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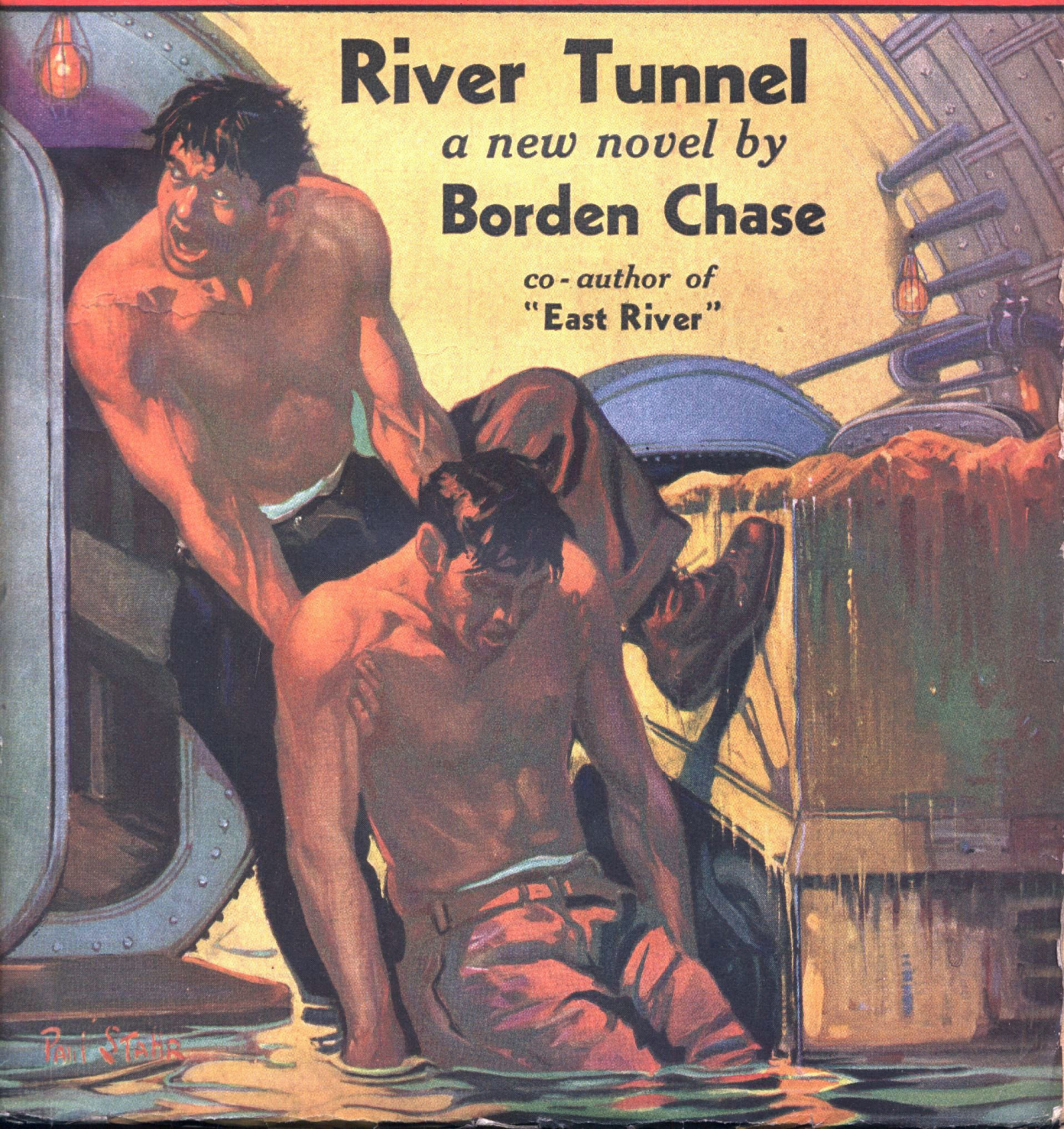


River Tunnel

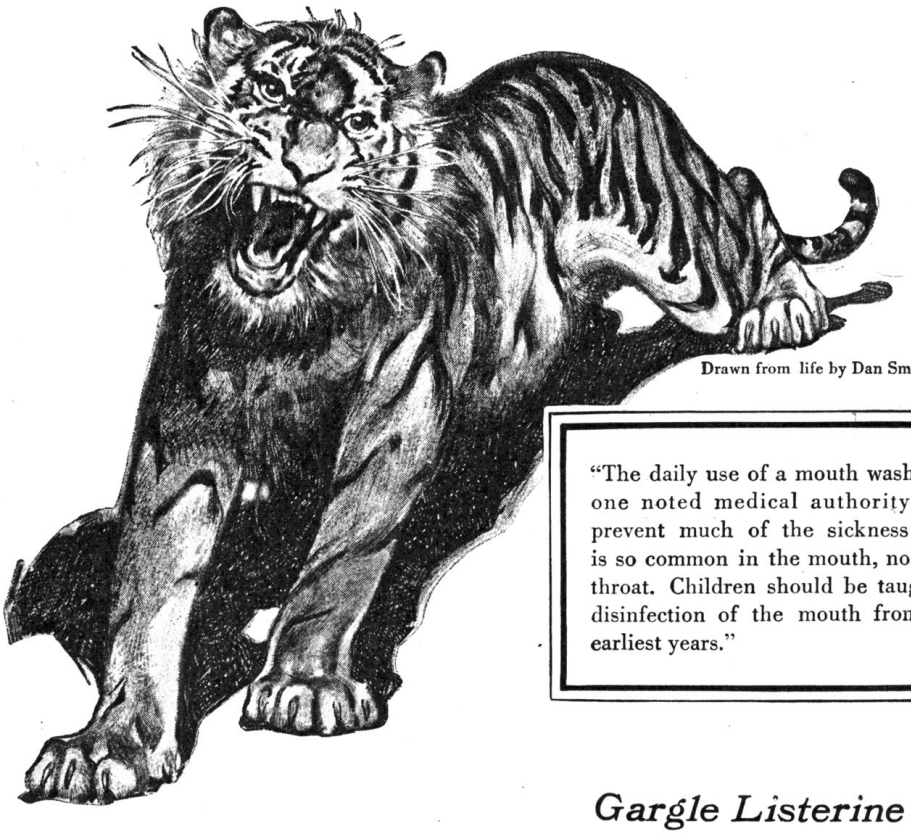
a new novel by

Borden Chase

co-author of

"East River"

The TIGER *in the* House



Drawn from life by Dan Smith

"The daily use of a mouth wash," says one noted medical authority, "will prevent much of the sickness which is so common in the mouth, nose, and throat. Children should be taught the disinfection of the mouth from their earliest years."

YOU call it a cold, but physicians call it the Tiger in the House because their experience teaches them how potentially dangerous a cold really is; how often it may lead to prolonged ill-health.

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The cause of colds, many scientists now believe, is a filtrable virus, invisible but potent. It lodges in the mouth and throat, which also welcome millions of the equally dangerous "secondary invaders"—the pneumonia, streptococcus and influenza germs. These often complicate a cold.

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Listerine is fatal to germs, including those associated with colds. Yet it does not irritate delicate tissue as do many mouth washes, needlessly harsh.

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Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 251 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 8, 1934 Number 6

NOVEL, NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

SERIALS

OTHER FEATURES

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

Young Men Now Get

A New Skin

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Help Your Kidneys

Don't Take Drastic Drugs

You have 9 million tiny tubes or filters in your Kidneys, which are at work night and day cleaning out Acids and poisonous wastes and purifying your blood, which circulates through your kidneys 200 times an hour. So it's no wonder that poorly functioning Kidneys may be the real cause of feeling tired, run-down, nervous, Getting Up Nights, Rheumatic Pains and other troubles.

Nearly everyone is likely to suffer from poorly functioning Kidneys at times because modern foods and drinks, weather changes, exposure, colds, nervous strain, worry and over-work often place an extra heavy load on the Kidneys.

But when your Kidneys need help, don't take chances with drastic or irritating drugs. Be careful. If poorly functioning Kidneys or Bladder make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Stiffness, Burning, Smarting, Itching Acidity, Rheumatic Pains, Lumbago, Loss of Vitality, Dark Circles under the eyes, or Dizziness, don't waste a minute. Try the Doctor's prescription Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). See for yourself the amazing quickness with which it soothes, tones and cleans raw, sore irritated membranes.

Cystex is a remarkably successful prescription for poorly functioning Kidneys and Bladder. It is helping millions of sufferers, and many say that in just a day or so it helped them sleep like a baby, brought new strength and energy, eased rheumatic pains and stiffness—made them feel years younger. Cystex starts circulating through the system in 15 minutes, helping the Kidneys in their work of cleaning out the blood and removing poisonous acids and wastes in the system. It does its work quickly and positively but does not contain any dopes, narcotics or habit-forming drugs. The formula is in every package.

Because of its amazing and almost world-wide success, the Doctor's Prescription known as Cystex, (pronounced Siss-tex) is offered to sufferers of poor Kidney and Bladder functions under the fair-play guarantee to fix you up to your complete satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. It's only 3c a dose. Ask your druggist for Cystex today and see for yourself how much younger, stronger and better you can feel by simply cleaning out your Kidneys. Cystex must do the work or cost you nothing.

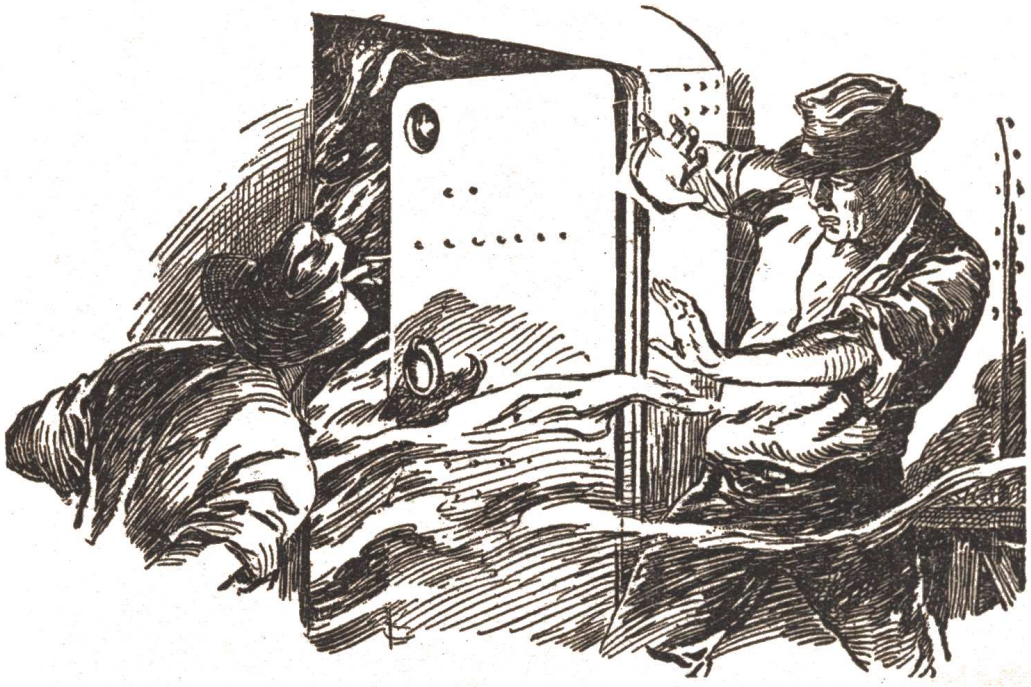
City Health Doctor Praises Cystex

Doctors and druggists everywhere approve of the prescription Cystex because of its splendid ingredients and quick action. For instance, Dr. W. R. George, graduate Medical Dept., University of Indiana, former Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, and Medical Director for insurance company 10 years, recently wrote the following letter:

Dr. W. R. George

"There is little question but what properly functioning Kidney and Bladder organs are vital to the health. Insufficient Kidney excretions are the cause of much needless suffering with aching back, weakness, painful joints and rheumatic pains, headaches and a general run-down, exhausted body. This condition also interferes with normal rest at night by causing the sufferer to rise frequently for relief, and results in painful excretion, itching, smarting and burning. I am of the opinion that Cystex definitely corrects frequent causes (poor kidney functions) of such conditions and I have actually prescribed in my own practice for many years past the same ingredients contained in your formula. Cystex not only exerts a splendid influence in flushing poisons from the urinary tract, but also has an antiseptic action and assists in freeing the blood of retained toxins. Believing as I do that so meritorious a product deserves the endorsement of the Medical Profession I am happy indeed to lend my name and photograph for your use in advertising Cystex." Signed W R. George M D

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



River Tunnel

By BORDEN CHASE

Author of "East River," "Tunnel Men," etc.

A flooded tunnel and fiery shaft could not stop these brave sandhogs from the swift completion of their job

CHAPTER I.

GANTRY PRANKS.

AT the foot of the street the river was a patch of silver, a shimmering picture in a dirty frame. Towering warehouses, lofts, and filthy tenements crowded close. And the damp stench of the water front mingled with acrid fumes from near-by factories.

From the gantry steps above the tunnel shaft Cocky Dean could see a white circle of frothing water, bubbling and foaming, and leaping high in wild convulsion. Eighty feet beneath, deep down below the swift moving river, the sandhogs were driving tunnel. And in twenty minutes his gang would be down there, breathing the "high air" that was leaking through the face of the tube to cause this boil on the surface.

He leaned against the rail of the heavily timbered platform that spanned the street, and watched the trucks loading at the chutes. Behind him, creaking elevators hoisted cars of wet sand from the tunnel.

A small electric locomotive clattered along narrow gauge tracks leading to the edge of the gantry and shunted the muck-cars before it. The ponderous boom of a derrick swung in a slow arc overhead as it lifted iron tunnel segments from the yard below and placed them lightly upon flat cars. At times a roar of escaping air blasted up the shaft and drowned the incessant whine of hoisting machinery.

A blinding sheet of flame licked in from the shaft

The usual activities of the water front passed before his eyes unnoticed. To Cocky Dean, heading boss of the sandhogs, there was no world outside the tunnel.

A burst of shouting drew his attention to a low building on the far side of the street. The door swung open and a group of sandhogs leaped down the steps. They were a rough, two-fisted crowd, and their working clothes were coated with mud and sand from the river bed. They pounded each other furiously, howling and shouting as they crossed from the dressing rooms and headed for the gantry stair. They were the men of the eight o'clock shift—Cocky Dean's gang—on their way to the tunnel to battle the river for two hours.

Some wore sheepskin coats, others ragged khaki jackets or grimy sweaters. It was late June and the day was warm, but these sandhogs who worked in compressed air knew the danger of a chill. There were thirty pounds of pressure on the tube being driven beneath the river, and cases of the bends, staggers, chokes, and paralysis were numerous.

Cocky grinned as he watched them. He was dressed as were the others, and the river mud was plastered thick upon his clothes. He was short, thin flanked, and heavy shouldered. A battered black hat covered his dark hair, and one sleeve was torn from his shirt.

Suddenly the lithe muscles twisted and knotted upon the exposed forearm and his hands clenched the rail. He leaned forward, opened his mouth to shout, but closed it without uttering a sound.

In the van of the group of sandhogs strode a burly miner. About his shoulders Cocky noticed a white sweater, conspicuous by its newness. The men around him were laughing, and he swaggered with what was meant to be a girlish stride—hands on hips and chin in the air.

"Whoops," he cried. "Ain't I the

one? Now keep yer dirthy paws off me nice, clean sweather."

"Hey, you!" yelled one of the men. "That's mine. Give it to me!"

HE was young, but tall. And his shoulders were wide. His khaki shirt and trousers were new and spotless, and his heavy boots creaked when he moved. A light felt hat, also new, was tipped slightly over one eye. Cocky's lips grew tight as he watched the boy step into the midst of the group and reach for the sweater.

The miner struck down his hand, and his eyes started at the new hat and traveled slowly downward to the squeaky boots. He turned to the others and winked.

"Shure now, me darlin'," he drawled, "I'm afther findin' it in the hog house. An' you say it belongs to you? Would you like it?"

"Be careful, Jim!" shouted Cocky from the gantry top. "Don't try to—" But the cry was lost in the confusion in the street below.

"Yes," said the boy. "I would like it."

"Very well, ducky," laughed the miner. "Take it!"

He placed the heel of his hand beneath the boy's chin and shoved. Jim Condon staggered backward, tripped, and sprawled headlong in the gutter. A roaring burst of laughter came from the throats of the sandhogs. He scrambled erect. His chin was out—his eyes narrowed—his hands clenched. He faced the miner.

"A joker, eh?" he snapped. His left whipped up, caught the miner below the right eye, and was followed by a slashing right cross to the chin. The man reeled. His legs buckled and his hands hung limp at his sides. He dropped to one knee.

"A beauty! Oh, what a beauty!" cried one of the sandhogs.

"The kid can fight!" roared another.

They formed a huge circle, blocking the street. A heavy truck, laden with sand, rumbled from beneath a chute extending from the gantry. The driver, after a few unheeded jabs at the horn button, hunched forward on the seat, watching expectantly.

Cocky Dan leaped down the steps. "Finish him, kid," he cried. "Hop to it—give it to him while you can."

The boy said nothing. He stood squarely before the kneeling miner, waiting for him to arise. Cocky sprang from the bottom step and shouldered his way through the gang.

"You young fool," he said. "He'll tear you apart if he gets to his feet."

The miner clambered erect. His arms went out, circling. His shoulders hunched. "Araaagh!" he growled. "Where is he?"

"Want some more?" asked the boy.

Cocky knew what was coming next. He moved forward slightly, paused as though undecided, then stepped back.

A thunderous roar burst from the miner. He lunged forward, caught the boy up in his arms, crushed him to his chest and smashed him to the ground. The movement had been swift—unexpected by Jim. He had started a right for the chin, but the ponderous arms smothered it. As he hit the street, the miner threw himself heavily on top of him. His rock-lined fists rained blows upon the boy's upturned face.

"Up wi' yer knee, kid!" screamed one of the sandhogs. "Roll him over!"

"Roll over, kid—over!" cried another.

"Yer boots, youngster! Use yer boots."

Cocky Dean stepped from the circle. He moved toward the battering miner. His steps were short, jerky, quick—and his chin jutted forward and up.

Each man of the gang towered a full head above him. But he looked like a fighting cock. And his movements were as swift.

"Quit it, Flanagan!" he barked. "Let him up—the kid's new. He doesn't fight that way."

"Says who?" roared Flanagan. He paused, one fist held close above Jim's face. Slowly his head turned. "So it's Cocky Dean to the rescue, eh? Divil take me if I don't think 'tis time we tried another waltz."

He placed one huge paw upon Jim's face and pushed himself erect. His mouth was wide in a grin, and his arms whirled, making circles in the air. Down went his head, he snorted—and charged headlong at Cocky, feet churning the pavement and hands flailing.

COCKY DEAN side-stepped, dragging one foot in the path of the avalanche of fighting bone and sinew. Flanagan saw the foot too late. He tried to swerve. The foot hooked his ankle and he sprawled. Before the huge body had measured its length Cocky was upon him. Their arms interlocked, their legs threshed. Over and over they rolled, kicking, gouging, beating at each other with fists and elbows. The clawing mass crashed against the forward wheel of the truck. Cocky caught a large red ear in his right hand. His left found the mate. He pounded Flanagan's head against the wheel hub. Flanagan roared. Cocky pounded harder. Flanagan's roar changed to a howl. Again Cocky pounded.

"Holler enough," he said, "or I'll crack it like a coconut!"

"Nuff!" grunted Flanagan. Cocky leaped to his feet.

The miner sat spraddle-legged in the street, his back against the wheel. One hand caressed a fast growing knob at the base of his skull as he gazed ruefully at the grinning circle of sandhogs.

"He's the divil's own spawn, he is," he muttered, his homely Irish face breaking into a grin. "Three times he's done it, and all within the month. Blessed if I don't think he's the betther of us."

The sandhogs howled. Cocky Dean smiled and ruffled the miner's hair. He stepped beside Jim and helped him to his feet. One of the boy's eyes was partly closed and a purplish lump glowed dully beneath it. He tried to smile. Cocky laid one hand upon his shoulder and playfully pushed.

"Better luck next time, Jim," he said. "And remember, the Marquis of Queensbury never worked in a tunnel. It's rough and tumble here."

"Thanks, Cocky," said Jim. "I'll learn. But I wish you had not interfered."

"Why?"

"Well, I don't want the men to think I expect any favors. Just because my father—" He nodded to a sign hung from the gantry. It read:

DANGER—CONSTRUCTION WORK—DANGER ROUTE OF SECTION 12 MUNICIPAL SUBWAY—JAMES P. CONDON—CONTRACTOR

Cocky Dean laughed.

"Did Flanagan show you much consideration?" he asked.

"No," admitted Jim ruefully.

"Neither will any one else," grinned Cocky. "Come on—let's get going."

CHAPTER II.

JINXED.

AT the top of the gantry Cocky Dean watched his men crowding onto the cages. They were a savage crew. The muckers were brawny, black-browed Irishmen, equally ready to laugh or fight. Two of the miners were Scots; scrawny, dried out veterans of the Klondike. The other was Flanagan, who stood near the edge of the cage, tenderly rubbing the lump on his head. But it was the men of the iron gang who kept the shouts and laughter ringing against the damp steel walls of the caisson as the cage sped swiftly down. They were Negroes—tall, muscular blacks from Senegal and Jamaica, splendid animals who faced death beneath the river each day with songs and laughter. Their foreman was Big Blackie, a towering Senegalese who worshiped Cocky Dean with the devotion of a dog for its master. They had driven tunnel together in Mexico. And there had been a fire. There were scars on Cocky's back left by the blazing timbers that had trapped Big Blackie.

The cage stopped at the foot of the shaft. Before them, a solid concrete bulkhead blocked the tunnel. From it protruded the ends of three iron cylinders—the air locks. The door of one was open, and the gang streamed in, seating themselves against the sides on long wooden benches. A howling blast of air roared from the large lock in the center of the bulkhead. Jim started and drew to one side. Cocky, standing beside him, laughed.

"That's the muck-lock," he said. "The lock-tender opened the valve to release the pressure. All this stuff may seem pretty bad at first, but you'll get used to it. In a few days I expect you to be going through the lock like an old-timer. But I hope you never have to use that one up over your head."

He pointed to the jutting end of a small cylinder high in the concrete bulkhead. Jim followed his gaze and smiled.

"I've heard of that," he said knowingly. "It's the emergency lock."

"That's right," said Cocky. "When the river breaks in that's the place to head for and don't pick any daisies on the way."

He stepped into the man-lock behind Jim and swung the door closed. Condon seated himself at the end of the bench and waited.

"Know what to do?" said the man next to him.

The boy nodded and turned to see who had spoken. To his surprise he found it to be Flanagan. The miner still had Jim's sweater about his shoulders, but the whiteness was gone from it. Catching Jim's gaze, he put his hand to the sweater and seemed surprised to find it there.

"Bless me soul! To the victor goes the shpoils," he said, and handed it to the boy. His eyes twinkled and he laid a friendly hand upon Jim's knee. "You've got a fine pair of mitts, me son, and a divilishly fine way of usin' them. We'll try a shtand-up fight next time, if you like. But you'll have to keep Cocky out of it—I've had enough of him. Watch it now, here comes the air—take a blow."

Jim grasped his nose tightly and forced the air into the upper passages of his head by blowing as Cocky Dean had taught him. The lock-tender had

opened the intake valve and the air was screaming into the lock from the tunnel.

The finger of the pressure gauge rose swiftly to thirty pounds. The men blew regularly as the strain upon their ears increased. The strident scream of the air lessened as the pressure within the lock equaled that of the tunnel. The door groaned and the lock-tender swung it open.

THE sandhogs stepped from the lock. Before them stretched the tunnel. The rounded walls were bathed in a white mist caused by the constant rising and lowering pressure. The lights blinked fitfully through the haze and long twisting shadows danced on the wooden floor as the gang started down tunnel. A pair of narrow gauge tracks led from the bulkhead, and a small electric locomotive came clanking out of the fog, dragging a string of muck-cars piled high with sand.

"What do you think of it, kid?" asked Cocky as they started down the slight incline to the heading.

"It's great—and it was decent of you to put me to work."

"What's decent about that?" asked Cocky. "You're a husky kid—even if your father does own the company."

"And I've got an engineering degree, too," smiled Jim.

"Use it for a necktie," grunted Cocky. "It won't do you any good while you're swinging a shovel."

"That doesn't scare me. I've been counting the weeks at college, waiting to get started in the tunnel. And—here I am."

"Yeah, here you are," said the heading boss. "And you've picked a hell of a job to start on."

"What's wrong?" asked Jim in surprise.

"Everything! This tunnel has a jinx on it. From the day we broke ground to sink the shaft, and every day after it, things have been going haywire. Trouble in the heading—trouble in the shaft—trouble at the power house—it's been just plain hell. We've lost a dozen men—called it an accident and hoped we were right. But every man on the job knows something is wrong."

"This gang doesn't seem to be worried much," said Jim.

"This gang?" laughed Cocky. "No—they don't worry. You'll find out later what it means to work in *this* gang."

He was silent. And a bitter smile twisted the corners of his mouth. Jim waited, expecting an explanation. Cocky offered none, but his jaws were tight and his lips drawn to a grim line.

"Dry boots!" The cry sounded along the curved roof of the tunnel. It was the signal to the men working in the heading that a new gang had arrived. For the work in the tunnel never stopped. Twenty-four hours a day the sandhogs toiled beneath the river. Each two hours a new gang stepped in and took the tools from the hands of the previous group. As the tunnel crept deeper the air pressure would be increased. That meant shorter hours and more gangs.

When Cocky and his gang arrived in the tunnel heading they stepped into another world—a grotesque subaqueous world of unrealities. Here the ordinary rules of nature were all reversed. It was as though they were living in a section of some gigantic automobile tire, inflated and held below the water.

The diameter of the tunnel was seventeen feet. The tube had grown foot

by foot until it extended three hundred feet in a slight downward slope beneath the river bed. As each forward step was made, another ring of cast iron segments was added to the preceding ring and bolted fast by the giant Senegalese and Jamaicans under the watchful eyes of Big Blackie.

THESE segments were rectangular plates, curved so that nine would make a perfect circle when joined by the small key plate

COCKY DEAN

at the top. They were smoothly faced to insure a water-tight joint and bored with six holes on the circle edge and five on the "cross" or horizontal edge. In these holes, when the plates were added in concentric rings, large bolts were inserted and tightened with heavy ratchet wrenches by the toiling negroes.

A temporary wooden floor was laid as the tube progressed and along this the small iron muck-cars rattled away to the locks. The track stopped at the "muck pile." It was here Jim Condon was to learn the first step in the art of tunnel building. He glanced at the men about him. They were stripping the shirts from their shoulders and tightening their belts. Jim looked at Cocky and grinned.

"Start digging?" he asked.

"That's right, Jim," answered Cocky. "Grab a banjo and tear into it. Take it a bit easy, though. Don't try to keep up with those other muckers. They're used to it—you're not."

"I guess I can hold my end up," smiled Jim.

"Have it your way, kid," said Cocky. "But remember—I warned you."

The wet river sand poured in through the open end of the tunnel in a steady stream. Cocky grinned as he watched Jim striving to keep the pace of the half dozen muckers, swinging his shovel in awkward strokes, loading the sand into the cars. It was back-breaking labor, and Cocky knew it. He had started on a shovel at the age of sixteen, and now, nine years later, he could remember the agony of his first day. He winked to one of the muckers, then turned and climbed the flanges of the iron.

Directly over the heads of Jim and the toiling muckers a wooden platform divided the heading into upper and lower halves. It rested on heavy iron turnbuckles made fast to the horizontal bulge of the tunnel—the spring-line. It served as a working platform for Big Blackie and the iron gang as they sung their ponderous wrenches, tightening the ring.

At the forward end of the heading was the shield. At first glance it appeared to be an integral part of the tunnel shell. A huge steel cylinder of the same diameter, it fitted sleeve-like over the forward rings. Around its rear circumference, uniformly spaced, were eighteen steel pistons. They projected against the last ring of iron, thrusting backward when the shield was advanced.

It was divided into six pockets, three

upper and three lower. Cocky Dean stepped from the wooden platform after watching the work of the iron gang and entered the upper center pocket. Before him crouched Flanagan, stripped to the waist and drenched with sweat.

The brawny miner turned to face Cocky. He extended a handful of sand to the heading boss and shook his head slowly.

"Bad shtuff!" he grunted. "I mind the time when I worked with yer father in the Whitehall tunnel. We shtruck just sich sand as this before the face blew out and let in the river. I don't like the looks of it, lad."

Cocky examined the sand. It was bad—coarse, gritty stuff that gave promise of gravel and bowlders. And Flanagan was right about that Whitehall job. Cocky's father had died there, trapped in the heading, fighting to keep the river out.

BUT he had not been the first Dean to die beneath the river. Always, it seemed, there had been a "Cocky" Dean. The first helped Brunel build his tunnel beneath the Thames in 1825, and had been drowned there. Another Dean of a later generation had been left below the St. Clair River when the Sarnia tunnel was driven. And still another had lost his life beneath the Hudson. Yes, the Deans were tunnel men—fighters all. And their prowess was legend amongst the sandhogs. Cocky, as the last of the line, had donned the mantle of greatness. With it had come the upthrust chin and swaggering walk, the slashing fists and willingness to meet trouble halfway.

It was an inheritance—part of the history of the Deans. It was expected of him. There were scarce a dozen men in the union knew his first name was Walter. He was "Cocky"—Cocky Dean—the *famous* Cocky Dean.

The fighting, swaggering and aggressive attitude were things that went with the name of Dean. The sandhogs would have accepted nothing less. "To work for a Dean is to work for a devil," they said. But their chests swelled and their chins went up when they were pointed out as "one of Cocky's wild men." Their proudest boast was to have worked for two Deans. For men still talked of the deeds of "young Cocky's father." And swore his son was a worthy successor.

"Be careful of that face, Flanagan," said Cocky. "Don't let the miners take out too many boards. Breast it down slowly. The super is howling for speed, but we don't want the river in our laps."

"Roight you are, Cocky me lad," said the miner. "And well I know how frightened you are. Shure the thought of the river comin' in scares you to death—*like hell it does,* you faker!"

Flanagan laughed loudly and turned to his work. A Dean afraid of the river! Again he laughed. But Cocky's lips grew tight. He knew that face needed slow, careful work, but his men would hurry, nevertheless. Weren't they working in Cocky Dean's gang? Wasn't he the man who dared anything to drive more tunnel than any other heading boss? Speed—that was the thing. Slash into the work and show the superintendent that Cocky's men knew what it meant to work for a Dean.

He climbed to the tunnel floor and stood beside the muck pile. The sand flowed from the shovels of the muckers in an endless stream. Dip and swoop—dip and swoop—over and

over in steady cadence. The heat in the heading was frightful. The air, hot from the pounding compressors, roared in from a large pipe above the platform. It sapped the moisture from the sandhogs' bodies, fanning them with a scorching breath. Sweat poured from them. It glistened in shining streams upon the naked backs and drenched the legs of their khaki trousers.

Young Jim swayed above his shovel. The handle was hot in his burning hands. It seemed weighted with lead and each stroke sent driving pains through the muscles of his back. The tunnel walls danced and the lights grew dim. He dashed the sweat from his eyes and dug savagely at the muck.

"Easy does it," said Cocky. He stepped beside the boy and took the shovel from his hands.

"Don't want any favors," muttered Jim.

"Sure, I know. But come over here and sit down a while. Mulligan will do your bit. You can do as much for him some shift when he's getting over a bender. Right, Mulligan?"

"Okay, Cocky," said the mucker, and grinned. The morning after pay day was always a bad one for Mulligan.

Jim staggered across the heading and dropped wearily on a pile of boards.

Cocky seated himself at his side.

"Like it, kid?" he asked.

"It's great. Sorry I'm so soft—can't understand how these fellows can wear me down."

Cocky laughed.

"THAT'S why they call them sandhogs. I've seen them come from the coal mines of Pennsylvania, the Klondike, some of them are lumberjacks, others sailors and deep sea divers. But when they hit the muck pile they all wilt. Remember, Jim, there's thirty pounds of compressed air on each square inch of your body. And there's twelve tons of sand to be taken out each shift—sometimes more. After you've shoveled a few tons into those muck-cars each day you'll soon harden up. Then you can try Flanagan again."

"I hope so," said Jim. "And I want to show my father I can start as a mucker and learn this business."

"Yeah? Well, listen here, young fellow, if Jim Condon learns I've got his son swinging a muck-stick, it's curtains for Cocky. And jobs are scarce."

"He'll never know," said Jim. He struggled to his feet. His back felt as though it had been slashed with a knife. But he reached for his shovel and headed for the muck pile, grinning.

"Only an hour left," said Cocky.

"Only!" groaned Jim.

The shovel bit deeply. He lifted, swung the sand into a waiting car, and stood perfectly still. About him the sandhogs were grouped like statues. Something was wrong! Jim glanced quickly from one to another. The muckers stood motionless, shovels resting upon the muck pile. Above, at the edge of the platform, he could see the giant Negroes leaning upon their wrenches. From the pockets of the shield the miners were gazing in horrid fascination. Questioning doubt was written strongly on the men. Something—something had happened! No one seemed to know quite what it was. But the jinx had struck again!

Cocky Dean realized a subtle change had come over the heading. He strove desperately for the cause. Everything was just as it had been during the early

part of the shift. But there was a difference! And it was this difference that had gripped the men—held them tense. He watched their eyes rove restlessly about, seeking the cause of their worry. He looked at the wet sand piling in through the lower pockets of the shield. No! There was no change there. He glanced up tunnel. The billowing clouds of mist were heavier—denser.

He sprang erect. "The air!" he cried. "It's stopped!"

As one the men turned to the air pipe. The heavy clapper-valve, affixed to the end to prevent an outrush of air in the event of a broken line, was hanging limp. Usually the blast of incoming air held it rigid. The monotonous roar of the pressure, so constant as to be unnoticed, had ceased. Unnatural quiet steeped the heading. It was ghostly, unreal.

From the pockets of the shield could be heard the faint whine of escaping air as it seeped through the exposed face. A mucker dropped his shovel. The clang of metal as the blade touched the iron shell of the tunnel sounded loud—unnaturally loud.

Cocky Dean leaped across the heading. A small field telephone hung just beneath the platform. He grasped the receiver and hammered the hook.

"Hello! Gimme the gauge-tender!" There was a pause during which the heavy breathing of the men was the only sound in the heading. Cocky cursed — beat at the hook again. "Gauge-tender? What t'hell's the matter with the air? We're not getting any. What?—"

THERE was a longer pause and then Cocky jammed the receiver on the hook.

He turned and faced the men. "Trouble at the power house," he barked. "Flanagan—take your men into the pockets and plug that face. Mulligan—get to the locks and tell the tenders not to exhaust any air. The rest of you men start bracing the pockets—the bottom pockets. That muck is going to start sliding when a few more pounds of air leak through. We're going to hold it!"

"The river'll be in!" cried a mucker. "That face won't last ten minutes!"

"You'll get wet, then, damn you!" shouted Cocky.

He climbed to the upper center pocket, motioning to Jim to follow. The boy dropped his shovel and clambered up the iron. He stepped through the shield and stood behind Cocky.

CHAPTER III.

A BRAVE CREW.

A WALL of boards extended from the arching hood of the shield above them and supported the sand of the river bed. With each advance of the shield, these boards were removed, thirty inches of sand breasted down and a new face built. It was dangerous work and the miners performed it with the skill of artists.

Starting at the top, Flanagan and his men had removed three boards. They cut in behind them with their shovels and scooped out the sand. The boards were replaced and the operation repeated on the next set of three. The greater portion of the face had been advanced and Flanagan was plastering the cracks with handfuls of red clay. Bags of this sticky stuff were piled in the pockets and the miners' helpers were passing more from below.

"Lend a hand here, Jim," cried Cocky. "Grab some of that clay and mud up. Stop all those leaks. Watch Flanagan and follow him. If he runs —follow him then, too."

He left and climbed to the lower pockets. The pressure had fallen as the air seeped out. The river was slowly creeping in to take its place. Already the sodden sand had come to life. It ran quicksilver-like between the planking stretched across the pockets. The muckers worked furiously, banking bags of cement and gravel against the hastily constructed bulkhead. The water seeped through—but they did not mind that. It was the sand they feared. Treacherous stuff that ran like fluid and would crumble the entire face of the tunnel. If this happened, they were lost.

Slowly the water rose. It was above the muckers' knees, but they battled on. The fog hung heavily about them, making their movements blurred and indistinct. They cursed and floundered about in the flood, reinforcing the bulkhead.

"We can't stop it!" cried a mucker. "Let's get out of here!"

"Go, damn you—and take this with you!" roared Cocky.

He lifted a bag of cement, balanced it above his head at arm's length, and heaved. It caught the mucker full in the back and carried him to the flooded bottom. He thrashed madly about and rose dripping and scared. He gasped, looked into the vapory reaches of the tunnel, and then turned to the men.

There were wild, sardonic grins on the faces of the sandhogs.

"The devil is loose!" cried one.

"Ye're workin' for a Dean," laughed another.

The mucker seized a plank and hurried shamefaced to the bulkhead.

Cocky retrieved the bag and piled it against the plank. He leaped savagely about, driving the men to their labors. Suddenly he glanced up at the platform. The iron gang had been passing clay in to the miners, but the supply was exhausted. And now they stood grouped about in indecision.

"Hi—you apes!" Cocky roared. "What t'hell you think this is—a fish fry? Get down here!"

His curses ripped through the haze. He sprang for the tunnel wall and climbed. He drove at them with his fists whirling madly. The iron men lifted their arms in half-hearted defense and backed to the edge of the platform.

"De devil, hisself!" cried one.

A fist caught him in the mouth. He lifted his ponderous arms, reaching for Cocky. He groped forward, his fingers clutching. The heading boss had gone—storming across the platform toward the hulking Negro iron boss.

"Down in the bottom, Blackie," he cried. "Get down there and take your men with you, or by God you'll never work for me again."

Blackie lifted his hands in protest. "Won't never work for no one," he said. "If I gets out of dis tunnel, I joins de church. Or—or sumfin."

THE men of the iron gang paused. Panic was over. Blackie was their leader—the "straw-boss." Where he led, they would follow. His jest had steadied them, and they climbed down to the flooded bottom.

"Stormy we-a-a-a-ther!" sang Blackie as the water swirled about his waist.

The iron gang roared.

Cocky grinned and reached for a bag of gravel. Good men, these blacks! He had been with them in other tight spots

and he knew they were fighters. He had seen them die—singing.

Flanagan appeared in the upper pocket. He looked like some heathen image of clay. It was plastered in his hair, his eyes and mouth, and his huge chest was thick with it.

"It's shlippin' a bit," he cried. "She can't hold up more than a few minutes."

"Scrape some of that mud off your ears and use it on the face," said Cocky.

He leaped to the pocket and examined the wall of breast boards. Jagged cracks appeared in the clay. He watched Jim, clay-daubed as Flanagan, working with the miners. The boy had courage, he'd do well in a pinch. But there was little time for such thoughts. Above their heads was the river, held in leash by the air billowing against this wall of boards and hay. If the face went, the river would pour a deluge into the tunnel. Too late to run then.

It was time to take the gang out, Cocky knew it. But there was no sign of wavering on the part of the men. Their honor—the honor of Cocky Dean's gang—was at stake. If they ran and the face held, they would be laughed to scorn. For them death was the easier choice. They worked on.

"Two minutes more and that face will go," said Cocky very quietly.

"Shure, we'll shtay with it a minute and a half," grinned Flanagan. "And thin I'll race the lot of you to the lock. Now mind you, Cocky—don't git in me way."

"Won't it hold?" asked Jim nervously. "It looks solid."

"You won't think so in a minute if that air doesn't come," said Cocky. "We'll all be—"

A dull roar filled the heading. Low at first, then rising steadily, it grew. Jim started. He looked up questioningly.

Cocky grinned. Flanagan expressed himself violently—profanely.

He gripped Jim's arm. "That's it, me bucko," he said. "It's the air."

The sandhogs cheered. They leaped madly about the flooded heading, shouting, laughing, and splashing water. Flanagan lifted a huge paw to his chin, wiped away a large daub of clay and threw it at Cocky.

The heading boss laughed foolishly. Now the tension was gone, it seemed easy to laugh. The men were acting like clowns. Blackie had climbed the flanges of the iron and stood poised like a diver. His wide mouth disclosed two rows of glistening teeth.

"Muddy water—'round my neck!" he said, and tumbled head first into the bottom.

The iron gang roared and pounded each other furiously. They could appreciate this sort of humor—it was grim. They had cheated death and it was time to laugh.

Cocky watched them in silence for a time. He knew these men, knew their habits and peculiar characteristics. This was their moment of triumph, and laughter was needed. These sandhogs who fooled and splashed and acted like lunatics had just won another victory over an old enemy—the river.

"All right, you apes!" he cried at length. "Get some of this stuff cleaned up. You miners—tighten up that face and brace it. Blackie, get your men on the iron or I'll rub your ears off. Muckers in the bottom—you too, Jim."

HE waded to the tunnel wall and searched for the "blow-line." This heavy canvas covered hose was attached to a six-inch pipe that ex-

tended back through the bulkhead into the shaft. When the spout was placed in the water and the valve opened, the pressure in the heading forced the water out through the line. It was a huge vacuum cleaner, efficient but dangerous.

Cocky opened the valve and the water subsided slowly. He regulated the flow carefully, closing the valve from time to time that the pressure in the heading might not fall. Jim paused beside him, a bag of gravel balanced on his shoulder.

"Why didn't you use that before?" he asked.

"With no air coming in?" said Cocky. "You're a fine college man. Every gallon of water I blew out of the heading would have made room for just two more from the river. Shame on you, Jim."

Condon felt like a schoolboy. He grinned and turned to his work.

"Dry boots!" The cry sounded from up tunnel and a new gang splashed into the heading. They laughed when they saw the flooded tunnel and taunted the men of Cocky's gang, calling them fishes and water rats. The tired sandhogs attempted a few jokes in reply. They made light of their struggle—but there was pride in their eyes and they strutted, in imitation of their leader as they straggled wearily to the bulkhead.

They ranged themselves along the benches in the man-lock and drew their coats and sweaters closely about their drenched shoulders. The door was closed and the lock-tender opened the exhaust valve. He held it wide for an instant, dropping the pressure quickly from thirty to fifteen pounds. Then the valve was closed until but a minute stream of air could seep through.

There had been thirty pounds of pressure in the heading, and the men would remain in the lock for thirty minutes. One minute of decompression for each pound of air is the rule of the tunnel. A too sudden drop in pressure would be fatal. The nitrogen bubbles, formed in the blood by compressed air, would not dissolve. The result would be the bends, or worse—the chokes or staggers. Possibly

YOUNG JIM CONDON

paralysis. For high air is deadly stuff.

Usually the time in the man-lock was spent in horse-play, rough pranks, sometimes fights or the inevitable stud poker. But to-day the men were exhausted. They huddled close, telling and retelling incidents of the flood until it seemed to Cocky each man in the gang had alone been responsible for saving the tunnel. He grinned—they were a fine crew.

At length the door groaned with the release of the pressure and Cocky swung it open. The gang crowded onto the cages and the bright morning sun smote dazzlingly against their eyes as they cleared the top of the shaft.

"They want you in the office,

Cocky," said a laborer when the cage stopped.

"Who does?"

"Old man Condon. He blew into town this morning and arrived in time for the fireworks."

"Hear that, kid?" asked Cocky of Jim.

Young Condon nodded. He turned the collar of his sweater high about his face and jammed his hat, no longer gray, tightly over his eyes. He started for the gantry steps.

"He was in Paris last week," he said mournfully.

"Yeah, *last* week. Well, he'll never notice one mucker more or less—especially if you leave that mud on your face."

He crossed the gantry and stamped down the stairs leading to the company office. From above he could hear the shouts of his men as they told of defeating the river. He smiled.

CHAPTER IV.

MYRA BLACKTON.

JAMES CONDON, senior, was tall, wide, and gray. It was obvious from whom Jim inherited his stature. He was Jim, grown older. At present he was storming angrily about the office, barging into chairs, kicking them from his path and pounding the desk top each time he passed. When he saw Cocky he roared.

"Been waiting for you! How'd you make out?"

"All right," said Dean. He was grimy. Mud was caked thick upon his face and hands. His clothes were stiff with it and his boots squished as he walked. But he sloshed across the office and planted himself in a leather covered chair by the desk.

It was then he saw the man seated in the far corner of the office. His eyes narrowed and he fished through his pockets for a cigarette. He drew a soaking pack from his shirt, looked at it in disgust, and threw it in the general direction of the waste-basket. It landed upon Bill Stevens's foot.

Stevens was immaculately dressed. His light gray suit matched his fedora. His shirt was gray, as were his socks. A blue tie was the only touch of color in the ensemble—save for a pair of black shoes. One of them was now slightly gray—the color of river mud.

He flicked a silver cigarette case from his vest and extended it, open, to Cocky. His lips lifted slightly in a challenging laugh, but he said nothing. He also was a heading boss. But he had not traveled the rough and tumble route as had Cocky Dean. Stevens was a college graduate, an honor man. He "used his brain and saved his back," as he put it. But he was good. One of the best heading bosses in the union.

Cocky Dean accepted a cigarette. "Thanks, Stevens," he said. "Thought you were in Antwerp, on that Sheldt River job. What happened?"

"The Skipper decided he needed *one* good heading boss," answered Stevens. "So I came back with him."

"Good?" laughed Dean. "For what?"

"Quit it—you two!" bellowed Condon. "What happened in the heading, Cocky?"

"We took in a little water, but the face held. Everything is all right. I've got a good gang."

"Humpf!" The contractor looked at Cocky closely. Condon had been a sandhog. He knew what it meant to fight the river. The air going out—

the water sneaking in—panic—death but a matter of minutes. It would not have surprised him to have heard a tale of horror. And now Cocky dismissed it with a few words.

"That all?" asked Condon.

"Yeah," answered Dean.

"Do you expect the *famous* Cocky Dean to get excited about a flooded tunnel?" asked Stevens.

He said it lightly, but there was a bite in the words that caused Dean's fists to close.

"Ever had your nose broken?" asked Cocky sweetly.

"Quit it!" roared Condon. "When you hear what I have to tell you, maybe you'll forget your two-cent arguments. Now—both of you men know I bid low on this job. It's a gamble and a big one. If I finish on schedule I will make money—plenty of it. If I don't—I'm broke. It's two million or nothing."

"You're ahead of contract now," said Stevens.

"I know it," barked Condon. "And if we finish ahead of contract, I will be in a position to bid in that Staten Island tunnel. There's a job as superintendent waiting for one of you men if I get that contract. White, the super on the night shift, is going to South America next month. That leaves me short-handed."

Cocky looked at Stevens and grinned. So the Skipper was dangling a prize before their eyes, eh? He knew every heading boss in the tunnel would give an arm for the superintendent's berth. But Stevens and he were acknowledged the best.

BUT Dean was a fighter. With practically no education other than that gathered in a few years at grammar school, he was determined to learn how to build tunnels. His father's death when Cocky had been but a child had made it necessary that he work. As a youngster he had done odd jobs about various tunnel shafts, running errands for the sandhogs, sweeping out the sawmill and placing the lamps for the watchman. Next had come a job on the gantry, wheeling the cars to the cages and cleaning the iron segments before they were lowered to the tunnel.

At length he had been given his father's union book—graduated to the status of sandhog. That had been a proud day for Cocky. And on that day and each succeeding one he had talked tunnel, dreamed tunnel, lived tunnel. The game was in his blood and he loved it. Each step had been a conquest. From mucker to miner's helper, to miner—then for a short time on the iron, and at length as heading boss with a gang of his own. Now a superintendent's job was in sight. It would take a better man than Stevens to stop him, thought Cocky.

"The Staten Island job," he said aloud. "That's going to be a nice piece of work."

"Look me up when it starts," said Stevens. "I may put you on as heading boss."

"Shut up, Stevens," barked Condon. "There's a little surprise ahead for both of you. Only one contractor in the country has a Chinaman's chance of underbidding me on that tunnel. If we make money here, he's licked. But if we don't—"

He lifted his hands above his head and a grim smile twisted the corners of his mouth.

"You mean the Blackton outfit?" asked Cocky.

"Yes—Blackton, the dirty dog!" bellowed Condon. "I've beaten Black-

ton once—twice—and I'll do it again. He's a crook! We were partners once, damn him, and I know what he's like. He'll do anything to stop me!"

"Oh, Mark Blackton isn't such a bad chap," said Stevens. "I'll admit he is a tough competitor, but I don't think he would do anything crooked."

"You don't, eh?" shouted Condon. "Do you know why the air stopped this morning?"

Both Stevens and Dean were silent.

"Sand in the bearings of the compressors!"

"What?" The cry came from both men in unison.

"That's right, sand! The engineer at the power house had Numbers One and Two machines running. And that's just the way they cut out—first One—and then Two. He started to turn over Three and Four. But he had a hunch something had been done to the others. He found sand in the bearings of all of them. If he hadn't caught it and cleaned out the bearings of those other compressors, well—"

"Blackton wouldn't have anything to do with a thing like that," said Stevens. "A man of his position—"

"Position be damned!" roared Condon. "He's a crook. And if it wasn't Blackton's outfit, who was it? The sand didn't sneak in itself. Of course it was Blackton. I'd *swear* it was Mark Blackton's work—but try to prove it. Huh!"

