

JULY 29

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JAMES F. DWYER

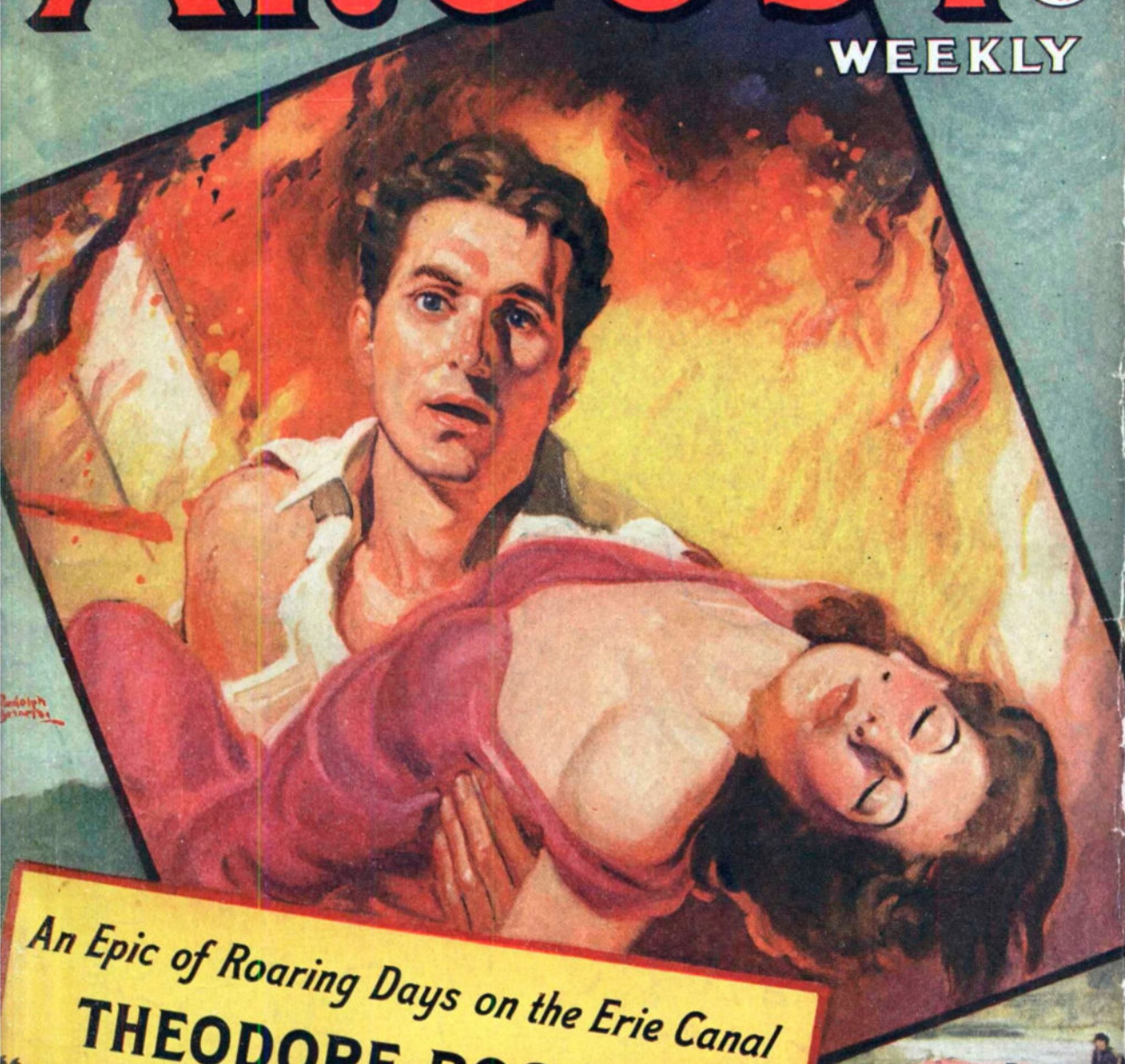
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Cover by Rudolph Belarski

Illustrating *Mother Damnation*

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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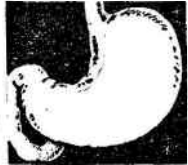
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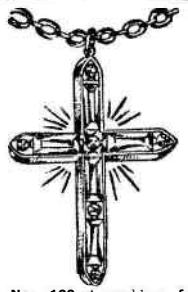
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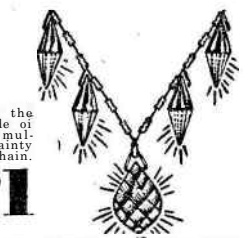
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30x4.75-32	9.25	30x4 3/4	9.85
30x4.00-32	9.35	30x4 1/2	9.95
30x4.25-33	9.45	30x4 3/8	10.05
30x4.50-33	9.55	30x4 1/2	10.15
30x4.75-33	9.65	30x4 3/4	10.25
30x4.00-33	9.75	30x4 1/2	10.35
30x4.25-34	9.85	30x4 3/8	10.45
30x4.50-34	9.95	30x4 1/2	10.55
30x4.75-34	10.05	30x4 3/4	10.65
30x4.00-34	10.15	30x4 1/2	10.75
30x4.25-35	10.25	30x4 3/8	10.85
30x4.50-35	10.35	30x4 1/2	10.95
30x4.75-35	10.45	30x4 3/4	11.05
30x4.00-35	10.55	30x4 1/2	11.15
30x4.25-36	10.65	30x4 3/8	11.25
30x4.50-36	10.75	30x4 1/2	11.35
30x4.75-36	10.85	30x4 3/4	11.45
30x4.00-36	10.95	30x4 1/2	11.55
30x4.25-37	11.05	30x4 3/8	11.65
30x4.50-37	11.15	30x4 1/2	11.75
30x4.75-37	11.25	30x4 3/4	11.85
30x4.00-37	11.35	30x4 1/2	11.95
30x4.25-38	11.45	30x4 3/8	12.05
30x4.50-38	11.55	30x4 1/2	12.15
30x4.75-38	11.65	30x4 3/4	12.25
30x4.00-38	11.75	30x4 1/2	12.35
30x4.25-39	11.85	30x4 3/8	12.45
30x4.50-39	11.95	30x4 1/2	12.55
30x4.75-39	12.05	30x4 3/4	12.65
30x4.00-39	12.15	30x4 1/2	12.75
30x4.25-40	12.25	30x4 3/8	12.85
30x4.50-40	12.35	30x4 1/2	12.95
30x4.75-40	12.45	30x4 3/4	13.05
30x4.00-40	12.55	30x4 1/2	13.15
30x4.25-41	12.65	30x4 3/8	13.25
30x4.50-41	12.75	30x4 1/2	13.35
30x4.75-41	12.85	30x4 3/4	13.45
30x4.00-41	12.95	30x4 1/2	13.55
30x4.25-42	13.05	30x4 3/8	13.65
30x4.50-42	13.15	30x4 1/2	13.75
30x4.75-42	13.25	30x4 3/4	13.85
30x4.00-42	13.35	30x4 1/2	13.95
30x4.25-43	13.45	30x4 3/8	14.05
30x4.50-43	13.55	30x4 1/2	14.15
30x4.75-43	13.65	30x4 3/4	14.25
30x4.00-43	13.75	30x4 1/2	14.35
30x4.25-44	13.85	30x4 3/8	14.45
30x4.50-44	13.95	30x4 1/2	14.55
30x4.75-44	14.05	30x4 3/4	14.65
30x4.00-44	14.15	30x4 1/2	14.75
30x4.25-45	14.25	30x4 3/8	14.85
30x4.50-45	14.35	30x4 1/2	14.95
30x4.75-45	14.45	30x4 3/4	15.05
30x4.00-45	14.55	30x4 1/2	15.15
30x4.25-46	14.65	30x4 3/8	15.25
30x4.50-46	14.75	30x4 1/2	15.35
30x4.75-46	14.85	30x4 3/4	15.45
30x4.00-46	14.95	30x4 1/2	15.55
30x4.25-47	15.05	30x4 3/8	15.65
30x4.50-47	15.15	30x4 1/2	15.75
30x4.75-47	15.25	30x4 3/4	15.85
30x4.00-47	15.35	30x4 1/2	15.95
30x4.25-48	15.45	30x4 3/8	16.05
30x4.50-48	15.55	30x4 1/2	16.15
30x4.75-48	15.65	30x4 3/4	16.25
30x4.00-48	15.75	30x4 1/2	16.35
30x4.25-49	15.85	30x4 3/8	16.45
30x4.50-49	15.95	30x4 1/2	16.55
30x4.75-49	16.05	30x4 3/4	16.65
30x4.00-49	16.15	30x4 1/2	16.75
30x4.25-50	16.25	30x4 3/8	16.85
30x4.50-50	16.35	30x4 1/2	16.95
30x4.75-50	16.45	30x4 3/4	17.05
30x4.00-50	16.55	30x4 1/2	17.15
30x4.25-51	16.65	30x4 3/8	17.25
30x4.50-51	16.75	30x4 1/2	17.35
30x4.75-51	16.85	30x4 3/4	17.45
30x4.00-51	16.95	30x4 1/2	17.55
30x4.25-52	17.05	30x4 3/8	17.65
30x4.50-52	17.15	30x4 1/2	17.75
30x4.75-52	17.25	30x4 3/4	17.85
30x4.00-52	17.35	30x4 1/2	17.95
30x4.25-53	17.45	30x4 3/8	18.05
30x4.50-53	17.55	30x4 1/2	18.15
30x4.75-53	17.65	30x4 3/4	18.25
30x4.00-53	17.75	30x4 1/2	18.35
30x4.25-54	17.85	30x4 3/8	18.45
30x4.50-54	17.95	30x4 1/2	18.55
30x4.75-54	18.05	30x4 3/4	18.65
30x4.00-54	18.15	30x4 1/2	18.75
30x4.25-55	18.25	30x4 3/8	18.85
30x4.50-55	18.35	30x4 1/2	18.95
30x4.75-55	18.45	30x4 3/4	19.05
30x4.00-55	18.55	30x4 1/2	19.15
30x4.25-56	18.65	30x	

Mother Damnation



BIBLE BILL

By
**THEODORE
ROSCOE**

Author of "Corday and the Seven League Boots",
"Two Hojrs to Go", etc.

In the roaring days of the Erie Canal their feud made the canallers' brawls look like ring-around-the-rosy. For Mother Damnation could toss a man out of her tavern with one hand; and Bible Bill could pull a mule's load, all the while spouting the Scriptures. So when they set to—Sin vs. Righteousness—they wrote a lusty chapter in Erie history

*Oh, She Was the Garbage Man's Daughter,
An' She Lived on the Banks of the Swill—
Old Canaiman's Song*

FOREWORD

IT'S gone now. The little, low bridges are gone. The lifting-bridge at Main Street (they cranked it up by hand). The docks. The widewaters. The marvelous Aqueduct which carried the canal over the river. The wooden locks where the tenders strove mightily to swing the creaking gates. The big, slow canal boats with dainty names. The mules. The towpath. The lazy brown water stretching into peaceful distance.

Today it's partly converted into the Barge Canal; filled up in places; a dry trench across some open field, grass-grown

with crumbled banks. The kids of today swim in whiter waters; for excitement go down to the New York Central bridge and wait for the streamlined Chicago flyer.

But yesterday it ran through our town, and we waited on the bridge for the *Lily H. O'Grady*, the *Elisabeth Price*, the *Belle of Buffalo* to go through. We dropped off the bridge onto a load of lumber and rode down to Lock Sixteen. We made friends with the captains and pelted the canalmen's kids. We narveled at two mules hauling three huge barges down to their gunwales in grain.

Evenings we swam in the canal. Mornings we fished for carp off its sunny banks. Summers we hiked up the towpath and watched boats go through the locks. Win-

A Fine Novel
of America's Yesterday



ters we skated on its frozen bed. We knew it was autumn when the boats stopped coming and the water w^{as} "going down." We were aware of spring-fever when, from some mysterious reservoir beyond the horizons, the water was "coming back in."

The canal was beautiful. The canal was ugly. Lazing across a landscape of open country, it was a peaceful river reflecting clouds and sky. In the cities it could be dark-shadowed; sneaking between walls of factory buildings, sinister. You were liable to see the bridge polios dragging the bottom with grappling hooks. At night, where street lamps shone, something purple and shapeless and awful might float by.

An earliest recollection is a school chum drowned nearby. Pleasantly I recall my father and me taking minnows for fishing in deeper waters; standing on the bridge near our house watching fascinating cargos slide beneath. Terribly I recall visiting a lock one day; hearing heart-tearing screams; rushing over to see a man crushed to death between the side of a great, slow-moving barge and the granite lock-wall.

There was a Swillberg. On the outskirts of our town. And lest good friends and neighbors of that now pleasant residential

district resent this remembrance of its forgotten past (I believe they call it the Pinnacle Hill section now) I hasten to say that this story refers back many years; that I, in turn, lived on a side of the canal ignominiously nicknamed Ashcan Heights (does anyone remember?) from the practise of neighbors ashing the approach to the canal bridge which was slippery »in winter; and that, so to speak, I have taken fictional license and lumped in that long-ago pleasance much color and character found elsewhere between Buffalo and Albany. So with Bible Bill and Mother Damnation, a number of other people rolled into two.

No, "Annie doesn't live there any more," I'm sorry to say; and with the passing of the Erie Canal passed such characters (and I knew them) as Cap'n Eagercheek and Cockeyed Ben Bartlett and that wonderfully christened coal-barge, the *Snob*. Slow? The Erie Canal? It is in the hope of reviving some of its lost color and sailor-swallowing, mule-skinning life that this story is written.

A fascinating and difficult task.

This story is dedicated to a barge hitching-post still standing on a crumbled bank near Swillberg.

T. R.

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN BIBLE BILL

"**T**^r**H**^E**R**^E usec' to be some queer fish I along this canal." Low-Bridge Jed gazed off down the twilight-tinted stretch of leisurely water. "I mean back in th' days when it was called th' Erie Canal, not th' Barge Canal. Back in th' days when you opened th' locks by hand—not all this hydraulic machinery—an' th' boats was pulled by mules along th' towpath, an' there was captains who could remember when it was called Clinton's Ditch. I mean before th' War (I had my leg, back then) when canal-boating was canal-boating; and when I say queer fish, I mean people."

The lock-tender's eyes squinted with memory, and he inspired further recollections with a tremendous chew of Iron Horse, stuffing his brown cheek to the bursting point, then spitting a heady half-pint with easy accuracy through the spill-way rail.

"Huh! Ask someone today about th' Erie Canal, about all they can tell you is, it run from Buffalo to Albany. Thirty years ago it was like Main Street to this here state; reckon most every kind of cargo you could think of floated down it one time or another. Most every kind of person, too. Boats? Well, I was born goin' through th' locks at Weedsport; there was a time when I knew every boat an' th' name of every family an' mule aboard.

"Take Habakuk Eagercheek in th' *Sylvia Watson*, big coal barge outa Tonawanda. Had a wife named Annie—th' canalmen use to wink about her bein' named Eagercheek, till Habakuk got a big bulldog aboard—dog's name was Tiger, an' he had three mules name of Tom, Dick an' Harry.

"Then Cockeyed Ben Bartlett, cap'n of th' *Sweetheart*, rickety old scow from Herkimer, pulled by two cockeyed mules looked just like Ben. There was Old Man

Widdle's *Snob*—sank just a mile below here, Widdle an' his boys all drunk an' drowned. An' th' *Angel P.*, a grain barge outa Buffalo—they said her Cap'n killed his wife on th' Albany haul—let her get her head knocked off, by not callin' 'low-bridge' one dark night goin' under a low one near Pittsford.

"It was a hard life on th' canal back then—racin' to beft the other guy's cargo—fightin' over who'd go first through a locks—cuttin' the other guy's hawser when he's tied up at night—pitch battles among crews arguin' th' right of way when there's a traffic jam in mid-stream. They think the old canal was slow, but there was plenty of life along the old ditch, with men like Big Jim Ritter, an' Slugs Jetersen, an' Three-Fingered Jack O'Brion on th' hauls.

"There wasn't just barges, either. Sometimes there was excursion steamers, house-boats; some of th' barges carried travelers who wasn't burnin' their pants off in a rush to get somewhere like they are today. There was the sahie men and boats every season, and then along would come a scow, you'd think it was Noah's Ark, an' wonder where the devil *it* got in. Back around 1900 there was a showboat come up, stoppin' along th' smaller towns; an' there was Professor Murgatroyd—he done these dancin' girls on my arm—used to come through every spring in a launch like the Admiral of the U. S. Navy, tie up near a kcks an' tattoo th' canalmen goin' through.

"**T**^H**E**^R**E** was plenty of life along th' towpath, too. Inns where th' canalmen could go when th' boats was tied up at night. Docks and railheads where you'd pick up cargo. You got to know everybody in th' villages you'd go by, an' in big towns like Syracuse an' Rochester where th' canal run right through th' city, there was plenty of time to go ashore to let 'em know you were in town.

"Take this place along th' canal they used to call Swillberg, just a few miles from this here locv. It ain't there any more—it's not the Erie Canal any more—but in th' old days of th' canal, that was

quite a place. They called it Swillberg 'count of th' grain barges would sometimes stop an' dump their cargoes along th' bank there. The grain would sprout durin' th' haul, y'see, an' they'c have to dump it, 'count of th' extra weight would bust an old barge's seams. Well, th' farmers around would bring their pigs up to eat th' rotted grain, an' a sort of settlement caterin' to canalmen grew up there. There was a locks nearby; th' boats would tie up an' wait their turn to go through, and it made a good place for a night's stopover, a good place for th' crews to go ashore an' relax.

"It was a kind of lively spot. There was a lot of shanties an' a couple of dozen bars, an' Sundays maybe there'd be as many as twenty boats tied up along the towpath, th' canal hands gettin' liquored up ashore, an' Swillbe g goin' like a hip-hip-hooray. Get th' crew of th' *Sweetheart* an' the *Snob* an' the *Angel P.* all ashore at once, say. Get Slugs Jeterson an' Three-Fingered Jack O'Brion arguin' over one of Slug's mules that broke a leg trippin' on a hawser Jack'd-left strung across th' towpath. You had to have a fist on the canal in those days because the other guy might have a knife. I recall some sweet fights that was settled in Swillberg, an' a couple of 'em settled permanent. Sometimes there was more than water and potato peels in the canal around there, but the police never knew who done it because it was settled th' canalman's way.

"Sure, there was lots of feuds carried on along the canal, and Swillberg harbored a couple of dandies. Slugs Jeterson and Three-Fingered Jack used to meet there specially to fight—one of the worst riots in the history of the state took place on l be canal there—that'? where Bible Bill MacBride had a war with Mother Damnation. Ever hear of Mother Damnation?"

Low-Bridge Jed, the lock-tender, fixed me, his audience, with a squinted eye. I confessed I had never heard of Mother Damnation.

"I'll bet you didn't, mister." His tone implied a scorn for the unenlightenment of the present day. "Or the Erie Canal or

Swillberg or Bible Bill, either. Got the time, perch yourself on that snubbin'-post, there, and I'll tell you a story about the old canal an' those canallers, guaranteed to make your hair curl."

I had the time, and this is how Low-Bridge Jed made good his guarantee. . . .

YES, there was lots of interesting things in the canal between Albany an' Buffalo (Low-Bridge Jed began, after taking on a fresh cargo of cut-plug); I reckon one of the most interesting things that ever got in it [^]feas Mother Damnation. And when I say in it, I mean *in* it. I don't mean the times she fell off the dock, maybe, or got pushed in off the towpath; I mean how she used to go in swimming every evening in a red bathing suit—an advertisement, like, for her place. Yeah, with Mother Damnation takin' a dive, you'd feel the water lift an' backwash half the way to Albany. They used to say the Bank Watch was goin' to fine her for endangerin' the canal dykes—she wasn't what you'd call a minnow. But that sight of her in a bathing suit was nothin' to her burlesque-costume number which she put on nights in her Swillberg Tavern, freshened up by her swim. If there was a whale of bulk to Mother Damnation, she knew how to package it to entertain a crowd.

It was standing room only in Swillberg Tavern when that lady took the floor. You'd see the boats lined up out in front like the carriages at the curb in front of a theater. Only the audience didn't leave Swillberg Tavern in tophats. Likely they'd come out without their shirts.

The place had a bad name and good beer. Dancing, drinks or dice, you could get anything you wanted at Mother Damnation's, but you paid express rates. I left one season's savings in the woman's cash box, and I saw some of those canal captains dice away a string of boats; hand 'em over, too. They didn't hold out an I.O.U. on Mother Damnation. Nobody forgot about Dapper Dan Jones, the cardsharp who tried to take her over th' first week she opened up, an' the next night disap-

peared. Yeah, all bound up in rusty wire, this Dapper Dan Jones floated up from the canal bottom after a three-months' absence, and from a season under water he didn't look so dapper.

No, Mother Damnation wasn't afraid of any bully on the ditch—Big Jim Ritter or Slugs Jeteron or Three-Fingered Jack O'Brion. She was like this dame I once read of in a book—sit on a rock somewhere, an' got all the sailors to stop off an' give her their bank roll, and most of them gave it, cheerful.

But there was one fish in the ditch she couldn't hook. That was Bible Bill Mac-Bride.

I SAID there was some queer fish in the canal, and Bible Bill was one of them. He sure was something different for a canalman.

How? I couldn't explain exactly, except there was somethin' in his cut that just wasn't in the common run. Comparin' most of those boaters to carp and bull-heads, Bill stood out like pickereel.

Handsomest specimen you ever saw. Six feet three, at least; square-shouldered, straight backed, arms muscle-roped like hawsers; strong as an oak. Get him up on a lock to give the tender a hand, and I've seen him open those massive old wooden gates like they was on a fence in somebody's garden. He could bring a loaded barge around a bend in a high wind like he's steering a birch canoe with a paddle.

Recollect comin' out of Utica one time with a haul of scrapiron, a four-boat tow that a tandem of mules couldn't get started. Bible Bill got out there on the towline and had those h[^]rges movin' like sailboats after a couple of heave-ho's.

Yeah, he had a pair of arms and hands, and a fist like a blacksmith's hammer. There was some mighty tough boaters traveling up and down the ditch, but they was careful about arguin' the right of way with Bible Bill. He wasn't any mutt like Slugs Jeteron, though. No brawler like Three-Fingered Jack, nor an ox like Big

Jim Ritter. Eagercheek, Old Man Widdle, cockeyed Ben Bartlett, they was canalmen plain and simple.

Bible Bill wasn't simple and he wasn't plain. It was somethin' about the way he walked. Somethin' about how he carried his chin. Somethin' about his head of black Scotch hair, the way he could look clear through you wth steel-blue eyes. You know how some men just stand apart? Put 'em in a business an' you know some day they'll own the company? Recruit 'em in the army and they'll come out a commissioned officer? Bible Bill stood apart like that.

Of course carallin' was all he knew; and that was one of th' odd things about him. He'd been raised on the Erie. Seemed to me I could remember Ma and Pa Mac-Bride on a barge named the *Jenny* out of Albany—they was burned up in a dock fire when Bill was around twelve, and he'd been on hi; own ever since. Bring up your average kid in a barge cabin and set him adrift at twelve, and he ain't precisely what you't! call a scholar. But Bill wasn't like the other canalmen's kids.

I can remember him when he was hardly out of knee pants, leanin' on the tiller of a tow with a book in his hand. He didn't go swimmin' wth the rest of us boater brats (swim like a beaver, he could, too) or play tag, jumpin' from one passin' string to another, or go out cuttin' hawsers at night like we did. Nights you'd see him down in th' barge cabin, readin'.

Later when the rest of us was at that age where you begin to sport around, Bill, he wouldn't go ashore to the Corinthian Theater in Rochester or join th' gang at the Savoy Burlesque in Syracuse; we'd see him lyin' out on an afterdeck with a lantern and maybe *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Recollect once I kidded him about it—we was both about sixteen, I'd guess—our boats alongside waitin' to clear a lock near Brockport. "Watcha want to read about the old Pilgrims for," I called over. "Whyn't you come around some night an' not be a sissy!" See that scar? That's where my head struck a deck-bitt about

half a second later. I thought a boom off one of the lock-gates had swung over and hit me.

So I didn't get to know Bible Bill very well, back then. There was a kind of wall between him and the rest of us, you might say. Time he was old enough to get a captain's license, he'd somehow raised the money to buy his own boats; there weren't many fellows under thirty who owned their own tow. There wasn't a better canal-man anywhere. Every spring his boats was caulked and painted; he could haul coal all season and keep his decks as white as hospitals; his matched black mules was the envy of every boater on the ditch. You could drop a pie on the floor of his cabin and pick it up and eat it without dyin' of choleramorbus; he kept a checkered cloth on his cab n table, a shelf of books over his bunk, always geraniums in his cabin window.

But can you imagine what those canal boats was named? Tiere were three of them in the tow, and their names were the *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Leviticus*. And his mules was Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter—everything from the Gospel. That's where the Bible Bill nickname came from. He had religion, see?

Not the run of th' mill, church-on-Sunday, cheat-you-on-Monday kind. Hell, no! He had the kind that worked twenty-four hours a day, and overtime no pay. The kind that got the crew out on deck and read a three-hour sermon every Sunday. The kind where he'd pace up and down the bow playin' hymns on his ocarina, and if he liked you he'd call you "Brother." The kind where he hung mottos around his cabin, *God Bless Our Home* and *Thou Shalt Not Steal*, and painted in big black letters on the side of his boats, *Prepare To Meet Your Maker* and *Judgment Day Is Coming*.

HE RAN his business like that, too.

Cheat you? "I'd as soon cut off my right arm as cheat a man," he'd say. Yeah, but look out you don't cheat him, he'd as soon cut off your arm for doing

it. Didn't drink or smoke or curse at his mules, but expects his crew not to, either. You didn't go spittijj' on the deck or takin' a nip of grog on one of Bible Bill's boats. You watched your step, and he had you steppin' lively.

I recall my grandfather on my ma's side tellin' how Stonewall Jackson in the Civil War would suck lemons an' make his men suck them, too; an' how he'd pray the Lord to save his enemies, then go over and cut 'em to mincemeat with a bayonet charge, only stoppin' to demote a lieutenant to corporal for cussin'. Bible Bill was like that.

"Got to watch your lip around that guy's tow," Cap'n Eagercheek told me the day I hired with Bill in Buffalo. "They say he'll throw you in a spillway quick as not, let him hear you cuss around there. You wouldn't be th' first guy end up in th' canal, you get profane. Teetotaler, he is too. Sign up with him, you'll think you're in the Navy."

I needed the job that year, so I figured what the hell. Get stranded in Buffalo an' you'd go to work for an evangelist. Besides I kind of liked Bill, although we wasn't what you'd call old pals. Me with nothin' to my name but a pair of dungarees, and him with a string of boats, I had to take my hat off to him.

We drag out of Buffalo friendly enough and at least them boats is a change. Time we clear Tonawanda, I kind of like it. Of course makin' my bunk up every mornin', an' washin' th' deckhouse, an' cleanin' out th' mule stalls like they was for Mrs. Vanderbilt is kind of oppressive. Every hawser aboard has to be coiled like on one of those pleasure yachts you'd see in Lake Erie, and I can't swear open at Willie, th' mule-boy. But Bill turns out not half bad, to my surprise. I begin to think he's not such a bad buy.

"You're okay, Brother." He gives me an elbow-jab, like to stave in my ribs. "Keep on like you been doin' an' we'll get on fine. Say, remember th' time I gave you one on th' button, you were kiddin' me 'bout *Pilgrim's Progress*? Well, it's

down in my cabin any time you want to read it. You might learn to make a little progress, yourself."

He didn't boss it over me, though, like he might of; and as far as Rochester we got along hunkydory. We was haulin' pig iron an' goin' about four miles an hour, everything nice as you please. We got over th' Rochester Aqueduct fine, squeezin' past Eagercheek's boat like three white cats passin' a lot of rubbish in a drain-pipe; and a few miles farther on, we overtook Cockeyed Ben Bartlett's *Sweetheart*, beat us out of Buffalo by a day.

You'd of thought Bible Bill would be pleased about it, see? But a change had come over him this last stretch of miles, like his face was shadowed over by a cloud. He began to get restless; pace up and down th' cat-walk; he left off playin' his ocarina, stuck the instrument into his pocket. He gave Willie and me what-for, for not dryin' out a towline. Townspeople who knew him would give him a hail while we're passin' under a bridge, and he'd answer short. Standin' on the bow, he was frownin' ahead in space like he had something bothersome on his mind.

Well, we was comin' up to Lock Twenty-eight; all the sudden I figured what it was. His girl was at Lock Twenty-eight, understand? Yeah, she was th' lock-tender's niece, prettiest girl anywhere on th' canal between Buffalo and Albany. Or off it, I'll bet you, with her dark curly hair an' gray-blue eyes an' a little crinkle of freckles on her nose when she smiled. Her name was Lorna Tenny, and she was just as nice as any girl you'd see in a garden swing on a calendar, only nicer.

And if you think there hadn't been some hot competition over Lorna, then you never seen canalmen try to make time with a lock-tender's niece while a boat was goin' through. I'd had romantic notions about her myself until she'd told me she was engaged to marry Bible Bill. I'd heard how Bible Bill had smacked Slugs Jeterson and a score of other tough mugs into the canal about Lorna.

It wasn't open season around Lock

Twenty-eight. What I didn't figure was that it was plenty open season *near* Lock Twenty-eight, because goin' up to th' locks you passed through Swillberg.

CHAPTER II

THE LADY IN RED

ALL right, we round a bend and there's Swillberg ahead, and a half mile farther on, there's Lock Twenty-eight. I said Swillberg was sort of th' Palm Beach for canalmen, and I'd been hoping we'd get there around nightfall so's we'd have to tie up along th' bank and wait for morning to clear the locks. I'd gotten kind of thirsty, a week on th' *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Leviticus*, and I caught a whiff of beer among the o'her whiffs coming out of Swillberg, that reached out and tickled my throat.

Lights was blossoming along the canal bank. There was the pink and pale blue of June twilight on th' water, and I saw from th' boats lined up at th' gates ahead that we'd have to tie up at Swillberg until morning. Then I savv something else. Bible Bill up on th' bow of th' lead boat, signalin' to Willie on the towpath to unhitch th' mules and make fast a line. He waved to me—I'm at th' tiller of th' last boat—to steer her inshore. I was shovin' the old rudder far as she could go, but my mind wasn't on it. My eye was on th' canal bank at Swillberg, and my mind, too, I remember. Know what I siw?

Well, whiffs of beer wasn't the only thing come out of Swillberg in th' dusk. There's a line of shanties and gin-mills and bars along th' canal bank, and this big dance saloon Swillberg Tavern, old ramshackle two-story building, saggin' roofs, sheds in back, plastered over with circus bills, verandah fronting the towpath.

On th' verandah was this woman. Big? Big as the side of a barn! Big shoulders, big arms, big blowzy head of red hair. Maybe she was fifty, maybe she was forty—I wouldn't know—but I tell you she was in a red bathing si it like seven Annette

Kellermans, and she coines swooping down across th' towpath like a giant edition of th' *Police Gazette*—throws off her beach-cape to unveil a Statue of Liberty figure, and soars from the canal bank in a whale of a dive.

So happened I'd ne'er been along at divin' time before, and I near to popped a tonsil at the sight. It was only her second season at Swillberg, see, and although she was already a by-word along th' canal, that divin' act. wasn't famous yet. Splash! We were still under way, loaded down to th' gunwales with tons of pig iron, but I tell you, th' waves from that dive seemed 10 rock th' boats.

That was nothin'! Th' look on Bible Bill's face when he seen that Divin' Venus *did* rock th' boats. Shocked? Like he'd been hit between the eyes. No, but then he got mad! Clear from th' afterdeck of th' third boat I could see it. Up there on th' bow of th' *Genesis* his face was mad as thunder.

Come up right under th' bow, th' woman did, blowin' an' snortin' like a cross between a mermaid and a hippopotamus, somethin' to see in th' canal water, a couple of orange rinds decoratin' her red hair.

"Come on in, fellas!" You could hear her foghorn voice a m le. "Come on in, th' water's fine!"

You could have heard Bible Bill's voice a dozen miles. Far as Schenectady at least. "Out of my way, woman!" Up there on th' bow he roared like an admiral on th' bridge of a battleship. "Out of my way, before I run you down!"

We was plowin' hard abeam to come alongside th' canal bank, three big slow barges loaded to th' waterline. Woman was between Bill's barge an' th' bank, ten feet of water gettin' narrower by th' second. Catch her between th' side of th' canal boat an' th' stonewall embankment an' she'd get crushed like a strawberry pressed into jam. You can't stop a canal boat moving in a drift, and I'd seen a guy get his legs pinched off like that, and I yelled. But the woman wouldn't move an inch.

"Run me down?" she bawled up at Bill,

brushin' hair from her eyes and treading water. "Whaddya mean, ya big loggerhead, run me down?"

"Sink you to th' bottom where you ought to be!" Bill roared at her. "Shameful sight that you are, disgracin' woman-kind and th' Erie Canal in that bathing suit!"

You'd have laughed at that bathin' suit, any young folks today. Come down to th' knees in bloomers, and had sleeves. But it was daring enough, those days back when women went swimming in more clothes than they wear these days to a funeral. Ask your pa how it used to be at th' beach, they'd come out in shoes an' hats an' dresses with sailor collars an' parasols an' black stockings. Didn't swim much, either; stick their big toe in th' water an' give a little shriek—anyhow, they didn't swim in th' canals.

BUT there was that woman in th' canal, an' th' barge creepin' up on her like a glacier of pig iron, an' instead of givin' way, she treaded water. "Shameful, am I? Disgrace, am I? You don't approve my bathin' suit, eh? Not fit to be in th' canal?"

"Nor out of it!" Bible Bill thundered down, "unless you repent your unrighteous ways! Gambling! Drinking! Cheating the canalmen of their hard-earned* wages! You and that den of iniquity ashore!" He pointed at the ramshackle tavern up the bank. "The day is coming, woman, when you will clean up that gin-mill and pray for your own salvation, or be smitten by the judgments of the Lord!"

Say, he began to let out like a fire-an'-brimstone preacher on th' Revival Circuit, and that woman would have to hit the sawdust trail mighty quick, or she was going to be smitten by something just as final as Judgment Day, at that. That big canal barge, th' *Genesis*, was almost on top of her; but she wouldn't repent or get out of th' way, either. Shakin' her fist up at Bill, she let out a blast that'd do credit to a longshoreman at Buffalo. Tell him off?

"Why, you lily-livered, prunes-an'-

prisms scow-swab, who do you think you are, orderin' me off th' Erie Canal? Think it's your ditch, do you? Think you own th' water? Where do you get off, you an' yer floatin' Sunday School, think you're better'n everybody an' turnin' up yer nose at Swillberg! Lemme tell you, mister, you're not no particle better than anybody else along this ditch, nor that high-toned girl of yours waitin' for you at th' lock-gates up there!"

"And you keep her out of it!" Bill roared. "She's a lady, that girl, and the likes of you wouldn't know the name!"

"So I'm not a lady, is that it? Not a lady, says you! Not a lady!"

Take it from me, she wasn't going to be a lady or anything else in about two seconds. There was about three feet of water between th' barge an' the stone embankment, and that woman in between. She wouldn't give an inch, and Bible Bill wouldn't signal Willie to swing off on th' towline an inch, anyhow he couldn't have stopped th' drift if he'd wanted to.

It was a close thing, for a fact. Bill up on th' bow, thundering down like a preacher from a pulpit; and the woman in th' water below, lambasting him back; and the big barge swingin' in. Whoosh! She could match Bill word for word, but there wasn't no argument with the barge.

Just at th' last second she dived. A second later th' barge was grinding its rope buffers along th' bank wall, and anyone in th' water alongside would've been ground up like gruel in a rock crusher.

I stood wiping sweat from my forehead, waiting for the woman to come up on the other side of Bill's barge. Twilight had thickened to almost darkness, and the water was swirling dark. Sure enough, the woman comes up, spluttering and gasping for air; swims off around the bow of the *Genesis*; hauls herself up on the embankment. I could hardly see her in the dark of th' towpath, but I could hear her. Puffing like an Albany harbor tug, she wrapped herself in her cape, an' she wasn't no Little Red Riding Hood as she went up th' path to th' door of her tavern.

"I won't forget that, big boy!" she shook her fist at Bill. "I won't forget that!"

"She won't, either." I went forward on purpose to warn him, after the other boats was snubbed in, th' lines made fast, Willie and th' mules brought aboard. Some of th' other captains, tied in for th' night at Swillberg, had got in arguments with this divin' girl, and later missed a lot of gear off their boats. I thought Bill ought to know.

He'd gone down to his cabin; got all shaved and brushed up to hike up the towpath to Lock Twenty-eight, call on his girl. I waited for him till he came up on deck, thinkin' it'd be a shame if he got conked on th' head an' tipped off th' bank, coming back in th' dark.

"Look out for her, Bill. She's a dead aim with a whisky bottle, I've heard; not even afraid to take a sock at a mug like Slugs Jeterson. It don't do to cross many lines with Mother Damnation!"

His eyes glinted at me through the darkness. "What's that you called her?"

"Mother Damnation," I repeated. "That's what everybody calls her. Mother Damnation!"

Holy mackerel! I guess I didn't say the wrong thing that time! His hand whips out and nails me by the collar, like to pinch out the windpipe in my neck. "Never let me hear you call her that again! You know I don't allow profanity on my boats! You'll regret it, Low-Bridge, if I ever hear you call her that name again!"

OKAY, I took that in the spirit it was given. Not that I wasn't annoyed at havin' a neck-ache after havin' gone to warn him to watch out for his own. But I'd broke one of his pet rules when I might've known better, and I didn't gab back because jobs on the canal were scarce from the Depression they blamed on Cleveland and the railroads. A job was a job.

That night was something different, though. The mules was bedded down in their stalls; Bible Bill's gone up the towpath to see his girl; I drift ashore for a friendly glass to kind of solace my pipes.

Everybody in Swillberg is packed into Mother Damnation's; hardly get through th' door for the smoke, noise an' glare.

Canal hands off the boats tied up outside are three-deep at the bar. There's a jam on th' dance floor and a nickel piano bangin' *She May Have Seen Better Days*. Upstairs there's the scuffle of boots, rattle of dice. Bottles clinking, girls laughin', everybody pushin', shovin', dancin', arguin' at once, you couldn't have cut the air with Lizzie Borden's axe, what with the canalmen in their work shirts, the mule-drivers in their towpath boots, the perfume, gin, tobacco, canal smell an' whiffs of rotted grain off the near-by dumps.

It was lively, though, after a week tied down like a battened hatch. I see Big Jim Ritter and Cockeyed Ben Bartlett at the bar; Old Man Widdle and his wife havin' a pai! of beer. S'ugs Jeterson's voice complained down from the craps game upstairs. At a corner table there's Cap'n Eagercheek surrounded by a bunch of girls who've got their ribbons tied in his whiskers.

There's Professor Murgatroyd tattooing an anchor on a boater's wrist. It's spring when you see those canalers comin' out of their winter hibernation, and they was whoopin' it up that night. Even the two Spillberg cops in their long blue coats an' gray bowler hats was paintin' their noses red at the bar.

And right in the middle of this noisy shebang—big, red heat ed, movin' through the crush like a walkin' lighthouse, with one weather eye on the cash register, was Mother Damnation.

She didn't seem none the worse for her bath experience; I heard her tellin' a group at th' bar about it, laughing. She laughed like she did everything else—big and prominent!—and that night she seemed bigger an' more prominent than ever. She had on a yellow dress slit to the knee, I remember, and green stockings. Her fingers and throat just flashed, what with the glass diamonds she always wore, and around her neck a bangle like a small-sized

chandelier. Top that with a haymow of red hair an' you've got something impressive, and when she laughed there was a couple of gold teeth added to the view.

But I had a hunch that laugh wasn't all good humor; somehow it was a little too loud. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, my old man used to tell me, but, boy, look out when a scorned woman laughs. "That don't mean she's forgot about Bible Bill," I thought. Still, it wasn't no skin off my nose, and pretty soon, with a couple of whiskies under my belt, I forgot about Bible Bill.

The whisky would've burned the hair off a goat, but we had cast-iron plumbing in those days, I guess, and anyone mixing their rye with soda would've been jeered off th' canal. You wasn't supposed to show your liquor, though. Leastwise, not at Mother Damnation's.

I had an example of that that night when Three-Fingered Jack O'Brion drifted in, three sheets in the wind, and took a sock at Slugs Jeterson just for old time's sake in the dice room upstairs. Mother Damnation went up after them, trotting up the stairs with heisted skirts, like a governess or something goin' up to see about all th' noise in th' nursery. Huh! There was two loud bangs on th' floor, and you realized she didn't wear them rings on her knuckles just for decoration^

Down the stairs she came, towing a man in either hand, both out cold as gunny-sacks of ice. Slugs woke up near th' door an' started to scuffle, and she parted his Swedish hair with a handy Old Crow bottle. Then out through th' door and into the night, and a minute later we heard a couple of big splashes.

"**N**OTHIN' like a drink of canal water to sober a man up!" Mother Damnation came back in, dusting her hands. "And that goes for any of th' rest of you boaters, try to start a riot in my place! This is a respectable establishment, see?"—she stood there blowin' indignantly on her knuckles—"an' any more tough stuff, an' I'll clear this dance hall out. Now

that's settled, I'll sing. Just a little number I done with the Tickle-Me-Under-The-Chin girls down at Niblo's Garden in the ole days—"

Well, she pointed to a faded burlesque poster on th' wall behind th' bar—Bevo Langtry, as she was billed in th' days when she weighed nearer a hundred forty than an Albany-loaded barge—an' goin' to the cash register, just like nothing had happened, she took out a yellow ostrich feather. Not that she was anything like the poster with that feather in her hair, but I mean, what with that an' th' chandelier at her throat, an' th' yellow dress an' green stockings, you could see her through th' smoke when she took th' center of th' floor. You could hear her, too. Settling her corsets and clearing her windpipe. Tuning up like a steam calliope.

"Hit th' piana, Joe!"

Joe hits the piana.

"Oh, I was in love with uh say-ler—down by th' Erie Canal;

"Pa wants me to marry a tailor—but I like my say-ler pal.

"For I'm just th' garbage man's daughter

"Who lives near th' banks of th' Swill—

"Sweet is th' perfume oj garbage, they say,

"But they say I'm sweeter still—"

Yeah, that was an old canalman's song, although I don't suppose you'd have heard it in a Boston drawin' room. Anywhere around Swillberg Tavern that night you'd have heard it, though. Maybe Mother Damnation's baritone wasn't rich, but it sure was extravagant, and she was throwin' it out of the windows that night, plain spendthrift. Might be they heard *The Garbage Man's Daughter* in a Boston drawin' room, after ail.

There's at least fifty verses—I don't remember 'em all, and I wouldn't tell 'em to you if I did. Mother Damnation's goin' strong on verse thirty-nine and rounding the bend, not tired a bit, toward verse forty. Then something happens. *Whack!* Like that! Somethin' I won't forget till the day I die.

"Stop!"

That yell from th' doorway, like a bolt from th' black! Bolt from th' black, Bible Bill was standing there. Panting, white-faced, fists clenched at his sides, boots braced wide in th' frame. I tell you, he was glaring at that woman like to strike her dead with his stare. Eyes like Edison lights and the night behind him, he didn't need to yell to smack that barroom silent.

Mother Damnation choked off as though she'd dropped through a hangman's trap, and for a moment, in that room, you could almost hear th' smoke wash around on th' walls.

"Sinful!" Low on that one, Bill's voice began to climb. "Blasphemous and sinful! Fortunately she did not see that costume, disgraceful sight that it is! But are you aware, woman, that clear to Lock Twenty-eight we could hear that impious song?"

He was coming slowly into the room, and Mother Damnation moving slow across the floor to meet him. She had a glare, too. You could almost see the sparks where their glares clashed together in midroom.

"So you don't like my voice?" Mother Damnation started in low key and went up, too. "First it's my bathin' suit, an' now it's my clothes, top of that you don't like my voice! Tell me, mister canalman," coy, at the same time menacing, she reached out, tickled him under th' chin with her ostrich feather, "is there anything about me you do like?"

EVER see a heated stove lid? Never as red as Bible Bill's face. "Not a thing!" he roared, slapping down the feather. "What you wear, what you sing, nor anything about you! Ever since you came here you've been contaminating the canal, ruining the men with your whisky and evil chance-games, stealing their hard-earned money, luring them to dancing and unseemly ways!"

"And who gave you the right to criticize what I'm doin'r Who are you to tell me my ways are unseemly?" Jaw thrust straight into Bible Bill's, Mother Damna-

tion stood with one fist upraised like the Statue of Liberty turred angry. For a second I thought she was going to let him have it, but all of a sudden her manner kind of changed. She brought her fist down, folded her arms, faced him with her head cocked a little o one side, squinting at him as though she's puzzled.

"Say, what kind of a canalman are you, anyway, rani in' in here to sermonize at me like this! No, but whft kind of a man are you, anyway? Ever have a drink of whisky?"

"Woman, I am a Teetotaler!"

"Ever take a chance at the dice or waltz around a little?"

"No, nor indulge in other unrighteous, evil pastimes!"

"Well," Mother Damnation rasped, "if you never took no whisky how do you know it's ruinous like you say? Never rattled th' dice, how d'you know it's steal-in'? Evil.pastime? Dancin's only fun! Say, why don't you wise to yourself, big boy; 'stead of rompin' in here like Aunt Carrie Nation, spoilin' everybody else's good time, come around an' relax. It don't hurt no one to let off a little steam keeps them from blowing up. Trouble with you is, you don't ever ease up a little. Why, I'll bet you've never gone nowhere without that collar an' tie!"

That was another thing about Bible Bill—hauling coal or cattle or scrap iron or fertilizer, no matter the cargo or what kind of weather, you never saw him without his tie and collar. Far back as I could remember him as a kid, there's always white shirts blowing on his laundry-line, Bill in clean collar and black tie. They were choker collars in those days, too; and that night, as a puffaw went up at the woman's sally, Bill looked like he was being throttled in his.

"Sure, Mother Damnation's right!" Big Jim Ritter called out. "Whyn't you get that tackle off your ne(k some time, Bill, an' let your chin down for a change?"

"I'll let your chin down, Ritter!" Bible Bill thundered back. "Right in the gutter where it belongs! As for you," he gave

Mother Damnation, "I'll continue to prefer the Gospel for my advice. Might do you a little good to try it yourself before it's too late. Might still be time for you to mend your ways and clean up this white-chimneyed outpost of hell!"

That referred to the old days when certain unlawful dives along the canal used to paint their chimneys white so's the boaters would know where they could get a sniff of cocaine, maybe, or fence stolen goods. Do you think that description didn't make Mother Damnation mad?

