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Volume 254 CONTENTS FOR MARCH 23, 1935 Number 3

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

SERIALS

OTHER FEATURES

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With the Help of Henry

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Henry Goes Arizona," "Deception Trail," etc.

Henry claimed dead men tell no tales—yet see what happened when they wrote letters which mysteriously appeared as damning evidence

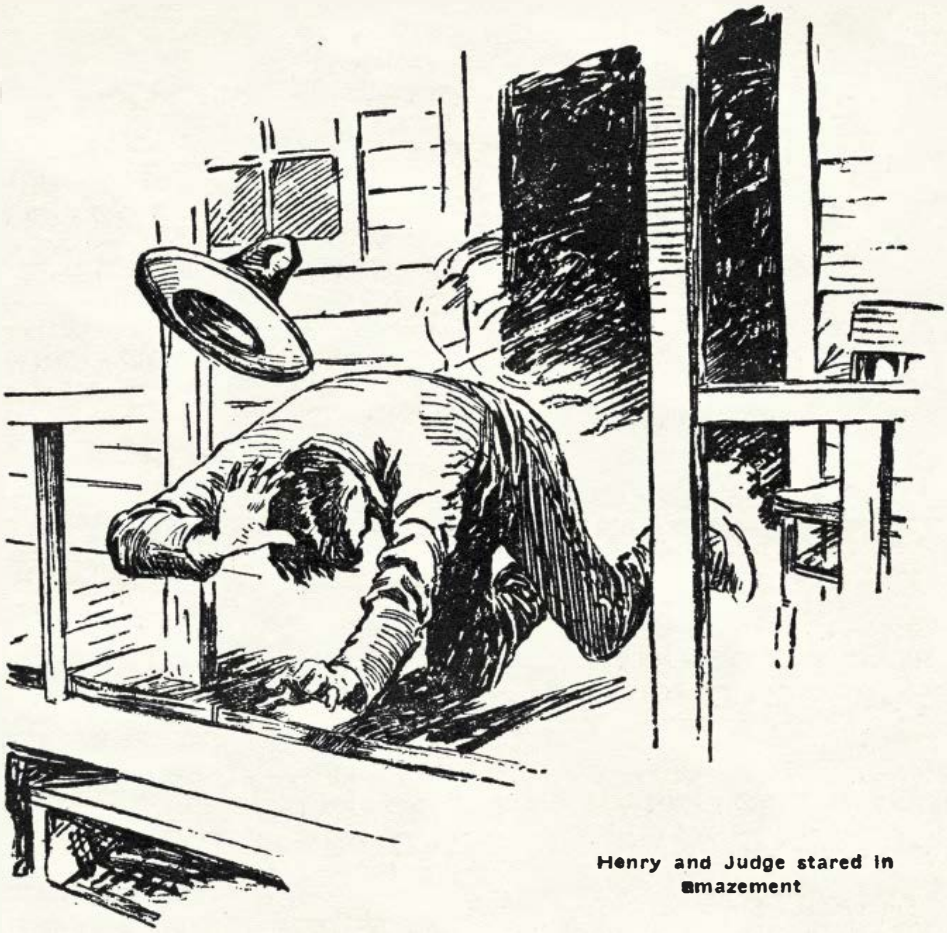
Long Novelette

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW SHERIFF.

HENRY HARRISON CONROY and Judge Van Treece sat on the veranda of the J Bar C ranch-house, in Wild Horse Valley. A description of these two men, and their actions, might serve to enlighten and enliven a commonplace statement of a commonplace scene.

Henry Harrison Conroy was about five feet, six inches in height, rotund and about fifty-five years of age. Born



Henry and Judge stared in amazement

backstage in a theater, Henry had been an actor all his life, until he had inherited the J Bar C cattle-ranch, when his uncle, Jim Conroy, had been murdered, leaving him this inheritance.

Henry's face was moon-like, featuring a huge putty-like nose, which was forever red. For years this nose had been a feature in vaudeville, with Henry Harrison Conroy, as a background. Just now Henry was clad in a skin-tight blue shirt, overalls, which did not meet at the front by inches, and held together with a big, horse-blanket safety-pin, and high-heel boots, which he had never entirely mastered.

Judge Van Treece, christened Cornelius, was sixty years of age, six feet, four inches tall, and consistently slat-like from end to end. His face was long, lean, with pouchy eyes and a long, thin nose. He wore a wrinkled old cutaway coat, baggy pants, nondescript shoes, and on his lap he held an ancient derby hat.

Between them, on the floor of the veranda, was a two-gallon demijohn and two tin cups. The air in their immediate vicinity was redolent of corn liquor.

These two men were intently gazing at a cloth poster, which had been strung between two strands of barb-wire on the fence. The poster was about three feet long and two feet wide, and at that distance the old legible lettering was VOTE FOR HENRY H. CONROY FOR SHERIFF.

Slowly Judge Van Treece raised a Colt forty-five, cocked it, rested it over the veranda rail, while Henry closed his eyes, leaned back in his chair and gave every evidence of a man suffering from shell-shock, gun-shyness and danger of a physical breakdown.

The big gun roared and jumped. A tailless rooster, twenty feet away from the poster, went into the air with a squawk, and fairly flew to the stable. Henry's eyes blinked violently for several moments, before he tilted forward and reached for the jug.

"And still," he said ponderously, "there is no dot over the 'I' in sheriff. Judge, I—I hate to mention it—but you are drunk."

"There is a preponderance of evidence," agreed Judge. "In fact, we are both drunk, Henry. Your last shot hit a corner of the stable, which is fifty feet to the left of the I. Twice, I damn near killed Shakespeare, the rooster."

Henry closed one eye and squinted at the skyline.

"'Tis nearly sundown," he said. "Only the tip remains."

"Queer," remarked Judge. "Very, very queer."

"Nothing queer about sundown, my dear Judge."

"You seeing the tip of the sun—that is queer — especially as you are looking toward the East. The sun, my dear Henry, sets in the West."

"So it does. How quaint of me. Let us drink to Mother Nature."

With great difficulty Henry poured the cups full of liquor. Both men got to their feet, bowed low to each other, braced against the railing and drank deeply.

"The voting must be over," sighed Henry. "Soon they will be tabulating the votes."

"Henry," said the judge thoughtfully, "suppose they elect you."

"Judge," replied Henry seriously, "if this county elected me sheriff, I would sell this ranch, gather together every cent I could beg, borrow or acquire dishonestly, and build an insane asylum large enough to incarcerate every voter in this county."

"You are a candidate, sir."

"Involuntarily, sir. My friends—if I may call them so—perpetrated a joke on me. I have never made a speech, given away a cigar, nor kissed a baby. I have grandly ignored my nomination. I haven't the nose of a peace officer. My Gawd, Judge! You don't suspect for a moment that they *might* elect me, do you?"

"I cast my vote against you, sir."

"So did I," replied Henry soberly. "We did our part. Oscar Johnson, that damnable Swede horse-wrangler, is the only man on the crew that I doubt. He doesn't understand. Frijole Bill swore he'd make that Swede vote against me, or bust his head. Ah, well, I worry unnecessarily. A drink to my defeat, Judge!"

"Yes, yes—a drink! But if you should be elected—"

"Verily, thou art a great hanger of crape, Judge. Nay, the world is not filled with fools. Sheriff!"

THEY drank, not omitting the bow to each other, and sat down again.

And they were still sitting there, when the ranch buckboard came home, bringing Frijole Bill, the cook, and Oscar Johnson, the wrangler. Frijole was sixty years of age, five feet three inches tall, and would not weigh over a hundred pounds, in spite of the huge mustache, which decorated his skinny face.

Oscar was over six feet in height,

with the frame of a Hercules. His head was huge and blocky, his face flat, with a button-like nose, and small, blue eyes. A mop of faded, blond hair stood up on his head, like the roach of an angry grizzly bear.

Frijole Bill was driving. He cramped the buckboard near the veranda and forcibly shoved the big Swede off the seat. Oscar managed to keep his balance, and stood there, blankly staring at Henry and Judge, while Frijole took the team down to the corral.

Oscar tried to take off the hat he did not have on, waved the invisible hat in the air and yelled huskily: "Hooray for Hanry for de shoriff."

"Frijole must have failed, Henry," said Judge sadly.

"One swallow does not make a summer," said Henry. "But, speaking of swallows, Judge—"

Judge tunked the demijohn with his toe. "As empty as—as Oscar's head," he sighed.

"Hooray for Hanry for de shoriff!" yelled Oscar, and sat down heavily.

"Drunk again," sighed Henry.

Frijole Bill came up from the stables. He stopped to look at Oscar, spat disgustedly, and came on up to the veranda. Frijole was not exactly sober. He had a penchant for prune whisky, which he distilled for his own use—a rather vile concoction, but with all the authority of a Supreme Court.

"I beg t' report the Tonto City vote," said Frijole. "Rollin' Stone, twen'y-sheven; Jack Nolan, thir'y-two; Hennery Harrishon Conroy, thir'y-three."

Henry and Judge looked at each other owlishly.

"You win by a scant nose in Tonto City, sir," said Judge.

"Scant?" whispered Henry. "A *scant* nose—me? There never was a scant nose in the Conroy family, sir."

"It was that damn Swede," sighed Frijole. "He campaigned all over Tonto City for yuh—until I caught him. But he'd already voted."

"The thirty-third vote," sighed Henry.

"But there are other precincts, Henry," reminded Judge. "When you only carry your own bailiwick by one vote—you should be swamped, sir."

"Hooray for Hanry for de shoriff!" cheered Oscar weakly.

IT WAS after midnight when Slim Pickins rode in at the ranch. He was singing a wild, range ballad, which has never been printed. He threw his saddle into the corral, tried to hang his horse on the fence, and weaved his erratic way up to the house, where he stood on the veranda and yelled like a Comanche.

"The drunken bum!" snorted Henry, crawling out of his comfortable bed. "I'll fix him."

"What aileth the idiot?" asked the judge, sleepily. "And what time is it?"

"Time," grunted Henry, "is merely a figure of speech, as far as my young life is concerned. Watch the exit for Mr. Pickins."

Henry dragged an old double-barrel shotgun from behind the bed and sauntered, with murderous intent, through the dark living room, while Slim again gave the battle cry of a marauding savage.

Crash! went a piece of furniture, the thud of a falling body; and the ranch-house shook from the thunderous report of two twelve-gauge shotgun shells going off at the same time.

Slim Pickins cleared twenty-seven feet at the first leap, and a split-second

later crashed against the corral fence, while Oscar and Frijole came stumbling out of the bunk-house, clad only in illfitting underwear and hats. With trembling hands, Judge lighted a lamp. In the middle of the floor sat Henry, an expression of dazed amazement on his red face.

"Who in the hell left that chair in the middle of the floor?" he demanded.

"You did, Henry," replied Judge mildly.

Henry gazed at the offending chair, nodded slowly and said:

"In my mental picture of the room, I forgot the chair. Isn't it queer what a trivial thing can do? For the moment I was a potential murderer. In my heart surged the blood-lust of a savage. In other words, my dear Judge, I went berserk. But I'm not berserk now. There is no blood-lust in my heart. I'm just a damned old fool, who fell over a chair and got kicked in the belly with both barrels of a shotgun."

Someone was knocking timidly on the door. "Who is it?" asked Henry.

"It's Frijole, sir; Frijole and Oscar. We caught Slim, before he could hurt himself. He—he has the full report of the election."

"Full report? Let us have it, man!" explained Judge.

"Nolan got sixty-two votes."

"Sixty-two for Nolan. Go ahead, Frijole."

"Sixty-three for Stone."

"Stone beats Nolan by one vote, eh? Very, very close."

"And Henry got sixty-four."

"Henry got—wait a minute, Frijole! Sixty-four, did you say?"

"Yeah, that's right — Henry's the next sheriff."

Henry got slowly to his feet, padded back to the bedroom in his bare feet, and came back quickly, with two shotgun cartridges in his hand. He picked up the offending shotgun, opened it and put in the two shells.

"Is Oscar out there yet?" he asked.

"He—he just went away," replied Frijole.

"Remember," said Judge soothingly, "there were sixty-four, Henry."

Henry nodded slowly, thoughtfully.

"Judge," he said softly, "I went out of vaudeville, because I believed that the world had lost its sense of humor. I was wrong — it was only the city people. Let's go to bed."

"I suppose we may as well, Henry. I wonder what Danny Regan will say. A great boy, that Danny Regan."

"Hauling poles," sighed Henry. "Hauling poles to remodel his little ranch-house—while the populace make me king—of the sheriff's office. And when the house is finished, he and Leila Harper will be wed."

"A grand girl, Henry."

"Aye—a grand girl. A grand couple, Judge. I—I wanted 'em to live here, with us—to run this ranch. But Danny, the red-headed, freckled, young devil, is as independent as a hog on ice. He wants a home of his own."

"Young birds," sighed Judge. "I —er—" he shot a sideways glance at Henry, who was rubbing his already red nose. "Henry, I had sort of an idea that you might be serious about Leila's mother."

"Serious?" queried Henry.

"She's a mighty nice woman, Henry. It seems a shame that she should be obliged to stay there in Tonto City and manufacture hats."

"Why in the devil don't you propose to her, Judge?"

"Me? My Gawd, man! Me? A broken-down old barrister, with only a thirst remaining. You have this

ranch, a position with the county, and —and—"

"A very, very great thirst," finished Henry. "That is the rub."

"She doesn't like liquor, eh?"

"Devil's brew."

"Well," Judge cleared his throat raspingly, "this new responsibility may make a difference. You can not drink and be the sheriff."

Henry gave his nose its final rub, sighed deeply and said:

"I think I'll kill that Swede before breakfast, Judge."

CHAPTER II.

TELLTALE FOOTPRINTS.

DANNY REGAN was not Leila Harper's only suitor in the Wild Horse Valley country. Leila was not yet twenty-one years of age, tall and slender, with clean-cut features, dark, wavy hair, and large, dark eyes. She and her mother ran a millinery store in Tonto City.

Big Bill Parton, the present sheriff, admired Leila greatly. But Bill Parton was forty, a huge, gray-haired man, hard-faced, with a deep voice. Until a year ago, Bill Parton owned the Rafter P cattle outfit, eight miles east of Tonto City. It was a small outfit, but controlled a good range and good water. A youngish man named Joe Hall had purchased the Rafter P; and had apparently fallen head-over-heels in love with Leila. Hall was a good-looking, swarthy young cowboy; but Leila only had eyes for the red-headed, freckled, stub-nosed Danny Regan, who, in range parlance, was as salty as the sea, and as forked as a clothes-pin.

Judge Van Treece, a drunken old derelict, was picked up by Danny Regan, who took care of him, until Henry Harrison Conroy came along, made Judge legal adviser for the J Bar C, and made Danny foreman of the outfit. But Danny owned his own little outfit, and he wanted a home for he and Leila; so he worked for Henry, and put his wages into repairs and remodeling on his own place.

As far as Bill Parton was concerned, Danny only smiled at his efforts to attract Leila. But Joe Hall was a different matter. Hall had made disparaging remarks about Danny's looks, and Danny had slapped Joe Hall down in the Tonto Saloon, after daring Hall to use his gun. Bill Parton intervened, which did not help the situation. But nothing further in the way of trouble happened.

It was about noon the next day after the election, when Bill Parton rode up to the J Bar C ranch-house. Henry and Judge were ready to go to Tonto City, and Oscar Johnson had the buck-board team hitched.

"Well," boomed the big sheriff, "I'm glad to congratulate you, Mr. Conroy, on your remarkable victory. You will make a great peace officer for Wild Horse Valley."

Henry looked at the sheriff.

"Mr. Parton," he replied, "I did not ask for victory. My brow is too tender for a wreath, because of the fact that all my life I have worn the cap of a fool. And I will not make a great peace officer for Wild Horse Valley, because of the fact that I am not going to qualify for the office."

"You mean—you are not going to accept?"

"That is exactly what I mean, sir."

"Well! I—I suppose you know best."

"Oscar sure campaigned for yuh, Conroy," he smiled.

"They say he was rather active," nodded Henry.

"I didn't see Danny in town yesterday. He didn't vote, did he?"

"Danny is working at his ranch," answered Judge. "He's rebuilding his ranch-house. You see, he's getting married soon."

"I see," nodded Parton, undisturbed. "Well, I'll be ridin' along, folks."

"Come out again," invited Henry.

"Thank yuh," said the sheriff shortly, and rode away.

"Ay don't like dis ha'r shoriff," said Oscar. "Ay t'ank he's hord horted."

"If he was a Swede, you'd like him,"

Judge sniffed audibly and looked at Oscar.

"What the devil have you been drinking?" he asked.

"Yust a little prune yuice."

"Some of Frijole's brew?"

"Yah, sure. He call it whoop'n holler yuice. You like hear me sink? Joost like a mockin'-birt."

"Move over to the middle," ordered Judge. "I'll do the driving."

"With all due respect to you, sir," said Henry, quickly, "but I'd rather chance Oscar, even full of prune whisky. Proceed, Oscar."

Oscar leaned forward, slacked the lines, and emitted a Comanche war-whoop, which acted like an electric shock on those half-broken horses. The sudden jerk almost snapped the necks of Judge and Henry, and that buck-board went out through the ranch gateway, as though it were tied to the tail of a comet.

AND they were half-way to Tonto City before Henry and Judge had regained their equilibrium. Both men had lost their hats near the ranch-house. Oscar managed to slow down the team, but offered no excuses for his reckless driving, except to state: "Yust like that—and we are ha'r."

"Don't brag," said Henry huskily. "Just congratulate the team on sticking to the road."

"For deliberate and downright murder," said the Judge, "I can thoroughly recommend Frijole's prune whisky. I believe you could pour that on a man's tracks, after he has been gone a week, and bring him back, a corpse."

"You like hear me sink?" queried Oscar. "Ay know fine Svensky song. My grandfadder wars a Wiking."

"He was?" queried Henry. "One of those old boys, who had horns, like a cow, eh? Judge, it strikes me that evolution worked faster in Sweden than it did over here. In two generations, they bred out horns entirely. Look at Oscar—not a horn on his head."

"Not bred out, Henry," replied Judge. "Merely a hardening of the skull, which prevented the horns from emerging. If you were to open Oscar's skull, I'm sure you'd find them, rather twisted inside his cranium, taking the place of the brains, which he should have had."

"A point well taken," admitted Henry.

"Ay don't know what the hell dis is all about," said Oscar.

"Anyway," sighed Henry, "there is Tonto City ahead."

"Don't you ever have a craving for the lights of a city street?" asked Judge. "Don't you ever feel the urge of the grease-paint, the applause of the multitude, Henry? To be back there on the stage, listening to the thunder of clapping hands, the strumming of an orchestra."

"I sometimes have a slight twitch-

ing in my nose," replied Henry. "And at times I feel a queer sensation at sight of a dog. No doubt my nose misses the old sights—and I followed dog acts for so many years— At times, they thought I was an encore for the dog act."

"You were on Broadway, Henry?"

"Twelve straight weeks — out of work. Twelve weeks of hot-cakes at Childs—once a day. Oscar, you better tie the team near the Tonto Saloon—I feel a break-down coming on."

"Yah, sure," replied Oscar. "Ay am broke, too."

As they dismounted from the buckboard they saw Leila Harper on the other side of the street, motioning to them.

"I suppose," remarked Henry, "the damsel wishes to congratulate me."

"Yah, sure," replied Oscar. "She is for Henry for de shoriff."

"Prune juice!" snorted Henry, and walked across the street, where Leila met them at the edge of the sidewalk.

"I suppose congratulations are in order," she smiled.

"Peace, sister," whispered Henry, lifting his right hand. "I have no illusions—nor delusions. Was Danny in town yesterday?"

Leila's sensitive face clouded for a moment.

"He did not come in to vote," she replied, "but he came in last night."

Henry looked narrowly at her.

"And something went wrong?" he asked.

"Danny and Joe Hall had a fight," she said, "and Joe hit Danny over the head with a bottle."

"Was he badly hurt, Leila?"

"Badly enough—but he wouldn't go to a doctor. Joe Hall, was saying things about you; and Danny resented it."

"I'm sorry about that," sighed Henry. "Awful sorry, Leila. Did Danny go back to his ranch?"

LEILA nodded slowly. "Mother bandaged his head. We wanted, him to stay and see the doctor, too; but he wouldn't. I—I wanted to go down to see him—but I had no way to go."

"Was Joe Hall hurt in the fight?" asked Judge.

"I guess he was. They say that Danny beat him terribly. Danny had knocked him down, when Joe picked a bottle off the floor and flung it at Danny's head."

"I think we better go down and see him," said Judge. "You can drive, can't you, Leila?"

"Why, certainly."

"Well, I can't—and I'll admit it. Judge thinks he can, but I'll admit he can't. We'll leave Oscar here, until we return."

Leila was a better driver than Oscar. Henry sighed with satisfaction over the way she handled the team.

"Not exactly Oscar's technique," remarked Henry.

"Oscar does show a lack of finesse with horses," admitted Judge.

"Why did you two come bareheaded?" asked Leila.

Judge explained the manner in which they left the ranch, and just why they had no hats.

"If Ben Hur had been a Swede, I'd believe in reincarnation," said Henry. "Oscar should have been a charioteer."

"He campaigned strong for you," laughed Leila. "He stood in the middle of the street, waved his hat and yelled—"

"Hooray for Hanry for de shoriff," finished Henry. "Leila, I spent one whole week explaining to Oscar

just why I didn't want the job. I even put the three names on a sheet of paper, and had Oscar mark X's after Stone's name. Day after day, I voted him. And look what he did to me. Got drunk, yelled my name to the four winds, and voted for me."

"True loyalty," smiled the girl.

The approach to Danny Regan's little ranch was along the edge of a low mesa, giving a clear view of the buildings below.

"Danny must be home," said Leila. "I can see his team and wagon at the corral fence."

She turned from the view to guide the team down a short grade, and Judge looked at Henry, a queer expression in his eyes. His lips drew tightly, as he turned his head for another view.

The team was there, tied to the corral fence, and the running-gears of the wagon were still loaded with poles.

They drove nearly up to the ranch-house, when Leila suddenly drew up the team. Between the house and the corral, sprawled flat on his face in the dirt, was a man. Leila was climbing over Henry's knees, trying to get out Judge caught the lines from her hands, while Henry grasped Leila.

"Easy, girl," he said calmly. "Let me out first."

"Oh, Danny, Danny!" she was saying. "Danny, what have they done to you?"

Henry managed to get out, lifted Leila out, and she went running to the sprawled body, dropping on her knees. Henry hurried to join her, while Judge managed to tie the team to the porch.

BUT it was not Danny Regan—it was Joe Hall. Near his outstretched right hand was a Colt forty-five, unfired. The three of them grouped around the body, staring at each other.

"Oh, where is Danny?" asked Leila hoarsely. No one could even guess.

Judge made a swift examination of the body, and got to his feet, brushing off his bony knees.

"Through the back," he said softly. "It's murder, Henry."

Leila looked at Judge and shook her head slowly.

HENRY HARRISON CONROY

"Danny didn't do it," she said. "Oh, God, he couldn't do murder!"

Henry turned away and walked to the house. It was unlocked. Not a thing had been disturbed in the house, but there was no sign of Danny Regan. He went to the little stable and found it empty. Danny's saddle was missing, too. He came back to Leila and Judge.

"His horse and saddle are gone," he told them.

"Let's sit down and talk this over," suggested Judge. They went up to the little porch and sat down on the steps.

"You don't think Danny did this, do you?" asked Leila.

"If we could only find Danny," said Henry, evading an answer.

"It looks bad," sighed Judge. "Especially since they fought last night. Joe Hall's face bears plenty evidence of that battle. But I can't believe Danny would shoot him in the back. And if Danny was on his way to notify the officers, we'd have met him. You say his horse and saddle are gone, Henry?"

Henry nodded slowly. "I think we better search the place."

They went all over the stable, corrals and out-buildings, but there was no sign of Danny Regan; so they came back to the body again.

"What's to be done?" asked Judge.

"Judge, the evidence is all against Danny Regan," said Henry. "Do you believe Danny killed him?"

"I can't believe it, Henry. Knowing Danny, as I do, I'd swear—"

"Don't swear in the presence of a lady. Get him by the legs, Judge."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Put him in the back of the buckboard."

"You mean—to take the body to town?"

"Do you want Danny Regan hung?"

"Certainly not! But why—"

"Grab his legs!"

It was not difficult for them to put the body in the back of the buckboard Henry wiped the perspiration from his brow, and looked at Leila. "There is an old road, which leads to the main road near the J Bar C," he told her. "We are taking that road."

"But," protested Judge, "this is something for the proper—"

"Damn lawyers, anyway!" snorted Henry. "Arguments! You get in here, Judge; between Leila and me. We're going to hide this evidence."

"Hide it? My God, that would make us equally guilty, Henry!"

Henry turned and looked at Leila. Her face was white, but her lips were shut in a hard line.

"You don't mind being a little guilty, in a good cause, do you?" he asked.

"I'll drive," she said tensely.

"You ought to be ashamed, Judge," said Henry. "Leila is young—got everything to live for, while you—why, even the buzzards—" Henry hesitated, and his eyes softened.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Judge," he continued, "but I'm just the thickness of a cigarette paper from being disgusted with you."

"Compounding a felony," muttered Judge. "Accessory to—well, what are we waiting for, anyway? I owe everything to Danny Regan."

"I know where that road turns off," said Henry. "Danny showed it to me one day; a short-cut to the J Bar C."

"What about Oscar?" queried Judge. "He'll wonder where we are, and—"

"You didn't tell him where we were going, did you?"

"Fortunately not."

"Then don't worry about Oscar doing any wondering. By this time he's so full of corn juice he wouldn't miss us if we didn't come back for a week."

AT ABOUT the same time that they drove away from the ranch, Danny Regan was sitting in the sheriff's office at Tonto City. In the office were Bill Parton, the sheriff, and Rolling Stone, deputy, who had been an unsuccessful candidate for the sheriff's office in the recent election. Stone was a small, bandy-legged cowboy, with a huge sense of humor.

Danny was disheveled, his face

and there was a purple swelling above his left temple, where Joe Hall had hit him with the bottle. Danny's eyes were bloodshot, weary, as he looked at Bill Parton.

"I ain't disputin' yore story," said the sheriff, "but, Regan, you never could make a jury swaller that tale."

"I've told yuh the truth, Bill," declared Danny.

"Let's go over it again," suggested the deputy.

"I was cuttin' and haulin' poles this mornin', about eight o'clock," said Danny wearily. "I was comin' back with my first load, when I heard a shot. A few moments later I came out on the side of the hill, where I could see my place.

"There was a man in the yard, bending over what proved later to be Joe Hall. I reckon he heard me comin', 'cause he ran down past my stable. I didn't know what it was all about, but I whipped up fast. Just before I got to the corral, I seen this man cutting through the brush on a horse.

"I seen the dead man was Joe Hall. Then I saddled my horse, grabbed a 30-30 Winchester, and took after him. I've been tryin' to locate him ever since. That's my story, Bill."

"That was about eight o'clock this mornin', eh? And it's past noon, before yuh notify me."

"Why notify you — as long as there's a chance to catch him. You couldn't do anythin', Bill."

"That's what I've been tellin' him for two years," said Rolling Stone soberly. "Gee, you shore got a crack on the head last night."

"Joe Hall got several cracks from Regan," said Parton.

"I hit him with my hands," said Danny.

"Well, Bill," said Rolling, "you know the news now—so why don't yuh do somethin'? Or are yuh waitin' for the buzzards to gobble up the eidence."

Bill Parton got slowly to his feet and looked at Danny.

"I want to see the evidence before I do much," he said slowly. "I hope yuh ain't aimin' to duck out on me, Regan."

"Sometimes," replied Danny, "yo're as ignorant as yuh look, Parton."

"Check!" snorted Rolling Stone. "Let's go."

There was little conversation during the ride of seven miles down to Danny's ranch. The load of poles and the team were still at the corral fence, but there was no sign of the body. The three men dismounted and looked around. Danny pointed out the exact spot where the body had lain. Darkly moist ground proved this to be the spot, although none of them could swear that it was blood.

They went through the house and the stable, finally coming back to their horses. Bill Parton was mad; Rolling Stone merely amused. Danny was puzzled. The ground was packed so hard that the buck-board wheels left only faint tracks, too indefinite for anyone to notice.

"Well," said Parton, "it's gone."

"If I hadn't seen it myself, I'd say yuh was guessin', Bill," said the deputy. "It's the first time you've been right in two years."

Parton turned to Danny.

"Are you sure yuh wasn't dreamin', Regan?" he asked harshly.

"Come to think of it, mebbe I was," grinned Danny. "I do have a lot of queer dreams, Bill."

"Yuh ought to git one of them dream books, Danny," said Rolling. "I've got one. If I think of it, I'll

see what it means—seein' dead men, layin' on the ground, with a man standin' over him."

"I wish yuh would, Rollin'," said Danny.

"Aw, hell!" snorted the sheriff. "Comin' all the way down here to listen to a couple sagebrush comedians! Let's go back. If yuh have any more dreams, Regan—look up the answers for yourself."

DANNY watched them ride away, puzzled, but thankful that the body had disappeared. He was not going to question anyone's motives for removing the body. Finally, he went over to unload the poles.

It was Bill Parton who saw the fresh buck-board tracks, leading off on the old, abandoned road. He dismounted and looked closely at the marks of the horses. Then he mounted and motioned to his deputy.

"I want to see where that buck-board went, and why they took this road," he said. "The tracks are fresh."

"All right," grunted Rolling, "Are yuh sure them horse tracks point this way? I don't want to back-track no buck-board."

Bill Parton nodded grimly. "Sometimes I'm glad this here sheriff job is about over," he said.

"It's shore a strain on a feller like you," agreed Rolling. "When you took this job, you didn't have a line in your face, and now yore brow looks like a picture of the Japanese Current, flowin' into the Pacific Ocean. Yuh know what I mean—all them jiggly, little lines. Bein' sheriff has shore robbed you of yore youth."

"If you'd think more and talk less, you'd have lines."

"Mebbe. I was sort of a strong silent man, when I joined you, Bill. I hardly ever laughed. In fact, I never seen anythin' worth laughin' at, until I joined up with you. You've shore changed me."

"You've been a damned fool *all* yore life," grunted Parton.

"Another remark like that, Bill, and you can foller yore own danged buck-board tracks. Anyway, you ain't knowed me *all* my life. What was you like, and what did you do, before yuh came to Wild Horse Valley?"

"That's none of yore damn business!" snapped the sheriff. "You keep watchin' yore side of the road, in case that buck-board happened to turn off. I don't want to lose it."

"Yo're watchin' yore side, ain't yuh?" retorted the deputy. "Or is this the sort of buck-board that splits in two, the left side goin' off on its own most any time."

"That's a brainless remark."

"Couple idiots follerin' a buck-board track?"

"One, yuh mean!" snapped the sheriff.

"Yeah, I did, Bill. I merely included myself, so yuh wouldn't be sore. But you can take the honor; I'm merely ridin' with yuh."

"Wait a minute!" The sheriff drew up his horse. "Here's where they turned part out of the road. See them tracks?"

"Prob'ly turned out to pass a scorpion goin' west."

"No, they didn't; they stopped here. See where they cramped the buck-board? Here's where we investigate."

Fifty yards off the old road was the ruins of an ancient adobe shack, its walls nearly crumbled down; and here they found the body of Joe Hall. It was lying in the same position as it was when it was discovered at the Regan

ranch, with the unfired Colt near the right hand. To all appearances, Joe Hall had been killed inside the old adobe.

BILL PARTON swore softly, as he walked around the corpse, while Rolling Stone sat down on the broken wall and rolled a smoke.

Suddenly the sheriff dropped on his knees beside the corpse and examined the ground carefully.

"C'mere," he ordered. "Look at this, will yuh?"

It was a clear imprint of a woman's shoe. Rolling Stone hunkered down and looked at it.

"A woman mixed up in it, eh?" he said.

Bill Parton shoved his hands deep in his chaps pockets and looked at Rolling.

"Answer that yourself," he said slowly. "There's her track. All we've got to do is find the woman to fill that track."

"I bet there'll be an awful rush down here," said Rolling. "Every woman in Wild Horse Valley will be anxious to fit up to that mark."

Bill Parton rubbed his stubbled chin, as he looked around for more tracks. He found more at the old doorway, and several more between there and the road; but he did not notice that Rolling Stone was following him closely, obliterating each footprint, as fast as the sheriff pointed them out and went hunting for more.

"We're follerin' that buck-board," declared the sheriff, as they mounted again.

"All right," replied the deputy. "There's only about twenty buck-boards in this valley."

"I'll find the woman that fits them tracks, too," declared the sheriff. "She's as guilty as the man who shot Joe Hall."

They finally came to the intersection with the main road, which led to Antelope, the nearest railroad town to Wild Horse Valley. The heavy stage had obliterated the buck-board tracks; so they had no idea whether the buck-board had gone toward Antelope, or back to Tonto City. It was only about a mile from the intersection to the J Bar C ranch.

"I reckon we better go back to Tonto City," said the sheriff. "We've got to take the coroner down to look at that body; so we might as well do it now."

"And git somethin' to eat," added Rolling Stone. "I'm hongry."

About halfway between the intersection and Tonto City, they met the J Bar C buck-board. In fact, they were nearly run down by Oscar, who was driving.

The two officers merely caught a glimpse in the dust cloud of Henry Harrison Conroy and Judge Van Treece, clinging to each other, while Oscar did a fair imitation of Ben Hur, yelling at the top of his voice.

"There's a buck-board, but no lady," laughed Rolling Stone, as he spurred his horse back into the road.

"That damn Swede is goin' to kill them two old pelicans one of these days," said the sheriff. "I think I'll find out where that J Bar C buck-board has been today."

That was not difficult to do. There were a number of people in Tonto City, who had seen Leila Harper drive away with Henry and Judge. Several had seen them come back to town; and the bartender at the Tonto Saloon told the sheriff that Oscar had been left there, until the buck-board returned.

"And still," reminded Rolling

Stone, " yuh don't *know* that it went down to Regan's ranch."

" I'm goin' to know," declared the sheriff.

He went to the court-house, where he explained things to the prosecuting attorney.

" We'll take some plaster of paris down there and make casts of those footprints," said the lawyer. " You get the coroner, and I'll meet you at your office, Bill."

" We've got to work smart," said the sheriff. " I figure that Danny Re-

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gan shot Joe Hall, got scared and pulled out. While he was makin' up his mind to come to me, Conroy, Van Treece and that girl went down there, stole the evidence and took it to that old adobe."

" We might have trouble in proving it," said the lawyer. " You say that no one positively seen them go to Regan's ranch; that no one, except Regan, saw the body at Regan's ranch; so there's no absolute proof that Hall was killed there. And, even if they did go to Regan's ranch, they could swear they never saw the body."

" Make it as tough as yuh can," growled the sheriff. " Get that plaster and meet me in ten minutes."

CHAPTER III.

A DREAM AND A LETTER.

JUDGE Van Treece stared moodily at his plate of bacon and eggs; sort of a hang-dog expression on his face. Henry Harrison Conroy flicked a drop of egg yolk off the front of his white shirt, and nodded approvingly, as Frijole Bill appeared with the pot of coffee.

" Little more Java, Judge?" queried Henry.

" No-o-o," mourned Judge. " I have no appetite."

" I noticed yuh was actin' kinda jumpy," said Frijole. " I used to bunk with a horse-thief that acted that way every mornin'."

" Huh?" blurted Judge. " Frijole, are you comparing me to a thief?"

" Calm down," soothed Henry. " Try the eggs."

" They're guilty as hell," sighed the judge.

" I was readin' about them eggs they ship from China," offered Frijole. " Some of 'em are a hundred years old."

Judge shoved the plate out of his line of vision. Frijole went back to the kitchen, closing the door behind him.

" Worried?" asked Henry. Judge nodded grimly.

" I moved dead men all night, in my sleep," he said wearily. " Why, I even shuffled 'em and played three-card Monte with them. I hid 'em, and we played button, button, who's got the button. Gawd, it was awful!"

" Pleasant dreams," mused Henry, sipping at his coffee.

" You don't seem to be worrying."

"Why worry?"

"Why? I'll tell you why. If Oscar—"

"Stop yelling. I know what you mean. Oscar has sworn to secrecy."

"Just like he was sworn to vote against you. Give him a skinful of prune whisky, and he'll shout the truth to the housetops. Henry, we've got to muzzle Oscar, or kill him."

"I prefer muzzles to murder, of course, my dear Judge. If—"

"Hey!" yelled Frijole, shoving open the door, "Miss Harper jist drove in. She's out in front."

"Gawd!" exploded Judge.

Leila was frightened and excited, when they met her at the front of the house.

"Oh, I'm frightened stiff!" she exclaimed. "The sheriff and Mr. Campbell, the prosecutor, tried to make me admit that we went down there and stole Joe Hall's body. They said they could prove it, and that they wouldn't do anything to me, if I'd admit it. They said they had a plaster cast of my footprints, which they found beside the body. But I didn't admit anything," she finished bravely.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Henry admiringly. "You are a very brave young lady. So they found your footprints, eh?"

"They—they made plaster casts of them."

"I see," mused Henry. "Clever, I'd say, Judge. Leila, have they brought the body to Tonto City yet?"

"Why, no, I—I guess not. No one has mentioned it, if they did. I saw the two officers and the coroner come back yesterday, without it."

"Perhaps they buried it down there."

"Why, they wouldn't do that!"

"Have you seen Danny?"

"He came last night," replied Leila. "He doesn't know we took that body away; doesn't know what became of it. Poor Danny is so muddled."

"He was born that way," said Judge dryly.

"No such a thing!" denied Leila. "Danny is smart."

"In some things," admitted Judge. "Such as picking you for a wife."

"I still have hopes," smiled Leila. "If we can both keep out of jail."

"THEY tell me that the modern jails are comfortable," said Henry. "I haven't been in one for years. I was suspected of poisoning a dog; a very intelligent pooch, it seems. They always are—after they are dead. An autopsy showed that the dog died from a combination of a hundred yards of wrapping twine, six dozen assorted pins and several razor blades. The judge exonerated me."

"We are getting away from the case at hand," murmured Judge.

"The case at hand doesn't seem to be a case at all, Judge. In fact, from my position in the wings, it seems a first-class mystery."

"They tracked our buck-board," said Leila.

"I knew they would!" exclaimed Judge. "I knew they would."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what to do," sighed Leila. "I just had to tell you. Mr. Bain, the blacksmith, loaned me his horse and buggy; so I could come out here. I suppose the sheriff knows I came here."

"Yes, I'd credit him with that much intuition," nodded Henry. "But that is all right, Leila."

"But what's to be done?" asked Judge anxiously.

"Nothing, my dear Judge. What is there to do?"

"I guess we have already done enough. Too much, in fact."

"He dreamed last night, Leila," chuckled Henry. "Spent the night trying to hide corpses."

"So did I," she replied. "And you kept digging them up. I had to tell mother what we did—and she had nightmares, too. It was awful,"

"Here comes somebody!" exclaimed Judge. "Why, it is Rolling Stone."

The bandy-legged deputy rode up to them, trying to look solemn, but was not successful. "Howdy, folks," he grinned. "How's everything?"

"That question covers quite a lot of territory, doesn't it?" asked Henry.

"I never thought about it thataway," laughed Rolling, "but I reckon it does. I—I wanted to git away from Bill Parton for a while; so I rode out here. Bill's fit to be tied, don'tcha know it? You've done heard about Joe Hall's demise, I suppose. Well, somebody swiped the body—unless Danny lied about seein' it in his yard—and me and Bill found it in that old adobe on the lower road.

"You men remember meetin' me and Bill yes'day afternoon, when you was comin' home in the buck-board, don'tcha?

"Well, we was comin' back from there, when we met yuh. Bill was trackin' a buck-board, but lost it, when we hit the main road.

"Then we went to town and got the coroner. Bill seen some female tracks around the remains; so him and Campbell took some plaster down there to make a cast of the print. That part would have been fine, except that we done forget to take any water along to mix the plaster.

"Anyway, it worked out all right, 'cause there wasn't any tracks left. Not a darn track left, in fact," said Rolling softly, "there wasn't no corpse either."

"No corpse!" exclaimed Leila, and suddenly put her hand over her mouth.

"No corpse?" parroted Judge. "No corpse. That's funny, Henry! No corpse!"

And Judge laughed chokingly, slapping Henry on the back.

"Nope, not a damn corpse," added Rolling Stone.

"What became of it?" asked Leila,

"*QUIEN SABE?*" replied the deputy. "It was gone—that's all I know. The coroner cursed the sheriff, the sheriff cursed me, and I got so mad that I flung the paper sack of plaster on the ground and busted it. Then I made some remarks about both of 'em, and we wasn't speakin' to each other all the way back.

"They acted as though I stole their danged corpse."

"And so," remarked Henry dryly, "you didn't find the corpse."

"Found it the first time," replied Rolling.

"You are sure he was dead?" queried Judge.

"He shore acted dead," nodded Rolling. "'Course we didn't test him."

"How do you test dead men?" asked Henry curiously.

"This here talk is gettin' technical," laughed the deputy. "Bill and the coroner had the same argument. The coroner asked Bill if he was sure Joe Hall was dead, and Bill said he sure was dead. The coroner asked Bill how he knowed, and Bill got mad. He said—"

"Ha'lo, yents," interrupted Oscar, coming around the house.

Henry took one look at Oscar, and groaned aloud. It was evident that Oscar had been drinking some of Fri-

jole's homemade liquor. Oscar had an air—and an odor.

"Hello, Oscar," smiled the deputy. "How are yuh?"

"Ay am yust as goot as anybody," declared Oscar.

"You've been drinking before breakfast," sighed Judge.

"Yah, su-u-ure. Last night Ay had a dream. Ay dreamed—"

"Stop it!" snorted Henry. "Never mind your dreams."

"But Ay like to ta'l about it."

Henry and Judge looked at each other in consternation. They couldn't let Oscar tell about his dream.

"You better go get some breakfast," said Henry.

"I'd like to hear a Swedish dream," said the deputy. "I've heard Irish, French, German, Dutch—"

"Das was goot dream," grinned Oscar, who stepped back.

"Nobody wants to hear your dream," declared Henry. "Go to breakfast!"

"Ay dreamed—"

"No! You didn't dream—"

"Ay ta'l you, Ay dreamed Ay vas—"

Henry fairly pounced on Oscar, clutching him by the throat, and they both went down under the impetus of Henry's attack. Leila screamed, as Oscar reached up, grasped Henry by the middle, and catapulted him six feet away, where Henry landed, sitting down, the breath knocked out of him. Oscar sat up, grinned widely and said:

"Ay dreamed Ay vas at a dance mit no pants on! Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Aw, shucks!" snorted the deputy. "I've dreamed that a dozen times."

"That's funny," giggled Judge, almost in hysterics. "No pants on! Henry, he dreamed he was at a dance, with no pants on!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the dazed Henry. "He—he didn't have no pants—"

And Henry went into a paroxysm of mirthless laughter.

"Well, what's wrong with you gallinippers around here?" asked the deputy.

"Have yuh all gone loco? Miss Leila, what ails 'em?"

Leila looked helplessly at everyone.

"No pants!" whispered Judge, inanely.

"At a dance," added Oscar. "Yeeminy, Ay vars ashamed! Haw, haw, haw!"

Henry got to his feet, panting a little, and brushed off his clothes.

"I—I hate dreams," he told Rolling Stone. "All my life I've been that way. It upsets me to have anyone tell me of a dream. If you have finished with your tale, Oscar, I'd advise some breakfast."

"Yah, su-u-ure," nodded Oscar. "You want me to drife bock-board today?"

"I hope not—but I'm not sure."

"Ay get breakfast now."

"Some day that Swede's goin' to kill both of you fellers in that buck-board," declared the deputy, after Oscar disappeared. "Why don't both of yuh ride horses?"

"I suppose we shall have to take it up in self-defense," replied Henry.

"If yo're sheriff, you'll have to ride a horse."

HENRY nodded slowly. "I suppose I shall. I might make Judge my deputy, and both of us walk to and from the—er—corpses."

"Take my advice," said Rolling Stone seriously, "and when yuh find one—nail it down, and clinch the nails, or they'll walk out on yuh."

"I suppose it's the climate," said

Henry. "The air of Arizona is very invigorating, you know."

"That's right. I was wonderin' if Frijole might—well, I forgot to eat any breakfast this mornin'."

"Sure!" exclaimed Judge. "I'll order him to cook some for you."

They walked into the house, leaving Leila and Henry together.

"That terrible Swede!" gasped Henry. "Leila, my heart was in my mouth, when he started about his dream."

"But what did Rolling Stone mean about losing the body again?"

"Sh-h-h-h!" cautioned Henry. "On the way back here yesterday, we met Parton and Stone. We knew they had been down to Danny's place, and that they had come back over the old road, trailing the buck-board. There was a strong possibility that they had discovered the body; so we drove back there, shifted the body to another spot, and came back. They had found the body. There were tracks of cowboy boots around it."

"That was why—oh, I see now! Oscar knows."

"Oscar knows," agreed Henry. "I've explained that if he don't keep still about it, he'll hang as high as the rest of us."

"Did he swear not to tell?"

"Oh, yes—he swore. He also swore not to vote for me."

"But this is serious, Mr. Conroy."

"Well, my dear, we will just have to wait and see how serious it is. I think we'll ride down and have a talk with Danny this afternoon. A few more buck-board tracks on that old road won't hurt anything."

"Well, I hope everything will turn out right, Mr. Conroy. I'll go back now."

"I'm glad you came out, Leila. Keep a stiff upper lip. Don't let the law bluff you. We know they lied about the plaster casts."

"Oh, I'm glad about that. It had me worried. I suppose mother is walking the floor, wondering why I don't come home. Come in and see us, won't you? Mother would be pleased."

"Sure about that, Leila?"

"Why, certainly. Mother thinks you are fine."

"When sober. I know, Leila. But this new job—if I take it—will require absolute sobriety. An entire new rôle for me; and I may be unsuited for the part. It will require a heroic figure—not a worthless old character actor. Henry Harrison Conroy, as the sheriff of Wild Horse Valley. A black mustache, piercing eyes, thundering voice. Can you imagine me—thundering? I'm a natural born nose polisher.