"If that's the way he's started," said Cocky, "things ought to be interesting around here for the next few weeks."

"That shouldn't worry the *famous* Cocky Dean," said Stevens.

"I still don't like your nose," said Cocky as he crossed to the door. He stood there quietly, holding the door open invitingly as Stevens sprang to his feet.

"None of that!" shouted Condon. "Get back in that seat, Stevens. As for you, Cocky, get over to the power house and let me know if the detectives have been able to find any evidence. There's a half dozen of them pawing around over there."

Cocky closed the door regretfully and hurried down the street. The power house was located at the river front. To reach it, he skirted the gantry steps and passed the hog house. Midway to the river, four small boxes, like packing cases with peaked tops, were spaced along the curb. They were painted a flaring red, and on the sides large black letters spelled the one word, "Dynamite."

The bulk of the blasting powder was stored in a specially constructed shanty on the dock. But these small caches were used to hold a day's supply. Near each was a sign, warning pedestrians to keep away.

AS Cocky turned into the street he noticed a blue coupé parked near one of the powder boxes. From the window beside the driver's seat drifted a thin ribbon of cigarette smoke. It curled mockingly about the sign, then lifted and drifted slowly over the dynamite.

"What t'hell you doing?" roared Cocky. He could not see the driver, but judged it to be one of the sandhogs. "Get away from that powder or I'll twist your neck!"

"I *beg* your pardon," said an indignant voice from the depths of the car. "Were you speaking to me?"

The car door opened. A small high-heeled slipper, followed by an expanse of silk hose, slid into view. Cocky gasped. When a pair of bright blue eyes glared at him from beneath heavy lashes, he gasped again. Blue eyes, auburn hair, and a nose that tilted up-

ward above a firm little mouth—that, thought Cocky, meant trouble.

Well—woman or not, she should know better than to smoke near dynamite. He pointed to the sign. The girl sat twisted sideways on the seat, her feet upon the running-board. She ignored his outthrust hand and glared at him. He held her gaze steadily and his fingers explored his drenched clothing for a cigarette.

"I asked you if you were speaking to me!" she demanded.

"Of course," he answered.

Cocky didn't like women. They annoyed him. Usually he had nothing to do with them. But this girl by her thoughtlessness had endangered the job. And when she snapped at him, that settled it—he snapped back.

"Do you always swear at ladies?" she said.

"If they are fool enough to smoke cigarettes next to a powder magazine."

"How interesting. And now I am a fool, too." There was a trace of laughter in her voice. "There seems to be no end to your compliments."

"Now look here," said Cocky. His anger was flaring. "There's a dozen places to park that car where you can smoke your head off and nobody will care. But don't park next to twenty sticks of dynamite."

"Or you'll—?" She was intentionally provocative.

He stepped beside the car, pushed her across the seat and climbed in behind the wheel. He jabbed at the starter. The motor roared and Cocky swung the wheel. The car leaped across the street and he parked it at the far curb. He shut off the motor and glanced from the corners of his eyes at the girl.

"Well, of all the—"

"And that," said Cocky, "is that!"

Laughter rippled from her throat like the music of water among rocks. She leaned weakly against the cushions, holding one hand tightly to her side.

Cocky grinned foolishly for a moment, until the humor of the situation struck him. Then he roared. There was contagion in his laughter and she started anew. Together they sat there, alternately laughing and wiping the tears from their eyes.

"You seem to be getting along famously."

Cocky turned. Stevens was standing beside the car. He too was smiling, but there was no joy in it. It was a forced smile of politeness.

The girl dabbed hastily at her eyes and rested one hand upon his arm.

"Oh, Bill, don't mind us. We've been acting like a pair of children. But it *was* funny."

"So it seems," he said coldly. "Had I known you were coming so early, I would not have kept you waiting."

The pleasure was gone from this little tableau for Cocky. Evidently this girl knew Stevens very well. Cocky felt like an intruder. He stepped from the car and stood for a moment, looking from one to the other, then turned on his heel.

"Don't go," said the girl. "You know Mr. Stevens, don't you?"

"Yes," said Cocky.

"We've known each other quite some time," said Stevens. His words were heavy with sarcasm. "We're great friends."

"In that case," she said, "don't you think it might be well to introduce us? Our meeting was rather informal."

Cocky grinned. He realized that Stevens had intentionally overlooked the formalities. He had intended to leave,

but now he derived enjoyment from Stevens's embarrassment.

"Yes, Bill," he added. "I would appreciate it greatly."

Stevens frowned. For a moment it appeared he would ignore the request. He glanced at the girl, then decided to pass the situation off as a joke. He stepped toward the car.

"We're seldom formal on a tunnel job," he said lightly.

"Why, Bill! This gentleman did me a service." The danger signals were flashing from her eyes, and Cocky smiled again as he saw that small mouth draw to a determined line. Slowly a flush mounted to her cheeks. "I was parked near the dynamite and he generously moved my car for me."

THIS was going to be good, thought Cocky. Stevens had been deliberately rude and the girl had been quick to resent it. Although there had always been enmity between the men, Dean knew Stevens to be a gentleman. His conduct was surprising, and Cocky waited for the next development in this little farce.

It came with startling suddenness.

"Very well," snapped Stevens, and his words were caustic. "Allow me to present one of the heading bosses—the *famous* Cocky Dean. Dean, this is Miss Myra Blackton."

Cocky extended his hand. As the girl's slim white fingers rested upon his work-stained palm, the name "Blackton" struck home. Blackton! His hand clenched, crushing the slender fingers in a steel grip. Myra winced. He quickly released her.

"Mark Blackton's daughter?" he gasped. "The—the—contractor?"

"Of course," she said, gently massaging the bruised fingers. "Does that surprise you?"

"No—oh, no," he stammered. He looked hard at Stevens.

"We met on that Baltimore job," said Stevens. "I worked for the Blackton outfit then."

"Yes, so you did," said Cocky. He turned to the girl. "Did you drive here alone?"

"No," she said. "One of father's men drove me here."

"Where is he?"

JAMES CONDON

"Now, look here, Cocky," snapped Stevens. "I think I know what you are—"

"Where is he?" repeated Dean.

"He wanted to smoke," said Myra. "He walked down toward the river front."

He turned abruptly and hurried down the street. He stepped into the power house and threaded his way between the giant compressors. A group of men were working on the Number Two machine, and Red Johnston, the master mechanic, was supervising the job. He looked up as Cocky approached, wiped a smear of grease from his face with a bit of waste, and stuffed the waste into his overall pocket.

"I'd give a month's pay to get the guy who turned this trick," he growled. He was a brute of a man,

and his thick red hair stuck up savagely above his square-cut face. "In fact, I'd give six months' pay to be alone with him for five minutes."

"I agree with you," said Cocky. "And you may get your chance. But where are those detectives who are supposed to be finding him for us?"

"Aaagh!" snorted Johnston. "They're most likely looking for finger-prints inside the accumulator. Either that or hanging by their tails from the rafters—the monkeys!"

"Did you see any one in here before it happened?"

"Now, Cocky—don't *you* start off with all that silly stuff. I've been asked that question fifty times. The answer is *yes*. There's been dozens of people in here to-day. Any one of them could have done it."

Cocky left the group and stood beside Machine Number One. It had not taken more than a handful of sand to ruin the bearings, he realized. A man could carry enough in his coat pockets to do the job. And there were always strangers in the power house—the men delivering oil, tool salesmen, electricians and many others.

He left the power house and glanced up the street. Stevens and Myra were standing beside the coupé. They seemed to be arguing. A man passed the door of the power house. He was wearing a blue serge suit and a light gray hat. But his hands showed plainly that he was a laborer. They were large and the fingers were spatulate, the nails broken and grimy. He paused, watching the two beside the car, and seemed undecided as to whether to continue.

"Looking for some one?" asked Cocky.

"No—I'm not," he replied.

"Work around here?"

"What's that to you?"

"Nothing much," said Cocky, stepping beside him. "Only I don't like your looks."

"Ain't that too bad!" he snarled. "Beat it, sonny—go peddle yer papers up another alley."

Cocky's fist exploded in his face. The man's hands went up in a futile gesture, waved wildly for a moment, and dropped. Dean's right landed twice and he slumped to the ground.

Cocky bent quickly and thrust his hands into the fellow's coat pockets. He turned the lining out and examined it carefully. Rapid footsteps beat along the street, and Stevens halted beside him. Myra Blackton, amazement strong upon her face, was at Stevens's shoulder. Her eyes were fixed upon the prostrate man.

"What have you done?" she cried.

"Is this your chauffeur?" asked Cocky.

"Yes—he is," she said. "But why—?"

For answer, Cocky extended his hand, palm upward.

He looked at Stevens, seeming to ignore Myra Blackton completely.

"What's your guess?" he asked as he stood erect.

"You damn fool!" snapped Stevens.

He knocked the sand from Cocky's hand and landed a short right hook flush upon the jaw of the heading boss.

CHAPTER V.

COCKY VERSUS STEVENS.

THE blow had been swift—unexpected. Cocky staggered backward. The mists gathered quickly and his eyes glazed. Before him

Stevens became an indistinct blur. Dean shook his head. He rocked forward on his toes. He strove to center Stevens in his visage. It was no use. The blow had shaken him, almost put him out. But he was on his feet and he lunged forward. One hand went out—grasping. If he could only locate Stevens—grip him with one hand, that was all he wanted.

His fingers closed on a shoulder. He clenched tightly and started a smashing drive with his right.

"Cocky! Stop it!"

His arm went limp. It was the voice of Myra Blackton. He strained hard to see. Slowly the mists dissolved, and he realized he was gripping the girl—staring into her face. She had stepped forward when Stevens struck and now stood between them. Behind her, he could see the other heading boss, a smile upon his face, calmly wiping a trickle of blood from his knuckles.

"Look out," barked Cocky. "Bill and I are going into a waltz."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she snapped. She stepped back and faced Stevens. "That was cowardly, Bill. I didn't think you could do such a thing."

"He asked for it," said Stevens. "You may not realize it, but that remark concerned you."

"What do you mean?"

"Some one put sand in the compressor bearings. Dean is inferring it was your driver."

"Is this so?" she asked Cocky.

"Yes," he answered.

"Why?"

Cocky explained the circumstances, and Myra listened quietly until he had finished.

She turned to Stevens. "It—it can't be true," she said.

"Of course it isn't," he answered. "The Skipper has a crazy idea that your father is trying to ruin him. Dean listened to him and decided to play detective. He doesn't realize that every man on a tunnel job gets sand in his pockets. Why, there is sand on everything we touch. It gets inside the cigarette packages, sticks to the money, keys—everything. When we change to our street clothes, a certain amount of it is transferred to our pockets. That's what happened to your driver—he's probably been working on some caisson job for your father."

"Yes, he has," said Myra quickly.

"Another thing Dean forgets," said Stevens. "I'm starting work here in a few hours. I'll be under the river—just as he is. Do you suppose I want to be trapped in a flooded heading?"

"All right, Stevens," said Cocky. "You may be right. I don't think you are, but I can't prove it. I'm sorry I hit Miss Blackton's driver. And as for that souvenir you handed me—we'll be seeing each other."

"Any time, Cocky," said Stevens.

Cocky walked slowly toward the gantry. It was not until he reached the stairs that he realized he had left Myra Blackton without so much as a good-by.

Women! They were a nuisance, he thought. Always getting in the way, stopping fights and sticking their noses into men's affairs. Women didn't belong near a tunnel job, all sandhogs knew that.

There was a superstition among the men who worked in high air that a woman near the shaft meant trouble in the tunnel.

THE old-timers told stories of floods and fires that had taken place within a week of some woman's appearance on the gantry.

And now there would be more stories. A car parked near the power house—a girl—the air failing in the tubes—the river coming in. Yes, thought Cocky, there would be much talk about women. He frowned as he entered the company restaurant.

Sandhogs were grouped about the tables that lined the walls. Some slept, resting their heads upon outstretched arms. Others played stud poker or black-jack, staking as much as a week's pay upon the turn of a card. They were reckless gamblers and gave little heed to their losses. Live for to-day, was the sandhog's slogan, for to-morrow the river might win. Flasks made the rounds and the man behind the long counter at the end of the restaurant was kept busy serving hot coffee, huge platters of food and wedges of pie and cake to the men coming off shift.

In the far corner of the room, Jim Condon was dealing a greasy pack of cards to a group of miners and muckers. Beside him sat Flanagan, a pile of bills pressed beneath his huge paws. Jim had won the bank in the black-jack game, and Flanagan was his partner. The boy's face was flushed with excitement, but his hands were steady as he handled the pasteboards.

"Two hundred to the good," he cried as he saw Cocky.

"That's a good time to quit," said Dean.

"Quit?" roared Flanagan. "Shure now, what kind of advice is that to be givin' me partner? And comin' from you, Cocky—shame upon you!"

"The kid's new," said Cocky. "He needs that money. If he stays in the game he'll come out without a dime."

"The divil you say," laughed the miner. He rested a wide hand upon Jim's arm. "Shtick around, me bucko, and we'll make a million and retire."

Jim laughed, but he took Cocky's advice. When he had dealt an ace and a queen to a mucker, losing the bank, he split the winnings with Flanagan and joined Dean at the counter. The heading boss was staring moodily into a cup of black coffee. There was an ugly bruise on his chin and Jim gazed at it questioningly.

"Been arguing?" he asked.

"Yeah," grunted Cocky.

"Who with?"

"A heading boss by the name of Stevens. He's going down with a gang on the next shift. He works from noon until two o'clock."

A mucker seated next to them heard the remark. He swung around on his stool and burst into roars of laughter.

"Hi, men," he yelled. "Bill Stevens is taking a gang down at noon!"

The restaurant was in an uproar. Men leaped from the tables and crowded toward the counter. Some shouted, others cursed, most were laughing and pounding each other upon backs and shoulders.

"Stevens and Cocky on the same job!" cried one.

"We'll drive tunnel now," said another. "By God, the sand will fly!"

"Cocky'll run ye ragged," said a towering mucker as he poked Flanagan in the ribs. "They'll be broken backs at the end of each shift."

"An' broken heads, too," roared Flanagan. "Cocky, me darlin', why didn't ye tell us?"

"What's all the excitement?" said Cocky innocently.

"Oho-o-o!" laughed Flanagan. "He wants to know what's the excitement! Shure, there's not a sandhog in the union but knows ye love each other dearly. Cocky Dean and Bill Stevens!" He turned and faced the men. "I'll

lay a hundred dollars even we make more tunnel than Shtevens!"

"What shift?" cried a miner.

"This shift comin'," yelled Flanagan.

"It's a bet!"

The sandhogs milled wildly about, placing and covering wagers. There were arguments, threats. A free-for-all started near the door, tables were overturned, the restaurant became a madhouse. An empty flask sailed through the air and caught Flanagan beneath the ear. He seized a heavy sugar bowl from a table and started across the room. Midway, a boot bounced from his shoulder. He spun, roaring curses as he charged and swept thundering at a group in the corner. His feet tangled in a chair and he sprawled. The pack were upon him. Fists and feet rose and fell. It was anyone's battle. There were no friends nor foes. If a chin lifted above the mass, it became a fair target. Laughs were stopped with a clenched fist.

Heads were pounded against table tops. The sandhogs were on the loose again.

"COME on, kid," said Cocky, as he led Jim through a side door. "You're not quite hard enough for that sort of fun."

"What started it?" asked Jim in amazement.

"Nothing has to start those wild men of mine," grinned Cocky. "You'll learn that soon enough. They're a great gang and they'll feel better when they get it out of their systems."

He guided Jim through an alley that led to the hog house, the dressing rooms used by the tunnel men. Rows of steel lockers lined the walls and before them were rough wooden benches. In the adjoining room were showers where the sandhogs soaked themselves at the end of each day's work, steaming their backs to open the pores and free the compressed air in their bodies.

Cocky motioned Jim to a bench and glanced at his watch. It was noon. The shouts of the men in the restaurant came to them faintly and mingled with cries of men stamping across the gantry to the cages.

"Stevens is going down with his men now," said Cocky. "He'll try for one and one."

"What do you mean?"

"One shove and one ring. His miners will breast down the face, the muckers will clear away the sand and the shield will be shoved."

"You mean, when they move the shield ahead, that's 'one'?"

"Yeah, one shove," said Cocky. "And then the iron-gang builds a ring of iron — that's one ring. One and one, get it?"

"Yes," answered Jim. "And what are you going after?"

"One and two. It's going to be tough, kid. Think you want to go through with it?"

"Sure I do."

"There's more to it than just a fight between Stevens and myself. There's something screwy behind all this. Your father thinks the Blackton outfit are trying to break him."

"Oh, Lord!" said Jim. "Has that started again?"

"What?"

"The Blackton story. Ever since I was six years old I've heard Blackton — Blackton — Blackton! Dad and Mark Blackton were partners years ago. They split and they've been at each other's throats ever since. If something goes wrong, Dad yells,

Blackton. If he gets a toothache, it's Blackton's fault. When I caught the measles, he accused Blackton of sending Myra over to play with me. She had them too, you see. If his eggs are too soft, he—"

"You know Miss Blackton?" asked Cocky in surprise.

"Certainly. We were kids together. I don't see much of her now though. She's a year or two older than I am and that makes a great difference to a girl. She started treating me like a kid brother when she was twelve and I balked. That was that!"

"Yeah, she is that way," mused Cocky. "Wants to be the boss—and gets away with it, too."

Jim smiled. He noticed Cocky was rubbing the bruise on his chin and that his eyes were boring holes in the wall. But young Condon knew when not to ask questions. He wondered when Myra and Cocky had met—knew the bruise had something to do with the meeting—and hoped he would be on hand when they met again.

CHAPTER VI.

'OLD MAN RIVER."

A WEIRD creature stepped through the doorway of the hog house. His clothes proclaimed him a sandhog but his actions were mystifying. He crossed to a locker, reached a scrawny hand into the upper section and withdrew a dirty roll of paper. Seating himself at one of the benches, he carefully unwrapped the package and withdrew from it a set of frayed newspaper clippings.

He studied them intently for a moment and then arose. Holding the clippings before his eyes, he waved one arm dramatically in the air and paced across the floor. His steps were slow and measured and as he passed Jim and Cocky he started to read aloud.

"What in the name of—" gasped Jim.

"Don't mind him," smiled Cocky. "That's Old Man River but the boys call him Stick-in-the-Mud."

"Who says Stick-in-the-Mud?" cried the man. He whirled and faced Cocky. "Ahaaa! Cocky Dean! You laugh—but it will get you!"

He lifted his arms high above his head and continued his pacing. His voice rose high, breaking into a shrill falsetto at times.

"He's harmless," said Cocky, tapping one finger lightly against his forehead. "He's a miner in Mike Druggin's gang. Been in the air for years but he was trapped on one job and it gets him at times. There was a blow, the river came in and the gang ran. He was left behind — they thought he was blown through the face. Well, he crouched down there on a small platform near the locks, waiting for the river to come up and drown him."

"How long?" asked Jim.

"Eight hours. Then they started reclamation work and found him. He claimed the sand had buried him but when the river came in it washed him up-tunnel. He was babbling when he came out and Lord knows, he had good reason to."

"Is he always—er—"

"No. Only at times," said Cocky. "He's a good miner and any gang is glad to have him work with them. But he claims that he and the river are pals. That's why most of us call him Old Man River. The sandhogs are a rough crew and one of them called him Stick-in-the-Mud. He flared up at the name, so it stuck.

"Old Man River, eh?" said Jim.

"Yes, my son," cried the miner. "The river and I are friends. The river told me it was coming into the tunnel today. It tried, but Cocky stopped it. The river will never forget."

He crossed to his locker, carefully re-wrapped the clippings that told of his experience and stripped off his mud stained clothes. Then he stalked majestically into the showers.

Cocky winked and rolled his jacket into a bundle. He placed it carefully beneath his head and stretched out at full length on the bench.

"Better grab a few winks, kid," he said. "We'll be going down in an hour or so."

"I'm not very tired," said Jim.

"You will be. Rest now while you can."

He yawned and closed his eyes. Jim made himself comfortable but not without a misgiving glance in the direction of the showers. But as Cocky was serenely snoring within two minutes, he decided there was no cause to worry. The bench was hard and Jim was used to soft beds but after a few preliminary wriggles he managed to doze.

IT was Old Man River who awakened them. He was fully dressed in his street clothes and was methodically bumping Cocky's head against the bench. Occasionally he gave Jim's head a whack and the boy leaped wildly erect when he realized who was standing above him.

"Time to go," said the miner.

"Thanks, River," yawned Cocky, rubbing his eyes.

"Hear that Stevens is on the job," said River.

"That's right," smiled Cocky.

"Well—good luck Cocky. I hope your gang runs circles around him." He grinned at Jim. "Husky lookin' kid, there."

"He'll do," answered Dean as River left the room.

"He sounded sane enough, then," said Jim when the door closed.

"Sure," said Cocky. "It only catches him at times. He laughs about it when it's over."

They started for the gantry, meeting Flanagan and the rest of the gang at the stairs. There were numerous bruised eyes and lumped heads amongst the men but they all laughed and joked as though they had been on a picnic. There was a heel print on Flanagan's cheek and occasionally he grabbed at one of the sandhog's boots, examined it and dolefully shook his head.

"Whin I find the boot that matches me cheek," he sighed, "blessed if I don't make the murtherer eat it."

"Have you looked at your own?" asked Cocky.

"Do ye think I'm an acrobat?" roared Flanagan. "What would I be doin' with me own boot in me mouth?"

The iron-gang met them at the cages and joined in the laugh. The cage dropped swiftly and they entered the lock. A certain grimness made itself felt as the air streamed in and the eyes of the sandhogs narrowed when the door groaned and swung open. They trooped down-tunnel behind Cocky and there was a threat in the stamp of their boots against the wooden flooring.

—"*Dry boots!*" The cry announced their arrival and Stevens' gang straightened from their work. The usual horseplay and laughter was missing when the incoming gang took over. Stevens climbed down from the work-

ing platform and stood before Cocky.

It seemed impossible that this mud smeared, clay daubed heading boss could be the same immaculate person of a few hours previous. His khaki working clothes were torn and covered with grime. A battered hat was low over his eyes and his lips were twisted into a thin smile.

"One and one, Cocky," he said. "Guess that will hold you."

"The kid here could do better than that," said Cocky, indicating Jim with a wave of his arm.

Stevens looked closely at Jim. Slowly recognition swept across his face. He turned to Cocky and laughed.

"Young Jim, eh?" he said. "Playing up to the Skipper by taking his kid in your gang."

"Wait for me on the gantry, Stevens," said Cocky. "We'll talk it over."

"I'll be waiting," said Stevens as he led his men up tunnel.

A RING of iron had been erected by Stevens' men and the bottom plates bolted tight. Big Blackie, the iron-boss, led his gang up onto the working platform. The muscular blacks seized the five-foot iron-wrenches, stripped the shirts from their backs and swung to the labor. Working in pairs, they swept the ponderous wrenches up and down, starting at the sides of the arch and working upward.

"I want that ring tight and passed in ten minutes," called Cocky from the floor of the tunnel.

"Sure 'nuff," said Blackie. "We gives you de ring in ten minutes or I kill me a few niggers."

He strode about the platform, driving the men and uttering dire threats. At times he seized a handle and threw his own mighty bulk against the wrench. One after the other the bolts were driven home and the wrenches climbed upward toward the top of the tunnel. The shining black hides of the iron-men were striped with long daubs of red-lead that fell from the waterproofing grummets encircling the bolts. The heat beneath the curved roof was frightful but Blackie gave the men no rest. He goaded them, mocked them and chanted bawdy songs, setting the pace for the work. As the wrenches flashed the tempo of the song increased and the blacks gasped in great sobbing breaths as they strove to keep the time.

Through the upper pockets of the shield the naked backs of the miners could be seen weaving and swaying as they skillfully breasted the tunnel face. They raced through the work, striving to complete the task of advancing the face thirty inches before the ring of iron was tight. In the tunnel heading everything was a race. The miners against the iron-gang—the muckers against the miners. Competition was the life of the job.

On the tunnel floor Cocky stood near the edge of the muck pile. The motor roared out of the midst shrouded reaches of the tube. Brakes screamed as it came to a grinding stop, shoving an empty muck-car to the end of the track. The brakeman quickly uncoupled the car and the motor raced back to the siding for another empty. When the second car was in place the muckers tore into the wet sand with their shovels.

They were naked to the waist and sweat poured from their backs, crept from beneath their battered hats or dripped from their chins unheeded. They were a shaggy, two-fisted crew

of Irishmen, proud of their might, proud of their work.

Cocky watched them closely as they dug into the sand that flowed from the lower pockets of the shield.

"Heads down, muckers," he cried. "You're getting slow, O'Malley."

"T'hell you say!" snorted a wide shouldered sandhog. He straightened from his labors and dropped the point of his shovel to the tunnel floor. "I'll load a car faster than you, me boy."

"What's the bet?" laughed Cocky.

"A shovel full of sand and a pint of good rye to wash it down."

"You're on," said Dean. "These two cars will clean out the muck. I want to shove in three minutes so let's go!"

He stripped the shirt from his back and seized the shovel. The muckers crowded closely about, leaping and shouting.

"A race!" cried one. "Me money's on Cocky!"

"Ten dollars on O'Malley," said another. "But I want two to one."

"You've got a bet!" roared Flanagan from the upper center pocket.

Cocky turned and faced the shield.

"Get back into that pocket, you square headed Mick," he yelled. "If that face isn't braced and ready for the shove when these cars are loaded I'll bend a pick handle over your skull."

"Shure now, Cocky me darlin'," howled Flanagan, "it'll be ready and waitin'. To the shovel, me angel, an' let's see what a Dean can do."

Cocky grunted. He had goaded O'Malley purposefully. The men were doing their best but it wasn't enough. Something was needed to stir that savage fighting instinct he knew to be in the gang. These men were fighters—the toughest bunch in the union. Each one had fought for his job. Cocky knew that. When he was short a man that meant a free-for-all at the tunnel shaft. The winner went to work.

ACROSS the heading Cocky saw Jim Condon leaning upon his shovel. The boy's eyes were wide as he watched the preparations for the race. The heading boss grinned. Condon would make a good tunnel man, he thought. A little training and plenty of work were all that were needed. He stepped to the muck pile. His muscles rippled and crossed as he turned the shovel, brushing the handle clean.

O'Malley doused his head beneath the water spout, wiped his hands against his trouser legs and tightened his belt. They stood shoulder to shoulder, their backs close to the cars.

"Get going!" said Cocky.

The sand flew. O'Malley's shovel whipped into the pile. He twisted slightly and the muck streamed over his shoulder. It fell with a dull thump into the iron car. Down went the shovel and half a cubic foot of river bed spun through the air. He growled as he worked, gasping grunts that broke from his throat with each thrust of his shovel.

Cocky crouched with his legs wide apart. He caught the sand lightly with his blade, sweeping it into the car with rapid strokes. His eyes danced and a grin twisted the corners of his mouth. He increased the tempo. The strokes came faster. O'Malley struggled to keep the pace. Sand flooded into the muck-cars. It crept up, higher and higher against the sides. Slowly Cocky drew ahead—his car was filling faster than O'Malley's.

The muckers howled encouragement, stamping their heavy boots and beating their hands against their thighs. The shouts maddened O'Mal-

ley. His mighty shoulders heaved and twisted. The air sobbed through his clenched teeth and blew bits of froth from his lips. His shovel tore huge chunks from the pile. But slowly Cocky increased his lead. His car was flush and now the sand was spilling from the sides.

"Full up!" he cried at last, throwing his shovel on top of the car.

O'Malley lifted his head. He glanced at Cocky's car and then at his own. He staggered across the heading and sank down upon a pile of boards.

"You win," he gasped. "And I'll eat a shovel of sand soon as I get me breath."

"Forget it," said Cocky. "Set up drinks for the gang when we go out and I'll call it square. You're a good man, O'Malley."

The muckers roared approval, pounding Cocky upon the back and laughing. A Dean had showed them how to handle a shovel and now they were anxious to prove their worth.

"Ready for the shove, Flanagan?" cried Cocky. He climbed the flanges to the upper platform, calling to Jim. The boy followed him, pausing for a moment to watch the muckers tearing up the wooden tunnel floor, preparing for the shove and the next ring of iron.

"All set," said Flanagan.

"How about the iron, Inspector?" asked Cocky, turning to Glendening, the municipal engineer who passed upon the condition of the ring.

"Okay, Cocky," said Glendening. "Iron's all tight. I want a one inch north lead and keep the same grade."

The tunnel was driving in a slight downward grade to the center of the river, to be met by the opposite section of the tube coming toward it. The shield had deviated slightly from its course and by driving it an additional inch on the north side, the line would be corrected.

Dean acknowledged the instructions given by the engineer and passed them along to the shield driver. Standing in the center of the upper platform, Powers set his spindles. These spindles controlled the huge hydraulic jacks spaced around the circumference of the shield. There were eighteen and they were numbered from the bottom upward on each side.

"I'm giving you One to Six on the north," said Powers. "And One to Four on the south."

"How's the pressure?" asked Cocky.

"Six thousand."

"Right! Open it up," said Cocky, directing Jim onto the platform beside Powers. "Watch him, kid. Learn how this is done."

Jim crouched beside the shield driver as Powers spun the main spindle releasing thousands of tons of pressure. The shield trembled—the iron shell of the tunnel shuddered throughout its entire length. The grinding sound of steel biting into sodden sand came from behind them. Jim turned. The curving hood of the shield was crunching into the face. Flanagan and his miners swung heavy sledges against the upper timbers breaking away the braces and allowing the sand to pour down into the bottom pockets.

Slowly the shield moved ahead. Air screamed through the exposed section of the face—the pressure in the tunnel lowered—a heavy curtain of fog closed in tightly, masking the heading. Through it Jim could hear Cocky shouting instructions to the muckers and iron-men. One moment his voice was directly below Jim's feet, the next it sounded from the platform. Occa-

sionally Jim caught flashes of the heading boss as he leaped quickly from place to place.

Around the lower circumference of the shield the huge jacks were thrusting back against the iron. Two Negroes stationed at either side of the tunnel called the progress of the shield. The municipal inspector checked the grade. The massive cylinder ground on.

"How's she going?" called Cocky from out of the mist.

"Pretty as a duck," answered Powers.

"Good. Put on your Five and Seven."

Powers twisted the spindles and the jacks crept out. They thudded against the iron and added their additional tons of pressure. The shield moved faster.

Cocky paused beside one of the blacks at the measuring sticks. He glanced at the markings. "All over!" he cried.

POWERS closed the spindles. The heading became a place of feverish excitement. In the pockets, the miners swept the sand down to the lower portion of the shield. Below, the muckers threw the blow line into the bottom and sucked the accumulated water from the tunnel. The motor came screaming out of the fog, pushing a string of flat-cars on which were piled the segments for the new ring.

The iron-gang sprang into action. Seizing their heavy wrenches, four blacks stationed themselves in the bottom. Big Blackie lifted a heavy length of chain and made one end fast to the plate on the first flat-car.

"What you say, Powers?" he called.

The shield driver grasped a pair of handles that controlled the erector. This huge beam swung pendulum-like from the center of the shield. As Powers shifted one lever it moved, swinging in a swift circle. The shield driver pushed the second lever and the sliding ram shot downward. When it was within an inch of Big Blackie's shoulder, Powers again moved the lever. The ram stopped. Blackie hooked the chain onto the jaw at the end and stepped clear.

"Hop to it, you apes!" yelled Cocky. "Let's build iron."

"Take it away!" cried Blackie.

Powers spun the erector. The massive iron plate was jerked from the flat-car and swung twisting into the air. At the correct moment Powers dropped it into the bottom. Blackie cast off the chain when the segment was in position and jumped clear. The men with the wrenches leaped forward.

Bolts were thrust through the holes and the wrenches hummed.

"Whip it dere, boys!" cried Blackie. "Get dem bolts tight in two minutes or I break yo' heads."

"Two minutes?" yelled Cocky. "My grandmother could do it in one and she's a hundred and forty years old."

"One minute it is!" cried a black.

Faster and faster the wrenches swooped as the giant Negroes whipped them back and forth. Their breath came in short, spasmodic gasps but their arms went faster and faster.

"Good 'nuff," grunted Blackie. He swept them aside and reached for the chain.

Again the operation was completed and one by one the segments curved up the sides of the tunnel. When the lower portion was finished it was checked for tightness by the inspector. Then the erector spun again, the plates

were fastened to its jaw and slammed into place.

When the final segment, a small plate called the "key," was jammed against the roof of the tunnel, Powers swung the erector parallel to his working platform and lifted his hands.

"One and one!" he cried.

"One more to go," answered Cocky. "Come down here, Jim, and grab a muck stick."

The boy clambered into the bottom and grasped a shovel. The muckers had replaced the wooden flooring and extended it flush with the bottom of the shield. Wet sand was pouring from the bottom pockets as the miners' helpers cleared it from the face. The race was on! The sandhogs wanted that second shove! They meant to get it!

Cocky glanced at his watch. The time was slipping away and there was much to be done. He stepped swiftly about the heading helping the muckers, watching the miners, speaking a word of caution at times or howling threats at Big Blackie.

The giant Negro laughed loudly when Cocky threatened to strip the hide from his shoulders. He roared at his blacks, jerking them from their feet when he seized the wrench handles to set a faster tempo.

The flickering lights of the tunnel cast fitful gleams upon the backs of the sweating sandhogs. The fog swirled about them in twisting wraiths.

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE IN THE SHAFT.

TEN cars of muck had been cleared away. Jim staggered wildly about the floor of the heading. He was exhausted but determined to keep the pace set by O'Malley. The miners had breasted more than half the face and the iron-gang were racing toward the key. The heat was terrific. And gradually the heading was getting warmer!

"Blimy, h'its roastink!" yelled a Cockney miner's helper.

"Is it always like this?" asked Jim as he dashed the sweat from his eyes.

O'Malley was next to him. He paused, glancing swiftly about. He shook his head.

"Never like this before," he growled. "We must be headin' fer hell."

Cocky paused at the muck pile. The withering heat was slowing the work. The men were staggering drunkenly about the cars, lifting their shovels in listless sweeps. Above, the cries of the iron-gang grew louder. Their heavy boots were dragging sluggishly across the platform.

"Hotter'n hell up here!" called Blackie.

"Finish that ring!" shouted Cocky.

Big Blackie turned to his work. But there was a worried expression in Dean's eyes when he looked up tunnel. The heading was becoming an inferno. These sandhogs were used to temperatures of one hundred degrees and over. But that mark had been passed. Cocky was glad there was no thermometer in the tunnel. The actual recording of the frightful heat would have staggered the men. He glanced at the muckers. Jim was rocking slowly backward and forward. His tongue lolled from his mouth and there was a glaze over his eyes. The other men were in much the same condition.

"Jim," cried Cocky. "Grab that water hose. Douse yourself and then turn it on the muckers."

He climbed to the platform and seized another hose that extended to the water line.

"Here, Blackie," he said. "Wet your men down. Keep them going till the ring's tied up."

"Cocky, me son," cried Flanagan from the center pocket. "We've died and gone plumb to perdishun!"

The monstrous miner was reeling drunkenly, his huge paws dashing the moisture from his face. It seemed as though the man would dissolve in sweat.

"G'wan!" snorted Cocky. "The devil wouldn't let the likes of you past the gate. Get Powers to fix up a water hose. We're going to make this shove!"

He hurried across the heading and grabbed the telephone. He jiggled the hook but there was no response. Once more he turned to the men, driving them to their work. At length the ring was tight and the breasting down of the face completed. The panting muckers had cleared away the muck and under the cooling flow of water were preparing for the shove.

Powers set the jacks. The miners stood ready with sledges. The iron-gang took their stations. All was in readiness.

"What's the shove order, Glendening?" asked Cocky.

"Same as before," said the inspector. "But I don't think we ought to shove. Something's gone wrong, Cocky. This heat isn't natural—there's trouble somewhere."

"There'll be plenty of it here if we don't shove," roared the heading boss. "Come on, Powers, open her up!"

The shield started forward. The Negroes on the measuring sticks took up their chant. But scarcely had the timbers started groaning and crashing when the heading was plunged into utter darkness. The blackness smote the sandhogs' eyes with the force of a blow.

Some screamed — others laughed nervously. Cocky cursed and blundered toward the phone.

While the heading boss pounded the hook, Powers shut off the pressure and the shield stopped.

"Who told you to stop that shield?" cried Cocky.

"Can't shove in the dark," said Powers.

"It's time to go," called a voice from the bottom.

"We'll finish the shovel!" roared Cocky.

His voice sounded wild as it cut through the black heading. There was a threat in it that steadied the men. They stood quietly, although with the failure of the lights the heat seemed to become a living, pulsing thing that wrapped them tightly in smothering folds.

"Take your men out of here!" ordered the inspector.

"Who says so?" asked Cocky.

"I won't allow you to finish this shove. I'm getting out."

"If you do," called Cocky, "I'll twist your neck."

The white beam of a flashlight cut through the darkness and centered upon the inspector. He blinked and lifted his hand.

"Don't be a fool, Cocky," he said. "No men on earth can finish that shove in the dark."

THE beam flashed to the measuring sticks still held against the shield by the iron-men.

"Eighteen inches to go," said Cocky. "What do you say, men?"

"Shove!" cried a voice from the

center pocket. "Shove the shield—an' may the saints presarve us!"

"How about you iron-men?" called Cocky.

"Shove!" The voice was that of Big Blackie. "I got fo'ty dollars on dis shove. Dat's mo' impo'tant than dyin'."

"Shove!" said a weak voice in the bottom.

Cocky smiled. That last cry had come from Jim.

"Open it up, Powers!" said the heading boss.

He flashed his light from place to place. First into the center pocket where Flanagan and his miners were performing their duties by the sense of touch alone. Next to the spindle blocks and then to the measuring sticks.

The inspector had turned on his flash and the two beams crossed and swung about the heading like meteors in an inky sky. The shield ground ahead—the timbers cracked and groaned—the air whined through the face, and the shove went on. Slowly, inexorably the cylinder moved forward. The cries of the men sounded weird and distorted in the blackness. They panted like beasts as the heat tore at their lungs.

The beam of Cocky's flash rested upon the measuring stick. The iron-man called the figure.

"All over!" cried Cocky. He swung his light into the upper pocket. "Make that face safe, Flanagan."

"Roight you are, me son," answered the miner. "I'll try—but I think the flesh has melted from me bones."

"Do it with the bones," said Cocky.

"Ain't he the darlin'?" roared Flanagan. But he braced the face skillfully.

The inspector sank wearily upon a pile of boards, mopped the sweat from his forehead and swung his light to whatever point the men directed. The heading was put in order and the gang grouped in the bottom.

"Let's go," said Cocky. He sent a white beam ahead and the men trouped slowly up tunnel. The heat rode heavy upon them and as they neared the bulkhead it grew worse. A mucker staggered and plunged weakly forward. His outthrust arms tangled in O'Malley's legs. There was a crash and Cocky swung the beam.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Riley is down," said O'Malley.

"Give him a lift, you and Flanagan."

"I—I—can't," gasped O'Malley. "I'm through."

He slumped forward. Two miners stooped to help him but they were too weak. They tugged at his outstretched arms but there was no strength left in their backs. Slowly they sank to their knees.

"Blackie!" cried Cocky. "Lend a hand here!"

He passed the flash to Jim and gathered O'Malley in his arms. The giant black lifted the other mucker and they staggered on through the stifling heat toward the bulkhead. Behind them came Flanagan. One great hand was fastened to the belt of each of his miners. He dragged them. His massive shoulders heaved with each step. His head rolled from side to side and with each step he uttered a prodigious grunt.

The locker-tender stood in the doorway of the man-lock. He helped the men inside and swung the heavy portal.

"What's happened?" asked Cocky.

"Don't know," he answered. "I've

been waiting for you fellows ever since the lights went out. What kept you?"

"Finishing the shove."

The lock-tender grunted. He knew Cocky Dean. The heading boss set his flash upright on the seat and counted his men. When he found all were accounted for, he signaled the tender to release the pressure. The valve was opened and the air howled. Rapid decompression lowered the temperature and gave the men a brief respite from the withering heat. When the tender partially closed the valve to allow for the regular period of decompression there were violent protests from the men. Smothering heat closed in tightly and in the cramped confines of the lock it became unbearable.

"Crack the valve open," ordered Cocky. "We've got to take a chance. They may get the bends going out too quickly but it's better than roasting to death."

The lock-tender opened the valve. Fog gathered quickly as the pressure dropped. The sandhogs sat quietly, looking from one to the other with sunken eyes. At length the outer door groaned. The air was exhausted. Cocky stepped to the door and swung it open.

A blinding sheet of flame licked in from the shaft.

He staggered back. His hands went to his face. He yelled. Flanagan and Big Blackie leaped to his side and pulled the iron door closed. The gang crowded forward.

"What—what—?" gasped a miner.

"Are ye hurt?" roared Flanagan.

"No," said Cocky. "It just singed me."

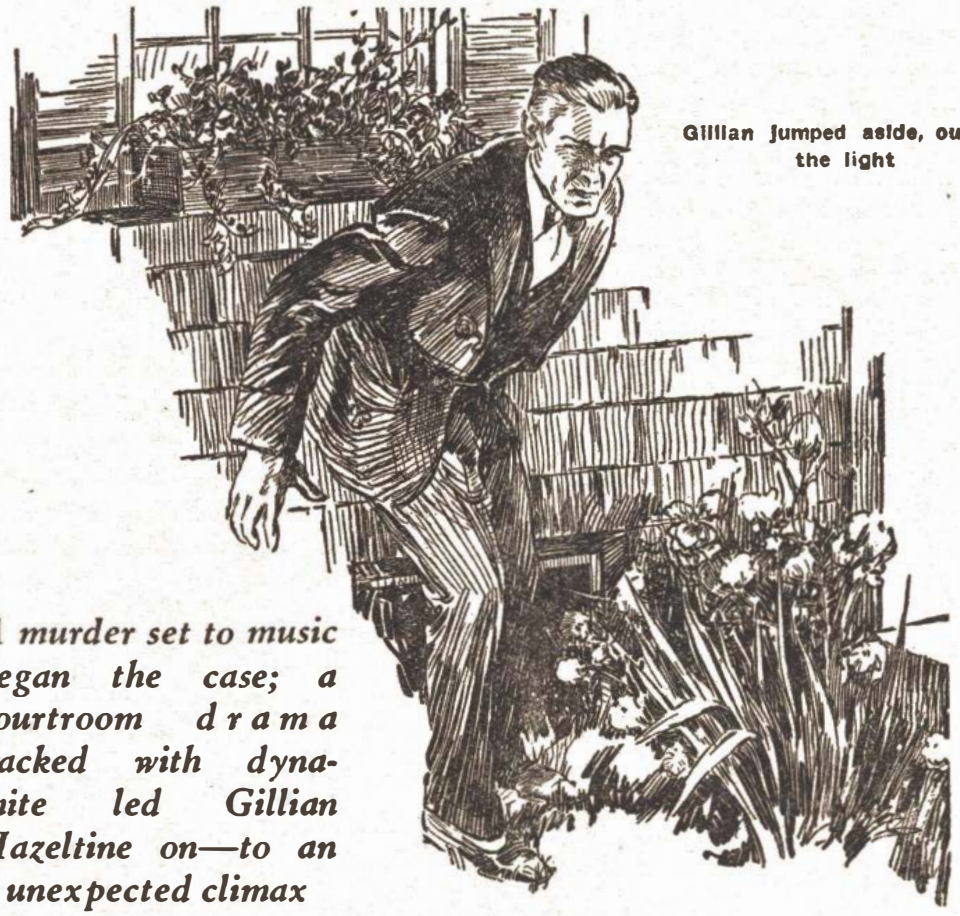
"The shaft is on fire!" screamed a mucker.

"Ah nuts!" barked Cocky. "Keep your shirt on. The caisson is steel—it can't burn. The wooden cage frames are burning and the air pipes are red hot. The fire must have fused the telephone and light wires, too."

"We can't stand much of this heat," said the inspector. "I'm just about all in and—"

He slumped to the floor. Others were leaning weakly against the sides of the lock and Jim was unconscious. His head was pillowed on Flanagan's chest.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



Gillian jumped aside, out of the light

A murder set to music began the case; a courtroom drama packed with dynamite led Gillian Hazeltine on—to an unexpected climax

Your Witness, Mr. Hazeltine!

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Mystery of the Five Bald Men," "The Honest Forger," etc.

Complete Novel

CHAPTER I.

"IS SHE PHONY?"

PICKING up the receiver, the man dialed ST-1200. A girl's voice said presently, "When you hear the musical note, the time will be thirty seconds after 1.30 A.M."

The man looked at the watch on his wrist and listened. He did this automatically. But as he looked at his watch, a queer expression came over his face. It was a look of utter amazement, of stunned astonishment.

He heard the mellow golden note of the time signal. As if he were shocked, he held the receiver in his hand, gripping it in a fist the knuckles of which were now blue-white. He replaced the receiver. He said "Good God!" in a voice of incredulity.

IN the eastbound Overland Limited, the elderly Chinese in Drawing Room A, Car 312, suddenly sat up in his berth and switched on the light. He looked at the watch on his wrist, a heavy platinum affair set with diamonds and emeralds. The time was thirty seconds past 1.30 A.M.

The elderly Chinese swung his feet to the green carpet and slipped them into

richly-brocaded Oriental slippers. He put on a heavy yellow satin dressing gown. He shuffled to the door, shot back the bolt and jerked the door open. With his right hand he gripped the butt of the automatic pistol in his dressing gown pocket.

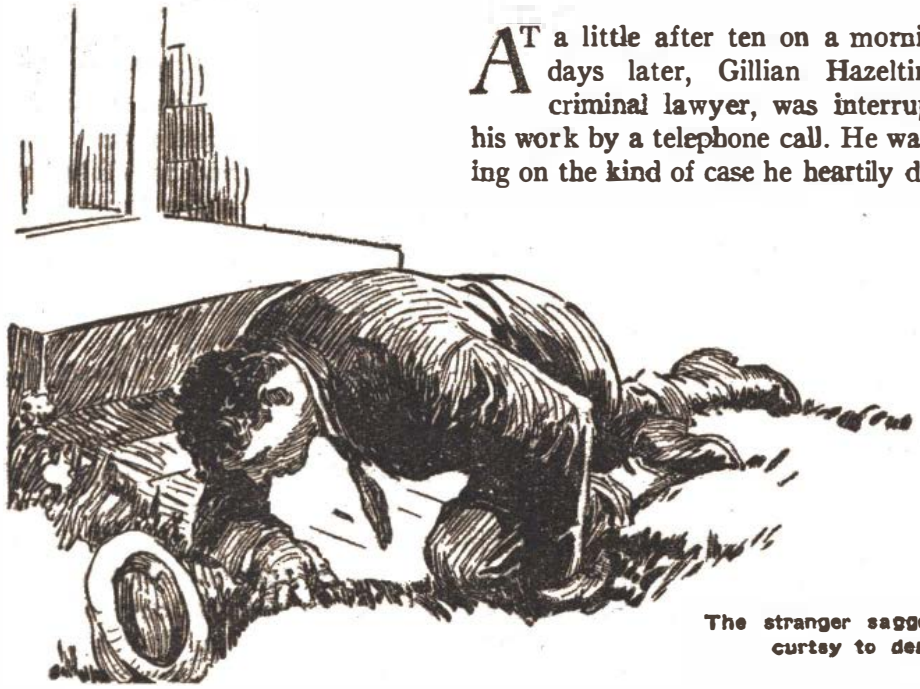
No one was in the corridor. Some one snoring in an upper berth sounded like a man strangling.

The Chinese shut the door and again bolted it. "The superior man," he quoted aloud, "fears nothing but his own conscience."

He got down on his knees and pulled out from under the berth a thin yellow suitcase with a combination lock. He set the numerals of the combination to 414, which were the numerals of his mother's birth month and day, according to the Chinese calendar. Opening the suitcase he removed from it an ornate, richly-embossed leather portfolio. The suitcase contained nothing else. The portfolio, of so-called legal size, was of olive-green leather with a zipper at the top. In the center of one side of the portfolio was the conventional image of the full moon. Raying out from it were embossed and gilded streaks, or arrows, at the points of which were square, solid-looking Chinese characters.

The elderly Chinese pulled back the zipper and looked inside. The portfolio was full of packages of United States currency. The Chinese closed the portfolio, returned it to the suitcase, which he locked.

Assured that the sound he had heard had been a trick of his imagination, and that the $465,000 consigned to his safe-keeping was in no immediate danger, he got back into the berth and snapped off the light.



The stranger sagged in a curtsy to death

AT a little after ten on a morning two days later, Gillian Hazeltine, the criminal lawyer, was interrupted in his work by a telephone call. He was working on the kind of case he heartily detested. It concerned a will which he had himself drawn at the request of a wealthy old man, now deceased, and this will was about to be contested by a howling pack of greedy, grasping relatives. He hated the case because it bored him, because the contest was going to be dryer than dust, and because the contestants were such disagreeable people.

But he was giving the case his utmost concentration when his telephone rang. He had left word with his secretary that no calls but those of vital importance were to be put through to him. He picked up the receiver and said hello.

A man's deep brisk voice said, "Hello, Gillian! This is Dan Murdock."

And Gillian Hazeltine said, "Oh, hello, captain."

Captain Murdock was the new chief of the Greenfield homicide bureau.

"There's a woman down here at the Fourth Precinct jail," Captain Murdock explained himself, "whom we booked early this morning on a murder charge. She polished off her husband last night. It's an absolutely airtight case, but she's been asking for you. She wants you to come down and do something about it. Can you come down?"