"This is a respectable tavern!" she exploded, ramming her chin close to Bible Bill's. "I run a square game, here; serve drinks at th' right price; an' I'll have you know there ain't no white chimney on top of it! Furthermore, I'll wear, sing or live how I want to, without some psalm-singin' reformer pokin' his nose in, tryin' to run my business! You want to close up gambling, go down and bellow in Canfield's or on Wall Street. You want to preach Prohibition, go preach to General Grant! Anyhow clear outa here with your turned up blue-nose an' pious talk, or in about two seconds I'll forget I'm a lady!"

"If get out, all right," Bible Bill raged, "but before I go, I'll tell you what I came here to say. There's three hawsers missing off my boats out there just now, worth sixty dollars apiece, and if I ever learn you stole 'em, I'll have you jailed for grand larceny, but it isn't that.

"There's a higher Law you're breaking, woman, a higher Law! Th' Law about remembering the Sabbath Day to keep it Holy. Th' Law about taking the name of the Lord in vain. I'm warning you, woman, you'd better get off this canal! There's no room along here for such as you, and you and this gambling hell will have to go!"

He was backing out, finger uplifted like Judgment. Then he saw me! I was scrooched down, hoping he wouldn't, and I wasn't wrong thinkin' he'd be mad if he did.

"Low-Bridge!" I tell you, his eyes almost kngcked me out of my chair. A tiger

might have glared like that, and, melting backward out into the night, had the same grinding voice. "Low-Bridge, I'll expect you in my cabin aboard the *Genesis* immediately!"

CHAPTER III

LOW-BRIDGE ON HEREDITY

SAY, that was a pretty kettle of fish, hard times like they were. Swillberg wouldn't be a bad place to be stranded provided you had any money, but it was no spot to comb the beach. You couldn't land a canal job there to save your soul; I'd just left my last dimes in Mother Damnation's cash box, and I hated the thought of walking an empty stomach up the towpath. I didn't need any little bird to tell me I was going to be fired, either. That I was th' first canalman in the history of the Erie ever fired for taking a snort of whisky didn't make me feel better for th' distinction.

I was sober as a judge and none the happier for it when I stepped aboard the *Genesis*. Bible Bill hadn't gone below yet; was waiting for me on the deck aft, pacing up and down, his face a white shadow in the darkness. It was quiet there on the barge. All the quieter for the blare and music of the dance hall up the bank, its yellow windows shouting and singing, as if the place, in defiance, was whooping it up double. That didn't make it any easier.

"Sorry about th' stolen hawsers, Cap'n," I opened, tactful.

He startled at my voice, as if he hadn't realized I was there. "That is nothing! Evil reaps its own punishment. Caught or uncaught the thieves shall suffer for their crime; the way of the Transgressor is hard!" He rounded on me, fierce in the lantern-gleams of the deck-lights. "What were you doing in that devil's-roost tonight?"

"I only had one drink," I subtracted fairly, two of Mother Damnation's glasses being the same as one in most other spots.

"A man's first drink is never his last!"

"I should hope not," I began to say, only catching myself on the "not" and switching to, "should hope you wouldn't think I'm a toper on one glass, Cap'n. Honest, I didn't see no harm in a little snort."

"Wine is a mocker! Strong drink is raging! You know I allow no slave of John Barleycorn on my boats!"

"Sure, Bill, but I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought! That's the rules, an' anyone workin' on my boats has to follow them. I don't allow my men goin' into that Swillberg Tavern, either!" Then he did a funny thing. Gripped my shoulders, and put his face close to mine, eyes burning at me like a mesmerist's. "What did you see in there tonight, Low-Bridge! What did you see!"

"What you mean, what'd I see?" I swear his face was queer, sweat coming out like blisters on his forehead.

"Did you—notice anything, Low-Bridge? Anything suspicious about—that woman?"

"She was there all the time I was," I gave him, relieved the subject was off me. "If you mean about th' stolen hawsers, I didn't see anything. But I—wait!—come to think of it, she did come out on th' towpath. Dumped Slugs Jeterson an' Three-Fingered Jack in th' water, she did. But she came right back in; that wouldn't have give her time to come down and board these boats."

"You didn't notice anything else?"

"Nothin' different than always. Somebody's always losin' gear on boats tied up along here. She musta snaffled th' rope, all right, but I didn't see anything."

HE APPEARED relieved; ungripping his hands and standing back, after giving me a last searching look. But suddenly he was in another mood, fists knotted at his sides, lips clenched, staring blindly at the lighted windows up the bank, in the strangest sort of rage. The windows were like bonfires in the black, and Mother Damnation was singing again,

concluding the adventures of *The Garbage Man's Daughter*.

"It's terrible! Ungodly! Having to listen to that woman ail night! And Lorna having to hear her, too! I can't stand it, Low-Bridge, do you hear? I can't stand that woman!"

Then his fingers were dug into my shoulder again; he had me shoved against the deckhouse as if he was going to knock off my head. "I tell 5011, Low-Bridge, it isn't just the woman, either! It's that tavern! It's the people like you in it! It's the canal! This whole vicious, degrading, vagabond life on the canal!"

I stared at him with my mouth open.

"I hate it!" he panted at me. "All my life I've wanted to get away from it! There's something about it that's unclean, rotten! Stale water—weedy banks—muddy towpath—I hate it all! These waterfront joints! These gutter-brawling canalmen with a girl in every port—men like Jeteron, Ritter, O'Brion!"

"It's th' canal that does it, Low-Bridge! Th' shifting from place to place. Th' lazy life! Winter, it starves you! Summer, it lures you into drifting, inviting you to cheat an' lie an' fight to carry its cargoes! It's a sewer, Low-Bridge, full of commercial avarice, political graft an' corruption!"

"Now th' railroads are beating it, it's gone cheap an' third class an' mean. It's like that woman up there, on th' downward path, leering and beckoning you down with it! She's like the canal, and the canal's like her—some men it breaks, and some it drowns—no, bir: it drowns them all in the end, Low-Bridge. Drowns their souls! I tell you, I hate the Erie Canal!"

"But you're the best damn—I mean, bang-up good boater on the ditch!" I gaped at him. "I thought you always liked the canal."

"Once I thought it might—might change for the better. But year after year I've watched it get worse. That woman—that's what it's come to! And when I think I have to live on it—the girl I want to marry has to live on it! Listen, Low-

Bridge, I hate this canal like you'd hate a three-hundred-mile-long snake! By heaven, if I only knew anything else, I'd sell these boats and get out of it! Sell 'em tomorrow!"

He put his face in his hands; and I stared like a cigar-store Indian, too dumbfounded to speak. Bible Bill hating the canal! It was like a soldier going to headquarters expecting a dishonorable discharge, then hearing Napoleon or Washington say he hated his country an' the army.

"I *will* quit the canal!" he gave me, looking up fiercely. "You hear me, Low-Bridge? First chance I get, I'll quit the canal!"

"But you can't do that!" I blurted out. "Where'd you go? What'd you do? Once you're a canaller, Bill, you're never anything else! You can't quit the canal!"

I meant it for myself as much as him. I tell you, way down deep his words had scared me—not only his talkin' like a railroader, but all that about th' canal bein' on th' downgrade, goin' stale, on its way out. There'd been talk about Albany wanting to shut it down 'count of competition with the trains. We canallers had to stick together, and if a captain like Bible Bill was going to drydock, what'd happen to lugs like me?

"Once a boater, Bill, you're always ^ boater! Guys like us can't quit the canal!"

He glared at me, savage. "Garfield was a canal boy, wasn't he? Others got clean of it! I'll get out of it, too!"

"But you was raised on the ditch!" I reminded. "You can't never quit when you are. It's in your blood. You got canal water in your blood!"

MY GOD! his eyes in th' lamp-shine were like steel knife-points. "What do you mean, Low-Bridge, by such talk!"

"Why, you've got something in your blood, you don't ever get it out," I tried to explain. "Like some men are circus men an' some are farmers all their lives. Same way with canal boaters, back on the old ditch season after season, sure as

they're born. 'Specially if they *are* born,' I enlarged. "Born with it in their blood, like I read about in a book."

"What book?"

"Why, this book I read one time—heredity, ain't it called?—a passenger once left on my old man's boat. Said all your life you did what's born in you to do. Like you're a born preacher or a born actor, you know—like your character and what you turn out to be and all depends on what's in your blood."

"That's a lie!" Honest, I thought his fingers was digging through my shoulder to the bone. "A lie invented by weaklings to excuse themselves of moral responsibility! That's this new science trying to argue against everything in the Bible—men like Darwin and Ingersoll who'd have us believe the Gospel wasn't true and tell us we're descendants of monkeys! Why, if what you say was true—this in-your-blood stuff!—no man would be any better than his ancestors. You couldn't call your soul your own!"

"I only read it in this book," I floundered, over my head and getting deeper. "It took this family—Jukes was the name, I remember, because I wondered were they relatives of Absalom Jukes off the *Lizzie J. Sweeney*—well, ever since back in the Revolutionary War they been nothin' but tramps an' bums an' criminals. Another family—I don't recall th' name—had always been scholars and preachers an' the like. Born with anything in your blood, and it's like your destiny to be that, like it's yours to be a boater on the canal—"

Well, it was the look on his face that choked me off. Mad? I could only see his teeth and eyes, the rest of his face went that black. "You don't know what you're saying, Low-Bridge! You don't know what you're saying!"

Nailing me by the gullet, he lifted me clean off the deck an' shook me like a dog. "Never let me hear any more of these beastly irreligious lies! Man makes his own destiny, and he's responsible to the Creator for what he makes of it! Man is the Captain of his Fate, and Master of his

Soul! *The Captain of his Fate, and Master of his Soul!*"

He said it twice, like that. Then, just as I was getting black in the face, myself, dropped his hands from my throat and backed off. I leaned against the deckhouse, gagging, ai' he looked at me. sweaty-faced, flabby, like a man cominsz out of a fit.

I'll never forget it—the lantern-shine an' darkness of that canalboat's afterdeck—water slapping down below—that bright-windowed tavern up the bank—the woman's voice sinking out through the night on a whiff of Swillberg smells—Bible Bill standing there like a man coming out of a fit.

"I'm sorry, Low-Bridge." His voice came thick. "Lost my temper, I guess, I hate this canal so bad—then you talkin' that nonsense and all. Just remember what I told you. If you want to work on my boats, lay off th' liquor and keep out of that woman's tavern. That's all."

And it was enough, if you asked me! I stumbled aft to my berth on the *Leviticus*, bewildered as I'd ever been in my life. On th' deck of the *Exodus* where it was dark and he couldn't see me, I had to stop an' look back. Bible Bill was still there by th' deckhouse where I'd left him. A finger hooked into his collar. Face like it was drawn by scribble? of yellow chalk in th' lantern-shine. Glaring at that Swillberg Tavern as if it had him hooked by the eyeballs, hypnotized.

Mother Damnation was caroling into the last verse of *The Garbage Man's Daughter*. And then Bible Bill was leaning over the tiller-post—the smartest captain on th' canal!—being seasick!

If I'd known what had happened besides hawser-swiping around there that night, I might have been a little seasick myself.

CHAPTER IV

RUSH HALL

ANYHOW, I didn't know. As for Bill, I didn't get the drift. Not so much his jumpin' me for a word he thought was

profane, nor threatening to beach me for a nip of Old Crow—so far as that was concerned, he was true to form. So was his ranting into that dancehall and preachin' fire an' brimstone. I'd heard of him once going into a Buffilo gambling joint and reformin' the owner by leaving him in a shambles.

But his outburst against the canal! All that storm I'd raised by sayin' he had canallin' in his blood! That talk about Captain of his Fate and Master of his Soul! No, but top of that, there's the hundred and eighty dollars worth of rope tliced off his boats—and he berates that woman about a song she's warblin'—leaves the thieves to be punished by the Almighty. I'm not much of a hand at religion, I guess, because that seemed to me like a lot of rope to leave up to the Almighty for a reckoning, and any other boater on the ditch would have raised his own hell about it.

Matter of fact, our boats weren't the only ones robbed that night at Swillberg, and there was plenty more than just larceny around there that night. Been there in the morning, we'd heard about it.

But we weren't there. Four-thirty A.M., Bill pipes me on deck, and we're under way while the canal is still green-dark; slipping past the other boats, and first through the locks while the other captains are still snoring in their bunks. Swillberg's inne astern in the warm mist before I've rubbed my eyes awake, and Bill's blowing the foghorn for Lock Twenty-eight before I realize what it's all about.

Then I can't figure it out. Up on deck with the dew, Bill's not at all like my last glimpse of him at midnight. But brisk an' lively as a commodore on a steam yacht. Up on the bow snapping orders like a gatling gun. Shouting at Willie, lumping to make fast a line. Rushing past me with a, "Speed it up, Low-Bridge!" and a crack on the shoulder as if nothing had happened. Yeah, and looking fresh as a daisy, shaved and clean collar and everything as usual except in six times the hurry.

"Ain't you startin' early, Bill?" Old

Man Tenny, the lock-tender, gives down a hail as we enter the gates. "Thought you said last evenin' you'd stop off for ham an' eggs. Lorna ain't up yet; she'll be disappointed."

"Rush haul!" Bill called up through his hands., "Tell her I'm sorry, will you, Uncle Dick? Too many boats waitin'! Got to get through! Tell her I'll see her on th' way back!"

That's funny, because pig iron isn't generally express. But Bill was pushing us through as if we had peaches. Waiting in the lock, he can't stand still for impatience. Just as we're clearing the last boat from the lower level, a girl darts out of the gatehouse, tugging on a sweater.

"Bill! Wait! Your breakfast! Aren't you going to say goodbye?"

Peaches or pig iron, I'd have stopped to say goodbye to that girl; not many girls who could turn out at that time of the morning and look like that. Appealing? But I don't mean just her looks. She came running down to the towpath, calling out for Bill to wait.

Bill didn't hear her. Up on th' nose of th' lead boat, he was juggling with the towline, shouting at the straining mules, cracking orders at Willie to, "Get those black animals moving!"

"Whip 'em up, there! You, Matthew! You, Mark! Gee! Haw! Get on with 'em, Willie! That black mule, Luke, kick at you again, you give it to him plenty! Get on with 'em! Get on!"

"Bill! Bill!" The girl was trying to get her voice above th' shouting, th' creak of stretching ropes, the splash of water churning from th' locks. She saw me at the tiller of the *Leviticus*; recognized me from where she ran along the bank. "That you, Low-Bridge? What's the matter? He said he'd stop for breakfast!"

"Bill!" I megaphoned a 'hail through my hands. "Here's your girl!"

He turned around at that. There was plenty of time, but you'd have thought he couldn't drop th' towin' line out of his hands and run aft for a minute. "So long, Lorna. Save th' ham and eggs for me!

I'll see you on th' haul coming west—"

"Bill!" I could see the anxiety on her face as she called after us. "Bill, is anything wrong?"

"Nothin', Lorna! Nothin'! Just tryin' to make Syracuse early! G'bye!"

She waved after us, frowning, and as we swashed around a bend I could see her standing there on the towpath, hands hanging, downcast.

WELL, that didn't seem like the way to treat the girl you're goin' to marry, but I gave up trying to figure out Bible Bill. There's plenty of time for thinkin' on the canal, haulin' through the quiet of a summer morning, woods and fields drifting by, nothing to do but lean ^{*}on the old tiller and stare up into space. That was the life! Th' country warm and smellin' of hay. Blue sky and white clouds overhead and reflected in the water. Burble of the current under your stern, an' creak of the rudder as you bring her easy around the bend.

But I couldn't think out head or tail of Bible Bill. Maybe it was because I couldn't light up my corncob. No smokin' allowed on those Biblical canal boats. That's where I took up chewin', on those boats of Bill's.

Chewing didn't help me to solve Bill, though, and I doubt if a pipe would've helped. He was spry that day. As lively as a dog after a bath. He was all over the catwalk, hustling up and down the decks, jumping from boat to boat.

He was as spruce and snappy as a piece of new elastic. You'd have thought maybe he'd say something to me about what happened the night before, but he didn't. There was that wall between us, just as there'd always been.

I remember how he came brisking aft to bark at me. "All right, Low-Bridge! Put on your shoes!" And as I laced on my boots, grumbling, he snapped, "What kind of a captain would these shippers think I am, if my steersman lolls around bare-foot?"

Admiral again, see? Captain of his Fate' and Master of his Soul. Not a word about

Mother Damnation or the stolen hawsers or the argument we'd had. All that was behind the wall. You'd have thought that maybe in his all-fired hurry to get on he'd forgot about it. He drove us on that Syracuse haul. Drove us as if we had a cargo of melting ice. Yeah, but then after blistering the surface of th' canal to get there, he ties up early, and gives Willie, Shanghai and me an hour's shore leave.

"No drinking, mind," he warns me with a bullet look from his eyes. "And back at midnight on the dot. T'ni staying aboard to work on cargo manifests."

He didn't though.

I dropped Willie and Shanghai at a dime museum on Salina Street, bought a bag of peppermints; and snuck into a place I knew for a sip of beer. There's a lot of canallers around, all talkin' tough times. Then I'm surprised to catch a glimpse of Bible Bill hurryin' past the swingin' doors. I was thankful he didn't look in and spot me. He was hard in conversation with a fella I recognized as a shippin' broker, one of the big local boys that'd once run for mayor of Syracuse. A dray that was goin' by on the cobbles suddenly stopped, and Bill's voice came abrupt through the silence of the street.

"But that's half the price what they're worth. T can't sell them any cheaper! At that price they're a give-away!"

"Only you can't give 'em away to me," the broker's voice cut in. "I can't buy 'em, Bill. The Commission cracking down and all, I wouldn't dare touch 'em with a ten-foot pole—"

The voices blurred as they went on down the street, but I couldn't help wondering what Bill was tryin' to sell. Back on Salina Street I picked up the Chink and Willie, an' we walked on clown to the canal docks. Bill must have bear, us by a trolley; he was there on deck waitin' for us. I didn't mention havin' seen him in town.

"You boys better turn in," he gave us, brief. "I'm makin' another early start."

We swung aboard, and Bill started down the catwalk for his cabin. Off the dock there was a hail; then I'm surprised to see

two bluecoats and a bank watchman hurrying from around the corner of a warehouse. Looks like Bill was goin' to be fined for exceeding the speed limit comin' into port. These watchmen patrolled the towpath and kept an eye on the freighters—a boat travelin' too fast would sometimes set up waves that washed out sections of the bank. But it wasn't the canal side that had been washed out this time.

I CAUGHT the name of Swillberg, and sauntered up the deck to see what it was about. The coppers had boarded the *Genesis* and were talkin' to Bible Bill, meantime sweeping the decks with their bull's-eye lanterns. The watch had a telegraph message in his hand. Bill's face was half-lighted in the lantern-shine; he looked kind of washed out, himself.

"It's a murder, Low-Bridge," he informed me. "Back at Swillberg. Some time last night."

"Jim Lacy," the canal patrolman told me.

I said, "Holy—gee!" Jim Lacy was the bank watch on the stretch between Swillberg and Palmyra, nice old fella kind of resembled Buffalo Bill from his goatee and long hair.

"Just got the telegraph," the canal patrolman said. "He was stabbed on the towpath and thrown into the canal. Floated down to the locks, there. Found him at ten this morning. But they figure it was done last night. There's been a gang of canal pirates workin' there at Swillberg. Looks like their job."

"The Lord will punish them!" Bible Bill said in his chest. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!"

The cops squinted at Bill, and shrugged.

The bank watch grunted. "Anyway, we're keepin' a lookout all up and down the ditch. Questioning all the boaters. You shipped through there last night, didn't you, Bill? Just wondered if you or your crew had seen anything."

Well, Bible Bill declared he'd lost some rope, himself, but had seen nothing. He let the coppers cross-question Willie,

Shanghai and me, and after a few more routine questions they went up the dock.

Then the haul we'd made to Syracuse was nothin' to the drag we made the rest of the way to Albany. No lie-over at Utica or Schenectady. We breezed through like racing canoes, so to speak, hell for high water down the Mohawk Valley. The mules were plain staggering when we tied up in the Albany dock basin, two nights later, ten hours head of schedule.

At the Iron Company docks, Bill got our cargo out of the holds as if it was red hot ingots; then whipped into clean collar and tie, and rushed up into the city as if a couple of those ingots had dropped into his pants. "Important business!" he told me, leaving me to stand by aboard and swab up. "Stay on the boats till I get back."

"What's it mean?" Willie came out of the mule cabin that evening to ask me. "What's it all about, Low-Bridge?"

"What's what all about?" A loadin' scoop had scraped the *Judgment* out of *Judgment Day Is Coming* on our sternboat's beam, and I was in a sweat to get it painted before Bill got back.

"What's all this rushin' and strainin'?" I got broken arches from that last stretch outa Schenectady. Mark and Luke is most spavined. The cap says he's gone ashore after business, but Shanghai was just up there buyin' our grub, and he says all the boaters around here are busted. The Miller Towin' Line's went bankrupt, and the Whittaker Express Line is for sale. Shanghai says it's Cleveland and the railroads."

"What's that Slant know about Cleveland or railroads?"

"Anyhow there ain't much money in canallin' any more." Willie sighed like he owned a string of boats instead of just the string in his overalls. "Shanghai says everybody's talkin' 'bout that murder back at Swillberg, too. They say the guy that stabbed that poor ole bank watch oughta git lynched. They're bettin' they'll never find out who done it, though. It'll be like last summer they killed Dapper Dan Jones."

"Jim Lacy was murdered by canal pirates," I analyzed. "Dapper Dan was nothin' but a tinhorn gambler."

WILLIE nodded wisely, chewin' a straw. "Yeah, I remember Dapper Dan. We was tied up in Swillberg the night he disappeared. I won't forget it, because he got in a fight at Mother Damnation's—she'd just opened up her tavern. There was free beer, an' everybody lit to the gills, an' fireworks on the towpath—regular show. That was the first night Bible Bill ever seen the woman. He come strollin' up the towpath from Lock Twenty-eight with Lorna on his arm."

"What happened?"

"Well, Mother Damnation, she'd just thrown Dapper Dan out of her saloon. She made a little speech to the crowd, sayin' she was new in Swillberg, but they'd soon get acquainted enough to find out she run a square game and wouldn't allow tinhorns. Then she announced she was going to put on her diving act. She throws off her red cape and runs out across the dock, everybody cheerin' at the sight. Say, she run right in front of Lorna and Bible Bill."

"I'd like to have seen it," I said.

"It was a show," Willie agreed. "That woman in red tights, and fireworks goin' off. Fireworks? But I guess Bible Bill was the fireworks! Say, he let out right in front of everybody and begun to yell at Mother Damnation like an evangelist once yelled at me in a tent meetin'. She shouts at him to mind his own business, and does a swan dive into the canal. Well, every time he's hauled through there since, they have a fight."

"She's a tough dame," I said, thinkin' of Dapper Dan.

Then Willie said somethin' funny. Wavin' a hand at the Albany docks, "Say, listen, Low-Bridge. They ain't no shippin' around. You don't think the cap'n rush-hauled this trip because he had a date with some dame here, do you? You don't think maybe he's two-timin' his girl with some dame here?"

"Stupid!" I caught him by his freckled ears. "Bible Bill ever heard you say that he'd whale the innerds out of you!"

"But Shanghai seen him. Up near the market this aft. Seen him duck into the Eagle Theatre. It's Commodore 'looker's Electric Light Girls!"

"Bible Bill at a cootch show?" I didn't believe it.

Willie pointed at the cookhouse. "Ask Shanghai. He couldn't believe it neither. An hour later, cornin' back down Market Street with vegetables, he seen the cap'n coming out of the burlesque. Shanghai says he acted soused. Bumped right into Shanghai on the sidewalk, and went right on without seemin' to recognize him. Can you beat it?"

I couldn't. I told Willie to quit his gossip and get back to curry-combin' the mules, or Bible Bill would curry-comb him; then I stood starin' up at the smoky heights of Albany, sheer bewildered. But nobody could tell me Bible Bill-was up there on a bender. At a burley show! Paintin' the town. Why, I'd heard him say the stage was a creation of the Devil and dancin' was a sin! There was a book right down there in his cabin called *From The Ballroom To Hell, or The Evils of Th/ Waltz*.

I'm not kiddin', they used to read such books back in those times. Bill always had a pocket full of tracts and the like; went with his Sunday 'ermons and the hymns he was always j:iayir>' on his ocarina. Only thing I could think was that Bill had gone into that music hall after some shipping agent—maybe he'd signed up to transport the show company, like they used to travel by canal in the old days.

NO, BUT alorg about eight o'clock, back he comes from town, hustling dockside with a big armload of books. Books! I remember he dropped one of them as he swung aboard the *Genesis*; snatched it up quick off the deck as if he didn't want me to notice. But I spied the title, and it began with the word *Law*.

"Get a cargo?" I asked.

"No!" His face was reddish an' sweaty, his collar wilted an' h; looked flustered and used up, but he hidn't been hitting the bottle. He snapped, "These politicians have ruined commerce with their greed and graft! Money changers in the temple, they are! Undermining trad;! Cutting rates! Rather than deal with such rascals, I would spend my day reading in the Public Library! What does it profit a man to gain a city and lose his own soul?"

Could Shanghai have nistaken the Public Library for the Eagle Burlesque? But I didn't say anything. Why get the Chink in trouble when *he* was the one who must've been drunk? S'ire, Bill hadn't got those books in any musi: hall.

He started past me, hugging the volumes, and then there was one more thing happened. Runnin' up the dock came this slicker in yella button shoes and a derby; said he'd followed Bill down from the town. He was an agert for an Albany brewery, he said. Would Bill take on an express load, special rates to Buffalo, cargo of Knickerbocker Beer?

"Fifty kegs to be dropped at Swillberg along the way. For that dame runs that canalside tavern there—what'ser name?—Mother Damnation."

Bill's face was like a bomb. "Get off the dock! I'd carry no booze in my boats if they went to Buffalo on empty bottoms! It's your kind of traffic bringing ruination to the Erie, mister! Get out of here quick and take your profane mouth with you,

before I teach you a lesson on profanity!"

You skeedaddled when Bill thundered like that with his finger in the air; his face was like it was that night when he'd grabbed me by the windpipe for swearing.

"Low-Bridge!" he flung at me. "Any more of these agents come dockside look-in' for me tonight, say I don't want to be disturbed."

And then about an hour later, swabbing up the foredeck, I get a glimpse of him through the cabin hatch. Below with his face in a book! Too busy to see agents, but he's got time to read. Only he wasn't exactly reading. Ever see a man eat the pages of a book with his eyes? Well, his supper was at his elbow untouched, but that was the way he was glaring at that book. And swallowing! Wetting his lips and hooking his finger into his collar and swallowing! It was like he was eating instead of reading, and from the twist on his face in the lamplight, it looked as if he wasn't enjoyin' the meal.

Sneaking aft in the dark to steal a pipe smoke, I thought it was all darned queer, even for an odd fish like Bible Bill. It was peaceful, tied up there with the river slapping by and the stars out and the slow creak as th' boats rubbed up against the dock and the frogs chirping. With my pipe in my teeth, I did a lot of thinking. But I couldn't think what he was reading at Law book for, or why he'd hardly touched his meals since he'd heard Jim Lacey had been murdered.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Happy Relief From Painful Backache

Caused by Tired Kidneys

Many of those gnawing, nagging, painful backaches people blame on colds or strains are often caused by tired kidneys—and may be relieved when treated in the right way.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter

stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)



To the king's men gathered there
he sang the song of Caedmon's axe

Tribute to None

By PHILIP KETCHUM

Author of "Scourge of the Severn," "Delay at Antioch," etc.

Beware, King John! The load that England bears is crushing, and no man's soul's his own—but a hero bears Bretwalda. A novelet of the mystic axe

I

SIR HENRY DE CRESSY was in a vile temper. In the tournament, that afternoon, an unidentified knight had unseated him, and the humiliation rankled bitterly. "By the teeth of Judas," he muttered, for the hundredth time, "I will have his heart's blood. It was not a fair tilt. His lance was longer than mine."

Earl Robert of Compton, at whose castle de Cressy was stopping and who was now seated beside him in the banquet hall, nodded his head and with his knife speared a roasted fowl from the platter which a servant brought him.

"'Tis strange you do not know his

name," de Cressy continued. "'Tis more strange how he disappeared."

A brief frown crossed the earl's face and his glance circled the banquet table which had been set up there in the great hall of his castle at Cooipton. It was round in shape and at it were gathered more than two score of the nobles from the surrounding country as well as the retinue brought with him by de Cressy, the King's Justiciar. Meat, taken in the hunt the day before, and bread and wine were being served to them by the castle servants, but the usual hilarity attendant upon such a feast seemed to be lacking.

Earl Robert thought that he knew the reason. It was not a wise thing to offend

the King's Justiciar, especially considering the mission which had brought him north, and most of these people would hold their emotions in check until Henry de Cressy downed enough wine to forget what had happened that afternoon.

There were a dozer or more figures sprawled on the reeds in the open space within the wide enclosure made by the table. To one side a troupe of ragged jongleurs fought over scraps tossed to them from those at the table, snarling, kicking and tearing at one another much as a pack of dogs might have done. Later, at the earl's command, they would put on an exhibition of vaulting, tumbling and sleight of hand which might be amazing, or which might be very poor.

Not far from them was a company of actors, and directly in front of the earl's seat were two troubadours who had come to the castle only the day before.

The earl's glance rested for a moment on the two troubadours. They were strange men, he thought, to be following such a profession. Both were young and broad of shoulder with well muscled bodies which even their ragged cloaks couldn't hide. The taller of the two had a thin, gaunt face and was sharp of eye. His hair was long and tangled and almost yellow in color. His companion was darker and had thick, heavy features and a black beard, which in spots was rather thin. Both of them, Earl Robert now noticed, ignored the fragments of food cast from the table. The taller man was [ducking softly on the strings of his harp. His lips were moving as though, he were singing to himself.

"By the teeih of Judas," de Cressy roared. "I want that krieghl. Do you hear me, sir?"

The earl nodded and sighed. These were hard times. He would probably be forced to pay a fine if he could not discover the identity of the unknown knight. The king's courts assessed fines on every provocation.

Earl Robert could easily understand why King John had to have more money. Long ago the king had lost his revenues

from Avignon and in order to pay the large army he maintained, he was always in need of more funds. Last year, in 1214, he had increased the scutage required of the nobles who had refused to join him in his campaign against France, and this year, despite objections on every hand, he had levied new and heavier taxes.

The earl glanced at Henry de Cressy. It was de Cressy's mission, he knew, to see that those taxes were paid and he didn't envy the man his job. Rumors had come to him that the northern nobles would refuse to pay and there were even some whispers of a rebellion.

Henry de Cressy called for more wine, and then leaning forward said sharply, "You must find that knight before morning, for on the morrow I leave for Northampton."

"I will find him, Lord," the earl answered. And as he spoke he again noticed the taller of the two troubadours. The man's lips were still moving as though in practice for his song. Earl Robert wondered what the man was singing.

THE taller of the two troubadours was named Brian and he really was no troubadour. And he was not practicing his song. He was talking to the dark-haired man who sat beside him and who was no more a troubadour than he.

"You heard him, Arthur," he was now saying. "Tomorrow he leaves for Northampton. You had better leave now and ride to Stamford. Tell Fitz-Walter. We have waited long enough for word from the king. It is time that we showed our teeth."

"And you, Brian?" asked the dark haired man.

Brian struck a soft cord on his harp. "It might look strange if we were both to leave now. I will follow as soon as I can."

"Shall I wait for you at the place where we left our horses?"

"Nay, for I must journey west."

The dark-haired man reached out and put a hand on Brian's knee. "It will do you no good, Brian, to again see your

father. His loyalty to the king is too much a part of him. It has blinded him to conditions. I wish that you would ride with me."

A worried look came into Brian's eyes and after a moment's pause he said, "Aye, friend. You are right. But there is another purpose which sends me west. My father has always looked on Henry de Cressy as a good friend. I fear that he may go to Northampton to meet him. I would stop that. Did you wonder why I entered the tournament lists this afternoon?"

"So that was it," Arthur whispered.

"Aye, it was my hope to keep de Cressy from continuing north. Unfortunately he was not injured in the fall from his horse. But enough of this talk, Arthur. You had best leave."

The dark-haired man nodded, crawled on his knees under the table and headed for the door. Brian went on plucking at the strings of his harp, now and then glancing up at the fat, bloated face of Henry de Cressy and wondering at his father's friendship for this man who was notorious for his cruelty and injustice. In a thousand ways, Brian thought, de Cressy had proven that he could be loyal to no one but himself. Even his service to the king had been a service which looked first to his own desires.

"Ho, troubadour," Earl Robert called suddenly. "Give us a song."

Brian got slowly to his feet. "A song, Lord? What song would you like?"

Earl Robert glanced at de Cressy and then said judiciously, "A song in honor of our great king."

"Our king, Lord?"

A faint smile touched Brian's lips. There were a dozen songs which the troubadours sang to the glory of King John, but Brian liked none of them. He plucked three times at the heavier strings of his harp; then, as a brief moment of silence followed that cord, he said clearly, "I will sing you a song taught to me by Snorri Sturluson, the great scald of Norway. It is the song of Balder's death. I dedicate it to King John."

THEN again his fingers plucked at the strings of his harp and in a deep, rich voice, he sang:

*"Brothers slay brothers
"Sisters' childrtn shed each others
blood.*

*"Hard grows the world.
"Sensual sins wix huge.
"There are swoid-ages, axe-ages,
"Shields are cleft in twain,
"Storm-ages, murder-ages,
"Till the world /alls dead.
"And men no longer spare
"Or pity one another."*

Brian paused and struck several cords, glancing around the room. There were barbs in that song and he wondered if they were striking home.

Henry de Cressy was scowling at him, and as he was about to continue, de Cressy jumped to his feet and said sharply: "Enough of that, troubadour. If you would sing, give us a song of England."

Brian shrugged. "I will give you, then, the song of the axe of Caedmon."

Again his fingers plucked a cord, a lighter cord this time, and his voice rang out triumphantly, as he sang!

*"I am the axe of Caedmon,
"Forged in Saxo.i fires.
"True is my steel, sharp my edge,
"Alive are my deiires—
"To know the strife of a battle,
"To slash against the foe,
"But only a Wihon shall hold me,
"And only a Wihon—"*

A hoarse cry interrupted Brian's song. Henry de Cressy was again on his feet and his face was livid with rage.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop! By the teeth of Judas, you are that man!"

Brian did not have to ask what de Cressy meant. He lowered his harp and a mocking expression came into his eyes. "Did you not like my singing, Lord?" he murmured.

With a rasping oath, de Cressy swung his body over the table. He was a large man, heavy, and almost as tall as Brian. His hair was dark and shaggy and his

eyes were almost hidden below thick, bushy brows. One of his hands reached for the sword fastened at his side and as he drew it he said grimly, 'Aye, you are the man. Come here.'

Brian had moved away from de Cressy and he was standing, now, near to the troop of jongleurs who had crowded against the table. He stooped over, grasped a blade from one of them, straightened up, removed the wood block from its tip and faced de Cressy. Brian was not smiling now. His eyes had narrowed and his lips made a thin, straight line across his face. A jongleur's foil, he knew, was no match for the heavy blade de Cressy carried, but it was the only weapon handy.

A hoarse laugh came from de Cressy's throat. He started forward, slowly, and then with a sudden rush, his sword jerking up into the air, starting down.

The action which followed was almost too swift for the eye to note. Only slightly did Brian's foil touch de Cressy's sword, yet it turned it enough so that, with a sideward twist of his body, Brian evaded the blow. Once, then, did his own blade flick out in a sweeping motion which brought the point across de Cressy's forehead.

De Cressy screamed and staggered away. Blood, spurting from that cut, ran down into his eyes and blinded him. His sword dropped to the floor and he raised his hands to his forehead.

A score of the men in the Justiciar's retinue had leaped to their feet as they saw what had happened to their leader. Swords scraped from their scabbards, and two men, quicker than their fellows, swung over the table and rushed at Brian. But Brian was no longer armed only with a jongleur's foil. He had picked up de Cressy's sword. One stroke of its blade stopped the first man to reach him and sent him stumbling against his companion so heavily that both of them fell to the floor.

Loud cries and shouted commands now rang in the great hall. More men started

clambering over the table. Brian glanced from side to side. He could see that the castle guard was blocking the door which led outside. Only one other course was open to him. He whirled around and rushed toward the far end of the table, threw the weight of his body against it. The table crashed to the floor. Brian stepped over it. His sword, slashing from side to side, cleared a quick path to a doorway which led deeper into the castle, and in another moment Brian had gained that door and was racing up a long corridor.

Behind him he heard Earl Robert's voice shouting, "He is trapped. Hubert! Hubert, come here!"

Brian tried a couple of doors on either side of the corridor. He found them locked. Ahead lay a stairway which led to the floor above. He could understand, then, what the earl's shout had meant. There was no other door on this floor through which he could escape. Like most castles, this one had but one entrance and that lay behind him.

For a moment Brian hesitated; then he dashed to the stairway and hurried up it to the floor above.

The corridor above was lighted by several torches fixed in sconces on the wall. Brian started down it but he had gone hardly any distance at all when a door was suddenly opened and a girl's voice said swiftly, "In here. Close and lock the door."

The voice had a friendly sound and without an instant's delay Brian stepped into the room.

II

JUST as the hallway, the room was lighted by torches and in the dim, yellow radiance of the smoking flame Brian could see that the girl who had admitted him was young and slender. The top of her head came barely to his shoulder. Her hair was long and hung in braids. It seemed very dark against the white sheen of her gown.

"Close and bolt the door," whispered the girl again. "Quickly. Before others come."

Brian turned and slid a heavy bolt across the door. Then he swung around to survey the room the wide wooden bed at one side with the usual chest for clothing at its foot; the thick carpet on the floor; the table with its flagon of water and the two chairs which stood near it. Over the shuttered windows there were long, heavy tapestries of a rich, red color.

Brian's eyes went to the girl's strained face.

"Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

"I am Lady Eleanor, daughter of the earl."

Brian's eyes widened with surprise. He had heard mention of Lady Eleanor, daughter of Earl Robert, but he had imagined her a much older woman.

"They are coming," Lady Eleanor whispered.

Brian sucked in a deep breath. He heard footsteps clamoring down the hallway, heard a heavy rapping on the door. The girl moved past him. "Who is it?" she called. "What do you want?"

"It is Hubert, my lady," answered a rough voice. "Will you open the door?"

"But I am ready for bed, Hubert."

"It is your father's orders that I search the castle."

"And my orders, Hubert, are that you go away and leave me alone. I am tired and have gone to bed."

A sound of mumbling voices came from beyond the door and after a moment the men moved on.

Lady Eleanor turned around, looked at Brian. Her eyes seemed very bright. "They will search the rest of the castle," she whispered. "Then, perchance, they will come to believe that you jumped into the moat. I do not think they will come back here."

Brian was scowling. He was not so sure that they would be let alone and he had no wish to be found in her room. "Why have you called me in here?" he asked suddenly. "Why did you send them away?"

The girl bit her lips. "I saw what happened in the banquet hall. I had slipped down to the door. I heard your songs and when I heard the last one I knew who you were. Your name is Wilton, Brian Wilton. And you are one of the men who have aroused the people of Northumbria against the king."

"But still—"

The girl took a step forward. "You count my father an enemy, a man loyal to the king, don't you? And I can't blame you for it, for when the summons came to him to join the other nobles at Stamford he did not go. But do you know why he didn't go? He didn't go because he was kept here by Sir Henry de Cressy, the King's Justiciar. He and his entire household are virtual prisoners. On the hunt, de Cressy's men ride with him and de Cressy's guards man the walls of the castle. My father tries to fool himself into the belief that this is not so, or that it is only temporary, but he knows that it is the truth. Now do you understand why I wanted to help you?"

The girl's voice had been very earnest. Her eyes looked steadily into his.

Brian nodded. "I did not guess that the Justiciar would be so bold, yet as he gets farther north he will not find things so easy."

"The nobles will really rise against the king?"

"Not against the king but against the king's injustice, against his excessive taxation, against his attitude toward the church which he would harness and use to his own ends."

Brian paused, scowling. He realized, suddenly, that he had used almost those same words in explaining his attitude when he had last talked to his father. But his father hadn't listened.

"Are they ready now?" whispered the girl.

"Aye," Brian answered. "Last Christmas a group of the barons presented their demands to the king. He asked until Easter to consider what he would do. Easter has come and gone and he has done nothing

more than to levy higher taxes and to try to cause trouble between us. That last, as much as anything else, is what has brought de Cressy north. He was ever a good trouble maker."

Again footsteps sounded in the hall outside but they passed the door without stopping.

LADY ELEANOR tamed toward the window, lifted a hand to the tapestries. "Help me pull these down," she whispered to Brian. "This window overlooks the moat. The tapestries can be cut and tied into a rope."

Brian hurried to the girl's side. He jerked down the tapestries and with his sword started cutting them. The girl opened the shuttered windows, leaned out. "Men are searching along the banks of the moat," she reported, drawing back into the room. "But they will soon give it up, and if you can swim—"

"I can swim." Brian grinned. "And in the woods I have a horse."

The girl smiled and inspected the rope Brian had made from the tapestries. She looked up and said suddenly, "Tell me, were you not the knight who unseated Henry de Cressy in the tilting this afternoon?"

Brian's grin widened. "Was it not a shameful thing to do?"

"A rash thing."

"And pleasant."

A serious expression came into the girl's face. She again turned to the window and looked outside.

Brian made the tapestry rope fast inside the room and then moved to her side. He was suddenly thankful that de Cressy was planning to leave this castle on the morrow. If Earl Robert had played well his game of loyalty to the king, he decided, the chances were that de Cressy would move on and leave him and his daughter unmolested.

"Are the men still there?" he asked.

"Nay. They have gone away."

Brian leaned out of the window. The shadows below were quiet and still.

"I can try it now," he muttered.

The girl said nothing but watched silently as he lowered the rope. Brian put one leg over the window, turned back to look at her.

"Words are of little use at a time like this, Lady Eleanor," he said to her. "But for you de Cressy would now have his revenge for what happened to him this afternoon."

"And but for you, Brian Wilton, and but for men like you," the girl answered, "England would no longer be England. Go now, quickly. I hear someone in the hall. It may be my father and if Henry de Cressy is with him—"

Brian swung through the window. He lowered his body down the swaying rope and came finally to its end with his feet almost touching the dark waters below. He released his hold on the tapestry, dropped into the moat. The water was swift and cold and it drove the air from his lungs. He kicked his way to the surface, struck out for the opposite bank, made it and pulled himself up into the grass near a clump of bushes.

After a moment he stood up and looked back. The window from which he had escaped was dark but the shutters were still open and Brian thought that he could make out a slender white figure. He waved his arm, turned and set out toward the forest.

IT WAS almost noon of the following day before Brian drew near to Wilton Hall. The morning had been clear and bright and fragrant with the promise of an early summer, but it had given no lift to Brian's spirits, and as he drew rein at the edge of the broad meadow surrounding the plowed fields nearer the hall, his face bore a worried frown.

The scene which lay before him was a beautiful one, a peaceful one. Here and there men and women were at work in the fields, tending crops which had already pushed through the rich, dark earth. Browsing cattle roamed the meadows and the surrounding forest was pleasantly

green. In the distance Brian could make out the blue waters of the river Avon and near to its bank was the village with its crooked and friendly streets, its spired church and its wide market place.

Wilton Hall was some distance nearer. It was built of gray stone with four corner towers rising above its two stories. No castle with wall or moat, it still had an appearance of rugged strength. An azure banner fluttered from a staff above one of the towers and on it was the black figure of a raven which carried in its claws a great axe. Such was the coat-of-arms of the Wiltons.

The axe, Brian knew, represented *Bretwalda*, the axe of Caedmon, whose story he had started to sing the night before. It had long been the treasured possession of the head of the Wilton family. The origin of the raven was more obscure, but his father had told him that it had come down from some ancestor who had been sold into captivity and who had sailed the seas with the Vikings of old.

There were sudden signs of activity from beyond the hall and Brian made out a company of horsemen starting for the road which led east and north along the river Avon. One of the horsemen carried a standard similar to the banner which floated above the castle. Brian's scowl deepened and he suddenly urged his horse forward, taking a course which would intercept the horsemen.

He waited for them in the road, and just as he had guessed, one of the horsemen, recognizing him, ordered the others to wait and came on alone.

Tall, heavy and broad of shoulder was the man who came on to meet him, and though thicker, his features were the same as Brian's. Both had the same high forehead, the same clear blue eyes, the same stubborn jaw. Anyone who had chanced to see them together would have guessed at once that they were father and son.

"Well, Brian?" said the older man abruptly.

Brian shrugged. "Where are you going, Father?"

The older man looked at his son narrowly. "And I might ask you where you had been?" he countered.

Brian made no reply to that and there was a long silence.

It was Brian's father, Sir Aubrey, who broke that silence. "A messenger came to the hall this morning with word from Sir Henry de Cressy, the King's Justiciar, I am going to Northampton to meet him."

The horses of the two men were close and Brian lifted his hand toward his father as though to take his arm, then lowered it again. "Sire, do not go to Northampton," he said earnestly. "Or if you must go, wait a few days. Do not go now."

"Why, Brian?" asked the older man bluntly.

Again Brian was silent and again it was his father who spoke first. "Northampton," he said slowly, "is a strong castle, son. It could not easily be taken, even by men who are inspired as only you can inspire them."

"Do not go to Northampton, sire," Brian cried again. "Why would you have dealings with a man like de Cressy?"

"He is the King's Justiciar."

"Aye," said Brian bitterly, "and a murderer unhung, a thief uncaught, a scoundrel with a heart blacker than the Judas by whose teeth he swears."

"But still the King's Justiciar."

Brian drew a ragged breath. No logic which he could command would serve to stand against his father's loyalty to the king and unreasonable though that loyalty was, Brian could not help but admire it.

His father leaned forward and said quietly, "Brian, I know what you have been doing. I know how hot and impatient is the blood of youth. In a way I can understand it. But when the final test comes, I charge you to remember this. No Wilton was ever disloyal to his king. This standard I bear has never been dirtied. Its azure field must stay clear as the sky."

A sudden tremor shook the younger man. Tears which he could not hold back came into his eyes.

"Come, Brian," said his father. "Ride with me."

But Brian made no answer, and after one of the longest moments he had ever known he heard his father sigh. Then Sir Aubrey turned and called to his men and they rode on.

Brian's eyes followed the men as long as they were in sight.

III

AS THE afternoon waned and as the shadows of the coming night stretched out from the forest, Brian paced restlessly back and forth across the great hall in his father's house, his mind torn by indecision, his thoughts rambling and confused. Over near the door stood the tall and stalwart John Tuck, peer of all yeomen in the north country. He could knock a sparrow from the top branch of the highest tree with an arrow shot from his longbow and he could move through the forest as silently as though he were a part of it.

"Tell me, Lord? Shall I send the word?" John Tuck asked quietly.

