APR. 25, 1931

ARGOSY

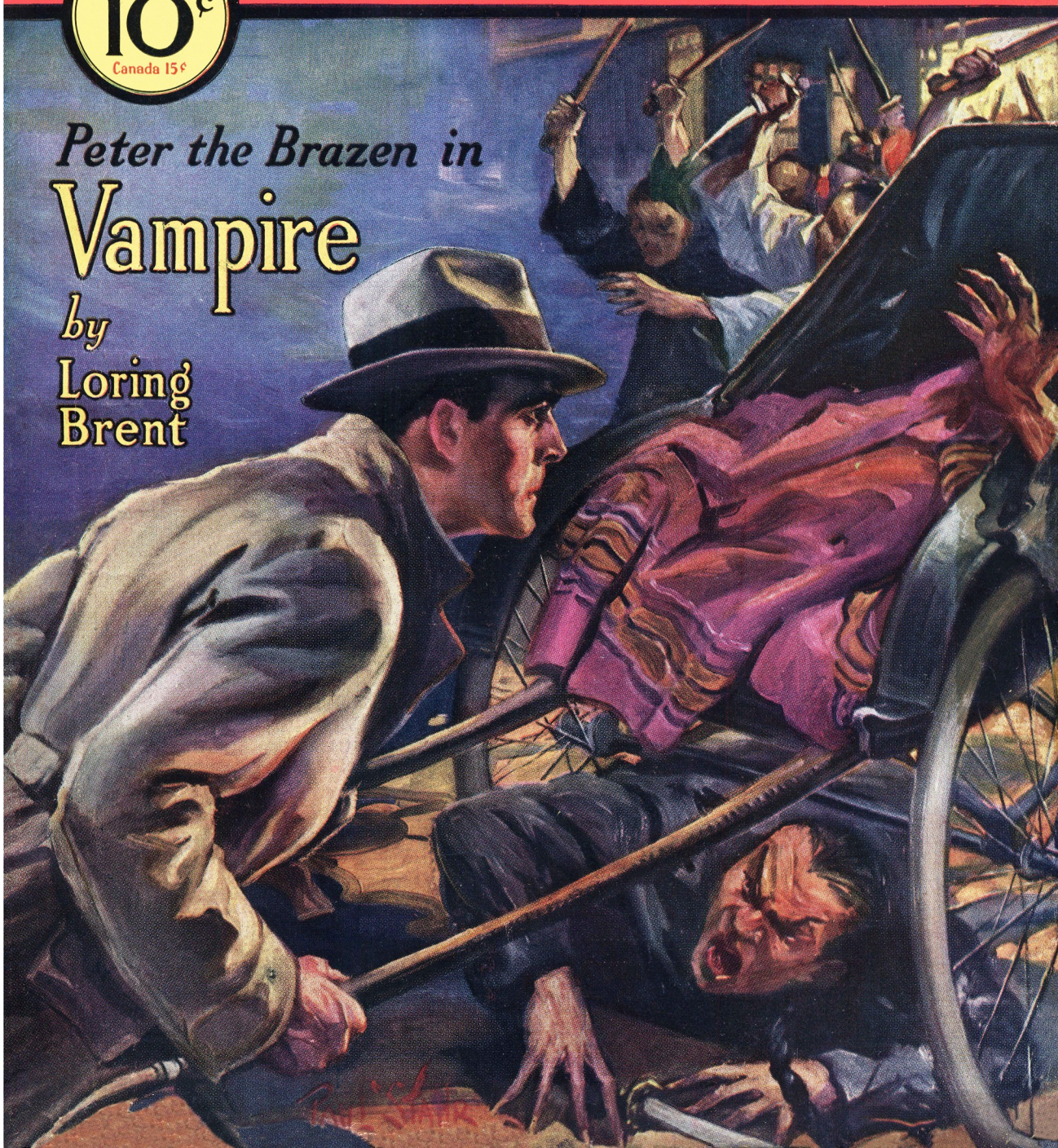
10 CENTS

Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

APR. 25
10¢
Canada 15¢



Peter the Brazen in

Vampire

by
Loring
Brent

Classified Advertising

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

June 6th Classified Forms Close May 2nd.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY — $100 WEEKLY SELLING BETTER QUALITY, ALL-WOOL, union-made-to-measure suits and topcoats at $23.50 and $31.50. Build big repeat business. Liberal bonus for producers. Large swatch samples FREE. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 500 Throop, Dept. D-409, Chicago.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN TO SELL YOUR MERCHANDISE? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the CLASSIFIED MANAGER, MUNSEY COMBINATION, 280 Broadway, New York.

HELP WANTED—MALE

FIREMEN, Brakemen, Baggagemen; colored Train or Sleeping Car Porters, $150—$250 monthly. Experience not necessary. 836 RAILWAY INSTRUCTION BUREAU, East St. Louis, Ill.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. $10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, LAKES, STREAMS. WRITE TODAY. MICH. ACREAGE CO., M-601, 32 NO. STATE ST. BLDG., CHICAGO.

TOBACCO

SWEAR OFF TOBACCO. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, NO MATTER HOW STRONG YOUR CRAVING, NO MATTER IN WHAT FORM YOU USE TOBACCO, THERE IS HELP FOR YOU. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 845, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

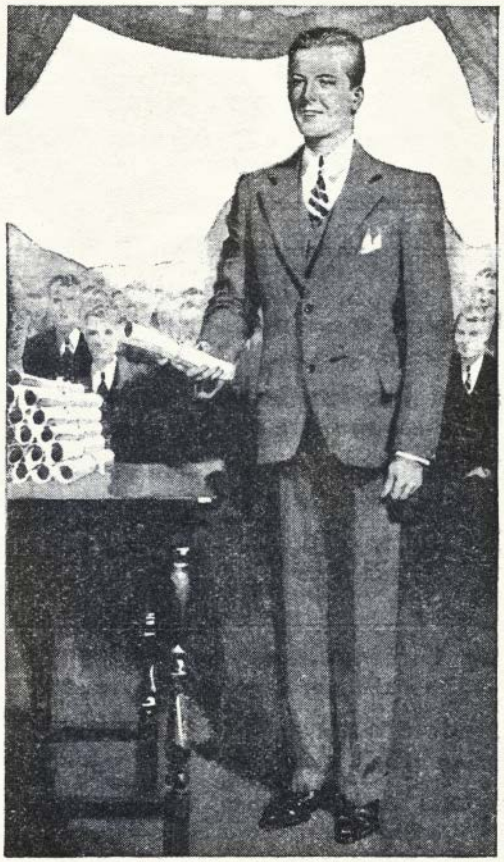
PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS—Write for free guide book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of inventions for Free Opinion whether it comes within Patent Office Rules. Easy Payments. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL. WATSON E. COLEMAN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 724 NINTH ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write For Our Guide Book, "How To Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

TO THE CLASS OF '29



IF YOU started a career after finishing high school, you've had time to realize a few things by now. You have discovered that your diploma will not open the doors of a business or industry and instantly place you in a big job. You know how hard it is to get ahead with your limited training. You are face to face with the stern reality of making your way against trained competition.

Look about you—those who are getting ahead are the *trained* men. This is an age of specialists. Deprived of college degrees by circumstances, many ambitious men today use high-school education as a beneficial background in acquiring the *specialized training* they need most. So can you!

International Correspondence Schools can do for you what it has done for them. All over the world high-school graduates are acquiring the practical knowledge they need from this 40-year-old institution. "Based on personal experience," says Jos. E. Driscoll of Roanoke, Va., "my advice to young men and women who cannot attend college is to take an I. C. S. course along the line of work they wish to follow." Marking the coupon below may be far more important to your earning power than the day you received that high-school diploma. Think about this!

Challenge us to help you!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS, *"The Universal University,"* Box 2146-E, Scranton, Penna.
Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Wood Millworking
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Structural Draftsman
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Electrical Engineer
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machinist
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Patternmaker
- ☐ Pipefitter ☐ Tinsmith
- ☐ Bridge Engineer
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Gas Engines
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Aviation Engines
- ☐ Automobile Mechanic
- ☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Steam Engineer
- ☐ Steam Electric Engineer
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ R. R. Locomotives
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Air Brakes ☐ Train Operation
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Coal Mining Engineer
- ☐ Navigation ☐ Boilermaker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing
- ☐ Agriculture ☐ Fruit Growing
- ☐ Poultry Farming ☐ Radio
- ☐ Marine Engineer

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

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

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

City..... State..... Occupation.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 220 CONTENTS FOR APRIL 25, 1931 NUMBER 4

SERIALS

COMPLETE STORIES

OTHER FEATURES

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President C. T. DIXON, Vice President

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
111 Rue Réaumur

Published weekly and copyright, 1931, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico, and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Entered as Second Class Matter November 28, 1896, at the post office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

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

THIS MAN'S IDEA IS A GOD-SEND TO FOLKS WHO NEED MONEY

By B. B. Geyer

This is a true story. I know this man personally. I know of the folks he has helped. I know of widows with children to support who thank him for their incomes. I know of men who lost their jobs but are now making more money than ever before. I can tell you of men and women who live better because of the opportunity this man gives them to add to their incomes. Yes, I know of literally thousands of folks to whom this man's idea of doing business is a god-send.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED?

Perhaps you need money. Maybe you want a few extra dollars a week. Or maybe you want steady, year-round work. Whichever it is, I know you will be interested in the wonderful opportunity this man has to offer you.

He is President of a large million-dollar manufacturing company. He does business in every section of the country—in your very locality. He started a few years ago with an idea. It was this. He said, "I will share the profits of my business with the folks who help me." He prospered. His business became most tremendously successful. And today it is still growing.

WILL $40 A WEEK HELP YOU?

Right now he needs 300 men and women in all parts of the country. He needs someone in your section to help handle increased business. To everyone who comes with him he guarantees a fair, square deal and an amazing opportunity to make money in pleasant, dignified work. You don't have to invest any capital. He has taken care of that. You don't need any experience. He tells you the few things you need to do in simple, plain language. All you need to do is say you are willing to give it a trial. I'll be surprised if you don't make $25 to $35 a week for a few hours of your time either in the daytime or evenings. If you want to, you can stay on with him permanently either spare time or full time. Your earnings will be in proportion to the time you can devote. I know of other people who make anywhere from $40 to $100 in a week.

YOUR INCOME CAN START AT ONCE

I sincerely ask you to fill out and mail the coupon. You don't obligate yourself or risk anything. You will receive complete instructions by mail. You can start right away and have the money you need coming in. It will certainly pay you to give this a trial. By all means, get the details. Just put your name and address on the coupon. Mail it today.

Albert Mills, President,
7459 Monmouth Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Yes, I want to make money. Without cost or obligation, send me full details of the wonderful opportunity now open in my locality.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

© A. P. Co. (Print or Write Plainly)

ARGOSY
ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 220 | SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 1931 | NUMBER 4

He reached over the retaining wall

Vampire

Groans heard through the fog on the Hongkong water front lead Peter Moore, known to all the East as Peter the Brazen, into the most gruesome adventure of his colorful career

By LORING BRENT

Author of "That Cargo of Opium," "The Man in the Jade Mask," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOMAN OF HORROR.

THAT shocking experience in the fog on the Hongkong water front was an episode left dangling, so to speak, in mid-air—with the power of sending iced winds down Peter Moore's spine for hours afterward. It was an Oriental mystery without beginning, end, or solution. Or so it seemed at the time.

The tall American was swinging down the bund, having just left the

musty offices of a coastwise steamship company with a ticket to Shanghai stowed away in his pocket.

Dusk and fog had fallen upon the "Pearl of Asia." The tepid water of the Pei-Kiang, which drains the heart of Southern China, had encountered chill air currents, and the warm river vapors were magically transformed into billowing yellow visibility.

There is something almost tangible about a Hongkong fog—tangible and menacing. Some fogs are gray. A Hongkong fog is yellow. Eerie shapes seem to swirl and writhe about in it, as evil genii might swirl and writhe in the smoke bubbling up from an Oriental sorcerer's incense-pot. The winds sliding off the hilltops do this.

To his left, as Peter Moore struck down the bund toward his hotel, golden blurs and patches of light showed feebly where granite office buildings were. These solid evidences of modern civilization were offset by the crooked ugly spars of shipping on his right — fishing junks and sampans where some of China's teeming millions live and die—like rats.

The odor of Oriental evening cookery was in the dank air—the sour smells of rice and weeds and fish stewing on charcoal braziers. And from some hulk afar came the muffled, measured beating of a witch doctor's medicine drum, as sinister, as blood-stirring as the tom-tom of an African tribe. It got under your skin, that noise. And into your blood.

In spite of himself, Peter Moore kept time to it. *Tumpa-dum-dum! Tumpa-dum-dum!*

A slim dark figure materialized startlingly from the fog and collided with him. He caught a brief glimpse of a Eurasian girl's tragic white face, with its enormous staring black eyes, a red slash for a mouth. She sprang back from him with a long-drawn hiss and vanished into the fog.

Tumpa-dum-dum! Tumpa-dum-dum! The fog was thicker now. Vague shapes slithered past. It was a night for strange and sinister affairs to be afoot.

Strange, how the fog cheated your senses. The mournful whistle of a tramp freighter seemed to be suspended in the air a dozen feet above his head. An odor of spices was so intense that a hand containing them might have been drawn an inch under his nose. Next thing it was opium.

Through a rift in the mist he saw a heavy door swing open. Beyond was another door of finely wrought iron. And beyond this fantastic grille was a room of scarlet, as bright as the heart of the half-set sun. Gilt embroidery glowed on cushions and walls of vivid scarlet satin. A half-naked black woman was sprawled on scarlet satin cushions eagerly drawing at a white opium pipe. It might have been silver or even platinum.

Peter saw the powder-blue smoke squirt in twin jets from her black nostrils; caught the momentary gleam of pearl-white teeth in a red and savage grin, then the door went shut with a thud like that of a heavy teak scuttle-hatch cover being dropped in place.

One saw such things in daytime Hongkong and thought nothing of it. Dusk and the fog lent them vividness and mystery.

WATER gurgled at Peter's feet. He had the sense of being lost. Then a terrifying sound came across the water. A voice in agony:

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" Over and over.

Peter Moore stopped sharply. It

chanced that the moaning voice had stopped him at a spot almost under a street light, but the glow from that source was of little assistance. The strong rays penetrated a few feet and were greedily devoured by the fog.

Layers of fog like countless layers of straw-colored chiffon drifted about on the surface of the water at his feet. He knew that he was somewhere near the jetty, because no sampans were moored inshore here.

He bent down and tried to see through the swirling vapors until his eyes ached. The voice was gurgling and moaning still. It was distinguished by a weird whistling, as of breath being sucked through a parched throat—a slim ghost of sound destined to haunt the American throughout that night.

Some one out there was struggling toward shore, fighting for very life. In prickling suspense, Peter waited. There was nothing he could do. The thin whistling, the labored groaning came closer. Now it was attended by a feeble splashing. The sobbing of a man in the depths of agony followed.

Peter's heart was trip-hammering high in his chest. He felt chill moisture ooze out on his forehead and the palms of his hands. Those sounds, coming from an unseen spot in the fog, were terrifying. The position from which the sounds seemed to come would change. First, they would come from the right, then from the left.

Then suddenly he saw something moving toward him in the water, only an arm's-length away—a feebly moving hand, then a head from which blood was welling and flowing down.

Peter reached down from the stone retaining wall and grasped the hand. The weird whistling of indrawn breath occurred; then the sobbing, agonized voice, "Oh—God!"

Peter said sharply: "Give me your other hand."

The other hand came out of the dirty yellow water, fumbled for his. Both these hands which he grasped were as cold, as clammy as seaweed.

Dimly in the fog he saw the man's face as he pulled him up to a sitting position on the retaining wall; the slender face of a man of thirty, twisted with torture.

He was naked to the waist. The entire top of his head was like a pool of blood, which overflowed and ran down his neck to his shoulders. There, mingling with sea water, it ran down in thin diluted streams. And blood flowed from a deep puncture, such as might have been made with a skewer, in his left wrist. Blood pulsed from the small round hole there.

The man was breathing in short, whistling gasps. His eyes were glazed with terror and pain.

"Don't let them get me!" he whimpered. "They're after me! I know they started after me!"

"Who?" Peter gasped.

"That—that woman and that yellow devil! She had eyes just like a snake's—and not a hair on her head! They held me down and pumped my blood into her! She had teeth like a rat's—and there wasn't a hair on her head! They scalped me! Look at me! They took knives and scalped me! Give me a drink!"

"I'll get you some brandy, and call the police and a doctor," Peter said.

"Don't go! Wait! If you leave me, they'll get me! Look at my head! They held me down and pumped my blood into her arm through a rubber tube. And while they were pumping my blood into her, they took these knives and held me so I couldn't move and scalped me. They—"

"Who are they?" Peter savagely demanded. "Where are they?"

The pain-sick eyes rolled.

"That woman without any hair on her head—and that yellow devil! He said it was an experiment. He said he was going to scalp me to see if it could be done, because he was going to graft somebody's scalp on her head—".

"Don't you know who they are?" Peter cried. "Don't you know whether it was a sampan or a junk?" It was all too horribly Oriental to have occurred elsewhere but aboard a sampan or a junk.

The tortured man did not answer. He had fainted. Peter paused only long enough to bind a handkerchief about that pulsing hole in the unknown's wrist.

THEN he started off at a run toward a grog shop a half block away. He collided with a man, knocked him aside, and ran on. As he ran, the sound of the devil-drum kept time with him. *Tumpa-dum-dum! Tumpa-dum-dum!* Through this measured drumming he heard a different sound—the muffled exhaust of a powerful motor boat.

Peter found the grog shop. He tossed a bill down on the counter and barked, "Give me a pint of good brandy. Send for the police and a doctor at once. A man has been almost murdered. You'll find us under the street light nearest the small boat jetty. Hurry!"

The bartender stuttered, "Y-yes, sir!" and Peter ran out. The fog was closing down in earnest now. Ships at anchor were creating a din with their whistles. The beating of the drum had stopped or was drowned out.

Peter's face was dripping with sweat when he returned to the street light. Under that street light he stopped and stared about him in bewilderment.

The unknown victim of Oriental torturers was gone!

Peter shouted. His voice was like that of a man in a dream. The episode, from beginning to end, was already beginning to have the fantastic quality of a nightmare.

He ran on down the retaining wall to the next street light, thinking he might have made a mistake. The tortured victim of "a woman with eyes like a snake's and not a hair on her head," was nowhere to be seen.

He ran back to the other light; he struck matches, and found splotches of blood, pools of blood mingling with the mud.

While he stood, shivering with apprehension, he heard again the muttering of the motor boat's exhaust. He cried, "Motor boat, ahoy! Ahoy, there!"

There was no answer for a moment; then he heard the unmistakable sound of the man's whistling breath. For a moment he believed that the poor devil had leaped into the water to kill himself.

Then Peter heard a low, hissing voice, followed by the man's whistling, "Help! Oh, God! No! No!" This frantic entreaty was followed by a gurgling sob, then a strangling sound, low on the water.

Peter shouted, "Ahoy, there! Damn you, ahoy!"

Silence was broken by the sprightly purring of the motor boat's exhaust. This grew rapidly fainter, until it merged with the harbor hubbub.

It was Peter's guess, impossible to verify, that the scalped man had been overtaken by his torturers, snatched back into the water, drowned.

He started for the sampan jetty with the intention of hiring a sampan and making a search. The obvious futility of such an attempt halted him.

PETER leaned against the lamp post, suddenly weak with fury and sickness. There was nothing he could do. Hongkong harbor, aswarm with mysteries, had simply tossed up at his feet the human victim of some fiendish Oriental plan, and snatched him back into the yellow fog whence he came. A story of blood-chilling horror, without beginning or end, was told. That was all.

The brandy bottle slipped out of Peter's limp fingers to the stone pavement and smashed.

He accused himself of cruel stupidity for not staying with the poor devil until his shouts brought help. Why had he abandoned him to this further horrible fate?

There was nothing to do now. Police would arrive in a moment. They would listen to him skeptically; raise their eyebrows, and exchange glances. They would point out to him the futility of attempting to find an unknown boat among those thousands of unknown boats with which Hongkong harbor is cluttered—or they would see a sinister connection between him and that blood at his feet.

Peter did not want to be questioned by the police. They could accomplish nothing. No one could do anything for that poor sobbing devil now. A grim incident of a fogbound Hongkong evening was closed.

But it wasn't closed for Peter. As he started on toward his hotel, cold, weak, trembling, Peter heard again the whistled babblings of the tortured man and tried to piece sense out of them.

He had been the victim, it would seem, of a modern kind of Oriental vampire; a horrible, hairless woman with snakelike eyes who had employed him for a blood transfusion. But why had the unfortunate man's scalp been sliced off? He had said, "They were scalping me to see if it could be done, because he was going to graft somebody else's scalp on her naked head." It sounded too horrible to be true.

Was all this part of some hideous old Oriental ceremony of which Peter had never heard? He would probably never know. He was certain now on one point: he wanted to get it all out of his mind as quickly as possible.

Peter would have been sicker still if he could have foreseen the fantastic part this snake-eyed, hairless vampire was to play in his own affairs.

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE INVITATIONS.

THE warmth and brightness of the Oriental Hotel lobby was a welcome relief from the clammy fog and the experience he had just undergone. An American tourist party had just come in from a Canton River boat. Young men and girls were chattering gayly over their experiences. A pretty débutante glanced at Peter, and her glance became a stare of candid curiosity.

Peter went on to the desk. The clerk looked at him and said, "Mr. Moore, are you ill? You are terribly pale."

"I'll shake it off," Peter said. "Is there any mail for me?"

He was hoping there would be a letter or a cablegram from Susan O'Gilvie. Susan was in Manila; had gone to the Philippines about two

weeks previously, looking for thrills. He had missed her. And he certainly needed some one like her now. Susan was sunny, bright, always gay.

When Susan was away from him, he was convinced he was in love with her. It was when she was with him and manifesting her insatiable love for dangerous thrills and mad adventure that he realized what a mistake any sane man would make to marry Susan. But Peter wasn't sane now. He was sick and furious and full of hatred for China.

The clerk handed him three missives—a cablegram, an unstamped envelope with his name written across it with a flourish, and a chit. Peter opened the cablegram first. It bore a Schenectady, New York, date line, and read:

> Advise urgency in Fong Toy deal. Am advised other interests are hot on trail.

It was signed Corliss. Bill Corliss was Peter Moore's immediate superior in the radio research division of the General Electric Company. And Fong Toy was a brilliant young Chinese scientist who had perfected in his Hongkong laboratories a device for eliminating static from radio reception.

Fong Toy had so far proved inaccessible to Peter. The young Chinese was shy, or calculating. Peter did not have to be told by Bill Corliss that Japanese, English and German radio concerns were also on Fong Toy's trail. Failing or succeeding to see Fong Toy this evening, Peter was sailing for Shanghai to-morrow to consult bankers there who were said to be Fong Toy's backers.

This mission to negotiate with Fong Toy had been entrusted to Peter because of his wide knowledge of China and the Chinese. He was authorized to offer Fong Toy a million dollars plus a generous royalty.

Opening the chit, he read:

> Mr. Peter Moore,
> Oriental Hotel.
> SIR:
>
> Dr. Fong Toy has authorized me to say that a meeting between you and himself may be arranged this evening if you so desire. You will kindly be prepared to present your credentials. As Dr. Fong Toy works only at night, the most convenient time for this preliminary conference would be twelve o'clock midnight, when Dr. Fong Toy ceases work for a half hour for supper. I will call for you a few minutes before midnight.
>
> Trusting that this rather informal arrangement meets with your approval, I remain,
>
> Yr. obdt. servant,
> WAN SANG,
> Secretary to Dr. Fong Toy.

Peter smiled faintly. It was so typical of young China trying to be brisk and modern and businesslike. He folded up the chit and opened the unstamped envelope. In a hasty scrawl was written,

> His Royal Highness
> Chong Foo Shommon,
> The Sultan of Sakala,
> Requests the Honor of Your Presence
> At an Informal Ball to be Given
> To-night in the Grand Ballroom of
> The Oriental Hotel, Nine o'clock.

PETER looked up from the strange invitation and found the clerk smiling at him.

"I'll have to explain that, Mr. Moore," the clerk said. "We got a radio from the Sultan's yacht this afternoon, ordering us to issue five hundred invitations to the five hundred most important people in Hongkong.

We didn't have time to get them printed, so we've all been busy writing them out, addressing them and delivering them. The Sultan of Sakala is a strange and eccentric young chap."

"I know of him," Peter said. "When the Sultan throws a party, he believes in throwing a party!"

The clerk laughed. "The Sultan hasn't landed from his yacht yet. He'll be along any minute. The fog is probably holding him up. Did you ever see that yacht? It's called the Sapphire."

"I don't believe I ever did."

"He had it built in England, and I understand it cost upward of a million pounds. Some yacht! It's as large as some ocean liners and has every convenience, including a swimming pool. They say his own suite alone has nine large rooms! Will you go to the party?"

"I imagine I'll look in," Peter said.

He did not have entirely pleasant recollections of the Sultan of Sakala. Although he had never met him, Peter's personal opinion was that Chong Foo Shommon was an exceedingly dangerous and unscrupulous young man. But he would go to the party. He needed the liveliness of a big party to make him forget what he had just seen on the water front.

Peter went into the bar. It was crowded with Hongkong business men who had dropped in for cocktails before going home, and there was a sprinkling of ship's officers, tourists and westernized Orientals. Peter looked about for some one to drink with, but saw no familiar faces. He found a place at the bar and ordered Scotch.

The bartender introduced him to the first of an evening-long series of mysterious surprises. Peter had known him years before, when Mike—no one ever knew him by another name—had been a bar steward in the Transpacific Service, on the old Vandalia.

Mike placed the Scotch before him and said: "Mr. Moore, take a good look at that guy standin' halfway down the bar, there."

Peter looked; frowned. The bar was crowded.

"Which one?"

"Tall, slender, blue-eyed, blond; blue suit. See him?"

Peter looked again and said, "Yes. What about him, Mike?"

"Don't you see the resemblance, Mr. Moore?"

"No," Peter said after a further perusal of the stranger's features. "Who is he?"

"He's Jeffery Douglas, the young Chicago lawyer who's been cleanin' up on them beer racketeers. He's travelin' in the Far East for his health. They say if he hadn't left Chicago, they would have made lead dumplin's out o' him. Don't you see the resemblance? It almost took my breath away!"

Peter laughed and answered, "I'm stumped, Mike. Whom does he resemble?"

"You! You might be twins! Take a good look."

Peter did. It is always hard for a man to see himself in another man whom his friends say is his double. Peter smiled and said: "Well, maybe you're right, Mike. He's about my height and build."

"Shucks!" Mike exclaimed. "He's got your eyes, nose and hair. He's a spittin' image of you!"

A few minutes later, the Chicago lawyer caught Peter's eye and stared at him. He smiled and Peter smiled in return. The two men who were evidently with Jeffery Douglas turned and stared at Peter, then laughed.

Peter would have liked to talk to Jeffery Douglas. He was interested, as all Americans are, in racketeering; but the lawyer and his two companions walked out a moment later.

THE second surprise took the form of a pair of eyes in a thin, dark face. Peter saw these in the bar mirror. The owner of the eyes was obviously an Oriental. Peter's guess was Tonkinese. His face lacked the thickness at the cheeks of the Northern Chinese.

Peter glanced at the eyes reflected in the mirror, and glanced again. Certainly, the eyes were measuring him. There was nothing of friendliness about them. They were small, black and glittering with purpose. They made Peter feel a little uncomfortable. Why was this fellow, whoever he was, staring at him with such hostility—such calculating hostility?

When Peter glanced again, the eyes were gone. A feeling of definite uneasiness caused Peter to look rather carefully about the bar, but the Tonkinese—or Cambodian—was no longer in evidence.

Peter finished his highball. He was replacing the empty glass on the bar when he suddenly felt a cold draft on the back of his neck. He glanced around. Close to the end of the bar at which he stood was a frosted glass window.

Some one had stealthily raised the window. Peter could see out into a service alley; saw fog rolling along it in a pale-yellow cloud. Then he saw a thin brown hand flutter in the half darkness.

Fascinated, he stared. He heard Mike say, "Goin' to have another, Mr. Moore?"

Before he could answer, the thin brown hand reappeared. It seemed to be attached to no arm, but to be magically floating about in the fog. The surprise now rushed on to its climax. A pair of eyes close-set in a thin, brown face stared at him. The mysterious hand was now in possession of a knife—a curved, short knife with a bone handle such as Malay sailors use. The hand was holding the dagger, not by the handle, but by the gleaming blade.

It happened so suddenly that Peter had hardly time to think. The hand holding the knife withdrew in a queer, quick gesture. In that instant, Peter dropped flat to the floor; heard a sharp, splintering thump less than a foot above his head, and sprang up to leap at the window.

He did not have to look to know that that knife was buried in the wood where he had been standing. He knew that if he had not dropped when he did, that knife would have found its swift way into his back.

Peter scrambled over the sill; looked right, then left. Nothing but fog.

He climbed back into the room and met the questioning eyes of Mike in a suddenly paper-white face. Peter closed the window and Mike said, weakly: "Get you?"

"No."

The bartender leaned over the bar and looked down at the knife. It was one of the strange features of the incident that no other man in the room was aware of what had taken place. The cheerful soft roar of conversation and laughter went on as before.

Peter grasped the haft of the intended assassin's weapon and yanked it out of the wood; tossed it down with a clatter before Mike.

"There's a souvenir for you," he said.

Mike looked fearfully at the knife,

then his dazed eyes returned to Peter's face.

"I heard," he said, "you were out here on business, Mr. Moore. I didn't know you were up to trouble."

"I didn't either," Peter said.

Mike drew a long, tremulous breath. "Say!" he gasped. "That guy certainly meant that knife for you. What's the big idea, anyway, Mr. Moore?"

"That," Peter answered, "is what I'm curious to know. I need another drink, Mike."

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world you do!"

CHAPTER III.

A HARD-BOILED RADIO MAN.

NOW occurred the next surprise. Peter was reaching for the drink when his arm was roughly seized and he was spun about to face a pale young man in the crisp white uniform of a ship's officer. Jagged symbols of lightning were embroidered in gold on the uniform collar; so that Peter knew that the young man was the wireless operator on some ship.

The young man was glaring at him with eyes blurred with drink. His breath was sour with alcohol and his manner was very belligerent.

Gripping Peter by the elbow, he said: "You're the guy I'm looking for. You're Peter Moore, aren't you?"

Peter, wondering if there was some connection between the intoxicated young stranger and the knife, nodded.

"Well, I'm Chester Blunt," stated the uniformed young man. "I'm the senior wireless operator on the Vandalia. You used to punch brass on her five or six years ago, didn't you?"

"Yes." Peter wondered why Chester Blunt was so belligerent.

"Listen," he said. "I've heard about you for years. I'm sick of your name, get me? All I've heard ever since I started poundin' brass on the China run was what a clever guy this Peter Moore is, and how good this Peter Moore is with a key. 'Yeah?' says I. 'Well, I'm gonna meet this guy Moore and give him an earful.' They kept tellin' me about all the excitin' adventures you used to have. Say! I've been on this run for two years, and I haven't seen anythin' I couldn't see back home in little old N' York. What's more, I'll bet you I'm a better operator than you ever were. I'll bet you I have more nerve than you ever had!"

Was this merely a drunk's belligerent speech, or was it concealing another surprise?

Peter said calmly: "Where's the argument?"

Operator Blunt shook his fist under Peter's nose. "There isn't any argument," he snapped. "I'm just tellin' you—thassall!"

The young man thereupon turned about with great dignity—and sat down heavily on the floor!

Peter thoughtfully helped him to his feet, helped him across the room to a chair, and sat him down. Then he looked about the bar, prepared for almost anything.

Nothing happened. When he was quite sure that no further surprises were preparing to spring at him, Peter left the bar and proceeded to his room.

He hoped there would be no more disagreeable experiences this evening. That water front episode had shaken him; made him feel physically sick. And the unaccountable attack upon him in the bar by the Tonkinese had left his nerves shakier still.

What was it all about? In his previous visits to the Far East, when he

was meddling in various sinister Oriental affairs, such a surprise attack could have been expected. But he was a serious-minded business man now, quite content to let sleeping dogs lie.

He put down the suspicion that one of these old dogs had awakened, fearing that he meant trouble. Thinking it over, as he prepared to bathe and dress, he suddenly recalled the Chicago lawyer. He must have been taken for Jeffery Douglas. An old Chicago feud had been carried over here!

But, Peter reasoned, a Chicago gunman, if he had wanted to put Jeffery Douglas on the spot would not have employed a Tonkinese knife thrower. He would have come to Hongkong with a sub-machine gun.

The only other possible explanation was entirely too far-fetched. Chong Foo Shommon, the Sultan of Sakala, was Tonkinese. Peter had once crossed Chong's path; had thwarted an elaborate little scheme of Chong's. But that was in the past. And why should Chong want him out of the way now?

PETER laid out his dress suit on the bed and went into the bathroom to bathe and shave. While he was lathering his face, he believed he heard the click that a key might have made in a lock. A moment later, he was almost certain he heard some one moving about in his bedroom.

But his nerves were jumpy, and he put it down to imagination. He could not, however, put down to imagination a sudden resounding crash in the bedroom, as if a heavy piece of furniture had been overturned.

Peter went charging into the bedroom, only in time to see a thin, brown-skinned, black-haired man reach for the light switch and plunge the room into instant blackness.

He did this with his left hand. With his right, he reached into a side pocket of his coat.

Peter rushed at him, barked his shins on a chair and sprawled to the floor just as two blue-red spurts of flame flicked out to the accompaniment of explosions.

He lay where he had fallen and awaited developments. At least fifteen seconds passed, with Peter lying there in the darkness.

Light from the bathroom seeped in and Peter's eyes gradually adjusted themselves to the faint glow in the murk, until he was certain he made out the slim shadow of his unknown antagonist against the wall and near the switch.

It was an exceedingly ticklish situation. Peter's gun, a thirty-eight caliber Colt's super-automatic, was reposing in a drawer in his wardrobe trunk—across the room. The invader had only to switch on the light, take careful aim and kill him.

Peter's only chance lay in a swift surprise attack while his unknown enemy hesitated. Slowly, cautiously, Peter wriggled toward him. He heard the man's quick, heavy breathing.

When he was less than a dozen feet away, Peter sprang up and leaped. He struck the unknown's gun as it went off. But before he could seize the man or secure the gun, the fellow writhed away like a snake, threw open the door and slammed it after him.

Peter switched on the light, dashed into the bathroom where he had left his dressing gown, and rushed back to the door. When he opened it and looked out, the corridor was empty.

A door across the way opened. A starry-eyed blond girl in filmy orchid negligee stared at him. Her eyes widened.

"I heard some shots," she said. "What's happening — another Chinese revolution?"

"A burglar broke into my room," Peter explained, "and took a couple of pot shots at me."

"Did he hit you?" she cried.

"No."

"Did he get away?"

"Yes."

The girl slammed the door. A broad-shouldered, gray-haired man in blue came up the corridor. He said:

"I'm the house detective. Somebody phoned down they heard some shots around here. What do you know about it?"

"Nothing," Peter replied; "except that they were fired at me."

The house detective followed him into the room, where he and Peter made several discoveries. Two bullets were embedded in the floor; one was lodged in the ceiling. But these did not affect Peter half so much as the discovery that the contents of all the bureau drawers were strewn on the floor and that his automatic pistol was gone from the wardrobe trunk.

Peter said nothing of this loss to the house detective. He knew that the house detective could do nothing about it, anyway. And it certainly had not been a burglar.

WHEN the house detective was gone, Peter lit a cigarette and tried to do some constructive thinking. He was not quite certain that the man who fired the shots and the man who had thrown the knife were one and the same; but they had looked sufficiently alike to provide grounds for the assumption. Both had been dark-skinned Orientals. Both had certainly been after his life.

Just as certainly, the man who had entered this room had not mistaken Peter for Jeffery Douglas, the Chicago lawyer. One could therefore assume that the knife had been meant for Peter, not for the man he so closely resembled.

It was beginning to appear that Peter, whether he wished to be or not, was being drawn into the web of some mysterious, Oriental plan. That assumption could no longer be questioned. But who stood back of it?

If Susan O'Gilvie were in Hongkong instead of Manila, he would have suspected that she was up to some of her mischief. Ever since he had put foot in China she had somehow managed to keep him most of the time in hot water. But Susan was not in Hongkong; she was safely out of the way in Manila.

What next?

Peter shot the bolt on his door, saw that his windows were locked, and finished shaving. Despite the recent exciting incidents which had occurred, his mind went back to that poor devil he had fished out of the water. He could not get the pain-tortured eyes out of his mind.

For the twentieth time he wished that Susan O'Gilvie were here. Susan was a great little pal. He wished he could sit down with Susan and chatter about absolutely nothing by the hour, and forget China.

When Peter was dressed he went down and had dinner in the grill room and shortly after nine went up to the grand ballroom. The ballroom and the large bar adjoining were already full of people prepared to enjoy the Sultan's impromptu party.

Peter drifted about and felt more lonesome than ever. Never in his life had he seen so many pretty girls, but

he knew none of them. For each girl there seemed to be five men. A large and excellent orchestra was playing popular fox trots.

He heard a man say, "The Sultan's just come!"

Peter thought, "What of it? I do not want to dance with the Sultan." He felt blue. He went into the bar and had several drinks of straight whisky.

Then he went back to the ballroom and watched the dancing. He could not get that poor devil's whistling voice, his agonized eyes, out of his head. Now occurred the next surprise of the evening.

A voice beside him exclaimed:

"Why! Peter! I thought you were in Shanghai!"

"Well, I'll be—" Peter gasped. "Well, for cry—"

"In person!" Susan laughed. "Not an animated cartoon!"

CHAPTER IV.

NERVES.

IT was certain that never in his life had Peter been so glad to see any one. Charming, beautiful, romantic, fun-loving Susan! Her hair, he saw, was done in a clever new way—drawn back from her face and into a little bun at the back of her head. It was naturally curly and full of bright lights.

Her small face was rosy. Her eyes were brighter and bigger than stars—and much riskier. He was delighted to see her, and he wondered why she seemed so startled, even embarrassed, at seeing him. She seemed much more startled than glad.

"How come, Susan?" he asked when the shock had worn off. "Why aren't you in Manila?"

"Oh, Hongkong called," Susan replied airily. "Have you seen Fong Toy yet?"

"I expect to see him to-night . . . Who brought you?"

"A lame brain from the American consulate. He wants me to marry him and live in Prairie Center, Kansas."

Peter glanced at the ten thousand dollar string of pearls Susan wore around her lovely neck and tried to picture her living in Prairie Center, Kansas. Then he saw that there was a new addition to the pearl necklace—a large and beautiful *cabochon* sapphire. It had the quality of a starry midnight sky in the tropics.

"Are you marrying him?"

"Nope." She looked at him sharply. "What's the matter, old dear? You look ill."

"Oh, I'm all right."

Peter had no intention of telling her why he looked shaken. He wanted to forget that poor devil on the water front. He asked Susan about the new gem on her necklace.

"It's a singing sapphire. I think it is hollowed out, and perhaps there's a reed in it. If you rub it on silk, it sings—very faintly."

Susan was blushing and looking at Peter strangely. He thought she was joking. It did not occur to him until later that his reference to the sapphire might have embarrassed her.

The orchestra began playing. Peter gathered her in and they moved out onto the glasslike floor. Susan smiled up at him mistily and showed him the tip of her tongue. Her breath smelled like violets.

It struck Peter that Susan was different. In some mysterious way, she had changed. He wondered what had happened in Manila. A girl with her beauty, her millions, and her appetite

for thrills was running a gantlet all the time. And he wondered if her presence in Hongkong was in any way accountable for any of the surprises which had been visited upon him this evening.

He said, "Susan, you aren't up to any new deviltries, are you?"

She looked at him sharply. "None that concern you," she answered.

"Then, you are up to deviltries?"

"I'm not up to anything, Peter, that remotely concerns you." She changed the subject. "Miss me?"

"Nope."

"Liar!"

Peter wondered what mischief she was up to this time. It was always the same. She was always planning little adventures which didn't involve him in the least. In the end, he was in them up to his ears.

"I'm learning," she told him. "I'm hard now, Peter."

They glided past an elderly Englishman and a dowager who stared at them through a monocle and a lorgnon respectively.

"Do you approve of my dancing?" Susan asked, and for a while they exchanged light comments. It was, Peter realized, all on the surface. Under their banter, they were sparring. He sensed that Susan was displeased because he was here instead of being in Shanghai. She had something up her sleeve. What was it? What did it have to do with the man who had thrown the knife; the man who had taken pot shots at him in his room?

SUSAN suddenly exclaimed: "For crying out loud, Peter! There's your twin!"

Peter glanced behind him; saw the Chicago lawyer Mike had pointed out in the bar. Jeffery Douglas was dancing with a languid Eurasian girl.

"He's a fighting lawyer from Chicago," Peter said, "making war on beer racketeers. He's taking a trip because Chicago stopped being healthy."

"It's amazing, Peter! He even laughs the way you do. I want to meet that man. I'll bet he even has your voice!"

"I'll do something about it," Peter promised.

Then he saw Chester Blunt, the wireless man, weaving his way across the floor toward them.

"This bird," Peter said quickly, "is the wireless man on the Vandalia. He looks as if he is going to ask you for a dance. Don't desert me."

"I know him," Susan said. "His name is Chester Blunt."

"Where'd you meet him?"

"Oh, you'd be s'prised."

"I'm getting used to surprises," Peter said dryly. He knew now that it was no use to question Susan. She was up to her ears in something. Did it explain why Chester Blunt had insulted him in the bar? What in the devil was going on?

Some one thumped Peter violently on the back. The American custom of cutting in at dances had long ago reached Hongkong. But the custom was to tap a man on the back, not to knock his wind out, if you wanted to dance with his girl.

"Pardon me, Moore. May I cut in, Susan?"

"Certainly, Chester! Sorry, Pete!"

Peter watched her go away. He was completely mystified. The girl had certainly changed. He could not recall when she wouldn't have rather spent an entire evening with him to the exclusion of all other men. What had happened in Manila? Who had changed her? Chester Blunt? Susan liked her men exciting, adventurous, dangerous.

She liked to play with fire. Was Chester Blunt fire?

Peter studied them. Usually when Susan met him after an absence she threw her arms around his neck; kissed him enthusiastically, no matter how many people were watching. What scheme was buzzing around in Susan's beautiful little head—a scheme having to do with wireless operators, knife throwers and Oriental gunmen?

Chester Blunt was a clever dancer. He did tricky things with his feet. Susan followed him beautifully. They seemed to be on terms of almost intimate friendship. Susan was smiling up into his face, flirting with him. Chester Blunt was looking down with impassioned, imploring eyes.

Peter wondered if he was jealous. He had been on the verge of falling for Susan ever since they had met; but hadn't quite toppled over the edge, because common sense had held him back. Susan was dynamite: she was nothing but a rich little thrill-hunter. No; he wasn't jealous, but he was curious to know what had happened in Manila—what chain of events started there had resulted in two deliberate attempts on his life?

When Susan and Chester Blunt came around, Peter waded out and tapped the operator on the shoulder.

"Pardon me, Mr. Blunt. May I, Susan?"

"Certainly, Peter! Sorry, Chester."

The operator glared at Peter. Susan was giggling.

Peter said: "Will you kindly tell me what ax you're grinding this time?"

She said sharply, "Don't be silly."

"I want to hear that sapphire sing," he said grimly. "Let's go out on a nice quiet little balcony and look at the harbor and hear the sapphire sing."

"There's a fog," Susan said. "You can't see the harbor to-night. And in your present state of mind, I am wary of dark little balconies. Let's go into the bar, instead. I need a drink."

PETER stopped dancing, took her firmly by the elbow and started for a door which gave upon a balcony. Susan's uneasiness seemed to increase.

"Peter, I'd rather not go out on the balcony." She looked anxiously about her.

"Why not?"

"I'd just rather not. I have reasons."

He took her by both elbows and propelled her toward the balcony.

Susan said breathlessly: "Will you promise to be good?"

"Why should I?"

"Don't be silly, Peter. Look here. You aren't really in love with me, are you?"

"I'm mighty fond of you."

"But you're not in love with me. Peter, I'm not joking. I want to know. I positively won't go out until we settle this. I don't want you to be in love with me. I mean it. Tell me you aren't in love with me."

"All right," Peter said. "I'm not in love with you."

"So that if you did kiss me, it wouldn't be anything but—but friendship!"

"Let the kisses fall where they may," Peter answered. "Why all this dog-goned mystery?"

She looked at him quickly; bit her lip, and narrowed her eyes.

They went out onto the balcony, into the fog. It seemed to twist and swirl about them. The fog reminded Peter of that poor half-dead fellow he had seen on the bund. He shivered.

Susan removed a cushion from a chair, placed it on the balustrade, sat

down, and looked up at him. Her face was soft and misty in the dim light.

"Give me your handkerchief," she said huskily.

Peter took one out of his pocket, unfolded it and gave it to her.

"Put your head down."

Peter put his head down. Susan briskly rubbed the sapphire which dangled on her string of pearls and quickly held it to his ear. Pete heard a very faint, high-pitched musical note, like that of a distant violin. He took the sapphire out of her hand and held it closer.

She was looking up at him, as he cocked his head. She smiled faintly.

"I KNOW what's the matter with you," said Peter suddenly. "You've fallen for somebody. You're afraid of hurting me. Well, don't be foolish, Susan. You were bound to fall for somebody. I'm interested only in one thing: He's got to be fit for you."

"I don't want to discuss it, Peter."

"I do," Peter said firmly. "Did you meet him in Manila?"

"Please, Peter!"

"Who gave you that sapphire?"

"The same man who gave me this one." She held up her left hand. Peter saw another *cabochon* sapphire set in a ring on her engagement finger.

"Where did you meet Chester Blunt?"

"In Manila."

"When did you get into Hongkong?"

"Just now."

"There was no ship from Manila putting into Hongkong to-night."

"Did I say I came on a ship?"

Peter laughed. "Did you swim, Susan?"

"Nope. I came on a yacht. A party of a dozen of us came over from Manila."

"Whose yacht?"

"Didn't I say it was the Sultan's? He was simply wonderful to us."

"Whose ring are you wearing?"

"It was a present from the man I'm going to marry."

"One of the men in that party?"

"Yes!"

"Can you think of any reason," he said slowly, "why your engagement, or anything else you've been up to, should have caused any one to try to kill me?"

"Peter!" she wailed. "What happened?"

He told her briefly about the knife-thrower and the shooting episode in his bedroom.

