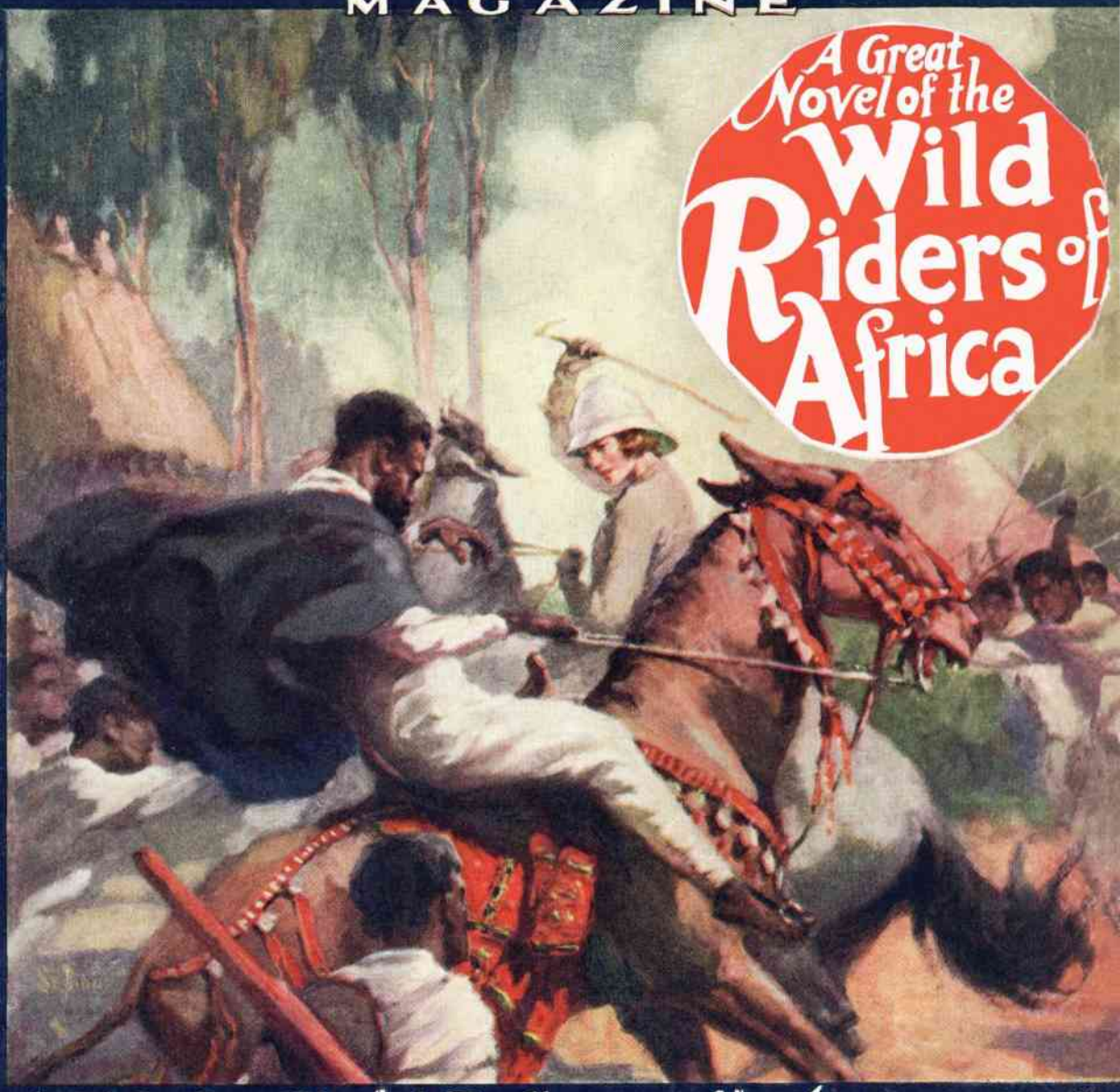
Price 25 Cents
30 Cents in Canada

JUNE 1928

THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

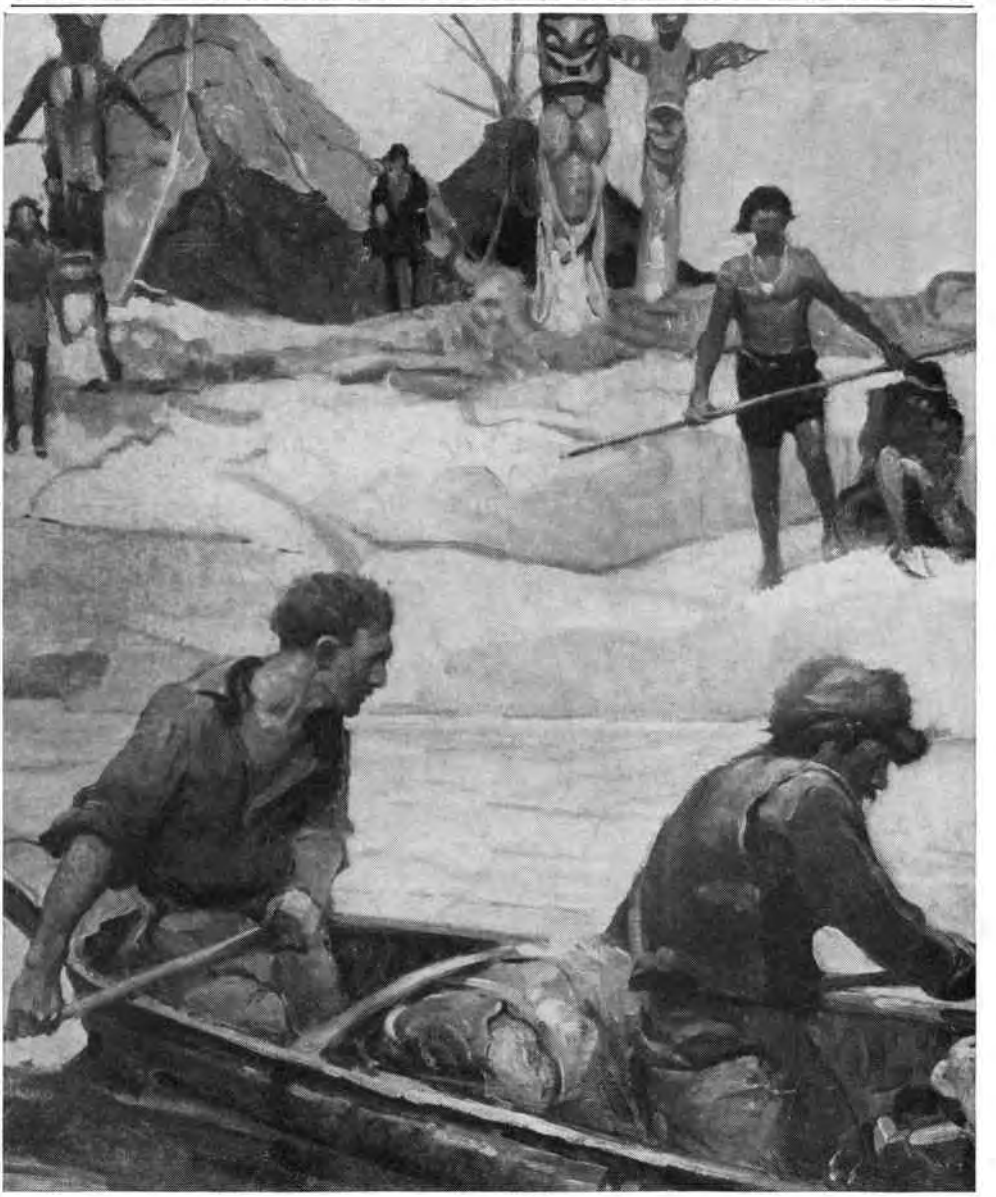
N.S.E.



$500 IN CASH FOR Real Experiences

A Thrill-crammed COWBOY NOVELETTE

Also Captain Dingle Clarence Herbert New Bertram Atkey & Others



William Byron Mowery, who wrote "The Sergeant of Lone Cree" and other good ones, is the author of that splendid North Woods romance, "HEARTS AFLIGHT," now appearing in—

THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE

MAY NUMBER NOW ON SALE AT ALL NEWS-STANDS

Missing Page

Missing Page

The Blue Book Magazine [v47 #2, June 1928] ed. Edwin Balmer (The Consolidated Magazines Corporation, 25¢, 196pp, pulp, cover by J. Allen St. John)
"Men Who Won the West: Meriwether Lewis" · Paul Lehman · fp
Spears in the Sun [Part 1 of 3] · James Edwin Baum · sl; illustrated by Frank Hoban
Gone to Hilo · Captain Dingle · ss; illustrated by O. W. Fackert
The Piper of Hualapai · Hubert Loomis Smith · ss; illustrated by Frank Hoban
The Next-to-Last Laugh · Raoul F. Whitfield · ss; illustrated by William Molt
A Matter of Habit · Pettersen Marzoni · ss; illustrated by L. R. Gustavson
Send Us Your Tanks! · James Sayre Pickering · ss; illustrated by Paul Lehman
John L. the Second · Hugh S. Fullerton · ss; illustrated by William Molt
Where There Ain't No Ten Commandments [Dr. Galt] · Culpeper Zandtt · ss; illustrated by Joseph Sabo
Rivers of Doubt [Part 2 of 2] · Walton Green · sl; illustrated by William Molt
The Affair at the Closed Hotel [Merlin O'Moore] · Bertram Atkey · ss The Grand Magazine Aug 1916; illustrated by Frank Hoban
The Doomed Poste [Foreign Legion Stories] · Warren H. Miller · ss; illustrated by Paul Lehman
The Resignation of Michael Radayne [Free Lances in Diplomacy] · Clarence Herbert New · ss; illustrated by O. W. Fackert
Brothers of the Saddle · Rollin Brown · nv; illustrated by Paul Lehman
A Revolution Derailed · Clarence F. Dunkle · ts
My War Debt · S. Austin Bell · ts
Cape Horn · William R. Barker · ts
The Burnt Child · Robert Moore · ts
Winning the D.S.M. · Theron Graves · ts

Missing Page

Missing Page

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 47 JUNE 1928 No. 2

They Disengage Us from Ourselves

"THE most influential books," observed Robert Louis Stevenson, "and the truest in their influence, are works of fiction. . . . . They repeat, they rearrange, they clarify the lessons of life; they disengage us from ourselves; they constrain us to the acquaintance of others; and they show us the web of experience, but with a singular change—that monstrous consuming ego of ours being struck out."

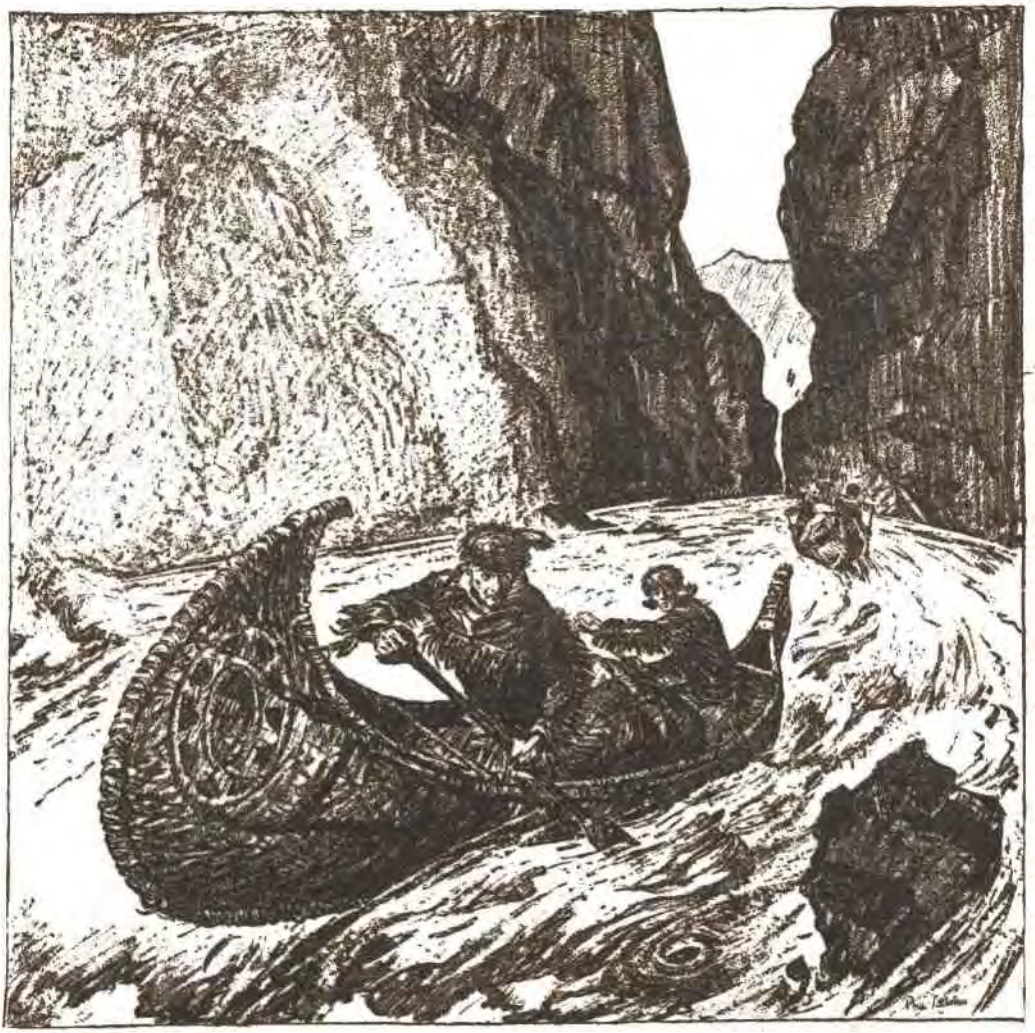
As usual, Stevenson says something here: consider for example, in the light of his words, the fiction which follows:

James Edwin Baum's "Spears in the Sun"—how well it serves to "show us the web of experience" in far strange fascinating Abyssinia! And Warren Hastings Miller's "The Doomed Poste"—what fine gallant fellows, those soldiers of the Legion, and how well are we rewarded for being constrained to their acquaintance!

Most valuable service of all, perhaps, is the power of fiction to disengage us from ourselves. Who could fail to forget his troubles in that joyous absurdity "The Piper of Hualapai"? Or in Walton Green's engrossing romance "Rivers of Doubt" or in Rollin Brown's swift-paced "Brothers of the Saddle"? Or in Captain Dingle's moving story of a boy who ran away to sea, "Gone to Hi-lo"? One and all, indeed, the stories in this book are, we believe, admirably calculated to take you out of yourself and the problems that beset you.

Next month, likewise, you may count on an equally rewarding recreation in these pages: Arthur Hawthorne Carhart's fine novel of the real present-day West, "The Forest Legion," is by itself a vacation in the mountains; the second installment of "Spears in the Sun" brings you to some of its most picturesque and exciting episodes; Beatrice Grimshaw's colorful South Sea Island tale will afford you a veritable enchantment; Clarence Herbert New, Bertram Atkey, Lemuel De Bra, Warren H. Miller, Culpeper Zandtt and many other able writers will give you of their best. And five of your fellow-readers will contribute, by way of variety and contrast, the records of the most memorable events of their lives.

—*The Editors.*



Drawing by Paul Lehman

MEN WHO WON THE WEST

Meriwether Lewis

AFTER a thousand adventures in their epochal journey up the Missouri and over the unknown Rockies, Lewis and Clark had won their way to the Columbia, and in its descent faced another peril in the passage of the Dalles: A portage seemed impossible; and they therefore "deturmined to pass through this place notwithstanding the horrid appearance of this agitated gut swelling, boiling & whorling in every direction, which from the top of the rock did not appear as bad as when I was in it; however, we passed Safe."

The fine character of Lewis is further evidenced by entries in his journal—for example: "This day I completed my thirty-first year. . . . . I had as yet done but little to further the happiness of the human race or to advance the information of the succeeding generation. . . . . I resolved to redouble my exertions and in future to live for mankind, as I have heretofore lived for myself."

Lewis was made governor of Louisiana Territory in 1807. Only two years afterward, on a journey to Washington, he was murdered, either by a treacherous innkeeper or by his Spanish servant.

SPEARS IN THE SUN

By JAMES EDWIN BAUM

A captivating novel of adventure in the strangest land on earth — Abyssinia, where they eat their meat raw, and their princes keep lions for house-cats: by the one man competent to write it, the historian and hunter of the recent Field Museum Expedition.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

IVORY-POACHING along the borders of Abyssinia is the king of sports. There is excitement enough for the ordinary mortal, goodness knows, in the usual hazards of elephant-hunting in permitted territory. But add to that the uncertainty of half-savage natives and the freebooting tendencies of barbarian chiefs —and top this off with the ever-present danger of capture by patrols of the King's African Rifles, and you have a combination of infinite possibilities: a happy arrangement of circumstances that sooner or later will cause things to happen. Unexpected hazards will develop—startling, violent, unavoidable. Events that will stimulate the most experienced and serene adventurer to a state of earnest and cordial enthusiasm.

Angus McPherson had been ivory-hunting for three years—longer than some who embark in that perilous but fascinating occupation. But of course it was only a question of time until death beneath the feet of some justly enraged tusker, or an equally undesirable exit upon the spears of savage black men would write *finis* to his little history—which is so self-evident that it is hardly worth mentioning. But the strange and unusual thing about it was the fact that Angus McPherson himself, upon this, his thirtieth birthday, came to exactly the same conclusion. He went further: he made up his mind definitely, irrevocably, come hell or high water, to give up the game.

The considerations that brought Angus McPherson to that wise decision were several; chief of these, perhaps, should be mentioned, regard for the feelings of relatives at home in Scotland—proud Highlanders who would have felt keenly the disgrace if one of their branch of the old McPherson clan was known to have become what they might have termed a common outlaw in the African colonies, harried like a wild beast by detachments from every British border fort in the Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. So far, the ivory-poaching operations of Angus McPherson had not been coupled with his real identity. There are many Angus McPhersons in the world; and the hard-bitten white officers of border outposts are not up in heraldry. He was, to them, merely one of several impersonal individuals of their own breed whose activities in ivory were carried on in closed territory in defiance of the law. It was their business to apprehend him if they could. And this they would do, of course, if the opportunity should arise. But they would do it without heat, without animosity—even with a shadow of reluctance, for, being of an adventurous turn themselves, they could not avoid a certain feeling of respect for a countryman who had the hardihood to carry on in an undertaking where the probabilities were all in favor of an early and violent demise.

ANGUS McPHERSON was in Addis Ababa, the straggling old capital of Abyssinia, when he came to his decision.

Spears in the Sun

The teeth from his last trek had been sold to Ras Tessayah. Abyssinia—being the last free kingdom in the Dark Continent—is one of the few isolated places where poached ivory may be disposed of without danger of seizure and international complications. The safari of Swahili and Baganda porters from the interior had been paid off and given papers of safe-conduct back to their own villages. Angus had seen them start earlier in the day, and now walked slowly along one of the main thoroughfares of Addis Ababa, wondering what he should do next—now that he had renounced ivory-poaching once and for all.

His finances were in excellent condition. Ras Tessayah had paid a high price for the tusks of this last foray. The soft native gold, molded into rings about three inches in diameter, had been weighed and checked by an Indian trader who owned the principal establishment in Addis—a man, strangely enough, of proved honesty, who had been glad, for a percentage, to give receipts for the amount in bills of exchange on a London bank. The health of Angus McPherson was as good as could be expected after eight months in a low, fever country along the Kenya-Abyssinian border. He was lean, muscular and burned to a deep copper red. The fever—which no man who passes any considerable period in mosquito areas may hope to avoid—recurred only at long intervals. And the bracing climate of the Abyssinian highlands, combined with proper care, could be expected to knock out the remainder in a short time.

McPHERSON was at peace with the world that afternoon. And the whole world lay before him. He walked with a light, joyous step, tall, straight and clear-eyed. Ali, his Somali gun-bearer, followed some five paces to the rear—without the usual heavy rifle, however, in this comparatively tame community. Ali had refused to be dismissed with the Swahilis and Bagandas, and since had followed his master about the paths of Addis Ababa like a faithful setter; uncomplaining, unquestioning, living in the hope that his white man would relent and again take the trail where a gun-bearer's services would be needed.

Angus was considering a visit home to the great hall in the highlands of Scotland, and after that perhaps a long journey into the Bahr-el-Ghazal after giant eland—when he noticed an Abyssinian chief surrounded by a hundred or more of his barbarian following marching down the street. The retainers, *zebanias*, vassals, stalwart and bearded, were armed with the usual long-bladed spears. The chief was mounted upon a quick-stepping mule and was, judging from the retinue, a man of consequence. A slave-boy carried his master's gun in a scarlet satin covering at the right side of the mule. And the animal was tricked out in much bizarre Abyssinian finery; headstall, martingale and tail-piece, or crupper, were of red leather handsomely embossed with round silver disks, shining and jingling. The high-peaked native saddle was resplendent with brightly colored saddle-cloth and the dun mule was fully fifteen hands high at the shoulder, an unusually large saddle-animal for Abyssinia.

As the procession drew near, Angus could see that the chief's face was set in an expression of haughty, dignified pride.

"One of Ras Tessayah's feudal barons from some outlying province," thought Angus, with little interest. "Must be from the north; I know most of those in the south. Seems to be quite set up with his own importance—displays a bit more than the usual starchy side—crowd glitters with strut and swank." And then the thought crossed his mind:

"How like Scotland in the time of the Stuarts this country is today! Proud clansmen, Highlanders too. Black, to be sure, but the common people faithful to their hereditary chieftains just as the peasantry of old Scotland were faithful

"One of Ras Tessayah's feudal barons," thought Angus. "Seems quite set up with his own importance!"

unto death to their plaid, obeying without question the will of the chief of their clan." Snatches of Scottish legends and history came to mind: Old Cluny McPherson hiding out in the shepherd's hut, guarded, fed and nursed by his stanch kilted followers. Allan Breck, that bonny fighter, risking his life time after time for a cause already lost beyond hope. The feud of the McDonalds and Campbells — the massacre of Glencoe — the Northumberland Percys — English, but troublesome to the border Scots—and who was that old lad Sir Walter Scott made such a fuss over? Oh, yes, the Douglas —"and dar'st thou then, to beard the lion in his den, the Douglas in his hall?" Or what was it?

"Silly stuff, that!" But Angus McPherson felt a thrill of pride in his race. "Let's see—wasn't it Stevenson, a rank Lowlander too, who said the Scotch had taught the world the meaning of the word loyalty?"

Life today, in Abyssinia, he thought again, was marvelously like it used to be in Scotland. The country itself was a great plateau, highlands cut by giant cañons, towering mountains, cool, healthful for Africa, and divided into feudal baronies, ruled by chiefs—heads of clans —and *Shums*, or petty village despots whose word was absolute law to their followers. In the wilder highlands, he knew, the chiefs surrounded themselves with all the panoply of powerful clansmen of the Middle Ages in his own native land. They had their thousands of retainers and men-at-arms. They enjoyed their little wars. They stole each other's cattle, women, slaves. At intervals they burned, ravaged, pillaged. They were, if not as stanch and loyal as the Scotch to their hereditary chieftains, at least faithful enough to carry out the resemblance.

The wandering thoughts of Angus McPherson were interrupted. An old man, a leper, blind and with the stumps of hands and feet showing beneath the folds of an unbelievably dirty *shamma*, crouched by the roadside. The shuffling of bare feet as the chief's crowd came abreast told him that some one of importance was passing. The ghastly object raised the stumps of hands in a gesture of supplication, mumbling. Angus was near enough to see a shadow of loathing cross the chief's face. One of his retainers evidently saw it too, for he stooped and picked up a stone. He glanced at his chief, received a nod and let drive at the pitiable object. The blind leper received it full in the chest and rolled howling into a shallow ditch made by the torrential downpours of the last rainy season. A loud guffaw issued from the chief's bearded lips, and his face settled into a nasty expression of satisfaction.

THE man was not seriously hurt; none of the chief's followers made a move to repeat the exploit, and the blind leper shuffled away down the watercourse. Angus was too familiar with Abyssinian customs to mix up in a chief's affairs, unless it became necessary. He knew the probable consequences, and in this case the damage had been done; nothing could have been gained—and much might have been lost—by unconsidered quixotic in-

tervention. He had many pleasant, if half-formed, plans for the remainder of his life which he didn't care to throw away in a piece of hasty and useless chivalry. His calling had taught him rigid self-control, if nothing else.

But now Angus saw for the first time a girl—a *white* girl—forcing her horse through the chief's crowd from the far side. He had a flash of a small face and a riot of sunny hair beneath the rim of a sun-helmet. She was mounted upon a spirited gray—and then Angus saw what sent a chill of cold fear running up his spine! The girl, small and clean—that air of cleanness (accentuated perhaps by the dark countenances about her) impressed itself more upon him than the fiery indignation flaming in her face—the girl, he saw with horror, barged in, raised her riding-crop and brought it down once, twice, across that swarthy, bearded face, with all the force of her arm. To strike any Abyssinian, he knew, was dangerous business. But to strike an Abyssinian chief—surrounded by his following—was one of those things that isn't done if you have any plans for the future.

ANGUS ran forward, but even as the quick thought went through his mind, "Here, Angus, is where you meet your finish," he was conscious of a wild thrill of admiration, exultation.

A dozen black hands dragged the girl from the gray horse. But quick as Angus had been, there were two before him—two mounted white men, concealed from view on the far side until now by the crowd. One of the white men, as they spurred through the throng, gave an unearthly yell—Angus learned later that this was a combination, a sort of blend, of cowboy and American Indian war-cries. Their plunging horses knocked down several men. Two long-barreled pistols gleamed, appearing from somewhere with the speed of light. One rescuer jumped from his horse and just before Angus arrived, had felled, with the butt of his pistol, two men holding the girl.

"Taos," drawled the one still sitting his horse and now presenting his pistol not more than three feet from the chief's breast-bone, "Taos,"—he pronounced it like the word *house* but with a *"t"* instead of an *"h"*—"reckon you better pass Mary Leonora up behind me. Her hoss has done quit the flat." The words were uttered in a slow drawl, a careless tone that was astonishing in its contrast to the tenseness of the situation. The man sat his horse loosely, sideways in the saddle. The six-shooter covering the bearded Abyssinian reposed in a hand as steady as the Rock of Ages. The steely blue-gray eyes danced, watchful as those of a great cat, and Angus was aware that this surprising old citizen was now actually breaking into song—a low minor chant, a ballad of war, the words a fitting accompaniment to his cool and dangerous bearing; uttered in a detached, disconnected manner—as if the singer were unconscious of his song:

"Oh, some men feel the fleeting soul
Slip to hell through a bullet-hole,
When a long six-gun has called the roll—
Hi—yee—deedledum—doe."

Why some hot-head among the chief's followers did not let drive with a spear when the two men spurred to the rescue was, Angus thought, due largely to the fact that the eyes of both rescuers, blue as steel and dancing like the quick eyes of birds, fixed themselves in turn upon each particular section of the crowd. They shifted automatically, it seemed, to the quarter where a man made the slightest sudden movement. Those six-shooters, too, especially the one in the hand of the singing man who remained mounted, appeared to be living things, ready to speak an eloquent language—the grim and sudden speech of death.

But the chief's slave-boy, dodging behind his master's mule, lugged the rifle from its satin covering and was cocking it when Angus arrived and seizing the weapon, wrenched it from the slave's hand.

"That's good, stranger," the mounted person drawled. "Had my eye on him but didn't know how to warn him. Afraid I might have to kill him."

In another moment some of the chief's spearmen would recover from the shock of this, to them, unheard-of occurrence of lèse-majesté. Then the spearing would start. Angus knew enough Amharic, fortunately, to make himself understood.

"We are friends of Ras Tessayah," he shouted, using the word that means closer than a brother. "If harm comes to us, His Highness will hang the perpetrator as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow!" And snatching from a pocket an old pass for the trail that Ras Tessayah had given him eight or nine months before, he waved it aloft, exposing the regent's seal.

The girl raised her riding-crop and brought it down once, twice, across that swarthy, bearded face, with all the force of her arm.

HAD the encounter happened in this particular chief's own territories, or in fact in any other part of Abyssinia except the capital, there could have been little question as to the outcome. But Ras Tessayah's name is one to conjure with in his own stronghold. For the second time Angus had an opportunity to observe the chief's face. It was a bearded mask of the sort of hate that does not die. The dark eyes gleamed and the head was thrust forward. The words of command—words that would have started the spearing and would have meant death to the four whites—were forming in his mind; Angus was sure of it. In his bad Amharic, Angus shot out:

"At the first move, *dejasmatch,*"—using the title next in importance to Ras, which means literally *"general,"*—"you are a dead man. Note that pistol not three feet from your heart!" The chief was almost past controlling himself, but now he seemed to notice the pistol for the first time; and as Angus saw him pause, hesitate, he continued:

"And I have your own gun to make sure of the job. Order your men to proceed —instantly!"

A deep, low muttering came from the black retainers. The chief looked long and speculatively at the six-shooter before his breast, turned in the saddle and observed Angus, with his own gun cocked and ready. Ali crouched at his back with curved Somali knife bared. The cards in that game had fallen too fast.

"Zourban!"—("Out of the way!")

And kicking his big mule with bare heels, he forged ahead, retainers, *zebanias,* following—a smoldering, incensed retinue.

Angus threw the cartridges from the magazine of the chief's gun and handed the empty weapon back to the slave-boy. The black crowd, shouting and gesticulating, passed on down the roadway and the affair was over—for the time being.

"MARY LEONORA,"—it was the mounted pistol artist speaking,—"climb up here behind me. Reckon you better get back to the hotel and take yourself a big snort of tea. Me and Taos and this stranger will absorb a hooker of barb-wire liniment." Turning to Angus, that curiously calm and unruffled person continued: "My name's Nick Marr. This is Taos Linley, and our female wildcat friend is Mary Leonora Rankin—all of the good old U. S. A. What can we call you?"

Angus gave his name without taking his eyes from the young lady's face. And her appearance—now that the reaction had set in—had nothing in it of the high-mettled, flashing passion of a moment ago. In-

deed, Angus thought, she would like nothing better than a quiet spot in which to faint, decently and comfortably. He hurried to her side, but as she leaned against the shoulder of the man called Taos, she saw him coming, took herself in hand, and with a visible effort straightened, doing her best to smile:

"We are greatly obliged to you, Mr. McPherson. I hardly realized it at the time—but now I see clearly—it was your sudden and most intelligent intervention that saved us." She seemed on the point of breaking down, and Angus would have sworn that she wanted, beyond anything just then, to bury her face in the brawny shoulder of the man Taos and give way in a deluge of tears. But she held desperately to her self-control, and offering a small hand that Angus was not surprised to find cold as ice, added her invitation:

"Yes, Mr. McPherson, come back with us to the hotel. Tea—and—yes,"—she smiled wanly,—"a little rest for me. I think—I need it—" Her voice broke. The tears that she had fought so hard to keep back came with a wild rush. "Oh, Taos—and, and Nick—" And just as Angus expected, the small head buried itself in the wide checks of the fortunate Taos' shirt. The delicate body was shaken by great sobs, and now and then Angus caught snatches of sentences gasped between sobs:

"Oh, why did I get you into it! You both might have been killed—speared—a hundred against two—all because of my foolish, hasty action! Oh, Taos, Nick—" While Angus thought that he would have gone down into the Bottomless Pit, cheerfully, happily, for a like reward of deep affection in that low, contralto voice, Taos interrupted:

"Shucks, Mary Leonora, don't take on so. Me and Nick have been in jackpots that would make this here look like a Sunday afternoon sewing-circle. Why, girl, I once seen old Nick, single-handed, walk up to a round-up wagon—camped on the upper Pecos, they was—throw a gun on six men, tougher *hombres* than you know anything about, and drive off ten head of horses they was just figurin' to alter brands on. Why, shucks—" And he seemed to think the affair didn't amount to anything. Angus wondered if he really thought they had not been in a desperate situation, or was merely taking that tack to reassure her.

The outburst of tears ended; and Mary Leonora, now smiling but very pale, announced that she would walk. She was again in perfect command of herself, and her voice and bearing were so quietly well bred and gentle that Angus was almost shocked at the remembrance of the small fury forcing her horse, regardless of consequences, through that black mob, the perfectly righteous anger burning in those dark eyes, the quick uplift of arm and the heroic way in which she had brought down the riding-crop squarely across that bearded, sneering face. This quiet and reserved person who set out walking at his side seemed so utterly different that it was some time before he could readjust himself. The two men mounted and followed at a distance.

"That was really a fine thing you did, Miss Rankin—no end of pluck—and your friends! I think I'd rather have those two in a tight place than almost any men I've ever known. Strangely calm—the man Nick especially. I don't suppose you noticed him in the excitement. But he was like a leopard—a great careless, almost humorous, carnivore—if great carnivora had a dash of humor. While the one you call Taos was busy felling the men that held you, he sat his horse, watching, protecting, eyes dancing—I really believe he enjoyed every moment of that show—and there was not a movement that escaped his eye. He was priceless! It sent a second thrill up my spine to see him and to hear him drawl—in a situation that was charged with dynamite—actually drawl: 'Reckon you better climb up here behind me, Mary Leonora.'" Angus found himself lingering on the name.

THE young lady questioned in a low voice: "You said, 'a second thrill'—I know what the first was! It gave me a great quickening of the heart too, the way Taos charged through and swung off his horse. Brave old Taos—he is the salt of the earth! And Nick—"

"No, my first acute desire to cheer," Angus interrupted her to remark, "was not from the sudden actions of either man, neat and timely as they were. That came when you brought the crop down." And then Angus made the first gallant speech of his life—slowly, dreamily: "There is a picture, a magnificent tableau, engraved upon my memory that I would rather have than a great hall filled with Titians and

Rembrandts. It has a background of dark, bearded faces, a crowd of armed men surrounding a burly ruffian sneering upon a mule.

"Into the center of the canvas rides a vision—I only caught a flash, you see, it happened so quickly. A small face, a round chin—very small but very determined. An arm rises and falls—once, twice; and I can see in the—the—eyes a flame that betokened a spirit that would have stopped at nothing—no, not even certain death. That it was, I think, which sent a thousand tiny pinpoints shooting up and down my back!" He stopped, and, suddenly seeming to realize what he had been saying, became embarrassed and straightway took refuge in his Scotch imperturbability.

Mary Leonora turned her head away. Even the tips of her ears beneath the brim of the helmet were burning. But she quickly covered her confusion with a hasty and frivolous air entirely foreign to her nature, chattering rapidly, feverishly, upon a dozen different subjects, each further from the one Angus McPherson had been discussing.

Angus meanwhile walked by her side, scarcely listening, but nodding now and then and puffing at his small blackened pipe, hastily crammed with tobacco after the—for him—entirely strange and unaccountable exhibition of deep emotion. He was ashamed. He had always disapproved of such soft lapses in men, and now, for the first time in his life, he had been carried away, inspired by something within that he did not understand. "Ass," he thought, "sentimental, balmy ass!" Puff, puff—"Embarrassing to the girl—only known her ten minutes,"—puff, puff, puff,—"blithering moke." And for the rest of the walk he spoke only in monosyllables, puffing away at the short, blackened, ill-smelling pipe.

AT the door of the crude inn—run by a half-breed Greek, but Addis Ababa's best—Mary Leonora abruptly dropped her attitude of light, rattling conversation. She appeared to be very tired; the reaction had set in in earnest.

"I do hope your part in this affair will not get you into serious trouble, Mr. McPherson." Her eyes were troubled and a cloud of apprehension sat upon her brow. "Here come Taos and Nick. You must stay and have something with them. I must have rest. I'm—I'm really in need of it—and now if you will excuse me—please—I'll go to my room." And with a tired little attempt at a smile of cheerful comradeship, she was gone.

Taos Linley and Nick Marr dismounted at the door, and gave their horses to a pair of black hotel *syces*.

"Partner," said the man Taos, "come in and float your teeth." He and his companion led the way, high-heeled boots clicking on the rough boards of the floor, big spurs rattling and jingling musically. The trio sat down in a small room off the main hotel office, punched a bell, and when an Abyssinian boy arrived, Nick gave the order:

"Son, just prance out and rustle around among them bottles and waft yourself back here in record time with the one labeled Three Star. How does that strike you, stranger? All right, son, shake a leg." Angus repeated the order in Amharic, and the boy departed.

The Scot was consumed with the desire to know how these two men—they appeared to be about sixty years of age—had happened to become associated with a young lady of Mary Leonora Rankin's evident breeding. She, Angus was sure, could not have been more than twenty-three. They did not appear to be relatives; they were clearly of a different station in life; America, he thought, was a strange country, where curious alliances might be formed.

They were delightful characters, quaint, philosophical, rough and jovial; light-hearted as boys, and with a sense of humor of a refreshing quality entirely new in the wide experience of Angus McPherson. But they had, beneath the light exterior, a wealth of sound common-sense. And he knew they were, in a tight place, calm as the very hills themselves, and dangerous to the last degree—fitting protectors for such a girl.

They sprawled at the small table with the same careless jauntiness that had marked them in the saddle. Wide double-terai felt hats were pushed back; gay checked shirts were open showing thick tufts of dark chest-hair at the base of reddish, wrinkled necks. Long legs, encased in boots that showed signs of wear, extended to a prodigious distance. They lolled—they did not sit in their chairs—relaxed and easy.

"That old Injun," said the one called Taos, twisting a cigarette from a paper and the contents of a small sack of what Nick called "makin's," "was sure some put out when Mary Leonora lams him with her whip." And then, Angus noticed, he changed his style of speech abruptly and lapsed into an entanglement of large words, words that flowed easily enough but were inappropriate. Angus was reminded of *Mrs. Malaprop* in Sheridan's delightful old play "The Rivals," as Taos pursued:

"That proud and dazzled old boar wrapped in his turpitude showed a modicum of savvy and a joodicious adherence to the dictates of the cerebellum when he forgets to order his mulligatawny minions to start a battle. He sure wilted like a vi'let at eventide—which shows he aint no brash idiot." He tossed off his drink and rose. "Well, you fellers tip the canteen some more. I'll take a *pasear* down to the barn and see if Mary Leonora's hoss has come home."

WHEN Taos had gone, Angus decided to ask a direct question:

"How in the world did you three happen to team up? You men are of the West, I take it—the 'wild and woolly West,' I think it's commonly called, while Miss Rankin is clearly of your Eastern States—brought up in sheltered circumstances."

"It's a long story, friend," Nick answered, falling into a reverie that lasted some minutes. At length he smiled and then broke out into a broad grin that held something of shame, as if a huge, but sterling joke had been perpetrated at his expense.

"It was sure a rough and rocky trail that led us to Mary Leonora," he said, wiping his lips with the back of a hairy hand. "Reckon you might as well hear it." And he paused, evidently weighing something in his mind, then went on. "It wont do no harm to let you know how we got acquainted—that part of it."

"Even now," began Nick, "when I dream about them harrowin' experiences, I wake up with a screech!"

He took a deep drink. "This here lion's milk aint so bad," he observed as he put down his glass. "Well, here she goes." And he launched into a tale which, Angus thought, was certainly quaint to say the least. It gave the Scot an insight into the characters of those two old men such as he could not have gained by a year's casual acquaintance. Much of what Nick said was couched in so strange a jargon of the plains, colloquialisms of the cow-camp and colorful figures of speech that Angus had difficulty in following his meaning. But he did not interrupt.

CHAPTER II

"IT happened three years ago back in the State of Wyoming," began Nick, hooking his thumbs comfortably in his wide leather belt, "and even now when I dream about them harrowin' experiences I wake up sometimes with a screech, thinkin' I've got my hands on the throat of one of them editors—sure, it was editors—that came near makin' wrecks of us both. You may not know it, McPherson, but almost every American, no matter what sex, tribe, religion or political party, at some time in his life gets the reediculous notion that he'll be an author. And while this breathless and awful idee is boilin' through his lights and liver, he lunges off half-cocked and massacrees the language something scandalous! Mary Leonora tells me this one time—and you bet she knows.

"But I better start at the beginning:

"Taos Linley and I was gettin' along so-so with our little ranch and bunch of kind-faced cows when an automobile towerist comes a-wheezin' and a-puffin' in one day and stays for dinner.

"When he pulls out, he leaves a copy of *The Scribes Magazine,* which allows on the cover it's a publication for authors and writers. We don't have the savvy to burn this little troublemaker, but I sneaks off and reads it all through. It tells just how to be an author and explains that all you need is imagination, talent and a typewriter.

" 'Taos,' I says, wavin' the little paper book, 'here it is! Why didn't we think of this before? It's as easy as stealin' milk from a blind cow, and her hog-tied. All we got to do is learn to pound the daylights out of a typewriter: Imagination, talent and a typewriter is all you need! We'll shuck this repulsive cow-manicurin' and be authors!'

" 'What's eatin' on you now?' Taos inquires, lookin' me up and down, disgusted. 'Don't you know we aint got no typewriter? And in the present eepoch of our parsimony, with the curly wolf yapping outside the door it don't look much like we got financial speed enough to catch up with one.'

"Taos, by the way, has reached what

educated folks would call 'the saturation point' of knowledge. He can't talk common no more than Shakespeare could. Which is due to a long spell he put in one time at the hospital in Laramie with a busted hind-leg. As his leg got better, he acquired the disease of novel-readin' and aint been the same since. He tore in and ravaged them hospital books like an outlaw range-cow demolishing alfalfa for the first time, and it had the same effect; he foundered himself on print.

"'But Merna Maginnis at the post-office in town has got one. She beats out letters on it regular,' I reminded him. 'If we can get her to typewrite for us, the rest is as easy as shootin' fish in a barrel with a hail-gun.'

"WELL, we got busy and wrote out a jim-dandy story. High-toned too—'society stuff,' all about dudes. We took it to Merna and asked her would she claw it out for us on the typewriter.

"'Fair vestal throned by the west,' says Taos, rememberin' something in one of them hospital books, 'we've decided to shake cow-punchin' forevermore amen. She's too hard a racket and the returns is too small. We figure our talent's wasted on cows. We feel the effervescence of an egregious fermentation wallowin' through our veins like the virus of stringhalt in a horse. It's the palpitation of genius. It's insp'ration run hog-wild. Hereafter we're authors. Would you kindly claw this out for us on your talking harp?'

"'What in the world have you two old buzzards had to drink now?' she asked with a scandalized look. 'But of course I'll help you all I can.'

"Well, she tore into it on her mechanical word-foundry and got it finished in a few days. Then we argued where to send it. We looked over the list in the magazine.

"'My boots are about wore out,' remarked Taos; 'the heels are run-over bad, like the leaning tower of Pizy. They fit good, but they wont survive long, which disproves what Shakespeare once said about the survival of the fittest. I reckon we better send it to one that pays sudden cash money.'

"Well sir, 'I don't remember'—as a man once said on the witness stand—to just how many places we sent that story. But we sure bombarded magazines with that manuscript! Then one day after it come rompin' back as usual, Taos got an idea. Both of us were layin' in bed waitin' to see who'd get up first and start the fire. Taos got as far as the edge of his bed when the idea hit him.

"'Eureka!' he yelled, as excited as if he'd seen a maverick and nobody around.

"'Eureka!' he yelped again, and then paused to round up his novel-read vocabulary. So I interrupted, to help him get located:

"'It's in Nevada—mining-camp. Been there myself.'

"'I've got it now!' Voice full of enthusiasm, hands wavin', 'I've got it at last. Nick, you remember that book on advertising we found last summer? Well, it's lucky I kept it. It says you can't do nothin' or get nowhere without joodicious and synchronized advertising. That's what we need, advertisements. It pays to advertise!'

"'But how can we advertise a story? You can't put up no billboards with a story plastered all over 'em where editors can read your stuff.'

"'Billboards is only a minor form of advertising,' he explains with contempt. 'Billboards are inharmonious. There's other ways. Circular letters is one. I'll read what the book says:

"'"A regular circular-letter campaign, using short snappy letters and follow-ups, is sure to show results." We'll circulate and harass them editors with short snappy letters!'

"'There's a sign pasted up in the telegraph office in town that says: "Don't write. Telegraph." That sounds even better.'

"'Much better,' agrees Taos, 'and more stimulatin'. Editors need stimulatin' frequent.'"

Perhaps the mention of a stimulant was father to the thought. Anyway, Angus rang for another drink. Nick continued:

"SO the rest of that day we toiled and made up a batch of telegrams—seven in all. One to be sent each day of the coming week to the editor of Parson's Magazine. 'Plowin' the ground for the seed,' Taos called it.

"The first telegram read:

"'It's coming, but keep your shirt on. —Taos Linley and Nick Marr.'

"The next day we sent one like this:

"'Just six more days and we'll mail it.'

"The third, near as I remember, was about this:

" 'You'll be surprised when you see It!'

"And so on. One each day through the week, gettin' hotter and hotter.

" 'A system,' said Taos, 'that is bound to work the editor up to a frenzy of profess'nal curiosity and hold him delirious.'

"On the last day, the day we mailed the story, we sent this one:

" 'It's now in the hands of God and the U. S. mail! Watch for It!'

"Well sir, we sure got action from Parson's Magazine! In a few days we received this telegram. We didn't expect such quick results with all our advertisin':

" 'It's coming but keep your shirt on.—Parson's Magazine.'

" 'There, what did I tell you!' Taos screeched, a-wavin' that yellow paper. 'Advertisin' done it! What did I say about advertisements? *"It's coming, but keep your shirt on.—Parson's Magazine."* How soon do you reckon that check will get here? It pays to advertise!'

" 'About a week. How much do you reckon now them Parson's folks can stand to pay?'

" 'Oh, about two thousand dollars,' he replied carelessly. 'And that's figurin' low. Deduct all we spent for stamps, and still it leaves quite a bundle. Let's tear off another!'

"And the next day while we're tangled up in a second story, along comes another telegram:

" 'Just six more days and we'll mail It.'

" 'There you be!' roared Taos, spreadin' the message on the box we used for a table. 'There you be! Them folks sure mean business!'

"Well, we got a telegram each day for a week from Parson's Magazine worded just the same as the ones we sent them. Our advertisin' method seemed to suit them down to the ground, because they didn't change a single word in any message.

" 'Taos, do you reckon that editor, knowin' the value of advertisements, would attempt any such low-down trick as to work *us* up to a frenzy and then try to get away with that story for a thousand dollars—at half price? If he did he ought to be took out and killed awhile!' I said.

" 'No,' he grunted, disgusted. 'Aint you got no business sense? Magazines need an assortment of promiscuous authors. They aim to reconnoiter and jeopardize our prejudices by imminent advertising; which shows they've got brains. But we aint married to 'em and we got to remember not to sign nothin'.'

" 'These are good men,' she said low and soft. Taos kind of gulped, and I felt something like a cow's cud come up in my throat."

"The next day the last telegram came:

" 'It's in the hands of God and the U. S. mail. Watch for It.'

"Well, it aint no use takin' a year to kill a steer. In a few days that story was back like a calf bawlin' for its mammy. When Taos saw it, the look that came over his face was, well—it was unclean! It reeked, that look did! His eyes blazed like coals fanned by a high wind. Slowly he reached for his notebook and began to write—impressions of how a murderer feels, he told me afterward.

"While he wrote, I took the story from the envelope and out came a letter! It was wrote by hand, and read about like this:

" 'Taos Linley and Nick Marr, Gentlemen:

" 'Your story "Moonlight on the Big

Muddy," herewith enclosed. We couldn't possibly use it. You see, the country is in a rather lawless post-war condition and we have a valuable plant here and don't dare risk it.

" 'But what I wanted to ask was about the facilities of your ranch. Could I rent a cabin for two weeks? Am a bit nervous and run down from being overlong among the husks and swine. Need a vacation badly. Why not in the West? What are your rates?

" 'Yours very truly,

" 'M. L. RANKIN,

" 'Associate Editor, Parson's.'

" 'He wants to come out here!' I howled, horrified. 'Why, I'd no more eat with an editor than I'd rassle with a porcupine!'

"Taos stood there awhile, not sayin' a word. By and by, pure innocent happiness seemed to flow up his neck and spread over his face and he actually beamed as he says:

" 'Don't disturb me, Nick. I feel as calm and sentimental as the cherubim and seraphim when they kicked the props out from under Lucifer and watched him fallin' a million miles to hell. We'll get that editor out here! No, don't say nothin' or ask no questions.'

"So we sent a telegram at once, tellin' him to leave them husks and swine and come a-r'arin'. We'd bootcher the spotted calf. Rates? There wouldn't be none."

The old cowboy deftly rolled another cigarette. The Abyssinian hotel-boy brought fresh glasses.

"THAT night," pursued Nick, "just before we blew out the bunkhouse lantern, Taos asks:

" 'Nick, you don't know nothin' about the Plutonian persticutions and the secret specifications of the Spanish Inquisition, do you? Such pastimes as martyrdom, impalement, the wheel, the rack, keelhauling and the bastinado are new to you, aint they? Well, you'll learn something!' And he blew out the light.

"I woke up about midnight and there he was in his red undershirt at work drawin' something on the floor. The lantern was lit.

" 'Our own coy and bashful Apaches weren't so slow, neither,' he remarked, when he seen I was awake.

" 'The favorite sport of them aborigines was to stake out a captive on the ground, face up, and then picket a big hungry rattlesnake with a rawhide thong to a stake near by. This rawhide string was just long enough to allow the snake to come within a few inches of the victim's neck. When things was all arranged, them carefree savages sat down, took out the makin's and while they smoked all calm and placid, they poured water, a drop at a time, on the rawhide string. As the rawhide soaked up water it stretched. The rattler crawled closer, inch by inch, while them blissful harbingers of death smoked and poured and poured and smoked, until at last the serpent buried his fangs in the screechin' victim's neck. Then them poor inoffensive red children clambered aboard their ponies with satisfied grunts and jogged away to other labors in pastures new.

" 'If you'd asked my opinion of such snake doin's a year ago, before my better sens'bilities had been massacreed by editors, I'd told you that such tortures was the worst form of revolting revelry and come mighty near bein' heinous. Now I'll simply say such efforts show just how crude and inexpert them futile and boorish savages can be.'

"Of course we went to town to meet the associate editor. But when the train come a-chuggin' in, nobody got off but a young lady. She looked like she expected to be met, so when I see that our victim didn't show up, I goes over and asks can I take her anywhere.

" 'Well, I'm glad to meet you,' she sort of warbled, givin' my big paw a real shake with her little hand. 'And which are you, Taos Linley or Nick Marr?' And that girl was the associate editor of Parson's Magazine! Mary Leonora Rankin!

"So here was all our plans blowed up higher than bird ever flew or man ever was!

"After we got her home and unpacked in the best room, Taos confided to me that she reminded him of Helen of Troy, a sailor's bride who launched more ships than the Shipping Board.

" 'A prehistoric heifer,' explained Taos, 'that made Cleopatra look like a greasy deuce in a brand-new deck.'

"FOR the next two weeks we didn't do a stroke of work. Just hung around the house. She seemed to like our talk so we told her all our no-account experiences; things we'd done and seen. But it wasn't long before we ran out of experiences, so then we took to makin' 'em up.

It got to be a regular lyin' debauch for me and Taos. Mary Leonora never batted an eye. At the end of two weeks, on the afternoon before she was due to leave, I was finishin' up a long yarn about bein' captured by Mexican bandits. It was a good one because I'd laid awake half the night makin' it up. I was lyin' away:

" 'Yes, ma'am, them bandits sure had me booked through for the opposite shore. In a week there wouldn't have been nothin' left of me but shards in the driftin' sand. Lead-poisonin' or hemp heart-failure would have turned the trick if it hadn't been for the hawk—'

" 'What hawk?' she interrupts.

" 'Didn't I mention that hawk? Well, a few days before, there'd been a hawk circling around the camp where they had me held prisoner, and I set a baited snare and caught it. The greasers thought snarin' a hawk was a pretty cute trick, so they let me keep it. The next night I wrote a note tellin' where I was hid, put it in a little leather pouch I made for the hawk's leg and turned the bird loose. Back at the ranch we had a big herd of Plymouth Rock chickens. Hawks used to come for miles to make a swoop at our chickens. I figured the chances were good that my hawk would wander over that way and make a dive at one of our hens. If he did, I knew our old cook would most likely knock him over with his shotgun. Well, it worked out just as I expected. They got my message, and it wasn't a week before the outfit pounced down on them bandits and you bet I was glad to see—'

" 'Look here,' she bleats out sudden. 'Look here! You two old snoozers are the most talented men I've ever met. It's a shame to see such transcendent powers wasted on the desert air! You have unlimited imaginations not hobbled and held down by any old-fashioned notions of truth. Why, men, you're the most monumental liars of the age! And you may or may not know, that Mr. Emerson once said something to the effect that if a man could do any one thing better than all other men, then he might depend upon it, the world would beat a trail to his door.

" 'Now listen to me, friends. People where I come from are just aching to get out to these wide open spaces, gulp the ozone and sit around and listen to the unique brand of wild trash you've been handing me for two solid weeks. They'll eat it up and cry for more. Also, which is more to the point, they'll pay big money for the privilege. Now the one thing you two are cut out for you've never even thought of! You are natural born dude-wranglers.'

"I seen her point at once, but Taos did hate to renounce his career as an author. Finally though, he done it.

"The next summer Mary Leonora sent out a passel of her friends as a starter, and the way we hurled lies at them goggle-eyed folks was a shame. We used mostly the new crop we'd made up durin' the winter. Them dudes drank in our leaky language like orphan calves drinkin' milk from a bottle, *glug, glug, glug*, and no questions asked. In the fall they teetered off home, dazed in the head but sound in the hoofs and legs. They told their friends, and the next summer we had more of 'em than we could keep from gettin' tangled up with the scenery and lost. In fact, we had to pry up the monthly rate by the roots and put a chunk under it to keep the herd down to where it could be fed and lied to regular."

NICK MARR settled back in his chair. His sunburned and wrinkled old face broke into a smile of deprecation that Angus thought was delightful. The old man, full of years and white of hair, was still a youth in spirit, and Angus found himself hoping that when *he* reached the age of sixty he would be able to hold to at least a vestige of that joyous quality of mind that allowed this old fellow to retain his youth in spite of the heavy hand of the marching years.

Unfolding another episode in the acquaintance of himself and his partner with Mary Leonora Rankin, Nick continued:

"The next summer, while the ranch is infested with dudes, clumpin' around in high-heeled boots and two-gallon hats and flappin' in and out of the dining-room wearin' bat-wing chaps and big red bandannas that looked like babies' bibs, tryin' to act like the cowboys they'd read about, me and Taos gets a telegram from Mary Leonora, asking us to come to New York at once. 'Have the one big idea,' she says. 'Be prepared to stay away eight months. Bring saddles.'

" 'That girl is sure plumb upholstered with brains,' remarks Taos, whittling the arm of one of our chairs on the front stoop, but now closing his knife and stand-

ing up on his hind legs like a black bear. 'When she gives the long yell, you can lay a small stipend no roots and yarbs grow up under my feet. I hit my cayuse down the hind-leg and come a-runnin'. How about you, old skeezix?'

"'Beauty in distress never chirped twice in my hearing,' I retorts. 'If Mary Leonora says come and come at once—that don't mean tomorrow.'

"We leaves a young feller in charge of the ranch and in just four days jingles the bell at her house in New York. A young lady in a white cap and an apron with fringes that looked mighty cute over a dress of some kind, opened the door.

"'Ma'am,' says Taos, takin' off his hat and sweepin' her a greaser bow, 'if it aint askin' too much, could you prance in and acquaint Miss Mary Leonora Rankin with the information that Taos Linley and Nicholas Marr is here champin' at the bit, ready to fight, frolic or hold the light.'

"'Come in,' says the young lady, eyin' us over, some curious. 'Miss Rankin is expectin' you.'

"SHE led us into a big hall with carpets on the floor deep and soft like quicksand. A couple of shiny steel statues stood in opposite corners. Mary Leonora tells us later that them burnished objects was iron clothes, armor worn by crusaders a mighty long time ago, and was jim-dandy protection against the swords and arrows them old-timers fought with. In about the time it takes to hogtie a steer, down the stairs Mary Leonora comes driftin', steppin' high, like a colt with its head up and tail over the dashboard.

"She was tricked out in fancy high-class harness. She had on a sort of wrapper, 'morning gown,' she called it, green silk with plenty of flimsy stuff around the edges that give her a dainty look—like a young gazelle I once seen in a picture.

"'Oh, I knew you'd come,' she warbled, grabbing our hands and almost doin' a buck and wing with excitement.

"'Ma'am,' replied Taos, makin' a bow that would have knocked the Prince of Wales for the count under the Marquis of Queensberry rules, 'never send for us if you don't want us. If there's one thing me and Nick here takes pride in, it's our unwaverin' allegiance to the allurements of beauty in the female. And ma'am, let me say the curvature of your lineaments is highly embossed and enhanced by them habiliments. You're sure swaddled and bedizened. You're dovetailed and mortised into that raiment like it was made for you—and not by no harness-maker neither.'

"'We're on hand,' I puts in, 'all ready to pop a lass' rope on day hoss, night hoss or fuzz-tail, whatever you says.'

"'I knew you'd come,' she bleats several times, and I see there was tears in her eyes. She brushed 'em away, but they come right back again. And then I knew she was in some kind of a jackpot. I don't reckon nothing could have took away that beauty of hers—that is, no brand of trouble. Mary Leonora is the thoroughbred kind that trouble don't hit with lines in the face and droop in the shoulders: she's the breed that trouble only leaves with a deeper look to the eyes and a higher lift to the head. She had something big on her mind all right—I seen that as I watched the salt water sparklin' in her eyes. She was sure glad to see us, and the combination of that with whatever was hangin' in the back of her head like a shadow made her voice break a couple of times in spite of her doin' her damndest to hide it from us.

"Taos noticed it too. He whispered to me as she led the way into the back parlor:

"'There's something eatin' on her, Nick. She can't pull no wool over my eyes nor kick up no dust in 'em, either. She's in trouble—you hear me!'"

ANGUS was so intrigued with the picturesque old man that he forgot, for the time being, that he was in Abyssinia, and not in Wyoming or New York. Nick became impressively serious:

"'Before you meet my mother,' she turns and says in a low voice, 'I must tell you that mother is sixty-eight years old—and blind. She's a beautiful and a wonderful person. I've told her all about you two. You'll love her—if you don't—then you're not human, and you can go straight back to Big Muddy, Wyoming.'

"I hardly know how to tell you about her mother. I'm glad she couldn't see Taos' face when he looked at her! I reckon neither of us ever saw an old lady like her before, and we just stared. I remember thinkin' that I wasn't lookin' at a real, live person but at the painting of an angel: She was almost too good to be true. She sat in a big rockin' chair and had on a little lace cap and a black

The small loop picked up the mule's forelegs; Taos jerked, and the long-eared outlaw hit the ground with a thud.

dress with white lace scattered around on it in places, snow-white hair and dark-brown eyes—dead ringers for Mary Leonora's, and they didn't look a day older, neither. They was so soft and deep you couldn't believe they was blind. I never see anything like it! If growin' old means gettin' like that old lady—then age would be a untarnished benefit to any young woman I ever saw—except Mary Leonora herself.

"When she introduced us, her mother says:

" 'Come and take my hands, please. I am a most fortunate old lady; my hands will tell me all about you.' A smile lit up her face that beat any sunrise I ever seen—and I've seen some too—I've watched the glow of dawn hit the sheer cliffs of Fremont's Peak, in the Wind Rivers, of a summer morning, so plumb lovely you'd swear it was the reflection straight from God Almighty's pearly gates, soft and unearthly. But that weren't nothing to the light that comes over that old blind lady's face. She took Taos' big, horny left paw and my right fin—this one with the fingers crooked and stiff from gettin' caught in my dallies on the saddle horn:

" 'These are good men, daughter.' She spoke awful low and soft.

"Well, at that, Taos he kind of gulped, and I felt something like a cow's cud come up in my throat. It wasn't five minutes before she had Taos a-tellin' of his mother in the early days back in Taos, New Mexico, when life was some complicated by greasers and Injuns.

"Oh, she was good folks, Mary Leonora's mother, and we felt like we was in church just bein' under the same roof with her. After awhile Mary Leonora leads us downstairs to a big room with books lined up all over the walls. She shut the door and locked it.

" 'Now, men—first I'm going to state the situation, plain. I'll get to the map—and the rest of it, later.' She was business-like but we could see that cloud a-hangin' behind her eyes. 'This house was built by my grandfather. It's the only home mother has known since her marriage fifty years ago. When father died, I found that the old place had been heavily mortgaged to my cousin, Floyd Rankin. Mother never knew that—doesn't know it now. A mortgage to her would be a nightmare. So I kept it from her. And between keeping up the place, living-expenses and the interest on the mortgage, I've been rather busy for the last five years. Fortunately, I've been able to do it—just. But next year the principal comes due—'

" 'Look here,' interrupts Taos, 'why didn't you tell us before? We've got a good, goin' business—and you figured it out for us too—we'll just waddle in and pry that mortgage up by the roots, like a

grizzly tearin' up a stump after grubs. It wont be no chore to me and Nick. Mary Leonora—don't you never hold out information like that on us again!' And old Taos snorted like a outraged pony.

"'Well, I should hope not,' I adds. "Here we've been blowin' our money right and left and nothing to show for it. Mortgages is fine investments. It's just what we need, and—'

"Just a minute, boys,' Mary Leonora stopped us. There was a glisten in her eyes. 'I expected something of the kind from you—but not so soon. It sort of took me off my guard for a moment. But it's out of the question. In the first place you haven't enough—no, nor half enough—and in the second I couldn't take it if you had it. No, men, you'll have to agree to let me handle this thing my way or we'll go no further. That's final.' Her little round chin was as firm as a rock pillar. You might think two full-grown men, used to having their own way even if it took powder to get it, could have bossed one girl and made her listen to reason. But, no sir! It wasn't no use. We threatened, in the end, to tell her mother about the mortgage, and make her take what money we could raise. But that was a bluff, pure and simple. We wouldn't have broke that old lady's heart to save her life, as the feller says. Mary Leonora seen through it. She smiled at us, and there was little lights showin' in her eyes, comin' and goin' like swallow-birds flashin' across the surface of a deep lake.

"'NOW let's not waste any more time,' she says. 'The mortgage comes due in just one year. It will be foreclosed, and if Mother should be forced to leave, it would kill her. You see—when women get old a home means so much more to them—so, I *must* get that money. I've exhausted every possibility but one. And that is rather a long story—a very slim chance—in fact, I sometimes think it's silly, crazy. But it's the only chance I know. It came about this way:

"'Father was a student of ancient history. Old armor was his hobby. He had a wonderful collection—much of it I've sold to museums to help out with the expenses—and not long ago, I found riveted into an old shirt of mail—'

"'See here, Mary Leonora,' Taos jumps in, 'how about that cousin, Floyd? Don't you say awhile back that he holds the mortgage? Well, it looks to me like cousin Floyd aint got no choice but to let your mother stay here. What difference does it make when it comes due? Your mother needs this house worse than he does. He's kinfolks—it looks easy to me. Just tell him—'

"Right there I seen that Mary Leonora stiffened up. She looked as proud as an old cock sage-chicken.

"'My cousin cannot be moved in the matter. I've gone all over it with him. The debt must be paid when due.'

"'She was so frigid that it made me think. I wondered what kind of an *hombre* this Floyd was.

"'How old is this here cousin?'

"'Forty something, but he doesn't enter into what I'm going to propose. There's no use discussing him—'

"'There's no use sittin' in a stud-poker game without lookin' at your hole card,' says Taos, who sees what I'm driving at. 'Now spread the pasteboards, Mary Leonora. Me and Nick wasn't born yesterday. We're dry behind the ears.' And he waits for some more on cousin Floyd. But she never peeped. She was proud as Lucifer. So then I make a guess:

"'This Floyd is a reptyle in the herbage. It's plain as a greaser brand. When your father dies, Cousin Floyd flashes a mortgage on you. Hems and haws—awful sorry but has to have the money when due—business reasons. He's all broke up about it, he says, but can't help himself; his hands are tied. Knows you aint got the money and can't get it. That leaves only one way out. Now tell us straight, Mary Leonora—how many times has cousin Floyd tried to make you marry him?'

"Well sir! You never seen nothing like her face! Surprised! Then she grabbed my hand.

"'Nick,'—and she give a hysterical laugh,—'you should be called *Nick Carter*. You're a real detective. It's true he has tried to make me marry him, tried first in a fawning, insinuating way. No hurry, easy and tactful—as if he knew he had me where I couldn't get away. Lately he's been hard and—and—disrespectful. Oh, I detest him!' And her voice got lower and a sort of startled look come into her eyes. 'And I—I'm afraid of him.' And I noticed that she hung to my hand with a grip you wouldn't think so slim a girl could have.

" 'I used to think I'd do anything—anything in the world—for Mother's sake,' she went on, stopping between words, like she was studying out why it was she couldn't go Floyd. 'But when it came right down to it—I couldn't—I simply couldn't bring myself to marry him!'

" 'Well,' says Taos, 'let's have a look at that Big Idea you mentions in the telegram. We'll think about cousin Floyd later.'

"Mary Leonora jumps up excited as a bird-dog when you take down a gun to clean it. 'Yes, I'll get the old parchment. I keep it here under lock and key. Not a soul but Mother has ever seen it—and, yes, I showed it to Floyd Rankin when I found it three months ago.' And she went to a safe built right in the wall, stuck in a key, opened the heavy door and come back with a folded piece of sheepskin so old it was ready to fall apart."

Nick Marr toyed with his empty glass, slowly gathered his long legs under him and rose:

"That's enough," he said, with an air of finality, lighting a cigarette. "I wouldn't have told nobody else so much of our business—but I reckon a feller's got a right to know something about folks he's helped to yank through a boggy ford. And you sure picked up a mighty slim hand this afternoon and played her through in as good style as ever I see. Don't think we aint got savvy enough to know it. Come around tomorrow and watch us get off. Pack outfit's r'arin', and we leave in the mornin'."

Nick held out a hairy hand. Angus took it silently, and picking up his battered sun helmet, went out.

And that night, in the still watches before the dawn, Angus slept. A parade of recent events passed through his dreaming mind in a weird and wonderful hodgepodge: A magnificent bull elephant with ivory weighing at least two hundred pounds stalked down a certain street in Addis Ababa. A blind leper crouched by the roadside crooning, curiously enough, in English:

"Oh, some men feel the fleeting soul
Slip to hell through a bullet-hole,
When a long six-gun has called the roll—
Hi-yee-deedledum-doe."

A beautiful girl on a tall gray horse forced her way through a crowd of kilted Scotch peasants and, accosting the elephant, demanded:

"Where did you get that ivory? Aha! I thought so! It's poached!" She raised her riding-crop and brought it down on the elephant's head, once, twice.

"There," she drawled with elaborate nonchalance, "that will float your teeth! Now you know that the Scotch taught the world the meaning of the word loyalty—for Robert Louis Stevenson said so."

IT seemed to Angus perfectly natural that the scene should change abruptly. It was moonlight on the Big Muddy. Floyd Rankin, disgustingly fat, stood upon the crest of a mountain and waved aloft a legal paper.

"There is but one way out," he declared dramatically, an ugly, triumphant look upon his face. "Mary Leonora must marry me when the rising sun hits the sheer cliffs of Fremont's Peak so plumb lovely you'd swear it was the reflection from God Almighty's pearly gates."

Then the scene shifted with lightning rapidity back to the street in Addis: an editor, black as the ace of spades, heavily bearded, sat upon a big mule with great toe in the small toe-stirrup. He questioned in a deep booming voice:

"You don't know nothing about the Plutonian persticutions and the secret specifications of the Spanish Inquisition, do you? Such pastimes as martyrdom, impalement, the wheel, the rack, keelhauling and the bastinado are new to you, aint they? Well, you'll learn something!" And thereupon, two retainers trailing the editor seized the young lady, dragged her from the gray horse and shouted, in a tuneless sing-song:

"She must marry him tomorrow, for Cluny McPherson has pasted up the banns on every billboard in Scotland."

Angus tried to cry out, to stop this travesty, this crime against humanity. He struggled desperately but somehow he seemed to be bound hand and foot and securely gagged. A black hand gently shook him by the shoulder. Angus started up.

"It shall not be!" he cried out, sitting upright.

"The master," said Ali, speaking softly, "he fights the lion in hees sleep."

The dream vanished. The morning sun was pouring in golden flood through the open door. Ali's blanket lay unrolled just beyond the threshold. It was a new day.

"Chai, Gaytah?" ("Tea, master?")

CHAPTER THREE

THE grassy compound about the little Greek hostelry was in an uproar by eight o'clock in the morning. The twenty-five pack-mules and six saddle-horses that composed the beast-of-burden part of the Americans' caravan stood quietly, a foreleg of each tied securely by a short rope to the long picket-line. But the twenty Abyssinians, composing the human element, were not so calmly quiet. Interminable arguments were in progress; little groups stood about wrangling and bickering in loud, vociferous tones. Mary Leonora, accompanied by Nick and Taos and Sallassy, their youthful interpreter, went from one group of contentious oral gladiators to the next, endeavoring to settle disputes.

In almost every case, they found, the heated argument was caused by nothing more serious than a lost water-bag or a missing black-powder cartridge for the ancient fusee of a *zebania* or camp guard. And no sooner were such infantile affairs settled, than the squabbling group broke out anew upon another childish subject. It was Mary Leonora who first saw the light through the heavy fog of intolerable brawling.

"It's the most insane performance I ever saw," she remarked to Nick and Taos. "There is one thing seriously the matter with these people: they are obsessed with a childish love of argument. See that long-legged *zebania* over there holding forth with the dramatic gestures of a sea-lawyer? I'll lay a small bet with you that the cause of his rebellious defiance of our order to pack up is nothing more than an overpowering desire to shine as an orator. He has found something, any little thing, that doesn't suit. It's enough. If furnishes the excuse and is good for an hour's delay. None of them want to leave Addis; they're determined to postpone departure another day. Sallassy, just what is that man talking about?"

"He say," replied the interpreter, "that the sandals of him—w'ich we furnish—is not fit close enough on the feet. That is w'at he say."

The three Americans laughed.

"You're dead right, Mary Leonora," Nick observed cheerfully. "I reckon maybe a wallop on the jaw would snap some of these greasers out of it. What say?"

"No," said Mary Leonora positively. "We'll manage without that. But we must get off today. It would be a demoralizing thing to allow them to delay us by this petty squabbling."

An enormous crowd, friends and relatives of the caravan men, stood around talking, gesticulating and adding to the general pandemonium, rushing here and there, giving advice, uttering cries of warning to beware of *shiftas*—brigands on the trail—interfering and compounding the excitement. It took Borama, the head-man, and the six *zebanias* a half-hour to get the jostling crowd of onlookers outside the gate. But that is only the first step toward compelling an Abyssinian caravan to pack up and get under way. The caravan men, docile and tractable enough when hired, now carried on like beings bereft of reason. The loud and belligerent jabbering, the dramatic speeches, the inspired oratory, was something to marvel at. Another hour went by, and in spite of the united efforts of Taos and Nick and the frantic exertions of Borama, little headway had been made.

WHEN Angus arrived, the mules stood, unpacked, at the picket-line. Groups of wranglers were still holding forth upon various subjects in loud and heated tones. This was no surprise to Angus, for he had trekked many times with Abyssinians.

"Good morning, Mr. McPherson!" Mary Leonora spoke gayly, almost airily. She had thought much concerning that embarrassingly gallant speech of Angus upon the subject of a certain mental picture—a tableau—the memory of which he would rather have than a great hall filled with Titians and Rembrandts. And Mary Leonora, for some reason, grew red and burning whenever it came to mind. A jocular airiness of manner, she found, was the only screen that effectually concealed her embarrassment.

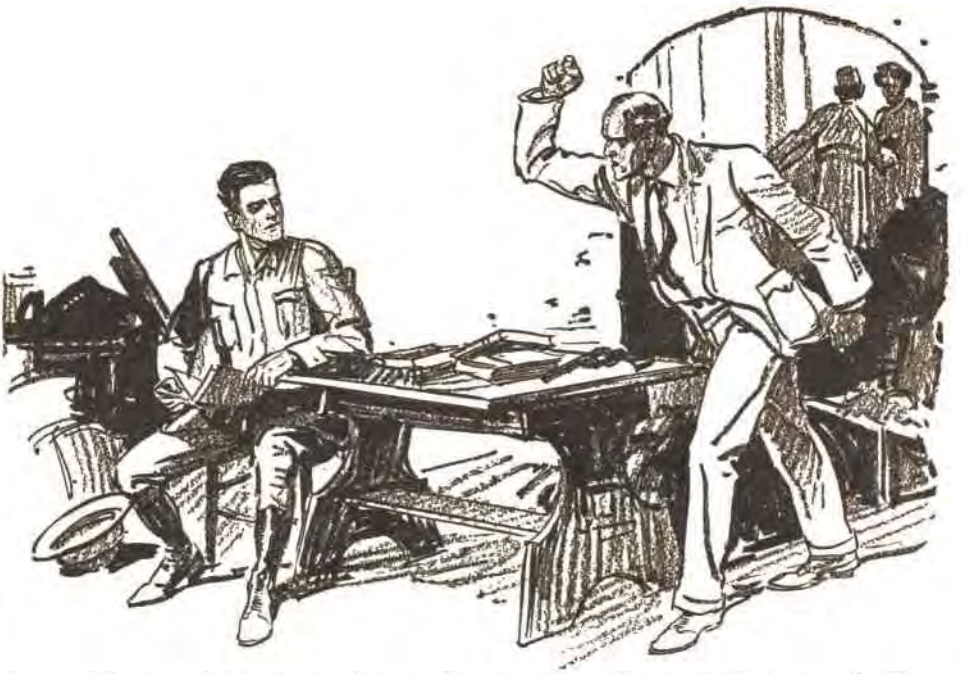
"You see, we are having our troubles." A sweep of the arm indicated the riotous commotion.

"Oh, this is to be expected in Abyssinia," Angus replied, noting the graceful wave of the arm and the trim khaki-clad figure. "She has the most beautiful eyes," he thought. "And such light hair with dark eyes. Marvelous!" Then aloud:

"You see, they'll try every dodge to stay in town another day. It's the regular thing. I suppose they've come to you with a hundred reasons why they can't get off today?"

Nick and Taos were glad to see him.

"Old-timer," Nick put in, "you know



"Damnable lies!" Cantwell exploded. "They'll pay for this!"

these saddle-colored folks better than we do —we'll get on to 'em all right, no worry about that—but it'll take time. Maybe you can jar 'em loose."

"Shall I try my hand?" Angus looked at Mary Leonora.

"I wish you would. We no sooner get one group settled than another begins a new argument. Such trifling things seem to work them up to fighting pitch. They act like ten-year-old children."

"Which is just what they are—mentally. Who is your head-man?"

"This fellow, Borama."

Angus spoke to the man in Amharic and evidently received satisfactory answers. "I've heard of him. I think he's all right. Not sure, though. This confusion is not his fault, you know. A head-man in Abyssinia cannot control his men as a safari-leader can in East Africa. There they are dealing with Swahilis, Kikuyus, Bagandas or other tractable tribes. The Abyssinians have never been conquered, and they hate to take orders. Once you get them on the trail and away from the fleshpots and the influence of friends and relatives, you wont have much trouble. Oh, you'll have some —it all depends upon how you handle them. Nick and Taos will soon have the upper hand, no fear. Abyssinians are a great deal like Somalis. You must first win their respect, and that can be done only by ability to excel at what, to them, are the only worth-while things: hunting, shooting and proof of steady nerves. After you have established respect, about half will turn out to be as faithful as anyone could ask for. But the rest—will bear watching."

Turning to Borama, Angus ordered him to summon the two men who, in his estimation, were causing the most trouble, the ringleaders in the obvious attempt at delay. Then he called the interpreter, explaining to Mary Leonora that, while his Amharic was good enough to get on in most things, he wished to be sure that his orders were thoroughly understood. Through the interpreter he addressed the two men:

"The caravan leaves today!" he announced—and instantly they broke out in furious objection. He cut them off as suddenly as they had begun:

"Today! Do you understand?" Again he silenced them. "Yes, I know all about it. Some of you have lost—or sold—cartridges. Some have no water-bags. Others have not finished making their tents. Still others think they must say good-by all over again to relatives and friends. There are some, no doubt, who have lost—or traded—their blankets and want new ones. Yes, I know all about those things. They will be straightened out later on the trail. You two men are to pack that little dun mule you see there at the end of the picket-line. If that mule is not packed in ten minutes, then I shall know that you are

not capable packers. You will be discharged and others hired, men who can pack a mule. Remember,"—and Angus looked at his watch,—"ten minutes!"

The men protested violently, vehemently, waving their arms and shouting. But Angus turned his back upon them and addressed Borama:

"You and I will apportion the loads." The baggage had been well sorted and divided by Nick and Taos, lying in small piles on the ground—each a load for a mule; and while they inspected these, Angus watched from the corner of his eye the two men he had just spoken to. Standing in the midst of a circle of eager listeners, they harangued the crowd, behaving like outraged bolsheviks. They made no move to pack the mule as ordered. When the ten minutes was up, Angus walked to the crowd. Pointing to the two scapegoats, he announced in Amharic:

"You are discharged. You will turn in your cartridges, sandals, water-bags and blankets. Borama, collect—" He was interrupted by a deafening chorus of protest, led by the two discharged men, but aided whole-heartedly by the crowd. To this he paid no attention, although the two ran in front of him as he walked away, turning to face him with excited and strenuous gestures. They retreated, walking backward, keeping just far enough ahead to avoid having bare toes stepped on. Angus went about his business as if he neither saw nor heard them. To Borama he shouted above the din:

"Tell off two packers to each mule. Order them to get the loads on at once. You —Sallassy—get busy with Borama. Make it clear that not one moment more of delay will be tolerated. The next man we see in an argument is fired like these two. Now you"—and for the first time after discharging the two, Angus seemed to be aware of their existence,—"you two get out of the compound!" Raising his voice he called: *"Zebania—zebania!"* The six camp guards with their ancient smooth-bore muskets reported, two or three saluting in what they considered a highly military manner.

"Throw these two trouble-makers out," he directed in Amharic, "and see that they stay out!" The men were hustled, protesting and fighting, to the gate.

"We better get a couple more to take their places," remarked Taos, at his elbow.

"Don't bother," Angus observed carelessly. "They'll be waiting outside the compound when you leave. They'll tag along behind. You needn't notice them until you pitch camp tonight. Then call them up and tell them you mean business, intend to stand no more nonsense and have it understood that you will let them stay just as long as they behave—and no longer. You'll find them among your best men."

ANGUS' knowledge of their language, his reputation as one who fights the *zohon*, —the elephant,—the assistance of Ali, who had followed his master that morning as usual, and the example of the two discharged men quieted things miraculously. Mules were untied from the picket-line and the business of packing commenced. But now pandemonium of a different kind broke out. Many Abyssinian mules, although small and inoffensive to look at, are direct descendants of Beelzebub. And there were at least a half-dozen here that had evidently sold their souls to the devil, and these shed pack-saddles as fast as the loaders could put them on.

To Nick Marr and Taos Linley, the Abyssinian method of packing was a source of amazement. Those old cow-punchers, expert packers, familiar with the diamond hitch, squaw hitch, Canadian, lone Jack and double S, found the native rig an abortion. They watched with great amusement two husky men wrestling with an obstreperous mule. A third man clung to the animal's ears with powerful black hands while his teeth gripped the beast's upper lip. Again and again the mule broke loose and bucked the flimsy, cinchless saddle off—for Abyssinians use no cinches on pack saddles, relying on the rawhide pack-rope to secure both load and saddle.

At length Taos, growing weary of the sight, hitched up his overalls, walked to his heavy American stock-saddle lying on the ground, unbuckled the lariat coiled conveniently on the off side of the wide fork, shook out a small loop and sauntered toward the corner of the compound where a dozen men were running back and forth in a vain attempt to corner and catch the outlaw mule with bare hands. Again and again they crowded in upon the wily beast, attempting to seize foreleg, ears or upper lip. But the four-footed truant broke through the black line, kicking and snorting and dashing to another part of the walled-in yard.

Taos seemed to know instinctively where the animal would break through the human

cordon next time. He stood in a careless attitude at that point, small loop trailing from his right hand, the main part of the rope coiled in his left. With a squeal, the mule dodged his pursuers and made for the opening in the line—a gap between two packers that Taos was careful not to obstruct. The loop shot forward—an underhand throw made without whirling the rope. The small loop neatly picked up the galloping mule's forelegs; Taos jerked—the rope was behind his hip and all his weight upon it. The long-eared outlaw turned a complete somersault and hit the ground with a heavy thud. The cowboy was on his head instantly, holding him down.

When the animal's first struggles were over, Taos calmly fashioned an impromptu hackamore or halter from the loose end of the rope, shook the loop off the front feet, and the mule rose, trembling.

"Sallassy," he ordered, handing the hackamore rope to the interpreter, "tell these *hombres* never to monkey with a sniffy mule until they first put on a hackamore. The idea! Tryin' to pack a spooky mule without a rope on him!"