"I can't, Dan," Hazeltine answered. "I'm up to my ears."

"Okay. That's all I want to know. I'll tell her."

The criminal lawyer hung up the receiver and returned to his study of the late Hamilton Jeffers's will. In addition to feeling bored, he now felt restless. He opened the solid gold humidor at the back of his desk—the gift of a grateful client whom he had saved from the electric chair—and selected a cigar. Lighting it, he pushed away from his desk and went to the window which looked down upon the winding blue reaches of the beautiful Sangamo. It was not a day to spend in the office, studying a dry-as-dust will case. It was a golden, balmy spring morning which seduced the senses and invited a man to play hookey. As far as he could see were trees springing into leaf, and fields bursting with downy green.

He wished he had asked Dan Murdock more about the case of the woman who had murdered her husband. How had she murdered him? What had been the circumstances? Even an open-and-shut murder case was more interesting than the will of the late Hamilton Jeffers.

His telephone rang again. He answered it with alacrity. A woman's voice cried, "Mr. Hazeltine? Mr. Hazeltine?" He did not answer for a moment. Thrills were going through him. Never in his life had he heard a voice quite like this one. It was pure music, like a mellow, golden note. And behind this golden note was an under-note like the sound, say, of a brook—the sound of a brook through the clear, perfect song of a bird, say, a meadowlark. And at each word or two, the voice had a trick of breaking huskily. Perhaps the feeling of spring in the air made Gillian Hazeltine use such poetic comparisons. At all events the voice thrilled him.

She was saying, "This is Olive Poldemus. I'm phoning from the Fourth Precinct jail. Captain Murdock finally let me call you. I—I'm the woman he called you about a few minutes ago. I've been charged with murdering my husband. I did not murder him. I know nothing about it. You—you must help me. You must represent me."

The voice was not only beautiful and rare but cultured. It made Gillian Hazeltine extremely curious to see Mrs. Poldemus. But he recalled what Captain Murdock had said, and he recalled that he was up to his ears in the Hamilton Jeffers will case.

"I'm sorry," he said firmly. "I am very busy, Mrs. Poldemus. And I'm afraid there's nothing I can do."

"Oh," she cried, "please, please come down. Just let me talk to you. It won't take you a half hour. I know nothing about this murder. I swear I didn't do it. I am absolutely innocent. Please, please come down and just let me talk to you."

Gillian Hazeltine hesitated and glanced at the papers scattered about his desk. From the corner of his eye he could see the blue-and-golden spring morning.

"Very well," he said. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Thank you. Oh, thank you!" Mrs. Poldemus cried, and once again he thrilled to the music of that remarkable voice.

HE put on his hat and, with the cigar at a jaunty angle, went to the Fourth Precinct jail. In the jail offices, Captain Murdock gave him a summary of the events in the case of Mrs. Olive Poldemus.

"This dame bumped this guy off, and it's cold turkey," the chief of detectives told him. "Here's the dope in a nutshell: Mrs. Poldemus came to town about two weeks ago and took an apartment in the Ravenhurst Arms, on Maplewood Avenue. Her husband came to town about a week later and took a small bungalow in that new bungalow court on Elmwood—the

Elmwood Bungalow Court, it's called, and it's about a mile from the Ravenhurst Arms. She went to his bungalow last night, around one o'clock, had a scrap with him, socked him with a gin bottle, strangled him with her scarf—and beat it."

"Eye witnesses?" Gillian asked. So far, no facts had presented themselves to arouse his imagination or interest. It was the usual story of a wife killing a husband.

"Well," Captain Murdock answered, "the woman in the bungalow next door heard the scrap, and recognized Mrs. Poldemus's voice. You heard her voice. Ain't it some voice, Gillian?"

Gillian nodded.

"We checked up on the scarf. It came from Saroney-Burkhart's. We had the salesgirl who sold the scarf come to the bungalow and identify it, and we brought her here to try to identify Mrs. Poldemus, which she did without a moment's hesitation.

"We pinched Mrs. Poldemus in her apartment about 4 A.M. We gave her a little grilling, and she told a wild story. Claims she was in a stalled taxicab in the woods between here and the Gray Goose roadhouse most of the time from midnight to 2 A.M. She claims she remembers the cab driver's name and registration number—says she studied the card in the cab. A Red Top cab. We checked up on that one. There's no such driver and no such number. It's a phony. Her whole story's a phony. Do you want to talk to her in the attorney's room?"

"No. I'll go to her cell."

A turnkey took Gillian to the mystery woman's cell. Although inured to astonishments, he was more than a little astonished when Mrs. Poldemus came to the steel-barred door. She was hardly more than a girl, a slim girl in her early twenties, wan from worry. Her dark eyes were liquid with grief. She was beautiful, with dark hair and clear, lovely skin. Her lower lip was raw from gnawing.

She cried in that remarkable voice, "Oh, Mr. Hazeltine!" She gripped the steel bars and looked up into his face with great, appealing eyes. He was suddenly seeing her on the witness stand—that fragile beauty, those wonderful dark eyes, the amazing golden voice, with its little husky moments, swaying twelve good men and true.

He reminded himself that he must watch his step; that this woman's hands were hardly dry from the blood of her husband.

Gillian said steadily, "I'm really afraid there is nothing I can do for you, Mrs. Poldemus. Hadn't you better decide to plead guilty and throw yourself on the mercy of the court?"

"But I didn't kill him!" she cried. "I swear I didn't! I know absolutely nothing about it."

She clung to the bars and appealed to him with her lustrous beautiful dark eyes.

"PLEASE let me tell you just what happened, Mr. Hazeltine. It won't take long. I think you'll understand how amazed and horrified I am. Two weeks ago, I came here from California. I came to Greenfield as a—a sanctuary. I used to live here when I was a little girl. I came also for business reasons. A Chinese by the name of Sing Fat came to Greenfield last night—or he was supposed to come here last night—bringing me a large sum of money in cash. I haven't been in touch with him. Will you represent me? Will you go to the Greenfield Hotel and tell Sing Fat to take the money to the First National Bank and deposit it in my account?"

Gillian nodded. "I'll attend to it. Now tell me something about this man who was killed last night."

"He—he was my husband." She paused. She was panting, and she was pressing her right hand under her left breast, as if to stifle the frantic beating of her heart.

"Have you any idea who killed him?"

"Not the slightest."

"Was he known in Greenfield?"

"So far as I know, he didn't know a soul here but me."

"Do you think some one followed him here and killed him?"

"Perhaps. But I don't know."

"Do you know if he had enemies?"

" He probably did. If he treated others the way he treated me, he must have had loads of enemies. Shall I tell you about my experience with him?"

Gillian nodded.

" Three years ago, when I was eighteen, I met and married this man—this Victor Poldemus, in San Francisco. I had just been left a fairly large fortune—almost a million dollars—by my father. I—I hadn't had much experience with life. I thought Victor was the most charming person I'd ever known. I want to stress that because it's terribly important in light of what happened later. He was fascinating. And he was absolutely unprincipled, unscrupulous and unmoral. In a little over two years, he spent most of my money—gambled it and spent it on other women. It doesn't seem possible I could have been such a fool, but I was."

SHE stopped again and laid her cheek against the bars, looking not at Gillian's face but at something beyond him. She was still breathing in little gasps, as if her emotions were almost out of her control.

" I realized what he was doing with my money, yet I couldn't stop him. He—he had this hold on me. It was a kind of sinister—oh, an awful fascination. He could simply make me do anything he wished.

" I left him about six weeks ago. We had a horrible quarrel. I'd refused to let him have any more money. There wasn't any more! Every dollar I had was gone. But I had so far not touched my father's jade collection. Perhaps you've heard of the Farrington jade collection. It was supposed to be the finest in the world, outside of the Metropolitan Museum collection, in New York. Before the depression, it was valued at more than a million and a half. Victor wanted me to sell this collection. When I refused, he struck me. Then I packed up and left him.

" Since my father's death, the collection had been stored in a bank vault in San Francisco. When I left my husband, I decided to make my own life. I decided to sell the jade. A wealthy Chinese importer named Chong-Lou, in Chinatown, had wanted father to sell it to him for years. So I negotiated with Chong-Lou. We settled on a price of $465,000 cash. But I did not want the money in San Francisco for two reasons. First, Victor would have tried to get all of it somehow. If he failed at that, he might, under the California community property law, demand and get half as his legal share. Victor suspected I had sold the jade collection to Chong-Lou, and he hounded me. I told him nothing. When the sale had been closed, I left California and came here. The money, in the form of cash, was to be delivered to me here."

" Why cash?" Gillian interrupted. "Why not a check? Is that the Chinese way of doing business?"

" It was Chong-Lou's way. Chong-Lou said he would send the money here by his most trusted man, Sing Fat. Last night, at a little after twelve, Sing Fat was to have arrived here."

" Meanwhile," Gillian interposed, " your husband had come to Greenfield."

She nodded slightly. It was difficult sometimes for Gillian Hazeltine to follow what she was saying. Her voice, with its little husky moments, was hypnotic. You were tempted to listen to the golden harmonies of the voice, to lose what it was saying.

" He followed me here," Mrs. Poldemus said. " He suspected why I had come—and he got it out of me. He could make me do anything. I—I hated him, but he could make me do anything. He made me tell him about the money."

" Where did you see him?"

" Always in his bungalow."

" When was your first visit?"

" Four days ago."

" How often did you go there?"

" Three times."

" When was the last time?"

" Yesterday morning."

" Did you quarrel?"

" Sometimes."

" What was the substance of your last talk?"

"He wanted to know all about the money—how it was coming, who was bringing it, and so forth."

"And you told him?"

THE girl moved her dark head slightly. "Yes," she said wearily. "I told him. I couldn't help it. But I told him he wouldn't get a penny of it. Then he asked me if I didn't think it would be fair to divide it with him." Mrs. Poldemus hesitated again.

"Did you agree?"

She looked up at him squarely with her large shining eyes.

"I said I'd think it over."

"But you had no intention of dividing it."

"No. He had no right to it. He had gambled and spent almost a million of my money on other women. I felt he had no moral right to any more of my money."

"What time did you leave his bungalow yesterday?"

"A little before noon."

"And you never saw him again—alive?"

"I haven't seen him since, alive or dead."

"What happened last night?"

The girl with the golden voice caught her lower lip in her teeth. She swallowed several times.

"Last night, at a few minutes before twelve, a man telephoned me at my apartment—a strange man—and said Victor had been badly hurt in a fight at the Gray Goose. I didn't even know what the Gray Goose was. This strange man was very excited. He said it was a roadhouse about ten miles from town on the River Road, and that Victor had got into a fight and had been stabbed in the back, under the heart, and might die. He said Victor was asking for me. This man said he was the proprietor of the Gray Goose, and that he had just sent for a doctor, and that I had better hurry right out, because Victor might die."

Olive Poldemus halted again, sucked her lower lip between her teeth and gripped her small, pretty white hands into fists. Then she uttered a weary sigh.

"It had begun to rain. It was teeming when I went out. A taxicab was just coming along the street—a Red Top. The driver pulled into the curb and I got in and told him to drive as fast as he could to the Gray Goose. He didn't say anything, but I thought he looked at me queerly.

"We drove out the River Road and—" The girl stopped again. "The Gray Goose was shut—dark! The windows were all boarded up! Not a soul was there—or

OLIVE POLDEMUS

anywhere near! Then I suspected that Victor had played another practical joke. I told the driver to take me back to my apartment. He took a short cut through the woods. At least, he said it was a short cut. Half-way back, the engine went bad, or he said it did. It was still raining, harder than ever. It took him more than an hour to fix the engine. I don't know how long. While I waited, I noticed the little card tacked on the back of the driver's seat, near the meter. It had his name and registration number. His name was Antonio Spiletti, and the number was 43405. I remember it perfectly, because I was afraid, when he stopped in the woods, that it was a hold-up trick."

"Just a moment," Gillian interrupted. "Was your husband in the habit of playing practical jokes?"

"Yes. He had a cruel sense of humor. He was always playing practical jokes, to humiliate me. I thought this was just an-

other. Now, I don't know what it was all about."

"Can you describe the taxi-driver?"

"Indeed I can!" the girl cried. "He was a short, thick-set man with powerful shoulders, a very red ugly face, close-set, small, blue-green eyes, a big swollen nose and a large loose mouth. There was a white scar across the bridge of his nose."

"Did you tell that to Captain Murdock?"

"I told him just what I'm telling you, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Very well. After this taxi-man took you back to your apartment, did anything unusual happen?"

"He didn't take me back to my apartment. Some distance from my apartment, he pulled up to the curb beside an all-night drug store and said I'd better get another cab. His engine, he said, wasn't running properly and he was afraid he couldn't get me home."

"Did this taxi-driver speak with an accent?"

"He had a deep, thick voice—guttural."

"Not Italian?"

"No. Possibly Dutch. I don't know. But not Italian."

"Did you notice the number of the cab license when he drove off?"

THE girl nodded. "I tried to. I don't know why—but I was suspicious. But I couldn't read the license number. He went away so fast, it was raining, and I think the license was covered with mud—or perhaps even painted over. I ran into the drugstore and phoned for another taxi."

"Where was this drugstore?"

"On the corner of Elmwood and Twelfth."

"Isn't that drugstore about a block from the bungalow court where your husband was staying?"

"Yes."

"Did you phone your husband?"

"No. I phoned for another taxi. It came and took me home."

"What did you do when you reached home?"

"I went to bed. At a little after four o'clock, there was a banging at the door. When I opened it, Captain Murdock came in and said I was wanted for killing my husband. He brought me here and I've been here ever since. They asked me a thousand questions, but I'm as much in the dark as they are. I haven't the slightest idea who killed Victor or why he was killed."

It was, all in all, perhaps the flimsiest alibi he had ever heard as a defense in a murder case, and Gillian had heard some very flimsy ones. And he could not determine whether she was, with all her emotional appeal, an actress and a liar, or an innocent young woman.

Olive Poldemus was clutching the bars, appealing to him with her enormous, beautiful dark eyes.

She said eagerly, "Will you defend me? Will you take my case, Mr. Hazeltine?"

Still baffled by her, Gillian shrugged. "I won't promise to take your case. But I will promise to investigate it before I decide not to take it."

"Will you see Sing Fat now—and tell him to deposit that money in the First National?"

Gillian said that he would. He carried away an impression of a pale, tragic, beautiful young face, of a golden, bewitching voice, of a mysterious personality which intrigued and puzzled and tantalized him. With all his knowledge of human nature, and with all his experience with clever, lying witnesses, he could not decide whether she was lying or whether she was the victim of a conspiracy which might well baffle the most astute of criminal investigators.

Captain Murdock was waiting for him in the jail offices. The chief of detectives chuckled and said, "Well, Gillian, is she phony or is she phony?"

"I think she's phony," Gillian answered, "but it's all rather mystifying. You say you checked up on that Red Top cab?"

"I had the Red Top people check all their cabs. None of them made a trip out to the Gray Goose. Nobody by the name of Antonio Spiletti is on their payroll or

ever has been. The cab license bureau has no such number as the one she mentioned in its files.

"And nobody answering to her description of the driver has ever been seen in town, to the best of our knowledge. The case is airtight, Gillian."

Gillian nodded thoughtfully. His steel-gray eyes were dreamy.

"I'm not satisfied," he said. "If she's lying, she's a fool not to have cooked up a better mess of lies."

Captain Murdock laughed. He was a hearty, red-haired man of thirty-five, with eyes as blue and as hard as cobalt.

"She hypnotized you with that voice," he said, "and she looked at you with those great big eyes."

Gillian grinned faintly and said, "Maybe. But I'm not satisfied. Who investigated the murder?"

"I did—and made the pinch."

"I suppose you went over the bungalow with your usual care."

"I certainly did. I overlooked nothing. And if you want to go out there, you'll find nothing's been touched."

Gillian left the jail and drove to the Greenfield, the city's largest, newest and most luxurious hotel. He inquired at the desk for Sing Fat's room number, and was presently knocking at the door of Room 235.

CHAPTER II.

SING FAT.

THE door was opened by a portly, handsome Chinese of middle age, in a well-tailored gray suit. He was a thoroughly Americanized Chinese with, however, the inscrutable almond eyes, the polished manners, and the bland self-control of the better class Oriental.

"I am Gillian Hazeltine. I'm representing Mrs. Olive Poldemus."

Sing Fat was delighted, he said, to know Mr. Hazeltine, but he seemed faintly puzzled.

"I know you, of course, by reputation," Sing Fat said. "But I had the idea that you practiced only in the criminal branch of the law." He spoke English with no trace of an accent.

Gillian said dryly, "Murder is generally supposed to grow on the criminal branch."

"Murder?" the Chinese repeated.

"You knew, of course, that Mr. Poldemus was murdered last night, and that Mrs. Poldemus is being held."

Sing Fat seemed to lose his imperturbable calm. His little eyes widened. His mouth opened, remained open.

He said, in an incredulous voice, "Mrs. Poldemus is being held for his murder?"

And Gillian said sharply, "Is it news to you? Haven't you seen the papers?"

Sing Fat sat down heavily on the edge of the bed.

"No," he said. "I have heard nothing about it. How horrible! How perfectly horrible! I can't believe that Mrs. Poldemus—" He stopped. "How was he killed, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"He was hit on the head with a gin bottle and strangled with a scarf."

"How perfectly horrible!"

"Did you know him?"

"Slightly—very slightly. What can I do to help you, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"I came here on another errand," Gillian answered. "Mrs. Poldemus told me that you had come to Greenfield, bringing her a considerable sum of money in cash."

"That is correct."

"She asked me to stop here and tell you to take the money to the First National Bank of Greenfield and deposit it to her account."

The Chinese placed his fat little hands firmly on the bed and pushed himself up abruptly.

In a strained voice, he said, "When—when did she tell you to do that?"

"A few minutes ago. I just left her cell."

"But—but it's impossible, Mr. Hazeltine!" Sing Fat exclaimed. "I gave the money to her messenger last night! There's some mistake! Some horrible mistake!"

"What happened last night?" Gillian

said sharply. " What time did your train get in? Tell me everything."

SING FAT gasped: " This is incredible! I arrived in Greenfield at twelve-one —one minute past midnight. I came here immediately, in a taxicab. I engaged this room. I came into this room at about twelve-fifteen, no later. I had been here perhaps five minutes when Mrs. Poldemus telephoned."

" At twelve-twenty?"

" Yes—as closely as I can judge."

" Just a moment. Did you know Mrs. Poldemus well?"

" Very well indeed. I had known her and her father in San Francisco since she was a little girl."

" Then there was no question in your mind that it was Mrs. Poldemus who telephoned?"

" Not the slightest question. I would know her voice among a million. I have never heard a voice, here or in Asia, quite so beautiful, quite so distinctive."

" What did she say?"

" She said that we would have to change our original plan, which was that she was to call here some time today and collect the money. Because of some legal complication with her husband, she said she would send a man she trusted for the portfolio. She described the man. In about fifteen minutes—"

" Hold on. Let's describe the portfolio first."

" Of course. It was of the legal size, a green pigskin portfolio with a zipper top. The sides were richly embossed with gilded Chinese characters, and on each side was a conventional symbol of the moon. I had it made specially and intended it as a gift for Mrs. Poldemus."

"Let's have the rest of the story. Fifteen minutes after she telephoned—"

" Yes. This man came to the door, I surrendered the portfolio to him—and considered my part in the affair terminated."

" Can you describe this man?"

" I can, indeed. He tallied perfectly with Mrs. Poldemus's description of him—a tall, heavily-built man of about thirty-two, with a red face and gray eyes. He wore a double-breasted blue serge suit, a black necktie and a gray felt hat."

" And you gave this man that money?"

" I did."

" Don't you think you were a little careless in letting this stranger have such a sum in cash?"

Sing Fat firmly shook his head. " Not at all, Mr. Hazeltine. I was under Mrs. Poldemus's orders. When she telephoned that this man was coming, when she instructed me to surrender the portfolio to him, I had no choice. Who could this man have been?"

Gillian compressed his lips. He was reasonably certain that the suave middle-aged Chinese was lying. He was certain that Olive Poldemus had lied to him. There were, of course, infinite possibilities, the truth in any case being obscured by a smoke screen of lies. Was Sing Fat lying, or was Mrs. Poldemus lying? Or both—or neither?

" You'd better come down to jail with me," Gillian said. " We'll try to straighten this out."

Sing Fat gave him a courtly bow, a ceremonious smile.

" I am your servant, Mr. Hazeltine. It is most fortunate that you came when you did. I was leaving for the West on the 2.30 train."

Gillian drove him to the Fourth Precinct jail, where the desk sergeant told Gillian that Captain Murdock had gone to headquarters and would be there in case Mr. Hazeltine needed him.

GILLIAN took the Chinese into the jail and to Mrs. Poldemus's cell. She sprang up from her cot and grasped the bars of the door.

" Sing Fat!" she cried, almost in a sob. Then her eyes widened and she said breathlessly, " What—what's happened?"

" He tells me," Gillian answered, " that you telephoned him at his hotel last night at about twenty past twelve and sent a man down for the money."

The girl stared at him with incredulity —or an excellent imitation of it. Then she stared at Sing Fat.

"*I* telephoned you?" she whispered.

"Yes, Mrs. Poldemus," the Chinese firmly said.

"And a man came down and—and got the money—a man *I* sent?"

"Yes, Mrs. Poldemus."

The girl with the golden voice had clenched her fists, was pressing them against her breast.

"It was a trick!" she wailed. "I didn't telephone! How could I telephone? At twenty past twelve last night I was in a taxicab! I was in that taxicab for two hours. I wasn't near a telephone!"

"It is most mystifying," Sing Fat said heavily.

"Most," Gillian agreed. "I hope you won't object to being detained while this case is being looked into a little more thoroughly."

The Chinese gave him a small, courtly bow. "Not in the least, Mr. Hazeltine. I had anticipated that."

Gillian took him to the desk sergeant, had him booked on a suspicion charge, explaining that the charge against Sing Fat might be changed later, and telephoned Captain Murdock.

"Can you meet me at the Elmwood Bungalow Court immediately?"

"I'll start at once," the chief of detectives said.

Gillian was, for the first time, really interested in the killing of Victor Poldemus. It was beginning to present the aspects of a mystery. He believed Sing Fat was involved and that Sing Fat was lying.

CHAPTER III.

MURDER WITH MUSIC.

GILLIAN drove out Elmwood to the Elmwood Bungalow Court, where Victor Poldemus had spent the last week of his ill-starred life. There were ten bungalows in the court, facing each other across a strip of lawn, five on a side. The Poldemus bungalow was the second from the street on the left side.

Captain Murdock was smoking a cigar on the porch steps. When Gillian approached, he got up and said, "Everything is just as it was last night. Nothing's been touched. The coroner's inquest is to be held here late this afternoon."

Gillian shivered a little. He had a distaste amounting to a violent aversion for dead bodies. The presence of death made him ill and faint. He hated dead men.

The front door of the bungalow showed evidences of violence. The chief of the homicide bureau explained that the cop who had been first on the scene after the murder had had to break the door down.

They went in. There was no entrance hall. The front door opened into a small living room. The bungalow comprised this room, a kitchenette and a bathroom. The living room was converted into a bedroom by opening a door and swinging out and pulling down a bed.

The dead man lay face down along one wall. The scarf, of red-and-blue Scotch plaid, had not been removed from his neck. About a foot away from his head was the bottom half of a broken gin bottle. Gillian glanced quickly at the corpse's head and saw there the results of the bottle's violent impact. He glanced back at the detective and said, "Fingerprints?"

"All blurred."

Gillian looked about the room. On a taboret near the kitchenette door were two glasses, partly filled with a yellowish liquid; a half-full bottle of gingerale, and a blue glass bowl partly full of water. It had presumably contained ice.

Gillian looked further. His glance fell upon an object—a green object on a small table against the wall. It was a green leather portfolio. It was unquestionably the portfolio that Sing Fat had described to him! It was of green leather with gilded Chinese characters embossed on the sides—a zipper top. Although it was empty, it still had a bulging look.

He told Captain Murdock about Sing Fat, and added, "I had him booked on

suspicion. You'd better have him held as a material witness—without bail."

Gillian began a thorough search of the room. He went carefully over the floor and the few pieces of cheap furniture the room contained. He examined the kitchenette and the bathroom. He found nothing bearing in any way on the murder or the mystery attending it.

He was inclined now to suspect that Mrs. Poldemus and the Chinese had conspired to

SILKY DAVIS

kill Victor Poldemus. On that theory, he believed that Mrs. Poldemus had telephoned Sing Fat last night from this bungalow, and that Sing Fat had brought the portfolio here. Sing Fat could easily have slipped out of the hotel unseen—and returned to his room unseen. And if he and Mrs. Poldemus had not cooked up this murder, then she was innocent and Sing Fat was lying.

Yet it was not quite so clean-cut as that. The finding of the portfolio had shed no light on the killing; had, in fact, tended to make it more complex, more baffling.

His mind in a whirl of conjectures, he told Captain Murdock he wanted to ask some questions of the woman next door.

MRS. ANNABELLE SHARP, the woman next door, proved to be still in a state of hysterics from last night's violence and tragedy. She was a thin, gray-haired woman of fifty, with a sharp, long nose, now cherry-red at the tip, and her eyes were red and watery. She moaned and sniffled and wrung her hands. But she was, Gillian suspected, enjoying her prominence.

Yes, oh, yes, Mrs. Sharp had heard the trouble last night. She hadn't heard many words, because Mr. Poldemus—poor, poor Mr. Poldemus—had had his radio going. He always had his radio going. He had loved lively music, jazz music, poor young man! And last night at the time of the murder, his radio was turned on louder than usual. Loud enough to wake the dead!

"Murder with music," Gillian said dryly, and asked her more questions.

She had heard Mr. Poldemus and his pretty young wife quarreling on previous occasions.

"Were you familiar with her voice?"

"Oh, very, very familiar! I never heard a voice like it in all my born days!"

"I took Mrs. Sharp down to jail first thing this morning," Captain Murdock said, "to have her identify Mrs. Poldemus's voice. We asked Mrs. Poldemus some ordinary questions, and she answered. And Mrs. Sharp, here, said there was absolutely no question about it."

"Oh, absolutely none," Mrs. Sharp affirmed.

"You'd seen Mrs. Poldemus come here previously, of course," Gillian said.

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir. And I'd recognize that scarf."

Gillian asked her when she'd last seen Mrs. Poldemus wearing the scarf.

"Yesterday morning. Mrs. Poldemus came here yesterday morning a little before noon, and she left about an hour later."

"Was she wearing the scarf when she came?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was she wearing it, though, when she left?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Gillian had been passionately hoping not. This was the final rivet in Mrs. Poldemus's doom. She had told him she had left the scarf here yesterday morning.

" You're dead sure, are you, Mrs. Sharp, that she was wearing the scarf when she went away yesterdy noon?"

" I am positive, Mr. Hazeltine."

" I'm afraid," Gillian sighed, " that settles it. But I'm going to make a little test."

HE thanked Mrs. Sharp and returned alone to the Fourth Precinct jail. He went to Mrs. Poldemus's cell. At sight of him, she sprang up and came to the door, staring up at him with large, appealing eyes.

" You—you're going to defend me!" she cried in that golden, remarkable voice.

Gillian looked about the corridor with an air of furtiveness. He bent down a little so that he could whisper into the girl's ear.

" The green portfolio has been found," he said.

" Where?"

" On a side-table in your husband's bungalow."

" Empty?" she whispered.

He nodded. " Where's the money?"

" I haven't the slightest idea, Mr. Hazeltine." She was wringing her hands together. Her lips trembled.

" Have you given me every shred of information that might prove helpful?"

" Yes," she said faintly.

" How about the Chinaman?"

Her eyes narrowed. " I don't know anything about him. I've known him for years, but I really know nothing about him."

Gillian shook his head. " It's no use," he said. " You can't get away with it. I've done my best. It's an airtight case."

She was staring at his eyes with genuine or cleverly simulated alarm and amazement.

" You've got just one chance to escape the chair," Gillian said rapidly. " And that's to make up a good convincing story that you killed him in self-defense. You took the money, of course. But it was rightfully, legally, yours, anyway. He was going to kill you, and you killed him in self-defense. Understand? There were no witnesses. Stick to that story and you'll escape the chair! Stick to that story about the stalled cab and they'll surely get you!"

Olive Poldemus, with those large, horrified eyes upon him, drew back into the cell.

" But it isn't true!" she breathed. " I didn't kill him! I didn't get the money! I haven't the slightest idea where the money is! And the story I told you about the stalled cab was absolutely true!"

Gillian had not been expecting that. He had expected, naturally, that she would come clean. For a moment, he was too astonished to say anything. He would have gambled his last dollar on his ability to make this girl tell the truth. She was evidently determined to lie to the very end. She was, perhaps, shielding some one.

If she had told him the truth at that moment, he would have taken her case without hesitation; would have conducted her defense with the determination to get her off with the lightest possible sentence. But he would have no dealings with any client who lied to him.

He left the jail in a state of anger. But he was not through with the case. The murder, the Chinaman, the girl's voice and her beauty had taken hold of his imagination. There was a mystery here, and he intended to solve it. When he had solved it, he might or might not decide to defend Olive Poldemus.

He returned to his office, told his private secretary to send out for a sandwich and a cup of coffee for his lunch, and picked up a copy of the noon edition of the Greenfield *Herald* which was lying on his desk. Black headlines announced that Gillian Hazeltine was interesting himself in the Poldemus mystery.

HE was reading the story when the telephone rang. It was his old friend, Josh Hammersley, a reporter on the Greenfield *Times*. Josh said he was checking up on the story that Gillian was taking the Poldemus woman's defense.

" I haven't decided," Gillian said. "What's your slant on this case?"

Josh Hammersley said he had been hard at work on it. " She got that money from

the Chink and killed her husband," Josh said. "Her taxicab story is absolutely phony. For some reason, she's trying to make a mystery out of it. The only mystery is, why didn't she cook up a smarter story?"

"You're wrong," Gillian said. "There is a mystery."

When he had hung up, his secretary said, "You aren't going to bother with this case, are you?"

"I'm going to find out what this mystery is."

She looked mad. Miss Walsh always looked mad when he dropped important business to chase will-o'-the-wisps.

"You're much too busy to touch this case, Mr. Hazeltine. How about the Struthers case?"

"Aaron Savage can handle it."

"Hmph! How about the Hamilton Jeffers will contest?"

"We'll ask Judge Wharton for a postponement."

Under the bright, accusing eyes of Miss Walsh he felt guilty. But he stood by his guns. He was going to devote himself exclusively to the Poldemus mystery until he had solved it.

"It has fascinating angles," he told her. "A murder with music! The radio was playing jazz when he was killed."

"That's no novelty," Miss Walsh said, with an air of sniffing. "You'd rather chase down a mystery than eat."

"Much rather."

She sighed. Once again, she knew, the office would be demoralized. There would be mysterious callers and mysterious telephone calls. Mr. Hazeltine would grow gaunt and hollow-eyed with sleeplessness. Secretly, she enjoyed these exciting interludes. But, being efficient and dutiful, she hated to see his regular business suffer so.

"I'm in to no one," he said briskly. "And cut off my phone."

"Yes, sir," she said resignedly.

"Tell the investigation department to get me all the information they can on Victor Poldemus, Olive Poldemus—married in San Francisco about three years ago—the Farrington jade collection—and all possible details of its recent sale to a big shot Chinaman in Chinatown named Chong Lou."

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine."

Left alone, he started a fresh cigar and went to the window. The beautiful blue Sangamo was the magical source of practically all of his legal inspirations. He would give his utmost concentration to a knotty problem and, if luck was kind, the river would give up the correct answer. Puffing away at cigar after cigar, breaking his periods of river gazing with pacings to and fro, like a restless panther, about his luxurious office, Gillian pondered this peculiarly baffling problem.

He tried various combinations of the principals in this murder case in his mind. He arranged and re-arranged them. He catalogued them as to possible motives, although there was but one outstanding motive—money—the fortune in the green portfolio.

He wanted to be convinced of Olive Poldemus's innocence. He wanted to believe that she had been made the victim of a clever conspiracy. He spent most of his time staring at the river from which, like Aphrodites springing from the foam, so many ideas had emerged.

And late in the afternoon, the beautiful blue Sangamo gave up the pale wraith of an idea. It was staggering and astounding. Yet, the more thought Gillian gave to it, the more brilliant its possibilities became.

CHAPTER IV.

BACK PORCH MURDER.

IT struck him anew with such force that he grunted. He sprang to the phone, and he telephoned an old friend, one Silky Davis. Silky Davis was, at the present time, engaged in the honest occupation of a brewer. He was the prospering proprietor of the Greenfield Brewery which brewed and distributed in kegs and cases legitimate beer under Federal and State licenses. In the days before the dawn of repeal, he had

not always been so law-abiding. A big-scale bootlegger, he had grown rich and notorious. At Gillian's suggestion, he had turned reputable. And had gathered about him the same band of loyal and sometimes dangerous young men who had, in darker days, done his dirty work for him. They, too, were now respectable, but they had forgotten none of their tricks.

At Gillian's request, Silky Davis came promptly to the Hazeltine law offices. A dapper young man still in his early thirties, with eyes like shoebuttons and hair like patent leather, he was as fastidiously dressed as in the days when he carried a "roscoe" under his left armpit.

Admitted to the inner sanctum of the Hazeltine offices, Silky Davis threw himself nervously into a chair and listened with bright black eyes to the amazing story of a murder and $465,000. Gillian told him about Sing Fat and the radio jazz, told him about the scarf, the portfolio and the over-eager testimony of Mrs. Annabelle Sharp. But he withheld his theory—the wraith of a theory which the Sangamo had given up—until the last.

"Are you going to defend this dame, boss?" the brewer asked.

"I am."

"You are an optimist. This case is in the bag. The betting downtown is ten to one that she goes to the hot squat. She has the phoniest alibi ever heard on land or sea. Am I right or am I right?"

"Perhaps you are wrong. And I want your gang to help me."

He gave Silky detailed instructions. When he had concluded, Silky said, "Boss, you know my boys are as clever as they come. But when we get through with this, give us something easy—like hunting for trained fleas in a haystack, or driving camels through the eye of a needle!"

But Gillian knew that Silky and his gang could secure the necessary information if it could be secured at all.

That evening, Gillian's beautiful green-eyed, red-headed wife greeted him on his arrival home with: "I hear you're defending another beautiful murderess."

"Perhaps she isn't a murderess."

"She has a voice like a singing angel," Vee Hazeltine said, "and eyes that would melt the frown from a bronze bust of General Pershing."

"Perhaps the girl is innocent."

"But you're taking her case!"

"Not until I unravel the mystery."

They were at dinner when, from the kitchen, came suddenly the sounds of heavy banging. Toro, their Japanese servant, came hastily into the dining room on felt soles and said in his impeccable English:

"Mr. Hazeltine, a man is at the back door. He will not give his name. He says he must see you very urgently."

Men sometimes came to the Hazeltine back door, approaching it by a path through woods and fields—wanted men, stealthy men, dangerous men, but always men who were in trouble.

A MAN who looked like a tramp was standing on the back porch, felt hat in hand. He was a short, thickset man with powerful shoulders, a square red face and small, close-set blue-green eyes. Something in his appearance stirred Gillian's memory, but he was sure he had never seen the fellow before.

Panting, the man said, "Listen, Mr. Hazeltine! You—you gotta hide me. He—he's gonna get me!"

"Who?" Gillian gasped.

"Listen! I gotta tell you somethin'! It's about this murder—this Poldemus murder."

Gillian said suspiciously, "Who are you?"

And his agitated caller panted, "I'm the guy who took the lady in that Red Top cab last night. It was a frame—see? I wanna tell you all I know. This big guy— Maybe we better go inside. I know this guy is gonna—"

A thin streak of blue-red flame in the darkness near the Hazeltine garage emphatically stopped him. The flame was accompanied by a sharp report.

The man with blue-green eyes made a little clicking sound in his throat and

seemed to collapse. His head dipped forward. His arms fell. His knees doubled up under him. He sagged in a grotesque posture, with legs a-sprawl, arms flopping loosely, forehead touching the porch floor, in a queer curtsy.

Gillian jumped aside, flattening himself against the wall, with sweat suddenly bursting out of his pores. But the assassin fired no further shots.

A glance at the back of the man's head assured Gillian that it was a curtsy to death. The bullet had entered the man's skull in back, almost precisely midway between the large, ludicrous ears.

Gillian stared down at him for a number of seconds in a state of paralysis. Then he gave a little groan. With frantically beating heart, he glared into the darkness. He saw nothing, heard nothing but the whisper of the wind in the branches.

With another groan, he backed into the house, and stumbled toward the telephone. Toro was already there, coolly calling police headquarters.

Gillian heard him in a reeling fog. "A strange man has been shot on the back porch of Mr. Hazeltine's house, on Riverside Boulevard. Kindly send some one at once."

A radio patrol car reached the Hazeltine house within ten minutes. Hard on its heels came Captain Murdock.

He examined the dead man, compared him to Mrs. Poldemus's description of the mysterious taxicab driver, and for the first time let his faith in her guilt be shaken. The dead man was removed, but the chief of the homicide bureau remained to argue. His theories, he admitted, were upset, but not so upset as you might imagine. After three Scotch highballs and two hours of discussion, he still believed that Mrs. Poldemus was holding out, shielding some one. But he agreed that, for the first time, the case had an element of mystery.

It would be fine for the newspapers, but hell on the police department.

He now made another admission. Against his better judgment, he had fallen in love with Mrs. Poldemus!

"I can't help myself," he said. "You know me, Gillian. You've known me for years. You know how cynical I am about women. I've tried to be cynical about this one. I don't say she's innocent. If she killed that guy, I don't blame her. I've never fallen for a woman before in my life. It burns me up! The first time in my life I fall in love, it's got to be a woman who's probably going to the chair!"

His blue eyes blazed. He rumpled his red hair, snatched up his hat.

"For God's sake," he said, on departing, "help us work on this case, Gillian."

"I'll work on it," Gillian promised. "You can tell Mrs. Poldemus I'm taking her defense."

"Okay. I'll tell her. But it's gonna be a tough case. It looks to me like your star witness just went to heaven!"

It was probably true: the one man who might have furnished invaluable evidence in Olive Poldemus's defense, perhaps given her an airtight alibi, was now on his way, if not to heaven, at least to the city morgue.

THE case of Olive Poldemus reached the front pages of the newspapers in full cry on the following morning. By the time the early editions went to press, hard-boiled city editors were convinced that it was not an open-and-shut case, but a genuine mystery, with all the elements of a fine circulation-builder. This mystery had wonderful ingredients: a missing fortune of almost half a million dollars, a beautiful young defendant with a remarkable voice, a mysterious Oriental figure, and a murder of a nicely brutal and passionate nature.

The coroner's jury, sitting late in the afternoon, had found Mrs. Poldemus sufficiently liable to be bound over to the Grand Jury. The Grand Jury met and returned an indictment, which Gillian did his best to quash, and the case of the State *versus* Olive Poldemus was duly entered upon the calendar of General Sessions.

Taking advantage of all the postponements the law would allow, Gillian turned his investigators loose on the slightly known facts in the affair. And it was duly re-

ported to him that Victor Poldemus had been all the things which his beautiful young widow claimed for him—and worse; that he had been a scalawag of the first water; a wastrel, a Don Juan, a man of the most unsavory sort. Little information could be gleaned from the wealthy Chinese who had purchased the famous Farrington jade collection. He refused to answer questions of any sort. And Sing Fat, a guest of the city of Greenfield, stuck to his story and refused to elaborate it.

The district attorney's office issued curt statements to the effect that their best investigators had sifted the case to its final elements; that they considered Mrs. Poldemus a red-handed murderess attempting to camouflage her deed with an atmosphere of phony mystery, and would prosecute her and send her to the chair where she belonged. So confident was Mark Storm, the district attorney, of a conviction, that he left for a fishing trip in Canada a few days before the trial opened, delegating the case to John Redfern, his most capable and hard-boiled assistant—a cool, suave, wily man with the stamp of genius upon him.

The Hazeltine offices were meanwhile demoralized, quite as Miss Walsh had anticipated, with mysterious telephone calls and mysterious comings and goings. Yet this atmosphere of excitement and mystery was accomplishing very little. Silky's gang of clever young men had, when the case finally opened, dug up no information of a useful sort, although they continued to promise a sensational development at any hour of the day or night.

Gillian went into court on the morning the case was called with the feeling that he had an even chance for a verdict. Certain vital influences were on his side. He had given out a great many interviews to the press, and had arranged for as many interviews with Mrs. Poldemus, on his famous old theory that a case was generally tried before it ever entered the courtroom. The public was by now well acquainted with the Girl With the Golden Voice, with her large, tragic, beautiful eyes, her lovely face.

Yet his optimism received a blow when he saw how John Redfern was planning to conduct the prosecution. He had had only a few head-on collisions with Redfern in the past on minor legal matters, and he soon perceived that Redfern had given this case the deepest study and looked upon it as a big stepping stone along the road to political fame and glory.

CHAPTER V.

LYING WITNESSES.

JOHN REDFERN was a tall, blond, powerful looking man of about thirty-five with the hard blue eyes of a fighter, the straight wide forehead of a

GILLIAN HAZELTINE

thinker, and the wide, prominent jaws of a man of tremendous will power. In a word: a fighter.

It was going to be, therefore, a fight. And the clerk had hardly called the case by number when the battle began. For two long, bitter days, the two of them fought over the selection of the jury, or until each had exhausted his peremptory challenges and the patience of Judge Paxton.

If the sensational character of the case hadn't been sufficient to whip up the public's interest, the promise of a courtroom fight between legal giants did so. An hour

before court opened on the first day, the courthouse corridors were packed. And when court opened, the press table was crowded.

And if the fight over the jury hadn't convinced Gillian of the quality of John Redfern's steel, the assistant prosecuting attorney's opening address to the jury dismissed his last doubts.

It was a forceful, fighting speech. In it, Mr. Redfern reminded the jury that he was performing to the best of his ability a painful duty. It was no pleasure for him to send a woman so young, so beautiful, to the electric chair. And he requested the jury to bear that in mind, and to do their duty as conscientiously as he was prepared to do his.

"I will endeavor to prove to you that Mrs. Olive Poldemus deliberately killed her husband over a sum of money."

Then he snapped, in his deep, vigorous voice, "First witness for the State—Dr. Alex Woodruff."

Dr. Alex Woodruff was attached to the Medical Examiner's office. A distinguished, white-haired man of sixty, he took the stand and was duly sworn.

HE testified that Victor Poldemus had met his death in a violent manner at the hands of a person or persons unknown to him. He had been called to the Poldemus bungalow in the Elmwood Bungalow Court shortly after three o'clock on the morning of May fourth, and there had been shown, by the police, a dead man described to him as Victor Poldemus.

John Redfern barked: "Kindly describe to the jury how this man, in your estimation, met his death."

"It was fairly obvious," the witness said. "Nothing on the scene had been disturbed. Near his head the broken fragments of a gin bottle were lying on the floor. A Scotch plaid scarf was bound tightly about his neck."

"Tightly enough to produce strangulation?"

"Yes. In my opinion, the man was knocked unconscious, or groggy, by the blow from the bottle. An autopsy showed that his skull had not been fractured by this blow. There were signs in the brain of a slight concussion."

Redfern: "Would that indicate, doctor, that the blow might have been struck by a person of limited strength?"

The witness: "I should say so. Yes."

"In your examination of the brain, did you make tests for intoxication—the presence, that is, of alcohol?"

"I did. I found alcohol present in the brain."

"Would you say that the man had been drunk at the time of death?"

"I should say he had been drinking. It is impossible to tell from an autopsy whether a man was too drunk to walk, too drunk to know what he was doing or saying. All I can say definitely is that the man on whom I performed the autopsy had been drinking some alcoholic beverage some time previous to his death."

"Did you examine the stomach?"

"I did."

"Did you find evidences of alcohol—beverage alcohol—in its contents?"

"I did."

"Could you define the nature of the beverage he had been drinking?"

"It was gin."

Redfern: "Very well. Now. Following the blow Victor Poldemus received on the head with a gin bottle, it is your opinion, is it not, that the scarf was wrapped about his neck and twisted sufficiently tight to shut off his breathing and cause death?"

The witness: "That was what the evidence proved."

"You say you reached the murder scene at a few minutes past three?"

"Yes, sir. At about five minutes past three."

"Did you take steps to ascertain at approximately what hour this man had died?"

"I did. Death had occurred at approximately one o'clock—two hours before my arrival."

Redfern picked up from the counsel table the now famous Scotch plaid scarf.

"Do you identify this scarf, doctor, as

the instrument by which Victor Poldemus was strangled?"

Dr. Woodruff examined the scarf and identified it. Redfern requested the Court's permission to introduce the scarf as a material exhibit for the State. The scarf was admitted. Redfern bowed grimly to Gillian and said curtly, " Your witness, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian said: "Dr. Woodruff, was the gin bottle with which Mr. Poldemus was struck an ordinary gin bottle?"

" I have the fragments of it here," the assistant prosecuting attorney said quickly. He held up the jagged base of the broken bottle.

Dr. Woodruff smiled and said, " It looked like an ordinary gin bottle to me."

" Would you say," Gillian asked, " that a blow struck by a person of limited strength would have shattered such a bottle?"

Dr. Woodruff: " It might depend on the tempering of the bottle. All I can say is that the wound on the dead man's head did not indicate a very forceful blow. His skull wasn't exceptionally thick, and his hair was rather thin at that spot. And it's possible, of course, that the bottle was broken by being thrown to the floor after the blow was struck."

" Did you find splinters of glass mixed with the blood on the dead man's scalp? Didn't you testify to this at the coroner's jury?"

The witness, vaguely, " Why yes. Come to think of it, I believe I did.

Mr. Hazeltine: " You're excused, doctor."

He had learned two facts of interest: First, that John Redfern was determined to overlook not the slightest chance to enchain Mrs. Poldemus in links of circumstantial evidence; second, that the State's witnesses were prejudiced.

THE next witness was the salesgirl from the exclusive department store of Saroney-Burkhart's, the girl who had sold the scarf to Mrs. Poldemus.

White with fright, the salesgirl took the stand and testified that she had sold the scarf to Mrs. Poldemus on the afternoon of April twenty-fourth. She remembered the sale distinctly because it was the last Scotch plaid scarf in stock.

" Mrs. Poldemus wouldn't have any other kind of scarf. I had to hunt high and low to find this one."

" Is that the only reason for your remembering Mrs. Poldemus?"

" No, sir. I remembered her voice. I don't think I would ever forget her voice —or what she said."

Gillian's eyes narrowed. The assistant prosecuting attorney said quickly: " What was it she said?"

The witness: " She—she said she wanted a good, strong scarf."

Mrs. Poldemus whispered to Gillian, " That's a lie—a lie!"

Gillian didn't have to be told that. It was ridiculous for the State to assume that the jury would believe that Mrs. Poldemus had bought the scarf with the intention of strangling her husband with it. However, the salesgirl's untruthful testimony on this point would indicate premeditation on the part of Mrs. Poldemus---a very dangerous and damaging point.

Redfern was saying, " Just a moment. You say, she said she wanted a good, strong scarf? Were those her actual words?"

The witness: " Yes, sir. She said she wanted a good, strong scarf."

" Will you identify Mrs. Poldemus?"

The girl pointed at the slim young woman in black who sat beside Gillian.

" That's her."

" Your witness, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian approached the witness. She stared at him from a pale face with dark defiant eyes.

" I want you to look at Mrs. Poldemus again," Gillian said. " Mrs. Poldemus, I want you to look at this girl's eyes."

Redfern snapped: " Objection!"

The court, curtly, " Over-ruled."

" Look in Mrs. Poldemus's eyes," Gillian said angrily, " and tell her that she said that."

The girl stared at Mrs. Poldemus. She flushed crimson. She quickly dropped her eyes and muttered: "She did! She said it!"

"Excused," Gillian said in a voice of contempt.

The next witness called was David Mantle. A bent-shouldered man of fifty in baggy black clothes came to the stand.

HE gave his occupation as a pharmacist. He was, he said, employed as night clerk in Ruggles's drugstore on the corner of Elmwood and Twelfth. He testified that Mrs. Poldemus—whom he now identified—had entered the drugstore at a little after two on the morning of May fourth and asked him to change a dime into two nickels so that she could use the telephone.

Redfern: "Did you particularly notice this woman when she came into the store?"

"Yes, sir; I did. I noticed that she seemed very agitated. Her face was so white I thought she was going to faint. Her eyes had a staring look. Her lips were almost gray. She was staggering a little, as if she hadn't much strength."

Redfern: "Is it your opinion that it was faintness entirely that caused her to stagger?"

The witness: "No, sir. When she asked me to change the dime, I smelled liquor on her breath."

"What kind of liquor?"

"Gin."

Olive Poldemus gasped. Gillian grasped her elbow and whispered, "Never mind. When the time comes, we'll shoot their testimony full of holes." But he wished he was sure of it. He was sure, however, of one thing: The prosecution had built its case on that gin bottle. It was Redfern's obvious intention to establish in the jury's mind the belief that Mrs. Poldemus had killed her husband after drinking gin from the very bottle with which she had struck him unconscious. With gin, he would discredit her in the eyes of the jury. With gin, he would strengthen his circumstantial case against her.

Redfern: "Are you sure it was gin?"

The witness smiled faintly. "Well, I'm a pharmacist. I ought to be acquainted with the smell of juniper and coreander oils."

