

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE FOR ADVENTUROUS READING ★ APRIL ★ 25 Cents

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE ★ APRIL 1948



THESE UNITED STATES... XVI—Kansas
Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

TWO NOVELETTES:

A QUEST MUST END
by THEODORE G. ROBERTS

CROOKED FACE
by ADRIAN KUEPPER

Ten Special Articles and
Ten Short Stories



THESE UNITED STATES XVI — KANSAS

Free Soil *or* Slavery?

OUR Civil War was first fought and decided in Kansas—in a prologue of small battles between the pro-slavery men and the Free Soil party that was of great importance and deep significance.

The early history of Kansas had been relatively uneventful. Probably Coronado and his expedition from New Mexico in search of El Dorado and the fabled golden city of Quivira in 1541 were the first Europeans to visit the region. There were a few explorations by French travelers; but for the most part, Kansas was entirely Indian country until it passed into the possession of the United States as a part of the Louisiana Purchase. Thereafter, travelers along the Santa Fe trail, Mormon emigrants to Utah and gold-seekers to California crossed the new country, and gradually it became known. Ft. Leavenworth was established in 1827, Ft. Scott in 1842; missionaries of various denominations began to bring civilization to the new land; and in 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act established a territorial government.

Now began the years of minor warfare which make this period of Kansas history of outstanding significance. In 1787 Congress had passed the Northwest Territory Ordinance, which forbade slavery in all new States north of the Ohio River. When Missouri was admitted, however, the preponderance of slaveholders was so great that in 1819 the famous Missouri Compromise was enacted; this admitted Missouri as a slave State in accordance with a constitution adopted by Missouri voters, but forbade slavery in any other portion of the Louisiana Purchase north of 36° 30'. There were slaves, however, in various places in Kansas; and at the first election held for a delegate to Congress (1854) hundreds of armed Missourians invaded Kansas and took possession of the polls. Most of the Free Soil advocates were thus prevented from voting; and as a result, the territorial legislature adopted their Missouri laws in connection with slavery. Promptly the Free Soil settlers set up a free State government of their own, and the war was on.

Settlers coming in from the North and East were stopped and driven back by outposts of pro-slavery men from Missouri, and by volunteer parties from other Southern States. Emigrants from the South, likewise, were turned away by Free Soil defense parties.

In spite of this reign of lawlessness, the settlement of Kansas continued, and as occupation of the tempting prairie land increased, strong agitation began for the admission of Kansas as a State. President Buchanan urged upon Congress the admission of Kansas under the so-called Lecompton Constitution, which would have permitted slavery. The Free Soil men, however, framed their own constitution at Wyandotte, which was ratified by the people; and in January 1861, Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free State. The long struggle that preceded this event led to the destruction of the Whig Party, and to the establishment of an uncompromising anti-slavery party. And it set the stage for the heartbreaking national struggle which almost immediately followed.

Readers' Comment

God Bless 'Em!

IT was the soul-stirring Rail-splitter cover (February) that attracted me. I saw, I bought, BLUE BOOK conquered. The forceful realism and exhilarating looking-at-life-and-finding-it-good tone of your magazine is so refreshing. You see, all us ladies do not like mush and marshmallow-cream fiction.

—Mrs. E. C.

A Bargain

IN these days of climbing prices, it's a pleasure to find a genuine bargain like BLUE BOOK. Being of a mathematical turn of mind, I estimated the number of words I get for the small sum of two bits: about the equivalent of one \$2.50 novel. Figuring on the basis of comparative magazines containing advertising, I find I receive at least twice as much reading matter.

But that's not all. In diversity, breadth and richness of story and fact, it's worth much more than the asking price. History, fantasy, adventure, science, war, detective stories give readers something they like. Supposing that crime stories are a reader's dish, a dip into a sea story might lure him into beginning a type of tale new to him. Or if scientific stories appeal to him, a glimpse of the first paragraph in a historical tale might open a new field of enjoyment.

Your authors know how to tell their stories well, whatever type they may be. Reading BLUE BOOK gives us satisfying relaxation in varied and stimulating form. Only in BLUE BOOK do we find such fine mental fare.

—Arthur W. Benson

Constructive Criticism

YOUR cover designs depicting scenes from American history indeed are excellent, those by Herbert Morton Stoops for instance. You could offer a six months' or year's subscription plus any one of the covers duplicated in framable form, etc.

(2) Smell the various magazines and when you find one with an irresistible smell to its paper or ink, then have that smell duplicated in your paper or ink. Folks often like to "whiff" paper or ink, especially when reading the magazine for the first time!

(3) Have a pure "mush" or love story, or some kind of story of contrast, from the general run, in each issue. Even many bachelors and hermits are lovers at heart. Ask Figaro!

(4) You could use a poem now and then. . . . Have the Table of Contents in a different, pronounced shade of ink. . . . Have a real or dummy page of ads between front cover and contents. . . . Have all three edges of the magazine tinted a bright, alluring color!

—William Zillman

BLUE BOOK

April, 1948

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Except for articles and stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence

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The Course of

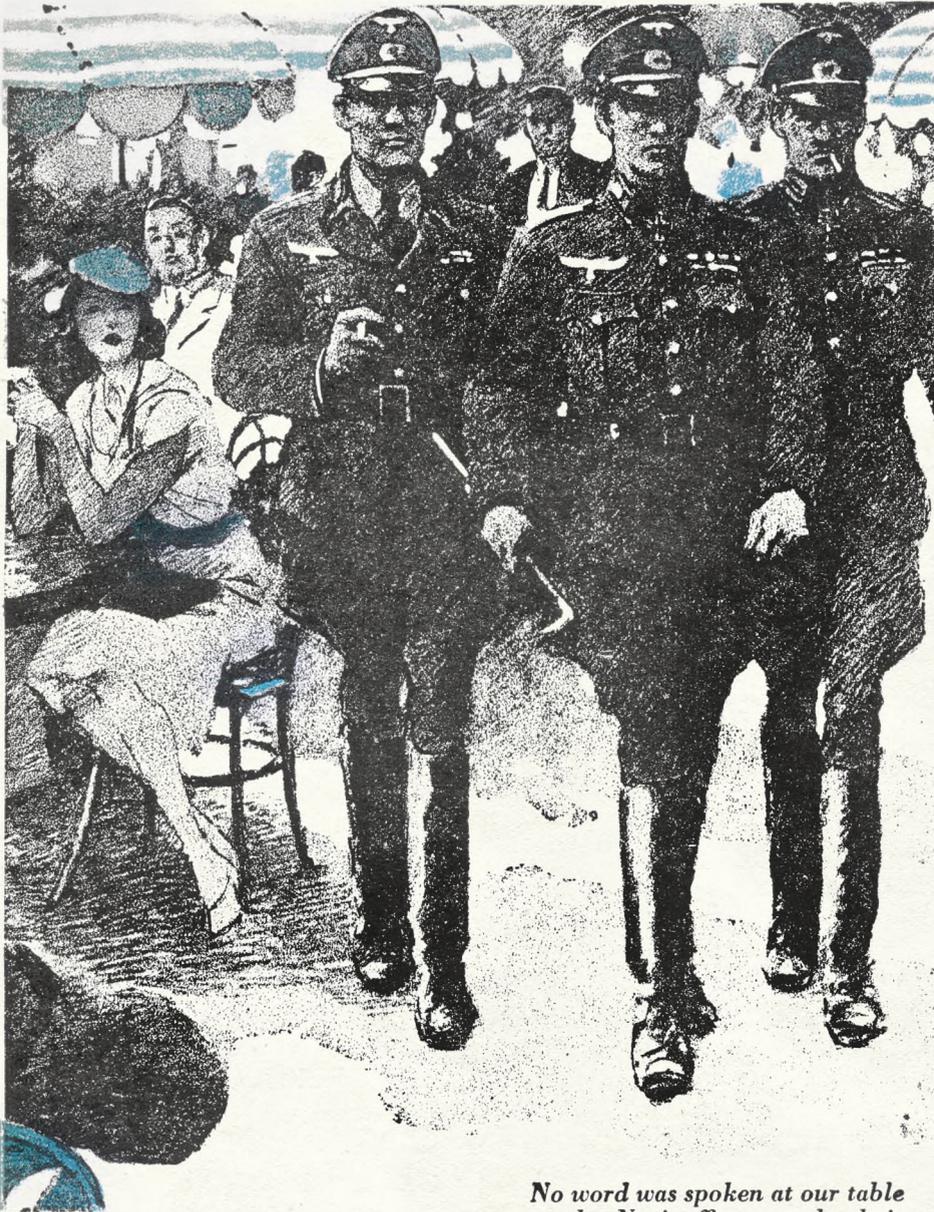
by LUDWIG LEWISOHN

MY passport was as faultless as my French accent was supposed to be. But the passport had been prepared by the Intelligence Department of a Great Power; the accent was the product of my far feebler efforts. I knew, nevertheless, that it would serve. The little group of people precariously vacationing that June—so near in

time, so almost legendary now as history—in the Hotel Beau Rivage was in no mood to scrutinize closely or inquire too curiously. For the very fact of being able to be here argued, at least, some abnormality of fortune on the part of each. Such people do not even pick up stones to throw.

Least of all did I fear the attention of the Nazi officers who were comman-

deering suite after suite in the hotel on the shore of the Lake of Annecy, and who daily threatened to drive us out to take shelter in the comfortless tall houses which overlook the canals of the ancient mountain city. These men had long lost the furious glitter of their first assault upon the world. They still stalked and shouted, but decay and doom had touched them.



No word was spoken at our table as the Nazi officers made their way to the end of the garden.

Justice

Illustrated by
MAURICE BOWER

They knew that the resistance fighters were in the *maquis*, the bush—in the thickets of every crag and mountain-side between here and Mont Blanc to the east, in every chalet from here to the Swiss frontier on the north. Their faces were like brittle, hollow masks. They guzzled the stolen wines of the land. They were too nervous to strip and bathe. The floors shook

under their boots; they themselves stank of rotting leather and of the sweat of fear.

It is not they who cause me to recall that summer, nor the silken lake nor the astringent air of the uplands of Savoy, nor my own business there, which had, in fact, come nearly to an end. Nor was it the fashionable Parisian gynecologist, too friendly with

THE DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR OF "ANNIVERSARY," "LAST DAYS OF SHYLOCK," "TRUMPET OF JUBILEE" AND OTHER NOTED BOOKS COMPRESSES A WHOLE NOVEL INTO THIS VIVIDLY DRAMATIC STORY.

the occupation forces for his future welfare, and the darkish lady, jingling with chains, whom too emphatically he presented as his wife, nor yet the stocky, perpetually smiling supposedly Swiss innkeeper, pretending that he knew no German. Not these, nor the members of a string quartette, rather sallow of skin and greasy of hair, who told you daily that, as soon as their visas came through, they were off on a concert tour to South America, and who offered to show their contracts. It is and was none of these. It was the Dmovskis; it was they alone. The other people, the terraces and flowery gardens, the wooded slope behind, the lustrous lake in front of the hotel—all these were but the setting of their drama and their fate.

So soon as—on the day of their arrival—I heard the *maitre d'hôtel* address them by name, I knew that one person was here who was not fraudulent. Ramon Dmovski's name was known; his merits in his chosen field of archæology were beyond question. In early youth he had come from his native Poland to study in Western Europe. He had stayed and had long been a French citizen. The results of his excavations in Asia Minor had so notably illustrated the truth of the Old Testament accounts, and his presentation of them had been so eloquent and moving, that all Paris had, some years ago, crowded his lecture hall in the Sorbonne. I knew his books; I remembered having seen a picture of him in his publisher's catalogue; I wondered at once how he would be able to face at such close quarters the violators of France, the very murderers of his ancestral Poland.

Well, he didn't face them at all. He looked past or, as it were, through them. He kept his tall, extremely slender form, visible from afar by its aureoled bush of milk-white hair, determinedly unbent. On the terraces, in the lakeside garden, beside the cool, dark-green canals of Annecy, his wide luminous blue eyes gazed unswervingly, as though unseeing, straight ahead. . . . They were lost eyes that found their way home only when his wife was with him.

I didn't wonder at that. If he was fifty, she was hardly more than half his age. But that was far from all. Lucie Dmovski was, in her slightly enameled fashion, exquisite and perfect. She had the air of one invio-



Well, Ramon Dmovski didn't face them at all. He looked past or, as it were, through them.

lable; she kept a strong sensual sting well-sheathed. Doubtless nature had not given her hair quite that bronze tinge. But the russet eyes, the incomparable texture of the skin, the small, pert, high bosom, the ravishing lines of thigh and leg—these were the real right thing. She stylized herself, moreover, with a cool and sober awareness. Her frocks were, so to speak, poured on to her. Her sturdier morning costumes, her decorative dinner gowns, seemed to be emanations of her very self.

AFTER I had introduced myself to Dmovski as a teacher of languages from Luxembourg—the rôle assigned me by my chiefs and borne out by my passport—and shown my knowledge of his work and standing, his rigidness seemed to relax a little. He introduced me to his wife at the first opportunity, and on the next afternoon it was she who with ever so graceful a motion of her slender hand, invited me to the lakeside table where they were having tea.

"How long have you been here?" she asked a little abruptly. "It wearies me, this calm beauty. Ramon doesn't seem to mind."

Dmovski drank her in with his eyes. He almost smiled.

"Lucie does rather belong to Paris," he said thoughtfully, as though the notion eased him.

I asked her if she were a born Parisienne.

She gave a quick little shake of the head.

"I'm a peasant girl from between Nancy and Metz. Did you ever see the famous dung-heaps of Lorraine?"

"So you've never had enough of Paris?" I asked lightly.

Again she gave that quick little shake.

"All this drives me frantic. The one mercy is that Ramon gave me the Peugeot coupé in which we drove here. Don't you sometimes hear it in the morning?"

I had heard the rather raucous starting of a car once or twice quite early. But my private information was that I could relax vigilance. The fall of the empire of the robbers and murderers was at hand. I started to speak, and saw the face of Dmovski freeze into a pallid mask.

"I beg her not to drive to Geneva so often."

He gave a little gasp. She put her hand on his.

"Don't worry so, darling. Everybody knows that I'm a harmless person. I go to the cinema in Geneva; I do a little shopping. That's all."

She looked at me with an appeal like a little girl's in her almost golden eyes. But as those eyes met mine, the appeal as of a little girl suddenly faded from them and was replaced by a

somber, brooding, watchful expression, as down the steps that led from the hotel to the lakeside garden tramped three of the Nazi officers. I had long known their identities, of course. They were the Lieutenants Brachvogel and von Schellenberg and the young Oberstleutnant Egon Hardt. Brachvogel and Schellenberg were the brutalized products of a brutish system. It had stamped their faces into a resemblance to the faces of hounds. Not so Egon Hardt. He was young and fair. One could conceive of his lips quivering; one could imagine his conscience as not being quite dead.

No word was spoken at our little table as the Nazi officers made their way to one at the farther end of the garden and sat down. Neither Ramon nor Lucie Dmovski looked in that direction. But his mask turned from white to gray, and she seemed lost in thought. I had, of course, not their inhibitions. I looked and saw the head of Egon Hardt move ever so slightly and his eyes cling thirstily for an instant to Lucie's form. I knew half by instinct that Ramon was wringing his long bony hands under the table. What a melancholy situation, I thought, and especially under the circumstances, how vulgar and how dangerous! Poor Dmovski! I made my excuses, and went for a walk.

EARLY next morning the Peugeot coupé fairly clattered. It has more speed than any other French car, but it is not pleasant to the ear. I stepped to the window. Lucie, admirably neat and compact, was in her car. In a moment she spun out. Since I had a corner room, I could mark her direction from my other window. The car picked up speed and raced not northward to Geneva, but eastward on the road to Chamonix and Mont Blanc. A lovers' meeting in the forest, I thought, or perhaps at some Savoyard peasant inn. It was none of my business, this unpolitical bit of common adultery. Yet my throat went a little dry. Dmovski was so decent and so distinguished a person. Why didn't he throw the little slut out? Futile and, indeed, foolish question! He loved her. The arrow was in his flesh and in his heart. He was afraid to draw it out.

There was a knock at my door. It was André, the waiter, with my *petit déjeuner* of rolls and coffee and honey. He chattered a few commonplaces.

"Do you know," I asked him brusquely, "where Madame Dmovski goes so early?"

"Yes, monsieur, certainly. She goes to the hairdresser in Geneva. A lady like that, a fashionable lady—they're not good enough for her here in Anancy."

He was rather proud of the fastidiousness of his *femme du monde*.

"I suppose," I said quietly, "that she told you that herself?"

"*Bien sûr!* Of course, she did. Is that all monsieur desires?"

Rather a coarse, unnecessary touch on Lucie Dmovski's part, I thought, to establish an alibi by chattering to the waiter. I ate my breakfast and made my preparations for the day. On this day, according to a schedule I had, one of my informants would turn up. Perhaps it would be—and I hoped so—for the last time. The German cities were rubble; the crushing tread of America was on the march. My work would be done, and I would be released from the imprisonment which the spy shares with those he spies upon. During the night, in addition, shots had been heard nearer than ever before. The resistance fighters were tightening their net. That too was a good sign.

It was a mild bright day, and I rowed that morning across the lake to the Abbey of Talloires. A bomb had hit the former hostelry; it was in ruins now. I had often wondered whether the resistance fighters used the little peninsula. But the poppies hardly trembled, and the lizards darted undisturbed. Nevertheless a tension crept into my nerves, and with strong strokes I brought my boat back to the Beau Rivage in time for luncheon.

The usual people were at their usual tables. Ramon Dmovski sat at his alone. I dared hardly nod to him. I did not want the slightest gesture to reveal my knowledge of his humiliation. And indeed, he looked sleepless, ravaged, suddenly old. He stared at the food before him as though he were wondering what to do with it. Then the familiar tramp of military boots resounded, and the clipped creak of corrupt German. In stalked Brachvogel, Schellenberg and Egon Hardt, accompanied by a civilian I had not seen before. I had to keep myself from too suddenly regarding Dmovski and watching his relief. But he was unchanged. He had, if anything, grown a shade grayer; his eyes were stonier; his bony hands were clasped on his knees. He did not betray any awareness of the presence of the Nazi officers. He was an image of horror and sorrow. So evidently the woman's intrigue was not with the Oberstleutnant. Or else they took this subtle way of clearing themselves, and Dmovski was not taken in.

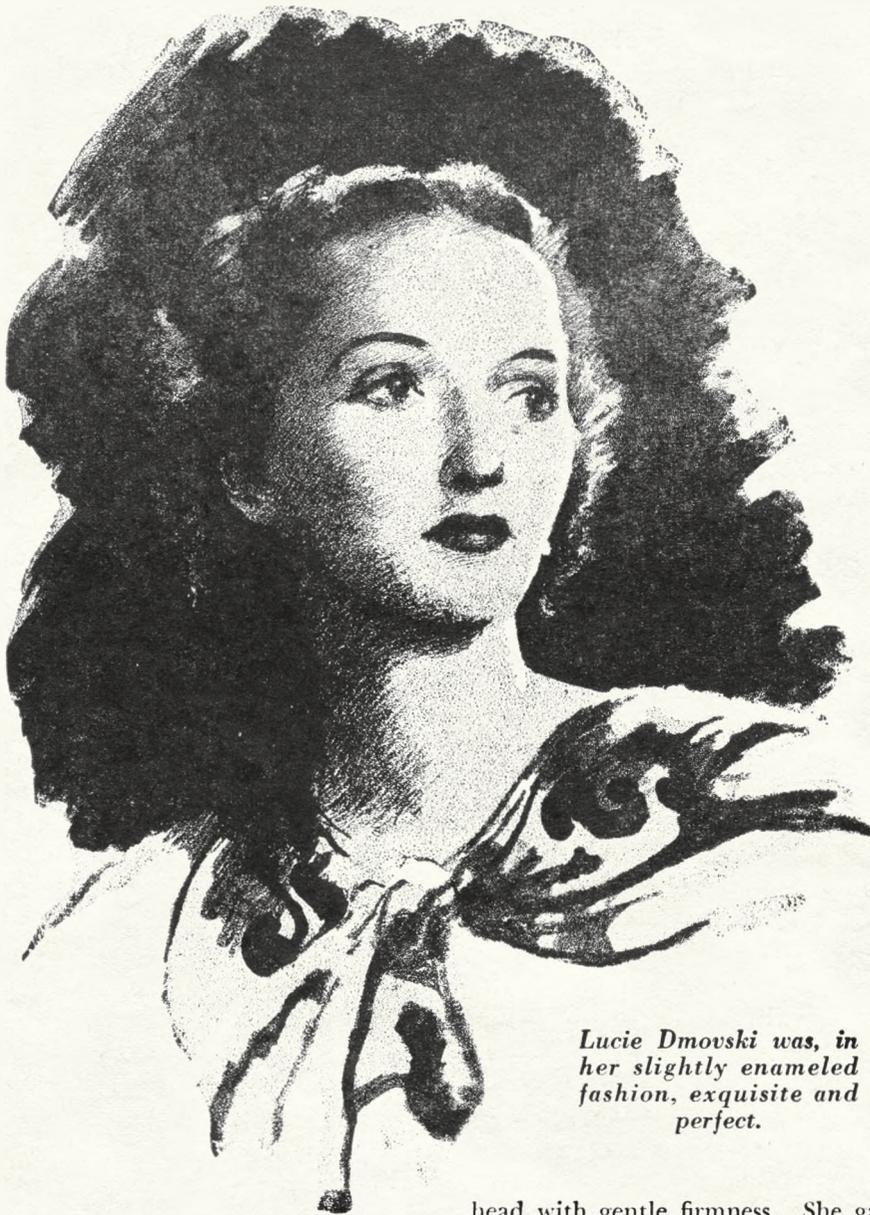
I FOLLOWED him, unobtrusively, out on the terrace. He hesitated a moment, then stopped to let me join him.

"What is your feeling," he asked hoarsely, "—is the end near?"

He had never before permitted himself a political remark.

"Yes. It is very near."

He leaned forward toward me. A little of his great misery seemed to seep out of him.



Lucie Dmovski was, in her slightly enameled fashion, exquisite and perfect.

"Do you know? Do you really know? I too am supposed to have special information—"

He clasped a hand over his mouth. His anxiety and grief, whatever was their source, had made him blunder. An unforgivable blunder, if what he said was so. Was he in touch with the partisans in the *maquis*?

At that moment, still from afar, we heard the snorting of the Peugeot car. Dmovski let himself sink into one of the metal chairs. He looked up at me with a faint smile. He was weak with relief. He offered me a cigarette and lit one. In a few moments Lucie leaped out of the car and was beside us.

"*Mais, mon pauvre chéri*, my poor darling," she cried with every outer evidence of sincerity, "you look all in. Don't you think he does, monsieur? Why? Why? *Why?* I am perfectly safe!"

She showed us her beautiful manicure and urged her husband to go in and upstairs with her. He shook his

head with gentle firmness. She gave him a long scrutinizing glance. Half to me, half to herself, she said: "I bet he ate no luncheon. I'll see to it that he has a good dinner." She ran across the garden and up the steps of the hotel.

Dmovski and I faced each other. His eyes were moist; he panted.

"If I knew who you were," he said, "really knew—"

"You would speak out?"

He brooded darkly with veiled eyes.

"There are conflicts," he murmured, "out of which there is no way but death." He stopped. He lifted his eyes. "You understand she loves me."

"Then why does she betray you?"

He lifted his eyebrows. He almost laughed.

"Betray me? Ah, yes, I see. I—"

Then we both caught sight of a man strolling in from the road. He was a Savoyard with an Alpine hat, broad-brimmed and feathered, with tall boots and the pack of the peddler. He came up to us and undid his pack and showed a group of those quaint wooden relief carvings of peasant kitchens

and rooms with clock and bench and oven and cat, which are common through all the Alpine lands from Salzburg to Zurich.

"Souvenirs of the Alps," he said, and grinned, as he handed one of the toys to Dmovski, but kept his eyes curiously on mine. It was my informant. He waited for the password from me. Then Dmovski said, turning the wooden piece in his hands: "*Tres joli*—very pretty." Then suddenly he added: "*Doux*"—for sweet on the tongue. For that was the password. From an old tag of an old poem that it is sweet and becoming to die for one's country. There were professors and poets in the resistance movement! Luckily there was another signal which I gave my man, telling him to see me later. I left him and Dmovski together in the garden. As I strolled away, I looked up and saw the face of Lucie at their window—a face white, strained, distorted by terror, beautiful no more.

NO one got much sleep that night. My Savoyard had confirmed what all sources accessible under the occupation had hinted. The Nazis were fleeing. Those left here were planning to try for internment in Switzerland. But the border-guards were being reinforced, and the resistance fighters were swarming in the forests and mountains. I had tried to get something about Dmovski out of my Savoyard. He had shaken his head. "A very fine gentleman. It is very sad."

"What is sad?"

He had looked at me steadily: "Did Madame ever tell you where she comes from?"

I had almost forgotten her casual remark. Now it came back to me. "From a village between Nancy and Metz."

The man had nodded. "A hell of a lot nearer Metz than Nancy." With that, he had gone.

It was enough. The pattern was clear. Oh, yes, Lucie Dmovski was officially French. But Prussian families—a few, at least—had stubbornly remained Prussian in both Alsace and Lorraine, in both Strasbourg and Metz. When the hordes of Hitler swept over the Continent, these had arisen. Poor Dmovski! No wonder he had said that there were conflicts out of which there is no way but the way of death. Would he kill himself, or her or both? He loved her and she him. Did he face the fact that she was a German spy?

All night there was trampling in the halls and rooms of the Beau Rivage. All night there was the sound of firing from the mountains. At dawn all the tumult died down, and I was at my window. The lake was tranquil, and the flowers were as unstimulating as though they had been jewels. Then

doors slammed above me—one and two and three. The Nazi officers and the Dmovskis were all housed on that floor above mine. I thought, too, that I heard a cry, a man's voice, half in entreaty, half in command. But the slamming of the doors confused me. A very few minutes later, after the silence had fallen again, the well-known raucous, metallic whir roared on the road. I leaned out at my window. Lucie—her face again wrenched by terror as I had seen it on the afternoon before—raced at a speed of at least eighty kilometers an hour toward Geneva and the Swiss frontier.

It was all so futile now. What message could she be carrying for her confederates? Perhaps they wanted to know at what point of the Swiss frontier they could most easily slip through. Perhaps—but I refused to be annoyed by such reflections. I hoped I saw a free world once more, and saw myself, with millions of others, back home.

The day was a sort of glittering nightmare. The Nazis stayed in their rooms. They could telephone to Anancy, of course, where their troops were billeted. They were packing, no doubt, hoping to escape with loot.

Dmovski wandered about, literally like a ghost, like a creature driven by the furies. And in truth he was. If he were known to have condoned his wife's activities, where would he be when the Vichy scoundrels were swept away? Once or twice he strolled toward me, pale to the lips. I could almost see those lips writhe. He knew now that I knew, or at least strongly suspected. But he could not get himself to the point of speech. And indeed, there was nothing to be said. He was a good and loyal and distinguished man, and the choice before him was: a bullet through his head today, or a firing-squad to face in a few weeks or months. He knew it; and he knew, too, that I would have to testify concerning the few facts I knew. So would our Savoyard. That I would do so—understanding how he loved the girl—with a sense of sorrow and regret would avail not at all.

Once or twice, loitering in the garden, I thought I saw him look longingly at the waters of the lake. But he had told me himself that he was a powerful swimmer, so that was no way out. Nor, unless he wanted to lock himself into their room, did he have much chance to keep his tension and his suffering solitary on this day. News and hope had seeped through. The other guests were restless and happy and talkative today. The chamber-music quartette people were all over the place. The Parisian gynecologist and his dark companion alone were depressed, and they sought to hide their depression under patriotic noises. The atmosphere of the place had an element of the morally repul-

sive. I kept myself steady by thinking of the mountains, cool, firm, eternal, towering above the ugly small passions of strutting men.

In the early afternoon I saw that Ramon Dmovski was at the breaking point. Evidently he did not want to die in a strange hotel room with Lucie's things about him. His hand was in his pocket grasping a revolver, as I could see. He gave me a stern, strange look, and walked swiftly along the garden-path toward the road. Should I follow him? Should I save him for a more degrading death?

He did not get far along the path. People had entered the hotel garden—quite a group of people, peasants from the surrounding villages. And in the midst of the group four men carried a stretcher improvised of the leafy branches of trees. Longish twigs trailed along the earth. And on the stretcher lay a woman's body. The long hair of the color of autumn leaves had become unwound, and russet strands trailed among the greenery of the branches. Dmovski stood quite still. I hastened to his side. The man at the head of the group took off his hat.

"We found her. It was the *maquis*. They are executing people right and left."

They had covered the gashes in Lucie's breast with her sweater. But the blood oozed out and trickled down. Her face was drawn, but not without a hint of peace.

"Carry her in, if you please," said Dmovski. "I am her husband."

They carried her in and laid her down in the hall of the hotel. They waited dumbly; and Dmovski, who knew his French peasantry, understood. He took out his wallet and emptied it of its contents. Then with clipped countrified expressions of sorrow and regret, they trailed slowly out.

Dmovski raised his head and looked at me.

"You always knew?" I asked him.

"Always."

"Did she know that you knew?"

"She kept hoping that I didn't. She loved me."

There was a touch of somber pride in his voice.

"And so"—suddenly his way out of this tragic conflict flashed into my mind—"and so you gave her up to them?"

He shook his head, and the faint touch of an ecstatic smile was on his lips.

"No. *They* tracked her down. I warned her. I am very grateful to God. He spared me that."

From the Editor's Scrapbook

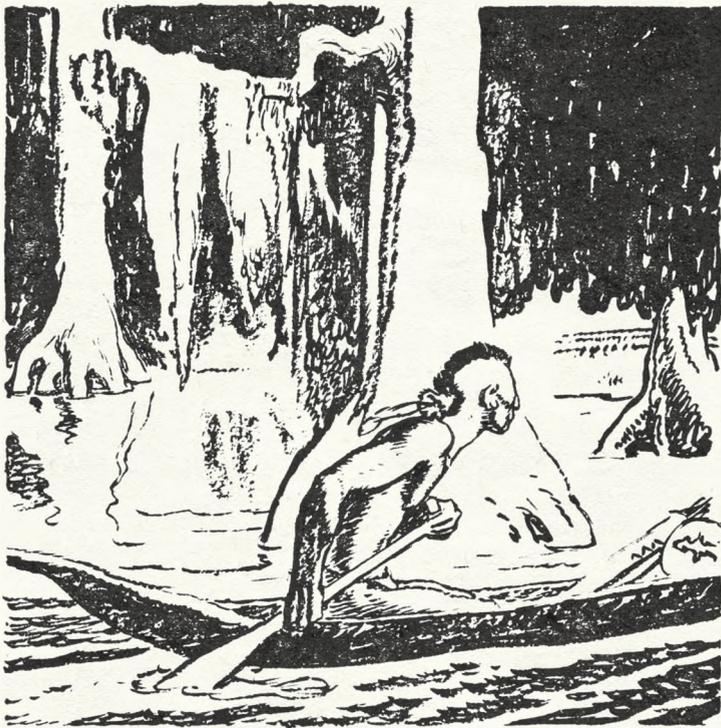
FEW INVENTIONS are the work of a single man. They are generally one man's adaptation of a commonplace, with many other men's modifications and improvements. The typewriter, though, is perhaps the product of more brains than most other devices. Between 1714 and 1865, more than a score of persons working independently in France, England and the United States devised various almost practical automatic writing-machines. About 1830, Xavier Projean, a Frenchman, invented the first type-bar and the first manual keyboard. Thirteen years later a Massachusetts man, Charles Thruher, perfected the first movable carriage. Another thirteen years after that, Alfred E. Beach, editor of the *Scientific American*, invented a writing-machine with type-bars converging to the center similar to those in use today, finger keys, and a bell to indicate the end of the line. The following year—1857—William Francis, a New York City physician, arranged a traveling paper frame and perfected the inked ribbon. But to Christopher Latham Sholes, a Milwaukee mechanic, goes the credit for perfecting the first practical typewriter. In July of 1868 he patented a

writing-machine that typed fifty words a minute, entirely in capitals. Sholes also named the device a typewriter. Such names as "patent writer," "typographer," "mechanical chirographer," and "writing-machine" occurred to him, but being a printer as well as a mechanic, he finally decided on "typewriter."

WHO ARE WE? We are all the nations of the world, all the races, all the creeds, all the tongues. Together we spell America with capital letters inked with democracy. We of the United States are 60,000,000 Anglo-Saxons, 15,000,000 Teutons, 14,500,000 Negroes, 10,000,000 Irish, 9,000,000 Slavs, 5,000,000 Italians, 4,000,000 Scandinavians, 2,000,000 French, 1,000,000 each of Finns, Lithuanians and Greeks, lesser numbers of Spaniards, Hungarians, Swiss, Dutch, and about one-third million each of Amerindians, Orientals, Filipinos, and Mexicans. When we go to church we are 40,000,000 Evangelical Protestants, 22,000,000 Roman Catholics, 4,500,000 Jews, 2,000,000 Anglican Episcopalians, 600,000 Mormons, 500,000 Christian Scientists, 100,000 Quakers and differing numbers of dozens of other persuasions.

Contributed by Simpson M. Ritter

He Saw America



From the bayous of lower Louisiana---

A CENTURY BEFORE LEWIS AND CLARK, AN INDIAN JOURNEYED ALONE FROM LOUISIANA TO THE OREGON COAST.

tion gained on his earlier wanderings had hinted at the extraordinary wonders extending league upon league toward the western sun.

Furthermore, Ape's interest had long been stirred by the ancient legend of a land far away to the northwest, from which his people had originated. No one seemed to know any particular details about these ancestors or the country of their beginning; the wise old men merely said it was so, and pointed always in the same direction—northwest. But Ape's avid curiosity wouldn't let it rest at that; his mind demanded a more comprehensible picture. As no one could tell him the things he wanted to know, he decided to try finding out for himself. Somewhere out in that direction, he reasoned, must lie the information denied him elsewhere. Besides, he wanted to see some of that strange country for its own sake.

It was somewhere around the year 1700 that he set out; approximately a century before Lewis and Clark accomplished their memorable journey to the mouth of the Columbia. Unlike his later-day followers, however, Ape was not traveling on a budget or trying to forward the course of empire. Time was no object; and America then, as now, was strewn with attractions for an inquiring mind.

ACCORDING to Ape's story, he began his journey at the time of ripening grain. His way led north and west to the Ohio River. Beyond the Ohio lay the prairies. He got across the stream on a raft contrived of canepoles and driftwood and was soon enjoying his first meal of buffalo hump.

He was amazed at the vast hordes of buffalo he met on these prairies. Often, he said, he could see them massed the length of a day's travel or scattered in herds as far as the eye could reach. Yet he appreciated them as a food supply. Tenderloins, humps and tongues were his daily fare for weeks at a time.

After a short stop at a village of Illinois Indians, he turned west to cross the Mississippi shortly above the mouth of the Missouri River. This crossing was accomplished by use of

THIS story of an unlettered savage who traveled sixteen thousand miles through the wilderness of unsettled America is not only highly probable, but has a substantial array of facts to support it. An account of the remarkable journey was written by M. Le Page du Pratz, a French planter of Louisiana, in the early 1700's. Du Pratz was an author of considerable distinction. He was a student and historian, whose writings on pioneer America and the Indians of that period were notably authentic. His transcription of Monchacht Ape's feat he claimed to have received first-hand from Ape himself, who was then living in that region.

About 1775, a French officer and writer of that section, named Dumont, published a book on Louisiana. In it he gave space to a recountal of Ape's exploit, as written by Du Pratz. Dumont further stated that he too knew the Indian personally and believed his tale to be substantially correct. . . .

Among the great epics of early-day travel in American history, the little-known journey of Monchacht Ape (Monkocht Apay) stands unique. In fact, Ape might well be considered our original transcontinental traveler out to see and behold. However, unlike

all the other more widely recorded adventurers who blazed explorative trails into America's unmapped wilderness, he accomplished his unparalleled expedition strictly on his own. No mailed conquistadors or buck-skinned woodsmen rode at his side; no special equipment eased the difficulties of his days; no familiar voices enlivened his camps. For five long years he faced the unknown, dependent on his own lone wit and courage to see him through.

Down in the warm southeastern homeland of his Yazoo tribesmen, Monchacht Ape lived the ordinary childhood life of his Indian brothers and sisters. Inside him, however, dwelt a different spirit. He had a mind that thirsted for knowledge and a disposition that drove him to find enlightenment. As he grew up, his vision extended far beyond the narrow little world that sufficed his companions. Legends of strange things in distant lands stirred his imagination; curiosity and desire to know, drew his thoughts ever toward far horizons. While still in his youth, he made a trip east to the Atlantic Coast and another as far north as Niagara Falls.

Then his eyes turned westward. There was a host of fascinating possibilities in that direction. Informa-

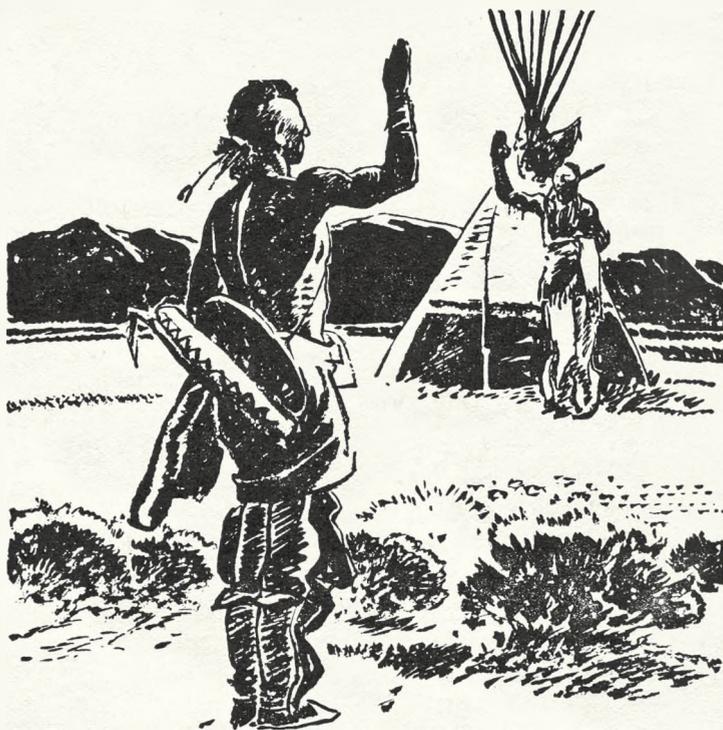
First

by GLENN R. VERNAM

another raft built of materials close at hand. From there, he followed the north bank of the latter stream until he fell in with some members of the Missouri tribe.

The friendliness of these people, combined with the shortening autumn days, induced him to accept their invitation to spend the winter there. It was well that he did; he hadn't reckoned with the fierceness of Northern winters. The snow, he said, rose to the height of a man's waist, while all the wild game hid itself in inaccessible places. But for the generous hospitality of these friends, he figured he must surely have perished in the bitter freezing storms which raged across the open prairies.

Ape seemed to have a special affinity for learning the languages and adapting himself to the everyday life of the different tribes he met from time to time. And he certainly had ability to get along with strangers. His odyssey reads like a good-will tour.



---northwestward across the broad plains.

All the different people he met received him kindly, made his stay enjoyable, and parted with him as friends, regretfully. Not once did he record inhospitable treatment.

The spring following his sojourn with the Missouris found him headed on up the Missouri River. Buffalo and wildfowl again flowed past him in uncounted millions. He made particular mention of the beauty of the roll-

ing green land; the muddiness of this river, in comparison with the Mississippi, also attracted his notice.

It was the people he called the Nation of the West, who gave him his first definite information about the land whence all the Indians came. He must have been up in the Mandan country of North Dakota then, for these Indians told him that continuing on up the river for one moon would bring him to the Great Shining Mountains. They informed him the place he sought was far off to the northwest beyond the mountains, but strongly advised against his trying to go there. It was, they said, a cold and barren land of fearful mountains, deep snow and few inhabitants. Along with all this, they also told him of a large river west of the Great Mountains, which ran toward the setting sun until it reached an endless body of water.

Ape pushed on eagerly. His hopes were high for great things to come. Nor was he disappointed. After following on up the Missouri for one moon, he found the mountains as beautiful and awesomely grand as they had been represented.