He picked up a pack-rope, passed one end around the mule's neck, loosely, looping it back in a hard knot that would not slip. He walked behind at a safe distance, cast the trailing end around a hind foot and brought it forward through the loose loop on the animal's neck. With this as a pulley, Taos gave a heave. The mule's hind foot was drawn up off the ground and the animal stood on three legs. Taos tied the rope to the neck loop, and the mule was anchored; he could neither strike, kick nor buck.

"There now," he said to the astonished natives, "slap on your rig and make everything fast before you take off that footrope." Sallassy repeated the directions, but the men grasped the idea before he had finished. The outlaw was packed in a jiffy. Borama came up and inspected the job closely, with amazement. It was something new to see one man alone catch and handle a bad mule without the slightest display of physical force.

"Melifiano, melifiano, Gaytah!" ("Good, good, master"), he murmured, grinning.

"That was mighty clever work, Taos," Angus said admiringly. "I've heard of American cowboy methods, of course, but I never saw them before. That's a neat tie—and such a saving of time—a one-man job, too—see how the men are looking at you? You're a great sahib with them already. Oh, you'll get along on the trail with these black fellows."

"Well, I reckon I ought to be able to tie down a little old mule," Taos snorted with contempt for such a commonplace job. "I'd sure admire to have nickels and dimes for every forkèd pony I've packed alone—in a long and dappled career."

WHEN the men came to realize that there was no possibility of delaying things another day and dismissed such hopes from their minds, they turned to with a will. In an hour the mules had been packed. The gate of the compound swung open, and the pack-train filed through. In the lead strode a huge Mohammedan *zebania*, smooth-bore musket hanging from his shoulder by a rawhide sling-strap, two light tent-poles over his shoulder, shuffling bare feet spurning the rocks of the roadway—for like most of the men, he carried his sandals tied to his cartridge belt. He was a picturesque figure in green turban, flowing white *shamma* and curved scimitar swinging from his hip. The mules followed tamely enough in a long line. The packers ran back and forth, readjusting loads, hazing wandering mules back into line with wild shouts: *"Zouri—zouri!"*

Borama, Medikoo the cook, and Sallassy brought up the rear on their riding mules—for some reason cooks, head-men and interpreters must ride in Abyssinia. Borama was resplendent in heavy cartridge belt worn outside his *shamma*. A slave boy trotted at the heels of Borama's mule with his master's ancient gun, while that dignitary sat in state, big toe only in the small stirrup, fanning himself now and then with a horsehair fly-switch, and holding a small grass parasol above his head with left hand. The cook's helper—a shiny black lad of some fourteen summers—trailed behind the cook's mule, in his hands a lantern, two pots, forgotten until the last minute, and two light poles for Medikoo's flimsy cotton tent. The cook's boy drew wages—not the handsome eight-Abyssinian-dollar-a-month wage of packers and *zebanias*,—four dollars American,—but a stipend of four dollars Abyssinian, or two American.

An excited horde of friends and relations followed, jabbering and haranguing, giving advice and carrying on as if they never expected to see the caravan men again. Mangy *pi*-dogs, wandering from dark alleys, sniffed at the passing mules, eyes sus-

picious and watchful, crouching, ready to bolt at the first indication of danger.

MARY LEONORA, Taos and Nick mounted. The two cowboys rode up to Angus, shook hands, and Nick said:

"Well, so long, McPherson. If you ever make a *pasear* to America, you'll find me and Taos holdin' down the Double Diamond ranch at Big Muddy, Wyoming. Come out and set with us a couple of weeks." And Taos added:

"We'll be right glad to see you after the way you whirled in and went through for us. *Adios.*" And the two rode slowly after the caravan.

Mary Leonora held out a small hand:

"It's been lots of fun meeting you here," she began calmly. "If you do come to America some time, I'm sure Taos and Nick would be awfully glad to see you—and—and I will promise not to make such an exhibition of myself as I did yesterday." Then she somewhat hastily flicked her horse with short crop and was gone. Angus had not had time to say one word.

"Best of luck!" he managed to shout as she turned and waved from the gate.

"Ass," Angus muttered to himself. "Blithering moke! Not a word could you think of until too late." And as Mary Leonora joined Taos and Nick, and the three trotted briskly ahead, Angus walked slowly out of the compound. He felt depressed—a state of mind to which he was not at all accustomed.

"Must be another dose of fever," he thought, "—not time for it, though." And then he began to piece together the information Nick had given him, trying to find the reason for the presence of the three Americans in this half-savage country. Why come to an almost moneyless country on a desperate hunt for an El Dorado? Ivory was the only thing of real value Angus had ever been able to find in Abyssinia. And they were not after ivory—he was certain of that. It was true there were reports of gold-mines owned by the powerful *rasses* and operated by their slaves. Vague rumors, possibly true to some extent—Ras Tessayah certainly had plenty of gold. But then such workings were jealously watched and guarded. No white man had ever seen them—or was likely to. Didn't Nick mention in one part of his story the fact that Mary Leonora had called their quest chimerical, crazy? Nick had also mentioned a map. But this might be only the fanciful drawing of some ivory-poacher like himself—probably made to sell to credulous Americans. Perhaps such a fake document had been sold to Mary Leonora's father, and she had found it.

"Good Lord!" Angus ejaculated, "I hope they've something more solid to go on than some adventurer's fist!"

The more he speculated upon it the more curious he became. The affair was strictly none of his business, of course. Therefore he had not put the direct question to any one of the three. He had felt that he could not pry into their business. He would have liked nothing better than to be asked to accompany them in any capacity, but he had felt that he could not offer his services under the conditions. Such an offer, to persons bent upon some sort of secret mission, might easily be construed as an attempt to force himself into the secret. He would have been regarded with suspicion, he had thought, and so had dismissed the idea from his mind.

FOR the next week Ali found his master most difficult. His moods could not be anticipated. One day he would be busily making plans for a long trek westward to the Sudan, the Nile and Khartoum. The next he would fold up his maps and throw them in the little rawhide trunk that reposed in a corner of the room and sit smoking by the hour, gazing into space, saying nothing, hearing nothing. At other times he went for endless walks, pushing on through the winding trails of the town and across the high plateau to the Entoto Hills. Upon these occasions he would order Ali to remain at home. And away the master would go, striding briskly, feverishly, as if driven, up hill and down, finally to sit for hours on the crest of a high hill, puffing away at his blackened pipe. Ali knew these things, for he always followed at a distance, unseen, his presence unsuspected.

Ali had explained these unusual actions to an Abyssinian acquaintance:

"Gaytah" (the master) "he fight the *shaitan*" (the devil) "inside. The *shaitan* tell him to go steal the *Ferengie sitt*" (white woman). "But Gaytah say to the *shaitan:* 'No. I do not want the woman.' But the *shaitan*, he say: 'Go on. To steal this woman is easy.' And so every day Gaytah fights with the *shaitan*. Gaytah needs no woman. If he want this woman, me, Ali, go steal her for him."

And then one day Ali, returning to their

rooms in a great hurry, broke in upon his master's reverie:

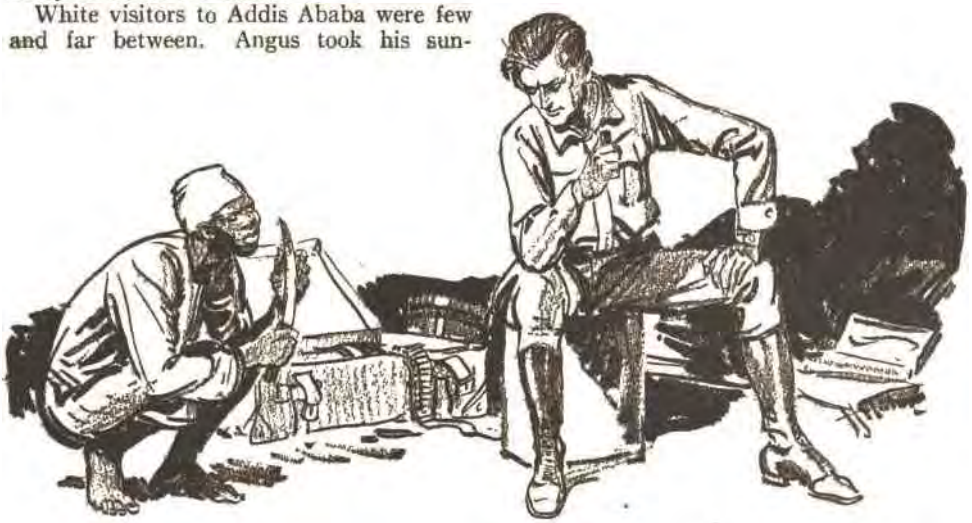
"There is come to thi-is place a *Ferengie So*" (white man). "He is a great chief, and I think maybeso he come from the country of those other Ferengies. He buy the *buckalow*" (mules). "He seem in a big hurry to make the safari."

White visitors to Addis Ababa were few and far between. Angus took his sun-helmet from the nail on the wall, slipped on his khaki coat and set out for the little Greek hotel.

Standing in the stone doorway of the hostelry, watching a pack-mule being put through its paces, stood a white man of magnificent physique but of stern and uncompromising mien. His helmet was pushed back, and Angus could see his features plainly. His nose was aquiline, predatory, the brows straight, the eyes direct and piercing. The mouth was a thin straight line, and the chin, Angus thought, was thrust forward unnecessarily far. It was the face of a man whom one would prefer as a friend rather than as an enemy, a face showing a mind capable of the greatest determination for either good or bad, a countenance that proclaimed a will that could not well become reconciled to defeat. The man lifted his sun-hat as he stooped low to examine the mule's front feet, and Angus saw that he was bald—although probably not more than forty or forty-five years of age. "He has the features and carriage," Angus thought, "of a Roman senator in the days of the Cæsars."

He was dressed faultlessly in white tropical rig, and there was an air of dominant self-assurance about the man that usually marks the experienced traveler. He stepped back, looked up and saw Angus approaching.

"Hello!" he volunteered, showing a faint surprise. "So there is, after all, another white man in this God-forsaken hole."



"W'at one holds this shaitan in his heart, Gaytah?" The Somali fingered his curved knife lovingly.

"Temporarily," replied Angus, taking the firm, strong hand, "only temporarily. I make my stays in Addis as short as possible."

"I'm outfitting for the trail myself—buying mules—and hiring men for a caravan. Hope to get off in a few days. Perhaps you can give me some pointers. I suppose Abyssinia is old stuff to you. You look as though you might have been on trek many times. Perhaps you wont mind giving me some pointers on the country?"

"Glad to do what I can," Angus murmured; "had some experience here."

"It's time for lunch. I'd be obliged if you could stay and feed with me," the stranger urged hospitably. "It's my first time here, and there are many things I'd like to ask about."

"Glad to." Angus liked the man's appearance: his directness and evident capability, his powerful physique and patrician head, as clean-cut as the silhouette on an ancient Roman coin.

"I'm here to investigate the archeology of Abyssinia. Justin Cantwell is my name,

chair of archeology at the Seaboard Museum, New York." And turning to his interpreter, he instructed:

"We'll look at more mules in a couple of hours. Tell these men to be back then."

"Come on!"—turning to Angus. "We'll go up to my room—more privacy there."

DUNNAGE-BAGS were piled in one corner and two rifles of excellent make stood in another. There were three books on archeology lying upon the table in the center. Angus picked one up idly and noted with some surprise that it was a light and inconsequential work on the subject, evidently the sort that would appeal to tourists and the average reader, not at all the kind of book on archeology that a professor in that science would be supposed to be interested in, and—the pages had not been cut. The other two were also what would be called "popular" works, and they too showed no signs of use.

"Not my idea of the tomes usually read by professors," thought Angus. Justin Cantwell interrupted his thoughts:

"There is supposed to be an old castle built by a Portuguese expedition some time in the Sixteenth Century near the village of Gondar in the northern part of the country. Have you ever heard of it?"

Angus was surprised at such a question coming from an archeologist.

"Why, yes," he replied. "The romantic expedition of Cristoforo de Gama, brother of Vasco, into Abyssinia in the early Sixteenth Century is common history. I've never been through the northern part of the country, so I've never seen the castle, but Arab traders have told me that it's in a fair state of preservation."

"That's one of the things I intend to investigate," Cantwell answered, "and I propose to travel direct to Gondar just as soon as I can get off."

"There is really nothing interesting from an archeological standpoint in that old ruin," Angus pointed out. "It's a monument to one of the most romantic gestures in the history of the world, and all that—four hundred Portuguese knights fought their way inland and allied themselves with the kings of Amhara against the Mohammedan hordes from the Sudan, built that castle and were finally expelled from the country. But there is no mystery about it. It's common knowledge, always has been. And speaking from an archeological standpoint, it's not at all ancient."

"I know, I know," Cantwell observed somewhat hastily, "but there are things about it—not generally known. By the way," he added carelessly, "have there been any other whites through here lately?"

With intentionally assumed careless indefiniteness, Angus answered:

"Yes. A party outfitted here a week or so ago. Left for parts unknown." And he changed the subject quickly: "What price are these mule-dealers trying to charge you? They're a gang of thieves, you know."

"That other party—were they Americans? Was there a young lady with them—and two men?" Cantwell asked the questions eagerly but without surprise, whirling around to face Angus, who was examining one of the guns in the corner with studied disinterestedness. Angus, knew he must have heard of that other party from the Greek hotel proprietor.

"I don't know much about them," Angus replied, turning the rifle over in his hands. "This is a pretty fair piece," he went on aggravatingly. "Ought to be heavy enough for lion. But you'll need at least a double .410 express for rhino and elephant—that is, if you expect to do any shooting."

Justin Cantwell ignored the reference to guns.

"I want to know about that other party." Angus did not like the dictatorial tone. "Was there a young lady with them?"

"Why, now that you mention it, I think there was. Saw them on the street once. Now, this small-bore repeater—it'll do fine as a meat-getter, just the thing for reedbuck, oribi, duiker and the smaller antelope—"

Justin Cantwell was impatient. He paced the room. Then whirling upon his heel, he shot out:

"When did you say they left? A week ago?"

"About a week, I think. When do you expect to get off?"

"Just as soon as I possibly can," Cantwell answered, pacing restlessly back and forth. "I hope in three or four days."

"Oh, it will take you longer than that. Your passes from Ras Tessayah, permission to travel through the country, will take two weeks probably. He's a deliberate old lad and wants to know something about travelers before he issues the papers. Abyssinia is not exactly an open country to whites, you know."

Cantwell threw himself in a chair.

"But I've got to overtake that other party. Do you know Ras Tessayah personally, McPherson?"

"Oh, yes. Known him for three years, off and on. Had some business dealings with the old boy."

"Now, look here, McPherson—" Angus did not like the way this stranger dropped the "Mister" and assumed the rôle of dictator—he was not accustomed to being "talked down to." "They tell me you're the only other white man in this hole at present. I need your experience, and I'm willing to pay for it. You get me the necessary passes from Ras Tessayah in forty-eight hours, and I'll make it worth your while."

"That wont get you off inside of two weeks. You'll find a hundred incidental delays put in the way by your men. You can't talk the language. You're an outsider, and they'll take every advantage of you. And if you happen to get a bad interpreter—and most of them are the worst trouble-makers in the world—or a poor and inefficient head-man, you may never overtake the other party. Mutinies on the trail in Abyssinia are common."

Cantwell's eyes narrowed. He sat observing Angus with a measuring, appraising regard. Then he made up his mind:

"See here, McPherson. I'll take a chance on you. The Greek at the hotel told me something about you when I arrived yesterday,"—so he wasn't really surprised to find another white man in town when I walked into the compound, thought Angus,—"and I believe you can get a caravan together, get passes and compel the men to march fast enough to overtake the other party—"

Angus interrupted: "Sorry, but I don't believe I can go with you. Just returned from a long trek—"

"That makes no difference." Cantwell was clearly not accustomed to having his plans interfered with. "Now, see here! That young lady with the other party—with those two western ruffians—is my daughter." He appraised the younger man narrowly, saw him start with surprise as he fingered one of the books on archeology, and apparently, in a burst of confidence, continued: "And I am no archeologist. I did not choose to tell people my real mission here—disgraceful, having to pursue a harum-scarum daughter—so I bought those books and intended to secure permission to travel through the country under the guise of archeology. There is the whole story."

"But—one of the men with her told me her father was dead—"

"I don't care what they told you. They might have told any kind of a tale. I'm her father and I'm here—and very much alive—and I must overtake that party."

"That puts a different light on it," Angus admitted.

CANTWELL, after a few moments' figuring, named a fat monthly salary—higher than Angus had expected. Cantwell was no man to haggle. It was evident that when he wanted a thing, he was accustomed to getting it, regardless of cost. But Angus did not care to be involved in a family feud.

"Cantwell," he said, "I will not be interested."

"You may not know it, McPherson," replied the older man, "but I have always gotten what I wanted. It's a matter of pride with me—there are some, I dare say, who would call it a mania." The man straightened with a gesture of arrogance. "It makes no difference to me what they call it. I have the means and the ability to get what I want—and I get it!"

"Your daughter," suggested Angus absently, "seems to have a will—"

The mention of the girl roused Justin Cantwell. He flushed, bored through the Scot with gimlet eyes, and burst out:

"She is the only person I have not yet been able to control. But I'll tame Mary Leonora! She'll eat out of my hand after this trip." The man became so wrought up that Angus was puzzled. Slowly the thought took form in his mind:

"Is it possible for a father to become so enraged at his own flesh and blood?" Aloud he observed:

"She said her name was Rankin, I think—not Cantwell."

The older man snorted. He paced the floor, hands clasped behind his back.

"Yes, she would do that. I'm not surprised." He stopped, and turning, watched the other's face as he asked:

"Did she say anything more—anything about—her family?"

"Don't think she did," replied Angus, affecting a totally disinterested air. "But as I said before, one of the men with her claimed her father was dead."

"Damnable lies!" Cantwell exploded. "Those two ruffians with her! They'll pay

for this—the three of them!" And as he brought his fist down upon the table, Angus thought he had never seen such bitter hatred in a man's face.

"What do you plan to do when you catch up with them?" Angus inquired casually.

"Plan? I'll tell you what I intend to do!" The chin was thrust forward, and the hawklike face was a mask of iron determination. He spoke slowly, incisively:

"When I overtake them I'll bri—hire the local chief with his black rabble—by hook or crook—to seize and hold the entire caravan. For this purpose I'll equip him with a certain clever little piece of mechanism that I brought along for emergencies—a machine-gun! If it comes right down to it, I'll have no scruples against the slaughter of those two outlaws who are aiding and abetting my daughter!"

"But, see here, Cantwell,"—Angus was surprised out of his usual taciturnity—"you can't do that, you know. Setting a band of natives to murder white men in a black man's country—it isn't done. You may kill them yourself—if you can; but inciting natives against white men! No—mustn't be done—going too far, that!"

"I care nothing whatever for what is or is not 'done!' Mary Leonora is my daughter. I'll bring her to subjection, at any cost—money, or blood. The natives shall be well paid. A machine-gun is worth its weight in gold to them. I'll leave the country with my daughter—go out through the Sudan—and not return here. There can be no questions, no interference, that way. It's a perfectly safe plan. If you fear consequences, I'll use you only to organize my caravan. Get me off as quickly as possible, and I'll carry out the rest myself."

ANGUS remained silent. It was indeed a feasible plan. He well knew that any one of a multitude of petty chiefs with his barefooted vassals would be only too glad to attack a caravan for even a modest remuneration. Cantwell, obviously, had studied the country, and for one who had never before been in that independent black kingdom, understood the natives remarkably well. Angus could picture the enthusiasm with which a white man willing to trade such an engine of destruction would be received! Guns, of any sort, to an Abyssinian chief, are the last word in things desirable. Yes, it was a practical scheme—there was no doubt about that. But it was a certainty that if any chief once attacked a caravan with his undisciplined followers, there would be no stopping them until every man, including the two old cowboys, was wiped out. And there was a big doubt in Angus' mind about the safety of the young lady. The situation, when the caravans met, in a wild, outlying district run by a black feudal baron who feared no authority and ruled as absolute tyrant of his mountains and plains and people, would be most delicate. Angus made up his mind:

"I think—I had better go along. Yes, I shall go—to see justice done."

Cantwell darted a swift glance at him, appeared satisfied, and said:

"Good! I'll get busy on the mule-buying this afternoon while you start the passport business."

AN hour later, in his own quarters, Angus sat in a deep study. Ali pottered about, packing the flat rawhide trunk.

"We make the safari, Gaytah—we go to fight the *zohon?*"

"Um-m-m, no," his master grumbled absent-mindedly. "We go to fight, not the elephant—to fight the shaitan."

"W'ere is the *medinah*" (the village) "of the *shaitan*—w'ere the *shaitan* lives?" Ali occasionally filled out his meager English with Arabic and Amharic words, for Angus knew no Somali.

Angus smoked. The subject took his fancy. He mused aloud:

"The *shaitan* we go to fight has no village. He dwells in the hearts of men—and women—everywhere. He is a very strong *shaitan, kufanoo* and powerful. So strong is this *shaitan* that sometimes, when he enters a person's heart, that person must be killed—as we kill the *jeeb*, the spotted hyena."

The Somali came and squatted on his heels before the master:

"And the name of this *shaitan*, Gaytah? W'at is he called in Ferengie talk?"

"His name is Deceit—Lies."

"And w'at one holds this *shaitan* in his heart now, Gaytah?" The Somali fingered his curved knife lovingly.

Angus took the blackened pipe from his mouth and answered with great deliberation:

"That—is not yet—known to me."

You will find thrills aplenty in the next installment of this extraordinary but authentic novel—in the next, the July, issue.

While the captain looked about for a stick, Timothy grabbed the mongrel and choked him until he dropped the little dog.

Gone to Hi-lo!

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

The distinguished author of "Captaincy" and many another fine tale of seafaring men is at his best in this moving story of a boy entrapped who yet wins to freedom.

Illustrated by O. W. Fackert

TIMOTHY GARNER had heard the old chantey sung once by a tramping sailor. It was about all the poor sailor could do to pay for the supper and corn-shuck bed farmer Garner gave him for splitting a cord or two of wood. Nobody but a sailor would have thought of further payment.

Johnny's gone—what shall I do,
John's gone to Hi-lo!
Johnny's gone, so I'll go too—
John's gone to Hi-lo!

Timothy had listened that wild night, before the red stove, to wild tales of far seas: the palms, the ports, the isles of blue seas. And when the sailor sung that old chantey, Timothy saw them all. And the ships! He had never forgotten that scrap of windy sea song.

The sailor had explained how and why a chantey was sung, illustrating it with a hay-rope. Pictured Hilo as a real place, which it was. Timothy tossed hay, mucked out pigs, harnessed horses to that chantey for a year. Wanted to join the Navy, but Father said no. One Christmas the storekeeper in the nearest village gave out calendars adorned with a bright picture of a sailing ship, all spray, sunlight and gulls, and flying fish at the bows. Timothy had no trouble about getting that picture for his own room. Ma and Pa Garner rather ran to pictures of reapers, binders and overfat stock. Timothy often sang his chantey to that picture. Sometimes, at his open window, he wrestled with his senses until he forced his nose to tell him that the warm smell of ripe wheat was the salt tang of the sea; that the acrid odor from the pens and sties were tropic waftings from the Sumatran forests. But he knew his nose lied.

On one chill morning, at barely four o'clock, Pa Garner agitatedly called Ma Garner, and together they peered, under the lamp Pa held aloft, at an empty bed. The window was open, though the night had been bitter; and the breeze clattered a calendar on the otherwise bare wall. There was the sheet of dates. Where a picture had been of a fine tall ship sailing through the flying sprays of the Trades, was but a cardboard blank.

Pa and Ma looked at each other, then out the open window. But no Timothy could be seen.

Timothy was ten miles along the nearest road to a great seaport. Swinging a bundle on a stick, he shouted to the dawn:

"Johnny's gone for evermore—
John's gone to Hi-lo!
Johnny's bound to quit the shore,
John's gone to Hi-lo!"

He took his breakfast from a cornfield. He drank brook water. He dined sumptuously on raw cabbages and a dessert of carrots. That night he slept in an orchard, and breakfasted on good apples. He walked his shoes off his feet, and finished his long tramp with his feet wrapped in old burlap found in a ditch. But he was bound for Hilo. He sang his way right through the big city and found the dock district by following his nose. He had never seen or smelled the sea. But the sea knew him for one of its own, and the ships murmured to him. Other men, sweating about those same ships, only heard them groaning at the shore-fasts.

Timothy slept one night in a crate on the wharf beside a tall ship unloading sugar from Java. Java! Java Head, Malacca Straits, Straits of Sunda! The sailor had spoken of them all. And the sugar smelled richly intoxicating. That's a way sugar has after coming across the world in a sailing ship. In the morning he went boldly on board the ship. *Star of the East,* her name was! That was a name for a Far East trader. The mate gruffly told him to be off. Timothy went, but refused to be discouraged. He found by asking that it was only the mate. He would wait for the captain. And when the captain came along about nine o'clock, the captain's little dog was set upon by a savage mongrel with slavering jaws. While the captain looked for a stick, Timothy grabbed the mongrel, choked him until he dropped the little dog, and took the pet to its master, who, smiling as if it hurt him, dug in his pocket.

"I don't want any money, sir," said Timothy. "Please give me a job in your ship."

That was easy. Sailing-ships had trouble in getting crews. Timothy was told to come aboard in three weeks. So he went off up the waterfront, humming his chantey, blissfully ignorant as to how he was to survive three weeks on less than five dollars.

LADY LUCK was smiling on him that day—perhaps because the fickle lady favors the brave. Timothy almost stumbled over a fat wallet lying in the gutter. There was nobody about. Only his inherent honesty sent him hot-foot to the nearest police station. The desk officer looked in the wallet, then at the lad, queerly, appraisingly.

"How much money you got?" he asked. Timothy dug for his meager handful of change. It was three dollars and four cents. The officer breathed heavily.

"There's a thousand dollars in this case," he said. "You leave it, and we'll try to find the owner. No name, though. Come back in a week. If nobody claims it, it's yours. Here—you need shoes, and anybody as honest as you ought to have 'em. Run along. Yes, in a week."

Timothy went out in a daze with a five-dollar bill in his fist. He ate the first real meal he had eaten since quitting the farm. And he bought a pair of secondhand shoes for seventy-five cents. He was not going to wear out much shoe-leather in three weeks. He was going to sit right there by the *Star of the East* and drink in the loveliness, the fragrance, the glamour of her. And not once through that first week did he think of the wallet or the possible reward. It was a policeman, who had been in the station that morning, who saw Timothy sitting there on the stringpiece and told him to hurry around to see the chief.

"No owner's appeared for the wallet you picked up, boy," that officer said. "It's yours. Give me back the five I loaned you, and run along. Put it into a bank while you doll up and look for a job. You're getting a fine start, my lad, and all because you're honest. Luck to you."

TIMOTHY followed the good advice in part. He had all the caution of unsophistication regarding banks. But he did buy an outfit. First he rented a little room from which he could always see the spars of the *Star of the East.* Then he found an old watchman who lied to him of a lifetime spent in just such ships. From him Timothy learned what to buy to fill the long canvas sea-bag he bought. He marveled as he stowed the things away; but every item thrilled him, useless as most of them were.

There were suits of dungaree, and cotton drawers; carried matches of a kind forbidden in sailing ships, the kind that strike anywhere; a sheath-knife with a stiletto point and a sheath all studded with brass. A long officer's oilskin, which would trip him in going aloft. A saucy watch cap with a cheese-cutter peak. Long fisherman's rubber boots, which should have been knee boots. Yellow soap, that should have been mottled salt-water soap. A tin plate and pint cup; a spoon and fork and knife. A box of clay pipes.

"Maybe you don't smoke now, me son, but you'll l'arn. And you don't need all of them. I'll take half a dozen. Got a bit o' 'baccy? Ugh! Well, I can buy a bit, I s'pose. A quarter? Oh, well! Aint very flush, I reckon, or else you wouldn't be goin' in that old wind-bag."

Timothy gave the old ruin half a dollar and went home with a song on his lips. In a week more he must report on board.

"Better than a steamer, sis'. Do you love the sea?"

"Oh, sure! I could look at it forever." She closed in, and sat very close to him. He colored, but was not displeased. He liked the snug companionship after so many friendless days.

"I like you," she said, fixing her big bright eyes upon his face. "Take me to a movie, big sailor?"

"You goin' to marry my girl, or shall I put the S'ciety on to you?" demanded the female. "My innocent Pearl!"

Meanwhile he put on his watch cap, and a clean suit of dungarees, and a monkey jacket and haunted the little park that jutted out into the harbor. He sat on a bench for hours, his fingers in his pockets wrapped tightly about his money, humming, sometimes singing:

"Johnny's outward bound today—
John's gone to Hi-lo!
Johnny's gone; he's on his way—
John's gone to Hi-lo!"

He sat there one evening after dark, and a girl sat beside him. She had passed and repassed him, glancing curiously at his absolute detachment. He had not looked at her. When she sat by him, he never ceased singing—never looked at her.

"Happy, aint you?" she said, edging nearer. He grinned at her. Her small pert face was pretty, her eyes large and bright.

"I ought to be, sister," he replied, and resumed his song.

"Come into some money?" she persisted.

"Going to sea. Going to Sumatra. See that ship? In her."

"That's a fat lot to holler about! It aint even a steamer."

That tickled him. He innocently drew forth his money. It was a roll as big as a section of capstan-bar. Carefully he peeled off a ten-dollar bill; he did not see the look of stark stupefaction in her face, never saw the look change to keen calculation. He got up, took her elbow in one gaunt raw-knuckled hand, and began to walk.

"Not that way. Better shows this way." She led him away from sailortown. "My name's Pearl. What's yours?"

"Timothy Garner. I like Pearl. If I had a sister, I'd like her to be called Pearl."

"Sister, ugh! Did you ever have a sweetheart?"

In the show she held his hand tightly. She pressed against him. Afterward she let him buy her supper, and ice-cream. And she let him walk her back to the park. It was after midnight when they came out; and she had listened for an hour while he told her all about going to sea. She had not been restive when he itemized the contents of his canvas bag.

"I'd like to see that bag," she murmured, hanging to his arm with both hands, her red lips upturned to his. She had wondered for

many hours what sort of sailor this was, who did not know what a girl's lips were for.

" 'Twouldn't be right for a girl to go to a feller's room," he said. But she laughed.

"Who's to know? Besides, that's all right on a farm. You're in the city now."

He took her to the room. She gave desultory interest to the bag. As he was repacking it, stooping down, she flung her arms about his neck.

"Gee!" he grinned, disentangling himself. She straightened her hat, dabbed at her nose with a puff from her stocking, and said quietly:

"Better let me go now. See you tomorrow."

He let her go. And as he got into bed, he picked up a hair comb, warm from her hair. Oh, well, she'd get it tomorrow. He fell asleep for the first time in years with another thought sharing thoughts of sea and ships. Her warm perfume still clung to the tiny room. He sighed as he fell asleep.

In the morning the girl came, with an elderly female not at all resembling her.

"Is this him, dearie?" the female uttered grimly.

"He brought me here to see his old sailor bag, Mother, and—oh, there's my comb, see?" The girl clung to the female, looking straight at the amazed Timothy with big bright innocent eyes full of reproach.

"You goin' to marry my girl, or shall I put the S'ciety on to you?" demanded the female. "Nice thing, when a poor woman's innocent little gal can't go out alone without bein' betrayed by drunken sailors!"

"I never done anything to her, lady," stammered Timothy. "She asked to come see my sailor bag, and—"

"Tell that yarn to the S'ciety! Best thing you can do is marry the gal. My innocent little Pearl!"

The female gathered Pearl into a hug, and half turned to the door. Timothy, all bewildered, stammered his protest.

"All right, my lad. We'll see what the S'ciety has to say!"

AND they left. Timothy knew vaguely of a Society which cared for the innocence of girls. It rather frightened him. He knew how innocent he was. There ought to be a Society to protect innocent lads. Then, flashing, fear came upon him. Suppose he could not convince the Society of his innocence! The girl had been in the room; her comb was there. He had not denied her presence. He remembered reading in the Sunday papers of similar cases. The burden of proof! Gee, but he was in a mess. And the *Star of the East* would not be taking on hands for a week. She would not sail for nearly two.

Imagine a girl like Pearl doing this! She was pretty, and bright, and she liked the sea. He had felt all tickly and hot when she kissed him. If she had asked him to marry her, he might have agreed, if he were not going to sea. But the thing she had done! And what would the Society do?

He wandered about the streets until noon. He stayed away from the waterside. He had money. A lawyer? He had read, in Sunday papers, about lawyers who took all a man's money and still left his case unsettled. Dully, for the first time losing the bright glow of his sea fever, he went to his room. The female was on the stairs, with Pearl, and a man was there too: a scowling fat man, with finger-rings and tie-pin, chewing a fat and frayed cigar.

"What's the idea, young feller? What yuh been pullin' off with this young girl?" the man said. "Careful what yuh say! I'm from th' S'ciety for the Prevention o' Vice. Talk up!"

Poor Timothy was not wise to the devious ways of the big city's lower strata. He was frankly scared. The man was grim and overbearing, still talking, too.

"Flashin' a roll big enough to choke a cow, and ruinin' a young girl. Goin' to sea, too, aint yuh? Aint you a nice specimen? What yuh goin' to do—marry the lady, or come along with me?"

TIMOTHY went with them to a justice of the peace, and emerged from the office married to Pearl. The female found rooms for them. She bought furniture, too. Timothy thought he ought to get more furniture for the money. He never got any change back. But he accepted everything; and Pearl suddenly became the cheerful, comforting little wife. She almost made him forget the manner of her getting him. She was as bright and as thrilling to the gawky lad as he had thought her on that eventful night. And though the female and the fat man appeared again, she never let them stay or bother her Timothy. She took his money, what was left, and hid it. And for two days after their wedding she patiently sat with him in the evenings watching the *Star of the East*.

"Yes, I know, honey, you want to go to

"Aint you a nice specimen? What yuh goin' to do—marry the lady, or come along with me?"

them islands. Only don't leave me till you have to. See? Don't go on board in a week. Leave it till a couple o' days before the ship sails. I'll be lonesome when you're gone, Gawd knows. Let's go away from the water for a day. Let's go on a picnic, or a bus ride."

They did those things, though he stifled for air. But the decency in him, once she had caught him, intrigued the little dockside light o' love. Timothy didn't know how to be rough or unkind to a woman. He took care of her. And in spite of herself she responded to him until at the end of a week they were almost as wrapped up in each other as if they had courted, trothed and wed in the humdrum orthodox fashion. At the end of the week he wanted to make sure. He went aboard.

"Plenty o' time," the mate said. "Ship wont sail for two weeks yet."

That was fine. Some delay in cargo, no doubt. Timothy went back to Pearl, and they had a celebration. In two weeks the ship was still there. In two weeks more, also. Somebody along the waterfront said she had been sold and might not sail for a month.

"You better start lookin' for a job, then," Pearl told him, a bit sharply, he thought. "Money's nearly gone—"

"Gone?" he stammered. He had thought that thousand would last forever.

"Yes, gone. What d'you think money does? Grow? Hunt a job, big boy. There'll be a little one soon—"

"A little one, Pearl? Are you—gee!"

HE was all delight with the wonder of it. He forgot the ship. Vaguely he puzzled how long it would be before the little one arrived. It would be a long time yet. But he was going to have a son! Pearl was going to give him a baby! Gee! He went out, job-seeking. He could always quit when the ship was ready. And he had got a job before he well realized what he was doing.

He got a job at a cattle-cake warehouse alongside the wharf. From the windows where he sweated over sticky bags of cake he could see the ship. When she or another ship unloaded, he could see the bales and bags and bundles come out of those vast holds—supposing of course that he were working there then.

Pearl grew peevish as the weeks went by. Timothy worked at the cake. Made from the refuse of sugar, it was—sugar that came out of those far-seeking ships. It was sticky and smelly, and the flies in summer made work hideous. And the foreman under whom he worked was none other than the fat man, the greasy, scowling man who chewed incessantly on a frayed cigar.

"Sure I quit the S'ciety, son," the foreman grinned when Timothy respectfully asked him. "Got tired o' pulling in nice young fellers like you, as let girls get 'em in trouble. The gals around here aint worth it."

"You better not say anything about Pearl, Mister," said Timothy.

Week after week, cattle-cake and flies. The *Star of the East* sailed. Timothy hadn't the heart to watch her go. When hands had been taken on, he had furtively glanced at Pearl. He could scarcely leave her now. Wages were barely enough to keep them, let alone saving. And she would

soon need him now. She was quite a manager, too. It puzzled him. On their scanty money she contrived to look nice. She had a new hat, and fresh shoes, and a bit of chiffon. And he knew she did not skimp the home.

Another ship came in. He watched as he sweat. She unloaded rattans and copra and sugar, and bales of gorgeous bird-skins. Through the misty dust of the cattle-cake he saw again the feathers spray about a leaping figurehead. He saw palms nodding in a drowsy noontime; a dazzling surf on a coral shore; the flying fish and the tropic birds. Timothy grinned as he packed cake. His grin became part of him. It was only very little changed when he went home one evening and found the female there: the female and a puny little man-baby that, God forgive him for thinking of it, seemed even then greatly to resemble the fat, frayed cigar-chewing foreman. Pearl watched him as he regarded the infant; she watched him from beneath half-closed lids, as if apprehensive. He touched the infant with a timid forefinger.

"Kinda small, aint he?" he grinned. "I s'pose they aint full size when they aint full time."

The female winked at Pearl behind his turned back, and Pearl closed her eyes with a relieved flicker.

SHIPS came, went, and came again. And the infant grew. Toys appeared in the house, and Pearl once more bloomed forth in her prematernal cuteness. She was out much. In the day she took the infant out; but at night Timothy cared for it. Pearl must have her recreation. Sweating all day in that poky little flat over a washtub, with lines of baby's things and steam and food, was hard on her.

Timothy sweated all day over cattle-cake, dust, flies and stickiness. But then Pearl encouraged him to spend his Saturday afternoons beside the ships. That was good of her. She never chided him, though often his supper was cold and a wife might have reason to chide a husband late for supper. Saturdays and holidays: if he wanted to take a vacation, he must lose his pay. He did forget to go back from lunch one afternoon, when a strange ship came in and brought a crew of castaways picked up at sea. Timothy lost himself for four hours. They docked him for that, and Pearl was shrewish about it.

"You got a wife and baby now, and you loaf away your time looking at silly old ships!"

"I'll work overtime tonight to make it up," he smiled, with that softened, rather pleading smile that was growing on him.

"Yes, and me stay here looking after the kid! Not much!" she retorted. Timothy went without tobacco the next week.

ONE evening the foreman walked home with him.

"Have to try and get more money for you," the foreman said. "Howsa kid? An' the missus?"

The foreman went in and chucked the baby under the chin.

"Howsa kid, Pearl? Lucky, that's what you young people are. I was after tellin' Tim I'm tryin' to get him a raise. You'd ought to move into a bigger place. I'd room with you then. How about it, Tim?"

"Pearl's got plenty to do with the baby," said Timothy. He wished the foreman would go. He liked privacy.

"I haven't got too much money to do with!" snapped Pearl. "When there's a chance to get a bit of room-rent, I'd think you'd ask what I think about it."

"I thought the baby was all you could manage," Timothy replied with a worn smile. There was not much home life for him since the baby arrived. He could imagine much less if Pearl had a lodger to care for too.

"I'm the judge of that!" she snapped.

"Oh, I wouldn't butt in," the foreman said. "Thought you'd be glad o' the cash, what with the kid."

"So I would," Pearl retorted. "I'll look for a place tomorrow."

The foreman was scarcely so cordial to Timothy next day. Timothy shouldn't have been quite so quick turning down the lodger proposition. There were nastier jobs that boys were usually put to in the reeking basement where the bags of cake were stacked.

"Get down there and take stock. Got to load a ship next week," the foreman said: and Timothy spent a week in suffocating cellar air, reeking with sickly sugar-cake residue.

Pearl found roomier quarters. She waited to tell Timothy. Timothy was late. The *Star of the East* came in on the evening tide, as he crawled out of the cellar. And she had tigers and peacocks and apes, and pythons from the Indies!

"It's like you, loafin' when I got plenty

Timothy almost choked on his exultant unbelief, as he gripped the rope. "To Hi-lo!" he yelled.

for you to do!" Pearl greeted him. "Come on and see the landlord of a new place I found. Never mind supper. It'll be no colder when you get back."

"Tigers and peacocks and snakes ten yards long!" he answered her; and obeyed her, not hungry but full-fed on revived romance. He agreed to everything. Couldn't remember what the rent was to be five minutes after they left for home. The best, lightest, biggest room was to be the lodger's, Pearl said. Timothy grinned assent, never knowing he assented.

"Apes, and tigers!" he whispered, and spent another hour beside the wharf, sniffing. In the moonlight the *Star of the East* glittered like a ship of stars. An ape coughed somewhere about her shadowy decks. A royal tiger answered, and the ape's cough ceased. The shore-lines creaked to the tide: a block shrilled aloft as a yard swung to a lift of the ship. The water slapped the black sides caressingly.

HE must stay away from the ships. Some day the urge would be too strong, and then what would become of Pearl? The next Saturday he went home in the afternoon instead of spending his freedom on the waterfront. The *Star of the East* was loading already. They said she was going to Hilo. *Hilo!* The place of his song, of his dreams. Oh, well, Pearl needed him. The kid wasn't doing so well, and she, poor child, was tired of caring for it. Not well herself, said Timothy. If he went home—

The foreman was there, shirtless and in stocking feet, in the best chair, smoking or chewing his eternal frayed cigar. Pearl was at the stove, in her wrapper. They looked at Timothy as if he were one of the apes or tigers or peacocks. They looked at each other.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't want to stay out when I'm willing for you to," Pearl snapped. "Saturday, aint it?"

"I thought I might help you at home," said Timothy with a crooked little smile.

"I can get along quite well without your help," she retorted. "I got all the help I want."

"I'll clean the winders," said Timothy, and nothing would stop him. He got bucket and cloth. They glared at his back. They looked at each other. The foreman nodded and went out.

The foreman was nice to Timothy on Monday. Pearl had been nice to Timothy through the week-end. Timothy got a better job. He was to get more money. On the evening before payday the foreman took him around to his club, and was very nice to him, gave him a surreptitious slug of whisky from a locker, which sent a new and altogether exhilarating fire through his veins. Showed him a billiard-table and let him roll the balls about. Introduced him to fat, smiling friends. Made much of him. And near midnight they left for home together.

Timothy stepped as if on air. The foreman was full of fun. Jokes, too—rather rude ones. Timothy had never leaned to that sort. Queerly he enjoyed them now. He laughed, the first real audible laugh in years. Then something fell on his head. He knew he was falling into a deep, dark abyss, but strangely he didn't care. Sleep was nice, too.

TIMOTHY was standing bewildered among a huddle of men on a dark, wet deck. He knew he was on a ship. Hadn't he spent hours enough watching ships to know that? The ship was moving. A tug hooted close to. The tug was alongside, and her skipper was taking his pay through the pilot-house window. A fat-faced man, chewing a frayed cigar, sat astride the ship's

rail, saying good-by to the ship's second mate, nodding and grinning toward Timothy, all bewildered there in the drizzle.

"Wake up, here! What d'ye think this is—a home?" yelped a sour-faced mate, bursting among the huddle of men and clapping topsail halyards into unfamiliar fists. His own fists and boots pointed his remarks. "Jump, you farmers! Lord! Aint there one sailor among ye?"

Timothy's head ached. How it ached! He looked at the rope in his hands. Aloft. All about him. This ship was queerly familiar. As if he had sailed all his life, in just this ship. Those white lower masts and yards. Of course. *Star of the East!* And he was aboard of her. Outward bound. Bound to Hilo! How was this? Dreaming, of course. That was the whisky. Not used to whisky. Oh, if it were not a dream! He sighed. A trickle of cold water hit his face, dripping from the sails overhead.

The fat-faced man shifted his frayed cigar over to the other side of his mouth, slung his legs over the rail to get aboard the tug to return. Timothy saw neither man nor tug. That cold trickle had awakened him. He almost choked on his unbelief. His exultant unbelief. He gripped the rope. Always he had known that the best sailors took the head of the rope. There he was, right by the lead block. His heart thumped in ecstasy.

"Come, bullies! Start a song!" roared the mate. "There must be one sailorman among ye!"

The fat-faced man saw him reaching for the rope. Saw his face, all lighted with spiritual fire in the gleams of the tug's lights. The fat-faced man stopped, just a fraction of a second in his getting aboard the tug, starkly amazed at Timothy's aspect.

Then there was a muffled yell. The vessels had touched in parting. Gently—a caress of a touch; a Judas kiss of a bump. The tug's deckhands dragged over the rail a fat-faced man with crushed hips. A frayed cigar-butt bitten in two. Eyes staring out of a face gone pasty white.

Timothy never glanced at the tug. Nobody he knew there. He reached up the rope. A harassed mate stopped bawling.

"Johnny's gone, what shall I do?
John's gone to Hi-lo!
Johnny's gone, and I'll go too:
John's gone to Hi-lo!"

"Bully for you, sailor!" said the mate.

"To Hi-lo!" yelled Timothy.

The Piper of Hualapai

By HUBERT LOOMIS SMITH

A strong story from Arizona, where men are men, and women seek culture; where varmints are wild, and music has charms to soothe.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

TEX was flivvering me to Hualapai Station by a short-cut from the Big Sandy ranch, where he is foreman. About a mile from the ranch-house the road dips down to the creek, and as we rattled around a clump of junipers, a gaunt shape suddenly appeared beside the sandy track, waving its arms as though to bar our passage. The figure was so spectral and silent, and its gestures so eerie, that for an instant I was startled. Then I saw that it was neither ghost nor man, but some empty clothes cunningly hung from a bough.

"Hello," said I. "A scarecrow! What on earth do you want with it here?"

"That aint no scarecrow," corrected Tex, bringing the car to a standstill. "That's a monument—a monument in everlastin' memoriam to True Culture and Anæsthetics, which same departed life in this part of Arizona six weeks ago next Saturday."

The monument flapped one arm uncannily as though in assent. I looked more closely. The coat was a black Prince Albert. From its breast pocket protruded the corner of a lavender-bordered handkerchief, and from a side pocket the tips of kid gloves. White waistcoat and shirt showed at bosom and cuff; a lavender tie flowed from the high, winged collar; pearl-gray trousers strode the wind haughtily, or subsided to where pointed patent leathers adorned with spats stood at graceful ease on the ground below.

"Those are mighty swell clothes to throw away," I observed. "What did you bring 'em out here for?"

That scene was worth peekin' at, believe me! Them skunks goes a-tangoin' and sashayin' and sky-hootin' around Tombstone like all possessed.

"Too *all-fired* swelled up for this man's country," growled Tex. "And anyhow they's memories attached to them clothes what makes 'em too sacred to wear." He shoved his boot against the low pedal and the car started with a jerk. "Yes sir, them's a memorial tablet and it marks the passin' of High Art and the rhythmic pulsation of the inner sago from this here county."

IT all started (continued Tex) from the Widow givin' ol' Tombstone Diggs a job with this outfit and him learnin' to play the saxophone. That was before the Widow left her own ranch here and went to live at Anvil Rock. Her brother Jim was foreman then, and Jim and his wife and the Widow lived in the ranch-house. I stayed over in the bunk-shack with the rest of the boys.

The bunk-house is low and narrow, and its caustics is so blame good you could've heard a infant bedbug snorin' in his sleep from one end of it to the other—only the bedbugs, gol dern 'em, never sleeps none when we're around. Every night Tombstone would toot for hours on that ol' saxophone, and with that kind of a house to help him out, you kin bet he made the ding-bustin'est racket you ever heard. Gol dern if it wasn't awful—with him jest learnin', too, and never playin' nothin' but jest the same tune over and over. "My Honolulu Lulu Blues" is what he calls it, and it shore gives 'em to you.

All us boys tries to give Tombstone little hints that the bunk-house wasn't no proper place for no conservatory of music. We mentions frequent and kinda casual that the tryin'-out room of a siren whistle factory would seem nice and quiet after sufferin' what we was; that a singin' school for jackasses wasn't nothin' to what we has to stand, and sech-like little observations. But Tombstone couldn't take no polite hint, and none of us has the heart to say nothin' outright uncomplimentary what would hurt his feelin's.

No human bein' alive could've stood up under Tombstone's music for ten minutes without shell-shock, so us boys usta hafta hump up in a row on the corral fence every night until he parked that danged saxophone. And settin' so many nights with nothin' to do but wish Tombstone'd git paralyzed in the diagram, and watchin' the sides of the bunk-house kinda bulgin' in and out in moonlight accordin' to the musical scale, we discovers a unnatural phenomemum which is plumb new to science.

First, we got to noticin' some little white streaks kinda millin' around near the bunk-house, and purty soon we sees they is actin' funny. Of course them white streaks was only skunks, and in this man's country *they* aint no phenomemum a-tall But them varmints seems to hanker after Tombstone's music, and that shore is a unnatural phenomemum if there ever was one!

I don't know whether skunks suffers from astigmatismums in both ears so's they can't

hear proper, or whether Tombstone's tootin' drove 'em plumb crazy, but anyways, as soon as he'd unlimber that there fog-horn and start bellerin' through it, the critters'd all bunch up by the bunk-house and go to crow-hoppin' around and kickin' up their heels like they was tickled to death.

But that was jest the beginnin'. After a night or two we notices that every oncet in a while one of the skunks'd skip inside the door of the bunk-house, then skip out again. Purty soon two or three of 'em gits to skippin' in at oncet, and every time, they stays inside a little longer. I reckon they finds out that Tombstone's too busy torturin' them Honolulu Lulu Blues to know they's there. In about a week it gits so they all corrals up inside about as soon as Tombstone lets fly with his first socktave in the drum-major key. Then we wouldn't see no more of them, exceptin' now and then when one'd frisk outside for a minute to do some extra fancy buck-jumpin' and crow-hoppin' they wasn't no room for inside. Not until Tombstone toots the last soft strain of the last canto, and the windows stops rattlin' and the echoes rolls away into Yavapai County, does them skunks show up. Then they all comes slinkin' out, kinda dazed and sheepish-like, and shakin' their heads like they has the earache.

FOR about a week we doesn't go near the bunk-house evenin's, waitin' to see what's goin' to happen, but finally we gits so dern curious we slips over in the middle of a concert and peeks in the window. And that scene was worth peekin' at, believe me. There was ol' Tombstone a-balloonin' out his cheeks till you'd think he'd git a blow-out in both of 'em. The lamp was a-flickerin' with the atmospheric disturbance he's kickin' up, and the shingles on the roof was flappin' up and down, and the room was plumb full of music notes all quakin' and a-quiverin' and a-tryin' to git away from Tombstone.

But them skunks, they wasn't tryin' to git away. Not much. They has orchestra seats, they has—right up in the front row. Only they don't set down none; but there they goes with the wind from the ol' saxophone a-swishin' all around 'em, a-tangoin' and sashayin' and sky-hootin' all around Tombstone like all possessed.

Tombstone was always mighty engrossed in his job, oncet he got to playin' and at first we thinks he don't know them skunks is there. But we was mistaken. Them varmints was the first audience he ever had what could stand one of his recitals close up, and you bet it made him feel good to find out how much he was progressin'. We could tell by the airs he's puttin' on, flippin' his little fingers up and down daintylike, so as to impress them skunks with his technique.

"I'm goin' to sling a handful of rocks through the door," whispers Cactus Williams, "and break up the swearee suddenlike."

"No you wont, you ding-busted ijiot," says I, grabbin' him quick. "You don't do nothin' discourchous to that there audience while my blankets and everything is right at Tombstone's elbow!"

Jest then one of the skunks hops up on Tombstone's knee and rubs his side against his arm kinda affectionate. My heart jest about stops beatin' thinkin' of the danger my blankets is in, but Tombstone keeps right on tootin'. Purty soon, while he goes on playin' with one hand, he reaches out very slow and chucks the critter under the chin. Mr. Skunk likes that, and he humps his back like a cat. Next thing he jumps on Tombstone's shoulder and starts kinda scratchin' and nosin' around among Tombstone's whiskers, which is some luxurious. I reckon he figures it's a right likely place to find a rats'-nest in. Skunks eats rats.

The boys got to snickerin' so I had to jerk 'em all back to the corral by their collars. I didn't aim to take no chances with my bunk so close to where Tombstone was settin'.

"Them skunks," opines Cactus when we all gits back on the fence, "they must all be kinfolks and belong to one of these here moron families what's all run to seed. Them varmints shore has weak characters."

"You're talkin' gol dern nonsense!" argufies Hassayamp Parker, impatient. "No skunk aint never lived what had a weak character. Skunks is strong characters—every one of them. Them skunks is all right, only Tombstone's got 'em hypnotized. Blowin' noises at 'em through a horn affects some good strong varmints thata way. Aint you never read about them Hindu snake charmers what makes cobras stand on their tails and shimmy by blowin' a tune at 'em through a hookah-pipe? I aint never heard none of that hookah-pipe music, but I bet it aint no more demoralizin' than what a saxophone kin make. Tombstone's turned skunk-charmer; that's what he's went and done."

FOR a few days us boys has lots of fun joshin' Tombstone, but after that it wasn't no laughin' matter a-tall. You see, them skunks was the first livin' critters Tombstone ever saw what didn't run from his music, and I reckon it flatters him plumb silly. They shore stacks up ace-high with him, them varmints does, and he gits to bringin' them sugar and sech-like from the table every night, and swipin' all the eggs the Widow's hens lays, so's them patrons of the arts kin eat 'em durin' intermissions of the concert.

We wouldn't of minded the critters gittin' fed up—'cause we shore gits fed up likewise

on them musicals—but it makes 'em feel too blamed much at home in the bunk-house to suit a bunch of plain cow-hands. It got so's the whole theater party'd stay after the show for a little supper. Ol' Tombstone, he'd go to bed, and as soon as he's asleep, he'd tune up the saxophone Nature give him, trembulous and heart-breakin' and sobbin'-like. That'd start the varmints a-shimmyin' and skylarkin' again.

Before midnight it'd get kinda chilly for us boys all humped up in a row on the corral fence, and the top rail'd git all-fired sharp, and we'd git plumb outa humor waitin' for our turn to enjoy the bunk-house. But if one of us as much as sticks his nose in the door, them merry-makers, they'd all give him the icy eye, and fuzz up the hair on their backs real haughty like they considers it a unwarranted intrusion. I reckon some of us bronco-busters aint got the finest manners in the world, but we shore knows enough etiquette not to force ourselves on no social gatherin' of skunks—leastways not when they's actin' supercilious.

By the time them cabaret parties gits to lastin' till one A. M., us boys gits plumb sore. "You looka here, Tombstone Diggs!" growls Hassayamp, yankin' Tombstone outa his bunk right in the middle of a bar of them "Honolulu Lulu Blues" he's snorin' in E flat, "you gotta cut out this program of yours, P. D. Q. We jest aint goin' to put up with it no more, that's all."

"What ya mean, pullin' a man's blankets off'n him this-a-way?" snaps Tombstone, wakin' up shiverin' and right down peevish. "Don't you ijiots know it's too cold for sech monkey business?"

"Yes, and I reckon you thinks it's a heap warmer out on that there corral fence, don't you? You think we're goin' to stand for to roost on a rail with stickers on it till daylight, jest so's you kin turn this here bunk-house into a gol derned night-club for skunks?"

"You're talkin' loco," Tombstone snaps back contemptuous. "It aint late at all. I jest went to sleep this minute. What you big lummoxes complainin' about, anyways? Nobody aint locked you out. Them little critters aint a-goin' to hurt you."

"No, and they aint to git no chancet to," says I. "You gotta stop tollin' 'em in here, that's what!"

"Yes, you'd like to spoil them pore little fellers' fun, jest so's you kin come a-r'arin' around here raisin' rough-house and pullin' a man's blankets off'n him, wouldn't you?"

"I reckon you figures skunks is more important than folks around this here bunk-house," contributes Cactus.

"Not a-tall," shoots back Tombstone, shiverin' plenty and gittin' more peeved up all the time. "I only thinks little skunks with white streaks is better company than the big kind what's streaked with yeller." With that, he grabs his blankets back and turns his face towards the wall.

AT dinner-time next day Tombstone talks to the Widow acrost the table, leavin' us outa the conversation kinda pointed. "Knowin' skunks better," says he to the

Widow, "makes me plumb ashamed the way I usta feel about 'em. Skunks is got souls for beauty, they has. They shows it plain the way they loves music."

"How do you know they loves music?" Cactus butts in. "I don't reckon they ever heard none around here. I aint."

"Of course you aint," explains Tombstone, plenty cool. "Not *many* kinds of varmints *does*. But as I was sayin', skunks —*first-class* skunks with *white* stripes on 'em—they appreciates music. Different skunks has their own pussonal tastes, too You take the two I calls Rose and Violet, they likes a tune played kinda poco tempo intermezzo; but Mignonette and Heliotrope, now, they prefers it fortissimo alligator." (Tombstone, he was workin' in all them Mexican words outa his music-book jest to show off before the Widow, he bein' a little soft on her.) "Last night I was renderin' a obli-cato entitled 'My Honolulu Lulu Blues,' which I executes oncet in a while, and I was playin' it with a kinda stack-a-toes movement—"

"So that's how you done it," Hassayamp busts in. "It shore sounded thata way, but I didn't know your ol' legs was limber enough to reach up so high. Anyways, that aint nothin'. I seen plenty jackasses what could make a racket without workin' in their toes at all."

"Shore," agrees Tombstone, right sour. "They makes it with their mouths, but I don't never tell 'em what I thinks of 'em when they's ladies present."

"You boys gotta cut out this horn-swogglin'," cuts in Jim, the Widow's brother, kinda sharp. "You keep it up, and the first thing you know you'll be sayin' something uncomplimentary and hurt somebody's feelin's. I reckon, Tombstone, if you tootin' that horn in the bunk-house is goin' to keep this outfit wranglin' over skunks all the time, you'd better move your bed over to the shack by the schoolhouse."

SO that evenin' Tombstone moves out, bag and baggage. Then when his pets shows up, he loads up with skunk victuals and tolls the whole bunch—they is five of 'em—over to his shack, where he's fixed up some boxes with hay under the floor to make it homelike for 'em. And it shore was funny to see ol' Tombstone stalkin' along slow and solemn-like, tootin' "My Honolulu Lulu Blues" lugubrious on the saxophone, and passin' out free lunches to that herd of striped mavericks a-millin' and a-crow-hoppin' all around him. Hassayamp says it reminds him powerful of a feller in his third reader at school what was called the Piebald Pipe-Fitter of Hamburger Town, and what pulled off the same stunt with a passel of rats. Tombstone was shore afraid we'd be mean to his pet stock if they stayed on the old range. But he needn't have been. We wasn't goin' to hurt no skunk's feelin's in a bunk-house we has to sleep in.

Later on we hears Tombstone tootin' away in his shack, so we knows he's invited his public out from under the floor for a little musical house-warmin'. That's puffickly agreeable to us, and everything would've been fine and hunky-dory on the Big Sandy if it hadn't been for a new calamity what happens. A real, shore-enough calamity this time what makes skunks seem like right pleasant company in comparison.

THE calamity calls hisself J. Oswald Willoughby Priddle, and he strikes down sudden and zigzag on this here ranch right outa a clear sky. It seems the Widow and Jim's wife, they'd cut the critter out from some she-herd in Phœnix, where he's givin' a lecture on the anæsthetic aspecks of modern art, and they ups and invites him to come and stay on the ranch awhile so's to project a little true culture into this here county.

Jim drives over to Hualapai to meet the three-thirty, but us boys doesn't see the apostle of high art till supper-time. And that critter is shore something to look at. I thought I'd seen all the brands of humans —long-horn, short-horn and white-face— what ranges the State of Arizona—town, camp and open country—but I hadn't never seen no specimen like that maverick. I reckon he's what the books calls a r'arin' avis. At first glance he's a kinda cross between a undertaker and a dancin' master, only he has long hair like the pictures of them Polack fiddlers. But he's got a mighty slick look about him, too, like these here fellers what sells fake oil-stocks for a while, then skips out.

When I goes in where we eats, I feels like backin' right out again. The Widow, she's throwed a white tablecloth over the ol' oilcloth, and she's bought out a crockery store in Phœnix and stacked the stock in trade all on the table at oncet. And she's got flowers on the table, and a silver contraption full of sugar what's made in square

lumps. And it looks like she aims to give us all the water-cure, 'cause everybody's got two glasses of water to drink—one tall one, and one silly-lookin' flat one as big around as a saucer.

The Apostle sets at one end of the table kinda hedged off from us cowhands by the Widow on one side and Mrs. Jim on the other. Jim, he looks down at his tools, and he ups and says: "Why, I got three knives and forks! Is any of you boys shy a pitchfork and a toad-sticker?" I seen Mrs. Jim reachin' around behind him, and Jim says: "Ouch! What you pinchin' me for?" Mrs. Jim looks daggers and bites her lip, and Jim shrivels down kinda foolish.

Then Cactus says: "If anybody spots the ol' condensed milk can, chase her down this-a-way. I aint seen her nowhere." The Widow glares at him and gits red spots in her cheeks, and Cactus, he gits red too, and dunno what else to do with his hands, so he upsets the gravy.

EVERY time the Apostle looks toward us cowhands, he looks like he smells burnt cabbage and don't like cabbage nohow; but he shore does make himself powerful agreeable to the Widow, flatterin' her till she blushes real pink and coy-like. And talk! Say, he jest had to open his mouth and let Webster's unabridged come gugglin' out like oil outa a barrel. And sech talk! All about the unfettered yearns of the inner sago in response to the cosmetic urge of the mystic harmonicas, and sech-like subjecks.

The Apostle, he talks powerful contemptuous about pussons what aint ethical like him. And every time one of us boys takes a chicken neck, his nose goes two inches higher, and he shoots another slam at sordid pussons what gorges their gross bodies and starves their souls; but I notices that his eyes follers the platter greedy-like till he gits another chancet to spear a few more breasts and drumsticks. And all the time while he's talkin' about him bein' contented with a crust of bread and a book of poems, he's a-crammin' down mashed potatoes and green peas and pie like he musta jest finished weatherin' through one of them contented spells—and a right smart long one, too. That feller's mouth could shore handle a two-way traffic slick.

Priddle hasn't been two days on the ranch before we can see plain as print what his game is. The very first mornin' he notices me long enough to ask casual how many head of cattle the Widow owns and what would the ranch sell for, quick cash. Like a sap, I tells him they's two or three cattle companies what would jump at it at fifty thousand—which is the truth; and right there he makes up his mind he's goin to marry that fifty thousand. More than that, us boys kin see that unless something happens to spoil his play, he's goin' to git what he's after. The Widow, she's went plumb daffy about him, a-blushin' and a-simperin' around him like a silly schoolgirl.

Tombstone, he's only been a little sweet on the Widow, but I reckon he don't enjoy seein' the Apostle of Art gittin' away with all the honors. Meal-times at first he tries kinda pathetic to keep in the runnin'. When Priddle lets up on the inner sago and starts talkin' the gizzards outa music, Tombstone thinks that's his chancet to edge in. "I'm kinda musical myself," he shoots in hasty while Priddle's swallerin' a big bite, "my favorite obli-cato bein'—" But Priddle, he goes right on talkin'; and the Widow, she's lookin' up at him pink and adorin' and don't hear nothin'.

Tombstone clears his throat apologetic and tries again: "As I was sayin', 'My Honolulu Lulu Blues,' which is my favorite obli-cato—" But the Apostle ignores him complete, while the Widow jest leans a little closter. That squelches Tombstone for quite a spell, but bime-by the Apostle mentions flowers; Tombstone pricks up his ears. "Speakin' of flowers," he busts in kinda desperate, "my yearlin' skunks Violet and Rose, they's goin' to grow up the best skunks I got."

The Apostle of Art stops talkin' for oncet and turns deliberate to look Tombstone up and down contemptuous, his nose sayin' plain he's smellin' rubber boots burnin' along with the cabbage. And the Widow, she raises her chin and looks like Greenland's icy mountains. After that pore Tombstone, he didn't converse no more, but I hears him mutterin' to himself.

PRIDDLE and the Widow and Mrs. Jim, they flivvers around to all the ranches in this part of Yucca County and to Hualapai and the Jack-pot Mine, and enthuses up all the women over the Bo's Arts and Bill's Letters Club they proposes to organize so's to bring the finer things of life into this here districk. I don't know which bo they's talkin' about, and I don't see 'em gittin' no letters from Bill, but that's what Priddle calls it; and anyways, it goes big with the womenfolks. The Apostle, he modulates his voice at 'em and smells the air distinguished till they's impressed plumb stiff. The Widow lets 'em all see she's roped the social lion, and the she-herd promotes her unanimous to bell mare. That don't hurt her feelin's none, you bet; she gits to talkin' kinda throaty and patronizin', so's you'd hardly know her.

Priddle and the Widow and the rest of the she-herd, they fixes to hold the first meetin' of the club in the ol' schoolhouse, which you know aint more'n three hundred yards from the ranch-house. From the talk I hears at the table, Priddle, he's goin' to give a address on the anæsthetic aspecks of art and the higher culture; and he's goin' to appreciate some music and paintin's out loud before 'em. After that, they'll organize the club formal, with Priddle as President and Treasurer, and the Widow as First Vice-President and Secretary, and all the other women as Second Vice-Presidents so's they wont be no jealousy. Each member'll have to plunk down two dollars dues to git in the swim, and Priddle, he's to hold the stakes, bein', he claims, real good at holdin' on to other people's money.

The Widow picks on us boys to sweep out the schoolhouse and help her fix things up. We has to stack up all the desks and borrow chairs from everybody in the county, and chase all over the Snake-skin Mountains for piñon pine branches and yucca flowers. After things is all cleaned up and he's shore he wont have to smell no dust or nothin', Priddle comes to boss things, standin' lookin' at the decorations with his head on one side and his finger-tips held together pensive, while he makes the Widow snip six needles off'n a pine branch, or move a spike of yucca flowers three inches northwest, so's to make it cultured and proper anæsthetic.

The Widow makes us git a lot of old boards and tarpaulins and build a sorta Injun wicky-up in the very back of the room in front of a back door what's there, and we has to cover it all over with yaller tissue paper she'd sent to Phœnix for, and pine branches and green fixin's. And we has to rig up flaps like a tent's got, all tricked up the same way, for the front of it. Cords workin' through ring-eyes is fastened to the flaps so's a man outside the back door kin pull them aside kinda invisible and artistic.

Inside the wicky-up and jest in front of the back door, we builds a frame and stretches on it a big canvas paintin' that Priddle brought rolled up in his things. Cactus says it's a picture of the fall round-up happenin' amongst the Joshua trees, and Tombstone says it's the clotheslines behind the Chinee wash-house in Hualapai, but I votes it's the Battle of the Marne with the frogs and sauerkraut mixed up fierce. Afterward we hear Priddle callin' it "The Flowers of Spring." Anyways, we trims her all around purty with greens and sets the Widow's phonographt behind it, where a man outside the back door can reach in and start it playin' invisible and artistic the same as the flaps in front.

US cowhands works for several days so hard our tongues is hangin' out, with Priddle settin' there artistic and sniffy, and bossin' us around sharp, like he'd married the ranch already. All the time him and the Widow acts mighty spoony, and we kin see that things is gittin' serious for the Big Sandy outfit.

"We gotta pull that danged rooster's tail-feathers, and do it derned *pronto*, too," decides Hassayamp, hammerin' so mad he pounds his thumb-nail. "In another week he'll have the Widow hog-tied, then we'll be decoratin' interiors for life."

"Let's toll him outside tonight," proposes Cactus, "and beat him up good."

"Yes, that'd be jest like you," growls Hassayamp, "then the first thing the Widow'd do afterward would be to fire the whole bunch, and the next thing would be to marry Priddle quick. We don't want to make no martyr outa that faker. We

gotta make a fool of him, somehow. Women is funny thataway. They'll stand for anything else a feller does, but oncet he shows up ridiculous, they gives him the mitten quick."

Tombstone, he's been powerful glum for a week, and all mornin' he's been meditatin' sour, but all of a sudden he chirks up. "I jest thought of a scheme," says he, grinnin', "which from what you says shore oughta make that blow-fly persona none gratis with the Widow."

Cussin' under his breath, Priddle raises his voice: "The ladies will excuse me whilst I put the quaint little rodent outside!"

We all wants to know what the scheme is, but Tombstone wont tell nothin' except that we kin help pull it off the night the she-herd rounds up at the schoolhouse. "This evenin'," he says mysterious, "I gotta ride over to Hualapai and telegrapht to Phœnix for a little artistic etcetera what is plumb necessary to put this here scheme acrost."

The next day Jim flivvers over to Hualapai for the mail, and when he gits back he hands Tombstone a package what come by express for him. It's about a foot square and flat like a book. Tombstone looks tickled, but he takes it over to his shack and wont tell us what's in it.

The night of the shindig, they shore is a mob shows up on the Big Sandy. Every she critter in Yucca County wants to be Second Vice-President of the club and git cultured good and anæsthetic; or if she don't, she figures anyways it's worth two dollars to see what kind of stunts this here stall-fed white-face the Widow has roped kin pull off.

The men-folks, they has to bring the women, and they lets on they's put out a heap, but I reckon they's right curious theirselves about what kind of a menagerie freak is puttin' his brand on the Big Sandy Ranch. Half of them wont go in the schoolhouse where the women is, and they makes a heap of silly cracks about the Big Sandy outfit recitin' poetry to the steers, and havin' to change to evenin' clothes when we rides herd at night. But I notices they keeps millin' close around the schoolhouse, starin' through the open windows like they's anxious for the pufformance to begin. And Tombstone says to me that's fine, because they can't be none too many of the Widow's friends see what's goin' to happen to Mr. Priddle. "The more, the merrier," says he, grinnin' gleeful.

THE Widow, she says I'm the most reliable feller in our outfit, so I gotta stand outside the back door (which is outa sight behind the Battle of the Marne, what Priddle calls "The Flowers of Spring") and help work the show. I'm to watch his Nibs through a crack till he wiggles his fingers a certain way, which is a sign for me to reach in and start the phonographt goin'. Then when the High Gazookus waves his arm majestic, I'm to pull easy on the cords fastened to the wicky-up flaps so's they'll pull apart slow and artistic, disclosin' the Battle of the Marne—or the Chinee

clothesline, whichever it is—to the she-herd waitin' breathless in their chairs out front.

The Widow's stacked up the phonographt records what Priddle brung the way I'm to play 'em, the first one bein' a "Spring Song" by a fiddle, with a colorado maduro soprano bellerin' awful high-toned on the other side when you turns it over.

When everything is set, and the Widow has took a chair by Priddle, who's settin' holdin' his head pensive up front, Tombstone slips around to the back door where I am, and shoves something flat and thin into my hand. I holds it to the light, and it's a phonographt record. "Take off 'The Spring Song,'" Tombstone whispers, "and slap this on instead. It's the thing I sent to Phœnix for."

"I bet it's got cuss words on it," I whispers back.

"You jest wait and see," whispers Tombstone, mysterious. "I aint promisin' they wont be no cussin', though."

BY that time the Widow's introducin' Priddle to the audience, so me and Tombstone peeks through the crack to see the critter pufform. The Apostle, he's got a rose off'n the only bush in Yucca County stuck onto his Prince Albert, and his ol' legs is struttin' around important in his pearl-gray pants, and he's modulatin' his voice at everybody promiscuous.

He leads off by lettin' 'em all know how cultivated and anæsthetic he is, and how vulgar they is, but how they is hope for 'em if they'll jine the club. Of course, he says all this kinda roundabout and oily, so's they wont git sore and renig on that two dollars head-tax he's after. Then he spouts a heap about poetry and music and paintin', tellin' how it aint anæsthetic to listen to no lilac-colored tune in a room with green wall-paper, and how when they looks at a fine paintin' like he's goin' to show 'em, they'd oughta think poetry in their heads what's played in the same key it is.

Then the she-herd, followin' the Widow's lead, all claps their hands—what's red and roughed up considerable from cookin' for mine muckers and cow-punchers—so's to make each other believe they knows what he's talkin' about.

Soon as it's all quiet again, Priddle wiggles his fingers like I'm waitin' for, and I touches off the phonographt. But no cuss words don't come a-r'arin' outa the ol' horn like I expects. Instead, she scratches herself a minute; then she ups and says kinda like she has a clothespin on her nose:

"Saxophone Solo, 'My Honolulu Lulu Blues.'" And right away I guesses what Tombstone's little game is. But I don't guess what's really goin' to happen—not by a long shot. Priddle aint in the habit of listenin' to nobody else talkin', so he don't notice the phonographt say nothin'. And I reckon he can't tell one tune from another, neither, because he goes right ahead with his rigamarole like everything's O. K.

The phonographt, she starts tootin' "My Honolulu Lulu Blues" plumb lugubrious jest like Tombstone always done, and he whispers to me he's tuned up the record a little with a file to make her sound like him thataway.

Purty soon I seen some little white dabs streakin' around in the dark behind us and gittin' closter. Tombstone, he pushes me away from the door and whispers: "My little music-lovers is comin' to attend this here swaree. They's plumb anæsthetic, they is. You stand still over there and let 'em go in the door. They aint afraid of me."

Then he glues his eye to the crack and whispers: "The Sultan of Russia, he's headin' for the wicky-up, and he's interpretin' the music majestic. Don't you scare my babies."

I FEELS right grieved leavin' the crack, but Tombstone, he keeps me posted. Purty soon he whispers: "The Shawl of Persia, he says the music is fillin' him fulla yearns for the purple open spaces. And he's struttin' closter and closter." By that time Tombstone's pets is projectin' around near the door, and I seen one of them skip up the steps and then down again.

"He says," relays Tombstone, "he hears the rustlin' footfalls of the little critters of the wildwood." And Priddle is plumb right about it, too, because by this time them five skunks is all crow-hoppin' and buck-jumpin' right by the door.

"He's right by the flaps now," whispers Tombstone excited-like, "and he says the odors of spring is overwhelmin' his senses."

"Priddle, he's jest makin' up them odors," I whispers back, "but he wont be in another minute," says I, watchin' them varmints all skippin' up the steps.

"Nothin' of the kind," contradicts Tombstone under his breath. "Them babies wont hurt nobody while that tune's a-playin'."

Then Tombstone squints through the

crack again and whispers, "He says Rose and Violet has a message for him." And I reckon they has, for they both skips inside the door, followed by Lily and Mignonette and Heliotrope.

Tombstone peeks some more, and his voice begins shakin'. "My whole bouquet, they's admirin' the picture, and the Mikado of Turkey, he's strikin' a pose." And the next second he hisses, "Yank away! The High Gazookus, he's wavin' majestic and he wants the curtain to rise!"

That majestic wave bein' the instructions what I'm waitin' for, I pulls on the cords so's to open up the wicky-up flaps slow and impressive like the Widow orders. And as I pulls, I hears the Apostle elocute right soft and melodious:

"Behold! The Flowers of Spring."

Immediate I hears a woman titter; then the whole crowd inside busts out laughin'. I couldn't stand it no longer, so I gives the cords a quick turn around the underpinnin' and jumps for the crack so's to see that tabloid, myself. And it's shore worth seein'. There's Priddle and the Battle of the Marne—what he calls "The Flowers of Spring"—and them skunks all hobnobbin' intimate, the little fellows a-friskin' around and a-rubbin' their backs friendly against the Apostle's pearl-gray pants, thinkin' he's responsible for them dulcet strains what the phonographt's tootin'.

By this time the racket out front has swelled to a deafenin' roar, the men guffawin' fit to bust, and the women-folks a-shakin' and a-gaspin' and gaggin' their mouths with handkerchiefs. All but the Widow. She's leanin' forward plenty sober and sorta wringin' her hands.

At last there's a little lull while the folks tries to catch their breath to laugh some more with, and a voice what sounds like Cactus yells: "Birds of a feather, they herds together." And another voice hollers, "Them aint no birds, you ding-busted ijot. Them's Arizona chipmunks!" I reckon that was Hassayamp, him always bein' argumentiferous thataway.

Evidently Priddle don't know skunks when he sees 'em, so he aint alarmed none, but he's plenty furious at havin' his elocution spoiled. For a minute his eyes scowls around savage; then he smiles sugary jest with his mouth and holds up his hand dainty-like for silence. "The ladies in the audience and those who is gentlemen," says he, "will notice that even the chipmunks is charmed by 'The Spring Song.' I loves the little wildwood critters and all their innocent pranks, but we must now proceed with our discourse, so I'll request some kind gentleman from the audience to remove them."

At that, everybody explodes again, but you bet nobody don't volunteer for the job of chipmunk-bouncer. Priddle looks daggers at Tombstone's pets, hatin' 'em plenty for takin' the limelight off'n hisself, and after waitin' regal awhile for somebody to come, he tries sorta dainty-like to shoo 'em away with his handkerchief, what has a lavender border besides the perfume on it. But them varmints jest thinks he is playin' with 'em, and sky-hoots around friendlier than ever. This brings down the house all over again—all but the Widow, what's settin' stiff as a petrified beet.

PURTY soon the Apostle gives it up and holds his hand up peremptory for the folks to quit laughin'. When they finally does, a-gaspin' for breath and a-rubbin' the tears from their eyes, with now and then somebody explodin' fresh, Priddle, he poses his ol' legs haughty and tries to go on with his lecture. But he aint more'n started when one of them varmints scampers up the green fixin's on the wicky-up, hops onto his shoulder, and goes to nosin' at his chin. I reckon he's looking for some whispers to scratch in. Anyways, Priddle tries to brush him off dignified, but Mr. Skunk hangs on tighter'n paint, real kinda affectionate and

a-cranin' his neck right curious to see where them whiskers is went to.

By now the people is raisin' the roof; the women standin' on chairs, the men jumpin' up and down slappin' their legs; and Priddle's face is purple he's so mad. Cussin' fluent under his breath, he raises his voice and hollers: "The ladies present will excuse me whilst I put the quaint little rodent outside."

Then he steps behind the Battle of the Marne with the rest of the varmints trottin' at his heels right devoted. As soon as he's outa sight of the crowd, he yanks the critter off'n him by the tail, and as it lands on the floor, he kicks at it savage. But swingin' so hasty and hearty-like he misses the varmint and knocks down the Battle of the Marne. This is shore kind to the folks out front, and they applauds generous.

BUT for oncet in his life Priddle don't yearn for no limelight. Jumpin' to grab the picture, he upsets the phonographt. The ol' horn, she gives a heart-breakin' squawk and stops right in the bluest part of them "Honolulu Lulu Blues." Right away that passel of skunks stops short in their tracks, lookin' kinda bilious and grouchy like they's jest soberin' up from a spree. Wheelin' around, Priddle catches sight of 'em, and losin' his temper complete, he starts kickin' right and left like an outlaw bronc'.

After that, things livens up and the action's shore stirrin'. But Priddle, he trips on the wicky-up cords and the flaps comes down on the run, shuttin' him in sorta teetee-teet with those five skunks. Then the women busts out screamin' and stampedes for the door, while the fellers outside goes to yellin' and whoopin' and crowhoppin' around, and shootin' their guns in the air. And they's all the excitement and noise a feller could ask for, and us boys has a regular Fourth of July celebration and a heap of innocent pleasure.

J. Oswald Willoughby Priddle, he musta been celebratin' too, because I hears him and his playmates all sky-larkin' around spritely together inside the wicky-up. Purty soon he busts through the back door along with the varmints. The latter, they seems kinda subdued; but Priddle, he aint thataway a-tall. Me and Tombstone, we moves off modest—and hasty-like.

Priddle seems right talkative, discussin' things copious, and bime-by I goes to work up a alibi with the Widow.

I FINDS her over to the house kinda hysterical, with ol' Rip-Roarin' Pete Jackson, owner of the Anvil Rock, and a bunch of women holdin' her down. Seein' me back from the firin'-line, she hollers dramatic: "Oh, Tex! Has anything dreadful happened?"

"Not a thing," says I. "Me and Tombstone was purty clost when the Battle of the Marne goes into action, but don't you worry none about us, ma'am. Me and Tombstone's all right."

"But Mr. Priddle!" bellers the Widow. "Did anything happen to dear Mr. Priddle?"

"Oh, *him?*" I says, surprised-like. "Why, nothin' to *speak* about, ma'am, though I does recollect thinkin' he musta romped with them chipmunks right peart for a spell."

"Merciful Heavens!" she hollers. "Where is he? What's he doin'?"

"Talkin', I reckon, but he aint interpretin' no 'Spring Song' jest now."

"Let me go to him!" yells the Widow, strugglin' with her friends. "He needs me! He's not strong!"

"Don't you believe it," says I. "Anyways, he's went off to the creek a-totin' his suitcase right peevish. I reckon he's goin' to change for dinner, but he aint comin' back here for it. And he aint talkin' anæsthetic about you, neither. He says gittin' up this show was all your fault, and he's goin' to sue you for a million dollars the minute he gits back to Phœnix."