"Peter, I can't understand it! I simply can't believe that anything I've done would cause such attacks on you. They won't happen again."

"How can you stop them?"

"Did I cause them?" she demanded hysterically. "Nothing I could have done caused them. It's one of your old enemies. It has nothing to do with me. I haven't done anything. You've got to be careful."

"Yes; I'll be careful. The point is, the Far East is full of rotters. I'd hate to see you fall for one of them. Won't you tell me who this man is you've fallen for?"

CHAPTER V.

UNDER A WEIRD SPELL.

SUSAN stubbornly shook her head. The orchestra was playing "Chant of the Jungle." Much nearer was the sound of a Chinese flute from the fog-bound city beneath them.

It wailed in the mournful dissonance peculiar to all Oriental music. Susan, listening to it, was suddenly like a girl bewitched. It was as if she had forgotten Peter's existence. She had lifted her eyes, was holding her hands, with fingers curling upward, above her knees, in the attitude of one entranced.

"I'm thirsty," she said. "They're serving free drinks in the bar." She jumped up. "Peter!" she wailed. "You're the best friend I have in the world. Tell me that nothing I do will make you hate me!"

"I couldn't hate you," Peter said.

They fought their way through the mob in the bar. Jammed in, arm to arm, Peter asked what she would have to drink.

Susan's eyes were stormy stars.

"Champagne."

"Champagne," Peter said to the bartender.

A pint bottle was opened and two goblets were filled.

"Peter, do you remember the night we met?"

Looking at this extremely dangerous new Susan, Peter remembered vividly.

"I was out on deck in a steamer chair, watching the gale," he said. "We were due in Yokohama the following morning. Suddenly you came down the deck—up to your ears in trouble."

"As usual?" Susan asked, draining her goblet.

"Did I say that?"

"Well, I was in trouble. I was on my way to Tonking, at the invitation of Chong Foo Shommon—our host tonight."

"Yes," Peter affirmed. "The Sultan of Sakala. You had met him in San Francisco on his tour of the United States, and he had tricked you into at least starting for Sakala—to take charge of his educational system. You were going to bring sweetness and light to the dumb little Tonkinese."

"And I'm convinced now," Susan said dreamily, "that I made a great mistake in letting you dissuade me. I know the Sultan better now. He isn't any of the things you said he was."

"Why go into that?" Peter asked. "It seemed advisable at the time to prevent your going there. When we reached Yokohama, I put you aboard the first American-bound ship and said good-by—"

"And I slipped ashore in the pilot's boat and followed you to Shanghai. But you were wrong about the Sultan. He is thoroughly Americanized . . . Another bottle, please," Susan said to the bartender."

"To celebrate your engagement," Peter agreed, "to Mr. X."

"I bumped into the Sultan in Manila," Susan said, "at a ball given by the Filipino Legislature for the Governor-General and his wife."

"Did he mention the Tonkinese educational system this time?"

Susan laughed softly. "Not once! He was very charming. I mean, he really was very charming."

"Finish your drink," Peter said. "I feel like getting tight. It's seldom I feel like celebrating anybody's engagement. This is a historic night. I have an idea I'm going to make it more historic."

"You're a wonderful man, Peter, and you've been a wonderful pal. Listen! There's going to be a little party—just the twelve of us who came over from Manila together—down at a place called the Tiger's Den. It's on Hai-Phong Road. We're all going to duck out and go down there at midnight. Will you take me?"

"I will if my date with Fong Toy falls through."

"They have a Chinese orchestra and funny cabaret stunts."

"I know the Tiger's Den. It used to be a tough joint, but they've dolled it all up for the tourists."

"I'll meet you in the lobby," Susan said, "at twelve sharp. If you're not there, I'll know you had to see Fong Toy. Come later, if we miss each other. It may be the last chance we'll have to see each other."

"Why?"

"I'm getting married to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" Peter repeated.

"Yes, Peter."

HE felt cold dew forming on his forehead.

"Bartender," he said, "let's have another bottle of that stuff." He folded his arms and looked at Susan. He was pale and his eyes were glittering.

Susan was pale, too.

"Peter," she cried. "You promised you wouldn't get sore."

"I'm not sore. I'm only wondering why you're so mysterious. We've been through a lot together, Susan. Why won't you tell me who this man is? Ashamed to tell me?"

Her chin flew up. "How dare you say such things?"

"If you aren't ashamed, why don't you tell me?"

"Because if I told you, you'd take it upon yourself to interfere. I'm free, white and twenty-one. I can marry any man I choose."

"Sure, you can!" Peter said angrily. "Why, indeed, should I interfere?"

"You've got to promise me that when you do find out, you won't come butting in."

"I don't have to promise it! I would not dream of butting in!"

"I'm old enough to know what I want." Susan was growing hysterical. "I won't have you riding herd on me as if I were fifteen years old!"

"I heard you the first time," Peter said. "I'm through riding herd on you. I won't interfere. I won't butt in."

"And another thing—" Susan began.

She stopped and her face suddenly went pink.

There was a commotion about the bar. Peter looked around and saw a short, thickset man with a round, brown face making his way toward them. He wore a small black mustache. But that wasn't what especially distinguished him. It was his white suit and his turban. The suit was fashioned along the conventional lines of a full dress suit, but it was white. The turban was sapphire-blue. Where the intricate folds crossed in the front blazed a *cabochon* sapphire as large, it seemed to Peter, as a pear.

Other sapphires were in evidence. The studs in his shirt bosom were *cabochon* sapphires. A *cabochon* sapphire adorned the thumb of the hand which he held in front of him.

Peter thought at first that the man was wearing a fancy-dress costume. He looked at Susan. She was white now, staring at the splendid, bizarre stranger.

"Peter," she began in a small, husky voice, "I want you to meet—"

The man in the turban interrupted.

"My darling! Where have you been? I've been looking everywhere for you!"

"I'm sorry, Chong," Susan said in a tight, breathless little voice. "Peter, I want you to meet my *fiancé*. Your

majesty, this is Mr. Peter Moore. I think you've heard of each other. Peter—this is His Majesty Chong Foo Shommon, Sultan of Sakala."

THE eyes of the Sultan reminded Peter of overripe blueberries. His pudgy brown hand did not move. Nor did Peter extend his hand. Susan watched him anxiously, as if she were afraid that Peter might do something rash. But Peter did nothing.

The Sultan said, "I am charmed to know you, Mr. Moore. I have heard a great deal about you."

"Thank you, your majesty."

"I have heard that you are a very troublesome and dangerous young man. I have heard, in fact, the most amazing legends about you—and the trouble you have caused in certain parts of the Far East."

"I am certain, your majesty," Peter returned, "that the reports were greatly exaggerated."

The blueberry eyes ran down the American's long, lanky frame. They returned to Peter's face.

For an instant Peter could have sworn he glimpsed smoldering red fire in them; that they were twin threats of hatred and murder. Then the moment passed.

"Mr. Moore has changed, Chong," Susan said eagerly. "He isn't in the Far East to start trouble. He's over here on a business trip. His old days of trouble hunting are past."

"I trust so," the Sultan said significantly.

Peter's eyes flicked from his round brown face, with its little toy mustache, to another brown face just behind him; another Tonkinese, but a tall and lean one, with a distinguishing star-shaped scar beside his nose. Peter had not clearly seen the face of the knife-thrower, or the face of the man who had broken into his bedroom, and he wondered now if this were the same man.

Chong Foo Shommon laughed and said, "My darling, I would like to dance. You dance so beautifully."

"All right," Susan said, "but I want to talk to Mr. Moore a moment longer. I'll meet you by the orchestra in ten minutes, dearest."

The Sultan smiled and withdrew with his bodyguard. Susan returned her eyes to Peter's face. She was suddenly pale and her eyes were glittering with determination.

"You haven't congratulated me," she said.

It was a deliberate and downright challenge. Susan did not like the look of disgust in Peter's eyes and she was going to remove it.

Peter's smile was thin and hard.

"Have you done something," he asked dryly, "that deserves my congratulations?"

"Haven't I? Chong is one of the greatest men in the Far East. I'm terribly proud of him. You think I'm doing something rash, reckless, foolish. You're wrong."

"All right; I'm wrong."

"Then stop looking at me like that!"

"You'd better run along with your Sultan."

Susan's eyes were blazing now.

"I'm going to make you congratulate me!"

"You're tight."

"So are you. And I'm thinking straight. You're just jealous. Chong is really a great man. If he weren't a Sultan by inheritance, he would be a great scientist and surgeon."

"He's quite an authority," Peter

agreed, "on Oriental methods of poisoning. He could write quite a book on the different methods he's used for poisoning his enemies."

"That's a lie!" Susan snapped. "There are more lying legends about Chong than any man in the Far East."

"Where there's smoke," Peter argued, "isn't there apt to be a little fire?"

"I don't care a damn what you say or think!" Susan declared. "I admire and respect him tremendously. Congratulate me!"

"No."

"We're going to settle this," Susan said in a furious voice. "Tell me why I shouldn't marry Chong. Because he is an Oriental? That's out. He's a king!"

"It will be thrilling," Peter said, "to be addressed as 'your majesty.' Her majesty the sultana!"

"I don't deny it. What girl wouldn't be thrilled? I don't deny I'm looking for thrills. The thicker they come, the better I like 'em!"

"You'll get plenty," Peter said. "Get Chong to tell you some time how he murdered his brother."

"That's another lie!"

"Is it? I heard he killed him by giving him a diluted dose of cobra venom and sat there and watched him die in the most horrible agony."

"I don't believe it. You haven't given me one good reason yet why I shouldn't marry Chong. You can't tell me anything I don't know about him. And I'm in love with him—very much in love with him. I think he's perfectly fascinating."

"You win," Peter said.

"Do you congratulate me?"

"No, Susan."

"You will before I'm through!"

"Will you make," Peter asked, "his fifty-first or fifty-second wife?"

"Oh, I know all about his fifty wives. He hates the whole idea. A harem was expected of him. The Sultans of Sakala for hundreds of years have had harems. He can't upset all those old traditions in a day. He and I are going to modernize Sakala."

"You, Chong, and Anarra?" Peter asked.

WHEN Susan was angry, her violet eyes looked purple. They looked purple now.

"Who is Anarra?"

"Don't you know about Anarra? She's a girl Chong bought from a Siamese prince in the Lao. I understand he paid a half million *ticals* for Anarra. They say she's very beautiful; a slim, golden-skinned tigress of the jungles with the most beautiful hair in the world. They say Anarra has Chong wrapped around her little finger and that he worships her as some men worship Buddha."

Susan laughed harshly.

"You're making that up as you go along."

"How many people were in the party that Chong brought back from Manila on the Sapphire?"

"Twelve, including myself."

"Did he show you about the Sapphire?"

"Of course he did!"

"Were there any Bluebeard's rooms—forbidden places?"

"Don't be fantastic, Peter. Naturally, we didn't go into his personal suite. A girl has to draw the line somewhere."

"Are you sure Anarra wasn't aboard?"

Susan looked at him with crinkling eyes, then burst into laughter. "Not

unless he kept her locked in a stateroom." She sobered. "Peter, I'm going to make a confession. I have not definitely decided to marry Chong."

"Then, for God's sake, don't!"

"Wait, Peter! I told him I wouldn't give him a definite answer until tomorrow morning."

"Then, why are you wearing his ring?"

"Oh, what's a ring? I told him you were my advisor and that I would not commit myself to marrying him until I'd had a talk with you. Well, I've had a talk with you. And you haven't convinced me at all. Chong is going back to the Sapphire before midnight, and I'm going to have breakfast with him here in the morning. I'm going to give him my answer then. It's going to be—*yes!*"

Peter said, "Very well."

Susan searched his face anxiously. "Peter, I'm asking you, very bluntly, to keep out of this."

"I haven't the slightest intention of interfering."

"But you're tight, and you're going to get tighter; and when you're tight you always look for trouble. I want you to keep away from Chong and the Sapphire."

"That's a promise," Peter said grimly.

"Now—do you feel like congratulating a girl?"

"You have my deepest condolences," Peter answered.

Susan glared at him.

"I hate you," she said slowly. "You're a prig. You won't congratulate me because you're jealous. You're sore because I'm marrying him and not you."

"If I were your brother," Peter replied, "I'd spank you and lock you in your room until you got some sense."

"You wouldn't be so mad if you weren't in love with me!"

"What of it? Run along to your damned Sultan. And will you kindly request him to call off his gunmen and knife-throwers?"

"If you do interfere, I won't be responsible for what happens."

"Good-by, Susan," Peter said.

He couldn't stand any more of this. The thought of Susan marrying a man like Chong made him sick.

Her eyes were suddenly wet. Susan must have known that he meant good-by forever. She extended one hand toward him, then snatched it back; turned and walked rapidly away on firm high heels.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SULTAN'S DARKNESS.

PETER, with his back to the bar, watched her go. He had thought that some of the recent adventures they had been through together had tempered, if not cured, her love for dangerous thrills. It seemed that Susan had an insatiable appetite. Certainly, she must know that Chong was one of the most dangerous men in the Far East: a man who would have been clapped behind bars long ago if it had not been for his great wealth and power.

A man spoke Peter's name, but Peter was so immersed in his thoughts he did not even hear him. He went to the arched doorway and watched the dancers. Over by the dais, where the orchestra was, he saw the Sultan, resplendent in his white dress suit and sapphire-blue turban, evidently deep in conference with two slim, sinister-looking young men who were brown-skinned and black-haired.

The two young men were listening attentively to Chong. At intervals they nodded curtly, as if in understanding. The b e l i e f grew upon Peter that Chong was plotting something; and, if Peter was not mistaken, it had something to do with himself.

He saw the two slim young Tonkinese drift off into the crowd as Susan made her way to Chong's side; saw her lift a white, unsmiling face to this man she was so foolishly determined to marry.

The orchestra started as if on signal. Peter watched Susan lift her arms, saw Chong enfold her. It made him madder than ever. He wanted to go out and do physical violence to Chong. Knowing Susan, he was certain that she had fallen under the man's sinister fascination, just as a bird falls under the fascination of a kreit adder.

It Peter were Susan's brother, he would have forcibly removed her from Chong's arms. But he was only a man who was much too fond of her for his peace of mind. He must not prevent her from making this mistake. Why? Because it was being committed in the name of love. Love! What the devil was love?

He decided that he wanted some fresh air; wanted to bring some more thought to bear on Susan's latest recklessness. He s k i r t e d the floor and went out on the balcony which he and Susan had left just a few minutes before.

The cold fog flowed past him and cleared his brain somewhat. And it carried him back again to the earlier distressing incident of the evening. It seemed to him he could hear that poor devil's groans again; his pitiful, gasping cry for help as they pushed him below the surface. And from some hulk afar off, the devilish beating of that drum. *Tumpa-dum-dum!* A woman with eyes like a snake's and not a hair on her head. Blood welling from the scalped head of her victim.

SUDDENLY Peter was aware that a blue-tinted electric bulb on the wall above him gave the effect of misty tropical moonlight. He had not noticed it before. Then he realized that the golden light from the ballroom was no longer streaming through the doorway.

He looked in and saw that the great room was in total darkness. It was as black as a cave. He supposed that this was to be a spotlight dance, to the accompaniment of dreamy music. But no spotlights flashed on. The ballroom remained in blackness. The orchestra played on a few seconds longer, then faltered to a stop.

Something was wrong. Either a fuse had burned out or some one had deliberately turned the lights off.

A babbling of voices arose in protest. Suddenly a woman sharply screamed.

The scream served to clear Peter's thoughts and to bring them into focus. If he had not been twice this evening the intended victim of Chong's assassins, he would not have been so suspicious now. But it suddenly occurred to him that the blackness would give the Sultan's knife e x p e r t s an excellent opportunity to pounce on him. Under Chong's orders, one or more of them had w a t c h e d him; would spring on him at any moment. And when the lights came on—who would know who had done the stabbing?

Peter felt that he had seen all he wished of Chong's attacks. He was sick of Chong's party, anyhow. He would return to his room. But he did

not reënter the ballroom through the doorway by which he had left it. He proceeded to the end of the balcony and quietly slipped in through another door.

The voices of several hundred men and women were now shouting for lights. Fireflies began to dance into being about the room, as men flashed on pocket cigarette lighters and held them up.

Peter slipped along the walls toward the main corridor at the end of the large room. Just as he reached the end of the room, the lights blazed on. He slipped out and went downstairs to his room. As he neared his room, he wished that he had a pistol or some kind of weapon.

He entered his room and quickly turned on the lights. He was not surprised to find that, in his absence, his room had been entered and ransacked again. Every article of clothing he possessed was on the floor. The bureau drawers, which he had carefully repacked after the gunman had fled, had been jerked out again and dumped. The contents of his steamer trunk were strewn about.

But no one was in his suite, and the windows were still locked. He shot the bolt on the door; glanced at his watch. It was now eleven-twenty. He telephoned the night clerk and told him that when a Mr. Wan Sang called, to send him right up.

He hoped that Chong would let him alone. He had no intention of interfering with Susan's preposterous marriage. He was definitely out of her life. If he still loved her, he would have to get over it as best he could. He would confer with Dr. Fong Toy, try to persuade the young scientist to sell or lease the static eliminator to the General Electric Company, and return to the United States on the first fast ship.

HE was finishing repacking his trunk when a sharp rap sounded on the door. Peter glanced up and looked at the heavy wooden panel. Who, he wondered, was there? He hesitated a moment, then opened the door.

With something of relief, Peter saw that his visitor was Chester Blunt. The wireless man's hair was rumpled, his eyes were bloodshot, and his skin had the waxy pallor which some men acquire when drunk.

The wireless man tried to focus his glazed eyes on Peter.

"Listen here, you—" he thickly began.

"Blunt," Peter quietly interrupted, "I have troubles enough without taking you on. Would you mind taking your hoop and rolling it along and playing with somebody who feels playful? I do not feel playful."

"I don't feel playful," Blunt said. "I feel kind of sick. A terrible thing has just happened. A guy was just stabbed to death up in the ballroom. He was a Chicago lawyer. The Chicago beer barons had put him on a spot, and he beat it off to China. They sent a killer after him. Somebody doused the lights, and this killer stuck a knife into his heart."

Peter, looking at him, swayed slightly. The attempt to kill him in the bar downstairs had failed. The attempt to kill him in his room had failed. And the third attempt had, ironically, resulted in the death of an innocent man who had fled to China because he had feared Chicago racketeers would put him on a spot.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Pay Dirt

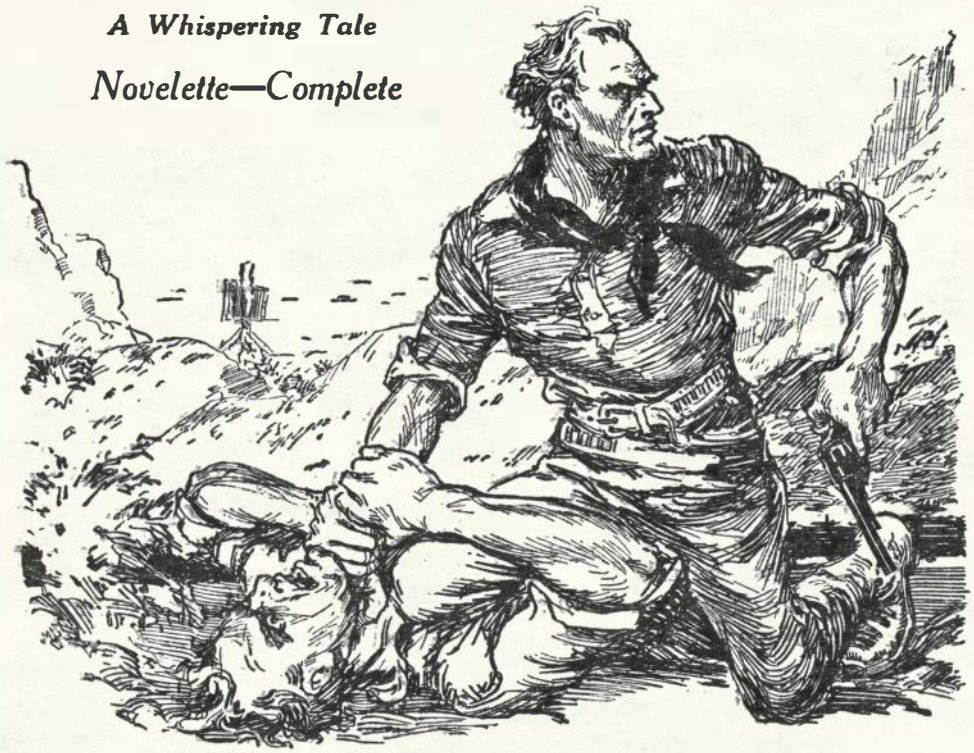
Death in the desert is a grimmer thing than elsewhere—but in all ways the desert is a grim school for men, as Pete and his partner knew only too well

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Author of "The Man with Pin-Point Eyes," "Sign of the Sun," etc.

A Whispering Tale

Novelette—Complete



CHAPTER I.

A DYING MAN'S WISDOM.

I COULD tell that he was going to die, almost from the first minute I saw him. I've lived too long in the desert to be fooled on those things.

He was running, if you could call it that. And that was a bad sign. Then again he had most of his clothes torn off. And he was soft and he had been fat. Those things weigh against a man when the desert has her way with him.

It was along in the afternoon, and the sun was sending out long shadows. The man showed as a speck at first, wobbling in a crazy zigzag. His shadow was jet black, as is the way with desert shadows in the summer.

Old Pete knows the desert even better than I do.

"Get that second burro unpacked," he told me. "There's some canned tomatoes in that pack, and we'll need the canvas, and all the water. Take one of the blankets and soak it in water."

The youngster was having an uphill battle

We weren't over five miles from Owl Wells, so we had water and to spare. I started throwing off the pack ropes. Pete went out to meet the running man.

I caught a glimpse of Pete trying to flag the man down. He waved his arms, shouted, yelled. It wasn't any use. The guy was plumb loco. Pete finally had to catch him. Then the guy let out a whoop and started to struggle, as though Pete had been a cannibal. Then he went limp and Pete eased him down to the desert.

"Make it snappy!" he yelled at me.

I started the burro over that way, sopping water on the blankets as I came.

The fellow was an awful sight.

His skin was like a boiled lobster. His lips were cracked until they were taut, drawn back from the teeth. The tongue was black and swollen. Most of the clothes were gone. Pete took off the few rags that remained. We lay him on the wet blanket, put a little tomato juice in his mouth, sprinkled him with water, made a shade with the big bed canvas.

"Any chance?" I asked, knowing that there wasn't, but just to be sociable.

Pete shook his head.

The man had been too fat. Thirst and heat had sizzled the lard off of him.

And when that happens there's some sort of an acid poison that gets into the system. It does with every one who gets out in the desert when it's hot. But a fat man gets it worse. That's why we always use tomatoes instead of water. It helps to cut that acid.

WE worked until sunset with this party. Along about dusk he opened his eyes and was conscious.

We'd been feeding him tomatoes and keeping his skin sopped with water.

As soon as he came to, we gave him some more water. He gulped it down as though he had been a piece of dried blotting paper.

"More," he said.

Pete shook his head.

"Not yet. Try to sleep."

The man rolled his head from side to side.

"The judge," he said.

Pete frowned.

"What about the judge?"

The man tried to talk, but his tongue got in his way and he was awfully weak.

"The automobile—broken axle—tow car—judge—"

He closed his eyes.

Pete looked at me and frowned.

"Say, d'you s'pose there's another one of 'em out in the desert? They must have come in from the auto road. Tried a short cut, maybe."

He cocked his eye over toward the east. A full moon was tipping its rim over the hills.

"Say, Bob," he said, "d'you s'pose you could track this pilgrim by moonlight?"

"Maybe."

"If you can't, you can stay with him and I'll go."

I reached for my hat.

"I can track him if you could," I said, which wasn't exactly true. There's no man can hold his own with Pete Harder in the desert. But then, I wasn't going to let Pete get too puffed up.

I waited to see if he was going to make any come-back.

"The quicker you start the sooner you'll find out," he said. "This guy's got about one chance in a hundred. I'll know by morning. If he can move I'll make Owl Wells. What I'm afraid of is that there may be a woman—"

I didn't hear the rest. I was moving away in the desert.

You can track easier when the moon is angling up or down. It makes shadows back of the little ridges of disturbed sand. When it's straight overhead, it flattens things out too much.

I wanted to cover all the ground I could, so I pushed right along. After five miles I got a hunch my man had been walking in a circle. I cut across at right angles, and picked up his tracks again within half a mile. I backtracked those for a mile, then did the same thing, and made another short cut.

This time the steps were more evenly spaced and were in a straight line. Looked as though he'd been more certain of himself then, and a lot stronger. I pushed right along. The course he was traveling would have been a short cut over the Red Mountains to the automobile road, and I knew a short cut that would take off a whole lot of

miles from that. I acted on a hunch and took that short cut.

AS soon as I came down out of the mountain pass on the old Indian trail I could see the machine. The moon was pretty much overhead now, but the shadows were black as ink, what there was of them. The road was an old short cut some of the old-timers used. There wouldn't be a machine over it in a month.

They'd taken out the rear axle all right. The car was right there and was going to be for some little time. I poked around in it. There were suit-cases, a couple of bags of golf sticks, some overcoats, and a lot of junk. The baggage was expensive.

There wasn't any sign of a canteen. Either they didn't have any or they'd taken 'em with them. I was inclined to think they hadn't had any.

There was a little pile of charred embers by the side of the running board, an empty thermos bottle, and some grease-stained papers. I looked around and found some chicken bones and bread crusts.

Looked as though one of the men had gone for help, the other had stayed with the car—for awhile. He'd eaten the lunch. The embers weren't so awfully old. I looked at the radiator and found it was full of water, looked around the car and found the tracks of two men all milled up. Then one set of tracks headed out over the desert. Those were the tracks of the man we'd found. I poked around and found the other man's tracks. He'd started back down the road.

He'd started running almost at once. Maybe he'd got thirsty waiting, maybe he'd just got the lost-panic. People get that way when they're left alone in the universe with themselves. They want to start running. It's just a panic, fear feeding on fear.

I swung back down the road. Within two miles I found a coat and vest. There were papers in the pocket, a watch in the vest. It had run down. There was a big Masonic emblem on the chain, gold set with diamonds.

I kept on. The man had simply run himself to death. Maybe it had been the heat, maybe it had been his heart. I found him blotching the road in the moonlight less than five miles from the car.

His tongue wasn't swollen, his clothes were on and he hadn't shredded the flesh from his fingers, digging in the coarse sand with his hands at the last, so I knew he hadn't died from thirst.

That seemed to account for everybody. Just two men.

I buried him where I found him in a shallow grave that would keep the buzzards off, even if it didn't stop coyotes. I figured on coming back and finishing the job later.

I put the papers from his coat in my pocket.

He'd been a judge of a superior court some place, and his name was Charles McNaught. I had some canned tomatoes and cooked up a little bacon and warmed over some beans. I was tired. I'd been on the move all day and most of the night. The moon was getting pretty well in the west.

I figured on making Owl Wells because it was nearest and if Pete had been able to move the other man he'd be there.

If he couldn't move him by morning it 'd mean there'd be two graves instead of just one.

The burro would have liked a long lay-off, but I gave him only two hours. Then we hit for the wells.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when we got there. Pete was there—alone.

"CASH in?" I asked.

He nodded. "Find the judge?"

"Yeah. If he'd waited at the car he'd have been O. K. If he'd thought of the radiator he'd have had enough water to have lasted him a week. But he ate a fried chicken lunch and then started to run. His pump stopped."

Pete ran his fingers through the white stubble along his chin. There was a funny look in his eye.

"Listen to me, and listen careful," he said. "My man got conscious along toward morning. He could talk. I knew he was going and he knew it, too. His name is Harrisson Bocker. He's a millionaire. He's got a son named Edward that's in college some place or other. I've got the address written down.

"The guy could talk rationally about some things. Other things he was goofy on. Seemed he'd made some sort of what he called a 'spendthrift trust' for his boy. The judge was the trustee. Old Bocker figured the judge was maybe croaked. That'd invalidate the trust and mean the boy would take the money all in one gob. Bocker said he'd blow it in. He always was an easy mark, sort of a rich man's kid.

"Well, the long and short of it was, he made me his trustee if old McNaught had cashed in, changed his will accordingly. I'm sole trustee. What I say goes. The kid don't get any money until he's forty unless I say he can have it. I can let him have all I want. If he gets married without my consent he loses everything. What do you think of that?"

I looked old Pete over.

"I think the guy was batty and you let him go ahead knowing he was crazy as a loon. He never even saw you before. What do you know about trusts?"

Pete chuckled.

"That's what you think. Nobody can prove nothin', and I've always wanted to have the handling of one of these rich men's sons. Let us go get the coroner. I want this here official."

CHAPTER II.

A DESERT MAN'S WARD.

I WAS a witness at the inquest, and then I lost track of Pete for a few months. I heard generally what was happening. The kid didn't take kindly to Pete as a trustee. He got a lawyer and they fought for a while, but the codicil to the will was in his dad's own handwriting all right, and Pete gave some pretty strong testimony. The kid couldn't even get money to pay a lawyer unless Pete let him have it, after the first court sustained the trust. So the kid gave in and accepted Pete.

In summer vacation Pete stopped the kid's allowance and brought him up to Kernville.

Kernville's up in the mountains on the rim of the Mojave Desert. It's where the big mountains and the edge of the big desert meet, and it has something of both the desert and the mountains in its climate.

Looked at in one way, it's civilization, but it's pretty close to the jumping-off place. The desert sends streamers licking at the foot of the mountains like dry tongues. The cañons are filled with sand, prickly pear, Joshua trees, the weird desert cacti. The mountains

are high, dry walls of crumbling rock with snow glistening on the ridges. Then, on the other side of the mountains, are roaring streams, pine timber, shaded slopes.

The Mojave Desert stretches to the east, runs into Death Valley, then sweeps along through the Pahrump Valley down through Nevada and Arizona, way on into New Mexico. It's all the domain of the desert, although the desert changes in every locality.

Men grow hard in Kernville. Big Bill Bruze lived in Kernville and he was hard. Nell Thurmond waited tables for Martha Stout, and Big Bill was sweet on Martha's help. And you couldn't blame him. Nell was pretty.

I was there when young Bocker arrived.

He gave his name as E. Reed Bocker. Pete asked him why he did that and the kid said Edward was common. He was like that.

Pete glare at him. "Your name's Ed Bocker up here," he said, "common or not." And E. Reed Bocker became Ed Bocker.

Pete put him to work in the mine.

Big Bill Bruze was foreman at the mine.

Ed Bocker was one of those handsome men. He had a profile like a movie picture actor, and his eyes were big and soulful. He was well muscled, not strong, just beautifully molded. His waist was slim, his shoulders broad and he drawled his a's when he talked.

I guess it was the first time that Pete had seen the kid at close range. He sure was enough to make a man go take a drink of rotgut.

He was so soft his skin would blister if he made three passes with a shovel. His hair had to be combed just so, and he had to have his suits pressed every couple of days. He brought along a bag of golf sticks "for exercise."

That was when Pete stopped his allowance and put him to work.

WITHIN three days Ed Bocker was the most hated man in Kernville. He was everything he shouldn't be: a patronizing, educated, snobbish, weak-willed nincompoop, and three years at college hadn't helped him any.

Martha Stout was the only one who saw anything good in the kid.

Martha had trained animals in a circus before she got so fat she couldn't wear tights.

"It ain't the kid," she said. "It's his training."

And she sold Nell Thurmond on the idea, because Nell started returning the kid's smiles.

That started the fight.

The kid thought he was working in the mine. He actually wasn't earning his salt. Pete was paying the superintendent for the privilege of having the kid draw wages. And the kid was snobbing it around, telling everybody how everything should be done.

Then he and Nell fell for each other. She liked his soulful eyes, and she and Bill Bruze had had a spat over something anyhow.

The two went to the picture show, Ed and the girl. Big Bill was waiting outside.

Ed had confided to me that he'd taken boxing lessons in school, and had stood well at the head of his class. He seemed to think he could handle Dempsey with one hand.

But Big Bill called him.

The kid turned up his upper lip.

"I don't brawl," he said, and stuck out his arm for Nell to take.

Nell looked at him.

"Aren't you going to stick up for your rights?" she asked.

Big Bill Bruze stepped forward and slapped the kid across the mouth. He flushed, but kept his eyes straight ahead.

"I don't brawl," he repeated.

Nell's eyes blazed.

"Well, you're going to brawl if you go with me, big boy!" she said, and pushed him into Big Bill. At the same time Big Bill stuck out his left. It smeared the kid up a bit.

The kid adopted the correct boxing attitude.

"Very well," he said.

Big Bill swung a right. The kid made the correct college block. But Bill's fist ripped the blocking arm to one side and crashed the kid on the jaw.

Ed Bocker's features bore that look of dazed incredulity that a mathematician would have if he saw the multiplication table go haywire.

He made a ladylike left lead.

It was technically correct. It landed squarely on the point of Bill's jaw. But it might have been a mosquito buzzing for all the good it did. Bill walked right into it, planted himself and swung a right to the stomach.

The kid was out the minute that right crashed.

But Bill Bruze was a bully and a killer. He was six feet of whipcorded strength, and he was jealous. What was more, he hadn't got the kid's looks, and he was sore at the kid because of that profile.

Bill measured the distance.

His right smashed the beautiful nose to powder. His left took out a couple of front teeth. His right put a permanent scar over the left eye. Then the kid hit the cement like a sack of meal. The bystanders prevented Bill kicking in his face, after he'd swung his foot for the second time.

ED BOCKER was four weeks healing, and then he looked like something the cat had dragged in.

He went to Bakersfield and a doctor told him a plastic surgeon could fix him up. Pete wouldn't let him have the money.

"You're gettin' over one handicap now," he said. "That damned beauty of yours. If you could only forget your education and the way you dawdle along on your a's when you talk, you might make a man."

The kid cried, he was so mad. Pete said things about a bawl baby and walked away.

Women are funny. Both Martha Stout and Nell Thurmond stuck up for the kid. Nell gave Big Bill Bruze the gate. She kept all her smiles for Ed Bocker. But the beating seemed to have turned Bocker plumb yellow. Bruze threatened to beat him up again if he even looked at Nell, and Bocker kept away.

The way I figured it, any man who would let fear of a beating keep him away from a girl he liked wasn't worth shooting.

Pete was worried about it. The summer was about over, and it looked like his whole plan was a fizzle. The kid was just a false alarm.

Pete asked me what I thought, and I told him.

"He ain't worth bothering with," I said. "Give him all his money and hope he drinks himself to death. Better yet, buy him the booze yourself. Or else pick a dark night and bump him with a club. Far as society's concerned he's a total loss."

Pete clawed at his white stubble.

"That's about the way I figure," he

admitted, "but Martha Stout knows a lot about animals an' about men. She says he's got pay dirt. That it's his trainin' that's to blame. He's just one of those kids that was born with a gold spoon in his mouth. He tells me his dad wouldn't let him associate much with the kids at college, because they were common. It's his trainin'."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"You an' me ain't got no education to live down," Pete went on. "We don't know nothin' about the handicap this kid's got."

I walked away. Pete's adopted kids were nothing to me.

CHAPTER III.

YELLOW.

PETE went out in the desert on a prospecting trip. He left the kid there without any money. The kid had hardened his muscles a bit by working in the mine. But he was yellow all the way through. His spirit was just as soft as it had been the day he landed.

He avoided Nell Thurmond because Bruze told him to. Nell wouldn't notice Bill Bruze. And the kid's face had healed up into a crooked mask that was a distortion of his former beauty.

I was worried about the whole thing. Seemed like Pete should have left this kid to live the only sort of a life he knew.

Then Pete came staggering into town with some gold that was enough to make a stampede. It was coarse gold, like wheat grains, and Pete was loaded with it. His coat had gold in all the pockets.

But Pete was in a bad way. He sent for old Doc Smith.

Doc Smith is sort of a father confessor to the town. He's young in years, but old in knowledge. He came to the country that borders the desert because he thought he could do some good there. He writes philosophy, acts as judge, and patches up the sick.

Doc Smith treated Pete, and then he sent for me.

"Pete's cashing in," he said. "He's located a bonanza, but his heart gave out on him. He wants you to take his kid and go back there."

"His kid?"

"The adopted kid, Ed Bocker."

"That kid couldn't live in the desert."

Doc Smith shrugged his shoulders. He gave me a pencil scrawl. "Here's a map Pete made before he became unconscious. He gave it to Martha Stout, who's acting as nurse. She gave it to me. Pete was unconscious when I got there. He won't ever regain consciousness. You've got to start right now, before some one tries to trail you."

I looked at the map and whistled.

It was a bum map, but I could tell where the main range was. It was down in the worst section of desert I'd ever been in. Pete had scrawled on the bottom. "It's up one of these cañons marked with a circle. My heart went bad on me, and I walked for days without remembering where I was."

That was all. It was a heck of a map.

"I want to see Pete," I told Doc Smith.

"Walk on tiptoes," he said.

I followed him into the room. Martha Stout was there, fat and efficient. Pete was stretched in bed, his face like wax, his eyes rolled up, his lips blue. He was motionless. I touched his flesh. It was like ice.

"He'll die inside of two days at the latest. If he wakes up and finds you haven't started the shock will kill him right then," said Doc Smith.

"I'm startin'," I told him.

I groped around until I found Pete's limp, cold hand, shook it, and promised him. I thought the eyebrows might have moved a little. Then I groped for the door. My eyes were all swimmy. Pete had been a pal of mine for years.

I got the kid rounded up.

That beating had done things to his soul, more than it had to his face. He was like a frightened quail, and he'd cringe every time he saw a man look at him real hard. That tickled the boys. There were lots to look at him real hard.

THE things we needed I threw into a car. We'd outfit at Needles. We made Needles by daylight the next morning. The kid was helpless when it came to doing anything. He couldn't even drive the car.

We got our burros together and started out into the desert.

That's real desert, down south of Needles. There are stretches of it that don't see a human being once in five years. And there are stretches where the sand hills get up and walk around.

Down toward Yuma they couldn't build an automobile road across those hills for years, until some slick engineer figured out a way to hold the road. For years they had a long road of planks fastened together so the road could be lifted and shifted. When the sand hills would march over the road they'd pull the road up and around. It would have broken a snake's back to follow it. And it broke the motorists' hearts.

They've solved the road problem, but the sand hills still walk around.

That's the section of the desert where the whispers hang out. Every night the desert seeps with whispers. Of course they aren't really whispers, just the sand slithering against the sand on the wings of the wind. But it makes lots of whispering noises, and, just when you're dropping off to sleep, it sounds like whole words and sentences.

That's the true desert. People who have lived in it for a long time get the same way the desert is, hard and gray, and with a whispering note in their speech.

Ed Bocker and I headed into that desert with three pack burros and two saddle burros.

Misfortune dogged us from the start.

One of the saddle burros was gone the second night. The third night the other saddle burro followed suit. I'd hobbled him, but he gnawed through the hobbles.

It was funny. I'd never had anything quite like that before. I wouldn't have believed a burro could have gnawed those hobbles, but I found 'em in the desert in his tracks.

Seemed like the first burro had followed him up and enticed him away. I found the tracks.

After that Ed and I had to walk.

His feet blistered and his face peeled. He sobbed and wanted to go back. I threatened him with a beating if he even looked back over his shoulder, and he stumbled on.

It was Pete's dying request, and I was going to see it through, but it sure was a trial. That kid was a thorn in the flesh, and I don't mean maybe.

We had to limit our water. Virtually none for washing, just enough for drinking to keep us going. It was awfully hard at first, particularly on Ed. After a while we toughened to it. I naturally got used to it first.

The work in the mine had toughened him up some, but his trouble was lack of grit. The desert toughened him more, walking every day through soft and shifting sand, scrambling over hard ridges of rock outcropping, working along valleys of rough float.

I KEPT wondering how those saddle burros had got loose. Then one night I heard a rifle shot. I rolled out of my blankets and got away from the light of the camp fire, jerked my Winchester from its scabbard and waited.

There was nothing more.

In the morning one of our pack burros was dead, shot through the heart. I worked for an hour before I picked up the tracks of the man who had fired that shot. He had been two hundred yards from the burro, with only moonlight to see with. It had been real shooting.

I tried to follow the tracks, but the man was too wise to leave a trail. He hit a rocky ledge and followed it.

I went back to the kid. I was worried now.

The desert is nothing to fool with. We were way out of the beaten track, in a wilderness of sand that was almost unexplored. Maps weren't much good because the sand would get up and walk around overnight. Big mountain ranges were the only things that stayed fixed in that country.

The kid was whimpering. He was frightened. It was too strong for him.

I figured we could carry the lighter packs on the two remaining burros. But how about getting back? And who was following us?

It looked as though some one had been wise to that map and was using us to lead him to the place where the gold was.

Finally we reached the shoulder of the ridge of mountains that Pete had marked with a circle. And I ran on man tracks in the soft sand, tracks that were fresh.

He was a man and he was a big man, and he had two burros with him. I figured he'd be the one who had shot our other burro, and I got the rifle ready as I swung in along his trail.

There was enough of a moon to follow it after the sun set. By midnight I came on his camp. I didn't let the kid know. The camp was just over the ridge. With the first gray of dawn I kicked the kid out.

"Buckle on your six-gun," I told him, "and come along."

"Game?" he asked.

"Game," I said.

He followed me over the ridge. We caught our man just as he was making his breakfast fire.

I thought there was something familiar in his motions the way he reached for his gun when he heard us coming.

"Little late, ain't you?" I asked him, looking down the sights of the Winchester.

He looked up so I could see his face, all twisted with hatred.

It was Big Bill Bruze.

"Gone into the hold-up business?" he asked.

I kept the rifle ready.

"You're not dealing with any college kids now," I told him. "You've called for chips in a man's game and you want to be prepared to play your hand."

He squirmed a bit, looked at the kid.

"Got a chaperon to fight his battles now, eh?"

"Maybe. What are you doing here?"

"Prospectin'. It's government land."

I jerked my head toward my camp.

"They weren't government burros you shot and ran off," I told him.

I could see his face twist with surprise and thought at the time he was doing some good acting. And that made me mad, madder than if he'd denied it with a wink or a grin.

"Never mind opening your trap," I said. "You might bite off a soft-nosed bullet. Just open your ears and do some listening. You've followed us down here, thinking we'd lead the way to a mine you could steal. Well, we're not playing *Santa Claus* with any mines, but I've got lots of ammunition. If we have any more trouble there's likely to be some careless shooting and you might get hurt. I've forgotten more about this desert than you ever knew."

And I stopped to let the words soak in.

He was a great big bulk of a man, hairy-chested, big-jawed, broad-shouldered. His shirt was open at the neck and the big muscles of his neck and chest stood out in cords of strength.

"Put down your gun and come ahead," he invited.

I laughed at him.

"My gun's my advantage," I told him. "It's my ace in the hole, and I ain't aiming to lay it down. There's nothing about your face that looks good to me, and the only way I can even bear to look at it is over the sights of a gun."

"Huh!" he retorted. "Speakin' of faces, what's that you've got with you? His face looks like it had been through a sausage grinder. What happened to it?"

"A coward kicked it," I said.

He flushed at that.

"If there's any more trouble I'm going to take your guns away," I promised him, and then I motioned to the kid and we went back over the ridge to our camp.

I kept an eye out for ambushes.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISITOR.

THAT afternoon there was a droning noise from the sky. I looked up and made out a plane swinging in wide circles. It's a funny sensation, being out in the desert and seeing a plane snarling through the blue sky like some great bird. That plane had left Needles maybe less than three hours. We'd been toilsome days in coming.

The plane spotted us. The circles got more and more narrow. I looked up at it. Something dark was coming out of the middle of the thing. That something dark hung poised for a minute, and then separated from the plane. I turned sick.

A man was being thrown overboard. Even as I looked, he broke loose and came down, a hurtling black speck, arms and legs spread out, spinning, turning, twisting.

I looked, my mouth warm with a rush of saliva, my stomach weak with horror. Then there was a puff of white. Almost at once a great mushroom of glittering white came out against the blue-black of the sky. It was a parachute.

The plane sailed off.

The black speck dangled and swung against the big mushroom of white. Slowly it drifted to the earth. I could see it was coming down almost on top of us.

It slid down back of a ridge some two hundred yards away. We walked over there, the kid's face white and drawn, my own rifle ready.

I could see it was a girl, untangling herself from the harness of the parachute. She came toward us.

"Nell Thurmond!" I yelled.

She smiled. Her face was a bit pale, and her knees were a little wobbly. It takes nerve for a girl to make her first parachute jump.

"I came to warn you," she said.

Ed Bocker's face was getting red and white by turns.

The girl didn't seem to even notice him.

"Martha Stout went crooked," she said. "She made a copy of the map, and she sold it to Bill Bruze. Bill's here, and he's got three other men who are camped up separate cañons so you can't surprise them all at once. They're planning to let you find the mine and then see that you don't leave the desert. Martha had to copy the map from memory, and they figure that yours is the best map. They think you'll be more likely to find it than they will."

I knew my eyes were bulging. I couldn't figure Martha Stout as a crook, no matter how I went about it.

"Pete?" I asked.

"He died the day after you left. He never regained consciousness."

I looked her over.

"You came to warn us. How about getting back out?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll take my fortune with yours . . . Hello, Ed."

He twisted his broken nose as he grinned.

"Hello, Nell."

I looked at the burros. We never would get out now. We had one more mouth to feed, one more person to divide drinking water with.

"Bet you were frightened when you climbed overboard from that plane," I said.

She didn't even hear me. She was looking at Ed Bocker.

I sighed and got the burros together. We were getting to where we could make a permanent camp, though we had little to make it with. Pete's map had showed the location of a spring of water up at the head of one of the cañons, and I figured that cañon was the second over. If there were hostile people in the country the first thing was to get to drinking water.

WE marched over the ridges. About dusk we came to the cañon that had the spring.

Two people were camped there. What was more they had monuments on the ground and a location notice.

"Howdy, folks," I said when we came up.

They weren't cordial about it.

"You can't camp here," one of them said. "This here is a located mineral claim."

I tried to keep smiling. "I can get water here, anyway."

He shook his head. "Nope. We can't afford to take no chances on having the claim jumped."

I started getting the canteens off the burros.

"Well," I told him, "we're not jumping any claims, but we're almost out of water, and we're filling up. What's more, we're goin' to come back from time to time and fill up some more."

He came toward me.

"I gotta stop you."

"You and who else?"

"My partner."

He was just a little uncertain, but his right hand was getting pretty close to the holstered gun that swung at his belt.