"Hands off that gal, Bert Nuttingall, or I'll shoot you in twain! Can you imagine me? I squeak like a rusty hinge every time I try to raise my voice. Someone would soak me with an overripe egg, and at the next performance I'd be the mere voice, offstage, saying;

"'No, sir; the afternoon stage don't git here in the mornin'.'"

"Anyway," laughed Leila, "come in and see us."

"Thank you, my dear—and my regards to your charming mother."

HE watched her drive away. Judge and Rolling Stone were in the kitchen, talking with Frijole Bill; so Henry sauntered down to the buck-board, climbed into the seat and relaxed thoughtfully. Finally he took a blank envelope from his pocket, drew out the enclosure and looked it over carefully.

It was what was left of a letter, it seemed. Some of it had been torn

away, while much of it was obliterated by a dark stain, which had left the paper stiff, completely blotting out the penciled scrawl. All that was readable was this:

Dear Chuck:
Glad to hear from you again.
I sure got a laugh out of your letter
friend. So they elected him
there. That sure is funny.
made him part with his
careful, Chuck.
rat and he'd kill
better make him give
you'll be safe
here as usual

It was a letter Henry had taken off the body of Joe Hall, when they moved the body the last time. The bullet had torn through part of the letter, and the blood had blotted out nearly all that was left. There was enough of the date line left to show that it was from Carson City, Nevada, written on the tenth of August. And this was only the fourteenth. The envelope had been so nearly destroyed that they could not tell if the letter had been opened, or not. Judge attached no importance to the letter, but Henry was not so sure. There was no one at the Rafter P, who answered to the nickname of Chuck. Henry put the letter away carefully, when Judge and Rolling Stone came from the kitchen.

After talking with Judge for a few minutes, the deputy mounted and rode away. Judge came down and climbed up in the buck-board.

"I hope I never have to go through such agony again," said Judge.

"You mean Oscar's dream?"

"Yes. Did you tell Leila what we did about that body?"

Henry nodded. "Yes, I told her. Did Stone say anything about what the sheriff was doing?"

"Nothing important. He wants to find the body, of course."

"I've been thinking about that," remarked Henry. "We've got to let them find that body. It—it's something—well, Judge, you know yourself that in all this heat—"

"Exactly. But how will we do it?"

"I want to talk with Danny," replied Henry. "Suppose we go down the old road, pick up the body, and

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place it where it is bound to be discovered."

"Cautiously," nodded Judge.

"Certainly. By all means, with caution, Judge. And after that is done, we will wash our hands of the whole thing. Day after tomorrow, I am due to take my office."

"Will you take it, Henry?"

"Who knows? It may be that they—er—will have to hand it through the bars to me."

CHAPTER IV.

LOST CORPSE.

LATER that day, three men, Bill Parton, Rolling Stone, and John Campbell, the prosecuting attorney, sat beside the crumbling wall of

the old adobe. Near them was a white splash of plaster on the ground, covering what had been a woman's footprint, and which they fondly hoped would give them a fairly good cast of that woman's shoe. Near them was a large canteen, and a broken sack of plaster.

"Won't prove anythin', anyway," declared Rolling Stone. "There ain't no law that says a woman couldn't walk around here."

"True enough," admitted the lawyer. "But I believe we can use this cast to frighten the Harper girl into a confession. If we can get her to confess that they moved that body, she will also admit that they found it on Regan's place. In this way we can build up a fairly good case against Regan for the murder."

"If we had some ham, we could have some ham and eggs, if we had some eggs," said Rolling Stone. "But before yuh can charge a man with murder, you've got to have a corpse, Campbell. Instead of settin' here, pourin' plaster into footprints, we ought to be tryin' to find the remains of Joe Hall."

"If we can scare that girl—she'll tell where it is," said the sheriff.

"I thought you was stuck on her, Bill," said Rolling. "Yo're kind of a dog-in-the-manger, ain't yuh? If you can't have her—put her in jail."

Bill Parton's big face reddened with anger, but he kept his lips shut tightly.

"I think that cast is sufficiently set," said the lawyer, and gently pried it out. "There we are!"

"It don't look like anythin' to me," said the deputy. "If that's a copy of Leila Harper's foot, she better see a doctor."

"When we make the imprint in plaster," explained the lawyer. "It will show exactly as the print showed in the ground."

"All right," said the deputy. "If we ain't goin' to hunt for the corpse, I reckon we might as well go back to Tonto City."

The sheriff and lawyer had come down in a buggy, while Rolling Stone rode his horse; and they had left their transportation near the road. As the sheriff and prosecutor drove around a clump of mesquite, with the deputy close behind them, another vehicle came around a curve, the horses trotting swiftly, and were so close that the sheriff jerked up on his horses to prevent a collision.

It was the J Bar C buck-board, containing Henry, Judge and Oscar. At sight of the three officers from Tonto City, Oscar started to jerk up his team, changed his mind instantly, and slashed them with his whip. At the same time he half raised to his feet and emitted a yell that might well have been heard in Tonto City.

The effect on Oscar's team was electrical. In fact it was so dynamic that a line broke, and Oscar went backwards over the rear of the buck-board, landing on his shoulders in the road, almost in front of the sheriff's equipage. The horses whirled sideways, cramping the buggy so sharp that it upset, throwing its occupants sprawling, while the frightened team went up the road, dragging the wrecked buggy.

Henry and Judge grabbed each other, helpless so far as driving was concerned. There was another curve a hundred yards beyond where they had lost Oscar, and apparently the runaway team tried to straighten out this curve, with the result that the buck-board threshed over a washout, flipping high in the air.

In some unaccountable manner, both

men managed to stay on the seat, but a large, blanket-covered bundle in the back of the buck-board, flew into the air and fell in the middle of the road.

Bill Parton was dancing up and down in the road, swearing like a mule-skinner, while Campbell sat there, dazed, wide-eyed. Rolling Stone slouched sideways in his saddle, an expression of amazement on his face.

"It's broke," wailed Campbell. "It's broke."

"Yore neck?" queried the deputy.

"No—our plaster cast. It's broke all to pieces."

"Oh, that damn Swede!" panted the sheriff. "Oh, that awful Swede!"

Oscar was sitting up in the road, trying to gather his breath.

"You done it!" puffed the sheriff. "Oscar Johnson, you done it!"

"Ay — didn't — do — it," panted Oscar. "Oll Ay done vars help hide it."

"You did, eh?" Campbell was on his feet, shaking a finger in Oscar's face. "You helped hide it, eh? Where is it now?"

"They done lost a big bundle out of their buck-board," said the deputy. "There she is, up there at the curve."

THE sheriff went limping up there and took a look at the bundle.

"Yeeminy!" breathed Oscar. "It yumped out!"

"This is Joe Hall's body!" yelled the sheriff.

"W'at de ha'l did you t'ink it vars?" asked Oscar.

The sheriff came back.

"You was goin' to take that body away and destroy it, eh?" he accused.

"No," replied Oscar sweetly, "ve vars only yust going to put it where it could be found. Yudge say ye got to give it up before it spoils."

Bill Parton turned to Campbell.

"That'll cinch 'em," he said harshly. "They'll either tell the truth, or we'll send 'em all to the penitentiary. Stone, why in hell don't yuh see if yuh can stop our team? Settin' there, like a damn wooden Injun! Do somethin', will yuh?"

In the meantime Judge and Henry were clinging to each other and watching that team eat up distance. Except for that first curve, they were staying on the road, but the buck-board was rocking and lurching wildly over the rough, rutty road. Judge risked a glance over his shoulder.

"We've lost it!" he yelled in Henry's ear. "The officers will find that body, Henry!"

"Yes—and a couple more, I'm afraid!" replied Henry. "Look out!"

The road made an almost right-angle turn; but the team did not. They went straight across country, through mesquite and cat-claw, over cactus and rocks for possibly a hundred feet, where a front wheel hooked around a tough manzanita, slewed around, yanking the buck-board to a splintering stop.

But the horses kept going, leaving parts of harness scattered behind them. When the dust subsided, Judge appeared slowly from among some cat-claw, grasped a smoke-tree for support, and looked around.

"Hen-n-n-nry!" he called softly. "Oh, Hen-n-n-nry!"

There was no reply. Judge licked his lips.

"Henry's dead," he told the world. "Poor Henry is dead—and I'd give ten years of *my* life for a drink of whisky."

"If it isn't busted, there's a gallon jug of it, tied under the buck-board seat," stated Henry's voice.

Judge craned his neck. "You—you are not dead, Henry?"

"Find the whisky," said Henry. "In the meantime, I shall try to find out how in hell a man of my size ever came through a six-inch hole in a mesquite thicket."

"Can you get out, Henry?" asked Judge anxiously.

"If I do," replied Henry, "I shall go back into vaudeville, under the billing of Henry, the Houdini Hill-Billy. But not with these pants, Judge. If I lose one-eighth as much of them as I did coming in, I'll be as naked as the day I was born. Get the liquor."

It was no figure of speech with Henry. He managed to tear himself loose from the embraces of that natural barb-wire entanglement, minus ninety per cent of his pants, all of his shirt, except the neck-band, and with a plentiful supply of scratches.

Judge had the jug, and they sat down in the shade of the smashed buckboard.

"All is lost," sighed Judge. "By this time the officers of the law have Oscar and the corpse."

Henry drank deeply and slowly closed his eyes.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," he said.

"There is a preponderance of corroborative evidence," sighed Judge, accepting the jug. "Such damnable luck! To have the officers of the law meet us there—and us with the corpse."

"Dirty work at the crossroads," said Henry, recovering the jug. "I wonder how far it is to Danny's ranch. It can't be far."

"Possibly a mile and a half, Henry. But by going down there, we might possibly involve Danny."

"I am thinking of my pants," said Henry, surrendering the jug. "I might borrow some sort of raiment to cover my shame."

"You are, sir," declared Judge ponderously, "a hell of a looking wreck. It is really too bad that the voters of this county did not see you in this wise; you wouldn't have received a vote."

"Oh, yes, I would; you forget Oscar."

"Poor Oscar. The toe of his boot caught me under the chin, as he left us, Henry. Well, here is to Oscar—the son of a Viking."

"A son of something," agreed Henry, "but I wouldn't specify just what. Whew! I can still feel myself turning handsprings in the air. I take it that the team went on."

"Ah-h-h-h-h! Not bad liquor," said Judge. "A queer odor and a bit harsh—but not bad."

"Prune yuice," said Henry. "I stole it from Frijole Bill. It must be at least three days old."

"Some daze," nodded Judge. "If I were asked for an opinion, I would say that we better start going somewhere—and keep the cork in that jug, Henry. No wonder Oscar thought he was a charioteer."

Henry corked the jug and placed it carefully on the ground. He looked at Judge, blinked several times and broke into a smile.

"Do you know any shongs?" he asked.

THE suspense was too much for Leila. She had seen the prosecuting attorney ride away with the two officers, and she was afraid they had gone to arrest Danny Regan; so she borrowed a horse and buggy from the blacksmith and induced her mother to close shop and go along.

Danny was alone at the ranch, nailing shingles on the kitchen roof; and

he greeted them warmly. Leila told him why they came down.

"No, they didn't come down here," smiled Danny. "Have you seen Henry?"

"Not today," replied Leila. Danny looked at her closely.

"You're not worryin' about me, are yuh, Leila?"

"Suppose they can prove that the body was here?" she countered.

"It sure is a funny thing," he declared. "I can't make head nor tail out of it. Who on earth stole that body, and why did they steal it? It doesn't make sense."

"Under the circumstances, I think you should tell Danny the truth, Leila," said Mrs. Harper. "It can't make things any worse."

"The truth?' queried Danny. "What do you mean?"

"I suppose I may as well tell him, mother," agreed Leila.

Mrs. Harper nodded, and Leila proceeded to tell Danny all about how they found the body, took it away and hid it; and how Henry, Judge and Oscar took the body to another hiding place, after it had been found by the officers. She told how they had tried to make her tell everything, after they had found her footprints near the body, and had told her they were going to make plaster casts of the marks.

"Well, God bless all of yuh!" exclaimed Danny. "It's wonderful of yuh to do all that for me—but I never shot Joe Hall."

"Henry wanted to be sure the evidence was away from here," sighed Leila.

"Bless his old heart—and nose," smiled Danny. "He's wonderful, and so is Judge; but, Leila, you're the most wonderful of them all. Just to think of you helpin' them take that—well, that's nerve. And Henry almost ready to step into office. Gee, I've sure got some great friends!"

"Our biggest worry is Oscar," said Leila. "Oscar is funny."

"In lots of ways," laughed Danny.

"I don't see why Henry Conroy keeps him," said Mrs. Harper.

"I asked Henry one day about why he kept Oscar, and he said he wouldn't part with him, until he had thoroughly made up his mind which of them—he or Oscar—was the bigger fool."

"They both drink," said Mrs. Harper seriously.

"And both sing, when they're drunk," added Danny, laughing.

"Terrible songs—and worse voices." said Leila. "But if you want to split your sides, listen when Judge Van Treece joins the chorus."

Danny, apparently unperturbed by what Leila had told him, took the two ladies and showed them what he was doing toward repairing the place.

"Stay down and have supper with me," he begged. "I get so lonesome around here. I'll do the cookin'."

"Young man," said Mrs. Harper severely, "if we stay, I shall do the cooking myself."

"I hoped you'd say that," grinned Danny. "I'm a terrible cook."

ABOUT an hour later, while Mrs. Harper was preparing supper, and Leila and Danny were sitting at the table, planning futures, someone outside the kitchen doorway said:

"Hoo-hoo-o-o-o! Hoo-hoo-o-o-o!"

The voice was not very strong. Mrs. Harper, skillet in hand, stepped to the doorway. For a moment she stood there, staring wildly, the smoking skillet held in front of her, like a weapon of defense. Then she dropped it and stepped back.

"Merciful Heavens!" she shrieked, and backed toward the table.

Standing near the kitchen doorway, hand in hand, was Henry and Judge. Henry was holding the jug in his right hand, and on the faces of the two old scarecrows were expressions of angelic innocence.

"H'lo, Danny," said Judge.

"Tha' wasn' Danny," said Henry. "Tha' was a woman."

"Im—impos'ble," declared Judge. "Thish ranch is not co-educa'nl."

Danny stepped from the kitchen, stopped short, staring at the two wrecks.

"What on earth happened to you?" exclaimed Danny.

"Young man," replied Henry expansively, "you are looking upon a couple losht shouls. Fug'tives from jushtish."

Danny came down to them, looking upon them with undisguised amazement.

"I never in my whole life—" began Danny, as Leila stepped out on the porch. She shrieked and darted back into the house.

"Goodn'ss gracious!" exclaimed Judge. "Is thish Regan's ranch, or Regan's sheminary?"

"Turn around," ordered Danny. "We're goin' to the stable, until I can get some clothes for you two. Forward march."

"Treated jus' like a horsh," complained Henry.

"My God, what a spectacle!" groaned Danny. "Leila and her mother are in the house, Henry. Don'tcha understand?"

"Perf'ly, Danny — perf'ly," and Henry started singing mournfully;

"Oh, a big, beer bottle, came drif'n in the shea. It drifted up to me—it drifted up to me-e-e. Inshide was a paper, with these lines written on, 'Whoever fin's thish bottle, fin's the beer all gone.'"

Danny closed the stable door behind them.

"Danny," said Judge thickly, "the horshes ran away. We lost Oscar and the corpsh, right in front of the sheriff. We're shunk."

"Great lovely dove!" snorted the young cowboy. "The sheriff caught yuh with the corpse?"

"He ain't caught us yet, has he?" queried Henry. "But they got Oscar and the body."

"Perhapsh Oscar is dead, too, sighed Judge, and yawned widely.

"Oshcar," pronounced Henry, "is unhurt; he landed on his head."

"You stay right here, while I get yuh some clothes," ordered Danny.

"Henry," said Judge, after Danny had closed the door, "do you re'lize that there's two women at the housh?"

"In my pres'nt condition," replied Henry, "I can only re'lize my pres'nt condition. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof—and we've cer'nly been evil."

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER CORPSE.

THE court room at Tonto City was crowded to capacity for the inquest over the body of Joe Hall. Leila, Danny, Henry, Judge, and Oscar were in the custody of the sheriff, who was first to testify. His testimony was at length, outlining as he did the trouble he had had in trying to get possession of Joe Hall's body.

He told of their first discovery, and that the body had been stolen the second time, during which time the woman's tracks had been obliterated.

Then he told of the double-runway, in which the blanket-wrapped body had been thrown from the J Bar 'C buckboard, along with Oscar Johnson, who had confessed his part in the stealing of the body.

"You have the plaster cast of that footprint?" asked the coroner.

"No, I ain't," replied the sheriff. "When me and John Campbell was dumped out of that buggy, John sat on the cast and smashed it."

Danny Regan was called to the stand, and told the same story he had told the sheriff and deputy the day Hall had been murdered. He told them he knew nothing about the stealing of the body, until told about it, after the officers had possession of the remains.

"Who told you?" asked the coroner.

"Miss Harper."

Danny was dismissed, and Henry Harrison Conroy was called to the stand. Henry's appearance was impressive. He wore a checkered suit, brown shoes and brown spats, and carried a gold-headed cane. He was a showman now—not a cattleman. He beamed at the audience, and a chuckle swept the place. The coroner seemed confused.

"Mr. Conroy, will you please tell your story to the jury?"

"Gentlemen," said Henry softly, "I don't exactly know my status in this matter. I have heard rumors that I am a murderer, or a kidnaper—or just a plain fool. I firmly admit the latter, which, of course, is no alibi for the other charges. For any wrong-doing, which may be charged to Miss Harper, Judge Van Treece, or to Oscar Johnson, I insist that I, and I alone, am to blame. I stole that body from the yard of Danny Regan's ranch. Firmly believing that the officers had discovered the body, I went back and stole it again. Later, I decided to remove the body, in order to place it where it would be found. Circumstances over which I had no control, unmasked me. I sit before you, a disgraced old man, without a whole pair of overalls to my name."

It required some time to restore order in the court room.

"Mr. Conroy," said the coroner, "you stole that body in order to save Danny Regan?"

"I am no cadaver kleptomaniac, sir," replied Henry stiffly.

"You believed that Danny Regan had murdered Joe Hall, eh?"

"I believed that if the law discovered the body at that spot, they might be disposed to consider that Danny knew something about the demise of Joe Hall."

"But why did you steal it the second time, Mr. Conroy?"

"Well, sir, I happened to remember that Miss Harper was with us, and that none of us were careful about our footprints. So I took the body away and obliterated the prints. It seems that I overlooked one print—but that is immaterial now. I also neglected, the first time, to search the corpse."

"You searched it the second time?" asked the coroner quickly.

"Yes."

"What did you find?"

Henry shut his lips tightly, and his eyes narrowed perceptibly.

"Nothing at all," he said.

"Wait a minute!" snapped the sheriff. "What did you take off that corpse, Conroy?"

"You heard my reply to that same question—nothing."

"Why did you search?"

"Curiosity, sheriff."

"Yea-a-ah? All right."

The coroner made a short résumé of the evidence. He pointed out the fact

that Joe Hall and Danny Regan had fought a battle the night before the murder, and that Joe Hall had been soundly whipped. The face of the corpse still bore witness to that fight.

"Why Joe Hall ever went down to Regan's ranch, we have no idea," he told them. "You have heard Regan's own story. It is your duty to decide this case on the evidence."

And those six men decided that Danny Regan must stand trial for the murder of Joe Hall. Apparently satisfied with a victim, the prosecuting attorney ignored the kidnapers.

BUT Bill Parton was not satisfied. He went to the prosecutor, after Danny was in jail, and asked what about Henry Harrison Conroy and his three companions in crime.

"Drop it," advised Campbell. "It would only pile up expense on the county, and no Wild Horse jury would ever convict them."

"I wish I knew what Conroy took off that body."

"He said he didn't find anything, Bill."

"He's a liar; he got somethin'."

Judge told Leila: "The county is too poor to feed us."

But Leila could see no humor in the situation; not with Danny in jail. Henry was diplomatic. He went down to the jail and talked with the sheriff, who asked him confidentially what he found on Joe Hall's body.

"I answered that question under oath," replied Henry.

"Are you goin' to qualify for this office?" asked the sheriff.

Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"If I don't—you'll stay in office, won't you?" he asked.

"Unless the board of supervisors decide to make an appointment."

"What will happen to Joe Hall's Rafter P ranch?"

"I'm takin' it back," replied the sheriff.

"Taking it back?"

"I shore am, Conroy. Joe Hall bought it on a shoe-string, and gave me his personal note for the balance—ten thousand dollars. He never had no deed to the place. It's still in my name. All I've got to do is move back there and take charge."

OSCAR JOHNSON

"He gave you a personal note, eh?"

The sheriff took an old bill-fold from his pocket and showed Henry Conroy the note, which was to run for three years, at seven per cent interest.

"And he never even paid the interest," declared the sheriff. "Damn it, he owes me over seven hundred dollars interest."

"Parton," said Henry seriously, "do you think Danny killed Hall?"

"If he didn't—who did, Conroy?"

"That is what I'm going to find out."

SLIM PICKINS and Oscar Johnson saddled horses for Henry and Judge next morning. One horse was a tall, bony roan, little less than

twenty years of age, while the other was a shaggy, gray pony, weighing about seven hundred pounds, short-coupled, and many years past the age of discretion. Judge rode the pony, and his stirrups almost reached the ground, while Henry, on the tall roan, towered far above him, a huge sombrero on his head. Judge wore boots, but on his head was that time-honored derby.

Henry saw the expression in Slim's eyes, adjusted his hat to an exact balance, and said:

"Slim, I have no illusions. I know the age, disposition and general decrepitude of these steeds. I have a mental picture of us both, fore and aft; so go ahead and laugh."

"Well, yuh do look like hell," admitted Slim seriously. "But yuh wanted somethin' reliable."

"Thank yuh, Slim. You will observe that I use 'yuh,' instead of 'you.' Put me under a big hat, and I go entirely Arizona. I do not suppose you have ever seen William Faversham in 'The Squaw Man.'"

"No, I don't reckon I ever did, Mr. Conroy."

"Well, if you had, Slim, I'm sure you would see the vast difference in our appearance. Ready, Judge?"

"Speak to the horse," replied Judge.

"His name's Lightnin'," said Slim, internally convulsed.

"Das tall hurse is named Yhonny," informed Oscar.

"Thank yuh, Oscar," said Henry soberly. "Just plain Johnny, eh?"

"Yah, su-u-u-ure. Ay yust named him."

"We really should have a bottle of something to christen him with," said Henry.

"Yuh might get a bottle of Frijole Bill's prune juice," suggested Slim. Henry shuddered and lifted a hand in protest.

"I'd be afraid to even break a bottle on his knees, Slim. Knowing the power of that concoction, I'd shudder to say what might happen to me and Yhonny. Shall we proceed, Judge?"

"Proceed? What in the name of all seven devils do you think I have been doing since I mounted this moth-eaten wreck."

"Lift your feet a little, Judge," advised Slim. "You've been kicking your heels together."

AFTER all, the horses had some powers of locomotion left. Johnny had a swinging walk, which forced Lightning to trot, in order to keep up, and Judge was obliged to hold his derby with one hand, and the reins in the other.

"It cu-comes to my mind," said Judge, jiggling in his saddle, "that the Spaniards were responsible for introducing horses in this country."

"I have never heard of anyone introducing a horse," replied Henry. "But what has that to do with us?"

"Nothing mum-much," replied Judge. "I thought I only huh-hated Swedes—but I include Spaniards."

"Are you getting an impediment in your voice, Judge?"

"Impediment—hell! It's my upper plate shaking loose."

"False modesty," said Henry soberly.

"I'm dying for a drink."

"No drinks," replied Henry. "After the spectacle we made of ourselves? I'm blushing yet. If there was a pledge lying loose around here, I'd take it. All my life, as far back as I can remember, I have been able to carry my liquor like a gentleman—until I contacted Frijole Bill's prune juice.

I'm cured, Judge; as cured as a picnic ham."

"Are you willing to swear on your honor as a gentleman that you will never drink whisky again, Henry?"

"That's the lawyer for you! Will you swear? Honor!"

"You are evasive, sir, damnably evasive."

"And my throat," said Henry, "is coated an inch thick with dust."

They stopped at Tonto City, but restricted themselves to six drinks, after which they mounted and rode on. It was Saturday, and many of the folks from the outlying districts were in town. But Henry and Judge were utterly oblivious to the mirthful glances.

They mounted, with difficulty, especially Henry, whose girth and short legs were a handicap in mounting a tall horse. There was a smattering of applause from across the street, but neither of them paid the slightest attention, as they rode away.

"I have been very patient," reminded Judge. "I have not been consulted in any way, nor do I know the slightest reason for this pilgrimage—if I may call it so. I am blindly following you, sir; like Sancho Panza following Don Quixote. But, damn it, sir, even they had a mission."

"Spearing windmills, if I recollect," nodded Henry. "A rather asinine occupation, it seems to me. Almost as bad as distilling the juice of a prune—or drinking it. As a matter of fact, we are going out to the Rafter P ranch."

"For any good reason, Henry?"

"Judge, I may answer in the negative. I say I *may*. As a matter of fact, I have started out to try and prevent the law from hanging Danny Regan."

"I do not believe there is sufficient evidence to hang him."

"With twelve jurors, selected in any way you can care to select them in Wild Horse Valley, they'd hang him, in spite of the evidence."

"I am afraid you are right, Henry."

"And," said Henry softly, "I love that damn fool, red-headed kid."

"So do I, Henry," admitted Judge. "If it were not for Danny Regan, I would be—God only knows. He made a man of me."

"Well," said Henry dryly, "I wouldn't give him any written recommendation for his ability in that respect; but I know what you mean."

"Thank you kindly. But why go to the Rafter P ranch? As I understand it, since Joe Hall's untimely demise, there is only Juan Gomez, his mother, Mrs. Gomez, and one Poco, last name unknown, at the ranch."

"Your census is correct, Judge. Apparently Joe Hall preferred Mexican cowboys and a Mexican cook. A matter of personal choice, of course. A faithful trio, no doubt. I heard Joe Hall say that he would trust Juan Gomez further than he would any living American."

THEY traveled slowly in the heat, Judge making spasmodic attempts to spur Lightning, and finally reached the Rafter P ranch-house; a rather large adobe structure. There was the usual out-buildings and corrals, and, as usual, in need of repair. Bill Parton had been fairly successful with the Rafter P; but Joe Hall had not startled the world with his ability to build up a herd.

There was no one in sight about the place, but the front door of the house was wide open. Henry and Judge dismounted at the front porch, stretched

their cramped legs, and started for the front door, walking like a couple of sailors, who still had their sea-legs.

Just as they reached the bottom of the four steps, a gun thudded inside the house. It was so unexpected that Henry and Judge bumped against each other, both reeling aside. A man staggered into the doorway, as the gun blasted the silence again, and the man sprawled across the porch, and came falling down the steps, stopping just between Henry and Judge, who stared at him in amazement.

They heard a rear door crash shut, and dimly remembered, later, that they had heard the sound of someone running away.

"Damned unexpected—this!" exclaimed Henry.

"Why—why, the man has been shot!" snorted Judge. "Heavens above!"

Henry, acting in sort of a daze, stepped over, took the man by the shoulders and turned him over. It was Juan Gomez, whom Joe Hall had said he trusted beyond all men. There was no recognition in his eyes.

"Who shot you, Juan?" asked Henry. "Tell me who shot you?"

"He can't even hear you," said Judge softly. "He's nearly gone."

Juan's lips were moving, and they listened closely.

"I — never — tell — heem. Poco—knows—where—it—"

And Juan Gomez died, his statement unfinished. Henry looked at Judge thoughtfully.

"He never told who, I wonder? And what does Poco know?"

Judge shook his head, not having any ideas on the subject.

Henry got to his feet suddenly and walked into the house, followed cautiously by Judge. Off the big main-room was a fairly well furnished bedroom, which had been used by Joe Hall; and this room looked as though it had been through a cyclone.

The bedding had been flung around, the drawers of a dresser pulled out and emptied on the floor.

"Searching for something," said Henry.

They went all over the house, and came back to the bedroom again, where Henry searched carefully. Finally he found a letter, which Joe Hall had written the day before he was murdered, and had failed to post. It was addressed to a packing house in Chicago, asking for prices on different grades of cattle.

Henry pocketed the letter and they went back to their horses.

"We'll leave the body where it is," said Henry, "and notify the sheriff and coroner."

Judge was visibly shaken. No doubt the killer had seen them. He had been behind Juan, when he fired the second shot, and should have had a clear view of Henry and Judge.

"I believe we got off cheaply, Judge," stated Henry, as they rode back to town. "I have a feeling that someone was searching that place, when we showed up. It is my opinion that our arrival merely hastened the killing of Juan Gomez; because the man who was searching that house could not afford to have Juan tell who he was; so when he saw us coming, he killed Juan."

"I accept that, because I have no theories of my own," replied Judge. "I only know that my nerves are all twittering. The nerve of a man—to blast that poor inoffensive Mexican right into us! Why, he might have killed both of us! I'm jumpy, Henry."

"Jumpy? If somebody yelled boo

at me, I'd go right over Yhonny's ears and establish a new record for a three mile run. I'm unused to murder, I tell you, sir. I hate it."

"I can see that," replied Judge. "Your voice squeaks on high notes. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if, in your present condition, you could give a fair imitation of a novice, playing a flute. You positively do tootle, sir. And to complete the illusion, you might paint a number of imitation holes along your nose—and finger them, sir."

"In my time," replied Henry soberly, "I have used my nose for many things, but I have never used it for a flute. I detest flutes."

"Forgive me, Henry," said Judge sadly. "I—I'm rather hysterical. I can see poor Juan Gomez, staggering, falling and that damn gun, thundering into the house. I'll always see that; always. Damn it, Henry, I need a drink!"

"Don't we all?" queried Henry.

THEY found Bill Parton and John Campbell, standing in front of the general store, and told them what had happened at the Rafter P.

"My God, what next?" exclaimed the prosecutor.

"You say—Juan Gomez is dead?" blurted the sheriff. "Wait! There is Mrs. Gomez and Poco, ready to leave town. I'll have to tell them."

Bill Parton went hurrying across the street.

"I wouldn't want that job," declared the lawyer. He looked closely at Henry and Judge.

"You two seem to run into trouble all the time," he said.

"You don't suppose it is habit-forming, do you?" asked Henry. "I would hate to go through life, finding one corpse after another."

"We might as well be undertakers," sighed Judge.

"I'll notify the coroner, John," called the sheriff. "You might as well go out there with us, if you're not busy."

The lawyer nodded and looked at Henry.

"I hope we find the corpse," he said.

"We don't guarantee anything," replied Henry, "except that it was there, when we left. You might take some plaster along, Mr. Campbell—someone might have left some tracks. Judge, I feel the deluge coming on."

Arm in arm they sauntered across the street to the Tonto Saloon. Mrs. Gomez, her mantilla covering her bowed head, sat in the seat of their ranch wagon, while Poco, an undersized Mexican sat very straight in the seat, holding the lines; but the team was still tied to the hitch-rack.

Henry halted at the entrance and looked at the couple in the wagon. When he turned, his eyes were suspiciously moist.

"That's Juan Gomez's mother," said Judge.

Henry nodded and turned to the doorway.

"And sometime," he said, "we think *we* have suffered."

The reaction from witnessing the murder was too much for Judge. He leaned against the Tonto bar, and refused to budge. He wanted to forget what he had seen. But Henry refused to make it a drinking bout. He took two drinks, left Judge in the capable hands of two cowboys, and went over to see Mrs. Harper and Leila.

They were anxious for news, and Henry had plenty to tell.

"I saw Mrs. Gomez today," said Leila. "She's a nice woman. And Juan was well liked. I know how his

mother must feel about it. But who would murder an inoffensive person, like Juan Gomez?"

"*Quien sabe?*" replied Judge, and laughed shortly. "I'm getting good at talking Mexican."

"What can be done about Danny?" asked Leila. "The law won't even try to find the real murderer. By the time the trial is over—"

"I know," interrupted Henry. "All they want is a victim."

"I know how that is," said Leila. "I talked with Mr. Campbell today. He tried to be nice to me, of course; but he gave me to understand that he hoped to convict Danny."

"Well, that's his job," said Henry. "My job is to find the man who really did the shooting. I think I'll go out and have a talk with Bill Parton, as soon as they bring the body back."

"Do you think he will help you?" asked Mrs. Harper.

"I don't believe he will. In fact, he will likely resent my interest in his business. You see, I believe the man who shot Joe Hall is the same man who shot Juan Gomez."

Henry had the letter he had taken off the body of Joe Hall. He had put it in a plain envelope, and carried it in a hip-pocket of his overalls. He showed it to the women, but it meant nothing to them. They had lived in Wild Horse Valley for years, but neither of them had ever known anyone nicknamed Chuck.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LETTER.

IT was rather late in the afternoon, when they brought the body to town. Henry sat down with the sheriff and prosecutor, and went over what he had seen of the tragedy.

"Did you go into the house?" asked the lawyer.

"Naturally, we did. It looked as though burglars had been there."

"It kinda looks to me like somebody was lookin' for money," said the sheriff. "Mebbe Juan walked in and caught 'em at it."

"I don't believe they were looking for money," said Henry.

"Then what in the world were they looking for?" asked Campbell.

"I can't say, exactly. One solution occurs to me, but I'd hate to mention it, until I've gone into it a little further. But I will say this much; I'm on the trail of the man who killed both Joe Hall and Juan Gomez."

"The sheriff laughed at him. "You better waste yore time, tryin' to find the man who killed the Mexican—we've got Joe's killer."

The prosecutor was a trifle amused, too.

"On their trail, eh?" he said.

"On *his* trail," corrected Henry. "One man pulled both jobs."

"All right," growled the sheriff testily. "You be here in town at ten o'clock in the morning, to testify at the inquest."

"I hope to be here," replied Henry. "I might have some news."

"And try to have that cock-eyed old pardner of yours here, too," ordered the sheriff. "We'll want him to swear to what you tell."

"That won't be difficult," smiled Henry. "We always rehearse, until he is letter-perfect."

"I can see that," said the sheriff.

Henry found Judge at the bar, enjoying himself greatly; but Henry steered away from him, and ate supper alone in a little Chinese café with only the clatter of dishes to interrupt his

meditations. It was dark, when he finished, paid his bill and went back on the street, where he mounted the tall horse and rode out of town alone.

Nearly an hour later he reached the Rafter P, where he found Mrs. Gomez and Poco, sitting in the dark on the porch.

"*Que es?*" queried Poco.

"This is Henry Conroy. You know who I am, Poco?"

Mrs. Gomez went into the house, and Poco came to the railing.

"I know you," replied Poco. "Joe Hall ees talk 'bout you. Hees say to me and Juan, 'Theese fat fool from the J Bar C ees elect new sheriff; so theese law ees all shot from hell now."

"Yes," said Henry softly, "I'm sure you have recognized me. Poco, I want to talk with you."

"I am not fill like talk," replied the little Mexican. "Juan ees *muerto*. You *sabe?* He ees died."

"I saw him killed, Poco."

"You see heem keeled? Why—who keel heem?"

"I was right here—at the foot of the steps, Poco. Some man shot Juan, back there in the house. He staggered to the doorway, when the man shot again, and Juan fell all the way down the steps."

"*Madre de Dios!* You not see theese man?"

"No, I didn't see him."

"W'y you come back here now?"

"To talk with you, Poco. You liked Juan Gomez?"

Poco hesitated for quite a while. Then he replied;

"Theese Juan is like brother from me. Hees *mujer* fill awful bad."

"I know she feels bad. I feel bad for her, Poco."

"*Buena.* W'y you fill bad for her?"

"Her son is dead, Poco."

"Oh," said Poco. Perhaps the statement was a little beyond his powers of comprehension.

"W'at you wan' talk weeth me?" he asked.

"Did Joe Hall and Juan Gomez have some sort of a secret between them?" asked Henry.

"Cigarette?"

"No, no; a secret. Something that both of them knew, but no one else knew.

"*Secreto?*"

"That's it, Poco. Maybe Joe Hall gave Juan something to hide for him. Or he might have hidden it, and told Juan where it was."

"Juan ees died," replied Poco. "Joe Hall ees died, too."

"I know it—they're both dead. But before Juan died, he said, 'Poco knows.'"

"He say that?" asked Poco quickly. "He no say who keel heem?"

"He was badly hurt," replied Henry. "I think he was trying to tell us to have you find what was hidden."

Poco was silent for a space of time, but finally said;

"I'm fill too bad, Juan's *mujer* fill ver' bad. Not much *dinero* for *entierro.*"

"*Dinero* for *entierro?*"

"Sure—for put heem een dirt."

"Oh, yes. Not much money for a funeral, eh? I see. Poco, would you like to see Juan have a fine funeral?"

"Sure. Ver' fine box, weeth seelver 'andles. Much seenging."

"All right, Poco; we'll make a trade. You show me what Joe Hall and Juan knew was hidden, and I'll pay for Juan's funeral."

"I'm not know w'at theese theeng ees, Señor Conroy."

"Perhaps it is a letter, Poco. Do you know of a letter—hidden?"

"*Por Dios*—yes!" exclaimed Poco excitedly. "Juan tell me, 'Theese *carta* ees for somebody, after Joe Hall ees died from keeling.' He say for me kip damn face shut. Sure, I know."

"Did Juan give it to anybody?" asked Henry.

"I'm don' theenk so."

"Show me that letter, and I'll give Juan the best funeral you ever seen."

"*Buena!* I get lantern."

POCO was back in a moment, with a lighted lantern, and led the way down to the stable. In the opposite corner from the doorway was a large, hinged-top grain bin. Poco lifted the cover, while Henry held the lantern. There was not over a bushel of oats in the bin, and Poco scooped them aside. He lifted up a loose board and took out an envelope of regular letter size, sealed.

He handed it to Henry, who fairly grabbed at it. But he did not stop to even read what was written on the envelope. He shoved it deep in his pocket, and as he turned away from the bin, something hit him on the head, with stunning force. As his consciousness faded out, he dimly heard someone yelling; but it meant nothing to Henry.

He awoke in the ranch-house of the Rafter P, dazed and sick, but fully conscious. He was on the floor, with Mrs. Gomez bathing his head in cold water. Seated, humped over in a chair, nursing a closed left eye and a lumpy temple, was Poco.

"*Buena!*" exclaimed Mrs. Gomez, as Henry struggled to sit up. On the left side of his head was a sizeable lump, and he was bleeding a little from a gashed scalp.

Mrs. Gomez hunched over a wash-pan of water, holding the dripping towel in both hands. Henry stared at her and at Poco, wondering what it was all about. Gradually he remembered being at the stable—and the letter. Painfully he reached to his hip-pocket—and found it empty. The important letter was gone.

"What happened, Poco?" he asked weakly.

"A man heet us," replied Poco painfully. "I'm not see heem, biffore he heet you. I'm yell like hell and start to ron—but he heet me, too."

"What did he look like?"

"I'm don' know; I'm scare like hell."

"He got that letter, Poco."

"*Por Dios,* that ees bad! Juan never 'ave fine funeral now."

"Yes, he will," declared Henry. "I'll give Juan a good funeral, even if we did lose the letter."

"*Gracias, Señor,*" said Mrs. Gomez. "Juan was good boy."

She wiped her eyes with the wet towel, and Henry turned away. He grasped the side of a chair and got slowly to his feet. He was dizzy for several moments, but it passed, leaving only a dull ache.

"How long ago did we get hit?" asked Henry.

"Mebbe one hour," replied Poco.

"Oh, not that long!"

Mrs. Gomez nodded. "I'm theenk you never wake up, *Señor.*"

"I don't usually sleep that sound," said Henry. "I—I hope he didn't hit my horse, too."

"Thees 'orse ees all right," stated Poco.

Henry took a deep breath and caressed his sore head.

"I suppose I may as well go back home," he said. "I'll give the coroner a hundred dollars for the funeral, Mrs. Gomez. He'll handle everything for you."

"*Gracias,* Señor Conroy; you mak' me ver' 'appy. But that ees too much money. Feefteen dollar be plenty."

"Not weeth seelver 'andles, *Mujer,*" interposed Poco.

"No," agreed Henry, "it wouldn't be enough. When I plant—I plant. Well, *buenas noches.*"

"*Buenas noches, amigo. Vaya con Dios.*"

Henry managed to mount the tall horse and start for Tonto City. He had lost his hat, but did not mind, because the cool night air felt good on his feverish head. His hopes were almost as low as his physical condition now. He felt sure that the letter would have told him some of the things he wanted to know; but the letter was now in the hands of the enemy.

THE road seemed endless that night, and it hurt his head to have the horse trot; so they merely went shuffling along. The road led down through a narrow arroya, before it opened out, a mile or so from Tonto City. The starlight was very bright, and as he rode down through the arroya, something made a swishing sound above him, like the swift flight of a night bird; and the next moment a rope yanked tightly around his body, jerking him bodily out of the saddle.

Henry merely had time to realize that someone had roped him, before he crashed down in the hard roadway, knocked unconscious again. It seemed to him that the unconsciousness was only momentary, but when he awoke there was no rope around him, his shirt had been almost ripped off, and every pocket had been turned inside-out.

He sat there in the road, after this discovery, blinking at the stars. Finally he said aloud;

"My God; an encore!"

He got unsteadily to his feet, carefully tested himself for broken bones, decided that he was still intact, and began walking to Tonto City. It was only about a mile to town, but it tested his powers of endurance.

At the doorway of the Tonto Saloon he halted. A reedy tenor, a cracked baritone and a harsh bass were singing:

". . . a wild sort of devil, but dead on the level was my ga-a-al, Sa-a-a-al."

Henry stumbled into the place and looked around. Judge, Oscar and Slim Pickins were at the bar, lifting glasses to each other's health.

"Vell Ay vill be a damn liar, if here ain't Hanry!" exploded Oscar.

"My old colleague!" exclaimed Judge. "Why, where have you—Henry, you are a mess, sir! I repeat, sir; you are—"

"Do I get a drink?" asked Henry weakly. "Or—well, do not stare! Don't you realize that it is bad form to stare?"

"If you could see yourself, you wouldn't blame us," interrupted Slim. "Henry Conroy, I—I'll be danged! Look at the welt on his head! And his shirt all tore up thataway!"

"Make mine whisky," said Henry painfully. "And don't ask questions."

After three drinks, Henry turned to Slim.

"Did you come in the buck-board?" he asked. Slim nodded.

"We will let Oscar ride Lightning, while you drive the buck-board team," said Henry. "And we shall go home now."

"Sure," agreed Slim. "I'm ready."

"Ay am to ride das Lightnin' hurse?" asked Oscar.

"Sure," grinned Slim. "We'll leave a light burnin' for yuh."

"Das all right; Ay had good sleep

last night. But where is das Yhonny hurse?"

"Das Yhonny hurse," replied Henry soberly, "is old enough to take care of himself. Ready, gentlemen?"

The murder of Juan Gomez, following so closely, as it did, the murder of Joe Hall, attracted nearly everyone in Wild Horse Valley to the inquest. The inquest was scheduled for ten o'clock, but it was nearly noon, before the court room was called to order.

Because of the fact that Henry Conroy and Judge Van Treece were the only witnesses to the killing, the sheriff had persuaded the coroner not to allow Judge inside the room, until after Henry had given his testimony. Judge was indignant, and he told them so, in no uncertain terms.

HENRY was very stiff and sore. Judge told Leila and her mother:

"I am not allowed to divulge what happened to Henry last night, but I will tell you that he is one mass of bruises. When we got to the ranch last night, he laid on the bed, while Frijole Bill put cold compresses on his head. He kept Frijole busy for an hour, refused even to get up and remove his clothes; and slept in them all night. This morning he put on a clean shirt, and came to town."

Leila and her mother went to the inquest. John Campbell, the prosecutor, spoke aside to the coroner:

"Did you notice that Henry Conroy is carrying a six-shooter in the waistband of his pants? I've never seen him carry one before. And I noticed a decided bulge about the hip line of Judge Van Treece."

The coroner was grimly thoughtful for a few moments.

"I'll speak to the sheriff about it," he said, and walked away.

The jury was finally selected, and the six men tried to appear intelligent, watching the coroner closely. After a short, preliminary speech by the coroner, explaining the reasons for the inquest, he said:

"Henry Conroy, please take the stand, and be sworn."

But before the coroner could start his inquiry, Bill Parton, the sheriff, said;

"Conroy, why are you wearin' a gun?"

Henry smiled slowly and caressed his nose.

"I am getting to a point where I do not even trust people in a court of law," he replied.

"Das is good!" snorted Oscar. "You can't fool Hanry, by Yimminy!"

"Another remark from you, Johnson, and out you go," declared the sheriff angrily. "What do you think this is?"

"Don't you know?" asked Slim Pickins innocently.

"This bickering must cease!" roared the coroner. "Another remark, and the sheriff will clear the room."

The room was silent again, and the coroner turned to Henry.

"Mr. Conroy, you will please tell your story to the jury."

In a few words Henry told them all he knew about it.

"You did not see the man who did the shooting?"

"I did not. We heard him slam a back door and go running away, but we were too stunned by the tragedy to even think of trying to see the murderer."

"Any questions, sheriff?" asked the coroner.

"Just one," replied the sheriff. "What was you two doin' out there at the Rafter P ranch, Conroy?"

Henry looked at him curiously, smiled and said:

"I don't remember."

"You were both drunk," declared the sheriff harshly. "Neither of yuh was sober enough to see or hear things straight."

"I bow to superior judgment," said Henry. "But I may point to the fact that several persons saw me mount that tall horse—which is quite some acrobatic feat for a man of my dimensions—cold sober."

The crowd laughed, and the sheriff scowled at them.

"Finished with the witness, sheriff?" asked the coroner.

"I may recall him, after we have heard Van Treece," growled the sheriff, and sat down, scowling around.

The coroner motioned to Rolling Stone and told him to call Judge Van Treece, who was waiting in the hallway. He came in, tall and dignified, his face set in grim lines. He looked neither to the right nor left, as he came down the aisle, and went straight to the witness chair, where he lifted his right hand and took the oath.