At that, the Widow, she kinda swoons against Rip-Roarin' Pete Jackson, and he has to comfort her, which I reckon is one reason why she changes her name to his'n a week later. That and the whole country laughin' about her and Priddle and the Flowers of Spring. And I reckon that Rip-Roarin' Pete's bein' the roughest ol' cuss of a cowman in Yucca County helps the romance a heap, him not bein' anæsthetic a-tall, just plenty good-hearted. And nowadays the Widow, she claims she never did have no use for a man what uses perfume, nohow.

TEX lapsed into silence, fixing his eyes on the grotesque outline of a Joshua tree ahead.

"Yes sir," he mused after a pause, "they's hereditaments and impertinences pertainin' to them clothes by the creek, to their airs and assigns forever, what makes 'em too sacred to wear!"

The Next-to-Last Laugh

By

RAOUL FAUCONNIER WHITFIELD

A test pilot—the man who tries out new types of airplanes—has about the most hazardous job known—as witness this exciting story.

Illustrated by William Molt

Figures were running toward me. There was a loud boom—the finish of the Gull.

FUNNY things happen at Rook Field, and that fact isn't so surprising. All sorts of nuts try to put something together that will do something in the air that has never been done before—and if the boys think that the something has a third of a chance it's given a try-out. MacComas has a pretty level head, and it isn't every inventor who can get his pet theory into a hangar at Rook. But enough of them do to make things interesting.

Now Eric Burnson had a duraluminum-surfaced baby plane that was supposed to be a world-beater. After listening to what Burnson said it should do I got the idea that it hardly needed a pilot. I didn't say a thing. It was Joe Curtis who spoke up.

"We had one something like this baby, a year ago," he stated grimly. "But I was lucky—I happened to be flying the big ones."

Burnson was short and rather stocky. He had thin features, a high forehead, and very peculiar eyes—he seemed to be seeing right through things. They were gray, and the pupils appeared to be slightly dilated. He burned right through Joe's blue eyes, nodding his head slightly.

"Perhaps the designer of the baby plane was fortunate, too," he stated quietly.

Joe's face didn't change, but his eyes narrowed just the slightest degree.

"He was," he returned grimly. "He didn't go up in his ship—and Lew Bellows came down fourteen thousand in a loose-winged spin. We haven't had a tricky ship here, not one *as* tricky, anyway—until MacComas told us that—"

Joe stopped. Burnson smiled with tight-set lips.

"That my plane was accepted for tests, eh?" he finished. "Sorry—but can't you do a sneak?"

Joe flushed. "Don't have to go that far," he snapped. "I've already told Mac that I refuse to fly it."

That was coming back at Burnson pretty strong. I caught the faint flicker of rage that flashed in those gray eyes; then it was gone, and the inventor smiled coldly.

"That's your privilege, of course," he stated. "I've had the Burnson up two thousand. But I'm not qualified to test my own ship as thoroughly as an experienced pilot."

JOE CURTIS shrugged his shoulders. He looked Burnson squarely in the eyes.

"It would be a damned good idea," he said slowly, "if some of you fellows learned to fly before you started inventing!"

I started to cut in, to say something that might break the tension. But I couldn't think of anything decent enough. And Burnson came right back.

"The creative and the mechanical mind are quite different," he stated coldly. "A chauffeur seldom helps to improve the automobile industry."

And that got Joe. He's pretty much of a fighter, anyway. I thought for a split second that he was going to swing on Burnson. But he didn't. He just laughed.

It was one of those throaty, nasty laughs, packed with contempt, and I saw Burnson stiffen. Then there was a little silence, broken by the scraping of Joe's chair as he shoved it back.

"I'm not laughing at *you*, Burnson," he stated, his voice coldly amused. "I'm laughing at that crate of yours. And it isn't the last laugh, either. The public will give you that. I'm giving you the *next*-to-last laugh!"

Then he got to his feet, swung around and strode from the Field-office room in which the four of us had been gathered.

Burnson's face was white, and the hand that rested on the table which held his blueprints was clenched tightly. MacComas, the superintendent of the testing end at Rook, was frowning. A door slammed back of the departing Joe Curtis.

"He's off his feed," I suggested, after a little silence.

The Super shook his head.

"That isn't it, Al," he told me. "How about it, Burnson—has he any real scrap with you?"

Burnson shook his head. "It happens that I'm not crazy about him," he stated directly, "but I've never clashed with him—until just now. Never had much contact with him, actually."

MacComas looked at me.

"Want to do the work on the baby Burnson, Al?" he asked.

I hesitated—but not long. It's the practice at Rook to put it up to a test-pilot. Sometimes ships lay around in the hangars or on the dead-line for weeks before they get into the air. Taking off a trick ship for the first time is a big gamble. But I had a hunch that Burnson knew his stuff.

"I'll feel her out—this week," I said slowly, "if it's all right with Mr. Burnson."

Eric Burnson nodded. "I'm glad to have you work on my plane," he stated simply. "I suggested Curtis because he'd been doing a lot of small-ship testing. Naturally, I think he's wrong in figuring that the Gull wont pass measure."

I grinned. "It's all in the game," I stated. "And I don't want to live to be a hundred, anyway."

MacComas grunted. "You will," he said grimly. "Only the good die young!"

THIS Gull plane of Eric Burnson's was supposed to revolutionize the flying game. It was a very small single-seater, and it had been designed to adopt most of the principles of natural bird-flight. It was supposed to be able to get off a pocket-handkerchief field, and to land on building roofs. A graceful little thing it was—and it looked fast.

When it hit dirt the wings ceased to support the ship—and were planned to act as air brakes, stopping all forward motion. The elevators could be spread fan-tailed in flight. It was tricky—there was no doubt about that. And the trickier they are, the more dangerous they are; but if the ship was up to snuff it would move everything along fast—in the air.

"They grabbed you for the dirty work, I suppose," Joe muttered. "She'll fall apart in the air, Al!"

But I decided that I'd be sure and inspect my 'chute-pack before I took the Gull off. And I also decided that I'd get altitude without rocking the boat any more than I had to rock it. If I could get five thousand or better it wouldn't be so bad. I could take a chance on getting clear, at that altitude.

I was thinking things over when I climbed the stairs of Ma Gray's house, four miles from the Field—we haven't any quarters at Rook—and headed for my room. The door was partly opened, and when I got inside I found Joe Curtis sitting on the bed, a scowl on his face.

"A great guy, you are!" I stated. "You sure ran out of *that* job sweet and pretty!"

Joe swore softly. "And they grabbed you for the dirty work, I suppose!" he muttered. "She'll fall apart in the air, Al."

I grinned. "I'm being paid good coin for testing ships," I stated slowly. "MacComas accepted this one. Somebody's got to do the trick!"

"Well—" Joe lighted a pill—"that somebody doesn't have to be me. And it wont be you!"

I stiffened. Joe and I had been pretty thick for a couple of years, but we hadn't reached a point where we told each other what we could and what we couldn't do.

"No?" I questioned. "How come, Joe?"

He just smiled. "When do you figure on getting her off the ground?" he asked slowly.

"I haven't started to figure yet, Joe," I returned.

He chuckled. "The only reason I asked, Al," he came back, "was because that's a mighty intelligent ship—according to Burnson. And I've got some good cigars over at my room. Didn't want to leave a window open and have it fly in after the smokes."

But Joe wasn't fooling me any by using the funny stuff. So I gave it to him straight.

"Don't mix in on this deal, Joe!" I warned. "Mac passed the assignment to me—and I'm testing that Burnson plane. You've had your laugh. Now give Burnson a chance to have his."

Joe Curtis flicked the ashes from his pill. His eyes were little slits.

"It might not be a laugh," he stated. "Not for you, anyway."

I swore softly. "You're getting old and sentimental, Joe," I told him. "You do your stuff—and I'll do mine. Just because you turned Burnson down and I didn't—"

"You *did*," Joe interrupted grimly; "only you're not wise to that fact yet!"

AS I mentioned before—a lot of funny things happen at Rook Field. And some happen that aren't so funny. The morning after I had the little chat with Joe Curtis, MacComas called me to the Field in a hurry. I drove out, and caught him at his desk.

"Listen to this one, Al," the test-boss ordered, picking up a piece of white paper from his desk. "Just came through the mail, postmarked from the city. Typewritten and unsigned. All set?"

I nodded. Mac read in a low voice:

"'Take our warning and don't test Burnson's Gull. It's curtains for the pilot who rides her in the sky. She'll never get altitude for a jump. MacComas, don't be a killer!'"

Mac paused, tossed the note over to me. I read it carefully. Then I tossed it down on the desk again.

"Well?" I asked. "What about it?"

"Who sent it?" Mac asked me.

I shook my head. I thought of Joe Curtis. But Joe hadn't had time to get to the city, which was about fifty miles distant—not to get there and have the letter come back in the first morning mail.

"You win!" I stated. "Some crank, I suppose. Or maybe some ship designer who thinks Burnson might have the goods."

MacComas grunted. "I don't like the last line," he stated slowly. "I've never sent a man up in a ship that *he* didn't think was right. This Gull is the biggest freak we've had here in a long time. But somehow, I figure that Burnson—"

He stopped, and I finished it for him.

"Has the goods?" I asked.

Mac shook his head. "Not exactly that," he stated. "But he has enough to rate him a test. We haven't gone forward very far—in the air. Al, how do you feel about the Gull?"

I grinned. "I *want* to skyride her," I came back steadily. "I'm curious."

Mac nodded. "Well, I wanted you to see this note," he said. "She's ready for the air, isn't she?"

"She is," I replied. "I'm going to have a talk with Burnson this morning—and I'll bounce her around the Field a bit after lunch. May not get her up until tomorrow, though."

The test-boss nodded. "Take your time, Al," he stated. "And if you get feeling funny about it—just tell me."

I shook my head. "It'll be all right," I stated. "We may have a world-beater. I'll chase along and meet Burnson. Forget about the note, Mac."

He smiled, and I headed for the hangar at the south end of the Field, in which we were keeping the Gull. There were quite a few things I wanted to talk over with the piercing-eyed Burnson.

He was to show up at nine. But at ten there was no sign of the inventor. At eleven I called the small hotel in which he had been putting up, a few miles from the Field. They hadn't seen him since the previous noon. He wasn't at the Field, and I knew the man well enough to be sure he'd be on the job—with tests for his pet plane close at hand! He'd been working two years on the Gull, and had been dreaming about it for ten.

I GOT Mac, and we drove over to the hotel. After considerable talk they let us into his room. The bed hadn't been slept on. Everything was in perfect order. Burnson's bags and extra clothing—both were in the closet.

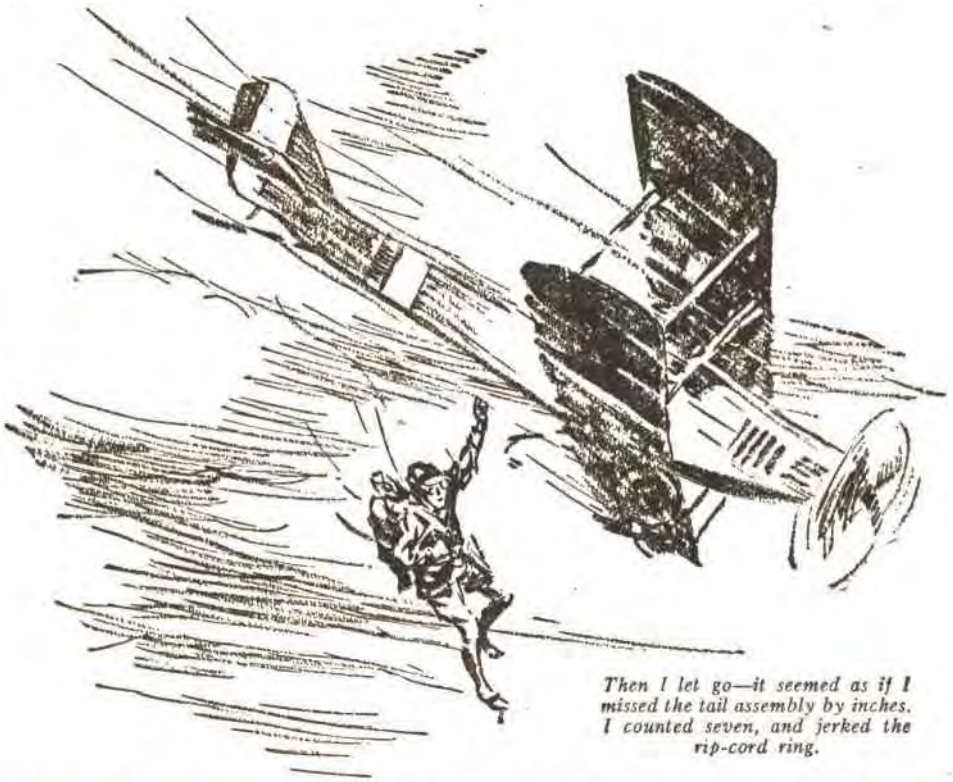
"Let's get back to the Field," Mac suggested. "If we don't locate him within a few hours there's only one thing to do."

We didn't locate Eric Burnson, and Mac called the police and told the story—at about three bells. And while he was doing it I suddenly woke up to the fact that I hadn't seen Joe Curtis around the Field. That *was* unusual. Joe loved his ships—he was always about. Not once in the last four months had I failed to see him, unless I knew where he was. I thought of his final words, the night before: "You *did!* Only you're not wise to that fact yet!" Meaning that I'd really turned Burnson down, as he had, only I didn't know it. And the "yet" was significant.

I shook my head slowly. "Joe wouldn't mess up a Government deal like this," I muttered to myself. "He isn't that dumb."

But I thought of the note. It had been written by some person who knew planes, and knew Rook. Burnson had disappeared—and Joe Curtis was not around the Field.

When Mac had finished giving the police



Then I let go—it seemed as if I missed the tail assembly by inches. I counted seven, and jerked the rip-cord ring.

the little information he possessed, I told him about Joe. It's all right to tell Mac these things—he understands. He shook his head.

"Looks bad," he stated. "Joe's gone and lost his head—that's all. He's been working too hard, and I didn't notice it. He's sore at Burnson, anyway. Never has liked him because he's been so sure of that Gull plane. And he thinks a lot of you, Al. He's done something—"

Mac broke off abruptly, staring beyond me, toward the door of the Field-office. I faced around—and into the room walked Joe Curtis. He was smiling. But he didn't say a thing. He half-turned toward the door—Eric Burnson was following him in!

Burnson's face was white. His eyes held an expression I couldn't quite fathom.

"Where in hell have you been?" Mac muttered, being the first to recover. "We've got the police looking—"

"I'm all right," Burnson interrupted in a low, steady tone. "There was an"—he hesitated, and his eyes flickered to those of Joe Curtis, and then went back to Mac's again—"an accident!"

"An accident?" I stared at the inventor. "What kind?"

"It happened to a friend of mine," Burnson stated, and managed a faint smile. But it wasn't a go. All three of us knew he was lying. His eyes showed it.

Mac shrugged his shoulders. He turned toward the telephone.

"I'll tell the police you're here," he stated. "Thought we'd better play safe. There's been some publicity about the Gull, and I figured some crank might have had it in for you."

Then Joe Curtis laughed. And I saw rage flash in Burnson's deep-set eyes. He was controlling himself with an effort, that was certain.

MAC made his report to the police. Joe grinned as he heard the test-boss state that there had been an "accident." Nothing serious, Mac explained. Everything was all right now. He hung up, and then faced us.

"Well," he stated, addressing the inventor, "you gave us a scare! But I suppose the affair is your own business. Al was waiting for you to— We want to get your ship in the air within a few days."

"I've changed my mind about the Gull," Burnson said, slowly and rather unsteadily. "Something has come up—and I've changed my mind."

That was all. There was absolute silence in the office. Mac was staring at Burnson, but my own eyes went from the inventor's to those of Joe Curtis. And Joe just sat there with a grin on his lean, browned face. Mac spoke first.

"Changed your mind?" he muttered. "What about?"

Burnson spoke more rapidly this time. Color was returning to his face, his thin features.

"*I'll* fly the ship on the first hop-off," he said quickly. "And then, if she seems to handle well enough—I'd like to have—" He hesitated, his eyes meeting mine momentarily—"to have Curtis carry on the remaining test work."

I stiffened. Joe pulled out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

"It's all right with me," he stated cheerfully. "Glad to try it, Mr. Burnson."

Mac frowned. I just looked at Joe through narrowed eyes. He lighted a pill.

"If she's right—suppose you take her up just before dusk, when the air's quiet," Joe suggested to Burnson. "Then I'll do some work tomorrow—if she's *still* right."

BURNSON'S eyes gleamed. But he just nodded his head. Mac looked at me.

"Al had the assignment," he commenced doubtfully, "and it seems to me that—"

"Show them the letter you got, Mac," I interrupted, and the test-boss handed it to Joe. Burnson moved to his side—they read it together. I watched Joe closely.

"Bunk!" he muttered. "I don't think the Gull's *that* bad. It sounds like a joke to me."

Burnson was muttering something to himself. I smiled grimly at Joe.

"You ought to know!" I told Joe, and walked out of the room. When I got outside, with the door slammed back of me, I heard Curtis laugh again. And I was very sure, then, that he *did* know.

But I couldn't figure the game out. Joe Curtis had come in with Burnson. And Joe was relieving me—and getting the test-job on the Gull. After he'd turned it down in the first place, he was taking it now. Why? And why, also, was Burnson letting him have it? Certainly the two men hated each other. They couldn't mask their feelings enough to hide that.

The more I thought of it—the more hot I got. It wasn't that I was crazy about testing the Gull. But I didn't like to see Joe step in and grab the job; not after what he'd said. And Burnson was letting him get away with it. And so would Mac. If the inventor wanted Joe—he'd get Joe That was almost a creed of the Field. But *did* Burnson want Joe?

"Not on your life!" I muttered, and pulled up short.

I'd been walking blindly along the dead-line, and I'd reached the hangar in which the Gull was kept. And that gave me the big idea. I didn't like those laughs of Joe's. They went mostly for Burnson, but they included me, too.

"All right!" I muttered, "we'll see who gives this baby the first test!"

And I headed for Burnson's duralumi-num-surfaced, fan-tailed Gull.

I HAD her on the dead-line, and was feeling out the controls, when I jerked my helmeted head and saw Joe emerge from the Field-office. The crew was back out of the way, and the engine of the little girl had revved up all right. We were set for the take-off. I'd have to pass up the ground-hopping, but that didn't mean so much, anyway. I had a pet 'chute-pack strapped to me, and was sitting on it comfortably.

Joe turned his head my way—and I waved a hand. He let out a yell that I didn't hear because of the throttled-down exhaust rumble, and leaped off the steps that led to the Field-office door. I saw Mac come bouncing out—and then Burnson. And I gave her the gun.

"The next-to-last laugh for Joe," I muttered; "the *last* laugh for *me!*"

She rolled. Out from the dead-line into the wind. She didn't need much ground on which to take off. I got her tail up, sitting tensely in the cockpit and saying a few of my favorite test-prayers. She skidded a bit, and I used the rudder to straighten her out. But she wasn't handling right. And for once the prayers didn't take.

We hit a ground-gust. Her nose dropped. I jerked the joy-stick back. The nose came up—but her tail dropped. She didn't zoom—she *did* skid. Her under-carriage struck; something crackled. I thought for a split second that we were going to crack up right then.

But we didn't. We got off—and this time we stayed off. The baby Gull climbed —climbed up into the sky minus most of her under-carriage!

I sat tight, and held the ship in a mild climb. Testing was out of the question

now. In a ship of the Gull's size loss of even a portion of the under-gear meant ragged flight. And the Gull was in the air now for the first time.

At three thousand I tried a mild bank —and she almost got away from me and slipped into a spin. But I managed to get her back on even keel again. Staring down and back, I got a glimpse of ground-crew men holding up the wreckage. As if I wasn't fully aware of the fact that I'd battered part of it loose!

At five thousand I got around in a bank, but the Gull's air work was sloppy, and she had a left wing-droop. The only thing that was functioning right was her engine.

"Looks like a hop-over!" I muttered. "Can't land this baby—not in this shape!"

The Gull was supposed to land slow, and on a small field. But not without undercarriage! I could risk a stall landing, but even then I'd crack up pretty badly. I couldn't see what was left below, but it was a sure thing that not much of the two wheels and the tail-skid remained. A 'chute-jump seemed the only way out.

I got two thousand feet more altitude. It wasn't the first time I'd been over the side, but the conditions weren't the best for a get-away. I'd have to handle the Gull as long as I could, and the cockpit was so tiny I'd have to wriggle out of it. But it had to be done.

ABOUT a half-mile to the north of the Field, figuring on the wind drifting me back toward Rook, I climbed the Gull at about a thirty-degree angle. Slipping the safety-belt, I squirmed out of the cockpit, holding the stick as long as I could. When I released it I had one foot on a wing surface, and as the nose dropped down I got the other one over. My left hand gripped a strut, the right one fumbled for the rip-cord ring, and found it.

Then I let go. It seemed as if I missed the tail assembly by inches. I somersaulted down, counted seven—jerked the rip-cord ring. The lead parachute got out—and then the bigger spread crackled in the air. There was a terrific jerking—the harness tightened about my body. And I was drifting now—drifting beneath the 'chute toward Rook Field.

Figures were running toward me as I neared the north end of the Field. There was a loud boom—the finish of the Gull. I wondered how Burnson would take it. And then I flexed my legs, made ready for the seventeen-foot-a-second contact with the earth.

I landed hard, and was out of the 'chute before it could drag me. Feeling pretty shaky, I sat down and dug a pill out of my khaki shirt pocket. And while I was lighting up Joe Curtis reached me.

HE stood looking down at me, breathless and scowling. I managed a grin.

"You damned idiot!" he muttered finally. "After all I did—"

Then he shut up. But that was enough for me. I was mighty curious.

"Spill it, Joe!" I stated. "What *did* you do?"

"I flew in and sent that note to Mac!" he stated grimly. "And then I cornered Burnson over in town—and made him take a drive with me, and give me a promise or two. He didn't want to do it—but he came through, finally."

I nodded. "Figured you did it, Joe," I stated. "But *why? You* were going to fly that ship."

"Like hell I was!" he came back. "Not until Burnson took off first. And I'm not so sure that he would have taken off. She was rotten underneath, Al—and I knew it. Burnson practically admitted it—this morning, after I stuck a gun under his face and got him out of town. He wasn't sure, of course. But he had to sacrifice something—to get what he wanted. And he eased up on the under-gear. Why, you didn't give it a hard rap, but it ripped right off! He nearly went crazy when he saw what had happened. Then he keeled over, fainted."

Joe shook his head slowly. "And after all I did—trying to keep you from breaking your neck—"

I chuckled. The other fellows were coming up now. "Guess he'll be more careful on the next one, Joe," I said. "If you hadn't been so high-hat—"

"You'd only have laughed at me!" Joe cut in. "Just because I turned it down you were sure I was sore because you grabbed it. And besides, it was only a hunch. Inspection didn't show any great weakness."

I grinned. "I was after the last laugh, Joe," I muttered. And then I got to my feet. "But I guess you get the candy—with the *next-to-last* laugh!"

Joe just grunted. "With a head like yours," he stated sarcastically, "you wouldn't have needed a 'chute-pack."

I let it go at that.

The curious tale of the so-different Boyd cousins, and of the murder which Martin was accused of committing.

A Matter of Habit

By

PETTERSEN MARZONI

"I want you to take a little ride with me," the first man said.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

WITH a look of distaste, Martin Boyd brushed a soiled collar from his hairbrush lying on the cracked top of an old-fashioned bureau. With precision he laid the brush in the top of a suitcase, the contents of which were arranged with an exactitude that would have made any woman gasp with sheer wonder. He looked around the room, the distaste growing as he viewed carelessly scattered clothing. The morning sunlight, filtering a sickly yellow past unwashed windows, streamed through a jagged tear in the cheap shade. He closed the suitcase, arranged its straps meticulously and deposited it beside him on the floor. His hat pulled down firmly on his head, he addressed a huddled lump in the middle of the bed:

"If you intend to get to work, you had better get up, Grant. I'm leaving you now and my alarm clock is going with me."

A grunt from the pile of bed-clothing was the only acknowledgment he received. He walked over to the bed and shook the recumbent figure. Red-eyed and tousled of hair, a bleary face lifted itself for a moment from the pillow.

"What you want?" a hoarse voice demanded. "Get the hell outa here! I know when to get up!"

"I'm not bothering about your getting up. I just wanted to tell you I'm through. I waited half the night for you to come in so I could tell you. Aunt Jane meant well when she arranged for me to live with you, but I can't stand it any longer. This filthy mess is too much for me. Get somebody else if you want to have help on the rent, but don't expect me back. Do you understand?"

"Huh?" Some of the sleep was banished from the hoarse voice. "So you're walking out on me! That's good. Shut the door after you, Efficiency." The head dropped back on the pillow, there was a burrowing in the covers and it was out of sight. Boyd stood for a moment, shrugged his shoulders, grasped his bag and left the room.

He picked his way down the side-street, a street just one step above squalor. With a breath of relief he turned into a shady road ten minutes later. All the marks of yesteryear's fineness were about the avenue, but the first signs of decay were visible in the rococo houses of the 'nineties, standing primly back in their yards. Boarding-houses—but not yet had they reached the point where signs must be swung outside to catch the transient eye. He knew instinctively that among the structures struggling to maintain their gentility were a few which housed ladies of uncertain age but most certain airs who agreed to accept "paying guests." These, however, were be-

yond his means, so he turned into a brick walk, leading up to a substantial frame house surrounded by a neat lawn, though its grass was thin in spots. A card in a window announced discreetly, "Rooms."

A NEAR-BY clock boomed seven times as he reached for the brightly polished handle of the bell pull. He hesitated for a second at the earliness of the hour, but a stirring within came faintly through the door, so he tugged firmly. At home the jangle of the doorbell had annoyed him and it was a relief not to hear it clanging through the hall now. But perhaps whoever was moving about within could not hear it either, he thought, so he pulled again. When a third tug at the handle brought no response, he rapped impatiently on the door. It opened slowly and a sleepy servant stared at him stupidly.

"Is Mrs. Gentry awake? I am Mr. Boyd, who spoke to her about a room yesterday."

"Yes suh; rest yourself." And the maid shuffled off down the hall. Prim and precise was Mrs. Gentry, and such was her greeting of the new roomer, whom she preceded up the staircase to a room. It was as pleasing to his eye in the clearer light of morning as it had been the afternoon before. After Mrs. Gentry had run up the shades and supplied him with a latchkey, she walked out primly.

Boyd placed his suitcase carefully in the closet, regretting there was not time to arrange his belongings. He tried the taps of the washstand in the corner and counted the towels on the tiny shelf. A dangling loop at the window caught his eye, and he hooked it back into place, smoothing out the folds of the curtain carefully. He sighed with pleasure, as he locked the door to his room—his own room!

"What's the big hurry, Efficiency?" Grant hailed him at noon. The cousin was lounging around the doorway of the stairs that led to the operating room of the Ivy telephone exchange a block above Edmonds, Wholesale Groceries. Martin was hurrying uptown to get a soap-dish before the end of the lunch hour, so he greeted his cousin curtly.

"Don't let me stop you, Rollo," Grant called after him. "That's the way the big boys always get ahead! You keep it up and I bet you're a bookkeeper inside of twenty-five years or maybe fifty. Me, I start driving a truck tomorrow and I'm going to be up seeing life!"

Truck driver—traffic would be more dangerous now! And hanging around the telephone exchange—so he could talk with the girls who flitted down for a sandwich and a digestion-destroying drink. Probably want to date one of them for a trip out to Barbecue Sam's. How could anyone live that way? So his cousin held Martin Boyd's musings for a while, but Grant Boyd and his lack of ambition were forgotten as he hurried up the steps of Mrs. Gentry's house about five-thirty that afternoon.

An hour later he let himself out again, bound for a neat little restaurant he knew. It was near the public library, where reading claimed him until nine o'clock.

THE only things Grant Boyd ever read were the subtitles in the movies and, in summer, the baseball results. Tonight he was nursing a grouch. One of the janes at the telephone exchange had given him a "standup." He dropped down to the Random Billiard Parlor. Luck was with him and he might have eased off his grouch, if Joe Thomas hadn't cut in for the last hour and cleaned up half his winnings. Joe brought with him a quart of liquor, almost warm from the still and he divided it freely among Grant and his three companions. When the bottle was empty they all adjourned to Barbecue Sam's.

The scent of locusts in the air, the stirrings of faint breezes that late spring brought, a night drenched with dark pricked out by star points, the hum of motors along a smooth roadway—these made a more fitting setting than Barbecue Sam's deserved. Here the underworld, the half-world and the foolish of the upper world met and rubbed elbows. Under a grove of oaks, whose majesty must have sneered at the raucous blare of the phonograph and the smooth, half-lighted floor, couples welded almost into one strutted and swayed their way about.

Grant's gang had no janes and knew none of those that were there. But Joe did know one prosperous-looking citizen who commanded a ringside seat around the tiny dancing pavilion. Joe whispered to him and together they disappeared for a few minutes; then Joe returned to the gang with two full bottles and the citizen returned to his seat.

Half an hour later Grant rose from his secluded table and made his way roughly through the scattered tables to a line of taxicabs waiting in a parking space out-

side the enclosure. Joe and the others followed; all piled into a taxi. With many oaths Grant and two of the others climbed out, demanding more room.

As the first taxi drove off, Boyd's companions stumbled into the one next in line. It followed the first back to town, while Grant swayed drunkenly in the shadow of an unkempt hedge which surrounded the roadhouse. He stood there rocking on his heels, trying to decide what to do. Finally he turned and lurched through a gap in the hedge back into the region of tables. Uncertainly he made his way through them, to the secluded table where Joe and the others had been with him. There was a bottle back there. Perhaps he could find a drink in it.

If there had been a drink, it was gone now—down the throat of a husky individual who was now seated at the table, just removing the bottle from his lips.

"What the hell you doing with my liquor?" Grant demanded sourly.

"Well, if it aint the sheik!" the man laughed up at him.

"Don't you laugh at me!" Boyd snarled, as he recognized an acquaintance of the telephone girl.

The stranger's laugh was more scornful. "So Norma give you a standup? And you out here claiming other people's hooch! Be yourself!"

ONLY half of the crowd under the lights jumped at the shot that broke in through the noise of the phonograph and the drunken laughter. Many thought it a backfire from the highway outside, but Barbecue Sam started toward the yard from his kitchen at the sound of the report. Two or three were already up and moving in the direction of a secluded table, hidden in the shadow of the trees. They did not notice a figure running toward the hedge skirting the highway. Sam saw him, but kept on his way toward the table in the shadows.

Sprawled awkwardly face down across the table, was a man, strangely immobile. The first to reach him stood back, but Barbecue Sam went up to him and pulled him by the shoulder. A bit more gently he lifted the head so quiet on the table. He lowered it suddenly when the beam of a flash-light showed a bullet-hole in the forehead.

"Oh, my Gawd, it's Con!" a woman screamed, and the telephone girl shrank back against the enveloping crowd. "Lemme get outa here. Lemme out!"

The clash of gears and the noise of a racing engine out front could not be heard by that group crowding and milling about the table, while Barbecue Sam attempted to drive them back. The chauffeur of the taxi speeding back to town strove to keep his eyes and mind on the road; tried to forget the thing that was boring into his back. The hand that held it there trembled a little, but the thing did not move. The chauffeur did not need to see it to know that it was a gun. The man who pressed it so firmly against his ribs seemed to know only one word—*"Faster!"* The chauffeur dared do nothing but obey, trusting that he could keep the road. His mad passenger had awakened him from a doze by punching him in the back with the gun and commanding him to drive to town.

As the taxi bumped wildly over a line of street-car tracks and for a moment hung on two wheels, the driver started to turn his head.

"Keep your eyes where they belong!" the voice behind him ordered. "Slow down a little now, and don't try any funny stuff if we pass a cop. Keep on to Water Street, and look where you're going."

It was nearing midnight and traffic was light. A lone policeman, straightening his uniform before a shining plate-glass window, was passed. Pedestrians were few, and in short seconds the retail district, with its shining lights, was behind them. The car swung into the dimness of Water Street. A light halfway down the block struggled vainly against its lurking shadows. The voice issued another order as the taxi made the turn:

"Slow up when I tell you to—don't stop. When you hear the door slam step on her and keep going. Don't try to look around. Slow her!"

THE car slackened its speed, the driver heard the click of the catch and a second later the door slammed to behind him. Afraid not to obey orders, he pressed the accelerator, but as the car leaped ahead the chauffeur gave one swift look around. In the dim light of the street lamp he made out a well-set-up figure in a gray suit and cap speeding up the steps of the house directly south of the lamp. The driver hastily turned his eyes back to the road and kept straight ahead, as the man reached for his pocket.

"What you want? Get outa here! I know when to get up!"

Boyd let himself into the house quickly, and as silently as creaking stairs and uncarpeted floors would permit, made his way to his room. He threw himself down across the bed, but was up again instantly. He couldn't stay there. The taxi had kept straight ahead and the driver hadn't looked at him, but Joe and the rest knew he was out at Barbecue Sam's, they knew Con was playing his girl. He had to get rid of the gun, too. Where could he go to fix an alibi? The battered clock—its alarm long stilled—ticking away on the rickety bureau, registered eleven-fifty. The cars were still running.

Carefully, as he had entered, Boyd made his way outdoors and down Water Street. He wanted to run but was afraid to risk it. That driver might be hanging around. Still, taxi-drivers were wise and minded their own business. That one was on his way back to Barbecue Sam's by now. Barbecue Sam's—that was it!

Ten minutes later Boyd was mentally urging the street-car on, sitting huddled in one corner of the seat beside an open window.

Corner after corner came in due procession; then the car began to speed across the open fields between the fringes of town and Barbecue Sam's. Boyd straightened up and leaned out of the window. Only the section of the car reserved for negroes carried passengers, and they were intent on their own affairs. The conductor was up front talking with the motorman. Boyd leaned farther out and the pistol described an arc through the blackness, dropping into a patch of dusty weeds.

There was a crowd gathered about the bright lights of the dance-floor when Boyd eased himself unobtrusively into the rear of the enclosure at Barbecue Sam's. He stopped for half a minute to slow his breathing, hastened by his short run from the street-car tracks a hundred yards away. Quietly he approached the crowd, reached its fringes, became a part of it. A man beside him glanced at his wrist-watch—twelve-twenty! Forty minutes ago this subdued crowd was dancing.

Boyd saw two or three people he knew, and he spoke to them. "Too bad, aint it?"

"It's just terrible," a woman answered. "To think I almost saw it!" she shuddered.

"Too bad it had to happen out at your place, Sam!" Boyd had made his way deliberately to the proprietor.

Barbecue Sam turned and stared at him.

"I thought I saw you go back to town with Joe and your gang?" He put it as a question. "When did you come back?"

"Come back? I aint been anywhere but here all the time! Joe's an early bird, but not me. Who do the cops think did the shooting?"

"They aint done any thinking to me yet," the proprietor answered him shortly. "I want 'em to get that guy what did it and get him good. Shooting around my place—after I was raided a week ago, too!"

BOYD moved on, pleasant, sympathetic. He made the complete circuit of a throng gathered about the lights where the detectives were questioning the waiters and those at tables nearest the shooting. Everyone saw him. He made certain of that.

The detectives finished their investigation and arose to go. The crowd made way for them, Boyd in the front rank of one line of the human lane. The officers walked straight ahead to question the taxi drivers waiting outside. Groups started for the entrance where cars were parked. It was a quiet crowd now, all of the hilarity silenced in them by that one sharp report.

Boyd attached himself to one of the groups wherein was an acquaintance. He managed to remain with him when they crowded into a car, and quite casually he asked to be dropped off in the downtown district. He went directly to the Random Billiard Parlor. Joe was there, sprawled in a chair, giving drunken directions to the players at a near-by pool table.

"Whatcha run off an' leave me for?" Boyd demanded of him. "You oughta stayed. Somebody bumped off Con Strickland. Shot him right through the head."

"The hell you say!" Joe straightened up in his chair. "What for?"

"Don't know. The cops are looking for the guy now. He made his get-away before anybody seen him. Musta worked fast."

The players left their table to hear and they stood and talked about the shooting until the proprietor drove them out. Boyd walked home and went quietly to bed.

"It's airtight," he commented to himself in the dark. "Even if they come after me, I'm in the clear. What the hell did he kid me about my girl for?"

The sun was once more streaming through the tattered shade, when he was awakened abruptly by some one shaking his shoulder.

"What do you want?" he growled sleepily. "I told you to quit waking me up, Efficiency!" He stared up belligerently, but instead of his cousin's face there was a strange one staring down at him. It was heavy of jaw and keen of eye. Nor was it exactly a strange face. He had seen it before. Where? Barbecue Sam's! Then the night rushed up out of memory and he was wide awake. They had come after him.

"That's a good name for you, Bill," a second man broke in with a laugh. "Efficiency! Tell him what you want, Eff."

"I want you to take a little ride with me and Mr. Anderson," the first man said. "My name's Morton. Maybe you've heard it." The heavy jaw moved just enough for the words to slide out.

Anderson and Morton! Sure, Boyd had heard of them! No King Brady or Nick Carter, either of them, but slow and sure followers of the obvious whose percentage of convicted arrests was staggering. Everybody in town knew of Anderson and Morton.

"What do you want me for?" Boyd demanded it sharply. Everything was all right. It was airtight. Nothing to worry about.

"For shooting Con Strickland at Barbecue Sam's last night." Morton was a direct-actionist.

"Whatcha trying to do, kid me? I was out there last night when you boys were there. Why wait till this morning to pick on me and ruin my beauty sleep?"

"Maybe you was, but you gotta ride anyhow. Move your wrist-watch and let me fix these bracelets."

"There's no need for these things." Boyd looked down at his cuffed wrists. The shining steel circles had been slipped on so deftly by the heavy Morton he hardly knew they were there. "I aint going to argue with you. I'll go right along. Take 'em off."

"After the ride, after the ride." Morton unlocked one of the rings as he spoke. "Go ahead and get dressed now. We'll stick around sorter close. Not that I want to embarrass you or mistrust you, but I got a little warrant here."

NOT until they were in the car would Morton listen to Boyd; then he settled back comfortably against the cushions. "All right,"—he turned to his prisoner,—"shoot!"

Boyd told his story smoothly, recounting the events of the night without a single slip or stumble; all the events—save one. The story was finished in the investigation room at headquarters, where the detectives

"My Gawd, it's Con!" a woman screamed.

received it without comment, except to write down the names of the persons Boyd stressed in his story. They were three in number, and Morton and the prisoner waited, while Anderson collected them.

A man unnamed by Boyd was waiting at headquarters. He was the first to enter the room two hours later, and Morton watched Boyd closely as the man came through the door. The prisoner gave no sign of surprise or fear. Barbecue Sam, Joe and a casual acquaintance, one of the group about the floor the night before, followed with Anderson. Boyd spoke to them all, trying to keep his eyes from the first man to enter. There was something familiar about him—just *how* familiar, Boyd knew a moment later.

"IS this the guy that made you ride him to Water Street last night?" Morton asked the stranger without any preliminaries.

"I don't know." The man eyed Boyd intently. "Same sort of clothes, same build, but I didn't see his face. I wouldn't swear it's the same man, but he looks like him."

"Is that what you dragged me up here for, because I look like somebody?" Boyd demanded indignantly.

"Shut up, you!" Morton silenced him. Then he questioned Barbecue Sam.

"Yes, I saw him out at my place last night," the latter answered. "He and this guy here,"—pointing to Joe,—"and two or three others was eating and drinking earlier in the evening. Then they all went home, leastwise I thought they did. That was about eleven-thirty. About twelve-thirty this Grant Boyd runs into me when you was investigating and said he hadn't never left. I saw the guy that did the shooting sneak out, and this taxi driver says he drove him home."

"What time did you drop this man in front of the house on Water Street?" Morton turned to the chauffeur.

"I don't know exactly. About midnight, I guess."

"When did you see him?" Morton asked the acquaintance who had been at the roadhouse.

"Very shortly after the shooting. After you had come. I don't remember the time," he answered uncertainly.

"Did this Grant Boyd come back to town with you?" Morton demanded suddenly of Joe.

"No,"—waveringly. "I come in about eleven-thirty and went to the Random Billiard Parlor. Musta been about one o'clock when Grant come in and tells us Con Strickland's shot. That's all I know about it."

Morton turned to Anderson.

"Want to ask 'em anything, Tom?"

The latter shook his head.

"You can all go now but Boyd. But be ready to answer a subpoena as material witnesses. Clear out!"

As they filed out, Morton rolled a cigarette and lighted it. He sat down in a chair that groaned with his weight as he tilted back against the wall.

"Airtight," he half-mused. "It looks like a good alibi. All 'cept one or two little things, Boyd. You knew Con Strickland; you knew his gal; then the taxi-driver lets somebody out in front of your house, and he goes up the steps and lets himself in with a latchkey!"

"Well, what about it? I aint the only man in there. It's a rooming-house."

"Yeh, but the landlady told us this morning you and your roommate was the only men renting a room from her. Nothing else in the house but women."

"She told you I had a roommate?" he asked with an air of hesitation.

"Who is he?" Morton shot the question out as he let the legs of his chair to the floor with a thump.

"My cousin, Martin Boyd."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. He didn't come home last night."

"Where does he work?"

"At Edmonds', where I do. You've probably cost me my job."

"To hell with your job!" Morton stared at his prisoner silently for a full minute. "Does he look like you?"

"About my size; I don't think he favors me in the face."

"Was he ever at Barbecue Sam's?"

"Once or twice with me. I don't know about other times. Maybe."

"Did he know Con Strickland?"

"Yes."

"Tom!" Morton turned to his partner. "You go get me a warrant for Martin Boyd at Edmonds'. I'll be with you by the time you get it." Once more Morton stared silently at Boyd as his companion left the room.

Anderson was folding up the warrant when Morton joined him five minutes later. "Got it? Then let's go," he said briefly and without further comment they went out to the car at the curb.

Anderson and Morton conducted their business very quietly at Edmonds'. Martin Boyd was in the car before he was quite aware of what had happened. Bewildered, silent, he stared at Morton's portly figure. They were taking him to jail! The thought really did not register. It was something beyond his comprehension. Jails were places they took criminals. He was no criminal!

He had been sitting quietly at his desk, framing a letter to the country trade, when the sales-manager called him into his office. These two strange men were there, and the sales-manager looked at him curiously.

"These are officers from the police department. They want you, Boyd," he announced simply, then waited.

What had Grant been up to now? That was Martin's first thought. Had he got into trouble?

"What do they want?" he asked. It was embarrassing—still, the sales-manager knew Grant!

"We want you for the murder of Con Strickland," Anderson announced.

THAT was the beginning of his incomprehension. The heavy man had snapped something around his wrist and pulled at him. He stood dazed.

"Better go along, Boyd," the sales-manager's tone was kindly. "Don't make a fuss. I will see Mr. Edmonds. We will help you, if you are innocent. If you are innocent, there is nothing to worry about. Take things calmly."

Then they led him out. Not through the office. He was glad of that, but through a side door which opened into the corridor leading to the office steps. Uncertainly he stumbled into the back seat of the car outside, Morton beside him, while Anderson climbed into the front seat. The car started off, and he spoke for the first time.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To jail," Morton replied noncommittally.

"But I haven't done anything."

"You'll have a chance to prove that." Morton puffed at a cigar-stump.

"What did you shoot him for?"

"I haven't shot anybody. I never shot a thing in my life."

"What'd you have against Con Strickland?"

"Nothing. I never saw him but twice."

"Then you do know him?" Morton was stolid as he asked the question.

"Yes, but I didn't like him much."

Morton glanced at the prisoner, whose face was twisted with the effort of com-

prehending what was happening. How his answers might implicate him did not seem to matter.

"When did you see him last?"

"What?" Boyd apparently was startled at the question. "Oh, about two weeks ago. My cousin brought him up to our room."

"What time did you go up to that room last night?" Morton sat up a little.

"I didn't go."

"What?" Morton perceptibly straightened at the question, Anderson half turned his head. That was what Grant Boyd had said. "Where did you go?"

"I went to my room on Broad Street."

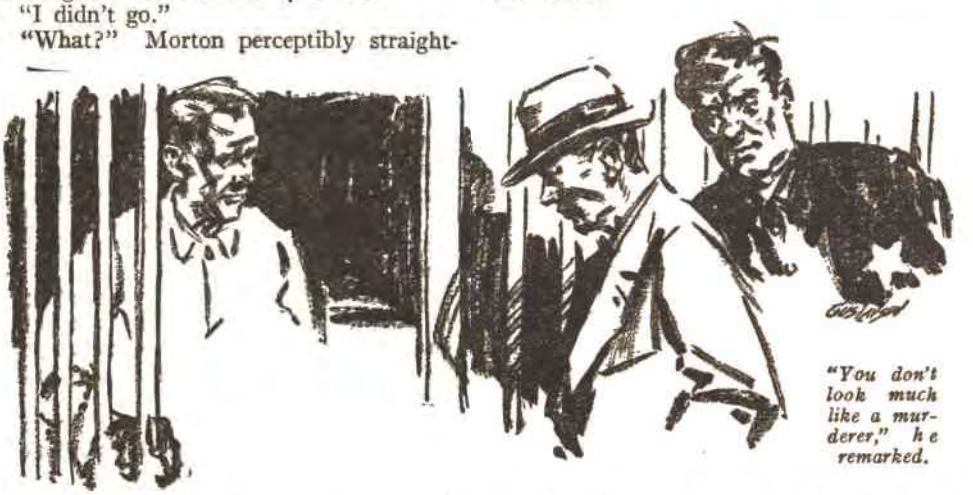
Anderson swerved the car sharply to the curb in front of the City Hall.

"Come on—we get out here." Morton started to climb out of the car. Clumsily Boyd followed him, trying to keep the bit of steel around his wrist hidden under the cuff of his coat. That did not seem to bother Morton. They led him up the short stretch of alley alongside the building and turned in at an unmarked door. It was a dismal door, that seemed embittered at its place in the scheme of things. He climbed the stairs with them, and Morton led him into the investigation room, while Anderson turned off to make his report to the desk sergeant.

"Tell Bob I'll bring him in later for mugging and his fingerprints," Morton called after him, and Anderson nodded. Once inside, Morton unsnapped the steel ring from Boyd's wrist. "Sit down," he ordered casually, and the boy dropped into a chair, rubbing his wrist, examining it to see whether the handcuff had burned its mark.

"So you've got two rooms?" Morton asked from behind the smoke of a fresh cigar, whose fragrance was not improved by its newness.

"No, I only have one room. I moved in yesterday morning. I couldn't live— I wanted a room to myself. I always have wanted one, where I could keep my things just like they should be. I never have had one before."



"You don't look much like a murderer," he remarked.

"Why did you pick out the day you killed Con Strickland to move?"

"But I tell you I didn't kill Con Strickland! I never killed anybody. Why do you think I did? Who said I did? I don't know anything about Strickland."

"All right," Morton interrupted him as Anderson rejoined them. "What did you do last night? Tell us all about it."

There was little to tell. He told them how he had gone straight to his room from the office. He recounted in detail the unpacking of his suitcase, the arrangement of his clothes and few toilet articles. Then he went to the Bon Ton Café, he explained, where he ate a small steak and potatoes, finishing off with cherry pie and a cup of coffee. From there he went to the Public Library and read, just as he did every night. The clock was striking nine when he let himself in the house on Broad Street.

"Did you see anybody?" Morton asked.

"No. There was just a dim light in the hall. Then I went up to my room and went to bed. I got up at six o'clock this morning and went to the Bon Ton for breakfast. Then I came on here to work."

"When did you know Con Strickland was dead?"

"I didn't know it until you said I did it. I didn't see the morning paper."

"Hum," Morton chewed on his cigar. "Who runs this dump on Broad Street?"

"Mrs. Gentry is the landlady's name." Boyd's tone was acrid, resenting Morton's descriptive term.

"Well, we'll go over and see her. Come along now and look pretty for your picture. We'll give you a place to lay down and think it over until we get back."

BEWILDERMENT, which had been almost erased during the investigation, was succeeded by a daze as Martin Boyd tried to bring orderly thought from the chaos of his mind. There was a confusion of men around him, making him to stand facing a camera, then turning so that only the side of his face showed. Another man came up and led him to a table, frowsy with bedaubed pieces of paper and inky pads. He was made to press his fingers upon the pads and then upon a sheet of paper, marked into spaces, with numbers and printing.

Morton and Anderson took charge again and led him back down the steps he had climbed so recently. They passed through the dismal door again, turning up the alley for a few steps to another door that was grim in its gray-stained solidity. A kindly-faced man in uniform looked at the warrant, then at Boyd.

"You don't look much like a murderer," he remarked as he led the way over to a heavy door, which fitted so closely into the wall of the room it seemed a part of it. "Yet you can't tell much about looks, unless you wear skirts—then you know you are going to get off!" He swung open the door. "Hey, Mose," he called through another door, made entirely of heavy bars of steel. "Come and get one. Put him off by himself. Morton and Anderson holding him for murder. Don't want him bothered."

Mose came, and the steel door clanged shut behind him and Boyd. The grayish light grew fainter as the second heavy door thudded into the beveled frame. Dully, Boyd heard the lock grating as the warden turned the key.

"Who'd you croak, kid?" asked Mose casually. Raggedly clad, shoes scuffling from a flapping sole, Mose was a trusty. They gave him the job every time he came back.

Boyd did not answer him. He looked curiously at the figures sprawled about on blanket-covered ledges in the steel-barred cubicles they were passing. Wretched figures they were, as, sleeping or awake, they disclosed themselves. They were criminals —and he was one of them. . . . .

"That's all right. Don't talk if you don't want to." Mose was not easily hurt. "Morton and Anderson'll make you talk, though. Tough pair, them birds. I don't want 'em after *me!*"

And he fumbled at the lock of a cell with his key. The door swung open. "Right in here," he pointed. Boyd went in, still walking in that half-daze. The door clanked shut behind them. He stood for a minute staring at it, even after Mose was gone. Then he sat down on one of the blanket-covered ledges and buried his head in his hands. Think it over, the detectives had told him. Think what over? He hadn't done anything!

Anderson and Morton were not stopping to think. They were on their way out to Broad Street. When they reached it, Anderson slowed the car so that they might take note of the numbers.

"There it is." He turned into the curb and stopped. "He sure gave us the number all right."

They went up the walk together and Anderson pulled firmly at the handle of the bell. Away back down the hall there was an answering jingle. Steps shuffled up to the door, and the maid who had answered Boyd's knock stood there.

"Did ya wanta see somebody?" she asked.

"That's all right, Alyssum," Mrs. Gentry called from down the hall. "I was so surprised to hear the bell, I will answer it myself. What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"You got a roomer named Martin Boyd?" Morton turned over the lapel of his coat, so that a badge gleamed dully. Mrs. Gentry gasped, then turned white. "What has he done?" Her mouth was a thin straight line. "I knew something was wrong when I discovered that he had not been in his room last night. I should have demanded references, but I felt—"

"How do you know he wasn't in his room?" Morton interrupted her.

"Come with me and I will show you why." She led them up the stairs, talking as she went. "I should have known he was too mealy-mouthed when he first asked for a room. And why did he move in here at seven o'clock in the morning? I thought

it strange that he went out so early. I don't know why I didn't think about it when he didn't come in after eleven o'clock. I was home all the time after that but that's just the way, you try to be kind to strangers and they treat you like this." She was opening the door to Boyd's room as she spoke. "There it is. That is just how I found it this morning. There has been no one in here since he left yesterday afternoon. He unpacked his clothes then, because I examined the wardrobe and the closet. But he did not spend the night here. The room has not been disturbed."

MORTON strolled about the room. The bed was without a wrinkle. The towels were folded neatly on the shelf above the washstand, which was dry and unsoiled. Nothing was out of place in the room. The shades were drawn down evenly. The most fastidious housekeeper would have been pleased.

"Thank you, ma'am." Morton turned to Mrs. Gentry. "Sorry to trouble you. He did tell the truth when he said he lived here."

"He never lived here!" Mrs. Gentry denied vehemently, as they were starting down the front step. "He merely brought his clothes here. I shall have them removed instantly."

"Better wait and lemme tell you where to send them," Morton replied. "I don't know just what his address is yet."

"What did he do?" For the first time Mrs. Gentry wondered why the officers were looking for Martin Boyd.

"He killed a man," Anderson called back, and he laughed at the shriek of horror which Mrs. Gentry emitted and punctuated with the slamming of her front door.

Boyd was still huddled on the edge of his bunk, his head buried in his hands, when the noise of the bolt of the cell door aroused him. He lifted his head and saw Mose. Behind him were Anderson and Morton. They came in and Mose locked the door. He lingered.

"Get the hell outa here!" Morton barked at him. He seated himself on the bunk. "Well, we found your rooming-house all right," he addressed Boyd. "Where were you last night?"

"I told you where I was. If you went there you have found out that I stayed there last night."

"We did go there. Why didn't you go home last night?"

"I tell you I went there!" Boyd turned on him furiously. "I was at home at nine o'clock and I went to bed. I didn't leave my bed until almost seven this morning. They could tell you that."

"They said you hadn't been home. Said they hadn't seen you."

"They didn't see me, maybe, because I didn't see anybody. But I was there last night—I tell you I *was* there!"

Morton looked at him closely, watching the earnestness with which he proclaimed that he had been at home. There was a hint of anger in his voice, too, anger rising above his bewilderment, anger that he should be doubted.

"What'd you do? Sit up all night?" Morton asked him quietly.

Boyd stared at him stupidly. Then his anger grew. "What do you want to joke with me for? Of course, I didn't sit up. I went to bed and slept until six o'clock this morning."

"You did, huh! Then who made your bed?" questioned the detective sharply.

"I did," Boyd replied in a matter-of-fact way. "I always make up my bed, because most people leave wrinkles in the sheets. I couldn't make it up in the other room because my cousin lived with me. I have my own room now, so I made my bed."

Morton eyed him narrowly.

"Where'd you wash?" he asked with apparent irrelevance.

"At the washstand, of course."

"I s'pose you folded your towel up nice and neat, too, didn't you?"

"Certainly. I left it hanging on a chair at first, but it made the room look untidy, so I put it back on the rack."

"I'll be damned!" Anderson almost breathed it. "He's a nut!"

Morton nodded his head slowly. "Sounds plausible. Wish I'd felt that towel. Probably dry by now. Listen, kid, all this sounds all right to me, but it aint enough. You aint going to be able to prove to no jury that a twenty-year-old kid's that orderly. Didn't you do anything else that would show? You oughta written your landlady a note so she wouldn't have fainted when she seen your room clean. What else did you do?"

Boyd stared at him, trying to think. He had something tangible to grasp at now.

"Yes, I did do something else!" he said suddenly. "There's an old-fashioned bell at the house. It's one of the kind where you pull a handle fastened to a wire that

runs through the hall to a bell. The wire comes down by the door. This morning I saw it was broken, so I fixed it; wrapped the ends together."

Morton got up from his seat suddenly. "You are the first man I ever saw what got into trouble from being orderly." He said it almost musingly. "Think that over! Come on, Tom, let's go."

Mose let them out. Boyd stared after them, wondering what Morton meant by always telling him to think things over!

ANDERSON and Morton had to wait at the house on Broad Street, while the maid went to find Mrs. Gentry. The landlady had not come at the sound of the bell. She came to them after an interval—more tight-lipped than before, defiance in her attitude. "What do you want now?" she demanded.

"How long has your bell been outa order, Mrs. Gentry?" Morton asked her.

"About three weeks. Why?"

"When did you get it fixed?"

"I didn't have it fixed. The first time I heard it was when you came this morning. I was so surprised I went to answer it myself. Why?"

"When did you try it last and find it wasn't fixed?"

"About eleven o'clock. I went out with some friends about eight o'clock. When we came back I discovered I had left my keys in the house. My friends pulled at the bell in hopes it would work and wake up Alyssum. But it didn't, so one of them had to go around to her room in the basement, and he had the hardest time wak—"

"That was eleven o'clock last night—you would be willing to swear to that?"

"Sir,"—Mrs. Gentry drew herself up,—"I am not in the habit of having my word doubted or not being entirely sure of my statements."

"Thank you, ma'am." Morton backed off hurriedly. "Thank you!" And he hurried down the walk with Anderson.

The latter climbed into the driver's seat of the car. "Well," he remarked, "I guess that lets the kid out."

"Yes." Morton bent over the flame of a match to pull at a cigar. "We'll give that Grant boy a little more talk now."

"What made you hold him after he had such a good alibi?"

"That's it." Morton puffed at the cigar, which refused to draw. "His alibi was too *derned* good!"

Send Us Your Tanks!

A story you will not soon forget

By

JAMES SAYRE PICKERING

Formerly Sergeant, Hq. Co., 327th Tank Bn., A.E.F.

" . . . Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it; he died
As one that had been studied in his death
To throw away the dearest thing he owned,
As 't were a careless trifle."

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

"I NEVER forget a face!"

Tom Babcock and I were just going from reveille formation over to mess in the little stone stable when he turned to me and said that, out of a clear sky. I knew what he was thinking about, though, because I had been thinking about the same thing. It was the new Captain we had gotten that morning, and I could have sworn that he and I had seen each other somewhere before. If I had seen him, then the chances were that Tom had seen him too, because we had been together pretty constantly during the last ten years. We'd been room-mates at school and then at college; we'd both had jobs in the same office, and we had left those jobs to join the Corps together. It was the same way in the army. We had swindled the billeting officer out of a small room in the same building where the company orderly rooms were, and we shared it, together with the company's briquets of coal. We were both buck privates, high in the rear rank, and we hoped to stay that way for the rest of the war. We lacked any ambition to hold higher rank, and besides, a private has a cinch; no responsibility, not too much work, if he knows how to go about it, and nothing to

"You took a crack at me before—now it's my turn to do the talking, Larkin! Go up there where hell's poppin', and get killed—go because I order you to go!"

worry about except himself. We were satisfied, except that we'd been a long time getting into the midst of things. Two months in France, and not under fire yet!

Tom went on talking, as he usually did.

"No sir! Once a man's pan has flashed before these observant eyes, it remains forever printed on this memory, wax to receive and marble to retain! 'Camera Eye Babcock' is what they used to call me in Scotland Yard, when Sherlock Holmes and I were in the habit of showing up the local boys! Good old Sherlock! But—I know that guy! And from his general aspect, I know no good of him! Give me but a few short hours, and you shall have his identity, past record, aliases and what not! Come on, Johnny! Step on it! I heard rumors of pancakes this morning!"

We did have pancakes, but they weren't so good. While we ate, I kept trying to place this fellow. His name was Cole, and he had a very red face, with light eyebrows that stood out plainly against his skin. He was about my age, as tall as I, but considerably heavier. His neck bulged out over his collar, and he pursed up his lips importantly when he talked, and between times too. He was a snappy officer, though; smart in the way he handled the company.

"He'll probably turn out to be a roarer," said Tom. "One of those full-blooded lads who always fly into tantrums about a dirty gun or some other such triviality. A loud, cussing roarer. I predict no benefit to the outfit from him. I am prejudiced!"

We went back to the billet to make up our bunks, both of us still trying to think where we had seen Cole. Tom was just in the midst of folding his blankets, and was standing there with his arms stretched out, one corner of his blanket in each hand, when he remembered.

"Eureka!" he shouted. "I bring you glad tidings of great joy! Johnny, listen! Hearken back to our bright college years!"

"Have you placed the swine?"

"I have, and you have labeled him! Do you remember when you and I were illustrious seniors, and when I, by political corruption and astute management, had won for you the proud position of chairman of the student board of government?"

I nodded.

"Well, do you remember one Henry Cole, who smuggled the chorines into the men's dormitory—no doubt to read the boys to sleep—and how he got caught? I'll bet that's our Henry!"

It all began to come back to me now. This Henry Cole had been a nuisance—a large, independent sort of an ass, who used to do the rottenest sort of things for the sake of being thought depraved and

reckless. This last escapade of his had attracted so much of the wrong sort of attention that the faculty had suggested, very circumspectly, that he be fired by the student board, from whose edict there was no appeal. It was done; his resignation was dictated to him and accepted amid loud, enthusiastic cheers. I remembered now!

"By the Lord Harry! That's the man! That tomato color! That fat face! Those tow eyebrows! Holy cat! I hope he's forgotten me! Maybe he wont know me when he sees me. Can you beat that for luck? 'We, who are about to die, salute thee!' "

"It's the same bird, all right! Remember how he howled when he found he was being given the air? The son may remember you, but I hope he doesn't know me! I didn't have anything to do with him. You didn't know him before he was hauled up before the board, did you?"

"No. But he was sore enough then to carry the grudge for the rest of his life! He'll probably find out, sooner or later. Can you imagine it? Of all the variegated luck that I've had in this man's army, that wins! Well, it isn't all beer and skittles!"

"What the hell is a skittle, Johnny? Tell me! You're educated and I've always wanted to know."

JUST here Keyes, the top sergeant, stuck his head in the door and called " 'Tention!" We snapped out of it and stood by our bunks, and he and Captain Cole came in. Cole said "Rest!" and we rested. Keyes always brought inspecting officers into our billet because we kept it halfway decent. Cole looked around and seemed satisfied. It was the same Cole, right enough. I knew him when I saw him close. I hoped he wouldn't recognize me in these clothes.

"Just getting acquainted, men," he said. "What are your names?"

"Larkin, sir!" I said, and Tom told his. Cole looked at us both, but showed no signs of having seen either of us before.

"You seem to keep yourselves pretty well here. A neat billet!"

That was like him! I suppose he thought we'd get down and kiss his foot for a word of praise. Then Tom, as usual, spilled some beans.

"Order, sir," he said, "is nature's first law!"

Cole raised his white eyebrows and looked at Tom sidewise from under his helmet.

"H'm! College man?"

"Yes sir!"

"You too?" He turned to me.

"Yes sir!"

"H'm!" he said again. "That's all! Come on, Sergeant!"

I turned on Tom and bawled him out. He never could keep his mouth shut, even in his sleep.

We met Keyes as we were leaving the billet, and he stopped us.

"Say!" he said. "What'd you fellas want to be kiddin' the new C. O. for? He didn't open his trap after he left here, and he went right downstairs and dragged out your records. He certainly dug up the dope on you two! Slip me the dirt!"

"It's nothing, Sarge, old bean!" said Tom. "We used to know the skipper slightly—oh, very slightly—in civilian life. He was probably just checking up a faint recollection. Did he seem perturbed?"

"Well, he wasn't too damn' well pleased! He shook his head and hummed around and wanted to know what kind o' soldiers you were and so on."

"I hope you gave us a good report."

"You guys could 'a' been non-coms long ago, if you gave a damn. I don't see how you stand this buck private business!"

"Easiest job in the army, Sarge! I didn't enlist to work! I came in to slaughter, to wade in gore!"

"Well, you may get a chance at that too, 'fore very long. News is leakin' out that we're goin' up in reserve pretty soon, and we might get into action. I have a hunch it's so!"

"I hope you're right! Let's go away from here any time! And by the way, Sarge, speaking of hunches, as you were, I have one that Captain Henry Cole, of the 388th Tank Battalion, Company C, may try to make things a bit unpleasant for us two, and for Johnny here, in particular. Now, I don't want to holler before I'm hurt, but keep your eye peeled and don't let him get away with too much!"

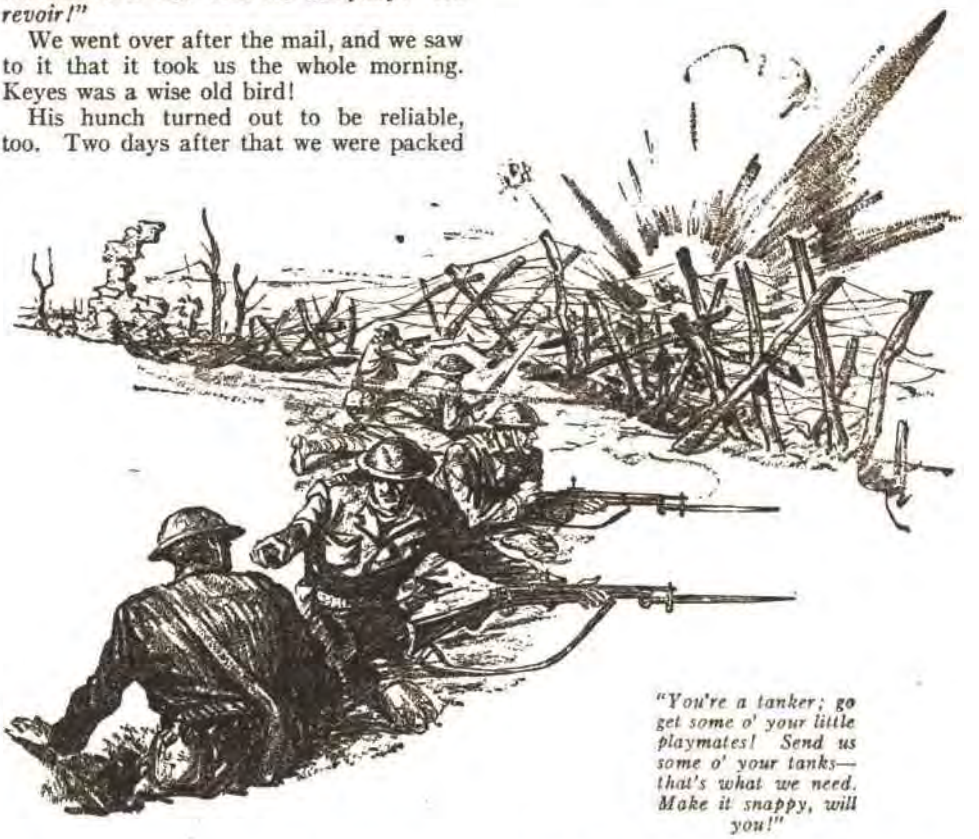
"You needn't to worry! I run the duty roster, and if he drills you, he's got to drill the whole outfit. He aint said a word you could hang onto, but he acted so damn' curious, I just had to come and find out. Just you keep out o' trouble and leave it to me. S'pose you slope over to the main camp now, and get the mail, till he gets quieted down a bit."

"Attaboy, Sarge! Tell Cole, of the U. S. A., not to overdo himself this morning,

because we're not with the company! *Au revoir!"*

We went over after the mail, and we saw to it that it took us the whole morning. Keyes was a wise old bird!

His hunch turned out to be reliable, too. Two days after that we were packed



"You're a tanker; go get some o' your little playmates! Send us some o' your tanks—that's what we need. Make it snappy, will you!"

up, loaded into trucks and shot way up-country. The brigade to which we were attached for duty was set to work on the line somewhere northeast of Toul, and we hung around the rear, waiting until they called on us to get 'em out of trouble. You see, the action was going so fast, doughboys advancing on the run, almost, that the tanks couldn't keep up with it. Those old boats can't make more than two miles an hour over torn-up country. So we stuck around in one little shot-to-pieces town after another, moving up nights as the battle drove on; and we could hear the guns, now, up ahead of us. Some of them, the long-distance ones, were even behind us.

I had a very peculiar feeling when I heard the first. Kind of a prickling all over, and a desolate and lonesome sensation right down in my stomach. I tell you, I wished I was somewhere else! Cole hadn't bothered with us. He was too busy, I guess, and we kept out of his way.

Our company had to send an orderly up to the Brigade Post of Command every now and then, and that's when we began to realize that we were really in the war. Shetrone went up first, and he came back in a day and a half when Collins went up to relieve him. We asked Shetrone all about it, of course, but he didn't say much. Just shook his head, and there was a peculiar look in his eyes. He must have had a pretty thin time. . . . . Collins didn't come back. He was our first casualty.

Duggan, who went up to relieve, or rather to replace Collins, came back and reported him killed in action. I felt squeamish then. Here was a man we knew; a man we had talked to day after day, eaten mess with, gotten drunk with; and now there wasn't any Collins any more. We began to get used to it after a while, though. We kept about a mile and a half behind the post of command, and the things that were going on up there were as hidden from us as though we'd been back in the States; but we kept sending up runners, and once we

sent up three in one day. They were supposed to carry messages back and forth between their own outfits and the P. C. Our company wasn't in the line, so they used our men wherever they needed them.

Wentworth went up and stayed there. Toomey went up and came back with his head in a bandage the same afternoon, and they took him on back to the hospital. Donaldson, Murphy, Potoschnick and Gibbs all caught it up there, and one day a stray shell came over and laid out three more, right in the street. We got shelled every day, now, but we had gotten used to it because it came at a regular time. This one wasn't scheduled, however, and it caught us all unprepared. We had lost fifteen of our hundred and seven men in five days, and we missed them. Keyes sent them up strictly according to the duty roster, each man in his turn; and while he didn't say anything, we could see that it wasn't making him feel any too good. Cole drilled us and inspected us; and although he looked hard at Tom and me sometimes, he never said anything.

THEY had sent us the tanks we were supposed to take into action, and we spent our time getting them ready. The mechanics tuned up the motors, and Tom and I, having taken to the machine-gun end of it, were told off to mount the Hotchkisses in the turrets. We were working out there one morning when Cole came out and stood watching us. There wasn't anybody else around. I was inside the tank, getting the gun-mount ready, and Tom was outside, handing up tools and waiting with the gun until I asked for it. Cole walked up and Tom saluted him. I didn't see him at first. I got the mount ready and stuck my head out of the turret.

"All right, Tommy!" I said. "Pass her up!"

Tom picked up the gun and heaved it up. I rested it on the door to get a fresh grip, and then is when I saw Cole. He was looking hard at me, swaying back and forth a little as he stood there with his hands behind him. I had my cap off. It was the first time he had seen me without it. I looked at him, and he looked at me.

"Larkin," he said suddenly, "you told me you were a college man!"

"Yes sir!" I knew it! He knew me when my hat was off!

"Northern, '16?"

Good night! There it was!

"Yes sir!"

"I thought so! Do you remember me?"

"Yes sir!"

For once in his life Tom had nothing to say, thank God! Cole looked at me hard, in both senses of the word. He opened his mouth, and his voice was thin and sharp.

"I remember you too, Larkin! I just wanted to make sure, that's all! Just wanted to make sure!"

He smiled, then, and his smile lifted the skin on my back and made my scalp tingle. Tom moved, and I think he started to say something, but Cole turned and marched away. Then Tom spoke.

"'Smiling, the boy fell dead!' What an evil eye! He knows, Johnny, my boy!"

"*You're* all right!" I said. "That is, if you have sense enough to keep your mouth shut! I can see things coming *my* way, though! I wonder what he'll do?"

We finished our job without talking much. Both of us suspected what was going to happen, and we met Keyes as we were coming in. He confirmed our suspicions.

"Johnny," he said, worried, "something's up. The C. O. took the duty roster away from Furness this afternoon, and I heard him slate you for a job. I heard him dictate the order, so that Furness could change his report. I hate to tell you, but I think you're down for a runner. It wasn't your turn yet. I'm sorry, Johnny, but I can't do anything. I hate like hell to send the boys up on that damn' job, but it's got to be done! It would 'a' come sooner or later anyway. Maybe it'll turn out all right!"

That "maybe" didn't sound so good to me! The runners had been bumped off just about one hundred per cent in the last few days. Tom was angry.

"Damn him!" he said. "The dirty pup was out at the tank lines this afternoon, and admitted he knew us. I'll tell you, Keyes: Johnny, here, had him thrown out of college for bringing a couple of bats into the men's quarters! That's the kind of a swine he is! We knew him the minute we saw him! That's why he was so damned curious about us! If you get hurt, Johnny, I'll kill—"

I shut Tom up. It was my affair, and I didn't want him to get mixed up in it.

"Thanks, Sarge!" I said to Keyes. "I've got to take it, I guess."

"I'm sorry, Johnny! It had to come sometime, though. Good luck to you!"

AFTER mess that evening, when the enemy guns had finished their regular evening vespers, the orderly came up and

told me that the C. O. wanted to see me in the orderly-room. I went up and knocked. Cole told me to come in. He was sitting alone there at his desk. I saluted him. He didn't bother to return it. His tow head was familiar. It was the first time *I* had seen him without his cap since we had met again. He looked up at me, and it wasn't a pretty look.

"Larkin," he said, "I remember you! You were the pious president of the holy board that fired me out of college! You did a good job, didn't you? Well, here's your reward. They've just killed Willis up at the P. C., and you're going up tomorrow to take his place!"

I didn't move. There wasn't any sense in my answering him. I didn't dare speak for fear of getting myself in more trouble, and he was certainly the boss right then. He leaned over his desk toward me, and stretched his hand so far over it that he had to lean sidewise in his chair.

"You're going up there, Larkin, and you're going up out of your turn, and you're going because I say so! I want you to know that! You took a crack at me, before, and now it's my turn to do the talking! Now *you* see how it feels! Go up there, Johnny Larkin, and be a runner!"

He began to shut his hand slowly, and he looked up at me from under those white eyebrows of his, and I could see his eyes shining red in the candlelight.

"Go up where hell's poppin' and get killed! And go because *I* order you to go! Don't forget that! *I'm* responsible! God! But wasn't it a chance that sent me to the company you were in!"

His hand closed to a fist now. I could see the knuckles shining white under the red skin. I had closed my own fists long ago, to keep from poking one of them into him. His face was terribly red, and his mouth writhed and his voice was a kind of a hoarse roar. I had grown cold all over, and at first I was afraid, horribly afraid; but then I remembered that I had been in college with this thug, and I began to get mad. I could hardly see him, and I dug my nails into the palms of my hands. I knew that if I started anything, that it would be meat for him.

"Go up and be a runner!" The man was actually slavering. "They've gotten every one we've sent in the last four days, and I hope to God they get you! Now get out!"

He half stood up, at this, and leaned way over the table with his jaw stuck out. I didn't say anything or do anything, but just stood there while the fog rolled away from me. What a cheerful devil he was! Then I reached down inside me, and gathered up all I had and put it into one sweet smile! I filled it full of contempt and pity and superiority, and I loved it! It got him too! I could see the veins beating in his temples, and I saluted again, taking no chances, turned as snappy a right-about as I ever did, and went out.

OUTSIDE, Tom was waiting, and we went off together. I told him about it. I was as weak as a cat, and I had to wipe the sweat from my forehead.

He poured forth his soul in a prayerful voice for about fifteen minutes, concerning his remarks with Cole's history, his dubious parentage and his probable future.

"Now I feel better! Is there anything we can do?"

"Not a thing!"

"How do *you* feel?"

I felt all right, and told him so. I was scared, of course, but that was only natural. I hadn't ever been closer to the front than we were then, and I didn't know much about it, except from hearsay. We talked pretty late that night, and I got up early, had breakfast and reported out. . . . .

I had about a mile and a half to go, and I took what used to be a road for about half that distance. It wasn't very light yet, and the morning was quiet back there. Up ahead, where I was going, there were a lot of noises and lights. The road was full. Not many cars, except ambulances, but men were carrying up ammunition and boxes, and ration details were just coming back. There was one outfit, infantry, that passed me, coming out of the lines. They had just been relieved, I guess, and they were pretty well shot. They just dragged along at a shuffle, looking straight ahead, and they carried their rifles as though they weighed a thousand pounds. Their faces were terrible—drawn and lined and gray; and they seemed drugged. They were in rags; and those rags were a mess of mud and blood. My heart was in my throat as I stood off to watch them. I saluted the officer with them, for if ever men rated a salute, those men did! He never even saw me. Just stumbled along, looking right through me.

An M. P. directing traffic showed me where to go. I turned off the road and struck across an open piece of ground.

Pretty soon, just about daylight, I came to the beginnings of a trench. It was just a shallow ditch at first, but it got deeper and deeper as it went. About half a mile farther on it began to be pretty well ruined. It had been a German trench, and faced the wrong way. I found the Post of Command by falling into it. It was a dugout, also once German, and lay open to the direction our attack was going. Shells were falling rather close, and they hurt my ears. Just before I came to the dugout, one fell in the field. It was a new sensation to me. I was watching the field, and suddenly a big piece of it flew up into the air with a sort of double thump and roar. Then it settled back again, the way dynamited cliffs do in the movies, the smoke drifted away, and there was a big hole in the ground.

A LIEUTENANT met me in the dugout and I reported to him. He told me to stick around inside until I was needed. It was a big place when you got into it. There were three colonels, two captains and a brigadier-general there beside the lieutenant, and there was a man at a telephone and another at a typewriter. I saw that one of the captains was a tank officer, and I looked to him to give me my orders.

I'd just settled down in a corner out of the way when a man showed up at the door. He reeled into the dugout, saying "Brigade! Brigade!" in a very quiet, but terribly excited voice. He was dirty and wild-looking, and he carried an automatic in his right hand. The lieutenant jumped at him and snatched the gun away, and the man just stood there. He shook all over. The officers looked up at him, but none of them spoke. The lieutenant took him by the arm and shook him, hard. That seemed to pull him together a bit, and he blurted out his message.

I didn't hear it except that it was something about B Company being held up and asking for orders. The lieutenant let go of his arm and pushed him over to the corner where I was. He slumped down nearly on top of me and just sat there, shaking so that he could hardly breathe. I watched him for a minute, wondering if I couldn't do something for him; and then suddenly he fell over against the wall. I was just going to call out, when I heard him snore. He was sound asleep! Nobody seemed to bother with him. They were all bent over the table, talking.

Just then another man stepped in at the door. He was smoking a cigarette, and he just stuck in his head and said "Brigade?" as polite as you please. He reported to the lieutenant and began to give him the same message that the other man had. The lieutenant stopped him, and pointed to the sleeping soldier.

"I got all that," he said. "The other fellow got here. What's going on? What did you see?"

"Mostly machine-guns, sir. Artillery don't bother us none, and them Heinies is meat for us when we c'n get at 'em. The damn' woods is lousy wit' machine-guns, though. Cut us up some, gittin' through."

"All right. Stand by to go back. How is the strength of your company?"

" 'Bout half gone, I sh'd say. We had to lay down two or three times, 'count o' them pill-boxes. They cut us up. One lieutenant's gone; my corp'ral's gone; first platoon's damn' near gone. Cap'n's still there, but he's hurt."

One of the other officers turned from the table and spoke to the runner.

"Take this message to Captain Wills. Tell him to stay where he is and to dig in until the artillery can knock out those machine-guns. Tell him to report himself wounded and to get to a first-aid station. Tell him to turn over the company to Lieutenant Fox. Got that?"

"Yes sir! Cap'n Wills sh'd dig in till the artillery c'n put down them pill-boxes. He sh'd go back to a dressin'-station an' let Lieutenant Fox take the comp'ny."

"Right! Get going. . . . . Wait! Tell this man where your outfit is."

The captain pointed to me. I went to the door of the dugout with the runner. He pointed to a little patch of woods that I could just see through the haze a half a mile away.

"See them woods?" he asked. I nodded.

"They's a little gully just beyond 'em, straight through from here. Comp'ny's in that!"

"Right! I see!"

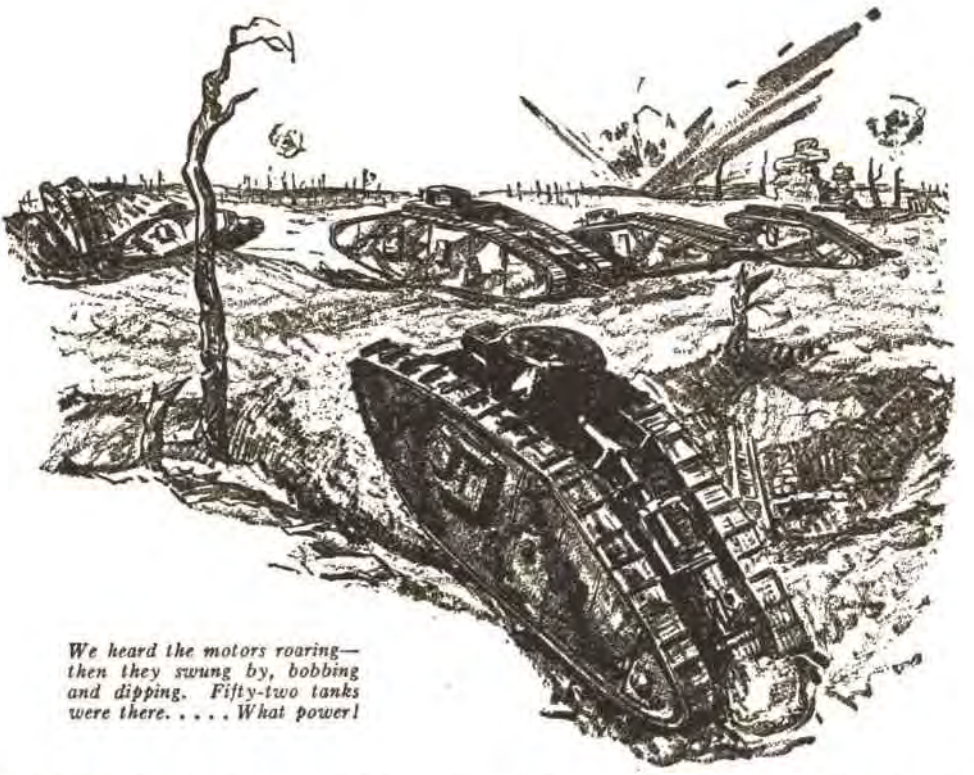
He left then, starting off across the slope in front of the dugout at a lope. The lieutenant turned to me.