The courtroom tittered. Most of the jurors were looking at the ceiling. Hitherto, they had stared as one man at the accused.

Redfern: "Was Mrs. Poldemus wearing a scarf?"

"No, sir."

Gillian took the witness for cross-examination, tried to trip him up, and failed. Mr. Mantle stuck to his story: Mrs. Poldemus on the night of the murder had entered the drugstore under the influence of gin.

THE next witness was a good-looking blond young man who answered to the name of Barney Pickett. He gave his occupation as that of a taxicab driver, in the employ of the Green Line Taxicab Corporation.

Mr. Pickett stated that at shortly after two o'clock on the morning of May fourth he had been despatched to pick up a call from the Ruggles drugstore, corner of Elmwood and Twelfth.

The assistant prosecuting attorney asked him if he could identify the person who had sent that call.

"Yes, sir. That lady sitting over there by Gillian Hazeltine."

"When you pulled up to the drugstore, describe what happened."

"The drugstore door flew open and this dame came out."

"Did her behavior strike you at the time as strange in any respect?"

"No, sir; not for that time in the mornin'. I've seen plenty of dames in her condition at that time in the mornin'."

"What was her apparent condition, Mr. Pickett?"

The handsome young man grinned. "Well, if you ask me, she was plastered to the eyeballs."

The judge sternly interrupted: "You must confine your answers to specific details. Do you mean that the accused seemed intoxicated?"

"Yes, your honor."

Redfern: "Describe Mrs. Poldemus's actions."

"She came out of the drugstore walkin' pretty unsteady. She was pale, the way some people get when they're tight, and there was this fuzzy look in her eyes. When I saw how things were, I jumped out o' the cab and held the door open for her, in case she needed helpin' in."

Redfern: "Did she?"

The witness: "She sure did! She would of fell flat on her face if I hadn't of grabbed her by the arm!"

"The beast!" Olive Poldemus whispered indignantly.

The witness: "I helped her in and asked her where she wanted to go. 'Home!' she said. 'Home, James!' I asked her where she lived, and she opened her pocketbook and looked at a piece o' paper. Then she said, 'The Ravenhurst Arms.' So I took her there."

Redfern: "Did anything of an unusual nature occur during the drive to the Ravenhurst Arms?"

The witness: "She told me twice to drive fast. She said she had to get home. She said that two or three times—'I gotta get home, I gotta get home.'"

Redfern: "Aside from her actions, did you notice anything else about her, indicating that she had been drinking?"

The witness: "I smelled her breath. It smelled like gin to me."

Redfern bowed to Gillian. "Your witness, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian took the lying taxicab driver back and forth across his testimony, but without success. Barney Pickett stuck to his story.

The next witness was Officer Henry Gibney, a clean-cut young man with steady brown eyes and a firm mouth.

He testified that he was the officer in charge of Radio Patrol Car 72. He was cruising his district on the night of May fourth, when—at 3.11 in the morning—he was told by the radio despatcher to proceed to the Elmwood Bungalow Court and "see the woman."

The woman had been Mrs. Annabelle Sharp. She had telephoned police headquarters to report what "sounded to her like a murder next door."

"I went to the Elmwood Bungalow Court," the radio patrolman testified, "and this Mrs. Sharp said a man had been killed next door. I went next door. The lights were on. A window shade was up about eight inches. I could see a man lying face down on the floor. The front and back doors were locked. I broke down the front door to get in. I found the man was dead. I called the homicide bureau. In about twenty minutes, Captain Murdock and a fingerprint man came. About four o'clock we went to the Ravenhurst Arms and arrested Mrs. Poldemus."

This was straight, honest testimony.

"While you were waiting for the detectives," Redfern said, "what did you do?"

"I looked around the room."

"Did you notice, on a table near the kitchen door, anything of interest?"

"I noticed a half empty gingerale bottle, a couple of glasses part full of gin and gingerale and a bowl of melting ice."

"How many glasses?"

"Two."

"Two," Redfern said impressively. "I see. How do you know they contained gin and gingerale?"

"I smelled 'em."

"Did you touch them?"

"No, sir. I bent down and smelled. I was afraid of fingerprints."

"Thank you, officer. Mr. Hazeltine?"

GILLIAN waived cross-examination. John Redfern was doing a very thorough job of it. Even with an honest witness, he had built a stronger case against Mrs. Poldemus. Two lying witnesses had testified that she had been drinking gin. One honest witness had testified that he had seen two glasses containing gin and gingerale in the bungalow sitting room. And Victor Poldemus had been struck unconscious with a gin bottle.

Captain Murdock came to the stand. His blue eyes had an angry look and his mouth was set in a hard line. Gillian had observed

the detective's face from time to time while the testimony relating to the gin was being taken.

On the stand, Dan Murdock's eyes softened a moment as he glanced at Olive Poldemus. She gave him a faint, sad little smile in return. Then his eyes swung to John Redfern and they were like cobalt again.

"I went into the bungalow and looked things over," he said crisply. "I examined the dead man. His head was bloody. A smashed gin bottle was lying on the floor near him. There was this scarf tied tight around his neck."

"How about fingerprints?" Redfern interrupted.

"I brought a fingerprint man. What prints there were were all blurred."

Captain Murdock identified the broken gin bottle, the scarf and the green leather portfolio. Redfern requested that the portfolio be admitted as Material Evidence C for the State, then asked Captain Murdock if he, too, had noticed the contents of the taboret near the kitchenette door. Yes, it was his opinion that Poldemus and some one else had been drinking gin and ginger-ale at about the time of his death.

"But," he said quickly, "I didn't smell gin on Mrs. Poldemus when I went to her apartment and arrested her."

"What time did you arrest her?" Redfern snapped.

"A little after four."

"Or approximately three hours after her husband's death, as estimated by the medical examiner?"

"Yes."

"What was her appearance when she opened the door to you?"

"She looked sleepy. She looked as if she'd just woke up."

"In other words, three hours had passed since she had taken that last drink of gin at her husband—"

Gillian objected to that. "Mr. Redfern has not proved that the defendant drank any gin at her husband's bungalow, or that she went to her husband's bungalow."

The Court: "Sustained."

Redfern tried another angle. "You say she looked sleepy?"

Captain Murdock: "Yes."

"And, at that time, you smelled no gin on her breath?"

Captain Murdock: "I would say, the lady had not been drinking."

Redfern: "I did not ask you for your opinion. I asked you if, when she opened the door, you smelled gin on her breath."

Captain Murdock: "No. You asked me how she acted. I said she acted as if she hadn't been drinking. She acted as if she didn't know what it was all about. I told her her husband was dead, and asked her what she knew about it. She said she didn't know anything about it. She looked shocked. I took her down town and booked her on suspicion."

MR. REDFERN waved to Gillian. Here was an opening—a chance to batter down the gin testimony, and Gillian leaped at it.

"Captain, have you had much experience with intoxicated people?"

"Yes, sir. I've dealt with thousands of them."

"Has it been your experience that a person so drunk that he—or she—staggers, will have no trace of gin on his—or her—breath three hours later?"

"No, sir. I've found that a person who has been as drunk as that will have gin on his breath a good many hours afterward."

"And you detected no trace of gin on Mrs. Poldemus's breath at 4 A.M.?"

"No, sir."

Gillian asked him several more questions relating to the accused's sober condition when arrested, and when he was finished with this line of questioning, he knew he had undone most of the damage accomplished by the State's witnesses. But there was an even more important point to be established in the minds of the jurors.

He said, "Captain, on the night of Mrs. Poldemus's arrest, did she give an account of herself for a period covering the time between midnight and 2 A.M.

The assistant prosecuting attorney ob-

jected, saying the question was leading. As this was the most delicate point in the State's case, Gillian had anticipated strenuous objections.

He said, "Very well, Mr. Redfern. I ask the Court's permission to read into the record that portion of Mrs. Poldemus's signed statement to the police relating to her whereabouts at the time, as established by the medical examiner, the murder occurred."

This permission was granted, and Gillian read Mrs. Poldemus's account of her taxicab ride to the Gray Goose and her subsequent detention in the forest when the taxicab broke down.

When this had been done, he said to the witness, "Now, captain, I want you to tell the jury in your own words what Mrs. Poldemus told you in regard to that taxicab ride."

Redfern objected on the grounds that the witness referred to, the taxicab driver, was not available to testify in his own behalf. He insisted that what he wanted was direct testimony, not hearsay.

Gillian, over-ruled, now attempted to introduce Captain Murdock's description of the man who had been shot to death on the Hazeltine back porch.

Redfern again objected. And when Gillian attempted to have Captain Murdock testify that the taxicab driver described by the accused answered to the description of the man shot on the back porch, Redfern cried: "The witness is prejudiced!"

The Court asked him to explain. And Redfern shouted, "I defy Captain Murdock to deny that he is prejudiced! I defy him to deny that he is in love with the accused!"

The judge told Mr. Redfern to stop shouting. To the witness he said, "Captain Murdock, do you wish to deny this?"

Captain Murdock vigorously shook his red head. "I don't deny it. It's true."

And in those two brief sentences went twinkling Gillian's last hope for giving his client an alibi. Because he was Mrs. Poldemus's lawyer, he could not himself take the stand and testify to what the taxi driver had said, and for a like reason he could not put Toro on the stand.

The case against Olive Poldemus remained airtight and copper-riveted.

John Redfern took Captain Murdock for re-examination. He said: "Captain, in your examination of the bungalow sitting room, did you notice the two glasses partly full of gin and gingerale on the taboret near the kitchen door?"

"I did."

"Did you conclude that Poldemus and some other person had been drinking at or previous to the time of his murder?"

"I did."

"That will be all."

CHAPTER VI.

BOMBSHELL.

COURT was now recessed until the afternoon. The first witness called after recess was Sing Fat. The Chinese took the stand and faced the courtroom, his yellow face calm, his little dark eyes inscrutable. He testified that he was a nationalized American citizen, having lived in the United States since he was eight months old. He stated that he had been in the employ of a prominent Chinese importer, Chong-Lou, for the past twenty-three years. He corroborated the published facts relating to the sale by Mrs. Olive Poldemus to Chong-Lou of the famous Farrington jade collection for $465,000, and he told of his trip to Greenfield from San Francisco with the money in the famous green leather portfolio.

He had reached the Greenfield Hotel from the Union Station at a little after midnight.

Redfern: "Had you known the accused in San Francisco?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you well acquainted with her voice."

"I was very well acquainted with her voice."

"Had you ever remarked upon its distinctiveness, upon its unique and strange

beauty, its little trick of breaking into huskiness at every few words?"

"I had. Yes."

"Did Mrs. Poldemus telephone you a few minutes after you had entered your room in the Greenfield Hotel?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did she say?"

"She said she would send a man to my room for the money in fifteen minutes."

"Did this emissary come?"

"He did."

"And you gave him the money?"

"I did."

The assistant prosecuting attorney picked up from the counsel table the celebrated green leather portfolio.

"In this?"

"Yes."

"That will be all."

Gillian said, "Cross-examination waived, but I wish this witness to be held for recall."

The State's next witness was Mrs. Annabelle Sharp. She had bought a smart tan dress and had her hair waved for the occasion. And it was quite obvious that Mrs. Sharp relished this opportunity to bask in the limelight.

Gillian watched her take the stand with misgivings. Her bright eyes, her sharp nose, her flush of excitement were dangerous omens. She was the State's star witness, and he didn't trust her. She wasn't reliable. She was a shrew, and he distrusted shrews.

Settling herself in the witness chair, she tilted her head as if she were posing for a photograph. Her gleaming eyes swept the jury box, the spectators, and were fixed on the press table.

MRS. ANNABELLE SHARP testified that she occupied the bungalow adjoining the one in which Victor Poldemus had been murdered. She gave her testimony with eagerness. Occasionally she glared at Olive Poldemus, and she generally referred to her as "that woman," in scathing tones.

There was, Gillian suspected, jealousy here—the jealousy of the ugly and middle-aged for the beautiful and young. Mrs. Sharp's nose became pink. Her thin, bony face became a brighter red.

Redfern: "Mrs. Sharp, kindly tell the jury something about your knowledge of the accused."

"Yes, sir." The witness gave an air of smacking her lips, as if with relish. "She came to the bungalow court at about ten o'clock on the morning of May first. That was the first time she came, or at least the first time I saw her."

"What were you doing at the time?"

"Raking my lawn. She was dressed in a blue dress, with a blue béret and black suède slippers, and she was carrying a light-blue leather purse."

"What happened?"

"She asked me where Mr. Poldemus lived, and I told her. She went to the door. Mr. Poldemus opened it as she went up the steps, and he said, 'Well, Olive! My darling! Come right in.' His radio was going, but he must have turned it down, because I could hear their voices over it, after she got in."

"Did they quarrel?"

"It sounded like he was giving her a good bawling out for something, and she kept arguing with him."

"When she addressed you, and when you heard her arguing with her husband, did anything about her voice strike you?"

"It certainly did! I never heard a voice like it before in my life!"

"Did you hear it again, Mrs. Sharp?"

"I heard it every time she came."

"How long did she stay that first time?"

"About two hours."

"Will you describe her subsequent visits?"

Mrs. Sharp did so. There had been two subsequent visits, in the morning, aside from the one late at night when Mr. Poldemus was murdered.

Gillian objected. "The witness has not said that she saw Mrs. Poldemus on the night of the murder."

Mrs. Sharp glared at him with glinting eyes. "I guess you don't know all I saw!"

Gillian glanced quickly at John Redfern. He had not suspected that Redfern, with all his capacity for turning witnesses into perjurers, could have gone this far—could have bribed, cajoled or bullied Mrs. Sharp into becoming an eye-witness. And Gillian was baffled by the expression on Redfern's face. It was an expression of wonder, of surprise.

The judge was saying: " Mrs. Sharp, if you were an eye-witness to any of the events dealing with the death of Victor Poldemus, you will please be as specific as possible."

And the witness said excitedly, " Yes, judge; I intend to be."

REDFERN had been leaning against the rail which separated the clerk's, the counsel, and the press tables from the spectators. He pushed himself away from the rail and strode quickly to within a few feet of the witness chair.

His surprise was past, if it had been surprise. He said quickly and gently, " Mrs. Sharp, will you tell the jury in your own words just what you saw and heard on the night of May third and the early morning of May fourth?"

" Yes, sir; I will, gladly. Mr. Poldemus went out for his dinner at about seven and came home about eight. I was sitting on my porch steps and saw him. Right after he went in, he turned on his radio as usual. Along about eleven I went to bed. Voices of people having an argument woke me up. I looked at my watch and it was about ten of twelve. I put on my kimono and went downstairs and out on the front porch. I recognized Mr. Poldemus's voice and I recognized that woman's voice—"

" You mean, Mrs. Poldemus?"

" I certainly do! They were yelling away at each other and—"

" Could you hear what it was about?"

" Money! It was always about money. Then I heard him say something about telephoning, and things were quiet for a minute, except for the radio. It kept right on going through it all. Things seemed quieter, so I went back to bed. I must have been in bed half an hour when I heard somebody come into the court and go up the steps of Mr. Poldemus's bungalow. I looked out my bedroom window. In the light from his window—Mr. Poldemus's—I could see this big tall man. I didn't hear anything he said. But I've got my theory. My theory is that this big tall man is that woman's sweetie. She telephoned him to get the money from that Chink, and she telephoned the Chink that this boy-friend of hers was coming to get it. And this boy-friend went and got it and brought the money—"

Gillian was angrily objecting. This sharp-nosed, mean-eyed, hysterical woman was going to run amuck in spite of anything he could do. But even the judge was banging with his gavel.

" Mrs. Sharp, most of what you are saying is obviously the purest assumption. Can you produce definite evidence to support your statement that this man you saw was in any way connected with the accused? Did you hear her telephone him, or did you hear her telephone Sing Fat?"

" No, your honor; but—"

" You are permitted to testify to nothing which you did not see or hear. Your opinions are not admissible as evidence. Go back to what you saw and what you heard."

" All right, your honor. I saw this big, tall fellow come up the sidewalk and go up Mr. Poldemus's steps with this thing under his arm—"

" What thing?"

" The portfolio!" Mrs. Sharp cried. " A minute later he went away."

Redfern: " With the portfolio?"

" Nope. He didn't have it then."

" Proceed, Mrs. Sharp." It seemed to Gillian that Redfern looked and acted anxious. And Gillian guessed that Mrs. Sharp was giving evidence that was news to Redfern, and that she was extemporizing; he suspected that all this attention and excitement was stimulating her imagination. And he watched her as an eagle watches a hawk.

" After this big, tall fellow went, after

leaving the portfolio, I heard the sound of Mr. Poldemus getting ice cubes out of his ice tray."

Redfern: "What time was it when this big tall fellow came and went away?"

"I should say a little after twelve-thirty."

"All right, proceed."

"I was worried. They kept quarreling and quarreling. And I was afraid they were coming to blows. So I slipped out onto the grass and got down and looked into the window. The shade was down to about eight inches from the bottom, so I could see everything that went on."

Redfern: "Wasn't it raining?"

"Yes, raining quite hard. But I didn't mind."

A FEW of the spectators giggled. Gillian glanced at Olive Poldemus. Her lips were parted. Her eyes were wide and staring at the witness. She was as pale as death, and tense. He was afraid she was going to scream—or faint. He was prepared for anything. He could see her fingers fretting at her handkerchief.

"I saw Mrs. Poldemus standing there. I saw Mr. Poldemus mixing two drinks of gin and gingerale. He put in the gin, then he put in the ice, then he poured in the gingerale. They were stiff drinks. And on the center table was piled up more money than I ever saw in my life. Two big stacks of it! As if they'd been dividin' it. The radio was turned on so loud I couldn't hear what they said. But I saw everything. They drank their drinks and they kept jawin' at each other. When those drinks were gone, he mixed two more and they drank most of them. When these drinks were almost gone, they put the glasses down on that little table by the kitchen, and that woman picked up the gin bottle and asked him a question. I didn't hear what the question was—"

"Just a moment, Mrs. Sharp," the assistant prosecuting attorney broke in. "At this time, was Mrs. Poldemus wearing this scarf?"

He picked up the blue and red scarf.

"Yes, sir. I was just gettin' around to the scarf."

"Pardon my interruption. You were saying that Mrs. Poldemus picked up the gin bottle and asked Mr. Poldemus a question."

"That's right, but I don't know what it was she asked him. The radio was so loud. Anyway, he turned to the little table where the drinks were. And when his back was turned, she lifted up the gin bottle and smashed him over the head with it."

"Did the bottle break?"

"No, sir, not till she threw it on the floor. Mr. Poldemus staggered back from the table and fell down. She yanked off her scarf and wrapped it around his neck and—and—I think I fainted."

A sound like a faint, distant roar rose up from the spectators. Even the jury seemed spellbound.

Gillian said hotly: "Your honor, this testimony is obviously the product of a hysterical imagination. I strenuously object to its admission as credible evidence. It conflicts on a dozen points with the stories she told me, the police and the reporters. I refer you to any of the newspapers containing interviews with this woman."

The court: "Mrs. Sharp, what have you to say about this?"

The witness: "Judge, so help me God, I have told nothing but the truth. I was waiting until I came into court."

The court: "Was there any particular reason for waiting?"

The witness: "Yes, judge. I received threatening telephone calls. I didn't dare tell the truth until now."

Mr. Hazeltine: "Your honor, this woman has a diseased imagination!"

The court: "From whom were these threatening telephone calls?"

The witness: "I don't know, your honor. Some man telephoned me. I think it was that woman's boy-friend. I don't know. He called me up the day after the murder and again about a week ago. He said if I told what I knew, he'd kill me."

Mr. Hazeltine: "Your honor, this is ri-

diculous. This woman could not, obviously, know that she had been seen, as she untruthfully claims she was—at that window."

Mrs. Sharp: "Is that so? How do you know that big fellow wasn't out there in the dark all the time?"

Gillian gave a shrug of despair. "If the court please, I move that this woman's entire testimony be stricken from the record. Obviously, it is perjured."

AT this point, John Redfern, who had seemed dazed, as a beggar might seem dazed, in whose hand is unexpectedly dropped a thousand-dollar bill—at this point, Mr. Redfern caught up with the trend of events.

"Not at all, your honor!" he said vigorously. "And I most strenuously object to Mr. Hazeltine's aspersions on the honesty or credibility of this witness. She is a respectable woman, with nothing to gain by lying. She has come here prepared and willing—bravely, I might say—to do her duty by the State and by Truth!"

"That's right!" Mrs. Sharp upheld him. "And that's exactly why I'm here. That big fellow couldn't bulldoze me! And if it'll do him any good to kill me now, let him!"

With upthrust chin, she stared at the reporters as Joan of Arc might have stared at her persecutors. Liar she might be, but this was her moment, and Gillian knew how impressive her theatrics were to any jury, and this was rather a dumb jury. Some of them were even staring at her with admiration.

The court: "I will reserve decision, Mr. Hazeltine, until the State completes the taking of direct testimony. You may proceed, Mr. Redfern."

Redfern: "You say you fainted, Mrs. Sharp."

"Yes, Mr. Redfern; I was so horrified, I fainted dead away. I don't know how long I was unconscious. When I came to, there I was, lying in the wet grass. It had been raining hard, and I was soaked to the skin. I guess it was the rain that brought me to. I got up off the grass and looked in the window again. That woman was gone. The money was gone. And poor Mr. Poldemus was lying face down with that scarf around his neck."

Mrs. Sharp paused and shook her head, as if with tragic recollections.

"I went to the front door, but it was locked. I was in a sort of a daze. I went home and got into a dry nightgown, and hung up the wet nightgown and the kimono to dry. I must have been in a kind of a daze. I don't know when it was that I telephoned the police."

Mrs. Sharp stopped, lifted her hands and let them fall in a gesture of finality. That was all, but it was plenty. Grimly, most carefully, the assistant prosecuting attorney began asking questions. He treated her with all the delicacy of one asking questions of a sick child whose mind may crack at any moment. He brought out more details.

And when he at last relinquished the witness to Mr. Hazeltine, he did so with the greatest regrets, the most obvious concern. For Gillian Hazeltine was famous for his rough handling of lying witnesses; famous for scaring the truth out of them.

Gillian did not question her until he had once again appealed to the bench to have her testimony expunged from the record. The judge instructed him to cross-examine.

And to that cross-examination Gillian brought all the skill, all the craft, all the brilliant power which had made him famous as a courtroom genius.

MRS. SHARP was as wary as a bird being stalked by a snake. She hopped about in her answers, each time slyly eluding him just when he was sure he had her in his grasp. He could not break her down. He caught her in minor discrepancies. He hammered on them. He flew back to them. But he could not trip her up in any major particular. She was a champion liar. In all his years as a trial lawyer, she was the greatest, most complete, most brilliant liar he had ever encountered.

He could not batter her down. He could not outsmart her. When he was through with her, he was soaked with perspiration. He was limp with weariness. And all he had succeeded in doing was making the case against his client tighter.

The woman was inexhaustible. Her voice remained sharp and loud. She sipped water from a glass. She never paused to weigh his questions, but shot back answers before the questions were hardly out of his mouth.

He had long ago despaired of Silky's turning up the precious information he desired; had long ago realized that his case for his client must rest upon its merits; upon Olive Poldemus's story, her alibi, backed up by the murder on his back porch of the taxicab driver.

That would have been enough. He had not anticipated Mrs. Sharp's sudden, hysterical eye-witness testimony. He must and he could batter her down; prove to this jury that she was lying. He could break her down with time. It might take days. And he was willing to devote days. His very reputation, the very life of his witness, were at stake.

And she would crack. In the end, she must break down and tell the truth. The weakest spot of her testimony was her description of the visit to the bungalow of "the big, tall man," with the portfolio under his arm.

He went back to that again and again. But in spite of his determination to break this woman down, he knew in his heart that she would never crack. He could see it in her glinting eyes, hear it in her sharp voice. Sick dread filled his heart. He knew, looking at Mrs. Annabelle Sharp, that the case was lost—hopelessly, completely. The lovely girl wrongly accused of the murder of Victor Poldemus was doomed to death, to pay for a crime she had not committed. And Gillian Hazeltine, with all his genius, all his skill and cleverness, was powerless to prevent it—defeated by an hysterical, lying shrew!

He barked hoarsely: "Could you see the color of the portfolio?"

"No," she said. "But it looked green."

"Oh, merciful heavens, how could it look green and not be green?"

"I didn't say it wasn't green. I said I couldn't swear to the color of it. But I said it looked green. It didn't look black or brown. And it didn't look gray. So I sort of thought it looked green."

"The nearest light was sixty feet away," Gillian said. "It was raining. You said this big, tall man had the portfolio under his arm, held against his side by his elbow. More than half of the portfolio must have been hidden from your sight. Not only that, but his arm which hugged the portfolio against his side must have been casting a shadow—from the street light—on the portion of the portfolio that you could see. In other words, it was in darkness. And you're trying to make us believe that, on this rainy, dark night—"

He stopped. A man had come slipping up the aisle and inside the enclosure; a man white-faced and with excited, snapping black eyes. It was Silky Davis.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GUILTY ONE.

GILLIAN stopped his question in midbreath. Silky, panting, whispered into his ear: "Drop everything, boss. It's hot! It's hotter than a stovelid."

"Your honor," Gillian said, "certain information bearing on this case has been brought to my attention." He asked for a postponement until the following morning. His request was flatly refused.

"Very well," Gillian said. "I will postpone further cross-examination. I emphatically wish to have Sing Fat held for further examination. Does the State wish to reëxamine this witness?"

John Redfern barked: "The State rests!"

"I thought so," Gillian sighed. "Very well. Mr. Savage, my assistant, will open the case for the defense." And to Aaron Savage, his assistant, he said, "Put Olive

on the stand and let her tell her story. Just let her talk." To the girl he whispered, "Don't worry. Go to the stand and talk to them straight from the heart. I'll be back before he can cross-examine."

With which he grasped Silky Davis by the arm and took him out of the court-room at a jog-trot. In Silky's car, they dashed through Greenfield at risk of life, limb and arrest, stopping presently before a squalid apartment house on Reardon Street—the tenement district of the city.

They climbed to the fifth floor. Above the bell button of apartment 5-B was a small brass frame enclosing a card bearing the name Miss Julia Ramey. Gillian pressed the button. There was no response. He pressed it again. There were sounds of stirring within, then the door was opened by a young woman in a soiled pink satin Japanese kimono, richly embroidered with storks and chrysanthemums. She was a "white" or platinum blonde, her hair being almost as white and almost as curly as sheep's wool. Her face was flushed and her eyes were heavy with sleep. She was pretty in a cheap way. Gillian guessed her age at twenty-three.

"Are you Miss Ramey?"

Sleepy-eyed, she stared at him. She sniffled. "Yes," she said huskily. "I'm Miss Ramey." She produced a handkerchief from the long sleeve of the kimono and blew her nose.

"We'd like to have a little talk with you," Gillian said. "It's in connection with the Poldemus murder case."

Miss Ramey seemed to come a little wider awake. "You'll have to excuse me," she said. "I got a terrible cold. I can hardly talk. You want to see me about what?"

"The Poldemus murder case."

Now quite awake, she frowned. Her pencilled eyebrows went up. Her heavily mascaraed lashes fluttered up and down. The impression she gave was one of sleepy bewilderment.

"How," she asked, "can that possibly affect me?"

"We thought," Silky said smoothly, "you could give us some dope on this fellow Harold Major. Your boy-friend, sister."

"I guess I'm just completely in the dark," Miss Ramey answered.

"Isn't Harold Major your boy-friend?" Gillian asked.

"All I have to say," Miss Ramey replied, "is you two guys have a hell of a lot of nerve waking me up to answer a flock of personal questions."

"We'll go inside," Silky said, "where we can talk better."

Blocking the doorway, she stiffened. But she did not block it for long. Silky picked her up by her elbows and carried her into the small, cheap, dark living room, and dropped her into an overstuffed chair.

THE living room smelled of tobacco and cheap incense. It was decorated chiefly with photographs of the more virile movie stars.

Miss Julia Ramey glared up with hard blue eyes at the two intruders.

"This gentleman," Silky said, "is Gillian Hazeltine, the famous criminal lawyer. Get busy and talk."

The bleached blonde looked quickly at Gillian and reached for a green lacquered tin of cigarettes. She lit one. Silky reached down, took it out of her mouth and said, "Stop stalling, sister. This is a matter of life and death."

The girl said, "What the hell do I know about the Poldemus murder case?"

"I guess we're just wastin' time, boss," Silky said.

"I guess you are," Miss Ramey affirmed.

"So you better get dressed and come to court," Silky said. "Is that right, boss?"

"That's right," Gillian said firmly. "Are you dead sure about this girl?"

"Sure about what?" she hoarsely demanded.

Silky nodded. "Sure that you're gonna answer a flock of questions, sister. Come on and get dressed."

She was pale now. "You must be screwy," she said.

" In the bathroom, sister. You get dressed in the bathroom and I wait outside. The bedroom has a fire-escape, and we're takin' no chances." He grasped her hands and yanked her to her feet. " And if you stay in the bathroom longer than ten minutes, I'm gonna shoot the lock off."

In approximately fifteen minutes, Miss Ramey, followed by Silky, emerged from her bedroom. She wore a green-knit sports suit and a jaunty little green hat. She looked tougher than when last seen.

She said huskily, " It's all a big mystery to me, and somebody's going to hear about this, and I don't mean maybe."

" The judge," Silky said, " will gladly listen to everything you have to say."

She had looked more and more rattled since their appearance in her doorway. On the drive to the courthouse she asked questions. What was it all about? Why was she to be questioned on something she knew less than nothing about? Gillian maintained an ominous silence. Silky answered her with jeers. By the time they reached the courthouse, Miss Ramey was so pale that her make-up showed in hard patches. There was dew on her upper lip, although the day was cool.

The two men conducted her to the courtroom and down the aisle. At the gate to the enclosure, Silky whispered to Gillian: " Just keep her talking, boss, until Nick Seeley and Jake Long get here with that bozo. It shouldn't be long."

Olive Poldemus was on the stand. Her beautiful golden voice was holding the courtroom entranced. She was pale, but she appeared to have full possession of herself. She was telling of the mysterious telephone call she had received at midnight.

Gillian interrupted: " With the court's permission, Mrs. Poldemus's testimony will be held over until later. I wish this young woman, Miss Julia Ramey, to take the stand. I believe she has important testimony to give relevant to certain events which took place on the night Victor Poldemus was murdered."

He held Miss Ramey firmly by the arm while Olive Poldemus left the witness chair. John Redfern was staring at the girl in the green dress. The judge was looking at her with surprise and inquiry over the tops of his spectacles.

" Who is this young woman?"

" She'll tell you all about it, your honor."

GILLIAN'S voice sounded surer than he felt. He had only Silky's word for it that this girl was the girl they wanted, and he had only his own skill and cleverness to make Miss Julia Ramey tell what he wanted her to tell. If she outthought him, if she turned silent and stubborn, he was going to look ridiculous. He was, provided Silky's men didn't appear at the psychological moment with the long-sought Harold Major.

Miss Ramey took the stand and looked out over the courtroom with an air of bewilderment. Mechanically, she held up her right hand and took the oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. She said to the clerk, " You'll have to excuse me. I have a dreadful cold." She blew her nose, looked at the judge, the jury, and back to Gillian, who wasn't three feet away.

" It's a complete mystery to me" she asserted. " I was just taking a nap, and this man woke me up and some other man made me get dressed."

The judge said: " Mr. Hazeltine, will you be so good as to explain this?"

" Your honor, this young woman has important testimony to give. With your permission, I will examine—"

" I object to this irregularity," Redfern interrupted.

" This witness is on the stand," Gillian barked, " and is about to give relevant testimony." Without waiting for permission to proceed, he began firing questions at Miss Ramey, his whole object being to break through that hard shell of defense.

" What is your occupation?"

" I have no occupation."

" Where were you last employed?"

" By the telephone company."

" When did you leave there?"

"I don't remember."

"Wasn't it on the third of May?"

"Somewhere around then."

"Somewhere around the time Victor Poldemus was murdered?"

She said hastily, in her husky voice, "I don't remember what date it was. I don't know anything about the murder of Victor Poldemus."

"What kind of work did you do for the telephone company?"

"I was an operator."

"In what department?"

"Time signals."

"Kindly explain that to the jury."

"Explain what?"

"What you did. Oh, never mind. I'll put it in a question. Were you employed in the department which gives out the correct time when subscribers call Standard 1200?"

"Yes, I was."

"Why did you leave the company?"

"The hours were too hard. And I caught this cold."

Gillian was watching the closed doors at the end of the long courtroom aisle, the center aisle. If Silky's lieutenants, Nick Seeley and Jake Long, didn't arrive soon, his case was lost.

"I can't see," Redfern interrupted, "what bearing this has on the case at issue."

"I can't either," Miss Ramey said. "It's a mystery to me. There I was, sound asleep, when this man and another fellow—"

"Kindly tell the jury," Gillian harshly stopped her, "what you did on the night of May third and on the early morning of May fourth. It had something to do with a telephone call. What was it?"

THE girl on the witness stand looked flustered. "I don't know what you mean," she said hoarsely.

"I'll help your memory," Gillian snapped. "On the night of May third, did you not go to the Elmwood Bungalow Court and to the bungalow occupied by Victor Poldemus?"

"I certainly did not!"

The court: "Mr. Hazeltine, does this woman know anything about the murder of Victor Poldemus? I am at a loss to understand just what you're driving at."

Mr. Hazeltine: "Your honor, this woman knows all about the murder of Victor Poldemus. With your permission, I will secure this testimony. Miss Ramey, will you think harder, please? Did you not go to Mr. Poldemus's apartment on the night of May third? Did you not go there by arrangement with him?"

"I did not!" Miss Ramey's hands were in the lap of the bright green dress. They were nervously plucking at one another. She was paler. Her make-up looked harder.

"What do you know about Harold Major?"

"I don't know anything about him!" the girl huskily cried.

"Isn't he your sweetheart?"

"No!"

"Haven't you been keeping company with him for six or eight months?"

"I've known him six or eight months, but he certainly isn't my sweetheart."

"Do you deny that you went with him on the night of May third to Victor Poldemus's bungalow—"

"I did not go to that bungalow!"

"Where were you when Harold Major went there?"

"I was—" she began hysterically, and stopped. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Where were you?"

"Home! Home in bed!"

"Did you telephone from your apartment?" Gillian shouted.

"I telepho— I didn't telephone!" She ran her fingers up into the hair at her temples and said, in that husky voice, "You can't make me say anything that isn't true!"

Gillian, watching the closed doors at the end of the long courtroom aisle, the center aisle, saw them open; saw three men standing in the hall; saw one of them arguing with the bailiff on guard there.

He recognized two of the men as Nick Seeley and Jake Long. He stared intently at the man who walked between them—a tall, heavy-shouldered man of about thirty in a gray suit. Gillian's heart jumped. Nick Seeley grimly held the man's left arm, and Jake Long grimly held his right arm. He was pale and he looked bewildered.

In the momentary silence, as the trio started down the aisle, Gillian said quickly, "I beg your honor's tolerance and indulgence for this irregularity. May Sing Fat now be called. He should be in the witness room. I wish to prove a vitally important point."

The judge looked dubious. He said, "You knew very well, Mr. Hazeltine, how strenuously I object to courtroom theatrics. I have warned you repeatedly. If this is merely a trick of yours, I warn you now, I shall hold you in contempt."

"It is not a trick, your honor. It is serious and urgent."

"Very well. Bring in Sing Fat."

THE trio was now halfway down the aisle. The white-faced tall man between Silky's lieutenant was staring glassily at the girl on the witness stand. And she stared glassily back at him. She swallowed, as if with difficulty. He licked dry, pale lips.

Gillian was pale, too. He was gambling the case and his reputation, so to speak, on the turn of one card. And it was Sing Fat who held the trump card. If he played it, and if Gillian followed with sufficient dramatics, the case might be won. It was a campaign sprinkled with "ifs." It was courtroom drama of a type to turn criminal lawyers gray before their time. Moments like it possibly explained why Gillian's black hair was prematurely sprinkled with white.

"Stop!" he barked, when the trio reached the enclosure gate. "Mr. Seeley, is this man Harold Major?"

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine," Nick Seeley answered.

The bailiff returned with Sing Fat, who came down a side aisle and entered the enclosure, looking calm, Buddhistic, incurious.

Gillian said to him, "Sing Fat, will you kindly look at these three men. Will you tell me if you recognize any one of them?"

The middle-aged Chinese scrutinized the three men. He stiffened, seeming to grow taller. "The man in the middle," he said, "is the man who called at my hotel and to whom I gave the money in the green portfolio!"

Gillian strode to the gate and flung out a hand, the pointing finger of which almost touched the chest of the man in the middle.

"Are you positive this is the man?"

"I am positive, Mr. Hazeltine!"

The assistant district attorney came over like a jungle animal on the prowl. But he voiced no protest at this extreme irregularity.

Gillian, indeed, did not give him an opportunity. Gillian wheeled about and said savagely, rapidly, to the judge: "Your honor, I wish a bench warrant for the arrest of this girl for the murder of Victor Poldemus!"

The girl leaped up. "You can't!" she cried. "You can't! I didn't! I didn't kill him! He did it! I saw him do it! He hit him with that bottle—and strangled him—I saw—"

She stopped. The spectators, to a man, had risen. Several of the jurymen were half out of their chairs. But not entirely because of the girl's shocking revelation. It was her voice. Gillian's sudden accusation had caught her unprepared. And when she protested, it was no longer in that carefully controlled husky voice, but in a voice as clear, as golden as birdsong, a voice of remarkable beauty, a voice that broke into quaint huskiness at each few words—a voice, in short, that was identical with the remarkable, incomparable voice of Olive Poldemus!

Even Judge Paxton was staring at her with amazement. He had snatched off his glasses and was staring.

There was confusion. The courtroom

was a babbling uproar of excited voices. Gillian was mopping his forehead with a saturated handkerchief. He could have wrung out his shirt, even his coat. It had been one of the tensest scenes he had ever played in a courtroom.

He said to Olive Poldemus, "It'll take a little time to untangle but the battle's over."

Julia Ramey was hysterically talking to the judge, to John Redfern, and two reporters. Gillian was a little sorry for her. She had cracked completely under the strain; was babbling, telling everything.

GILLIAN did not stay to listen. He was exhausted. What he wanted was a shower and a good stiff drink.

He drove home, undressed, took the shower, rubbed himself dry and put on his dressing gown. Then he rang for Toro. And when Toro appeared, Gillian said, "Toro, mix me a long, cool drink—a stiff one."

"A gin rickey?" Toro asked.

"Toro," Gillian said, "gin is an obnoxious liquid. Please do not mention that wretched stuff in my presence for a least forty-eight hours."

He was smoking a blond perfecto and sipping a long Scotch highball when his wife came in. She had been playing golf and had just heard of the amazing wind-up of the Poldemus case.

"What in the world happened?"

Gillian told her. He began at the beginning. "Sometime soon after Victor Poldemus's arrival in Greenfield, he picked up his telephone and dialed Standard 1200. Do you know what Standard 1200 is?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Pick up that receiver and dial ST-1200."

An expression of surprise and pleasure came over her flushed, beautiful young face.

"How marvelous!" she cried. "She gave me the correct time!"

"It's a new institution in Greenfield," Gillian said. "The larger cities tried it first, and the smaller ones are now following suit. Victor Poldemus was a San Francisco man, and was in the habit of checking his watch.

"At all events, he called Standard 1200 on one occasion soon after his arrival in Greenfield, and heard a voice that must have stunned him. His wife's beautiful, remarkable, incomparable voice!

"At that time, this man Poldemus was trying to bully his wife into sharing her proceeds from the sale of the famous jade collection. He knew Sing Fat was bringing the money, and he knew when it would come, for he bullied all that out of his wife. And when he heard a voice identical with his wife's, he hatched his plan.

"He got in touch with the time operator and schemed out a way to get the money from Sing Fat. Miss Ramey's boy-friend, a tough individual named Harold Major, was taken into the scheme. The scheme was neat and simple. Just before Sing Fat reached his hotel, Harold Major telephoned Mrs. Poldemus, telling her that her husband had been injured in a fight at the Gray Goose, and that she must go there at once. She went. She took a taxicab that happened along—a taxicab elaborately planted by Harold Major and driven by a pal of Major's. While Mrs. Poldemus was on this wild Gray Goose chase, Miss Ramey telephoned Sing Fat. Harold Major went to the Greenfield Hotel, secured the portfolio full of money from Sing Fat, returned to the bungalow where, because he was greedy, he killed Victor Poldemus—and got away with all the plunder.

"I reasoned out all of this, by suspecting that a voice identical with Mrs. Poldemus's was in existence, if I could only find it. I had Silky Davis and his gang exhaust every possibility—obscure night-clubs, where Poldemus might have heard the girl's voice; check-room girls, cigarette girls, girls in all possible places, such as cigar stores. On the long, long list were telephone operators. Silky's gang went quietly forth with nothing but a description of that voice—and only today tracked down the girl who owns it. Finding her

sweetheart was a matter of simple elimination of possibilities. But it was great detective work.

"In one respect we were very lucky. I only hoped that the girl, whoever she was, and her accomplice, whoever he was, would not leave the city. I think they stayed behind for one or two reasons. First, they were so cocksure about not being detected. Second, they may have had the criminal's common fear that their sudden absence would be suspicious. The girl, especially."

"But how about the money?" Vee asked.

"Captain Murdock," Gillian said, "is very much interested in this case. In fact, he is tremendously interested in Mrs. Poldemus."

"You might even go so far," Vee interrupted brightly, "to say that Captain Murdock is in love with Mrs. Poldemus."

Gillian nodded. "Captain Murdock will undoubtedly have a long, long talk in private with Harold Major. And Captain Murdock is a man who will go almost any lengths for a woman he loves. In short, I believe that most of Olive Poldemus's fortune will be delivered to her at an early date."

THE END

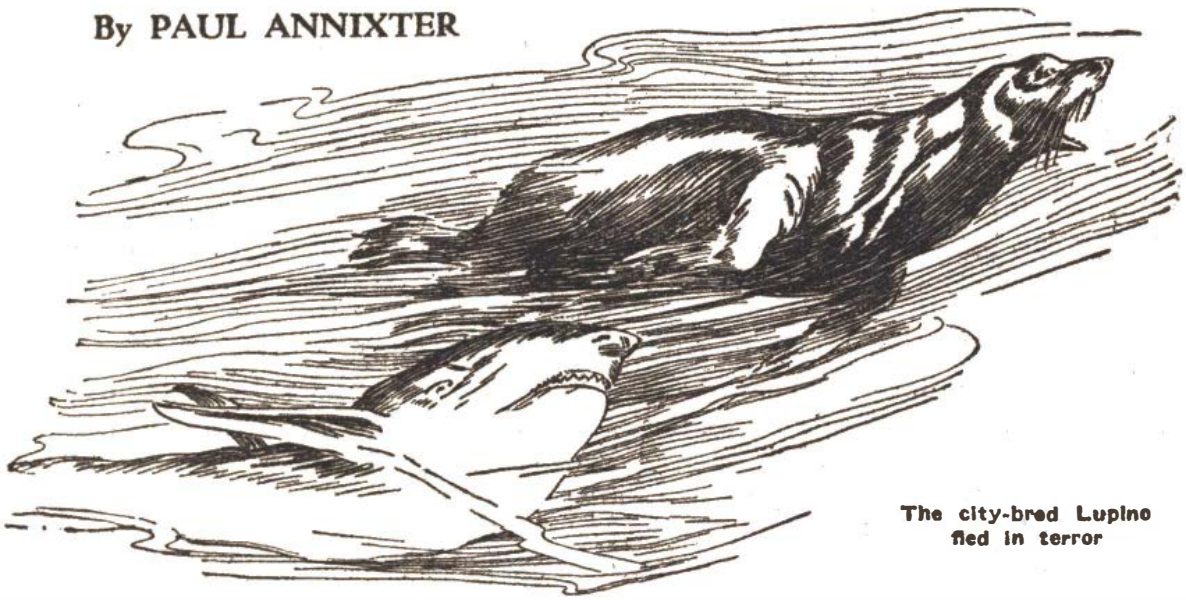
Where Ignorance Is Bliss

A FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION deserter was captured in the desert by the famous Blue Men (Touareg), and was promptly searched and stripped of all his clothing. Among his small possessions they found a photograph of himself as a private in the Prussian Guards, his magnificent helmet with warlike eagle and uniform displayed in all its glory. The Arabs were soon convinced they had captured the Kaiser himself. He was bartered from tribe to tribe, his value rising after each sale. Finally he was taken to Cap Juba, the fortified post in the Rio de Oro, his picture exhibited to the French officials with a demand of twenty thousand pounds for the prisoner. It was refused with great laughter.

The Arabs were convinced the Europeans were bluffing, but as time went on and no offer of ransom was forthcoming, the Arabs became desperate and this time offered the "Kaiser" for a miserable thousand pounds. They were laughed at. The disgusted Arabs finally sold their valuable prisoner for forty francs to one of the airmen of the Aëropostale. That incident nearly ruined the business of banditry in the Sahara forever. *John S. Stuart.*

Lupino

By PAUL ANNIXTER



The city-bred Lupino fled in terror

Lupino, the trained seal, flaps his flippers and dashes away to a life of freedom—only it proves to be life in the raw

A BREATH-TAKING plunge and the smooth green water of the bay closed over him. With powerful strokes of flukes and flippers he put behind him the great glass tank that had been his traveling home, the nerve-racking smells, sounds and commotion of the crowded steamer deck. Even as he shot down into the depths he could hear behind him the clanging of bells, the grinding crashes of the two steamers still locked together in the dense mist.

The fog, the chaotic cries of the menagerie animals caught in the crushed bow of the steamer, the violent shock as his tank crashed and he was hurled into the bay—these things drove from his mind everything but flight, swift, desperate flight. But it was fear that drove him, not any passion to quit his association with men.

To Lupino, the trick seal, the animal show of De Groot Brothers had been the whole of life. A good life, too; soft, easy and secure, the winters consisting of long drowsy weeks spent with four or five other seals in a great indoor pool, broken only by occasional sessions at rehearsing old tricks or learning some new one, with the sure award of a fine fresh fish.

And even better were the summers, traveling about with the show, enjoying the privileges of a star, with many loyal human friends and admiring satelites. Lupino, wearing a round red cardboard cap, fastened under his chin by an elastic band, and a big gilded bow tied about his neck, danced to music, shot off a cannon, balanced a long pole on the end of his nose with a red ball on the end of the pole, counted with his flipper up to ten, and climbed an almost perpendicular ladder and dove off it into a tank to the accompaniment of the ruffle of drums and a prolonged dramatic chord in G.

But best of all his tricks was one learned in the past few months, in which he came waddling and staggering up to a bar and barked and pounded with his flippers till an obsequious bartender served him with a bottle of amber liquid. Disdaining a glass, Lupino drained the entire bottle, then staggered out, his cardboard cap hanging over one ear, the audience cheering and the band playing an old familiar drinking song.

There was glory in acting to wild applause; a continual excitement in traveling from place to place; in the heterogeneous sights, sounds, smells and movement of the menagerie tent. Lupino looked upon it all with the trusting delight of a child. The melting brown eyes in his blunt doggish head glowed with a mild, kindly light as he heaved high out of the water to survey the crowd, his watery barking cries and the expressions beneath his neat, bristly mustache portrayed a whole range of emotions from ecstatic joy to lugubrious sadness.

All men were his friends. He knew all the keepers and performers and spied for each over the rim of his tank, knowing how each would speak and act and what he might expect. The stirring sound of the band seemed to fill him with joyous rhythmic excitement. Even the deep mysteries of train travel through the night he enjoyed, for his trust was boundless, his pail of fish chunks came as inevitably each day as the rising of the sun or the carrying on of De Groot Brothers show.

It is doubtful if in his sleek sealy mind any other life than that of the show was even conceivable to Lupino. He had known nothing but this limelighted splendor since he was picked up as a three months old pup on a far northern sealing beach after his mother had fallen to the clubs of the sealers. Now he was three and a half years old, the most accomplished trained seal in the American show business, and the most prized possession of De Groot Brothers moribund and somewhat moth-eaten animal show. If there were any young seals in the world who had no kindly keepers and admiring human audiences, Lupino certainly knew nothing of them.

THESE things considered, it was not to be wondered that Lupino continued to swim about in the vicinity of the collision for an hour or more after being pitched into the bay. He would have liked nothing better than to be picked up by some of the keepers and taken away to some safe quiet place, but destiny had seen fit to put him through a strange initiation, and no keepers appeared. Instead, there came a couple of frightful explosions and the night was torn by flames and cries, all of which combined to drive Lupino from the scene in mindless terror.

Pop Salters, his trainer, would have laughed at the idea of Lupino having any memory whatever of his old wild life in the northern sea, but animal memory lies not in the brain but in association. Pop would not have believed that in Lupino's blood and along his sensitive flanks was still a memory of the solid sweep of ocean currents, only waiting to be revived. Out of the press of the cold bay water and the salt smart in his urbane nostrils as he bored through the depths, many pictures began to live. A stream of bubbles trailed after him as he shot on and on, his torpedo-shaped body looping and curveting through the water with a speed and agility that could outswim the very fish.

For a time he swam in circles about

the size of his big winter tank, for he was unable to conceive of a limitless body of water, but he touched no walls and his circles became larger and his sense of amazement grew. It was this growing sense of freedom and unrestraint that kept him going on and on in a spirit of incredulous exploration until finally the burning steamer was left far behind, the brackish waters of the bay began to clear and there came to him the breath of the open sea itself.