"Mr. Van Treece," said the coroner, "will you please tell the jury exactly what you saw happen yesterday at the Rafter P ranch."

"And," added the sheriff, "try to tell the same story that Henry Conroy told."

JUDGE VAN TREECE'S eyes glanced slowly around the room. The old man seemed hard and grim, and his bony hands were clenched tightly.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said slowly, "I believe things have gone far enough. A coroner's jury decided to have Danny Regan held for trial for the murder of Joe Hall. It was a—"

"Wait a minute, Van Treece," interrupted the sheriff. "That inquest is over. This inquest is over the body of Juan Gomez. All you have been asked to do is to tell what you saw, and what you know about the shootin' of Juan Gomez."

Judge turned his head slowly and looked at the coroner.

"Are you conducting this inquest, or is the sheriff doing it?"

"Well, I—I—" faltered the coroner, not sure of himself.

"Make up your mind," urged Slim.

"I—I believe Van Treece should be allowed to tell his story in his own way," said the coroner.

"Thank you," said Judge softly. "Perhaps I started wrong."

Judge got to his feet and faced the jury.

"Gentlemen!" His voice rang sharp. "Joe Hall was afraid he might be murdered. He knew a man who would kill him in a minute, if that man wasn't afraid that a certain document would—"

Judge reached in his pocket and drew out an envelope.

"This document would convict him. In some way he found that Juan Gomez knew—"

Big Bill Parton was on his feet, head hunched forward, his jaw sagging. He was like that for a moment, swaying—and then his right hand flashed to his gun.

"Damn you to hell!" he screamed. "Back! I'll kill every damn man that—"

A big gun thundered in the close-packed room. Men were ducking wildly, sliding out of their chairs; anything to get below, or out of the line of fire.

Bill Parton was still standing there, gripping his gun, but his right arm was

sagging slowly. The gun fell to the floor, clattering on the wood; and Bill Parton sank down across it.

Henry Harrison Conroy sat there near the witness chair, a smoking Colt across his lap.

"That one was for Juan Gomez," he said calmly.

The shocked crowd were on their feet now, crowding in. The coroner, badly dazed by the tragedy, but with the true instinct of a trained physician, was the first to Bill Parton. The big sheriff was not dead, however.

"Bad, Doc," he whispered.

"It didn't pay," said Parton, his voice audible in the stilled room. "I was safe, until Joe Hall came here. Van Treece has the letter that Hall wrote. It'll tell all about it. I—I tried twice last night to take that letter away from Conroy, but I must have missed it. He figured it out some way."

"You killed Joe Hall?" queried the coroner.

"Yeah, I got him. I figured Juan Gomez had that letter, and that I could get it. Hall forced me to give him my ranch—blackmailed me. I killed Juan Gomez."

"Went out like a match," said Rolling Stone, and the doctor nodded.

"I guess that settles it, folks," said the coroner. "The inquest is ended. Mr. Campbell, I suppose we shall have to turn Danny Regan loose."

"We could hardly hold him, after this confession," said the prosecutor, white faced. "I have never been so shocked in my life. Van Treece, may I see that letter you have?"

JUDGE handed him the envelope, and Campbell drew out a folded sheet of blank paper.

"Why — why —" he stammered. "This isn't any letter!"

"It was the best we had," said Henry. "Needs must, when the devil drives, Campbell. Parton didn't know."

"You lost the letter—and bluffed?"

"What else to do. He knocked me down in the Rafter P stable, after I put the letter in my pocket. I already had a letter in that pocket, and he must have taken that one. After I recovered, and was on my way to town, he roped me off my horse and searched me again. I knew he did not have the letter, on the second search, or he wouldn't have made the search; so I bluffed."

"But what on earth made you suspect Bill Parton?"

"A letter I took off Joe Hall's body. It was almost blotted out with blood and bullet, but there was enough left to make me believe that Joe Hall was up to something. Then Parton told me about having Joe Hall's note for ten thousand dollars. I saw the note; so I went to the Rafter P, saw Juan Gomez killed, and got a sample of Joe Hall's writing, with his signature. Joe Hall never signed that note—it was a forgery."

John Campbell shook his head slowly.

"And some misguided, blamed fool said you wouldn't make a sheriff. Henry Conroy, you would damn near make a United States Marshal."

"With a little more experience," nodded Henry soberly. "One never knows, does one? Ah, there's Danny!"

He was with Leila and her mother, and they all hugged Henry. Suddenly Henry drew aside, wiggling his right boot, a queer expression on his face. Then he reached down, jerked his pant-leg from the boot-top, shook it violently, and a crumpled letter fell to the floor.

It was the letter Poco had taken from the grain bin. Henry stared at it for a moment, and a broad grin spread across his face. He turned to the prosecutor and handed him the envelope.

"There it is!" he exploded. "No wonder Parton didn't find it. In my excitement I shoved it inside my pants, instead of in a pocket! He tore off my shirt, when he should have torn off my pants."

Henry whooped, grasped Danny by the shoulders, and did a war-dance around him. Campbell was reading swiftly.

"It's all here, Conroy," he said. "Parton and Hall robbed a bank in Nevada twelve years ago, and shot a cashier. In a gun battle, Hall was wounded, while Parton got away with the money. Hall went up for ten years. Then Hall located him and began blackmailing Parton. The whole thing is here in detail. He signs his name Charles F. Holton, alias Chuck Holt, alias Joe Hall. Why—"

Campbell looked around. "Where's Conroy?" he asked.

"They're out on the street by this time," replied the coroner.

Which was true. None of them were interested in Joe Hall's letter now. Judge Van Treece was crossing the street, heading directly for the Tonto Saloon, his old derby hat clutched in one hand.

Mrs. Harper, Leila, Danny and Henry stopped and watched him.

"A wonderful character," said Henry. "The stage lost a great actor, when Van Treece studied law."

"Wouldn't you like to join him, Henry?" asked Mrs. Harper.

Henry turned his head.

"Laura," he said huskily, "I would not lie to you—I would. But I am not going to do it. I'm going down to your house for supper. I know you hate liquor, and could never care for a drinking man. But I'd never swear off for the love of a woman, because I'd never stay sworn off; and I hate a hypocrite. I like my liquor."

"Well, Henry," she replied softly, "it doesn't seem to have hurt you any."

Leila looked at her mother in amazement, grasped Danny by the arm, and hurried down the street.

"It is great to be in love, Laura," smiled Henry.

From across the street came Oscar's voice:

"Hooray for Hanry for de detective!"

THE END

Still Dangerous

By
DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Tied to the gear shift lever, Orrin felt the car plunge downward

Orrin, the State cop trailing a crook gang, made only one mistake—but one was enough

ORRIN swung around a curve and came within sight of the Hatfield house. It was a huge pile, encrusted with once resplendent gingerbread and badly in need of paint. A few trees were close to it—crabbed, ancient things which appeared to lean toward the house, grimly protective, like faithful servants clinging to some bankrupt, gone-to-seed aristocrat—but otherwise it stood by itself. There wasn't another dwelling within sight. There were only meadows right and left, in front some fifty yards of weeds to the highway, and on the other side of the highway another meadow; while

behind the house, breathlessly lovely under a star-studded sky and an enormous harvest moon, stretched the waters of Lake Cheehokee.

There was a light on the first floor, in back, and a radio yawped through the November night. There was no breeze. Orrin saw the light the moment he turned the curve, almost a mile away.

When he got near the house he pulled out the choke. The engine coughed, stalled.

He shut off the ignition and stepped on the self-starter. He did this several times. Then he got out, lifted the hood, aimlessly poked here and there at the engine. He got back into the car and made the starter whir several more times. He got out again, took off his coat, opened the other side of the hood, poked further and with equal futility. He stood in front of the car, in the full glare of the headlights, and thoughtfully scratched his scalp.

At last he shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, glanced around. He saw the house. He started for it on foot.

There was a dark, closed Lincoln at the side of the house, facing the highway. It was near a side door. Behind, fast at the stern to a thirty-foot dock, was a swanky speedboat.

As Orrin passed through the rusted-away gate the bawl of the radio suddenly ceased, and through an eerie silence he could hear the lap-lap of the wavelets on the shore. He wondered if this meant he had been seen. Probably it did. Probably, he reflected, at least one of those dark windows hid a man with a gun—and the gun would be aimed at him. He remembered what Cap Matthewson had said: "Don't get it into your head, rookie, that just because this guy's doing a hideaway he ain't still dangerous. There's enough warrants out against him, Federal and State both, to set him up in the waste paper business, if they ever get served. And besides that there's plenty of babies from the city would give a lot for a crack at this guy, too. He's hot no matter where he goes. But all that don't mean he can't shoot straight."

Matthewson had also said: "And don't think you're a big-timer just because you're sent on a job like this. The only reason I'm using you is because you're the only cop I got that don't look like one, see? Don't try to pull a fast one and stick up the guy yourself. All you got to do is find out if he *is* Harrod. We'll do the rest."

The front steps, crazily ajar, creaked under Orrin's one hundred and seventy pounds. He could find no pushbutton, so he knocked.

He thought he heard a murmur of voices, a shuffle of feet, but he wasn't sure. He knocked again.

Then feet scuffed across a huge entrance hall, and the door was opened two inches. A woman's face appeared. She had a bold, sharp nose, and hard blue eyes, and hair belligerently red.

"Sorry to disturb you. I've had some engine trouble, and I wondered if I could use your telephone."

"What kinda trouble?"

Orrin shrugged. "I don't know exactly. Something wrong with the vacuum tank, it looks like."

"There's no phone here," the woman said, and slammed the door.

Orrin sighed, turning away. He knew that there *was* a telephone in the Hatfield house, and that the new, mysterious tenants of that house used it every day—for they never stirred outside, but ordered everything by wire. But he knew, too, that to argue would mean to rouse suspicion. So he started back for the highway.

The front door flew open, and the woman's voice came:

"Say, I guess that's awright, mister."

"Thank you," Orrin said, turning. "I was afraid I'd have a long walk. Don't see any other houses around here."

She was much more amiable now, and held the door open for him.

"Yuh gotta excuse me for that. Soon's I had a better look at you I figured it was awright. But when yuh first came in the shadders of the porch here—well, yuh gotta be pretty careful out here in the country, yuh know."

"You're not alone, are you?" Orrin was polite, casual.

"No, not exactly. . . . But yuh can't be too careful out here in the country, anyway."

He wondered whether her change of attitude was due to the fact that when he turned his back and started down the moonlit path it must have become apparent that he carried no gun.

"It's in the back here . . ." She led him across a huge, dim hall. "It's back in the kitchen here . . ."

FROM the left came a murmur of voices. The door there was ajar. Orrin pushed it open.

"In here?" he asked, blinking. Then he said hastily: "Oh, I'm so sorry! Didn't mean to disturb you."

He backed out of what was evidently the dining room. He had only been in there for an instant, but he'd seen enough. He had seen three men sitting around a table, with glasses and a whisky bottle. Two of them had short beards, the third wore sun glasses. But Orrin, every ten or fifteen minutes all afternoon, had been looking at three rogues' gallery pictures, and he had fastened those images in his mind; he knew he couldn't be mistaken.

The redhead rasped: "Back here in the kitchen, I tole yuh!"

"Sorry . . . I thought you'd motioned toward that door."

The kitchen was damp, dismal, and very big. It was overrun with cockroaches. There were dirty dishes in the sink; and the floor was greasy, the linoleum cracked in many places.

"There it is. Funny little phones they give yuh out here in the country, don't they? Takes forever to get the operator, too."

The redhead returned to the center of the house, leaving Orrin with the cockroaches, the dirty dishes, and a tiny wall telephone. There was no dial on the instrument, and no crank. There was no directory in sight. He lifted the receiver.

For some time he thought the line was dead, and he was about to hang up when a disgusted "Numbableeze?" sounded in his ear.

He knew that everything would be all right, even without the number, for the Erindale operator was expecting this call. He said: "Central, will you give me the nearest garage? I'm calling from the Hatfield house on Lake Cheehokee."

"Just a minute, please."

Soon a man's voice, "Yeah?"

"I wonder if you could send a mechanic out to me. I'm broken down on State Route 3, out near the old Hatfield mansion."

The voice came lower now, serious, tense.

"Never mind that. *Is* it Harrod?"

Orrin frowned. This was unlooked-for stupidity, and no part of the arrangement. He didn't recognize the voice, either. Probably some trooper who'd been assigned to watch the phone while Cap Matthewson stretched his legs.

"An old Cadillac, yes. You'll see it easily. I'll stand out there and signal you, anyway."

"I get yuh, kid. Somebody else's stannin' there, huh? Okay. Only say yes or no, at least. You can say *that* much. Is it Mush Harrod?"

"Yes."

"It is, huh? Good! Wharton and Splinter Riley with him too?"

"Yes," said Orrin. "Yes, it's some sort of engine trouble . . . All right. I'll expect you in fifteen or twenty minutes then."

He hung up. He stood there a moment, biting his lower lip, while his eyes moved back and forth. He didn't like this silence in the old Hatfield house. He was uneasy.

The redhead hadn't reappeared, so he pushed through the hall door and made for the entrance. He had almost reached it when he heard a voice behind him:

"Just a minute, buddy."

Milton "Mush" Harrod was descending the staircase.

HARROD was a huge man, bearded, dark. His black eyebrows ascended sharply at the outer edges, and there were up-pointed wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, giving him a foxy, somewhat diabolical appearance; he seemed always to be smiling at some secret, unsavory joke. He wore dirty gray flannels, black and white sport shoes, and an astounding purple and white silk shirt with collar and tie to match.

"Yes?" Orrin wondered, as he turned, how it happened that Harrod was coming from the second floor, though a few minutes earlier he had been in the dining room. "Do I owe you something for that call?"

"Oh, you'll pay plenty for that call, buddy!" The racketeer exile reached the hall, strolled across to Orrin. "Plenty!" He grinned. It wasn't a pleasant grin.

Orrin reached into his pocket. "Well, it certainly saved me a long walk," he said, and laughed. But the laugh didn't sound very solid, even to his own ears. "So I don't mind. How much do I owe you?"

"Plenty," Harrod said again. He was silent for a moment, grinning still, and nodding. He scratched his nose, never taking his gaze from the visitor.

"Federal or trooper, buddy?" he asked.

"I don't understand."

Harrod chuckled. He jerked his head toward the dining room door. "Well, you will soon. After we get to work on you. Step inside there."

"Why, as a matter of fact, I'm just going back to my car."

"Why, as a matter of fact," Harrod said slowly, "you ain't going to do any such damn thing, buddy."

"Say, listen—"

Harrod called: "Hey, punks!"

Harvey Wharton, alias Wells, alias West, and George "Splinter" Riley appeared at the dining room door. They didn't seem to be having as good a time as their boss. They looked serious, troubled. Wharton held an automatic pistol in his right fist.

Harrod spread his hands. "So you see?"

"What is this, anyway? A hold-up?"

"Where you made your mistake," Harrod said, "was when you told the twist you had something wrong with your vacuum. They didn't rehearse you very good, I guess. Even from the house here you can see that that's an old Caddy you got, and that model don't have a vacuum. Never did have.

They work by air pressure in the gas tank."

Such a petty mistake! Yet it was this, unquestionably, which had caused the recall of the visitor—this, and not the fact that the redhead had been able to see that he was not equipped with a pistol.

Orrin shrugged. "Well, maybe it's the carburetor. I don't know. I don't know much about automobiles, anyway."

"You know something about guns though, don't you? You know that if Harv turns on that thing he's holding it's going to ventilate you something awful?" Again he jerked his head. "Go inside. We got things to ask you, and there's no sense standing up for it."

"Say, I don't know what this is all about, but—"

"*Inside!*"

"—but I want to know why I can't make a simple telephone call—"

"Too damn simple." The wrinkles at the corners of Harrod's eyes went up, up, tightening. "They certainly didn't pick a very bright guy for this job, did they? That wasn't any telephone you was talking into, buddy. I mean, not a regular one. In these big old houses they have telephones for servants, you know. This was one."

Orrin was beginning to feel very foolish indeed.

"It happens the twist used to be a truck pusher herself, so she's got just the right voice, see? And the guy you was talking to was me, buddy, just me."

"Oh," said Orrin.

"So now, get inside."

ORRIN sat in a straight-backed chair, against the far wall, and the others sat at the table, facing him. They all stared at him. Stared for a long time without saying anything.

Finally Harrod asked: "Ever seen him before, punks?"

Wharton and Riley shook their heads.

"Me either. If he's a Federal," Harrod said, "he might be alone, or he might have one other louse along somewheres—"

"Lil's on the look," Riley muttered.

"—but if he's a trooper, like I think, then he probably's got a whole regiment parked somewheres waiting to hear the glad tidings. How 'bout it, buddy?"

Orrin said: "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure! I suppose the idea was to try to get a squint at me, and then, if it was what they thought, call in the thundering herd, huh? Heavy artillery and weep gas and tanks and everything, huh?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Splinter Riley rose, frowning, his arms at his sides and his palms outspread.

"He certainly ain't connected with the Russell mob, anyway. He's *some* kinda bull. And if yuh ask me, Mush, I think we better get the hell outta here," he said.

"Oh, yeah . . . Yeah, we'll get out all right." Harrod was unhurried, thoughtful.

"Only first I'd just like to know who this baby's working for."

He rose, and strolled over to Orrin. He drew back his right fist.

"How 'bout it, huh? You a trooper?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Harrod hit him in the mouth, hard. Orrin's head banged against the wall; he spat, and started to get to his feet, but Harrod punched him in the chest,

and he sat down again. Both Riley and Wharton were aiming guns at him.

"Are you a trooper? Or a Federal?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Harrod hit him twice more, once with the right and once with the left.

Wharton rose in disgust. "This might be fun for you, Mush, but I'm worried about this guy's boy friends. I think we oughtta scram."

"I want a look at this guy's car, first. We oughtn't to let it stand out there. They might have some kind of arrangement so's if it's there over a certain length of time they should come anyway."

"We could turn the headlights off."

"They could see it anyway, if they were up by those trees towards Erindale. No, we want to get it out of the way. Chuck it in the lake, I guess. That's the eye! We'll run it off the dock."

"What if he's got a few bozos parked in the back seat?"

"If he has," Harrod said, and grinned, "it'll be just too bad for him. Because he's going to walk in front of us. Come on, cop!"

Wharton shook his head. "I don't like it much . . ."

"Stay here, then, if you want to. Get up on the second floor where that Tommy is, and then if anybody starts boom-booming at us you can spray them from there. Only be damn sure," he added, "that you know who you're aiming at! Put the shoulder stock on, and get your eye down to it."

They went out, Orrin in front, Riley and Mush Harrod behind him. The muzzles of their guns pressed his back.

"If there's anybody in your car, buddy, you better speak up right now. Because we'll turn these on, surer'n hell."

"There's nobody in there," Orrin promised.

THEY found his coat, and Harrod nodded when he saw the badge.

"Yeah, a trooper. Like I thought." They found his pistol in a side pocket. "You was going to be so smart you wouldn't take that along, huh? Well, it wouldn't have done you any good anyway."

Harrod chuckled, and got behind the wheel. Orrin sat next to him. Splinter Riley worked his long legs into the back seat, from where he held a pistol against the upper part of Orrin's spine.

"So you couldn't get it started again, huh? Well, I'll show you how, now."

Harrod started the engine, snapped off the lights.

More than half a mile ahead, at the top of a slight rise, was a clump of trees. It was the nearest conceivable hiding place.

"They might hear that starter," Riley offered.

"Let 'em. We got time enough to hop into the boat and get away even if they do." Harrod drove slowly. He turned into the driveway. "What we don't want, if we can help it, is shooting."

Orrin knew that two State policemen lurked in the shadow of those trees, and had a Ford parked there. But they were mere look-outs. The real raiding squad, twelve men, was at Mooresburg, a good twenty-one miles from the Hatfield mansion. It had been agreed that to concentrate such a force at tiny Erindale, four miles away, might attract too much attention. Orrin had little hope that the look-outs would find anything to report. That the old Cadillac was driven in next to the house they might consider strange, but not

alarming; probably they'd think it meant only that Orrin was getting on well with his new acquaintances. Even if they did guess the real reason, and sent word to Mooresburg, it would be too late. Orrin himself would be dead, and Mush Harrod and his companions would be far away, before the raiding squad could arrive.

Harrod drove Orrin's car around the Lincoln, drove until the front wheels were on the dock. Then he braked the car, but left the engine running.

"Okay, Splinter," he said quietly.

Orrin sensed it coming and started to move. The first blow caught him just above the right ear, and he fell against Harrod in the driver's seat. Harrod pushed him away. Another blow caught him a trifle higher. He slumped in his seat, head forward, eyes closed.

Oh, he was conscious, but it was so difficult for him to think, that he didn't much care what happened. He was not shamming. He was groggily indifferent—simply didn't care to open his eyes, or to struggle, or make a noise.

"Why not leave him right in the car here and run the whole works off the end of the dock?"

Harrod's voice was rich with scorn. "You just think of that, punk?" He started to tie Orrin's ankles together. "Grab that hunk of cord and fasten his wrists. Fasten 'em to the gear shift here."

"He might come to before he dips and let out a yap."

"We'll fix that," Harrod promised.

A dirty handkerchief was thrust into Orrin's mouth and another tied over it to keep it in place. He was hunched forward now, his brow pressed against the instrument board, his wrists and ankles made fast to the gear shift rod.

Harrod hit him on the left ear.

"So your boss thought I was a has-been? A guy he could send out a kid like you to bring in, huh? Just because I got to stay out of the rackets for awhile, and lay low, they think I ain't ever going to make a come-back, huh?" He hit Orrin again. "Is that it, cop?"

"Come on," said Riley. "Let's get this over with."

"Hell, I'll be back in the city in another month. Yes, and showing my pan in all the night clubs, too!"

"Come on," Riley said. "Better put it in second, huh?"

Harrod put the car into second gear, let out the clutch pedal, pulled the hand gas lever far down. Then he jumped out, laughing.

ORRIN no longer felt indifferent. Things were whirling swiftly within his head, whirling soundlessly, without a hitch; but he realized what was happening to him; even through the roaring in his ears he could hear what Riley and Harrod said. He heard Harrod jump out of the car—and at that same instant he felt for and found the top of the gear shift lever.

He knew very little about this car, had never even seen it until he started on this job. But he did remember that there was a fancy, imitation onyx ball on the top of the gear shift rod, and he remembered too that such balls usually were easy to unscrew.

This one was. It was coming off as the car pitched forward, the front wheels falling. It came off as the driving rod screeched in startled protest against the edge of the dock.

The water seemed to strike Orrin from all sides at once. His eyes were open now, but he had no sense of direction, not even a feeling of gravity. Something punched his left cheek. He didn't know what it was.

Sliding the cords over the top of the gear shift rod, once the ball had been removed, was easy. His wrists and ankles remained bound to one another, but not to any part of the Cadillac. He pushed against things, pushed away from things. His only thought was to get away from the car.

Freed, he felt as though he were sinking, and for a horrible instant he wondered whether they had fastened weights to him. This didn't make sense —but he didn't have time to realize that.

He was dumfounded when his head quit the water and he found himself staring at the sky and the smoky red moon. He tried to gulp in air—and went under the surface again. He felt that he was choking, remembered the handkerchief in his mouth, yanked it out. He came to the surface again, and lifted extraordinary quantities of air into his aching lungs, while the blood pounded furiously in his temples.

For a moment or two he just paddled, gasping. It was difficult to keep his balance. Treading water with both hands together, in front of him, and both feet moving together, had a tendency to tip him backward. But soon he managed it, got the trick. And he looked around.

There was no sign of the automobile. The speedboat was only a few yards away, rocking gently, looking very lovely in the dull, serene moonlight. He was at the very end of the dock. He couldn't see the house, so he assumed that nobody in the house could see him.

Awkwardly he swam to the dock, got behind one of the piles, grasped a projecting nail. There he rested for a time.

But the water was like ice. The water of Lake Cheehokee was cold even in mid-summer—vacationists invariably complained about it—and this was November. Orrin was numb, stiff. He realized that whatever he was going to do, he'd better do it immediately. Ten minutes of this, he thought, would freeze him into helplessness.

In a series of underwater maneuvers, during which he tried not to splash, he succeeded in untying the knots which confined his ankles. This made it easier for him to balance himself in the water.

His wrists were a much harder problem. The cord which bound them was thin, but tough. He tried to chafe it against a pile, but the pile was too broad, and the effort repeatedly cost him his balance and resulted in a ducking. He realized that it would take half an hour to snap the cord in such an awkward, intermittent manner; and he knew he couldn't last half an hour in this water.

There was the speedboat. He swam toward it. It was low in the water, and he had little trouble reaching the edge of the bow.

THE speedboat was an eighteen-footer, low, sleek, brand new. The reason for its presence at the Hatfield dock was obvious. Lake Cheehokee was less than a mile broad, but it was nineteen miles long, and most of the bank was deeply wooded. Three different highways touched it at three different places. Mush Harrod and his companions, if escape by land were cut off, could easily make some distant point in such a craft, and either disappear into the wilderness or else hold up a motorist on the far side of the lake. He was no fool, Mush Harrod. Cap Matthewson's words came back to Orrin: "Don't get it into your head, rookie, that this guy ain't still dangerous!"

In the stem of the speedboat were the wheel, the instruments, the engine control. The engine itself was amidships, and was exposed by two lifting panels. These panels were open.

The tools, Orrin reasoned, might be in the stern, but more probably they were in the engine compartment. Certainly there would be a knife, or some sharp-edged instrument, among them.

He worked his way toward the stern, his almost unfeeling fingers desperately gripping the edge of the boat. When he got opposite the engine compartment he put all his strength into a lift, and partly by the aid of his chin, partly by pushing with his feet against a pile, he succeeded in getting both elbows on the top. He threw up one leg.

Here he was taking a chance of being seen from the house. But there was no help for it. He was obliged to get out of that water.

He slid and tumbled into the engine compartment. It was about seven feet long, about two feet deep, and four feet abeam; but the engine itself occupied the greatest part of this space. At the forward end was a tool box. On either side of the engine was a clearance of not more than eight or nine inches. Orrin squeezed in next to the engine.

There was almost no room to move.

After a time he reached his arms above his head and began to fumble with both hands in the tool box. He drew out a heavy wrench, and in disgust dropped this on his own chest. He drew out a knife . . .

Then he heard an automobile starter, and something more than curiosity inspired him to struggle to a sitting position, so that he could have a look at the house.

Somebody was racing the engine of the Lincoln, and both car doors on the side facing the house were open. Splinter Riley, a suitcase in each hand, stood between the house and the car. He was motionless, rigid, staring toward the highway.

Orrin looked past Riley. Two large, unlighted automobiles were turning from the highway into the drive.

Riley dropped the suitcases and ran screaming into the house. The woman tumbled out of the car, ran after him.

"It's Max Russell! *Mush, it's Max Russell!*"

Then the whole world seemed to explode, and for a full minute the noise was terrific. There were two submachine guns in that fight, and the first one sounded to Orrin like the ripping of a sheet of coarse canvas. The second one sounded like that too, but it was pitched lower and its noise was jerky, irregular. All this was punctuated by the louder, rounder crashing of .45 caliber automatics. Sometimes, too, Orrin's ears would catch a tinkle of broken glass, or Splinter Riley's excited shrieks.

A shadow emerged from the kitchen door and sped toward the boat. Orrin ducked back out of sight. He heard a man jump into the pilot's compartment —only one man. The starter whirred angrily, somewhere near him. The engine caught promptly; it must have been well primed in advance. Soon the boat was in motion.

The engine began to get warm. This unimportant fact greatly impressed Orrin at the time. Then he began to wonder about his fellow voyager. Who was he? Presently he learned. The shooting had become fainter, a sort of silly splutter like firecrackers a block away; and above this sound, and even above the much more immediate thunder of the engine, he heard Mush Harrod's guffaw, his bellow:

"*Shoot,* you fools! I hope you all shoot yourselves off the map! Go ahead—*shoot!* Have a good time!"

Orrin put the handle of the knife in his mouth and began to saw at the cord around his wrists.

The cord parted abruptly. Orrin's left hand banged against the side of the boat, his right hand hit the engine just below the coil box. There were two coils, and the right hand broke both connections; so that the engine stopped with a soft, apologetic swoosh.

MUSH HARROD cursed quietly, but with considerable feeling. He tried twice to start the engine. Then, with another curse, he climbed to the glittering, veneered top. Kneeling, his right hand against the side of the boat, he peered into the engine compartment.

"Well, for—"

The wrench made a short arc and hit his right wrist. He screamed in pain, sprang to his feet. He reached under his coat for a pistol, but his right hand had been numbed by the blow. He got the pistol with his left hand—but by this time Orrin was out of the compartment.

Cool and self-satisfied, wrapped in reddish mist, the harvest moon watched these men fight.

Orrin swung the wrench as he advanced. Mush Harrod took two backward steps, tugging at the pistol. The pistol came out. Orrin, swinging the wrench, stepped forward. Again Harrod stepped back—and fired.

The gangster had retreated a few inches too far. He teetered wildly for an instant, swinging his arms to catch his balance, while the one shot went wild. Then he fell back into the pilot's compartment. Orrin threw the wrench at him and sprang after it.

The gangster was big, but hard, and amazingly fast. The wrench missed him, and he was up to meet Orrin's rush with a low left to the pit of the stomach. Orrin was slammed against the wheel. Harrod dropped to his knees and started to scrabble for the pistol. He got it. He raised it—and Orrin's right foot kicked it out of his hand. The pistol flipped like a leaping salmon and then disappeared into the cold, cold waters of Lake Cheehokee.

"So—*that's*—gone," Orrin panted.

"I got plenty without that," Harrod assured him.

"You'll—need—it!"

The pilot's compartment was about four by four feet. Neither man could have retreated if he'd wished to. Toe to toe they stood, grunting softly, and punching, punching . . .

"Thought I was no good any more, huh?"

"You never—were—any good."

"Yeah? Well, see if you like—"

The gangster's head snapped back when a perfectly timed uppercut caught the point of his chin. He swayed briefly, slithered to one knee.

At this instant Orrin saw the fire. A realization of what had happened flashed through his mind even as he was shuffling forward to finish the fight. The ignition switch was on, and the disconnected coil wires were sparking. The carburetor had been flooded by Harrod in his attempt to restart the engine, and gasoline was everywhere. The flames weren't high, but they were firm and rapid, licking their way like luminous lizards along the feed line toward the tank.

"*Look out!* We've got to—"

He forgot Mush Harrod in that instant. And an instant was plenty for Mush, who knew nothing about the fire. Mush snatched up a small fold-

ing chair, the only article of furniture in the compartment.

"Thought I was all washed up, huh?"

The chair was too light to hurt much, but it threw Orrin against the tiny stern rail.

"Look out! Fire up there—"

The chair hit him again, and he toppled over the rail.

Stunned though he was, and dizzy, he knew what had happened when everything became a dirty crimson and his eardrums felt as though they had been pushed to the center of his head. The red faded as fast as it had appeared, and the water was dark again. Orrin came to the surface, gulping air, staring wildly around him. It was all over by that time. The echoes of the explosion, r e b o u n d i n g from the wooded hills that hemmed Lake Cheehokee, criss-crossing crazily, were mere tinkles to his wounded ears. The speedboat was black, listlessly smoking. It was floating loggily on its side, and going down. The whole top had been ripped off, and there was no sign of either the engine or Mush Harrod.

Orrin tried to yell for help. The croak sounded like an invalid's cough. Certainly it was no louder than that.

He sighed; and wearily, without any real hope, without even the strength to raise his arms above the surface, he struck out for the lights of the old Hatfield house.

"BRIGHT thought, bringing three first-aid kits along," commented the man who held the flask. "Here—spill some more into yourself, rookie. Take it while you can get it."

Orrin swallowed a little.

Cap Matthewson was standing there, in uniform. The place was crowded with men in uniform. Orrin closed his eyes.

"Who won?" he muttered.

"Max Russell and half a dozen of his hoods paid Mr. Harrod a little visit. It seems they didn't want Mr. Harrod to go on living." Matthewson shook his head, clucked his tongue. "No finesse, either. No finesse at all, rookie. Just drove in here with a flock of cannon and opened up every-which-way. We caught two of 'em running off. Two others were erased completely, and there's several ambulance cases. Russell himself is with us no longer. Likewise Splinter Riley and the Wharton mug. In fact, it must have been a very pretty slaughter while it lasted, I guess, but it was about over when we arrived. The only one still scrapping was the redhead, and she was screaming blue murder and clicking away at us with an empty gun. I think she's nuts, myself. Got three of the boys holding her down up front there."

"Mush Harrod—Harrod—he—"

"Took a powder, I guess. Not a sign of him anywhere."

Orrin opened his eyes.

"The old Cadillacs have pressure pumps instead of vacuum tanks," he stated.

"Hell! Have you gone nuts too, rookie?" Matthewson peered at him anxiously. "Sure they have. I know that. Why?"

"Nothing. Only I wish *I'd* known it, half an hour ago!"

"He's gone nuts," Matthewson said.

The kneeling t r o o p e r coaxed: "Here, rookie, blow yourself to another gulp of this government rye. Take it while you can get it! They might not be so nice to you at the hospital."

THE END

Wonders of the World

THE famous Colossus of Rhodes, a tremendous metal statue of the sun god, stood in the Rhodes Harbor with an arm outstretched in blessing. It was 105 feet high, beautifully proportioned, made of bronze in sections raised piece by piece into position. A spiral staircase within the body led up to the eyes, where beacon fires were kept burning at night to guide ships safely into the harbor. From 292 to 280 B.C. the Colossus was in construction, the metal being taken from the engines of war captured from Antigonus during his siege of Rhodes.

In 224 B.C. an earthquake felled the great statue and for years Greek and Egyptian engineers labored in vain to rebuild it. Finally in 672 A.D., when the Arabs conquered Rhodes, they sold the Colossus as old metal—all that remained of one of the marvels of the ancient world.

The COLOSSUS of RHODES

AN IMAGINATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

"One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World"

THE GENERALLY ACCEPTED VERSION OF THE COLOSSUS OF RHODES

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Baited Cipher

By ARED WHITE
Author of "The Emperor's Agent," "The Spy at Charleville," etc.

Long Novelette

"A German spy in our trap, messieurs!"

While the forces of the Allied Military Intelligence combined to trap the shrewdest of German spies, an American agent, Fox Elton, had his own plans

CHAPTER I.

THE FRENCH SPREAD A NET.

FOR some reason that he did not attempt to analyze, Captain Fox Elton, American Military Intelligence, found himself more interested in a face and the indefinable mood behind that face than in the long detailed discussions of the ten Allied secret agents who were plotting the most difficult case that had confronted the Allied secret service during the war.

Others centered their attention upon an enlarged portrait of the Herr Lieutenant Baron von Straef, Prussian spymaster who had intrenched himself deep under the heart of Paris in defiance of French efforts to land him in their nets. Not one, but half a dozen

of the elusive Prussian's photographs had been displayed, dissected feature by feature. The group had gone into every known part of the Von Straef past record, theorized upon his probable habits of thought, speculated upon his methods of operation, charted his established rendezvous right under the streets of the French metropolis.

Elton listened at times with intent interest, jotting down notes. But he voiced no opinions, offered no suggestions. From time to time his eyes wandered to the face of Lieutenant Guiroye, agent of the French secret service. A man of forty, Guiroye, prematurely gray, and with a face as stolidly expressionless as a bronze cast. On Guiroye's breast hung the Order of Leopold and the Belgian *croix-de-guerre* with three palms. On his sleeve was the insignia of three wounds.

But it was the humor behind that mask, an indefinable something about the man, that stirred Elton's interest. Perhaps, he told himself, an inevitable reaction on his own part to a type that he could not immediately understand or perhaps his secret service intuition.

Colonel L'Ourcq, chief of the Deuxième Bureau, came in for the close of the conference.

"Will it not become the open scandal which must bring us all to shame if this Prussian scoundrel is allowed in Paris much longer!" L'Ourcq demanded.

Ordinarily a man of imperturbable composure, the Deuxième Bureau chieftain had been shaken out of his

matchless *savoir-faire* by the Von Straef menace. He bit out his closing words.

"Yes, let us make up our minds firmly, *messieurs,* that this Von Straef must die! It is that we must bring to a prompt end his whole organization in France! Please remember that our armies prepare to crush the Kaiser before another winter comes. This our commanders cannot achieve if always their military plans are betrayed to the Imperial staff! Best of luck, *messieurs.*"

The ten officers rose as one man, saluted and filed out. The plan agreed upon was an exacting but simple one. It had been conceded frankly that Von Straef must be dealt with by subtle indirection, lured rather than forced out of his hole. First his tentacles must be clipped, his henchmen rounded up wherever found. To accomplish this a ring of coördinated observation must be maintained around Von Straef's known haunts in the region of Rue Montross. Any person who roused even a shadow of suspicion must be brought in for inquisition. From time to time, the ten star operatives assigned to the Von Straef quest were to confer over developments until a final plan of trapping the Prussian was achieved.

Captain Elton left the Palais de Justice with his assistant, Lieutenant McGee, who had been permitted to sit in at Elton's request. He hailed a taxicab and directed that they be driven to American military police headquarters on Rue St. Anne to report developments to the chief of his service.

"Looks to me like a roundabout way of beating the bush, Cap'n," McGee spoke up as the taxicab threaded its way through the crowded Champs Elysées. "If the French have got their dander up against this German, I can give them a plan that'll work. Send in some engineers with dynamite and blow Von Straef out of his hole. That'd close the mess up soon enough."

"That plan's been considered many times, McGee," Elton replied. "But it would mean destroying perhaps a hundred buildings and tearing up at least a mile of good Paris streets."

"What's all that compared with the damage done to the armies!" McGee protested. "If I was the French I'd rather wreck Paris than have a Boche spy nest under the city making fools out of all of us—and sending the dope to Boche generals."

"The French probably feel the same way about it, Lieutenant. But don't forget that if you blew up the present Von Straef entrenchment the fellow would only move along to a new prepared position. Everyone concedes the Germans worked all this out long before the war and they're not simple enough to have just this one hole. Consequently we've got to admit the French used good judgment in biding their day of getting Von Straef out in the open."

"Maybe so, Cap'n," McGee replied indifferently, and added without enthusiasm, "But I don't get much kick out of this idea of hunting needles in Von Straef's strawpile. Why, we'll be jugging innocent bystanders the next six months."

ELTON made no reply. His mind was occupied now piecing together in his own way each bit of information given out on this Von Straef case, analyzing fragments, sketching in the framework of the net of his own he meant to weave. He knew that the trapping of Von Straef might require a month, or twice that

long. Or Von Straef might manage to keep clear of any net that might be contrived, just as he had done in the past despite the best efforts of the best Allied agents, no less than a dozen of whom had disappeared into thin air in their quest of the wily Herr Captain.

At the Rue St. Anne headquarters, Colonel Rand was waiting in the office of the American provost marshal of Paris. The American counter-espionage chief had come down from headquarters at French behest for counsel on this Von Straef tangle. He looked up expectantly at Elton and listened attentively to his star operative's account of the secret conference of Allied agents.

" Well, that sounds like a sensible plan," Rand commented, massaging his long thick nose with a thoughtful index finger. " I don't see how I'm going to spare you and McGee from our own work with our St. Mihiel fight coming up, but guess I'll have to please the French. Besides, trapping this Von Straef is important—if it can be done. When do you report on the job, Elton?"

"At four this afternoon. Colonel L'Ourcq's executive officer will have all assignments ready to parcel out, sir. But I was just going to ask that you give someone else to L'Ourcq. I'd like to be free to come and go at will without getting tangled up in any plan."

" But—L'Ourcq asked particularly for you, Elton. Said he wouldn't be satisfied with anyone but our—our best operative."

" I appreciate the compliment, Colonel. But it strikes me this Von Straef may have some help lined up that no one has counted on. Furthermore, I've an idea there's only one way to land the fellow, and I'd rather work alone on that angle."

" Just what do you mean, Captain?"

" Frankly, sir, I mean there's only one sure way of taking Von Straef himself—and that's to go into his hole after him and bring him out."

The American espionage chief's thick brows knotted. He was used to Elton's audacities. This young officer who had gone to Berlin and back twice, who had even invaded Imperial headquarters at Spa to get his man, was entitled to outline bold moves. But invasion of the Prussian lair under Paris with its unexplored tentacles and ramifications was suicide. Nothing less. The French had sacrificed a dozen agents learning that. In carefully laid masquerades they had made their way down under Rue Montross by way of Oudert's, an old wine rookery. The only tangible information that had resulted was the mute testimony of their lifeless bodies found floating later down the Seine.

" Damn it, Elton," Rand rejoined presently with sharp irritation, " I gave you credit for knowing that just can't be done! At best it's a thousand to one shot—and I'm not letting you take that risk."

Elton lighted a cigarette and looked at the Colonel with a whimsical smile.

" You may be right, Colonel. All would depend on the method of approach. But I want the Colonel to realize that I place a proper value on my life. and have no intention of rushing pell-mell into Von Straef's little death traps. Of course, if I went in with proper credentials—"

" If you have some definite new plan, Elton, I'd like to weigh it."

" If the Colonel will pardon my saying so, the dangers are sharp enough that I'd rather not discuss details with anyone. But with some hard work, a lot of patience and any kind of a break

I may be able to deliver Von Straef to the Deuxième Bureau in person, sir. That is if you will give me *carte blanche*, a liberal expense account—and the help of McGee."

Rand again massaged his long nose the while he stared solemnly at his youthful assistant. In such words from any other of his operatives Rand would have placed small credence. But without exception, Elton had returned from each previous case with his man. And the trapping of Von Straef would be the greatest feather of all in the cap of Rand's bureau, one easily worth the Legion of Honor to the executive in charge.

"All right, I'll leave it up to you, Elton," the Colonel yielded at last. "If you're sure you know what you're doing, go ahead. But I warn you against taking brash chances in this case—and I'll expect you to keep me informed of pertinent developments. Captain Fenton can report to the Deuxième Bureau in your place. That's all."

"Thank you, sir," Elton said simply and went out to rejoin McGee in the anteroom.

AFTER locating Captain Fenton, counter-espionage officer working out of the Paris headquarters, Elton briefly outlined to that officer the L'Ourcq plan for the vigil over Rue Montross and environs. Fenton was to report at four that afternoon to the Deuxième Bureau for the detailed organization of the quest, and afterwards report all developments to Elton at the Hotel Wagram. Next Elton instructed McGee to procure, by purchase or hire, an ordinary Paris commercial cab which McGee was to operate as chauffeur, first securing the proper clothes and cap for that rôle. He then retired to his quarters in the Wagram to check over his notes and weigh the impressions he had gained from the ten long hours of the L'Ourcq conference.

With the aid of a strong glass Elton studied the Von Straef visage from a small clear photograph that had been handed out by the French. The picture was one that had been taken at Potsdam, before the war, when Von Straef was an officer of the Kaiser's White Cuirassiers. A puzzling type, Von Straef. His head was long and narrow and the features were more those of a dreamer than an officer of the Imperial military caste. The mouth was thick and droopy, with no touch of martial severity in their lines, the eyes were large, thoughtful and looked out with an air of friendly detachment.

It was more the face of a poet or musician than Prussian martinet, Elton thought. Certainly there was nothing in any feature nor in the ensemble that suggested the ruthless spymaster who had entrenched himself under Paris and by daring resourcefulness stripped the Allied command of priceless secrets. But Elton knew that, after all, a camera may record little of the inner genius. The lens might have caught Von Straef in a passing mood, or it might have omitted significant shadings and contours. But at least it enabled Elton to fix in his memory the fellow's general appearance.

Fenton showed up shortly after dark. The L'Ourcq ring was to be clamped down immediately, he reported. Two French operatives were to smuggle themselves into an old stone rookery directly across Rue Montross from Oudert's, an established entrance to the Von Straef stronghold under Paris. The Frenchmen had taken rations with them and would take turns watch-

ing through shuttered windows for an indefinite period. Two Belgian agents, disguised as cabmen, were to take up stands on adjoining streets in the hope of picking up suspicious fares leaving the area. Two English agents had been assigned, disguised as French gendarmes, to ordinary patrol duty. Fenton and two French agents were to man a wine barge that would tie up on the river landing at the foot of Rue

CAPTAIN ELTON

Montross while the three wandered into Oudert's to take their bearings with a few glasses of wine, in the rôle of boatmen plying the Seine.

"That ought to keen the old street under proper watch, Fenton," Elton commented. "That puts nine of you to work. As I recall it, L'Ourcq was assigning six of his men—you've accounted for only five. Do you know where they placed the sixth Frenchman?"

Fenton shook his head.

"Probably unimportant," Elton said. "I merely like to keep a check on all details and make sure I've overlooked nothing. Now take my advice, Fenton, and don't go poking around too far in Oudert's with your French friends. Remember, Von Straef has an amazing faculty for learning things—almost too amazing."

CHAPTER II.

TWO MISSING AGENTS.

LIEUTENANT McGEE was waiting with a battered old taxicab near the entrance of the Hotel Wagram when Elton went out. Stepping into the cab, Elton gave his assistant instructions for covering the Rue Montross area.

"Taxicab driver, eh?" McGee muttered disgustedly. "Don't I get a thinking part in this little game, Captain?"

"There may be plenty of fast thinking for both of us if we are lucky enough to pick up a Von Straef trail," Elton rejoined. "In the meantime there's nothing to do but prowl around and look things over."

Rue Montross was one of those ancient, rambling streets that belong to the era before Napoleon. Forbidding old stone buildings, musty with age, inhabited mostly by old cronies, boatmen and shadowy wrecks cast off from the underworld of Paris. Oudert's wine shop stood at the end of the street against the Seine. To both Elton and McGee this was familiar terrain. Once shortly before they had stood vigil over Rue Montross, that time to pick up possible couriers from the Von Straef rendezvous.

It would have been an easy matter to close up Oudert's. But winking at this flagrant hole was part of French patience in biding their day for a chance at Von Straef. Doubtless the old Alsatian who ran the place was in Prussian hire. But he was small fry compared with the large fish for which the French spread their nets in Rue Montross.