Living in the desert doesn't give you

much weight, but it gives you a lot of strength per pound and it makes a man plenty active. I got within reaching distance before the right hand could connect with the butt of the gun. My left cracked him on the jaw, staggered him back. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the other man reaching for a gun. Then I saw Ed Bocker get into action. After that my hands were full.

I finally got my man where I could take his gun away from him, and looked around to see what luck Ed was having. He wasn't having much. His footwork was all the college professor on boxing could have asked for, but it wasn't getting by in the soft sand with a clump of sagebrush to tangle his feet every once in a while. His broken nose had stopped another punch and it hadn't done the general effect any good.

But he was swapping punches, and his blows had a little steam to them.

I rolled myself a cigarette.

"Now then, son," I told him, "are you going to knock that gent out, or are you going to be a sissy all your life?"

He turned to look at me when I spoke, and the reception committee that had taken him on, slammed home a terrific wallop to the chin.

ED was punch-groggy, but there was something that gleamed out from the back of his eyes I hadn't seen before. He was forgetting some of his complexes and getting down to raw human nature.

He went in, and, for a second or two, he showed speed and strength. His boxing helped him time his punches, and something that had been dormant in him made him put snap in them.

The left measured the distance, the right crossed over, and a sprawling figure staggered backward, poised for a second and then went down with a thud that jarred the earth.

Ed Bocker stood over him, staring with a species of dazed incredulity.

"I knocked him out! I knocked him out! I knocked him out!" he kept repeating.

I didn't pay any attention to him in particular. I left that for the girl. I was busy going through the camp and confiscating firearms. I got two six-guns and a rifle, and I took all the shells I could find.

The one that Bocker had knocked out stayed out. My man was sitting up, nursing a black eye and a bloody nose and gazing at me moodily. My lips were split, and one of my front teeth was wobbly. The sand was all dug up with man tracks. We were a great-looking outfit.

"Any guy that tries to corner water in the desert is a so-and-so," I said. "And, what's more, you guys ain't to be trusted with firearms. You might get hurt."

He didn't say anything.

I filled the canteens, loaded on the captured arsenal, and led the way over the ridge, down a cañon, over another ridge and camped at the head of a little draw where the ridges would break the wind.

We were getting into the region of drifting sands.

No one said very much that night. Twice I caught Ed Bocker looking at his skinned knuckles with sort of a wide-eyed incredulity.

"I knocked him out," he said once.

"Sure you did," I told him. "That's what your fists are for. You box for points in college, but when you get out in the world you fight for knock-outs. It ain't a sociable pastime."

Nell Thurmond didn't say anything. Her eyes were starry.

I made a little camp fire because I wanted some tea, and we had to cook some rice.

But I kept every one but myself away from the circle of firelight, and when they made up their beds I had them bed down far from the fire.

SOME one was watching us, it seemed to me. It was an uncomfortable feeling.

I'd just got the rice ready and the tea water boiling when the rifle started to talk.

"*Bang!*" it went.

I heard the crack of the bullet rushing through the air toward me, and I heard the "*thunk*" as it struck.

I grabbed a rifle and rolled over to one side. I caught the flash of the second shot and answered with a snap shot that must have given the hombre something to think about.

There were no more shots.

I remembered that second bullet had a tin-panny sound when it struck, but I couldn't be bothered just then. I was streaking up the ridge, keeping just below the skyline, watching the skyline of the second ridge over. If I saw anything move against the stars I was going to throw lead. This had quit being a joke.

But I didn't see a thing. Somehow or other, I got the idea I was up against some one who knew as much about the desert as I did, maybe a lot more—only I wouldn't have missed those first two shots.

I went back to camp. They'd had sense enough to kick the fire out, but I could see the glow of an isolated ember here and there.

"Get those embers covered," I said, and began kicking sand over all I could find.

"He hit the canteens," said Nell.

"What?"

"Yes. A hole through each one."

I whistled. "Any water left?"

"Yes," said Ed Bocker, "I knew I couldn't do any good with a gun, so I beat it out to some of the mesquite and whittled plugs. They help, but the water seeps out around them, no matter how tightly I push them in."

I didn't say anything. The water would leak out. With bullet holes in those two big canteens we could never make the long march back out of the desert. It would mean one of us would have to try it, and leave the other two. And I didn't like the idea of leaving the girl with only Ed Bocker to protect her. That stretch of desert was getting mean.

I salvaged as much of the rice as I could, and we had weak tea, not too hot, and rice. We ate in the dark.

I rolled the two into their blankets, pretended to crawl into mine. But I crawled out on the other side and started playing Indian.

The shots had come from a rifle. The two citizens at the spring might have had a rifle cached, but there was Big Bill Bruze to be reckoned with. Maybe he'd done the rifle shooting.

I crawled up along the sandy ridges, sniffing for wood smoke. Finally I located a camp. It was Big Bill, all right. I started to wake him up and have a show-down, then I figured on a better lesson. I still-hunted into his camp, picked out the biggest of his canteens, carried it out into the desert and buried it where I'd find it again. Then I went back to my blankets.

That night the desert began to whisper. The sand hissed over the sand on the wings of the desert night wind, and

the whole darkness literally crawled with whispers. I could tell the others were awake, listening.

The desert is a fearsome thing out at night in the land of the marching sand hills when the wind brings the sand to life and the desert begins to whisper. Listening to those whispers will do things to a man's soul. They bite deep. I didn't sleep much.

CHAPTER V.

SHOW-DOWN.

MORNING, and I organized things. We needed access to that spring and I intended to have it.

"I'm going over to the spring," I told Ed Bocker. "You stay here with the girl. Use your head. If anything happens to me you've got to get her out of here."

He didn't argue, just nodded. The desert was doing things to him. I could see that. But I had other things to think about. I went over to the spring. The two looked at me, surly-like.

I kept my eye on them and went through the camp, looking for a rifle. I couldn't find anything that even looked like a rifle. I told the two a few choice sentiments and went back to camp.

There I made the two a little talk.

"We came into this country to find a mine. We're going to find it," I said. "What's more, we're going to have trouble. A little trouble all the time. A devil of a lot of trouble if we locate the pay dirt. Let's go."

We started out. I had the map and did more exploring than the rest. I left Bocker to do most of the guard duty. The girl did the cooking. I covered cañon after cañon: and always I had the feeling of being watched.

Day after day, the program was about the same. It was hard work, looking for gold and watching back trail. It did things to my disposition. It also did things to Bocker. He got thinner, more whipcorded. His eyes were steadier, and his lips took on a firmer line.

Then one day I stumbled onto it. It was up a winding cañon, and I could see there had been some old camp made at the mouth. A little ways on up I found a can with a piece of paper in it. The paper had some of Pete's writing in lead pencil:

IT'S UP AT THE END OF THIS CAÑON

That was a funny message, but I figured it was because Pete's heart had started to go bad on him when he was coming out and he'd left this paper to guide him when he came back.

I stood staring at the piece of paper when a rifle cracked. The report sounded thin and stringy on the hot desert air, but the bullet came cracking through the heat and whipped up the sand within two feet of me. I ducked for cover and got my own rifle into play.

I spotted him up on a ridge, just over the crest, four hundred yards away. He'd been following me, looking at me through binoculars. When he saw me pick up the can with the paper in it, he figured it was a location notice and had gone into action.

I decided to try a trick I'd seen once south of Tucson.

I started walking straight toward the ridge, firing often enough to keep him under cover, making him take little snap shots that went wild at the distance. Fifty yards, and I came to a

protecting ridge that ran up and headed the ridge he was on.

I didn't come over the top of that ridge the way he figured I would, but I started running for all that was in me, working up toward where the ridge joined the main formation.

I got up there, eased over the top, waited until I got my breath enough to hold the gun steady, and then began to slip down, on the same side of the ridge where my friend was.

Two hundred yards, and I got where I could see him. He was stretched out just back of the crest, his rifle at his shoulder, waiting for me to show myself against the skyline as I came across.

I could see he was getting a little nervous, from the way he was stretching his head.

But it never dawned on him to look up his own ridge.

I got my rifle at ready and catfooted down to him.

WHEN I was within twenty yards he heard me. He flung around and started to throw up the rifle. There wasn't any time to waste in chatter. I slammed a bullet in the general direction of his gun arm and worked the repeating lever as I jerked in a fresh shell. That one was due to rip his heart to ribbons if he didn't take the hint of the first one.

But the first shell hit the rifle on the lock and slammed it out of his numbed and nerveless fingers.

"Had another gun hid, I see," I told him.

He was the same hombre I'd had the fight with at the spring. He'd evidently had one rifle buried in the sand, and they'd kept it cached.

I made him take his shoes off and pass them over. Then I took my rifle and started back down the ridge. He wouldn't do much mischief in the hot sands of the desert in his stocking feet.

"You take my advice and head for camp," I told him as I left. "Your feet won't stand over a mile of this, and you'll need all the mud you can puddle out of that spring."

Sure it was cruel, but he had it coming.

Then I heard firing from the direction of my camp. The shots sounded thin and weak, but plenty rapid. I started down the ridge just as fast as I dared to take it in the sun.

I topped a ridge and looked down on camp from four hundred yards. A black speck was perched on a ridge, making talk with a rifle. Another black speck was wading out to meet him, shooting as he walked, shooting calmly, unhurriedly.

Another black speck was behind the blanket rolls, peppering away with a six-gun. It wouldn't do any good at the distance except keep the guy with the gun occupied.

I knew Nell Thurmond was fully aware of that fact. She was just joining in. I elevated my sights for four hundred yards.

And then I held my fire. The black speck on the ridge had tossed away his rifle and was running down the slope. It was Big Bill Bruze. I could tell from his awkward, sidelong gallop.

Ed Bocker held his gun for a moment, at his shoulder. Then he tossed it away and started running up the slope, toward Big Bill.

I uncocked my rifle and shortened the distance as fast as my legs would cover the ground, and I could see some one else running toward the two enemies, a long-legged cuss who had sprung up from nowhere out of the

desert. He must have been buried in the sand. I hadn't seen him.

BIG BILL BRUZE and Ed Bocker met on a little level space. The sand was soft. There was no chance for college footwork. It was primitive man against primitive man.

I got there just as it finished. I'd seen some of the action while I was running, not as much as I'd liked, and I had to keep an eye on the long-legged stranger with the rifle who was quartering down the other slope.

Big Bill went down for the count as I came up.

I got a look at his face. His nose was ground to powder. His eyes looked like pieces of hamburger steak. His lips were ribbons.

Ed Bocker had some marks, but, on the whole, he seemed fairly beautiful compared with the other guy. I flung my rifle in the general direction of the long-legged customer.

"Now then, you get your gun stretched out in the sand and your hands up, and—"

My jaw sagged. The long-legged cuss was old Pete himself. He started to laugh. And the girl was laughing. Ed Bocker was as speechless as I was.

Pete did the talking. "I never had but one school, the old desert. I knew there was pay dirt in this kid, but he'd had things too soft. Civilization wasn't bringing it out. So I framed it with old Doc Smith to give me some sort of a powder and paint my lips blue. Then I planted some gold and pretended to have a mine out in the worst section of the desert goin'.

"I didn't intend nothin' else, not me. But Martha Stout embellished the idea. She said Ed would never get no self-respect until he'd mastered Big Bill over the girl. So she let Big Bill Bruze bribe her for a rough copy of the map and started him out here. Then they shipped the girl in by plane.

"Big Bill got a couple of his buddies to locate on the spring, figuring they'd keep you from water and make you surrender the map for water. He just didn't figure you right.

"I wanted Old Mother Desert to take this lad in hand and bring out the pay dirt in him. I was the one that followed you and run off the burros and punctured the canteens. I been watchin' all the time. And I been waitin' for Big Bill to find out the girl was here and come after her.

"The old desert took things in hand and ripped off some of the softness from my boy and done brought out the pay dirt."

I let the information soak in.

"One of those guys might have killed me," I said.

Pete snorted.

"If'n you can't take care of yourself in the desert you'd oughta cash in your chips."

"And there wasn't any gold at all?"

He shook his head. "Only what I bought from a placer mine and stuffed into my pockets."

I could feel myself getting madder and madder.

"And all this time I thought I was carrying out your dying wishes I was just playing schoolma'am for a kid that couldn't absorb nothing from college?"

Pete's eyes got sort of gray, like the desert sand. His voice had that whisper to it that comes to those who have lived long where they can hear the sand whispering to the sand, a dry huskiness.

"The desert did the teachin'," he said. "She's the cruelest and the kindest mother a man ever had. Now I can give this kid his money an' let him get

married and know that the money won't ruin him. We've brought out the pay dirt, you an' me. You're mad now, but you'll be glad for what you've done 'fore you get back out."

I turned my back and walked away.

THAT night though, when the sand commenced to whisper, I could see things in a little different light.

I lay and listened to the sand. Then the wind died down, and I could hear Ed Bocker and Nell Thurmond talking in low tones over the embers of the fire.

And I could hear something soft and hissing that I thought was sand whispering; but the wind had lulled. I propped myself up on an elbow to hear what it was.

It wasn't sand. It was old Pete, the damned old galoot, chuckling to himself, and his throat had got so dry from years in the desert that it sounded like a sand whisper.

Then I knew how much I liked the old cuss, and I got over being mad and commenced to chuckle, too.

Nature had played a funny stunt when she'd delivered Harrisson Bocker and Judge McNaught into the desert. If the old judge had been trustee for Ed Bocker he'd have trained him up to be a pampered son of luxury, never worth a damn.

But the desert had taken a hand. Seemed sort of like she'd known what she was doing when she slipped Pete in as guardian and trustee of young E. Reed Bocker.

And then the wind, which had lulled, sprang up again, and the sand began to stir and rustle, and it sounded just like Pete's chuckle. I got to wondering if the desert was chuckling, too, and was still wondering when I dropped off to sleep.

THE END.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

Talking Lighthouses

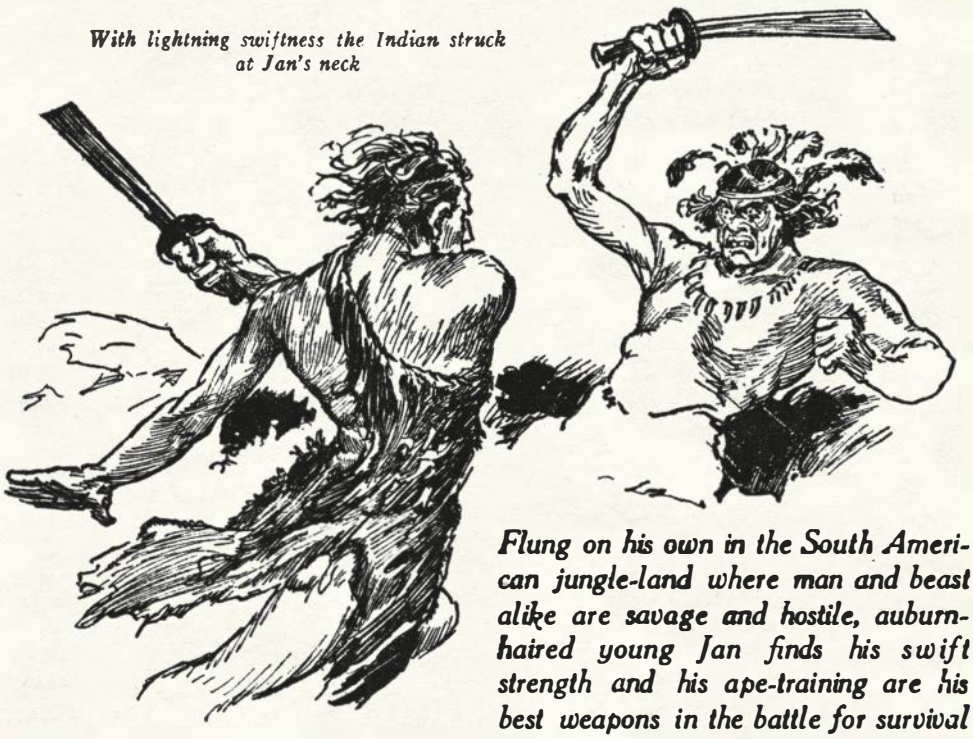
AT last the lighthouse has found its voice. The first talking beacon in the world has been put into successful operation at the Cumbrae Lighthouse on a small island in the mouth of the Clyde River in Scotland. It is so far superior in performance to the age-old light beacon that within a few years every important lighthouse in the world will no doubt be similarly equipped.

The apparatus consists of a specially constructed radiophone, and is used in conjunction with the lighthouse foghorn. The radiophone will, at regular intervals, transmit the name of the lighthouse by wireless. This will be picked up immediately by the ship's operator. The blast from the lighthouse foghorn, sent simultaneously with the radiophone message, will then reach the operator's ears. The warning of the horn will naturally take longer to reach the ship than the wireless message and the lapse of time between the two will enable the operator to calculate exactly the ship's distance from the lighthouse.

This invention will probably even change the architecture of these familiar landmarks, since no light of any kind will be longer necessary, although a keeper will have to be retained to look after the mechanism.

William David Belbeck.

Jan of the Jungle



With lightning swiftness the Indian struck at Jan's neck

Flung on his own in the South American jungle-land where man and beast alike are savage and hostile, auburn-haired young Jan finds his swift strength and his ape-training are his best weapons in the battle for survival

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Author of "Maza of the Moon," "The Prince of Peril," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TALL, strong, and auburn-haired, the sixteen-year-old youth Jan had never seen a human being other than his kidnaper and evil genius, Dr. Bracken. That half-mad fiend, having been jilted by Jan's titian-haired mother Georgia Trevor, had stolen the boy shortly after birth. By sewing him in the skin of a baby chimpanzee, Dr. Bracken had succeeded in getting his captive chimpanzee-mother Chicma to adopt the child as her own. Only two words had Dr. Bracken taught Jan: "Mother" and "Kill!"—and the chief item of his training was to attack a red-headed female dummy. A human being with an ape's mind, trained to kill his mother—that was the revenge Dr. Bracken planned.

But Jan—named after Jan ibn Jan, chief of the *jinn* of legend—and Chicma escaped from Dr. Bracken's menagerie in the depths of the Florida Everglades; and their capture on the beach by the crew of a Venezuelan trading schooner just before Dr. Bracken and his bloodhounds caught up to the fugitives, balked his revenge for the time.

This story began in the Argosy for April 18.

A hurricane caught the homeward-bound schooner; and Jan, his chimpanzee foster-mother, and a kindly Haitian Negro named Borno who had befriended the captive youth, were washed ashore on the edge of the South American jungle country. Jan, hunting food, was suddenly seized by savages lurking in the undergrowth.

CHAPTER VII.

BROWN MEN'S PRIZE.

JAN'S struggles presently grew less as the pressure of the powerful fingers on his throat continued. Then his arms were seized and tightly bound behind his back. For some time he lay on the ground, panting for breath with rattling palate, and staring defiantly up at the strange creature whose prisoner he had become.

The man was short and powerful, and naked save for an abbreviated loincloth. His straight black hair was cut in a soup-bowl bob, and his coppery skin glistened with perspiration from his recent exertions, for, despite his youth Jan was stronger than the average man and had given him a good tussle.

Jan watched the native suspiciously as he took up a bundle of long sticks—as long as he was tall—from the ground. One of these sticks was curved, with a string stretched across the curve from tip to tip. The others were sharply pointed at one end. To Jan, a stick had always meant a potential beating, and a low growl rumbled from his throat as his captor made a step toward him.

Puzzled by this unusual sound, coming from a human being, the tall savage paused for a moment, looking quizzically down at his prisoner. He took a second step, and a louder growl resulted. Then he uttered a few words. The youth's only answer was a snarl and a quick leap to his feet. Then he darted into the jungle, his hands still bound behind him.

As he dashed away through the forest, Jan heard a quick grunt of surprise. Then there was a twang, and one of the long sticks whizzed past his ear, burying its point in a tree trunk, where it quivered for a moment as if alive.

Sprinting, leaping, stumbling, dodging first one way, then another, and constantly goaded to his utmost speed by the unmistakable sounds of pursuit behind him, the youth ran on and on until his breath came in great sobbing gasps and there was a terrific pain in his side. But still the sound of those menacing footsteps followed him relentlessly, doggedly.

Suddenly there came to his nostrils an odor that was hatefully familiar to him. It was the smell of burning wood, and he instantly associated it with Dr. Bracken and his ten years of captivity. The cook always burned wood in her kitchen stove, and at some time during the day there was always a puff of wind to carry it into the menagerie.

Jan halted for a moment, suspicious of the acrid odor, but a shout from his pursuer sent him running forward again. The shout was instantly answered by a voice directly ahead of him. Soon there were more yells on his right and left, and more answers from the man who pursued him. Accompanying the yells were the patter of footsteps and the rustling of underbrush, warning him that he had been surrounded.

Looking about for a place to hide, Jan selected a clump of huge begonias, which spread their immense leaves near

by. Plunging into this clump, he squatted down, and peering through a space between two gigantic leaves, watched for the approach of the numerous enemies his ears told him were closing in on him.

As he sat there with perspiration streaming from him, endeavoring to keep his labored breathing as quiet as possible, two bronze-skinned savages suddenly came into Jan's line of vision. They passed on, but were succeeded by three more, the last of whom stopped as something caught his attention. It was one of Jan's footprints, and it told this trained hunter as plainly as words that the youth was hidden behind the broad leaves of the begonia. With a loud whoop of exultation, he sprang upon the crouching Jan and dragged him forth.

IN an instant, Jan was the center of a ring of curious savages, who plucked at his shock of red hair, pulled at his jaguar-skin garment, and poked at his sunburned body as if he were a strange being from another planet, chattering excitedly to each other the while with many grunts and exclamations of amazement.

His spirit unbroken and his anger aroused by this manhandling, Jan voiced his disapproval in the only manner he knew—by alternately snarling and growling at his captors. This demonstration seemed to amuse them hugely, and several of them took to baiting him for the purpose of entertainment.

One huge fellow took it upon himself to poke Jan's tender, sunburned nose with his forefinger. He instantly withdrew the hand with a howl of pain, for Jan, with a quick snap, had bitten it nearly through at the second joint. Enraged, the wounded savage whipped out a *machete* and would have cut off Jan's head, but two companions seized and dragged him away, while the entire party laughed at his discomfiture.

Then Jan's original captor took him by one arm and one of his fellows seized the other, after which they hustled him along between them into a cleared space where a fire was burning and many hammocks were swung. Here Jan's feet were bound, and he was thrown to the ground with one man watching him. Several others gathered around the fire, which they replenished, and over which, when it was going well, they suspended the carcasses of six monkeys, a capybara and two peccaries to roast.

Despite the ache of his bound hands and feet and the stinging bites of numerous tiny black flies, Jan kept every sense alert, listening to the strange chatter of the bronze-skinned men and watching their every movement. All were naked except for their abbreviated loin-cloths, and all were well armed. Some, he observed, had the bent sticks with strings stretched across, and the bundles of sharp-pointed sticks which could fly from them. All had either *machetes* or knives, familiar to Jan because of the assortment of cutlery which Dr. Bracken had used in cutting up meat. Some also carried short, heavy sticks with sharp stones lashed to their thick ends, and some had very long sticks with sharp points.

As soon as they finished eating, the savages, one by one, wandered to their hammocks, which were slung in the smoke of the fire to keep off insect pests, and went to sleep.

Jan's original captor brought him some gnawed monkey bones with a little meat left on them, and unbound his hands so he could eat. His fingers were first numb, then filled with a sensation that resembled the pricking of a

thousand needles as the blood began to circulate freely in them. He ate a few bites of monkey flesh, took a long drink from a gourd which his captor proffered, and submitted to having his hands bound once more, for he saw that resistance would be useless.

The black flies, which Jan was powerless to brush away, disappeared at nightfall, but their place was taken by hordes of mosquitoes. For hours Jan lay awake, squirming and tossing in fruitless endeavor to rid himself of his tiny tormentors. But at last he slept.

Awakened at daybreak by a stir in the camp around him, Jan was fed, given a drink of water, and left to watch the preparations for departure. All camp equipment was loaded into a half dozen large baskets, which were carried on men's backs, suspended by broad straps that went around their foreheads. When all was in readiness, Jan's feet were unbound and he was forced to march away with the others.

FOR five days Jan was taken deeper and deeper into the jungle by the band of hunters. Near the end of the fifth day they suddenly emerged into a circular clearing, in the center of which was a large round communal hut or *malocca,* flanked by two crudely constructed lean-tos.

A dozen yapping mongrel dogs rushed out to greet them, instantly followed by more than a score of pot-bellied naked children whose clamor equaled that of the canines, and then by women wearing nothing but small square or triangular aprons.

Jan was dragged to a strong stump about five feet tall near the entrance to the communal hut, and bound to it by strips of fiber passed around his body. Then his hands and feet were unbound and he was given a drink of water. Dogs, children and women crowded around him, all apparently more curious than the men had been. A dog nipped him on the shin, and Jan promptly kicked it over the heads of the children standing in front. Then a youth of about Jan's age, apparently its master, attempted reprisal by pulling his shock of red hair. Jan cuffed him off his feet with one well-placed blow, much to the young native's chagrin and the amusement of the spectators.

Then a middle-aged matron, evidently the squaw of Jan's original captor, came to his side, knocking children and kicking dogs right and left. After she had cleared a space around him, she handed him a piece of something flat and hard, evidently food. He bit into it, finding it rather tasteless and difficult to chew, but it satisfied his hunger which had been developed by the long march. It was a *farinha* cake, made from mandioca root.

Jan was left on exhibition at the stump for some time, but his popularity as an exhibit suddenly waned as another party of hunters returned with a new prisoner whose hands were bound behind him and who was urged forward by spear thrusts from behind. Although, like his captors, he was naked except for a loincloth and copper-skinned, he was much taller than the men who had captured him, none of whom were much taller than Jan, and his aspect was made ferocious by daubs of red ocher on his face, ornamented sections of bamboo thrust through the distended lobes of his ears, and a necklace of jaguar's teeth.

The new prisoner was quickly hustled to the stump and bound like Jan to the opposite side. Women and children crowded around him hurling

insults, while dogs barked and snapped at his legs. But despite the abuse heaped upon him, he maintained a stoical silence.

AS the sun sank lower and lower toward the horizon, and the shadows of the trees that rimmed the clearing grew longer, many children brought firewood, which they heaped around the two who were bound to the post. Jan had no idea what it was for; and although the silent Indian behind him knew, he gave no sign.

A number of cooking fires were built, and much meat was consumed, as both hunting parties had been quite successful. But this time the savages did not retire to their hammocks immediately after their meal. Instead, they formed a large circle around the prisoners.

As soon as darkness fell, Jan's hands were bound like those of the other prisoner, and the circle of spectators began a slow dance around them in time to the throbbing cadence of a kettle-drum beaten by an old man. Many of the dancers carried flaming faggots, snatched from their cook fires, which they thrust into the prisoners' faces or held against their arms or bodies, inflicting painful burns.

Jan struggled to break his bonds, snarling and growling at his tormentors, but to no avail. Presently, imitating his fellow prisoner, who had neither moved nor cried out under torture, he relapsed into silence and ceased his struggles, resolved to show these people that he could stand pain as stoically as the big Indian.

The dance grew faster and faster, the searing thrusts of the lighted faggots more frequent. Then suddenly, as if at a prearranged signal, all of the dancers threw their faggots at the base of the pyre which had been stacked around the two torture victims. Jan heard a crackling sound that swiftly increased in volume. Then there was a sudden upthrust of licking flames and a burst of terrific heat which brought scorching, excruciating agony.

CHAPTER VIII.

ORGY.

BORNO and Chicma did not rest very long on the beach. By the time they were dry from their ocean bath, the rays of the sun had grown intolerable.

The ape got up first, and began sniffing the air as if some far-off scent had attracted her attention. Then she shuffled away in the direction of the jungle.

The big Negro, who was wise in the ways of wild things, observed her actions and followed her. He found her in a small patch of wild pineapples, devouring one of the fragrant fruits. Selecting a ripe one for himself, he drew his *machete* and hacking off the leaves and horny rind, ate it with gusto. As he was about to prepare another he thought of Jan and called him. There was no reply.

"Jan!" he shouted again, with all the power of his huge lungs. But not so much as an echo answered him. Chicma, evidently understanding what was wrong, threw back her head and called to Jan in her barking chimpanzee language.

The big Negro had been raised in the jungles of his native Haiti, and it did not take him long after returning to the beach to pick up Jan's trail. Chicma was beside him when he discovered the signs of Jan's struggle, and she bristled up with a snarl.

They followed the trail until nightfall, when darkness made further tracking impossible. Then Borno crept beneath the buttressed roots of a huge ceiba tree, and lay down to snatch such sleep as biting insects would allow. The chimpanzee crept in and curled up near him.

In the morning Borno divided his pineapple with Chicma, and they took the trail. Soon they came upon the deserted camp site of the hunters. Toward noon they found a clump of wild bananas and both ate their fill of the fruit. Then Borno shouldered half of a good-sized bunch to take along.

Thus they traveled day by day, Haitian man and African ape, both actuated by the same desire—to rescue the son of a North American millionaire from the savages of a South American jungle.

Near the end of the fifth day, when the man and ape had eaten their evening meal of Brazil nuts, and night had fallen, the hollow booming of a kettledrum came to their ears across the jungle.

Chicma paid no attention to the sound, but when Borno suddenly got up and stole away in the direction of the noise, she followed. The big Negro pushed his way through the jungle as rapidly as possible. Soon he could hear the whoops and yells of the dancers, and the slapping of their bare feet on the packed ground. Then he smelled smoke, saw the flicker of firelight, and emerged into the circular clearing.

Just ahead of him was the huge circle of the community hut. Beside it was the tall stump to which the prisoners were tied, around which the dancers whirled, their faces contorted and hideous in the firelight.

Borno circled and entered the clearing behind the big hut, in order to creep near the fire unobserved. Chicma followed him silently, but when he reached the rear of the *malocca* she sprang up onto its thatched roof.

PAYING no attention to Chicma, as he did not count on her for much assistance, Borno gripped his heavy cudgel tightly in both hands and dashed around the hut. He had heard the crackle of burning wood which told him that the death pyre was lighted.

With a blood-curdling yell and a swift rain of bone-crushing blows, he leaped among the dancers, felling several and scattering the others right and left. At the same instant Chicma, who had poised herself on the thatched roof just above the door, was dropped inside the hut by the breaking of the roof supports.

The frightened Indians fled in all directions. A few of them started to go into the *malocca* for their weapons. But when they were met at the door by Chicma—a terrifying hairy apparition wearing a jaguar skin, and frothing with rage—they fled weaponless, fully convinced that the evil demons of the jungle had joined forces against them.

Borno, meanwhile, kicked the burning wood away from the post, and with a few deft slashes of his *machete* released both prisoners.

As soon as he was free, the captive Indian rushed into the big hut, emerging with a large bundle of weapons and a big basket of smoked meat. Then he threw several flaming faggots onto the dry thatch, which immediately blazed up, lighting the entire clearing.

"*Vamos!*" he said, with a significant gesture, and started away, the basket slung from his brawny shoul-

ders and the weapons carried under one arm.

Borno understood the Spanish word for "Let's go!" and calling to Jan and Chicma, hurried after the tall Indian.

Jan, who had seen the wonderful efficiency of the *machete*, paused for a moment to secure one of the coveted weapons from the belt of a fallen savage whose skull had been crushed by the big Negro's cudgel—then followed, with Chicma ambling behind him on hind feet and fore-knuckles.

The Indian, with remarkable precision, struck a narrow trail at the edge of the clearing. This led them in a short time to a small stream, on the bank of which a number of dugout canoes rested side by side. Into one of these he dropped his basket of smoked meat and bundle of weapons. Then he pushed the other boats, one by one, into the water, permitting them to drift away downstream, while Borno assisted.

When the last empty canoe was drifting downstream, the one which contained the food and weapons was launched, with Jan and Chicma riding in the middle. Borno wielded a paddle in front and the Indian in the rear.

Propelled by the silent strokes of the two powerful men, the canoe shot rapidly downstream, passing, one by one, the empty craft which had already been launched.

Huddled against Chicma, Jan was still suffering much from the burns inflicted by his captors, but he did not whimper nor cry out. Silent and wide-eyed, he drank in the brilliant spectacle of the star-strewn sky reflected by the gently rippling water, and strove to penetrate the mystery of the shadowy banks, from which came many mysterious and terrifying sounds—the night noises of the jungle which he had not learned to interpret.

Steered by the deft paddle of the Indian, the canoe soon emerged into a much broader stream. Here the steersman kept the craft in the middle as if he feared some danger from either shore.

Lulled by the rhythmic strokes of the paddles, Jan fell into a deep slumber and did not awaken until the hot rays of the morning sun struck him full in the face. The canoe was still traveling in the center of the broad river, the two men paddling with unremitting vigor.

THE Indian presently steered the canoe toward the left bank. They were almost beneath the overhanging branches and vines before Jan saw that he was making for a narrow inlet, barely wide enough to admit the canoe. A moment more, and they were in the deep shadows beneath the densely matted roof of the jungle. The steersman deftly swung the prow of the boat inshore, and Borno, springing out, dragged it high on the muddy bank while two frightened turtles and a small alligator splashed into the water and disappeared.

Opening the lid of the basket, the Indian took out several strips of smoked meat. Then he picked up his bundle of weapons and stepped ashore. Depositing the weapons on the ground, he handed a strip of meat to each of his companions and to Chicma. Then he sat down to munch slowly the strip he had kept for himself.

Jan bit into his and found it tough and of a disagreeable flavor. It was tapir meat, hastily cured, and not only had a smoky taste but was rancid. Observing, however, that the Indian devoured his with gusto and that Borno

tore off huge mouthfuls with his large white teeth and chewed them with great relish, Jan resolved to eat his whether he liked it or not. But Chicma merely sniffed at hers, then tossed it aside and waddled off into the jungle to look for something more to her liking.

As soon as the Indian had eaten, and drunk from the stream, he promptly stretched out on the ground and went to sleep. Borno followed his example. But Jan, who had slumbered all night in the boat, was neither tired nor sleepy. He wandered along the bank of the small stream for a little way, disturbing a number of frogs and turtles, whose splashing leaps into the water interested him, and hacking off shrubs and water plants with his newly acquired *machete*. This was freedom! This was life, and he gloried in it.

Presently there came a summons from Chicma—the food call. She had found something good to eat, and was calling her foster child to come and share it with her. Interested, but in no great hurry to comply, Jan wandered off in the general direction of the sound, lopping off lianas, branches and bits of bark from tree trunks with his new weapon. It was a fascinating thing, and he wished to become skilled in its use.

Despite his lingering gait, Jan soon arrived within sight of Chicma, who had found a clump of wild orange trees and was hungrily devouring the fruit. But he saw something else which brought a low growl from his throat and caused every hair on his body to stiffen. For, stretched out on a thick limb, his spotted sides barely rising and falling with his suppressed breathing, and the tip of his tail twitching nervously, was Fierce One, the jaguar, apparently about to spring down on the unwary Chicma, who seemed to have no intimation of his presence.

WITH a snarl, and a cry of warning which Chicma understood, and which sent her instantly scuttling into a near-by tree, Jan bounded forward.

Surprised and annoyed at this interruption of its hunting, the jaguar turned and with a roar of rage leaped for the youth. The beast was lightning quick, but Jan, who had been trained all his life by a jungle creature, was just a shade quicker. With a slash of his *machete* at the hurtling beast, he flung himself to one side, just out of reach of the raking claws.

The jaguar was swift at recovery, but no swifter than Jan, for as it whirled for a second spring, he was on his feet, his keen *machete* ready for a second cut. In a fleeting instant he saw the result of his previous haphazard slash at his enemy—a paw half severed and dangling uselessly.

Then what had previously been but chance and an instinctive movement of self-protection became a fixed purpose. As the angry brute made its second leap, Jan slashed the other front paw and nimbly eluded the snarling bundle of feline fury. The second blow completely crippled the jaguar's other front paw.

Badly disabled and half disarmed though it was, the fierce beast turned again and attempted a leap. But it was a clumsy effort, and Jan found it easy to step to one side and bring his keen weapon down on the back of the jaguar's neck, severing the vertebræ. With the tenacity to life shown by all members of the cat family, the doomed beast thrashed about for some time, then lay still.

Jan stood back, watching the death

struggles of his enemy with some curiosity, alert for a trick. But when the furry form lay quiet, he cautiously advanced and spurned it with his foot. There was no response. He seized a hind leg and turned the great beast over. What made it so limp and helpless? This was the first thing Jan had ever killed, and he did not fully understand it.

Perhaps Fierce One was sleeping, and would presently awaken to attack him. Well, let him come. Jan had overcome the awful alligator, the yellow-bearded men, and now Fierce One. With his tousled red head flung proudly back, he strutted over into the clump of orange trees in search of Chicma.

The old chimpanzee was not there, but by calling to her Jan finally got a reply, far off in the jungle. Chicma would not come to him, but kept calling him to come with her—that Fierce One would surely eat him. Jan only laughed, but he complied, eventually locating the ape at the top of a tall tree.

"Come down, Chicma," he cried. "Fierce One will not hurt you. He is sleeping."

"It is a trick. He is only waiting to spring upon us," replied Chicma. "We must go farther away from him." Then she caught hold of a huge liana and swung out on it into another tree. By means of the vines and closely matted branches, she made the rapid progress which only an ape can make, traveling always in a direction away from the orange grove.

Although he could have followed her with ease among the branches and vines, Jan preferred to walk on the ground. He was filled with pride and the sense of power.

After they got away from the river bank the undergrowth became less matted, so walking was comparatively easy. Jan wanted to show these jungle creatures that he was afraid of none of them.

ALL day they traveled through the jungle, Chicma fearfully keeping to the trees while Jan stubbornly remained on the ground. He thoroughly enjoyed the bright-colored butterflies that flapped through the shafts of sunlight, and the gayly plumed, raucous-voiced parrots and macaws.

There was a great flock of monkeys, too, who fled to the topmost branches, chattering vociferously. Jan, who had learned to know and imitate their simian language since infancy, chattered back at them, assuring them of his friendship. But they did not trust him. He looked too much like a man and smelled too much like a jaguar, for the scent of the great cat's blood was still on his *machete* and body. The jaguar skin, too, from which his single garment was fashioned, was a danger signal to jungle dwellers.

Jan regaled himself with the cloying sweetness and fragile beauty of the orchids which grew in great profusion; and his heart missed a beat when a huge tapir—much bigger than the jaguar he had killed—came crashing through the jungle in front of him.

It was not until the patches of sunlight no longer penetrated the forest roof and it began to grow dark, that Jan thought of Borno and the Indian, sleeping on the muddy bank of the little stream.

He had grown fond of his big black friend, and did not want to desert him. Nor did he want to leave Chicma, who was leading him farther and farther away from the only human being who had unselfishly befriended him.

He stopped and shouted to the chimpanzee to wait. But the cry had scarce-

ly left his lips when something flashed through the forest shadows, striking his left side, and spinning him half around with the force of its impact.

Jan clutched at the long shaft, wet with his own blood, and broke it off, gritting his teeth that he might silently bear the pain. Then he reached behind him for that part which had gone through his flesh, and jerked it out. But the pain and loss of blood were too great. A giddiness assailed him, and he sank limply to the ground.

With a whoop of triumph, and *machete* flashing in his hand ready to deliver the death-blow, a savage came bounding out of the shadows.

CHAPTER IX.

CHICMA'S ATTACK.

SITTING on a limb fully fifty feet above Jan's head, Chicma heard his call and noticed with bewilderment his actions when the arrow struck him. But when she heard the whoop of the savage, and saw him rushing toward Jan with upraised knife, her mother instinct came to the fore. With a snarl of rage, she swung down from the limb on which she had been sitting, and timed her drop with such precision that she landed on the Indian before he could reach his intended victim.

Knocked off his feet by the impact of the hairy body of the ape, the Indian fell on his face, dropping both his *machete* and his longbow. For a moment he lay there, half stunned and breathless. Then Chicma sank her huge teeth into his neck. The pain brought him to his senses, and he groped for his weapons. Failing to find them, he stood up and shook himself with the ape still clinging to him like a bloodthirsty octopus.

Watching the struggle of the two as through a dim haze, Jan made several attempts to rise, but each time fell back because of the giddiness induced by his wound. It was not until he saw the Indian stoop and reach for his *machete* that he was able to get to his feet.

His keen weapon recovered, the savage made a slash at Chicma's head. She dodged, and he was about to swing for her again when he saw Jan facing him, similarly armed. With lightning swiftness he struck for the youth's neck, a blow so powerful that it would have severed his head from his body. But Jan was faster than the savage, even though giddy. Avoiding the deadly blow by a quick step backward, he leaped in before the red man could recover. Jan's *machete* flashed once, and the Indian's hand, still clutching his weapon, flew into the undergrowth. Jan's blade flashed a second time, and the savage fell to the ground with a fatal body wound, and died almost at once.

Jan gathered up the weapons of his fallen foe: a bow, a bundle of arrows, and a *machete* with belt and case. Then he and Chicma proceeded on through the forest. His wound was very painful, but not dangerous, as the arrow had passed only through the muscles beneath his left arm without injuring any vital organs. When darkness came on, with the suddenness of the tropics, they perched themselves, supperless, in a tall tree for the night.

RISING with the sun, the youth and the ape set out in search of breakfast and a drink of water. But it was not until half the day had passed that they found either. Then, suddenly emerging from the depths of the tangled jungle, they came upon both in

satisfying abundance. They found themselves on the bank of a tiny stream, the water of which was clear and cold. Growing on both banks of this stream in profusion were oranges, pineapples and bananas.

Having drunk their fill of the sparkling water and satisfied their appetites with the fruit, they proceeded along the bank of the little stream. They had not gone far before Jan heard, ahead of them, a strange noise that made him uneasy. He looked quickly at Chicma to see if it had alarmed her, but she plodded along so unconcernedly that he decided it could not be anything of consequence.

The noise grew louder as they proceeded, until they came to a sheer cliff of bare rock towering more than two thousand feet above the jungle. Emerging from a hole in this rock, about fifty feet above the level of the stream, was a small waterfall. Clear and limpid as crystal, it tumbled almost vertically into an oval pool.

Jan gasped with admiration at the beauty of this scene. He tried to explain his feelings to Chicma, but being tired and sleepy she only grunted and climbed a tall tree beside the pool to find a comfortable crotch for a nap. To her this was merely a place where food and drink might be had in abundance. Until the food gave out or the place became too dangerous, here she would remain.

While Chicma took her nap, Jan practiced with his new weapons. While a prisoner of the hunters, he had often seen them use the bent stick with the string stretched across it. He found, however, that it was far from being as easy as it looked. The bow was stiff, requiring all his strength to bend it, and the arrows seemed to strike anywhere but the place intended.

With the passing days, however, he mastered the weapon, though he had lost or broken most of his arrows in the meantime.

Chicma spent the greater part of her time dozing in the tree, only coming down for food or water, but Jan, always searching for something new, roamed away from the pool every day. For a long time he subsisted only on fruit, as did the ape, but growing within him, day by day, was the desire for meat, his favorite food.

One day he brought down a curassow with one of his arrows. Curious, he cut into it with his *machete*. A slab of the turkey-like breast meat came away, and Jan, who had never tasted other than raw meat before his escape from Dr. Bracken, sampled it. Finding it good, he cut away and ate as much as he wanted, then took the rest back to the pool with him, hanging it in the tree to keep. But in the morning when he awoke, ravenous after his long sleep, he found it swarming with little white worms and giving forth an abominable stench. Disgusted, he hurled it far out into the jungle, and set forth after new meat.

The first animal to cross his path was an ocelot, the beautiful markings of which gave him the impression that its flesh must be delicious. Having wounded it with an arrow, he foolishly rushed to close quarters to finish it with his *machete*. But the fierce tiger cat, sorely wounded though it was, gave him a terrific battle, from which he did not fully recover for two weeks. And its meat, he found, was not nearly so good to eat as that of the dingy-colored curassow.

Day by day the youth learned the lessons that the jungle had to teach him. He learned to hunt with the silence and cunning of the jaguar, to

travel among the branches and vines with the ease and facility of the monkeys, or to speed along the forest floor with the swiftness of the deer and the stealth of the panther.

Man, he found, was his natural enemy, and after several encounters in which he barely escaped with his life, he took to stalking the savages as he would jaguars or ocelots. Only a few escaped with their lives to tell of a red-headed jungle demon, half man, half jaguar, that shot at them from the trees and made off through the branches as easily as a monkey.

AFTER two years he had not only learned many of the hardest lessons which the jungle has to teach, but had accumulated a small arsenal of weapons taken from the savages he had slain. There were a score of bows, more than a hundred arrows, a dozen long spears, five blow-guns with their deadly poison-tipped darts, and a miscellaneous assortment of steel and stone axes, *machetes*, knives, ornaments and trappings.

He had watched the birds building their nests and the natives their huts, and the idea had come to him to combine the two in the big tree in which he and Chicma slept. It proved a hard task indeed for his untutored hands, but after nearly a month of trials and tearings down, he completed a round, compact, rainproof tree-hut about fifty feet above the ground, divided into two parts by a rude partition. On the floor of each "room" he made a nest of soft grass. The hut proved snug and dry, even during the heaviest of the tropical rains.

In this hut he kept his weapons, ornaments and other treasures—bits of bright stone that he had picked up, teeth, claws, and sometimes bones of animals he had slain, bright feathers and plumes from the birds he had brought down, and a few odorous, badly cured hides.

Very often he bored Chicma by repeating the human words which Borno had taught him.

All this time he felt stirrings and yearnings for which he could not account. He was not content to make short journeys from the hut, returning at nightfall; but took to wandering farther and farther away, sleeping in the trees at night. He was always discontented — searching for something, he knew not what, but always searching, always going farther and remaining away longer.

ONE morning, when he was four days' journey from the hut, he suddenly emerged from the jungle into a grove of trees that appeared most strange and unnatural to him. They grew in straight rows, evenly spaced, almost to the very edge of a broad river. There was little undergrowth beneath them, and no rope-like lianas were draped among their branches.

Jan was puzzled. Stealthily he moved forward among the slender, straight trunks to investigate this unusual place. But he had not gone more than a few steps before he saw something that caused him to stop and hastily dodge behind one of the tree trunks. To Jan, all strange humans were enemies, and he instinctively fitted a long arrow to his bowstring. But as he gazed at the creature coming toward him, something held his hand. This being was unlike any he had ever seen before and more lovely than the fairest jungle flower that had ever charmed his innate sense of beauty.

He gazed, spellbound, while the won-

drous creature sat down on the moss beneath one of the trees, and leaning against it, opened what he thought was a basket of white leaves on which there were many strange little black tracks. Curious as he was about the basket with white leaves, he could not keep his eyes off the face above it. The being had dark-brown hair, as curly as Jan's own, tumbling just below the nape of a snow-white neck. The big brown eyes were half-veiled by the long, curling lashes, pink cheeks, and a tiny red mouth.