"You give him five minutes' start," he said, "and then go to his company with the same message. He might get hurt on the way. Did you get it?"

"Yes sir!"

"Repeat it!"

"Captain Wills is to dig in until the artillery can knock out the machine-guns.



We heard the motors roaring—then they swung by, bobbing and dipping. Fifty-two tanks were there. . . . . What power!

He is to turn over his command to Lieutenant Fox and go to a dressing-station."

"Right! Get going!"

I HATED to leave the shelter of that dugout. The field across which the other runner and I had looked was throwing itself up into the air with astonishing liveliness, and of course the noise was terrific. There was, first of all, the deep thunderous undercurrent of the big guns, their separate explosions running together into a shaking rumble. Over them, rushing with screaming haste, were the shells which they sent, passing back and forth through the air above. Then there was an obbligato, faint from where we stood, but plainly audible—a ceaseless, wild, syncopated tattoo of machine-gun fire. All this infernal symphony was punctuated by shell bursts, *sforzando*, in the fields and in the grove ahead. I tasted a curious metallic taste, and my belt was loose around my waist. I pulled my helmet down, futilely, and started across to the little woods where the company was.

The noise seemed to numb me. It was so fierce as to be tangible. I was swayed, physically, by the short, sharp bursts as by sudden winds; and soon, every time I saw a shell strike and burst, even so far away as a quarter of a mile, I ducked convulsively. I had to force myself to think, all the while, that Cole would rejoice if I showed yellow, and I also imagined that everybody I ever knew was watching me, and I didn't have the courage to turn back.

I was well down the slope now, and I began to pass the bodies of those who had gone that way before. All the dead *I* had ever seen, save for two or three at a distance, had been lying in serene and calm repose, surrounded by banks of plaintive flowers; but these poor devils among whom I was running showed all too plainly with what terrific wrenches their lives had been dragged from them. The brassy taste grew stronger in my mouth, and I was afraid I was going to be sick.

Something snapped above my head, just as though some one had clapped his hands behind me. I had slowed to a panting walk, but this mysterious noise held all the terror of the unknown, and I ran again. I heard it several times, and it was not until I got to the trees, what was left of them, that I learned what it was. Something cracked against a trunk close beside me and went on past with a high whine. I knew then, with a wrenching stomach, that they were bullets, and in such fashion did

I learn that high-velocity bullets do not whistle until they ricochet. I feared those that might be coming my way lower down, and ran half doubled over.

The wood was being shelled, and several times a whistling roar made me slide down, flattening myself on my face. I was shaken by the bursts, and once I was covered with dirt and bark, and a tree near me burst, for an instant, into livid flames. There was a shouting in the air, but a tremendous shouting not made by voices. Some of the men here were not dead, but were agonizing, each by himself, in a hell far beyond the dreams of the most morbid Puritan spellbinder. One man raised himself up on his arms, his head sunk between his shoulders, as I passed. He did not look at me, and I dared not stop. There were so many! I could not stop for one! I began to look for the gully, and just as I was about to give up in despair, I heard rifle fire to my left, and rolled in among the men. They were lying prone, shooting out in front, but I didn't look to see at what they were firing. I slid down beside one of them. He turned as I came up, and spoke to me above the tumult.

"What's up?"

I LOOKED at him. His unshaven face was blue where it wasn't gray. The collar of his tunic was thrown open and a bloody bandage was tied about his neck and shoulder. His uniform was caked with mud and stiff with blood, and beneath the rim of his helmet, his eyes were wild lights sunk in black circles.

"I want Captain Wills!" I said, when I could get breath.

"I'm Captain Wills."

I looked at him closely, and saw that he was an officer. He carried an automatic and wore high boots. I gulped and blurted out my story.

"I'm from the Brigade. You're to dig in and wait here until the artillery can smash the machine-guns. Then you're to go back to the dressing-station and get fixed up. Lieutenant Fox is to take the company."

"Who told 'em I was hurt?"

"Your runner."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. He left the P. C. before I did. I haven't seen him since."

Here I had to stop. I turned away and was very sick.

"Huh!" Captain Wills grunted, either in disgust or sympathy, at my plight. He shifted his position to his good elbow. He reached out with his bandaged hand and tapped my collar, where the little bronze button showing my corps was fastened.

"Listen! Lieutenant Fox is dead. I'm the only officer left in the company. If we move out of here now, the whole damn' outfit is gone! You go back there and tell them not to turn the artillery loose on this section. The target is too close to us. All we need to make this scrap a success is to have some wild gunners shooting down amongst us! Send us some o' your tanks! That's what we need! This place is crummy with concrete pill-boxes. You're a tanker!" He stabbed at my button. "Go get some o' your little playmates and get us to hell out o' here! And make it snappy, will you!"

I drew a long breath and I felt my scalp prickle at his mention of tanks. A burst of fire ahead knocked all thought out of me for a moment, and I hugged the dirt.

"That's the kind o' damn' thing we're up against! Go on! Get out o' here and tell those damn' brigadiers to send us some tanks!"

I started. I slid out backwards, ducked around a tree and ran. I ran all the way up the hill and got to the dugout where the P. C. was, without a breath left in me. My outfit was going into action!

The lieutenant shook me just as he had the first runner, who was still asleep in the corner, and I gave him my story in gasps. The tank captain heard me, and was in action before I had finished. He stepped over to the brigadier, spoke to him, got a nod, and then dictated an order to the clerk at the typewriter. He pulled the sheet out of the machine before the clerk could reach it, and the brigadier signed it. Then he stepped over to me.

"Get back to your outfit! Give this to Major Carter! Tell him to come a-runnin! Then you come back here! Get goin'!"

I trotted that whole mile and a half with the order in my hand. I had to show it to the M. P. before he'd let me by. My chest burned and I felt like Pheidhippides when I got back to the tank lines. Several of the men standing around shouted at me, but I didn't have wind or time enough to answer. I pushed open the door of the battalion orderly-room, and stood in front of Major Carter. He was sitting at his desk. I didn't salute him—I just fell on him, and he snatched the paper from my

hand as I waved it at him. All I could say was, "Hurry!"

He shoved me to one side as he ran for the door. It was pretty to watch him work. He had four orderlies out of there before I hit the floor, and I was just getting up when I heard the companies going by at the double, their feet stamping on the ground. The officers were snapping out commands, and then the door opened and the company commanders came in, buckling on their sidearms. Cole looked at me, and his face was a sight to see. His eyes bunged out of his head, and his hands shook so that he could scarcely fasten his belt. Carter ripped out their orders, reading from the slip I had given him, and they turned to go. Carter drew a long breath and turned to me.

"Tell me!"

I told him all I could. He knew the ground and nodded as I talked. He put on his close, leather tank helmet, bit the end off a big cigar with a jerk of his head and stepped out. He nodded up toward the front.

"Tell 'em we're comin'!"

The men were already in the tank lines when I left, and I didn't get a chance to see Tom or Keyes. I ran again up the road, and told the M. P. that the tanks were coming. He grinned.

"Let 'em come!" he said. "I wont stop 'em!"

I got back to the P. C. and found the whole crew outside, waiting, looking up over the hill. I reported, and hadn't gotten the words out of my mouth when we heard the motors roaring. The first tank showed up over the hill. It looked as big as a house, and we watched it come on, its treads lying down in front of it. It slewed off, suddenly, and showed the rest of them behind it, in travel formation. The first one lurched over the rise and came down with a run, clanking. They were making time. The boys must have had their throttles wide open.

They came right up to us and then swerved off on a long slant for the woods. The first one came to our trench, overhung it for an instant, and then smashed down in it. It clawed at the bottom and rose slowly out in a splatter of mud and clods. The next followed and the next, each tearing down a bit of the bank until they had reduced its sharp declivities to two gentle slopes. They made an unspeakable noise, but the kind of a noise that made us want to yell and shout! My throat tightened as I watched, and I felt some one grip my shoulder. It was the tank captain. His eyes were all lighted up and shining, his mouth was open, and he roared in my ear: "What power!"

*

THEY all swung by, bobbing and dipping, each one with its gun muzzle sticking out of the turret, ready! I counted them. Fifty-two tanks—the full strength of the battalion, were there. Fifty-two tanks, painted with spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs; thirteen to a company, including headquarters, and all following suit. They must have pressed repair-men and mechanics into service, to take the places of our casualties. Every once in so often, one passed us with the officer of the platoon or company riding on the rear chute, and they waved to us as they passed. I didn't see Cole, but he must have been there. When the tanks got into action, these men would hop off and run between them, directing the attack. Not a sweet job!

The last one crashed through, and out in front they began to deploy, swinging farther and farther to the left of the lead tank until they were in line. A shell burst among them and hid two or three in its smoke for an instant. My heart took a jump. In my excitement, I hadn't thought of that! They would catch it hot too, and Tom was in there, somewhere! So was Cole! But Cole was outside!

The line swept on, and just before it disappeared in the haze, we could see the officers trotting out to their positions. The smoke hid them. The noise of their passing was merged with other noises and was lost. The tank captain and I turned and looked at each other, and I drew in the first full breath I had taken in fifteen minutes. He stuck out his hand, and I stuck out mine, and we gripped so hard we hurt each other.

We went back into the dugout and found the orderly who had come in that morning still asleep through all that racket, and the lieutenant sent him out to his old company.

"Tell Captain Wills, when you find him, to consolidate with the other companies of the regiment and to go on after the tanks to H-32, and dig in with the others on that line. Tell him to send a man back, when he gets set, to guide his relief in."

The runner went off, and the lieutenant gave me the same message. He added:

"You'd better get back to your outfit when you see them. I imagine you'll be moving up again, and they may need you! Good luck!" He grinned at me as I started out. The field wasn't so bad now. The shells still fell, even thicker than before, but the machine-gun bullets were gone. I ran down the slope, and on the edge of the woods I saw my first tank. It was laid out —wide open. I didn't dare stop, but I could see that it had a heart painted on it—my company was diamonds. Two more were in the woods, and another one right in the gully where the company had been. That one was a diamond, and I couldn't look at it. Some more of the men I had been living with! I felt gone inside; but I had no idea, then, what was coming to me. I hadn't seen any of the officers, yet, though it was a hundred to one that some of them were lying among that terrific welter of bodies through the field and the wood.

The gully was empty, so I struck on. The pill-boxes were ahead, and they were horrible! The tanks had gone around them or over them and had cleaned them out from the rear with machine-gun fire. One of them, almost the last one, had evidently been successful in stopping a tank by some sort of fluke. The machine was in front of it and almost on it. The tank had a diamond painted on it, and I passed close enough by it to see that there were two figures on top of it. I went over to it. I hated to go, but some fascination drove me on. The back of a man, stooping over the tread, still stood there. I crept around to the other side and saw what had happened. The side of the tank had been blown out, evidently by the explosion of the gas-tank. It had been burning so recently as to give out heat that I could feel from where I stood.

ONE figure was half in and half out of the turret, and the man whose body was propped up against the tread had died with a grip on the arms of the man in the turret. He had been trying to drag him out of the little hell of that flaming gas-tank. The door in front had swung open, and a third figure sat inside, still at the controls.

I went up, driven by this horrible desire, and saw what I had to see. The less said about the condition of the three, the better. The bodies were cooked, but enough remained for me to see plainly that the figure on the tread, that man who had so evidently given his life to try to save the gunner, was Cole!

I choked and ran from the place! What horrible justice and what a death! All that I knew of him had been rotten; all that he had ever done to me had been the result of a fierce and blind hatred; and he had died so! And he had sent me, that morning, years ago it seemed, to die, myself!

I GOT to the top of the rise, and found Captain Wills' company there. I gave him my message. It was nearly dark then, and I heard, suddenly, through the smother, the roar of motors from in front. The tanks were coming back. The infantry scrambled to one side, and I stood up, waving my arms at the tanks until one swung over beside me and stopped. The door in the turret flew open. A face, black with powder, streaming with sweat and ineffably weary, looked out. It was Keyes! He spoke, and his voice was hoarse.

"Get aboard, Johnny!"

I swung up, burning my hand on the hot exhaust pipe as I did so. Keyes turned the turret around until the door faced me, where I rode in the rear. He shouted that Tom was driving for him, and at that news, I put my head against the bumping side of the turret and cried. Keyes' eyes held horrors, and he was very deaf, but he did not tell Tom to stop until he had run the car back to the lines.

The crews climbed out: nineteen tanks out of the fifty-two had returned, and the thirty-eight men stood together, scarecrows, tottering with nerves and weariness. Three officers were left, none to our company; and Keyes took command. He called the roll. The gaps, the terrible silences between the answers to the long-familiar names, were heart-breaking. Major Carter came to the orderly-room to get the list. He had great lines in his cheeks that had not been there when I saw him go from his desk that morning. He sat and read the list, his brows drawn down. He looked up at last.

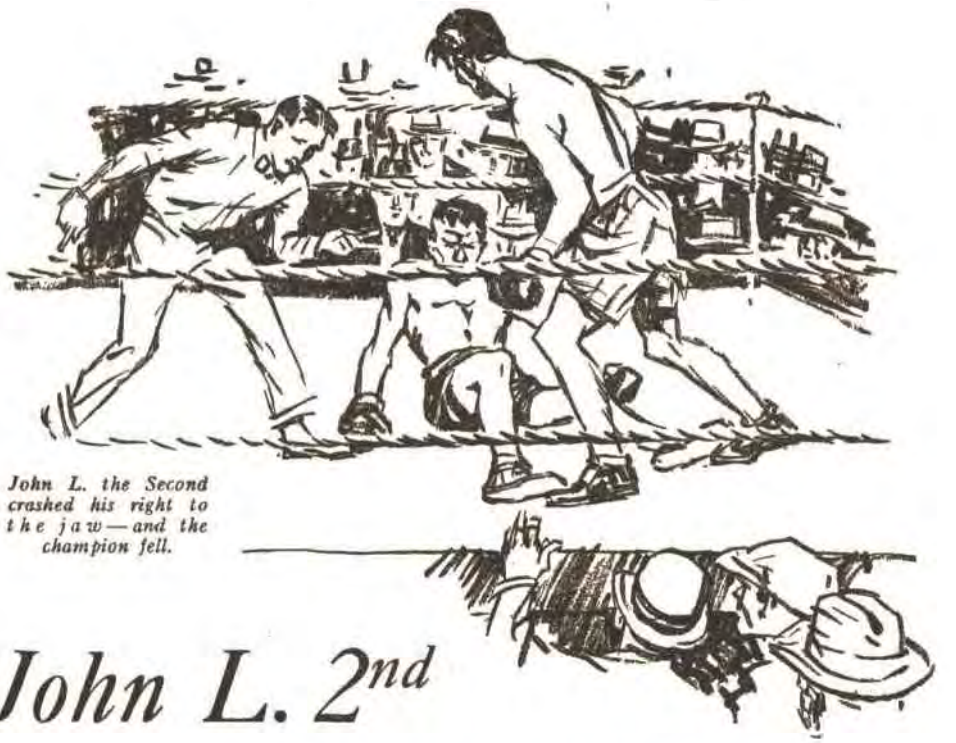
"God! We got 'em through, but—hell! All your officers gone! All mine gone! Damn it all!"

He paused a moment.

"We'll get you another C. O. now. Cole's gone! A good man, Cole!"

Keyes and Tom turned slowly and looked at me. I sat there and looked from one to the other, and then at the Major. They seemed to wait.

"Yes sir!" I said. "A good man!"



John L. the Second crashed his right to the jaw—and the champion fell.

John L. 2nd

By HUGH S. FULLERTON

The dean of sports-writers out of his long experience here contributes a really unusual story of the prize-ring.

Illustrated by William Molt

SEE here, young fellow, you wrote in the paper this morning that Burglarious Bill Grogan, the Boy Bandit, was trying to save up ten thousand fighters and retire. I'm not kicking on that. I don't care how many names you call me. But you said I never managed a champion.

You're a smart reporter, and you may know something about boxing, but you slipped on that one. I managed the best man that ever stepped into a prize-ring, a champion if ever there was one, because he licked himself and the other fellow too; and anyone who can conquer himself is a real champion.

Who was he? Do you recall John L. the Second? You ought to, as you kidded him enough in that column of yours. You remember he retired. You newspaper fellows said he was an accident, that he just happened to cop Burke with a lucky punch, and that he was so yellow he was afraid to meet him again. Usually when you reporters say anything, I let it ride. It's all good publicity for me whether you knock or boost, but that time you had everything backwards. I never told the story. There were people involved who might not have liked it, but if you writers who keep calling me a bum prize-fight manager knew what a newspaper story you overlooked—

Sure, I'll tell the story now. It can't hurt anyone. The truth is that boy who called himself John L. Second was the nerviest and the best fighter I ever handled; and that takes in about every kind from palookas to champions. Of course his name was not John Lawrence Sullivan. His real name was John Lawrence Sellar.

Sure, that's him—Sellar, of Sellar and Son. I thought that would surprise you! Commence to understand now why he retired from the ring? Well, it was his fight with Porky Burke that changed the name of that firm from Sellar and Co. to Sellar and Son—and there is a story.

All right—quit smoking those infernal cigarettes in this room and I'll tell it to you.

It was a number of years ago—I was sitting in my office one morning when Jimmy the office-boy came in and said a raccoon coat wanted to see me.

"What kind?" I asked.

"One of them rah-rah boys," says Jimmy.

"Maybe framing some charity bouts," I said. "Tell him to come in."

I WAS busy at the desk pretending to be busy when in walked a nice, clean-cut young fellow, wearing college clothes like they belonged on him. He was kind of thin, looked as if he had been studying too hard, and his face was serious.

"Mr. Grogan," he said, "I want to learn to be a fighter."

"It's hard on the eyes," I said. "Planning to trim up some of your fraternity brothers?"

"No," he said seriously. "I'm not a fighter; I don't like to fight, but I've got to be one."

"Why not train for the track team?" I said. "A hundred yards in ten seconds beats learning to box."

"I don't want to box," he said. "I want to fight—real fights."

"Say," I said, "I've had all kinds of nuts come here with all kinds of crazy notions, but this beats them all. What's the big idea?"

He sat down and told me who he was, and some things about his old man I never knew, though I knew that in spite of his wealth he was a fight man and usually attended all the big bouts. The kid told me that his dad, before he made his fortune, liked to box, and he was one of the big admirers of John L. Sullivan. He always had an idea that if he ever had a son, he wanted that son to be a great fighter.

"And I'm it," said the kid. "Dad wanted to name me John L. Sullivan Sellar, but Mother wouldn't let him, so he called me John Lawrence. I wasn't a strong kid, and Mother, while she was alive, wouldn't let me go in for athletics. Mother and Father used to have arguments about it, he declaring that a kid who didn't like to fight was no good, and likely to grow up to be a coward, and Mother always afraid I'd be hurt. She was an invalid for a long time, and Father loved her dearly, so she always had her way. I was sent to a private preparatory school and I wasn't as strong as the other fellows. I played a little baseball and tennis, and did some gymnasium work, but I didn't try for football or boxing. I preferred study and reading. I wasn't home much excepting in vacation times, and saw little of Father. He never seemed to want me; and once, when I showed him a cup I won playing tennis, he just snorted and said: 'Tennis—that's about your gait.'

"I felt that he didn't like me, and that he was in some way ashamed of me. After Mother died I saw less of him, and it was only recently I understood what the trouble was: He had hoped for a son who would be a fighter, and his pride was hurt. So, Mr. Grogan, I've got to be a fighter. I came to ask you to train me and see whether I can or not."

He was so earnest about it, and seemed so determined, that I laughed, but it wasn't any laughing matter with him.

"I haven't told you everything," he said finally. "Father isn't the only one who thinks I'm no good because I can't fight."

"A girl?"

"Yes," he answered, flushing a little. "Her dad and mine have been friends for years. I suppose Dad talked to her father, and he talked to her—and she's ashamed of me—"

"She wants a fighting man for a sweetheart, eh?" I said. "Well, bring her around here. I'll show her my bunch. That ought to cure her."

"You don't understand," he said. "It doesn't make any difference to me whether I can fight or not; only I've got to fight in order to show them I'm not afraid. They think a fellow who doesn't like to fight is a coward."

THERE was something about the boy I liked. He had little muscle, no strength to amount to anything, but he had an eye that showed determination—blue eyes, that changed color when he set himself to do something. I told him to come around the next day and I would try him out and see whether we could teach him anything.

I worked with him for two weeks, then turned him over to old K. and K. Brown, telling him to go easy on the kid. You remember Brown, don't you? He was about as tough a battler as I ever had on the payroll. If it is more blessed to give than to receive, old K. and K. hadn't a blessing coming; but as a taker he was a star. He had taken everything anybody had, and then stuck out his chin for more. All another boxer had to do was to throw a right

up into the air, and Brown would get his jaw against it somehow. He fought them all, always got second money, but in spite of that he was popular with the crowds, who liked to see him take his batterings and keep grinning.

I went on a trip for a month and forgot the kid. A couple of days after I got back, K. and K. came into the office and said:

"Say, the mutt is learnin'."

"Who?"

"The little mutt that calls himself John L.—he can hit," said K. and K.

I laughed at that.

"I aint kiddin'," said Brown. "The mutt burns me good and plenty."

So I went down to the gymnasium. The kid was there in gym suit working out. He was crude and awkward, but he was stepping around better, and he had learned some of the tricks. He was boxing with Brown, and he had a fair straight left and a queer looking right-handed punch that seemed to jar K. and K. every time it landed—and he seemed to land it whenever he used it.

He looked stronger and in better condition, but he seemed discouraged.

"I'm trying hard, Mr. Grogan," he said. "But I'll never make a fighter—I can't fight and I don't like it."

"I never saw anyone who enjoyed a wallop on the chin," I said. "But you're doing fine. That left of yours is all right, and that right punch is a peach; where did you learn it?"

"Oh, that," he said, looking pleased and interested for the first time. "I used to fence some at school, and while boxing I forgot and started hitting that way with my right, as if I were fencing—and it landed."

"Keep at it," I advised. "Crouch a bit lower and cover that chin—you might get hit."

"I don't mind being hit, Mr. Grogan," he said. "The thing I hate is hitting anyone."

NOW, what do you think of that: hating to hit anyone and not minding a punch on the jaw?

"I don't like it," he repeated. "I don't like to hit Mr. Brown."

"Hit who?" I asked.

"Mr. Brown, the man you assigned to box with me."

The idea of calling old Korned Beef and Kabbage "Mister" got a laugh out of me and the idea of hating to hit him was even funnier. I had to tell the gang about it—and old K. and K. heard about it.

It's queer the way things work out sometimes. No one ever had called old K. and K. "Mister" before, and I reckon no one ever had treated him like a gentleman; and when he heard that Young John L., as we called the kid, had spoken of him that way, he became his greatest admirer. There wasn't a thing he wouldn't do for the kid, and he was as devoted to him as a bull pup to a baby.

A COUPLE of weeks later the boy came to me and said:

"Mr. Grogan, I'd like to rent the gym for an hour some day this week. I want my father to see me box—or rather he wants to see me. He found out, some way, I was taking lessons."

I fixed it. Having a bunch of prosperous business men down to my gymnasium would be a good boost for the place, so I chased all the ham and beaners out for one afternoon, decorated the place a bit, and told him to invite all his friends, not knowing what I was letting the kid in for. It was quite a party. His father, a big, fine-looking man; the girl's father, who was a real fight fan in spite of his wealth; and a girl, whose name was Peg—they came and brought a swarm of their friends, mostly girls.

I didn't have any trouble spotting Peg as *the* girl. She was a beauty, brown hair, eyes that were either blue or purple, and a thoroughbred in every line. She was excited and it was easy to see that she wanted to be proud of the kid and show her friends he could fight.

I sent in a couple of light, fast boys to spar a few rounds and entertain them, and then announced that John L. Second would box five rounds with K. and K. Brown.

Old K. and K. was battered, flattened and cauliflower-eared; and when he scowled, which he did when he tried to smile, he looked dangerous. I could hear some of the young ladies saying it was a shame to make a nice boy like Jack fight a brutal, rough-looking man like that. K. and K. scowled worse than ever at that, tickled to death at the compliment, he being about the kindest-hearted fellow that ever hit anyone on the chin.

The kid looked pretty in his new silk trunks, and the first round he went fast, working in and out, jabbing and tapping, and slapping that fast left of his at K. and K.'s face, dancing out of range of Brown's slow, wicked swings; and twice he sent that

funny-looking twisting right punch over K. and K.'s guard and landed it solidly. The girls applauded after the round and got real excited, while the fathers chewed their cigars and admitted to each other that the kid was clever. The kid's father's pride showed plain when I said to him:

"The kid is learning fast. He's got a great right, and he knows where to send it."

In the second round the kid seemed a little excited. In the first mix-up he stuck his jaw against a punch that staggered him, but he grinned and danced away for a minute and after peppering K. and K. three times with his left, he uncorked that funny right-hand punch again. It hit K. and K. high, on the side of the head, and he went down as if he had been hit with an ax.

I knew in a second something had come off. The punch wasn't hard enough to hurt anyone, let alone Brown! The girls were squealing with excitement, and the boy's father was leaning forward, watching closely, with a sort of a sneer on his face. John L. the Second was standing in the middle of the ring, his arms at his side, watching K. and K. as if he was stunned. I counted ten and went through the motions of reviving K. and K., though I knew something was wrong. No one ever knocked him off his feet that way, but I will say the old boy showed his stuff; he took that dive as naturally as a Fred Fulton.

I helped him to his corner while the kid, trying to shake off the gloves, came over, hanging around and said: "I didn't mean to hurt you, Mr. Brown," and the girls were squealing and clapping their hands. K. and K. came out of it so naturally anyone would have sworn he had been dazed, if he had not winked at me over the kid's shoulder.

Then I got wise. That old fox was planning all the time to pretend to be knocked out, so as to let the kid have some of the glory before his friends. The girls swarmed around the kid, and two of them ran around the ring to tell "Mr. Brown" how sorry they were he was hurt, and old K. and K. grinned, and looked desperate. I noticed that neither of the fathers joined in the congratulations, and that they went away in a hurry without speaking to me or to the boy, but thought little of it until the next day when John L. the Second came to the gym. He was bitter and sore.

"I guess I'll have to become a real fighter, Mr. Grogan," he said. "I'll have to make my living somehow. Will you manage me?"

"What's the idea?" I inquired.

"Mr. Brown rather overplayed it," he answered. "Don't blame him; he was trying to help me. I thought at the time it was funny he went down, for I didn't hit him hard, just a touch like fencing. It fooled the girls—but not Dad nor Peg's father."

"It did look bad," I admitted.

"That isn't the worst," he added. "Dad claimed I fixed it with Brown. He said I tried to make a sucker out of him. We quarreled."

"He'll get over it. Tell him it was K. and K.'s idea."

"He may get over it—but I wont," he said, with his chin getting set. "I may never make a fighter, but I'll never touch a penny of his money."

"How does the girl feel about it?"

"Just as her dad and mine do—only worse. She thinks now I paid Brown not to hit me so I'd be a hero in her eyes."

WELL, that was that. I found myself managing a fighter who was rich enough to buy the whole place and not miss the money. At that, it felt pretty good to have a millionaire's son on my hands. I figured I could afford to buy him his meals for a time even if he never fought, as I felt certain he and his dad were sure to make up sooner or later. He wouldn't have it that way, and said if he did not pay his way by fighting, he'd try something else. Then he jumped in, working harder and harder, gritting his teeth and working and training all the time. He got to be a pretty fair gymnasium fighter, but many a gym champion is a bum in the ring. In about three weeks he came to me and said:

"Mr. Grogan, you've been paying my bills long enough. Get me a fight and see whether I can earn my board and lodging. Maybe the loser's end will do that."

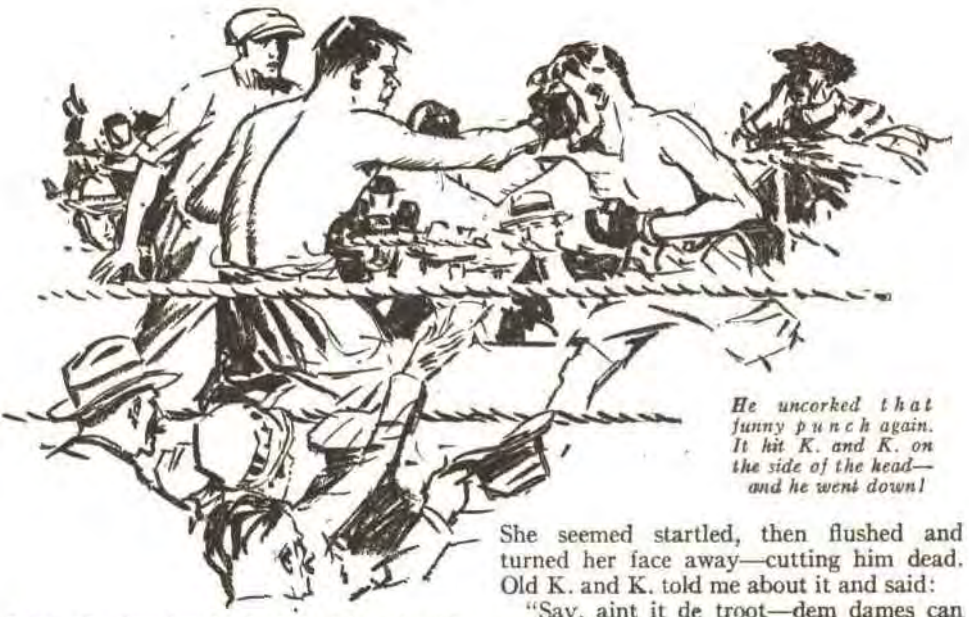
"All right," I said. "Under what name?"

"John L. the Second—the boys call me that as a joke. It's a good name even if I can't live up to it."

"Why not call yourself Levinski or Ratowski or something like that at first, and change when you start winning?"

"No. It'll give them a better laugh if I call myself after a great fighter."

The boy had a hard winter. I tried to pick the softest matches for him, but there were mighty few soft enough for him to beat. He developed speed, a lot of footwork, good judgment of timing, and he could hit. He was a boxer, but he couldn't



He uncorked that funny punch again. It hit K. and K. on the side of the head—and he went down!

fight. In the ring he lost decisions to fellows he could box rings around in the gym—and I discovered that he had told the truth when he said he did not like to hurt anyone. He would have them tired and licked, and then would let up, refuse to press the advantage and lose the decision.

I took him on tour, and he lost to everyone he met. He was not taking much of a beating, as he had learned a lot of defensive boxing and remarkable judgment of distance and speed; yet he kept losing to ham-and-eggers. He was game; he didn't mind taking a hard punch, and he never kicked on anything.

"I guess I'll never be a fighter," he said. "I don't like to fight—and I can't make myself like it."

"Get mad," I advised. "Some day some one will sting you hard, and you'll forget you don't like to hit anyone."

"I'm afraid not," he said, smiling sadly. "I've tried hard enough, but it wont work. I'd better get a job in a grocery."

By the time we got back to Boston, I had about made up my mind he was right and never would be a fighter—but we had hardly settled in the gymnasium and started work than a change came over him.

ONE afternoon he and K. and K. were doing roadwork out Commonwealth Avenue when an automobile passed them, and the girl was in it, the first time he had seen her in a year. The kid was jogging along, dressed in flannels and sweaters and an old cap, and he looked up right at her. She seemed startled, then flushed and turned her face away—cutting him dead. Old K. and K. told me about it and said:

"Say, aint it de troot—dem dames can treat a guy worsener than they'd treat a dorg?"

The boy never mentioned the meeting, but he worked harder than ever.

It was about a week after this he began working out, taking his shower and rubdown, and then disappearing for several hours. At first I thought he was snooping around for a chance to make it up with the girl, but my guess was wrong. His manner changed, and at times he was almost grouchy. Then one evening he returned to the gym about dusk, walked into the office and said: "Bill, get me a battle."

He never had called me anything but Mr. Grogan before, and his changed manner surprised me.

"Who do you want?" I asked.

"Anyone," he said sharply. "Get me a tough one; I'm rearing to go."

"All right," I said, "I'll match you for next week."

Half an hour later old K. and K. came into the office with one eye plastered shut.

"Say, who hopped that boy? He pasted me all over the ring and closed this glim fer a week!" he said.

I was still puzzled, and figured he was sore on the way the world was treating him and might put up a real fight, so I picked out a couple of fair boys and asked him which one he preferred to fight.

"Neither of them," he said. "Get me Mattox—I want a fight, not a sparring match."

Mattox was the toughest of the second-raters, a glutton for taking punishment, and

he packed a right-hand punch that meant a nice nap for anyone who let it collide with his jaw. Mattox was tickled to death at the chance. He was one of those tough boys who had been calling John L. the Second sissy and yellow, so I thought maybe the boy was sore and wanted a chance to even up in the ring. I was pulling hard for him to lambaste a little sense into Mattox's thick skull, but afraid he couldn't do it.

The afternoon of the fight John L. the Second disappeared. Just as soon as they had weighed in, he jumped into a taxi and went away. The snow was a foot deep and the weather was cold, and when he failed to return at dinner-time I was afraid he had run out on me, lost his nerve entirely. He was to go on in the semi-final bout, and it was nearly nine o'clock before he showed up at the dressing-room.

I never saw such a change in a fellow. He was quarrelsome and was fretting to get into the ring. Two light boys were boxing, and the kid looked out toward the ring and said:

"I hope one of them knocks the other out quick; I want in there."

"What's the hurry? Want to get it over with quicker?"

"I'm afraid it'll wear off," he said—and laughed in a funny way.

"Look here, young fellow," I said, getting scared. "You haven't been taking dope, have you?"

"Nothing like that," he said. "I was just afraid my desire to fight would go away."

The minute the bell rang, that boy was a whirlwind. He bounced out of his corner with his eyes glaring, and filled Mattox's face so full of fists he thought it was raining boxing-gloves. He battered the tough boy all over the ring, kept on top of him every second, and had him hanging on and hugging to last out the round.

The crowd was crazy with excitement, yelling for the kid to put the old warhorse away—Mattox wasn't liked. In the corner the kid was fretting like a nervous colt, and in the second round he tore in again. Mattox tried to stop him with a right, but the kid took it on the head, shot his left into Mattox's face, popped that corkscrew right of his flush to the jaw, and Mattox went down with his eyes rolling, for the count of nine. I didn't think he'd ever get up, but he did, and staggered into a clinch and hung on until the bell saved him.

The kid came back to the corner trembling all over.

"You've got him," I said, while fanning him. "His eyes are rolling and his head wont clear. Just go into him fast, start him covering up, poke your left out and time him with the right—he'll stay down the next time."

"I can't," he said, almost crying. "I can't do it. I just can't hurt him any more."

He didn't, either. He boxed through the rest of the six-round go—let that big stiff stay the limit when he was so far gone one solid punch would have ended it!

THE kid seemed a little sick when it was over. He didn't offer any explanations, just dressed and went away. He had me puzzled. I couldn't figure it at all.

You know that, no matter how long you may be in any game, a fellow always can learn. I thought I had seen everything, but this John L. the Second was something new. I guessed everything from dope to jealousy might be the matter with him—but I wasn't within a mile of the right explanation.

Twice after that the same thing happened. He would come to me all worked up, eager to fight, would demand a match and urge me to get the toughest opponent I could find. Each time on the day of the fight he would disappear, show up just in time to get into the ring, start like a whirlwind, fight hard for two or three rounds, then ease up, box pretty and let his man recover. The fellows who wrote about the fights said he tired from his own exertions in the early rounds, and that if he could hold the pace or save himself for the finish, he would make a great fighter. I knew different. He wasn't tired.

In spite of the fact that he was not knocking them kicking, the boy was getting quite a reputation. The crowds went wild over the way he tore in, forced the pace and fought during the early rounds. He wasn't taking much punishment, because, by the time he slowed down and commenced boxing easily, the other fellow usually was glad to rest and last it out, hoping for a draw.

Late in the winter he came to me one day with his jaw set and said:

"Porky Burke is coming to Boston. Can you get him for me?"

"Hop high, little gamecock," I said, because Porky was the champion and the toughest bird in the class.

"Get him for me; if I don't beat him, I'll quit and start in as a clerk."

It sounded foolish at first thought, but the more I thought it over, the better it looked. Besides, there was something in the way he talked and the look on his face that influenced me. Not that I ever figured him to whip Porky, but hoped he might have one of those spells of his and make the champion step around, for a few rounds at least.

The champion had been dodging the top-notch challengers so as to grab the easy money in vaudeville and the pictures, and he was not likely to be in best condition. He needed a few fights to harden him, and it looked to be a chance to hook him into a match. The kid never had beaten anyone that amounted to much; he was supposed to be faint-hearted—just a fast boxer who weakened after a few rounds, but who was popular with the fans. I thought perhaps the champion and his manager would think it like picking up easy money to match with him.

They did: they jumped at the chance, and we signed an agreement for the boys to meet in two weeks. Porky was grinning when he signed, and we agreed that the winner should have eighty-five and the loser fifteen per cent of the purse. I held out for twenty-five per cent, but the kid said: "Make it winner take all, if they want to, or give the loser just enough to pay his expenses."

The day of the fight was a cold, raw one with snow-banks melting slowly and a northeast half gale blowing thin rain around. The champion and John L. the Second weighed in at three o'clock, the champ, as usual, cheating the scales four or five pounds.

"Let him weigh a ton," said the kid, when I started to protest. "I'll get him."

Then he ran downstairs and went away in a cab the way he had been doing every afternoon for a week. Just after he left, old K. and K. came into the office.

"Say," he said, "what's eatin' dat kid? He's been batterin' me all around de gym—and then running away."

"Wonder where he goes?" I asked.

"I see him out Roxbury way, and I aint hopin' he ever comes back."

"What's the matter?" I asked, surprised. "You and the kid fallen out?"

"Naw, we aint had no fuss, but I don't like guys dat hang out in cimitries."

"Cemeteries?"

"Yea—and I don't like no cimitries."

Knowing how superstitious K. and K. was, I had to laugh; then he got mad and sullen and walked out, leaving me worrying about the kid and wondering what it was all about.

When he did not show up toward dusk, I called K. and K. and said:

"I'm anxious to find the kid. Where is he?"

"Most likely in the cimitry at West Roxbury."

I thought he was joking, although a joke from old K. and K. is like maple syrup from a dogwood tree, but after questioning him a little, I called a cab.

IT was getting dark when I reached the cemetery in West Roxbury. There was still light enough to see, although the street-lamps were lighted and the hills were in shadow. The cemetery gates still were open, and stopping the cab, I walked around the paths, looking for the boy. It was ten minutes before I saw him. He was standing at the foot of a grave, looking downward. His hat was in his hand, and he was as motionless as the stone at the head of the mound. I felt guilty, spying on him, but curiosity made me keep on walking toward him. I wanted to know whose grave he was visiting, and why he had been coming there day after day.

I was half-hidden from him behind a big clump of bushes and not fifty feet from him when I stopped. He hadn't heard me, though my feet crunched the crusted snow. His face had a set expression; his teeth seemed gritted hard together, and his hands were balled into fists. I peeped over the bush past him and looked at the stone and even in the dimming light I could read:

JOHN LAWRENCE SULLIVAN
Born 1859—Died 1918

I stood there fully five minutes watching that boy and letting the truth sink into my brain. Then I turned and sneaked away so as not to let him know I had discovered his secret. I commenced to understand what he was doing.

By the time I reached the office, I had it figured out. He was out there in the cemetery at the grave of the great old warrior whose name he had assumed, begging the spirit of the great John L. to help him make good in the eyes of his father and his girl, trying to get something of the fighting spirit of the old champion into his heart. I understood what he meant when he said he was afraid it would die out, and

that his natural dislike for hurting anyone would overcome his fighting spirit.

As soon as I had it all clear in my head, I called up his father.

"This Mr. Sellar?" I asked. "Well, this is Bill Grogan. You don't think that kid of yours can fight, do you? Well, come down tonight and take a look at a real fighter."

"What do you mean?" he said, surprised. "You think the boy—"

"I don't think nothin'," I said, roughing him. "I know! Come down and see the boy you chased away from home trim a champion. I'm putting tickets in the box-office for you."

Then I hung up the receiver and refused to answer the phone, which rang four or five times. I knew I had him thinking, and was satisfied he would be in the house when the bell rang.

HE was. He brought his friend, the girl's father, and the girl herself. I had been hoping for that, and had given them a box where they could see without being seen too much. The house was packed to the doors before the first preliminary started, but not until the fourth bout was being fought did John L. the Second show up. His jaw was set; there was a fighting light in his eyes, and he was fretting and eager to get into the ring. I pretended not to notice anything was different, and avoided talking to him until we were in the ring and were fixing the bandages on his hands.

"Look over in that box there," I said to him out of the corner of my mouth. "Your dad—and some one else."

He glanced quickly across the arena, looked away just as quickly, commenced to rub his shoes in the resin, and his jaw seemed to stick out further. He looked over at the champion, who was laughing and joking in the other corner, and said to me:

"Let me at that fellow—I want him."

There was something in his voice I never had heard before, and I knew that the champion was in for a surprise party in short order. When they went to the center of the ring to get their instructions, it was the champion who got a shock. The kid sneered at him openly, and when Porky tried some of his talk, the kid's lip curled and he said:

"You four-flush champion!"

They scarcely touched gloves in the handshake, and in a second the kid was right on top of Porky, fighting like a wildcat. I don't believe any light-weight in the world could have stood up a minute under that attack excepting Burke, and in that time the champion was giving ground, trying to clinch and was covering up to save himself. The kid was fighting like a machine, hitting clean, and although he was going at top speed, his blows carried weight and were telling. The champion, caught by surprise when he had expected an easy battle, was puffing and disturbed as he got to his corner at the end of the round, and the crowd was in an uproar, because there had been more fighting in one round than they usually saw in an entire bout, and the champion was tottering on his throne.

"Go right after him again, Jack," I said while he was resting. "He's tired already. Don't let up on him, and use that right the minute he drops his guard."

"I'll get him! I'll drop him!" he said, baring his teeth and fretting to start again.

The crowd had hardly believed it could be true in the first round. They thought the kid was just a flash and would slow down, but in the second round he sailed in again. Porky had steadied and was getting cautious. He clinched, and then when the kid came in again, he tried to stop him with his famous left—but the kid, refusing to stop, stood toe to toe and slugged with him until Porky, the hardest hitter in his class, was driven back. Just at the end of the round he put his straight left hard to the champion's face, and quick as a flash, whipped that queer right over Porky's guard and rocked him back onto his heels.

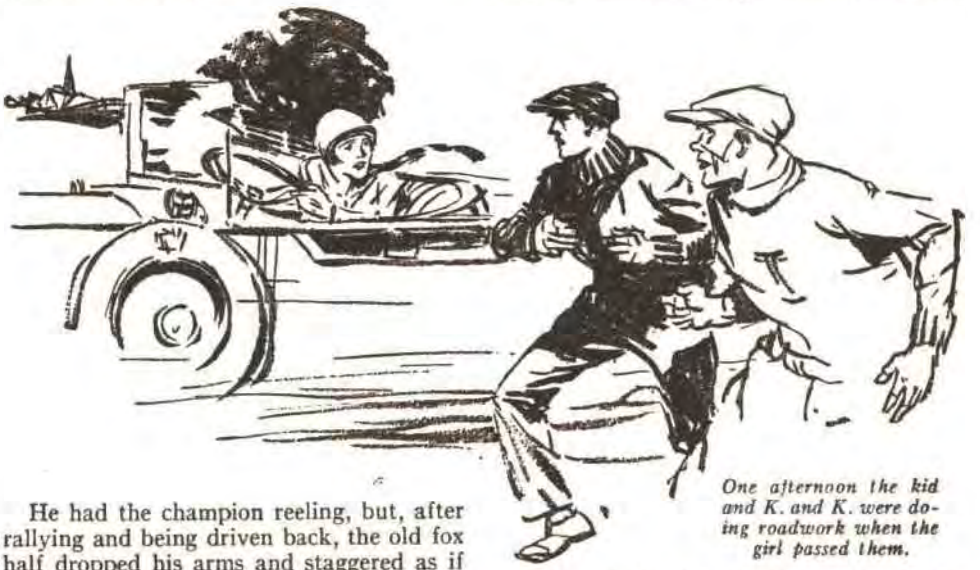
By that time the crowd was going wild, cheering John L. the Second, urging him to go on and finish the champion. You know how the wolves howl when they think a great fighter is about to be whipped and a new champion crowned.

I LOOKED over at the box. The boy's father and the girl's father were leaning halfway over the railing, yelling, and the girl was sitting straight, staring at the ring as if bewildered, and scared.

"Watch him, kid. Don't take any rash chances this round. He's dangerous when he's hurt," I advised.

John L. the Second didn't seem to hear. He was glaring across at Porky, licking his lips as if they were dry, and fussing with his feet in the resin, getting them into position to make a sprinting start.

HE could scarcely wait for the bell to start the round and I was scared and kept cautioning him. I knew Porky and his tricks, and knew how often he had outsmarted young boxers when they were beating him. I kept yelling at the kid to be careful, but I might as well have been yelling orders to the moon. The kid was deaf, dumb and blind to everything except the man he was fighting, and he was fighting like a tiger, showing no mercy and striving to batter Porky down.



One afternoon the kid and K. and K. were doing roadwork when the girl passed them.

He had the champion reeling, but, after rallying and being driven back, the old fox half dropped his arms and staggered as if he was groggy and hurt. "Look out!" I yelled; but the kid, thinking he had his man, jumped right into the old trap. As he started to finish the champion with his right, Porky uncorked his big punch flush to the jaw, and the kid went down as if he had been hit with an ax.

Maybe you've seen them drop that way, with their eyes rolling, their muscles quivering, saying *"whee-e-e"* like an old camel when she kneels. Maybe you've seen them go down that way, but you never saw them come up afterward!

It seemed a shame. The kid went down near our corner with his eyes glassy and his muscles quivering, out clean and complete. I started to climb into the ring to lift him to the corner. The referee was counting; and Porky, breathing hard and still wabbling, was trying to grin over having lured another kid into a trap and knocked him out. At the count of five the kid moved his head a little bit and began clawing out with one hand. His eyes were closing, but I thought he could hear, so I stuck my head under the ropes and yelled: "Get up! John L. is calling!"

He heard me over the noise of the excited crowd. His eyes opened halfway; he groped out with his hand, pawed around, found the lower rope and after a hard struggle he dragged himself up to his feet and fell into a clinch just as the bell rang.

He was in bad shape when I got him to the corner; but his head was clearing, and the ammonia brought him around. K. and K. and I worked hard over him during the minute of rest; just as the bell rang for the fourth round, I leaned over and whispered to him:

"Fight him, John L.! Fight him! Old John L. is in your corner tonight."

The words acted like a shot of dope in the arm. He shook his head, looked at me in an odd way; his jaw tightened to fighting lines again, and as the bell rang, he rose as if unsteady on his legs and went forward slowly. Porky figured it was all over and came with a rush to finish the battle—and at the last step the kid tensed into position and met the rush.

I've seen fighting most of my life, but never anything like that. The kid, who a minute before had seemed to be knocked cold and hopelessly beaten, met and stopped the champion's rush, stood toe to toe and slugged with him, and beating him back, pounced after him. In a minute Porky was reeling and trying to cover up, but the kid gave him no chance. He kept right on

top of him every second, and then suddenly his left caught Porky squarely on the chin. The champion's knees sagged a bit and his arms dropped; then John L. the Second, his face set and hard, stepped back half a pace, measured the distance and crashed his right to the jaw. Porky fell, curled up on the canvas, and was dead to the world.

The referee stood over him and, as usual, gave the champion a slow count. He might have counted fifty—for Burke was knocked cold and not even twitching. The crowd was on the chairs, yelling, screaming, throwing hats and cheering the new champion. Over in the box the boy's old man, his face white with emotion, was standing staring toward the ring. His chum was beating him on the back and yelling until he was purple in the face. The girl had half risen from her chair when I looked, and her face was white and drawn.

John L. the Second was standing in the ring, his gloves dropped to his side, staring down at Porky. The referee finished the count, and lifted the kid's hand to proclaim a new champion. Suddenly the kid shook loose from the referee's grip, dropped on his knees, lifted Porky's head and commenced to talk.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, old man," he said, almost crying. "I didn't mean to hurt you—"

I got to him by that time. He walked with me to the dressing-room, through the cheering crowd, like a man in a dream, not seeming to hear the noise or to see the men and women jamming around trying to pat him on the back or shake his hand. We were not in the dressing-room two minutes before the door opened and the two fathers came in, followed by the girl. The kid's father ran over to him, put his arm across his shoulders and said:

"I'm proud of you, boy."

The boy shook his father's hand away and said:

"To hell with fighting! I don't like it, and I only fought to show you—"

He stopped and seemed to notice for the first time that the girl was in the room.

"Peg," he said, "does a fellow have to be a brute and knock men out to show that he's a man?"

I never did hear her answer, for a second later she was in his arms, crying. . . . .

Now, young fellow, that is why John L. the Second quit the ring; and I'll leave it to you, after hearing, to decide whether or not I ever managed a champion.

Where There Aint No Ten Commandments

By

CULPEPER ZANDTT

This extraordinary adventure of Dr. Galt, American physician in the Orient, is one of the most picturesque and colorful tales even Culpeper Zandtt has ever written.

Illustrated by Joseph Sabo

IT had been habit with Galt for many years to cultivate the faculty of close observation—first, as one of the necessary things in his professional work, and afterward, when he had retired from general practice, as the line of least resistance in the study of human nature. Always an admirer of the late Haroun al Raschid, he frequently adapted one of that eminent jurist's methods in obtaining first-hand information by prowling about whatever place he happened to be in, at night, when the people, relaxing from their daily occupations, were bent upon pleasure or profit or devilment, and therefore most nearly their real inner selves.

Being decidedly welcome in Government circles at Singapore, the Doctor had the run of the most exclusive houses in the city and suburbs. Upon an evening in June, he had dropped in at the lawn-party and ball the Narvinsons were giving at their Tanglin villa—and noticed a man who had come out on the P. & O. two weeks before.

He judged Habburton to be a man of thirty-one or two—well set up, his clear eyes and skin indicating clean out-of-door living most of the time. It was generally supposed that he was a professional writer, and made a decent enough living at it. Some of the staff knew his family—to others, he had presented the sort of letters which give a person entrée at all times.

"That'll be about all, Parmenter! Take your hands off Miss Osborne! —You heard what I said!"

He could talk when in the mood, holding the women fascinated as they listened to him—or if at dinner in one of the clubs, with so much of keenly absorbing interest that men drifted over from other tables to listen. But he wasn't often drawn out of his shell, preferring to look on and think his own thoughts. In fact, the women were beginning to suspect an "affair" which occupied him to the exclusion of everything else—and kept after him more than he liked, in their efforts to probe the mystery.

Something of this came up in a chat the Doctor had with one of them, after trailing her to a rustic summer-house.

"Sit down a few minutes, Kate, and give me a bit of information."

"With pleasure, Doctor—but I shouldn't stay more than a moment or two. It's Mr. Habburton's dance, you know."

"Hmph! Will you wager a quid that he's aware of the fact? You girls corner him—say that you're saving a dance or two—and of course the poor chap has to put his name down on your cards. But I'll bet that if you let him alone, he'd be sitting this one out by himself. Habburton has something on his mind—if you ask me."

"That's what we all think—but nobody has the slightest idea what it can be. It seems to me he's trying to forget something, and just can't manage it. Perhaps he's drinking too much—that would account for his preoccupation, wouldn't it?"

"Not as long as his eyes and skin look as they do. I don't think the man ever drank to excess in his life—except sporadically, perhaps. The type who might deliberately drink two or three quarts of hard liquor without showing much effect from it—if it came into his mind that he'd get a memory-obliterating kick, that way. And if ever he did anything like that, he'd be dangerous—sort of a man to let alone until the liquor is out of him."

HABBURTON knew the Doctor, of course—they'd met at several houses and clubs. They spoke once or twice at the Narvinsons. Then Galt missed him, somebody thought he had taken a rickshaw up to the Tanglin Club. The Doctor was beginning to be interested—followed the man, found him in one of the small card-rooms playing poker with four of the members—very good poker, too.

When the game broke up at midnight, Galt suggested taking him down to the Raffles in his car. As Galt was turning into the drive in front of the hotel, Habburton said:

"Where were you going from here, Doctor? You live at the Singapore Club when in town, do you not? Your garage must be over in that neighborhood. Suppose you drop me wherever you put your car up—then I'll take a tram out Keppel Harbor way. Good old moon, tonight—I'd not sleep if I turned in at the Raffles."

"H-m-m—if you don't object to com-

pany, I'll run you out to the Harbor in the car—out to the Gap if you like, along the Buena Vista Road. Perfect night for it; most beautiful road on the whole Island—sea-view all the way."

"No safe place to leave your car at night. What I had in mind was a bit of slumming—something rather worse than you'll find in the city. There are a lot of sailors' dance-halls an' boozin'-dives out there in the Harbor district—gamblin'-places, too—most of 'em in the little Malay *kampongs* which straggle along the north side of the road, but run by Chinese who make fortunes out of 'em."

"And you were thinking of prowling through a lot of joints like that all by yourself? What is this—a suicide-pact with somebody? It's safe enough for me, I reckon, because most of the Chinks in town know me by sight—for somewhat unusual reasons. But even if you wore dungarees instead of these conspicuous whites, you'd be drugged and shanghaied before morning in all probability. Oh, I understand the psychology of the thing all right—a man gets into a jam at times when nothing but being damn' reckless and taking a lot of chances will suit his mood. Dunno but I feel some like that myself tonight. Want company—or not?"

"Mighty decent of you to suggest it, Galt! If it were anyone else, I'd say no—just because I'm rotten company for anyone, tonight. But I've heard a lot about you—an' liked what I heard. Very good! Put your car to bed in its regular hotel; then we'll go have a look-see. Have you such a thing as a gun about you?"

THEY got into a tram which ran down Collyer Quay on the water side of the Club. In it were a couple of naval officers going out to their cruiser at the new base—half a dozen deck-hands, greasers and stokers from one of the Jardine-Matheson boats—three P. & O. men with girls whom they had picked up somewhere in the city and were taking out for an all-night dance—two well-to-do Chinese, and a couple of Tamil girls of the Harbor type. Along the quay were Chinese house-boats, five or six rows deep, with most of their families asleep on deck-mats among pigs, chickens and other live-stock—though some of the women were curled up along the gunwales, crooning over native guitars while their men squatted on their heels and smoked.

Out along Anson Road and Keppel Road, back of Tanjong Pagar, some of those in the tram got out, but more got in—Malays, Burmese, Tamils and Chinese, then a mate and two men from one of the cargo-boats, so drunk that nothing but the homing salt-water instinct guided them in the right direction. Had any of them been alone, he would have wakened aboard some outward-bound steamer, eventually, but probably not his own—and some Chinese boarding-house keeper would have collected a shipping-charge for him. Sailors are rarely killed in any of the 'longshore dives unless by one of their own kind; they're worth more alive—and drunk.

After passing the wharf at the foot of Mt. Faber, Habburton and Galt got out. Nestling under the three-hundred-foot hill upon which is the Signal Station, a straggling conglomeration of low stone buildings and Malay houses stretched along one side of the tram-line as far as the New Harbor Docks and for some distance beyond. From some of these came echoes of phonograph records, dance-hall pianos, fiddles and saxophones.

Galt had been in a number of the city dives along the upper River in the Chinese suburb, and the Rochore Road neighborhood in the East End, but never had investigated the Harbor District. He had supposed Habburton must be familiar with the locality, but the latter's knowledge of it proved to be mostly from hearsay.

"I fancy we'll not strike the two places where most of the stories originate, Doctor, until we've looked about a bit. I'd say we'll not do better than pick out what sounds like music a cut or two above the rest—an' then run it down. What? Listen a second! Eh? That's not quite so bad—what? Somewhere in back of these other buildings, I'd say. Here's a little by-path which seems to be used a lot—dirt's packed hard, d'ye see. Come along!"

A hundred yards back from the tram-line, they found themselves in a Malay *kampong* with the houses close together, the occupants squatting on their raised verandas in the moonlight—smoking and chewing betel-nut. Presently they came upon a stone building of two stories from which came a sound of well-played dance-music—a tango at that particular moment, which some of the Malay and Chinese women dance as well as an Argentina. (It must be remembered that sailors' dance-hall women of whatever race are neither *nautch, gamelan* nor *geisha*. They may

dance a bolero alone upon request, for the money thrown at them; but their terpsichorean efforts are devoted to dances which sailors know and in which they participate.

The entire ground floor, obstructed only by four massive posts supporting the one overhead, was a single, poorly lighted room with a bar at one end and tables along the walls, leaving a good-sized space in the center for dancing. A small annex jutting

"Wot wuz ye a-s'yin' ter me lidy-friend ter mike 'er cry! Tell me that, ye pizen-face bloke!"

out from the rear wall behind the bar was used as kitchen and storehouse; the windows were set unusually high in the walls and were less than a foot in width. Upstairs the space was divided into sixteen small rooms, each with a *charpoy*, cheap washstand, table, chair and small mirror.

Choosing an inconspicuous table in one corner, the two sat down and ordered mugs of ale. When the coolie returned with them, Galt's fingers were absent-mindedly playing with a curious little object—a cube of the finest ivory not quite three-quarters of an inch square, upon one face of which a peculiar Chinese ideograph was inlaid in gold—two other faces having a little dot of gold in the center of each. Habburton, in a casual glance, supposed that the Doctor had some poker-dice in his pocket and was idly playing with one of them—but the China boy who was serving the ale almost turned a shade lighter in color and became exceedingly respectful. Before leaving them, he said in a very low tone:

"Numbel One mans no likee sailo'-gal—no wantee Tamil—M'lay. Me catchee topside memsahib-gal chop-chop—bling this side when mans wantee. You likee—can do. Bling Numbel One Scotch an' chow-chow wine—you likee?"

"Maskee. You bling one time champagne-in icee, John. No wantee memsahib-gal this side now—mebbeso bimeby."

Habburton understood enough pidgin to follow this—and was interested.

"I say, Doctor—what got into that coolie all at once? Fancied he was a bit high-hat when he went for that ale—but you had him almost lickin' the Blanco off your white buckskins in a second or two! I recall your sayin' that most of the Chinks in town know you—but that doesn't explain their almost grov'lin'!"

"Oh, they think I'm pretty friendly with some of their big men, I reckon—no telling what I might do to them if I got sore. Just as well to have 'em in that frame of mind in a place like this—we'll not be drugged or picked upon unless we go looking for trouble."

HABBURTON was studying the men and girls at the other tables as their faces peered through the reeking eddies of stale tobacco-smoke or one of the insufficient lights shone down upon a head, here and there. It was a heterogeneous collection of raw, rudimentary humanity drawn by the lure of primal passions too compelling to balk at race or color prejudices—a Goya done in sepia and black, inspired by sheer devilishness.

"D'ye know, good old Gustave Doré should have had a go at this—rather in his

line, don't you think? Or Hogarth—what? Material for another 'Inferno,' an' the 'Rake's Progress' up to date. Though the 'Rake' was a cut above this in education, of course—fancy he wouldn't have cared about 'em off-color. For the fellow before the mast, the old deck-hand, the seasoned stokehold rats—even the buckomates who've graduated from windjammin' into steam—none of 'em with two brain-cells in the lot—a place like this supplies the essentials. Liquor which kicks like a mule, to fuddle themselves with, an' women to dance an' sing, an' dream with—young an' good-lookin', even if they're all a creamy brown or yellow. As a matter of fact, in quiet decency of behavior, these girls are a good many cuts above the ugly quarrelsome white hags they get in the dance-halls of Tilbury, Hamburg, New York or Sydney. Over in that nest of dives back of Rochore Road, there are some middle-aged Malay women who've lived in hell for years an' want nothing better than to make more hell before they pass out. But in this joint they seem to be a cut above the down-an'-outers. My word! . . . . Look at the little China girl coming so quietly around this corner! Must be one of the owner's private stock—notice the coolies slippin' in between her an' those bounders who are beckoning her to their tables!"

Habburton reached out for another chair. "Er—have you time to sit down an' chat with us a bit, sister?"

"Oh, yaes—I like come talk with you nize-lookin' mans. Pleas'—I mus' not drink chow-chow wine—it make me foolish. You buy limon-squash fo' me—yaes?"

She was dressed in lavender satin tunic and trousers, beautifully embroidered in pink and white apple-blossoms, thick-soled cloth shoes of good comfortable size—evidently never having had her feet deformed according to the old Chinese custom—and her face was healthily clean—free from almond paste. In answer to their courteously indirect questioning, she smilingly admitted being Madame Chrysanthème, though from Amoy instead of Nagasaki, naïvely said that she was a very good pianist and guitar-player, that she knew all the American and Continental dances including the "black-bottom." Presently she went out on the floor with Habburton for a tango—the two of them doing it so artistically that they had the floor to themselves, while those at the surrounding tables clapped in time with the castanets and threw quite a shower of coins at their feet when the music stopped. Habburton, of course, paid no attention to these, and the girl merely motioned to one of the coolies, who picked the money up and disappeared with it. Those of the onlookers who were partly sober thought they understood this—that the money was the China girl's perquisite, and that she probably belonged to the owner—but the drunker ones began muttering among themselves, spitefully egged on by some of the Malay women.

"Blimme! 'E's nort but er bloody toff a-bargin' in 'ere to show hoff an' kick our coin t'hell f'r 'is fancy Chink! 'E's er bloody rotter—that's wot h'I s'y!"

A good-looking but fat and bleary Tamil girl got up from one of the tables and squirmed her way around to them, slipping past the coolies who tried to block her. Reaching for another chair, she was about to sit down with them—saying:

"Ullo, boys! You off some yacht—yaes? Give me dollar—I match Apple Blossom—see w'ich git you mans an' w'ich git thaes mans!"

The little Amoy girl leaned forward and rapidly hissed in a dialect which Galt partly understood, though his friend didn't:

"You one beeg fool! I theenk you die pretty soon! Thees mans b'long Great Tong! He lif' one finger, you b'long bottom-side chop-chop—throat cut before knowing what happen. Go 'way, fat sow—before Great One say kill!"

THERE had been several little things to corroborate this statement since the two white men had come in, as the Malay well knew. An expression of abject fear came into her face. She made a low salaam—awkwardly, because of the liquor that was in her—and went back to her table, where the sailors wanted to know what had been done or said to her, resenting what looked to them like something insulting.

"The bloody toff! Wot'd 'e s'y to ye, Meroe?"

The muttering spread from table to table around the dimly lighted room. Faces which would have looked tough enough in broad daylight took on more sinister lines as they peered out toward the strangers through the smoke-eddies. Hands crept furtively back under coat-tails to loosen knives in their sheaths. And the women, with the age-old wisdom of the East, felt the taste of blood in the air, the premonition of approaching tragedy—waited, mo-

tionless, for that which was to come, glancing from the corners of their sloe-black eyes to see who would start it.

Then a bucko-mate got up from the table where the Malay girl had been sitting, and swaggered across the floor to their corner. He was powerfully built—evidently considering that he needed no other weapons than those born with him—and was carrying but half his customary liquor-ballast, so that he considered himself in just the proper condition for a fight. Resting his knuckles upon the edge of their table, he thrust his bloated face within a foot of Habburton's.

"H'I s'y—*you!* Wot wuz ye a-s'yin' ter me lidy-friend ter mike 'er go an' cry? Wot wuz ye a-scarin' of 'er for? Tell me that, ye pizen-face bloke!"

The scarcely tasted mug of adulterated ale was standing near Habburton's arm. The next instant its contents were dripping from the mate's face.

"Just a moment, now! If you want to fight, get out there on the floor an' put up your hands!"

Galt muttered: "He's twenty-five pounds heavier, and he'll rough you whenever he sees a chance! Can you really box? Don't let him close in!"

IF Butcher Muggins was "a-goin' to polish-hoff the cove," that satisfied the crowd. They didn't expect much of a show, because Muggins had once cleaned out this same dance-hall with the leg of a buffet-table—but they could chuck what was left of the toff out on the tram-line after the mate was through with him. . . . . There were no preliminaries. Habburton merely slipped out of his white coat, which Apple Blossom impassively held for him. What was to be would be—that was on the knees of the gods. Had there been time, she would have run up the road and burned two punk-sticks in the temple of the Three Compassionate Widows—but it looked to her as if everything would be over before she had gone half the distance. In her pitying little Chinese heart, she thought this handsome Englishman had been foolish to throw the ale in the brute's face—the affair might have been managed by the house-coolies; the best they could do now was to protect both white men afterward.

At the urging of his cronies, the mate also shed his coat—but he said it would make no difference. When the two met in the center of the floor he started to rush his adversary, both arms flying like a windmill—but instead of hitting anything, he ran against a staggering blow upon the side of his jaw and another just below the breast-bone which made him feel sick and weak. For two or three minutes he boxed more warily—then jumped toward Habburton with his head down, intending to take a couple of stiff blows while he jabbed his massive knee upward into the other man's abdomen—but the Englishman had seen worse things than that done in the War; and that knee, striking nothing but air, threw the mate off his balance until he lowered his guard and received a terrific blow squarely upon the chin. He crashed full length upon the floor with a jar which shook the building—and he stayed there.

Then hell started to break loose. Knives and pistols were drawn—the crowd surged toward the victor, now calmly getting into the coat an admiring Chinese girl held for him. Except for three or four bleeding knuckles, he wasn't marked.

Suddenly, the big room filled with coolies who poured in through front and rear doors—tall, powerful men from the Yunnan foothills of the Himalayas. The crowd were disarmed and forced back into their seats while a dignified Cantonese in a richly embroidered satin outer vest bowed respectfully to Dr. Galt and asked his wishes concerning the men who had tried to rush him. As the Doctor afterward told Habburton, the kick of the joke in the whole affair was that probably every man who had started to attack them in that dance-hall would have been found in the Strait next morning with his throat cut, had the Doctor given such an order.

Galt, however, was satisfied to call it an evening and get back to the Club, where he took Habburton for a few hours' sleep.

BEFORE leaving his guest, Galt said:

"From general appearances, old chap, I'd say you're feeling somewhat better. You went looking for trouble and you got it—if I hadn't been there, it might have been damned serious before you got through. If this is going to be a habit, I may not be along the next time unless—well, a medico learns to keep his mouth shut, you know, and sometimes he's able to prescribe a bit. Now, if you feel like giving me the story behind all this, I'll be glad to hear it and make any suggestions I can. If you don't, it's all right with me. I know these waters pretty well—all over

the place—might be of assistance, possibly. Eh?"

"Doctor, you're a brick! I appreciate fully what you did for me tonight—owe you an explanation as a matter of courtesy. Sit down here, if you're not too sleepy—get your pipe going! I'll give you the gist of it. You know, of course, that I do books an' magazine stuff—but it's under a couple of *noms de plume*, so nobody has connected me with it. Made twelve hundred pounds last year—mostly from the American market—will do a lot better this year, barring unforeseen misfortunes. Have you ever heard of Colonel Parmenter out here—retired list?"

"Name seems familiar—wait a second! Isn't he British Resident up the Peninsula, somewhere? Selak—I think? Been up there with the present Sultan two or three years if I'm not mistaken? Eh?"

"That's the man. Ever hear anything about him personally?"

GALT looked thoughtful for a moment, then shook his head.

"Only that he apparently satisfies the governor, so far—and manages to get along with the Sultan. I know His Highness and rather like him—spent a few weeks up there last year. One of the more inaccessible states—not anywhere near the Siamese Railway line, but the berth is one of the least difficult ones for a British official. Not one of the Federated States—so he's merely there to advise upon outside matters. Parmenter was down on leave while I was there. Ahmed Mahmoud seems a decent sort—educated at Cambridge, progressive, minds his own business, does as much as he can for his people and has too good a head to be influenced by any of this Red propaganda going about. The job of Resident is something of a sinecure, I'd say. No conspiracies to watch—no arms-smuggling—sanitary conditions fairly good except during the rains when they get occasional fever and cholera. In fact, I'd say the Resident hasn't much to do aside from writing his reports and killing time. Of course a real pukka Resident would be getting up sports among the brownies just to keep himself fit and benefit them—trying to assist the Sultan in carrying out his improvements. But the average man in such a berth takes the ground that he loses prestige in the Oriental mind by letting 'em see him do too much work, or by mixing with 'em beyond what's necessary. So, if he has no other white man but a deputy, he drinks, eats, and sleeps too much—gambles—frequently goes native."

"Hmph! You seem to know a good third of what I was to explain, Doctor! Parmenter was alone up there for the first eighteen months an' while his reputation was decent enough at home—likable sort of a big husky chap, you know—I fancy he was anything but a pukka Resident at the end of those eighteen months. Did everything you've mentioned, with a few extra embellishments of his own. Wife's a charming woman of the rather delicate type, though she's good at tennis an' rides well. Parmenter's a strappin' full-blooded chap an' of course that sort of man can be, at times, dev'lish repulsive to just that finer sort of woman. Well, he sent for her more than a year ago—an' suggested that she fetch along her cousin, Miss Patricia Osborne, for comp'ny.

"Pat's by way of bein' rather stunning as to looks—breezy, out-of-doors girl—good at all sports—crack shot. Not an Amazon—just medium height—able to look out for herself against anything but overpowering weight an' brute strength. She an' Parmenter have known each other since before her cousin's marriage to him—he's taken the liberty of being rather familiar with her as a matter of course, because of his wife's relationship. Now this Nora Parmenter's no fool. She knew her husband expected Pat to be even more company for him than for her—quite relished the idea of having two white women to be familiar with instead of one. She put it up to Pat with some hint of what the situation prob'ly would run to—but neither of 'em had any notion of what the fellow had been up to out here or how entirely both would be in his power in such a place as Selak."

"I take it you and Miss Osborne—eh?"

"Why, I fancy we both understand it that way. She's no idea how much I'm making with my professional stuff—fancies I'm waiting to see my way clear, I suppose; but I think she's as fond of me as I am of her. At all events, my last letter from her—which came down the Strait by cargo-boat last week with a request that Selby of the staff would forward it to me in London, where Pat supposes I am at present—speaks of Nora's bein' in poor health, getting more an' more run down, losing weight, no resistance. Pat also writes that the climate an' the isolation have changed Parmenter a good bit, that he drinks too much, is more

The mate, instead of hitting, ran against a staggering blow just below the breast-bone.

domineering—inclined to be more familiar than before. She asks if I don't think it might be advisable to have him recalled, or given six months' leave so they could all go home. Nora has oodles of money, which Pat thinks she willed to him if he outlives her—"

"Just a moment! Is Mrs. Parmenter still in love with the man?"

"Prob'ly not—though it's diffic'lt to say. A woman will take a lot from a man she's once loved before the last shreds of that affection are broken. She was getting rather fed up before she came out here—an' must have seen enough to cure her entirely, I fancy."

"And she's presumably worth a damned sight more to him dead than alive, if Miss Osborne's supposition about her will is correct. Great cats! Why will a woman be such a fool as that! If she dies there in Selak, the only course is to bury or cremate her on the spot. And in such a position, Miss Osborne might find it almost impossible to avoid marrying the man! As I recall it, his deputy has been on leave for some months—no white man or woman there to help her—not much chance for getting safely out unless she appealed to the Sultan, which might be out of the frying-pan onto the coals. Why the devil didn't you start for there after getting that letter, Habburton?"

"With what excuse? No accommodations except in the Residency, which I fancy is full up. One doesn't go barging-in upon the Sultan with a demand for chow an' lodging. Might get together a hunting-party—but that means a lot of official red-tape in case His Highness doesn't like to have us hanging round, shootin' his game. To be of any use at all would mean stickin' pretty close to the Residency—which Parmenter could an' would forbid. His wife has given no indication that she needs help—hasn't even written in for medical advice; prob'ly hasn't the least suspicion as to what may be causin' her run-down condition. I may be crazy, myself, even to think of such a thing! A man may drift into being a pretty rotten bounder, you know, without going anywhere near as far as murder—she'd never believe that of him unless it were proved to her. I fancy no such idea is even in Pat's head! She might be inwardly relieved a lot to see me in Selak, but she couldn't permit any inference that she had sent for me to make the long trip from London, out. What excuse could I give Parmenter an' Nora for plumpin' myself down upon 'em in an already overcrowded house?"

"In other words, your position is that of the average Englishman with a proper regard for the conventions and decencies. Well—it's my turn to sit in at this and draw cards, I reckon! Have you such a thing as a valet or China boy?"

"Back in London—aye. But I don't lug anything of the sort all over the globe with me—no point in it, unless one's a millionaire."

"My boy, Ling Foh, will pick out a husky Yunnan coolie for you—good luggage-carrier, clothes-cleaner, barber, or fighting-man if necessary. I reckon we can get together everything we need before night and go up the Strait in the morning on one of the rubber-tramps bound for some little shipping-wharf within sixty or eighty miles of the Selak border. His Excellency will give me a letter to Ahmed Mahmoud which will make us *persona grata* at the Palace. I've a standing invitation to visit him, anyhow—but an official letter will give better color to the trip, and we can take hunting-gear along to fill in the odd days. If what we suspect concerning Mrs. Parmenter's ill-health is true, her case probably wont be hopeless for two or three months, yet—the brute wouldn't dare be too precipitate. But we shouldn't lose an hour in getting there. I think you would have started within the coming week if your recklessness hadn't gotten you eliminated before that—but you might have made a mess of explaining when you turned up in Selak. By going with me, there's no explaining to be done."

"But—I say, old chap! I appreciate this offer of yours no end, but really, you know I can't be putting you out to any such extent as this! The expense is no consideration; I'd gladly stand the whole of that an' pay for your professional services as well. But one cawn't ask you to go out of your way like this for people you don't know!"

"Look here, Habburton—what you fear as a remote possibility, I see as a very real *probability,* and it goes against the grain to let a brute of Parmenter's type get away with anything like that. I've nothing to do but amuse myself—take such adventure as may happen along. So we'll just go up to Selak and have a look-see—incidentally fetching Miss Osborne back with us when the affair is settled one way or the other."

NEVER having had experience with that sort of country before, the trip in from the little rubber-wharf at which the cargo-boat dropped them was a trying one for Habburton—a five-day nightmare. They could have taken canoes up a little river, thirty miles farther up the coast to a point where the Sultan had managed to have a narrow road cut through the jungle for the motor-trucks bringing out his crop—but Galt had thought it better to slip unseen from the jungle into the *kampong* surrounding the Palace, and be some hours on the ground before their arrival became known at the Residency. So they had traveled in hammocks slung from a stout pole carried by four bearers, having what the Londoner considered narrow escapes from snakes and jungle-beasts.

He had once been lion-hunting in the district around Mt. Kenya, East Africa—but there, the country had been more or less open, with tall grass and occasional clumps of scrub trees. The Peninsula jungle, on the other hand, is as dense as that of the Amazon Valley or Borneo, with the trees meeting so thickly overhead that there is scarcely more than twilight along the narrow trails beneath them. Monkeys incessantly chatter overhead, traveling for miles by swinging themselves from one branch to another. Tawny leopards and tigers slink through the underbrush, stalking whatever they see that is good eating. Thirty-foot pythons slither gracefully among the tree-branches or drop their coils unexpectedly upon whatever may be moving beneath them. Eventually, two rather dirty men with their China boys and bearers halted by a little brook just outside the Sultan's *kampong* to shave, wash and put on cleaner khaki from their packs.

Galt would have bet that there was a carefully folded suit of evening clothes somewhere in Habburton's luggage because most Englishmen will dress for dinner among other whites whether they're in the heart of a tropic jungle or on the slopes of the Himalayas—but the Doctor's only concession in that line was two suits of washable white linen that weighed very little, took up a minimum of space, and could be washed at any brook—pressed by patting upon a smooth slab of stone if no iron was available.

The official letter which he had brought from the Governor at Singapore referred to the possibility of Ahmed Mahmoud's obtaining a loan from the Chinese banks for road-development throughout his State, secured by bonding his little principality if there was enough rubber under cultivation

to warrant it—carrying one main road through to a shipping-point on the Strait and sending out his crop in motor-trucks. It was, of course, nothing more than the Sultan had considered before at one time or another—but there was between the lines what he took as implication that, were he inclined to join the Federated States under British protection, there might be Government loans as well. Anyhow—it placed the Doctor and his friend upon even a pleasanter footing than they would have had if dropping in upon His Highness as merely a hunting-party. They were given very comfortable rooms in the guest-wing of the Palace, and the Residency people were invited to meet them at dinner.

PARMENTER arrived with his wife, Miss Osborne and the recently returned deputy, who had found himself obliged to occupy a hastily cleaned-up Malay house in the *kampong* (though he couldn't yet see why there wasn't room for him at the Residency). When Patricia's eyes fell upon the man she had been almost praying for, she was struck speechless—it seemed impossible that he really could be there. Whatever doubts there may have been in her mind as to how much he cared for her were settled for all time by the fact of his presence, and she was in his arms with no thought of how it might look to the others. With a deep and lovely blush, she remarked that she'd no idea he was in that part of the world and was tickled pink to see him.

During the dinner, Galt chatted genially with anyone who addressed him—but the Sultan thought he was quieter than during his previous visit, noticed that he seemed to be studying the Resident and his wife rather closely. His Highness didn't jump at conclusions—that wasn't the Oriental way, and the official letter which the Doctor had brought him wasn't of the sort which might have been used as a pretext. So far as he could see, the Doctor's hunting and botanizing intentions were bona fide ones which, probably, had been planned some time in advance—his fetching Habburton along was natural enough from his knowledge that the Londoner had friends in Selak whom he would like to see. On the other hand, Ahmed Mahmoud was beginning to suspect that something was wrong at the Residency. It was quite evident that the Colonel didn't intend to have outsiders of any sort about the house; he even mentioned to Habburton his regrets that they couldn't entertain him at the Residency because of the crowded conditions there—which drew the quiet remark:

"I believe no suggestion has been made as to your putting us up, Parmenter—but I fancy you'll find us about the veranda an' living-room a good bit while we're here. Can't expect us to stand out in the sun whistling for Nora an' Pat to come up to the Palace with us—or go trekkin' into the jungle. What?"

"Oh, we expect you'll be droppin' in occasionally, of course—when not huntin' or occupied with His Highness. But Mrs. Parmenter is in poor health—really not up to doin' any entertainin' at all, d'ye see—an' she gets nervous if Miss Osborne is out of her sight. Beastly climate here, you know."

"Why not have Galt overhaul her a bit—he's the reputation of being a first-chop physician an' surgeon."

"Not necess'ry at all! She's a prescription from her own medico in London who understands her case perfectly, an' I'm by way of bein' rather good at first-aid, myself, in any emergency. She's not in a serious condition, y'know—merely run down. Can't expect her to improve in this weather—fancy she'll pick up in a few weeks, when we're past the monsoon."

ENOUGH of what Galt supposed might be the situation had been explained to Ling Foh—and that silently efficient Cantonese had begun investigating before he'd been in the *kampong* twelve hours. Such trading as was done with the outside world was in the hands of his countrymen, as is the case all through the Orient—and a good deal of the more burdensome labor as well. So that merely the hint that his master was one of the dreaded and respected Great Tong sufficed to bring him all the underground assistance he needed. And the Doctor's supposed affiliation with the mysterious beneficial Society spread around the *kampong*—into the various parts of the Palace, until it was presently whispered in the Sultan's ear by his Wazir. Ahmed Mahmoud was inclined to doubt the rumor—until the little ivory cube which the Doctor was known to carry in his pocket was described to him. That settled it. His respect for the genial American medico was vastly increased.

Three or four days passed—with Mrs. Parmenter a trifle weaker. Galt prescribed

a tonic—which the Resident found on her bureau and threw out of the window, as she afterward told the Doctor. He and Habburton spent each afternoon on the veranda with the ladies—giving the medico a chance to slip her a powder which he knew would counteract her weakness to some extent—but they were told plainly enough to keep away from the Residency in the evening. The women invited them to dinner just once—but Parmenter canceled the invitation upon the ground that his wife really wasn't up to it, and even said he thought their staying around in that neighborhood was having a bad effect upon her because she kept wanting to show them courtesies which her failing strength wouldn't permit. That night, His Highness remarked:

"Mrs. Parmenter seems to me drifting into a rather serious condition, Doctor—though her husband makes light of eet. What you think?"

"She'll die in less than two months unless something can be done for her! What's your opinion of Parmenter? Think he cares much for her?"

"Chap ees really most devoted—much more so than manner would indicate!"

"Then my professional experience and instinct are worthless. How do you get that impression?"

"In the Orient, as you yourself know, Doctor, there ees always an underground information bureau—the servants are close observers—eavesdroppers, if you like—they know what goes on. Thees Parmenter—waits upon hees wife himself—prepares most of her food—brings it to her in bed, or in deck-chair or veranda. He gets up in night to see that she ees comfortable—most attentive. Outwardly—in public—he ees brusque with her—but in private, no. Her *ayah* and the coolies say he ees a most devoted husband."