Elton contented himself with driving past the place, refreshing his memory on the precise location of entrance and immediate surroundings. There were two derelicts in boatmen's smock, bérets and sabots loitering outside on the river dock. Always before they had been there. Obviously Von Straef lookouts, whether or not they knew the name and mission of their master.

On circling out of Rue Montross, Elton identified two old cabs which he thought covered the new masquerade of the Belgian agents. The two drivers were sitting inside their cabs, immobile as stone images. Seemingly business was very dull for their cabs tonight. Driving on to the street assigned to the British agents, Elton passed through twice with an eye open for gendarmes, but was able to see no one in police uniform. With an anxious scowl he back-tracked to the point of Belgian vigil.

The two taxicabs were standing at the curbings in the same place, and Elton noted that neither cabman had moved. Even under the dim blue glow of shaded wartime street lights he saw that the two were as stolidly inert as lay figures in wax. His brows knotted as he caught the slow idling of motors in the cabs.

"Drive alongside, McGee," he directed. "Either my nerves are on thin edge to-day—or there's something wrong there!"

Elton stepped quickly up to the driver's seat of the first cab. On the instant he caught the grisly detail of glassy eyes and frozen face. It was one of the Belgian agents. A touch of the man's wrist told Elton the fellow had been dead some time. From the driver's seat of the second cab, half a dozen meters behind, gaped the empty eyes of the second Belgian. From the bluish haze of the dismal street Elton sensed two figures approaching. He turned back at once to his own cab and ordered McGee to drive at high speed to the Quai d'Orsay.

"What's up now, Cap'n?" McGee demanded as the car raced on its way.

"We'd better get a warning to Fenton before he sticks his nose into that hole at Oudert's," Elton replied. "If I'm not badly mistaken Von Straef knows what's in the air and just where to watch out for trouble!"

A FAST launch put Elton on the Seine from the Quai d'Orsay. Just where Fenton and the two French agents were to launch their foray on Oudert's, or at what hour, Elton did not know. Therefore it was a matter of searching feverishly up and down the Seine for an old wine barge. He passed Oudert's shortly. No barge was tied up there. But on dropping down the river he came upon an object that set his face in grim lines. An empty barge drifting close to the shore. Another hour of futile search and he returned to the quay and gave McGee orders to drive at once to the Deuxième Bureau.

"Any luck, Cap'n?" McGee inquired laconically.

"Not so far as Fenton is concerned," Elton replied grimly.

At the Deuxième Bureau, Elton found the executive officer, Lieutenant d'Auteuil, on duty. D'Auteuil was engrossed over the evening edition as he waited developments and his whole manner indicated he was unaware of developments.

"What time were your agents and our man Fenton dropping in at Oudert's?" Elton asked anxiously.

D'Auteuil consulted the details of

an operations chart, glanced at his watch and shrugged.

"An hour ago, Captain, they should have tied up at Oudert's," the Frenchman replied. "Yes, before very long it is that we should have the report of what they have learn."

"I'm very much afraid, *monsieur,* there'll be no report from there," Elton said heavily. "I found an empty wine barge drifting down the Seine below Oudert's a few minutes ago. Your chart seems to confirm the worst."

"But—it may be another barge, my Captain," D'Auteuil argued. "Or they may have cast their boat adrift for some good reason."

"The two Belgian agents are dead—killed in their taxicabs, and I was able to find no one in gendarme uniform in the area to which the British agents were assigned."

D'Auteuil dropped his paper and sprang to his feet.

"*Le bon Dieu,* Captain!" he gasped. "But are you certain of what it is you report? The Belgians—also the British—they are the experienced agents who know how to look out for themselves! It is less than two hours since they leave for Rue Montross!"

"It is half an hour since I found them dead; and from a hurried examination I judge they had been dead some little time."

The French officer sprang to the telephones that littered a large desk and gave hurried instructions to gendarmes and secret police in half a dozen different points in Paris. A doleful half an hour had passed before confirmation came. The Belgians were dead, both from the thrust of a knife in the back. No trace could be found of the disguised British agents who were operating as gendarmes. Later came a third report. The barge drifting down the Seine was the one in which the two French operatives and one American agent had set out for Oudert's. There was no trace of them at Oudert's.

"*Diable!*" swore D'Auteuil, dazed by the swift tragedy that had befallen the Deuxième Bureau's well-laid plan. "But this Von Straef have the genius of the devil himself. It must be, my Captain, as I have suspect, that there are a hundred agents of this Prussian who see everything that happen in the region of Rue Montross!"

"Or perhaps," Elton rejoined thoughtfully, "he has some other rather unexpected source of very accurate information."

"Your pardon, my Captain," D'Auteuil excused himself hastily, "but I must go at once to inform Colonel L'Ourcq of what occurs. *Vivedieu,* but we will deal with this Prussian now if it is a hundred agents we must use—or a thousand!"

ELTON dismissed the complication on Rue Montross from further immediate action and returned to the Wagram long enough to gather up personal effects and release his room. Then he went with McGee to American military police headquarters for the night. For the present he had no taste for undue prowling about Paris. It seemed apparent that Von Straef's agents were too well informed of events, which might mean Elton's name on the Prussian vengeance list. Besides, he wanted the night to himself, free of all distractions, while he rechecked the whole devious pattern of Prussian mischief.

Morning brought tragic confirmation of the worst. On reporting in at the Deuxième Bureau, Elton found L'Ourcq and D'Auteuil grimly contained and with tragedy etched in their

drawn faces, the center of a group of French agents. Elton listened in silence to the reports. The bodies of the British agents had been found in an old wine cellar. Fenton's body and that of one of the French agents of the barge adventure had been grappled out of the Seine. Two French agents concealed across from Oudert's had been found dead of gas poisoning.

Colonel L'Ourcq presently acknowledged Elton's presence with a reserved nod.

"You are rather fortunate, Captain Elton," he said coolly, "that another agent was assigned by your colonel to the case of this Von Straef." The Deuxième Bureau chief added in a gentler voice: "Please that you convey to Colonel Rand our deepest regret at what have happen to Captain Fenton."

"The Colonel, I'm sure, will appreciate your condolences," said Elton.

"Please also say to your colonel that what has happen only sharpens our determination to get rid of this Prussian. It is our deepest wish that Colonel Rand will lend us his further coöperation—and perhaps it is that now we can hope for your own services, Captain Elton."

"Colonel Rand instructed me yesterday to see this case through," Elton explained quietly. "I had Captain Fenton work with your men last night only because I wanted to be free to work in my own way, *monsieur*. There was no other reason. As you suggested a moment ago, sir, I was fortunate, although no one regrets more than I what happened to poor Fenton and our other agents."

"*Bien,* Captain, but it is the case for the closest of liaison, in which all must work together. Personally it is that I will direct the case against Von Straef."

"You are certain, *monsieur,*" Elton inquired, evading the issue of joining hands directly with the L'Ourcq operation, "that Von Straef was directly responsible for what happened last night?"

L'Ourcq swore through his teeth as he reached to his desk and handed to Elton a small oblong card.

"This impertinent scoundrel sent to the morgue this infamous token of his acts, Captain!"

On the face of the card, under a delicately wrought coronet, was the name "Oberleutnant Friederich von Straef, Imperial Army." Elton turned the card over. In small neatly written letters was the legend, in French, "My deepest regrets—*c'est la guerre.* M-16."

ELTON looked from the card to L'Ourcq in puzzled inquiry.

"Von Straef sent this to you through the mail?" he asked.

"*Diable,* but this Von Straef presented the card to a loyal French florist on the Champs Elysées, my Captain!" L'Ourcq exclaimed. "A hundred francs of flowers the Prussian order sent to the morgue where are the bodies of his victims—and with it this card which is not discovered until it is delivered. Yes, it is not until the flowers have been placed that the card was read. From the florist my agents learn who it was that purchased the flowers. The description, it is that of Von Straef himself, and at an hour, my Captain, when the streets of Paris are filled with the secret police!"

"An unusual whim of vanity," Elton commented thoughtfully. The strange face of Von Straef rose in his memory and he added, "Or perhaps an act compelled by Von Straef's rather unusual temperament. But what is your present plan of attack, Colonel,

and what can our section do to assist you?"

The once imperturbable L'Ourcq struck the top of his desk with his chubby clenched fist.

"We shall concentrate our secret police and our agents, my Captain, under a plan which in detail we shall prepare before night. Our agents, they shall be prepared to support one another, and it is that their orders will be to shoot at the slightest suspicion of hidden attack."

"Of your agents, Colonel L'Ourcq," Elton said with thoughtful deliberation, "all are accounted for but two. Since Colonel Rand will be interested in as many details as possible, may I inquire what check has been made upon the two who are missing?"

"Devore, his body it is in the Seine, Captain," L'Ourcq replied promptly. "Of that we may be sure. An officer of great courage who would fight to the death in the trap that caught your Captain Fenton and our agent who was with poor Devore in the barge. Guiroye return yesterday on the afternoon express to Belfort, where it is his duty to watch at our frontier. The others, they are dead, which account for all."

"Devore was an officer of long service in your bureau, Colonel?"

L'Ourcq spoke incisively as if in resentment of a possible implication in Elton's query.

"The fifteen years! It is that no finer officer ever wore the uniform of France, Captain Elton."

"Thank you, Colonel. No officer could merit a finer tribute from his chief. And Guiroye?"

"Twenty years in my bureau. Because of his knowledge of Belfort and its environs, it is Guiroye's eyes that watch who come and go at the frontier."

"Captain Guiroye came to the conference by your orders, sir?"

"But yes, to receive the instructions that he shall watch closely for the couriers of Von Straef who may attempt to slip through in the region of Belfort and Basle."

Elton lighted a cigarette and took several thoughtful puffs while he weighed the prudence of further questions. He sensed that L'Ourcq caught the hidden import of his thoughts and guessed that the Frenchman might openly resent bringing such suspicions into the open. The frozen face of Guiroye was again before his eyes, that unaccountable mood of the Frenchman which stirred some deep intuition. Elton drew himself erect and nodded.

"If there is nothing further, Colonel L'Ourcq, I would like to prepare my report for Colonel Rand," he excused himself. "I know I am speaking for my Colonel when I say his section will stay with you on this Von Straef case to the end."

Outside McGee was waiting with a large American staff car that had brought the two from American headquarters to Paris a few days before.

"Drive at once out of Paris through the Porte de Bercy and take the direct route through Provins to Chaumont, thence on to Belfort. No stops for lunch. I want to make Belfort before dusk."

CHAPTER III.

A BELGIAN CROIX DE GUERRE.

THE old French fortress city lay sprawled in lethargy, with no outward signs of the entrenched flanks of two great armies that lay across the frontier a few kilometers distant. The September sun was

flaunting its setting rays aslant multi-colored roofs when the Elton sedan pulled in at the *hôtel-de-ville*. Except for poilus in faded uniforms shuffling aimlessly about the streets on leave, animation seemed suspended for the day.

"What I can't figure, Cap'n, is why we're running up to this hole," McGee grumbled for perhaps the seventh time in the past hour. "What's the game—or am I to stay in the dark?"

"We may be wasting our time, McGee," Elton replied patiently. "But I'll let you in on this much. Unless I'm working a wild guess, there's a traitor in the French camp—and he's got to be in one of two places, Belfort or Paris. My hunch favors Belfort."

"Still on the Von Straef case?"

"Nothing else. And I've figured from the first that the last place to set a trap for that Prussian is in Paris."

McGee pursed his lips and looked at Elton from under knotted brows.

"You mean Von Straef has run out on Paris and may be hiding around up this way?

"Or just some of his henchmen you're looking for?"

"A henchman, McGee. And you may be certain that if we're on a live trail he'll be a particularly desperate and dangerous customer to deal with. Will you wait here a few minutes?"

From a minor official on duty in the *hôtel-de-ville* Elton learned, by discreet inquiry, that Captain Guiroye lived in the ancestral Guiroye château some two kilometers northwest of Belfort on the Dijon route. There he was to be found when not on duty at military headquarters or absent back of the lines in front of Belfort.

After dinner at a French café which offered little to eat, Elton directed a cautious reconnoissance of the Guiroye premises, a rambling stone antique set well back from the road in a broad expanse of neglected gardens. Through binoculars he studied the lay of the château and proceeded on slowly towards Dijon, returning after darkness had fallen. A French staff car outside testified to Guiroye's presence.

"I'm going in for a little visit with Guiroye, if he's at home," Elton informed McGee. "It may be only a

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courtesy call, or it may be a great deal more than that. Here are your orders, McGee: Take no chances with anyone who may come up to the car while I'm inside, especially if I'm gone for any length of time."

"Expecting trouble, Cap'n?"

"I'm not expecting anything. Neither am I taking any chances—after what happened in Paris last night."

On the long drive up from Paris Elton had rehearsed carefully the delicate interview with Guiroye. He knew he must proceed with subtle indirection, without the slightest display of the suspicion that had shaped itself in his mind. But Elton was convinced that one of two men ran with the Von

Straef wolf-pack. Guiroye or the missing agent at Paris. And he meant to narrow the field of his suspicion to one man out of this interview.

Guiroye himself answered Elton's knock. The man displayed neither surprise or other emotion at seeing the American. Elton noted at first glance that Guiroye's face was set in that bronze-like immobility of the day before, nor was there the slightest contraction of muscles as Guiroye, in a restrained monotone, invited Elton inside.

"I am honored, *monsieur,*" Guiroye said, bowing Elton to a chair. "Your health, I trust it is excellent."

"I always take special care of my health," Elton said, a covert implication in his voice. "I dislike to intrude business at your home, *monsieur,* but I have a matter of some urgency to discuss with you, and with your permission I'll get to business at once."

"As you please, Captain," Guiroye assented.

"I'm convinced, *monsieur,* that Von Straef is receiving help from an abominable traitor," Elton said with blunt directness. "I intend to go to the bottom of this."

"Such things, they are always possible, Captain," Guiroye replied without rift in his wooden stolidity. "But in such a case as this it sounds—improbable, do you not think?"

"You have heard, Captain Guiroye, what happened in Paris last night?"

"But yes, that is most unfortunate. Yet—*c'est la guerre.*"

"SO Von Straef remarked, in writing an arrogant note on the back of his card, *monsieur.* But I have reason to believe I can trap this traitor of ours. If I am at liberty to remain here a short time information may be brought to me that will prove the truth of what I suspect and establish the identity of the traitor."

Elton closely watched the response of Guiroye's face to this threat. But he caught no reaction, not even the slightest contraction of eyes or shift of posture. Guiroye's eyes met his unshrinkingly, in a sort of set stare in which there was not even tension. It was as if Guiroye was a man without emotion, one in whom feeling had been suspended.

"That will be a valuable service, Captain," the Frenchman said. "You are, of course, welcome to remain here as long as you wish. May I offer you a glass of wine? In my cellars are some excellent wines from our own vineyards, some vintages that date before the war."

"Thank you, *monsieur,* I think not." His eyes wandered about the room and fastened upon a large tapestry depicting a medieval boar hunt in the Vosges. "Your château is very interesting. May I?"

Elton rose, extended his silver cigarette case to Guiroye, who shook his head, then walked over to the tapestry, absently taking a cigarette from the case and putting it in his mouth. He did not return the case to his pocket, but appeared wholly absorbed in the picture.

But Elton did not see the tapestry. Having baited his trap, his eyes were upon Guiroye, whose face was reflected from behind in the small mirror concealed in the cigarette case. He caught a sudden malignant gleam in Guiroye's dead eyes, a knotting of convulsive muscles at Guiroye's jaw. The Frenchman rose and stepped to a desk. Elton caught the momentary gleam of steel, then saw the figure of Guiroye slowly moving upon him, the right hand that

bore the knife concealed behind the fellow's back.

Not until his antagonist was within striking distance did Elton act. Then, as he caught a flash of steel, he whirled, side-stepped adeptly and leaped into a grapple with the swift agility of a trained boxer. Guiroye attempted a short, sharp thrust, but Elton's fingers closed about the other's wrist. Another quick shift of position and Elton put a pressure on Guiroye's wrist that forced the Frenchman to drop his knife with an oath of pain. Elton shoved his host into a chair and sat down in front of him.

"Thanks, *monsieur,*" he said placidly, "for obliging me with a full confession. In addition to establishing the identity of our traitor you have also reassured me that Von Straef isn't nearly as clever as he's credited with being."

Guiroye's face resumed its wooden immobility, but Elton saw the play of terror deep in Guiroye's eyes.

"What has happened—it proves nothing," Guiroye muttered.

"On the contrary it proves everything—evidence enough even for a friendly court-martial, *monsieur.* Although, of course, Colonel L'Ourcq will have his own way of getting contributory evidence. Please don't flatter yourself you've left no trail behind you, now that we know where to look for it."

THROUGH fully a minute Guiroye merely stared without change of expression. Then defiance shone in his eyes and he licked his lips.

"I'm not afraid to die," he said in a low voice, as if speaking to himself.

"But you're afraid to die a rat's death at the end of a rope, Guiroye," Elton rejoined. "And perhaps that can be avoided if you want to be sensible with me."

There was a quickening interest in the fellow's eyes. He stared at Elton again, in mute inquiry.

"Perhaps," Elton added, "I can arrange commutation of the death penalty for, say, life imprisonment, if you want to play the game. It is within your power, Guiroye, to undo a lot of the red mischief you've done. Colonel L'Ourcq will probably take into consideration anything you do to help me."

A slow transformation wrought itself in the Frenchman's face. The flood of pent-up emotion broke its bounds, veins stood out and throbbed at neck and temple. Guiroye's eyes glowed with a strange intensity.

"But I do not want to live, *monsieur!*" he cried. The last of his stolidity was swept away and he wrung his hands while his voice rose to a shrill outcry. "No—all I ask is to end my miserable life. Yes, it is that for years I have wanted only to die—and yet I have not dared to die. There is nothing I will not do, *monsieur,* if only it will bring me—death!"

Elton studied the man with puzzled eyes. Had Guiroye's reason suddenly snapped?

"Steady yourself, Guiroye," he rejoined. "Pull yourself together and let us speak sensibly."

"Ah, but you do not understand, my Captain!" Guiroye exclaimed. "I speak only the truth. But always these Prussian agents have warned me that if I ended my life they would bare my infamy to curse all who are kin to me. So I have not dared to die. But if—"

Guiroye broke off and gaped at Elton in a pathetic supplication for understanding and help. Elton leaned close to the traitor's ear.

"Perhaps, *monsieur,* if you can justify yourself to me, I will not need to say anything of this to L'Ourcq. But that, of course, must depend upon the value of your services and your good faith."

"My Captain! I ask only that I may be my own executioner," Guiroye cried. "Yes, I will condemn myself and end my own miserable existence if only you will assist me to protect others who bear my name!"

"I have given you my terms, Guiroye. At another time I want to know your whole story. But first I want to learn how far you are willing to help. You know the formula of identification for getting into Von Straef's nest under Rue Montross?"

Guiroye shook his head violently.

"But no, my Captain. Always it is that Von Straef keep himself protected. I am allowed to meet only his agents as they come and go from Paris with his reports."

"I've got to ask you to withhold nothing from me, Guiroye. How often do these couriers report through Belfort? And has it been your business to see them safely through your own front lines?"

"They come, my Captain, sometimes one in a fortnight, again as often as two times in the one week. In the uniform of the French officers they pass as my agents and I am responsible that they go through a special listening post under our lines in front of Belfort."

"Excellent. When are you expecting your next German spy-runner?"

Guiroye turned ashen and was seized with a fit of trembling as he pondered this question. He asked for a glass of brandy from a nearby decanter, and gulped it at a swallow.

"The Oberleutnant Hentzel, he will come from Paris on the night of day after to-morrow, my Captain," he said in a whisper. "The *Herr Oberleutnant* is the most important of Von Straef's couriers, which means that he will bring information of importance for the information of Wilhelmstrasse."

"And I can count upon your help, Guiroye, in entertaining this Prussian in your château when he comes?"

Again Guiroye was stricken by an ague as he pondered.

"But if anything should happen, my Captain, to cause Von Straef's suspicion—the terrible truth it will be sent at once to my Bureau at Paris."

"You'd better adjust yourself, Guiroye, to to-night's development. We're playing to trap Von Straef now—and that's your only hope of escape. As far as I'm concerned, you can slip out for Spain or South America if your help results in the arrest of Von Straef. What's the answer?"

"Yes, my Captain," Guiroye responded, this time without hesitation. The lines of his face stiffened, his drooping jaw lifted, decision burned in his eyes. "For this Oberleutnant Hentzel I will arrange for you to trap. A signal of lights in one of my windows will bring him inside—and in the Belgian *croix-de-guerre* he wears on his breast there will be the message in cipher from Von Straef to the Imperial staff. But—please, my Captain, it must not become known that I have done this!"

CHAPTER IV.

A MESSAGE IN CIPHER.

IN the two days that followed, Elton searched out in all its devious details the story of Guiroye's treason and fabricated a net of very fine meshes.

The coming of Hentzel offered extravagant possibilities in view of Guiroye's later disclosures. The American staff car was sent spinning back to headquarters with a report that Elton had gone on to Besançon. McGee was brought into the Guiroye château and acquainted with developments pending further operations.

Two days of planning and preparation gave Elton little enough time for the complicated fabric he now spun. The trapping of Hentzel was a simple enough affair, but Elton was looking far beyond that adventure. Hentzel bade fair to offer him the approach he had prayed for at the outset of the Von Straef case. An approach that might lead him under Rue Montross—and whose later ramifications might spell incalculable disaster for the Imperial German staff.

And Guiroye's whole conduct now convinced Elton that the Frenchman meant to play the game through. Without reservations the fellow told his whole story, answered every question, supplied invaluable information. Guiroye became another man, one moved by a new hope—a strange, tragic hope which Elton found it difficult to understand.

"But if we succeed, my Captain, I shall have the privilege of dealing with myself! But before I die—shall I not have made some amends!"

Many times, as they laid their plans, Guiroye said that, always with an indefinable fervor burning deep in his gray eyes. He made himself no clearer, yet Elton understood the grim determination behind those words. A morbidity, Elton concluded, growing out of the Guiroye tragedy of past years, but one which later reasoning might correct.

Guiroye's treason was a thing that had developed within him like some insidious malignancy. A familiar story. Gambling debts at Monte Carlo as a junior officer. An unexpected benefactor—who proved a masquerader of the Imperial secret service in wait for just such prey. An adroitly fabricated net of evidence that would have branded Guiroye as a traitor. Demands for minor French staff secrets. Thereafter Guiroye was forced in deeper and deeper. With the outbreak of war he had tried for a line command, which could bring the release of death in action. But the French had held him at Belfort, in charge of counter-espionage because of his knowledge of the region. And the Imperial staff had arranged for him to capture all agents whom they distrusted or of whom they wished to rid themselves. Thus Guiroye had been credited by L'Ourcq with unusual capacity in his work.

"*Le bon Dieu,* but can you think of life more terrible!" Guiroye cried when he had disclosed the hideous events of his past. "I am a religious man, yet I did not dare pray for deliverance from such foul mischief. But yes, I have been compelled to become the creature without feelings, one who has been without hope, who did not even dare to die! So it is, my Captain, you offer me deliverance—and I will not fail you. Death—it is all I ask in return, my Captain. A death that will not be followed with disgrace for my father, who commands French hussars, and my three brothers who died at Verdun!"

Guiroye offered no objection to Elton's insistence that all remain within the château until the hour for Von Straef's courier. The Frenchman pleaded illness as the reason for his absence from his post of duty at Belfort and directed operations through an ad-

jutant who came from Belfort headquarters each afternoon. Ten operatives served under Guiroye's control, observing events at Belfort and down the Franco-Swiss frontier in front of Basle. All was exceedingly quiet at present, they reported, no single suspect having been interrogated in Guiroye's absence.

ON the night of the second day, Guiroye coolly arranged the signal that would beckon Oberleutnant Hentzel into the château. A conventional signal of shutters opened at a certain angle on a specified window. Guiroye's calm demeanor as the hour of action approached told Elton that the Frenchman had gotten himself stoutly in hand, had adjusted his shaken mind to this new intervention.

"Nine o'clock," Guiroye said quietly, his eyes on the clock. "Hentzel, if he came by the Belfort express, will come to my door within the few minutes."

Elton and McGee stepped into a small alcove shut off by heavy portières, from where they had a full view of the door through which the German emissary must enter. Left alone, Guiroye was overcome by nervousness as the habit of fear of the German conspirators asserted itself. He gulped a glass of cognac and got himself quickly back under control.

At the sound of a tap of the knocker a few moments later, Guiroye started violently, then got to his feet, threw his shoulders back and went unhurriedly to the door. An erect, square-shouldered young man in French uniform stepped inside with a blunt exclamation of greeting.

"Are you ready to move, Guiroye?" the fellow demanded in French. "I am in the devil of a hurry to-night and mean to make it through the lines before midnight."

The visitor crossed the room and helped himself to a glass of brandy. At first sight, Elton had set the fellow down as unmistakably the Von Straef courier, Oberleutnant Hentzel. The agent's features were not of distinctive Teuton mold. In the French uniform he might pass readily for a Frenchman. A type that could muster in German uniform, or Belgian, or American. Hentzel's features were those of a decisive man, with shrewd, level eyes that had a touch of arrogance in them. A man with whom no chance was to be played, Elton estimated.

"Well, are you ready to move?" Hentzel demanded when Guiroye merely stood gaping at him. "Did I not say I am in a hurry? Where is your automobile?—I did not see it outside!"

"Has something gone wrong, *Herr Oberleutnant?*" Guiroye asked in a thin, dry voice.

"Yes, a great deal—but nothing to worry us!" the fellow blurted with a chuckle. "Your French geese are flocking into the Rue Montross. Have you not heard what happened to a dozen of them within the past few nights?"

"I have heard, yes, that there have been some casualties—in Paris, *Herr Oberleutnant.*"

"And you will hear of a lot more if L'Ourcq does not come to his senses, Guiroye! Your Deuxième Bureau just as well realize that the Herr Baron von Straef—"

The German agent broke off with a gasp. From an alcove had emerged so silently that he did not discover them until they were in the middle of the room two grim figures in American uniform. Hentzel's eyes swept back to Guiroye.

"Who are these men, Captain?" he barked.

"Permit me to introduce myself," Elton said quietly, a smile suffusing his face as he stepped close to Hentzel. "I am Captain Elton, American Military Intelligence. And you, I take it, are the Herr Oberleutnant Hentzel, a reservist serving as a spy with the Imperial army."

LIEUTENANT GUIROYE

"What do you want?" Hentzel blurted impotently.

"For a man of your evident intelligence, Hentzel, that strikes me as a rather foolish question," Elton replied coolly.

HENTZEL recovered swiftly from the shock of this unexpected intervention. His lips turned in a careless smile and he folded his hands behind his back.

"A foolish question, yes," he assented with a sneering look at Guiroye. "When one deals with a traitor he should be prepared to expect treachery. Well, I concede you your advantage, my friend."

"Let me warn you, Hentzel," Elton spoke up quickly. "I read in your face your intention. Don't deceive yourself that you'll get out of this room alive."

"Thank you, an unnecessary warning," Hentzel replied with a hopeless shrug. "But I am a man of proper discretion, and—"

With an indescribable suddenness Hentzel dove for a window. Less than two seconds put him across the room, another second must have seen him catapulting through the glass, a maneuver calculated to beat his captors to their weapons. Elton knew, as he reached for his pistol, that timing was against him. But McGee, expert pistol marksman, flashed into potent action only a split second behind the German. The roar of his service pistol filled the room. Hentzel pitched headlong against the window, shattering its broad pane, and collapsed.

Elton crossed the room and bent over the fallen figure.

"Wing him?" he asked McGee.

"Never take chances with a man of that stripe, Cap'n," McGee replied grimly. "He's shot through the heart if my aim and judgment's still working in a pinch, sir."

Elton lifted the limp form to a lounge. A hasty examination told him Hentzel was in the clutches of death.

"There is nothing we can do for him, *monsieur*," Elton said to Guiroye, who came up with a glass of brandy. "He is dead."

"Dead!" Guiroye repeated dazedly. That indescribable light shone again in the Frenchman's gray eyes. He nodded his head with a tragic somberness over the thoughts that were pouring through his mind. "*Oui*, the *Herr Oberleutnant* is dead," he muttered. "How fortunate he is to be dead—in the line of his duty."

"*C'est la guerre*," McGee said with a shrug.

Leaning over the body, Elton gently unpinned the Belgian *croix-de-guerre* with its two bronze palms from Hentzel's breast. Then he directed Guiroye and McGee to secretly inter the body.

"That, at least, is a much better burial than he would receive if we turned his body over to headquarters at Belfort," Elton said. "And we can't afford to have anyone suspect what happened here to-night."

With the fine point of Guiroye's knife Elton pried the edge of the *croix-de-guerre* until he located the hidden release that gave access to the hollow inside. There he found a wax-coated object the size and shape of a large pea. From this he cut away the wax with a meticulous care not to mar the delicate tissue of the inevitable cipher message underneath.

A MESSAGE of some length was disclosed on a sheet of onion-skin paper the size of a paper franc. Elton lighted a cigarette and stared with a scowl at the cipher. Those groupings of symbols might mean precious days of juggling before he could make his next move. Unless Von Straef still used the cipher-key that the Deuxième Bureau cryptographers had broken a fortnight before. He ransacked Guiroye's effects for paper and pencil and set himself to the quest, first copying in a large legible hand the jumble of letters of the Von Straef missive. The message read:

RGGJN OZYRM MZCAN CRANP
DDAOJ ERYNO DMMNE ZJWNR
FNAJP REZVJ GGZYA JHNYK
ADXLK RALDE ENMDA NZYZN
CY26V JYKDQ INPYJ WNZNO
REYKJ ZJZRH NTFDW NFNEY
DMFRI DAJFC DAYRE PNVJG
GANCD AYVKD GNRGG JNOQR
YYGNC GREZD DERZC DZZJQ
GNF16

From memory he wrote out the broken key, hardly daring hope that it would fit. The key was a simple one, easily carried in memory by Von Straef's agents, and yet complicated to hostile agents because it shifted with each day of the month. It consisted of the English alphabet in two lines, one under the other. The upper line was the true alphabet, the lower Von Straef's code arrangement, the alphabet in reverse, beginning with the letter removed from "Z" that corresponded with the day of the month up to the twelfth.

On the twelfth the code arrangement returned to its original arrangement, as on the first day of the month, and ran the same changing course until the end of the month.

The day being September 8, Elton set down the code alphabet beginning with the eighth letter back from "Z" or "R."

The key thus reduced read:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
R Q P O N M L K J I H G F

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
E D C B A Z Y X W V U T S

Elton gave an exclamation of joy as the first letters of Von Straef's message responded to that code. He knew that in a few minutes he would know what word the Prussian was sending to Wilhelmstrasse or Spa. It was simply a process now of taking each letter of the Paris cryptogram, locating its position in the second or code line and jotting down the true letter standing in the first line directly over it. A few minutes' work unmasked Von Straef's mischief:

Allied staffs prepare coördinated offensive. Americans will strike through Argonne forest Sept. 26 with objective

Sedan. This is a key movement of major importance. Will report whole Allied battle plan soon as possible.—M-16.

Elton was pacing restlessly back and forth across the room when McGee and Guiroye returned an hour later from their gruesome errand.

"Guiroye, you said you knew the lay of the German Intelligence post across from the French lines!" he exclaimed. "You are positive of your information?"

"But yes, my Captain," Guiroye replied. He bit his lips and muttered dejectedly: "It is the route through which I have been compelled to guide these Prussian agents for many months."

"Good!" Elton exclaimed. "Then you ought to have no trouble putting me through your lines, eh, Guiroye?"

"In the uniform of a French officer, yes, my Captain."

"Then get your automobile to the door ready to roll while I write out a little message in cipher, *monsieur*. Also I'll have to borrow one of your uniforms—and abstract Hentzel's trick *croix-de-guerre*. Von Straef is sending a message to the Imperial staff to-night that he hadn't exactly figure on!"

CHAPTER V.

IMPERIAL ORDERS.

GUIROYE'S small staff sedan, which he drove himself, made slow progress through Belfort and out into the region of the front lines. Headlights were forbidden, there was no moon. But alert shadows halted them frequently as they worked their way out of Belfort, and thereafter they were challenged every few hundred meters.

Long months before the Belfort area had passed into the realm of passive resistance. Divisions occupying the southernmost sector, where the opposing trenches jutted against the Swiss Alps, and neutral soil, were here mostly to lick their wounds and rest up from the raging tempest of battle farther north.

But their sentries were kept on the *qui vive* for skulking shadows. It was a region of intrigue and mysterious prowling, a natural passageway for spy-runners and adventurous mercenaries intent on running the lines or slipping through the boundaries into Switzerland.

For Guiroye, however, the way was open. A few crisp words of identification passed him on forward through black networks of communicating trenches into the front lines, thence on forward to the outpost lines. As for the two men in French uniform who accompanied the counter-espionage agent, Guiroye's presence sponsored them.

"Your instructions, McGee—do not let Guiroye out of your sight until I return," Elton whispered into his assistant's ear.

On reaching the outpost line, Guiroye made a terse explanation to the officer in command.

"*A reconnaissance, monsieur,* into enemy terrain," he said. "You will see that I am not disturbed."

Guiroye strode now with the sure step of a man who knows every inch of his terrain even by dark. Entering a small dugout under the outpost trench he lighted a candle that illumined a timbered hole some ten feet square.

"This, my Captain, is the listening post of my Intelligence group." He glanced anxiously at his watch. "The hour it is midnight and you must leave at once, although I must warn you of

the danger of trying such a thing without the password through the German listening posts."

"You're positive, *monsieur,* you never picked up from Hentzel any hint of his system of identification after leaving here?"

"Positive, my Captain. When it is you emerge from the ground some fifty meters from my post, you must crawl a hundred meters straight ahead. There you will find the German listening post. Beyond that I know nothing."

"All right, put me through—and I'll take my own chances," Elton ordered.

Guiroye was ague-stricken again as he sprung aside a timber that disclosed the secret passageway out into no-man's land. Elton had taken the Frenchman fully into confidence as to his plans. Guiroye had assented, but Elton saw now that his strange ally was holding small faith in the success of such a brash adventure. He gave McGee a significant nod. McGee nodded mute understanding.

ELTON plunged into the black hole at once and crawled over its tortuous course until it brought him out into the open. Cautiously eeling his way forward, a few meters at a time, he searched with straining eyes for some indication of the German listening post in no-man's land. After the inky blackness of that hole through which he had passed his immediate surroundings seemed plainly outlined in the starlight. But a hoarsely whispered challenge close to his ear was his first intimation of the German listening post.

"An officer courier who must pass at once," Elton responded, *sotto voce.*

He caught the vague undulations of a black object moving towards him. A moment later he made out the inverted outlines of a German helmet. The sentry, without rifle, crawled close beside him.

"I am sent forward to identify you," the sentry whispered.

"Forget your confounded formula of identification," Elton shot back. "Take me through at once to your officers. I carry a message from Paris that must go forward to-night. Do you understand?"

Instead of replying the sentry backed away over the same route he had come. Elton caught vaguely a whispered exchange as the sentry reported to the others in the listening post. Presently the fellow crawled up and motioned Elton to follow. There were three soldiers in the post in command of an *unter-offizier* who now took up the parley while his men kept the nocturnal figure in French uniform covered with their rifles.

"You must identify yourself to me before I can pass you farther," the *unter-offizier* explained respectfully.

"Something very important has happened, my man!" Elton rejoined with sharp annoyance. "I come in place of Oberleutnant Hentzel. I demand that you escort me immediately to your Intelligence post, where your officers can examine me. Do you suppose an impostor would want to enter your front lines openly, you blockhead!"

Elton's flawless German and his arrogant certainty of himself forged the *unter-offizier's* decision.

"*Jawohl,* you will follow me, please," he acceded.

The *unter-offizier* went ahead, detailing a grenadier to the rear. After fifty meters on hands and knees the three got up and moved at a fast walk towards the German outpost trenches. Elton kept close to the heels of his guide, attempting no questions. The

rôle he had adopted for himself, of a Von Straef henchman, required blunt, direct handling. He knew that any show of uncertainty or effort at easy plausibility might excite sensitive suspicions. Disciplined reticence should serve his purpose at the German listening post better than the most adroit story. And as for final identification, the cipher message he carried concealed in the Belgian decoration should serve his purpose better than anything he might say.

As they came to the German outpost entanglements, Elton caught the hushed voice of the German *unter-offizier* responding to a challenge. *Nach Paris!* Spoken with a peculiar enunciation, the first word German, the second French. Elton repeated the phrase over and over as they moved on to fix in his mind that precise enunciation. They were passed through the wires, admitted to the trenches and escorted to the German Intelligence post in a timbered dugout. A German *oberleutnant* sat at an improvised table in the center of the dugout.

"What is it?" the officer demanded of Elton, after the *unter-offizier* had made his report.

"*Nach Paris,*" Elton said calmly. "I'm from Agent M-16 with an urgent message that requires an immediate reply."

THE officer's eyes narrowed. He was a thin, sallow man of sharp features and cold, severe expression, the type that stands out for the niceties of precise routine. Elton read in the fellow's face that he was stung less by suspicion than by this departure from the conventional words of identification required of those who came through that secret hole in the French lines.

"What else have you to say?" the *oberleutnant* demanded.

"Oberleutnant Hentzel was in no condition to come here to-night," Elton said stoutly. "Therefore it was necessary for me to come from Paris on short notice. I must return with as little delay as possible."

"What was the matter with Oberleutnant Hentzel?"

"That is not for me to report, *Herr Lieutnant.*"

The German officer drummed with lean fingers on the top of his desk. His eyes finally centered on the Belgian *croix-de-guerre* on Elton's breast.

"I see you have been decorated," he mused.

"Oberleutnant Hentzel's decoration, *Herr Lieutnant.* Perhaps you would like to examine it."

"Of course. Hand it to me!"

Elton unpinned the medal and handed it to the officer, who promptly opened it. Extracting the wax-covered cipher message, the *oberleutnant* hurried out of the dugout without further reference to his suspicious visitor. A beefy grenadier offered Elton a seat and attempted a conversation. How were things over in France? Were there really two million Americans in France as had been whispered? Were the Allies about ready to ask for peace? Would the Americans really stay in the war through another winter?

Elton replied in blunt monosyllables, giving no satisfaction. He knew that words were dangerous in this realm of sharp suspicions, even casual words on subjects of no importance might only serve to rouse sensitive intuitions among men schooled in every known trick of the Allied secret service.

He guessed that the officer had taken the cipher message to his superiors in a post located well back

from the outpost line. There the messages would be deciphered into English, redrafted in German, analyzed, weighed—and finally flashed by telegraph or radio to Wilhelmstrasse or Spa. At Imperial headquarters it would be evaluated and a colonel-general or field marshal awakened for his decision. And the message was baited to bring out one decision.

Half an hour elapsed before the lieutenant returned. His eyes were glowing with a tense excitement.

" The message had to be transmitted to Imperial headquarters for action," the officer said in a crisp voice. " It will require perhaps two hours for a decision, so Gefreiter Schultz will take you to quarters where you may rest, *Herr Lieutnant.*"

The indicated German corporal escorted Elton to a small dugout under the outpost trench, a haven equipped with a lighted candle, a pile of straw and a musty army blanket. Beside the bed was a German iron ration of tinned sausages, cheese and hard bread.

Elton ignored the ration and lay down to wait. Notwithstanding the high success that so far was attending his desperate venture, he knew his security hung by devious threads. The slightest suspicion on the part of high headquarters and he would be stripped promptly of his masquerade. The precaution of fingerprints or expert questioning by an adept Intelligence officer would mean the end.

THEREFORE he knew he must wait upon the turn of the cards in his precarious game. If Imperial headquarters accepted the message from its remote Intelligence post as a matter of course, one which had been properly safeguarded there, then they would concern themselves only with formulating a proper cipher reply to the Von Straef message. And the message from Von Straef which they would decipher read:

> **Urgent. I come at once to Spa to report personally. Send plane and competent Intelligence officer to relieve me in Paris. This is urgent.—M-16.**

A request hardly to be denied, Elton reasoned. Between the lines was a hint of portentous information which Von Straef must deliver personally to the high command. And out of the Imperial action upon that enciphered request Elton expected to find his chance of trapping Von Straef.

An hour passed. Two hours. It was nearing three o'clock, which meant that time was pressing. Once daylight came there would be no chance of returning through no-man's land to French terrain. Staying over through a full day would bring added risks of German suspicion. And such a delay might send that desperate French traitor scurrying to cover in an effort to save himself from Prussian vengeance.

He started at the sound of footsteps entering the dugout shortly after three o'clock. Avidly he searched the face of the corporal who entered.

" The *Herr Lieutnant* directs that you report to him," Corporal Schultz announced stolidly.

Elton felt the stir of a bright gleam of hope out of the reassurance in the corporal's face. This good omen was confirmed by the scene in the Intelligence post. The *Herr Lieutnant* was puffing a black pipe with contained gusto. He stepped up to Elton and pinned on the Belgian *croix-de-guerre.*

" You will proceed at once to Paris," the officer directed. " There must be no delay in reporting to Rue Montross. Do you understand?"

"But—I may not be able immediately to locate Oberleutnant Hentzel," Elton protested. "It is he who always goes under Rue Montross."

"*Donnerwetter!*" snapped the officer. "But this must be delivered at once—to-morrow at all costs, and not a minute later! Where is Hentzel?"

"As I already reported, the *oberleutnant* may be difficult to locate in a hurry."

"What is the matter with every one in Paris? Did they not know the message they sent required a prompt answer? The orders for you are that this message will be delivered promptly—and yet you tell me you do not know how to do this!"

Elton's face brightened under the irritated lash of the other's tongue.

"I have observed the entrance at Oudert's winery," he announced dutifully. "If I cannot get the help of the *oberleutnant* I can deliver direct to the *Herr Baron's* agents. But if that is what you wish, I shall have to have your help with the words of identification."

The Intelligence officer gave several quick puffs of his pipe and began pacing back and forth across the dugout. Elton clearly followed the workings of the fellow's mind. A fine dilemma—urgent orders from Imperial headquarters delayed by the blundering stupidity of Von Straef's men. But finally the *lieutnant* concluded that the important consideration was to put the message through on his own initiative. Very deliberately he took from his wallet a slip of paper which he handed to Elton.

"You will memorize this with the greatest care," he instructed in a low voice. "It will admit you at Oudert's in event you cannot locate Hentzel. Be sure you learn carefully every word. Under Rue Montross no risks are taken, and the miss of a word in this formula—might land you in the Seine, my friend."

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER RUE MONTROSS.

THE trench network of the French was as silently somber as a cemetery under soft starlight when Elton emerged from the Intelligence post and set off at a fast pace behind Guiroye and McGee for Belfort. But every few yards they were halted by vigilant shadows that seemed to rise out of nothingness like the denizens of some haunted place. Off in the far distance artillery growled fretfully, a grim reminder of that strange violence in which ten million men faced one another along a deep line from Switzerland to the North Sea.

A word from Guiroye at each barrier passed them on. Elton cursed under his breath at these brief interruptions. As matters now stood he knew that he must race into Paris with the least possible delay. Imperial headquarters, having taken the cipher bait, might be counted upon to act promptly in sending an agent to relieve Von Straef.

"Our friend's been acting mighty fidgety, Cap'n," McGee reported covertly. "He nearly paced a hole in the ground when you were so long coming back. I've been watching him like a hawk."

The hour was approaching four o'clock, the countryside was plunged in the darkness preceding dawn, when they drove in at Guiroye's billet. Elton hurried them inside and demanded a room in which he could work alone and without interruption.

From the hollow *croix-de-guerre* that the *Herr Lieutnant* had pinned back on his breast Elton extracted the small square of thin paper that he was to deliver to Von Straef. Carefully scraping clear its covering of wax he unfolded the message and copied its tiny symbols in a large hand. Then he wrote down from memory the broken cipher key and reduced the message carefully into English, the language invariably used by Imperial headquarters in secret communications to Paris. It read:

> **Major Muehler replaces you Monday. You will report by French plane from Orlay.—M-1.**

Elton painstakingly checked the message over to verify its symbols. His pulse hammered joyously as the message checked out.

It seemed that not only had the Imperial command accepted his baited cipher at full value, but was complying without equivocation with the unusual Von Straef request for temporary replacement at his Paris post of duty.

As he changed back into his American uniform Elton carefully measured the time element in his next move. Muehler would report at Paris Monday.

Sunday morning was just dawning. Which meant that with speedy action he had barely time to spring the fangs of a dangerous trap under Rue Montross.

Pausing to give orders that McGee and Guiroye get ready for a fast run to Paris, Elton carefully prepared a message and fashioned it into Von Straef's cipher:

YRHNZ	CNPJR	GMANE	PKCGR
ENREO	ANCDA	YRYDE	PNYDZ
CRPDX	AJNAV	JGGCA	DWJON
ENPNZ	ZRATO	NYRJG	ZFI

Melting the wax he had scraped from the original message he wrought a neat new covering for his substitute cipher message and secreted it in the Belgian *croix-de-guerre.*

McGee and Guiroye were waiting to shove off. The car sped at once out into the open highway with Guiroye at the wheel, and by the route through Vesoul — Chaumont — Provins, on to Paris.

"What's coming off now, Cap'n?" McGee demanded as the Belfort frontier faded in the background.

"I think the stage is all set, McGee," Elton replied quietly, "to pay a little visit to Baron von Straef in his little stronghold under Rue Montross."

"That includes me, Cap'n?" McGee asked anxiously.

"No, I've got an important job for you and Guiroye. Guarding a road that leads from Paris into the flying field at Orlay."

McGee swallowed hard, crossed his legs and grimly lighted and puffed a cigarette.

"But why do I draw a job watching a road out in the country, Cap'n, when there's a real job to do in Paris?" McGee grumbled.

"Because there may be a real job to be done at Orlay—one requiring decisive action and accurate pistol marksmanship. That is if things go as planned out there."

"But what if they don't?"

Elton shrugged and turned to McGee with a level smile.

"In that event," he replied, "you'll probably locate my body drifting down the Seine below Oudert's."

