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All-American Fiction Magazine

WEEKLY

A Fire-Fighters Novelet by
KARL DETZER

By Public Command—
THE SHIP OF ISHTAR
by
A. Merritt

ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Combined with All-American Fiction

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Illustrating The Schooling of Michael Costello

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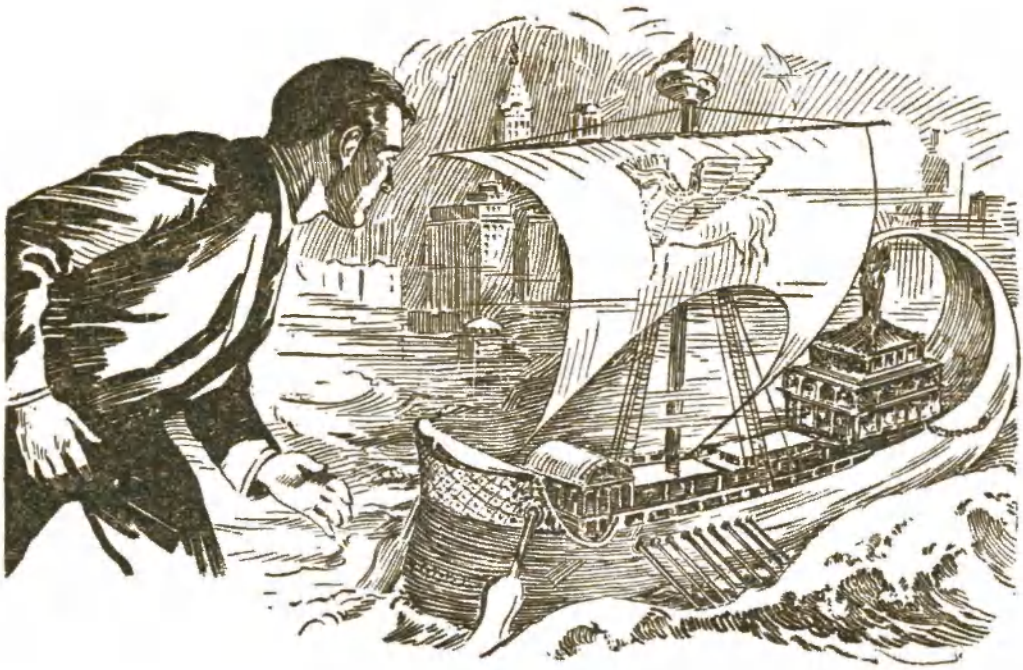


The Ship of Ishtar

By A. MERRITT
Author of "Creep, Shadow." "Burn, Witch, Burn," etc.

By public command—the story that the critics hailed as one of the ten great classics of imaginative fiction

CHAPTER I

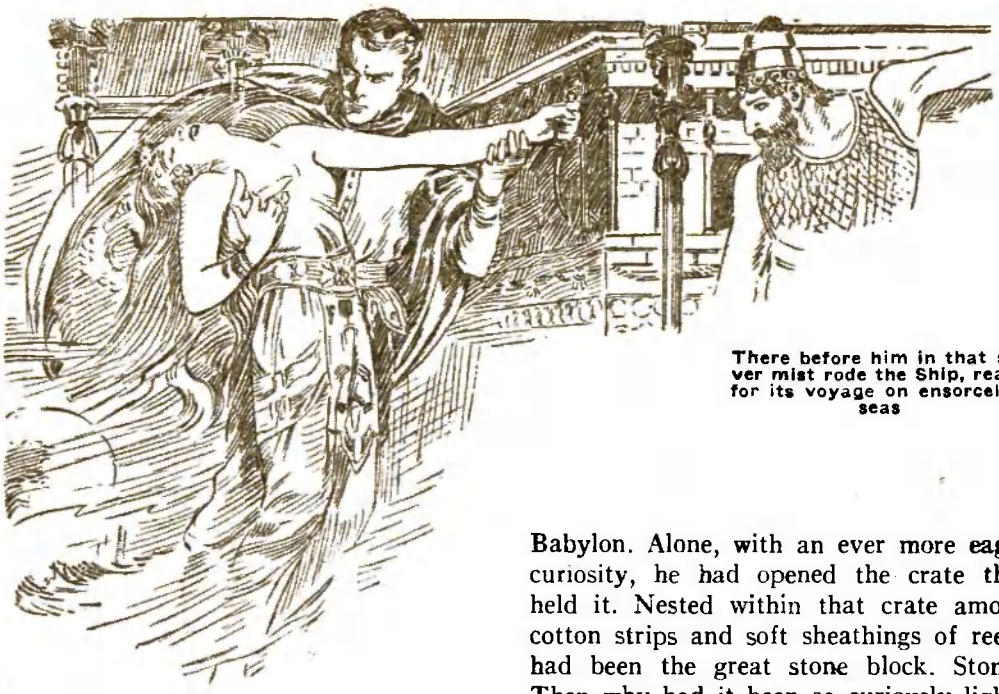
THE BLOCK FROM BABYLON

JOHN KENTON stared down at the great block, vaguely puzzled, vaguely disturbed. Strange, he thought, how all his unrest, his haunting unhappiness seemed to center upon it. It was as though the block drew them to it—like a magnet of stone. And was there subtle promise in that focusing?

He stirred impatiently; drew out again Forsyth's letter. It had come to him three days before, that message from the old archaeologist who, by means of Kenton's wealth, was sifting for its age-long-lost secrets the dust of what had once been all-conquering Babylon.

Eagerly had Kenton desired, eagerly had he planned, to go with that expedition. All his life the past had called to him. During all his years he had harkened to its calling. He had wandered in the forgotten places; had slept upon the sites of forgotten civilizations, dead empires, vanished cities. In those years he had let love pass him by; had thrilled to ghostly romance rather than to living. Scholarly, half an ascetic, if he amassed no lore of the heart he garnered another knowledge vivid enough to make savants listen with respect when he spoke.

But on the very eve of his sailing, America had entered into the World War. And Kenton had bade Forsyth to go without him. He himself had gone into



There before him in that silver mist rode the Ship, ready for its voyage on ensorcelled seas

training for a commission; he had fought and been wounded in Belleau Wood; had been invalided home. Hag-ridden by a great restlessness, thus he had returned; his attitude toward life, like thousands of others, profoundly changed. The world he knew had lost its zest; the one in which he could be happy he did not know where to find; he could not formulate even what it might be. The war had turned the present to quicksand beneath his feet; worse, it had destroyed his bridge into the past.

Yet something in Forsyth's letter had touched with life an interest he had believed dead; had evoked specter of that once familiar span between the then and the now. There was an echo within him as from some far, faint, summoning voice bidding that old self of his to awaken—to awaken and to beware!

And with a certain grim wonder he had found himself awaiting with impatience the arrival of the thing the letter had promised.

It had been cleared through the customs that afternoon—the block from Babylon. Alone, with an ever more eager curiosity, he had opened the crate that held it. Nested within that crate among cotton strips and soft sheathings of reeds had been the great stone block. Stone? Then why had it been so curiously light?

AGAIN that thought came to him as he stood there beside it. The long mirror at the end of the room reflected him as he mused. Slender, a little above the medium height, face dark and keen, suggestion of the hawk in it with the thin, curved nose and clear blue eyes set widely apart, chin a bit pointed and cleft. And at the corners of the firm lips and deep within the clear eyes a touch of bitterness and of weary disillusionment—the hall-mark of the war. Such was John Kenton as the long mirror showed him on the night-dawn of his great adventure.

He read once more the letter which Forsyth had written:

I send you the block because it bears a record of Sargon of Akkad, one of the few ever discovered of that king. It is unusual in many ways. Frankly, I have not been able to discover its purpose. I send it to you to amuse you in your convalescence; with the leisure time at your disposal you may be able to interpret what I, in the press of immediate work, cannot.

In the inscriptions upon it there is over and over again the name of Ishtar, Mother Goddess, Goddess of Love, Goddess of War and Wrath and Vengeance as well. It is mostly in this last aspect of her that I read the symbols. The name of Nabu, the Babylonian God of Wisdom, appears many times; but text and context are so mutilated that, beyond words that seem to carry a warning of some kind, the references to Nabu are undecipherable. The name of Nergal, God of the Assyrian Underworld, appears frequently. But here, too, the text is too far gone to reconstruct—at least, in the little time that I have.

There are other names: Zarpanit—a woman's; Alusar—a man's. In the Babylonian pantheon, as you know, Zarpanit or Sarpanit was the wife of the God Bel Meredach, and a lesser form of Ishtar. But in the absence of certain characters I believe that the Zarpanit referred to here was an actual woman, preferably some priestess of the goddess. As the name of Alusar occurs always near the name of Nergal he was probably a priest of that grim deity.

We found the block in the mound called 'Amran, just south of the Qser or "palace" of Nabopolassor. There is evidence that the 'Amran mound is the site of E-Sagilla, the *ziggurat* or terraced temple which was the Home of the Gods in Babylon. It must have been held in considerable reverence, for only so would it have been saved from destruction of the city by Sennacherib and afterward have been placed in the rebuilt temple.

Kenton folded the letter; looked down again upon the block. Once more his eyes measured it—four feet long, probably a trifle more, four feet high and about three wide. A faded yellow, its centuries hung about it like a half-visible garment. Its surfaces were scarred and pitted: originally they must have been smooth and polished as porcelain. Through the scratches and defacements the inscriptions ran, now submerged, now emerging—like bent straws in a frozen, yellow pool.

HE RAN a hand over it. The material mystified him; it was not stone nor any of the baked clays of the age with which he was so familiar. It was some composite, unknown. Most was it like cement of ivory sifted with dust of pearls; compact and finely grained, with tiny iridescent glints darting out of the wan yellows.

Kenton began to study the inscriptions. Archaic cuneatic, these; most ancient. There were the names of Zarpanit and Alusar. There were the arrowed symbols of Ishtar the Glorious, of the Dark Nergal, of Blue Nabu, the Giver of Wisdom. They were repeated many, many times, all of them. And always there was the persistent sign of warning—over and over again and linked always with the name of Nabu.

Curious, he thought, how baffling the inscriptions were. It was fanciful, of course it was fanciful, yet it was as though a veil lay between him and them; as though, just when he was on the brink of understanding, something reached out and muddied his mind.

And now Kenton became aware of a fragrance stealing about him; a fragrance vague and caressing, like entwined souls of flowers that had lost their way. Sweet was that fragrance and alluring; wholly strange and within it something that changed the rhythm of his life to its own alien pulse. He leaned over the block; the scented swirls drew round him, clinging like little hands; spirals of fragrance that supplicated—softly, passionately.

Pleaded—for release.

A wave of impatience swept him; he drew himself up. The fragrance was nothing but perfumes mixed with the substance of the block and now sending forth their breath through the heated room. What nonsense was this that he was dreaming? He struck the block sharply with closed hand.

The block answered the blow!

It murmured. The murmuring grew louder. Louder still, with muffled bell tones like muted carillons of jade deep within. They grew stronger, more vibrant. The murmuring ceased; now there were only the high, sweet chimings. Clearer and ever more clear they sounded, drawing

closer, ringing up and on through endless tunnels of time.

There was a sharp crackling. It splintered the chimings; shattered and stilled them. The block split. There pulsed from the break a radiance and throbbing in its wake came wave after wave of the fragrance. But no longer questing, no longer wistful nor supplicating.

Jubilant now! Triumphant!

Something was inside the block! Something hidden there since Sargon of Akkad had reigned, sixty centuries ago.

Kenton started to ring for his servants, stopped—jealously.

For the radiance streaming from the block was more than that of jewel. It was like the living breast of a goddess breaking through a shroud of stone.

Let other than himself uncover what lay within? Behold it uncovered?

No!

He ran from the room; came swiftly back with tools to free whatever was that shining wonder which for sixty centuries had been entombed within the block.

CHAPTER II

THE FREEING OF THE SHIP

THE substance of the block was singularly hard and dense. It resisted him: it seemed to fight against the steel. Bit by bit he drilled and chiseled away the stubborn matrix, working along the edges of the crack through which streamed the prisoned radiance.

Suddenly the block shuddered like a living thing. Rang out again that carillon of bells of jade. Sharply it pealed; then fainter became the chiming, fainter still. It died; and as it died the block collapsed, disintegrated; became a swirling, slowly settling cloud of sparkling dust.

Out of that cloud the alien, unfamiliar fragrance swarmed; leaped on Kenton, clung to him. For another instant the cloud whirled, a vortex of glittering mist. It vanished like a curtain plucked away.

There on the floor where the block had been, stood a ship! It was a jeweled craft of enchantment; such a bark as djinn of Aladdin's day might have made for elfin princesses to sail ensorcelled seas.

It floated high on a base of fragile waves crested with milky rock crystals. Three feet in length from bow to stern, its hull, too, was of crystal, creamy and faintly luminous. Its prow was shaped like a slender scimitar, bent backward. Under the incurved tip was a cabin whose seaward sides were formed, galleon fashion, by the upward thrust of port and starboard bows. Where the hull drew up to form this cabin, a faint flush warmed the crystal; deepened as the sides grew higher; gleamed at last with a radiance that turned the cabin into a great jewel.

In the center of the ship, taking up more than a third of its length, was a pit. Down to its railed edge from the bow sloped a deck of ivory as fallow as the yellow of a rising moon. But the deck that sloped from the stern was a jet black; another cabin rested there, smaller than that at the bow, and squat and ebon. Both decks continued on each side of the pit in two wide platforms. At the exact center of the ship—and with an odd suggestion of contending force—the ivory and the black decks met. They did not fade into each other; they ended there abruptly, edge to edge.

Up from the pit arose one tall mast; tapering; green as the carven core of some immense emerald. From its cross-sticks a wide sail of peacock iridescence stretched, ruffled as by a carven breeze. From mast and yards fell stays of twisted dull gold.

Out of each side swept a single bank of seven great oars, their scarlet blades dipped deep within the white-crested azure of the waves. At the ship's bow hung golden chains of jet.

AND the jeweled craft was manned. Why, Kenton wondered, had he not seen the tiny figures before? It was as though they had arisen from the deck. One had just slipped out of the cabin's

door, an arm was still outstretched in its closing. It was a woman. And there were other women shapes upon the ivory decks, three of them, crouching; their heads were bent low; two clasped harps and the third held a double flute. Little figures, not more than two inches high.

It was most odd that he could not distinguish their faces, nor the details of their dress. The toys were indistinct, blurred, as though a veil covered them; a veil like that which had so obscured the cuneiform inscription. He thought that the blurring might be the fault of his eyes. The freeing of the ship had demanded unwavering attention; his eyes might well be weary. Or perhaps it was that rose pearl radiance from the bow that dazzled him?

Kenton looked down upon the clouded stern. His uneasy, groping perplexity deepened. The black deck had been empty —this he could have sworn. But now four manikins clustered there, close to the rail of the pit.

He tried with all the strength in his fingers to lift one of them. He could not move it; it seemed part of the deck itself. Methodically he tugged at each of the other toys, and with the same result. He stared into the pit. There were toys in there, too—oarsmen, many of them. He counted two at each oar, one standing and one sitting; twenty-eight of them, and each in chains.

A detail of the cabined bow struck him. It was indeed astonishing, he thought again, how he kept missing these details; how, like the little figures, they seemed suddenly to strike into sight.

There was a ledge halfway up the cabin. On it were dwarfed trees blossoming with hundreds of tiny jewels. Birds were nestling along the ledge, scores of them; there were other scores clustering in the gemmed branches. They were white birds with ruby bills and scarlet feet and shining ruby eyes. What were they? Why—they were doves, of course. The doves of Ishtar.

This was the Ship of Ishtar!

HE CAUGHT himself up, wonder deepening. Whence had come that thought? What did he know of any Ship of Ishtar?

The haze around the toys was growing thicker. Certainly it must be that his eyes were tired. He would lie down a while and rest them. He walked to the door; assured himself that it was locked; turned.

All the side of the room beyond the ship was hidden by swirling silver mists that, thickening swiftly, closed in even as he stared, unbelieving, upon the mystery he had freed.

And as the mists touched it, enveloped it, the ship rocked and swayed and swiftly as the thickening of those vapors began to grow.

He glimpsed a movement upon the decks. The figures, the toys—were stirring. The oars were lifting; were sweeping through the waters.

The gleaming hull shot up, carrying the moving shapes high above his vision.

And now there was a shrilling as of armies of storm, a shrieking chaos as though down upon him swept the mighty torrent of the winds that race between the stars. The room seemed to split into thousands of fragments and to dissolve.

Kenton had one fleeting, incredible glimpse of the turreted skyline of New York vanishing beneath the onrush of a vast blue sea whose gigantic, foam-flecked combers were surging over it; were drowning it.

For a heart-beat, towers and turrets stood sharp against the flood like a picture on a screen. Then they were gone.

Down upon Kenton raced the unbelievable ocean.

Clear through the howling clamor came the chiming of a bell—one—two. It was his clock ringing out the hour of six. The third note began—and was stilled as though cut in twain.

The solid floor on which he stood melted away. For an instant he felt himself suspended in space. In front of him loomed the bow of the ship. Its crescented

prow leaped toward him, then dropped as though the ship slid down the valley of a wave.

The roaring voices of those tempests whose breath he heard, but did not feel, abruptly ceased to be. The crescented prow swept under him; a score of feet below him the ivoried deck was flashing by.

Kenton dropped.

As though to meet him, the deck rose swiftly. He felt a numbing shock, a fiery pain through his head. Splintered lightnings veined a blackness that wiped out sight both of ship and sea.

Then only the blackness.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN CALLED SHARANE

KENTON lay listening to a soft, persistent whispering. The sound was all about him: a rippling susurration growing steadily more insistent. A light beat through his closed lids. He felt motion beneath him, a gentle, cradling lift and fall. He opened his eyes.

He was on a ship, on a narrow deck, his head against the bulwarks. Before him was a mast rising out of a pit. Inside the pit he caught a glimpse of men straining at great oars. The mast seemed to be of wood covered with translucent, emerald lacquer. It stirred reluctant memories.

Where had he seen such a mast before?

His gaze crept up the shining shaft. There was a wide sail; a sail made of silk of opal, and bellying in the breath of a scented breeze. Low overhead hung a sky that was all a soft mist of silver.

Kenton heard a girl's voice, low and sweet. He sat up, dizzily. At his right he saw a templed cabin nestling under the tip of a sickled prow; it gleamed rosily. A balcony ran around it. Small trees blossomed on that balcony, while birds with feet and bills crimson as though dipped in Burgundy fluttered among the branches.

And suddenly he remembered the block from Babylon—the ship of enchantment he had freed from it. Swift upon that memory came realization, staggering, incredible.

He was on that ship—the Ship of Ishtar.

The girl's voice sounded again; was answered by another deep-toned and golden, in whose throaty notes was vibrant a debonair imperiousness. His gaze coursed along that trail of golden sound, leaped over the three women kneeling at its source; it fastened upon one face and hung there.

Never had he beheld such a woman.

Tall, willow-lithe, flame-slender she stood, staring beyond him. Her wide eyes beneath straight, fine black brows were green as tropic seas. Like sea, they were filled with drifting, mysterious shadows. Her head was small; the features fine; the red mouth delicately amorous.

Above her brows a silver crescent was set, slim as a newborn moon. Over each horn of the crescent poured a flood of red-gold hair, framing the lovely face, streaming down over high, bare breasts, falling in ringlets almost to sandaled feet. Pale pearls and rosy gems gleamed in those red-gold waves.

Were she maid or woman, Kenton could not tell. As young as Spring she seemed, yet wise as Autumn; Primavera of some archaic Potticelli—but Mona Lisa, too. If virginal in body, certainly not in soul.

HE FOLLOWED her mocking gaze. It led him to the door of the black cabin, where stood a man. Taller by a head than Kenton, massively built, his pale gray eyes stared unwinkingly upon the woman, somberly menacing. His face was beardless, pallid, heavy and cruel. Despite his bulk his pose was snakelike; and in the pale eyes serpent and wolf were mated. His huge and flattened head was shaven; his great nose vulture-beaked; and from his shoulders black robes fell, shrouding him to his feet.

Behind him were three others, with shaven heads. Two were as still as he,

and as deadly; each of the twain held a brazen, conch-shaped horn.

On the third Kenton's eyes lingered, fascinated. His pointed chin rested on a tall drum whose curved sides glistened with the diamonded skin of the royal python. He squatted, huge torso bare, gnarled, prodigiously powerful. His apelike arms were wound around the barreled tambour; spiderlike were the long fingers standing upon their tips on the drum head.

But it was the face that held Kenton. Sardonic, malicious—there was in it none of that evil concentrate in the others. The wide slit of his mouth was froglike; humor was on the thin lips. His deep-set, twinkling black eyes dwelt upon the woman with frank admiration. From the lobes of his outstanding ears hung disks of jet.

Kenton felt a quick glow of friendliness for this squatting incarnation of satyr ugliness.

The woman paced swiftly down toward Kenton. When she halted he could have reached out a hand and touched her. Yet she did not seem to see him. Indeed, this was part of the strangeness of his first adventure upon the ship, that none heeded him, gave no hint of knowledge that he was there.

"Ho—Klaneth!" she cried. "Ho—Worm of Pestilence! I hear the voice of Ishtar. She is drawing near! Are you ready to do her homage, Worm of Nergal?"

A flicker of hate passed over the pallid face. "The House of the Goddess brims with light, Sharane," the man answered with a voice thick and dead and in some way foul. "But tell me, temple drab; does not my Dread Lord's shadow thicken behind me?"

Now Kenton saw that from the rosy temple a light was pulsing, stronger and ever stronger; while down upon the black cabin gloom was gathering like a storm cloud.

"Yea!" mocked the woman. "The goddess comes. And your Dark Lord speeds to meet her. But why should that make you rejoice? For lo—she gives me clean strength ten thousandfold! And what are you, Klaneth, but a drain through which pours that filth you worship as Nergal!"

Now at this the two priests with the horns thrust themselves forward, gesturing, howling imprecations at the woman. The pale, cruel face of Klaneth grew grayer still; he raised clenched hands, and from his mouth, flecked with foam, came a dreadful hissing.

A SUDDEN wind smote the ship, like an opened hand, heeling it. From the doves burst a tumult of cries; they flew up in a small white cloud; they fluttered around the woman. Three quick, backward steps she took.

The apelike arms of the frog-mouthed drummer unwrapped, his spidery fingers poised over the head of the snake drum. The blackness deepened about him; hid him; cloaked all the ship's stern.

Kenton felt vast presences seize the ship—felt the gathering of fearful, unknown forces. He slid down on his haunches, pressed himself against the bulwarks. From the ivory deck blared a golden trumpeting. Kenton turned his head, and on it the hair lifted and prickled.

Where the woman had been was now —no woman.

Resting on the cabin was a great orb, an orb like the moon at full; but not like the moon, white and cold—an orb alive with roseate candescence. Out over the ship it poured its living rays and, bathed in them, the woman loomed gigantic. The lids of the glorious eyes were closed. Yet through those closed lids eyes glared. Plainly he saw them—eyes hard as jade, white-hot with wrath, glaring through the closed lids as though those lids had been gossamer.

And the slender crescent upon the woman's brows was radiant now; and all about it the masses of red-gold hair beat and tossed, streaming like rack of racing storm. Round and round the shining crescent whirled the cloud of the doves; snowy wings beating, red beaks open;

screaming. Out of the blackness roared the thunder of the serpent drum.

"Ai-ai-i!" From the moon-crowned shape came a cry like the jubilant clamor of newly wakened winds of spring shouting over the pine-crested billows of a thousand hills. Answering it, another roaring of the drum; sustained and menacing. The blackness thinned. A face stared out, half veiled; bodiless, floating in the shadow. It was the face of Klaneth—and yet no more his face than that which challenged it was the woman Sharane's. The pale eyes had become twin pools of white flames; pupilless. On his brow sat throned the ageless, ultimate evil. For a heartbeat the face hovered, framed by the darkness. Then the shadow dropped over it.

Now Kenton saw that this shadow hung like a curtain at the line where black deck met ivory deck, and that he lay upon the latter hardly a yard distant from where that line cut the ship in twain. He saw, too, that the radiance from the orb struck against this curtain, and made upon it a great circle that was like a web of beams spun from the moon; and that against this shining web the shadow pressed, striving to break through.

AND suddenly from the black deck the thunder of the serpent drum redoubled; the brazen conches shrieked. Drum thunder and shrieking horn blasts mingled and became one—the pulse of Abaddon, Lair of the Damned, throbbing in the voice of the Abyss. They fed the shadow, strengthened it; they were the rhythm of its will. Blacker, denser now, the shadow thrust against the web of light.

From Sharane's women, crouching low, shot storm of harpings, arpeggios like gusts of tiny arrows, and with them pipings from the double flutes that flew like shrill, swift javelins. Arrows and javelins of sound cut through the thunder hammer of the drum, the bellow of the horns; weakening them; beating them back.

A movement began within the shadow. It seethed. It spawned.

Over all the face of the weblike disk of radiance black shapes swarmed. Their bodies were like monstrous larvae, slug-shaped, faceless. They tore at the web with black talons, flailed it with batlike wings. And the web gave.

Its edge held firm, but slowly, the center was pushed back until the disk was like the half of a huge, hollow sphere. Within that hollow crawled and writhed and struck the monstrous shapes.

From the hidden deck drum and brazen horns roared triumph.

Again rang the golden trumpet cry of the woman. Out of the orb poised upon the cabin streamed an incandescence. The edges of the radiant web shot forward, curved—and closed upon the black spawn. Within it they milled and struggled like fish in a net.

And like a net lifted by some mighty hand the closed web was swung up high above the ship with all its infernal burden. Its brightness grew to match that of the great orb, whose rays were now piercing the darkness at the stern; putting it to rout. Within it the shapes of blackness squirmed, shrank; dissolved. From them came a faint, high-pitched, obscene wailing.

They were gone.

The globular net that had been the shining web opened. Out of it drifted a little cloud of ebon dust. The web hovered; streamed back to the orb that had sent it forth.

Then, swiftly, the orb was gone.

Gone, too, was the darkness that had shrouded the deck of Klaneth. High above the ship the doves of Ishtar wheeled in a vast ring, crying victory.

A hand touched Kenton's shoulder. He looked up, straight into the shadowy eyes of the woman called Sharane; no goddess now, but only lovely, alluring woman. In those eyes he read amazement, startled disbelief.

KENTON sprang to his feet. Too late he remembered the blow that had ended his fall upon the ship. A thrust

of blinding pain shot through his head. The deck whirled round him. He tried to master the giddiness; he could not. Dizzily the ship spun beneath his feet; and beyond in wider arcs spun turquoise sea and silver horizon.

Now they formed a vortex, down whose pit he was dropping—faster, ever faster. Around him was a formless blur; again he heard the tumult of the tempests, the shrillings of the winds. He abandoned himself to headlong flight.

The winds died away. He was standing, his flight over, on solidity once more. He heard three clear bell notes. He opened tight-closed eyes.

Kenton stood within his own room. There by the window glimmered the jeweled ship.

THE bell he had heard had been his clock, chiming the hour of six. Six o'clock! The last sound of his familiar world before the mystic sea had swept that world from under him had been the third stroke of that same hour, clipped off in mid-note. Why then, all he had seen, all his adventure, must have happened in half a clock chime!

Adventure? Had it been that? Or only a dream?

He lifted a hand and winced as it touched a throbbing bruise over his right temple. Well, that blow had been no dream. He stumbled over to the ship. He stared at it, incredulous. Then one by one he pulled at each of the manikins, each toy. Immovable, gem-hard, part of the deck itself each seemed to be as each had been before.

And yet in half a clock chime those toys had moved, new toys appeared. For now the long-armed beater of the serpent drum stood upright on the black deck, peering toward the platform at the right of the mast, one hand pointing, the other resting on the shoulder of a manikin in glittering mail.

Nor was there any woman at the cabin's door as there had been when he had loosed the mystery from the block. Clustered around the threshold were five slim girl toys with javelin in hands.

And the woman was on the starboard platform, bent low beside the rail as though looking at someone lying there. Looking where he had crouched while over him had waged the battle between the radiant orb and core of blackness.

And the ship's oars were no longer buried in the turquoise waves; they were lifted, poised for a downward stroke.

CHAPTER IV

MESSENGER FROM NABU

AGAIN, one by one, he went over them—each toy. His fingers lingered on the leaning woman; caressed her. No life was there, no warmth, no pulse.

Only toys?

Then why, as his hand rested on the silver crescent upon her brows, did some gladness well up from unknown depths within him? A hot new life swept like a roaring wave through every vein. What was it that shouted within him, exultant; telling him that his commerce with this Ship of Ishtar had but begun?

Abruptly, he withdrew his hand; unhooked a silken hanging from the wall and threw it over the shining bark.

This done, he went to the bathroom and examined the bruise on his head. It was tender enough, but nothing serious. He might have fallen upon the floor of his room, he thought as he touched it, overcome by those strange perfumes.

But he knew he had not.

An hour with cold compresses fairly well removed all outward marks on it. At seven-thirty he dined; and dined well. Wherever he was bound, he would be no worse for being well provisioned. That the ship would return for him he never for an instant doubted.

"You needn't bother about me any more tonight, Jevins," he told his man. "I've some writing to do, some very important work. If any one calls, tell them I'm away for the night. I'm going to lock myself in, and I don't want to be dis-

turbed for anything less than Gabriel's trumpet."

Jevins, a heritage from Kenton's father, smiled.

"All right, Master John," he answered. "I'll not let anybody bother you."

"It's really important," Kenton rested a hand on the old man's shoulder. "I think, probably, it will be—well, the most important work of my life," he ended, whimsically.

And with what spirit of prophecy he did not then dream.

"Trust me, Master John," said old Jevins.

Kenton passed on to his bedroom, entirely satisfied. He would have no interruptions now. Jevins would see to that. He caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror and paused. Hardly the costume this, if he were going voyaging on the strange ship.

He stripped; then rummaged among some costumes he had brought home with him years ago from Persia. He picked out a silken vest, a silken and embroidered tunic; he slipped his arms through them. A pair of wide pantaloons with a broad blue woven girdle; he put them on. He thrust his feet in a pair of curved Turkish slippers.

His gaze fell upon an ancient cloak he had picked up in Mosul. It was very old, very beautiful. Untold centuries had softened its blue; through its azure web and woof great silvery serpents writhed, half hidden, cabalistically entwined.

He threw it over his shoulders; caught another glimpse of himself in the mirror and stared, astonished. Could this be he—this youthful, adventurous Sultan, whose keen, dark face stared back at him? The blue and silver cloak made him seem taller than even his six feet warranted. There was a look of power about him, too—curious how subtly changed his face, his carriage.

Could it be the cloak?

That reminded him: there was a detail missing; the strange blade that had been wrapped in that same garment when he had bought it. He found the weapon; balanced it in his hand.

An odd enough weapon this. Silvery serpents twined about its hilt. At the end of that hilt gleamed a single blue gem, cabochon cut; not a sapphire; some jewel he did not know. Below the hilt was a strong rod of bronze eight inches in length and round as a staff. This staff flattened out into a lean-shaped, razor-edged sword-blade, two feet long and full six inches at its greatest width; a blade oddly like the assagais of the Zulus. He thrust it into his girdle; felt now that he was fully dressed for his part.

HE OPENED the bedroom door cautiously; listened. He slipped through and back to the room where the ship lay. Lifting its shroudings he drew one deep breath of wonder at its beauty; then turned off the lights.

As his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness he caught a dim shimmering where the ship rested; faint reflections from the Avenue's lights penetrating the window hangings.

How silent the room had become. It was filling with silence as a vessel fills with water.

Now a sound broke the stillness; the lapping of little waves, languorous and caressing. He realized that his eyes were closed; strove with all his might to open them. The lapping of the waves came closer. By an effort he half raised his lids.

There was a wide mist opposite him, a globular mist of silver drifting down upon him as though it were the curved breast of another world.

An impacting world?

No, an interpenetrating world.

Fleeting, incredibly swift, was that comprehension; in the infinitely small point of time it sparked through his mind he knew it for revelation—the only key to the inexplicable.

By light of that spark Kenton saw the globe upon which he lived—not for what it seems, but for what it is an etheric

vibration between the intervals of whose pulsing pulsed the electrons of other interlaced worlds; children of that primal force whose vibrations are matter in all the guises that we know—and that we do not know.

He visualized these worlds and his own as congeries of electrons, each in reality as wide apart as the planets from each other; as those same planets from the sun. He saw through the abysses of space between these specks myriads of similar congeries grouped into unseen, unseeable worlds; each world spinning, whirling, yet untouching and untouched by any other; interlaced; interlocked; interpenetrating.

Embracing worlds keyed to lower and to higher pitch than ours, and each in utter ignorance of the other embrace. Worlds moving through and about us. Worlds registering no more upon each other than do the thousands of wireless messages upon the receiver untuned to receive them. Worlds interfering with each other no more than do the dozen messages that, freed from contact with each other by their varying scales of vibration, pass simultaneously over a single wire.

On one of these interpenetrating worlds sailed this Ship of Ishtar.

The jeweled shape there was not the ship itself. It was the key that opened the door of Kenton's world into that of the ship's; the mechanism that attuned him to that other world's vibrations.

Swift came the revelation; swiftly it fled.

THROUGH the silver mist the ship drifted down upon him, its oars motionless, its sail but half filled. Wavelets ruffled at its bow: wavelets of palest blue with fine laced edges of white foam. Half his room was lost now in the ripples of that approaching sea. The part of his room on which he stood and watched seemed to be many feet above those waves —so far below were they that the deck of the ship was level with his feet. Soon it would be within stepping distance.

Closer drew the ship and as it drifted lazily on, Kenton drew further back from the waves rippling toward him.

He wondered why he heard no rushing winds, no clamoring tempests. No sound save the faint whispering of the waves.

Now Kenton's back was against the wall of his room. Before him stretched the turquoise ocean, the ship seemingly not more than six feet away.

Kenton leaped, straight for the ship.

Winds roared about him now; winds vast as those that swirl within the unfathomable abyss the Norsemen called Ganungagap, within whose womb from mated fire and ice was born the giant whose skull was made the sky, and from whose flesh and bones was moulded earth. The vast winds roared and howled about him, yet again he felt them not.

Suddenly the vast winds were still. His feet struck solid surface. Gasping, he opened his eyes. He stood upon the ivoried deck facing the cabin with its blossoming little trees and its flocks of crimson-billed, vermilion-footed doves.

Between him and the cabin's door stood a girl, her soft brown eyes filled with awe and wonder and that same startled disbelief that he had seen in the shadow-filled eyes of Sharane when her gaze had fallen upon him at the foot of the emerald mast.

Even through his whirling senses he knew that this girl was lovely. Her red mouth was open like a surprised child; her bluish black hair hung in soft ringlets over her white shoulders; silken folds of filmy green fluttered about her, revealing curves too full for maidenhood. Yet her eyes were innocent and her voice almost childishly sweet as she spoke to him.

"Are you the Lord Nabu that you come thus out of the air and in his cloak of wisdom, his serpents twining within it?" she murmured. "Nay, that cannot be! For Nabu is very old and you are young! Are you his messenger?"

She dropped to her knees; crossed her hands, palms outward, over her forehead.

"I am not the Lord Nabu," Kenton heard himself say, and vaguely he wondered how he could so clearly understand her speech, answer it so readily. "Maybe I have been sent by him. I do not know."

But the girl had leaped to her feet; sprung to the closed door of the rosy temple.

"Kadishtu!" she struck softly upon it. "Holy One! My Lady Sharane—a messenger from our Lord Nabu."

KENTON turned and looked behind him. His glance traveled over the pit of the oarsmen. They seemed asleep, bare bodies bent over their oars, their heads bowed. The golden-bearded warrior had vanished from the black deck, but the satyr priest of the serpent drum was there. Upon his ugly face was stamped stark amazement. The frog mouth lolled open; the little eyes protruded; one huge paw swung over the drum-head as though about to beat alarm. Kenton saw that the huge torso was balanced upon a pair of grotesquely bowed legs, short as the arms were long. Above the waist the drummer was a giant; below it a dwarf.

The black, deep-set eyes searched him; then the corners of the slit mouth lifted, the face creased into a thousand wrinkles. The drummer had smiled at him. The hovering paw drew away from the drum-head; waved a greeting, sardonic but reassuring; warning, too—for a long thumb thrust toward the black cabin.

The door of the rosy cabin was flung open. On its lintel stood the crescented woman of the red-gold hair, the woman named Sharane. Her eyes were full of wonder; an uncertain recognition within them, too. She looked beyond him to the drummer. He followed her glance. The drummer seemed to sleep.

"Watch, Satalu," she whispered to the girl.

She caught Kenton's hand; drew him swiftly, softly within the cabin; closed the door behind them.

The cabin was surprisingly large; fragrant; filled with a rose-pearl light. Two girls were there who stared at him with eyes filled with wonder; one was fair-haired, blue-eyed; the second black-tressed as the one without. The Lady Sharane dropped his hand, ran to them, thrust them toward the door.

"Out!" she cried. "Out and watch with Satalu. And gossip not together of this, lest Gigi wake and hear you and the Black Worm be warned."

The pair slipped from the cabin. Sharane flew to another door; opened it. Kenton caught a glimpse of another cabin and in it other girls as lovely as those who had gone, and as startled as they. He saw javelins, leaning against a wall, racks of arrows, great bows, short swords. Only a glimpse of these he had, for with one short whispered command Sharane closed this door; locked it.

She stood, regarding Kenton. She came close, looked deep into his eyes, measured his tall body. She stretched out slim fingers; with them touched his eyes, his mouth, his neck, as though to assure herself that he was real. At her touch strange thrillings ran through him, swift desire.

She cupped his hands in hers and bowed and set her brows against his wrists; the waves of her hair bathed them. They were silken strands of nets to which his heart flew like a bird eager to be trapped. He steadied himself; he drew his hands from hers, roughly; braced himself against her lure. She lifted her head; regarded him.

"What has the Lord Nabu to say to me through his messenger?" The mellow voice rocked Kenton with perilous sweetness. "Is the strife to end? What is your word to me, messenger? Surely will I listen, for in his wisdom has not the Lord of Wisdom sent one to whom to listen is not—difficult?"

There was a flash of coquetry in the misty eyes turned for an instant to his. Still thrilling to her closeness, groping for some firm ground upon which to stand in this unfamiliar world, Kenton sought for words.

Desperately, playing for time, he looked about the cabined space.

CHAPTER V

THE SIN OF ZARPANIT

THERE was an altar at the far end of the cabin. It was sown with gems, with pearls and pale moonstones and curdled, milky crystals. From seven crystal basins before it seven silver-pale flames sprang. There was an alcove behind the altar, but the glare of the seven flames hid what might be within. Yet he had a swift sense of tenancy of that veiled alcove. Something dwelt within it; something living, but—yes, that was it—asleep! At the side was a low, wide divan of ivory inlaid with the crystals, patterned with golden arabesques. Silken tapestries fell from the walls, multicolored, flower woven. Soft, deep silken rugs covered the cabin's floor; and piles of cushions. At right, at left, low windows opened; through them streamed silver light. A white bird flew upon the sill of one; it scanned him; it preened itself; it cooed and flew away.

A dove of Ishtar!

Soft hands touched his. He gazed into the lovely face of the Lady Sharane, into eyes shadowed now with doubt.

"You are Nabu's messenger?" she asked. In the hardened voice he read suspicion, a rising anger, but no ghost of fear. "Messenger you must be." Her voice was very low, more as though her thought found tongue than that she spoke to him. "Else how could you board the ship? But messenger of Nabu—or messenger of—"

Her eyes suddenly blazed upon him. "Nabu or—Nergal?"

"Lady of all loveliness!" Kenton's tongue was loosed. "It may be that I am a messenger. But how sent, by whom sent—it may be that I know no more than you; except this: that it was never by command of the Lord of the Dead that I came!"

"You do not know!" she cried. "And yet if you came not from the Lord Nabu, why are you clad in his cloak and why carry you his sword? Many, many times have I seen them both in his shrine at Uruk. . . . I am weary of the ship," she whispered. "I would see Uruk and Babylon again! Ah, I long for Babylon!" Her voice deepened, mournfully. A tiny chill ran through Kenton.

"Lady," he said. "In one way at least I am a messenger of Nabu. As you say, he is the Lord of Truth. I will speak only truth to you. Yet before you learn more of me, this must you do—tell me the story of this ship; how it came to sail upon the strange sea; and where have vanished the Lady Zarpanit and that Alusar whom she loved."

She shrank to the edge of the divan, fear in her eyes.

"All that you must know," she whispered. "If you know of—of them—you must know *all*. I do not understand."

"Sharane," he said, "it does not matter whether you understand, nor whether your tale be twice told. I must hear it and from you! After that I will speak and you shall listen."

She looked at him, doubtfully; searching the clear blue eyes bent steadily upon her. Then she sank back upon the divan and beckoned him beside her. She drew close, laid a hand lightly upon his breast.

HE FELT his heart leap under the touch; she felt it, too, and moved a little from him, smiling; watching him through downcast, curving lashes. She drew her slender, sandaled feet beneath her; sat musing for a space, white hands clasped between rounded knees, eyes filled with some dream. When she spoke her voice was low, her words half intoned.

"The sin of Zarpanit; the tale of her sin against Ishtar, Ishtar the Mighty: Mother of the God's and of Men, Lady of the Heavens and of Earth—who loved her—even as daughter."

She paused; and Kenton had an eerie thought that what had lain sleeping behind the seven altar lights had wakened and was listening; was listening and watching him; weighing him; measuring him. He had a sense of peril, of trespass within

forbidden places; and now for an instant unearthly fear shook him.

Sharane's soft shoulder touched him—and fear was forgotten in his delight of her exquisiteness. And as his fear fled he knew that the beat of that pulse had swung the balance for him; that he had been measured.

For good or for ill he had been weighed by the hidden dweller in the candled shrine.

"High Priestess of Ishtar at her Great House in Uruk was Zarpanit." Sharane's eyes were veiled, her head bent. "*Kadishtu,* Holy one, was she. And I, Sharane, who came from Babylon was next to her; her priestess; loved by her as she was loved by Ishtar. Through Zarpanit the Goddess counseled and warned, rewarded and punished, kings and men. In Zarpanit the Goddess became incorporate; dwelling in the house of her soul as in a temple; seeing through her eyes; speaking through her lips—so greatly did Ishtar love her!

"Now the temple in which we dwelt was named the House of the Seven Zones. In it was the Temple of Sin; God of Gods, who dwells in the Moon; of Shamash his son whose home is the Sun; of Nabu the Lord of Wisdom; of Ninib, the Lord of War; and of Nergal the Dark One, the Hornless, ruler of the dead; and of Bel-Merodash, the mighty lord. But most of all was it the House of Ishtar, who by her sufferance let these others—all save Bel, who dwelt there of his own right—temple themselves within her holy home.

"From Cuthaw in the north, from the temple there which Dark Nergal ruled even as Ishtar ruled at Uruk, came a priest to sit over the Zone of Nergal in the House of the Seven Zones. His name was Alusar—and close as was Zarpanit to Ishtar, as close was he to the Lord of the Dead. Nergal made himself manifest through Alusar; spoke through him and dwelt at times within him even as did Ishtar within her Priestess Zarpanit. With Alusar came a retinue of priests and among them that black worm, that spawn of Nergal's slime—Klaneth. And Klaneth was close to Alusar as I to Zarpanit—"

She raised her head, looked at him through narrowed eyes.

"I KNOW you now," she cried. "A little while ago you lay upon the ship and watched my strife with Klaneth! Now I know you, although then you were not dressed as now, and you vanished as I looked upon you."

Kenton smiled at her.

"You lay with frightened face," she said, "and stared at me through fearful eyes, and fled."

Renewed suspicion rippled through the words. But over Kenton a sudden hot anger swept.

"Your eyes lied to you then!" he said. "It was no fault of mine that I fled. I who returned as quickly as I could. Never think again that my eyes will hold *fear* of you." He gripped her hand, drew her close. "Look into them!" he bade her.

She looked long; sighed and bent away; sighed once more and swayed toward him, languorously. His arms flew around her. She thrust him away.

"Enough!" she said. "I read no hasty script in new eyes. Yet I retract; you were not fearful. You fled not. Let be."

Wholly withdrawn, gaze turned from him, she brooded.

"Between Ishtar and Nergal," Sharane took up the interrupted tale, "is and ever must be unending strife and hatred. For Ishtar is Bestower of Life and Nergal is the Taker of Life, the King of Death; she is the Lover of Righteousness, and he is the Father of Evil. And how shall ever Heaven and Hell be linked; or life and death; or good and evil?

"Yet she," the voice deepened, "Zarpanit, *Kadishtu,* the Holy One of Ishtar, her best beloved, did link all of these. Where she should have turned away, she looked with desire; where she should have hated, she loved!

"Yea, the Priestess of the Lady of the Heavens loved Alusar, Priest of the Lord of Death! Her love was a strong flame

in whose light she could see only him—and him only. Had Zarpanit been the Lady Ishtar she would have gone to the Dwelling Place of the Lost for Alusar, even as did the goddess for her lover Tammuz—to draw him forth or to dwell there with him. Yea, even to dwell with him there in the cold darkness where the dead creep feebly, calling with the weak voices of birds. In the cold of Nergal's abode, in the famine of Nergal's domain, in the blackness of his city where the deepest shade of earth would be a ray of sun, Zarpanit would have been happy, knowing that she was with Alusar.

"So greatly did she love."

Was there a stirring behind the pale altar flames? He strove to see; turned his gaze back to the Lady Sharane. If there had been movement she had not heeded it.

"I helped her in her love, for love of her," she whispered. "But Klaneth, the Black Worm, crawled ever behind Alusar waiting for chance to betray and to creep into his place; yet Alusar trusted him. There came a night—"

She paused, the eyes that had been soft, tear-filled, were shadowed with remembered fear.

"There came a night when Alusar had crept to Zarpanit within her chamber. His arms were about her, hers around his neck; their lips together.

"Klaneth, I thought, watched at the outer door. I lay at the threshold of the inner, watching."

Her eyes widened, her lips whitened, the whole lithe body quivered.

"And that night the Goddess Ishtar came down from her heavens to Zarpanit, entered and possessed her! And at that same instant from his dark city came Nergal and passed into Alusar!

"And in each other's arms, looking into each other's eyes, caught in the might of mortal love were Heaven and Hell! The Soul of Life and the Soul of Death."

She shuddered and was silent and long moments crept by before again she spoke.

"Straightway those two mortal lovers who clasped were torn from each other. We were buffeted as by hurricanes; blinded by lightnings; thrown broken to the walls. And when we knew consciousness once more the priests and priestesses of the Seven Zones had us. All the sin was known! Yea, even though Ishtar and Nergal had not met that night, still would the sin of Zarpanit and Alusar have been known—for Klaneth, whom we thought on guard, had betrayed them and crawled away and had brought down upon us the pack.

"Let Klaneth be cursed!" Sharane raised arms high, and the pulse of her hate lifted Kenton's heart like a rushing wave. "Let Klaneth crawl blind and undying in the cold blackness of Nergal's abode. But Goddess Ishtar! Wrathful Ishtar! Give him to me first that I may send him there as I would have him go!"

CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE GODS JUDGED

HER tense arms dropped slowly; her lovely face grew still. "For a time," she said, "we lay in darkness, Zarpanit and I together—and Alusar far away. Great had been the sin of those two, and in it I had shared. Not quickly was our punishment to be decided. I comforted her as best I might, loving her, caring naught for myself, for her heart was close to breaking, knowing not what they were doing with him she loved.

"There fell another night when the priests came to us. They drew us from our cell and bore us in silence to the portal of the *Du-azzaga*, the Brilliant Chamber, the Council Room of the Gods. There stood other priests with Alusar. They opened the portal, fearfully, and they thrust us three in.

Now, indeed, my spirit shrank and was afraid, wailing out within me; and beside me I felt the shuddering soul of Zarpanit!