This creature, Jan thought, looked altogether too fragile to be dangerous, and was, moreover, too beautiful to be destroyed. He relaxed his bowstring and was about to lower his arrow, when he suddenly caught sight of something which caused him to bring the arrow quickly back to the firing position. It was the flash, through a brilliant patch of sunlight, of a tawny, stealthily moving creature, larger than a jaguar and more formidable. The only beast in the menagerie which had resembled it was Terrible One, the lion, so Jan instinctively thought of it in those terms.

As the puma, a giant of his species, crept closer and closer, Jan, who had watched the hunting of these great cats many times in the jungle, became aware that it was stalking the lovely human he had been admiring. He could see the tip of the long, yellow tail twitching, the mighty muscles preparing for the swift charge which even the fastest of the jungle creatures seldom escapes. Jan foresaw the outcome—a lightning leap, a rending, bone-crushing blow from the huge paw, a crunch of the mighty jaws, and a limp and bloody victim being dragged away to some jungle lair to be devoured.

Many times Jan had seen these great cats bring down their prey, and never had he intervened to save the victim. But this victim was different. He could not bear to see that beauty marred—that frail body mangled and bleeding. Drawing the arrow back with all his strength, he took careful aim at the tawny shoulder, and let fly.

The arrow flew true to the mark, and the great carnivore, with a terrific roar of rage and pain, sprang out of its hiding place, straight for the girl it had marked for its prey.

But quick as was the puma, Jan was there before it, barring its way. His bow and arrows he had tossed aside, and his keen *machete* gleamed in his hand. Snarling furiously, the immense beast reared up on its hind legs—taller by a head than Jan—and slapped at him with a mighty paw. Jan dodged to one side, nearly severing the paw with his *machete* as he did so; and he would have been temporarily out of danger in another instant, had not his toe caught on a root, sending him sprawling.

Before he could make another move the puma pounced upon him, sinking its great teeth into his left shoulder, shaking him as a cat shakes a mouse, and raking and gouging him with its terrible, sickle-like claws.

The youth felt his strength waning fast. He tried to use his *machete,* but his efforts seemed feeble, futile. He hacked at the side of the monster's head again and again, cutting off an ear, blinding an eye, leaving nothing on one side but a bloody mass of mangled flesh and bone. But the powerful jaws would not relax their hold. The bulging, muscular neck continued to pivot that gory head as it swiftly shook Jan's limp body.

Jan had reached the limit of human endurance. It seemed to him that a great weight was crushing him, forc-

ing the breath from his body. His *machete* dropped from his nerveless fingers, and merciful unconsciousness crept over him.

CHAPTER X.

OUTSIDE THE WALLS.

AT sixteen Ramona Suarez was still something of a tomboy. She loved to mingle with the dark-skinned children and mongrel dogs of the laborers on her father's great rubber plantation. She took great delight in climbing trees, scaling walls, and exploring thickets, to the despair of her doting old duenna, Señora Soledade. Her duenna scolded, her mother, Doña Isabella, tried to reason with her, and her father, Don Fernando, who secretly chuckled over her escapades, tried to look stern when required to lecture her.

But they might as profitably have scolded the wind, reasoned with the rain cloud, or lectured the lightning. Ramona would listen dutifully, then, with a flash of white teeth and a shake of her dark brown ringlets, would romp away to hatch up some new deviltry.

Señora Soledade, corpulent and dignified, was of the opinion that the big patio, with its flowers, shrubs and trees, winding walks, vine-clad arbors and bubbling fountains, was a large enough world for any girl. Charged with the duty of keeping Ramona always in sight, and taking the task in all seriousness, she was really able to do so only about half the time.

One day the old duenna was seated in the shade of an arbor in the patio, working on a bit of lace, and Ramona was busily engaged beneath a near-by orange tree with her English tutor, Arthur Morrison. Quite positive that her charge would not get away so long as the tutor was about, and drowsy from the mounting heat, the *señora* settled back comfortably in her chair, and with her hands folded over her ample equator, dozed.

But scarcely had she fallen asleep when the tutor, with a final charge to his pupil to study diligently, strolled away.

Ramona waited slyly until the tutor had entered the house. Then she peeked at the old lady, and saw that the coast was clear. Leaving her text-books, pencils and rulers beneath the orange tree, she picked up one of her favorite story books and climbed the tree.

At first it had been Ramona's intention to read the book in the tree, thus dumfounding the duenna when she should awaken; yet one side of the tree overhung the patio wall, giving her a new idea. Softly she let herself down from a branch to the top of the wall, then, with the book gripped between her teeth, suspended herself by her hands on the other side, and dropped. She had attained the freedom she craved, and she meant to make the most of it.

Tucking the book under her arm, she wandered off between the tall straight trunks of one of her father's young rubber groves until she came to the river bank. Then she sat down, leaned against a tree, and immersed herself in her book.

Ramona was an avid reader, and soon forgot her surroundings. But she was brought sharply back to reality by two sounds, one following the other in rapid succession: the twang of a bow-string and the roar of a mountain lion. For a moment she was paralyzed with fear and in that moment the great beast charged.

But quick as the puma had been, there was one who was quicker. Ra-

mona was conscious for an instant of the lithe, auburn-haired youth who put himself between her and the charging death. Then for a moment things happened so swiftly that she could scarcely follow them—the roaring beast, the youth's swift and skillful slash that crippled one of the great paws, and his leap for safety, blocked by the projecting root.

The girl uttered a single, piercing scream as she saw her champion go down. Then she leaped to her feet, undecided for a moment whether to run for help or go to the assistance of her champion. She decided on the latter course, and looked around for a weapon.

JAN'S bow and arrows lay where he had thrown them, and she caught them up. Fitting an arrow to the string, she aimed it at the heaving flank of the puma, and pulled. But the hardwood bow was very stiff, and even though Ramona exerted her utmost strength she could only draw the arrow back a few inches. As a result, it barely penetrated the tough skin, with little more effect than the bite of a fly.

Seeing the futility of that, Ramona struck at the puma with the heavy bow. But here, again, her strength was not great enough to distract the attention of the huge feline. What could she do to save this handsome knight of the jungle who had come so gallantly to her rescue?

She knew that house cats become greatly annoyed when their tails are pulled. Perhaps this also applied to the big cats of the jungle. She could only try.

Springing around to the rear, she seized the long tail with both hands, braced her feet, and pulled. At this instant, the snarling of the beast was stilled. She saw the *machete* fall from Jan's fingers—saw him go limp at the same moment that the puma, a final shiver running through its frame, sank heavily down on his senseless body.

Ramona leaped to one side and pulled. Gradually she was able to drag the great beast off the prostrate form of her champion. But the sharp teeth were still clamped into the bloody and lacerated shoulder. Picking up the *machete,* she pried the jaws apart.

Tenderly she raised the youth's head, placed it in her lap, and with her tiny handkerchief attempted to wipe away the blood. But the little square of lace proved quite inadequate, and she threw it away, soaked with blood, before more than a small part of one cheek had been cleansed.

The river was only about twenty feet away. Gently lowering his head from her lap, she dragged him to the water's edge. She ripped a panel of cloth from her white frock, and dipping it in the water, proceeded to bathe his face and wounded shoulder.

The cold water and the pressure of the cloth on Jan's wounds brought him to his senses. The blinding pain made him think for a moment that he was still in the grip of the puma. He tried to escape. Springing erect he knocked his little nurse flat in the mud.

For a moment he stood there, staring wildly down at her, while she gazed back in wide-eyed wonder and alarm. Then she smiled, a wistful little smile, and Jan, who in all the jungle had found no friends save Chicma and Borno, knew that he had found another.

He wanted to say something to her. But what? And how? It would be useless to bark at her in the chimpanzee language. He had tried that unsuccessfully on Borno and other humans. And

the few words which Borno had taught him had quite vague meanings for him. However, they were human words, and this creature was undoubtedly human.

"I spik ze Engleesh," he announced, with Borno's accent, intently watching to see what effect his words would have.

She smiled again, and sprang lightly to her feet.

"I speak it, too," she said. "My name is Ramona."

"My name Jan," he replied, and added naïvely, "Jan like you."

Before the girl could reply the shrill voice of Señora Soledade called:

"Ramona!"

"*Sí, señora,*" she replied.

"Come here this instant!" was the command in Spanish, which of course Jan did not understand.

"I must go now, Jan. Good-by," said Ramona, and ran through the grove in the direction from which the voice had come.

Jan watched her until she disappeared from view. Then, with strange reluctance, he picked up his *machete* and his bow and arrows, and plunged off into the jungle. His wounds were very painful, especially his mangled shoulder. He must get to Chicma as soon as possible. She would lick them and make them well, after the manner of ape mothers, as she had often licked the bloody welts inflicted by Cruel One, the doctor. But he was not thinking of his wounds.

IT had taken him only four days to reach the rubber plantation from their tree-hut, but that was when he was well and strong. Wounded and weakened by loss of blood, he was six days in making the return journey. By this time his wounds had closed, and although they were still quite painful, Chicma showed no interest in them.

Recalling the soothing effect of the water with which Ramona had bathed his hurts, he left the chimpanzee dozing in the tree-hut, and descending, waded into the pool beneath the waterfall. The cold water allayed the fever, and he paddled about for some time in the manner of a young puppy.

For two more weeks he divided his time between the tree-hut and the pool, doing no hunting, and living on the fruits that abounded in this earthly paradise. One day, as he was paddling and splashing in the water, he discovered that by moving his hands and feet in a certain way he could keep afloat. Thrilled by this discovery, he tried again and again, until he was able to swim about the pool at will.

Interested in this new sport, he began to watch the manner in which other creatures of the jungle swam, and to imitate them. The four-legged animals, he noticed, swam as he did, but the frogs did it in quite a different fashion. It was some time before he was able to duplicate their kicking stroke, but he mastered it eventually.

The frogs, he decided, were the really expert water creatures, and he attempted to imitate them further by entering the water as they did. His first dive was not a pronounced success, as, forgetting his lesson on the ocean, he made the mistake of trying to breathe beneath the surface. Half-strangled, he quickly paddled to shore, and having coughed up most of the water, decided to try again.

It was not long before he learned to hold his breath and dive with the swift skill of the amphibians.

At first he only dived off the bank of the pool, but later he began practicing dives from higher points—a projecting ledge of rock, an overhanging limb. Once his foot slipped and he fell from

a considerable height, alighting flat with a loud smack that all but knocked the wind from him. This taught him that the water could be very soft or very hard, according to the way one fell. After that, he took care to cleave it cleanly and gracefully.

One day, when his wounds were healed and he was beginning to feel the urge of the jungle trails, he dived from one of the lower boughs of the tree in which his hut was situated. The force of the dive carried him clear up behind the curtain of tumbling waters—a place he had not previously explored. He drew himself up onto a jagged, rocky ledge and sat there for some time, listening to the roar of the falls and admiring the thin sheet of water with the faint light filtering through it.

Presently, as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light of the place, he made out, high above him, two figures so strikingly manlike in form that he started and involuntarily clutched the hilt of his sheathed *machete*—without which he seldom ventured anywhere. In a moment he saw that they were not men, but harmless images of stone with manlike bodies and grotesque faces, one of which resembled that of a hawk, and the other that of a dog. He also noticed that leading up the face of the cliff to the ledge on which they stood, were a number of notches cut deeply into the stone.

SPRINGING to his feet, he climbed rapidly upward by means of the notches, and drew himself up on the ledge. Here a new surprise awaited him, for he saw that the two grotesque statues guarded the mouth of a dark passageway which extended into the solid rock beneath the waterfall.

His curiosity aroused, Jan cautiously entered the passageway. It led straight into the cliff for about fifteen feet, then veered to the right and upward. As soon as he made the turn, he was in total darkness and was compelled to grope his way forward.

The passageway leveled out, presently, and turned sharply to the left.

Still groping in inky blackness, Jan discovered, by the murmur of water beside the pathway, that he was walking on the bank of an underground stream. A walk of about ten minutes brought him to a point where dim light filtered into the cavern. It came from just above the surface of the water, where the cavern roof dipped, arching over it at a height of only a few inches. Here the path he had been following led straight into the water.

Jan paused here for a moment, undecided whether to go on or to retrace his steps. But his insatiable curiosity won out, and he waded into the water. The bank sloped steeply, and he was soon swimming against the swift current.

When he reached the point from which the light emanated he was forced to turn on his back in order to keep his nose above water, because of the narrow space between the cavern roof and the surface of the stream.

Suddenly he shot out into the bright sunlight. Turning over, he looked about him and saw that he was in the middle of a narrow river, which apparently flowed straight into the solid rock. A few swift strokes took him to shore. He climbed the high bank, and when he reached the top, stopped in sudden amazement at what he saw. For he stood before the ruins of an immense building, the remaining walls of which were covered with gigantic bas-reliefs depicting strange, angular-looking human beings, some with heads like birds or animals, some with beards that

reminded him of the detested Dr. Bracken, and some with hot unhandsome human features. They seemed to be engaged in fighting each other, or in hunting strange beasts or birds.

Some of the tall columns of the façade were still standing, supporting fragments of ornamental cornices. Others had fallen and broken into cylindrical sections.

Guarding the portal of this strange edifice, on either side, were two colossal statues with bodies that were human in form, but one had a face like a hawk's and the other like that of a dog. They resembled the two statues he had seen beneath the waterfall, but were much larger.

Leading to this portal were the remains of a paved avenue, now broken and weed-grown. Along each side of this highway was a row of pedestals, on some of which stood statues of grotesque monster, half beast, half human. Others had fallen or been overturned, and their cracked and shattered fragments were strewn about among the weeds and broken fragments of paving slabs.

Thrilled with awe and wonder at these strange sights, Jan was slowly advancing toward the portal when he caught the guarded movement of something creeping toward him in the undergrowth at his right. He whipped out his *machete* and paused, watching breathlessly. Then he saw another movement as something passed through the undergrowth on his left.

Suddenly two great shaggy creatures bounded out onto the sparsely grown avenue and closed in on him. They were manlike and yet apelike in form, with long bushy beards and hairy bodies. One brandished a huge club menacingly, while the other hurled a large rock fragment straight at the boy's head.

Jan managed to dodge the missile, and turned to flee. But he had not taken more than a dozen leaps when a third hairy monster sprang in front of him, barring his progress, and swung for his head with a heavy cudgel.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Pearls Grown by Cactus

THE discovery that pearls are occasionally produced by the giant sahuaro, the elephant of the cactus family, was made recently by an experienced botanist in Arizona. The foundation for the production of a pearl begins when a wound is made in the cactus, usually by a woodpecker, jack-rabbit or pernicious insect of the desert, or by any other medium that pierces the gummy cactus flesh.

The botanist found a tissue, resembling bark, on one specimen of the sahuaro, which had formed about the wounds on the side of the cactus hit by sandstorms. When the giant cactus began to decay, the bark was shown by microscopic and chemical examinations at the University of Arizona to have resisted this ending of its life. It was at this stage of deterioration that tiny pearl formations appeared. The value of these cactus pearls is only scientific.

Bert Morehouse.

The dog leaped from the sled and crouched, snarling

Antidote

A loose sled dog, a sack of flour, and a puzzling trail—those were the clews that led young Dave Blaine, Alaska marshal with a roving commission, to a problem that taxed his powers

By JACK ALLMAN

"ALONG time ago, Dave, I told Tommy that driving that wolf dog would get him into trouble. Now look what's happened." The big raw-boned prospector cast an I-told-you-so eye over the small group gathered in Arctic City's one wind-swept street.

The one addressed, a tall, slim man, and by far the youngest in the crowd, threw back the hood of his caribou calf parka and fixed the prospector with a contemptuous stare.

"Oh, yes," he said, "prophesying beside a hot stove is a damned sight easier than sledding mail over mountains in one of these blizzards." His gaze returned to the string of nine panting dogs that lay on the hard-packed snow of the street. Their pink tongues lolled from their mouths and their whiskers were white with the frozen fog of their breath. They were strung along either side of a towline, but there was no sled attached.

"I can recall plenty of times when that leader of his pulled him out of t i g h t places," he continued. "And once, up on the Koyukuk, that wolf dog and Tommy saved my life. I'll never forget Tommy for that, nor this dog either."

The leader, a three-quarter wolf, licked a sore front paw. His tongue came away red. He was a splendid animal, rangy, lean and sleek, with just a hint of untamed savagery in the nervous, pointed muzzle. Tartar, Tommy had named him, because of the Mongol slant of his agate eyes.

"Tommy swore by that leader of his, marshal," said the grizzled owner of Arctic City's trading post. "But what do you figure's happened?"

There was an anxious note in his question.

"Well," replied the young marshal, "Tommy's either got himself into a tight place, and cut them loose, or else the dogs have busted free. One or the other. Quite a ways from here, too. Look at that towline—all frayed." He stooped down and picked up the tasseled end of the three-quarter-inch rope. "Go hook up my team," he said sharply to the trader's half-breed roustabout.

"You ain't damned fool enough to try and cross that glacier in this weather, are you?" asked the trader. "Better wait till this blizzard kinda blows herself out, Dave."

"And leave my old friend Tommy Martin out in that?" The marshal waved a mitted hand toward the gunsight notch between the two mountains back of the camp. His words were as sharp and cold as the whirling arctic gale that swept down through the pass and hid the white expanse of the glacier in a curtain of wind-whipped snow.

The little group was strangely silent. The trader's words had voiced their own sentiments in the matter, but the slim man's quiet reproach stilled their tongues. Dave Blaine had a reputation for doing things, regardless of weather, the opinion of others, or the sage advice of older men. Their silence was a compliment, unspoken.

THREE years before, when Dave had returned from a few years of schooling in the "States," these same men, together with the rest of the twenty-eight thousand whites in Alaska, had laughed at his idea of a Federal marshal with a roving commission.

The Territory—one-sixth as large as the United States—was cut into four divisions, and a quartette of marshals, politically chosen and Presidentially appointed, policed the country. Each man was confined to his own district, and if a criminal escaped from one judicial division to another it was sometimes a couple of months before the officer of the adjoining district could be informed.

Dave Blaine had seen the need for an officer whose movements would be unhampered by such red tape. He had convinced the Territory's Representative in Congress of the advisability of creating such an office and had managed to get himself appointed as the first incumbent. Men of more mature years had laughed at the idea of a twenty-four-year-old "kid" filling a position of such responsibility, but it was not long before they began to speak of him with respect in their tone.

He knew members of all the Indian tribes, spoke their language, and called them friend. It was through this channel that he so often turned up unexpectedly where he was needed. Once he had shown up on the Arctic slopes with a sack of fresh potatoes and saved the lives of a small group of shipwrecked, scurvy-ridden whalers. Indians had brought him word of their plight, and he had crossed two divisions of the Territory to reach them.

At another time he had unexpectedly appeared at a new strike where the original discoverers were being held as prisoners while a bunch of renegades waited for the ninety-day recording date to pass, so that they could restake the claims. He floated down the river on a raft with his prisoners, turning them over to the marshal in whose district he had captured them.

Single-handed, with the officers of the boat lying bleeding and wounded on the deck, he had squelched a mutiny of Indian deck-hands when the entire food supply of a camp depended upon that boat getting in before the freeze-up.

Hardboiled miners, trappers and prospectors gave Dave Blaine his due. They accepted him before he had been on the job a year. He was their kind of an officer. Quiet and unassuming—the last to draw his gun when trouble broke out; the first to hit the trail when word came that some one was in trouble. He was an Alaskan to the core, a kid sourdough, a regular fellow, thoroughly able to take care of himself under all conditions.

Six-foot-two, one hundred and ninety pounds, lean-limbed and slim-waisted, he possessed a physique that was ideal for the long grinds over Arctic trails, or the tortuous hours spent on the end of a stuggling stick forcing a shovel-nosed poling boat over the white waters of Alaska's nameless rivers. He had a reputation as the country's greatest dog musher, covering almost unbelievable distances in all kinds of weather and coming in with his dogs in good shape.

He also had a reputation for unraveling some of the deepest mysteries that were always cropping up in "The Land That God Forgot."

Behind those clear blue eyes, deep-set under straight brows that rivaled the raven blackness of his curly hair, there functioned a hair-trigger brain which had proved itself time and again to be more than a match for the cunning of some greedy criminal. Dave Blaine was feared by all men that lived outside the pale of the law, and he was respected by those who were aware of his trail wisdom. Reckless, they called him. Reckless to the point of carelessness, to the very brink of foolhardiness; but he always came through smiling—frost-scarred, perhaps, but smiling and victorious.

"WHEN did Tommy leave here with the mail?" Dave Blaine's sharp question was directed at the old trader.

"Yestiddy morning, 'bout five-six hours afore you hit camp. He couldn't any more than reached the summit afore you pulled up outa the valley." The old man swung an arm to indicate the two directions.

"Have much of a load?" asked Dave.

"Three-four hunnerd pounds, I guess, including camp equipment. Picked up ten thousand in bullion from the little stamp mill up the gulch."

"That's only forty pounds." The marshal seemed a bit impatient. "What I want to know is, did he leave a supply of grub?"

"Well, I helped him load out an' all I saw was what he had in his grub box: four—five pounds red Mex beans, couple pounds rice, half slab of sow belly and a sack of flour."

"Whole sack of flour?" Dave's brows knit into deep furrows. That would be more than Tommy ever packed.

"No, just a dab," replied the trader. "Not over eight-ten pounds. It was

in the bottom of a fifty-pound sack an' the bag was that near empty that he'd tied it into a knot."

"Well, he's got enough to keep him for a while in case I should pass him in the storm," observed Blaine.

A team of seven perfectly matched malamutes swung around the corner of the trading post. Dave Blaine loaded the sled up with his light trail outfit. He dug up a moosehide dog moccasin and slipped it over Tartar's sore foot. Then he put the wolf dog leader on top of the load.

"Might be a help in locating Tommy," he explained in answer to some one's question. He gave the trader instructions for the care of the remaining dogs of the mail carrier's team and with a wave of his arm and cheery "see you all later" for the crowd, he swung up the street into the face of the blizzard.

An old trapper slanted his frost-burned eyes at the wind-torn pass and gravely shook his head.

"Blaine's got plenty of nerve, headin' up into that mess," he said.

"Nerve is right," agreed the trader. "Well, you know how he is. He'll find Tommy—if he's to be found."

DAVE pulled his parka hood over his head and rubbed a mittful of snow over his cheek bones and the end of his nose. Stiffening face muscles warned him of the searing frostbite that rode the knife-like gale.

He was above timber line now and the clean sweep of the wind obliterated all trace of the trail. He talked low, encouragingly, to his dogs, urging them up the steep slope till the big bare bluff of Storm King Mountain formed an impassable barrier before him. He swung sharp right and was soon on the glacier's jagged edge.

Kobuk, his lead dog, hesitated at the first steel-hard icy ridge, but a soft word from Dave sent him clawing, scratching up over the steep shoulder and out onto the wind swept waste.

Dave headed his team for the notch. The wind whistled and screamed across the ice field till the dogs were almost swept from their feet. They passed patches of ice as black and shiny as onyx, patches that were almost white, or green like sea water, or blue as lapis lazuli. In some places they were honeycombed where Alaska's twenty-four-hour summer sun had eaten in, but for the most part they were hard as steel and smoother than polished glass. It was ice like this that had torn those toenails loose on Tartar's foot.

"Tommy was beyond the summit before his team got away," Dave reasoned. The gale whipped the skirt of his parka about his knees, packed snow into the windward side of the dogs' furry pelts, formed a blinding rime on his eyelashes. He bored ahead.

"And they would have left a man out in this!" he mused. "Still, I've gone through worse gales before."

Just then a particularly violent gust swung the dogs from their feet and whipped the sled across a fifty-foot sheet of glare ice. Dave hung tenaciously to the handle-bars and the whole outfit brought up in a pile against a jagged pressure ridge.

"Well, just as bad, anyway," he grinned. Dave's sense of humor had often been his salvation when things became tough.

He straightened the team out and headed once again for the notch in the mountains towering above. He had not gone far till a deep, wide crevasse blocked his way. He followed it, ran along the edge of the black fissure till

another rift intersected. Then he found himself pocketed. He'd have to back up and follow the giant crack in the other direction. And all this time Tommy might be lying somewhere up there ahead, injured, perhaps with a broken leg.

He swung the team around, and started back. Through the driving film of snow crystals something caught his eye. A ten-foot snow bridge spanned the two ice walls. By the sharp curl on the edges of the crust he knew it was thin. It would save time if he could cross it—might even mean the difference between life and death for Tommy.

"Gee, Kobuk! Mush!"

The tawny leader swung his teammates over the narrow ridge. Dave threw his weight forward onto the sled. The back end sagged down.

For a second Dave's heart quit beating. The towline snapped tight. The nose of the sled lifted and the wheel dogs were raised off their feet. For an endless second the sled balanced on the edge of the deep crevasse while Kobuk and the swing dogs leaned into their collars, their bellies close to the crusted snow. Then, slowly, the nose came down and the dogs jerked the sled out of danger.

Dave's breath came back with a gasp. The wolf dog on the sled ran a warm tongue over his face.

"I GUESS you realize how close that was, don't you, Tartar? Well, now that that's over, we'll get across this hump and see if we can't find your master." Dave swung back to the handle bars, and with a cheery word for the dogs started tunneling into the wind.

More crevasses. More jagged pressure ridges. More glassy smooth areas where the wind slithered them about at will. Then the summit.

In a smothering swirl of frost crystals that cut like ground glass they pulled over the saddle which marked the head of the glacier. From here on the trail led down, and from here on Dave told himself, he would have to keep a sharp lookout for the missing mail carrier. He turned Tartar loose, sent him ahead as a free leader.

"He'll follow the route he used coming back," Dave reasoned.

It was not until well after he had left the barren wastes above timber line that Dave picked up the first signs of Tommy's trail. Among the scrub spruce on the lower reaches of the mountain he found the narrow, parallel tracks of the mail driver's sled. Light, powdery snow had drifted over the dim trail, but Tartar clung to it through the mad race down the hillside.

Once, Dave stopped and brushed the new snow away with the gauntlet of one of his big mitts. Crimson spots showed bright against the whiteness of the crust.

"It happened beyond here," he told himself. Tartar's torn paw had left its mark.

The timber became heavier. The steep hillside sloped off, and soon he was on the floor of the narrow valley.

Once more he swept the trail. Once more he found the crimson spots. "Humph," he grunted. "Guess all my worries were for nothing. Unless Tommy's hurt real bad he'll be at that old deserted cabin down there at the forks. Can't be over five miles from here."

He jogged along the trail in the center of the valley. He whistled softly to himself. Tommy would be all right after all. Plenty of shelter and fuel here.

An animal's tracks in the snow attracted his attention. He stopped. There was a spot beside the trail where the snow was torn and trampled. Then tracks leading to a like spot fifteen feet farther on. From there they led to a dark object half buried in the snow.

"Looks like somebody 'round here is using poisoned bait," he muttered, wading out to investigate.

He stood for a moment looking at it thoughtfully. In the center of the trampled space, where it had thrown its last convulsion, lay the frozen carcass of a lynx. Its head was thrown back in the agony of a tortured death.

"Just what I thought," Dave grunted. "Strychnine, just as sure as the devil. Wonder who's poisoning fur in this district?"

The cat's mottled pelt was ripped into ribbons. The frozen pink flesh of one shoulder was eaten away. "And *you'll* die, too, my gluttonous friend." Dave directed his prophecy at the wolverine tracks leading off into the brush.

The law against fur poisoning was one that Dave was particularly keen about enforcing. He hated those men who were too lazy to tend a line of traps, but scattered their deadly bait with an eye only to their personal gain. They never found half of the animals killed, and those in turn were eaten by others that wandered off to die and serve as poison for still more.

The practice was ravaging the greatest fur-bearing country in the world. To Dave, it was a crime far worse than sea poaching or robbing sluice boxes. It was a form of murder.

THE matter of the poisoned lynx was still revolving in his mind when, swinging around a sharp bend, he came suddenly upon the old cabin. Tartar fell back behind the team. His lip curled back over his glistening fangs and he clung close to Dave's heels. The dog's sudden change of attitude puzzled the musher. Then he looked up and saw that the cabin was occupied. Blue smoke issued from the short pipe sticking through the roof. The wind carried it off down the valley in lacy veils.

A man stood in the doorway as he swung up the steep bank and came to a halt. It was not Tommy Martin. He was a big man, much larger than Tommy. His face was wide and flat, set off with a large, loose-lipped mouth and a shapeless nose. His eyes were small, beady and set close under shaggy red brows. His head was covered with an unkempt sorrel mane that almost covered his protruding ears. It was with a start that Dave recognized the cabin's occupant. A winter's growth of red beard was almost a disguise.

"Hello, Red," he greeted. There was a surprised note in his salutation. It was a shock to find Red Benson here in this part of the country. The last time he had seen him was two years before at Fort Yukon, just after he had come back from spending two years on McNiel's Island for selling whisky to the Indians.

"'Lo, Blaine," Red answered. There was surprise in his tone, too. "You didn't just come through that pass, did you?" he asked incredulously.

When Dave informed him that he had, Red looked at him as though he didn't believe him, then stammered an invitation to put up his dogs and have a bite to eat. He started to help unhook the team, but as Tartar's snarling increased every time he came near he backed off and left Dave to take care of the dogs.

"That wolf dog acts as though he

knew you, Red," ventured Dave. He watched the other's face closely.

"Never saw him before in my life," said Benson, and gathering up an armful of wood, he strode into the cabin.

THE interior of the shack was dark and odorous. Unwashed clothing hung on the drying rack above the smoking, worn-out stove. The floor, of poles, had not been swept for months, although a fairly decent broom of willow twigs stood in the corner. "Left by a former tenant," mused Dave.

Two bunks were ranged against the rear wall. On one was an old four-and-a-half-point Hudson's Bay blanket and a mangy wolf robe. Piled on the other was Red's meager grub supply and the half-skinned carcass of a red fox. While Benson prepared something to eat, Dave sidled over and felt of the animal's paws. There was no sign of them having been caught in the jaws of a trap. So Red was in the poisoning game!

Dave decided to wait until they sat down at the table before doing any questioning. With the candle between them, he would have a chance to see the change of expression on Red's face.

The meal over, Dave leaned back and filled his pipe. Any one who knew the marshal well would have seen that he was troubled. As the razor-like edge of his big knife shaved off the thin chips of tobacco from the hard plug of Westover, Dave droned his favorite song:

"Oh, I've panned from Peru to Point Barrow,
But I never located a claim,
Until I'd persuaded my conscience
That pay dirt pervaded the same."

Whenever Dave Blaine hummed the plaintive air, or sang the melancholy words of *The Prospector's Lament*, all who were acquainted with him knew that he was in deep thought.

Red Benson's furtive eyes sought the marshal's, as though to read the thoughts behind the mask. But Dave seemed not to notice. He puffed slowly at his pipe. The cabin was quiet as a tomb. A dog chain rattled outside. Red half rose to his feet, but Dave ignored the movement. His hands clasped behind his head, he gave himself over to a mental review of the situation.

There was a baffled expression on Red's lean face. He was too guarded in his answers. It couldn't be that he was afraid of being caught as a poisoner: Dave hadn't even mentioned that. His queries had all been about the missing mail driver. Red's answers had been sullen.

No, he said, he hadn't seen Tommy Martin. Yes, he had seen fresh tracks last night when he came back from his trap line. No, he hadn't been here when Tommy went through on the other winter trip, two months before. He had only been here a little over a month. Necked a small outfit in from an Indian camp down on the Yukon. Set out a trap line and had been here ever since.

Dave wasn't at all satisfied with the story. He went out, on the pretext of taking care of his dogs, and swept the loose snow from the trail beyond the cabin. He swept a long stretch of it, but failed to find any tell-tale red spots.

Yet Tommy had reached here. That was a cinch. Tartar had left his trail from here into Arctic City. Dave tapped the stem of his pipe against his teeth and juggled the facts of the case in his racing brain.

A man can't just disappear into thin air; yet there were no branching trails that he could have taken, and besides,

there were Tartar's tracks leading right here. It was from this cabin that the team had broken away and gone back.

Why would they break away? Why wouldn't Tommy wait here for some one to come? He was too old a hand on the trail ever to start necking that big basket sled of his, and he'd never leave the mail—with that ten thousand dollars in gold bullion.

Where was the sled—the mail—the bullion? Where was Tommy Martin?

WHAT Dave Blaine had expected to be simply a rescue trip had turned itself into a deep and confounding mystery. Without appearing to, he watched closely every move of the sullen trapper. Of course he could take Red in on a poisoning charge. All he'd have to do would be to find where Benson kept his strychnine.

But his big problem now was Tommy Martin. The poison charge could wait. Somehow he felt sure in his mind that Red Benson held the answer to Tommy's disappearance.

Red cleared off the extra bunk to make room for Dave's sleeping bag and then heated a basin of water. The marshal watched him, silently. The trapper stripped off his shirt and undershirt and unwrapped a bandage that bound his shoulder. Dave waited for him to explain the torn flesh of a very recent wound.

"Got a lynx in a trap the other day, an' just as I went to club him I slipped. He got me before I managed to get back on my feet and knock him senseless," Red offered, bathing the wound.

"Bad business, those cats," was the marshal's only comment.

Dave got up and went over to Red's pile of furs. He kept up a running chatter about the quantity and quality of the catch as he idly went through the entire pile. He picked out the greenest lynx pelt. It was stretched tight and dry on the casing boards. Dave thumped it with a curious finger. Red hadn't skinned a lynx during the past week, he said to himself.

He looked again at the trapper's torn shoulder. The wound wasn't over two days old. Tartar's teeth could have done that, was the thought that flashed through his mind.

Red rebandaged his shoulder and then started to mix up the sourdough hot cakes for morning. Into a pot, in which the starter left over from this day's breakfast, remained, he put a pinch of salt and a tablespoonful of sugar. Taking a flour sack from the shelf behind the stove, he emptied the teacupful that was left into the pot. Finding it not enough, he dug up another sack from among the stuff that had been on the bunk. From this bag he added another two cups, then sufficient water to make a thin batter which he stirred vigorously. He then hung the pot from the rack above the stove.

Dave, sitting on a stool unlacing his moccasins, caught his breath as he saw the second flour sack appear. There were only eight or ten pounds in it. And the sack was tied in a knot!

His mind flashed back to what the trader had said about Tommy's food supply. Then he remembered that Red had said he had not been away from the cabin since coming here. Why, then, would a man have two opened sacks? If he had gone on a two or three days' trip he might have taken a small dab of flour in a separate sack, but Red said he had not been away. Tommy's flour—that was the answer.

Once more the old Westover came out of Dave's pocket. Once more the old song filled the cabin, and Red

glowered from beneath his shaggy sorrel brows.

"Oh, I've worked all winter with a partner;
Crosscutting some cursed cold creek,
And never once thought of staking,
Until we'd located the streak."

Dave sang about ten verses of his ditty and then hit the hay, but it was a long time before sleep came to him. When it did, his plans for the morning had been checked and rechecked. They were perfect. He slept like a child and awakened with a clear program in his mind.

BOTH men helped themselves from the pagoda of crisp brown hot cakes that rose from the center of the table.

"Do you know, Benson, I believe I've doped out Tommy Martin's disappearance," said Dave, out of a clear sky.

"Yeah?" grunted Red, disdaining the use of the three-tined iron fork and shoving a huge wedge of the sourdough cakes into his cavernous mouth with the point of his knife. "Got it all figured out, huh?"

"Believe I have," replied the marshal. He finished his cakes and then continued.

"You see," he said, "there were four fellows working on a quartz prospect up near Arctic City. They ran into some jewelry rock—gold sticking out all over it. Well, three of those fellows died the same day. The reason the other one lived was because he was drunk down in town.

"Well, I dropped into town that same day, and of course I made an investigation. It looked like poison to me, and sure enough I found a can of cyanide that they used in amalgamating their test runs of ore. I figured the other member of the quartette had doped up the grub and then gone off to town. I made some tests with all the grub in the cabin. The only thing that seemed wrong was the flour. I had made up some biscuits and thrown them out where the snowshoe rabbits could find them. Sure enough, they knocked the rabbits off in a hurry. By the time I got down to the town, word had gone ahead that I was making tests of the food. The only living member of the crowd was gone. Nobody has seen him since.

"Well, I figured that when I do catch that bird, I'll have my case complete, so I sent the flour in to Fairbanks to have an analysis made of it. It was just a dab in the bottom of a sack and I sent it in by Tommy Martin."

Over the rim of his coffee cup, Dave watched Red's face twitch. The trapper never raised his eyes, but his knife rattled nervously against the graniteware plate.

"Whew! What a pain!" groaned Dave suddenly, letting his coffee spill as he grabbed his stomach in a well-simulated cramp. "Whew! That was a tough one," he grinned, wiping his brow with the back of his hand. "What'd you put in those cakes, Benson? Dynamite? I never had such a cramp in my life. Felt like some kind of an acute poison."

Red's knife and fork dropped from his shaking fingers. His hands crept slowly down over the front of his shirt. He rubbed his broad, flat stomach.

Dave got up from the table and paced the floor, stopping once in a while to double up in a violent cramp. He wiped imaginary sweat from his forehead. He acted. Acted as he never had before in his life. He could

even feel himself getting pale. Benson's face was a mask of horror.

"IF that's cyanide poisoning we've got," Red gasped, "it's all off with us!" Great beads of real fear sweat stood out on his brow.

"If we only had some strychnine!" groaned the marshal.

"Strychnine?"

"Yes, strychnine. Strychnine will counteract cyanide. You know yourself, if you poison an animal with strychnine it always throws a bunch of fits before it dies. It's a terrific stimulant. Poison a wolf with cyanide and it just crawls away and dies. Cyanide is a depressant. They're opposite poisons. One will counteract the other. Strychnine would save us."

Red made a dive for a loose pole in the corner of the floor. When he raised up he held in his hand a small, wide necked bottle half full of white crystals.

"Here's a bottle that I bought to—to kill an old dog one time," he said. "It's strychnine—label says so."

"Enough there to kill all the dogs in Alaska," remarked Dave. "All the fur-bearing animals, too, for that matter." He picked up his empty cup from the table, rinsed it out, and then dipped it half full of water from the big can on the stove.

"This'll be a sure cure," he said, shaking a small quantity of the crystals into the water and stirring it.

"Give it to me!" croaked Benson, leaning over and reaching for the cup with both hands. "Give it to me, I tell you!" he roared as Dave drew it out of his reach.

"Wait a minute. Wait." The marshal continued to stir the mixture. Red's face was directly over the flickering candle that stood glued in its own grease to the table top. In its yellow light Dave could see the bloodless pallor of the man's face through the red stubble. Around his eyes, where there was no hair, sweat beads sparkled.

"If I was quite sure that I had cyanide in me I'd drink this in a minute," said Dave slowly. "It'd save me. But if I'm mistaken and we haven't got hold of cyanide accidentally, this strychnine would kill us, and kill quick. I'm going to wait and see if these cramps get any worse before I try it." He set the cup down and started again to pace the floor.

He watched the nervous picking of Benson's thick fingers. Saw the erratic jumping of his Adam's apple as Red's nervousness made swallowing more and more of an effort.

Dave doubled up again in the attitude of a cramp. He let a groan, that was a masterpiece of imitation, escape his lips.

With a gurgling cry, Red Benson sprang to his feet. He kicked the stool out behind him and grabbed for the cup. His thick forefinger threaded the handle and he raised it to his lips.

FROM the corner of his eye Dave saw the motion. He leaped. A chopping motion of his fist caught the thick wrist just as the rim touched the man's lips. The contents flew into the air and the cup fell to the table with a hollow clatter.

With what seemed like one motion, the marshal whipped a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and snapped them onto the hairy wrists. For a moment Red stood dazed and then he lunged, only to meet the hard fist of the marshal's extended arm. The blow caught him full on the button and knocked him back onto the deacon seat along the front of the bunk. He sat

there, half groggy, blinking his bewildered eyes.

"I've got you where I want you, Benson. You've convicted yourself nicely." Dave took the bottle from the table and put it in his pocket.

Red's fear-filled eyes followed the motion, and his manacled hands gripped his belly.

"All right!" he snarled. "I admit using poison on furs! Now give me some of that strychnine—to kill this damn' cyanide I've got in me!" He was trembling like a leaf. "Come on, give it to me! Think I want to die here like a dog? I admit using that poison—for God's sake give me some of it!" The fear in his eyes gave them a strange, maniacal light. Dave laughed in his face.

"Why, you damned fool, it'd kill you like that!" Dave snapped his fingers. "There isn't any antidote for cyanide poisoning, that I know of. Anyway, strychnine isn't. And besides, you haven't eaten any cyanide. That flour was perfectly good. That little story I told you about sending the evidence of poisoning out by Tommy worked on your imagination. I'm not arresting you for poisoning furs—you're going on trial for murdering my old pal, Tommy Martin."

Red Benson's bulky figure sagged like a sack of wet sugar. He looked at the marshal with a tortured face that seemed to grow older by the minute.

"And there wasn't any poison in the flour?" he asked, weakly.

"Not a bit," Dave assured him. "It was your conscience that convicted you. You killed Tommy, and I'll tell you how you did it. Night before last he came here after a fight with that gale on the glacier. He stayed all night. In some way you found that he had that bullion. And then you killed him. In the morning you started to hook up the dogs. Probably going to drive up onto the glacier and drop the whole works, sled, dogs and Tommy's body down one of those deep crevasses. Tartar, the wolf dog, leaped on you—tore your shoulder—then broke away with the team."

Dave's blood pounded as he drew the picture that rose before his eyes. His fingers flexed, knotted into iron-hard fists. He fought against the desire to sink them into the hairy red face.

"Where's Tommy's body?" he snapped.

"Buried in a snowdrift." Red's voice was scarcely audible.

"The sled?"

"Burned."

"The gold?"

"There." Red pointed his two hands at the wide, shallow sand box beneath the stove. Dave dug in with a moccasined toe and uncovered the corner of a small yellow brick.

Red Benson's head dropped on his barrel chest. There seemed to be no strength left in his thick bull neck.

"And there wasn't any poison in that flour?" It was almost impossible for his thick brain to grasp the fact that he had been fooled.

"Nothing except the evidence of your guilt," said Dave.

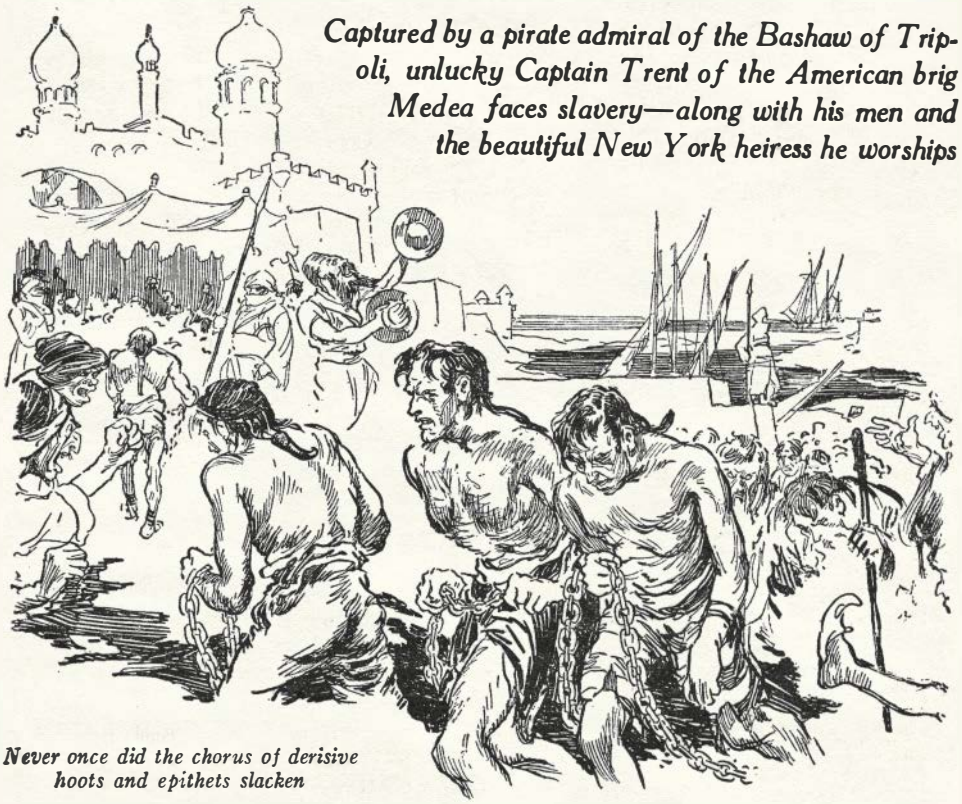
"I wish you had let me drink the strychnine," Red muttered in a whisper. "It'd be better than a rope."

"Too bad I didn't, you murdering, fur-poisoning rat! But I'll need you to help me dig out Tommy's body. And then you can claw that gold out of the sand box, while I take on some more of those hot cakes. We've got a long trip ahead of us to-day."

THE END.

Captain Judas

Captured by a pirate admiral of the Bashaw of Tripoli, unlucky Captain Trent of the American brig Medea faces slavery—along with his men and the beautiful New York heiress he worships



Never once did the chorus of derisive hoots and epithets slacken

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Captain Nemesis," "The Tiger of Pnom Kha," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

CAPTAIN AMOS TRENT, young master of the fleet brig Medea, sets sail from New York for Cadiz and Minorca in the days when Mediterranean traders are perpetually threatened by raids and demands for tribute on the part of Barbary Coast pirates, with whom President Jefferson has yet to deal. Two days before his departure he rescued beautiful and patrician Dorothea Sayles from a water front mob, and the New York heiress later is forced to take passage on his ship, due to the premature departure of the ship on which she had planned to sail—the Finch, under Captain Arnold Estes, an unscrupulous though aristocratic rival of the Medea's master.

At sea, the British man-of-war Leopard, acting on a tip from the lying Estes whose ship it had overhauled first, halts the Medea and impresses fifteen of her most able seamen under the flimsy pretext that they are English deserters. The little brig is left

This story began in the Argosy for April 4.

dangerously short-handed, but Amos continues eastward, happy at least in the discovery, one moonlit night, that capricious Dorothea Sayles returns the love which he has borne for her from the first. But before morning a violent squall sweeps down, leaving the undermanned Medea hopelessly crippled and far off her course along the African coast.