Here he met a band of friendly hunters whose native haunts were beyond the mountains. They were able to tell him many details about the great western river and the Big Waters which lay beyond the farthest land. At the time Ape met these people, one man and his wife were making preparations to return home. Ape gladly accepted the invitation to accompany them, as their knowledge of the trails through the rugged territory would save him unnecessary hardship. After



*Illustrated by
Herbert Morton Stoops*

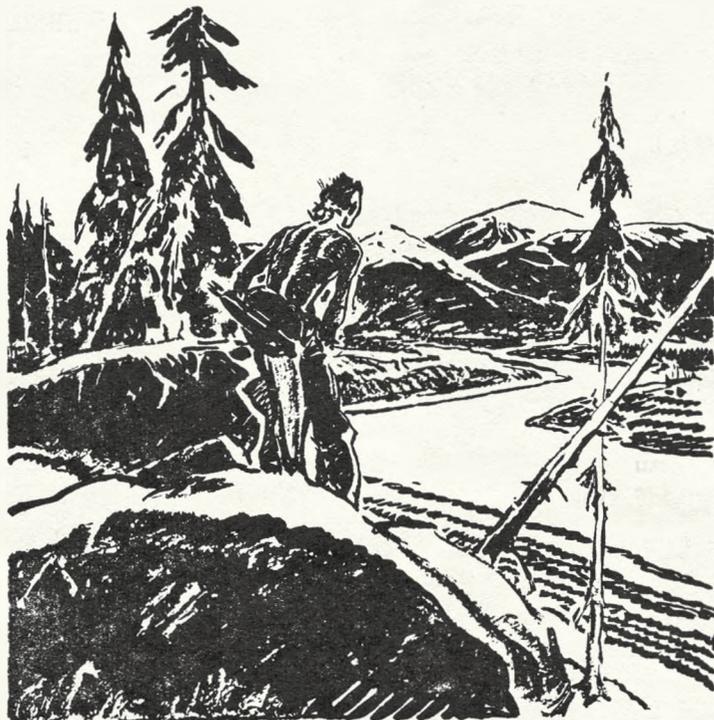
---past the miles of grass prairies.

a few days' rest, they led him up the river for nine days and then made a five-day journey over some high ground to a stream which ran in a westerly direction.

This crossing probably took place west of Great Falls and Helena, between the headwaters of the Missouri and Clark's Fork. Or there is a possibility that Ape was led even farther north, heading up Sun River to cross over onto the South Fork of the Flathead. In either case, he found his way to the Great River of the West.

He spent the winter with these new friends. He called them the Otter People. They had canoed downstream a considerable distance to their own village, where Ape was received as though he belonged to the tribe. These Indians introduced him to several new foods peculiar to that region. One was a breadstuff made from roasted roots; another was a small pea-like grain which grew wild, and which was very tasteful when cooked. He said this nation made life so agreeable for him that it was hard to part with them the following spring. But for his urge to see the Great Western Water, and perhaps find the land of his ancestors, he would have willingly stayed there.

And the rest of his journey was equally agreeable. His friends had provided him with a canoe as an easier mode of travel. In this he floated at ease, killing game along the bank to supplement his store of root-bread, peas and dried meat. Ape stated that with his bow and arrows, cooking-pot, sleeping-robe, and the abundance of game, he had everything that



-- west of mountains, high and cold --

any person could wish to make life pleasant.

He said the natives called this stream the Beautiful River. In his opinion, it couldn't have been more appropriately named.

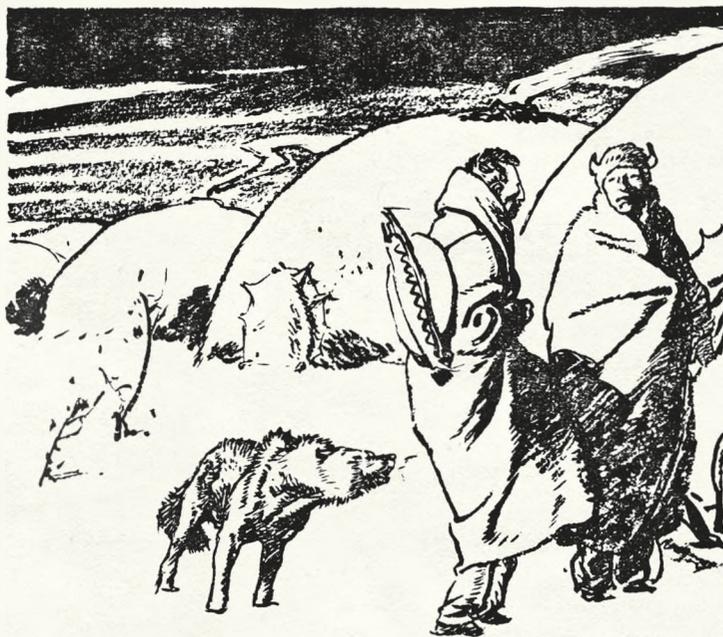
He met various other tribes of Indians along the course of his downstream voyage. With each of these he usually stopped for a day or so, and as usual all of them treated him as one of the family. He always seemed to

have picked up a working knowledge of the language and customs of the next territory while enjoying the hospitality of the different tribes. In fact, this Eighteenth Century savage might not be a bad example for a large share of our modern civilized gadabouts to copy.

Down along the lower Columbia, or Beautiful River, Ape mentions finding quantities of big blue birds which were very good eating. These were likely the Western blue grouse. Likewise, he was probably referring to seals when he told of seeing strange dark-skinned animals, whose heads resembled those of buffalo calves, that came up out of the coastal waters to eat grass. His description of the immense Western forests and the Columbia River salmon are very realistic. So are the sketchy details of sea creatures and shellfish with which he came in contact.

Here he spent considerable time with a tribe living a day's journey from the coast. They told him they had located their village back in the woods so that they might more easily hide from the bearded men who visited the coast each year.

These bearded men were greatly feared by the natives. They came over the Western Water from the direction of the setting sun, sailing in great canoes from which towered two or three tree trunks hung with big squares of cloth. They were armed with weapons which made a terrible noise and spouted fire. All of them wore a bulky kind of clothing that covered their entire bodies, even in the hottest weather. The Indians



-to winter among the hospitable Mandans-

said these white-faced strangers often tried to steal their young men and women when they stopped ashore for water and wood. Being afraid to fight against the fearsome weapons, the natives made a practice of staying well in hiding when the bearded ones appeared.

Monchacht Ape was more enlightened. His contacts with civilization on the Eastern Coast had taught him a few salient facts about firearms and chastising one's enemies. As it was nearing the time of year when the foreigners usually arrived, he helped assemble several of the neighboring tribes to form a surprise party. Ape's practical intelligence and directional ability seems to have won him a position of recognized leadership in the affair.

At any rate, he relates how, after a five-day march to the spot where the strangers habitually landed, he posted lookouts on the cliffs while the others located places of concealment for a proper ambushing attack. There they lay in wait for seventeen days; the bearded men were late that season.

But at last two tall-masted crafts hove into sight. The lookouts spread the alarm which sent their companions scurrying to selected vantage-points. Craftily they waited while the ships cast anchor in the mouth of the river and began taking on fresh water. It was not until the enemy went ashore to cut wood that they struck suddenly from three sides. They managed to kill eleven of the bearded ones before the rest fought their way back to the boats and put to sea.

APE'S description of the dead sailors pictures them as smaller than either the Indians or the white men of his acquaintance; also, he said, they were not like any of the English, French or Spanish he had known. However, they were white of skin, with bearded faces and hair worn long in the center of their heads. The description of their clothing indicates silk or finely woven cotton. Shoes of some kind were worn, as were turban-like caps of cloth. Only a few of the men were armed with muzzle-loading guns.

Though Ape didn't say so, this affair evidently raised his standing in the community to a high degree. He received his share of the booty taken from the victims, as well as a generous amount of respect for his counsel and activities. Life was made pleasant for him in the extreme. He even acquired a wife.

Still, the idea of locating his ancestral country continued to plague his mind; he had never lost sight of the primary object of his journey. Some unseen power, he stated, seemed to direct his will, drawing him ever onward toward the Northwest. In

fact, his taking a wife appeared to hinge no little on the idea that she might prove a helpful asset in uncovering hidden sources of native information.

Not long after the battle with the bearded men, he was once more on his way, accompanied by his dusky bride. Their honeymoon route lay northward along the coast, between the mountains and the Great Water. To anyone familiar with Washington's evergreen coast in midsummer, there can be little disagreement with his description of this idyllic land. And at that time he noted the extreme length of the days and shortness of the nights as compared with those of his homeland.

Ape never reached the land of his desire, however. All the people he met advised against his trying to go there. The farther he went, the stronger did this opinion prevail. They told him the coast extended north for an unbelievable distance before turning west to where it was cut in two by the Great Water. Moreover, most of the way led through a land of barren, frozen mountains, where he would surely perish. The wise men of all the villages spoke the same, counseling him emphatically to abandon such a hopeless plan.

In the end, he allowed himself to be persuaded. Regretfully bowing to the inevitable, he turned back toward the Columbia. He eventually retraced his steps across the continent, reaching the Yazoo country after an absence of five years. Ape reckoned his actual traveling-time for the round trip as thirty-six moons.

This helps substantiate his story. Fifteen miles per day is a fair average for a man on foot in unfamiliar country. That would make his thirty-six moons total about 16,000 miles. Then consider that a person following the devious courses of winding rivers, and equally sinuous Indian trails, would easily travel double the distance of a direct route. This leaves around eight thousand miles, half of which is the approximate highway distance from the southeastern part of the United States to the upper Washington Coast, via the upper Missouri and Columbia.

Further corroboration is seen in his accurate description of the country, its oddly varied wild life, the customs of its inhabitants and the long days of the Northwest. Too, there are the Indians' warnings about the forbidding Alaskan Coast stretching away to the Bering Sea, and the accounts of the bearded men. Sailing-ships from both Europe and the Orient are known to have visited the Northwest Coast long before any white men ever traveled its dim trails.

Added to that, Monchacht Ape's story was essayed and printed upward of seventy-five years before any known white man explored beyond the northern Rockies. Neither his imagination nor that of his biographer, Du Pratz, could hardly have devised so complete a record of the discoveries which Lewis and Clark were to duplicate, almost step by step, a full century later.

Everything considered, it seems that well-earned credit is due this early-day American who was first to see the widely distributed wonders of his native land.



down to the sea that swallows the sun!



A great fire leaped upward; many were blown overboard, and they cried for help in the darkness.

Action off Salerno

A former Naval officer gives a vivid picture of one of our toughest landings.

by CLARY THOMPSON

IN Italy's Gulf of Salerno, we grew to hate the sun.

As day followed endless day, this hate, born of fear, grew as fierce as the glaring sun itself, and as uncompromising as the Mc-109's and Focke-Wulfs and Stukas that came tearing down out of it with their strafing and bombs.

We were D plus 2. On the second day of the invasion our convoy of Liberty ships steamed into the Gulf loaded with soldiers and the equipment it takes to win a war.

All hell broke loose before we ever dropped anchor.

They came out of the sun, as they were always to do. We were green then, and new. They were upon us before we knew it; and even before our startled senses could register, they had dropped their bombs and strafed our decks and were gone over what later became known as Messerschmitt Hill.

Some of their bombs had missed. Some had not. Stunned, we stared at a nearby burning ship, and wondered how many were dead.

Two hours later they came again—always out of the sun.

This time we were not caught off guard. The danger-signal had gone up on escorting destroyers and cruisers; and the command ship, anchored near us, sounded its sharp warning.

We waited at the guns. It was 11:00 on the morning of September 11, 1943, and the sun was high. Being new, we were not yet sure they would come again, and chose to think of the first raid as something unusual even for the Gulf of Salerno on D plus 2, something to tell the folks when we got home.

We had little time to wait. A cruiser steaming past us pulled warning blasts on her whistle. Five seconds later the Jerries came out of the sun like mad bats with the speed of light.

Things happened too fast then.

With a great roar the escorts opened fire with their long-range guns. The atmosphere seemed to turn into a vacuum, and the whole earth to be trembling from the pressure of giant wings beating space.

But still the planes came. Getting nearer, coming directly out of the blazing sun, they darted from side to side and swung like weights on lightning-

like pendulums, weaving, turning, twisting, at 450 miles an hour.

At about fifteen hundred yards we opened up with everything we had, along with every ship in the Gulf.

The pressure of giant wings changed to a clattering, banging clamor that shook the earth and sky and sea. Smothering heat from thousands of guns enveloped the sector, and the sky was black and red from shrapnel and tracer and bursting shell.

It was unbelievable that the planes could enter that fire and live, but they came on. At a thousand yards they spread out of the sun like a Chinese fan and darted over our assemblage almost too fast for the eye.

Then the bombs came.

They fell everywhere—on our port, our starboard, the bow. Their sickening *kr-r-r-r-ump!* mingled with the crescendo of the guns, and the Gulf of Salerno was a literal hell on earth.

Two of the bombs fell into the sea one hundred yards off our port bow, one just off the starboard quarter. The thud of their explosion in water is like no other sound in the world; it is a throbbing thud vaguely similar, in a magnificent way, to the first shovels of earth being thrown into a new grave.

In our thirty fathoms of water they churned up the bottom into a muck that boiled on long after the six planes had darted over Messerschmitt Hill.

We on the aft gun stations counted ourselves with a sort of stunned terror. We were all there. A gunner with phones called the bridge and bow. They were all there too. The fact surprised us.

Without voicing it, we all knew at the same time that this was not going to be the way Sicily had been during invasion. Sicily was a picnic.

There was a lot of shrapnel on deck; we examined it curiously, and wondered how it had missed all of us.

Then the empty cartridge cases were cleared away and the guns made ready for action again. We had become wise suddenly, and had got the drift of things. We knew they would come back many times before our cargo of bombs, TNT, barbed-wire, food, telephone poles, gasoline, ammunition, trucks, guns, jeeps and water was unloaded onto landing-barges and hauled

a mile to shore. We would be there at least three days.

Our ignorance was bliss.

They came back. They came and dropped their bombs dozens of times in the seven desperate days and six nights we lay there. They came back many more dozens of times, but were driven off by our fighters before they got to us.

The night of September 11 was a nightmare that seared itself into our brains forever. . . .

We had had another of the sneak raids in the afternoon; then things quieted down for a while. That is, they quieted down for us. The war was still in sight on the beach, though, and we could hear even the chatter of machine-gun fire mingling with the louder mortar and artillery as our men of the 36th Division clung tooth and nail to their narrow beachhead.

In this interim we had started unloading our trucks and guns, and as the soldiers' vehicles went over the side, they went with them, to stay.

Just before dark a young second lieutenant with lined face and sunken eyes came aboard to attend to some phase of unloading. We gathered around him for news. He questioned us, too. There was a rumor at the front that the Allies had just landed three hundred thousand men at Le Havre. He was eager to know: Was it true? We hated to tell him the truth.

MR. FERGUSON, the first mate, knew how it was, but he asked anyway: "How are things at the front?"

The lieutenant thought that he was kidding. Then he understood and grinned as best he could. "The front?" He swept his arm around the bay wearily. "Man, you know," he said.

Night settled ominously. As darkness grew thicker and the hills of the front turned purple, then black, firing on the beaches became plainer and plainer until it lighted the sky in crazy patterns that seemed unreal and out of another world.

The Stukas came after us at 02:00 in the morning.

There was no warning, other than that they themselves gave. They could not find us right away, and began dropping flares from a great height.

The warning was sounded from the command and escort ships, and destroyers and speedy little LC-VP's and mosquito boats darted in and out among us, throwing a smoke screen. We Libertys, too, threw up billowy columns of black smoke.

Flares were falling in every direction. These flares were instruments of the devil. They made darkness much brighter than daylight, and they fell as slowly as frozen molasses from a barrel.

Strapped in the guns, we waited like men waiting for an executioner; we knew they were coming. We could only hope they would miss.

By the light of the flares the hands on my plain-faced watch were as visible as at midday. It was seven minutes after two o'clock.

THE flares were low now. Two were over our bow, one on the starboard beam, one off to port. Suddenly a red one dropped from directly overhead. We froze, sweated, and braced ourselves. That one came from the Stuka leader. Its meaning: "Over the target!"

We heard them when they started their dive. It was first a whine, then a whining roar. It lasted a long time. There is no pain like that waiting. One of the loaders, with his face toward the sky, burst out crying with great gasps of curses and prayer; but he held on to his loading.

When the roar grew deafening, we let them have it. The first shot came from a can near us, and in a split second thousands of itchy fingers moved against triggers.

The earth itself seemed to recoil against the terror that burst there in the night. The sky was a thunderous, murderous working thing full of smoke and shot and shell and tracer. Our steel ship rang like a dull bell under the smoke and fire.

Even above the slam and bang and roar we heard the planes pull out of their dive with high whines like a violin string when it has all it will take.

The sea erupted.

Our bow went high out of the water and fell back like a stricken whale. Bombs—God knows how many—fell like huge raindrops that sometimes precede a summer shower.

Smoke was so thick now that we could hardly see our own stack, but we saw a great fire leap upward two hundred yards off our port quarter where a merchantman was hit. We could hear the crew yelling. Many were blown overboard, and some jumped, and they cried for help in the smoke and darkness. Small boats we could not see through the smoke rushed about recklessly, and a Navy fireboat churned by in the darkness.

There was little talk in our group when the smoke of battle cleared away.

Those three days were going to be long. We lay down by the guns.

The second day was a repetition of the first, except that little slivers of desperation were digging into our minds. We were not unloading very fast. It seemed there were not enough Army stevedores to go around; for some reason we never knew, we were low on the priority list, and had no stevedores at all.

Only nine of our merchant crew could do this type of work. They were helped by the soldiers we brought to the front. But the soldiers left as their trucks and guns were unloaded, and trucks and guns made up only a small part of our cargo.

Very often landing-barges could not get alongside even when the tired crew and infantrymen were at the winches. Enemy plane alerts sometimes lasted three or four hours, and there was no unloading then. We often lay for hours without discharging one piece. Sitting like ducks on the water, our dread grew with the slow hours. We could see no end to the ordeal.

But our ebbing morale went sky high at noon. We bagged a plane!

An alert was on, and we had stared at the sun until our eyes popped. You cannot stare down the southern Italian sun in September, try as you may. But when your life depends on it and you know death is coming out of it, you try very hard. Our hate of this thing was growing fast, this burning ball of fire that was never hidden for a moment behind even a wisp of cloud.

They swarmed down out of it as usual, six of them. An Me-109 came our way. He appeared to be making a dead run for our bow, then swerved to his right, turning his belly up to our whole port side. That was the final swerve he made for the Fatherland. Our portside gunners filled him full of 20-mm. shells for at least ten seconds.

HE twisted and writhed for a moment; he caught fire; he dropped his bombs harmlessly. Then at 450 miles an hour he headed straight for the sandy beach. Just a few feet from the water's edge he seemed simply to disintegrate and disappear into one billow of palish smoke and sand.

A loud cheer arose from amidships where members of the steward's department, engineers and deckhands had gathered to be free from shrapnel and to watch. After that, the Navy gunners hitched their blue denim trousers and were very cocky for a while.

But there were more raids, and the unloading had dribbled almost to a stop. There was no rest, no moment of release. By nightfall tired faces had become haggard. We sat all night without discharging a pound. It was the waiting without unloading that rubbed our nerves raw. Most of the



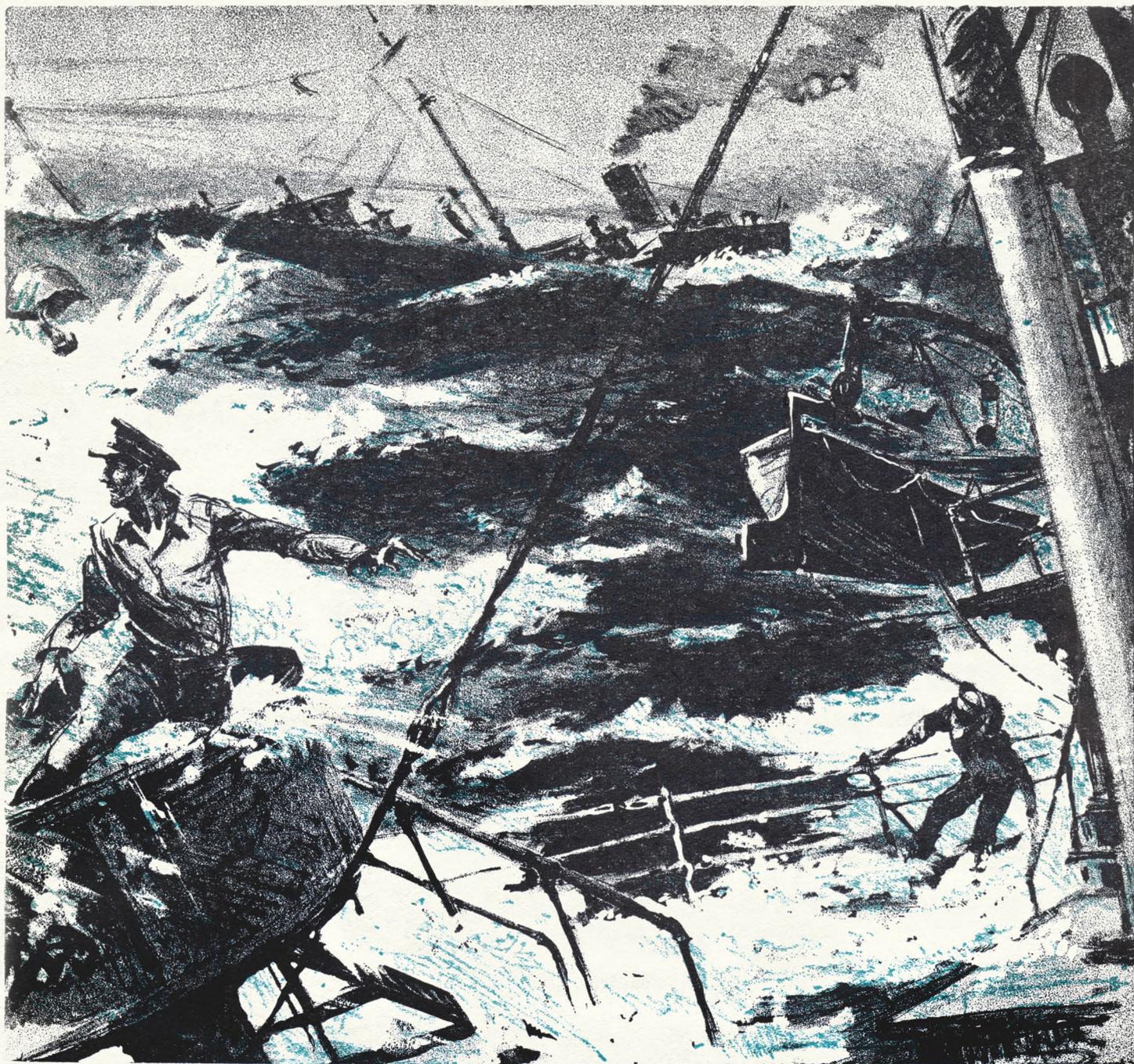
I lived an eternity in three

soldiers were gone. Many of them were already in the clamoring death-struggle we could see and hear on the beach. They were glad to get off; they were infantrymen, trained to protect themselves. They had gone wild on the ship, because you cannot dig a foxhole in steel deck-plates.

The Germans pulled a new one next morning. They came for breakfast, but not before the hateful sun came up; it rose over Messerschmitt Hill, red and glaring like mirror-reflected light.

They came right out of it, of course. And except for the grace of God—and maybe some of our 20-mm. fire—they would have got us that day.

Our stern was pointing directly toward the beach and sun. Two of



seconds. . . . Salt water was in my mouth, my eyes; I hit the deck hard, was up in the air again.

the six or eight that were around came after us—us, not any of the other ships.

"Here they come!" yelled one of the gunners, jerking his 20-mm. gun dead astern. And there they came. Two of them, one just in front of the other, were making a bee-line for us, an end-to-end run.

I saw their propellers flying. I saw the black crosses under their wings. I saw the pilot of the one in front just as he came over us. I lived an eternity in three seconds.

Then my feet were off the deck, and salt water was in my mouth, my eyes, drenching me. I hit the deck hard, was up in the air again, down again.

The ship was rocking like a chip in a flood, and her movement knocked up

great waves. The sea was turning inside out a few yards dead astern, where the second plane had dropped his bomb, and the first one had missed by a few feet by No. 2 hold on the starboard side. Half of the ship was covered with water.

Those still left were abandoning a hit Liberty off our port beam—a Liberty we all knew well. They had been discharging high-octane gas onto an LCT, a large landing-barge. The bomb hit both the ship and the LCT, and the flame from the explosion had thrown a suffocating wave of heat against us. Men were yelling, going over the side. Two little LCM's were standing on end, sinking. The LCT and the ship were an inferno.

We watched with sickened hearts, then turned leadenly to cleaning the salt water from the guns while our merchant skipper, Captain Walter Rees, shifted anchor to be a little farther away from the menace of Messerschmitt Hill. We anchored again three hundred yards from the burning skeleton of another Liberty that had been with us in Sicily.

Our desperation grew the next day when German tanks broke through the front lines.

About 14:00 a launch from the command ship hailed us. An officer with a megaphone shouted: "Write this down." There was a scramble on the bridge for paper and pencil. Then he said: "Cease all unloading. Cease

all unloading. All LCT's and LCM's assemble at Red Beach. All ships stand by for evacuation on thirty minutes' notice."

Our hearts sank; we searched each other's faces vainly for hope. We could read only one meaning in that order: Was this to be another Dunkerque?

The ship was like a quiet dungeon, filled with doomed men. The fighting was very near on the beach. One of our cruisers that had been methodically throwing great shells into shore had increased the tempo of its firing.

Late that afternoon we saw a sight we will never forget. Two of Britain's great battleships, the *Warspite* and *Valiant*, steamed in from the Mediterranean. They were squat, rugged, low in the water, bristling with guns. They felt their way past us like giant alligators.

They moved in near the beach, less than three hundred yards away, and the *Warspite* turned her guns shoreward. She opened fire. Her roar was that of the cornered British lion, full of pain and rage. The earth shuddered. The water trembled. Beneath the gun as far as the eye could see, the scant growth of Salerno's beaches bowed to earth.

SUDDENLY, as if enraged beyond endurance, she turned four guns into shore and fired salvo after salvo. Three hundred yards distant, we had to gasp for breath if we got any.

The projectiles hurtled through the air with a whistle such as a box-car would make if thrown at the rate of five thousand yards a second. The whistle of the shell was keen for a long time, and after a while the earth would shudder, over beyond the hills.

She lobbed them in for nearly an hour, and was getting out with her escort when the Stukas came after her.

There were five or six of them. They were very high, but their galvanized-colored wings glinted when they turned in the sunlight. They did not resemble any of our planes. They looked mean, vindictive, wicked.

The bay was full of ships, but they knew who they wanted. They concentrated over the two battle-wagons like vultures, waiting for a chance to swoop; they worked and wound about like bees.

The two ships opened up with their pom-poms. The fire of the "Chicago pianos" was more rapid than a sub-

machine-gun. A thick barrage, even as a stretched blanket, burst just beneath the planes and gave the illusion that the planes were actually sitting on the bursting charges. Escorts opened fire with their large guns; but the planes, as if on a magic carpet, seemed to ride their barrage too.

Then the Stukas prepared to dive. They went up higher and formed a circle. As each completed the circle, he would turn his nose down as if to dive. At that instant the harried ships would triple their barrage, and in mortal dread the Stukas always pulled out of their dive just before reaching the bursting shells.

Fascinated, we sat on the front row of this Battleship vs. Airplane show, and the impression we could not help but gain was that each was scared to death of the other.

The Stukas never had the nerve to dive. They scattered and fled when our P-38's went up after them. Thus the first round went to the ships, but the planes won the second. They hit the *Warspite* next day.

By 15:00 this next afternoon we had had five more raids and unloaded nothing, though discharging had resumed on some of the ships.

Our morale scraped the bottom. Many of the men, they later admitted, had resigned themselves, and more than one prayer had been made; we could see little hope, and knew our luck would ravel out after a while. We rarely had a chance to eat without interruption by a raid. Many reached the stage of exhaustion where sleep is impossible, even with a chance to do so—which we did not have. Yet we were not discharging. With steady work, it would take three days to finish. And the planes—they were always coming back. Sickness had broken out. Dozens merely stared into space, saw nothing, felt nothing.

A young soldier still on board—he had borne up under all the fighting in North Africa—cracked up completely on this steel-plated floating prison where there was no place to dig a hole, no place to go for safety; he wept and babbled incoherently.

One of our gunners went out of his head and started singing jazz songs into the battle phones. A merchant marine oiler, just a kid, cried silently all the time, and never opened his mouth.

For five days and nights we had lived in hell. The planes kept coming, and

we knew they would always be back. We could see no end to it, this waiting, this waiting. Many saw no more hope at all.

We got a barge alongside about 15:00, though, and our Filipino bosun and his deckhands burned up the winches for a while. To bolster morale, Captain Rees and some of the ship's officers went into the hold and pitched cargo into nets until exhausted. This unloading helped, and we allowed ourselves to enjoy it, but everyone knew it would take those ten men three weeks to discharge the ship.

In the midst of this, a loud cheer rose. The Army cargo security officer had gone ashore and was coming alongside with seventeen Negro stevedores. Our hopes went higher than any shell ever went above Salerno. But they were destined for short lives; the GI stevedores were dead on their feet; and to top this, in twenty minutes after they arrived and started work, a four-hour raid began.

IT was in this raid that the Stukas got the *Warspite*, who had slipped in and had been pounding the beach with her great guns.

The Germans are very clever. They pulled an entirely new one to get their hit. Ordinarily they came swinging and zooming out of the sun all together, in a group. At about a thousand yards they would spread out over the assemblage of ships and drop their bombs. When one was over us, all were over us.

But not so this time. Two came diving from the sun as usual; everyone opened up, following them and shooting at their tails as they sped over the hill. But they were not through. Two more came down right behind them, and everyone shot at their tails. Then two more came, and two more. The raid lasted three times as long as usual, and apparently the attention of all of us was on these Me-109's.

That proved fatal. A high altitude bomber was at work—one of those so high you cannot see him until the sun glints on his wings. Right in the midst of the shooting, with everything aimed at the Messerschmitts, he plopped his bombs on the *Warspite*, who was getting away in a hurry.

There was a great explosion when the bomb burst on the steel monster, but she kept heading to sea. In five

Illustrated by Arthur Harper



minutes she had slowed almost to a stop, and black smoke started boiling from amidships. Fireboats rushed to her aid. En route to her, a British light cruiser—one that had been with us the whole week and whom we affectionately called "Old Blood and Guts"—sped by us under forced draft. Now billowy whitish smoke poured from the battle-wagon. Two more cans broke away to give her protection.

The sight made us sick, and with heavy hearts we watched her crawl slowly out to sea with her screen of cruisers and destroyers. We didn't know it then, but she was knocked out of the war for more than a year.

The alert lasted almost until sundown, and we unloaded little. We knew the planes would come, and could only wonder if they would miss again. They came, and we fought them stubbornly, leadenly.

That was the same night the paratroops came in. We heard later that these fresh troops we saw falling in the moonlight helped save the sad day on the beachhead.

We had advance notice they were coming. It must have been a beautiful sight to see, had our wearied senses been able to appreciate it. They came in great transports to the adjacent airfield, and jumped from a low altitude as plane after plane roared over. They looked like thick pillows wafting down to earth.

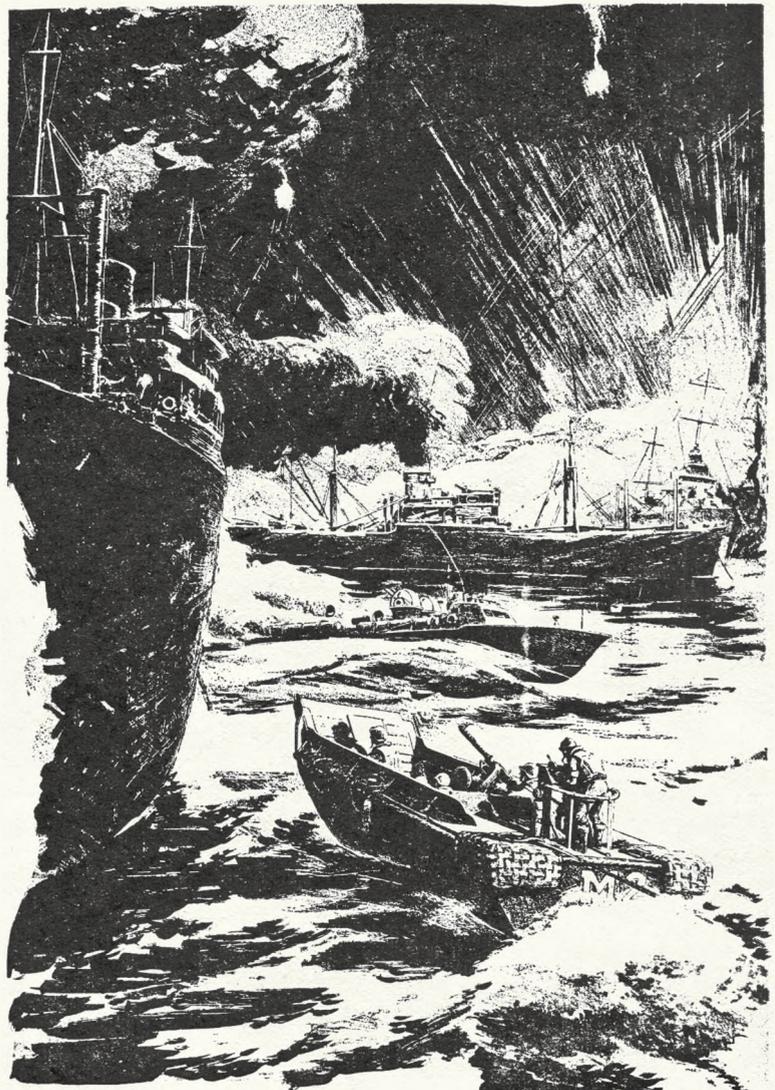
But we were too jaded, too dead on our feet to have much feeling for anything. More GI stevedores had come aboard during the night, but the unloading was not fast. They were worn out; darkness hampered their work; and alerts kept the winches still.

We of the gun-crew lay around our stations; it took much effort to move even a leg. To the discharging—or lack of it—we paid but little attention anymore. Somehow it did not make so much difference to us personally. Somehow nothing made a great deal of difference. We lay like thrown sacks, waiting for the next raid. Sometimes the men talked in low tones of home they never expected to see again.

Strangely, the planes stayed away until eleven the next morning. In a sleepless stupor we watched the unloading, and looked on with dulled emotion while four of our unloaded ships moved out three miles to sea to be away from the bombing center.

Our fighter escort was getting better; but in spite of all our planes, the Germans broke through. We had four raids on the afternoon of this sixth day. We fired sullenly, like automatons; and like puppets the maestro has cast aside, we flopped down beneath the guns after their visits.

We claimed another Jerry on one of these raids. He went up high with a zoom when we hit him, like a shot quail. Then he fell in a clean, fiery



His message was from heaven: "Weigh anchor and be underway at 14:00."

tail-spin. We were not sorry for him. We were not joyous, either.

On the seventh day came the deliverance we no longer expected. It came as suddenly as the Messerschmitts which had just missed us again.

An officer in a passing LCI hailed the bridge.

His message was from heaven:

"Weigh anchor and be underway at 14:00."

The mate and I were standing together on the wing of the bridge. We looked at each other. I must have looked the way he did. We turned and indicated we did not hear.

It came again, this time clearer, between rounds of the *Philadelphia*, who was pounding the shore with six-inchers: "Weigh anchor and be underway at 14:00."

A little hope where there was none is a wonderful thing. Unashamed, many of the men cried and grinned through their tears; faces haggard and dark for days were lighted with hope.

At two minutes before 14:00 our anchor cleared the bottom; at 14:00 sharp we were pulling out.

We moved out three miles with the other ships. All afternoon others came, one at a time; there we waited until two hours before the glaring sun went down.

The Jerries came out of it again as a parting gesture just as our little convoy was forming up to leave. The sun was red and mean and wicked.

AS we moved out—September 17—the Stukas were after the battle-wagon that replaced the *Warspite*, hovering around her like frogs bewitched by fire, dreading to dive into her barrage, but also dreading not to.

Destroyers and corvettes raced about the fringes of the assemblage—more loaded ships had come in—covering the area with blue and black smoke that churned together into a mean cloud. The Me-109's tore out of the sun and moved across this cloud like slivers of lightning. Dull roars of guns and bombs rang in our ears.

The Gulf of Salerno grew dimmer in the distance, fading like a mirage. It simply ceased to be, just as the sun went down.



TAILS UP!

A TWO-HUNDRED-MILE DOG-RACE IN THE FROZEN NORTH DEMANDS STRENGTH AND COURAGE AND—HONESTY.

by JOHN BEAMES

AT a swaying, long-striding trot, heads and tails up, the seven dogs ate up the trail. They had mushed forty miles that morning, and it was not quite noon. A racing carriole slipped along behind them, its runners barely whispering. Young Hale Martin loped after it, his long whiplash rippling at his heels like a snake.

He was on his way to the winter carnival at Prince's Pass, to compete in the great annual dog derby.

He was a long-legged lad of twenty-two, a hundred and fifty pounds of close-knit bone and flat, elastic muscle. He ran with closed mouth, breathing easily through wide nostrils in a big beaked nose. His eyes were half closed against the dazzling glare of the sun on the snow, and only a thread of frosty blue was visible under his lashes.

The trail dipped to a long incline, and Hale hopped on the rear runner.

The dogs lengthened their stride, and the outfit whizzed like a comet down the main street of the frontier town of Prince's Pass.

People halted to watch them go by, and half a hundred dogs of all breeds and sizes set up a bedlam of barking, baying, yelling.

Hale rushed to the head of his train, his whip flicking right and left, for the hackles of every dog had lifted, their wolf fangs were bared, and in their hearts was a wild longing to kill a few dozen of these mongrels for sport.

"Ha over, Boo," he shouted to his lead dog. "Ha over, there!"

Boo obediently swung left, and they passed up a side-street to Shorty Mitchell's house and dog barn.

Shorty was expecting them—he had himself been a famous musher in his day. He was small and homely, but gave Hale a gap-toothed grin under a bristly mustache. His wife stuck her round red face out of the door and

called: "Put them dogs in quick, Hale, and come in for dinner—it's waitin'!"

They tied each dog separately in the barn as a precaution against the little friendly scraps that may convert a fine dog-team into a collection of mangled cripples in five minutes.

Mrs. Mitchell opened a barrage of questions on Hale the moment he entered the house. Despite her fat and her fifty years, she was extraordinarily active, bouncing about the room, filling his plate, laughing and shouting. Hale answered her questions briefly between mouthfuls.

At last he sat back with a grin. "If I eat any more, Auntie Moll," he said, "I'll be that hog fat I can't run."

His uncle proffered tobacco, but the lad shook his head.

Shorty nodded approval. "Smokin' and runnin' dogs don't mix very good," he agreed.

Mrs. Mitchell began washing the dishes, making a great clatter, but her

voice could be heard clearly above it. "Think you're goin' to win again?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said. "But Auntie Moll, I've got to win this race." She looked up sharply. "You say that pretty serious, son."

"I'm serious, all right. I got to win this-here race if I never win another."

"Why's it that bad?"

"Dad," answered Hale shortly. "You know him."

"Oh, that man!" groaned Mrs. Mitchell. "What's he been up to now?"

"Well, all he done was bet the whole outfit I'd win—he didn't have nothin' else to bet."

"He bet the outfit—the whole outfit?"

"Just like that, Auntie, and he says to me: 'All you got to do, boy, is go out and win. It's a cinch.'"

"My lovin' Pete!" ejaculated Mrs. Mitchell. "Where is he now?"

Hale grinned. "Home. He was scared to come to town and face you."

"He better be: I'd talk to him! Crazy Nick, they always called him. I guess he won't never get no sense. Who'd he bet?"

"Charley Critch—the outfit against seven hundred dollars. He didn't have no right to do it. Boo's my dog. The rest of 'em is his. What with the dog sickness and one thing and another, I lost the team I won the race with last year. These-here pups of Dad's is pretty good, but three of 'em don't hardly have the wool out of their coats yet, and none of 'em ever run in a race before."

"PRETTY tough on you," commented Shorty.

"It's not me I'm worryin' about—I'll get along; but it's the family. If Dad loses this outfit, he'll be flat broke, and he's in no shape to start over. The four kids is too young to go out to work, and May's gettin' married in the spring. It puts the whole thing on me."

"Charley Critch," said Mrs. Mitchell thoughtfully. "He's one to win his bets, straight or crooked—mostly crooked. He's runnin' Luke Rourke again this year, him that come in second last time. He's got rid of most of the old dogs he had on his train, and he has three new ones—young and look pretty fast."

"I don't know that my bunch is good enough to beat his last year's team," said Hale glumly. "Who else is runnin'?"

"Nobody what's liable to give you much trouble without you have awful bad luck," said his aunt.

She had raised and run dogs all her life, and knew as much about them as any veteran musher. She went over the other trains and their drivers, and concluded:

"Luke Rourke's the boy you have to beat, him and any dirty scheme Charley Critch has thought up. You'll have to be on the watch."

NEXT morning Hale took his train out for an airing, running up and down the plowed stretch on the river. The other mushers were out exercising too, each man keeping his dogs well away from all other trains, and looking his opponents over with a critical eye.