THE rosy glow of sunset was in the sky over Paris when Guiroye's staff sedan sped into Paris through the Porte de Bercy. Behind

from Provins to Troyes and from Troyes to the foothills of the Vosges lay scattered the carcasses of hapless French fowl that had fallen victims to the streaking French military car. But Elton had a full night in front of him in which to set the stage for his invasion of the realm of Von Straef.

First of all he knew that he must check secret service developments affecting Von Straef. Over the telephone from American military police headquarters on Rue St. Anne, he reported to Colonel Rand. The situation was unchanged. Agents were being massed in an organized net that was to be kept so tightly drawn Von Straef's couriers could not break through. Elton replied with subtle evasions to Rand's demands for information and ended the conversation as quickly as possible.

Reconnoissance of the routes to Orlay and of the American flying field itself occupied the better part of two hours. The situation there was much to Elton's liking. There was only one road through which traffic was permitted to enter the flying field. Carefully rehearsing with McGee and Guiroye their mission in front of that entrance, Elton had them drive him back to Paris.

"Get something to eat and be back on the job outside Orlay by midnight," he instructed McGee. "I may show up during the night or I may not arrive before sun-up. Put a full clip in your automatic and keep on your toes for fast action. Guiroye will stay with you. That's all."

Stepping out of the French car at the Hôtel Wagram, Elton took a taxicab at once to the vicinity of Rue Montross. Dismissing the vehicle a few blocks short of Oudert's, he walked on into Rue Montross. An American military police brassard on his sleeve was its only disguise, proclaiming to casual observers a routine patrol mission along the Seine.

The gloomy blue war lights cast their bilious glow down the cobblestones of the deserted street. Not even the bright sun of midday could rob Rue Montross of its aspects of a dead and forgotten street, a dismal relic of bygone decades, steeped in the slumber of centuries. By night it was as dismal and musty as the catacombs.

As he came close to Oudert's he made out a French wharf-rat humped up, seemingly asleep, against some piling on the river front. Close by another of the same tribe lay sprawled with elbow for pillow. Elton noted that one lay with face to Rue Montross, the other facing the river. And he guessed that under the guise of slumber alert eyes observed in both directions outside Oudert's.

HIS suspicion was confirmed when one of them stirred, lazily got to his feet, and wandered into Oudert's. But Elton was not concerned with this vigil. He expected no trouble in finding his way through the old café. For perhaps the hundredth time since leaving Belfort he rehearsed the formula of identification given him in the German Intelligence post. Entering Oudert's he sat down at the third table from the door and pounded the table for an attendant.

"I wish to see Monsieur Dubois at once," he said in French.

"*Monsieur* is asleep at the present moment," the waiter replied. "Cannot I attend to *monsieur's* wants?"

"I demand Monsieur Dubois!" Elton exclaimed with annoyance. "It is a special wine I want. Bring him at once!"

The flunky shuffled away with a muttered assent. A few minutes later he reappeared with a sallow little Gaul of expressionless face and dead eyes.

"I am Monsieur Dubois," the fellow said in a low voice. "What is it you want."

"Friends tell me you have a very rare old chablis in your stock of wines, *monsieur,*" Elton said. "I wish to purchase a quantity if the wine is of a particular vintage."

"What vintage is it you look for, *monsieur?*"

"Of the year nineteen hundred and nine. No other. And it must come from the vineyards south and west of Lyons, *monsieur.*"

There was the faintest stir of interest in Dubois' dead eyes.

"*Bien, monsieur,* I have what you wish," he said in his flat voice. "Shall I fetch you a glass from my cellars?"

"I will go with you to see how well it is stored," Elton rejoined.

Without ado the corpse-like Frenchman led the way through his shop into a small vacant room, in the center of which he raised an unconcealed trapdoor leading into his wine cellar. Dubois preceded Elton down a steep narrow flight of ramshackle stairs into a basement that reeked of wines, its walls piled high with casks, hogsheads and cases. The Frenchman went behind a high pile of casks and leaned against the wall.

"*Bon voyage, monsieur,*" he muttered, and shot the rays of a flashlight into a narrow aperture.

Elton stepped resolutely into the black hole. He sensed, rather than saw, that the rift in the wall closed behind him. A moment later electric lights flashed on, disclosing a chamber of cement. The hole was furnished with a desk and several chairs. He selected a particular chair, the one indicated in the formula, sat down, crossed his legs and waited with his eyes fixed on a far corner of the room.

In the heavy silence that followed Elton felt the throb of his pulse. Despite his disciplined self-control, he knew that the slightest whim of mischance might catch him up at any instant. It had been easy enough getting past Oudert's. But a score of Allied agents had succeeded that far. Getting out might prove another matter.

CHAPTER VII.

VON STRAFE'S ADJUTANT.

AS he waited Elton knew that his every move was under skilled observation and wondered if the rising beat of his pulse would betray his cool exterior. What if the German listening post in the Vosges had detected the ruse? Or Hentzel's disappearance had been discovered? What if Muehler had dropped in ahead of schedule from Spa? In such event he knew the baited cipher upon which he now staked everything would unmask him to Von Straef's henchmen.

Shortly there was a rift in the wall, a gnome-like figure came from the shadows beyond, a fat man of French features, dressed in a black smock.

"What is it you want?" the fellow asked in French.

"I have some information to deliver," Elton replied.

"Who is it you wish to see?"

"One whose name must not be spoken between us."

"*Bien.* Where do you come from?"

"From Germany."

The fat man waddled in, motioning Elton to follow. A long, narrow passageway led into another concrete

chamber. In contrast with the walking corpse of the Café Oudert, the fat man was alert, animated, with sharp, searching eyes that seemed to gleam an eternal suspicion.

"You will give your information to me," he instructed. "I will write it down as you speak and deliver it, if it is by word of mouth."

Elton's eyes narrowed. This conversation was not part of the *Herr Lieutnant's* formula.

"I have nothing to say to you," he retorted crisply. "My instructions are definite."

"Then it is a written message you carry concealed!" the fat man announced, in a sudden excited accusation.

"If so, that is my own affair!" Elton snapped back. "But I have no time to waste in senseless conversation with you, *monsieur.*"

The fat man gave a raucous laugh and bellowed an order down the concrete passageway. There was an instant response of hurried feet and a moment later three French gendarmes in uniform entered the chamber with drawn pistols.

"A German spy in our trap, *messieurs!*" the fat man exulted. "He has confessed as much to me. *Le bon Dieu,* but he did not know that our Deuxième Bureau trapped the Herr Baron von Straef last night. Ah, another to taste the kiss of death at Vincennes! Search him, *messieurs,* for a cipher message he carries about his body!"

Elton's voice was rising to his throat in protest when a quick intuition warned him. The gendarmes were in regulation uniform, they were distinctly French, the fat man's exultation rang true. But Elton sensed the ominous danger of a Von Straef trick and instantly shaped his course against that threat.

"I am an American officer, *messieurs!*" he protested, stepping back from the three gendarmes.

"Disarm him!" the fat man ordered. "Search him—first search through his pistol and medals, where the German agents conceal their ciphers!"

Elton's arms were pinioned by two of the uniformed men, while a third tore his pistol from its holster and handed it to the fat man. With the quick precision of one who knew what he was about, the fat man stripped off the Belgian *croix-de-guerre,* located the cipher message and held it up with a gloating laugh.

"You will excuse me, Herr spy, while I have this message examined by one who knows the tricks," he mocked. "In a few moments we shall have some more German secrets—and another German neck for our guillotine!"

Elton was left in the room under close vigil of the three gendarmes, who motioned him into a corner and kept him covered with their pistols. They chatted among themselves in French, finding great glee in the spectacle they would see at Vincennes when the Herr Baron and his nest of spies were executed.

ELTON stood in sullen staring, holding to the rôle in which he had entered the Von Straef hole, But his mind was busy in appraisal of his situation. If this was not a part of the wily Von Straef's test of identification, Elton knew the worst that could happen to him was to be taken to headquarters of the French Deuxième Bureau. But the plan he had forged, one even more important than the trapping of Von Straef, would be ruined by this French success in trapping Von Straef—one day too soon.

The better part of half an hour

passed before the fat man returned. The fellow was in the same humor of gloating exuberance in which he had departed with the unmasked cipher.

"Ho, but we have read the message, Herr spy!" he roared. "The evidence of your guilt it is complete. What have you to say for yourself now? *Diable,* but I suppose you will say you did not know there was a cipher message in your *croix-de-guerre,* eh?"

Elton glared malevolence.

"I have nothing to say to you," he muttered defiantly.

"Then you confess that you are a German spy?"

"I confess nothing," Elton rejoined with a sullen shrug.

"***Bien,*** my friend," the fat man said in a swift change of voice and manner. "Let us forget the gendarmes and you will please come with me on a matter of business."

The fat man turned about and with a sweep of his porcine hand bade Elton follow. The gendarmes stood aside with broad smiles. Elton's pulse leaped with sudden excited anticipation. The truth was clearly unmasked. That had been merely a trick of Von Straef's henchmen, and Elton knew he now was being taken to the Prussian spymaster.

By this time Von Straef must have deciphered the message from Imperial headquarters. Doubtless, Elton thought, it would be little to the Von Straef liking. The substitute message made no mention of Muehler. The order Elton had enciphered read:

> Take special French plane and report at once to Spa. Courier will provide necessary details.—M-1.

Not even Von Straef would dare disregard that peremptory summons from M-1, which meant Von Ludendorff, chief of the Imperial staff. And that he was to supply the details lent Elton the great chance for which he played, a trap of sensitive springs and powerful maws.

Elton composed his mind as he followed the ambling henchman. He knew that he must cling to the mental attitude of his rôle, must carry out with the utmost conviction the part of an officer courier of the Imperial headquarters. He would answer questions bluntly, preserving an attitude of official reticence. The slightest wrong reaction might rouse Von Straef's sensitive suspicion.

By a rambling course, through a veritable catacombs of concrete and rock passageways, the way led finally to a large chamber into which Elton was admitted with his guide through a sliding door that was controlled from within. In the center of a chamber, seated at a walnut desk, a man of small stature sat poring over a notepad. Elton glimpsed the luxuriousness of the chamber, a thick Oriental rug, velour and tapestry hangings, an immense desk of carved teakwood.

The man at the desk looked up shortly. His face was long, thin and of sharply aquiline but well balanced features. It was a mild, almost pleasant face at first glance, until you caught the mettle of the eyes. Those eyes were of the lightest gray, cold, level and unrelenting. Elton instantly identified the type. A gentleman of the German military caste, one who would halt at no violence in the line of duty, one to whom such qualities as mercy are set apart as frailties for weak men.

AND as he took the fellow's measure, Elton was busy searching over each feature, weighing them against those pictures he had seen of

Von Straef at the Deuxième Bureau. There was a similarity of feature, but not of expression. Elton, as he measured the man, was stricken by misgivings. Von Straef's height was definitely recorded as seventy and three-fourths inches. The man at this desk appeared much shorter, possibly not more than five feet six inches.

"You have brought me a message," the other announced in a level, quick voice. "What details have you to report?"

Elton glared in stolid reluctance, the reluctance of a man who is not sure of his terrain.

"I have nothing to report," he said, half defiantly.

The other smiled thinly.

"If your mind is not free," he said, "I am adjutant to his Excellency, the Lieutnant Baron Friedrich von Straef, Imperial general staff. Those French masqueraders you met a moment ago are my own men. A little precaution, you understand. Who sent you here, and what details have you to report?"

Elton's face cleared at this declaration.

"My instructions are to answer certain questions," he said in an even, official voice.

"Very well," the other responded more gently, with an undertone of restrained curiosity. "Who sent you here and just what were the circumstances? Please tell me anything you overheard that might be of interest to —the *Herr Lieutnant.*"

"But of such matters I have no information," Elton replied promptly.

"You came by airplane or along another route?"

"There is an airplane at Orlay. It is a French plane and is under no suspicion. The pilot will be there at dawn ready to take off. That is all I have to report."

"*Quatsch!*" the German swore, scowling at his watch. "That is a very short while. The Herr Lieutnant Baron is absent for another two days —and so I will have to go myself to appease those unreasonable ones at Imperial headquarters!"

He got up, snapped his fingers at the fat man and ordered the uniform of an American observer lieutenant brought. Into this he fitted himself with the fat man's aid. Then he took from the teakwood desk a small automatic pistol which he slipped into the pocket of his tunic.

A light struck Elton as the fellow stood erect. The German agent's legs were inordinately long, his torso short and slightly toady. Seated at a desk he had appeared insignificant of stature. But Elton's trained eye now saw that this man measured a full seventy inches. Moreover, the play of his features as he prepared for the adventure out in the open confirmed the quick suspicion that swept Elton's mind. This man was Von Straef.

"I will go at once to Orlay," the German announced, as the fat attendant slipped an American musette bag across his shoulders. He glanced at Elton. "You will go with me to meet the pilot. Come, there is little time."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARKSMEN AT ORLAY.

ELTON'S face remained an impassive mask, screening the surge of emotions that came with this turn of events. In a few minutes he would have Von Straef, wiliest fox in the Imperial secret service, out in the open. Success was almost within his

grasp, success of his whole carefully plotted and desperately executed pattern. And if his trap sprang on Von Straef at Orlay he might be able to send another message to Spa that would shape the whole course of events in the impending drive on Sedan through the Forest of Argonne.

But he promptly suppressed his inner exultation. There remained the danger of Muehler's premature arrival, which would instantly upset everything. Likewise he guessed Von Straef would remain on the *qui vive,* with alert agents protecting his departure. Should the Prussian's slightest suspicion be aroused he would turn back, thus justifying disobedience to an order that was clearly distasteful to him because of its dangers.

On leaving Von Straef's chamber they turned to the left through an interlacing network of high, narrow passageways, which told Elton they were not leaving by way of Oudert's. From time to time they were delayed by blind walls which yielded a way for them under the manipulation of secret doors of concrete and steel. The fat man trotted ahead, lighting the way with a large flashlight.

An underground rendezvous of a dozen outlets, Elton guessed. As impregnable, in some respects, as the Rock of Gibraltar, even if laid directly under the French war capital, its existence an open secret to the Allies. A great section of Paris would have to be blown up to destroy the tenacious roots of such a nest. And destroying it would only drive the Imperial agents to another prepared position, one whose tentacles must have been laid long before the war began. As for invading the place by force, Elton saw that any segment could be walled off and flooded with gases, thus destroying even the most intrepid and persistent invaders.

For what seemed hours the fat man hurried on. Elton's watch told him they were traveling nearly half an hour, by an ever changing course that must have been shaped to the streets and structures far overhead, when they mounted a series of winding steps. Through an opening barely wide enough to admit their bodies, they emerged past a final concrete barrier into a small room. The opening closed behind them, the fat man disappeared. Elton identified the anteroom of a public subway station and guessed from their attitude that the two attendants of the place were Von Straef agents.

Von Straef walked boldly outside, bought two tickets and boarded the subway with Elton. A short ride and they left the underground route for the open air. An ordinary taxicab was conveniently waiting. Into this Von Straef hustled, muttering instructions to the driver. The vehicle sped off through Paris. Elton quickly identified their route of travel—in the direction leading to the flying field at Orlay.

Trailing close behind, he caught the outlines of three fares in a second cab. French gendarmes in uniform. He looked back for a careful view and turned to Von Straef with a scowl.

"It appears to me there is a taxicab with French gendarmes trailing us," he warned.

Von Straef, busy with his own thoughts, nodded absently.

"I had presumed as much," he said curtly.

"But if they should trail us to Orlay, they might see too much," Elton protested.

Von Straef snapped his fingers.

"The Allies are so many dumb geese," he said in a matter-of-fact

voice. "Nevertheless I do not violate the tactical principle of moving through enemy country with a rear-guard."

"Your pardon, I had not thought of that," Elton said, with a show of relief.

HE sat back in the car. Twice he had caught the searching eyes of the chauffeur on him through the driver's mirror in front. And the Herr Baron also carried an immediate bodyguard at the wheel, he guessed. Those gendarmes behind he had recognized. The same specious trio that had snapped him up in that second chamber under Oudert's. Four men to be reckoned with, besides Von Straef.

The taxicab raced out of Paris and settled down to a lively clip for Orlay. Carefully Elton estimated his immediate situation. McGee would be waiting on the roadway outside the flying field with Guiroye. But would not Von Straef grow immediately suspicious at slowing down for two wayfarers, one in an American lieutenant's uniform, the other French? And, five men to three, Von Straef was yet to be reckoned with. Only the factors of surprise and quick decisive action at the critical moment favored Elton.

Elton coolly prepared for action as he sighted the figure of McGee, lolling at the roadside. Guiroye stood a few paces away. Covertly Elton unfastened the flap of his holster and loosed the safety of his automatic. Fast coördinated action he must count upon in the inevitable crisis ahead. McGee was less than fifty meters ahead when Elton strained forward.

"There is our secret pilot now, waiting for us!" he exclaimed. "Stop here while we pick him up."

"*Verdammte esel!*" swore Von Straef, stung by the inconsistency of the pilot gawking by the roadside outside the flying field with an American soldier close by. "I will signal my rear-guard to bring him along!"

Elton roared to the driver to stop the car. At the same instant he thrust the muzzle of his automatic sharply into Von Straef's side. The chauffeur acted automatically, the car halted in a cloud of dust under a shrieking of brakes. But, as the car stopped, the driver, sensing trouble behind, turned quickly and reached for a weapon on the seat beside him.

There was cool, fast coördination in Elton's response to the crisis. He saw the flash of the driver's arm, glimpsed the fellow's pistol snapping into play. His own weapon swept from Von Straef to the henchman in front. He fired on the instant, a direct shot at the target that offered, a human head. The driver collapsed with a shrill curse.

Von Straef leaped into this breach, stripping his own weapon from his pocket. But not in time to avoid the grip of Elton's fingers at his wrist to deflect the course of a bullet that drilled a hole through the top of the taxicab.

McGee had come running up and stood gaping, hand at the holster of his service pistol. Elton saw the Von Straef gendarmes pouring out of their car, weapons drawn for action.

"Cover the rear there, McGee," he commanded. "Shoot if you have to—and shoot to kill!"

WHATEVER hesitation he might ordinarily have felt in firing upon French gendarmes on French soil, McGee was not a man to question orders. The order of Captain Elton, his superior officer, was direct and explicit. And the scene in that taxicab was eloquent of violence.

But before he was set for action, a first shot came from the three men in uniform. It hissed close to McGee's ear but did not upset the cool certainty of his calculating aim. At a range of thirty meters he took the first of the three, a clean hit in a vital spot. Not even in target practice on the old cavalry range at a bobbing cardboard target had McGee's expert marksmanship been much more sharply effective. Six shots, at something less than two seconds' interval, fired against a wild return fusillade. Three threshing human targets lay at the roadside.

McGee half lowered his empty pistol when another shot rang close. It came from the driver's seat of the rear taxicab. A second shot and a third sang out as the last Von Straef agent fired while McGee worked feverishly to feed a fresh clip into his empty automatic. Into this situation the figure of Guiroye sprang suddenly. French automatic in hand he ran towards his target, fully erect, firing as he went.

The Frenchman's form masked McGee's fire. But in the fast duel that followed one of Guiroye's last shots found its target, and in the next instant, following a sharp detonation, Guiroye fell.

From the taxicab Elton saw this furious struggle in only its vague outlines. A sharp twist of the arm had disarmed his own prisoner and a brief grip at the baron's windpipe had choked him into submission. Von Straef collectedly lighted a cigarette.

"Get those corpses into a taxicab and follow me to the flying field!" Elton ordered McGee. "See if there is anything our doctors can do for Guiroye—then come back out here and see that no evidence is left behind of what happened."

An American military car came roaring out of the flying field. An American officer and several armed soldiers piled out and rushed up.

"What's going on here!" the officer demanded fiercely, glaring at the two men in officer uniforms. "What's all the shooting about!"

"American Military Intelligence," Elton said crisply. "Merely cleaning up on a few enemy agents. Kindly put a driver at the wheel of this car and hurry us inside. The most important part of our little job remains unfinished!"

Von Straef affected nonchalant surrender as the two taxicabs with their gruesome cargo moved into Orlay.

"I congratulate you upon your little coup," he said quietly. "I am only grateful that it is I, rather than my distinguished chief, who finds himself in your trap, my captain."

"Save your breath, Von Straef," Elton rejoined. "Please remember that the Deuxième Bureau has the fingerprint record of the *Herr Lieutnant Baron*—even if I had the slightest doubt of your identity."

Von Straef merely shrugged and looked absently out the window. But Elton caught the Prussian's purpose, that of a sudden desperate bolt, not in any hope of escape, but to claim the last dubious distinction of death in action at the hands of the enemy. He gripped the prisoner's wrist.

"I haven't the slightest intention of letting you force me to shoot y o u, baron," he said coolly. "So please dismiss a n y thoughts of attempted escape."

"You are very considerate of my good health, my captain," Von Straef said with a caustic smile.

"Only because I feel it is a matter for the French to attend to in their own peculiar way, *Herr Baron.*"

Von Straef took a nervous puff of his cigarette and smiled.

"As you please," he said indifferently.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COURIER FROM SPA.

AT headquarters at Orlay, Elton made a hurried explanation to the American colonel commanding. He also enlisted that officer's vow of complete secrecy for the time being. The taxicabs, bearing the bodies of Von Straef's hapless agents, were concealed in a hangar. Guiroye was found dead—shot through the heart. The colonel pledged himself to ask no questions of any transient French pilot who dropped in out of the skies during the morning. Von Straef was put in a stout room under a strong armed guard. As an added precaution, Elton left McGee behind with instructions to hold the prisoner under close personal observation.

An American car sped him back to the city. He dismissed it at his Paris billet on Rue Montaigne. The hour was still considerably short of nine o'clock. Herr Muehler might report in at any hour at Orlay. But with Von Straef out of the way, Muehler was merely a matter for discreet handling after he reached the lair under Oudert's, Elton argued.

He telephoned at once an urgent request to his friend Lepage of the French Deuxième Bureau to bring Von Straef's fingerprint record. Then he developed a fingerprint record he had taken of his prisoner on the minium-coated surface of his cigarette case. This done he had a hasty luncheon and laid out, from his wardrobe, the tailored uniform of a lieutenant of French chasseurs, together with a black wig and rather ostentatious set of French military whiskers.

Lepage arrived within the half hour, bringing the Von Straef fingerprint, which had been secured two years before by a French agent at Imperial headquarters, then at Charleville.

"My captain, is it you dare hope to trap this rogue of a Von Straef?" Lepage demanded, in a voice that disclosed he had no faith in any such adventure.

Elton studied the whorls and markings of the two prints under a strong glass for some minutes. Then he turned to Lepage with a smile.

"This merely confirms my belief that I already have Von Straef securely a prisoner, *monsieur,*" he replied quietly.

"*Le bon Dieu!*" gasped Lepage. "But is such a miracle possible! You mean, my captain, you have in a trap that fox of a baron?"

"This evening, *monsieur,* I will have Von Straef surrendered to your Bureau. But in the meantime I must enjoin you to say nothing, not even to the chief of your service. The most important part of my mission is yet to be completed—and I merely wanted to make doubly certain that it is Von Straef I trapped before returning again to his rather unpleasant little billet under Rue Montross."

"Ah, the great service, my captain!" Lepage exulted. Then his face clouded in a sudden apprehension. "But I implore that you take no risks, my captain. The baron is the most slippery of all. *Oui,* not less than a dozen times has he disappeared—poof! Just when we have him in a secure trap!"

"Lieutenant McGee will see to it that he doesn't slip from under this time, *monsieur,*" Elton reassured.

"Now if I may excuse myself, you may expect to find Von Straef at your Bureau before midnight."

Elton, as his visitor departed, completed his disguise and surveyed himself with amusement. Such disguises, although common in his profession, were not to his liking.

Artificial contrivances were too treacherous, too readily detected by trained eyes. But this one suited his present purpose very well.

HE drove across Paris in a commercial cab to Rue Montross somberly reflective, carefully rehearsing each detail of his next move. Even though the risks of a second invasion of Rue Montross appeared less critical, the slightest mischance could only spell disaster. And he knew that already he had accomplished his mission—the trapping of Von Straef. This further coup was of his own device, and yet he saw that it vastly outweighed in importance the capture of a hundred secret agents.

He proceeded from an adjoining street into Rue Montross afoot and directly entered Oudert's. The first words of the German formula brought the pallid Dubois, who announced his identity in the precise words of the morning. Elton's memory searched out each word carefully as he proceeded.

"Friends tell me you have a very rare old chablis in your stock of wines, *monsieur,*" he proceeded. "I wish to purchase a quantity if the wine is of a particular vintage."

"What vintage is it you look for, *monsieur?*"

"Of the year nineteen hundred nine. No other. And it must come from the vineyards south and west of Lyons, *monsieur.*"

Again there shone a stir of interest in Dubois' moribund eyes.

"*Bien, monsieur,* I have what you wish. Shall I fetch you a glass from my cellars?"

"I will go with you and see how well it is stored."

From behind the pile of casks in Dubois' cellar Elton was passed through the wall. The electric lights came on. Presently the fat man waddled in and admitted the visitor in chasseur uniform. At the first chamber, the fat man sprung his little trap. Elton swallowed hard as three gendarmes came rushing into the dismal little vault. In the dull light their sudden appearance struck him as apparitions from the dead. The gloating laugh of the fat man echoed through the chamber.

"A German spy in our trap, *messieurs,*" the fellow echoed. "He has confessed—"

"I have no further time to waste on this nonsense!" Elton cut in sharply. He stripped off beard and wig and glared at the fat man. "Take me on, at once. I have important duties to perform without delay!"

The ferret-like eyes of the fat man blinked suspicious consternation as he stood, stricken by a complication that his wits could not immediately fathom. But his recognition of the agent who had been accepted by Von Straef a few hours ago, together with Elton's sharp assertion of authority, turned the scales of the fellow's decision.

"The *Herr Lieutnant Baron* has returned me here to receive an important agent from Germany," Elton announced bruskly, as they threaded their way towards Von Straef's chamber. "Has such an agent yet reported?"

"No, *monsieur,* nothing has happened, except the usual reports," the fat man replied, a deference in his

voice that pointed the turn of his mind.

"When this one arrives, see to it that he is not delayed!" Elton commanded. "He must return at once to Germany with an important message."

ELTON installed himself in Von Straef's apartment. The door sealed him in as the fat man departed. Elton shifted uncomfortably in the sudden recollection that he was unfamiliar with the signals of communication, therefore veritably a prisoner until Muehler arrived or the fat man reported back. And the slightest suspicion on Muehler's part, or the fat man's, would send an inquiry into Germany that could only seal his fate.

But he wasted no time in such qualms. Taking up the Von Straef pad he wrote out hastily a message, whose wording he had forged out roughly in his mind. Working it over he cut the message to a vital sixty words.

> Americans will mass in front of the Forest of Argonne for heavy feint threatening Sedan, but their force will be only three divisions with artillery, while their main force is shunted northward to support main French and British attacks. American threat can be minimized as their Argonne attack will not be pressed for a decision. This definitely verified and urgent.—M-16.

With painstaking care Elton reduced that message to the Von Straef cipher, using three strips of paper, which he then covered with wax and concealed in the Belgian *croix-de-guerre*.

An hour passed without interruption. His handiwork completed, Elton sat back to wait. As the minutes passed on, not even his iron discipline kept back the qualms of a growing uneasiness. He lighted a cigarette and puffed circumspectly, knowing that he must give no evidence of his growing tension. Through one of the vents in ceiling and walls the suspicious eyes of the fat man might be watching, appraising his every breath.

An agent upon whom Von Straef placed such dependence must be gifted with shrewdness as well as sharp suspicions.

Another half hour mounted. Then came a rift in the wall as the fat man pattered in, behind him an angular, severe-looking man of medium stature in the uniform of a French grenadier.

"Someone who brings a message," the fat man said stiffly, "but says it is a message by word of mouth which he will give only to his Excellency."

Elton read the dire suspicion in the fat man's glinting little eyes. And he read, too, that the fat man's suspicions centered upon the visitor in French grenadier uniform. Elton motioned the fat man out of the chamber, with a smile of reassurance, instructing him to leave the secret door open and remain within easy call.

"You are Muehler, reporting in from Spa," he addressed the alert figure in front of him, when they were alone.

"I am the Herr Major Otto Erich Muehler," the other said, clipping his words with a display of the dignity of his senior military rank. "My orders are to relieve Von Straef, who is to report immediately to Imperial headquarters."

Elton got up, brought his heels smartly together and saluted.

"It is impossible for the Herr Lieutnant Baron von Straef to report to Spa or anywhere else outside of France within the next three days," he announced firmly.

"My orders are very explicit!" Muehler shot back. "Von Straef will do as he is told."

"Circumstances may alter even the strictest orders, *Herr Major.* I assure you the *Herr Lieutnant* will not be available for reasons of great importance that I cannot disclose. But representing him, I deliver to you this *croix-de-guerre,* in which there is conveyed, in toto, information of such critical importance it must be delivered at Imperial headquarters immediately!"

"As I said, my orders are very explicit!"

"I AM authorized to say to you, if necessary, that you are to return at once to Belgium with the critical information delivered to you or pay the consequences of refusing to meet a serious military situation. As the *Herr Lieutenant* has reported already, the American Argonne attack occurs within the near future. He cannot possibly leave France before that time."

The *Herr Major* chewed savagely at his mustache while he weighed the veiled threat in this junior officer's ultimatum delivered under Von Straef's authority. Such impertinence from juniors in rank must have been unheard of within his experience.

"I must know the reasons for this —this insubordination!" Muehler blurted fiercely, his face now an apoplectic red. "My orders—"

"I have no authority to say anything more, *Herr Major,*" Elton retorted quietly. "If you do not wish to act for the best interests of the service, in this emergency, I am to summon three witnesses to your refusal. Therefore it is for you, *Herr Major,* to make your decision on what I've said to you."

Major Muehler spent the impotence of his outraged dignity in a brief stalking of Von Straef's chamber. Finally he yielded, but with a counter-threat.

"Under these unheard-of circumstances I will return at once to Belgium," he snapped. "But only to receive my further instructions upon the astounding refusal of Lieutnant von Straef to obey Imperial orders," he added with a final explosion. "Be good enough to arrange for me to leave Paris immediately!"

"Of course, *Herr Major,* I will escort you personally to the flying field at Orlay."

On the drive to Orlay, Herr Major Muehler sat stiffly nursing his outraged dignity. He was in such high dudgeon that he seemed oblivious to the possible danger of his presence on Allied soil, to the risk that his masqueraded French plane and spy pilot had been unmasked by Allied agents in his absence under Oudert's.

Elton, placatingly polite, made no attempt to force the conversation. His mind was centered upon the job of seeing Muehler safely in the air out of Orlay with that message for Spa imbedded in Von Straef's *croix-de-guerre.* The Muehler plane was waiting. The pilot began tuning it up at Muehler's appearance.

"May I wish the *Herr Major* a pleasant and safe journey," Elton said, saluting as the German masquerader climbed into the observer's seat behind the pilot.

Muehler merely grunted. The plane's motors picked up into a roar. A few minutes later the pilot turned its nose down the field and raced off into the air. Elton stood, a serene smile on his face, watching the ship into the distance.

Lieutenant McGee had taken no chances with Von Straef. From someone at Orlay he had borrowed a pair

of steel wristlets with which he had secured the Von Straef right wrist to his own left. The holster-flap over his heavy army automatic at his right side was suggestively unbuttoned.

"I'm going to leave it to you to deliver our *Herr Lieutnant Baron* to the Deuxième Bureau, McGee," Elton said. "They'll know just how to take care of him. Also arrange to have Guiroye's body turned over to the Deuxième Bureau. When you've done that drop over to my billet. I've got a little unfinished business yet to take care of."

"Yes'r," McGee assented. "But about Guiroye, there's something I thought the cap'n might want to know. That Boche agent didn't kill him, sir. The shot that went through his heart was fired so close it left powder burns on his coat. The cap'n may remember he was itching to die."

Elton nodded somberly.

"I understand," he said presently. "Well, perhaps it's just as well for all concerned. Report to the French that he was shot from close range in a hand-to-hand encounter with enemy agents. That'll not bother my conscience too much after the help Guiroye has given us."

WHEN, in the late afternoon of some days later, Elton reported to American Paris headquarters for a conference with Colonel Rand, he found the espionage chieftain surrounded by a group of staff officers in a state of joyous excitement. Rand was reading aloud an official communique from the American battle front covering the first furious advances in the Argonne. The colonel turned eagerly at seeing Elton.

"Great news, captain!" he exclaimed. "The American attack is making wonderful progress! Just listen to this little document: 'American divisions have advanced far ahead of all objectives in first phases of attacks. Germans, weakened by shifting of heavy forces to the northern sectors, unable to withstand force of our onslaughts. Initial successes presage eventual fall of Sedan and defeat of German armies in France.'"

"That is glorious news, sir," Elton commented, and added with a mischievous glint in his eyes, "Evidently the Imperial staff didn't take the American threat as seriously as they should."

"And here's a neat one from the French communique," Rand rejoined, seizing a sheet of flimsy and reading avidly: "'French believe Germans withdrew heavy forces to shorten lines and avoid a decisive battle in the face of American odds and determination.'"

"Not such an unreasonable theory," Elton mused, with a wry smile. "But what does it matter so long as our army is smashing ahead?"

The colonel laid an appreciative hand on Elton's shoulder. "Even if the credit you deserve for tricking the Imperial staff with your baited cipher will always remain in musty secret service records, I'd give my eagles, Elton, to be able to think I'd done such a service for my country."

"Thank you," Elton responded, flushing under the colonel's unprecedented extravagance. His face cleared in a moment and he added, "But I just came in to report exploring Von Straef's hole under Rue Montross. Located twelve exits and am convinced there are no more. We've just cemented up the last hole and passed a note in for Von Straef's henchmen that they can surrender whenever they get ready."

THE END

Ra was right up with the leaders

Ra, the Inhossible

By C. C. RICE

It wasn't inhuman—it was "inhossible," the way Ra acted when there was a dame around

I STROLLED back to my stalls after the fourth race to have a look at my old plater, Secrets Told, who was hot for a win in the seventh.

Manny Williams was outside his own stalls, and I stopped to have a good laugh at him. He was the most disgusted looking party I ever saw; and I couldn't blame him much. His boy was brushing down Ra, who had just finished a bad ninth in a nine horse field.

"What was the matter with old Equipoise today?" I kidded Manny.

He shot me a very sour look.

"That rotten, sway-backed, three-legged, spavined hay-burner! Listen, John, I've given the brute the best years of my life, and what do I get? Just a big Bronx whinny! Of all the obstinate hoss-flesh I ever see, that goat is the worst!"

Manny was working up plenty of venom.

"Honest, I ain't going to have any-

thing more to do with him! I'm through—finished! If he don't quit he bolts, if he don't bolt he stops. It wouldn't surprise me any day to see him go into a waltz at the half post! "

"What he needs is a good kick in the pants," I prescribed.

Manny grunted. "I've tried that too. It don't help a bit."

"Manny," I said curiously, "give me the real lowdown, will you? Why in the name of all that's sensible have you held on to him this long? "

"Take a look yourself." He nodded at Ra. "One glance and you'd swear he was a second Man o' War."

"Smooth looking dog," I admitted. And he was, too. A sleek, red colt with all sorts of grace and power. Everything you could ask for in a sprinter.

"Moreover," Manny told me, "every once in a while he gets flashes of speed that'd throw you into a faint, no kidding. But never at the right times."

"Sulky, eh? "

"Not exactly. Just don't seem to give a damn."

"I hate a horse that won't try."

"Me too. I would have gotten rid of him long ago, even with all his promise, except the wife is so crazy about him. She makes a regular pet of him; feeds him enough sugar to kill him. And he positively worships her. So whenever I suggest letting him go, she gets all in a huff and tells me he's the best horse in the string and that she'll prove it. So out she comes for his morning workout and feeds him lots of sugar and baby-talk. And believe it or not, just out of sheer cussedness that alligator will go out on the track and clock six furlongs in one-eleven flat! "

I looked at Ra with new interest. I could tell Manny wasn't exaggerating. And if Ra really could do that, there must be something to him.

It occurred to me that it might be fun to take him in hand and find out what made the wheels go 'round.

"Hmm," I murmured appraisingly, "one of Sun God's get, isn't he?"

"Yeah, one of his worst mistakes. Out of Sweet Strain."

"Gosh, sounds like the social register! Listen, Manny, what would you say if I told you I'd take him off your hands? "

"I'd say you were a bigger fool than I am, and for heaven's sake, grab the halter and lead him away. If my wife divorces me—well, I always did like single life."

"How much do you want? "

"Buy me a glass of beer."

"No," I said, "I'm superstitious. Take fifty bucks."

"Oke," he agreed, "if you feel that way."

I ACTUALLY led Ra away right then. Dave Hubert, my trainer, was outside my stable, swearing at my dear old Secrets Told. He looked up and stared at me crossly.

"*Now* what have you got? " he wanted to know.

"Dave," I said, "you are in the presence of blue blood." I patted Ra's nose, but Ra only looked at me as though I were a piece of uninviting cheese.

Dave spat, unimpressed. "I could swear he was the twin brother of that Williams plug."

"Not only the twin, Dave, but the Williams plug himself, not a magic lantern slide."

Dave stared as though he were seeing all the insane people in the world at once. Suddenly he got downright furious.

"Listen!" he yelled. "I'm gonna get me some seals to train! They may be slimy but they're better class! "

"Now, now, Dave," I soothed him (talk about opera stars—they're sweet little kittens beside Dave), "be careful of your tongue. This animal is sensitive. He's real Beacon Hill—Sun God out of Sweet Strain."

"Spark Plug out of my hat!" he growled. "Listen, young fella, the only thing that keeps me from quitting is the thought that you might grow a few brains as you get older. Then perhaps you'll

stop bringing me home stray tubs of glue." He shook his head sadly. " I don't know why I put up with it! "

" But this horse really has something on the ball," I protested.

" Baloney! But stick him in there if you've got to. I'll take an afternoon off some day and see if I can break him to a saddle."

Dave's bark was a good real worse than his bite. I knew all along that he was itching to take Ra and see what he could get out of him. Dave might not have been a really great trainer, but he knew his business right through the alphabet, and he could tell as well and better than I that Ra had all the trappings of an important horse.

A COUPLE of weeks after I bought Ra we moved up to one of the New York tracks for the spring meet. Ra came along, although he looked as though he thought the whole business very silly. Besides him there were Secrets Told, Ipecac, and my little two-year-old, Miss Chastity.

I found time to get out of the city nearly every day and watch my family's progress. During the first week of the meet we were fabulously lucky. Old Secrets Told won two in a row, Ipecac won a stake race, and Miss Chastity ran away with an important two-year-old affair.

I was too engrossed in happy thoughts to bother much about Ra. Poor Dave, however, was sweating gum-drops over him. Ra, the low ingrate, was behaving about as badly as it's possible for a horse to behave. In his workouts he would act as though the whole idea of running around a track was beneath his dignity, and he'd run—if you could get him to run at all—six furlongs in one-twenty or more. And anybody knows that a milking cow can do better than that.

Dave cursed and tore his hair and threatened all kinds of terrible things.

" John, for my nerves' sake," he would plead, " please, please let's take a good, big stick and whale the tar out of him! "

But I said no. Although I wasn't a member of the S.P.C.A., it was my theory that a good swiping never improved any kind of animal, no matter how richly he deserved it.

I suggested a stable-mate. We got him a nice little goat, the pleasantest animal you ever knew. But Ra spurned him. So then I took my own beloved Jerry Cruncher, a disreputably shaggy Airedale, and put him in the stall. Within twenty-four hours it was easy to see that Ra could work up no fever heat of affection, and that the attitude was reciprocated by Jerry.

If something extraordinary hadn't happened towards the end of the week, I think Dave would have opened his arteries. Something did though, thank heaven. Quite unaccountably Ra began to show spurts of speed. Perhaps he was just tired of being ornery and was just ornery enough to change about. Anyway, a couple of workouts were encouraging. He breezed six furlongs in one-fourteen, which is no great potatoes, really, but which was nothing short of miraculous for Ra.

Dave was overjoyed and stayed drunk for two days. I'd never known him to drink much, but I suppose Ra was enough to put any man in the gutter.

Well, we decided to enter him in a cheap claiming race. To guard against any possible mishap, we engaged Pete Strudheim to ride. Pete was one of the outstanding jockeys then, and if ever a man knew how to handle a bad actor, Pete did. He could stick a leg over a bucking bronco and win the Futurity.

Everything was set to a T. Ra clocked one-fourteen and a fifth the morning of the race and was in a condescending mood. The track was fast, the distance six furlongs, the odds on Ra eighty-to-one. I placed a hundred on him, and Dave, who seldom bets, risked twenty.

We were clinging on the rail as they started. Ra acted up a bit in the starting machine, but I didn't think much of that—he probably didn't care for the way the handler parted his hair.

They were off—a perfect start. Dave and I watched without drawing a breath—

Ra was right up with the leaders. Our excitement increased as he passed the quarter-post in good fashion, and when he was still legging at the half, we pounded each other on the back jubilantly.

When we'd finished yelling congratulations back and forth, we looked again—and what had happened! Ra had quit, just as nonchalantly as you please! He'd merely decided that the whole affair was childish.

Dave spat out a very blue curse and walked off. I stayed, for no reason at all, and watched Ra practically walk through the rest of the race and finish last.

I tore up my tickets with a vengeance and went away from there.

And this is where the story turns, because Boots makes her entrance.

BOOTS, I suspected (and still suspect), had a perfectly good christened name. But chorus girls, for some reason known to themselves alone, change their names frequently, sometimes with every show.

I met her at an after-the-theater party the same day Ra lost. She was introduced to me as Boots La Fleur, and since I didn't want to call her a liar before all those people, I let it go at that.

Boots was a nice kid, I decided right away. And anyone I could think was nice that evening must have been very nice indeed.

Boots was as pretty as any picture ever painted, although not nearly so silent. She was dark and small and had that indefinable coziness about her and—oh, well, you've heard all that time and again. All I can say is that she was a sweet little number.

But, no kidding, I could have broken her neck that evening. Boots, it was obvious, liked me too, and she didn't trouble to cover it up. Now I'm no Gary Cooper or Clark Gable; there's no glamour about me at all. So I'm not just bragging when I say Boots liked me. It was one of those mutual attraction affairs, I guess, and tough luck for her.

But she spoiled everything by not making me chase her. A girl has to give the male sporting blood a chance to assert itself, or else the man is going to suspect there's something fishy about the reward. That's only natural.

And that's why I steered clear of her all evening. But later on she cornered me. She'd heard I owned horses and she was simply insane about horses.

"Tell me about them, Johnny," she urged.

"Well," I said, "they have four legs."

"My! Tell me more about horses."

"They run around a track. At least they all do but one."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing," I grunted; "he's just too proud to associate himself with race-tracks."

"I'll bet he's sweet," she decided. "You probably don't understand him."

"Him and the Einstein theory," I said.

The conversation worked out that she was going to get up terribly early in the morning and come out to the track to see my darling horses. I didn't give her any encouragement, but she stuck to it.

And sure enough, next morning about seven-thirty, as I was leaning on the rail clocking Miss Chastity, I felt a tug at my sleeve.

"I'm here!" chirped Boots.

I forget what I said, but you can imagine it was something pretty dull, for no man feels at all romantic at that time in the morning.

"Where," she asked, "is the horse you were telling me about? I feel so sorry for him. I'm sure he's an awfully nice horse if you'd only give him a chance."

"He's right there," I told her, pointing, "the low-life!"

SHE ran over to Ra and threw her arms about his neck. She talked all kinds of seductive baby-talk to him and patted his nose and neck as though he were something terribly precious. And, believe me, for the first time since I'd owned Ra, I saw a happy look in his eyes. He nuzzled

Boots and pawed the ground ecstatically. He looked for all the world like a great big dog about to roll over and have his stomach scratched.

I'd hardly had time to marvel at this before another surprise closed in on me. Pete Strudheim walked up.

"Hello, Mr. Stimson," he said. "I asked Dave if I could work out with Ra this morning. That hoss is interesting. He's got more than he wants to show."

"Good Lord!" I gasped. "I thought you'd probably want to shoot him after yesterday."

Pete laughed. "I did feel like it then. But on second thought I knew there was something there."

"O.K., boy," I said, "do your worst."

Pete went over to Ra. Boots was still petting him and feeding him sugar. Ra was taking to affection like a frog to lily-pads. When Pete finally swung up, I could see that Ra, for once, was enthusiastic.

Dave watched the proceedings with apparent disdain. I could tell he was interested, though.

Well, things happened that morning. Ra was all in a lather to be off. Finally Pete gave him the works, and I'm telling you, never in my life have I seen a horse plunge like he did. From the first step his hoofs scarcely touched the ground at all, I swear. And when they did, they seemed to bounce him ahead just like when you skip a flat stone along the water. He all but flew! I was actually frightened lest he kill himself.

I was so fascinated that I barely remembered to stop the watch at the finish. I looked at the figure and felt my heart leap into my throat. Three-fifths of a second better than the track record!

For an instant I was sure that I'd clocked wrong. But just then some railbird came running up to me, his eyes bulging.

"Am I seein' things?" he cried hoarsely. "Did that horse just clip the track record or not?"

I had a sudden flash of intelligence. "No," I said, trying to keep my voice calm, "no, you must have got your clock wrong. It was just one-fourteen."

"Gee, it seemed faster!" And he went off greatly disappointed.

Dave passed me a look of approval. "You just saved a few thousand bucks," he said tensely.

And then Strudheim and Ra came in. Strudheim's face was red with excitement, and his voice was quivery, as though he'd just witnessed a genuine miracle.

"Boys," he whispered, "you just seen the fastest hoss in the world, and I ain't foolin'!"

We nodded solemnly.

"Listen," he continued, in a sepulchral tone, "if you seen a guy run the hundred yard dash in eight seconds flat, you'd say what? You'd say he was inhuman!"

We nodded again.

"Well, I'm saying this brute is inhossible—plain inhossible!"

We looked over at Ra reverently. Boots was once more hugging him and saying all sorts of lovely things to him. He was revelling in it, snorting breathless appreciation from his heaving lungs.