As the brig limps north, three pirate feluccas from Tripoli bear down on her, and after a desperate, bloody fight, the Medea is boarded by a Scotch renegade named Lisle and his merciless corsairs. Amos, his loyal first mate, MacCord, and a few surviving men are chained to rowing benches in the slaveholds of the feluccas, which set off for Gibraltar with the captured brig in tow. Dorothea Sayles and the other women passengers, suffering shameful indignities, are locked up to await an unknown fate. After weeks of indescribable torture of body and mind in the felucca's hold, Amos sees sunlight again on the quay of the bashaw's capital, Tripoli, where the captives are marshaled before the jeering natives in preparation for a triumphal procession.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MAD PLAN.

UPWARD toward the lofty spires of the city, seeming so bright and speckless in the distance, toiled the triumphant column, only half seen because of clouds of white dust that arose in choking thickness.

First of all rode Lisle, the renegade *mirant* (admiral), resplendently garbed in silver chain mail and a flashing conical helmet. Immediately at his heels stalked the captains of his three feluccas. Then, waving and shouting to friends and relatives in near-by windows or on the housetops, swaggered the crews. Next came donkeys and whining camels, laden with the choicest plunder. After them and flanked by stalwart, yellow-uniformed janizaries trudged the long column of enslaved Christians.

Ere he had marched half a mile beneath the cruel African sun, Amos was in agony from weakness and lack of water. Nevertheless his eyes darted to and fro, endlessly searching the surrounding country and noting all coves and passages, with an eye to the future.

Never once did the chorus of hoots and derisive epithets from the populace slacken. Naked children, emboldened by the example of their elders, hurled handfuls of stones and filth at the plodding, helpless men in chains. By gradually slackening or increasing his pace, Amos found he could exchange an occasional word with the nearest prisoners, but these could give little satisfaction to his queries save that they would eventually pass in shameful review before the bashaw, then be marched to the great common dungeons under the fortress to await their turn on the auction block.

As the procession entered the city, it passed through streets completely arched over to keep out the glare of the brazen sun. The shade was so soothing that Amos was nearly blinded when the column issued at last into a great paved square at one end of which was reared a tall, white-plaster building, faced with an elaborate arcade. Though thousands upon thousands of excited Tripolitans milled back and forth, the center of the square was kept clear by a division of red-and-blue uniformed soldiers, who guarded a high, green-carpeted dais.

Amos, because of his unusual height, was able to make out the erect, glittering form of Lisle, leading his victorious corsairs toward the figure seated on the dais. Somewhere out of sight of the square a battery of artillery boomed three salutes, and the whole column came to a halt.

"See!" cried a gaunt old man at Amos's elbow. "Lisle makes obeisance to the bashaw—damn his heathen eyes!"

THE prisoners were now herded into a vast uneasy mass, watching the elaborate ceremony take place. Amos slowly but persistently wormed his way through the malodorous press of slaves, heading toward that spot where the unhappy women stood looking on with terrified eyes.

"Hah!" grunted a guard. "The *mirant* salutes and does not salaam, so 'tis not his splendor, the bashaw, who sits yonder. 'Tis crafty old D'Ghiers, the vice regent, presiding in his stead."

His curiosity stirred, Amos paused in his search just long enough to cast a hasty glance at the vice regent who, glittering with jewels and decorations, sat high above the small sea of turbaned heads encircling him. Sidi Mohammed D'Ghiers, the captive discovered, was a dark-visaged old aristocrat with a commanding air who meditatively stroked a forked, black-dyed beard while he gravely awaited the admiral's address.

Amos continued his erratic course toward the crowd of women captives, and a moment later was rewarded by a glimpse of that sweet and beloved face which had given him courage to bear the horrors of the galley benches.

"Dorothea!" he cried in a strangled voice. "My darling Dorothea!"

Recklessly he shouldered aside a gaunt Sicilian slave and pushed on until he stood within speaking distance of the prisoner in flowing white. His heart stirred uneasily, for the girl yonder resembled not at all that gracious, light-hearted toast and queen of society whom he had seen descending the stairs in her father's great mansion on Dey Street. Dorothea was quite as lovely as before; nothing could rob her of the vigorous, patrician beauty which was innately hers; but she had changed, grown more mature and stately under suffering.

Rendered mute by surging emotions, Amos could for a time only look his fill of her, as a parched traveler drawing fresh life and courage from a desert spring. But at last, when a general craning of necks heralded some particularly interesting event in the center of the square, he softly called her name, at the same time keeping a wary eye on the gigantic Tripolitan guard standing just behind her. At first she could not hear because of the crowd's restless buzz of conversation.

"Dorothea!" He raised his voice a trifle.

Looking up swiftly the girl saw him, started as though stabbed, turned pale, then flushed rosily while an expression of such radiant joy lit her face that Amos all but risked catastrophe by rushing to take her in his hungry arms.

Softly her lips formed the words, "I love you, Amos," though tears trembled in her eyes and veiled their depths.

"Dorothea, my beloved," he murmured, "have — have they — harmed you?"

GENTLY she shook her head with its rich, sun-bronzed hair. "No, Amos, the admiral treated me with all courtesy—why, I know not. The other women were not so fortu-

nate. Ah! It was horrible, horrible! My very dear one, no words can tell how I have longed, prayed to see you before I die. I would never endure what the others have suffered. They told me you were dead."

"No," he whispered, "I could not die—I will not rest till you are freed of this infamy!"

Slowly her glorious eyes sought his deep-sunken ones. "What happens next?"

Amos shuddered. All too well he knew, yet somehow could not find courage to tell her of the appalling fate in store. "Why—I understand we are to be apportioned among the inhabitants, in a manner, to be bought."

"To—to be sold as slaves, do you mean?" The sudden horror in her eyes proved she had read assent in his anguished expression. "Good God! Do you tell me we are to be sold like blackamoors in a public market?" Her bound hands sought her throat, and she shut her eyes as the thought came near to overwhelming her.

Amos unconsciously raised his voice. "Take courage, my beloved, and have faith in me. Somehow, some time soon I will get us free of this nest of devils. Even though I kill the—"

A guard, his attention suddenly drawn from Lisle's reception, saw what was happening and, with a deep grunt of brutish anger, balled an enormous fist to knock Amos reeling back among the other male prisoners. Dorothea stifled a scream and would have started forward, but the guard raised his lance and roughly barred her path.

It was fortunate that at that moment a command was given to hale forward the prisoners, for Amos, struggling to his feet, would have leaped forward in a suicidal attack on the big Tripolitan, if other guards had not seized and hustled him along. Nevertheless, he caught one final glimpse of Dorothea, sending from her glorious eyes an unspoken message of abiding love.

By twos the captives were led past the base of the dais for the inspection of the gorgeously arrayed vice regent who, with Lisle now seated at his right, sat looking down in apparent disgust. Wrinkling his thin, hooked nose, Sidi D'Ghiers plucked an orange from the basket by his side and, biting off the end, held the fruit to his nostrils as though the stench of the unhappy wretches were too great to be endured.

When Amos and a beetle-browed Frenchman with a blue-black beard halted before the dais, the mail-clad admiral stiffened, pointed out the American and muttered something into the vice regent's emerald-decked ear. The other listened with a look of surprise, then gazed with growing curiosity on that muscular, grimy, but still commanding figure standing erect on the hot stone pavement of the courtyard.

Amos, alarmed at the intensity of the vice regent's inspection, momentarily feared that the time to pay for his assault on the admiral had come, but, to his surprise, he was herded on with the rest of the slaves, to be finally shoved into a great, dim-vaulted chamber far beneath the earth's surface.

This huge dungeon was furnished only with a few bare benches and mounds of moldy, vermin-infested straw. Here, he and the other prisoners were abandoned to their thoughts amid a final volley of curses from the mahogany-faced jailers.

HARDLY had the door clanged shut with a deadly finality than Amos commenced his efforts to plot an escape. Standing on the stone stairs leading from the gallery outside,

he peered about, estimating the number of dispirited and soul-weary prisoners at perhaps a hundred. After making sure that no jailer lingered to overhear what was said, he struck his wrist chains sharply against the stone wall to still the buzz of conversation which had broken out. Everywhere, fierce bearded faces were lifted and turned in his direction.

"How many Americans here?"

"Here! Here! Here!" Perhaps twenty-five or thirty voices answered from the depths of that gloomy chamber, their accents frequently proclaiming the origin of the speaker.

"All right," Amos crisply informed them. "We'll all meet in the corner farthest from the door. I want every American there at once."

There must have been something about his voice that inspired obedience, for amid a dull clanking of fetters, every one of the scattered wretches who had spoken groped his way toward the appointed corner, cursing and being cursed if he chanced to stumble over the exhausted prisoners of other nationalities who already lay like dead men.

"Is that you, sir-r-r? What's afoot? Hae ye a plan?" In the semi-darkness Amos started joyfully, for although he could not distinguish the speaker, those accents were unmistakable.

"MacCord!" he cried delightedly. "Where are you?"

"As I thought, 'tis Captain Trent, his ain sel'. Noo the Laird be praised—I'm coming, sir." An instant later, two hands made horny by long toil at the oars crushed one another in a grip of steel.

"I'm wi' you for whatever you plan."

"Mad Americans, *por Dios!*" snarled a Spaniard, resentful at being excluded. "Silly children who think to escape! Would you perish in the bashaw's torture chamber?"

Then came the sound of a resounding blow and a hoarse American voice. "Stow yer gab, ye garlic destroyer, or I'll lay ye cold!"

Indiscriminately driving aside all other prisoners, lest some one of them might seek liberty in betrayal, the American contingent crouched in close conclave in their corner of the great dungeon. Amos, squatting in the center of the circle, softly asked of each his name and former occupation.

As might be expected, they were, for the most part, unlucky sailors captured, as he had been, by the far-ranging corsairs of Tripoli. Among the seamen, however, was a thick sprinkling of merchants and a few ex-naval men who had by adverse fate fallen into the hands of the pirates. The men with naval training he found to number six.

"What ships are you from?" he asked them.

"The United States," grunted one, "and damn the day I deserted her."

"The President," said another bitterly. "I'm hoping she'll come back to look for me afore long."

"Aye," growled a third voice. "Ye can wager yer 'baccy money there'll be Yankee frigates hereabouts afore long."

"No," dispiritedly broke in a man near Amos. "Why should they come? Don't get yer hopes up; this has been going on for years."

"Aye," broke in MacCord's deep voice, "but not afore our dear cousins, the British, restrained the Portuguese tae aid British commerce at the expense o' ours. I warrant the matter is nigh past bearing, but if France, Spain and Holland endure this shame, how

can our wee country, three and a half thousand miles awa', accomplish aught?"

And so ran a rapid undertone of comments while Amos remained silent, listening and learning much concerning the men he hoped to lead.

GRADUALLY, as his eyes became accustomed to the fetid gloom, he commenced to distinguish faces which were alike only in a common dirtiness, gauntness and determination. At last he spoke.

"As Mr. MacCord here can tell you, I'm Amos Trent, late gunnery lieutenant of the United States frigate Constellation."

"Ah!" A genuine delight crept into the faces of the ex-naval men and they pressed closer. "Now, are you so, sir? Say the word and we will follow you to the end. Show us the means," they pleaded, "and we'll teach these murdering devils a lesson."

"Patience, my lads," cautioned Amos. "Keep your voices down. This matter will take time. Do I understand aright—you are willing to risk all in a bid for escape?"

It was but natural that every one should assent, although it seemed to the keen-eared Trent that two or three sounded half-hearted; he would have given much for more light by which to single out the faint hearts.

By a rough but amazingly accurate estimate of character, Amos then divided the group, which on actual count came to twenty-six, into three divisions, and, putting them on their oath to obey all instructions, set a leader over each division. This done, he stored in the recesses of his mind the names of those men appearing to be most reliable and, having accomplished these preliminary steps, said a few words.

"Though our ways may part at the slave block, most of us will remain in this accursed town, so in due time you will be informed of what is expected of you—be patient and have faith in me. Meanwhile, keep your mouths shut and trust no one beyond our number. Remember—we'll all die in agony if the plot miscarries. Now go to your places and rest."

When the group dispersed, Amos sought a clear space on the floor and there relaxed his tired body while his mind furiously attacked the problem before him.

"Dorothea!" he whispered and thought to see her fresh young face smiling down through the darkness. "Have patience, my sweeting—ere long I'll get you free of this foul city and its bloody masters."

Once he heard the muffled reverberations of many cannon, but listening to the regularly spaced reports he soon dismissed them as coming from signal guns, doubtless greeting the victorious return of some other convoy such as that in which he and his fellow prisoners had been brought to the city.

His mind reverted once more to his adored Dorothea and the irretrievable degradation which hourly threatened her. In the square he had read her unmistakable determination never to submit. He knew she would die by her own hand rather than live the loathsome rôle of a Barbary slave and concubine; that was frightening him most. Would she wait for rescue?

"Now if I could gain her at least a temporary protection," he mused, "then, with time, much might be accomplished."

For a long time he lay listening to the noises of rats scurrying over the foul straw and the snores of the exhausted prisoners. Only too well he

realized that Dorothea's alluring beauty was not the sort to prompt delays.

"I must act quickly," he told himself. Then he started up in the darkness as the answer came, a solution fraught with risks and dangers.

"By Heaven! 'Twill do," he whispered exultantly, "if—"

CHAPTER XV.

ARNOLD ESTES AGAIN!

HE lay back, a smile on his lips for the first time in many long weeks, while his mind turned back to that momentous day when his life had been suddenly shaken to its foundations by his first sight of Dorothea Sayles. Retreating over the past weeks and months, he smelled again the reeking slave-hold of the felucca; he struggled once more on the Medea's deck in his futile, gallant fight to stave off the inevitable; he recalled the awful moment when the squall had crippled his undermanned ship, and in the darkness his hands clenched at the recollection of the heart-breaking experience with the Leopard. Step by step he went back and, for the first time, came to recognize the author of all his misfortune and Dorothea's suffering as Estes.

Estes it was who, beyond a doubt, had lied to the Leopard concerning the Medea's crew, and so brought complete and terrible disaster upon her. Let him but once more face that sneering, treacherous dog! Let him but get that shore dandy within reach of his hands!

He broke off his bitter musings abruptly, for down the gallery leading to the dungeon reverberated the tramp of many feet. At the door came the rattle of chains and the sound of heavy bolts being shot back with a noise that awoke most of the shivering wretches. Fearfully they raised haggard, drowsy faces toward the portal and started back in alarm at the red gleam of many bayonets visible in the light of a flickering torch held by a brutal-looking jailer.

Spitting and complaining of the stench, the Tripolitan entered, then beckoned to those outside while the nearest prisoners shrank back in mute terror lest they be the ones he sought. A guard, with a drawn scimitar glinting dully, stepped inside and held back the door, calling in guttural undertones to those still out of sight.

Suddenly a man appeared, a middle-aged, bearded European, chained and clad in the soiled remains of what must have been an expensive velvet suit. As he was pushed down the stairs the newcomer held his head high and gazed with disgust upon the huddled, curious prisoners below; then another captive entered, followed by yet another.

In high hopes for more recruits, Amos watched the new prisoners pass the revealing torch glare. When the fourth prisoner bent to enter, a shock rather like an electric current stung his nerves. Could it be there was something familiar about the set of those shoulders? The man was passing the torch now and for an instant his features were clearly lit. Amos felt the blood roar in his ears; his hands opened and shut spasmodically. There, in the act of descending the four or five steps to the dungeon floor, was Arnold Estes!

AMAZEMENT held Amos motionless a long moment during which he discovered that his enemy was in sad state. Captain Estes's left arm dangled in a crude, blood-stained sling

and his once frilled shirt was foul with dirt, while the dark hair streamed lank and lifeless over his high white forehead. A moment the traitor paused on the lowest stair, looking uncertainly into the darkness beyond.

Then, aroused from his amazed inaction, Amos, like an avenging giant, leaped to his feet and, hurdling over the intervening men, bounded forward. He heard a sharp gasp as Estes saw him, flinched and started back toward the door, but the janizary guard prevented further retreat with threateningly raised blade.

Amos, tripping over a suddenly aroused sleeper, missed his footing and, perforce, dropped his eyes during that fraction of a second which marked a swift change of expression on Estes's unshaven features—a change from instinctive fear to cool, calculated presence of mind. Quite boldly Estes redescended the steps, his handsome features clearly recognizable in the glare of the torch.

"Ah, as I live, 'tis Captain Trent!" he cried with a wide smile. "I regret, sir, to find you in the same evil circumstances as—"

Taken aback at the other's abrupt change of face, Amos paused, chained hands half extended to grip the traitor's throat. "You loathsome swine!" he growled. "You damned unhanged scoundrel!"

"Why—why—" stammered Estes, giving way, an expression of apparently genuine alarm on his features. "I misunderstand you, sir. Why do you lay such—"

He had no time to finish, for Amos was upon him. In a trice the sea captain's hands closed on the other's throat—hands become as unyielding as steel traps through the long weeks of gripping a ponderous oar-handle. Insane fires burned, seared the enraged captain's brain, as he choked the man who had cost him his ship and brought a terrible fate to Dorothea.

Estes's face had turned purple when one of the guards, suddenly aware of what was taking place, leaped below. Fortunately Amos's wrath was already cooling, and he violently cast the other aside, hurling him half conscious against the damp dungeon wall while the Tripolitans laughed uproariously at what they deemed a singular piece of madness.

AFTER a little, Estes, gasping and nursing his bruised throat, crawled aside, dark eyes gleaming with an unspeakable fear and hatred, while Amos towered over him.

"Why—did—you do this?" Estes had the temerity to choke. "Damn you—Trent—owe me satisfaction—this cowardly an' unwarranted attack."

Amos emitted a harsh laugh. "Do not attempt to lie yourself clear. It's lucky for you, my bully boy, that I'm a merciful man by nature. Had you but half your just deserts, the jailers would pitch your carcass to the scavenger dogs to-morrow."

The young captain was magnificent in his anger. But there was also a certain strange dignity to Estes, for as soon as he could manage it he staggered to his feet and, with amazing effrontery, tottered directly up to his late assailant.

"Will you tell me," he demanded hoarsely, "what I've done to merit this damnable, unprovoked attack? Have you gone mad from your imprisonment?" This last he ventured because of the wild gleam the torchlight revealed in Amos's smoldering eyes.

"You damned lying dog! 'Unpro-

voked,' you dare say! You who treacherously set the Leopard upon us."

"The Leopard?" Was there a genuine surprise in Estes's dark face? "The Leopard, said you?"

"A truce to your false innocence," growled Amos, raising menacing fists. "I know 'twas you told her we'd British deserters aboard. Our lookout watched you close by the frigate; saw you speak to that damned bulldog who impressed half my crew."

"But—but—" cried Estes, stammering in his eagerness to explain. "Upon my word you are mistaken. I never spoke to the ship you mention." He leveled a shrewd glance at his accuser. "Could you read the ship's name?"

"Why, no, we were not near enough." A shade of doubt crept in Amos's tone. Honest and truthful himself, he commenced to wonder if perhaps he had not been precipitate. "Nevertheless, I know your ship," he continued, "and 'twas the Finch we saw speaking to the frigate. There's no mistake, you were side by side afore the fog shut down."

Brushing his lank, uncombed hair from his eyes, Arnold Estes peered up, searching the other's face. "But did you actually read the name of my vessel?" he persisted.

"Why, no," admitted the other carelessly. "There was no need of it. We know your Finch too well to be mistaken."

Then a new expression crept into Estes's sweaty features. Obviously this heavy-witted Trent was not altogether sure. Then, aloud, in injured and angry accents, Estes said:

"You were mistaken—what you saw was, no doubt, the Nerid, the Finch's sister ship. You'll recall she was built but two years before my Finch and by the same yard. They're as like as two peas in a pod."

"The Nerid?" Amos, in growing consternation, remembered there was such a ship, and that she too had cleared from New York but two or three days previous to his own sailing. Although improbable, it was not beyond the realms of possibility that, as Estes claimed, she had been the vessel sighted in communication with the British man-of-war.

UNDECIDED on what attitude to assume, Amos pondered for a moment; then, coming to a swift decision, deemed it wiser to allow the shrewd and astute Estes to think he had swallowed the explanation. Immediately he extended his hand.

"My apologies, captain," he said. "Perhaps I've been a mite precipitate. I imagine you'll grant the circumstances warranted a certain suspicion on my part, especially with the matter of that sugar from Port Mahon."

The other, after a carefully timed hesitation, decided with seeming magnanimity to accept the tall young captain's apology. "Well, Trent, this time I'll overlook the matter. We Americans must stick together in this horrible affair. Let's sit down somewhere. I'm monstrous weak from your bear's hug."

"And you, Captain Estes," asked Amos as he sank wearily to the damp floor by Estes's side, "how came you in this loathsome slave pen?"

"Why, I was took, two short days out o' Mahon," replied Estes bitterly. "Just when I thought to win the prize—" He broke off abruptly, as if realizing he had made an indiscreet remark. "I was boarded and carried by a thundering big xebec. Half my crew was slaughtered by the Moslem devils

who gutted my poor little brig and sold her hull and cargo in Malta to the British. Of course, they enslaved the rest of us."

"So you fought?" queried Amos with some interest.

"Aye, that we did," replied the other gloomily. "But to no avail. Merchantmen ever make indifferent gunners. And you—how came you to Tripoli?"

Amos settled lower on the straw and in an undertone briefly recounted the ill-fortune that had dogged the Medea, finishing his account with a description of the rowing benches.

"Thank God," was Estes's shaken comment, "the xebec carried no oars!" He shuddered. "What a fearful fate! Do you think we will be sold to the galleys?"

In the darkness Amos shrugged. "God alone knows, but I tell you, Estes, 'tis the fate of Mistress Sayles that plagues me."

As though a rat had bitten him the other gasped and jumped. "What? Dorothea Sayles here in Tripoli? Surely you are mad to say so!"

Amos laughed bitterly. "It's true," he said shortly. "When you left New York so unceremoniously"—he stressed the word— "and left your passengers behind, she booked passage on my Medea, worse luck! And now like us, she lies a captive, doubtless somewhere in this very castle."

"Oh!" A hollow groan arose from Estes's throat and there was a soft clink of his manacles coming together. "Oh, how terrible! Dorothea Sayles! My God, Trent, we must save her from this infamy!"

There was no denying the earnestness in that voice. Whatever his faults, Amos decided that Arnold Estes was indeed genuinely aghast at the appalling fate in store for the winsome and capricious Dorothea.

CHAPTER XVI.

SLAVES FOR SALE.

MUCH to the astonishment of the prisoners and to Amos's disgust, the slaves were not haled from their dungeon until the morning of the fourth day following. Marshaled in columns of two's and under heavy guard, the prisoners were led down one malodorous gallery after another, to emerge at last in a spacious courtyard where a company of janizaries was added to the escort.

"After the pestilential dampness of the dungeon," observed Amos to MacCord, "one appreciates the oft ignored boon of fresh air and sunlight."

"Aye, the rays feel gude i' the back," replied the Scot and yawned cavernously. "The heat fair makes me sleepy."

To the steady tramp of the picturesquely garbed guards and the dull clank of chains, the long column issued from the land gate of the bashaw's castle and so marched once more through a maze of narrow streets. It did not take Amos long to discover that there was unusual excitement afoot. In the streets were many native types who, from their manner, must be newly arrived visitors.

There were lean, hawk-faced men from the desert who looked disdainfully down from the snuffling, fawn-colored camels they bestrode; there were groups of arrogant Turkish officers swaggering by in uniform, invariably followed at a distance by three or four servants. Also there were blue-black Moors, wiry Bedouins with enormous gold-trimmed belts, and

crowds of greasy looking Armenians and Jews come to town for purposes of trade.

With a shock of surprise Amos also noted various figures in the army-scarlet and navy-blue uniforms of the English service. These alone, of all the Europeans, were free to roam about Tripoli without worry or restraint, for their country, well occupied with checking Napoleon on the high seas, had made terms with the Barbary pirates.

Before long Amos descried, looming ahead, a vast white dome such as generally roofed over a *soûk* or market place. Apparently on this day all roads led to the great open-walled structure, for as the slave column drew near Amos could see that the *soûk* was filled to overflowing with a busy, shrilly chattering crowd that represented a cross section of the Moslem world.

AFTER a path had been forced through the crowd, the prisoners were herded to a clear space in one corner of the vast market and there, surrounded by vigilant guards, were ordered to squat on the pavement.

MacCord nudged Amos as he looked about. "Mark you—we've muckle company on the block. I'm thinkin' there must be nigh thirty or forty o' us puir de'ils o' all ages, sizes an' condeetion. Losh, hark tae 'em a'! 'Tis a second Tower o' Babel we've come tae."

He was right. Among the slaves were nervous Frenchmen and Spaniards, cursing the day that a faithless bashaw had cast aside his sworn friendship for Napoleon to join forces with the English under dire threats from the sublime Porte. A few Dutchmen, blond, blue-eyed and obviously bewildered were in the number as well as many Greeks and Levantines. But at least a quarter of the prisoners were of that lanky, alert type that proclaimed them citizens of the new republic in the West. They sat apart, gazing with mingled contempt and curiosity at the milling swarms of natives waiting the opportunity to bid.

"Yon'll be the 'block itsel'!" suggested MacCord. "'Tis a waesome bit o' masonry, watered wi' the tears o' thousands o' puir souls."

He indicated a spot in the center of the market containing a rough platform, composed of four huge gray stone blocks. A short flight of steps led up to the top, which would measure perhaps eight feet to a side. Around the base of the block a number of spectacled scribes squatted, busily laying out their writing brushes and ink horns.

Amos amused himself for the next few minutes in studying the ever changing crowd, seeking to distinguish between those who had come to buy and those who had only come to look on. For all present it was obviously a gala occasion. In stamped leather pouches at their girdles, the various idlers and dealers carried supplies of figs, dates, sweetmeats, bread and suet of which they partook at irregular intervals and ate noisily.

"Ah," observed MacCord darkly, "here comes trouble — mark their prideful bearing."

He referred to the arrival of a detail of soldiers who roughly beat aside the multitude. In their wake appeared a familiar, muscular and erect figure, that of Gregory Lisle, Scottish *mirant* of Tripoli.

Like the orthodox Mohammedan he had become, Lisle wore a turban, twined in snowy graceful folds about his scarlet fez. The renegade's robes

were of brilliant azure, lavishly embroidered with heavy gold arabesques that clinked softly against the hilt of a jeweled scimitar swinging at his side. Treading with an assured step, the renegade marched to a gilded armchair.

"May the blessings of the Prophet attend thee! O mighty *mirant!*" whined an obsequious merchant, who promptly thrust forward an orange that the smells of the slave market might not offend the great admiral's nostrils.

NEXT, amid much bowing and salaaming, arrived that stern old man with the dyed beard whom Amos recognized as Sidi Mohammed D'Ghiers, the bashaw's vice regent. It appeared that the commencement of the auction had waited on his arrival, for scarcely was he seated when a brazen gong clashed harshly in a far corner of the market. Hardly had the sound died away than a fat Hebrew, clad in soiled blue robes, waddled up to the stone platform and, with a penetrating voice, called upon all present to listen.

Amos, like most of the prisoners, could understand little of the man's harangue, but a swarthy Spaniard from Majorca who knew Arabic like his mother tongue, translated for Amos's benefit the gist of the dingy little man's words.

"*Sangre de Dios!*" whispered the Spaniard. "The dog announces the sale of two hundred Christian slaves."

At the intelligence Amos experienced a singular shock—he felt slightly nauseated, rebellious, indescribably alarmed all at once. Though long delayed, the degrading hour had come at last when he was to become a creature without a soul, without rights, without the least part in his own fate. Dully he wondered whether he would be knocked down to some kindly owner or to some black-hearted devil who delighted in cruelty for its own sake.

"Great God! I'm going to be some one's property, on a par with a dog, a camel or a horse!" He gritted his teeth to suppress a groan. In that dark moment, the one ray of sunlight was the possibility that the first step in his plan for the liberation of Dorothea Sayles might be successfully carried out. Feverishly he prayed that he might not precede her on the block. He must be present when she was offered for sale!

ALMOST before Amos realized it, two enormous Negro guards had strode in among the huddled prisoners, selected a muscular Italian on the edge of the crowd and dragged him struggling to the block. There they stripped off his rags while the auctioneer bellowed out the unfortunate's name and the scribes below the platform dipped brush in ink and began scribbling. After a moment's impassioned pleading the Jew turned to run clawlike hands over the unfortunate Italian's massive arms and chest, at the same time vociferously pointing out the strength, the fitness of the offering.

Poor Amos, deep in the crowd, dropped his bloodshot and sunken eyes in overwhelming disgust; to think that ere long he, too, an American officer and gentleman, must stand up there to be bid upon like a prize ox at a country fair! Finally, the bidding ceased and the Italian was knocked down to a lean-faced Arab from the interior.

In Amos's throat there was a parched feeling as, one by one, the male prisoners were auctioned off, to be promptly claimed by their owners and led off with hanging heads and spiritless tread.

During the early part of the auction,

Lisle and the bashaw's regent conversed together, seemingly oblivious of the proceedings. However, when a stalwart American seaman was exposed for sale, they both put in bids and, in the end, Lisle purchased the man whom Amos recognized as one of his leaders, a boatswain out of a brig from Boston. Ever louder grew the excited comments of the dark-faced crowd and still fouler became the exhalations of their unwashed bodies as the sun rose higher in the brazen heavens and warmed the air beneath the great roof to a furnace heat.

Luck apparently was with Amos, for when all but a few of the male prisoners had been auctioned, he yet squatted in the unsold group with MacCord, Estes, and the Spaniard. The perspiring auctioneer descended, mopping his flabby features, to yield his place to another even more repulsive creature who, speaking in the curious accent of the Levant, commenced a fresh harangue. From a screened section in the rear of the market, the Levantine's assistants led forward a dark-complexioned Sicilian girl, who, far from seeming fearful, smiled and almost pirouetted to her place on the auction block.

"See," commented the Spaniard. "The *niña* is no fool—she throws her thighs about to seek the favor of some wealthy merchant!"

"An' sma' blame unto her," grunted MacCord. "She's for a fact a verra toothsome doxy."

AS in the case of the male slaves, the auctioneer unceremoniously snatched aside the single cloak which hid the unfortunate girl's nakedness and, with many sly grins, pointed out the plump roundness and the supple firmness of her body, then let the fabric fall and called for bids.

Amos's heart turned to ice. He was sickened and horrified with the thought that soon Dorothea must endure the same shame. The realization was utterly unbearable. He tried to quiet his mind in a constantly repeated reminder that if all went well she might be spared the ordeal. At worst, she would never have to submit to the ultimate degradation. As his eye wandered hurriedly over the multitude, it came to rest upon the hard, arrogant features of the Scottish renegade and he came to a decision.

"He's the one," the harassed captive muttered. "True, he's a devil, but at least he's white. Now I wonder if he's like the rest of his countrymen?"

Warning MacCord not to follow, Amos edged his way bit by bit toward the outer ring of prisoners. Meanwhile, one after another of the female slaves was exposed and sold. Some wept, some smiled pitifully, some stood numbed, incomprehensive of what was happening, frozen with the horror of their fate.

"I must hurry," thought Amos. "She'll be up before long—"

There was no denying the inexorable progress of the auction. Sooner or later, Dorothea must be haled forward. Suddenly she was there, almost before Amos realized it and, as ever in the presence of despair, she was walking very erect, small head held high and staring straight before her with superb, unseeing eyes.

Amos saw that his beloved one was dressed, like the others who had preceded her, in a loose native robe of white that could easily be torn aside.

The thunder of furious waters was in his ears as with an odd sense of unreality he watched her place one foot on the lowest step of the platform. Her soft brown hair was floating unre-

strained down her back to fall to below her waist in gleaming strands. She was deathly pale, pale as that moon beneath which she and Amos had discovered and confessed an all-enduring love.

When, statuesque and queenly, she stood on the platform before all eyes, a tense excitement gripped those dark-faced men in the audience.

"Am I drunk?" hoarsely cried a sidi from Tunisia. "Such beauty cannot be real—she is the fabled moon maiden who maddens men with beauty."

"By the Prophet's beard!" muttered an eagle profiled Berber. "This is no earthly woman, but one of Allah's beloved houris from the seventh circle of Paradise." The crowd, muttering, sighing and crying out in delight, surged closer, hungrily feasting their eyes on the Christian beauty.

"NOW!" cried a small voice. Something in Amos's mind clicked and, facing the Scottish admiral, he cupped his hands.

"Lisle! For God's sake, listen! Lisle! Bid now, bid high! Shut the others out. Do you hear me? On my word, her father's worth millions. Buy her—hold her for the ransom from New York!"

Shaken beyond control, Amos could not tell whether the Tripolitan admiral had heard or not, for the other never turned his head, but merely shot a casual glance in the distracted prisoner's direction from eyes as cold and blue as his own Scotch lakes. Then, somewhere behind him, Amos heard a gasp of anger. Arnold Estes, seated only a few yards away, had heard the speech and was glowering furiously.

"Stop it, Trent!" he grated. "Stop it, you swine! Sell her to the renegade, betray her, would you?"

But Amos never heard. His eyes, terrible in their expression, were riveted on the auction block, for now the Levantine's grimy paw reached out to pull aside the unresisting girl's covering. At the motion she shuddered and raised both hands to cover her eyes.

The garment never fully left her exquisitely modeled body, for with one tremendous bound the maddened Amos upset the guard beside him, smote senseless another who sought to bar his passage and, in an instant, had gained the platform to pick up the startled, gaping auctioneer by the waist. With superb ease he heaved the shrieking Levantine high above his head and, like a living catapult, hurled the struggling body at the foremost of the guards.

The howling missile struck down two who fell with a resonant clash of accouterment to lie in a writhing, groaning heap on the pavement.

"Back!" roared the raging slave, felling an overbold guard who came near. "Back, you heathen swine!" He was vaguely aware of Estes and MacCord fighting like demons to join him, but, chained and hopelessly outnumbered, they were soon overpowered.

Dorothea, though she stood erect, was as one unconscious while he, terrific in his wrath, formed a living screen before her.

"Amos!" she whispered brokenly. "Amos, dearest one, stop. It cannot be avoided. Stop! For my sake, you must live."

But the maddened sea captain heard nothing, and, stooping, caught up a ponderous ebony stool upon which the auctioneer had sat to rest. Dashing it to pieces against the stone slave block he snatched up a heavy leg. Armed with this club, he prepared to sell his

life in a vain effort to shield the girl who, above all else, symbolized honor and purity.

At a furious command from the vice regent, half a dozen janizaries stepped forward, spears leveled, ready to close in. Amos whirled up the stool leg and stood on guard, bitterly cursing the hampering manacles which allowed his hands but a bare two feet of play.

FOR all their numbers, the yellow-uniformed guards seemed loath to approach that heroic, half-naked figure. Perhaps it was the berserk gleam in those burning eyes that warned them off, but taking courage at last, they uttered a deep shout and sprang in.

Amos knocked aside a couple of thirsty, gleaming spear points, then suddenly realizing that as he stood above, he was offering a perfect target, he uttered a piercing cry and leaped tigerlike among his startled assailants. Like a homicidal windmill, he whirled back and forth, brandishing the heavy ebony stool leg with devastating effect. Two janizaries he felled; another sought to close with him and leaped back howling to nurse a broken arm; a fourth aimed a vicious blow at the raging sea captain's head with his scimitar, missed and gashed a fellow guard deeply in the shoulder. Panting, almost awed, the Tripolitans drew back an instant, then, reënforced, came on again.

Eventually the odds told. Struggling with the strength of a madman, Amos was borne to the floor, to be half stunned, then secured with ropes about wrists, elbows and ankles. The cursing janizaries, gleaming with sweat, then caught him up and hurled him, like a sack of meal, at the feet of the glowering vice regent. A panting subofficer expectantly drew a heavy sword and looked up for orders.

During the struggle, Dorothea stood motionless on the block, her face covered, waiting for the inevitable end. Then, quite suddenly she moaned, swayed and collapsed, to lie a huddled heap of white cloth and flesh on the greasy stones of the slave block.

A moment the vice regent turned his glittering black eyes on Amos, who, meeting the look, glared up, helpless but unconquered. Then, with a short motion of his bejeweled hand, Mohammed D'Ghiers turned the thumb earthward in a gesture as old as Rome. The captain of the guards grinned, rolled up his sleeve, clutched Amos's hair with his left hand and turned his gaze to the vice regent, the trenchant blade poised in mid-air.

Admiral Lisle, however, seemed struck by an idea. Prompted perhaps by admiration or pity, he turned to D'Ghiers.

"Hold!" he said in Arabic. "Yon man is worth many good sequins. Why squander them? I spared him once before to get that gold—surely, Sidi, you wouldn't cheat me of my money?" He grinned half jokingly at the vice regent.

Apparently the two were fast friends for D'Ghiers, after a long hesitation, nodded assent to the renegade's plea. Amos, incredulous to be still alive, was further pinioned and left to lie on the floor directly before the seat of his preserver.

Gradually the chill of imminent death left him and as from a great distance he heard the bidding on the still unconscious Sayles heiress rise and rise, until it filled the great white-washed *soûk* with a deafening clamor. Up soared the price while the auctioneer hugged himself for glee. Then one by one, the bidders reluctantly

dropped out as the amounts offered reached unheard of figures.

AT the end of twenty minutes, as nearly as the battered sea captain could ascertain, the only bidders left were an enormously wealthy merchant out of Tunis, a huge eunuch with painted lips and frizzed hair who bid in the interest of the bashaw, and a little Hebrew with narrow, glittering eyes and reddish hair.

"Ten thousand sequins," boomed the Tunisian with a fine flourish. Fingering enormous gold earrings that glittered with his every motion, he looked challengingly at the bashaw's eunuch who, frantic at having neared the limit of his funds, made a final gesture.

"Eleven thousand sequins," he called in a reedy, high-pitched voice. "Beware, dog, how thou biddest against our gracious bashaw—whom Mohammed bless and preserve."

But the Hebrew was not to be daunted. Groaning and whining as though he lay on the rack and with a sob in his voice, he raised the bid to eleven thousand five hundred sequins, truly an enormous price, if Amos were to judge from the excited comments of the onlookers.

His eyes turned in despair to Lisle and he felt a glacial coldness grip his being. Apparently the *mirant* was not in the least interested, for he chatted idly with D'Ghiers. Sickened, Amos realized that his play for time had failed. The Scot did not intend to purchase the girl and hold her for the ransom she represented. That loathsome bidder yonder would become the owner of Dorothea's fragile white beauty.

"Which of the three is the worst?" he asked himself. "Probably the Jew. He'll buy to resell her in the rich markets of Constantinople." He next eyed the Tunisian, a gross, fat little man, whose thin gray beard grew in patches. While he bid, his swart features took on a sensual, satyrlike expression that sickened Amos. Last there was the flabby eunuch, who flung out his bids petulantly and hungrily eyed the unconscious girl. All three were vile—and Amos bitterly cursed the hour he had delayed slaying Dorothea with his own hands.

The bidding continued upward to twelve thousand sequins, at which price the bashaw's representative quit, blowing out his fat cheeks in disconsolate anger. But the Jew and the Tunisian kept on until at twelve thousand five hundred sequins the Tunisian flung both hands in the air and, shrieking horrible curses, bolted from the market as though unable to witness the passing of the prize into other hands.

"Ah—now, then, Aaron," the victor addressed the auctioneer as, leering and wriggling in ecstasy, he commenced to shuffle forward; but at that moment the Mirant Lisle got quietly to his feet.

"A moment, Jew!" he called in quick, clipped Arabic. "The bidding is not quite finished. I've taken a fancy to bid. Ho, auctioneer, thirteen thousand sequins for yon damsel! What say you to that, Sir Meat Buyer?" Folding his arms, he eyed the startled Hebrew, one hand meditatively stroking that tawny beard of his.

AT his words the Jew spun quickly about, chattering in rage, scarce believing that he heard aright. "Thirteen thousand sequins!" he cried. "Said my lord thirteen thousand sequins?"

"Aye," nodded Lisle, carelessly loosening an embroidered money bag

at his belt. "Thirteen thousand good golden sequins, thou pork-dodging son of Sheol."

The rival bidder winced, torn between desire for that fragile white figure and the instinctive love of his money bags. "Oi!" he wailed. "Oi! My lord must be mad! No woman is worth such a price."

From his chair Admiral Lisle merely treated the other to a thin-lipped grin of contempt. "Well," said he, "will you bid?"

"You are a hard man, my lord—I—I—" The fellow's hesitation was at once pitiable and ludicrous. He stood on one foot, then on the other, squirming and clawing his beard in despair. At last and with the air of one who risks all on a gamble, he raised his voice: "Thirteen thousand sequins and five hundred more will I bid, and by so doing beggar my wife and children."

A resounding shout of excitement arose from several thousand throats. It had never occurred to the motley watchers that the little Hebrew would venture to bid higher. Now they egged him on. True, the Mirant Lisle had named a prohibitive sum; but, as many of them loudly remarked, such an incarnation of pale beauty was well worth the amazing amount.

"I'll save your wife and brats from starving—fourteen thousand sequins," calmly countered Lisle; but Amos could see sweat gleaming on Lisle's brow.

"Takes more than a change of religion to alter a Scot's love of the baubees," Amos thought. "Will he go up again?" His soul quivered in suspense.

"Fourteen thousand five hundred," screamed the Jew.

Lisle winced, cast a shrewd look at the pinioned prisoner at his feet, then bid.

"Fifteen thousand sequins!"

At these words the Jew moaned like a wounded hare and shook his head. Whereby Dorothea Sayles, proud aristocrat of old New York, was knocked down to the hawk-faced Scottish renegade for the equivalent of ninety-five thousand dollars.

That Amos heard and, for all his aching bones and uncertain fate, gave thanks to God that his desperate ruse had worked, little dreaming the fearful price he would pay for its success.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TRAGIC SETBACK.

At last came his own turn upon the block. He stood calmly resigned, so exultant over Dorothea's safety, temporary though it was, that he barely noticed the bidders.

It soon appeared, however, that his late exhibition of temper had reduced his value. Evidently a troublesome slave was worth much less than a tractable one, and all the auctioneer's eloquence was wasted. In vain did he dwell on the captive's magnificent physique, his youth and presentable appearance. Most of the bidders merely shook their heads wisely and put away their money bags.

In the end Amos was sold for the equivalent of two thousand dollars to a gigantic mulatto with thick purple lips and a calculating eye. The big Moor thoughtfully rubbed his ebony-hued chin and, taking no chances, ordered the new purchase's bonds to be cruelly tightened. Then the Negro slaves lifted Amos from the block to make room for David MacCord, the tough old mate proving coldly contemptuous of the whole proceedings.

"Good-by, sir," he called in a low

voice as the captive captain was led past. "Dinna despair—we'll all be bidin' yer command."

Amos's new proprietor then deliberately counted out his gold pieces, while a scribe recorded the transaction, and presently master and slave moved out of the market place.

As Amos stumbled along, guided by his new master's savage jerking of a sort of halter rope, he fell to speculating on the nature of the labor to which he would be doomed. He found the answer quickly enough as the Moor, with an enormous black finger, pointed silently down a narrow alley leading toward the water front. Above the flat housetops Amos could distinguish a mass of rigging and slender spars.

After a few more turns he saw the water itself and the naked ribs of a boat on the ways, shining bright and yellow against the blue background of the sea.

Some of the weight on his shoulders seemed lifted. Evidently he had been bought by a boat builder and, therefore, would be near salt water. At least his was not to be a hopelessly uncongenial form of slavery.

"Thank God!" he muttered dully. "I've not fallen into such bad hands after all."

But he counted without his master, for that wily individual, determined on teaching the new slave respect and obedience in an unforgetable manner, turned him over to a quartet of brawny slave guards who, after stripping the helpless sea captain of his last rags, proceeded mercilessly and scientifically to beat him into senselessness.

"Now, if Allah wills," observed Hamet Sokna, the boat builder, "this Nazarene fighter has learned who is master. If Allah wills otherwise, you will beat him until he has not the spirit of a worm."

SO severe were Amos's various cuts, bruises and lacerations that it was two full days before he could find strength to regain his feet, and fully five days elapsed before he was able to move with anything like his accustomed agility.

In his eyes burned a new gleam, hard and bright as the iron shackles confining his ankles. Thanks to Hamet Sokna's crude but convincing object lesson, he now entertained no false illusions. A troublesome slave would be very quickly broken, not only in body, but in spirit as well, and, intelligent man that he was, Amos realized the futility of open resistance.

The one force that kept him sane during the first dark days of his slavery was the thought of Dorothea.

"At least she's safe for the time being," he muttered, as he hewed at an oaken knee, making the chips sail high in the yellow sunshine. "Lisle's too canny to hurt the chances of a big ransom. He'll no doubt ask a stiff price, but he'll hold her unharmed." He chuckled as he swung the adz. That had been a master stroke!

"Let's see, now, it 'll take six weeks—no, it's safer to call it eight—for Lisle's letter to fetch to New York—a week or so there to get the money together, then eight—no, six weeks to get it back here, for they'll have a following wind all the way that time o' year. That gives me six, seven—fifteen weeks to complete my plans. Which, God willing, ought to be time enough."

Then he fell to wondering what had become of his various leaders, of MacCord, of Estes. He would have given much to know the fate of that dark

young man who had been auctioned even later than himself. When Amos saw him last, he was still heaping acrid curses on his rival—he had apparently quite misunderstood Amos's purpose in disclosing to Lisle the knowledge of Andrew Sayles's enormous wealth. Amos wondered if Estes might at that moment be one of a slave caravan following a burning road toward the Lybian Desert. Or was he yet in Tripoli?

Because it was familiar work Amos very quickly fell into the shipyard routine, laboring from dawn till dusk at the long-hulled galleys and feluccas building in the yard, and because of his skill, often earning a pleased nod from his owner.

As he proved more tractable and valuable past expectation, Hamet Sokna allowed him greater liberties. For one thing he was now permitted to sleep in the great slave barracks, where there were not a few other Americans, some who were members of his original group. Evidently the Moor, with singular astuteness, had noted the skill and ability of Yankee boat builders and bought as many as he might. He was ever striding about the shipyards, his small yellowish eyes flitting from one craft to another, noting every detail, mercilessly dealing out punishment to those who flagged and granting extra privileges to those who did well.

SO passed the first dreary month of Amos's captivity, a month during which he gained in strength and health and iron determination to escape.

Though ill-housed and abominably fed, Amos was at last permitted to take occasional brief evening walks about the city in company with one or two other American slaves.

According to a long established Tripolitan custom, trusted slaves were allowed to wander about the bazaars in the evening and could go where they listed, so long as they were back in their barracks and chained to the wall when the nine o'clock gun had boomed from the lofty battlements of the bashaw's palace.

Most often Amos walked out with the members of his plot, and with them studied the city and surrounding country as best he might.

The first nucleus of a practicable plan came one evening as several of the slaves sat on the sea wall behind the yards.

