like monoxide gas, but—"

" Exactly," the sergeant said. " It looked like monoxide gas, at first. But it wasn't. Evidence of strangulation. Dead since about nine or ten last night—"

" I got that call from my office at 9:05," Stafford barked. He found himself shaking the sergeant's arm. " There wasn't anything else in Winthrop's car—"

" This." The sergeant opened his fist.

A black vanity compact with the modernistic initials " A.B." in white letters. Stafford felt his throat tighten. He gulped, " That's hers. Anne Barrow's. Commissioner—"

" Get the dispatcher," the commissioner said quietly, addressing his aide. " Call all cars. Broadcast this murder, and the apparent abduction of Miss Barrow. Bring in everybody with a record, or who's suspected of having a record."

STAFFORD understood. Winthrop was a man of means, a great supporter of the commissioner's political party. The time for quiet procedure was not now. He

took the black compact, turned it over and over in his big hands. Twice had his railroad been struck at in one single night. How many times more before he could get trace of Anne Barrow alive—or dead?

His fingers closed over the compact in a tight, clenching grip. Without realizing it, he dropped the compact into his pocket, turned wearily to the door.

CHAPTER V.

THE NUMBER CLUE.

BY nine o'clock that morning, while the sirens of police wagons roared through the city streets, and the great roundup got under way, Big Jack Stafford drew up his own battle line with tersely snapped orders.

He spent fifteen minutes with the general manager who approved every move he outlined. Then, with the general manager's backing behind him, he telegraphed all station agents along the entire line to demand police protection for every shipper who cared to use the railroad.

At 10:45 two special trains roared out of the city. One headed east with sixty-six hurriedly assembled railroad police fully commissioned, and the other shot west with sixty more. The specials were scheduled to run wide open, discharge two or three men at each station, and hurry on. The men themselves were under orders. They were to augment all local police at the several stations, and were to keep watch night and day over all freight loaded and switched. They were armed to the teeth and Jack Stafford had told them to shoot to kill.

Through the afternoon, with train schedules to maintain and constant conferences with the general manager, Stafford hammered away at his job. Now and then local police headquarters called him. Each time the report was disappointing. Had the earth opened and swallowed Anne Barrow she could not have more completely dropped from sight.

All through the afternoon the telegraphic reports came in from along the line. Nowhere was there any evidence of molestation. All shippers who desired to load, and ship by rail, were doing so. Every loading platform had its armed guard. Shipments being loaded, or already in cars on the west, were being picked up by a specially ordered freight train so that all cars could be brought into the city yards before eight that night. It was Stafford's idea to leave nothing on the lines that might tempt the gangsters. All shippers had been advised of the special train's movement, and were cooperating by having their cars ready.

The result was that by a little after five the dispatcher's office reported Extra 1718 East with a hundred and twenty loads, would arrive in the classification yards at system headquarters on schedule—7:15 p.m.—and asked that an engine be made ready to move the through stuff over the east end. A hundred and sixteen of the hundred and twenty cars would go eastward all the way.

Stafford consulted with the roundhouse personally. An engine was ordered made ready. Stafford would use the 2032, one of the largest and fastest in freight service. He would pick his own engine and train crew. He went over the roster in his mind, decided on his men, instructed roundhouse and yard office accordingly.

"I'm not taking any chances, Joe," he barked over the phone to the yardmaster. "Hundred and sixteen buggies going through, and whatever you have loaded here to hang on. Pull your train down to the east end. Right down against the signal bridge. I'm having the engine ready to leave by 9:15. I'd shoot 'em out sooner, but they're in no danger here, and I want the westbound passenger trains to clear first so we won't have anything in the extra's way. I'm giving that train passenger rights from the signal bridge to the end of the line, and God help anybody who tries to get in the way of it."

"You figgerin' on ridin' it, Jack?" the yardmaster queried doubtfully.

"I'll ride it unless I die between now and then." He slammed the receiver in place.

All arrangements for the extra were com-

pleted before six, even to the squad of special agents which was to ride it. He would have cinder dicks well scattered over the tops, in between, and wherever else a man could ride. He didn't suspect that anybody would try to fool with a train in transit, but he just wanted to make sure.

HE shoved a crumpled cigarette into his mouth. His fingers scraped around in his baggy coat pocket for a match. No luck. He tried the pocket on the other side. Cold metal. His eyes widened. He brought out the metal. The black compact. Anne Barrow's compact. He had completely forgotten it. He held it under his desk lamp. He stared with narrowing eyes at the white, modernistic monogram.

Found in Winthrop's car. Whoever had taken Winthrop from this room, then, had taken her with him. Anne Barrow had been in the dead man's car for some distance at least. Where had she been taken after Winthrop had been killed?

There was no answer to the question. He turned the compact over in his big hands. He turned it over and over and then, with a tingling running along the back of his scalp he suddenly stopped, gulped, stared, and wet his lips.

He said, "Holy—" He came out of his chair, held the compact up, examined the back of it closely. There, very faintly, was a number scratched. In fact he had to look with a strain on his eyes, to make out the middle one.

A number—scratched! He made it out as 47-107. The sprawl of the figures indicating the scratching had been done hurriedly, and in the dark because there was no alignment to the digits.

He clutched the thing in his closing fist. That 47-107. Had Anne Barrow done the scratching? Certainly none of her captors would have done it. She evidently had used a finger nail file—the point of a nail file—and had done that under cover of darkness while she rode in Winthrop's car. Had she dropped the thing, then, to give whoever should find it something to go on?

Stafford's blood pounded through his veins. He swallowed, thought of police headquarters, reached for the phone, shoved it away without lifting the receiver. What could the number mean? A boxcar? The railroad had a series of freight cars in the 47,000's. Had it something to do with something one of her captor's had said? It couldn't be a street address. There was, true, a 47th Street, and there could easily be a number 107 on it. But why should Anne scratch it backward? If it indicated a street number, why not 107-47?

His car was downstairs. Perhaps he could find Captain O'Leary. O'Leary might have an idea. 47-107. The figures were large on his brain as he started for the door. He was in the hall when he remembered his top coat. Anne Barrow usually had to remember it for him. He slipped into it, found another badly wrinkled cigarette, tried to get it to draw. It wouldn't. It had a leak in the side. He threw it away, loped down the stairs. 47-107—

Behind the Union Station, over which system headquarters was located, was a large park area. Here Stafford kept his sedan. He raced through the early darkness for it, fumbled with his key, finally got it unlocked and got in.

Backing out was the work of but a moment. He headed into a wide circle which would take him through the station park into the street, a distance of less than a hundred yards. He raced his motor along the high, evergreen shrubbery that lined the drive, approached the traffic signal where the drive entered the thoroughfare.

He had not noticed the car moving ahead of him. He came to a stop behind it because the light was red, had just turned red, in fact, as he approached it.

Stafford's right foot, on the brake, wanted to tremble. That number in his mind. A clue. What would O'Leary think about it?

His eyes, from the red glow of the traffic light above the roof of the car ahead of him, roved over the back of the sedan. Suddenly his breath caught in his throat. He blinked twice. He tried to swallow and couldn't.

He was looking at the white license plate

on the car ahead of him—the white license plate with the black numerals. And the numerals were 47-107.

"Follow that car!"

Stafford's heart stopped. He swung his eyes from the license plate to the owner of the voice at his side. He had not heard his door open, had not seen the thin shadow which had lurked there. Now he saw a lean, sinister profile, felt something hard prod into his ribs.

"Step on it!" The command was low, sharp, and Stafford got a glimpse of the deadly eyes that glinted under the smart hat brim. "He's movin'. Step on it, an' one move I might get suspicious of . . ." A deeper thrust with the drawn gun.

STAFFORD saw the white license plate going forward. The light at the intersection was green. Fighting to get control of himself, fighting to get this all straight in his mind, he let in his clutch, jerked into motion, steadied his foot on the gas and swung into the main street behind the car with the white plate.

"Maybe you'll tell me what this is," Stafford snapped out because he had to say something.

"He wants to know what this is," the man with the gun snarled as if talking to himself and finding, in his observation, a huge joke to enjoy. "You'll know when it's time, Stafford. Just keep behind that car. You lose it, an' I'm most awful likely to lose you. An' that would be just too bad."

Now, of course, Stafford understood the number on the compact Anne Barrow had scratched there. Now that it was too late to do anything about it, he saw the whole thing.

Last night, the gunmen who took Anne Barrow and Winthrop out of Stafford's office, had loaded them into Winthrop's car and had made this same request—" Follow that car!" And Anne Barrow, not knowing where they might be following the car to, had done the only thing she could think of—the smart thing. She'd tried to give the police a clue that, a few hours earlier, might have meant much. And he had had that clue in his pocket the live long day . . .