Brian frowned. John Tuck had asked him that question many times during the past few hours but he had not yet given any answer. He stopped, now, and stared at Tuck. At a word from him he knew that Tuck would hurry away and that within a few minutes a dozen men would be riding to the north and east, carrying with them a call which would assemble at any point he might designate hundreds of yeomen and burghers from the towns and villages, all of them ready to do his bidding.

What trick of fate had given him a leadership over such people, Brian didn't know. Later he was to realize that it had grown up gradually through his attendance at county fairs, through the sympathetic way in which he had listened to the people's complaints.

When he had realized that the common people of the north country would follow him in a revolt against the king's injustice, he had felt all the thrill of a great power.

And Fitz-Walter and William Marshall, and Cardinal Langton, the leaders of the nobles, had been as pleased as he. But that had been six months before. Right now he wished that he had never grown interested in the political problems which England faced.

John Tuck stepped forward and said earnestly, "These new taxes, Lord, are more than we can endure. It cost me a hundred shillings to share in the land left me by my father. The men of Worcester have had to pay a hundred shillings for the right to buy and sell dyed cloth, and the men of Burgh were taxed for the right to hold a market. We are being stripped of money, and in the courts decisions are always given to the man who bids the highest. You know all that."

Brian nodded. "Aye, conditions are even worse than you have told me."

"Then let me send word to those who are awaiting it. They have been ready for a long time."

"To turn against their king?"

"Nay, but to fight for justice if it can be had in no other way."

Brian wiped a hand across his brow. In just such a way had he argued with others and even now, he knew, the nobles who had assembled at Stamford must be riding toward Northampton, for when the king had made no answer to their demands on Easter, it had been decided to await the coming of his Justiciar, and then to show their teeth.

He straightened, nodded to John Tuck and said briefly, "Send the word. Northampton. At once."

John Tuck drew a deep breath. "Northampton, at once," he repeated. And turning, he hurried from the room.

SO IT happened that by the afternoon of the next day a strange and motley army gathered in the meadows around the embattled walls of Northampton Castle. From Stamford, where they had gathered to receive word from the king, came the nobles from the north country who rebelled against paying more scutage to finance the king's wars against France.

A few retainers had come with them. Yeomen from the forest countries and burghers from city and town, many of the latter poorly armed, made up the rest of the army. In all it numbered less than two thousand, but the call to assemble had been hurried and more men would arrive with each succeeding day.

In a tent set up by William Marshall, son of the Earl of Norwich, a group of the leaders had gathered and it was to that tent that Brian made his way. Arthur Pinel, who had carried word of de Cressy's plans to come to Northampton was there; Fitz-Walter, Cardinal Langton, Sir James Wycliffe and a score of others whom Brian knew. They had all been talking together rather loudly, but as Brian came in the tent grew quiet.

Brian nodded to the men and turning to Fitz-Walter, he said, "There is still no word from the king?"

"There is still no word," Fitz-Walter answered. He was a tall, rugged man, fiery of temper, bitter toward the king. "There is still no word and the king means to send no word. He does not think we would dare to rebel against him."

"What said de Cressy? Have you talked to him?"

"He appeared on the walls of the castle. He asked us, in the king's name to disband. He promised safety to all who would throw down their arms and go home."

Brian laughed harshly. "De Cressy's promises are worth nothing," he said bluntly.

Others agreed, and Cardinal Langton started speaking of the matter. Arthur Pinel got up, drew Brian aside. "Your father is in the castle," he said quietly.

Brian nodded. He looked blankly at his friend and said, "What of it, Arthur?"

"I thought you might not know."

Another man stepped up and touched Brian on the shoulder. He was a stocky, heavy-set fellow with a red beard and a leathery face. "My name is Hubert Mandeville," said the man. "Until last night I was captain of the castle guard at Compton."

"At Compton?" Brian repeated.

The man nodded. "It was I who was charged with finding you after you fled from the banquet hall. I searched all but one room."

Brian scowled. "What do you want?"

"Only to tell you this," the man replied. "So angry was de Cressy when you were not found that he ordered the earl and his daughter to accompany him to Northampton. I thought you would want to know that."

There was a shrewd expression in the man's eyes. Brian stared at him and then looked over toward the castle. Anger rose in him slowly. His mind called up a picture of the Lady Eleanor, slender, fair, her eyes brilliant. And now he was remembering the evil stories of women who had suffered cruelly at de Cressy's hands.

"I thought you would want to know that," repeated the man.

Brian's lips smothered an oath. He whirled back to face those in conference in the tent and there was a great urgency in his voice as he cried, "Why do we waste time here in talking? Why do we not act? Why do we not go ahead, take this castle move on to Bedford and then on to London where we can see the king?"

"Storm Northampton? Without catapults? Without towers?" someone cried.

"Aye," Brian answered. "The drawbridge is lowered now for several wagons to pass across it. More are coming down the road and it will be lowered again. By a ruse we can take it. Are you with me?"

There was a catching enthusiasm in Brian's voice. William Marshall sprang to his feet. "Aye, Brian! We are with you." And while his shout still echoed, others took up the cry.

A harsh sound came from Brian's throat. His hand dropped to his sword and he stared toward the castle and tried desperately not to think of his father.

THOSE men on the castle walls and those who were responsible for guarding the gate and the bridge across the moat, could have seen little to make them sus-

icious of the ragged group of men trudging up the road ahead of several wagons which were coming in from the fields. The men were moving slowly as though very tired. They had the look of villains, men huddled to the soil. No glittering armor covered their bodies and they seemed to be carrying no weapons. When they passed groups of soldiers who stood a safe bowshot distant from the castle walls and when the soldiers mocked them, the ragged group did not even have the spirit to answer.

It was natural that the drawbridge should be lowered to them and to the following wagons, for those who surrounded the castle were still a safe distance away, and every additional man admitted meant another warrior in defense, in case of trouble.

The great bridge dropped slowly over the moat and the ragged group started across it. Suddenly, then, two of them turned back to the wagons, seized hidden axes and started chopping at the heavy chains which had lowered the bridge.

A shout of warning went up from the bridge tower and soldiers poured through the gates with leveled lances and bared swords. However those soldiers now produced weapons which had been hidden under their clothing and within a moment the drawbridge was the scene of a desperate battle.

At the same time a body of mounted men came charging from the camp of the rebels and those who did not have mounts were running after them, shouting and waving their weapons. Nearer to the castle a few of those running men stopped and, flinging arrows to their bows, began picking off the guards on the castle walls.

The mounted men, led by Fitz-Walter, the Earl of March, Brian, Wycliffe, and the knight Pinel, crossed the drawbridge before their mounts were slain, and now others, following after them, pressed against the castle gates, forced them open, battled their way on through. Outside, the archers had moved closer and under John Tuck's direction were keeping the walls clear of

men. That chain on the drawbridge had been severed and so now the way into the castle was blocked only by the defenders who jammed around the open gate and tried to hold the rebels back.

After the first fury of the charge, after his first taste of the battle, Brian staggered aside and leaned on his sword. He felt a grim satisfaction in the success of his ruse to gain entrance. It had worked better than he had thought it might. All that remained now was for them to overcome this resistance at the gate and the castle would be theirs. He wiped a hand across his face, straightened, and then plunged back into the battle, his sword slashing.

"A Wilton!" shouted a voice. "A Wilton!"

A cold chill swept over Brian's body. His hands grew weak and under the heavy blow of a sword, his own blade was twisted from his grasp. Someone reached out from behind him, pulled him out of the way and took his place. The rebels had been surging forward, gaining ground foot by foot, but now they stopped advancing and again Brian heard that cry:

"A Wilton! A Wilton!"

BRIAN saw him then as the mass of men to one side of him gave way, and it was a sight that he would never forget. In the forefront of the defenders stood his father and with both hands he was wielding the axe *Bretwalda*.

There was a light in his father's face which Brian had never seen before. Memory of that was to stay with him, too, and later he was to understand that it was the light which always comes to the face of a man who delights in battle, who loves to pit his strength against the strength of others. But in the moment Brian saw his father as a stranger; and he stood motionless, stricken of his own will to fight. He heard his father's cry ring out again and then he saw that behind his father the defenders were moving forward.

Men fell back against Brian, carrying him with them; but the rebels rallied and

drove forward again toward the gate. For several minutes, then, the tide of battle wavered back and forth. Brian had lost sight of his father but he could still hear his cry, still see, occasionally, the slashing movement of the axe *Bretwalda*. Then around that place where his father stood there was a sudden press of men, a more furious clashing of steel on steel.

"A Wilton! A Wil—"

The shout broke off suddenly and Brian seemed to feel the blow which had choked off his father's cry. With a wild shout he threw himself forward. Of how he reached his father's side he had no memory. He only knew that in some way he reached the place where his father had fallen. On all sides of him the battle still raged, but of it he was hardly conscious. He stooped over, called his father's name but there was no response from the silent figure which lay sprawled over the bodies of those he had slain.

Brian's eyes then fell on his father's axe, the axe *Bretwalda*. How long it had been in the Wilton family he didn't know, all of its story he didn't know. He had never swung it, had been afraid to try, for he had seen other men, more powerful than he, who could not handle the weight of the great axe forged long ago by Caedmon. Now, however, his hands went out to it, and he lifted it as easily as though it had no weight at all. And then, still standing over his father's body, he slashed from side to side, hurling men away, flinging back any from either group who sought to pass by him.

What might have happened had not Arthur Pinel stooped down and taken his father's legs and pulled him away and then lifted him in his arms, Brian never knew. Some were to whisper later that had not Brian taken his stand over his father's body, the assault would have been successful, and that may have been the truth. But whatever the case, Brian fought no more after he saw Arthur Pinel back away, carrying his father. He lowered the axe to the ground and stared after him, his shoulders bowed.

Behind him there arose a great shout from the defenders and they surged forward. And fighting bitterly every step of the way, those who had made the assault on the castle retreated through the gate and then across the bridge.

Brian didn't see that. Still dragging the axe *Bretwalda*, he followed Arthur Pinel to his tent.

Pinel lowered Sir Aubrey Wilton to the ground, knelt at his side, looked down at him for a moment and then arose.

"He is dead," Brian muttered hoarsely.

Arthur Pinel shook his head. "Nay, Brian, but he has a grievous wound between the shoulder and neck where a plate of his armor broke away and someone's sword cut him deeply."

"But he will not live," said Brian.

Arthur Pinel looked away. "There is a chance for him," he said slowly. "There is a chance."

His words, however, were flat and Brian knew that he did not mean them.

"Leave me alone with him," he said to Arthur. And Arthur walked out of the tent and left him.

IV

AFTER it had grown dark, William Marshall brought two lamps to the tent in which Sir Aubrey Wilton was lying and one of these was placed on either side of the pallet. Wycliffe had bound up his wounds, but the one in the shoulder continued to bleed and could not be stopped.

Brian sat on the floor near him and waited for the end. He knew what the result of the assault had been just as a man is often unconsciously aware of the weather. It made no impression on his mind. Outside the tent he heard two of the nobles talking in lowered voices.

"We have started now," said one of them. "Aye," commented the other. "And there can be no turning back."

Sir James Wycliffe, who was waiting in the tent with Brian, touched him suddenly on the shoulder and said, "Look, he is opening his eyes. He is conscious."

Brian's head turned and he stared at his father. Sir Aubrey's eyes were open and they were fastened on his face.

"Father," Brian whispered. "Father—"

Sir Aubrey's lips moved but no sound came from them. His eyes didn't leave Brian's face.

Wycliffe lifted his head and helped the wounded man to fake a draft of wine. Having lowered him again he said to Brian, "He seems stronger. I can't understand it. An ordinary man would long ago have been dead of such a wound."

Brian tore his eyes away from his father's face. He couldn't bear the quiet, impersonal look of the older man. Over to one side lay the axe *Bretwalda* and Brian recalled now that a part of the legend of the axe lay in an old prophecy that to those who held *Bretwalda* would come a great victory, a great defeat, a great sorrow and a great joy. He thought of how he had lifted that axe and stood with it over his father's body. He had held it and had known defeat and sorrow, such a sorrow that he felt that he would rather have known death.

Arthur Pinel came to the tent opening and motioned to him. Brian got up, looked at his father and then walked over to join Arthur.

"How is he?" Arthur Pinel asked.

"He looks at me," Brian answered flatly. "He just lies there and looks at me."

"He is too weak to speak," Pinel guessed.

"I would almost like to believe that."

Arthur Pinel took Brian's arm. "Brian," he said slowly, "we have taken a step this afternoon from which there can be no turning back. Though Northampton has not fallen, we will yet take it. A guard has been thrown around the walls, and not long ago a patrol captured a woman who said that she had escaped from the castle. She has asked to speak to you."

"Why?" Brian asked gruffly. "What are I to speak with any woman from Northampton?"

"The woman is Lady Eleanor of Compton."

Brian stared at his friend. He said, "Lady Eleanor?" And from his tone the name did not seem to mean anything to him at all.

Arthur Pinel lifted his hand and motioned to a group of soldiers standing a little to one side. One of them came forward leading a slender, dark-cloaked figure.

LADY ELEANOR stopped a pace from where Brian was standing and looked up into his face. It seemed to him that there were tears in the girl's eyes, but the sight of them did not seem important. Lady Eleanor was not important to him now. He blinked at the girl and said flatly, "What do you want?"

"I saw the fight at the gate," Lady Eleanor said slowly. "I saw your friend carry your father away. How is he?"

"He is dying," Brian answered. "What do you want?"

The girl's figure was very straight and she did not flinch under his gruff reception. "When Henry de Cressy left Compton," she said, "he insisted that my father and I go with him and my father did not dare refuse. He brought us to Northampton. I was in the castle when your father came to see the Justiciar. I want you to know what happened."

"Well, what was it?" Brian asked.

"Henry de Cressy told your father that because he had failed in loyalty to the king his lands were to be forfeited."

"My father was ever loyal to the king," Brian said sharply.

"So he told Henry de Cressy, but de Cressy only laughed and said that informers had told him a different story."

"Lies!"

"Aye, but has not justice under King John's rule always been something that could be bought or sold?"

Brian looked around toward the tent in which his father was lying. He stared back at the girl and asked, "What else said de Cressy or my father?"

"Your father said that he would appeal directly to the king and de Cressy asked him why he did not join the rebels who

were even then gathering outside the castle gates."

"And my father?"

"He repeated that he had always been loyal to the king, that he would still be loyal, that he still believed that if he saw the king he could get justice."

Brian turned away and looked out across the camp. Here and there were fires and all about were moving figures, but he saw none of them. Once more he was trying to understand the deep loyalty which had characterized his father's life, trying to understand how he could still have faith in a king who had done all that King John had done, how he could still fight for such a king in the face of what de Cressy had done. Such loyalty passed his understanding but it gave him a deep and enduring pride in the man who was his father.

"How did you escape from the castle?" Brian asked finally.

"Tapestries may still be cut and made a rope," Lady Eleanor replied.

"And de Cressy, does he still think that this rebellion is a thing to laugh at?"

"Aye. That is why I have come to you. Henry de Cressy is sure that you can never take Northampton. While you are wasting your time here he plans to escape through some passageway, hurry back to the king. He will raise an army in the south; brand all rebels as traitors to their king, you and my father among them."

"You know where this passageway is?"

The girl shook her head.

Brian rubbed his hands together. He called to Arthur Pinel and said, "Find me John Tuck. Bring him here."

From the doorway of the tent Brian again stared at his father. Sir Aubrey's eyes were open; seemed fixed on his face. Brian drew a deep breath. "I was with those, Sire, who made the assault on the castle," he said slowly.

Sir Aubrey's lips did not move, but his eyes never turned from his son.

Brian moved away. He could no longer stand there under his father's gaze. John Tuck came up to him and Brian said, "Get me my father's axe there in the tent."

John Tuck entered the tent, came back with the axe *Bretwalda* and handed it to Brian.

Brian stared at it and his lips tightened. "There is a passageway from Northampton Castle," he said abruptly. "Where does it lead?"

John Tuck frowned. "Such a passage would be well guarded on the inside. You could never gain entrance that way."

"Where does the passage lead?"

"I do not know but there is a man with us who was once on the castle guard. Perhaps he—"

"Let us find him," said Brian sharply.

AN HOUR had passed and at a spot near the bank of the Nene River Brian and three companions waited silently. Brian's eyes were fixed on a point some score of paces away and every now and then he would twist the great axe in his hands and draw a long, shuddering breath.

"You are sure that is the place?" asked John Tuck of one of the other two men.

"Aye, that is the place where the passage opens," came the answer. "But why have we come here?"

"Be silent," Brian ordered sharply.

The minutes dragged slowly by and piled up into another hour, and then at last there was a faint movement at the spot which Brian was watching. A stone slab was pushed aside.

"They are coming," Tuck whispered.

Brian said nothing. He waited while an armored soldier appeared from the passageway back of the slab, looked around and then called to his companions. He waited while another half-score men came out and while the slab was being replaced.

"Where will we find the horses?" asked the gruff voice of Henry de Cressy.

"This way," someone answered, and started moving off to the right.

Brian stood up. He gave no warning of his intentions, gave no orders to the men who had come with him. His charge was sudden and unexpected and the slashing blows of his axe were so heavy that none

ju'd stand against it. Screams rent the air and hoarse shouts echoed throughout the night. All of those men who had come through the passageway had carried bare weapons with them and some of them made an effort to defend themselves. But their swords might as well have been of wood.

Four men rallied around de Cressy, and being only Brian and John Tuck, de Cressy called to those who had fled, ordering them to return.

Brian laughed. "We meet still once more, de Cressy," he shouted. "And this time to finish what was started in the tournament at Compton."

"You!" grated de Cressy.

Again Brian laughed. The slashing blows of *Bretwalda* had sent two of the men sprawling to the ground. Now the third man staggered back, blood pouring through a gash in his coat-of-mail where *Bretwalda's* edge had struck.

Henry de Cressy screamed now, screamed in terror. He struck viciously at Brian, but the great axe of Caedmon, slashing down at him, sheared off his arm at the shoulder and cut deep into his body.

Brian watched him fall. He heard men running toward him from the camp, heard John Tuck saying something about those who had escaped. He lowered the axe to the ground, bit his lips. In this victory he did feel little triumph. He turned away and started walking slowly toward the crackling fires of the camp.

V

FITZ-WALTER, William Marshall and a few of the other leaders of the region were standing in front of Arthur's tent when Brian reached it. Fitz-walter said bluntly, "In half an hour, Brian, we are riding toward Bedford Castle. We have received word that it will not resist us. We will take that castle and then move on to London. Word has come from London that all the merchants there will lift us. When we have taken London the king will have to listen to our demands."

"Aye." William Marshall nodded. "But we shall leave enough men here to keep up the siege of Northampton. Until the King's Justiciar—"

"Henry de Cressy is dead," Brian interrupted. "What matters Northampton Castle now?"

"The Justiciar dead? Then Northampton matters not at all."

Fitz-Walter's eyes were gleaming. "We ride for Bedford!" he shouted.

"And London!" called another voice.

Brian moved past them, stopped in the entrance to the tent. The lamps were still burning on either side of his father's body but Sir Aubrey's eyes were now closed and the stiffness of death had settled over his features.

"Brian?" said a quiet voice. "Brian?"

He turned his head. Lady Eleanor was standing over at one side, looking at him earnestly. Her face seemed very pale in the flickering, uncertain light from the lamps.

"You here?" he said quietly.

"I came in just after you left," the girl replied, "You should not have gone, Brian. Your father—asked for you just before he died."

"He asked for me?" Brian repeated.

The girl nodded. "Some man asked me to give him more wine. I did, and for a while it seemed to strengthen him."

A sudden trembling came over Brian. "What—what did he say?" he asked unsteadily.

The girl looked down at Sir Aubrey's body. She said slowly, "He asked for you, Brian, and I told him that you would be here in just a moment. Then he said, 'Tell Brian this. Tell him that every man has to stand on his own two feet. Tell him that every man has to be true to what he believes. Tell him that loyalty to himself is more important than any other loyalty.'"

It seemed to Brian that a tight cord was choking his throat. His breath was coming fast and he was still trembling. "My father said that?" he heard himself whispering.

"Yes, Brian. Your father said that."

"That is the truth? Those were his words?"

"Those were his words."

IT SEEMED to Brian, in that moment, that a heavy weight had suddenly been lifted from his soul. He moved over and stared down at his father and he was conscious of the fact that Lady Eleanor had come with him affil was still at his side.

"You must do as he would want you to do," he heard her whispering. "The men here are riding on to Bedford and then to London. They will want you with them. You want to be with them. Your father would want you to go. I have spoken with Hubert. He will see that Sir Aubrey is taken back to Wilton Hall."

Brian turned away. From the entrance to the tent he could see signs of great activity. Men were kicking out their fires, folding their canvases. A good many were already mounted and were ready to depart. Orders were being shouted and here and there men were singing.

He could sense a new spirit in the men. When he had arrived here they had been grimly silent, almost desperate. After the assault on the castle they had been sullen and a little shaken. But now they were exultant. Word of the message from Bedford and London had passed from mouth to mouth and already they could taste the victory which was to be theirs.

John Tuck came up with his horse and

said, "Ready, Lord? We ride to see king."

Brian nodded. Ahead of him and of others lay the ride to Bedford, which to fall without a blow; a ride on to London and a session with the king. And after that a meeting on June 15th between Stair and Windsor in a meadow which was called Runnymede; On that day at Runnymede King John was to attach his seal to a document which in later years was to become the bulwark of the English Constitution.

All that lay ahead of him, and in days to come was to mean a great deal but just then Brian was not thinking this ride to Bedford and to London, was thinking of the man who lay there the tent behind him and of that message words as told to him by the girl.

"Come, Lord," said John Tuck. "They are ready to leave."

Brian swung around once more, looking down at the silent figure of his father and then up at Lady Eleanor. "I will expect you, too, to be at Wilton Hall," he said abruptly.

The girl made no answer but the trace of a smile showed for a moment on her lips and Brian felt a sudden assurance that she would be there and that it would not be so hard to return to Wilton Hall as he knew that she was waiting for him.

He lifted *Bretwalda* to his shoulder, and turning away, mounted his horse.



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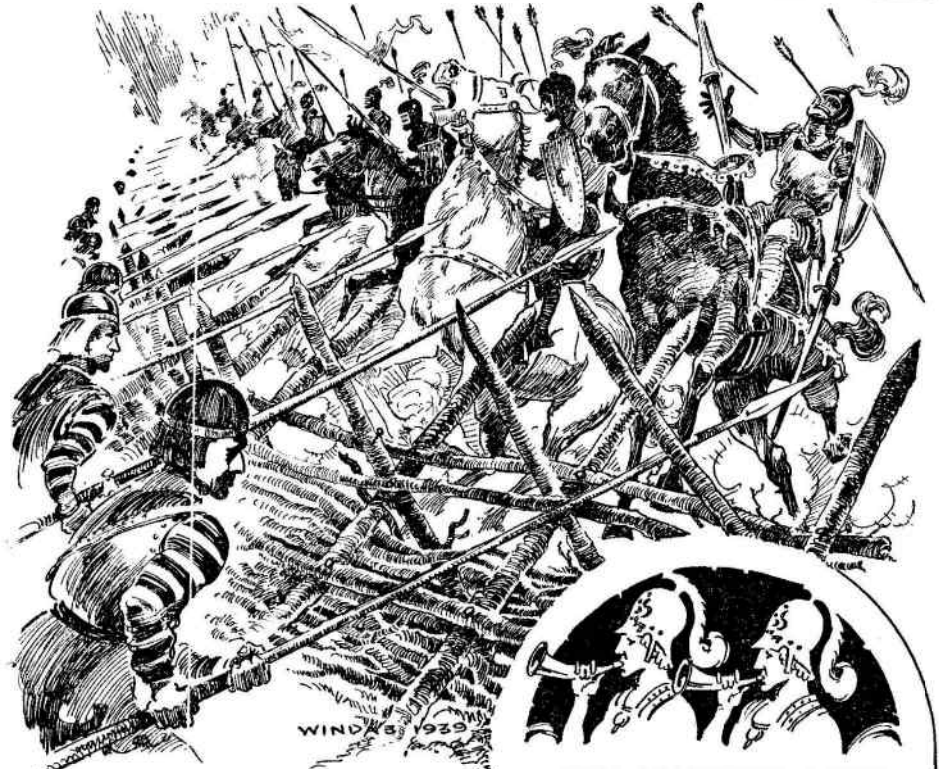
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LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN by W. A. WINDAS



• CHEVAUX DE FRISE • MARTIAL MUSIC •

The hedge of pointed stakes or beams for repelling cavalry attacks, was first used by the Frisians. They had no cavalry themselves, so the hedge itself came to be known as the 'chevaux de Frise' (Horses of the Frisians).

Ancient Greeks were the first to use martial music to inspire their soldiers. They would not, however, march in battle until the 7th century, as was done later.



• STIRRUPS •

Stirrups were invented by the Franks in the 5th century, and adopted by the Eastern Roman Empire. They made it possible for heavy-armed men to pull horses from their saddles, thus helping prove cavalry superior to the Greek phalanx.

• DRAGOONS •

Dragoon regiments obtain their name from the early pistol which these troops carried. So proud were they of their new weapon, and of the tactics they worked out for it, that they wore a dragon's head on their helmets.





Again and again the native women circled the hut, lifting their great song

When the Dyaks Dance

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Author of "The Devil's Mushroom," "Spider Gold," etc.

In that Borneo jungle reigned the silence of death; and then slowly the lullaby lifted—the song of the world—and its magic gave one man new life

JAN KROMHOUT, the big Dutch naturalist, told me this story one evening in Bandjermasin. A cyclone was in the making near the Karimata Strait. The atmosphere resembled aerified india-rubber with a seasoning of sulphur. The beer spurted like an oil well when uncapped; my ears heard in fancy the tinkle of ice cubes on faraway Broadway.

Kromhout had found an old copy of the *Strait Times*, the front page of which carried a thrilling story and a photograph. The story concerned a fire on the small steamer, *Krung Kao*, plying between Bangkok and Saigon. The blaze was discovered after the vessel passed Poulo Condore Island in heading for the mouth of

the Saigon River. The captain, a Malay half-breed, lost his head, launched a boat, jumped into it with four of the crew and pulled away from the steamer. The rest of the crew started to follow His example.

There were seven passengers on the steamer. Three women missionaries, two French sisters of charity, and an American named John CreMon who was accompanied by his wife. This man Creston was asleep when the fire was discovered, and when he got on deck the captain had decamped and the crew were hurriedly lowering the remaining boats. It looked as if the seven passengers would be left as baked offerings to the gods of the China Sea.

Creston was annoyed. He had no fire-arms, but he got hold of a fire-slice dropped by one of the stokers who had rushed up on deck, and with this fire-slice he did wonders. He beat the crazed Chinese sailors back from the boats and forced them to attack the blaze. They conquered it at last, then Creston assumed command of the crippled *Krang Kco*, headed for the coast and beached her at the mouth of the Mekong. The photograph showed a tall, well-built man in the thirties with a sweet-faced woman at his side.

"I am not surprised," said Jan Kromhout. "I knew Creston. One season I trapped with him at the head waters of the Kapuas River. He came from Baltimore, and he was the finest looking man I have ever met. *Ja*, he was so.

"Always he reminded me of a picture by Dirck Hals in the Ryks Museum in Amsterdam. It is the picture of a swordsman who has the grace of a black panther. When I was a little boy I would go and stare at the picture hoping and praying that I would grow up like the original. You can see that I did not. I did not pray enough to control the lines of my stomach.

"But this American, John Creston, was that swordsman of Dirck Hals and some more.

"Those fellows that make the cinema pictures in America would have been glad to get him. You bet they would. But he kept out of their way. He liked the jungle and the things of the jungle. He knew every wild thing in the Malay. Every monkey from the big *milk* down to the little lemurs and he had ways with them that puzzled me.

"He had been to lots of out of the way places, but it was funny that when speaking of his travels he never mentioned a woman. Never. One day I talked to him about this. I said: 'It is funny that you do not mention girls. Don't you like girls?'

"He flushed when I put that question. 'Why, yes,' he said. 'Of course I like girls.'

"Then why don't you speak of them?'

"He did not answer me. If you saw him you would think that he was the sort of fellow that would have had lots of affairs with women. He looked a man that women would bother.

"There was a young Dutchman who lived on the Stadhouders-Kade when I was a boy. He was not half as good looking as Creston but he was always in trouble with women. One night a burgomaster who was on his way to the Hague found that he had forgotten some papers and he went back to get them. That young Dutchman heard him coming up the stairs and he stepped through the window, thinking there was a balcony outside. There was no balcony. He had mixed up the house with another house he visited on Kalver Straat. He fell three stories and was killed.

"All the women were sorry but the old men were pleased. When they buried him they put an iron cross on his grave, and folk said that the ends of that cross caught the petticoats of any woman who came near it."

BUT I am speaking of this man Creston (Jan Kromhout continued). One day I said to him: "If one of these snakes gives you an extra hot shot of poison who will I write to?"

"No one," he snapped. "I had only one friend in the world and now she is not here."

That was his secret. He was living down the memory of a mother. For some men it is a difficult business. *Ja*, a very difficult business. Those memories of their mothers are like thick glass in the windows of their souls. They stop them from seeing other women. It is sad. This Creston had a photograph of his mother that stood on a box alongside his bed, and he would not let the Dyak boy touch that painting. He would not let anyone touch it. Once I moved it a little because I wished to sit down on that box and I thought he would hit me.

One night that Kapuas River started to

make trouble. It washed away some huts of the Dyaks, and in one of those huts were two women. One was an old woman, and the other was a woman who was going to have a baby. It was dark. You could not see the women, you could only hear them yelling in the middle of the stream.

I tried to stop Creston, but he pushed me aside. This paper says that he does not know fear. That is one of the truest statements that I have seen in a paper for a long time. He was frightened of nothing. I would not jump into that river for a million dollars because the flood had brought down all kinds of snakes and spiders and scorpions from the hills, but Creston jumped in.

The *pawang* had told him that one of those women screaming in the darkness of the flood was going to have a baby and nothing could stop him.

He brought those two women to the bank, and he brought with them a fine attack of fever. *Ja, ja*. A bad attack. Fever is funny. Sometimes it hits a little weak man and leaves him in a day or two so that you would think it had taken pity on his weakness, then again it will jump on a big strong man and fight him to death's door. It did that with Creston.

It jumped on him like those fellows that wrestle in what you call "all-in," and it gave him all the kicks and blows that it carried. He was a very sick man. He was in great pain and he could not sleep. Not a wink.

The natives were interested in Creston's illness. They loved him. They would bring all sorts of things to the hut, herbs and roots and potions that they thought would make him sleep, and the old *pawang* brought a packet of secret powder that he said would bring a dead man to life. He wished to give it to Creston but I would not let him. It was hard to stop those natives.

I had to watch Creston day and night to stop those fellows from slipping something into his drink. Those powders might have done him good. Many times when the quinine gave out I thought I should

try them, but I d dn't. We Dutch are square-headed folk and we do not believe in charms. When Creston's temperature was the highest I would say to myself *Na hooge vloeden dlzpe ebben*—After high floods low ebbs.

But that fever didn't believe there would be any ebb. It had Creston by the throat and it wouldn't let go. It was one devil of a fever. I was scared. The November rains were coming, and if Creston didn't shake it off before the wet season set in he would never come down to the coast. He was skin and bone. He could not eat and he lay without speaking. It looked as if he had given up the fight and was anxious to pass on. The boy who was attending to me saw signs. *Ja*, he saw plenty signs. Three vultures flew in H*circle over Creston's hut, the *wihwahs* were howling in a way that they never howled unless death was close.

The old *pawang*, who liked Creston, came and spoke to me. Very inquisitive was that old man. He wanted to know if Creston had any women that loved him. I said he had not, and that puzzled the *pawang*. The men of that tribe found women to look after them when they were very young. They were clever fellows. It was very nice to own a strong wench who would make fires and trap game and cook and take a crack on the head when her lord and master was in a temper.

The *pawang* went and told the tribe that Creston hadn't a woman friend in the world. Those natives were startled quite a bit. They held a pow-wow amongst themselves, and they decided they would do something to help that American who was so very ill. They cam; and explained it to me. They would have a special ceremony that would put Creston under the protection of the Great Mother of the gods and men.

THE Dyaks think that men are babies given into the care of all women. A man is, to their minds, not the particular worry of one woman. *Neen*. He is the worry of all the women in the world. There

is watching over him the maternal eye that the Romans called the *Bona Dea*, the Great Mother. She was Cybele, Maia, Mater Phrygia, Rhea, Ceres, and other names. She was the goddess that had the qualities of universal motherhood. It was a nice belief, was it not?

"It was," I agreed. "A very pleasant belief. At this particular moment if she has any love for me she should materialize on this table a dozen iced lager. I've never asked her for much."

Jan Kromhout ignored my flippant remark. He was busy with his tale. The Dutchman was a storyteller on whose slow sentences rode God-given Belief. He bristled with anger if Doubt showed on the face of a listener.)

People say now that the world is small. It has always been a small world. In the days when Maia was worshiped on the Aventino on the first day of May, and when Damia was worshiped at Tarentum, and Ammas in Galatia—the three being the same goddess under different names—news of thos; happenings were carried by caravans to places that were quite some distance away. It was carried to Persia, to India, and up over the Road of Silk to China, and from China it dripped down into the Malay. The human tongue is the best medium for spreading news. It was then, and it is today.

Those caravan men told of the Great Mother of the gods aid men. A goddess as beautiful as the diwn who mothered all the foolish men of the world. It was a nice belief. She was around when they were sick on caravan routes or on jungle trails. They had only to breathe her name and she would put a ssft arm under their aching heads and whisper nice things in their ears. It was a be ief that found easy converts.

Creston was shuffling along the last lap to eternity, so I die! not think it would hurt to let those natives stage that show. I asked some questions and they told me what it was to be. Just as the women of ancient Rome conducted the ceremonies to the goddess those women of the tribe at

the foot of the Kapuas Mountains conducted it. No men were allowed to take part in that business. Not much. It was a purely feminine matter.

Creston was lying in a small hut made out of split bamboo and thatched with *nipa*-palm. It was alongside the hut that I slept in. It had a small window opening that was about six inches square, and it had a strong door of plaited bamboo. No one could get into that hut through the little opening, and before that ceremony started I put a chain and a lock on the door, I did not want any of those women troubling that poor devil who was so near death.

The *pawang* asked me to go into my own hut and shut the door. He begged me not to look out of the little opening in my hut and I promised him I would not. I did not believe in that mumbo-jumbo, but those natives were crazy to do something for that American and it didn't seem right to stop them.

In Greece and Italy and Phrygia that business of worshiping the goddess was quite an affair. There were queer goings on. *Ja*. There was a fellow in Rome named Claudius who disguised himself as a woman and got into one of those shows and he also got into a lot of trouble when they found him out. You should read about that fellow.

But I had no curiosity about that business. *Neen*. I locked up Creston's hut then I went into my own, shut the door, and sat down to wait. It was getting dusk, so I lit a lamp and started to read Furbringer's book on the *Spino Occipital Nerven* of reptiles. It is a good book and I wanted to keep my mind off that poor devil who was dying.

Up till that evening I had thought that silence was just the absence of sound. That it was nothing in itself. Just a sort of vacuum caused by the stopping of all noise-making activities. That is the general opinion; I think you would find that those foolish dictionaries would say the same. They are wrong. Silence is as much an active thing as sound. *Ja*.

I found it out that evening. It came and stood at my shoulder and told me to close that book about the nervous system of snakes. Close it and put it down gently, which I did. Then it told me to open my ears as wide as I could. There was not one little bit of noise in the whole of that jungle. There was not one bit in the whole of Borneo. It was a devil of a silence.

I thought Creston must have died. I stood up to go to him, then I sat back again in the chair. Those women in the dusk outside had begun that business of putting Creston under the protection of the Great Mother of the gods and men.

THOSE women sang the lullaby of the world. The lullaby of all women of all tin*. Sang it into the hot silence. It swept over me. It stunned me. It held me with clamps of iron in that chair with only my ears working. . . .

The Dyaks have a legend that tells about the first baby that was born in the jungle. It cried so much that it disturbed all the animals. The animals could not sleep and they could not sneak on tiptoes on other animals that they wanted to catch. They were very mad with that baby.

One day they got up a committee to call on the mother of the baby and speak hard to her about the child. There was on that committee a big female orang-utan that the natives call *mias*, there was a honey-bear, a big pig that is called the *babirusa*, there was a *seladang* and a small Bornean panther, a clouded tiger, the little mouse-deer, a boa-constrictor, and a lot of flying squirrels, porcupines, civet-cats, lizards, and frogs.

The big female *mias* did the talking. She asked the woman why the baby cried, and the Dyak mother said she could not keep the child quiet. She was sorry but she had done everything she could. When she finished speaking the big *mias* stepped forward and took the crying baby out of the woman's arms. The ape started to sing a lullaby, and in ten seconds the child was asleep.

It was that lullaby multiplied a million times that the women sang around the hut of that American. It was a protective chant. It was a song of strength to men. It brought memories of firesides, of warmth, of broad bosoms softer than the down on the wild goose, memories of sleep deeper than the Tuscarora Trough. It was the mother of all lullabies.

The big things of the world have foundations that are way back in the past. Thousands of years back. I mean the big things of life. Honor, and national pride, and love of country and of offspring, and cleanliness and truth. They started in people when the world was young.

So did that lullaby that the Dyak women sang to Creston who was at death's door. The basic notes of that were sung to the Neanderthal man in a rock cave in Germany when he was a baby. And I bet his mother thought he had a nice head while we think he had the retreating head of an ape. *Ja*, she crooned over him and thought him pretty. And the long-headed palaeolithic babies heard that soft chant that grew better and sweeter for the round-headed neolithic babies that followed them.

V

It spread out over the world. From the Black Forest to the Khasi Hills, from the Nile Valley to the Rocky Mountains. It was the song of life. It was more than the whispers of love; it had in it the joy notes of life, of procreation, of reproduction.

Those women were marching around the hut of Creston as they sang. Marching round and round in the soft dusk. And their bare feet on the grass made a soft undernote. A prmilive undernote. I thought of our wandering ancestors who had to be always moving; their women carrying their fat babies on their hips and singing to them as they swished down the dry slopes of the Caucasus to the sea. Lullabies and bare feet on the grass. It is in our blood. *Ja, ja, ja*.

We are a little mad just now in the matter of music. Some crazy men who make jazz are fooling us. It will pass.

There are things that are; in our souls that we cannot get away from, things like the lullaby of women. The *berceuse* of the French, the *weigenlied* of the Germans, the *lullen* of the Dutch, the *lulla* of the Swedes, the cradle-song of the Anglo-Saxon. You cannot turn those into foolish jazz. For that I am glad. *Ja*, I am glad.

IT finished at last, and when it finished I felt that my soul had been washed in nice warm oil and dried with the fleecy towels that my mother used when I was a little boy. I do not see those towels now. I do not think they are made. There is too much hate in the world to make things that are nice and soft. We have grown as hard as the cannons of hell that fill all our thoughts.

For a minute I was so happy that I forgot Creston. Then when I was sure that the women had slipped away into the jungle I ran to his hut. The lock and the chain were just as I left them. They had not been touched. I put the key into the lock, turned it, slipped off the chain and entered. There was no light in the hut, the little lamp had gone out while the women were singing. I took a step towards the table on which the lamp stood, then I stopped and my heart went up ten or fifteen beats.

Would you think I was crazy if I told you that something went by me to the door? Something. I do not know what. A wraith, a phantom, I couldn't tell. It was not flesh and blood although I felt its presence. And it had a perfume. A most delicious perfume. In that jungle there were heavy, wet scents that were bad for the brain, but this was a clean dry perfume that was good to breathe.

I struck a match and lit the lamp. Creston lay on his back, his eyes closed. I looked around the hut, and I saw that the leather frame that held the photograph of his mother had been folded shut, and it was now lying on the box instead of standing up as it had been.

Creston opened his eyes and looked at me inquiringly. His lips moved, and I

stooped to listen. "What has happened?" he whispered.

"It was the women singing," I said.

"But—but who came into the hut?" he asked.

"No one," I answered. "I locked the door and kept the key in my pocket."

He was quiet for a minute, then he said: "Something—I do not know what—came in and talked to me."

"About what?" I asked.

"About life," he murmured.

"That is good," I said. "It is nice to talk about life. Life is good."

He glanced at the photograph on the box. He seemed puzzled because it was lying flat. He stared at it for a long time, but he asked no questions. I was puzzled too. I thought, and that was silly of me, that Creston had not closed that folder and laid it down on the box. I thought someone else had done it, but how the devil did anyone get into that hut when I had the key?

Both of us looked at that small window. A child could not climb through that opening. Creston spoke to me again. "Yes, I will get well now," he said. "I am very thankful to you, Kromhout, for nursing me."

"Of course you will get well," I said.

He dropped off to sleep then, and I knew that he had got a strangle-hold on that old fever. The singing of those women had got into his brain and strength was coming back to him.

IN the morning the old *pawang* came and asked about Creston. He was cunning, that old man. He knew a lot. He looked in at that sick American from the door of the hut and he sniffed the air. I did not say anything about the whiff of perfume or about that photograph being folded up.

"He will get better now," said the *pawang*, "The gods have found for him a woman who will love him."

"Where is she?" I asked.

He waved his hand to the leagues of jungle that stretched between us and the

coast. "She is somewhere," he said. "Somewhere out there. The gods looked for a woman who was free and they found one."

He left me some green limes and he waddled away across the clearing, turning every few yards to see if I was looking at him. *Ja*, he knew much that old man. Those limes had little figures made with women's fingernails on their skins. I did not give them to Creston. I buried them. I do not know why. The marks of the fingernails on their skins made them strange to me.

Creston got better with each day that passed. Never have I seen a man climb back from the edge of the grave like that American. He absorbed strength through his nostrils each time he took a breath. *txi* three weeks he was well enough to travel. He went down the Kapuas on the first high water. Just as we were climbing into the boat the old *pawang* handed me four green limes. I looked at the skins. They had the same marks of fingernails that I had seen before.

"Give them to him," said the *pawang*. "They will bring good luck. You forgot them. Those marks are prayers made by the nails of the women who sang."

I took the limes and gave them to Creston. I knew they were the same limes that I had buried three weeks before, but they did not look as if they had been buried. They were fresh-looking and clean. Creston sniffed them and looked pleased. A lime has a nice smell, and the natives think they bring good luck.

We came down to the coast, and Creston thought he would go across to the mainland and rest for a while. He thought to go to Penang, then go on to Taiping and up to Maxwell's Hill where there are bungalows four thousand feet high. He believed that a month or two on a mountain peak would set him up. I said goodbye to him at Pontianak. He was still carrying those four limes that had the markings of women's fingernails on their skins.

"Why?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he said. "They say that they bring good luck."

He laughed, we had a goodbye drink and he sailed away.

YOU do not write much out here. Letters between rren are a nuisance. The post office was staited for lovers. A year went by and I fo^got Creston. I forgot those women that had sung around his hut at the head waters of the Kapuas. There had been other things to trouble my brain. I had sent off shipments of animals to New York and Amsterdam, and that is a business that makes you forget all other businesses. *Ja*. If you have to ship monkeys it will make you forget lots of things. You will forget rheumatism, and gout, and toothache. Monkeys are like that. If I was a doctor I would recommend that monkey-shiping business for all sicknesses.

I crossed to Singapore from Bandjermasin with a shipment for the big zoo in the Bronx at New York. Small monkeys and some snakes. On the second day in Singapore I was sitting in the bar of Raffles Hotel when someone slapped me hard on the back. It was John Creston.

He was excited. Much excited. "You old Squarehead!" he cried. "You are just the man I wanted to meet! I have work for you! Nice work!"

"I do not want work!" I said. "I am having a rest after shipping some monkeys to New York."

"This is different," he said. "I want you to ship me to Paradise. I am to be married next week and you Kromhout, are to be best man at the wedding."

He bought some drinks and then he insisted on taking me up to the Hotel Van Wijk on Stamford Road where the lady was staying. All the way he talked about her. Talked excitedly. She was French, she was a divorcee, and he had met her in one of those mountain bungalows where there is not much to do but fall in love. Her name was Adelf, he said.

I did not like that won[^]tn. I did not like her one little bit. She was like a small fat bird and she was one of those women that giggle at everything that is said before they find out whether it is serious or funny.

Everything was funny to her. I was funny, so was John Creston. She called him "Jacky", and when she called him that I could see that he didn't like it much. He was not the Jacky type of man.

Naturally any woman of ordinary intelligence would have understood that soon enough—particularly about the man to whom she was engaged: but I am afraid that Adele was gifted with less than ordinary intelligence. She merely giggled, and understood nothing—John Creston least of all.

The more I saw of that woman in the days that followed the more I disliked her. She made me nervous, and I thought that Creston was nervous too. *Ja*, I am sure he was. That fellow that had the courage of tiger was all jumpy and sweaty when that woman was around. She said things about men that annoyed me. She thought them fools. There are lots of women who think that quiet men of the Creston type are fools.

Creston gave a dinner two nights before the day of the wedding. There were a lot of people. Some friends of this Adele woman. There was one fellow that knew her before she divorced her husband. He was a big man, a rubber planter from Kelantan. He spoke to Adele like an old friend, and each time he lifted his glass he looked at her and grinned. Creston was pretty silent, but he saw a lot.

That rubber planter got noisy when he had drunk about twenty whiskies. He said things that were not nice. Creston kept his temper for a long while, but at last he took that big brute by the arm and started him for the door.

It was what you or I would have done in the same situation; all that can be done, in fact, when a party is being ruined by a noisy drunk. This planter was just such a tiresome man.

Creston was polite with him, but the fellow got mad. He lashed out with his fist, and Creston had not time to dodge. It was quite a wallop. It knocked Creston backward, but he recovered quickly. He jumped on that big fool and put a ju-jitsu

grip on him that made him howl. Straight for the door they went, the fellow howling like a *wahwah*.

That howl brought Adele to her feet. She made a rush across the floor and screamed at Creston. She told him that he was a brute to hurt her friend. She was a fury. I have never seen a woman as angry as she was then.

Creston was so astonished that he let go of that rubber planter. They were at the door of the dining room. There was a porcelain vase on a stand. That drunken brute grabbed it and brought it down on Creston's head. He dropped as if he was shot and the planter ran.

NOW I am going to tell you something.

Something big. I got Creston into the cloakroom. I was helped by other people. I do not know who they were. Some were the people who were at Creston's dinner, some were folk who were in the hotel. There was one woman who seemed to know what she was doing. She looked at Creston's head and she asked for water and she bathed it. She was one of those cool women who do things.

"Does he live in the hotel?" she said.

"*Ja*," I answered.

"You should get him to his room," she said. "I will help you. He can walk."

Now I think that I sniffed that perfume before we reached Creston's room. I think so. But Creston did not. That whack on the head might have put his nose out of order.

In his room he sat on a big chair and he looked at that woman. Then he forgot the wallop on his head; he forgot that rubber planter; he forgot Adele. On the mantel above his head was that picture of his mother, and when the woman caught sight of it she jumped back and clutched at her breast with her hands.