"For the *Du-azzaga* was filled with light and in the places of the gods sat not their priests, but—the gods themselves!

Hidden each behind a sparkling cloud the gods sat and watched us through their veils. In the place of Nergal was a fiery darkness.

"Through the blue shining mist before the shrine of Nabu came the voice of the Lord of Wisdom.

" 'So great is thy sin, O Zarpanit, and thine, O Alusar,' it said 'that it has troubled even us, the Gods! Now what have ye to say before we punish?'

"The voice of Nabu was cold and clear as the light of the far-flung stars, passionate as the wind—yet in it was understanding.

"And suddenly my love for Zarpanit soared up like a flame and I held fast to it and it gave me strength. And beside me I felt her soul stand erect, defiant, her love flinging itself around it like a flaming garment. She answered not—only held out her arms to Alusar. I looked at him and his love, too, stood forth unafraid even as hers. He sprang to her, clasped her in his arms.

"Their lips met, and the judging gods were forgotten.

"Then the god Nabu, peering out through this blue, shining mist, spoke again.

" 'These two bear a flame that even we may not destroy!'

"At this the Lady Zarpanit drew from her lover's arms: came close to the glory that shrouded Ishtar; did homage; clear-eyed, unafraid, addressed her:

" You, O mother, are you not the mother of that fire we call love? Did you not create it and set it as a torch above Chaos? And, having made it, did you not know how mighty was the thing you made? It was that love of which you are the mother, O Holy Ishtar, that entered me—that came unsought into this temple of my body which was yours and still is yours though you have abandoned it. Is it *my* sin that so strong was love that it opened the doors of your temple; that its light blinded me to all save him on whom it shone? *You* are the creator of love. Why did you make it so mighty? And if love be grown stronger than you who made it, O Ishtar, can we—a woman and a man—be blamed that we could not conquer it? And if love be not stronger than you, still did you make it stronger than man. Therefore punish love, your child, O Mother—not us!'

"She ceased; and Alusar drew her to him, saying:

" 'Man may not accuse the gods, who gave him being, yet the flame you made to forge on life's anvil gods and man is a strong flame, O Mother Ishtar! Also it comes to me who stands here to be judged that there is a justice which even the gods must heed—or in time cease to be. Now in the name of that justice I speak! To that justice I appeal! I ask no mercy—if we have sinned we must suffer. If you, O Ishtar, could destroy in Zarpanit that flame of love for me, wipe out all memory of me from her, I would pray that on *me* alone be set the burden of suffering. But that even you cannot do, and so each single arrow-point of my agony would be tenscore thrust in her! Nay, if we have sinned we have sinned together, and together we must pay. And that in the name of the eternal justice which rules even you, I demand, O Ishtar.'

"IT WAS the Lord Nabu who broke the silence of the gods. 'They who are to be judged, accuse,' he said. 'And there is truth in what they say. They carry a flame, I tell you, which even we may not destroy. The fire they bear is one whose ways, O Ishtar, you know better than do I. Also it is you who are the accuser and you who are the accused. Therefore, Ishtar, it is for you to speak.'

"From the glory veiling the goddess a voice came; sweet but small with bitter anger.

" 'There *is* truth in what you say, Zarpanit, whom once I called daughter! Now because of that truth I will temper my anger. You have asked me whether love is stronger than Ishtar, its mother. We shall learn! This is your doom; that

you and the man Alusar dwell in a certain place that shall be opened to you. Ever together shall you be, even as he has demanded. You shall look upon each other, yet never shall you touch hands or lips. You may speak each to the other, but not of this fire of love. For when that flame leaps and draws you together then I, Ishtar, will come to you, Zarpanit, and fight with love. It will not be the Ishtar you have known who shall come. Nay, that Sister-Self of mine whom men call the Destroyer, the Wrathful—*she* shall possess you. And so it shall be until the flame within you conquers her, or that flame perishes for weariness.' "

"The voice of Ishtar was still; the gods were silent. Then out of the blackness of the shrine of Nergal bellowed the voice of the Lord of Death.

" 'So say you, Ishtar! Then I, Nergal, tell you this. I stand with this man who is my priest; nor am I so much displeased with him, since it was by him that I looked so closely into your eyes, O Mother of the Heavens!' The dark cloud shook with a hideous laughter. 'I shall be with him, and I will meet you, Ishtar the Destroyer! Yea, with craft to match yours and might to grapple with you—until I, not you, have destroyed this woman and the flame she boasts, as well as that within this priest of mine. For in my abode there are no such flames, and I would quench it in him that my darkness be not affrighted when my priest at last comes to me!'

"And again the laughter shook the ebon cloud, while the glory that covered Ishtar quivered with wrath. But the three of us listened with despair, for ill as it was with us, far more ill was it to hear this jesting of the Dark Hornless One.

"Came the goddess's voice—bitter, smaller still:

" 'Be it so, O Nergal!'

"There was silence for a little time among the gods; and I thought that behind their veils they looked at each other askance. At last there came the passionless voice of Nabu:

" 'What of this woman Sharane—'

"The voice of Ishtar, impatient: 'Let her fate be bound with Zarpanit's. Let Zarpanit have her retinue in that place to which she goes.'

"Then Nabu, again: 'And the priest Klaneth—is *he* to go free?'

" 'What! Shall not my priest have his retinue, too?' mocked Nergal. 'Set Klaneth beside my priest Alusar with others to minister to him.'

"Again I thought that the gods looked askance at each other. Then Nabu asked:

" 'Shall it be so, Queen of the Heavens?'

"And Ishtar answered: 'Let it be so!'

"The *Du-azzaga* faded; I was one with the nothingness."

AGAIN Sharane was silent, brooding, he knew, over pictures of a world that lay six thousand years deep in the abyss of time, yet still fresh and living to her. Silent, too, sat Kenton, fighting against belief in this strange tale of strife between angry god and goddess made incarnate in priestess and priest. She stirred, laid hand on his.

"When we awoke we were on this haunted ship, on this strange sea, in this strange world, messenger," she said. "Yea, and all that the gods had promised and decreed in the *Du-azzaga* had come to pass. For with Zarpanit was I and half a score of the temple girls she had loved. And with Alusar was Klaneth and a pack of his black acolytes. They had given us oarsmen, sturdy temple slaves—a twain for each oar. They had made the ship beautiful, and they had seen to it that we lacked nothing."

A green flame of anger rose for an instant in her eyes.

"Yea," she said, "the kindly gods did all for our comfort, and then they launched the ship on this strange sea in this strange world as battleground for love and hate, arena for Wrathful Ishtar and Dark Nergal, torture chamber for their sinning priestess and priest.

"It was in this cabin that Zarpanit

awakened—with the name of Alusar upon her lips. Then straightway she ran out the door as though she knew where he were, and, as she sped out, from the black cabin came Alusar calling her name. I saw her reach that line where black deck meets this—and, lo, she was hurled back as though by the thrust of strong arms. For there is a barrier there, messenger—a barrier built by the gods over which none of us upon the ship may pass. But then we knew nothing of that. And Alusar, striving to pass that unseen wall, too, was hurled back from it.

"Then as they arose, calling, stretching hands, striving to touch finger to finger, straightway into Zarpanit poured that Sister-Self of Ishtar, the Angry One, the Destroyer. While around Alusar black shadows deepened and hid him. At last they parted, and what had been the face of Alusar was the face of Nergal, Lord of the Dead!

"Yea. So it was, even as the gods had decreed. And that immortal twain within the bodies of those mortal two who loved each other so battled and flung their hates like brands against each other. While the slaves chained to their oars in the pit cowered and raved or fell senseless under the terrors loosed above them. And the temple girls with us cast themselves upon the deck or ran screaming into the cabin that they might not see. Only I did not cry out or flee—I who, since I had faced the gods in the *Du-azzaga,* could never again feel fear.

"And"—she drew a deep breath, eyes misty with sorrow—"so it fared; how long, how long I do not know, in this place where time seems not to be, since there is neither night nor day as we knew them in Babylon.

"Yet ever the priest and priestess strove to meet, and ever wrathful Ishtar and Dark Nergal thrust them apart. Many are the wiles of the Lord of the Shades, and countless are his weapons. And many are the arts of Ishtar, and is not her quiver always full? Messenger, how long the pair endured I know not. Yet always strove they to break that barrier through, driven by their love. And always—"

She covered her face; her white shoulders shook with her weeping.

"THE flames within them burned on," she whispered. "Nergal and Ishtar could not dim them. Their love did but grow stronger. There came a day—"

For a little she faltered, then went on:

"It was in mid-battle. Ishtar had taken possession of Zarpanit and stood where this deck touches the pit of the oarsman. Nergal had poured himself into Alusar and hurled his evil spawn across the pit against the goddess's lightnings.

"And as I crouched, watching, at this cabin's door, suddenly I saw the radiance that covered Ishtar tremble and dull. For an instant I thought I saw the face of Ishtar waver and fade—the face of Zarpanit look out from where the face of Ishtar had been.

"While the darkness that shrouded the Lord of the Dead lightened, as though a strong flame had shot up within it.

"Then Ishtar took one step, and another and another, toward the barrier between black deck and this. But it came to me that not by her will did she so move. No! She went haltingly, reluctantly, as though something stronger than herself pushed her on. And as she moved, so moved Nergal within his shadows to meet her!

"Closer they came and closer. And ever the radiance of Ishtar would wax and wane. Ever the shadows, clothing Nergal would lighten, darken, lighten again. Yet ever—slowly, unwillingly, but inexorably—they drew closer and closer to each other. Now I could see the face of Alusar, the priest, thrusting itself into sight, stripping itself of Nergal's mask.

"And suddenly, with fast beating heart, it came to me that Wrathful Ishtar and the Dark One were no longer striving against each other. But that she, the goddess, was at grips with the flame in Zarpanit! And that he, the Lord of the Dead, was battling with the flame within

the priest—those flames that Nabu had said not even the gods could destroy!

"Slowly, slowly, the white feet of Zarpanit carried Ishtar to the barrier; and slowly, slowly, ever matching her tread, came Alusar to meet her. And they met! They touched hands, touched lips, clasped—before conquered god and goddess could withdraw from them.

"They kissed and clasped. They fell upon the deck—dead. Dead, in each other's arms. They died, messenger, when their lips touched.

"There was a burst of light like the stroke of a thousand lightning bolts. The ship shook and shuddered.

"But before that burst of light came I thought I saw two shining flames rise from their bodies, hover for a heart-beat, rush to each other, merge—and vanish.

"Neither Ishtar nor Nergal had conquered! Nay! Love of man and love of woman—these had conquered. Victors over god and goddess—the flames were free!

"The priest had fallen on the hither side of the barrier. We did not unclasp their arms. We bound their bodies round with silken, perfumed coverings. We set them adrift, alock, face to face.

"Then I ran forth to slay Klaneth. But I had forgotten that neither Ishtar nor Nergal had conquered one another. Into me as I ran poured the goddess, and into Klaneth returned Nergal! As of old these two powers battled! And again the unseen barrier was strong as of old, holding back from each other those on the ivory deck and the black.

"Yet I was happy, for by this I knew that Zarpanit and Alusar had already been forgotten by them. It came to me that the strife had gone beyond those two who had escaped. That now it mattered not either to Wrathful Ishtar or to Nergal that they had gone, since in my body and in Klaneth's they could still strive against each other for possession of the ship.

"You see, messenger?" Her eyes searched him. "Also it came to me that so long as I might keep them at strife, that much longer might Zarpanit and Alusar have to find hiding place for them. Find sanctuary in some far-flung world.

"And so I dared the black priest often—and often was I the phial for Ishtar. And so we sail—and fight.

"How long, I do not know. Once I knew time. Here there is nothing of that time I knew in my own world. No time here—on these strange seas, in this strange world. Many, many years must have passed since we faced the gods in Uruk, but see, I am still as young as then and as fair! Or so my mirror tells me." She sighed.

CHAPTER VII

WOMAN FROM THE DUST

KENTON sat silent, unanswering. Young and fair she was indeed—and Uruk and Babylon mounds of time-worn sands these thousands of years. What could he say to her; what message could he have for her who, if her story were true, ought by every law of nature, in which he believed, be but dust within the dust of her crumpled temple?

And yet she was not dust. She was here before him, living, palpitant, clothed in beauty.

"Tell me, lord"—her voice roused him; her face was dreamy, the long lashes downcast—"tell me, my lord, has the Temple of Uruk great honor among the nations still? And is Babylon still proud in her supremacy?"

He did not speak, belief that he had been thrust into some alien, incredible reality wrestling with outraged revolt of the modern, skeptic part of him. What! Believe this tale of an angry goddess and god, creatures of human fancy whose fanes were only moldering ruins on the highway of the ages, whose very names were forgotten? Give credence to this?

Nevertheless, the woman was real, living; she must be answered. Against each other strained the opposing currents of his thought.

And the Lady Sharane, raising her eyes to his troubled face, stared at him with

ever growing doubt. Suddenly she leaped from beside him.

"Have you word for me?" she cried. "Speak—and quickly!"

What could he answer? Dream woman or woman in ancient sorceries, there was but one answer for Sharane—the truth.

"But you *are* from Nabu," she breathed. "You must be. How else could you have come—and wrapped in his blue cloak of wisdom and his serpents?"

"Listen," he answered. "Listen until I am done—"

And tell her the truth Kenton did, beginning from the arrival of the block from Babylon into his house; glossing no detail that might make all plain to her. She listened, her gaze steadfast upon him, drinking in his words—amazement alternating with stark disbelief; and these in turn with horror, with despair.

"For even the site of ancient Uruk is almost lost," he ended. "The House of the Seven Zones is a wind-swept heap of desert sand. And Babylon, mighty Babylon, has been level with the wastes these six thousand of years!"

SHE leaped to her feet—leaped and rushed upon him, eyes blazing, red-gold hair streaming.

"Liar!" she shrieked. "Liar! Now I know you—you phantom of Nergal!"

A dagger flashed in her hand; he caught the wrist just in time; struggled with her; bore her down upon the couch.

"I tell you the truth!" he cried. "I know No Nergal—nor Ishtar—nor Nabu! I am a man, and I have told you truth!"

Abruptly she relaxed, hung half fainting in his arms.

"Uruk dust!" she whimpered. "The House of Ishtar dust! Babylon a desert! And Sargon of Akkad dead six thousand years ago, you said—six thousand years!" She shuddered, sprang from his embrace. "But if that is so, then what am I?" she whispered, white lipped. "What am I? Six thousand years and more gone since I was born—and I alive! Then what *am* I?"

Panic overpowered her; her eyes dulled; she clutched at the cushions. Through Kenton's mind flashed a cynic thought. This woman who could talk so calmly of commerce with gods, of their vengeance and their strife, accepting what to him was the unbelievable—this woman to be appalled by age, overwhelmed by that purely natural fact of the passing of time! It was this paradox that made her real. He had known a woman who could look at hurricane and earthquake without a tremor, but who cowered and wept at the approach of a birthday. In Uruk or Babylon or New York—the breed held true.

Pity awoke within him. He took a step toward her. She looked up at him; the pale lips still quivering, the slim fingers twitching at the silken nets over her breast. He bent over her; she threw white arms around him.

"I am alive?" she cried. "I am human. I am—woman?"

Her soft lips clung to his, supplicating; the perfumed tent of her hair covered him; the fragrance of her body rocked him. She held him, her lithe body pressed tight, imperatively desperate. Against his racing heart he felt the frightened pulse of hers. And between her kisses she whispered: "Am I not a woman—and alive? Tell me, am I not alive?"

Desire filled him; he gave her kiss for kiss; yet tempering the flame of his desire was clear recognition that neither swift love for him nor passion had swept her into his arms.

It was terror that lay behind her caresses. She was afraid, appalled by that six-thousand-year wide abyss between the life she had known and his. Clinging to him, she fought for assurance of her own reality. Seeking such an assurance, she had driven back to woman's last intrenchment—the certainty of her womanhood and its unconquerable lure.

No, it was not to convince him that her kisses burned his lips—it was to convince herself.

He did not care. She was in his arms.

She thrust him from her; sprang to her feet; faced him. "I am a woman, then?" she cried triumphantly. "A woman and alive?"

"A woman," he answered thickly, his whole body quivering toward her. "Alive!" Yes!"

She closed her eyes; a great sigh shook her—a sigh that was almost a sob.

"AND that is truth," she cried, the Lady Sharane. "And it is the one truth you have spoken. Nay, be silent!" she checked him. "If I am woman and alive, it follows that all else you have told me are lies, since I could be neither were Babylon dust and it six thousand years since first I saw the ship. You lying dog!" she cried, and with one ringed hand struck Kenton across the lips.

The rings cut deep. As he fell back, dazed both by the blow and by this sudden shift of fortune, she threw open the door of that other cabin in which he had glimpsed the clustered girls.

"Luarda! Athnal! All!" wrathfully she summoned them. "Quick! Bind me this dog! Bind him—but slay him not!"

Seven warrior maids streamed from the cabin, short kirtled, bare to their waists, in their hands light javelins. They flung themselves upon him. And as they wound about him Sharane darted in, tore the sword of Nabu from his hand.

The blue cloak was thrown over his head, twisted around his neck. At the strangling grip Kenton awoke from his stupor—awoke roaring with rage. Savagely he tore himself loose, hurled the cloak from him, leaped toward Sharane. Quicker than he, the lithe bodies of the warrior maids screened her from his rush. They thrust him with their javelins, pricking him as do the matadors to turn a charging bull. Back and back they drove him, ripping his clothing, bringing blood now here, now there.

Through his torment he heard the laughter of Sharane.

"Liar!" she mocked. "Liar, coward, and fool. Tool of Nergal, sent to me with a lying tale to sap my courage! Well, witless one, I'll send you back to Nergal with another tale to tell him!"

Back and back he was driven. The warrior maids dropped their javelins, surged forward as one. They clung to him; twined legs and arms around him; dragged him down. Cursing, biting, flailing with his fists, kicking—caring no longer that they were women—Kenton fought them. Berserk, he staggered to his feet, the girls clinging like hounds to a stag, seeking his throat, his eyes. His foot struck the lintel of the cabin's door. Down he plunged, dragging his wildcat burden with him. Falling, they drove against the door. It flew open and out through it they rolled, writhing, battling down the ivoried deck.

There was a shouting close behind him, a shrill cry of warning from Sharane. Some urgent command, for grip of arms and legs relaxed; clutching, clawing hands were withdrawn.

SOBBING with rage, Kenton swung to his feet. And as he swung upright, he saw that he was almost astride the line that was the mysterious, deadly barrier between ivoried deck and black. Dimly it came to him that this was why Sharane had whistled her furies from him; that he had dragged them too close to its menace.

Again her laughter racked him. She stood upon the gallery of little blossoming trees, her doves winging about her. The sword of Nabu was in her hands; derisively she lifted it.

"Ho, lying messenger!" mocked Sharane. "Ho, dog beaten by women! Come get your sword!"

"I'll come, damn you!" he shouted, and leaped forward.

The ship pitched. Thrown off his balance, Kenton staggered back, reeled to the line where black and ivory decks meet.

Reeled over it—unhurt.

Something far deeper than his consciousness registered that fact; registered

it as of paramount importance. Whatever the power of the barrier, to it Kenton was immune. He poised himself to leap back to the ivory deck.

"Stop him!" came the voice of Klaneth.

In mid-spring long, sinewy fingers gripped his shoulder, swung him around. He looked into the face of the beater of the serpent drum. Staring at him with amazement and a curious awakening speculation in his beady black eyes, the drummer's talons lifted him and cast him like a puppy behind.

And panting like some outraged puppy, Kenton swayed upon his feet and looked around him. A ring of black-robed men was closing in upon him, black-robed men whose faces were dead white, impassive; black-robed men closing in upon him with clutching hands. Beyond the ring stood the mailed warrior with the golden beard and the pale agate eyes; and beside him Klaneth.

But there was no fear in Kenton now.

"Stop me—hell!" he roared. He rushed the black robes. They curled over him, overwhelmed him, pinned him down.

Again the ship lurched, this time more violently. Kenton, swept off his feet, slid sidewise. A wave swished over him, half strangling him. The hands that clutched him were washed away by it. Choking, he threshed hands and feet, striving to stand. Another wave lifted him, flung him up and out. Like a leaf over a cataract he felt himself falling into the sea. Deep he sank. He fought his way upward, thrust his head at last above the surface. He dashed the water from his eyes; looked for the ship.

A roaring wind had risen, and under it the ship was scudding, a hundred yards away. He shouted; swam toward her. The wind roared louder; down went the sail; down dipped the oars straining to keep the ship before the wind. Faster and faster flew the ship before the blast—was lost in the silvery mist.

Kenton ceased his efforts; floated, abandoned in an unknown world.

A wave smote him; he came up behind it, choking. The wind was roaring overhead. The spindrift whipped him. He heard the booming of surf, the hiss of combers thrown back by ramparts of rock. Another wave caught him, swept him forward. Struggling upon its crest, he saw just ahead of him a pinnacle of yellow stone rising from a nest of immense bowlers upon which the billows broke in fountains of spume. Again a wave seized him, hurled him on; he fought against it helplessly.

His strength left him; he let himself go; stopped fighting. He felt himself lifted by a gigantic comber; dashed straight against the yellow pillar.

The shock of his impact was no greater than that of breaking through thick cobweb. For infinite distances, it seemed, he rushed on and on through a soft, thick darkness. With him went the sound of waves. Abruptly, his motion ceased; the sound of the waves fled. He was gripping something—something hard and smooth; not rock, no—wood.

Suddenly he knew he was within his own room.

HE SNAPPED on the lights; stood swaying, shuddering. What was that upon the floor at his feet? Stupidly he stared. It was water that was dripping from him, forming a pool. But this was strangely colored water—stained crimson.

He realized that he was wet to the skin. He licked lips that had gone abruptly dry; there was salt upon them. And the water that dripped from him was crimsoned—crimsoned with his blood.

There was a long mirror in this room of his. He stumbled to it. Stumbling to meet him came a drenched and ragged figure. Ripped and tattered was its clothing, water dripped from it and from a score of wounds blood mixed with that water mingled and dripped.

He turned to where the ship gleamed; bent over it. On the black deck was a group of the little figures, leaning, looking over the rail.

Upon the gallery of the rosy cabin one tiny figure stood.

Sharane!

He touched her. Jewel-hard, jewel-cold, a toy—yet Sharane.

Like a returning wave, his rage against her swept him. Echoes of her laughter in his ears, Kenton, cursing, sought for something with which he could shatter that shining bark of beauty, break the link it formed between Sharane's ensorcelled world and his own.

He caught a heavy chair by its legs, swung it high overhead, poised for an instant to send it crashing down upon the ship—

And suddenly beneath the salt upon his lips Kenton tasted again the kisses of Sharane.

The chair dropped from his hands.

"Ishtar! Nabu!" he whispered, arms held high in supplication. "I call upon you. Set me once more upon the ship. Whatever the price, that price I will pay. Ishtar! Do with me as you will—only set me again upon your ship!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Salesmanship and This Sick World

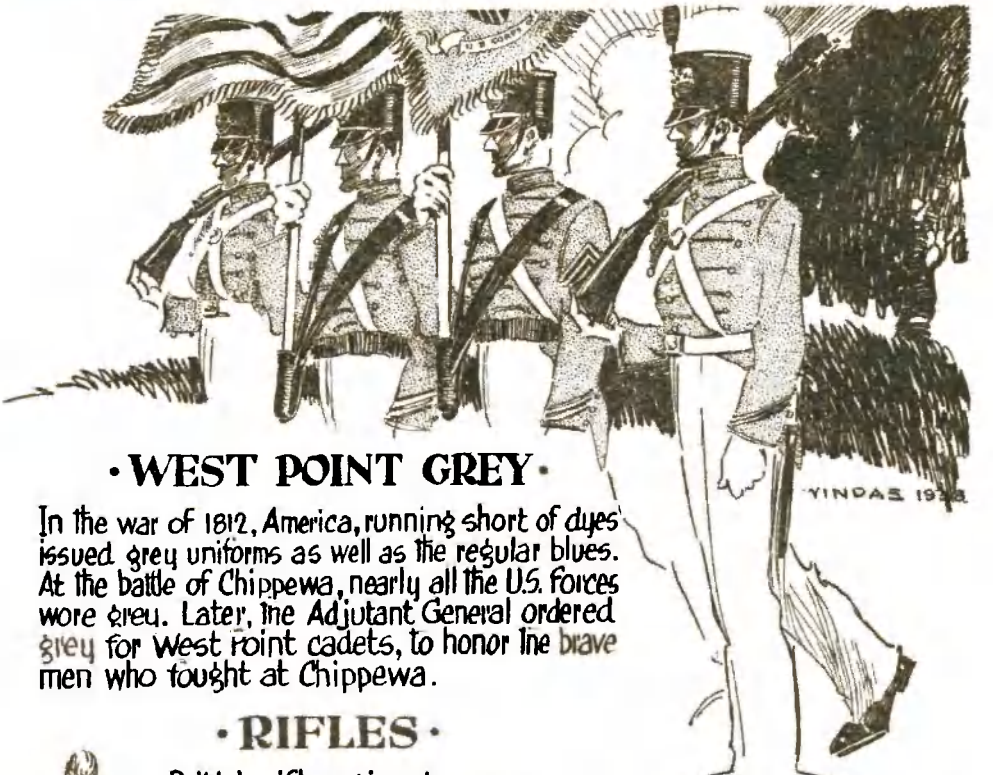
A MR. JAMES MORAN has sold an icebox to an Eskimo. This incredible fact was reported a month or so ago from Juneau, Alaska, where, after a good deal of effort, Mr. Moran closed his deal with Charlie Pastolik of Saint Michael's Island.

Is this merely proof of Mr. Moran's genius, or is it a trend? Perhaps both; Mr. Moran says quite simply, "I drove home selling point after selling point until Charlie's resistance melted." Well, there you have part of it, and Mr. Moran will go down in history as one of the great men of his day. But the weakness of Charlie Pastolik may very well be a significant portent. The human race is letting down, and in the next few years you will probably find Scotchmen distributing five-dollar gold pieces on the street corners and people from Missouri who will believe every word you tell them. It's not right, of course; we have got to have some kind of standards in this world, even if we can't have peace. You can't exactly blame Mr. Moran—but Charlie, if he has a conscience, should not sleep well.

—*Charles Dorman*

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

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



·WEST POINT GREY·

In the war of 1812, America, running short of dyes issued grey uniforms as well as the regular blues. At the battle of Chippewa, nearly all the U.S. forces wore grey. Later, the Adjutant General ordered grey for West Point cadets, to honor the brave men who fought at Chippewa.

·RIFLES·

British rifle regiments were so named because they were the first to carry rifled guns as opposed to smooth bores of other British infantry of the day.

·COMPENSATION for WOUNDS·

Probably as old as warfare itself. A 15th century book says "Mercenaries shall not be recompensed for wounds..... other troops shall receive this"

·COLONEL·

The regimental commander is named from the French word colonne" (column), as this officer always marched at the head of the column.

The Schooling of Michael Costello

By KARL DETZER

Author of "The Beginnings of Michael Costello," "Backfire," etc.

The *pompier* is that fragile and fearsome device calculated to make tyro smoke-eaters wish they'd never heard of the Department . . . Young Mike was a fireman born, but the *pompier* showed him he couldn't "climb" . . . A Complete Novelet

I

"AND isn't it a fine hot morning," Michael Costello thought, "to be going where I'm going this day!" He swung off the surface-car at the corner of Wells and Lake and was for crossing the street when he saw the great truck coming toward him.

It was loaded with beer in kegs, and the August day being hot as it was, sight of it gave young Michael's tongue a furry dry edge.

Five minutes of nine it was, and he had only two blocks to go in those five minutes, to reach the medical examiner's office in time. On time he must be, too, for if he didn't take the examination this morning, and pass it, what's more. . . . No ifs-and-ands, he was going to pass this physical examination this time, and if anyone came forward with any more arguments that he shouldn't be a fireman, and him a Costello, by the blessed saints he'd settle them, too. Why, if he didn't pass it this trial, there'd be two months to wait before the next recruit school for the fire department.

So off at a lope he went, thinking to get this heavy traffic behind him, when he heard somebody let out a yell. God help him, what a yell! He swung around at the curb, and there it was, happening. The beer truck was rolling fast, and the old man with the cane had stopped still as a post in front of it, and on the truck was coming, straight as a heaved brick.

Michael yelled too, and a girl beside him opened her painted lips and let out a small tight scream, and still there the old man stood, not moving a muscle. But the truck swerved just then. It had two ways to go, and two only.

Straight at the old man, standing there like a dummy, or straight at the post of the elevated railroad structure. The latter it chose, and its brakes were screaming and its tires letting out a squeal when it struck.

Rip of steel and smash of wood and snap of breaking radiator coils and the whole structure of the elevated weaving, and the poor bewildered old man standing still. And then came the fire.

A small lick of it first, running out from under the truck's smashed hood, and then a bigger flame, in under the seat, and smoke was coming with it. And then a taxicab stopping, and its driver leaping out to help; but already Michael was past him like a shot.

FIRE was swooshing up both sides of the truck now, as Michael reached it, and he was starting to pull open the door, when he saw the unlucky driver inside, all in a slump across his wheel. But the door was jammed. Fire spit at Michael's legs and he tried a third time and a fourth to open it.

There was no time for a fifth try. The blaze was beginning to roar, so in Michael went, through the window of the cab of the truck, and he caught the driver by his big shoulders and started to pull. Lead

and scrap-iron the fellow must be made of, he thought, he was so heavy, and so jammed in there behind the wheel and not able to lift a hand.

From nowhere came a policeman, and saints be praised he was a young man and husky, too, and between him and Michael they got the door open at last, but not until the fire was running like red imps up its side. They dragged the driver out, and the two of them carried him to the curb, and then the policeman yelled, "I'll pull a box. Hold his head up, boy! Loosen his collar!"

When the first engine company—Number 13, it was, from Dearborn street—came rolling, Michael was still kneeling there by the curb, and the driver was opening his eyes. And out in the street that great truckload of cool beer was going to glory.

Michael stood up at last, remembering. Faith, it was nine o'clock, and he no longer was on time! The doctors at the examiner's office had no liking for tardiness and his appointment this day had been for nine! And already, by the clock in the restaurant window, it was three minutes past.

"Here's a doctor," the policeman was panting, "And your name, boy, if you'll give me your name. I'll need you for witness."

But what time did Michael have to go into names? He was running, and looking down with shame at the front of him as he loped along. Who'd ever know now how this blue suit had looked not ten minutes ago, fresh from the iron, and brushed within an inch of its life, or how his shoes had been like a pair of mirrors, and his hands scrubbed clean?

He was panting, and the sweat was running down his collar when he got out of the elevator in the city hall and hurried along the corridor where the politicians were standing in huddles. Pause he did, though, if only for a second, to dust off his knees and give a quick sweep of his shoes with his pocket handkerchief, before he opened the door.

He knew it was hopeless—he'd never make it

And didn't the clock on the wall point to six minutes past, now! Michael looked quickly from it to the cool young red-headed girl with rimless glasses, sitting at ease in front of the telephone desk.

"Michael Costello reporting for physical," he told her, still out of breath, and she looked at him, then, out of her cool eyes, and down at the sheet in front of her.

"You're late," she charged. "Take a chair." She checked off his name on the appointment sheet with a blue pencil. "Dr. Cannon will see you in a few minutes."

Dr. Cannon. And that, thank the saints, would be a different examiner than the one

who had refused to pass Michael two weeks ago. He sat down and wiped his sweating dirty hands on the handkerchief, which was none too clean itself, now.

THE office hadn't changed in the two weeks since he was here before, and hadn't he walked out beaten that time! The same clerks were sitting there, solemn and important at their desks under the windows, adding up figures, or doing whatever it was that examiners' clerks do. And on the other side of the room along the wall, firemen were sitting in their best dress uniforms—not the same firemen, of course, but wasn't it true that they looked the same, decorated up with bandages and arms in slings and one with a crutch leaning beside him? Men hurt on duty they were, coming in for a checkup to see how soon they could return to work.

Michael wiped his face again. It was eleven long minutes before the girl spoke his name; offhand, too, as if she didn't really care how splendid the name Costello was; and he got up and walked with a sudden stiff feeling in his knees to an open door.

It was the same kind of office he had been examined in two weeks before, with a plain desk by the wall, with an instrument of some kind on it, and in the corner a scale and beside it a measuring bar. And at the end of the desk sat a youngish man with a reflector stuck up over one eye and the prongs of a stethescope around his neck, with its small black bell dangling in front of him against his white shirt.

Serious looking he was, but not tough, Michael thought, and he remembered the doctor who had turned him down. Tough as spikes that one had been, with his veins full to overflowing with ice water.

"I'm Dr. Cannon," this young man said, and Michael, observing his small black mustache, couldn't help thinking how much trouble he must have gone to, raising it. "You'll strip down to your waist, please."

He looked at Michael, at his dirty hands and his soiled knees and the dust on his coat, and then up at Michael's sweating face and didn't he grin! Michael flushed.

"You're panting," the doctor said. "Been in an accident?"

"Not me," Michael answered. "There was a bit of a smash up. I give a hand to a cop," he said, and peeled out of his shirt.

"What kind of accident," the doctor was asking, but he saw Michael's chest, then, and didn't wait for an answer. For he was leaning forward, demanding, "Why, what you been doing to yourself, young fellow? What are all these scars?"

"It's just a few burns," Michael said, trying to sound offhand, and was for letting the matter drop right there. The same old burns shouldn't keep a Costello out of drill school a second time! Not if he could help it!

"I'll say it's burns. Turn around." The doctor was standing up now. "Turn around please, Mr.—" He glanced at the paper on the desk. "Michael your name is? Turn around. Let's see your legs."

But already a small low whistle was creeping out from under his bit of a mustache, and with a cool finger he touched the troublesome spot that had taken so long to heal on Michael's shoulder.

"How'd it happen?" he was asking, with a voice full of astonishment. "How'd you get burned so? Why, boy, you're literally toasted, and not so long ago, either."

"Six weeks," Michael argued, trying to make it sound like the devil of a long while. "In June it was sir. I'm all right now, sir."

"How'd it happen?" the doctor repeated.

"In a fire," Michael said. "In a house on fire."

No need to tell this stranger all about Father Maloney, him that was the saint of the 19th ward, and how a gang of politicians had tried to burn him up. The doctor was jabbing him here and there, meanwhile, and saying, "Does this hurt? Does that?"

It was as easy to say no as yes, so Michael said, "No." He said, "It doesn't hurt any more. Not a little bit, it doesn't," and was thinking, "Are they ever going to

be through with their fuss?" when the doctor let loose a short laugh.

"It must hurt some, I know. Can't help it. It's scarcely healed. And you got it in a house on fire, you say? Whose house was that?"

"The parish priest, Father Maloney's house," Michael answered shortly, but still this doctor wasn't satisfied and began heaving questions, till at last Michael had to tell him more about it. About how he'd carried Father Maloney out of his blazing room that night six weeks ago, and down the stairway where the blaze was roaring—Only he skipped most of the story, even so.

THE doctor let loose another whistle, saying; "Oh, I remember it now. So you're the lad that saved the old priest's life! Well, well. Went through solid fire, lugging him out, didn't you?"

"It was nothing."

"Oh, the papers had it all. I remember. Quite a job you did."

"It was nothing," Michael repeated. "Wasn't anybody else to give a hand."

"You sure gave a large hand, from the looks of you now," the doctor exclaimed. "But it's healing nicely. Very nicely indeed. I suppose they used the new tannic-acid spray-treatment on you. Oh, it's fine stuff for burns! Too bad we didn't know about it years ago. But if you'll tell me why anybody, just having gone through that, wants now to get into the fire department—"

"I'm a Costello," Michael said. "The Costello's always are—"

"Firemen?" The doctor laughed. "Well, if it's in your blood! Open your mouth please." He slid down the reflector above his eye.

When he had done with poking and prodding, after a bit, he said, "In a couple of more weeks, I'd say you'd be okay."

Michael broke in, objecting, "But that's what the other doctor said two weeks ago! A couple more weeks! Would you go putting a man off forever? I can't wait any longer, what with the new drill school starting, sir, and no other till the first of the year! I'm fit as I'll ever be."

"What other doctor?" this one asked. "Oh, I see. You've been down here before. This is your second attempt. Just a minute, then, I'll look up your other record." Back in a moment he came, with his hand full of papers, and he sat himself down on the edge of the desk and he read them very carefully, and coughed little confidential coughs to himself as he did read.

At last, he let drop the papers and said, "You're pretty anxious."

"And I am that, sir!" Michael said.

"And school starts next Monday? Four days from now? Um. I'm warning you, though. Drill school will be too much for you, after the dose you've just had. Entirely too much. Might put a strain on your heart. It's tough enough, that school is, on a husky chap. Oh, I know, you usually are husky. But you have to work in a smoke chamber, among other things. In a heat chamber. Don't know whether right now you can stand it."

Michael set his teeth together. "I've *got* to get in now," he said.

Faith, wasn't the uncle he lived with needing the very bed he slept in? Wasn't it time, the neighbors said, that he settle down steady and had a business for himself and kept himself off the streets? Hadn't his father been at it, copying the good grandfather, as soon as ever he could, too? "You'll sign the papers?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'll sign them," the doctor agreed, "if that's any satisfaction to you." He grinned, and Michael liked it, but immediately he looked as if he felt sorry for him, too, and Michael didn't like that. "I'll have to warn you, though," the doctor said. "It isn't a chance in the world you have to get through the school."

II

THE fire-department drill school was housed in what once had been a public schoolhouse, an old red-brick building, close to the Loop, on the near West Side.

Often enough, Michael Costello had passed it, going to and from his home there in the 19th ward, and every time, in a hurry or not, he must stop and look up at the drill tower in the yard, with envious eyes.

Firemen he'd see, doing their gyrations on that tower, or upon the high wing of an eighty-five foot aerial ladder, or lugging hose, or gripping the sills with their pompier hooks as they went aloft. Always in those days he had thought, "And sometimes it'll be Captain Jim Costello's son, Michael, swinging to that ladder there, hauling that hose!"

And here he was now, tramping up the front steps, with his straw suitcase in his hand. And here he was, pushing open the front door. And here he was, standing inside, in all the noise and confusion, with men hurrying this way and that and clumping their heavy shoes, and somewhere a doleful sort of voice yelling for Recruit Smith to report right away to the office.

"Straight ahead you go," a young fellow was good enough to tell Michael, "and first door to your left. You register there."

So Michael walked toward the door, keeping his knees firm, for faith, he'd let nobody on earth get a small glimpse of the way he was feeling, not entirely at ease.

Down the wide stairway at the rear of the corridor flowed the sound of voices from above, like a waterfall, and men were going up and going down the stairs. Michael gave them a glance and hurried into the room on his left.

So he was here at last, was he?

Inside the room, a temporary desk had been set up for this first day of school, and sitting behind it, and behind the papers stacked up on it, were two young firemen in uniform. One of them was talking to the other out of the side of his mouth, and at sight of him Michael, who was all set to like everyone here, stopped. For the fellow was looking up, and his eyes were mean eyes, and there was no mistake about it.

"Got your orders with you?" he asked Michael, still off the edge of his mouth. "Let's see 'em, then. Costello, eh?"

The other fireman said, "Look here, Jennings, I can't get this requisition figured out."

"I'll tend it later," Jennings answered, and again he looked at Michael. "Nineteenth ward, eh? I'm from there, too. Name's Jennings. Fireman second class. I suppose you know Dave Boyle?"

Michael nodded, but kept his tongue behind his teeth.

So the name of Boyle came out here, too, first breath. It seemed you couldn't live without hearing it. And if there was one man in the world he held no relish for, it was this same Dave Boyle. Not that there wasn't power in the man! By the saints, he was all power and wickedness, and his heart—wasn't it carved out of solid ice?

No matter where you went or what you did, you must ask permission of Dave Boyle, if you lived in the 19th ward.

If you were wise, that is. And he, Michael Costello, had never been wise. Hadn't all the close scrapes he'd ever had in his life so far been simply because he would have none of Boyle and the crooked likes of him?

If he'd knuckled under to Boyle in the first place and done as he'd ordered, there'd have been no fire in Father Maloney's house. Except that Maloney, being the saint he was, would have none of this smooth ruffian either. And would he stop his good work, trying to clean up the wickedness in the neighborhood? Not Father Maloney!

So his house burned in the night. . . .

"Dave's a great guy," this fireman, Jennings, was saying now. "A fine friend to have, for any young fireman. Why, do you know, Costello, he's responsible for more promotions than any man in politics. Not only this department—all of them. A cop can't lift his left foot, without Boyle's permission. And in every office in the city hall, do they listen when Boyle speaks? I'll tell you they do!"

"That's what I've heard," Michael ad-

mitted, and tried to stand square on his feet.

"So it's lucky you are, young fellow, coming from Dave's ward, and having him behind you. You'll be luckier still when time for promotions come around." And before Michael could say that Dave Boyle was not behind him, that he'd have no need for the likes of him when promotions came 'round, here the fireman was, handing him a slip of paper and sending him off, saying, "Your bunk number. Go to third floor and ask the man at the door to show you where you sleep."

A GREAT broad room it was, on the third floor, with windows around three sides of it, and up and down it long rows of cots from wall to wall. A fellow never would be lonely here, Michael was thinking quickly, for even so early in the first day, a full half of the cots already had been assigned, and the young men, sitting on them with their gear piled up at their feet, certainly looked as uneasy as he was feeling and like himself were trying not to show it.

He found his own cot, but no sooner was he there than somebody shouted, "Attention, men," and Michael dropped his straw bag and turned around.

Two officers had halted in the door and were looking in. One of them was short and old, with a rim of white hair sticking out under his cap, and a splash of white mustache across his red face. That would be Deputy-marshal Joe Carrigan, Michael knew, the drillmaster himself. Quite a name, this Carrigan had, for taking recruits apart and tying them in knots and making them wish they'd stayed at their trade of driving a grocery truck.

Coming in now he was, walking fast, and not so much as the trace of a smile on that red face of his. His cap was tilted a little to one side, and he came forward with his knuckles turned in, as if he might be on the lookout for a fight to begin with. The man behind him was taller and younger, a blond giant of an officer, and as he approached, Michael could see that he wore the double bugles of a captain on his uniform cap and shoulder lapels.

A dark recruit with curly ringlets and a stub nose had the cot second but one from Michael's, and here the chief stopped.

"Heels together," he roared. "Stand up with your heels together!" He had a rumbling voice that seemed to spill out of the bottom of his chest. "Your name?"

"Tony Cappeli," the recruit replied, and fidgetted.

"You'll soon learn to say sir," the chief announced, and came on to the next bunk, which was still empty. "And your name?" he shouted across it at Michael.

"Costello, sir," Michael shouted back.

"It's a good fireproof name," the chief said and nodded once, shortly, as if the sound of it satisfied him. "See you keep it that way."

But the captain had stepped forward. "Michael Costello?" he asked, and glanced at a list in his hand.

"Right, sir," Michael said.

"It's the lad we got the report on, from the examiner," the captain spoke quietly to the chief. "The one with the burns."

Chief Carrigan growled something in his chest, and walked on past, booming, "And you, now, what's your name?"

A voice behind Michael answered, with more than a trace of impudence, "My name is Patrick Breen."

MICHAEL swung around in astonishment. Sure enough, standing there big as life by the bunk behind him, was none other than his old neighbor, Paddy Breen. They had been boys together, in that dirty and wicked section of the old 19th ward known as "The Valley," and for weeks now, months, there had been enmity between them.

It had been Paddy who got Michael into his first miserable scrape, by inviting him into Mother Holligan's blind pig, to sit with him, while he drank, well knowing at the time that the police were chasing him, and his pal, Tony De Louis, with him. It was Paddy who tried to get Michael to swear to a false alibi for him that night

when the police took all three of them over to the Maxwell Street station house, and charged Michael with their crime. And it was Paddy who got everything fixed for all of them, guilty and innocent, because, as it turned out, he was politician Dave Boyle's own nephew.

Michael stared at him now, standing there with that impudent look spread all over the face of him, and his thin lips smiling a bit, and his bold eyes saying, "Be blowed to you now, if you are Chief Carrigan! It's Dave Boyle got me this job and Dave Boyle will keep me here!"

"Would it hurt your feelings, you upstart, to say sir?" the chief was asking.

"No," Paddy said.

"Then say it!" Carrigan yelled.

"Sir," Paddy answered.

"Where you from?"

"Nineteenth, sir," Paddy answered, not troubling to look respectful, even yet.

"Nineteenth what?"

"Ward," Paddy replied.

"Hereafter you'll belong to no ward!" the chief shouted. "It's divisions and battalions and companies in the fire business. Not wards! It's for politicians and the likes of them that wards were made for, not for us."

The chief went on, moving up and down between the lines of bunks, looking over the recruits—an even hundred there would be when all were there—stopping now and again to ask a question or rid himself of some good advice. He seemed little pleased at what he saw and heard, for he kept barking and grumbling the whole way through. The captain who followed him was named Jimmy O'Day, Michael discovered, and he remembered reading about him in the newspapers last year when he pompiered up the side of a burning old loft on Monroe street, with a coil of line on his shoulder and lowered three girls to safety from a fifth floor window. "Climbing Jimmy" the papers dubbed him after that.

When they had gone and talk began to buzz again through the room, Paddy Breen stepped over to Michael's cot.

"So you did get in, after all," he said, grinning.

"I did that," Michael nodded. "I had no trouble." He wondered how anyone as pasty-faced as Paddy had got by the doctors. How anyone with a record like Paddy's could go anywhere, except to jail.

"Well, there's lots more starts drill school than gets jobs at the end of it," Paddy was saying. "If only you'd listen to my good advice—"

"I'll thank you to keep your advice to yourself," Michael said, feeling his face getting hot. "I've heard your advice before this."

"Very good," Paddy answered, "but don't say I didn't give you fair warning. It's not too late, yet."

Michael turned his back on him and set about stowing his gear underneath the narrow bunk. He'd got along so far without knuckling under to any crooked policeman. He'd continue to get along. There'd be no trouble come out of minding his own business, he decided—but he had no way of knowing just then, of course, what would be happening to him a week from next Saturday night.

III

THE doctor in the examining office had been right. A job and a half this drill school was, a stout man's job and a half. From seven in the morning till late at night, six days a week, drills followed drills, and study halls were squeezed in between them, with more to them than any one recruit's head might rightly be expected to cram, what with hydraulics, and problems of friction loss in Siamese hose lines, and what extra pressure you needed to boost water up each ten-foot floor, and what your pitot gauge ought to show to get an effective stream in a third story window with six sections of hose and a five-eighths tip.

This and a lot more, till Michael Costello wondered: Did Captain Jim, and his father before him, old Hell-snorting Patrick, have to learn all this in their time.

before they earned the name of fireman?

Chief Carrigan was a fireman himself, Michael had to admit, even if the old man did seem to like the sound of his own big voice.

All day and all evening he stormed about, so that it was a blessed pleasure to see him tramp out of the building at last and go home to his bed. Captain O'Day said little, but he had a way of getting around and helping a fellow at just the right minute with a problem that was for tying itself into knots.

Even so, on the second Saturday night, after the week-long grind, word came up from the office at six o'clock that all who wished could take the evening off. Michael got out of dungarees and into his civilian clothes and set off at once for Halsted Street. Certainly Father Maloney, who had got him the chance to go into this job, would want to hear first hand how he was faring.

A hot night it was, with the pavements warm even through shoe leather, and the crowds of men in shirtsleeves outside the Star and Garter Theater, and the pawnshops along South Halsted looking hot and dusty through their dirty windows and heavy iron screens.

Music of cymballa and pot-bellied fiddles floated stickily out of the Greek coffee shops, where old men with fierce mustaches sat with their hats on at the small round tables, drinking *mastika* and *resinatta* and smoking their gurgling *hookas,* with the rose-water in their bows.

Through open doors, Michael could see the fat Turkish dancing girls throwing their big hips about, on the small untidy platforms at the far end of smoky rooms. He could hear their heavy shoes slapping down on the loose boards, and the wailing of the musicians' instruments and the guttural mumble of talk.