Were they taking him to his death? Stafford had never thought of death before although he had faced it a dozen times in the course of duty. In wrecks, and spills, and close shaves on the main line. Now that the prospect of it loomed large, he was not afraid.

They paraded through the street, stopping now and then for traffic lights, jerking forward with the flow of traffic. Incredible that, on all sides of him, men and women were going home from their work. Going home to eat and perhaps read or take in a movie or a party. A whistle shrilled, the hoofs of a horse sounded sharply, a mounted policeman galloped past. He could call out to that cop . . .

A turn. He followed the license plate into a side street. They picked up speed now, turned again, came into a squalid residential section. They threaded their way through this, crossed the tracks of a branch line of railroad, roared into open country. And they were going west from town! Winthrop had driven west!

The highway was lonely, being a secondary road with rough pavement. The big sedan kept about thirty yards ahead. Stafford kept his eyes on it. Out of the corner of his eyes he watched the man at his side. If he could only get a chance to throw the man off balance. Maybe by a sudden swerving. Then he could get his brake on, and— But what about that leading car? Somebody in there would be watching, and any move Stafford might make would be discovered immediately.

The big sedan's stop light glowed. The car swung to the left.

"Sharp turn," the gunman at Stafford's side growled. "Ditch. Take it easy."

Stafford took it easy. A side road. A deep woods looming in the headlights.

The big sedan's stop light flared up again. It pulled out and stopped.

"Stop behind him," the gunman said.

Stafford pulled up. Was this where they had found Winthrop's body that morning?

The gunman opened the door. He slid

out, his gun leveled. He said, "Come out on this side."

Stafford eased out. He kept his hands in sight. A second and a third man came out of the shadows from the other car.

"All clean, Squeak?" a man in the darkness asked.

"All clean," the gunman at Stafford's elbow returned. "Nobody spotted us. I watched for that."

"The tape, Charlie?" another voice said.

"Here."

The first speaker came into the headlight aura. Stafford saw the peculiar cleft of his chin, the beadiness of his shoe-button eyes. The face stirred memory. He frowned. Then it came to him. One of the two on the truck that morning at a shipper's. This man had been one of the pair that had manned that truck.

"If you thugs," Stafford suddenly blurted, "will just tell me—"

Crack! The cleft chin's open palm smacked Stafford in the mouth. The man said, "Tell yuh nothin', Big Feller. An' any more cracks—"

But the gunman didn't get far. Stafford's quick eyes saw one possible chance. The man called Squeak was at his elbow. Nobody was behind him. A quick move, a fast jerk on this Squeak's shoulders, and he would have Squeak in front of him. Then—

His timing was faulty. He saw it, even before he completed his first move. The cleft chin saw what Stafford intended to do. The cleft chin raised his gun, brought it down in a swinging arc. Stafford tried to dodge it, but Squeak snapped his head into position to take the blow.

Stafford buckled at the knees. He knew he was going down when the darkness engulfed him.

CHAPTER VI.

RACE WITH DEATH.

BRIGHT dagger thrusts of pain into a large and throbbing mass of mixed light and shadow. Stafford was conscious of the stabs and pretty soon determined the immense and practically vacuous mass to be his head. Consciousness assumed, presently, some definite form and he had a sense of being rolled. A car, moving. Memory flooded him. He was not dead, then. He was not dead. Tape. They had mentioned something about tape. His wrists were taped, too. He couldn't move them. They were fixed tightly at his back.

The car seemed to come to a stop rather suddenly. He must be lying on the floor in the rear with something over him. A lap robe, perhaps. As the car stopped the suddenness of it rolled him against the front seat.

"Stirrin' yet?" a voice asked. Sounded like Squeak.

"Not yet, Squeak," another speaker said. "I musta socked him." The cleft chin talking, Stafford told himself. The cleft chin added, "If Dutch don't raise hell about that—"

So they were taking him to Dutch Jelke? Stafford felt his body stiffen suddenly.

"He told us to bring him in well an' healthy," Squeak said. "Now we gotta carry him in like a stiff."

A clawing hand caught in Stafford's hair, jerked him upright. Stafford gave a decided grunt. It would have been more, but they had tape across his mouth, too. He grunted and winced. He couldn't help it. He weighed a hundred and ninety pounds, and half of that had just been hefted and jerked suspended from the hair.

"He's out of it," one of the men growled. "Looka him squirm." The hair was twisted. Stafford squirmed. Somebody laughed.

"Yuh can't talk, an' yuh can't see, feller," a voice whispered to him, "but yuh can get up an' walk. Get goin'."

Each of his arms was held. Something familiar crunched under his feet. Cinders. He tensed. The pain insisted, but he refused to heed it. Cinders. He listened intently. A long distance off he heard an engine. Were they taking him onto railroad property?

He breathed deeply, tremulously. He stood there like a blind man in the darkness of eternity. An engine whistled, muted

with distance. The railroad wasn't close. He wondered what the next move would be. No one had said anything although he was sure another door had opened and closed. He was not alone. Hard fingers gripped his left arm.

Hinges creaked and he felt the pressure on his arm slacken. "What's he say, Squeak?" the cleft chin's voice queried huskily.

"The big shot's gone," Squeak said. "Couldn't wait. Red says bring the sap in. Take off the shackles. Then we gotta go places . . . quick."

"Geez," the cleft chin said. "I told yuh we shouldn'ta drove around with him so long, trying to wait till he come outta it. When his nibs gets through with us—"

"We hadda sock him," Squeak defended. Then, in Stafford's ear, "Hold them wrists still."

It felt as if they'd taken off half the skin when they pulled the tape on his wrists loose. He rubbed his wrists. His arms were half numb. He then held his arms at his sides. They took the tape from his eyes and he stood in candle light. Even at that he had to blink. The cleft chin, evil eyes glinting, had him covered with a gun. Squeak jerked the tape from his lips, gave him a shove.

"Okay, guy," Squeak said. "It won't be long now."

"Through that door," the cleft chin ordered. The gun in his hand was steady.

Stafford saw the door, opened it. Immediately another gun greeted him. He was looking into reddish eyes under a shock of brilliant hair. The man called Red was smoking a cigarette. He was seated at an old pedestal table on which two candles flickered.

"Dangerous, eh?" Red greeted him. "Hadda take a sock at you, eh? Sit in that chair."

Stafford sat. "I'm still trying to find out why all the interest in me," he snarled. "I'd like to know—"

"Sit down!" Red barked. "Shut up." He shifted the gun around, moved closer.

"He'll ask yuh questions," the cleft chin said. "If yuh'd left that tape on his puss—"

"Beat it," Red blared at the cleft chin. "You've balled enough up for one night. You an' Squeak. Step on it!"

THE inflamed eyes returned to Stafford after the door had closed. The thick lips twisted into a leering grin. The whisky bass said, "You'd like to know. Hunh. Stafford. Big shot. Move freight, eh? I don't see you movin' it, guy. I don't see—"

"How long does this keep up?" Stafford cut in severely. He was missing no detail of the small, low-ceiled room. The table, the candles, the three chairs, the army blanket nailed over the window. There was a door leading into another room different than the door through which he'd come. There was a key in the lock.

"Shut up!" Red snapped again.

"I take it," Stafford ignored the man, "I'm Jelke's guest. I take it that when he gets through with me—"

Red made a gurgling sound in his throat, drew his finger across his neck. Red said, "An' very much outta you, guy, an' I'll be the one that'll have to put down the period." He hefted the gun. "In fact, another crack outta you—"

The blood froze in Stafford's veins. His ears became alert. That scratching sound at the door with the key. A sound like finger nails. Red had heard it too. Stafford saw him shoot one sharp glance in that direction, saw his fingers grip the butt of his gun harder.

The sound was repeated, feebly, and in the sudden, intense silence of that small chamber a low groan emanated from back of the door. Stafford felt his heart turn over. He could see only a picture of Anne Barrow, alive. Anne Barrow, a captive. Behind that door.

The red man seemed to have read his thought. The gunman said, "Don't get any notions."

Stafford had notions. His brain could act with the speed of light in an emergency. This was an emergency. The table, the red-

head, the candles were all five feet from him. How much more there was to the house he couldn't tell, nor how many there might be in it. He needed a weapon. He was sitting on it. The old wooden chair. Maybe if he went at it fast enough . . .

The chair was hurtling through the air, and the gun in Red's hand was spitting viciously in one split second. Stafford hurled the chair, dived to the side. The bullets pinged about his ears. An oath from the table, another shot and then Stafford was coming up under the table with that in his big hands. The candles went off, died as they hit the floor.