"That's a mighty fine new galley we're a building," observed Amos to Abner Hudson, a powerful, red-headed man from Rhode Island. "She'd be just the craft. She'll be fast and able. With twenty strong rowers in her, I doubt there's a galley in this blasted harbor could catch her."

Hudson listened attentively, his freckled brow wrinkled in thought. "When will she be finished?" he demanded.

Another, whose name was Johnston, rubbed his bronzed forehead in speculation. "Oh, say in another three weeks. How many Americans have we in these barracks?"

"Twelve," an elderly, gray-haired seaman informed him. "There be twelve of us here in Hamet Sokna's, and in el Gerid's yard, hard by, there be ten more stout lads. As Cap'n Trent's been sayin', if we could but join forces some night and make a swift departure, we could thumb our noses at the whole o' this heathen town o' Tripoli."

Yet another slave, still clad in the ragged remains of a fine linen shirt, shook his head.

"No, no, Allen," he objected. "You're crazy to think on it. Old Hamet's no fool; he puts a guard over each vessel the minute she's calked and fit to float. Now, in the name of common sense"—he turned to Amos—"what chance would we, with our leg irons, have of getting aboard without rousing half o' Tripoli? Supposing we did—don't forget, even after getting under way you've still got to run the government galleys on patrol duty at the mouth of the harbor. Besides these dangers we'd have to navigate this damned treacherous shore without chart or map of any kind."

With his words, a depression became evident among the wearied slaves for, though Hamet Sokna, their master, was not as brutal as some, none the less the whips of his guards were always busy and the fare he provided was miserable. Only on the rarest occasions did he add chunks of unnutritious camel's meat to the daily ration of soggy half loaves of bean bread and a single cup of olive oil. On this foreign fare, occasionally varied by a few onions or garlics, the prisoners were supposed to thrive and to carry out the incredibly hard labor assigned. But the seed had been sown and all eyes were on the new galley when the slaves, warned by the fading light, scattered to seek their proper barracks.

IT was not until some six weeks after his sale to the ship builder that Amos heard or saw anything of the girl he reverenced and adored. One afternoon, Hamet Sokna, in a rare burst of pleasure at the quick finishing of a felucca, granted his slaves a brief extra hour of liberty at the end of the day.

This, Amos realized with a throb of joy, would permit him to wander farther than ever before. Breathless with excitement, he invited the red-headed Hudson to accompany him on an expedition long planned and impatiently awaited.

"Aye, Cap'n Trent, I'll go with ye," said the other, "and with pleasure. But where away to spend our treasure o' leisure time?"

"Toward the palace of the admiral."

The other started and stared in surprise. "But, man alive, 'tis a long, long tramp," he objected. "We'll scarce have time to reach it and return before the slave bell sounds in the barracks. I don't have to tell you what it means to be late—"

Amos nodded briefly. No one long in the slave barracks had not heard the piercing, agonized howls of some wretched slave receiving the bastinado for coming in a few minutes past the hour of return.

"Nevertheless," he said, smiling grimly, "I've taken a fancy to walk in that direction. You can come as far as you like."

In preparation for their expedition the two slaves each passed a bit of rag about the center of the chain joining his ankles. By knotting the rags through their belts, they freed their legs of the dragging, dust-provoking chain and so started out on their quest, an odd, long-legged pair of scarecrows—Hudson, red-bearded and blue-eyed, clad only in a native loin cloth, and Amos, thick brown hair falling to his broad, splendidly formed shoulders, ridiculously garbed in a pair of sadly stained and torn canvas trousers.

Hudson continually looked about, frankly interested in the hitherto inaccessible outskirts of the great walled city.

Amos marched with long, swinging strides, his heart thumping madly

in the vague hope of perhaps glimpsing those lovely patrician features of her who was his inspiration and his ideal.

The broad streets of the suburbs proved an ever changing kaleidoscope of colors and smells. The dogs, of course, were legion, snarling at the heels of the wandering Americans.

Goats and sheep roamed at will or scavenged among the piles of malodorous refuse that harbored flies before every iron-barred doorway. But the small bazaars, with their array of strange and bright-colored goods, afforded a redeeming background which Amos was too preoccupied to notice.

At last the two adventurers arrived at that same road by which they had entered Tripoli, almost seven weeks before. Far out on this broad highway, as Amos had long since learned, was built the splendid palace of Mirant Gregory Lisle.

Already he could see it, a long, flat-roofed structure of two stories, with a graceful white dome rising in the center. The palace was entirely surrounded by a low, spike-crowned outer wall, above which towered date and sugar palms and a wide variety of fig, tamarisk and other sweet-smelling trees.

His tangled hair and beard caked with the white dust of the roadway, Amos, footsore and thirsty, drew near this wall and halted, as he noted Negro guards lounging sleepily beside a whitewashed barracks. For some moments, he and Hudson hesitated, uncertain as how best to approach the palace.

Finally, by cautiously circling the low, white outer walls, they discovered, much to their surprise, a wide, double gate of wrought iron lying carelessly unlatched at the rear, thus exposing to curious eyes a garden of surpassing beauty.

"Come, Hudson," suggested Amos eagerly. "Let's investigate yonder earthly paradise."

But Hudson eyed the distant, drowsing guards and shook his red head decisively. "No," he said, "you can go ahead if you're fool enough, but my curiosity isn't sufficiently great to enjoy the whipping we'd earn if we got caught wandering about. By your leave, Trent, I'll sit me down behind this worthy marabout's tomb and think a while of the fine dark wenches yonder, in old Lisle's harem."

IN vain Amos pleaded with the wary Rhode Islander, but finally it was agreed that the captain should rejoin him there after having had a closer view of the palm-shaded garden. Shaggy and dirty as only a slave can become, Amos approached the open gate, his feet, already hardened from going barefoot, making no sound in the thick dust as he strode forward.

Dorothea was somewhere near! Only a few hundred feet at most. His breath came quick and fast as he gained the shadow of the gate posts. Feasting his senses on the cool green loveliness within, he listened to the soft, musical tinkle of a little fountain which cast a crystal stream toward the snowy jasmine blossoms whose languorous perfume filled the warm evening air.

Gradually, a sense of peace entered the soul of the haggard, somber-eyed onlooker. Amid such scenes, Dorothea's confinement could not be a particularly unbearable one; but where was she? What was she doing?

Filled with a rare tranquillity, he fell to wondering which room was hers, then suddenly tensed every nerve as he heard the soft shuffle of advancing footsteps. He shrank back, a dirty outline pressed flat against the whitewashed gate post,

as a fat black eunuch, in a spangled yellow robe, waddled by, eyes on the ground and humming softly to himself. He halted before a gorgeous azalea bush, glanced casually out of the gate, then broke off a pink blossom and tucked it above his sable ear before shuffling on.

No sooner had the stout eunuch disappeared than another tread sounded on the graveled walk, the steps approaching very slowly. Suddenly aware of his foolhardy temerity, Amos shrunk back even farther in the shallow niche behind the gate post; the next passer-by might not be so unobserving as the Negro.

While he waited breathlessly, a figure dressed in robes of dazzling white appeared, paused at the fountain opposite the gate, sighed and looked with somber eyes far out over the bare, reddish hills beyond the marabout's tomb. Then the stroller's eyes turned, and she stiffened in fright as she caught sight of that bearded, gaunt slave, clutching his chains and crouching in the shadows. The slim body started back violently and a slender white hand flew to the veil which concealed the lower part of the woman's face.

Cold with premonitions of disaster and in lively fear that the house guards might be screamed for at any instant, Amos wheeled about and commenced to hurry away as fast as the hampering chain permitted.

But suddenly a voice rang out—low, vibrant and imperative.

"Amos! Amos!" Once before had that voice called to him in just that fashion. A vision of a water front street in New York flashed through his mind. Amazed, he whirled about and in an instant Dorothea was in his grimy arms, warm, real and murmuring expressions of indescribable joy as she pressed kiss after kiss on his eager bearded lips.

HIS first impulse was to hold her tight—so tight that no force might ever separate them again. One indescribable moment more he pressed her close, then yielded to the dictates of caution. "We must be careful! Go back!" he warned and shuffled back to his hidden position outside the gate.

"Dorothea," he murmured. "Oh! my darling Dorothea! Our only chance for a few words is for you to stay in sight of the palace where you now are. I'll take shelter behind this gate post. You'd best pretend to be musing."

He wanted to shout his delight to the high heavens, to rush forward and fling both wiry brown arms about her again, but he dared not. Too much was at stake.

Dorothea, her eyes eloquent of all she might not say and do, adopted a pensive attitude, obediently leaned against the trunk of a young azalea and so called to her lover in mellow, breathless undertones. Suddenly, amid her delight at finding him once more, she seemed to recall something, stiffened, then tenderly regarded the ragged figure at the gate.

"Amos," she called, "Amos, will you tell me the truth to a certain question?"

Startled at her tone, the bronzed giant looked up swiftly. "Why, of course, sweeting. What would you?"

"As you may know I am being held for ransom," she began, "and so is that villain Estes. He was bought by a captain in the navy and so comes here betimes with his master. But a week gone by he told me a tale, unbelievable and base—"

Amos's brow wrinkled with a sen-

sation of impending disaster. Estes again!

"Yes," he repeated steadily. "What did he say?"

The girl laughed uncertainly. "Why, Amos, he told me—nay, but I'm foolish to even think you might have done a thing so monstrous. Estes"—she dropped her eyes and her small hands tightly gripped the hem of her native dress—"told me you—you betrayed knowledge of my father's wealth to this infamous renegade, Lisle; said you begged Lisle to buy me for the sake of the rich ransom I represented. It's a lie, of course—I—don't know why I even ask—but I—I—"

Then, indeed, Amos felt his heart sink. The incredible cleverness of Estes! What a past master of deceit! But a confidence that he could swiftly explain his motives for the black appearing act urged him to speak.

He nodded. "Yes," he cried anxiously, "'tis true—but I—"

THE white figure beside the azalea started, reeled as though beneath a crushing blow. "You!" she gasped in horror. "You really did that?" Her eyes flashed with the hard brightness of a jewel. "You betrayed me to Lisle to gain his favor?"

Aghast, and wondering greatly what specious lie Estes had invented, Amos nodded. "Aye," he said. "No! No! You mistake me, 'twas only for your good—I—"

"For my good?" she stormed, her voice quivering with passion. "For my good? To ruin my father? Bah, you're a clumsy liar!"

"Ruin your father?" In a sad state of perplexity, Amos braved her furious, reproachful glances. "Scarcely that. Why, I felt—I knew—surely, your father would be glad to pay a ransom to save you from the infamy that otherwise awaited you."

For a moment Dorothea seemed at a loss for words. Her slight figure shook and her usually soft graciously curved lips drew themselves into tight, scarlet lines. "But the ransom—do you know—have you any idea what ransom Lisle has asked?" Amos had no time to reply. "A million dollars is the ransom! A million dollars! My father 'll pay it—it's his obligation as a Christian gentleman—but it reduces to beggary an old man."

Like the notes of a dirge, the words fell on the sea captain's ears.

"A million dollars?" he muttered dazedly, quite unable to comprehend the sum. All too well had Lisle, with true Scottish acumen, followed the hint. Hot blood pounded in torrents to Amos's bewildered brain. "A million dollars!" Why, that was enough to equip three cruisers, complete with gear and armament! The demand was outrageous, incredible. "But—" stammered Amos, "I—I—"

"Peace!" she cut in, white hand imperatively outflung. "I'm ashamed to own I've ever loved a pitiful traitor who sought to save his skin at the cost of another's misery!"

Stung to the depths of his being, Amos perforce listened to the tirade she poured forth.

"Dear God in heaven! So, Arnold Estes was right! And I called him a liar to his face. He told the truth. Ah! Ah! What vile thing you are!" Shaking, white as the jasmine blossoms above her head, she checked herself and pointed out of the gate. "If you have any of the regard for me you prate of—I pray you go at once, Captain Trent! I must hasten my apologies to Mr. Estes; it appears I've used him most shamefully." She was all

ice—all cold hauteur, now, as she faced him, lips curled in contempt and looking suddenly quite worn and weary.

"But, Dorothea—" stammered Amos, clutching the iron grille. "You must listen before you judge me. 'Tis a vile construction Estes has put on my deed—"

But Dorothea was not to be pacified. With a furious swirl of draperies she turned aside. "Your deed is unexplainable. It is quite clear—you chose to bankrupt my father in order to save your own life. I advise you to be gone before I call the house guards."

Casting on the lone, wasted figure a final look of unutterable scorn, Mistress Sayles, strangely vestal-like in her robes of unrelieved white, raised the veil over tear-stained features and hurried swiftly off down the path.

IN a blind agony of suffering, Amos started from the protection of the gate post and, casting discretion to the winds, willing to sacrifice everything to make her understand, actually passed inside the garden in his act of suicidal impulse. But, from afar, came the anxious voice of Hudson, low and insistent.

"Come back! Great God, man, come back! Are you crazy? They'll skin you alive if you're found in there. Hurry! I hear the guards!"

Through the foliage of the orange trees Amos caught a glimpse of dark-limbed men, advancing in military cadence toward the gate, and knew the Rhode Islander was right.

"Bah!" he snarled in sudden revolt at her injustice. "A wench that has no more faith than that is not worth dying for." Suddenly cool and moving silently, he spun about and darted back to the shelter of the wall and from there to the shade of the white-plaster marabout's tomb.

"What's happened, man?" Hudson's plain brown face was filled with alarm. "Ye look like a ghost—were you seen?"

"No," mumbled the other and passed a calloused hand over eyes that were veiled in pain. "I've just lost the last illusion from my bankrupt store of them. Come, shipmate, we'll have to hurry to reach the barracks before dark."

That night the slave called Amos Trent tossed endlessly on his pile of moldy straw. All through the night, while the other slaves snored, scratched and groaned in their sleep, his spirit struggled with the demons of lost hope and disillusion, and it was not until dawn was graying the towers of the bashaw's castle that a saner, calmer viewpoint reached him.

Gradually all the unexplained elements became clear. Estes perhaps honestly mistook his motive in informing Lisle, and, ever playing the knave, had fashioned a cunning lie. Doubtless he had painted his rival as a despairing slave fawning before the doughty old warrior, begging mercy on consideration of a great secret he would reveal. Already distracted and unhappy by the fearful position in which she found herself, Amos realized how very easy it would be for Dorothea's mind to prey upon Estes's interpretation of his act.

With a sensation of faint hope, he remembered that she had refused to credit Arnold Estes's unsupported word. Dorothea had had at least that much faith in him and, as the sky grew lighter with the approach of day, he relaxed somewhat and fell once more to his eternal scheming for her rescue.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Signals Astray

"Take dese here bags, honey," came a fluid voice at the nervous ladder-climber's ear

No colored boy ever goes looking for trouble—but trouble had "sho-nuff" caught up with freezing Owl-eye Breckinridge, stranded far from his native Mississippi

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

OWL-EYE BRECKINRIDGE, skinny, pop-eyed, and of color, swung a feeble dinner bell and tried to believe in Santa Claus. Owl-eye's business was in a jam and getting no better mighty fast. Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and his old job in a filling station there had never been like this. Something was going to have to be done, before too much Indiana frost and too little food just naturally ruined a boy.

He chafed a numbed right ear and recalled mournfully all the things that were wrong. They ended with his having paid an Indianapolis darky two dollars for this Santa Claus suit he was wearing: a suit that a wind straight out of the Arctic was now wrapping around his goose-pimpled legs with a slapping sound that finished the job of freezing a Cotton Belt Negro plumb to death.

Thinking about that Indianapolis boy only made his spirits follow the thermometer downward. For, according to that glib-tongued one, all a boy had to do to get rich at this season was to buy from him a red suit, mask, tripod, and iron kettle, and set up on the

sidewalk as a lone wolf Santa Claus. Nobody bothered to question the origin and credentials of any fur-trimmed St. Nicholas at the merry Yuletide, was the line the seller of the suit had taken and that Owl-eye had swallowed.

No, they didn't question him. They didn't bother to drop money in his kettle, either. Hence an emergency that had his brain busier and his stomach emptier than in years. Nobody up North, here, seemed to know the distress signal of his Hattiesburg lodge, either. Again and again he held his left hand aloft in it, and got nothing but cold fingers in return.

The shivering Owl-eye rubbed the numbed right ear, and remembered that he couldn't go back to Hattiesburg. There were a lot of reasons, including his having shinned up that porch pillar to borrow a suit of clothes for the evening from his white folks, through a window. Also, his borrowing that car from the garage gentleman the same evening to take another boy's girl to a dance.

The ensuing trouble had come not so much from the borrowing as from the accidental wrapping of that car around a telephone pole *en route*. That misstep had messed up the car, the suit, and his business all in one swift stroke of misfortune. After which his lodge distress signals hadn't worked, and a northbound freight had done him more good than cod-liver oil. Now he was in Indianapolis, and more trouble.

Mr. Breckinridge sighed, shivered, and shifted his attention to the Shady Rest Gasoline Filling Station across the street from his chilling post. An unattainable haven of lights and warmth it shone to him through the snow. One that revealed another big difference between Hattiesburg and Indianapolis, too: a colored man owned it. Twice that day, at a distance, Owl-eye had seen him drive up. Fur-collared overcoat, dime cigar in his face, and the help all hopping when he barged into the station. The insignia of the Brothers of Asia, Africa and America adorned his windshield. Owl-eye envied him; he had always wanted to belong to that lodge. They sure did put on a swell funeral for a member!

But what really wrung him was the stove in the filling station. A red-hot stove that drew the freezing Owl-eye as a meat store does a dog. It shone redly as heat, warmth, and a solution to his difficulties if he could just get a job in the same place with a stove like that.

WHICH accounted for a squat darky in dungarees looking up from fixing a flat to rub his eyes at first in disbelief.

"Look here who done fotch me my Christmas!" he guffawed to a fellow worker. "Old John B. Santy Claus hisse'f, in pusson, not a movie!"

"How 'bout me gittin' a job around here, boy?" queried the stove-colored St. Nicholas from between chattering teeth.

"Gwan now! Put Santy Claus to work here, and de customers 'll think us is givin' de gas away!" mocked the squat boy disdainfully. "Run on an' ring yo' bell, nigger! Ain't nobody do de hirin' here but de big boss, and he busy wid big lodge doin's to-day. 'Sides, is he see you, he liable sprain a lung hollerin' at you to git gallopin' out of here in dem clothes!"

Owl-eye kissed Luck good-by again. He didn't have any other clothes but his overcoat. Trouble wore the same face here as in Hattiesburg, after all.

In this case he didn't even belong to the right lodge. His was different from this big gas and puncture man's, its distress signals useless around him.

Disconsolately he shuffled back across the street to his pot and tripod, where the day's receipts still stood at fifteen cents and a lead slug. If only he could have got that job by the stove!

"He'p de pore freezin' widders an' orphans!" croaked Owl-eye once more to the heedless passers-by, while he chafed the right and more numb of his two ears with a hand that felt like a board.

Then a great change came into the life of Owl-eye, heralded by nothing more impressive than the sight of a comely colored girl fighting her way against the wind toward him. Unconsciously, at sight of her, Santa Claus creased a red-flannel trouser leg ineffectively between a frozen thumb and forefinger, tidied his wind-blown whiskers of wool.

"Some baby!" breathed Mr. Breckinridge involuntarily.

Then he saw something else; and again the wind was cold and bitter, the skies low and bleak. Again Luck had left him at the post. Pullman porters got all the breaks! For an evident member of that pampered tribe had just collided with the oncoming vision squarely in front of the unnoticed Owl-eye.

"Why, G'awge! Whar at you been so long, boy?" Her voice betrayed separation, surprise, reunion, and welcome, all in one.

"Plenty of places, Aroma," rejoined the slender, snappily dressed George. His own grin was like the sudden opening of an ebony grand piano. "Yo' papa ain't cramped me none. All he tell me when I talk to him on de phone was to git off de earth an' stay off, as long as you was on it. Sho' got hard-boiled wid me!"

"Aw, dat's jest because he ain't know you, big boy."

"Naw, and he sho' took up a heap of his time tellin' me he ain't want to know me, neither! I could hear him gnawin' off pieces of de phone an' spittin' 'em out all de time he was cussin' me. Sho' was mad!"

Owl-eye listened and rang his bell forlornly. Nobody paid any attention to him.

"Dat's jest because he's all pestered wid de lodge and his business here lately," Aroma defended her father. "Dem boys workin' fo' him ain't no-'count."

"Sho' is a mess!" agreed the no longer grinning George.

"If my papa could jest come down to de depot once and see you come in, in dat blue suit wid dem buttons all shinin', it 'd be different," sighed Aroma. "Is he ever see you once, he couldn't he'p fallin' fo' you."

"He sho' can he'p it now," said George dubiously. "He won't even listen to me, let alone look at me."

Aroma's air was that of one who sees something slipping.

"He was jest de same way about dat Johnson boy," she reminisced incompletely.

George stiffened with something besides the cold. "Is dat 'Fishfeathers' Johnson nigger been messin' 'round here any mo'?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I ain't say he is, is I?" Archly. "I jest say my papa ain't like him none, neither. Fishfeathers sho' thinks I's de cat's can-opener, though! Dat boy 'd marry me in a minute, is I—"

"Quit talkin' 'bout dat Fishfeathers. He gimme de earache in both ankles." George changed a painful subject.

"What you so good-lookin' 'bout to-day, nohow, baby?"

THE question seemed to recall something else to Aroma. "Aw, I done fo'got!" she giggled. "I's done got it!"

"Got what?"

"By registered mail," continued Aroma, "from my uncle up in Chicawgo—"

"What come?" persisted George. "Got me freezin' my gizzard to death in dis wind, waitin' fo' you to tell."

"Wrist watch, dat what. He winned it in a raffle. Sho' is all busted out wid diamonds an' class!"

"'Uncle,' is you say?"

"You sho' is act jealous!"

"Dat uncle is liable to be named 'Fishfeathers,' dat's why! Let's see it."

"Ain't got it wid me."

"Whar you got it, den?"

"Now you done said somep'n'! My papa wants me keep it in de safe down at his place of business. He's skeered of burglars 'round Christmas."

A violent fit of coughing racked the shivering Owl-eye, but he could not get attention, let alone sympathy, from a pair whose minds were quite elsewhere.

"But I tells him lemme leave it on my bureau, whar I can see it when I wants to," chattered the happy Aroma. "'Sides, burglars ain't pay no mind to what's layin' in plain sight; it's what you locks up dat dey goes lookin' fo', ain't it?"

"I ain't never broke in nobody's house yit," answered the newly thoughtful George. "Ain't know what dey do. 'Sides, when I busts into yo' house I ain't after no *watch*—"

Aroma seemed to catch ideas before they were uttered.

"What *is* you after, big boy?" she voiced provocatively.

George apparently knew a lead when he saw one. Owl-eye hadn't had less attention since he last tried to borrow fifty cents from the white folks, or tried out his Hattiesburg lodge distress signal on these Indianapolis colored folks.

"Yo' papa like me jest like he crave sulphur an' molasses in de springtime," essayed Aroma's swain in a sudden resolution. "And I ain't got time to mess wid him no mo'—'specially wid dat gun of his'n in de house. So what about me and you elopin' down a ladder to-night, and makin' marriage while he's asleep?"

Aroma's answer missed maidenly reluctance by approximately nine miles. "Ladder's leanin' 'gainst de back of de garage. I seen it there dis mawnin'," she covered the remaining salient point.

Despite the cold, a faint sympathetic glow stirred around the upper left vest pocket and between the ears of the stiffening Owl-eye. Here was love's young dream! Like the movies at the Frolic. And a thought followed: if this George could storm such a citadel for a girl, why might not he take heart and get himself suitable clothes to make a second assault on that stove-heated job across the street?

Then it was that the ill-starred Owl-eye suddenly buckled beneath the impact of an idea that caught him off guard and amidships. An idea that profited by his past experiences, and that fitted the present situation like a wet union suit. Indeed, it dazzled him by its promise, nerved him to action by its simplicity. Hope at last was in the hand that swung his bell.

Then the Lochinvar in the snow thought of something else. "Dawg-

gawn it!" George recalled ruefully. "Us cain't 'lope to-night—my flivver's in de shop."

"My papa's ain't," Aroma met that emergency.

Wilder than before clanged the bell of the reviving Owl-eye.

But George was yet struggling with a new aspect of his old trouble. "You means I elopes out of here wid you in yo' papa's own car? And him a light sleeper, and got dat hawse-pistol handy, and cravin' me fo' a son-in-law like he would de itch?"

"Fishfeathers wouldn't be skeered!" Softly.

"No more'n I is!" rang the skillfully roused resolution of George at that. "Say, what's de matter wid dis Santa Claus here, gal? Ringin' his bell like he had hold of a chicken's neck! Now, tell me ag'in how to git out to yo' house in de nighttime."

"Bus, from de monument. Take de number fawty-fo'. Get off at Fox Street, an' ourn's de third house on de right, if—if you comes—"

"If I comes! Gal, don't you keep me waitin' in de wind on dat ladder!"

Clang! Clang! Clangety-clang! reverberated the bell of Owl-eye.

AT eleven forty-five that night, a bus stopped at the corner of Fox Street, to let off a lean and overcoated figure in haste.

"One, two, three—on de right, she say," counted the caller to himself, as he turned toward the third house from the corner.

Every window in the two-story frame structure was dark, save where light shone faintly through the drawn shades on the eastern end of it. "Dem's de windows she say was her room—dem two on de end," checked the lone newcomer. He turned his eyes to where the driveway sloped back and upward in the darkness to a darker shadow which indicated a car parked before the garage doors. Then he glanced back at the bedroom windows and stood watching them for several minutes. He guessed that Aroma's preparations for the elopement had taken her out of the room for a time. No shapely shadow cast itself on the shades.

"All set!" he murmured in evident satisfaction. Then he passed out of sight behind the garage, to reappear shortly, dragging a ladder cautiously behind him.

A ladder long enough to reach a second-story window and strong enough to carry two downward therefrom is no light burden; but, carefully maneuvering it to avoid noisy contacts with gutters and shutters above, the midnight caller at last had it with its upper end resting just below the sill of one of the windows where the light was.

Catlike he crept upward. Suddenly, as though his coming had been heard, just as he reached the final rungs the lights in the window were snapped off, and there was the faint screech of a sash being raised. A startled movement on the part of the climber betrayed the tension of his nerves.

"Take dese here bags, G'awge, honey!" came a feminine whisper at his very ear, and at once the whisperer began to load him down with baggage like a pack mule.

Again the ladder swayed beneath the nervous excitement of the Lochinvar on it.

"Git quiet wid dat ladder, boy!" hissed the anxious Aroma, as she encircled her hero's neck with one arm, and continued to drape baggage upon him with the other. "Don't you wake

my papa up! Dem hawse-pistols make a hole you can drive a wagon through!"

"I ain't goin' wake him up!" countered the eloping baggageman in a whisper made strange and strained by agitation.

"Dey was one mo' bag, but I had to leave it behind," whispered the girl as they gained the ground. "Don't try to say nothin' now—jes' put de bags in de back seat my papa's car back here. An' I'll drive. When I lets off de brake, it 'll roll down to de street, an' not make no fuss to wake up my papa, startin'. He be all right when he git used to you, big boy—but he sho' is got to git used to you first!"

"Uh—arrhhh—er—" gurgled her lover in seeming acquiescence, as he squirmed uneasily in the seat beside her.

"Us 'll come back an' Christmas wid him—after he git over de main spell of fits," planned Aroma nervously. "Dat's why I ain't mind leavin' de other bag... Why, I sho' nuff forgot to fotch my wrist watch off de bureau. Nemmin' dat. Shet up an' let's ride—to de preacher's!"

NOT long afterward another bus halted at the Fox Street corner, to discharge a lone, slim and muffled figure in haste.

"I done told her not to keep me waitin' on dat ladder," he reproached himself, as he pored over the face of his watch under the corner light. "And here it is one minute to twelve. Comes dawg-gawned near bein' late my own-se'f!

"Third house on de right," he further murmured to himself as he turned toward it. "Ladder's leanin' back of de garage, she say...de two upstairs windows on de east end de house is hers...and she say to walk easy, 'count her papa sleep wid both eyes open and shoots a mean slug..."

But a few steps farther he stopped, electrified at what he saw. For the ladder he sought was before him—not against the garage, but up-ended against the house front, reaching upward to a window that showed dark and open against the outer wall of the structure—Aroma's window!

In the snow were tracks. Disturbing tracks. Large masculine ones heading toward the ladder; and smaller, feminine ones accompanying them, leading away from it. Both sets ended where tire-tracks in the snowy drive began.

A suspicion the size of a house and lot loomed in the heart of the luckless lover. With fear engendered by it clutching coldly at him, he put foot on the lower rung of the ladder and began a cautious ascent.

"Honey!" he called softly into the black silence that lay behind the open window above when he had gained it. There was no answer. He leaned inward on the sill, hooked a leg over it, and stepped noiselessly to the floor within.

"Aroma, gal! Quit yo' funnin'!" he whispered in panic, as the suspicion grew larger.

"Uh-huh! *Fishfeathers!*" For the first time the suspicion that racked George found words. He saw it now! "Knowed all time dat gal talkin' too much about you, not to mean somep'n'! So you done elope wid her first, is you, Mist' Johnson? An' make a monkey out of me eh? Well, boy, order yo'se'f a new gizzard right now—because yo' old one ain't gwine work right no mo' when I gits through wid you fo' dis!"

It was his angry stride toward the bureau, however, that did it. That and

the left-behind bag of the absent Aroma. Headlong over it and an intervening chair crashed the embittered George, to clutch frantically first at thin air, and then to sweep the bureau's littered top with despairing fingers as he fell.

WHICH accounted, as the lights were suddenly snapped on from behind him, for the revelation of a young Lochinvar seated wild-eyed upon the floor beneath his love's open window at midnight, with her diamoned wrist watch gripped damningly in his hands.

"Hold up dem hands, nigger! H'ist 'em high!" barked a newcomer to the stage—a bulky and bathrobed figure that could be none other than that man-eater popularly known as Aroma's papa. "And drap dat watch—easy!"

Commands emphasized by a flourish of the equally famed horse-pistol that completed his identification to the trapped and terrified George upon the floor.

"Bustin' in an' burglarizin', is you?" glared and rumbled Aroma's parent.

Mr. Pullman's palest porter couldn't think up any good lies. And the truth would be more damaging still.

"Now, git gwine!" barked his captor, flourishing the ancient firearm recklessly, in the direction of the hall.

"Whar to?" quavered his frog-eyed victim respectfully. This wasn't any time to bring up details.

"Over here! And plaster yo' back against dat fur wall while I gits my pants on an' telephones de police come git you! A good-lookin' boy like you, bustin' in people's houses! I—"

The quivering George couldn't hear the rest because of the headlines which were running through his mind. "Surprised Red-Handed Robbing Residence" alternated with "Burglar Shot on Spot." Neither sounded right. Yet what could a boy do, caught in a girl's room with her watch in his hand by a father who didn't know him, and would shoot all the quicker if he did?

It was one of those things that could be explained but never believed. In fact, it was beginning to sound thin even to himself. He might get away with the elopement story if it were not for the watch, and get away with both if it were not for the horse-pistol. But explaining to a parent who disliked you to the point of fanaticism that you had merely come to rob him of his daughter would be like issuing the order "Begin firing!"

Evidently, too, Aroma's father was used to the ways of modern youth—leaving at all hours. For he saw nothing amiss—in the absence of Aroma. And if he did, it could not help George.

Cold chills marched seven abreast upon the spine of George as he checked and rechecked his business. All the choice left him was between fingerprints and a funeral—in either event, his.

He looked into a steel-barred future, as he listened to: "Dis here de po-lice station? Thutty-two sixty-fo' Fox Street talkin' . . . Done cotch a burglar . . . Yas, suh, I got him right here on ice fo' you . . . He ain't *gwine* git away! . . . Sho' ain't . . . G'by!"

ALL of which was shortly before Aroma, some miles away, was asking as she slowed the curtained car to a halt at a curb; "Dis look like de reverend's. What you say his name was, G'awge?"

A remark, however, that seemed to precipitate a climax not in the cards.

The increasingly uneasy companion of her flight, indeed, seemed unable to contain himself longer, and yet to be gravely doubtful of the reception his further remarks were going to receive.

"You wouldn't let me tell you nothin' on dat ladder," he whined apprehensively. "All time talkin' 'bout yo' papa shootin', till 'twas too late. I been ridin' 'round fo' de longest time, tryin' to git it out dat—*I ain't G'awge!*"

"You ain't G'awge?" Aroma whirled on him, her mouth agape.

"Now. My name 'Owl-eye'—from Hattiesburg, Miss'ippi. All I—"

The involuntary eloper checked himself hastily. It might not help any to tell a lady that you had come to burglarize and remained to elope. His bright idea of preceding George on that ladder, entering a receptive window and secreting himself in Aroma's room, to outfit himself in her father's clothes later on and land himself that stove-heated filling-station job, began to look as wet as the Pacific Ocean.

But the open-mouthed and gasping Aroma suddenly saved him from the embarrassment of an explanation only to plunge him into another. It began to dawn upon the flattened Owl-eye that he never had really been in a jam before. For Aroma had gone swiftly limp, fallen out, fainted. Leaving him alone in a strange city, in a strange car with a strange girl.

Blind panic swept him. Everything was against him, including the evidence and his not knowing the way back to her house. Gone was hope and thought of any filling-station job now. What a boy needed was absence, in big chunks. Nothing else fitted in with this calamity. He gazed down in horror at the lifeless-seeming Aroma beside him. Maine, California, and Oregon called him. The big idea and the only idea was to get away! And feet couldn't handle the distances his fix called for: airplanes and automobiles alone could do that. But he couldn't dump an unconscious girl out in the street at midnight without complicating his future—nor could he take her along without having trouble right with him when the inevitable awakening came.

On top of everything else, his right ear must have been frozen: it was itching maddeningly. Frantically he rubbed it while he strove to solve the unsolvable, with all the time the ancient remark of the rabbit to the dog. "Let's go from here!" taking up all the room in his anguished and addled brain.

And they went. With a howl and clash of gears, Owl-eye was on his way, with Aroma limp beside him in the swaying car.

"Oh, Law-w-wd! Oh-h-h, Lawd!" mourned Owl-eye to himself as he rubbed his itching right ear, while they careened around corners and shot across deserted intersections in his blind search for the way out of town.

Far ahead a black cat galloped across the street ahead of him, and the car swerved wildly. Owl-eye sickened. It was all over now! Luck, and liberty, both gone.

Aroma proved it by beginning to stir in her coma. When she woke up the fireworks would start, sure enough!

The blood-chilling wail of a police-car siren interrupted his repinings by proving the prophecy. Aroma, too, suddenly sat upright and gazed uncomprehendingly about her. Then her memory functioned, and the roof of the car rang with the results of her first good lungful.

"Oh, Law-w-wd! Oh-h-h-h, Lawd!" moaned the sweating Owl-eye at the

wheel. He rounded another corner. And immediately, both outside and inside of the borrowed car, things began to look familiar. Worse than familiar—as they were badly complicated by the rapidly nearing shrieks of that police siren. He didn't need his own horn any more—Aroma was making dents in the welkin that were dents.

The police car shot into the street from a side thoroughfare just ahead of them, blocking the way as it halted. Aroma's shrieks and Owl-eye's anguish redoubled.

THEN it was that the agonized Owl-eye got his first awful glimpse of what trouble really could be. Too many turnings had done it. For he was right back in front of Aroma's home! From the car ahead policemen were disembarking and bearing down on him, while Aroma's s c r e a m s rent the air. Two husky officers leaped to block the frantic attempt of the frenzied Owl-eye to dive headlong through the rear curtain of Aroma's car, and the jig was up!

"I ain't never see dis nigger befo'!" Aroma, for her part, was telling the world and the law. "He grab me out de window on a ladder when hit so dark I ain't know he ain't G'awge!"

In the hallway of her home a light was flashing on, voices rising. While on the sidewalk, in the clutch of the law, Mr. Breckinridge had never looked grayer, his future blacker.

"Oh, Law-w-wd! O-o-o-h-h-h, Lawd!" he mourned, glassy-eyed, while he rubbed his itching right ear, and glimpsed the years that must elapse before he saw freedom and Hattiesburg once more.

"All right! All right! Where do you live, then?" an irritated officer broke in with gruff efforts to sort out sense from dramatics in the half-hysterical Aroma.

"Lives here! Tells de world he grab me right out dat window—"

"Inside, all of you, then!" growled the Law, as a bulky figure appeared in the lighted doorway of her home. He jerked significantly at the belt of the captive Mr. Breckinridge.

At which definite move toward the dungeons, Owl-eye's broadcasting of the distress signal of his Hattiesburg lodge broke forth in all wave-lengths and many kilocycles. His right ear forgot to itch, and he flung his left hand aloft. But clearly all present belonged to the wrong lodge.

"Get in with you!" snapped the Law.

Before him now loomed the bath-robed figure of the Man with the Horse-Pistol, the father of the girl in whose abduction Owl-eye had been caught red-handed. And George. Not that George mattered now. Not to Owl-eye . . . When a boy got all the trouble there was, there wasn't any more trouble for him to get—that was all!

In fact—and Mr. Breckinridge's protruding eyes projected a final half-inch at the discovery—George seemed to be in a big trouble of his own!

"Here he is! I got him here for you!" Aroma's parent was speaking to the officers and pointing to the shrinking George with his horse-pistol. "Come right in an' git him!"

Then it was that Owl-eye and Aroma suddenly impinged on the laboring consciousness of her father. And things just naturally became a mess. There wasn't any sense to anything any more, the father thought—not with the unaccountable Aroma gumming up the game by casting herself upon his ashen-faced prisoner,

George, with, "big boy, is you shot? Is you shot, honey?"

"Not yet!" came grimly back from her father.

"You—you mean it ain't Fishfeathers you done eloped wid?" burst from the astounded George.

"Fishfeathers?" barked the panting parent of Aroma. "Where? Where at dat boy! I—" Actions spoke louder than whole dictionaries full of words as he whirled.

"Who say 'Fishfeathers'?" Aroma added to the din. "I ain't runned off wid him. I— Why, George, how come *you* ain't elope' wid me?"

AT which her father's eyes grew crossed with the new intricacies of what had started as simple burglary in his own mind. But one word in the bedlam stung like a bee.

"Elope!" he choked.

"You say you ain't elope' wid Fishfeathers?" the shaken George clung to the point that puzzled.

"Elope? G'awge? Fishfeathers?" The veins were beginning to stand out dangerously on the parental neck and brow. "Why, ain't dis"—indicating the flabbergasted George with his gun—"de burglar? De one I cotch in yo' room wid yo' watch in his hand?"

"Naw, dat ain't no burglar! Dat's G'awge! De boy I been tryin' to marry all time, but you ain't never let him come around—phonin' him to keep away! Dis here is de burglar!"

"Marry? De burglar ain't de burglar? I phoned? I wouldn't let him come around? Gimme air! Gimme air! Cain't stand but jest so much foolishment, and den I starts shootin'!" bellowed the bathrobed one. "Why, I ain't never even see dis boy G'awge, you calls him, befo'! It was dat triflin' Fishfeathers I thought I was tellin' to stay 'way, ev'y time I hear him on de phone. I—"

But if Aroma's father said any more along that line it was lost, so far as the wretched Owl-eye was concerned. For he had just finished putting two and two together, penetrated to the man beneath the robe, recognized him —and made the discovery that finished him. That stove-heated Shady Rest Filling Station job was gone now, whatever happened.

Frantically Owl-eye massaged his frosted right ear. At that moment a peculiar change shot across the face of Aroma's father, looming above him.

"You come upstairs wid me, an' not a peep out of you!" he rumbled as he grabbed Owl-eye. "Stand by jest a minute, gent'mens, will you?" Thus he held off the Law from its prey. "Turns him over to you after I gits through wid him!"

Legs like wet macaroni dragged a Hattiesburg boy upward to his nameless doom. The door of the upper room swung shut.

"Quick!" suddenly urged his captor, thrusting up a window beside the horror-stricken Owl-eye. "Down dat drainpipe outside, you! And don't fall off when I shoots—I got to satisfy de po-lice, you knows . . . After all, you fotch her right back, and—"

He paused. Owl-eye chafed his itching ear. It wasn't working right, or he wouldn't be hearing this! Nor the next thing:

"—And see me to-morrer at my Shady Rest Fillin' Station, is you crave yo'se'f a job. Because I ain't never let a lodge brother down yit, when he rub his right ear dat way in de secret distress signal of de Brothers of Asia, Africa and America!"

THE END.

"Wait a minute, mademoiselle, you're lookin' too kind at him!"

The Battle of the Silent Men

With his ancestral château cleared of its German invaders, Dick Halloran brings to a dramatic climax his struggle with the silent forces of intrigue and treachery which have sought to ensnare him since his arrival in war-menaced France

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Author of "The Czarina's Pearls," "The Baldassare Ruby," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

DICK HALLORAN arrives at the château of Biset-sur-Aisne in France just before the outbreak of the War in 1914. He had expected to take over an inheritance; instead, he finds his distant relative, the Vicomte de Serigne, still alive and in possession and meets the *vicomte's* beautiful niece, Clotilde de Serigne. A series of mysterious attempts have been made on his life ever since the night on shipboard when he talked of his ancestral château to a Kaiser-mustached stranger, named Wagner. Now, on his first night at the old castle a secret agent, Maurice Sauvage, assigned to him by M. Bourdain of the Paris *Sûreté*, is stabbed to death in what is known as the cardinal's bedroom. From then on the château, with its hidden passages and tunnels, becomes a place of strange and sinister happenings, foremost of which is the fact that apparently the same Sauvage shows up the next day as if nothing had happened, only to be murdered in another room, behind a bolted door.

Meanwhile a troupe of American

This story began in the Argosy for March 21.

movie actors, whom Dick rashly invited to use the château, have arrived to film a scenario. They consist of plump Sam Marx, owner and director; Audrey Barnard, blond ingénue of indeterminate age; Bill Forsythe, hail-fellow-well-met comedian; Émile Lurdau, a suave "villain," recruited after they reached Paris; and numerous assistants and camera men.

The war begins, and a few weeks later the Germans capture the château and all its inmates. At the instigation of the Kaiser-mustached Wagner, who turns up in Prussian uniform, Dick is court-martialed and condemned to death, as is Mlle. de Serigne, both of them refusing to reveal the entrance to a secret tunnel leading twelve kilometers underground to the château-fortress of Pierrefonds behind the French lines.

Dick escapes from his dungeon cell and, accompanied by Bill Forsythe, makes his way through various hidden passages within the walls of the château. They spy on the Germans and discover both the actor, Lurdau, and the head of the *Sûreté,* Bourdain, talking with members of the enemy staff.

Unable to rescue Mlle. de Serigne, they traverse the Pierrefonds tunnel, taking along the frightened movie man, Marx, and lead back a battalion of French soldiers who make a successful surprise attack on the château in conjunction with an offensive above ground which regains for the French the village of Biset and considerable territory beyond. At Pierrefonds Dick's brave plan nearly went awry when M. Bourdain, once more back on the French side, accused him of being a German spy.

Unable to find Mlle. de Serigne at the recaptured château which the French are using as headquarters, Dick and Bill Forsythe discover her nursing a wounded civilian in a little stone house in the village. This Frenchman they had seen the night before leading a party of Germans to a buried entrance to the Pierrefonds tunnel in the château park, but his enforced betrayal was stopped by a mysterious bullet from the dark.

Puzzled by the many sinister and bewildering events that he has witnessed since coming to France, Dick, with Bill Forsythe, returns to the brooding old château.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MARX PLOTS A MOVIE.

AS Dick and Bill Forsythe reached the château gates the first person they met was Marx, recovered from his fatigue and refreshed by sleep.

"Hell's bells!" he began. "You blame near ran the legs off me last night—and believe me, I was scared out of ten years' growth! But, boy, think of that fight in the tunnel as a picture! We gotta work that in somehow. You know, a long shot showing the two gangs millin' around and then a few close-ups, showin' a coupla guys tryin' to gouge each other's eyes out, and another showin' a guy gettin' rambunctious with a bayonet. That would be a wow!" And Marx chewed enthusiastically at his unlighted cigar as he visualized the pictures.

"You're going to have one tough time shooting pictures around this joint," said Dick, watching the crowds of officers and men that eddied and flowed through the château.

"Leave it to me, boy, leave it to me," responded Marx, looking self-satisfied. "First thing I does after I wakes up, I dusts in to see the French

general. He's a pretty human guy and tells me to go ahead, only one of his officers has got to see the films after they're made. I got a peach of a story now, all full of spies and fights.

"It's like this, see? You gotta be the American in love with the French girl, see? Your rival is this guy, Lurdau, and he's supposed to be a German spy, see? But he ain't really. And this here French girl, who is Miss Barnard, she's got a old father, see, and that's the count..."

"How will you get him to play for you?" asked Dick, then suddenly remembering the tender scene he had viewed through the peephole in the library, he knew the answer.

"LEAVE that to me, kid, leave that to me!" Marx waved a careless hand. "He'll play all right, don't worry about that; but anyways, he's the father of this here girl. So these two guys, the American and the Frenchman, who everybody thinks is a German spy, try to make up to this girl, see? But she kind of favors the American, so this French guy, he stacks the cards so as to make it look like the old count is a German spy, see, and he gets him in Dutch, see, threatenin' to have the old man shot, if she won't have him.

"Well, the girl, she backs and fills and the first thing you know the old man is tried by the French and gets lined up before a firin' squad, see? The American fellow gets busy to save the old boy and he goes to the king or the president or whoever runs this country, and gives the true dope, see? That's where you get your suspense, see? This American guy—that's you—is comin' back with a pardon and is havin' all sorts of trouble on the road, and this French guy, Lurdau, who's a German spy, is tryin' to stop him.

"Meantime we gets shots of this here bunch of soldiers, loadin' their rifles and puttin' the handkerchief around the eyes of the old count. Just about the time they're ready to put the hooks to him, the American jumps in, wavin' the pardon, and saves the old boy, see? Course, he grabs off the girl and there's a fade-out showin' 'em clinched in each other's arms. What do you think of that? Pretty good, what? And we can get shots of the army and everything goin' on. It 'll make one swell war picture, what I mean, and it 'll go over big in the States. Why, boy, they'll eat it up!"

"Sounds all right to me," said Dick, yawning. "When you going to start this racket?"

"Quick as I can get everybody together. We'll all meet down here under the tree on the terrace and I'll explain the story right away."

"You've got to start without me," said Dick, "for an hour or two, because I'm going to hit the hay and tear off a little slumber."

"All right," agreed Marx, "but how about you, Bill?" He turned to Forsythe hopefully. "You gotta play the part of a French colonel and fill in with a lotta gags."