In one coffee house, a waiter in a dirty apron was for having a fight with two fat customers and the three of them were yelling at one another. Michael paused there, hoping for a bit of action, and as he hesitated, looking in, he felt the touch of a hand on his arm, and he swung around.

"Hello, Mike," a voice said, and he was looking into the grinning face of Paddy Breen. "Let's step inside for a small drink of the heathen stuff."

"I'll be getting on," Michael answered, and started away. Wasn't this just the way Paddy had stopped him, that other time, and hadn't it ended badly? He'd get along very nicely without the likes of him tonight. But Paddy wasn't to be put off easily, and he insisted.

"No," Michael refused at last. "I'll not go in with you."

"I'll walk beside you, then," Paddy volunteered. "I've some things I got to say to you, and I might as well say them walking, since you have no thirst. One is, you've got to use sense, Mike, or else—"

"Or else, what?"

"Or else there's no telling how many jams you'll get in. My uncle don't like it, the way you didn't play ball—"

"To hell with your uncle," Michael flared. "I've got on so far without Dave Boyle!"

"To hell with him, eh?" Breen halted, angry, too. "Very good. You make your bed, eh? All right, lie in it."

HE TURNED back and Michael stuck his hands into his pants' pockets and watched him go and hoped that it would be the last of him he'd see till drill school started again Monday morning. A gipsy cried from a hole-in-the-wall, "Your fortune, mister?" but Michael passed on without turning his head.

Not till he got to the corner of Harrison Street, where Blue Island Avenue juts off to the southwest, did he tarry even for a moment. A Greek orchestra was playing on the sidewalk in front of the Athens bookshop; a man was hawking sticky candy out of a tray.

There was a crowd on the corner, and suddenly from its midst came the sharp ringing of a bell. The crowd broke up at once, and Michael could see that a fire alarm box had been pulled there, so

dodging a street car he ran toward it, across the street.

The quarters of Engine 7 were a scant half block away. It would be here in a moment he knew, and he shouted at one of the loungers, "Where's the fire?"

The fellow did not answer, but only turned his back and walked away slowly and at the same time Michael heard the siren of Engine 7's new pumper roll into the street. He glanced at the building fronts, at upper windows and roof line, on all the five corners there, but he saw neither smoke nor flame.

A policeman was running south along Halsted Street toward the alarm box, which had ceased ringing now. He was a big man with a sizable waistline, and he was panting.

"Where is it?" he yelled. "Where's the fire at?"

The pumper rumbled to a halt and its captain and two pipemen charged forward, demanding, too, where the fire was.

A short man with no front teeth grinned and walked toward them. "Better ask *him*," he said, and still grinning, he pointed at Michael, and added, "It was him that pulled the box."

Then it was the policeman grabbed Michael's arm, and a tug he gave it, too.

"You? You done it? Where's the fire at, then? Oh, it's a false alarm, is it? You the guy that's been pulling 'em all over the neighborhood this summer? Like to see the red wagons run, eh? Well, come along with me and I'll give you something to look at!"

Michael swung around, trying to pull away, and was only in time to see the short toothless man climbing into a car that drew up to the curb. It hurried off at once, and Michael yelled, "Get that man, get him!"

"What's he got to do with it?" the officer demanded, shaking Michael. "It was you pulled the box."

At the same instant Paddy Breen shouldered his way through the crowd.

"What's up?" he wanted to know, and there was a grin on his face, too. Michael did not answer. He knew what was up, and no mistake. Dave Boyle and his nephew Paddy were making it clear who ran this end of town.

The policeman said to Michael: "Come on to the call box, smart guy. I'll send for the wagon. You can amuse yourself this night in the station house."

THE captain at the Maxwell Street station listened to Michael's story and when it was done, he asked the policeman, "Where's the complainant at?"

"Got away in the crowd, sir," the officer said.

"And you took his word for it? Have I got to send a governess out with the likes of you, to see you don't pull boners every night of the week? So you let the complainant get away in the crowd! I'm not saying this young squirt didn't send in the alarm, but how can I prove that he did? You're a shame to your mother's memory, Officer Dennis, you are! Now get out!"

He looked hard at Michael, out of eyes like a pair of small marbles.

"I've got half a notion for to believe you," he admitted. "It'd be like Paddy Breen, thinkin' to get a boy into trouble. Ah, how I'd like to get a charge against that scoundrel that would stick! Just once!" He rubbed his hands together contemplating that pleasant thought, and added: "Or get him alone some night in a dark, dark alley. Just him and me nightstick and me. You can go now, and walk careful."

Michael walked careful. Father Maloney, when he heard the story later that night, said the devil must be lonesome for Boyle and Breen, having to wait so long for his own blood brothers.

"But keep your chin up," he added. "Don't let them ply you with discouragement. You'll come out on top, but it may take a bit of a tussle to get there. Keep your chin up."

Since there was no drill school on Sunday, Michael saw no more of Paddy Breen till Monday morning. He walked into the

building then and up to his bunk, waiting for the starting bell to ring, and sat down without looking toward Breen's bed.

But before the bell rang, Captain O'Day ran into the bunk room in a lather of a hurry, and straight toward Michael he came with a scowl on his face. Even so Michael was standing with his heels together when the Captain got there and he lifted his right hand nimbly in his newly learned salute.

"Report to the office at once, Costello," O'Day said, and without another word turned himself quickly around and walked away. Michael heard a small laugh coming from the direction of Paddy Breen's bunk, but he didn't give the politician's nephew the satisfaction of acknowledging it.

Chief Carrigan was sitting at his desk, and when Michael stepped in, saluting again, the old man yelled, "What's this I hear first thing this morning about you pulling a false alarm Saturday night?"

He listened calmly enough, though, to the story Michael had to tell, and all the time his pair of white mustaches kept working up and down like the wings of a white gull across his face, that now as always was red as sunset. When Michael had done he asked in a quieter tone, "And you did not pull the box?"

"No, sir," Michael answered bluntly. "I did not."

"And who was this lad you say you suspect set the cops on you?"

"I'd rather not mention his name," Michael replied.

"Not mention it?" the chief let out a roar. "Rather not mention it?"

"I'll settle it in my own way, sir."

Carrigan opened his big mouth to yell again, but he stopped himself short in the middle of it. "Oh, very good, then," he agreed with a nod. "It's hard to remember I was young myself once. But if what you tell me is the truth, Costello, and you don't settle it off duty, that is—you're beneath being spit upon!"

He let Michael go at that, and Captain O'Day, waiting in the corridor, asked, "By the way, Costello, I hear you're old Jim Costello's boy."

"I am that, sir, God rest his soul!" said Michael, giving quick brace to his shoulders.

"That's fine." O'Day nodded and looked Michael over from head to foot. "That's fine, and I wish you luck. I was recruit on Engine 32, and just two weeks in the business, too, when your old man was killed. A fine officer he was, Michael, and a great loss to the fire business. In time he'd have been chief of department, he would."

"That's what I've heard tell," Michael said. "That's why—" He stopped, feeling his ears go red. For sure, it was too early, still, to go boasting about what he intended to do, how he wanted to go on and up in this fire business, until some day, by glory, he'd be chief of department himself!

O'Day told him, "Take care of yourself, then," as if he knew already what Michael was hoping, and away he walked.

By the time Michael got back to the bunk room, the starting bell had rung and the recruits were lining up and shouting, "Here" in answer to their names. Michael slipped into his place in line and kept his eyes off Paddy Breen.

"First platoon to the smoke-house," Fireman Jennings, who had charge of marching the recruits here and there, was saying, "Second platoon to yard for instruction in knot-tying."

MICHAEL was a member of the first platoon and this smoke house was one of the tests he'd been worrying himself about, ever since the morning young Dr. Cannon had warned him of it. Down in the rear of the school was a windowless brick-building with a double door and into it, six at a time, with Captain O'Day to instruct them, the recruits must go.

Full of smoke as Hell's attic it was, and they strapped on their masks with the heavy cannisters banging against their chests, made sure that the flutter valves were working right, and plowed into it.

Inside they labored, moving a pile of lumber from one side of the room to the other, then moving it back again while O'Day with his own mask on stood watching them. A light flashed at last, just as Michael's lungs were about to burst and sweat was beginning to dim his glass eyepieces.

Then the door opened and out they went into the blessed fresh air and were grateful to be out, too.

In spite of himself Michael was panting as he slipped off his mask and his eyes were watering so that he could see very poorly indeed, but when Captain O'Day asked how the six were feeling, he was first to answer, "Feel fine, sir. I could do it again."

Across the captain's face flew a dark little shadow and he said, "You'll have to, if you stay in the fire business. And tougher than that it will be, and hotter and longer, make no mistake. Next six men ready?"

Michael got through the morning, thinking what a fine change it would be to go tying knots in the shade of the building that afternoon, while the other platoon tasted smoke. But as it turned out, he was to tie no knots.

For when noon dinner was over, and the men had a quarter hour rest period, it was Paddy Breen standing over Michael's bunk, grinning down at him. "It's pale you are," he was saying. "Maybe the smoke was too much for you, Costello. If I was you, I'd see a doctor."

"And if I was *you*," Michael countered, sitting up straight, "I'd get clear of here before it's you needing a couple of doctors!"

"And from what *I* hear, you was almost needing a couple of bondsmen Saturday night, too!" Breen was saying.

Michael yelled, "Twice now you've set the police on me, Paddy Breen, and twice I beat it!"

So a word led to another, and another to a bit of swearing, and then Michael was standing up on his two feet, and Paddy was making some underhanded remark beneath his breath. And then Michael's fist was doubling up, and then it was shooting out straight from his shoulder, and then, again, it was feeling fine, it was, against Paddy Breen's jaw.

And Paddy was swinging back, and Michael was taking a belt on his own jaw, and giving one and taking one, and hollering at the top of his lungs. And then Paddy was down once, then Michael was down, and then Paddy again.

But even so it took less time than nothing before a big strong voice was yelling and a pair of big strong hands was tearing the two of them apart.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" the voice was yelling. "Will you cut it out, gentlemen, or do I have to belt the both of you on the head?"

AND there stood old Chief Carrigan, with a scowl on his red face that would have kindled a roof-fire if the wind was right, and he was swearing at them both without stopping for breath between words, and a master he was at proving himself full of unkind things to say.

It wasn't a minute before Michael found himself marching out of the room, and Paddy beside him, and Carrigan behind, tramping down the stair.

In the chief's private office, Carrigan stood them both up before his desk, and he called Captain O'Day in, and they went at the matter from start to finish.

"Sure, I hit him first, sir," Michael admitted, and in his voice was no trace of shame. "He was for telling me I looked pale, and was needing a doctor, after a taste of smoke—"

"It's a lie!" Paddy charged, and Captain O'Day stepped in between the two, quickly, showing how fast he could think.

An hour it required to call each other liars of all degrees and kinds, and when they were done, Chief Carrigan said, "I'll make my decision at once. Call in the recruits, captain. Have them form in the bunk room. I'll show them whether they can fight in the school, that I will, at once!"

He made Michael face the class, with Paddy facing it, too, a little way off, and the school had to stand listening. It was quite a speech the chief made, for all its shortness.

"So as to you, Recruit Breen," he finished. "You are hereby dismissed from the school."

"Oh," Breen retorted arrogantly, "you don't dare do that, sir."

"You'd be surprised what I darst do," the chief said, holding tight to himself, "astonished and surprised. You've been a trouble-maker from the start, Breen. There's an even dozen black marks to your name already."

Paddy tried to speak and Carrigan bellowed: "Be silent! Twice you've been absent without leave—that we've caught you at!" He silenced Paddy again. "Twice drinking in quarters! Late for drill three times more. Five times disrespectful to your superior officers. Not to mention blathering all over the lot whose nephew you are!"

He paused, looking hard and fierce, and then asked: "Do I make myself perfectly clear, Breen? You are hereby dismissed from the fire department recruit school, according to verbal orders of the commanding officer, dated this day and effective at once, and get out of here!"

Then he turned to Michael.

"It's time you, too, learned a thing or two, Costello. There was provocation, I admit. Great provocation. Why, if he'd said to me, what he— But never mind that. Great provocation it was.

"Even so, Costello, you'll learn to control yourself and your knuckles in particular whilst you're on duty, or out you go from the fire business. Out you go on your ear! Therefore, though I find you guilty now of fighting, understand, and disturbing the peace, to the prejudice of good order and discipline, and conduct unbecoming, and all the other things the rule book has thought up—which I will put in a written order when I get to my desk—I place you on probation the rest of the term."

Paddy Breen let out a laugh, then, and was for making some kind of remark, but he stopped it when Carrigan went swinging around at him, with his fists turned in, and his nose snorting so loud it would be no surprise to see brimstone shooting out of it.

"Take your gear with you, Breen," he said, making his voice calm. "The rest of you get to work."

IV

THE two months' term was more than half over before the recruits were fit, in the seasoned opinion of Chief Carrigan, to start their monkey-climbing up the smooth outside of the drill tower walls. It was a special and devilish contraption, this drill tower, built like a lighthouse, six stories in the air, enclosed in slippery sheet iron, with windows and cornices, and on one side a slick bare wall.

Every time Michael Costello let himself have a look at it, he must steady his knees under him, right from the start. For it wasn't till he got close to it the first day that he had a true notion how high it was, extending half way up to the blessed heaven.

Sure, he'd learned to climb ladders tilted against it, all right, the second week of school; and each day for an hour all recruits must go aloft on them. They started with little single-span eighteen-footers; from them went to thirty-foot extensions, and from thirty- to forty-foot Bangors, and from them to the aerials.

Learned to climb, Michael had, all the kinds of ladders under the sun, and at all the crazy angles any madman might invent, and learned how to go through a nest of electric wires without contact, and how to lug up hose in a bun, and how to drag a man out of a window, and throw him over a shoulder, and get safely to the ground.

Now, it was one thing to have a good solid ladder under one to play ape upon, and a couple of other things to have nothing at all but space and only the tower to hold, to keep from falling.

It was this that worried Michael, for he knew that before he was through, one of these days, he'd be hearing the order to get out the pompiers. It came on a Friday morning, while the recruits were doing their evolutions on an eighty-five foot aerial that had come rumbling into the schoolyard at breakfast time.

Michael had gone up it all right, while Captain O'Day held the stop watch on him, eighty-five feet in the air, in ninety-eight seconds, which was a good enough score in any man's fire department. But he'd been slower than that, quite naturally, when it came to going aloft with a section of hose bunned up on a roll on his shoulder. When he got to the top at last, he saw O'Day glance down at the stop watch and give a small shake to his head.

"Almost two minutes, Costello," he remarked, when Michael got back to the ground and stood panting in front of him. "You'll do better with practice, you will."

Chief Carrigan, standing off at the other side of the yard, said nothing at all, for he hated to give out more than one handful of praise or blame in any long month, except in matters of discipline, and Michael already had heard much more than his share.

He was standing on the ground when Carrigan walked closer and Michael heard him telling O'Day: "Pompiers it will be Monday morning, captain. Send out to the shop for an extry dozen of them."

THIS was the word Michael had been waiting for, and waiting uneasily. Now he stood there on the ground, with his heart trying to tear through his ribs, what with the exertion of carrying aloft the hose, and heard O'Day answering, "Sure, sir. They'll be here."

This pompier drill was the thing that would make or break any recruit, trying to get into the fire business. A single long staff of wood, the pompier was, with short iron foot rests stuck through it every fourteen inches, and at its upper end a great gooseneck hook.

Harmless enough to look at, it was, but this fearful business of reaching up with the hook and catching it on some flimsy window frame and trusting your neck to it, swaying with the wind and climbing, then heaving it up again, and again climbing— Faith, the thought of it was enough to turn a man's stomach.

Two schools of belief there were, Michael knew, about these pompiers, in this and every other fire department. Fine exercise they gave, some firemen admitted, but why risk the lives of men, monkey-drilling high in the air on sticks of wood, when not once in a million times were they needed at fires?

The answer to that was simple enough. That millionth time, sure, and wasn't it sweet for a fireman to know how to pompier when that time rolled 'round, with people screaming for rescue in some high smoky window, and not a ladder of any kind able to reach close to them!

This Saturday evening was free again, and when Michael left the school grounds, he was thinking that Monday would be a hard day and no mistake there. Captain O'Day had called all the recruits in just before supper and warned them before they started out.

"You'll be in need of all your faculties Monday, men," he had said. "So I advise you to tread very easy this night and all day the Sabbath, too. It's mighty unpleasant, a hangover is, when you're pompiering up a wall!"

Michael went back to the house of his crusty uncle in the Valley district, and there the old man was waiting with news.

"Now I hear you're thrown out of the fire department business," he said.

"It's a lie," Michael answered. "And where did you hear it?"

"From your friend Paddy Breen," the uncle replied.

"It's Paddy is out of the fire business," Michael told him, "and since when have you been chinning with the likes of him?"

"On the street I met the pup," Michael's uncle explained. "He was askin', was you home from the drill school yet, he was. I told him not yet, you wasn't, and he give

me a laugh at that, he did, and said you would be soon enough."

"He's a liar, I tell you, by the book and the clock," Michael said, warming up. "And it's himself that's thrown out of the business for good—"

"It's himself that's starting up in some good business his uncle's a-giving him," the uncle said, "and you it is better be doing the same. Which reminds me. A gentleman was here lookin' for you these two days ago. On very special business he wanted to speak to you. Your old boss it was, from the I. C. freighthouse."

"What's he want?" Michael asked, with an uneasy feeling.

"He wants for you to come back to work for him, that's what he wants. What's the use riskin' any fine young man's neck on the fire department, he says, when there's a nice job open for him, right there on the freighthouse floor. Get Michael out of these silly ideas, he says, and the job will be waitin' Monday mornin'. With a little more money than afore on Saturday nights, too, he says."

"I don't want it," Michael answered.

"There's plenty of difference, nephew," said the uncle, pointing with the bit of his pipe, "between fallin' off a wall, and leavin' a bit of a parcel or box fall on your toes in a freighthouse."

"There's that," Michael agreed. "And it's the walls I'm going to fall off, if any. I'm going into the fire business. I'm Jim Costello's son, I am, as you ought to know, uncle—and I'll be a fireman, too."

SO MONDAY morning, when the bell rang, and Michael marched out to the drill tower with the rest of the recruits, there were the pompiers, all standing in a row along the base of the wall. Chief Carrigan was there, and Captain O'Day, and the fireman named Jennings, and the chief relieved himself of a short speech before the drill began.

"You've got through the easy work," he was saying, and Michael pulled his eyes back from the pompiers to the chief's red face with the white mustache across it. "We're going to pompier today, and them that can't pompier, well, it's too bad for them, and that's all there is to it. Are you ready, captain?"

"Ready," said Captain O'Day.

"Then go to it," the chief said, and walked back a pace, and sat down on a drill hydrant, and took off his cap and wiped his forehead, for the morning had turned uncommonly hot.

Fireman Jennings picked up a pompier and tested the hook at its end and looked over the underside of the iron gooseneck carefully.

"First you make sure there's plenty of grip on the steel teeth, here," he pointed, "or else there's no telling how it might slip. And now you reach up with it and push it through a window, so. If there's glass in the window, you duck your head down, so the spread of your helmet saves you from falling glass."

He lifted the pompier over his head and stuck it through one of the empty windows on the drill tower wall and pulled down on it, testing to make sure it had caught hold. Then up he went, hand over hand and foot over foot till he got to the window. And there he threw one leg over the sill and gripped with his knees and lifted the staff again.

So he went, to the top of the tower, and it looked easy enough to a young fellow standing safe on the ground, watching him. But it wouldn't be easy—Michael had sense enough for that.

When Jennings got down, by the stairway on the inside of the tower, he said, "First platoon line up. First six men. You, Tony Cappeli—you, Joynt, Greenbaum, Murphy, Flynn, and Costello. That's enough, now. Grab your pompiers, and up you go."

Cappelli went first, and who was he, to deny that man was descended from the apes, for he was an ape himself, going up that wall. Then the next two recruits went up together, and Michael stiffened his knees, watching them, and realized that a brisk little breeze had blown up these past few minutes.

It was swaying the pompiers against the side of the wall, and he could see Greenbaum gripping the staff in tight fingers, and closing his eyes part of the time.

"Keep 'em open!" the captain yelled. "Keep your eyes open, Greenbaum!"

Not till Recruit Flynn had passed the second floor, did Jennings say, "And you, now, Costello," and he gave Michael that one-sided crooked grin of his at the same time, almost as if wishing he'd fail.

MICHAEL walked forward, stiff in the knees, and picked up the long pole, and he looked at the teeth along the underside of the gooseneck, and they were sharp enough. He reached upward, lifting the staff overhead, just as Jennings had done, and shoved the hook through the window, caught it on the sill and pulled down hard.

It held, all right, so he lifted his left foot and started to climb. But then a gust of wind came whooping along and it swayed him a little, back and forth, so he gripped tighter and hung there a moment, with an all-gone feeling in the middle of him, in spite of the fact that he was only ten feet off the ground.

"Keep going there, Costello!" O'Day yelled at him, and Michael climbed again. He got his knee across the sill of the window at last and loosened the gooseneck from its grip, and slowly raised it and pushed it upward to the sill above. He could see Flynn at the third floor already, resting from his climb, and as Michael looked up at him, the wind tugged at his canvas work cap and blew it off.

Flynn reached out quickly to grab for it. And somehow, reaching, he lost his balance. He came like a shot, straight down the wall past Michael's face, and Flynn's own face was twisted with terror as he fell.

He was screaming, one long shrill scream, and the frightening noise of it didn't stop until it ceased very suddenly as he landed on the paved courtyard with a heavy jarring sound.

Men were running toward him. Even Chief Carrigan was off the drill hydrant and loping forward. Flynn had hit with his shoulder, and he turned half over and lay still. A stretcher came from nowhere, and recruits were lifting him gently and putting him on it, and someone was yelling for a doctor, and someone else was running to the telephone.

"This way, men, bring him in," Captain O'Day was saying, and he led those who carried Flynn toward the school building door, with Chief Carrigan following. That left Fireman Jennings in charge of the men in the yard. He lighted a cigarette, looked up at Michael and shouted, "Aloft, you. Go on up and get it done."

Michael realized then that he still was hanging there with the pompier in both his hands. He easied it toward the window above him, that which represented the third floor, and caught it on the sill, and began to climb. But the wind was playing tricks on him. By the time he was half way up, it was swaying him back and forth like a pendulum, so he wrapped both arms around the staff and clung there, trying to get strength back into his knees, while Jennings yelled at him to hurry.

But it was not until he reached the third floor and was starting up to the fourth, and heard the ambulance siren on its way for poor Flynn, that his knees refused to work at all.

He had the hook well caught and one foot stretched out for the iron climbing-bar, when he remembered that Flynn had been hanging right here, in this spot, when he fell.

Michael let his eyes shift to the ground, and before he could raise them, a great giddiness took hold of him, and the tower seemed to sway and the ground tilt up on edge, so he gripped the sill tighter and let go the pole.

"Climb, you!" Jennings was yelling. "Climb, I say!"

But what chance was there for anyone to climb, with the whole world turning over the way it was, and the tower shaking so, trying to throw him off, and the wind blowing in such gusts? So he held on tightly, and he still was holding, he knew not

how many minutes later, when there was Jennings beside him in the window, the man having run up the stair.

It was Jennings who eased him inside, and pried his fingers loose from the frame, and his knees from the sill, and who was leading him down the stair. When he got to the bottom, the ambulance had come and gone, taking Recruit Flynn with it, and Captain O'Day had ridden along.

"Costello failed at third," Jennings was saying to the chief. "He froze to the sill."

The chief didn't answer at once, only stood staring at Michael for a long uneasy minute, and then he said, "Go to your bunk, Costello. I'll be seeing you later."

Miserably, Michael crossed the drill yard and walked into the door of the school. No one need tell him what Carrigan would be saying to him later.

One thing only could he say. The son of old Jim Costello had failed in the fire business.

V

MICHAEL waited an hour, but Chief Carrigan remained in the yard beside the tower, putting the other recruits through their first day of pompier drill. How much longer would he be, Michael wondered? And why should he wait another minute, when there would be only one ending to it all?

He remembered the job that his uncle had talked about Saturday night, the one he could have again in the Illinois Central freight house. It would be open for him this minute, it would. He need only go down to the foreman. . . .

Without so much as waiting to pick up his gear, Michael walked out of the bunkroom. In the doorway he paused for a moment, and turning himself around, took a last long look at the neat rows of cots and the charts tacked up on the wall, and the way the afternoon sun was slanting in through the window panes, making a pattern of warm yellow light along the floor.

Then he hurried down the stair. No one was in the office, but as he reached the front door, who should be coming in but Captain O'Day. Michael saluted, forgetting for this moment, that he no longer intended to be a fireman.

"You look sick, you do," the captain said, his voice a bit troubled.

"I'm not," Michael told him. "I'm leaving, sir."

"Leaving?" O'Day repeated. "And why?"

He listened, while Michael confessed.

"You've no permission to go," the captain said.

"I'm through."

"As faint-hearted as that?" O'Day challenged.

Michael flushed. So it was faint-hearted, was it? When he knew, well enough, what would happen? "It's a rule," he said stubbornly. "Pompier, or else—! The chief himself warned us. . . ."

O'Day pursed his lips. "It's a rule, yes. But there's a second chance, often."

"Not for me."

"It's too hard you're taking it, lad!" O'Day said. "Seeing a man fall your first time up—though he wasn't hurt bad, it turns out—but seeing it happen and yourself perched half way up, why it'd turn the stomach of the chief of department himself, if his dinner wasn't setting right!"

"I can't climb," Michael insisted. "I feel it in my bones. And it's better work in a freight house the rest of my life than disgrace the uniform after I put it on."

"You'll go back to your room and wait till Chief Carrigan comes," O'Day ordered.

"I'll not, begging your pardon, sir," Michael said. "It's through I am, sir, and thank you. There's a job I can have easy if I hurry."

He went out blindly, not turning his shamed head to see the half-smile on O'Day's face. He'd get the job. He'd not go back to his uncle without it. Get the job and pack up his gear afterward.

Fireman Jenning's voice was bawling at some poor soul, there on the drill tower, as Michael walked quickly down the front steps of the school. He could not see the tower from this angle, but the very thought

of it put a kink in his knees. He must hold on his hat when he got to the street, the wind was blowing so.

As he went through the gates, he had another sinking feeling. He, a Costello! A fine son he was now, wasn't he, to have had a father like old Captain Jim! Grandson of the man whose own stout hands had finally ended the Great Fire with dynamite, was he? Beaten he was, and a failure, unable to stand the gaff!

He turned into the cross street, still cursing himself for a fool, and turned again into Madison Street, and started eastward, downtown toward the freight house. Traffic was rolling slowly, packing the dirty pavement from curb to curb and dust was blowing past in gray clouds.

Here was the district of flophouses and cheap hotels, of beds, such as they were, for a dime a night. The district of failures. The thought brought him up short. He refused to let his eyes take in the faces that passed him, hopeless and beaten, just as he was beaten now.

TWO blocks Michael had walked along Madison street, when he heard a shout coming from across the way, and he hesitated for some reason, and turned half around. He saw it then, the dirty brown smoke rolling out of the front of an old four-story building.

A flophouse it was, like its neighbors on both sides, with some sort of drinking place on the first floor, and above it dirty windows looking out with the blank expression of blind men's eyes. Even as he paused, there was a deep grunting sound, from somewhere in the depths of the old brick building, and then the front windows cracked and spilled out on the sidewalk with a tinkling sound.

Smoke rolled after the broken glass, red and brown smoke, with streaks of black, hot smoke with a swift-burning fire behind. In ten seconds at most, and before Michael could move a foot, more glass spilled out, this time from a window on the second floor. Smoke followed it, too, then flame. The whole inside of the place afire.

From nowhere a policeman came running, and he took one look, and charged on toward the corner, where the alarm box stood on its iron post. Traffic was halting. There was a yelling of motor horns, and cars and trucks jammed tighter together, blocking the street. No apparatus could get past them, that was one sure thing!

Michael ducked between them. He was halfway across when he heard another shout. An old man was screaming from an open fourth-story window in the burning building, and smoke poured past his head.

It was somewhere on this street, so many years ago, another Costello had found a building on fire, Michael remembered as he ran. His father, old Jim, had been a lieutenant, then, over on Engine 17 on Lake street, and coming past here on his afternoon off, had discovered the fire and hauled a lame woman out of her bed and to the street.

He'd got his captaincy out of that job of work, had Jim Costello. And here was his son, disgraced already, without so much as ever setting helmet on his head!

"Help!" the old man was screaming. "Help! I'm burning up!"

A fat man bounced out of a small hardware store, second door away, and stood looking up helplessly, with an owlish face. Michael tore past him. The stairs would be somewhere inside this drinking room. But even before he reached what was left of the door, Michael could see that no stair would do any good in this place.

A solid wall of fire stood across the front of it, roaring and blocking the way, and other fire was whooshing upward inside. The poor old man in the fourth story window must wait for ladders, and no mistake there. Michael glanced back at the pavement.

Dust poured into his eyes and wind pelted grit against his teeth.

Men were running about, yelling senselessly at one another, and the trucks still were sounding their horns and not moving a solitary inch.

Ladders? How in the name of all the blessed saints would fire-department lad-

ders find a way to squeeze through that blockade? It would take long, long minutes at the very best— And by that time . . . The old man was screaming again.

He was hanging far out over the sill, and the brown smoke whipping past him moved swiftly, as hot smoke always does. There was fire right close to his feet, and no mistake!

The building was an ancient one, with a cut stone front, and rusty old decorations in sheet-iron over its door, and around each upper window where smoke was pouring now, a row of weather-worn bricks.

A MAN with a pompier now—Michael felt his throat tighten at memory of pompiers. But a man going up that front with a coil of line—Michael was yelling at the fat man in front of the hardware store.

"Rope!" he was demanding. "Give me some rope!"

Hard it was making this stupid fellow understand. So Michael dashed into the store, and opening his pocketknife with his teeth while he jerked the tough line off a reel, he cut a fine long piece and ran out again with it trailing behind him. In less than no time he had it looped as he'd learned at the school, and the loop tossed, fireman fashion, around his shoulder.

The policeman was back, now, shouting, "You can't climb that, boy! You can't climb that! Wait for the fireman— Wait!"

There was less than no time to wait. Michael turned up the collar of his jacket, found foothold on the awning irons, and boosted himself upward.

Of the three windows across the front of the second floor, fire rolled out of two. He chose the other, of course, and gripping its sill, climbed. There was too little room. He must wedge himself tightly between the two sides of it, and ease up gently, one inch at a time, while the wind pushed and pulled at him.

But he got up at last and his fingers, reaching ahead of him, found a worn spot between two stones, and his toe another small crack in the masonry. He could hear the sirens now, coming in from the east and west, but still a long way off.

A small piece of stone pulled away from the top of the window, and he let it drop past him, and in the space it had filled, he found an elegant spot to grip with three fingers.

Men were yelling at him from the sidewalk, and the old man was screaming in a thinner voice, and flame was roaring above and below him, and just beyond the wall. Another eight inches, and a new crack for a toehold; and then seven inches more, and he had the third floor sill in his hand.

There was no fire yet on this third floor. He could see through the dusty window. Smoke, but no fire. It had followed the draft in the stairwell, no doubt, missing this floor by some blessed miracle. With his elbow, he broke the glass. Heat reached out for him.

But he got the sash up at last, and one leg over the sill, and then he was climbing again. The old man leaned down.

"I'll be there," Michael was panting, but the wind gave him a pull, and he must hold on with both hands and both knees, to keep from being blown out across the street. He did let his eyes wander if only for a second and— Glory, that would be a ladder truck, stalled a block away!

"Can't—hold out—" the old man was screaming, and Michael looked up at him. He was six feet away now, no more, and a filthy dirty face the old beggar had, to be sure. "Can't—"

That was all he said and he sort of wilted, and Michael forgot how much windy space lay out there behind him and below, and how poor Flynn looked, too, tumbling from the drill tower not two hours ago. Up he went, with his knees braced, and his fingers clawing brick and stone, and he caught the fourth floor sill —and faith, it was hot.

But not too hot to pull himself up to it. That was fire, all right, just inside, but through it Michael could see the foot of an old iron bed.

"What an elegant place for to fasten my line through," he panted to the old

man, and ducked in, and slid the rope around the bed post, and out again, with the skin on his face crawling. "Now if you leave me loop this—that way—and this—and now, out you go!"

WHAT were they yelling so about in the street, Michael wondered, as he let the old fellow down, hand under hand. And how did the division marshal's red buggy get through all the traffic so fast? And where did that pumper come from, that was hooking up at the corner hydrant now? And what the devil—why who in the world had a face as red as that, with white mustaches across it, if it wasn't Chief Carrigan, pushing through the crowd?

The rope went limp suddenly, and Michael knew that the dirty old beggar had reached the sidewalk at last, and someone jerked the line twice, to make doubly sure, and then a hundred voices were yelling at once, "Come down!"

So Michael made a loop of the rope and slid his own body into it, one leg and one arm, crouching low over the sill and against the hot wall, to keep under the flame. Then gripping the two ends he was, and braking his speed with his elbow as Captain O'Day had taught him, and here he was riding down past blazing windows and here he was bringing up with a bang on the sidewalk.

And this would be the division marshal, saying in a loud voice, "A fine job of work, boy, for a civilian!"

And that would be Chief Carrigan himself, letting a yell out of him, saying, "Civilian, you call him? Civilian? Why, it's one of my own blasted recruits!"

But Michael was walking away. Two hose companies ran past, with their long brass-tipped nozzles, and water was drumming already from a third line, and a policeman was lugging the dirty old beggar through the crowd, and Carrigan's voice was yelling again.

"You, Recruit Costello! Slow down!"

"Here, sir," Michael said, halting.

"I see you're here," Carrigan challenged, with his mustaches working up and down, "and you're supposed to be settin' on your bunk at the school this very minute, you are! I gave you no leave to walk out!"

"I took leave," Michael told him, looking him in the eye. "I'll be no disgrace to my name. If I can't climb—"

The chief let out another roar.

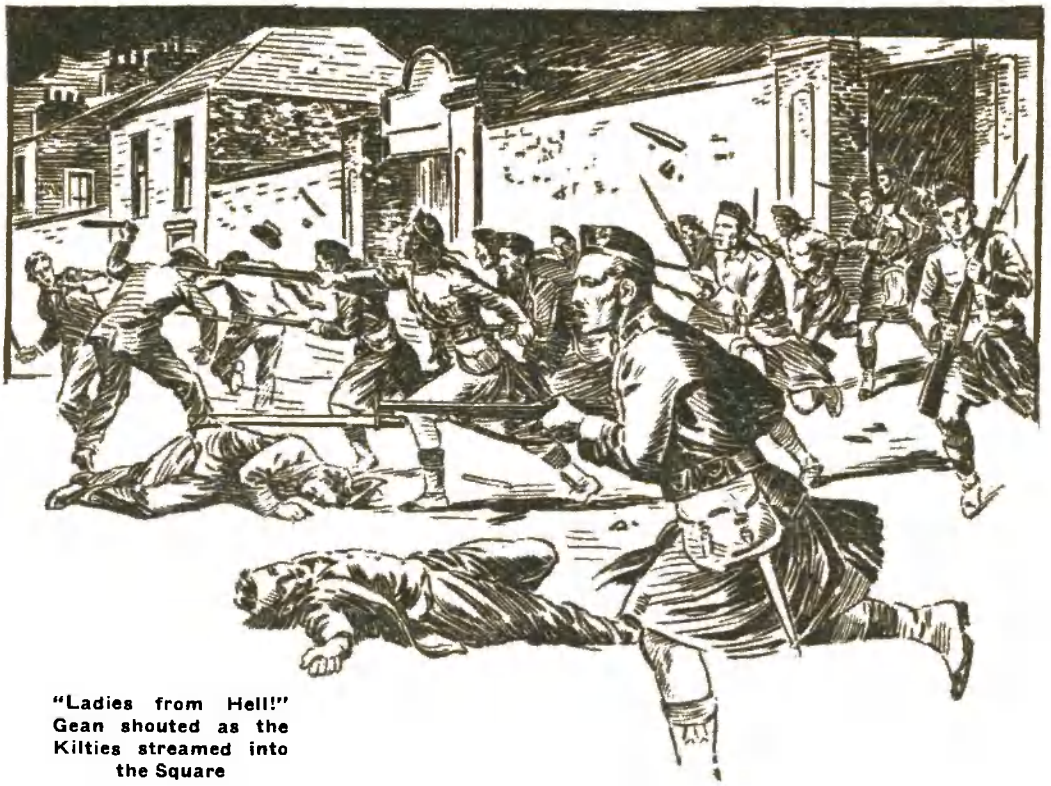
"Can't *what?* Can't climb, you're saying? After this just now? Well maybe, with this much start, I can learn you!"

"You mean—?" Michael began.

"I mean," Carrigan bellowed, "you get back to that drill school now where you belong, or I'll boot you back!"

"Yes, sir," Michael answered.

Further adventures of Michael Costello to appear in Argosy soon



"Ladies from Hell!" Gean shouted as the Kilties streamed into the Square

Rebellion

By HAROLD Q. MASUR

The British had rifles, grenades, tanks and crack troops; but the 'Feiners knew the government's deadliest weapon was the informer. A gripping story of Dublin's blackest days

SEAN O'CASEY'S destination was the innocent-looking bakeshop at 20 Talbot Street. He looked at his wrist watch. Dennis Moylan had said three o'clock. It was almost that now. He hurried his step, pushing through the murky fog that lay chilled and damp over Dublin.

The city was tense under martial law, quiet except for the rumbling of lorries filled with grim Tans, or the measured marching of the regular soldiery.

He slowed up as two peelers in their black belted uniforms passed him. It wouldn't do to look suspicious. His steel-colored eyes narrowed at the sight of them. The Royal Irish Constabulary were even more hateful to Sean than the Tans. They were his own people, sons of Erin, who had sold their black souls to the English for gold.

Nonchalantly, he turned down the steps at Number 20. He entered the bake shop, noting the significant flicker in the eyelids of the burly man behind the counter. The savory smell of hot bread assailed his nostrils as he edged toward the back door and disappeared behind frayed green curtains. A sharp knock, then two in rapid succession. As the door opened a crack, a shaft of light revealed a thin, white face.

"We've been waitin' for ye, Sean, me boy."

Silently, Sean followed him through a narrow passage to an inner room. A heavy door was locked and bolted behind him. Five men, serious, tense, were seated around a gas-lit table.

Sean's teeth flashed a brief smile at the sharp relief he saw in their faces. There wasn't much time for smiling these days. The men were well known to him. Patrick Moore, Tom O'Reilly, Kevin Quinn and Terrence Walshe—all stout patriots. And at their head sat Dennis Moylan, thin, hollow-cheeked, with the deep-set burning eyes of a crusader.

"You're late, Sean. Any trouble?" he asked.

"Didn't ye hear the explosion? Someone threw a bomb into an official's car at the Amiens Street Station. A colonel and two captains were done in. The janizaries threw a cordon around the whole neighborhood and I had the devil's own time gettin' through."

Dennis Moylan said, "I sent the boys out. It'll be terror against terror. If the English think they can beat us into submission, then the past four hundred years haven't taught them much of a lesson."

THERE was silence for a moment. Sean sank into a chair by Dennis' side, looked at him expectantly. Nerves were strung tight, like violin strings. The gaslight flickered nervously as though it too sensed the tension. The others watched, tight-lipped, while Dennis unfolded a small square of paper, read it over to himself, then lit a match and touched it to the note. The flame flared and died, leaving wisps of brittle black soot.

"An order from Cathal Brugha," he explained shortly.

Sean's lips pursed. An order from the Chief of Staff of the Irish Republican Army. He could almost feel the hidden current.

Dennis Moylan continued, "It's an order to all divisional commanders. We're in sore need of ammunition. The Birmingham firm held up our last shipment. We're fighting an empire and we must have weapons. 'Tis desperate measures we must take."

"What are the orders?" demanded Sean. "We'll raid the Castle if need be."

Dennis looked at him fondly, faintly amused. "Not the Castle, Sean." His tone grew serious. "This time it's Ballivor Barracks."

The listeners drew in their breaths.

"On Tuesday next," Dennis added. "But 'twill not be so easy as the job you did at Dunmanway. They've fortified Ballivor into a blockhouse."

"Ye can't take a blockhouse with Colts and Peters," Kevin Quinn broke in. "We need bombs."

"Pah!" Sean exclaimed disdainfully. "What good are our bombs? Half o' them rolled off the sloping roofs of the barracks and burst at our feet. We'd best charge them unexpected like."

"Ye'll not have that trouble with the bombs Mike Collins has sent us."

The men looked at Dennis sharply, impatient for an explanation. He moistened his dry lips, relishing their suspense.

"It's something new they tried out on the police barracks at Callan last week. The bombs are covered with soft yellow clay that makes 'em stick to the roof. They say it'll gut the whole damn place and pick out the peelers as ye'd pick out a periwinkle from its shell. But you must use 'em carefully so they'll not set off the arsenal. We want rifles and bullets more'n the lives of the R.I.C. this trip."

"Ye'll have Ballivor's arsenal by Wednesday sunup," Sean said quietly.

"Good. The bombs are in a portmanteau in Jim McNeill's rooms."

ON Monday afternoon, Sean sauntered carelessly down the street in the direction of Jim McNeill's house. Carrying any kind of a portmanteau was a dangerous business, he reflected, but carrying one filled with bombs was doubly so. And yet he would feel better about the raid if he knew they were safe.

As he turned the corner, a chill gathered about his heart. A company of Auxiliaries were swarming about the street in front of McNeill's apartment. Others pressed inside. His teeth ground. Another one of their blasted searching parties. Indecision brought him up for a second, then he continued on down the street, whistling lightly.

He turned in at the door, ignoring the guards. Soldiers were everywhere, swarming over the house, pulling it apart in a relentless search for arms. He climbed the two flights to McNeill's. They paid no attention to him, noticing only that he seemed harmless enough.

McNeill's door was open. There were two Tommies and a corporal flinging clothes out of drawers. Sean's eyes swept the room. A few feet from the bureau stood an innocent-looking black portmanteau. McNeill was standing in the center of the room, his white face drawn, his fists opening and shutting nervously. Beside him was his wife, her lips trembling in a thin face that had sickened almost beyond recognition. McNeill's head shook slightly as though to warn Sean to get away while he still had the chance. Sean ignored the gesture.

"Good afternoon to ye, James," he greeted with a cheeriness he did not feel, "and to you, Mrs. McNeill. Sure an' 'tis a fine Dublin day, I'm thinkin'. Just right for my trip."

The Tommies looked up with a grin. Sean waved to them with a fatuous smile.

"Good day, gentlemin . . . Well, Jim, I'll be on my way to visit my sister in Galway. Thank ye for mindin' my portmanteau. I'll write to ye by post."

His smile never flinched as he walked over to the bag and picked it up. McNeill's body tightened. "Have a good time, Sean," he managed to say.

Sean started to walk out.

"Just a minute," the corporal called.

He turned, feeling his pulse beat rapidly.

"What's your name?"

"O'Casey, an' it's been in the family a good many years."

"What 'ave ya got in that bag?"

"Why, all my clothes," Sean said innocently. "Didn't ye hear me tell McNeill here about my sister? She's in Galway. Married, an' two fine young ones. 'Tis there I'm goin' for a visit. I have a train to catch, too."

The corporal winked at his men. "All right, then. You'd best get along. Step lively now."

Sean could see the air go out of McNeill and his shoulders slump with relief. The woman's eyes were closed.

"Goodbye, goodbye," Sean called as he walked jauntily from the room. The soldiers on the stairs ignored him. When he was outside and away from the lines of brown-clad auxiliaries, he paused to draw in a long cool breath and wipe the beads of perspiration from under his hatband.

FOG hung like a heavy shroud over the city. Sean pressed himself flat against the protective shadow of a building. His coat collar was up, his soft-brimmed hat pulled down. It was after curfew and his life wouldn't be worth the flame of a farthing rushlight if they laid hands on him. He patted the comforting bulge of blue steel in his pocket. His left hand carried the precious portmanteau. He walked alone. One shadow could reach Ballivor more safely than several.

He slithered across the street, sheltered against another wall. He knew that men were converging from all parts of the city upon Ballivor. They would be waiting for him. The atmosphere seemed like a gas tank waiting for a match.

Off in the darkness the whip-lash of rifle shots shattered the night, leaving ominous echoes as the sounds ricocheted and broke against the buildings. His lips curled grimly. That was his idea—to draw suspicion away from the raid.

He had to cross the street, to leave the sheltering shadows of the buildings. There was the low rumbling of a lorry, but it was running at right angles to this street. He gathered his muscles for the spring.

The rumbling grew into a sudden roar. But he was already on his way. A lorry filled with Tans lurched crazily around the corner. Bright piercing headlights cut into the darkness. For a brief instant the moving figure was caught in its stream, then disappeared outside its focus. It took but a split second, yet the men in the truck had seen him.

There was an inarticulate shout. The lorry ground to a stop, brakes screaming. Sean sped to the corner, turned. The Tans were piling out of the lorry, hot in pursuit.

"This way! He went this way!" a voice shouted.

Bedlam let loose behind him. A few scattered shots broke out, but they were wild. Sean wheeled into an alley. There was an ashcan against a dead end wall. It was too late to turn back again. He flung himself behind the can, portmanteau between his knees.

A group of Tans passed the entrance.

"Here, you two men follow me. The rest of you keep on down this street. Comb the neighborhood."

A flashlight probed the alley. Sean heard the steps of three men picking their way toward him. One of them laughed.

"Looked like a rat scurrying for a hole."

They came only part way in.

"I don't think he came down this street, lieutenant."

"Perhaps," was the terse comment. "No harm to look a little further."

They advanced a few steps closer. The flashlight picked out the ashcan, then sprung away. "I guess you're right," the officer said. "All right, let's go . . . Hold up!"

"Damn!" Sean whispered the oath.

A bright gaslight had suddenly been turned on in a second floor window throwing a haze into the alley. He saw his own shadow, multiplied and grotesque, flung along the wall. He held his breath.

"Come out of there, you," the officer barked.

Sean rose slowly, hands buried deep in his pockets.

"What are you doing out at this hour?"

"I was just visitin' some friends." Sean's voice was light, but there was something in his eyes that belied the tone.

"You know the rules. The city is under martial law. No one is allowed out after midnight."

"I'll be on my way then and abed before you know it."

"You have a bag there. Hand it over."

"That's just some clothes. I was returnin' from a trip. You wouldn't be interested."

The back of the officer's hand left a red welt across Sean's cheek.

"You have an insolent manner. Take him back to the lorry."

The Irishman's eyes hardened. Little white muscle knots jerked convulsively around his lips. Sean O'Casey fired two shots from his pocket. The first smashed through the lieutenant's stomach; the second stopped one of the Tans as he stepped forward to reach for Sean, killing him before he fell.

The officer, staring in unbelief, staggered back a few steps, his face suddenly ashen, then his knees collapsed and he fell to the ground without a sound.

The third Tan, recovering from his shock was lifting his rifle. Sean fired again from his pocket and the man went down.

Wild shouts mingled with running steps grew louder. No time to get out of the alley. He tipped the can upside down and sprang up on it. He placed the portmanteau on the ledge. Danger lent power to his arms and he lifted himself swiftly to the top.

Several Tans appeared at the entrance of the alleyway. Sean jeered and paused to fire a parting shot. A bullet pinged viciously into the wall at his feet, chipping it.

"Long live Ireland," he shouted, then cradling the bag in his arm, he dropped over the side. He found himself in another alleyway leading into the opposite street. He sped out and into the darkness, leaving a group of angry and jabbering Tans firing at random.

OUT of the smokey haze loomed a solid gray block. Ballivor Barracks! In the black shadows of the trees, men were already gathering. Crouching groups were waiting silently. Men, grim, determined, fired with hatred. Fighting a war hundreds of years old. And now for the first time a faint glimmer of success pierced the veil that had hung over Ireland centuries long.