At once, as soon as a blue spurt of gun flame shone, Stafford brought the table down where he thought the red hair should be. His aim was poor. The man yelped, dodged back. Stafford, fearing the door would burst open any second and put a quick finish to this battle, and to him, flailed out with his fists. The gun, for the sixth time, exploded practically in his face, and the powder bit his nostrils. He felt his knuckles peel against bone. Then he tripped over the broken table, went down in a heap and carried the red-head with him. Without further ceremony his big fingers found the man's throat. His powerful arms tensed. With one quick, desperate motion he snapped the head against the floor. There was a thud and the struggling figure suddenly went limp.

WITHOUT waiting to examine his victim, without even so much as striking a match, Stafford groped for and found the door with the key. He twisted the key, pulled the door open. He took a step forward, stumbled over something, went down to one knee. His hands groped at his side, closed over a warm arm. The groan was repeated. He found a match and struck it.

Anne Barrow's dark eyes looked up at him in the gloom. Tape across her mouth prevented her from making an outcry. Stafford ran a thumb nail under the corner of the tape.

" Thank God you're alive," he whispered fiercely. " Here. Hold still, Anne. I'll try not to hurt—"

The tape came from her lips. She winced slightly.

" My hands," she said. " Oh, quickly!"

He loosed her hands and her ankles.

" Hurry," she pleaded. " The train. A special. I heard them talking about a special."

" What about it?" Stafford snapped. He was helping her to her feet. She staggered heavily against him.

" I don't know what train, but some special freight I think," she said hurriedly. " It's—it's not to leave the yards tonight. They're fixing to do something to it. I heard them through that door all the afternoon. I heard them plan to get you. Oh, I do hope—"

Stafford silenced her. The noise of a motor came to them. They crouched against a wall. Squeak and his companions coming back? Stafford whispered, " Come over here by the window."

They groped to the window. Stafford released the catch from the inside. Unlike the one in the other room, this had no blanket over it, but it was boarded where panes should have been.

Voices sounded outside as they slipped it up. Around the other side of the house, most likely. He wished he had a gun. He helped Anne through and then followed. They were in total darkness. Their escape would be discovered within a matter of seconds. He swallowed, took her arm, groped his way around the corner of the building. Stafford's foot banged on something hard. He reached down, got it. A huge rock. It would have to do.

Yes, there was the car. The motor was running. A man was behind the wheel. His back was to them. Stafford's hand tightened on the girl's arm. He drew her out.

The man at the wheel went down with a broken head even as the two heard a sharp outcry from within. Stafford virtually tossed the girl's slim form over the fallen man in the front seat of the car. He climbed in at the wheel, raced the motor, threw in the clutch.

Behind him guns spat from the darkness alongside the building, but this was a gang car, and the glass was bullet proof. The lead rained against the glass on his side until he swerved around a corner into a dirt street. Then he let the car out, wide open.

It was some seconds before he could locate his whereabouts. The section of the city was entirely strange, and not until he bore down on a traffic light was he aware of his position. From then on it was less difficult. He gained a wide avenue, raced along that for perhaps a mile, drew over to the curb at a busy intersection.

" Any idea, Anne," he queried, " what'll happen to that train?"

" None, except I heard Jelke say he'd be present to watch the start of it, and you'd be there at the finish. What he meant, I'm sure I don't know."

That was enough for Stafford. The start of the train would be at the signal bridge. Jelke would have to be somewhere near the signal bridge, on the adjoining highway if he was to see the train get out of town. He dropped a nickel in the telephone slot, got Captain O'Leary of the state police on the wire. He spurted what information he had, told the captain Anne Barrow was in a gangster car with him. He described, as best he could, where he'd left the man with the red hair and a couple of his companions.

" Have your men get out on that highway," Stafford ordered, " and keep all eyes open. I'll be at the east end of the yards as fast as I can make this buggy travel. I said I'd be on that extra freight when it left here tonight, and I'll be there."

He glanced at the drug store clock. Five after nine. Ten minutes. He raced out to the car, roared away from the curb.

Why he wasn't stopped by a dozen officers he never knew. He ducked through side streets to get away from lights. He finally crossed a bridge over the tracks, dropped down to the cinder road on the opposite side. The road terminated at the railroad yards.

Stafford almost terminated his career at the end of the road. He got stopped a fraction of an inch, on smoking tires, from the barricade. Across from him, a little distance removed, he saw the activities around the extra with the protected loads—the freight that had passenger train rights.

" If you'll take this car back to the yard office," he snapped to Anne Barrow, " and have the boys take this thug in charge—"

He left her there with the unconscious gunman. His long legs carried him across the maze of tracks. He reached the special freight train, raced alongside its caboose. The conductor saw him, gasped, shouted a question.

" Don't give a sign to move until I say so," Stafford yelled back. " Not a wheel turns."

STAFFORD was a dozen yards from the locomotive, way down near the signal bridge where the yard lead curved out to the main line, when he saw the lights on the highway suddenly go up. He heard the siren of the state police car, saw the powerful flashlight abruptly break into action and split the dark wide open. Almost immediately a low car pulled out from the side.

From the rear of the sedan a sudden burst of firing. Stafford staggered against the engine's tender. Firing. Machine gun. The low sedan suddenly become a streak, pulling away, going eastward. The state police searchlight swinging. A motorcycle cop forging ahead of the police car, and into the glare. The motorcycle suddenly folding up, the cop pitching into the ditch.

Stafford, speechless, goaded his legs into action. He saw the fire from the police car, the sedan gaining distance. He pulled himself up to the gangway of the waiting locomotive. He was just at the deck when he heard the scream of tires, saw the searchlight waver crazily, the police car turn half around in the road and then roll over.

" Great God!" The veins were cords in his throat. The red dot of the gangster sedan swerved on a curve, was lost.

Stafford came out of his stupor. The engineer stood by him. Stafford yelled, " Cut me loose, Harvey."

" But we got—"

"Get off this engine," Stafford shouted desperately, "and cut me loose." He swung on the fireman. "You get off too. For God's sake—"

The fireman followed the engineer down. Stafford yelled, "Look after those men in the ditch up there. Get the crew."

"But we got a train—"

"I'm taking this engine. I'm borrowing it for a little while." Even as he spoke it a grim shadow came into his eyes. Jelke was making a run for it, was he? Stafford looked back at the tender. Why didn't they hurry? The fireman's lantern made a little bobbing motion. Big Jack Stafford took engine 2032 by the neck.

The signals, fortunately, were lined up, because it was time for that freight train to be pulling out. The engine, with Stafford at the throttle, bellowed under the signal bridge, obscured the lights with its cloud of smoke. The needle was right up at the two hundred mark on the gauge. And the 2032 was a baby that could run.

Jack Stafford counted on that. He knew what he wanted to do. He knew he could do it, or turn over in the attempt. There was a grade crossing with this fine new highway just beyond the Eagle River bridge. If the engine just didn't quit on him . . .

The headlight was out on the 2032. The cab lights were out, too. Somewhere, in the black distance behind him, another police siren sounded, but he couldn't hear it. He couldn't hear anything but the music of that giant locomotive talking back to him at the touch of his hand.

THE Eagle River bridge. He kept his mind on that stretch, fifteen miles ahead of him yet. There was no place for the fugitive car to dart out between here and there. The fugitive car would perhaps do ninety on the open road. This engine—

Never in railroad annals has there been a madder race. Stafford swung into a bend and picked up the tail-light of the fleeing car. Another car was coming against it, and he saw the low black body in silhouette. Five miles more and the highway turned far out to the south, circling through a village which was not on the railroad, and then coming into open country again to approach the tracks just this side of the Eagle River.

Stafford watched the ruby dot of light. His throttle was as wide as it would come out on the quadrant, his lever hooked to the last notch for swift running. He had been wondering ever since he had bought these 2,000's, how much they would do. Now, as the darkness fanned past him, the telegraph poles a dim and dizzying blur, he was satisfied. The engine rocked, careened, bounced crazily. Once it hit a low joint and Stafford almost hit the roof of the cab. He held on fiercely and a grim smile played around his mouth. If he had anything at all to do with it, Mr. Jelke would be in at the finish—plenty.

He switched on the gauge lights for a second to look at the speed indicator. It was a new type with a leeway of a hundred and twenty miles an hour. He saw where the needle pointed and swallowed. A sweat beaded his brow. A hundred and fifteen. He didn't know how long the track would stand it. No wonder that dot of red grew closer. Inch by inch he overhauled it.