"Your Highness has noticed, of course, his excessive familiarity with Miss Osborne—presumably on the basis of the family connection, but rather more than is customary even with that excuse. Do you also happen to know that Mrs. Parmenter left him practically all of her money in a will signed before she came out? And you tell me he wont let anyone else prepare or serve her food, except the breakfasts, when he's asleep!"

"Ah! So? One does not look for this sort of theeng among the English! And what weel you do, Doctor?"

"Haven't decided—yet. It's a rotten situation! You may gamble upon one thing, however—I'm not going to let that fine woman die in any such way as this! Where do I stand with *you* in the matter?"

"Considering the facts: that will—hees manner with Miss Osborne—hees driving you out of the Residency and preparing hees wife's meals—I theenk you quite justified in shooting the bounder! If necessary, I will have him arrest' and confined in my Palace pending investigation. Eet may cause complications with Straits Government—but I am an independent Sultan—I do what I consider justifiable."

"That's the mean point in the whole proposition! I've already proof enough to imprison the fellow for twenty years if his wife lives—or hang him if she dies—but there's the Government side of it! Nasty mess to stir up over one of His Excellency's own officials—puts the Raj in a bad light with the Orientals!"

NEXT evening, Galt took his companion for an after-dinner stroll through the *kampong*—looking at the native and imported wares in the little shops—walking on until they approached the Residency grounds from the edge of the jungle and stood concealed by the shrubbery where they could see Parmenter helping his wife out of her chair on the veranda and up to her room—leaving Pat Osborne alone in her deck-chair. Habburton shivered a little, and whispered:

"Possibly you'd best give me a dose of quinine, old chap—may be in for a touch of fever! There's something dev'lish in the air, tonight—I seem to get a taste of blood in it! Don't know what you've dug up by way of evidence, but I'm becoming almost convinced that poor Nora is bein' slowly murdered!"

"Looks that way to me—and it's got to be stopped right now! Another few days, and she'll be past anything I can do!"

"My God, man—you really mean that? Then, by heaven, I'm going up there and kill him! Been itchin' to do it for three weeks!"

"Not unless he gets me first, Jack. You can't afford it! Any action I may take will be at least given the benefit of the doubt by the Straits Government until I've produced evidence to justify it—but in your case, it would be set down to jealous rage on Patsy Osborne's account. Thrashing him senseless is all right enough if it comes

The Doctor's bullet tore the pistol out of the other man's hand, temporarily paralyzing it.

to that—but be sure you don't kill him. *Psst!* He's put his poor wife to bed now, and is coming down again. We'll get a bit nearer, behind those two bushes—in case Pat needs us."

Parmenter didn't get down to his heavy drinking each night until Pat Osborne had retired and he had strolled over to Frank Reed's house for the usual game of cards in which some of the *datos* occasionally joined him. It was lowering the prestige of the Raj, as Reed had pointed out when he first refused to permit such a game in his quarters—but the *datos* in question were educated men in spite of their appearance in the Malay costume, and Parmenter had argued him out of it. So that he was little the worse for liquor when he came out on the veranda and sat down on the foot-rest of Pat's chair—slipping an arm around her waist and trying to kiss her.

Squirming over the chair-arm, however, she managed to get upon her feet and twist out of his grasp.

"This sort of thing has got to stop! I've put up with it partly on Nora's account—partly because I've been in a somewhat helpless situation. But I've got a man of my own here, now—he'll be smashing you if you don't stop this!"

"What—that waster! A poor scribbler who couldn't keep you in stockings an' nighties, Pat! No! What you want is a man—able to give you what you want—an up-standin' red-blooded *man*, d'ye see. Well—I fear poor Nora'll not be with us long—she's a good bit weaker tonight. Afterward—no need to consider the conventions in a place like this—foolish to wait more'n a month or so—"

"Oh, you rotten—murderer! If ever you lay a finger on me again I'll kill you—understand?"

"Hoity-toity—what's all this rot you're sayin'! You're talkin' like a crazy woman, Pat! You know what care I take of Nora—you see it all day long for yourself! The servants see it! You're all upset over this writin'-bounder bargin' in upon us when nobody wanted him or his fool medico about the place! Come, now—give us a kiss an' say you're sorry you said what you did to me—what? Eh? You'll not? Oh, very good—we'll see about that! What you need is a master, my girl!"

With an unexpected spring, he had her in a grip too strong to break and was pulling up her chin to press his lips upon hers when a quiet voice which gave an impression of ice remarked, just behind him:

"That'll be about all, Parmenter! Take your hands off Miss Osborne and let's go

into this a bit. Now—you heard what I said! I'll give you until I count three!"

"Damn you, Galt! What d'ye mean—bargin' in here without permission, after I warned ye to keep away in the evenings? Ye'll go down those steps an' off my ground, or it'll be the worse for ye!"

"If I do, you'll hang—in a few months—for the deliberate murder of your wife!"

"Damn your soul for a filthy, lyin', drunken quack! I'm goin' to smash ye for that until ye can't stand!"

The calm voice was still icy—and, to his amazement, compelling: "Wouldn't it be better to step into the living-room, where we'll not be spreading this affair all over the *kampong* for every Malay and Tamil and Chink to discuss? Go on in, you fool—I'll show you where you stand! We'll take Miss Osborne with us to hear the discussion. Eh?"

"We'll *not!* It'll be lively in there, presently—she might get hurt! You keep out, Pat!"

"I really couldn't think of it, you know. Somehow—it strikes me you're going to hear a few things you'll not like—and swallow them. So I'll accept your left-handed invitation and hear the pow-wow."

WHEN the three were seated,—the Resident behind his table-desk in the corner, Galt on the opposite side, in front, and Miss Pat near the end of the desk,—the Doctor coldly made a few statements.

"Habburton and I heard something of your wife's symptoms before we left Singapore. To a physician with some years practice in Asiatic waters, they pointed to an Oriental method of elimination quite frequently used out here—overdoses of digitalis, partly counteracted by an extract from one of the Eastern plants which prevents any immediately dangerous effect upon the heart from the digitalis but leaves it slightly weaker after each dose, until eventually the heart-action becomes worn-out—and fails. The poisoning may be prolonged for more than a year in some cases—but two or three months is usually considered long enough in Asia to produce seemingly natural death which no autopsy can prove to have been otherwise, if the previous facts are unknown. Digitalis, of course, is one of the well-known heart-remedies prescribed by all physicians. You follow me, I trust? Very good. You have here in the Residency the usual medicine-chest—but, in your case, with extra-large bottles of digitalis and other drugs which are deadly under certain conditions. The digitalis bottle is two-thirds empty. I had it stolen just after you prepared your wife's dinner.

"Next—in this particular neighborhood, the plant I mentioned grows abundantly if one knows where to look for it in the jungle. You have repeatedly fetched in bundles of its leaves and distilled the juice from them. You may claim to have been taught that the plant had curative properties which you hoped might benefit your wife—but its use with digitalis would be against you in any court where a physician was called upon for professional testimony. The facts concerning your wife's will would clinch the matter. When I mentioned to His Highness that will and your familiarity with Miss Osborne, he merely shrugged and threw up his hands—then smiled in his Asiatic way. He'll order you hanged if I say so. That's what you're facing. Any remarks or suggestions?"

"Hmph! . . . . Upon my soul, Doctor, I marvel at your consummate cheek in coming to me with any such cock-an'-bull story! You've some notion of tellin' it in court, I suppose? Eh? But if you, as a medico, don't prefer such a charge against me, who the devil do you suppose will—eh? An' I'll take jolly good care you don't! Now what have you to say?"

"Merely this: I'm taking your wife and Miss Osborne up to the Palace at once. You may do what you please—but you'll not come near either of them before they reach Singapore with me."

PAT OSBORNE had had the opportunity for judging what was usually in Parmenter's mind by the tone of his voice—and she had been getting increasingly apprehensive for the last few minutes, sensing the approach of something horrible which she might not be able to prevent. Galt's arraignment had been conclusive—would be even more so in any court—if he lived to give it! That was the grim possibility which almost stopped the beating of her heart. She knew Parmenter had been absently fingering the handle of a drawer in his flat-topped desk, as he talked, and that he kept a brace of automatics in it. Galt's testimony was the only direct proof which could be put in evidence against him. What was coming would have been obvious to anybody within hearing. She started to scream a warning—but the conviction that

it would only precipitate matters paralyzed her. It is doubtful if the Resident could have killed Galt had he snatched the pistol out and fired instantly because the Doctor's motions were quicker than the eye could follow when there was occasion for being a split-second faster than some one else—but Parmenter was fool enough to relish playing with his victim a bit, hoping to see the fear of approaching death in Galt's eyes.

The Doctor's bullet, fired from below his edge of the desk, tore the pistol out of the other man's hand, temporarily paralyzing it from the shock. Pat Osborne jumped for the pistol as it lay upon the floor and grabbed it before Parmenter could stop her—but he was over the desk with a smashing blow aimed at Galt's head before either of them realized what he was going to do. The Doctor could easily have killed him as he ducked away from the blow and sprang to his feet with leveled pistol—but Habburton, who had been standing just outside the door where he could watch the proceedings, ran into the room and took matters into his own hands before there was any necessity for his friend further to defend himself.

A blow upon the side of the Resident's head knocked him several feet away on the floor, but he was up again instantly, taking the position of a trained boxer—murder in his eyes. Considering the man soft from lack of exercise and liquor, Habburton was careless—being himself knocked flat by a sickening blow to pay for it. This, however, showed him what he had to deal with—he expected every foul trick his opponent might get a chance to try. Patricia thought that her eyes registered every move in the sickening, brutal struggle the next ten minutes—but afterward could remember little save a whirling, struggling, striking pair of figures which hit against and smashed nearly every movable object in the room. Habburton recognized in a moment or two the deadly animus in his adversary, and knew that he was fighting for his life—so played the game with increasing coolness as the other man became more and more crazy with rage. He was occasionally hit—that was unavoidable.

But the opening he had been watching for came at last—a terrific blow with all his weight behind it came up from his waist, landing upon the point of Parmenter's chin.

While the man lay unconscious, they tied both his wrists and ankles, and Galt obtained from the medicine-chest and Parmenter's room all the scientific evidence he needed. Then they persuaded Nora—who had no illusions about her husband's "tender care" but didn't suspect that he was actually murdering her—to be placed in a hammock and carried up to the Sultan's Palace where Galt could treat her without interference.

MEANWHILE a number of dusky figures had stealthily crept up on the veranda—a mass of brown faces were peering in at each window when the Resident gradually recovered his senses. Recognizing his own China boy, he called to him and was freed from the lashings. The boy then gently sponged his face and fetched a clean suit of "whites." He was a faithful servant, but had little respect for a master who had "lost face" with the whole community. Parmenter asked him if he wanted to make five hundred dollars. The eyes and face were expressionless, as usual. Parmenter then showed him the money—handed him half of it—said he could have the rest when he had killed Dr. Galt. And the China boy spat in his face.

For an hour, Parmenter sat alone in his chair behind the desk—thinking—thinking—recalling every word that Galt had said—the unbreakable case which he had so relentlessly built up from evidence in his possession. Then he took the other automatic from the drawer, tested the action, saw it worked perfectly. That last degrading insult from his China boy had made him visualize how he appeared to other people—even the brownies, whom he despised.

He hesitated for a moment, with the muzzle of the gun over his heart, shook his head—probably a minute or two of consciousness—too long! Placed it against his temple—and pulled the trigger.

IN about two weeks, Galt decided that Nora was sufficiently improved to stand the trip down to Singapore. They had proved to her beyond all question what Parmenter had been trying to do—but she couldn't seem to understand it.

"I would have divorced him at any time—whether he wanted some other woman or not—so there was no excuse for killing me upon that score. And he couldn't have gotten a penny by my death. There had been no love between us for several years; so before leaving London to come out here, I had made a new will leaving all I had to some one else."

Rivers of Doubt

By

WALTON GREEN

The exceptionally engaging story of a yachtsman's amazing adventure in a Central American jungle—and an equally perilous palace.

Illustrated by William Molt

The Story So Far:

SINCE the dawn of recorded history only three things of consequence have happened to Porto Pina, a pocket-handkerchief harbor on the southern Caribbean. The first event was when Columbus landed there on his second voyage. The second was when the Mogul Banana Company selected it for a port of call. The third was the arrival of the steam yacht *Dora* of New York.

The morning after the *Dora* cast anchor, her young owner Curtis Imric summoned her captain, Ben Runker, to his cabin.

"The point is this," said Curtis: "I'm broke. I'm dead broke. I've got this boat and a few thousand in cash with me, and I've got creditors for a million looking for me in New York. I'm not going back, Ben. I'm going to pay off all hands and ship you home, and then I'm going to stay here and live along on what I can get for the *Dora*."

Fate and Catherine Espinosa decreed otherwise, however. For this wealthy and beautiful young woman invited the visiting yachtsman to her great estate back in the hills, and presently he found himself the rival for her favor of the handsome if unscrupulous Spanish adventurer the Marquis de Soldano. And Catherine's undeveloped emerald mines were a further cause of conflict between the two men. For—

"Yesterday," said Catherine to Imric, "I sent him a messenger and returned unsigned his contracts of concession for my emerald land. I am now happy to ask you to undertake the enterprise jointly with me. I shall supply the equipment and operating expense, and the profits we shall share like and like. What do you say, señor?"

"What do I say?" returned Curtis. "Of course I say yes."

"Very well, señor. Tonight he returns, and tomorrow you go with him to the mine. I had hoped that he would not return at all from Porto Pina, but in his letter he insists that he has papers and plans at the mine, and that he must make a last trip." *(The story continues in detail:)*

"I THINK," observed Soldano, fiddling with the breech-bolt of his rifle, and leaning it carefully against the deck-stanchion, "that in another half hour we shall have plenty of shooting. This small stream we are in is called Rio Cayman—that's native for Alligator Creek—and there are more 'gators in it than in the whole stretch of main river we came up this morning."

"But where are the alligators?" asked Curtis.

"Wait until the tide drops a little more. Do you know, Mr. Imric, this Bayano river is quite an affair, even as tropical rivers go. It's navigable for two hundred miles, and it has a twelve-foot tide even up here. That's because it empties into the Pacific. On the Atlantic side they scarcely have two feet of tide."

The two men were seated on the awning-covered deck of Catherine Espinosa's bongoe. The craft was called a bongoe in deference to the fact that small river-steamers

Curtis was caught in a convulsive reflex and catapulted back from the water's edge.

in that country are always called bongoes. Catherine's bongoe, however, was an extremely up-to-date Florida house-boat.

It was early afternoon. Since daybreak they had been steaming through the ugly, mud-brown reaches of the great Bayano River. The favoring tide had brought them to Alligator Creek just at the flood. The house-boat had then been run onto the mud-bar at the mouth of the creek, and the subsiding waters were leaving her high and dry as they had purposed.

They sat twelve feet above the surface of the river. The deck awnings were in two layers, with a ten-inch air space between them. But even so, the listless, damp heat was very great, now that they were close to the radiating miasmas of the shore.

It was siesta time, too hot to move, too hot to talk, almost too hot to smoke. Soldano's vivacity was gone. He was courteous but apathetic, as though it were no longer necessary to make an effort with Imric.

A significant contrast as they sat there: Soldano tall, regular-featured and immobile, immaculate in whites, even to the high-buttoned jacket, lay unperturbed in a deck chair, his eyes nearly closed.

Curtis Imric sat scowling beside him, heavy-browed and ugly of face—full of dynamic energy and restlessness.

To Curtis' wide-awakeness, the whole boat seemed soddenly asleep, as indeed it was. The black Carib crew were sprawled on deck wherever there was a patch of shade. The *mestizo* pilot was sleeping on the floor of the wheel-house. A ten-year-old negro boy who had been told-off to Curtis as gun-bearer, squatted on heel and buttock in the shade of the fore-hatch, hands clasped about his long convex shin bones,—a folded-up letter *N* in sleeping flesh and bone. Even the imperturbable Firkins, standing inside the doorway of the saloon, seemed to sleep, though he stared open-eyed at the landscape. But his stare was as unseeing and as aloof as though he were drawing the curtains in a Piccadilly Club.

Curtis was irritated by the mass insensibility which seemed to envelop him. He turned to Soldano.

"Do we go ashore after the 'gators?"

"Can if you want to," murmured Soldano, scarcely raising his eyelids. "Easiest thing is to shoot right here from deck."

"But where will the alligators be?"

"Must be a hundred in sight now. Take your glasses, Mr. Imric, and examine the surface of the creek and the mud banks."

Curtis did as he was bade. The tide was falling fast. The two-hundred-foot stream of high water had shrunk to a forty-foot channel running between the long sloping beaches of khaki-colored mud. The beaches were thickly dotted with mud-incrusted pieces of water-logged trees of many sizes.

CURTIS focused his glass on one of the muddy logs. It was a gigantic alligator, so still, so mud-colored, that it seemed only a protruding part of the uncovered river bottom. Curtis swung his glass to the stream. What he had taken for pieces of driftwood or protruding stumps were alligators again—hundreds of them, as far as the eye could reach—alligators floating partly submerged, with only their gnarled snouts and sometimes their horn-hooded eyes exposed.

"I didn't know that there were so many alligators in all the world," grunted Imric. He laid down the glasses and reached for his rifle.

"Before you shoot," whispered Soldano, "let me tell you a few things. These 'gators are very wary. Hearing is their strong point. That is why I have had everyone on the boat keep so quiet. You wont have time for more than one magazine full—they'll all start sliding for deep water at the first shot. You take the right bank and I'll take the left. Don't shoot for the body—only an absolutely direct right-angle hit will get through the scales. If you want a dead kill so that your 'gator stays where he's hit, you've got to get him in the eye or ear. I'm going to ping that big fellow through the tail to show you some fun. All ready?"

Curtis sucked in a deep breath, released part of it, and drew a careful bead.

"Let her go!" he whispered, and squeezed his trigger-hand. They emptied their magazines. The river was in an uproar. From both banks hundreds of mud-brown streaks were slithering and wiggling to the channel, like rain drops sliding down a dirty window pane. The channel itself was churned into pale chocolate foam, and the noise was of a thousand paddles beating the water. Gradually the tumult slowed down—all except one great reptile that continued to thrash and upend itself directly in front of the house-boat.

"That is the little chap I drilled through the tail," observed Soldano mildly. "Sportive creature, isn't he?"

"Can't you kill him?"

"Not a chance. And he's not really wounded—he's just angry. No bull-fight principle involved, my dear fellow." There was a hint of mockery in his smile. But Curtis was not satisfied.

"I don't know," he began uncertainly. "Is this all there is to alligator-shooting? I think I drilled one of those brutes through the head, but I don't see him."

"Oh, they sink when they're killed," Soldano answered negligently. "Don't come to the surface for a couple of days—and then even the niggers wont go near 'em."

"Well—I can't see much sport in this. You don't hunt; you don't track; there is no danger—you don't even use the meat!"

"Agreed," answered Soldano blandly. "Nearest thing to your moose-calling that I know of."

Curtis laughed in spite of himself.

"Very well, I'll lay off. But I do wish we could do a little real hunting. I'd like to see some of those great beasts near to and perhaps take some pictures of them."

"All the real hunting you want when we get up to camp, Mr. Imric—I'll send you out after jaguar at night. They'll drop on your neck, and you'll never know what killed you. And there's nothing right now to stop your taking a camera ashore and sneaking up on some 'gators—if you've got energy enough. But it's awfully hot and dirty work in that mud, and it might be dangerous."

"Why dangerous?"

"Well, the natives are scared to death of going near alligator pools on foot. Claim the creatures sometimes attack. I think that's nonsense. I've never seen them do anything but lie headed toward water, and slide for it at the slightest noise. I fancy the only real danger is slipping in the mud and falling into a pool. If that happened, it might be awkward. Do you still want to go ashore?"

"Decidedly," remarked Curtis. "I'll take my camera and leave any shooting to you."

Soldano looked down at his spotless whites, and hesitated.

Then he said slowly:

"Very well, I'll come along. But I'll have to change out of these clothes. Wait a bit while I talk to the pilot. He knows the country. And we'll take your black boy along with us."

TEN minutes later they stood in the steaming shade of the river foliage. For fifty yards back of the bank there was no vegetation, for the higher tides often overflowed to this distance. Through the cleared area they worked their way upstream, keeping parallel to, but well away from the banks of the creek.

After a few hundred yards the trees became larger. Palms and bamboo of incredible variety and size; and one huge Corneto palm whose main bole commenced ten feet off the ground, connected with the mud only by a network of aerial roots, like a many-legged Eiffel Tower of nature.

The party moved in single file, the negro lad in front. Then Curtis with the camera slung about his neck. Soldano, carrying the rifle, brought up the rear. They advanced slowly, the dried mud-crust breaking through and slipping with every step. Once they startled a tapir, dirty-brown and sparsely haired. The animal waddled shyly away in the mud, his rudimentary tail slapped tight to his rump, his fat, prehensile snout wiggling in gentle alarm—for all the world like a cross between a fat pony and a baby rhino. Twice they crossed—precariously on logs—small affluents of the larger stream. In every waterway and mud hole were alligators, but it was too dark to photograph them. The place was a noisome, slimy hell-hole of reptilian life; nature at its prehistoric worst—sullen, foul-smelling, terrible and meaningless.

But of a sudden they emerged from the dark mud-forest into a crater of broiling sunlight. The black boy emitted a funny little cautioning sibilant and pointed ahead and downward. The two men crept up beside him. They stood at the edge of a backwater with sharply undercut banks and short mud shelves. The surface of the pool revolved sullenly and slimily with a dozen wicked-looking snouts thrust through the scum. At their feet, so close that they could have touched him with a fishing-pole, there stretched the biggest alligator Imric had yet seen. The great beast was broadside to them, fast asleep, with his four-foot jaws wide open in rigid wait for the friendly plover.

This, thought Curtis, was more like it. His mouth drew down in a wry grin of excitement and he whispered sideways to Soldano:

"Isn't he lovely? If he'll hold that pose without waking up, I can take a picture of his tonsils—if he's got such things. Wait a minute—"

He raised the camera and lowered his eyes to the focusing hood. A large branch was in the way. He side-stepped cautiously in front of Soldano, and sighted again. The focal-plane shutter closed with a low definitive click, and the great jaws of the alligator—as if released by the same spring—crashed down with the same sound a hundred times magnified.

At the same instant Curtis' feet went from under him and he was sliding and sprawling down the steep mud-beach toward the water. Nothing lay between him and the alligator pool except the biggest maneater of all. He slid on hip and shoulder, turning over and over—grasping wildly at the viscous mud. Across his instantaneous vision flashed two images—a straight, ten-foot streak of finger-marks left in the mud by his impotent grasp—and the figure of Soldano, also prone in the mud, but at the top of the bank, and holding firmly to the large branch.

In the next instant—with that inexorable speed and denial of volition that comes only in dreams, or when falling on ice—his body shot against the tail of the great brute that was thrashing its way to deep water.

HAD the tail struck him at full sweep it would have slapped the life out of him then and there. As it was, he was caught in a convulsive reflex of the huge body and actually catapulted back from the water's edge. That saved him—that and the fact that as his body was flung backward, it came to rest over the camera which lay half submerged in the mud, a precarious but sufficient anchorage.

Curtis lay on his stomach across the camera, and gasped and spat mud. Ten seconds—certainly no more—could have elapsed. If he was hurt, he did not yet feel it. He looked up at the bank. The black boy, on hands and knees, the fish-bellied whites of his eyes big with horror and incredulity, sprang up and dashed away into the forest. Soldano had pulled himself to a sitting posture. His left hand rested on the overhanging branch which had saved him. His right hand grasped the rifle which was stuck butt-

end in the mud as a climber uses an alpenstock.

Soldano was laughing—quietly and restrainedly, but unmistakably. The pupils of his eyes were down to fiery points of excitement. His cheeks, a mottled pink and putty gray, were sucked in and haggard with some compelling desire. Imric might have been a dying bull, and Soldano the matador.

Curtis, frightened and angry, snapped:

"What the hell are you laughing at? Is it funny to see a man nearly killed?"

Soldano's face became mockingly solicitous, but his eyes remained the same.

"Lie very still, Mr. Imric. The boy is cutting a rope-vine—we shall have you up directly. Yes—of course it is funny. But even more it's exciting. To escape death narrowly oneself, that is the most exciting—the next best is to see another squirming on the edge. It is most funny. I had a friend who fought a bull and tripped on his mantle. It was exhilarating. The horn of the bull—"

But Imric broke in on him.

"You wouldn't laugh if you were down here!" he snarled.

Soldano's expression changed.

"Ah, who knows?" he exclaimed softly and with apparent sincerity. "I hope so. I should wish to die as I have lived. But here is the boy with the vine of life," he was mocking again.

"Seize the end firmly, Mr. Imric," he gibed, "and do not forget your camera."

BACK once more in his stateroom, Curtis lay in a steaming tub, saturating luxuriously and trying to boil the mud out of him. He felt not merely dirty, but as though his entire system were impregnated with slime and animal filth. Firkins hovered, impassive and solicitous, with only an occasional "Yes sir," to punctuate Curtis' voluble recital of the adventure.

Curtis caught himself up and frowned. Why should he make an audience of this horse-faced, leather-souled man? Relief, reaction? No, it wouldn't do. He climbed out of the tub, and dried himself, dabbing his forearm gingerly where it had been rasped by the alligator's hide. Firkins insisted on carefully dressing the scraped area.

"In this country h'infection is very easy, sir," he explained, "just as easy as slipping. It's well to watch your step, sir—and everybody's step, if I may make bold to add." He gathered up the muddy clothing and withdrew.

Curtis finished dressing and went on deck. Soldano had not yet appeared. Was it possible, he wondered—or was Firkins merely one of those gloomy souls who see potential death in every sidewalk banana peel. Then Catherine's warning recurred to him. "Heart of a tiger and mind of a wicked cardinal," she had said. Very well, he would watch his step.

HE settled himself in a deck chair and let the steward mix him a very long gin and ginger-ale. Dried out by heat and sweating, he drank it off greedily. First drink of the day; ah, how good it was! After work, after exercise, after fatigue and fear—what fine solace to the hammered nerves and fainting soul! Peace and tolerant understanding suffused him. And then, ironic pleasure in the situation. All about him, mud and animal life, lovely or lethal—immense forests and matted jungles for hundreds of miles. Savage, cowardly and killing brown men, as primitive and ignorant as they were a thousand years ago. Gigantic storks standing in the water—curassows at the edge of the forest; tree ferns and orchids clinging—gorgeously parasitic, to the huge trees. Great rope vines covered with canescent moss festooned from high branches. Monkeys chattering and parrots screaming from the tree tops. And here, on this boat, champagne and white linen and English servants. God—what a country, what a scene, what impudent incongruities of civilization intruding upon the ageless privacies of nature!

His perceptions became intimately tuned to his surroundings. He was enjoying one of those moments of acute receptiveness to impression—rare moments, treasurable in retrospect. He understood the why and wherefore of everything. He regarded the mud beaches and the threatening jungle with approval. Slender herons standing one-legged on the muddy shores, the feathery loveliness of egrets picking their way to the river's edge—these things were no longer exotic—just a little Japanesey perhaps, but quite proper and satisfying. Even two huge condor, swept down from some Andean height, high in air above the gigantic balsa trees of the back lands, sinister and carrion-seeking though he knew them to be—even these were a fitting part of the scene and an approved complement to his thoughts.

And Catherine—Catherine too he understood and approved. His mistrust, his anger, his thwarted desire of the night before was gone. Gone too his accompanying reluctances. Now again, and once for all, was he committed heart and soul, blood and body to the course she had ordained for them. Soldano? Aye—let him try. He would find that the savage from the North would meet halfway the cultured savage of a senior civilization. He would find—

"For fear I might slip?" asked Curtis slowly.

"For fear you might slip," agreed Soldano.

"Or for fear I might be pushed," Curt insisted.

"Or be pushed," assented the Spaniard easily.

"Well, upon my word!" Curtis sat bolt upright. "Are you trying to tell me you meant to kill me this afternoon?"

The ears on the short head were wickedly laid back, intensifying a vicious snarl on the lips. Curtis lifted his rifle and fired.

A STIR at his elbow brought him to earth again. Soldano was in the chair beside him, a tall glass in his hand also, and a small smile on his clean, thin lips.

"Yes, Mr. Imric," he began slowly, "forgive me if I intrude upon your thoughts. But I have watched you for some moments with much interest. You have a mobile countenance: one which—how shall I say—may be translated by the experienced observer. You were thinking this is a beautiful but terrible country—am I right?"

Curtis nodded.

"Yes," continued the Marquis softly, "it is that and more too. It is a dangerous country. Some of the native tribes are more savage and uncivilized than in the depths of Africa. It is less explored, fewer white men have penetrated. Within a radius of five hundred miles from where we sit there are no less than thirty-seven languages and dialects spoken. It is a land of snakes and fever, of death and poison. It is not a good land for the stranger—how do you say in the States—for the tenderfoot."

"I am not quite a tenderfoot, Marquis."

"No—but you are quite a stranger. You must watch your step."

Soldano looked slightly bored. He drained his glass of vermouth and soda before answering.

"My dear fellow," he began gently, "you could scarcely expect me to admit a failure—even to you. Think back a minute. Had I wanted to kill you I could easily have shot you by mistake while you were floundering about with your friend the 'gator, or while the boy was in the woods."

Curtis merely grunted.

"No, Mr. Curtis, what I wish to tell you is this: Unless I am greatly mistaken, you think I intend to kill you. This idea was suggested to you by the lady to whose—er—favors we both aspire. No—don't interrupt me please. Now, no man can really enjoy a trip like this if he thinks the other chap is going to spoil it all by killing him. I certainly don't want to spoil your trip. I give you my word as a gentleman that at this moment I haven't the slightest idea whether I shall kill you or not—I really and truly haven't made up my mind yet. Now—isn't that much more comfortable?"

Curtis began to laugh. This Spaniard was really exhilarating. "What is to prevent my beating you to it?" he asked.

"Everything, my dear man. Your training, your Anglo-Saxon prejudices—everything. Where I, as an uninhibited Latin, hesitate, you will not even contemplate. No, Mr. Imric, I have you on the hip—on the defensive. My moral superiority is enormous."

Curtis Imric was definitely pleased. The Spaniard's spiritual impertinences had struck an answering chord. Damn it—the man was a superlative sadist perhaps—but his candor was engaging! In the mood and the moment it suited Curtis to fall in with him.

"Isn't the country big enough for both of us, Marquis?"

"Ah, that is what I can't decide. Do not misunderstand me, Mr. Imric. It does not occur to me to kill you for revenge. Emotional crime has no place in my code. That is a luxury which the intelligent man can no more afford than a nation can afford to go to war except for economic reasons."

"Well," Imric broke in dryly, meeting the man in his own language, "you have ceased to have any economic reasons against me. You are definitely out of this emerald mining enterprise, and I am definitely in."

"So I understand. And that is what my intelligence urges in your favor. On the other hand, the emeralds are still there, and the Señorita Espinosa is still there. My instinct urges upon me that the last chapter for both of us will not be written except by one of us."

"Perhaps," agreed Curtis musingly. "Then I am to understand that you've got me up here to kill me if you want to, that I can't go back or escape, that you have told me all this—not to warn me—but to increase your own morbid enjoyment and to test my nerve. Very well, let it go at that."

"You have stated it admirably," said the Spaniard pleasantly. "Let me thank you for your understanding. And shall we now have another little drink?"

THEY raised their glasses and smiled at one another with elaborate courtesy. It would be hard to say which smile was the more sardonic. Anglo-Saxon versus Latin: old world against new: decadence versus—what? In any case, an answering atavism of maleness and ruthlessness and joy in danger.

"Don't count too much on my Yankee inhibitions, Marquis," Curtis grinned amiably. "There's a tradition in my family that one of my great-grandfathers was a Spaniard himself."

Soldano inclined his head gravely.

"Nice of you to mention it, I'm sure. And now, shall we dine on deck—if the mosquitoes permit? Tomorrow we start at daybreak so as to reach camp before dark."

NEXT day they made their way up the river between narrowing banks, and through an occasional quick-water. The matted swamps and savannas of the littoral gave place to hill country, heavily wooded with mahogany and cedar. The river water was fresher and cleaner.

There was nothing to do but lie about on deck and read and smoke. Soldano, aloof but not unfriendly, kept to himself. Curtis read and drowsed and thought over the situation. He decided that he had nothing to fear from Soldano while they were on the boat. Nor from any of the hackneyed methods of murder. The Spaniard's attempt—if he made it—would be characterized by indirection and originality, if for nothing more than to satisfy his craving for experience. Curtis several times made up his mind that the only decent and sensible thing was to kill the man before the man killed him. But he couldn't bring himself to planned details. He'd have to rely on hot-blooded provocation. In the meantime, defensively and a little shamedly, he slipped a small, pug-nosed automatic underneath his shirt and next to the skin of his abdomen. The rubber scabbard he pinned to the inside of his trouser band. It was rather uncomfortable and inaccessible. But an armpit-holster or pocket would be too conspicuous.

Toward sundown they came to the camp. Another surprise. Little suggestion here of native life or usage. Except for the landing-wharf of bamboo piling, the camp might have been lifted bodily from the Panama Canal Zone. Half a dozen wide-verandahed, screened-in, utilitarian-looking bungalows were scattered about in a five-acre clearing. There were well-kept sanded paths, brilliant patches of flowerbeds. Also there were corrugated iron tool-sheds—ubiquitous index of American penetration—and even a pump-house and iron-bound water tank which should have graced a midland farm in the United States.

The bongoe charged the wharf at speed, reversed her engines, churned about for a bit, and then gingerly sidled up to the frail landing-stage.

On the landing-stage there stood a very tall, very thin and very still man. He wore khaki trousers tucked into high boots, an O. D. shirt and a dirty pith helmet. He was palpably knock-kneed. His neck rose thin and shriveled like a dead geranium from a flower pot, the enormous thyroid cartilage plainly visible at fifty feet. It was obvious that any shirt large enough for his frame was three sizes too large for his neck. The face under the dirty helmet was childishly small, leathery, puckered, inanimate and absurdly wise like a tired old monkey. Next to his great length, immobility was the outstanding characteristic. He looked like a mummy dried in the tropic sun and leaned against the wharf shed. Even the long-stemmed pipe tucked into one corner of the baby mouth seemed to smoke by itself, and to emphasize the stillness of the figure.

"That," said Soldano, joining Curtis at the gangway, "is Billy Mead, the superintendent in charge. He's a damned good engineer when he's drunk—which means that he is a damned good engineer. I've been up here three times and he's spoken to me about twice. Let's go ashore."

MEAD did not approach his visitors, but waited for them to come up. Nor did he offer to shake hands. He ignored Soldano and spoke over the heads of the two men.

"You're Mr. Imric? Orders by runner to report to you from now on. Supper in the cook-shack in twenty minutes." He turned and led the way up the steps to high ground. The speed and certainty of his movements were in surprising contrast. Imric and Soldano exchanged amused glances and followed.

Curtis was installed in a three-room bungalow by himself. He found a bathroom with running water and modern sanitation. The little building was furnished simply but well. No luxury—but everything a man needed. It was double-roofed and completely screened—a tidy bachelor's apartment on bamboo stilts in the jungle. Curtis soaked in a coolish tub for five minutes, donned a fresh suit of whites and made his way to the mess shack. The other two were already there.

They dined on a screened-in porch. The table top was a solid slab of mahogany, six feet in diameter and four inches thick. Its size and beauty of texture astonished Curtis, and he turned to Soldano with a query.

"This whole camp is an abandoned hardwood prospect. An American company had a five-thousand-acre concession. They worked it two seasons and then got out. All their white men went to pieces. Died of snake bites or fever, or poisoned arrows. They knew hardwood, but they didn't know the tropics. Didn't know the *Anophele* malaria mosquito from a harmless *Culex;* and they slept in the open. Also they treated the Indians the way my forefathers did three hundred years ago, with the result that Fer de Lance arrows accounted for every man the black malaria didn't get."

"Fer de Lance—what's that?" asked Imric.

"Snake"—the laconic engineer spoke for the first time. "Kin to our rattler—more poisonous and no warning. Brush Indians dip their arrows in it."

Curtis regarded the long man speculatively.

"You said 'our rattler.' Where do you hail from, Mead?"

"N'York State."

"And what are you doing way down here?"

"Drinking."

"Yes, I know," Curtis agreed pleasantly, "but I mean, what do you do in between times?"

"Aren't any in-between times," answered Mead somberly.

CURTIS was irritated. It wasn't his habit —except perhaps with Cap'n Ben—to propitiate indefinitely.

"Very well," he snapped. "Are you sober enough to tell me about the emerald mine?"

"Isn't any emerald mine."

"What do you mean?"

"Plenty of loose emeralds—small ones—in the mud—sand of the small streams —but I can't find the source of them. I've got niggers scratching and digging every possible location—but emeralds come in a matrix of black slate—there's a big deposit up in one of these hills to the south'ard of us—in one of the small defunct volcanoes probably—but I haven't struck it yet. I need more men and more equipment—mining gear and machinery to get the slate down with and break it up."

Curtis turned frowning to Soldano.

"What's all this? I understood there was an operating mine up here. Where did that enormous stone of the Señorita's come from?"

"It came from here." Soldano smiled deprecatingly. "Out of river sands. But there has never been any mine in the real sense of the word. It's all native methods —haphazard hand-washing—placer mining, I think you call it is the States."

"Do you mean to tell me," Curtis exploded, "that all your emerald mining has just been a lot of prospecting and washing out a few loose stones from heaven knows where? And I've gone and dumped—"

He bit his lip and stopped. The money was gone—signed, sealed and delivered by this time—and Catherine probably knew no more than he, the true condition of things. Unless— No, she might be many things, but certainly she was not a gold-digger. He took a long pull at his whisky and soda. Soldano was watching him quizzically. Ah—was that it? Did the astute Spaniard know something which neither the girl nor the engineer knew?

They finished dinner in some constraint, on Curtis' part, at least. His deep-grained good-loser instinct impelled him to conceal his really tragic chagrin about the emerald mine. He tried to cover up by a show of conversational fellowship an effort unusual to him and correspondingly unapt. Soldano in one of his moods of courtly perversity, helped him not at all. The engineer, scarcely touching his food, continued steadily to drink.

The man had switched from whisky to native rum—the evil-smelling Chicha distilled from sugar cane—smooth and sweetly sickish—and heady to a degree. But for all the apparent effect it had, the uncouth engineer might have been drinking water. His immobility was as convincing as ever; his movements, when he did make them, as startlingly clean-cut and decisive as the manual dexterity of a skilled mechanic.

LEAVING the table, they strolled outside. Soldano yawned, a shade elaborately, and observed that he was going to bed.

"If you want a crack at a jaguar, night is your best time. I've spoken to Mead about it; he'll fix you up. Good night." He moved off toward his own bungalow.

Mead watched the receding figure with concentrated impassivity. Then he turned his eyes, but only his eyes, toward Imric and permitted a query to come into his expression. Curtis, fascinated at the economy of effort, nodded affirmatively.

"Yes, to both your questions, Mead. Yes, I'm afraid of 'the Markis' as you call him. And yes, I'd like to go out after jaguar."

"High boots, gloves, cover yourself up. Get your gun and meet me here. I'll fix your headgear."

TEN minutes later they started into the woods, wearing mosquito helmets with the netting tucked inside their coats. Not an inch of flesh was exposed to the deadly mosquito that does most of her work at night.

Strapped to his hat, Curtis bore a gas-burning hunting lamp with a four-inch reflector. The rubber feed-tube ran down his back and beneath his coat to a carbide tank hooked to his belt. It was very hot under the mosquito helmet, and the head-torch hissed and smelled abominably. But the mirror threw a pencil-beam of light that was strong enough to pick out detail at two hundred feet.

They walked in a straight path in the middle of a perfectly straight twenty-foot cutting. The engineer explained tersely that there were five miles of these cuttings radiating out from the camp. The lumber people had taken out most of the cedar, leaving the mahogany and lignum-vitæ and precious woods to the last.

It was easy hunting, amazingly beautiful and strange. Starlight and pale moonlight filtered through, but they could scarcely have moved without the head-light. For the first few hundred yards, Imric had his rifle at his shoulder every few moments. Wherever he turned his head and threw his pencil-shaft of light, he saw eyes—dozens of eyes—hundreds of eyes, pricking out of the night like malevolent stars. But always Mead stopped him. They were not the eyes of large game at a distance, but small animals close at hand, birds and parrots and big-eyed tree snakes. Monkeys they disturbed too. But they could not come up with them. Once there was a startled swish of squealing in the undergrowth. Curtis turned his light and saw a waddling, coarse-furred animal that looked like a gigantic guinea pig. It was four feet long and as tall as a young hog.

"Capybara," the engineer whispered. "Largest living rodent. The niggers and the jaguar eat 'em. Very rank though. Don't shoot."

FOR twenty minutes they walked in silence. Presently Curtis wanted to smoke. The engineer produced a pocket

torch and carefully examined the vicinity. He selected a two-foot cedar log which had been left by the cutters. This, too, he went over carefully. Then they sat down and smoked, stuffily and uncomfortably under their mosquito nets, but consolingly. Curtis took the hot calcium lamp from his hatband and laid it between them on the log and as

A glow of light from the room fell full upon the screen door which he must open to pass through.

far away from his body as the length of tube would allow. The lamp rocked gently and then came to rest, tilted upward at a forty-five angle. Curtis watched it for a moment, concluded that it was secure enough and decided to let it be. Mead began to speak in a whispering monotone.

"And that's one way to find 'em. Sit down on a log, drop your light and pick 'em out of the sky." At last, thought Curtis, the liquor's really got him! The engineer's gaze was traveling along the light-beam of the upturned lamp. Curtis followed his glance. Twenty feet away—it seemed almost overhead—a large, bare branch overhung the cutting. Midway of the branch, flattened and compressed so as to seem part of it, lay a splendid jaguar. His mottled, rattlesnaky spots stood out from his tawny hide. The ears on the short head were wickedly laid back, intensifying a vicious snarl on the lips. In the harsh glow of the light every detail showed. The tip of the tail moved very slowly, like an angry cat.

Curtis kept his eyes fixed on the eyes of the jaguar. He lifted his rifle from his knees very, very deliberately—and fired. There was no chance of missing. Without even a convulsive scramble, the animal slipped from the limb. He must have died in midair, for he fell to earth heavily and limply as a shot quail falls.

Almost simultaneously something else happened—and at Imric's left elbow. He heard a soft "*phut*," and turning his head, saw a long thin stick which he had not before noticed, protruding from the log directly under his head-lamp. In the same instant, the engineer's arm swept across the log with incredible speed—slapping the lamp loose from its tube and knocking it twenty feet away into the bush. Then his voice came in a sober and insistent whisper:

"Thank God the moon's nearly down. We'll have to feel our way back in the dusk. You seem to have made friends here pretty quickly, Mr. Imric. If you'd had your light on, that arrow would have caught you in the throat. Come on."

Curtis felt slightly cold and sick for a moment, and then a rush of hot anger succeeded that first sensation.

He stumbled after the tall engineer.

"I think my friends, as you call 'em, may have come up here with me."

"Huh?" grunted the tall man, laconic again. "Well, you're safe in the dark. Don't show yourself near a light again tonight or you'll surely stop a Fer de Lance arrow. Want to come to my bungalow for the night?"

"Certainly not," Imric answered shortly. They stumbled ahead rather noisily, but at least not furnishing much of an archery target. It took two hours on the back trail which had taken but half an hour going out. Had they not been in the cutting, they could not have moved at all.

AT last they regained the edge of the clearing. A light showed in Curtis' quarters. The engineer stopped.

"I don't like that light."

"Nonsense," growled Curtis. "It's probably the faithful Firkins waiting to brush my teeth. I'm going to walk straight in. Good night."

He walked rapidly toward the steps. A glow of light from the living-room fell full across the screen door which he must open to pass through. Curtis calculated quickly. The edge of the clearing was less than forty feet from his veranda.

He could get in safely enough, he reflected, by going around to the other door. But his take-a-chance love of excitement asserted itself. He whistled blithely, ran part way up the steps, yanked open the screen-door, and then—with the speed of a boxer, ducked his body to the ground. There was a slight "click" sound above him. In the next instant he had jumped through the door and slammed it behind him.

His eyes searched the path of light. Ah—there it was! He chuckled grimly, and plucked a delicately feathered eight-inch dart from the wood-work. Curtis waved his hand pleasantly to the jungle, and went inside. Firkins was there.

"Firkins, some one tried to wing me with this just now. What do you make of it?"

The man looked at it carefully.

"Don't touch the tip, sir. It's a poisoned blow-pipe dart. Very common up here, sir."

"So? And out in the bush a while ago some one tried to shoot a very long and very wicked arrow into me. Firkins, I think tomorrow we join battle."

"Very good, sir. Will you have Scotch or Irish, sir?"

"Scotch, thank you." Curtis undressed in the dark and went to bed. Firkins, though his master did not know it, stayed on guard through the night.

When Imric came out on his veranda next morning, he found the Marquis de Soldano already there. The Spaniard was drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. Curtis' anger rose at the sight but he curbed himself. It was life and death now—perhaps even over the breakfast coffee. He would let the other lead.

"And did you have good sport last night?" was the tranquil opening.

"Excellent," returned Imric with equal tranquillity. "Killed a fine big cat, but had to leave him. Lost my headlight in the excitement. We had to feel our way home in the dark. What's on for today?"

"I was wondering if you would care to go upstream in a launch and see the country. We might go ashore at some native village."

"Delighted," said Curtis without hesitation. Everything must be without hesitation. The Spaniard meant to kill Curtis, and Curtis meant to kill the Spaniard. Everything must be very smooth and tranquil.

"Very well." Soldano dropped his cigarette in his coffee-cup and arose. Curtis took his seat at the breakfast-table and watched the other as he moved to the steps. Undeniably a face of beauty and distinction. Undeniably a body of convincing poise, with a ruthless intelligence behind it. Suddenly it came to Curtis that this was the kind of man that needed killing, if only in the name of ethics and sportsmanship. But on the heels of this thought came its own revulsion. Bah! He would kill the man to save his own skin and to get the woman he wanted. Reason enough, that—and had been for a million years.

His lip twisted back in the old look of self-derision. He felt coldly settled and secure. But he needed time.

"Why don't you stop by in half an hour or so? That'll give me time to finish breakfast and get ready." His tone was brusque—he couldn't help it.

Soldano, sensitive to the change, paused on his way down the steps. There was a slightly puzzled look on his face.

"Of course, of course—but don't be too long, Mr. Imric."

CURTIS watched him until he was out of sight. Then he poured himself coffee, and lighted a cigarette. His somber face was almost as impassive as the gaunt en-

gineer's. But within him coursed the old familiar thrill of anticipatory excitement; lovemaking or fighting—either one could cause it.

He finished his coffee and went inside. For ten minutes he sat in deep thought. Several times his glance fell upon his two rifles which stood in the corner, but each time he frowned in perplexity. At last, however, the frown faded and a slow smile crept around his eyes.

He crossed the room and picked up the rifles. They were American guns—good, hard-shooting weapons up to a thousand yards. He slipped a shell into the chamber of each, and four extra shells into each magazine. Then he sighed, smiled, lighted a cigarette contentedly, and summoned Firkins.

When the man arrived, Imric called him over to the east window of the living-room. This window afforded a view for nearly a mile up the river—to a sudden bend where a steep promontory projected into the stream and forced its course sharply to the south.

Curtis spoke rapidly and with emphasis. Firkins listened in concentrated impassivity, his wooden stare focused on the river promontory. Once his gaze flickered to the rifles—that was all.

"Very good, sir. I quite understand."

Curtis regarded him doubtfully—in two minds whether to repeat his instructions. Firkins decided the point by walking from the room as quietly as he had entered—decorous, poker-faced and imperturbably competent. Curtis smiled grimly to himself, picked up his helmet and field-glasses and sauntered outside. He had just seen Soldano leaving his bungalow.

MIDWAY they converged, and proceeded to the landing-wharf together. Soldano carried a rifle in the crook of his arm—a patently unready position for which Imric was thankful. He himself was unarmed, save for the stubby little automatic below his appendix.

The launch was a clumsy native dugout, awninged over with an improvised thatch of jipa-japa palm supported on slim bamboo poles. The motive power was a one-lunged gas-engine such as the New England fishermen use.

"The launch boy is late, but we'd best get out of the sun," said the Marquis, motioning Curtis to precede him. Curtis was not overanxious to turn his back, but he climbed in and began to fiddle with the engine. Another idea had come to him.

"Let's not wait for the boy," he suggested. "I can manage this craft—I've run a make-and-break-spark engine since I was knee high to a grasshopper."

It was Soldano's turn to look doubtful. But he cast off the bow line and came aboard. Curtis rocked the heavy fly-wheel back and forth a few times, let go with a snap, the motor caught, and they chug-chugged out into the stream. Curtis, boyishly pleased with his performance, forgot the situation long enough to turn and beam upon his companion.

But in the midst of his smile he was alert once more.

THE Spaniard's tunic, unbuttoned at the top, had bellied open as he sat down, and Imric caught the glint of metal under the left arm-pit. From now on, he reflected uneasily, it would be pistol against pistol, with a loaded rifle thrown into the scales against him. And his own pistol, worse luck, was damnably inaccessible. So be it.

In the next five minutes Curtis Imric did some hard thinking. The clatter of the engine drowned any need for conversation. Soldano, almost provocatively, had half turned his back and appeared to be interested only in the scenery.

Now there is a curious little blind spot in human nature that has cost many a man his life in a tight place. It is the well-nigh universal failure to realize that your adversary can see what you are doing out of the corner of his eye though he may be looking beyond or away from you. And the corollary of this truth is the ability to strike without looking—an ability possessed only by the best boxers, the best poker players, and the biggest and crookedest bankers and statesmen.

Imric was a fairish fighting man, and he knew enough not to telegraph his blow—not to be feinted into a false lead by his opponent's apparent carelessness—rifle leaning easily against his knee and face turned shoreward. But he wanted to examine the Spaniard's coat and armpit. His glasses lay on the thwart beside him. He raised them and seemingly inspected the right hand shore. What he really did was to screw the glass down to ten-foot focus, at the same time keeping Soldano within the field of vision of his left eye. He moved the glass from distant point to point—though he saw only a blur—then swept it slowly across Sol-

dano's averted figure, pausing only long enough to get every last detail he wanted—then swung deliberately back again and focused on the right-hand bank.

The time had come. The dugout was in midstream, directly opposite the tip of the promontory, and equidistant from either side of the salient. With the glass still held to his eyes, he spoke petulantly:

"I can't make it out. Two shiny stakes sticking up in the mud at the very top of the bank—about a hundred yards apart—one on either side of that headland there."

"Eh?" queried Soldano; "let's have a look."

Curtis kept the glasses an absent-minded moment longer, as people do under such circumstances—then handed them over to the Spaniard. The action brought him inevitably and naturally within striking distance. Soldano raised the glasses with both hands, elbows away from his body and armpits uncovered.

Curtis sprang. In one motion his left foot kicked the rifle away, his left hand clamped Soldano's shooting wrist, his right dived under the armpit and flashed back with the pearl-handled revolver. Instantly he was clear of his man again and with ten feet between them. It was not unlike what the boxers call a "One-two"—beautifully timed and very pretty.

AND then—to his astonishment—he saw that the other had not moved. At the first thrust, Soldano's elbows had instinctively clamped down. But that was all. The glasses never left his eyes. The poise of his figure maintained its supreme nonchalance. It was the most superb piece of theatricalism that the American had ever witnessed.

From behind the steadily held glasses came the smoothly ironical drawl.

"Very, very prettily done, Mr. Imric! You really caught me out. Now if I'm going to be shot in cold blood, I prefer to have it occur while I am looking at the very lovely shore through your very excellent glasses. Just one question, Mr. Imric. Does your sporting code permit you to disarm a man by trickery and then kill him?"

Curtis began to lose his temper.

"Stop your damned showing off, Marquis, and put down those glasses." The Spaniard obeyed with easy grace, as though humoring a child. Curtis, still keeping him covered, extended one leg and hooked the rifle within reach. He picked it up with his left hand and dropped it overboard. Then, still with his left hand, he reached inside his trouser-band and fished out his own automatic. Then he dropped the pearl-handled revolver overboard. The Spaniard maintained his courteous smile.

"Now," continued Curtis, still nettled, "we are both unarmed except for this automatic, which I shall presently throw overboard. I give you my word I have no other weapon with me. Are you the same?"

"Obviously," rejoined Soldano, spreading his hands and laughing.

"Very good. Now, I'm sick and tired of your dirty work. You and your filthy hillmen have tried three times to kill me. You're not even a good clean personal murderer. You pay some one else to do it for you. That's not my idea of sport. This time you've got to fight it out."

"With pleasure, señor," said the Spaniard urbanely.

"You've got to fight it out," repeated Curtis. "I'm going to kill you because I'm a better swimmer and a better woodsman and a better shot. Those two shiny things leaning up against the top of the mud banks—"

"Yes, yes, I know," broke in Soldano soothingly. "They are your pair of rifles which you have had placed there. Doubtless each is loaded with the same number of cartridges. I recognized them at once through the glasses. That is why I did not resist. Also I was too late," he added deprecatingly. "I am delighted that an American is ready to resort to the code duello. First man to reach the shore runs to whichever rifle he wishes. Am I right? Very sporting, very Russian, I am sure."

"Well, I'm damned. You certainly—look here, Soldano—can't we still—" He broke off at the other's mocking smile and began to remove his coat. His light canvas shoes he kept on. Soldano did the same.

"I am ready when you are, señor," said the Spaniard from the bow of the boat.

"Let's go," ordered Curtis. He dropped his pistol overboard. The next moment both men were in the water.

IN a dozen strokes Curtis knew that he was a beaten man. Soldano could outswim him one yard in ten. The Spaniard knew it too, and turning on his side looked back with a snarling and triumphant smile. It was the first time he had let the mask fall.

He was now drawing rapidly away from Curtis, swimming easily and powerfully.

"Very prettily done, Mr. Imric! Now if I'm going to be shot in cold blood—"

"Thank you for showing me the easiest way, you fool," he called. "She sent us both up here so that only one would come back. Did you think that you alone were given the key to the grille?"

Rage and despair and conviction of the truth struck into Curtis. It weakened him, battling as he was to keep down the Spaniard's lead. But he must not answer, for every breath meant still a chance for life.

They were nearing the point of the headland, Soldano by now a full forty yards in the lead. He made bottom and splashed his way up the mud bank, fresh and unwinded. Curtis, lungs cracking, and gulping his breath in terrible open-mouthed gasps, staggered ashore three minutes later. Soldano was making for the rifle on the right—the one nearest camp. Curtis could hear him tearing his way through the undergrowth.

Curtis slipped in the mud and fell to his knee. His exhaustion was extreme, but he must get up the bank and under cover. He was losing more time now than he had in the water. If Soldano recovered the first rifle and could get back within range before Curtis reached his own gun—then it would be all over after a trifle of easy pot-shooting.

He stumbled and slid and clutched his way up the precarious bank, his tortured heart and temples pounding near the bursting point. At last he reached an overhanging branch and drew himself to dry ground—the trunk of his body in the foliage but his spent and nerveless legs still overhanging the bank.

FOR two minutes he lay while strength gradually returned. He could hear no sound. Soldano must have found the rifle. By now he would be on the back track. There was a snapping crack overhead—as of a tightly drawn sheet of paper being split with a horsewhip. Curtis swung his protruding legs out of sight, with a return of hope. Rotten shooting! Six feet over at that distance could only mean that Soldano was a poor shot or was suffering from a bad case of buck-fever.

Imric lay quite still for what he judged to be a full minute. By now he felt restored. He jumped suddenly to his feet and plunged into the thicket. A ricochet passed near his head with a purring whistle—quite a different sound from the first shot. It was uncomfortably close. He fought his way on through the jungle, reckless of noise. Speed was his best chance. Silly of Soldano to waste that second shot where any twig would deflect a rifle bullet. He pushed doggedly on. Twice he dropped flat and listened. No sound. Soldano had gone to stalking, as he should have done at the outset.

Curtis felt easier for a time. Surely by now he must be far enough. He worked out toward the river again and made his way cautiously to the bank. Ah—there it was! Butt in the mud, but barrel extending over the rim of the bank. He drew the rifle to him and lay quite still.

He considered their positions. Soldano was between him and camp. Having wasted two shells, he would if possible retire to some point where he could intercept Curtis if the latter tried to pass from the wooded headland to the mainland. That there was such a point, Curtis now remembered with chagrin. He had seen it from his bungalow window. The headland was a narrow-based salient, almost a peninsula, and an open canebrake lay between it and the cut-over timber near the home camp. The advantage of getting ashore first was very great, how great he only now realized.

Soldano knew the country near the camp, and he would have noticed the open canebrake. It was less than four hundred yards wide at the base of the promontory; nothing larger than a snake could come out of the woods without being seen. Soldano could take cover midway and command the position with a two-hundred-yard target in either direction. This, thought Imric, would not do at all. He had made the terms and chosen the weapons. And here he was being hunted and potted at! Somehow—in some way, he must take the offensive.

He had quite lost his desire to hunt at long range. What the swimming, taunting Castilian had flung at him in the water, had made him want to kill at close quarters—to kill by hand and then to fling the false body at the feet of the woman who had betrayed and made a fool of him. . . . .

He pulled himself together. Time enough for all that later. The immediate thing was to try to get out alive from the situation which he had himself made.

He crept cautiously to the bank and peered at the river. The downstream current was quite swift. He watched some floating driftwood and logs. They passed his position slowly, but gathered speed as they were sucked around the deep water at the tip of the headland. It was over a hundred yards to the headland, and from that point it was another five hundred down the other shore to the canebrake. But the longest way round might be the shortest way to win. It might be done—with luck.

IMRIC'S mind was made up. He lowered himself over the edge and slid down the bank. Under the bank he was perfectly protected, unless Soldano had followed, which was highly unlikely. So he took his time. He scanned the shore line between him and the point. Here and there were scattered dead trees and a few saw logs which had been washed ashore from the lumbering. He tried several, but they were too heavy.

At last he lifted one that came away from the mud as though made of feathers. It was a ten-foot balsa log, light as cork and quite as buoyant. He rolled it to the water, waded after it, and wedged his rifle carefully between some broken-off branches that protruded from the trunk. Even as he pushed out into deep water, it came to him perversely that thousands of bathers, from Honolulu to Palm Beach, were diverting themselves with surf-boards of this same balsa wood; only their surf-boards were prettily covered and painted, and they were not swimming for their lives.

HE made no attempt at speed but was content to keep the log on an even keel and, so far as possible, between him and shore. In fact, the current carried him to the tip of the headland faster than he wished. He wanted time to practice with his cork log, for once around the point he would be in range of Soldano. He must keep low in the water, and learn to guide and balance the log with one hand.

The current carried him so close to the promontory that he ran aground. He pushed off quickly and was swept around the bend. It was very easy. The water was refreshing after the fearful heat of the forest. He found that he could lie on his back and swim gently, his right hand grasping a branch midway of the log and keeping it between him and his enemy. It took him nearly an hour to cover the five hundred yards to the farther end of the canebrake. Here he would make for shore, and get in Soldano's rear just as Soldano had done to him.

He began to work his way across-current into shallow water. Forty feet more, and he would have been safely hidden under the high bank. But a back eddy caught him. The light log swung slowly and inexorably—exposing him broadside to the canebrake.

Curtis had been a hunter all his life and a soldier for a couple of years. He knew that motion is visibility. So now he lay motionless on his back, floating with his legs deep, only his face and nostrils exposed.

But that was enough. There was a thudding *phut* sound in the log beside him, and a moment later the rolling echo of a rifle-

Curtis caught him with a full-shouldered football tackle; they went down in a rolling heap. Now indeed Curtis meant to kill—with his bare hands!

shot. He thrashed over on his belly, got behind the log, and tried to push for shore. But the eddy was too strong, and he was forced to paddle off into deep water. As he did so he caught sight of the Spaniard running to the bank and working the bolt of his rifle as he ran.

Imric was now in a curious predicament. He had five shells against Soldano's two. Soldano could not hit him so long as he kept behind his log. On the other hand, he could not shoot Soldano unless he could get ashore and use his rifle. His only chance was to get into slack water so that he might push his log broadside ahead of him as a shield, then work in to shore until he could touch bottom and stand up and fight it out.

That chance came very soon. Even as he looked, he saw that the current had carried him down and that he was opposite the northern edge of the clearing in which the camp stood. He could see the bungalows and the cook-shack. He thought he saw figures standing near the wharf. But he could not be sure. Soldano had disappeared—presumably into the woods next to the clearing, to keep abreast of Curtis if he again offered a target. . . . .

Near the shoreward string-piece of the camp-wharf stood Catherine Espinosa and the engineer, Mead. The gaunt Yankee held a pair of ancient binoculars glued to his eyes. Beneath the binoculars the thin black pipe projected and emitted an attenuated wisp of smoke. Beneath the pipe the great Adam's apple moved intermittently as if of its own volition. Nothing else appeared to move.

The girl spoke first.

"You say they left just before I got here?"

The small head on the long neck nodded slightly.

"When did you find their dugout?"

"Hour ago."

The girl was holding herself in hand.

"You will please, Mr. Mead, be good enough to tell me what has happened."

"Don't know, ma'am. Disagreement likely. Three shots—long intervals."

Catherine was breathing fast and she was unusually pale. Otherwise she gave no sign.

"What do you regard so intently in the river?" she asked quietly enough.

THE engineer did not answer at once. Nor did he move. With the glass at his eyes and the pipe in his mouth, he spat—spat as effortlessly and impersonally and disinterestedly as a gargoyle gushes

water. After another interval he lowered the glasses.

"Balsa log swimming to shore and a man behind the log. Up by the woods there."

Catherine seized the glasses and focused. A hundred yards above the wharf was a small beach. The log was moving uncannily into this beach.

A man ran out of the woods, ran to the water's edge, dropped on one knee and fired.

From behind the log rose another man, raising a rifle as he stood waist-deep in water. The man on shore fired again, stampeded into a hasty snap-shot. The man in the water dropped his rifle and started floundering toward shore, wringing his right hand grotesquely as he came.

The man on the beach yanked at the bolt of his empty rifle, looked up at the muddy, bloody figure from the river, dropped his gun and fled.

Now, Soldano had as little chance running as Imric had swimming. Curtis caught him even before he was opposite the camp-wharf—caught him from behind and just at the knees—with a full-shouldered football tackle. They went down in a rolling heap. Curtis' hands thrust upward and his unwounded left closed on the Spaniard's throat. His shattered right struggled for the same mark. Now indeed he meant to kill, and to kill with his bare hands.

Soldano's free right hand was clutching at his hip. A look of exultation came into his half-glazed eyes.

"You kept man!" he gasped, and his hand came away from his belt with the bright steel blade flashing in the sun.

There was a sharp report from near at hand. Soldano's throat went limp under Imric's grasp. The head rolled sideways. Curtis disengaged himself and rose shakily to his feet. Thirty feet away stood the engineer. A thin wisp of smoke drifted lazily from his pipe, and his right hand was buttoning the khaki flap of his pocket. Otherwise the figure was as immobile, as volitionless as ever.

"Damn you," cried Curtis hysterically, "did you hear what he called me? Couldn't you let me kill him myself?"

"Not a chance. He was going to knife you. I don't like knives." The Adam's apple rose and fell in the columnar throat. "I want a drink." He turned and moved up the pathway: disinterested, effortless, aloof—and drunk.

Curtis turned to follow, but he felt suddenly weak and ill. He sat down abruptly and looked resentfully at his wounded hand. "Looks clean," he thought dully, "but must fix it up—never can tell."

And now for the first time he saw Catherine. She was perhaps sixty yards away, walking up the slope from the wharf, slowly but very straight, to Imric.

For a few seconds, in his dizziness, Curtis did not understand. But of a sudden his brain, responding to the stimulus of revulsion, cleared as a sick man's mind clears after a long fever. He looked wonderingly about at the palms and bamboos. Incredulously almost, he watched the slowly approaching woman. Reaction and self-scorn swept through him. For the first time he began to realize that he had forsaken even his own standards. And it had taken a murderous Spaniard to tell him so. For the first time he saw this land and these people as they were—medieval and cruel.

The girl was coming nearer. Straight and unseeing past the body she walked, nor did she deviate from her course by so much as a hair's breadth. Marry him? No, thought Imric in bitter disillusion, never would she have married him. She would cheat him, trick him, make him the creature of her lustful uses, suck him dry and toss him aside. Such was the arrogant and unscrupulous stuff she was made of. Catherine! Aye—and well named at that! Catherine the Great and the wicked—spender of men's brains and bodies.

"Kept man!" By heaven, it had been a close call. But it wasn't too late. He would clear out—at once—tonight. Lotus eating—that was what he had been at. But he would get back to the land of hard fare and hard work. Better disgrace and debt and work, than the cowardly shifts of an exiled voluptuary. Better—

CATHERINE stood before him. Her head was high and there was a curiously exalted look on her white face. He rose painfully to his feet.

"I trust you enjoyed your ring-side seat," he began roughly. "Too bad the wrong bull was killed."

"I do not understand!" she said slowly.

"It is hardly necessary to go into details. Your dead lover was explicit enough." His voice was harsh. "I am leaving at once, if you will permit. I shall trouble you no further than to ask the loan of one of your launches—in exchange, shall

There was a sharp report from near at hand. . . . . Thirty feet away stood the engineer.

we say, for my steam yacht," he added needlessly.

There is a certain thoroughbred type the world over that bears pain without flinching: nay, more—that rises and meets it head-on and scorns it. It is not a matter of race, or breeding, or class or color. It is a matter of character. Curtis should have recognized it.

As he finished speaking, Catherine's expression lost its look of exaltation. A faint color crept over her pallor—that was all. Then she spoke, very quietly and evenly.

"This is my country, señor, and you shall come or go as you will. I have said to you that all I have is yours to do with as you wish. I do not unsay what I have spoken. I wish you Godspeed."

She turned away from him and looked toward the river. Curtis walked slowly up the slope to his bungalow. Once he turned back. She was standing where he had left her. She had lighted a cigarette. He could see the pale blue smoke floating lazily upward in the hot sun. Three men passed below her on the path. Two of them carried a litter. She gazed over their heads and beyond them—beyond the palms and the river and the jungle, beyond the great balsa trees and the forested hills—to the far-off snow-clad Andes that drove their icy whiteness into the clouds.

Two weeks later Curtis Imric landed in New York. He was virtually penniless. He had nothing but a few suits of clothes and a great many creditors. He spent his first evening at his favorite club. He wrote out his resignation and took it to the manager, but found that he could not resign until he had paid his house charges. That nettled him. It was going to be difficult even to be poor.

The next morning he went to the office of his principal creditor, the senior partner in a big bond house. He walked into the man's private office as he had always done, though if anything a trifle more truculently. The bond man regarded him sourly.

"Thought you'd skipped out, Imric."

"I did. But I'm back and ready to face the music. I may as well tell you that I'm flat. I've lost even my steamer that belonged to you fellows by right. Tried to make a turn and recoup."

"Humph!" The bond man was noncommittal. "What do you want now?"

"A job. My only asset is my time, and that belongs to you. Put me to work, give me half what I earn, and credit the other half against my debit balance."

"You have no debit balance. I wrote off the loss three weeks ago. I never waste time on bad debts."

"All right," snapped Curtis; "we'll see."

"What can you do?" objected the other querulously. "You're not trained in any-

thing except spending money and playing the market."

"Sell bonds?" suggested Curtis.

"My Gawd!" exclaimed the bond man piously, and was silent. "All right," he continued after a time, "go ahead and write your own ticket. I'll speak to the bond manager."

NEXT morning Curtis Imric went to work at the hardest job in the hardest game in a rather hard world. He sat at a small mahogany desk near a large window. His desk was equipped with a telephone, set of market reports, a book of bond-yield tables and a long list of prospects. Beside his desk stood a second chair for customers. His window looked out over the lower bay. He could see the Statue of Liberty and the Narrows and the fruit steamers on their way to South America.

A month went by. Curtis plugged. He had one supreme asset for the job—the ability to immerse himself in the moment—to accept the glib, cynical standards of the gang. He forgot everything except bond selling. He sold good bonds and was happy. He sold unsalable pup issues and was still happier. The very qualities of emotional extravagance that had carried him to the verge of spiritual ruin, were now remaking him from the best that was in him. He was happy, but in a dogged numb way. He was suffering another reaction, and his heart was heavy with yearning and self-reproach. He found himself scanning the shipping news, and watching for the steamers that sailed to Caribbean ports.

Another month went by. The senior bond man and the junior bond man were on their way to luncheon.

"I used to say that they never came back," said the senior querulously. "But I don't know—I don't know. You say he put away two hundred thousand of those Pan-Traction Refunding 5's?"

"Uh-huh," affirmed the other. "Sold 'em to the Stephens estate where they'll stay put. Silverman pinned 'em on us. Hardest selling issue we've had this season."

The senior bond man looked vaguely aggrieved.

"I don't know—I don't know. Maybe he's learned. If he keeps it up another six months I s'pose we'll have to talk real turkey to him. What's he after, anyway?"

"Search me," replied the junior indifferently, "one of these romantic fools, I guess."

STILL another month passed. Spring was in full flush. The salesmen had their windows open. Thirty stories above the caverns of commerce in the dirty streets below, the soft spring airs blew in from the sea—air pure as on a country hill-top.

Curtis Imric hung up his telephone receiver, and turned his face to the harbor. He would deliberately give himself five minutes. He had been doing this increasingly of late. It meant pain and longing. He'd have to cut it out—get a desk away from the window. He turned back to survey the room. A short, stocky figure had entered the doorway at the far end, and was heading for his desk. Imric's saturnine face scarcely changed, but his heart missed a beat in warm delight.

"Hello, Cap'n Ben!" They shook hands as though they had parted yesterday.

"Hello, Mr. Curt. Been aimin' for the last two months to answer your letter. Then I let it go so long, thought I'd better come up myself. Had a hard time findin' you. What are you figuring to do here?"

Curtis began to feel cheerful, and just a little pleased with himself. Funny how he valued the good opinion of this man.

"Well, Skipper, I decided to take your advice. I'm working for one of the guys that threw me for a loss."

"Broke as hell, aint you?"

"Absolutely," said Curtis cheerfully.

"Fine stuff," agreed the Captain. "I allus said hardtack was better for you than them fancy lizard cutlets. But you sure did pull out in a hurry. Why couldn't you wait for me? But say, Mr. Curt, you certainly done a good job on the Spanish fellow."

Curtis' look clouded.

"I didn't kill him. But I'm sorry I didn't." He paused. "What happened to the *Dora?*"

"I sold her and turned the cash over like you told me—two hundred ten thousand dollars gold." The Captain's face was unreadable.

Curtis sighed. After all, what else had he expected?

"Well—that's that," he said slowly.

The Captain was fishing in his breast pocket.

"Yes, Mr. Curt, that's that. And this is this. Skin your eye over this report."

Curtis took the paper and glanced over it. His heart did another queer turn in his stomach.

The Captain was speaking.

"We put part of the cash into machinery and equipment in Tobango and rushed it upriver. And 'long about six weeks back that long-legged souse of an engineer comes through with the goods. He shoots the top off an old volcano and uncovers an emerald mine. Say Mr. Curt, they's all the emeralds in the world in that there hole! I'd hate to say how rich you was at this minute. You kin buy out all them fellers you owe money to and put 'em to work for you."

Curtis folded the report with exaggerated care, and stuck it in his book of bond-yield tables. Then he arose.

"I think, Skipper," he said succinctly, "that we must now go out and find some bootleg champagne."

"Mebbe later," quoth the Captain, "but first they's some folks out in the reception-room waiting to see you." He lowered his voice and looked slightly embarrassed. "I been trying to tell you. Fact is, Mr. Curt, I'm up here on my honeymoon."

"What!" exploded Curtis.

CAPTAIN BEN nodded a trifle sheepishly.

"Yes, sir, me and the big duenna got spliced before we come north. You'll mind my telling you she favors my Aunt Matilda down in Augusta. I calc'late that's why I done it. She understands English, and I don't understand one word out of a hundred that she says. I figure on a real happy marriage, Mr. Curt."

Curtis roared with delight.

"Is she here now?"

"Yes, sir. They're—she's waiting outside in the reception-room."

"Let's go," exclaimed Curtis. "Wedding-breakfast on me. Champagne for three." He rose and started for the ladies' reception-room. The Captain hung back, fussing with his papers.

Curtis, his homely face lighted with an unaccustomed smile, entered the room. By the east window which gave upon the river a woman was seated.

But it was not the duenna aunt.

The smile vanished from Curtis' face, and a dull red took its place. Very deliberately he closed the door behind him. Then he turned to the girl at the window. She continued to gaze at the river.

"I don't know why you have come," he began constrainedly, "unless it is to punish me some more. The Captain has told me about the mine, but that is nothing. I—oh, God, can you ever forgive me? The night I left I was half mad—all these months I have tortured myself—I have seen you standing there—silent—while I raved like a beast and slapped in the face the only thing in the world I cared for."

He stopped. The girl had not moved.

"There is no use asking you to understand—because I—I can't understand myself," he ended lamely.

SLOWLY Catherine rose. Her face was sad and her eyes were brooding. No imperious princess this, ruling a tropical kingdom—but a young girl, uncertain, sad, but quite fearless. While Curtis was speaking, her look changed slowly. She faced him now, somber-eyed and tender.

"I was afraid to come, señor, but I am afraid no longer. Do I understand? Yes, Curtis Imric, I understand, and I am happy. It is not what you say, but your voice which has made me certain again. It is like that night on the peecnic when I prepared the food—and when you asked me in marriage—

"No, Curtis Imric—" She stopped him —"you will hear me first. I have thought much. I was wrong. I would have done you much harm perhaps. But now it is my turn. I am Catherine Espinosa and I speak what I wish. I ask, señor, if you will marry me?"

Imric's great arm reached out and his grasp fell roughly upon her shoulder. Roughly and exultingly, yet tenderly, he drew her to him. She came demurely triumphant, proudly eager—laughing the low throaty intimate laugh that fired his blood and thrilled his last nerve.

AFTER a time they stood decorously at the window gazing upon the great river teeming with shipping. Ferry boats shunted back and forth, raucously blaring their whistles at one another. A long white yacht steamed gracefully around the Battery, headed for an upstream anchorage. Curtis gazed at it—indifferently at first, and then with a gathering frown of puzzlement. He looked at the girl. Her eyes were dancing.

"Yes, Curtis *mio*, it is your boat. It was I who bought the *Dora*. And it was Captain Runker who made me bring her north. He explained that you would want it for our honeymoon."

"Well, I'm damned," said Curtis Imric.

THE END.

The Affair at the Closed Hotel

By BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

"Take Miss Brown around to Fitz - Percy and Molo—then join me here. Quick!"

A new and amazing adventure of Merlin O'Moore, a young man afflicted with moon-madness: by the author of the famous "Easy Street Experts."

MR. FIN MACBATT was bored—also sullen. All the world was gray to him, and he could not have felt more averse to his master and his master's dog, Molossus, had that uncommon pair been Pluto, King of Hades, and Cerberus, house-dog thereof, respectively. One might have thought, not without reason, that Mr. MacBatt, living as he did with Merlin O'Moore at that most famous of London hotels, the Astoritz, during a great part of the year, would have been delighted when the stern call of duty bade him go forth into the country in the train of his master. If only for the change.

But this was not so. The big-headed, lantern-jawed, blue-jowled valet loathed the countryside, and despised the seaside. And when—as was now the case—Merlin chose to stay at a place like Cromingham, which was both seaside *and* countryside, the urban-minded MacBatt's teeth went completely on edge from the very moment he arrived.

It mattered not to the dour-souled bighead that he got off with comparatively little work, Merlin being at golf for the greater part of the day with his great friend, and now his guest, Miss Blackberry Brown, the famous white-black comédienne. It mattered not that the air was so bracing. All MacBatt wanted was London—her white glare and glitter, the snuffling and snarling of her motor traffic, the whoop of those seedy demons of her curbs, the newsboys, the *frou-frou* of the skirts of her wealthy (looking) daughters, and the wailings of the string bands in her restaurants.

For that was how Mr. MacBatt was constructed. He was not amenable to the charm of a big, pouring sea breeze, nor did the dreamy contemplation of a moon-silvered sea, or a black-and-silver countryside, appeal to him. And the only substitute for the *frou-frou* of silken skirts being—he always unjustly maintained—usually the sharp, whistling *frou-frou* of the homeward-wending plowman's corduroys, it is perhaps not wholly surprising that in the opinion of the bulbous-browed valet the only difference between country life and death was that the latter threw less strain upon one's patience. A grim outlook, true—but it was Mr. MacBatt's.

BECAUSE of these things we find the valet, late upon a fresh October afternoon, moving, in company with one of Mr. Merlin O'Moore's best cigars, along a by-lane which leads from Cromingham to East Sherington. Mr. MacBatt's object was to leave a private message at a house near the middle of the lane. There was a sprightly parlor-maid at this house to whose *savoir vivre* Mr. MacBatt looked for some slight amelioration of his unhappy lot, and the message had to do with certain of his plans thitherward.

But, in so far as that particular phase of Mr. MacBatt's flirtation was concerned, Fate had already prepared a bludgeon which fell just as the valet began a soliloquy dealing with the monumental and peculiar idiocy of a man—Merlin O'Moore, to-wit—who, being worth millions, yet lacks sufficient intelligence to refrain from owning and visiting a golf-cottage on the East Coast.

As Mr. MacBatt mused acidly, something in rags leaped the hedge and collapsed at the valet's feet with a quavering howl. It was a tramp—curiously abject, even for a tramp—and he glared white-eyed at MacBatt, pointing a trembling finger wildly at nothing in particular.

"Lumme! He tipped him off of the gallery rail with a rope round 'is neck like a bloomin' hangman," quavered the man. "*Hung him!* 'E hung 'im! . . . . It was fair murder! Help! I seen it. I sawr it. Lumme!"

MR. MACBATT was not much interested, but as obviously the poor ragged wretch was practically helpless with excitement and terror, he picked him up and grimly shook him into a certain coherence.

Quaking with drink, shock, semi-starvation, ill-health, or whatever ailed him, the man was presently able to make perfectly clear to MacBatt the following facts, to-wit: That when, a few minutes ago, he quietly approached the great hotel, now closed for the winter, upon the cliff about a quarter of a mile to the right of the lane, he did so under the impression that the hotel was entirely empty, save for the furniture and perhaps a decrepit caretaker; and that, therefore, he would have little difficulty in finding a means of entrance, a bed, and possibly a few crumbs in the still-room left over by the mice. To his amazement, he discovered, on prowling round the place, that there were certainly two men in the hotel. He had climbed on to a first-floor balcony and had peered through the window of the room.

There had been the merest chink at the side of the blind, but it was enough for the tramp to see—so he swore—a man standing upon a gallery or balcony running round a big hall, attach a noosed rope which hung from a beam overhead another form—an unconscious man, the tramp said, and push him from the balcony rail. There had been a fearful jerk and the rope had broken—then a horrible thud—and the next thing of which the tramp seemed to be aware was that he was scrambling down the pillar of the outside balcony and departing from that place, anywhither as long as he got away. He had seen MacBatt walking along the lane and had headed for him. He finished his curious narrative with a statement to the effect that he hadn't had anything at all to do with it, s'elp him.

Mr. MacBatt thought it over. He climbed through the hedge and took a look at the big, silent hotel on the cliff. It was very still; all the blinds were drawn, and no smoke came from any of the chimneys.

"This," said the sardonic valet, "is just about the sort of mix-up that would suit the Boss and his measly dog. Not to mention little Blackberry Brown and that old tale-pitcher Fitz-Percy."

IT should be explained that Merlin O'Moore's guests included Mr. Fitz-Percy, an ancient actor, deadhead, and man of the world, and a Mrs. Tudor de Roche—so-called—an auntie of Miss Brown, also once a favorite of the footlights, but, alas! no longer so.

"It'll be full moon presently—is now, in fact," soliloquized MacBatt, looking up at a big, ghostly ball which, as the daylight slowly faded, was growing brighter every moment, "and as, I suppose, he'll be going more or less off his burner, as usual, it seems to me that it would be a charity to put him on to this. Get him and his weird pals interested, and it looks like an evening off for Fin MacBatt—or an hour or two, anyhow. And I can do with a bit of a breather this evening, too. . . . . Oh, sure!"

He turned to inform the tramp that the matter was now in other and more capable hands—but the tramp had vanished, as tramps will. The man had not liked Mr. MacBatt at all, and, discreetly, had quietly faded away while the valet was staring at

the hotel. But MacBatt did not mind—he did not require any tramps. He threw away his cigar which had gone out, and, lighting a cigarette instead, turned back to the house.