The leaders crowded around Sean. His eyes searched the darkness. "Quinn, O'Reilly, Moore, Walshe." He whispered the roll call for his lieutenants.

There was a jumble of replies.

"Moore," he repeated. No answer. He repressed an oath. "Anyone know what happened to Moore? Did they pick him up?"

No one answered.

"We can't wait all night," Sean said. He peered at the luminous dial of his watch. "It's time now. Walshe, take twenty men to the other side. Careful now . . . You, Kevin, cover the front with me. Tom, take ten men and cover the east corner."

He opened the portmanteau and handed each of the leaders three of the new egg bombs apiece. They were soft and sticky with the yellow clay.

"Get rid o' them quickly," he cautioned, "they're timed to four seconds each."

He waited impatiently while the men took their positions. The night was supercharged with tension. They were waiting for his signal. Sean reached for a grenade. He thought of the disdainful name a white-haired man, safe in London had called them. "Murder-gangs!" Lloyd George had shouted in the House of Commons in extenuation of the Terror. Sean sucked in his lips. How else could they fight a mighty empire with the resources of the whole world behind it? They must take their enemy by surprise, attack suddenly.

His arm lashed out. Instinctively he counted four. *Whang!* A burst of fire exploded from the top of the barracks. Immediately hell broke loose. The trip-hammer of Tommy guns poured crimson flashes into the darkness. The whip-lash of Mausers bit into the stone. A terrific explosion rent the air as a jam-tin filled with gelignite hit the building.

Then, with amazing suddenness, the barracks came alive. A leaden spray from Lewis guns splayed out into the night, flicking up the dirt around the feet of the attackers, slashing bark off trees behind which they took refuge. The methodical crackle of Enfields was ominous.

Sean shouted orders. He hadn't expected such a withering counter-attack. There was something deadly in murderous fire that poured into the Irishmen on the outside. As he stood there, both fists spurting lead, steel spray from a police grenade scattered viciously about him. A sharp pain sliced his cheek; the trickle of warm blood enraged him.

He reached for another grenade and whipped it at a barred opening in the barracks where red flashes squirted as though from a fire hose. There was a dull roar and scarlet flared up within, then died leaving the opening quiet.

That was it, he thought, but he'd have to be careful. Another explosion inside the barracks like that might set off the arsenal.

HE TURNED to call an order to Kevin, and his eyes froze. By the light of a spitting Tommy he could see Kevin poised to throw a bomb. His teeth already held the pin. Suddenly he stiffened as a rifle bullet caught him. Sean started a warning but it was too late. The bomb went off in Kevin's hand. The Irishman was a sudden inferno—then no more.

Sean closed his eyes.

"Mother of God!" he whispered. His teeth grated. Something was wrong. These black janizaries were trained fighters—but men in the middle of their sleep—

"Sean!" someone hissed his name.

It was Tom O'Reilly, panting, his red face sullen and streaming, his eyes wild.

"We're goin' to get it now. We're done all right!"

Sean gripped his arm. "Speak, Tom! What is it?"

"Behind us! A whole company of Fusiliers!"

Fury boiled up within Sean. His face was a white mask touched up by the orange flicker of the hell that was going on all around him.

"Informer." He grated out the word with all the pent-up anger born of high hopes and despair.

"Y're wounded," O'Reilly said, seeing the blood on his face.

" 'Tis nothing," Sean muttered savagely.

"Pass the word for the boys to break for it. No sense in bein' butchered like rats."

A crouching figure, ducking from tree to tree jerked toward them. It was Terrence Walshe, terror in his face.

"They've got a line around us!" he screamed. "Ladies from Hell, armed to the teeth!"

Sean thought quickly, but there was no time to give a command. A murderous blast poured into them from the rear. The noise was deafening. It was as though thousands of riveter's hammers were suddenly banging granite. Death splashed crisscross between the barracks and the soldiers behind them. The sky lit up with exploding grenades. Sod spurted from the ground. Black smoke roiled over them.

The Irish attackers, caught in between, were helpless. The pounding of guns mingled with cries of wounded men Flesh and bone could never stand this withering hail. All about him the crouching shadows were falling, men he had long known staunch men, patriots, each with a prayer for Ireland on his lips.

A searing pain stabbed his shoulder and he sank to his knees, one arm limp, the other feeling in the portmanteau which had miraculously escaped being hit.

Terrence Walshe lay at his feet, his forehead a crimson smear. A few feet away, Tom O'Reilly, legs flung out grotesquely, now held a smile on a cold-growing face.

A few survivors broke and ran. A powerful searchlight, mounted on a truck behind, glared up and swept them. Unseen marksmen picked them off with deadly accuracy. His own life seemed charmed.

Then the Welsh Fusiliers charged in and from around the back of the barracks came the Seaforth Highlanders, their picturesque uniforms seeming strange in all the chaos.

Sean felt a shattering impact upon the back of his head. Fiery pinwheels spun and boomed. He felt himself sinking—then there was darkness and oblivion.

SEAN O'CASEY returned to consciousness slowly. There was a dull pain in his head and his tongue was a piece of flannel in the hot oven of his mouth. He lay feverishly in the bleak cold gray of dawn, taking stock. The attack had been a dismal failure. He himself was a prisoner inside Ballivor Barracks.

What was in store for him, he could only guess. He knew the brutality of the R.I.C. These burly men selected for their physiques and masked as policemen, were in reality soldiers, an army of occupation, holding Ireland for Britain.

They knew he had important information—so important that they would work in earnest on him. And Sean had heard tales of their methods.

Morning advanced and his head cleared slightly. The cell door grated open. A sergeant and two huge peelers entered, ominous-looking in their black uniforms. The sergeant, thick-lipped, gimlet-eyed, heavily girthed, regarded Sean with a cruel smile.

"Your little raid didn't come off, did it? Ai! but it's a pity, we were expecting you."

Sean said bitterly, "Sure, with the aid of some damned scut of a squealer."

The sergeant laughed.

"Aye, and he'll not be the only informer this day."

Sean battled down his anger and looked at him curiously, remaining silent.

"We know all about you, O'Casey. Y're a captain in the Republican Army—as you call that yellow bunch of ambushing cowards. Come now, how would you like

to save your skin and make a few pounds besides?"

Sean's lips curled contemptuously. "Save y'r breath."

"It's your ilfe that's at stake, man," the sergeant wheedled. "Tell us where we can find Michael Collins. You'll get passage to England and a nice fat sum of money. Come now, where is he?"

"Even if I knew, do ye think I'd be tellin' ye?"

"You could put a stop to this killin' and bloodshed. Give us the information we want—and where we can find that scoundrel, Cathal Brugha, too. You won't regret it."

Sean grinned provokingly. "Too bad y'r brains don't match y'r sense o' humor, Sergeant."

The smile fell abruptly away from the officer's face. "We have ways to make you talk," he said harshly.

"Have ye now? 'Tis news to me."

One of the peelers was holding a carbine. The sergeant grabbed it from him and thrust the iron-shod butt against the side of Sean's head. The impact set up a screaming whistle in his ears.

"None of your impudence!" the sergeant shouted. "Speak up!"

Sean shook his head, the twisted smile never leaving his lips.

"Speak up, man, or I'll bash out your brains and spill 'em over Ulster."

Again the heavy gun butt caught Sean a sharp ear-splitting blow against the side of his head. His old wound opened and blood ran down his cheek. One of the peelers looked on with a grin; the other, tall and heavy-set like his companions, turned away, his brow creased.

Sean clamped his jaws shut to control his agony. That screaming in his ears had gone now; instead there was a burning ache in his head, so great that the three men and the room had blurred.

"Will ye talk?" the sergeant rasped.

"I'll see ye in hell first!" The words burst out of Sean. "I'd as lief be dead as lift a finger to help England. But why do I waste my breath on ye with y'r hands still puking with English pay. Ye've lost y'r soul helpin' foreigners to mulct y'r own native country and rob her starvin' people. All ye've got left is y'r traitorous job and much good 'twill do ye when the reckoning comes."

"Pah!" the officer growled. "Here, Potter, give him a little persuasion."

The grinning policeman came over, his coarse face cruel. Without warning, he knotted his fist and struck Sean like the crack of a bat against a ball. Sean's mouth was grim, his cheek muscles jerking convulsively.

"Come on, McCue," the sergeant called to the peeler whose back was toward them. "Show him the power of y'r muscle."

McCUE turned, anger and contempt in his face. "Have ye forgotten, Sergeant, that I'm an Irishman, too? Have ye forgotten that you y'rself was born in Cork? Have ye forgotten all that? I'm sworn to keep the peace, but I'll have no part o' this bloody business. At least he knows what he's fightin' for an' I can't say the same for m'self."

He stopped, and he must have realized then what would be coming. His face was pale, but he stood his ground before the sergeant. There was a moment of silence.

Sean's eyes shifted from one to the other. The sergeant regarded McCue furiously, twin spots of red flushing his cheekbones.

"Leave the room, McCue. Consider yourself under arrest till you come to your senses."

When the rebellious peeler had left, he stared indecisively for a moment at Sean.

"Well, my friend, we'll leave your fate up to the Castle. You know what that means." He made a rasping sound with his tongue while he ran his finger suggestively across his throat. He gestured to the other peeler and they left the room, securing the door behind them.

The dull pounding pain in Sean's head

kept him from sleeping. His life was safe for a while at least. They wouldn't execute him till they had exhausted every possibility to get information out of him. He smiled grimly. What fools they were to think they could stop this war by executing a few leaders!

A faint noise scratched the silence. Slowly the cell-door opened to admit a bulky shadow. Sean lay quiet, scarcely breathing, his eyes straining in the darkness. The figure came closer, leaned over him. There was a warm breath upon his face.

"Hsst! O'Casey—Wake up!"

"Who is it?"

"McCue."

The silence was oppressive, both men listening for sounds. Then McCue started whispering.

"I've been thinkin' for some time about this. I want to join forces with ye, Captain O'Casey. That's where I belong. Fighting for Ireland—not against her." There was something intangible in his voice, something of awe and hidden conviction.

In the darkness Sean reached out and they clasped hands.

Then McCue's low voice came again, tense and husky.

"Not a sound, an' I'll be gettin' ye out of here. To-morrow I'll resign."

"No, no," Sean whispered. "You stay on here as a peeler. Ye'll be more valuable to us from the inside."

He rose and followed McCue through the cell-door. It was growing light now in slate-colored streaks from the east. There was a sound of movement from behind a wall. Sean's heart raced wildly, and then they were in a passageway leading out the gate. Again he pressed the constable's hand. Then his solitary figure merged with the grayness and disappeared.

DENNIS MOYLAN seemed to grow even more gaunt as he listened to Sean's story of the raid. The name of each known dead brought an almost imperceptible shudder to his narrow frame.

At last Sean was finished, and the two men sat in silence for a few moments. Dennis Moylan's face was drawn and pale; he remained motionless, stiffly upright in his chair, staring at the bare wall. He turned finally.

"The hazards of war," he muttered.

"We must strike again, immediately," Sean said fiercely. "As soon as I can lay my hands on Patrick Moore and end his miserable life."

Dennis reached into a drawer and took out a sheaf of bank notes. "These are all that remain of Moore," he said slowly.

"Then he was at the bottom of our defeat?"

Dennis nodded. "One of our agents saw him leaving the Castle. He followed Moore and finally tapped him on the shoulder. Moore started to sweat, then he broke into a run. The money was found in his pocket."

Sean stared at the bills, his brow furrowed. "What a waste of men!" he groaned.

Dennis touched his arm. There was something in the way he did it that made Sean search his face.

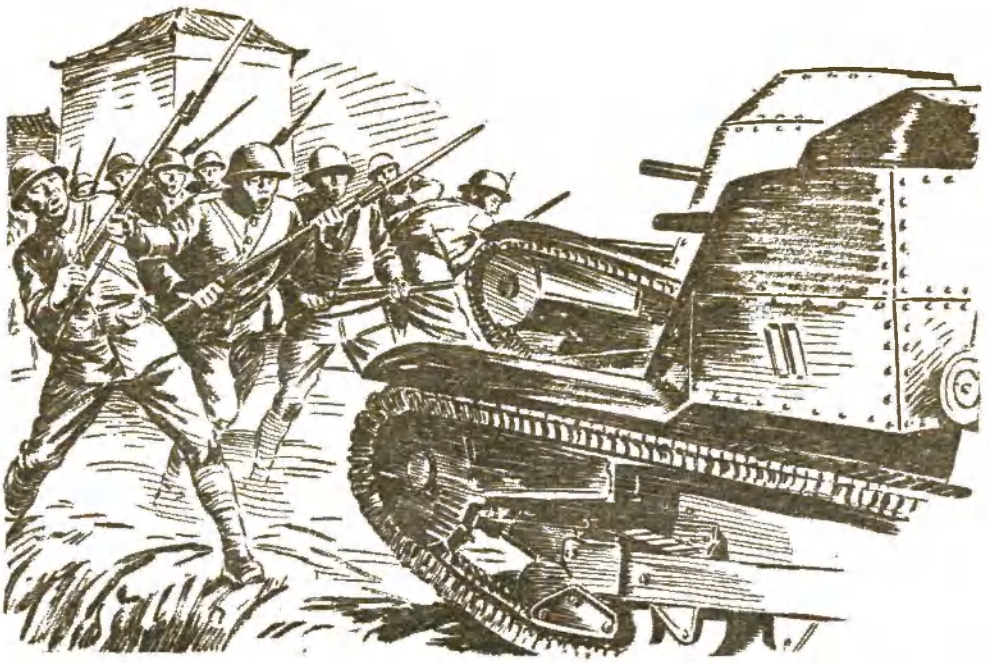
"Perhaps it was not a waste," the other said thoughtfully.

In answer to Sean's bewildered look, he continued:

"Perhaps it was part of our proof, proof to the English that we were determined to fight to the end. Every raid, every attack, every loss of an Irish life, helped to do that." He paused, his eyes glowing. "De Valera has been invited to Downing Street to discuss terms of settlement. Orders have just come in from General Headquarters to suspend hostilities during negotiations."

He smiled suddenly.

Sean's face was triumphant. He was on his feet. "At last," he whispered fervently. Then his eyes started blazing. "Let them not try their shopkeeper's tricks on us," he warned. "I've got a man inside Ballivor now, and the next time we'll not fail."



The twin tanks churned through the Japanese ranks

Tanks Can't Fly

By LOUIS GOLDSMITH

Have you heard the one about the Scotchman and the Irishman, who started a red-hot feud over carburetors—and arrived at a photograph finish by turning a Japanese attack into a minor Armageddon

I

THAT Peichow incident, if the death of thousands can be rightly called an incident, always reminds me of the poem where for the want of a horseshoe a kingdom was lost. Man's destiny hinges on such small things. In this case it was a petty feud between a redheaded Irishman and a club-jawed Scotchman. Or maybe, to take it back a little further, it was the blackjack game between Bonus Bentley and me, or maybe . . . but reasoning like that can be carried too far.

Duke Thomas, Bonus Bentley and I were sitting under an old mulberry tree near the dormitory shack watching the troop evacuation from Peichow sector to the threatened Shantung front, north of Lunghai railroad. The four-file column of khaki-clad troops crawled wearily past, too tired to look up in passing, too tired to do anything in their stupor of exhaustion but swing one foot ahead of another in shambling route step. The majority looked like sixth or eighth grade students of our country, but there was nothing childish about the sullen, exhausted faces and the two-handed big-swords sticking above their sloping shoulders. Most of the hilt guards carried a strip of narrow red ribbon, showing that that long knife had killed a man; perhaps many men. When the soldiers of X Route Army, Chinese

Central Government, got to close quarters and those big-swords rasped from the shoulder scabbards, the enemy's much publicized fatalistic courage turned into a panicky yen to be in some other part of the world.

"Damn," I swore, slushing some straight Scotch into my glass, "I was on top of the world before that march started. Those coolie boys look starved."

Duke lay back in his rattan chair, his right arm strapped to his side. His collar bone had been broken a few weeks before in an air scrap.

"What they need," he stated, "is a whopping big victory, or another chance at the little brown boys with those big-swords of theirs."

"What made you feel on top of the world?" Bonus Bentley asked me, a strange gleam in his eyes.

Bonus is a tall, gangling, homely son-of-a-gun who used to think he could play blackjack until I won a bonus check from him and the services of Red Kelly as my airplane mechanic. I was surprised that he'd even bring up the subject now without getting hot under the collar. Duke Thomas, just back from the Tanshein hospital, didn't know about this yet, so I took the occasion to let him know, in an off-hand way and with due modesty.

"First," I said, counting on my fingers, "because I'm no doubt one of the best combat pilots in China. Second, because I've got a Danter pursuit, designed and built in the old U.S.A. and powered with a late model Spadley two-row radial, and thirdly because I've got the best mechanic that ever tightened a nut."

Bonus Bentley dribbled a little Tansan into his Scotch and swirled the mixture. I didn't like the self-satisfied smirk on his face.

"I'll grant you just one of those points, Mr. Wright," he said formally. "You have got a good pursuit plane."

I choked on the Scotch. "What about my mechanic—what about Red?" I coughed.

"Take him," Bonus replied. "Take a dozen of him, and when you've got really bad engine trouble I'll be kind enough to loan you the advice of Sandy McGregor. He came on the Canton plane this morning and's been assigned to my hangar."

"McGregor!" Duke exclaimed, sitting up in his chair. "Say, Bonus, you're in luck."

I'd never even heard of the man. "He's probably a fair enough mech," I allowed, "but Red's more than that. He's an artist."

Duke shook his head. "McGregor's one of the best, Ted," he said. He lay back in his chair and looked from Bonus to me, his white, perfect teeth showing in that devilish grin of his. Duke is a big dark complexioned guy with a long, oval face, a little hairline mustache and a satanic sense of humor. He was getting a big kick out of this argument.

"Nuts!" I said. "Red's the best mechanic in the world." I swigged the rest of my drink. "Look here." I thumped the glass down. "When I came in from the morning patrol my Spadley was wheezing like it had the T.B. Come out to the hangar now and I'll have Red start her up. She'll be ticking over like a twenty-one-jeweled watch."

THEY trailed along behind me to the second hangar and we saw Red Kelly squatting on the dirt floor with a big mechanic's hammer, pounding a piece of old cowling metal like a wild Indian and cussing a blue streak. There was a big knot showing through his carrot colored hair and one of his eyes was beginning to purple.

"What in hell's gone wrong?" I asked. I looked over to my slick little all-metal, low-winged pursuit job. The front cowling was off, all the spark plugs had been removed, one of the mags lay on the workbench, half dissembled, the propeller was leaning against the bench with a timing disk bolted to the hub, the back plate of the super-charger section was loosened —the Spadley looked as though it was well started on a major overhaul.

"You keep that damned Scotchman outta here," Red screeched. The freckles on his pug nose disappeared in a flood of red anger that went over the rest of his thin, freckled face and out to the frying-pan ears. He was half crying with rage. "I told that club-mugged, bow-legged cow that it was carburetor trouble. What'd he say? 'Na doot ye'd think so, not knowin' much about motors. It's ignition, mon.' " Red pounded his flat chest. "Me! He says that to *me*."

Bonus Bentley walked over in front of the Danter and stood looking up at the wreckage, hands in his breeches pocket. "Just like a twenty-one-jeweled watch," he said. "Congratulations, Ted." He turned to Duke, then, not trying to hide his joy. "Want to see my Russian job?" he asked.

"Put that hammer down, Red," I told Kelly, "and after this don't let that ham-handed Scotchman get near a real piece of machinery. You'll probably be up all night getting the Spadley together."

Bonus and Duke had gone on to the next hangar where Bonus' Russian two-seated fighter was stored. I followed them.

A short, bow-legged guy stood there, wiping his bloody nose with one hand and pointing to the left landing gear oleo strut. That side of the plane was blocked up and the wheel hung down at a crazy slant.

"I told that potato-eatin' Mick to gang aboot his business," the Scotchman said. "'Twas a mere trifle of lettin' a little pressure off the right strut to level it. Now look! He says it's the left by-pass that's leakin'. 'Tis a sad day when Sandy McGregor has to take advice."

An ominous crackle sounded from the wooden blocking. We all jumped to get our support under the wing, but were too late. The Russian plane slopped over to the left and the wing tip dug into the ground. Wrinkles in the smooth fabric showed that a spar had been fractured.

Sandy McGregor stood glowering at the damage for a moment and then, with a throaty howl, started toward my hangar. Red Kelly must have heard the McGregor battle cry. He dropped his tools and met the Scotchman's charge in the middle of the hangar. Mechanic helpers came running from all directions, filling the air with their screeching, grunting Chinese.

McGregor was of a sturdier build than Kelly, but Red was like a piece of spring steel. He backed up for an instant under the slugging fists and then came in, cursing and bawling like an enraged bull. His right fist caught McGregor squarely in the eye and we could hear the *plop* of it thirty feet away. They stood chest to chest, slugging like a couple of lumberjacks. Then McGregor got his long arms around the smaller man and lifted him clear of the ground and threw him down so hard that the Irishman lay quiet for a moment.

I SLIPPED up behind and got McGregor's left arm as he reached for Kelly and dragged it back in a hammerlock and kicked both of his feet from under him. Bonus picked Kelly up bodily and carried him over beyond my ship and threw him down on the ground again. I heard Red grunt as he struck so I pushed up on McGregor's arm until I got a grunt of pain out of him, too.

"I'll take care of McGregor," Bonus said, coming back to us. "Get a dog chain and muzzle for that crazy Irishman."

"Crazy Irishman, hell!" I threw back, "it was this oatmeal-lushing mutt of a Scotchman that started it." But I got up and let go of McGregor. "I'll talk to Red," I told Bonus, sorry that I'd lost my temper. "He'll help McGregor strip that wing and fix the spar."

"He willna'," McGregor sputtered, "I'll ha'e noot to do wi' that worthless deil."

Probably just as well if they didn't mix, I thought, walking slowly back toward our living quarters, expecting Bonus to catch up with me. I sat down under the tree and listened to the monotonous thud of marching feet. There was a

Chinese war map tacked up beside the bulletin board and I went over and traced the fifteen weary miles those boys had already covered in leaving the Peichow trenches. I'd flown over that country repeatedly; knew every inch of it.

From the small village of Peichow a stone causeway stretched north two miles or more over swampy ground and up a gentle rise. A thin line of Chinese soldiers now occupied the trenches at the crest of the rise, from which the Japanese had retreated after a wedge drive they'd pushed over the causeway. The X Route Army had fought every inch of that gain over the causeway, dropping like flies under the fire of infantry automatic rifles and the more blasting hail of steel from tank machine guns. The battle tide had turned, south of the causeway when the Chinese got to close quarters with their big-swords. The Japanese had retreated north, back over the path of their advance, deserting several large tanks that had become stalled and three of their eight-wheeled, charcoal-burning ammunition trucks. In one sense it was a Chinese victory, for they'd gained more ground than had been lost, but they'd paid for it, eight men to one.

Bonus Bentley passed by as I stood there by the war map.

"Did you get that mutt chained?" I asked, intending to suggest a drink before chow.

"He'll be all right if that flash-pan of yours keeps his place," Bonus retorted.

I jerked my head around, surprised at the tone. But he had passed on into the dormitory. The *shush, shush* of marching feet scratched on my ears. I went over to the porch edge, watching those tired soldiers trudging by on the main road, and as I watched a coolie chant started along the line and grew in high, quavering volume, rhythmic with the slow movements of their feet. It was something about the green willow leaves of the Spring and the foot of a maiden so small she could dance on a lily petal. I understand very little Chinese so I caught only the few words that were repeated over and over.

Duke Thomas came from the restaurant building and sat down in the big rattan chair. "McGregor's got a black eye," he said, "that's a mate to Kelly's. They're over at the canteen now, thick as thieves over a quart of Scotch I bought them."

"Fine," I cheered. "So the war's over." I gave Duke a closer glance. He's a good looking chap and usually I don't like men that're handsome. Maybe it's because I'm not a big man and I got a nose smashed all over my face in a crackup, years before. But I liked Duke and was sorry to see him troubled about something.

"Yes, that's fine," he allowed, rattling an empty glass, "but what about you and Bonus?"

"Well, what about us?" I asked, remembering the way Bonus spoke when he went into the dormitory. "It's not my fault if that long legged scarecrow picks a bum mechanic. My plane's fritzed up, too."

Duke poured a drink. "Sit down, Ted," he invited. He sat there watching the Tansan bubbles in his glass. "Y'know," he said, after a while, "this war's no pink tea for the Chinese and they aren't paying us fellows to stage little squabbles of our own. There are only nine white men here at Tuikung and we'd better stick together."

Bonus came out on the porch. I guess he'd heard some of what Duke said. He came over and slapped me on the shoulder. "You're crazy, Duke," he said. "Ted and I won't get sore at each other over a couple of hot-headed mechs."

"Of course not, Duke," I laughed. "Come on, let's have a drink to that."

Which was all very nice, but I changed feelings considerably when I went out at five the next morning for my regular patrol. That beautiful, sweet running Spadley engine of mine was a wreck. It looked as if it'd been struck by a two-hundred pound demolition bomb, with its parts scattered all over the workbench and on the iron work table under the

Danter's nose. Red Kelly was lying under one wing of the Danter, face bloodied and snoring like a sawmill and McGregor, likewise as to face, was sleeping off the jag in one corner of the hangar. I gave Red a couple of boots but couldn't bring him to life so I had to go down and borrow the Italian ship that Tom Fang was assigned.

II

IT WAS easy to figure what had happened. These two mechanics, both of them rated tops in their work, had had a few drinks of Duke's liquor, all chummy and nice. Then they'd got to talking about engines, no doubt both of them being very polite at the start. But as drink followed drink the polite talk warmed into an argument and they finally decided to prove their points by demonstration on my Spadley. During the demonstration they had more drinks and as a result I had to fly a temperamental Italian plane on the morning patrol.

Somehow I couldn't find it in my heart to blame Red for this. I trusted him too much and he'd done too much good work for me. Probably this Scotchman had made a wisecrack and Red told him he was wrong and then stuck to his point, shutting his mind to all other evidence of the trouble in the engine. Of course McGregor had done the same, but there wouldn't have been any thing to it if he hadn't butted into Red's business. The more I thought of it, the madder I got. This Italian plane was slower than my Danter and I didn't have any confidence in it.

From Liani I flew southwestward toward Peichow. An occasional whisp of smoke from the trenches and fox holes showed where the infantry was warming the breakfast rice, and water for tea, but otherwise there wasn't any activity until I got about five miles from Peichow, edging along over the Japanese occupied province of Shantung. Ahead of me I saw a two-seated Jap fighter, three thousand feet below, flying the same direction, but much slower.

We get five thousand gold bonus for every Jap we knock down and this looked like easy pin money. I could dive under it from a distance and come up in their blind spot with both guns popping. Only it looked just too easy. There it was, all by itself, wallowing along at about a third my speed. I looked all about me, aloft and alow, as the sailors say, and couldn't see a thing. But of course the sun was getting up to the east.

Maybe I was more than usually wise that day or maybe I just felt pessimistic. Anyway I nudged my stick back and started to climb so that when I got over the Jap plane I had twelve thousand feet. I started a slow turn, looking the sky over carefully and then suddenly tightened it into a vertical to the south, kicking it out toward Tuikung and shoving it into a dive with motor wide open. Jap pursuits were coming at me from all directions!

They had the altitude of me and their planes were just as fast or maybe a little faster than mine so it would be only a matter of minutes before one Theodore Wright got fixed up to look like a sieve. I sat there watching my oil temperature climb and pressure drop, wondering how long it would be before this old coffee grinder flew to pieces and cursing the sour-faced Scotchman who'd ruined my Danter. Another thing I wondered about was that nest of Jap pursuit planes concentrated around Peichow. There are plenty of flat, level places for temporary fields along the beach, northeast of Liani, so why had these birds been squatting near a sector that was considered inactive?

I looked back over my shoulder to see how the race was going. There wasn't any race. The Jap pursuits had turned back and were heading north. After mentally shaking hands to greet myself from the grave, and easing my throttle back to decent limits, I started thinking about those Japs again and was still doing it when I landed. Maybe that had

something to do with me snubbing Bonus Bentley. That and the brake trouble which caused me to ground-loop twice near the hangars, like a ten-hour solo student. Bonus was standing by the hangar watching me, and came out to grab a wing to straighten me out from the last ground-loop. He was smiling, which was natural enough, but I thought he was having a good time over my troubles with the Spadley engine. So I snapped the switches and jumped out of that lousy crate and went by him without speaking.

DICE ELDON was passing by in one of the field cars and I hailed him. At headquarters I talked with Major Lio about that concentration of Japanese planes and he called the Adjutant of General Chan Lum, commander of the X Route Army. They gabbled back and forth in Chinese, me not understanding a word of it. When they were through Major Lio refilled our teacups, which was the Chinese hint that it was time to go, and said politely that my news about the planes was very interesting. And that was all there was to it. I went back to my hangar and stood over Red Kelly while he got my Spadley back together. He told me his side of what had happened the night before, and it was just as I had thought. He and McGregor could be good friends until they got near an ailing motor. Then it was just too bad for all concerned, including the poor engine.

Duke Thomas followed me back to the hangar after noon chow.

"What's happened to you and Bonus?" he wanted to know. "He says you're a sorehead and he won't fly with you any more."

I don't like being called a sorehead. "Does he expect me to hug and kiss every time I see his homely mug?" I asked. "I can't fly with him anyway, now that he's got McGregor workin' on his ship. I'd stall off into a spin trying to fly slow enough to stay with him."

"You're a couple of damned fools," Duke said. "And the hell of it is the rest of the gang are taking sides in this. Dice Eldon told Jimmy Wayne that Bonus had egged McGregor into doctoring your engine. And that's the way it goes. Pretty soon we'll be throwing hand grenades at each other."

"She's all ready to test, Mr. Wright," Red Kelly reported. Red always looks like a drowned cat when he's got a hangover, which is the only time he puts a "mister" in front of my name.

"Stick around, Duke," I said. "You'll find out that Red knows something about motors besides talk."

But there was another engine warming up in front of the next hangar and Duke had gone over there.

Red sidled near me while the helpers were wheeling my Danter out on the tarmac.

"Mr. Wright," he said, "I don't like to beef, but something's got to be done. McGregor's shootin' his face off, claimin' he's the only real mech around here."

"And of course," I interrupted him, "you've been making the same claims for yourself. You two fools can have a contest on that sometime, but not with my engine."

Red brightened. "It's an elegant idea, Mr. Wright."

"Sure," I nodded, without realizing the dynamite I was playing with, "and now if this Spadley doesn't tick over nice you'd better start toward Canton."

I guess McGregor had come to, and worked hard on Bentley's job because there the Russian plane was, out in front of the next hangar, wing repaired and landing gear level as the water in a goldfish bowl. And the motor sounded sweet, idling slow with every barrel putting its grunt of power in at the right instant. Boy, that's poetry!

Just to show Bonus there was no bad feelings I gave him a high sign as McGregor had kicked the blocks. What'd he do? Gave the high sign right back to me, only he stuck his thumb out to meet his ugly nose. Then he kicked her

around on one wheel and took off across field in a climbing turn, just to show the trust he had in that mud-faced Scotchman.

I climbed into the Danter and primed it and held the inertia button till she squealed high, then pulled to engage the starter. The Spadley grunted over a couple of cylinder compressions and took the gas like a sweetheart. And did it sound pretty! I just wished Bonus could be there with his engine idling alongside of mine, to hear the difference. Red sliced his finger across his throat and I cut the switches while he made a few minor adjustments. We tried her again and the more I listened to that big, two-row Spadley the more human I felt. Red walked around the ship, feeling her over and trying not to look conceited, his carrot hair stickin' up like the comb of a banty rooster. It occurred to me that maybe I didn't fully appreciate Red, and hadn't treated him with the respect due such a real mechanic. So I cut the switches and we left her there and went over to consume a couple of Scotch-sodas. I came back a half hour later and took the Danter up for a test hop, poking north toward Peichow.

THERE'S a States regulation that no military ship design can be offered for export until at least two years after it's accepted for home use, but that Danter of mine must have edged the two years pretty close. It had a fifty-caliber machine gun synchronized to shoot through the prop and two thirty-calibers mounted on the wings at converging angles. I hung her on the prop, climbing three thousand a minute and opened the guns for a burst, just out of devilment. It was pure joy flying such a job, after a mech like Red had tuned it up.

At fourteen thousand I looked down on a flat country, greening with spring, cut up by innumerable small and large canals and thickly dotted with grave mounds that looked, from my altitude, like tiny moles on a wrinkled face. There, I thought, was China. Bigger than the imagination and yet every inch of it cherished by some hardworking coolie farmer who'd give his life for the miserable little half-acre back of a one-roomed, mud-and-wattle hut. I'd have gone sentimental thinking of that, maybe, except that just then I saw a five-ship formation a couple of thousand feet below me, tight on the empennage of a single plane. Bonus Bentley was in the same spot I'd been in the day before, except that in my case I'd had some altitude to use for speed.

I checked up, looking around to see if there were any other planes within striking distance and then shoved down on my stick. I think the Jap pilots had orders to stay around the Peichow area, but they were so close on the tail of Bentley they couldn't resist the temptation of potting him. I don't blame them. I'd have done the same thing myself. War isn't a pink tea party and it's been my experience that the higher up you go the more cold blooded it becomes.

There's something queer about flying. A sense of isolation, of unreality and yet of being the center of things. When a man loops he stands still and the world turns around him and now, diving down on those five ships at nearly four hundred miles an hour I was stationary in space and they were rushing up to meet me. The right wing ship of the formation came into my ring sight and I squeezed on the trigger levers and held them because, as I flattened from the dive the ships passed more rapidly through the sight.

The first ship wobbled a little and broke formation, starting a long glide back toward Shantung. The second plane dropped its nose. The pilot must have fallen forward onto the stick. It never recovered from that dive. Maybe I got some slugs into the lead ship before I jerked the stick back and cut the switches. It was a trick I'd learned from Duke Thomas. I shot straight up, like a rocket, motor dead but prop still milling. As it slowed I flipped the switches on and

braced my back against the head cowling pad. The Danter trembled there for an instant, stalled, then started back on her tail and it felt like somebody'd slugged me across the back and head with a cord of firewood as the nose whipped down. But when I came out of it I still had altitude on that formation and I was still behind them. At that moment I guess they remembered their orders. They started back toward Peichow but I picked off another one before they got away.

I turned back and chugged along toward Tuikung, feeling mighty fine and reminding myself to be generous with Bonus Bentley. I think I had a picture of Bonus rushin' out to meet me with his hand extended and tears of gratitude dripping from his eyes. But there're two things about Bonus. One thing, he's too keen for bonus money, which is the reason for his nickname. And another thing, he's just naturally mean dispositioned. When I slid up to the hangars that sour-faced Scotchman of his was thumbing over the Russian motor and Bonus was no place around.

III

I GOT out and walked over to the dormitory. Duke Thomas was sitting alone on the porch, looking thoughtful.

"Ted," he said, "you've got the best pursuit job in the outfit and Red Kelly's a darned good mechanic, so why've you got to rub it into Bentley by showing off?"

Right there I lost all my generosity. "Where's that drawn-out string of fly-bitten crow bait?" I asked. "I can lick him on the square hole in Chinese cash, with one hand tied behind me."

Duke stood up, his face as white as chalk. "I've got my right arm strapped down, Ted," he almost whispered, his voice was so low, "but if you don't sit down here and listen to reason you're going to have to fight me and keep on fighting me as long as I can stand up and take it."

"Hell, Duke," I said, flopping down in a chair, "tell me what you want. I'll go and beg his pardon or anything else you say. Only I won't let him talk against Red Kelly. Red's the best mechanic in the world and everything was sweet and lovely around here until that Scotch grease monkey shoved his ugly jib into things."

I heard the door slam and looked up to see Bonus standing there, humped forward a little and with both fists clenched. "I heard that, you four-flusher," he said huskily. "You're like Red Kelly, makin' a big stage play until some real guy comes along. McGregor knows more about gas engines and airplanes than Kelly or all his children'll ever know. That's what makes Kelly sore."

Bentley's taller than me and I got an idea he can take me into camp, because he's got the reach and's all bone and muscle, but I'm not going to let him run Kelly down in favor of that bow-legged Scotchman. Only before I can mix it with him Duke Thomas is there between us and you can't go sluggin' around a guy that's got his shoulders in splints and his arm strapped down. So Bonus and I stood there glarin' at each other for a minute and then he walks off and I sits down again as though it was just one of those things that happen, like Hongkong feet or leprosy or those other little things that happen to a guy in China.

Duke sits down again and I started telling him my theory about this Peichow setup. After the Japanese had retreated from Peichow, leaving their front line trenches to the Chinese, they'd seemed to lose all interest in that sector, concentrating everything around Liani, and pretty soon the Chinese had withdrawn their best shock troops from Peichow to reinforce the main line of defence. So why were there so many Jap planes around to keep us from seeing the area back of Peichow? For the darned good reason that they were quietly concentrating troops and artillery for a spear-head across

that causeway and south of it and then an eastward flank movement on the main body of the Chinese defenders, or maybe a straight drive down to cut off the Lunghai railroad.

Duke sat there listening to me, his face drawing tight. "Ted," he said, "if you'd told this to Major Lio the Chinese way, he'd understood you. You rush in there, blatting the information in a hurry, instead of drinking a few quarts of tea first and spending an hour or so complimenting him on his ancestors. No wonder he got sore at you and clammed up. You treated him just like he was an intelligent Chinese coolie. Now for the lova Pete keep away from Bonus, and keep Red Kelly away from McGregor. I've got delicate business ahead."

That was okay by me. I thought that by this time Kelly and McGregor would have had enough of their feuding to last a week or more, so I went over to the restaurant and ate a big slug of diced chicken with walnuts, Cantonese style, washing it down with Scotch, and then hit the hay until eight o'clock the next morning, when Tom Fang came in and stood by while the room boy tapped my shoulder to awaken me. Some way or other Tom had gotten hold of a dozen ripe tomatoes, almost as big as my fist and he had the room boy there with some boiling water on a brazier. The boy dipped them in the water, holding them eight seconds to kill all the germs, and Tom waited politely while I went through the whole mess of them. Were they good!

"Mr. Wright," Tom said then, choosing his words carefully, "I think perhaps Mr. Kelly is killing McGregor or maybeso Mr. McGregor is killing Mr. Kelly." He spread his hands apologetically. "Which is," he allowed, "of not importance to awaken your sleep. But I think for more worthiness to disturb you they are both wrecking my most unagreeable airplane for which it is to me I am very sorry to complain."

"Sun Lin," I spoke to the room boy, reaching for clothes, "is big club, joy-stick from wrecked airplane, office-side? You catch this side chop-chop."

BUT as I left the dormitory with blood in my eyes and the oak joy-stick in my hands Duke Thomas stopped me. He meant business if ever a man did.

"Ted," he snapped, "take the Danter over toward Peichow and get as far north as you can. I'll put support ships out to you as fast as possible. Let those Japs know that we're wise to them and if possible slow 'em up. The X Route army'll be back in those trenches before nightfall if we can hold the causeway open."

"T'hell with that do-and-die stuff," I said. "I'm here fighting for money, not glory."

At that moment a thin, quavering chant came to my ears and the *shush, shush* of thousands of marching feet. I'd been hearing that sound all the time since I'd awakened and its monotony had made it silent, like the steady ticking of a clock. It was the tail end of the X Route Army, returning northward, chanting that same wistful thing about green willow leaves in the spring and a maiden with dainty feet. I couldn't let those boys down.

"Okay, Duke," I said and went back into the dorm for my goggles and flying coat.

The Japs were up there waiting for me, just as though we had a date and I was the guy wearing a red carnation in my buttonhole. Only it might turn out to be a white lily on my chest—except that guys who fight for money don't get lilies on their chests. They get machine gun bullets pumped into them and nobody cares much one way or the other.

I had bad luck the first crack. Or maybe it was good luck for me. One of the bullets drilled through my carburetor, way below the jet level, and after a few apologetic coughs the old Spadley gave it up and the prop stopped turning. I had five thousand so I kicked her into a right-hand spin, hoping to kid that mess of Japs into thinking I was out of control. I jerked out of this and into a couple of

left twists and then stalled and did a falling leaf until I was in range of an open field, south of the causeway. I sideslipped, just scraping over one of the stalled tanks that the Japs had left there near the road, and fishtailed into the field.

Chinese and Japanese planes were milling around to the north and one of the Chinese must have seen me and gone back for help because pretty soon Tom Fang came in with a two-seater, and Red Kelly hopped out before the ship stopped rolling. He came over, lugging a canvas sack full of tools and looking as though he'd been through a meat chopper. Tom Fang thought he and McGregor'd been murdering each other but of course Tom didn't know this or that about Scotch or Irishmen.

Tom Fang left his motor idling and came over, trying his best to hang onto the old Chinese poise. "Is most brave landing," he complimented me, "Mr. Duke Thomas is said please to come back Tuikung-side for more airplane to fly."

"I'm not going to leave Red here," I objected, but I knew that was foolish because the fighting was still several miles to the north of us.

"You go back, Mr. Wright," Kelly said, licking his parched lips, "and if you happen to come back near here and happen to be forced down and happen to have a little whisky with you, it'll be more help than you staying here now."

I knew that Red had a hangover or he wouldn't have "mistered" me, so I gave him a nod of understanding and got in Tom's plane.

Back at Tuikung field I started toward the canteen to snag a bottle of Scotch, but Bonus Bentley stopped me. He was prancing around his two-seated fighter like a wild man while a dozen Chinese mechanics pondered over the engine.

"Where's Red Kelly?" he demanded. "We can't get this lousy thing started."

"What's the matter with your sourpuss Scotchman?" I answered. "Red's Peichow-side, fixin' my Spadley."

"Fixin' your—hey!" Bonus squalled, "Charley Lin flew McGregor up there to fix your engine."

I stopped dead in my tracks and we both stood there for a minute, starin' at each other.

"FOR the lova Pete," Bonus muttered, "Duke came out here and shouted for somebody to take a good mechanic up to fix the Danter and bring you back. I sent McGregor up with Lin and I guess Red climbed into another ship."

"With Tom Fang," I groaned, "and by this time those two fools'll have my Spadley scattered from hell to breakfast, and'll be stagin' a private war all their own."

"The only hope," Bonus said, "is that Kelly'll have brains enough to listen to McGregor's advice."

"The only hope is," I corrected him, "that Red'll have the Spadley going before McGregor gets there and that he shoots the damned Scotchman before he can get close enough to gum things up."

Just then the Chinese boys got the engine started and Bonus motioned me to get into the rear cockpit, but before I could fasten the safety belt that darned engine sputtered and quit. They worked with it fifteen or twenty minutes, first drying it out with throttle wide open and gas cocks off and then flooding it with the primer. Nothing seemed to work.

Duke didn't know I'd gotten back so while I sat there in the gunner's pit like a dummy, some Chinese student pilot took out the last available ship. I was so mad I could have chewed nails. After awhile I got out and went to the canteen and ordered a lunch put up for Red and a quart of Scotch, and I ordered a double cognac for my own lunch. Bonus came in a little later and had a lunch put up for Sandy McGregor and also some whisky and ordered a bottle of rye for himself. He sat there across the room, swilling it and glaring at me.

This went on for several hours, me matching Bonus drink for drink and both of us sitting there wondering what was happening up north. We could hear faintly

the driving chop of machine guns in the air and it rasped on my nerves like a fingernail dragged across a schoolroom chalk slate.

About three o'clock one of the Chinese mechs came panting into the restaurant. They'd gotten the engine started. I moved off the bench, dead sober, I thought, and was astonished to see two whisky bottles in the rack start a jig and then change their minds and do a high dive off onto the floor. It puzzled me for an instant, but when the third bottle did a nose over I knew I wasn't so very drunk and wasn't seeing things. Big guns were starting to pound to the north of us and what I mean, they were big, just like the growlers that used to shake us on the Western front.

Bonus and I piled into the Russian fighter and on the way toward Peichow I got to thinking of that coolie army, massing up there with nothing bigger than trench mortars to face modern field artillery. The damned fools would go up and take it and tomorrow or the next day there'd be a half column in the Occidental papers announcing the success of another drive by the invaders. Civilization on the march!

Approaching Peichow we could see the scattered Chinese defenders retreating from the crest trench before a solid wall of Japanese bayonets. I felt sorry for the Chinese, but couldn't help admiring the splendid, machinelike discipline of the Japanese. Nothing could stand before that steady advance of steel and men. Nothing but a counter drive of steel, and about all the Chinese had to meet the modern artillery and bayoneted ranks were their ineffective rifles and the big-swords. They didn't even have the drilled discipline of the Japanese. The X Route Army was collecting now in the open ground, south of the two mile causeway, milling around into formation under the commands of their officers; getting ready to die like sheep in a slaughter pen.

It made me a little sick.

Bonus circled the field over my Danter. I couldn't see anything of Kelly or McGregor. Not a sign of them! We landed and Bonus taxied up beside the Danter.

IV

I GOT out and looked around, completely puzzled. Then I happened to glance over toward the road and saw Red's carrot top, sticking out of the manhole in one of those tanks the Japanese had left stalled on their retreat.

"Didja bring the whisky, Mr. Wright?" he shouted.

I started over toward him and when I got near heard the rumble of a heavy-duty engine.

"For cripes sakes, get outta there, Red," I shouted, running over and sticking my head into the manhole. I waved the whisky bottle at him, like a bait.

"I can't hear you," he shouted from the bowels of the thing, working over the clunking engine. "I got a bet with that damned Scotchman. Whoever's the first to get one of these tank engines repaired and drive the tank across that rock fill is the best mechanic."

I looked wildly around and saw Bonus at the manhole of the other tank, arguing with McGregor. But of course you can't talk sense into a stubborn Scotchman. The right tread of the other tank gave a jerk and I don't know whether Bonus fell in or got in on purpose. Anyway, the manhole cover dropped into place and I wasn't going to see poor old Red go off by himself. I shoved the quart of whisky into the front of my coat and started to climb down the two rungs of the iron ladder, but Red threw the clutch on the left tread about that time, and I landed in a heap.

It sounded like all the devils in hell were pounding with hammers inside that metal box. I had to crawl through a cubby hole to get near enough so Red could hear me. I told him about the Jap advance and told him to jam ahead of that crazy Scotchman and turn broadside to stop him from running into certain death.

"How can I?" Red howled. "You're

blockin' the observation slit. Think I can fly this thing blind?"

The oil and gas fumes were so thick in there you could feel 'em sawing at your throat. I moved up into the gunner's turret and looked around, trying to orient myself. A little ahead of us, off the port bow, a wall of steel lumbered diagonally across the road. It may be that McGregor was trying to block us from running into the Jap advance but apparently Red thought it was just dirty race tactics because he gave the engine all she'd take and put soup on the left clutch, crossing behind McGregor's tank, only cutting in so close that our right tread started to climb up over the left tread of the other tank. I thought we were going to roll off into the swamp. The floor kept coming up and up until I had my right hand against it, bracing myself. But she finally thudded down from that vertical bank and leveled off on the left side of the road.

I lost balance and fell on top of the whisky bottle, almost breaking it. At the time and in all the excitement I worried at the dreadful waste if it had broken. I pulled the cork and took a sip. It tasted good, seeming to cut some of the oil and gas fumes that were thick enough to squeeze in your hands, so I took a real drag at the bottle and would've done better only Red let out a howl of anger, claiming it was his liquor. I passed it down to him and then started checking over the heavy-caliber machine gun. It was just possible we might need it.

Guns are guns in any man's language. This had a belt feed and block exactly like a Browning, but for the rest of it I guess the Japs had just tried to copy the best points from machine guns of all nations. She jammed on the first shell as it went forward and I found an exploded casing bulged in her tighter than a drum. I worked like the devil with this for a couple of minutes and then gave it up.