"What is it?" asked Creston, and his voice was tense.

"I—I—" stammered the woman. "I—I met her in a dream! Not her, that picture of her!"

There was mystery in that room. Fine,

fat mystery. You bet. It dried my throat. I could not say one word. And there was a great silence as if the world had suddenly died. All the little sounds from outside were throttled.

It was a strange story that was whispered to Creston and me by that lady. She was an American, and she had been keeping house for her brother at Kuala Lumpur. Just one year before she had an illness, and during that illness she had a dream. A strange dream. She thought that she had entered a bamboo hut in a jungle and had knocked over a photograph. A photograph of a woman who was the image of the woman whose picture was on the mantel.

That was all. The dream clung to her. She could not forget it. And while she was whispering that story the room was filled with that dry clean perfume that I had sniffed in Creston's hut at the headwaters of the Kapuas.

Jan Kromhout paused. He reached for the copy of the *Sirait Times* and studied the photograph. "She has not grown one day older since the morning when I was best man at her wedding," he said slowly. "She is a nice lady. One of those motherly women who know all men are babies who are given into the care of the women of the world."

"But—but what do you think?" I stammered, after the big Dutchman had finished speaking.

Kromhout laid the paper aside and frowned. He looked at me gravely for a moment, appearing to give his answer the utmost consideration, before he spoke.

"What I think is that this damn beer will boil if we don't drink it," he said quietly. "When A finish this bottle I am going to bed."

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Here it is—the lowdown on what makes college athletes tick for their supper. Begin this amazing story now

Jim knew all the best ways of waking big tough guys from heavy slumber

The Ringer

By CHARLES RICE McDOWELL

BIG Jim Deederick was twenty-two and looked older; he was a fireman's helper on the freights and some day he would be an engineer; by heaven's mercy he had scraped through grade school, but he didn't take kindly to learnin'. When he began to turn into a professional prizefighter, Min Deederick, his maw, mindful of what had happened to Jim's pa, decided she hadn't raised her boy to be a pug.

With the aid of the influential Mr. Toleson, she got Jim back into the high school which had washed its academic hands of him a couple of years before. Mi. Toleson obliged because he was fond of Min, and because he realized Jim was a top-notch gridiron man. Toleson's old friend, Slick Nelson, in his first year as coach at Southeastern, could use a couple of players like Jim.

Slick looked him over, and agreed.

This story began in last week's Argosy

BY SOME smart finagling, Toleson wangles Jim sufficient credits to enter Southeastern's farm-out military academy. There Jim, still unable to cope with his books, meets slight, cynical, good-natured Ted Wendell, who shows him how to learn things. Jim goads Wendell into becoming a fairly good sprinter. Wendell decides to go to Southeastern with Jim.

At Southeastern, Nelson lies awake nights wondering if Jim will pan out, wondering too if some other school offering Jim more of a scholarship, better board and room, won't end up by snagging Jim off. He decides to run down to Oakdell to pick up Jim, himself.

Nelson calls up Miss Maude, the faded, intelligent stenographer of Southeastern's athletic department. He learns that in all probability Durham Tech has kidnaped Frog Waller another semi-pro player whom Slick needs as a block back.

Worried, Nelson piles Jim and a couple of other ringers into his car, and Jim's college career is under way. . . .

CHAPTER VII

THE FROG BY NIGHT

IT HAD been a little over twenty-four hours since Slick Nelson had driven away from the S.E.U. campus. He had covered a little over a thousand miles and was still two hundred miles from home when he decided to stop for the night. He negotiated with the hotel clerk before displaying his companions. He suspected that otherwise he might be told the house was full.

The long boy made the short boy help him push the beds together so he could sleep in one and rest his feet and legs in the other. In the connecting room, Jim Deederick sat quietly and waited for Slick to put through his call to Cap'n Eddie. Cap'n Eddie would be up at twelve-thirty during this season of the year.

"Jim," said Slick, hanging up the phone, "Durham Tech has stolen one of our best men."

"Who?"

"A big blocking back named Waller—Frog Waller. We've got to get him back. I don't know how we're gonna do it, but we got to get him back. I'd go myself, but everybody knows me down there. They'd know what I came for the minute I landed in town."

"I'll go down there and get him," said Jim. "How far is it?"

"It's just about a hundred miles from here."

"How far is it to S.E.U.?"

"About two hundred."

"I'll run down there and get him, coach, while you catch a little sleep."

Slick rolled his eyes nervously and lit another cigarette. He already had one burning. Jim reached over and put the extra one out.

"You couldn't get him, Jim. It would be three o'clock by the time you got there. Everybody would be asleep and you couldn't find him for sour apples. Besides, you don't even know him. There's no use. Let's go to bed. Lord, how I hate to lose that boy."

Jim got up and held out his hand.

"Gimme those car keys, coach."

"What the blazes? You mean you still want to try to get him?"

Jim grinned. 'You gimme them keys and turn in and sleep till I come back. When I wake you up there'll be a big tramp named Frog Waller standin' at the foot of your bed.'

Slick looked at Jim. It wouldn't do any harm to try. It would be one chance in a hundred, but it was worth taking. He handed Jim the keys and got out his road map and showed Jim how to go. "They've more than likely got him at the Varsity House where they can keep an eye on him."

Slick drew a sketch on the back of an envelope showing Jim how to find the Varsity House. "Don't ask anybody anything, Jim. If you do ask questions, talk to somebody you figure isn't interested in the college. Here, you may need this," he added, handing Jim two ten-dollar bills.

When the door closed behind Jim, Slick felt in his bag for his pint and took a long drink. "By golly," he said to himself, "I believe that crazy goon is gonna make a great coach out oi me!"

THE only lighted place near the Durham Tech campus, when Jim pulled in, was a Greek restaurant which stayed open to catch the truck trade. Jim stopped and went in. Two truck drivers were munching hamburgers. Jim sat down and ordered a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee. He picked up an old newspaper and waited for the men to leave. When they went out, Jim came directly to the point. "Where do they keep the freshman athletes here?"

"You football player?" asked the Greek.

"Yeah."

"You good football player, what?"

"Pretty fair. Where do they keep—"

"Don't know. You have to ask in morning when coach gets up. I got nice room upstairs."

"Where's the Varsity House?"

"Freshmen, they don't stay in Varsity

House. You freshman, what? Room a dollar."

"Where is the Varsity House?"

"No freshmen stay there. Seventy-five cents, no?"

"Where did you say the Varsity House is?"

"Oh, it's right around corner there. Big white house with porch next to brick house with iron fence."

"All right," Jim said, handing the Greek a quarter.

"Okay. You don't get p ace to sleep at Varsity House you come back here. You good feller. I let you have room fifty cents."

Jim walked in the Varsity House, turned on the light and looked around. He had known the door would be unlocked. In the middle of the bare floor was a pile of trunks. He stooped down and read the names on them. Presently he came to a shabby little steamer trunk with the name painted on it in big white letters, W. A. Waller. Jim smiled. Coach was right about where to find him.

"Turn that light out of my eyes," came a rough voice from the room just off the hall.

"All right, in a minute," Jim replied pleasantly. "Which is Waller's room?" he asked, snapping off the light. Jim had dealt with his fellow man in stages of half sleep too much in his call-boy days to be much worried about the situation.

"Upstairs—number seven, I think," the boy inside answered, as he lapsed back into sleep.

Jim went upstairs, struck a match and found the room. He opened the door and turned on the light. Jim saw at a glance that he had the right fellow, and he knew why they called him Frog; it was for the simple reason that he looked almost exactly like a frog.

He walked quickly over and sat down on the side of the bed. "Frog," he said quietly. "Frog," he repeated, patting the muscular shoulder. Jim had tried every known technique for waking big, rough men, and had finally settled on the gentle, coaxing method. When Frog's eyes opened

and he blinked at the light, he saw a strong, friendly face.

"Say, Frog, I hate to wake you up."

"That's all right," mumbled Frog, tasting his mouth as he sat up. "That's okay."

"Listen, Frog, I gotta tell you sump'n and we're gonna wake somebody up in here. Could you pull on your pants and shoes and slip downstairs?"

"Sure—sure."

"Okay. I'll be on the front porch." Jim went out and left the light burning to be sure Frog wouldn't go back to sleep. In a few moments Frog came out on the porch.

"Say, Frog," Jim began, taking Frog's arm. "Let's slip around the corner to the Greek's. I woke a feller up in there a minute ago and he bawled hell outer me."

FROG followed sleepily along, wondering what it was all about. They sat down together in the back of the restaurant, and Jim came straight to the point. "Say, Frog, didn't you promise to play ball for S.E.U.?"

"Well, I reckon I did."

"You know good'n well you did, and what are you doin' down here?"

"I went out on a party with a bunch from home and got pretty high and they brought me on down here. At first they said it was just for a visit. They said they were gonna take me back."

"Do you like it here better, Frog?"

"I dunno. I ain't seen the college yet. I seen the stadium yestiddy. It looks right good. I guess they all look right much alike, though. The fellers have been pretty nice to me and I won't have to wait tables down here."

"You promised Coach Nelson, didn't you?"

"Say, who are you, a coach from S.E.U.?"

"No, my name's Jim Deederick."

"Jim Deederick—you was all-Southern, wasn't you?"

"You promised, didn't you, Frog?"

"I guess I did."

"Well, are you goin' back on your promise?"

"I dunno what to do!"

"Well, Frog, when a feller don't know what to do, it's a good idea to do the straight thing. Come on, get in the car."

Frog had supposed Jim was going to stop at the Varsity House to talk some more, but suddenly he realized the car was making fifty miles an hour, going out of town.

"What the hoorah, Deederick? What about my things?"

"We'll tend to that tomorrow."

"I'm cold with nothing on but this undershirt. I can't go this way."

"Well, climb back there and wrap up in that blanket and go to sleep."

Frog was cold and he was sleepy and the blanket looked warm. He gave up the struggle over the technical problem of what was the moral thing to do under the circumstances and crawled in the back and covered up, head and all.

Jim awakened Frog in front of the hotel, found him a sweat shirt in his own roll and went in to wake Coach. When Slick opened his eyes, the thing he wanted most stood by his bed; a big hundred-and-ninety-pound blocking back, the answer to a coach's prayer.

"Hello, Frog," Slick said casually.

"Hello, coach," the Frog replied.

There were no questions asked, no explanations offered. The little visit of Frog Waller to Durham Tech was water over the dam. Within an hour the big Buick was on its way. Slick drove and Jim sat peacefully beside him on the front seat. In the back the three beauties slept again. Kushaugh slept foolishly, Duckbutt slept earnestly, and between them the Frog slept with the calm serenity of a gargoyle made of stone a thousand years ago. Jim Deederick looked at them and punched Slick.

"A hell of a lookin' outfit, ain't they, coach?"

But Nelson was too happy and proud to even joke about the appearance of his cargo. "I got an idea, Jim, the big son-of-a-gun in the middle is gonna mean a lot to me. From all I understand, when he hits 'em, they stay hit."

Jim agreed that he could "well believe that to be true, nodded, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

OH, ATHLETES AUDACIOUS!

WHEN Slick unloaded his drag in front of the big frame house where the freshman athletes were kept, other cars had already arrived. The porch was full of big fellows sitting about wearing ill-fitting pants, sweat shirts and country haircuts.

Slick told Jim he wanted him to room with Waller for a while and cautioned Jim not to let the Frog out of his sight. He hurried into Cap'n Eddie's office. Miss Maude told him that Cap'n Eddie had gone to Junction City to meet a train. The big tackle from New Haven was coming in.

"Good," said Slick. "It looks like everybody we were expecting will be here by tonight."

"Yes," Miss Maude replied, "your big end from Dallas got in this morning. He thumbed rides all the way up. He had four days growth of red whiskers on him."

"Pretty good-looking boy?"

"From your point of view, Slick, I'd say yes. But honestly, he's the worst-looking thing I ever saw."

"Get hold of Shep, Miss Maude."

Slick phoned Millie while he waited for Shep, to tell her he'd be out home pretty soon. The trip, he told her, was wonderful. He'd never had such a good time in his life.

Nace Shepard was a colorless, impersonal young man of thirty, who occupied a position known as custodian of athletic properties, listed on the payroll at one hundred dollars a month. There were suspicious persons in the community who suspected the job paid more.

He had been an assistant manager in the days when football first began to pay big money at S.E.U. and he had made himself generally helpful by stealing enough money at the gate to keep the players' laundry bills paid and to furnish them with change for the movies.

While Shep may have knocked down a little for himself, he had always had sufficient discretion not to overdo the thing. Shep was a valuable man, on the whole.

"Shep," said Slick, "I want you to go over to the athletic dorm and get Jim Deederick and take him up to Fincher's and buy him a couple of good suits and whatever else he needs, like shirts and shoes and socks. Steal that lousy cap he's got and buy him a good Dobbs hat."

"Yes, sir," Shep replied, impersonally, and left the office.

Jim and Frog were setting up an iron bed upstairs, when suddenly Jim dropped a metal sidepiece and listened. He had heard someone ask where Jim Deederick's room was. The sound of that voice made Jim know he was going to feel at home at S.E.U. He dropped the bed-rail and ran downstairs.

There on the landing the bull-necks saw a city-looking boy, wearing loose tweeds and horn-rimmed spectacles, and a big, rough guy in denims hug each other and heard them call each other enough ugly names to show that they must be the most devoted friends.

"Come here, Frog, and meet my old roomy," Jim shouted up the stairs.

Ted went with Jim and Shep down to Fincher's to pick out the clothes. Shep was surprised when he observed that Deederick didn't exercise any choice as to what was bought. He took whatever Ted said. During the years at S.E.U. Jim and Ted were to go most places together, and Jim was to do a lot of things just because Ted thought best.

Classes didn't begin for a full week after Jim arrived at S.E.U. Jim and Frog and three or four of the boys had been outfitted and had worked every day with the "try-outs." The try-outs hadn't been promised anything, of course. Out of the twelve or fifteen who dropped in at S.E.U. each September, not more than three or four were ever kept. Most of them were specialists—passers or punters or place-kickers.

The three or four who happened to have

some ability that fitted in the gaps would be taken care of. The rest of them drifted away to smaller colleges which make up the early season practice opposition.

Slick had paid Jim the compliment of advising with him on which boys to keep. They hadn't done much rough work but they had done a little of everything a football player has to do.

Slick had found a promising guard, a good place-kicker and a long drink of water who could kick a ball a mile. The rest of the bunch was trash.

Cap'n Eddie told Slick he thought he could fix up two of the boys through alumni groups. He might talk to Shep about the other boy. Shep had ways of solving such problems. Of the ten who were rejected, all but two drifted out of town as mysteriously as they had come. The other two turned in their uniforms, admitted their fathers could pay their tuitions and gave up football altogether.

JIM soon learned that he would be busy enough at S.E.U. not to get bored. He would wait table from seven-thirty to eight-twenty and then go to class. During his vacant hour in the morning he would clerk in the Co-op. Then he would wait table again from twelve-thirty to one-thirty.

From one-thirty to three-thirty he would be in laboratory, and then he would report to football practice. He would wait table again from six-thirty to seven-thirty, and three nights a week he would go to skull practice in the gym. Except for the Freshman orientation meetings, held twice a week, when the Dean of Students lectured on study habits, the rest of Jim's time would be his own.

That would leave one night during the week for a movie or to keep the polish on his pool game. Jim's faculty adviser couldn't quite see how he was going to get in the R.O.T.C. drill, but he thought it could be worked out.

The night before school opened, Coach Nelson had Jim and Frog out to supper. Slick was very happy.

For the first time in years he had landed

every man he had really counted on getting, and they all looked okay to him. He told the boys how sorry he was that he wouldn't get to work with them until next year. The Varsity would be back from training camp tomorrow and he would have to give all of his time to them. Slick looked very tired, because he had been driving thirty miles to the Varsity camp every day for afternoon practice and coming in every night to be in his office early the next morning.

Jim knew the coach was facing a poor season with his Varsity this year, but had set his heart on putting out a real team the next year, when Jim and Frog would be sophomores.

One reason Slick had Jim and Frog out to supper was because he wanted to explain to them how to conduct themselves at the meeting of the faculty committee on scholarships and awards. He frankly explained to them that there were a lot of sissies and phonies on the faculty who were always trying to hurt football at S.E.U. For that reason they mustn't answer "football" when they were asked what their hobbies were.

Slick explained that he had seen to it that nothing had been said about their having ever played football in the letters recommending them for scholarships and jobs.

"Can't the fools tell by looking at us?" Frog asked.

"Oh, yes, but that's not the point. You see, the president of the university is coöperative. He's got to please the alumni and the legislature. He can handle the faculty all right, because they've got their jobs to think about, same as the coaches. The president can coöperate and will so long as the record don't show anything about football."

"Who is the president of this place?" Frog asked.

"Dr. Handiwell. Dr. F. Wadlington Handiwell,"

"What sort of a guy is he?"

"Aw, he's a won'erful orator and a fine practical man. A whole lot of the faculty

are all the time trying to stab him in the back because they don't get paid as much as the coaches, but he's a fine practical man.

"He told old man Harnet, the college treasurer, that he wasn't worrying much about the faculty griping, as long as he could get a carload of Ph.D.'s for fifteen hundred a year. Anyway, we can count on the prexy to coöperate just so long as we don't get anything on the records about our scholarship boys being football players."

"Coach, you ain't askin' me to lie and tell 'em I ain't never played football?" Jim asked.

"No, of course not. Just don't bear down on the football or athletic stuff, when they ask you what your hobbies are."

"Coach, I air't quite sure what you mean by hobbies. I've heard that word used so many ways."

"Anything you like to do a lot."

"Well, what am I gonna tell 'em?"

"Let's see. Didn't you used to travel a lot on freight trains and thumb rides a whole lot?"

"Sure."

"You loved that, didn't you?"

"Sure."

"Well, when they say, 'Mr. Deederick, what is your hobby?' you just look as dignified as you can and say, 'Travel'."

"S'pose they ask me what else?"

"You like movies, don't you?"

"Sure, I love a good Western."

"Well, if they press you, tell 'em you're interested in the theater."

"S'pose they press me about athaletics, coach? I ain't goner out and out lie."

"Tell 'em you have a deep emotional reaction to the aesthetic side of athletics!"

"I'll fergit all that stuff, coach," Jim said, blushing at the thought.

"Naw, you won't, either," put in the Frog. "I'll teach it to you." Frog was a man of more than one gift. He had been in home talent plays and had a flair for learning lines.

"What are you goner tell 'em, Frog?" Jim asked.

"Don't worry about rie, I'll handle 'em. I been called up before so many faculty committees and discipline committees in my day that I know how to handle 'em. Why, they'll be putty in my hands."

"IH do the best I can," Jim muttered disconsolately, "but I'm warnin' you, coach, I ain't goner tell 'em no out and out lies!"

CHAPTER IX

FAIR GROVES OF LEARNING

WHEN Jim and the Frog arrived at the Administration Building, a crowd of boys were standing in the hall. Forty or fifty of them were herded together at one end. These were youthless fellows, nearly all wearing specs. Their color wasn't good and many of them had pimply faces. Future Phi Beta Kappas were coming up for scholarships and awards on the basis of their high academic records. They huddled together, looking suspiciously at the row of athletes wallowing abng the wall

Jim saw the long boy with the big Adam's apple and the short boy with the thick ears. He saw a keen-eyed, sharp-featured six-footer that he knew must be the pitcher Cap'n Eddie said they were all trying to sign. Beside him stood a chunky tellow almost as old as himself. He knew from the hands he was a catcher.

He saw the big red-headed end from Dallas and the tackle from New Haven. A swell-looking bunch of material for any school to get, Jim thought, as he saw them lined up against the wall.

Every two or three mintues a name would lie called out and one of the group would go into the room where the Faculty Committee on Scholarships and Awards was doling out the jobs and scholarships for the coming year. At last Jim's name was called, and he went in and took his seat in front of twenty-four faculty members.

Dr. F. Wadlington Handiwell, President of S.E.U., picked up a card. "This gentleman is James Deederick, who comes to us highly recommended. Colonel Wise, the

headmaster of his academy, is a splendid man in whose judgment I have the highest confidence. He states in his letters that Deederick is a young man of exceptional character and fine ideals. He is in Colonel Wise's opinion a young man of real potential leadership." The president dropped his eyes. "His financial need is undoubted. His father died in his early childhood. It is with peculiar pleasure that I recommend Mr. Deederick for a full scholarship, a position in the dining hall and a position in the Cooperative Store."

"What's his academic record?" snapped a sour-faced man on the front seat.

Dr. Handiwell coughed. "His record, Dr. Pickens, at Oakdell High School in Oakdell, Kentucky, is excellent—a preponderance of A's."

"What did he do at the academy?" the sour-faced man insisted.

Dr. Handiwell was forced to admit that Jim's record was five C-minuses and five D's.

"Another football player?" The sour-faced man could afford to be brave in the presence of Dr. Handiwell because he couldn't very well be fired. The worst had already happened when he had been given notice of his retirement at sixty-five, which would be at the end of two years. His attitude had already cost him the usual five years' extension at forty-five hundred a year.

"What are your hobbies, Deederick?" Dr. Handiwell asked.

"Travel and movies and athletic aesthetics," Jim blurted nervously.

"What?" yelled Dr. Pickens, looking sourer than ever. A titter spread over the room. "How old is he?"

"Twenty," replied Dr. Handiwell, looking at the card.

"I'm goin' on twenty-three," put in Jim. "Most people think I'm older than that, but I reely ain't quite twenty-three."

"MAY I ask this young man some direct questions?" snapped Dr. Pickens. He straightened his glasses and looked mean. Jim didn't mind.

"Yes, indeed," replied Dr. Handiwell, generously.

"Deederick, you're a football player, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And a good one, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And a basketball player?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you got the cup for being the best player in the tournament last year?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are the fellow that knocked out that Payne boy over at Q.M.A. and finished his boxing career?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you're the boy that had big league baseball scouts hanging around the Q.M.A. bleachers all last spring?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you're about twenty-six years old?"

"No, sir. Min says I'm goin' on twenty-three."

"Who is Min?"

"My mother."

"Excuse me. You're a typical tramp-athlete, aren't you?"

"Well, I don't think I am. I haven't ever been a tramp. I've done a lot of hoboing on freight trains, but I ain't ever begged."

"A hobo, but not a tramp."

"Yes, sir. I hoboed because I love to ride freight trains. You see, all my folks are railroaders."

"Are you a gambler, Deederick?"

"I used to gamble a lot when I shot pool for the house at home, but I've about quit. I don't care nuthin' for poker or dice any more."

"Why did you quit gambling?"

"Gran always said a gambler never come to nuthin' in the long run. He says it's liable to make a feller crooked if he keeps it up."

"Do you drink much—I suppose not?"

"I don't drink none, least I haven't since I was small."

"Well, Deederick, I wish you would tell this committee why you think you deserve a share of the income of this University.

You understand that your receiving a scholarship and a job will prevent some serious student from receiving one."

"I don't think I ought to have it if I'm keepin' somebody out that deserves it more than me."

The sour-faced nan's expression softened slightly. "Well, didn't you ask for this scholarship?"

"No, sir, I ain't asked for nuthin'. I never asked nobody for nuthin'. They just come down there to Oakdell and brought me up here. I thought I was doin' 'em a favor to come. I can make more playin' ball in one summer than I'll ever get out of this place. I'm giving up real money tryin' to help you-all out with your athletics and get me a little edjercation."

Now Dr. Picken's expression entirely changed and he practically beamed. "Deederick, you mean you really would like to get an education?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Well, it's like my roomy said over at Q.M.A. I'm the kind of a guy that needs to learn sump'n a heap more than them little fellers out there in the hall. They already know all they need to know. What they need is exercke."

"Dr. Handiwell," said Dr. Picken, turning to the president, "I move that Deederick's petition for a scholarship be granted and that his petition for jobs be granted, and I wish to add that he can have anything else he wants around here as far as I'm concerned. It is refreshing to hear someone tell the truth once in a while!"

"Yes, Doctor," Dr. Handiwell replied. "Is there a second?"

There were so many seconds that Dr. Handiwell didn't think it necessary to tak* a vote.

"Next gentleman," he added, in a tone precariously near that of a barber, and the door was opened for Jim Deederick to leave the room.

WHEN Dr. Handiwell returned to hit office, he asked his idolatrous secretary what was next in his schedule. "Wh>,"

Dr. Honeywool, you are to preside at three-thirty at the joint session of the Advisory Committee, the Executive Council and the Committee on Flans for Curricular Enrichment."

Dr. Handiwell loved the way Miss Macey pronounced his name. He had gradually come to pronounce it the same way himself. "Dr. HoneywoDl," he would say to himself over and over again, "Dr. F. Wadlington Honeywool." Not so bad. The teachers most hungry fo: raises learned the trick, and he was beginning to be introduced as Dr. Honeywool. There were still a few yokels from rural counties in the legislature who continued to call him Handiwell, but they were persons of no culture—persons of no importance. To the world that mattered he was F. Wadlington Honeywool.

"What else have I to do today, Miss Messy?" the president asked. Of course he knew exactly what he had to do. Dr. Handiwell had experimented a bit with Miss Macey's name. Macey, Meecy, Micey, Mosey, Musey, he had repeated many times to himself. He concluded there was really nothing much to do about the name but to lend it as much dignity as possible by the tone of voice. He came out finally with something that defies actual spelling, but as nearly as anything was "Messy." Of course Miss Macey was anything but that.

Miss Macey read the president's calendar gravely. "Why, Dr. Honeywool, you have to address the local alumni group tonight at eight o'clock at the Florolina Hotel. Oh, Dr. Honeywool, had you forgotten that—oh, Dr. Honeywool, I didn't remind you. I am *so* sorry, Dr. Honeywool."

"It had slipped my rind, Miss Messy."

Dr. Honeywool then lsked Miss Macey to call his car. He thought he'd better go to lunch, for even won'erful men must eat, especially when they are to preside at three and speak at eight o'clock.

On the way home, William, the colored chauffeur, told Dr. Handiwell the story about Durham Tech stealing Frog Waller and Jim Deederick stealing him back. Dr.

Handiwell didn't reply, but William knew he wasn't the best driver in town. He knew he received the best wages in town because Dr. Handiwell recognized his value as a newsgatherer.

After lunching on roast beef, potatoes and three cups of coffee, with three lumps of sugar each and heavy cream, Dr. Handiwell slept vigorously for an hour. At three-thirty he was presiding at the joint meeting of the Advisory Committee, the Executive Council and the Committee on Plans for Curricular Enrichment. As this included all heads of departments and acting heads, it was a fairly important group.

It was toward the end of this annual meeting that the butters-in and troublemakers of the faculty always blew off steam and asked embarrassing questions.

Dr. Handiwell could skillfully drag meetings out with matters of routine business until there wasn't much time left for the troublemakers. He could count on the deans and the members of the Executive Council to coöperate in this regard, but some of the department heads always showed off to their colleagues by trying to put the president on the spot.

A few disgruntled ones came each year to the meeting with all the thrill of big-game hunters, their guns loaded with enough shells of sarcasm and innuendo to make a hippopotamus squirm. Always hopeful, they were forever doomed to disappointment; they had never fathomed the true depth of F. Wadlington Handiwell's hide.

THE meeting had lasted just one hour when Dr. Kitlick rose to his feet. As the leading authority in the Southland on the Influence of Chaucer on Shelley, he enjoyed great prestige.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I rise to protest against the gross improprieties being practiced by our Athletic Department under the very noses of this administration. The reputation of this University is being dragged through the mire by our running a three-ring circus—no, a twelve-ring circus.

"We have ceased to be an educational institution and have gone into the entertainment business on a large scale. We are today in the amusement racket in competition with Madison Square Garden. We have brought to this campus from distant states as tough a crew as ever scuttled a ship, and we are harboring them on our campus almost within the sound of my voice.

"We have just this morning doled out to them a large part of the income of this so-called University in the form of scholarships and jobs—income that might be profitably used for the education of educable young men. One monstrosity nearly eight feet tall has been brought here within the last few days. The sole attribute equipping Mm for higher education is that he can stand and put balls in a basketball goal without having to throw or jump.

"I ask you, gentlemen, is the fact that a man's elbows are higher than the shoulders of normal men a proper reason for giving him a scholarship? His name is Mcintosh and his sobriquet is Cushaw. I suspect that Cushaw Mcintosh is about as educable as any other long-necked squash!

"Such students are a demoralizing influence on the campus; their very presence in our classrooms turns intellectual discussion into a farce. Many of our adolescent students admire them and try to be like them—" Dr. Kitlick had worked himself into such a frenzy by this time that he plopped down in his seat without finishing.

Professor Charlie Tate, who had entered education by the back door, rose to reply. Professor Tate had wasted six years of his younger life in the coaching racket. He had first become a small prep school instructor because it was the duty of the history teacher there to handle athletics on the side. The fact that he had been employed by the headmaster after a football game and before his scholastic record had been examined caused some of his friends to suspect that he had been employed to coach football, and incidentally teach a little history.

A desire to get out of a small town where his personal habits were too closely scrutinized had caused Professor Tate to drift back to Columbia summer after summer until he had accumulated a couple of degrees. Through i. slow metamorphosis, Coach Tate had become Professor Tate, but some of his colleagues thought the transition had come too late for him to ever become a scholar.

They admitted he was a fair enough teacher, but what of that—he read no papers before learned societies, and he openly fraternized with the rougher element around the gym; a man, on the whole, of low tastes.

Ex-coach Tate always had believed a good offense was the best defense, and now that his own kind had been insulted he was ready for battle. "As I look about me into the pompous faces of some of my colleagues here, their stomachs loaded with academic hardware"—Professor Tate had accumulated several gold balls but no keys during his college days—"and listen from day to day to their pedantic twaddle and meaningless technical jargons, I often long for a breath of fresh air. I can get some relief in the ill-smelling odors of the gym.

"When I see hundreds of youthless student faces, disillusioned and cynical, I welcome to this campus a few good, dumb, natural boys—athletes—boys who still enjoy doing what a youngster ought to like to do. I love to look occasionally at a boy who doesn't look as though he'd been everywhere he ever wanted to go, and done everything he ever wanted to do. I get sick of boys with complexes now and then; boys who hate their parents and their teachers and their home towns; frustrated young whippersnappers who are just waiting to put their cynicism into the books they plan to write.

"I welcome to this campus a little group of athletes who can take life lightly, who keep their lips stiff and fight back instead of letting their troubles sour inside. I personally think a few dumb athletes on our campus may dilute a mixture that has become too rich for my taste."

PRESIDENT Handiwell's big face shed an aura of good feeling over the whole room as he chuckled, "A little difference in taste is being displayed here, gentleman; a little difference in taste, ha, ha! I gather that some o' you like cushaws and some of you don't. In's like olives, isn't it, gentlemen—some like 'em, some don't, ha, ha." There was scattered laughter from some of the worst-paid professors.

A zealous ex-Rhodes scholar rose at this point and discoursed at length upon the purity of English athletics. At the end of his speech he turned to ex-coach Tate. "Don't you think, Professor, the English chaps handle the matter better?"

Professor Tate remained in his seat. "English purity in athletics, so far as it exists at all, is simply a by-product of English snobbery. They think athletic games are too good for the common people. They resent a man playing polo unless he can own forty ponies. They resent poor boys playing gentlemen's games."

"I'm sorry," replied the Rhodes scholar, "but that isn't so."

Professor Tate frowned up. "You mean to cail me—"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Dr. Handiwell roared, tapping his gavel.

Both professors nodded apologies and forced smiles of truce.

"The athletic problem is a good deal like the liquor problem or the problem of war—a little difficult of solution in half an hour."

Professor Tate was on his feet again. "Pardon me, Mr. President, but there is one more thing I want to explain to this faculty. The crowds that fill our stands are aesthetes; they are artists who react to motion, rhythm, grace and skill—"

Dr. Kitlick cut in. "Why not employ good professionals to provide the aesthetic joy, the ecstasy, that students derive from this type of art? Then we wouldn't have to read their stupid papers."

"That costs too much," Professor Tate replied. "A good pro football player would cost us as much as a full professor. A pro as good as this boy Jim Deederick would

cost as much as a dean. And what does a boy like Deederick ask of us? I ask you, gentlemen—I'll tell you.

"He asks nothing but a little round steak, not much better than dog meat, once a day, a few boiled potatoes and a few cans of beans. We keep him in a room without a carpet, a room we couldn't rent, with a mean bed and one chair.

"We give him a remission of fees that might not be paid anyway, and he comes to us after turning down big league contracts."

Although the time was growing short, Professor Pickens arose. Professor Pickens hated Dr. Handiwell and openly insisted to his colleagues that the president was a crook. He usually referred to the president sarcastically as our "won'erful man" or "Handy the Great," and repeatedly urged that he ought to be in the funny paper.

Some of Professor Dickens' old friends understood that twenty years ago Dr. Pickens had lost the presidency to Dr. Handiwell by one vote. Since S.E.U. athletics were believed to have grown steadily more corrupt since Dr. Handiwell took office, the sour-faced man, as leader of the opposition, had seized on prexy's connivance in gymnasium frauds as his most vulnerable point.

He let no opportunity pass to snipe at the president and now that he was soon to be retired he had nothing to lose and could vent his spleen to his heart's content.

"GENTLEMEN," he began, "we are in the most enviable position of any group of promoters in the world. We have an air-tight racket. We can hire 'em cheaper than the pros and charge more at the gate. They have to pay 'em money.

"We feed 'em dog meat and sleep 'em on army cots. We get free ads. The pros have to pay for theirs. We've got better side-shows. We can throw dances in the gym, dress up our coeds in bareback dresses and provide the sex appeal. We've got the fraternity lounges for 'em to get drunk in and shower rooms to sober 'em up.

"We've got tax-free property for our

sideshows and we've got glamour that the pros can't meet. I'm for bigger and better ringers. Let's hire a few good Kaintucky hog-callers for the cheering section and Harry Richman to lead the cheers. Let's get rid of that goat we've got for a mascot. We need a giraffe."

Dr. Pickens resumed his seat in a warm glow of happiness as he thought how deeply he must have pierced the rind of President Handiwell.

"Gentlemen," said the president complacently—the sour-faced man's remarks had trickled off his skin as the warm drops of April showers run down a rubber coat—"your remarks have interested me very much. There is nothing which I feel should be encouraged so much as free and frank * discussion of the problems of this University.

"As to the merits of the issue relating to the subsidization of athletes, I must freely admit there is much to be said on both sides. A great deal has been said, and I feel that I, personally, have been edified by the expression of opposing views.

"But," Dr. Handiwell continued, "thinly veiled insinuations have been made at this meeting to the effect that this institution is now subsidizing athletes. Those insinuations it is my duty as President of this University to deny.

"The records of this University are an open book. You are welcome to examine them. You will not find in my files a single word in the letters from our alumni which refer to the athletic ability of the young men they recommend for scholarships.

"Some of the young men in the dormitory annex which is sometimes referred to falsely as the athletic house, may have some skill at games. But all of these men have been granted their scholarships and positions as persons and not as athletes.

"They have all come to us upon recommendation of loyal alumni; these recommendations have stressed four major points—need, character, ideals and promise of leadership.

"If by chance some young man of outstanding character happens to be endowed

by his Maker with special skill at games, we have not thought it proper to penalize him because of that talent. Our books are open, gentlemen. Would anyone present care to examine the files?"

"I'd like to see the files in the gymnasium," Dr. Pickens replied.

"You are privileged to do so, Professor Pickens. Is there any particular young man's file you would like to see?" Dr. Handiwell knew he could count on Miss Maude.

"I'd like to see the gym files on this man Deederick. May I?"

Dr. Handiwell turned to the registrar, who acted as secretary of faculty meetings. "Call the gymnasium and ask Captain Moran's secretary to send the complete files on James Deederick."

While they were waiting, Dr. Handiwell made a few announcements which he thought would interest the faculty. He announced modestly that he had received two additional honorary degrees since their last meeting. He was now Dr. F. Wadlington Handiwell, A.B., M.A., Ph.D., and LL.D to the fifth power. Dr. Pickens wondered, as the announcement was made, how many preachers the president had been forced to give D.D.'s from S.E.U. for these last two LL.D.'s. The price seemed to him to be going up.

WHEN the gymnasium janitor puffed in carrying the complete file of correspondence on Jim Deederick, the president gestured to the registrar to turn it directly over to Dr Pickens.

While Dr. Pickens' eyes were running rapidly down the pages of the letters, all of which extolled Deederick's character and leadership, Miss Maude was down in the storeroom of the gym lighting a match to destroy the last remnant of a letter from an alumnus with little enough sense to actually put in writing something about Deederick being as fast as a snake.

As Dr. Pickens threw the file disappointedly on the registrar's desk, Dr. Handiwell rose from his chair. Triumph was written on his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "since ugly insinuations have been made here today concerning the conduct of athletics at S.E.U., I am going to ask you to vote on two resolutions. First, that it is the belief of this body that no subsidization of athletics exists at this University; second, that this policy shall continue."

Both resolutions were recorded as passing unanimously, although Dr. Pickens and Professor Tate sat in sullen silence, declining to vote. Neither was eligible for promotion.

At the close of the meeting, Dr. Handiwell returned to his office to finish dictating the first draft of the Handiwell Plan for the Purification of Athletics in Southern Universities.

"—that no student shall be granted any scholarship, remission of fees or lucrative employment by the university on account of athletic ability, but solely upon the basis of the recommendations as to financial need, character, ideals and promise of leadership."

Miss Macey interrupted. "Oh, Dr. Honeywool, pardon my interrupting, but did you want anything included about the boys' grades?"

"Yes, yes, add this. The question of academic qualifications shall be left to the discretion of the presidents of the respective universities."

CHAPTER X

PROBLEM CHILDREN

DR. HANDIWELL left the office at five-fifteen; he wanted to get a look at the freshman football squad as they returned to the gym. To light he would address the State Chapter of S.E.U. Alumni at a banquet in the Florolina Hotel. He would have to memorize the names of the men on the freshman squad. The alumni always spoke of his wonderful knack at learning and remembering names, and he couldn't let them down.

Dr. Handiwell arrived early for the banquet. It was a big advantage to be on the ground first and encounter alumni one

at a time. If he should fail to remember the names of any of the gas station boys, his alumni secretary could tip him off.

"What's up tonight, Sprig?" he inquired of the secretary. "Anything out of the ordinary?"

The alumni secretary motioned him aside and whispered in his ear. "A bunch of these Rose Bowl advocates have framed this meeting to pass a resolution for open subsidization of athletes."

"Open—open—?"

Sprig stood corrected. "I mean subsidization."

"Who are the ringleaders?"

"Slats Runsdell, Stew Morton, Bun Whitley and Snorter Jones."

"I'm not surprised at Bun and Snorter, but I am amazed to hear that Slats and Stew would countenance such a thing. Where are these boys now?"

"They're up in Room 907 having a few drinks."

"I must see them before the banquet begins. This thing must be stopped."

"Shall I call them and tell them you are coming up to the room?"

"Oh, no, don't do that. Not if they are drinking."

Dr. Handiwell didn't drink with alumni any more than he drank with students. He only drank with members of the board and members of the appropriation committee of the state legislature.

"Get me a room on the eighth floor and have the boys come down there, Sprig. I can't countenance a drinking party."

On the elevator, Sprig reminded Dr. Handiwell of the names of the wives and children of Slats and Stew. "I wouldn't mention families to Bun and Snorter—they're both divorced now."

Dr. Handiwell was all set when four dissipated middle-aged fellows came noisily into the room.

"Well, hell-o, Slats, how are Peggy and the twins?"

"Fine, Doctor, fine. Just fine."

"Hell-o, Stew, did Dot come with you?"

"No, Doctor, I wish she could have," Stew lied.

The president threw one arm around Bun and the other around Snorter. "Well, well, well, Bun, it's like old times to see you and Snorter again." He pushed all the middle-aged boys into the room, patting their backs as he pushed. Two of them found chairs and the others sat on the bed.

Dr. Handiwell knew his crowd. He put them in good humor with a little joke he had heard on the train the other day. The boys laughed and slapped their legs. But Dr. Handiwell had to work fast.

"What's this I hear about you boys planning to propose subsidization at the meeting tonight?"

Four flushed faces grew a little hard. They had resolved to buck the president and fight it out. But Dr. Handiwell knew their type. They had all been minor players who had barely won their letters in the days when S.E.U. teams weren't so good as now. A Rose Bowl team at S.E.U. would enable them to spoof themselves and their business friends that they had once been great athletes.

THIS gang isn't as tough as they think, Dr. Handiwell said to himself. He decided he wouldn't argue with them; he'd tell them a thing or two.

"Look here, boys, S.E.U. is not going in for subsidization. We are going to follow the Handiwell Plan."

"But, Dr. Handiwell—"

"Look here, you want my coöperation, don't you? You've got to have my coöperation, haven't you?"

The four middle-aged boys knew what he meant by coöperation.

"All right, if you want me to continue to coöperate, you'll keep that subsidy business from coming up at this banquet."

The four alumni looked at each other accusingly. Why didn't one of the others tell the old scoundrel where to get off? We're not students any more, we're big businessmen, they thought.

"Come here, boys," the Doctor said, motioning to them affectionately. They came into a circle in the middle of the room, and hovered beneath the outstretched arms of

the great man. His voice and expression told them he was about to let them in on the cold dope. "We've got the best bunch of freshman athletes in the history of S.E.U. and we're going to have the best team in our history a year from this fall, Jim Deederick and Frog Waller and a couple of others are big-time players, see?" Dr. Handiwell coughed to rub out the "see."

"You boys stay out of this thing and leave the whole business to me. You leave the whole business to me and you'll get a whole lot nearer the Rose Bowl than you will with this open subsidy idea. Besides, the academic standing of S.E.U. will not be injured."

The middle-aged boys looked at each other dubiously. Was this cold turkey, or were they being spoofed?

"You fellows will be surprised how good a team we can have under the Handiwell Plan." Did the doctor leer slightly? He didn't stoop to a wink, but the muscles around his right eye drew just enough for the four middle-aged boys to understand.

The banquet was a little late in starting, but after Slats and Stew and Bun and Snorter had mingled a few minutes with the crowd, it was all fixed, and the question of subsidization did not come up.

Three hours later, when the banqueters were leaving the hotel, the hat man heard repeated over and over again: "I tell you, Dr. Handiwell is a won'erful orator!" "Yes, sir, he's certainly a won'erful man." "S.E.U. is migluy lucky to have a president like Dr. Handiwell."

HUNK BLKVINS, S.E.U. freshman coach, sat in his office looking over his cards. He was in trouble. He had to do something about Ingerton; he had to get him fixed up somehow.

Ingerton didn't have a cent and he couldn't stay in school unless he could get everything. They were already packed three and four deep in the rooms over at the Athletic House and the athletes were waiting on each other in the beanery. All the jobs were assigned,

Something had to be done and it had to be done quick. Ingerton was good. He had been out of school a couple of years and seasoned; he had been well coached. He's got four years of good football under his belt and he's plenty tough, Hunk thought. Next to Deederick and Frog Waller and his big end from Texas, Hunk would rather have him than anybody on the squad.

Hunk looked over the cards for the fourth time to see who he could afford to lose. His eyes fell on the name of Sam Bell. If Hunk had known anybody as good as Ingerton was going to drop in, he never would have consented to Bell's being given his jobs and scholarship.

It seemed a shame that a mediocre boy like Bell should be getting help and making it impossible to fix up a boy like Ingerton. Of course, Bell was supposed to be a promising all-round athlete—good high hurdler and all-state forward. He looked like he might make an end, but Ingerton was already an end.

Hunk put down the file and dropped Bell's card on the desk. He stared thoughtfully at the name. He may be better than Ingerton some day; he's bigger and he's faster and he's willing, he thought, but he's greener'n apples in May. He looks awful working on a tackle and they sucked him in a couple of times in the game with Maryland Teachers' Irigerton looked good all the time he was in the game.

Hunk decided to ditch Sam Bell and give Ingerton his jobs. He'd have to give the kid the works and make him want to leave. Hunk, of course, knew how to make 'em want to leave.

Hunk was lucky. Bell was late to practice by a whole five minutes. Hunk asked him: "What's the matter, son, don't you want to play football?"

Sam explained that he was kept overtime in laboratory. Hunk scowled and didn't answer. Then Hunk told him to do a couple of laps around the field—it might teach him to dress a little faster.

When Sam came up panting after half a mile, Hunk put him working with Al Zebowitch and Ingerton in a two-on-one

workout. Bell was pretty well shot when Zebowitch and Ingerton had mauled him for ten minutes. Hunk set up a dummy scrimmage and put Bell on left defensive end, without any guard or tackle on the defense. He ran plays repeatedly straight at Bell, yelling at Frog Waller and Ben Bierman to cut him down.

He pretended not to notice that Bell had taken too much and could hardly get back to his feet after Frog hit him the last time.

Jim Deederick walked over to Hunk and called his attention to the fact that Bell was all in.

Hunk pretended not to hear and told Deederick to go down to the other end of the field and work on his punting. He ran one more play at Bell.

The Frog tried not to hurt him, but Bell didn't get up. He lay on the ground, dazed. Hunk asked if he was hurt. Bell's lips trembled, but he said, "No, sir," and stood up.

They ran one more play. Sam didn't come in, but backed out of the play.

"Take Bell's place, Ingerton," Hunk said. Bell sat on the ground. Hunk motioned to him to stand up and Bell stood up. Hunk turned the practice over to Joe Carter and took Bell aside.

"You can't take it, can you, Bell? You don't like the game, do you? A little of the old stuff comes up in your neck, don't it; when the goin' is rough?"

Bell said quickly:

"That's not so, coach."

"What? You tryin' to call me a liar? You get off this field and don't come back. Turn in your uniform."

BELL was stunned. He had played in one game for S.E.U. and he knew he wouldn't be eligible anywhere else in the South. He wanted to play football. He had always dreamed of being an All-Southern. The price was too much. He'd have to forget his pride.

"I'm sorry, coach. I apologize," he called after Hunk, but Hunk apparently didn't hear.

Sam Bell was crying when he went into

the dressing room, but he was sure Slick Nelson would understand. He hadn't lost hope. He was willing to eat dirt or do anything.

Slick and Cap'n Eddie left town for Muncey before Sam had a chance to see them, but Hunk saw them and told them that Sam had showed a yellow streak and that he was impudent when he tried to talk to him. Sam left that night for his home in Louisiana. Ingerton moved into Bell's space in the Athletic House.

Jim Deederick had taken Sam to the train, and when Slick returned to his office his found Jim waiting for him.

"Coach," Jim blurted, "what did Hunk tell you about Sam Bell?"

"He said Bell showed up a little yellow streak and that he was impudent when he talked to him about it."

"Coach, that ain't so. Bell was framed to give Ingerton his jobs."

"What are you talking about, Jim? Hunk isn't that kind."

"I don't know what kind he is, but I know what I saw happen. The kid was framed."

"You misunderstood Hunk, Jim."

"I didn't misunderstand anything, coach."