Ra, the Inhossible!

PETE and Dave and I put our heads together gravely. It was agreed that we'd keep the breath-taking truth of Ra's performance strictly among ourselves. If an inkling got abroad it would pull his odds down to normal.

There was a pretty fair allowance race next day we could enter him in. Pete would ride him, and we swore on our scout's honor that we wouldn't give even our own mothers a tip-off as to betting. We'd keep Ra under cover as best we could until the race.

Then Ra was torn from Boots' embrace and led away to the stable for feed.

Boots came to me and slipped her arm through mine. I tried not to notice how pretty she was, even that early in the morning.

"Johnny," she purred, "I think Ra is simply the cutest thing! I'm just dying

to see him race. Is he going to race today? "

"Nope. Tomorrow."

Boots' face fell. "Johnny, you're an awful old meanie! I've got a matinee tomorrow and you know it! I think you might have managed some time when I could see him."

"Sorry. Why don't you speak to the racing commission?" I tried to be dry about it, but Boots had started cuddling, and it disconcerted me a little, I'll admit. After all, Boots was a very smooth little job, no matter how you looked at it.

"Do you think he'll win tomorrow?" she asked.

Of all the questions! But of course Boots didn't realize what had happened that morning. She didn't know that she'd just witnessed the birth of a second Equipoise.

"I don't know," I answered gruffly. "Let's get some breakfast."

"Johnny," she pouted, looking as though she were going to open the floodgates any second, "why are you always so mad at me? I try to be nice, Johnny. Do I really give you such a pain? "

"Let's get some breakfast," I repeated, hoarsely.

Ra raced next day. The setting was perfect, fast track and all. The odds were 100-1, and we were figuring to cash in on some sweet bets. Dave and I were jittery with excitement. Pete Strudheim smiled confidently as he rode Ra into the track.

Off they were!

And that low, ornery, good-for-nothing so-and-so just loafed around the track at five miles an hour! My temper is a fairly even one, but I confess that if I'd had a gun I would have shot the low beast at the quarter-post!

He ran last, of course, and seemed to take a mean sort of pride in the achievement.

BOOTS had wangled a dinner date for that evening. I met her and, with a good many choice expletives, described Ra's performance.

"Perhaps he wasn't feeling well," she suggested, disappointedly.

"And perhaps he didn't hold his eyebrows right! " I retorted. "That three-legged plug is an alligator and will never be anything but an alligator! "

"I think he's sweet."

"O.K., you think he's sweet! Well, give me a dollar and he's yours! "

"Johnny, do you really mean it? " Those beautiful orbs were wide with joy.

"Sure I mean it! " I told her. "And I'm playing a dirty trick on you, too."

And that's how Ra, the Inhossible, changed hands for the second time within a month. I promised Boots she could keep him in my stable, and that Dave would handle him—poor Dave! I also promised that I'd send her a feed bill every week.

I felt better next morning as I leaned on the rail and watched Ipecac breeze five furlongs in sweet form. Ra was no longer my horse. I didn't feel called upon to worry about his stubbornness now.

"J-o-o-hnny! " called a very feminine voice.

And there she was again—fresh as the morning dew, and probably knew it. I was determined to remain unsusceptible.

"I've come down to see my horse work out," she said, all happiness.

"Horse! " I muttered. "You've got a swell imagination. That animal isn't even a good mule. His ears aren't long enough."

"Just as sweet-natured as ever, aren't you, darling? " She wanted to cuddle again. Women are crazy.

"I think Dave put ground glass in his oats last night," I said.

"No he didn't, smarty. Because here he comes."

She left me for Ra, who had appeared around the corner of the stables. Ra actually whinnied when he saw her. It was like the meeting of two old friends after a separation of twenty years. Boots was all over the brute, patting him and telling him what a fine horse he was. Ra was in seventh heaven.

Dave loped up and gave me a sour look.

"Look at the hound!" he snarled. "You'd think he'd just won the Preakness! Be just like the obstinate devil to go out there and clock record time again!"

No sooner said than done!

Ra pranced out on the track all a-quiver, and if my watch was still sensible, proceeded to click off the six furlongs in one-fifth better than the record.

Now what were you going to do in a case like that? I just stood dumfounded. Dave looked entirely defeated.

I HADN'T noticed that Strudheim was up on Ra again. He drove him off the track into Boots' waiting arms and dismounted hastily.

"You still interested!" I gasped.

"Sure thing," said Pete; "I'm not giving up till I find out the story. And I think I got it now. Listen."

We did, eagerly, and I noticed that Boots drew near enough to hear too.

"You've heard of certain dogs and cats being crazy about women and having no use for men?"

We had. It was fairly common.

"Well," said Pete, seriously, "whether you want to believe it or not, I think this hoss is the same way. Girl crazy. Wants to show off."

It was a pretty ridiculous notion, but we considered the possibility respectfully.

"Remember," he went on, "when Manny Williams had him? The only time he'd run was when Manny's wife would baby him."

"Pete," I said, after a moment's thought, "I'll bet you're right!"

"Of course I am!" he insisted. "Just a plain case of girl-crazy."

Boots was looking thoughtful.

"Mr. Strudheim," she said, "may I speak with you for a second?"

Dave and I watched curiously as she drew him aside and whispered seriously.

Presently Pete turned back to us, a definite glint in his eye.

"Listen, boys, I'd like to ride Ra in Friday's stake race. Would you couple him with Ipecac as an entry?"

We stared at him incredulously.

"When," I asked, "are you going to start strutting around like Napoleon?"

He laughed. "No kidding, I ain't goofy. I got an idea. Anyways, the gal wants you to. Ain't that enough?"

Boots trained a pleading gaze on me. I gave in, mostly because I knew she'd have her way in the end anyhow.

Strange things can and do happen in racing. I don't have to tell you that. They happen every day, and everybody knows it. Nobody knows it better than the folks who follow the racket seriously.

I myself, although I'm far from a graybeard, have seen some almost incredible things happen on and around the track. But, I'm telling you, the Friday morning of Ra's race I saw the craziest thing in the world happen—bar nothing.

As usual, I dragged out of bed towards the crack of dawn and drove up to the track. I parked my car as usual, walked to the stables as usual, whistling a mournful tune as usual. Then, suddenly, everything became unusual.

As I approached I could hear shrieking and shouting and horses' hooves stamping excitedly.

Dave was standing outside and looking very queer—as though the absurdities of this world had suddenly grown too tremendous for him to comprehend.

"What in time is all the racket about?" I asked him.

He merely sighed and jerked his thumb towards the door.

"Look inside," he said weakly.

I did. To describe the scene in cold, dispassionate words, I should say that the place was filled with riotous young women. But that hardly covers it. Fully twenty gorgeous females were running about in wild confusion. They sang, they danced, they pushed and shoved, and their whole attention was focused on Ra's stall.

Mouth agape, I watched half a dozen of them tussle for a curry-comb. Finally one got it and applied it to Ra.

Ra—and I looked again to make sure I wasn't a victim of D. T.'s—was

completely turned about in his stall and was wearing a garland of dewy gardenias about his head. His eyes seemed ready to pop out of their sockets at the furious attention given him. He was in a dither trying to watch each individual maiden as she romped noisily to and fro.

Have you ever seen a horse look positively entranced? You never have, of course. Because no horse ever has, except Ra. Well, I imagine no horse ever had ten beautiful women all trying to curry him at once, and a dozen more trying to grab hold of his neck to pet him.

" Hello, Johnny darling."

I woke from my trance to find Boots looking up at me impertinently.

"Would you kindly," I asked, " tell me what this carnival is all about? "

" Of course. Ra likes women, didn't you know that? " She smiled saucily. " So I thought I'd bring the 'Frivolities' girls in person. They're training him, Johnny. And I made them all put five dollars on him, so I'm sure they'll do their best."

" You're a nut! " I said.

" Maybe," she allowed. " Johnny, I like your suit. It's so fuzzy and tweedy."

"Be serious, Boots. You're going to scare that horse to death. And Ipecac, too."

" Don't be silly. Ra will win."

" In a pig's neck! " I snorted.

" What'll you bet? "

" Boots," I said, " I'll bet you anything in this wide world you want." And I meant it.

" Anything I want? " She thought for a moment. " All right," she agreed, " it's a bet."

The morning went past and everyone connected with the track was cross-eyed with amazement watching the mob of toothsome wenches as they ran wild about the stables, forever making a ridiculous fuss over Ra.

Ra didn't have any workout at all that morning. Boots forbade it. Dave didn't raise a word of objection. He knew when he was beaten.

I moped around until post-time, pretty much disgusted with life. The only reason I hung around to see the race was because I had nothing better to do. Under normal conditions I'd have been steamed up about Ipecac's chances to win. But I figured that after the morning's excitement even he would be hopeless.

Ra's race was the third. I was wandering about in front of the grandstand as the horses paraded down from the paddock. I wasn't at all surprised to see Ra accompanied by a bevy of beautiful maidens, all flushed with excitement and crying out extravagent encouragement to him.

But the crowd had never seen such a sight before. They went mad with delight. I could see dozens of people streaming down from the grandstand to place a last minute bet on Ra, the hunch horse.

Poor Pete Strudheim—he was having the devil's own time trying to hold Ra in check. Ra wanted to go, and go quick. His eyes bulged with impatience and he tossed his head from side to side wildly.

THEY finally entered the track proper, and Ra had to leave his lovely harem behind. He pranced along impetuously, as though the ground were hot under his hoofs. I could see that Pete had to use every ounce of strength to keep him from bolting out of the parade.

Off they trotted to the starting machine up at the beginning of the back-stretch. As they approached it Dave slipped up beside me and watched disdainfully.

" Three to one the dog will never start at all! " he exclaimed.

And when they got to the post it looked as though Dave's prediction might come true. It seemed half an hour before the handlers could get Ra jammed into a stall. And when they did, he sprang out with all his might. I saw through my glasses that the handlers were really getting downright exasperated. Finally three of them braced themselves and threw their whole weight against him. Pete pulled back in the bargain, and Ra was persuaded

through pure impact to retreat into his stall. Then two of the men grabbed the side of the stall with one hand and his bridle with the other. Ra was safe as long as their strength held out.

And then the signal!

I'm telling you, brother, that crocodile, Ra, shot out as though a gigantic slingshot had released him! Before you could blink your eyes he was five lengths in the lead, and Pete just let him have his own way.

The more I think of that race, the more I'm inclined to swear on a Bible that Ra's hoofs didn't touch that track more than ten times the whole way 'round.

In the first two furlongs Ra had raced away ten lengths from the others. He seemed to increase his speed with every bound. At the half-post he had fifteen lengths lead. As he leaped around into the stretch he had a full twenty lengths, and a child could see that the race was over.

But not for Ra. As he thundered down the stretch he seemed to exert himself all the more. I stared, awe-stricken, as he skimmed along all by himself. I could actually feel his muscles strain inside me. It couldn't be possible! He was killing himself!

I shut my watch off as he passed the post headlong, and looked. A flat two seconds off record time!

Dave grabbed my arm and almost broke it off.

"Did you see it?" he yelled. "Did you see it?"

Of course I'd seen it.

"Ra, the Inhossible!" he whispered.

"Amen!" I said.

We looked over at him. He was stumbling back to the judges, Pete Strudheim white-faced on his back.

Dave wagged his head.

"That hoss," he said, in a choked voice, "will never run again!"

And I knew it was true. Ra was heaving and snorting as though his sides would burst open. Sweat streamed off him in rivers, and his legs were so trembly that I expected to see them buckle under him at every step.

"Yes, Dave, Ra, the Inhossible, has run himself out." I sighed to think of it. "Such is the vanity of the male!"

"It's a shame! A few less chorus girls and he might have been all right."

"Well, he'll be O.K. for a pet," I suggested. "After all, that's what Boots really wanted him for. And with a line like his he'll make a good stud besides."

"Yeah," said Dave, thoughtfully, "a good stud. Listen, John, do you think you could manage to get me a good colt by him?"

I laughed. "Dave, you're an old softy!"

He slunk off shamefacedly.

BY now the crazy excitement was calming down a bit, and the photographers had quit clicking poses of Ra and Pete and Boots.

She came over to me, her eyes shining triumphantly, and slid her arm through mine.

"Well," she said, trying hard to be nonchalant, "he won, didn't he?"

"Yeah," I admitted, "he won all right. I never saw a horse win better."

"You lose your bet," she reminded.

"That's right. What do you want, baby?"

She didn't answer, but I could tell just what she wanted. The battle was lost. I felt weak in the stomach and knew that it was what I'd wanted to do ever since the night I met her, only I'd simply been determined not to.

So I leaned down and kissed her. It was the feeling you get only once in a lifetime—soft blossoms floating down on your head and all that stuff. I could have kicked myself for being ornery so long.

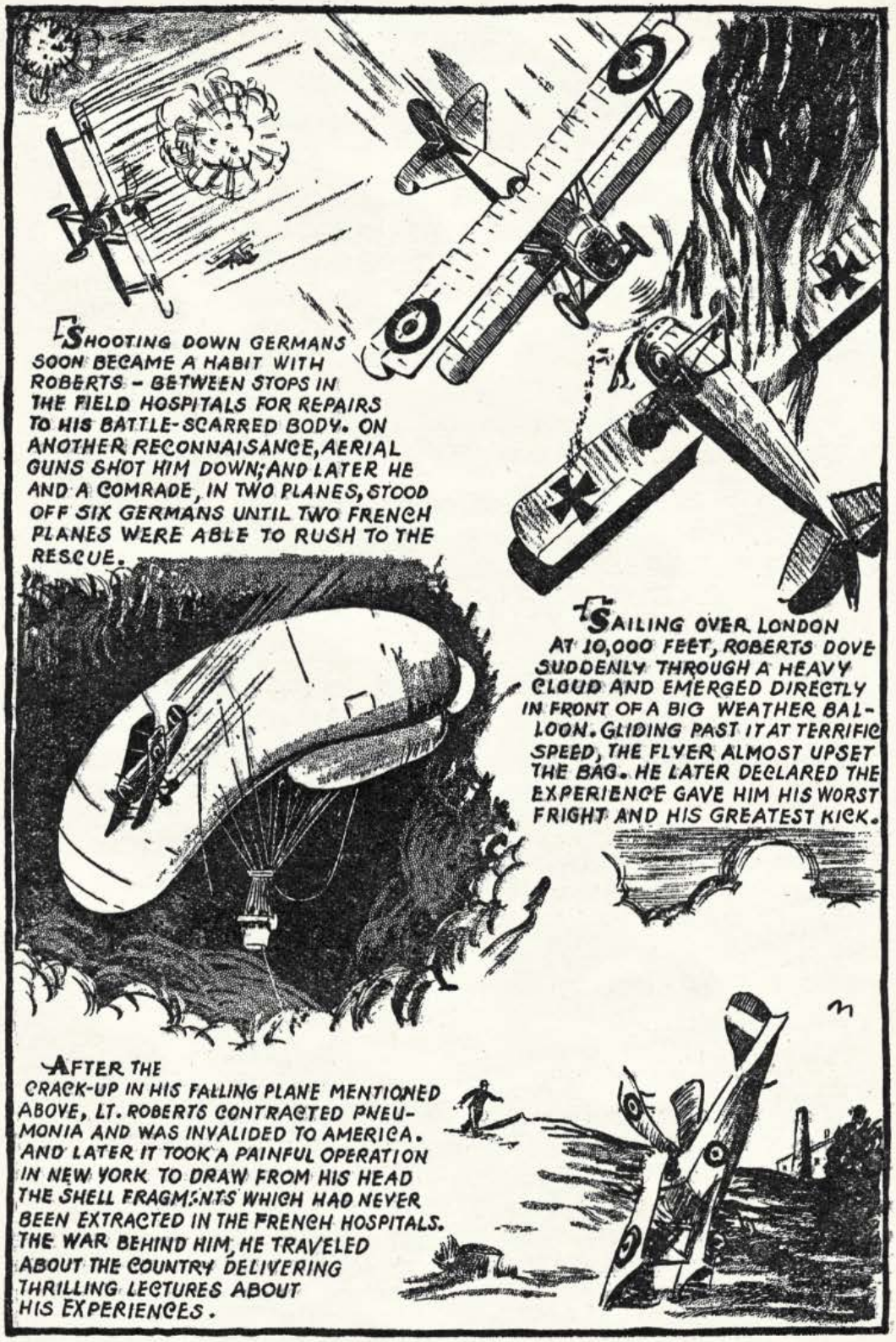
"Look at him," said Boots, pointing. "Isn't he the polygamous little devil!"

I looked and saw that Ra, dead as he was, was not too dead to be in his glory—once more the center of attraction for two dozen beautiful women.

He could have 'em, I thought.

THE END

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

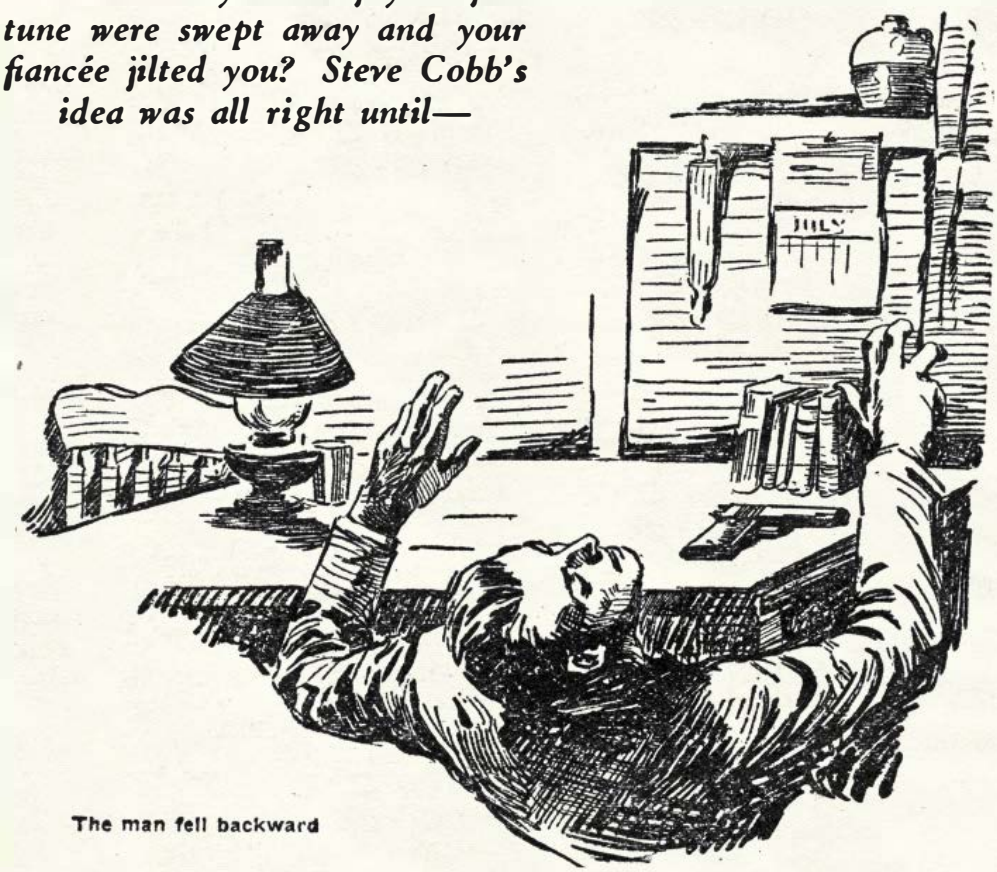


Next Week: Jan Christiaan Smuts, a Fighter

The Wild Man of Cape Cod

By FRED MacISAAC
Author of "Masquerade," "The Devil and the Deep," etc.

What would you do if your fortune were swept away and your fiancée jilted you? Steve Cobb's idea was all right until—



The man fell backward

CHAPTER I.

CAPE COD BEACHCOMBER

IT was one of those soft sweet summer days on Cape Cod when the South wind was blowing gently but steadily and causing good sized waves to roll upon the golden sands of Cobbport. Out in the bay a few fishing boats were bobbing lazily and away to the east a squadron of small yachts were making a race of it.

Stephen Cobb lay stretched out on the sand, a battered straw hat tipped over his face. He was naked save for scanty swimming trunks. A giant in bronze with honey colored hair. He measured six feet four did Steve Cobb and weighed two hundred and twenty and didn't have an ounce of fat on him. He lay flat neither asleep nor awake. The past was dead, the future didn't interest him much, and he hadn't done any thinking for ever so long. He became aware that somebody was prodding him in the side with the toe

of a shoe and he grunted and opened his gray eyes.

"Come on. Wake up," somebody said sharply.

He tossed away the old straw hat and sat up. There was a young woman standing over him and his first impression of her was pleasant. This was a shapely young woman with a lot of yellow hair and fine features and blue eyes. Her mouth, however, was not smiling and her eyes were hostile.

"Well?" inquired Steve blandly.

"This is a private beach," she said significantly.

"Ask me if I care and listen intently for my response," he said with a broad grin.

"You have no business here. You are trespassing!" she exclaimed.

Her attitude was not so hostile now because he had very white teeth and a decent nose and nice eyes, while his almost naked figure was positively beautiful.

"Who the heck are you?" he asked quizzically.

Steve's fist had crashed his left temple

"I own this beach — at least my father does. We propose to fence it in and keep loafers out."

"This beach belongs to the Cobb estate. Nobody has lived in the house for years. I kind of like this beach, lady."

"What are you? A clam digger?" she demanded.

"Part time. Part time fisherman."

She eyed him sharply. "You talk like an educated young man."

He nodded. "Compulsory education in Massachusetts. Too bad."

"Why that's what my father says. It's a mistake to educate the lower classes. It makes them discontented."

"Not me. I'm very contented."

"What's your name?"

"Cobb."

She half smiled. "Practically anonymous. Nearly all the natives are named Cobb."

"The original Cobb was some boy," remarked the beachcomber.

She frowned. "That will do. Kindly leave."

"Nope. I like it." He had been sitting up but now he lay down again and placed his hands behind his head and grinned at her insolently. "Take a tip, will you?"

"I'm beginning to get angry," she said menacingly.

"The tip is that a girl like you should wear fluffy summer dresses or a one-piece bathing suit. Those white pants you have on disfigure you."

The young lady stamped her foot. "This is too much!" she exclaimed. "Leave here at once or I'll get servants to drive you away."

"Here's an idea," he remarked. "Sit down beside me and I'll tell you the story of my life."

She turned and ran inshore.

"Snippy little snob," he observed aloud. "Oughtn't to wear pants. No girl ought to wear pants."

He closed his eyes and relaxed so completely that he dozed.

"There he is," a woman's voice cried shrilly. "Eject him, please."

Steve Cobb sat up. The girl was back. She was accompanied by a uniformed chauffeur, a gardener and a groom.

The groom, who was English, stated the case. "Come now, me lad," he began. "Be off with you. This is a private beach. There's plenty of shore for you natives to clutter up, what?"

"Go ahead and eject me," requested Cobb.

"If you will have it." The groom bent to grasp him by the shoulders. A pair of powerful arms lifted, drove his chin into his breast, doubled him, and sent him rolling like a ball along the strand.

THERE followed a brief but exciting mix-up. The brown arms of Steve Cobb worked like pistons. His strong legs bounced him back and forth and in and out, and he ducked, blocked, countered and delivered powerful blows which played havoc with the groom, the gardener and the chauffeur.

Before the horrified eyes of the young mistress, the servants went down, got up, and finally remained down. Not having been engaged as pugilists, their hearts had not been in their work.

When it was all over, Steve Cobb advanced upon the girl who stood her ground but trembled. He wasn't even breathing heavily.

"Have you any more servants?" he asked blandly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. She swung her right arm and slapped him smartly on the left cheek.

Steve laughed delightedly, pounced on her, picked her up kicking and writhing but no screaming, hugged her to his breast and kissed her leisurely.

Finally he set her on her feet. "I usually leave about this time," he said. "The sun is going down. Good afternoon."

"I'll have you horse-whipped," she flung after him.

"If you're on the beach tomorrow, I'll give you another kiss," he promised.

He walked slowly down the beach, grinning to see the beaten servants slinking back toward the big house.

The girl stood like a statue where he had left her.

By and by he passed through the straggling village street and presently came to his domicile. It was an unpainted structure. There was only one window and one door, but the door had a step. On the step was sitting a young girl, maybe fifteen, but so elfin that she didn't look that old.

"Hello, Myra," he said. "What do you want to borrow this time?"

She blushed crimson. "Our hens ain't laying, Steve," she said. "Mother wondered if you had a couple of eggs."

"By a strange coincidence I have a couple of eggs, kid," he stated.

She rubbed her knuckles against her eyes.

"Oh, Steve," she wailed, "I hate to be borrowing all the time. It isn't as if we ever paid back. We're so damn shiftless."

He laughed. "Move over," he said. "Myra, I just met a princess. She was a most haughty princess who ordered a pauper off her private beach. When he wouldn't go, she summoned her entourage — make a note of that word—write a story round it and you'll get big money—so he knocked the blocks off the retinue, and then he kissed the princess and came home to find a queen sitting on his doorstep."

"Didn't you know that the Cobb Estate was occupied?" she demanded. "Are they actually closing the beach?"

"No, to the first and yes to the second, your majesty."

She sighed. "Don't it make you feel terrible, Steve, to have people living in your old home and ordering you off your beach?"

"Not at all. Like Buddha, I find that man needs no possessions to be happy."

"I wish you'd snap out of it," she said mournfully. "A fine big man like you with so much brains and you're turning into a bum. Like us."

"Myra, I wouldn't swap you for that princess with all her wealth and wardrobe. Your bare tootsies look beautiful to me."

"Don't kid me, Steve. Is she very beautiful?"

"Beauty is skin deep. She has a nasty disposition."

"Wouldn't it be fun if you married her and got your old home back?"

"Marriage, your majesty, means children. As you and I are both agreed that people would be much better off if they never have been born, it would be obviously unfair to bring children into the world. And that girl looks to me as if she would have loads of kids just for spite."

"Myra," called a shrill voice from the end of the lane. "Hurry up."

Patting the child on top of the head, he entered the hut and returned with two eggs.

"Scram, your majesty," he said, smiling. "Tell your mother to make judicious use of these."

"You big nut," she retorted, giggling. Steve went into his residence and closed the door.

It was a one room shack. A crazy stove in one corner, a table, an old sofa with torn upholstery, two wooden chairs, and a rag carpet comprised its furnishings. Steve loved it. He liked to prepare his own meals and he was a decent cook. When the weather was fair he slept on the sand under the stars.

When it rained he made shift with the sofa.

"I shouldn't have kissed that witch," he remarked as he seated himself at his evening meal. "Poisoned

lips. Witch describes her. Wonder who the heck she is."

CHAPTER II.

A CONTENTED MAN.

AFTER dinner Steve lighted his kerosene lamp, picked up his one book which was *Alice in Wonderland,* opened it in the middle and began to read aloud. He could have closed the book and gone on without missing a word, having read *Alice* at least a hundred times. Half an hour passed when he heard voices outside his door.

"Yes, sir, this is where he lives," said Myra. "And he's sitting in there reading *Alice in Wonderland,* same as he always does."

"The poor nut," said a male voice which caused Steve to scowl, not at the expletive but because he recognized the voice.

"Come on in, damn you," he shouted. "Let's have it over with."

There entered a fat man, middle-aged, bald, red faced, and smiling triumphantly.

"Run you down," he declared. "Where does a fellow sit in this pig sty?"

"All this place needed to be what you called it was you, Pennypacker," replied the host with a chuckle. "Sit on the sofa, you're better upholstered than it is. Or try that wooden chair beside the stove."

Mr. Pennypacker selected the chair. "Living in squalor," he sneered.

"Neat as wax and clean as a pin. Not squalid. You don't have to spend the week-end."

Pennypacker frowned. "What's the matter with you? Quitter?"

"I was reading a very interesting book, *Alice in Wonderland.* I hate being interrupted."

"Do you know I've been looking for you for months?"

"I've been here for six weeks. Punk detective, you are."

"Steve, I want to talk business."

"I don't."

"You've got to listen to me."

Steve produced a corncob pipe, pulled a tobacco pouch from the table drawer, filled his pipe and lighted it.

"Okay," he said pleasantly. "I'll listen."

"What's the sense of this sort of thing?"

"Suits me."

"Steve, you've a big future in business. With your record—"

Steve chuckled. "Did you ever consider the South Sea island savage, Henry?"

"Certainly I haven't."

"He's no fool. In my humble way I imitate him. I don't spend three dollars a week."

"You ass, you can make a thousand a week."

"I doubt that, but it would be at the expense of my health and tranquility. This is the life, old man. You ought to drop everything and join me. A few hours of healthful labor and I have fresh fish, oysters, clams, lobsters. By spending a few cents I can buy a steak. No clothes problem because I don't wear any. I pay no rent. I swim, row, run and loaf. I sleep like a baby. I have no nerves. And intelligent companionship? There is a friend of mine who is a hundred and one years old and who is a philosopher. Would you like to meet him?"

"You're laying down because Rosalie Forbes jilted you."

"On the contrary," Steve said, smiling broadly. "Rosalie made me do

everything that I didn't want to do. Tail coats, for instance. And she kept men up until four A.M. And she made me dance. Why should a man dance, Henry?"

"This is a pose," sneered Pennypacker.

"I'm being natural for the first time in my life. Want to feel my muscle, Henry?"

"No, you jackass. You were strong

STEVE COBB

as an elephant in college. Don't credit your sojourn here with that."

"Well, anyway, I like it here."

"It isn't as if you were broke. You have the Cobb Company six percent bonds, haven't you?"

Steve grinned. "You bet you. I'm sure of fifteen hundred a year. A man can be a king on fifteen hundred a year."

"Warburton will buy them and pay big money for them."

"No doubt. He can't have them."

"Their face value is twenty-five thousand. I can get you a hundred thousand."

Steve yawned in his face. "It's getting close to bed time. I'm up with the birds. Were you ever up with the birds, Henry?"

"With a hundred thousand you can get back into the game. Don't lay down, Steve."

"I love to lay down," Steve replied with a bland smile.

"I've been looking up the law," said Pennypacker. "I think the peculiar features of that bond issue can be set aside by the courts, but Warburton is willing to pay a good price for it."

"Oh, yeah?"

"ETHICALLY you had no business to hold out those bonds, Steve. The settlement with the Warburton interests required that your father's estate be turned over. The bonds were not included in the list through an oversight. They had been issued so many years ago that they were overlooked."

"What sort of ethics did Warburton use when he blackjacked my poor old man and picked his pockets? There was dirty work at the cross roads, Henry, and I'm not at all sure that your hands are clean—"

"Damn you," shouted Pennypacker. "I did all in my power to protect your father. He was over-extended and the depression—"

"And this wolf of a promoter, Warburton—I know. I'm not interested in business. Did you ever dig a mess of clams and make your own chowder?"

"Bah! What's your game? Warburton owns the Cobb Company lock, stock and barrel."

"Thanks to my poor old father's heart attack. If he had lived we'd have beaten that hyena. I'm damn suspicious of that heart attack, Henry."

"Pshaw. You know the strain he

had been under. Point is you can't hold up Warburton. Your father's issues of stock are a precedent and if you brought suit, you'd only get the face value of the bonds. I tell you I've looked into the thing."

"You're Warburton's man, now, eh?"

"A lawyer must have clients," said Pennypacker with some embarrassment. "What do you plan to do?"

"Nothing. Nothing whatever."

The lawyer gazed searchingly at him. "You're deep, but don't overplay your hand. Sell for a good price—a hundred fifty thousand, maybe."

Steve laughed pleasantly. "Just tell Warburton when you get back to New York not to forget to pay the interest on the bonds."

"New York? Don't you know he's here? He moved into the Cobb mansion today. He took it with the other Cobb assets."

Steve laughed loudly. "I bet he has a daughter," he remarked.

"A lovely girl. You'll meet her. Warburton wants to be friendly."

"Humph. How did you locate me?"

Henry grinned. "Miss Warburton came home with a tale of a savage on the beach who beat up three servants. Not knowing anybody else capable of such a feat, it occurred to me that you might have returned to Cobbport."

"Well," said Steve, rising. "Go fill your lungs with sweet air. Go before I chuck you out. Don't tell Warburton I'm here. I'm snubbing the Warburtons."

Pennypacker rose. "Steve," he said uncomfortably, "Warburton is a big man, one who is accustomed to having his own way and I suspect he is not too scrupulous."

"Are you telling me?" jeered Steve.

"What I mean is that you are broke, aside from the bonds. He thinks you double-crossed him in holding them out."

"My father made me a present of them when I was twenty-one and told me never to let go of them. They were not among his or the company's assets."

"Yes, but the fact that they were not mentioned among the company obligations—"

"Why should they have been? Father was dead. Blame the bookkeeping department."

"Yes, but while it's doubtful if you can use them to block his plans, their existence is a menace. If you don't do business with him, you may regret it."

Steve stretched out his arms, shut his fists, drew in his forearms and gazed complacently at his biceps.

"Perhaps I did need an interest in life," he observed. "Well, well, so something might drop on me. Good night, Henry. Pleasant dreams."

CHAPTER III.

STEVE SNUBS A MILLIONAIRE.

ABOUT three the following afternoon Stephen Cobb was lying on the beach, semi-nude as usual, with his battered straw hat over his eyes, his arms spread out and his abdomen rising and falling with the regularity of slumber.

His location, however, was not in front of the Cobb estate but a quarter of a mile below where the sand was less soft and where there were piles of pebbles.

"So," said a voice with an edge to it. "So this is where you are."

Steve pushed the hat away and gazed up at her.

" You are getting to be a pest," he remarked.

" So you were afraid," she said contemptuously.

" So you took off the pants and put on a skirt," he commented. " Well, it's an improvement, but, even so, I don't like you."

" No?" She laughed lightly. " You asserted you would sleep on my beach this afternoon. And you were afraid."

He grinned at her. " I decided to snub you."

" You said you were going to kiss me again," she reminded him maliciously. " Well?"

" I don't seem to want to."

She drew from behind her back a riding crop.

" How fortunate," she said coldly.

His right hand darted out, grasped a slender ankle, and toppled the girl upon the sand. He rolled her over, secured the riding crop, and sent it flying into the water. He placed his face within a few inches of hers and gazed sternly into her eyes.

" You don't tempt me," he said brutally. " Go home."

Releasing her he resumed his reclining position but his hands were behind his head.

She sat up slowly. Her pretty little face was crimson and her eyes blazing.

" Why did you kiss me yesterday if I didn't tempt you?" she asked through clenched teeth.

" I thought it would make you mad. Go home."

She locked her hands and place them around bent knees.

" Nevertheless, you were afraid to return to my beach."

" Okay. I was afraid," he said indifferently.

She cocked her head on one side. " You weren't. There was some other reason. You are a very nasty brute but I'd like to know the reason."

" Very well. I don't care to continue our acquaintance."

The girl leaped indignantly to her feet. " Acquaintance? I ordered a dirty beachcomber from my property and he talks of acquaintance! Oh, if I had my whip!"

" Just a minute."

The receding tide had left the whip on the water's edge. He retrieved it and handed it to her

" Lay on, Simon Legree," he said cheerfully. " See if you can make me holler."

She fingered it wistfully. " It would serve you right," she said in a voice which shook with anger. " Why are you so nasty?"

" I hate women. I hate blondes, brunettes and red-headed ones. I hate women who have private beaches. The prettier they are the more I hate them."

" Then you think I'm pretty?" she asked eagerly.

" Yes, but bad tempered. Would it make you wildly angry if I kissed you?"

" It certainly would."

" I don't believe you. You've spoiled my nap and I'm going home."

With that he turned his back to her and walked swiftly away.

She stood there on the beach gazing furiously after him.

" I'm going to have trouble with that girl," he said solemnly.

THERE was an expensive touring car standing in front of the post office of Cobbport's single business street. It was a gaudy foreign machine with an incredibly long and shiny hood and a dozen loafers were gravely inspecting it. Steve noticed

the spruceness of the liveried chauffeur and observed an elderly man who stood in the post office doorway chatting with Silas Cobb, the postmaster.

"Oh, Steve," the postmaster called. "This gentleman was asking about you. It's Mr. Warburton who—er—bought the Cobb estate."

Steve nodded and continued on his way. He had never seen Warburton but the fellow resembled his newspaper pictures. He was a smartly dressed, old young man with pink cheeks, very white hair, and a white mustache waxed at the corners. He had a large predatory nose and a large tightly clamped mouth and he resembled very little the young woman who had gone looking for a young beachcomber with a riding crop clutched tightly in her hand.

Five minutes' walk brought him to the narrow lane at the left which led to what Pennypacker had described, not inaptly, as a pig sty.

As he made to turn he was overtaken by the foreign car.

"Oh, Mr. Cobb, a moment please." Warburton had a harsh imperative note in his bass voice which grated upon the young man.

"Sorry, I'm in a hurry," he flung over his shoulder.

He heard the door of the car open and shut and footsteps behind him.

"My dear Mr. Cobb, a moment, please."

Steve waited for him. They contrasted strangely, the millionaire in his English blazer and panama hat and white flannels, and Cobb in his bathing shorts and burnished copper skin.

"Well, sir," Steve said gruffly.

"I have only just learned that we are neighbors. You know of course who I am."

"I've heard of you."

Warburton's cheeks grew pinker. "No hard feelings, I hope," he said hurriedly. "It was the fortunes of war, young man."

"You took a great load off my shoulders and my mind," replied Steve with a half smile. "No very hard feelings."

"Well, well, well, I thought by your manner, you didn't want to meet me."

"I didn't. I'm tired of your kind of people."

"Ah, you are bitter."

"You are gazing, Mr. Warburton, upon a happy man. I wouldn't change places with you if—if you gave me that purple blazer with the brass buttons."

Warburton laughed politely. "Naturally. You have youth. I am old. Mr. Cobb, I wish to tell you that you are a remarkable sales manager. That trans-continental trip of yours brought wonderful results considering the depression. I had heavier artillery than your father—"

"Pardon me, sir, but I came down here to escape business."

"And so did I," declared Warburton heartily. "Let's not discuss it. I feel sensitive about occupying your old home. I want to tell you that you will be a welcome guest. I want you to meet my family."

"Thanks, but I'm not going out this season, Mr. Warburton."

"Come, come, my boy. Look here. How would you like to be sales manager of the reorganized Cobb Company?"

"I'd hate it."

"Well, well. You *are* bitter. What can I do?"

"Let me alone, please," said Steve. "And good afternoon."

Leaving the affronted millionaire

standing in the lane, Steve Cobb padded swiftly in his bare feet to his cabin, entered and threw himself on the couch.

" Phew!" he exclaimed. " The place smells of Warburton's."

He climbed on a chair and lifted from its hiding place on one of the rafters a paper shoe box which he opened and drew forth a package of engraved certificates. These were gold bonds of the Cobb Concrete Company, issued in 1914 and had ten years to run.

These bonds were a lien upon the property, a first mortgage with plenary powers. At the time of issue, the company had been a small affair which, since had grown enormously. Its over expansion was the cause of its wreckage. There were clauses in these bonds seriously hampering financing operations, so fifteen years before Steve's father had bought them in and placed them in trust for his son. When Warburton had beaten the company's stock and more recent issues of bonds down to almost nothing and then acquired the company, incidentally breaking its founder's heart, it was probable that he knew nothing of this original bond issue.

No amount of money would buy them. They were a hair inside Warburton's shirt, a thorn in his crown, a nail in his shoe. So the game was to coddle Steve and make a fuss over him and persuade him to sell.

CHAPTER IV.

DECLARATION OF WAR.

STEVE was digging himself a mess of clams about ten the following morning when Miss Warburton appeared on the scene. She was wearing a costume of white flannel. She had on high heeled French shoes and a walking staff was in her hand. Her hair was like an aureole and her eyes were bright and she smiled at him from afar.

" Hold everything," he said to himself. " Circe advances."

" Hello," she called.

" Mornin'," he said grumpily.

" I am full of apologies, Mr. Cobb," she informed him.

" Forget it, Miss Warburton."

She came close and watched him as he thrust his spade into the sand. It came up with much mud and a couple of sizable clams.

" Father told me who you were, last night. Why didn't you come to dinner? On account of me?"

" I don't like French chefs."

" Oh! I feel dreadful about ordering you off your own beach. And living in your house. Perhaps I'm in your room. Which was your room?"

" I'm sorry I kissed you, since you're sorry you set the menials on me."

" Oh, that isn't exactly complimentary."

" I don't think anything of kissing a girl," stated Steve. " Forget it."

She placed her little hands on her hips and lifted her chin.

" You are a great hulking clod," she said vindictively. " A mass of flesh and bones. You have the mentality of a third rate prize fighter. You must have been absurd as a business man. No wonder you couldn't protect your property. You are right where you belong—digging clams."

His face reddened but he managed a laugh.

" Not worth bothering about," he remarked. " Well, Miss Warburton, I used to know a lot of girls of your type. Like a fool I got engaged to

one. Neurotic, unprincipled, mercenary little monkeys. I suppose your father told you to be nice to me. Well, I don't like your father. I don't care much for you."

"Liar," she snapped. "You liked kissing me. I could tell."

"I did it to infuriate you. I hated it. Now will you go away?"

He bent over his spade or he might have been alarmed by the rage in her eyes.

"I'll go," she said. "I'll make you crawl on the ground. I'll make you grovel. Oh, I'll grind you under my heel."

"If you're here in one second," he said without looking up, "I'll lay you across my knee."

He heard a scuffling of sand as Miss Warburton departed in a hurry.

"If I liked girls," he remarked aloud, "I'd go for that one. Spunky little brat."

At the end of an hour, having filled a pail with clams, he suspended mining operations and became aware that a green yawl had slipped into the bay and was letting go her anchor. It was a fifty footer, broad of beam and seaworthy.

"You could go round the world in her," he commented. "Wonder what brought her into this jumping-off place. Well, what the heck do I care?"

After that he strolled, pail in hand and spade on shoulder, back to the village. That the green yawl was going to have an influence upon his life, he had no premonition.

COBBPORT lays on the south side of the Cape. Except for one hundred yards on the Cobb estate, in fact, comprises all that is beautiful and desirable in Cobbport, a peninsula shaped like a crescent, about half a mile long, which forms the little harbor.

The original Cobb, Ezra by name, bought the peninsula away back in the year 1700, when peninsulas were to be had for little or nothing. The village was a straggling affair, at least half of whose inhabitants were descendants of the original Cobb. Those who were not Cobbs were named Sears or Bearce or Burton.

LUCINDA WARBURTON

They were folks without ambition who, as a result of generations of sea food augmented by salt pork were stringy, anæmic and shiftless.

Ezra Cobb, Steve's grandfather, had been different. He had gone to New York, plunged into business, made a fortune for his time, and, never having forgotten Cobbport, had returned, built a huge house to replace the cottage on his property and lived there for three months in the year.

When he died, it was found that his wealth had dwindled, but his son, Ezra, Junior, had inherited his business enterprise, and soon repaired the family fortunes.

Steve's father had vision. His business had grown by leaps and bounds. It had grown so large that it attracted the attention of a big bad wolf of Wall Street named Warburton. The chicanery of Mr. Warburton in conjunction with the depression had licked Ezra Cobb. Despite the tremendous energy of his son, Steve, he had gone to the wall and everything he owned had gone with him.

And now, by some whim, Warburton was living on the Cobb estate with a young wife and a twenty-year-old daughter, while Steve Cobb seemed to have reverted to the status of his various distant relatives who had never ventured out of Cobbport.

While the Cobb mansion was old-fashioned, it was spacious and exceedingly comfortable. There were fifteen master's bedrooms, six servants' rooms, a huge stable which had been turned into a garage, store houses, hot houses, and a wonderful garden. From every room in the house there was a gorgeous view of the sea.

When Steve returned to the village there was muttering up and down Main Street. From time immemorial the natives had been privileged to use Cobb's bathing beach and to picnic on the Cobb grounds. Workmen were running a wall across the base of the peninsula and cutting off the beach with a wire fence.

Josh Sears stopped Steve to ask if tradition hadn't given Cobbport folks a legal right to overrun the beach and grounds.

Steve shook his head. "My father took steps to prevent 'right of way' many years ago," he said. "His lawyers took care of it. About all you can do is overcharge Warburton for everything he buys in town."

"And don't you think we won't," declared Mr. Sears, who owned the general store.

CHAPTER V.

THE "TROUBLE MAN."

THREE nights after Miss Warburton had come upon Steve Cobb digging clams, William Warburton was sitting in the Cobb library with a person who had come down from New York.

This was a curious-looking person. He was very tall and he had no back to his head. He had protruding ears and pits on his face which indicated that he had had smallpox in his youth. He had small greenish eyes and a long narrow chin and a very large mouthful of irregular teeth. As his upper lip was short, when he smiled he revealed a half inch of unhealthy looking gum. Although he was wearing a tuxedo which fitted him, he was obviously no gentleman.

His name was Hutton and he was Warburton's trouble man. When Warburton had trouble getting something honestly, he sent for Hutton. He never asked Hutton questions which might embarrass Warburton. As the man was bound to him—Warburton could hang him—he talked to him more freely and frankly than to any other human being.

Warburton, who came of a good Maryland family with gentlemanly ancestors and was rightfully in the Blue Book of New York, and who had inherited a large fortune and built it into an enormous one, both despised and admired Hutton. He had summoned him as soon as he learned that Stephen Cobb was his neighbor.

"When I took over the Cobb Company," he explained, "I discovered a

most annoying situation. In order to get started, Cobb issued twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of bonds through a bank in Worcester, Massachusetts. These bonds had amazing restrictions. For example they limit capitalization In fact, Cobb's various issues of new stock were in violation of the bond agreement."

"Why didn't the bond holders stop them?"

"Because Cobb was shrewd enough to buy them in within a few years after starting the business."

"Then he retired them."

"No. Instead, he gave them to his son. If we had known about their existence, we could have forced young Cobb to disgorge when the control of the company came into our hands. You see they were not listed and had never been sold over the counter and their existence had been forgotten. Cobb put out six different issues of stock in twenty years."

"The Yankee crook."