Red was down there with one arm looped over a clutch lever and the bottle of whisky tilted. I looked ahead to the right and saw McGregor's tank leading us by a couple of tread shoes, scraping the right edge of the causeway. When I looked to the left, my head started going around in circles. I darned near fainted. Our left tread wasn't two inches from slipping off that causeway. I always do get dizzy when I stand on a high place and look down. This was getting dangerous!

But when I hollered down to Red, motioning him to turn around and go back, he thought I meant we should try and butt McGregor off into the swamp on the other side. He grinned and nodded and gave a heave on the right clutch. I guess McGregor had the same idea at the same time. Both tanks wheeled diagonally and started climbing up on each other. I don't know what would have happened only our engine sputtered and Red eased up on the clutches. That flopped us down and the rear third of McGregor's treads hung out over the edge of the causeway as we crawled from under him.

This gave us a length or better lead of him and I braced my feet on both sides and turned around to shake hands with myself and grin at Red. Red passed me what little there was left in that quart bottle and I was swigging it down with gusto when I happened to remember about those Japs. I choked on the last swallow and almost got sick at my stomach. I wished then that McGregor was in the lead.

THE ground about ten feet ahead suddenly went up in the air like a wave breaking over a rock, and the next instant we tumbled down into a shell crater big enough to bury a house. The rocks and dirt were still rolling down on the far side, and this threw us at right angles. Red tried to jerk her around, but wasn't quick enough. We hung over the right edge of the causeway and started teetering over. Without thinking I reached up to get goggles off my eyes and cradle my

face for a crash. But just then there was a crunching, grinding sound overhead and the side walls started to buckle under the weight of McGregor's tank, crawling over the shell hole on top of us. We were in reverse, the treads sawing the edge of the causeway, and this weight on top gave us enough traction to get back into the middle. Red socked it to the left tread and we pivoted and started to climb.

Tanks give you a funny sensation. Everything seemed level inside and yet I was standing straight up and my face was only a few inches from the floor. I don't like 'em and I don't care who knows it. They're noisy and they smell bad and they're dangerous.

I began to get sober, in spite of all the liquor in me, and I considered our situation. Here we were, four white men, or at least two white men and a crazy Irishman and Scotchman, charging right into the middle of ten thousand Japs. Those boys weren't going to like us when we got there even if they liked us before we started which was doubtful.

But what could I do, inside that four-by-four gunner's cage? The more I hollered and motioned at Red the harder he tried to win the race, thinking that I was encouraging him. Maybe he knew about the Jap advance or maybe he didn't, but one thing he did have stuck in that thick Irish skull of his: McGregor wasn't going to prove himself the best mechanic by winning.

The Scotchman must have had engine trouble because we had slowly closed the gap separating us and were almost neck to neck, or manhole to manhole, when we met the Japs. There was just room enough on that causeway for two tanks so you can imagine what happened to the brown boys. They must have thought we were crazy or something. The front ranks started piling back on the rear ranks, but that column, eight abreast, just kept on coming and the natural result was that some of them got run over and the rest dove for the swamp.

Further ahead the boys weren't so badly pressed for time. They'd get themselves into a semblance of formation and let go in rifle volleys that sounded something like hail stones on a tin roof when they hit the steel plates of our tank. There were officers at the sides, waving tin swords in a grand manner which is a weakness with Japanese officers. I guess it's because their propaganda pictures always show a brave officer with a big sword leading his men to victory. Only, about the time they got set in a real heroic posture our tanks would get so close they'd have to ditch the sword and do a belly flop down into the black swamp water, twenty or thirty feet below.

Afterward Bonus swore that he couldn't see behind or to the side and thought our tank was ahead and McGregor, the stubborn fool, wasn't going to let us win that race. I couldn't see behind either, not having tried to open the slot port. But I could see ahead and believe me the sight wasn't cheering. Everything was fine so long as we didn't get an artillery shell dumped on top of us and as long as we were breast to breast on the causeway. But as soon as we got to the open ground ahead the Japs would circle around and get into those iron boxes if they had to use can openers. I tried to remember whether it was the Japs or Chinese who had that unpleasant habit of pulling people's fingernails out by the roots.

McGregor was losing ground to us, and we were right near the end of the causeway, leading by a couple or three side rivets, when our engine started coughing. We were out of gas and oh, what a sweet spot we were in! Red wheeled her on one tread with the last cough of the dying engine and we blocked McGregor. Maybe that sounds like dirty pool, but don't blame Red because the best mechanic in the world can't make a gas engine work without fuel.

I pulled my automatic and got set to sell my life as dearly as possible, as they say in the story books. I expected to see those Japs come swarming over us like a bunch of ants. Instead they continued

backing up, fighting to get through to the rear. It didn't make sense! But when McGregor gave up trying to climb over us with his stuttering engine and cut it dead so we could hear something, I understood what was causing the panic. It was the most blood-curdling sound I'd ever heard. The battle cry of the X Route Army, thousands strong.

"Szi-wang! Szi-wang! Szi-wang!" (Death! Death! Death!)

A yellow flood of men poured by us, big-swords swinging to the rhythm of that awful chant.

The Jap artillery was behind the crest and couldn't bear their guns low enough to do any good. We'd cleared the causeway and thrown the enemy into momentary confusion and the coolies didn't give them any time to recover and reform their line of bayonets. There was no mercy in those boys. They'd been brooding too long on the machine gunning that the Japs had given them over this same road.

They went to town.

Bonus and I stood sheltered under McGregor's tank and shook hands and hugged each other, both of us admittin' frankly how scared we'd been. When the last of the Chinese had passed us, a staff officers' car stopped and the three officers gave us the car and the Republic of China and whatever else they could think of. They actually thought that we'd cleared that causeway on purpose!

Red and McGregor got in the front, McGregor driving, and Bonus and I in the rear, all of us just like brothers. That night we were going to have a champagne party to celebrate. Barrels of it. Carloads of it. Boy, did we feel good! And then, about a block from the field restaurant, that darned engine started missing.

Red cocked one of those flapper ears to his. "Carburetor!" he swore.

McGregor looked at him with pity. "Na doot ye think so," he began; then his eyes traveled to the zero mark on the gas gauge. "In a way o' speakin'," he reluctantly admitted, "you're richt, Mr. Kelly."

And, as Duke Thomas said later, a good Scotchman never goes back on what he says.

How to Lower Your I.Q.

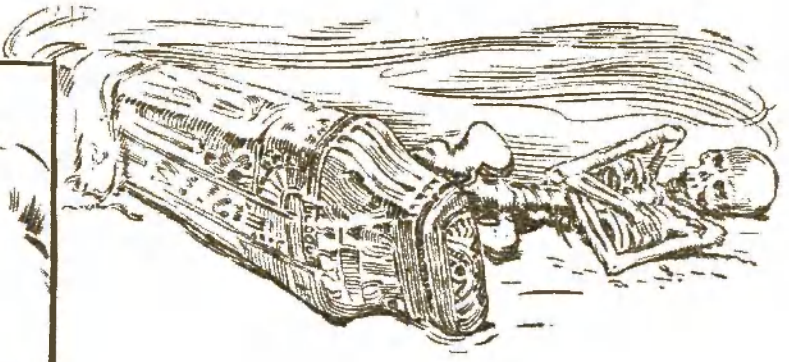
THE psychologists are in a turmoil because there seems to be good evidence that environment can cause feeblemindedness. This is unheard of; it was always believed that a normal person could not become feebleminded except from disease. But Doctor Beth Wellman of Iowa State University says different.

Always the psychologists have regarded the I.Q. as fixed by birth and practically unvarying. A normal child has an I.Q. somewhere between 90 and 110 and keeps it through life, so everyone thought. Sixty percent of the American population is in that I.Q. group, and about one percent is below 70, or feebleminded.

But Doctor Wellman has proof that I.Q.'s change as much as forty points. One child, she says, dropped from 103 to 60—feeblemindedness—and there are cases of tremendous rise as well. Doctor Wellman's point is, of course, that a bad pre-school environment may permanently impair a child's mind.

—*John St. John*

'—and I shall live another two thousand years—"



Two Hours to Go

By THEODORE ROSCOE

THE passengers are at first startled, then merely annoyed when the great airliner comes in to an emergency landing two hours short of its destination. The radio is out of order, the pilot announces, and they may be delayed on this deserted Chilean army field for some time while he makes his way through the storm to a nearby mining camp to send a message for assistance. But to John Enfield this is a welcome interruption, for one of his thirteen fellow travelers may be the murderer he seeks. In his pocket is a letter: *Taking Trans-Andean Air Express Sept. 15 Buenos Aires to Santiago, Chile.* It is signed by a piece of silk, a fragment of cherry-colored foulard flowered with forget-me-knots. There is a dark stain in one corner of the fragment which matches in color and design eleven similar fragments which have come to Enfield through the mail. Piece by piece they are forming a pattern—a pattern that, when completed, should resemble, symbolically enough, a hangman's noose. Will he be able to place it around the neck of one of his fellow passengers? Somehow he must make them talk.

AFTER the first flurry of excitement is over: "Suppose you had only two hours left to live, and you knew it," he says to the man in the neighboring lounge chair, "how would you wish to spend them? Assuming you could press a magic button and be transported anywhere you wished." The question produces some surprising answers as they hear from Mary Messenger, the little school teacher who deplores a life of routine; ex-attorney Hammand Carlyle, who would humanize the Law; Adam Henry Clay, the newspaper tycoon, blustery, splenetic with Big Business; Millicent Royce, resentful of snubs; austere Mrs. Piedmont Lennington and her outspoken daughter; emotional Mr. Flaum; unsociable Herr Gerstner, self-styled German envoy; motherly Mrs. Earwig and her frustrated husband.

ANOTHER foulard fragment appears, under Enfield's ashtray this time, and he finds himself hoping the pilot will not return too soon, for he wants to hear from the others—expressionless Jack McCracken; white-haired Dr. Hilary; and Charles, the valet. The co-pilot repairs the radio just long enough to receive an urgent warning which he communicates to Enfield—*Aboard Trans-Andean airliner is an escaped maniac, dangerous when excited.* McCracken, a hard-luck gambler, has just expressed the wish to fill a Royal Flush in his last two hours when—the lights in the cabin go out . . .

This story began in the Argosy for October 8

CHAPTER XV

SABOTEURS DE LUXE

IT WAS as if the storm had suddenly broken through the windows; let in the night at a rush. At one cataclysmic swoop, passengers and lounge cabin were blotted out. The blackness was absolute, overwhelming. For a second Enfield wondered if he'd gone blind. Tense-nerved, keyed to emergency, he stood up and instinctively backed away from his chair, staring about him at black invisibility.

At the instant of pitch darkness all sound within the plane had been extinguished. Tumult of wind and rain burst in on this silence with a roar. The screech of the gale, the hiss and drumroll and rush of plunging water loudened ten-fold for the extinguished lights. Another second Enfield stood in consternation. It was no time to imagine the roof had fallen in, or to think of a maniac in ambush somewhere in the dark. Blindly he shot his hand to the topcoat on the hangar beside his lounge chair; groped out his gun. All this was but a matter of reflex action, occupying a dozen seconds. The Colt was in his grip before he realized it.

Then he heard the co-pilot's shout from the cockpit door, "Steward! You fool *muchacho!* Did you turn out those lights?"

Simultaneously Mrs. Piedmont Lennington voiced a frightened little scream; Hammand Carlyle called out, "Matches, somebody." There was the scuffle of people rising from their chairs; the steward's excited Spanish, "But I did not touch the light-switch." Gerstner's voice in a volley of German oaths; a yell from Iriving Flaum; a sharp, admonitory, "Don't get scared, anybody, I got some matches right here," from Jack McCracken.

It woke up Millicent Royce who called out, "A.H. A.H. What's happening?" Adam Henry Clay boomed wrathfully, "Some idiot turned out the lights."

It was Rowena Lennington who beat the gambler's matchbox with her lighter, holding up the little flare in a cupped palm to reveal the lounge cabin as a dim and shadowy compartment, more than ever to Enfield like the hold of a foundered submarine. He pocketed his gun quickly, but kept his grip on the trigger, alert in the darkness at the head of the aisle for any outbreak among the passengers.

But the little twinkle of light in the tall girl's palm, spraying yellow beams across the cabin, dispersed some of the darkness and with it the feeling of panic.

Scared faces relaxed as the light beams showed the walls and windows about them still intact. The storm had not rushed in; it had merely seemed that way. Enfield was not surprised to see Mary Messenger hugging Hammand Carlyle's arm; Gerstner half way to the door with his suitcase out of the luggage rack over his chair; little Mr. Earwig bolt upright with an arm about his wife.

Eyes were white-rimmed and startled in the gloom; but the shadows quickly steadied, Jack McCracken added a match to Rowena Lennington's tiny beacon, then the co-pilot darted out of the cockpit with a flashlight, and the electric rays, torching the length of the lounge cabin, drove the darkness out of the corners, and everything was all right.

Everything except the cabin lights. The ceiling globes, the reading lamps above each chair, the lights in the pilot's cockpit and the electric bulb on the wall in the steward's cubby had been extinguished.

There was a rapid exchange of Spanish between the co-pilot and the steward; the co-pilot angrily accusing the steward of blowing a fuse in the fuse-box in the pantry, the steward voluably denying this. He had not, he declared, touched the fuse-box or the light-switches.

The co-pilot hurried aft to inspect both; came out of the steward's cubby angry and bewildered.

Addressing Enfield in Spanish, he explained that the switches and fuse-box were not the cause of the trouble. Somewhere there must be a short circuit or a broken connection. He was, the co-pilot declared vehemently, an airman, not an electrician. He could not understand this

unless someone in the cabin had taken out a knife, pried into the wall and severed the wiring. No? Then the lights were gone. He could use an emergency lamp in the cockpit; the passengers would have to comfort themselves with flashlights and candles.

CANDLES! Enfield had a momentary sinking of heart. Candles at a time when the situation called for a searchlight. Two searchlights! He mustered a show of unconcern, however, and relayed the co-pilot's announcement to the passengers.

Their responses, he thought, were characteristic. Immediately Gerstner flung his suitcase back into his chair and launched a blasphemous tirade in his native tongue at the German co-pilot, snatching out his watch in protest against further delay, and becoming red-faced about the weather, the plane, the Trans-Andean Airlines.

In reply to this outburst, the co-pilot merely turned his back on the man, and strode to the cockpit, muttering under his breath as he retreated through the forward door.

Gerstner dropped sputtering in his chair, glaring at his traveling companions as if they were at fault. But the others ignored him, their eyes on the steward who appeared with a handful of white candles which were to be fastened upright in convenient ashtrays.

Mary Messenger cried in a cheerful voice less convincing than her worried eyes, "Candles! Oh, this is really fun. We should have had them before," and the old white-haired gentleman at the far end of the aisle, calmly engaged in fitting a cigarette into his long ivory holder, offered in a gentle tone, "Yes, the lights were growing hard on the eyes. Candles will be more restful."

Even Adam Henry Clay, settling grouchily into his chair beside Miss Royce, growled, "I suppose we'll have to make the best of it, though heaven knows what's liable to happen to this third-class airship next."

The face of the quiet man beside Miss Messenger warmed with a smile. He nodded at the lighted candle the steward was affixing to her chair-arm. " 'How far that little candle throws its beams—' Remember your Shakespeare?"

"Indeed I do," the pretty girl nodded. But Enfield saw the anxiety concealed behind her air of persiflage as her smile answered the lawyer's, and she said in a lower tone, "Only condlelight always make me think of Macbeth—the—the sleep-walking scene—or Hallowe'en."

"Why, I like a candle," Hammand Carlyle said pleasantly. " 'So shines a good deed in a naughty world'." He looked across the aisle. "That right, Enfield?"

Was there an underlying significance in the man's quotation, in the level look of his undisturbed gray eyes? Enfield sensed some change in the young lawyer's attitude; the direct look, composed, self-assured, was almost a challenge, a warning. Had Carlyle seen him pocket the gun? Meant to let him know he was aware that something was up?

Or was it no more than talk? Talk to cover anxiety, nerve-strain, the sound of storm. Talk to relieve the atmosphere of tension, to reassure those who had been upset by that startling moment of blackout. Words were opiates, anodynes, means of relief; like faces, too, they were masks, could hide a meaning.

ENFIELD released his grip on the gun in his pocket, and when he brought out his hand it was holding a pack of cigarettes. Leaning across to light a smoke on Miss Messenger's candle, he murmured an agreement with Carlyle's comment. Something homey about candlelight.

"Not for me," Irving Flaum spoke out from his chair. "They remind me of funerals."

"Funerals!" Millicent Royce appealed, her hands clapped to the sides of her head. "Say, it isn't enough I have to sit up all night in a busted-down plane without any lights, but I have to sit next to a coffin-salesman talking about funerals."

She turned on Adam Henry Clay, "Can't you do something?"

"What can I do?" The publisher glared. He was nipping the end from a cigar with a gold penknife, and he clamped the Corona into a corner of his teeth, adding maliciously, "You wanted to come on this plane, you know."

"Still harping about that good looking pilot, are you?" Millicent Royce stiffened upright, flouncing her furs. She demanded, somewhat illogically, "Well, I don't see him on board anywhere, do you? What time is it? Almost two o'clock! I want another drink. Charles!" Her call whiplashed aft to the steward's pantry. "Charles, where are you? Mister Clay would like some scotch and soda, and bring me some Bacardi!"

Enfield saw Clay grasp the woman's elbow; heard his low-growled, "Millicent, don't you think you've had enough? Do you want to be in the hands of the neurologists again?"

If Miss Royce turned her back on this admonition, Enfield did not. Miss Royce had been subject to nervous disorders? He wished he could discuss this with Mr. Clay. Better still, Charles. Valets had a way of talking if the tip were discreetly handled.

But a close scrutiny of the man coming up the aisle with the summoned Bacardi was not promising. The man walked too softly, arriving before his mistress with the soundless dispatch of a geni produced by rubbing a lamp. Something about him made Enfield think of a trained seal. The perfect manservant, features a pale blank, eyes impersonal, movements as disciplined as those of a robot. Probably been in Clay's service for years—well paid to see, hear or think no evil—a character long disenfranchized by autocratic rule.

Enfield was talking to Carlyle and regarding Charles from the corner of an eye when it struck him that the valet had been with the steward in that pantry where the fuse-box was located. Could Charles have tampered wtih the light-switch?

"—and it is getting colder," he heard himself agreeing with some half-registered comment from the lawyer. "I think I'll ask the co-pilot up forward if he can't do something about the heat."

WITH this manufactured errand, Enfield stepped to the forward door, ducked through the narrow passage into the cockpit. The co-pilot, stooped at an instrument panel, turned with an exclamation, quickly removing from his head a pair of radio phones. "I had hoped you would come. You have discovered which one—?"

"Not yet." In a lower voice, "I wanted to ask about the lights."

The co-pilot nodded; wiped a hand across his forehead. "Yes. It is unexplainable. Switches and fuse-box were not touched. A short circuit in the wiring is not likely. If someone were to cut the wires—but the wiring is in the walls. The only open wiring is in the baggage compartment aft where there is a panel for use of the electricians. But no passenger could enter the baggage compartment without being seen. It is that door beyond the steward's, in full view and locked. There is a door on the outside of the plane, but that is locked on the inside before the take-off. The baggage room could only be entered through the cabin."

"No one went from the cabin into the baggage compartment," Enfield assured him. "You are certain the fuse-box in the pantry was not touched?"

"Certain. But I have discovered something that was!" The co-pilot's voice went to an alto whisper. "The dynomotor. It has not burned out as the pilot thought. We made but a hasty examination. Now I have gone over it more carefully. It has been damaged. To silence the radio."

Enfield pulled a breath. "You are sure?"

"The sabotage is unmistakable. Someone must have done it at San Luis del Monte while the plane was being serviced, the pilot at lunch."

Enfield stared. "The ground crew?"

"But no. They were occupied with the gasoline, and I was aloft on a wing to

supervise the loading. It must have been one of the passengers, can you understand? One of the passengers at lunch time who entered the plane while the others were occupied elsewhere."

"Then you must have seen—" Enfield began; and the co-pilot nodded, glancing apprehensively toward the cabin lounge. Undertoned below the cataract water-roar of the night, his voice just reached Enfield's ear.

"The rest of you were lunching at the *cantina* across the field. It was Miss Lennington—that girl and her mother. They returned to the plane, remained inside for a while, came outside with a camera."

Enfield recalled, "They wanted to take some movie shots of the place. It hardly seems likely the two women would scuttle the dynomotor, much less know where or what it was."

"The man Flaum and that old Dr. Hilary might. They, too, entered the plane. Flaum was only a short while, coming out with his hat. The elderly gentleman remained inside until the take-off. I saw him when I entered the cockpit to inspect a gauge. In his chair asleep, taking a *siesta*."

Mrs. Piedmont Lennington and Rowena! The coffin salesman and white-haired Dr. Hilary! Unlikely *saboteurs,* Enfield thought. As unlikely as that the airliner's radio should have been wilfully damaged at all—what motive for putting it out of commission?—as unlikely as the dislocation of the cabin lights—as one of the passengers being an escaped maniac—or a fugitive from Justice, for that matter.

BUT everything tonight had become unlikely—certainly the response to his suggested game had been unexpected, the stories more surprising than he might have guessed. Confused with these other mysteries, those volunteered character studies might have baffled the analytical powers of Diogenes. The process of elimination didn't work. No sooner did he cancel the Lenningtons as criminally or mentally suspect, than they came under suspicion for sabotage. Whereas Miss Messenger, a possible criminal or mental case, could not possibly have wrecked this dynomotor.

"The escaped madman must have done it," the co-pilot was whispering. "This Francis Yates, whoever it is. To silence any wireless message of alarm. Who could it be, Mr. Enfield? Which one of those four?"

Enfield looked around the pilot's cockpit helplessly. Instrument boards. Panels complicated with dials, gadgets, gauges. Altimeters. Bank-indicators. Barometers. Chronometers. Compasses, speedometers, clocks, wires, radio tubes. Mysteries as far beyond his province as the technicalities of psychiatry; and a combination of mental pathology and radiography made a problem he did not like to contemplate.

He groaned, "But there is no necessary connection between the insane person and this wrecking job, and no proof against those four. You are positive no member of the ground crew—?"

"They are not allowed to enter the plane," the co-pilot insisted. "There was no one but those mentioned who—but wait!" He broke off with a German oath. Squinted toward the passenger cabin. Switched back into Spanish, *"Carácoles!* I forgot. It was just after the passengers had disembarked and started for the *cantina.* That Miss Royce. She sent her servant back into the cabin for her liquor hamper. He was ten minutes inside, too. In the cabin alone. And the cockpit was deserted at that time. He could have done it—that *major domo*—that butler!"

Charles, again. Enfield drew on his cigarette; shot the smoke through his lips with a, "Damn!"

Three people he had to find: a murderer —a madman—and the party who had crippled this radio. With the complication that in the first two cases they might be women —that in the second case he or she might be working with confederates—that the third party did not necessarily relate to the second or first, or might, on discovery, prove to be the second or first.

And time was shortening with every minute-tick; danger increasing. Outside,

the storm was developing into a tempest that might threaten any solution of these cases at all. No telling at what moment an insane person, apparently normal, might go berserk. And in any case, a homicidal criminal, a manic depressive and a possible *saboteur* endangered the lives of their fellow travelers—certainly if the night were to engulf them with a major disaster.

Enfield swore under his breath: he could have handled the first case, but the second two—

He snapped, "Keep on that radio, Walther, and try to get that Argentine station again. So far the passengers have stayed quiet, and we must stall off any panic. Let me know if you find any more evidences of sabotage."

THEN, emerging in the candle-lit glooms of the cabin lounge, he interrupted a murmur of conversation with a word to Carlyle, something inconsequential about the co-pilot promising more heat. He could not help a quick glance at Mr. Clay's valet who was stooped at Miss Royce's chair deftly ministering to her imperious wants. Enfield wanted badly to talk to Charles and was wondering by what indirection he might engage the man, when Irving Flaum supplied the means.

"We ain't quitting the game, are we?" the fuzzy-haired man asked. "We ain't quitting with Mr. McCracken's story, are we? I thought we were going to play it all the way around."

"Yes, let's go on," Mary Messenger urged. "Dr. Hilary's had to listen to us," her smile traveled down the aisle to the passenger in the last chair, "it's only fair for us to give him his turn."

"Yeah, and Charles, here, ought to play," Flaum suggested with a wide grin. "This is a Democracy," he said with a pointed look at Gerstner. Then addressing his words to the valet, "Everybody's got a right to speak—how about Charles?"

"By all means." Enfield made the suggestion emphatic. "We don't want to forget Charles. He probably has ideas about how he'd like to spend his last two hours."

"Thank you, sir." Straightening upright beside Royce's chair, heels together at attention, tray in hand, eyes straight ahead in a face without expression, the man had the aspect and voice of wood.

Enfield saw amusement on some of the faces down the aisle, and Millicent Royce said brusquely, punctuating the order with a faint hiccup, "That will do, Charles!" dismissing the man.

But Clay, to Enfield's surprise, snapped, "Wait a moment, Charles! *Do* you have any ideas on the subject under discussion?"

"Sir?"

"You've been listening all evening," the publisher reminded sharply. "Do you have any ideas? Do you have any ideas," his eyes were caustic, "about anything? I must say, in the short time you've been with me, I've never heard you express an opinion on anything at all. Most secretive personality I've ever known."

Charles' face was blank.

"Sorry, sir."

"Not that I approve of these idiotic parlor games—particularly when they aren't in a parlor—but I'd frankly like to know if you've any opinions, or if I've hired some kind of a *zombie*. If you can't play pinochle with me back there in that pantry, at least you can answer this fool question."

"You—you really wish me to speak?"

"Go on. Go on! Dammit, it seems there's nothing else to do in this blasted airship. Go ahead, Charles."

It was evident to Enfield that Adam Henry Clay, grouchy from fatigue and probably suffering a touch of liver, was baiting the man. Charles, himself, seemed taken back. He looked about him as if he did not quite know what to do; then settled his collar with a neck-twist, tucked the tray under his arm, and faced the passengers hesitantly.

"Well," he began, "since Mr. Clay has asked me—and with everyone's permission—" He coughed, drew a breath, then blurted, "Well, my last two hours, if I had the chance, I'd like to be a gentleman!"

CHAPTER XVI

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

AND all at once, instead of the characterless valet, Charles stood revealed in the dimness of the candles as a middle-aged Englishman, stooped, grayish, weary, his pale face relaxed to show tired lines.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you ladies and gentlemen have been saying out here, and I hope you won't take offense at my listening. What Mr.—Mr. McCracken said about most people being dealt the wrong hand, doing things they don't like and wishing their lives were different—that applies to me too. I was thinking about it while Mr. McCracken was talking. All my life I've been what you might call a gentleman's gentleman. And all my life I've wanted to be just a—a gentleman—do you see?

"It's a funny country, England. First off you're born, you're told your place. I'm a cockney—raised within a stone's throw of Saint Mary le Bow's—Limehouse neighborhood. My mother was a chambermaid and my father an 'ostler. My grandfather was an 'ostler, and my grandfather's father. Being born in service, so to speak, I was never expected to be anything else. That was how I was trained, and how I was trained to think.

"That's what's called knowing your place—but a lad can't help having ambitions. I didn't want to go in service, when I was a boy. I wanted to go to the Boer War. I used to dream of fighting Afrikanders and becoming a great general. I knew of course I couldn't because all the officers in the British Army were gentlemen, even in the London Territorials. Besides, I was too young to go, and my father had put me in a house as pantry boy. He'd been apprenticed as a lackey when he was a boy, and he expected me to be—that's the way England was in those days.

"I don't say it was wrong," Charles asseverated gravely, "it was just that I didn't like it—especially having read about America where President Garfield had been a canal hand and President Lincoln a woodcutter and General Grant a mule driver and all that. I wanted to go to America where it didn't matter what your father was or your grandfather, like it did and still does in England. I saved tuppence a day so I could go to night school and learn not to drop my 'haitches'. I made up my mind that if I ever 'ad a chance, I'd go to the United States where everybody was free and equal and you had as good a chance as the next to be a gentleman.

"I'd been a footman in Lady Soames household for five years when the War came along and I got my first chance. Even in the army, I was made a batman straight off, but I 'ad a bit of luck with my captain—pulled him out of a nasty hole at Wipers—and he promised he'd see I got to the States when I was mustered out. Made me a bit of a present, the captain, and I got over."

He sighed, nodding at the memory. "I won't say I was disappointed. It was like this. I landed in New York the winter of 1919, and I had it all planned. With the money my skipper had given me, I'd bought a dress suit and a topper and all the fittings; I knew the right clothes and where to get them; I had enough to last me a month at one of the smart hotels; I was going to start right off in a land where everybody was free and equal—equal chance, I mean—and become a gentleman.

"It's funny to me when I think of it now. Over in Europe people 'ave ideas like that about America. They think they can land in the States and be as good as the next man. Have as much chance, that is to say. I guess they don't know about the Boston people and the Newport people and all that. They think about Abraham Lincoln. I guess they don't know that some of these old American families that started out as immigrants and refugees—well, today they're just as 'ide-bound and name-conscious as British royalty. If you don't think so," he turned toward Rowena Lennington, "look at the scandal when one of them marries a chauffeur or gardener—

the family couldn't take on any worse than London society over the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

"WHAT I found out about America," he explained, "was that it wasn't much different than England or France or any other place. It don't do, for example, for a man to marry out of his class. If he does, he's most likely a climber or doing it for money—he's not a real gentleman and he knows it. Or maybe he's honestly in love—then the girl's family and friends won't accept him and all his married life he'd be an outsider. He'd be an outsider just as I was an outsider in that smart New York hotel where I sat around in my gentleman's clothes. I was an outsider, and I knew it. I didn't belong there in the Ritz any more than I belonged in a drawing room at the Cecil. The worst part of it was that about half the other people there didn't belong there, either."

His glance went nervously to Adam Henry Clay as he hesitated; then a dogged expression settled on his features. "What I mean to say is this. That money doesn't make a gentleman any more than clothes makes one. Most of that New York crowd I spend a month with were just clothes and money. They hadn't earned their way up like Abraham Lincoln—they'd cleaned up or married money or inherited it. Instead of being born in a Social Register, in America you bought your way into it. You couldn't drop an 'h' on Park Avenue, any more than you could drop one on Regent Street, unless you had the money. And there was something else I learned.

"No matter where you are you can't get away from a class system. Take a smaller American city. There's this same business of social strata, only the little group at the top are fiercer about it than in New York. Take a village—I lived in one for a while—the Joneses and Smiths go together, but they just won't let in the Browns, if you understand me. Brown being a grocery clerk and Jones owning the bank. Brown can—"

"Brown can some day own a bank of his own if he saves his money and works hard," Adam Henry Clay interrupted loudly. "That's the point about America, Charles. That's Americanism."

"I was coming to that, sir. Brown can own a bank some day, yes—he could own one in England under the same circumstances, like Thomas Lipton and MacDonald and other great commoners. But as soon as he owns his bank, he's just like Smith and Jones. He looks down on Black, who took his place as grocery clerk. I mean that the people in America, the same as England or France or anywhere, as soon as they get to the top they set up an aristocracy. Of their own kind. Grocery clerks' wives are looked down on a little bit by bankers' wives—more, if the bankers' wife was once in the grocery-clerk class herself."

"You're talking a lot of damned nonsense, Charles!"

"Oh no, sir. I've been in service with a good many American families. I won't mention names, but one of the biggest families I was with—they'd made their money out of oil. The wife, sir, had once been a cash girl in a country store. Now that she lived on Park Avenue, she simply wouldn't speak to a store clerk. Simply wouldn't, sir."

Adam Henry Clay banged his fist on the arm of his chair. "This class system nonsense was never heard of until the Roosevelt Administration! Nobody ever heard of classes and masses in America until that fellow got in the White House!" He squinted in sudden suspicion. "Look here, Charles! You aren't by an chance a Communist?"

THE man smiled wanly. "I was once, sir. The winter of 1929 when I wasn't placed. But it didn't take me long to find out the Communists were like everyone else. They had their hierarchy and aristocracy just as tight, if not tighter, than any other people. The old members in the party, they were just like the old families of any country; Stalin, he's just another king in his way. That's my point.

Take a man out of a factory and put him in a palace—it's human nature he pretty soon establishes himself on an upper level of some kind, and it won't be long before he's talking about traditions and making a family crest out of the sickle and hammer.

"I don't say it isn't right; I say it's just the way things are. In America I was still a gentleman's gentleman, the same as I was in London. It wouldn't have made any difference even if I'd had a million dollars—maybe I could have gone around the Ritz, but I still wouldn't belong there. I just wouldn't *feel* right. I just would *be*—"

He stalled; fiddled nervously with the tray under his arm. Shook his head. "I guess I can't explain what I mean, after all. I—I guess I don't quite know what a gentleman is. I thought in America I'd be able to find out, but I 'aven't been able to. I don't think it has much to do with birth—I've seen people in the best families who were perfect swine. I know it hasn't anything to do with money. I know you can't just put on a dress suit and be one. You either *are* one, or you aren't. And for my last two hours, I'd like to *be* one and know I was, that's what I mean. I'd like to *feel* I was one. I'd like to know I was entitled to the feeling and had earned it and was capable of upholding it—like Abraham Lincoln must have felt."

He was retreating slowly, backing toward the door to the steward's cubby. On the threshold he paused, a middle-aged Englishman, grayish, stooped, tired under the eyes. "That's what I'd like to be my last two hours. A gentleman—"

Then his heels went together; shoulders back; eyes front; the expression washed out of his face. Once more he was the perfect manservant, features impersonal, manner mechanized.

"Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. That will be all, Mr. Clay? Then with your permission I will prepare the cocktail for Miss Royce—"

He was gone in the candlelight and shadow at the aisle's end; melted from the steward's doorway as if dismissed by some conjuration. The candles fluttered in a draught from somewhere and the shadows made fantastic silhouettes on the walls as the passengers shifted in their chair and moved their heads. In the cockpit the co-pilot, Walther, was hammering again, the knocking faint above the drumroll of rain and the crying of wind. Enfield wondered desperately if the man might be, for some unsuspected reason, scuttling the airliner's controls. Listening to Charles's story had brought the puzzle of the radio sabotage and the disconnected cabin lights no nearer to a solution; the valet's story had told Enfield next to nothing.

He had no more reason to doubt the man's sincerity of speech than he had had to doubt the sincerity of Jack McCracken, of the little Earwig couple, of Miss Lennington or Flaum or any of the others. No more reason, and every bit as much. For one of them was a murderer, of that he was certain. And if that were so, it was equally possible that another was mad and a third a dangerous *saboteur*. Unless that radio message and the co-pilot—but it was unreasonable to imagine the man had invented that Francis Yates story. Unreasonable, because there was always a chance that the pilot on his way to that distant mining camp, his path blotted out by the black rainstorm, might turn around and come back. And the co-pilot would scarcely have jeopardized his own safety by wrecking the radio and forcing the pilot to fly blind throughout the afternoon.

THEN who of the five possible suspects —Charles, Flaum, old Dr. Hilary, Rowena Lennington and her mother—could have scuttled the wireless? Who could have cut the lights? Who was Francis Yates, escaped asylum inmate seen aboard the plane as it took off from Buenos Aires? Which one of these people could be a killer, a murderer who had slipped through the meshes of a nation-

wide manhunt, daring from hiding to taunt the police?

Candlelight swam before Enfield's vision, a blur of dim-seen faces ranged down an aisle of shadows. His head ached, and from a constant smoking of cigarettes his throat burned. He saw by his wrist dial it was a quarter to three. He saw little Mrs. Earwig had fallen asleep, her head on her dispirited husband's shoulder. He saw Adam Henry Clay quarreling in an undertone with Millicent Royce. He saw Flaum leave his chair and disappear through the door marked *Caballeros;* and Jack McCracken dealing himself another hand of Canfield.

On the starboard side of the aisle, Mary Messenger had taken down a traveling case to unpack a sweater, and Carlyle was helping her into it. In the chair beyond the young lawyer, Mrs. Piedmont Lennington remained the tight-lipped statue of rebuke she had congealed into after her daughter's recital of Alpine adventure.

Rowena was reclined back in her chair, hands behind her head, staring at the ceiling, obviously avoiding her mother's eye and any contact with the German, Gerstner, in the next chair. Watch in hand, the man was silently raging now, his cheekbones suffused, lips muttering to himself.

And as before, the old white-haired gentleman in the last chair was so peacefully relaxed, so quiet as to seem asleep; but Enfield caught the look of calm blue eyes as Dr. Hilary lifted his gaze from contemplation of his cigarette, and Enfield thought he had never seen a face as benign, as untroubled—eyes as composed.

"Dr. Hilary—?" he heard himself inviting in a casual voice that did not seem to be his own. "Dr. Hilary, do you care to join our game?"

"It's your turn," Mary Messenger added, leaning from her chair to look down the sloping aisle. "Truth or Consequences? You have your choice, you know."

"Thank you." Under the drumming of the storm, the gentle voice was clear and mellifluous as the running of an unhurried brook. "Thank you, Miss Messenger, yes. I've enjoyed sitting back here on the sidelines and listening to your game very much indeed. I think Mr. Enfield proposed a very provocative question, and the answers have been exceptionally interesting—exceptionally! But I'm afraid I can't join you in your game."

Dr. Hilary turned his chair slowly to face the forward end of the cabin lounge. He must have been twenty ears older than the English valet, Charles—seventy at least. In the candle-glimmer his hair was a delicate silver, his eyes that startling blue enhanced by whitened brows.

Yet it seemed to Enfield that the old man's face right then was the youngest among the passengers. Forehead, cheeks, chin showed none of the usual erosion of seventy years; there were lines, but no wrinkles; the face was ruddy and engaging—mellow rather than elderly—without a sign of senescence.

"I'm afraid I can't join in your game because I can't accept the premise in the question, 'What would I do with my last two hours?' You see, I don't believe I'll ever have a last two hours. A last two hours implies consequent death. And I don't believe I'm ever going to die!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE TEMPLE OF DARKNESS

ASTONISHMENT robbed Enfield of muscular control; it took him a moment to rearrange his face. Others in the cabin lounge were less mindful of their expressions; Mary Messenger sat with her mouth open a little; Carlyle had forgotten he was lighting his pipe; Mrs. Earwig woke up to regard the speaker in sleepy bewilderment; Irving Flaum, on his way back from *Caballeros,* jarred to a stop at the foot of the aisle and stood looking at Dr. Hilary as if the old gentleman had just dropped in from Oz.

"Say that again, will you?" Jack McCracken requested, his squint at the old

man quizzical. "I thought you said you were never going to die."

"I'm not." Smoking placidly, his smile unchanged, Dr. Hilary assumed a slightly occult air—in the candlelight he might have been a clairvoyant, eyes visionary, face wreathed in the floating incense of a seance. "I expect to be alive two thousand years from now, as I was alive two thousand years ago and two thousand years before that. I don't believe I will ever die, and I don't believe anyone else will ever die."

The old man's eyes were limpid, unfathomable blue; and meeting their spiritual gaze, Enfield experienced a prickling along the nape of his neck. He heard Flaum say, "Well, if you were in my business, Doctor, you might have a different idea about that." But the remark did not occasion the laugh for which it had been intended.

"I have been in a coffin before," Dr. Hilary said soberly. "I have lain in a tomb, in a catacomb, in a sarcophagus. I have slept in the burial chambers of Byzantium, in the Parsee Towers of Silence, in a grave in far-off China and wrapped in linen under the sands of the Nile. But that does not mean I have ever been dead."

The prickles in Enfield's neck spread up through his scalp. He eyed Dr. Hilary in dismay. Such an amiable old fellow, too, courteously mannered, kindly, his voice modulated and without stress, his face almost childishly serene. Only the blue eyes were uncanny with their liquid depths, matching the ghostliness of the old man's words.

"Yes, I expect to be alive two thousand years from now, just as I was alive two thousand years ago."

Enfield thought: "Crazy as a hoot-owl!" and tried to look pleasantly interested, wondering: "What the hell should I do?"

He knew about manic-depressives—how they appeared to be as normal as anybody until they slipped a mental cog on some fixation, some aberration of fancy. Gentle as lambs, they could become, when aroused by controversy, vicious as raging lions.

Knowing about manic-depressives was one thing, however, and knowing what to do about them was another. He must handle this old man with gloves—there were women seated too close to him for comfort. Somehow Dr. Hilary must be tricked into the steward's cubby; perhaps shut up in the baggage compartment.

Enfield made a rapid calculation—the distance to the old gentleman's chair—the door to the steward's pantry—the breadth of the old man's shoulders. He was about to say in a soothing tone, "Yes, yes, Doctor, we know you will live forever, and wouldn't you like a cup of hot tea before you go on?" when Dr. Hilary looked straight at him and apparently discovered his thoughts.

"I expect some of you think I'm mad," was the quiet announcement. "Perhaps I had better explain my meaning by pointing out that none of you really expect to die. Occasionally you may hear someone say he thinks his days are numbered, but he doesn't really believe it. He shrugs off the idea—no use crossing the bridge before he comes to it. Death is something that happens to other people, people in some far place like China, and now and then some unfortunate neighbor or relative—but he puts off his own dying day, relegating it to the distant future, subconsciously certain it will never quite arrive.

"DEATH—" Old Dr. Hilary made a negative gesture with his cigarette holder— "death in the meaning of self-extinction is something absolutely inconceivable to the human mind. The mind can comprehend the immeasurable distances to the stars; it can conceive of cosmic dimensions beyond the mathematics of Einstein or the vision of the greatest telescope; it can imagine almost anything except its own extinction. The human ego simply refuses to accept such a thought.

"From the days of the beginning mankind has refused belief in death, instinctively pushing the thought aside, constructing in its stead a great variety of Valhallas, Nirvanas and Hereafters. 'There is no death,' is the saying. 'That which we call death is but transition.' "

Blue eyes gazing off, the old man paused; in the respectful hush which accepted his explanation and awaited his further word. Dr. Hilary sat in thought, and Enfield, disturbed, unable to support his previous suspicions, stirred in his chair uncomfortably.

"Yes," Dr. Hilary went on after a minute, "all of us are convinced of a future life in some form or another, some dimension or another—a life in which the self, the soul, the personality or whatever one chooses to call it, carries on. I do not believe in the resurrection of the body, for the decay of the physical self is all too evident in the chemistry of the grave. But there is no similar evidence that the spirit, the ego, is extinguished by physical death; from the first, Man has instinctively believed in his immortality—that he takes after-life as a fact is shown by the reckless way he risks his life in the present world.

"Then," Dr. Hilary asked, "is it logical to believe in a future existence and not believe in a past one? Tomorrow is only a continuation of Today, as Today is a continuation of Yesterday, and Yesterday a continuation of a thousand Yesterdays before.

"So it is with our lives. Every man has within himself his father and his mother, his grandparents and the great-grandparents before them.

"I, for example, am the result of missionaries, merchants, traders, pirates, a hangman, a dissolute Scotch laird, an Irish milkmaid whose parents were unknown. Going farther back I would find Dutch burghers, Flemish soldiers, a French dispatch rider, a swordsman who went to the Crusades. Farther still, the line crosses the Alps to the Mediterranean.

"Could I but trace it, I would find it somewhere among the ancients. Within those ancients my life was incipient, my future existence was a part of their existence which, in turn, had resulted from the existence of *their* forebears.

"What a labyrinth of roots each of us springs from. How far each life-line must have traveled, and what a far-wandering course. Go back far enough and you might find the line carried by one of Caesar's legionnaires who was the son of a Greek slave whose father was a Persian sailor whose grandfather was a Tartar cameleer from China. On the maternal side might be a Phonecian shepherdess, a maid of Carthage, an Egyptian dancing girl, one of the daughters of King Solomon.

"PEOPLE talk of their genealogies. Who can trace his genealogy back from the year 1500? People consider themselves one hundred percent Aryan or Latin or Briton. Nonsense! In your intricate backward genealogy races melt away, intermingle, merge; your ancestors spoke all the tongues of Babel and were of the complexions of all the peoples of the earth. Snip one root out of your past, and you would not be you. You, as you are today, are the sum of those ancient ancestors; you have them within you, as your life was incipient in theirs. Today they live in you; Yesterday you lived in them.

"We are astonished sometimes at the things we do in this day and age of supposed enlightenment—our brutal wars, our superstitions, our violent outbreaks of crime. We forget the barbarians in us; our Roman ancestors are talking to us when we take up arms; our Assyrian ten-thousandth-great grandparents are sending us to astrologers for advice; our African progenitors whisper in our ears to fill us with nameless dreads at night.

"Our atavistic impulses, our tendencies to sudden vandalism, certain instincts, subconscious fears and feelings—are they memories out of the past which lie deep-buried in our minds as we carry the life-stream passed to us by the ancients? Every child is told not to fear the dark,

yet darkness is a child's first fear—is he remembering timber wolves roaming the forest, brigands lying in wait beyond castle walls, black deserts a-prowl with *bedouin* marauders, jungles alive with enemies?

"His mother never told him of these dangers; why does he fear them? How does young Beethoven know more music than many a music scholar fifty years his senior; how does a Russian peasant boy know every move in chess, how is he without a lesson able to beat the champion masters of Europe? Inherited fears, we say of the child afraid of the dark. Genius, we say of the prodigy, and throw up our hands.

"Inherited fear?" Dr. Hilary shook his head. "One inherits red hair or a turned-up nose, not some abstraction like fear. Genius? Who can define the word! Another explanation would refer to a 'throw-back'! It seems to me that *go-back* is a better term. In the child's subconscious he is *remembering*—whether it is fear, or music, or the master-moves in chess. But how could a child remember something he has never seen, heard about or learned before? The answer to me is apparent; he must have seen the dangers he dreads, studied harmony and composition, learned those intricate chess moves.

"In other words, he is a *go-back* to one of those ancient ancestors whose existence was a part of the sum which he represents. He is the reincarnation of that ancient forebear. The man who lived Yesterday is *he*, and he is the man who lived Yesterday. History is repeating itself; the billion life-particles that have joined to create his existence, have worked a repetition, so to speak—he is one of his ancestors all over again, come back to the world.

"This is not the Theosophist's theory of reincarnation, as generally accepted; it is my own theory. I believe all of you were alive a thousand, ten thousand, twenty thousand years ago—alive in some personality or another. I believe Beethoven may have been a musician in the court of Darius the Great. I know that I am the reincarnation of an ancient Egyptian—"

ONE could almost believe it as the old man broke off speaking to draw thoughtfully on his cigarette. Sitting straight-backed in his chair, knees bent at a sharp angle, boots together, he was posed like one of the seated guardians at some Cheops tomb-entry. Candlelight was mystic on his face; and the shadow silhouetted on the wall beside him was a stenciled figure such as one might see on Egyptian frieze.

"I will tell you a story," he resumed quietly, "and I think you will understand, as I tell it, why I believe in reincarnation.

"A number of years ago when I was a good deal younger and a lot more skeptical than I am today, I happened to be in Egypt doing research for a certain historical society. I had an overweening passion for Egyptology and an extraordinary aptitude at deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics, and I considered myself a scholar of note-worthy erudition and acumen. I know better now.

"My work took me into the Egyptian hinterland, far up the Nile to a place in the desert known as El Zar. It is not exactly a garden-spot, El Zar—merely a clutter of mud huts, flies and smells on the brown riverbank, about as far from the postcard views of Egypt as heat and dust and poverty could make it.

"I had never seen such ragged, listless *fellaheens*, such shabby water-wheels, such decrepit camels. The desert stretched off to nowhere, the sun beat down, the air was blinding with blowing sand.

"But history was thick around El Zar—so thick it almost made my head spin. I didn't know why, but the minute I landed there I was possessed with a strange excitement, a feeling that I was on the verge of a great discovery, the sort of feeling an explorer has when he enters new territory, or an antiquarian at sight of a relic.

"I'd been trying to trace a certain Prince Amen who was driven from the throne of Egypt by the Red Pharaoh. Have you ever heard of the Red Pharaoh?