"I'm pretty near dead for sleep," said Bill. "I've got to flop a little while. I'll join you later."

"Oh, all right, all right!" grumbled Marx, and went to find Lurdau and the rest of the cast, rounding them up finally under the large tree on the terrace for a few shots.

AFTER an hour or two Dick and Bill Forsythe joined the party and were set to work, the first shot showing Dick registering deep affection for Miss Barnard, which took some acting on his part. This scene

was taken over about three times before Marx was satisfied. Afterward came a scene between Lurdau and Dick, registering intense hostility. This went more easily.

Lunch interrupted these activities, but they were resumed again after the meal, Marx driving his cast relentlessly, the fat little movie man transformed into an implacable and censorious taskmaster. Even the old *vicomte* did not escape his blighting corrections.

The company knocked off work before the dinner hour and returned to the château. As Dick entered the hallway he saw Mlle. de Serigne mounting the stairs, and his heart beat faster as she flashed a friendly greeting to him before disappearing into the regions above.

Dinner that night with the French general and his staff was a quiet affair. All the officers were tense and preoccupied, their attitude toward the civilians at the table being courteous but distant. Dick observed that none of them let drop the smallest word even faintly referring to military operations.

The general, a spare, white-mustached Frenchman of courtly appearance, made some polite inquiries as to the progress of the scenario. He nodded from time to time as Marx explained the story enthusiastically, and he even studied each one of the actors in grave silence, as Marx identified them and the parts they played.

After dinner an orderly invited the civilians, one at a time, into the library where a stout, keen-minded French staff officer put them through an examination. No one escaped, not even the *vicomte* and the servants. The French could afford to take no chances.

When Dick's turn came he was surprised at the amount of information concerning himself that the French officer had available. The preliminary pumping hurried through, the Frenchman asked many questions concerning the death of Sauvage, both the first and second murders of that mysterious character, who apparently had died twice on successive nights, and about the disappearance of Mlle. de Serigne.

Dick answered fully and completely, giving every detail he could remember of every incident since his arrival in France.

"And," Dick ended quietly, "it's none of my business, but if I were you I would keep an eye on M. Bourdain!"

"You mean . . .?" asked the French officer.

"I mean," Dick announced resolutely, "that from what I've seen, I think he is playing with the Germans—that he is a traitor to your country."

The French officer looked at him thoughtfully.

"That is a very grave accusation to make," he said after a long time. Then, dismissing Dick, he sent for Mlle. de Serigne.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MURDER STALKS AGAIN.

BILL FORSYTHE and Dick sat on the edge of the terrace that evening. Behind them the château blazed with light. The continuous battle-roar of the last few days had diminished until now only the distant boom of an occasional shell disturbed the night air. The Germans had turned and were busy digging in while the French were reorganizing and consolidating their strength.

The old château was a busy place, with the marble salon given over en-

tirely to field clerks and staff officers who worked continuously. The library was used as a conference room, and even now the dried-up wisp of an officer who was chief of staff of this command sat at the head of the long table, dictating orders to four or five staff officers who sat with their notebooks and pencils before them.

It was Dick who had warned the chief of staff of the peephole in the library so that now a fully armed sentinel was stationed in the secret passageway.

"You know, Bill," said Dick, "that the chief of staff is sleeping in the cardinal's room?"

"Well, he's got more nerve than I have," commented Bill.

"Yes," agreed Dick, "that cardinal's bedchamber is no place for a quiet night's rest. He's a pretty nice guy, too. When I told him about that peephole in the library wall, he thanked me in that pleasant way the French have; but when I told him about the cardinal's bedroom, although he was still polite, I could see he didn't think much of my advice."

"Well, anyway," remarked Bill, "they've got that secret passage guarded and there's no way anybody could get in it now."

"Yes," returned Dick slowly, "they've got *that* passage guarded."

"What do you mean? Do you think there's another one?"

"I know damn' well there's another one."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well," Dick replied slowly, "that first night, when I was there with Sauvage a draft blew into the cardinal's bedchamber from somewhere. Now the secret panel behind the armored figure is in the anteroom. And when that draft blew into the cardinal's room, *the door to the antcroom was closed!*"

"The heck you say!"

"Yes," Dick went on, "and whoever pulled the rough stuff before the Germans came is still here and is very likely to pull some more rough stuff now that the Germans have gone."

The two men smoked in silence for a space. From the shadow of the outbuildings beyond the château a group of lusty voices were singing "Madelon." The rousing, crashing chorus ended in a burst of laughter. Whatever else might be happening the poilus were keeping undismayed in the face of danger.

In the library the staff conference was drawing to a close. The general came in, the candlelight gleaming upon the four stars embroidered on his sleeve, and the little group of officers rose respectfully while he said a few words to them.

"And the operation orders are ready?" he asked the chief of staff.

"Yes, *mon général.*" The thin little man picked up a sheaf of papers covered with writing. "I will study them again to-night, before retiring, and have them issued before daylight."

"*Bon!*" replied the general, and departed.

The chief of staff carefully stowed his sheaf of papers in a heavy parchment envelope which he placed in the inside pocket of his tunic. Each officer, before leaving, picked up any scraps of paper remaining and, carrying them to the fireplace, tore them into fine shreds and set fire to them.

Thereafter the library was empty. The chief of staff, leaving last, went somewhat wearily up the staircase, along the upper gallery, through the anteroom and into the cardinal's chamber, returning the salute of the

sentry posted in the anteroom as he went through the door.

ON the terrace the two Americans continued to smoke, enjoying the warm summer night.

Marx and Lurdau, talking over the day's work, came down the broad stone steps and joined them.

"I gotta take that shot of you and Miss Barnard over again," said Marx. "You made love to her to-day without any more pep than if you was married to her. Yep. We sure gotta do that over again."

"Why don't you draft Mlle. de Serigne in that part? I'll bet Dick would put some pep into it then," spoke up Bill Forsythe, g r i n n i n g wickedly at his friend.

"Hey? What's that you say?" Marx looked up, keenly interested. "Say, boy, that's one swell idea!"

Lurdau listened in silence to this. Dick looked up inquiringly.

"How do you know Mlle. de Serigne will consent?"

"Leave that to me, boy, leave that to me." Marx cocked his unlighted cigar at a jaunty angle.

"All right," replied Dick, shrugging his shoulders, "that's that. Are the French moving on in the morning or are they going to stay here for a little while?"

As Dick finished his words, Lurdau, seated in a rustic chair to one side, turned his head to catch the reply.

"Search me," g r u n t e d Marx. "They'll probably be pulling out tomorrow or next day. I just passed the chief of staff in the upper gallery on his way to bed. That baby ain't taking any chances. He's got a soldier on guard outside his room with a bayonet about two yards long, ready to poke into anybody that comes monkeyin' around. I guess he ain't so dumb at that, seein' that's the same room where you had all your trouble, Dick."

Lurdau slowly turned his head away to glance up at the upper line of windows in the château. A light gleamed through the small window of the cardinal's chamber. Yawning and stretching, the actor rose.

"Good night, gentlemen. I think I'll go to bed," he stated and left them.

"Lurdau's a pretty good actor," remarked Dick, as the tall form of the French-Swiss disappeared within the château doors. "When you hired him did he give you any references showing where he had worked before?"

"Yep. He sure did. That fellow's all right. He was travelin' around in road shows a while, and then he was in a couple of French movie outfits. The last one went busted, and he was pretty near on his uppers when I took him on. I couldn't read his references, seein' that they was in French, but he looked good to me, and that's all I asked. What do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nothing," r e t u r n e d Dick. "I've just been trying to figure out all the ins and outs of this thing ever since I left the U. S. A., and I think I'm beginning to see what's what. Let's hit the hay," said he, rising.

The three men walked toward the château. Dick and Bill said good night to Marx outside the door of their room in the old servants' quarters where they had a couch and a bed.

They went to sleep almost as soon as their heads touched the pillows, so worn out were they by the excitement and strain of the last twenty-four hours.

Dick was awakened in the morning by Bill's hand, shaking his shoulder.

"Get up, Dick! There's been Hades

poppin' last night! The chief of staff was found murdered, this morning, in the cardinal's bedroom!"

CHAPTER XL.

A CONVERSATION WITH MADEMOISELLE.

THE body had been discovered by an orderly taking early breakfast to the chief of staff. This orderly, having knocked repeatedly at the door and receiving no response, decided to enter and carry out his orders, which were to awaken the officer at daylight. Tiptoeing into the room, he found the stiffened body of the chief of staff, a knife wound through the back between the shoulder blades.

A quick investigation on the part of the harassed staff showed that the operation orders in their heavy envelope had been taken by the assassin.

The French acted very quickly. A cordon of soldiers was thrown about the château and no one was permitted to leave. Every civilian inmate was placed under guard and brought to the dining room.

They were all there, including Miss Barnard, Lurdau, the *vicomte* and Mlle. de Serigne, who sat by herself at the window, gazing with unseeing eyes out over the park.

One by one, each member of the party was taken in and subjected to a severe cross-examination and the movements of each one on the night before checked up rigorously.

The *vicomte,* treated with the deference that became his rank, nevertheless had to submit to questioning along with the others, but the chambermaid stated that he had retired early and gone to sleep, leaving his light burning, so that she, seeing it about one o'clock, went in quietly and extinguished it.

Marx, Dick and Bill Forsythe supported each other's stories. Lurdau stated that he had left them and gone straight to his room, and gone to sleep. The sentinel in the hallway corroborated this. The rest of the party all had perfect alibis, including the servants.

While these investigations were going on, a strict examination was made of the sentries on duty during the night, but they swore that they had neither seen nor heard anything unusual. All three men, however, were placed under arrest pending further investigation. Two officers, an engineer and a member of the intelligence section, were detailed to make a searching examination of the room itself, and spent hours going over every inch of its floor, walls and ceiling without solving the mystery.

In the meantime a hurried conference of the staff was called by the general himself, and new orders were hastily prepared, while a grave atmosphere of worry settled over the French headquarters, for it was well known that the stolen orders contained information of troops, organizations, and plans, of incalculable benefit to the enemy.

The party of civilians was kept in the dining room under guard until nearly noon, while Marx paced up and down the room, chewing savagly at his cigar and cursing the events that prevented his going forward with the action of his drama. At the same time he took the opportunity to ask for Mlle. de Serigne's coöperation, which she promised after a little thought, much to the surprise of Dick who overheard the conversation.

Through all that morning of waiting, with Mlle. de Serigne so near him, Dick could not find the courage to talk

to her, for her manner seemed singularly aloof and distant so that he had to content himself with studying the clear fine lines of her features and wondering what tragedy was mirrored in her eyes.

JUST before noon the French general came in with several staff officers and, after demanding pardon for the hardship of their arrest, released them all.

"It's all right, general, to go ahead with this here movie?" asked Marx.

"Assuredly," responded the general, nodding. "It is still the story that you told me last night? You are going to act that out to-day and to-morrow?"

"Surest thing you know, general," answered Marx. "I could finish up the thing in a couple or three days if we don't have no more bad luck. You ain't goin' to leave us right away, are you?"

"I fear not," replied the French commander, looking worried for a second. "No, I fear not."

Luncheon was announced as they stood there, and the party seated itself at the table, while Marx talked on about his picture, and the French officers listened politely, their minds plainly elsewhere.

"My felicitations to you, *M. le Vicomte,*" said the general, during the course of the meal. "I understand that you have entered the movies."

The *vicomte* flushed at the slight note of raillery in the officer's voice. "It is only to aid my guests," he returned rather stiffly, and changed the subject.

After lunch Marx marshaled his forces onto the terrace and prepared to continue his filming operations. The cordon of sentries had been withdrawn from around the château, and the French headquarters force, with a newly promoted chief of staff, went about its labors—labors which could not be interrupted by the death of a single man, no matter how highly placed, when the lives of hundreds of thousands and the safety of a nation were in the balance.

Marx, equipped with a megaphone, bustled about arranging his scenes. In the first one, he had Mlle. de Serigne seat herself on a broad, low stone bench, with the château as a background.

"Now, Dick, you gotta put up a better exhibition of makin' love than you did yesterday. Get some pep into it. Walk up to her as though she was the only woman in the world and you're so hungry you could eat her up. That's the stuff!" He waved his megaphone joyously, as Dick approached Mlle. de Serigne, greeted her and sank beside her on the bench.

"Take her hand now and look into her eyes! Go on, that's it! That's it!" shouted Marx.

And Dick took the soft hand that rested within his so lifelessly and looked into the eyes which stared forth at him with so much tragedy in their depths.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he whispered, "I would give anything in life to be able to help you. I wish you would trust me..."

"Hold that—that's fine!" shouted Marx. "Camera! Squeeze a little closer!"

"I wish that I could trust you." Her voice answered Dick with that musical inflection which sounded so much like the tinkling of silver bells. "I wish I could trust you, *monsieur*. One does not know whom to trust these days. The world seems full of silent men who peer and listen, and..."

"Wait a minute, *mademoiselle,* you're lookin' too kind at him! You ain't in love with him yet. You've gotta hold him off a bit." The voice of Marx broke in like a fog horn.

Obediently she withdrew slightly, removing her hand from Dick's, but a wild surge of hope went through him as he felt, or thought he felt, her fingers linger ever so slightly as she drew away.

"There's something horribly wrong in this place and it has you frightened. I'm going to find out what it is," said Dick, leaning toward her.

This time she withdrew still farther from him, a startled look on her face.

"Fine," yelled Marx. "Now start to get up as though you're goin' to beat it."

"*Monsieur,* I beg of you, do not meddle with what does not concern you," she replied to Dick, her voice so low that he could scarcely understand.

"Cut!" yelled Marx. "That's one peach of a shot, or I'm a Dutchman."

For the moment the opportunity for conversation was ended, leaving Dick more baffled than he had been before.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MYSTERIOUS MUSTAPHA.

THE next scene was a shot showing Lurdau and Mlle. de Serigne together. Dick watched this narrowly and, despite himself, felt a growing resentment against the actor, who seemed to be putting entirely too much fire and fervor into his part.

The worst of it was that the girl did not appear to object; in fact, she showed so little dislike that Marx had finally to stop the camera and retake the scene, after warning her that she must treat this one with more coldness.

The total effect of it was to add to Dick's already large store of rancor and suspicion concerning Lurdau, whose personality had always rubbed him the wrong way and whose peculiar actions seemed to lend themselves to a more sinister rôle than the one he affected.

Wandering away from the party, Dick presently found himself in the château courtyard where he stared up at the tall towers, trying vainly to find the link which had always eluded him in this mysterious chain of affairs. His eye rested for a second on the nearest window above him and he stiffened suddenly, for a face was looking down at him—a dark and bearded face which he knew only too well. As his eye rested upon it, the face disappeared swiftly.

Those features would always be imprinted on his mind; the features of the man whom he had faced alone, high above the earth on the precarious ledge running between the two north towers, the man who had so suddenly ceased his murderous attack on the bidding of an unknown voice, which had addressed him as "Mustapha."

There might be the explanation, or the key which would lead to the explanation which he had sought for so long and so unsuccessfully, and it was time to act if he wished to find out. Rising from the stone step on which he had seated himself, he hurried across the courtyard, feeling of the pistol which he still carried with him.

Into the entrance of the first tower he went and up the steps, two at a time, determined to capture the fellow and make him disclose what he knew. Up through the third floor he hurried, and noticed as he passed by, the sword which he had dropped when the bearded man had landed on him from above.

Continuing on his way, he arrived at last in the topmost room with its

window which gave upon the ledge. So far there had been no sign of Mustapha, and there was none here, but the window was open and he stepped out on to the narrow footway.

Making slow progress, he rounded the bulge of the tower and came to where he could see the window of the other tower. It was open and he made his way to it as quickly as possible, ready with his pistol to force his way through any sort of opposition.

An instant later he found himself in a round room whose ceiling was the conical roof of the tower, a room very similar to the one he had just left.

But this room had the air of being a human habitation. A low bed, its covers in disorder, stretched along one wall. Two or three chairs and a table made up the rest of the furniture. There were several paper-bound, yellow-backed French books scattered about. On a low serving table against the wall there were dishes and bottles, as though some one had not only slept here but had eaten as well. Of clothing there was no sign and he could not determine whether the room had been occupied by man or woman.

A SMALL doorway gave upon a narrow staircase, and Dick went down this a few steps, finding himself entering the passage which led to Pierrefonds, with the iron door which opened into the fireplace not two yards away.

Still there was no sign of Mustapha, and he stood there undecided whether to go to the left into the Pierrefonds passage or to the right through the fireplace into the small room where he had found the stiletto and the glove.

After a moment's hesitation he decided to take the right-hand course and descended into the fireplace, bending low to enter the small room. It was deserted and he stood there, trying to figure where Mustapha might have gone. As he studied this he walked aimlessly around the room and finally found himself staring out of the window at the village square with its busy streams of soldier traffic, and its camions rolling by in a steady procession, loaded high with supplies for the fighting forces.

As he gazed absently over the scene, he saw a man pass around the corner and disappear down the street, which led toward the post office. So short was the time that Dick had but a second's glimpse, but that glimpse showed him unmistakably the heavy form and the black-bearded features of Mustapha.

Without wasting a minute, Dick made his way down to the courtyard and out the château gates, arriving at last at the village square to gaze down the street where Mustapha had disappeared. Craning his neck above the heads of the many soldiers who jammed the street, he saw the dark head of Mustapha, just about opposite the post office.

Plunging into the stream of marchers, Dick hurried through them with what speed he could make, keeping an eye on Mustapha, who hurried on ahead. Suddenly the black-bearded, heavy-shouldered man swung out of the road and disappeared within the garden gate of the small house where Dick had found Mlle. de Serigne seated at the bedside of the wounded civilian.

A moment later Dick halted before this gate and tried to open it. It was locked on the inside. A small rope hung down from above, its other end attached to a brass bell. He grasped this and pulled it again and again, but

no one answered, and at last he desisted and turned away, deciding to find some new angle of approach. He wended his way back to the château, deep in thought.

THINKING that a renewed study of the ground might give him some fresh idea, he retraced his steps, entering the tower by the furnace room and going back up through the fireplace and the narrow passage which led to the small inhabited room. As he went quietly up these steps and was nearing the top, he paused suddenly as the sound of voices fell on his ear.

Listening intently, he made out that there were two people talking, a man and a woman. He moved upward a step or two, so as to hear more easily. As he reached the small platform before the partially opened door it was flung entirely open and Lurdau stood before him, staring down at the American blackly. Behind Lurdau peered Mlle. de Serigne, her eyes startled and questioning.

"So this is where you are," said Lurdau scornfully, "sneaking and spying!"

Dick suddenly saw red.

"With all the sneaks and spies around this place, it's about time somebody investigated," he growled back, his fists clenching. He strode nearer, glaring savagely at the tall actor. Lurdau backed into the room, and Dick followed, blazing with wrath. As he cleared the doorway behind him Mlle. de Serigne sped swiftly out of the room and down the stairs.

"I mean," said Dick, "before you start calling people sneaks and spies you had better explain a few of your own queer actions."

For an instant the two men stood foot to foot, glaring into each other's eyes like two belligerent turkey cocks. What might have happened then, neither of them ever knew, for at that moment Bill Forsythe swarmed up the stairs and into the room.

"Dick," he called breathlessly, "the French general has sent for you and wants to see you in the library immediately. He's waiting there with M. Bourdain."

CHAPTER XLII.

M. BOURDAIN TAKES A HAND.

IN the library Dick found the white-mustached French general sitting quietly at the head of the long table. Pacing up and down the room nervously was M. Bourdain. Dick returned the general's courteous greeting and bowed coldly to the agent of the *Sûreté*, the man who had tried so hard to have him shot as a spy.

"M. Halloran," said the general, "I have called you in, hoping that you may be able to shed some light on some matters of importance to the French army."

"I will be very happy to tell you anything I know," returned Dick, and found the general's eyes fixed on him reflectively as though the gray-haired officer were trying to assess the truth in his soul. M. Bourdain, still pacing back and forth, growled something under his breath which Dick could not hear.

Prompted by the general, Dick again told his story, trying hard to remember every detail of the happenings on the ship, on the train to Paris, his experiences in the city itself, the meeting with M. Bourdain and Sauvage, the trip to the château and all that followed.

When he finished his recital the old general sat for a moment twisting his

mustache, then he leaned forward, looking keenly into Dick's eyes.

"M. Halloran," he said, "it is only fair to tell you that you have been accused in very powerful quarters of being in the employ of the Germans."

"Then," replied Dick steadily, "the powerful quarters you mention lack the first necessity of a wise exercise of power, which is knowledge. In the first place, I am an American citizen..."

"Of Irish ancestry, and many Irish are pro-German," broke in the acid voice of M. Bourdain.

"Of Irish name and American stock for six generations," Dick said quietly, without looking at the *Sûreté* agent. "Of noble French ancestry on my mother's side, the heir to property in France—this very château in which we are sitting to-day—and I hope moreover to win a certain French lady for my wife."

The general nodded. but continued to study Dick through half-closed eyes.

"I find it hard not to believe you, my dear M. Halloran," he said slowly. "Youth and courage and honesty shine forth from your eyes, but you will understand me when I say I cannot allow myself to imperil the safety of my country by heeding so slight a thing as personal impressions. M. Halloran, there is one black mark against you, a mark of such serious import that it cannot be disregarded." The officer looked very grave.

"And what is that?" asked Dick quietly.

THE general started to speak when M. Bourdain leaned down and whispered something in his ear. The gray-haired French officer nodded.

"M. Bourdain advises me to say nothing of this until the matter can be more fully investigated. In the meantime, if you will accompany my intelligence officer through all the scenes of your various experiences in the château, explain everything to him, your willingness may go far toward minimizing the effect of this single serious charge against you."

"If you will pardon me, general, I cannot give my coöperation under any such condition," replied Dick firmly. The French officer and M. Bourdain looked up, startled. "I must insist," Dick went on, "that the coöperation I give and the willingness I show to help in this matter be considered as natural impulses, springing from the heart and not in any way influenced by the fear of some unknown charge against me."

M. Bourdain again growled something under his breath, but the general nodded in comprehension.

"I understand," he said, "and will withdraw my statement. We need your coöperation, M. Halloran, and we will decide the other matter on its own merits. M. Bourdain, will you please call Colonel de Roselle and Major de Berg?"

In a moment M. Bourdain had returned with two officers. The older one was wearing the five stripes of a colonel on his sleeves, and was decorated with the gold aiguillettes of the general staff. The other, the major, was a member of the engineers. The two introduced themselves to Dick courteously but coldly, and with them he left the room.

"I think it would be better, gentlemen, if we started right in the cardinal's bedroom where I arrived the first night." They were passing through the entrance hall as he spoke, and Dick remembered suddenly the creak of a panel which had seemed to come from the shadows under the old portrait.

At Dick's suggestion the engineer

took the measurements of the wall behind the painting and shook his head.

"It is not thick enough, this wall," he stated, "to permit of a passage within it."

It was true. The partition wall which divided the dining room from the entrance hall was only about eighteen inches in thickness. But Dick's quick eye detected something that he had never before observed and he pointed it out to the two officers, who nodded their heads in confirmation. It was a seemingly unimportant fact which might have had a large bearing on the series of mysteries which enshrouded this place.

The ceiling of the dining room was much lower than the ceiling of the large entrance hall. "Which means," said Dick, "that the floors above being equally level, there is an unaccounted-for space above the dining room."

TAKING notes of this matter, the three went on to the cardinal's room where Dick told the story of that first night, acting every motion and detail.

"You see, gentlemen," he concluded, "there is undoubtedly another secret entrance to the cardinal's bedroom itself, aside from that panel in the anteroom."

The engineer officer nodded and went to work, tapping and sounding, measuring and computing, until every inch of the chamber had been covered. But whatever the secret of the cardinal's bedroom was, the ancient tower withheld it jealously.

The small room in which Sauvage was murdered apparently for a second time yielded no better results, despite the fact that the three men spent a full hour in studying it and discussing possible solutions for this queer slaying, committed in a room with its door bolted on the inside. Dick's mind was racing along, seizing and discarding one theory after another, until suddenly the answer came to him.

"Gentlemen, I think I have it, but I will not risk ridicule by telling you until I check up to see if my premises are correct."

Dropping this grain of comfort, Dick took up the route he had followed in seeking for the gendarmes that first night. He led his companions down the back stairway into the small hall with its tapestry-covered walls hung with boars' heads and stags' antlers. Here he described in detail the story of his fight with an unknown man in the dark, and again a sudden insight gave him the answer concerning this mysterious individual. But he did not reveal it, preferring to verify his suspicion.

"Now," said Dick, once they were back in the long gallery again, "the next events must concern people other than myself. One being M. Bourdain, whose telegram from Paris I still have with me." He produced the small oblong of slate-blue paper on which M. Bourdain had sent him the news of the pending arrival of Sauvage—*after* Dick was certain he had seen the man dead in the cardinal's room.

"Who or what your M. Bourdain is," said Dick, "I do not pretend to know, but I must tell you frankly I do not trust him." The American went on to tell them of the various times and places he had seen the agent of the *Sûreté*.

The two officers kept their eyes on him quietly and coldly, the whole time he spoke, and made no comment whatsoever when he finished.

"And the other person," Dick went on, "is Mlle. de Serigne, who is a

patriotic French girl and has proved her loyalty to France by risking her life in the cause of her country. The facts of her disappearance you probably already know."

Dick caught a significant glance passing between the two French officers.

"Yes," agreed the colonel, "we know of Mlle. de Serigne."

CHAPTER XLIII.

MORE VAGUE SUSPICIONS.

WHAT that glance meant, Dick was unable to puzzle out. It left him vaguely uncomfortable and fearing some nameless danger threatening the girl. There was little time to worry over this, as they went on directly to the next circumstance in the chain of events he was reënacting.

He told briefly of the light which he seen signaling in the enemy's direction from the top of the great tower. It was with a great deal of effort that he spoke of this as it cast suspicion on Mlle. de Serigne and smacked of disloyalty to her. For he was forced to mention his brief glimpse of the girl's face in the tower room.

The officers conferred together in low tones out of Dick's hearing, examining some papers while they talked, and making many notations in their memorandum books. Dick told them briefly of the man, Mustapha, and again they looked at each other significantly and nodded. Striving to overcome that faint, brooding fear for Mlle. de Serigne that this caused him, he went on to tell of the fight on the ledge and the mysterious voice from the window of the other tower.

The French officers listened avidly to every detail he gave concerning the arrival of the German forces, of the examination of the inmates of the château, including his own cross-questioning and the strange appearance of Wagner in the uniform of a Prussian officer—Wagner, the Kaiser-mustached stranger whom he had first met on shipboard. At this the two French officers proceeded to the bureaus set up in the marble salon, where they excused themselves for several minutes and attentively examined a large *dossier* of reports and photographs, one of which they brought to Dick.

"Is this the man?" asked the colonel, carefully concealing with his hand the bottom part of the picture which contained some inked-in data. Dick immediately recognized the cold features of the Kaiser-mustached man he had met on shipboard, a matter which seemed to give a great deal of satisfaction to the two officers.

By mutual consent the trio adjourned to the dining room for breakfast, finding the general already there, chatting with Miss Barnard, who divided her favors equally between the gallant old French officer on her right, and the *vicomte* who sat in silence on her left. Bill Forsythe ceased eating to cast an inquiring glance in Dick's direction, to which Dick returned a shrug of the shoulder, signifying his uncertainty about the whole matter.

Mlle. de Serigne came in during the meal, smiled rather sadly at Dick, returned the general's greeting formally and kept her head averted from the *vicomte* and Miss Barnard. The more Dick looked at her, the more firm became his resolve to clear her.

Having her near at hand, with the spirituality of the girl shining forth from her clear eyes, drove the slightest vestige of doubt from his mind, but he

knew that once alone and with her out of sight, those doubts would return to gnaw like rats at the edifice of his confidence.

TOWARD the close of the meal Marx blew in, bustling with self-importance, his cigar stuck at a jaunty angle in his lips, his speech full of plans for the day's work. The old general listened with interest to the movie man's comments and to his projects for the picture.

"General, we gotta borry a few of your soldiers to-day, in the big scene. Do you s'pose I could snake off a half dozen of 'em or so some time this afternoon? We wouldn't need 'em more'n five minutes." There was an entreaty in Marx's voice and eyes that was hard to resist, and the general nodded, giving his assent.

"And what is this big scene you speak of?" asked the general, curious.

"Oh, I gotta take a shot of an execution with all the trimmin's," explained Marx. "That's why these here soldiers have gotta have everything, guns, an' knapsacks and all that kind of junk—everything except bullets," explained Marx.

"And you, my dear *vicomte*"—the general turned to his host—"are to be butchered to make a cinema holiday?"

The *vicomte* nodded somewhat glumly, plainly sick of the exacting demands of this tiresome American movie fanatic.

"I think," cooed Miss Barnard's voice, honey-sweet, "that it will be a very nice picture if one can have nice pictures with so many nonprofessionals taking the big rôles," and she smiled beatifically at Mlle. de Serigne, just as though she had not a jealous thought in her empty head.

"I'll be needin' you, Dick, in another hour," Marx spoke up as he rose from the table. "You're goin' to be on the job all right, aren't you?"

Dick cast a questioning glance at the two staff officers. The major looked at the colonel, inquiry in his eyes. The colonel shrugged his shoulders and nodded.

"Yes," replied Dick to Marx's question, "I guess I can make it all right."

Leaving the dining room with his polite inquisitors, Dick went over the scene of his cross-examination, his hasty trial by court-martial, his condemnation to death and his escape from the stone cell, through the passageway. They checked this up by examining the stones which he had removed and which he afterward replaced with the aid of Bill Forsythe.

From then on he led them through the tunnel to the room in the tower in which he had found the rose, the glove and the ivory-handled stiletto. He described his arrival in the room and the arrival thereafter of Bill Forsythe, but kept tightly locked within him any word concerning the objects he had found in that room.

"And then Forsythe and myself went down again, pausing in the kitchen . . ." He was going on with his story when the colonel interrupted him.

"You are sure that you have completely described everything in that room?" the officer asked quietly.

"Yes," returned Dick without a tremor, being possessed of that quaint knightly idea that a lie told for the sake of a woman's name is a matter of pride.

"You are sure you found nothing in that room, no object of interest?" The French officer's voice was very suave as he asked the question with slightly raised eyebrows. Dick

realized instantly that they already knew what he had found in that room.

"There was nothing there," Dick replied stiffly, "that interested me to the point of recalling itself to my memory."

AGAIN that significant look passed between the two officers, and Dick felt a little chill of fear for Mlle. de Serigne settle about his heart. Nevertheless, he went on telling of his waiting in the kitchen and of seeing Lurdau pass through, and still later of the hurried passage of the well-dressed, dark-bearded Frenchman.

As he told this last, Dick suddenly stopped in mid-sentence, wondering why he had been so dumb as to have failed before to see what had suddenly occurred to him. The French officers looked at him curiously, but he gave no word of this strange explanation which had cleared up a lot of things in his mind. The story took short telling from then on, and he hurried through it until they found themselves back again in the library. Here the general was busy with his new chief of staff, but he rose at the entry of the three, joining them at the fireplace and looking at Colonel de Roselle inquiringly. The latter nodded slightly.

"I would appreciate it if I could be excused now," requested Dick, and received an affirmative nod from the general, "but before I go, general, I think it would be only fair to tell me just what is this serious black mark that you believe you have against me."

Again the general looked inquiringly at Colonel de Roselle, and again that officer nodded, almost imperceptibly. The old, gray-haired commanding officer twisted his mustache and stared at Dick with probing blue eyes. Instead of giving an answer immediately, he asked a question.

"How much money has Marx offered you for the use of the château, and how much does he pay you for your services as actor in his movie play?"

Dick, rather surprised at the question, nevertheless gave the figures without hesitation.

"You had best be sure," said the general very gravely, "that this money you are receiving does not come from the German general staff."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FINAL MOVIE SHOT.

DICK was stunned for a moment at the implication contained in the general's words, but he shook his head. "General," he said, "you'll pardon me if I tell you that in my opinion such a weird hypothesis could only have originated in one brain."

The general looked slightly nonplused and raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Yes, general, it bears all the earmarks of having originated in the brain of M. Bourdain."

The lightning-quick glance which passed between those three French officers told Dick that his shot had hit home. There was a moment's silence. The general cleared his throat.

"That all may be," he said gravely, "but the fact remains that you are under grave suspicion, M. Halloran. You are directly accused of the murder of Sauvage and of the murder of the chief of staff. It becomes my painful duty to order your arrest."

Dick's heart stopped beating for a moment and he stood, unable to find

words to express his amazement and r i g h t e o u s indignation. The three Frenchmen stared at him gravely. Finally he threw up his head.

" General," he said firmly, " such an accusation is too preposterous to defend myself against. There is only one reply to it. If you will give me liberty until to-night, I will have the real culprit exposed. May I have that opportunity?"

The three French officers looked at each other. The general thought a while, then nodded his head slowly. " Yes," he said, his voice kindly. " You cannot escape. I think you are entitled to that, at least."

THE movie crowd was in the rose garden when Dick at last found them, busy taking shots of Lurdau conspiring secretively with one of the cast, dressed as a German officer. This shot finished, Marx, with much waving of arms and admonitions for speed and yet more speed, shifted the s c e n e to the courtyard, where he staged a very effective portrayal of Lurdau deep in conversation with two of the cast, dressed as high-ranking French officers, wherein Lurdau, as the disgruntled German spy lover of the heroine, succeeded in having the heroine's uncle brought under suspicion as a German spy.

During the many rehearsals and the final retaking of this scene, Dick, who had little to do, occupied his time with some heavy thinking. He noticed a lot of interest in the movie sets on the part of passing orderlies and privates. He further observed that the interest was not confined to the soldiers, but that Colonel de Roselle followed the proceedings with deep interest from the window of the red salon, where from time to time Dick saw the spare, angular figure of the general, an interested spectator as well.

In this interim which did not require the services of Mlle. de Serigne, he saw her leave, going through the château gates into the village square, and turning the corner of the street that led to the post office. Watching her, he knew very well where she was going, and could visualize the little stone house guarded by its high walls from the street. A few isolated things which had puzzled him before began to assume an ordered sequence in his mind.

What was not clear was the exact status of Mlle. de Serigne in all this plot and counterplot. In thinking back on some of the incidents with which she had been connected, he again felt that s l i g h t spasm of fear for her safety.

She returned before the next scene, which required a new background, this time a dark entrance to the château cellar out of which Lurdau issued very stealthily and seized her as she stood gazing dreamily into space. This was the scene wherein he was supposed to threaten her with the approaching arrest of her father.

This was a new corner of the château to Dick. It was at the opposite end of the building from the cardinal's chamber, and contained the dining room and below it, on a level with the floor of the moat, the entrance to the great kitchen at present in use. It was the pointed, medieval doorway of this kitchen, set deeply into the flanking tower, which provided a background for the scene they were now shooting.

Dick stared curiously at the dining room windows above him and at the windows of the bedroom which surmounted the dining room. He was studying these intently when he sat

bolt upright from the grassy bank on which he was reclining. For several minutes his gaze lingered on the windows at the front and sides of the château. Then he walked quietly away.

WITH a great deal more to think about, Dick returned presently to the movie activities and followed around from place to place as the scenes shifted with remarkable rapidity. Lunch time came and went and still Marx drove his cohorts, wheedling, cajoling and threatening in turn, but constantly pressing forward to the finale of his picture, leaving the interior shots and small bits until later and watching the sun anxiously, for his light.

Marx was not the only one who watched the sun anxiously. Dick was deeply interested in the coming of the night for a very different reason.

A little knot of officers and soldiers followed these proceedings, taking advantage of the lull in the fighting up front which gave them a few minutes' breathing spell. From time to time one of the staff officers drifted down and studied the action of the cast and camera men with curiosity. At about three o'clock Colonel de Roselle added himself to the audience, following the group of actors to the courtyard where a space was cleared at the base of the towers. Shortly thereafter the general came down and chatted with Colonel de Roselle.

Dick had slipped away again, but now came up, panting and joined them. His face was pale with excitement. The two officers listened to him in astonishment and then started asking questions. They began calmly enough, but grew more and more excited as he answered until finally they conferred together rapidly, disregarding him. Suddenly the general gave some brief, low commands. Colonel de Roselle nodded and turned away to carry them out.

Dick was called to play his part, wherein he frantically interviewed the President of the French Republic, demanding a pardon for the old *vicomte* condemned so unjustly. Shots were taken of his hurried trip in automobile and motor-cycle side car, clutching the precious document in his hand.

All of the preparatory scenes were finished. The preparations for the final scene were in progress.

At the edges of the crowd, standing at ease, waited the group of soldiers who were to act as the firing squad, enjoying the proceedings with all a Frenchman's zest for a tinge of the dramatic.

Marx had worked himself up to a pitch of almost frenzied activity; his cigar was chewed down to a mere stub, his tie was disarranged and his collar hung precariously by one button.

"All right, count," he shouted through his megaphone, "you take up position against that wall, so we can line up the camera."

Gravely the old *vicomte* did as he was bid, leaning against the wall, unseeing and indifferent.

Marx jockeyed his camera man into proper position, paced off the ground and put a stake in to show the firing squad where they should stand, and then hopped about, squinting at the effect from different angles.

The firing squad marched briskly into its place and stood at ease while Marx again squinted and hopped, making several changes in the relative positions of the various actors before relapsing into a sort of grumbling acquiescence.

"How's that, general?" he asked the keenly interested French commander, expecting approval. To his chagrin, the general shook his head.

"It's wrong on two counts," criticized the general. "In the first place, an officer should be in command of the firing squad and in the second place an officer of the legal branch should read off the sentence before the execution. That is, of course," explained the general, shrugging his shoulders, "if you want to make it appear like the real thing."

"Hell's bells, you're right, general! You're right, general, old-timer!" Marx looked nonplused for a second and then quickly recovered his poise. "How about lendin' me a couple officers for a couple of minutes?"

"Certainly, my friend," replied the general courteously, and said something to Colonel de Roselle, who nodded. A lieutenant lounging near by was beckoned over and joined the firing squad, looking a little worried and self-conscious.

THEY rehearsed the scene, until finally Marx considered it good enough to take.

Dick found Mlle. de Serigne standing at his side and turned to find her staring, white-faced and anguished, at the stage set for this movie climax.

"I do not like this," she said, "it is making a mock of horror."

Dick soothed her with some few words and advised her to leave, if it upset her. She nodded. Dick's cue was to run in just as the rifles were raised, and before the volley was fired. Beside him stood Major de Berg, the engineer officer, smoking a cigarette, his eyes enigmatic. Mlle. de Serigne slipped quietly away.

All was in readiness.

"Action! Camera!" shouted Marx through his megaphone.

Two of the cast, dressed as French officers, blindfolded the *vicomte* who stood proudly against the wall, his hands tied behind him. They marched off the scene to the clicking of the camera, and Colonel de Roselle, a sheaf of official-looking papers in his hand, strode forward and went through the motions of reading something to the blindfolded prisoner.

The cameras clicked away as he strode back and cleared the ground for the squad of soldiers and the young officer who commanded them with drawn sword.

Dick stood by, his white envelope in his hand. The young officer barked some sharp command. The rifles came up to the position of load. There was a steely tinkle as they went through the motions of loading their pieces and stood ready for the next command.

Dick stood his ground.

Again the young officer's voice barked forth. Up came the rifles to the shoulders. Dick made no move.

Marx's voice bellowed through the megaphone.

"Hurry up!" he shouted. "You'll ruin the picture!"

In that second came the shattering crash of a volley.

Marx rushed over angrily to Dick.

"You've ruined the picture!" he bellowed wildly.

"The picture is finished," said Dick quietly, a queer light in his eyes as he turned away from Marx and looked at the wall of the tower, below which huddled a quiet form.

Marx stared at the scene, puzzled.

As he looked, still not understanding, he saw the young officer leave the firing squad and approach the form on the ground with a drawn pistol. He

placed the muzzle at the head of the fallen man and fired, administering the *coup de grâce* required by French military law.

Marx stared wild-eyed at the major of engineers.

"My God," he cried, "they've killed the count!"

"Yes, but not one moment too soon!" replied Dick, white-faced and grim.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BATTLE OF THE SILENT MEN.

THERE were five of them around that table in the library. At the head sat the general, listening quietly, his head resting against his hand. On his right sat Colonel de Roselle and on his left was Major de Berg. Dick and Mlle. de Serigne, the latter very pale and silent, sat near by. Dick had just finished speaking.

Colonel de Roselle referred from time to time to a sheaf of papers which lay on the table before him.

"Of course, M. Halloran," he said, "you arrived in France at a very tense time. Even before you arrived you were drawn into the net of intrigue and espionage which preceded the great conflict. It was your misfortune to meet and be overheard by this man, Wagner, on board the ship. Wagner, or Major Count von Donnaberg, is a skilled member of the German Military Intelligence. On board the ship he learned your destination and plans, and stole your passport in order to have you impersonated by one of his own men. It was he who plotted your death, a plot which resulted instead in the death of the young American of the movie company who was mistaken for you."

Dick leaned forward eagerly, nodding from time to time. The French officer went on.

"It is plain that he sent instructions to the agents who posed as gendarmes on the train. Failing in this he sent word to Paris to have you apprehended. He did even more harm to you by having sent to M. Bourdain from what seemed very authentic sources, a report that you were in the employ of the German general staff and were using this movie company as a screen for your activity. He also included Marx in the accusation. Your actions inclined us to give you the benefit of the doubt. Nevertheless, Sauvage was detailed to watch you, to protect you if you indeed proved to be what you said you were, and to trap you if you were a spy."

"But here's one thing I don't understand," interrupted Dick. "You remember I told you of our arrival in the château that first night and of the *concierge* who admitted us. Why did that *concierge* state afterward that there was only one man admitted?"

"The *concierge* is one of our agents and had received instructions to watch you. He made that report to keep the case quiet so that it could be investigated by the military authorities instead of the civil authorities."

"Was it the *concierge* with whom I fought in the little anteroom that night when I hurried to find the gendarmes?" asked Dick.

"No, that was another of our men, a colonial named Mustapha."

"Was Mustapha the other man of the two who captured us that night we tried to enter the tunnel?"

"No, that was the gardener."

"Who fired at me from the woods that day when I was investigating the tunnel?"

"That was Mustapha, and it was Mustapha also who fired the shot that wounded M. Desnault, the notary, that night he weakened and was about to show the Germans the entrance to the tunnel in order to save Mlle. de Serigne's life."

Dick looked up startled. "The black-bearded, middle-aged man in civilian clothes? Was it he who called Mustapha off that night we fought on the top of the tower?"

COLONEL DE ROSELLE nodded. "Yes, that was M. Desnault. Unfortunately, he had led the Germans so close to the entrance of the tunnel before he was shot that they covered every inch of ground and finally located it and broke in."

"I can't understand the relationship of M. Bourdain to all this, nor can I understand how he could be a loyal Frenchman and still play back and forth betwen French and Germans." Dick looked puzzled.

"Very simple," responded the colonel. "M. Bourdain long ago entered the German Secret Service, ostensibly to betray his own country, but actually to learn the secrets of the German general staff. He played his rôle very cleverly, giving them from time to time information calculated for its truth and for its harmlessness to France. M. Bourdain's whole activities were concentrated in a silent battle against the notorious Baron von Kraintz, chief of the German espionage system in Northern France."

"And this man, Lurdau, how does he fit into the picture?" asked Dick.

"One of our most trusted agents," explained the colonel. "He was sent immediately to join the movie company and report on you and Marx."

"Well, who was it signaled that night from the tower, to the German forces?"

"It was Mustapha, aided by Mlle. le Serigne, signaling to our intelligence unit in the rear of the French army, then falling back before the German advance, telling them of the arrival of a German flanking force at the next village."

"But this M. Desnault, the notary, how did he disappear so mysteriously?" asked Dick.

"M. Desnault knew too much of what was going on in the château before your arival. He was kidnaped by the German agents operating here and hidden in one of the dungeon cells of the château."

"How did he escape?" asked Dick.

Colonel de Roselle bowed toward Mlle. de Serigne. "It was *mademoiselle* who sought and found him, who discovered the key which unlocked his cell and who led him to the secret room in the tower where she kept him concealed. She kept us informed of these and other matters by telephoning from M. Desnault's house to which she had access. It was while returning from one of these visits that she was captured by the Germans and condemned to death on the insistence"—here Colonel de Roselle's face hardened into grim lines—"of this same notorious spy, Baron von Kraintz."

DICK nodded thoughtfully. "It begins to get clear," he said, "but I can't figure out how there happened to be two Sauvages."

"Very simple," returned Colonel de Roselle. "They were twin brothers, very devoted, Émile and Maurice Sauvage. It was Maurice who accompanied you to the château. It was he who was murdered in the cardinal's chamber. His body was quietly removed

by the killers during your absence and all traces of the dead man removed. M. Bourdain received word from the same authentic sources that you had murdered Maurice Sauvage. He broke the news to Émile Sauvage who was also in his bureau, and Émile, fired by grief and desire for revenge, begged to be allowed to take his brother's place and avenge his death at your hands. M. Bourdain sent him immediately in a powerful car. He came in the dead of night and took the small car in which you had arrived and drove it out of sight, waiting until you should awake before arriving."

"It was Émile Sauvage, then, who was murdered in my locked room, poor devil!" Dick shook his head. "Of whom was he so frightened that evening before he was murdered?"

"That we do not know, but we think it was probably the *maître d'hôtel* who recognized him. The mystery of Émile's murder we have been unable to solve as yet," said Colonel de Roselle. "It seems incomprehensible that he should have died a violent death in that small room, with the door bolted from the inside and no other means of entry."

"The answer is simple enough," said Dick. "I told you that I found a small fleck of red paint on the panel of the door, and a slight roughening of the varnish on the opposite side from the thin steel bolt which locked it on the inside?"

"Yes?" The little group leaned forward intently.

"Well," said Dick, "it was a strong but very light steel bolt. Some one with a powerful electric magnet simply placed it against the thin wood of the door, pulled the bolt back, entered and murdered Sauvage and left, pulling the bolt back into place again. It was the same person who had previously murdered Maurice Sauvage and who later murdered your chief of staff."

"How did you arrive at the conclusion that the *vicomte* was the guilty one?" asked Colonel de Roselle, curiously. Mlle. de Serigne shrank back a little, and that brooding look came into her eyes again.

"My suspicions were aroused the first night of my arrival when I felt that I was being watched from some unseen point in the hallway. It was while accompanying you and Major de Berg that I noticed that the ceiling of the dining room was lower than the ceiling of the hall outside. The upper floors being the same, I figured there must be a space between the floor of the bedroom and the ceiling of the dining room. While the *vicomte* was engaged in acting in Marx's movie, I studied the windows of the dining room and the bedroom above and saw that the windows of the bedroom extended lower than the windows next in line, evidently to let air and light into this secret room between the two floors.