Now came a rush of deeper memory and a softly mounting excitement which swallowed up his fear and loneliness. There was a call in those clearing waters with their sharp electric tang, an unbelievable thrill in this experience of traveling without hindrance in a straight line. Finally the great heave and surge of the open sea took him, but instead of a frightening sense of space and emptiness there was a great familiarity about it.

On and on he swam and the belated dawn found him far out at sea, quite muddled as to direction and impulse, yet utterly at home. Land was only a vague smudge on the distant skyline; nothing but space and water as far as the eye could reach. He had ceased his headlong flight, for his little-used swimming muscles were tired, and upended like a great cork in the water, he rode the slow rollers, restocking his lungs and blood with oxygen. In him was still an indistinct doglike urge to get back to the show, but it had dimmed considerably in the face of the wonders about him. And to be perfectly frank, he had no notion of which way to turn to go back.

AS the sun began parting the fog curtains, Lupino raised himself high in the water to stare and uttered a faint yap of surprise. He had thought himself utterly alone, but all at once breaking the water everywhere he saw dozens of sleek dark creatures, not unlike himself, rising and falling in the waves in a sort of rollicking game.

They were a school of dolphins moving up the coast, and drawn by the bottomless curiosity and friendliness of their kind, they had collected around the stranger. Lupino had never seen a dolphin before, but doubtless instinct told him they were harmless, warm-blooded mammals related to himself. At any rate he sensed at once their friendly quality, so like his own cheery disposition, and set out to know them better. So, as the school moved northward, Lupino swam with them until once more his civilized muscles tired and he was left far to the rear.

Once more Lupino was alone and homesick for the show. Hunger added its prod to grief and he set out to head for it, but he swam, without knowing it, straight out to sea. Then something of great interest stopped him again.

He was coming to the great feeding banks, and suddenly whipping through the depths below him he saw a streaming white flutter as of ribbons. Instantly he knew what it was, and knew that he was hungry. Down and down through darkening shadows he sped like a projectile, for now he could both smell and taste, as well as see the prey. Fish—thousands of them, made wavy silver sheets of light in the blue-green depths. With a burst of speed he overtook the fleeing school, his jaws closed upon a fat straggler and he shot to the surface again to crunch with swift jaws a meal that had an edge on anything Pop Salters had ever given him out of the well-known pail. Delectable! A minute and he dove again for more.

For the next hour, De Groot Brothers show entirely forgotten, Lupino

hunted fish. He had never dreamed he could loop and twist and dodge with such dexterity or speed. His eyes and flukes grew quickly wise to maneuvering in the depths and more and more the boundless waters felt like home. Finally fed to capacity, he lay on the sunlit surface and surveyed the immediate vicinity. Nothing was in sight, so he folded his tired flippers upon his breast and was asleep. Just that. One minute he was wide awake; the next he was sound asleep, rocking gently to and fro on the slow swells, the age-old cradle of his kind.

When he awoke two hours later he was quite recovered from the shock and strain of the night before. He set out vaguely again in the direction in which he still believed he might find the show boat, for he was sickeningly lonely again. No more than a city waif lost in the woods did he know his way in this wilderness of waters, and presently he was a good five miles out from shore, swimming with true Rotarian vigor but directly away from all chance of reunion with man.

ONCE a sharp black fin cut the water close to him and he caught a glimpse of a round dark back. He remembered the dolphin school and his friendly heart sent him speeding toward the other. He was shocked and terrified a moment later to have the stranger roll over like a barrel to expose a livid belly and a snapping triangular-shaped maw that barely missed shearing through his flukes as he dove.

It was a twenty foot shark and Lupino naturally knew nothing of sharks. For a minute or two the monster continued to pursue Lupino into the depths and up again, his jaws snapping again and again within a foot of the seal's tail. The fact that the shark knew seals very well as one of the most agile races of the sea was lucky indeed, for the city-bred Lupino might soon have been caught had the chase continued.

Thereafter he was on the lookout for dangers as well as association in the sea. His natural instincts warned him of the more ordinary enemies. He allowed no formidable sea creature to catch him off guard. Twice he encountered sea lions during the afternoon and developed a healthy respect in regard to them. And toward nightfall he learned the painful lesson that there are savage beasts as well as beneficent beings in the world of humans. He was taking another seal nap, bobbing on the swells not unlike a lemon pip in a whisky fizz, when a faint alarm made him raise his head to scan the tossing surface.

A muffled sputter of sound came echoing along the troughs of the sea. Lupino peered as the sharp prow of a small motor launch came toward him, cutting the waves. Two men were in the boat and Lupino, w i t h o u t a thought, swam toward them gladly. Perhaps some of the keepers had come for him. He looked for all the world like a big friendly dog in the water.

"Look!" exclaimed one of the tuna fishermen pointing. "A fur seal, worth a hundred bucks! Slow her down while I take a shot at him."

A rifle cracked and a white spurt of water shot up close to Lupino's head. He heard the report of the shot, but it did not terrify him. This was mere sport to one who had fired off cannons in De Groot Brothers show.

The launch with throttled engine was making a wide circle around him. *Thup!* A second report sent clapping echoes over the water. Lupino felt a blow like an ax and a red hot pain

seared his heavy neck. "Got him," yelled the man with the gun as the seal rolled over on his side, wallowing.

The shock and pain of the wound had rendered Lupino incapable of movement for a few moments, and that fact undoubtedly saved his life. The fishermen thought him dying and maneuvered the launch toward him, a big boathook ready with which to secure the prize. But Lupino was only stunned. The bullet ripping through the layers of fat and muscle in his neck had numbed his very brain. But the sight of the boat above him and the sudden feel of murder in the air whipped his paralyzed nerves to action. These men had nothing in common with his former friends—they meant to kill him. He rallied with a great effort, and vanished, just as the man with the hook reached for his gun.

A mile away Lupino came to the surface. Luckily the layers of fatty tissue had closed quickly about his burning wound, checking the flow of blood, else roving sharks would have quickly crossed his trail and pursued him like hounds on a hot scent.

THAT brush with the poachers seemed perfectly ordained to drive all further thought of man from Lupino's brain. The abrupt closing in of driving storm clouds late that day completed the metamorphosis. Through the white spume of rising seas the wanderer traveled steadily but in no wise terrified by the emptiness of the water world about him, the span of which had diminished to a few dim yards instead of the limitlessness of the horizon lines. For no longer was he without compass or bearings. Some instinct was now driving him steadily and with fierce purpose, northward, ever northward.

He could not know that all the scattered remnants of the once vast herds of Pacific fur seal were likewise traveling northward—in small herds and family groups—the bulls far in the lead, the cows a day or two behind, while the partly grown pups played and dallied along the coastline as was their immemorial custom. The great spring running of the Pacific fur seal to Alaskan waters was at its height and Lupino had answered the silent migratory call of his kind sounded through miles of ocean depths by water wireless.

"Aurk! Aurk!" The joyous watery barking of a fur seal came to Lupino's sharp ears early next morning. Raising to look above the waves he saw over a dozen black heads bobbing corklike on the surface a hundred yards away, heading north. In a passion of friendly yearning, Lupino sped to meet them, his cheery soul aglow with pleasure. With a rush he was among them, but queerly the strangers hardly seemed to notice him, nor did they slacken their headlong pace in the slightest. They were all mature bull seals, all hurrying northward like himself. Lupino fell in with them. He had to exert himself to keep abreast of them, but before long his own zeal was as great as theirs.

All day they swam without pause, the miles slipping incredibly away behind them. Once they heard a sound like thunder far ahead and presently encountered a pod of sperm whales at play. Around the fringes of the herd a convoy of black six-foot dorsal fins were cutting the water. They were a pack of orca, killers or grampuses, the scourge of the seas, more terrible than sharks; small whales really, around fifteen feet long and carnivorous as wolves. They were dogging the great sperms after their custom, waiting a chance to mob some whale calf or cow.

They were crazed with blood and hurled themselves upon whales and seals alike, ripping away great chunks of hide and blubber and flashing away again with a speed that made the water boil in their wake.

Directly in the path of the seals one of the killers came to a grim end. Just as he tore a white gaping wound in the flank of a calf, one of the bull whales rolled over and his twelve foot flipper rose and struck the water with a smash like the report of a three-inch gun. The flipper had only struck the killer a glancing blow, but he lay on the surface blasted like a ship that has struck a mine.

The seals scattered and fled beneath and around the whales, leaving four of their number dead behind them. As Lupino rose to the surface again two torpedo-like shapes came rushing at him. Panic-stricken, he dove again, expecting swift destruction, but it was not killers, only a pair of huge dog-fish that pursued him, slow, dull-witted scavengers of the sea, who feed on what the swifter killers leave. They quickly turned back to the surface again to look for leavings, moving in the unlovely waving manner of all the shark tribe.

A MILE away all the seals who had come through unscathed came mysteriously together again and the little company continued its northward journey with fierce zest and ever increasing speed. Through the day they were joined by other straggling companies of bulls until the herd numbered nearly a hundred. And continually their furious pace increased. Never a thought of rest or food or danger among them. Each was driven by one master-thought, to reach the Alaskan breeding grounds ahead of all his fellows. Though Lupino still knew not the actual cause of the madness, the haste of his companions turned his blood to fire. With each added league he gathered speed until he became a living projectile.

At last, on the fifth day, they reached their destination, a far-flung islet of the Pribilof group, where night and day a booming surf heaved and beat upon the rocky shore. With a rush they shot from the breakers and flung themselves high on the strand, only to find that they were among the last instead of the first to arrive. Immediately a fighting line of old battle-scarred warriors advanced upon the newcomers to drive them off and assert the rights of priority. There ensued a bloody battle while the sea pounded below the fighters and the gulls circled screaming overhead. The shingle grew red with blood and torn and bleeding forms fell beneath the ranks of the battlers.

To Lupino the terrible struggle all about him was no mystery. His instinct grasped the meaning of it, his yellowish mane rose on the back of his swollen neck and he roared forth his challenges with the fiercest of them. He was shocked and stunned by a terrific blow on the back of the neck and staggered up to see a whiskered old warrior a foot taller than he rearing above him. His usually mild eyes combusted with a trollish rage, his whiskered lips drew back, revealing his yellowed dirk-like tusks in a snarl quite as fiendish as that of his attacker, a scarred beachmaster of five seasons.

The winner of many and many a death-duel, the older bull advanced upon him, his powerful neck swinging from side to side in skillful feints, thinking to polish off the youngster with a few masterful strokes. But Lupino was a bundle of surprises. Not

for nothing had his trainer taught him through long rigorous months to catch unerringly a series of colored balls no matter how often or how swiftly they were thrown.

As the old bull feinted to his left and struck in the same instant to his right at Lupino's throat, he merely laid himself open to attack like a layman swinging at a skilled boxer. Lupino's black head had countered to his right and struck to his left with almost the speed of a cobra's. His tusks fastened on the old one's already reddened neck and thrust deep, piercing the throat. Roar and lash as he would, the old beachmaster could not break away. Lupino had won his first battle.

Throughout the next two days and nights the roaring and fighting continued unabated, each bull striving to preëmpt as much of the southward facing beach as possible and hold it until the arrival of the cows. No quarter asked or expected; it was kill or be killed. A dozen times Lupino joined in lethal combat; a dozen times he either routed the enemy or quieted him for all time. Some of those battles lasted for hours.

IT was not until the fifth day that the females began to arrive. Scarcely a quarter the size of the bulls, they were mild, soft-eyed creatures, robed in light brown coats of velvety fur. As drove after drove arrived from the south the rookery became a bedlam. The beachmasters became obsessed with a foaming madness in which life was of no more value than the moss and pebbles beneath their trampling flippers. Many a cow was literally torn to pieces between two or three furious bulls, each bent on dragging her into his own harem.

By the following day the pandemonium had died down to an occasional bickering that occurred when some cow strayed out of harem bounds. Lupino found himself lord and master of twenty sleek and docile young wives, but as in all matings, polygamous or otherwise, it was only in one that Lupino found the answer to his dream. She was a petite and graceful young four-year-old with liquid eyes and a rare gold-brown coat of fur as soft as young eiderdown.

In the weeks that followed, Lupino lost much face in the community for his attentions to Miss Golden Fur were so consistent that he allowed the majority of his fickle harem to stray and be annexed by other jealous swains, without even a battle to retain them! Such a thing was unheard of in all the annals of the colony.

When a month had worn by and the pugnacity of the mating season had somewhat diminished, the man-raised Lupino had come out of his madness as from a dream, slipping into the *alter ego* of his old gentle and affectionate disposition. He no longer sought battle; sought rather friendliness and companionship. In his life among men he had learned of finer, gentler ways than wild seals ever knew, and all of these he showered on Golden Fur. It is to be feared, however, that much of this went to waste, for her ways were the fickle, sealy ways of all her kind, to whom the feelings and doings of the lordly male were mere matters for tolerance.

On several days in an excess of joy and good feeling, Lupino went down to the strand and put on his great seal act of De Groot Brothers show, for the benefit of his wives and the community at large. Using a flat rock for a bar and table, he barked and counted up to five and to ten with waving flipper, and

pretended to drink imaginary whisky from an imaginary bottle. He caught up a dried kelp ball, balanced it on the tip of his nose, showing off the marvelous synchronized muscles of his swelling neck. He tossed it high aloft and caught it unerringly again and again. His ruffle of drums was the grunting, barking clamor of the rookery at large, his prolonged dramatic chord in G was the challenging roar of the fighting bulls of the colony, which in plain seal language was a prolonged raspberry.

During these performances four more of Lupino's wives were allowed to stray and be collected by his rival in the next colony, without Lupino's even noting the fact. Thereafter Lupino was no longer rated among the real grandees of the rookery. He had only five wives left to him and didn't seem to care a hang. And his treatment of these quite lost him the decent respect and regard of the community.

He rarely chased them or chewed their necks to put them in their places. Instead he was idiot enough to treat them as equals. He was even caught hobnobbing on friendly terms with some of the half-grown bachelor-seals who occupied the high slopes above the rookery, and any one knew that a bachelor-seal was scarcely worthy of contempt from a real herd bull.

OCTOBER came and Lupino was surprised when the great rookery began to break up. Fighting had ceased some time past and now family by family, colony by colony, his neighbors of the beach began to decamp for the south. Not one of the beachmasters had touched food since their arrival on the island; in consequence all were shrunken to about half their former weight. Lupino had weighed nearly six hundred pounds when he had come north; now he weighed little over three hundred.

Though the other bulls and cows separated without concern for the southward journey, Lupino had other ideas on the matter. He was determined to keep Golden Fur with him, and the two started south together. But two days later he awoke from a short sleep on a rocky, windswept shore, to find her gone. All down the bleak Canadian coast he sought her vainly in the days that followed.

It was as he lay resting on shore one day with a band of stranger seals that disaster almost overtook him. He awoke from a nap at a salvo of excited barkings around him. From behind a line of rocks a crowd of men had suddenly appeared, running and shouting. They had crept up on the herd from a point far down shore. Cut off from the water, the seals went floundering desperately inland. The poachers rushed them, swinging blows right and left with heavy clubs.

Lupino, who had no instinctive fear of man, lagged far behind. Two terrific blows on the head flattened him out, an inert quivering mass upon the sand. The poachers left him for dead and ran on after the rest of the herd, floundering toward their doom on the higher ground inland. The method of the hunters was to first tire them out by a chase, and then club them to death. The occasional crack of a rifle added to the din.

A QUARTER of a mile out from shore the Coast Guard Cutter Sitka, whose chief duty it was to protect the pelagic life of those waters, was rounding a rocky point of land when her coxswain, leaning on the rail, caught the faint echo of a rifle shot carried on a seaward eddy of

breeze. He hurried up to the bridge.

"I think I heard a shot from the shore, sir. Must be near that old seal rookery beyond the point. May be poachers at work—"

"Quite possibly," said the captain. He brought out his glass and scanned the waters closely, then the shore.

"You're right, coxswain," he said excitedly. "The seals are back in that old rookery; first time in years. And there seems to be something wrong ashore. Better nose in a bit closer."

A minute later, still studying the shore, he shouted:

"Lower away a boat, Mr. Conrad. Those seals are frantic, and I see dead ones up the beach."

Presently around a jutting point of rock a dark low hull could be seen, partly hidden in a rocky indentation in the shore — the poachers' boat. The cutter's captain shouted an order. From the ship's big bow-gun came a deafening report and a shot went screaming landward, sent purposely high. At the second shot the poachers could be seen running down toward the beach, arms raised in surrender.

Fifteen minutes later the sealers had been rounded up at the point of a gun and were being forced to drag the dead and wounded seals down to the shore. Whatever spoils there were would go to the government. A crowd of men were standing about the prone, bulky body of Lupino, ropes being arranged to drag him to the water's edge, when one of the government men lifted the big bull's left flipper and called sharply to the captain.

"A Biological Survey marker here, sir," he said, pointing excitedly to a small brass-colored slip of metal fastened beneath the flipper. "The number is 141 1-'27."

"Why, he must be one of a big lot of pups the government took out from the Pribilofs in 1927. Most of them went to zoos and shows for training and exhibition purposes. How in Heaven did he ever get back here?"

Just there Lupino regained consciousness. As he reared up, dizzy and weaving from the stunning blows he had received, the men jumped back from his head, for bull seals were often formidable. But Lupino had seen the blue caps and uniforms of his rescuers, so like the uniforms of his keepers in the show, and came waddling gladly toward them, his long whiskers twitching with pleasure. A bit later he submitted mildly as a suffering dog, while the ship's doctor examined his wounds.

"Absolutely tame, as I thought," said the captain. "I'll wager he's been with some circus. Take him aboard, men. I'm going to trace his history."

And so it was that Lupino came back to civilization and the safe and certain joys of captivity again. He had no idea of how he arrived in the cities of men again after many weeks aboard the government cutter, or how his record was traced by a little tag on his flipper. He only knew that at last he had come back to a friendly gilded tank with Pop Salters talking to him and many old friends standing round; back to his bands and lights, his happy histrionics and his Public.

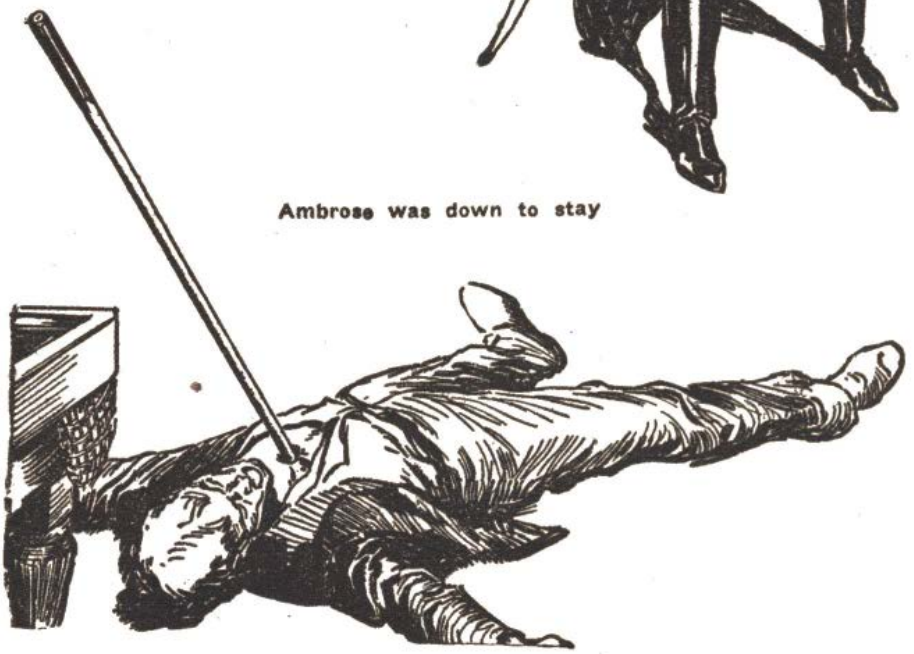
He loves it all as he used to love it, but often in winter quarters, lying beside the dull-eyed, frosty-tempered mate that men have chosen for him, he dreams of the great Alaskan seal herd, and of Golden Fur and her beautiful gleaming coat and the fierce mad weeks they knew together in the wonderful northern summer.

THE END

A Grave Must Be Deep!

By THEODORE ROSCOE

One by one they were tagged, and a tag meant "out" in that pleasant little Haitian slaughterhouse



Ambrose was down to stay

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

WHEN Patricia "Pete" Dale received word that her former guardian had been murdered at Morne Noir, his estate in Haiti, she was told by a queer little Haitian lawyer, Maître Tousellines, executor of the valuable estate, that she had been named in the will. Pete had never liked the guardian, known as "Uncle Eli" Proudfoot, and did not want to go, but "Cart" Cartershall, the young artist who was in love with her, persuaded her. Cartershall, who tells the story, accompanied her.

It was a villainous looking crowd that gathered at midnight in the dismal château at Morne Noir to hear the will of Uncle Eli, and the will was even more grotesque. It stated that Uncle Eli was to be buried with Voodoo ritual. The entire estate was willed to Sir Duffin Wilburforce, overseer of Morne Noir—provided he stayed on the estate for twenty-four hours after the fu-

This story began in the Argosy for December 1.

neral. If he failed to do so, the estate was to go to Ti Pedro, the tongueless Dominican plantation manager. In order, six other beneficiaries were named, provided the previous one failed to stay on.

They were Ambrose Jones, Uncle Eli's young pilot; Toadstool, a gorilla-like young Negro stable boy; Widow Gladys, his mother, who was housekeeper; the business manager of the estate, commonly known as the En-sign; Captain Manfred, Uncle Eli's liquor besotted bodyguard; and finally Patricia Dale.

Shortly after the funeral, which took place immediately, Dr. Sevestre, the man who had been first to discover Uncle Eli's dead body, was shot down by an unknown killer. That brought Lieutenant Nemo Narcisse, of the Garde d'Haiti, hotfooting it onto the scene. He revealed that practically every one present, except Patricia and Cartershall, had a criminal record.

Later that night Sir Duffin was killed in the room that had been Uncle Eli's.

CHAPTER VI.

NEXT!

I SING the restaurant business. It is here to stay. War and the moving pictures, death and politics and bullfights—we eat in spite of them. The ship sinks, but cookey brings hot coffee from the galley, though the stove be six feet under brine. Napoleon marches an army on its stomach, pampering the chefs. Henry the Eighth beheads a wife and goes out for lunch. Sudden death strikes an old château in dark Haiti; the library is a morgue; but the pantry carries on. The phrase is familiar: "His heart was in his mouth."

Louis of the hare-lip framed himself in the doorway. I found a cracked pitcher, lukewarm water with a little green frog in it for good measure, and I shaved. I cut myself four times. Then Louis wagged his finger, and I went down to breakfast. There was a grinning darky posted at Pete's door; a sound of water splashing in her room. I called to her as I went by, and she said she was all right.

But I'd encountered breakfasts more palatable. The Morne Noir dining room, that morning, was a combination Sing Sing, museum and Paradise Lost. A soggy, high-ceiled room at the back of the house, the plaster fractured on the walls, one side opening on a dripping courtyard where a marble Cupid with a cracked head stood in a broken fountain and didn't know enough to come in out of the rain. Weeds and tropical vines overran the courtyard wall. Daylight was absent, the court curtained with an oyster-colored mist through which the rain fell in lassos and spirals, wept and twinkled on the stones and pooled in puddles where mosquitoes bred. Most of the rain ventured into the dining room, glossing a varnished stuffed alligator over a ruined fireplace, clinging in drops on the ceiling. There were four green lizards and a brown lizard on the ceiling.

A meal in that room would be like feeding on the bottom of an aquarium, but what with Scotch dying in my stomach and my nerves already unglued by the damp, I wanted coffee. Steaming Java might scatter the dreads of last night, and I'd wake up on Forty-Fifth Street, after all.

Nothing of the sort. The party was still going on, and the guests continued in their costumes. Lieutenant Narcisse had marshaled the Mardi Gras in the lower hall; the black guards of Haiti made a cordon with bayonets; we were marched to table. Narcisse pointed at chairs. Cornelius came web-footed from a pantry and swam around in the mist dishing out bitter coffee, bacon and grits. There was raisin bread. I

cherish an antipathy for raisin bread that persists to this day.

I took to my chair amid a clattery of crockery and a battery of side glances; one long table and the boarding-house reach. Ambrose, who had been whispering to the lieutenant, sat down sullenly between Ti Pedro and the Widow Gladys. Narcisse and his gendarmes surrounded Toadstool at the other end, and I could hear them grilling the moose-faced Negro son in creole, and it must have been warm for him judging by the way his dark skin bubbled. His mother, unable to slap the length of the board, sat smiling her slice-of-watermelon smile and eating other things with gusto and sound. Maître Tousellines, gray-faced under his stovepipe hat, rolled bread into little pills and popped them in his maw; and I remember Ti Pedro swigging coffee with a tremendous, freckled grin, swallowing like a hydrant, and beaming at his muted thoughts. I wondered at the Dominican's secret festivity until I remembered the will. And I wondered at it, then.

I WAS sitting between the En-sign and Manfred.

The En-sign's shoe moved under the table and stepped on mine. His copper face was low over his plate, and he regarded me from the squinted corner of an eye, talking softly while a strip of bacon dangled from the side of his mouth like a thin, limber brown tongue. The voice was so low it seemed to issue from the tongue of bacon. Lines tracked across his forehead, seriously.

"Lissen, bright boy, Manfred and me got something to say to you and pipe it low."

"*Ja!*" came the furtive whisper on the left. The German was gazing straight ahead, face a blank, coffee mug masking his mouth. The birthmark brightened angrily as the hidden lips moved. "We would like a few private words."

"Before the girl gets here," said the bacon-tongue.

Manfred's blunt yellow head nodded furtively, and I had an acute feeling that a knife might catch me under the table from two directions, so I lit a cigarette and asked behind my hand, "What's wanted?"

Manfred whispered, "The En-sign and me, we know you shot the Englishman."

"And the doctor," the corner of the sailor's mouth said. "You was on the upper veranda when the doc was plugged, an' Sir Duff was a pipe. The girl couldn't of made such a hole with that twenty-two."

Manfred's shoulder was friendly against mine. "We don't blame you," he muttered into the coffee mug.

"Not a bit," the En-sign chewed, "and," rubbing the question off his lips with the back of a tattooed hand, "all we ask is, how far are you going?"

I said, with a mouthful of raisin bread, "You tell me."

"That was my idea," the corner of his mouth agreed. He leaned across me to stab a fork at the bacon plate, lips moving around in his face for me to hear. "We're onto the game, swab. You, her, the estate. All we want is our share, see?"

"Our share," echoed the German accent in the coffee mug.

"And we don't blame the skirt for bein' sore, left last like she was," the En-sign breathed, "but it wasn't fair to us, neither." His voice broke out loud, "Yeah, mister, it rains all the time, now. It's what they call the

avalasse season in Haiti." Softly: "It was a lousy will, an' me and Manfred got stung on it, too. The old man must of gone nuts. He was queer ever since that mutt Browinshields was muffed, and then all those crazy schemes he wanted to pull with the Cacos." The blue eye winked chummily.

"We play fair with you, my friend," came the German echo. "You tell the girl."

"What?" I inquired through a funnel of cigarette smoke.

THE En-sign smeared butter on bread, flip-flopping the knife as if he meant to sharpen the blade. He folded the buttered slice; tucked it into a cheek. He chewed: "You're a wise swab. I don't know why you smacked the doc, but I suppose you got reasons. Narcisse ain't a dumb boob, though." His voice was barely audible through the masticating. "He may get you for the English job. An' you couldn't get away with the rest of 'em, see, not alone. Widow Gladys an' the Toad is tough stuff. Ambrose is worse. Ti Pedro's hell."

Manfred muttered into his coffee. "We take care of those."

"Easy," the En-sign mumbled, two tongues of bacon a-wag in his teeth. He looked at me with an expression on his forehead as if he were thinking about his mother. "You an' the girl friend won't do another thing," he purled *sotto voce*. "Your guns is frisked, anyhow. Leave 'em to me an' the Nazi. We got our ways, hear?"

I nodded at ashes drooping off the end of my cigarette.

He purred, "Then it's a three-way split an' the rest is up to us. Tell the babe it's no more'n our share an' that Manfred an' me bossed the deck before, run the whole job. Tell her why can't we keep goin' like it was, even if the New York office is out. Tell her we can still make dough, an' plenty of it. Just because prohibition's repealed—"

He blinked eloquently, leaned away from me and grinned at the table, reaching into a pocket for his pipe. I counted the four lizards on the ceiling; and on my left Manfred poured rum into his coffee mug and was sloshing the liquor around, staring at the miniature whirlpool with fascinated intensity. I tried to look as if I hadn't heard them, as if the roots of my scalp weren't throbbing. I grinned blandly at Ambrose down the table, and poured myself a fresh cup of coffee, leaning across the En-sign's unbuttoned chest for the pot.

"Prohibition?" I questioned sideways. "I don't get you."

The En-sign's Alice blue eyes twinkled cheer at nothingness in front of his nose.

He twisted to face me. "Got a match, mate?"

I held the small fire over his pipe. His mouth didn't move; the words seemed to come through the stem and out of the bowl in tiny puffs of smoke. "Cut the bluff, wise guy. You and her will play ball or else. Manfred and me are in or you two go out. I told you we had ways."

Manfred said something that sounded like, "And means."

"That's that," the En-sign said, leaning back in his chair as if his comment referred to his breakfast. Concealed from the dining room, he let his hand move like a predatory spider up my back. The fingers came creeping up my spine, closed like steel pliers on my neck-nape, dug in. For a blinding half second I could hear the vertebræ crack in that osteopathic and subtle pinch. I

grinned at him politely, moved my elbow and poured a cup of hot coffee across his exposed stomach. He drove his chair backwards with a shout, jumped up, hand pressed to his scalded breadbasket. Everybody jumped up. Narcisse fled around the table with drawn sword, and Pete walked into the dining room, just then, looking as dewy in white with a starched sailor collar as if she'd just spent a night with friends at the Biltmore.

The nautical En-sign (with a starched sailor belt) straightened up to look at her, and the breakfast nook turned to stare.

"Sorry," I apologized to my table partner, "something stung me on the neck and I guess I jumped."

BUT I wasn't as cool as my speech when I crossed the room to sit beside Pete and pretend everything was under control. My little heart-to-heart chat with the navy man and his Prussian pal had spoiled my day. Manfred and the En-sign telegraphed little eye-messages up the table that came in black-rimmed envelopes, express, and I had a feeling the next time I was stung it would be for keeps.

"Thank Heaven," I pulled the Coué on myself, "the cops have all the guns in the place."

Only my thanks were unheard because there wasn't any Heaven. Not that morning. The sun had been drowned in a tropical flood and the sky over Haiti wept. The day wore weeds, and just when the morning should be brightest, the château was going to be darker than night, lighted only with gunfire where there shouldn't have been guns.

Narcisse, who didn't guess it, either, stooped at my chair. "As soon as *ma'mselle* has finished the breakfast will you both come to the office under the stairs?"

UNCLE ELI'S office under the stairs was a kennel-like lair, its door directly across the hall from the library. Once it had been the chapel, judging from the one stained glass window which cast a dim, shrine-like rainbow pattern on a tiled floor that hadn't been mopped in a hundred years. The ceiling at a slant, like a stairway turned upside down. The walls of panelled mahogany. The sort of roll-top desk President Chester A. Arthur might have used for the pigeon-holing of bills. Three or four junk-shop chairs. A square, black iron safe in the corner. A smell of cigars smoked in 1910.

Lieutenant Narcisse snapped on a dusty electric bulb; closed the door on the blackamoor gendarme posted outside; told us to please sit down. Pete sat down, trying to cheer me up with a smile. I faked one back at her, wondering which panel opened to the wall passage and the death-room upstairs. The Haitian officer swung a polished boot across the desk, squeaked back in his chair and looked at us with shiny black eyes. Some of the official bombast seemed to have been let out of his doublet. His curls were mussed, and his suspicious, mulatto features were sober.

He began suavely, "I do not wonder at your resentment, *m'sieu*. Americans are invariably resentful of foreign environment, forgetting that they are the foreigners. The situation—Haiti—a republic of color"—he spread his hands, studying the moons on his fingernails, "naturally complicates the matter for you. But why," he looked up quickly, "do you not admit to shooting the Englishman last night?"

"Because we didn't shoot him," I said.

He fished Pete's nickel revolver from the pocket of his tunic. "*Ma'mselle,* here is your gun. A thousand pardons, but I am something of a ballistics expert in this country. Perhaps it will please you to know I was, at one time, with your police department in the Caribbean. *Alors,* your little gun is a twenty-two. Is it coincidence that the bullets I extracted from the body of Dr. Sevestre, before breakfast, are of the same calibre?"

"I didn't shoot him," Pete said without expression.

The Haitian moved his plump shoulders. "Did you know there were but five shells remaining in your pistol?"

"The man who sold me the gun told me to leave one chamber empty when I carried it."

THE lieutenant nodded, returning the pistol to his tunic to yank my Lüger from his hip. "*M'sieu,* there are three bullets absent from the magazine of this, your gun, and bullets of nine millimeter calibre. That was a terrible hole blown in the back of Sir Duffin, eh?" He smiled at the Lüger. "A big hole and a big gun, *oui?*"

"Do you understand English as well as you speak it?" I angered.

"I was at one time guide and interpreter for your United States Marines, *m'sieu.*"

"Then understand Miss Dale or I didn't kill the doctor or that rotten Britisher. I'm no firearms expert, but all you've got to do is look at that muzzle to see the Lüger hasn't been fired since Nineteen-eighteen."

Scowling, the officer returned the weapon to his hip. A damp sweat polished his brown forehead. Rain came in buckets against the stained glass window, bringing the faint thumping of drums. Narcisse plucked at his lower lip. "Unfortunately I am not carrying equipment with which to examine these firearms. I can only believe the English *blanc* turned about in the wardrobe, was shot from behind, then spun and fell. The two of you were alone with him, then. What would you?" He made a Latin shrug. "I have questioned every one else in the place to no avail. Even that Caco scoundrel, the Toadstool, provides himself with an alibi. Ti Pedro, who directly benefits by the Englishman's murder, could not possibly have done the shooting."

"That son of a Briton got what was coming to him," I suggested, "trying to play ghost and scare the life out of Miss Dale."

"You can tell the others I don't want any part of the legacy," Pete put in.

Narcisse squinted at a cocked thumb. "The doctor, before he died, testified that your Uncle Eli had been slain by a bullet of nine millimeter calibre, you comprehend."

"I suppose Mr. Cartershall fired that shot, too? We were four thousand miles away when Uncle Eli was found dead."

"This is a hell of a lot of nonsense," I raged. "All you've got to do is check with the American authorities and get us out of here. Yes, where the devil is that messenger you sent last night? What's more," I stormed, "if anything happens to Miss Dale while you're holding us in this rats' nest, I'll have the roof blown right off Haiti, put that in your book!"

Narcisse gave me an oblique stare. "What do you expect will happen to *ma'mselle?*"

"Nothing," I countered hastily, "and by the Lord, it better not! It's up to you and those minstrel cops of yours that nothing does!"

I shut up to light a cigarette. The Haitian's cheeks were olive-oiled in the stuffy heat. "I will do all I can to protect *ma'mselle. Enfin,*" he spoke at me, "but I would know what you and the German and the Yankee naval officer were talking about at breakfast a while ago, eh? What was it you whispered when you thought I was not watching, *m'sieu?*"

I glared behind my cigarette.

"And why did you spill the hot coffee so adroitly on your confrere?" he insisted.

"He made a remark I didn't like. Said I came here trying to marry an heiress," I lied, hustling the point. I wanted to tell the police about that little breakfast chat, but I couldn't have Pete worrying. Then I remembered a word of the En-sign's that had puzzled me.

"LIEUTENANT NARCISSE, what are Cacos?"

He regarded me sharply. "Why do you inquire, *m'sieu?*"

"You—a while back you referred to Toadstool as a Caco."

"It is a term for bandits, *m'sieu.* The type of guerilla renegade—you might say the gangster—who infests our mountains."

I traced the rainbow shrine pattern, faint on the tile, with a boot-toe; tried to put the next question offhand. "Do you know a man named Browninshields?"

The Haitian sat up with a jerk. "What do you know of him?"

Pete sat up, too, her worried eyes shading from blue to hazel. "Cart, what are you talking about?"

"I wanted to know if he knew a man named Browninshields."

"I did," Narcisse said carefully. "Where did you hear of him?"

"Read about him in the paper," I hazarded, not liking those black eyes. All at once they were augers boring at my head.

"Then you read," he was suggesting, "how Captain Browninshields of the American Coast Guard was shot dead on the dock at Cap Haitien last year when his boat put in for supplies." The officer heaved up from his chair. "A murder that created an international situation the most delicate. All we know of the assassin is that he employed a Lüger pistol, and the discharged shell had been purchased from a sporting goods store up in New York. You seem to have an excellent memory for names, *m'sieu.* Could it be you, yourself, were in Haiti last year?"

It was my face's turn to be olive-oiled. "I never heard of Browninshields before. I just happened to see the name in an old newspaper—at—at the port where we landed yesterday. I was never in Haiti before in my life and never want to be again. This whole thing's ridiculous," I shouted. "Murder all over the place and you pick on the two most innocent for your third degree while the rest of this underworld mob with admittedly criminal records—"

"Admittedly," he caught at the word. "*Ah, oui, alors,* admittedly. But how to vouch for your characters, *m'sieu.* Maître Tousellines, who brought you here, can speak no certain information on your past. For all I can determine, *m'sieu* the American may be all manner of a criminal. Now that we speak of it, that is precisely why I have summoned you to this private conference, *m'sieu.*" He sat

down, watching my forehead. "The pink-eye, Ambrose, tells me you were with him in a Florida prison six years ago—"

My forehead must have been worth watching. "What!"

"Do you admit it, *m'sieu?*"

The officer blurred in front of my face. "Ambrose? Saw *me?*"

Narcisse shrugged. "He took me aside before breakfast and advised me to arrest you and send you away at once. He said you were a most notorious gangster—"

"Why, that double-damned, white-headed, lying—"

"He said you had, as he expressed it, done a stretch with him in the can, *m'sieu.* That you were the sort of expert who could open a safe or a bank vault with your fingers crossed. That you were known as a gunman for one M'sieur Capone."

"Oh, Cart—you— you a gunman in a Florida prison—oh—" It brought a burst of merriment out of Pete (hands pressed to cheeks she began to laugh) and a roar out of me.

"So I'm not only suspected of murder, but I'm a safe-cracker, a public enemy and a gunman. Don't tell me any more, it's too beautiful! Get Ambrose in here," I begged stormily. "Maybe he can remember something else. Maybe I'm Adolph Hitler! Maybe I'm—"

NARCISSE called to the gendarme beyond the door. Pete wiped mist from the corners of gray eyes with a finger. Boots hobnailing up and down the hall produced Ambrose. He sidled through the door to stand before the Haitian officer, twitching and wheezing with asthma, fingers twiddling with a tweed cap, his albino eyelashes fanning.

He opened up with a whine. "What you want of me, chief? You ain't got nothing on me. I was in the billiard room takin' masse—"

Narcisse nodded at me. "Did you ever see this man before?"

The mice eyes raced around the room, sped past me in a scuttle, darted at Pete, at the officer, then rested on the floor. "Yeh. I seen him."

"Where."

"At prison in Miami, Florida. Up in that skyscraper prison. He had th' cell next mine. He was doin' time for opening a safe at—"

"Ambrose," I said, thick-tongued, "you're nine kinds of a liar and you know it. You never saw me before in Florida or anywhere."

"Yeh?" His wheezing sounded as if his pinched chest were full of gum. His face distorted on the effort to breathe and lie at the same time, and he spun the cap wildly. "Don't gimme that stuff. They're tryin' to make me take the rap for killin' the sawbones an' Sir Duffin, an' I ain't going to take it, see? Not with no killer like *you* in the house. I got your number, see? Six years ago. Miami prison. Cell alongside mine. You use to talk through the bars an' tell me what a hot shot you was, how many guys you'd took for rides, an' how you could open safes like they was tin cans—"

I rubbed the ache the En-sign had put in the back of my neck and stared at the albino. He panted at Narcisse. "I'll tell you, this mug is a killer. He told me he was. Get him outa here, that's what you'll do if you're smart. Take him to Le Cap an' put him in the can! I know him!"

Narcisse spoke through white teeth, "Are you sure?"

"Yah," the boy puffed. "You think I could miss on that face?"

"And I can't miss on yours," I bawled. Then I missed. My uppercut was out of practice. My fist made a foolish parabola past his pimpled chin, the blow throwing me off balance against the roll-top desk. Ambrose slapped me across the ear and caromed against the wall, wheezing shrill falsetto oaths. I lashed a punch that glanced off his shoulder, twirling him around. His cursing filled the close room with contamination. Pete's scream, "He's got a knife!" brought Narcisse tangling against me, and there was a second of free for all before I opened Ambrose's fist with a dropkick and sent a dirty little paring knife flying under the desk. I got his ears and banged his head against wainscoting while Narcisse sat on my back and spanked me wth his sabre.

"See?" the youth shrieked. "He'll murder me—"

"Enough!" Narcisse roared. By that time the guard was through the door and we were all on our feet, Ambrose screaming I would murder him, and not a little truth in his accusation. Narcisse flailed the dusty air with his sabre.

"Enough! Enough! Stand so!" He bawled at the gendarme. "What room houses this pink-eyed spawn of an octopus and a shark?"

"Billiard room, *mon* lieutenant."

"Take him there and shut him in and do not so much as move an inch away from the door!"

AMBROSE continued to squeal that I'd kill him, while the guard booted him out into the hall. Narcisse slammed the door; swung back across the disheveled office, cursing. White at the temples, Pete sat in her chair. I could only stand and choke. Narcisse adjusted his medals; cleared a curl from his forehead, his plump face cinnamon.

"By the sacred name of ten thousand and two pipes, but yes! You comprehend, *m'sieu!* I know nothing about you, save that pink-eyed boy claims to have seen you as a murderer. I know nothing of *ma'mselle.* Foreigners, you come to Morne Noir late at night, armed, in the middle of a case the most mysterious. I find you together in the company of the murdered Englishman. There is no proof *m'sieu* did not assassinate the doctor. Then he speaks of an obscure crime that took place in Haiti last year. *M'sieu!* What proof have I that you and the girl are not working together in a plot to steal for yourselves the Proudfoot estate—"

"Good heavens!" Pete gasped.

"And that you are, indeed, a dangerous criminal!" the officer crabbed at me. "There it is! I can only identify y o u and y o u r character through the American authorities and my messenger has not yet returned. If the road has been washed out by this curst rainstorm it may occupy hours before the rider gets through. Meantime—"

His voice was disconnected by a snaredrum flam of thunder that broke like surf around the château, dinned across the roofs and filled the house with a sound like breaking chains. The little office shook with noise and there was a split second when the church-window across the room glowed livid with outer lightning. *Wham!* Thunder followed like a blast. The electric bulb in the ceiling dimmed and went out. Instantly the office was dark as a cellar save for the ghost of a blue shine where the window had been. Pete, Narcisse, everything around me vanished. A thousand off-stage wind machines sent a hurricane tearing through

the black outside. Inside voices were hollering. Doors began to slam open. Somebody shouted, "Lights!" Boots ran.

I felt, rather than saw, Narcisse go by me; heard him kick the office door open and dart out into the main hall. Midnight and confusion filled that lower hallway, as if shades were stampeding in a cavern; in the blind black of the office I floundered with outthrown hands, trying to find Pete. Then I heard her cry my name out in the hall; and played blind man's buff trying to locate the voice. I remember thinking I'd cracked heads with a bald man, and trying to choke the life out of the newel post at the foot of the stairs.

"Pete!" I wailed. "Where are—"

"*Staaaaahp!*" A long-winded, quivering shriek knocked me stockstill and stymied in a bath of ice. Coming from Nowhere and Anywhere, the terror-driven cry pierced through the dinning dark around me, knocked everything else silent as pitch. For the sixty ticks of a minute it seemed as if the atmosphere was dead.

Then, *bam,* a muffled explosion sounded somewhere in the blackness, recessed, dull as the blow of a hammer on lead. Furore broke loose. Shades ran by me in all directions, cursing, scuffling, and lifted above the clamor the sound of somebody rattling a doorknob like mad and Lieutenant Narcisse screeching, "Lights! Lights!"

ONE lantern—two lanterns came dashing out of darkness beyond the stairs; lights no bigger than match-flares in that high-ceiled, windy hall. The two gendarmes with the bull's-eye lamps raced up, waving them like frantic railway signals. The hall with its upper balcony, its extinguished chandeliers, its imperial stairway with me throttling the newel post came into view, all angles and crazy shadows. I don't know why nobody thought to open the front door. I don't suppose there was any daylight worth the admittance, anyway.

Pete, thank God, stood not far from me with white hands pressed to her cheeks. Directly across from the office, Lieutenant Narcisse could be seen trying to twist the doorknob from the door of a closed room that was sandwiched in between the library and the billiard room. A little crowd intermingled with the popeyed Haitian police crept toward the officer; gathered around like an accident crowd on a side street. The transom over the door was slanted open and pale tendrils of smoke were curling from the narrow aperture.

Gasping oaths, Narcisse released the doorknob and stood back. Drops as big as molasses glistened on his taffy-colored brow.

"Who is locked in this room?"

The hare-lipped corporal saluted. "I locked him in, m'sieu lieutenant. It is Dominican boy—Ti Pedro—"

"By the Seven Sacred Goats of Gonaives!" Narcisse squalled. "Give me the key to this door!"

The stricken guard fumbled in his tunic; found a big brass key. Narcisse jammed it into the lock; threw the door open with a crash. The bull's-eye lanterns jumped in; and the little "accident crowd" surged forward to look. Then it surged back at what it saw. With the hall in midnight behind them, the curious wanted to stay in the area of the light, but nobody wanted to stay in that opened room.

It was not an inviting chamber. The walls were puce-colored plaster, bare

as a cell; there was one small window in back, thick-paned with dust and completely curtained by an enormous spider web. There was a heavy oak door in the side wall with rusty iron hinges and a rusty iron keyhole in which no key had turned for a hundred years, nor had the door been otherwise opened, nailed shut as it was by two spike-studded planks.

It was an even less inviting chamber when Maître Tousellines, huddled at my elbow, looked up and whimpered, "*Tonnerre!* it was in this storeroom where Uncle Eli kept the rosewood coffin—" The coffin was not there, now. There were no other articles of furniture. There was nothing but a woven grass rug on the floor, and near that inner door which had not been opened, the hem of the grass rug was burning in little blue flames, fuming spirals of smoke that smelled like hay. The little flames quickened when the crowd fell back in the hall door; the glow of the burning carpet was weird blue and the light of the police lanterns no better. Firelight and lantern light touched a purplish tint to the body face down on the carpet.

It was Ti Pedro, and he was dead. Locked up by himself in that plaster room (no secret panels in plaster, by the way) with a window which hadn't been disturbed and a side door nailed fast, and the key to the hall door in a policeman's tunic, the Dominican had been shot and definitely killed. That wasn't all.

I saw Lieutenant Nemo Narcisse go down on his plump knees beside the body, then stagger upright and stare at the blank plaster ceiling in open-mouthed dumfoundment. Where had that deadly bullet hailed from? Blood oozed from a hole drilled exactly in the middle of Ti Pedro's flocculent scalp. *He'd been shot in the top of his head!*

CHAPTER VII.

FRAMED!

I DON'T know how long the scene was posed—one of those badly done crimes in waxwork such as you might see for a dime if you go to Coney Island.

Except that the Coney sculpting would be better and the parodied crime more plausible.

Somewhere in darkness behind me the old clock on the stairs was ticking like a metronome; and I was a whole lot older when I yanked my eye from the smoky store room. One is as old as one's thoughts. In a brief eon of time I thought about Uncle Eli's will and funeral; about the doctor's sudden doom and Sir Duffin's rendezvous with death in a wardrobe; about my chat with my table partners in the breakfast nook and the business at hand.

I thought, "They're going to knock off every one else who made honorable mention in that will!"

I thought, "But the doctor wasn't in the waiting list, why was he killed?"

I thought, "Pete! And me! Caught in this black island sink. Drums and rain. Ti Pedro. They'll get to us after while. What's Tousellines gabbing about? Lord, what a face that Negress has. Why doesn't somebody do something to stop this? Do something!"

After all that thinking I was back where I'd started, and decrepit. Meantime I had an arm about Pete's shoulder, and the exodus from the storeroom had started. Lungs gathered breath about us, then broke in a hash of explosive blurts.

"Say! Say, by Gee!" that was the En-sign spitting hot-chewed nails. "Condemnation, if Ti Pedro ain't plugged right in the bean! Right on top the bean!"

"Foah de Massy sake!" from Widow Gladys. "Yo'all see dat, Toadstool?" *Crack!* "Y'all see dat, Toadstool boy?"

"By the soul of Saint Bouleverse!"

"Shot through the top of his dog-gone bean!"

"*Ja!*" came the German accent. "And the killer has set on fire the room to burn him!"

The En-sign rasped, "Yeah, and where'd the killer go to? How'd he duck outa this here room? Even the cops can see that winda ain't been up. That door to starboard ain't been open, neither, an' this hall door bein' locked — Keeripes!" — his tongue changed voice in shrilling bewilderment— "how'd the sniper get into this room?"