Little is known about him, for he ruled in the days before the pyramids, long before Tutankhamen and Amenhotep and the better-known Egyptian kings. The mortar was hardly drying in the temple of Bubastis when the Red Pharaoh ruled, and the pharaoh who ordered the death of all the Israelite children, years later, was a humane man in comparison to the Red Pharaoh.

"The Red Pharaoh was a pretender, a dictator who seized Egypt just as the dictators seize countries today; then he laid waste the land with fire and sword, scourging the people with his armies, watering the desert with blood. There is an old Egyptian story that the Red Sea is a pool of blood that never drained from a valley where the Red Pharaoh staged his mass executions. The story is apocryphal, but recently discovered records prove the Red Pharaoh to have been one of the greatest killers of human history. It was he who drove the good Prince Amen from the throne, slaying the prince's wife and putting a price on Amen's head.

"If little is known of the Red Pharaoh, even less is recorded of Prince Amen; fleeing into the desert, his footprints were lost not only under the sands of time, but under the sands of his own day.

"The Red Pharaoh sent soldiers after him, a captain and one hundred archers—so much is in the records. Prince Amen and the soldiers who went after him were never heard of again.

"The story would have been forgotten, along with the prince, but a legend developed that the prince had taken a great treasure with him—from generation to generation that story has lived in Egypt for over three thousand years, and the Egyptians have a saying that the truth goes on forever like the Nile, while a lie dries up like a well dug in shifting sand.

"I WASN'T interested in the treasure legend—I put it down as a fable like the Red Sea story—I was interested in history. I wanted to find out if Prince Amen had reached the heart of Africa where there are mysterious evidences of Egyptian blood in certain Congo tribes today.

"It would take too long to tell of the struggle through a library of papyrii that led me to believe Prince Amen had fled up the Nile as far as El Zar; the point is that when I visited El Zar in my research, I was certain this ancient prince had been there.

"Then I found out I wasn't the only one trying to trace the history of Prince Amen. There was a camp of archaeologists in El Zar, young Americans like myself, five of them. Those five archaeologists were wild boys. They had come down from Cairo, hot on Prince Amen's trail, and they were a lot more interested in Prince Amen than they were in archaeology. I found that out. The history aspect didn't interest them, either. They were all stirred up about that treasure story, and when they learned I was an Egyptologist who could decipher hieroglyphics, they let me in on a secret.

"No, I should say they hauled me in. One of those boys had found a scroll of papyrus at the bottom of an excavation, and he had deciphered enough of it to know that it was a letter written by Prince Amen to a friend. The prince told in this letter that he was fleeing the wrath of the Red Pharaoh—fleeing to El Zar and taking his greatest treasure with him. The soldiers had killed his wife, the letter said, and Prince Amen's only hope was to hide himself and his treasure in the Temple of Darkness, reached by the Blue Doorway in the desert near El Zar.

"Do you see why those young archaeologists were wild? They were treasure hunting! Prince Amen had amassed great wealth in his benevolent reign, and his greatest treasure must have been something fabulous. There it was in writing—he had taken it with him to El Zar to hide in the Temple of Darkness reached by a certain Blue Doorway in the sands near El Zar. Those boys had dug holes in the sand for miles around El Zar and had found no Blue Doorway. They be-

lieved they must have been mistaken about the hieroglyphic letter, and they called me in for my advice.

"I jumped when I read those hieroglyphics. I jumped right up from my chair. 'I know where the Blue Doorway is!' I cried. 'I can lead you to the Temple of Darkness!' Then I stopped, astonished at myself. Absolutely. Those words had rushed out before I realized what I was saying. I had never heard of the Temple of Darkness before—never heard of the Blue Doorway! The strangest part of it was, I had an intuitive feeling I knew all about that temple, I had a feeling I could walk out of that camp and go straight to that doorway somewhere out in the desert sands.

"Those boys yelled like anything when I blurted what I did. 'Lead us to that doorway, Hilary, and we'll divide the treasure six ways.' It made me sick, the feeling I had. I knew I could find that Blue Doorway where Prince Amen had fled with his treasure, and the strength of my conviction made me wonder if I was touched in the head. And at the same time I didn't want to go to that Blue Doorway in the sands. I had a feeling that if I went there—if there *was* such a place—it would lead to some dreadful end that had better be left forgotten in ancient history.

"I told those boys to give up their treasure hunt, but they would have none of that. Not with the scent of Egyptian prize-money in their nostrils. They believed, too, that I had deciphered the directions to this secret temple from their piece of papyrus, and how could I explain my unaccountable hunch?

"'Nothing doing, Hilary,' they cried. 'You know where the place is, and you've got to take us there!' Next thing I knew, I was looking into the muzzle of a gun."

DR. HILARY widened his eyes at this memory, and a look of mystery shadowed across his face.

"I took them there," he said simply. "We walked out of that camp at nightfall and hiked across the sands under the stars. About a mile from El Zar, near an outcropping of sandstone, I stopped. I didn't know why I stopped.

"'That is the place.' I pointed. 'Near those rocks.'

"They brought shovels with them, and they dug. For twenty hours they dug.

"'If you are lying,' their leader told me grimly, 'we will kill you.'

"I didn't know why I was unafraid of that threat. 'That is the place,' I said. And there, buried thirty feet under the sand, it was. A door of blue granite at the bottom of their excavation.

"Their leader brought out a stick of dynamite to blast the door.

"'Give up this treasure hunt!' I begged. 'Go no farther because—' Then I could not tell them why. I only knew I did not want to go on with it. I was frightened because they had found the Blue Doorway by following my directions; I was sick because I could not understand how I had known where it was. And in the same queer way, I was certain there was tragedy beyond that door.

"Do you think I could stop those lads who had the glint of ancient treasure in their eyes? They blasted the door. There was a stairway underground, and they went down with rush-lights and I went with them.

"At the bottom of the stairway we were in a vast subterranean chamber ventilated by wind from some hidden source, a cavernous room like a great underground hall. There were a dozen doors leading into side passages that wandered off under the earth like the galleries of a coal mine. There was a smell of age to that place that frightened me, a smell that was older than the breath of Noah. But what frightened me most was a sense of familiarity with my surroundings.

"Before I could stop myself, I was pointing into the blackness of one of those galleries. 'Prince Amen went that way,' I said. 'Through that second door at the left. The soldiers of the Red Pharaoh were close after him.'

"I could have bitten off my tongue when I said that, for those treasure-maddened archaeologists raced to the tunnel I had indicated. In the door of that tunnel they found something. Do you know what it was? An arrow! An ancient bowman's shaft inscribed with the scarab of the Red Pharaoh.

"I tell you, it made me ill. Those boys thought I'd seen the arrow lying there in the dust of three thousand years, but I hadn't. Somehow I had known that was the doorway the fleeing prince and the pursuing soldiers had gone through.

"We followed that underground gallery for half an hour; then there was another mine-chamber, another choice of doors. I couldn't turn back then, and I pointed out the way a second time. In that passage we found another arrow. The Red Pharaoh's soldiers must have been shooting at the fugitive. Once more I had picked out the direction of the chase.

"Then for hours we followed those subterranean passages under that desert in Egypt, and you can imagine my feelings as time and again, in a labyrinth of black galleries, I pointed out the trail.

"Can you picture those American treasure-hunters racing along with their torches aloft? The play of inky darkness and shadow? The hollow echo of shouting and pounding boots trailing off through corridors that had heard no sound for centuries piled on centuries?

"Those boys were seeing treasure in front of their eyes, but I was seeing something else. I was seeing Prince Amen running ahead of me, running for his life with a bundle clutched in his arms. Occasionally he would look back in terror, eyes dilated, sweat streaming, the agony of an arrow-wound white on his face.

"After him, like bloodhounds, raced the Red Pharaoh's soldiers, a hundred bowmen led by a captain with a spear.

"That chase had taken place more than three thousand years ago, yet I could see it all in my mind. I could imagine the shouts, the hammering of many sandals, the ***whing*** of arrows speeding after the fugitive. Imagine those shouts? I could almost hear them! No—leading those five wild archaeologists through that underground labyrinth, I felt as if that chase were being repeated, as if at any next turn of the passage Prince Amen, himself, might appear in the gloom ahead.

"I FOUND myself running. 'This way! This way!' I called to the boys behind me. 'We are almost there!' Almost where? I didn't know. But suddenly the passage led into a room as huge as the night; far at the end there was an opening, a patch of sky, a single star. The vast cavern was filled with a rushing of wind and a muffled booming of water, and I had to raise my voice in a shout. 'There is the exit!' I shouted. 'Prince Amen tried to reach the exit where he could block pursuit by tumbling a balancing rock!' Then, 'Stop! Stop!' I screamed. 'Look out for the bridge!' and I threw myself down just in time.

"It takes my breath away to remember it now—how I happened to remember it then. I flung myself down, and the torch sailed out of my hand into blackness ahead of me and fell down, down and down into a mile-deep underground canyon with a boom of roaring water at its bottom. I was on the very rim of that abyss, and if I'd run straight ahead I would have missed the narrow span of the bridge, a natural trestle of stone that arched across the chasm and ended at that distant exit that framed a star.

"It took me a while to get to my feet and start across that bridge. There were no handrails. It was a terrible bridge, like walking a tight-rope in the dark. I didn't want to cross it, but the boys behind me kept pushing me on because Prince Amen with his treasure must have fled across that awful span. It was a long bridge, too, and in places no wider than a girder. I thought of Prince Amen, wounded, gasping for breath, teetering and balancing across that dreadful trestle, his arms heavily laden, his eyes hungry on that distant star. Arrows whistled by his

head. Cries of his pursuers came nearer. Once he stumbled, caught himself. Looking back, he almost lost balance, slipping on his own blood—

"That bridge was a nightmare. Have you ever visited a place in a dream and had an uncanny feeling, not that you have been there before, but that you have dreamed about it before? That underground trestle was like that. Not a dream within a dream, though. A nightmare within a nightmare! Far back in my subconscious I had a memory of crossing that bridge, and I have never experienced anything in my life as terrible as crossing it again. A hundred times I wanted to turn back, but those fortune-hunters behind me pushed me on. They wouldn't have stopped for anything, those boys. They were mad to have a look at Prince Amen's treasure. They got it!

"Prince Amen never reached that exit which framed a star. He never got out of that ancient mine to block the opening by tumbling a balancing rock—how had I known it was there?—in the sandstone ledge that sheltered that aperture. We found him after we crossed that horrible trestle—lying where he had fallen, not a dozen paces from the exit he had tried desperately to reach.

"There he lay—the bleached bones of his skeleton preserved through the ages by darkness and dry, desert air. There, splintering through the hip-bone, was the spear which had felled him—the spear hurled by the captain of the Red Pharaoh's guard. And there, still clutched in his bony embrace—how those five wild archaeologists stared when they saw it, and realized!—was Prince Amen's greatest treasure. Another skeleton—a little skeleton—one tiny hand of bones still intact—the fragile skull resting on the bones of the father's ribs—the skeleton of an infant!

"Those five fortune-hunters looked pretty sick when they got out into open air. I felt pretty badly, myself. I was remembering how that captain of the Red Pharaoh's guard must have felt when he leaned over Prince Amen with his torch and saw what his spear had done. The baby had been killed in the fall, and the captain must have felt as I did when I saw that little skeleton."

Dr. Hilary passed a hand across his forehead. "History tells us the Red Pharaoh was assassinated by a captain of his guard. Egypt was liberated and there was a better dynasty. I know it was that captain who pursued Prince Amen into the Temple of Darkness. I am sure it was. There is a drawing of him on a stone plaque in the museum at Cairo— I stopped there to see it last year when I returned to Egypt intending to explore once again that mysterious underground temple near El Zar. A great sandstorm had blown across the desert, and I couldn't find the Blue Doorway or the exit guarded by the balancing rock. You see, those archaeologists never told about the place—all five of them were drowned in a river-boat accident returning from El Zar to Cairo—and I made no official report because—well, that drawing on the plaque in the Cairo museum—that picture of the captain of the Red Pharaoh's guard—the profile is so much like mine that it might have been a portrait."

CHAPTER XVIII

LAST MAN SPEAKS

REINCARNATION. Egypt. Cairo. El Zar. Words that sounded strange there in the cabin lounge. When Dr. Hilary made a sign to indicate that his story was finished, Enfield had to bring himself out of a conviction that none of this night was quite real.

"That's a remarkable story, Dr. Hilary. You believe yourself to be, I take it, the reincarnation of that ancient Egyptian captain."

"How else could I explain my knowledge of that doorway under the sand, my familiarity with that underground labyrinth? But do not mistake me, I am not a Theosophist. Rather, I am a

devotee of Yoga. Had I the time—and I apologize for taking more than my share in your game—I could tell of some experiences in the Far East that are quite as incredible as that Egyptian episode. But perhaps you would be interested in a photograph in the frontispiece of my latest book."

Drawing a small volume from his pocket, he extended it toward Enfield; nodded. "I published it last year when interest in Yoga was revived by all those news stories about Thibet. I consider the photograph very curious, for it was taken of me in India several years ago, and in it my features have an Oriental cast."

Enfield stepped down the aisle to take the book. He could determine nothing particularly Asian in Dr. Hilary's photograph; the title and authorship were more worthy of note.

Raja Yoga And The Bhagavad Gita
By Mansell H. Hilary, Ph.D., Lt. D., M.A., F.R.S.

Enfield turned the book in his hand, and was filled with confused emotions of relief and despair. Relief that this gentle old scholar could not be any Francis Yates, escaped asylum inmate—the book and its photograph frontispiece were undeniable identification. Despair that the puzzle of the mad passenger, along with that of the murderer, was not yet solved.

It was after three in the morning: long past the hour for such an unmasking. Time this masquerade was brought to an end. Enfield felt his nerves had reached the limit of their endurance—the game of Truth and Consequences had established neither truth nor consequences—he must break either one or the other of these unsolved cases—he could restrain himself no longer.

"But people *do* die," he said in a controlled voice, handing the Yoga book to Dr. Hilary. "At least, in the accepted meaning of the word, people die. Some"—he was backing up the aisle toward his chair, and he waited until he had reached the forward end of the cabin lounge—"some are even murdered!"

"Murdered?" The old savant's eyes, in the candle-shine, were startled.

Enfield had purposely stressed the word, and he quickly let his eye travel over the passengers to mark individual reactions. "Yes, murdered," he repeated; taking up a position at the head of the aisle, the better to observe his audience. "Most people die natural deaths, but occasionally some are murdered. And that brings us back to Truth and Consequences—the question that started the game—and my own answer to that question."

"Say, that's right." It was Jack McCracken, craning up out of his chair. "*You* ain't come through with an answer yet, Enfield. And you said you'd come to a conclusion on your own part that surprised you."

"Why, so he did," Rowena Lennington exclaimed. "It was Mr. Enfield's question in the first place." She pointed her cigarette at him. "You really mustn't let us down, you know, after starting all this."

Mary Messenger cried, "Of course Mr. Enfield must play. We all went right on talking, and never gave him his chance." Then she looked at him excitedly. "But you say your answer has something to do with people being murdered?"

Enfield did not feel calm. But he nodded calmly, and calmly put his right hand into his pocket—the pocket that concealed his Colt automatic.

"My last two hours"—he said deliberately, watching the faces ranged before him—"my last two hours, given the chance to be anywhere I wished, doing anything I wished, I'd like to solve a murder. It was a brutal murder, a double murder—the most vicious sort of a crime. If I never did anything else in my life—if I had only two hours left to live—I'd like to catch the kidnapper who murdered Bascomb Wynstreet and little Billy Wynstreet at their Bluepoint summer home, the fifteenth of July, 1937. You see"—and he didn't need to feign sincerity or make any pretense of grim feeling—"I'm with the F.B.I."

HE COULD sense a tensening of the atmosphere as eyes met his, there was a general leaning forward and craning up out of chairs, and people turned to give him their whole attention. Shadow-patterns became fixed on walls and ceiling; from the pilot's cockpit there came an abrupt silence, as if the co-pilot had halted his tinkering to listen; in the minute that followed Enfield's declaration, there was no sound in the cabin lounge save the storm-whoop at the windows, the siren-wail of wind in the mountain night.

Then Adam Henry Clay said, scowling from his chair, "You say you're with the Federal Bureau of Investigation?" his manner that of gruff surprise.

Hammond Carlyle took his pipe from his mouth. "A Government man?"

More leaning forward and craning among the passengers farther aft; and Mary Messenger, looking at Enfield, round-eyed, exclaiming, "A G-man. Oh, Mr. Enfield—how thrilling!"

Enfield wondered grimly if the pretty Ohio schoolteacher had an idea of just how thrilling it was. The airliner's cabin had chilled considerably with the cold of the Andean night, but his forehead felt moist and the hand gripping the gun in his pocket was sweating.

Looking down the aisle he experienced a tingle of nerves. Miss Messenger, Carlyle, the Lenningtons, Gerstner, Dr. Hilary on the one side. Clay, Miss Royce, Irving Flaum, the Earwigs, Jack McCracken on the other. One of them was a murderer—another possibly mad. Yet for six hours of cramped association, listening to their talk, marking every gesture, he had been unable to identify either killer or maniac, unable to perceive a single incriminating clue.

For a sickening moment he wondered if he had made a mistake; wasted the night and precious time on a false lead. But the evidence he had been presented with at the beginning of the plane ride was uncontrovertable; one of these passengers before him had to be a desperate and dangerous criminal—the more dangerous for the audacity of inviting capture and the cunning of an impenetrable disguise.

He had not expected his announcement to effect a give-away; had only hoped for some sign. But the attentiveness and surprise on the faces ranged before him in the candle-glimmer was no more than might have been registered by any chance group of people hearing an unexpected announcement. No one dropped a mask by grabbing for a hidden gun. He had known he was up against a shrewder intelligence than that.

He said, forcing a conversational manner, "Yes, Miss Messenger, I'm a G-man. I suppose that sounds pretty melodramatic and all that, but it isn't—save for rare exciting encounters that you more or less take in your stride—quite what it's been publicized. You might compare it to a fireman's job, a lot of marking time and detail with occasional hurry calls to keep you awake, and even then it's so much routine."

He took a cigarette from his pocket and tapped it lazily on his thumbnail, deliberately keeping his eyes on the girl. He thought, "I ought to have been an actor—" and secret hairs prickled on the back of his neck because someone down the aisle might at that moment be sneaking out a gun to shoot him.

"No," slowly turning his glance as he struck a match and fired the cigarette, "it's not very exciting, a Federal man's job. I don't mean to say it's humdrum; but modern police methods are, I should say, about nine percent science and ninety percent hard routine work and one percent melodrama. I have an office and a desk and a calendar. I take vacations and go fishing. Of course," he allowed himself a casual smile, "when you do run into melodrama it can be touch and go."

HE SHOOK out the match and wondered if the smile on his face looked as imitation as it felt.

Rowena Lennington's, "I should think

it would be—what with brutes like Dillinger and his crowd" seemed to come from a great distance away, although the girl was not ten feet from him, hunched forward in her chair, elbows on knees, chin in palms, regarding him in open admiration. She reiterated, "I should think it *would* be touch and go," and turned to the stiff-backed woman beside her. "Think of that, Mother! Mr. Enfield is a G-man."

Mrs. Piedmont Lennington, giving Enfield a bleak look, snapped, "Then why hasn't he done something to get us out of this?"

"G-man, Mother, not airman," the girl defended him; while Mary Messenger spoke again excitedly to ask: "But don't you often risk your life, Mr. Enfield?"

"Why, not often," Enfield said. "I shouldn't say more than any policeman on a job. Certainly not the way a soldier does—the way Flaum did that Christmas Eve he told us about—or those volunteers Mr. Earwig described—nothing as dangerous as friend McCracken's dash across Bilbao. To begin with, a criminal thinks twice before he takes a shot at a Federal Agent—and your chance of running into a Dillinger is a thousand times rarer than your chance of having an automobile accident.

"No." He gazed thoughtfully at the glowing tip of his cigarette. "It isn't exactly the thrills that keep you on a job like mine. It's hatred of crime. Hatred of seeing your fellow man bullied and bilked, sometimes tortured and killed by a class of deadly parasites who prey on society like wolves, trample the weak and undermine the strong, see honest people as suckers waiting for despoilment.

"I suppose I feel about criminals the way a doctor feels about germs—they imperil the health of a nation. You've got to eradicate them from society, or society can't survive. I didn't know I felt so deeply about it until I began speculating on what I'd do with my last two hours, given any option on the time. Naturally I considered the usual possibilities. There's a young lady in Washington, D. C.—I'd like to re-live a horseback ride I once took in the Sierra Madres—there's an island in the Mediterranean I'd like to see again—a sweet little schooner I wanted like the devil to buy.

"But boiled down, those things seemed small potatoes compared to what I might do at my job. The *real* thing I wanted to do with my life was fight crime. I'd be happier finishing up in harness somewhere—adding my bit to the work of the boys in Washington are doing, cleaning up the leeches and parasites and wolves preying on the honest people in America. And the crime I'd like most to see cleaned up is that rotten kidnapping case in which Bascomb Wynstreet and his young son were murdered."

IT WAS not an extemporaneous speech; earlier that night he had written it out in his mind. Not badly delivered, he thought, considering the circumstances. The competing voices of rain and wind, the knowledge that one of his listeners was taking it personally and that another in the audience might interrupt with a berserk brainstorm, was not conducive to smooth oratory.

He must have sounded convincing, though. There were murmurs of acclaim and nods of approbation while he turned aside to get rid of his cigarette. Mrs. Earwig said in her fluttery voice, "That certainly was a terrible crime!" and Irving Flaum focussed his goggles to ask: "Say, did they ever get any farther with the case?"

"Still working on it," Enfield said.

"And a fine muddle they made of it," was Adam Henry Clay's tart criticism. "Bungled it from start to finish, if you ask me. I told the Department what I thought of it in my editorial columns. That business about not indicting the Ketchell woman—"

But he was interrupted.

"Wasn't there something behind that?" Hammand Carlyle's eyes were gravely curious. "There must have been something that held the police from prosecuting Clara

Ketchell. If I ever saw a case made to order for the D.A.—"

"That's just the point." Enfield nodded grimly. "It was made to order."

There was a moment's pause.

"But I don't know about it," came Jack McCracken's drawl from the far end of the aisle. "What was it, Enfield? I was in Bilbao—that was when I was in Spain—that summer of 1937. What was this Wynstreet case?"

It seemed almost incredible that someone might not have heard about it. Press, radio and newsreels had kept it in headlines for months; the faces of Bascomb Wynstreet and little Billy Wynstreet had been engraved on the national consciousness by thousands of front-page photographs; the name of Clara Ketchell became notorious; the Wynstreet summer home on Bluepoint Island in Bluepoint Lake as well known as the Adirondacks themselves; the crime a subject for America's sermons, political speeches, magazine articles, editorials.

Enfield regarded the wiry gambler in controlled surprise. "But I don't suppose the story would get to Spain," he said evenly. "I'll tell it briefly. I was going to, anyway. Maybe," he made it careless, his glance sauntering over the others, "some of you'd be interested. . . ."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Temple of Ishtar

THE lost city of Ishtar has been found. For five years now an expedition of French archaeologists has been excavating in Mesopotamia, uncovering the ruins of a city called Mari where, thousands of years ago, the goddess Ishtar was worshipped. She was the goddess of love and war—certainly one of the most celebrated and powerful deities of all time.

Most important, the French archaeologists have discovered Ishtar's temple. There were many of them, of course, in Mesopotamia, but the temple at Mari is thought to have been the first and the most famous. Its oldest ruins date back before 3,000 B.C.; and excavation reveals that it was rebuilt a number of times. According to Andre Parrot, director of the French expedition, the most recent reconstruction was done somewhere around 2,000 B.C.

In Babylonian times Ishtar's temple at Mari was a goal for pilgrimage. Men and women came there to pay homage to the goddess who was so vitally important in their lives. And always they left presents at her feet—small statues and jewels and gold. It was wise, they knew, to give concrete evidence of their faith; for without Ishtar's good will the men would not be lucky in love and the women would never bear children. So Ishtar grew very rich from gifts—or, more accurately, her priests did. It was probably a most satisfactory arrangement: the goddess received the homage—and the priests took care of the gold.

—J. Wentworth Tilden

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

Coming Soon: Ned Buntline—Stranger than Fiction

The terriffic blast sent him sprawling

By

CARL RATHJEN

Author of "It Rained One Night," "Red Pennant Flying," etc.

Paradise Cove

Calm in the California Gulf it lay, looking just like its name in the moonlight. Only in the rustle of its foliage could Satan's whisper be heard. An exciting story of adventure in tropic waters

IT WAS a dingy rooming-house just a quarter-block south of East Hollywood Boulevard. It was queer that someone living in a place like this should have dough enough to charter a plane. Ted Wayne stepped back to check the house number again.

The tall man who opened the door stood back so the door shielded him from the street. In the dimness of the hall he looked vaguely familiar to Wayne. One thing was certain though, his checked coat and gray flannels were too expensive for a place like this.

"Someone phoned me," said Wayne, "and said to meet him here. Something about a job for me and my plane."

"Yes, Wayne. Come in," said the man, leading the way to a shabbily furnished living room that wasn't quite as dismal as the hall. Wayne recognized him now. Rogers Ridgefield, the brightest star of Consolidated Artists Studios. Wayne had often worked in his pictures, doing air scenes and stunts when no closeups required the use of Ridgefield's regular double, but he had never met Ridgefield personally.

"Why all the mystery, Ridgefield?" he asked, glancing about.

Ridgefield smiled, and shrugged. "Reporters, autograph hounds. I'm on vacation and I mean to have a real one this time." His tone seemed to assume that Wayne knowing pictures, would understand .

Wayne nodded. "I remember now reading in one of the gossip columns that you were planning a sneak vacation. What can I do for you?"

"I want to fly down to Paradise Cove,"

Ridgefield said. "Do you know where it is?"

Wayne smiled. "It's a new one on me. I thought I knew every inch of—"

"It's down in Mexico, Sonora State," Ridgefield said. "On the Gulf of California. That's why I'll need an amphibian. I can relax down there unrecognized. I'm planning to stay a couple of days and I'll want you to remain with me."

"I see," said Wayne.

Ridgefield's dark eyes watched him. "Can't you make it?"

"It's this way," Wayne declared. "I've gotten tired of stunt stuff and charter flights, so I've . . ."

Ridgefield smiled. "Will five hundred rest your weary bones?"

Wayne laughed. "I'd burn my bed for that. But you don't understand, Ridgefield. I've applied for a Coast Guard pilot's berth—I flew for the navy a few years back. My appointment ought to come through any day now and if I'm away . . . I tell you what I'll do. I'll run down to Southern Division Headquarters in L. A. I'll speak to Captain Spellford and if you don't hear from me in an hour you'll know it's okay. And I'll meet you at Glendale Airport, say at six-thirty."

Ridgefield frowned a moment.

"All right," he agreed. "If I don't hear from you . . . But make it the Alhambra Airport. Too many reporters around Glendale."

•

CAPTAIN SPELLFORD, commandant of the Southern Division Headquarters of the Coast Guard, shook his narrow, greying head.

"No, Wayne," he said, "your appointment hasn't come through—yet."

Why that hesitation, Wayne wondered. "You sound doubtful about it."

Spellford nodded. "And here's why. Remember a few years back when you pulled a stunt out over the harbor when a regatta was—"

"Will I ever forget?" said Wayne. "For *Wings Over the Sea* for All-Star Films I was supposed to spin a ship down toward a crowded waterway. I made it look too good and the bay boiled when the regatta tried to get out of the way. A man by the name of Bixby had charge of the Coast Guard patrols that day and he was wild because his superior was on hand to see the riot. But what's that got to do with my appointment?"

Spellford smiled grimly. "Bixby," he said, "is now in Washington, and he's the one who is to pass on your appoint—"

"But he can't hold that against me," protested Wayne. "The director of the picture had assured me he'd gotten approval for the stunt. How was I to know he'd only spoken to the regatta sponsors and not to the Coast Guard?"

"I understand and think I can straighten matters out with Bixby for you," said Spellford. "Just watch your step until the appointment comes through. Don't do anything that might bring you unfavorable publicity."

Wayne thought of the flight he was to make with Rogers Ridgefield.

"A little charter flight to Mexico will be okay, won't it?"

"Why not?" answered Spellford. "Just don't get mixed up in anything."

"Not me," assured Wayne. "I want a steady job. I want that appointment."

THE amphibian's props were faint silver discs in the moonlight when Wayne felt Ridgefield tap his shoulder. "Paradise Cove ahead," pointed Ridgefield.

The curved white beach lay gleaming in the moonlight like a broad scimitar. Behind it the deep velvet of shadows revealed the presence of many trees. There was no sign of habitation. But when Wayne swooped the amphibian toward the water he saw the two yellow squares of lighted windows peering from the shadows. He set the amphibian down and the spray made silvery luminescent wings.

Several men came down the beach to grasp the amphibian's wings as Wayne cranked down the wheels and taxied from

the water. Standing aloof from the rest were a squat, white-haired man and a girl. Her dark hair was glossy in the night and her slenderness contrasted with the blunt build of the old man beside her.

A man, wearing dirty dungarees, stepped nearer the plane. He was tall, rawboned, and he had a broken nose that twisted toward the right side of his face.

"Hi, DePino," he called, looking at Ridgefield. Wayne frowned at Ridgefield, who had turned his head; and wondered why he had been called DePino. In the glow of the dial lights he noticed a slight circular scar on the back of Ridgefield's neck. He gazed out of the plane as a short Mexican came forward, his white teeth flashing.

"DePino," the Mexican grinned, "you bring golden *señorita* like you say?"

Ridgefield laughed. "*Manana,* Manuello," he said, and the men laughed. Ridgefield turned to Wayne. "Manuello," he explained, "saw that picture, *Marooned Blonde,* I made with Madeline Chartress. He's been wanting me to bring her down here and maroon her with him."

Wayne smiled slightly and Ridgefield saw him frowning as other men greeted him. "Puzzled about that DePino name they call me, eh?"

Wayne nodded.

"That's my real name," said Ridgefield. "Most of them knew me as DePino before I gave up a first mate's berth on a coastwise freighter to become Rogers Ridgefield of the films."

Wayne nodded but made no comment. It seemed plausible enough. Ridgefield, among other things according to publicity blurbs, had been a sailor before talent scouts discovered him.

"Want any help staking down the plane?" asked Ridgefield, as they stepped down to the sand.

"I'll manage all right," said Wayne, letting his glance stray toward the girl who looked away quickly.

"I'll go on ahead then," said Ridgefield. "Manuello, take my bag."

Ridgefield, starting to walk away with the tall rawboned man, beckoned to the white-haired man beside the girl.

"Julianne," he said, pausing and turning to the girl. "This is Ted Wayne. Show him the way to the house, will you?" Then he and the others disappeared into the shadows of the trees. The mutter of their voices drifted back.

"Hello, Julianne," smiled Wayne.

"Hello, Mr. Wayne," she replied.

"Might as well just say Ted," he began, "that is, if Ridgefield, or DePino, will have no objections."

She shrugged.

Wayne glanced up at her as he drove a stake into the sand.

"Just what is Ridgefield or DePino around here?" he asked. "Does he own the place? He acts as though he . . ."

"It belongs to my uncle, Don Petrie," said Julianne, staring at the moon-flecked water of the cove. "He bought it when he retired from the sea."

"The sea," muttered Wayne. "Ridgefield wouldn't by any chance have been the first mate on your uncle's ship?"

"Yes, he was," Julianne said "That's why he—and all my uncle's old sailor friends are always welcome here. They are the only people who . . ." She smiled suddenly down at Wayne who was staring up at her. "Can't I help?" she asked, turning to get him another stake.

THEY were walking toward the house. Somewhere a brook babbled in the night. The ground was soft with moss. The air was suddenly fragrant as they passed a flowering magnolia, then pungent as they crunched the fallen fronds of a pepper-tree. Eucalyptus towered into the star-sprinkled sky. Wayne breathed deeply.

"This is swell," he said.

She did not answer him although he thought he saw a faint smile move her lips.

"This place has everything," said Wayne, looking at her. "There's big game fishing in the Gulf, marlin, sailfish. You can get here by land, sea, or air. It's not too far from Southern California. Does

your uncle realize what he's got here? He could have one of the biggest resorts on the west coast."

"That was his plan," said Julianne. "With the money he saved during his years at sea and more he was going to borrow . . ."

"*Was* his plan?" questioned Wayne.

"This is Mexico," replied Julianne. "Down here everything is *mañana.*"

"But what about all those men?" insisted Wayne. "They can t all be guests. Don't some of them work for your uncle?"

"They are workmen," said Julianne. She suddenly seemed bored with answering his questions, but Wayne persisted.

"Say, if Ridgefield, or DePino as you know him, is such an old friend of your uncle's can't he get things started?"

"Everything here," Julianne murmured, "is . . . There's the house ahead. You must be hungry after your trip."

"I was beginning to be afraid," Wayne said, grinning, "that I'd have to tell my stomach *mañana.*"

Julianne turned to him. "I'm sorry," she said, "if I have . . . I do want you to enjoy your stay here."

"I am going to," he said, looking at her. She smiled, then turned and went into the house. Wayne frowned after her, then shrugged. Paradise Cove, with or without its mystery, if any existed, was no concern of his. All that interested him was to get that commision in the Coast Guard.

RIDGEFIELD and the other men took a power cruiser the next morning to go big game fishing. Ridgefield offered Wayne the use of a second cruiser and one of the men, but Wayne, seeing Julianne's uncle alone on the beach, refused the offer. Thinking of Julianne's evasiveness, he gradually led the conversation with Don Petrie around to Paradise Cove.

Don Petrie's dark eyes glowed as he pointed with his pipe. "I build hotel over there, on high ground with casino coming out over water. Down there, anchorage and wharves for yachts. Half-mile back of trees I clear land for airplanes."

Wayne watched him closely. "You seem like a determined man," he suggested. "You'd have to be to have been master of a ship. Why don't you get started with your plans?"

The light dimmed in Don Petrie's eyes as though a screen had been drawn between him and Wayne. He shrugged. "Why don't you go fishing? Marlin and sailfish are—"

He was fishing, thought Wayne, but without any luck.

"I'll go fishing . . . *mañana,*" he grinned. "Where's Julianne?"

He spent the rest of the day with her and she was gay and light-hearted until he pointed to the cruiser making for the cove in the twilight.

"Here comes Ridgefield," he said.

Immediately she became guarded, uneasy, almost like one who suddenly remembers that the gun he has been inspect ing a little too carelessly is loaded.

"No luck," Ridgefield said when Wayne strolled out on the pier. "I've been unlucky all around today," he smiled, motioning to chips and cards scattered on a table in the cabin. "Just couldn't get any cards on the way back from the fishing grounds. Here," he said, reaching for his wallet, "the boys are going to continue the game at the house. Take this fifty and try your luck for me. We'll split on what you win."

"And if I lose?" smiled Wayne.

"I'm out fifty," Ridgefield snapped.

Wayne stared at the money. Was Ridgefield just a good fellow? Or did he have some reason for not wanting Wayne to remain around the cruiser while the men disembarked?

"Okay," said Wayne, turning toward the house with Manuello and two other men.

He sat at the round marble table where he could look out the window beyond Manuello who sat opposite him. Ridgefield and Rod, the man with the crooked nose, and a third man were preparing to leave the cruiser.

"You got good hand? You want no cards?" asked Manuello, staring at him.

Wayne lowered his gaze. "I'll take two," he said.

Ridgefield and the others left the cruiser. They carried only rods and reels. Wayne tried to appear concentrated on the game, but from time to time he glanced toward the cruiser. Soon it would be dark, and if he got out there before the moon came up . . .

"What you see out there?" demanded Manuello, swaying to peer around. He'd been drinking heavily. "Maybe you see *señorita,* eh? What you do with her while we fishing with DePino?" he smirked, and the others laughed.

Wayne started to stand up. Then he remembered what Captain Spellford had said about staying out of trouble.

"Play the game, I'll start with five," snapped Wayne, tossing the chips out on the table.

Manuello laughed.

"I twist arrow in your heart, eh?" he suggested.

"You're balmy," growled Wayne.

"Julianne, nice *señorita,*" said Manuello, lifting his glass and slopping it on the table. "But she not like golden *señorita* DePino always promise he bring. Some day I go Hollywood and catch her myself."

THEY played another half hour; and outside it grew dark. Time to ease out of the game, thought Wayne. But the door opened and Julianne entered with a tray. Manuello hooked his arm about her waist.

"You be my *señorita* till I go Hollywood."

Wayne pressed his hands on the table.

"It's your deal, Manuello," he said crisply.

But Manuello paid no attention and Wayne got up and tore Manuello's arm down as Julianne tried to free herself. Manuello swore. He kicked free of his chair and reached for a knife sheathed behind his neck. There was no time to grab his arm; he was too fast for that. Wayne punched hard for the jaw and there was a hollow thump as Manuello's head struck the marble table. The other two men rose angrily.

"Get out," Wayne told Julianne, as the men closed in.

"Hold it," barked Ridgefield, appearing in the doorway. The men, glaring and grumbling, backed away from Wayne. Ridgefield knelt by Manuello and Wayne joined him. Ridgefield rose slowly. The two men jabbered angrily in Spanish and gestured toward Wayne.

"Guess I hit him too hard," Wayne muttered, "and when his head hit the table . . ."

"Looks bad," frowned Ridgefield, "even if he did ask for it. I got you into this Wayne, I'll see what I can do. Did you understand what those two just jabbered they wanted to do to you?"

"I can guess," said Wayne, staring at Manuello.

"Don't let it bother you," suggested Ridgefield. "I know the way to handle them." He spoke determinedly in Spanish and in a short time the men were sullenly silent. They appeared better satisfied when he took out his wallet.

"*Si,* DePino," one of them muttered.

"They'll say it was an accident," Ridgefield told Wayne.

"Sure it was," Wayne declared. "But I'll have a devil of a time proving it if it ever comes out that you bribed them."

"And how would you prove it otherwise?" suggested Ridgefield. "If there should be any question about Manuello's death I'll keep you in the clear. Anyway, it's better hushed up, isn't it, if you still want that Coast Guard job?"

Wayne nodded gloomily. "Guess you're right."

"I think," Ridgefield said, "it would be wise if we got out of here now. We'll fly back immediately."

Julianne came to the door as he was packing his bag.

"I'm sorry," she said. "You . . ."

"It'll work out all right," he muttered. "Forget it, Julianne, and don't worry about me."

Ridgefield appeared in the doorway. He held two vases carefully.

"Julianne, will you find your uncle for me? I'll meet you at the plane, Wayne. And will you pack these in? Watch it. They're fragile. Maybe I'd better put them in this box myself. Don Petrie got them for my home in Hollywood. Just what I need for the mantel above the fireplace."

WAYNE went ahead with packing until he heard Ridgefield leave the hallway. Quickly he shut the door and locked it. He made certain the shades were fully drawn before he turned to the box containing the vases.

They were fragile things, with almost no weight to them at all. They were empty. He thrust a pencil into one until it touched bottom, then drew it out, his finger marking the depth of the vase. He stood the pencil on the table beside the vase and his finger was almost level with the top. No false bottoms there.

He repacked the vases quickly, his face feeling guiltily flushed for all his suspicions about a guy like Ridgefield being mixed in some shady business.

On the flight north Ridgefield assured him again he had nothing to worry about.

"Thanks," Wayne said warmly. "But it's tough I had to break up your vacation."

"That's all right," smiled Ridgefield. "But so long as I still have a few days vacation left, I'd prefer to have them by myself. No need of the studio knowing I'm back already and calling me for work. Be better for you to avoid attention, too. I suggest that you land at a private field a friend of mine has in the mountains back of Malibu."

"Risky business," muttered Wayne. "A strange, small field in the mountains at night. But we'll have a try at it."

The field was narrow, unlighted, in a small valley. But the moon was bright and Wayne lowered the landing wheels, then sideslipped and fishtailed in. Ridgefield smiled slightly and wiped his brow.

"Looks like I picked the right man," he remarked, stepping from the plane. "Make yourself scarce for a few days, Wayne, until I get everything set in case the trouble down at Paradise Cove should leak out. I'll get in touch with you in about a week and pay you the five hundred I promised for the flight. Okay?"

"Why not?" smiled Wayne. "After what you've done for . . ."

"Forget it," laughed Ridgefield. "And don't worry."

•

DON'T worry! How could he help doing that now? Nearly two weeks and still no word from Ridgefield. Maybe something had gone wrong, but there had been nothing in the papers about the death of Manuello. Then why the silence from Ridgefield?

Maybe something *had* leaked out. He'd spoken to Captain Spellford over the telephone and the captain couldn't understand why the appointment hadn't come through. Was it possible, Wayne wondered, pacing about his room and staring out the window, that the Mexican officials doubted the accident story at Paradise Cove and had communicated with Washington? Maybe that was why the appointment was being delayed. His silence would look bad even though the death *was* an accident.

He couldn't stand this blind conjecture any longer. He grabbed his hat, and getting his car he drove to Coldwater Canyon in the Hollywood hills where Rogers Ridgefield lived.

The butler was doubtful whether Mr. Ridgefield could be disturbed at the moment; but Wayne caught a glimpse of him coming down the stairs in white tie, tails, and top hat.

He shoved past the butler. Ridgefield glanced at him coldly. "I can't see anyone or give an interview now," he said. "I'm on my way to a premiere."

"It will only take a moment," Wayne assured him. "Can I see you alone? It's very important."

Ridgefield nodded to the butler. The

puzzled, aloof look about his dark eyes did not disappear when the butler left.

"Well?" he inquired.

"You know why I'm here." Wayne frowned. "I didn't hear from you."

"Hear from me? About what?"

Wayne felt the color rising in his neck like the mercury in a thermometer held over a flame. "About the—happening down at Paradise Cove of course," he snapped.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Ridgefield declared.

Wayne balanced angrily on his toes, then settled back to his heels. "All right," he muttered. "You played square with me the other night. Maybe you want to play dumb now so you can't be linked up if the story does break. We'll let it go at that until if and when it does come out. In the meantime, how about the five hundred?"

Ridgefield's dark eyes glowed. "What is this? Extortion?"

"I wouldn't call the butler," warned Wayne. "You and I will settle this right now. So you really are backing out? Leaving me to go it alone. I might have expected that, but I don't expect to go out of here without my five hundred. Now shell out."

He advanced grimly. Ridgefield lunged and lashed with his white-gloved fist, at the same time calling for the butler. Wayne slipped the blow over his shoulder, and grabbing the arm, he twisted it. He saw the angry flush mounting the smooth back of Ridgefield's neck and he stared in surprise. Ridgefield wrenched free and Wayne had barely time to roll with a sharp punch.

"Hold it, hold it," Wayne called, dodging another blow. But there was no stopping Ridgefield until Wayne caught his arm again.

"You won't get away with this," Ridgefield fumed.

"Take it easy. What happened to that scar you had on your neck? You couldn't have had a plastic job done so fast."

"What scar?" Ridgefield snapped. "I never had one on the back of my . . ." He twisted around to stare at Wayne. "Scar? Was it round, circular, like a carbuncle scar?"

"Yes," answered Wayne. "What do you know about it?"

The butler came dashing in.

"It's all right," Ridgefield assured him. "It's a mistake."

The butler glanced doubtfully at Wayne who still retained his grip on Ridgefield's arm. Wayne released it and stepped back.

"My double," said Ridgefield, "had a scar like that. He was a trouble-maker and I had to let him go a few months ago. He forged my name to checks. That was all I ever got on him but I suspect he was mixed up in some other nasty business. I didn't prosecute because of the publicity. Looks as if I should have. What's he done to you?"

Wayne shook his head grimly. "It needn't concern you. Did this double look just like you except for the scar? What was his name?"

"DePino. I originally found him when a location unit hired a freighter to—"

"That's him. DePino," Wayne growled. "He was using *your* name. Sorry I caused you this trouble."

"Mistakes will happen," Ridgefield replied. "If I can be of any help to you . . ."

"Thanks," said Wayne. "But I'll have to figure this out for myself."

He left, frowning . . .

CAPTAIN SPELLFORD smiled slightly. "Hello, Wayne. You look as though you've been up all night."

"Two nights," Wayne muttered.

"Worrying about that appointment?" asked Spellford. He shook his head. "Not a word from Washington yet."

"That's not on my mind," declared Wayne. "There's something else been bothering me. Sooner or later you'll probably hear it, and I'd prefer you to get it from me. Remember the last time I was in I mentioned a charter flight to Mexico? Well, I made the flight, and when I got to this Paradise Cove . . ." He spoke rapidly.

"Well, that's the whole thing from A

to Z," he finished. "I haven't held back anything. What am I, a murderer? If so, I'll take my medicine and like it. I've only kept quiet this far because I thought it was just an accident, but I'll go nuts if I go on asking myself questions I can't answer."

Spellford was silent a moment. "You say those men down there don't appear to do any work, and this DePino appears to be their chief? Wayne, I think you've stumbled upon something. For a long time, my department in cooperation with the border patrol has been trying to get trace of dope that's coming in from Lower California. We've no clues, but it strikes me that this DePino—"

"I was close to that idea myself," declared Wayne. "But there was nothing in those vases. Still what you say about DePino seems likely, and Julianne and her uncle were so evasive when . . .

"What threw me off though were those empty vases and DePino's letting me go after I killed Manuello. But I see it all now. If DePino had held me prisoner or killed me, he stood a chance of exposing himself. Suppose I'd told someone I was flying to Paradise Cove, and then I didn't return. There would have been an investigation. DePino didn't want that, so he gave me the impression things would be hushed up and I'd forget all about Paradise Cove. But he made a mistake.

"He should have paid me for the flight and he should have got in touch with me to reassure me, then there wouldn't have been any reason for me to try to contact him."

Spellford nodded. "Just where is this Paradise Cove? It's not listed on any charts. The name must be one the owner, Petrie, made up. Where is it located, Wayne?"

"Not so fast," Wayne muttered. Spellford watched him shrewdly.

"Is it the girl?" the captain inquired.

Wayne looked up startled, then nodded slowly. Spellford's voice was stern.

"I'm sorry, Wayne, but if she's guilty along with the others . . ."

"But we don't know that," protested Wayne. "Maybe she was just trying to protect her uncle, that's all. You've got to give me a chance to find out. Suppose you let me go in alone before you make your raid and . . ."

Spellford shook his head doubtfully. "It would be better for you to stay out of it entirely," he advised. "Let the Coast Guard make this raid as though it got the information and clues itself. That girl, Wayne, is the only one who can exonerate you on Manuello's death. If she once realizes you were at all instrumental in bringing about the arrest of her uncle, she'll undoubtedly . . ."

"I'll take that chance," declared Wayne.

Spellford frowned. "Risky business your going in there alone."

"You've got to give me the chance," Wayne insisted. "Besides, you can have a Coast Guard boat standing by offshore awaiting my signal for the raid. How soon can we start?"

Spellford smiled grimly. "You *are* anxious. But it's my turn now to say not so fast. I can't send a boat way down the coastline of Mexico and then up into Mexican waters without getting permission and cooperation from the Mexican government."

"Start telephoning now," said Wayne.

THE Coast Guard patrol boat drifted in the darkness about a mile off Paradise Cove. Wayne tugged at a painter and drew a dory alongside and prepared to step down. The husky commander of the patrol, Bo'sun Vinson, grasped his arm.

"You've got two hours, Wayne," he said, "before the moon comes up. Then we'll be spotted and the gang will take to their heels."

"Two hours should be enough," promised Wayne. He tapped one of the guns thrust in his belt. Keep a watch for the flare and come pronto when you see it."

"You bet," assured Vinson.

"*Si, si,*" said a fat, proudly uniformed Mexican army man they'd picked up at Guaymas. "We come with guns shooting."

Wayne stared at him doubtfully. "Just be sure what you're shooting at before you shoot. I'll be there, you know."

Vinson grinned and leaned down to cast off the painter. "We'll give him blanks," he whispered. "Won't make much difference with him anyway. Good luck, Wayne."