He wasn't afraid that the driver might suspect his presence. No, that car was making plenty of noise the way it was boiling along. What he did fear was his connection. He was going to make a connection if it was the last act of his life. It was all clear in his mind. A matter of expert timing, of expert running. He was going to win this time, or he would die in the effort.

The sedan was a bare fifty yards ahead of him, still apparently innocent of his presence when he saw it take the curve to head for the village. His lips tightened. He could see the few street lights of the village off there, to his right, gleaming feebly. He didn't need to look ahead on the track. That sedan was enough for him to watch. He watched it until the village swallowed it up.

Beneath Jack Stafford's feet five hundred thousand pounds of live metal lurched,

creaked, squealed, groaned, and thundered at his command. A half million pounds on wheels, hurtling into the blackness over twin ribbons of steel.

The Eagle River came in close to the track now, also on the south of him. Far across the fields, in the direction of the village, which at this moment lay slightly behind him, he saw a pair of headlights undulating over the pavement. His hot throat tightened. His fingers clenched the throttle valve a little more tightly. His pulses pounded, the blood drummed at his temples.

Five hundred thousand pounds rocketing along at almost two miles a minute. A long, low sedan, laden with lead death.

The sedan was closing in. He was parallel with it. He watched it from narrowing eyes. Dutch Jelke . . . five men dead, three of them innocent railroaders . . . three railroad widows grieving tonight over their dead as railroad women do, silently and without complaint . . . Dutch Jelke . .

Five hundred yards to the Eagle River crossing. The sedan's headlights were even at that moment picking out the warning sign. Four hundred yards, and a new pair of headlights were visible far back on the road. Stafford closed his throttle, his hand tightening on the whistle cord. Two hundred yards. The gangsters had seen him. A cab window shattered at his very nose. A bullet pinged off the backhead of the boiler. One hundred yards and Stafford couldn't wait any longer.

FIERCELY he unleashed the two hundred pounds of pressure behind the brass throat of the engine's whistle. Leaping over the earth at fifty yards a second, and he saw the blue gun flame in the sedan's windows. He touched the air valve. This had to be right. Fifty yards, another second . . . With his engine shut off, Stafford heard the scream of the car's brakes suddenly applied.

He saw how they'd hit. All in the fraction of a second. His hand was tighter on the brake valve as the sedan rushed up almost under him. He couldn't look out, but he knew how it would work.

He felt the jar against his smashing, churning high drive wheels. He heard one mad cry, the rasping, fierce rending of metal. He saw the headlights of the car point to the sky, churn round and round. Then he looked and the sedan was piled in a crumpled heap far behind him, the headlights still burning. He blared exhaust air out through his port valve. He came sharply to a stop and looked back again. The wreckage was outlined in another pair of lights now and men were swarming over the road. One wore a uniform. State cops. He heaved the lever over and slowly backed up to the scene.

Rain drove against the office windows, rendering them partially opaque. Big Jack Stafford heaved himself out of his swivel. Anne Barrow closed her note book.

Jack Stafford said, " There's your report for the board. Maybe you can put some embellishments to it yourself."

" I'll put in about the car repairmen discovering the wired mechanism under that freight train that would have destroyed it by fire had a wheel turned," Anne Barrow said. " Now I see what Jelke meant when he said he would be in at the start of that train and have you there for the finish. Evidently he had intended to see that everything went off all right, and then have us both brought where we could watch the fire and—"

" And after that," Stafford mumbled, " polish us both off. I reckon that's what Squeak and his boy friends came back for. To get us both."

" One thing sure," the girl said, " we'll never know now. The medical examiner made his official report. Out of the five men in that car you smashed at the Eagle Creek crossing, not one but had all his bones broken."

Stafford smiled grimly. " All right, Anne. You fix up the report. You know the language. Tell 'em we're moving freight. We'll move it as long as we've got rails."

THE END

What was the secret of Billy-be-damned's past that made him go berserk every time a certain word was mentioned?

"Shut up! It's all over!"

Billy-be-damned

By R. V. GERY

NO, gentlemen! I'm sorry—don't know the party you mention. No, never heard the name. Very sorry and all that. And there's the door!

Eh? See here, misters, didn't you ever hear of "no" for an answer? I tell you I don't savvy where that party is—and if I did I wouldn't tell you. There's the door, and the gangway's down; get off my schooner, d'ye hear me? You'll get no line on Billy-be-damned from me. Why? Never mind why.

Huh? What's that? You're friends of his? Not looking to take him back out of this, to where he came from? You're sure? You're not any of these stinking lawyers? Just anxious to know the how and the why and the wherefore, eh? We-ell, that's another thing. Got any credentials about you? Let's see 'em.

H'm'm! Well, that looks fair enough, misters. Come in and set down on the locker there. There's the gin if you use it. But I don't mind telling you right out, you get no dope on where Billy is from me. He's happy now, and so's his girl, and I'll see you sifting cinders before I spoil it. So if it's the plain tale you want, well and good—but if it's any more, the door's handy.

Yeah, Billy-be-damned! There was a card, if you like! You know him, it seems—know his name, eh? Yeah, that's it. The Honorable, eh? That's a lord's son, ain't it? Well, never mind. His name don't signify out here. Billy-be-damned, he is, and Billy-be-damned he'll stay, to those that know him. Let the rest be.

Wait, now, while I think.

Sure, it's all of six years since I met him, and that was in Noumea, down in New Caledonia, and that's a hell of a place to meet anyone. French penal settlement, I dare say you're aware, and that's enough said. Shorty Malone and I'd come in there, sailing a broken-down old cow of a schooner we had those times. There was a man—Frenchman by the name of Blum—we thought we'd see.

Says Shorty: "Let's go hit up old Paul for a skinful. He's good for it!"

Well, he was. Many's the hot time we'd had with him, for he'd a pretty taste in liquor, and by thunder a prettier taste in girls. Yes, gentlemen, you'd be surprised! Some kind of a vice-consul he was, with an office in the Rue Something-or-other—I've forgotten. Oh, quite a boy, our friend Blum!

So our tongues were hanging out, Shorty's and mine, when we landed and made for his office.

"About four cases should do it," says Shorty, licking his sinful lips. "Magnums!"

You see, we'd been kicking about the Duffs and the Hebrides for four months, and that's certainly the place to nourish a thirst. Oh, yes, indeed; even Noumea looked pretty much of a paradise after that.

All of a sudden Shorty pulls up. "'S'trewth!" he says under his breath. "D'you see what I see, Tom?"

WE were coming up to Blum's office now, and there wasn't much wonder Shorty'd stopped. Here's the man himself, hop-skippity-jump down the steps with his mouth open; and there's a fellow after him with a cleaver.

What? A cleaver, I said. One of these butcher's things, yes. You see them on a chopping-block, and that's just about what this chap's trying to make of Blum. Coming pretty close to it, too

"Hey, what the hell!" says Shorty, and jumps in front of the Frenchman. "Steady, brother! What's it all about?"

He might well have asked. I'm telling you there weren't many spectacles to beat Billy-be-damned this time. He was a holy show, and no mistake. Remember Billy as you knew him—that big, brindled son-of-a-gun with the mop of yellow hair. Well, try and figure him now, in the rags and remnants of duck trousers and a singlet, with a whacking great black eye, and a cut down one cheek that spelt knife. He was breathing hard, and his face was the color of wet cinders.

Shorty squares up to him. "Drop that chopper!" he says. "This ain't Canton, fellow! And now let's have the news."

Billy-be-damned throws the cleaver down, and stands there swinging his arms and panting.

"He—he annoyed me!" he jerks out.

Blum, behind us, explodes into a string of firecracker French and English.

"Zis man," he says, "'e is crez-zee! 'E come here, one, two week ago, and say he go up the islands. For that, I say the permit is necessary, *sacrebleu! Bon,* he go away, and become ver' drunk—*salement grisé, hein?* Then he return. The permit, says he. Attention, I say; first some question! And *pif! paf!* There he goes as you see!"

"You must have said something to him," I put in. "What was it, Paul?"

"What do I know?" Blum shrugs. "I ask him the usual—his name, his domicile, his—"

Billy-be-damned interrupts. "The swine asked if I was married," he says.

"Well? Aren't you?"

It slipped out before I thought, but believe me, I regretted it. Billy-be-damned glares at me like a tiger.

"No!" he says. "And to hell with you!"

And with that he turns tail and runs hell-for-leather up the street.

"Mad!" says Shorty.

"Yes, I think," Blum agrees. "A crez-zee Anglais, huh?"

WELL, somehow or other that didn't satisfy me. This crazy stuff didn't render at all—big, red-faced lumps like this one don't go off the handle like that, just because a fool Frenchman asks them a question. All the time—and that was the full of three days, and full is right—we were celebrating with Blum, I was thinking.