Toadstool's moose-like mask, the black-lacquered globe of Maître Tousellines's head, Manfred's plush birthmark, distorted faces leaning over my shoulder, peering, then rubbernecking back. The melting Haitian lieutenant and his troopers staring down at the punctured cranium of the murdered man. Green smoke roiling around the lanterns to confuse the eye. Hare-lip Louis stamping out the fired grass matting.

Then, the last smoldering strand trampled out, Narcisse drew his sabre and drove us into the hall. He closed the door of the storeroom; posed like an admiral waiting for a flashlight photograph. He glared at us, and we glared at him and the closed door behind him.

His eyes were crescent moons under thunderheads. He glared down the line, apparently wanting something he couldn't find.

"OPEN that front door!"

A gendarme scuttled to obey. That house needed air. It didn't get it. The forlorn gray light of drowned day washed into the hall on a gust of mist; we stood like spectres at the last round-up, corralled by a fence of bayonets.

"You, you and you!" Narcisse spat like a cat at his squad. "Did I not order you to stand guard over these *blancs* and not move if the devil himself summoned you? Bones and blood, *oui!* Louis, you rabbit-mouthed black buffoon! You left your post when the lights went out and one of these little prisoners escaped and shot down Ti Pedro in the dark!"

Lanterns shrugged in chocolate hands. Butterplate eyes swerved uneasily under broad-brimmed hats. Corporal Louis spoke in that impossible, honking nasal achieved only by a split lip, a creole accent and darky fright— a tonal quality beyond description.

"*Moi*—heard light go out—then hear m'sieu lieutenant run f'om office, callin' foah lights, *oui!*" The corporal waved a khaki arm. "Gendarmes we leave our lanterns out back. We run fetch'm toot sweet."

"Bah! And while you were gone these—these—came out of their rooms and shot that Dominican in the dark!"

"*Gott im Himmel!*" Manfred spoke out. "Do you think we stay in our rooms all day to be shot like rats in the trap? Do you think we sit quiet when the storm blows out the electricity? *Nein!* I am no target. I, myself, run first thing into the hall."

"Bully for you, and I'm right behind you," the En-sign seconded his comrade. "I seen them glims was

doused. Then I heard that guy scream. Right after there was that shot. Huh," he grunted at Narcisse, "I tell you, chief, we'll all get shot if you don't snap into it. We'll all get shot before twenty-four hours—like Ti Pedro in there—"

Narcisse swore, "But some one of you has a gun." He pantomimed the maneuver. "Some one of you slipped out in the dark, broke into that room and jumped out again before I reached the door."

"And stopped to lock it after him?" The sailor's query was a vocal sneer.

Narcisse scowled. "You, Maître Tousellines. You delivered to me last night the key to that storeroom. Where is there another?"

The old black lawyer patted at his temples with his handkerchief. "M'sieu the lieutenant, there is not another. There is only that solitary key which I gave you."

"There must be another key!"

"There is but one," the lawyer stammered. "M'sieu Proudfoot was most cautious about the storeroom. It was there he cherished his rosewood coffin for safe keeping.

"How long did he cherish a coffin in there?" Pete wanted to know in a faint voice.

"Perhaps a year or so, *ma'mselle.*"

"What's that got to do with Ti Pedro gettin' sniped in the masthead?" the En-sign growled, waving a fist like a meat ball. "By Gee an' by God, Narcisse, are you gonna stand there askin' riddles instead of—"

Pete rebuffed the sailor with her level speech. "I only wondered how long the room had been closed."

"Ten thousand pardons," Narcisse bit through his teeth, "but I happen to be Inspector-Chief of the Garde d' Haiti, and I desire only to know how the room was opened when Louis had the single key in his pocket. I insist, Maître Tousellines, there is another key to this door!"

"There was but the one key, and that M'sieu Proudfoot carried on his watch chain. At his death I was to take it from him and open the room to produce the casket. Which I hastened to do. Then, m'sieu the lieutenant, last night I delivered the key to you. There is no other."

NARCISSE swallowed lantern light. His fingernails clawed through his buttered curls. He looked up and down the shadow-crowded lobby of the hall, and clawed at the hooks of his tunic collar. "How, then, does the murderer make this entry and exit from that room? How does Ti Pedro catch the bullet in the top of the skull?" He snarled at himself, "I was at that doorknob in two jumps after the shot. And he is shot in the top of—"

"In the top of his nut," interrupted the ineffable sailor with a sort of laugh. "Say, Narcisse, why don't you look for an aviator?"

The Haitian officer scathed the En-sign with a stare. "An aviator?"

"Well, they're the kind of guys usually shoot a fella through the top of his head." His mouth went up. He gave a roar of laughter. Narcisse crashed the hilt of his sabre on the floor. The En-sign stood to attention, sober as the hypothetical judge. Guffawing at murder! I drew Pete three inches away from the man. He wasn't normal.

Manfred had something to say. He stepped at Narcisse with a grimace; made a Nazi salute; clicked a right-about-face; stabbed a finger at the Widow Gladys.

"You waste your time, Herr Leutnant, until you fire one quick round of shots at this female witch. She was in the dark hall ahead of me, so. How do I know? Toadstool is with her, *ja,* and I hear the practised slap. So!"

Heads twisted at the Negress. She stood offside in a nest of bayonets like something in a zoo. At Manfred's pointed accusation, she made a half waddle forward, her arm uplifted for the assault; then she thought better of it, and grinned like a teakwood Steinway.

"Lawd, how dat Nazzy man he do lie. Ah sho' nuff comes outen my room in de dahk, Toadstool he'm along by. But we bof' behind dis yer' German Nazzy, dat's so. He out in de dahk first. An' I don't hit Toadstool, did I, Toadstool?"

She hit Toadstool before the guards could stop her. Toadstool spun like a toy wound up by the blow; came around in an imbecilic crouch; and ended up by saying no, the Widow Gladys hadn't hit him and never did.

Manfred grunted, "Just the same, she is a witch. Does she not call herself the sorceress? Look at that boy of hers. A cacodemon, five parts *Fledermaus!*" The German draped his jaw on his chest, pulled his ears down to his shoulders, contracted his eyes on the Negress, and succeeded in impersonating Lucifer rising out of the fumes.

The widow giggled. "Lawd, lookit dat Nazzy man!"

"So!" Having pumped up the bellows in his militant chest, Manfred deflated with a shout. "Listen, Narcisse. Here is a room locked up like the military fortress in Salzburg! The window, it is not opened. The doors, they are sealed. A man sees something, cries out and is shot into the top of the brain. It is then set on fire, the rug! You call that human? *Nein!* I say it is the work of that *bocor* witch woman!"

"Where is your room?" Narcisse flicked his sabre at the widow.

She nodded her chins, indicating the back hall.

"Toadstool, he was with you?"

The Widow Gladys nodded. She elevated her hand over Toadstool's cringing head in the lazy way of someone swearing an oath. Toadstool made a quick affirmative head-bob. The widow lowered her palm.

"If she moves," Narcisse snarled at his guards, "stab her. *Bien!* You, Toadstool, come with me. Let us talk in your room where your mother cannot reach you. As for the rest of you, wait where you stand!"

TOADSTOOL sidled out of line and followed the officer down the hall, through the darkness of the dining room into further darkness somewhere in back. As for the rest of us, we waited where we stood, a row of guarded blanks confronted by a closed door. I didn't dare look at Pete. I could see her hands in front of her, clasped together on a bit of handkerchief. She was staring at the closed storeroom door as if it wasn't there. The black police with their bayonets and white eyes looked like dressed up Zulus from a So-This-Is-Africa movie; and the hall smelled dark green in the wiggling oil lights; and the whole scene was taking on that spurious cast that anything as real as death always takes. There were the library doors closed on the cadavers of a doctor and an errant Englishman. Here was this storeroom door shut on the body of a third victim. Fifty hours ago I'd been an artist in New

York. Last night I sat through a wake in Haiti. Ten minutes ago I'd been sitting in an office under suspicion of murder. Now the lights had blown out and the murder was done. It wasn't convincing.

Wanting conviction, I found myself eying Maître Touselines. He chose the moment to clap on his 1861 hat and extract and consult his grandfather watch. His judicial lower lip mumbled French at the time, as if he were fussing in a hurry to meet an appointment. He couldn't be a murderer. He looked like a page out of Mother Goose and I'd seen him with her umbrella. Then the corner of my eye picked up the En-sign's beefsteak face—

He'd been calling me with his eye. Now he caught my glance; signalled me with an oblique wink. Manfred was studying me, too. I was convinced.

The navy man jerked his head. I took a backward step, and the pair leaned toward me in a friendly way, both smiling on the side of the face that was toward me.

I heard the En-sign breathe. "Nice work, kid."

Manfred winked the eye on my side of his face. "*Jawohl.*"

I gave them a vacant stare. Nobody home. The En-sign swerved a sideglance at the nearest gendarme, then scratched his upper lip with a finger and whispered under his hand. "You double-crossin' son of a pig, I ought to crack your head for burnin' my guts with that coffee this mornin', but you're actin' so clever—me an' Manfred gonna give you a las' chance—"

"A last chance," the German echoed softly.

Mice feet ran over my scalp. Pete was only a step away. If she overheard this—

I gestured pianissimo. The En-sign let his voice barely float. "Her an' you are gonna split with us, get that straight. We gets half or you don't get nothing but what we give you."

"What we give you," Manfred exhaled on a zephyr of beer.

"We know how you pulled this last job," the En-sign winked.

"We try to cover you by putting the blame on the black witch. We help you," the German confided.

"And if you don't give us a break I'm gonna spill the beans and me an' Manfred will cook your goose," the En-sign menaced with his lips.

"Goose," Manfred waggled his head somberly. He was opening and shutting his big hands at his sides; his eyes were amber with malevolence; his smeared cheekbone had shaded lavender. I suppose my own cheekbones were shaded with frost. Looking at Manfred, then, I could believe those stories about Socialists beheaded by executioners in tuxedos. A swift glance at the En-sign would ratify anything discreditable on the part of his compatriots.

"Go to hell," I consigned them with a secreted shiver; and I stepped up to Pete's arm, steering her closer to the nearest bayonet. I'd rather have stood with my back toward a team of Bengal tigers, and it took all my concentration to stay me from turning around.

Pete whispered up at me, "What did they want?" rigidly.

BEFORE I could lie to her, Narcisse and the Toadstool were focussed in the picture. The Haitian officer's features were out of place with rage, and he gave the blacker boy a shove that threw him

against his mother, a haven from which he was promptly slapped.

" The boy can tell me nothing," Narcisse fulminated at us. " He and his infernal mother were shut in a room behind the pantry. It would have been impossible for them to race this far down the hall at the moment of darkness, to shoot Ti Pedro and fire that grass carpet and retreat before I, myself, pounded at the locked door."

Tousellines offered, " It was an execution the most swift."

" It must be the devil, himself." Narcisse rapped the floor with his sabre hilt. *"Mon Dieu!* I say it must. Observe, Tousellines. I leave m'sieu the American and ma'mselle in the office under the stairway. I rush into the darkness of the hall. I call for lanterns. There was a scream. Then a shot. In two jumps I am at this door and it is locked. *Voilà!* It is Ti Pedro."

" Waydda minute, skipper. Waydda minute." The En-sign butted in hoarsely. " Didn't I tell you to look for an aviator?"

"Sacré! Any more of this jesting and I will sabre you to a—"

" I'm only tryin' to prove Ti Pedro was shot from aloft somehow. Stow your temper for a minute an' listen." Shouldering off the wall, the En-sign swaggered up to the officer, mouth cracked in a grin that bunched his red cheeks up over his eyes. He put his hand on the face of the corporal and pushed the darky to one side. He let his triumphant grin go from face to face; then squared off in front of Narcisse.

" Sherlock," he chuckled, " did I hear you say you was in that office under the stairs with the artist an' the Judy, here?"

" You did, swine!"

" The lights blows out an' you rushes into the hall, leavin' them two behind?"

"Oui, and they were unarmed."

" Whaddle you give me," he pointed a thumb at the door behind Narcisse, " if I tell you how that Pedro swab was bumped off?"

" If you know something and do not tell the police, *m'sieu,* I will most certainly give you the guillotine!"

" Save it fer a snappier dome than mine," the mariner advised venomously. " The trouble with you is, yuh don't use yours."

" Non?"

" Nah!" He tapped a green-edged fingernail on a bronze medal pinned to the lieutenant's bosom. " You disarmed this bunch, didn't you? Then what? You locked th' gats in that safe in the office. Then what? You leave this artist mug and his dame back there with the safe? Then what? You run out into the hall and stand around in the dark—"

IT penetrated my numbed brain that this talk had something to do with me. I took my hand from Pete's shoulder and pushed the En-sign's shoulder. " What the devil are you trying to tell these cops?"

He ignored me completely, except in what he said to Narcisse. " Don't you get it, chief? Didn't Ambrose tell you this guy's a safe-crackin' expert? It's plain enough for anybody. This artist fella opens that tin box, grabs himself a cannon, beats it into the hall—"

" That's a black lie!" Pete cried out. " I suppose—I suppose, Cart—if he did have a gun—could climb up through that little transom and out again—"

The En-sign put his tongue in his cheek like a cud of tobacco, and rubbed

the swelling with the back of a hair-matted hand. He blinked one eye at the transom, then rolled it blue and wide at Pete. "That's an idea, kid! Say! Say! D'you get it, Narcisse? Sure! The wise artist shot Ti Pedro through the transom. Yeh! Say, maybe I missed my berth. Maybe I shouldda been a dick! He shot Ti Pedro through the transom an' that's why the Dominican gets a bullet in th' top of his nut!"

"So I think you hit the nail on the head," Manfred spat out.

Narcisse was now looking at me, eyes yellowed.

The En-sign went on harshly. "That's the answer to this job. That's how th' killer gets outa th' room. He wasn't *in* th' room to begin with. Yah! He shot through the transom, downwards into Pedro's noggin! Sure you did," he chuckled at me. "Sure, an' what an ace of a sniper you are! Why," he roared, "I'll bet you wasn't near th' door, here, neither. Where was you, bright boy, when th' lights come on? Where was you when they brung th' hurricane lamps?"

"He was standing across the hall at the foot of the stairs," Pete defended fiercely.

"I was standing by that newel post and you saw me there!" I choked at the sailor.

"I saw him, myself," Narcisse glared.

"You bet," the En-sign made cheerful assent, "cos' that's just where he was, this arty guy. And why was he there? Because he come outa th' office with th' gat he's took from the safe he's opened, an' he went hikin' up them stairs over there. Standin' on them stairs he can draw a bead smack down through this transom over here. A pipe for a gunman like him!"

I untied cords in my throat and gnashed out, "I'd have to be a pretty good gunman to take a shot like that in the dark, particularly when I didn't have any gun—"

"You musta had a gun, bright boy, an' maybe it wasn't dark." The man's salty face fissured in a thousand merry wrinkles; his coppery nose screwed up between happy cheeks. "I got that answer, too. It was lightning outside, wasn't it? Down in the hall we couldn't see it, becos' there's no windows in th' hall. But up them stairs over there, lookin' across through th' transom into Ti Pedro's room, here, you could see it. Lightning plays behind that winda in there an' brightens up th' room. You see Ti Pedro's head, an' you pop a bullet down through th' transom an' hit him atop his nob!"

STEPPING out of shadow, Pete stood forward with fists clenched at her sides. "And since you've taken over the case," she accosted the En-sign scornfully, "perhaps you'll explain why a gun fired in total darkness on those stairs wouldn't be seen by us down in the hall?"

"Maybe Bright Boy muzzled the flame with a nose-blower or something. You tell us how he did it."

"And how was it," Pete cried, "the sound of the shot, when heard by the police lieutenant and the rest of us, seemed to come from Ti Pedro's room?"

The En-sign hitched a sweat-stained belt on his tattooed (and blistered) stomach muscles. "You said 'seemed to come,' didn't you, girlie? That's a give-away. It was thundering outside. Them voodoo drums is still goin'. The whole dam' house is fulla noise as a ship in a storm. How do you know where a sound comes from? You can't

never tell in the dark. Manfred," he twisted about to blink at the German, "where'd it seem to you th' shot was?"

"On the stairs, Herr En-sign."

"Narcisse," I bawled, "they're trying to frame me, and if you believe—"

I must have made a move at the officer, for Corporal Louis put a bayonet-point into the knot of my necktie and held me suddenly at attention. Tears were drops of quicksilver sliding down Pete's marble cheeks. I saw Narcisse snatch a lantern from one of his men; go sputtering across the hall to the stairway. The bull's-eye sent a yellow path mounting the steps ahead of him, and he was half way to the landing when he stopped, grabbed up something with a shout, came leaping down the steps and at us. Curses of astonishment rose in the windy gloom, my own curse leading the chorus in key and profanity. Narcisse carried a gun in his hand.

"It was dropped—or thrown—on those stairs. You were right, m'sieu the En-sign. Here is the pistol!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FACE ON THE FLOOR.

WELL, it wasn't anything else but. Not an automatic or a baby .22, but an old fashioned duelling pistol with a barrel as long as a piece of lead pipe and a long, curved, chased-silver handle, single-ball, vintage of colonial days.

Everybody looked at the pistol.

Lifting the muzzle to a splayed nostril, the officer sniffed audibly. "So! It has just been fired!"

Everybody looked at me.

I looked at everybody. Amazed satisfaction leered from the En-sign's mottled countenance; I saw his glance slue sideways at his infamous German partner; saw Manfred's eyebrows go up.

The Haitian lieutenant's teeth glittered as he barked, "Have any of you seen this weapon before?"

"I have."

Everybody looked at Pete. Pale, she was pointing a white finger at the gun in the officer's fist. "I saw that gun when I was a little girl. Uncle Eli's house in Florida. He kept it with a lot of others in a trophy case—he—that was Uncle Eli's gun!"

"But I—I have seen it, also," came the unexpected admission from Maître Tousellines. "It is one of a collection of which M'sieu Proudfoot was most choice. Always it was locked in the office safe."

Narcisse glowered, "I did not see it when I locked up the other weapons in the safe."

"It was in a little strong box," the lawyer gurgled.

"Who could open the strong box? Who has that key?" Narcisse shouted at his black compatriot. "Who?"

"Not I!" the old Negro wagged. "*Non,* I have not the strong box key. Nor do I know where it is. I could not open the box."

"Ah, but *ma'mselle* knew of this loaded pistol and its whereabouts," the officer's eyes flashed black lightning at Pete. "And her American friend could open the safe and the strong box, eh? I begin to believe m'sieu the En-sign speaks more truth than poetry when he accuses the so-called artist of this murder."

"I told you I had it figgered," the En-sign gloated.

As for me, I could only stand there in that ghost-gray hall, my brain in complete coma, everything going flibbergibbet around me, and listen to

those rats railroad me to beat the New York Central. Away off in the gloom, drums were trains in the rain; the hall of Morne Noir was a dim cavern of Inquisitionists; dead men stiffened behind doors; I could only stare with my tongue out at the weapon in Narcisse's hand. If it hadn't been for Pete they might have got me, right then. My head had stopped.

BUT Pete's warm-haired head hadn't stopped. In the space of five minutes the lights could go, the mute from Santo Domingo could be trapped and shot, murder in every shadow, storm and Witch's Sabbath—and when it comes to nerve I'll put my wager on the frailest woman, any time. She laughed. Her eyes narrowed green at those devils around her, and she laughed a cold laugh that shocked the color out of the darkest of those visages.

"Don't be a fool!" she spoke to the officer in the way women can speak to men. "The En-sign's story is all right, except it isn't true. Assuming Mr. Cartershall could open the safe in that dirty office—and Heaven knows he can't open a Gladstone bag without pinching his fingers—why should he go to the trouble of breaking into a strong box to get that ancient pistol when the safe was full of all kinds of guns?"

"Because the other guns, *ma'mselle,* were not loaded."

"Very nice," she said, tight-lipped (in my defense, and me standing beside her like a gawk), "but who set fire to the grass rug behind this door?"

Gulps from the audience.

"A shot from that stairway might go through the transom of this door," Pete scathed, "but it wouldn't hit a man directly through the top of his head. More likely it would hit him above the ear. Besides, just before we heard the shot we heard a scream. Somebody screamed 'Stop!'"

"True!" Narcisse bowed.

"And Ti Pedro never gave that scream," Pete's voice broke on a sob. "The voice screamed, 'Stop!' and that Dominican in there didn't—didn't have any tongue to—to scream out a word like that." She whirled on the En-sign, on Manfred. "There goes your murderous little plot to frame Mr. Cartershall. Who set fire to that grass rug? Who gave that scream?"

Under the girl's verbal attack German and sailor retreated against the bayonets. Head high, chin up, foot stamping, Pete turned on the gray police lieutenant. "You leave us alone! It was dark and the hall was full of—of other murderers! Listen, you! The inside door, nailed shut in there. What room is connected with that fastened door?"

The Haitian lieutenant scowled. "The billiard room—"

"Tell me! Tell me, you! Who was in the billiard room?"

The door to the billiard room, down the hall, stood shut. Narcisse glared at the door. "Ambrose was in there, and—"

"Who would benefit most by Ti Pedro's murder?" Pete lashed out. "Who was named third in the will?"

"Ambrose!" The hall echoed to the yell.

"And where," Pete finished, "is Ambrose?" She turned about, hugged my arm, put her face in my shoulder and began to cry. God knows what I did. In the cathedral-like gloom of that shade-infested hall, we stood like two lost souls while hullabaloo broke like the Tower of Babel at quitting time around us.

Ambrose! Ambrose! Where was that pink-eyed, tubercular Munchausen? He wasn't behind the chintz-and-chocolate bulk of the Widow Gladys, or behind the shining black shoulders of the Toadstool, or the lawyers' red-ingote, or the portières or anything else in the hall. Like a blow on the brain it came to me I hadn't seen him in the "accident crowd" gathered to spy at Ti Pedro's death-rendezvous; hadn't seen him since lanterns re-lighted the dark. Only Pete had owned enough mind to mark him absent.

"Ambrose! Good God! Third in the will—"

Some one else had remembered that numerical progression, too. Some one else had Ambrose's number!

NARCISSE went by. I saw him snatch a lantern from a gendarme's paw; make a rush at the billiard room door. The rest of us mobbed after him. He opened the door with a kick; then stood. The rest of us bunched and bayed on the threshold. Light sped into the room before us and explored a shadowy pool table, its mahogany legs and sagging pouches, its flat green cloth worn bald here and there and scarred with old cigarette burns, its little cluster of colored balls huddled together at one end of the field as if in fear.

Thunder boomed above the plaster ceiling, shaking the circular green shades of the dark overhead lamps. Rain tattooed on the shuttered side windows; and the weak lantern-light strayed beyond the table and grew weaker. So did the watchers in the doorway.

"Ambrose!"

The youth on the floor beside the table was spread-eagled. Arms and legs stretched X to mark the spot. Our combined lungs chorusing his name could not get a rise out of that lad; he was down to stay. Pinned like a bug by a hatpin. Impaled by a wooden lance that was speared through his skinny chest to nail him flat on the carpet.

Only (and you might say, this was the point!) it wasn't a lance. Ambrose had been speared by a billiard cue—a billiard cue that had been sharpened like a pencil, its polished shaft sticking straight up at the ceiling, allowing Ambrose to study the handle with white-lidded, horrified eyes, and his mouth wide open to yell. But that yell had been smothered by a gag; and let me live to a millenium, I'll never see the like of that gag again. I thought at first he had choked on a crimson crabapple. Jaws fastened apart by that unswallowable sphere in his mouth, he looked for all the world like a magician stuck in the middle of a trick.

What a trick that was! The deadly cueist had made his score. The shot had been called and played. Jammed in Ambrose's mouth was a billiard ball. We could see the little white circle with the number. Number Three!

PICTURE that decayed billiard room ominous in shadows and enfeebled light; that white-haired boy on the floor with a sharpened cue sticking up out of his wishbone and that billiard ball popping from his mouth; the thunderstruck huddle hoodooed in the door to the hall, and that other door nailed shut on the other room and the other dead man.

Nobody laughed. Nobody could move. Then Narcisse pulled himself together with an effort that made the fat sizzle on his forehead, backed out of the billiard room, slapped shut the door with a crash. The crash brought

pandemonium. It started with a sob and mounted to the hollering of Jerusalem's Wall. Tousellines moaned a prayer to his patron saint, and those about him took up the cry of calamity. Toadstool and his lovely mother were backing away from me, pointing black fingers, jibbering. I stepped on a policeman's foot, and the Haitian screeched as if he'd been tagged by the Grim Reaper.

Nobody wanted to stay in that billiard room. Nobody wanted to go back into the dark hall. There was a moment of hubbub, bravado, consternation and fright (such a coterie of gargoyle faces as Cocteau might have sketched during an opium fit) through which I shoved like a dummy with its straw out, and fought to shield Pete from mass panic. We were thrown back in a bargain-basement rush to the other side of the hall where there were certainly no bargains. Anything to get away from the doors on the library side. The library doors that were closed on doctor and Briton. The storeroom door, shut on the dead Ti Pedro. The billiard room portal, masking what had happened to Ambrose.

Best door in the house was the front door, open to the veranda and clouds of sooty rain; but two Haitian Guards stood with crossed bayonets in the frame, and the crowd could only back against the stairway.

My face was guttering at the temples. I clutched Pete's shoulders and spoke down to her hair. "Stick with it, Pete."

"I—I'm all right."

"They can't get away with any more. They can't!"

She said something I couldn't hear. Every one in the hall down to the last gendarme was saying something. Now was the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. It sounded as if the guests wanted to go. Twenty-four hours was a little too long, and whoever was trying to scare us away had outdone himself on this latest prank.

But we were going to play Questions and Answers again. A monstrous, blue-black .45 automatic glinted in Lieutenant Narcisse's fist. He appeared to be unwell. Pomade was melting in his curls and lubricating knots on his forehead; sweat formed in a row of glittering jewels on his upper lip. Nostrils opening and shutting, he stared dumbly at us, then at the billiard room door, uncertain, as if doubting what lay behind it.

"FIVE minutes," he doubted. "Five minutes of darkness and two men are slain. Ambrose came to the office, talked, marched across the hall to that curst game room; a cat's jump later he is killed." He began to breathe hard. "You, Corporal Louis. You shut him in there!"

"*Oui!*" The gendarme shuffled his feet.

"There is no lock on that billiard room door?"

"*Non,* m'sieu lieutenant."

"That Ambrose, he was all right when you shut him in?"

"Pink-eye boy all right, foah de Gawd!" the hare-lip honked. "Ah kicks him in room. Close de doah, Ah do. Just so Ah see pink-eye boy catch up cue an' staht to play. Louis waits front de doah an' heah de balls click-click. Den lights go pouf! Louis go fetch de lanterns."

"By Petian's soul! And the killer slides into that room and sticks him like a boar. *Oui,* it was Ambrose who

gave that scream. He saw the assassin coming at him." The automatic jiggled in the officer's grip. He scraped water from his upper lip with a grassy tongue; made a sudden twist at Manfred. "Captain Manfred von Gottz, your room is opposite that billiard room. And by your own confession you rushed into the hall the moment the lights departed."

"*Hein!*" The German's jawbones were bulging, yellow; the blemish on his cheek like red velvet. "*Aber,* I did not spear that white-headed mongrel. Where would I have on me the billiard cue? Or the knife with which it was pointed?"

Narcisse said thickly, "German dog, if the assassin had on his person a knife, why does he bother to fashion himself a lance?"

"Because the lance strikes deeper than the blade, *ja!*"

"M'sieu the Captain von Gottz speaks from experience," the Haitian officer reminded. "Is it not you were once captain of Prussian Uhlans, eh? Perhaps you know too much about this lance—"

"Dunderhead! Have I any knife to sharpen such a spear? Herr Proudfoot would not allow those who worked for him to carry knives."

"Ambrose had a knife." It was my own voice getting into the mêlée where it didn't belong. "He tried to stab me with it back there in the office and I damn well kicked it out of his hand." I laughed coarsely. I was acquiring some of the Morne Noir mannerisms, suddenly determined to play these criminals at their own vicious game and throw some mud on my own hook.

"Listen to me, lieutenant," I demanded. "You wanted to know what this sailor and this German swine were whispering at breakfast; by God, I'll tell you! That navy deserter and his Boche friend told me they had ways to finish the others. They said they were going to get Ti Pedro and Ambrose. They—"

The En-sign had been leaning on the balustrade, stuffing tobacco in his pipe, eyes riveted on the billiard room across the hall. My outburst dropped him in a crouch, his face turned savage as a Molly Maguire. "Who put a nickel in you?"

"You did," I said with a calmness that astonished its owner. "You and your Nazi boy friend. I'll put a stop to this Greek chorus of yours. If you think you can frame and threaten Miss Dale and me—"

"Why did you not speak of this at once?" Narcisse sputtered.

"I was going to," I snapped. "But I thought they were pulling a bluff and I didn't want to scare Miss Dale. When Ti Pedro was shot I—I didn't have a chance to speak. Now I'm telling you. I wanted to tell you when you asked me in the office—"

I STOPPED to grab breath, and before I could get started again, the En-sign's mouth was chewing:

"Don't be a fool, Narcisse. This guy is ribbing you with a pack of lies. Look, Narcisse. By Gee an' by Gawd, if he kicked a knife outa Ambrose's hand in the office, like he says, then that would give Bright Boy a blade to sharpen a cue with, wouldn't it?" He straightened up from the crouch, his mouth a hyphen between the red parenthesis of his cheeks. He poked the pipe stem at me. "I betcha you speared that little harpoon in Ambrose, yourself!"

I shed a little of my self-collectedness. "You and Manfred said you were going to murder those two!"

"You wouldn't send an innocent guy to hell for somethin' *you* done, would you, Bright Boy?"

Calmness departed. "You lousy rat, are you trying to frame me again?"

Of course he was trying to frame me again, the same way Manfred was consistently trying to frame the Widow Gladys. Not that I couldn't believ the Negress and her son capable of murder in any degree, but I doubted the one-armed woman's ability to wield a spear in so drastic a manner. Whereas Toadstool might have done so with a smile, I considered neither him nor his mother endowed with the imagination that must have been behind that billiard room scene. These deductions I made in my best Gaborieau manner (oil colors being my medium) and was furiously convinced that Manfred and the En-sign were close as crossed fingers behind this noon-hour massacre. Not being a Paris fiction detective, and Pete being present, I could only call the En-sign a rodent and ask, thick-tongued, if he was trying again to frame me. Trying? That was a laugh.

"Nah! I'm just tryin' to help th' police, an' save my life before you get down the list to me." The mariner was once more amused. Cheeks fiery as carbuncles, throat chuckling, he leaned against the stair-rail, coolly adjusted the pipe in his teeth and held a match before eyes as blue and guileless as those of a cathedral-window saint.

"Sherlock," he advised Narcisse, "I see this here pair of murders plain as I'm seein' you. The girl, now. *She's* the sniper what shot Ti Pedro. Look. Her arty boy friend opens the safe, quick as light gives the dame the loaded pistol. She beats it up the stairs an' pots the Dominican. Meanwhile, *he* takes th' knife he's grabbed off Ambrose, ducks acrost to the billiard room, yanks a cue off the wall and with one swipe cuts himself a spear. Ambrose sees him an' lets out a squawk. He whales the spear into Amby, beats it back acrost to the stairs just as his girl friend shoots Ti Pedro, an'—"

"Wait!" Narcisse held up a hand at the En-sign; spun at me. "Where is this knife you grabbed from Ambrose in the office?"

"I didn't grab it. I kicked it. For God's sake, lieutenant, can't I tell you something?"

"I have no doubt you could tell me a great deal."

"It wasn't only at breakfast those two threatened Miss Dale and me. They were giving me the high sign while you were questioning Toadstool a few minutes ago."

"That is a lie!" Manfred shouted.

The En-sign cried plaintively, "Narcisse, this arty mug is a triple liar. He was threatening Manfred an' *me* at breakfast! Tellin' us to clear out of Morne Noir or him and the Jane would smack us down."

"You're a liar," I shouted.

"*Herr Gott!* it is the pot calling the kettle black," Manfred shook a fist at me.

DESPERATION wried my tongue; tied up my vocabulary. Everybody was shouting now. Liar! Liar! Diogenes would have run out of lamp oil in that ménage of mendacity. I shall always remember the En-sign as one of the few talented people who could yell a falsehood and perjure himself like an advertising man—that is to say, misrepresent with

a smile and look you straight in the eye.

He was looking me straight in the eye. "By cripes, Bright Boy, you got a nerve," he was bellowing. "Trying to plant these butcherings on us, and all the time you know it's you and your babe."

I burbled at the sailor, "I'll kill you for this!" and tried to hit him, but Pete held my arm.

"Sure you'll kill me," the En-sign was crying in a wounded tone. "You'll kill us all if the cops don't put you and your girl out the way. Four murders just since the funeral. By Christmas!" he flung at Narcisse, "didn't Ambrose tell you this bird was a safe-buster an' a Capone gunman! Didn't Ambrose say he seen this yegg in the trap six years ago at Miami!"

"Ambrose lied!" I cawed.

"Why would Ambrose lie about you, Bright Boy?"

"Because he wanted the police to get me out of here. You and he and the rest of your murderous gang. Trying to frame Miss Dale and—"

"Ambrose had the goods on you! You ain't no artist! You're a homicidal maniac, by Gawd! Ambrose reckanized you; an' you put him on the spot so's he wouldn't blab. You an' the dame will put us all on the spot —to get the Old Man's estate—if this dumb Haitian cop don't nail you. Pinch 'em both," he shouted at Narcisse. "Pinch 'em both before they kill us all! Same as they killed Amby an' Ti Pedro—"

"He didn't kill Ti Pedro and Ambrose!" Eyes blazing, Pete spoke a flow of low, fierce words. "You navy deserter—you inhuman thug! You're trying to confuse the police! Don't listen to him, Lieutenant Narcisse! You listen to me! I think I can tell you how Ti Pedro was killed—"

Narcisse lifted an elbow; shoved Pete out of the way.

"Can you prove, *m'sieu,* that you are this artist you claim to be?"

I couldn't budge my tongue.

"Fool!" Pete cried at the officer. "If he's a gunman would he be carrying a box of paints and—the *canvas!* The painting! Why," Pete's eyes were wide blue, "he's even got a portrait with him! My portrait! Upstairs in the room! Show him, Cart!" she sobbed. "Show this fool!"

Narcisse gritted at me, "You have this work of art with you?"

Dumb, I nodded.

Shadows and struggling faces, the gray hall with its doors closed on the murdered and its front door open to black rain and drum-thumped mist reeled in front of my eyes. Bong! The old clock on the stairs started filling the gloom with the tolling of twelve. Noon? I had never seen a noon so merged with midnight. The big gun in the police lieutenant's fist was levelled at my jugular vein.

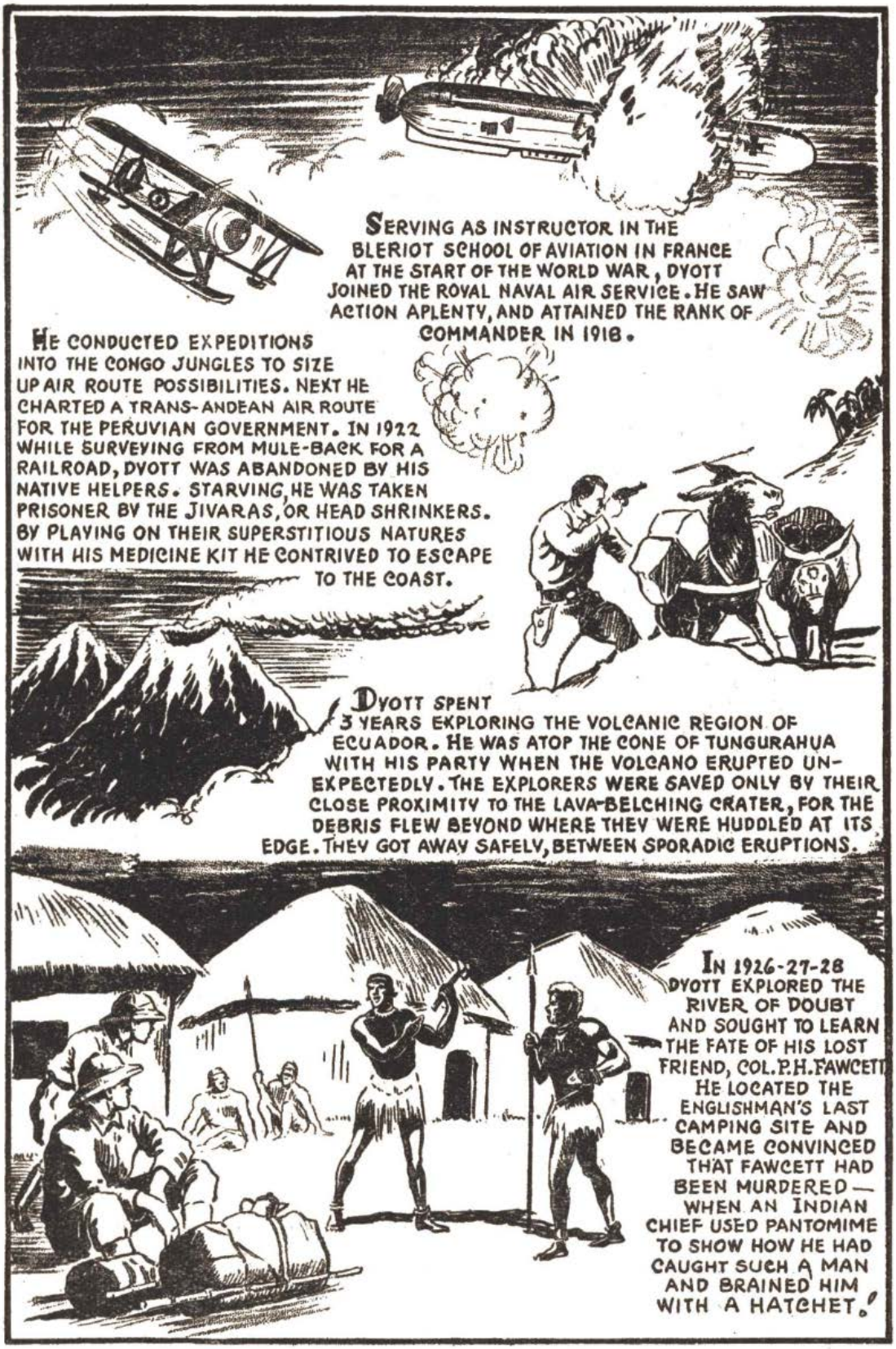
"I give you ten minutes," he was dicing the whispered words through his teeth. "If you are an artist I will believe Ambrose lied. If you are an artist I will be convinced you are not gunman and murderer. You have canvas and paint-box, *oui?* Perhaps that is but part of the disguise. But the talent, that is something you cannot pretend. M'sieu the artist, I desire to watch you paint!"

"Paint?" I gurgled. "In this madhouse?"

"*M'sieu,* I give you ten minutes to prove you are an artist."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

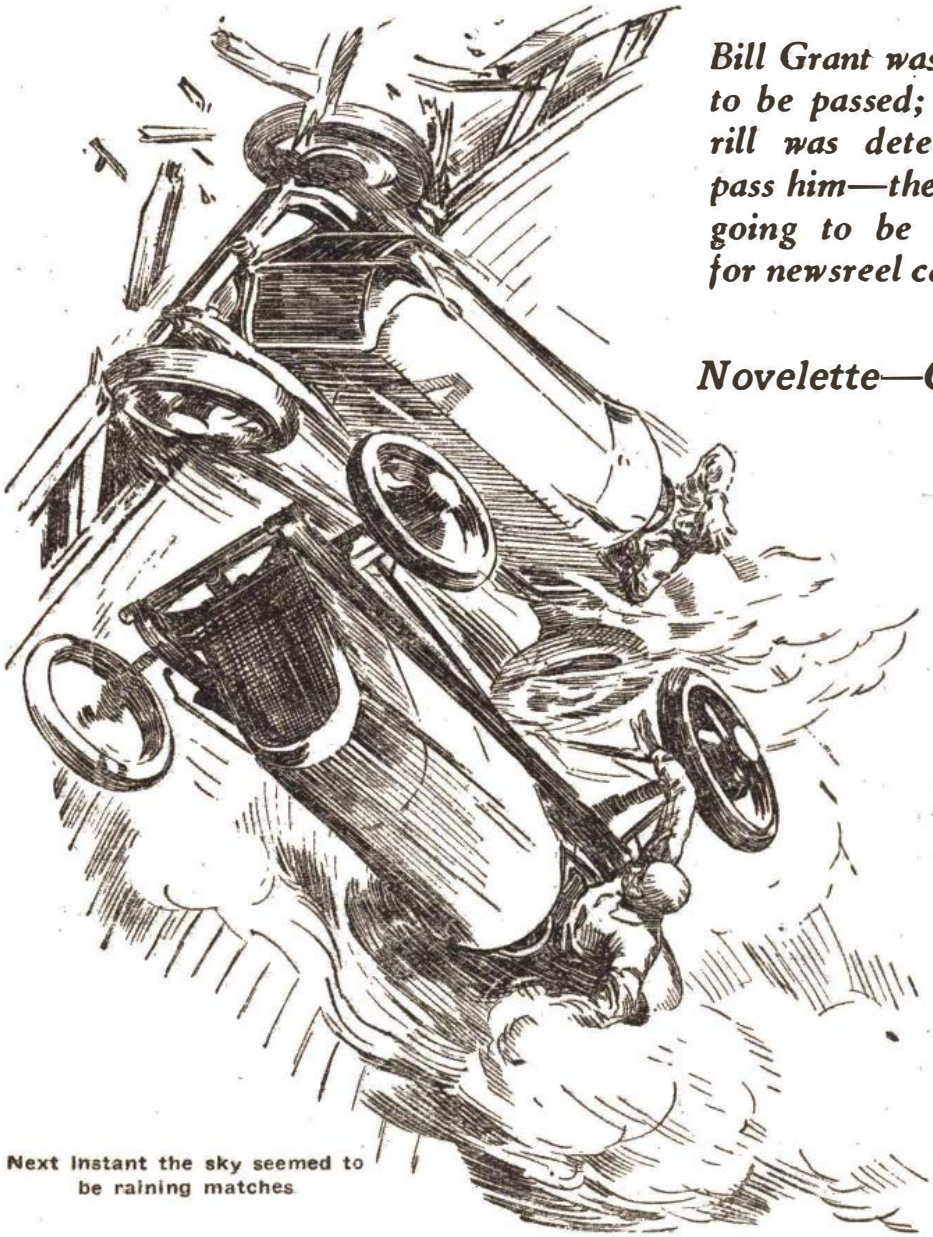

MEN of DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
EXPLORER AND AIRMAN
An adventurer since his early youth, George M. Dyott has been in the thrilling game of hunting odd spots all his life. He has survived countless perils. Inaccessible South American interiors have been his specialty.
COMMANDER
DYOTT
BORN IN NEW YORK, THE SON OF AN ENGLISH FATHER AND AN AMERICAN MOTHER, DYOTT WAS EDUCATED IN ENGLAND. AT 17 HE RETURNED TO AMERICA SEEKING HIS FORTUNE. MINING IN THE WEST, HE STRUCK GOLD AND WAS ABLE TO FINANCE A LONG COVETED TRIP TO THE SOUTH SEAS. THEN HE WENT BACK TO ENGLAND AND STUDIED ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING AT FARADAY HOUSE.
IN 1909 HE INVENTED, BUILT AND FLEW A RACING MONOPLANE, COMPETING IN AIR MEETS AT HEMPSTEAD PLAINS, L. I. HE MADE THE FIRST NIGHT FLIGHT IN A HEAVIER-THAN-AIR MACHINE. THE FIRST EXPLORER TO USE AN AIRPLANE IN HIS WORK, HE TOOK TWO PLANES TO MEXICO FOR EXHIBITIONS AND EXPLORATIONS. AFTER STUNTING OVER THE BULL RING AT MERIDA, YUCATAN, HIS PLANES WERE SEIZED AND HE AND CAPT. PAT HAMILTON WERE JAILED. ESCAPING, THE TWO AIRMEN HIRED A LOCOMOTIVE AND GOT OUT OF THE COUNTRY.



Next Week: Gen. Lazarro Cardenas, Mexico's Fighting Chief

All the Breaks

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS



Next instant the sky seemed to be raining matches

Bill Grant was not going to be passed; Cliff Merrill was determined to pass him—the result was going to be good stuff for newsreel camera men

Novelette—Complete

FOR three seconds it looked as if Cliff Merrill would take Bill Grant on the last turn at the Branfield Fair Grounds.

Bill had a lead of one length, a good fast car and the title of Northeastern U.S.A.A. champion. But all that was not enough against the ten thousand dollars' worth of gleaming speed at the command of Merrill, the Dollar Kid. The silver car came up on the sober gray bus like a bullet.

But suddenly Bill Grant's gray car, on the inside as the two hit the sharp

curve in the half-mile dirt track, slung its rear end toward the outside fence. The whiplike skid came at the very instant that Merrill's glittering machine was passing.

There was a crack, a geyser-like spurt of brown dust, and two cars, wheels locked, soared up the bank. At the top of the steeply sloping curve stood the fence. A six by six timber ran along the bottom of it as a guard rail. This opposed the progress of the tangled cars.

Next instant there was a hole in the fence and the sky seemed to be raining matches.

Before the dust had cleared away, Cliff Merrill, hanging onto a broken arm with his good one, was out of his bucket seat. He stamped in helpless wrath in front of Bill Grant, who was crawling from his overturned machine with a chest full of cracked ribs.

"You pulled that skid deliberately!" Cliff Merrill raged. "You crooked oaf, you—you saw I was going to pass, and you cracked me up! You meant to crowd me into the guard rail to take the race!"

"Me?" said Bill Grant. He got to his feet with a grunt. Slowly he staggered around to the front of his machine. The left front wheel was gone, the front axle was broken, and it looked as if the frame were twisted.

Up on the track the trailing cars, leaders now, blasted past the hole in the fence on their way to the checkered flag

Cliff Merrill followed the chunky, hard-bitten champion in undiminished rage. In the tall young man's jet black eyes blazed a flame of furious hatred.

"I'll get you for this!" Cliff Merrill rasped, still gripping his fractured arm. "Maybe you were a champ till I came along, but I'll show the boys—and the grandstand, too—what a two-timing, no-account quitter you are! I won't just beat you—I'll lap you! That's what I'll do—I'll come back to this track and I'll lap you!"

"Me?" muttered Bill Grant.

He was squatting by his gray car, squinting sadly along the frame. It certainly was twisted; it looked just about the way his ribs felt.

Cliff Merrill whirled around and, disdaining the ambulance crawling around the track, walked off toward the road.

TWO years later Bill Grant was still champion of the dirt tracks making up the Northeastern circuit. A couple of other ambitious young men were breathing on the back of his neck, but he still held the title.

And he came back to that same Branfield Fair track for a three-session Labor Day week-end program. It rained Thursday, Friday and Saturday, thereby raining out completely one of the three racing days. The pilots needed those other two days badly.

Bill hadn't seen Cliff Merrill since the dust had subsided. But Bill, and also Jeff Kingsley, his mechanic, and the rest of the boys who drove on the Northeastern circuit, had heard plenty about Merrill.

Merrill was the goods. Volcanic in his seat when he was out of his car, he was as cold as blue ice when he was wheeling.

The millionaire sportsman had junked the damaged silver bus sight unseen, and flown to the Coast, where he bought a couple of Millers and got back in the game as soon as his arm knitted. Though he had to sweeten the kitty again for a third car after knotting up the others, he had cleaned up that winter in California.

Coming East next spring, he had taken third on the bricks at Indianapolis—third place in the five hundred! Then he had gone abroad, picked up a French, an Italian and two English machines, and won a French road race, a Brooklands feature, and the annual scramble in Tunis.

He had returned, with another Italian car reputed to have been turned out by hand in thirty months under the critical eye of Mussolini himself. He had a staff of engineers, mechanics and —so it was rumored—press agents to keep his fame burning brightly in the newspapers. Whether the story about Mussolini were true or not, he had taken the five hundred miler in the Hoosier speed capital with the Italian car—taken it from the cream of American pilots and the best cars they could buy or borrow for a shot at the big prize.

That was about all Bill Grant and Jeff Kingsley knew of Cliff Merrill, except that he wasn't bothering about the insignificant Northeastern circuit any more. And they weren't bothering about Merrill in their absorption in the struggle to keep far enough ahead of the game to buy camshafts, ham and eggs, and tires.

Jeff Kingsley, oil-blackened hands on hips, watched with approval on Saturday morning when no less than two sound trucks from rival movie organizations rolled into the infield.

"They're finally getting onto the fact that we've got class and speed, even if we mostly hit dirt half-milers," the mechanic said proudly to the stocky, silent driver. "Huh, Bill?"

Bill did not reply. His gray eyes were wandering reflectively over his mount. The gray paint was new, but the car under it was the same car with the frame lined up, and the motor was still the same old two-cam, sixteen-valve job. In its day it had been rated an alligator by despairing rival drivers, but now it was not much better than a clunker.

"Well, will you look at this!" Jeff gasped, eyes still bulging toward the infield entrance. "We're playing to nobility!"

Into the field had swung a long, low, cream-colored machine with a footman rigidly in place beside an imposing chauffeur. Riding alone in the open body of the car, screened by a glittering, movable windshield, rode a tall, slender gentleman in a spotless white linen suit and Panama hat.

"Nobility!" muttered Jeff as the car rolled effortlessly over the rough infield. "I should ha' said royalty! Bill, I'll bet two bucks that bus hurt that bird's pocket more'n we've drawn down three seasons in prize money."