. . . He found Julianne under the flowering magnolia. He waited until he was certain she was alone, then he stepped boldly toward her. She heard him coming and turned. Her gasp was audible.

"Ted," she cried softly, running to him. "Oh, I'm glad to see you. I thought you were dead, that DePino had . . ."

"Yes?" Wayne prompted eagerly.

"I'm glad to see you," she repeated, flatly.

Why was she evading him again? He didn't like the implication back of it. "What were you going to say," he asked, "that you thought DePino had killed me?"

"No," she said, but it didn't sound convincing. "When I didn't hear from you I thought that . . . perhaps the plane had crashed."

"Julianne, just what is DePino around here?" he demanded.

"I've told you," she said. "He's my uncle's former officer from sailing days. But let's not talk about him. All that matters now is that you are here."

"Does it?" Wayne tried not to be irritable. "Are you really glad to see me?"

"Of course."

"There's nothing else on your mind?"

He saw her look away. "My uncle brought me up," she murmured. "He has Spanish blood, and in some ways is a little old-fashioned. He taught me that it—it is not good form for a *señorita* to speak of some things before—the man does."

"Julianne." Wayne caught her arms. "You mean you're more than glad to see me?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I am a fool, I know. But it is so."

"Hold it!" The voice of the man with the twisted nose, rapped out of the dark. Wayne stepped back and spun about. "I said hold it," Rod warned him. "Be smart, Wayne. We've got you covered from two sides."

"I'm smart," said Wayne, and they stepped out from under the trees. But before he had spoken he had pulled the flare pistol from his belt and let it slip to the soft moss. No need of having them find it on him.

"What's up, Rod?" he inquired calmly. "Didn't DePino send word to you that it was all right for me to come here?"

"Don't pull that," Rod jeered, yanking the automatic from Wayne's belt. "I spoke on the phone to DePino this afternoon. He didn't say thing about you coming here. Quit stalling. Julianne, go on back to the house."

"But what are you going to do with him?" she cried.

"Back to the house, I said."

She obeyed and Wayne stared after her until his arm was jerked and a gun prodded him in the back. Then he walked ahead, guided at an angle away from the house.

THE door of the shack wouldn't budge. Wayne turned away in a sweat and searched for something in the darkness to use as a crowbar, but there was nothing. He groped about the walls in the hope of finding a loose board or a crack in which he could hook his fingers to pry an opening. But the walls were too smooth; and a heavy, experimental kick vetoed any idea of his being able to inflict any damage.

He sat on the floor with his back to the wall. A fine mess, to be locked up like this, with Vinson and the Coast Guardsmen waiting and watching out there for the flare. The moon would rise in another thirty minutes and then it would be too late for the patrol. What difference did it make? It was too late anyway. How could he hope to get any signal out to them, much less save himself?

He rose as someone fumbled about the lock. The door swung in and a bright light glared into his eyes.

"All right, Wayne," said Rod. "Come on. DePino would like to have a little talk with you. Don't try anything. There are two of us."

"Thanks for the comfortable way you kept me," Wayne said. "I particularly liked the air-conditioning and the soft mattress."

He marched between them toward the house. There was no chance to break away. DePino, he figured, must have come by automobile. He'd heard no sound of airplane or boat on the cove.

They were about a hundred yards from the house when Julianne screamed. Rod and the other man broke their pace momentarily. They hadn't overcome their momentary surprise before Wayne seized his chance.

He rose on his toes and lifted his arms before him. He swung them out and back sharply and the edge of his palms caught each man on the Adam's apple. The smaller man gave a strangled cry and dropped, clutching at his throat. Rod staggered back, choking, his hands lifting toward his neck. He brought his gun down.

Wayne knocked it aside and closed in. A hard uppercut, and Rod seemed to hang limply before he fell forward. Wayne started to look for a gun, but Julianne screamed again and he dashed empty-handed for the house.

Through an open window, as he sprinted for the door, he glimpsed a man trying to force Julianne into a closet.

"You hell cat," he heard the man snarl. "You going to tell pilot. Later we shut your mouth . . ."

Wayne charged through the doorway. There were two more men in the room, but they were ignoring the struggle. From a heavy table that stood between them and Wayne they were taking vases and stowing them in a wall compartment. Their backs were to Wayne and he heaved the table over. Its edge struck them behind the knees and they went down, pinned across the legs. Vases shattered and pulverized on the floor.

"Ted!" Julianne called as the man, releasing her with an oath of alarm, whirled to face Wayne. He reached for a knife behind his neck. It left his jaw a perfect target for Wayne's fist. Stepping aside as the man fell forward, Wayne grabbed Julianne.

"We've got to get out of here," he said, pulling her toward the door. The two men across the room by the table were squirming free, twisting around to shoot. Wayne pushed Julianne out the door. A gun barked and the jamb splintered beside him.

It was time now to get the flare pistol and signal the patrol boat. Off in the darkness he spotted Rod running toward the house, barring the way. No chance to get by him unarmed. And sounds of running men came around the corner of the house to the right. Wayne swerved Julianne into the deep darkness under the trees away from the spot where he'd dropped the flare pistol. Behind him, DePino and Rod were shouting, organizing a search.

"They couldn't have gone toward the beach," someone said.

Wayne tightened his grasp on Julianne's arm. "Here, in this shed," he directed.

"But they'll find us," she gasped.

"Not that fast," he said. "You'll be safe here till I can send a signal."

"You can't," she protested. "Look."

He heard the men searching among the trees and saw the probing beams of flashlights. They had spread out too quickly. He couldn't hope to get through. He tried to release Julianne's clutch on his arm.

"I've got to try it," he declared. "I've got to make that signal. We're lost if . . ."

"You can't go down there," Julianne pleaded. "Can't you make some sort of signal from close by here? There's gasoline and—"

"Gasoline! Where?" he demanded, but he found the partially filled drum himself in the shed. Wrenching and tugging while those flashlights came closer and closer, he rolled the drum outside and removed the plug. Gasoline gurgled out and the air was sharp with its fumes. Stepping back, he struck a match and tossed it.

THE hot explosion sent him sprawling. His skin felt fried. He scrambled dazedly back to the shed. Julianne was beating at his burning clothes. Above the roar of the fire he heard someone yell outside.

"DePino! They're in the shed."

"Stay down," he warned Julianne, as shots sounded and bullets came probing through the thin walls. "As long as you stay down," he reassured her, "the foundation will protect you."

He shifted between her body and the entrance. DePino and his men couldn't come in yet. Too much heat from the burning gasoline. Wayne had left the drum close to the entrance for just that reason. He hoped Vinson and the Coast Guardsmen would hurry. That gasoline was about burned out.

"Julianne," he asked hopefully, "are there any guns in this shed?"

"No," she murmured.

DePino and his men were in a semicircle beyond the fire in the shadows of the trees.

"He hasn't got a gun," Rod called, "so as soon as that fire dies a little more . . ."

"Get to the back of the shed," Wayne told Julianne. He found a broken axe-handle and waited grimly just to one side of the entrance. The men were coming now. If only there was some way to delay them until Vinson could get to them. He picked up a loose brick and heaved it. The men jeered and fired. He barely stepped back in time.

Behind the men Julianne's uncle, Don Petrie, suddenly appeared. He wore a battered sailing-master's cap on his white head. He fired a warning shot from the pistol in his hand.

"Belay that," he commanded. "DePino, the rest of you, stand fast."

Wayne saw a man on the outer edge of the semicircle swing his gun around.

"Look out," Wayne yelled. He dashed from the shed as the old man fired and the others whirled to cut loose on Don Petrie. Julianne's uncle tottered. Wayne swung the axe handle and bludgeoned a man. He batted a gun from the hand of another. The rest were spinning to turn on him. He couldn't hope to win out now, but he kept fighting. He caught Rod across his crooked nose as guns began hammering in the night.

Funny, he didn't feel the burning pain of bullets yet. A man shouted frantically. They all gave way before him. Some of the men went down. Others raised their hands. Then he saw the flash of guns, the Coast Guardsmen charging up through the trees. It was their guns he had heard.

DePino was getting away. Wayne raced in pursuit and tackled him as DePino hammered a glancing blow with the gun. Everything blurred for a moment.

DePino was on his feet, getting away again. Wayne grabbed an ankle and twisted him down. He held the gun away and pounded his fist until DePino went limp beneath him.

BO'SUN VINSON turned as Wayne dragged DePino into the aura of light about the fire and dumped him by the men huddled there under the Coast Guard guns.

"Have we got 'em all?" Vinson demanded.

Wayne glanced about. Julianne and one of the Coast Guardsmen were staunching the flow of blood from her uncle's wounds.

"Shoulder and thigh and nicked about the chest," said Vinson. "He'll pull through."

"Looks like you've got everyone," said Wayne. "The only one missing, as far as I can see, is your Mexican general."

Vinson laughed. "We know where he is. He started when the shooting began. He's probably in Mexico City by now."

They walked over to Julianne and her uncle.

"Julianne," asked Wayne. "There's no longer any sense in evading my questions. Will you speak up now?"

She nodded. "DePino," she said, "when he was on my uncle's ship, unknown to my uncle, once had him take some dope ashore. After that, under threat of exposure, he

forced my uncle to help him with the smuggling. My uncle gave up the sea and came here, thinking he could break away from DePino, but DePino learned of this place and forced himself and his men upon us again. I'm sorry, Ted, I should have told you sooner, but I didn't know you so well and . . ."

"Your actions and Petrie's have cleared you tonight," Wayne assured her. "The dope was smuggled in the vases, wasn't it?"

"Wait a minute," said Vinson. "Captain Spellford told me you said those vases were empty, and they didn't have false bottoms."

"That's right," agreed Wayne. "But the vases themselves are the dope!

"Didn't you ever look in a baker's window and see the castles and ships made out of sugar? Well, the vases are on the same idea. A substance that doesn't effect the dope is used to hold it in the shape of a vase. And baker's cake coloring is painted on the outside. Go in the house and take a look. You'll see some of them all pulverized on the floor."

Vinson started to turn, but stopped at the sound of someone coming through the trees was heard. It was the Mexican general, and he was dragging someone with him.

"I got heem, *señores*," he called. "And I never shoot bullets, but I get heem."

Vinson glanced at Wayne.

"The old boy's sticking his chest out like a pigeon. But I thought you said everyone was . . ."

He stopped, eyes on Wayne.

Wayne was staring at the man in the heavy clutch of the general. "Holy smoke," he muttered. "It's Manuello! Then he didn't die . . ."

"Peeg," Manuello sneered and the general cuffed him.

Vinson laughed. "Oh, there's something else, Wayne. While we were waiting for your signal, we got a radio from Captain Spellford. Your appointment has come through. There's a job waiting for you in the Coast Guard."

Wayne glanced at Julianne and smiled.

"It's too late," said Wayne, looking at Julianne. "I've got a job. We're going to make something of this place. We got a good start tonight by cleaning the snakes out." He smiled at the girl. "Don't you see, Julianne? *Mañana* has come. . . ."

Heads or Tails?

TWO distinguished scientists have been having quite a time with salamanders. Professor Ross G. Harrison of Yale removed the ear from an embryonic salamander and grafted abdominal tissue in its place. An ear began to grow just the same. But when Professor Harrison left the original ear alone and grafted tissue beside it, another ear developed. In no time at all Professor Harrison had a four-eared salamander on his hands.

But that isn't the whole story. Professor Oscar E. Schotte of Amherst transplanted face tissue to the tail of a salamander, and instead of a tail the grafted tissue turned into a rudimentary face. The two gentlemen (and the salamanders) have a very neat problem there, you see. An explanation is that the experiments disagree because one salamander was older than the other. Maybe. But perhaps the whole confusion simply results from the fact that the salamander is a creature with a nice wit.

—Eduard H. Ohlsson

Big Tim's fists were thudding trip-hammers, but even so Big Tim was only one man

Tin Money

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

IN THE Alaskan no-man's-land No-Shirt McGee finds a dying man—Rainbow Gleason—and stumbles upon a fortune. For Gleason has discovered an enormously valuable placer tin mine; this would have been his if he had not been doublecrossed by his partner and by one Parson Doyle. But now, dying, Gleason reveals the mine's site to No-Shirt McGee, with the understanding that No-Shirt will cut Gleason's daughter, May, in on the profits.

No-Shirt lines up Big Tim Harrison and Bulldozer Craig as partners, and within a week both of them have fallen violently in love with May Gleason. Morgan Kenworthy, an engineer representing a great smelting corporation, promises to buy the tin if they get it out by a certain time. But there is plenty of trouble ahead for McGee.

Parson Doyle plans a clever frame-up, accusing McGee of the murder of Gleason and his partner. For awhile No-Shirt lies in hiding at the new mine, doing what he can to get ready for operations. Then he returns to civilization to face the law. The trial looks bad for No-Shirt—until the coroner proves to be not only honest, but intelligent; he testifies that the bullets entered the dead men's bodies *after* the men had frozen to death, and McGee is cleared.

BACK at the mine, now officially the Gleason Mine, the tension between Bulldozer and Big Tim over May Gleason becomes a serious problem. These two men are friends; but Big Tim, still suffering nervously from the results of a plane crash several years before, is on the raw edge of a crackup. Still the work of equipping the mine goes on swiftly; what the partners need most now are the supplies to be brought by the *Western Trader*.

One night the camp receives a radio SOS from the *Western Trader*. No-Shirt, Big Tim and Bulldozer go up in Big Tim's plane —but when they call the *Western Trader* again, they are told that the ship never sent out a SOS. Then a radio message from Kenworthy reveals the truth: the first call was a hoax—and now they are flying with a load of dynamite, fused to explode in four minutes.

The first installment of this three-part serial, herein concluded, was printed in the Argosy for October 15

CHAPTER X

POWDER CAN FREEZE

I TAKE a stiff drink, but it don't seem to do no good. I'm just as scared as I was before I pulled the cork. Here we are with fifty pounds of dynamite in the nose of our plane all set to go off and no way of reachin' it without landin'—and no way of landin' on the ice floes thousands of feet below us. We've got wheels on, instead of pontoons. And you couldn't do much with pontoons any way, there's too much ice.

There's no way out.

I look at Bulldozer, and he's got a good grip on hisself. Then I look at Big Tim. He's flyin' the plane and his wasted face don't give anything away. His nose makes him look more like a hawk than ever. The thin cheeks give the nose a beakish look.

No detective is needed to figger out the setup. My will gives May Gleason, Bulldozen Craig and Big Tim Harrison everything. The three of us disappear and May gets the tin claims. Parson Doyle will prob'ly pull a fast one and get control. If he don't, then some other outfit will.

There's somethin' the matter with me all at once. I'm cold, and am havin' a hard time to breathe. I look out and frost pictures form on the window as soon as my breath hits it. I wipe it off, hold my breath and look again. The ice below sorta blurs. "I'm suffocatin'," Bulldozer pants. "Can't seem to get my breath." He's got his mouth open and is breathin' hard, like a man climbin' a mountain. We both look at Big Tim.

He's smokin' a cigarette—a pasty-faced, ghost of a man, flyin' a plane that's liable to blow up any second. He's as calm as a whale sleepin' in the sun. "We're still alive," he says over the radio to Morgan Kenworthy. "I'm flying with a pair of ice men. Neither shows the slightest fear."

And then that white face of his breaks into a grin.

"We're both paralyzed, Tim," I yell. "Say, can't we open a door or somethin' and get some air?" My ears keep poppin' all the time, too.

"Pile up everything near the door," he says, "rifle, extra gasoline and oil, grub, water, thermos bottles—everything we don't need."

"All right," I say a few minutes later, "everything's piled up!" I'm gaspin' for breath even though I moved slow.

"Throw that stuff out," he says to Bulldozer. "Give No-Shirt a hand with the door."

Bulldozer gets the door open and it's a good thing we didn't have a brass monkey on that plane. I've never seen it colder. Out went the stuff. I drops the rifle last. I hated to let go of it, it was a good rifle. Then we close the door and shiver until the heat of the motor exhausts warms up the cabin again.

Things close by commence to blur and I feel all tired out. I shut my eyes and drift into space. May be the plane has blowed up and this is death. I don't know. I drift . . . drift . . . drift.

I WAKE up sicker'n a dog, but too weak to heave up my last meal. The plane's goin' 'round in a spin and Bulldozer is slumped in his seat, his head rollin' 'round loose. He'd have been all over the place, rattlin' like the last pill in a bottle if it wasn't for his safety belt.

The motors are roarin' as they do when there's no load on 'em. We're divin' downward under full power and spinnin' at the same time. Big Tim is in a kind of a faint, but his hands are doin' things. There's a pressure behind my ears that hurts like sin and I commence to swallow.

Suddenly we straighten out. "You fellows fainted several minutes ago," Tim says. "I'm ashamed of myself. I must've passed out." He speaks over the radio. "We're all right, Kenworthy."

Then he smiles and turns to me. "Kenworthy heard the motors roaring and guessed we were in a spin," he says.

"Would you mind tellin' me what's goin' on?" I ask.

"May," Bulldozer says, like a man in

a dream, "I love you!" Then he opens his eyes and says, "Where am I?" He gives me a hard look as he shakes off the sleep and growls, "Was I talkin' in my sleep?"

"You'd better get red in the face," I say. Then we both get drowsy again as the windows commence to frost up. I'm in a stupor for the next couple of hours, then all at once I commence to perk up. I quit gaspin' for air. The frost pictures are gone from the windows and there's a smooth beach below us.

We land and come to a stop. "Break out that ladder, No-Shirt," Big Tim says. There's a small ladder lashed in the cabin and I cut the lashin's and pass it out. He puts it up again' the plane's nose, opens the compartment door and reaches in. He passes down a bundle and Bulldozer takes it on the run and lowers it gently to the sand some distance away.

He cuts the lashin's and there's a box inside, with the cover screwed down. "If that's the bomb," I warn, "stay away from it."

"It's safe enough for the present," Big Tim says. "Fortunately I *know* powder." I'd heard that remark before. He takes out the screws and pulls off the lid. There're a couple of clocks inside and some dry batteries, with wires runnin' to sticks of powder that're well lashed.

"Our friend wanted to make sure," Big Tim says, "and had a pair of clocks to do the trick."

"Then why didn't it let go?" I ask.

"When I heard a bomb had been planted in the nose compartment," Big Tim says, "I knew the powder must have come from the stock we brought in. That powder will freeze and won't explode until it is thawed. You know that, No-Shirt."

"Yeah. I've thawed many a stick in hot water before loadin' a hole," I says.

"I just climbed until I found sub-zero weather," Big Tim explains. "And I found it at the twenty-six thousand foot level. That's why you boys passed out—air's rather rare at that altitude. I'm in pretty poor shape, and I passed out, but snapped out of it as the plane went into a spin. I put her right back up there again because I wanted to make a good job of it."

I remember how easy it is for a twenty-mile-an-hour wind to drive cold through a parka when it's ten below. Up there it might've been sixty or seventy below. And a hundred and eighty mile an hour wind was blowin' against the nose of that plane.

I take a look at Big Tim again and I realize how it is he's lasted through many a tight place. He knows planes and flyin', and what's more he thinks fast in a jam. A buzzard like him is worth savin'.

Big Tim carefully packs the infernal machine and stows it away in the plane. "We've got a fair idea who built this bomb," he says, "but we've got to prove it. This may help."

THERE'S plenty of excitement at the camp when we land. Kenworthy looks at us with admiration, and that's a compliment coming from a man who's been on the frontier of the world and seen plenty of action. "Don't look at me," I says, "look at Big Tim."

"I don't know how you did it, Harrison," he says to Tim, "but here you are."

"Climbed up to a cold spot and froze the powder," Tim says shortly. "Simple as shooting fish in a barrel. But we owe you our lives. If you hadn't telephoned—*blooie!* And the bottom fish would have said, 'What's all this sinking to the ocean floor!' "

"Who's that groanin' over in the hospital tent?" I ask.

Kenworthy half smiled. "He is the gentleman who broke down and confessed a bomb had been placed in your plane," he answers.

I went over and looked down on a white-faced giant sprawled on a cot. "Kenworthy's a devil," he gasps, "he got some kind of a foreign rasslin' grip on me. I'm all busted up inside."

"He'll be all right in a few days," Kenworthy says over my shoulder. "He's suffering from a slight disturbance of certain nerve centers."

"Who put you up to this?" I growl.

"He doesn't know," Kenworthy said. "The man was hired by a go-between to plant the bomb in the nose of the plane and start the clocks at a certain time."

A half hour later I find myself alone with May Gleason. Her eyes are dancin'. She's picked up four cigarettes smoked down to the cork tips. "Tim has snapped out of it," she says excitedly. "He cracked and was about to go completely to the dogs, then a little action straightened him out. Look, he's smoking cigarettes right down to the cork tips. And he's relaxed. The old tenseness has gone. If we can only keep him that way."

"I guess some of those old pictures are fadin'," I says. "I sure hope so."

Bulldozer is settin' on a case of dynamite thirty feet away takin' in everything May says, and his eyes full of the dyin' calf gleam poets rave about when they write about lovers. He follers me down to the monitor a few minutes later. "No-Shirt," he says, "I've got a chance now. She ain't feelin' sorry for him; ain't feelin' she must save him. It sure is hell on the long-odds horse when a girl feels she's got to do missionary work on the favorite."

CHAPTER XI

WATER'S AN ENEMY

IT SEEMS to me like there's no peace for the wicked. The cussed ice hangs off'n Driftwood Cape for days. And all the while water comes roarin' down our ditch and goin' to waste. We know we'll be cryin' our eyes out for water before the season is over.

I send a gang of men with powder to blast dirt into the gulches in the back country and make a flock of small dams to hold back the water some. In a week's time we've got a lot of little lakes. None of 'em are deep, but they cover quite a stretch of country.

"I'm goin' to put guards on 'em," I tell Bulldozer, "otherwise Parson Doyle's men will be blastin' our dams and we'll be flooded out."

Big Tim flies in a crew of men from Nome a couple of days later. "Here're your dam guards," he says. "But that isn't the real news. The *Westward Trader* is five miles off of Driftwood Cape. She's made a big circle through a lead and is coming down from the North. And she's got a lighter in tow."

The word passes all over camp. Owners of small claims hear the news and head for the beach. I tell my guards what I want done, how much they're goin' to be paid, then follow.

Bulldozer, Big Tim and May Gleason are hurryin' along ahead of me. They're talkin' excitedly. "It's the biggest thrill I've had in years," Tim is sayin', "that ship smashing her way through the last barrier, then dragging that lighter by sheer power."

Well, it isn't my biggest thrill by a long shot. Mine was settin' in a plane with a nose full of powder ready to let go. Some folks have the damnedest idear of thrills.

As we reach the beach, plumes of steam shoot up near the steamer's stack, and then her deep-throated whistle stirs the echoes. Everybody commences to cheer, and somebody empties a six-gun into the air. "After all these weeks," May says, "it begins to look as if we might win out. I feel just like crying."

I start to speak and somethin' sticks in my throat. I guess this is a thrill after all. The ship drops anchor and then puts a power boat into the water. It comes to the beach and the four of us get aboard. They've got the lighter alongside the steamer and sailors are openin' hatches and breakin' out their cargo gear.

"What's the most important stuff?" the chief officer yells down. "The ice may chase us out again. There's a wind coming up and if the pack moves this way . . ."

It meant the steamer might be shoved onto the beach and smashed up. "Everything's important," I answer. "Lumber first, for sluice boxes—"

"The big tractor and fuel," Bulldozer cuts in, "I can't haul big loads with the equipment I've got."

"And don't forget the pipe," I add.

"Looks like we'll have to shove everything over the side," the mate says.

He gives a signal and out comes a big tractor to thud onto the lighter. It no more'n hits than Bulldozer is fillin' the fuel tanks and warmin' it up. "It's so new it smells of fresh paint," Tim says.

"Everything about this deal is new," May adds, "new mine, new town, new people and if all goes well a new smelter. It seems to me everything has been hanging in the balance from the first."

"And still is," I think. "Our water's got to hold out, the ice must hold off in the fall until we can get the tin down to the beach and aboard the steamer. Yes, and the ground has got to show tin on a large scale."

The lighter is groanin' with all kinds of stuff when lines are cast off and the power boat takes it in tow. They shove it up the mouth of the creek 'till it strands. Bulldozer drops down a couple of big timbers, opens the throttle and that tractor rides down the timbers to solid tundra.

EVERYBODY goes to work packin' stuff ashore. The tractor, which is the heaviest, got onto the beach under its own power. Grunt, sweat and cussin' handled the rest. Things are dumped, regardless. The only thought bein' to get the stuff off of the lighter and give it a chance to go back for more.

Most of us work the clock around. There's no bigger slave driver than the pack ice when the wind is blowin' the wrong way. When the job is gone, the beach makes me think of Nome in the early days, with cargo piled above the water's edge. Only there it ran for miles and was five and six feet deep. And a man had one hell of a time pokin' through it and findin' his stuff.

We leave the lighter up the creek in a safe place, and watch the *Westward Trader* pull out, smashin' her way through the ice once more. "That skipper took a long chance to get the last of our stuff ashore," I observe.

"Skippers have to take long chances or their firms don't get the business," Big Tim says. "And if they take their long chance and lose, then they're the goats. The firm can never be wrong, you know."

Somehow we get the idear he is thinkin' of air as well as sea skippers. Bulldozer has already marked out a tractor road to camp. The first thing he does is to build the knocked-down sled he'd shipped North. It's loaded with lumber, several kegs of nails and other things that don't break easily, and we start.

It's quite a long drag to camp, but Bulldozer makes it without upsettin' anything.

Big Tim takes off for Nome for more men. "Bring anybody, man or woman, who can drive a nail," I yell just as the plane moves down the field.

I don't get much sleep the next few days. Kenworthy is livin' in his plane which he landed on our private field and he's hangin' round eighteen hours a day. "Do you mind a suggestion?" he says one morning. "Here's a sketch I've made of a sluice box I feel will be more effective than the one you have in mind. I've had some experience with placer tin, you know."

"Okay," I answer, "that's the kind of a sluice box we'll build." I can see the recovery will be greater.

Then another day he says, "I sauntered through the back country yesterday, and noticed two of your dams have quite a pressure behind them. If they were blasted out, the force of the water would probably take out the dams below them and the combined head of water would wipe out everything. Hadn't you better double your guards?"

So we doubled the guards the next day. Several days later Parson Doyle comes to the property line of his claim and yells at me. "Listen here, McGee," he says, "you're making your own bed and you can lie in it. Or rather, Kenworthy is making it for you. You'd think he expected to own this camp some day from the way he makes suggestions. Isn't that

significant? Or haven't you the brains to grasp that point?"

"If you'll come through with any practical suggestions," I answer, "I'll take 'em. But that don't mean you'll ever own this camp."

"Then I'll make a suggestion," he says, "throw Kenworthy out and use your own judgment. Also, I want him to stop lying. Someone planted a bomb in the nose of your plane. Enemies of Harrison's, Craig's or even your own might have done it. Kenworthy using methods that would gag the Inquisition forced a man to say he'd been hired to do it. Then Kenworthy circulated the report I was back of it. I resent it!" He pounded his fist into the palm of the other hand, and he looked for all the world like a parson saying, "I shall fight the devil to the last ditch."

"Take it up with Kenworthy," I yell. "Suppose I am a sucker for thinkin' he's on the level, what difference does it make to you?"

"Just this," he says, "if you own this ground, I can buy tin from you. He won't sell it to me in a thousand years." He gets all het up, then, and tells me what a bunch of cutthroats Kenworthy and his people are. "You regard me and mine as the villain in this affair, and Kenworthy as a sweet-scented hero. It is just the reverse. This isn't any story-book affair, McGee, it's a knockdown-and-drag-out fight and you're the catspaw. Would you like proof?"

"Sure," I answer.

He points to a shoulder of land, down the valley a ways. A man could throw a dam across there without much trouble. The ground is worthless. I've sampled it. "Kenworthy has staked that ground, Mr. McGee." He's sarcastic when he calls me mister. "It is worthless, but he's staked it? Why?"

It's news to me, and somethin' of a jolt, but I say, "I'll bite, Mr. Bones, why did Kenworthy stake hungry ground?"

"Don't be funny," he says, "calling me Mr. Bones. This is no minstrel show."

"He's not beyond blasting your dams. Water will rip out everything in the upper part of the valley, wipe out your town and equipment and wash most of the tin up against that shoulder of rock and leave it there. Some would be carried on, it is true, but nearly everything down to the frost line would concentrate there. Kenworthy would merely have to sluice it out of the mud." He laughs in my face as he finishes, then sneers. "But don't take my word for it. Learn by experience."

BY GOLLY, Parson Doyle is right. That's just what could happen. But I don't let him think he's opened my eyes. The next time Big Tim flies to Nome, I go with him and I look up the records. Sure enough, Kenworthy's filed on a group of claims around the shoulder of rock. As it is hungry ground I name the rock, Hungry Rock.

When we return I get quite a view from the air—a chain of little lakes, our ditch runnin' along the bank above the natural creek and finally the new town, Gleason City. The monitor is tearin' away at the ground, exposin' mighty boulders and openin' up stretches for the sun to thaw.

Men in rubber boots and slickers are takin' tin nuggets from the sluice boxes and sackin' it accordin' to size. There's a lot of fine stuff that's almost pure tin. Plenty that will run five and six hundred dollars a ton, too. I look at the dams again, then at Hungry Rock. And I can't help thinkin' Kenworthy sure picked hisself a fine piece of ground when he staked that. if the dams go out for any reason, the tin is on his ground and it'll take a bigger lawsuit than any we can pay for to get it back.

I decide to have a talk with him as soon as we land, then I take another look and get a idear of my own. I weigh it carefully then decide to have a talk with Kenworthy any way.

When we land I spot Parson standin' on his property line. He waves for me to come over. "Well, I notice our precious friend has flown away." He points to the spot where Kenworthy's plane had stood. "And I presume you checked

up while in Nome and learned I told the truth about his filing on hungry ground. Oh, you don't need to admit it, you've sense enough to do it. If something happens and your camp is wiped out and your tin washed onto Kenworthy's property, I want you to do me a favor."

"What?"

"Sell me your claims and water rights. They'll be worthless to a small outfit like yours, but my people can handle them to advantage," he explains.

I think of that old Chinese sayin', "When monkeys fight they scatter dirt, when tigers fight one is hurt." I feel like a rabbit caught in between a couple of fightin' tigers.

"I won't promise to sell you anything," I answer, "but if the time ever comes that the tin is on hungry ground, come around and make me a proposition."

I TELL Bulldozer and Big Tim about the setup and we agree to keep pretty close watch on the dams. Bulldozer is havin' trouble with the boulders. Every time the dirt around 'em thaws he has to move 'em again.

"Let me try a trick with a hole in it," I suggest.

I take the monitor and start one of the boulders rollin'. I keep it rollin' down the slope until it hits the bottom of the valley. I send another one after it and then turn the monitor over to Bulldozer.

"While the boys are layin' more pipe line and extendin' the ditch to increase operations," I suggest, "and the sun is thawin' out the ground you've exposed, keep the monitor workin' on them boulders until they're piled up and out of the way. There may be tin under the pile when you're finished, but it won't be worth what it'll cost to keep shiftin' the boulders around."

"Boulders, frozen ground, pack ice, isolation," May says, joinin' us, "no wonder this country hasn't been developed before. The average man would take a look at it and keep going."

"It isn't the obstacles," I explain. "It's just that most men passed up the country. It took a man with vision like your dad to realize what it is worth. Men will go wherever there's money in the ground."

Things moved along slicker'n a whistle after that. Bulldozer even takes a sled load of tin ore down to the beach and loads it onto the lighter. In fact things are movin' so nice I'm suspicious. I ain't forgotten it's calmest before the storm. Parson has got men workin' on his ground, sinkin' test shafts down to the frost line, thawin', then sinkin' some more.

There's no sign of Kenworthy. Him and his plane haven't been reported in days. Several outfits has moved in and started little stores. There's a restaurant and a beer place or two. We're growin'.

Then one mornin' I wake up and hear Bulldozer cussin'. "One of them Arctic fogs has moved in on us," he says. "May says she got a weather report over the radio last night and that fog was expected. Three hours later Kenworthy showed up. He drops a flare and makes a landin'. If he'd been a hour later, he'd have been caught in the fog."

"Prob'ly heard the weather report and got a move on," I says. "Did he bring any mail?"

"A little sack along with newspapers and magazines," Bulldozer says.

I look out. Everything's drippin'. The fog is too thick to drink, but not thick enough to plow under, if you get what I mean. "A fog can't stop a monitor," I says.

"Yeah," Bulldozer answers, gettin' into his rubber clothes, "but it can slow things down. The stream has to bore a hole through it before it can move gravel."

It's so thick around eleven o'clock in the mornin' you can't see a hundred feet ahead of you. I'm blunderin' through the stuff when I hear May yell, "Bulldozer Craig, what're you doing with that monitor? Stop it! You're flooding me out!"

She waits for an answer, but Bulldozer can't hear her from the noise the monitor is makin'.

"I'll fix him!" she says in the tone of

voice a woman uses when she's mad. "Trying to make me believe he can't tell what he's doing in the fog."

I join her and she points to the kitchen. Water is about a inch deep on the floor and Kate, the cook, is sloppin' around in hip boots. It ain't muddy enough to be monitor water and I suddenly leg it up the slope to the ditch. Water's pourin' over all along. About that time Bulldozer shuts off the monitor and yells, "Boys, there's something wrong, the flume is overflowing."

I LET out a whoop and Kate beats on a dishpan. That brings everybody. "One of them dams has let go," I yell. "Get your most important belongin's and climb to high ground. There may be a solid wall of water!"

Big Tim races to the plane and warms his motors, then I hear Kenworthy's plane motors roar. May is packin' up her post office stamps, money orders and such, while Bulldozer swings into action with the tractor. He drags the monitor to high ground, then hooks onto the pipe line and hauls it up to the nearest ridge.

If there had been skids under the buildin's I believe he'd have yanked the town itself away. The solid wall of water doesn't come. Instead there's a steadily risin' torrent that gouges out the dirt right down to the frost line, runs crazy and sweeps away buildin' after buildin'.

The ditch lets go with a roar and I hear somebody yellin' for help. I wade up to my hips, then am forced back. The boulders we've missed on the slopes are rollin' down with the water and they'll flatten out anything they hit. I got back, and I hear the yells for help growin' fainter.

"It is someone floating down on a building I am sure," May says. "Isn't it terrible? Does it mean we've lost everything, No-Shirt? The mine I mean?"

"Can't tell a thing until this blasted fog lifts. It ain't gettin' any better. Hear that water roar. I guess all the dams have let go," I answer.

"I saw something over there," May yells and plunges through the fog. I stumble along behind her and somebody moans, "Over here!"

It's one of the dam guards, bleedin' from a wound in the back of the head. "Somebody slugged Pete," he says. "Don't know whether they killed him or not. They got me first—snuck up behind me in a fog and let me have it. Then I feel a jar and know they've blasted the upper dam. I start out, hopin' to warn you, but I'm too weak to run far. Then I find Pete. I drug him to a high spot and left him."

We help him to a safe place, fix his head and shove him into a sleepin' bag to rest. It's too bad the planes have cleared out, or we could've sent him to Nome.

In twos and threes we gather and commence checkin'. The man we heard holler for help out in the flood stumbles up, blue with the cold. We strip him, dry him off and shove him into a sleepin' bag, then count noses. "I guess everybody is safe," I say, "unless Pete dies, or the plane crashes before they can find a clear place to set down."

CHAPTER XII

MAN THE MONITOR

WE SENT a party to bring in the wounded Pete, then we waited for the flood to go down. It went down grudgin'ly, and as soon as there was a chance of stoppin' it me and Bulldozer went up and blasted off a bank to save what water we could. And still the fog hung on.

It lifts three days later and the sun comes out. The days are gettin' short and there's a hint of fall in the air. Ice forms on puddles each night, but the sun has some warmth. Parson crosses the property line and comes over and talks to me. "I warned you Kenworthy would blast out your dams," he says. "And that is exactly what happened."

"How do you know he done it?" I ask.

"Ye gods!" he almost screams. "I've known dumb men in my time, but you

stand head and shoulders above them all. Kenworthy arrives, he lands, a fog comes up and his men work unseen. It was the first opportunity to strike in days and he grasped it."

"That's your guess," I answer. Inside of me, I don't know just what did happen. But I've got a crazy theory.

"You said if you were flooded out you'd make me a proposition," Parson continues. "Well, I'm waiting."

"But I wasn't flooded out," I argue.

"You weren't flooded out?" he screams. "What do you call a flood?"

"There was a fair description of one in the Bible," I answer, "it rained forty days and forty nights."

"Your tin nuggets are gone, washed down onto Kenworthy's hungry ground," he says.

"Look down there!" I point to the water that's still runnin' down the valley. There's a ripple that ends in a little water fall. "See that ripple? That ripple is in the world's biggest sluice box—the valley. It is made by the boulders I had Bulldozer pile up down there to stop the tin nuggets any flood might wash towards Kenworthy's hungry ground or—anywhere else. The flood was a hard blow and it knocked us off'n our feet, but we ain't counted out yet."

"Groggy, and foolish," he says. He walks away, bewildered. And I head for the landin' field because there's a plane in the air and it looks like Kenworthy's. I'm wonderin' what he's goin' to say about stakin' hungry ground.

May joins me and she's anxious. "I hoped it was Tim," she says, "we saved the radio equipment, but I haven't got it working yet. I don't know whether Tim crashed or not."

"May be Kenworthy will know," I answer. She's still worryin' over Big Tim, and yet daily the cuss shows improvement. He gains in weight, his eyes are clear, his fingers don't shake when he lights a cigarette and what's more he smokes it to the cork tip.

Kenworthy makes a perfect landin'. "Tim's safe," he says. "We found a hole in the fog and landed. He had motor trouble as he took off a couple of hours ago and stopped to make adjustments. Quite a flood."

I'm just about to make a coy remark about the hungry ground he'd staked when he says, "Foul play, of course. Someone took advantage of the fog and blew your dams. I was afraid Parson's crowd might do something of the sort. And just to hold the trumps when, and if it happened, I staked some hungry ground. I didn't propose to let him step in and win the fight at this stage of the game."

"It didn't get down that far," I explain to Kenworthy, "I stopped it with a few hundred tons of boulders."

His face lights up like he was very happy over the whole thing. "Fine! Fine! I admire resourcefulness."

Now I ask you what's a man goin' to think, with Parson blamin' Kenworthy, and Kenworthy actin' innocent as a babe?

Bulldozer comes up and says, "All right, No-Shirt, how're we goin' to collect our tin money in a mess like that?" He ain't exactly gloomy, but I can see he's not bubblin' over with good humor. He thinks his chances of makin' a cleanup and askin' May Gleason to marry him have gone glimmerin'.

Kenworthy looks at me, too. He's curious. "Our pot of tin is behind that boulder riffle you built in the valley," I answer. "There should be a hundred tons of it there. And that's what we need to make Kenworthy's people build us a smelter."

"The season's late, the water's low," he answers, "so how're we goin' to get it before the freeze-up?"

"What do you want for your share?" Kenworthy asks.

"It's all in No-Shirt McGee's name," Bulldozer answers.

"No-Shirt is honest," Kenworthy says. "He'll let you sell your share." He looks at me and I nod.

"I'm stringin' with No-Shirt," Bulldozer says.

"And you, Miss Gleason," Kenworthy

asks. "Would fifty thousand dollars tempt you?"

"Terribly," she answers, "but I'm staying with No-Shirt McGee. That's what Dad would have done and it's what I want to do—either win big, or lose everything."

"Big Tim is coming. There's no need of asking him if he will sell out. He's a long-shot gambler every time," Kenworthy says. "If you people ever go into another proposition, I'd like to be counted in. Not as a representative of my company, you understand, but on a personal basis."

"Why, Mr. Kenworthy," May exclaims, "that sounds like a compliment."

"It is, the finest I can pay four people who are fighting an uphill fight," he answers.

WE WATCH the plane land and as soon as it comes to a stop, I race up and yell at Big Tim. "Fly down to Nome," I yell, "and get a drag line scraper, and plenty of line."

He nods, closes the door and roars away. Kenworthy grins. "A sweet idea, Mr. McGee," he drawls, "if it works. Well, I can't see how I'll be of any help around here, so—*adios*." And with that he gets into his plane and disappears.

"Damn that bird," Bulldozer growls, "he just makes people like him. But I'd feel better if he'd stay around camp—where we can watch him. He could've slugged Pete and George, you know, and blasted our dams. If anything more happens, he'll look fishy to me."

As the last of the water drains away, behind the boulder riffle there's a mess of smashed buildin's and shattered lumber. The folks who had put up shacks and started small businesses prowl around in the muck draggin' out enough lumber to cover their salvaged possessions.

Most of 'em are pretty blue and think they'll come back next year and start all over again. I don't blame 'em. We've got our own backs to the wall. Bulldozer connects up the monitor, repairs the ditch and turns the hose on the muck washin' away the mud and givin' 'em a chance to work out the lumber that's sunk too deep to be pulled or shoveled out.

The rest of our crew goes to work repairin' the ditch and shiftin' sluice boxes so we can work to best advantage. Big Tim comes in with the drag line outfit and as soon as the plane lands there're a bunch of citizens who want to be flown back to Nome. They want to catch a boat outside before navigation closes.

And none of 'em have any confidence the *Western Trader* will get to Driftwood Cape again. "And even if she does," one of them explains, "she'll prob'ly get caught in the ice and have to go out again. We had a late breakup and are goin' to have an early freeze up. A Eskimo told me the snow will be two squaws deep this winter."

"What do you mean two squaws deep?" I growl. "Squaws stood on end or laid flat?"

Big Tim flies a bunch out, then who should show up but Kenworthy. "Heard people wished to leave," he says, "and thought I'd see how you are getting along and take a load back with me. No, there'll be no charge."

May Gleason has set up the radio again and got it working. It is just as well, because the weather's uncertain and Big Tim will want a weather report before hoppin' off from Nome. It's easy to get in a jam hoppin' off one place, findin' your destination too foggy to land, then turnin' back only to find fog where you hopped off from.

By the time we get the drag line outfit workm' the fog rolls in again. May tells Big Tim not to leave Nome until the weather clears, then comes down to watch us move the muck from behind the dam to the sluice boxes.

"We haven't much of a crew left, have we?" she says.

"Eight, besides me and Bulldozer," I answer, "but they're good men. We'll get out our hundred tons of tin and be all set for next year. It'll be a boom camp, then. If there's a smelter assured, then a bunch of little fellows can go after the

low grade dirt and make money. Gleason City will be a good camp."

Bulldozer orders the sluice box water shut off and we take a look to see what we've got. It is easier to pick out the rock and throw it away and dump the remainder into sacks, than it is to pick out the tin nuggets. "Nearly five hundred pounds," Bulldozer says as he finishes, "and the heaviest stuff is deeper down."

May doesn't answer. She's starin' at the fog, which is whippin' around like gray drapes at a window. "I thought I saw someone," she says in a low voice. "We're all here, except Kate. She's cooking."

"May be some miner drifted into the country," I suggest, "or even Parson Doyle, come over to warn me again' Kenworthy once more."

I MAKE a sudden run in the direction she points, just to make sure. A big cuss steps out from behind a rock and swings at my jaw. I let out a surprised yell that sounds like a woman in distress. Then, *pow,* I get a punch in the stomach. I lash out and nearly break my hand on the cuss' jaw.

"What's the matter up there?" Bulldozer yells.

The answer comes in the crunch of many boots on gravel. "Claim jumpers!" May cries. "Claim jumpers! I'll radio Big Tim."

"Oh no, you don't sister!" a deep voice rasps.

And with that a hand gives her a push on the shoulder and she plows gravel with her chin. She jumps up and swarms all over the brute, bitin' his shoulder and kickin' his shins.

"Run, you little fool!" I yell at her. "We're outnumbered six to one."

That's stretchin' it a little, but it seems like there're men everywhere. I wonder if Kenworthy's brought in several planeloads of muscle boys to clean up on us. Every man he took out free of charge was a friend, and most of 'em knew how to fight.

I pick up a boulder and make a pass at my attacker. Up goes his arms to protect his face, which is just what I figgered he'd do, and then I smashes it down on his right foot. Us McGees are dirty fighters in a pinch.

"Come on, May," I yells, "you can't kick, bite and claw that buzzard into submission."

Bulldozer is fightin' three men at once. He reminds me of a Kodiak bear. There's a grin on his lips every time his fist cracks a stomach or jaw. Somebody comes in behind and knocks him cold before I can get there.

"Everybody run!" I yell. "We're licked!" I grab May's arm and leg it to the monitor. For a split second the claim jumpers hesitate, figgerin' there's some kind of a catch. There is! Also, he who hesitates at a time like this, is lost.

"Turn that valve wide open," I yell at one of our men. The water squirts, then roars. I swing the nozzle around and it catches a cuss in the rear. He goes along on his toes turkey fashion for twenty feet, then I lower the stream and knock his feet out from under him. He goes down and skids into a boulder and lays there.

The three men who fought Bulldozer and the mug who slugged him come next. They make the mistake of tryin' to climb the bank, thinkin' the fog will cover them. I spray it back and forth, hittin' the stones below 'em. Now when that high head of water, forced through a six inch nozzle hits a stone, it flies into the air like a seed squired out of a lemon. But it has the force of an old-time cannon ball.

I couldn't see what was happenin' in the fog, but I could hear four men hollerin' bloody murder. One of 'em washed into view. He was the one who slugged Bulldozer. I tickled him in the ribs and washed him into the fog again.

"Watch out, No-Shirt," May yells. "There's somebody behind that boulder!"

I SWING the monitor slowly in a half circle to make sure nobody's goin' to rush us in the fog. Then I look at the boulder. It's almost a blur in the fog,

but flame stabs suddenly and a bullet whistles past my ear. I'm a target for a few seconds, then I get the stream against the boulder. Solid sheets of water squirtin' up and over it make aim impossible, but two more bullets come through somehow.

I lower the stream and knock the dirt out, sluicin' out a hole right under it. In it drops, leavin' a cuss, dressed in oilskins, racin' for cover. He's got a six-gun in his right hand. And I've got a monitor in both my hands.

The stream hits him between the shoulders, knocks him fifteen feet straight ahead, then he smashes to the ground. My men are rushin' 'round in the fog, pickin' up knocked out claim jumpers, draggin' 'em near the monitor and tyin' 'em hand and foot. I'm interested in the cuss who took pot shots at me. I race over there and roll him over. "Hello, Parson," I say cheerfully.

"You devil!" he gasps. "You've murdered me. My ribs are all torn loose. I've internal injuries. I'm . . . dying."

"You were trying to kill me with a revolver," I answer, "and I had to hit you hard. You've tried to turn suspicion on Kenworthy from the first, but you can't blame him for the claim-jumpin' job. Now out with it, why'd you blast our dams? What had you to gain by washin' our tin onto Kenworthy's claim?"

"I planned to move in when your two outfits had almost killed each other off. You'd go after the tin, and he'd put up a fight," Parson gasps.

"Got anything more on your mind to confess before you die?" I ask. May and a couple of the boys are crouched around, listenin'.

"You were right," he says, "I fired bullets into the bodies of Rainbow Gleason and Jessup. Used your rifle. Stole it, then dropped it behind the bunk when I was done with it. You knew it, but you couldn't prove it."

"And the bomb cached in the nose of the plane?" I ask.

His eyes seem to say, "I'll be dead soon, and after all you can't hang me, because nobody's been killed." Then his lips say, "Yes. Anything to stop you—to stop Kenworthy. Anything . . ."

Then he's unconscious. "Pack him up to a tent," I tell the boys, "and put dry clothes on him."

"Is—is he going to die?" May asks.

"No, but he thinks he is. I got hit in the ribs once with a stream from a monitor, and even now I ain't sure but what I died. He's prob'ly got some broken ribs, though," I answer. "A couple of you fellows stand guard over the prisoners. May and I'll have a look at Bulldozer."