"Wonder whether he really had a wife," I said to Shorty.

Shorty blinks at me over the top of his glass. He was in the fulsome stage by this time: I reckon we all were.

"Hell, no!" he said. "Think any wife'd let that article get away from her? You don't know women, Tom!"

Well, that's as it may be, I thought. Anyhow, I don't know Billy-be-damned's kind of women, that's sure enough. It was clear enough now, from the look of him and from what Blum said, that Billy was—well, what you gentlemen know he was; a high-class, silver-mounted affair with all the trimmings. Probably gone wrong somewhere, it looked like, and feeling it. They act so, these high-steppers.

"Cre-z-zee!" says Blum, opening another bottle.

Crazy or not, we'd the surprise of our lives when we pulled back to the schooner. On top of the hatch, smoking a pipe and looking down at us, was Billy-be-damned.

"'Morning!" says he.

Shorty backed water. "Eh?" he said, rolling his eyes. "Whazzis?"

Billy-be-damned laughed. He was cold sober now, and dressed regardless in a suit of drill; not much crazy about him.

"Oh, it's quite all right," he said. "I'm genuine. I'd like a word with you two, if you don't mind. About a passage."

Sure enough, that was what he wanted—a passage with us, and pay for it.

"Where d'you want to go?"

"What in Tophet do I care?" he said. "Anywhere. I don't mind telling you, I'm running away from things. But if," he says, looking at us mighty old-fashioned, "you ask me any more damned impertinent questions, there'll be proceedings. If not," says he, "I'll pay you fair and easy for your trouble."

And with that he drags out a roll of bills and chucks them across to us.

"Take what you want," he says, "and for God's sake let's go!"

So that was the way Billy-be-damned came into these parts, and that was the way we hooked up with him. Nothing more—we didn't know who he was, and he didn't intend we should know. What his thoughts were, what went on behind that handsome, ruddy face of his, why he was down in the Black Belt at all—that was his secret, and we didn't go prying into it. Why should we?

WE went back, round by the Loyaltys to Espiritu Santo, and so working north towards the Duffs. Billy'd said it was all equal to him where we headed, as long as he got what he wanted, and that seemed to be sitting forward under the headsails, smoking and staring at the islands. They're thick as pepper thereabouts, and it looked as if Billy—we'd got to calling him that by now—was all set up with looking at them. For days on end he'd not speak, and if one of us addressed him, as like as not he'd send him to hell, in that way of his.

"Pleasant company!" says Shorty one time, after he'd been so directed. "He'll be getting something he didn't reckon on, if he's not careful."

"Let him be," I says. "His money's all right, ain't it? What more d'you want? You figurin' to put him ashore, eh, just because your toes got trod on?"

"Sure I'll let him be," says Shorty. "But he's certainly got a stinker of a tongue on him."

"What of it?" I says. "Plenty of these dooks have. They get it at Oxford and Cambridge college, I'm told."

Shorty squints at Billy-be-damned, sitting up there forward.

"Dook?" he says. "You think it's that? Waster, eh?"

"An' maybe not," says I. "He may be a dook, for all I know, but he don't give off to me like a waster."

Well, nor did he. He was more like a good chap, with a lot of rats gnawin' at him inside. I didn't make him out at all, I'm free to admit.

And we made the Duffs. You'll know 'em, maybe, if it's only by hearsay—just about the last and worst pocket of the Black Belt. Storms and fever and blinding heat—yes, and the natives there ain't anything much better. Cannibals? Oh, well—there's a lot of talk, y'know. I'm not saying, one way or another. Only who is it's always telling you it's stomped out? The missionaries, eh? Fat lot they know.

Still, we'd friends there, Shorty and me, and there was an old chief by the name of Poiwa we made up to special. One o' the old fighting stock, and it's my belief he knew damn well what cook-pots were meant for. But outside that, he was pretty good, and he'd a great taste for rum. Moreover, he'd got a lot o' pearl and shell cached away somewhere, and we'd notions about that.

"We'll go ashore," says Shorty, when we'd dropped anchor. "Maybe he'll have a cargo for us this trip. Suit you?" he says to Billy.

Billy'd been staring as usual, saying nothing at all, but taking it all in—the beach and the trees and the coral. It was a wild enough spot, even for the Duffs. Now he stirred himself, as if he was coming out of a dream.

"My God!" he says, half to himself. "Here's the place!"

"Think so?" says Shorty. "Glad to hear it."

Billy-be-damned whirls round on him. "Is that so?" he asks, in a kind of altered, creaking voice. "Well, d'you mind, once again, attending to your own bally business and putting me ashore?"

"Oh—delighted!" says Shorty. "And might one trespass so far as to inquire what you propose doin' when you get there? These natives are considered rambunctious, I might inform you."

"They are, eh?" says Billy-be-damned. "Well, my cross-eyed son of a tinker, I'm infernally obliged to you for telling me. And I'll be still more obliged if you'll drop that dinghy of yours in the water and hump yourself sculling me ashore!"

He seemed to have taken on a new lease of life—a fleering, sneering manner that got under Shorty's skin.

"So?" he says slowly. "You're leaving us, mister?"

"I am," says Billy-be-damned.

"Then take that!" says Shorty, winding one up from somewhere round his right heel.

BUT he'd got the wrong man for once. Ho, ho, ho! Billy-be-damned ducked inside like a flash and collared him by the scruff of the neck.

"Now," he says, shaking him, "we'll just have a little gymnastics. I've been wanting to shunt some of the toplift out of you for a long while, Malone. And here goes to do it!"

And he starts in doing dumb-bells, with Shorty for the bell. You gentlemen may know what kind of a reputation as a strong man he'd got at home; but we'd never seen anything like it. He swung Shorty about—and Shorty was no chicken, either—as if he was a baby.

Well, I don't stand for that kind of stuff where my friends are concerned. So I dropped a running bowline round the pair of them, and took a hitch with it at the mast.

"Now," I said, imitating him, "on the other hand, we'll just take things easy a bit. What the blue blazes d'you think you mean by all this, eh?"

He struggles a minute, and then, so help me, he begins to laugh.

"Sorry, boys," he says, and there's the friendliest expression in his eye. "I'm—well, I'm afraid my temper's not all it might be. You'll have to forgive me."

And he sets Shorty back on the deck and holds out a hand. "I'm really damned sorry, Malone," he says, in a voice we've not heard before. "I ought to know better, but somehow—well, will you accept my apologies? Let's have a drink before I go—and perhaps," he looks at Poiwa's canoe, that's drifted alongside with the old chief pop-eyed in it, "your royal friend might join us."

You couldn't be mad with a crazy coot like that. And anyhow, it wouldn't have done at all to let Poiwa see we were quarreling. So the upshot was we shook hands and broke out the rum, and in about half an hour everyone's happy. Poiwa takes me aside.

"Yi-yi-yi!" he says, in what he fancies is English. "Much plenty strong, eh?"

There isn't anything these blacks respect more in a man than muscle, unless maybe it's suitability for the pot, if you get me. So I played Billy-be-damned up for all he was worth, and Shorty backed me, and we got him to do a few more strong-man tricks—and by the time Poiwa went ashore, with the rum running out of his eyes, he had it set in his mind that this Billy-be-damned was some species of tin god. At any rate, he was damnably impressed.

"You're making a sensation," I said to Billy.

He laughed. "Glad to hear it," he said. "I'm going to stay here a bit."

"Eh?" I stared at him. "Stay here?"

"And why not?" says he. "Looks like a good place to me."

"But they're— You don't see anyone, more than once a year or so. It's a hell of a location, Billy! Besides, they're man-eaters!"

He gave me the queerest kind of a look. "Man-eaters?" he said softly. "Oh, that! Well, maybe I've had some experience with man-eaters. Worse ones than these—"

Naturally, that didn't make sense, either, but there wasn't any good worrying about it. We did what we could to persuade him to give it up and come on with us, but no, here he'd stay, and if we didn't mind he'd as soon we shut our traps and set him ashore. So finally we did, next day, with a boatload of truck that might come in handy for him, a half dozen demijohns of the rum, and a bundle of books he'd brought aboard at Noumea and seemed to set great store by.

POIWA turned out the troops to welcome him—as ugly a looking bunch of murderers as ever you'd ask to see—and chipped in with the cargo of stuff we'd been looking for all along. We were so taken up with it—there was a year's clear profits and better in that one haul—that we neglected Billy a bit, I'm afraid; and the last thing we saw of him was parading off along shore, with a dozen of the king's braves for escort and to carry his junk, and twenty or thirty women peeping out at him from behind rocks and so on. He waved at us.