Halfway there, passing the head of a footpath which led into the lane, a deep bass growl warned the valet that Molossus and his master were there or thereabouts. He turned to the footpath and came face to face with Merlin and Miss Blackberry Brown, who, having diligently labored throughout the afternoon on the golf-links, were now strolling home in company with the deadhead—that is to say, Mr. Fitz-Percy, and the *passée* but still extremely vivacious aunt, Mrs. de Roche.

THE Fitz-Percy smiled upon the valet.

"Here is none other than good Mr. MacBatt," he said, his keen old eyes flickering over the valet in his usual comprehensive, all-absorbing gaze.

"Good evening to you, MacBatt," he added suavely. "You are taking your fill of this good sea-air, I perceive."

"Yes, thank you, sir," replied the valet with a twisted smile. His light-gray gaze wandered past the old deadhead to Merlin O'Moore.

"What is it, Fin?" inquired Merlin.

"A curious thing just happened, sir, which I thought I ought to tell you," began MacBatt. Merlin seemed to liven up a little, as he saw from the expression on his valet's face that something of interest was in the air.

Mr. MacBatt, with a sardonic note in his voice, in spite of the deference which he had long been taught to infuse into all his conversation with Merlin O'Moore, related briefly the facts of his recent encounter with the tramp.

MERLIN and Blackberry Brown glanced significantly at each other. Here, it seemed, was a full-moon adventure ready made for them. As has been shown elsewhere, the attractive Miss Brown was almost as susceptible as O'Moore to the full moon. Both, at that period of lunar development, were, and always had been, afflicted with a perfectly inexplicable restlessness and hunger for change and excitement. Both, to use Merlin's expressive term, were "moon-slaves." It was the chief cause of their friendship. . . . .

"You say the man hanged another man, Fin," said Merlin thoughtfully.

"The rope broke, sir," MacBatt reminded him gently.

Merlin nodded.

"Well, we had better go up there, I think, and make a few inquiries. You and I, Fitz-Percy—"

"Naturally, my dear boy," said the deadhead jauntily.

"And Molo—"

The big fighting-dog gaped a befanged gape of pleasure, as he stared with pale, wicked-looking eyes up at his master.

Blackberry Brown broke in.

"And—of course—myself!" She laughed. "And you, Aunt."

But Aunt thought not. She was fair, fat, and fully fifty, and she was in the habit of respecting her well-being and her meal times.

And now her very sound idea was to go home to a quiet, comfortable dinner. The prospect of walking up to the hotel and back held no charm for her. She had been a dancer during a great part of her stage career, and although her feet, strictly speaking, were not completely worn out, nevertheless they were at all times grateful for careful usage.

IT was arranged that Aunt should go back to the house—convoyed by Mr. MacBatt—and dine, while the moon-haunted pair, with Molossus and the Fitz-Percy, should proceed to the hotel, there to see whatever might be visible.

"And, MacBatt," said Merlin, as they turned, "you can prepare something cold for us, ready when we return."

"Very good, sir," said the valet, with bitterness in his heart, perceiving that this command sent his planned hour of dalliance with the fair parlor-maid gracefully up into the air, where it speedily resolved itself into the stuff that dreams are made of.

"Very good, sir," he said, adding under his breath a fervent wish that Merlin might encounter some peculiarly sanguinary complication or other at the "empty" hotel.

By the time the quartet of adventurers had reached the hotel, the daylight had yielded to the light of the moon. They approached cautiously through the stunted shrubs of the grounds, and selecting a balcony near the main entrance which might have been the one used by the tramp, aimed for that.

There was no sign of life in the big place, nor was there light in any of the windows. The hotel looked utterly empty. It had

never been a success from the time of its building, and no fewer than four different managers had carefully tried—and as carefully failed—to "boom" it. This was the first time it had closed for the winter and it seemed to have closed so very economically that even the services of a caretaker were dispensed with.

All this the Fitz-Percy conveyed to Merlin and Blackberry Brown as they walked there.

But Merlin quieted the old prattler with a gesture. He had been eying the windows nearest the balcony while the Fitz-Percy was speaking.

"He tipped him off the gallery rail with a rope around 'is neck," quavered the man. "Hung 'im! I seen it! I sawr it!"

O'Moore laughed a little as the airy old deadhead babbled on.

"You seem to have gleaned as much of the history of the place in the three days you have been down here as I have in a dozen visits extending over the last three years!" he said. The deadhead flapped back the sable wings of his Inverness overcoat—for the walk was beating him—like an ancient white-headed crow.

"Naturally, my dear boy. A man in my position learns to become a highly competent and rapid gleaner, or he perishes more miserably than the beasts of the fields. To me—a deadhead, as those lacking in reverence for these silvery hairs have dared to describe me—an hotel with many empty rooms and consequently many empty chairs at the *table d'hôte*—saddest of sights, my dear young people—is always an interesting object of speculation and possibly manipulation, to me. One never knows whether one might not engineer an invitation from the proprietor (for suggestions or services rendered) to fill, for a brief space, one of those empty beds, one of those empty dining-room seats. . . . . So one falls into a habit of inquiry—mostly, alas, wasted! A gleaner! Indeed I am, Merlin, my boy. May you never become one—may you, rather—"

"There's a light in the window of the room opening onto the balcony!" he said quietly. "Do you see it? A thin streak. . . . . It must have been just switched on. And look there!"

He pointed away to the left to a shrubbery across the lawn on the far side of a carriage drive.

"Do you see anything?" he breathed.

They peered. There was a faint glow of light filtering among the dense evergreens —very subdued.

"Some one in the shrubbery with a lantern?" hazarded Blackberry Brown.

"No, my child—the light does not move," said the deadhead gently.

"I think the glow comes from the side lamps of a motor—pointed to the road," explained Merlin with a new note of excitement in his voice.

He turned to the others, his eyes gleaming a little.

"The tramp seems to have told a little of the truth, at all events. There is some

one here—and in the hotel. There would be no point in sitting still in a motor hidden in the shrubbery."

The Fitz-Percy nodded.

"True," he said. "I will progress unto the motor in the manner of the red Indian—stealthily—and reconnoiter!"

MERLIN nodded.

"Yes. See if it's unattended, and if it is, let the air out of both back tires, and hang about out of sight, keeping an eye on it. If anyone comes out, you might slip round to the balcony and give me warning. I'm going up onto that balcony to see what is happening inside that room, and Double B and Molossus can guard the main door until I come down, if they like." He hesitated a moment. "If there are several men inside, and if they really have murdered some one, it may be dangerous," he muttered. "I wish we'd brought MacBatt. He's a dour and discontented devil, but I believe he would sooner fight than drink—almost. . . . . What's the matter, Molo, old boy?"

The giant fighter from the Pyrenees had rumbled low down in his great throat, glaring behind him, leaning round. Merlin felt the weight of the powerful brute against the thick collar he held.

There came silently from behind a clump of evergreens the lean but wiry figure of the big-headed, predatory-souled MacBatt.

"What do you want here?" said Merlin O'Moore curtly. He was secretly glad to see the ruffian who valeted—and had been tamed by—him, but MacBatt's orders were not of a character which gave him any excuse for appearing here, convenient though his arrival was.

"Beg pardon, sir. Mrs. de Roche instructed me that she did not desire dinner yet. She seemed—if I may say so, sir—uneasy." (The blood-curdling prognostications of the fate of Merlin's party invented by MacBatt for the poor lady's especial benefit would have made a rhinoceros uneasy.) "—Uneasy, sir; and she instructed me to rejoin you. She wished me to say that she knew you would forgive her altering your orders as you would understand her very natural anxiety about our—the—young lady, sir."

BY "our—the—young lady," the wily MacBatt meant Blackberry Brown. It sounded, of course, as though the famous "white-black" comédienne was about seventeen, with her hair not yet done up. It was a deft compliment. "Our" young lady!

"*Dear* MacBatt!" said Blackberry with what would have been a giggle if uttered by a flapper, but was a "silvery laugh" in a white-black comédienne.

Even the lips of the experienced Fitz-Percy twitched.

"Oh, very well—admirable idea," said Merlin, immensely relieved that his little friend would not have to stand guard at the main door alone. "You had better take up your position with Miss Brown—under her orders—at the door, Fin. Do as she tells you—you understand."

For Merlin knew that what Miss Brown lacked in sheer muscular power she more than balanced in brains and—though that does not come into this story—beauty.

"Fitz-Percy, you had better take Molo. You're the only other man I've ever met who can do anything with him. Stun him up with my putter—here you are—if he gets too cannibalistic. It's the only talk he understands."

This was true—the red-masked *dogue* had taken an extraordinary liking to the suave old deadhead.

"And now for it—if there *is* anything queer!" said Merlin.

THEY all stole forward to their posts. Since nothing of any note happened immediately to the others, let us follow Mr. O'Moore up one of the balcony pillars, and so onto the balcony itself.

To his unfeigned pleasure, he discovered that he was able, through the chink between the dark green blind and the window frame, to follow the movements of the man who—the first glance informed him—occupied the gallery of which the trembling tramp had told.

The French window through which he was peering opened, not onto a room, but onto one side of a gallery which ran round what appeared to be the lounge-hall of the hotel, and it was on the side of the gallery farthest from Mr. O'Moore that the mysterious man was still engaged upon his grisly work with the noosed rope.

Merlin recognized him instantly as the person who for the past two years had posed as the proprietor of the hotel—a good-looking but rather worn person of vaguely military style, perhaps forty-five years old. He might have been, in those pre-war days, a Major who had "sent in his papers" on account of a "misunderstanding" at cards.

The sudden crash, the report of the revolver, burst on the night with a clamor that was shocking.

Too many kings in his hand during a friendly though red-hot poker game, for instance. . . . .

But whatever his appearance—and he would have built up no fortunes whatever as a confidence-trick exponent—he was engaged in as curious and grisly a pastime as ever a man visited an empty hotel to engage in.

Over his head, screwed into a heavy oak beam, was a big hook. Attached to this hook was a thick rope with a noose at the lower end. The noose was round the neck of what at first glance Merlin—with a chill, ugly thrill—decided was a man sitting on the gallery rail. An instant later he saw that the noosed thing was not a man but a baggy-looking dummy, without legs or arms. It resembled a sack of oats with an overcoat on—except that the maker had taken pains to tie the mouth of the sack low down, leaving a big frill of the sack above the "neck." This frill had been tied and tortured into a very rough and flabby semblance of a head. The whole "model" was posed on the gallery rail—so that a slight push would send the dummy outward and down until brought up with a jerk.

The gallery made quite a business-like drop. On the rail, within easy reach of the man, lay a revolver, fully cocked.

As Merlin gazed upon this extraordinary tableau, the creator thereof completed certain gruesome preparations he was making with the knot of the noose and stood back, surveying his work with a certain pride.

Then he turned his head and looked at a recess in the wall behind him, and a little to his side. His lips moved rapidly, but Merlin could neither hear what he said, nor see the person he was addressing. But he could see that the rope enthusiast was grinning a curious and unpleasant grin, and that his eyes were glittering oddly.

Then, abruptly, he pushed the dummy off the rail. It went down like lead, and in a half-second or so the rope straightened with a thudding jar that seemed almost to shake the hotel. Certainly it shook the balcony on which Merlin was standing.

The man with the mad eyes laughed shrilly and turned his head to the recess.

"It's all right now," he said. *"And it's your turn next."*

Then he ran around the gallery, passing out of Merlin's area of vision. No doubt he was going down to the hall to fetch the rope.

Merlin stepped back, put his head over the balcony rail and whistled softly. He realized very completely precisely the sort

of person he had to do with—if the maniacal glitter in the eyes of the amateur hangman meant what Merlin O'Moore believed it meant—and he purposed taking no unnecessary risks.

MacBatt's bulbous head appeared over the rail, as he climbed the balcony pillar in response to Merlin's whistle.

"Take Miss Brown round to Mr. Fitz-Percy and Molo at once. Tell them to keep together, and then—if you want a fight—join me here. Quick!"

"Yes, sir," hissed the big-head sharply, and disappeared.

Merlin turned once more to the French window.

The amateur hangman had not yet reappeared, and very gently and slowly Merlin leaned against the window, testing it. It gave a little, even under that slight pressure, and the moon-haunted O'Moore decided that he could burst it quite easily. Like most windows of the kind, it was a little rickety.

Then the noosed end of the rope suddenly appeared again, flung up from below so that it caught on the gallery rail, and, a few seconds after, the "hangman" hurried back to his old position.

He prepared his noose again, chattering and staring into the recess. Once something, some noise—the creak of a basket chair from the lounge below, possibly—caught his attention, and he turned like a startled rat, snatching the revolver, glaring down.

Merlin saw that he could not hope to close with the man without giving him time to fire at least three shots. And if he chanced to be a good shot, if he was expert with the weapon he handled so readily, Mr. O'Moore realized clearly that when he burst in, he might easily be bursting in merely to receive a bullet through his head.

Behind him he heard the soft shuffle of MacBatt's clothes as that individual pulled himself over the rail. Merlin did not turn, however, for the "hangman" had put down the revolver again, had arranged his noose to his satisfaction, and had stepped into the recess.

STILL without turning, Merlin beckoned MacBatt close to him.

"Inside there's a maniac with a cocked revolver which he'll use without hesitation. I may have to burst in this window and rush him—but we'll try to lure him here first. Hit full smash at his shadow on the blind the instant the blind moves or he touches it. Not before, whatever you do!" whispered the young man, his grip tightening upon the cleek which was his only weapon. "Have you got a club?"

"No, sir—a hammer! Better rush him together," said the grim MacBatt, balancing the big, butt-ended hammer which he had slipped into his pocket before leaving the house.

Merlin, still peering in, saw the "hangman" drag something out of the recess, and with a sudden momentary stiffening of the muscles, he saw, too, that it was no dummy this time, but a man bound hand and foot—literally wound round with cord—and brutally gagged.

The "hangman" dropped on one knee, leaned over his victim, speaking and shaking his fist at the man. Then he reached for the noose.

"Ready, Fin?"

"Sure, sir!" echoed the valet, who at this moment would have cheerfully followed Merlin—the man he sincerely believed he hated and despised—to Hades.

"Look out, then!"

Merlin leaned hard against the window, so that it creaked sharply. As he expected, the man inside looked up, snatching the revolver and staring hard at the window. Merlin, the tail of his eye peering through the chink, did not move.

FOR several seconds the "hangman" stared suspiciously at the window, like a man-eater who ceases his orgy to glare over his shoulder at some noise back in the jungle.

Then the suspicion died out, and his hand moved as though to replace the revolver.

Merlin wetted his finger and drew it gently down the glass, producing a noise which must have been inexplicable to the man inside. At any rate he leaped to his feet, his glittering stare fixed on the window, his face strained and twisted. He listened—Merlin saw that from his tense attitude.

They heard him mutter something—what, they could not catch—and Merlin saw him point the revolver at the window. But the next instant he lowered it a little and stepped briskly forward. As Merlin had hoped, he was going to satisfy himself about the origin of those queer, startling noises.

"Look out, Fin—here he comes. *Full smash* at his shadow on the blind the

instant the blind moves. I'll do the same—then burst in at once. Ah! *Now!*"

They hit out simultaneously as the blind shot up, aiming at the silhouetted figure on the other side of the window. The sudden crash, intensified by the report of the startled hangman's revolver, burst on the silent night with a clamor that was shocking.

The man with the revolver staggered back with a howl that was half a groan. He reeled, lurching back wildly, for Merlin's cleek had taken him on the neck, and MacBatt's hammer, flung clean through the window, had met his forehead. He was cut badly, too, by the broken glass.

He made a violent effort to keep his balance, but even as Merlin and his man burst open the window, he pitched back against the gallery rail, fell limply across it, and was slipping over, head-first, just as the invaders seized and saved him from a headlong fall down to the tiled floor of the lounge-hall below which would have meant his certain death.

From somewhere outside came the fearful note of the excited Molossus, and a shout from the Fitz-Percy.

"Watch him, Fin!" said Merlin, and went back for an instant to the balcony. The Fitz-Percy and Blackberry Brown were staring up, their faces pallid in the moonlight, and the big fighting dog, his forefeet planted against the balcony pillar, was raving to join in.

"We're breaking a window and will be with you at once," said the old deadhead, who was not equal to climbing the post. "You all right?"

Without waiting for a reply the pair promptly smashed a window, shot the catch, and began to scramble in.

THEN Merlin went to the victim, cut his cords, removed his gag—strange that he had not suffocated—and did what he could for him. But the man had not lost consciousness. He grinned rather feebly with lips that bled from the violence the "hangman" had used with the gag. He was youngish, with the shrewd face of a business man; and even as Blackberry Brown, the Fitz-Percy and Molossus came hurrying up, he spoke, feeling the side of his head.

"You've saved my life," he said a little shakily. "Another five minutes and I should have been hanged by the neck!" He shuddered. "That brute meant business. He's mad. I—I think I'd like a drink. There's a flask in my car in the left-hand door pocket." He turned so pale that for a moment they thought he was fainting.

"Ha! Hold on, my dear boy," said the Fitz-Percy sharply. "I will get it." And he disappeared forthwith.

Then Blackberry Brown took charge of the rescued man, while Merlin went over to see how MacBatt and his victim were faring.

"It's all right, sir, he's out and *well* out for the next quarter of an hour. He must have a skull like a bull, sir!" quoth MacBatt, binding his knuckles which had been cut by the broken glass. Then he deftly searched the unconscious man for weapons, removing an ugly knife from one of the pockets. "He will do very well now, sir."

MERLIN nodded and turned again to the victim, who had begun to explain things to the charming Miss Brown.

"I was trapped—" he said, and paused to take a generous pull at the flask which the Fitz-Percy now brought. "My name is Cornell, and I own this place. Inherited it from my father some months ago. That blackguard—Ewell—over there, was manager for my father. He was no good—a thief, a heavy drinker, and insolent to the guests. Why my father stood him I never knew—I think Ewell had a sort of hold over him—Lord knows what. But the day after I became owner of my father's estate, I discharged the scoundrel—a luxury I had long promised myself. . . . .

"This morning I had a letter from him asking me to meet him here, when he said he would reveal to me the affair which had given him his claim upon my father. I was a fool to pay any attention to it—but I felt like a motor run, and—oh, well—I thought perhaps it would be useful to learn whether this blackmailer *really* could injure him—or blacken his memory. . . . . You understand. Anyway, I came.

"The brute seemed civil enough—took a very reasonable tone. In fact, apologized for past behavior. I'm afraid I was careless, too. He produced a letter, spread it on a table, and, hinting that it had to do with my father, inviting me to read it. . . . . When I bent over it—foolish, of course—he stunned me with his revolver butt—a fearful crack. . . . . When I got my senses back, I was bound and helpless in that recess. And he was arranging his hanging gear. He is as mad as a hatter—

drugs, or drink, I fancy. He said plainly that he intended to hang me as soon as he got the rope to work to his satisfaction."

Cornell shivered a little. "I saw that he meant it—"

"Devil a doubt of it," said Mr. MacBatt, interested, and swiftly apologized as Merlin O'Moore turned sharply.

"Then, thank God, you people came—and I don't know how I'm going to thank you enough, that's all!"

Blackberry Brown patted him on the shoulder.

"Oh, never mind the thanks—need he, Merlin?" she began, when the "hangman" evinced symptoms of coming to life. He could not have chosen a more convenient moment, for at that moment the local policeman and a brace of thickly built friends came in.

"We heard a sort of smashing sound—like a broken winder—and we seed a light up here," said the man of law a little doubtfully.

"And so you came up—very wisely," finished Merlin. "Well, here's your man. If you and your friends will accommodate him with a cell somewhere and then bring the sergeant along to my house, we will give you the facts."

"Thank you, sir," said the policeman, who knew Merlin. "We will do so. . . . . Now, my lad, come on—and come quiet!"

The man looked dazedly round. He was in the minority, and apparently was not so mad or dazed that he failed to realize it. At any rate, he went quietly—to what ultimately proved to be a permanent residence, not in jail, but an asylum.

The others presently left the hotel also, bound for Merlin's house, MacBatt taking Cornell in his car, leaving Blackberry, Merlin, the deadhead, and Molossus to walk back through the moonlight.

The Fitz-Percy was in high spirits.

. "A breezy little business, my young friends," he said. "And I do heartily assure you that I turn my face homewards comfortably certain that, come what may, I—nay, all of us—have earned the excellent collation of which, some instinct tells me, we are shortly to partake. How say you, my dear child? How say you, Merlin?"

They agreed, and the tactful old diplomatist fell behind to talk to the grim Molossus, leaving the moon-slaves to make, uninterrupted, the most of the big, silvery ball of light that was now at its best—according to their peculiar custom.

The Doomed Poste

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

SERGEANT-MAJOR IKE SMITH, of Texas, stood out under the Sahara stars with an ear cocked toward the headquarters tent of Commandant Knecht of the Second Regiment, Foreign Legion. Swirls of Arabic were coming from in there—harsh, angry, at times despondent, then bitter with reproach. The Commandant's voice sounded through the babel of talk occasionally, brief, sympathetic, but firm.

Ike moved up nearer. His tanned and big-nosed face with its heavy mustache seemed all one grim chin as he laid hand on the holster of his automatic. That conference of the friendly Arab sheiks in there seemed very like a quarrel, and he knew how quick was the Arab knife. But it ended without violence, in a few sharp, incisive words from Knecht; and Ike caught the sentence: "You must do the best you can for yourselves. We withdraw tomor row. Orders from Algiers."

The group of flowing burnouses and domed turbans came out and passed him presently. Ike listened some more, then began pulling unhappily at the long fore-

The stirring drama of an American's great adventure with the Foreign Legion in the Sahara.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

The lorries arrived within a mile of that ominous hell; the Légion fell out, formed column, and advanced.

lock of black hair that had a way of straying down from under the visor of his kepi. There were groans, explosions of dire disgust, occasionally what sounded very like a sob, coming from in there now.

Ike thought up an excuse and entered the battalion headquarters tent. Knecht sat behind its folding table, his head buried in his arms, his kepi kicked into a corner in some outburst of French fury. An order from Headquarters of the Nineteenth Army Corps in Algiers lay on the table, crumpled, then had been smoothed out again. Ike looked at it, but could make nothing of the typewritten French below the printed heading.

"Criswell an' the boys wants to do a scout inter the hills this evenin', sir," said Ike, announcing himself.

The Commandant raised wet brown eyes upon him, then smote with a furious fist the wrinkled order before him. "Ah, *bah!*" he raged. "Animals! *Bougre imbeciles!* I ask you, Sergeant Ike, would it not try the patience of the blessed saints? We are ordered to the Riff by these idiots-*la!*"

Again he smote the Headquarters orders, while Ike chewed solemnly. The Riff was a good place, according to his way of thinking. Lots of fighting going on up there!

"All we have fought for here, for *nothing!*" exploded Knecht in the highest pitch of exasperation. "My four hundred brave *garçons* left dead in the palmeries; this foothold won in a country that is all anarchy; my zou-zou's capture of Sultan Belkacem; all our dreams of pacification of this district—*nothing!*"

He waved his fists wildly and abandoned himself utterly to despair.

"'What war dey fightin' about?'" Ike quoted, grinning. "As one ol' darky said to the other when ten thousand Yanks and Rebs lay dead on the battlefield of Seven Pines—"

"Eh?" said Commandant Knecht, raising his head and beginning to smile. "Eh, my sergeant? You mean that your negroes didn't even realize that your civil war in North America was all about *them?*" he queried incredulously. "Oh, irony incom-

parable!" He burst into a guffaw, then sat up, much refreshed, for that timely joke of Ike's had changed his view considerably over the Arabs. "You have reason, my cowboy!" he said in complete agreement. "I was sad because we have to abandon our Arab allies here. They will all be massacred, to the last man, as soon as we go."

Ike did not display any perceptible sympathy. "Well, let 'em be!" he said. " 'Pears like the Ay-rab vote's too plenty in this country anyhow. They was fightin' among themselves afore we come; they'll be fightin' some more after we go. An' they needs rejoocin', some, up in the Riff, from all I hear."

"It is very serious, my sergeant," said Knecht. "Disaster to our arms, up there! Every man is needed. For if the Riff goes, all North Africa rises in rebellion. And you will not face the long gun, the spear, the yataghan, up there, my cowboy! They have Mausers, supplied them by the Germans who want an independent kingdom so that they can treat with Abd-el-Krim for his mines. They had them once before, before 1914. You remember Agadir, Sergeant Ike?"

"Seems like thar was a piece in the papers 'bout the Kaiser puttin' his foot in it," said Ike. "If you asks me, Commandant, they's got a haid on their shoulders up in Algiers. What's the use of us workin' on these Ay-rabs down hyar in the Tifalelt, when they're winning out up in the Riff? This here can wait." He waved a hand out toward that country of high mountains bordering the north edge of the Sahara and strewn with walled towns and elongated palmeries following the rivers down to where they lost themselves in the dry desert sands. " 'Tother cayn't! Up an' at 'em, I'd say! An' these Ay-rabs here wont fergit that we've come here *oncet*, an' kin do it again."

COMMANDANT KNECHT recovered his poise and became all geniality once more under his Texan's homely wisdom. Ike had hit the situation squarely on the head. It would take years to pacify this region of a hundred thousand hostile Arabs. They had rescued the beleaguered 32nd Tirailleurs in Tinghar; having accomplished that, Algiers wanted them immediately up in the Riff. It was tough to have to abandon the friendly tribes to the tender mercy of great Sahara *harkas* of fighting men; but they were all fighting among themselves, anyhow, before the French came, and had been for centuries. And to let Abd-el-Krim succeed in the Riff was to bring on at once the Day, *El Youm*, the Day of Rebellion, of which every Arab in North Africa dreamed. It would mean massacre, burning, and pillage all over this fair land, which was now a second France in beauty and prosperity. The Riff was the real danger-point!

"Eh bien!" said Knecht vivaciously. *"En avant* the Légion, the Soldiers of Civilization, then! We return by forced marches to Bou Denib. We leave our horses at Colomb Beschar, and once more the Légion will be on foot. We take train to Fez and the Taza Corridor. And there we join the First Regiment—and once more the Légion will be first in the advance and last to guard the rear in retreat!"

Ike saw that the Commandant was launching himself into an oration such as every Frenchman delights in, and said: "Shall I tell the boys, sir?"

"Do!" said Knecht, bringing himself up short. "Let the squadrons be packed and ready, Sergeant. Marching orders will be issued at sunset. And tell Lieutenants Ressot and Hortet to report to me."

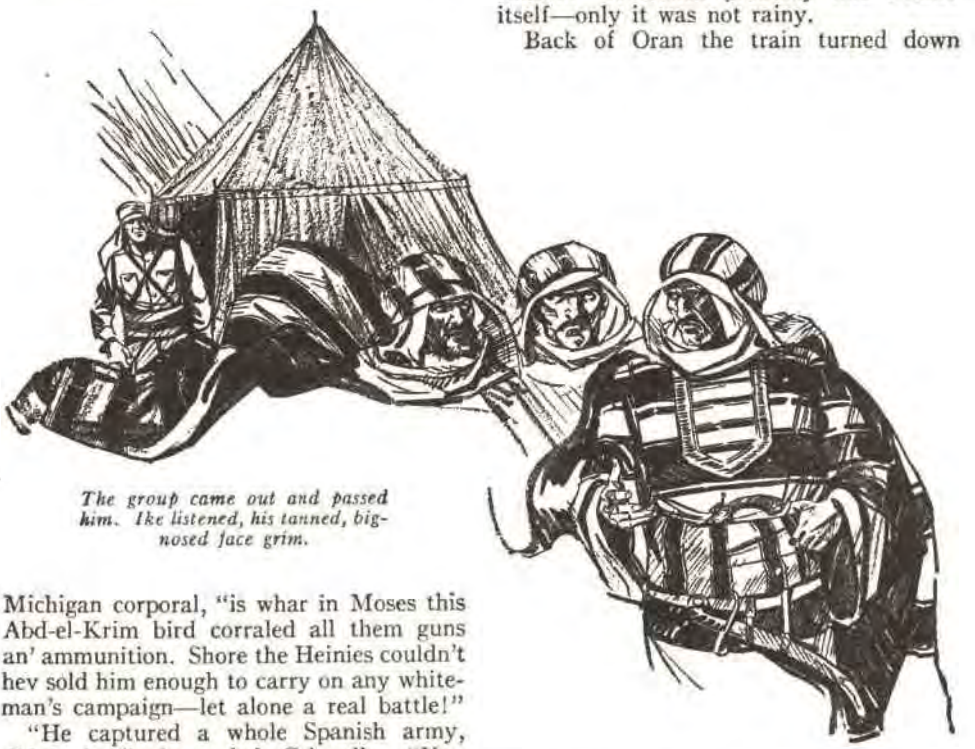
THE little army commanded by Colonels Knecht, Courtois and Lamy retreated from Tinghar to Bou Denib by forced marches. At Colomb Beschar they said good-by to their horses and were met by excited commissary officers who greeted them with ominous news: "Fez itself is threatened! Abd-el-Krim has advanced twenty miles on a hundred-mile front, messieurs! There are more than seventy blockhouses beleaguered within his lines!"

"The damn' fool!" snorted Ike. "Don't he know what he's up against, tacklin' France? That bird ought to hev seen the Western Front!"

"Unfortunately he has, my cowboy," retorted Knecht grimly. "His brother, I mean; and Sidi El Hadj, who is a German, and a lot of his officers. They have learnt too much, my friend! It is serious, this! For why? There are not forty thousand men in all the Nineteenth Army Corps, and they are scattered all over North Africa. Abd-el-Krim has at least that many with good artillery and plenty of machine-guns. If he takes Fez, he proclaims himself sultan of all Morocco, and the whole country will rally to him as the Arab has done thousands of times before. And then rises all Algeria.

Tunis! *Pardieu,* it will take four hundred thousand men to get them back!"

The Légion entrained in that charming transportation marked "*Hommes 40—Chevaux 8*" and whirled north. Sar-major Ike made himself comfortable on a heavy knapsack for a stool, and bit off a plug of chew. "What gits me, Criswell," he said to his



The group came out and passed him. Ike listened, his tanned, big-nosed face grim.

Michigan corporal, "is whar in Moses this Abd-el-Krim bird corraled all them guns an' ammunition. Shore the Heinies couldn't hev sold him enough to carry on any white-man's campaign—let alone a real battle!"

"He captured a whole Spanish army, didn't he?" demanded Criswell. "You ought to read the papers, Ike! Remember how they turned over to him tons of cartridges, stores, machine-guns, 75's, what-not? We'll have a party till he uses it all up! Regular Western Front stuff. You give an Arab as good weapons as we got, and he aint goin' to be easy! We've been fightin' flintlocks and spears and yataghans down here!"

Ike chewed reflectively. He would have to change his tactics with the boys. No more reckless charges, safe until the Arab had time to reload! No more pitting a company against a horde! It would be man to man—and the Riffs were good shots.

AT Sidi-Bel-Abbès a box car was added to them, and out of it were served those picturesque blue-gray overcoats of the Légion with red epaulets and blue sashes and scarlet facings. Good-by to the light khaki of the Desert! It was cold at night where they were going! The train sped on through the beautiful olive and vineyard and rose country of the Lesser Atlas. A smiling garden, all this, for hundreds of miles, dotted with new French towns and old Arab ones; peace, prosperity and civilization. It looked precisely like France itself—only it was not rainy.

Back of Oran the train turned down toward Fez, and now the whole country seemed marching. Columns of Spahi troopers trotted along the roads. Columns of dust proclaimed regiments of zouaves, of tirailleurs, and of Senegalese, all pouring toward Fez through the Taza Corridor. The Algerian Government was stripping itself bare of troops to halt this menace of Abd-el-Krim. For weeks yet France itself could not put down a soldier here. For the first time North Africa all alone was fighting for its life—with its own troops. And the Légion, as usual, was being rushed ahead of everything else.

Some miles out of Fez the whole Second Regiment was detrained and took the road to the north. They could hear the guns of Abd-el-Krim, the answering fire of Algerian artillery, the musketry of the First Regiment aided by zouaves and tirailleurs, hard-

pressed but holding on. It was a rugged country of enormous mountains, with fortified *postes* crowning each, of bare valleys with miserable roads, and only goat-pastures of brush on the white limestone ridges. The command slammed along the road at a quick-step, their band playing the Légion March ahead. They were brigaded with a regiment of bare-footed native tirailleurs from Algeria marching ahead, and beyond those a regiment of Moroccan sharpshooters. All morning under a hot sun the Légion tramped on, swearing at its heavy packs, listening to the ominous thunders of gun-fire rolling and echoing down the hills. They were nearing it all rapidly, for Abd-el-Krim was advancing, no doubt of that! He had only twenty miles to go to reach Fez itself!

There came a halt, and "What's up?" ran down the line. This was no time to stop, even for eats! Presently Lieutenant Hortet came riding down the column. The grizzled old zou-zou, who had been their comrade all through the Tinghar campaign and was now promoted from the ranks for signal gallantry at Ksar el Meski, was snorting with a zou-zou's contempt for all native troops.

"*Morbleu!*" he growled at Ike. "It is the Fourteenth Moroccans, who are grumbling over their shoes! And a third of them have deserted to the enemy as it is! We will get more Maghzeni bullets than Riff, *là-bas!*" he grumbled, pointing north.

Ike saw that the Moroccans were being shamed by their officers. The road took a turn ahead, and beside it the shod Moroccans were lined up, while the barefooted Algerians marched past them. And then they also were turned off the road. The Légion column looked backward, for a familiar rumble was sounding behind them. Back there were miles of lorries coming up, a long train of old Western Front busses, covering the road as far as one could see.

"*Houp! Attention!*" rang down the line.

"Is we back in France, I want to know?" demanded Ike as he eyed those lorries and the shiny black faces of Senegalese driving them. "Nope—it aint rainin'! C'mon, gang! Pile in!"

It seemed like old times as those lorries whirled up, stopped, were crowded like a bee-swarm with Légionnaires, sped on. It meant something doing, and in a big hurry. The scanty native lines had broken, somewhere, and the Second Regiment had the road to the rescue. They passed all the elements of the Army of Africa lining that road and cheering, colonial zouaves and tirailleurs with French-Spanish faces, native zouaves and tirailleurs, hawk-faced, lean and brown. There were squadrons of the Battalion d'Afrique, more squadrons of bearded Spahis, with scarlet-lined white and black burnouses and short Lébel carbines strapped over shoulder. There was artillery, the good old *soixante-quinze* on its own wheels and always all there; mule-teams of the .65 mountain-guns packed and dismounted; ammunition trains; *goums* of irregular Arab troops in mixed horse and foot—all heading north into that ominous hell of the Front.

IN an hour the lorries had arrived within a mile of it, at a strategic military center called Fes-el-Bali which Abd-el-Krim was on the point of taking. The Légion fell out of its transportation, formed column, and advanced on the double. A wild and fearsome region was this! It abounded with steep mountains all about, and every one of them was crowned by a smoking French fort that had a rim of white smoke from Riffian trenches all around it. Riff artillery was shelling from every available placement. Long files of their tribesmen could be seen like moving ropes of white crawling over the huge mountain slopes in support of those at the attack.

"Line of battle! *Pas gymnastique!*" Ike heard Lieutenant Hortet pass down the order from Knecht. Company by company the column was right-facing, moving out in a long wheel, joining up the flanks. They moved forward over broken rocky country that was all hillside, encountered the sharp, tearing *bzzz!* of high-power bullets—not heard since the days of Fritz—opened ranks to let wounded and bewildered Moroccans pass through, heard the raving of machine-guns on ahead. And then they had topped the crest of the slope and were at point-blank with the enemy.

Up the hill on all sides the Riffians were coming. They had no idea of a line of battle, but were each man for himself, the hill simply dotted with them. That they were crack shots the Légion learned immediately, for men began to drop, groan, stumble forward; and the orders, "Prone! —Fix bayonets—Fire at will!" came in quick succession. They had not three minutes to wait, no time at all to dig in. Up the hill came that scattered horde, burnouses jumping from bush to rock, firing,

Against the skyline barbed wire came in sight; here and there a lifeless form hung limply over it.

yelling the attack. The Légion was firing murderously too, but it did not stop them; there were too many.

"No use shootin' these fellers; they's three more fer every one we kill, Criswell!" Ike drawled, shoving in a fresh clip. "Signal for grenades, Corporal. Ol' Knecht 'll holler for a bayonet charge in about a minute!"

Criswell jabbed the foot of Anzac Bill next him, and the signal went down the line from man to man. The mob was at them now, close up, exulting and triumphant Riffians, a whole hillside of them as far as the eye could see. Grenades filled the gap between them with noise and dust for one tense moment; then up rose a wall of cold steel—all that was left between Abd-el-Krim and Fes-el-Bali.

There is only one way to use it—accompanied by a forward charge. To stand fast is to be shot down, and the Légion rushed them of its own accord. It crashed down on that mob like an advancing wave; even then it was too thin, for the wave broke through in spots, where the men composing it had fallen, and still there were too many of them in front, and not a few Riffians were firing exultantly into their backs. And it was just at this juncture, when even European discipline and tactics were about to melt into a hand-to-hand mêlée, ten to one, when the first supports arrived: three squadrons of Spahis whom Knecht had flung on the Riff flank in the nick of time. Down in a long line into the valley they were coming, firing and sabering as they galloped. Riff and Spahi, Berber and Arab—there was no love lost between them! Ike could feel the attack slackening up on their own front before that charge. The Riffians *had* no flank, properly speaking. It was no line of battle that could be enfiladed, but a dense mob. It was also extremely vulnerable to cross-fire, Ike knew in his homely common-sense, and at once blew his whistle for magazine clips. Space opened out between them—space filled with dead men. They grew in numbers during that retreat, and presently came the order from Hortet: "Dig in!"

The Légion dropped in its line, fired eagerly until the Spahis had crossed their front and were chasing the Riffians into a valley to the right, then got to work with picks and spades. They were in good posi-

tion for the next attack wave, halfway down the hill, with room for a support regiment on the crest. Ike, looking along the line, saw regiments of zouaves and tirailleurs digging in also. They had been as busy as the Légion, and now rude trenches were appearing in a long meandering line that covered three miles as the rest of the brigade got up.

"Close call for this here Bali-place, buddy!" chirped Ike as Hortet came along the lines. "Them Moroccans was shore on the run!"

"Name of a hen!" growled Hortet. "Is it that our army, too, supplies the enemies with rifles? These Moroccans, look you, they only join the sharpshooters so that they may be instructed—and then steal the rifle and some cartridges!"

"Loyal bozos!" Ike grinned saturninely. "What we goin' to do about them posts out thar, Loot?" he asked, pointing a horny finger at the mountainous Riff landscape.

IT *was* rather a somber question. The *postes* looked like tiny white dominoes topping the hill-crests from where they stood. In time of peace they were a good thing, a chain of small forts that guarded the peaceful tribes from raids out of the Riff. But they were defenceless against large bodies of tribesmen filtering through between them in a general advance like this one. All they could do was to shut their gates, fire their cannon at bodies of hostiles down in the valleys, and signal for help. And Abd-el-Krim, now that his lines held everything for a hundred miles with the *postes* well inside of them, proposed to hold the Army of Africa where it was, and meanwhile demolish the forts one by one. His artillery was doing that now. Hortet pointed out, with the canniness of the old soldier, that it was a military blunder of the first magnitude. A few of those guns, well used, right here where Knecht's brigade lay entrenching itself, would soon clear the way to Fez!

"Jest like them sheik fellers!" agreed Ike, chewing joyously. "They don't see big enough. I'll 'low there's ammunition an' loot in them forts, but he's losin' the hull game for them. Look yander, Looie! One seventy-five planted over thar would bust us out'n this trench in a hurry!"

He pointed over toward a convenient gun-position on the opposite hill, while Hortet shook his head over the irony of it, from a soldier's point of view. Not one piece of artillery to help the charging Riffian infantry! Instead they were hammering a breach in a *poste* across the valley called Biban. Presently Hortet said: "Do you know who are in this Biban *poste*, Sergeant Ike? A detachment of the 21st Senegalese. Fifty men and a sergeant; and they are doomed—in plain sight of us all here! Pitiful, is it not?"

"Humph!" grunted Ike, looking at the *poste* without emotion. As a Texan his sympathies for the black men were minus scant, an ingrained habit that persistently overlooked the difference between the American negro, whose life has been protected by the white race from enemies of all kinds for over two hundred years, and the Sudan warrior, who still owes his bare existence to his prowess at arms and always *has* had to fight for his life. There was a difference, a big and fundamental one, due to just those facts. To Hortet those Senegalese were heroes, huge black giants, indomitable fighters, tireless marchers, fanatic Mohammedans. Most of them had their faces striped with enormous scars, identification-brands of former Tuareg masters before the French came to set them free. He had commanded them before and knew them for what they were, the splendid soldiers.

And the drama out there on that mountain-top was itself arousing sympathy among Ike's men of many nations securely entrenched where they lay. The Riffians had a seventy-five up there, and its bellow reverberated down through the mountains at frequent intervals. It was steadily demolishing the wall of the *poste* over its main gate. A breach was growing, bit by bit, before the Légion's eyes. The rim of white burnouses investing the *poste* on all sides was steadily growing thicker as tiny dots of white climbed the mountain and added themselves to it. Smoke drifted from trenches the Riffians had built surrounding it; more smoke from Senegalese rifles lined up along the parapets. The moment the gun had made a penetrable breach, there would be a charge on those doomed black men by hundreds of tribesmen aided by machine-guns.

"Hue!" ejaculated Hortet. "Who was it saved *you*, Sergeant Ike, in the palmery of Ksar el Meski? A company of the Twelfth Senegalese, who broke the Arab when he had crushed in your flank! *Eh bien, alors!* Do we let them die?"

Ike moved impatiently. "Wart," he

growled, "yore talkin' plumb foolishness! It's three miles from hyar to that *poste,* an' Gawd knows how many of them Riffs atween us here an' them! I'll 'low we ought to do somethin'; but—"

HE left off speech, for to Ike's practical sense it would be a mere massacre for the Légion to try to relieve that *poste.* It would take a daring firebrand like Hortet even to attempt it, and then only with some special plan. Hortet said nothing in reply, for he was thinking. And at that juncture Commandant Knecht's voice broke in on them. He had been coming along his lines to see that there were no weak points in the positions held by his brigade.

"Ouff!" they heard him say in his usual genial and careless tone. "They gave us a hot fight, no, my cowboy?"

"They fit right smart, I'll 'low, Commandant!" Ike was saying, when Hortet broke in on them eagerly: "And do we *nothing* for those brave black *garçons-là,* my Commandant?" he demanded.

Knecht turned on his stocky little lieutenant in a mock fury. "Have you lost your reason, my zou-zou?" he asked. "Or is it that you would march those idiot legs of yours into yet another death-trap? We can do *nothing,* my Hortet! It is a *désastre,* that we must lie still and witness!"

"Tchk!" disagreed Hortet, scanning the defiles with squinted eye. "If they could but hold out till nightfall! Give me forty picked men, my Commandant! Under cover of night—"

"You would sacrifice them, to the last man!" bellowed Knecht with indignation. "Holy name of a kicked dog! You would not get one mile with that handful!"

"But no, my Commandant!" persisted Hortet. "That defile, regard you: she leads around back of the mountain. They are all up there now, the *stupides!* It is on this side that the gun makes her breach. It is there that they will attack. Meanwhile I and my forty come up behind. The Senegalese make their sortie by the rear gate—*et voilà!* We fight our way back!"

"With sixty men against thousands!" jeered Knecht. *"Tiens!"* he suddenly exclaimed. "The *poste!* She is helioing!"

They fell silent, reading the flashes coming now from that beleaguered fort. *"Twenty-four men left. Have mined the poste. Will blow it up when they force the breach. Bidet, Sergeant,"* it read.

It was curious, the effect of that message on the three officers. They rose to the challenge of its stark courage with a shout. The grim desperation that would blow up the fort, survivors and attackers alike, made their own caution seem tame. Life itself was absolutely nothing here!

Knecht said: "It is decided, my zou-zou! And you, who bear the legend of a charmed life, shall lead the forty. I give you one hour after dark to reach your position back of the fort. And then I advance with my whole brigade. It is well to leave them alone up there while daylight lasts, is it not?"

"Shore, so long's we cayn't take that damn' gun!" put in Ike. "This platoon *goes!* Savvy, Loot?" he told Hortet with firmness.

That democratic taking counsel among themselves regardless of rank was characteristic of the Légion. It might shock regular army men; but the fact remained that, before an advance, every sergeant, corporal, a number of the old and tried men, even, were called in and shown exactly what was proposed. If a lieutenant was shot down, his sergeant knew just how to carry on; if not he, the corporal. If the corporal went west, there were still old soldiers to lead, who knew just what the Commandant was driving for. In this way the Légion never lost cohesion during a charge, but had a way of getting there regardless.

"I shall send over an airplane, with the message to hold fast at all costs till dark," said Knecht. "The Riffs have read that helio, no doubt. They have foreign officers with them who understand signaling. It may give them caution, that mined fort!"

A DENSE fog was filling the defile as the picked forty assembled behind the lines under Hortet and Ike, and grenade bags were served out to them. They had witnessed one attack on Biban, late in the afternoon. The minute that gun had finished its breach, hundreds of tribesmen had come out of their trenches, massed, surged up in a broad wedge of men. It kept coming and coming, that wedge, renewing itself; but the abundant drift of white smoke from two positions on the fort told of chattering machine-guns playing on it with deadly effect. The Légion had raised a cheer as they saw the retreat, the wedge still there, but silent and motionless now. And the Tricolor was still flying over Biban.

Out into the dank night Hortet led that

party, to rescue perhaps fifteen black men. The fog helped them, though it was going to make things difficult for the rest of the Second Regiment. They had the defile as a sure guide. It had goat-paths running along both sides of the brook in its depths, and along these the forty scuttled at a terrific rate, in two parties of twenty led by Ike and Hortet. The Riffians had posted no sentinels down here; perhaps it was the sheer audacity of such a venture that made them neglect it. They had plenty of skirmishers on the hill to warn them against any advance from Fes-el-Bali.

The hour went by with Hortet feeling his way silently around through that defile. Then a low call, and Ike had crossed the creek, deployed his men beyond Hortet's and up they went through the bushes, climbing in a thick fog. It thinned as they went higher; stars become visible overhead, the outlines of surrounding mountains. Ike looked at his watch. Forty minutes. In twenty more Commandant Knecht would start the general advance. They would know when that advance had crossed the valley by scattering shots from Riff pickets on the other side of the hill. There would be an *alerte* sounded, and the main body of Riff up in the trenches would rush down to meet the attack. Then would be their own most favorable time to attempt to reach the sortie party from the rear gate.

HORTET came in from the right and joined him. It was uncanny, the silence up above! The Riffians were up to something in connection with this *poste*, but what? The Légion was climbing silently, a swish of bushes and the occasional fall of a pebble the sole noise. They could hear beyond it—nothing at all. Surely the tribesmen weren't going to let the night pass without an attack on that *poste!*

And then Hortet solved it with his shrewd judgment in military matters. *"Morbleu!"* he whispered. "Is it that they themselves go to attack the rear gate?"

Ike felt an empty and hollow sensation in the pit of his stomach at that thought. For their forty to run into the main body of the Riff—and most likely provided with a machine-gun—would not be nice!

Against the skyline barbed wire came in sight, dim and ragged; here and there a lifeless form hung limply over it. They were near the rear trenches of the Riff. There was a double line of them, they knew, one facing the *poste*, the other securing the tribesmen against any attempt to relieve it. Ike and Hortet knew all about barbed wire, from years of it on the Western Front. The line was halted and cutting parties crept forward.

Meanwhile zero hour had come and passed. Presently there were distant shots, yells, the braying of mules. Knecht was advancing.

"That goes well!" snapped Hortet. "It is but to wait—"

And just then there sounded up above, the unmistakable snick of a machine-gun set "on." It was followed by the sharp snap of a 75's breechblock, and then the heavy bark of the piece—*crash! crash! crash!* as rapidly as it could be served.

Ike pawed his chin. "C'rect, Loot!" he said. "That's wot them bozos hez been doin' all ev'nin'—haulin' that durned gun over hyar! They's aimin' to bust in the r'ar gate an' pile in through the breach simultaneous, I'm settin' hyar to tell ye, old-timer!"

Hortet stamped his foot with decision. "And we *take* that gun, *mon vieux! Morbleu,* we'll need it! You attend to the mitrailleuse. Forward, *groupe franc!"* he ordered in a low and metallic voice.

THE forty jumped to their feet and dashed on with bayonets fixed. Through gaps in the barbed wire they poured, then stabbed down yelling and shooting defenders in the trench. Forward, over a brief ribbon of rocky soil and into the besieging trench. There was more resistance here, but the Légion swept on, Hortet heading for that gun, Ike for the mitrailleuse, which had not uttered a chatter as yet.

The surprise was complete—for a moment. Then a roar as of a multitude burst on them from both sides, and all the mountain-top was covered with masses of burnoused figures—the Riff storming-parties that had already been formed for the attack. Criswell flung himself at the machine-gun, and its raving chatter opened on the mass to their right. From Hortet came the furious crashes of the 75, captured and being served rapid-fire on those to the left.

But there is no stopping the Berber! He was here in these mountains, from the Riff to the Kabyles, when the Romans came. Tall, red-headed, green-eyed men of Viking ancestry who know not fear, they came on like the sea, enveloping the gun, sweeping over the mitrailleuse, developing a fierce hand-to-hand combat around both.

Men flung their last grenade among them, fired their last cartridge, and then took to cold steel—for there was no time to as much as shove in a clip—but on and on they came. It looked very like a massacre of the entire forty, then and there!

Ike and Criswell, working the machine-gun red-hot in a nest of Légionnaires de-

Men flung their last grenade, fired their last cartridge—then took to cold steel!

fending their flanks and rear with bayonets, were aware of a deep shout and wild African yells as the gate opened and the Senegalese poured out. The Riff had given back somewhat before that murderous machine-gun, and Ike chose the moment to rush it over to Hortet, so that what was left of their command could be together.

The sergeant of the black men burst through to them at the head of a wedge of bayonets: "Retreat! Retreat! *Vite! Vite!*" Bidet was screaming at them. "She will blow up in five minutes!"

Hortet snapped and sputtered. "Let her!" He stamped impatiently. "*Calmez-vous*, my sergeant—"

"No! *No!* The whole fort, my lieutenant! *Pouf!* We are all killed with falling masonry!" He made excited pantomimes.

Hortet eyed the fort with *sang froid*. "I do not think she will reach us," he said judgmatically. "But for the good of these Riff—we put over somesing! *Allons!* Five minutes, you say? *Bien!* We roll the gun up to the gate! Let them have it—she has no more cartridges, anyway!"

"Low-down trick, Looie!" chortled Ike with unholy glee as he joined the party wheeling the gun forward, while Criswell kept off the Riff with the machine-gun. It looked like an attempt to get back into the fort with it to the tribesmen, and every yelling devil of them joined in the rush for it; they must have their persuader back!

Criswell ground into them with the mitrailleuse—and it, too, ran out of cartridges as Ike and his party fought their way back. The 75 was now buried in exultant Riffians; more of them were draining into the fort. Hortet said: "And now we retreat! It will be *bien* difficult, that!"

"Hell, no!" said Ike with all the emphasis of a white-hot idea in his mind. "You listen to this cow-punch, waddy! We don't retreat downhill nohow, but t'other way, boys! Listen to ol' Knecht! He aint far off, that-a-way!" He pointed vigorously beyond the masses of Riffians and over the hill crest.

They could hear the vindictive thunder of the whole regiment charging up the hill on that other side. It was not far from where they stood now, but between them was a dense mob of tribesmen, and a fort that, to say the least, was somewhat uneasy on its foundations. It was that fort that Ike was thinking of. "When she goes,

we cl'ars out of this, hard as we kin roll our tails, savvy? Straight for Knecht! Thar'll be some confusion round hyar, I'm thinkin'! And then's our chancet!"

"Bien!" snapped Hortet; and then they all held their breaths. . . . .

TERRIFIC indeed was that concussion: Biban blowing up! The night was one vast white glare, filled with the shooting débris of masonry, mangled bodies, exploding shells and rockets. The ground shook like an earthquake under foot; and then there was an appalling darkness, accompanied by a rain of ruins, rocks, pebbles, metallic fragments, bones.

Out of the dust of it rose Ike's voice in a stentorian shout: "Get, you birds! Straight for the regiment! Beat it!"

White men and black, with bayonets at the hip, they plowed in a solid wedge through the masses of stupefied and bewildered Riffians. It was their one chance to get through, and they weren't stopping for anybody! Past the smoking column of gloom that had been Biban they charged at the double, tossing a wave of tribesmen aside on each flank as they went. They came into a horizontal and buzzing hail of bullets, crouched low under it as they bored into the back of the Riffian defense. And then they were through, and before them was advancing a long line of brilliant flashes in the night.

"Prone!" Hortet's whistle shrilled. He signaled vigorously with a flashlight, and presently the rifle-fire stopped in front of them, and then Knecht himself had come up. About thirty weary and wounded men rose up out of the ground to greet him with raucous cries. Among them danced their big and jovial commander, like some happy Newfoundland dog, pawing every one of his returned *garçons,* rejoicing as he assured himself in the dark that this and that one was still alive.

He paused whimsically before Sergeant Ike—who was a picturesque ruffian with most of his uniform torn off, his kepi gone, a bandanna that dripped blood about his forehead. "You tell it, my cowboy!" commanded Knecht.

IKE got rid of a chew that he had hung onto all through the fight. "Waal, Giner'l, she didn't go off 'xac'ly accordin' to schedule, after all!" he drawled. " 'Twuz like the darky who aimed to dose his mewel with qui-nine. He gits him a piece o' hose, an' fills it with the stuff, and puts one end in the mewel's mouth an' t'other in his own —only the mewel blew fust! Them Riffs was at that rear gate already when we got thar, Commandant, y' see!" Ike went on to enlarge. "They hed a 75, an' a Hun sho-sho, an' two stormin' parties in position—"

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Knecht at that falling out of his plans. "And you retreated, of course, my pearl of a wise sar-major?"

"Mought hev," said Ike, grinning; "on'y 'twouldn't be exactly healthy. But Hortet, here, he sez, 'Go git 'em!' so we tuk the gun an' the sho-sho an' slapped 'em on the wrist with 'em. Then out comes the nagurs, an' up goes the fort. . . . . Guess that's about all, Commandant!"

HORTET, who had been listening in a French frenzy of impatience, burst in with: "It's *not* all, my commandant! He is one liar, that-one! *Morbleu,* it was our cowboy Ike himself who brought us here! I was wonder, me, how we could accomplish our *decrochage,* when he says, 'Wait till the fort she goes, then we run like hell for the regiment in all the blaa-blaa of it—' "

Knecht guffawed and took both their hands with heartfelt *"Félicitations!"* There was not time for much more. He glanced up the hill, where the flaming line had come to a stop. *"Allons!"* he said energetically. "She will make a good salient, this hill! Pass the word, Ressot, for the Algerians and Moroccans to move up in support!"

He sent his other lieutenant to the rear with that order, then dug Sergeant Ike facetiously in the ribs with a pudgy thumb: "What the Légion takes, it holds—no, my cowboy?"

Ike chewed solemnly. "Mebbe," he allowed. "But seein's them Riffs has got ez good hardware ez we has, it aint goin' to be no party, Commandant!"

Knecht puzzled for sometime over that "hardware." *"Quincaillerie? — Quincaillerie?"* he kept muttering, thinking in terms of hammers and saws. Then he tumbled, burst into a Gallic bellow of delight, and slapped Ike on the shoulder. *"Oui!* Guns! —But no generals, my sergeant! No generals, eh?" he demanded uproariously.

That was so; and it meant the finish of Abd-el-Krim, in spite of his hardware looted from the Spaniards!

"The Riff Salient," another vivid story of the picturesque Foreign Legion, by Warren Hastings Miller, will appear in an early issue.

"One has not the physique to defend with the fist; other means of protection are necessary, m'sieur."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

"The Resignation of Michael Radayne" again displays Mr. New's remarkable knowledge of international politics—and his skill in telling an interesting story.

Illustrated by O. W. Fackert

WHEN the sight-seeing motor-busses run along the Avenue de Neuilly in Paris, the Maison Dyvnaint is pointed out to the tourists as the residence of two world-famous members of the British nobility; but all that can be seen of it is a twelve-foot wall of weathered purple bricks entirely surrounding a plot three hundred feet square, with a beautifully wrought black-iron gate in the center of the Avenue frontage, and the Gothic Renaissance dormers of the top floor over the thickly planted evergreen trees which line the entire inner circuit of the wall and prevent any view of the interior space through the entrance-gate—at the side of which, with a small postern door in the wall, is a tiny lodge house. Projecting six feet from the top of the wall on the inside, a row of phosphor-bronze brackets support six lines of heavy copper wire charged with one thousand volts of alternating current. Pedestrians, desiring to gain admission, enter through the little postern, and wait in the lodge until permission is telephoned from the mansion to conduct them thither. Those who arrive in cars find another iron gate behind the evergreens which they cannot pass until they are recognized. These details are not described by the bus-conductor; he knows nothing about them.

In the late afternoon, not long ago, a man of thirty-five—apparently Parisian—tried to open the big wrought-iron gate in the Avenue wall. Failing in this, he presently discovered the little postern—rang the bell—and was admitted by a keen-eyed, powerfully built man who seemed to be a superintendent of the premises. The visitor presented a card, explaining that he was unknown to any of the family but desired to obtain a brief interview with Madame la Comtesse—"upon a matter connected with journals in which she perhaps has interest."

"M'sieur is a stranger to the family. He will, perhaps, consent to a search for concealed weapons? A card of introduction would have rendered that unnecessary, but —M'sieur has no card. No?"

"No, m'sieur. One submits, of course, to the search. It was to be expected—with a stranger. One has the automatique—for the defense, M'sieur will consider—but will leave it here until one departs again. As to other weapons, nothing but this stiletto and this loaded stick, which also may be left in this place. One has not the strong physique to defend with the fist, M'sieur will observe; it is therefore understood that other means of protection are necessary."

AFTER satisfying himself that there were no additional weapons, the superintendent took his visitor through the evergreens, along a winding path between rows of tall box-hedge, to a small door in one side of the mansion, and then to a little reception-room overlooking the garden. After the Frenchman had restlessly examined the pictures on the walls, the books scattered about, the desk in one corner, plentifully supplied with unmarked stationery, and what he could see of the garden from the window, he sensed rather than heard some one else in the room, and turned quickly about to see a charming woman comfortably lounging in one corner of a divan.

"That part of your message relating to something of importance connected with our news-sheets made me decide to see you —chiefly to correct what seem to be an erroneous impression, M'sieur—Gastaigne?" (Glancing at his card in her hand.) "We have a few thousands invested in news-properties, because they pay very well and aren't subject to much fluctuation in value. But we are merely shareholders—not connected with the management. On some of the boards, where our holdings warrant that—but not otherwise active in any case. . . . . I will, of course, hear what you have to say in the matter."

The visitor partly drew a folded document from his pocket—then hesitated.

"Madame has perhaps read in the journals that the villa of M. le Prince of Rumania at Neuilly was entered during his absence at Dinard, and that a number of important papers were stolen—papers giving details of the royalist plot in Rumania?"

"Oh, yes—but one understands that all the papers with the exception of a single letter were subsequently returned."

"That is not true, Madame la Comtesse. Papers from the Prince's desk—yes. From another place of concealment in his study —no. Among others not returned, was—this." He handed her the sheet of paper which he had taken from an inner pocket. It bore no heading or address, and was written on thick, creamy personal stationery:

> My dear Prince:
>
> It is possible that you credit me with more political influence than I actually have—but it appears to be rapidly growing, with excellent prospects of our taking over the Government very shortly. Of course even the party in power may be defeated in any Parliamentary vote, but in so far as we are able to carry such a measure through, I will promise diplomatic support to your claims at once, and full recognition when you are actively in the field. We consider it a foregone conclusion that Italy will back the de facto Government according to their secret treaty, possibly to the extent of armed intervention. So you may be forced to accept the promised backing from Moscow—the Red forces now mobilizing along the Bessarabian frontier. Your new Peasants' Party in Transylvania is likely to be cut off at the mountains by a juncture between the present Rumanian Army and Italian forces. But if you can get the Bessarabians to declare for you,—and our influence will be exerted in that direction,—your opponents will be caught between two fires. With outward relations severed between Britain and Moscow, we nevertheless understand each other fairly well throughout the Labor faction. I suggest that you destroy this letter at once—it might be dangerous at some future time.
>
> M. R.

"Madame is possibly familiar with the writing and initials?"

"I have one or two notes which, if photographed side by side with this, would bear a startling resemblance."

"And—could not one of the journals in which Madame and her so famous husband are shareholders possibly make use of this letter? *Oui?*"

"In what way, m'sieur?"

"To destroy, let us say, the political career of a statesman in Madame's country —a statesman of growing power, who so frankly announces the intention of using it in such a manner when he is in control."

"H-m-m—M'sieur has, perhaps, some personal reason for enmity against this man? Some reason to feel a strong desire for this statesman's downfall?"

"But no, madame—no personal reason whatever. One does not concern oneself with the politicians of other countries. But

—one is of modest circumstances—the income is trifling—one's tastes and habits more costly than it meets. One becomes possessed of a paper which has a certain value to those who might use it for their own purposes. One desires, then, to dispose of that paper for reasonable compensation—and then—*voilà!* The incident closes itself. *Oui!*"

"In the last twenty years there have been repeated rumors that the Earl and the Countess have been engaged in underground political intrigue."

"You are then, Apache—m'sieur? You undertake, let us say, the little adventure of entering the house of M. le Prince—for a consideration, of course. You honorably deliver the papers from his desk to your employer, as agreed—returning all but one because they were of no value to him. Nothing being said, however, concerning what you might find in other places, you look about for something of value which you, personally, might use—and come upon this letter? *Oui?*"

"One does not admit, madame, committing a crime which is punishable in France; there are many ways in which this letter might have come into my hands. Apache? That also might be difficult to prove—though your *maitre de maison* might arrive at such conclusion from the weapons deposited with him. If Madame la Comtesse can see no use for this letter by one of her journals—well, one must contemplate a journey by air to Croydon, in the morning. There are doubtless those in your country, madame, who would purchase it."

"One observes, m'sieur, that it might be of advantage to keep such a document out of the news-sheets, until—well, until there was some unquestionable reason for using it. M'sieur has perhaps set a price upon the letter?"

"One would prefer that Madame suggest a figure."

"For this original—and all the photographs M'sieur has printed from the negative he made, including the negative? That is understood? *Oui?*"

"*Touché!* Madame is, mentally, of *premier force.* If negative and prints were required, the price makes itself a higher one—obviously."

"And what guarantee does M'sieur give that he will turn over everything relating to this letter?"

"None. That is Madame's risk."

"For—let us say—one hundred thousand francs?"

"For one hundred thousand francs, Madame will receive—just this original letter. There is no negative in existence—no prints. Madame credited one with more brains, or more duplicity, than one appears to have. One's real object, which might have made itself obvious to Madame, was to prevent, if possible, another disastrous European war. If the terms of this letter are carried out—well, Madame observes?"

"Not very clearly, I fear. You observe, m'sieur—M. le Comte and I are very largely

occupied with commercial affairs. In a general way we follow what goes on in the various Parliaments and form often erroneous opinions, like the man in the street. Oh, we admit, if you will, that our friends connected with the government often give us a somewhat better grasp than that—but we're not experts in building up future results from what we read and see. I'm willing to purchase this letter for a hundred thousand francs because, if the political situation ever became sufficiently serious in England, doubtless one of the news-sheets might bid a trifle more than that—or one of our Conservative statesmen might even make more effective use of it without publication at all. My reasons for the purchase, of course, will be purely academic to you as long as my bank-draft is good. I don't see how the promises in this letter could lead to a European war—but as I told you, I don't know enough about politics to be sure that they wouldn't."

WHILE the man Gastaigne was being given a bottle of wine and some cakes by the Afghan *khansamah*, Her Ladyship was speaking to Achmet, her principal Afghan chauffeur, in one of the rooms at the other side of the house—telling him to follow the Frenchman, see where he went, and if possible overhear what he said to anyone else when he got there. Achmet took one of his relatives with him in a touring-car, kept the man in sight when he left the little postern door in the brick wall —until, as the chauffeur had anticipated, his quarry hailed a passing taxi, which it was a simple enough matter for the two Afghans to follow without being observed. Somewhat to their surprise, however, the taxi crossed the Seine and discharged its passenger at the Prefecture—on the Ile.

Achmet and his cousin had had occasion to study the headquarters of the Paris police, before. At night it was, to them, a quite simple matter to work their way up the outer face of the walls to almost any of the windows they wished to reach. Upon this occasion the cousin parked the car by Notre Dame while Achmet, with some impression as to where the man probably would go, perched himself upon a narrow ledge just below M. le Préfet's window, which was raised a few inches for ventilation. The Préfet was alone in his room, seated at the desk smoking a cigarette, when Gastaigne, after a preliminary knock, came in and closed the door behind him.

"Ah—Marquis! Earlier than I expected. Madame was not, then, at home?"

"*Au contraire, mon ami.* She received me with some reserve, yet in a charming manner—considering that she could scarcely avoid considering me an Apache, at first. When leaving her, I think she had revised that opinion—placing me as perhaps a diplomatic spy, or possibly what I seemed, a man with unusually altruistic ideas."

"She purchased the letter for one of her journals?"

"She purchased the letter—to place in her safe, and hold indefinitely—with some idea, one thinks, of showing it to one or two of their Cabinet friends and asking advice. She made it quite clear, in a pleasant way, that some of the Dyvnaint fortune was in a few news-sheets merely as a good investment, but that their interest was merely that of shareholders or board members. I said rather plainly that if the promises and suggestions in that letter were carried out, it ould mean another and overwhelmingly disastrous European war—but she couldn't quite grasp that. A dim possibility—yes; but not hinging upon so limited a locality of the Continent. I would say from close observation that, while she is abnormally intelligent and quick-witted, she does not think politically."

"What did you manage to get from her for that letter?"

"A hundred thousand francs."

"Your price—or hers?"

"I didn't mention one. It was her offer —but on the supposition that I had photographed the letter, her price covered negative and all prints from it."

"That was her commercial instinct—clever deduction, too. Did she believe you —that there was no negative?"

"I think so."

"Hmph! Either she has not the political grasp—or else she bought your goods for a song, and knew it! There are at least four of the London journals which would have paid two or three thousand pounds for that letter without much haggling—knowing the dynamic possibilities in it at some crucial moment!"

"You think I sold too low? Made a mistake in letting her have it?"

"From our point of view, no. If you were really a pauper, my dear Marquis,—needed the money,—yes; because you easily could have obtained five times as much. I assume that your idea jogged along with mine—first, to place that letter where it

would not be used as a commercial speculation, yet find its way to publication if there is a political crisis across the Channel; then to test out our charming Countess herself. In the last twenty years there have been repeated rumors that the Earl, the Countess and three of their most intimate friends have been actively engaged in underground political intrigue. They have rendered vital services to this Government in matters which came under the head of state affairs, but always in the way that service officers and commercial leaders would handle it, rather than as diplomats would. Their immense wealth and world-wide acquaintance of all sorts give them real and widely extended power which they do not hesitate to use when they consider it necessary, and it is usually exerted to the advantage of their own or some other Government. But there never has appeared to be the slightest foundation for connecting them with those half-mythical and very mysterious individuals known as the Diplomatic Free Lances. Your experience with Madame la Comtesse would appear to be additional proof against such a supposition. Apropos—would you mind telling me how that letter came into your possession?"

"Not at all—in strict confidence, of course. I took it from a box hidden behind a row of books in the Prince's study."

"Mon Dieu! You, Marquis? The man for whom my gendarmes have been turning Montmartre upside down! But how—why—your reasons?"

"I'm in close touch with intimate friends associated with the Bratiano government—knew of the strong movement in Transylvania. His Highness always has been popular with the Army and one section of the people, you know. Well—the man lacks self-control, lacks all of the qualifications of an able ruler. If he puts himself at the head of an army anywhere near his country, it means civil war at the start—spreading into a general Balkan conflagration, and once the Red army gets into it, the fight becomes a bloody European war in self-defense. I knew that His Highness was in constant communication with friends and followers at home—undoubtedly had lists of names in his possession, papers indicating support or refusal from some of the other governments. The existence of such papers among his personal effects was a foregone conclusion. I bribed the valet to spend an evening at the opera, made up to represent him—I'm quite good at theatricals—and entered the villa at Neuilly as if I belonged there. Went all over two floors of it and wasn't questioned once. The papers from his desk were shown to their minister here in Paris—Manoilescu's arrest followed, at the frontier, and other documents were obtained. Were it not for the Moscow-Bessarabian menace on the east, I think the present agitation would die out, but—here's this Socialist-Laborite in London—Michael Radayne—becoming more powerful every day—coalescing socialists, communists, democrats, Laborites, into a more or less workable opposition which, unless it breaks up, will drive the present cabinet out and form a democratic one with Radayne at the head of it. And then you'll see the ban on Russia removed, full recognition again—their propaganda active in every country. That man is too dangerous to be permitted at the top!"

"I agree, my dear Marquis—I agree, thoroughly! I think that letter could not be in better hands than where you left it."

ACHMET had a most interesting tale to tell when he returned to the Avenue de Neuilly—where M. le Préfet was better known than he supposed.

Next morning, Countess Nan of Dyvnaint motored out to the flying field at Le Bourget, where there were a couple of the Trevor hangars just beyond the Government barriers. Getting into a small two-seater which was being warmed up, she glided beautifully up into the air, gaining altitude until she reached a level of four kilometers, above the lower strata of clouds, and headed northwest for St. Ives, in Cornwall. Reaching there in a bit over two hours, she came down on the moor and located Earl Lammerford in the laboratory of his old castle on the cliff-brow. Taking him up with her, she then flew east to Croydon and came down at another of the Trevor hangars, beyond the Government lines. Sir Abdool was in Afghanistan at the moment; their friend the Honorable Raymond Carter had run across to Washington for a brief visit—but Trevor himself was in London, and the three dined together in Park Lane. After dinner they locked themselves in the big Jacobean library on the opposite side of the hall, with coffee and cigarettes. Presently the Countess handed the letter obtained from the Prince's villa to Earl Lammerford, who read it through very carefully—reread it—then passed it to Earl Trevor without comment.

Trevor had had a strenuous week, both with his multitudinous commercial affairs and a number of social engagements which he felt it would not be good policy to slight. He had dined comfortably, lighted one of his favorite long cigars and was preparing to relax, hoping that nothing would prevent his retiring early. He glanced through the letter casually, without letting his cigar go out—his mind more than half on other matters. But something in the familiarity of the handwriting made him pick up the sheet again and study it more closely. Then he glanced at his wife.

"NAN—where and how did you get this thing? It's original—there'll be no question as to the handwriting. Surely it scarcely could have been you—who—eh?"

"Burgled the Prince's villa in Neuilly? Well, no—but I bought it from the man who did—Achmet was perched under the Préfet's window on the Ile, and heard the man admit it. He gave me his card as Jules Gastaigne, but is actually the Marquis de Lespigny of Provence—a friend of several among the Rumanian aristocracy, as it happens. Of course neither he nor the Préfet have the least idea that Achmet overheard and told me everything they said. De Lespigny left me under the impression that I took him for an Apache or possibly an adventurer with leanings that way. His story was that he needed money and thought one of our news-sheets would pay well to get hold of such a letter—use it to smash Radayne. Considered that the man was a traitor to my country and that I might welcome an opportunity for putting him out of politics. Of course I explained that I was no political—that none of us were—but that we had, of course, friends in the Cabinet to whom it would do no harm to show such a letter and get their opinion as to what had best be done with it—also, that we are merely shareholders in our news-properties, having nothing to say as to the editorial management. In the Préfet's office de Lespigny appeared to be a rather simple-minded altruist; but he certainly knew, even before the Préfet suggested it, that he could have sold this letter for a good deal more than the hundred thousand francs I gave him. So I think that what he said, there, may be accepted as his real point of view—which is that, with our social and political acquaintance, our being unalterably on the Conservative side as opposed to socialists and communists, this letter stood a better chance of being used, in our hands, as he wished it used, than with some one else who undoubtedly would speculate with it and sell the thing to the highest bidder, who even might be Radayne himself. Eh?"

"That's precisely what might very easily happen, Nan—if it were sold to a news-sheet. Take, for example, the editor of some usually Conservative paper which is, none the less, a bit lukewarm upon occasion. He'd show it to his owners. Owners not in business for their health—no proof he ever had the letter to publish or withhold—think a coming coalition Labor government inevitable even if Radayne were put out of politics—stand to make more from Radayne than anyone else. Approach him with the letter, offering to sell. Now, Radayne is the son of a poor Somersetshire curate, one of the livings at the Duke of Mabercorn's disposal. Went to Eton, but couldn't have managed Oxford if an aunt hadn't died an' left him two thousand quid. He came down from there with possibly six hundred of it left, but stood fairly well up as a student. Just where he inherited the taste for dabbling in electricity, nobody knows—but he got a berth with a city house, manufacturing an' installing appliances. Kept earning a little better screw each year—got in with the People's Palace crowd in Mile End Road—and then with the work-people's gang east of there. Began coming up as a political—first, on the Liberal-Conservative side, in consequence of his birth an' Oxford associations. Rumors floatin' about that he'd been investin' money which turned out amazingly well—that he might be worth fifty thousand pounds. As a matter of fact, the man had nearer eighty or ninety thousand pounds at the time—has over half a million sterling, today; but not a soul knows how he managed to get it. 'Shrewd investm'nt' is simply rot! We all know how much that could run to with the pay he was getting in the City! He'll not get by with any story of other legacies, either, because his father is still living, an' their relatives much too easily checked up. Speculation? Aye—with a fairly good pot to start on. But about the time he was really known to be wealthy, he switches off from everything Conservative an' begins drawing the various breeds of radicals into some sort of a machine which he succeeds in holdin' together—though how the deuce he does it is a mystery! It's like takin' half a dozen Kil-

"This is my friend Mrs. Seppingford, Michael. We both detest your politics, but compliment you on the way they were presented."

kenny cats an' makin' 'em pull an apple-cart in harness! Well, taking the man as he is, I'll wager a good bit that I could get him to pay at least ten thousand pounds for that letter any time within the next year. An' that's where the unscrupulous editor would win out."

LAMMERFORD had been considering the letter from various angles.

"Is there really anything in that document, George, of which his radical followers would disapprove? They hate any suggestion of royalty, to be sure—some of them would get pretty rabid at the idea of helping any useless aristocrat to a throne. But if they all were brought to understand that this irresponsible princeling is merely bein' used as a cat's-paw to help Moscow seize Bessarabia an' two-thirds of Rumania, they'd be well satisfied with this letter—wouldn't they?"

"Reds an' communists would—extreme Laborites too, I fancy. English Labor as a whole—no! They'd be dead against any access of power or territory by Moscow."

"W-e-l-l—that hasn't been conclusively tested out, as yet. Point is, would even the Laborites throw him out of politics because of this letter, when he's immeasurably the keenest politician, the smartest Parliamentary trickster, they've ever had? I doubt it. They'd caution him to go slow, thinkin' they could keep such a man under control; but they'd keep votin' for his measures in Parliam'nt. Now, if they've votes enough to get in an' form a Govern-m'nt, defeat all other parties by substantial majorities, what the devil do they care what anyone else says or thinks about this letter? It can't really hurt Radayne unless with the men in his own parties."

Countess Nan had been considering the matter from other viewpoints.

"The letter, by itself, might be smoothed over, Lammy—if they get strong enough to take over the Government—though I very much doubt it. The more one reads that letter, the more certain it seems that it would make the blood of any Englishman boil! But suppose, for example, this Labor Demosthenes should be caught indulging in some of the vices commonly associated with the idle-rich aristocrats—caught so entirely with the goods that there could be no lying or wriggling out of it—and the Conservative news-sheets gave it full publicity—with this letter? Eh? Wouldn't that nail Radayne's coffin up fairly tight?"

"If you once get him with the goods, as you say—aye! But that would take some doin'. He's by way of being woman-shy—steers clear of 'em—wont even have a girl typist in his house."

Trevor chuckled.

"Then he must have had a beastly shock at some point along his career, Lammy! For I happen to know there was a bit of scandal about Radayne an' one of the Duke's maids when the lad was at Oxford —spendin' summers with his father, the curate. If ever he comes within the magnetic field of a handsome woman with strong personality, he'll fall—all the way!"

"Do you know—strikes me this is by way of being a rawther academic discussion. If the man controls the votes, he'll be Prime Minister within a month or two, an' we may kiss our fingers to any hope of stemming the democratic tide for the present."

"But—if Radayne is out of politics—smashed, done? What?"

"H-m-m—there's no other man in sight could hold his various factions together, I fancy. At least—I know of none!"

"Seems to be worth tryin' out. What?"

ON the following Thursday night the galleries of the House were packed with men and women representing every stratum of British society. It had been understood that Radayne would reply to a question introduced by one of the Government leaders—and those of the aristocracy were hoping for some statement as to how far he proposed going in destroying them. Many, representing business interests, were anxious to gain some idea as to how much trade was likely to be interfered with. A sprinkling of individuals from the lower classes were anticipating some declaration of a policy confiscating all private fortunes.

The lighting of the House of Commons never has been considered brilliant enough to be dazzling, but on the floor, and for a few tiers of benches up, the face and figure of any speaker stand out clearly enough to emphasize him against the shadowy background. It was the Viscount Corbyn who put the question from the Government benches—an hereditary aristocrat, perfect in his bearing and of courteous manner, a gentleman who simply wouldn't have known how to be anything else. He stood out in the softened light like a clean-cut cameo against its darker under-shell. When he sat down to the accompaniment of somewhat perfunctory hand-clapping, there were a few moments of murmuring interval—then a wave of applause as Radayne, upon one of the front benches in the Labor section, got upon his feet, bowed to the Speaker, and glanced about the House in a leisurely manner. He stood nearly six feet—well-proportioned, expensively but carelessly dressed. His dark hair was trimmed but somewhat rumpled, his face clean-shaved, with a pallor indicating more attention to reading and indoor discussion than to keeping up properly with his out-of-door sports for exercise.

What followed during the next fifteen minutes was one of the most brilliant dissections of the Government's question that ever had been heard on the floor of the House. He indulged in occasional pointed satire, but very little pointless sarcasm. The points he made were apt and merciless —the Government side knowing that he was distorting many of their facts to something very far from the meaning which had been intended, but unable to see just how this distortion might be controverted in debate without emphasizing possibilities they had not contemplated. After finishing with the question, Radayne paused, glanced about the House and went on with what seemed to be merely a tentative intimation of his real policy.

"We have no desire to destroy property. Without the chance to accumulate something for his old age, something to support him after he has worked long enough, no man would have sufficient incentive either to work or to live. But the principle of accumulating beyond any possible future need is unsound. A man should be entitled to a fair percentage of profit from the business he has built up, as compensation for his money invested, his foresight, organization and management. A larger percentage, obviously, than any of his employees—but not one hundred per cent or five hundred. An employee who does his work conscientiously is entitled to some share in the business profits outside a weekly wage—foremen, expert craftsmen, skilled workmen —a scale of percentages adapted to the ability of each.

"Again, the squandering of inherited fortunes represents economic waste; we propose to abolish that. The man who will not work, in one way or another, is entitled to nothing at all—neither clothes, food nor shelter. If he be hopelessly incompetent, there should be institutions for his care at the expense of the State—with no attempt to make his stay in them luxurious or even pleasant. In Roman days he would have been eliminated—but neither our laws nor the trend of modern opinion favor that solution. Our present system of taxation is

far too burdensome for the individual. With confiscation of the excess in private fortunes, above a fair percentage of profit or necessary use, there would be ample resources from which to cut the present taxation in half at least. Obtaining correct figures as to profit or loss from any business enterprise or public utility is always difficult, but with committees appointed both from employers and employees having access to the books and preparing them, a fair working basis would be obtained. In case of disputes within the committees, the balance sheets would be submitted to a Government accountant in each locality. This, of course, is but a tentative outlining of our program—subject to extension or modification by general agreement. But it represents about what we desire to obtain, I fancy. Some of us on this side are not entirely in agreement upon all the points. Many of you on the Government side, doubtless, will consider yourselves unalterably opposed to these propositions. Yet I venture to say that some such procedure as I have outlined will be adopted, sooner or later, by an overwhelming majority."

AS Radayne sat down there was a moment of dead silence before those in the House began to recover from his hypnotic spell; then a mighty wave of applause shook the building—even the Government side paying tribute to the way in which he had marshaled his facts and presented them—quietly, with no straining for oratorical effect. The Conservatives were somewhat relieved to find that he did not contemplate as drastic confiscation as one wing of his party had been clamoring for. Commercial men saw in the proposition no serious interference with trade. Those of the working folk who heard him, while not entirely satisfied with his moderation, got the impression that by his plan they stood to get more from the "toffs" than ever they had obtained up to that time.