"Never mind me," Bulldozer mutters thickly, "just show me the guy who slugged me from behind."

CHAPTER XIII

MUSCLE MAN

THERE'S nothin' Bulldozer can do about the cuss who slugged him from behind. The monitor's already done it. When the fog lifts twenty-four hours later, Big Tim arrives and reports seein' men movin' over the tundra. "They weren't carrying packs," he says, "and they appeared to be in a hurry."

He listens to the story of what happened, then we bundle everybody, includin' Parson, into the plane; and, with Bulldozer to hold a gun on 'em, they're started for jail at Nome. Claim-jumpin' is the charge again' most, with somethin' special again' Parson Doyle when we can take the time off to testify.

I keep the old drag line outfit humpin' twenty-four hours a day. Big Tim can't fly back on account of uncertain weather, which is a pretty good thing in a way, because Bulldozer's head needs lookin' after.

The cut is healed when the plane finally lands. The days are pretty short, and the ice on the quiet ponds gets thicker each night. We have trouble keepin' the sluice boxes free, too. They keep icin' over, but as long as the drag line bucket will haul dirt from below, we keep at it.

Bulldozer takes a whackin' big load

down to the lighter and when he returns he's grinnin' from ear to ear. "I thought that lighter might've been damaged with all that flood water roarin' around it," he says. "We had had so much grief I didn't want to add more by mentionin' it, but the steel cables we'd fastened to deadmen in the bank held her. But say, the ice is beginnin' to run in the Berin' Straits."

"I've tried to get the *Westward Trader* on the radio," May says, "but so far I've had no luck. She's supposed to unload freight at Nome and then come on up here."

Big Tim disappears ten days later. "I'm taking a short hop," he says. "Alone!"

SNOW is flyin' when he shows up again after we've worried forty-eight hours. He sets the plane down on the frozen runway and comes into the shack we all use as a livin' room. A heater's roarin' away, with red-hot sides, and there's a smell of dryin' wool clothes in the air.

"Quite a sea is running at Nome," Big Tim reports. "I flew over the *Westward Trader* twice, and then talked to the radio man. He got the skipper to talk and I told him the ice was getting worse—the whole Arctic seemed to be pouring through Bering Straits. He decided to up anchor and make a run for Driftwood Cape." Big Tim shakes his head sadly. "I don't think that skipper is going to like me when he learns the ice is worse than I told him. But we have to get our tin out."

We start to run dirt through the sluice boxes the next day, but the cold is too much for us. The last of the bags go onto the sled and Bulldozer heads for the beach. He's draggin' a spare sled behind him and plenty of cables.

Big Tim lands on the beach so we can talk with the ship by radio. Bulldozer's got a raft rigged up with two anchors from the lighter. We shove the raft into the water with the tractor, then pole it out to a point opposite the creek mouth. We drop anchors and bring cables to the lighter. Bulldozer rigs a block-and-tackle arrangement to work on the anchors, then he hooks onto the runnin' end of the cable and starts the tractor. For a while it can't get goin', then slowly it commences to move the lighter.

"Hold everything," Big Tim says, "the skipper just telephoned he can't make it."

"Hold nothin'!" Bulldozer bellows, with the throttles wide open, "tell him the barge is in deep water."

He don't stop until the barge is almost over the anchors, then he slacks away. We build a big fire on the beach and look out at sea. The hours pass and no ship's lights break the darkness.

Dawn comes with a flurry of snow, then we see a red light. "That's a port light!" Big Tim yells. "Look, she's swingin' in. There's the green starboard light."

Her searchlight blazes, the finger of light searchin' through the ice driftin' down from the Arctic. It finds the lighter and holds. We go alongside in a skiff and watch the sacked placer tin yanked over the side to disappear into the hold. It's fast work, with everybody movin' like mad.

We get the two anchors aboard the lighter as the last sack of ore leaves. "What'll it weigh?" we ask the first officer.

"Maybe seventy tons," he answers.

"Go on," I yelp, "there's a hundred tons there."

"Seventy tons," he answers. Somewhere deep in the ship a bell rings and the *Westward Trader* moves ahead, swings and heads toward Nome and the Outside.

BULLDOZER'S cable hauls the lighter up the creek again. He's had a ways built and we put in the rest of the day and much of that night gettin' the lighter up the ways, beyond reach of Spring floods and ice. "Seventy tons of placer tin," Big Tim mutters, "and we had to deliver a hundred. Kenworthy's folks won't advance money on that much; won't build a smelter. It's a sweet chance for them to force us to sell." He shrugged his shoulders. "And I'd just got back to the point of view I held before the transport crash

—the air line, feeding the big transport lines and . . ."

He broke off. There was one more item to that dream, but he didn't mention it —a girl.

Bulldozer half expected him to say somethin' about the girl, but he didn't. He says, "Who wants to ride back with me?" Most everybody did, and they climbed into the plane, but me—I got onto the tractor with Bulldozer.

We go limpin' along through the snow that comes down in flurries then stops awhile. "No-shirt, I'm sure in love with that girl!" he says. "And it ain't goin' to do me any good. I thought when she straightened Big Tim out, the job would be finished and she might look my way. But May thinks the job's only commenced." He heaves a sigh. "Swell folks, ain't they?"

"Better ask her," I advise, "you can't always tell about a girl."

When we get to camp everybody's hard at work storin' things for the winter. It's a couple of days' hard job, then Big Tim says, "Everybody pile aboard except my partners. I'm coming back for them."

We set around a hot stove and try to keep up each other's spirits. But that seventy tons of tin sticks in our minds. Big Tim drops onto the field at the peep of day. We're waitin' for him. We board the plane and the motors roar. We bank and look down on Gleason City, its shacks, the ditches we dug and the mine we'd developed. There was plenty more tin money behind that boulder riffle we'd built. If we could pull through the winter we'd be back next year and make a real producer out of the mine. If we didn't somebody else would. That's the story of minin'. Somebody opens the mine and somebody else comes along and cleans up.

WE LAND at Nome and it seems a long time ago that I walks into the court room and stood trial for Rainbow Gleason's murder. Somebody is waitin' with a car. We pile in and drive to the hotel to get a meal. After it's over we set around and talk. It's time to say good bye, but each is afraid to make the first break.

Fin'ly Big Tim gets up. "I'm leaving," he says. "I'm flying to Fairbanks, then down to Juneau." He shakes hands with me, then Bulldozer. May comes last and he says, "Well, s'long, May. Good luck." But there's something in her eyes that holds him—something old Bulldozer would've given his life to see if meant for him.

"I shouldn't tell you this, May," Big Tim says, "but I . . . love you."

"Yes," she says gently.

"We're all so close," Big Tim says. "I'd like No-Shirt and Bulldozer to know. I . . ."

"Well," May says gently.

"I'm crazier'n a loon," Big Tim tries to explain, "my wife would always be worrying about me. It wouldn't be fair to her. She would have to wait for hours not knowing whether I had crashed or not, she would—and . . . hell, May, I've tried to be strong about this, but can't you see I'm weak? No good! If I wasn't, I'd . . ."

Somehow she was in his arms, and when they look at us again there's a gentleness and understandin' in their eyes as they look at Bulldozer Craig. He walks over, and his jaw is set. He kisses May, then he drives his fist into Big Tim's stomach until he grunts. "Good luck, you so and so," he whispers affectionately. "You deserve it."

Just as we're really breakin' up, Kenworthy steps into the room. "I've just learned," he says, "there are seventy tons of placer tin aboard. I doubt if it will run that high. There's a certain amount of water and ice in the bags. However, we're advancing thirty-six thousand dollars on the shipment. We will probably hold it until we build the smelter."

"But your company insists on a hundred tons," I blurt.

"And my company got it," he answers, "or they wouldn't have sent the advance money—seventy tons of placer ore and thirty tons of operator integrity, courage

and sound judgment." He shook hands all around. "It begins to look as if that air line of yours, Tim, might spout wings, soon," he says.

Tim can't say anything.

"We'll deposit the check tomorrow," I tell the others, "and form a company and split the stock four ways. We'll declare a little dividend all around. Me and Bulldozer will prob'ly catch the last passenger steamer for Seattle, but we'll be around, May, for the weddin'."

Afterwards, me and Bulldozer are walkin' along, lookin' into the windows. "Wouldn't it be hell, No-Shirt, if me and you got rich?" he says.

"Why?" I ask.

"Shucks," he answers, "then we'd quit tryin' to get rich and we wouldn't have any more fights on my hands. I was just thinkin' that even if I can't win the girl I love, settle down and marry I can have a lot of fun bein' No-Shirt McGee's muscle man."

LOOKING AHEAD!

DEAD STORAGE

"Murder in the first degree," the foreman said, but in that instant Tom Bates swore to himself that he would never go down that grim corridor to be strapped in the chair. He would never sit with the black bag over his head—because he was innocent. Beginning a gripping novel of America's Gold Coast by

EUSTACE L. ADAMS

'49 GOLD

Paddy's Bar was a ghost town, long forgotten, a relic of the dead past. But, very suddenly, the past was reborn—and these were no ghosts of '49, for shadows haven't the gold craze in them, and they don't carry guns. A complete novelet by

ROBERT E. PINKERTON

THE KING OF HALSTEAD STREET

Tony Brecchia ruled there over his *paisanos* and dwelt with his daughter in a practically enchanted house. But the time came when he was ready to make a king's sacrifice because, as everyone knows, a princess must be protected even to the death against care and sorrow. An unusual novelet by

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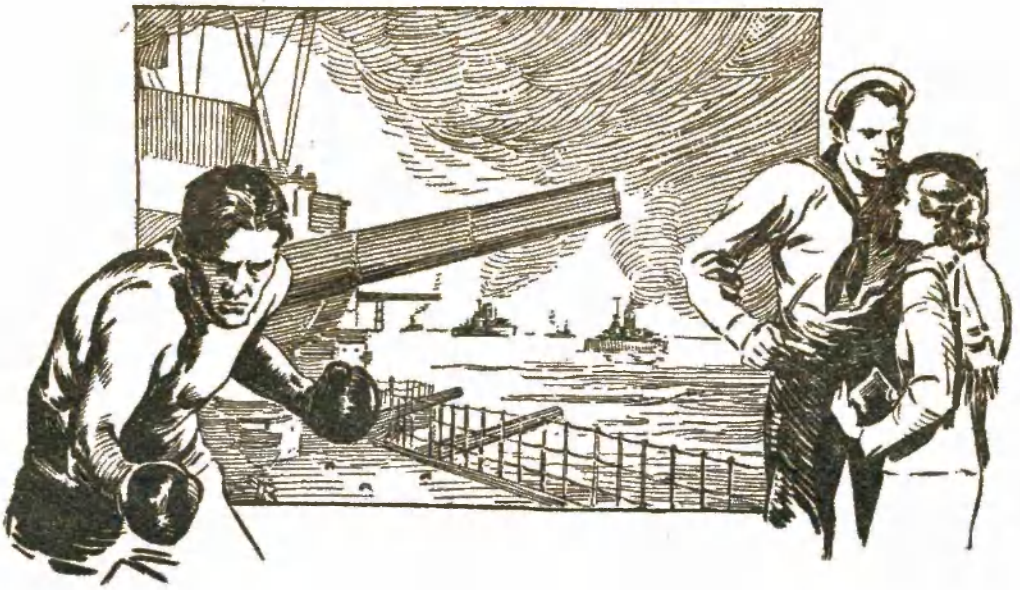

The Navy's More Than Ships

By RALPH PERRY

ENSIGN LAIKIE says I shouldn't tell the inside story of the scrimshaw championship of the Atlantic Fleet. He says landsmen will never understand Navy esprit de corps anyhow, so why try to explain? He says it's not too late yet for a court of inquiry, that there'll be other appropriation bills to get through Congress, that—

Oh, he's full of officers' reasons, but after all, he's only a young ensign, and I'm Bob McSwain, the senior chief boatswain's-mate of the *USS Kansas.* I was helping to win championships for the *Kansas,* and rooking the *Texarkana,* back when he was too young to pronounce "Annapolis," let alone study there. I claim a civilian can understand the Navy perfectly if you'll just start him on the right course.

So here goes. First, esprit de corps, the real seagoing kind, consists of getting the better of a rival ship in any way you possibly can, provided you promote the good of the service by that same act. Keep that in mind. And second, Ensign Laikie, the Iron Gob, Vic Smith and I are from the *Kansas;* while Sally Bronson is a *Texarkana* junior. If you just remember who is from which ship, the events of the scrimshaw championship, instead of exploding like shrapnel, will follow a line as direct as a shrapnel shell before the fuse burns to the powder.

Mrs. Potter provided the explosive when she discovered scrimshaw. She's a little old lady who turned her New York town house over to the service for a Recreation Center. The newspapers call her "Grandmother to the Atlantic Fleet," but she isn't really Navy. She thinks she is, though; and she has a fortune of about fifty million dollars to back her opinion.

Scrimshaw is seagoing fancy-work. Pie-markers carved from whale's teeth are scrimshaw, and so are ship models in bottles, and engravings on

Scrimshaw: A form of seagoing fancy-work; nautical tatting; and, by inference, the gentle art of chiseling

aluminum mess-trays done with a steel fork and colored red and blue. Nowadays the most popular scrimshaw is square-knot work in colored silk, which consists of a few hundred thousand or more square knots tied in a pattern as intricate as lace, and all to make a pillow-top fit for nothing but to give a girl or sell for a drink. The more difficult it is to do, the more monumental the waste of time, the better the scrimshaw.

In the Navy, scrimshaw is just one more tradition. It doesn't matter either way. It just is and always has been. Them as likes it makes it. But you can see how it would affect a gentle soul like Mrs. Potter, who is childless and over sixty. Scrimshaw was just the naval tradition that she wanted to encourage and publicize, and make no mistake: when Mrs. Potter lifts one finger the Navy comes to attention.

She offered a hundred dollar prize for the best piece of scrimshaw exhibited by the sailors of the Atlantic fleet. We got word aboard the *Kansas* that one of our lads, Victor Smith, seaman first class, had won the prize with a pillow top of square-knot work in five colors of silk, and to have him at Mrs. Potter's Anchorage the next day at three o'clock to get the money. There would be speeches and refreshments.

ALL plain sailing and simple enough, wasn't it? That was what Laikie and I thought. Even if it was only the scrimshaw championship, the *Kansas* was top ship. We'd put it over the *Texarkana* and the rest of the fleet. In fact, the speeches and the presentation looked to us like a chance to protect a championship we really were proud of, which was the fleet heavyweight championship. Our Thorvald Larson was to fight Wild Bill O'Malley, the fireman from the *Texarkana,* at ten that same night.

Larson was a Swede from Mesaba, Minnesota, but that wasn't why he was called the Iron Gob. He was as hard as iron, yes; and just exactly as intelligent, too. He never had but one thought at a time, and he never wasted a motion. He'd won the championship for the *Kansas* three times, and he was an odds-on favorite to repeat—provided Laikie and I could get him into the ring in perfect condition.

That jaw and those ridged belly-muscles would take everything O'Malley could dish out for three or four rounds. When the challenger got arm-weary, one of the Gob's punches would suddenly flash out a little faster and considerably harder. One would be plenty. After that jab connected he would hammer a dazed challenger into the resin. With mind and muscle the Gob always concentrated on one idea: attack. He gathered power as a thundercloud gathers darkness, and lashed it out in a lightning flash. He was never clever; but, in condition, he was indestructible.

And that indestructibility made the heavyweight championship all simple and plain sailing, too? You're wrong. Any landsman who thinks that keeping a seaman with a one-idea brain in perfect condition is simple should have been the *Kansas'* athletic-officer, or her senior chief boatswain's-mate. Laikie and I knew otherwise.

On the day of the fight, for example, the Iron Gob rated liberty. For him that was enough. He rated liberty, so he was going ashore. That he was to fight at ten meant precisely nothing to him at half past two. The best we could do was persuade him to go to Mrs. Potter's Anchorage with his watchmate, Vic Smith. It was the quietest, safest place in New York for a bluejacket, and I'd be along to convoy him.

So there we were at three o'clock, part of an audience of about two hundred gobs drawn from the whole fleet—the two hundred who'd spent all the pay they hadn't bet on the fight and had nowhere else to go. Vic Smith was in the middle, with the Gob to the right and me to the left, and a platform in front empty except

for a display of scrimshaw, with Vic's five-color pillow-top in the center. The Gob had his elbows on his knees and his chin propped by his fists. His hair was straw-colored, and he'd had it clipped close to his skull. His head looked as hard as the top cannonball in one of those piles at the Navy yard.

"The *Kansas* hadn't ought to be smeared," he said.

"Aw, forget it. You'll take that *Texarkana* bum," I told him.

"Yeah, but the *Kansas* hadn't ought to be smeared," he said. "While you and Vic was buyin' cigarettes, a civilian with a squint in his left eye asked me was this the scrimshaw championship? And when I says, sure, he says, 'Boy, am I gonna smear that champion! My paper's gonna run a full page of pictures of silk pillow-tops and pie-markers, and under it in big type, Prize Winners in the Navy's Latest Championship. The Navy asks for $516,215,808 this year.'"

The Gob rolled his bullet head toward me. "Ain't that a lot of dough to spend for silk pillows, Chief?"

"Pipe down. You got those figures wrong," I said, but I looked around for that reporter. It was like the Gob to clamp onto the exact figures, and pay no attention to anything else. Some smart-aleck newspaper was going to get a laugh and hamstring national defense by taking a landsman's view of service matters. The lads that fought the *Bonhomme Richard* had scrimshaw in their ditty boxes. It's always been, but you've got to be Navy to know it. Those headlines would look bad.

"They hadn't ought to smear the Navy," said the Iron Gob.

"You said it, lad," I told him. "Now pipe down. Here's Mrs. Potter."

SHE came walking out on the platform. There was a red-headed girl with her, carrying a manuscript. Mrs. Potter beamed at us, and the girl raised the manuscript and began to read a speech. I didn't hear it. When you meet Sally Bronson for the first time, you don't listen, you look.

I can't describe her fairly, any more than I can a ship under sail. She's a golden redhead. Her eyelashes are dark, and there's a mole over her left eyebrow that she blackens with a soft lead pencil. The eyelashes dance on her cheeks, and the shadows glide in the hollow of her throat, but that still doesn't describe the life and movement of her! In face, figure and spirit, Sally Bronson is a girl for a sailor, that's all.

Finally I heard her voice. ". . . and what can more delight the heart of woman," she was saying, "than to know the bravest are indeed the tenderest, the loving, the most daring? We who love sailors—"

She lost her place, and I knew then that Mrs. Potter had written that speech. ". . . who thrill to the history of John Paul Jones' heroes and know fighting men as doughty sail the seas today, admire these delicate silken traceries as much—no, more!—than brutal blows or swelling muscles. And so it is with pride that I ask a new, a true Navy-champion to rise and receive from my hand the prize and reward of his skill. Will Victor Smith, seaman first-class of the *USS Kansas,* step forward?"

Vic Smith started to get up, and I and every bluejacket present envied him. He *started*—but he never left his seat. The Iron Gob put a right hand flat across his face and pushed him down.

"You stand by or I'll bust you one," the Gob said, and shoved himself into the aisle as though he were a boat and Vic's nose was the side of a dock.

The Iron Gob was big enough to catch every eye. His nose was broken, and his ears were cauliflower, but the white stripe of a seaman first-class was around his right shoulder. He could pass for Vic Smith among people who weren't Navy—and if I'd ordered him back, landsmen would think we couldn't remember what names we gave ourselves on the *Kansas* unless we looked at the stencil in our hats.

The redhead gave him a queer look. She stammered: "Victor—

Smith? The—*scrimshaw* champion?"

"Lady, that's me," said the Iron Gob. "D'ja mean that, what you said about lovin' sailors?"

She looked down, and the dark eyelashes touched her cheek, twice, slowly. I couldn't believe she was flirting deliberately, but she sure enough was.

"I'm so glad you won, Mr. *Smith,*" she said. "Of course I mean it. Look, there's a reporter coming, with a cameraman. We'll have our pictures taken, and then we can have a dance in the canteen. I'm sure you're thirsty?"

Two hands closed on my shoulders from behind, pushing me into my seat. "Atta girl, Sally!" whispered a voice in my ear. "Oh, baby, you never miss a trick!"

I twisted around. It was Hopkins, the chief quartermaster of the *Texarkana.* "Lay off me," I said. "Who is that dame?"

"That's Sally Bronson," he said. "You know Shouting Bill Bronson, the skipper of the *Texarkana?* That's his daughter."

"You mean she's Navy? That she knows who the Gob is?"

"She was *born* Navy," Hopkins gloated, and leaned harder on my shoulders. "Her first name's *Texarkana,* and her second's Esprit de corps. You bet she knows. Just watch her maneuver."

"Well, she ain't going to make the Gob break training, or dance him legweary," I said.

Hopkins shifted his fingers nearer my throat. Mosely, the *Texarkana* chief gunner's-mate, and Howell, their ship's fitter, leaned forward ready to lend a hand. I'm big. They were bigger, all of them.

"Ain't she, though? Let's see you stop her, sailor," said Hopkins. "You *Kansas* lads have spent the *Texarkana's* fight bets for three years. You pipe down, Bob McSwain. I ain't fooling."

MRS. POTTER was beaming down at us from the platform. She crossed the Gob and reached up to put a tiny hand on his shoulder. I could see the diamonds on her fingers flash.

"I'm sure none of us expected such a *big* champion," she said, and mad as I was the pride in her voice made my throat choke up. "It proves what I have always maintained, that the bravest are indeed the gentlest, yet when I see these rugged hands and the delicate, the lovely work they have accomplished, I marvel."

"Lady, you said it!" someone called.

Mrs. Potter lifted her chin. That was that. She wasn't a person you contradicted to her face. "And I have kept the best thing of all secret, for a surprise," she announced. "I knew that women interested in the navy want to learn how to do this marvelous scrimshaw work themselves once I publicized it, so I obtained, in advance, from the admiral himself, a twenty-four hour liberty for the champion, whoever he might be. And this very afternoon Mr. Smith is to go with me to demonstrate scrimshaw in the largest department store in the city, and afterward to dinner at my house."

She waited for the applause. She looked puzzled when she didn't get it. Sally Bronson's eyes got big, but her lips tightened and she reached out to take the Iron Gob by the hand. Even Hopkins muttered in my ear. "Holy three-ringed-hell-holes, there'll be an eight-endorsement report to the admiral over this. But sit still, you! Three years we've paid good dough to the *Kansas.* Now the *Texarkana's* got a chance to get it back."

I sat. The cameraman was already taking pictures, and the reporter was writing down all their names. How could I yell out, "Mrs. Potter, the scrimshaw champ's a liar. He couldn't knot anything smaller than a hawser."

Well, anyhow, I thought, that newspaper layout would carry the face, if not the name, of a fighting sailor. But the bets—the bets! The Kansas had its last dime on the Gob.

Ten minutes later I was on the telephone calling on Ensign Laikie for help. The *Texarkana* sure enough

wasn't fooling, and they were too many for me to handle with the men I had.

"This is McSwain, speaking unofficial, sir," I said. "You asked me to keep an eye on Larson while he was on liberty, and he's got himself in bad trouble, sir."

"Tell the cops to turn him over to the shore patrol and say we'll put him in the brig ourselves," Laikie ordered.

"Mr. Laikie, it ain't the usual trouble, sir. Larson's went and gypped himself into the scrimshaw championship of the Atlantic fleet. Here at Mrs. Potter's Anchorage."

"He what?"

"Yes, sir. It's girl trouble he's got, sir. She's a redhead, and she's—" How was I going to describe Sally to a man that had never seen her? "I—I can't arrest him, sir. The *Texarkana* is wise. They won't let a *Kansas* man near the Gob, and I don't want to start a riot in the Anchorage. That is, unless you give orders, sir. The *Texarkana's* got Hopkins and Howell and Mosely on the detail, and Vic Smith and I are all the *Kansas* can muster. We're outnumbered bad, sir."

"Scrimshaw champion? Gypped? Girl?" Laikie said, "What is this, McSwain—a missing word contest, or a battle?"

"It's our heavyweight championship, and the *Kansas* is losing it, sir."

"McSwain, are you sober?"

"Victor Smith won the championship, sir," I explained, "but this girl made a speech, and when she sung out for Smith, the Gob answered. He said he was Smith, and she pretended to believe him, sir. She's got him in the canteen now, sir. She's fed him two banana splits already, big ones with lots of whipped cream and cherries, sir, and she's sent for sarsaparilla! How's Larson going to take what Wild Bill hands him for three-four rounds, with all that in his belly?"

"Oh!" said Laikie. "Oh, I see. Chief, I've got two hundred on the Gob. Make him give the redhead the air."

"You wouldn't order that if you saw her, sir," I said. "We're dealing with a 4.0 rater, sir."

"Well, if you say, 'So long, Toots,' grab the Gob and walk out, can she stop you?"

"Hopkins can," I said. "And Mrs. Potter can stop the Gob. He's her scrimshaw champion, sir. Didn't I make that clear? And the redhead will win the heavyweight championship for the *Texarkana* if she gets more of that whipped cream and pop into the Gob, sir. Mr. Laikie, she's going to dance with him next, to get him leg-weary, and the *Texarkana* has got the door blocked. I can't do nothing without busting Hopkins one, sir, and I hate to start a fight while Mrs. Potter's cruising around. That's why I'm asking for orders, sir. I got a month's pay bet on the Gob myself."

"Don't start a riot in the Anchorage," Laikie ordered. "Is that all?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Potter's going to take the Iron Gob to make a speech to five hundred ladies this afternoon on how to do fancy-work. All the reporters will be there, besides the one that—"

"Avast, Chief," said Laikie. "If there's worse still, save it."

He started to swear under his breath, so I knew he was thinking.

"I'll come to the Anchorage myself," he said at last, and he sounded confident. "Your orders are to stand by. Keep our lads handy, but if you smack anybody without orders, I'll have your stripes. Mrs. Potter's more than a friend of the Navy. She's the Secretary of the Navy's aunt."

I STOOD by. So did Hopkins and Mosely, and they stood in the doorway of the canteen, with their shoulders touching. Howell was dancing with a fat brunette, going back and forth like a sentry just beyond them. The rest of the fleet let us alone. Those that hadn't already gone in to dance didn't; it was the *Kansas* against the *Texarkana*. I walked up to Hopkins.

"I ain't blowing you down yet, you ape," I said. "You want to remember Mrs. Potter ain't just got a few million. She's the Secretary of the Navy's aunt. We got to be careful."

"*You've* got to be careful," said

Hopkins. "We're just watching the dance. You ain't got another fin to lay on the Gob?"

"I have," I said. I had to stick up for the *Kansas,* even though it was my last fin, and Sally had just poured all the sarsaparilla into the Gob's glass, and was ordering cream soda. I had just one hope: that she would find out what Laikie and I knew too well—the Iron Gob always attacked.

"Let's go some place else to dance, huh? This place ain't got no life," he was saying.

"I'd love to, but I promised Mrs. Potter we'd stay here," Sally countered.

"Yeah, but let's go some place else to dance, huh? This place—"

"Ain't got no life?" Sally groaned.

"Yeah!" said the Iron Gob. "Let's go some place else to dance."

Sally looked despairingly at Hopkins and Mosely.

"Let's go now," snapped the Iron Gob. He'd seen his opening. The words were like a right cross. He rose. His fingers were tight on Sally's arm.

"Because this place ain't got no life?" Sally tried to joke. "Change the record, Champ."

I know she was surprised when he did, for I was. In fact, the Gob recognized Ensign Laikie in his civilian clothes before I did. He had come in by the back door. He stopped to speak with Mrs. Potter for a moment, and then he turned slowly and came toward Sally.

I had always put Laikie down as a nice youngster who would make a good officer in time, but nothing much above the usual run. Also my opinion had been that officers did well with the girls because of the gold braid. Take the braid off and put the white embroidered bird on their arms, and they wouldn't do as well as c.p.o.'s or even a gob in a tailored uniform. But the way Laikie maneuvered to Sally Bronson's table made me proud I was from the *Kansas.*

He looked at her casually, and then his eyes steadied like a big gun that's found the target, with just that same easy sway and fixed point. He didn't hurry across the floor, and yet he was eager to reach her. Sally noticed, and liked it.

"Say," said Hopkins under his breath, "that's your athletic-officer. He's outa uniform!"

I hooked two fingers in his collar. "Steady, you ape," I said. "If I can't get to your girl, you leave our ensign be."

"You'll excuse me?" Laikie was saying to Sally. "I'm a reporter from the Press. I want to interview—er—the scrimshaw champion. If you don't mind?"

"Of course not," Sally agreed. Laikie sat beside her.

"How did you happen to take up scrimshaw, Champ?" he began.

"I hadda," said the Iron Gob. And clamped shut his mouth the way a breechblock locks.

Laikie raised an eyebrow at Sally. "I'll admit he doesn't make the reason quite clear. Can you help him out?"

"Surely. You see, I'm helping entertain the champion."

"So Mrs. Potter told me when I said I was from the Press. She was delighted at the publicity—though not more than I suddenly became over the assignment. You make a reporter's job pleasanter, Miss—"

"Bronson." His eyes widened just a bit. I'd forgotten to tell him, and the news was a shock. "Really?" said Sally. "Really, Mr.—"

"Laikie. Jeff Laikie. But—er—yes, certainly you make it pleasanter, and easier. What's an interview without a picture, or a picture without a girl?"

"Thank you for not adding 'pretty.'"

Laikie did himself proud. He said:

"I've marvelous restraint. I'd have said 'vivacious and beautiful,' though if I'd used adjectives. My photographer is right outside, and if you both will just come with me we'll snap the pics."

HE rose, and his smile made Sally smile, too. She put her hand on the table to get up, and then hesitated. She was a Navy junior, and an officer's daughter. As I've said, when you don't

want officers to get wise, as a class they have a kind of second sight.

"Well—" began Sally. Then she looked carefully at Laikie. "Do you know, you're wearing an interesting ring. It's got an anchor on it, just like the rings naval officers wear."

Laikie was a 4.0 rater, too. He looked at his naval class-ring as though he had never seen it before. Naturally he'd forgotten it when he changed his uniform.

"Six bucks in a pawn shop," he remarked. "If we don't hurry, my photographer won't have proper light for those pics."

"Oh, yes. Your photographer. And you are a reporter. You told Mrs. Potter so. To her face. A charitable old lady—and the Secretary of the Navy's aunt."

"I don't understand what you mean."

"A reporter wouldn't, Mr. Laikie. Only a naval officer would understand the phrase 'conduct unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman'."

"You are a brat," said Laikie.

"Shouting Bill Bronson's brat, from the *Texarkana,*" Sally agreed. "The Gob and I are staying right here. Won't you join us in a chocolate split, with coconut marshmallow?"

"I never expected a Navy junior would run a shennanigan that will make the service a laughing-stock in every newspaper in the country."

"Not the Navy. The admiral approved this—er—contest, remember," Sally argued sweetly. "They'll only laugh at a ship. At the *Kansas.*"

She reached for that chocolate and marshmallow goo the waitress was bringing them, and before she pushed it in front of the Gob he'd picked up his spoon. Only one idea at a time, that was Larson. As for me, I kissed the fleet heavyweight championship and my last fin goodbye.

All that could be done now, as Sally implied, was to head off an eight-endorsement report, to keep civilians from suspecting anything, and the Secretary of the Navy from asking who had pulled a fast one on his aunt, and why.

That wasn't going to be easy, either, for Victor Smith had been bumping into my back whispering it was his championship, and he'd never won anything before in his life. He'd go to Mrs. Potter next, and tell her all the things I'd been afraid to shout out.

I turned on him. "You go back to the *Kansas,*" I said. "Shut up—I said go, and that's an order. Officially, that's Vic Smith sitting there with the redhead. Officially, your name is Larson. There ain't going to be no scandal, you hear me, sailor? I'll buy you a hundred fathoms of silk in six colors, and relieve you of all detail for a year so you can make another piece of scrimshaw that will win a world's championship, including the Pacific Fleet—but right now, you run back to quarters, savvy?"

His mouth turned down. He was a little scrawny fellow, and he sounded as if his throat was bony and knotted up, too. "My name's Victor, an' I never won nothing before, Chief," he said. "More than a million knots I tied. One thousand and fifty-six on the sides, and one thousand and sixty top and bottom. How many is that?"

"Too many," I said. "You return to quarters."

He went. We have discipline in the service. But he dragged his feet.

I couldn't exactly blame him.

ENSIGN LAIKIE knew we were licked, too, though he fought on as if he didn't. He leaned toward the Iron Gob and used his officer's voice. "Champ, you've watched Vic Smith work at scrimshaw. You've never done any yet, but lad! you're going to. How much of your hitch have you got to serve?"

"A year and a butt."

"Then it'll be a year and a butt you'll spend knotting silk, eight hours every day, if you come back to the *Kansas* as scrimshaw champion. Think it over, sailor."

The Gob looked unhappy, but Sally smiled. "The naval regulations forbid cruel or unusual punishments," she said.

"They can't make me do it, huh?"

"No, and if they try it, you put in for a transfer to the *Texarkana.*"

"Yeah," muttered the Iron Gob. "That wouldn't be so bad, huh?"

"It isn't fair for you to be clever, too," Laikie said.

"You and *Kansas* shouldn't pick on a defenseless girl. I don't trust you. I won't feel easy about the Champ while you're cruising in the offing. So—"

She looked across the dance floor and caught Mrs. Potter's eye.

"What are you going to do?" Laikie whispered.

"A favor," said Sally. "I can foresee your next maneuver, and I am about to save us both a great deal of trouble."

"You have met Mr. Laikie—the reporter?" she asked Mrs. Potter.

"Indeed I have! And he was so kind! He promised to take a picture of my champion." Mrs. Potter was so happy about it that even Sally winced, but she said:

"He's just thought of a much better piece of publicity than that. That is, if you approve. I didn't dare to answer for you, but don't you think it would be splendid if a representative of the Press introduced the scrimshaw champion at the department store? Then Mr. Laikie could tell all the ladies about the story he was going to write for his paper, and take a few of their names to print, and have his photographer make a group photo—"

"But that would be just too splendid!" Mrs. Potter cried. "Of course I approve! I—I can't thank you enough—"

"Please don't try," Laikie said. The look he gave Sally would have burned the paint off a lifeboat. Mrs. Potter turned away. "Now you have done it!" Laikie whispered. "You—you Jessie Iscariot! My gosh, woman, I can't do that!"

"You can retreat," Sally pointed out. "As long as you are in the offing, Mr. Laikie, you are a menace. Battle is joined, sir. Fire when ready, Mr. Gridley. Go on; tell her you're not a reporter, and that this isn't the scrimshaw champion. Or do ships-about."

"Miss Bronson," said Laikie. "I'm going. The *Kansas* surrenders to the *Texarkana.* But this affair's been Navy, up to now. You're pushing it outside the family. You are exhibiting a *Kansas-Texarkana* feud to a public that never thinks of individual ships, and judges the whole service by a drunken blue-jacket they meet."

He turned on the Gob. "You'll go with Miss Bronson, and do the best you can at this meeting," he ordered. "You'll show these department store ladies how scrimshaw is knotted. Use a length of signal halliard. That's thick and easy to tie. Try to do what you've seen Smith do. Understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir," muttered the Iron Gob.

HE had finished the chocolate and marshmallow goo, and was ready for the next idea. He wrinkled his forehead, so the blond hair came closer to his eyes, "I ain't just the *Kansas.* That squint-eyed guy said he was gonna smear the whole Navy. He hadn't ought to smear the Navy, even for five hundred and sixteen million bucks."

"*What* squint-eyed guy?" said Laikie and Sally together. "You mean there's a civilian mixed in this?"

I said, "Lemme through, Hopkins," and pushed up to them, with the *Texarkana* petty-officers hanging to me so close I could feel their breath on my neck. "The Gob was telling me a reporter was here with instructions to make a joke of the whole Navy, sir," I reported. "There's going to be a picture of the scrimshaw, and a heading that runs: This is the latest Navy championship. The Navy wants more than a half billion this year."

"Miss Bronson, don't you believe this sea-lawyer," Hopkins warned her. "He's from the *Kansas.*"

"That was quick thinking, though, Chief," Sally razzed me. "The naval appropriation bill is really being debated."

"It wasn't half a billion, Chief. It was five-one six, umph ump ump and eight aught eight dollars, and the re-

porter had a squint in his left eye," said the Iron Gob.

Hopkins let go of me. His eyes bugged out as though he'd been eating ice cream and saw broken glass in the last spoonful. The Gob was no lad to make up figures out of his head. Sally Bronson's face lost all its verve.

"Hopkins," she moaned, "Cassidy, the reporter for the Star, has a squint. That's a little-navy sheet that heads a syndicate. It talks from coast to coast. Chief, we can't risk this. How'd the *Texarkana* feel if it won a championship that trimmed an appropriation bill, Chief?"

"Aye, aye," Hopkins groaned. "But —we got that whipped cream and soda pop into the Gob. Maybe Wild Bill can take him?"

"Chief, that won't be enough. The Gob hasn't enough imagination to have indigestion. I was counting," Sally told us, "on making him stand before the ladies trying to tie knots with silk too small for his fingers till he got the jitters. I was going to spoil his timing. And now he's got to win, for the only thing that's certain to spoil the Star's headline is to print that scrimshaw headline under the face of the Navy's best battler. From the *Kansas!*" she wailed.

"Yes, but it's too late," Laikie interrupted, his face as long as a boat boom. "I can't withdraw the Gob from the scrimshaw championship, and neither can you. How can you go to Mrs. Potter and say, 'I lied to you about this naval officer to steal a prize fight for the *Texarkana*, but I didn't know then that the whole naval service was involved?' "

"Pipe down, sailor," Sally answered with her eyes half-closed. "Don't tell me I can't. Never tell a Navy junior she can't."

Her red head lifted. "Get the real scrimshaw champion, quick," she ordered. "I've got a story about naval watchmates and buddies that a civilian like Mrs. Potter will swallow. You *Kansas* lads get me the real Vic Smith."

And of course Ensign Laikie turned to me.

Well, I'm the *Kansas'* senior chief boatswain's-mate. I came into the Navy at sixteen, as an apprentice, and that's thirty-seven years ago. I've seen wreck and collision, and my messmates blown up by a mine they were sweeping while we took up the North Sea barrage. But I've never felt as I did then.

They were all looking at me, and Vic Smith was on his way back to the *Kansas*, at my orders. Instead of furthering a feud with the *Texarkana*, and helping the Navy, I'd let the *Texarkana* lick us even while they were trying to help the *Kansas* win, and I'd hurt the service.

I said, "No soap," and let them make out from the look on my face that it was no soap right. For there was Mrs. Potter coming across the dance floor, small as a bird and as happy.

"And now I'll take my real Navy champion," she piped. "And we'll show my ladies that skill and brute strength can go hand in hand."

THE IRON GOB stood up, and just then someone small scraped under my arm. It was Vic Smith.

"Put me on report! Courtmartial me and be blowed, McSwain," he yelled. "It was one million, one hundred and nineteen thousand, three hundred and sixty knots I tied in the background alone, and most a quarter million more for the design. I *won't* do it again. I'm the champion right now, and I'm gonna be recognized. *I'm* the Scrimshaw Champion," he yelled at Mrs. Potter, "and even if that gorilla is my shipmate and my buddy I won't give it up to him. He can have everything else I got, but he ain't gonna steal my championship and keep my picture out of the paper. Talk to ladies, will he?"

And with that he hauled off and smashed the Iron Gob in the nose.

For a little man it was a 4.0 sock. It spread the Iron Gob's nose out like a beef liver. He started a counter, but Mosely and Hopkins and Howell and I all boarded him at once. We're all big, and we needed to be. We held the

Gob, legs and arms and my elbow round his neck, with the blood from his nose dripping on my sleeve. We lifted him, still fighting, face to face with Mrs. Potter.

"What does this *mean?*" she said. And believe me, fifty million dollars can get more authority into a voice than even an admiral's stripes. "If *he* is Victor Smith, who are *you?*"

"The champ, an' that's who," grunted the Gob. "Have 'em turn me loose, lady, and I'll prove it to you."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Potter. "I hoped to show my ladies that the Navy did something beside fight." She turned to me. "You seem to be the senior petty-officer. Will you explain this—this—"

She couldn't find a word for it, and because I couldn't either I pretended to be too busy holding the Iron Gob to open my mouth.

"—example of naval seniority and naval esprit de corps?" Sally Bronson carried on smoothly. "I'll be glad to, Mrs. Potter. It's really the soul of the Navy in action. Every member of a ship's crew works for the ship; the ship is more than the crew, but when a ship wins a prize, some individual member of the crew must receive it. Usually that is the captain, but when officers aren't involved, it's the senior individual of that rank. Victor Smith is the ranking seaman first-class aboard the *Kansas.* Aren't you?" she asked the Iron Gob.

"I'm the champ, that's who," he repeated.

"Therefore," Sally cut in, "this big sailor stepped up to get the prize, and it was all right with this little sailor, who actually made the pillow. Wasn't it?"

"It was," I said.

"But when you proposed to take the scrimshaw champion to demonstrate before your ladies," Sally went on gravely, "that was very different, for the man who'd officially accepted the scrimshaw championship for the *Kansas* can't tie scrimshaw at all, and the little sailor can. He didn't want to see you and the Navy embarrassed—"

"Sally Bronson," Mrs. Potter said, and there was still ten million dollars worth of authority in her voice, "I cannot take a bluejacket with a smashed nose to represent the Navy at a public meeting. I'm the Grandmother of the Atlantic Fleet, and nevertheless sometimes you Navy people puzzle me. What I do see is that I must introduce an acceptable scrimshaw champion. I shall present this little man as Victor Smith—*if* you assure me that it will be honest."

"It'll be honest," said Sally and Hopkins and Mosely and I all together. Our faces must have convinced Mrs. Potter.

"Though I suppose this reporter will expose us?" she pleaded.

"Madam, I promise you that not a word of what has happened here will appear in the Press," Ensign Laikie promised gravely.

"Then it's settled," said Mrs. Potter. She took the scrimshaw champion by the arm, "Remember, Whatever-your-name-is, that I shall call you Victor Smith, and that you and I represent the Navy," she ordered, and walked toward the door.

And that's the inside story of the scrimshaw championship. I think it explains why I disagree with Ensign Laikie. Civilians can apply real esprit de corps, if it's explained to them properly. Victor Smith made a 4.0 rating at the ladies' meeting, and the squint-eyed reporter got fired, as I understand, for his blunder in offering a heavyweight champion's picture as the scrimshaw champ's. He rated being fired. Any civilian does who mixes into Navy affairs, particularly little-navy civilians. The Iron Gob? He knocked out the challenger in the sixth. About the fourth, when he was taking plenty, as usual, I asked him if all that gooey food wasn't hurting his wind.

"Naw," he said. "Grub's grub, ain't it? You'd have fed me a beefsteak before the fight anyhow, wouldn't you?" said he. "Grub's grub, ain't it?"

That's the Iron Gob for you. Always one-idea Larson.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

THE last of the month is the time to breathe deeply, throw back the shoulders, and see what we have ahead of us for the following month. As far as fine fiction for the readers of ARGOSY is concerned, it looks like a good month. . . . Next week Eustace Adams, after a long absence, comes back to our pages with a fast-moving novel of the Florida coast, *Dead Storage*. Shortly thereafter will appear Judson P. Philips with the football novel of the year, *A Punt, A Pass and A Prayer*. It's truly a thrilling and unusual yarn.

Remember *I Was the Kid with the Drum?* Well, if you thought that was an eerie tale, then we give you *Ghoul's Paradise,* in which Theodore Roscoe takes us back again to that thriving, if somewhat crime-conscious rural community in upstate New York, Four Corners.

And maybe it's cheating a little to go beyond November, but we must tell you that Captain Hornblower is returning with the December 3rd issue. ***Flying Colours*** is the name, and it takes up the fortunes of that very human hero of the sea where *Ship of the Line* left off.

LAST week the following communication should have appeared; but there was no room, and we think you'll still want to hear from the creator of No-Shirt McGee about Tin Money. Says

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

When I was in the Arctic last year I stumbled into the tin region—a country lousy with placer tin and being developed by sundry groups of miners of modest means.

I learned to my amazement that America uses sixty percent of the tin the world produces but produces less than three percent herself. That the foreign interests have a tight trust that hikes up the price on us until we paid better than fifty-eight cents a pound last year and the bill ran close to eighty million dollars. The places tin is used are endless.

Also that the placer tin produced in Alaska is so rich that it can be shipped to Singapore or England to be smelted.

AND now that everybody's feeling fairly comfortable, we're just the ones to startle them with a sharp, if belated plaint from

G. J. H.

Put this in your "corner" and like it! You get my dime and I get your mag week in and week out which is pretty good evidence of my satisfaction. These petty, comma, typographical kickers are to be pitied rather than condemned, but listen to a real complaint.

I'm referring to three recent offerings: "Sandhog," "Ship of the Line" and "Pardon My Glove." The latter two fizzled miserably and spoiled two excellent yarns, particularly the near masterpiece "Ship of the Line" and the fault was not the author's but yours, Mr. Editor. If, instead of blindly accepting these stories from name authors you had rejected them until the authors ended their stories as the character portrayal demanded, you might some day approach the status of a top-notch editor. Let me illustrate. "Ship of the Line" portrayed a great naval figure; pounded, shouted success from the beginning. Not one hint of disaster was discernible nor compatible with Hornblower's character and actions. "Pardon My Glove" should have followed its logical way to *Sassoon's* smashing success. Just think how Eustace Adams would have had *Sassoon* smash *Tiger Towers* to oblivion. He would have left out the society girl and made the love interest over *Bonnie.*

"Sandhog" proves my point. *Saxon's* death was reasonable, even logical in such a tale. And read again the author's handling of his death. The picture of incredulity in *Saxon's* eyes is still before me. Masterful writing. No,

I am not an author with a grievance. I have never written a line nor intend to. Please pardon my long-windedness.
Butler, N. J.

Next, further ARGOSY ratings from:

NORMAN W. SIRINGER

May 1932:

Timber War.....Frank R. Pierce B minus
Strangle Holds.....Erle S. Gardner D plus
Sea Rover.....Don Waters D
Blind Canyon.....Robert O. Case C minus
Hairy Barbarian.....L. G. Blochman D
Witch Oaks.....J. Allan Dunn D
Temple of the Dogs.H. Bedford-Jones C
Ninth Inning Nerve,
Lieut. John Hopper C
Ten Minutes to Two.Theodore Roscoe C plus
X Marks the Lot..Thompson Burtis D
Helgvor of the Blue River,
(translated by Georges Surdez)
J. H. Rosny-Aine C plus
The average for May, 1932 was 2.70.

May 1937:

Grand National.....Judson Philips B plus
Galloping Gold.....W. C. Tuttle C plus
The Faith Unfaithful,
William Corcoran C
The Sea's Way.....R. E. Pinkerton C minus
Red Snow At Darjeeling,
L. G. Blochman C plus
Beyond Control.....Carl Rathjen C
All Noisy on the Spanish Front,
Theodore Roscoe B minus
Hocus Pocus.....Lester Dent C minus
The Smoking Land....George Challis B minus
The White Flower....Sinclair Gluck B minus
The average for May, 1937 was 3.67.

May 1938:

Magnificent Babu Dutt,
L. G. Blochman C plus
Living Ghost.....Max Brand B
Highpockets.....Frank R. Pierce C plus
Short Rope for Rustlers.W. C. Tuttle C
Granger Wagon.....Bennett Foster D plus
Clean, Green and Phoney,
Donald B. Chidsey C
Law Visits Halfaday Creek,
James B. Hendryx C
Heads of Sergeant Baptiste,
Theodore Roscoe C plus
The average for May, 1938 was 3.36.

I see that you referred to my last letter as a "report card." I suppose it did look like one. However, my grading plan is somewhat different. A grade of D or D plus does not mean that the story is poor, it merely shows that it was not up to the Argosy average, which is C.
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