Charley Critch and his driver Luke Rourke came over when Hale halted. Critch was thin and narrow-shouldered, and his eyebrows came up to a peak above his sharp nose.

He talked in a soft, almost lispng voice.

"Just come over to have a look at my dogs," he said.

"They ain't your dogs," replied Hale shortly.

"No, no, not till after the race," agreed Critch, drawing out the word after. "I want you to take good care of 'em—not run 'em too hard."

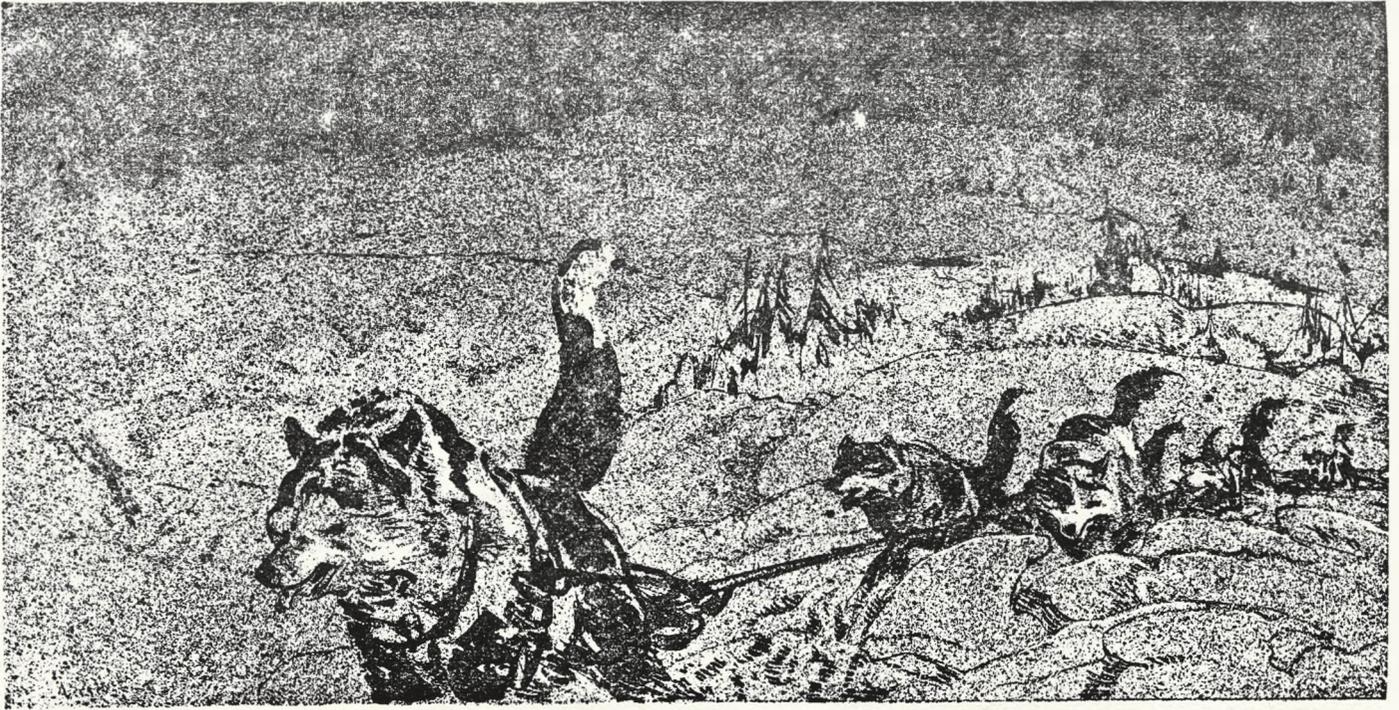
Luke laughed raucously. He had a squat body and a long neck, topped by a face like a tomcat's—flat and puff-jowled. For all his awkward build, he had a well-earned reputation as a first-class driver of racing dogs.

He stared hard at Boo. The dog was of mixed ancestry: the hound strain showed in his black and tan, rather short-haired coat; the husky in his beautiful compact feet, short-coupled body, and direct, fearless gaze out of slightly oblique eyes that had tawny streaks in the dark iris.

The man who drove Boo had to earn and keep his respect; his likes

"Cha-way, Boo!" Hale shouted, and tossed the carriole. Boo dug in his claws.





and dislikes were marked and displayed plainly. Something in Luke antagonized him, and his lip lifted defiantly.

"Don't like me, eh?" mocked Luke and flicked him across the nose.

Boo lunged like a snake, and his fangs ripped through the man's mitten into his finger.

The musher jumped back, and his finger went into his mouth. "I'll beat hell out of him for that when I get him," he said in a muffled voice.

"It was comin' to you," snapped Hale. "Who in hell told you you could put your dirty hands on my dog?"

"He won't be your dog for long," snarled Luke.

Hale took a step toward him, one hand folding into a hard knot. Then he halted and laughed. "Think you'll get my goat, eh? Go on about your business; we'll talk after the race."

But he was gloomy when he returned to Mitchells'. "I could stand to lose the race," he said, "but the way I feel about Boo, after all we been through together, I don't want to part with him to nobody."

"I know," nodded his aunt sympathetically. "But I don't think you'll have to give him up. I wisht I had your dad here—I'd make his hair stand on end about that-there bet!"

MOST of the population of Prince's Pass, including all the dogs, were at the starting-post next morning. The dogs evidently felt that it was some special celebration got up in their honor, and raced madly up and down, barking and quarreling.

Mrs. Mitchell came down with Hale, dressed in breeches and fur parka, and

carrying a heavy whip. "I'm takin' this along," she said, "in case Charley Critch has some scheme to sick a bunch of dogs on your train and get 'em chewed up before the race."

A train of mongrels did nearly blunder into the outfit in a way not beyond suspicion, but Mrs. Mitchell's tongue and whip made them sheer off in a hurry, and what she said to the driver turned his face a bright red.

She quieted and petted the excited, wild-eyed train while the teams lined up, each held in its place by a spiked drag. Then the word was given to get ready, and she retired, leaving Hale with his foot on the drag and his whip coiled in his hand.

The starter's pistol cracked; the crowd shouted; and the mushers swung their whips and yelled: "Cha-way, cha-way."

Boo broke fast, but Luke Rourke, his whip rattling like a machine-gun, cut in ahead. Hale fell in behind. If the man chose to start a two-hundred-mile race as if it were a five-mile dash, that was entirely his own business.

He himself was content with second place for now. He'd keep his train moving fast until he had fought off two or three challengers from behind, and then let the dogs down.

He saw Luke, a mile or so ahead, pull up off the river and plunge into the forest. He looked back and saw that the next train was a half-mile behind. "Easy, Boo, boy," he called. "You got a long trip ahead."

Through the forest and over frozen lakes, the sun bright, the snow not too hard and gritty, the train held on all day. The feet of the dogs made a soft pattering, and the sleigh-runners

hissed softly. Now and then Hale spoke an encouraging word or issued a direction. They galloped on the down grades, and slowed to a walk at every steep incline, but on the level maintained a pace that eats up the miles fast but puts no strain on well-conditioned dogs.

Hale had to think of the three puppies, who would tire soon if pushed too hard. He was on the best of terms with all his dogs, but between him and Boo was perfect understanding. He never used the whip except when one dog snapped at another, for if sleigh dogs get to bickering, a murderous fight may develop in a flash. At long intervals he rested and fed the dogs a specially compounded meal. Racing dogs do not have to get along on the freight husky's one meal a day of frozen whitefish.

HE pulled into Cole's Landing, the end of the first leg of the race, before midnight.

"Hello, Buttsy," he said to the checker who came out to register the train. "How far's Luke ahead?"

Butts, a chubby little man in thick glasses, peered at him in a puzzled way. "It beats me," he said. "You're an hour ahead of your last year's time, but Luke, he's two hours ahead of you."

"Two hours," said Hale incredulously. "His dogs must be run near to death."

"That's the funny part about it," said Butts. "I don't know how any man could get such a scrubby-lookin' outfit eighty miles in the time and have 'em in the shape they was."

It was Hale's turn to look puzzled. "Scrubby-lookin'? Why, he was drivin' seven young, smart-lookin' dogs."



Butts shook his head. "He had seven, all right, but two-three of 'em was old dogs, I'd say. Anyway, he went by two hours ago. You'll have to hustle if you want to catch him."

Pondering gloomily, Hale pulled on a half-mile to get away from the staring, chattering, half-Indian population of the Landing and their vociferous dogs, then camped.

The weather had been normally chilly the day before; but by now one of those sudden thaws that sometimes break a Northern February had set in. A big southwest wind was snoring in the treetops, and the air became almost sticky in its warmth.

When Hale hitched in and pulled on, the dogs soon had their tongues out. He himself opened his shirt to the waist, and tossed his cap into the carriole. To men and dogs who had endured several months of sub-zero temperatures, the heat was oppressive.

It was broad daylight when he pulled into High Reef on the second leg of the triangular course, and the snow was melting fast under a blazing sun. The miners had taken the day off for the great sporting event in their isolated lives, and greeted him with a cheer.

"You're Hale Martin, eh?" said the checker. "Drivin' seven dogs? All seven here? Uh-huh."

"How far's Luke Rourke ahead?" asked Hale.

"Pulled through an hour ago."

"What shape's his dogs in?"

"Appeared to be sufferin' from the heat," answered the checker shortly. "But I ain't supposed to answer questions."

Leaving the mining village, Hale went south through the woods to Wilderness Lake. The going was very

bad, for the snow was turning to slush, and even the light carriole cut down. The dogs panted heavily, and Hale wiped sweat from his brow.

The sun glare on the lake was blinding; the air shimmered, and mirages flickered overhead. Thus Hale found himself steering directly for a wooded islet that hung upside down from the sky. The island vanished, and a train of dogs appeared, moving slowly twenty feet in the air. Hale was busy watching it until his feet sank to the ankles in slush. Water was welling up from a hidden crack and discoloring the snow.

He hunted dryer going and found a strip of glare ice where a lead had frozen over since the last snowfall. This was very slippery, but the dogs picked up speed, and for the first time, he urged them on.

An hour or so later he caught sight of a dog train, but was not sure it was real until he pulled within a few yards and saw that it was Luke and his outfit. The dogs were shambling along wearily, their heads low and their dripping tongues almost touching the ice.

Hale stared and then shouted, "Say, them ain't the dogs you started out with!"

Luke turned on him a face like a spitting tomcat's. "Sure, they are."

"You're lyin', Luke," retorted Hale. "Them's the bunch you had last year. You changed dogs on the trail."

"You're crazy," yelled Luke.

"I'll talk to you when we hit P.P.," said Hale. "Got no time now."

He hustled his snarling train by, and passed off the lake down Wilderness River, running in a deep ravine. The ice here was treacherous at any time, but the violent thaw had made it doubly dangerous. Hale speedily went through and had to pull off and break trail in deep, soft snow and rocks along the shore. The strain soon told on the dogs, particularly on the puppies. Though he frequently changed the moccasins they all wore, sore feet appeared, and first one dog and then another began to carry a foot.

NIGHT came early in the gorge, and with failing light the peril increased. Hale decided to make a long camp; it was unlikely Luke's weary dogs would catch up, and he thought he could afford to take a chance on the other trains. He looked each dog over carefully, fed them and himself, and lay down in the carriole for a nap, Boo curled up beside him. He was wakened somewhere around midnight by a warning growl from the dog. Luke came up. Even in the feeble snowlight, there seemed to be a wonderful change in his train. The dogs were moving fast, heads and tails up.

Luke cracked his whip and mocked in a loud voice, "See you in P.P.," as he slid by.

Hale sprang up and hitched in. "Boys, we got to catch that swipe," he said to the dogs. "Cha-way, Boo! Mush, puppies, mush!"

The night was overcast and the gorge a strange place of confusing ice-glints and wavering shadows. The only definite outlines were the inky black streaks that showed where the water had broken through the ice. These could be steered clear of, but there was no certainty of sound footing anywhere.

Boo's intelligence and experience were priceless. He ran with his head down, literally smelling out the trail. Again and again he balked at bad spots and led the way to safer ice.

THE pursuit went on all night. Now and then Luke's voice, or the defiant yelling of one of his dogs, could be heard. Then Hale would halt his train. There was no sense, as things were, in pushing ahead and having to break trail himself. It was far better for Luke to break through and so leave a danger signal behind.

The warm wind still roared overhead, and the temperature remained high. The river, swollen by melted snow, rose steadily, running across the old ice. The dogs had often to paddle in two or three inches of water.

At daybreak they came to a ridge of broken ice several feet high, extending from bank to bank. Luke was trying to make a way over the barrier, swinging an ax and cursing.

Hale's eyes widened. "Well, I'll be damned," he ejaculated. "Them's the bunch you pulled out of P.P. with. Where's the outfit you was drivin' yesterday?"

"You're nuts," snarled Luke. "I've drove these right through, never no others."

"The only worse liar than you in the world was hung awhile back for horse-stealin'," retorted Hale. "You switched dogs some place goin' out, and after I passed you yesterday you must've switched back. Somebody must have brought your own train across, so they was fresh when you picked 'em up again. That's the way of it, eh? These dogs never went to Cole's Landin' nor to High Reef."

"You're lyin', and you can't prove it," shouted Luke, coming back a step, his ax held threateningly.

"Start somethin'," warned Hale, "and I'll wrap this whip around your neck. You pulled a crooked one, but you wasn't quite slick enough. This'll lose you the race."

"Naw, it won't," answered Luke. "If you start tellin' any such of a yarn around P.P., nobody won't believe you. And anyway, even supposin' I did, which I didn't, it wouldn't be against the rules. All the rules says is I got to bring back the dogs I started out with, and I'm doin' just that."

The dogs strained forward, scrabbling with their paws. Luke bawled despairingly, "Help, help!"

"There's a rule against switchin' dogs on the trail," maintained Hale. "I bet there is."

Luke shook his head with a malicious grin. "We looked it up. There ain't a word about that."

"Well, there ought to be."

"Maybe, but I guess they didn't think of that one. Mind you, I ain't admittin' I done no such a thing; but if I did, there wouldn't be nothin' against it. If I go back with the same dogs what I started out with, nobody can't say a thing."

He returned to the task of getting his dogs over the ice barrier. Beyond was a stretch of undisturbed ice, and he went away with a rush and a derisive yell. Hale's tired dogs could not keep up.

The ice did not remain sound for any distance, and they dragged along, as often in water as out of it. It was obvious that no records would be broken in this race. In fact, there was a growing possibility that no one would finish.

A LITTLE lower down, the trail left the river to pass overland to Prince's Pass, but they were on the wrong side of the stream. Unless they could somehow cross, they might have to pull on down for miles and then back-track to the trail.

Hale came in sight of Luke trying to make a crossing, dragging his unwilling lead dog by the collar. Man and dog broke through together, and had to scramble back.

Farther on, Luke pulled around a tongue of ice that jutted out from the bank, the open main channel on one side and a slowly curling eddy on the other. Hale halted and looked the situation over.

He cut himself a pole of driftwood and went out on the tongue. It appeared wide and thick enough to support the weight of his outfit. He brought his train out upon it, unhitched all the dogs but Boo and made them lie down.

Then he chopped the pole loose from its shore anchor. It swung out into the current, Hale pushing hard on his pole. Once it hung up and tilted dangerously. Hale got it off after a struggle, but a piece broke away, and the pan sank so low that water washed over it now and then.

The dogs whined and whimpered, and only Hale's voice and whip kept them from jumping overboard and trying to swim to land. Boo alone sat stolidly on his haunches, one slant eye cocked on his master.



They drifted down on Luke, who was out probing a frail-looking ice bridge. He yelled at Hale: "Hey, that's breakin' the rules. You ain't supposed to ride no ice."

"A hell of a lot you care for rules," retorted Hale. "I got to get across some way, and if the ice won't stay put, I got to float with it, ain't I?"

His pan bumped into the ice bridge, breaking it up, while Luke raced for safety.

The pan and its accompanying field of fragments and slush came almost to a standstill, while Hale strove with all his might to push over to the farther bank. His pole caught in a hole, and the half-rotten wood snapped, leaving him with a piece a few feet long.

He was still six feet from shore when the pan grounded and would not budge. Slush ice began to crowd over it, and the outfit was in danger of being washed overboard.

"Steady, Boo, boy, steady," said Hale, lifting the dog in his arms. He braced his feet and threw. Boo landed on the bank, and dug in his claws.

Hale lifted the carriole. "Cha-way, Boo!" he shouted, and tossed it shoreward. Boo raced away until the main trace tightened, then dropped flat on his belly and hung again to keep the carriole from slipping back into the water.

One by one, Hale flung the other dogs ashore and then leaped himself. He landed, slipped back to his waist in water, and clawed his way up the ice blocks. He was at least on the

right side of the river, but the carriole had upset, and his cap, parka, robe and odds and ends of gear had disappeared under the slush.

He turned to wave to the staring Luke, and shout: "Say, can you toss me over some matches? Mine was in my grub-box, and it's in the ditch."

Luke shook his head sullenly. "You broke the rules," he said. "You had it comin' to you. I got my own business to tend to." He went back to his own train.

All Hale could do was take off his dripping clothes and wring as much water as he could out of them. He was blue-lipped and shivering violently by the time he had pulled the clammy garments on again.

HE hitched in and slowly and painfully picked his way through and among soft snow, rocks and jumbled ice blocks. Luke was out ahead of him on the other side, and he had glimpses of the man testing the ice here and there, and pulling on again.

At last Luke seemed to decide he had to take a chance. The water at that point was covered with discolored ice that appeared fairly solid. Standing on the rear runners of his carriole, he cracked his whip and yelled.

The dogs broke into a gallop, and went flying across the ice. The leader had almost reached the shore when the carriole went through, throwing all the dogs back on their haunches with a jerk. They strained forward, scrabbling with their paws.

Illustrated by John Costigan, N. A.



Luke, up to his armpits in water, bawled despairingly, "Help, help!"

Hale ran over and caught the lead dog by the collar. He called Boo over and ordered the dogs to lie down. Fumbling with one hand, he loosed the main trace from the carriage, passed it back behind Luke's leader, and made fast to the main trace there.

"Howk on her, Boo," he shouted. "Cha-way!"

With both trains laying into their collars and tugging, Luke and his carriage were dragged up to safety.

"Well, you're over, anyway," said Hale, beginning calmly to unhitch his own dogs.

"Yes," grumbled Luke, "but my carriage is all shot to hell—both runners is busted—and I lost all my stuff. Damn Charley Critch and his smart ideas."

"He put you up to switchin' dogs, eh?" asked Hale.

"Who in hell else? Them's his dogs, ain't they? I'm just drivin' for him. He said the whole thing would be a pipe. I dropped the dogs off at Snake Portage, and picked up my old team. Jean Poireau, the breed, took 'em across to the south end of Wilderness Lake, and they was waitin' for me when I got there. Only the thaw crabbed the works. I'd have won easy and nobody any wiser, if them old dogs hadn't played out in the heat and you caught up with me."

"Pretty smooth scheme, all right," agreed Hale. "What was you goin' to get out of it?"

"Oh, he promised me your dogs."

"Damn' generous, givin' away what don't belong to him," commented Hale. "Well, I got to be goin'."

Luke was fumbling in his pockets, his teeth chattering. He brought out a pulpy box of matches and swore. "Say, gimme a match before you go," he begged. "I'll freeze to death if I don't light a fire and dry off."

Hale grinned. "Maybe you don't remember you wouldn't toss me no matches when mine went in the river. They're still there. It's still thawin', and you won't freeze if you run hard enough. So long."

THE sun was low on the horizon when Hale and his exhausted, limping dogs jogged slowly up to the winning post in the center of a yelling crowd.

Mrs. Mitchell was there to give him a resounding kiss and another to Boo. "I thought you'd do it," she said.

A hairy, excited little man suddenly shot out of the crowd. "Whee, whoopee, hi-i-i!" he yelled. "We done it, we done it, we done it! Didn't I tell you, boy?"

Hale looked at him with a wry smile.

"You come damned close to losin' the whole outfit," he said. "If you wasn't my own dad, I'd—"

"Crazy Nick," said Mrs. Mitchell grimly. "Come on over to the house. I got things to say to you."

The elder Martin cringed a little, but recovered quickly. "I win seven hundred dollars from Charley Critch," he shouted. "Don't that prove I was right? Come on, Hale, let's go see him and get that money."

But Critch had slipped away, and Prince's Pass saw him no more. Luke Rourke limped in three hours later with his broken carriage.

Whale Below!

Clinging far out on the crojick yard, our sailor-writer saw a huge gray shape rise from the stormy water below—and recalled the tradition that a whale's spout would blind a man.

by BILL ADAMS

I WAS telling a couple of kids who dropped into my cabin to pay me a visit last evening, as many kids do, of my first experience with a whale.

I was on my first voyage. The ship was some ten days out, rolling along under full sail—her yards square, the wind dead aft. With a wind dead aft a ship usually rolls considerably, even in a very moderate sea; in a gale from dead aft she rolls very heavily indeed.

I was sent aloft to the starboard crojick yardarm (crossjack is the full

spelling; but the abbreviation is always used by sailors). The crojick is the lower yard on the mizzenmast, corresponding to the main yard on the mainmast. I do not remember for just what purpose I was sent: probably to tidy up some loose rope's end—the head earring, perhaps. I was not yet used by any means to going aloft; I did not enjoy so doing—in fact, it scared me stiff. I was given to shivering and shaking, when high up. So I shivered and shook as I went up the lower rigging. I did so the more when

I stepped from the rigging out onto the footrope of the crojick yard.

The farther I went out along the footrope toward the yardarm, the more I shivered and shook; also, the more I felt the rolling of the ship.

It would have been very nice—very, very nice—to have been back at home sitting by the open fire, eating a big red apple. But whereas a fellow who takes up some profession ashore can quit if he does not like it, a sailor cannot—not at any rate until the ship reaches a port. Moreover, whereas a landsman can quit a job without ignominy, a young sea apprentice cannot—I should say *could* not, seeing that young sea apprentices no longer are. I did not think about these matters while on my way out to the crojick yard. I was much too busy shivering and shaking, far too scared, to think of anything except holding on tight.

I WAS six feet three when I went to sea, at eighteen. A fellow of that length is, one might almost say, out of place aloft even if he is not scared. The footropes are not slung with any consideration for a fellow with very long legs. They are too close up to the yard, and the farther out one goes toward the yardarm (which is the extreme end of the yard) the closer to the yard they are, because they are fastened to the yardarm. Thus, the farther I went, the more scary I became and the more afraid of falling.

With the yards square, the yardarms are well out beyond the bulwarks and directly above the sea. The lower yards, being a good deal longer than those above, protrude a very considerable distance over the sea. And of course, as the ship rolls, they dip and lift. What with the continual lifting and dipping, and the small space into which he can fit his long legs, a scared "new chum" of six feet three has what one might reasonably refer to as "one hell of a time" getting out to the lower yardarm.

You will notice that I did not fall from the crojick yard. I am still here. But I came almighty close to so doing! Having reached it, I began to busy myself with the job in hand. My heart was in my mouth. I was no longer shivering or shaking, for I had managed to attain the yardarm without falling. That was some consolation. But my heart was in my mouth, and it was a very large heart. What I mean is, I was still scared stiff. And of course, in a very short time, when my job was done I was going to have to make my way back to the mast. The fates seemed to be against me. I ought, I suppose, to have remained ashore, where I could have sat by the open fire and eaten big red apples.

I can remember that morning just as vividly as though it had been but yesterday. I can see the cold gray

rollers of the Western ocean (which you fellows ashore speak of as the North Atlantic), and can actually feel the chill wind blowing up under my dungaree jumper. I can hear the murmur of the sea along the ship's sides, can see the bow wash breaking away as she drives through the water.

Some sixty feet below me is that cold gray water. When the ship rolls to port and the yardarm lifts, the water is still farther below me. When she rolls to starboard and dips, the water is closer to me. It has, or it seems to have, something of a threatening look: as though it disliked me and would take pleasure in having me fall into it. That is a very odd thing about the sea. It actually can appear to want to dispose of a fellow. It can be devilish, at times. And to a kid on his first voyage, not yet at all used to going aloft, it can look most horribly devilish.

How alone I did feel! And yet, always, no matter how alone one felt, or how scared, one was conscious, astonishingly conscious, of the terrific lure of the sea! One might compare the sea to a very beautiful and very evil-hearted woman. Or one might compare it to a trap cleverly baited with an alluring bait wherewith to snare forever a guileless youngster in whose soul was a touch of the romantic.

So there was I, out at the yardarm, attending to the job in hand.

And, all of a sudden, so suddenly that— Ah, how do I tell of it?

Well, the bottom of the ocean rose—I think that was my first thought. At the exact moment in which the crojick yardarm dipped down toward the cold gray water, the bottom of the ocean arose to meet it! The thing was instantaneous. The thought that this was ocean's bottom rising came, then went, all in one tiny tick.

It was a long, rounded, pale gray shape, smooth as rubber, glistening; and from near its front end there arose into the air a tall jet of spray, with a long low sibilant sound.

FORTUNATELY for me, I was well back from its front end; for that jet rose to such a height that, had I been directly above it, it must, as the crojick yardarm dipped, have sprayed my face.

It was the jet that made me realize a whale had risen to blow right beneath me. And how it happened that I did not fall onto the whale's great glistening gray back is still a mystery to me.

I think I did start to fall, but checked myself in the nick of time. He was enormous: so enormous that he could not have been a sperm—the sperm seldom attains a greater length than sixty-five feet. He remains clearly photographed in my mind, and must have been fully ninety feet long.

Doubtless he was a sulphur-bottom whale. I can still see his vast bulk, beside the ship: so I am able to make a fair estimate of his length. Possibly he was ninety feet long. In him were no doubt a hundred and fifty barrels of valuable oil, for as many as a hundred and sixty have been taken from one of his kind.

But I did not at the time think about any such matters. Nor did I know then that I might have been blinded had he risen a little farther astern, so that his jet would have struck my face. More than one old whaling-man has assured me that for a fellow to be struck in the face by a whale's jet causes blindness.

He did not remain at the surface for more than a moment. He sank, in a peaceful sort of fashion, not in the least alarmed by the close proximity of the ship. He sank, vanished, was gone. Another moment or so, and my job was done.

THE odd thing is that all my shivering and shaking was also gone. Though I was terrified at the moment he rose, his departure left me with a feeling of intense excitement and delight. I had no trouble at all making my way back along the footrope to the mast. To go down the rigging was simple.

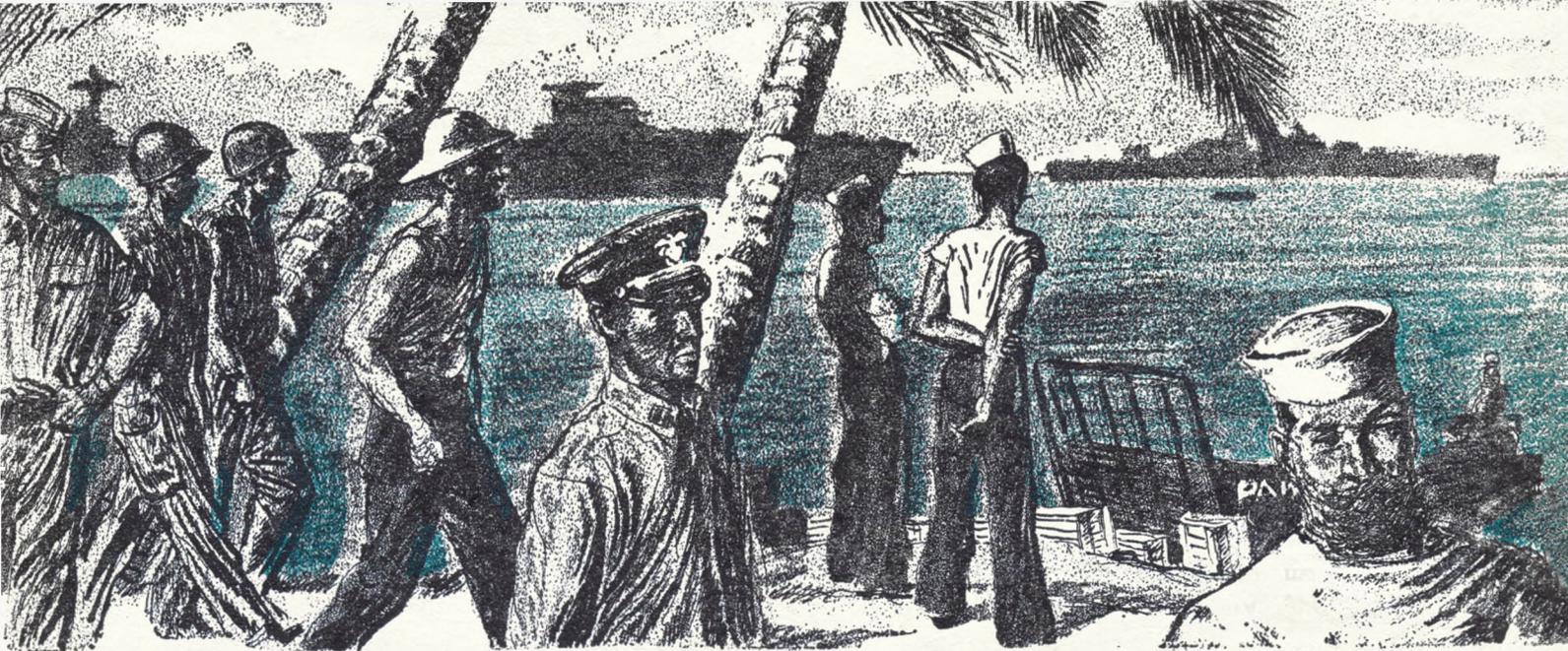
Not a man aboard, save I, had seen the whale. The man at the wheel was too busy watching his compass—for when a ship is running before a following wind she is far harder to hold on her course than when the wind is abeam, before the beam, or even on the quarter. The mate was forward under the forecandle head with all the watch, the carpenter busy in his shop, the sailmaker sewing a sail on the fore hatch, the cook in his galley. The Old Man—the skipper—was below.

I wonder why I did not tell anyone about that whale? I kept it to myself. Probably had I spoken of it they would have informed me that I was a liar, or that I had dreamed, or imagined it. Not a soul aboard ever knew how scared I was aloft. Not for anything would I have had anyone know. That was my own very special secret, always, till my horror of height was conquered at last. I think that I kept the knowledge of my whale to myself because I looked upon him as something I did not care to share—because he had at first so terrified me—just for an instant.

At any rate, I have a notion that I am the one and only man who has looked down upon a whale from directly above him. Good old whale! I suppose he long ago is dead; perhaps by harpoon and lance, perhaps by old age. I hope it was by old age, for he remains a treasured memory of my youth.



How it happened that I did not fall onto the whale's great glistening back is still a mystery to me.



The Battle for Leyte

SALLY DARLING:

Just came down from a fairly dull 12-16, and since I'm not on again till the 4-8, maybe I can make this a real letter for a change. I'm writing this in the wardroom, because George has his recognition stuff spread all over my bunk for inventory or something; and if the table here doesn't come loose on some overenthusiastic roll to port (as it does on occasions) and land in my lap, I'll manage all right until the evening's bridge game gets under way.

An AINav has just come out relaxing the censorship rules on anything over a month old; so let me tell you about a little run-in we had with the Japs last fall, not long after that stalwart son of ours was born—before I knew about it, in fact.

When we left Pearl last August, we headed south at a leisurely pace and by devious ways finally wound up at Manus, in the Admiralties—a hot, wet little island, mostly jungle and rusting beer-cans. We operated out of there for a while, going through tactical maneuvers with a bunch of CVE's (small carriers) until somebody decided that we knew the job all right. Then we shoved off for Morotai. The landing there was the first real operation we took part in; but from where we sat, all tense and expectant at first, but soon enough all limp and bored, it was just another shakedown cruise—except that we got more sleep. So presently back we went to Manus and lay at anchor and discovered a new officers' club—one with a door elabo-

ately labeled "Women" painted on one wall, and some rum to supplement the waxy-tasting beer.

Little by little the harbor filled up with heavy stuff: battle-wagons, cruisers and carriers (big ones); and then one day the word got around ashore that we were going to invade the Philippines pretty soon—a couple of months earlier than scheduled. That evening the old man told us to get our departments ready for sea. Three days later we got under way.

And this time when we pulled out of Manus, everybody was pretty sure that we were finally due to see some action. After four months of waiting, the idea wasn't unwelcome—particularly to men who'd never been shot at, and that included most of us. The run up was uneventful, and we took our position east of Samar Island on D minus four, the northernmost of three almost identical groups of baby flat-tops on hand to soften up the beachheads and supply air cover for our troops until Army planes could use the strips inland. Our unit was made up of six CVE's, with a seven-ship screen—three cans and four of us 5"-class DE's. Enough to handle any subs that might happen along, probably, and to put up a fair amount of AA, if need be. Not a lot, you understand, but some. We weren't supposed to run into anything tougher.

That first morning we were all naturally pretty much on edge: we really expected some sort of trouble—enemy planes at least. But our carriers launched their strikes without inter-

ference. There wasn't a sign of a Jap anywhere, though we knew there were plenty of them on Leyte, a bare fifty miles southwest of us. It was ludicrously anticlimatic. Somehow we felt cheated.

The days passed, and still nothing happened to disturb the routine of steaming up and down our patrol area, launching planes before dawn and three or four times during the day, standing watches, going to General Quarters morning and evening as a routine precaution, wondering why the Japs didn't come out and fight.

D-day, H-hour rolled around. We knew our assault troops were hitting the beaches on Leyte. General Mac was returning. But nobody seemed to know or care about us. The torpedo planes and fighters flew their strikes and came back to roost, to re-arm and take off again. They at least were seeing action. Less than thirty miles away, we on the escorts didn't even hear about it. You probably knew more about what was going on than we did. I'm sure you couldn't have felt more remote from the fighting. So the big day came—and went; and beyond our normal GQ's, we didn't even have an alert. Some war!

A COUPLE of days later, on October 21st, I came down to the wardroom after an uneventful 16-2000 watch and found Jack (still Exec then, of course) and some of the others clustered around a large-scale chart of the area, picking out the positions of two Jap task forces that our subs had reported



Gulf

A LETTER FROM A DE OFFICER TO HIS WIFE, TELLING OF HIS LITTLE SHIP'S BIG SHARE IN A GREAT BATTLE—THE RAYMOND'S SUCCESSFUL CLOSE-RANGE ATTACK ON A JAPANESE CRUISER.

by ROBERT L. JOHNSON, JR.

in the vicinity, moving in from the southwest. We knew our Seventh Fleet had heavy stuff guarding the approaches down there, so we probably wouldn't see anything ourselves, but at least it did look as if the Japs were finally going to bring their navy into the fight. The thought gave us a pleasant tingle of vicarious excitement, and I stayed and speculated with the others for a while before hitting the sack.

THE bridge messenger woke me for my watch at 0330 the next morning and I climbed out, covered with sleep, threw some water in my face, dressed in the dark, and trailing a life-belt in one hand, groped my way up to the wardroom for coffee. Presently Doug and Bill joined me there in the murky red light and we decided that I'd stand this one in the coding-room, since my foot was still pretty sore after that accident.

Sunrise was about six o'clock; so at 0530 Doug passed the word from the bridge, "Now all hands. . . man your battle stations for morning alert," pausing in the middle the way he always does. I left my decoding and went topside with the customary feeling of resigned boredom. Up there in the pre-dawn dark the usual morning launchings were in progress. We could look across and see the red truck lights of the carriers involved winking vaguely, and the white and amber lights on the escorts giving the pilots their bearings. We'd hear the sputter and then the roar of each plane as

it left the flight deck, and the blue-white flame of its exhaust would flicker briefly before its wing-tip lights blinked out and it was off for the beaches with a cargo of light bombs and fifty-caliber machine-gun slugs. Everything went like clockwork.

At six a watery sun came up through the uninspiring gray overcast, showing the formation to our starboard, with the screen in an interrupted circle around the carriers. Samar showed indistinctly to the southwest. Intermittent squalls hung about, trailing heavily from the clouds. At about six-thirty we secured from GQ and set the normal war cruising-watch. It looked like just another day.

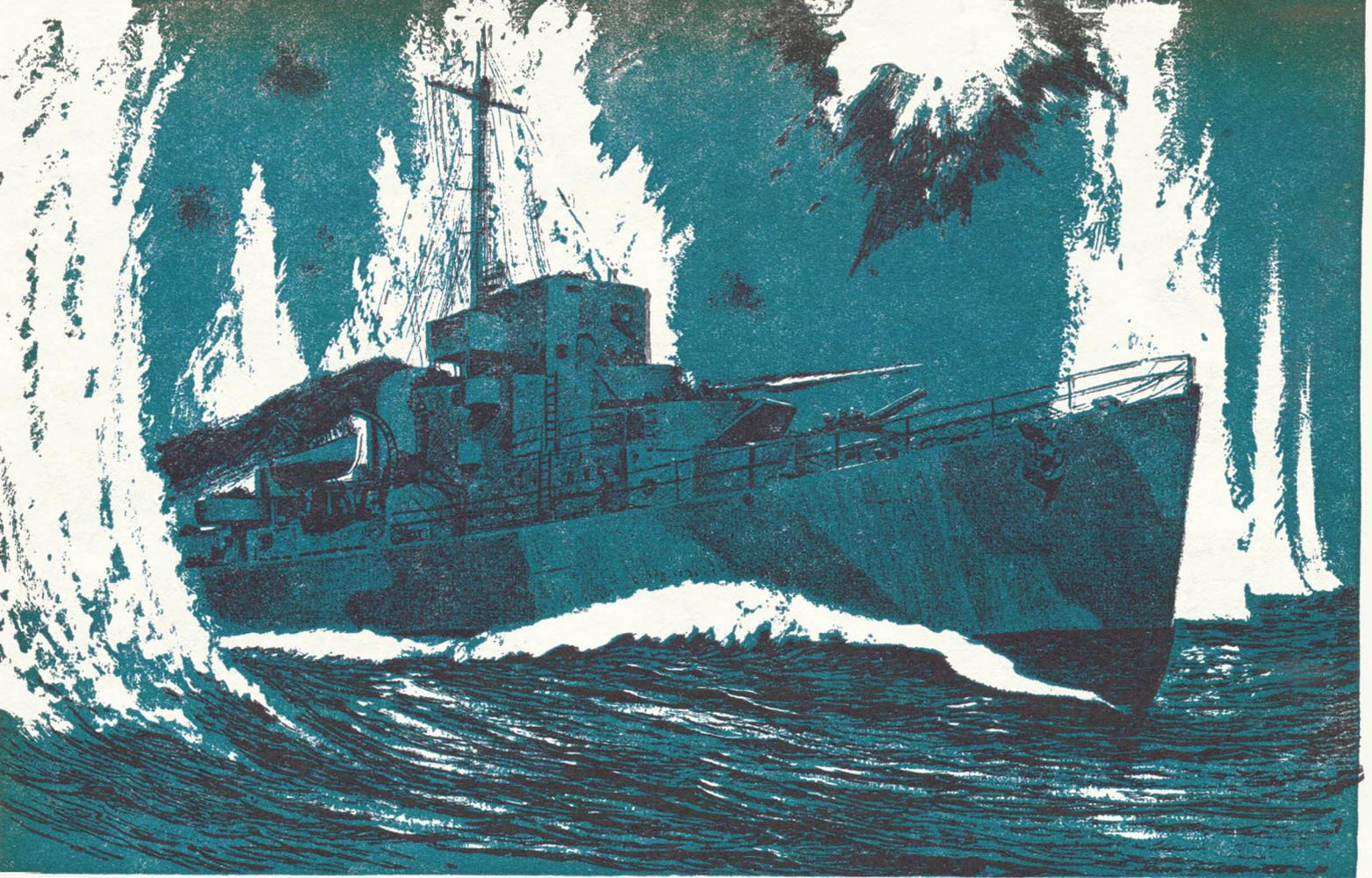
On my way back down to the coding-room, Dick called my attention to a funny thing. Off to port, in the far distance, was something that might have been AA fire—except that it could not be, because we knew there wasn't another outfit that close to us. Still, I showed it to the Captain, wondering whether he'd bring us back to GQ in an excess of caution; but it faded away shortly and nothing more was said about it. Instead, he came into the coding-room with me and looked over a long secret dispatch that I'd almost finished breaking. Then he went out; and I started in on it again with only a line or two to go, glad that the watch was almost over.

Almost immediately the loud-speaker outside started to crackle. There was a sort of breathless pause; then the old man's voice came over all in a rush: "A Jap force of four battleships, six

cruisers and ten destroyers has been reported twenty miles astern of us, heading this way." He had hardly stopped before the strident, impatient clanging of the general alarm started feet pounding outside. I felt suddenly as if someone had kicked me in the stomach, and my heart was pounding in my throat as I typed out two more words, to see if I still could. Burns, the radioman, stuck his head in the door and said: "GQ, Mr. Johnson." I said, "Thanks," and picked up my life-belt. As I started for the door, the Captain's voice came over again, with no hesitation this time: "We're under fire."