In the Commons lobby and corridors there was a throng of visitors waiting for a moment's chat with such members as came out that way. A sprinkling of workingpeople in their holiday clothes, city men with their women friends, members of the aristocracy. Radayne was surrounded the moment he appeared; but the Duchess of Mabercorn, with a much handsomer and younger woman, were the first to get a word with him.

"Congratulations, Michael! You were at your best tonight. This is my friend Mrs. Seppingford—who wants to argue a point with you at first opportunity. We both detest your politics, naturally, but compliment you on the way they were presented. I suppose when you get control you'll confiscate the poor Duke's land and turn us out of Mabercorn Towers? Mrs. Seppingford has just leased an estate near us and hopes you'll not turn her out for a year, at least."

As the Duke and Duchess had been his early benefactors, Radayne couldn't be anything but civil to Her Grace, but he had hoped to avoid meeting the handsome woman with her. He wished no distractions in his political career. As she stood there listening to the Duchess, however, and apparently studying his face in a very self-possessed way, he was conscious of an inexplicable interest. The lady didn't appear eager to speak with him—which rather piqued the man; and after her brief study of his face she was glancing away, as if waiting to move on. Suddenly he determined to make her show a more personal interest—he was, after all, a man very much in the public eye.

"I'm not aware, Mrs. Seppingford, that I have at any time advocated confiscation of the old entailed estates—so you need have no apprehension upon that point. Of course it will come about eventually—because, with the present annual increase in the birth-rate it will not be so many years before every foot of land in every country will be needed to feed and clothe the population. But that will be a problem for our grandchildren, and theirs—to handle when it presents itself. You're not English, then?"

The corners of her mouth crinkled in a smile which showed two ravishing dimples.

"Australian. That was clever of you, Mr. Radayne. Sheep money, you know. Not one of the great wool fortunes—scarcely in your proscribed class, I fancy, but my husband left enough to keep me in more or less comfort, and I warn you that I'm not giving up a penny of it, no matter what absurd laws you pass—one may always emigrate to the States, you know. Apropos—I've just taken the place in Somerset—moving down tomorrow, and for the week-end I'm having a bit of a house-warming. Would you come to me from Saturday to Monday? There are tennis and golf—a day with the birds, if you like—one or two interesting persons—no formality. It's not compulsory,

you know. Still, one fancies a chat with you might be worth while. What?"

Radayne's habit had been to avoid house-parties as much as possible—they rarely occurred among his followers and were likely to place him in a position which they would misconstrue. But he determined on the spur of the moment that he would accept this invitation. The woman intrigued him.

"H-m-m—fancy I might be able to arrange it, Mrs. Seppingford. I'll see what my secretary has down for those days. Thank you for wishing to have me. . . . . Bannock! Let me present you to Her Grace of Mabercorn and Mrs. Seppingford! Mr. Bannock is our leader among the northern Laborites, ladies. You should hear him on the floor when he has some particular grievance against the aristocracy!"

DOWN in Somerset, on Saturday afternoon, Radayne was conscious of feeling a most comfortable relaxation. He'd had no lengthy talk with Mrs. Seppingford as yet. She had smiled in a comfortable, welcoming way when they met, assured herself that he had everything he wanted in his room—valets being unpopular with his constituency—and had then busied herself with the needs of other guests. As hostess, she was perfect—as a woman, the embodiment of feminine mystery and allure without making any apparent effort.

Sunday morning Radayne drove over to see his father for an hour or so in the village near Mabercorn Towers, and a short call upon the Duchess. In the afternoon Mrs. Seppingford permitted him to find her alone in a small rustic summerhouse at the end of the garden. Chatting leisurely, she got him to describe his father and their early home, the sort of life he had led as a boy at Eton—as a slightly older boy at Oxford. Presently she remarked, as if the thought had just occurred to her:

"People have said that you're a woman-hater, Mr. Radayne—that we have no place in your life. But in our very brief acquaintance I've seen no evidence of it. In fact, from what I know of you, I wonder that you've never married."

"Well—I'll tell you something in strict confidence. I did marry—during my last year at Oxford. A most unfortunate affair which gave me a frightful shock at the time. The girl was not of my class. I was a young fellow with no experience in life—believing what I was told because it never occurred to me that any woman would deliberately lie, in the circumstances. We eloped, were married in Bristol, spent a week at an hotel in Wales—and then she left me. Simply took the train up to London, leaving a note saying there was no use in our sticking together any longer. I found where she had gone, kept track of her through one of my Oxford mates who had gone in for the law—and after three years, divorced her. But the experience was enough to make me rather cautious in extending my acquaintance among women."

"My word! One comprehends exactly why you would be. However—you're now a man of the world, quite able to protect yourself from any of my sex. Let's hope you'll not condemn the lot of us, in your own class, for an unfortunate adventure with a woman of quite different type."

When Radayne returned to London on Monday, his thoughts were so full of Mrs. Seppingford that he found it difficult to concentrate upon politics—and he had secured engagements with her for three or four evenings, when she came up to town. She was really less than two hours behind him—but her chauffeur was a smoothly-shaven, dark-complexioned man who might have been Hindu or Malay—actually Afghan, of the Trevor household in Park Lane. And during the drive up from Somersetshire she was busy, in the privacy of her car, making changes which so altered her appearance that nobody could have recognized the Mrs. Seppingford who had started in it—getting out in Park Lane as Nan, Countess of Dyvnaint.

Next morning Her Ladyship took the express to Bristol, where, inside of two hours she had found the record of Radayne's early marriage in the parish register of the church he would quite naturally have selected.

In his talk with her that Sunday afternoon, Radayne had mentioned an address in the East End where his barrister-chum had kept his wife under observation. It took Her Ladyship only four days—assisted by two of her Afghans who had been trained in such work—to run the woman down and find her living with a man whom she claimed to have married, though others in the tenement put a tongue in the cheek when it was mentioned among them. The woman was now a stout, overworked drab—but with still enough good looks to make her attractive with any man of low intelligence who didn't ask too much. It was doubtful if she saw as much as a five-pound note at any one time during the year. She

The tipsy young fellow struck Radayne a savage but futile blow—and was himself instantly floored.

was naturally suspicious of her plainly but richly dressed visitor—but the Countess had a winning manner.

"Mrs. Hobbs—would you care to earn a hundred pounds in a perfectly honest way? Money which you may bank in your own name, or hide in a broken teapot if you prefer?"

"A hundred quid! My Gawd! We read o' that much money in the pipers—but it ain't real! Are ye havin'-me-on, ma'am?"

"No—here's the money." She took sixteen five-pound notes from her purse, and twenty "ones." "All I want is a little information—but I want the truth, and I can easily check up on you if you prefer to lie. Will you tell me what I want to know?"

"Aye—if so be I know, myself."

"You were married to Michael Radayne in St. Luke's Chapel, Bristol, on May 8th, 1907—after eloping with him from Somersetshire, where you were employed in the Mabercorn household. After a few days you left your husband and came up to London—rooming and finding work in Hackney. Am I correct—so far?"

"Aye—though how ye found it out, I can't see!"

"When did your husband divorce you?"

"Divorce! Who e'er talked o' divorce! He never divorced me! He'd ne'er the nerve to stand bringin' up our marriage in the courts! He was just a poor weak fool of a lad as happened to tike my fancy f'r a bit. We were ne'er div— My Gawd! What am I sayin'! Now ye'll be havin' me up before the beaks f'r bigamy!"

"Don't lose your nerve, Mrs. Hobbs You've never gone through the marriage ceremony again, have you?"

"No, lidy—never! I'd that much sense, at least!"

"Then how can anyone legally prosecute you for bigamy—when you have not committed it? Your husband might have you up for adultery—but we're both quite certain that he'll never dream of such a thing. Where is he now?"

"How should I know? I've not laid eye on 'im for twenty years! In Canada or Australia, belike—if he's still livin'."

"You fancy he hadn't ability enough to

make anything of himself—in the City, possibly in politics, stand for Parliament?"

"What, him! Where would anything like that get into 'is blood—with his father a poor half-starved curate, his mother a woman o' good village fam'ly, but no stren'th? There be a Radayne in Parlyment—a big man on the Labor side—the pipers is full of 'im. But he'll be a diff'rent sort from what my husband was—a weak lad what let a girl fool him into marryin' her when there was no need!"

"Well, Mrs. Hobbs—I think you've told me the truth. Here are your hundred pounds—and I'll drop a hint at the police station around the corner that you came honestly by them, in case anybody sees you with five-pound notes."

AFTER the next week Radayne's infatuation progressed so rapidly that he was dazed. There was no possible way by which suspicion might have come to him that he was in the hands not only of a very charming woman but also one of the most powerful hypnotists in the country—a woman who had studied the art from Yogis as a girl, in India, where she was born.

One night, when they were motoring by moonlight through the outlying shires around London, he suggested that they stop at some roadside inn, take a room and have a hot supper served in it. She considered the proposition—but presently refused.

"Not tonight, Michael. I'm not in the mood. Saturday—perhaps. There are two or three inns along the west road beyond Richmond where I fancy we'd not find anyone who knows us."

Events moved rapidly during the next few days. Radayne was carrying the load of his infatuation in addition to his political activities which now were approaching a crisis. The Government admitted in its private conferences that it was doomed—that Radayne had consolidated the Labor and socialist factions until he now had more than a safe majority on the floor of the House. Nothing could stop him. He had but to get up and move a vote of censure, almost any evening—or call up the Government's most important measure for debate and defeat it overwhelmingly. Whatever the method or pretext, the Government was due to fall—it was known that as the next premier, Radayne already had picked most of his Cabinet. There was a general feeling in the House that the blow would fall during the following Monday evening.

On the previous Friday afternoon Countess Nan had a confidential interview with the managing editor of the leading Conservative daily belonging to the Trevor syndicate—commercially known as the Universal Press Syndicate, Ltd. The editor was quite prepared to write the obituary of his party for an indefinite time, and he was rather stunned at the facts put in his possession by Her Ladyship. He was, however, sufficiently alert to guarantee absolute adherence to the detailed instructions concerning the placing of reporters, with cameras and flash-lights, in each of four different roadside inns west of Richmond. She was not sure which of them Radayne might select—but appeared to be certain that it would be one of the four, and that there would be events completely turning the political situation before morning.

At this point the editor, advocating exposure of the facts, squirmed a bit at her caustic inquiry as to whether he placed a news-scoop ahead of party interest.

"The point is just this, Mr. Scarsdale. With Radayne suddenly and completely smashed—out of politics for the rest of his life—our present cabinet carries on, as there now seems no hope of its doing. Without Radayne, his coalition falls to squabbling fragments—and there will not be for years any such consolidation of the radical opposition. You admit that? Very good! Well, on Sunday morning we will have all the weapons and ammunition to force him out. But it's going to be far more effective—far more likely to damn him with his followers irrevocably—if he simply chucks it cold, on the very eve of absolute victory, without a word of explanation and nothing in the news-sheets to account for it!"

WHEN Saturday came, Radayne supposed that the Black Swan Inn was his own selection, not remembering how favorably Mrs. Seppingford had spoken of the place when mentioning the four. He had run down that morning to look at the rooms, order the supper, and get some idea as to the inconspicuousness of the place—deciding to keep her in ignorance of where they were going until they arrived. Apparently the inn couldn't have been improved upon for his purpose. They reached it at eleven, that night, and went directly up to the room he had reserved—being obliged, however, to cross the further end of the taproom, where a newspaper-man and four sporting bloods had been drinking until

they were slightly under the influence of their liquor. All of them glanced around at the woman's handsome face and the man's vaguely familiar one. As the pair disappeared up the stairs, the men in the taproom put their heads together and began speculating upon who they might be—and ordered another round of drinks.

In the room above, Mrs. Seppingford, in the act of laying aside her cloak, pointed to a mouse running across the end of their room, in which the supper had just been put upon a small table, and screamed quite loudly—twice.

There was an immediate commotion in the taproom—one of the young bloods starting for the stairs with the newspaper man after him.

"Beauty in distresh, b'gad! Callin' for shishtance! Yoicks! Comin', m'dear—comin'!"

There was loud pounding upon the door; finally it was smashed in, and the tipsy young fellow struck Radayne a savage but futile blow—and was himself instantly floored, half-senseless. There was a sharp flashlight explosion—then a sudden dousing of the lights in the room. The newspaper man, followed by the others, surged in with electric torches, but Radayne slipped out surreptitiously with the lady—the pair running silently down the stairs, across the taproom and out to their car, which they managed to start before the others came piling out after them. Before the newspaper man left, however, he took a couple more shots of the private room with its dainty bed and other furniture—the appetizing supper on the cozy little table. And his first shot, from just outside the door, had caught a square front view of the politician's face, with a slightly blurred one of his companion.

SHORTLY after noon on Monday the government leader, Viscount Corbyn, the Home Secretary and Earl Trevor called at Radayne's luxuriously furnished house in the West End, knowing from those who had been keeping him under espionage that the man was at home.

Always a fighter, Radayne came down to them entirely self-possessed, prepared to dictate terms. He got, however, no opening for that. His visitors were serious—as if carrying out a most unpleasant task. The Viscount did the talking:

"Radayne, I fancy we compliment you when I say that we believe you to be the most dangerous man for the peace of England that she has seen in politics for many years. Had we no other resources with which to defend ourselves, you would be Prime Minister before midnight, and heaven knows what would happen during the next few years—a world-war, almost certainly. Well, d'ye see, we simply can't have it, old chap! Wont do, you know—wont do at all! So we're suggestin' that you announce your resignation an' withdrawal from politics—on the floor of the House—at, say, nine o'clock. What?"

"H-m-m—any reason for supposing I might consider that suggestion, your Lordship? It's a rather amazing one in the circumstances, don't you think?"

"Oh—I can't see that, you know. Would you mind glancin' over these photographs—of a lady an' gentleman in a rawther compromisin' situation? Midnight—supper—private bedroom—country inn—lady much distressed—callin' for assistance—all that, you know. Photograph of a page in the Parish Register of St. Luke's, Bristol—showing that the man in this affair was married twenty years ago. Married man with lovely woman not his wife—country inn at midnight! Wont do, you know! Photograph of letter written to Prince of Rumania some months ago, makin' promises which would bring about a general war if carried out. Really, old chap, you can see for yourself that a premier of this sort is quite impossible in a British governm'nt!"

RADAYNE, stunned, looked at the photograph of the letter, and inwardly cursed irresponsible princes. (They had the original, of course, though he had supposed it destroyed months before.) The letter alone he might have fought, with some desperate chance for overcoming the prejudices of his followers upon the ground of political expediency. But—taking the other photographs with it—not a chance. He knew exactly how his constituency regarded what they considered the loose morality of the aristocracy. A married man—of course they'd dug up his wife somewhere—in a private room, at midnight, with a beautiful woman not his wife. Secluded country inn. No, they'd never swallow that if he explained until he lost his voice!

At nine o'clock he rose from his seat in the House and offered his resignation to the Speaker—upon the ground of serious ill-health, necessitating his leaving at once for the Riviera under his physician's orders.

Brothers of the Saddle

By ROLLIN BROWN

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

DUSTY miles and long, over a parched country of drouth, of low-growing grayish sage and little grass, cactus, spiny yucca and thin mesquite; close under the fantastic wind-eroded buttes of San Simón Pass; crossing dry washes of boulders and sand, alkali flats where the dust was fine and white like flour—this was the way up from Amaxilla to Sanderson. The road was much used, for over this route the Condor Copper Company was forced to send its wagons out to the railroad—that is, if it intended to continue working the Pecoso Valley properties, and it did. They were highly profitable, and the present period of drouth did not greatly affect the Condor's activities. The veins that it had bought from S. T. Wigon, the CZY, had proved almost inexhaustible.

From the San Simón, the Pecoso Valley stretched south for some fifty miles, until it banked an end up against Los Dientes: a gigantic oval of flat lands, quartered by several tiny chain-like ranges of hills—such as the little range that sheltered the buildings of the Wigwam brand; but these were insignificant in the scheme of the whole. Crossing the Dientes, heading south, it was possible for a rider, without change of mounts and if the horse under him was good, to work down into Old Mexico. Half a dozen scattered permanent water-holes made such a feat possible. In good years cattle were even grazed across the Dientes.

And primarily the Pecoso was cattle country, because of its lack of water. A few wells were put down; windmills, tanks, the conservation of natural springs and water tunnels furnished a limited continual supply for stock, but little more. Rainfall was as erratic as it was scarce, as the great dry washes, deeply cut gorges and *arroyos* of the country bore witness. These channels of natural drainage had seen bursts of rain that had taxed their capacity, followed by days, month on month, when no cloud crossed the sky.

A frowning land—hard and boisterous at times, unfriendly in the main. Stern names were linked with its earlier history. There was the name of Farnum, for instance—Samuel Farnum, who had been first minion of law and order when the little town of Amaxilla had grown to the stage when such a thing was deemed necessary. He was shot down in the Billings affair, long years ago; a son prosaically named Joe survived him. There were Tomás Andrés Silvas, gentle-mannered *ranchero*, and the Garcias. There was Tod Mallor, white-mustached, quick and harsh in anger, who had outlived so many of his friends, and still ran the Wigwam ranch that he had founded. A niece, daughter of his brother, lived with him, a smiling, dark-eyed girl of twenty years, named Paula. . . . . There was Capstan Bland, soldier of fortune, who had first looked down on the Pecoso from the head of a pack-train bound into Santa Fe. Ten years later he had married and returned. He had founded the Sled Rail.

Three sons survived Capstan Bland. The elder, Jess, had taken to the profession of law, and had recently hung out his shingle in Amaxilla. In age Jess was nearing thirty. Clark was six years younger, and Dave four years younger than he. To the three brothers Capstan Bland had left the

This unusually attractive and authentic novelette of cowboy adventure is by the author of "Five to One" and "Forgotten Country."

"Head back for Amaxilla—now!" said Mahenny. "If we see you again, Farnum, none of us will be kind!"

Sled Rail brand and its stock, its many long acres, the home ranch-house and corrals. At a time just before his death, two years gone by, there was the matter of a small loan from Tod Mallor, his friend, to tide the usual beef sale over until the following spring, for grass had been poor that year.

CLARK still stood before the lamp he had set upon the table—tall, lean, with the sinewy muscles of a riding man and of youth.

"I made sure of it this afternoon, Dave," he said. "Over in Bitter Fork way I found it again—three scrawny little calves in the band, this time; and each carryin' the fresh print of our Sled Rail iron on his side. Their mammies was two of Mallor's cows an' a CZY, respectively. I guess we're not goin' to need any more proof."

Dave Bland stared moodily at nothing. Seventeen years made him a man to look at things and face them as a man should; but somehow he felt quivery tonight, jumpy.

"What—what're we goin' to do about it, Clark? Huh?" he asked finally.

"That's what I'm tryin' to make up my mind about, kid. I don't quite know." Clark grinned slowly—not that the thing was especially humorous. "It's kind of unusual, I'd say—lack of precedent, sort of, to go by. Now, those calves are not a gift, I somehow surmise. Huh, Dave?"

"No," said Dave gravely.

"Yet somehow there they are, awful plainly marked with our iron, an' followin' another man's cows. An' the Bitter Fork, incident'ly, is a mighty conspicuous place. It's kind of like tackin' up a public sign, sayin': 'Here is three calves that somebody has stole.' Who that somebody is, is o' course pretty obvious. . . . . I'm just wonderin' how long we got, Dave; an' whether I dare take the chance of ridin' in to see Jess."

Dave didn't know. After a moment he burst out, "If we'd sometimes been in the habit of plantin' a sleeper out in the brush, if we'd worked over a brand now an' then—any of them things—"

Clark nodded. "I know how you feel. But it would still be kind of insultin' to our intelligence, at that, Dave. Sled Rail calves followin' the wrong mammies right out there in the Bitter Fork, where there's three-four riders passin' through every day or so! Pshaw—"

Clark's words halted, and Dave stiffened into a posture of rigid attention. Somewhere outside, a dog had begun to growl.

Clark did not move, but a careless easy-going something had dropped from his figure. He was as tense as Dave. The throaty note of the dog's growl changed into a challenging bay, shrill and high-pitched. A second joined with it, and the pair made heavy sudden chorus into the night. Clark left the table and strode on his toes into a side room at the right, swinging the door noiselessly shut behind him, to cut off the light. A shudder of nervousness possessed one of Dave's hands, and the boy furiously clenched his fingers.

In a few seconds Clark was back. "It's Jess, comin' alone," he said. "I could see that buckskin of his plain in the moonlight."

Clark went outside.

IN height Jess Bland was somewhat the less of Clark, but nevertheless a tall man; and he was slightly the heavier. The family mark was strong upon him—in the high-bridged nose and about the chin. He was dressed now, as was his custom upon the streets of Amaxilla; in a black suit, soft collar and tie and sombrero of moderate size. In addition a holster, gun and full cartridge-belt were strapped at his hips.

He greeted them half-jovially but failed to keep a serious note from under the tone. "Dave, mind saddling," he asked, "while I talk to Clark? Better take a pack-mule, and maybe that buckskin of mine for one of you. A mighty good horse, that buckskin."

A question hung on Dave's lips, and Jess answered it: "Plenty of time, I guess. But Biddle is coming somewhere behind me."

As Dave went out, Clark spoke. There was no use in wasting words; Jess evidently knew all about it. "It's gone that far, then?" he asked. "Biddle's been sent out with a warrant for us?"

"Yes." Jess nodded. "Evidence—some ten head of Wigwam and CZY cows, followed by sucking calves branded with our iron—has been run into one of the CZY corrals and held. Pretty rank, all right; but that's the way it stands. Joe Farnum tipped me off about two hours ago—"

"Who's behind it?" Clark cut in.

"For several reasons it would look like Mallor. Wigon, of the CZY, and that foreman of his, Mahenny, may have a hand. I don't know, and Joe didn't seem to have a very definite idea. Evidently, though, the thing is pretty well framed—a witness to the act, probably, and the like. Hard-looking break! I think you and Dave had better ride for awhile. Give me a chance to look around alone."

"Uh-huh!" Clark considered for a few seconds. . . . . "Jess, I can't quite chalk a frame-up like that up against Mallor."

"No—" Jess knew that Clark was likely thinking of Paula Mallor— "No," he continued slowly, "not unless Mallor wanted to break us flat right now. He has the reason—six weeks, and his note on the place here is due."

"I know—but—"

"The drouth has made it impossible to get any cow money in the Pecoso, Clark. I've been looking everywhere. There's not a cent. With this—"

"But Mallor's not a sneak," Clark said.

"I've always thought so myself," Jess agreed, "until tonight. . . . . You'd better be moving, Clark; and I'd like to have some idea of where you'll be."

Clark went over to the mantelpiece of the fireplace, his boot-heels thudding sharply on the flooring, and picked up a small pair of binoculars. He tucked them into a leather case, and took a heavy gun and belt from a nail on the wall before turning.

"We'd better head down into the Dientes," he said. "They have advantages. There's a little grass feed in and around Corral Flats."

Jess nodded. "All right. If anything turns up, I'll send Joe Farnum, or one of the boys we can trust, down to tell you. He'll stay out in the center of the opens in camp until you appear."

"Yes." Clark was fingering the few brass heads of the cartridges that showed in the belt he had taken. "I'm short on shells, Jess. Been meanin' to get more for the last two weeks. What gun's that you're carryin'?"

Jess touched the holster at his hip. "Father's old .36. I don't have reason to carry a gun much, y'know; I've never got another."

"Plenty of shells?"

"Belt's full."

"Mind tradin', Jess?"

For answer Jess Bland unbuckled the gun-belt at his hips.

AFTER Dave and Clark had gone, Jess brought the dogs in, seated himself, and placed the gun Clark had given him on the far side of the table. The light of the lamp fell slantwise across Jess' features, and he suddenly appeared tired and older than his years. With a forefinger he pro-

ceeded to trace intricate meaningless designs on the dark cloth of one trouser-knee.

Long moments slipped by, and there was no motion of the man except for this restless finger that kept pace with the movement of his thought. Both his enemies and his friends had remarked before this time that Jess Bland would have made an excellent professional at the table of chance. He had that way about him, an immobility of feature and a coolness of mind that accepted victory or defeat with the same outward gesture.

Jess had long to wait, which bespoke the fact that his exit from Amaxilla had gone unnoted. . . . . Yet when it came, there was no warning. The unlatched door of the room opened with a single swift movement, framing the sturdy form of a CZY rider.

Jess gave the man an unhurried glance. "Ask Sheriff Biddle to come in, wont you?" he said. "Tell him it's quite safe."

Blustering, Biddle's reddish face appeared at the rider's shoulder after a second.

"Biddle," Jess went on, "tell whoever you've got at the windows that I wont give them the slightest excuse to shoot. In fact, I've had the forethought to place my gun there on the far side of the table, in plain view. I wont make a motion, if you happen to be waiting for that."

CHAPTER II

STARS seemed low in the sky, luminous and silvery; and the narrow white crescent of a moon, close to the west horizon, still gave the early night a thin light. The rough-cut jumbled ridges and the opening of San Simón Pass were visible in outline behind. The country to the south, the sweep on the long lands of the Pecoso, was less distinct, and distance blotted out the ranges called Los Dientes—the teeth. From the right a tiny glitter of lights, winking across some five miles, not unlike a clustered band of far-off fireflies, marked the town of Amaxilla.

Spur rowels and bridle chains clanked softly, rhythmical, in time with the slow, even Spanish trot of the two horses. The shuffling hoofs of the animals lifted a line of dust that was fine and buoyant and hung long suspended in the air behind, misty and white in the moonlight. The pack-mule, tagging free, slowed from time to time, then raced to catch up.

The two riders were silent. Clark bore to the left, and Dave realized without question that they were to stop at the Wigwam before going on. He stoically accepted his brother's decision.

The moon dropped lower, disappeared. Finally Clark halted long enough to catch the following mule and give the lead rope into Dave's hand. A small chain of valley hills had lifted at their side; a bit later the walls of a short box cañon opened off, and a single lighted window, square and yellow, appeared. Clark swung into the traced white ruts of a road that led toward it; and they passed between the heavy posts of an opened gate, going straight on toward the corrals. Great cottonwood trees, dark and massive, hung over the place. From the corral a horse whinnied softly at their approach.

"I wont be long," Clark told Dave. "But I want to have a straight talk with Mallor before we go on. Wait here."

He unbuckled his spurs and chaps, hanging them on the saddle-horn, and moved off noiselessly toward the veranda of the house. The surroundings were familiar to Clark. He went carefully up the veranda steps and paused beside the near casement of the yellow window. With no intention of playing eavesdropper, he nevertheless wished to reconnoiter the room beyond.

Two men were in it, he saw directly. They sat across a square table and were speaking in words that Clark could not hear. The nearer, Mallor, an elderly man, stockily built and strong, sturdy despite his age, sat with his back to Clark. Across the table was Tarp Mahenny, buckaroo boss and foreman for Wigon's CZY—a lank, sun-dark man, with a skin so brown that a tinge of Mexican or Indian blood seemed evident in his heritage. His face was without wrinkle, strangely smooth and suave of expression.

Clark hesitated, and the instant gave him a sense of tenseness between these two men at the table. Mahenny was speaking, smiling, but his right hand resting on the arm of the chair he sat in, was stiff, poised. Clark knew Tod Mallor as a slow, heavy-voiced man, heavily genial or angry, as the case might be. Now one arm, elbow to the table, supported his head. He was silent. Half-smiling, Mahenny spoke on. Finally the tense right hand lifted, and delicately, with a forefinger, emphasized some point on the surface of the table. Mahenny's hands were expressive, it occurred to Clark.

Mallor seemed to stare at nothing, to pay no heed to the man before him.

CLARK stood still, waiting, wondering for a moment; he debated leaving as quietly as he had come. Yet that seemed purposeless. At his hip he fingered the butt of the .36 that Jess had given him; finally he took the weapon out, balancing it up sharply, to get the feel. The gun and the caliber of it were little enough to Clark's liking. He stepped slowly on to the door, and the fingers of his left hand felt carefully for the latch. The door swung in a few inches.

Clark spoke to Mahenny: "Just ease your hands down an' unbuckle your gun-belt, Tarp. Don't touch the holster! An' lift the whole thing out onto the table—by the buckle."

Mallor started, but Mahenny's placid face made no change. For just an instant he hesitated, then calmly did as he was told. Plainly he had no desire or reason, at the moment, to make gun-play; and moreover the light of the hanging lamp was in his eyes. Clark stepped on into the room, with Tod Mallor's clouded eyes upon him, and took the gun-belt and weapon from the table. He noted, as he held them, that the gun was of a .44 caliber, identical in model to his own, which Jess now had, and that the cartridge-belt was full.

Clark turned to Mallor, and began directly. "Tod," he said, "I'd always considered you as one of the best friends we had here in the Pecoso. Father trusted you in the old days. And for that reason—"

Mallor's face was dully red, as it had been when Clark entered the room.

"For that reason," Clark went on slowly, "I want to ask you to your face whether or not you're behind this thing. All evidence would say that you are, Mallor—but you're no liar. I'll believe whatever you say, an' I'd like to have an answer."

Mallor's eyes shifted. He did not speak for a moment; and then, thickly from the throat: "About the west range and the ranch-house—yes, Clark. I—I'll be forced to foreclose the minute the law allows. I—I—"

"Remember," Mahenny cut in, with a gesture, "that the drouth has hit Mallor just as hard as it has you."

"Nobody asked your view, Mahenny," Clark said. He turned back to Mallor. "That's your privilege, Tod. You've extended the loan for two years now, an' added more to it, to keep us goin.' I reckon we can't ask more. . . . . But—well, is it necessary to push Dave an' me out of the Pecoso besides?"

Mallor's eyes looked at Mahenny, rather than at Clark. "I'm not in that!" he said, measuring each word. "I've got no part in that!"

The breath came softly between Clark's teeth. "I've person'ly seen several head of calves marked with the Sled Rail followin' Wigwam cows, Mallor," he suggested. "Branded within the last day or two."

Mallor shot to his feet. "I've heard about it too! I'm not pullin' that deal on you, Clark—believe it, or not! An' by—" Mallor's thick hands trembled on the edge of the table.

Mahenny laughed shortly.

Clark turned to him again. "Just what do you mean by that, Mahenny?"

"It's amusin' to hear Mallor deny brandin' his own calves with another man's iron—"

"Yes?"

"Yes," Mahenny repeated carefully. "In the past it's sort of gener'ly been considered that men didn't choose to give their stock away like that. In fact, I once saw a man hung—that wasn't so long ago, either—because two suckin' calves carried his iron an' followed another man's cows. It kind of appears to me that this here situation aint so different."

"Uh-huh," said Clark. "Now, if you'll think back, Mahenny, you'll remember that just about a minute or so ago I hinted that you was to keep shut. The reason for that, Mahenny, is that I know you for exactly the loose-mouthed dirty liar that you are!"

THE habitual smile left Mahenny's mouth, and with no motion of the facial muscles his lips turned white. He muttered something about brave men—when they had the guns. Clark didn't get the words, but he got the meaning.

Very carefully he plucked the CZY foreman's gun from its holster and placed it down on the table. He put his own gun, then, down beside it, turning the butts just so, and stood away.

"The distance is about equal," he told Mahenny. "Go for yours whenever you're ready!"

Mahenny's face turned livid; and his right hand, upon the table's edge, became clawlike, stiff, yet lithe as bent whalebone. Expressive hands! His eyes met Clark's and hung there. They were steady eyes.

eager suddenly, yet over all cunning, measuring the situation. . . . . A full moment passed before they dropped, and in that moment each man saw deep into the other. Mahenny's hand slid back from the table's edge and fell from sight.

Silently Clark took up the guns, and noted again that Mahenny's was identical to his own .44. Mahenny's cartridge belt was full. Clark toyed with the gun.

"Mahenny," he said finally, "I'm goin' to keep your gun. But in case you wont be able to get another right away, I'll leave the one I'm carryin' down at the gate—at the foot of the right gate-post."

He turned sharply away and went out, but he heard one of the men get up and follow. It was Mallor. On the veranda he called Clark back.

"You an' Dave clearin' out, Clark?"

"For a time."

"Uh-huh. Clark, I aint had no hand in this last. I want you to believe that."

"I take your word for it, Mallor."

"I aint! An' by God, I'll—" Mallor did not finish the sentence, and it was as though this bespoke his own indecision, the limit of his own bonds. Silently his hand reached out in the darkness for Clark's, and Clark took it.

"You'd like to see Paula first?" Mallor asked.

"I would."

"I sent her over to the cabin when Mahenny came. Her an' Francisca. You'll find them there. . . . . So-long."

"So-long."

For a few seconds Clark stood motionless, as Mallor had left him. There was something, surely, below the surface of Mallor's actions. He wished that he could put

"Over in Bitter Fork way I found it again, Dave," Clark said. "I guess we're not goin' to need any more proof."

the thing he sensed into words. It was too intangible, merely a feeling. . . . . He strode away, back toward the little outcabin. The Wigwam buildings seemed deserted tonight. In the darkened doorway of the cabin Paula Mallor suddenly stood before him.

Something of her he could see in the starlight that sifted through the heavy cottonwoods above—the slim oval of her face and the slenderness of her body in soft outline. Memory supplied the rest—the clean olive-tanned profile, and the dark sleek mass of her hair drawn plainly back.

She stood close before him, and he told her something of what had happened.

"But, Clark—I don't understand," she said.

"I don't either," Clark admitted.

"Uncle Tod," she began, and halted. "He—he hasn't been himself lately. Something's wrong, and he wont let a word of it out. Wigon was here this afternoon—"

Clark pondered. The rustle of a skirt from behind the doorway attracted his attention. It was Francisca, the Mexican girl who helped with the household work.

"I haven't long, Paula," Clark said finally. "We must be out of the Pecoso by daylight. I'll say good-by."

She went back with him as far as the veranda, walked slowly, hesitant. And as he started on, her hand caught at the denim sleeve of his short rider's jacket and drew him back.

"Clark, I'm afraid something's wrong, terribly wrong—more than we know about."

CHAPTER III

JESS BLAND had picked as his office, in the town of Amaxilla, a tiny ancient square-fronted shack, located at the easterly end of the short main street. It had been built at an earlier day, when Amaxilla was known only as one of the little Southwest cow towns. It was the only available place that Jess could now afford; he had his living quarters in a lean-to addition at the rear.

Two windows, like even-spaced eyes in the square front of the shack, looked out onto the main street and gave light to the room within. Beneath one of these Jess had his desk, and before the other, placed toward the light, were the two chairs that he could offer to visitors or clients.

Joe Farnum, melancholy of face, solemn, and dressed as he had left the saddle, now occupied one chair and sat with his feet elevated onto the other. Jess, at the desk, was in shirt sleeves, for the morning had already grown hot.

"An' so," continued Joe, "I followed 'long, jist out of stubborn curiosity. One thing I made out plain; that is, that they had a surveyor's instrument, an' that grades an' the likes was the things of special interest. The four of them had stayed in at Low Well for three-four days, I'd say—from the sign. Before that, over at the Mica Tank, on the CZY. . . . . Strange, it appears to me, Jess, that none of the CZY boys has mentioned as much round here. Such things gener'ly provokes comment an' gossip."

Jess traced spirals and curlycues on the upper crossed knee of his trousers. "Uh-huh," he admitted. "I guess, though, Joe, that the CZY boys have been held pretty close to home lately—"

"I guess. Listen, Jess: how you figurin' on handlin' things now, with Clark an' Dave gone fer the wide spaces?"

"I've had you in mind, Joe."

"Uh-huh. I can watch your stock pretty reg'lar, I s'pose. I'm livin' at home, though—got to, if I'm hopin' to get my homestead time in fer this year. But I can chase what stock you got over into Long Crick. Lor' knows you aint got much more'n seventy-five starvin' head left."

"Work it the best way you can, Joe; and I'll guarantee wages somehow—out of the stock or somewhere."

"I aint worryin'." Joe grinned amiably, and suggested a seemingly new topic of conversation. "I don't think you're much of a lawyer, Jess."

"I'm beginning to have the same hunch myself."

Joe wagged his head sagely. "You got too much of a single-track mind. Now take a man like S. T. Wigon—"

"That's just what I'd like to do, Joe. I'd like to take him in these two hands of mine." Jess' hands gestured and broke an imaginary body over his knee.

Joe shook his head. "He's too fleshy an' he'd bend. You aint really practical, Jess."

"Maybe that's it." Jess began tracing spirals again. "Joe," he said suddenly, "if I hadn't known you since about the time we were both in rompers—"

"I was born with bowlegs an' chaps," Joe corrected, "an' I never did play mud-pies with sissy boys in rompers."

"Well, since I gave you your first black eye, then. . . . . As I say, if I hadn't known you since about then, Joe, I wouldn't realize that you actually had something of importance under that tow head of yours. Now, come out with it in so many words."

Joe grinned. "Jist what I been tryin' to do fer th' last hour."

"Namely?"

"Well, since you insist! Jess, from the looks of it, Amaxilla is goin' to be blessed with a branch-line railroad, down from Sanderson. Condor Copper is behind it, I'd say."

"I'd gathered as much," Jess told him, "but I wanted to hear you say it. You have a curious way of progressing like a crab, backward and at angles."

"But I usually arrive in time to eat."

"That's true; that's true. Now, Joe, there's another thing I deduct from your ramblings: It seems likely that the road will cut through the San Simón and cross by Mica Tank and Low Wells."

"Uh-huh," said Joe. "As I was sayin', you got too much of a single-track mind, while a man like S. T. Wigon—"

"Yes?"

"Well, Wigon looks all around. Such a road would kinda help his CZY, now, wouldn't it? An' to go by Mica Tank the road would have to cut square across the Sled Rail's west range. Now, Jess, it somehow hangs in my mind that your west range an' the buildin's was mortgaged some time back, the first season of the drouth."

"Uh-huh," said Jess. "And the next year—after Father died—we had to go in deeper. Joe, how do you figure Mallor out?"

"I don't figure. But that niece of his'n, Paula, is a right pretty gal."

"Which is far off the subject."

"Well, now, I dunno." Joe's eyes stared vacantly out through the window on his side, into the street. "There goes Amaxilla's beloved Sheriff Biddle, surrounded by two of a trusted posse," said Joe, changing the subject for still another time. "Jess, I thought you rode back with the li'l dears an' saw 'em into bed sometime in the wee small hours of this mawnin'. Did you inform me wrong, or do my eyes mistake me? It's surprisin' they'd have popped out ag'in so soon."

Jess had swung around. "Huh!" he said. "Mahenny and Wigon with him! Both of them were absent from last night's would-be surprise party."

"Hard-rid hosses," suggested Joe. "Jess, the posse that visited you las' night at the ranch was made up mostly of CZY men, or am I wrong?"

"As far as I know you're not very often wrong, Joe. It's only your way of getting at things that worries me. Now, to come back to Mallor—well, the drouth must have hit him as hard as the rest of us."

"It's awful early for our dear sheriff to be out," Joe continued. "Awful early, with such down-cast cayuses. Them hosses has traveled a spell, Jess. Now, I wonder."

"Likely thought they'd head Clark and Dave off somewhere. Joe," Jess went on, "do you suppose Clark could have stopped at Mallor's last night and got himself into a jam?"

Joe shook his head. "Sheriff Biddle, I got the hunch, don't really want very much to catch 'em. Things has kinda been planned that way—"

Joe's melancholy eyes lifted and looked straightly into Jess Bland's. Quick, sharp boot-heels had come onto the board walk before the windows. A man's face swiftly glanced into the room, and the door, midway between the two panes, suddenly swung in without the formality of a knock.

Joe settled himself more firmly into his chair and planted his feet solidly across the second. "Seats already took by the first customer," he announced. "On with the show. I allus did like a circus, since the first an' only other one I ever see, out in Los Angeles once."

SHERIFF BIDDLE gave him a swift glance and turned to Jess. "You're to come with us, Bland!"

Jess' finger ceased to trace spirals. "So? And where's the warrant for me, Biddle?"

Joe grinned to himself.

"It's not exactly an arrest, Bland," said Biddle; "but I think you're comin' with us for a little while, an' not bother about the formalities. Tod Mallor was found dead at daylight this morning on the veranda steps of his house. Your brother Clark was there last night."

Jess' eyes looked for a long span of seconds into Biddle's face.

"Shot at close range," said Biddle. "Murdered!"

Joe Farnum's face was suddenly utterly serious. He grunted and his feet came to the floor.

Jess Bland's restless forefinger began to move again, tracing meaningless designs on the knee of his dark trousers.

"What makes you think Clark was there?" he asked, making no move to get up from behind his desk.

"He was seen," Biddle snapped.

"By who?"

"I'm not here to go into the details," Biddle said.

"No, I suppose not. Such'll come out in the due course of time and law, huh?"

"It will."

Jess' face was unchanged. His only move was to lift the crossed knee higher, up above the level of the desk's surface, and he continued to trace curlycues upon the knee. The forefinger made a circle round and round the kneecap, then the hand became stiff and flat. The gesture was repeated. It occurred to Joe Farnum that Jess was sparring for time.

"You have it figured," Jess suggested, "that I might know where Clark is, and get word to him to clear out ahead of you, huh? Is that the idea?"

"It might be," Biddle admitted. "Since that's what happened last night."

"Uh-huh," Jess considered. "Now, Sher-

iff, if he'd shot Mallor, I calculate he'd know about it, wouldn't he? He didn't, but if he had, he wouldn't need me to warn him."

The logic of this struck Biddle visibly; such an angle, seemingly, had not occurred to him before. He wavered and unconsciously turned back to Mahenny, in the doorway, for support. Mahenny's place was suddenly taken by Wigon. In stature Wigon was of medium height; and, as Joe had indicated, the rich living of the last few years—since he had sold certain of the CZY lands to the Condor Copper for a high figure—had made him soft and fleshy of body. It showed more heavily in his face than under his clothing, yet the man's eyes were singularly sharp. Small and hard they seemed; occasionally, furtive.

"This playing for time will get you nowhere, Bland," he said in nervous sharp accents. "A man has been murdered—get that through your head. And Sheriff Biddle here intends to use every precaution in bringing the murderer to justice."

Joe Farnum's eyes had not left Jess, nor the finger that so persistently circled Jess' lifted kneecap.

"Of course," Jess agreed, after a second. "Of course."

He stood up slowly and turned slowly around, to get his hat from a wall peg, and went out before Biddle. Just once, for a fraction of a second in the turning, had his eyes met Joe Farnum's.

AFTER they had gone out, Joe settled deep into his chair. He put his feet back upon the second, and a hand worked at the mass of his tow hair under an uptilted sombrero.

"Huh!" he ejaculated once, massaging his skull. "Huh! Round an' round, that-a-way. Round an' round; then a straight flat hand. Huh, don't make sense nohow. But it's gotta make sense!"

Joe's head sunk in thought.

"Huh!" he muttered again. "A flat hand, that-a-way. That might mean 'Flats.' Yeah, now, that's logical. Round an' round —Round Flats. But there aint no such place hereabouts." He tried Circle Flats and Finger. But again, he didn't know of any such places. There was a Finger Mesa, though, up the other side of Sanderson. Yet such a location didn't sound right. Besides, Jess had plainly traced a circle.

"Huh!" Joe muttered after a time. "Huh, now le's see. He lifted a knee way up—high country. Flat an' high. Round an' round, like critters millin' in a corral. . . . . Huh! Now mebbe that's a idea. Just how would a man indicate a corral, anyway, if he didn't jist make a circle so? That's a likely location, by the by. Corral Flats—huh! Sounds awful reasonable. Right on the peaks of the Dientes—high country—some grass an' water there. Sounds too reasonable fer safety. I reckon there aint no time to lose."

CHAPTER IV

JOE FARNUM rode south very carefully through the blistering heat of mid-day and afternoon on a sturdy little blue-roan cayuse, keeping well down in the hard-going dry washes, even though they angled him far from a direct course. Then, toward late afternoon, judging that Amaxilla had been left far enough behind, he chose a more open route. On the valley bottoms, where there was still some grass and the white dust would not lift too heavily, he ventured to put the blue-roan into a faster gait. Just before sunset, as he worked into the first rises of the Dientes, he found the sign that he had watched for all day—the tracks of two shod horses and a mule, heading south and up.

Joe smiled agreeably to himself. With luck he would be into Corral Flats before the thin moon of early night was down; and with greater luck, he would hit Clark and Dave's camp and find supper. Joe habitually kept one chap pocket stuffed with jerky, but this supply was not great. He hoarded the strips of dried meat now, both because he was without canteen, to quench the after-thirst, and because he knew that the chance of finding camp before the following morning was not large.

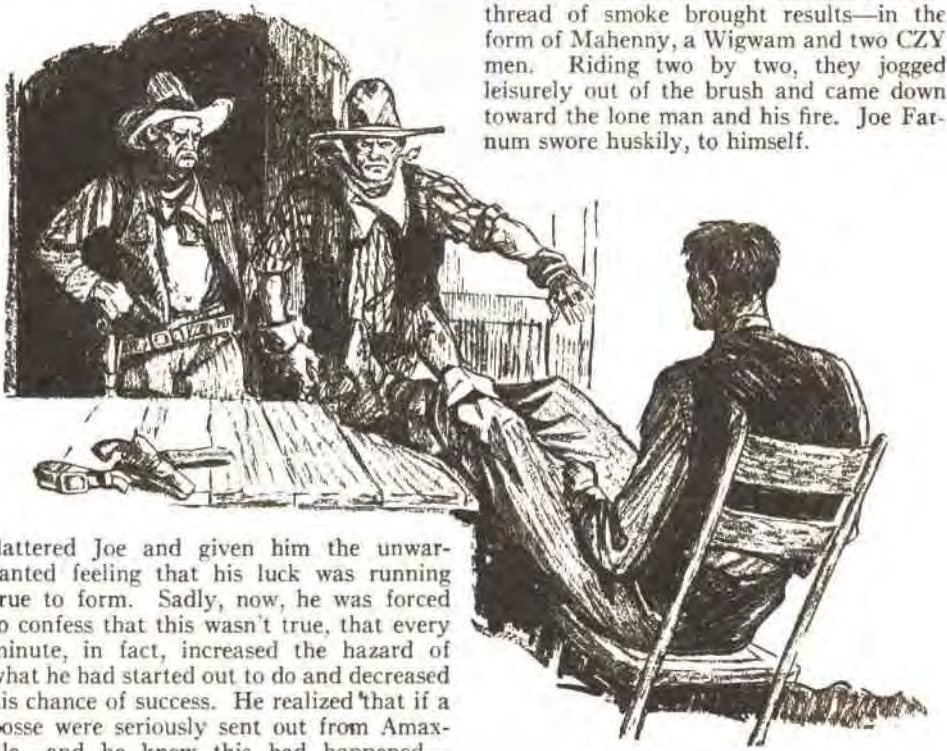
Joe was blessed more with experience than foresight, yet, whatever the cause, it was well that he did just this. He came into Corral Flats at midnight; and after a futile half-hearted circle, he tethered the roan to the end of his "lass" rope, and bedded down on a wet saddle-blanket. The night was warm. At daybreak he began circling again, riding the edges of the flats and working into the open fingers that had a way of stretching crooked paths off into the brush. Finally, finding nothing, he swung back to the water-hole where he had stopped briefly the night before. He had not been able to see close enough in the dark, by the flare

of a match, to make sure, but now the tracks of the two riding-animals and the pack-mule stood out plain in the mud, covered and blotted over later by his own mount's.

IT was getting on toward noon, and Joe ate a frugal mouthful of jerky. This plainly wouldn't do. His aptness in deducting Jess Bland's finger symbols had flattered Joe and given him the unwarranted feeling that his luck was running true to form. Sadly, now, he was forced to confess that this wasn't true, that every minute, in fact, increased the hazard of what he had started out to do and decreased his chance of success. He realized that if a posse were seriously sent out from Amaxilla—and he knew this had happened—their first move would be toward the Dientes. From there, some of their number would probably be sent on south, to watch the water-holes toward the border, and block escape in this quarter. The sole object of Joe Farnum's mission, as he saw it, was to warn Clark Bland and Dave of the turn things had taken and send them, before it was too late, off over this route to safety. After that, time could take its own course in straightening things up—with Jess' and his own help.

Thus Joe figured things out, without helping the situation. He crossed over—a two-hour ride—onto the far south side of the Dientes, to a second watering-place he knew of, and found nothing. He returned. By late afternoon he had finished the last crumb of jerky from the chap pocket and the roan was finally going dead on its feet. Joe realized that he had best play his last card while he still had time—if he actually did have time. Accordingly, he rode straightly for the middle open stretches of Corral Flats and built a smudge of torpedo-weed stems and dead sage limbs that were rotted enough so that he could tear them up.

Within an hour the far-visible little thread of smoke brought results—in the form of Mahenny, a Wigwam and two CZY men. Riding two by two, they jogged leisurely out of the brush and came down toward the lone man and his fire. Joe Farnum swore huskily, to himself.



There was no warning—the unlatched door opened with a single swift movement.

The four riders jogged on, came close and halted, massed around Joe. One of the men hooked a leg up across his mount's neck, to rest; and Mahenny dropped his chin to hand, the elbow of the arm propped up on his saddle-horn. He looked carefully and long at Joe.

"Uh-huh," he said, with the habitual smile on his lips and nothing of the sort evident in his voice, "we'd been wonderin' who was makin' that single set of tracks."

"So?" said Joe shortly.

"Yes. We're glad to find out, because we wasn't quite sure we was in the right direction until now. That is, Biddle wasn't." Mahenny studied Joe, then turned to one of

his riders. "We don't want to bother with him?"

The man shook his head.

"Uh-huh. . . . ." Mahenny swung back to Joe. "Well, you got your ridin' notice. Head back for Amaxilla—*now!* An' if we see you again, Farnum, none of us will be kind."

Joe felt that the least he could do, under the circumstances, was to remount the tired roan and make a show of leaving. He did; and the roan, heading homeward, shuffled into a trot across the opens. Joe cursed, and he was mightily hungry. A hundred yards away, he glanced back—the four riders lingered in the vicinity of the dying smudge fire; one man, dismounted, was re-cinching his saddle.

Joe angled into line along the edge of the flats. He had pursued the same course that morning, looking for tracks, circling, and working into the open fingers—

It was from one of these narrow brush-fringed openings that a voice now suddenly addressed him, in low tones. . . . . Joe halted, and his first glance was back toward the four he had left. They were plainly in view; so Joe dismounted and decided, for the sake of appearance, that his mount must have picked up a stone in the frog of its hoof. He lifted the sound hoof and began a very obvious scrutiny of it. Under his shoulder he said:

"Clark, couldn't you pick nothin' less conspicuous than a near-white buckskin for ridin' purposes?"

"Not on the spur of the moment, Joe," Clark conceded. "What's the lay of the land?"

"It lays rocky an' hostile to the north, son. In fact, the whole country-side by now, I'd judge, is up in arms. Your way lies south, an' across the border with no delay. Why was it necessary to stop at Mallor's?"

Clark sensed the seriousness under Joe's words. "What's happened?" he asked.

"Mallor was shot on his own doorstep that night. At least, so the story goes."

"Shot?"

"Dead. Shot at close range," Joe repeated Biddle's words. "Murdered! I'd judge, Clark, that this was unexpected from all angles."

Clark, searching, found no words.

"The cue for you two is to get south, I reckon," Joe drawled on. "Let things straighten themselves up. Let Jess an' me work it out—give us time. An' you'd better be goin' *pronto*."

Still Clark said nothing, and Joe studied him from below an armpit, in a world that was upside down. "Well, I'll be goin' myself now," said Joe finally, " 'fore I bring this here pack of hounds down on you. Careful with you, an' you'll make it."

He added a perfunctory soft, "So-long," as he mounted and pushed the roan on.

*

CLARK turned back to Dave, who sat the saddle well within the screening walls of brush and held the second horse—Jess' buckskin—that had brought forth Joe's comment.

"D'you hear it, Dave?" Clark asked.

"Not all. Something about Mallor."

Clark slid a leg across the buckskin's saddle. "Mallor is dead. He was shot sometime night before last—the night we stopped there. . . . . Joe thinks we'd better hit south."

Clark took the lead, pushing the buckskin away, and headed back along the way they had come. Dave followed silently. For close to a mile Clark chose a winding course to the west; then abruptly swinging south, he climbed up the steady rise of the land. The brush that grew high, in thick clumps and stringers on the bench lands of the Flats, a heavy growth of scrub oak and juniper, fell away on the rocky slopes above and was replaced by a thinner mesquite and stunted dry manzanita. Clark picked what cover he could find, ravine bottoms and the eroded side-slope gulleys.

They finally topped out on the ridge above. Here the pack-mule waited, tethered under a rise; and dismounting, Clark took up the conversation.

"Dave, there was something mighty peculiar about Mallor that night. He told me straight-out that he intended to clamp down onto the west range the minute the law allowed. Forced to, I somehow gathered that he said. An' he was mad—kind of sullen an' different than I'd ever seen him before—when I first came into the room. That must of been at Mahenny, or somethin' Mahenny had told him. In the end he followed me out onto the veranda, an' his handshake was a friend's grip, Dave."

Clark was scanning the long sweep on the rising serried north slopes below them with the small pair of binoculars. "Now, see," he went on, "those four riders are stayin' in the Flats, an' the other section of the posse is way down below, on the edge of the foothills. A wise man, Dave, would send some of that posse south, to guard the

water-holes, fast as horses would carry 'em."

Dave mopped his forehead with the back of a hand. They sat for a long time in silence.

"What d'you say," Clark finally asked, slowly, "that we head north, back to the Pecoso, at dark, Dave?"

Dave started. After a second he said shrewdly: "You're thinkin' of Paula."

"Yes," Clark admitted. "Tod's death must have hit her awful hard. But there's somethin' to learn back there in the Pecoso, Dave. There are reasons. Then, s'pose we went south, over the border, an' things never did clear up? By doublin' here, quiet an' careful, we might put 'em off the trail for some time to come."

SHADOWS, purplish and long, stretched down over the Dientes while they talked of it. Clark, had he been alone, had made his decision, but there was Dave to consider. He finally left the choice to his brother, and Dave chose to go back. Underneath it all, both disliked the idea of definitely fleeing the country; some dominant trait of character spoke against this easier course. Then, the north was an open book to either, each draw, ridge, ravine, waterhole and tiny spring, up as far as Sanderson. They cached the provisions in their pack on the ridge in the short twilight, to be picked up in an emergency, and turned the mule free. If they could double to the north, as the plan was, without being seen and leaving few tracks, they might go free there for days, while the posse combed the south. The doubling move would be unexpected and therefore of advantage. In the Pecoso they might get into communication with Jess and work vitally to their own advantage, do more than could Jess and Joe alone. . . . .

An hour after nightfall, with the thin moon that was higher in the sky now and imperceptibly thicker, spreading a pale sifted light into the draws and cañons, the two rounded a bend of a hard wash bottom and met, practically nose to nose, with Sheriff Biddle's suddenly shifted faction of the posse, which had decided on a night camp with Mahenny at the Corral Flats' water.

A single gun in the posse opened fire instantly. The buckskin horse made a conspicuous mark in the moonlight, and the man who had opened fire poured a swift volley after it, other guns cutting in. A bullet creased the animal's flank; and some few moments later, a chance long shot quartered deep into the buckskin's shoulder.

An hour after that, while they had at least temporarily dodged Biddle and his followers, Clark was forced to abandon the weakened stiff animal. He risked the noise of the shot that would halt its suffering, and mounted behind Dave.

So ended all possibility of going south, had they wished to reconsider, until Clark had a fresh horse under him. The fact that they had turned back into the Pecoso was also definitely established.

It had been in the afternoon of this day that Deputy Marshal Cliff Sardon, a squarely moulded, square-jawed man, arrived in Amaxilla, brought down from Sanderson by the news of Tod Mallor's death. He had been an old-time friend of Mallor's, and Cardon was of an entirely different stamp of man than was Sheriff Biddle. Biddle was weak, and, lacking support, without backbone—an easy tool, not fundamentally that he was crooked, but that he found it impossible to choose his own way under opposing pressure. Physically, however, Biddle was actually no coward. Sardon was even less so; he was not ineffectual or weak, nor did he care a hang whose was the boss voice in Amaxilla. His sole motive in coming was to see the man who had killed Tod Mallor brought to justice.

He took immediate action, and with men recruited under his own fast hand, blocked the water-holes of the south as a first move.

CHAPTER V

TOD MALLOR was buried in Amaxilla, and a little group of his friends—a very few, because most were absent with either Biddle's or Sardon's faction of the posse—attended the short ceremony. Paula Mallor, heavily veiled, and the girl Francisca were immediately driven back to the Wigwam, at Paula's wish; and Jess Bland, freed from unofficial confinement since Sardon's arrival, although he saw her at a distance, refrained from speaking. Yet he reasoned that such a talk was of the utmost importance, as soon as a decent interval had elapsed. Joe Farnum, hitting a slow course back from Corral Flats on the tired blueroan, had been forced to halt for a part of the night, and at morning he found that the center of action had passed him and gone north. At daylight then, jogging along and

riding on the tail of events, as it were, he shrewdly suspected that Dave and Clark had been freshly mounted on Wigwam horses—possibly at Paula's consent.

Just why Dave and Clark had turned north neither Jess nor Joe knew. But Joe came closest to the reason, voicing the fact that if they had succeeded in slipping back through the line, unobserved, the Pecoso would have been free to them for a time and something might have worked from it. It was a nervy move that might have seen a measure of success, had circumstances and ill-luck not blighted it from the start. Both, however, now saw the utter seriousness of the situation. Sardon, looming suddenly, grimly and sharply into the foreground, immeasurably decreased any chance of escape. Blocking the south water-holes, he himself had come back into the Pecoso. The man was everywhere.

"Mallor's death," Joe Farnum said, "wasn't in the first program, I reckon. It changed everything, sudden. But since they didn't go south, accordin' to my advice, it would of been better for Clark and Dave to come in here, straight-off, an' surrender."

IN a little knoll that topped above a ravine, some twenty-five long miles to the northeast, in a cut-up and jagged strip of barranca land, Clark Bland reasoned something of the same thing. Through the night he and Dave had succeeded in cutting back from the vicinity of San Simón Pass and evading immediate pursuit. The horses they had taken from the Wigwam corral, the morning of the day before, were practically exhausted. Only the fact that they were good animals, hardened by grain feed, had enabled them to hold up under the continuous racking pace that must have totaled better than a hundred miles—a weaving criss-crossing trail that went west from the Wigwam, that was shot finally in a burst of hard speed into a half-dozen directions, angling out at last for the San Simón, and then into the east. . . . . Clark lay flat on his stomach, scanning the opens through the little pair of binoculars. Dave was asleep.

Without knowing of Sardon's arrival, Clark nevertheless realized that some fresh influence had come into the posse. They had crossed the trail of the men who had gone south, seeing and knowing plainly what it meant, and their every move, with the exception of the turn at the San Simón last night, had been cleverly foreseen and checked. Biddle, Clark reasoned, was not capable of such generalship. The posse, all told, must number close to thirty men. Hours before, Clark had realized that his and Dave's purpose in turning back from the Dientes had little chance of fulfillment. He had talked to Paula for less than a moment, while they took horses from the Wigwam corral, and she could offer no clue to the murderer of her uncle. Merely, Tod Mallor had been found on the veranda steps at dawn, dead. Mahenny had left shortly after Clark the night before, and Paula had not again seen her uncle alive. The girl's grief was poignant, and it was evident, at the time, that only by the greatest effort could she talk of it.

There was nothing to be gained in the Pecoso with the turn things had taken; the south was blocked. There remained the course of surrender, and, hesitating, Clark wondered if they hadn't better take it. Yet Paula, in that brief moment, had pleaded that they leave; further, Clark had no way of knowing just how things were stacking up at Amaxilla.

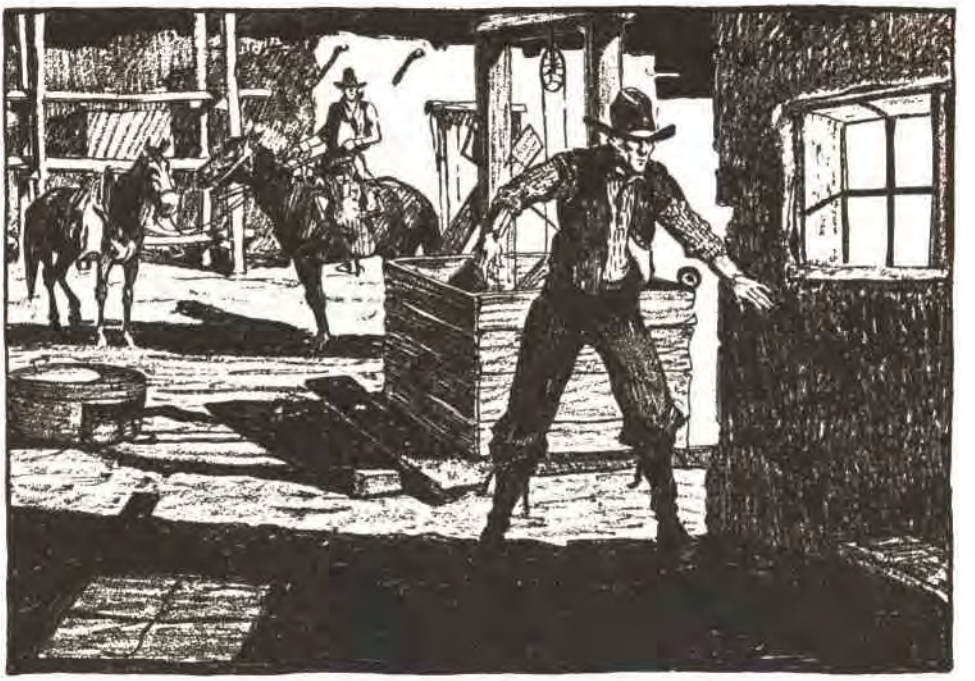
At the moment his glass came to rest on a small band of range horses that were working into the barrancas for water. Clark knew the spring—Dave and he had stopped there briefly some two hours before. As he focused the glasses on the band, he saw that there were broke horses among them. In particular a tall rangy sorrel took his eye, and the saddle-marks—white hair that had replaced the sorrel in spots where a saddle had long rubbed—showed that the animal had seen steady use at some time. Clark shook Dave's shoulder.

"A band of range ponies workin' in below, Dave. They'll be unshod."

Sleepily Dave sat up and understood They went down to their own horses, tightened *cinchas*, remounted, and quietly headed into line for the water-hole.

"They'll be in awful poor shape likely," Clark decided, "but better'n what we got just now. Unshod, that way, we may be able to lose our trail."

ALREADY Clark made fresh plans for the future. They would leave the two horses they rode at the water-hole, where the tired animals would likely stay, unobserved for some time, and, driving the ponies before them, cut deeper into the barrancas. At separated points their two unshod mounts would turn off, and continue a devious winding way far to the east. then south. If the move were successful its out-



With no intention of playing eavesdropper, Clark nevertheless wished to reconnoiter.

come might be any one of a number of things. In time they still might be able to get into touch with Jess. Some development might point a clue that would solve Mallor's murder, clearing everything. At the least, things would be given a chance to cool down.

The sorrel proved to be a good animal, in fair flesh and strong. But it was the only gelding in the lot; the rest were mares, in poor or worse condition. Dave finally roped a small bay, and they turned the band into the barrancas. . . . .

Two hours later from a high point Clark scanned the country they had left and the west. He could find no sign of pursuit. They rode on, traveling as much as possible over stony country and following the rocky dry washes and ridges. The morning passed, noon came, and the afternoon wore on toward sunset.

At dusk he was satisfied, and they swung straightly into the south, to place as many miles behind them as possible before the next daybreak. Then there would be rest, hours and hours of it. From the country Clark was turning for, a six or eight hours' ride would take them back to Corral Flats and the provisions that were cached on the slope above. Until this might be possible, holding a secluded position, they could live on what small game offered. But rest, not food, was the thing their bodies now heavily, insistently, demanded. Both were near to the exhaustion point.

Dave hung on stoically until some three or four hours after nightfall; then he could hold the saddle no longer. Twice Clark caught him as, asleep, he threatened to fall. Finally a halt was decided upon, for an hour of sleep, or at the most, two. The ponies were tethered.

WHAT wakened him Clark did not know. He sat up with the sharp sensation of fear upon his body. The night was quiet; at his side Dave breathed in slow exhausted inhalations. The moon that had shown higher each night and slowly brighter was now dimmed under a scattered bank of clouds, but Clark did not notice that at the moment. He listened intently. There was no sound in the night.

Then the sorrel suddenly neighed in a high-pitched shrill whinny. Clark shook Dave, and ran toward the animal. Before he could reach the end of its tether the sorrel neighed again. Dave was going for his own mount now; there was no doubt but that the call meant the approach of other horses, whether a wild band or mounted animals there was no way of knowing. They cinched and swung into the saddles, hesitating momentarily.

A shifting of the soft night wind brought the sound—shod hoofs clicking across some

bed of rock. It was directly south, and near. The two instantly turned north, heading back into the way they had come. They swung into an open rise; and before they could breast over the crest, two revolvers began to pop from behind. The whine of bullets went overhead. . . . . After they had dropped beyond the ridge one gun still continued, in three measured shots spitting out the round of its cylinder —as a signal that the quarry had been jumped, and the location.

A mile went by—two. Clark chose to double to the east, and after a short half mile, a line of white dust, conspicuous as the low moon broke briefly from under the clouds, turned them back. They halted once in a tiny brush-thick ravine and waited, hoping that the pursuit would pass them by. It pushed too near and they were forced to strike north once more, or face the danger of being trapped. Two things were vitally to their favor: their unshod ponies made little sound, and the clouded night was dark. After the moon set it turned inky.

That laborious day in the barrancas, the devious hard trail that could not be followed, had been for nothing! No matter if they succeeded in outriding it tonight, at dawn this faction of the posse would be swiftly on their fresh trail. One thought took possession of Clark's mind: they must have fresh mounts at dawn. The grass-fed range ponies they mounted would be swiftly ridden down in a daylight chase before stronger animals. There was not the stuff in them that had enabled the two Wigwam mounts to hold out for some twenty-four hours of fast and intermittent chase, covering close to a hundred miles, much of that through rugged country.

FINALLY Clark headed straightly for the Pecoso, traveling back through the cut-up lands at a long steady trot, to save what speed was left in their animals for a time of greater need. Through the hours of the late night they heard no more of the posses, but both were too wise to reason they had left it behind. Again they had been out-generaled by numbers and fast maneuver, and for a second time, as on the night when the buckskin had made so plain a target, sheer luck had played against them.

At the first thin light of dawn, over the country they had left, they quartered down into the level lands of the Pecoso, striking for the tiny chain of valley hills that sheltered the Wigwam buildings. The Wigwam was closer than any one of the other far-scattered outfits of the valley, and the chain of hills offered a certain amount of cover. If fresh mounts were not to be had here for a second time, they could continue north to their own Sled Rail; yet Clark thought it probable that a guard had been posted here.

The inevitable line of white dust lifted under the ponies' hoofs, and hung long suspended over the trail behind, like a far-visible flag or a white arrow pointing to their whereabouts. Clark increased the pace; the hills were some six or eight miles away. It was Dave, riding grimly and mechanically, who first saw sudden hope in the situation. With a tired arm he pointed to the north.

"Look, Clark! It's still dark up there, but don't it look like clouds pilin' up, to the north?"

Clark turned in the saddle, and studied the darkness of the north. Now that Dave called his attention to it, there was also a different feel to the air, some atmospheric change that his exhausted senses had failed to note before. Clouds had darkened the moon last night, he remembered.

"It does look that way, Dave. The air feels different this morning, too."

The slow dawn showed the dark masses of the north to be real.

Then, with the suddenness that lightning might have zigzagged down from those clouds half a hundred or more miles away, the pawns in this far-ridden fast game of chess that had crossed, angled and turned upon itself through the Pecoso and beyond, showed their changed heads once more. A harmless-appearing little line of dust, a second dot of white upon the flatness of the Pecoso, lifted from a wash bottom some mile and a half to the right.

Clark saw it instantly, and shortly he could count the number of dark specks that rode before. Seven in number! Dave and he increased the pace of their ponies imperceptibly. There was a chance that the posse might think them scattered men from their own ranks. The posse's pace increased accordingly, angling in toward them.

Ten minutes of this went on. Clark spoke to Dave:

"I reckon we can maybe get into th' hills ahead of them, Dave. But it'll be sharper'n anything before. Better ride, I guess."

A very solemn expression was on Dave's face. For an instant their eyes met. Then —they rode.

CHAPTER VI

THE coolness of the morning changed to sultry heat almost as soon as the sun rose. No breath of breeze stirred through the Pecoso; heat devils began to shimmer up from the valley lands. Lizards flecked from cover and basked on flat hot rocks; and the little side-winders, unlike their larger diamond brothers, wormed away into the shade of mesquite roots or into some burrow of the smaller life they preyed upon. Shortly the early slant sunlight took on a peculiar yellow cast, and from the north the long continuous grumble of far thunder murmured on the air, vibrant and low. The sound was somehow ominous; cattle instinctively banded together and were restless.

The black north clouds piled up until they covered half the sky. Toward mid-morning the first big lopsided drops of rain fell. A swift patter followed; finally heavy gusts, sheet-like waves of rain, as if the heavens, once opened, would lavishly give the parched earth more than it could use.

Joe Farnum, bespattered with mud and his clothing soaked through, came into Jess' office an hour or two after noon. He grinned with a smile that threatened to crack his weathered features.

"Well, it's happened at last, Jess! D'you ever see such a rain an' so much of it? Bitter Fork, as I crossed, was runnin' a mud-yaller stream that come up above my hoss's knees, an' I reckon by now it's swelled to be impassable. Stock's standin' out, jist soakin' theirselves on the hillsides. Now, if Clark an' Dave work things right, they got every chance in the world. Tracks'll be washed out nigh as quick as they're made; they'll be water left in every draw an' ravine, to the south, north, or which way. They got their pick. Ride an' go for it; that's all."

Jess seemed less happy than he should have been. "I'd intended to get out to Mallor's this morning," he said. "Find out what Paula knew. It didn't seem quite right to go out there yesterday, so soon after the funeral."

"No," Joe agreed. "She thought a heap of Tod, I guess—she's pretty much broke up. By the by, out in all this downpour, who did I run into but that girl of hers, Francisca—ridin' into town here alone, to mail a letter. I took it for her."

He grinned. "Well, it's enough of a surprise to bring anybody out," he expatiated. "Now, me—well, I'm bound up street to the Cattlemen's Loan an' Securities. There ought to be some money openin' up, with this; an' I know a likely bunch of feeders up above Sanderson that can be bought cheap."

The rain still fell in torrents, and the grinning Joe stepped out into it again and removed his sombrero; like a man basking in the first warm spring sunshine he walked up the street. . . . . At a distance he saw the square-bodied Sardon leave the adobe structure, at the far end of the street, which served as a jail for Amaxilla, and come toward him. If anything Joe's grin grew broader, as he turned into the Cattlemen's Loan and Securities. Sardon's and Biddle's swift activities had reached an end, Joe reasoned; the thought was pleasing.

JESS was seated at his desk when the door opened and admitted Cliff Sardon. Sardon was not the man to mince words.

"I want to talk to you, Bland," he said.

Jess indicated one of the two chairs, but Sardon evidently preferred to stand. The beat of the rain on the roof caused him to raise his voice slightly as he went on.

"To start, Bland, your two brothers are charged with stealing stock," he began directly. "The evidence has been kept over in one of the CZY corrals, and the charge still stands."

Jess was puzzled for a moment; then he decided that Sardon, whom he knew by reputation as an indefatigable worker, had realized defeat in one direction and swung his activities into the next best channel. He acknowledged the deputy marshal's words, and added his own version of how it happened that Sled Rail marked calves happened to be following Wigwam and CZY cows.

Sardon nodded curtly. "Not impossible," he conceded. "What have you to support your belief?"

Jess admitted he had actually nothing.

"You mean, then," Sardon suggested, "that you person'lly don't believe your brothers guilty. That isn't much to go on. It wouldn't convince any jury I've ever seen. A good many men have taken sentence, and sometimes more, on less proof than that over in the CZY corrals, Bland."

"They have," Jess said; "and at the same time no case, no sort of circumstantial evidence, would be easier to frame up."

Sardon looked sharply at him. "You've had training and experience in other law offices than your own, Bland?" he asked.

"Out on the coast," Jess said, "—while my father was still living."

"Uh-huh. Did you ever see the defense of a rustlin' case taken up from this angle? Or is it original with you?"

Jess' face grew warm. "I'm not putting up a defense—I'm stating the truth!"

"As you person'lly believe it."

"As I personally believe it," Jess repeated.

"Uh-huh," Sardon considered. "However, as a lawyer, Bland, you must admit that this thing, one way or the other, now offers a certain motive in Mallor's murder —most of those calves were taggin' Wigwam cows. If your brother Clark also believed it a frame-up he would feel doubly hard against Mallor. In addition I've heard that Mallor held a mortgage on a portion of your ranch, the Sled Rail. Would you have been able to meet it?"

"Frankly—no," Jess said slowly. "Not the way things looked no later than yesterday. In three years we haven't had enough rain, here in the Pecoso, to get half a grass crop, and what little cattle money there was has been withdrawn."

"Hard times, yes; I know." Sardon nodded, and continued: "On the night of Mallor's death your brother Clark entered his house at a gun's point. There was an exchange of words."

"So I've heard."

"Bland," Sardon continued, "can you tell me what make and pattern of gun your brother carried that night?"

"I can. It was a .36 caliber, single action, five shot. The gun had belonged to my father, and I'd taken to carrying it at times. Slightly smaller and easier to handle than the most. Clark had it that night, because I'd given it to him earlier in the evening."

"I see," said Sardon, pausing. Then: "Bland, you probably realize that a .36 caliber isn't common; but do you know that it happens to be the sort of bullet that killed Tod Mallor?"

Jess' eyes shot up. "No," he said coolly, "I didn't, until now."

Sardon nodded. "You'll probably wish to take your brother's defense," he added. "You can see him any time you wish now."

FOR a long moment after Sardon had gone out, Jess sat behind his desk, motionless. For the first time in his life that he could remember words had stunned him. *You can see him any time you wish now!* Did that mean Clark or Dave? He had not asked.

Without hat he plunged suddenly out into the street. Up the line of buildings he could still see Sardon's back through the unceasing rain, as the man strode firmly up the serried board walks. It was through the spattered glass front of the bank that Joe Farnum saw the two of them go by—Sardon first, with measured steps, Jess following, running, hatless.

The structure that served Amaxilla as a jail had originally been built as a small fort—that is, at a day and time when the town had been a settlement of three or four families and what casual drifters happened along, hunters or traders; a small way station in the center of a desolate dry wilderness, under the constant menace of roving or organized Apache warfare. The building was small. Its thick adobe walls were still solid and strong; and like so many of its kind, an open courtyard or *patio* formed a center square. Clark was confined in a barred room that opened from this, to the left.

Jess' first question concerned Dave.

"I don't know, Jess," Clark told him. "You see, I straddled much the best horse, a tall rangy sorrel. An' when I saw one of us wasn't goin' to get away, I made Dave take it, an' we split into opposite directions. That was in the little range of hills back of the Wigwam."

"There was shooting?" Jess asked.

"Some," said Clark.

CHAPTER VII

IT would have been just as easy for Joe Farnum to have carried firm word that Dave and Clark must surrender; and they would have obeyed such a command, had it come in that form, from Jess. Jess blamed himself, yet in actuality the manhunt through the Pecoso had been the result of circumstance. No one, before its finish, could have foreseen the outcome, and Jess knew that a stacked deck surely awaited the fugitives at Amaxilla.

No one could have foreseen the fact that Dave Bland, known to have been hard hit with a bullet that had rocked him in the

Before they could breast the crest of the rise, the whine of bullets went overhead.

saddle, would utterly disappear. Wigon had fired the shot; but his aim, he said, had been at the tall sorrel under Dave rather than at the youth himself. He didn't figure, so he said, that the boy had been responsible for the murder, but he was implicated and he was wanted.

Sardon took a large portion of the posse afield once more, to look for the body, for the two eye-witnesses of the shot said that Dave could not have ridden far. Jess Bland rode without halt; but it was Joe Farnum who eventually found the saddled sorrel grazing alone, far over into the barranca lands of the northeast.

The rain had washed out all tracks and sign. It was decided that Dave Bland had turned back into that country where for an interval he and Clark had ridden free, and somewhere within the miles of its rough-cut eroded wastes he had fallen and breathed his last. Nothing more could be done. . . . .

Three days had passed. Cold fury was manifest in Jess Bland's every action and word. From Clark's lips he learned how the .36-caliber gun had gone into Mahenny's hands—that Clark had dropped it at the Wigwam gate-post that night, preferring to keep Mahenny's weapon for his own use. To Jess' mind there was no doubt that Mahenny had been the actual murderer of Tod Mallor.

Yet Mahenny had an alibi that was without visible flaw. He admitted with easy grace that Clark had taken his own gun and belt across Mallor's table, but he emphatically denied having ever seen the .36 again. It seemed logical, he stated, that Clark would have disposed of the gun after it had done for Mallor, and logical that he would account for its removal by trying to place its existence in other hands. That would serve a double purpose. Further, Mahenny had witnesses in the persons of Wigon and two ranch-hands that he had returned to the CZY ranch-house shortly after eleven o'clock that night. Dave alone, who was silenced and gone, would have been able to substantiate Clark's word, that the .36 gun had been discarded where Mahenny could get it. Yet, implicated as he was, this would not have helped materially.

THEN, there was Paula. Twice in the days of the search for Dave had Joe Farnum stopped in at the Wigwam, and found only the Mexican girl, Francisca, and her brother, a dark slim youth of Mallor's employ. Joe hadn't asked questions.

Now, Jess Bland, at last forced to drop hope of even giving Dave's body a decent burial, saddled again, after a few hours of exhausted sleep, and rode for the Wigwam. Jess knew a certain amount of Spanish and Francisca knew some English. He finally got at the fact that Paula had left the ranch and gone up to Sanderson; the girl's brother had taken her in the buckboard.

How long would she be gone? Francisca did not know—perhaps a long time. Where and with whom was she staying? The girl considered, and said with a friend named Mary Aubrey. Jess had heard of the Aubrey family and knew them to be friends. He questioned Francisca's brother, but the youth had been away from the ranch on the night of Mallor's murder with the other riders, except one, helping work a band of cattle into an area of better feed, at Tod's order. He repeated Francisca's story of driving Paula to Sanderson.

It was this, Paula's desertion, that at first shook Clark Bland more than any event since he had learned that Dave had been hit. Jess, however, hurriedly sought Joe Farnum and asked if he could make the ride to Sanderson immediately. Joe could, and did, although he had had, all told, a scant night's sleep in the last three days. Aubrey—Joe repeated the name as he left. He hadn't noticed particularly, but he'd seen that name, he believed, on the envelope of the letter Francisca had given him to mail, that afternoon of the rain.

After all, Jess finally told himself, it was only natural that Paula should have found the Wigwam suddenly unbearable, and sought brief solace with her friend.

"SHE wasn't there," Joe said, on his return.

"What?" Jess asked unbelievingly.

"She wasn't there," Joe repeated. "I talked with this Mary Aubrey. She said that Paula had come to Sanderson, all right; but that she'd left on the first train, jist as soon as she could get one."

"Where to?" Jess shot.

"This Aubrey girl wasn't sure. Somewhere on the Coast—'Frisco, likely."

For a long time Jess Bland stood without motion, staring into Joe's eyes. Yet Clark, when Jess now told him, tried to make excuses. Paula hadn't known how much she'd be needed; Tod Mallor's death had hit her hard, and she likely felt that she had to get away, far away, to forget. Clark was sure that she actually knew nothing of importance. She had told him that Mahenny had left within half an hour after his own departure that night. From that time Mahenny had an alibi that placed him at the CZY. Paula hadn't heard the shot. . . . . For hours Clark sat in the tiny, barred adobe room that opened off the *patio,* his head sunk into the two palms of his hands, his eyes, unmoving, on the floor before him.

Over at the CZY bunkhouse, that was placed some distance from the ranch-house where Wigon had his own quarters, Jess found the sole Wigwam puncher who had been at Mallor's on the night of the murder. It had been he who had first discovered Tod Mallor's cold body on the veranda steps at dawn. But the puncher had heard no shot during the night. This was all that he would be able to testify, and from the man's bearing and evident sincerity, Jess was forced to believe.

As he turned back toward Amaxilla, Jess at last admitted to himself that he had actually nothing, no tiniest shred of evidence to be used in Clark's favor. The trial would be held at Sanderson, the county seat, before an unknown judge, and Clark would shortly be moved to the north. Sardon was still in Amaxilla, apparently waiting to command this change.

Casually Joe Farnum drifted into Jess' office. Some twenty unbroken hours of sleep, ending early that morning, had restored Joe's naturally undauntable spirit.

"As I was once sayin', Jess," he began, "you aint much of a lawyer. Single-track mind. Now, Wigon—"

"Yes? If you've got anything to say, Joe, let me have it without the superfluities," Jess told him.