"First thing you know, Jim, you'll be getting dissension stirred up among the freshmen. I want to have a talk with you tonight." Slick could hear Hunk coming in. "Don't say any more now, Jim."

"I want to tell him to his face."

Slick pulled Jim into the next room. His eyes flashed and he dug his fingers into Jim's arms and glared into his eyes. "Look here, Jim, you're getting too big for your pants. You're not big enough to tell me how to run my job."

Jim forced Slick's hand open with fingers like metal tweezers and pushed his arm down. "I don't want to tell you or anybody else how to run anything at this place. Let me out of here."

Slick stood across the door. He had tried to scare Jim, but he had found the boy didn't scare easy. "Wait and let's talk this thing over, Jim," he said.

"You don't want to hear Sam Bell's side. You don't want to do anything but protect Hunk. Let me out."

Slick saw Jim was too worked up to be reasoned with now. "I'll see you right after supper, Jim," he said, opening the door.

That night Jim Deederick caught the blinds out of Jmction City, bound for Oakdell, Kentucky.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Want Some Sea Food, Mamma?

IN T long ago scientists announced that appendicitis in the United States is much more common inland than on the seacoast. This you may regard as an interesting fact but not particularly pertinent. But you are wrong. Medical men have concluded that people living along the coast suffer less from appendicitis simply because they eat a lot of sea food.

Sea food, you see, contains a considerable quantity of iodine; and iodine appears to be valuable. For the territory known as the "goiter belt" corresponds with the high-appendicitis area, and goiter, too, results from lack of iodine. Obviously something must be done for those inland unfortunates who can't get at a good shore dinner. Personally, we leave it up to Washington; let government servants convey clams inland, singing sea chanteys as they go.

—Augustus Harden



Hauling himself aboard, Sands heard one of the fighters croak, "You black squid!"

The Fog's Whiskers

By FRANCIS GOTT

Author of "That She-Devil Sea!"

Meet Hannibal Spugs, the Newfie runt, who was equally adept at pulling a prize catch of cod in white weather—or baiting a net for a scoundrel

THE winter sea lay like a tub of oil—flat, heavy, viscous. To the east'ard, like a frozen red cherry, the morning sun bobbee above the fingery vapors. Aboard the fishing vessel *La Corcha* spars and gear worked loosely.

"A dory—adrift!" Manuel Sands pointed into the sun.

Sands had the rugged body of a down-easter, yet his face was the face of a Spaniard, dark, fierce, but lit by kindly, enigmatic brown eyes. His mother was of the true Asturian blood, by way of Gloucester.

"Aye, a dory!" Hopkins, the helmsman,

twisted his crooked shoulder grotesquely as he turned his body the better to see.

"Pick 'er up!" commanded Sands.

"Her strakes're all stove in," argued Torrey, the third man on the schooner's* quarterdeck. "She's wuthless. Let's on to George's banks. Keep on yar course, Hopkins. We can't waste time on useless wreckage."

"Steer for the dory," Sands ordered simply. Again he studied Torrey's gangling frame, his baboonlike face. He caught the glint of vindictiveness in the mate's small blue eyes. "There can't be ary two cap'ns, Torrey, on ary one ship."

"Cap'n! That's a laugh!" Torrey wiped his long nose with the back of his mitten.

"Never does ary harm, mister, to study anything adrift," commented Sands.

Torrey stalked to the taffrail and stood there, growling sullenly under his breath. Sands remained silent. From both of

his master-mariner grandfathers he had inherited one telling quality of command-taciturnity. But he was sorely troubled. He didn't know much about Gorham Torrey. The man, twenty years Sands' senior, had lost his own vessel on the rocks. Because Sands was pressed for ready cash, he had sold Torrey a half interest in *La Corcha*. Now he wished he hadn't.

Driven by her kicker, the schooner nosed through the clutching vapors, curling up from the kiss of cold air on the warmer waters. At right angles to her course, she glided slowly alongside the damaged dory. Sands caught the frozen painter with a gaff and made it fast to a shroud. The sight of the sprawled, stiff form of a man in the dory's bottom caused fiis lips to pinch tight together as his glance met Torrey's.

"A little guy—pore feller!" squeaked Alonzo Hopkins, the runt of a litter of large-framed men himself. "Breathin', but jest about gorn!"

"All hands on deck," ordered Sands, his breath leaving his lips like smoke and sucked into nothingness by the cold air.

They lifted the dory from the southing clutch of the sea and dragged it inboard. Frozen whiskers of spume lined her gunnels. A trawl tub and half a trawl, knife-cut, bespeaking tragedy, rested in the bow. Several codfish were behind the tub. One of them had long strips cut from its side; evidently the occupant, starving, had eaten the raw, white flesh. Slush lapped the oilskins of the unconscious man.

AN AMAZING vitality, aided by brandy, and hot blankets wrapped about his naked flesh, brought the little trawler to. He had big hands and feet, and knobby, swollen joints that creaked when he moved. His chest was deep, his rugged face homely, determined and be-whiskered.

"Tell me about it," prompted Sands kindly. Sands had a deep, abiding faith in his fellow man, yet on occasion he could be stern and terrible.

"Hannibal Spugs be mir name." The

man's voice was a hoarse, dry, halting croak. Hardship had injured and stiffened the cords in his neck. Yet his startlingly clear blue eyes were cheerful as they lit his weathered, tawny features once again. "Dey calls mir Han."

"Hans?"

"Na!" the little man snorted. "What mir look like—er Dutcher? Mir name be Han. Ay come from Newfunlun'."

"Newfie, eh!" Torrey's voice was half a sneer.

"Ya, Newfie! *Vou* herring chawer!" Han Spugs bristled. "Newfunlun' people be gud people!"

"Sure they be," agreed Sands, giving Torrey a hard look.

"Well, how cone mir here?" Spugs' eyes beclouded in confusion. "Ya! Remember now! De fog she shut mir in, quick like er cockroach <vid a blanket dropped him on. Mir vessel, she be name *Lorelei*, she pass mir by, close, close. Ay not see her, Ay not hear her—but Ay smell her. Ay shout, Ay holler, Ay cry, but she be the wind up -she not hear."

"Yuh mean to say yuh could smell yer vessel?" Torrey scoffed. "That's a good one!" He laughed.

"Ya, for true Ay smell her." Spugs glared at Torrey. "Ay take him smell mir grandfadder -after and mir fadder after him. Dey could smell er whaler many mile de wind up."

"I don't believe it!" Torrey's tone was nasty, baiting.

"How many days in the dory?" asked Sands, pushing Torrey away from the bunk.

"How many day?" Spugs shuddered. His face twitched. "Six day, seven day, ten day maybe—Ay not know. De ice she jam mir dory like er bug two decks er cards between. Ay not know."

Han Spugs recovery was rapid. He scooped so much steaming hot haddock chowder into him that Sands wondered. Yet he was glad to see him eat.

"Damned supercargo," growled Torrey. "Yuh eat enough fer three men."

"Ay get de wrinkles oud mir belly,"

croaked Spugs, jabbing at his teeth with a fishbone. "Then Ay v/or k like hell."

He did a neat job of carpentry on his dory, made it tight and strong. Then he secured trawl twine, ringed gengines and hooks to four lines and knotted them to his half trawl.

"Now Ay fish," he stated.

"D'you feel stout enough?" Sands eyed him dubiously. "You still look a little peaked around the gills."

"Ay top notch!" snorted Spugs. "Mir people be tough tribe."

"Fine," Sands grunted. However he didn't want the little man to fold up and get lost again now that he had fished him out of the sea. "We two go dory mates."

Although a hard worker himself, Sands sweated to keep up with Spugs. The Newfoundland rowed deep and strong, handling oars twice as long as himself. He slatted trawl with amazing dexterity. His grip was sure and never gave.

"I'm puttin' Spugs on regular shares," Sand told Torrey that night, leaning over the binnacle light to look at the compass.

"What! That lunatic?"

"Best damned fisherman we got on *La Corcha*," stated Sands with conviction.

"Accordin' to yer tell, he is," growled Torrey. "I got different notions. Guess you don't know much about judgin' men, Sands, or fishin' either. Must be the Spanish blood in yuh."

"That'll do, mister." Sands' lips grayed at the insult. "My Spanish grandfather was one o' the finest fleet skippers out o' Gloucester. Another word on it and I'll knock you into the scuppers."

"I ought to be skipper o' this tub." Torrey glowered at the compass. "With my experience I got the belter right."

"The right is mine," said Sands.

"Yours! Hell!" Torrey spat to leeward. "I own half and besides I'm the better and the older man. You ain't no comet, either as skipper or fisherman."

THOUGHTFUL, truced, Sands left the quarterdeck. He stood for a moment in the waist of the vessel, absently

looking out over the sea for a light. A slight chop was kicking up. The wind was damp, hinted at fog, pierced his clothing with a biting rawness. He descended into the fetid, smokey warmth of the forecabin.

"Feels like a spell o' white weather," he informed his crew.

"Cod bite de fog whiskers," chuckled Spugs in his warped speech.

"Or else the fog bites the cod's whiskers," squeaked Hopkins derisively.

"What you know, you horned sculpin?" hooted Spugs. It plainly tickled him that Hopkins was almost as small as he was. "This be wintertime—school time for little feller."

Spugs fished out a stub pipe, polished black with age. He looked into its empty mouth dolefully.

"This be man-size tobacco," grinned Hopkins, tossing him an oiled pouch. "Runts has to work up to it, gradual like."

For answer, Spugs crammed the bowl to overflowing, tamping it down solidly with a splay thumb. Some of the tobacco fell on the gray blankets of the bunk on which he sat—Torrey's bunk.

Fanshaw, a lank, dour man, suddenly reared out of his bunk like a python. He stretched, crawled into oilskins, and climbed topside to relieve the mate.

A moment later, Sands heard Torrey's big boots clump above their heads. As the mate came down and turned around, Spugs bristled. A black scowl came across the mate's face.

"What yuh mean, Newfie, messin' tobacco in my bunk?" he snarled.

"Ay pick it up," muttered Spugs.

Torrey reached a long arm across the mess table, caught Spugs by the collar and yanked him head foremost to the deck. Spugs grunted in pain at a twisted shoulder.

"*Bastante!* Enough!" Sands used his mother's tongue. His dark, fierce features glowed angrily, vividly, like an ancient oil painting, suddenly wiped clean of the grime of a century by the swipe of a soap rag.

"Ay tear you in pieces!" Spugs heaved himself to his swollen knees, croaked up

at Torrey hoarsely. "Ay use de pieces for cod bait, you black moray!"

Torrey drove a short, vicious kick into Spugs' barrel ribs. Spugs crashed against a locker under a lower bunk. He started clawing himself out like a stubborn turtle.

Sands' hand darted to Torrey's oilskin jacketed arm, gripped, whirled the cursing man around. They clinched. Tensed, straining, each sought to throw the other off balance. The narrow confines of the forecabin permitted no footwork. Both strong men, neither gave more than an inch or two. They were so evenly matched that they grew motionless, like a statue, veins swelling on their foreheads, lips drawn back from clenched teeth.

At last Torrey broke. With an agonized gasp, a gulping for air, he melted in Sands' grip. Sands threw him back with a groan. Torrey slid helplessly across the mess table and into his own bunk, where he lay with closed eyes, breathing heavily.

Spugs retrieved his pipe. With a penetrating glance at Sands' face, he lit it, smoked silently. No one said a word. When Torrey opened his eyes, Sands caught the cold, uncompromising glitter in their blue depths.

The mighty blast of a siren, right on top of them, shook Sands suddenly. The little vessel vibrated as if she were a finely tuned violin. Fearing for the safety of *La Corcha* and her crew, Sands hurriedly swung himself to the open deck and hastened aft.

"Bloody murderers!" cursed Fanshaw, shaking his fist at a towering black hull, ablaze with deck lights, disappearing in a swirl of fog directly astern. "Makin' eighteen knots if she was makin' a foot!"

A mournful bellow from the transatlantic steamer mocked the dour fisherman. *La Corcha* tried to roll her scupper awash as the wake of the great ship surged under her.

SANDS made his way forward, had Hopkins pass him up his reefer, and then stepped into the bow, right abaft the heel of the jib boom. He wanted to

think and he could do it best standing a lookout. Torrey's surly attitude needed pondering.

He turned and ran his eyes down the lines of the little ship. That half of her was owned by a man such as Torrey was proving himself to je, hurt him deeply.

The white pall ranked over him. He could see no farther aft than the running lights, red to port and green to starboard, steady, impersonal eyes, pouring rivulets of color down the ratlines. A sonorous *blat* challenged any danger that might be lurking near in the dank murk—Fanshaw sounding a fog horn, dourly.

An hour passed. He stamped his numb feet. Fog globules beaded on his eyebrows, along the rim of his sou'wester, dripped from the tip of his finely chiseled nose. Then instinct warned him. He started to turn his head when something struck him between the shoulderblades with the force of a spar used as a battering ram.

He fell forward. The outboard fluke of the anchor cut a deep gash in his left cheek as he slipped overside. His arms flashed out. His fingers, hooklike, caught the lower bobstay under the bowsprit. The sea wrapped herself about him in a frigid embrace and sought to pull him under.

He closed his eyes for a moment while his senses whirled, then slowly, painfully, he dragged himself out of the sea. He wrapped his arms up over the bowsprit, until first his knees and then his feet rested on the lower bobstay. Puzzled he heard the sounds of a fight—thuds, grunts, curses. . . .

He inched himself up farther and flopped over upon the deck to safety. He saw two men struggling under the lower jib. He lay still a moment, wondering, getting his breath and his bearings.

"You black squid!" A labored croak—Spugs' voice.

"Ough!" An agonized grunt.

Sands got to his feet and squelched toward the combatants. The two men, one short, the other tall crashed to the deck. They thrashed about, snarling, jabbing.

"Get up!" Sands commanded, thrusting a seaboot between them.

The tall one lurched to his feet like a camel. It was the mate. Spugs rolled deftly out of range of Torrey's long legs before he too got to his feet.

"I seen this Newfu runt knock yuh overside, Cap'n," panted Torrey.

"De Devil haunt you!" cried Spugs. "You done ut yourself!"

"What's all the rumpus up for'ard there?" Fanshaw's deep rumble came out of the gray smother.

"Keep on your course," Sands roared back. "Everything's under control."

"He tried to kill you, Cap'n!" Spugs almost sobbed.

With a weary gesture Sands pointed to the companionway slide leading down into the forecabin. Squabbling like gamecocks, the two men went below.

Sands looked about him with a shiver. Swung by a roll of the vessel, the white arm of the anchor davit flashed across his line of vision. He grunted. Worked loose from its port guy, he figured it was the davit that had struck him. He felt better, for he hated to think that either Spugs or Torrey might have knocked him overside.

He laced the trailing port guy of the davit in its ring bolt and made it fast. Then he went below. He bathed his face, taped a bandage across his cheek and crawled into his bunk.

ONE spume-swept morning three days later, they sailed into Rockland's broad harbor with a good load of fish. Under the press of work, the tension of animosity generated by the mate relaxed.

Late that night, as the vessel beat to the eastward under an icy wind, Torrey reached beneath his mattress and drew forth a deck of cards.

"How about a game of pinochle?" he asked.

"Sure." Sands smiled agreement. Win or lose, he enjoyed the cards. Also he was eager to get on more friendly terms with Torrey.

"Any o' you boys want to sit in?" Torrey looked the men over with veiled eyes.

"Ay play wid de cap'n," Spugs twisted from the bunk which he shared turn and turn about with Fanshaw. "Pinochle be meat for de brain."

"Then you needs ut, Newfie," hooted Hopkins.

"Maybe some other runt feller wid a big head like a monk fish need to sharpen him brain on de cards, too," croaked Spugs derisively. "Once Ay see a big splash like a whale ketch in a pool in de Bay o' Fundy at low water. Ay haul mir dory gud up an' scurry like er crab over rockweed to see what be ketch. What you think Ay find, you Down-east herring choker?"

"That's easy," said Hopkins, grinning. "Yo find a damn fool monk fish."

"Ya. You smart. Ay bash he in de head. What you think Ay find dere?"

"What you find, Newfie?"

"Nothing! She be empty!"

"He took your wind that time, Hopkins," chuckled Sands.

Chagrined, Hopkins sat opposite Torrey and dealt. Sands' sharp glance noted that on the backs of some of the cards there were almost imperceptible scratches. When it came Torrey's turn to deal, Sands caught the blur of the mate's long fingers dealing from the bottom. Sands' dark eyes flashed*

"Cards're runnin' like that string o' scrod I caught two days ago," muttered Hopkins, disappointed.

Sands was both astonished and puzzled by the strength of his own hand. He wondered what Torrey was up to. They played it out. Spugs glanced at the score in satisfaction and grinned. Sands thoughtfully underscored his stub figures, blackly, on the brown paper bag. He decided to go on with the game, to say nothing—yet.

Each time Torrey dealt, Sands found himself with an excellent hand. Twice again he caught the deft-fingered mate surreptitiously manipulating the cards. The fine scores that Sands made gave him the game by a wide margin.

"You're lucky, Cap'n." Torrey thrust

out his long neck and studied the marriages in Sands' last hand. "But I alius was lucky too. What say to a wager? Game's dead without a bit o' gambling."

"A wager?" Sands' voice was casual. He darted a quick glance at Torrey's face from under his heavy lids. "Hmn! What sort?"

"Let *La Corcha* be the stake!"

A wave of contempt for Torrey surged through Sands. For a long minute he watched Torrey shuffle and reshuffle the cards. The man was clever, too clever. Torrey finally looked up, his hard-bitten face expressionless.

"Cod's whiskers!" exclaimed Spugs.

"The idea just hit me like a herd o' whales." Torrey tasted of each word as ft left his tongue. "Me'n you, Cap'n, don't take to each other any too good. Seein's how neither one o' us's got the ready cash to buy the other out, it might be a good idea to settle the argument by the turn o' the cards. All fair an' square. I kin make out an agreement in writin'."

Sands caressed the bandage on his face with the tips of his fingers. The hot blood in him urged him to grab Torrey's scheming head and pummel it, but his stable brain controlled the impulse. A fan-shaped wedge of spray came through a crack in the companionway hatch and, settling, wet his fine, dark hair. An omen!

"AMBLING with the cards might not be healthy, Torrey—for you!" Sands spoke softly, carefully, his dark eyes fiery.

"Eh!" Torrey hedged, his shrewd blue eyes held by Sands' gaze. "What you mean, Cap'n?"

"This!" urged Sands relentlessly. "I'll take you up on that wager—with a fair reservation."

"Good!" Torrey licked his lips. "And that is . . . ?"

"The better fisherman gets *La Corcha*!"

"That's crazy!" Torrey jumped to his feet, his knees banging loudly against the upturned triangular leaf of the table. "What kind o' gamblin's that?"

"My kind." Sands' lips quirked in a grim smile.

"I won't do ut!" Torrey snarled like a trapped seal.

"You have mace your claim both to me and to the crew that you are by far the better fisherman and captain than I." Sands' voice was soft, but his glance was hawklike. "I am merely giving you a chance to prove it"

"De cap'n spill your wind, mate," chortled the Newfounc lander savagely. "Iffen you back water now, us'n spit on you, because you ain't a man."

"Fairest wager ever I seen bearin' down to wincl'ard," rumbled brawny Glasgow, a Nova Scotian, learing on an elbow from an upper bunk and ruffling his iron-gray hair.

"Aye," grunted another.

Torrey glared about him and a hopeless flicker passed over his face. He sat down.

"All right," he said.

"Fine," Sands said thoughtfully. "We'll each take a whack at complete command of the vessel, turr and turn about, two or three days for you and the same for me, and then over again. This is December first. We'll let the wager run a full month—to New Year's, if it's agreeable to you and the crew. Whichever one of us is instrumental in bringing in the greater total poundage of fish—gets *La Corcha*!"

Torrey wet his lips. He nodded.

The view of each member of the crew was obtained. Then Sands drew up an ironclad agreement in black and white in his stub script. His hand was firm as he signed it, but he noticed that Torrey's fingers shook. Glasgow, Hopkins and Spugs witnessed the document.

An amendment was added to the effect that in the event of accidental death, not infrequent in the fishing fleet, that ownership of the schooner was to go to the survivor.

During the days that followed, Sands and Torrey fought for supremacy. The weather was bitter cold, but because of it they were able to spend days at a time on the fishing grounds, for the fish froze

almost as soon as they were drawn from the sea. Neither Sands nor Torrey saw any necessity of wetting any rock salt.

Good catch and bad catch, each man's poundage mounted, nor was there the least shadow of a doubt that any member of the crew threw fish lack into the sea. Thirty thousand pounds of cod, twenty thousand of scrod, fifteen hundred pounds of haddock. Eight thousand pounds of scrod, nineteen hundred pounds of cusk, and five hundred pounds of pollock. So it went. Good catch and bad catch, the poundage mounted.

And the prices were good. No matter who lost, he would have a stake when he quit *La Corcha*.

Sometimes they used a drag, but for the most part they trawled. Gradually, pound by pound, Sands proved to be the more proficient. He could find fish where Torrey couldn't, and he never ordered the dories over when the seas ran too high. Torrey tried it on one occasion but only received a contemptuous and indignant refusal on the part of the fishermen.

THEN, too, Sands was helped by Spugs, his dory mate. The Newfie had a nose for fish, and he more than willingly used all his skill in his benefactor's behalf. Spugs' never failing faith and stubborn courage warmed Sands' heart.

But certain members of the crew, taken in by Torrey's tales of past exploits, favored the mate. So the battle was fairly evenly balanced insofar as moral backing went.

"How long we got to put up with the Newfie?" Torrey asked ill temperedly one night as their long bait knives rose and fell in the glare of an electric lantern. "He gets in my hair. Besides, he ain't got arty business aboard."

"It's only human kindness to let him stay," returned Sands. "He needs a stake to get him home and he more'n earns his salt."

"A damned pest!" snapped Torrey.

One evening as dusk spread through the white pall of a raging nor'east blizzard,

disaster threatened. Long hours before the storm had struck, Sands had read the signs of its approach. Not wishing to anger Torrey by offering advice, Sands held his peace, a worried frown upon his face. According to the agreement, Torrey was in absolute command.

Now the little vessel desperately fought the triple onslaught of sleet and wind and sea. Over and over again, in never ending struggle, *La Corcha* shook and trembled to her stout keel at the icy arms of brine, weighing tons, flung across her decks. Always, heaving, straining, dodging, she darted free, pulsating in every fiber of her being. And like the cork that was her name she stayed afloat.

"Dios!" cried Sands. "*Que' barca!* What a ship she is!"

He desired her more fiercely then—and so did Torrey.

"She's gettin' sheathed in a dangerous coat o' ice from main truck to waterline," Torrey shouted in Sands' ear, shaking a shroud swelled to the thickness of his arm with frozen sleet and spray. "Makes her logy. What say we make Port Mouton? We kin get in before the height o' the blow strikes us."

"You're the cap'n," rasped Sands, clawing pellets of ice from his eyebrows. "Makin' harbor through this smother will take some close reckoning." *

Under stiff and close-hauled canvas, Torrey placed the schooner on a west'ard course. Somewhere in that driving murk, far under the rim of the hidden horizon, pounded by high combers, and churning, mounting ice floes, was the Nova Scotian coast. The hours wore by while the storm-wracked vessel labored.

Sands tried to pierce the murk. Torrey was taking them too far to the south'ard. In his mind's eye, Sands knew just where they were in that tumbling, gale-lashed waste. So too did Fanshaw, who, in clipped, terse words, dropped his doubt of Torrey in Sands' ears. Sands knew it was time.

"Come below, Torrey!" he roared, his voice whipped away to a muffled whisper by the wind.

In the snug forecandle, Sands and Torrey, sheathed in ice encrusted oilskins like armored storm gods from the polar regions, faced each other to a showdown across scalding mugs of coffee.

"D'you know where we are, mister?" asked Sands, level voiced.

"Thirty miles from Port Mouton," hesitated Torrey through cracked lips.

"Wrong," Sands frowned. "You're givin' her too much speed and not enough leeway. We're forty miles off Port Mouton headin' to the nor'ard o' Cape Sable."

"Yuh can't prove it." Torrey scowled doubtfully.

"No, but I can feel it," retorted Sands grimly. "The proof will come when we pile up on the rocks—which we ain't goin' to do, mister."

Torrey wilted.

"Bring her up a bit to the nor'ard," advised Sands.

"Suits me. You know the ship better'n I do," Torrey saved face by growling, yet the vindictive glitter showed again in his eyes.

AS DAWN broke, slowly and with no abatement of the storm, Sands proved his dead reckoning to be exact by bringing *La Corcha* safely into Port Mouton. All hands showed their relief by the way they calmly and matter of factly chopped ice from deck, hull and rigging.

By the end of the second day the storm had blown over and the sea had moderated. At high tide they took on water and stores, passed inspection by a Dominion cutter, and sold their fish. Then they put to sea once more at Torrey's hurried orders.

"What's the fussin' scramble?" rumbled Glasgow. "I needed some tobaccy."

Sands too wondered at Torrey's nervous haste. An hour later he knew and an angry curse left his lips.

"Where's Han?" he asked, descending into the forecandle.

"Ain't he on deck?" Hopkins scratched his head in concern.

"Maybe he fell overboard," Fanshaw's dour face lengthened as he gave his gloomy

opinion. "Them N;wfies is unlucky to beat all getout."

A glimmer of suspicion crossed Sands' mind. He climbed topside and strode aft.

"Where's Han Spugs?" he demanded, facing Torrey.

"Oh, him?" Torrey spat to leeward with satisfaction. "He cuit."

Sands' heart sank. He had developed a real affection for the courageous little man and had thought that Spugs had returned the liking. He couldn't make himself believe that Spugs would quit him thus—without word of g-atitude or farewell.

"Reverse your course!" Sands snapped.

"It ain't your turn at command until midnight," remonstrated Torrey.

"Put about!" Sands flung Torrey from the wheel and whirled the spokes.

La Corcha wet her lee scuppers as she obeyed the helm. She buried her nose in a racing comber and spray fanned high.

"You're goin' ag'in' the agreement," Torrey said, glaring.

Sands' face glowed in the winter rays of the sun. He set his firm lips and said no word.

The minutes dragged. The crew made covert talk. At last Sands nosed the vessel's starboard bow toward the fish pier that they had left two hours before. Expectantly, his gauge swept its level. No sign of Spugs.

Then he was astonished to see a lone hogshead, upside down, move by no visible means toward the wharf's edge. It teetered in a slow, circular, tantalizing way on its broad rim. The rotary motion stopped. Then all at once the big hogshead was thrown violently backward on its side and started rolling. Han Spugs erupted from its yawning mouth, jackknifed into a somersault, and bounced to his feet.

The hogshead dropped overboard, scooping harbor ice and brine into its capacious belly with a soughing gurgle.

Although taken unawares, Sands in no wise let his attention be distracted from his handling of the vessel. He gently brought her starboard bow close in against a piling.

Bristling like an Airedale ready for fight or fair treatment, the Newfoundlander darted to the edge of the wharf and jumped aboard. He churned aft and brought up short on his stubby legs in front of Torrey.

"Meaner'n a black -quid you be!" he snorted through his tawny whiskers.

"Yuh Newfie runt!" Torrey thrust his big fist in Spugs' face.

"Dis mate feller senc. mir ashore to buy he special chaw tobaccy," accused Spugs. "Behind mir back him sick on mir de sheriff. Den him scuttle wid de vessel like er beetle quick, quick, de harbor oud. *Scheu-eu!*"

The crew howled with laughter and slapped their oilskins.

"Well, you're safe now, Han," soothed Sands. Then in a curt aside, "Take over, mister."

rp WICE during the following days, Torrey and Spugs flung themselves upon each other and fought to a draw in the waist of the vessel.

"Let 'em fight," said Fanshaw, looking on dourly. "Mayhap they'll blood the pizen out o' their carcasses."

During the third week of the wager as Christmas neared, Sands had cause for worry—the fish eluded him. Torrey was now ahead and looked almost cheerful, stamping about with a mocking leer, loud with unheeded advice. Spugs took Sands' setback glumly, shaking his hairy fist at the sea.

Then Sands bethoug'it him of a pinhead rise of ocean bottom two hundred miles to the east'ard on that vast, underwater shelf of land that is the Grand Banks. On Christmas day they reached it; it looked no different on the surface from any other spot on thit broad, fogbound stretch of sea. But underneath their keel, fathoms deep, the cod streamed by.

"Christmas Day," said Sands. "We rest."

Glasgow baked the turkeys after Fanshaw kneaded the dressing. And Spugs soaked dried apples and cooked a batch of pies. They ate hugely and then slept.

The twenty-sixth dawned clear. The fish were there and bit hungrily, swallowing hook and bait. Dory after dory settled to the gunnels. Once more was Spugs' chortle heard upon the decks.

Freezing temperatures prevailed. The end of the month drew near with Sands away ahead. Then Torrey took command and drove the vessel under straining canvas far to the north and east, into waters little frequented by either steam or sail. They nosed through moiling fogbanks. Ice floes were frequent. A dismal, gloomy stretch of sea.

"Here we fish," snarled Torrey.

Sands peered into the haunting grayness of early dawn. Far to the west'ard a pale star winked. Helped by Spugs he put the dory over and rowed to meet the pallid sun.

They set their trawls and hauled in moderate catches. At noon they returned to the ship, ate and then handled fish. At one o'clock, in the dory once again, Sands clung to a rope's end trailing from a turnbuckle of the main shrouds and waited patiently for Spugs. He shouted. At last the little man shoved his hairy face over the bulwarks and dropped into the dory.

"Dat mate feller he got fleas in he britches," he quonked. "But Ay fix he. Him can't fool ol' Han Spugs!"

The short day faded. The dusk of early evening crept upon them as four o'clock drew near.

One by one the vessel picked up the other dories. Two miles to the sou'sou'east, she tacked lazily back and forth.

"The fool!" muttered Sands anxiously, frowning at a fogbank rolling down upon them. "Why don't he come about? He sees us and has all the other dories in."

Too late to beat the fog, *La Corcha* swung toward them. The damp impenetrable mist swirled about them, raw and cold. Sands shivered and rested on his oars. Spugs lifted the foghorn and blew.

"Ay don't think him come," stated Spugs calmly, taking a bearing by jjieans of the small box compass on the thwart at his side.

"Eh?" Sands was startled in spite of himself.

Aided by the fog, night rolled over them in one dark sweep. Ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed, a full hour. The moderate wind lessened to a mere whisper. The sea flattened to a vast quiet. Tiny wavelets lapped the dory.

"*Madre miat*" swore Sands softly. "How could she have missed us at that distance?"

"Easy to read de compass wrong if one want and nobody else suspect," croaked Spugs. "Ay think you forget, Cap'n, iffen you die dat black squid of a mate feller get us'n vessel."

Cold and stiff, Sands twisted uncomfortably. Deep within him he knew that Spugs was right.

"Us'n row." Spugs calmly lit his pipe, glanced at the compass and then bent to the oars. "We stay by de marker long enough so him not miss us."

"Row! Where to?" Sands grasped the red trawl-buoy and hauled up the weighted line. "One place is as good as another in this murk."

"Plenty wind—for mir feller," chuckled the Newfoundlander, the coals of his pipe glowing ruddily against his tawny whiskers. "But for dat mate feller—che-haw! Haw! You not worry, Cap'n. De word, Ay think she die and fool dat Torrey when Ay see he get de wicked eye, noon time, round about."

EVERY few minutes Spugs rested on his oars and shoved a hand into the sea. Sands could barely see the movements of his dory mate, so dense was the fog and so dark the night. Each time Spugs stopped, Sands was puzzled why he tasted and smelled his hand. Perhaps thoughts of being adrift again in an open boat had unsettled the Newfie's mind.

"What's the matter, Han?" he asked kindly.

The answer was a mounting series of chuckles. Spugs' shoulders, thickly padded with wool underwear, wool shirts, a light reefer and an oilskin coat, heaved to the

leaving of some great joke. Spugs rowed on. Once again he shoved a hand into the sea and tasted and smelled his fingers.

"He!" he exclaimed, lighting a match.

"Oil?" Sands looked at the viscous film spreading away from them on the water. "Probably some lirrers been by with bilge pumps going. Pretty far to the nor'ard, too."

"This be fresh lie," Spugs chortled.

"Maybe so." Sands shrugged.

Spugs began rowing at right angles to his course. He lit another match.

"These spots be bigger," he announced. "We go de other way."

Backing on one oar and pulling ahead on the other, he spun the dory about. Aided by the compass, he followed the oil spreads without too much difficulty. Sands noticed that the blobs diminished in size and stretched out in one general direction into the obscurity of the night.

Spugs might as well amuse himself by this means as any other, Sands thought. Their lot was now hopeless. They could have remained anchored to their trawl, but as Torrey had missed them purposely, remaining in that spot would have been useless. And by the time Torrey conceded to any advice the crew might give, or force upon him, it would be too late.

The ship's log would read: "*Manuel Sands, master; Hannibal Spugs, seaman—lost in the fog.*" In his mind's eye Sands could picture Tor-ey writing down the words, satisfaction in his hard bitten face.

"Dis oi' devil ocean be big." After hours of rowing Spugs rested on his oars and blew his nose violently.

In mental weariness Sands dropped his head in his hands. Then, straightening, he fished deep into his layers of clothing and brought out his heavy gold watch. He struck a match and held it close in a cupped hand.

"Eight bells, midnight—and the New Year, Han!" he announced. Then he forced a note of cheerfulness into his voice. "Strike 'em out, shipmate, double. Use the haft of your knife on the water johnny."

Spugs drew in his oars and smartly

struck the bells on the silt-encrusted water jug. He rang them out, two by two to the stroke of eight ami then over again as is the custom at sea when the New Year comes up through the hawse pipe.

Sands thought he heard their echo—*Madre Mia*, that was *La Corcha's* bell!

"The ship's bell! Listen!"

"Ay hear it." Spugs sucked violently on his pipe. "Soon us'n spit dat mate feller right in he face. Surprised he be, Ay bet!"

An undiscernable gray shadow, the dory moved onward. The *drut-a-drut* of the bell grew louder. At last Sands' straining eyes sighted *La Corcha's* anchor light. Then he saw the spars, hull and rigging loom up.

They came up silently under her counter. Becalmed, her sails hanging limp, she pulled gently at her anchor hawser. Spugs shipped his oars. Noiselessly, they palmed the dory amidships.

Like phantoms rising from the sea, painter in hand, the dory mates climbed to the vessel's deck to face the startled gaze of Fanshaw and Torrey, in furious argument under the rays of a lantern.

"Ay think she be purty hard job to drown ol' Han Spugs." Shoving a gnarled paw deep under his oilskins, the little Newfoundland drew forth a fist full of spark-plugs and shook them under Torrey's chin. "Ay take 'em de engine oud, and de spare set, too. Wind die, engine no gud, plenty full up oil cans Ay put under de stern wid little holes Ay punch in 'em. So how you think you lose us'n, mate feller?"

Sands read both guilt and fear upon Torrey's drawn face.

"Go below, Torrey, and pack your sea bag," Sands said very quietly. "We have no further use of your services. It's the last day of the wager."



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MEN of

(From actual photo)

SHUTTEFI-MEN

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DICK SARNO

©NeE, A FREIGHTER, WAS BURNING AT SEA. THE WEATHER WAS TOO BAD TO GET A PLANE INTO THE AIR SO DieK HIRED A FAST BOAT. HE GOT THE PICTURES BUT HIS HANDS WERE SO FROZEN THEY BARELY ESCAPED AMPUTATION.



4?NCE, HIS PHOTOS WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN CONVICTING CROOKS OF A MAJOR GRIME.



HE HFS RISKED INJURY TIME AND AGAIN FROM FLVING BRIEKS, POLICE GLUBS AND TEAR GAS TO SECURE SENSATIONAL STRIKE PICTURES. ONE DAY HE HAD FOUR, ©AMERAS SMASHEO. ^TOPPED A BULLET WITH ONE OF THEM!

Photo of DieK taken RESEAtvj AT eifteus W HEW YORK. SCHLSUTEK. GIBSON) FAMOUS KNIFE-THROWER., IS TOSSING THE KNIVES.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

DARLING

13m

SARNS



K>R 17 YEARS AN
GENIAL, HANDSOME
TONY HAS BEEN SCOOP-
ING THE PIELD WITH NEWS
FR. OS. OP. SOCIETY.

BEAUFIELD AND JOHN JACOB ASTOR

LASSES OF SOCIETY ARE FOND OF HIM. TONY WAS
THE ONLY CAMERAMAN INVITED TO MURIEL
VANDERBILTS WEDDING.

"WHEN ENZO FIERMONTE MARRIED
AIRS. ASTOR DISK, THERE WERE NO
PICTURES OF THE TWO TOGETHER.
ENZO, THE PRIZE-FIGHTER, WARNED ALL
CAMERAMEN TO STAY AWAY OR ELSE/

Tony caught up with them
IN FLORIDA - ENZO THREW A
PUNCH. TONY CALMLY SLAMMED
HIM OVER. THE HEAD WITH A
PLATE CASE/

Then, BECAUSE OF HIS JOB, HE EMPLOYED
WITH TONY. MRS. DISK PERSUADED ENZO
TO LET TONY TAKE THE PICTURE.



Mrs. Graham
7 AIR. VANDERBILT
SENT FOR TONY WHEN
HEFT SON WAS KILLED IN AN AUTOMOBILE
ACCIDENT. ALL OTHER. CAMERAMEN WERE
EXCLUDED. IT HAS TOW WHO FIRST CAPTIONED MRS.
HARRISON WILLIAMS AS THE BB'S! PRESSED WOMAN IN 1928.
IT MADE HER INTO A NATIONAL TV FAMOUS AS
A FASHION PLATE

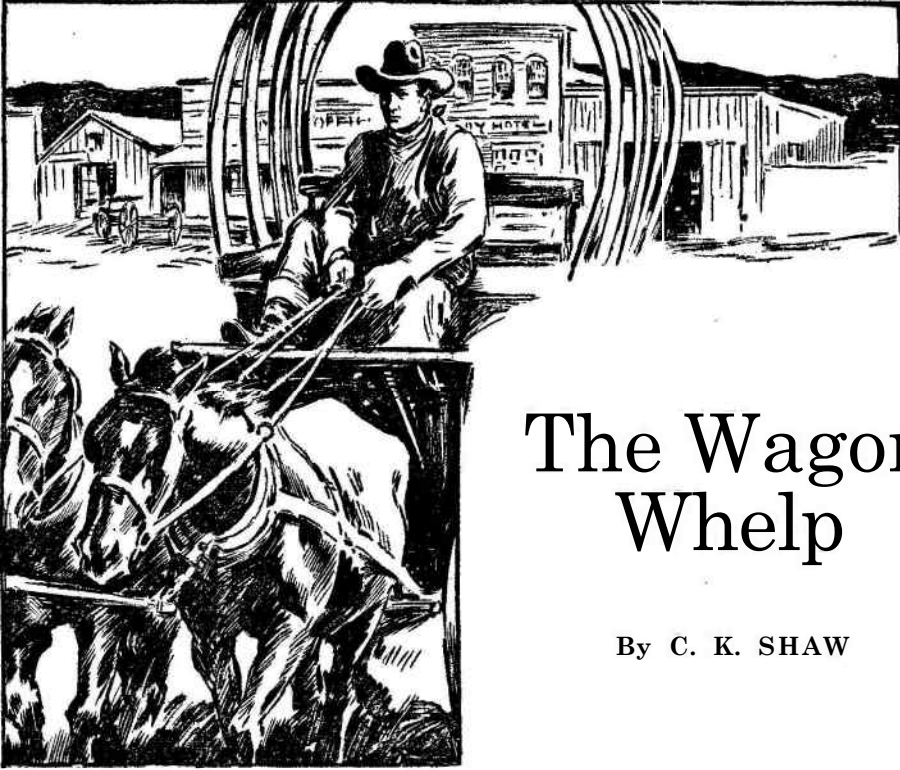


°XonyE-ARNO WAS THE
ONLY MEMBER OF THE PRESS INVITED TO
HAROLD PRATT'S ESTATE WHEN THE PRINCE OF
WALES VISITED THIS COUNTRY. HUNDREDS OF
- NEWSMEN WAITED OUTSIDE/

ONE OF TONS SOCIETY FRIENDS INVENTED A "BULLET
PROOF" GUN. IT HAD NEVER BEEN TESTED BEFORE.
TONY WANTED PICTURES SHOWING A GUN FIRING TOWARD
HIM SO HE GOT BEHIND HIS CLASS. IT DIDN'T STAND THE TEST -
THE FIRST SHOT HIT HIS CAMERA. THE GUN KNOCKED HIS HAT OFF.



Coming soon: Grey and Howell—Kings of the Sea



The Wagon Whelp

By C. K. SHAW

Before the prairie schooners could roll there had to be a man to drive them. The country was tough and the spot the kid was in was toucher—but young Pete knew that once he got his eight-and-two team traveling, the only way to go was ahead. . . . A distinctive novelet of th; West

I

YOUNG Pete Messmer was doing a good job of filling his father's boots. At eighteen, he was freighting with eight and two, nursing them over cow trails that Oregon and Washington called roads. He was easy on horseflesh, cool-headed in a crisis, and brought his wagons in with the wheels on the ground. Filling his dad's boots was a man-sized job, even if old Peter Messmer had died in a pile-up on the Rock Creek grade.

Old Peter hadn't been a drinking man, but folks, especially Justin Turk, said that he had been hitting the bottle that trip. But they didn't say it around where hard-eyed, hard-fisted young Pete could hear

them. They shut up and nodded when the kid, who'd been just over fifteen at the time of the accident, said the brakes had given way; said that old Peter had reached the top of his skill in the last seconds before the outfit went over the precipice; said that every unit in the ten-horse string had lain in its piece.

"He had them swingers and pointers climbin' that chain like monkeys," the lad insisted. 'He had his leaders on the bank and his wheelers layin' over for every ounce there was in them. No man and team could hold them two loaded wagons on a three-quarter pitch and headin' into a hair-pin curve."

But after a whiie Pete talked very little about his dad's death, for he sensed what

men were saying at his back: that a fifteen year old kid would be too scared to know what, was going on when a wagon was headed over the bluff; that Pete just thought he had pilled on the brake rope as he reared up from a boozy nap on the freight.

PETE MESSMER watched Walt Cain tie the big black swing-horse to the wagon-bed, saw him get the blacksnake whip and crawl into the bed. The seven foot of loaded leather slithered out and wrapped around the head and neck of the black horse, cutting blood in squirts that splattered on Jus' in Turk, who was standing close to see the job was well done.

Turk was the man who had returned to Alkali with word that Old Peter Messmer had been drinking on his last trip.

Turk owned more freight outfits than any man in Oregon. His teams stretched from Walla Walla to Salt Lake and from Alkali and the Dalles to the John Day and Powder River valleys. A horse to him was a machine, and when it failed to work perfectly, he wanted the animal's hide to pay for it. Walt Cain, Turk's Eastern Oregon wagon-boss, was a true disciple of the old freighter.

The whip wound around the black head and neck. If an eye were knocked out, the black would just have to get along with one eye. "A horse can pull as much with one eye as two," Justin Turk claimed, "and can only see half the deviltry."

Many of his horses had running sores on heads and hips, because a stray chain was a favorite weapon with Turk. He was always on the wagon grounds when his outfits pulled out in the mornings, and if he saw a team weaving, and slow to hit the collars, he'd ride over and rattle that chain. It seldom failed to bring a lung-bursting effort. Turk never spoke to a horse when he was handling him, he gave him a kick in the belly if he wanted him to step over.

Walt Cain liked beating the black horse, it showed in his stubbled face.

"Fight back will you!" he jibed, throwing his hundred-and-eighty pounds behind each lick. "Kick at Walt Cain, will you!" His face was red for the sun was hot in Alkali Canyon, and he was working hard. The raw-boned black was weaving now, would have gone to his knees but for the close tie of the double-halter rope, but for his spirit. He was groggy, and had stopped flailing his front legs,

Pete Messmer had stood at the edge of the wagon-yard, watching, unable to leave. His square-fingered hands were bunched to iron hardness. He hated Walt Cain and he hated old Justin Turk—he hated every man that drove for Turk. And every man that drove for Turk hated Pete Messmer, because they had absorbed the antagonism of their boss and Walt Cain.

Pete's jaw was square and his mouth wide. His thighs were thick. He wasn't short, but his undistributed weight gave that impression. His shoulders hadn't filled to his hips yet. His eyes were murky as he watched Walt Cain lead the black away.

"I'd like to put a knife between your shoulderblades," he said, and was surprised to find he had spoken aloud. He turned to see who owned the shadow that was cutting across the toes of his shoes. It was a tall man with *Assistant Sheriff* printed on a band about his hat.

JIM ROACH was a different cut than the teamsters fanning around. He was the gunman type, and Sheriff Balogny Smith had left him to keep an eye on Alkali while he spent a week in the John Day section.

Balogny hadn't told anybody exactly what his errand was; but the wise talk around Alkali had it figured that he was out after the gang that was supposed to be smuggling opium to the Chinese working on the railroad over the line.

There's been talk about it for some time, and the railroad muckamucks were making things hot for the law in every county between the Border and the railroad. Maybe Balogny had a tip.

Alkali, self-sufficient, wasn't much in-

terested—except that Balogny's departure left Alkali in the hands of this trigger-fingered Roach.

"Thinkin' thoughts like them out loud is goin' to hatch you trouble," Roach said sharply. "Plumb. I don't like to hear such words spoke."

Pete's shoulders squared like solid oak beams. "Maybe you like seein' a horse get its brains battered out!"

"Nope. But I don't like to hear talk of stabbin' nobody in the back, even Walt Cain. Pete, you got the love of horseflesh into your blood. Your pappy freighted and your grandpappy run a pack train into the first mines in Eastern Oregon. You got the love of horses sewed into your bone and sinew. Why don't you take Walt Cain on, toe to toe, 'n' no back stabbin'? Cut his lights out in a fair fight. I'm sheriff while Balogny is away, and I ain't standin' for no back stabbin'."

Pete Messmer watched him walk on. Roach had suggested that he kill Walt Cain, the only requirement that it be a fair fight. That would be Roach's way if things happened he couldn't stomach. Those two guns he packed were notched—scratched, he claimed. Said he was crawling through a barbed wire fence once, but he always followed the assertion with a wink. Sheriff Balogny Smith hadn't been worried about leaving the town to Jim Roach. When he left he told Alkali that it better walk easy, for life with the assistant-sheriff was precarious as a gambler's money.

Pete rested his broad-palmed, stocky-fingered hand on the scabbard at his waist. It contained a skinning knife that had belonged to his dad. When old Peter had freighted hams and sugar into the interior, he needed that knife to take the skin off a bear that might try to rush his wagons at night.

The Messmers were not killers. Pete watched the swaying back of the lawman and felt sick to his stomach. He could strip the hide off a coyote, but that was all he knew of the handling of that knife—that was all his dad had known.