"Humph!" says Shorty. "And there goes another one that thought he knew it all. They'll pot-pie him in a week!"

But somehow I thought different. Billy-be-damned—you know it as well as I do—isn't the sort to let any slew of blacks pot-pie him. He's too—well, he's too Billy-be-damned, if you know what I mean.

So that was that, and Shorty and I hauled out and set a course for Sydney. Poiwa's consignment had done us that proud we didn't see the sense of any mere island peddling of it. Sydney it was—and there we sold the schooner and Shorty and I parted company. He went down into the Low Islands somewhere, and I drifted bit by bit back to the old stamping ground, up in the Black Belt.

I RECKON it was two years before I hit the Duffs again, and during all that time I don't suppose I'd thought of Billy-be-damned once. Then it was only to wonder whether, after all, they'd pot-pied him, and if he'd butchered tender. But then I got word of him. He was alive—oh, very much so.

I met a missionary coming away from the group, and went aboard to pass the

time of day. He was in a great state of mind over something he'd seen only a day or so before.

"Upon my word, Captain Mason," he said, "I'd never have believed it. Those islands of Poiwa's up there are almost civilized. There's a white man there, living native—"

"Indeed?" I said, for my mind had flashed back two years. "You don't say so."

"But I do!" he said. "He's got Poiwa and the rest of them eating out of his hand. It's a plain miracle. He's a second Mussolini, this fellow."

Well, I didn't know what he meant by that, for I wasn't sure who this Mussolini might be---one of their missionary heroes, maybe.

"He is, eh?" I said. "Well, I believe I might run up there and take a look. There might be some trade there."

"I would, if I were you," said the missionary. "It's worth it."

So I cracked on and sailed across to Poiwa's island. My word! I stared, open-mouthed, when I got inside the reef.

There was a neat bungalow in the middle of what had been Poiwa's ramshackle village, and a flagstaff in front, with a coral pier finely built, and all the improvements. And here, if you please, comes old Poiwa out, in full fig in his outrigger war canoe, with Billy-be-damned sitting at his right hand like an admiral.

"Hello, Billy," I called, as soon as I could find voice.

He stares under his hand.

"By the living Jingo!" he says. "If it's not Mason. Well, well, well!"

THE paddlers drove the canoe alongside, and he jumped aboard. Believe me, you've no conception of what he was like. He's a big lump of a man, as you know—but two years here in the sun and wind and storm had made him a sight for sore eyes. Yes, gentlemen. I'm telling you, this Billy-be-damned was, and is, something to make a fellow proud of humanity. He was stripped to the waist, with nothing but a dinky *lava-lava* kilt affair about his middle; tanned a glorious level mahogany from brow to ankle, his yellow hair long on his shoulders, his blue eyes blazing like sapphires. Beside him, the best of Poiwa's fighters looked puny, and they aren't any lalapaloosas, either.

His first words were: "Where's Shorty?" And when I told him, he clicked his tongue.

"Pity!" he said. "I'd like to have met him again." He grinned. "I owe him a lot. And that reminds me, Tom—how's trade?"

"So-so," I said, for this was the kind of talk I wanted to hear, remembering what had happened the last time we were here. Billy-be-damned takes me by the arm.

"Forget it!" he says. "We'll fix you up. I've had an embargo clapped on all exports here for a year or better, just waiting till you came along. But first we'll go ashore. I'm ordering a feast and a general holiday over this."

Well, we went up to the council house and started in on a jamboree that lasted most of the day. Old Poiwa was in the chair, of course, grinning all over his tattooed face, and gabbling away in broken English; but the master of ceremonies was Billy. He was just what the missionary had said, and some more on top of that; it didn't take half an eye to see that here he was the king pippin, the big noise, the Great I Am, and whatever else you like to think of. There'd been no fighting for eighteen months, he told me; and from the way the bucks drilled and maneuvered (he had them put on a show for my benefit) I didn't wonder. Nobody in the Duffs was going to tackle that outfit.

And there'd be no long-pig, either, he said. They'd cut it out, even in secret. Pot-Pie wasn't done any more.

I caught Billy's eye in the middle of things, and he grinned over his shell of champagne—yes, I'd a case or two aboard, just for luck.

"Well," I thought to myself, "here's somebody's found his niche, anyway."

And then we went across to his bungalow, and with a single fool question I ruined things. The place was like a new pin inside—clean mats on the floor, a cot, his books on a bookshelf, pipes and tobacco, and a Winchester on the wall. I looked about me.

"And where's the wife?" I said.

My word!

That great golden fellow staggered as if someone had hit him with a sledge. The color left his ruddy face, and he began to breathe fast, as if he was going to throw a fit. And he gripped me by the shoulder.

"There's your boat!" he said, pointing to the schooner. "Now—get out, Mason! And don't come here any more!"

Well, I went. There wasn't anything else to do. I tried protesting, but he simply looked at me, and wiggled a finger. Poiwa's braves perked up their heads, and I don't mind owning I'd the creeps up and down my back as I went down to the jetty, alone. It wasn't until I was aboard that I was half myself again.

And then I saw Billy, alone, too, paddling out in a canoe. He held her thirty feet away.

"Just in case you don't understand me," he said in a grating voice, "keep clear of me—or it'll be the worse for you!"

"What the hell d'you mean?" I asked.

"What I say," he said. "Get out of here, and think it over. Maybe even your fat head'll get you there one of these days."

So I got. Poiwa's men were running about ashore in a way I didn't like at all, and I saw the big war-canoe being pulled out of its house. They'll hit twelve knots in anything of a breeze, those babies, and I'd uncomfortable visions of pot-pie, after all. I almost saw Billy himself acting as chef. So I clapped on all sail and let her drive.

WELL! I've given you some notion of Billy-be-damned, and how I got across his bows. Now I'll tell you something you wouldn't believe, if you didn't know what you do know.

It was going on for a month later, and I was down 'round the Hebrides again. I still couldn't size Billy up at all, think as I might, and I must have spent whole days on him. It was my talk of a wife that had done it, I knew—but why? Where's the harm in asking a man a simple, fool question like that, I said to myself.

Trade was rotten, after losing Piowa's stuff, and I remembered Noumea and Blum. Maybe he'd have some kind of a slant on this business, I thought, so I ran across to see him.

He was in his office when I knocked, and there was another man with him. Blum looked up, and his jaw dropped.

"*Dieu de dieu!*" he said. "You! And where do you come from? Out of the sky, *hein?*"

"Not exactly," I said. "What's all the excitement?"

He turned to the other man. "Monsieur Ackroyd," he said, "I present to you the one man hereabouts who can assist you. Captain—Monsieur Ackroyd!"

We shook hands. He was a stout, broad-shouldered fellow of forty or so, with one of those talcum-powder complexions, a hardish eye, and a jaw. Somebody who knew what he wanted and went and got it, I fancied.

He came straight to the point. "You know anything about a big fellow who was here two years ago?" he asked. "Went off somewhere up the islands?"

Well, I hesitated. "What d'you want him for?" I said.

He shrugged. "Nothing," he said. "I want to know where he is, that's all—and to go there. I'll pay a hundred, cash down, for the job."

A hundred was a hundred. But the thing sounded funny, all the same—and I wasn't overly taken with the looks of this Ackroyd. He was a biter, if you get me.

"No," I said. "I'm not on, if you'll excuse me. Not without knowing some more about it."

"You're on to where he is, then?" he asked sharply.

"Maybe. What's his name?"

Well, he gave it me—Billy's proper name, the one you know. "You won't take it up, eh?" he said, cocking his head on one side at me.

"I'm not keen, as it is," I said.

He looked down at the floor and then up again. "Listen," he said. "You've my word that I mean this man no harm. And, if you like, that I won't even speak to him. I want—to show him to someone, there, as he is. And I'll pay two hundred, not one."

WELL, that did it, of course. I'd have been a fool to have turned an offer like that down.

"All right," I said. "What d'you want me to do?"

"You got a schooner, eh?" he said. "Very well, I'll charter her for as long as is necessary. Can you sail to-morrow?"

"To-day, if you like," I said.

"To-morrow." He got up. "We'll be aboard by ten. That's all—I'll ask you to excuse me, now, gentlemen; I've some things to see to."

"Wait!" I said. "Let's have this again. You give me your most solemn word, before Blum here, that there's no monkey-business here. You intend no harm to Billy-be-damned, eh?"

His mouth twitched at the name. "Billy-be-damned, eh?" he said softly. And then to me: "You've my solemn word, sir," he said, and stalked out.

I looked over at Blum. "Well?" I said.