"Superfluities," Joe considered. "Now, that's a fine upstandin' word for excess trappin's, aint it? Maybe you'd call a no-good son-of-a-gun, what had no business where he was, a superfluity, huh? If that's kerrect, I name Tarp Mahenny for the order."

"Meaning?" asked Jess with sudden sharp interest.

"Meanin' that he should be forgot."

"If I could put my finger on the smallest piece of direct evidence, Mahenny would go up for Mallor's murder."

"Likely," Joe agreed. "But that would be all. It wouldn't amount to much."

Jess didn't speak for a second. He started to shake his head; then: "What are you driving at?"

"Clark's mentioned meetin' with Biddle's

posse, that first night when they headed back from the Dientes."

"Yes. Almost nose to nose." Jess began to see something of Joe's idea. "A single gun opened up instantly, spitting as fast as a trigger could be pulled."

"Uh-huh," said Joe. "Now, it would seem that the owner of that gun might be interested in killin', wouldn't it? I kind a-been makin' private investigations. It happens to be the same gun that got Dave while aimin' at the sorrel under him."

"Wigon?"

"Uh-huh," Joe grunted carefully. "Wigon was ridin' in the front ranks of the posse from the start. Now, that in itself is peculiar, 'cause lately he never mounts a hoss can he help it. It aint his way, it bein' hard on soft flesh. An' he's been so exhausted since that he aint left the CZY ranch-house either."

Jess speared at the idea. "Where's a motive, Joe?"

"Motive?" Joe considered. "Oh—motive. Well, Wigon owned the Wigwam an' Tod Mallor, as far as money went, practically body an' soul."

"What do you mean?"

"Y'know that day I went up to the bank, to see if I could get me a loan for that bunch of feeders I'd spotted up above Sanderson?"

"Yes."

"Well, Stevens had the papers there on his desk, goin' through 'em; an' I jist talked myself blue in the face, I reckon, tryin' all the while to read upside down, an' the light so poor as it was. I talked so long an' hard, not even thinkin' what I was sayin', that Stevens agreed to givin' me the loan. I seen you go by that day, runnin' up the street, an' I knew what must a-happened. But I kept on talkin'."

"I can't see it, Joe," Jess considered slowly. "Mallor advanced Father money on the Sled Rail, and he extended the loan to us the next year and let us have more—"

Joe nodded his head. "That's about the time. . . . . No, I aint wrong, Jess. An' if I was to make a guess, I'd say Mallor had been makin' an' holdin' loans for Wigon. Wigon's idea. Kinda long-shot loans, through the drouth, see? I happen to know that Mallor let Tony Garcia, up north, have a thousand last year. Now Tony was jist natchurly a enemy to Wigon, an' he'd a-starved 'fore he'd gone a cent in debt to him. Yet Tony's got a nice little place up there, see?"

"Wigon has made some sharp deals."

"Now, you're gettin' warm," said Joe.

WARM, was it? Jess wondered. A time of drouth, disaster to the smaller owner, the unfortunate, was the hour of harvest and expansion for the man who could and would cash in on it. There was no secret to that. Didn't the coyotes, out on the miles of flat lands, barrancas and wastes of the Pecoso, grow fat in a time of drouth, on animals too weak any longer to fight them off?

"Granted," said Jess, "that Wigon might have been working through Mallor—"

"An' leavin' out the superfluities," suggested Joe.

"Yes—"

"Then we come back to the start," said Joe. "We come back to the matter of some Sled Rail branded calves—very plainly branded calves—followin' very plainly on the heels of their mammies, which is marked CZY or Wigwam, evidence still held an' faithfully guarded over in one of the CZY corrals."

"Uh-huh."

"Uh-huh," Joe repeated. "Now it would appear that just about the time this happened somebody wanted to get Clark an' Dave out of the country or under cover for a spell, wouldn't it? Ridin' round near home like they was, they might come to see an' know too much, say—"

Jess nodded.

"That is," continued Joe, "since there is reason to believe that the Condor Copper is plannin' a branch-line road down into Amaxilla, passin' through Sled Rail land—makin' such land of somewhat more value, it would appear. In fact, if such was to become general knowledge, arrangements might be made elsewhere an' a new loan made, an' Mallor paid off 'fore th' law could let him foreclose."

Joe paused and looked at Jess with a question in the tilt of his eyebrows. Jess was silent for a moment, then:

"Yes, Joe, I get that much. That might account for the start of it."

"Warm," said Joe, "very warm. Then there's Paula."

"Paula?"

"Uh-huh. Wigon was sweet on her it's known, an' Clark was somewhat in the road. Wigon's a sharp man—"

"Could Wigon have had a hand in the way Paula disappeared?" Jess cut in, more as though he asked the question of himself.

Joe eyed him sadly. "Women's reasons! Pshaw, Jess—no one's ever been able yet to figure out jist why Eve took the apple that time. She wasn't hungry."

"Nevertheless—" Jess said, and paused.

"Tod Mallor was a square man," Joe continued with conviction. "Square an' inclined to be hot-tempered. Wigon might have pushed him a long ways—since Tod probably wanted to leave as much of the Wigwam to Paula as possible—but when it come to somethin' out-an'-out crooked—Well, when it come to the time when he saw a straight frame-up had been pulled—"

"You mean—"

"Mebbe. An' mebbe the time jist natchurly come when Wigon was convinced Tod Mallor was in his road." Joe arched his eyebrows. "Mebbe a lot of things, but anyhow Mahenny would likely be the handy man to turn the trick. The moment was ripe on that night when Clark appeared at Mallor's—as everything would point."

SLOWLY Jess turned it all over in his mind. "Joe," he said, "there's just one thing in this that could be proved. Those papers at the bank."

Joe nodded. "An' they may have disappeared now."

"They'd show that Wigon had a hold on Mallor."

"Uh-huh," agreed Joe.

"Clark is held for murder, Joe. There's the matter of the .36 bullet that killed Mallor, the gun that Clark was carrying."

"Uh-huh," said Joe, going into one of his habitual sidetracks of conversation. "That gun's pretty valuable evidence. It's a little early yet for it to be found, but by the time Clark's moved up to Sanderson, or thereabouts, Wigon or Mahenny, ridin' with plenty of witnesses, will be sure to find it somewhere along Clark's back trail, or where he was known to have been. You can be sure of that. It's likely already planted—or it will be pretty quick."

Jess looked at Joe for the span of ten seconds. "I suppose you're right," he said slowly.

Joe nodded. "Oh, there's no way of provin' any of my ravin's, Jess—that is, before a jury. I can't see a chance. Everything's covered. an' luck's broke straight through on Wigon's side. Even the brandin', say. It would have been done on the range by one man—Mahenny probably. None of the CZY punchers would have been let in on it. . . . . There aint hardly a chance, Jess. Mahenny saw the openin' that night, to follow Wigon's orders an' get Mallor, an' he took it. That's my reasonin', anyhow. An' he did the job careful enough so that he has a cast-iron alibi. Not even the shot was heard."

"Then why, Joe—"

"Well, we might jist as well kinda figure things out. All told, they point a pretty straight path toward where Clark's headed. All the proof that can be dug up, as far as we want, amounts to jist speculation. We might as well realize that by figurin' things out. Y'see, I know how you feel about Dave gettin' hit, Jess. You kinda feel the thing was your fault—an' mine, too—because if they'd surrendered at Corral Flats that day, which they might've done, Dave would still be livin.' But, Jess—"

"What are you getting at, Joe?"

Joe unconsciously lowered his voice. "I managed to get that money for them feeders out of the bank today. It took a lot of persuadin', that way, an' they got everything I own as security, so they double if they lose. But I got the money on me."

Jess suddenly sensed the direction of Joe's words.

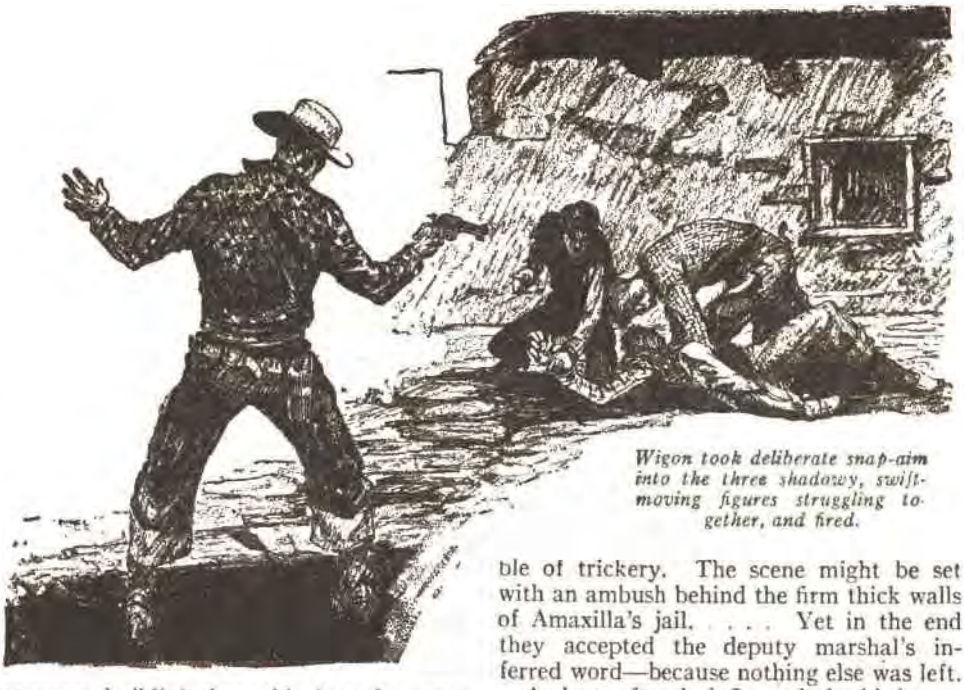
"An'," Joe continued, "I got it straight that Clark's to be shifted up to Sanderson tomorrow. Tonight's kind of in the nature of a last bet, Jess. An' I kind of think we ought to take it. Y'understand?"

Jess did, and he looked into Joe's face. Joe was studying the string of his tobacco sack, and toying at the thing with a finger. Thus did he offer all that he had; all, in fact, that had been given him in the hard-working rocky course of his years!

"It might mean just that, Joe—everything," Jess said after a while.

"Pshaw!" said Joe. "Clark, an' whoever might find it necessary to go with him, will need straight cash 'cross the border, for a new start. What does things I got on that li'l dry-land homestead of mine amount to, anyhow? I believe th' two of us could do it, Jess. Only—" Joe paused, and for a long moment he was silent. "Only, Jess—well, I met Sardon on the street, jist as I was headin' in here. I aint quite sure—I aint quite sure what we mightn't be goin' up against. Sardon stopped me.

"'Technic'ly Dave Bland was shot while fleein' justice,' he says to me. 'Technic'ly it wasn't murder, if such a thought ever occurred to anybody. But that, Farnum, wont help Clark out of th' Sanderson jail, which is a bigger, better an'



Wigon took deliberate snap-aim into the three shadowy, swift-moving figures struggling together, and fired.

stronger buildin' than this here in every way.'

"Them was about his words," said Joe. He stared uneasily at the floor.

CHAPTER VIII

JOE FARNUM covered Sardon's activities through the afternoon, and shortly before sunset he saw the deputy marshal get his horse and, at an ambling gait, head out into the Pecoso. From the outskirts of the town Joe kept watch until the rider and mount were just a dot on the flatness of the valley beyond. The move was at once puzzling and plain—plain, in so far as Sardon's words might have indicated that he would not be in the vicinity of Amaxilla that night. And if these words had been given in truth, they meant beyond doubt that Sardon himself had become certainly convinced, in the end, that Clark Bland had had nothing to do with Mallor's death. They meant, equally plain, that he also saw no chance of Clark's acquittal by law; that he was a just man before he had been named marshal. He sanctioned the thing from an angle that was devoid of the corruption that had tainted much of Biddle's term of office as the only course now open under such law.

Then there was the other possibility. Neither Jess nor Joe knew Sardon intimately enough to be certain that he was not capable of trickery. The scene might be set with an ambush behind the firm thick walls of Amaxilla's jail. . . . Yet in the end they accepted the deputy marshal's inferred word—because nothing else was left.

An hour after dark Joe rode for his homestead, and returned, toward midnight, with a fresh horse under him and the lead ropes of two others in hand. He left the following two tied in the bed of a small gulch, some four or five hundred yards to the west of the town; then openly he rode in and put his own mount at a rack just below the jail. The town was poorly lighted, and, except for a handful of miners from the Condor Copper's daylight shift on spree, deserted.

Since he had talked to Clark, earlier in the night, Jess Bland had kept steady watch on the low front of the jail from a blind alley-way left between two buildings across the street, and Joe now carefully turned toward the spot. He dropped in beside Jess. They spoke in whispers.

"Somebody that I couldn't recognize left about an hour ago," Jess said. "As near as I know that leaves only the jailor, Dwight, and Biddle inside. Biddle is sleeping in the room just to the right of the entrance. I saw him blow his lamp out."

Joe nodded to himself. "There wasn't a chance of gettin' the gun to Clark?"

"No. But I convinced Dwight that important things were developing in the evidence, and that I might want to see Clark at any time on short notice. He seemed to think that was all right. I may be able to work it alone, Joe."

"Clark knows where the hoss'll be, an' that he's to hit right out, no matter what happens?"

"Yes."

They drew into the shadows and waited while a party of heavy-booted miners went by on the board walks, jeering some one of their number for the way he had bet a bob-tail flush. The boots thumped on, and the sound died off into the road that turned north, as it left the street, toward the Condor shafts, and, later, the CZY.

"Might as well get it over with," Joe said finally.

A NARROW entrance led directly into the inner *patio* of the jail that had once been a fort. Two doors opened from this hall-like way, one to either side; and the room to the left was where Dwight, the jailer under Biddle's regime, customarily slept. At the far end of the entrance a barred gate guarded the inner square, protecting it securely and thus giving the two front rooms free access to the street.

Jess rapped boldly at the left door, and upon repeating the knock, he heard Dwight stir within. The thing was suspiciously easy. At Jess' insistence of its importance, grumbling a bit, Dwight lighted a lamp and put on his clothes. His only move was to take Jess' gun, and pat his clothing for a concealed weapon—a formality. Then, taking a sawed-off shotgun and his keys, the jailer led out into the passage and opened the barred door into the inner court. He swung it to behind them; the lock clicked.

A lantern that was kept lighted—probably because of the importance of the single prisoner—dully illuminated the open square. They turned toward the room where Clark was housed, and Dwight mechanically lifted the keys to let Jess go within, as had been the custom in the past days. Then he sleepily seemed to think better of the idea, and muttered:

"Reckon you can talk well enough through the bars."

Jess nodded; and from his cot Clark came up and leaned against the iron grating. In any way that Dwight was concerned the situation was safe enough: a locked door barred the way out into the street, Jess was unarmed, Clark behind the second door of the cell.

Jess began to speak in a low voice.

Moments passed. Biddle, in the right room, had evidently not been awakened. A vibrant, excited quality came into the two low voices at the barred door. Finally Clark spoke clearly, loud enough so that Dwight could hear.

"It means Wigon will swing!" Jess shot back. "Biddle will be implicated!"

Both were silent. Jess glanced sharply over his shoulder, nervously, at the jailer.

Dwight stared dully at them. Then, as his mind seemed to grasp the significance of what he had overheard, he stepped slowly near, and his words were brittle in sound:

"Wigon, you were sayin'? Biddle's implicated?" Dwight, in the past, had had more than a suspicion that his boss and Wigon played hand in hand, and that sometimes their activities were apt to be off-color, just a shade. From things he had seen, he had wondered about this case, the earlier part of it. That afternoon, also, Sardon had given him a sharp questioning that he had no way of understanding.

Jess hushed him with a gesture. "Nothing can be said now, but by morning—Dwight, I'd like to be left *alone* with Clark for a time."

Dwight nodded uneasily. The hour of the night, Jess' insistence, added sudden strength to what he had overheard. Again he thought of Sardon.

"Wigon, you were sayin', would swing?" he questioned tensely.

"Morning, Dwight—by morning you can expect more," Jess told him. "I've got to get the details straight with Clark—alone, Dwight. Lock me in the cell with him, if you don't want to stay here. I'm unarmed, nothing on me, as you know."

DWIGHT hesitated. He suddenly knew Sheriff Biddle should be secretly informed of this immediately—true or untrue. Implicated! And Biddle was asleep in the right-hand room that opened outside. Jess had suggested the way, and Dwight's fumbling mind grasped at the idea. . . . . Safe enough. For an instant he hesitated.

Then he motioned Jess back, and, with the shotgun half lifted in one hand, he sought the right key with the other and pushed it into the keyhole of the grating.

Simultaneously, almost, with the click of the lock the door shot out. Jess somehow tripped and fell forward, colliding against Dwight—an arm went across the barrel of the gun, to keep it down for an instant. Then Clark, free, had caught Dwight's throat in his hand and cut off a rising cry. His left hand had the gun, twisting it back. As though he were dumfounded, Jess stood off, aghast at what had happened.

With minute detail, fraction-second

speed, the plan was going off as it should. Jess and Dwight were both to be forced back into the cell at the point of the shotgun. With the keys Clark would let himself out through the *patio* into the street. There would be no proof, no actual move, wherein it could later be said that Jess had intentionally aided Clark after the barred door to the cell had swung open. It had turned out easy, easier than Jess had believed possible. Joe Farnum would be brought into the affair in no way—

The sawed-off shotgun twisted back out of Dwight's grasp. Dwight was not a young man, and the nature of his work had left his muscles flabby. The gun fell from his grip, swung down and hit the hard floor of the square. The instant explosion of one cocked barrel was deafening within the walls.

FOR just an instant Joe Farnum's attuned ear had caught a click of hoofs from somewhere to the west, as though riders were swinging from the north road, to avoid the town. The lateness of the hour in itself presaged something of note in the hoofs. From the direction, they were likely CZY men. Thus, while he listened intently, his lank strong body crouched into the shadows around the far corner of the jail's front, did the sound of the exploding shotgun barrel resound in Joe Farnum's nervous ears.

Joe reached for his own gun mechanically. He drew a long breath and started for the dark hall-like entrance into the building. Then Joe Farnum halted, for the soft-padding hoofs of an instant before had beat into sudden sharp action. The sound had been deceptive, he realized—the riders were close to the jail. Joe dodged back for the corner, and in gloomy outline he saw two mounted figures plunge down the middle of the street.

For an instant Joe thought that they were going to ride by. Or maybe these two weren't looking for trouble. He was seemingly wrong on both counts. The farther of the riders wheeled his mount, and checked its pace in a swift sliding of hoofs. Mahenny's voice cut into the night:

"Inside! In the jail!"

The second rider was slower to leave the saddle, as though half reluctant. Yet both in the span of seconds had charged into the mouth of the building. The latter was Wigon; Joe's mind recorded the fact as he cut into the entrance behind them. . . . .

Within, the plan—such as it was—shattered, the seconds precious, Clark had just succeeded in finding the right key and swinging open the barred door from the *patio* to the street.

MAHENNY did not shoot, as he led into the dimly lighted inside square, because he saw only Jess Bland and Dwight, struggling together, and the jailer's body was the nearer. After that it was too late, for Clark landed a hard-driven blow against his chest, and grappled. Wigon, behind, was catapulted on by the smash of Joe Farnum's body. On his heels, almost, Biddle, half-dressed, gun in hand, appeared.

The peaceful inner *patio* of his jail, that Biddle had left for deep profound sleep an hour before, had become a dully lighted mad-house. Grappling forms. Staccato breathing. The smash of fists and bodies.

Then Biddle lifted the butt of his gun and brought it down heavily. That blow very nearly paralyzed Joe Farnum's left shoulder, missing his skull narrowly, and he released Wigon.

Biddle's gun boomed in an opening shot as Joe turned upon him. The shot was wild; they grappled. Again Biddle's gun roared, this time into the open air above, with Joe's hand upon his wrist. Joe had no desire to use his own weapon, if it were possible to keep from it.

Wigon was free, but he failed to act instantly, cowering back against the inner wall. In that instant his character was stripped bare to view. He felt in an empty holster for his gun and realized that it was gone, that he had had it in hand, not in holster, a second before, and now it was lost. In a panic his eyes scanned the dim floor, and found nothing. . . . .

Jess Bland, half down across the open square, freed a right arm that Dwight had tenaciously clung to with a wild insane sort of strength, and downed the jailer with a single driven blow. He whirled back toward Clark and Mahenny. . . . . From beneath those two struggling bodies a gun barked twice and two lateral skimming lines of earth shot up from the hard-packed floor of the *patio*. By the rareness of chance the second of the balls ricocheted up and caught Jess through the leg. He did not feel it at the moment, did not know that he had been hit. Plunging down, he twisted the gun from Mahenny's hand and flung it far across the square.

Wigon still crouched against the wall. Then his hand went under his vest, and tore from concealment a second gun, smaller and lighter in caliber than the one he had lost. He took deliberate snap-aim into the three shadowy swift-moving figures, struggling together almost at his feet, and fired. Trembling, his thumb drew the gun's hammer back again.

Just what happened then Wigon did not know. Joe Farnum's fist, loosened from Biddle for an instant, connected with the side of his jaw.

Jess pinned Mahenny down.

"Get out, Clark!" he shouted. "Get going while you can!"

Clark hesitated, and Joe Farnum in thick gasping words put in his plea, almost in a sob:

"It's all—for nothin'—if you don't!"

A short minute possibly had elapsed since the shotgun had exploded, swift drumming seconds of action. Yet a heavy-shouldered miner from the street, forerunner of those in the town who had heard the first and later shots and were now hurriedly pulling on clothes, or already running along the board walks, came charging into the dim *patio*. Confused at what he saw, the man halted. Clark slipped behind him.

Two shots came from close up the street as Clark swung into the nearest saddle, Mahenny's. Close enough so that he had been recognized. Such was the narrowness of the margin.

The miner had recognized Biddle and fallen upon Joe Farnum. The old jailer Dwight staggered to his feet, and tripping over the forgotten shotgun that had made defeat out of victory, picked it up, vaguely remembering that one barrel was still unused. Under Jess Bland Mahenny's struggles grew weak. A rattling sharp cough came from Mahenny's lips. . . . .

Jess suddenly realized that he fought a dying man.

CHAPTER IX

SOME one had brought the lighted lamp from Dwight's room and held it overhead, adding to the dim glow of the single lantern. Faces packed the entrance, and a file of figures stood about Mahenny. The man lay on his back, on the hardness of the *patio* earthen floor. A folded coat had been put under his head. Although many of these men had seen others die, none at the moment seemed to know quite what to do. In fact, nothing could be done. They stood silent and ill at ease. A froth of blood was on Mahenny's lips—he had been hit through the chest, the bullet quartering down into his body.

"Wigon—yeah," Joe Farnum answered a low question without great interest, for as he saw it the thing was finished. There they were, Mahenny had been hit, and that was all. "Yeah, I saw Wigon shoot. The three of 'em all mixed up at his feet—he jist missed an' hit his own man. That's all."

Sheriff Biddle had seen as much, but he offered no comment. Dazed, Wigon now lay much as he had fallen before Joe's single blow, the small gun still in his hand. A rattle came from Mahenny's throat, and some one bent over him.

"The gun! Yeah, the gun," Mahenny babbled in sudden jerking words that sounded loud in the stillness. "Y'know where the buckskin died that night. . . . . Yeah, put it there. The buckskin still has *his* saddle on it. Sure proof. . . . . Tonight! Yeah, ride down an' do it tonight! . . . . You can't keep the gun, Wigon. Dangerous. Sooner the better. . . . . Wigon! Wigon, I say—"

The man who bent over Mahenny lifted a face.

"Anybody got a bottle on 'em?"

From somewhere in the crowd a flask came out, and the man tilted it above Mahenny's lips. . . . . Jess Bland's body was suddenly taut as spring steel, and his eyes were riveted on the gun in Wigon's inert hand.

Thickly Mahenny began to talk again: "I didn't do it! Leave me alone! . . . . I rode straight for home. I'd put the gun there on the table before Wigon—when Mallor come in. At th' CZY."

Joe dropped beside Mahenny. There was no other movement from among this file of men. A tense silence. Then in shrill words Biddle gave sudden orders to clear the jail. A burly cow-puncher from one of the northerly ranches dropped a slow hand on the sheriff's shoulder and looked steadily into his eyes.

"I wouldn't," he suggested softly. The cow-puncher happened to be a friend of long standing to Joe Farnum.

Jess' eyes hung on the gun in Wigon's hand. It was the .36 that had undoubtedly killed Mallor: the gun that Jess himself had once carried on occasion An unusual

caliber, rather out of date, a model never particularly popular among gunmen.

Jess stared, seeing only the gun, yet listening to Mahenny's following words, one by one—he never forgot those words, babbled without reason from the mouth of a dying man; years later in his memory they were as plain as upon this night.

"They couldn't hear," Mahenny rattled on from his throat. . . . . "Everybody down at the bunkhouse. . . . . Nobody'd know. . . . . Nobody'd hear. . . . . I took the body back—dead—'cross the saddle before me. . . . . Dead. . . . . Back asleep in the bunkhouse at dawn—"

A slow groan ended Mahenny's words. He coughed. . . . . Under Jess's eyes, Wigon's hand suddenly pushed the gun under his clothing, hiding it. Wigon stared stupidly at Mahenny.

Sharp drawn silence. Jess Bland's face was white in the glow of the lifted lamp; the muscles of his jaws were tight lumps. He suddenly leaped for Wigon—twisted the hand and gun out into view. He shook Wigon until the man's mouth hung open.

Yet Jess's words were slowly cold, calm: *"You shot Tod Mallor, Wigon!* At the CZY that night! Mahenny carried the body back to the Wigwam!"

Wigon's eyes, still confused, looked into the faces above him. He had heard the latter part of Mahenny's words. Quivering, he began—

"It—it was self-defense. Self-defense! Tarp had brought the gun back with him, an' we'd put it there on the table. Right before us on the table, and we were talkin' of it an' what had happened when Mallor come in. Mallor was mad—fightin' mad. He come into the house with a drawn gun—"

"Why?" Jess asked coldly, as though from a far distance. "Why?"

"Tarp had let it out—let it out about the brandin' of those calves."

"Yes," said Jess, as though considering, calmly weighing the words. "Yes, the calves. Mallor finally saddled and rode for the CZY that night, to talk to you, the boss. Yes. That's about it, isn't it, Wigon? A little too much of a straight frame-up, and Mallor couldn't quite stand for it in the end. I guess that underneath Tod was a square man. Square enough."

A different tone came into Jess's voice:

"Wigon," he said, "you shot Tod Mallor that night in *cold blood!*"

Terror was in Wigon's eyes, terror and stark fright. He squirmed away, across the hard earth to Mahenny—

"God's truth—it was self-defense!" Trembling fingers clawed at Mahenny's shoulders. "Mahenny! Tarp! You can say it! Tarp! Tarp, you can tell 'em it was self-defense! Tarp, say it was self-defense—"

No sound came from Mahenny's lips. He was dead.

AGAIN a mount that he felt was fast and true was under Clark Bland, a horse that was hard-muscled and strong from grain feed and work, like the two Paula had given them from the Wigwam corral in the dawn of that morning that now seemed long past. Again he was in the saddle, and the fresh rush of night air fanned his face and whipped up the long mane of the horse beneath him. At daylight again a posse would take the trail from Amaxilla, hard-riding men, mounted on good horses. Again the man-hunt through the Pecoso would be on.

Only, it was different now. There had been a savage thrill to those other first hours, when he and Dave had ridden side by side; hope had been in the saddle with them at the hardest moments. . . . . Dave was gone now—dead. The thought was knife-like in Clark's mind. Back there, at Amaxilla, Jess and Joe Farnum now faced sentence for the crime of their desperate loyalty. Clark wondered why he had let them consider the idea; why, when Jess had first sketched the plan that early evening, he had not refused to move. Yet Dwight was something of an old fool, and the thing had seemed possible, plausible, at the time. If worst came to worst, the three of them were to ride south together. . . . .

At the end, Joe Farnum's words had summed up all that was left: "It's all—for nothing—if you don't!" That was the exact truth. Clark had had to go then, had to leave them. He owed that much, for what they had done. It was the only way. To them he owed the duty of a clean escape, also, a straight hard trail that would lead swiftly south to the Dientes and on through the country that was now open and had water in plenty, on to the border and into Old Mexico.

What lay ahead, down there across the border? To give him that those two, back at Amaxilla, had fought and met defeat, with no question facing the broken years that would spell their reward. It was not

worth the price, a fraction of the cost. Yet they had given gladly and strongly from their hearts. Joe Farnum's money—"for a likely bunch of feeders up above Sanderson"—rested in Clark Bland's pocket—burned, it seemed. He would send it back, somehow. Yet there was great honor in knowing and calling such a man as Joe Farnum friend.

Then, there was Paula—Paula, who had turned away and fled. . . . .

Clark was swinging into the flat middle levels of the Pecoso. . . . . No, he told himself. South—straight south. He slowly checked his mount. Yet, why not? Why not have one last look at the place they had called home, the ranch-house, corrals and sheds that he and Dave had loved so well—the Sled Rail, as it stood, as old Capstan Bland had left it to his sons? Why not? A last so-long to the past; and there, feeling the presence of his brother, as Dave had once been so habitually at his side, he would bid a wordless good-by to him, too. By dawn he could still be far enough south. . . . . Also, there was the matter of arms, he was forced to consider; at the ranch-house he could get one of the rifles, and that would serve.

This last cold fact decided him.

His mount padded softly into the door-yard, and as quietly Clark slid from the saddle. There was no need of light; each detail of the place was vividly familiar. He entered the main room, and stood there silently in the darkness. Soft slow seconds slipped by.

It was time that he got the rifle and went south. He realized that. . . . .

What was that?

IT had sounded like a man coughing. A man coughing lowly from the room to the right! Clark's body was stiff, rigid in each muscle. Then he trembled—muscles weak as jelly. He had heard it again—that cough. Like Dave—Dave had coughed that way in his sleep sometimes.

He heard another voice, a question spoken lowly, softly. By another voice. And Clark Bland knew that voice also. He put a trembling hand to his forehead. No, it was sheer madness. . . . . His hand fell; a strip of light had appeared under the door to the right.

The door burst open under Clark's hand.

A candle lighted the scene within, and the two windows of the room were padded over with blankets, so that no crack of light would show without. On a cot, by the far wall, lay Dave Bland, and over him bent Paula. She swung about, speechless with fright. Dave's head turned. . . . .

For seconds no one of the three moved. Then Dave grinned. . . . . Words came later still—Paula's:

"He'd fallen from the saddle down at the corral, Clark. Francisca and I carried him into the house, but he couldn't be kept there. Not when the men returned—and we might be searched. We didn't know. It was raining, raining in torrents. Francisca drove the sorrel over the hills and turned it loose, still saddled. Together we hitched up the buckboard and came here. . . . . Then—then, Clark, one of us had to stay and nurse him back, until he could ride once more. I knew more about such things than Francisca; somehow, then, I had to be gone for awhile. I wrote a letter to Mary Aubrey, in Sanderson—she was to lie for me."

Dave smiled slowly up from the cot. He saw the look in Clark's face.

"I could ride tonight," he said. "If—if we had to."

CANNILY Joe Farnum figured things out thus: Clark hadn't had a gun, and if he knew what he was doing, he wouldn't go south without one. Well, mostly Clark did know what he was doing. Uh-huh. Now where would he get that gun?

There was the Sled Rail—about as close as anywhere else. Nobody there; everything open. Nobody'd been there at the ranch-house since—well, since about the start of the chase. All told, the Sled Rail hadn't played much of a part in things.

Joe lighted some matches, but he couldn't find any fresh tracks on the Wigwam road. So he turned straightly and swiftly for the Sled Rail. Jess, not even waiting to have his leg bandaged, had gone south with as many men as would follow, to intercept Clark at the Dientes or before.

Joe rode Wigon's horse, and according to Joe's idea, it was a pretty likely sort of a nag. Strong—and fast on the open going. He gave it its head, and the spurs.

There was something symbolic about Joe riding Wigon's horse, in his saddle. This occurred to Joe, and he liked the idea—only the stirrups of Wigon's saddle were short, and he didn't figure that he could afford to stop and restring the laces.

THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES

By
Clarence F. Dunkle

Most railroad men have curious experiences to record, but few as exciting as this.

A Revolution Derailed

BILL ROWDER and myself, without a gun and nearly two miles from military assistance, broke up a revolution in Ecuador, South America, on October 17th, 1909, and saved our lives solely by wit, use of the terrain, and our engine.

For more than twenty-four years my time was spent in Central America and South America following my occupation of locomotive engineer, and when this story opens, I was at the throttle in Panama helping Uncle Sam dig the Canal.

I had been working there for about five months and was hauling a conductor by the name of Bill Rowder, off the C. N. O. & T. P., of Lexington, Ky., when, on a Sunday (an off day for Canal employees) I happened to be in Panama City. There I met a man named Johnson, agent for the Guayaquil & Quito Railroad, running from Duran to Quito in the Republic of Ecuador, South America. He wanted six men, engineers and conductors, to go down there to work for his company. He wanted none other than those with considerable mountain experience. He said a revolution was going on down there, and the company didn't want natives handling their trains because they couldn't be trusted. The company would pay us two hundred fifty dollars per month with a bonus of one hundred dollars a month after three months' service, and first-cabin transportation both ways; the living conditions were good and all rolling-stock was of the best; all we had to do was just to be neutral and not have anything to do with either side.

I knew it was dangerous railroading in any country where war is going on, and I had heard that the Guayaquil & Quito line was the most dangerous one in the world for trainmen, being a "bastard" forty-eight-inch gauge with a grade up to seven per cent, a rise of eight thousand feet in eighty-six miles, and one switch-back at an altitude of five thousand feet; but I told Johnson that I would go if I could get Bill Rowder, my conductor, to go with me. Johnson said "O. K. See him and let me know in the morning."

I went to our headquarters at Empire, found Bill and told him what Johnson wanted. Bill asked if the company would give us written contracts, and I assured him that the contracts were part of the bargain, and that we'd get our contracts upon our arrival in Ecuador at the American Consulate. (All contracts, to be valid, must be executed before the United States Consul in any foreign country where Americans accept employment.)

Bill said: "Let's get our money and go." So we quit our jobs and went to Panama City, and met and made final arrangements with Johnson, who ordered us to be ready to leave that evening. We were aboard the boat sailing out of Panama City at nine-forty-five P. M. October 5th, 1909, with Johnson, who had failed to get the other four men that he wanted to ship with us.

Arriving at Guayaquil five days later, Bill according to orders reported to M. K. Jones, Superintendent of Transportation, while I went to C. F. Roberts, Superintendent of Motive Power; and after passing the required examinations, we were sent to the 3rd division, Lataconga to Ambato, with headquarters at Ambato. The company needed us badly, and we were at once sent out to learn the road. This third division was seventy-seven miles long, climbed one mountain with all the trimmings, and was every whit as bad as I had expected. The train-crew made the round trip of one hundred fifty-four miles daily, and we had returned on the third day. We reported "in" to Sam Stewart, General Manager, who this time asked us if we thought we could handle the job O. K. We, of course, replied that we could—without giving a thought that we might be called on to make our first trip at night.

WE were very tired, turned in early, and were sound asleep when the caller woke us up, saying that Stewart wanted both of us at once. We found Sam in his office and knew from that something important was doing. Sam said: "There's a train of soldiers coming from Quito. You pick it up and go to Reambamba and take on some more. You'll get further orders at Reambamba."

Bill wanted to know if neutral employees were obliged to handle Government troops. "Yes," said Stewart, "you are. And further, you are Government employees, because the Government is a heavy stockholder in this railroad. You men will have to be careful of what you do, for after you once haul Government troops, the revolutionists will treat you just the same as if you were soldiers." It was then we knew for the first time that Johnson had hooked us, for we were on the pay-roll from the day of our sailing from Panama.

At nine-forty P. M. the troop-train arrived from Quito, and after getting my engine onto the train, Stewart with General Alfaro, Jr., the son of President Alfaro then ruling Ecuador, came to the engine. General Alfaro was in command of this expedition, and he told me how he wanted me to run. I was to make the best time possible with safety and stop at all bridges, cuts, and so forth, so examination could be made of them before passing.

At ten P. M. we pulled out of Ambato, and at Lucies Junction we found the troops there that our orders were to get at Reambamba. It appears that these soldiers had been marched to the Junction to save the time necessary to run the train down the branch line to Reambamba and back again. I now had three hundred eighty-five soldiers aboard the train. Some *army*, when you remember that three thousand troops in South American republics is a *large* army. While at the Junction waiting for these additional soldiers to load, I received running orders and final instructions, which were to go to Devil's Slide, leave the troops there, and return the train to Ambato.

DEVIL'S SLIDE was three miles below the switch-back. We had a nice run going down and arrived there at three-forty A. M. There was a passing siding at this point; and after the troops had unloaded, I ran around the train, coupled to the rear, and started back up the mountain. With the engine backing up, I had no light on the rear of the tender. The grade was very heavy, about five per cent, the track wet from fog, and I wasn't making more than three miles an hour, when all at once, the gangway was full of armed men.

I knew almost instantly that these were of General Hernandez's revolutionist army, then trying to overthrow the Alfaro government. Without parley one of these soldiers ran his bayonet into my left shoulder and then said *"Alto!"* ("Stop!") I stopped quickly, for I was very painfully hurt and knew no way to escape. My shoulder was bleeding freely—the bayonet had been thrust in and then pushed upward, tearing the flesh.

I was grabbed from the seat-box and thrown off the engine. In falling, my head struck a rock which cut deeply into my left temple. I then tried to get onto my feet, but was hit on the head with a rifle-butt and knocked down again. By this time I was out. I began to think they intended to kill me and the conductor, but I soon learned that they intended something different, because an officer came up with Bill under guard and shouted orders to his men not to hurt me *now*. At Reambamba they would finish the Gringos!

I was jerked up on my feet. The native engineer who was to come from Buckeye to meet them here had not arrived, and the revolution would have to use me until their arrival at Reambamba.

It was very dark, and I couldn't see how many men there were, but I could hear them all around the train. I could hear their talk and smell their breaths, and I knew this: they all were drunk. I understood Spanish thoroughly, to speak, read and write, and knew everything the General had told his men besides the talk of the men themselves. An English-speaking native told me to get back on the engine and get to Reambamba *pronto*. I was afraid that Bill would be taken into the train, but to my joy, I saw him getting on the engine.

THERE were five soldiers on the engine, and as our deck was very small, there wasn't room for the fireman to work on account of them. I told the soldiers to get off in order to let the fireman fire the engine. At first they wouldn't budge so I got down on the deck and made motions. Finally they understood and three got off, leaving two soldiers, one on each side. At about four A. M. I started back up the mountain. I had a train loaded with human beings—their number I never will know. The wet rails and heavy grade prevented speed, and the heavy load of this backing train kept me down slower than a man could walk. This angered the two soldiers still on the engine, and several times the one standing back of me said *"Mas pronto!"* ("Go faster!") Then he began to strike me in the left side with his bayonet each time he said it; by the time we had reached the lower stem of the switchback, I was cut in fourteen places on my left side.

I was getting very weak from the loss of blood. I wasn't chicken-hearted. I had done twenty-eight months campaigning in the Philippines during the Spanish-American war, but never had anything hit me like this. I had been thinking. I was thinking. *Bang!* It came to me all at once. Our salvation! There was no other chance. It was now up to me to hold out until I could talk to Bill about my plan to get rid of these crazy semi-savages. So when Bill was about to get off the engine to throw the switch after our rear end got over it, I said:

"After you throw it, come back to the engine. You'll find me out on the running-board."

After stopping, I went at the sand-pipes on the tender, juggling them considerably, and was on the running-board working away, though scarcely able to stand, when Bill came up. Now, I didn't want my talk with Bill to be overheard by one of these English-comprehending natives, and so my sand-pipe work there was a blind to allay suspicion and interruption. I asked Bill if he had coupled up the air on the train when we ran around it at the Slide. He replied "No." I said:

"Good! At the upper end, you throw the switch. Then climb back on the running-board, and when we are in heavy part of the grade, go down on the pilot and pull the pin when I give you the slack." It took me only about a minute to say this to Bill and I was glad to note no concern on the soldiers' faces when I climbed back onto the seat-box.

AT the upper level of the switch-back there was a bumping-block set up at the end of the rails to keep the cars from going off, were the train backed up on it. Here the road was built in the side of the mountain, and it was impossible to get off the train on either side. One side was straight up several hundred feet, the other side straight down ditto. The two ends of the train were available to persons who wished to walk the rest of the way home. From the bumping-block at the track-end to the edge of the cliff was six feet, and from rail-level to the next ledge below was three hundred ninety feet, straight down as ever plumb line indicated.

Leaving the switch-back, the grade was the heaviest on the road, about seven per cent for five hundred yards. Turning a train loose on that kind of grade and giving it a start, it certainly would be running all of forty miles per hour at the time it reached the lower end, and nothing could

prevent it tearing out the bumping-block and sailing over the mountain-side to the ledges below.

It was just before daylight, very dark, and we were favored by a heavy fog. Our two brakemen had fled when the train was captured. Bill had asked me what I was going to do with the two soldiers on the engine, and I had promised to take care of them.

On every locomotive there is a water-hose connected to the branch pipe of the injector. The water from the boiler after passing through the injector is at about two hundred twenty degrees, F. The hose is used for wetting down the coal and washing out the engine-cab. My engine had two of these hoses, one on each side of the cab, and the only time they could be used was when the injector was working.

I blew the whistle, and started the train up. At the top level Bill got off and threw the switch. Both of the soldiers were sitting on the end of the tender, one on each side. I gave Bill just enough time to get on the running-board. Then I started up the mountain as if it was Reambamba or bust. I had a hard time getting the train up as far as I wanted it, but we finally reached the place I had planned to get to. I reversed the engine, gave it a full head of steam, and shoved the train back fully fifty feet. I stopped, and at the same time put on my injector. Then—I turned the hose on the soldiers, who at this moment were in the gangway trying to make it all out. And when the hot water hit their faces, they cleared the deck *pronto*.

WE didn't wait to see if we had made a good job out of it, but steamed for Ambato, where we arrived at eight-twenty A. M. I wasn't able to get to my quarters without help, and I was confined in bed two weeks. President Alfaro came to see Bill and me. He advised us that "it would be best for us to leave the country as soon as possible: he was very sorry that we should go, but we would never be safe in Ecuador." He gave Bill a two-carat diamond pin, and to me he gave a diamond ring "in grateful appreciation of our services to the Government of Ecuador." Our fireman came to visit me too, with his wife. Both praised the Americanos as the most wonderful people, and Bill and I had to take it without blushing.

We received three months' pay and transportation from any place in Ecuador we chose to go aboard ship, to any port in the world. We were advised not to try going out by way of Guayaquil, as that port was a revolutionist hotbed and too dangerous for us to enter. We came out from Ecuador through the interior, thence to Peru by canoe and on foot. Sixty-five days after leaving Ambato, we reached Aroya, Peru, with no regrets that we were out of Ecuador.

THIS ended the 1909 revolution in Ecuador. The records in Quito, the Capital, show the entire trainload of revolutionists were killed; not one, it seems, escaped alive. I've talked with railroaders that have worked on that line since, and they say the truss-rods and trucks can be plainly seen in an unearthly tangle on the first ledge below, with more on the second. The records also show the concentration of revolution forces at Huegra to have been a feint designed to draw the Federal troops out of Reambamba, a natural stronghold, and had succeeded in causing General Alfaro to detrain all the loyal soldiers in that section, including the Reambamba garrison, at Devil's Slide, for the purpose of effecting their capture or defeat.

The revolters then would capture the train (which they did) and proceed to Reambamba by rail, make a gesture of force, or if necessary fire a volley of musketry, take that town, garrison it, add many recruits to their ranks, and be in full possession of the Government at Quito before General Alfaro was out of the brush surrounding Huegra or aware of the whereabouts of the revolutionary army. They then would outlaw General Alfaro and hunt him down at their leisure and compel his loyal troops to surrender to the revolution.

It was a "pretty kettle of fish," any way you look at it, that Bill and I kicked back into the water, especially in view of the fact that the main body of Ecuador troops were on the frontier facing Peru, which had already declared war on Ecuador. And now, when I think of that bumping-block going down, and of the drunken horde that followed it, I get a "kick" that partly compensates for the scars on my temple, shoulder and left side. From three-fifty A. M. to four-twenty A. M. on October 17th, 1909, was the longest thirty minutes in my life.

About two years later another revolution broke out. Quito was captured; President Alfaro was killed, and his body burned in the street.

My War Debt

A strange adventure of the Great War, set down with sincerity and deep feeling.

By
S. Austin Bell

I BELIEVE that in the life of every man there exists one great regret. Some word or deed for which he must always pay, and keep paying, at the cost of his peace of mind. It may be a guilty feeling that at one time he acquired something in the wrong way; or perhaps, just the thought that he had caused a hurt to some one who had passed this life unforgiving. Again, maybe he is paying his war debt. A man with a war debt must continue to pay throughout his life. . . . .

At sixteen years of age I was corporal in a Scottish battalion of infantry. My army age was nineteen. Even nineteen is an early age at which to command a machine-gun, but I was a good shot, a good mechanic, and the men obeyed the insignia of rank on my arm.

On the night of July the nineteenth, nineteen-sixteen, we were ordered to clear a wood on our sector, a veritable nest of machine-guns. By noon of the twentieth we had driven the enemy from the wood, and seven hundred of my comrades had paid their war debt.

While our relief battalion was coming in, on the evening of the second day, the enemy counter-attacked. I was at the trigger of the gun; Thomson and McLean, all that was left of my section, were filling magazines at my rear, when a light shell struck our emplacement. I threw myself sidewise and forward, as the shell burst upward and outward. I was unhurt, but the concussion, in that small gun-pit, was considerable; I was stunned for some minutes.

When I regained my senses, I turned to find that Thomson and McLean had passed on with the rest of my section. Thomson was old enough to have been my father; he was very much attached to me. McLean, although two years my senior, had seemed young in comparison; he was a fine fellow. We had been long together.

There was murder in my heart as I turned to recover my gun from the débris of the gun-pit, and found myself confronted by the biggest man I had ever seen. He was dressed in the uniform of a German sergeant, and his bayonet was within twelve inches of my throat. My hand flashed to the revolver at my side; at the same time, stepping back, my foot struck the inert body of one of my comrades, and I fell heavily on my back. As I struck the ground, a huge foot kicked the gun from my hand, and the German's bayonet sank in the earth six inches from my throat.

THE field of battle breeds contempt of death in any man, who survives long enough. In that second, between life and death, I saw clearly that the German's bayonet had been diverted from my throat purposely.

I was well aware of the physical superiority of my opponent—he could have broken me with his hands had I attempted to reach my gun; the next move was his, and so I

waited. As he withdrew his bayonet, he addressed me in fairly good English: "You are my prisoner; you will come back with me." As I arose, a German officer approached and ordered my captor to remain with me, in the gun-pit, for other possible prisoners, before retiring to the rear.

When we were alone, I spoke for the first time: "Why did you not kill me? Had I not fallen, I would have killed you." For answer the German drew a photograph from an inner pocket and passed it to me, at the same time saying: "That is my wife, my son and myself. We have only one child; he is fighting like you; you are very like him—same hair and eyes, same features. No, I could not kill you while I thought of him." As he finished speaking, a terrific roar arose from the British lines. My comrades, reinforced by the fresh English troops, were attacking once more. In the fight that followed, a Mills bomb fell into our gun-pit, killing my captor. I was slightly wounded, and I spent the following three weeks in hospital. I had retained the German's picture; often I looked at the sweet face of the mother, at the boy who looked like me, then at the father whose lips seemed to say: "No, I could not kill you while I thought of him."

The spring of nineteen-eighteen found me in charge of a machine-gun position on the Cambrai front. For several days a hidden enemy gun had been playing havoc among us. On the sixth night I was ordered to take six men with hand grenades and sidearms.

I was told to find and bring back the position of the enemy gun, and only to fight if necessary. Men were scarce, and our artillery could easily destroy the outpost if they had the proper information.

WE had advanced for six hundred yards over no-man's-land when, thirty yards to our right, we saw the flash of a machine-gun, followed immediately by the familiar *rat-tat-tat-tat*. Although visible from our position on the flank, the flash was no doubt screened from the view of those in front.

It would have been easy to go back and make a report; but after talking to my men, I decided to do the job while we were there. Lying prone on the ground, we made our plans, passing orders from mouth to ear in faint whispers. I was fairly sure of success. We were still two hundred yards in front of the enemy line. It was not likely that more than two men occupied the post. Even if they had a tunnel connecting them with their front line, they could not receive help in time.

We approached to within twelve yards of their position without being observed. The emplacement, built in the side of a small knoll, could be reached in comparative safety from the enemy side. Facing our own line, there was a camouflaged opening through which the gun vomited its leaden death.

Taking care to keep out of the sweep of the gun, I crept forward to the shelter of a shell-hole within seven yards of our objective. After noting carefully each detail, I succeeded in dropping my first grenade clean through the opening from which the enemy gun-muzzle protruded. This was the signal for my men to close in; but the fight was over with the bursting of the bomb. One man was taken prisoner. Two more had been killed by the grenade.

HOLMES and O'Brien entered the gun-pit, secured the gun, and we were back in our own trench before the enemy had time to realize that anything was wrong.

I received the thanks of my commanding officer and I felt that I had achieved something for which I could be justly proud. My pleasure in that achievement was of short duration. The following morning O'Brien came to my dugout. Next to fighting, O'Brien's greatest pleasure was hunting souvenirs. This was against military regulations, but O'Brien always "found" his souvenirs.

Seating himself on an empty shell-case O'Brien drew a fine leather wallet from the pocket of his tunic. "Found this last night, Serg. I think it belonged to the jerry gunner."

Taking the wallet from him, I examined the contents; private letters, German, French and Belgian money, a lady's silk handkerchief, some pictures, one of a pretty girl; and then—

I was gazing at the sweet face of a mother, at a boy who looked like me, and at a father whose lips had said: "No, I could not kill you while I thought of him."

Soon afterward I was badly wounded and I lost my picture of the German family; but in my mind I often see these three.

Only the mother can speak; and always she says: "He would not kill you; yet you killed my boy." The thought of duty performed does not restore my peace of mind

Thus do I pay my war debt.

Cape Horn

By

William R. Barker

Few men in this day have rounded the Horn in a sailing ship; and few records of real experience are more interesting.

CAPE HORN! Only a deep water man of the old school realizes the significance of that ominous name. A "Cape Horner" is a real sailor, and the man who has undergone the trials and hardships of a voyage around the southernmost Cape is always proud of it.

My father, a master-mariner, a rover of the seas in both sail and steam, has weathered Cape Horn some twenty times or more. For forty years he has followed the sea, and even on his brief stays ashore the smell of salt water is always in his nostrils. During these respites the urge to "bend sail," "batten down" and away is strong upon him. And invariably that salty impulse prevails.

I think I inherit my father's love of the sea. I still have dim recollections of dark, weird and adventurous voyages in sail, when as a child I accompanied my father on voyages between England and Australia or to the west coast of Chile. Still later I sailed with my dad on the three-masted, full rigged ship *British Isles*, outward bound for Valpo with coal from Cardiff, Wales.

We signed on a mixed crew, consisting mostly of Finns and Dutchmen, and in the month of March were towed out into the Barry Roads, and then a few miles down the Bristol Channel. Amid cries of "Pleasant voyage!" and "Good luck!" the tug cast us adrift, and was soon lost in the deep, uncanny mist that had suddenly come down like a blanket over the still waters. I remember my father, grim, his brow overcast, as he gave the course to the helmsman. Our fog-horn pierced the deep gloom at intervals, and in answer came the weird echo, and the deep-throated baying of an ironclad, ever receding in volume till finally we heard the sound no more. The deathlike stillness chilled me; I shivered and crept closer to my father.

"Get below, son, and turn in," he said.

I obeyed, and with difficulty crept into my bunk, extinguishing the oil lamp which swung monotonously to and fro with every roll and lurch of the ship.

I slept; but suddenly I was awakened roughly by deep-throated commands, the cries of the sailors as they hauled on the braces, the shrieking of the wind as it tore through the rigging, and the thunder of setting sails.

Above the din rose the cry of "Lee fore brace," then the faint strain of the chantey "Ranzo, boys, Ranzo." I felt the ship heel over like a drunken man. Then as if by instinct I knew we were off on what was to be a long wearisome voyage, fraught with danger and loss of life. The "old man" had shaped his course, and the *British Isles* was showing her heels beating down St. George's Channel toward the great Atlantic and the nor'east trades.

MANY weary days followed, during which we were steadily approaching the Line, and passing through the dol-

drums. I would sit in the chart-room on the poop, and put my face to a porthole. Nothing but dark, gray water met my eyes; and rain, rain, rain. It rained for weeks, never ceasing. Everything became mildewed. Even the "Liverpool Pantiles" and "Harriet Lane" tasted moldy. I began to imagine that the mold had eaten into my very bones.

At last, long last came the sunshine, and "Square the cro'jack yard." Once more we were away and in the trades, sailing on ever farther from home, outward bound. It was when we were off the Falklands that trouble first began. During the dog-watch the bosun one evening saw smoke issuing from the hatch of the Number One hold. He immediately came running aft, and in excited tones informed my father that we were afire. The hatch was opened, and my father, accompanied by Mr. Scott the chief mate, and Silvo a Finnish sailor, went below to investigate. The coal was so hot, and the fumes so unbearable, that Mr. Scott refused to work in the hold, and was for putting into the Falklands. It was then I saw my father for the first time as a strange man.

"Mr. Scott," said he, "this ship is going round Cape Stiff, and you are going to assist me, sir, to put out this fire. Now get a move on."

An evil leer darkened the mate's face; he answered insolently: "No, you don't, sir."

MY father's face turned purple, and writhed under the stress of his anger. He spread his legs apart so as to balance himself on the sloping deck, and then I saw that he grasped a pair of huge pistols, one in each hand. These he poked into the mate's belly, savagely.

"Mr. Scott, are you going round Cape Stiff with me?"

The mate slunk away, casting a scowl at my father that boded ill for him—or such was my boyish presentiment.

Then Dad bellowed for all hands aft. He threatened to shoot any man who refused to work the ship, and ended his menacing oration by ordering every man-jack of them to turn to. Then and there the offending mineral was attacked with shovels, wielded by tattooed muscles of steel.

Before long five hundred tons of coal lay banked up on the main deck, the fire located and extinguished. Then came the job of putting it all under hatches again. Finally we battened down.

AS the weeks dragged by, the weather began to get colder, the barometer fidgeted, and the days became shorter. The sun went down over a mountainous sea, lashed into foam by the fury of the "Roaring Forties." For weeks we sped along at a great rate under topsails, the ship rolling and shaking herself like a dog. On we sped towards Cape Horn.

The *British Isles* rolled and heaved in the grip of mighty gales. Graybeards like mountains came crashing aboard, to pour out again through her lee scuppers. Sometimes she rolled so far that her big main yard skimmed the waters. Or again down she would plunge into those terrible valleys, burying her bowsprit, and shipping tons of water over her fo'castle head.

There was one young fellow, an A. B. and about twenty-two years old; I remember him well because he used to take me aloft to the mizzen royal yard, and show me how to take in or set sail. I remember how he would talk to me about his mother, and how glad he would be when he got back to Bergen; he would show me the "Little Book" and her pictures which she had given him. Tears of homesickness would well up into his deep blue eyes. Carl Jensen was a clean-cut sailor-man, and the best all-weather man on the ship.

But it was on this very voyage that young Jensen met a sailor's death.

One evening as I sat in our cabin talking to my father, I heard a most terrific roar, comparable to a thunderclap. Dad was on the poop in a few moments. Again I heard his deep bellow: "Port and starboard watch on deck! Man the fore yard!" At this time we were making close to eleven knots, under topsails, and we were rolling about sickeningly. Alas—even now I can hear that shout, ringing like a knell of doom in my brain, followed by the awful cry: "Man overboard!"

We on the poop perceived that poor struggling figure, now towering above us on the crest of a huge body of water, or deep, deep down, far below our keelson, and ever falling astern, astern. We strained our ears and heard his cries even above the shrieking of the wind. Of course we did everything possible under the circumstances. The lifeboat would have been crushed like an eggshell in such a sea.

The men, poor simple fellows, cried out in their fear for the loss of their comrade. They bent a new fores'l in place of the one which had carried away. Then they filed

aft, cautiously clinging to the lifeline, and with torn and nail-less fingers got their whack of grog.

WE were six weeks rounding the Horn. During this time it snowed incessantly. Halyards, stays and braces, everything became coated with ice and snow. Back and forth we tacked, attempting to triumph over the prevailing head winds.

Our crew were heroes. Imagine them on the main deck, waist-deep in water, ever and anon leaping to the lifeline to avoid a towering wall of water which would come thundering aboard. Or again, think of them aloft on the yardarms in the bitter cold of night, with the mighty, quaking watery waste below them. It was while off Cape Horn that several of the men were affected with frostbite. At first two Dutchmen complained of numbness; then gangrene set in. They lost toes and fingers, and even though the medicine chest was ransacked, very soon half the crew were down. One dark day we had our first death from this terrible malady. Three other big strapping fellows passed into the beyond within a few days, and I had the awe-inspiring experience of hearing the burial service read at sea. I heard those deep, muffled voices mumbling prayers, and the splash of the weighted body, enshrouded in canvas as it slid to that watery grave. I was sick at heart, and truly afraid.

A fortnight after the above incident the shifty wind suddenly turned fair. I heard again the joyous command, "square the cro'-jack yard." We had made it—at last we were leaving Cape Horn astern!

During the weeks we spent trying to weather Cape Horn we lost three sets of sails. The *British Isles* was not wearing her last set, which was complete excepting for upper t'gants'ls, and royals. One starry night after having made splendid progress up the coast of southern Chile, my father and I were pacing the poop deck briskly, and enjoying the keen night air. I, happening to glance forward, noticed the bosun, known as Hanky, coming aft on the lee side.

My father also noticed Hanky's mistake and let out a snort of contempt for the bosun's unseamanlike error. "The weather side, you loon!" he bellowed.

Hanky, seeing his mistake, hastened to obey, but too late. Before he could mount the sloping deck, he met his end. At that moment the man at the wheel let her "run off." The mizzen royal rent asunder, and in an instant we shipped a tremendous volume of water over the lee-rail. Two lifeboats were swept away, and the forward deck-house and galley were cleaned out.

Hanky, God rest his soul, was too late; that graybeard caught him. How he avoided being swept over the side I could never understand. However, the poor fellow was washed back and forth against the bulwarks as the ship rolled.

Well, they picked up poor Hanky. His last words were, "Captain, I'd go to hell with you. . . . Good luck!"

I cast a glance at that dead body. God keep me from such another sight until my dying day! I saw Dad crouching low as he examined the body for a sign of life. He took hold of the hair on Hanky's skull. Half of the man's scalp lifted up like the lid of a teakettle, disclosing the quivering brain beneath. His body was laid on a grating and wrapped in canvas. Again my father took his Bible, and in the presence of the first and second mates, and Chips the carpenter, he read the burial service. Then by the faint light of the binnacle Hanky's body slipped over the rail.

After the bosun's funeral the men in the fo'c'stle became surly and discontented. Even now when I think of what they had to endure, I do not blame them. Imagine them living with the curse of death like a dark cloud over their heads. Think also of their food—salt pork, worm-eaten hardtack, and black coffee without sugar. Poor brutes, when one of the officers gave an order, they would scowl, and cast a surly glance at a handy belaying-pin. The officers of necessity had to be hard, brutal, and seemingly unsympathetic.

ONE night, about a week after Hanky had been buried, Mr. Postlethwait, the second mate, happened to go forward for the purpose of turning out the starboard watch. Peering through a porthole, he saw Mr. Scott engaged in earnest conversation with several of the men. Becoming curious, Postlethwait decided to eavesdrop for at least once in his life. He listened intently, got the drift of the conversation, returned aft and asked to see my father. It seemed that Mr. Scott had tried to convince the men that the Captain had buried poor Hanky alive.

The following morning all hands were summoned aft.

"Men, I understand that several among you accuse me of having buried the man

Hanky alive," said my father. "Now, Carpenter, you were present when I examined Hanky. Was he dead or alive?"

"Dead as a niggerhead, sir," said Chips.

"Mr. Postlethwait, was Hanky dead when you weighted that shroud?"

"Aye, aye, sir," said the second mate. "Hanky was dead."

"All right, men, are you satisfied that the bosun was dead—do you think your Captain would bury a man alive?"

The men were impressed. "No, Cap'n, Hanky was sure dead," they echoed in unison.

"Enough—get forward. Postlethwait, see that the chief mate is locked in his room." And my father went below.

The main object of the *British Isles* was now to make Valpo as soon as possible with the remnants of her crew. Day by day the distance lessened. Sometimes we were becalmed for days, and it was during these trying times that the men would whistle for a fair wind. They would even throw some of their most precious belongings overboard in offering to King Neptune, Lord of the Sea. It was amusing, but also pitiful, and indeed I felt for those poor fellows, most of them doomed to rove the deep until the coming of the one final journey.

Finally we limped into Valparaiso under t'ga'nts'ls, all our royals and three full sets of sails having been lost during that terrible ordeal off Cape Horn. With flag flying at half-mast we cast anchor, and clewed up sails. You will, no doubt, imagine the joy I felt on seeing the dark outline of the mountains towering up in the distance, the first land I had seen in one hundred forty days. We were about forty-five days overdue. In fact, when the authorities perceived us in the bay, they were astounded. People on both sides of the world had long since given us up for lost, and Lloyd's Agency had informed the relatives and friends of all on board that all hope for our safe arrival had been abandoned.

My father reported his list of casualties to the authorities, and I am glad to say that there was no more doubt cast on the episode of Hanky's burial. Well do I remember bidding adieu to the good old ship. I hated, in a way, to leave her—she had been my home for so many trying months!

I had gone through the greatest experience of my life, and to this day I am proud of having been an insignificant passenger on board the *British Isles*. I glory in the fact that I have rounded Cape Horn!

The Burnt Child

CONTRARY to the rules of racing, some owners and trainers will resort to the use of an electric battery in order to stir their horses to greater effort during the running of a race.

During the years I was a jockey on the minor tracks in the East and Middle West I never used this particular form of encouragement on a racer but once, and that time during a morning workout.

At the time I was in the employ of Joe Wilson, whose stable consisted of three two-year-olds, a right fair selling plater, a chestnut horse who was as near to being of stake quality as any horse on the half mile tracks is apt to be, and a rangy gelding named Midnight, who, as his name would suggest, was as black as tar without a white mark.

Midnight was a thorn in the side of his owner. The large black could run, when he wanted to, but when he wasn't in the mood for speed a sulkier animal never faced the starter. I have ridden him at times when he would leave the barrier in front and show his heels to the opposition for the entire journey and upon other occasions when he would elect to bring up the rear and no amount of whipping or urging on my part could make him do otherwise. Now in order to maintain a racing stable it is necessary that the owner bet on his horses when conditions seem favorable, as purses alone are not sufficient to keep up the expenses and it can be readily seen that Midnight was a very uncertain betting proposition.

The gelding was entered in a mile and a quarter event for non-winners at the meeting and by running one of his good races could have been the winner by many

Not all the exciting moments in horse-racing happen before a crowded grandstand—as witness this curious experience of a one-time jockey who undertook to reform a sulky horse by means of applied electricity.

By

Robert Moore

lengths, but this happened to be one of the times when Midnight had no intention of delivering his best effort. After breaking well forward he refused to extend himself and dropped out of contention immediately. I went to the whip, but might just as well have been belaboring a log for all the response I got. I tried every trick of the trade on the erratic black during that mile and a quarter with the result that I managed to keep him just close enough to the other horses to catch every bit of mud that rained from their flying hoofs. Midnight was last and a very bad last at that.

TO Wilson this was the last straw. Always optimistic, the owner had reasoned that his inconsistent racer, favored as he was by the muddy going, was a certainty to win from such mediocre opposition, and had bet several hundred dollars on his chances.

I changed my clothes in the jockeys' room and went to the stable to hear the grief. I found Wilson seated on an upturned water bucket watching the stable hands wash the mud from my recent mount.

"Say, Bob," he said to me, "this thing's gettin' past a joke. If I didn't know that black devil could run I wouldn't waste five minutes on him; but he can an' what's more he does—when he sees fit. Now there's an old sayin': 'A bird that can sing an' wont sing must be made to sing.' "

"Very good as far as it goes," I agreed, "but it doesn't go far enough. It doesn't tell how to make him sing."

"There's ways," answered my employer. "What Midnight's goin' to get is a good shot of lightning an' maybe that'll change his mind about sulkin'."

"You mean a battery?" I asked.

Wilson nodded. "That's just exactly what I mean. This horse has burned up the last dollar of mine that he's goin' to. From here on I'll do a little collectin' on him for a change."

"That's easier said than done, Joe," I told him. "You know I want to win a bet on this horse just as bad as you do, but it's a tough racket to carry the 'hot-shot' on a horse around here; in the first place there's too many guys hanging around the jock's room who would just love to get something on me so they could run to the judges. You remember how quick they ruled those fellows off last summer for using a battery?"

"I wasn't thinkin' of havin' one used on him in a race," said Joe, who had a very wholesome fear of the officials. "It's just like you say, a jock's takin' an awful chance when he rides with one. Now here's my

idea. I know a fellow who's got a battery an' I'm goin' to borrow it so you can work this horse three or four times with it. When he gets used to havin' you hit him with a battery every time he starts to sulk he's goin' to expect it all the time. Of course in a race you wont have the battery but you can punch him with the spurs and the way I see it he'll run just like you did have it. He might run a good race for us."

"We can try it," I said. "But what he might do isn't going to make me bet on him."

"I've got to bet on him again," wailed Joe. "I'm too much loser on the beast to quit now."

NEXT morning the battery was at the stable. It was a very cumbersome affair, very different from the "hand-buzzer" type used by unscrupulous jockeys of today, which can be concealed in the palm during the running and thrown away when the race is over. This persuader consisted of a good sized dry-cell battery and a kind of switch which was fastened to the chest of the user by two straps. From the switch two wires ran down either leg and were connected to the spurs. Needless to say it was worn under the clothing.

Two days later I put this contraption on, to work Midnight three quarters of a mile. Joe gave me orders to use it the moment my mount started to sulk, and I didn't have long to wait, for after breaking off fairly well the horse shortened his stride and showed no signs of working. I reached inside my shirt and pushed the lever on the switch. A faint buzzing sound told me that the battery was working. Taking a good hold on the reins I drove both heels into Midnight's glossy sides.

THE black made one frantic plunge into the air and hit the ground running. Up the back stretch and around the turn we went like a comet. I was a good judge of pace and I knew that if this burst of speed lasted we were going to cover the six furlongs in something very close to one minute and thirteen seconds. Into the stretch and my mount showed no signs of weakening. Joe Wilson, watch in hand, was standing in the centerfield close to the fence timing the trial and I could see the satisfied smile on his face as we flashed past.

We finished the three quarters of a mile, but before I made any effort to pull the horse up I wanted to cut off the power, lest I inadvertently touch him again with the charged spurs. Just as I reached for the switch something happened, or rather everything happened. At the instant I raised my hand to pull the lever it seemed that I was shot, hit over the head and that the horse fell, all at the same time. Onlookers have since told me that for no apparent reason I suddenly threw both hands into the air and jumped, head foremost, from the horse who was still running at almost top speed. The next thing I remember I was hanging to the fence with one hand while the other was exploring the inside of my shirt in an effort to shut off the battery which had survived the accident and was still buzzing merrily and sending its hot sparks into my chest. The horse was running like a mad thing around the track and it was several minutes before they caught him.

IT was later explained to me that the perspiration from my body had caused a short circuit in the electrical apparatus with the result that I got the full charge.

Two days after my nose-dive from the back of Midnight I was lying on my bed in the hospital. Every inch of me was bruised and sore but the X-ray had shown no broken bones. I was thanking my lucky stars for this when the nurse announced a visitor.

"How you feelin', old-timer?" asked Joe Wilson as he seated himself.

"Not so bad," I told him. "No bones broken, so I'll be out in a day or so. How's my black friend?"

"Midnight? I'm just about to tell you. Old man Stevens heard how fast he worked an' he offered me three thousand for him."

"Did you take it?" I wanted to know.

"Did I take it?" repeated Joe. "You know that old sayin' about a bird in the hand bein' worth two in the bush? I'm better'n even on that horse an' that's more'n I ever expected to be, battery or no battery. Speakin' of batteries reminds me. That's a right good scheme an' I'm goin' to have you try it on that sluggish two-year-old when you get out."

"No, you're not," I assured him. "Not me! If they wont run from just a plain whip, somebody else can ride them. You're always pulling old sayings—did you ever hear the one about the burnt child dreading fire?"

Winning the D.S.M.

By Theron Graves

With proper modesty the author of this chronicle of courage has requested us to print it under a pen-name.

ON a blazing August day back in 1900, during the Boxer War in China, three American soldiers rode slowly along the ancient way leading northward from Tien-Tsin to Pekin, capital of the Celestial Empire. The road, deep-rutted by the travel of ages and more lately by the artillery and wagon-trains of the retreating Chinese army and those of the closely pursuing Allies, wound tortuously through endless fields of broom cane. The air was stifling, fetid with the reek of countless slain who lay unburied and rotted where they fell. Puffs of dust rose in the stagnant air with every step of the jaded horses, settling in grimy layers upon the clothing and sweat-streaked faces of the riders, one of whom wore the insignia of a lieutenant of the United States Signal Corps. On the sleeves of his companions were the chevrons of sergeants.

Lieutenant Sanford, Sergeant Trotter and the writer formed this venturesome trio, riding unescorted through the heart of the enemy's country. Our mission was to find and repair a break in the field-telegraph line which provided the only means of communication between the Allied column —rushing to the relief of the besieged legations in Pekin—and the outside world.

Shortly before noon we had discovered the break at a point close to a deserted Chinese village. The wire had been cut, and about fifty yards of it carried away. After testing the circuit in both directions and finding it "O. K." we replaced the missing wire from a small emergency coil we carried and at once headed north, intending to catch up with the main column during the night. This we felt confident of doing for the retreating Boxer army had doggedly disputed every mile of the Allied advance that day and progress had been slow and difficult. We knew that the troops were worn out and would need all the rest they could get.

With Pekin and the invested legations only two days' march ahead, the advance of the morrow was sure to be vigorous. Word had reached Allied headquarters that the Boxers were on the point of overpowering the legation guards and massacring all "foreign devils" in their capital.

On the shoulders of the American Signal

Corps rested the burden of keeping the relief column, consisting of Americans, British, French, Russians, Japanese and Germans, in touch with the anxious world —it being needful that our field-telegraph be established in Allied headquarters each night. So it was that as we pushed on through the burning heat, our thoughts were centered more upon the problems of the next day than upon our surroundings.

SUDDENLY there sounded a sharp hiss, as if an angry hornet had zipped past, close to our heads. The faint "*pop*" which we heard an instant later scarcely was needed to inform our trained ears that we were under the fire of a Boxer sniper.

Instantly we turned from the road and spurred our surprised mounts into the cover of the tall cane. Once screened from the view of the sniper, we halted to devise some way of finding our enemy and putting a stop to his activities.

This was a ticklish business, for we had no idea of where the sharpshooter was hidden.

Trotter, an experienced scout and Indian war veteran, quickly climbed a near-by tree and began a careful and minute examination of the surrounding country, using a pair of powerful field-glasses.

"I've got him spotted!" he exclaimed suddenly. A moment later he descended and described the situation.

Several hundred yards to the east of the road, he said, was an old building on one corner of which, in a sort of tower, he had glimpsed a man, partially concealed, and had caught the glint of sunlight on a rifle-barrel. Without doubt this was our sniper.

We were in a quandary. Undoubtedly the enemy's lookout commanded a clear view of the road and surrounding country. It was impossible to guess how strong a force occupied the improvised fort, for such it appeared to be. To remain where we were until darkness was not to be considered, yet we were unwilling to slip away and leave that sharpshooter free to snipe at anyone who chanced along the road.

While we debated the situation in hushed voices there came a welcome interruption. A squad of Japanese cavalry, consisting of a corporal and six men, came jogging down the dusty road. Apparently the sniper had left his post momentarily, for no shot greeted the Japs.

Lieutenant Sanford hailed the newcomers and they halted in surprise. Luckily the corporal understood enough English to grasp the situation as hurriedly outlined. The little fellow's eyes sparkled as he listened. Quickly he assented when our lieutenant suggested that we combine forces and drive out the Boxers. It was agreed that Trotter and I should scout the position, of course remaining concealed from the enemy.

This was a difficult job as we were in a wholly strange and hostile country, but slipping stealthily from cover to cover we soon drew near the building which stood by itself on a slight elevation. It was a square structure of adobe with blank walls about twelve feet high. There were three flat-roofed, shedlike buildings standing in the form of a gigantic "U" enclosing a court or patio. The upper end of the "U" was closed by a high mud wall in which was a big gate, now tightly closed. This gate was the only means of entry or egress for the compound. In other times the place probably had been a storehouse or granary. The lookout tower, standing at an angle of the roof, apparently was unoccupied.

At first glance the situation appeared hopeless. The place probably was swarming with Boxers and seemed impregnable.

Taking advantage of some screening underbrush, we wormed our way to the very foot of the outer walls. There we found that an agile active man might, with assistance, climb to the flat roof.

Satisfied that we had learned all we could, we made our way undiscovered back to our party, where the following plan was worked out:

Trotter and I were to make our way to the roof of the fort, while Lieutenant Sanford and the Japs were to take stations in the tall cane opposite the gate.

Once on the roof we might, if still lucky, drive out the Boxers who then would have to face the men hidden in the cane.

As viewed now, this scheme looks exceedingly wild, but it appeared perfectly practical and sane to us at the time. Neither Trotter nor I had the slightest doubt of being able to reach that roof, once we got the sniper out of the way.

LIKE Indians we stole toward the building, arriving at length unseen and only a few yards from the wall. The sharpshooter was back on the job again, scanning the road for possible victims.

Taking careful aim with his Krag carbine, Trotter drilled the man through the

head at the first shot. He died so suddenly and quietly that he remained sitting in his tower, his lifeless body leaning against the parapet as if still vigilantly on guard.

Apparently the Boxers in the fort thought it was their sniper who had fired, for Trotter's shot caused no alarm.

The menace of the sniper removed, we quickly found a small log which we set up against a corner of the wall. I, being the lighter and more active, scrambled up this log and thence to the roof. Lowering my carbine so that Trotter could grasp its stock, I braced myself and in an instant my companion was beside me.

ONCE safely on the roof we looked the situation over quickly. The courtyard was empty and the only means of access to the roof and watch-tower appeared be through a square opening which le into the dark interior by means bamboo ladder.

We might have conclu deserted but for the fa us the murmur of As far as we c "sitting pretty up a bit. C by this ti the ga ou

the roof, with its steep ladder leading to we knew not where or what, certainly was not inviting. Yet we agreed that the only way to break the stalemate was to descend that ladder and stir up the Boxers.

Which of us was to back down that ladder first? That was a problem. Finally we decided it in typical Yankee fashion, by tossing a coin. The job fell to me.

There was nothing to do but go through with it and so, carefully looking after the loading of my revolver and carbine, I put my foot on the top rung of the ladder began to climb down into My scalp felt prickly, as become too tight almost hea Boxer

me. I stunned him with a lucky upward thrust of my carbine-butt, the blow striking his chin with the kick of a mule. His head snapped back and down he went. This seemed to daunt his companions, who held back on the far side of the door, evidently having no stomach for this sort of fighting. Why they didn't use their rifles I have never understood.

MEANWHILE Trotter, a powerful man, had given an excellent account of ·self. Four of the Boxers had dropped ' ·ets and a fifth he had lit- ·· revolver as a club. · from his exer- ·· cold as ice,

arsenal, including more than one hundred military rifles of modern make, several thousand rounds of cartridges and a huge collection of swords, pikes, spears, and Chinese bows and arrows.

Tapping the telegraph line, our lieutenant reported to General Chaffee, the American commander, what had occurred, and asked for instructions. We were ordered to burn the fort, with its arsenal, so as to eliminate its menace, and this we did.

The exploding ammunition made quite a *"boom,"* scattering embers of the dry old building far and wide.

It was not long before the fierce blaze consumed the structure, leaving nothing but smoldering ashes to mark its site. The fire also acted as a funeral pyre for the slain Boxers, whose bodies we placed where the ·· would be fiercest.

·ing farewell to the Japanese cavalry- ·resumed our interrupted march, ·with the Allied column about

·iting adventure an · went from Allied ·and more than ·some docu- · bearing · then set

Missing Page

Missing Page

Missing Page

Missing Page

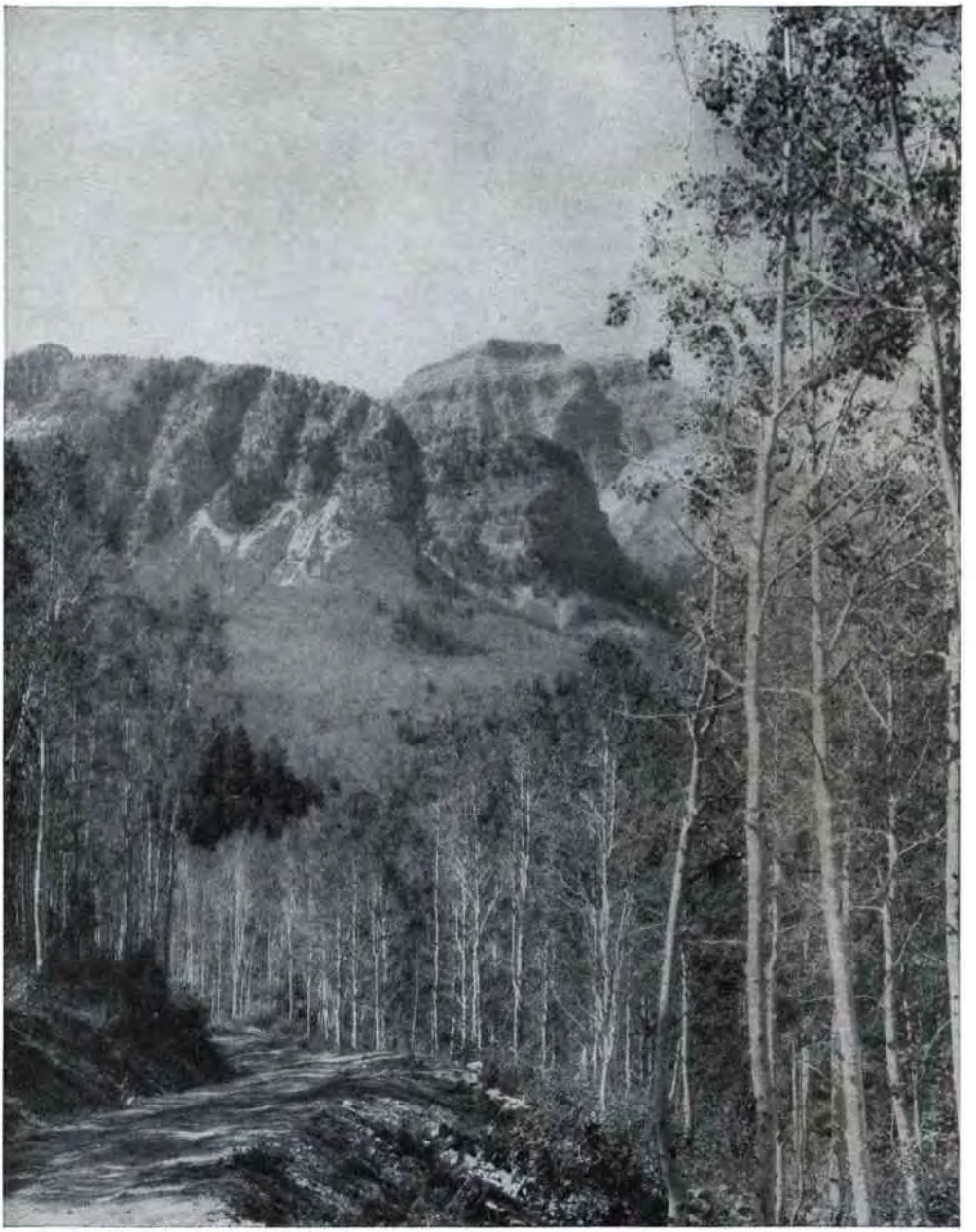


Photo by F. S. Baker, Courtesy U. S. Forest Service

"THE FOREST LEGION"

A stirring novel of present-day Colorado

By ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

The Blue Book Magazine for July

The Consolidated Magazines Corporation, Publisher, 36 So. State St., Chicago

FATIMAS

and don't spare the horses!

Day in and day out, from clubs and liners, hotels and homes, comes the call for this excellent cigarette. It isn't that "price doesn't matter"—but that *taste* matters so much more!

OUTSTANDING FAVORITE AMONG HIGHER PRICED CIGARETTES