"Taking advantage of the *vicomte's* absence from his bedroom I made a hurried search and found an entrance through a high oak clothes-press leading into this concealed room. In this concealed room I found the electro-magnet. From this small room I followed a passage which led downward, paralleling the main staircase and descending below the first floor. Here it ran the whole length of the building, rising again in the thick outer wall of the south tower, where it opened into the cardinal's bedroom, its entrance concealed by that tall portrait of Louis XIV, high in the wall.

"A ladder was kept within this entrance and it was by using this that the *vicomte* and the *maître d'hôtel* descend-

ed into the room, knifed the sleeping Maurice Sauvage and left his body, returning after I had gone for the gendarmes and removing it entirely. The body was dropped down an oubliette which flanked this passage, because I found shreds of his clothing and blood-stains at the mouth of this opening. The chief of staff was killed in the same manner and his papers taken. I found those papers in the concealed room underneath the *vicomte's* bedroom."

"SPLENDID!" exclaimed Colonel de Roselle. "You have performed a noble service for France and you will not find her ungrateful. And now, you must wonder as to how a nobleman of France could turn into such an utter traitor."

Mlle. de Serigne paled slightly. Dick nodded.

"The events which led up to this started before your departure for France. You received a letter from M. Desnault telling you of the death of the *vicomte* and of your inheritance of the château, not knowing that the château was a powerful gage in the battle being waged by the men of the French and German secret service. You were surprised to find the *vicomte* still alive and in possession when you came to take over your property, but it was not the Vicomte de Serigne whom you found here."

Dick nodded as though this statement confirmed an opinion he had already formed.

"A few weeks previously the real *vicomte* lost his *maître d'hôtel* and his two valets, all three of whom had been in his employ for years. They had, however, received offers of positions elsewhere which nearly trebled their pay. Before their departure three new menservants presented themselves, having excellent references and being men of fine carriage. A few days later the *vicomte* was drugged by these new menservants. Unfortunately for them, before he could be spirited away he lay in a state of coma which led Mlle. de Serigne and the village doctor and the notary to believe in his death. The village doctor was killed in a motor accident twenty-four hours later. M. Desnault, the notary, was kidnaped and imprisoned in one of the cells of the château. The unconscious *vicomte* disappeared.

"Then Mlle. de Serigne was told and had proved to her that her uncle and dearly beloved foster father was in the power of the Germans and would meet instant death if she by word or sign exposed the affair. With the doctor and the notary and Mlle. de Serigne thus stopped from betraying the secret, it was a simple matter for the German secret service to put into the château one of their own men who had been selected for his close resemblance to the real *vicomte* and who had been trained for a long period in the rôle he was to play. Unknown to Mlle. de Serigne until to-day, when our agents confirmed it and told her, the real *vicomte* died of pneumonia while imprisoned in a fortress in Germany.

"Therefore, it was the false *vicomte* who murdered Maurice and Émile Sauvage and our chief of staff. His identity was discovered by us just after your finding the proof of his treachery. It was the general, here, who ordered real bullets put into the rifles of the firing squad. It was a real sentence of death that I read to the impostor as he stood there blindfolded. He did not flinch, but went to his death bravely."

"And he was..." Dick leaned forward.

"The notorious Baron von Kraintz, chief of the German Intelligence of Northern France."

THEY went silently from the room, those five people, Dick and Mlle. de Serigne together. Passing through the marble salon with its busy staff officers and field clerks, these two sought the comparative privacy of the park.

On the terrace they met Marx, Lurdau and Miss Barnard. The blond movie actress seemed inconsolable over the loss of her "count."

"He was such a nice man, such refined manners," she mourned. "I don't see how they had the heart to shoot him!"

Marx, chewing reflectively on his unlighted cigar, came out of the moody depression he had been in since the spoiling of his last scene.

"Hell's bells!" he exclaimed, a new light in his eyes. "They sure crippled that last shot by pluggin' the count full of lead, but, oh, boy, what a noos reel it 'll make! It 'll be a wow! Genooine execution of a German spy in France! Oh, boy!" Marx hurried away, full of the new idea.

Lurdau shook hands with Dick and said that he didn't blame him a bit, while the American apologized for all his suspicions.

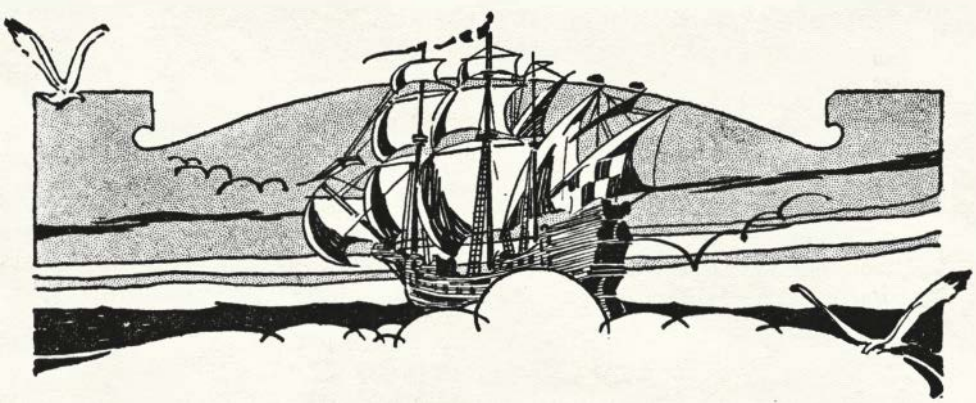
With Mlle. de Serigne at his side, Dick strolled on into the park.

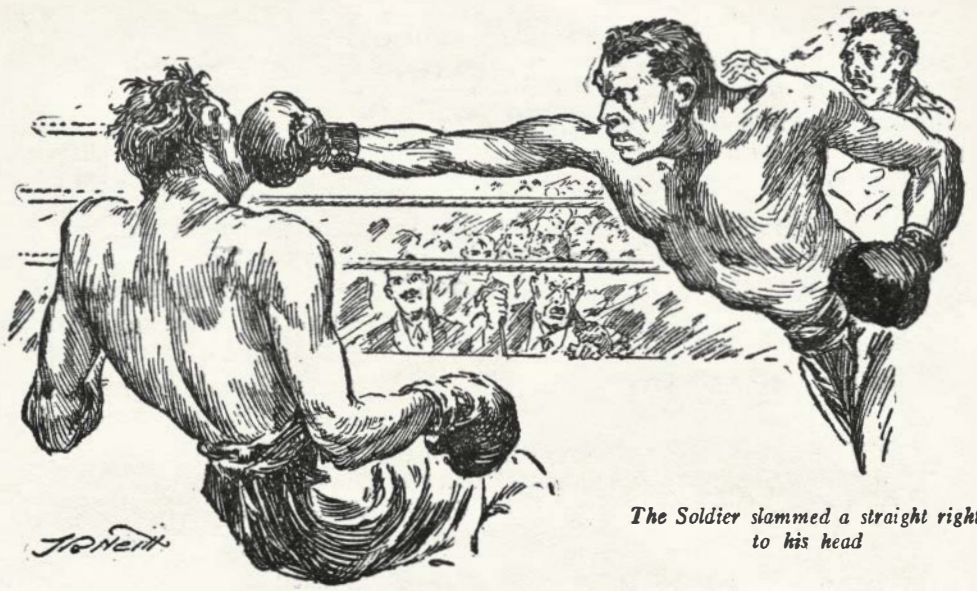
It was there that Bill Forsythe found them, seated on a marble bench under the statue of Venus, and he handsomely begged their pardon for intruding. Any one, even Bill Forsythe, could see that the entrance of a third party at this particular moment was probably an intrusion.

"I suppose congratulations are in order," he hazarded, seeing the triumphant look on Dick Halloran's face and the air of dreamy happiness shining forth from the eyes of Mlle. de Serigne. Both of them nodded.

No man could foretell what the fortunes of war might or might not bring in the coming years of bitter combat, but in this quiet interlude there was time at least for a short happiness before the rumbling of the guns on the horizon swelled to a louder and more threatening note. Those two, sitting there happily together, did not realize that the army of the "silent men" who worked in the darkness behind enemy lines would continue their activities for several more bitter years, no matter how many of their number perished before the rifles of firing squads.

THE END.





The Soldier slammed a straight right to his head

Fighter's Eyes

The Kid was a square-fighting, hard-hitting boxer who did his duty as he saw it; but he risked never again seeing duty or anything else

By MAX WILKINSON

THE KID was crazy about it out in the country. It had been his idea to get out of the city while he was getting ready for Soldier Madison. I liked it too, although I didn't have the hate on the big town that my fighter did.

In a way, you couldn't blame him. He had been around New York a long time and didn't have much to show for it except a couple bad ears and a reputation for being a tough egg. He had Mary, of course, but he had first met her out in the sticks.

There was an apple tree just in front of the house, and under that tree was a patch of the bluest grass you ever saw. In the evening, after supper, the Kid and I used to go out there and lie down. The Kid wasn't much of a talker, and neither was I. We would lie out there under that tree, flat on our backs, and wait for the moon. It usually showed up around nine o'clock, climbing up into the top of a big old maple down in a thicket between the house and the road; and after awhile Mary would come out on the porch and tell us it was time to be turning in.

A life like that gets next to a man when he's tired, and I reckon the Kid was pretty tired when we went over there. I know he was, now; but I didn't realize it until that day, just about a week before his fight with the Soldier, when I reached him with a long left hand and his eyes winked out like a light.

I don't reckon I ever will forget that

day. It was in the afternoon, and it was bright and hot. We were working in the big old barn that stood back of the house, where we had rigged up a ring of sorts; and through the wide cracks in the weather-boarding the sun streamed through so clear that you would almost dodge, thinking it was solid, like gold.

We had been stepping fast. I wasn't holding anything back, and the Kid was whaling both his hands into my body.

I remember we got into a corner, and I shot a right hand for the head. The Kid rolled away from it into the ropes and came off fast—right into the straight left I lifted to meet him. It took him high, and as it landed I bowed in to get inside with my right; but I never let that punch go.

The Kid suddenly stood up straight, his hands dropping at his sides; and when I stepped back he looked right through me, his face as gray as a piece of paper. There was one of those shafts of sunlight shining directly into his eyes, but it didn't bother the Kid. He was already blind.

I REMEMBER how scared I was, but I don't remember what I said. Maybe I didn't say anything. I grabbed the Kid by his shoulders, almost sick at my stomach with fear, and he said:

"I can't see you, Eddie; I can't see anything." He was whispering.

I jumped into a corner and grabbed up a bucket of water and let him have it; then I led him over and sat him down on a stool. I didn't know what to do, and I reckon he knew it. Pretty soon he said:

"Take it easy, Eddie. Take it easy, and don't let on to Mary."

Of course I knew it wasn't just my punch that had done it. The Kid had never been any shakes as a boxer, but he could take it like nobody else in the business; and that was the way he got his name.

You can get away with that sort of thing for a while—the Kid had got away with it for fifteen years—but a man isn't made out of concrete, and when he lives as if he were, he's likely to go pretty sudden.

I left him sitting there on the stool, holding his head in his hands, and got into my clothes pretty quick. Then I beat it up to the house for some hot water. What good I thought that would do I don't know.

When I got back down to the barn the Kid was sitting up on his stool, looking around kind of like he was dazed, and shaking his head like you do to get water out of your ears after a dive. I knew he could see me, and I was so relieved I dropped the pitcher right there in the door.

"Gosh, Kid!" I said. "I wouldn't want to go through that again. How you feel?"

He was still gray around the mouth, but he grinned a little.

"It's coming back, some, Eddie," he answered. "It ain't quite clear yet—but for God's sake don't let on to Mary."

I didn't say anything; I couldn't.

AFTER supper we went out under the tree and lay there a long time. Pretty soon the moon came up and all that thicket below us looked as if it had been dipped in silver. It was so still you could almost hear that moonlight dripping down among the leaves. After a while the Kid kind of stirred.

"I'm through, Eddie," he said at last. "I'm washed up."

There was nothing I could say to that, because I knew he was right. But I tried to p r e t e n d he was talking through his hat.

" There ain't no use in trying to kid ourselves," he went on. " Eddie, you got to help me. We got Mary to think of, you know."

He got that last out with a rush, as if he had been thinking it a long time and was afraid to say it.

" You're worried about money, ain't that it, Kid?" I said.

" There's Mary, Eddie," he answered. " What I'm getting for this fight is every cent I got in the world. I got to see her fixed. She'd go crazy without her kitchen and things."

Maybe it was the way he said that, or maybe it had been in the back of my head all the time, ever since the Kid dropped his hands back there in the barn, blind as a stone. But anyway, there came to me in a flash the only way out for the Kid and Mary.

" Maybe," I said, " we ought to call up Nicky and have a little talk with him."

The Kid started at that as if he had been hit. I knew that he would rather have sold his soul than have sold a fight—and that was just what a talk with Nicky would mean.

" I couldn't do that, Eddie," he answered. " I been on the level fifteen years."

He wasn't sore at me, but somehow his voice had a tone that embarrassed me.

" You got to think of Mary now," I told him. " And you wouldn't have to make it look bad. You could give the fans a swell show for a couple of rounds, then take a smart fall. Nicky would pay plenty for the rep it would get the Soldier."

I could see the Kid shake his head there in the dark. " I always earned my money before, Eddie—and that's the way I'm going to finish."

It was hard for me to say it, but I had to: " But you ain't going on, Kid. You're through. And if you don't take this chance to pick up some extra dough so you can go into some little business or other, you're letting Mary down, and down hard."

I reckon that went home all right, for the Kid started walking up and down that patch of grass, his head low on his chest. I knew he was fighting the toughest battle of his career just then, and I kept still.

Finally he stopped, a little way off from me, and I heard him say almost as if he was talking to himself: " I reckon maybe you're right, Eddie. I hadn't thought of it that way before."

Just then I heard the door open and Mary's step as she came out on the porch. I sat up because I knew she had come out to tell us it was time we were turning in.

" Sure you haven't, Kid," I answered. " Maybe you can buy this place. Mary likes it, and you could fix up quarters to take care of a few boys. A lot of guys like to get out of the city to do their training. It 'll be a good business."

" I thought about that, Eddie," the Kid said. " But—"

" Forget it," I cut him off. " The Soldier 'll make it look good."

" He'll have to make it look good," the Kid said after me, as if he was repeating a lesson. " I just couldn't look bad my last fight."

I'VE known days that seemed longer than a lifetime, but the toughest I have ever spent was that next one, when I waited with the Kid for Nicky Hollister to show up.

I always liked Nicky. He was a good fellow all the way through. I was glad to see him walk up on that porch. I wanted to see the unpleasant business settled and done with.

He came up and shook hands with the Kid, and after I took one of his cigarettes he sat down and we began to talk.

"Well," he said, "what's the good word, Eddie?"

"A little business, Nicky," I answered. I took a big drag off my cigarette, then looked over at the Kid. "Why don't you go in and tell Mary to make us a pitcher of lemonade?" I said. "Nicky looks hot."

The Kid got up as if he was glad to get away; and when he was gone I didn't lose any time.

"Nicky," I said, "the Kid wants to retire. He's tired of fighting and he wants to settle down out here in the country somewhere. What do you think about it?"

I didn't have to make it any plainer than that to Nicky. He knew the game from the inside out, and he knew what I was getting at.

"I think it's a good idea, Eddie," he said to me; and he meant it. "The Kid's a credit to the game, but he's had enough of it."

"Well, you know how he feels about it," I went on. "But maybe if you would make a little proposition he would listen. I know he needs the jack, and you know what it would mean to you if the Soldier could get credit for stopping him."

Nicky pulled out a purple handkerchief as big as a flag and wiped his face slowly. After a while he said thoughtfully:

"That's fair enough, Eddie. The Soldier's coming along nice, but you never can be sure with youngsters like him. If you would like to pick up, say, five grand, all the Kid's got to do is say the word."

THE KID came back just then, and I got up and took the pitcher. He held the glasses while I poured three drinks of lemonade for us. He sat down then, and Nicky looked up at me, waiting.

I took a big breath and made it sound as natural as possible.

"Kid," I said, "Nicky's got a little proposition, and I like it. He's got the Soldier in the place where he needs just about one good win to be in the heavy dough from now on. You pick out a soft spot next Friday and fall on it, and it means five thousand to you. What about it?"

For a moment he just sat there, looking up at me. Then he said, as if he were wondering about it all: "But don't forget, Eddie, I ain't never been stopped!"

Nicky pulled out that big handkerchief again and mopped his face; and I found a seed in the bottom of my glass I hadn't noticed before.

"That's why," I said, "it's worth five thousand dollars to Nicky if you'll —take a dive."

The Kid waited a long time before he spoke; he seemed to be having a hard time understanding what we were talking about.

Then he looked over at me. "I reckon it's O. K. with me, Eddie. If you think it's all right, I'm game." He waited a minute, and I couldn't look at him. Then he added, pleadingly: "But the Soldier 'll have to make it look good, Nicky. I don't want my last show to look bad."

At that Nicky let out a big laugh and jumped up. He slapped the Kid on the back.

"Look bad?" he said. "Why, Kid, I promise you the Soldier 'll come in there with the best he's got. That 'll be my orders from the first bell."

The Kid got up and put his glass down by the pitcher. When he straightened up he looked at Nicky. "Listen, Nicky, you—I'd hate to have anybody lose any dough on me in a fight like this. I wish you wouldn't lay any money around."

He stood there then like a kid who's spoke out of turn in school and expects a bawling out for it. But if Nicky was surprised—and even I was, knowing the Kid as well as I did—he didn't bat an eye. He just looked at the Kid for a minute, with a funny expression in his eyes, then he smiled and took the Kid's hand.

"Why, sure, fella," he said slowly. "I won't put a penny down on the Soldier. I'll be satisfied just to have him get a win over you. How's that?"

"That's swell, Nicky," the Kid answered. "That's a swell way to look at it, and I'll try to make the Soldier look good."

The Kid shook hands with Nicky and then went into the house; and I told Nicky I would walk out to the car with him. When I was sure the Kid wasn't going to come back out, I said: "Look, Nicky, about that betting. I know how the Kid feels, but I'm different. I got a couple hundred saved up and I want to buy into my brother's business. When you put your dough down, how about putting mine with it?"

Nicky kind of grinned. He wouldn't look at me; he seemed a little embarrassed.

"Eddie," he answered, "I'm superstitious. I ain't betting a penny against the Kid. But if you want me to, I'll get that two hundred down for you." He looked back at the house. "Heck, he's a square old guy, ain't he?"

NEITHER the Kid nor I went to New York until the day of the fight, and then we took a late train. The Kid was sick; anybody with half an eye for fighting shape could see that. And I was just about as sick as he was, watching him as I had that past week, eating his heart out because he was going in there for the last time—and with the fight fixed. He couldn't forget that business with Nicky; and he couldn't shake off that fear that the Soldier might come in cocky just because he knew he was slated to win. I don't think he had slept a night since I had invited Nicky out to the house.

I tried to talk to him just before we left our dressing room. I tried to get him to promise that he would take his dive early. I didn't say I was afraid of his eyes—I couldn't do that—but I kept telling him that there wasn't any use in killing himself just to give the fans a good show.

"It ain't me I'm worried about, Eddie," he told me. "It's the Soldier. I don't want him in there with half his stuff left in the corner just because he knows he's going to win."

The Soldier was already in the ring when we went out, and the crowd was still rumbling away down deep. I got the Kid into his gloves and gave him a little water to drink, then the referee called him out to the center of the ring for instructions. When he came back I had just time enough to give him a slap on the back before the whistle to clear the ring blew.

The way the boys went out of their corners with the bell, nobody in the world would have known that that fight was fixed. The Soldier was high and light, and it was pretty to see the

way the Kid rolled under his left and hooked short and sharp with both hands to the body.

The Kid didn't know how to pull a punch, and he must have shook the Soldier pretty hard. Anyway, I saw him shake his head and his lips moved as if he said something. Then he came back in behind a left and a right that set the Kid on his heels.

It was a swell minute of action, and the fans were up in their seats. Then when the Kid brushed aside a left, picked a right out of the air and dropped his own left on the Soldier's ear with a smack you could hear all over the house, the place went crazy. And when the Soldier worked out in the open for a second, shaking his head and moving his lips like he was talking, I thought the yell that went up would lift the roof. The Kid had all the better of the exchange so far, and the Soldier was showing it. A boy hardly ever talks to himself when he's winning.

THEN the Soldier came in again, and I felt a chill run down my back. There was only one way for him to fight the Kid and make it look good, and that was for him to stay outside and box. He didn't know half enough to make it an inside fight. The Kid had forgotten more than the Soldier would ever know about that kind of battling. He had been doing it for fifteen years.

The Kid tied the Soldier up and the referee started in to break them; but the Kid spun the Soldier half around and banged him with a left while he was still off balance. He did it so easy that a laugh went up, and even from where I was sitting I could see the Soldier losing his head. I looked over in his corner and saw Nicky yelling at him, and I knew he was telling him to stay outside and box.

The Kid tried to step around to keep the Soldier off. There wasn't anybody in the division that he couldn't stop if they crowded him; and that was just what the Soldier was doing. The Kid might miss a few purposely, but he couldn't pull his punches. He wasn't made that way.

The Soldier was crazy mad, and he crashed in, his hands high, leading for the head, and the Kid bowed in and banged his right hand up under the heart. He was a sweetheart with that right hand, and the Soldier had still been coming in. He sat down hard, and the way he surged up without a count I knew the Kid was going to have his hands full to keep from hurting him and yet making it look real. I was wet with sweat when the bell rang.

The Kid came back to his corner, his face white.

"I can't lay down, Eddie," he told me. "Everybody in the house would know it if I took a fall with a guy crowding me. I been missing them out there on purpose; he's lost his head, and I could have stopped him half a dozen times."

"You'll have to do the thinking for both of you, Kid," I answered.

The Kid shook his head doggedly. "I told Nicky that the Soldier would have to look good," he said. "The Soldier thought he was coming in here and push me over—and he's leaving openings an amateur could hit."

I knew right then what was going to happen. I knew that if the Soldier started rushing the Kid again, that deal with Nicky was off—and unless the Kid's eyes went bad the seconds were likely to carry Nicky's man out feet first. And, knowing how bad the

Kid needed that five thousand, I dreaded that bell.

But I went crazy with the rest of them when the Soldier charged out of his corner. His jaw was set and you could see his only thought was to get toe-to-toe with the Kid and slug it out. Over his shoulder I saw Nicky screaming at him; then I saw the Kid, his head away down between his shoulders, slide under the Soldier's left and tie him up. I learned later that he told the Soldier then that the fight was going to be on the level; but all I saw was the Soldier's mouth work as he shot something back—then he was outside sticking with a long left hand and shifting to get away from the Kid's right.

The Kid had grown as cool in that instant as if he were going through an ordinary workout.

IT was the prettiest fight I've ever seen, then, for the next couple of minutes. I guessed that the Kid had warned him what to expect, but somehow I didn't care. I forgot all about money; and from the way the Kid was w o r k i n g, you could see the only thought in his head was fighting.

The Soldier was fast, and he didn't give the Kid much chance to get in close. He stayed as far away as those long arms of his would let him and started jabbing, jabbing, jabbing, and crashing his right across in the prettiest one-two I've ever seen. But the Kid kept boring in.

They fought all over that ring, the Soldier sticking and stepping, the Kid crowding after him and ripping those short h o o k s into the body. They crashed together in our corner, and I tried to yell. Any one of those punches the Kid was stopping out there could leave him blind, but I was up in my chair with the rest of the house. Both of us seemed to have forgotten that day over there in Jersey.

They were toe-to-toe, and the Kid drove a pair of lefts to the body, then hooked high and hard to the head. I saw the Soldier's eyes go stary for just a second, then he was outside and jumped a left into the Kid's face and knocked him through the ropes with the longest right cross I've ever seen.

The Soldier stepped back in just as the bell sounded, but he was so crazy he didn't pay any attention to it. The Kid was half crouched in front of him, and he didn't even put up his hands to stop the s t r a i g h t right the Soldier slammed up against his head.

The referee jumped at him with a yell, and I was in there myself, then. I had to lead the Kid back to his corner.

I reckon I nearly blew the top of his head off with the smelling salts, for he cleared up, some; but he lay with his head back on the ropes, his eyes closed, and I knew he was hurt bad.

"I don't think you ought to go back, Kid," I told him. "There ain't no use killing yourself just to give these bums a good show."

He kind of shook his head, like he was hurt, somewhere.

"I ain't never missed a bell yet, Eddie," he said. "And he can't do much now."

That was all I could get out of him, and when the bell sounded I hoped it was the last one I would ever hear.

The Soldier jumped across the ring almost before I had swung the stool out between the ropes; and when I saw the Kid turn I made a dive for the platform. But I was too late; before I could make it the Soldier had started.

The Kid wasn't even looking at him. His eyes were wide open—he looked like he was straining them open—but I knew he couldn't even see his own gloves. The Soldier had blinded him there after the bell in the second round, and I had let him go back, sightless.

They were fast, and the left the Soldier whirled up against the Kid's head knocked him back into the ropes; and when he came off on the rebound the Soldier buried his right to the wrist in the Kid's stomach.

He fell back into the ropes, then sat down, slow. His face was twisted and he reached up and tried to pull himself to his knees. He wasn't looking at anything; just sitting there, his legs paralyzed, straining until the sweat poured off his face, trying to pull himsef to his feet.

The referee didn't even b o t h e r to count. He just motioned to me to come on in.

EXCEPT for his eyes, the Kid came round pretty quick; but then he sort of broke down. He hadn't got any younger that night, and if he had been kind of hoping against hope that he might be able to go on, he knew now that he was through. To see him lying there on the rubbing table in our dressing room, his hands over his eyes, got me. I was glad I was able to get him over to the hotel before Nicky or the Soldier showed up. I think I would have taken a poke at the Soldier myself.

By the time we got a cab the Kid's eyes had begun to come back—like that last time—but I didn't say anything about Nicky. I was going to let him settle that himself.

The Kid had got his clothes off and was lying across the bed when the house phone rang. We both knew who it was, and as I went over to answer it he said:

"Tell him to come on up, Eddie. We might as well get it over with."

When I opened the door Nicky was standing there, alone. He just nodded to me as he walked in. I hadn't turned on the lights, on account of the Kid's eyes, and I saw him look at me kind of puzzled. He didn't go over by the bed where the Kid lay, but stood for a moment in the middle of the floor, fishing in his pocket for a cigarette. He looked like he wanted to say something, and didn't know how to go about it.

"Kid," he finally got out, "the Soldier's been telling me a funny story, and I don't know what to make of it."

I closed the door, shutting off the light from the hall, and stood with my back to it. I could just make out the Kid as he raised himself on one elbow, covering his eyes with his hand.

"I reckon he has, Nicky," the Kid answered slowly. "What about it?"

Nicky wasted a couple of matches trying to light his cigarette before he spoke.

"He's saying, Kid, that you double-crossed him in there to-night. I know you stung him pretty hard a few times, but— Heck, Kid, I know you ain't that kind. I just want the straight of it, that's all."

The Kid took a long time before he answered that, and when he did speak his voice sounded tired. I reckon it took a lot of courage to do what he did.

"Nicky," he said, "I don't like that word, but I don't mind telling you that I put that fight on the level. I told you the Soldier would have to make it look good—but he came in there fighting my kind of fight. I couldn't lay down."

I had heard enough of that; I was pretty full, anyway; and I stuck my oar in.

"Yes," I said, "and if the Soldier hadn't blinded the Kid there after the bell in the second round, the Kid might have flattened him. We could protest that fight, Nicky, and you know it." I shut up when the Kid rolled his feet over the edge of the bed and sat up.

"Forget it, Eddie," he told me. "It's all over—and my eyes ain't no concern of Nicky's. What's done is done, and there's the end of it."

WHEN the Kid said that about his eyes, I saw Nicky half turn to me; then, before I could stop him, he had stepped over and switched on the lights.

For a moment he stood there with a look on his face hard to describe.

"Kid," he said, and I thought his voice sounded a little funny, "I'm glad you put me right on this. I know you ain't the kind to double-cross a guy, and I'm glad you're not kicking on the decision. The Soldier's young—"

"He's got the stuff, Nicky," the Kid cut in. "He's young and he'll go some place. Just go ahead and forget it."

Nicky was square, and I reckon he had the whole lay by that time. He didn't hesitate a second; he stuck his hand into his inside pocket and half pulled out a packet of some kind.

"Kid," he said, "I appreciate what you're doing for me. I saw the Soldier foul you there—and it's worth that five thousand just not to have you squawk. I got it all right here."

But Nicky didn't know the Kid yet. I believe he was grinning as he shook his head.

"That's not the reason I'm not kicking, Nicky," he answered. "I'm through, and it won't do me any good to turn your apple cart over. I started on the level, and that's the way I finished. You don't owe me a cent!"

There's something about a guy like the Kid that you can't argue with. No matter how wrong you think they are, you just can't talk. And that's what both Nicky and I felt. He got up without a word.

I walked down the hall to the elevator with him, neither of us trying to talk.

"About that two hundred of mine, Nicky. If you got it down, you might as well let me have it now," I said.

For just a second he didn't seem to hear me, an absent look on his face. Then he kind of waked up with a start, and when he looked at me I saw he was beginning to grin.

"It's old age, Eddie," he said to me—and winked! The elevator stopped for him just then, and as he stepped into the car he pulled a heavy manila envelope out of his pocket. "I got your dough down all right—and I'll bet it's the best bet you'll ever make. You ought to give me a regular job, guy!"

I didn't get what he was driving at; just looked at him as the door shut. As I turned away I heard him laugh.

I was back at our room before it occurred to me to look at that packet he had put in my hand; and when I did I suddenly understood.

In that envelope there was five thousand dollars in twenty-dollar bills; and as I opened the door, where the Kid was sitting with his hands covering his eyes, there suddenly flashed on my mind a picture of that Jersey farm.

"A training camp ought to be a good business," the Kid had agreed that night out under the apple tree.

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

ARTHUR K. AKERS

Author of "Signals Astray," etc.

"A LITERARY accident" is perhaps the best autobiographical explanation I can offer—more or less growing out of an incurable itch to spoil white paper on sight. From early school days in Kentucky, when I was presented with a dollar-and-a-half printing press and immediately founded a weekly paper, I have been doing that.

Later, as a telegrapher working on practically every newspaper in New York, I witnessed there, unawed and from a distance, the early struggles of Bud Fisher, George McManus, Irvin S. Cobb, and other future stars. At the time, as a side line to making a living and attending college for a year, I was appearing with my first short stories in the old *McClure's*, *Pearson's*, and the like. Once, in a week when the competition was singularly weak, the old New York *Telegram* even presented me with a prize-check of staggering size (two figures!) for the best short story in that week's prize contest. And once again, when yet too young—and dumb—to appreciate it, I made the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Then came a fictionless gap of some ten years before economic necessity suggested that fiction might again be a prop to facts, I by that time having become that ponderous personage known as a publicity manager. Two stories—one with white characters, the other with colored—found surprisingly sudden sale with one of the country's big monthlies. Since then, the colored brethren of my typewriter have proved the more popular, and have more or less kept me busy—and eating!

Some two years ago, with the fiction income of the evenings beginning to exceed that from the advertising activities of the daylight hours, it was wisely and tactfully brought home to me by the president of the corporation whose advertising I was directing that it was time for me to become either fish or fowl. So I became a full-fledged fiction writer, with a part-time connection with a Birmingham advertising agency on the side.

The material for my darky stories is drawn from a lifetime alongside them in Kentucky, Virginia, and Alabama. I now live in Birmingham. I do not pretend to be either a student or an authority. But it has seemed to me that the small-town and rural Southern Negro, either on his home grounds or when drawn into the industrial fabric of our cities, had a capacity for entertaining readers everywhere almost as great as the talent he had for amusing himself. So I have drawn one frequently-found type of him for the carefree, luckless, improvident, lovable character that he has so often seemed to me.

At one time and another I have been telegraph operator, manager, salesman, advertising man, and writer. No form of exertion appeals to me, which bans golf and bridge. But I have a colored gentleman hired to take my exercise for me! And it is he—while I loaf over a typewriter all day—who mows, clips, rakes, repairs, and otherwise does the kind of hard labor around my suburban place which so often falls to the lot of a married man.

The Man Who Left No Trace

"And now tell the captain what you were doing at the morgue"

Matt Riordan Uncovers an Angle That Captain Brady Didn't See in the Strange Case of the Two Eggs

By Victor Maxwell

A Novelette

CHAPTER I

The Man in Gray

"HERE it is, cap'n." The inspector read the wire over the phone to Captain Brady. "'Man traveling as George E. Norcross, wears light gray suit, spats, suède shoes, gray gloves and gray fedora, carries gray woolen ulster, will reach your city on Inter-oceanic Express this morning. Arrest this man and hold for me. Roland P. Miles, Sheriff.'"

"Well," exploded Brady over the line, "you an' Reade jump down to the depot an' grab that guy."

Brady, half an hour later, was interrupted again by the jingle of his phone. He reached for his instrument.

"Brady speaking," he said crisply.

"Cap'n, we're at the depot. That guy is dead."

And that report began the startling events that turned a police department inside out. Read this baffling, thrilling story in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, formerly FLYNN'S (May 2).

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

"WHAT a mess you are making out of the ARGOSY!" says this critic:

Yale, Mich.

Just writing a few lines to tell you what a mess you are making out of the ARGOSY. The March 7 issue is the worst. Since January 10 your magazine was receding from the high spots. Well, it's enough when it comes to that, but even in these latter issues I have found something to amuse myself with.

Now for favorites. Paul Stahr, illustrator greatest, February 7 illustration for "Boots and Saddles." Fred MacIsaac, author, "Balata" and "The Hothouse World" are best. Bedford-Jones, author, best "Cyrano," Murray Leinster's Darkness stories, John H. Thompson's *Bill* and *Jim* stories, and last, but not least, *Peter the Brazen.*

Of course there are others, but it's too tiresome to name them all.

LEONARD MIKULSKI.

"BARONS of the Border" gets some applause:

Tremonton, Utah.

I have read every type of fiction magazine printed and I think ARGOSY has them all beat. The first installment of "Barons of the Border" is great; I hope the next three will be as good. As to the argument in "Argonotes" I think your impossible stories are all right, and I am enjoying "The Hothouse World" a lot.

Let's have some more *Jimmie Cordie* stories.

CLIFTON TOLMAN.

A CHEER for "The Hothouse World":

San Francisco, Cal.

In the present issue of March 21 every story, in my opinion, is perfect. "The Hothouse World," by Fred MacIsaac, is one of the best of its type I have ever read. Any of Mr. MacIsaac's stories are welcome, as are the *Peter the Brazen* by Loring Brent and *Gillian Hazeltine* stories by Worts.

Although I am a lover of impossible stories and also of mysteries, two of the biggest pieces of junk I ever saw were "The Snake Mother," by A. Merritt, and "The Green Goddess," by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith.

A year or so ago you printed some stories by Murray Leinster, I believe. They were called "The Darkness Stories." I enjoyed them immensely and would like to see more of them. Thompson's *Bill* and *Jim* tales are good. R. M. Farley's stories are O. K.

You can see who my favorite authors are, I guess. As a writer of Westerns Charles Alden Seltzer can't be beat.

R. PARSELL.

BUT it "doesn't compare with 'Balata'":

Fremont, Mich.

Grinstead comes first on my list, next W. Wirt, then Mason, Roscoe, Adams, Rouse, Perry and MacIsaac. I also like the *Semi Dual* stories. I am reading "The Hothouse World," which is a good story, but does not compare with "Balata."

I did not like "The Snake Mother," but many other readers did and everybody is entitled to their own likes and dislikes.

I have not named half of the good authors; two, for example, Worts and Mundy.

PHIL MCANDREW.

HERE'S a reader who's going to get sequels to both his favorites pretty soon:

Parkersburg, W. Va.

Let's have some more of those *John Solomon* stories by H. Bedford-Jones; the last one was great. Ray Cummings is my favorite author. His "Tama of the Light Country" was one of the best I have read for a long time. I have been reading the ARGOSY for a year and a half and expect to read it many more years if it keeps as good as it has been.

WILLARD WHITE.

FUNNY how our readers get the same ideas for future stories that we do!

Elkhart Lake, Wis.

The first time I picked up an ARGOSY was in August at a friend's place. I have been a steady reader ever since. I never knew a magazine as good as yours could be published for ten cents a copy.

All your stories were excellent, except "The Elephant Sahib" and "The Snake Mother." There are three stories that are exceptionally good. They are "The Bell of the Lutine," "Bonds of the Northland," and "The Renegade Caid."

Couldn't you get Jack Allman to write a serial concerning divers and salvage? I think every one enjoys a story such as his "Bell of the Lutine."

MELVIN WEBER.

GRATEFUL for the broad knowledge ARGOSY gives:

Decorah, Iowa.

When I was a "kid" I used to catch h—— from the folks for reading the magazine; in fact, I still catch it from my wife for reading it—she can't wait until I'm through with it.

There is one thing I have always been more grateful for from ARGOSY than anything else, and that is the broad knowledge that it has given me: the *Montmartre, Jebel Druse, Fleet Street, Khyber Pass,* the *Bund,* etc., are not merely names to me, they are familiar to me; and when I say familiar I mean *familiar.* I have not seen these places in person, but as an Argonaut upon the good ship ARGOSY.

It seems hardly necessary to mention that my favorite stories are those of adventure. And when it comes to mentioning favorite authors, why—I like them all, every one of them. Though I will say that *Jimmie Cordie* and his glorious ruffians have few peers. But my favorite author just now is Erle Stanley Gardner. I think he will rise high—if he stays out of the dirt, meaning racketeer stories. Still he is good.

K. HELLAND.

"KILL W. Wirt!"

Cleveland, Ohio.

Being an old-time reader of ARGOSY, I think it no more then right that I add my comments to the many that I have read in "Argonotes." I enjoy your stories very much; in fact, I love 'em.

But for Pete's sake kill W. Wirt off before he kills everybody in China. I like stories about the Orient—when they are not written by W. Wirt.

Yours for more pleasant reading,

WM. K. MILLS.

A SOUTHERNER'S opinion of ARGOSY:

Tallahassee, Fla.

I have read ARGOSY since around the first issue, that is, since it was a monthly magazine, then a semi-monthly, then the weekly, and honestly believe that it is the best all-round magazine that has ever been published. The different writers and the different stories every week make it the best.

I am not so particular as some of the writers appear to be as to their favorite authors, though, as I have had some experience in the West I am partial to Western stories and I like Max Brand, Charles Alden Seltzer, and numerous others.

John Carter exploring in the bowels of the earth was extra fine.

When a businessman goes home after a hard day's work and sits himself down before the fire in an easy chair with his pipe, then the next thing he wants is a copy of the ARGOSY, then contentment gradually comes to him and he finds that life is glorious.

JOHN Z. REARDON,
Commander Sons of Confederate Veterans.

MORE Ralph Milne Farley? Surely—just stick around. And there's a fantastic Garret Smith novelette coming soon:

Aloha, Ore.

I appreciate your magazine, and would like you to have a few more stories in the magazine such as "Caves of Ocean," by Farley, or perhaps one like "When Death Went Blind," by Garret Smith.

I think you have a good magazine and hope you will keep up the good work.

ELLIS JERSEY.

"THE modern Edgar Allan Poe":

Youngstown, Ohio.

"Yellow Soap" was the first ARGOSY or *All-Story* I picked up, and I've been picking 'em up ever since. I get a large chuckle out of some of the boys and girls saying they don't like **this** writer or that writer. I think they're all good or they would never be writing for your splendid book. Let's have more of Worts, MacIsaac, Wirt, and dear old Teddy Roscoe. Roscoe, in my mind, is the modern Edgar Allan Poe—and that's saying a lot. Keep up the good work and writers.

FRANK E. WRIGHT.

SOME recent favorites:

Chicago, Ill.

I have inclosed ten choice coupons for an illustration for framing. Some of the best stories are: "He's My Meat!" "Murder Extra!" "The Blade of Don Beltram." The best serial is "Flames of Feud" so far. The authors I like are W. Wirt, Pierce, Worts, Fred MacIsaac. How about another *Jimmie Cordie* story? I will be waiting for it.

EDMUND STYGAR.

"THE Last Battle" gets a big hand:

St. Albans, N. Y.

I have just completed Theodore Roscoe's novelette, "The Last Battle," and I wish to inform

you that it lived up to the promise which its author's name inspired.

There are stories in the ARGOSY which I do not care for, but I will refrain from commenting as I see by the "Argonotes" that these stories find favor with some of your readers.

I am sure, however, that Mr. Roscoe's stories are enjoyed by every one, so please give us this author's entire output.

JAY KRAUS.

Denver, Col.

I simply must tell you what a wonderful edition the March 7 ARGOSY is. "The Last Battle," by Theodore Roscoe, is keen, although I had to read the last part twice. Something got into my eyes and a lump in my throat nearly choked me when the lieutenant started to tell his pitiful story. Boy, that Roscoe can sure pull a fellow's heart out by the roots.

Believe it or not I'm still all chokey. And "Murder Extra!"—there is another. Would like more and more of Raoul Whitfield's stories. If "The Tiger of Pnom Kha" is as good all through as the first installment it will be a winner. Also please have Messrs. Giesy and Smith give us more stories. And if by any chance "The Snake Mother" awakens, please, oh, *please*, let us know about it at once. I fell in love with her at first sight, coils and all.

LA VERN MASSIE.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get an ARGOSY drawing (not the cover painting) for framing.

This coupon not good after July 18.

4-25

Looking Ahead!

Circus Revenge

An old ARGOSY favorite returns with a smashing novelette of crime and treachery and heroism under the Big Top and on the sawdust Midway

By JOHN WILSTACH

Suicide, Inc.

Deaths and kidnapings stirred San Francisco to the core—and three loyal musketeers of the newspaper world found the key to the secret

By RICHARD A. MARTINSEN

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF MAY 2nd

NEW BIG MONEY FIELD

FOR WIDE AWAKE MEN!

SELLING NEW SPECIALTY to BUSINESS and PROFESSIONAL MEN

Four $15 Sales Daily Pay $280 Weekly

When green men, with just average ability, make $200 to $400 a week, and up, our proposition *must* be worth investigating. We train you, giving you successful methods of one of the fastest sales forces in the country. If you are looking for a man-size business, free from worries of other overcrowded lines of work, write for full information.

WORLD'S LARGEST

Firms Among Our Customers: Sears, Roebuck, Larkin Company, Loftis Bros. and Company, LaSalle Extension University, National Radio, Dodd, Mead and Co., Collier's, National Brake Service, Inc., Advance-Rumely Thresher Co., and scores of others nationally known are among our customers. It's a life saver for the smallest merchant who needs it even more than the big firm and he buys quick. 2 sizes—one costs $2.50—sells $7.50; your profit $5. and more, as your sales increase. Other size costs $5—sells $15—your profit $10 and more—every salesman working regularly makes close to $12 profit per sale on this size! Think of that!

GUARANTEED

To Bring Customer 10 Times Its Cost in Actual Cash

Customer gets signed certificate of guarantee protecting him, backed by a national organization. Very few business men are so foolish as to turn down a proposition guaranteed to pay ten for one, with proof from leading concerns of the world that it does pay.

Here's What Our Men Make

$400 Weekly!

Between Sept. 6th and Sept. 20th—just two weeks—E. D. Ferrell, of Atlanta, Ga., cleaned up $802.50 on his first orders. His sales were all made in three small Georgia towns. His customers are reordering, and he is going strong. His sales winning plan is now added to our sure-fire sales manual. Tells where, how and who to sell.

EDDIE FOYER
$4920 in 3 Months

California rings the bell again! Eddie Foyer starts out April 1st and by July 1st he has 410 $15 sales to his credit. Multiply 410 by $12 profit and you've got something to show you the money in this proposition.

ARTHUR FRIEDMAN
$105 Profit on 1 Sub-Agent Sale

Besides his own profits—$1,260.00 clear in 23 days—Friedman, Wisconsin, gets a $105 bonus on a single sale made by one of his sub-agents. It's all in selling the right thing, boys!

$165 First Day!

Made by E. H. Walker—Georgia—Made one sale to a Columbus, Georgia, organization, and that sale got him four more sales within a few hours. Met another salesman, and the other salesman bought him out! That's the kind of proposition this is.

Leaves 14 Year Job After Making $120 in Spare Time 1st 5 Days

Here's Sidney Rosenthal, Illinois—This old-timer wired an order for 100 of the $15 size 8 days after getting our sample. He had cleaned up $120 as a sideline in spare time and wrote: "This is the best and easiest proposition I have ever become associated with. Will specialize on $15 size."

$1500 A Month
clear for M. L. Tardy, California.

$6000 First Year
for A. R. Almond, South Carolina. They make good everywhere.

$60 Per Day
for W. E. Vaughn, North Carolina

Write for Other Salesmen's Reports

We can send them as fast as you can read 'em. We've got plenty! See for yourself. Mail the coupon for further details.

A handsome, impressive portfolio that contains letters from the world's most famous concerns. Every type of business and profession represented. You have immediate positive proof of success. They can't say—"it doesn't fit my business." Nails 'em right then and there. Sells them on sight.

BE SURE TO READ THIS

Remember, this is no ordinary proposition. You deal with a company that doesn't split pennies, headed by a man who spent twenty years on the road. A company with a record you can be proud of as our representative. Get the facts—see with your own eyes what you can make in this business. Mail the coupon for full information.

SURETY Company's BOND Protects Customer

Your customer is entitled to the service of a national organization bonded by a Surety Company with assets running into the millions. He CAN'T lose. You are able to show positive safety. This means quick sales and big turn-over for you.

Seeing Is Believing . . . Mail Coupon for Proof

This is a business with a future to it. Enormous repeat business. Tremendous profits from sub-agents—your sub-agents have more margin than total profit on 99 out of 100 other specialties. You get profit on all mail order business from your territory. Every customer is a prospect for two or three times the initial amount on your second call. Every customer recommends others to you. If you get ready to quit, you have an established route that can be sold like any other business. An opportunity to make $5,000 to $10,000 a year is worth while. Just a limited number of openings. Hurry, boys—they won't be left long now!

F. E. ARMSTRONG, *Pres.*, Dept. 4033-D, Mobile, Ala.

SEND ME FULL INFORMATION. MR. ARMSTRONG

F. E. Armstrong, Pres., Dept. 4033-D, Mobile, Ala.
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

Name .....

Street or Route .....

Box No. .....

City ..... State .....