The blade wasn't long and delicately thin. It was thick and stocky like Fete himself.

Pete had no thought of killing Walt Cain, or even Justin Turk. Turk had lied about his dad. 'Cause maybe he was jealous of old Peter's record; but killing him had never once entered young Pete's mind.

Fie knew his dad hadn't been drinking. He had awakened at the first lurch of the wagons, and wondered instantly why the brakes were, not set. He saw his dad's hand flash to the back of the seat where the trail rope was fastened, saw him attempt to brake. The wheelers were sliding on their hunches as Pete had come up to a sight of the team; and the next second the—" had lost their feet.

Pete threw hi;; leg over the back of the seat, as the wagons were tottering, realizing every cool, deft move his dad was making in the fight. They could have both jumped that last second but neither thought of it. With his last breath, old Peter was speaking to his team.

"Steady, boys—steady."

Pete hadn't settled to the seat and he was thrown up the hill as the outfit went over the drop. His life had been saved. Sometimes yet, he waked from a deep sleep to hear the crash of wood, iron and horses. At the time folks said it might break the nerve of the fifteen-year-old kid, but it hadn't touched him that way. He knew those brakes were dead.

For two years Pete had been driving for a Washington outfit, now he was back home and had worked a month in the Alkali Feed and Livery Stable. There were no freighting jobs to be had around Alkali unless a man worked for Justin Turk.

THAT evening, Turk and Cain were in the chop house off the saloon when Pete came in for his supper. They were huddled in conversation and Turk's long, thin face was twisted in rage. Cooky Tompkins brought Pete his beefsteak in person, and leaned across the counter for a word. Cooky was young Pete's best friend. He had freighted with old Peter until an accident had left him too crippled. Cooky

jerked his head toward Turk and Cain.

"OP Turk can't stand to lose even a small part of the freightin' and him with teams strung from here to Salt Lake. He's whole hog or none. He's boilin' in his fat 'cause Ory Herman landed a small contract into the John Day country."

Pete looked to another table where Ory Herman and his son Loot were eating. He had heard that Ory was already having trouble; that he had been a day late the last trip. It took a man that knew how to skin 'em to keep to a schedule on that John Day trip. Ory He"man had come in with a good reputation as a teamster but he was having trouble. A day late was bad. Turk would knock a diver down with a chain that brought an outfit in a day late.

Pete finished his sapper and stood watching Justin Turk. The man's thin body was on edge, his hands were constantly moving. Turk felt Pete's glance and swung to face the murky eyes. He was used to having men lower their glance when he was angry; Pete's eyes held steady.

Justin Turk barged across the room. "Open that big mouth of yours—talk—I dare you! I'll cram anything you say back down your throat! Nobody can stand around and look like hat at me!" His anger was always like that, uncontrolled.

His thin voice centered the attention of the chop house. Pete Messmer made no move and his eyes remained steadily fixed on the freighter. As Turk approached, young Pete saw his eyes were boiling like fat sputtering in the lye. They held deep, ugly hostility.

"Open your trap!"

"I was just looking' you over," young Pete said. "Wonderin' how many horses you had beat to death—you and Cain."

Walt Cain slid up to his chief. Two others of Turk's teamsters hoisted their bulks from chairs and edged up. Cain was stockier than young Messmer, and his strength was mature. The taunt had spiked his sleeping hate to life

"Throw up your dukes and get ready to fight," he ordered.

Turk moved back, letting his wagon-boss handle things. He was pleased. He had tried before to draw Pete Messmer into a fight. This time he had succeeded.

Pete realized he had been trapped. No teamster in the room could be counted on to help him while Walt Cain and his two men were beating him to a pulp. Any one of the trio was as big as Pete and tough as nails. Cooky would leap in, but Cooky was an old man. He'd go down like a worn-out ox the first blow. Pete's anger lapsed to a cold wave that paradoxically lent fire to his blood. He dropped his palm to his hunting knife and ripped open the flap. Deliberately he drew the blade.

"You are three to one, not countin' Justin Turk and steel knuckles," he said. "Cain, Bangs and Oswald, come on, walk into this." He flourished the knife. "I'll fight any one of you man to man, and I'd take you on two to one if I was sure the third wouldn't leap on my back. You'll never beat me up like you did Bence Hall. I'll slit you from chin to wishbone." He looked at them all without shifting position. "Injun Joe taught me to handle this knife, and I reckon he had scalped more white men than any warbonnet on the Columbia. What you waitin' for, why don't you step in?"

Walt Cain's face went gray through its dirt and sweat, his whiskers seemed to^{*} bristle. He was standing dead still when the door pushed open and assistant-sheriff Roach walked into the room. Justin Turk went up to Roach.

"Arrest this galoot," he said, pointing to Pete Messmer. "Arrest him and take that toad-stabber off him!"

Jim Roach looked around with rapid understanding. "I know my business, Turk. When I want to arrest a man I will; when I want to disarm him so's your men can beat him to death, I will. But I ain't apt to want to. Sorry, Messmer, that I interrupted your carvin' bee, but seein' I did and seein' I'm the law, I'll ask you to put that knife back in its jacket."

Pete Messmer put the knife away and walked over beside Cooky. The old man

was standing at the end of the counter with a heavy iron skillet in his hand.

Justin Turk's anger was swelling his neck and purpling his brow. He spat hot, ugly words at Jim Roach. Roach included him and all his teamsters when he replied.

"You fellers see that no such beatin's as happened a month ago happens while I'm boss here. Don't think any man or group of men is too big for Jim Roach to tackle. The bigger they come the harder they fall. I'll keep this town peaceful if I have to put you all to bed with the earth fer a cover."

II

* / ^ < OOKY wagged his head. "You've made some bitter enemies, Pete."

Pete Messmer grinned. "I bluffed them into thinkin' I could handle that knife."

The old man sighed. "When you started with all that lip was when I went for the iron skillet. Gettin' mouthy that way is goin' to dig you a grave some day."

"Cooky, Justin Turk don't hate me normal. I saw a killer in his eyes when he went for me just now. I'm goin to ask you something and think careful before you answer. Wouldn't a guilty conscience make you hate the man you'd done something to? Hate him more than normal?"

Cooky scratched his bald head. "A man that has done another a big wrong would, I figger, hate seein' that man. Maybe he'd be scared of him."

Pete Messmer wasn't a fast thinker except where handling horses were concerned. "Scared?" he repeated. "Yep, I reckon he is some 'fraid of me. Cooky, Justin Turk killed my dad!"

"Hell's imps! He couldn't of."

"He loosened the nut on the brake-rod, hopin' it'd loose in a dangerous spot. It did. You couldn't tell nothin' by the tangle that was left of them wagons at the foot of the cliff. Justin Turk done that so's he could get my dad's freight contract. He hates me 'cause I remind him of what he done."

"You've thought of your dad pilin'

up so long it's drivin' you nutty, Pete. Turk'd do most anything for an extra pound of freight—except kill."

"He sticks a pitchfork into a horse, don't he? He knocks men down with a stay chain same as animals. I tell you Turk is a murderer!"

The old man drew a catchy breath. "Dry up! There's somebody edgin' around to hear what we're sayin. Don't breathe no more about rrrrder if you ain't wantin' to wake up on a coal-shovelin' job."

"Who'd kill me?"

"Turk, you fool, in the bat of an eye—"

Pete nodded. "That's what I wanted to know, if you thought Turk would murder a man. I've thought of it so long I was afraid to trust myself."

"I never said—say, listen, I never said no such thing! I'm on a cookin' job and I mind my own business. Say—"

"I'll see you in the mornin', Cooky."

Pete walked out into the quiet street and toward the livery stable where he slept, at night. He was thinking, as he had thought so much the last year, how simple it would be to loosen a nut on one of the rods underneath a big freight wagon. Tonight when he 'rad seen the threatening light blazing in Turk's eyes, his suspicions had crystalized.

He went down the shadowy stalls to see that the horses had all been fed and bedded. It was early yet, most of the town at supper, but he always took care of the evening trade. He smoked his pipe and watched the gray in the sky eating up the last of the sun's ,|low. When he heard a commotion at the front of the stable, he walked out.

Justin Turk was standing there with a monkeywrench and a rifle in a canvas scabbard in his hands. He was talking sharp to Hack Billings, the owner of the stable. Billings swung on Pete, pointing a finger at the gun end wrench.

"Turk just missed them things from one of his wagons, he came to me about it and we found them among your things in the harness room."

Pete had recognized both the wrench and

the rifle. "Those belonged to my dad—"

"Didn't I tell you he'd claim that?" snapped Turk. "This ain't the first stuff I've missed. Funny it never happened 'fore this cub started workin' in town."

Pete's anger was rising in a deadly flood. Turk was trying to run him out of the country by branding him a thief. "You know I brought that stuff here with me when I come to work," he said to the stable owner.

"I don't know nothin' of the kind. This wrench and gun belongs to Justin Turk, you'll be lucky if he dot't slap you in the jug." Turk bought most of his grain and hay through the Alkali Feed and Livery, and Hack Billings was not taking a chance on losing his trade.

"They don't belong to him and you know it!"

"Shut your trap," the tableman ordered.

"Billings," Justin Turk cut in, "this man is a thief, and if you want to keep my business you get rid of him—right now."

BILLINGS had never had as good a hand as Pete Messmer, but he hesitated only long enough to roll his cud of tobacco to the other cheek. "Sure he's lired. I don't want a thief around. Get your junk and move on, Messmer."

Pete's right fist slashed out with a speed that dazed Hack Billings. The stableman didn't seem to know just how he came to be lying on his back with stars shooting before his eyes. He look;d at Justin Turk to be certain he had things straight as he climbed to his feet.

"The young whelp hil me!"

"And I'll hit you again if you don't keep shut. Turk, drop that wrench and gun."

Justin Turk drew his right arm back, the four-pound wrench was in his fist, "Don't come at me or I'll string your brains clean to the river!"

Pete Messmer's eyes grew dangerous. "It wouldn't be the first man you've killed."

The words burned to s lence. Justin Turk was as gray as worn shoe-leather. His furtive glance dropped to the knife at

Pete's waist. He was fearful of that square-palmed hand that held the strength to sink that blade to the heart of a grizzly. He dropped the wrench and gun.

"You're lyin'," he whispered. "You ain't got no proof." He backed for the street as he spoke. Escape from those eyes, that were squeezed to blazing streaks, was his only thought.

Pete made no move to follow him. Turk gained the street and faded away in long strides.

"See that you don't let your tongue get you into trouble," Pete said to the stable owner as he came back from the harness room where he had been rolling together his belongings. He swung his bed, wrapped in a tarp to his shoulders and picked up the wrench and gun from the dirt where Turk had dropped them. "See that you don't start no lies about me bein' a thief," he warned, and walked away.

It pleased him to see how eyes stayed with him when he spent an hour in the saloon before going back to bed down with old Cooky. Whispers followed him as he walked down the street.

"Bad kid to monkey with; good kid to let alone. He'd a' carved his initials on Turk and his whole crew if they'd a rushed him in that thar fight."

The next morning he ate breakfast before daybreak, and a dozen or more freighters were in the restaurant. The wool and wheat haulers mostly cooked over a camp fire in the wagon-yards, but a man freight-ing all year liked to eat at a counter when he got the chance. Cooky caught a few whispers and when he had time, relayed them to Pete.

"You better catch a ride to Walla Walla," he advised. "Get a job up north—"

"Meanin' Turk has passed the word it's dangerous for me to stay?"

"Well, kid, there's goin' to be a show-down if you don't get out. That knife bluff you threw yesterday is goin' to get called, and, Pete, you just natural ain't a carver. You couldn't cut a man's gizzard out. Toss your bedroll on one of the north-goin' wagons and—"

"I'm stayin' in these parts. . . . This new man that's took some of Turk's business, what's he like?"

"Ory Herman is an old-timer; honest I'd say, maybe too honest. He won't be able to match Justin Turk. He's been late pulling in on his first two trips, everything that could happen has happened to him and now last night a horse busted loose, got to a grain sack and then to the water trough. Died of colic. The only man in town with a horse fer sale was Hack Billings, and Hack wouldn't sell him a good animal. He unloaded that bald-faced bay onto him—Bay Baldy, that won't pull the hat off a man's head iffen he don't feel right."

"Billings wouldn't sell him a good horse, huh?"

"Nope and Herman didn't have time to cast around fer a buy. He's got to make this trip on time or he loses out."

"Baldy ain't a freight horse, he's got saddle blood in him. He's too proud to pull, less he's treated mighty fine. Walt Cain couldn't work him and a horse Cain can't work is a bad one."

PETE left the restaurant in the wake of Ory Herman, his son Loot, and a seasoned freighter, Yellowstone Jones. Yellowstone had snaked big outfits over the roads of Montana, freighting for the government. Jones was a man around forty with big strong hands, and he had come to Alkali with Herman to work for him.

Turk was riding about the wagon grounds, for he had outfits going both north and east this morning. Pete Messmer stood at the edge of things. There was barely enough light to the new day for him to follow the movements of the Herman outfits. Yellowstone had Bay Baldy. The white face of the big bay gave him a wise look, perhaps because the white hairs extended up and around his left eye. He was in the swing, beside a placid, stocky gray mare and he was behaving in a manner that gave no suspicions of his true intentions.

Pete hung about, debating on slipping

Yellowstone a warning, then backed off. Many times a teamster resented things like that. Yellowstone was hooked up, he walked down his eight-horse team, straightening a strap on the way. His blacksnake hung around his neck. He climbed up the wheel and into the seat. Ory Herman and Loot were already pulling out. He picked up his two pair of lines and slid off his brake.

"Tighten up, boys."

The team weaved and began setting their toes for the start. Solidly, as one great unit they leaned into the collars—all but Bay Baldy. He tossed his head and pranced a little. He didn't put on a big show like so many balky horses.

Pete's body was humming like a live wire. If Yellowstone loosened that four-horse whip at the bay, the jig was up. That horse wouldn't even stand being cussed on a crimp morning. If he were treated like a brby, he might allow this outfit to move.

"Steady," Yellowstone took the team back from the strain of a start, wrapped the lines proline the brake and climbed to earth. He walked to Baldy, slapped the iron-muscled shoulder and reached up to rub the white nose. "Cold, huh, ol' boy?" He rubbed a palm across the white eye, walked back and climbed to his seat. He took up the lines.

"Yeah, boys!" he called. "Lean into it."

The team obeyed. Baldy pranced a little, tossing his head and looking in all directions. Yellowstone spoke to the gray mare beside the oay. "Lift in, Dolly."

The team settled to a pull and the wagons began to roil. Baldy still tossing his head, condescended to move along, too. Pete lifted his hand in salute to Yellowstone Jones as Jones swung his team to keep them to a down hill slope. Yellowstone answered him, but the freighter's face was worried.

Maybe he felt something was in the air. Men have acted strangely just before death struck them. And Yellowstone Jones might have sensed that in the next block a bullet was going to enter his heart.

III

AS THE! rifle cracked from the alley,

Yellowstone's body leaned forward in the high spring-seat, then it tumbled sideways over the brake, caught a second before slipping down the wheel. Pete Messmer had been following, keeping almost abreast. He leaped forward now and stopped the slow-moving team. Ory and Loot Herman came running back.

Yellowstone Jones was stone-dead.

A horse was crashing away, a man slicked to his bare back. An Indian streaking for the Columbia River. Assistant-sheriff Roach who was around to see that the morning start was a peaceful one, cracked a rifle to his shoulder. Even as Pete Messmer called at him to hold, he pulled trigger.

Roach swung to Pete as the Indian slid from the back of his running horse. "There's one good Siwash. A dead one."

"Yes, and a silent one."

"What you airnin' at?"

"We'll never know now who put him up to killin' Yellowstone Jones."

Turk galloped up. He asked the saloon-keeper if the dead man hadn't had trouble with a drunken Indian the evening before. The saloon-man rodded.

"He must have kept on drinkin' through the night," Turk said. "Kept gettin' madder at Jones. An Injun is a devil when he's got a hide full of whisky."

Roach drew Pete Messmer aside. "Spill anything you know, Messmer. "What'd you mean by a dead Injun bain' a silent one?"

"Just what I said. Somebody put him up to get rid of Herman's best teamster."

Jim Roach looked at Pete with one lid dropping low. "Somebody that was interested in seein' Herman fail in his freight contract, huh? Maybe lurk?"

Pete felt chills traveling up his spine. Jim Roach was as dead as a coiled rattler and he was out to make a rep for himself as a peace officer. "I don't know a thing—not a thing," Pete said. "That Injun woulda talked 't he's dead. I was just spoutin' out a hunch."

"You must have somethin' back of the hunch."

"Nothin' that counts with the law."

"You reason like Balogny Smith. He's a dang good sheriff but he won't act less he has a dead cinch on somebody bein' guilty. Now me, I'm broader. Keep your eye peeled and if you get any evidence, even half-baked, fetch it to me and I'll hold court. Maybe I should arrest ol' Turk now pendin'—well, pendin' anythin' I happen to think of after I've had my breakfast."

"No, feed him the rope, let him hang himself."

Roach glanced at the dead man. "Seems like it's workin' the other way round." He shook his head. "I believe in action, strenuous and smokin' from both hands. If you get any proof durin' the day let me know."

"I'm goin' to John Day with Ory Herman, he'll be needin' a teamster. Maybe I'll have something for you when I get back. I'll step over to him now, I hear him tryin' to get somebody to take the outfit."

Four men lifted the body of Yellowstone Jones and carried it away. Ory Herman's face was struck with tragedy. His eyes were gray as granite.

"I've known Yellowstone for ten years," he said. "He was a friend to count on in times of trouble. He came to Alkali 'cause he knew I was buckin' a tough proposition. Now I'm not even stayin' to see him buried. He knows I got to make Rock Crick grade ahead of night. Is there a teamster in the crowd? I'll pay what you ask for the trip."

Snagtooth Garret was in the front ranks at the beginning of Herman's words, but he was at the outer edge when they finished. He was out of work and a good skinner, but he was shaking his head.

"I ain't crawlin' into no dead man's seat, drawin' the ribbons over the back of no dead man's team. I ain't needin' work that bad."

"Does seem like Herman has had a curse set on him," another man said. "Horse

died last night, 'n' a good driver shot deader 'n a mackerel this mornin'."

Pete Messmer pushed up beside Ory Herman, his square-built body carrying a threat. "I'll take that team through for you. I noticed a shotgun strapped to the bed of the lead wagon, and I got a rifle I'll carry in the seat with me. I've got a skinnin' knife handy to take the pelt off any game I bag." His glance ran through the crowd and focused with intensity. Necks craned to see who was receiving the full blast of that glance. It was Turk.

Ory Herman also followed the path of Pete's level stare, and his bushy brows drew together over his nose. "I'll be glad to have you," he said. "I've heard of 'you around town."

PETE went with Ory up to the hotel where he gave directions for the burial of Yellowstone Jones. The graveyard was a mile out of town, and to stay over for the services would keep him in Alkali too long. Pete got his roll of blankets, the few tools he carried and his sheepskin-lined coat.

When they were ready for the start, Ory Herman spoke. "Messmer, you may be gettin' yourself into trouble takin' out this wagon. Justin Turk might try some devilment on the trip. Jones did have trouble with an Injun last night, but it wasn't nothin' serious, 'less somebody made it worse. There's been too many things happen to this train of wagons for everythin' to be accident."

"I reckon Turk is the accident."

Ory Herman looked at the youth. "You hate Turk, don't you?"

"Like a rattler. You see, Herman, I figure he got my dad."

The old man's eyes went grim. "They told me your dad was killed in a pile-up on Rock Crick."

"Yes, the same as you'd be killed if your brakes give way this evenin' as we went down. The same as your son or me would be killed."

Herman nodded. "Was the brakes tampered with?"

"Things was too tangled to show. I charged Turk last night with murder, and he forgot to ask me who I meant. All he said was I had no proof. He got my dad's contract."

Ory Herman digested the words. "The same as he'll get mine if—"

Young Loot Herman joined them. "I just took a look at the dead Injun. He was the one all right. I was with Yellowstone last night when the trouble come up. I didn't think it was so much, forgot it and so did Yellowstone."

"But if the liijun was drenched with whisky for hours and had somebody to whet him up, he'd probably be ready to kill by mornin'." The words came from Ory Herman and his son looked at him sharply.

"You mean—"

"I mean you and me and Pete Messmer are takin' these wagons through on time in spite of accidents and in spite of—death. Keep your eyes peeled every minute and after we ket to the head of Alkali Canyon we'll go over the brakes."

PETE nursed the big bald-faced bay along; and riot until the horse was good and warm did he begin to step him against the collar. The Alkali Canyon was eleven miles long and a dead lug all the way. Before the first hour had passed, Baldy was taking care of his share of the load. Pete shook his head as he watched the bay leaning irto the collar as steadily as any horse in the team.

"It's a good t'ling Yellowstone Jones didn't go down your back with a black-snake while you was cold," he said. "This outfit would still be on the beddin' grounds."

Ory Herman was leading the caravan, and he wasn't allowing his frayed nerves to rob the horses of their rest stops. He would even draw up on a steep pull, if the ascent was long. "Never pull the lungs outa a willin' tean," he had said to the boys. "Any teamster worth his salt can start any load he's ever had rollin', even if it is a steep piich."

They watered again at The Wells, seven miles up the canyon, and rolled on to a dry noon on Shutler Flat. They hung on the nosebags, not unhooking their teams as they usually did at noon. The grub box supplied the men with a lunch, and in thirty minutes they were on the move.

It was the middle of the afternoon that the front wheel of Pete's trailer came off. Ory Herman and Loot came back to help him hunt for the axle nut that had worked loose. It was an unusual accident, for the movement of the wheel was opposite to that threaded bur, and the rotation should have tightened instead of loosened.

The three of them spent a half hour on it, then Ory Herman said he and Loot would go on. The lost nut might be a mile or two back, a wheel had been known to run a long way after one was lost. Searching for it in the dust of the road and the sage to the side might mean the rest of the day. At least two of their wagons would go on to Rock Creek before dark.

"It's Turk's hand again," the old teamster said. "He figures to tie up at least one of our teams." He didn't mention that this would cost him the freight contract, but Loot and Pete both knew.

Pete pulled off the road, unhooked and tied his team to the wagons, and started back in the search. Ory and Loot rumbled on to Rock Creek.

Three hours later he was back with the lost axle nut, and his lips were grimly set. The threads were worn completely smooth in spots—so smooth a file must have been used. The nut was very old, older than any of the other wheels, Pete found.

It wasn't hard to figure. Most likely Cain or Turk had substituted a worn one for the one Yellowstone lad made secure after greasing his wagons. It was certain that a man of Yellowstone Jones' knowledge wouldn't have been using the worn-out axle nut.

DUSK came and then deepening shadows. It had been a hot day and the horses were weary from their long, dry drive. The blackening cut of Rock Creek

canyon lay ahead. Four hours had been lost through the middle of the day and that meant the sharp, steep curves of the grade would be in darkness before Pete Messmer reached it.

He would have to lead the team down to water, then string them back. It meant a late start in the morning for he could not drive down the grade before daylight. And it would mean not sleeping. If the three of them could have nighted together, they could have guarded the wagons in shifts.

It was dark when Pete reached the head of the grade. He heard a call ahead and soon Ory Herman appeared. Pete stopped his team and crawled down. Herman had come back to help him lead down to water; and because he was too nervous to wait at the bottom of the grade.

"Loot has the spuds a fryin' and the coffee boilin'," he said.

Pete tucked the tail of his shirt into his overalls. "She's like a stack of black cats, ain't she?" he said of the grade. "But I calculate I can drive her."

Herman voiced a sharp protest. "Get that out of your mind! You have to be drivin' every inch of the way to make it in daylight. We might as well admit Turk has played an ace. You'll have to watch your team tonight and see that none of them bust loose—like last night."

Pete went to the back of his wagon and came back with the lantern. He lit it and walked toward the head of his team. "I calculate to swing this light between my leaders so's it will shine a little for me."

"Messmer, you'll be killed, to say nothin' of pilin' up the outfit!"

Pete stopped. "Are you afraid to risk the outfit?"

Ory Herman burned out his reply. "Not by a dang sight! Holdin' this contract means a lot to me, but I ain't askin' no man to take such chances."

"You never asked me. I know every turn in this grade with my eyes shut. If my brakes hold I got a plumb good chance of makin' it."

They went over the brakes with the

lantern, then hung it between the leaders and Pete swung himself up to the driver's seat. Ory Herman crawled up beside him. He had the up-grade position and could jump if need arose. Pete would be swinging out over thin air in many spots.

The big team crawled forward, the leaders becoming used to the lantern before any bad places were reached. Pete knew before he felt the jolting of the wagon when he was at the rib rock leading to the first bad turn.

The road was narrow and sidling, the bend sharp. He had his trail-brakes set firmly and he moved his foot-brake to the last notch. He had a pair of leaders that didn't have to be bumped along, and now they answered willingly when he spoke. The wagons crept around the turn with a few rocks rolling over the side.

The steep pitch that lead to the hairpin curve was the worst spot on the grade. That was where old Peter Messmer had gone over. Pete felt a chill as he remembered. It had been the shank of the evening and the light had been good. But then his dad would have made it as he had made it many times before but for his bad brakes.

Pete felt the road beneath his wheels growing steep. If he made this curve he would make the grade. He had become acquainted with his wheelers during the day. Meg was a powerful-hipped, lazy brown mare and Rex was a mountain of flesh, stove-up but wise as a sage. He had probably seen more freight wagons through bad days than any horse in the team. Bay Baldy was leaning against the chain like an old-timer, all his thoughts on camp and supper.

Pete spoke to Meg and Rex and they settled their combined weight to throwing the wagon to the bank. The swingers and pointers gave good support and the leaders were as high on the bank as footing allowed. The next few seconds depended on perfect coördination of man and horses.

Pete's voice when he spoke was without strain. Confidence traveled out to the slow-

moving team. "Easy boys—easy goes."

The eight horses and two wagons came out of the curve and straightened away to a sidling gentle bend. Pete gave no sign that the high point had been passed. He was still thinking out every foot of the road ahead. The-e was still a lot of space yawning below him.

When they made the last turn and Rock Creek lay ahead, Ory Herman began to feel for a light for the cold pipe that had been clinched in his teeth all the way down.

"That shows the devil don't always win out!" he said.

Pete laughed dryly and told Herman about the worn condition of the nut he had recovered. "I figure she'll have to be watched every ten miles or so."

"You mighta lost a wheel back yonder of a curve."

"I mighta, bul I'd a lost a wheel same in the daytime as at night, and either way it'd a been the finish. Turk maybe figured that nut would last to the grade."

Loot Herman was beside Pete as he climbed down. "By cracky I couldn't believe it when I saw that lantern bobbin' down the grade. Then I caught the rumble of the wSgons and knew sure as hellfire you was comin' down blind!"

They unhooked, watered and took the horses to the wagons for the nose bags. Loot had fried potatoes in a big black frying pan and coffee in a still blacker tin pot. He kept the fire burning fairly high for a cool dampness was on the creek loot-torn. Pete sat witli his back against a wheel and ate heartily.

Ory Herman took the first watch and allowed the boys to roll into their beds. They couldn't figure any move Turk might make, but they were not taking the chances of leaving the horses and wagons unguarded.

IV

THE middle of the following morning, Ory Herman pulled up to see if he could help a man in a broken-down hack. The fellow said he had had a runaway

and one wheel had been smashed. From the looks of the lathered team they had run quite some distance. He had two hundred-pound Kicks of beans in his rig besides flour and other stuff in cans. He was on his way to a sheep-camp in the thirty-mile district.

He asked Ory Herman to take one sack of the beans and some of the flour into Condon and leave it at the general store on lower Main Street. That was where he was to have left it and a "dusty from the Harvey sheep-camp would be after it.

The favor was a small one and Ory did not hesitate to grant it. He piled the sack of beans and four sacks of flour on his wagon and Loot took a couple of boxes of canned goods. The man was grateful, but his anger against the team of cayuses hooked to the broken rig was sharp.

He kicked one of them in the jaw as it shied away from him. "Stand still, Buck," he snapped, jerking on the lines. "When I finish with you tonight, you won't run away again!"

Pete knew there were lots of men who beat their horses hours after a thing had happened. He looked at the man and half wished Herman had refused to help him. A man who kicked and beat his horses wasn't worth much.

They reached Condon airily and were planning on traveling on toward thirty-mile for the night. They strung out down Main Street, dust fogging around them, the sun still hot. It was down hill to the spring in the center of the street where an old trough would be brimming with cold water. The early cattlemen had called this spot Summit Springs in the days when they had dug out the spring so their cattle could drink.

A MAN rode out toward Ory Herman as Herman was stopping to water his team. Pete recognized him and wondered what Balogny Smith was doing in Condon when he was supposed to be running down some clue on the dope being spirited into the John Day country. Pete and Loot pulled up also and got their water buckets.

As they approached the trough, Ory Herman was speaking to the sheriff.

"Search if you have to, but you won't find no dope. I don't like bein' held up is all. I've heard the law was after some whites and chinks over in Canyon City way, but it don't mean nothin' to me."

"I hope not," Balogny said. There was another man beside the sheriff and he wore a U. S. badge. His eyes were cold and driving. He was looking over the load as though he could pierce the wrappings.

"We've been tipped off it's in a sack of beans," the U. S. man said.

"I ain't carryin' no beans—" Ory Herman's lips went dry. "Not for myself," he amended. "I got a sack on for the Harvey sheep-camp, a feller on the flats asked me to bring it and leave it at the general store."

They searched the bean sack first, and in a small bundle they found what they sought. By this time the sheriff had sent for Jake Harvey who happened to be in town. The sheepman shook his head. He had not been expecting any beans and flour and canned stuff to come by hack.

"There's a screw loose some'ers," he said to Balogny Smith.

"So loose the whole story rattles," the sheriff snapped, and took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. He stepped toward the old teamster. "Put out your paws, Herman."

Ory Herman stood stone still, his bushy brows a straight shelf over his grave eyes. "I guess Justin Turk has managed to hold me up for sure this time. I reckon he sent that man that was waitin' for me with the beans. He know doubt had heard the law was searchin' the wagons as they come through here."

"Stick out your dukes."

Ory Herman held out his thick-wristed hands. The fingers were doubled to his palms so tightly the knuckles threatened to burst the skin. "I hope you don't take these boys in on this," he said. "Maybe they can get a man to drive my team on to John Day and—"

"I'll give them boys just one hour to

make arrangements either to send the teams on or board them here. I'm takin' the three of you to Alkali with me tonight. So long as your son and Pete Messmer don't show no signs of skippin', I'll let them range free."

Pete and Loot made no effort to find three drivers; to send the wagons on with strangers was out of the question. They stabled the teams, and every move they made was watched by the U. S. men. He took them to a waiting hack the moment arrangements were completed. The sheriff and Ory Herman rode in the front seat, Pete and Loot in the back. The U. S. man followed the rig on horseback.

* **T** WAS A long hard forty miles back A to Alkali. They reached the sandy little town just as life was beginning to stir in the wagon-yard.

Ory Herman was lodged in jail without any commotion. Balogny Smith warned Loot and Pete to not leave town, but said until there was something definite connecting them with the dope ring, he would not arrest them. He told the U. S. man that Pete Messmer was known to be as square a shooter as his dad. The U. S. man said there was no telling about it.

The boys took a room in the hotel, and Loot fell asleep with all his clothes on. He was not as rugged as his father, and the shock of seeing Ory Herman in irons had put fear into his eyes.

Pete had tried to bolster him up, but the lad had trembled a lot; and now as he slept, he twitched. Pete looked down on him and his eyes whetted to fresh anger. This boy, old Ory, and he were all suffering from some trick, and there could be only one man at the bottom of it. Justin Turk.

Pete blew out the lamp, looked out the window at the first streakings of day and decided to go to the wagon-yards. The wool and wheat haulers were stirring and Turk was riding about to see that his two men were up and hustling.

Pete wondered if Turk knew yet that Ory Herman was in jail.

His attention was taken by an Indian who came up Main Street from the Columbia River and waved to Turk. Pete managed to get close enough to see the Indian's horse jefore he trotted away. There was nothing unusual about an Indian being on the main street of Alkali, for the breaks of the Columbia sheltered many of them, but there was unusualness in an Indian being up at the crack of day.

Pete wailed until the freighters had breakfasted before he went in to see old Cooky. In the restaurant he found Loot. The kid had awakened and come to hunt him. Pete ordered them both a big breakfast, but Loot couldn't get much down but his coffee. When Cooky brought him two eggs especially 'rancy, the lad answered with a thin grin and said he would wait outside for Pete. The smell of food was turning him sick.

"Not heavy 'rtough through the saddle to mix it with he-men," Cooky observed as Loot left. "Bight now when his dad needs him, he's useless as a rye straw shakin' in the wind."

"He's some puny," Pete admitted, "and scared. Has Turk sounded off any about the arrest of Ory Herman?"

"Yeah, and he's rollin' the spurs to Assistant-sheriff Rosch. He's remindin' Roach that he tried^o get him to arrest you and Herman and everybody."

"Puttin' the steel to Roach, is he? Now that's a foolish move." He looked over Cooky's head straight into the wall. "Mighty foolish."

"Now what cracked scheme has entered your mind?"

"Where is Roach?"

"Roach! Uh-huh, I thought you was hatchin' somethin'. Forget about that two-fisted gunner, Pete. I have alius tried to look after you 'cause I know oT Peter would want me to. You stay away from that killer Roach. You've done what you could fer Herman, now you think about a freightin' job up north where—"

"Where is Roach?"

"All I know is 'ie is gettin' himself some sleep, was into a card game most of last

night. Maybe at the Alkali Feed and Livery. Pete, blast your hide, if I can't stop you, I'll have to put in, but recollect I'm agin' it, flat-footed."

Pete slid off the stool. 'I might call on you, Cooky. Oil up the double-barrled Hannah and keep her standin' to hand." He smiled a little as the old man wiped the sweat from his glistening dome.

OUTSIDE, he told Loot to go on over to the jail and stay with his dad. A block down the street, Fete slapped into the U. S. man and Justin Turk. The teamster was shrilly airing hi- ideas.

"You're makin' a mistake to leave young Messmer runnin' loose. He's got connections that run deep, 'couita his dad. He might be the one that fctched Ory Herman in here."

Pete squared away directly in their path. Turk saw him, but kept r ght on shouting. "The way that kid pulled a knife on W^ralt Cain shows the stock he is "

The two men stopped before Pete. "Turk," Pete said, "you've been haulin' that dope in and you managed to slip some of it to Ory Herman when you learnt the law was in Condon. You're not goin' to get away with it."

Turk grabbed the arm of the lawman and gave it a jerk such as he was in the habit of administering to one of his teamsters. "Arrest this feller for threatenin' me!"

"You have hold of rny arm, Turk," the iawman said quietly.

Anger was naked in the freighter's eyes. "Mighty high-toned and tetchy, ain't you?" he asked, 'Goin' to let this kid outsmart you, huh?"

He brushed by Pete and walked for the saloon. The U. S. man spoke to Pete. "We figure you're mixed into this, Messmer; we haven't the thread that draws you in. But we'll find it." His heels crunched the hard earth trail as he too walked toward the saloon.

Pete moved on, his square face set to iron. He went to the Alkali Feed and Livery and asked for Jim Roach. The sta-

ble owner heard his voice and ordered him off the premises. Roach slipped down from a seat on a manger and approached.

"What you want of me?"

"Plenty. Let's go where we won't have jackass ears listenin'."

They went to Pete's hotel room. Roach let himself into a chair and glowered. His eyes were bright from drinking, but his legs were steady under him and his hand still swift. "What you want of me better be important," he said. "I ain't in no humor to be wild-goose chased."

"Too bad you wasn't in on bustin' that dope ring up. Reckon there's good reward money in it."

"Is that what you want to say?" Dangerous lights glittered in his eyes. "Brung me here to say it was too bad, huh?"

"I think it's too bad you wasn't with Balogny, yes, 'cause T think you'd a been too smart to have been fooled."

"Balogny is plenty smart—plenty smart."

"Yes, but he's bein' took for a ride this time."

The gunman wasn't one to be blarneyed, but the fact his pride was wounded showed in his red-rimmed eyes. He catfooted to the door, jerked it open. The emptiness satisfied him, so he closed it, turned the key and faced Pete Messmer.

"What's in your head?"

"Ory Herman ain't the right man and I can't make Balogny see it. Turk planted that hack along the road to slip Herman the dope. I reckon Balogny had showed himself too prominent in Condon and Turk was wise. I reckon if you got the real facts of the thing, Roach, and arrested Turk, your stock would soar purty high around this man's town."

"What proof you got?"

"None, that's why Balogny won't listen to hie. But I'm right, Roach, I'd bet a right arm and throw in a right leg."

"None, huh! You want me to jump Justin Turk, powerfulest man in the country with no proof. He beats horses but—"

"And kills men!"

"You mean the Injun? I run down a

thing or two on that, nothin' against Turk."

"He killed my father."

The thin echo of the words died away. "So that's why you hate him?"

"Yes. He caused my father to pile up and then got his freight contract. He's doin' the same thing to Ory Herman."

"You mean accordin' to *you*, he is."

Pete Messmer nodded. "Yes, accordin' to me. Roach, you could make Turk talk. I saw an Injun meet him 'fore it was light this mornin'. He was ridin' a spotted horse with a rope on his nose for a bridle. A big buck, put together solid. We might see that Injun first off."

"If it was John Johns, he's a bad actor. Was he bareback and usin' a ragged red blanket?"

"He was bareback but usin' a sheep pelt."

Jim Roach straightened. "I was baitin' you on the blanket, John Johns alius rides a sheep pelt. I was seein' if you'd lie in order to switch a man to your side. Little things like them count."

"Messmer, I got a live hunch to back your hand. Balogny is a good man and smart, but he's hipped on this evidence stuff. I say, if you've got a reasonable hunch a man's guilty, tie a rope around his neck and lift him off the ground. Try that a couple of times and see what he's got to say. We'll find out first what a no-good lazy Injun was doin' up 'fore breakfast, and if he ain't a lead, we'll see Justin Turk. That leatherhead will talk, or my name ain't Jim Roach."

V

THE fact that the law had found so small an amount of the dope being smuggled into the country lent power to Pete's belief that it had been a plant. The real smugglers had just wasted enough of the stuff to throw the law on a false trail. Jim Roach said the thing was to locate the man driving that broken-down hack. He could lead them to the real supply.

Quietly Pete and Roach were riding toward the shack of Indian John Johns.

Johns had been caught twice smuggling liquor to members of his tribe and once had been up for murder. The Indian that had killed Yellowstone Jones had been a friend of John Johns. The picture was roughly fitting together.

It was night, and the rippling of the Columbia muffled the walking of the horses.

Pete and Roach circled the shack that was sheltered from the wind by high bluffs, then dismountec and left their mounts tied to a sage. A hack was standing in front of the half-collapsed barn, and two horses were feeding from straw that had been thrust under it. A hack wasn't unusual, many Indians had rattly old rigs. Pete grabbed Roach by the arm.

"I believe one of them horses is a buckskin! That fella was drivin' a buckskin!"

Roach stopped in his tracks. "Listen here," he said, "and let what I'm sayin' sink into that thick skull of yours. Don't never grab me by my gun arm again, and since I shoot with both hands, don't grab me by any arm at all. Kick my shin, er twist my ear, but don't grab my gun arm no more. Is that clear?"

"Plumb. Now about that buckskin—"

"There's forty buckskin horses to every mile—still it looks good."

They moved toward the dark shack. The windows had no glass and the door was half open. Pete and Roach agreed there was only one occupant of the shack and he was in bed.

"Strike a match and hold it through the window," Roach ordered.

"He might have a gun in bed with him," Pete said blandly.

"And I got one in my hand. Strike that match."

Pete struck the match and Roach leaned through the window with an order for the Indian to come out. His voice filled the room and flowed out to the silent sand.

"March for the door and don't think crooked. This is the law, but not the law as Balogny Smilh sees her. This is the real thing administered by the hand of Jim Roach who administers her sudden. Come outside!"

The window was not more than a foot to the right of the door, and as the Indian walked out, Roach whipped a gun into his side. Pete found a lantern and lighted it.

It was John Johns, fully dressed in a dirty shirt and greasy overalls. His black hair hung in two braids over his shoulders and his face was immobile. A gun was thrust in his pants band but he had no idea of reaching for it. His hands were high and steady above his head.

"Where's the man that drove that hack?" Roach asked. "Don't count on that Injun face of yours foelin' me."

The Indian nodded. "My team. I drive."

"Lyin' is goin' to fe:ch you heap bad luck. Where is that feller?"

"My team, I—"

ROACH clipped a bullet by the high cheekbone. Pete shined the lantern against his face and it was blank, eyes as unblinking as a snake's. Pete felt his liver pressing his heart, or something like that. He knew if that Indian didn't start talking, Roach was going to start shooting in earnest.

He set the lantern down and stepped back into the shadow of a scrawny juniper. He was afraid the Indian might see his weakness and it would hurt their cause. The juniper protected him from some of the bullets that suddenly cut loose from the scabby streak before the shack.

At least three men opened up with rifles from the boulders and sand. They flung lead at the figures outlined by the light. Pete felt his hat lift from his head, but the tree shadow made him indistinct.

John Johns dived for his waist gun and it came up belching flame. Pete saw him fall. Roach had at least settled that gun as he made for the cabin. He stumbled to his knees as he got inside, and the yell that went up from the boulders told they knew the gunman was wounded.

Pete dodged away among the rocks, and rounded to enter the shack from the back. The lantern was still burning, and that stayed off the advance from the front and also held Roach to the shack.

Pete had the gun in his hand that Roach had given him, but he didn't try any shots. He wasn't good with a short gun, and he thought it was best to try to join Roach silently. The gunman was ripping lead among the rocks in a way that proved his wound had not put him out of the fight.

Pete slipped up through the sage at the back and found that two of the attackers had beat him to it. A voice that set up a tingle at the roots of his hair was whispering out:

"I'll leave you two to finish the thing. I better get that hack away."

Pete lay flat in the sand and started crawling toward the barn and the hack. Jim Roach would handle those two men even if they rushed him; the important thing was to get that hack driver. But the fellow was leaving now on the run and Pete still had to move cautiously.

The team, still wearing their harness, was kicked up to the tongue and hooked up. The man was climbing into the seat as Pete finished the wide circle that was necessary in order to keep to shelter. He had been afraid to come out in the open and gun it out; he was too poor a shot. He caught the tail end of the hack as it began to move, and pulled himself into the bed. Filled sacks were about him. He felt of them. Beans!

Pete let the man drive until he was far enough away so a disturbance couldn't bring him help from the two men at the shack. He drove up to a wire gate, wrapped the lines around the buggy whip and rose to crawl out. Pete swung his clubbed gun, but a sixth sense swayed the man aside and the blow glanced off his shoulder.

Pete leaped and the pair of them went over the wheel and into the sand.

THE man tried for the gun at his hip, but Pete's fist caught him under the chin and sent him to his knees. He was quickly up, still trying for the gun. They were locked in a deadly clinch, the heavy footing sucking up sound. Pete knew he had to keep that gun out of the picture.

He reached down and fastened his pow-

erful hand on the fellow's right wrist, with his other hand he held him close. They swayed in groaning effort. Suddenly Pete loosened his hold on the man and landed a stunning blow on the other's chin. Again and again he hit with his right, still holding the fellow's wrist with his left.

The man began to go down, his knees first, then his head sank forward on his chest. To the last he kept his grip on the gun. Not until he was slipping to the sand did it fly from his grasp. Pete's right was back for another blast when the man collapsed. It hadn't been an easy victory. The man had put up a strong fight.

Pete found a rope in the hack and bound him while he was still unable to resist, then he drove back toward the old shack. There was still the sound of battle there.

Pete found a rifle in the hack and chipped into the fight. He judged there were three guns working against Roach, and wondered where the men had come from.

He cut loose with a volley of shots and a wild yell. Echoes rattled in all directions. With the rims of the Columbia tossing sound around, it would be hard for Roach's enemies to know just how strong this new danger was.

Pete shifted his position as lead began to fall near him. By that businesslike retort, he knew that the men pressing in on the cabin were going to fight it out. Jim Roach shot only twice. This economy of lead sent a chill to the roots of Pete's hair. Ammunition must be very low.

Shifting quietly through the rocks and sand, Pete tried to work up for a better shot. No use for him to try to snap a bullet into these streaks of flame. He needed more time than the bat of an eye to score a hit. Two men were working on the cabin now, one front, one back. There was no sign of the third. Pete began to think he had been mistaken about their being a third, when he caught a movement over the sand behind him.

He spun about as a powerful pair of shoulders lifted above the sage, the starlight catching on a dull ribbon of steel.

Pete Messmer had his own rifle hugged against his side and his finger was on the trigger. He lunged straight at the bulking form, firing as he leaped. That other gun roared in his face, and he felt pain in his shoulder and a hot pouring of blood down his left arm.

The range was too close for either to miss. The thundering echoes were pierced by a cry fearful enough to have been conjured from the nether regions. At its highest pitch, it was cut off by the clamping fingers of death. As though life had been torn from him in one fierce second, the man before Pete crashed to the earth.

THE echo of that cry, eternally held at its most piercing note, was slow to dim away. It lingered high among the rims after the heavy roar of the guns had died. It must have shaken the two men closing in on Jim Roach, for there was silence about the cabin. A few minutes passed and the gorge registered their retreat. Two horses thudded away.

Pete called to Roach, and the gunman wobbled from the old shack.

"Who was the gent that had his war whoop choked off in his guzzler?" he asked as he came nearer. "Where you been all this time—pickii' daisies?"

Pete was leaning on his rifle to keep to his feet, for the dead man lying in the sand was giving him a queer feeling. The pain in his shoulder wasn't helping any.

Roach struck a match and one glance at the cruel, stubbled face was enough. It was Walt Cain, the wagon boss that was supposed to be on his way to John Day.

Pete told of the hack driver and the sacks of beans. "If we can only make the fellow talk," he finished.

Jim Roach leaned on Pete so they could make it quicker to the rig. "Did you say *if*?" he asked. "Me with three bullet holer in me and you think maybe that feller won't talk!"

They drove back and loaded on the body of Walt Cain and the Indian that had been killed at the door of the cabin. They led their saddle horses from the rear of

the hack and Pete headed the rig for town. Jim Roach was too weak from loss of blood to sit in a saddle and much of the time during the ride, he leaned heavily against Pete.

IT was streaking morning-light when they turned from the sandy road along the Columbia into the quiet Main Street of Alkali. As they drove up to the Feed and Livery Stable, the owner was just coming from the driveway. The man took a quick step forward as he recognized the outfit, then he saw who was driving.

In the thin gray light that was cutting away the blackness, his face hardened. He shot a swift word over his shoulder to someone in the stalls.

Pete crawled down over the wheel, dizzy from the pain in his left shoulder and not much aware of his surroundings. Jim Roach was to stay at the hack with the two dead men and the prisoner, while Pete went to fetch Sheriff Balogny Smith. In a shadowy way Pete knew another man had joined the stable owner. This second man stepped toward the rig.