IN about three seconds I was up the ladder and on the bridge, buckling my belt around me, picking up a battle helmet. The Captain looked anxious, a little harassed. Talkers were putting on their telephone headsets. I looked around quickly for the enemy but couldn't see them. The horizon was indistinct, and it had evidently been raining. There was no wind to speak of, and the sea was dead flat.

Then all at once I saw a salvo land over on the other side of the formation, a neat little row of geysers like poplar trees along a French country road. But no sound of their impact reached us; everything was very quiet. Stan stopped talking to his gun-crews long enough to remark that they looked like fourteen- or sixteen-inch stuff; and from the tone of his ex-professor's voice, he might have been remarking on the weather. As he



Time and again, we're bracketed—one salvo short, the next over. Our world is full of noise and tumult.

spoke, another line of tall splashes materialized and collapsed; then another—and another. I stopped counting.

Soon the salvos began coming closer, landing with a sudden, oddly quiet *thwuck*, like a very short roll on a muffled drum. They weren't exploding on impact, which meant they were armor-piercing—not that there was any armor to pierce in our outfit! So far, they weren't hitting anybody, just feeling out the range; but it was only a matter of time.

The Admiral's voice rasped over the TBS voice radio, telling us to "make smoke." We called the engine-room to give us stack smoke, and the chemical generators on our fantail began to trail dense white clouds astern. In another minute all the ships were making smoke, the escorts cutting in and out, to put it between the enemy and ourselves.

All this happened much faster than I tell it. At the same time we'd gone to flank speed, racing to reorient the screen after the carriers had wheeled around into the wind to get their planes off those precarious flight decks and into the air. It's a mad scramble, planes clawing their way out helter-skelter, and no time to rearm with torpedoes. The few that are armed carry small fragmentation bombs or depth charges, plus their guns; many, just back from the beaches, aren't armed at all. Too late now; the

launching course is taking us straight at the Japs.

We all keep sweeping the vague horizon with our glasses, and finally I make out a battleship hull-down in the distance. George gets a quick look at it, but it disappears in the mist and rain and smoke before he can identify it.

SUDDENLY, without warning, the quiet is blasted by a crashing roar from ahead. The destroyer on our starboard bow has a target off on the formation's port quarter, and has opened fire with her after battery, shooting over us at about maximum five-inch range. With that maddening calm of his, Stan trains our guns around and asks the Captain's permission to open fire. In no time all the escorts have taken up the refrain, and the air is alive with the crash of our guns. Most of the time we can bring even our forward gun to bear, and trained aft, it throws waves of deafening heat back onto the bridge, sprays us with particles of smoldering cork. Beneath our feet, the ship jumps to the recoil of each salvo.

Further reports of the enemy have brought the cruiser estimate up to seven or eight—some heavy, some light; and we plot them as coming in at about thirty-five knots. Eighteen is the best our unit can make, though we DE's are doing almost twenty-five,

and the cans, of course, better than that. Still, we have to stick to the carriers. We're all pretty scared, I guess. None of us see any way out of this spot. It's a foregone conclusion that they'll sink every one of us inside twenty minutes.

Their salvos are coming faster now, and landing closer. A couple of heavy cruisers have started up each flank, and their eight-inch guns are rapid-firing. Those diabolically neat little rows of white water are springing up all through the formation. They're still about five hundred yards short of us, but coming closer to the flat-tops. The Japs are using dye-loaded shells that burst green and red and milky white on impact, each ship using a distinguishing color, so they'll know which bursts are whose and can correct their aim. We're cutting for land, the formation tacking along in shallow reaches, to spoil the enemy's fire-control problem, individual ships maneuvering at will within the general pattern—chasing salvos, firing over our shoulders. It's a wild game of trying to outguess the other guy.

The *Raymond's* making more speed than I'd thought possible, twisting, turning, using full rudder all the time, weaving a tangled trail of black and white smoke, firing continuously, and still keeping more or less on our station. But for all our efforts, the Jap shells are coming nearer each time.

Again and again he'll walk salvoes right up to us and then, just when the next one is due to hit us squarely, he'll shift targets for no apparent reason. Then it happens: one of the flat-tops is hit, the *Gambier Bay*.

The bridge speaker crackles again. Admiral Sprague orders his "big boys" (destroyers, and not very big when you're thinking in terms of cruisers and battle-wagons) to form for a torpedo attack—"little boys" to stand by for a second attack. And that, by all that's awful, means us! The picture of a DE making a run on a battleship or even a cruiser is really rather terrible—running in under eight-, fourteen- and sixteen-inch guns with no armor and not enough speed. But there's not much time to worry.

THE destroyers pull out of formation. One cuts across our bow, knifing through the water on her way in, black smoke streaming from her stacks, forward guns blazing. No one on our bridge says anything, but we're cheering her in our hearts. It looks like plain suicide, even for a can—a gallant, futile, foredoomed gesture. But: "Give 'em hell!"

Then it's our turn. We cut back through our own smoke, heading for the nearest cruiser. Number Two gun is masked now, but Number One keeps pounding. George and I look at each other, smile and shrug. The smile says, "So long, fella;" the shrug says, "It can't be helped." (It's queer how quickly you accept the idea of dying, though I thought about you, darling, and wanted very much to live.)

Meanwhile the range is closing fast. Suddenly there's a splintering, tearing crack overhead, like a big tree abruptly split in two. It's an air burst. They're trying to clear our decks and bridge with shrapnel. Salvoes are hitting close around us now, too. Still we keep going.

We train our tubes out to starboard and wait for the range to get down to ten thousand yards. More AA shells are ripping apart overhead, spraying the forecastle with chunks of twisted steel. There's a kind of screaming whistle, and a salvo lands close astern. That's bad. Up to now he's overestimated our speed, but now he's reaching out. Another salvo splashes abeam to port, perhaps a hundred yards out—too close. Another rips the water to starboard: we're bracketed. The cruiser ahead seems huge and close; actually it's still just a little too far for a decent chance.

But our patch of water's getting awfully hot. Maybe better fire those fish while we still can, even at long range. A salvo lands ahead of us and to starboard. It's unbelievable that we haven't been hit a dozen times. The skipper looks around quickly. Nobody astern of us to port. To the

talker: "Stand by torpedoes." Then, "Left full rudder." The ship heels over sharply as we turn to unmask our tubes, then straightens up. "Fire when ready." *Bang—swish.* Twice, three times. I see them hit the water clean and straight and hot. We continue our turn and double back on our wake. Number Two gun takes up where Number One left off, hammering away at the Jap as we twist and turn, dodging salvoes, trying to out-guess the cruiser's guns. We keep looking back at her, to see whether any of our fish get home, but we can't tell. Our own smoke's too thick.

So we rejoin the formation. Somehow, miraculously, we've made our run, fired our fish, and come back. We've steamed into the enemy's guns, and we're still afloat. We begin to hope again. If only our heavy stuff will come up in time! Where in God's name are they? Where's Halsey? He *must* be on his way, just over the horizon, maybe. If we can just hold out for another half-hour!

Illustrated by John McDermott



I looked around quickly for the enemy but couldn't see them.

It's 0830 now. We've been under fire for an hour and a half, and the flat seas are still torn with Jap salvoes. An hour and a half is a long time of hell—a hell of a long time. The gun-crews are splendid, but tired. Two men have passed out from exhaustion in the forward handling-room. Those shells are heavy, and the guns have been eating them fast. The repair parties pitch in and keep the ammunition coming. Suddenly the port lookout points wildly and shouts: "Torpedo!"

Sure enough, it's right there, coming straight at our port bow, tearing along just below the surface, broaching viciously, spraying water as it breaks the surface. "Left full rudder . . . shift your rudder. Steady." It passes close across our bow, foaming, silent, deadly. Almost instantly the cry comes again: "Torpedo!" This one races down our port side and passes clear astern. Another, deeper, passes beneath our screws. We hold our breath and strain our eyes, but no more follow.

Looking around, I can see only five flat-tops. The *Gambier Bay* has been left behind, crippled. And there are only four escorts in sight—one can, three DE's. No one has seen the *Johnston*, the *Hoel* or the *Roberts* since our torpedo attack. We reform what's left of the screen around the remaining CVE's and continue our limping dash for Samar.

The Japs are still closing in. Their flanking forces are nearly abeam now, pinching tighter around us. And the enemy's fire is beginning to tell. Time and again one ship or another shudders under the impact of a hit. One of the DE's takes a shell forward. A flat-top rocks back under a raking salvo. The only remaining can is hit below the waterline. One by one, all are hit except the *Butler* and ourselves. The leading cruiser on our side of the formation is coming in at a sharper angle now, for the kill. The range goes down to twelve thousand. Every time she fires, I want instinctively to duck. And she's firing steadily, the *thwuck* of her salvoes a monotonous counterpoint to the crash of our guns. Her fire is murderous. Soon all her salvoes will be hitting. It looks pretty bad.

Then comes the order: "Small boys on port quarter, intercept leading cruiser." We don't have to look to know that we're the only "small boy" in that position. Below in the radar plotting-room, Jack acknowledges: "Wilco. Out." Without batting an eye, the Captain leans forward to the voice tube. "Left standard rudder." About then the idea starts to penetrate—we've been ordered to intercept a heavy cruiser!

We come to a collision course, keeping her a little on our port bow, clos-

Mardi

ing to engage at point-blank range. Seeing our maneuver, she concentrates her fire on us, and the sea around us churns and leaps under her shells. The range is down to ten thousand. This is where we turned away last time; but not now—we stick to our course.

Through my glasses I can see the big Rising Sun flag at his forepeak. And I can see our salvoes landing around him, hitting in his superstructure. Our firing is beautiful. But five-inch shells won't sink a cruiser. There's a sudden, split-second whine. "Hit the deck." A wall of water hides our target momentarily as the salvo lands just short. We twist and turn but keep going. Range, nine thousand yards.

Time and again we're bracketed—one salvo short, the next over. Our world is full of noise and tumult, angry white water and pounding guns. AA bursts rip open overhead, spattering the sea around us, tearing our eardrums with their splintering crack. We're still pounding in, the decks quivering to the overload on the shafts, and bucking under the steady fire of our forward gun. We're still putting shells in his upper works too, hurting him some. The range is down to eight thousand!

Nothing is important any more except the flame of the cruiser's guns and the answering roar of our own, the scream of shells passing low overhead, the rending crack of airbursts, the vibration of the deck, and the swiftly closing range. The little bridge is our whole world. Now and then, above the roll of the enemy's guns, between our salvoes, I can hear the Captain's constant orders to the helmsman, weaving us between pillars of water, twisting and dodging, holding her steady for brief seconds, then turning sharply, running the gantlet.

SPORT SPURTS

by Harold Helfer

IF the hurrahs for Joe Tereshinski, Georgia's right end, were somewhat louder than the cheers for Georgia's other footballers, it is quite understandable—the chief cheer-leader is his wife.

* * *

The Washington Redskin Professional Football Club has an ironclad rule that all players must wear neckties and coats while stopping at a hotel.

* * *

Horatio Alger item: Both Bucky Harris, manager of the New York Yankees, and Burt Shotton, 1947 manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers—the two pennant-winning clubs of 1947—spent terms with the last-place Phils.

Each time the cruiser's guns flash, we brace ourselves for a hit. The range is seven thousand!

Crack! A shell bursts low and close on our port side; there's a brief, high whine, and a chunk of steel sizzles across the bridge at head level, striking the water close aboard to starboard with a little puff of spray. Too close for comfort. A near miss sprays the forecandle; we turn sharply to starboard, then straighten up, as the next salvo lands astern and to port. We risk a steady course. The sea churns up dead ahead—right on in deflection, but short. We swerve back to port, and the next salvo lands close along our starboard side, a neat row of splashes. The range is six thousand yards. A short, snarling whine, and we all duck as a salvo straddles us amidships, two shells kicking up water to starboard, three to port—right across us. The closest splash is a couple of yards to port; water sprays the bridge.

SHORT of ramming him, there's no point going in any farther, so the skipper brings us around broadside to, paralleling the Jap; and both guns go into local control, rapid fire. We can't miss at this range, and we don't. Even without my glasses I can see our shells bursting around her bridge and along her side. One of her turrets stops firing, and the others seem to be slowing down. Somehow, we must have got in a telling hit or two somewhere.

For a couple of eternal minutes we slug it out on this course, then turn away slightly and start back toward our formation, still firing steadily with both guns. The cruiser follows along, though; and the range even closes a little. Then, abruptly and to our amazement, she swings slowly away from us. For the first time the range begins to open. We stare at each other, dumbfounded. . . .

We couldn't believe it. In another ten minutes the whole Jap force was out of five-inch range. We ceased firing. Pretty soon only their upperworks showed over the horizon. Then nothing. They'd gone. The battle was over. The Captain took off his helmet, lit a cigarette with not-quite-steady fingers. It seemed deafeningly quiet. Kelly, the signalman, turned to me.

"I guess God was sure taking care of us, Mr. Johnson," he said. . . .

And that was that. What's more, the bridge game is getting noisy, with Chris and Julian arguing about how the last hand should have been played; so I'm off to see if George has put away that mess on my bunk.

We'll be back in port pretty soon, and I'm looking forward to more news of you and the baby. Wish I could see him.

All my love,
Bob

HE came along the street from the flatboat docks, and the eagerness in him was a flood bursting from a ruptured dam of loneliness. Eleven months, now, he had been gone from New Orleans; and the sights and smells and the excitement caught at his senses and brought soft laughter to his throat. He was big, and the fur-pack on his shoulders made him larger. His rifle was that of a woodsman, and he walked in deerskin paces which made no sound and gave him an alien grace. His hair was long and a brazen red, and the whisker bristles on his jaw glistened like molten gold. He moved with deceptive speed, a second fur-pack swinging from his right hand, a long rifle in his left.

"Dennis! Ho, Dennis McLane!" a cry came from the first saloon.

McLane grinned, white teeth whiter against the darkness of his skin. Here was a drink and a remembered voice and the start of the Mardi Gras. This was the beginning, and here he would begin. Here was Lemoyne, dapper and dandy as ever, and Dennis went toward him, dropping his pack to clasp a slender hand.

"François!" he said. "Damn your black eyes—it's been a long time!"

He liked Lemoyne, liked the wisp of black mustache, the slim sleekness of him. He was a dandy, boots gleaming and city clothes immaculate; and yet Dennis McLane had the memory of a fight they'd had where he'd ended on the ground, the smiling Frenchman inviting him up for more.

"A drink," François Lemoyne said, and tugged at his arm. "*Nom d'un nom*—I'll buy a drink, or perhaps two." His glance came to the huge fur-pack. "Drop those pelts inside," he finished. "Their selling can wait."

McLane grinned and followed the slighter man. He laid both packs near the door, ranging himself at the bar, behind which a Negro beamed.

"Brandy," he said. "I've drunk still-whisky until I can't stand the smell."

"Two," François Lemoyne ordered and glanced admiringly at the other. "You're bigger," he observed. "Those woods exert a magic charm."

"Magic!" McLane reached for his glass. "That's sweat, and good eating. I've cleared my land and run my traps, and there's no magic that does those things. It takes a bit of muscle."

He drank, the brandy warm and friendly to his throat. He drained

Gras Bondmaid

A DRAMA OF OLD NEW ORLEANS
by
WILBUR S. PEACOCK

the glass and pushed it back for a refill, liking the moment, wishing such came more often.

"Barak and Stenser and Aumont, they are back?" he said. "Damn my eyes, but it will be good to see them again!"

"Barak and Aumont, yes," Lemoyne agreed, then shrugged. "The Indians got Stenser and his family, all but the girl."

"No!" Dennis McLane said in disbelief. "When was this?"

"Two months or so; sometime back."

McLane shook his head. "Stenser was a good man," he said. "I never heard talk against him." He caught up the refilled glass. "Well, here's to his soul—may it rest in peace."

They drank slowly. The time would come for talk, for tales of the woods in return for those of the city, for information and rumors and bits of laughter-bringing scandal. But for now, there was only a sense of comradeship. They nursed their drinks, watching the motley crowd outside.

The city was filling, boats riding at rope-end in the river, hawkers opening their booths and displaying their wares. Tonight torches would flare and people would dance, and New Orleans would be a gypsy queen for days and gay nights, celebrating the Mardi Gras.

FOR this, Dennis McLane had paddled two hundred miles downriver. For this, he had come, as he always came, to wrestle in the big fights, to drink with friends, and to do a bit of reckless kissing when the silver moon rode as high as did the merry-makers' spirits.

He sighed in anticipation, and caught the answering smile of Lemoyne's. Their thoughts were alike, and memories danced in their eyes.

"I'd paddle twice as far," he said; and the Frenchman nodded.

"I missed a sailing," François Lemoyne admitted. "I was to leave on the tide today, but now I wait a month."

He produced cigars, and they lit them at the lamp. Smoking, they braced arms against the bar, the brandy racing gently now, mellowing, slowing, a touch of that to come.

"And Stenser's girl?" Dennis asked almost absently. "What of her?"

"She's marrying Bull," Lemoyne said. "Tomorrow night, I think."

"Marrying! That child, that infant!" Black thunder darkened McLane's eyes. "Is Bull mad? Hasn't the Church forbidden the banns?"

François Lemoyne choked a bit at the vehemence, then grinned openly.

"How many years since you've seen the girl?" he asked.

Dennis McLane knit his coppery brows in thought.

"Eight, ten, what does it matter?" he said. Then, realizing, he flushed.

"She is not so little now, Dennis," Lemoyne said. "She is seventeen, and she could break your heart without half trying."

"Think of that!" Dennis McLane said, and his eyes were mocking. "I've



yet to see the woman who could do more than race my heart for a time."

François Lemoyne shrugged. "You may be right," he admitted. "The good Lord knows that many have had their chance. Oh, well," he shrugged, "it is none of our affair. Instead, let us plan the night."

They bent their heads, and they talked, slow laughter coming. But now and then a frown chased itself across the features of Dennis McLane. He was remembering a slim girl of eight or nine, still playing with a ragged doll, and trying to couple her with his memory of Bull Taggart, huge and ungainly, his speech as cutting as the whip he used. And somehow, each stood apart in his mind, without merging, and he did not like it.

But after a time the thought went away, and he no longer cared. For he had much to do in the coming week, and many to see, and he was impatient to begin the things he had paddled downriver for days to do.

THIS was Mardi Gras. A great fire leaped in twisting tongues of red and yellow flame in the center of Canal Street, and about it the throngs of dancers moved, masks bright and grotesque, costumes as colorful as clever hands could render them.

Music came from Congo Square; and yet it was too primal to be true music. It was an ululation, driven high by countless voices, lifting and lowering in a rude macabre rhythm that gave life to the stamping of bare feet on the stone-hard ground. Here the Negroes danced, swaying, knees lifting high, their music a clashing thing which fought with that of the bands at far corners.

Dennis McLane watched. He wore the fancy white skin-suit tonight, its fringe deep red and blue from the dyes he had made.

He watched the crowd, and he was a bit drunk with too much rich food and heady liquor and the giddiness of being with many people.

He liked this; he liked it all. He was a woodsman and he wanted no other life; but for a time this was what he needed, and he soaked it in, every sense alive. He smiled at the laughter, and he sang the songs which raced about; and when he could, he kissed the girls whose eyes challenged his youth and his strength.

He waited now, waited for François Lemoyne to appear. One night had been theirs, and if their heads had rung a bit in the morning, that too was part of the Mardi Gras. Tonight was another, and there would be a third; and then New Orleans would settle back on itself for another year. Costumes would disappear and there would be no coquetry, no gallant words. There would be but the bare



Her eyes came back, and slight panic touched them as he barred

hard fact of living until a year had passed. Then would come again a magic time when carnival existed and cares were put aside.

He saw her first as he had seen the others, with eyes that liked the soft clean lines, the uplift of breast, the soft roundness of a chin. She was a shepherdess, crook in hand; and her mask was dainty, but barely deep enough to give her full disguise.

She came through the crowd as though searching, and something in Dennis McLane came alive, and wonder touched his heart. She was different—how, he did not know. Not that it mattered, for this was no time for thinking. It was just that she was different, a fact to be accepted.

She saw him, as he knew she would: In his gay suit, red hair flaming, he stood out from the crowd even with their own gay costumes. She saw him, and her eyes went past, then came back, and slight panic touched them as he barred her way.

"A kiss," he said, "by the rules of Mardi Gras, a kiss."

He was laughing, and he was big, and the blue of his eyes was dark in the torchlight. He caught the scent of her perfume, and his hands went out to touch her shoulders; but she twisted about and was gone, racing through the crowd.

"The devil!" Dennis McLane said aloud, and flushed at the mocking words spun from a passing harlequin.

Then laughter came to his eyes again, and he was after her, taking long running strides, slipping through the throngs with the ease of a man stalking through heavy underbrush.

He saw her at the corner of the block, and for a moment her head turned as though she watched. Then she was gone, and he was racing, hoping to find her before the narrow twisted streets of the Vieux Carré swallowed her completely.

He rushed about the corner, spilling a man from his feet, and going on without apology. There were few torches here, fewer ahead, and he caught sight of her flitting shadow half a block in the distance.



her way. "A kiss," he said, "by the rules of Mardi Gras, a kiss."

"Wait!" he cried, and there was half-anger, half-amusement now in the tone.

He increased his stride. He ran easily, following the center of the street, and so suddenly did he come to where she waited, he almost stumbled in his efforts to halt.

"Why?" he asked then, bending his head a bit to see her face in the moon's dimness.

"I wanted to see if you would follow." He liked her voice, soft, almost husky.

"Any man would follow," he said, and smiled at the thought.

"And stop to talk."

IMPATIENCE touched him. She spoke in riddles, and this was no time for that. His hands came up to bring her close, and then they stopped, and he knew not why.

"The kiss?" she asked. "For Mardi Gras?"

He felt then the man he was, big and ungainly, unversed in city ways and pretty speeches. This was not a

girl like the others, one to be kissed so swiftly and inexpertly. His thoughts tangled within himself, and he realized she was smiling into his face.

"Here, Dennis McLane," she said; and her hands, gentle slender hands, brought his face down to hers.

Her lips were sweet and warm and infinitely tender. The kiss was not like others he had taken. It frightened him, man that he was; and yet before it was done, the exaltation in him was a boundless thing, immeasurable.

And when the kiss was over, when still he stood, hands at last touching her shoulders, he felt the great shuddering pounding of his heart.

"Who are you?" he asked, and he reached to lift the mask. "How is it you know me?"

She fended his hands, stepping back. "My mother read about you," she said. "You rode a great horse, and you carried a spear, and—"

She was crying then, and turning away. And in his bewilderment at her words and actions, he let her go.

He heard the faint tapping of her shoes on the street, and then she was fully gone, and when he looked, she had disappeared.

"God's blood!" he said at last, pausing and wiping the perspiration from his face.

There was a deadness in him now, a deadness and an urgency he couldn't describe. Impatience coiled within him, and he could feel the tension mounting as it did some days when danger threatened.

GAYETY still swirled in the streets, laughter bright and compelling. But no interest for that lay in him now. He watched the crowd, eyes shadowed with thought, and taut nerves whipped him about at a touch on his arm.

"I've been searching for you," François Lemoyne said. "Why didn't you meet me as we agreed?"

"I met a girl," Dennis McLane said shortly, and flushed at the instant amusement in the Frenchman's eyes. "A particular girl," he finished.

Lemoyne shrugged. "Where is she?" "Gone."

"Oh!" François Lemoyne spread slender hands. "Then it does not matter; I have more girls than we can kiss in a month. Come!" He dragged at McLane's arm.

"Where?"

"To my home. There, I have a party started which will last the night. You'll not be bored." He snapped his fingers. "Oh, yes," he said, "I've a tale to tell: It seems that Bull and Anna Stenser were not married to-night. When she returned, she told him there was to be no marriage, and when he raged, she ran into the night. Ha! There was quite a scene!"

"What changed her mind?" Dennis asked casually, not really caring.

"How should I know?" Lemoyne countered. "She was in costume when I saw her. Ah, what a shepherdess!" He kissed his finger-tips.

"Shepherdess!" McLane whirled, his eyes alive again.

"Yes—why?" the Frenchman asked; and then knowledge came to his eyes. "Oh-ho, so this girl of yours is Anna Stenser!"

"I don't know," McLane admitted.

"Well, hope she isn't," Lemoyne said brittlely. "For Bull Taggart would whip you to death if he thought you'd brought this thing about."

"Why should I bring this thing about?" Dennis McLane countered. "I but kissed her once, and then she disappeared."

Lemoyne shrugged, preening his mustache. "If you do not know, then I cannot tell you," he said. "Come, let's be off."

Dennis McLane fell into step beside his friend, and despite himself he felt a strange sense of gladness about the girl. She was not for Bull Taggart,



"No woman, no matter who she is, can resist a man who speaks to her of love," said Lemoyne.

no, she was not for him. Not, he convinced himself, that his interest was a personal thing. It was just that—somehow, he could not find the words he wanted.

MORNING was a glimmering thing of pale shadows and crimson-touched sky when Bull Taggart found Dennis McLane. They'd fought before, twice for personal reasons, and once in the wrestling ring; but this was a different situation.

Bull Taggart came with the whip, the sinuous plaited weapon which was an extension of his sight and anger. He caught McLane as Lemoyne's party ended, and the timbre of his tone drove all the slight drunkenness from the red-headed man.

"It's been a long night, McLane," Taggart cried, and laid the whip out with a backhanded snap that cracked the tip like a gunshot.

Dennis McLane had turned about. Lemoyne was at his side, and the laughter drained from them in one flashing second of indecision. McLane saw the girl. She was as he remembered, slim and eager, but now her costume was rumpled and dirt-spotted, her face a growing white like a china mask. She stood to one side, held in thrall, and Taggart gave her no heed, intent only on the man from the river.

"What do you want, Bull?" Dennis McLane asked.

His voice had become suddenly very slow and even.

"You know," Taggart answered.

"I don't know a thing," McLane said. "What are you—drunk?"

"Not so drunk I couldn't find her in your canoe, not so drunk I don't know that she met you secretly last night. Not so drunk that I can't figure two and two and get an answer."

He was sweating, the perspiration riding high on his dark face. His hand flicked impatiently, and the coils of whip moved with a life of its own. He was as dangerous as a bayed wolf.

"You're a drunken fool," Dennis McLane snapped out. "Now go your way."

"Not yet, not yet," Bull Taggart said, and shook his head. "Anna is bonded to me for her father's debt. If you had not met her and planned to run away, we would be married now."

"But—" Dennis McLane began.

He cried out. He could not help the sound—it came with the same incredible speed as the whip. He cried out, and the whip was a knife-blade, laying open the shoulders of his suit, slashing deep into the flesh.

He tried to go forward, and the whip was a barrier he could not face. It flicked like a snake's tongue, incredibly fast, incredibly deadly. And

when it touched, it was a blade, shearing through everything it met.

It caught his leg and tripped him up; and when he tried to rise, it was a sword-point smashing at him, driving him back, laying flesh open on his cheek until the bone glinted whitely.

He didn't cry out now; he sobbed deep in his throat, trying to go forward, mocked by a will-o'-the-wisp that would never stand still. Men he could stand against; animals he could overmatch, but this whip was a thing of the devil, biting, viciously cruel, wielded by a master who never let him get to balance again.

His coat of deerskin was red and white now, stained with the crimson leaking from his flesh. It hung in rags, and he pulled the remnants free, bare-waisted, marked like a dog tortured by some sadistic master.

He crouched and came in, hands before his face, trying to get in close. The whip was a wall, flicking, flicking, driving him to one side. He spat blood, almost blinded, a welt across his forehead. Blackness crowded his mind, and yet he knew that to fall was to die.

He swore deep in his throat, taking the blows, feeling the crimson agony spilling along every nerve. He saw

nobody but Bull Taggert. They were alone in a hell of Taggert's making.

He went backward, tripped by the clutching single-fingered hand of the whiplash. Gravel ground into his wounded back, and he knew now why men feared Bull Taggert, and the first tinge of fear touched him.

But instinct did what his mind could not will. He came up, slowly, bending beneath full-arm blows that struck like mauls across his back. He could barely see, could barely stand, yet he came erect.

A blow turned him, and a second sent him stumbling. Taggert was a shadow now, standing in the growing sunlight, and from somewhere a cry was going up, like a woman's screaming. Only seconds had passed, only brief seconds, and yet the fight was almost over, Dennis McLane a shambling tortured hulk trying to go forward.

He saw François Lemoyne then, and for a second he did not understand. Lemoyne was fighting for breath, his face purpled, his hands clawing at his throat. Gallantly, he had tried to rush Taggert, and the whip wrapped about his neck with crushing force, strangling him so brutally it had almost crushed his throat.

McLane took a stumbling step forward, and Bull Taggert leaned his weight against the swing of the bloody whip, face tight and strained. McLane caught the whip even as the blow seared him like a hot branding-iron. Leather slithered in his numbed hands, and he had to concentrate single-mindedly to make his fingers lock.

They locked, and he swung his body against the pull of the whip, snapping Taggert out of balance and bringing him forward. Bull tried to recover,

staggering because the whip was tied to his wrist.

Dennis McLane caught him. Like a wounded bear, he wanted only to reach the man; and when they met, his hands came out, searching, seeking. He felt hands hammer at his head; his eyes were blind with blood and sweat and pain. He found Taggert, and his hands did what must be done.

Muscles lifted in bold relief on his slashed shoulders, lifted and strained. He threw Taggert, threw him and fell atop, locking his legs about Taggert's thrashing knees, hands clamped at Taggert's throat. Hands slashed at his belly, then swung upward to his face. He rolled his head aside, taking the blows, feeling the first arching impulse of the whip-man's body.

Then fingers clawed at his hands, pulling, tearing, and he would not let go, riding Taggert as he would a bear he was knifing to death. He felt the first slackness come, and he gave no heed, expecting it to be a trick. Then fingers lost their power, plucking aimlessly. After that, there was stillness.

He loosed his hands, loosed them, blinking against the faintness. There was still a thing to do, something that would quiet this man forever.

He caught Bull Taggert's whip-arm, caught it in a leverage across his knees and broke it with a surge of strength. Then he lifted the fist and caught it between his hands. Fingers locked, he strained, throwing the last surge of power in his body into the hold. Bones crumpled. Bull Taggert would never wield a whip again with that hand and arm.

Then, and only then, did he come clumsily to his feet. He felt hands aiding, and he blinked at the girl.

"Get your things, wherever they are," he said. "You're going with me."



François Lemoyne came into his line of sight, his mouth still straining for air, his eyes shocked with the viciousness of the fight. "You should have killed him," he said, and his voice was rough and strained.

"Pay the debt, pay the girl's debt," Dennis McLane said. "She's going with me."

"I'll decide—" Anna Stenser began, and he turned on her savagely.

"By God, don't argue!" he snapped. "I fought for you; I whipped a man in a fight I didn't want. I'll pay your debt, and you'll belong to me."

She faced him, white with anger, barely coming to his shoulder. "The fight was not of my choosing," she cried. "I was bonded to Taggert, and I chose to marry him of my own free will. I'm not the spoils of war; I'll decide—"

He caught her shoulder, and crimson leaked from his fingers onto her dress. He could feel the world spinning sickeningly.

"You'll listen to me, woman," he said. "I fought and I won. You're going with me."

He felt the slap of her hand on his battered face, and then he was toppling forward, diving into a tunnel of nothingness without end.

THERE were scars left by the fight, reddish puckered lines which would fade some day into white cicatrices against his skin. Three weeks he had lain in bed, fever rushing along his veins like a swollen river, and his voice had roared in fever's tantrums. He didn't remember many of those days, and ones he remembered he wanted to forget.

Now he lay on the cool bed, a light coverlet over his nakedness, and impatience tugged at him. Spring was



He crouched and came in, hands before his face, trying to get in close.

pushing through the earth, and its odors touched him, exciting nerves drawn tight by inactivity.

He could hear Anna moving about in the room below, softly as she always did, and bafflement came to his eyes. He didn't understand the girl; her depths were beyond his grasping. They spoke now only when necessary, their gazes cool and remote when they came together.

He'd remembered the final slap of her slender hand, recalling it through the days when fever had rocked his senses. It had angered him, not understanding why she had done it after he had fought for her.

The situation was a normal thing in a time where legal slavery was permitted and recognized. Debts were repaid in many ways, not the least of which was bonded labor for a period long enough to pay an obligation. Anna Stenser's father had owed money to Bull Taggart; and so, when her father had died, she had been legally obliged to assume the responsibility.

Dennis McLane could understand in a dim way that she could marry Taggart. The man was powerful in New Orleans, his freighting business into the territory growing every month. As mistress of his house, Anna would have wanted for few comforts; she would not have been a servant about the house, but rather the one who gave orders to other servants.

It was a sensible thing to do, for love and its nuances were often no more than story-book things in this pioneer land where men outnumbered women fifty to one. All too often marriages were events of necessity, not romance.

Once, when the fever had abated, he tried to talk to her. But she too had changed; now she was remote—submissive and remote.

"I am sorry I struck you, Mr. McLane," she had said. "I was excited."

He winced when the bandage came unstuck beneath her hand. He was lying face down, her fingers cool on his flushed back, and he tried to turn to see her face.

"Lie still," she said impersonally, and he subsided, staring at the wall.

He could feel the unguent being spread upon the wounds, then the solidity of the bandages. He lifted to permit the cloth to go about his chest, then relaxed as the knots were made at his side.

"You kissed me at the Mardi Gras," he said. "You kissed me *differently*. Why?"

"I was excited."

"And you ran away from Taggart. Did you choose my canoe by accident?"

"It was an accident; I was excited."

He turned his head, peering from his marked face at the cool perfection of hers. Somehow he could not imagine her being other than tranquil. She was not like women who became excitable.

Illustrated by John Fulton



"You're bonded to me now," he said. "I had Lemoyne pay your debt to Taggart."



"I took a whipping for you," he said, trying to hurt her, trying to crack the cool mask of her composure.

"I am sorry." He could feel the trembling of her hands.

"I fought for you. By the rules of the river, you belong to me."

Her hands were still, but he could see the tremor of the pulse at the hollow of her throat.

"By the rules," she admitted finally.

Anger was stirring in him now, growing because he could not understand the coolness of her. Unreasonably, he wanted to wound her, to touch her deeply.

"You're bonded to me now," he said. "I had Lemoyne pay your debt to Taggart."

"I understand."

"You want it this way?" He was searching for an advantage.

"Do I have a choice?" she asked.

Now he could hurt her. This was the thing he had been groping for.

"No!" he said.

He cursed himself, after she was gone. And yet, because the anger still lay in him, he would have had it no other way. . . .

Days later, resting again after a short walk in Lemoyne's garden, he wondered what he had gained. Anna was stubborn and high-spirited, not like the other servants of the house. She bent before him, yet would not break. He owned her legally; yet somehow her very submissiveness was sheer defiance.

She ran his errands, senseless errands, with the same quiet with which she did the changing of his bandages. He tried to bring complaints, and succeeded only in lifting scorn into her eyes.

"You're a fool, Dennis," François Lemoyne said on a Saturday night. "A blind man could tell that you are in love with the girl. Tell her so." He laughed. "No woman, no matter

who she is, can resist a man who speaks to her of love."

"Bah!" Dennis McLane flicked his cigar yards away. "She is too haughty, too pride-ridden, for me. I'll break her yet, mark my words."

The dapper Frenchman shrugged, rubbing idly at the arm of the iron bench. His eyes were speculative as they watched McLane.

"What do you gain?" he asked at last.

"Gain!" Dennis McLane clenched his fist. "I fought for her—not intentionally, mind you, but still for her. And she struck me for it." He laughed harshly. "I'll break her of slapping."

"And lose her?"

"Lose her!" Dennis McLane spat. "I don't have her."

Lemoyne shrugged. "I cannot stay to watch," he said. "I sail for France on the fifteenth." He hesitated. "But one more thing will I say. You can bond a woman; you can fight for her—and still she is not yours. Think that over, my friend."

And then it was that the truth came to Dennis McLane. The words of Lemoyne lay in his mind, twisting and tormenting; and later, when he was in the house, his tone to Anna was gruffer than ever before.

"Have my clothes ready," he said. "I pack and leave on the river Monday at daybreak."

He felt the cool measure of her gaze; and despite himself, he flushed.

"Pack your gear too," he finished.

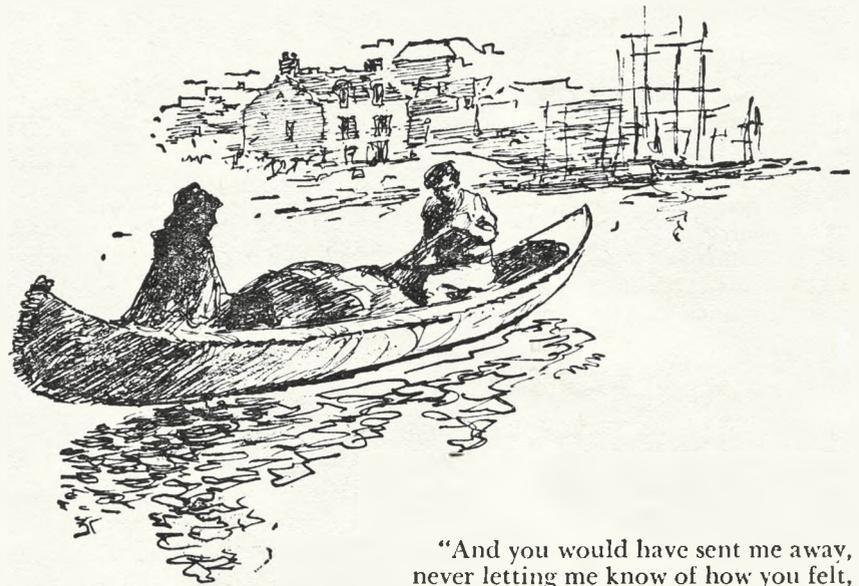
He spun on his heel, going outside again. New Orleans lay sleeping about him, and he knew he would be glad to return to the woods and his snug cabin. Problems were few and simple there, solved mostly by the sweat of his back. And in time, of course, even such problems as this would upset him but little.

He paced the streets with a restlessness born of many things. He stood outside Lemoyne's house and watched the candlelight splintering through the closed shutters of Anna's room. And at last, satisfied that his way was best, he entered the house and went to his room. He lay for a time, staring into space, before he slept.

IN the morning light Dennis McLane finished the loading of the canoe. He tested the balance, liking it. The trip upriver would be arduous, but he could make it long in days, and perhaps even catch a tow from some other river rider, taking his turn at hardwood paddles.

He stepped to the dock and went along the edge of shore, pausing at last to watch the canvas-shrouded ship just catching the tide. François Lemoyne was there, Lemoyne and Anna Stenser.

He wondered what she had thought when the Frenchman brought her to the great craft's dock, when all along



she had thought she was to leave with Dennis. Nagging him had been the thought that she would at least come and say good-by.

But now, seeing the sparkle of flung water, the swaying of lanterns on the ship, his thoughts were rueful, even a bit sour, and at last he turned away, going back toward the landing where his canoe waited.

Wood squeaked beneath his feet, and he bent to catch the rope, drawing the canoe in. He stepped aboard, seating himself with accustomed skill, and lifted the paddle. Slipping the rope free, he spun the canoe, driving it into the river's flood, turning and going against the current.

He looked back once, thinking again of Anna. She hadn't broken from his blows. She had remained cool and distant, and so he had let her go without good-by. Somehow, he knew she would not accept her freedom, thinking it charity from him, and so his way had been the only one.

He dug his blade, feeling the rush of power in his shoulders. The canoe lifted and went ahead, and he frowned a bit, realizing he had misbalanced the supplies.

He saw then the canvas unfastened. He saw further than that; he saw the movement, and his hand flicked for the knife at his belt.

Then Anna sat upright, spoiling the balance, and so deep was his astonishment that Dennis McLane could not speak.

"You did not speak of love, Dennis," Anna said. "François told me of what you felt."

Dennis McLane flushed. "You—you would not have listened," he said.

"And you did not say that you thought of me as a woman to be desired and not as a bond-servant to work for you."

"Your eyes were cold," Dennis McLane whispered.

"And you would have sent me away, never letting me know of how you felt, never letting me tell you I remembered you from the time I was a child. You would never let me tell you why I searched for you that night of the Mardi Gras, to see if you were as I remembered." Her voice was soft. "Dennis McLane, you are a fool."

"Aye," Dennis McLane agreed, and this was Mardi Gras again with all its exciting mystery.

"You can take me, Dennis," Anna said, "if you want me."

He kissed her then, bending forward, and almost tilting the canoe. He kissed her, and her lips were as he remembered, soft and yielding and promising of the future. And when he sat back, wondering at the things this woman could do to him, he heard the soft sigh of her laughter.