He put a finger to his temple and twiddled it round and round.

"Crez-zee!" he said. "Another crez-zee Anglais! But his wife!" He opened his eyes wide. "Oo, la, la!" said Blum.

And when I saw her in the boat next morning I felt inclined to agree with him. She was the kind of thing only London, Paris or New York can turn out—a thinnish ash-blond, clean-run and bred to the minute, dressed in clothes that never came out of the Pacific.

Not my kind of woman, but a beaut, for all that.

Ackroyd introduced her: "My wife—Captain Mason!" and they went below, where I'd rigged up the cabin somehow shipshape for them. In ten minutes or so he comes up.

"When you're ready, skipper," he says, giving me another shot of that hard eye of his.

"Very good, sir," I said, and set about getting up the hook.

IT was a week's clear run to the Duffs, and during that time I'd plenty of leisure to think things over, for the Ackroyds kept to the cabin mostly, or sat on deck in such a way as to make it clear to me I wasn't wanted. It wasn't any of my business, but I could see from the second day out that things weren't any too cordial between them. She looked desperately unhappy, I thought—and he was about as accommodating as a thundercloud.

I heard him going for her in the cabin at night once or twice, and she seemed to be hitting back at him in a listless sort of way.

"You'll see!" I heard him say.

"Yes, I'm quite sure I shall!" she answered.

Of course, I ought to have cottoned to the situation; but I was much too occupied thinking about Billy-be-damned. He wasn't going to be any too easy to approach, after what had happened a few weeks ago; in fact, several times I came to the conclusion I'd been a fool, and it was damned dear at two hundred. However, there it was, and I'd to trust to luck.

The day before we were due at Billy's island, Ackroyd thawed out a bit. He came and sat by me at the wheel, smoking cigar after cigar, and looking rather like a dose of salts. I didn't say anything; he wasn't the companionable sort, not in that mood.

Finally he threw his smoke overside.

"Married, Mason?" he asked suddenly.

"No, sir," I said.

"Humph! Don't then. They're the devil!"

"Yes, sir."

He frowned. "Now I wonder," he said, "what the deuce you mean by that!"

I didn't answer. There wasn't any answer, for I didn't know myself. After a minute he got up and lumbered below, without another word out of him. Once again I thought that Blum and his "Crezzee!" had about summed up a situation.

But that was nothing to what happened later on. It was well after midnight, and the schooner was lolloping along, quiet and easy. I was at the wheel, alone, wondering how in thunder I was going to manage Billy-be-damned next day, when the cabin door opened without a sound, and the girl came out.

"Hal-lo!" I said to myself.

She slipped across to me. "Captain!" she whispered.

"Yes, madam?" I said.

"You—you know where we're going? And who we—he—I—who we're going to see?"

"Yes, madam," I said, and all at once the light broke on me, so that I could have fallen down backwards, there at the wheel. "Yes, I know, ma'am."

She didn't say anything for some time, while I tried to catch up with things and see what there was to do. Then she touched me on the arm.

"Thank you, captain!" was all she said, as if she knew I understood. And she was gone.

Well, I held the schooner on her course, more by luck than good judgment. I'd something else to think of now. Here was I, willy-nilly, taking something back to Billy-be-damned. Something—oh, it all began to fit in now—he'd run away from. Somebody else's property now, at that. Though why Ackroyd was bringing her back was beyond me—miles beyond me. But anyhow, what was Billy going to say, or do, about it?

I WAS still racking my brains over it all, when dawn broke, and there was Poiwa's island, ten miles or so straight ahead. I handed over to my Kanaka bos'n, and went below to breakfast. So far, I'd eaten alone; but now they were both there, facing one another across the little saloon table. He was smiling to himself in his knowing way, and she was sulky, but very nervous.

"Sit down, skipper," said Ackroyd. "That's the place, in front there, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said I.

"There's this man there," he went on. "I imagine he'll be down at the beach to meet us."

"I shouldn't be surprised, sir," I said.

He looked across at his wife. "There," he said. "You hear that, Grace? He'll be waiting for us, my dear—and you'll be able to see what he's like now. Billy-be-damned's what they call him hereabouts, by the way. Doesn't sound very much as if he's—improved, does it?"

"But—you'll keep your word?" She jerked out the words as if she had to fight to get them loose.

He laughed. "Oh, certainly," he said. "Skipper, I want you to take Mrs. Ackroyd and me inshore in the dinghy. Needn't land—I just want my wife to see this fellow here, that's all. He's an old friend of hers. And then," he grinned, "I somehow fancy that our next move will be out of this."

"You'll let me go—if he wants me?" she said.

"I've already said so. But he won't want you—Billy-be-damned. After the way you treated him. Oh, it's quite safe, my dear. Besides, he's probably—er, consoled himself long ago. Don't forget—Billy-be-damned! They don't call 'em that for nothing."

"I don't believe it—" she was beginning, when I cut in. This Ackroyd was getting up my nose.

"See here, sir!" I said. "I don't like this at all. Billy-be-damned's a friend of mine—"

"So?" he said, cold as ice. "Backing out, eh? What about that two hundred?"

"Damn the two hundred!" I said.

"If you like," said he, and I thought for a moment there was going to be trouble. But his wife spoke.

"Oh, captain," she said in a beseeching kind of voice. "Don't make difficulties now, please. We're—we're so close."

Ackroyd grinned at me. "You see?" was all he said. It was all he needed to say, at that; I saluted and went on deck, without my breakfast. That cabin was a bit too much for me.

Well, we got inside the reef. I put the dinghy over the side, and we dropped into her. Poiwa's place was utterly deserted, and I didn't like the looks of that at all. It was as if they'd seen us coming and bolted, all of them. Ackroyd glanced at the shore with pursed lips, and I thought his wife was going to break down.

"Pull in," he said, and I did, in no end of a frame of mind.

I'd not taken twenty strokes before I heard the girl give a kind of a gasp, and Ackroyd chuckle. I looked over my shoulder, and there was Billy.

He was walking down the shore, alone, with the Winchester under his arm, and stripped to the kilt still. A heathen god, I thought he looked like in that morning light—a glorified heathen god

"Mason!" he yelled at me. "Get back! What did I tell you?"

I LET the dinghy drift, and the girl stood up in it. And Billy stared at her once, for about five seconds, and then he turned and went stalking up the beach, as fast as his long legs could take him. He vanished into the trees, and Ackroyd chuckled again. And the girl fell back on the thwart again with a miserable kind of a cry.

Ackroyd nudged me. "And that's that!" he said. "Get back to the schooner."

"Keep your hands off me," I told him. "I'll take my own time."

I could have murdered him then and there, and murdered Billy-be-damned, too. What call had that big lout to turn his back on a lady like that—especially this lady? It had me beat, twenty ways from the jack, for it wasn't Billy-be-damned at all. Not a bit of it. I just couldn't see him doing such a thing.

Ackroyd got her aboard, and down to the cabin. I pulled out a pipe and sat on deck, scowling at that empty shore, and doing a deal of quiet cursing to myself. Somehow, this affair of the girl had got me. It wasn't right—it just wasn't right She and Billy-be-damned belonged to one another, whatever might have happened in the past.

And here Billy had up and walked out on her.

And left her with this cold-eyed codfish, Ackroyd. After a while here he comes on deck.

"I thought I said we'd get out of this," he said nastily.

"You did," I said. "Well, we'll go when I'm ready, and not before. I'm skipper here."

He looked at me as if he'd have eaten me alive. "True," he said. "How about this?"

And he pulled a gun on me. By the Lord Harry, a gun! I hit him a crack on that blue jaw of his that you might have heard back in Noumea, and knocked him deader than a herring on the planks. There's no chippy-chappie from the cities pulling any guns on Tom Mason, I'm telling you.

"Here!" I called to the bos'n. "You lookum this fella!"

He grins. "Yi-yi, sah!" says he, and he's dragging him off, none too gentle, when the girl sticks her head out of the cabin.

"Oh!" she says. She'd been crying to beat fifty.

"Oh, nothing at all!" I snaps at her. "Get back and wait, will you? I'm handling this from now on, d'ye see?"

"Wh-what d'you mean?" she says.

"Just what I say, me dear," I tells her. "You get below and dry your eyes—and see what Santa Claus'll bring you. You, Johnny," I said to the bos'n, "if them fella come alive again, you ketchum another clip, bingo! an' keep 'em quiet, savvy?"

"Yi-yi, sah!" says the bos'n.

Well, I went overside into that dinghy

again and sculled for the shore as if Satan himself was after me. Maybe he was—I don't know. I only know I was so mad with Billy-be-damned I'd have taken the hide off him if he'd said a word to me.