Bill Grant did not take the bet. His eyes had passed from that splendid pleasure vehicle to a bright blue truck following it. There was a car—a racing car—mounted on that truck. And behind the truck rolled a glossy new sedan of a famous make, and behind that several other cars, in which cameras and camera men, equally unmistakable, might be seen.

IT wasn't until the cream colored car had come to a swift, silent halt beside the pit fence that Jeff Kingsley got his shock.

"It's—it's Merrill—Cliff Merrill, Bill!" he croaked suddenly. "And that's the Italian Angino—the thirty-grand car! He's come to take you—Bill, he's come to clean you—like he said! Bill— Where in hell are you, Bill?"

Bill, after a single glance at the resplendent blue racer, had walked out

onto the track. He stooped over it thoughtfully. He picked up a handful of the damp, soft dirt into which the surface had been converted by the three day rain. Intently he examined it, quite unmindful of the jittery mutterings of his mechanic.

"Tow the bus back to the garage, Jeff," he said suddenly. "I want a fine mesh wire screen mounted in front of the radiator."

"But, Bill, I got a screen on it now!" Jeff objected. "With a fifty lapper scheduled for this afternoon you'll need all the breeze you can get through that boiler."

"Yep!" Bill's voice was amiable but his gray eye was decided.

With a sigh Jeff picked up a wrench and the tow bar.

Bill Grant leaned against the fence. He continued to lean as Cliff Merrill, emerging from the cream colored dream through a door opened by the footman, strode over to him. Behind Merrill came a crowd of camera and newspaper men, all of whom seemed to know that something was going to happen. The pilots and mechanics of the Northeastern outfit joined the mob scene, full of curiosity.

Cliff Merrill brought his slender, white-clad, six-foot body to an abrupt halt two feet from chunky Bill Grant. For an instant his black eyes roved challengingly over Bill's scarred and unprepossessing countenance. Then he spoke in a voice shaking with emotion.

"Grant, I said two years ago, when I was only a young amateur, that I would show you up for a dirty trick you played on me. I've picked up a little information about handling a car since then and I'm here."

"That's good — fine," said Bill approvingly.

"I'm showing you up as a quitter, a coward and a bully, Grant!" Merrill flared. "I'm here to say it with speed on your own track; on your own circuit. I've come not just to beat you, Grant; I'm here to lap you!"

Somewhat sadly Bill Grant's eyes flicked toward his old gray job. Then he realized that, although he disliked public speaking, a reply to this sonorous declaration was due.

"Me?" he inquired mildly.

"You!" snapped Cliff Merrill. "And I'm giving you fair warning. I'm trimming you in the fifty lapper to-day and in the sprints to-morrow. I'm letting the people who regard you as a champion in this corner of the country know that in fast company you're a welcher with a macaroni backbone."

A pug-nosed reporter nudged Ray Vane, who represented the U. S. A. A. at that sanctioned meet.

"Fighting words," he said. "Why don't your local champ hand something to the Dollar Kid if he isn't all that Merrill calls him?"

The U. S. A. A. man smiled languidly. "To a young man used to risking his neck about five times per lap throwing fists around is kid stuff," he explained.

Cliff Merrill bunched up his knuckles and shook them under the stocky champion's slightly bent nose.

"I'm lapping you!" he declared. "Lapping you! Get it?"

Bill Grant blinked. But if he contemplated speech it was unnecessary, for Jeff Kingsley dropped the tow bar just then. With blackened hands clenched at his sides the mechanic confronted Cliff Merrill.

"Throw out the anchors, you!" he blazed. "You come down into the dirt with a lot of hot air in front of

you and the hottest automobile in the world at your back. With a car like that why wouldn't you take Bill—Ouch!"

Bill Grant's toe, impinging upon his ankle, effectively cut off his flow of language. Bill Grant's eye indicated the tow bar meaningly.

"My car is fast but it isn't built for half mile dirt," Merrill answered disdainfully. "I'm giving you that advantage, too—racing a heavy machine against your light one, Grant. Any more alibis?"

Bill Grant shook his head.

BY rolling around the track in twenty-eight seconds flat, Cliff Merrill's blue Italian streak not only hung up a record but won pole position—inside in the first rank of cars—for the start of the fifty lapper.

"That blasted publicity hound's come here to ruin your rep and bust you just for the front page space there is in it for him," Jeff growled.

"No; the boy's sore at me as well as spectacular," Bill asserted.

It was all Bill Grant could do to wrest second position in the time trials by a scant two-fifths of a second from Al Kelly. Kelly, impressed by the blue Angino, uncorked his mount to the limit and narrowly missed kissing the fence.

Ten cars qualified for the fifty lapper, which was too many for that soft and narrow track.

"What is this—an obstacle race?" Cliff Merrill demanded, scowling disdainfully at the sad looking tail-enders.

John Powell, the perspiring starter, to whom he voiced his complaint, was almost too busy lining them up to answer.

"Obstacle races are the only kind there are," he said over his shoulder. "If you can't squeeze past 'em I'd say that rapid Italian iron of yours is fast enough to take off and fly over 'em."

The visiting speed king smiled quietly.

"That's what Grant is going to think I'm doing," he said. "When I'm through with him the grandstands will advise your Northeastern champ to take up velocipede racing with the other kids on his block."

But Powell was back in the haze of blue castor oil fumes, shouting directions to the hopeful young men in ninth and tenth positions, who were lost in the fog and stunned by the deep, roaring note of the warming revving motors. A couple of camera men pulled Cliff Merrill back to the blue Angino and he climbed in and put on his racing face.

"I'm going to lap you, champion!" he roared to the man in the car alongside.

Bill Grant, hunched low in his bucket seat, waited patiently. In his strong, blunt fingers he was rolling a little pellet of dirt from the track. The camera men snapped him, too, but the little round wad of mud was out of reach of the camera lenses and Bill's face was set in thoughtful rather than in fighting lines.

Powell got them away to circle the track for the flying start. Cliff Merrill, setting the pace, wheeled around so briskly that a couple of cars, struggling against fouled plugs, were trailing in the grandstand stretch. The starter kept his green flag rolled up and motioned them around the course again.

This time they were bunched and in order. Powell snapped his green flag as they came blasting down toward the starting line.

Merrill stepped on the blue Angino.

The car lifted pace like a diving airplane. Out of that mass of roaring hot steel the winner of the five hundred miler shot without effort. In a hundred feet the gleaming car left Bill Grant's gray job a length behind. As the first turn came up ahead Merrill, reaching for his hand brake to steady the machine, glanced around and saw that he was all alone.

Bill Grant was forty feet behind, with Al Kelly and Ham Slocum almost climbing up his tail. The rest of the field was nowhere.

Merrill had a free and dustless track ahead. With his foot eased on the throttle he drifted around and cut loose again on the back straightaway. Bill Grant followed, still losing ground but pushing his bouncing car hard all the way around the corner. Both Kelly and Slocum found themselves taking his dirt.

And it was dirt, to-day, not dust. The spurting rear wheels of every car on the track were picking up the half dried surface of the track in the anti-skid tread of the tires and slinging it backward like buckshot out of a gun. The mud balls burst and the pebbles rattled on hoods, windscreens, crash helmets and goggles.

OUT in front Cliff Merrill pressed his mount. He cut it loose on the stretches, hurtling down them like a meteor; then braking hard and riding the turns at a less violent pace. That rough little half mile circuit wasn't the kind of driver's paradise where a man plants one foot hard down on the accelerator and the other foot on top of the first to keep it from slipping off.

It wasn't until the third circuit of the fifty lap race that Merrill ran into the tail end of the field. He ducked behind his windscreen as the hail of mud hit him and hummed past the trailing car like a streak of light. Just a hundred feet ahead two old crates were ding-donging down the track in a hot battle for eighth place. Merrill closed up on them. Then the blue car's swift progress was interrupted. Traffic jam. Grit scored the turquoise paint work; mud hurtled past Merrill's head. On a turn the green clunker triumphantly dived past its skidding yellow rival. Then Merrill, with a brief burst of top speed, took them both on the backstretch.

Bill Grant had already lost a good quarter of a lap. He held second place, standing off Kelly and Slocum and finally batting out a lead of two hundred feet on Kelly, who had grabbed third position. But now as Bill hit the back and home stretches he got no more than a fleeting glimpse of the flying blue machine whipping into a turn ahead and vanishing.

There came a time in that thunderous conflict when there was no flick of blue ahead. Merrill was stretching his lead to half a lap. And the race was not yet half over.

Bill Grant grinned wryly and hammered on. The track was full of cars now as the field spread out. Bill took them as they showed ahead, on curve or straightaway, though skidding wheels menaced and the blurred white fence drifted close as he jammed his mount through the holes.

Only once did his eyes, screwed up behind his dirt streaked goggles, glint hopefully. That was when he hurtled down the grandstand stretch and caught a glimpse of a yellow car slowing for a stop.

The driver of that tail-ender was

pointing a finger rigidly toward his radiator cap as he ground to a stop in the pits. A streak of white steam showed under the frame of his car. His radiator was boiling over.

Lap after lap went by. No swirling dust cloud rose and clung above the scored surface of the banked turns; the brown dirt flung up by forty wheels was too heavy and water-soaked to hang in the air.

But that dirt was doing its stuff nevertheless.

Still they blared on, with men and metal strained to the utmost. As the wheels ploughed and slashed up the banked corners the pilots bounced high in their bucket seats.

The battle to keep the car under control and yet revving its best grew harder as the track roughened more and more. Throttle feet jarred off the accelerators; the drivers were thrown about and jerking wheels became things to cling to as well as to steer by.

Unceasingly they hacked away at the dwindling distance that separated them from the checkered flag. Bill Grant was taking long chances on every curve.

The track was clearing up now, as car after car pulled into the pits. One went out when a broken connecting rod hurtled through the crankcase. But most of the stops were made with the driver signalling frantically for water.

Unfortunate mechanics risked scalding to get the radiator caps off and plumes of steam mounted high into the air as the loosened caps blew off.

BEFORE the fortieth lap Kelly and Slocum both pulled in with overheated motors. Bill Grant rode in second place unchallenged.

But now Bill Grant was no longer looking down the stretches ahead; he was glancing back. He had lost distance to the Angino. Merrill's blue streak was coming—closing up behind on every short straightaway. And finally Merrill was surging up close in back of Grant's flying gray mount at the end of every stretch.

And there were ten laps to go!

All Merrill needed to lap the champion was an unobstructed straightaway.

On those rough, ploughed up turns Bill Grant's jarring car held off the Angino. Bill's flying wheels sent a shower of mud back at the ever challenging Merrill as both cars barrelled into the corners. More dirt went whirring back as with wrestling forearms and straining shoulders, shooting off the curves, they fought their steering wheels to straighten out on the stretches.

It was tough going. Bill Grant was saved twice by trailing cars running wide on stretches, which made three abreast impossible or extremely risky for Cliff Merrill.

And Merrill was content to wait, with his rival on the griddle, pushing his old gray beyond the danger limit, while he rode the Angino with power yet uncorked under his throttle foot.

Bill Grant was close to the end of his tether. The forty-fifth lap was coming up.

Nobody knew better than Bill the bitter axiom that a slow car will be passed by a fast car. But he hung on doggedly while his connecting rods still took the kick of his hot, hard-pressed pistons.

Bill came bouncing off the corner into the grandstand stretch. It was empty of cars—and it was the grand-

stand stretch. He clamped his jaws together as tightly as his foot was clamped on the throttle pedal.

Cliff Merrill came out to take him. Before Bill's gray mount reached the first crowded stand Merrill's blue Angino came boring through the breeze to a place almost alongside. The Italian car's front wheels whirred up on a level with his rear shoes; Bill's quick glance backward gave him a glimpse of the bared teeth and grinning lips of the speed king.

But he saw something besides the pilot. There was a plume of white vapor gushing backward from the bottom of the Angino's radiator. Steam!

Bill kept his foot down hard and his car rifling along an unswerving course close to the infield fence. The turn was leaping toward him with grandstand and pits mere blurs on either side.

The Angino hung on his flank. Its front wheels crawled as far as his bucket seat. Then they slipped back an inch—a foot—half a car length.

Cliff Merrill's lips were more curved than ever. But it was a snarl rather than a grin that they displayed. Steam!

Braking at the last minute Bill hit the curve and went broadsiding up the bank in a bouncing, almost uncontrollable car. Desperately he straight-armed the steering wheel, with every sinew straining. He kept command and went jarring on around the corner. He had not been lapped.

Bill had no moment to look, but he knew the Angino was somewhere behind him. Steam!

Well Bill knew what had happened to that intricate masterpiece of mechanism. Dirt—damp, clay-like dirt—from his shoes and the shoes of every other car had been flung through the screen into the core of the Angino's radiator. Steadily it had packed into the air spaces until the radiator offered no more passage to the cooling air than a comb filled with honey. And as the water in the cooling system boiled away in a steady white gush of steam the fast revving motor had gotten hotter and hotter.

Bill's own radiator, with two fine meshed screens in front of it, was still keeping his water below the boiling point. His old engine was still turning at full power.

On the backstretch he planted his foot down hard and looked back at his rival.

Merrill had dropped a hundred feet. A bearing or wrist pin might let go and send a connecting rod through the crankcase, or a red hot piston might seize in its cylinder. But even without cracking his motor he was fading.

Nevertheless, as things stood, Bill Grant was badly beaten.

BILL GRANT jammed on. He raced along the curving, sloping brown ribbon at all his motor would give him. Cliff Merrill had been within inches of lapping him. And a lap was half a mile and the race was almost over. Bill poured in the gas, eating up space. He was asking for a crack-up as he slammed into every corner.

The light blue flag flicked in his face. Last lap! He did not know where Merrill was. Bill was riding to the finish at the last notch of speed in his jarring mount. That was all he could do.

He hit the curve in unfaltering power and blared around into the backstretch. His glaring eyes suddenly

picked up ahead the blue car. Two cars separated them, but Bill Grant took them both on the stretch. Then, though he skidded to the perilous verge of a spin, he man-handled his car around that last, hard bend on the tail of the flying Angino.

Both cars broadsided off the corner into the homestretch. But it was Bill Grant's gray warhorse that had the pick-up in the final pinch. He crept by the overheated blue machine. Fifty feet in the lead he hurtled past the checkered flag. First!

With every nerve and muscle in his body relaxing like unstrung bow-strings Bill Grant circled the track and pulled into the pits opposite the yelling, stamping stands. His face was wooden.

Cliff Merrill coasted in behind. He stopped his car in front of Grant's with a jerk of the hand brake. He leaped out. Ripping off his goggles he walked up to the front of Bill Grant's car. His eyes, white-rimmed in an oil-blackened face, glared at the two radiator screens. Then he swung around and in a leap confronted his scrawny, gum-chewing chief mechanic. His right fist, swinging upward, caught the man on the jaw and knocked him against the Angino's hot motor.

"You blasted fool!" he raged. "You lost that race for me!"

His eyes darted lightning at Grant. He levelled a shaking finger at the chunky pilot.

"You beat me—but by a trick!" he shouted. "Not by driving — by a trick!"

"Me?" inquired the dirt champ.

"It won't save you to-morrow in the sprints," Cliff Merrill declared, suddenly choking down the wrath in his voice and speaking with deadly certainty. "I'll show you up then, you sneaking, yellow plotter! That trick won't save you twice!"

"Have to think up another, then," Bill Grant murmured imperturbably. "Nice car you've got there."

He dragged himself out of his bucket seat and looked from the Angino to his own machine with his forehead wrinkling thoughtfully.

IN the garage that evening the day's work really started for Bill Grant and Jeff Kingsley. Fifty laps at top does things to an old motor.

"The clunker's got to ape to-morrow, Jeff," Bill said. "The track's drying up fast; maybe a change of gears might help some."

"How'm I going to make that pile o' scrap equal to an Angino?" Jeff Kingsley demanded passionately.

Bill grinned appealingly. "I don't need one as fast as Merrill's bus," he said. "I'm chipping in a little experience."

Jeff Kingsley shook his head in mournful doubt; then brightened up a trifle.

"That Angino overheated so much to-day that she may not be so hot to-morrow," he suggested.

"Never won a race yet by hoping," Bill Grant said. He stared hard, with perplexity in his eyes, at the motor. She had not wound up all season any faster than she had to-day in the fifty lapper. But to-morrow the races were sprints. The main event was a ten mile race. It took flash—pick-up—lift—to win a short one. And something else.

Slowly Bill Grant turned away from the motor and looked at the rear brakedrums.

"Got any kicks on them binders?" Jeff inquired caustically.

Bill touched the handbrake. "Are those brakes as good as you can make 'em?" he inquired.

"They're as good as the rest of this bunch of iron," the mechanic stated with cold emphasis.

"That's not good enough," the dirt champ said. "We'll quit kidding ourselves about a change in the gear ratio helping and see what we can do tonight for the cinchers."

Jeff snorted. "Some drivers I've worked for were interested in wheeling, not stopping," he muttered.

"Dragging the foot is hard on shoe-leather," Bill remarked, taking no offense.

THAT man in the background, the promoter, worked things next day so that Bill Grant and Cliff Merrill did not meet on the track until the main event. With a fine sense of the dramatic he kept his customers waiting and keyed up in their seats for the big splash of the afternoon.

Branfield and roundabout newspapers, indifferent to the blandishments of Merrill's manager and Merrill's press agent, had played up rather than soft-pedaled the story of Merrill's defeat in a grudge battle. However, they had also hinted that the bad feeling between the two men was due to some off-color work by Bill Grant when Merrill was just breaking into the game. Unanimously they foreshadowed Merrill's victory in the sprint races. They had seen that Angino accelerate.

The stands were packed in consequence of the prophecy of even more sound and fury on the dirt track. If the Northeastern dirt champ was to be rolled in his own dust a large number of people wanted to see it happen; if the visiting speed king was to have a dent put in his diadem an equal number of people wished to witness the event.

The elimination heats were no better than curtain raisers. Smoothly enough Merrill's Angino left Ham Slocum a bad second in the first encounter of the afternoon. Merrill's chief mech was red-eyed from lack of sleep.

Al Kelly, as was his custom, was making things hot for Bill Grant in the second heat when a blowing tire put Al out of it in the fourth lap.

Bill Grant, rolling in after taking the heat, found Jeff Kingsley in a jittery lather.

"D-d-d'you know who's in the pits?" the sweating mechanic demanded. "Art Arkwright — with a gang of the big timers. Arkwright's a real backer—he had three cars in the 500 this year."

"And he got one sixth place out of his investment," Bill remarked. "Not so big—for a big timer."

"Shut up!" breathed Kingsley. "H-here he comes with Ray Vane now."

To hide his emotion he bent and reached a long arm into the gray car and revved it up thunderously.

Arkwright, broad-shouldered, paunchy, pink-faced, paused with the U.S.A.A. representative to listen judiciously to the sound of the roaring motor.

He shook his head when the mechanic cut the gun. "Sounds to me just like a bucket of rusty scrap iron falling off a bench," he declared with a knowing jerk of his head.

Bill Grant nodded, unperturbed. "And you sound to me like a bum phonograph record, running backward," he said.

Raymond Vane laughed. So did Arkwright, not too jovially. "Would I sound any better to you if I should offer you one of my three jobs, contingent on your putting up a show against Merrill to-day?"

Grant shook his head. "Why don't you take two wheels off and try it on a motorcycle track?" he inquired. "Some of those cycle tracks run down hill, they tell me."

Arkwright breathed heavily before he laughed again. Then, without a word, he moved away with the U.S.A.A. man.

"There goes your chance at the big time!" Jeff groaned.

"I can take a beating right here on this circuit, if I feel like being beaten," Bill Grant said coldly, with a glance at the admiring crowd around the Angino. "Only I don't—I'm not going to be lapped—or beaten."

Jeff applied his rolled up shirt sleeve to his wet forehead. "Don't run out o' track," he muttered anxiously. "One more butcher bill will flatten us again."

The time for the main event came along. "Roll 'em out, girls," yelped the starter.

OUT they came, with drivers outwardly casual but taut as bridge cables inside. What they could do about breaking up Cliff Merrill's happy old home week they would do but they feared it wouldn't be much.

With Cliff Merrill on the pole and Bill Grant outside him, six cars circled the track. On the backstretch Merrill edged his resplendent Angino over toward the gray machine. As they rode wheel and wheel he looked across at the chunky champion's head and his lips triumphantly framed the word "lap!" Then he opened up and led the roaring field around the starting line at a rising pace.

Crouching by the line, John Powell gave them the green flag.

The Angino bored into it. Bill Grant, with a flattened throttle, hung on Merrill's flank longer than he had been able to last the day before.

"Not quite so hot," he appraised the Angino in the fleeting instant before the first turn came up ahead. "But still too blasted hot."

Cliff Merrill, after opening a couple of lengths on Grant's gray car, let his hand linger a moment on his hand brake, head jerking sideways. He had eased up a trifle on his throttle for the curve.

Bill Grant was closing up on him in the last few feet of straightaway. Hell bent, as if no turn existed, the champ was pouring it into his car. He drew almost level again. The field was bunched thirty feet behind.

Cliff Merrill made up his mind. Another trick! Bill Grant must be running him into the turn faster than it could be taken. That meant that his Angino would go sailing up the bank toward a looming fence too far out of hand to be saved. Merrill knew that stunt. He braked hurriedly and hard. Hands tense on the wheel, he waited his flying rival's crack-up.

For just an instant longer Bill Grant kept gunning his car. He was dealing in inches and in tenths of seconds. But as the Angino slowed and the gray bus whirled on, Bill Grant had space to cut over in front of Merrill to the infield fence. He did that,

And then he braked his hurtling car, violently, ruthlessly. If those cinchers were not perfectly balanced—

The car did not spin or hurtle off the track. The brakes over which Jeff Kingsley had toiled long took speed off the shuddering, flying machine. The bus stood the jarring strain of it. There was nothing delicate about that automobile. It dropped almost to the Angino's pace.

Slamming into the turn, Bill Grant got both hands back on his wheel again. It took all he had to manhandle the car into control—but he did it.

Cliff Merrill, hanging back for the gray car's whirling finale, had nowhere to go but behind or outside. Stunned, he realized that he had lost the pole—and lost it to a car that stayed on the track. Angrily he set sail around the corner.

Flying dust thicker than a black fog enveloped Cliff Merrill. The track was no longer damp. When Merrill came out of it he was on the backstretch. So was Bill Grant—thirty feet ahead of him.

Bill, rocketing into the next curve, found the Angino roaring up within six feet of him. And this time Merrill kept his hand and foot off his brakes as long as the gray car hung on to its top speed.

The dirt champ braked a little sooner than on the previous curve. Merrill was in the bad spot now.

"No use pulling too many miracles with those brakes!" Bill warned himself as he cinched them up.

THE blue Angino, matching the gray car's pace, suddenly went sliding up the bank. Skittering wheels slashed the dirt. The car was within two feet of the fence before Merrill stopped its broadsiding. That didn't advertise too well the setting of its brakes.

A car traveling sideways, with tires ripping at the dirt, will not make speed. Merrill found that out. Controlling his skid and blaring on around the curve, he bounced on through dust that was not quite as thick as before.

But that was because Bill Grant had pulled ahead of him.

Blasting down the grandstand stretch Bill had time to see that the Angino had lost too much by that slide to catch up with him. On the next curve he had a clear track. He used it, pulling to the outside of the straightaway to give him a wider swing at the curve. And again he took the car's top speed off her violently, instants after his brain blazed out a warning of peril.

Shaken and perplexed—not quite sure of his car, Merrill desperately fought that power of deceleration with his own mount's flashing pickup. As lap after lap reeled off he cut his rival's lead on the straightaways.

But as the race flitted by he saw his chance of lapping Grant go glimmering. You must catch a man before you can start to lap him. Grimly Merrill settled down to pick up the gray car.

Bill, hurtling on, with two muscle-tearing struggles each lap, knew what was happening. Merrill was sizing up what had almost beaten him—and he still had the better car and plenty of curve. That car should win.

With set jaws Bill Grant went on whittling — standing off the flashing blue machine on the straightaways by holding up on his brakes in that grim moment just before the track reeled sideways under skittering wheels.

Suddenly John Powell loomed on

the edge of the track with a blue flag outstretched. Last lap!

As if in response to that flag the Angino came blasting up outside the gray car.

Both cars lunged toward the curve. Cliff Merrill was watching his rival like a hawk hovering over his prey.

Ahead of the gray machine and the blue there was a car approaching the turn. It was two hundred feet in front—Al Kelly, with a blown cylinder head gasket that kept the edge off his speed.

Both leaders hurtled desperately on to get the lane outside that car. That narrow track would hold one more only.

The pilot of the blue Angino had not quite enough gun to blast his way by Bill Grant and cut him off. His rear wheels crept on, past Bill's bucket seat, past the hood of his car. Merrill had half a length—three quarters.

And then the turn came up.

Bill played the only card he had. He kept his speed.

Merrill, though a cold hand behind a steering wheel, was hot now. Mad with rage at the possibility of being beaten twice by a man he had so publicly proclaimed was to be lapped, he jammed stubbornly on into the narrowing funnel ahead. Room for one car—and two cars hurtling into it!

Eye leaped challenging to eye in that instant of decision. Who would quit?

"A champ's a champ," Bill Grant told himself and kept his foot down.

HIS car surged on, rear wheels spurning the dirt. If he could just plunge past Al Kelly's car and dive toward the fence before Merrill could cut in ahead of him!

The blue Angino was crowding Bill to the limit. He seemed to be driving down a V with a car on each side.

Pouring in the gas he levelled up with the unhappy Kelly, who was clinging to the fence. Next instant Bill had jammed by the car, with the Angino's rear left shoe whirring along inches from his right front.

Both gray car and blue were hitting the corner at a pace hotter than the limit.

Merrill, a few feet ahead and higher on the bank, felt his momentum take command first. His car whipped around broadside.

Slithering rear tires ploughed the dirt. His sliding car was like a barrier across the outer side of the bank.

Bill Grant, clear ahead of Kelly, tried to cut speed and plunge into the groove by the infield fence. But he was going too fast to make the swerve and still keep his wheels rolling ahead.

Bill's car went into a slow spin near the fence. The unlucky Al found himself shooting on toward a spinning car and a broadsiding car, scant feet ahead. There was no way he could save himself.

On that soft dirt Bill Grant sensed what his car would do. It would slide around a complete turn, or perhaps a turn and a half. But Kelly was rocketing toward him. In another instant the trailing car would be crashing into him.

Grimly Bill Grant flicked his eye toward the infield fence. A tough looking bunch of timber. Then, in cold resolution he corrected the spin with a wrench of his wheel to the right.

His gray car came out of it and surged toward the infield fence. Bill hit it braking to the utmost. His swift wheel juggling sent him hurtling at the least suicidal part—between posts. And he ducked in time.

A section of white painted railing ceased to be. It was blasted into the air.

Jarring in the rutted safety zone Bill Grant felt a spring snap—and perhaps his backbone, too. His hand darted toward the kill button on his wheel but he did not press it. Reeling high on two wheels he curved around, pounding along between the infield fence and the safety fence thirty feet inside the edge. Still on four wheels he stopped.

He darted one glance at the track; then threw his car into reverse.

Kelly had roared past. Merrill, in the Angino, had broadsided right up the bank into the outer guard rail. Smacking into the heavy timber he had bounced back onto the track.

Bill Grant jarred backward through the hole he had made onto the track. He noticed as he thumped onto the dirt again that he had blown both front shoes. His crumpled radiator was gushing water. But the motor was turning over.

He jolted past the wide-eyed Cliff Merrill. The pilot of the Angino had killed his motor when it looked as if he would smash through the outer fence. Now it stayed dead.

Bill Grant made about twelve miles an hour around the rest of that lap but he beat the field to the checkered flag. The tow car brought Merrill in.

"CALM down!" Ray Vane, the U.S.A.A. man said wearily to the raging Cliff Merrill, fifteen minutes later. "Sure it was a tough one, but hadn't you heard that racing is tough? And tell me; what was this dirty trick Bill Grant played on you when you were learning the trade on this circuit?"

"You know! You must have seen it!" Cliff Merrill rasped. He pointed a quivering finger toward the north turn; then shook a knotted fist at Bill Grant. "Two years ago right there—as I was passing him—he threw his car into a slide to crowd me up the bank into the guard rail. We locked wheels and went over. He pulled the slide deliberately—and I'll square it if I never—"

Ray Vane laughed. "Deliberately!" he exclaimed. "You sap, I saw that crack-up. Grant threw a wheel, which was why he side-swiped you!"

"Then why didn't you tell me you threw a wheel?" Merrill stormed. "Why didn't you tell me then—or even yesterday, when I came back to show you up?"

Chunky Bill Grant ironed out his scarred and unprepossessing countenance. "We take 'em all as they come," he said curtly. "Explanations, apologies and alibis barred. We take 'em on—and then we take 'em. Isn't that a champion's job?"

"You'll have to take me on again—and try to take me!" Cliff Merrill blazed. "I'll get a car and come back to this circuit and—"

"You don't have to come back," Bill Grant retorted. "Art Arkwright over there"—he nodded toward the fat, pink-faced racing man—"is getting Jeff and me a car—a new one that will ape. I'll see you on the bricks at Indianapolis. Thanks to you, Arkwright thinks I can wheel 'em."

A sound movie man thrust a microphone toward Bill Grant's face while his partner closed in with the camera.

"Say something about your victory, Mr. Grant!" he demanded.

"I got the brakes," Bill said modestly. "B-r-a-k-e-s."

THE END

STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

OLD AGE RECORD

THERE are many stories of centuries-old reptiles and other animals in folklore, but the oldest recorded life span ever attained that is known for a fact is 152 years for backboned animals. On the island of Mauritius, near Madagascar, the inhabitants observed a giant land tortoise. He was originally brought from the islands in the Indian Ocean in 1766. This giant tortoise in 1810 was moved to the barracks of Fort Lewis, and lived until 1918.

CALF-LOVE

A LITTLE girl from Leola, Pa., visited the stock yards near Lancaster last September. She saw a calf no one else wanted, liked it, and bought it for $10. She fed it all winter and entered it in the spring. The much-despised calf was declared grand champion of the Lancaster stock show—she sold it for $248!

THE MEN DON'T COUNT

THE Chams, who inhabit the southwest province of Annam, believe in woman's superiority. A woman's first duty is to propose marriage, and so she selects the young man she wishes to marry, sends her parents with a present of two cakes and some chewing betel to the shy man. He is spared words, having only to taste a cake as a sign that he is willing to become engaged. The bold maid has then to prove that she can become a mother, and the couple live together until children are born.

HUMAN CORPSE FOR RENT!

THAT'S the latest racket that has come to the attention of the Manila police. It is alleged funeral parlors are renting human corpses to professional gamblers at 25 pesos a night to circumvent the anti-gambling law. Under the law prohibiting gambling during week days an exception is made for occasions when human corpses lie in state. The law evidently was drafted on the theory that there should be something to do at a wake. Gamblers find the statute convenient. To escape the clutches of the law they hire corpses from funeral parlors.

HEAVENLY GOLD

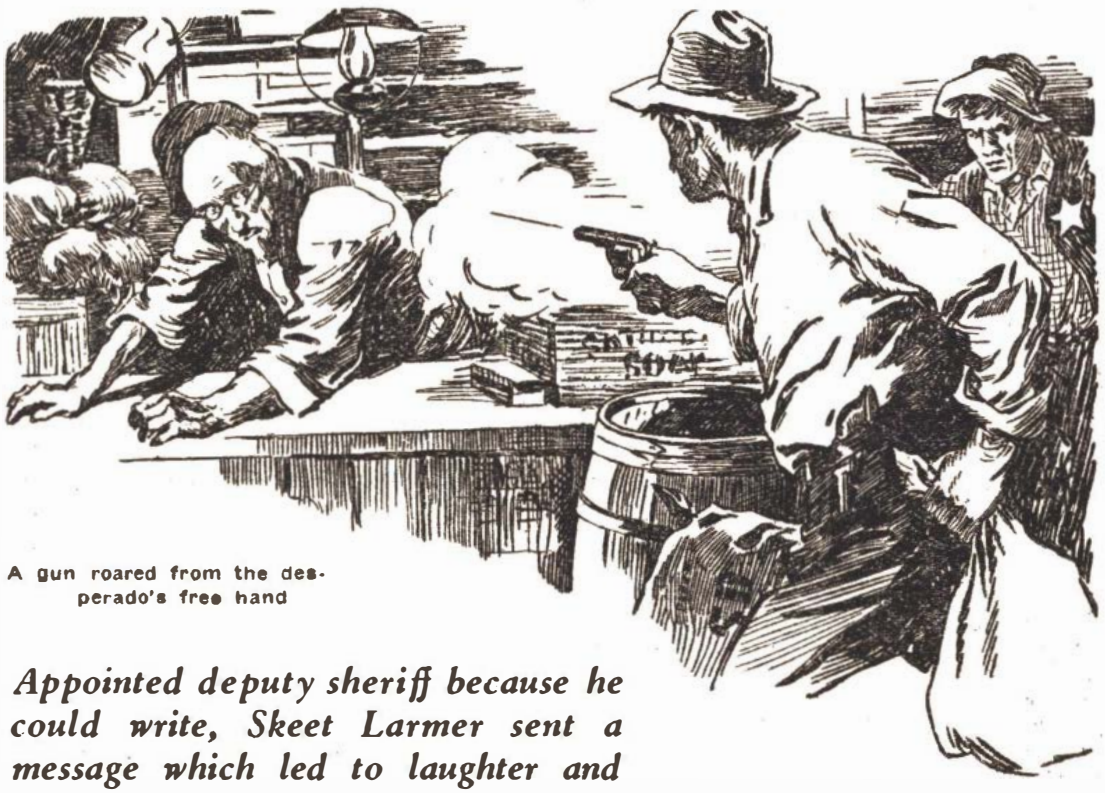
GOLD that dropped from the sky was found by a scientist in New Mexico recently. H. G. Hawley of the Nininger Meteorite Laboratory in Denver found a stony meteorite near Melrose, N. M., which contained minute amounts of gold.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

IN Chile there is a tribe of Indians called the Yaghans, now almost extinct, which wander about by the ocean, living on shellfish and moving from beach to beach in canoes. If they are caught in bad weather, the men are said to have no hesitation in "lightening the ship" by throwing their wives and children overboard. When food is short, the old women are eliminated from the food list by strangulation.

Tin Star

By HAPSBURG LEIBE



A gun roared from the desperado's free hand

Appointed deputy sheriff because he could write, Skeet Larmer sent a message which led to laughter and the lock-up

"OLD SAM MAYFIELD said to tell you-un to hurry up thar to the settlement, Skeet," announced the panting and red-faced "settlement" boy. "He-un gimme a stick o' candy to run down yar fer him. Said hit war 'pawtant. Said not to come up thar barefooted, nuther!"

The gangling, tousle-headed, jeans-clad young man in the cabin doorway blinked toward his bare feet. On far-back Smoky Thunder Mountain it was considered quite all right for anybody to go barefooted in the summertime, and he was resentful, at first. Then he remembered that old Sam Mayfield, who owned the one store in the small mountain hamlet, had let him have food supplies on credit back in the winter, and recalled also the fact that those supplies were not yet paid for.

"Tell Sam I'll be thar in no time," he drawled, and turned into the cabin shadows for his mildewed old cowhide boots.

As he approached the log store building shortly afterward, he noted that a saddled horse stood beside the front door. A horse on Smoky Thunder was a rarity; it meant the presence of a stranger. On fire with curiosity, Skeet Larmer went stamping nosily into the store. Billygoat-bearded and bespectacled Sam Mayfield stood behind the counter.

"Hi, Skeet." Mayfield indicated

the stranger. "That air Sheriff Lem Bodine, from Johnsboro down in the low country. He wants the law rep'esented in this section with a deputy, and I told him you war the man fer the job. I told him you war one o' the few yarabouts which could read and write, and 'at you'd been around some, even to a-ridin' on a railroad train two or three times."

Sheriff Bodine eyed the young mountain man keenly. He was none too well impressed with Larmer as officer timber. And yet, Larmer promised as much as anybody else he'd seen here in this exceedingly isolated, rugged country. Besides, according to Mayfield, Skeet could read and write. So Bodine outlined to Skeet just what he expected of a deputy, and proceeded:

"I couldn't find a badge, but I did bring a set of handcuffs for you. You'll have to furnish your own gun, of course. Got one?"

"Shore he's got a gun," Mayfield said.

Almost before Larmer knew what had happened, he had raised his right hand and taken the oath, and was pocketing a rusty pair of manacles and the key to them. Lem Bodine was soon astride his horse and riding down the stony ox-wagon road that led to the lowland.

The storekeeper grinned. His eyes twinkled. Larmer grinned too.

"Plumb smart, ain't you-un?" drawled Skeet. "Got me this yar job so's I could pay you-un that thar debt! Well, that air all right, shore. I jist ain't had the money, Sam. Last winter war a bitter hard winter. Lucky fer me I didn't have nobody to suppo't but my own self. But you'un war wrong abouten me a-havin' a gun, Sam. Fer because I ain't got no gun now."

He'd sold his Winchester in order that he might buy a guitar for Bill Cline's Junie. However, he did not confess that weakness to Mayfield.

"Mebbe you won't need a gun fer the present," said old Sam. "But you ort to have a badge, Skeet, shore. You air the law on Smoky Thunder now."

At once Larmer set to work and cut a star from the bottom of an empty tomato can. After he had fastened it to the front of his almost buttonless "hickory" shirt, he turned up the brim of his slouch hat and cocked it over one eye, puffed out his chest and went straightway to Bill Cline's cabin to tell Junie.

The girl sat on a bench in the cabin yard and strummed tunelessly on the guitar that Larmer had given her. Her dress had been patched so much that little of the original material remained, and her feet were bare. When she saw Skeet coming, she blushed and rose.

But before she could speak, her big and black-bearded father rounded a cabin corner with his rifle in one hand, a dozen or so dead squirrels dangling from the other, and a blanket-roll over one shoulder. Bill Cline had been hunting over toward the North Carolina state-line.

"Hi, Skeet." Fod the reason that no man on earth was quite good enough for Junie, there was a half belligerent gleam in his eye. He dropped the squirrels. "Whut air you-un a-wearin' that tin star fur?"

"I air Depity Sheriff Larmer now. I air the law on Smoky Thunder, i-god," said Skeet. "Don't believe hit, ax Sam Mayfield."

"You air, air you?" snorted Cline. "Well, don't let hit make you-un so biggety and brash. Lissen yar, Depity Sheriff Larmer. Over on Shelton Lorrel they-uns told me abouten a big Kentucky killer outlaw which'd jist

been through thar. Name's Red Anson Kelso. Red hair and beard. Carries two big Colt pistols. One feller tried to capture him, and he tuck the feller's rifle from him and busted hit over a rock! And lissen fudder, Depity Sheriff Larmer. As I war a-toppin' Bee Ridge this mawnin', I seed a big, red man a little ways afront o' me, a-headin' this way. Yeah, Red Anse Kelso!"

HE was not joking. Bill Cline didn't joke. Neither did he lie. Skeet swallowed. How like *luck* that was! And he didn't even have a gun.

"Loand me yore rifle a few days," blurted Skeet.

"And git hit busted over a rock? Not me!' hooted Cline. "Skeet, I betcha Red Anse makes you-un eat that tin star o' yore'n!"

"I'll see cain't I borrow a gun some-'eres else," drawled Larmer.

Bill Cline hurried to the hamlet with news of the big killer outlaw, and the news spread fast. Skeet Larmer found himself unable to borrow a weapon anywhere. Nobody would risk losing his rifle. Late that afternoon, Skeet ambled gloomily into Mayfield's store and found old Sam alone.

"Me, I ain't got no gun now," Mayfield told him. "Say, y'ort to git word to Sheriff Lem Bodine about this dadburned Red Anse feller. Send Lem a note. You can read and write. Tell him Red Anse air yar a-fixin' to raise hell. Tell him to come quick and fetch a extry gun. Yar's paper and pencil."

"Mebbe I bettern had," agreed Skeet. Laboriously he wrote the note, and just as he was folding it a huge, red-haired stranger stalked into the store. It was Kelso, of course. Against one hip he carried a heavy revolver in a holster; he had another such gun inside his soiled cotton shirt. His pale-blue killer eyes took everything in at a glance. So that he might not have an open doorway at his back, he moved quickly to the right when he was across the threshold.

"Old man," he barked, "throw some bacon, crackers, and canned sardines and salmons and tomaters into sack fer me. I'm hongry. Hustle!"

Mayfield swallowed, looked helplessly toward the frozen Deputy Sheriff Larmer, then busied himself with the order. As he lifted the laden burlap bag to the counter, he said apologetically: "Hit amounts to—to two dollars."

"Charge her to my account, i-god," laughed the big, red man, stepping to the counter and picking up the bag.

"Say, hold on—" pleaded Mayfield. On Smoky Thunder two dollars was a tidy sum of money. "I cain't affo'd—"

There was fight in his eyes. A gun roared from the desperado's free hand, and Mayfield's old felt hat jumped to a crazy angle on his grizzled head.

"Charge her to my account!" repeated the desperado, laughing again.

The next second he was gone. Skeet Larmer moved at last. He tossed to old Sam the note that he'd just written the sheriff.

"Git one o' the Tilsons to take that down to Lem Bodine," he said and he was not drawling now. "I air a-goin' to foller Kelso, fer because he air a-locatin' some'eres around yar, I bet, and I want to find his hideout."

Then Larmer, also, was gone.

KELSO'S new hangout was at the head of a wilderness cove, among thick laurels and bowlders. Hidden nearby in the early darkness. Larmer watched him prepare supper over a tiny fire, and wolf it. Skeet told himself that it was as foolish to try capturing so formidable a man without a gun

as to try capturing a rattlesnke with bare hands. He crept soundlessly back and turned homeward.

Late the next day, Little Jim Tilson, carrying his coarse brogan shoes over one shoulder, returned from Johnsboro in the low country. Larmer was in the store with Mayfield.

"Give Bodine my note?" anxiously inquired Skeet.

Little Jim leaned wearily against a counter. "Shore. And whut do y'reckon he done?"

Larmer bristled importantly. "Whut?"

"He laughed fitten to kill, that's whut! 'Git out o' yar,' the sheriff says, and I got out." Tilson swore. Skeet Larmer exclaimed: "He-un don't b'lieve hit abouten Red Anse Kelso!"

"Mebbe he don't," the storekeeper moaned. "And Red Anse, he'll be in yar putty soon to confisticate more grub, or mebbe kill me and rob me!"

Deputy Sheriff Larmer held to the hope that Lem Bodine would come on the next day. But he didn't. His behavior in the matter puzzled Skeet, then angered him. Half desperate, Larmer decided that he would show both Bodine and Smoky Thunder something by capturing Red Anse Kelso without the aid of a gun.

That night the big outlaw retired to his bed of hemlock boughs before his supper fire had gone out. Skeet Larmer peered down upon him from the top of a bowlder that lay at his shaggy fiery head. To wait until Kelso was asleep and then sneak one of his guns—No. Such men slept with one eye open, and when they woke they woke shooting. A bluff was better. Kelso wouldn't know that he was unarmed.

There was no waiting until the firelight died. Skeet's hard voice shattered the deep wilderness silence.

"On yore feet wi' yore hands up, Anse—dad-blasted quick!"

Anson Kelso rose like a jack-in-a-box, hands high. A sneer curled his bearded lips, but he did not lower his arms. His back was to Larmer. Skeet began to creep down the bowlder, slipped, and fell to the ground at the outlaw's feet! Kelso then went for a gun and got it. Larmer rose to his knees as on a rebound, and drove a fist into the pit of his man's stomach. The gun blazed harmlessly as Red Anse doubled in sickening pain, blazed again harmlessly. Skeet was fighting for life, and he knew it, and he fought like a hydrophobiated wildcat. The gun roared twice more as they mixed it whirlwind fashion through the fire and into the laurels.

Then Skeet snatched up a stone and bounced it off Kelso's forehead. The desperado dropped like a shot beef.

When he came to, he lay on the ground with his wrists manacled at his back. The fire had been built up, and beside it stood a gangling, tousle-headed young mountaineer who had torn a sleeve from his "hickory" shirt and was using it as a bandage for a bullet-wound in his upper left arm. The young man's face was bleeding, too. Kelso swore a great oath.

"Who the hell air you, anyhow?" he spat.

Deputy Sheriff Larmer indicated the now badly bent tin star on his torn shirtfront. "I air the law on Smoky Thunder, i-god, that's 'zackly who I air! Hod-dang you-un, git up and le's go to town. Try any tricks on me, and hope t' die ef I don't shoot a j'int out o' yore backbone. Git up from thar!"

Anson Kelso looked straight into the barrels of his own revolvers. He got up from there and went to town with Skeet, and he didn't try any tricks.

Since the battle had taken toll of each man's strength, the pace was slow, with many rest periods. They reached Johnsboro about the middle of the next morning. A little crowd of curious people followed them to the very door of the sheriff's office.

Lem Bodine wheeled in his desk-chair and blinked at the pair of bloody-faced newcomers. From them his gaze flashed to a face-and-profile photo on a man-wanted circular nailed to the wall above his desk. It was the unmistakable likeness of Anson Kelso, robber and killer.

"Jee-hoshaphat!" cried Bodine. "I understand now!"

He called his office deputy and the jailer, and had them lock the outlaw in a cell. His next move was to order a doctor in to treat Larmer's wounds. Skeet broke out angrily, warily:

"I sent fer you-un, axin' fer a gun, and you-un laughed at the note I writ! Wisht I hadn't l'arnt how to read and write, i-god. Edgication ain't never done me a dern bit o' good yit. I had to ketch that big rattlesnake withouten any gun. I—"

"There's two thousand dollars cash reward out for Kelso," Lem Bodine cut in, smiling, "and that ought to ease your pain a little."

"Two—thousand—dollars!" gasped Skeet. With that much money he could marry Junie Cline and lord it over Bill Cline and the rest of Smoky Thunder for years upon years. The sheriff smiled again, and said:

"His name on the circular is Anson Kelso, you'll notice, and not Red Anse Kelso. In your note you meant to tell me that Red Anse was up there fixing to raise hell. But you didn't, and here's where I thought you must be crazy. You wrote it—*red ants!*"

THE END

Ohio River Boat-Wreckers

ABOUT the toughest muggs this country has ever known used to infest the Ohio River when the stretch from Louisville to the Mississippi was practically a wilderness. It was quite usual for these to gang up on a flat-boat crew and kill them off for the sake of a small cargo, disemboweling the bodies so they would never float. Less bold pirates made a fair living out of wrecking boats, which was quite a game. Bands of them hung around river taverns, heartily greeting the tired flatboat men and inviting them in for a drink, generally followed by poker. During the cards several wreckers would sneak out and punch some caulking out of the boat's bottom.

"Hi, there! Your boat's a-sinking!"

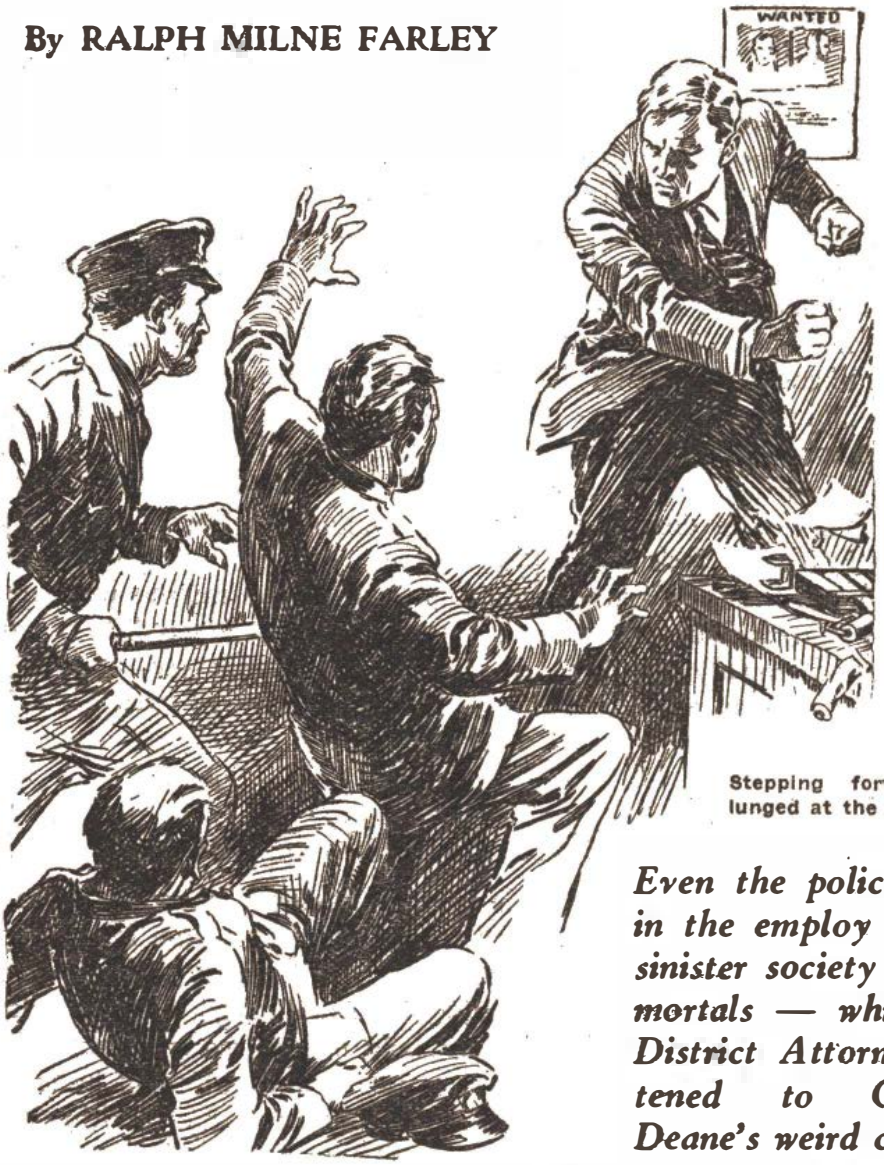
Rushing out, the whole party would kindly help the boatmen rescue their cargo, carrying it to a good safe place.