It was Turk. His saddled horse was in the doorway and in his hand was the length of chain he always carried on his morning rides about the wagon yards.

Turk looked into the hack bed and saw the body of Walt Cain and the bound prisoner. He jerked back with a curse. It was the rattle of the chain that poured alertness back to Pete Messmer. He heard death in the cold clink, and realized he had left his rifle in the hack.

Jim Roach was on the opposite side of the rig, having trouble in easing himself to earth. The stable owner was moving in at Pete's flank, a pitchfork clubbed in his hand.

"I've had enough of you!" Turk whispered. "You ain't no better than your dad—he got in my way!"

The chain clanked Oack and began to fall. Turk was watching for Pete to swing aside, but Pete Messmer didn't swing aside. Doubling low, he charged. The whispered words were still in his ears. His dad. Old

Peter had been in the way. Turk *had* killed him!

Pete felt a numbing shock as the chain slid off his back. Turk was stooped from lifting the chain and delivering the blow.

Pete plowed into his middle with his head, and he was coming with a force that flaming anger lent his powerful body. Turk stumbled, the chain clinking in his pain-contracted fingers. Pete blasted a right fist for the freighter's chin and grabbed for the chain. He wrested it away and drew back for a blow.

The stable owner yelled and Pete knew he was charging; but his mind was on Turk. He brought the chain down with a terrible force against the freighter's head. Turk came at last to feel the weight of the weapon he had wielded so many times on men and horses.

Pete tried to swing around to meet the charge of the stable owner, but with the crash of Justin Turk, there had come to him the feeling of all things being finished. He swayed on his sturdy legs, wondering why that clubbed pitchfork didn't land. Then he saw that Jim Roach had the liveryman backed against the wall, a gun half buried in his stomach.

Roach shifted his tobacco and glanced down at Justin Turk.

"He's had that comin' to him for twenty years," he said.

"I evened up on him," Pete Messmer replied, looking down unmoved to the man at his feet. "An eye for an eye."

ATEN THOUSAND dollar shipment of dope was found in the hack-load of beans. The driver of the rig told how it had been fixed to put the blame on Ory Herman. Two Indians, brought in, talked. In John Day Town, the man who received the stuff and then peddled it to both whites and Chinamen on the railroad was caught. It was proved that Turk and Walt Cain shared in the profits.

Assistant-sheriff Jim Roach spent his days in the shadow of the harness shop, recovering from his wounds and telling how he had broken the dope ring. He agreed

half of the reward money should go to Pete Messmer, but as he retold the story, Pete's name wasn't mentioned many times. Balogny Smith couldn't quite free himself of uneasiness.

"How'd you get proof enough to go a-shootin' after John Johns?" he asked his assistant. "The law has to have proof 'fore it cuts a gun loose."

Roach rolled his tobacco to his other cheek. "Smelled it partly, and maybe instinct like animals have helped some."

"Instinct wouldn't a helped none if you'd a shot the wrong man. Say that Injun hadn't a' been guilty—"

"But he was. I done a good job, didn't I?"

"Yep, smooth a piece a work as I ever saw. I ain't wantin' to talk you down none, but I'm remindin' you not to make a practice of ridin' up to a man's door and shootin' by instinct."

. . . Ory Herman and Loot and Pete

Messmer talked earnestly as they ate supper in the chop house off the Alkali saloon. That afternoon Herman had landed the freighting contract to the entire John Day country. The old freighter wanted Pete to come in as a partner.

"That reward money will start you up with teams," he u'ged.

Pete's eyes were very bright. "But I'm only eighteen, Mr. Herman. I reckon you could find an older man that would do you better."

Herman shook his head, "It's the new, clean blood that counts in a deal, Pete. I'm lookin' a lot to you, lad. I'll be always hangiii' around to see the dough-gods don't burn and the 'taters are cooked right." He reached across the table to shake Pete's hand. "I'd be in jiil but for you, and I'm not forgettin' it."

Old Cooky cam; in with apple pie, and he rested a hand m Pete's shoulder. Pete looked up and grinned.

Buy It if You Must

WE ARE supposed to be living in the golden age of advertising, wherein every man Regulates his life by billboards. Now it may be that advertising is more potent today than ever before; but it certainly has become more polite and conventional than in the past. For fifty yea-s ago, according to researchers of the New York Federal Writers' Project, the ads you saw were quite likely to startle you out of your shirt.

For example, a Coney Island establishment displayed tl Is sign: Bad Liquors and Worse Cigars. Again, impressionable citizens were often confronted with a large poster on which a half-naked man with a towel draped around him roared silently: "Soap! Soap! You Son-of-a-Gun! Fairbank's Soap!" . . . But most extraordinary of all was the shy legend displayed by a printing concern: The Highest Prices . . . The Poorest Work . . . The Longest Delays . . . We Are Determined to Satisfy No Customer . . . The Worst Possible Taste . . . We Ensure Disappointment. . . Do Not Read This, and If You Do, Hurry Away; We Are a Bankrupt, Rotten, Swindling Concern. . . . If You Wish To Be Robbed, Fleeced, Shorn and Swindled, Cone in Here. . . .

That, children, was the way your parents were seduced into spending. Pretty girls on posters illustrate the decadence of our time.

Hell Child



Mona screamed just as the curtain caught fire. Then she rushed blindly for Jim

To you she's the darling of a million screens—the golden tot of Hollywood. So, all right . . . stop oohing and aching for a minute and let us take you to the sound stages to meet Little Miss Borgia in person—the Brat of a Nation *

By **ROBERT NEAL LEATH**

Author of "Karpen the Jew," "Ill Wed by Moonlight," etc.

I FELT like wringing her neck. Instead, I took *The Art of Motion Pictures* out of my glass bookcase and uncorked the bottle of bourbon which that hollow volume contained.

"Pal," I said, "that air rifle is a noble invention, but just why did you find it necessary to hide on a catwalk above the stage and shoot the general in the teat of his pants?"

"America's Baby Girl" — otherwise known as Mary Lou Martin—pulled her

dress down till it nearly hid the hem of her own, and very little, pants. She gave me a limpid, reproachful glance—worth at least a million dollars at anybody's box office. For, physically, Mary Lou looked a golden and innocent six; actually she was ten, and mentally she was developed to a point of diabolic fiendishness which no reasonable number of years could account for. She spoke to me. Her voice was honey dripping from a cupid's wings.

"Pal," America's Baby Girl said, "if you drink that neat, you'll have a awful hangover tomorrow."

I drank it neat. I had to. "We're talking about the general," I said. "Explain."

Mary Lou looked at me. Ordinarily her eyes would have melted stone lions, but now they filled with such undiluted venom that I gulped. "I," said Mary Lou carefully, "do not like the guy what's playing the general, pal!"

"I see," I said, watching her. The sound I heard was just my teeth, grinding together. "You don't like the general. That's just ducky! So you had to pink him in the pants four times, and make him give a leap and a yell each time, and spoil four different takes!" I said. Because Mary Lou was the star of a Civil War picture, now in production at National Art, which contained a battle sequence and a column of soldiers moving up to the front line. "Pal," I said, "do you know #hat that marching scene is costing us?"

"Ten grand a day," Mary Lou said in a pleased way, then added quickly: "You'd better hire a different general. Then it can't happen again. The air rifle, I mean. Honest!"

She gave me the look again but I knew too much about those limpid eyes. I'd been controlling my temper fine, so far, but now I'm afraid I left *The Art of Motion Pictures* and came around my glass desk. I've already mentioned her pants; they were special—*Mary Lou Panties*, a trade-marked item retailed throughout the United States with a profit to Mary Lou herself of almost a thousand a week. Nevertheless—

"Pal," I said, "I'm going to kick those famous little panties right up around your ears!"

She gave a calm golden giggle, sitting there so daintily in my white chair.

"Pal, don't do it!" she said calmly. "I'd have to sue you. This is California and you can't strike a minor in this state regardless of provocation. That," she said, "is what Henry says."

Henry Carmella is the big shot among Hollywood lawyers, so I thought she must be right. Therefore I stopped. I tried to make her tell me why, but she wouldn't.

"I'll have a choc'lut ice cream cone first," she said.

I sent Paddy O'Mara out for the choc'lut ice cream cone.

"Now—?"

"The guy what plays the general," this hell child said, "has got designs on my Mama! He loves ler or something. Ay tank Ay go home now," she said insolently, getting off the white chair.

"Please do!" I said.

PADDY always dressed so much like an advertisement for country club haberdashery that I felt a little embarrassed about giving him an order. But, after all, a secretaiy is supposed to sec.

"Get Jim Trowbridge in here," I ordered Paddy. '

Jim Trowbridge was the general. He came in with his lips white from being pressed together. He was so scared that my heart turned over and went *glump*. The poor guy thought he was going to lose his job, and he needed every possible day's work he coul' get, to eat.

I liked Jim Trowbridge, and you would like him, too. He came in wearing tan makeup and a confederate uniform, handsome and big and swaggering—but with that fear in his eyes, and those lines upon his face that came from worry. Lots of people who didn't know might think Jim Trowbridge lucky. Thirty years old, but looking forty. The last of the famous Trowbridge line of actors. But in simple fact, Jim Trowbridge had started life with two strikes ag:in:st him already.

His father, and his grandfather before that, had been mati ice idols, great lovers, athletes with the sune perfect physique that Jim had now, big money-makers—and bigger spenders Acting seemed to be Jim's pre-ordained late from the date of his birth. Nobody would think of hiring a Barrymore as a bank clerk or a soda jerker—and nobody would hire a Trowbridge that way, either.

That was strike one against Jim—because he simply cculdn't act. Oh, sure, he did all right in little parts where he could merely swagger and keep his mouth shut. And I suppose he probably knew

as much about the theater and about the movies, as any man alive—having heard nothing else as long as he could remember.

But—and this was strike two—as soon as he had to open his mouth before a microphone, every bet was off. Without being in the least effeminate, he had the softest, gentlest voice you have ever heard. A voice that might have come out of a saint's mouth—but a voice that certainly did not jibe with any sort of matinee-idol waggering.

Consequently Jim was an actor, because the world would not let him be anything else. He had an agent, and Jim's agent when talking to the big-shot movie studios asked five hundred a week for Jim's services. "His name alone was worth that. But it was a lucky year when Jim got a whole week's work with the big shots. The rest of the time he sneaked off down Poverty row, without telling his agent, and took any job at my salary he could get. I knew, because I'd been on Poverty Row myself.

"Jim," I said, "sit down. What's this about you and Mary Lou's mama?"

Jim looked startled then peculiar, and maybe he blushed a little.

"I'm not marrying," he said in a rigid, soft tone, "anybody."

I must have stared. Plenty of guys feel like that, I know, especially in a town where there's five glamour girls for every man. But I'd never thought of Jim Trowbridge from the love 'em and leave 'em angle. "Hub?" I grunted.

"That's right."

"But you're in love with Mona Martin, anyway?"

Jim looked at me, straight. "Yes," he said.

"Does Mona know it?"

"I've never said anything," Jim told me. "I can't imagine how you guessed."

"That's all," I told him, and he got up, suddenly and immensely relieved.

"I'm sorry about dumping like that," he said, fumbling with his general's hat—

"and spoiling those four takes. I'll try not to let it happen again."

I felt like crying or something. Imagine—a big Trowbridge that meek and humbled! The poor guy apologizing, he was so scared and relieved. "For the love of Mike, let's have a drink," I said.

So we had a drink and then Jim left.

THE situation seemed to require a lot of thinking and I gave it a lot but I didn't get anywhere. Mary Lou was becoming impossible, yet as supervisor of her picture I was responsible for turning out a good picture as cheaply as possible. So I got Mona Martin on the wire and asked could I come over that evening. She said yes in a flustered sweet way and suggested dinner too.

I went to dinner and later I wished I hadn't. A grown man can't feel very proud of himself when he's decided deliberately to ruin practically a baby, but that's what I planned to do when I left that house.

They lived modestly on a hilltop, with only one servant, a fat colored cook, Mary Lou's father was dead, long ago.

I arrived early and Mona Martin herself, wearing a silly pink apron, let me in. Mary Lou's mother was one of those sweet, fragile blondes. The Anita Louise type. Almost painfully lovely. But for some reason we couldn't fathom at National Art, she did not photograph. Otherwise we might have made her nearly as famous as her child. She was only twenty-eight and she looked like a gossamer fairy princess, and she had no business being a mother in the first place. At least not the mother of a brat like Mary Lou.

Jim Trowbridge showed up a few minutes after I did, and when he found me already there a strained look came quickly into his face although he didn't say anything except hello.

"Skip it," I told him. "I've already got a wife and I'm not on the prowl."

"Thanks," Jim said.

Mona's clear, innocent gray glance went

from one of us to the other in bewilderment.

"Why—what do you mean?"

"Nothing," I said.

Maybe she really didn't know that Jim loved her, but anybody could see that she loved him, whether she had admitted it to herself or not.

Mary Lou led the way to dinner and the first thing that happened was a flash accompanied by a violent explosion when I sat down. Mary Lou had been watching me in that cute way that millions paid to love, and she burst into a roar of laughter when the thing under my cushion went off and I leaped about nine feet straight up.

Of course the cushion caught fire and I had a couple of active moments throwing it out a window, and the chair was ruined, but that wasn't the bad part.

"Pal," Mary Lou lisped between a couple of gasping gales—"you certainly did look funny! Four bells, all right."

"No doubt," I agreed.

Her mother waited in silence till Mary Lou's fiendish merriment had subsided.

"Mary Lou, you may leave the table," she said. "You'll have your dinner in your room, later."

"I'll have my dinner here. I'm the one—" Mary Lou calmly replied, dimpling, "that paid for it!"

WELL, that was the bad part. With an ordinary kid, you would simply slap her down and let it go at that. And most insults only become intolerable when they happen to be the strict and literal truth. And it was Mary Lou's earnings which actually *were* paying for our dinner; so her mother just sat there, cut deep down into her gentle heart, and white and still in the face.

I could see, too, in Mona Martin's quick stricken pallor that this line of Mary Lou's was not anything the child had thought up on the instant.

The brat had it all figured out. She had found the one comment to which her mother could not reply. She had dis-

covered a knife and she used it to get her own way in everything. I had an abrupt, sickening series of pictures of what Mona Martin's life must be. Whenever she bought a dress, or a sandwich, or a lipstick, she might expect a neat little golden remark—"I'm the one that paid for that!"—if Mary Lou happened to feel ugly.

Perhaps it wouldn't have worked on some other mother. But it worked horribly on the gentle Mona.

Then I found myself trying to give Mary Lou the benefit of the doubt. Maybe, I told myself, she wasn't really such a monster as she seemed. For most kids have streaks of downright cruelty inside them which, however, they are compelled to restrain. Most kids are dependent upon their parents, and have to act reasonably courteous. But what about a child movie star?

I gave up.

I had plenty of time to do all this thinking, because nobody said anything for what seemed to be a month. Jim Trowbridge, I saw, was also pale and he sat there suffering even more than Mona did. Those two gentle, nice people simply could not cope with Mary Lou. The servant girl brought some avocado cocktails and Mary Lou began daintily to eat. Pretty soon all of us were eating, and somehow or other we got through that dinner.

"Now, Mary Lou," her mother said, "you're going to bed."

All my muscles got tense, and I thought Mona was going to lose out again. But she sighed. She lifted Mary Lou in her arms.

Mary Lou suddenly was fighting and screaming in a terrific tantrum, but Mona carried her out. A'ter a while she came back, looking tired and defeated, and I learned later that she had locked Mary Lou in her room. But she hadn't slapped or spanked the brat at all.

"I'm sorry," she said, and that was all. There had been no alcohol before dinner, but now in the drawing room she offered liqueurs. I asked for whisky and soda

instead. A double one, Jim took that, too.

"You'd better join us," I told Mona. She grinned and shook her head.

I sipped my drink more quickly than usual, because what I'd found out was anything but helpful and I wanted to get out of there. Mary Lou's distant screams had stopped, and it took me some time to realize that the muffled knocking noise I heard now was coming from the driveway outside, where I'd parked my new coupé. All at once I did realize it, however, and jumped to a french door and flung the drapes back.

Mary Lou had climbed out of her window. She was crouching, now, in the middle of a big thin pool of wetness which I realized was the gasoline formerly inhabiting my gasoline tank. She was crouching and industriously pouring nails into one of my rear tires with a hammer. She wasn't very good at it and every once in a while she would miss the nail then the hammer head would spark gaily against the cement.

I howled at her and she looked round, pleasantly.

"Hi, pal," she said, and *Socko!* said the hammer.

I flew out of the house and down the driveway, wondering whether I'd make it before the gasoline puffed up in a sheet of flame, and grabbed Mary Lou into the air.

"Pal," she said, wistfully, "those tires need a kind of design, like on a cowboy's boots!"

I said grimly, "Do you understand what I can do to you for this?"

"Yes, pal," she purred. "Nothing. I'm box office. Bigger than Gable! You'd lose your job if you got me any bad publicity and hurt me with the fans." She smiled angelically.

I put her down, confiscated the hammer, called a garage and a taxi, and went home.

MY DREAMS were; troubled by small angelic devils and the next morning I went in to see Ben Sponberg, my boss. Practically everybody in the world

had taken it for granted for some time now that Mary Lou really was bigger box office than Gable. She was runner-up to Temple. And I'd heard no rumor that Mary Lou was slipping, although ordinarily any news like that gets around Hollywood faster than the celebrated greased lightning. But the kid's own crack about it set me thinking.

"Ben—I want some dope on Mary Lou's last picture," I said. "How's it doing?"

He studied me a while before he replied. Ben is smart and I could almost see his brain work. I hardly expected any information which might be discouraging, since I was responsible, as I've said, for the Mary Lou picture now in production.

But, to my surprise, Ben softly said, "Cost two hundred and seventy-three grand. To date we've got back two-thirds of that. After yours, we must make one more picture on the kid's contract. Then I think we will let her out. I think," Ben said slowly, "there is something wrong with Mary Lou."

Yes, Ben was smart. To make a good picture you must have a good story, good technicians, good direction, and good actors. But you can't get anywhere unless, first of all, you start with a good story. Therefore if anything goes wrong and a production turns out stinko, an executive can pass the buck most easily by blaming the writers. But Ben didn't do that now. He blamed Mary Lou, and he knew something was wrong with her although he couldn't put his finger on the trouble.

Now, it's a strange thing, but nobody except a rare actress who is very great indeed can develop a mean personality and remain attractive on the screen.

Her voice may remain precisely the same, without any new overtones or undertones which the most scientific instrument will record. Neither her face nor her figure may change, but if she changes inside, somehow or other the change shines out and the camera catches it and hairs of horror rise upon the necks of the audience.

When Mary Lou started out, and before

she became America's Baby Girl, she was the sweetest and cutest little tike that ever plunked a heart. She would throw her arms out and dance and sing and you would know she was the kid you'd love to have in front of your own fireside.

She looked the same, now. She was very good. But she wasn't great. No kid can quite achieve the greatness of hiding her own personal soul. She could still throw her arms out and dance and sing, but hairs were rising upon audience necks. Box offices were falling off and Ben Sponberg, who is very wise, knew that something was wrong with Mary Lou Martin.

"Maybe," Ben said, "you could do something, eh?"

Sure, I could do something. I had Jim Trowbridge called off the set, again.

"According to the schedule, you're through this afternoon."

"Why, yes," Jim said.

"Would you like another job, starting tomorrow morning?"

His eyes shone. Remember, it was a lucky year when Jim got a whole week in a big studio, and he'd already had a week with us. So I went on, quickly: "It's not acting, Jim. Assistant director—in the Mary Lou unit. Hundred and fifty a week, to start. But it might come every week."

He hesitated. It was temptation, but you could see the Trowbridge tradition fighting Jim Trowbridge all over his face.

"I—my salary is five hundred, Chuck. You know that," he said.

"Let's not kid each other," I said. "This is a chance."

Jim said suddenly, "I'll take it. Thanks, Chuck."

MAYBE it was a dirty trick I'd played on Jim Trowbridge. He hadn't inquired exactly how he was supposed to assist the director. And the job he got really was playing watchdog on Mary Lou Martin.

Karl Jaffé, our German ace, was making the picture. Jim was detailed to watch Mary Lou every moment, and to prevent

her from tearing the studio down. That would have been assistance aplenty, if he had been able to accomplish it.

I figured it like this: Mary Lou, when she did deign to act, was passable. At least Jaffé could get some footage shot. But most of the time she was engaged in playing practical jokes on other members of the cast. She had become unreasonable and temperamental beyond the wildest dreams of any adult star you could name, and Jaffé was going nuts. Usually Jaffé couldn't even find Mary Lou, when he got ready to shoot a scene, and if he did find her he couldn't know whether she would follow his instructions or not.

I figured that Jim Trowbridge was behind an eight-ball, anyway, no matter how you looked at it. His fool pride prevented him from proposing to Mary Lou's mother so long as; he was himself not successful, nor had any chance of becoming successful.

Furthermore he would have been wrecked by Mary Lou if he did challenge destiny and marry her mother. You cannot, I assure you, hang around Poverty Row from age seventeen to thirty without learning how movies are made. I thought he might be director material—if he could conquer himself and if he could conquer Mary Lou.

Thus the shambles. Thus the massacre.

Jim tried. I must say that for him. But the only result was that instead of scattering her attentions among all the members of the unit, Mary Lou concentrated on Jim.

She made him a laughingstock. She burned him up and she burned him down, she put flies in his soup and she whizzed bullets past his ears. And all the time Jim remained gentle, timid, afraid—afraid he would lose that precious hundred and fifty a week.

Maybe you know how it is in a movie studio. An important star—or director, or executive, or agent—can pull a gag that wouldn't be tolerated in a waterfront saloon, and everybody screams with delight.

Everybody screamed at Jim—except, of course, Jim. Jim timidly smiled.

The payoff came one Friday afternoon. Production was six days behind schedule, and I went out on the set to see what was coming off. Jim's right ear was bleeding. Mary Lou had fired a horse pistol behind his ear, and the paper wad in the blank cartridge had taken a nick out of the ear.

Jim came up to me and tried to resign, but I insulted him out of that idea.

I watched Mary Lou a moment. She was wearing a diminutive crinoline, and the set was a big charming interior of a Southern mansion of Civil War days. The ballroom. At this moment, only a corner of the set was being used. Karl Jaffé was getting ready for a shot which included only a couple of the adult principals. Mary Lou was waiting, sitting demurely in a canvas chair. Jim Trowbridge passed her, heading for an elaborate, old-fashioned velour curtain ten feet away.

Then Tsaw why.

MONA MARTIN was standing there, prettier than any picture, and trying to efface herself. I could see them talking—doubtless in bw, desperate tones. Then my glance came back to Mary Lou's chair—and she wasn't in it.

I thought I ought to warn Jim Trowbridge. I looked toward him. Mona Martin was walking away. A movement near his feet caught my attention. A tiny hand appeared at the bottom of the velour drapes, holding some slivers of wood. The hand made an abrupt scratching motion, and a small flame appeared.

I yelled—because Mary Lou hadn't used just one match, she lit five or six all at once and she was setting fire to the bottom of Jim's pants and the matches slipped and the velour drapes caught the flames.

I suppose those drapes must have been composed of cellulose and guncotton rather than silk, for the fire ran up them faster than a monkey up a pole. And everything happened at once and within a second the stage was a horror.

Mona Martin spun about. If ever Jim had been in doubt that she loved him, he didn't need to doubt any longer.

Mona's gentle sweet face took on such a grimace of sacrificial dread as I'd never seen before—and she flung herself toward him.

I think she must have figured that Jim Trowbridge was the most important thing in the world to her, for she actually knocked him down. She hit him with that slender body of hers the way an All-American guard would. And an electrician on a wooden catwalk above the drapes stumbled violently backward to avoid the rising blast of fire, and he knocked a baby spot off. And the heavy spot came crashing down and it couldn't hit some punk writer or actor.

Oh, no. It had to pick our German ace, it had to land with a sickening smack square on Karl Jaffé's head. And Jim Trowbridge was down and Mona Martin crouched on him, before any man could get there she was ridiculously and desperately trying to beat the flames from his legs with her small hands and with her own dress—which was a terrible mistake, because Jim looked bad but he really wasn't in much danger, and Mona's dress was fragile and explosive and suddenly she herself was the one who needed help.

I was moving there as fast as I could but a prop boy beat me to it.

I'll say this for Karl Jaffé's gang. They certainly used their heads. The prop boy flung a rug around Mona and treated her pretty rough, but he stopped the burning. And a couple of grips mobbed Jim and a dozen more guys worked fast and got the drapes down.

But long before anybody thought about extinguishers, Jim hurled his helpers away and got to Mona's side. He stood her up and took the rug off her. She was burned pretty badly and she looked at him gently and smiled and quietly fainted.

He caught her then and carried her out toward the little emergency hospital we have on the lot. The calves of his legs showed black and grimy red through the

charred tatters of his pants but he paid no attention to that.

We hustled the unconscious Karl Jaffe over to the hospital, too, and the doctor looked mighty grave. He took an X-ray, quick, and I got out of there to walk in the hall while he was developing it. A lot of people were there, of course, asking questions. I heard some of the words that came out of their mouths, but some I didn't hear, and then somebody was beating at my legs and I looked down.

MARY LOU was crying, screaming at me. He." iace was ugly. The face of America's Baby Girl was blotched with makeup and soot, and tears ran down it here and there in streams. Somehow I found it possible to feel surprised. Because Mary Lou, maybe for the first time in her brattish life, was genuinely and hysterically frightened. I think she had always loved her mother from the bottom of her heart, but she'd never realized it before now—never, perhaps, had even guessed it.

"They won't let me see my Mama!" she screamed like a crazed cat, striking at me. "Make them let me see my Mama!" I said. "Get away from me!"

She changed suddenly. She broke. Her small hands grabbed instead of striking. "Pal," she wildly sobbed, "don't let my Mama die!"

I knew her mama wasn't going to die. Her Mama had severe burns from her knees to her breast, but she would recover. Nevertheless America's Baby Girl deserved a good deal of brutality. I hoped, rather doubtfully, that Mary Lou might even have had a lesson.

"She will die all right," I snarled—"and you're the one that did it, pal."

Suddenly she was gone and my glance followed. Jim Trowbridge had come out of the room where they'd put Mona Martin to bed. Mary Lou flung herself upon him, grabbing and shaking.

"Jim—Jim!" she screamed—"take me to my Mama! I'll—I'll get you fired if you don't!"

Jim Trowbridge had, of necessity, stopped. He looked down at Mary Lou. I think that was the moment he changed and really became a man instead of just the ineffectual last product of the Trowbridge line.

For the first time, I saw his jaw really harden. He said nothing. But he reached down with both hands and he grabbed Mary Lou brutally by one shell-pink ear and by the back of her dress. He lifted her, deliberately, and walked out with her.

Before they got to the door, Mary Lou stopped screaming. Complete astonishment dawned quickly across her splotched features—and an amazed, downright fear.

They disappeared that way, and I reentered the surgery. Jaffe's skull was fractured but he probably would live, Dr. Schultz told me. Ben Sponberg had come over from his office, of course. I thought a while, and then I asked Ben to come outside.

"I'm in the soup," I said. "Let me get out my own way, will you?"

"Who do you want?"

"Jim Trowbridge," I said.

"As director? You're nuts!" Ben said.

But I had liked that sudden hard jaw on Jim, and I went to bat. "I tell you he's got the technical knowledge!" I said. "Jim might not direct very good, but he'll do it fast. He really makes his living on Poverty Row—not here. Mary-Lou is on the skids anyway. Two-thirds of the picture is already in the cans. On the rest maybe I could even save some dough!"

Ben shrugged. "Try it," he said. "I can always change my mind."

So I went hunting for Jim, to tell him. It took me half an hour till I finally thought of returning to the big sound stage. The murmur of voices drew me toward a corner. Scenery cut off my view, and I didn't make much noise. It was Jim's voice, sure enough, and something savage in his tone caused me to eavesdrop. Quietly I climbed up to a place where I could both see and hear.

JIM had put Mary Lou on a stool. He occupied another, directly in front of her, his knees touching hers, and he was telling America's Baby Girl exactly what he thought of her.

Now in my time I've heard experts bawl people out, but I must admit I'd never heard anything as completely devastating as the string of words that mild Jim Trowbridge was thinking up.

Don't get me wrong. He didn't use any profanity. He didn't need to. He had Mary Lou crying with deep, shocking sobs. Once she squirmed and viciously kicked at his burned legs and tried to run away.

Jim simply brought her back. He put her on the stool again, and resumed his own position.

"Now," he said in that even, savage tone, "you try that again before I'm through—and I'm going to tear you into a thousand little pieces and run every one of them through a meat grinder. With the finest blade!"

Knowing Jim, I know that the chances were pretty slim in favor of his even spanking her, let alone carrying out a picturesque threat like that. But Mary Lou evidently wasn't quite so sure.

If I'd happened to be sitting on that stool, I think I'd have stayed there, myself. And then Jim went on from where he had left off. He did a lot of repeating. Probably he wanted to make certain it would penetrate, and he sounded as if he might keep on going for hours.

So I went away, and waited till evening and got him on the telephone.

My news made him nearly come apart. Being an assistant director had hurt his pride, I knew, because that certainly does not carry a big-shot rating in Hollywood. But a full-fledged director in a top-flight studio is, definitely, a big-shot. Something worthy even of a theatrical Trowbridge.

I heard Jim's voice catch and tremble a little—and I'm sure his jaw must have set a second time. He said he would do his best to make good.

Therefore I didn't go near the set. If you give a man absolute and complete authority, he may possibly surprise you with the excellence of the thing he turns out. But three days later I met Jim and Mary Lou in the lunchroom. Mary Lou, naturally, had discovered her mother would soon be well, and right now the brat was getting set to throw another of her famous tantrums.

Jim ordered *consommé*, a welsh rabbit, and beer for himself. He ordered a chicken omelet and a glass of milk for Mary Lou.

"Why, no," Mary Lou decided calmly. "I'm ten now and I think it will be beer for me, too."

I sat down and watched and listened, because I had recognized the electric danger in Mary Lou's tone—the old prelude to fireworks and insult. But Jim just looked at Mary Lou and he only tightened his jaw.

"You will have milk," he said.

Mary Lou seemed to assemble herself. Her lips became muscular and drew back over her white small teeth. But Jim kept on looking, a wild cold light started burning in his eyes and his jaw became tighter and all at once Mary Lou relaxed. "Milk," she told the waitress meekly.

SECRETLY, I began patting myself on the back. I said nothing, however, and I waited till all the returns were in. Mary Lou's picture turned out not so good; but it wasn't terribly bad, either. And Jim had shot a third of it—and had spent less than a third of the budget, as I had predicted he might. Therefore I persuaded Ben Sponberg to give him a second chance—on Mary Lou's last picture under her current contract—and that's where we got a surprise.

This last Mary Lou story wasn't just one kid and a lot of adults. It was entirely a kid story. We had six—count 'em, six—children. Most directors would simply exit as rapidly as possible in the general direction of London, faced by six kids. But Jim didn't even hesitate.

His amazing gentleness worked on five of those kids like enchantment—and his jaw let Mary Lou understand that she, personally, must not argue. Consequently the result was a lulu, a whizzerino, a picture with enough natural charm to lay 'em in the well-known aisles.

So Mary Lou has a new contract now. Her original sweetness is coming back, reborn in the fright she had about her mother and nourished in Jim's jaw. And Jim himself is sitting on top of the world

—Hollywood's ace director of kids.

Nevertheless, I've changed my mind about Jim Trowbridge. He is really nothing but a rat. I fix it up so he can become proud of himself and marry this princess Mona Martin, see, and what does he do?

I'll tell you what he does. He makes me the best man at the wedding. So now I got to go out and buy the most expensive gol-dinged chest of table silverware there is in Hollywood, for this guy—the rat—as a present.



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Thirty Days for Henry

By W. C. TUTTLE



CHAPTER XIII

CANTINA OF CUTTHROATS

HENRY HARRISON CONROY spent most of the day tilted back in his desk-chair, either deep in thought or half-asleep. He either grunted in reply to Judge's questions, or ignored them entirely. Oscar Johnson and Frijole Bill came from the ranch in the buckboard, and it was evident that both of them had been sampling Frijole's prune whisky. Henry yawned and looked at Judge.

"I believe we are going to Agua Frio, Judge," he said.

"Why go to that village of vice?" queried Judge. "If it has taken you all afternoon to arrive at such a decision—why waste your time, sir?"

"I believe we will find Jimmy Miller at Agua Frio, Judge."

"Suppose we do, Henry? We have no authority to take him out of there. In fact, as officers of the law of the sovereign state of Arizona, we have no right to go down there."

"I have no designs on the person of Jimmy Miller, Judge; I merely want to ask him a question."

"What sort of a question?"

"I shall ask him to identify his father's signature."

"His father's signature? On what, if I may ask, sir?"

"Oh, on a little bank check, Judge. If you remember correctly, Hailstorm Miller closed his small bank account just before his death. He made out a check for the full amount. After the dynamiting of the bank vault, I happened to find that canceled check among the ruins. Fate, perhaps."

THAT amiable and seemingly incompetent sheriff of Tonto City, Henry Harrison Conroy, has just thirty days to clean up three murders, a stage robbery, a gambling house holdup and a bank looting—or else he loses his badge. Unfortunately, Sheriff Henry has 110 definite clues in regard to the crime wave; but he does suspect that the books of the murdered banker, Howard McRae are not ill order, that MeRac's son knows more than he's telling, and that King Colt, proprietor of the Tonto Gambling Palace, is involved in the trouble.

ACTUALLY, King Colt has been running dope across the Border, but he knows no more about the two holdups than Henry. In fact, King is growing increasingly angry that he has not profited by the depredations. Recently, too, he has received a great shock: He has discovered that La Mariposa, the beautiful singer in his honkytonk, is his long-lost daughter, June McLean. La Mariposa herself remains unaware of the relationship; and King Colt's flashy henchman, Pancho, discovers that she is f-ying on King and sending information to one Jack Tallant, an enemy of the big gambler.

For some time Pancho has been planning to take La Mariposa across the Border with him, and so now, with some devious scheme in mind, he warns her to get out of Tonto before King Colt learns of her treachery. Immediately she hires a buggy to take her away this night. . . .

The first installment of this four-part serial, hereii. concluded, appeared in the Argosy for July 8

"And you doubt the validity of that signature, Henry?"

"Yes—but without reason. You see, Judge, I am grasping at straws and nothing is too small to investigate."

"But you surely do not suspect that the bank—"

"The bank held that mortgage, sir."

"But Howard McRae told me himself that they would lose money—having to take the ranch in lieu of the ten thousand dollars."

"I heard him say that, Judge. But just remember that both the ten thousand dollars and the ranch were lost."

"Well," sighed Judge, "I am afraid you are barking up the wrong tree. Anyway, Howard McRae is dead."

"True, Judge, true. But Howard McRae had something that the killers wanted. The condition of the house plainly indicates that. McRae's fortune was supposed to have been wiped out in that bank robbery. If he had no money left, what did the murderers seek in his house? Anyway, I want to find Jimmy Miller; so we will take that buckboard and go to Agua Frio, hoping that we will find him."

Frijole and Oscar came in, Frijole lugging a big, battered valise, roped shut.

"Going on a trip, Frijole?" inquired Judge.

"No, I ain't goin' very far," replied Frijole. "Me and Oscar decided to drive down to Agua Frio and shake our feet a few times. We ain't been to a Mexican dance for a long time."

"What is in the valise?"

"Oh, that? That's my dance clothes, Henry. The ones you gave me."

"Oh, I see—the cutaway and the striped trousers."

"What about your dance clothes, Oscar?" asked Henry. Oscar grinned widely and with a glint of triumph in his little eyes.

"Oh, Ay am all fixed oop. Ay sent away long time ago for suit, and it coom by freight t'ree days ago. Fits like ha'al, you bat you. You vait."

"Something special?" queried Henry.

"You bat you! Ay gave de measure to faller in Scorpion Bend and he sent it away to New Yoik. He said de President of de United States would yump at a suit like dat. Ay have never seen anyt'ing like it."

"Well, now I think this will work out fine, Judge," said Henry. "We will rent a spring wagon at the stable, use our team, and all four of us go to Agua Frio tonight."

"It may not be as bad as it seems—to me," replied Judge, "but right now you could easily scratch a match on the goose-pimples on my back. Frijole, you and Oscar stop drinking. Sober up, so we may drive to Agua Frio in safety."

"Ay am de best damn driver in Arizona," declared Oscar.

"That cockeyed Swede couldn't drive a nail," declared Frijole. "Leave it to me, Henry."

"Yes, Frijole—and we will all end up in some cañon."

"I believe I shad do the driving myself," said Judge.

"Perhaps," suggested Henry, "we should draw straws to see who does the driving—and then walk down there. It might be safer."

BUSINESS was, quiet at the Tonto that evening. Kin.; Colt had not returned; and Pancho Lopez had not been in the place since earlier in the afternoon. There was only a handful of men in the honky-tonk, when La Mariposa sang at eight o'clock, and she was too nervous to sing well. Her two suitcases were packed, and she had a length of rope with which to lower them from the window.

No one seemed to know where King Colt had gone. The air was sultry, and someone mentioned that there was a storm coming down th' valley. La Mariposa went back to her room to wait for the nine o'clock show, and from her window she could see the faint glow of lightning flashes far to the north.

It was the longest hour La Mariposa had ever spent in her life, watching the lagging hands of her little clock span the

short distance between eight and nine. Nervously she went down the stairs, carrying her music. There were a few more people in the place, but there was not the usual confusion, it seemed. King Colt was not there yet, nor was Pancho.

Lonny Blair, the skinny piano player, with his inevitable half-glass of stale beer on the top of the piano, a limp cigarette hanging from a corner of his lips, played jerkily. There was only a spattering of applause when La Yariposa finished her song.

"It must be the storm, kid," muttered Lonny. "No business t'night. Might's well close up. No use givi' 'em an encore."

"Thank you, Lonny."

"You're welcome. I wish Colt would git this thing tuned. Sounds like a dented dishpan. See yuh at ten, kid."

La Mariposa nodded and went back to the stairway, where she met one of the girls.

"I was out looking at the storm," said the girl. "Gee, it sure' looks fierce. First I ever seen here. They say it gets pretty bad sometimes."

"I hope our rooms don't leak," said La Mariposa. "I have seen the stars through my roof."

"Same here, pardner. I think I'll stay down here, until the rain is over."

La Mariposa went swiftly up to her room and lighted the lamp. A quick glance showed that the ladder was in place. Tommy Roper had not tailed her. The wind whistled through the window, as she lowered a suitcase on the end of a rope. It was quickly untied in the darkness. Then she sent the other one down, flinging the rope after it, when it had reached the bottom.

Quickly she slipped on a coat over her evening gown, flung aside her big comb, and put on a small felt hat. She put out the light and crawled over the edge of the window onto the ladder. Rain beat against her, as she went down the ladder. Into the blackness of the storm a hand caught her sleeve, guiding her, and she stumbled away to a buggy. A flash of lightning blinded

her, and a crash of thunder was like the explosion of dynamite, but her groping hands found the buggy, and she managed to get in.

Then they were driving away slowly, into the teeth of the storm, with no lights visible anywhere, except the flashes of lightning, which were gone too quickly for rain-filled eyes to locate objects. La Mariposa bowed her head and let Tommy Roper do the worrying.

AGUA FRIO was only a huddle of buildings, mostly adobe, where the riff-raff of the Border congregated at times. Wanted men found a haven in Agua Frio, far removed from things official in Mexico. Smugglers, horse-thieves, killers and crooked gamblers predominated. In Agua Frio Pancho Lopez was the boss, although he spent most of his time in Tonto City. He owned the only cantina and dance hall in the town. At times many of the dance-hungry of Tonto came to enjoy the pleasures of Agua Frio.

Frijole and Oscar brought their dance clothes with them that evening, and were making a change, while Henry and Judge sat at one of the little tables in the old adobe dance hall, drinking sparingly of the potent tequila, and watching for Jimmy Miller. There were only a few patrons in the place, which reeked of liquor, cigarette smoke and cheap perfume.

They had made discreet inquiries about Jimmy Miller, but with no success. Agua Frio recognized Henry and Judge—and protected its own.

"Just another of your wild-goose chases, Henry," remarked Judge.

"Enjoy your tequila," replied Henry. "I find it delightful, in spite of that fact that I know they sour the maguey mash in bull-hide vats out in the sun, where scorpions, tarantulas, red ants and tumble-bugs sniff of the perfume and fall into the mash, adding zest to this devil's mulligan."

Judge shuddered visibly. "My soul revolts," he said soberly, "but my stomach remains a true Van Treece."

A waiter, who greatly resembled Pancho

Villa, came to their table and filled their glasses from a jug.

"Look like damn rain," he told them.

"Mixed with carbolic acid," added Judge.

The waiter nodded and went on. Someone called Henry by name, and they turned to see Jimmy Miller beside them. Jimmy looked old&r, hard-eyed, as he sat down at their table.

"Has Arizona annexed Mexico?" he asked quietly, "or have you gents forgotten that there's a line between the two places?"

"We are not acting officially, Jimmy," replied Henry.

"I just wondered. The boys was kinda upset—you bein' here. Were yuh lookin' for me?"

"In a way, Jimmy. Frijole and Oscar wanted to come down here and dance a while, so we came along. Jimmy, would you know your father's signature?"

Jimmy looked keenly at Henry for several moments. "I sure would," he replied quietly.

Henry produced a soiled, canceled check and handed it to Jimmy. It was the check that closed Hailstorm Miller's small account at the Tonto bank, drawn the day before he died. Jimmy examined it closely, jerked up his head and looked at Henry.

"Where did you get this?" he asked huskily.

Henry explained about finding it after the explosion.

"Dad never signed that check, Henry," declared Jimmy. "That ain't even a good forgery. And Dad wasn't in Tonto City the day that check is dated. He was in Scorpion Bend for two days, sellin' cows. Henry, what does it mean?"

Henry shook his head slowly. "I do not know, Jimmy, except that it seems the bank closed out his account—without his knowing anything about it."

"You heard about Howard McRae being murdered, Jimmy?" asked Judge.

"Yeah, we heard that down here. Henry, do you think that McRae had anythin' to do with the murder of my father?"

"Jimmy, if that signature is a forgery.

the forger knew tha; your father would n • live to prove it."

"I see." Jimmy nodded grimly.

The room was filling up rapidly. Suddenly Henry leaned forward, looking across the smoke-filled room toward the doorway. Josephine Swensen and Julius Sorenson were entering the place. Julius' huge figure was encased in a wrinkled, black suit, a stiff-b: > som white shirt, sans collar or tie, while Josephine was clad in a yellow and black dress: On the exact top of her once-blond mop of hair, sat a small, multi-colored hat, from which a single black and white feather reached almost t> the ceiling.

"My goodness!" whispered Henry. "The senior member of the Cherry Sisters!"

"Look!" gasped Judge. "Over there. Henry—the cantina doorway!"

CHAPTER XIV

OSCAR ON PARADE

HENRY swung around in his chair.

Standing just inside the doorway to the cantina were Oscar Johnson and Frijole Bill Cullison. Frijole Bill, only a half-pint in size, was wearing a pair of Henry's striped trousers, at least twelve inches too large around the w list, while draped ou his narrow shoulder;, was a cutaway coat, the sleeves of whic i came just past the ends of his fingers. He wore a yellow, silk shirt, surmounted by a scarlet muffler, and on his head was h s shapeless old sombrero. The bottoms of the ruffled trousers completely covered Frijole's boots.

But it was Oscar Johnson who scintillated sartorially. Hi; new suit of biiliard-cloth green fit him so tightly that any sudden movement might end in disaster. The sleeves were too short, as were his skin-tight trousers, disclosing inches of wrinkled sock and a pair of bright orange button-shoes. Oscar;; shirt was a mixture of red, blue and orange, and his necktie was lavender. Balanced on his head was one of Henry's discarded gray derby hats.

Henry gasped, cloked back his tears and made a desperate grab for his glass

of tequila. Judge seemed transfixed, blinking painfully.

"The figure at the right, gentlemen," whispered Henry, "shows the evil effect of alcohol on the human system. Observe the gangrene."

"And they are both is drunk as lords!" gasped Judge. "Henry I see it all now. Julius brought Josephine—look! She sees Oscar."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "He ignores her."

After a false start or two, Oscar and Frijole came over to their table.

"Oh, hallo dere, Yimrny," said Oscar, grinning owlishly. "Velcome home."

"How are yuh, Osar," replied Jimmy. "Yore sure all duded up tonight."

"Ay am properly dressed," corrected Oscar. "Ay am yust as tight as Ay can be."

"Tight!" snorted Frijole. "I had t' throw him, to button up them pants. I'm through, y'betcha. He can peel himself, after the dance is over."

"I see that Julius and Josephine are here tonight," remarked Judge.

Oscar turned his head and looked at them, a tight expression around his mouth. Then he said:

"Ay t'ink Ay am going to resent it."

"You let them alone," ordered Henry. "You came down here, knowing that they would be here. Josephine is old enough to know what she wants. If she prefers Julius, that is entirely her business."

"Henry," said Oscar, "have you ever been in lofe?"

"I—why, Oscar!" Henry's eyes filled with tears. "Are you in love?"

"You bat you!"

Henry had turned away, but now he looked at Oscar, his eyes nearly screwed tight, tears glistening on his cheeks. Then he shifted his eyes to the lanky Josephine, stiffly sitting in a chair, feather erect, her lips pursed defiantly.

"God bless you, Oscar," whispered Henry. "I—I have ne'er seen a Swedish Cupid, but you have my blessing."

"I'm goin' to git ire a seen-yuh-reete

and rattle m' hoofs," declared Frijole. "Play me a fan-danger, and I'll show yuh a sight."

"Don't look now," said Henry, "but Frijole is about to lose his pants."

Both Oscar and Frijole lurched away. Jimmy Miller said:

"Shore stormy out tonight. Big thunder storm comin' down the valley. But we need rain."

Henry wiped away his tears. "And I used to laugh at professional comedians!" he said huskily. "Oscar and Frijole could get top-billing on any circuit merely on their appearance. And Josephine! Judge, I am afraid there will be trouble before we can ever get Oscar away from Julius. If those two mammoths ever lock horns in here, there will not be a wall or ceiling left."

"Dumb brutes," muttered Judge. "I would not be adverse to leaving Oscar and Frijole here. There is no earthly use of us endangering our lives by staying with them. You have the information you were seeking."

"Wait a minute," said Jimmy Miller. "You can prove that the bank forged my father's name to that check; and the man who forged that check must have known that my father would never know it had been forged."

"True, Jimmy," replied Henry. "The evidence seems conclusive. But it doesn't help your case at all, because it doesn't show who killed Ed Clay and stole that gold."

"What about the gold that Thunder and Lightning found?"

"Someone moved it away. No doubt it was the men who kidnapped the two Mexican boys, and forced them to tell where it was hidden."