"It is not a horse, Dennis, and the paddle is not a spear—but they will do."

Dennis McLane shook his head. This woman was a mystery, speaking of things which made no sense. But because she was there, because the future held glorious promise, he bent his back to the paddle, and the canoe sprang ahead like a startled mount.

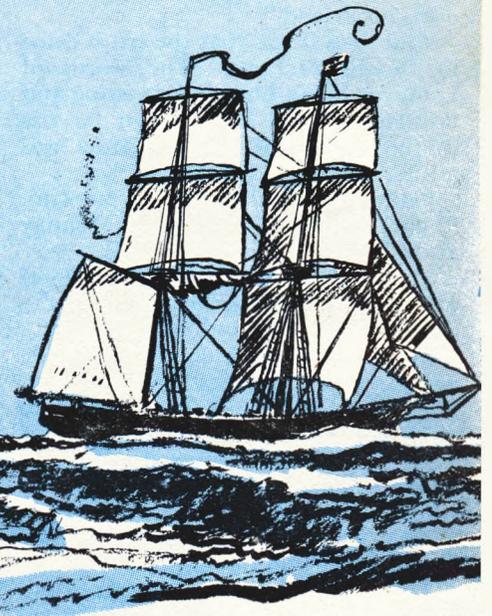
"Ho!" his cry lifted to a waking world, and her laughter touched his and mingled and was one.





Forgotten Sweethearts

Illustrated by Charles B. Falls



FORGOTTEN are the sweethearts of the sea, women who once reigned supreme over the vast realms of the seven seas, in the days when ships were made of wood and sailors of iron. The rough and hairy specimens that manned the colorful sailing vessels—men who could spit against the wind, untie set knots with their teeth, whose bulging biceps were gayly bedecked with scandalous mermaids; these vanished American adventurers probably did have a sweetheart in every port of call, but to only one did they always come back pledging anew love and constancy. She was a heroic lady with her garments blown backward, breast high and voluptuous, hair misted with the salted spray of the ocean and her feet bathed in water charging the ship. She commanded ship and sailor from her regal position on the bow, leading

her human cargo on to action-packed adventure and romance, from the mystic ports of China to the exotic havens of Tripoli.

The proud female figurehead, perched high on the bowsprit, was the descriptive calling-card of the square-rigged ships and the squarer-rigged sailors housed in them. The lady, and the word is used in meaning to befit the standards of those roaring men of the seas, was a vital part of the ship, and without her no vessel was complete. Her size was carefully computed. Thus, a ship of four hundred feet in length would probably have a guardian goddess nine feet high. Her image was carefully selected, certainly with more care and discretion and with lasting favor than the ladies of pleasure picked up in the rip-sporting dives along the waterfronts. And these figureheads that commanded so

much attention were often carved by great artists; even men like Grinling Gibbons did not scorn to make them. As the goddess of the ship, the Barnacle Bills gave complete homage to her, and she received the care born of love and devotion. Thus, when the ship went into battle or neared a port whose inhabitants had the pernicious inclination to steal everything the visitor had to show, the figurehead would be unscrewed and placed in the safety of the ship's bottom.

THE sweethearts of those hardy operators of barks and clippers were, at least in the early decades, recreations and beings of King Neptune's land—mermaids and sea nymphs, with faces with all the beauty of seraphim, a bountiful breast that ever stood up for the sailor's admiration, and a sumptuous pair of hips that gave the

of the Sea

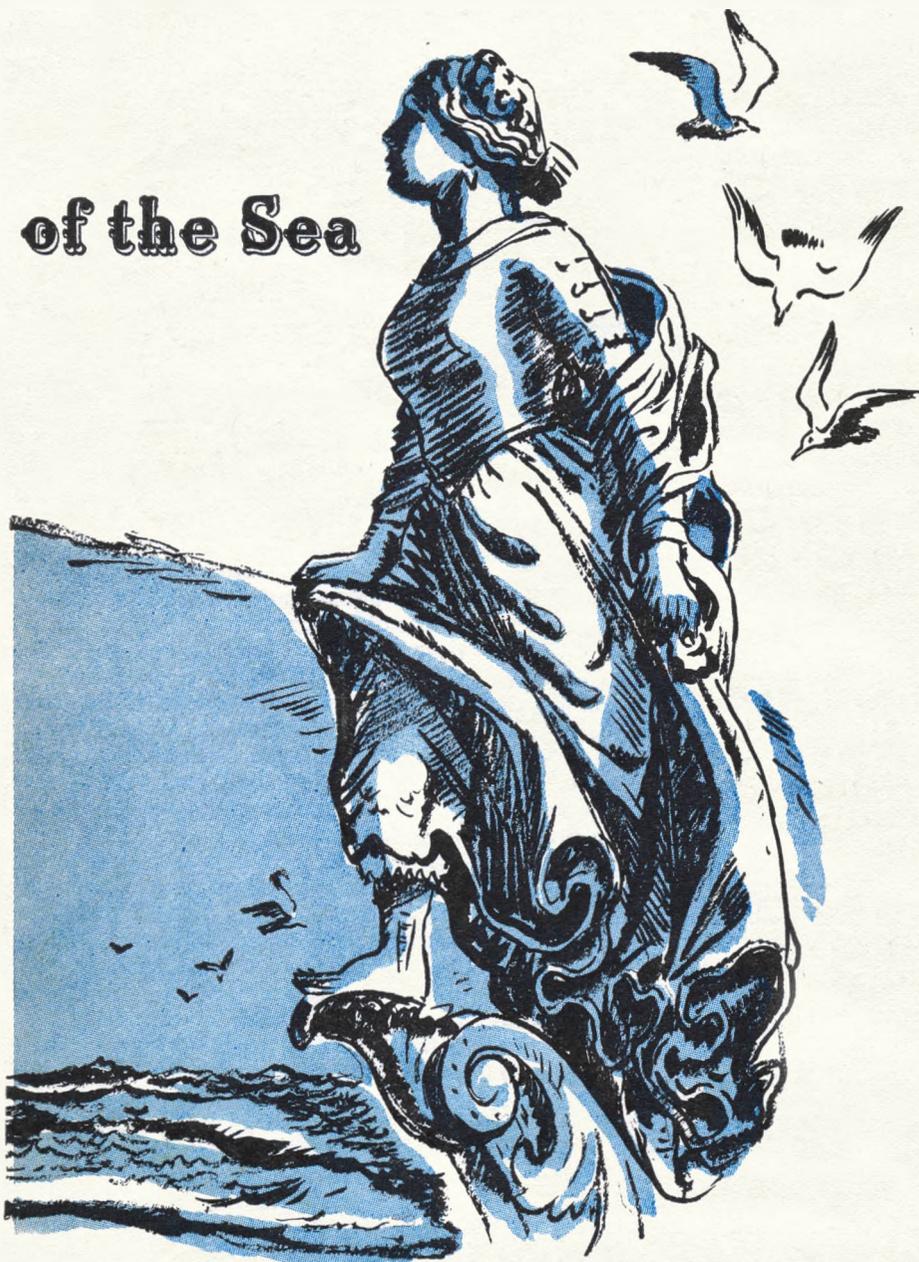


figure the beautiful lines that the strong men of the sea love.

Typical of such a vixen is the mermaid figurehead found in the rare collection of the Mariners' Museum at Newport News, Virginia. No longer is she the imperious queen of seventy-five years ago, but only a forlorn museum piece for Americans to gape at with little recognition of her queenly ancestry. Fortunately, the mermaid is comforted by the presence of the water goddess Galatea, water nymph extraordinary, whose regal forebears go back to ancient Greek mythology. Once this same Galatea had the surging sea break beneath her as she gazed rapturously at the storm-swept sky above her perch on a famous American clipper, named in her honor and built in Boston in 1854.

The better-known *Cutty Sark*, called by the powers of the marine dynasty

of wooden-ship days the last of the clippers, had *Nannie*, the beautiful witch of Burns' "Tam O'Shanter," to decorate her bowsprit. In the quiet recess of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston an imposing wooden figurehead of a beautiful lady is all that remains of the well-known American clipper *Creole*. Gone is her historic ship; gone is her adventurous crew; forgotten are deeds in sea commerce of a hundred years ago. When the lusty sailors began to be herded into the close confines of a landed corral by narrow-minded landlubbers, the days of the figureheads began declining from their pomp and magnificence. The bewitching mermaid, the unreconstructed temptress and rebel of Neptune's kingdom, gave way to sisters who lived on land and who were less capricious, and who wore clothes. Women like Jenny Lind took

THE LAST SHIP'S FIGUREHEAD IN OUR NAVY POINTED THE SEA-PATH TO VICTORY FOR DEWEY AT MANILA

by WILL
TALSEY

over the coveted bowsprit position. The famous songstress was modeled in wood for a figurehead that adorned a clipper plying between Boston and Europe. This figure, showing a plump full face, a fuller breast and sweeping hips, is forever mute of song or words to this generation, as it reposes in retrospection in the same Mariners' Museum that offers a haven to the buxom Galatea and the streamlined mermaid.

In a later, even less imaginative decade the effigy of a shipowner's wife oftentimes went to sea on the bowsprit of colliers, figures that were as colorless as a derelict. When in the closing year of the Nineteenth Century an American ship set forth to skim the billows with a figurehead of a trim lady, hatted, belted and carrying a rolled umbrella, the reign of figureheads came to an abrupt end. Fortunately a great seaman and American naval hero, Admiral Dewey by name, saw to it that the long line of female figureheads ended in glory. With him in the battle at Manila and with him on his triumphant return to this country, came a most beautiful maiden-figurehead, made of bronze and designed by the artist Saint-Gaudens. This last queen of the ship figureheads rests in retirement at the Naval College at Annapolis.

But all the ship figureheads were not replicas of provocative mermaids or staid housewives; sometimes the sailors had had their fill of women. Most times these cynical appraisals were acquired because of some unhappy experience with some Dido who knew well how to roll her eyes and roll a sailor. Whatever the cause, Barnacle Bill sometimes rebelled, and it was necessary for the czars of shipping to take notice and change figureheads. So, off went the queens from their ships' throne, and on came successors representing the male of the species.

But they were not ordinary men—the sailors' imagination would not tolerate such commonplace. When the sailor rants and raves against women, he seeks solace and inspiration from His Satanic Majesty, ruler of Hell. And so it is understandable that a powerful clipper had a figurehead representing in full likeness the devil himself, horns, hoofs and all. Led by

that plenipotentiary of a well-heated land, this clipper, very appropriately named the *Styx*, sailed the seas in the Seventies and Eighties, sometimes bringing to port a crew who preached and practiced the works of their master whose likeness graced the bowsprit. On the other hand, the unpredictable mariner may have harkened to the call of a Salvation Army mobilization and then would desert the fiery devil for religion. There were clippers and other sailing vessels with figureheads representing St. Paul and St. George.

OCCASIONALLY old salts went completely berserk and took to reading books; and when that happened, naturally dire things followed. These rugged individualists would select a figurehead of some well-known person of the times or some famous figure of history or mythology who intrigued the reading mariner. Then things happened. For instance, the famous *Constitution* was first adorned with a figure of the mighty Hercules, and then succeeded by the omnipotent ruler of the water world, Neptune. These two mythical characters were replaced by the very real Andrew Jackson. When Jackson's spare figure in flowing cloak appeared on the *Constitution's* bowsprit, things began to pop which was old stuff to Old Hickory. The Boston Whigs uproariously began to circulate petitions exhorting: "For God's sake save this ship from foul disgrace."

When these hotheads threatened to board the naval ship and destroy the



figurehead, the sailors of the *Constitution* warmly rubbed their hands in happy anticipation of the fight that was in the offing. But the wise Navy Department wanted no terrific casualty list of Bostonians, and ordered Marines posted on the ship to protect Andy from the brash Whigs. While the navy personnel duly respected the orders issued by the Great White Father from Washington nothing was mentioned about where the *Constitution* should anchor and so the ship's captain, still loyal to his men and their prayer for a good battle, brought the *Constitution* smack into port with the bow facing Boston, so that the capricious Jackson looked down on those who came to the dock to storm and stew.

But nothing happened. Then one night when the rain came down like stilts and flashes of lightning exploded with a thunderous accompaniment like the roar of cannon fire and while the sailors were bedded in taverns and inns taking on flagons of bourbon, the brave Whigs secretly boarded the *Constitution*, sawed Jackson's head off and carried it back to Boston in a bag. Bells rang out the city's joy, and excited mass-meetings voted approval. The sailors, thinking that Paul Revere was making his second ride, ignored the commotion while they exchanged business or social chit-chat with the bar-maids.

Your old salt was very much a realist, yet he had lofty ideals, and it was easy to understand that when the most beautiful of all the clippers was built, there occupied the commanding position on the bowsprit no less than Sir Launcelot, the famous knight of King Arthur's Round Table, resplendent in armor. A sister ship roamed the seas with a likeness of Sir Galahad, fellow

knight of the Round Table. An older sailing vessel, whose home port was Hamburg, Germany, had a figurehead of Santa Claus. Early explorers, like Columbus, Henry Hudson and Captain Cook, were inspired by figureheads representing saints or the Virgin. . . .

The Vikings were fond of great dragons. However, a golden deer was the fitting figurehead of the *Golden Hind*, ship of Admiral Drake. The famous American frigate *Lancaster* had a large spreading eagle, and the equally famous British *Revenge* had a rampant lion. The lion had a great vogue in the Seventeenth Century, although antelope and swans were also used as figureheads. In the great naval battle at Trafalgar, Lord Nelson's flagship *Victory* had an oval shield bearing the royal arms and supported by the full-length figures of a sailor and a marine.

The figureheads are as old as ships—as the old sailor put it, "half as old as time." When Jason sailed his ship *Argo* in search of the Golden Fleece, a bough from the oracle oak of Dodona was nailed to the prow. However, the first type of figureheads was a reproduction of "Ka," the great protective god assigned by the Egyptians to watch over them. And so it was natural that each ship, so alive and yet so threatened with danger by the mysterious seas, would have its own Ka painted on its prow. While the Egyptians had great faith in Ka, they still thought that the great protective spirit could have material assistance, and so dragons spouting fire, or tigers and rams with flashing bared teeth also adorned the bowsprit to frighten away the evil spirits that lurked on the waters. The Chinese, sailing their junks long before the Egyptians, painted eyes upon their ships, that they might find their way over the Yellow Sea.

IT was the ancient Greeks who first used feminine figures on their ships, and all of these were goddesses, carved in the beautiful classic style of the learned Hellenes. With the decline of Greece, the Roman mariners took over with figureheads of their goddesses. With the waning of paganism and the growth of Christianity, the feminine figures continued for the most part, but represented by replicas of the Virgin and saints. The Spanish, Portuguese and the English ships had many ships with coats of arms on the bow. Not until the Americans took to the sea in ships built in American yards did the figureheads take on the style challenging to the imagination and as colorful as a seed catalogue. Then Neptune rubbed his eyes as he gazed at reproductions of his people—mermaids and sea nymphs as jubilant as the Stars and Stripes on the mast.



A Hot Spot in Cold War...1582



From "The Voyage of the *Susan* of London to Constantinople ...unto Sultan Murad Can, the Great *Türke*..." to be found at length in Rich. Hakluyt's "Principall Navigations of the English Nation"... All proving that the natures of great Nations even in a peaceful Spanish harbor, were just as unpleasant then as they are today.... Here newly illuminated by Peter Wells, a mighty suspicious sailor.



When they suddenly tooke foure or five brasse pieces, and placed them on either side of the harborough where we should go out, and hid them with stones and bushes that we should not see them... The Master tolde us it was very true, that they would lay holde of us if they could. Then we weighed our ankers: but having little winde, we towed the shippe forward with the boat. The Viceroy himselfe was at the waterside with more then five hundred men on both sides of the harbour... And when we came out with our shippe as far as their ordinance, our Ambassadour and the Capitaine being in their armour, the Master commanding of the company, and trimming of the sailes, the Pilot standing on the



poope, attending to his charge, with other very well furnished, and every man in order about their businesse very ready, they on land on the contrary part having a very faire piece mounted on the North side openly in all our sights, as the shippe passed by, they

traversed that piece right with the maine mast or after quarter of the shippe, and a Gunner standing by, with a lint-stocke in his hand, about fourteene or fifteene foot long, being (as we thought) ready to give fire. Our whole noise of trumpets were sounding on the poope with drumme and flute, and a Minion of brasse on the summer decke, with two or three other pieces, alwayes by our Gunners traversed mouth to mouth with theirs or land, still looking when they on land should shoot, for to answeere them again. The Pilot on the poope, seeing this readinesse, and the shippe going very softly, because of the calmenesse of the winde, he called to them on the Southe side, where the

Viceroy was, and said unto him: Have you warres with us?... All this while, our trumpets, drum and flute sounded, and so we passed out in the face of them all.



The



*Illustrated by
Arthur Harper*

MURMURS from the nocturnal sea rolled through the darkened streets of Sorrento with an intensity I had never heard before. The disturbing sibilance increased in volume until I was compelled to tranquilize my curiosity by going to the window. A strange view greeted my startled eyes. A tide of shadows, like the march of doom, moved up Corso Italia. I threw open the door and watched the army of phantoms treading mysteriously toward the shores of the sea. Casting the beam of my flashlight against the outer fringes of the procession, I recognized many inhabitants of the town. How did they dare violate my curfew order, as military governor, which confined everybody indoors after eight o'clock? Raising my eyes toward the ocean, a shiver of excitement shot up my spine. A golden cross a half-kilometer high, with proportionate arms, flamed against the flanks of Mount Vesuvius.

The ghostly figures had now reached Marina Grande, and from that point they stared across the phosphorescent-

tinted waters of the Bay of Naples. What catastrophe was portended by the blazing phenomenon they saw? I urged them to return to their homes, but I could no more stir them into action than I could hold back the incandescent lava that poured from the erupting volcano's crater. The liquid fire, as it rolled down the mountainside, divided at a certain point into three streams, two turning off to the sides, and the main current pushing straight ahead, thus forming the awesome cross which invoked "ah's," ejaculations and prayers from the multitude at the water's edge.

On the following day the cascading lava had cut a channel of such depth that it accommodated the entire flow, thus eliminating the outward branches, whose cruciate spread had provoked supernatural fears that night before. The river of fire, now a quarter of a mile wide and a hundred feet deep, moved down the vast declivity with the irresistible sweep of centuries on their way to Destiny's rendezvous.

On the streets of Sorrento, white ash fell like snow. So closely did the vol-

canic flakes resemble winter's blossoms, that one instinctively turned up one's collar in protection from the assumed cold. One day while Major General Alfred A. Gruenther, Chief of Staff of the Fifth Army, then held at the bastions of Cassino, and I walked through the streets to visit Benedetto Croce, sage of Sorrento, the ash fell in such large geometric white flakes that the impression of a snowstorm was overpowering, and we found ourselves naturally talking about Christmas, although beneath the gray-encrusted leaves of the orange trees ran the sap of March. General Gruenther spoke of Christmas in Nebraska, his home State, while I recalled the Yuletide of Stowe Township, Pennsylvania, my home town. But the illusion disappeared as one felt the heat of the atmosphere and noted that the fat flakes did not melt or pack when stepped upon; nor could one make and pelt snowballs as one instinctively had the merry desire to do.

This, however, came at a later period of the eruption. The day after the appearance of the golden cross, Lieutenant Giuseppe Ercolano, who served as my major-domo, and I crossed the Bay and climbed to a rocky summit from which we could with safety watch the volcanic river grinding by in its terrible beauty and hellish splendor. Every color of the spectrum was re-

Wrath of Vesuvius

HIS LITTLE CAR BURIED BY CINDERS, HE BARELY ESCAPED THE FATE OF THE ANCIENT POMPEIANS.

by CAPTAIN MICHAEL A. MUSMANNO, USNR

flected in the angry tide as, steaming and growling, it melted piano-sized boulders as if they were bouillon cubes. In the direct course of the fiery cataract lay the helpless towns of San Sebastiano and Massa di Somma, whose panic-stricken inhabitants were fleeing with as much of their personal belongings as they could carry on their backs. Some more fortunate ones were able to hitch up horses to wagons, on which they frantically threw household furniture, leaped aboard and dashed away toward a less ardent spot.

To grasp the enormity of a volcanic eruption, one must comprehend the size of Vesuvius. Its crater towers four thousand feet above sea-level, and its circumference at the base measures thirty miles. With ground at a premium everywhere in Italy, it is easy to understand why people will live on the slopes of a live volcano which, like a mastodonic beast, may at any time rise and fling its poachers into a sea of water or fire. They are also attracted to this volcanic area by the rare fertility of its soil. The lava of the centuries impregnates the ground with a richness which allows farmers to plant and reap four times a year. The vineyards which grow to the very lip of the crater produce a grape which has no equal in all of Italy. The wine pressed from these grapes carries in its rich purple depths the savor and perfume of the mythical banquets of Olympian heights.

How many towns through the centuries have drunk of this wine and in its exalting drafts staggered through a blizzard of fire into eternity? Through the turgid atmosphere I could make out with binoculars the venerable columns and antique streets of one of these urban martyrs of the ages. Pompeii! What was it experiencing now, this town celebrated in history and story because it had once been a victim (and forever!) of the towering ogre of rock and brimstone. Pompeii!

Except for the falling of a fine copper powder, Ercolano and I found Pompeii untouched by the latest scourge. We walked awe-stricken through its streets, these silent thoroughfares which nineteen centuries be-

fore throbbed with all the verve of a working, spending, laughing, modern city. "Look at this wineshop!" Ercolano called out. "Too bad the jars are empty." In possession of their original graceful curves and shape, they have rested on their stone shelves, lo, these nineteen hundred years.

At my feet I descried a large circular splotch with radiations like a sun wheel. Perhaps this ancient discoloration told the story of a roistering Pompeian from whose hand a jar of wine crashed as the rumble of the volcano fell upon his terrified ears, and the sky blackened. I pictured the twenty-five thousand inhabitants fleeing madly, falling here and there beneath the marble pillars toppling in the fiery tempest, others throwing themselves into the colored tiled fountains to escape the blazing missiles. Then we came to a Pompeian bakery with loaves of bread which were dough the morning of that day, but by afternoon had been thoroughly baked by the titanic baker Vesuvius. Now those loaves were stone. . . . *I ask for bread, and ye give me a stone!*

And now Vesuvius again? He is roaring and belching just as he did on that summer afternoon in 79 A.D., but this time he is honoring Pompeii with only a little sprinkling of fire-dust. His bloodshot eye today is turned on San Sebastiano, Massa di Somma, Torre Annunziata and Resina. Gragnano, Sant' Antonio d'Abbate and other towns in my territory are restless and apprehensive. From San Sebastiano the exodus is about complete. The river of lava has reached the outer walls, which collapse as if they were cardboard and disappear beneath the surface of the fiery stream, never again to be walls, because when the lava eventually stops moving, they themselves will be lava. Houses disappear into the maw of the smoking anaconda whose appetite shows no selection or restraint.

The village of Massa di Somma with its red-tiled roofs is gulped up like a patch of carrots. At night the body of the flaming dragon is seen clearly against the black background. The remaining towns in its potential path await their fate.

Of what use were all our blackout regulations when German planes by triangulating against the luminous Vesuvius torch could find the Naples harbor almost with eyes shut, and drop bombs on the Allied shipping therein? One plane, however, circled about the crater like a moth, and then, as if hypnotized by the seething inferno, crashed in a paroxysm of yellow flame.

During this period I was using for transportation a little Italian car known as a topolino. Small as a bantam rooster, and equally vain and daring, it looked down proudly upon the earth from its overall height of four feet, indignant at everything in its way. Propelled by a five-horsepower engine about the size of a mouth organ, it was a midget demon for driving power. Alternately sputtering and purring, it took me over roads which utterly immobilized larger vehicles.

PREPARING for eventualities in the wake of the increasing fury of the maddened mountain, I sent Ercolano to the southern portion of the Sorrentine Peninsula to make arrangements for emergency provisions, while I covered the northern section.

It was toward midafternoon as I left the town of Gragnano in a storm of lapilli (pieces of solidified lava) which were falling like arrows shot from the bow of Vesuvius' crater. In the early hours the missiles were small of size and light of weight; but as the afternoon lengthened, they became heavier and larger. By the time I reached Angri, the fantastic rain had developed into a black blizzard. Occasionally the lapilli achieved such size and fell with such force that the Apennine peak seemed a besieging enemy catapulting its missiles onto the plain beneath. The roof of my topolino vibrated, and I feared for the ceiling fabric.

Although the road was now covered to a thickness of six inches, my motor mouse skipped along, not remaining anywhere long enough to sink inextricably into the deepening carpet. As the clinkery downpour continued, vehicles along the highway stuttered in complaint, all moved with difficulty, and a number succumbed to the scoria which imprisoned their wheels.

Arrived at Pagani, I came upon a spectacle lifted bodily from the Middle Ages. Hundreds of darkly hooded persons, in black cloaks, brandished Roman torches and chanted in an emotion-stirring cadence that the scourge of the eruption might cease. Then, forming into double columns, they moved solemnly through the town, their eerie voices clashing with the hissing of the metallic hail, and seeming at times to be the audible manifestation of their open lamps blazing in the phosphorescent atmosphere.

Finishing my business in Pagani, I had started for my car, when an intense rumbling, followed by a terrific crash, froze an apprehensive foot in midair; in the next instant I was as black as a chimney-sweeper. The roof of a building abutting on the road had collapsed under the weight of the piling lapillus. I sprang into the topolino, threw on the ignition and plowed out to the highway. Trucks and machines of every description had stalled and were being abandoned; but my stout little bantam, as if proceeding on stilts, made progress slowly through the gray-black mass.

Still the traction was becoming increasingly difficult and slippery, and suddenly we slid off the road and sank

into the soft clay and cinders up to our fenders. We were on an isolated segment of the highway, so that there was no one to turn to for assistance. I tried with some tools and bits of wood to lay a track which would establish traction back to the macadam, but everything failed.

AS I vainly tugged at the wheels, a sizable lapillus hit me on the back of the neck with a force which alarmed, and I ducked into the car, slamming shut the door. There was nothing to do but sweat out the clinkery tempest, or wait until another vehicle might chance along.

I resolved to be entirely calm in my dilemma. In the car I found a book, "Considerazioni Pedagogiche," written by my friend Lelio Capiello. I would read as I waited the solution of my predicament. However, aside from the fact that presently it would be too dark to read, I could not dismiss from my vivid consciousness the not-inconsequential realization that the lava chunks had risen above the bottom of both doors, thus achieving my virtual imprisonment. I recalled A. Conan Doyle's story, "The Poison Belt," and thought of the scientist in that book who, from an oxygen-filled glass porch, looked out over the world as the hu-

man race resigned itself to a deadly gas that was finishing off the earth's population.

I had a good view here of the gentleman who was causing all the trouble. Old Man Vesuvius was tempestuously smoking his pipe, and the column of smoke from the colossal briar rose twenty thousand feet into the air. The ashes from the bowl he absent-mindedly shook over the entire Sorrentine Peninsula, spreading them to a lethal thickness which paralyzed traffic, smashed roofs and destroyed vegetable gardens and vineyards. In distant Salerno twenty-one people had been killed by the fall of a ceiling which collapsed under the weight of the ash from Old Man Vesuvius' calash.

I applied pressure to the horn of my car, but the battery was dead. I raised my voice in a "Hellol!" but this was useless. There is no Italian equivalent to our "Hello," so I turned to the Latin "*Salve!*" pronounced in two syllables—"Sal-ve!" But this brought me no more response than it brought the Pompeian drivers who were stalled in their chariots that far-away August day when the tidal wave of volcanic rock, which was to petrify them for a Twentieth Century museum, closed over them.



I did not believe. I could not let myself even hypothesize that this adventure could have any but a happy ending. I even smiled to myself as I recalled the cartoon which depicted a passenger train racing toward a river only half-spanned by a broken bridge. A passenger leaning out of the window is saying to a panic-stricken fellow-traveler: "Don't worry, I've seen this thing many times in the movies, and it always comes out all right."

Cyclonic gusts of wind piled the gray-black flood as high as the windshield, and despite my self-assurance that everything would turn out "all right," curiosity, mixed with a reluctant apprehension, gnawed at just how this most desirable termination was to be effectuated. There was little I could do. Should I smash the windshield and crawl out? This was not feasible. The space was too small, and moreover the high lapilli mark had already climbed above the frame of the glass. Might I break through the roof? Of the small holes in the ceiling, none was big enough for me to enlarge with brute strength (and I'm not much of a brute anyway) to a size sufficient for me to squeeze through. Presently the world was wholly dark. I switched my pocket flashlight on and off, hoping that someone might see the distress signal and investigate.

WHEN the wind veered in my direction, the weird chanting from Pagani fitted into the unsteady glare from the oscillating torches, weaving a mysterious message on the murky curtain of the night. Above the tower of smoke surmounting the crater, crooked fingers of blinding lightning flashed their indecipherable signals, while the stricken mountain from time to time emitted ground-shaking growls like a wounded lion.

The lapilli had now climbed beyond the glass and had but a few inches more to go for the topolino to become my sarcophagus. I shouted with all the power of my lungs, and I detected a little hysteria in my voice. This frightened me more than the realization of the increasing gravity of the situation. I yelled again: "*Aiuto! Aiuto! Help! Help!*" It was a good, strong, stern call, and I was reassured. None the less I felt a little sad about the whole thing. It was such a desolate business. . . . I had done convoy duty, knowing that any moment I might feel the bite of the cobra of the sea, the submarine; I had experienced the terror which envelops one as an .88 flower unfolds its iron petals; I had lived through a score of murderous air raids. In all these encounters I had had companions. One can endure almost any fate with friends; but to be penned up with only "*Considerazioni Pedagogiche*" for solace—



I placed my lips to a small hole in the roof and aimed a pulmonary blast at the world in general: "*Aiuto!*" For my pains I got a shower of dust in my face. A sulphurous powder from the lapilli was flaking through the aperture. Now a gentle languor came stealing through my limbs, and my eyelids grew heavy. Gases from the calcined deposits, mixing with water and verdure, were producing a toxic emanation. I tore at the lips of the aperture, trying to spread them apart sufficiently to allow my head to pass through so that I might breathe some fresh air, but my strength could not equal my will.

I fell back into the car exhausted, but with the most pleasant sensation. The upholstery was soft and yielding. I stretched out luxuriously. It was wonderful not to have to exert oneself. A slender thread of light fell through the lapilli-clogged opening. It was a comforting beam, and I was asleep. Asleep on a couch of dreams!

I dreamed that suddenly the power of a giant was in my arms. I tore the roof into ribbons, clambered out,

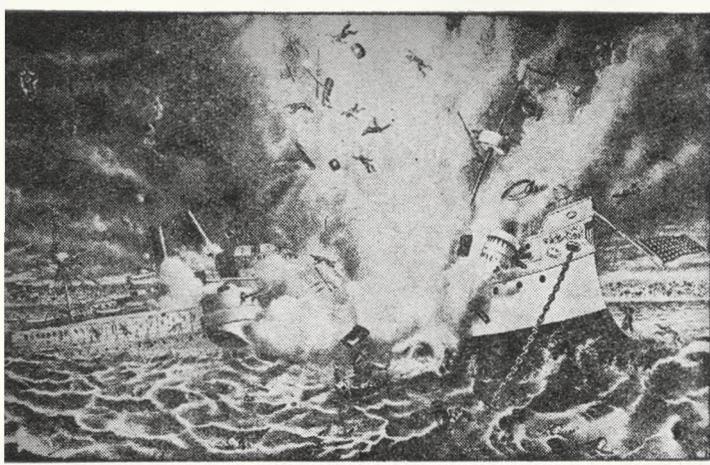
waded and swam through the lethal flood and then collapsed at a door where I was found by a ravishingly beautiful signorina with the eyes and voice of an angel. She helped me into her home, restored and comforted me. From a Pompeian amphora she poured the rich purple perfumed Vesuvius wine, and we talked of rose-gold days and moonlit nights. I fell in love with her and we were plighting our troth when I felt a strong force lifting me under my armpits.

"*Commandante! . . . Commandante! Svegliatevi! Sono io.*" It was Ercolano, and he was hoisting me through the roof of the car.

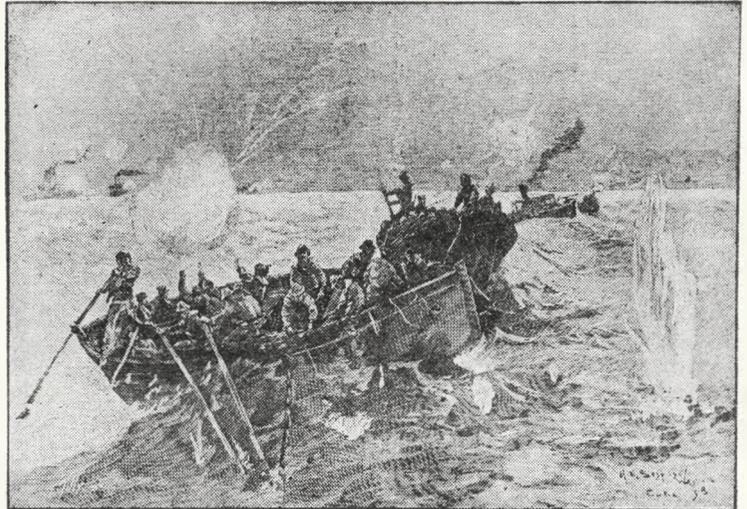
I was to have met him in Naples that night at nine, and when I failed to appear, he started out to investigate. He made his way through the lapilli drifts and found me, laid planks of wood across the road, cut into the top of the car and extracted me like a sardine from its can. He told me later that as he pulled me through the ceiling of the topolino, I was laughing; but I don't know to this day what I could have been laughing about.

The Men Who

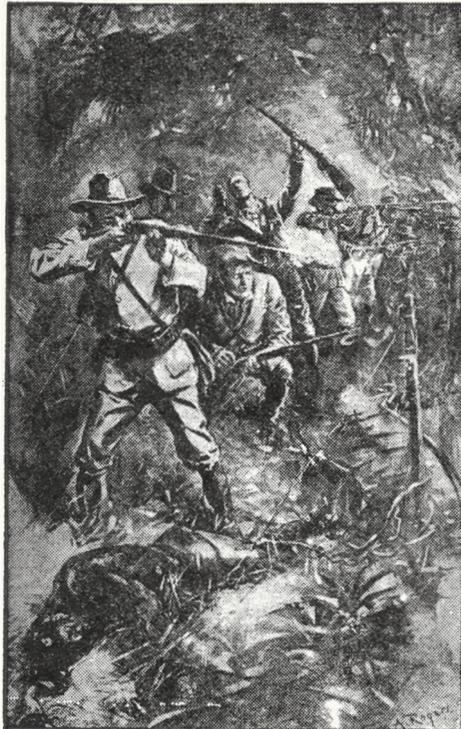
Fifty years ago, we went to war for the first time on behalf of a people beyond our shores. The veterans of the Spanish-American War are properly proud of what they did, and of the fact that they were a hundred-per cent volunteer army. They fought the war with poor equipment, poor food, antiquated guns and black powder. According to the *National Tribune*, the losses in deaths from all causes were 4.3% as compared with six-tenths of one per cent for the Civil War, seven-tenths of one per cent for World War I. (Best obtainable



Above: Explosion of U. S. Battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor, Feb. 15, 1898, with the loss of 260 lives, brought with it the breaking of diplomatic relations followed by war. To this day, the cause of the explosion has never been discovered. . . . Below: The Rough Riders at Las Guasimas, June 24, 1898—a preliminary skirmish, by about a thousand dismounted cavalry against nearly twice as many Spaniards. The latter were driven back on the San Juan defenses of Santiago. The Rough Riders were commanded by Col. Leonard Wood and Theodore Roosevelt (second from left).



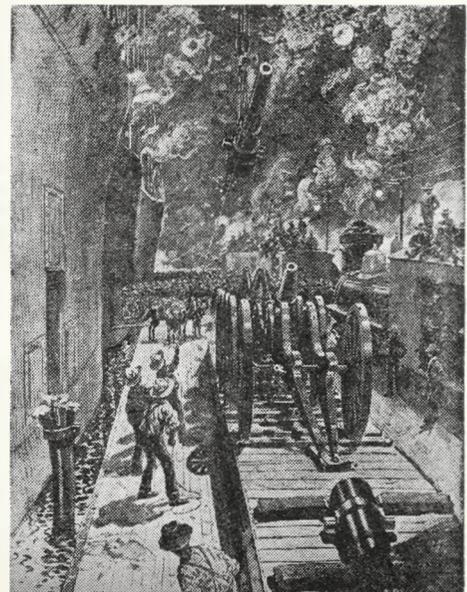
The Cuban marine-cable at Cienfuegos being cut by sailors of U. S. Cruiser *Marblehead* and gunboat *Nashville*, May 11, 1898.



Guantanamo Bay was occupied on June 7th by a landing party of Marines that met little resistance. But the Spanish troops inland kept up a harassing fire till the Marines with the aid of the *Marblehead's* searchlights drove them off on June 12th.



Below: American sailors of U. S. Cruiser *Marblehead* attack on Cienfuegos, on May 11, 1898, to cover the cutting of the Cuban marine-cable. . . . Below at right: Embarkation of troops and artillery in Tampa, Florida, June 1898.

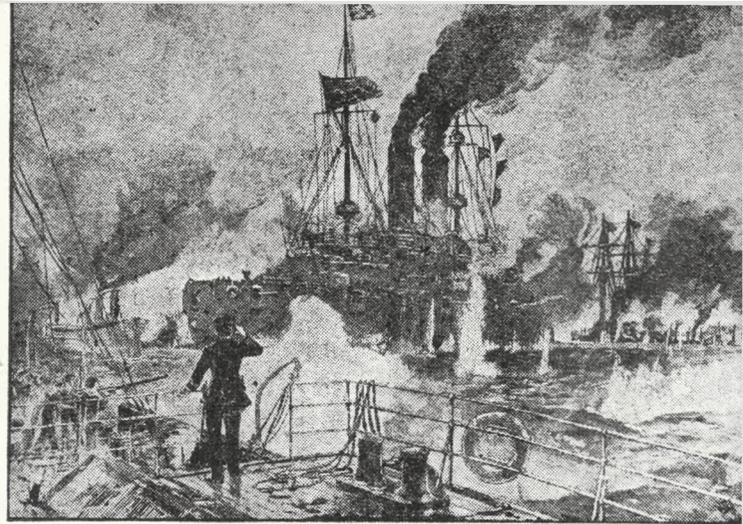


Old prints from
Three Lions,
Schoenfeld
Collection

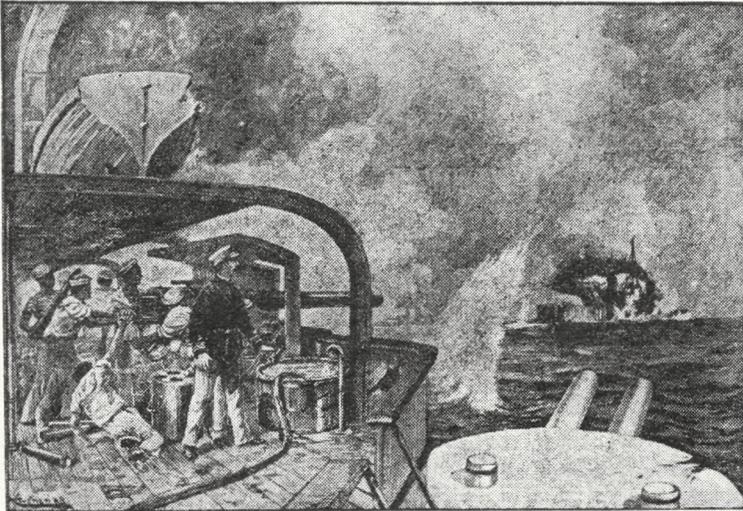
Fought in 1898

figures for World War II are about three per cent deaths from all causes in the Army and very slightly less in the Navy—including Marines and Coast Guard.)

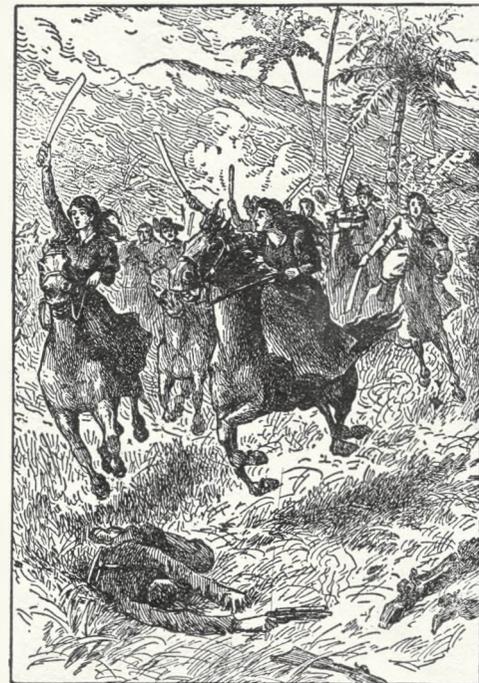
This heavy loss in 1898 was an early and not-to-be-forgotten lesson in the fact that lack of preparedness is the most important cause of wartime casualties. It may be noted, also, that these veterans received no bonus, no war risk insurance, no vocational training and no hospitalization until 1922, twenty years after the war : its Philippine aftermath.