Notorious among wreckers was Colonel Plug, who ran a crooked gambling house above Cairo. He had a faithful wife, Pluggie, who entertained one boatman after another while the colonel carried on his wrecking business. After a long and successful career, this unhappy man had the misfortune to enter a flatboat during a bad windstorm. To the tune of a howling wind he gleefully poked a plank out of the bottom and prepared to leave. At the same instant the hawser snapped, sinking the colonel. He never came up.

Delos White.

The Immortals

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY



Stepping forward, he lunged at the policeman

Even the police were in the employ of the sinister society of immortals — while the District Attorney listened to Charles Deane's weird charges

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ALTHOUGH he knew he was going to have opposition in the person of Professor Oscar Cairns, eminent scientist, Charles Deane, brilliant young chemist, nevertheless, presented samples of his discovery of a new element which he named "Stratium," to a learned society of chemists. At the meeting, one of the samples disappears mysteriously, all efforts to recover it being in vain.

At the conclusion of the meeting, when Deane returned to his laboratory, he found the dead body of Professor Cairns stabbed with a knife! While Deane is examining the corpse, the phone rings and a mysterious voice informs him that it knows he is in trouble and wishes to give him assistance. Deane is directed to take a taxi waiting for him outside the laboratory. He hesitates at first, but decides to do as he is bidden, inasmuch as the case against him would look like murder to the police.

This story began in the Argosy for November 17

He is taken to the home of John Cortlandt Maitland, financial rival of Deane's lately deceased patron, Wolf Diggs. At Maitland's home, Deans meets with several strange experiences which lead him to believe that he is not dealing with ordinary people.

Deane meets Maitland's daughter, Mavis, to whom he is attracted, and Peter Markham, a shrewd lawyer.

Later on, Deane is taken by plane to Maitland's hunting lodge in the Black Hills of South Dakota, where, to his amazement, he finds that Professor Cairns and Angus Frazer, his assistant, are very much alive! They soon discover that they are all being held captive by Maitland and his lieutenant for some ulterior purpose.

Deane learns from Mavis, who has fallen in love with him, and through other sources, that Maitland is head of a secret society of persons who believe that they have discovered " Ichor," the fluid of the immortal gods.

Mavis agrees to help Deane escape before the society engulfs him and he become " unnatural," as they are.

Mavis pilots a plane for Deane and they are pursued by one of her father's planes which tries to stop the motor of her plane by a magnetic ray which would put the ignition out of order. But Mavis has a counteracting device, and they land safely at the airport. Deane takes an airmail plane to New York, but is forced down in flames.

Fortunately he escapes, and he hops a freight train going East, and he gets off at Fargo.

CHAPTER IX *(Continued)*.

CRASH!

TOSSING off the burlap, Deane crawled to the door of the car and peered out. There were two men, one carrying a lantern and the other a pad of paper, several cars away.

As Deane watched, they swung open the door of the car they were inspecting, and one after the other crawled into it. Deane immediately jumped down from his car, and tiptoed off into the darkness in the opposite direction. It was a starlit night, and the moon had not yet risen. All around him loomed the dark shapes of freight cars.

But at length he came to a clear stretch of track and then to a railroad station, on which the name read " Fargo."

His first thought was food, so he made his way to a nearby restaurant, where he perched himself upon a stool and ordered himself a full meal.

WHILE waiting to be served, he picked up an evening paper, and glanced idly through it. A headline caught his attention: " Mail Plane Crashes." He read the article; it related the very wreck from which he himself had escaped that morning. It seems that earlier editions had reported merely that the plane had failed to reach its next stop. Later, a westbound plane had sighted the smoking wreckage, and had come down to investigate. The remains of only one body had been found. Yet the plane had carried two persons, namely the aviator, and one male passenger (name unknown), who had purchased a through ticket for New York.

Considerable speculation was rife as to which of the two had escaped death, and as to what had become of the survivor. Footprints had been found, constituting a winding trail from near the scene of the crash to a nearby railroad track, but there the trail had vanished. It was assumed that the survivor, badly burned and partly crazed by his burns, had wandered that far, and then down the tracks in one direction or the other, and had probably been struck by a train, or fallen off a trestle or down an embankment. Squads of volunteers were now making a thorough search.

"And I'll bet that representatives of the Maitland gang are in each of those squads," Deane added to himself, with a grim smile.

At this juncture the white-coated man behind the counter shoved his soup in front of him, so he laid down the paper, and picked up his spoon. As he began to eat, he glanced up and down the counter.

The next customer to his right, several seats away, was a swarthy heavy-set Sicilian with a huge black mustache. This man was eying him intently, even malevolently, it seemed, as he looked up. Deane hurriedly turned his eyes back to his soup, but the Sicilian kept up his intent stare.

A momentary panic seized Deane. Was this swarthy man a henchman of Maitland? But instantly Deane realized that if this were so, then all the more important for him to be calm; so he devoted himself, as nonchalantly as possible, to his meal; and did not even cast a glance in the direction of his neighbor.

But, though he ate with simulated calm, he was rapidly developing a plan of action.

Sooner or later—perhaps it had happened already—something would be found on or about the charred body in the wrecked plane to identify it as that of the pilot; and then Maitland would know that Deane had escaped. Not finding Deane's body beside the right-of-way, Maitland would cause his far-flung organization to guard and search all sizeable towns in both directions along the railroad—undoubtedly the master-mind had already foreseen not finding Deane on the right-of-way, and was already taking this precaution. Why, undoubtedly the Sicilian was a part of this program!

Involuntarily Deane glanced to the right, but his neighbor was now engrossed in a bowl of spaghetti.

Deane continued his planning, meanwhile devoting himself to his own food. From the published item about Deane's through air-line ticket to New York, Maitland would know his destination, Maitland's henchmen would be set to watch all forms of transportation leading into the metropolis. Accordingly, Deane's problem would be to elude these watchers, and reach the house of Donna Cairns ahead of them.

He thrust his hand into his pocket, and was reassured by the touch of the little pearl-handled Lüger of Mavis Maitland. A face swam before his eyes, a confusing face, framed in honey-colored hair; or was it brown? Cat-yellow—no, frank blue—eyes. Steel-cold—or wistful—smile. Was it the face of Mavis Maitland, or of Donna Cairns? Deane shook his head, and passed the fingers of one hand through his tousled sandy hair.

THEN he resumed his planning. His first job was to find out about train, plane and bus schedules. His second job was to throw the Sicilian off the track.

Finishing and paying for his meal, he left the restaurant. The Sicilian followed him. Some of the stores were still open. Abruptly Deane decided to kill two birds with one stone; so he entered one of the stores, and bought a small grip, pajamas, shirts, socks, and a toilet kit. The Sicilian did not enter with him, and was nowhere in sight when he emerged.

Hurriedly taking a taxi, to throw off further pursuit, he directed the driver, "Take me to a good hotel."

The driver took him to the Gardner. There he consulted the railroad guide and the airplane schedules. Only one

plane east a day, at 5.10. No go; about twenty hours to wait. The next train for Chicago left at ten minutes before midnight, arriving at 7.10 the next evening. He had had no idea that Fargo was nearly as far as New York from Chicago.

Well, he had better take the train. Next, to throw off the scent any one who might be listening. So, after pretending to shake his head sadly over the train and air schedules, he asked for a bus table, consulted it, smiled broadly, and inquired how far away was the bus terminal.

Then remembering that he had nothing but large bills left of the money which Mavis had given him, he got some change at the desk. Then ostentatiously hailed a taxi for the Greyhound depot.

But, as soon as the yellow was under way, he leaned forward, and in a low tone changed his destination to the Northern Pacific. The driver glanced at him peculiarly, and then cut through an alley.

"Fine!" thought Deane, settling back in his seat, and starting to plan what to do to render himself inconspicuous between now and train time.

The next thing that he knew, the taxi had come to a stop. Deane stared out. All was in darkness. The headlights of the car were off. The driver had alighted, and was opening the door.

"Here you are, sir," he said obsequiously.

"Is this the N.P.?" Deane asked incredulously.

"Yes, sir," said the taxi man.

In a flash, Deane sensed that it was not; but with a perfect attempt at clumsy bewilderment, he shook his head, and then backed out of the cab.

The muzzle of an automatic was jabbed into his ribs, and the voice of the taxi driver hissed in his ear, "Stick 'em up, and hand over your bill-fold."

CHAPTER X.

STRUGGLING EASTWARD.

HAVING a pistol jabbed in one's ribs as one dismounts from a taxi in a dark alley may not seem to be an adequate cause for rejoicing, and yet Deane's heart gave a leap of pleasure as he heard the taxi driver hiss: "Stick 'em up! Hand over your bill fold."

For instantly he realized that this was just an ordinary holdup, and not a machination of Maitland. And he had expected the jab of the firearm in his ribs; that is just why he had backed out of the cab.

"Yes, yes," he faltered. "Don't shoot."

And at the same instant, with that speed and elusiveness which had made him the Nemesis of Southern California in the Rose Bowl, he pivoted on his right heel and drove his left fist into where he imagined the face of the taxi driver would be.

The fist grazed the other man's cheek. The pistol went off. But, wrenched aside by Deane's sudden twirl, its bullet did not even graze him. Then, guided by where his left fist had touched the man's face, his right fist squarely met the point of the man's jaw. A dull thud was heard, as the man fell inertly backward in the darkness. Promptly Deane stepped over to the cab to retrieve his traveling bag. He could not afford to stick around for police questioning.

But as he reached into the interior two dark forms jumped him from behind. It was well for him that there

were two of them, for they collided and interfered with each other. A descending blackjack, intended for his head, missed its mark and landed on his right shoulder.

Deane kicked savagely behind him, heard a grunt of pain, and then wheeled to face his two new assailants. His left hand he raised defensively across his face, but his right arm hung limp, temporarily paralyzed.

One of the men continued to groan; and, from the direction from which the groans came, appeared to be sitting or lying on the ground. But the other shouted a peremptory command, "Stick 'em up, big boy! I've got you covered."

It was too dark to tell what kind of a weapon the man carried, or even to see him at all. For a moment Deane considered lunging forward, relying on the supposition that, if he could not see the man, then by the same token the man could not see him. But suddenly he reflected that he himself was probably silhouetted against the dim light of the cab.

"O. K.," he replied.

Up went his left hand, but his right still hung limp from the blow of the blackjack.

"Both of them," menacingly.

"But I can't," Deane explained. "Your blackjack got my right arm. It's broken, I think."

"Both of them!" repeated the voice out of the darkness, with even more menace in its tone.

A tingle of feeling began to return to the fingers of Deane's right hand. With a stupendous effort he slowly raised his arm.

The darkness was suddenly penetrated by the ray of a pocket flash light which swept back and forth. It fell on Charles Deane, standing with both hands upraised. It fell upon an inert form in the clothes of a taxi driver, lying flat on his back. It fell on another form, groaning and struggling to rise, with hands braced against the pavement. It fell for just an instant on the man who stood confronting Deane.

And in that instant Deane saw that the man was unarmed; his threat had been mere bluff. The next moment Deane's hands were down and he had lunged forward with his left fist square into the solar-plexus of the man who had tricked him.

Then he wheeled, uncertain how to combat the new menace represented by the flash light.

Again the beam swept over the scene in the alley, and a jovial though authoritative voice said, "Good work, young feller. It's O. K. I'm one of the Fargo police."

And, to prove it, the newcomer turned his flash momentarily on his own blue uniform and shield.

Then the cop continued, "What happened? A holdup?"

"Obviously," Deane replied grimly and a bit nervously.

For the police represented a worse menace to him than any one else short of Maitland's gangsters.

"Turn on the headlights," the policeman commanded.

Deane groped on the dashboard of the cab, and did so; and at once the whole alley became dimly illumined by reflected light. The taxi driver was still out cold, but his two pals were rapidly coming to their senses again. The cop deftly searched them, and then chained them together with a pair of handcuffs. At his direction Deane lifted the driver into the vacant space by the front seat, usually used for baggage. Then the cop and the two pris-

oners got into the rear, and Deane drove them to the police station.

On the way his mind was working rapidly; so that, when the prisoners were booked, he gave a wholly fictitious name as complaining witness, and stated that he had just arrived in town (luckily they did not ask him on what train), that he had been on his way to the Gardner Hotel when the holdup had occurred, that he had planned to stay in Fargo for several days, and that he would be in court promptly at nine thirty the next morning.

Then he took his bag out of the taxi, walked back to the hotel, and registered by the same false name which he had given at the police station.

ON being shown to his room, Deane took the precaution of mussing up his bed and his newly bought pajamas, so that both would look as though they had been slept in. Then he had a refreshing bath and shave and distributed his toilet things about the room.

By this time it was after eleven o'clock. Leaving his room, Deane went out for a walk, located the Northern Pacific Railroad station, and studied its surroundings. Then, returning to the hotel, he asked for his key, announced that he was going to turn in, and left a call for 8 A.M.

Just then the desk clerk was called into the manager's office. Fine! The clerk, if interrogated on the morrow, would swear Deane had gone to bed. There was no one else in the lobby. So Deane slipped out into the street and made for the railroad station.

There he did not buy a ticket, but instead furtively skirted the place and hid in the shadows across the tracks. He chuckled to himself at the thought that, back in his hotel room, his bag contained absolutely nothing which would serve to identify him.

Shortly after half past eleven the eastbound train arrived. Deane sneaked up to it on the side away from the station, and walked the whole length of the train, looking for an opportunity to get on; but there was none. Every door on that side was locked, and he did not dare skirt the rear end.

At length the all-aboards were shouted. There was but one thing to do: Deane crawled onto the steps of one of the Pullman cars and wedged himself there in the tiny space beneath the trapdoor. The train started. He tried to lift the door above his head; but it would not budge.

Smoke and cinders swirled in upon him, nearly choking him. It was with difficulty that he managed to hold on. He knew that he could not stand this very long.

Then he heard a thumping above his head, and voices. Two men were standing in the vestibule of the car, talking. They fumbled with the side door. Their voices sounded louder, as it came open. He saw the streak of light of a cigarette butt flipped out into the night.

The voices departed; the main door of the car slammed. Deane reached up over the edge of the trap, and found that the side door was swinging ajar. So he wormed his way out and over, and soon was standing in the vestibule.

Quietly he closed the side door and then furtively entered the car.

Fortunately the men's washroom was at that end. Deane was a filthy mess. But there was no one in the washroom, and before the porter showed up Deane had shaken out his coat, thoroughly cleaned his face, hair and hands, and turned his shirt inside

out, so that he was fairly presentable.

Then he hunted up the Pullman conductor, explained that he had gotten on at the last moment, and booked passage for Chicago.

When Deane was finally in bed in his berth, he could not sleep. Strangely enough, however, instead of worrying about his own predicament, or even turning over in his mind the strenuous affairs of the day, his thoughts reverted to a trim little golden-haired figure in a white aviation costume. There came to his mind a poem which he had once read in a Chicago newspaper:*

Star-dust caught in her blown hair one night—
Shaken across the desert from the starry skies—
And the emerald-amethyst world beneath her flight
Shines and dies out in her mysterious eyes.

Feel of the air is in her steel-slim fingers,
And her cool voice is as silver as atmosphere,
While ever and all about her definitely lingers
A sense of space—illimitable—crystal clear.

The path of the planets where four winds meet and pass,
The gold of a comet's trail across the sea,
The shine of the summer sun like gauze of brass,
Are none so intangibly lovely, I think, as she.

How aptly it described Mavis Maitland! Had she returned safely to Sioux Lodge? Had she survived her father's displeasure? Deane wondered.

THE next morning at breakfast in the diner he reflected with a grin that the hotel clerk was only just then learning of his absence. But perhaps not even then; for the clerk, upon failing to waken him by phone at eight o'clock, had undoubtedly got into the room by pass-key, and had found that the room had (apparently) been slept in, but that Deane had arisen early and left the hotel, with the (apparent) intention of returning, as all his belongings were still there. So the clerk wouldn't worry.

No one would worry until court time at nine thirty. If there were other cases ahead of that of his assailants, he would not be missed until that case were reached. Then inquiry would be made at the hotel.

The day would be well along before it would sink in on the Fargo police that he had skipped town. Then the departures on all the morning trains would be checked. It might be several days before it would dawn on the police that he had left the night before.

And if Maitland's gang really were shadowing him in Fargo, they probably would be at least one jump *behind* the Fargo police. Especially if the morning paper had carried an account of the holdup.

So Deane ate his breakfast with considerable relish, feeling quite satisfied with himself. The affair of the taxicab, which had seemed for a while to jeopardize his entire get-away, now appeared nothing short of providential.

Nevertheless he took no chances, kept to himself as much as possible, stayed in the smoking room whenever it was unoccupied, ate after the others, and took no promenades on the station platforms.

Nothing eventful occurred throughout the day, but when he returned from the diner after lunch he found a young man of about his own age sitting in

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* *By courtesy of the Chicago Tribune.*

his section, number 2 of car 33. Ordinarily he would have been sufficiently assertive to inform the intruder of the mistake, especially as the intruder was reading Deane's own morning paper—which, by the way, had contained no further news of the plane crash.

But making himself conspicuous was the last thing that Deane desired just then. So, having no belongings in number 2, Deane effacingly withdrew to the smoking room.

As the train was pulling into Chicago, and Deane was standing by the water cooler in the corridor, he happened to overhear just around the partition a snatch of conversation which caused him to prick up his ears.

"Yes," a man's voice was saying, "I occupied number 2 last night. Why?"

"Did you get on at Fargo?" A gruff voice.

"Say, who are you, and just what business is it of yours?"

"I happen to be an inspector of the Chicago police."

A pause, during which Deane pictured to himself the showing of a badge or other credentials. Then an "Oh!" from the first speaker.

The gruff voice repeated its question about getting on at Fargo.

"Certainly not," with some asperity. "I came through from Winnipeg."

"Porter," asked the gruff voice, "did this car come from Winnipeg?"

"No, sah. It hooked on at Fargo, sah."

"And this young man occupied lower 2?"

"Ah didn't much notice him, sah. But Ah thinks so, sah. Yes, sah."

"Where did he get on?"

"Now Ah remembers, sah. Ah didn't see him get on, but he came through with the Pullman conductor. He didn't have no ticket, sah. Paid cash to Chicago."

"Why, of all the—!" exploded the young man.

"Shut up!" said the inspector. "You're the person, all right. Will you come along quietly to headquarters, or shall I have to put on the bracelets?"

"But what—what am I supposed to have done?"

"I dunno. The Fargo police wired for us to hold you. You answer the description all right, and the porter's story checks, and yours doesn't. Come along."

Not waiting to hear any more, Deane tiptoed down the corridor and out of the car. Then hurried to the front of the train, so as to be one of the first to get off, and out of the station. Nor did he draw a calm breath until he was safely out on the street.

Once again he bought himself a bag and outfit. And this time a hat. Also had a shave and his suit pressed. Then walked to the Union Station and took a night train to New York. The train finally pulled out of the station, without any further untoward occurrences.

HE had thought of taking the night mail-plane, but gave that up as being too conspicuous. He had thought of going by bus, on the idea that his enemies would not expect him to use such a slow method of transportation; but then he reflected that its very slowness would give Maitland time to discover the identity of the dead body in the plane and receive a report from his scouts in Fargo. So Deane compromised on a fast train.

The first part of the trip was uneventful. So much so, in fact, that

Deane relaxed to some extent the vigilance and seclusion which he had displayed en route from Fargo to Chicago. He even went into the observation car to read.

He was engrossed with a story in one of the popular magazines when he experienced an uncanny feeling of being watched. He glanced up, and sure enough a dark foreign-looking black-bearded man—a Hindu, apparently—was regarding him intently from just across the aisle. Surprised in his scrutiny, the Hindu at once buried himself in his own magazine. So also did Deane.

And then there ensued a sort of hide and seek, each trying to spy on the other when the other was not spying on him. But suddenly realizing that this game was making himself conspicuous and was well calculated to confirm whatever suspicions the Hindu might have of him, Deane stopped his peeking and paid strict attention to his book for at least half an hour.

And when at length he did venture to glance up again, he was relieved to find that the Hindu had relaxed back in his chair and was sound asleep. Taking advantage of this situation, Deane studied the man intently, for the purpose of memorizing his features against a future meeting.

But, to his horror, he immediately noticed something which completely diverted his attention from this study. The man was not breathing! There was not the most infinitesimal rise and fall of the man's chest, nor the least flicker of hair or beard or mustache in line with the man's nostrils!

Deane's memory flashed back to the time when he had found John Cortlandt Maitland in exactly that same condition on the couch in Maitland's study in New York.

Then, this Hindu too was a member of the sinister secret society who called themselves "The Immortals." Thank God the man was asleep, and pray Heaven that he would stay that way until Deane could get off the train!

At the moment the observation car was vacant except for the two of them. Tiptoeing out of the car, Deane got a timetable and sat down in the washroom of the next car to study it. He found that the next stop would be in twenty minutes. Here, then, he would get off without even going back to his own car for his hat and bag. Thus he would delay the discovery that he had left the train.

He nervously awaited the stop. At last it arrived.

But as he reached the station platform he heard one of the passengers ask, "What's all the commotion ahead?"

And another man replied, "An old bird cashed in up in the observation car. They're carrying him out right now."

"In that event," thought Deane, "I'd better stay near the train until I see whether he comes to life here or later."

So he stuck around the steps of the car. From the car ahead there emerged the conductor and the porter—the latter gray with fright—carrying the limp body of the Hindu, which they placed on a baggage truck, with a rolled-up coat under its head. Another porter brought a blanket. The conductor hurried away into a nearby train office. An inquisitive crowd gathered; but Deane kept well on its outskirts and finally mounted the steps of the car, ready to duck inside as soon as the Hindu should come to life.

The clanging of a gong could be

heard in the station courtyard, and then two white-coated men arrived, carrying a stretcher. One of them applied a stethoscope to the chest of the Hindu, examined his eyeballs, and then shook his head. The body was lifted onto the stretcher and carted off.

Deane smiled grimly to himself as he pictured the amazement of the ambulance men, when their supposed corpse should come to life and berate them roundly for disturbing its sleep.

"All aboard," shouted the trainmen.

Well, this solved Deane's problem for the present. If the spy was staying here, he himself might just as well continue on to New York.

The train was well on its way again before it dawned on him that the Hindu might be really dead, after all. Later on, however, came the more disturbing thought that, if by any chance the Hindu were *not* dead, he had undoubtedly wired or phoned ahead the information that Deane was aboard this train.

AT Hoboken that evening a man with dark glasses came very slowly and deliberately through the car. His slowness and deliberation seemed to be gropingly due to defective eyesight; yet somehow Deane got the impression that the man paused overlong as he came abreast of Deane. And, although the glasses masked all expression of the man's eyes, his face was turned searchingly toward Deane for a long period.

Deane was becoming increasingly sensitive to espionage. Or perhaps was merely becoming increasingly suspicious of espionage where none existed.

As he made his way along the platform under the Pennsylvania Station in New York, he saw the same man now facing the outgoing crowd, and apparently arguing with a redcap who was offering to help him. The man turned into the stream of people just behind Deane.

After mounting the stairs Deane glanced back. There was no one with dark glasses behind him; but there *was* a man without glasses who looked strangely familiar. And this man followed Deane to the taxi stand.

"So that's the game, is it?" said Deane to himself, as he turned abruptly away and went back through the station and out onto the street.

The man again followed him and stood beside him at the curb. A taxi drew up. Deane stepped back to let the other man take it, but the other declined with a courteous smile and wave of the hand.

"You were ahead of me," he said. "I'll take this one."

And he turned and walked away toward another taxi, which was just arriving. There was nothing for Deane to do but take the first cab. So he got in and gave the name of a small Lexington Avenue hotel.

The two cabs started. Deane glanced back through the rear window and saw that the other cab was following him. It followed him for quite a number of blocks.

"Well," thought he, "late at night though it is, if the Immortals are on my trail, the sooner I get to Donna's house, before I get bumped off, the better."

So he leaned forward and told the driver to change to Cairns' address. But the other cab continued to follow, until finally it forged ahead. Then, to Deane's surprise, his cab followed it.

He couldn't very well make a fool of himself by telling his driver not to follow the other cab. But he could ask the driver to go more slowly. A card in the cab stated, "If you wish to go more slowly, ask the driver."

So Deane leaned forward and said, "Would you mind slowing up? I was in an auto accident recently and feel a little nervous."

"Yes, sir," the man replied but kept right on following the other cab..

The card also stated, "Select your own route," so Deane looked out of the window to see where he was, so that he could give proper directions for some other routing to the house of the Cairnses.

AND suddenly he realized that he was being swiftly taken into the wrong part of the city altogether. His mind flashed back to his eventful taxi ride in Fargo. Regardless of whether his present ride was a repetition of that one, or another attempt at kidnaping by Maitland, he wanted to get out of it.

Both cars had now stopped for a red light. The eyes of Deane's driver were intently on the car ahead. So Deane quietly opened the door, slipped out and, dodging between two parked cars, gained the sidewalk. Just then the light changed.

Deane had taken care not to close the door of his cab, lest the sound attract the attention of the driver. Now, as the cab started up, the door swung open, caught on one of the parked cars, and ripped half off.

"Hi, there!" shouted the chauffeur of the parked car.

The taxi driver turned around at the ripping sound and the chauffeur's shout, and saw Deane escaping.

"Hi, there!" *he* shouted. "Come back here and pay for your ride!"

"And for scratching up my car!" added the parked chauffeur.

Deane heard the whistle of an approaching traffic cop. Not waiting for any more, he ducked into a subway entrance which loomed invitingly near by. It turned out to be an exit, rather than an entrance, but he didn't dare go back. As he reached the bottom, quite a number of people came through the gate, which fortunately was of the swinging variety, and so he was able to wedge his way through.

A northbound train came along. He boarded it. The doors slammed shut. A policeman came running along the platform. But the train started.

Deane doubted that the traffic cop had a very good idea of his appearance, or that the taxi driver had had time to describe him. Certainly, if the driver were one of the Maitland gang, he wouldn't even want to give a correct description. So Deane was probably safe from that quarter.

The problem was now to beat the gang to the house of Donna Cairns. It would take a little time for his driver to inform the man with—or rather now without—the dark glasses, of Deane's change of destination. And, anyway, the subway would beat a taxi uptown.

So Deane stayed on the train until the station nearest to the Cairnses, and then took a taxi from there.

"Is Miss Donna at home?" he inquired.

"Who is calling?" asked the butler.

What should he say? He ought to have foreseen this obvious question, and been prepared for it. He could not give his own name, the name of the supposed murderer of her father. He could not say "a man with a message from her father," for she would be

shocked by the apparent callous levity of such a statement.

"I'm Mr. Horace Jones," said he, with sudden resolution. "She doesn't know me, but I have a very important message for her."

"Very well, sir. Will you come in?" said the butler, showing him into a small reception room off the hall.

Presently Donna Cairns entered, in clinging filmy gown. Deane noted with a pang how changed she was since the night he had met her at his lecture on stratium. She was now thin and wan, and her wistful beauty had taken on an ethereal tone. Her wavy chestnut hair seemed to have lost some of its vitality, and her soft brown eyes had become hollow.

She greeted him tentatively, and he instantly realized with relief that she did not recognize him. This simplified his problem.

"Miss Cairns," said he, "prepare yourself for some startling news. I am a detective who has been working on your father's case."

She gasped and clutched her robe to her chest.

Deane held up one hand as he continued, in what he imagined would be the proper manner for a police inspector, "Now hold onto yourself and please, please don't make a scene. Your father is still alive. We have just discovered that he was kidnaped, not killed; and that another body was substituted for his."

Rigid with a sort of fascinated terror, she watched him unblinking, with a slight though increasing negative shaking of her head as he continued.

"My dear young lady," said he, "I know it sounds preposterous, but I have a letter from him in his own handwriting to prove it."

He ran his left hand triumphantly into the inside breast pocket of his coat.

There was no letter there!

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE TOILS.

"BUT I did have the letter!" Deane exclaimed. "I must have left it in my other suit."

With dawning recognition and contempt she stared at him. Then she cried:

"I know you now. You are Dr. Deane, the man who killed my father. What do you mean by coming here and taunting me?"

"Miss Cairns," he hurriedly replied, "the only reason that I told you that I was a detective was so as to lead up gently to my message. Your father and I were both kidnaped by the same gang. A dead man resembling him was planted in my laboratory. For some time we were kept apart, but finally we got together. He gave me the letter, which I have unfortunately mislaid; and I escaped. Please believe me. Your father's safety may depend upon it."

"Oh, I can't stand any more!" she cried, and putting her handkerchief into her mouth, she rushed from the room and up the stairs.

Deane ran after her into the hall, calling after her, "Miss Cairns!"

But she ran on up and disappeared around a turn at the head of the stairs. Deane was in a quandary. He could not very well pursue her into the upper reaches of the house. Ought he leave? She had not told him to.

He ran his fingers through his sandy hair in bewilderment. Then he figured that Donna's failure to tell him to leave gave him a chance to stay,

until perhaps she might come down again and permit him to prove the truth of his story. So he returned to the reception room and began to pace nervously up and down.

Five minutes passed. Ten minutes. Then the butler entered, visibly perturbed.

"Miss Donna requests," he announced, "that you should wait here. She will be down very shortly. What you said about her father has upset her mightily. She is having a good cry right now, but as soon as she gets over it she wishes to hear further. So just make yourself at home, sir."

The butler bowed himself out. Deane sat down to wait. Things were not going so badly after all. Even without Cairns's letter he might still be able to convince the old professor's daughter. But he worried about the possibility of Maitland finding the letter in his other suit, back at Sioux Lodge.

Donna came in. Her face was calm again, and all signs of her recent tears had been effaced. She even had a fresh handkerchief. But Deane noticed that the butler remained in the hallway just outside the door.

Taking a seat, she said, "And now, Dr. Deane, you may continue. Please forgive me for my outburst, but you must realize what a shock it was for me to have the supposed murderer"—she paused, gripped her hands together in her lap, and then with an effort continued—"of my father have the apparent effrontery to come to my house and taunt me with a vulgar jest. But go on—I am willing to listen to you."

"Miss Cairns," said Deane with deep feeling, "I don't blame you for a thing. Your reaction was entirely natural. But, thank God, it is over, and you are at last willing to let me explain. For you *must* do so; your father's life may depend on you and me working together."

He paused and looked at her narrowly. For he had suddenly noticed that she seemed to be listening for something.

The doorbell rang. Donna Cairns sighed, unclenched her hands, and the tense look left her face.

"Show them in, Higgins," she called and there was almost a note of triumph in her voice.

Then she turned back to her guest with, "You were saying, Dr. Deane—"

There was a commotion in the hall.

"But, my word!" the butler exclaimed.

Then a rough voice interrupted. "Back over against the wall there! Stick up your hands!"

And three men with drawn automatics barged into the room.

Deane jumped to his feet and pushed Donna to one side.

"So!" said he. "I thought so."

FOR one of the three men was the polite gentleman who had followed him out of the Pennsylvania Station that evening, and the others were the two thugs with whom he had battled in the taxicab on the way to the house of John Copeland Maitland on the morning of the supposed murder of Professor Cairns, months ago.

"I suppose," Deane grimly added, "that your skull-faced chauffeur is the man who is guarding Higgins out in the hall."

"These seem to be old friends of yours, Dr. Deane," said Donna sweetly.

"We take it he's no friend of yours, lady," said the polite gentleman. "So don't you worry. We're after him, not you."

"Oh, I'm not worrying at all," she airily replied. "The fact is, I thought when you rang that you were the police. I had phoned for them to come and get this man for the murder of my father. They ought to be here any minute now."

"The hell you say," exclaimed the leader, losing his suavity. "Here, you, Deane, out the back way with us and be quick about it."

The two thugs pounced upon their captive and hustled him out into the hall while their leader followed, with pistol alert. In the hall, sure enough, it was the skull-faced taxi driver of that mad ride to Maitland's brownstone front, months ago, who now held the butler cornered.

"Come on, Snippy," commanded the leader. "Back away, keep a drop on the butler and cover our retreat. If he or the skirt starts anything, shoot."

"Oh, you needn't worry about me," asserted Donna, appearing at the door of the reception room. "I'm quite happy to have you take Dr. Deane for a ride. It will save the expense, the agony, and the uncertainty of a murder trial."

Deane thought he saw a chance to grab the gun of one of his captors. But Donna was in range, in danger of being hit by a stray bullet. So, for her sake, he gritted his teeth and marched peacefully off with the henchmen of Maitland.

Down the hall they went and out through the servants' rooms to the rear door. This door opened into a jet dark areaway.

But as they filed out the place was suddenly flooded with light and a sharp command rang out, "Drop your guns! We have you covered!"

It was the police.

"Out of the frying pan into the fire," thought Charles Deane. He had failed to get his mission across before falling into the hands of the authorities. Now his only hope was to convince the district attorney, and his one bit of convincing evidence was missing.

As the police closed in on the four gangsters he stepped boldly forward, and announced, "I'm Dr. Charles Deane; I want to get immediately in touch with District Attorney McGrady. It's of vital importance."

"Oh, we know who *you* are, all right," sneered the police sergeant in charge. "The little lady phoned headquarters all about you. And Dan McGrady will talk to you when he gets good and ready. Will you come peaceably or do you want the bracelets?"

He heard the mocking laugh of Donna Cairns from inside the kitchen.

"I'll come peaceably," said he grimly.

Then the five captives were marched off to the wagon.

Fortunately for Deane's rest that night, he was locked up in a cell with a total stranger, rather than with any of the four Maitland men. His worries for the safety of Professor Cairns, whose daughter had so impetuously spoiled everything, were disturbing enough, without having to keep on his guard all night watching their enemies. And, speaking of enemies, was Donna herself safe? And even if she were safe, what about her finances, with her father gone?

Finally Deane slept.

EARLY the next morning he was awakened for breakfast, and then was taken to the identification division for photographing and fingerprinting.

Immediately he insisted on an inter-

view with the district attorney. But the policeman promptly refused.

"Why?" urged Deane.

"Because McGrady is off this case."

"But why?"

"Search me. Those are our instructions."

"Mighty strange, don't you think? A double murder, and the D. A. lets a subordinate handle it!"

"Search me! But it's lucky for you, young fellow, that you aren't up against Dan in person."

"I wonder," said Deane.

He submitted to the snapping of a front and a profile view, with a serial number pinned to his chest and shoulders.

But when it came to putting his finger tips on the ink pad he shook his head.

"No, no!" said he.

"Come on! Come on!" badgered the officer. "Every one booked here has to be finger-printed. Who do you think you are, anyhow?"

"I refuse to answer on advice of counsel," Deane replied, grinning.

"Come on! Don't try to horse me!"

"Look here," said Deane sharply. "I'm under indictment for murder. For *two* murders, so far as I know, although I haven't been told. I don't have to give any evidence which might tend to incriminate me. And finger-prints are evidence, aren't they?"

"Say, that's a new one!" exclaimed the officer, with real admiration in his eyes. "It's a wonder that no crook ever thought of *that* line before."

"Isn't it?" Deane assented. "But that's my story, and I'll stick to it."

Only for a moment did the officer's admiration persist. "Here, you!" he exclaimed. "This is all hooey! Everybody that comes in here gets finger-printed, and you're no exception."

So saying, he grabbed Deane by the wrist. Deane's first reaction was intense resentment at being manhandled. As a matter of fact, his objection to having his finger-prints taken had been merely instinctive rather than based on any particularly reasoned calculations.

Deane jerked his hand away and wheeled about, his fists raised on the defensive. Then, for a moment, the futility of resistance was borne in on him. But only for a moment. For suddenly the thought occurred to him that a rumpus might attract the attention of District Attorney McGrady, which was just what he wanted.

So, with lightning-like speed, he stepped forward and lunged at the policeman.

Down crashed the man, but instantly three others swarmed into the room. A whistle sounded in the corridor outside. Deane, with his back to the wall, fought them off. This was like old college days! The man who ran through the whole Southern California team in the Rose Bowl could hold off four policemen.

And then a keen-looking, red-haired man of apparently about Deane's age appeared in the doorway and cast his blue eyes quickly and inquiringly around the room. Deane stared hopefully at the newcomer. Was this Dan—?

DEANE came to his senses alone in a cell—a different cell from the one in which he had formerly been confined. His head ached, and he felt nauseated. Running his fingers tenderly over his scalp, he located a bruised and bloody bump. He inspected his fingers. Mingled with the fresh

blood there were traces of ink. Quite evidently he had been finger-printed, after all, and he had not secured an interview with McGrady. All his effort had been for nothing.

He stared around his new quarters. Not only was there no other prisoner to share it, but his keen mind instantly noted another peculiarity, namely a rather large mirror set in the rear wall.

The presence of this mirror intrigued him. Why a mirror in a prison cell? The glass was evidently plate of the best quality; but the silvering, although even, seemed to be unusually dark: more like black night outside the window of a brightly lighted room than like a mirror. Deane vaguely remembered having seen somewhere a mirror like this.

He sat down and delved into his memory, but without results.

A guard arrived, unlocked the barred door, and informed him that his lawyer was waiting to see him in the interview room. His lawyer? He had no lawyer. Wonderingly he followed the guard out to the room with the long table, two benches and the dividing screen, where interviews were permitted. And there, smirking at him on the other side of the wire netting, was the pudgy little Peter Markham, whom he had met at the house of John Copeland Maitland.

As Deane took his seat at the long table, the little lawyer shoved his fat white dirty-nailed fingers through the netting and wiggled them at his client. They reminded Deane of loathsome white grubs, black heads and all. He cringed and omitted to grasp them.

Markham withdrew the proffered hand, unabashed, and said ingraciatingly, "Well, you sent for me, and here I am. At your service."

"I did not—" Deane indignantly began.

The lawyer held up one hand in protest, and raised his eyebrows meaningfully. Then continued, "It is a good thing that you did send for me. You are in a tough spot."

"Are you in touch with Maitland?" Deane asked pointedly.

"Maitland? You mean John Cortlandt Maitland, the banker? I hardly know the man. No. Why do you ask that?"

There was an amused twinkle in Markham's eyes which belied his words.

"Oh, nothing," Deane lamely replied.

"Anything particular that I could do for you right now?"

"Yes," said Deane suddenly. "Get me a personal interview with the district attorney."

Markham's fat lids narrowed ominously for an instant. Then he pursed his lips and shook his head.

"I advise against it," said he. "You have a much better chance of acquittal if some underling prosecutes you. Let's not attract McGrady's personal attention to your case."

Of course the Maitland gang didn't want him to get in touch with McGrady, but it was just as well to know it. Deane smiled to himself and changed the subject.

"What makes you think I'm in a tough spot?" he asked.

"It's the finger-prints," Markham replied. "They found your prints on the gun which killed Wolf Diggs, as well as on the knife which stabbed Professor Cairns."

"I think you told me all this once before," said Deane levelly. "And I think that I told you that it was impossible for the authorities to identify

my prints. For I have never been finger-printed—that is, not until this morning," he added wryly, lifting his hand and feeling tentatively of his bruised head.

"You have no reason to suppose—?" began Markham, his voice full of ill-concealed concern.

"I have *every* reason to suppose!" Deane cut in. "The chances are that whatever prints of mine they have for comparison are phony. And if the prints on the gun and knife check with these, then they must be phony too."

"Then I tell you what." The lawyer leaned forward close to the wires. "It's important, for your protection, that I get a set of your genuine prints, so as to check up on the phony prints which the Department has. I'll bring around a pad the next time that I come to see you."

Said Deane to himself, "Now I wonder." But aloud he said, "All right."

"Interview over," announced the officer in charge.

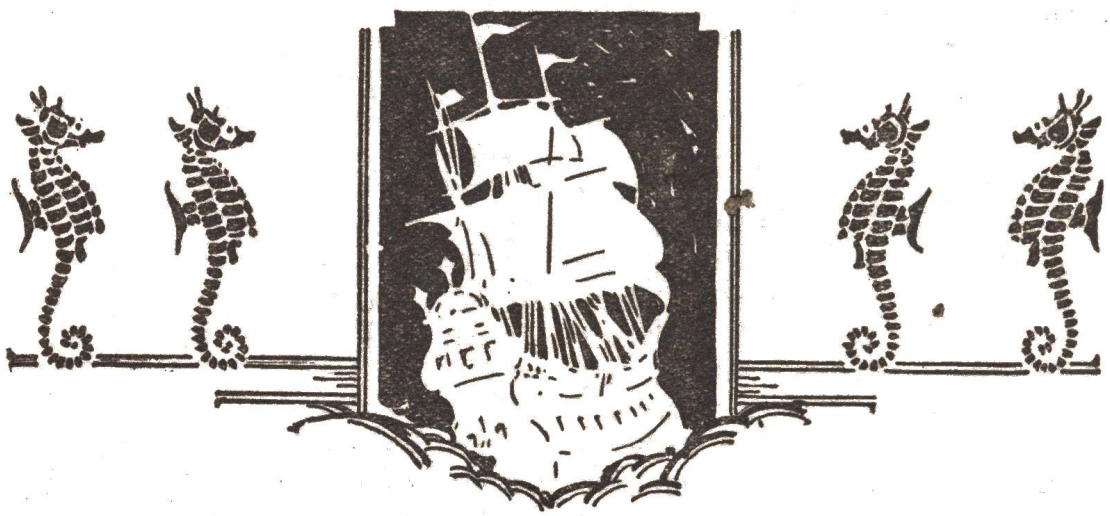
And disdaining the again proffered grublike fingers of the lawyer, Deane nodded good-by, and got up and returned to his cell.

IT was a dark, overcast day. The lights were turned on. The noon meal was brought. Deane ate slowly and thoughtfully, trying to figure out the reason for Lawyer Markham's intense interest in the matter of finger-prints. Some one had slipped somewhere, and the Maitland gang was just beginning to find it out.

As Deane drained the coffee from his tin cup, the reflection of one of the room lights flickered from the bottom of the cup onto the walls of the room. And suddenly he had an idea.

First he experimented until he had succeeded in capturing the brightest reflection of all; and then he swung the beam over onto the dark wall mirror! And, for an instant, he glimpsed a face in the depths of the mirror! A face whose eyes blinked and whose jaw dropped with an expression of thwarted surprise, ere it faded away in the black depths of the glass!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

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GREATER and more exciting action fiction ahead!—Go adventuring with ARGOSY—and (like the Marines) see the world!—Coming features in the next three issues are: "Deception Trail," a *Hashknife* complete novel of the West by W. C. Tuttle; "The Wolf of Quebec," a fine novelette of the North by William Merriam Rouse; "Diver's Chances," a *Jem Healy* pearl diving novelette by Gordon MacCreagh; "Shoe-String Logger," a novelette of the tall timber by Frank Richardson Pierce; "Masquerade," a Boston mystery in five parts by Fred MacIsaac; "The Rollers," a thrilling novelette of the future by Murray Leinster; "The Sacred Sword," a Guiana prison novelette by Tom Curry; "Captain Long Knife," a six-part novel of railroad building in the old West by F. V. W. Mason—and dozens of other tales.

A. MERRITT'S astounding tale, "Creep, Shadow!" has just been brought out in book form and has received the most enthusiastic of reviews from the press.—Remember, ARGOSY first gave you this story; in seven installments which cost you exactly 70c, as compared with the $2.00 which is asked for the bound book.—Don't say we never gave you anything!

RALPH MILNE FARLEY, whose fine story, "The Immortals," is now running in ARGOSY, asks us to print the following note about the installment which appears in this issue:

> I wish to express my appreciation to R. H. L. of the Chicago *Tribune* for his kind permission to quote, in my story, "The Immortals," the poem entitled "Portrait of an Aviatrix," by "Jayhawker," which appeared in R. H. L.'s column, "A Line o' Type or Two,' on March 14, 1930. This poem was my inspiration for the character, *Mavis Maitland*, and aptly describes her.

AND more tunnel fiction coming:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

I have just finished reading "East River," by B. Chase and E. Doherty. In the four years (I am a comparatively new reader) that I have been reading the ARGOSY, I don't think I have ever come across a story, long or short, which was as realistic as this one. I felt that I was building a tunnel.

Incidently, in one of the newspapers I saw a picture showing our former Vice President Dawes in conversation with Victor McLaglen and the director of the film version of the story, "East River." If the film is as good as the story, I'm sure we'll all enjoy it. These two authors are new to the ARGOSY. Please have them write some more tunneling stories. I'm sure all your readers will enjoy them.

SIGMUND STEINBERG.

ONLY one man could have done it:

Grantwood, N. J.

With the publication of your new serial, "East River," your magazine has reached a new height in its selection of excellent reading matter.

The Chief—or "Dad," as we call him—recently put the Q. T. on us fellows (or rather, on Doubting Thomases) when, after reading the third installment of "East River," he said that in all his time at the construction game there was only one person he had ever heard of who had ever gone through an experience such as the fellow called *Dick Creadon* went through in "East River." That is, only one man who had lived to tell about it. And the Chief thought

it would be a good idea if one of us kind of checked up on the authors to see if they weren't handing out a straight one for once.

The man to whom the Chief referred was a fellow named Jack Cassidy and as to the company he worked for, the Chief couldn't say for sure, as there were three or four companies on the job at the time. The place and time? Well, it was during the construction of the real East River tunnel.—How did it happen? Everything seems pretty accurately described in the story, except that Cassidy, who was rather short and stocky, after all other efforts to stop the break had failed placed his back against the break and told the bunch to "beat it."

The suction pulled Cassidy into the break, doubled up like a jack-knife, and it shot him up through muck and water to the surface, bottom first. There he was picked up by a tug crew who, not knowing where Cassidy had come from, surmised that he had dropped from the riggin' of some ship nearby, and so took him to a hospital. Naturally, he had a tough time of it there. As far as the Chief knows, Cassidy never went back to the tunnel game again, and the last the Chief knew of him, he was working on the Buffalo-Statler Hotel.

Perhaps your authors can corroborate the above. We take the "old man's" stories with a grain of salt.

R. W. RAMSEY.

O'LEARY, the mule, too well-preserved:

Leedey, Okla.

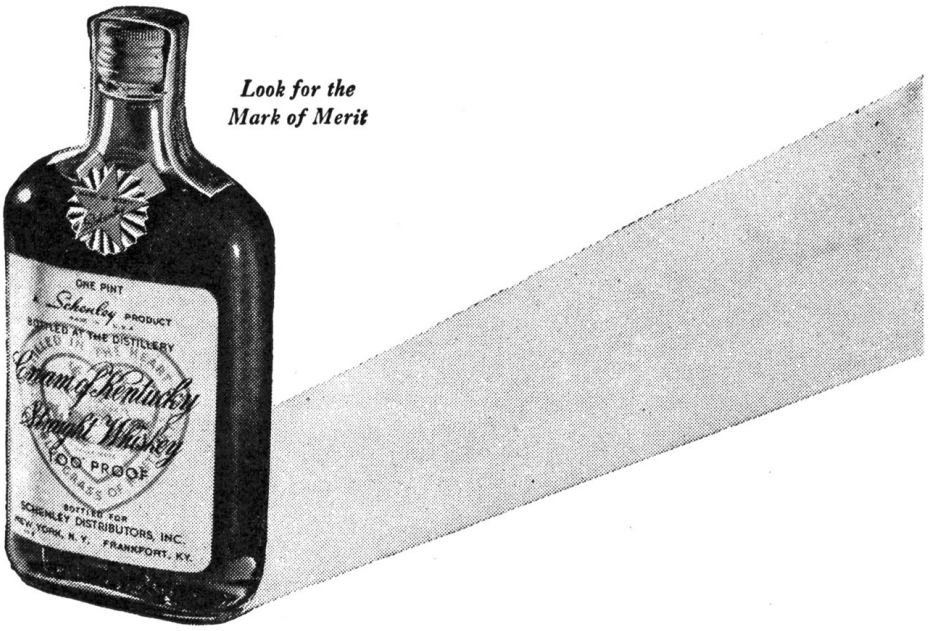
I have read ARGOSY for a good many years, and I have found copies of it in many strange places. I have been a sailor, a soldier, an A. B., a mate, an oil field worker (even a soup-wagon driver), and several other things.

I often see mistakes which writers make in their stories, but there are so many readers who don't notice that I pass over the errors and go on. But Paul Annixter made a big one in his "The Murders on the Range" when he stated in the story that the mule, O'Leary, was 32 years old, after describing what long teeth the animal had. I know mules and horses, and I know that very few live to be that old. Those that do must be fed on soaked or soft grain for usually their teeth are worn off, and few of the animals can stand very much hard work. Never yet have I seen a large mule who was much of a fighter; for ordinarily they are muscle-bound. If Annixter had made his mule's age at six or seven it would have been a little better, but 32 is too much.

I like almost all of your stories, though there are a few authors whose work I don't like. Mr. Merritt is one.

I would like to see the ideas of other readers about 32-year-old mule ba-ba.

RICHARD P. FRENCH.



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