"In that old cabin in Red Wall Cañon, wasn't it, Henry?"

"Yes, Jimmy."

"Red Wall Cañon is on the Circle M spread."

"Yes, I have thought of that. But it has little significance."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Judge.

THEY turned to follow his gaze. Oscar was leaning on the table, talking to Josephine, who was not even looking at him. Suddenly he reached out and deliberately plucked the feather from her hat. Julius, still seated, scowled at Oscar, but did not get up. Slowly Josephine got to her feet. Swinging half-way around, she balled her right fist and took a tremendous smash at Oscar's jaw. But he bobbed his head and the blow merely sent his derby hat sailing across the room.

There was a commotion in the cantina, and they turned to see Jack Tallant coming into the dancehall, a gun gripped in his right hand. He saw Jimmy Miller with Henry and Judge. With his free hand he strong-armed a waiter, whose tray and glasses were flying, and came straight to the table.

"Some of them damn coyotes kidnapped Gila Jim!" he panted. "They left a ransom note, askin' for twenty-three thousand dollars, if I ever wanted to see him alive. King Colt's outfit, as sure as hell! A couple of 'em followed me across the Border."

Jimmy Miller was on his feet, a gun in his hand.

"We better get out, Jack," he said quietly. "All this bunch belong to Colt or Pancho Lopez."

"No way out, except through the cantina, Jimmy. Are yuh game to shoot a way through?"

"Start shootin'—I'm with yuh, Jack."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. From the middle of the room came a Viking yell, and they turned to see Oscar and Julius locked in mortal combat. Josephine was dancing around, a chair in her hands, seeking for a crack at the head of one of them, presumably Oscar.

The whole room was in an uproar. A bottle whizzed past Henry's head and shattered against the wall. Jack Tallant whirled and fired a quick shot at the huge kerosene lamp hanging in the middle of the room, and the light went out in a shower of broken glass and kerosene.

"Hurrah for the Swedes!" yelled Frigole's voice above the commotion.

In the dim light Henry could see Jack Tallant and Jimmy Miller ploughing their way toward the cantina doorway, knocking everyone out of their way. Judge was down on his knees under the table. Someone crashed into Henry, knocking him off his chair, and others walked across him.

From the front of the cantina came the rattle of pistol shots. Henry got to his feet and made a diving run toward the doorway leading into the cantina, but collided with a heavy body and they both went down. It was Josephine. She gasped:

"What in de ha'al is going on around here, anyvay?"

While Henry pumped air into his aching lungs, Josephine got to her feet, the light of battle in her eyes, and when a frightened waiter tried to go past her she vented her wrath in one right swing to his jaw. He fell across Henry, bumped his head against the wall, and did not move.

"My goodness!" gasped Henry. "This is — er — real interesting. Judge! Oh, Judge!"

"Present," wheezed Judge, stumbling up to the doorway. Henry shoved the inert body off him and got to his feet. Most of the fighting seemed to have moved outside.

"I—I believe we should go, Henry," quavered Judge.

Slowly they went through the deserted cantina. Those pistol shots had sent everyone to cover, it seemed. Josephine was on the porch, and she turned to look at them, as they came out.

"Did you see Yulius?" she asked painfully.

"Not after the battle started," replied Judge. "Where is Oscar?"

"That yug-head! If gentlemen were worth ten cents apiece, you could buy a car-load of Oscar Yohnsons for a nickle."

"He—he loves you Josephine," declared Henry hoarsely.

"Ya-a-ah! He does, eh? Look at my yaw! Ay vars trying to hit him vit a chair, and he socked me on the yaw. Love!"

"Well, it must be a species of love."

"Oscar Yohnson vars only a trouble-maker. He came ha'ar to show off his clothes and make poor Yulius yealous."

SOMEONE was coming through the cantina, and they turned quickly. It was Oscar Johnsoi, a split in ever seam, minus his hat, his muffler and part of his shirt, one eye completely closed and his jaw swollen. His huge right hand was locked in the collar of Julius' shirt, and Oscar was dragging him through the cantina. Julius was unconscious, a huge, limp figure, his clothes learly torn off his body. Oscar dragged him out on the sidewalk, looked squarely at Josephine, and let go of Julius, whose chin bumped hollowly on the sidewalk.

"Ha'ar is your yentleman, Yosephine," he said calmly.

"T'ank you," she replied just as calmly.

Oscar dusted o'f his hands, pretended to flick some dust off his dusty and torn green suit, and grabbed at a porch-post for support. He hid a lump as big as an egg on the side of his head.

"Ay t'ank Ay have leever trouble," he announced. "Where is Free-hole?"

"Spots before your eyes?" queried Henry.

"Yah-su-ure."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Frijole, who stepped out of the darkness. "It has been quite an evening. Look at that green suit!"

"It evidently did not stretch much," said Judge.

"It shore didn't. Julius looks kinda put out, as yuh migh' say. How about goin' back to Tonto City, Henry?"

"What is the matter, Frijole; did you get hit in the stomach?"

"Hell, no! But some sap-sucker grabbed my suspenders and busted 'em; and I've got to hold up my pants. Ready to go home, Oscar?"

"Yah, su-ure. Yosephine, you vant to ride home vit us?"

"Ay came vit Yulius, and Ay vill go back vit Yulius."

"Yust as stubborn as a mule," said Oscar. "Always Yulius. Yust a knot-

headed hurse-vaterer. Oil head and no brains. Coom on, yentlemen."

They reached the vehicle, just as the rain started in earnest. To the north were the flashes of lightning, presaging a heavy storm—and there was no top on the spring-wagon. Oscar announced his intention of doing the driving.

"Then don't you try to do any guidin' in this dark," said Frijole. "You let the team foller the road."

"Ay am de best driver since Ben Hor," declared Oscar.

"Shut up and do some driving," ordered Judge. "Do you want to keep us soaking in this rain. Henry, when I think of my rheumatism, T shudder."

"Hey!" said Frijole, turning in the front seat. "I got a couple of quarts as I went out; the bartender wasn't lookin'. It'll help waterproof us on the way. Oscar, you knot-head—slow 'em down a little!"

"Free-hole, give me de odder line."

"I ain't got no line. How would I; yo're drivin'."

"Va'al, Ay am sorry, Free-hole, but Ay only have von."

"What's that?" gasped Judge. "He only has one line?"

"What's the difference?" chuckled Frijole. "He couldn't drive with two lines if he had 'em. Anyway, if we get off the road, we'll know it."

CHAPTER XV

TWO WANDERING MANIACS

SHE had ridden quite a distance out of Tonto City before La Mariposa realized that they were not on the road to Scorpion Bend. There had not been a word of conversation. The only sound was the hissing of the rain, the rattle of wheels and the thud of hoofs in the mud. She was about to question Tommy Roper when a flash of lightning gave her a faint glimpse of the profde of her driver.

It was not Tommy Roper's rugged, good-natured face—it was the profile of Pancho Lopez, the last man on earth she wanted to be with. He did not realize that she had

recognized him. At first she was urged to try to leap from the buggy, but they were going too fast, and she was afraid the wheels might go over her, hampered as she was by her long dress and coat.

She realized now that he was taking her to Agua Frio. She had no weapon of any kind. Mesquite and sage whipped against the wheels, as they went swiftly along. La Mariposa, frightened and helpless, crouched low in the seat, her shoulder bumping against the shoulder of Pancho Lopez. She thought of trying to grasp a line and throw the horse off the road, chancing an upset; but she did not have the nerve. It was evident that Pancho was going to take her into Mexico before revealing his identity.

*In spite of the darkness and rain, Pancho drove swiftly. The chance of encountering the Border Patrol was slight, because of the drenching rain. She had not the slightest idea of what Pancho might do with her, once she was in Agua Frio.

Suddenly the horse swerved partly off the road. Pancho surged on the lines, and the next instant there was a crash, the rending of wood, and the light buggy turned completely over, throwing La Mariposa headlong into the brush. She dimly heard several voices yelling, the crashing of brush and the rattle of wheels.

The brush had cradled her fall and she crawled out, unhurt, except for a few scratches, and stood there in the blinding rain and darkness. There was no sign of Pancho or the team and buggy. A lightning flash illuminated the country, but she could see nothing except the wind-blown brush. Apparently she was all alone out there, but that did not frighten her half as much as being with Pancho Lopez.

She stumbled into the road and started walking back the way they came, going slowly and listening closely in case Pancho came back in the buggy.

THE crash flung Judge and Henry into the bottom of the wagon. The front seat jumped loose on one side and deposited Frijole into the bottom with them.

The team was running away in earnest now, but they left the road, crashed off through the mesquite, where they tangled in the brush and came to a stop. Frijole got out and managed to find both lines this time, while Henry and Judge readjusted the front seal.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "Where is Oscar?"

"Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" blurted Frijole. "I never saw him leave."

"Never mind Oscar," groaned Judge. "Get this equipage back on the road to Tonto City."

"I wonder what we hit back there," said Henry.

"Possibly a stump," suggested Judge.

"There ain't a stump between Tonto and Agua Frio," said Frijole.

"No matter," said Henry, "we will not go back and investigate."

"I shore hate to lose Oscar," mourned Frijole.

"Do you think that much of him, Frijole?" asked Judge.

"No, but the big jug-head had both bottles of whisky."

. . . They got back to Tonto City and slopped their way into the hotel, seeking dry clothing. John Harper was in there, looking for them. Hi; said:

"They found Tommy Roper, out there beside that old fence behind the Tonto Saloon, all tied up with ropes. Somebody had hit him over the head, and he hasn't been able to tell us anything yet. Doc Bogart says he'll be £11 right by morning."

"That is rather queer, John," said Henry. "I cannot quite figure out an attack on as harmless a person as Tommy Roper."

"And another thing, Henry," said the lawyer. "A man told me a while ago that La Mariposa is missing. She failed to show up for her song, and an investigation disclosed that her clothes are missing, the window was open, and a ladder led to the ground. I went to talk the matter over with King Colt, but he is out of town."

Henry shook his head slowly. "John," he said soberly, "I hive always said that anything can happen in Arizona. To that

I will add: everything seems to happen in Wild Horse Valley. Someone has kidnapped Old Gila Jim Tallant and left a ransom note for Jack, demanding twenty-three thousand dollars."

"Twenty-three thousand? Why, that is the amount stolen from the bank and from the Tonto Saloon, Henry."

"Yes, I have pondered over that, John."

"But why would anyone kidnap that poor, old cripple? Do you think that Jack Tallant robbed the bank and the Tonto?"

Henry shook his head wearily. "I haven't a ready answer, John. I feel that the Board of Commissioners discriminated against me when they gave me the additional thirty days—because the last thirty days seems to be the hardest. If you will excuse me now—I feel the need of dry clothing, and a soft spot on which to lay the weary bones."

"I'll talk to you in the morning, Henry. Something must be done."

"I believe you are right, John," agreed Henry. "The thing to do is to find out just what to do, before we try to do anything."

"Here comes Doctor Bogart," said Judge.

The old doctor hurried in, saw them and came over to the desk.

"Tommy Roper regained consciousness a few minutes ago," he told them, "and was able to talk a little. He says that La Mariposa engaged him to drive her secretly to Scorpion Bend tonight. He brought the horse and buggy out behind the Tonto, placed a ladder up at her window—and that is all he remembered. Apparently someone slugged him, Henry."

"My goodness! I wonder why she was running away from the Tonto."

"Tommy doesn't know, except that she asked him to take her to Scorpion Bend," replied the doctor. "I was over at the Tonto, but King Colt is not there tonight. Perhaps, when he comes back—"

"Yes, perhaps," said Henry. "It does not appear that we can do anything tonight; so we may as well get a good sleep and make a fresh attack in the morning."

HENRY and Judge went up to their room and threw off their soaked clothes. Judge groaned dismally over the prospect of rheumatism, but grunted in amazement, when he saw Henry changing into dry clothing.

"Are you going to bed with your clothes on, Henry?" he asked.

"We, my dear man, are not going to bed," replied Henry.

"Not going to bed? Are you losing your mind, sir?"

"I hope so," replied Henry seriously. "We will take slickers, in case the rain continues, Judge."

"Well, we are going out in that damnable rain again, Henry?"

"On horseback," nodded Henry.

"Well, of all the asinine—why, Henry? Give me one reason why we should go horsebacking in the rain on a dark night?"

"I have a feeling," replied Henry, drawing on his trousers, "that the obstacle we struck with our equipage was the buggy that contained La Mariposa. Someone knocked out Tommy Roper and stole the girl. I felt at the time that it was a buggy. She may be hurt, lying out there in the rain. Anyway, it is our duty to investigate. Come to think of it, we really should find out how Oscar survived his landing."

"Well," said Judge dismally, "I do not see what good we can do—in the dark. Why, you cannot see your hand before your face."

"I realize that, Judge. But we shall carry a lantern."

"Lantern!" Judge sat there in his wet underclothes, looking very much like an old rooster which had been plucked and thrown in the creek.

"A lantern, you said, Henry. Two damned old fools and a kerosene lamp. A lightning-bug in a million acres of dripping brush, sir. Looking for a woman who *might* have been thrown from a buggy—in case we did hit a buggy, which we very likely did not. Henry, this move of yours strikes me numb."

"It may be those wet flannels, Judge. Come, come! I am half dressed. You for-

get that a very beautiful young lady may be in need of succor."

"Two suckers, I suppose," groaned Judge. "Well, I can see that you have one of your stubborn streaks, Henry; so neither common sense nor any flow of oratory can swerve you from your ridiculous ideas. It is really a pitiful situation, when a man of my age becomes a slave to a—well, the vagaries of a—a—"

"Wandering minstrel?" queried Henry.

"Wandering maniac," groaned Judge. "Well, I may as well peel."

Clad in warm, dry clothing, but still groaning, Judge managed to saddle his horse. The heavy rain had turned to a dismal drizzle as they rode away from the main street, with Henry carrying a lighted lantern. They found the road to Agua Frio and turned south. The lantern did not cast any amount of illumination ahead, and they were obliged to trust to the horses to stay on the road.

About a mile out of Tonto City they met Oscar, standing beside the road, soaking wet and muddy, his round face barely visible in the weak lantern light. In their slickers, with the collars turned high, and their hat-brims turned low, Oscar did not recognize them.

"Who in de ha'al are you?" he asked hollowly.

"I am the spirit of the storm," replied Henry dramatically.

"Va'al," remarked Oscar, "oil I can say is dat you have made damn bad valking. Gude night."

Chuckling, they rode on. Judge said:

"Do you think he recognized us, Henry?"

"No," said Henry. "When the crash came, Oscar had two quarts of whisky in his possession. Right now, I will wager that he has at least a quart of it in his stomach."

"Even the Swedes have belter luck than I," groaned Judge.

THEY searched along the road, nearly to the Border, but found no sign of anyone, and it was nearly daylight when

they came back to where a road forked to the Tallant ranch. Here, in the lantern light, they found the imprint of a woman's shoe in the mud. The tracks were on the road to the Tallant ranch.

"That poor girl must be lost," said Henry. "Evidently, heading back for Tonto, she got off on ihe wrong road. Well, she will be all right if—but will she? T just remembered that Gila Jim Tallant has been kidnapped. I wonder if Jimmy Miller and Jack Tallant—but no matter. It is getting light, so we will not need this lantern any further."

They were a queer-looking pair in the cold, gray light of that wet morning. The pudgy Henry, atop a tall roan horse, a huge sombrero on his head, making him resemble a toadstool; while the lanky Judge, riding a small, short-coupled gray, splayed his feet wide in the s irrups to keep from dragging them in the low brush.

"We may as well go to the Tallant ranch," said Henry wearily. "Even if there is no one at home, w; may find more trace of that lost girl."

"Our hero," groaned Judge. "A modern Don Quixote."

"And Sancho Pansa in the flesh. All we need is a pair of til hats and a spear."

"All we need is brains," corrected Judge, shivering under his glistening slicker. "I shall be thankful when this fool's pilgrimage is over. At your age, Henry, you should be more considerate, even if only of yourself."

"I am afraid, Judge, that I may have to get a younger deputy—one more my own age. Once you had legs—but they are merely limbs now."

For once, Judge was too miserable to form a retort. They slogged along the muddy road until they came in sight of the Tallant ranch. A trickle of smoke came from the sagging stovepipe, and at sight of it Henry essayed a cheer.

"Smoke means the presence of human beings, and human beings means a possible breakfast, Judge."

"I reserve judgment," grunted Judge.

They rode up to the kitchen doorway,

dismounted and walked into the house. A disheveled La Ma'iposa was trying to coax a fire with wet wood, a smudge across her nose, her evening gown torn and bedraggled. She turned quickly, her eyes full of fright.

"Thank God—the sheriff!" she gasped. "I—I am glad you came."

"We were looking for you," explained Henry. "You see, we found your tracks on the road."

"Did you? I thought I was on the road to Tonto City. But now—why did you look for me down here?"

Henry explained about the accident on the road, the finding of Tommy Roper, and his subsequent explanation.

"It was Pancho Lopez" she said. "He tried to take me to Agua Frio."

"My goodness!"

"What did King Colt say?" asked the girl anxiously.

"As a matter of fact, he knew nothing about it when we left town. He has been away, it seems. You were—er—running away, were you not?"

"Yes. Pancho threatened me and I thought I better go. You see—"

La Mariposa stopped, her eyes widening, as she looked at the doorway.

"**H**OLD it, folks," ordered a voice.

Henry and Judge turned quickly. Joe Hake was in the doorway, his six-shooter covering them. Then a man stepped past him and took the guns from Henry and Judge. Hake scowled at the girl, puzzled at her presence, but turned and called to someone out of their view.

Two of Hake's men came in, carrying Old Gila Jim Talknt, and put him on his chair in the main room. Old Gila cursed them bitterly. Then two more men came in, driving Jack Tallant and Jimmy Miller ahead of them. Both men had been beaten severely, it seemed; but Jimmy grinned at Henry. Hake motioned for Henry, Judge and the girl to follow them into the main room.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Henry. Hake snarled at him:

"It means that the whole damn bunch of yuh are prisoners, Conroy; and yuh can take it or leave it."

"Oh, I'll take it, of course," said Henry. "Where is King Colt?"

"He's gone to Tonto, if it's any of yore business."

"No, I merely wondered."

"Yuh won't need to wonder long—not with this bunch of coyotes," shrilled Old Gila Jim. "They'd slice out yore heart for a dime."

"Shut up, before I cut yore ears off, you old rattler!" snapped Hake. Then he turned to La Mariposa. "Where'd you come from?" he asked.

"I do not believe it is any of your business," replied the girl.

"That's the stuff!" applauded Gila Jim. "He's nothin' but a hired killer, anyway—hired by King Colt, who should have been strangled in his youth."

"Keep it up," rasped Hake. "Colt will be here pretty quick—and then you'll talk."

"Will I?" shrilled the cripple. "Talk about what? Money that never existed? You fools, you believe that I could show yuh where the money is cached, so yuh brought me back here. If I *had* that money, King Colt would never get it. Stick pins under my nails, would he? Go ahead."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "That must hurt."

"Shut up, you fat-nosed fool!" snapped Hake. "Here! One of you boys get a couple ropes and tie up these two jaspers."

"Do not be melodramatic," begged Henry. "We are officers of the law."

"We're not usin' any law this mornin'," replied Hake.

"I am sure Mr. Colt would not approve, Mr. Hake."

"We'll leave that until he gets here, Conroy. Tie 'em tight, boys. Yuh remember, Colt said not to underrate Conroy; so yuh can take an extra half-hitch on him."

"How about cookin' a little breakfast, Joe?" asked one of the men.

"Go ahead," said Hake. "We can't do

anything else until the boss gets here."

"You are making a terrible mistake," declared Henry, as they bound him tightly. "The law will surely take cognizance of this treatment of two officers."

"Funny, ain't he?" chuckled one of the cowboys. "Talks like he'd done swallered a dictionary."

They had placed Henry and Judge on either side of La Mariposa on a rough bench beside the wall, but made no move to tie her. Jimmy Miller grinned weakly at Henry.

"Quite a night, Henry," he said. "After that ruckus in the cantina, me and Jack discovered where they had taken his dad. But they outsmarted us, ganged up on us from behind. It shore was a nice fight while it lasted."

"But why did they kidnap Gila Jim Tallant?" asked Henry.

"They think we've got that bank money and the Tonto money cached down here. They was goin' to torture Gila down there, but he swore that unless they brought him home, he'd never tell where it was cached."

"And we ain't even got it," chuckled Gila. "They had to pack me all the way down there and all the way back for nothin'. Yuh don't need to glare at me, Hake. There's a rope waitin' for yore neck—you and all yore gang, includin' King Colt."

"You won't live to, see it," snarled Hake.

"Isn't it possible to talk of something pleasant?" asked Henry.

"Better save the talk until King Colt gits here," said Hake. "You'll talk plenty then."

CHAPTER XVI

CONROY'S CLEANUP

IT WAS shortly after daylight when King Colt, swathed in a slicker, dismounted from his horse behind the Tonto Saloon, and entered the back door. It was too early for many customers. Swampers were busily engaged in mopping floors and cleaning up the place. King went to the bar, where he was served quickly.

"Any word of La Mariposa?" asked the bartender. King looked up quickly.

"What do yuh mean?" he asked anxiously. In a few words the bartender told him, not realizing that King Colt had been away.

King Colt shoved the bottle aside, his lips grim, as the bartender told him about Tommy Roper's statement.

"So she was runnin' away, eh?" he muttered. "Where's Pancho Lopez?"

"Nobody has see 1 him since early yesterday, King."

King Colt's eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Steve McRae and Tuck Darnell have been looking for ycu, too," said the bartender. "Waited around here most of the evening."

"What did they want?"

"They didn't say. And we heard a rumor that Old Gila Tallant had been kidnaped. Didja hear anything about it, King?"

"No," grunted King Colt. "I'm not interested in him. If anybody asks for me, I'll prob'ly be in this evenin'."

He turned and we.it out through the rear entrance swiftly.

. . . Oscar Johnson had tried half the night to find Henry and Judge. He finally went to the hotel, only to discover that they had left. Their two horses were not in the stable. Oscar had lost one quart of the-whisky when th; lurch threw him out of the wagon; so he decided to go down there and try to find it. As he rode out of town, he saw King Colt gallop away from behind the Tonto and cut into the Agua Frio road.

Oscar was not mich of a hand to wonder about things, but it did interest him to know where the boss of the Tonto was going at this time in the morning. So he trailed King Colt, staying far enough behind to not be seen by the big gambler. He saw King swing to the left on the Tallant ranch road, and after due reflection Oscar went on to try to find his whisky. He felt the need of stimulant.

He found it, unbroken, lying in the mud beside the road. Quickly he dismounted,

drew the cork, and proceeded to slake his thirst. Then he rode north again toward the forks of the road, and there he saw two riders, coming south, turn and go toward the Tallant ranch. They were Steve McRae and Tuck Darnell.

"Va'al," said Oscar to his horse, "it looks like somebody vars having a party. Ye better go and take a look."

KING COLT galloped up to the ranch house, dismounted and came in through the kitchen. He stopped in amazement at sight of the people in the main room. His eyes shifted from face to face. Then he said:

"Hake, what does this mean?"

"They was here ahead of us, King," replied Joe Hake, "so we took 'em in."

"So you took 'em in," muttered King Colt. "You fool, you fool! Hake, what in hell have yuh dene?"

Then his eyes searched out La Mariposa. "You, too," he said. "So yuh tried to run away, eh? Who brought you here?"

"I walked here from the main road. Pancho Lopez—"

"So he was the one, eh? Pancho Lopez knocked out Tontny Roper and took yuh with him."

"We were coming from Agua Frio in a spring-wagon last night," explained Henry, "and we ran into their buggy in the dark."

"I'm damned!" exploded King Colt.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Colt," agreed Henry.

"Hake, do you realize what you've done?" asked Colt jitterly. "Why didn't yuh scout this place before yuh came here?"

"We thought the place was empty, King."

"With our two horses in the yard?" queried Henry.

"They'd drifted around the other side of the house," said one of the cowboys. "We found 'em later."

"And that old crippled coyote over there," said Hake, jointing at Gila Jim, "swears that he tricked yuh, King. He says there's no money cached at this place—that he lied to git back here."

"Yeah?" said King Colt. "All right, we'll take him back to Mexico with us. This time he won't come back."

"Well," snapped Gila Jim, "you crippled me for life, so yuh may as well finish the job."

So intent was everyone on the business at hand that none noticed the coming of Steve McRae and Tuck Darnell, until they entered the house. Joe Hake was taking no chances, and had them covered quickly.

"Put down that gun, Joe," said Darnell. "Don't be a fool."

"Hold it," ordered King Colt. "What do yuh want, Steve?"

"Quite a collection you've got," said Steve, scanning the room. His eyes came back to King Colt and he replied:

"As long as you've got that red-nosed sheriff, I guess it's all right. He seemed to have some bright ideas about your friendship with my dad. He wanted to know why the bank loaned you money without security, and all that. Talked about examining the books—and I thought you ought to know about it. They took the books to the courthouse and locked them up in a vault."

King Colt laughed quietly. "Lie's no fool—that reel-nosed fathead."

"T deny that," declared Henry. "Look at these ropes."

Gila Jim Tallant was staring at Steve McRae, a queer glint in his deepset eyes. All at once he began laughing.

Everyone looked curiously at him, as he cackled loudly, slapping a fist on his withered, bony knees.

"I've got it!" he croaked. "That face!"

He pointed a bony forefinger at Steve McRae.

"I'd know that face anywhere, I tell yuh. Steve McRae! Hell, yeah! It's the same face, I tell yuh—the face of Tex Rayburn! King Colt, I can see it all now. Tex Rayburn got the loot from all yore robberies, after they sent you to the penitentiary. Then he became a banker. Yeah, he was educated. And you came here to blackmail him out of everythin' he had."

The room was silent, except for the

wheezing chuckle of Gila Jim. Then Henry said quietly:

"But McRae, or Rayburn, got even when he had his bank robbed and stole all the money, including what belonged to King Colt. It had to be an inside job, because the vault was dynamited *after* the money was taken out."

"Pretty smart, Conroy," rasped King Colt. "I didn't think you figured that out."

"Oh, my goodness, yes," said Henry. "I have been curious to know if you found the stolen money after you murdered Howard McRae, or Rayburn."

"You poor fool," whispered King Colt.

"So *you* killed him, eh?" said Steve McRae. "Damn yuh, Colt, I thought Jack Tallant and Jimmy Miller pulled that job. Well, yuh didn't get the money."

"I suppose," remarked Henry pleasantly, "that you added it to the six hundred and fifty ounces of gold that you stole from the stage, and the ten thousand you took off the dead body of Hailstorm Miller."

Steve McRae backed up a little, his face white. Tuck Darnell's eyes shifted from spot to spot, estimating his chances to get away.

"So that's the angle, eh?" said King Colt. "Watch 'em, Hake; they're feelin' like runnin' away."

"King!" called Jimmy Miller. "Untie my arms and give me a gun, will yuh? All I want is them two killers. I won't come back to bother yuh—and I'll guarantee that they won't come back either. They belong to me more than they belong to you."

"Don't ask favors of that stinkin' grizzly, Jimmy," said Gila Jim. "Tex Rayburn was a killer, and that kid of his looks like the same breed of rattler. He'd slit yore neck for a dime. So would King Colt. That makes me laugh. King Colt! Look in the records of the Wyomin' State Penitentiary. You'll find him there, but yuh won't find King Colt—you'll find—"

The small room shuddered from the concussion of a heavy shot, and old Gila Jim Tallant fell sideways, a leer on his face, killed instantly.

"I SHOT higher that time," said King Colt quietly, as he holstered his gun and fanned the powder smoke away from his face with a wags of his big left hand. La Mariposa screamed suddenly and put her hands over her face.

"That," exclaimed Henry, "was cold-blooded murder, Colt."

"Call it what yuh please," said King Colt, "it shut his mouth."

"Yes, there is no doubt of that," admitted Henry. "Things are gradually clearing up, it seems. Steve McRae and Tuck Darnell robbed that stage and murdered Ed Clay. Steve knew the gold was being shipped. They hid the gold in Red Wall Cañon, where Thunder and Lightning found it. King Colt's boys forced Thunder and Lightning to reveal the hiding place of the gold—but it had already been removed by Steve McRae. Steve, it seems, was suspicious when Lightning or Thunder remarked that gold is where you find it. Am I right, Steve?"

"Go to hell!" snapped Steve. "And I never had a hand in that robbery and killing."

"Tuck Darnell worked alone on that job, eh? Was the murder of Hailstorm Miller a one-man job, too?"

"You can't prove a thing," declared Tuck Darnell. "You say that Steve and me robbed the bank and the Tonto. We was at a show in Scorpion Bend that night; so that proves yo're all wrong."

"My goodness!" said Henry quietly. "Then that *Clarion Weekly* editor must have lied. In the last issue it said that the *East Lynn* company were obliged to cancel their one-night stand in Scorpion Bend, because of a freigh: wreck, which prevented them from reaching the town in time to put on a performance."

"I reckon that cinches you two," said King Colt. "But whit good it'll ever do the law, I can't see."

"You surely cannot do us any harm," said Judge.

"For a feller that's supposed to be smart, you're pretty ignorant," declared King Colt. "Put yourself in my place. **Do**

you think I'm goin' to let you put a rope around my neck? I've got to have money—a lot of money. Then I'm headin' so far south that nobody'll ever find me. I'm through in Wild Horse Valley—through with every place except Mexico or south of that. Conroy, you and Van Treece can only blame yourself; you came to the wrong place."

"Yes, it seems that we did," admitted Henry. "Our main idea was to try and find La Mariposa."

Under cover of Henry's slicker, La Mariposa was sawing on his wrist-ropes with a tiny pen-knife, small, but sharp. Just what good freedom of hards would do him, he did not know. He could not hope to do much, empty-handed against guns. Still, it thrilled him to feel that little knife eating away at the ropes. He felt the last strand fall apart, and he managed to work the ropes away from his wrists.

"Well, what's to be done, King?" asked Hake. "We've got to make Steve and Tuck tell us where the money is cached, and then we've got to head south fast. The first thing we know, this whole valley will be on our necks."

"We're safe enough for a while," said King Colt. "We've got everybody concerned right here with us, Joe. They won't be missed for twelve hours; so we've got time. The thing to do is to figure out just how to do this thing."

"I might suggest," said Henry, "that you take the money and leave the valley. Someone will find us and turn us loose, I am sure."

King Colt laughed. "And have the Mexican officials run us down before we get as far as Hermosillo. No, we've got to figure out somethin' better than that. All right"—he turned to Steve McRae—"go ahead and tell us where yuh cached that money."

"Yo're crazy," snapped Steve. "Tell you where that money is cached, and get killed, anyway? Not a chance, Colt. You're between the devil and the deep sea right now. You don't dare let us go; we won't tell you where the money is cached; and you can't get away without money."

"I feel," said Henry, "that your best move, Mr. Colt, is to turn his all loose and give yourself up. You *might* escape the rope, you know."

King Colt laughed. "That is a fine idea—for you, Conroy. What about you, Steve—you and Tuck Darnell? Willin' to risk a rope?"

"Damn yuh—no!" snapped Tuck Darnell. "I'll make a deal with yuh. We dig up the money and all go south—me and you and Steve."

"Well, figure out somethin'," said Joe Hake impatiently. "I'm gettin' nervous."

"Yo're idea sounds interestin', Tuck," said King Colt. "What'll we do with the rest of the folks?"

"I don't care," replied Steve, "just so they ain't able to tell what they know."

"You would make that sort of a deal with the man who killed your father?" queried Henry in amazement. "What an unnatural son!"

"Go ahead and worry about it—you won't worry long, Conroy."

"We'll send La Mariposa to Scorpion Bend with one of the boys," said King Colt.

"What's the idea?" growled Steve. "She'll talk as much as the rest."

"I said we'll send her to Scorpion Bend, Steve. Don't forget that I'm bossin' this party."

"We could take her up there," suggested Henry.

"You ain't goin' no place," declared King Colt. "Yo're too damn smart, Conroy; and you'll be the first to go, when it starts. If I was you—"

FROM out in the kitchen came the sound of a blow, the scrape of a boot on the rough floor. King Colt whirled, reaching for his gun, but his hand stopped. In the doorway, flanked by two men, was Pancho Lopez, and their guns covered the room.

"Keeng Colt, my old *amigo*, you forget to post the guards," said Pancho amiably. "No one see us come. *Buena!* This ees quite a party, eh? Oh, the leetle Botterfly,

too. This ees ver' nice. Meester Hake, eef you mak' leetle move weeth the hand, you die queek.

"W'y don' somebodee say sometheeng? You are so nice and quiet. This ees the firs' time that Keeng Colt ever forget to talk. I am ashame' for doin' all the talking. Ah, the shoriff, too. This ees nice. All tie up for Pancho. Well, well! Meester McRae, Meester Darnell."

"Pancho, you came just in time," said Henry. "King Colt was going to kill all of us."

"Well, that ees w'at you call the toff deal, eh? Pancho not do that. No, no. Pancho going take' La Mariposa, and then he ees— Stop that, Colt, you fool—"

King Colt had suddenly thrown caution fo the wind, and his big right hand snaked for his gun. Pancho fired twice, deliberately, rattling the windows with the double concussion. King Colt's hand fell away from his half-drawn gun; he backed slowly, buckling at the knees, and pitched into Henry. Henry's free right hand, trying to fend the heavy body away, came in contact with the butt of that big Colt .45. With a twist of his wrist he pulled the gun away, cocking it with the same motion. And as Pancho's eyes darted from face to face, Henry shoved the gun past the limp body of King Colt, covered Pancho Lopez—and squeezed the trigger.

The shock of that heavy bullet seemed to almost lift Pancho off his feet. He bumped heavily into one of his own men, throwing him off balance, and at that moment Joe Hake and his men went into action. There was also action from another quarter. Yelling at the top of his voice, Oscar Johnson, armed with a section of two-by-four, dived in through the little kitchen and was into the melee before Hake's men were able to pull their triggers more than once.

Both of Pancho's men were staggering backward, their guns blazing, when the human tornado struck. Joe Hake sprang back, raised his gun as he dodged a mighty swing; but before he could shove the muzzle against the whirling Swede, Henry's

finger squeezed the trigger again. Hake was not over six feet away from the muzzle of Henry's gun, and the smashing impact of the big bullet whirled him completely around. Osear's next swing clipped the tall outlaw behind the ear.

It was all over. Oscar stood in the center of the room, club in hand, a grinning Viking in the swirling powder smoke.

"What is going on ha'ar, anyvay?" he asked.

Henry shoved the big body of King Colt aside and got shakily to his feet. He quickly released Judge, who stood up and quickly sat down again.

"Rheumatism," he said simply.

"Weak from fright," corrected Henry. "Oscar, where on earth did you come from?"

"Oh, Ay yust drifted in, Hanry. How are you?"

"Greatly relieved," replied Henry, as he surveyed the room. Then he removed the bonds from Jack Tallant and Jimmy Miller.

"Let Steve McRae and Tuck Darnell alone," ordered Henry. "The law can handle their case. I—oh, hello, John!"

JOHAN HARPER, the prosecutor, flanked by Thunder and Lightning, came slowly into the doorway, wide-eyed. Behind them came Jim Henderson, chief of the Border Patrol, and one of his men,

"What a mess!" exclaimed Harper. "What happened, Henry?"

"How did you happen to come here?" queried Judge.

"Well, I—I don't know," admitted Harper. "You reported the kidnapping of Gila Jim Tallant and you were not in town, so I had Thunder and Lightning drive me down here—sort of ooking around, I suppose."

"It looks like you've had a showdown, Henry," remarked the big Border officer. "King Colt, Pancho Lopez, Joe Hake—well, well! It seems that both sides lost. Miss McLean, I am glad to see you. We heard that you had disappeared. How are you, Jack?"

"Well, I'm all right now, Chief," replied Jack Tallant. "They shore had us in the hole, until Henry got into action. I dunno yet how he ever got loose and picked up a gun. Gee, I'm shore sorry about Gila Jim. He was a great man."

"Wasn't he your father?" asked Henry in amazement.

"No. You see, I work for the Government, Henry. I posed as his son, and was supposed to be smugglin' cattle and horses. But I couldn't find out much; so they sent Miss McLean and she got a job at the Tonto. She found out more than I could, but it wasn't quite enough to trap Colt and Lopez."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "There *are* things I did not know."

"Amazing," said Judge.

"Amazing that there should be anything that I do not know?" asked Henry.

"No, sir—amazing hat you would admit not knowing everything."

"But, Henry, I would like to know a few of the things," reminded the lawyer. "I just got here, you know."

"Oh, certainly," said Henry. "Well, Tuck Darnell and Steve McRae killed Hailstorm Miller and stole ten thousand dollars. Then Tuck Darnell robbed the stage and killed fid Clay. First degree murder in both cases.

"It seems that Howard McRae framed a robbery of his own L-ank, which was done by his estimable son, aided and abetted by Mr. Darnell. They also relieved King Colt of a few thousand. King Colt, knowing full well that the robbery of the bank was all a fake, had Howard McRae killed and tried to find the missing money in the McRae home.

"John, they were a bad bunch of boys. King Colt, thinking that Gila Jim Tallant instigated a lot of this outlawry when he failed to find the money at the McRae home, kidnapped Gilt Jim and tried to force him to tell where the money was hidden."

"Well," said Harper, "there seems to be work ahead for the courts, thanks to you, Henry."

"You might thank Miss McLean," said Henry. "She cut my hands loose."

"She's a great girl, Henry," said Jack Tallant. "She said that just as soon as we put Colt and Lopez out of business she'd marry me."

"Well, bless you, my children," exclaimed Henry, beaming. "They are both out of business—permanently."

No effort was made to remove the casualties. The prisoners were hustled out and soon the cavalcade was on its way to Tonto City. There, while the townspeople crowded around, trying to discover what had happened, Llenry found the stagedriver and drew him aside.

"Do you remember a few days ago that King Colt gave you a letter to post at Scorpion Bend?" asked Henry. The man nodded thoughtfully.

"Yeah, I 'member that, Sheriff. What about it?"

"By any chance do you remember who that letter was sent to?"

"Yea-a-ah. Wait a minute. Mrs—Mrs McLean, I believe."

"Thank you very much. It was of no importance."

"Tawnee Bill," muttered Henry, as he walked away. "I wondered just why he killed Gila Jim—to prevent him from letting that girl know that King Colt was her own father. At least he was a man." #

He walked away, unaware that two persons were watching him interestedly. Over on the edge of a sidewalk, sitting together, wondering what it was all about, were Lightning and Thunder Mendoza. No one had explained a thing to them. Lightning said:

"Everybodee ees keeled—almost—and these banker who owe us ten dollar een the book ees also een jail. I see these toff Jack Tallant kees the fimale feedler, and everybody ees pound Henry on the back. Judge he ees greening like hell, and the beeg Swid act like hees been elec' *presidente* of these *Estados Unidos*. W'at ees go on, do you suspec', my leetle brodder?"

"Too much talk," declared Thunder. "Of these, I can not get my head nor tail.

Pippel are dead, pippel are een jail. Everybody' say 'Buena!' Wat ees good about that? But I know sometheeng that ees *importante*."

"W'at ees that?" asked Lightning anxiously.

"I'm spiking weeth the drogstore, and I ask heem eef rattlesnake oil ees wort' twenty dollar for leetle beet."

"W'at he say?"

"He say 'Nots!'"

"He don' say w'at kind, eh?"

"W'at ees the deeference? They don' grow here."

"Don' be too damn sure," warned Lightning. "Hanry ees smart, and he say that anytheeng can happen een Arizona."

An hour later Henry and Judge were preparing to drive out to the ranch when the depot agent found them and handed

Henry a telegram from the editor of the Scorpion Bend *Weekly Clarion*. It read:

PLEASE SEND US FULL DETAILS OF MOST WONDERFUL ACHIEVEMENT IN HISTORY.

Henry turned the buckboard team around and drove to the depot, with Thunder and Lightning sitting in the back, their legs dangling. Judge held the team, while Henry went into the little depot. He came out in a few minutes and resumed his place as driver.

"It is rather remarkable," said Judge, "that you were able to wire full details of everything that happened today. It seems that it does not require much time for you to cover the most wonderful achievement in history, Henry."

"I made it rather short," admitted Henry blandly.

"What did you tell him, Henry?"

"I told him to reprint the Declaration of Independence."

THE END



Looking Ahead!

THE NINTH LIFE

Satan spawned her, and the cat-goddess Sekhmet ruled her being. From the Netherworld she came, bearing the curse of a thousand yesterdays—and where she walked men died, terribly. Not since H. Rider Haggard created his immortal "She" has a more fascinating figure come to life on fiction's page. Beginning a fine new fantastic novel, by

JACK MANN

McGEE ON HORSEBACK

It's Derby day in Hungry Creek; and, sourdoughs, before you place your bets, remember that the Mighty McGee is in the saddle, with a horse that looks like a long-haired moose and is guaranteed to turn any racetrack into a first-class shambles. A novelet of No-Shirt in the North, by

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E. HOFFMAN PRICE

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—AUGUST 5



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



SINCE the tumult and the shouting over C. S. Foster and his stalwart Captain Hornblower, no ARGOSY author has stirred up so much excitement in the bleachers as William Gray Beyer. The bleachers appear to have been packed with pseudo-scientific fans, all of them impatient to discover a new man whom they could carry off on their shoulders. Well, then Mr. Beyer (a new man to us, too) arrived in ARGOSY with a witty and ingenious tale called "Minions of the Moon"—and a great many people were suddenly impelled to write us letters.

So this is Pseudo-scientific Week in these columns and more particularly, Beyer Week. You will note that several of our correspondents want a return engagement of the ubiquitous, f wacky, Omega and his two young friends. We had that idea, too; we got in touch with Mr. Beyer, and he promised that very soon he would get to work on a sequel. No crowding, please, ladies and gentlemen; Mr. Beyer will be with you in no time at all.

Now we turn you over to our correspondents, a number of whom seem to think it an outrage that ARGOSY should print anything but fantastics. First

JOSEPH HEIT

I have been reading the ARGOSY for quite a while now and have enjoyed it immensely, but, the two most enjoyable serials were "Seven Out of Time," by Arthur Leo Zagat and "Minions of the Moon" by Wra. Gray Beyer. I liked the latter especially well. The story of Mona, Mark and Omega is by no means ended. How about some more?

I am sure I am speaking for a vast number of other readers in this also.

I hope you see fit to publish more of that or at least that type and quality stories.
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

GEORGE LANE

I have read the ARGOSY for many years and have finally been induced to comment on it by two recent stories, both of the same plot, but on opposing ends of my favor,

"Minions of the Moon" was refreshingly different; a scientific with humor! The one point I didn't like in it was Omega's atheism. I cannot see a person having such knowledge, and yet not believing that it must have a Master-Mind controlling it. Let's have a sequel to it, anyway.

Zagat's "Tomorrow" is well-written, but I dislike intensely the petty racism it carries. I read the ARGOSY for my mental "dessert" and it puts a bad taste in it to have jingo-journalism mixed with it. Please ask Zagat where he picked up the negro recruits for the Japanese army.

ROCKFORD, III.

THERE'S one thing you can't say about the pseudo-scientific fans—that they are an especially taciturn lot. They know what they want and they always want more of it and they stand right up and say so in no uncertain terms. Listen, please, to the firm and clarion tones of an inscrutable gentleman who prefers to be known as

O. M.

Just to tell you how very much I am enjoying the story "Minions of the Moon" by William Gray Beyer. That is the type fiction which made me an ARGOSY fan back in 1914. I am sure all the old timers will agree, we all want more fantastic tales. There are hundreds of wild west and sport magazines printed for us to buy if so desired. Years ago, I could count

on at least three good fantastic stories in the ARGOSY, now very seldom more than one.

All of Theodore Roscoe's stories are interesting. "Sand in the Snow" was okay. What has happened to Otis Kline (if that is the way to spell his name, I've forgotten). You published a creation of his about earthmen on Venus which I would certainly like to read again. Where are all the old-time writers? If they are no longer living, surely there are a few others like them to take their place?

By printing so many westerns, sports, northern and ranch lovey-dove, you are sinking the good ship down into the common class of one among many. It worries me. I grew up with the ARGOSY always at hand. It has become part of my diet. I am starving for more *fantastics*.

The April 29th Cover is a perfect eye-catcher. It ought to cause sales to go up a great deal. They would rise, if you published *more* fantastastics.

I've just the one fantastic or two which you print makes our ARGOSY worth the dime, so I should restrain the grouching.

We old-timers enjoy historical fiction too. The following stories of just since February were fine: "The Axe Bites Deep," "Lost Harbors," "Nonstop to Mars," "Seven out of Time," "Vandal," "A Sword for Leif the Lucky," "Crusader," "The Wonderful Lamp of Thibaut Corday."

GILLETTE, WYOMING.

IT MAY very well be that O.M. has started something here. We happen to know that certain persons approve highly of Westerns, Northern and sports stories, and after reading the letter above, they may reach for something to throw. If they throw it far enough, we'll print it. . . . Now we introduce a gentleman, strongly pro-Beyer, who makes a prediction that seems probable to us.

Bend ear to

J. AYERY

If you don't mind my breaking in like this, I'd like to congratulate you upon discovering a new Stanton A. Coblenz in William Grey Beyer. Even the first installment of his delightfully screwy fantasy brands him as being an equal of the creator of "In Caverns Below". But not content with rivaling Coblenz in satiric science-fiction, Mr. Beyer seems also to be a worthy foe of Edgar Rice Burroughs, besides, of course, injecting a goodly portion of himself.

Personally, I predict that he will be hailed as the find of 1939 in the science-fiction field, bar none. All of which menus that I want to see more, much more of him in times to come.

SKOWHEGAN, MAINE

ARGOSY CALENDAR OF AUGUST HITS

Aug. 5: THE NINTH LIFE—A great fantastic novel by JACK MANN

Aug. 12: RAIDERS OF THE ICE—A stirring short novel of Arctic Adventure by ROY DE S. HORN

Aug. 19: HURRICANE RANGE—Beginning a fine new Western novel by LUKE SHORT

Aug. 26: RIVER ROGUES—A colorful novel of the old Mississippi by FRED MACISAAC and CHARLES HARKINS

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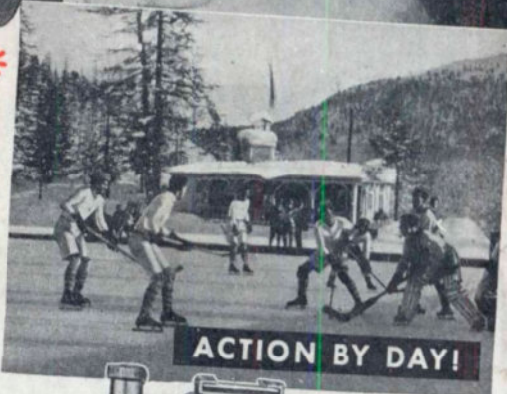


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