The American squadron in the China seas, under Commodore Dewey, raced to Manila, and on May 1, completely annihilated the Spanish squadron. Not one American was killed; nor was an American vessel put out of action. . . . Below: Amazons of the Cuban Army of Independence. They were considered a very dangerous foe when riding into battle, becoming "insanely brave" under fire.



At left: The destruction of the Spanish fleet at Santiago, July 3, 1898. The burning *Cristobal Colon* chased by U. S. Battleship *Iowa*.

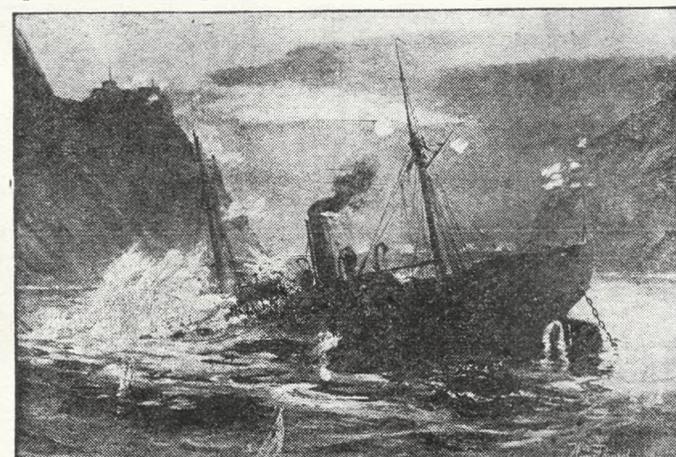
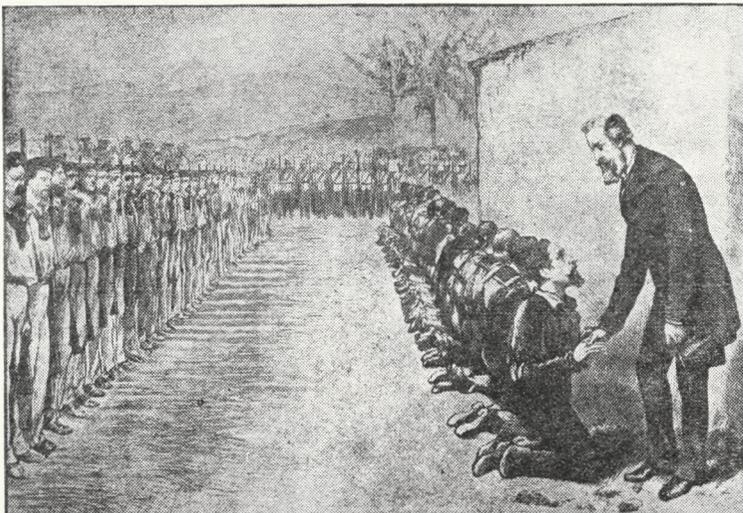


At left: Capture of the blockhouse at San Juan Hill, July 1, 1898, during a general attack on the heights surrounding Santiago ordered by General Shafter. In this engagement the Rough Riders won fame.



Below: Lieutenant Hobson and six volunteers were chosen to block the escape of the Spanish squadron from Santiago, by sinking a ship across the narrows. Spanish fire smashed the *Merri-mac's* steering-gear so that she overran her mark and failed to block the exit. Hobson and his companions were rescued by the Spaniards.

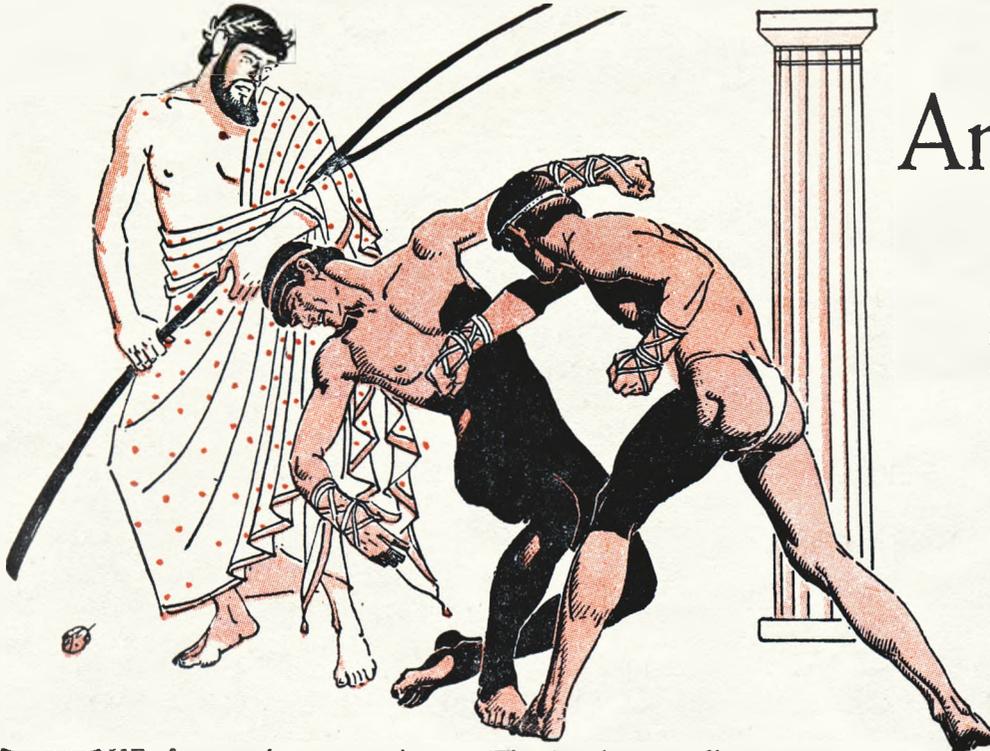
Below at left: In November 1873, the steamship *Virginus* carrying men and supplies to the insurgent Cubans and flying the United States flag, was captured by a Spanish cruiser and taken into port. Many of her passengers, her captain and some of her crew were publicly executed. The affair produced a hot war-spirit all over the Union, but the matter was finally settled by diplomacy. The picture shows Captain Fry bidding his companions farewell.



And in This

SOMETHING ABOUT THE
DEADLY BUSINESS OF BOX-
ING IN ANCIENT TIMES.

by ROBERT
FOREMAN



THE feature bout was between a muscle-bound old pug named Amycus and a much lighter but smarter boxer billed as Polydeuces.

For the first half-hour the men kept weaving and dodging, hardly striking a blow. They were jockeying for a position—something exceedingly important, because the battle was being held outdoors in daylight, and the one who could get the sun at his back had a real advantage. That was obvious, even to Amycus. But Polydeuces was too clever and too fast for him.

Getting the sun in his eyes once too often made Amycus lose his temper; and throwing all caution aside, he charged in swinging both fists. Polydeuces danced away and landed a stiff left to the chin. Again Amycus lowered his head and came on. This time Polydeuces used both hands on Amycus' face, partly closing his eyes. Then a stinging right to the bridge of the nose sent Amycus reeling.

By sheer guts, Amycus rose. Half-seeing and in desperation, he grabbed Polydeuces' left hand with his left, pulling him close and starting a haymaker from the ground at the same time. Though this was against the rules, if it connected—well, it would have done its work. But Polydeuces saw the blow coming, side-stepped and brought his own right to Amycus' temple. There was plenty of shoulder behind the punch, and that was the end of the fight.

Where did this bout take place? St. Nick's? The Garden? Perhaps Boyle's Thirty Acres? Not even close. The above battle was recorded in ancient Greece over two thousand years ago by a poet named Theocritus.

The Greeks, according to many authorities, originated the sport of boxing during the rule of King Theseus of Athens, although some authorities argue that the Cretans started the leather-pushing industry even centuries before this.

But no matter who started it, boxing is an ancient art. For centuries men have been putting on the gloves for sport, for money, and to settle arguments. One of the most interesting ways to trace the development of boxing is by following the type of coverings contestants wore on their hands.

From the beginning, the fists were held clenched and covered. The first "gloves" were mere rawhide thongs about ten feet long. These thongs were rubbed in grease to make them supple, then wound around the four fingers, knuckles and lower forearm, leaving the thumb free to grasp a loop at the end.

These softened thongs grew outmoded by 400 B. C. and were replaced with gloves that packed more of a wallop. The gloves described in the writings of Plato are appropriately known as "sharp thongs" because of the stiff sharp-edged leather used. Very shortly after this, actual gloves came into use. These extended almost to the elbow, a very necessary precaution because of a hard-leather ring which was tied onto the knuckles. This ring was about an inch in diameter, a half-inch thick, and was covered with leather spines. So it's little wonder that fleecelined protection was worn up to the elbow, when a single blow could easily have broken a man's arm.

This glove was used by boxers until about the year 100 A. D. when the

Romans decided it was far too sissified for them. The device the Romans whipped up for boxers to wear, though not quite so effective as a stiletto, did have some equally murderous refinements. Known as a *cestus*, it was a hard ball into which the hand was inserted. Above the knuckles were two or three wicked-looking spikes. Beneath these spikes was a good load of lead and iron to add authority to the blow struck. The *cestus* naturally made it necessary to wear more protection so *cestus*-slingers wore arm-paddings right up to the shoulder.

One of the finest descriptions of a *cestus* appears in the poet Virgil's "Aeneid." A pug named Entellus picks a fight with one Dares. Entellus brings out the *cestuses* used by a famous boxer of the past. These are pictured as being "made of seven ox-hides stiff in rigid coils insewn with iron and lead, and stained with blood and brains." Needless to say, Dares gulps several times and seems ready to throw in the towel before the battle begins. But Aeneas suggests that Entellus use a gentler model glove, which he does. The battle is another one of those classical contests between brawn and brains which is finally stopped by the referee when Entellus starts to lose his temper and attempts to kill Dares. Since the fight was stopped, Entellus can't take home the prize, which was an ox "bedecked with gold fillets." This makes him so sore that he walks over to the ox and smacks it once between the eyes, which splits its skull wide open and kills the beast.

Unlike boxing as we know it, the Greeks fought without a roped-in ring.

Corner—Polydeuces, of Greece!

Illustrated by Frederick Chapman

They just went at it in any place where there was lots and lots of room. Consequently, infighting was almost negligible. This also tended to make the battles long and on the defensive side. There were no rounds, either; but if both parties agreed on a breather, one could be taken. As for matching men up by weights, this was unheard of; and so as the centuries breezed by, boxing became a sport only for heavier men. A fight lasted until one man decided he had been licked. This decision might have been impressed on him while he was upright or while on the ground, because there was no rule against hitting a man while he was down.

The referee wandered around holding a long forked willow switch which he would bring down on the shoulders of a fighter who violated the rules (which meant kicking or holding).

The boxer of ancient Greece assumed a position that guarded his head and left his body completely uncovered. This was the custom, because body blows were unknown, either because they were considered unworthy of a boxer or were definitely ruled out. No one knows exactly why. Because all blows were aimed at the head, a prominent belly was actually considered an asset for a boxer, since the protuberance made it harder for an opponent to reach his head.

The adversaries faced each other with extended left arms, and because each was trying to clip the other on the head, there was a great deal of cir-

cling during which no blows at all were struck. The left hand was used for sparring to make the openings so the knockout could be delivered with the right. All this naturally made for long periods of inactivity; but when a blow was finally struck, it often settled the fight. This was especially true after the lead-loaded cestus came into being.

SINCE a boxer had to stand and weave with his guard held high for long periods of time, his ability to do this became one of his greatest virtues. Much of his training, therefore, consisted of holding his arms up and learning to fight the fatigue this caused. A classic story of the day tells about the boxer Melancomas, who was popular with the Emperor Titus because he could maintain his guard for two whole days, never dropping it once. It is said that Melancomas won many a bout this way, not having delivered a single blow. How the crowds that saw this kind of "fighting" reacted is not mentioned, but it's fortunate for Melancomas that he is not trying to win ring battles with such tactics today, because there is no telling what the boys in the dollar-ten seats would throw at him.

Boxing bouts were featured during the Olympic games; and in the records of these sports festivals we learn some interesting tales of crooked contestants that make yesterday seem far too modern. For example, in the 126th Olym-

piad, two boxers, Didas and Garapamon, were caught taking bribes. The gold they received was made into statues which were placed at the entrance to the stadium, and suitably inscribed as a warning to all future contestants "to compete not with money but with strength of body." In the 192nd Olympiad one boxer's father offered money to his son's opponent, but the deal was discovered and Pop was severely punished.

There are also some stories of itinerant boxers who, like the football players of a few years back, fought in the games for any city that would hire them.

A form of boxing which also included wrestling, strangling and kicking was the Greek sport known as the Pankration. The pankratiast, like the boxer, was able to win his victory on the ground or upright. The only things he could *not* do were bite and gouge. There are some interesting scenes of the Pankration depicted on Grecian vases now in the British Museum. These show the referee raising his willow wand over a pankratiast who has just inserted his thumb in an opponent's eye. Another scene shows one bright boy shoving a full fist into his opponent's mouth. Since this vase is only a fragment, it's impossible to tell if he got away with this, or if the referee caught him in the act.

Kicking was within the rules of the Pankration and led a poet of Greece in a satirical piece on the Olympic



games to award the Pankration prize to a donkey named "Brayer." A boot in the stomach is said to have settled many a Pankration, as well it might have. Also recommended were such "modern" holds as the flying mare and half nelson.

History reveals the feats of a certain Pankratiast nicknamed "the Dumb-bell." The Dumb-bell gained his fame by developing a foot-lock. He always managed to get himself thrown by his opponent in such a way as to be able to grab a foot from beneath him. Then by judicious twisting of the foot, the Dumb-bell convinced his adversary the fight had gone long enough. The Dumb-bell after his victory in the Pankration admitted that he had picked up this trick by consulting the Delphic Oracle, and merely asking how he could assure himself of the victory. The oracle answered, as oracles do, with this riddle: "You will win by being trampled upon." This puzzled the pankratiast for some time until he figured out that the oracle meant he should let his opponent stand on him and then grab his foot and give it the works—which is exactly what he did. This won the fight, proving that the oracle was correct and the Dumb-bell had been misnamed.

The Pankration was held indoors on ground that had been watered, making it good and muddy. All falls covered the pankratiast with mud, making him slippery and hard to hold. For this reason much of the Pankration was fought upright as boxing. Both open and closed fists were used, but coverings were placed over the hands.

Although the Pankration was a bit more lively and hence a better show from the spectators' point of view than boxing, later Pankration rules prohibited most of the wrestling holds and on-the-ground fighting, thus making it more and more of a boxing match.

As for the amount of gore connected with ancient boxing, it increased by buckets with the Romans, until all semblance of skill had vanished for the sport. Only centuries later did the skill and pace developed by the early Greeks come back into boxing.

SO the next time you're in a seat near the ringside watching two well-matched, evenly weighted gents toss six ounces of leather at each other, remember you're seeing one of the oldest sports on record. Furthermore, if you think the referee has an old-fashioned outlook on the bout, just recall that chap in ancient Greece who wore a toga and had to cover an acre of ground so that he could wave a willow wand over a contestant. Then I think you'll admit that some progress has been made.



"Tell me, how are things on the moon these days?"

LONG, lean and slightly undernourished, George Riley floated over the Long Island countryside at a modest ten miles an hour, holding just enough altitude to clear the maple trees at the edge of the Barclay estate.

Well prepared for a possible meeting with Mr. T. V. Barclay (A BARCLAY SAILBOAT, THE MOST HONORED NAME AFLOAT), George was wearing a neat pin-stripe suit, white shirt and a tie of conservative pattern. He was also wearing a "Hoppicopter."

A small but efficient engine was strapped securely to his back, and four horizontal blades were whirling rapidly eighteen inches above his head. He regulated the speed and direction of this somewhat unorthodox aircraft by a short control-stick that hung over his right shoulder. A thick pad of foam rubber and a sheet of asbestos separated George's spine from the engine; nevertheless, he vibrated.

George flew across a vast expanse of lawn that sloped down to a beach, a boathouse and the Atlantic Ocean. Crammed with hedges and flower-beds in formal design, the lawn reminded George of an illustrated seed catalogue. Now that he had finally located the Barclay hangout, he fervently hoped he'd find the sailboat tycoon somewhere on the premises. In front of the house he drifted to a stop and waited, hovering in the air.

Nobody appeared. The Barclay mansion, a Nineteenth Century mon-

strosity heavily loaded with assorted architectural gingerbread, was as lively as a tomb.

From his height, he saw that the layout also included a garage, stables and a small greenhouse. Correctly assuming that T. V. Barclay was a passionate lover of flowers, he wheeled over to the greenhouse and peeked in, but saw nothing except more flowers.

George sagged, as much as the hoppi-copter harness would let him. He was desperate. To continue eating his normal one meal a day, it was most important that he see Mr. Barclay. He'd haunted the boat factory for a week, but the owner of "the most honored name afloat" was a hard man to find.

He was trying to decide whether to hang around awhile or go back home, when he saw the girl. She was standing on the beach, waving her arms, and George was certain she was waving at him. Accordingly he zipped over the lawn and came in to a perfect two-point landing on the sand.

Had George been the whistling type, he would have whistled. She was as smooth and sleek as a P-80 jet job, with greenish eyes, chorus-line legs and long hair the exact color of the sand. In addition she carried such deluxe equipment as a beautiful coppery tan and not more than two ounces, dripping wet, of yellow bathing suit.

"If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes," the blonde said, "I wouldn't be-

Wild Blue Yonder

SOMETHING NEW HAS BEEN ADDED; AND THE HOPPICOPTER SWOOPS SWIFT TO TURN TRANQUILLITY INTO TURMOIL.

by DONOVAN FITZPATRICK

lieve it. I still don't. Tell me, how are things on the moon these days?"

"Oh, you mean the hoppicopter," George said. "It's real, all right. I'm George Riley. I'm looking for Mr. T. V. Barclay."

"Glad to meet you, George," she answered. "My name is Rosemary Iris Barclay, because my father is mad about flowers. He's out sailing at the moment. Now, what's your problem, George?"

"I'd like to interest Mr. Barclay in putting my 'copter into mass production," George said. "There's a fortune to be made with it. It'll sweep the country like miniature golf. A hoppicopter in every closet, so to speak."

Rosemary looked at him in awe. "You don't mean that you invented this all by yourself? Why, you're a genius."

"I didn't exactly invent it," George said modestly. "I just took the basic idea and improved on it. Made it easier to fly, more comfortable, and so on."

"I think you're terribly smart, anyway," Rosemary declared. "And furthermore, I think you're just about the best-looking man I ever saw. You remind me of Gregory Peck, except you look even hungrier." She eyed him carefully. "Are you getting enough to eat, George? Who takes care of you—cooks your food and darns your socks and sees that you keep your feet dry?"

"Why, nobody," George admitted, somewhat confused. "I'm living in the old Sheldon cottage down the road. I've been working night and day on the 'copter, and I've—"

Rosemary Iris nodded emphatically. "Just as I thought. You need a woman's care." She paused. "But I'm glad you're not married, George; I'd be crazy to deny that."

"Well, thanks," George said, and wondered if she weren't crazy already. "When do you expect your father back?"

Rosemary flung up a nicely rounded arm and scanned the sea like a professional sea-scanner. "In about two

minutes; he's coming in now." She meditated a moment. "It kills me to tell you this, George, but I don't think your chances are so good. Father doesn't hold with any form of transportation more modern than a sailboat. I doubt if he'll be interested in going into the hoppicopter business."

ROSEMARY was quite correct. After the introductions, George delivered a brief lecture on the hoppicopter and offered his proposition. He then took to the air in a brilliant demonstration of 'copter flying—forward, backward, sideward, up, down and on the bias. He ended with a couple of wingovers,

a maneuver practically impossible in a plane without wings.

T-V, a short, bald-headed man with pale gray eyes, watched the performance with an expression of polite bewilderment. "Very interesting," he commented, when George had landed. "Doubt if the public would take to it, though. Looks kind of dangerous to me."

George assured him it was as safe as a sailboat, maybe safer.

In front of the house George drifted to a stop and waited, hovering in the air.



Rosemary backed him up. "I bet I could fly it right now."

"Rosemary, you might put some clothes on," T-V remarked absently. "That bathing suit is almost indecent."

"If it isn't," Rosemary asserted, "I'll get my money back."

George felt things were getting out of hand. "Wouldn't you like to know why I came to you instead of to an aircraft company, Mr. Barclay?"

"Hmmm?" T-V murmured, bending over a bright green flower. "Oh, yes. Some aircraft company will no doubt be interested. More in their line."

"I've been to aircraft companies," George said patiently. "Dozens of them. They're all too busy with experimental work for the Government. Besides, they use big engines. That's when I thought of you."

"When?" said T-V, patting some dirt around the bright green flower.

"When I found out I'm using the same engine you use for auxiliary power on your larger sailboats," George said triumphantly. "The sixteen-horsepower size."

"Never cared much for those infernal auxiliary engines," T-V said. "A sailboat is a sailboat; ought to stay that way." He peered at George vaguely. "Good luck, young man! I'm sure you'll sell your machine to that aircraft company."

"But I didn't—" George began desperately. But T-V was already ram-

bling up the lawn to the greenhouse. George drooped. The hoppi-copter felt like a B-24 on his back.

"Good-bye, Rosemary Iris," George sighed, preparing to take off. "It was a nice try."

WHERE are you going?" Rosemary said in alarm.

"To California," George told her unhappily. "Nobody wants to invest in my 'copter, and there's a flying job waiting for me in San Diego. It isn't much, but it's better than starving."

"You can't go off to California," Rosemary cried. "Not when I've just found you. George, I don't want to appear forward, but how do you feel about long engagements? I think I'm falling in love with you."

"Gee, thanks," George mumbled, "but I've—"

"See here, George," Rosemary interrupted briskly. "You can't give up so easily. I've decided we'll fight this thing together. Have you had any lunch?"

"No," George said.

"I thought so. You're neglecting your health, and you won't be any good to me that way. Come on up to the house while I dress and you eat, and we'll figure something out."

George unbuckled the 'copter and left it on the lawn and followed Rosemary up to the veranda. Her legs, he noticed, looked quite as nice from the back as from the front.

"Relax," Rosemary said. "I'll send out some food."

George dropped into a chair and stared moodily across the lawn. The flowers were a riot of bright color, and the ocean danced and sparkled in the sunlight. It was a sight to soothe the troubled heart of mankind, but George was too despondent to appreciate Nature's finery. Even the food which a servant brought out on a tray failed to interest him as much as usual, but he managed to get away with seven or eight sandwiches and a pitcher of milk before Rosemary reappeared. She had on checked slacks and a white sweater, and she still looked as slick as a P-80.

"I've got it figured out," Rosemary said. "We used the wrong tactics. A conservative gent like T-V needs time to think things over. We hit him too fast."

"Could be," George agreed, reaching for the last sandwich.

"The psychological approach—that's what we need. Here's the pitch, George: You go over to the greenhouse and get Father talking about flowers; you won't have any trouble, believe me. Then, when he's well mellowed and off guard, swing the conversation around to the hoppi-copter. Convince him it's practical and safe, and you're all set. I'll wait for you here."

"Well, maybe you've got something there," George said, getting to his feet. "Anyway, it's worth a try. Thanks, Rosemary. I don't know why you're so nice to me."

"It's biological," she told him. "Any Freudian could give you the complete details."

GEORGE found T-V among the flowers, vigorously pumping a spray-gun. It was just as Rosemary had predicted. When he learned of George's eager interest in things horticultural, T-V dropped the spray-gun and began a conducted tour of the greenhouse, bringing George up to date on the type, genus, ancestry and personality of each individual bud and branch.

"Take this one," T-V said, indicating a flower that swayed in splendid isolation in a huge wooden tub. "My Napoleon Purple Rose. Developed it from cuttings I brought back from Europe. Going to enter it in the flower show tomorrow—it's practically certain of first prize in its class."

George gazed at the purple-reddish bloom through a small Niagara of perspiration that ran down his forehead. The noon sun poured through the glass roof of the greenhouse with the intensity of a blast furnace. George loosened his collar and privately vowed that if he ever owned a greenhouse, he'd install air-conditioning. "Hot," he observed.



"I wanted to show you. . . . Well, get me out of this flower-pot."

"About a hundred degrees," T-V agreed happily. "Now, here's a Tiger Orchid from Guatemala. Very rare. Found it myself; spent three days in the jungle. Terrible place, the jungle. Swamps, insects, wild animals—terrible. Worth it, though."

DECIDING to make his play before he should collapse of heat prostration, George said: "Too bad you didn't have my hoppicopter, Mr. Barclay. You wouldn't have had to worry about the jungle."

"That so?" T-V said.

"You'd go over it. Child's play, with a 'copter. Fly over the jungle, spot your orchid, drop down and pick it. No swamps, no insects, no wild animals. Cover a lot of ground, fast."

"Well, I'll be keelhauled!" T-V said nautically.

"Great for hunters," George continued. "And fishermen. Why, the hoppicopter would be the biggest boon to sportsmen since the invention of the folding camp-chair."

"Fly over the jungle, eh?" T-V mused. "Very interesting."

"To say nothing of the busy housewife," George went on. "Get her shopping done in a hurry. And great for country schools—do away with the school bus. Any child could fly it."

"Hunt flowers by air, eh?" T-V murmured. He peered at George craftily. "What happens if the engine stops?"

"I've taken care of that," George assured him. "I built in a free-wheeling device. If the engine stops, you just release the stick, and the blades go into auto-rotation. You float down like a parachute."

"Hmmm," T-V said. He meditated briefly. "Tell you what, young man. Bring your machine over to the factory tomorrow and we'll have a look at it. No, not tomorrow—Monday. Flower-show tomorrow."

"You bet," George said happily. "I'll be there, Mr. Barclay—" The words froze in his throat at a sudden, familiar sound overhead. He looked up. Five feet above the greenhouse roof, Rosemary hovered in the 'copter.

"No!" George yelled, and sprinted for the door, followed by T-V.

"Get away from that greenhouse," George shouted from the lawn. "It's dangerous."

"Don't be an alarmist," Rosemary said calmly. "I'm doing all right." She executed a couple of swoops and turns, came to rest. "Easy as pie."

"Rosemary," T-V said, raising his voice a trifle. "Come down at once. You might hurt yourself."

"Listen, Rosemary," George pleaded. "There's something you don't know. Keep a little downward pressure on the stick—" He wanted to tell her that if she let go of the stick, the 'copter would go into free-wheeling and fall, but he never had time.

Illustrated by Stuart Hay



George found T-V vigorously pumping a spray-gun. It was just as Rosemary had predicted.

"Look, men," Rosemary said, letting go of the stick. "No hands."

"Oh, no!" George moaned, and closed his eyes. He opened them when he heard the crash, and saw Rosemary and the 'copter disappear through the roof of the greenhouse. *This, he thought wildly, is the end!*

They found her sprawled in a big tub of black earth, looking somewhat shaken but apparently intact. The soft earth had broken her fall. The 'copter, still strapped to her back, had one broken blade. "Don't say it," Rosemary said crossly.

"You might have cut your throat, falling through that glass," T-V said, quite sternly.

"I'm sorry, Father. I wanted to show you how easy it was to fly." She glared at George. "I didn't know about not letting go of that damned stick." She picked a piece of glass out of her hair. "Well, get me out of this flower-pot."

They lifted her out of the tub and stood her on the floor. George was unbuckling the harness when they heard an anguished howl from T-V. They looked around. Rosemary had landed on the Napoleon Purple Rose.

LATE that afternoon George was in the workshop behind his house, repairing the damaged blade, when Rosemary drove up in a station-wagon and pounded the horn.

"Anybody home?" she called.

"No," George said. "Go away."

"Don't be bitter, George," Rosemary said, climbing out of the car. She pranced into the workshop and gazed at George lovingly. "Just think, you living here all this time, practically my next-door neighbor, and I didn't know it until today. It kills me! Ah, well," she went on philosophically, "we're young, George. We'll have some happy times together, now that we've found each other."

"I doubt it," George said. "I'm going to California while I still have the train fare."

"Sometimes I think you're a defeatist," Rosemary said. "You mustn't think of giving up. The problem remains the same—convince Father that the 'copter is practical and he'll buy. After all, my father is a reasonable man."

"He didn't seem so reasonable a few hours ago."

"He was a bit upset," she admitted. "But he'll get over it in a day or two. Meanwhile, we'll rib up a foolproof scheme to sell him on the 'copter."

"No, thanks," George said firmly. "No schemes. I don't like the way your mind works."

"Don't be difficult, George. I'm only trying to help."

"If you want to help," George said, "grab hold of this mold and help me lift it into that tank of water."

"What, that little thing? You can't be very strong, George—not that I'd feel any differently about you."

"I'm strong enough," George said. "It's slippery, that's all. Careful."

"You're not kidding; it's slippery," Rosemary said, when the mold was safely in the water. "What's it covered with wax for?"

"It's a casting for a new blade," George explained. "I use the wax as a mold. It's a special kind—dissolves in water. You probably won't want to stay that long, but in about a half-hour the wax will be dissolved, and I'll have a new blade."

"Hey, like magic. Disappearing wax," Rosemary said, impressed. "I'm sorry I broke your 'copter, George."

"Oh, that's all right. I've got another one, anyway." He pointed to a bench in the corner. "There's the first egg-beater I ever built."

"Well, good," said Rosemary Iris. "That reminds me—I came to get a flying lesson. Since we're practically engaged, I ought to know how to fly it better, so I won't make any more mistakes, don't you think?"

"You won't make any more mistakes," George snorted. "Because you are not going to do any more 'copter-flying. Once was enough."

Rosemary moved over to him, very close. "Oh, come on, George. Just a short lesson."

"No," George said.

Two arms crept around his neck. "Please, George."

"Not a chance," George said stoutly.

He felt a soft pressure on his lips, and as if from a great distance he heard a voice saying, "Please, George."

"Absolutely . . . not," George said.

HE had to admit she was an apt pupil. After a half-hour's instruction she was handling the 'copter beautifully. She came back the next morning for another lesson, and George pronounced her a first-rate egg-beater pilot. "But it won't do you any good," he insisted. "I'm going to California."

"Uh-huh," Rosemary said thoughtfully. They were in the workshop, and she was holding the can of molding wax. "George, how long did you say it took this stuff to dissolve in water?"

"About thirty minutes. Why?"

She didn't answer, but went out and sat under a tree in the yard, an unusually pensive expression on her face.

Pretty soon she came back in. "George, how much weight can your 'copter lift? Besides yourself, I mean."

"Well, let's see." George tapped his head reflectively with a wrench. "I weigh one-sixty. About a hundred pounds, maybe a little more." He re-



"First time I ever flew—I think I rather like it."

garded her suspiciously. "What are you driving at?"

"I don't know yet. But an idea is beginning to unfold. I'll have to think about it."

"What kind of an idea?"

"Why, some way we can really and truly convince Father that the 'copter is sure-fire."

"Look!" George almost yelled. "I crossed T-V off my list of prospects when you sat on that flower. I don't want any more ideas. I'm going to California."

"That's right," Rosemary said absently. "So long, George. I'd like to stay for lunch, but I've got to think."

Mumbling to himself, George Riley watched her drive out of the yard. He went back to work on the hoppi-copter, feeling confused. He felt even more confused when he discovered she had taken the can of molding wax.

She phoned him that night, just as he was getting into bed. "George, I've got an idea."

"Beginner's luck."

"Don't try to be funny," Rosemary said. "You're essentially the serious type. I'm only doing this so you can have a lot of money and marry me. Have you got the machinery repaired yet?"

"Yes," George said. "Why—"

"Both of them airworthy?"

"Sure," he said, "but—"

"Listen," Rosemary said, in conspiratorial tones, "stick close to the house tomorrow. Don't go away, even for a minute. I may need you."

"You're talking like *Charlie Chan*," George said. "Besides, I have to go into town tomorrow and get a haircut. It's getting pretty long in back."

"Never mind about a haircut," Rosemary said. "I saw Gregory Peck in the movies last week, and his hair was long in back, and he wasn't worrying. You stick around. Promise?"

"All right," George said wearily. "But I don't see—"

"Faith, George—have faith. Good night."

GEORGE sat on the edge of the bed for a time, staring at the phone. He was not happy. He had trouble getting to sleep, and when he did he dreamed he was a purple rose being chased by a blonde hoppi-copter.

He floated up to the world of reality at the insistent ringing of the phone. The clock on the bedside table said seven-thirty. Rosemary said: "Buckle on your armor, George. This is D-Day, H-Hour. I'll be over in ten minutes."

"Don't hurry," George said.

But she did. She was there in five minutes, and before he was fully awake they had loaded both 'copters in the rear of the station-wagon and were careening over the road to the Barclay estate. "I haven't had any breakfast," George complained, trying to tie his shoes.

"Never mind that," Rosemary said. She swung into the driveway and skidded to a stop behind the boat-house. They lugged the 'copters up the stairs to the roof-deck of the boat-house where Lionel, the Barclay chauffeur, was standing at the railing, looking out to sea through a pair of binoculars.

"How goes it, Lionel?" Rosemary said, lowering her 'copter to the deck and herself into a beach chair.

"No action yet, Miss Rosemary," Lionel said. "He's about two miles out."

"What in hell goes on here?" George demanded. "Who's two miles out?"

Rosemary said: "T-V. In a sail-boat."

"Is that any reason for getting me up in the middle of the night?" George said belligerently.

"That remains to be seen," Rosemary said. "Here's the story—Father is trying out a new boat, an all-metal, experimental job. I think we ought to be on the alert, just in case he gets into trouble."

"I don't get it," George said, but he had an ominous feeling that catastrophe was near.

"Well," Rosemary said, "if the boat should sink, or something, think what a good impression it would make if we could rescue T-V with the hoppicopters."

"Oh, brother!" George said, sinking into a chair. "And how would you do that?"

"Easy." She pointed to a long rope that lay coiled on the deck. "We tie this rope to our harnesses, fly out to the boat, pick T-V up and carry him back to shore. And don't tell me it wouldn't work. You said yourself the 'copters could carry the load."

"Oh, it might work, all right," George said carelessly. "Now, look, Rosemary. I appreciate your efforts, but you're a little off your trolley. In the first place, sailboats don't just up and sink—" He stared at her in horror, his eyes bulging. "Rosemary, what did you do—"

"He's turning around, Miss Rosemary," Lionel reported from behind the binoculars.

Rosemary took the glasses. "Yep. Seems to be riding a bit low in the water, too." She began getting into her 'copter. "Come on, George. I think my father's boat is sinking."

George grabbed the binoculars. "You know damn' well it's sinking," he yelled. "You're crazy—both of you. I won't have any part of it."

"We haven't time to argue," Rosemary said, buckling the harness. "You don't want my father to go to a watery grave, do you?"

"You—" howled George, waving his arms in the air. "I'll—"

"Better hurry up, bud," Lionel said. "Not much time."

"And be sure to tie your end of the rope good and tight," Rosemary said. "Father doesn't weigh much, but we don't want any trouble."

SPEECHLESS, George glared about helplessly. He knew when he was trapped. He got into the 'copter, muttering dire threats, and they took off, the rope dangling in a long loop between them.

"You'll go to jail for this," he shouted above the roar of the engines. "You'll get twenty years, maybe more. I hope."

"You too," Rosemary told him cheerfully. "I'll name you as accessory before, during, and after the fact, and Lionel will back me up. Do you suppose they have co-ed jails, George? I wouldn't mind a twenty-year stretch in the pokey with you."

George contemplated the nice deep water they were flying over. He could imagine Rosemary sealed in concrete and dropped overboard some dark night. It was the happiest vision of his life.

They flew up to the boat and hung around. It was lying very low in the water, the sails hanging limp. T-V

sat on the rail, up to his knees in water, holding a life-preserver in his lap.

"Well, well," T-V said in surprise. "What are you two doing here?"

"We came to save you, Father," Rosemary said. "The boat is sinking."

"A brilliant observation," T-V said caustically. "I'm aware of that. What do you mean, you came to save me?"

"We can carry you to shore on this rope," George put in hollowly. "Sit on the rope and hold on with both hands, as if you were in a swing."

"That's the silliest thing I ever heard of," T-V said. "I'll do nothing of the kind. I'll put on this life-preserver and swim to shore." He hesitated. "Hate to, though. Water's cold."

Rosemary said: "You can't do that, Father. You'll catch pneumonia for sure. You know how easily you take a chill."

"Darn this boat," T-V said vehemently. "Wish I had my hands on the man who built it." He considered the water, now almost over the rails, then regarded the 'copters hovering above. "I want an honest answer, young man. Do you think you can carry me back to shore without breaking my neck?"

"Oh, sure," George said, his voice cracking a little.

"Very well," T-V snapped. "Let's go to it."

They dropped down, the 'copters close together, the rope a long U between them. With a little grunting, T-V established himself on the rope. "Cast off," he directed.

The MAXIMS of JAPHETH

by Gelett Burgess



The tall man goeth ill with the damsel of short stature; neither doth much talk and small performance befit the braggart.

Rosemary called: "Ready, George?"

He nodded, unable to speak. They gunned the 'copters, and slowly T-V Barclay was borne aloft. As they turned and headed for shore, the sailboat disappeared beneath the waves with scarcely a ripple.

"How's it going, Father?" Rosemary shouted, as they droned along.

"Why, very nicely," T-V said, almost cordially. "The rope is a bit sharp. First time I ever flew—I think I rather like it."

George wondered if he were going mad. *Sure you like it*, he thought. *Why not? The whole family is crazy!*

THEY reached the shore without mishap and lowered T-V to the beach with scarcely a jar. George got out of the harness and sat down on the sand. His knees seemed to want to bend backward.

"Well, well," T-V said. "Quite an experience!" He looked at George, his eyes suddenly sharp. "Don't understand about that boat. Certainly was fortunate that you happened to be handy with your flying-machines."

George gulped and stood up, ready to run.

"Very practical for rescue work," T-V said. He squeezed a little water out of his trousers. "Come to my office tomorrow, young man, and we'll talk business. See you later—must get out of these wet clothes."

George suddenly felt so weak that Rosemary had to put her arms around him to hold him up. "You're a success, George—or you will be soon. I'm glad, because I don't like long engagements."

"Rosemary," George said severely. "You are crazy. You are a dangerous woman."

"Do you really think so?" Rosemary said, smoothing his hair. "You have nice hair, George. Even nicer than Gregory Peck, and that's saying a lot."

"You bored holes in the bottom of that boat," George said.

"You have nice eyes, too," Rosemary murmured.

"Then you filled the holes with wax," George said.

"And beautiful hollows in your cheeks," Rosemary said dreamily.

"When your father took the boat out, the wax dissolved and the boat sank."

"You're smart, too," Rosemary said. "We'll make a wonderful couple."

"Rosemary, you're not listening to me," George said. He put his arms around her to make her listen.

"No," Rosemary said. "You haven't said the right thing yet."

George considered a moment. "You mean you think I'm crazy enough to stand here and tell you that I'm crazy about you?"

"That's better," Rosemary said. "Now I'm listening."

Animal Man

THE GIFTED AUTHOR OF "THE BIG HITCH" GIVES US ANOTHER COLORFUL STORY OF THE CIRCUS LIFE HE KNOWS SO WELL.

by ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON

THE big white cage came rolling up, its rubber-tired wheels slickering silently over the damp grass, and halted beside its mate. Kneeling camels, and zebras tethered to other cages nearby, looked up incuriously to greet it. A water buffalo rumbled; a llama danced about stiff-legged at the end of its rope.

Ed Harker, riding majestically on the cage's top and working the brake, lighted a cigarette with his free hand and leaned back. He sat for a while, contemplating the broad expanse of the circus lot spread out below him. All of the busy activity of arrival and setting up was going on: Tents were rising, loaded wagons rumbling about, tractors chugging, workmen bawling at each other. The Big Top's framework of poles and rigging rose, like some gaunt prehistoric skeleton, against the rosy morning sky. It was a colorful spectacle, delighting the hearts of "towners" who had risen early to see the circus arrive, and of swarms of small boys scurrying about and squealing delightedly.