"No, the fool was honest. If he hadn't died suddenly, he would probably have thrown these bonds on the table. As things were, we took over and had begun the work of reorganization when our auditor discovered that the bonds had never been retired. He then dug up the terms on which they had been issued. The owner of those bonds can block every move, Hutton. The company was originally capitalized at a hundred thousand. Cobb expanded it to ten million. In order to make a profit I've got to turn it into a twenty-five million corporation. Instead, there never was a legal right to increase capitalization beyond a hundred thousand. The company is liable for all dividends paid on stock illegally issued. I can't put out the new stock until those bonds are retired."

"You say this boy is living here in a hut and has no money at all?"

"Right."

"Well, buy the bonds from him."

"I sent Pennypacker to see him. He won't sell."

"He'll sell if you pay him enough."

Warburton shook his head. "I'll lose the five millions I've sunk in this company if I can't put out new stock. I called on him myself the other day."

"What's his game?"

"He's no fool. He knows that we —er—violated ethics—"

"Ethics?" Hutton laughed heartily. "We busted the whole ten commandments."

"I fear he bears malice."

"Maybe he heard something."

"Pennypacker says no. He has no suspicion. But it galls him to think the company has passed out of his family. He is biding his time."

"LISTEN, if he tips over the apple-cart, he shows up his old man as a crook."

"Hardly. As Cobb had the entire issue of bonds in his possession, he had a right to run his business as he pleased. But this boy can block my every move. He can hold me up. Hutton, there are millions at stake!"

"I'm getting sick of doing your dirty work, Warburton," said Hutton with a scowl.

"I would like those bonds, please," said the millionaire coldly.

"Are they registered?"

"Never were registered."

"Records of paying interest to Stephen Cobb, though."

"The last coupon was paid six months ago. We took over the company two weeks later. It could be arranged as though the bonds had come to us in the settlement of Cobb's af-

fairs as this estate came into my hands; partial payment of Ezra Cobb's obligations to me."

"If this young fellow happened to be found dead, you mean?"

"Hutton, I forbid you to talk in such a manner," said Warburton, flushing angrily.

"Well, if you could get the bonds, and Steve Cobb sort of vanished, you could turn them over to the treasurer

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for retirement, show a canceled check for payment—"

"No need for that. As it is a small total, payment could have been made in cash. Or, better still, have the bonds appear on the list of Cobb assets turned over to me as of six months ago."

"The bonds are in a safety deposit vault?"

"No. Six weeks ago, he gave up his vault in the City National in New York and came directly to Cape Cod. There is no bank in this town. I suspect he keeps them near him. You see, I found out about the bonds and immediately started to keep tabs on the fellow. Why do you suppose I moved into this old ark in this down-at-the-heels summer resort?"

Hutton smiled nastily. "You figured you had a couple of vamps to sic on him. Which one were you going to use, your daughter or her stepmother?"

Warburton seized a paper weight and lifted it menacingly.

Hutton drew an automatic from his pocket and leveled it at his employer.

"I'd sooner shoot you than anybody I know," he said in a very low tone, which was almost a hiss. "I know you, Warburton. You'd use either of them if there was dough in it. You're meaner than a hyena and dirtier than a snake. So he won't fall for dames, eh?"

WARBURTON, very pale, set down the paper weight. "Put away that weapon," he snarled. "You dare not use it."

"Some day, when I get a little sicker of living, I may," replied Hutton. "I'm rotten, but not in your class."

"Damn you," cried Warburton, who was like a ghost.

"Let it pass. I get fifty thousand if the bonds come back in a way to do you some good."

Warburton, with an effort, recovered. "I could send you to the chair," he said significantly.

"Yes, but I could make things hot for you. Fifty thousand." Warburton nodded.

There was a knock on the door. "May I come in?" asked a woman with a peculiarly vibrant voice.

"Come in, my dear," he called loudly. He was eager to conclude the interview.

There entered a woman so beautiful and so striking that Hutton, the trouble man, drew in his breath sharply and even Warburton's jaded eyes kindled.

She was tall, with an enchanting fig-

ure. She had jet black hair braided and dressed in such a way as to make her appear to be wearing a crown of ebony. Her skin was the color of yellow ivory, clear, softly glowing, smooth as satin. She wore a black silk evening dress cut very low. Her arms were marvelous, her neck and shoulders rarely beautiful.

Her small head was regally held and her great black eyes were absolutely gorgeous. She had a small straight nose and a small mouth with very full lips. She smiled politely at Hutton, but her eyes did not smile. There was something enigmatic about her face. It was beautiful as a siren's is beautiful and about it there was something not exactly wholesome. She looked like a woman who has seen much and felt little, and took much and given nothing. She had been married to Warburton for five years and scorned him. He hated her and continued to be fascinated by her.

"Well, well, my dear," he said fussily. "We've just concluded our conference."

She turned her eyes on Hutton. "Bird of ill omen," she said in that curiously haunting voice of hers, "what agony have you and my dear husband been preparing for someone?"

"Just a business conference," said Hutton uncomfortably. "I'm sure you and your husband want to bill and coo, so if you'll excuse me, I'll be driving over to Hyannis."

"Aren't you staying here?" she asked mockingly. Hutton had never been a guest in any of Warburton's houses.

"No, Mrs. Warburton. Not this time," he said. "Good night."

Mrs. Warburton sank gracefully into a big chair by the fireplace.

"William," she said in a tone which always infuriated him, "I saw the most beautiful man this afternoon. He was half naked. He has the torso of a god. Such arms! Such bulging muscles! Such legs! A chest on which I longed to lay my head. And a magnificent head, like a shaved Viking, though his hair was brown, not golden. I gazed at him in rapture. I am afraid I was mentally unfaithful, my dear."

"You are a vicious woman," said Warburton darkly. "I'm damned if I know why I ever married you."

"I know why I married you, darling. For your money. What else have you to offer, pray?" she said insolently. "This boy—I don't suppose he is more than twenty-five, carried a pail full of clams and over his right shoulder was a spade. He walked with the grace of Apollo. Do you know, I felt like asking him if I might carry his pail. I would like to be the squaw of that young savage."

Warburton rose and stood over her. "I would like very much to strangle you," he growled.

"Darling," she cried. She leaped up and threw her arms around his neck, kissed him passionately upon the lips and, when he made to embrace her, she ran out of the room laughing wildly.

He called her an unpublishable name. A thousand times during the past five years he had vowed to divorce this artist's model whom he had married in haste and who had tortured him ever since.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AFFAIR AT THE HUT.

THE indifference of Stephen Cobb to wealth, women and other good things of life was far from being a pose. He had been reared like most

rich men's sons. After graduating from Harvard, he had gone into the business with no notion that conditions were going to grab him and make a slave out of him. He had plenty of money and lots of playtime, at first. During this period he had met and fallen in love with Rosalie Forbes, a beautiful, gay young woman who desired to marry a rich and handsome husband.

The depression had caught Ezra Cobb with his business unsafely expanded. For some years it had boomed and its owner, instead of piling up a surplus for emergencies, had used profits to build new factories and increase output.

Steve, who had served an apprenticeship as a salesman, had been made sales manager shortly after the depression. For years he had worked ten or twelve hours a day at his desk and had been dragged around at night by Rosalie, who was insatiable in her desire for excitement.

He had worked terrifically and fought a losing fight. The securities of the company dropped steadily and business faded even more rapidly. In desperation he started on a tour of the country in search of new business and he was so successful that he might have pulled the company through, if William Warburton had not taken advantage of his father's financial stress to wrest the control of the company from his nerveless fingers.

While Steve was in California news had come of his father's sudden death. As he was leaving for the east there had come a wire from Warburton offering him the post of sales manager. This he hadn't troubled to answer.

Having a majority of the voting stock, Warburton closed down all the plants of the company throwing thousands out of work and picked up stocks and several bond issues at his own price. The structure Ezra Cobb had raised was shattered; his private fortune which Steve was supposed to have inherited had gone into the pot, and all that was left to the son and heir was the small original issue of bonds, the curious character of which Steve was unaware at the time.

His father had put them in trust for him when he was under age and he had not perused them when they came into his possession. All he remembered about them was that Ezra had a queer smile on his face when he told him about the trust. "Never let go of them.

"They may come in very useful sometime, son."

A plane had landed him in New York in time for his father's funeral. Rosalie had walked down the aisle on his arm and had given him back his ring the following night.

He didn't care. He was so tired he didn't care about anything. For a few months he had lived at his club until the cash in his possession was almost gone and then he had begun to yearn for the Cape, with its scrub pines and its salt breezes and the softness of the air from the gulf stream.

And in three months Steve Cobb had reverted to type—almost. He had traveled on his nerve for years. He had been worried sick most of the time. Here he had found peace. Here he was content.

He could have lived fairly well for a small sum on the Cape, but he preferred to live like a savage in a hut. He had lost his ambition. Knowing that Warburton had secured the Cobb Company by sharp practice and chicanery he didn't care. Someday, if he felt the urge, he might make things un-

pleasant for Warburton, but there was no hurry. Hurry was stupid.

On this particular night it was very warm. He sat outside talking to Myra Sears until ten o'clock. Myra was a sweet child. Her father was totally worthless, her mother a worried haggard woman, old before her time.

Myra was going to high school and she wanted to go to college. Steve had a notion that, by the time she was ready for college, he might snap out of his lethargy and make money enough to gratify the child's ambition. But, so far, he hadn't promised anything.

"I got to go home," the child said at ten o'clock. "Where you going to sleep tonight, Steve?"

"I think I'll climb the hummock back there and sleep in the grass," he said. "Since they cut off the beach, I've been going up there. Too many pebbles on the town beach."

"The hateful things! What harm does it do them if we use the beach?"

"Pride of property, Myra. Let's hope that you and I never get that way."

She laughed ruefully. "Gosh, I guess I'll never have any property to be proud over. Good night, Steve."

"Pleasant dreams, kid."

BY AND BY Steve took a blanket and climbed the hummock back of the hut. He spread it on the long grass about a hundred yards from his domicile and rolled himself in it. Usually he went immediately to sleep, but tonight he remained awake for a while. Being a kind-hearted fellow, his conscience troubled him because he felt that he had been nasty to the Warburton girl.

True, she had ordered him off the beach and brought down three servants to drive him away, but he had been insolent and had goaded her into doing that.

He had forcibly kissed her, after beating up the lackeys, so the next day she had come after him, when she found her own beach vacant, carrying the riding crop in case he kissed her again. That meant she rather hoped he would and she probably would not have used the riding crop. The least

MRS. WARBURTON

he could have done was to have accommodated her when he had overpowered her.

And the other day when she had come to him full of good will because she had learned he wasn't a common peasant but her own kind of people, he had been especially disagreeable. After all, it wasn't her fault that Warburton was her father. And she was very good looking and rather gallant.

After sleeping for an hour or two, he was awakened by a tug at the blanket. He opened his eyes. There was no moon, but the stars gave light enough to enable him to recognize the strained anxious face of Myra Sears.

"Listen, brat," he said reprovingly, "ladies should never go into a man's bedchamber."

She giggled. "This is outdoors and it's all right," she informed him. "Steve, I couldn't sleep tonight, somehow, and I can see out the window down to your house from my bed and there's a light moving round in your house."

Steve sat up. "That's a good one! Robbing my shack," he said chuckling. "Why didn't they pick Warburton's? I wish 'em joy of what they find there. Good God!"

"What's the matter?"

"You go home."

He rose and went swiftly down the little hill and approached his hut from the rear. There was no window at the rear or on the sides, but there were chinks in the boards and he saw a glimmer of light.

Noiselessly he sped around the house.

A blanket served as a curtain for the window and it didn't quite reach the sill. Steve applied his eye.

THERE was a man sitting at the table within who was inspecting, by the aid of a flashlight, a package of engraved paper. At his elbow was a cardboard shoe box. Within reach of his right hand was an automatic pistol. On the muzzle of the pistol was a jigger which Steve judged to be a silencer.

He moved noiselessly to the door. It was not fastened because it possessed neither lock or bolt. He pushed it open, stood for a second in the doorframe and dropped flat.

The intruder had turned his light on the doorframe, picked up his pistol and fired as Steve dropped.

There were four almost simultaneous reports so smothered that they were almost inaudible; four flashes and four pinging sounds as the bullets went out of doors.

Steve lay flat. He heard the chair pushed back. A couple of steps and the man stood over him. He turned the flashlight upon the naked back. His right hand, holding the pistol, dangled at his side.

Suddenly the weapon was torn from his hand, a bullet escaping as he pressed the trigger. A heavy weight rolled against his legs, and he crashed down upon the old and creaking floor. And then a pair of hands were at his throat. He kicked, he twisted and squirmed, but the iron hands tightened. He grew limp. Life seemed to go out of him. Steve rose, went to the table, lit the lamp, replaced the bonds in the box, laid the pistol on the table, took a chair, stood on it and replaced the box upon the rafter. As he did so he heard a scraping noise. He leaped to the floor as the robber, who had recovered during Steve's leisurely movements and had crawled to the table, rose up to grasp his weapon.

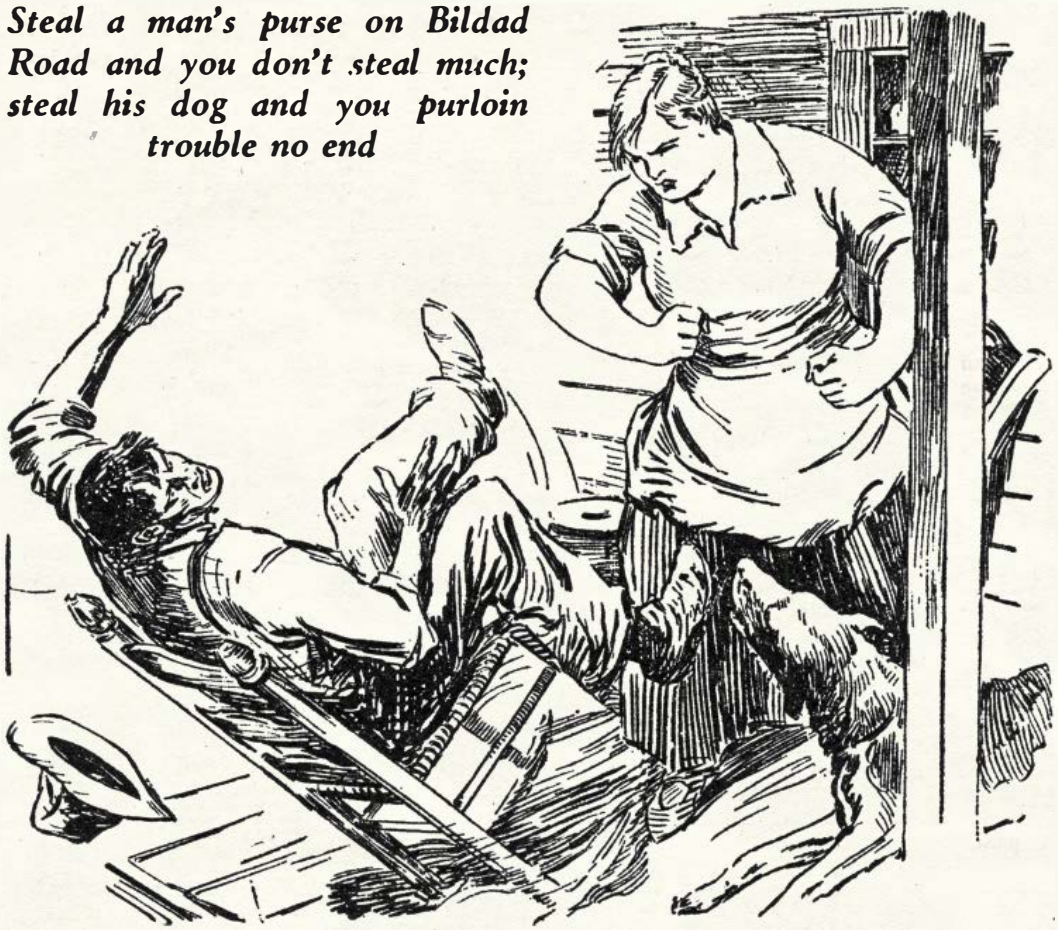
As head and arm came above the level of the table, a huge right fist crashed against his left temple. The man went backwards and down with a leaden thud and lay still.

"Naughty, naughty," chided Steve Cobb. "I'll have to find another hiding place for these bonds."

He drew water in a tin dipper and dumped it upon the man's face. The fellow didn't move. Alarmed, Steve dropped on hands and knees beside him and placed his hand on the heart. He felt no beat. He laid his ear against the robber's chest. The heart had ceased to beat.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Steal a man's purse on Bildad Road and you don't steal much; steal his dog and you purloin trouble no end



Hilda was out of her chair like a wildcat

The Bildad Liar

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

IN a corner of the gloomy shack, Vinegar Joe Baldwin sat on an odorous horse blanket and hugged his knees with a tense embrace. Vinegar Joe was nervous. Occasionally he rubbed his hand over a lantern jaw that rasped like a file, but never did he take his watchful gaze from the path that led to the shack. He could look through a dim window and command that path for a hundred yards.

Baptiste Tatro, the other more or less human being present, stood over the stove and stirred a bubbling kettle of herbs. He dripped with perspiration, and now and then he cussed softly as he bent wrinkled black brows above the kettle and sniffed at its contents.

At last he straightened up and snapped the drops from under his shaggy hair with a hand that had not known soap for a long, long time. He beamed at Vinegar Joe.

"Rheumatiz medicine is done, by gar!" he exclaimed. "When she gets cooked so she smell mean like pigpen she is just right for bottle at one dollar each!"

Without replying, Vinegar Joe leaped to

his feet and whirled to a burlap curtain that hung behind him.

" Judd Hale's coming, Baptiste, and I'm going to the Corners!" he exclaimed. " You had him figgered out right! Now do your dirty work! I've done mine!"

Baldwin vanished like a shadow. The curtain flapped down. Knuckles beat a sharp tattoo on the door. A tall, good looking young man stepped into the shack. His movements were effortless, and beside his stature the man at the stove was an ungainly black spider.

" 'Allo, Judd!" exclaimed Baptiste. " It makes fine day!"

Hale glanced around and found a wooden box that appeared to be clean. He sat down and considered Tatro, who swung the kettle aside, wiped his hands on his trousers, and began to fill his pipe while he observed his visitor slyly.

" Baptiste," said Hale, " you're the champeen gossip of Bildad Road."

" Yas," admitted Tatro, with pride. " I know most all what happen."

" And you're the champeen liar."

Tatro shook his head doubtfully.

" Some folks on bildad can lie 'most as good as me."

" I want some gossip, and I don't want no lies with it. If you lie to me I'll jam you into one of them bottles of liniment you sell, and cork it up."

"Aw right, Judd. I tole you some gossip, and no lies. What you want to know? Something about one gal, eh?"

" I don't care nothing about any gal. What I want to know is, where has my dog, Tige, gone? Who's stole him? He wouldn't leave me without two-legged help."

" Mabbe he got shot for pattridge," suggested Tatro.

" Talk sense."

" How much you pay for sense talk?"

" Five dollars." Hale produced the money.

"Aw right. Listen, Judd. They got notice up in Valeboro today which say ' mad dog loose!' Yesterday those dog of your'n was run around sick in Valeboro. He yelp! He ki-yi! And make what you call, white stuff, all over the mouth. The policeman in Valeboro corner your dog in shed and shut him up. Today he go to shoot dog if he is still sick. Your dog have gone. Where is he I dunno."

Judd Hale had been pierced by a thrust of agony at the first words. But before Tatro finished he began to think.

" I guess what you told me is true enough," he said, " because I could go to Valeboro and find out if it is or not. But they's more to this. Tige ain't run mad. How come he was sick? They's people around here mean enough to poison a dog. But that don't make much sense. Tige was worth money. First class watch dog, and the best animal for foxes and rabbits on the Road. He was stole, I bet, out of that shed. Lemme see. Was Vinegar Joe Baldwin mixed up in this at all?"

Tatro slapped his leg and a vast appearance of surprise.

" By gar! It was that Vinegar Joe tole me what I tole you!"

" Joe tried to steal Tige once and got his pants chawed off. He don't like me. If I could ketch him alone I'd make him talk, but he's too foxy."

" Yas, Vinegar Joe is smart feller."

" For ten dollars more," said Hale thoughtfully, " do you suppose you could get Tige back?"

The black eyes of Baptiste gleamed like polished jet.

" You very wise man, Judd!" he cried. " If Joe have stole your dog I get her back for ten dollar! You give me two days, eh?"

" You've made a bargain," announced Hale, rising. " Now I guess I'll go and sniff around a little myself."

VINEGAR JOE BALDWIN arose to greet the morning in a state of normal cussedness. He felt that he had eaten too much rabbit stew and drunk too much hard cider the night before with Baptiste, but that would wear off.

The first person he met on the Road was Ellery Blaine, whose white whiskers were long enough to tuck into his belt. Ellery halted and stared.

"Jiminy crickets, Joe!" he cackled. "What's the matter of ye?"

"Matter? Nothing. Why?"

"You look peaked, if you was to ask me. Too much likker, mebbe. They'll put you into a wooden overcoat afore they do me, I'll bet a cooky."

Ellery went on, chuckling to himself. Vinegar Joe stared after him for a moment, and then swung rapidly toward the nearest house. A fat woman was washing dishes on the porch.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed, before Joe could speak.

"What's eating you?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing." Her mouth closed so tightly that it became an indented line.

"Now you see here, Marthy!" growled Vinegar Joe. "They's something the matter. I saw the way you looked at me. What's funny about my face, hey?"

"Nothing," she replied, mournfully. "It was just on account of you looking so sickly."

"I ain't sick!" yelled Baldwin. "Nor you needn't try to make out I be, neither!"

"If you're going to get mad about it you can crawl off into a hole and die, for all of me," snapped the woman. "Get along, or I'll have Pete put the boots to ye when he comes home."

Vinegar Joe was already going, and at a pace that was close to a run. An old hen betty and a woman had told him that he looked sick, but he did not believe it. However, there'd be no harm in finding out for sure.

He burst into a tumbledown little house a mile farther along the Road and routed out of bed his particular crony, a middle aged reprobate known as Woodchuck Sam.

"Wake up, Woodchuck!" cried Joe, shaking him. "I want you to rub the cobwebs out of your eyes and tell me how I look."

"You ain't handsome," mumbled Woodchuck. "And never was."

"Be I looking sick, or not? That's what I want to know."

Woodchuck Sam grunted, and reached under the bed for a jug. He took a long swallow, and blinked at his visitor.

"You ain't got more'n one foot in the grave," he said calmly, "or you wouldn't be asking about it. But if I had a hoss that looked like you do I'd shoot him to save fodder."

"That's all I wanted to know!" gasped Vinegar Joe. "Gimme a drink, quick! I got to move while I got strength to travel!"

BALDWIN ran, and walked when his wind gave out. He reached Tatro's shack with his legs trembling under him.

"Baptiste!" he panted. "I'm sick! Awful sick! I want you should give me some medicine! Make it powerful, too!"

Tatro dragged him into the full light of day and stared critically into his face.

"Lemme see those tongue," he said. He poked a powerful thumb into Joe's ribs. "That hurt some?"

"Yow!" cried Baldwin. "Don't do it ag'in!"

"Yas," said Baptiste, after five minutes more of examination, "your eyes is yaller in the white. Your hand is shake. You got red spot on the face and those tongue look like piece of old boot the dog chaw. I don't like for to see you die, Joe, but your liver is turn to stone. Onless he can be soften up you better take bath and get ready for to live with the angels."

"Can't you do nothing?" asked Baldwin, huskily.

"Yas, I got medicine for those stone liver."

"Then gimme some! Don't stand there and do nothing!"

"I got to have pay for those medicine, Joe."

"I'll pay. How much you want?"

"Listen at me, Joe. I give you one bottle of liver medicine and if you ain't first class in one week you can kick old Baptiste one mile by the road. But I don't cure you for money. I want those dog Tige that Judd Hale lose. One dog Tige for one bottle my liver medicine. I want to use heem."

" You blinkety-blanked double crosser!" yelled Baldwin. " You can go plumb to the place you're headed for! I'll go see a reg'lar doctor in Valeboro."

" Yas!" cried Baptiste. He wagged a finger under the nose of Vinegar Joe. " You know what he do? He say three dollar and come back every day for three dollar each time. You ain't got money for to get cured in Valeboro, Joe. I guess you get those dog for me, aw right."

Vinegar Joe Baldwin gave up. He sat down on the grass with a hollow groan, and leaned against the side of the shack.

" Baptiste," he said, feebly, " gimme a dose of that medicine now, will you? I'll get the dog, so help me!"

" Today you get heem?"

" Yes. I ain't ready to die yet."

Tatro went into the shack. He grinned as he found a spoon and bottle.

" One bottle rheumatiz to Ellery Blaine," he chuckled. " One bottle make-thin for Marthe, the fat womans. One jug cider to Woodchuck Sam. That's all those dog going to cost me, and I get ten dollar for hees own dog from Judd Hale. I guess I ain't smart feller, me!"

ON the vine shaded porch of a modest house at the edge of Valeboro sat a well rounded young woman with eyes of heavenly blue, and shimmering, pale gold hair. With a cherubic smile she looked down upon the large dog sprawled beside her.

Tige, for it was he, gazed fondly up at her. She had a splendid, glossy coat, he thought. That she was well fed he knew. As for him, he was stuffed.

Much that had happened to him recently was entirely beyond his doggish intelligence, but the memory of a time of great suffering was rapidly fading out now in the more blissful light of his present experience.

A journey by night had ended at this house, and after that the really astonishing things had begun to happen. He shuddered at the remembrance of a scrubbing. He closed his eyes in shame, and yet with a sneaking feeling of pleasure, at the thought of the kisses which had been rained upon his velvet muzzle.

Within his knowledge Bildad Road dogs had sometimes been kissed by children; but no Bildad Road dog had ever been stuffed with beefsteak good enough for a man, and chocolate layer cake, and apple pie, and . . . he could not remember all of the delectable food, most of which he had never smelled before.

He was beginning to feel a deep affection for this strange woman creature. Nevertheless he longed for the voice of his master and the comfortable feeling of his nearness. And here in this place of many houses there was neither rabbit nor fox to chase. No, it was not home.

Tige raised his head suddenly, and growled, with the hair along the back of his neck rising. Coming up the steps was the lanky, slab-sided, undershot disgrace to humanity who was somehow associated with that recent time when everybody in the world seemed to be chasing one lost and suffering dog.

" What you back here for?" demanded Mrs. Hilda Tupper. She stopped rocking. " I told you twelve dollars was all you'd get for this dog."

Vinegar Joe Baldwin, obviously in great distress of mind, eased himself into a chair without being invited. He showed his three front teeth in what was meant to be an ingratiating grin.

" Mis' Tupper, I didn't come for money. I come to give you some. My conscience got to hurting me on account of selling you a dog that had been suspicioned of being mad. That's the very one they had shut up here in Valeboro. Lemme buy Tige back."

" But how did you get him, you varmint? You told me you bought him on Bildad Road when you saw my advertisement in the county paper for a watchdog."

" He did come from the Road, Mis' Tupper! I kind of happened to be there when the policeman shut him up and I helped, and got the job of shooting him next day. But I kind of figgered he was just having a fit and would be all right."

"He is all right!" Hilda Tupper's voice took on a dangerous quality and her eyes began to darken. "So good-by!"

"Mis' Tupper!" Vinegar leaned forward and spoke in a hoarsely earnest desperation. "I just found out that that there dog belongs to a lone widder woman, eighty years old. Her eyesight ain't good and Tige leads her around. She's helpless, and wearing away of sorrer, without him."

"I'm a lone widow woman, too," replied Mrs. Tupper. "I need Tige myself."

"They's plenty of chances for you to get cured of being lonesome." Vinegar Joe grinned again, and hitched forward.

HILDA TUPPER left her chair like a wildcat, and with the same movement kicked it back against the house wall.

"If I had a cat," she hissed, "and the cat had drug something out of the garbage pail and brought it up onto the porch I'd feel just the way I do with you here! You heard me say 'good-by' but I guess you don't know what them words mean. So I'll have to kind of act it out, and show you in the sign language."

It suddenly became apparent that the plumpness of Hilda Tupper was wholly composed of smooth working muscles. She boxed Vinegar Joe on the left ear and at the same time landed a creditable uppercut that swung his jaw a good inch off to one side. He went over backward, with his chair on top of him. Mrs. Tupper laid hold of the rockers and shoved him off the porch. He landed in a barberry bush.

"There!" she exclaimed, tenderly, to Tige, as Vinegar Joe went up the street picking thorns out of himself, "now you and me can have some peace. That critter would lie to a baby and steal its nursing bottle."

Tige thumped his tail on the floor. He wanted to say that he heartily approved of what she had done, and if she hadn't been so all-fired quick he would have chawed the pants off that two legged mistake. Hilda took the dog's head between muscular, velvet covered hands and hugged him.

"Oo old boo'ful darlin'!" she cooed. "Does ums love ums muvver—"

A loud knock at the back door sounded through the house. Tige skidded eagerly after his mistress as she ran through the house. He made up his mind to get a mouthful of the visitor this time, if there were any trouble.

A black haired, black browed man took off a shapeless hat and bowed low. Tige knew him, and for that reason hesitated. Baptiste Tatro addressed the blue eyed angel who confronted him.

"Mees, I have come to tole you about those dog you have got—"

"Listen!" purred the angel, shaking an iron fist under Tatro's nose. "A man that nature didn't do as much for as it's done for you, and that's next to nothing, was just here talking about this dog. If I hear anything that sounds like the word 'dog' from you you'll go to your own funeral."

Baptiste took a backward step.

"Lady, your dog is going to be stole tonight."

"No, he ain't!" exclaimed Hilda Tupper. and she started to make good on her promise. But the first swing put Baptiste down, and with excellent judgment he talked from the spot where he had fallen.

"I tole you how to catch those thief! I come and get heem tomorrow! I make heem pay me to keep out of jail, and I give you half! I save your dog—"

"Sic 'im, Tige!" said Mrs. Tupper.

When Tige came back from the fence he brought a large piece of cloth that had recently been on the person of Baptiste Tatro. Hilda Tupper mixed a saucer of milk and cream, half and half, and sighed.

"I 'spose I'll never find another man I can't lick," she murmured, "but I'd ruther be a widow than marry one I can push over with a couple of wallops. Bildad Roaders! Huh! I heard they was tough!".

JUDD HALE padded silently into Valeboro. It was between two and three o'clock in the morning and there was not a sound or a light in the village. Wrath was bitter within Judd. Instead of deliver-

ing Tige, Baptiste had reported that the dog was owned by a vicious lady who was in all probability crazy. Under persuasion of a grip on his windpipe Tatro had divulged her name..

Behind the house of the Widow Tupper there was a large shed and it was here that Hale decided to look first for his dog. He found the door fastened with a padlock but this he removed by gently prying off the hasp. The door opened without noise.

In the total darkness of the woodshed there was a faint doggy smell. A low whine came to Judd. That was Tige, and Tige had heard his master's step. Another dog would have barked. With a cautious hand before him, Hale stepped over the threshold, closed the outside door, and turned on a flashlight.

The rear of the shed was partitioned off. Behind a solid looking door in the partition Tige snuffed and scratched. No sound came from the night outside. Judd found a knob on the door, and stepped into the rear room. Tige leaped joyously and knocked the flashlight out of his hand. At the same moment the door closed with an ominous click.

Judd Hale knew, without trying the door, that he was a prisoner. That loud click came from nothing less than a spring lock. A bell buzzed from the direction of the house. Running footsteps sounded.

Suddenly the dusty little room blazed with light from a bulb overhead. Hale heard the outer door of the woodshed open. Then a voice called to him, a voice of honey that uttered impolite words.

"Is that another one of them Bildad Road bums? I don't want you to associate with my dog. Sic 'im, Tige!"

"Tige won't sic 'im," answered Judd. "This here dog is mine, ma'am, and the sooner you let me out the better it will be for your woodshed. If I spread myself around you'll have a heap of kindling instead of a shed."

"You talk big!" exclaimed the voice, sarcastically. "I've licked two Bildad Roaders already and I just as soon take on another."

For some time Judd Hale had been accumulating wrath against Vinegar Joe, and Baptiste, and the Widow Tupper, and now the whole accumulation exploded.

His roar was deafening. He launched himself against the locked door and struck it with a shoulder that was backed by one hundred and eighty pounds of the hardest meat and the stoutest bone on Bildad Road. The door gave an agonized squeal. Judd hit it a second time and the hinges ripped out. He jumped over it as it fell and made for the woman he saw faintly through the dust.

Something stung him on the nose and he realized with astonishment that this embattled female had dared to hit him. He picked her up and tossed her into the air, and caught her as she came down. Then he dropped to one knee and with a flip laid her over the other. His mighty hand rose and fell with a steady rhythm. Smack! Smack! Smack!

Hilda Tupper was a woman of courage, and a good set of teeth. She bit Judd through the pants leg. His hand did not miss a beat. She wriggled until she got her fingers full of shirt and flesh over Judd's short ribs, and she pinched. The arm that held her head and shoulders merely snuggled her tighter and the spanking went on. Hilda Tupper was licked.

"You can't have my Tige!" she whimpered. "I'll shoot you! I love that dog!"

"Mebbe you don't suppose I think considerable of him myself!" roared Hale.

As he took a better hold and settled down to his work he became conscious of an annoyance. Tige stood with hind legs braced far apart and tried to thrust himself bodily under the corded arm that held the Widow Tupper in position for her punishment.

"I'll be flabbergasted!" cried Judd. His arm dropped. He got up and set Hilda on her feet. "Tige wants me to stop!"

At that instant a hardwood club rattled against the door casing. A broad, red face above a blue uniform appeared in the doorway.

"What's going on in here?" demanded Valeboro's policeman.

"It's none of your business," panted Hilda, "but we was just learning Tige to be a good watchdog."

JUDD HALE reached the door of Baptiste Tatro's shack after an approach that would have done credit to an Indian on the warpath. One well directed blow kicked the door in. Baptiste swung from the stove with a face that faded to pale gray.

Vinegar Joe vanished behind the burlap curtain in the corner. Instantly his voice mingled with the voice of Tige; and a moment later he shot back into the room on hands and knees.

"I located that getaway hole before I come in," said Hale, "and I told Tige to watch it."

"You got your dog back, Judd?" cried Baptiste. "I'm tickled first class, me!"

"I had to marry the Widow Tupper early this morning to get him," replied Judd, "but that wasn't what you might call a hardship."

The breath of Baptiste whistled through his teeth. Vinegar Joe sank back on his haunches, with a glance at the curtain and an equally hopeless look at the doorway.

"You was coming down to let me out of that woodshed sometime today, wasn't you, Baptiste? For about ten dollars, mebbe?"

"Sure, I keep her from putting you in jail." Tatro grinned feebly. "I don't want you to go in the jail house, Judd."

"Does Vinegar Joe know how you trimmed him on that liver medicine deal? You hired Ellery Blaine and them others to tell Joe he looked white around the gills so you could get Tige back for nothing, and sell him to me."

"Joe, he don't care about little joke." Baptiste managed a laugh. "Don't you, Joe?"

Vinegar Joe licked his lips and gulped.

"And Joe bought a cake of soap and some hamburg steak and half a pound of red pepper at the Corners store," continued Hale. "That was the day Tige disappeared."

"Baptiste thought it up," whispered Baldwin. "It was him planned—"

"But you done it!" exclaimed Judd, with a wolfish grin. "The pepper hurt Tige's stomach so he yelped and the soap made him froth at the mouth, and you saw to it he was locked up where you could steal him during the night."

Judd Hale opened the door and called over his shoulder.

"Come on in, Hilda!" He drew a package from his pocket. "You and Tige watch Vinegar Joe while I begin on Baptiste. I got two pounds of mad dog meat just like what Tige had and they're going to eat all of it!"

THE END

Weird Lights

NO one has yet been able to explain the will-o'-the-wisps, those globes of bluish light about as big as eggs which float over marshy places. Sometimes they circle around, or they may hang stationary. There may be a single will-o'-the-wisp or dozens; a scientist reports having waded through a bog in Nevada and being surrounded by hundreds. Other scientists have seen them; they have been found all over the world. Sometimes they are as large as billiard balls, but it seems impossible to grasp them, though they will drift within a few inches.

Apparently they are cold, phosphorescent, rather than flames. This is about all scientists know.

—*J. W. Holden.*

The Monster of the Lagoon

By GEORGE F. WORTS

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

THE queerest, most terrifying monster the world had ever known was what Singapore Sammy Shay and his fellow adventurers found in the lagoon on the island of Little Nicobar, in the South Seas. Sammy and his partner, Lucky Jones, had gone to the island in search of pearls. Professor Bryce Robbins, who had chartered their schooner, the Blue Goose, was interested only in the scientific aspects of the case.

After two encounters, in which two of the members of the expedition were lost, Professor Robbins declared that the monster was a huge amœba, big as a house, and that it apparently thrived only in the waters of the lagoon. It had an insatiable appetite for flesh, and was apparently indestructible.

Other members of the party were Laughing Larry McGurk, mate of the Blue Goose, a fellow who apparently couldn't be killed, although doctors had said that he had only two more months to live; Hector Barling, who had brought his yacht, the Wanderer, to the island to join in the hunt; Julie Farrington, who was so pretty she had all of the men excited about her, and who had come to the Orient with her mother as Barling's guest.

Jason Rebb, a white man who called himself king of the natives on Little Nicobar, invited Julie, Barling and Larry ashore one night to witness a native dance. With the dance at its height, Rebb suddenly declared his intention of making Julie queen of the island.

Laughing Larry McGurk, trapped by a South Seas king, gets a chance to prove if he is "the guy who can't be killed"

He shot out of the water fantastically

This story began in the Argosy for February 23

CHAPTER XIX *(Continued).*

DEVIL DANCE.

LARRY McGURK was not at all afraid for himself. He was a man who had been forced to accept the fact that he was to die very soon. He wished there was some way in which he could deliver Julie from this predicament. If he could do that, he would die gladly.

Suddenly, in the midst of these somber reflections, he grinned. It was a hard and ferocious grin.

He said to Rebb, "You call yourself a magician! I'm going to make you look like a tinhorn! Tell 'em that! Tell 'em I'm the man who can't be killed. Tell 'em I defy 'em to kill me! They can't do it! Tell 'em!" And over his shoulder, "Beat it!"

Julie whimpered, "I won't desert you!"

"Barling, get her out of here! Get her aboard that boat!"

Jason Rebb did not hear this. The king of Little Nicobar was shouting at the semicircle of spearmen. He was evidently translating Larry's boast. For the black men were beginning to laugh. And those who had spears grasped them firmly and advanced on Larry McGurk.

Larry had wanted to focus all attention upon himself. He had succeeded. For he was aware that Julie no longer clutched him. He assumed that Mr. Barling had acted without hesitation, and that he and Julie were making their way toward safety.

Though he was sweating a little, he wasn't afraid. But his stomach shrank as several of the spearmen raised their spears to the throwing position—slightly above and off the shoulder.

Jason Rebb shouted a curt order. A spear plunged through the air. It started, accurately enough, for Larry's chest. Then it was as if some magic diverted it in its flight. Mysteriously, the throw was wild—by inches.

A yell went up. That had been, of course, an accident. The next spear grazed his chest on the left side, but it drew no blood. The dancers were stopping now, gathering about, grinning, watching the warriors at their target practice.

Mr. Rebb shouted wrathfully. A third spear, at the moment of leaving a tall, black man's hand, seemed to slip. At all events, it plunged into the ground between Larry McGurk's feet.

A fourth spear whizzed past his neck, but did not even tick him. And now there was bedlam.

The king of Little Nicobar was roaring. He snatched the cutlass from the ground and sprang at Larry, swinging the wicked, curved sword over his head. A spear handle thumped on Jason Rebb's head as he swung the blade. He fell to the ground at Larry's feet and lay there, unconscious.

The black giant who had hurled the last spear plucked from his loin cloth a knife with a bone handle. The blade, narrow and wickedly curved, like the blade of the Malay *parang,* was a full ten inches in length.

With a savage yell he hurled himself at Larry McGurk, his eyes smoky-red, saliva frothing from his thick, dull-red lips.

It was more than Larry McGurk could stand—but he stood it. He could feel the bite of that wicked blade in his heart. But, once again, providence magically intervened. The black giant, racing toward him, unexpectedly caught one foot in the protruding loop of a root.

He went crashing to the ground. The knife, clutched in his big fist, struck the ground four inches from Larry's foot.

But it did not strike into the ground. The keen blade struck a stone—and snapped off at the hilt!

And when the mass of yelling black men and women saw this, the yelling stopped. A sound like a deep, unearthly moan rose from the islanders. A woman ran forward, snatched up the bladeless handle and held it above her head with a shriek. Then she grovelled at Larry McGurk's feet.

THE moan persisted. It was like the humming of a million bees. The tribe of Little Nicobar dropped to knees and elbows and noses and grovelled before

Larry, as if he were a god—or a demon. And above the moaning, he heard Hector Barling's faraway yells. Larry was starting to back away, down the path. He supposed Hector Barling and Julie had been captured. Abandoning his leisurely retreat, he turned to run. He collided with Julie.

"I couldn't go! " she cried. "I couldn't leave you! "

"Barling? "

"He went when you told him to—ran! "

"Come on! "

And as they ran, Jason Rebb came drunkenly to his feet and staggered down the path after them.

But Hector Barling had not been captured. He had reached the tender and was screaming at them in a panic to hurry.

The engine was purring when Larry and Julie reached the boat. Larry gave it a heavy shove, when Julie had climbed in, and jumped aboard.

"My God! " Hector Barling shrilled. "I thought you'd never come! "

The king of Little Nicobar came running into view. As the boat backed swiftly into deep water, he ran down to the edge of the beach, waving his arms and hoarsely shouting.

The crack of a rifle behind him deafened Larry's left ear.

Mr. Barling was clumsily holding the rifle with the aid of his bandaged-and-splintered arm. As Larry glanced at him, the automatic rifle cracked thrice, swiftly.

The king of Little Nicobar plunged forward and buried his face to the ears in the water and lay there.

Mr. Barling shouted exultantly, "I got him, I got him! "

Larry barked: "You damned fool! Why did you do that? "

"Why did I do it? " the patent medicine king crowed. "He had it coming, didn't he? He was going to kill us and take Julie, wasn't he? Wasn't it justice?"

"There's no telling what that mob will do," Larry said. "We're going to have enough trouble without them."

Julie said, "You didn't have to shoot him, Hector. After all, we were safe."

Mr. Barling blew up. He raved. His nervous system had collapsed after last night's adventure. Tonight's excitement had shattered him again. He called Larry a conceited ass and a smart Aleck. Julie, in hysterics, laughed and sobbed.

"A show-off! " Mr. Barling yelled at Larry. "That's all you are! The man who can't be killed! "

"Oh, let's drop it," Larry said.

"Oh, no! We won't drop it! " the millionaire panted. "I see right through you. I see through both of you."

Julie stopped sobbing to say, "Oh, stop talking like a lunatic."

"I'm not crazy enough not to know the truth when I see it. And I defy you to deny it! "

"What? " Julie wailed.

"That you're madly in love with him—and he's just as goofy about you! "

"Who? "

"This fellow here! "

"Larry? "

"Yes—Larry! "

"Oh, you poor sap," Larry groaned. "In love with me? Don't you know I'm going to be dead in a month? "

"What difference does that make? "

"Hector," Julie said, "stop being an ass."

"It's true! "

"It isn't true. You're crazy."

"You don't love him? "

"No, no, no. Calm down."

But Mr. Barling did not, or could not, calm down. He shook and shivered and jabbered and babbled. Most of it didn't make sense.

"When you get him aboard," Larry said, "you'd better have the doctor give him a shot."

He saw them safely aboard the Wanderer, rowed back to the schooner, and made his report to Sam Shay.

"We ought to pull out," the red-headed man said. "The expedition is jinxed. We've lost three good men. Lucky and Bryce are at each other's throat. Barling has cracked wide open. Julie has gone primitive on us. But," he said grimly, "we aren't pulling out. Before we leave this

damned place, we're going to get what we came for—the Dutchman's pearls and a live sample of that murdering jellyfish! "

CHAPTER XX.

LARRY SWIMS IN.

EARLY the next morning Julie came over to the Blue Goose. Obviously, she hadn't slept. There were dark patches under her eyes, her lips were pale, her face was wan.

Larry went below and brought her a cup of strong black coffee and told her to drink it down. She asked him what they were going to do.

" Sam says we stay."

" So does Hector. He's a madman. He didn't sleep a wink. He paced up and down the deck. He got me out and made a fool of himself. He had the wireless operator up all night. He's snapping everybody's head off. Poor Dr. Plank came on deck for the first time today. He wanted to give Hector morphine or something to quiet him. Hector insulted him. It was awful. And of course mother's having one attack of hysterics after another."

The tender, having left Julie on the schooner, had returned to the yacht. It was coming back to the Blue Goose. And in the stern squatted Mr. Barling. He clutched a handful of yellow sheets of paper, which he brandished. He came up the schooner's ladder, waving them.

He yelled at Julie: " Look at this! Here's your sweetheart! "

Julie wearily asked him what he was talking about.

" I got a report on him from my Chicago office," Mr. Barling cried. " I've got all the dope on him! "

" On whom?"

" This Laughing Larry of yours! "

" You promised not to use the wireless."

" Never mind that. Nothing but a mate on a filthy old ore carrier! "

" Is that a disgrace? " Julie cried.

" Ah! Then you admit you're in love with him! "

" I admit nothing of the kind. I am not in love with him. Or anybody else."

" That—that business last night! " Mr. Barling panted. " Just showing off! That's all! Just a show-off! Oh, it makes me sick. It makes me nauseated."

" Well," Julie said, in a calm voice, " he got away with it, Hector. You must admit he saved our lives."

" The man who can't be killed! " Hector sneered.

" Shut up," Julie said. " Everybody's nerves are snapping. It isn't fair to take your grouch out on everybody else. Go on back to your yacht."

" And sail away," Larry said.