I MARCHED up to his house, not giving a rap whether he was going to plug me or no. Sure enough, he was there, sitting on his cot. He'd got that Winchester, and he was holding it in a way that suggests only one thing. I made one jump over the veranda at him—and he swung round and levelled it at me.

"Clear out!" he croaked.

"Put that damned thing down," I said. "I've had enough of guns stuck in my face this morning. And you listen here to me, Billy, you big ox! Listen, d'ye hear me?"

"Shut up!" he said. "It's all over. She's laughing at me—"

"You great, ignorant, two-year-old baby!" I said. "You're not fit to be alive. Listen here, you ass—"

And I told him. He glared at me.

"This true—you?" he whispered.

"Go and see," I said.

Well, he went. He didn't use my dinghy, or his canoe that was rocking at the shore. Not he. He went into the water, flailing with both mighty arms. A minute and he was at the schooner's rail, and had yanked himself aboard. I sat down on the beach and smoked my pipe.

It was maybe twenty minutes later when he came back, as he'd gone, swimming. His canoe, a little outrigger with a sail, was at the water's edge, as I've said. He thrust it out, waist deep—then he seemed to see me, and came back.

"Tom," he said, "we're going. Good-by!"

That was all. A grip of the hand, and he was away. I saw her slip overside to him, and the canoe's mat sail fill. They stood for the gap in the reef. I took the dinghy and sculled out again. Ackroyd was on deck, dancing like a lunatic.

"I'll have your blood!" he yelled at me. "By Gad, I'll—I'll prosecute you! Get after them! Get after them, I tell you!"

I hopped aboard. "And maybe not," I said. "If you don't like it, say the word—one word, mister—and there'll be an accident. There are plenty of sharks in this lagoon, and they'd like a meal, I'm sure."

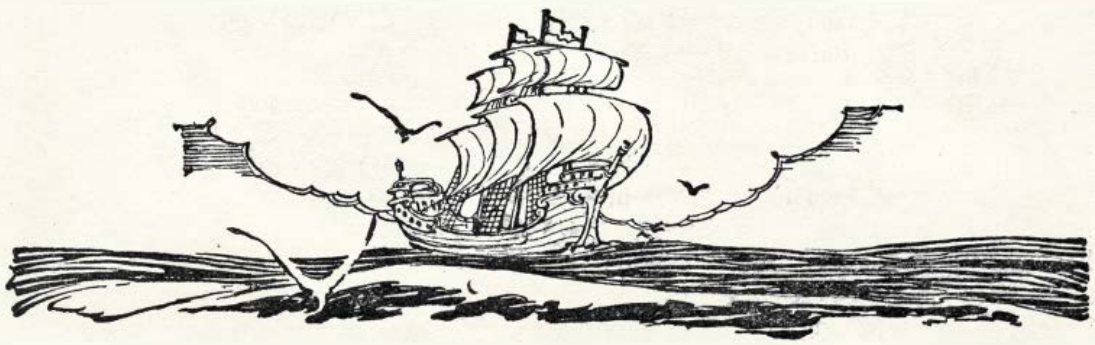
I meant it, too. I'd have done it. But he just gaped at me out of his swollen mouth.

"Johnny," I said to the bos'n, "you leggo them sheet and yank up them anchor. We're outward bound."

Yes, gentlemen. I know where they are. But I'm not telling. Devil a bit of it! Billy-be-damned's a happy man—And his girl; but there are two kids now. Living in sin? Who said so? A bunch of stinking lawyers, some place. You send 'em to me, misters, and I'll talk to 'em. Oh, by thunder, yes!

THE END

Soon—Another INSPECTOR VAN TROMP story by R. V. Gery



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

Tropical Hell!

ESCAPE! To get away somehow from the burning hell of the Guianan prison is the single, unswerving purpose of the prisoners condemned to it by France. Bad food, malaria, dysentery, elephantiasis, even leprosy, areever present threats. In the coast prisons of St. Laurent and Cayenne, the three punishment isles, St. Joseph, of solitary, Royale Isle, and tiny Devil's Isle—which, because of Dreyfus, has given its name to the entire land —and in the jungle camps, thousands of *forçats* (forced hard laborers) repine. In each man's breast is the hope of beating the rap. There's only that one desire—to get away. To remain is, by average, to die a mean, miserable death. And very soon at that.

The prison is a very real one; not of bars but of Nature. The virgin jungle, filled with nameless terrors for civilized men, runs a thousand miles south to Brazil, and straight to the sea on the east. Then it extends for hundreds of miles across Dutch and British Guiana, where, if caught, the fugitive may be sent back, extradited. Venezuela, six hundred miles away, offers the nearest refuge, and there are several small Central American republics where an escaped convict may be safe. But to reach one of them is the problem. With money it can be done; the trouble is that a man finally condemned to Guiana is usually poor and friendless, with no way either of earning or stealing the price of escape.

Nevertheless, these desperate men start just the same, alone or in bunches. Before me now is a clipping which tells of ten who last month made a daring escape from the three small punishment isles (the majority of prisoners stay on the mainland). Led by a Frenchman, four men from

LOOKING AHEAD!

CATAPULT

The U. S. Navy's early experiments with hurling planes from the decks of ships were dramatically dangerous. This novelette by the author of "Launch Planes!" tells what happened when catapulting was first tried out at Pensacola. By

GEORGE BRUCE

'WAY UP THE BOZEMAN

The tale of a bitter feud between two Indian fighters in the wilds of the old West. A short story by

ERNEST HAYCOX

LONE INDIAN

Can you imagine *Bill Peepe* dressed up like an Indian for the sake of a real estate gag? For if *Bill* could pull off a shady deal he was even willing to stain his skin to the necessary dark hue. A complete novel by

FRED MacISAAC

THE FANG OF AMM JEMEL

Allah was good—very good—to *Amm Jemel* on the day that he permitted his faithful follower to get revenge upon his enemy. A novelette by

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—MARCH 9

2 SERIALS—1 COMPLETE NOVEL—2 NOVELETTES—SHORT STORIES

Royale, four from St. Joseph, and two from Devil's, communicated with one another through the food delivery boat carrying supplies between the isles. Durvernay, the leader, had brought money over on his body, and he bribed a Negro from the mainland to deliver a canoe near Royale one night. The men from the other islands swam through the rough channels, swarming with sharks, to Royale, where they swam out to the canoe. Then they started, putting their fisherman friend off on the mainland. With the food and water which he had brought, they headed west. For thirty-two days they sailed and paddled under the burning sun. I myself have been on that coast, and I know the water that they must contend with. It is unruly; huge rollers batter against the crumbling land. Storms are frequent.

Despite everything, a passing ship, when these men became desperate, having eaten all their food and drunk up their water, paused to give them a handout. Then the fugitives rested on a deserted section of Trinidad, and at last headed on. When nasty weather hit them, almost at their goal, they were wrecked on the Dutch Isle of Curaçao. Here they were liable to extradition, but once again the kindness of strangers intervened. Men furnished them with a fourteen-foot boat, and once more they started out. The mast broke during a blow, but they managed to fight through to Aruba, an oil station on another Dutch island. Having repaired their frail boat, having been given more food and tobacco, they set off. Three miles from Aruba they suddenly sank, though they managed to cling to the wrecked boat till a Dutch pilot boat rescued them and took them back to Aruba. Once more the colony subscribed funds.

Plainly, these unfortunate humans are headed for Maracaibo, Venezuela, for the huge oil fields. It is said that a former chief of police of Caracas, the Venezuelan capital, was an ex-Guianan convict.

I saw this Guianan land of beauty—to the eye, beauty—not long ago. It is all right when one has clean clothes, a shelter, decent food and clean drink, and does not stay too long in the fever-ridden bush. But in filth and squalor, as the convict must live, it is murderous; the climate enervates, the food and water poison, the sun kills. They are trapped to the end. No wonder they call it "The Dry Guillotine."

TOM CURRY.

SEVERAL readers have remonstrated with us because of the garbled geography in George Bruce's "Launch Planes!" in the Jan. 26 ARGOSY, in which much of the action centers about Panama. "Don't you study your maps?" asks Robert Buckman of Providence. Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Buckman, we do study our maps, and Mr. Bruce writes from first hand experience. He explained, when he handed us the manuscript, why he had juggled lakes, locks and towns about. In the first place, "Launch Planes!" is strictly fiction, dealing with a theoretical situation. More important, it deals with a touchy subject in these restless times—national defense. It would be poor policy, Mr. Bruce thought (and we agree with him), to give intimate and exact details of the workings of a vital link in our national defense chain Therefore, Mr Bruce took some liberties.

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