But it didn't delight Ed Harker particularly, that morning. Like all circus men, he had eyes only for one small part of all the teeming activity—his own particular department, the menagerie tent, directly in front of him, sprawling alongside the Big Top's frame. It wasn't nearly "up," yet, he noted in annoyance. The sidewall was not yet hung, its quarter-poles not set in place, the mounds of straw and sawdust still waiting to be spread. It would take those lazy bums of canvasmen at least another half-hour to get it ready for occupancy. Meanwhile, beasts and men would just have to stand around and wait, a most discouraging business. And with no breakfast, either! Off in a corner of the lot, the cookhouse was already steaming and giving off appetizing odors, and the red flag was already

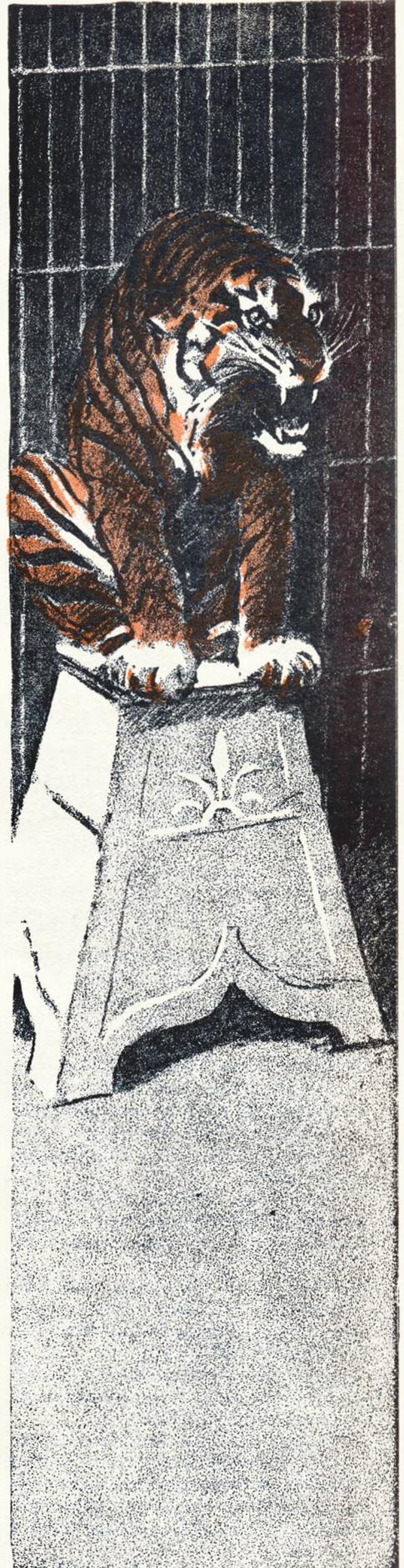
noisted to its peak to denote service. But the animal-men could not eat until their beasts were bedded down and settled. Luckily he'd had the presence of mind to snatch a cup of coffee in the pie-car before he left the circus train!

He sat there, itching to get down and lend a hand with the interminable job—to show those vacationing high-school kids and ex-hobos who seemed to be all you could hire in the way of tent-help nowadays—to show them how a real trouper put a top up! But of course, he couldn't do that. Not only would it be beneath his dignity as an animal-man; but he didn't dare leave his cages unguarded even for a moment until he got them safely inside. Already curious youngsters were swarming about them, poking inquisitive fingers through the wooden shutters, despite the DON'T TOUCH! DANGER! signs stenciled on them.

"Hey, you punks! Get away from there! You want to get hurt?" he roared down at them, scowling as blackly as he could.

Then, watching them scatter and peer fearfully up at him, he grinned wryly. That was the toughest part of his job, having to be nasty to kids. He liked kids; all circus men did. And heck! It hadn't been so very long since he'd been a barefoot towner kid himself, peering into every circus wagon he saw, and being bawled away by stern showmen—who were probably just as sympathetic inwardly as he was now! But you just *had* to get tough with 'em; there was no other way out. Kids didn't realize the danger, that was all. They didn't know what savagery, what killing jungle power was cooped up in those pretty, innocent-looking wagons of his.

Well, he—Ed Harker—realized it! He'd grown up to find out for himself what was inside circus cages; and to spend his life studying their occupants and taking care of them. Perhaps it



Lord, that guy was good!



He was really doing about five things at once, all the time—and in deadly danger all the while.

wasn't much of a career, by towner standards, just being an animal-man. But it suited Ed Harker; he didn't ask for anything better. It was an interesting life, and pleasant enough—that is, it was when those bums of canvasmen got your tent up for you on schedule, and you got a chance to eat occasionally!

Grumbling, Ed tossed his cigarette away, and started to climb down the little iron ladder on the cage-front. Standing on the tongue, he reached up to loosen the footrest and lower it on its chain. It stuck, as it usually did, and as he wrestled with it his fingers absently closed on the bars of a little window set near the top. Then he remembered—and let go, just in time!

There was a roar and a thump from inside; something flashed past the window and raked the bars. Wildly, Ed leaped backward off the wagon-tongue, landing amid a tangle of the led stock. Ugly camel heads swung around on snakelike necks and snapped at him, zebras squealed and lashed out with wicked little striped hoofs, the llama leaped and spat. The led-stock boss came tearing around a wagon, waving his arms and shouting.

"Hey, you goddam towner," he howled, "git out'n them animules! What yuh tryin' to do—git yourself killed? Git away from there!" Then as he caught sight of Ed's uniform cap emerging from the melee, he broke off, grinning. "Oh, it's you, Ed! I thought you wuz one o' the yokels! What the heck you doin' git'in' mixed up in a mess like that?" he went on. "You'd ought to know better, an old circus hand like you!"

ED shook his head shamefacedly, sucking a finger. "Sorry, Saganaw!" he mumbled. "Didn't mean to bother your beasts. One of my cats clawed at me as I was getting off my wagon. Darned near got my whole hand!"

"Gee, that's tough, fella!" The led-stock boss was instantly sympathetic. "Hurt you bad?"

"Oh, no. Just a scratch." Ed exhibited the finger, on which a red streak was spreading. "It was that damned Sheba, in the end compartment. Meanest cat in the act! She'll strike at anything she sees outside her bars; I ought to have remembered."

"Yeah? Tigers is sure dangerous, ain't they?" Saganaw moved languidly to his own beasts; he yanked snapping camel muzzles about, casually slapped zebra rumps into place and grabbed the llama by an ear, restoring order. "I'd be scared to work around 'em, myself! I sure would," he said then, biting off a huge plug of chewing-tobacco.

"Oh, they're no worse than other big cats," Ed rushed to the defense of his charges. "They've got their little

ways; you have to watch 'em. But most of 'em are all right; there's only a couple of really bad ones. Of course, they're wild animals, and being cooped up in cages all their lives doesn't help their dispositions any. You can't help feeling kind of sorry for them."

"Yeah? Well, I ain't feelin' sorry fer no critter that tries to chew my arm off!" The led-stock boss disclaimed humanitarianism with a squirt of tobacco-juice. "Wanna stick a plug o' 'baccy on that cut? It'll stop the bleedin'."

"No, thanks. It's almost stopped anyway." Ed wound his handkerchief about his hand. "Oh, I like tigers—always have. They're fun to work around. Most of 'em are pets of mine—except that damned Sheba. Of course I wouldn't dare go in the cages with 'em! But they're all right from outside."

Saganaw nodded, and spat. "But your boss, Cap'n Bennett," he pointed out. "He goes in the cages with 'em."

"The Captain? Oh, sure!" Ed's eyes shone with hero-worship. "He's different. He's a trainer, not just an animal-man. One of the greatest in the business. He's been working tiger acts all his life. He's not afraid of anything! But me, I'm different. I'll play it safe, and stay outside the bars."

Saganaw spat. "You an' me both," he agreed. "I wouldn't want to be a trainer, neither." Then he looked toward the menagerie, and chuckled. "Well, what d'ya know? Them lily-fingered, Johnny-come-lately canvas monkeys have finally got our tent up! Now ain't that sweet of 'em? We better move in quick, before it falls down again!" He turned hastily, began untying ropes and jerking on them. "Hup, you lop-eared hayburners!" he bawled. "On yer feet! We're movin' in."

His men broke up their crap-game under a monkey-cage and hurried to help him.

Ed turned back toward his cages, rolling up his sleeves. The work elephants, dragging their log-chain harnesses, were already moving among the cages, and one of them set her massive head against the back of Ed's first vehicle and started to push. It rumbled forward, with Ed steering by the pole, in under the tent-flap and across the menagerie. It was difficult guiding over the lot ruts with his sore hand, and he swore under his breath as he wrestled with the heavy tongue.

At last he had the wagon placed to his liking in the cage line, and went back for the second, Ed walking beside the elephant, patting her trunk and feeding her peanuts from a little bag in his pocket. He had a weakness for elephants—as what circus man hasn't?—those huge docile beasts that do most of the work around a modern

tent show, always reliable and never complaining.

They brought the second cage in, and Ed worried it into place against the first one, taking extreme care to get it exactly "spotted"—for many a wild-animal escape has taken place because cage doors were not precisely together! One of the gold carvings on a cornice chipped against a tent-pole, and he swore savagely. He was vain of his two beautiful old cages—the finest in the menagerie and relics of a circus wood-carving art now long dead. He spent long hours lovingly polishing the gold-leaf and cleaning the paint; he regretted that modern traffic rules required the substitution of rubber tires for the carven "sunburst" wheels that had been the glory of the old vehicles in horse-drawn days.

ONLY after he had the dens placed to his exact liking did he take down the wooden shutters from their sides; though impatient growls and scratchings from inside urged him to hurry. Finally he removed them, one by one, stacking them neatly against the wheels. And there were his tigers—the whole nine of them, pacing and weaving in a symphony of black and gold, of gleaming furry bodies and long waving tails. They sniffed the morning air with delight, after the nightlong confinement; they yawned and stretched and rubbed against the bars. Most of them greeted Ed in friendly fashion, blinking amiably like huge house-cats. He went down the line, calling each one by name, talking to it, patting heads and rubbing whiskers through the bars. Only the female in the end compartment, a big glowering brute, crouched in a far corner and hissed at him, rumbling and lashing her tail. Ed spoke to her coaxingly, but only defiant snarls answered his efforts.

"Just *won't* make friends, will she, kid?" a voice behind him said then.

Ed swung around, startled. There was his boss, in riding-boots and Stetson hat, hands in pockets, and watching amusedly. Ed was officially working for the menagerie crew, but he'd always regarded Captain Bob Bennett, the tiger trainer, as his boss. Bennett always called Ed "kid," though the two were almost the same age. Bob Bennett was the youngest trainer in the business, and was so featured on the billboards. But he looked much older than he really was; his face was lined and set from years of braving death in the "big cage," and he never smiled. Only his eyes were alive, warm and friendly.

Ed grinned respectfully, touching his cap. Not that there was any "side" to the Captain; they'd worked together for years and Bennett always treated Ed as an exact equal. But in the circus a distinct social gulf sepa-

rates a trainer from a mere keeper, and Ed couldn't forget that.

"Morning, sir," he said. "Yes sir, she's mean as ever—the worst I ever handled. She got my finger this morning." He held up the bloodstained handkerchief.

The tiger trainer clicked his tongue. "Better get some antiseptic on it, quick," he rapped. "Claws infect badly; I ought to know—I've been in the hospital often enough from letting 'em go!" Then he looked back at the hissing big cat. "Yes, Sheba's a problem. Guess I'll have to get rid of her, in the end. I hate to admit there's a beast I can't handle. But she's absolutely crazy. Inbred, you know—offspring of a brother and sister; and it's the same with beasts as with humans. They're usually deformed, physically or mentally. Sheba's a perfect specimen, to look at, but her mind's twisted; she's like a human lunatic. All she'll do in the arena is sit on a pedestal; she won't learn tricks, and she's torn me up half a dozen times. She'll have to go to a zoo, in the end; it's really too risky hauling her around on the road. She'll kill somebody, eventually!" He shook his head, and sighed. Then: "Had your breakfast, kid?"

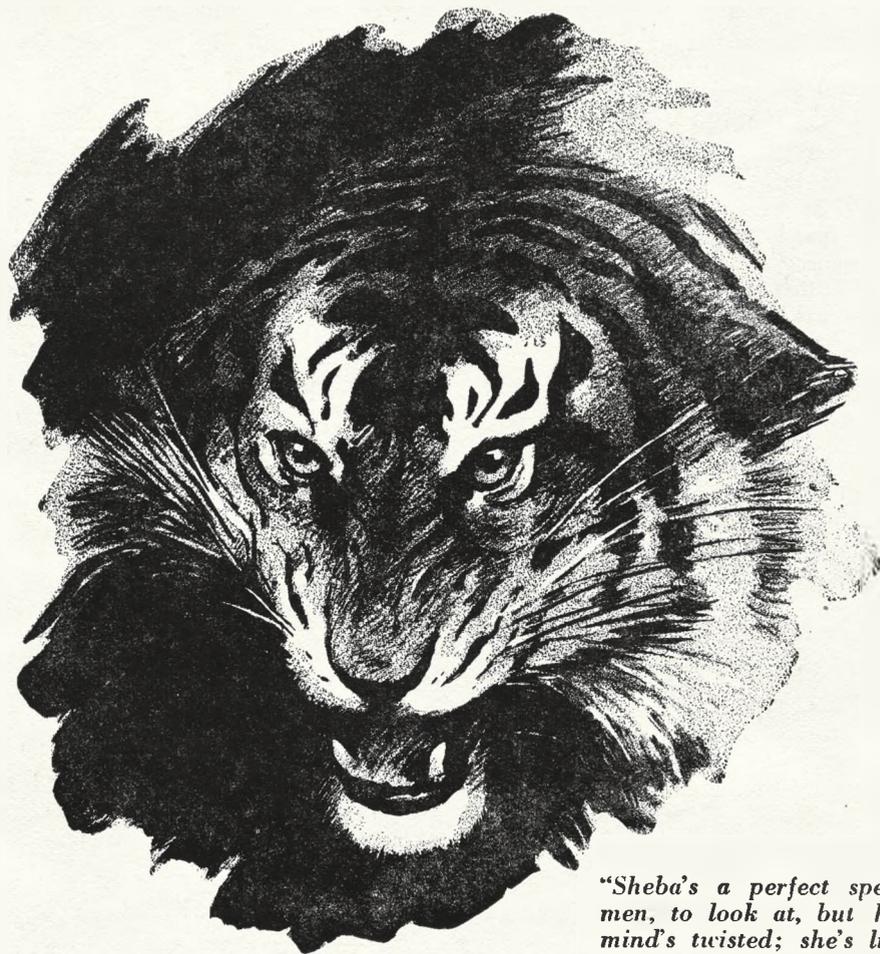
Ed looked sheepish. "Not yet, sir," he admitted. "Wanted to get my cats fixed up a bit, first—see that they were all right."

"Well, damn it, go on and eat!" Bennett snapped. "They've almost finished serving. Your stock is the best-cared-for in the show, anyway, without your starving for it. Go on—scram! Beat it! And get something on that scratch—hear me?" He dug Ed in the ribs with an elbow, then sauntered off down the sawdust, hands in pockets.

Ed looked after him, admiringly. There was a guy to work for! He looked tough and acted tough, but was the kindest man in the world, inside. Fussed over his beasts and his men like a mother! But just the same, Ed carefully raked all the night bedding out of the cages and made his beasts comfortable, before he headed for the cookhouse.

THE other animal-men had eaten before he got there; no one was at his table. The waiter grumbled about "people who thought more about animals than about inconveniencing people," as he served Ed. But Ed ignored this; he wolfed down his food, and hurried back to his menagerie. He got out his tools and buckets, and really went to work.

He cleaned every compartment of the two dens carefully, scraping the floors with a scraper, and spreading clean sawdust a couple of inches deep in each. It was Ed's boast that his cages had no odor; and they certainly hadn't, by the time he had finished.



"Sheba's a perfect specimen, to look at, but her mind's twisted; she's like a human lunatic."

It was slow work, for each tiger had to be moved out of its compartment and locked in with a neighbor during the cleaning operation. Some went willingly; some had to be driven with a crowbar, snarling and clawing. Not really angry, more like playful tomcats. But Sheba he couldn't move; she backed into a corner, battling and snarling, and he had to rake around and under her.

Then he groomed the cats themselves. Few people outside zoos and circuses ever realize that performing wild beasts are curried and brushed like prize horses for their appearances; but they are, with a long-handled broom—a ticklish operation. Most of them like it, sprawling and purring, catlike; but there are always a couple of incorrigibles who slow up the work.

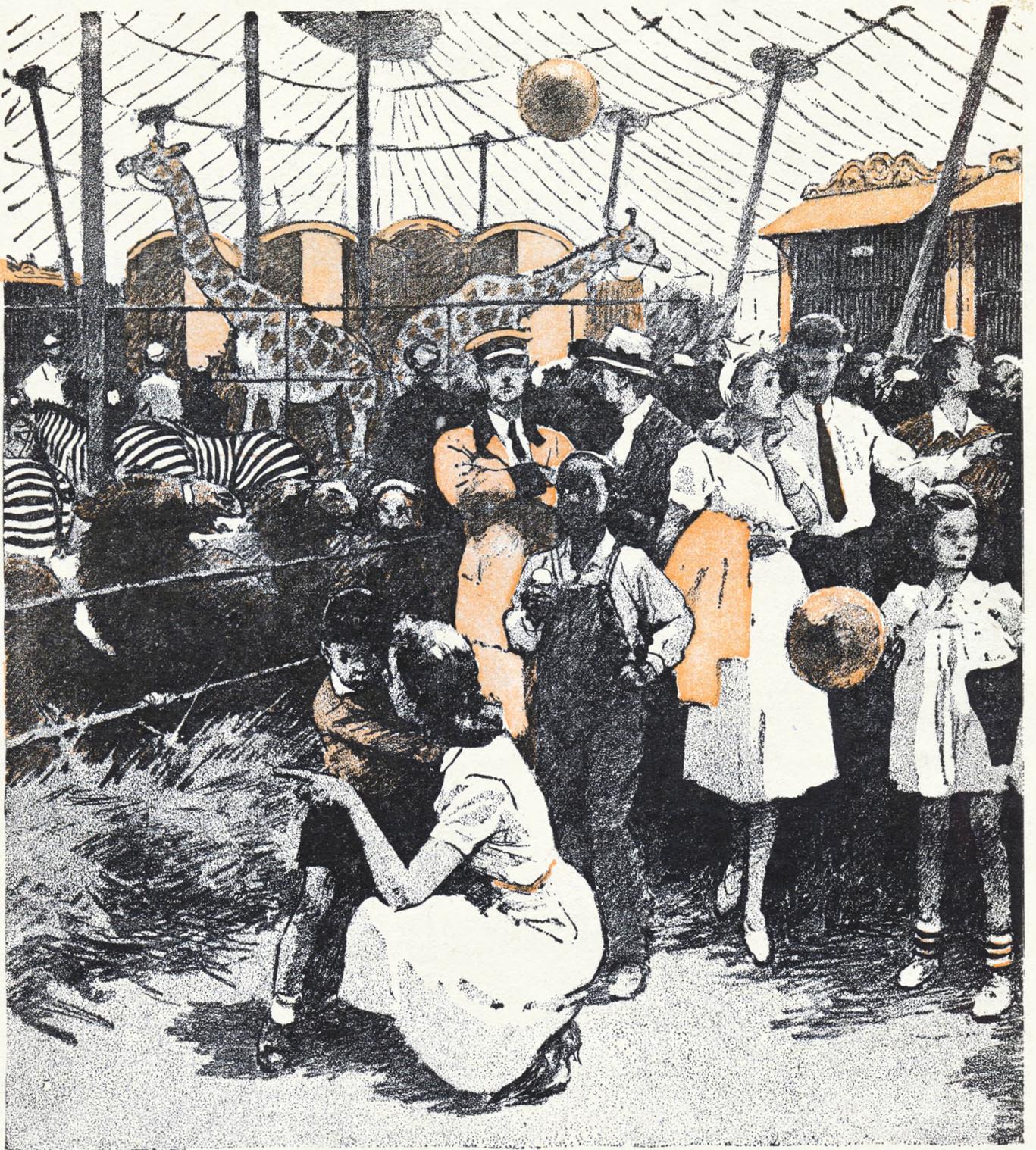
Then, beasts and cages attended to, he had to help the other cage-men set up the long wooden arena chute and hook it on to the cage-line, hammering every stake into place, and personally checking the sliding doors and panels. Then he inspected the great arena itself, and went over all his boss' properties; he laid out the whips and blank-cartridge revolvers and arranged them on a pedestal. The regular property-men might set up all the rest of the Big Top's impedimenta, but they couldn't be trusted with this stuff

—it was too important. It had to be done by the animal-men themselves.

By this time it was noon, and Ed hurried over to the cookhouse for another hasty meal; then he dashed back to wash the wheels and bodies of his white cages and stick the quaint little "banners," relics of old-time "street-parade" days, on their tops. Then he went to the menagerie wagon, donned his gaudy black and orange uniform, with matching cap (the uniform was really only a sort of pajamas that went on over his regular clothes) and stationed himself in front of his cages. The band was thumping now out on the Midway, the barkers were braying, and the calliope tooting. Presently someone yelled "Doors!" and the first of the afternoon crowds came trickling into the menagerie, bound for the Big Top.

For the next hour Ed was busy answering questions about his tigers, discouraging people from trying to feed them peanuts and poke them with umbrellas, and generally watching over them as the other keepers were doing with their charges.

Finally the crowd began to thin out; the elephants and the led stock were being festooned with their "spectacle blankets," and Captain Bennett came sauntering along behind the ropes, dressed in his ring costume. Ed



greeted him with another touch of his cap, and the usual grin.

"Well, sir—how do things look?" he asked anxiously.

"Fine! As they always do." The Captain leaned an elbow on the bars, and carelessly scratched a tiger's ear. "You're the best animal-man I ever had working for me, kid—far and away the best. How come you have never thought of being anything better—a trainer, for instance?"

"A trainer?" Ed stared; then he laughed outright. "Me, a trainer?

For the next hour Ed was busy answering questions about his tigers, discourag-

You're kidding, aren't you, sir? Why, I'm just a cage swipe; I couldn't be anything else."

"DON'T see why not!" And Bennett shook his head. "You've worked around tigers all your life; you know 'em as well as I do. What's stopping you from training 'em?"

Ed laughed again. "Why, I wouldn't have the nerve, sir!" he declared. "I'm all right with cats, outside the

bars. But I'd never be able to go inside! Honest, sir."

The Captain's pale eyes studied him. "So you put your trust in bars, do you, kid? I don't, myself. They're static defenses. Give me a whip and a chair and a gun; and you can have all your bars!" Then he shrugged. "Well, suit yourself; it's your life. If you're satisfied, I certainly am. The guys on the outside of the big cage are just as important as the guys inside;



ing people from trying to feed them peanuts and poke them with umbrellas.

don't ever let anyone tell you different! Your job's just as responsible as mine, even if you don't get the applause." He glanced at his watch. "Well, got to get going, kid—the show'll be on in a minute. See you in the Big Top." He ducked under the cage, and disappeared.

The last of the crowd was hurrying through the connection; the animals were already lined up and ready for the opening parade. Soon the whistle

blew, the band struck up, and the show was on. The performing lions were being driven out of their cages into the arena chute, with a belching of roars in shaggy throats. The tigers would be on next; Ed caught up his crowbar and began to open compartment doors, ready to move his beasts in when the signal was given. . . .

Ten minutes later he was in the Big Top, standing just outside the glare of arena spotlights, watching the striped

cats go through their smooth performance in the great barred structure: Walking balls, balancing on tightropes, leaping on pedestals and through blazing hoops. As the act progressed, Ed was almost as busy as if he were the trainer—poking tigers off their seats as their cues were given, breaking up quarrels between them, handing in properties and generally making himself useful everywhere.

He found time, though, to admire his boss, working quietly and capably with the beasts inside. Lord, that guy

was good! He was really doing about five things at once, all the time—and in deadly danger all the while—putting the snarling cats through their tricks one by one, holding the others on their pedestals by sheer force of personality, shifting props and paraphernalia about; meanwhile keeping an eye cocked for the band's changes of music and the crowd's applause. You had to be born to it, to do stuff like that! The Captain's father and grandfather before him had been trainers. He, Ed Harker, could never hope to learn it; not in a million years!

Well, he'd stick to his own job; it was important, too. He kept on moving about the arena, poking up beasts with his crowbar and giving a hand with set pieces. Once, when a tiger tried to sneak down from her seat and jump Bennett from behind, it was Ed's bar that interfered at the critical moment, distracting the beast until the Captain's barking revolver and lashing whip sent her back to the pedestal again.

Bennett himself spoke of it when he came out of the cage, after he'd taken his bows and sent the cats back to their cages again. "See what I meant by your job being responsible, kid?" He rested a gauntleted hand on Ed's shoulder briefly. "That brute might have got me, if you hadn't been on the ball. Thanks!"

ED grinned sheepishly. "You'd have spotted her yourself, sir," he protested. "You always do. You must have eyes in the back of your head!" "You develop 'em, in this game!" The trainer stripped off his gloves, and tossed his whip to an attendant. They moved together up the Hippodrome track, dodging somersaulting clowns and galloping horses. "Well, that's it, kid! We're through, until the night show. I've got to duck uptown as soon as I change out of my uniform; I'm doing a radio broadcast with the press agent. Damned nuisance; wish I could get out of it! Weather doesn't look good; it's clouding up, and looks like a blow before night. I never feel safe being away from my beasts during a storm. Still, I can trust 'em with you, eh?"

"Sure, sure!" Ed grinned. "You run along, sir. I'll take care of everything just fine!"

They separated in the "backyard," the Captain going toward the dressing-tent, and Ed lingering for a while, sitting on a wagon-pole smoking a cigarette, watching the performers go in and out of the Big Top, and flirting casually with some ballet girls in bare legs and fluttering tulle skirts. But all the time he had an eye cocked toward a sky rapidly becoming threatening and dark. A mass of blue-black clouds was building up, thunder was rumbling, and an occasional streak of

lightning was brighter than the fading sun. The Captain was right, there was going to be a blow pretty soon. Ed hoped the show would be over before it hit.

After a while the clouds made him nervous, and he went back into the menagerie to stand beside his beasts. They were restless, pacing and growling; he spoke soothingly to them, and tried to calm them. Patrons were already straggling out through the tent, even though the show was still on; for the thunder was now audible even above the band's blare, and the canvas had begun to flap and ripple in a rising gale. By the time the Hippodrome races were run, and the show ended, the bulk of the audience had already emerged. They showed no tendency to linger to look at the animals, either. It was ominously dark now, though only about four in the afternoon, and the electric lights had been turned on in all the tents. Otherwise the last of the crowd could not have seen their way out.

Hardly were they gone before the storm struck—all at once, with a drumming as of a million triphammers on the canvas overhead, a creaking of ropes and howling of wind in the riggings. Lightning flashed so that one hardly knew the lights had been turned off again, and thunder rolled incessantly. The storm excited the animals, as it always did: Lions began to roar, hyenas to laugh like maniacs; leopards coughed, parrots screeched, and even the placid led stock pawed and tugged at their tethers. The elephants had already been led outside the tent, where they could see the storm for themselves. The big brutes are not afraid of storms as long as they can see them, but if they can only hear them they are liable to stampede.

Cage animals are just the reverse. They are quieter if they cannot see, if they have the sense of being closed in. All of the cage-men were hastily putting up the boards on their dens, and Ed followed suit. Then he stood talking to his cats through the slats, soothing them with his voice. Not that he wasn't feeling jumpy himself, for this was far and away the worst storm of the season, and it could be a "blowdown" before it finished. The howling gales were mounting, not diminishing, and the crackle of lightning was almost incessant. He longed to be outside with the canvas-men, shouting and bawling to each other as they tightened the storm guys; and he could hear the "click-click-click" of sledgehammers continually driving in tent-stakes. But of course he couldn't leave the cages; that was his post of duty, no matter what happened. He wished the Captain hadn't gone uptown.

Well, if the worst came, and the tent did go down, the cages would prob-

ably be all right. It'd be the led stock that'd be most in danger. Saganaw would have his troubles if the Top should go. For now the quarter-poles were dancing about, the canvas was ripping, the fall-guys straining and screaming like a windjammer at sea. And the gale was still rising—

Then suddenly it happened: There was a vast "swooshing" sound, a ripping of canvas and crash of breaking poles, and the whole world seemed to fall in on top of Ed. A quarter-pole knocked him flat and the vast suffocating weight of tons of wet canvas bore him down. When he struggled to his feet, half-stunned and cursing, the whole side of the tent nearest him was down over the tops of his wagons, imprisoning him with them, in a sort of pocket of canvas.

Anxiously, he hurried over to the dens and inspected them for damage. The first one seemed all right; a falling quarter-pole had knocked it askew and damaged its carvings, but the body of the den and its precious contents were obviously unharmed. He turned toward the second—and froze! Good Lord! The end door was wide open, and through it was slipping a tawny shape with burning eyes that glared crazily.

Sheba! The worst cat in the act, the killer! She was on the ground now, facing Ed and hissing defiance at him and the whole world. A few seconds more and she'd be out from under the tent and loose on the lot and the town, a killing menace to any human being she might encounter!

Instantly, without thinking, Ed acted. He caught up the nearest weapon, his cage-scraper, and sprang to confront the tigress. At all costs he must drive her back under the wheels of the wagon, keep her there until help arrived and she could be recaptured.

"Back there, Sheba! Back!" he yelled at her, trying to imitate Captain Bennett's voice. Then "Help! Help! Loose cat here—loose cat! Bring a shifting-den!" he howled at the top of his lungs, over and over, meanwhile jabbing toward the beast with the scraper's end, forcing her back. "Help! Help!"

HAD anyone heard him? He doubted it. The howl of the storm and the shriek and roars of the frightened animals in the blowdown drowned his voice, and the muffling canvas buried it. He'd just have to hold the cat there, and wait. Luckily he could see; the lightning through the cloth was almost as bright as day. If it had been dark, he wouldn't have a chance.

Not that he had much, as it was! Sheba had retreated under the wheels, as he had hoped she would; but she wasn't much bluffed. She was crouch-

ing there, lashing her tail, snarling and hissing. She raised a huge taloned paw and lashed out at the scraper, batting it sidewise.

"Back, Sheba! Back!" Ed snapped at her, jabbing with it. He didn't dare yell for help again, lest his voice betray his fear.

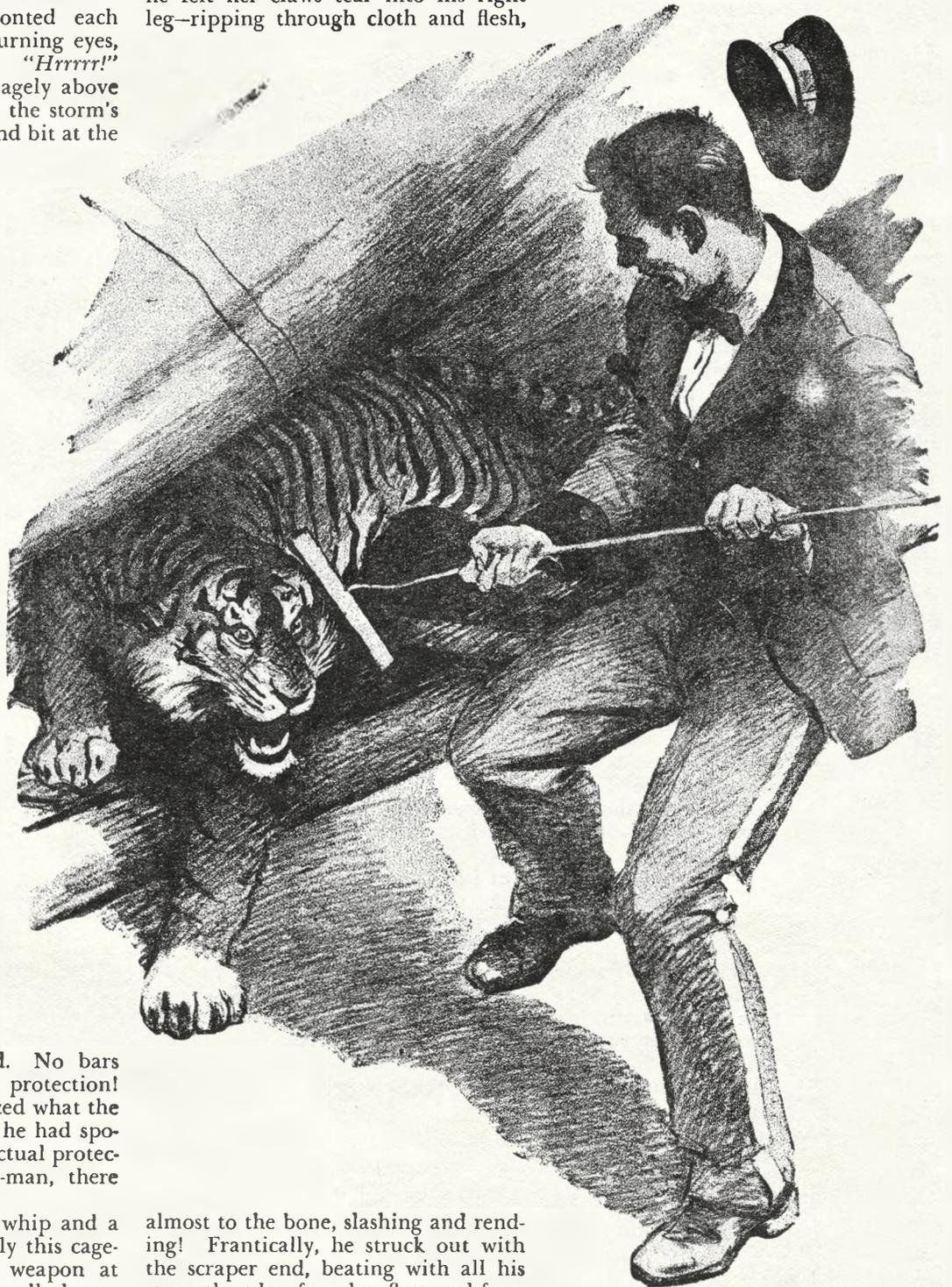
Man and beast confronted each other, eyes glaring into burning eyes, each menacing the other. "Hrrrrr!" The tiger's snarls rose savagely above his own commands, above the storm's cacophony. She clawed and bit at the

"Back there, Sheba! Back!" Despite himself, his voice sounded high and shrill. "Back—"

"Hrrrrr!" Sheba's voice rose louder too; the coughing hunting-snarl of a maddened tigress. She lunged out suddenly, savagely, past his guard, and he felt her claws tear into his right leg—ripping through cloth and flesh,

For Pete's sake, why didn't they come with that shifting-den? They'd better; he couldn't hold the cat much longer! He was crippled now; he couldn't put his leg to the ground. Blood was coursing down his calf, and

*Illustrated by
Maurice Bower*



*"Help! Help!
Loose cat here—
loose cat!" he
howled at the
top of his lungs,
meanwhile jab-
bing with the
scraper.*

scraper, raked out at Ed. No bars between them now, no protection! Suddenly Ed Harker realized what the Captain had meant when he had spoken of bars not being an actual protection. Trainer or animal-man, there was no real safety.

Only Ed didn't have a whip and a chair and gun; he had only this cage-scraper. It was a futile weapon at best; a flat piece of iron, hardly larger than a razor-blade, stuck on the end of a heavy wire! It was meant to rake dirt from cage-floors, not to battle with. The beast had already bent it badly in her first attack; he had to hold it at an angle to keep it pointed at her face. Another blow of those steely claws would twist it like a pretzel. Its only value was that she might not realize its frailty.

almost to the bone, slashing and rending! Frantically, he struck out with the scraper end, beating with all his strength at her face, her flattened forehead and twisted lips. He felt her release him, saw her retreat again beneath the wheels. He fell sidewise against the wagon, holding on with an elbow and bracing himself. They faced each other, panting and heaving, like boxers between rounds. But he knew the pause wouldn't last, that she'd drive in again, with the smell of blood to madden her further.

pain was tormenting him so that he bit his lips to keep from groaning. His battered scraper was useless now in his hands, so twisted and bent that he could no longer even point it at her face. He was as helpless as a tethered goat before the cat's next onslaught. Unless they got here quick—

Then suddenly Ed Harker realized that it didn't really make much difference whether they came or not. It would be too late for him, in any case.

He was bleeding too badly; the cat's claws must have found an artery in that leg. He was getting groggy; waves of dizziness were running over him and he could feel his knees buckling. He could hardly see the beast before him any more, just two great glaring eyes that seemed as big as dinner-plates. He was going to pass out any minute—to fall; and then she'd be on him—and that would be the end.

YES, this was it, all right! It was the finish for Ed Harker, the man who was afraid to face cats without bars! This was his zero hour; he was face to face with his Last Enemy— But no, that wasn't right. Somehow, even in this last extremity, he couldn't consider Sheba an enemy. He'd loved tigers all his life, and he still loved them. Even if he'd had a gun in his hands, he couldn't have shot her! It wasn't really her fault, the poor beast! It was her mind that was twisted; heredity, not her own desire, had filled her brain with tortured hate of all things living. In this last extremity, it was as if he could look straight into that sick brain before him, could see and follow her every thought and impulse, could see that she was as much afraid of him as he of her; that she was literally cowering in panic from him, and fighting only from the desperation born of fear.

Maybe he was out of his head; maybe the pain and loss of blood had driven him nuts. But his only thought now was to comfort the crazy beast before him, to soothe her fears. "Ho, there, kitty, kitty!" he murmured softly, through stiffening lips. "Steady, girl! It's all right! It's all right! Ho, now! Ho!"

And—was he dreaming, or did some of the wild glare go out of the huge cat's eyes? Did her snarls lessen, her hissing suddenly have an almost apologetic tone? Did the crouching muscles relax just a little? Certainly that was a growing respect in the eyes that blazed up at him. Sheba was confronting a miracle—a man who was apparently invulnerable; who'd taken her worst blows and survived them, still on his feet; whom she couldn't hurt or intimidate, but who faced her godlike, supremely powerful. And yet he sympathized, soothed her with soft words, was kindly even after what she had done to him. Something was born in the maimed soul of Sheba in that moment which had never been there before. She crouched, looking at him, her teeth bared but no longer hissing, her body motionless.

And a strange impulse came to Ed Harker—a thought so wild that he wondered if it was born of delirium—

a thought born from watching the cat grow suddenly calmer and more docile. If he could soothe her, couldn't he command her? It was worth trying, anything was worth trying, in this last moment of extremity. It would mean lifting the scraper that was his only defense from its guard-position—but to hell with that! He'd have to take the chance.

Ed Harker stood up, balanced on his one leg. Calmly, he raised the iron and tapped it on the open door of the cage—tapped it like a trainer's whip.

"Hup, there, girl!" His voice, still soft, commanded. "Come on, now. Get back in there! Go on! Hup! Hup!"

The cat's eyes shifted to the opening, then back to him. She hissed, half-heartedly, and tried to glare.

"Hup, Sheba!" His voice rose sharply. "Back home, girl! Hup!"

Then suddenly she leaped. The striped form soared— Oh, God! She was coming straight at him! But no, the striped body miraculously flashed past him, clawed briefly at the sill of the den and then vanished inside it; one last defiant snarl sounded from the black interior.

Ed had just strength enough to slam the door and lock it after her. And when a couple of minutes later, the other animal-men lifted the canvas off the cages and rushed in with a portable cage and nets—evidently his cries had been heard after all—they found Ed Harker leaning as if nonchalantly against the wagon and smoking a cigarette.

"What kept you guys so long?" he drawled. "You don't need that stuff now. Sure, there *was* a cat loose. But I put her back in the cage by myself. Oh, nothing to it—an old hand like me—"

Then he collapsed, in a dead faint.

BUT it was not until sometime later that he realized the full import of what he'd done. There'd been congratulations from almost everybody on the circus, even the management; that evening he was the hero of the whole show. The wound in his leg, so serious at the time, had proven trivial enough; the circus doctor had kidded Ed, while taping it up. He'd even insisted on limping through his part in the night show—leaning on his crowbar—and on bedding down his beasts for the night in the now reconstructed menagerie tent.

It was only as he was putting up the sideboards for the last time that his boss (who had said hardly a word until then, but had just looked at him queerly) came up and spoke to him in the darkened tent.

"Remarkable thing you did today, Ed," said Captain Bennett. "I wonder if you know just how remarkable."

Ed flushed. "Aw, it was nothing, sir," he protested. "You'd have done it yourself, if you'd been here."

The trainer looked at him. "Would I?" he murmured. "I wonder! Sure, I can work Sheba in the big cage, all right—when I've got all the tools, an audience to cheer me on, and guys like you on the outside to help me. But alone, with only a cage-scraper—no, I don't know whether I could do a thing like that or not. I don't know!"

"But you did, Ed," he went on, after a pause. "You did it, all by yourself. And don't you see what that means, man? You're not just a cage-swipe any more, you're something bigger. If you could make Sheba do a thing like that, under those conditions, you could make her do anything. And any other cat on the show, too! You're a trainer, Ed, whether you want to be or not. It's my prediction that you'll make the greatest of us all!"