" You'd like me to, wouldn't you? You'd like to see me sail away and leave her here! " He uttered bitter, mirthless laughter. " So you're the fellow who can't be killed! "

" That's right," Larry said stolidly. " Bandits tried it. Sharks tried it. A tiger tried it. A cobra tried it. Natives with spears tried it. Why don't you try it, you pompous little pipsqueak? "

" All right! " Mr. Barling cried. " Let's give it a real test! Let's see you swim across the lagoon! Let's let that monster try it! "

" Don't be an ass! " Julie said.

" You don't dare! " Mr. Barling shouted. " I'll bet you don't! "

LARRY began unbuttoning his shirt. " How much'll you bet?"

" One — million — dollars! But maybe dirty deckhands on filthy ore carriers don't save that much! "

" No," Larry said. " This dirty deckhand doesn't happen to have that much."

" All right. I'll leave you a million in my will if you swim to the middle of that lagoon and come back alive! " He laughed again.

Bryce came on deck. He, too, was pale and irritable.

" Sam says to cut it out," he said. " Sam says to tell you you're all screwy and to get drunk or do something."

"Listen, fellow," Larry said. "This

pompous little squirt bets me a million I can't swim the lagoon."

"I heard him. Anybody within ten miles heard him."

"But I haven't a million, so he'll leave me a million in his will. A month is a long time. I have a hunch I'm going to outlive him. You know all about wills. Draw up a document. Make it legal and binding. I have a hunch I can spend a lot of that million—"

Julie angrily broke in: "Don't be idiots!"

"I can't get killed," Larry said. "I've tried every way there is. I'm not afraid of that thing. Draw it up."

Bryce went below. They heard Sam roaring at him. Bryce came above with paper and ink and a pen. He drew up the strange document.

Julie cried, "Larry, you're not going into that lagoon!"

His eyes were hard and his lips were thin.

Bryce said: "Sign it, Barling."

Mr. Barling signed it. Bryce witnessed it. Larry was taking off his clothes. He removed everything but his underclothes.

Julie wailed: "Larry, you can't do it!" And when she saw that he meant to go through with this suicidal plan, she ran down to Sam's cabin.

He was sitting up in his bunk, with his feet on the floor.

She cried: "Sam! You've got to stop him!"

"I'll try," Sam said. With an effort, he stood up. Groaning, he started for the stairs, with Julie helping him.

They were halfway up when they heard the splash as Larry McGurk dived. When they reached the bows, where Mr. Barling and the scientist were standing, Larry was swimming toward the inlet. Julie screamed at him to stop, but he did not even look around. He was using a trudgeon, pulling his powerful brown body through the water with long, sure strokes.

The tide was beginning to ebb, but the current was not strong enough to retard him. Julie dropped her elbows to the rail and buried her face in her hands. She would not look. She could not look.

"That's number four," Singapore said.

"Five," Bryce said. "Or don't we count the king of Little Nicobar?"

Julie took her hands from her eyes. The world was swimming. Her heart was beating slowly, like a gong, in her chest. She felt her strength, like a current, oozing out of her arms and legs. She could feel perspiration gathering, wet and clammy, on her upper lip and her forehead and the palms of her hands. She fought off faintness. Through a reeling blue-and-white blur she saw the bronzed arms of the swimmer against the heavenly blue of the lagoon.

Singapore Sammy dropped his arm clumsily about her shoulders and gave her a hug.

"Don't take it so tough, baby," he said. "How do you know he didn't want it to happen like this—quick?"

Julie leaned heavily against Sam and watched the swimmer.

"Maybe he'll make it," she whispered.

THE man who couldn't be killed did not reach the center of the lagoon, which was more than a half mile from the inlet. When he was less than a third of the way, there was a sudden disturbance in the water all about him—such as is made by a school of small fish trying to escape from a larger fish—a rippling commotion.

And he instantly vanished, as the sea gulls had vanished, as if a great hand had reached up and plucked him below the surface.

Julie's weight against Sam's side had become complete. She had fainted and was limp in his arm.

Sam tightened his hold and watched the lagoon.

"That's all," he said.

But the agitation in the water had not subsided. And suddenly Larry reappeared. It was a grotesque and horrible spectacle. He was under water for fully forty seconds. And when he reappeared, it was to shoot into the air. The swiftness of his

flight, some trick of vision, made him seem twice the length of an ordinary man—twice his own length. He shot out of the water fantastically, gleaming wet in the sun. It was like the leap of a salmon after a fly.

He disappeared. Again he was under water for many seconds. And again he shot into the air, with arms flattened at his sides, his legs straight, his head thrown back. He looked as stiff, as unyielding, as a steel beam.

He disappeared again. Lucifer Jones came lurching forward. His eyes were bloodshot. He was unshaven and dirty. He stared at the group, then at the lagoon, and just then Larry McGurk was cast into the air again.

Lucky said, " That's Larry! What's the idea? "

Bryce Robbins briefly told him. Lucky looked at Barling with the brooding intensity of the very drunk. He said, " You didn't do that, did you, Barling? You didn't dare the kid to do that? "

And Mr. Barling snarled: " Go to hell! If he can't be killed, he won't be killed! "

Lucky reached out with one hand, snatched at and secured a fold of Mr. Barling's white silk shirt, lifted him off his feet—all with the one hamlike hand—and with the other he punched the patent medicine king in the nose.

Mr. Barling fell flat on his back, with arms and legs asprawl, and with blood spurting from his smashed nose.

Sam, at that instant, shouted: "Get that engine started! Bryce, help me get this anchor up! Barling, damn you, give us a hand! " He shook Julie. She opened sick eyes. Her head wobbled on her neck.

He shook her again. "He's swimming back! It didn't get him!"

Lucky, momentarily snapped into soberness, ran aft and started the engine. Oangi appeared miraculously and helped windlass the anchor in.

Larry was swimming toward the inlet. Swimming feebly. Hardly able to lift one hand ahead of the other, or to kick his legs. But he was still alive. Still swimming!

Even at that distance he looked white. His head was low in the water. His arms followed one another in the trudgen slowly, weakly, as if their strength was going fast.

But the miracle had happened. He had escaped.

They met him midway through the inlet, a swimmer spent. But he gave them a white grin as hands reached down, grabbed his hair, grabbed his shoulders.

Utterly spent, he was hauled aboard. Ah Fong met him at the rail with his bathrobe and wrapped it about him.

AND then Julie proved herself a liar. She refuted what she had been solemnly swearing. She pushed the rest of them aside and gathered the limp swimmer into her arms and said, " Oh, my darling, my darling! I was so afraid! "

She cuddled his head to her breast and kissed him. And Mr. Barling, holding a silk handkerchief to his smashed nose, bleated: " Hah! I told you so! She's madly in love with him! "

" I admit it," Julie said.

" But he's still a liar," Larry muttered.

" Don't say you don't love me! " Julie wailed.

" Yes, I will. I like you. I like you a lot. But I don't love you."

" You're a liar," Julie said. " You love me."

" Try," Sammy said wearily, " and make her believe you don't. If you do, you don't know Julie."

Bryce Robbins was staring at him, and staring at Julie with eyes of amazement and shock. He said queerly: " Here's your million-dollar will, mate."

Larry took the fantastic document and looked at it, and looked at Mr. Barling. "All I've got to do now," he said, "is kill you, Barling."

And the patent medicine monarch panted, "It wouldn't do you much good, would it? "

" Rub it in! " Julie said angrily.

Larry went limping aft and below to get dressed. His left knee was wrenched and beginning to swell. But aside from this,

he had escaped from that astonishing encounter unharmed. The strange destiny which watched over the life of Laughing Larry McGurk was still, ironically, guiding and guarding him.

CHAPTER XXI.

WAR CANOES.

TROUBLE was brewing in many quarters. It was in the air, like the sensation of thickness, of tensely-drawn electricity, before a thunder storm. To Singapore Sammy, trying to think clearly, the situation was comparable to that in a volcanic area which has given warnings of eruption.

With Julie's emotional declaration of her love for Larry McGurk, the situation was made even more delicate and dangerous. Bryce Robbins was infatuated with the brown-eyed blond girl. So was Lucky Jones. Heretofore, these two men had been on the friendliest terms with Larry. Now they suddenly hated him. Under the present nervous stress, anything might happen.

And Mr. Barling had definitely shown his intention to make trouble. He was going to stay. He said he was going to stay to the bitter end, and he meant it. And a man in his nervous condition might do anything.

One by one, Sammy had seen his little company go haywire. Bryce Robbins, the cold scientist, was now a creature of uncontrolled impulses. Lucifer Jones, always so dependable, had cracked, too. Julie, once a gay and lighthearted companion, was now the victim of a dangerous restlessness and recklessness—in love with a man who could live no longer than a month. It was enough to crack the morale of any girl. Just the same, Sammy wished she hadn't cracked. Even Larry, on whose level-headedness Sam would have banked his last dollar, had gone haywire. Deliberately swimming into that lagoon! Taking that idiotic dare!

Sam had the feeling that hell was going to pop at any moment; that he would see murder before this ill-fated expedition upanchored and sailed away.

Trouble came from an unexpected source. Oangi came gibbering aft at tiffin time. The Kanaka sailor was flinging his arms toward the island, but what he said was too incoherent to make sense. They were having tiffin under the afterdeck awning. The tide had swung the schooner around, so that the stern pointed toward the Wanderer and the barrier reef.

Sammy hobbled forward to investigate. He saw five large war canoes, bristling with spears, making out from the mangrove point. The canoes were loaded with men whose faces were painted with white and blue and red.

As Sam returned aft, he called to Larry to break out the machine guns. Obviously, the warriors of Little Nicobar were on their way to avenge the death of their white chieftain.

The five canoes crossed the schooner's bows a full quarter mile away. They were headed for the Wanderer. They had presumably been watching, and knew that the murderer of their white chief was aboard the Diesel yacht.

And apparently the crew of the yacht were fully aware of the impending danger. Sammy saw men running about the decks. Some had guns in their hands. And Mr. Barling was running about among them shouting orders. His voice was once again shrill with hysteria.

The five great canoes—each of them was possibly seventy feet long—were approaching abreast and about forty feet apart. It was their apparent intention to mass their attack, to swarm upon the Wanderer and no doubt to annihilate everyone aboard.

THE five canoes were about a quarter of a mile away from the Wanderer when a machine gun on her bridge began rattling. Sammy, watching through his glasses, saw that the gun was in the hands of Captain Milikin, and he was relieved; for Captain Milikin was a cool-thinking, solid individual.

The water across the bows of the five war canoes was suddenly a-churn with

plunging lead. There was immediate confusion aboard the war canoes. Spears waved and wabbled as men scrambled about. But Sammy was certain that none of the bullets had entered the boats; that Captain Milikin had merely wished to show the black warriors that it would be imprudent to venture closer.

That sensible idea was not, however, being shared by Mr. Barling. Five boatloads of savages had the effrontery to threaten his life! And he was evidently determined to show them what happened to men insolent enough to threaten the life of Hector T. Barling.

Sammy watched that pantomime on the Wanderer's beautiful flying bridge. Mr. Barling started emptying a gun at the boats. Captain Milikin knocked the muzzle of the gun upward with his fist.

But some damage had been done. Several of the black men had fallen to the bottom of the boat at which Mr. Barling had shot.

The five boats had stopped their advance. The paddlers were evidently demoralized. By this time, Captain Milikin had disarmed his owner, and Mr. Barling had disappeared from the bridge.

No more shots were fired. It took the natives upwards of half an hour to restore order. And when their yelling and milling about had stopped, and the paddlers resumed their work, the canoes were put about and headed back to the point.

Julie had gone to the Wanderer for tiffin. She returned during the siesta hour with a report on Mr. Barling's latest outbreak.

" He wanted to wipe them out. He wanted Captain Milikin to break out the one-pounder he carries and shoot grapnel at them—destroy every one. But Captain Milikin is sensible. He had a talk with Dr. Plank, and they practically used force in giving Hector some kind of hypodermic injection—morphine or something to calm him down. He's a lot calmer, but he's still dangerous. I think this is the first time in his life anybody ever really opposed him. Certainly, he's never had any real excitement before. And it's too much for him."

Sammy asked her how her mother was.

" In bed—prostrated. All she can do is wring her hands and whimper. Hector almost struck her when she begged him to leave this place and go home."

" Why," Sammy drawled, " didn't you back her up?"

" Do you think I'd go—now?" Julie cried.

" I'd like to see you get that little squirt away from here," Sammy said.

" But he wouldn't dream of it, Sammy. Don't you realize that he can't go—that he's got to stay? It's in his blood now. It's like dope."

" It's worse than dope," Sam said. " What's he planning to do? "

" He has ordered the captain to have the crew serve day and night as sentries. Larry," she said suddenly, " I want to talk to you."

SAMMY watched them go forward. He hadn't liked the feverish look in Julie's eyes, the wild flush in her cheeks. Larry, however, appeared to be calm, restrained, uneasy.

Lucky snarled, " Watch that guy be noble! "

And Bryce said coldly, " What would you do in his boots? "

"I'd grab her if I was gonna kick off tomorrow! If she was as nuts about me as that, I'd make hay till the sun went out! "

" Perhaps his principles happen to differ from yours."

" Is that a dirty crack? "

" You can take it as you wish."

Both men had clenched fists. Sammy said, " Step it down, you lunks. I'll have no more fighting on this ship."

The two men glared at him, but the tension was momentarily broken. Bryce went to his cabin and Lucky went aft to sulk.

Julie came aft, alone, a few minutes later. Her head was high, her face was pale, her eyes were blazing. She evidently intended to pass by Sam without speaking.

He said, " Baby, you ought to know better."

She whirled on him. Her eyes filled with tears. She sniffled. "S-Sam, you—you talk to him."

"What's the good? He's a decent lad. I don't pretend to be as decent as he is, but I'd do the same."

"Captain Milikin could marry us!"

"Sure—and then what? You'd have him for a month—or less. You'd see him sicken and die, as he's going to. You couldn't help. He'd die—and there'd never be room in your life for another man."

"I don't care!"

"You would later. Larry sees that. There aren't many men in this world decent enough to do what he's doing."

"He says he doesn't love me."

"Maybe he doesn't."

"He's lying! O-h-h-h-h, Sam!" She almost fell into his arms. She sobbed. He patted her shoulder. She lifted a tear-streaked face and howled, "Oh, I love him so!"

Sam said uncomfortably, "I don't know what to do about it. If you were a man, I'd tell you to get plastered. I don't know what to tell you. But go ahead and have a good cry. Listen! Listen to that! War drums!"

She stopped crying. She went to the taffrail, where Lucky stood glowering at the island. The sound of the drums was actually something less than sound. Rather, it was a soft, measured thudding on some sense below hearing. It was like the steady beating of a heart, yet its rhythm was as genuinely barbaric as the festival of the juggernaut.

Tumpa-tump - tump — *tumpa* - tump-tump.

"You'll hear it," Sam said, "for a long time. It'll get into your brain and into your blood. Fifty years from now, if you listen right, you'll hear that drum. It's worse than that bird in Siam—The Bird That Beats on Gold." He sighed. "It's going to help a lot."

"What will they do?"

"After a few hours of it, you won't mind what they do—if they'll only stop that drum. But they won't. We'll hear that drum till we leave—if we're lucky enough to leave."

JULIE returned to the Wanderer soon afterward. She told Sam she intended to lock herself in her room, with the phonograph, turn it on, and have hysterics until she felt better.

He went to the head of the ladder with her and said quietly, "Listen, kid. I suppose I'm a sap to say such a thing, but can't you—couldn't you use will power or something? You're going to make it pretty tough for Larry."

"No," she said firmly. "I love him."

"Yeah. You must."

"You—you can't realize how it is, Sam. You—you can't understand. From the minute I saw him in the Mudhole! Why do you suppose I stowed away? I'd follow him to the end of the earth! Don't you suppose I'd help it if I could? Feeling as I do, what do you suppose I've been through since I came aboard? I wasn't going to say anything. I swore I wouldn't. But when he swam into the lagoon, I knew I couldn't keep it a secret any longer. How do you suppose I felt?"

"It's tough, Julie."

"I love him so damned much! Just the way he holds a cigarette. The lazy way he looks out over the sea. The way he holds his hands when he's at the wheel. And his voice. And his shoulders. And his eyes. And his sense of humor. Lord!—and you tell me to use will power!"

She ran down the stairs to the platform and went aboard the tender. Watching it go, Sammy felt low and pretty useless. Yet he said nothing to Larry McGurk. Larry was handling the problem as a man should handle it.

The drums made Sam uneasy and restless. He had heard such drums before, once in Borneo, once in Papua. They got under your skin and into your sleep. Even the most civilized ears, attuned to that dull, constant pulsing of sound, would know its meaning. Their tempo was the slow, insinuating tempo of menace. You did not grow used to it. It was as insistent,

as ruthless as the gnawing of an insect buried in your flesh.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MAD SCHEME.

ALL that night, men armed with machine guns patrolled the deck of the Wanderer, and from dusk to dawn the searchlight on her bridge sent its blue-white beam swivelling about the water. And all that night the drums beat out their slow, deliberate rhythm.

Mr. Barling visited the Blue Goose shortly after breakfast. His eyes had a glazed look, his movements were slow and curiously measured, and Sammy correctly assumed that the patent medicine king was under the influence of sedatives.

These sedatives, whatever they may have been, had taken the rough edge off Mr. Barling's hysteria, but he was still in an ugly mood.

The man was touchy and irritable. He flared into bursts of petty rage at the slightest provocation.

It was all keyed to a single obsession. All the hatred stored up in him, all his resentments—the resentments, it seemed, of a lifetime—were directed against the murderous thing in the lagoon. It was an epic hatred—a seething, blistering hatred. Everyone in contact with him was scorched, as bystanders might be scorched by flames from the mouth of a cannon fired at a distant target.

Foremost among them was Bryce Robbins. For it was Mr. Barling's fierce and fixed purpose to destroy the thing in the lagoon.

Their discussion became a wrangle which went on for hours. Lucky Jones sided with Mr. Barling. He, too, had a truly blasphemous hatred of the hungry, nameless monster. He disapproved of Bryce's plan to secure a live portion of it to take back to civilization. He wanted to blow it to smithereens.

Singapore Sammy and Larry McGurk sided with Bryce Robbins. And from time to time that argument had the aspects of a pitched battle, with men shouting and yelling insults and taunts and curses.

It went on through tiffin and lasted well into the afternoon. The scientist, the red-headed man and the man who couldn't be killed stood their ground, and, in the end, won.

The ravenous beast of the lagoon was not to be killed!

"But we are to waste no more time," Mr. Barling said. "I will place the Wanderer across the inlet, as close inshore as it is safe. We will study it. We will somehow lure it aboard the Wanderer, into the swimming tank. The tank is large enough to hold all of it, or most of it. Once it's aboard, we will sail immediately for New York. Is that satisfactory?"

"Having that thing aboard, in that tank," Sammy said, "will be worse than having a tiger by the tail. But it's your risk. I wouldn't have more than a hundred pounds of it aboard this schooner. It's powerful."

"So's the tank."

"How'll you get it in?"

"Easy! Get it used to meat. Put meat over. Lure it aboard! I'll have the engineers reënforce the hatch covering. We'll leave a hole in the hatch—and fill the tank with meat and all the fish we can catch. We'll lay a trail of meat to the hole, and it will pour itself inside. Once we have it inside, we'll slam a lid over that hole. Trapped!"

Sam said dubiously: "According to Bryce, it won't live in ordinary sea water."

"That's easy," said Mr. Barling. "Once it's in the tank, we'll take the Wanderer into the lagoon and pump that tank full of lagoon water. And we have enough storage tanks on board for a fresh supply."

"How will you transfer it when you reach New York?"

"That's a problem for clever engineers to worry about."

"How does your crew feel about staying here?"

"My crew feels as intensely as I do about it. They want the thing killed. But I can talk them around to this. What they really want is action."

"They're going to get plenty," Larry predicted.

THE Wanderer's anchorage was changed that afternoon. She was placed across the inlet, a few hundred feet offshore, with bow and stern anchors down so that she would not swing ashore with the changing tides. And her crew fell in readily with Mr. Barling's rather mad plan. All but the captain. Captain Milikin declared that he had had a premonition, a dream in which he had seen that horrible thing swarm aboard and devour them all.

But Mr. Barling's scheme to strengthen the hatch cover of the tank was enthusiastically carried out by his engineers. They strengthened it to such a degree that even Sammy was forced to admit that it might hold the monster, although he was still dubious of the plan. It took the engine-room crew five days to complete their work.

And in this time, a number of interesting facts were discovered concerning that diabolical mass of hungry protoplasm in the lagoon. One was that it could be enticed out of the lagoon if the tide was ebbing, so that the sea water was sufficiently diluted with lagoon water. Another was that it had apparently centered on Julie as the tidbit it wanted most!

This discovery was made soon after the monster began making daylight appearances. Ordinarily, it spent most of its time in the precise center of that round body of water. But when the crew of the yacht began throwing in chunks of meat and fish which they had caught, the filmy gray mass would come into the inlet, provided the tide was ebbing. It could be seen clearly in the water, a shapeless mass, always changing, always shooting out and drawing in its cloudlike tentacles, searching, always searching for food.

Mr. Barling had organized regular fishing expeditions He had excellent deep-sea gear. And every day, several of the crew would go to the barrier reef in the tender. In an hour of fishing, they would always fill two or more barrels with their catch.

First Mate McTavish rigged up an ingenious catapult, by which a thirty-pound fish could be hurled several hundred feet. With this device, fish were hurled to the monster. And it was always fascinating to watch. A fish would be hurled. It would strike the water, say, a hundred feet from the monster. Instantly, often before the fish landed, a tentacle would shoot out and seize and ingest the fish. Then the tentacle would leisurely return and be absorbed by the central mass.

When no fish were being thrown, the filmy, horrible body would lie there, close to the surface, moving about with an awful restiveness. And one day Mr. Barling discovered that the thing became curiously agitated whenever Julie walked along the deck. It would shoot out long tentacles following her passage, no matter whether she was alone or in the company of someone, and no matter how many accompanied her or were scattered along the rail.

Mr. Barling thought at first that it was due to the color of the pajamas Julie was wearing when he made the discovery. They were of satin, with a sapphire-blue top and white trousers. Dismayed by the monster's particular interest in her, Julie was reluctant to try experiments, but she finally consented. And she proved that it made no difference what color clothes she wore.

Mr. Barling even tried others in Julie's clothes. A small deckhand walked up and down the deck in the blue-and-white pajamas—and the waiting monster paid no heed. But when Julie appeared on deck in pink pajamas, it instantly became excited.

Its agitation every time she appeared was very pronounced. And no question could exist that that revolting, jellylike mass in the lagoon wanted Julie more than it wanted anything.

Mr. Barling said, "We could use you, Julie, to lure it aboard."

And she said hysterically, "I honestly believe you would! I honestly believe you'd sacrifice anybody for this mania! "

YET Julie was not the only person singled out by the monster. It grew to know Mr. Barling, too, and in the most amazing way. Mr. Barling, as Sammy

learned much later, could not quite restrain his hatred of the thing, nor could he put down impulses, typical of him, to express that hatred.

Secretly, he would slip out of his suite, in the dead of night, and, with the catapult, would hurl at the monster various edibles—chunks of meat from the diminishing store in the great refrigerators, and fish.

On several occasions he catapulted to that malignant mass chunks of beef in which he had wrapped up several pounds of dry mustard. And on several occasions, he disemboweled a large bonita and filled it with red pepper.

On receipt of these delicacies, the monster would go into a sensational fury. It would lash about until the water resembled green flames.

And amazingly enough, it identified Mr. Barling as the perpetrator of these insults. Thus it was that when Mr. Barling appeared on deck, it would seem to grow frantic. It would shoot out tentacles and lash the water into foam. But this was different from its agitation when it "saw" or "felt" Julie's presence on the yacht's deck. It reacted to her in a sinisterly deliberate way, as if it merely hungered for her. Mr. Barling, however, it seemed to wish to destroy.

The work of the engineroom crew was finally finished. The hatch covering the steel swimming tank was so strong, at least in Mr. Barling's estimation, that no creature on earth could dislodge it. At one end of it, in the center, a hole had been cut in a steel plate an inch thick. Through this hole, if Mr. Barling's plan worked, the giant amœba would flow, in seeking the food with which the tank was to be filled. An electro-magnet, actually a solenoid, had been rigged there, so that the closing of a switch would shoot a thick bolt over the hole, covering it and blocking any attempt on the part of the monster at escaping. This bolt was operated electrically by remote control. One switch was on the bridge, the other on the boat deck, aft.

Unknown to them at the time, the changing of the Wanderer's anchorage had accidentally furthered Mr. Barling's mad scheme. It blocked the entrance of the lagoon to a certain extent, so that the tidal currents themselves were diverted, making it more difficult, or inconvenient, for fish to swim in. So, little by little, the monster's food supply was curtailed, and by the time Mr. Barling was ready to trap it, its hunger had increased to the point where it would go well out of its way for any food.

Unaware of this, however, Mr. Barling planned to capture the horrible, slimy mass at night. He reasoned that it was always bolder in the night, although Bryce Robbins argued that it was not a case of boldness but of the creature's sensitivity to the direct rays of the sun. He maintained that it shrank from direct sunlight.

IN any event, having decided upon the night for the capture, Mr. Barling proceeded with his elaborate plans. Ever since the yacht had anchored across the entrance to the inlet, the monster had become bolder and bolder. At least it had, day by day, been coming closer and closer for the fish and chunks of meat the sailors catapulted to it. One afternoon, when Julie appeared on deck, the great filmy, slimy mass surged out of the inlet and a large cluster of tentacles shot out from the central mass to within forty feet of the Wanderer's hull.

With a shriek, Julie ran into the music room. Mr. Barling, however, was wildly enthusiastic. He marked the time: two forty-five. The tide was ebbing rapidly, so that it could be assumed that the water all about the yacht was strongly diluted with lagoon water. Tonight's ebb-tide, occurring approximately twelve hours later, would set the time for the experiment at between two-thirty and three.

Mr. Barling laid his plans accordingly. All of the crew of the Blue Goose, with the exception of Ah Fong, who remained aboard with a machine gun in case the natives made a surprise attack, came aboard the yacht.

All afternoon the crew of the Wanderer

fished at the barrier reef. At dusk they came in with their catch—eight barrels of assorted deep-sea fish. Seven barrels were emptied into the tank. The other barrel was used for bait. A one-inch Manila line a thousand feet long had been softened by soaking and stretching. It was the baitline. At yard intervals along it, hunks of meat and whole fish were lashed with twine.

During the making tide, just before sunset, Mr. Barling set the baitline. At the outer end of the baitline was fastened a small kedge anchor. The other end of the line was made fast to a cleat set for the purpose in the hatch cover close to the small hole through which, if all went well, the monster would flow. And—again if all went well — the investigating tentacle would reach the hole and sense the presence of the great store of food in the tank.

With the inboard end of the line made fast to the cleat, Mr. Barling coiled up the thousand feet of line, with bait lashed in place, into the tender. Then, with the tender slowly moving toward the lagoon, he payed out the line. When the end of it was reached, he dropped the kedge anchor. Theoretically, the hungry monster would work tentacles up the long line and eventually work itself entirely aboard and into the tank.

It was the opinion of the assembled company, with the lone exception of Singapore Sammy, that Mr. Barling's scheme was wonderful. Sammy took exception to it on the ground that the monster might not be so readily managed. True, it might come aboard the yacht. But suppose it decided not to flow into the tank? Suppose it decided on a tour of inspection first?

But he was quite alone in that opinion. Even Mrs. Farrington, after three days of hysterics, had fallen into the universal madness and was anxious to see the monster captured. The persistent beating of the drums seemed to soothe that high-strung lady. While the sound irritated the others and made them restless and touchy, that unremitting pulsing had a curiously calming effect on her. True, she would burst into tears on little provocation; but for the most part she entered into the spirit of the game—what Mr. Barling called "the greatest fishing expedition the world has ever known"—and she even worked the catapult and screamed with delight when the most horrible beast ever to dwell in the sea snatched and ingested the barracuda she sent it.

IT was decided that, when the zero hour approached, the decks would be cleared, and all doors closed and bolted against possible intrusion by the slimy thing. Everyone would gather on the boat deck aft, where they could overlook the arrival of the giant amœba and watch its descent into the tank. Mr. Barling was to stand beside the switch with which the hole in the hatch would be electrically sealed when all of the monster was in the tank.

Thus was Mr. Barling's mad plan executed. Flood lights were arranged over the after deck, so that the creature would be clearly seen.

At two o'clock they gathered along the rail of the boat deck. All but Dr. Plank were there. He was still confined to his bed by fever.

Cutlasses were served out, in case the monster did not go into the tank.

It was, once again, a moonless night. Close at hand, the lagoon glowed, a smoky emerald, clouded by mist from the bubbling volcanic mud pots. And once again the air was sickly sweet with the fragrance of the great orchids.

In a growing atmosphere of tension, the watchers waited. A sailor suddenly cried: " It's takin' up the slack! "

They saw the monster, deep in the water. It had dropped down for the bait nearest the lagoon. The inlet was a swift current of green fire, lashed by tentacles which were sharply delineated.

Mrs. Farrington cried: " I can't stand it! I can't stand it! " And rushed to her suite.

Sammy watched the line. There was a cry along the rail as the first fish tied to the line above water disappeared. He watched it come—an endless gray python,

six inches in diameter. It swarmed up the line, coating it, surrounding it, moving upward with a swift wriggling like that of an earthworm, with the rope as its core, absorbing fish and hunks of meat as it came.

No one was crying out now. In a hush, broken only by the heavy breathing of the watchers, that transparent, palely-gray endless python came aboard. Tentacles shot out here and there like the antennæ of a great caterpillar as it slithered across the afterdeck to the hatch. It reached the last tidbit lashed to the line. And it did not hesitate. It began to flow into the hole!

Mr. Barling gave a little gasp of gratification. His scheme was working. It was working perfectly! The monster, strung into an apparently endless rod, was coming aboard and flowing into the tank!

Sammy clocked it. It began to enter the tank at two thirty-five. For one hour and sixteen minutes that seemingly endless mass of protoplasm flowed into the tank. He began to wonder if it would never come to an end.

Try as he would, he could not consider any of it dispassionately. Occasionally, as he stared at the flowing, snake-like, wriggling thing, he saw green sparks in it, and he wondered if these were the brain cells Bryce had mentioned.

And he wondered what would happen if the great slimy mass completely filled the tank before the greater portion of it was aboard. But his fears were groundless. At precisely three fifty-one the seemingly endless python of gray, transparent slime entered the tank. The python became smaller and smaller. All of it—the very last inch of it—went into the tank.

WITH a triumphant shout, Mr. Barling closed the switch. There was a metallic thump as the stout steel bolt shot across the hole. The monster was trapped!

He cried: "We've got it! It worked! It's trapped! It's ours! "

Sammy said, "Yeah. I hope so. I certainly hope so."

Mr. Barling yelped. "Aw, don't be such a gloom. It can't get out. It's practically hermetically sealed in there. I saw to that. There isn't a crack anywhere big enough to insert a hair! "

Sammy watched the tank. He hoped Mr. Barling was right. But none of the others were so dubious. Like people suddenly and unexpectedly released from prison, they were leaping about and shouting. Julie was executing a dance, snapping her fingers, flinging her arms about. Mr. Barling was laughing like a madman, going about and thumping men on the back. Bryce Robbins was laughing hysterically.

For a few moments the unremitting sound of the drums was drowned out. The brains of the most advanced of all living creatures on earth had triumphed over the brute strength of the most horrible, most malignant creature ever to inhabit the earth or the waters of the earth.

Over the heady tumult, Mr. Barling presently made himself heard. "We're going to celebrate! We're all going to get as drunk as owls. Steward! Henry! Jim! Clyde! Bring all the liquor you can carry into the main saloon! We've won! We've won! Sam, you can get your pearls in the morning. For the first time in millions of years that lagoon is safe for any man! Tomorrow we clear for New York! When Hector T. Barling puts his mind to a job, that job gets done! Who's afraid now? "

Laughing, Julie cried, "Who's afraid of the big bad monster! "

She tossed her cutlass to the deck below, climbed over the rail and slid down a stanchion. With a shout, Mr. Barling followed. The others swarmed after him.

Mocking their enemy, taunting its malignant hunger, its horrible appetite, its hideous potentialities, Julie leaped on the hatch. She began a tap dance. Her feet twinkled and clattered. Sailors began clapping their hands in time, unaware that they were keeping time to the beat of drums.

Sam Shay was the last to join that excited mob. He did not go down a stanchion, but went forward, and down the

stairway. His back was still bothering him, and he wasn't yet up to athletics.

Walking aft, he saw, in the floodlights, the beautiful blond girl, her silver-golden hair flying about her head, her cheeks feverishly flushed, spinning and spinning and spinning on her little nimble feet.

And he saw what no one else saw at the moment. He saw that the great lid on which she danced was swelling, that it was beginning to bulge ever so slightly in the middle.

Then a deckhand saw it and shrieked: " That thing is bustin' loose! Look out! "

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MONSTER'S FURY.

NO one heard him. No one heard Singapore Sammy's shouts of warning. He ran aft and seized Julie about the waist and carried her off the hatch.

Mr. Barling was staring at the hatch with bulging eyes. Sammy grabbed his arm and the millionaire cried: " It can't get out! "

" What would it do to this ship! "

" But it can't get out! I tell you, that hatch is too strong! It's almost solid steel! "

" So was Pete Cringle's diving suit! "

There was a deep and sinister ripping sound. The hatch cover bulged more. The planks were beginning to splinter.

Sammy shouted to Julie: " There isn't time to get off the ship. Go to your room. Larry! Take her to her room! And make her stay there! Don't let her out until I tell you! "

Still under that spell, Julie cried: " What if it does bulge? It can't get out! Nothing is strong enough to get out of there! "

Larry scooped her into his arms and ran with her to the main corridor door. He vanished into the corridor and the door slammed behind him.

But none of the others had moved. As if hypnotized, as if refusing to accept the evidence of their eyes, they stood, cutlasses in hand, and watched the swelling hatch.

It burst off with a sudden explosion of splintering planks and tortured steel. It seemed to vanish into the air. Sam backed away in horror. Where the hatch cover had been was now a huge, gray, greasy bubble welling up and out.

One of the deckhands had been knocked unconscious or dead by a chunk of flying metal or wood. Unerringly, a tentacle a foot in diameter shot up from that pulsing gray pulp and enveloped him. As the *serang* of the Blue Goose had done, the unfortunate man vanished into the tentacle, his body disappearing down the tentacle in a swift stream of fragments of bone and flesh and gobbets and long threads of blood.

With the swiftness of lightning striking, the insatiable pulp in the tank reached out and dealt death and mortal injury.

Sam Shay was in the heart of it, wielding his cutlass, slashing and hacking, each effort an agony to the torn muscles in his back. It was worse than the nightmare he had gone through on the night when the Blue Goose ventured into the lagoon.

In this crowded space it was more difficult for men to escape. And the monster, at closer quarters, a more compact mass, had many of the men at its mercy.

Sammy saw Captain Milikin, a dozen feet away, entangled in at least a score of agile, milky-gray arms of the hideous stuff. The captain was a powerful man. He chopped at the tentacles, but no sooner had he freed himself of one clinging mass than other flashing, slimy arms wrapped about him.

Sammy tried to fight his way to Captain Milikin's side. Before he could reach him, he saw the captain's arms and legs disjointed, his head crunched and dissolved. In an instant, that living, breathing, gallant man was utterly non-existent.

Others were going in the same incredible, horrible way. Fighting now for his own life, Sammy saw a steward lift a steamer chair to beat off a looping tentacle. The chair vanished magically in a cloud of

splinters. The steward dived down and tried to crawl away. He was engulfed in a veritable wave of the protoplasmic slime —engulfed and absorbed!

A TENTACLE encircled Sammy's waist. He hacked it through, leaped away from snakelike reënforcements —and saw two deckhands seized by the same splaying tentacle, wrapped in a crushing embrace. Their heads vanished, their arms vanished, their torsos dissolved into the wrenching, crushing, sucking mass.

Men, screaming, were dying—and some were escaping. Sammy saw them swarming up the stanchions to the boat deck, saw slimy creepers go looping after them. A deckhand was dragged back. An oiler escaped.

A four-inch tentacle shot out of the tank and twined about Bryce Robbins' left arm between elbow and shoulder. He saw that arm wrenched and twisted and pinched off. He saw Lucky Jones do a perfect back somersault to escape a lunging, three-headed tentacle. He saw Lucky seize the scientist's legs as he sprawled back. Sam ran to them and grasped a handful of Bryce's hair.

The after deck was now clear of everyone but Bryce Robbins, Lucky and Sam Shay. The monster was coming out of the tank. A great lip of slime was welling up over the edge toward the three men.

Sam and Lucky dragged the wounded man into the corridor. They ran down the corridor to Dr. Plank's suite and ran in. As he closed and bolted the door behind him, Sam saw that the wave of slime was swiftly following, sending great tendrils and shoots into the corridor.

Dr. Plank was sitting on the edge of his bunk in pajamas, his eyes wide and his skin white and blotchy with terror.

Lucky panted: "It's coming down the corridor! Is there a way out of here?"

The sick doctor dazedly shook his head. "No, no!"

Sam helped the half-conscious scientist across the room and barked: "You've got to fix up this man quick."

The doctor staggered from the bed. He was like a man in a trance. But he fashioned a tourniquet above the amputation and checked the bleeding.

All the time he babbled. What a fool Barling had been not to get out of here when he had the chance! What would become of them now—with that hideous thing aboard?

"It won't leave until it's got all of us!"

Sammy ran back to the door and placed his ear to the panel. The doctor shrieked: "Don't open that door!"

The red-headed man had no intention of opening the door. With his ear flattened against the wood, he heard a splintering crash near by. This sound was followed by agonized screams.

Sammy had his hand on the knob. He jerked it away. Through the keyhole, a thin tentacle of the gray slime was oozing. And slime was oozing in a thin layer through the crack under the door. He trampled the stuff under his feet and kicked it about, but it continued to ooze in, yet not in dangerous quantities. Evidently this room was not its objective.

He shouted: "Is Julie's room next door?"

Dr. Plank said, "Yes. Is it going there?"

"It's broken in there! It's got her!"

"Don't open that door!" Lucky shouted.

Listening, Sam heard a steady swishing sound. The monster was flowing, writhing, wriggling through the corridor.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

EVER since we stopped offering to pay for each letter from a reader which was published in this department we have been swamped with mail. Strange as that seems, it's true! Hundreds of communications have come in to tell us about the best stories which we published during the year 1934; so many, in fact, that we now feel we know just twice as much about the kind of stories readers prefer as we knew before. But we still aren't satisfied—we want to Know All!—And so we're trying the same thing again. The deadline on letters about 1934 stories was March 9th. We have put the date ahead to August 1st; and this time we want to know what stories published since the first of January, 1935, appealed to you most.

Read the announcement at the bottom of this page. It holds something of interest to you.

IN praise of fire-fighting yarns:

Newark, N. J.

I have been reading ARGOSY for the best part of twenty years. My favorite author is F. V. W. Mason. Whenever I see his name on the cover I know I will find entertainment and amusement second to none. However, the story I liked best during the past year was "Fatal Alarm," by Karl Detzer. That tale was based on actual fact; it was convincingly told; it was exciting; and it was plausible. I learned a lot about fire-fighting and fire-fighters from reading this one serial; and the suspense in it was maintained to such a degree that I used to go down town on Tuesday nights, at midnight, in order to get the next week's copy.

J. R. SCOTT.

HE'LL take Seltzer:

Honesdale, Pa.

Now that the dollar per letter curse has been removed, we feel ourselves moved to let you have our ideas. The story that stood out last year, for real reading, was "West of Apache Pass," by Seltzer. Why? It was *different* from the usual run, its handling was different, and after all what we want is variety, which ARGOSY gives us. Well, we like it. If one likes an all-Western magazine, there are plenty of that kind on the market, or

WHAT is *your* idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.

love stories, or detective, or what have you? But for real variety let us have what you have long been serving us.

However, ARGOSY has always been remembered as a serial magazine; and try as we old-timers will, this sticks in our mind. I, for one, vote to go back to the old order and to cut out some of the complete stories. The latter are all right, but like spareribs—not much meat.

FRANK L. BENSCOTER.

DIFFERENCE of opinion:

Placerville, Calif.

I do wonder why any one will print such a miserable fool story as "Captain Long Knife," by F. V. W. Mason. That writer is a cussed fool, and his story is all rot, from start to finish. I am an old-timer in the west, and I have seen rough, uneducated men; but, believe one who knows, the roughest of men never cast slurs at a respectable woman, and the roughest of them would have championed the cause of a respectable woman, if a drunk insulted her. I hope F. V. W. Mason gets drowned before he has a chance to clutter up the ARGOSY with any more rot like this story of *Captain Long Knife*.

O. C. HAYNES.

Tucson, Ariz.

Everything considered, I find your magazine very interesting; but there is one story that I read during the past year that suits me just fine. It stands out in my memory as though I had read it but yesterday, and remember almost every detail in it. No other story has ever taken my fancy like this one, "Captain Long Knife." One of the reasons I liked it so much, I suppose, is because the story is about things that happened long ago. I like all stories that tell about people who are long since gone. My romantic nature, perhaps? I don't know.

E. WINDOLPH.

FOR fight-to-the-end fiction:

Cincinnati, O.

I've been intending to write to you for some time; and the story I want to cheer for is Theodore Roscoe's "A Grave Must Be Deep." The very name of Theodore Roscoe is enough to cause one to grab for a copy of ARGOSY.

I liked "A Grave Must Be Deep" because of its vivid and brilliant style, because of its pulsating intensity, because of its locale (even though one knows that voodooism is an absurd thing, it is something that is interesting enough for anybody to enjoy). Stories like his, the "fight-to-the-end" kind, are the kind that keep ARGOSY the magazine it is and always will be. I certainly am grateful to any writer who can lift me, even for a few minutes, out of life's drudgery and into the realms of imagination, with a story as distinguished as "A Grave Must Be Deep." You should publish more stories like it.

NATHANIEL REEVES RUTHERFORD.

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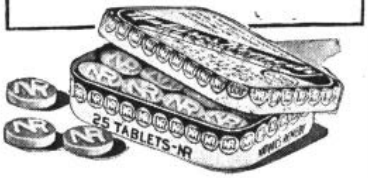

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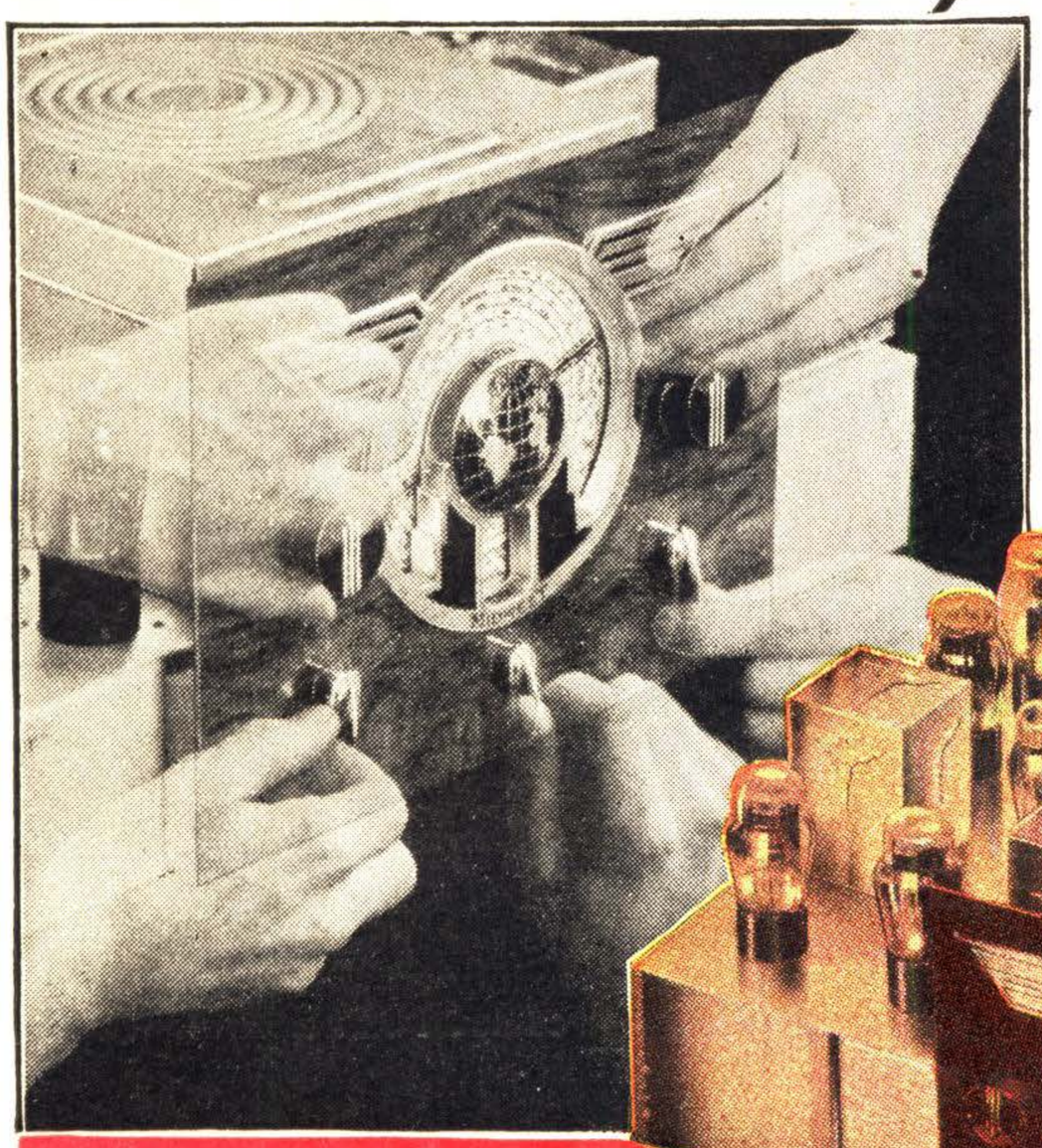

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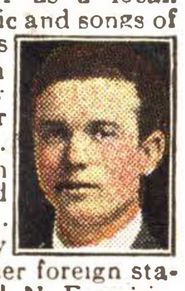

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