ED gasped. "A—a trainer?" he stammered. "But—but I haven't got the experience, the background—"

"You don't need 'em," the other cut in impatiently. "You've got something a damned sight more important: a natural control over animals. Oh, sure, I happen to come from a long line of circus tamers. But—you ever hear of Clyde Beatty? Or Terrill Jacobs? Or a lot of others bigger than I'll ever be—and without a drop of circus blood in their veins! They were animal-men once, too, and proud of it! And nobody had to teach 'em to be trainers; they just walked into the cage and did it. Like you did, today. You're on the other side of the bars now, Ed. Ask yourself: 'Am I really afraid of big cats any more?'"

Ed Harker stared at him wonderingly. "Well, no," he replied. "Now that you mention it, I guess I'm not!"

"Sure you're not—and you never will be again! And that's all there is to it, man. You already know as much about beasts as I do, after my years of experience. The rest is just 'monkey tricks' and showmanship. I can give you that—we'll work my act together, between shows, and I'll teach you all I know. Then—I've already spoken to the management about it—we'll see about getting you some cats of your own. By next season, unless I miss my boards, your name will be up on billboards: CAPTAIN EDWARD HARKER AND HIS FIGHTING FELINES. How does it sound?" He put out his hand. "What do you say, Ed? Is it a deal?"

Long after Bennett had walked away, Ed Harker still stared after him, dazed. Absently, he put his hand through the bars and stroked a tiger's head. Then suddenly he became aware that it was Sheba he was stroking. . . . And she was arching her back, and purring—a rasping purr!

IF Tony knew he was in a hot spot, there was no sign of it in the strange mixture of Italian and Brooklyn accents that flowed steadily from his cracked, bearded lips. The Italian came from his parents, and the rest of the speech-mixture from Tony's birthplace.

Mingled with the curses were words of encouragement: "Don't worry, palsy, I ain't leavin' ya. We're stayin' here where we are and let the war come to us. *Attenti!* Pal, I think it's coming." He patted the hot water-jacket of his machine-gun and slipped in a new belt. His finger caressed the trigger, and the satisfying thunder of his weapon brought a smile to his grimy face.

"*Amico*, maybe we are left alone on this unprintable hill, but we got too much stuff to move now. If those so-and-so riflemen are around, they ain't givin' us much support." He trailed off into an unprintable string of epithets. The thin cloud of steam rising from the gun lost itself in the smoke and dust of the battlefield.

Only now and then was any movement to be seen, but the gunner fired with great regularity, cursing the dust and fumes that kept him from seeing any better. "*In piedi!* Stand and fight, damn it, stand and fight!" he yelled hoarsely.

Tony reached back with one hand for his canteen, managed to get the top off and lifted it to his lips. Just a sip, and then with a sudden motion he leaned forward and poured the rest of the precious fluid into the jacket of his smoking weapon, carefully putting in only a thin stream. Then he put the empty water-container back into the pouch on his belt.

An earthquake threw him to one side, and a mountain of flame and gravel half buried him. Without bothering to brush the rocks and dirt from his clothes, Tony anxiously set the machine-gun up on its tripod, hurriedly adjusted the mount and pressed the trigger. Nothing happened, but with two quick jerks of his capable hands, accompanied by several times that number of words of a highly colorful nature, Tony had his weapon barking again.

Puffs of dirt danced around Tony, and once or twice a heavy blow, accompanied by a diminishing whine, almost knocked the gun from his grasp.

Suddenly the soldier scampered around the gun, swinging the barrel as he went, and raking the cliff two hundred yards behind him from top to bottom, back and forth, then back to the crest again. He swung back to his original front, steadily spraying a complete circle around his position. The gun stuttered to a halt, and the white canvas of the belt wriggled convulsively for a second and was quiet.

Tony Stands by a Friend

A gun can be a man's best friend—as witness this authentic battle record

by R. H. BRIDGES

Tony grabbed an ammunition chest, opened it and jerked out the metal tab of the fresh belt, inserting it into the machine-gun. A couple of quick motions, and again the weapon sprang to life under the capable hands and encouraging words of its master.

One hand still on the trigger, the other fumbled behind him for a minute, and Tony brought his find to his mouth, grasped a ring in his teeth, and a throw that was developed playing left field on the sandlots back home brought half-a-dozen figures limply from behind a rock to his right front. For good measure, the spray of the weapon passed over them once and went on.

Again and again the maneuver sweeping the cliff behind him was repeated. And again and again that mighty arm reached behind him, paused for a second at his mouth and swung, with never an interruption of the nozzle that spewed a steady stream of steel in the direction of the attacking force.

A half-track vehicle roared around the bend of the road below him, and almost automatically Tony turned his efforts toward this new threat, sending it flaming into the ditch beside the road. There was a sign of movement around the vehicle; then there was none. No more vehicles appeared.

A sudden movement a few yards to his left jerked the man's attention for a second from his gun without decreasing the rate of his fire. But that second's glance brought a dry grin to Tony's face: "Pal, we got a friend inviting himself to a taste of this party. Guess we'll let him stay, huh? Okay, I thought so."

The steadily growing cracking of friendly rifles brought a steadily slackening, a slowing between bursts to Tony and his gun. "Baby, you got time to cool off now. You sure got hot for me, didn't you, kid? Those birds ought be ashamed to let you do all the work. They think there ain't another machine-gun in this regiment?"

A plane roared over, its guns spitting. Then another and yet another, and Tony cocked a bloodshot eye for a minute in their direction. "Kid, we're getting a lot of help. Takes the whole blamed Army to take your place and give you a rest. Let's help them out just a little more, huh? How about it, baby?"

"Baby" must have said yes, because the heavy bark of the machine-gun again made itself felt, though in a voice that sounded a little more subdued, now that it had help and could afford to take things a little easier.

A new voice broke into Tony's consciousness. "Soldier, that was nice work. That was damn' nice work. What outfit you with? What's your name? Do you know that you been all by yourself up here? You 'most whipped 'em single-handed!"

Tony looked a little bewildered by this barrage, but his training came to his rescue. "Yes sir!" he answered.

"Tony, this is Lt. Riley! I should have known that it was you, but you look a little dirty."

Tony looked at the Lieutenant, gazed at him from whiskered cheeks to scuffed boots and back again. There was no impertinence in his look, nor in his mind, and the officer saw none. Both men grinned.

"Tony, didn't you know that the platoon you were with was forced back off this hill, what was left of them?"

"I thought something happened to them," Tony answered, running an oily rag back and forth through the barrel of the gun. "Baby, here, and me were kind of busy for a while, and I guess we didn't notice too much."

"The second platoon is sending up more guns, so you'll have a chance for a little rest, maybe." Lt. Riley nodded toward the heavily laden figures coming across the field behind him. "I suppose you know that you'll probably get a medal for this."

TONY looked only mildly interested, and continued with his work of cleaning his machine-gun.

"Tony, you could have left with the few that got back from here. That would have been okay. Nobody would have blamed you."

"I still had a dozen boxes of ammunition," Tony explained simply.

"Still, it took plenty of guts to stay here and fight the whole damn' battle single-handed." There was a decided catch in the Lieutenant's voice.

Tony looked up, his features a strange mixture of mud, blood, sweat, puzzlement and reproach. "Guts, Lieutenant? Guts, hell! Do you honest-to-God think I'd ever let those monkeys get their dirty paws on my pal here?"

Tony fingered a fresh dent on the water-jacket and frowned fiercely at the horizon.

BAR GOLD

SAILING TO CHINA TO TRADE FOR TEA AND SILKS, EZRA COOPER RESCUED TWO CASTAWAY CHINESE WOMEN FROM A WRECK OFF THE COAST. NOW IN THE PORTUGUESE COLONY OF MACAO, HE LEARNS HE HAS PLACED HIMSELF IN DIRE PERIL.

"THERE'S poetry in it," Cooper said, looking at the little gold cup before him. Clark grunted. "Poetry be hanged! You're in China to trade, not to talk poetry. I can't get excited over your cup, however sacred it may be. Rubbish!"

"All my life I've wanted to see China," Cooper mused. "I found Canton a bit tough so now we're being lazy in Macao, while the ship is being scraped at the Canton anchorage. You talk Chinese, I don't; yet I like the cup rarely and you don't. What's the answer?"

"Difference in temperament, I'd say."

Perhaps; they were very different. Ezra Cooper was long and lank, a bony-faced Yankee shipmaster. En route to China he had picked up Clark—a resident of China for years, and who spoke the language—and used him as a supercargo and interpreter. One man had hard, firm character while the other was pleasant but not forceful. Yet it was Cooper, the practical, who could see poetry in the tiny square cup—the poetry of exquisite art.

Poetry was little regarded in this year of 1834. Americans were allowed by the lordly Chinese to trade in Canton, yet were almost prisoners there. Cooper had found it expedient to move with Clark to Macao, where they obtained a house and servants. It was late March and the off-season for the tea trade; so other Americans were now here spending the off-season with their families, who were not allowed in Canton. One of these Americans was coming to the house now—Dr. Macleish, a missionary member of the American colony.

Dr. Macleish was admitted. Cooper shook hands and introduced Clark. The visitor caught sight of the tiny cup and went to it with an exclamation.

"Hello—this is really something! Where did you get it?"

"Newburyport, Massachusetts—aye, back home," said Cooper, laughing. "A man just arrived from China had



it. I got it from him. I liked it and still do."

"You may well, Captain Cooper. You have here something extremely rare."

"I know little about it," Cooper admitted. "A gift from the emperor, I believe, to the winner of the yearly examinations at Peking. Can you translate the characters?"

Macleish studied the cup. Slightly over an inch high and two wide, it was square-sided, had an odd handle, and the outside was covered with Chinese characters deeply incised in the metal. It was of bronze, heavily gold-plated.

"No, I can't; it is clerical writing, used only by the upper classes," said the visitor. "The handle is a conventional design called the cloud pat-

tern." He put down the cup. "But what I dropped in about was to ask regarding the Chinese women here. Let me be blunt, Captain, and pardon me."

Cooper felt a chill. "What women?"

"Servants say that Chinese women live here; rumors have spread; Senhor da Silva, captain in the garrison, was joking about it. He is coming tomorrow to call and to verify his beliefs. He's a dangerous man, Captain. All this is none of my business, but I wished to be ahead of him, for your own protection."

Cooper met the worried glance of Clark and gestured restraint. He knew Macleish to be an honest, earnest man. Slowly he replied:

"I accept your challenge, Doctor. Be blunt, then! We're in a Portuguese

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by
Cleveland
Woodward



Cooper stood paralyzed,
horror slowly rising in
him....As for Silva, only
his head was visible.

colony, not in China. Give me the exact motives for your visit."

"Very well, sir. The American colony here is disturbed. If you, an American shipmaster, have set the conventions at naught by housing women, it reflects upon us all. Having met you, I do not believe this, so I have come to speak to you."

"And to warn me. You are kind, and I thank you." Cooper turned. "Clark, will you be good enough to get in touch with T'ai Ho and ask her to come and meet Dr. Macleish? Explain that he's an influential member of the American colony, and a friend."

Clark departed. Stuffing his pipe, Cooper met the uneasy eyes of the visitor and smiled. Macao was no abode

of angels; anything could happen here and no one would care. The Portuguese colonists were bombastic, torn by dissensions; the little peninsula on which Macao stood was a citadel of ancient might now fallen into decay and vicious dissipation. The old houses with their gay colors and mother-of-pearl inlays and massive stones now roofed all manner of strange evil.

"As my ship was coming into the outer anchorage at Canton," said Cooper, "we sighted some wreckage. From it we took a Chinese girl, T'ai Ho, and her maid. Her father had been a high official, disgraced and executed. She had escaped, but the ship went down in a storm. We had to conceal her aboard; had the Chinese known, it would have meant loss of ship and cargo, perhaps death for us all."

"Yes, the laws against any contact of Chinese and foreigners are severe," put in Macleish. "You took a high risk in hiding her aboard."

"We could do nothing else. At Canton she got in touch with an old servant of her father's. He recovered for her some of her father's wealth, got her safely here to Macao and got this house for me when I came last week. I found her here, but I haven't seen her. She lives apart from us and is reconstructing her broken life. When I secure a cargo and leave, she may go with us. I haven't asked her. That's the situation."

Macleish nodded; his face had cleared. He gave Cooper a handclasp that spoke volumes, then stood up to meet T'ai Ho as Clark brought her in.

Cooper, who knew only some pidgin English, watched in silence as Clark began to speak rapidly with her. He

was astonished and charmed by her looks. She was in Chinese garments. Her hair, which had been cut off for disguise, now had grown out a bit and was adorned with ornaments inlaid with kingfisher feathers. Her aquiline, mobile features were the hue of ivory. She looked delicate, fragile as a flower. He liked her name, too—it meant Heavenly Harmony.

When she smiled and spoke to Dr. Macleish, he shook hands with her, in foreign style, instead of shaking hands with himself in Chinese fashion, and humor lighted up his eyes and banished the gravity of his face. He laughed at her confusion over the handshake, and when she had departed with Clark, he turned in enthusiasm.

"Captain Cooper, she's admirable! I remember hearing of her father's execution last year—he and his family were sentenced to death. You did nobly to rescue her. I made bold to tell her you invited her to drink tea here tomorrow—your servants will arrange it. She's utterly charming, and of the highest standing. It's risky for her, so close to China; she'd be executed instantly if found, but she can take care of herself."

"So you're satisfied that I'm not—"

"Peace!" Macleish lifted a hand in protest. "Accept my apologies. I shall pass the word, and shall shut Captain da Silva's mouth—"

"I'll do that myself if necessary," said Cooper tightly.

Macleish gave him a sharp look.

"Well, have a care; I've heard dark stories about him. Now, I wish you and Mr. Clark would come and dine with us on Saturday. . . ."

Presently he took his leave. Clark lighted a Manila cheroot and laughed.

"Too bad you couldn't savvy his talk with T'ai Ho, Captain. She explained this was a double house, called you a fine man, and so on. He's a decent fellow."

"Very." Cooper got his pipe going again. "Feel like taking a look around the shops? I want to buy a few odds and ends."

"Good! Let's make a day of it—see all the sights, and so forth."

SO they did. The *praha grande* and sea wall, the Ma-Ko temple, the grotto of Camoens, the ruins and mediaeval buildings—the Portuguese had been here three hundred years before the British squeezed into Canton—the gambling houses, the queer mixture of races, the swaggering Dyak soldiers from Malacca and Timor—they saw everything, and after the rigorous iron repression of Canton, this freedom to wander at will was most enjoyable. But when they got home again and Sing, the Number One boy who ran their household, heard of the excursion, he smiled gently.

"Pavilion of Perfumes—no?" he asked.

"Never heard of it," said Clark.

"Maybe-so you go. My take you, two-three day. Ver' fine house."

Cooper forgot all else, however, when next morning brought Captain da Silva, a supple, dark-faced man who had lived in India and spoke English fluently. His white uniform and polished sword were handsome; he was polite and very friendly; but Cooper did not take to him at all. His smile, his white teeth under a black mustache, his bold eyes and air of perfect *savoir-faire*, his frank curiosity about the Americans, combined to render him a man of great charm. He accepted a cheroot and launched into a discussion of gold: Chinese gold, bar gold. Cooper, who distrusted a man given to many words, said nothing but listened closely as Silva, his dark eyes gleaming, rhapsodized on the subject.

"There is only a barrier at the foot of the peninsula, a wall of stones, to cut us off from China. Things are smuggled in all the time, and so with gold—excellent gold, each bar stamped by a shroff, or money-tester. They are fine oblong ten-tael bars, good in any market. One gets them by the chest, and pays for them by weight; the profit is beyond belief! I can get you a dozen chests at any time."

He quoted prices, and Cooper was startled by the low rate. China had no gold coinage; each bar was stamped with the mark of a shroff, which was security for the purity of the metal. To smuggle gold out of China was illegal—but this was not China. And it was Cooper's business to make money for his owners where possible. A fifty-thousand-dollar profit on a dozen chests of this gold was tempting.

"Not an hour's walk from Macao, in the hills," went on Silva, "I can show you a secret place overflowing with this gold—glowing, gleaming bars of it in huge quantity! An incredible sight, and well protected by the mandarin of the district, you may be sure. A man can pick what he wants, and it will be delivered here in the city."

Cooper succumbed. "I might take a dozen chests at that figure," he said.

The other man laughed.

"We'd both make a profit, eh? Good. I'll arrange it. As for payment—"

"I'll employ an agent; easy to find one here," Cooper went on. "I can send him to you and make payment by drawing on my Hong merchant at Canton."

Silva reflected and then accepted. One must be cautious, he explained; an officer must shun publicity to protect himself; let Cooper do no talking and one could arrange everything. Would not the gentlemen from America be interested in seeing some fine old Chinese houses here? He, Cap-

tain João da Silva, would be honored if he could take them on a slight excursion about the city and to dinner—Good! In a couple of days, then: on the Friday. It was settled.

The visitor shook hands and departed, without any mention of Chinese women. Cooper, who had the feeling of having fallen into a trap, looked inquiringly at Clark, who shrugged lightly.

"Amiable—pleasant—rascally! What think you of the gold deal?"

"I'm hooked. It'll be fine, if true. By the way, T'ai Ho comes to call this afternoon; did you speak to Sing about it?"

Clark nodded. "He says it's all arranged."

So it was, indeed: when afternoon brought the caller, Cooper found a room arranged with mats and tea things, and Sing bowed in a Chinese lady who insisted with much merriment upon shaking hands in the American style. Clark could talk with her, Cooper could not; they sat sipping tea rather formally.

UPON reaching this house, Cooper had found awaiting him three boxes of bar gold, sent by T'ai Ho upon regaining some of her father's wealth, and Cooper now thanked her for the gift.

"She says it's nothing," Clark translated. "Her father had left much hidden treasure. No harm in telling her about Silva?"

"None." Cooper was fascinated by her delicate oval features, and wondered at their startled look as Clark talked. Then she spoke with animation and a flash of her black eyes: presently Clark translated.

"She says to look out for him; he's a bad egg and has a reputation among the Chinese of being a master with foreign weapons—probably the sword—and a killer. She can get you an excellent agent, an honest one—Sing's cousin. His name is Wu-pei."

Cooper duly offered thanks.

T'ai Ho spoke at some length.

"She'll have us meet him at dinner tomorrow; she says to bring the cup and he'll translate the inscription."

"Dinner? Where? In her rooms?"

"That would be most improper. No: we're to dine with her at the Pavilion of Perfumes—Sing will take us there."

This, it appeared, was a sort of tea-house much used by the Chinese women and half-castes of Macao, who were free of the usual restraints yet mindful of conventions. The place could be rented for a dinner or a party; it was entirely proper, supplied the best of food or drink, and even the Portuguese made use of it on occasion.

At length T'ai Ho rose and took her departure, bowing and shaking hands with herself, amid much laughter.

Cooper had begun to laugh easily these days; life here was simple and good, not involved as in Canton, and he enjoyed it, having no responsibilities or worries. Yet his time of relaxation and laughter was coming rapidly to a close.

Next morning he was up early, and as was his custom took a brisk walk to the esplanade and sea wall, drinking deeply of the fresh sea air. As he

wealthy mandarin. The Chinese say that she's hiding here and has access to all her father's wealth, concealed and lost when he was executed. That will go to me; she will be handed over to the Chinese. A pleasant prospect, eh?"

Cooper, staggered as he was by this information, remained quite impassive and managed to ask some questions. Silva answered them freely; his quest was not quite so cut and dried as he had indicated.

Bar gold again! Certain gold had turned up, known by its markings to have belonged to the defunct official; one thing had led to another, and now

and then asked for T'ai Ho. She had gone out.

Pipe puffing mightily, Cooper reflected. He knew very well that there was nothing accidental about that meeting, and Silva's casual air had been entirely assumed. The man had heard something—perhaps Macleish had mentioned the girl's name, and Silva thought the scent of bar gold would attract American nostrils. T'ai Ho was supposed to buy her safety, and Cooper was to be the go-between.

"He's not been appointed to run her down—that was a plain lie," he told himself. A quiet, slyly put game of blackmail intended to milk the girl of all she possessed. One payment would lead to another. "Silva's playing a lone hand. He's a leech. He has a



When T'ai Ho smiled and spoke to him, he shook hands with her, in foreign style.

came back toward the house he ran into Silva, who greeted him joyously. Then, as they chatted, the dark and smiling officer dropped a casual word that hit Cooper like a blow.

"Congratulate me, my friend! I've been given special duty. Our noble Senate, who handles all civil affairs, is seeking a Chinese fugitive who's supposed to be in the city. It's not a police case, but a diplomatic matter. So I have been detached to the special duty of finding her."

"Her? Oh, you mean the fugitive is a woman, eh?" queried Cooper.

The other thumbed his sleek mustache and winked significantly.

"Exactly put, my friend. One T'ai Ho by name—daughter of a Chinese official executed sometime since, a

it was almost certain that this T'ai Ho was in Macao. She would be found, said Silva with careless assurance, and the right man might well profit largely by finding her—his laugh told who the right man was. How profit? Well, the woman assuredly would not object to buying silence and safety with her gold!

COOPER, hot and cold, parted from his acquaintance and went home. He found Clark gone for the day on the trail of an elusive tea shipment he hoped to get for Cooper. The latter called in Sing, the cheerful factotum, and made a valiant effort to explain the matter, but Sing merely beamed and understood him not at all. Cooper cursed furiously but vainly,

rich thing, and he'll play it deftly, without haste, making all the profit."

What to do? He conned the matter with all the care of a shipmaster conning a chart. He himself had gulped the bait, and was neatly on Silva's hook. How much of her father's gold T'ai Ho had secured, or where she had it, he was ignorant; but this was not a matter for her. She could do nothing but pay. There was only one way of stopping Silva, and only one man to do it, as Cooper viewed the case: He himself. And to effect this, he must play up a bit to the man—then, somehow, stop his mouth. He looked at the little square cup, and frowned.

"Am I to kill the fellow—make myself a murderer for her sake? I don't

like it," he thought angrily. "Hm! Well, wait, see what happens. Tell Clark about it—he's full of dodges; maybe he can suggest something."

The day passed slowly. Clark returned late in the afternoon, without his tea shipment, and Cooper told him the whole thing—fact and fancy. Clark chewed his cheroot, nodded, and showed no surprise.

"I figured the fellow was something of the sort, when I saw that gold-mounted sword he wears—it cost real money; officers haven't that much."

"Damn his sword!" Cooper, later, remembered the words with a qualm. "The point is, do you think I've hit the right key?"

Clark grinned. "Your finger is on it, Captain, and holding it down." He sobered. "Yes, I think you're dead right. He took you to be an easy mark. Anyone would; you have the air. You don't ask questions—why, you've never asked me questions! You picked me out of the China Sea on some wreckage and have never once asked where I came from!"

COOPER welcomed the diversion. "I'm not interested in the past. You're my kind of man, I like you, and we get on. That's enough."

"Yankee,"—Clark's eyes warmed,— "it's a simple yarn. I came out from England four years ago as a writer-clerk, you'd call it—to the East India Company, thinking to make my fortune like others. Now the Company has been dissolved. I've no fortune. I stayed on with others to close the business, and was sent to India. The ship went down in a typhoon; you saved me. That's all, absolutely."

Cooper chuckled. "Well told; I said you were my style. I like gaps in stories. Well, think this business over and tell me tomorrow what you think. We must get into our best bib and tucker for T'ai Ho's party. So you missed the tea shipment, eh?"

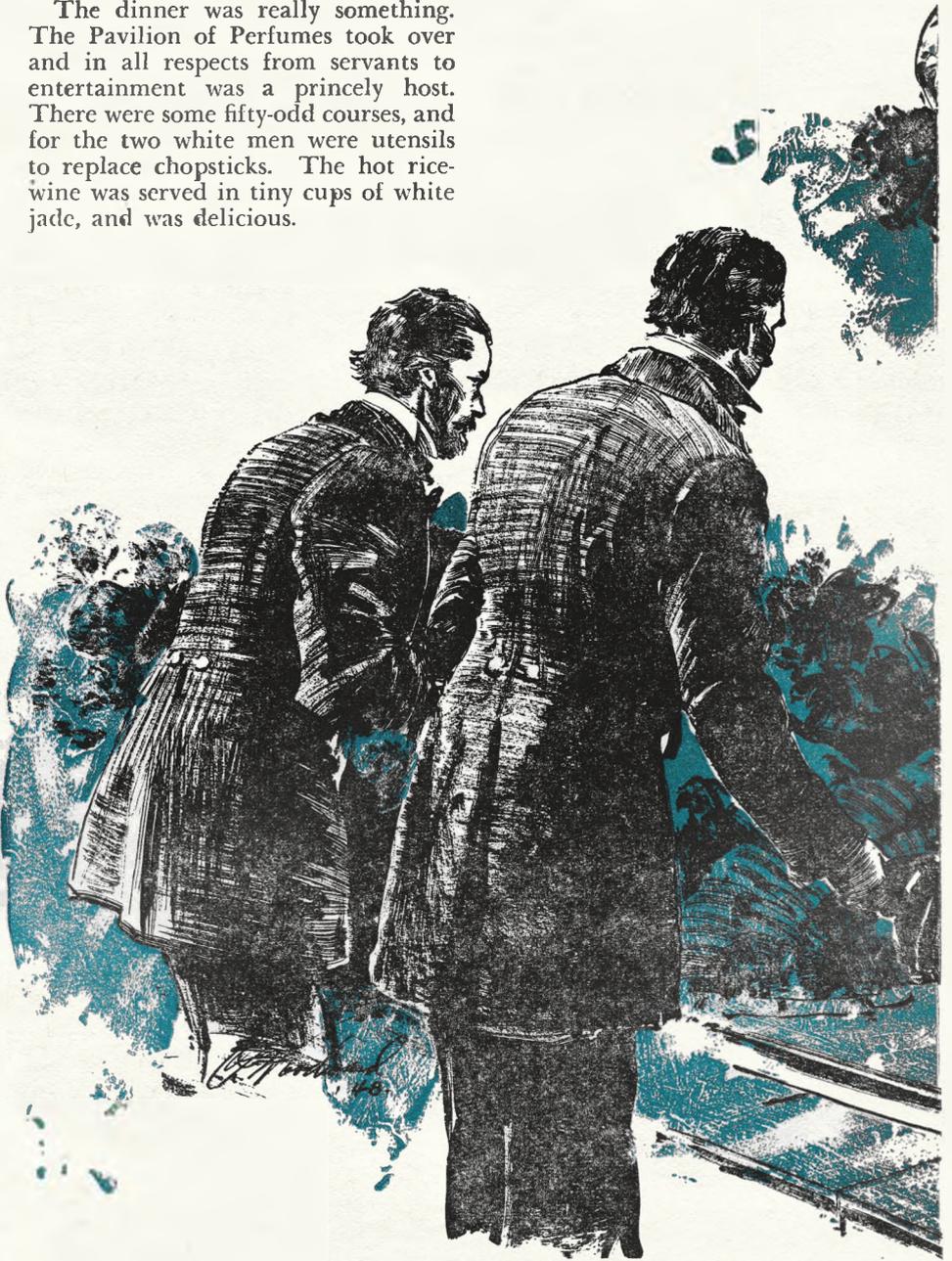
"Completely. But I picked up some information; tell you tomorrow."

For the evening, Cooper forgot all about Captain da Silva. . . .

With Sing as guide, they walked down narrow, twisting streets and came to a house like a thousand others. Inside were servants, all Chinese, and a courtyard where flowers bloomed in multitudes and a fountain plashed and colored lanterns were hung in strings.

Here sat T'ai Ho. With her was an elderly Chinese with wrinkled features, wispy long gray mustaches, black cap and black, richly brocaded garments; through Clark she introduced him as Wu-pei. He spoke a little pidgin English, but only a little. He was Sing's cousin, therefore reliable, and hoped to serve Cooper as business agent in the gold deal with Silva.

The dinner was really something. The Pavilion of Perfumes took over and in all respects from servants to entertainment was a princely host. There were some fifty-odd courses, and for the two white men were utensils to replace chopsticks. The hot rice-wine was served in tiny cups of white jade, and was delicious.



Dancers from Siam and Timor performed in slow posturings, jugglers put on tricks and magicians did wonders; there were musicians from the islands and a Manilaman who sang Chinese and Spanish songs. Cooper talked with T'ai Ho—laughter, bits of pidgin, odd words half-understood. She was merry, and for the first time he thought of her age. With the help of a word from Clark, she understood.

"Very old woman," said Clark, a twinkle in his eye. "All of eighteen—disgraceful to be unmarried at that age, she says. Better pop the question, Captain."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Cooper. Wu-pei, who was blandly witty, cracked some jokes all his own; while they were laughing, Cooper produced the tiny square cup, and laughter ceased. Wu-pei examined it with care, exchanged a few words with T'ai

Ho, then began to translate the inscription. Clark passed it on in English to Cooper.

"Says it's a compliment, also a warning. As a sacrificial cup, also a gift from the emperor, it's doubly sacred. Here we go:

At the Dragon Gate you receive this
prize for scholarship
Like a bright ray from the Pole Star
That has been ten thousand years
reaching you.
With such radiance about your head
It is fitting that you bear this sacred
cup
Used annually by imperial hands in
the heaven-worship.
Yours be the brightness of the golden-
age unicorn,
Celestial harbinger of prosperity,
Provided that in your future life
You fulfill this promise of talent.

*Here sat T'ai Ho. With her was an elderly Chinese.
He was Sing's cousin, and hoped to serve Cooper.*



Then will come age
To crown, as with myriad apricot
blossoms,
Your hoary wisdom!

Cooper listened. "What?" he asked. "Is that all?"

"All. Nothing very exciting, just a verse. Wait a minute." Clark listened to an earnest speech from T'ai Ho, made response, and translated. "She says keep it and remember the words. Since the gods brought it to your hands, it's meant for you, Captain."

"Thank her for me. I'll get it written down." Cooper did so, exchanged a look and a laugh with T'ai Ho, thrilled to the vivid intelligence of her glance, and pocketed his copy of the verse. He must find some way of talk-

ing with her, of effecting an exchange of words and thoughts: to go on like this was maddening!

It was late when he and Clark walked home. T'ai Ho was taken in a palanquin with a dozen Chinese guards and torch-bearers. Wu-pei had promised to see Silva soon and talk business with him; everything was arranged. Sing was waiting at the door for them; the rear of the house along the garden, which T'ai Ho occupied, was apparently dark and empty. Cooper put the little cup on a stand in his own room, and the translation of the verse beside it.

An odd verse, he thought, purely Chinese in its feeling for wisdom, for light and learning. How had she applied it to him—what had her eyes

meant? The query troubled him and kept him from sleep for a long time. At the back of his mind he knew well enough. This affair with Silva weighed on him. It was horrible to determine upon the man's death; yet he could see no other way out. To set himself up as judge and executioner was unthinkable, but he had to do it if he meant to save T'ai Ho. He tossed until the first daylight, tormented by his dilemma, then fell into a heavy slumber.

Daylight brought reality, common sense, practical things; the daily round took accustomed shape and fancies disappeared—yet the deep sense of worry remained. Still, there was no crisis apparent.

SATURDAY came; they dined with Macleish and met others of the American colony from Canton, talked of ships and trade, and it was not until they were nearly home that thought of Silva intruded. Then Clark spoke suddenly.

"Oh! I nearly forgot about it: when I was knocking about town the other day I got some information—about the sword."

"What sword?" queried Cooper.

"That handsome pig-sticker our friend Silva wears. He won it in Malacca as a fencing prize. He's a champion swordsman in these parts, and no joke about it. He's killed half-a-dozen men in duels and is regarded with respect. You've picked a bad one, Captain."

Cooper grunted. "I've picked nobody. He's picked me, and I don't know what I'm going to do about it."

"Are you an expert with the sword?"

"Only at carving a turkey. I can swing a cutlass if I have to do it."

Clark shook his head. "Won't help you here. They tell me this blighter is a regular devil in a fight."

This was not happy news. But, as day followed day and no further word came from Silva, the weight lifted, the crisis seemed reprieved; and when the big deal in smuggled gold came to a head, it overshadowed all else.

It was a big deal. Wu-pei came and talked; when with Clark's help Cooper found what he had let himself in for, he was staggered. The dozen chests would cost him close to half-a-million dollars. This amount did not matter to the Hong merchants, who each kept far more than this ready to hand, but it mattered to Cooper, who was spending his owners' money. Wu-pei wanted to get everything understood before seeing Silva about the gold.

Clark explained: "He says all bar metal bears the guarantee stamp of some shroff. He knows all the marks. Silva gives him a sample bar from any hundred-pound chest, which is also marked outside. He hands your or-

der on Houqua, your Hong merchant, to Silva and takes the gold, which is delivered here at the house until you can get it aboard your ship. You give Wu the order now, in blank. You won't know the exact amount until he has closed the deal with Silva. Houqua pays it. If your account won't cover it, he'll hold it as a bill against you till next voyage. It's all very simple."

Cooper thought it was not. "The mark of the shroff is the key to the thing—"

"And Wu knows and guarantees it; that's his *raison d'être*; he may even look up that particular shroff in Canton or Amoy or wherever he is, and check. Like the mark of a goldsmith in England, the mark of a shroff here stands behind the metal."

Cooper disapproved this way of doing business, but it was the custom of the country, so he gave up objecting. He signed the blank order on Houqua and Wu-pei departed blandly, promising to return in a few days.

IT was the next morning that Silva showed up. He had postponed his excursion with Cooper and Clark; now, he sighed, duty was done and he was free. Would they come out tomorrow and see the sights? Or, if Cooper preferred to have a look at the gold storage place, in Chinese territory—

Cooper would, and said so. Silva promptly assented. They would have to go by palanquin, since the distance was considerable; it would take them all day. And Silva must arrange it with the Chinese. Say, then, day after tomorrow? He would come early, with a palanquin for Cooper. Clark was not invited, but cared no whit.

"Now," said Silva, dropping his voice, "about that matter of which I spoke to you on the street—the Chinese fugitive. I have a strong suspicion where to find her."

"Indeed?" rejoined Cooper. Silva thumbed his mustache and smiled.

"Yes; and I should like your advice. Suppose I report that she has left Macao and gone elsewhere; do you think she would be grateful?"

"She ought to be, yes."

"To the extent of ten chests of bar gold?"

Cooper shrugged. "You should know; I don't. That's an enormous sum."

"My risk is heavy." Silva smiled; he was very oily, very confidential. He painted a heart-rending picture of his own risks in endeavoring to save the poor fugitive, and the costs he would have to pay in graft. His hope was, of course, that Cooper would contact the fugitive and get a reaction to his offer. "Ten chests, eh?" he urged.

"Tell you what," said Cooper. "Suppose you let me think about it

overnight. I'll tell you in the morning what my guess is, after I talk to one or two people."

Silva was delighted. He seemed quite blind to the absurdity of his position; but after all he was dependent on Cooper to contact T'ai Ho and relay the offer, so nothing else mattered. It was settled, then, that Cooper would meet him for luncheon at noon on the morrow, at a restaurant downtown; and with this Silva departed.

Clark, being consulted, had nothing to offer; a bad business all around, he thought, and recommended that Cooper report it to the Portuguese authorities. Cooper flatly rejected this course, as possibly dangerous to T'ai Ho, and Clark shrugged.

"Then don't ask me, Captain. It's your pidgin, not mine. There's no law in these parts except Chinese law, which would seem pretty queer to us. I can't advise you, to be quite honest about it."

Wu-pei came seeking him in the afternoon. He produced a flat, heavy little bar of gold which Silva had taken from one of the chests as a sample; this, he stated, would be his commission for the business, if Cooper approved. The American assented. The bar was neatly and heavily stamped in the center with the rectangular character *k'ow*, part of the name Hankow, the mark of a famous shroff at that city. His name was Tien-k'ow, and metal so stamped was accepted anywhere in China.

Twelve chests in all, said Wu-pei; they were to be delivered to him here at the house this evening and Sing would accept them for him. Cooper asked the price paid, and sighed at the amount, which ran close to four hundred thousand Spanish dollars. However, there was no help for it now, and as Wu-pei guaranteed the deal, he had to be content. Each chest was carefully wrapped in matting and sealed with the same mark for a seal, bearing Chinese writing besides, he saw when they arrived.

"You risk little, really," said Clark, when they were looking over the chests. "We're dealing with honorable men whose honesty is proverbial. The mere word of a Hong merchant is better than any bond. I suppose business will come eventually to a lower level in China, but that day is still far off."

"I'm more worried about Silva's extortion than about his gold," said Cooper.

"If I get any ideas on the subject, may I act?" asked the other.

"My dear fellow, I'll bless you! By all means, do whatever you like. I'm out of my depth, and admit it frankly. Between these hen-track marks, and T'ai Ho's peril, I'm not far from distracted. As for taking the law into my own hands, I shrink from the idea

but may have to come to it. Well, just time for a game before bed."

They got out the chessboard; it was their custom to have a game the last thing. Cooper had a smattering of it and was learning from Clark, who was something of an expert. As they played, Clark frowned over the pieces and seemed distraught. Usually he chatted lightly; tonight he was tense, concentrating on the board. Cooper lost piece after piece, saw himself beaten, trapped, checkmated. He leaned back, laughing.

"I'm worse than usual," he said. "The ivories seem to obey you magically."

He paused. Clark was rearranging the pieces, though apparently not for a game.

"The Chinese say that one can reenact life on the board, or any difficulty. They have army games, strategy—hml I don't savvy it. Yet somewhere there's a thread of connection. Here—say your queen stands for T'ai Ho, your bishop for Wu-pei, my king for Silva— Oh, it's nonsense!"

Angry, irritated, he swept the pieces into their box.

"There's something—I can't get it. An old Chink at Canton used to do divination with the pieces; it was amazing to see him. No, I'm useless at it. For a minute I had a flash of comprehension, but it's gone." He rose. "Well, see you in the morning!"

Before Cooper fell asleep, he thought of the odd scene. A connection, yes, between them all—himself, Silva, T'ai Ho. Their actions were the moves on the board— No, it escaped him. A queer fancy, but nothing more. He frowned, sighed, and went to sleep. In the morning he looked at the boxes of bar gold as he dressed. They had been put in his own room, neatly stacked against the wall: four rows, three chests to a row.

NOON came; he met Silva at the restaurant. Brass buttons and blue broadcloth, fine uniform and flashing sword, one staid and rather dour, the other romantic and dashing, they sat at table and discussed an excellent luncheon, and if Ezra Cooper had a sinking of the heart, he gave no sign of it.

"Well," said Silva at last, "and what, my friend, do you advise?"

"I think your terms a bit high," said Cooper. "If you asked nine chests instead of ten, I think you might get them."

"Oh!" said Silva thoughtfully. "I have every respect for your opinion, I assure you. Do you suppose, Captain Cooper, that this fugitive, in case I were able to contact her, could make payment at once?"

Cooper had expected some such query and was ready for it, though his heart sank a little more. He did not

like sacrifices. Yet, as a stop-gap, they must be made. How much Silva knew about him, he was unaware, but he suspected the worst. He was in the jaws of a trap, sure enough, and they were squeezing hard. Tomorrow he must nerve himself to the work, and do it; a chance would certainly come while he had Silva off alone. But now he must pay, and he could hope only to lose as little as possible.

"Might be," he replied thoughtfully, keeping up the pretense. "I doubt whether such a person could supply the full amount on short notice. Say, a couple of chests—"

"No, no! Say three," snapped the other. "Three full chests. Tonight! Yes?"

Cooper looked at him, swallowed hard, and nodded.

"Very well," he agreed. It was clear enough now. The mask had been dropped. This was a demand, and he must assent. "Either tonight or in the morning."

"Before we leave on our sightseeing. I shall arrive at your house with the palanquins at nine. Before then, three chests at my quarters; the balance in three days. Eh? Does that seem fair?"

"Give me your address," said Cooper, abandoning all the mockery of the game.

Silva wrote it down for him. It was agreed.

EZRA COOPER walked home, bitterness eating at him. He saw now that Silva did know everything; the demands would continue, would increase, would become past any bearing—if he let them. The loss of three of those chests would hit him hard; a shipmaster's pay was not calculated to support much blackmail of this sort, but he could see no other way out.

It must be done; three chests must be given up—and tomorrow he must end the thing once and for all. The thought hurt. Cooper was not unused to the sight of blood and death, but deliberately to set himself a killing-job was something different. Yet Silva had to be silenced. How he had learned of T'ai Ho's presence—perhaps

from loose talk or from Macleish—did not matter now; the evil was done, and there was only one way to remedy it.

Finding Clark at home, Cooper wasted no time but recounted the talk with Silva.

"I need your help," he concluded. "You can have Sing do what must be done. Three of those chests of gold bars must be removed, rewrapped in fresh matting and tied up; it must be done tonight. They must be delivered to Silva's quarters in the morning about eight-thirty. The time must be exact; impress it on Sing. Silva calls for me at nine and I want to give him no time to open and examine the gold."

"Don't you suppose he'll realize you're sending the gold you got from him?"

"I don't know and don't care; we're going past the barrier into China and that's all I care about. I want him to leave, thinking that I've delivered the gold to him. Savvy? You make it all very clear to Sing, so he'll be sure to make no mistake; have him get three of those chests out of my room this afternoon."

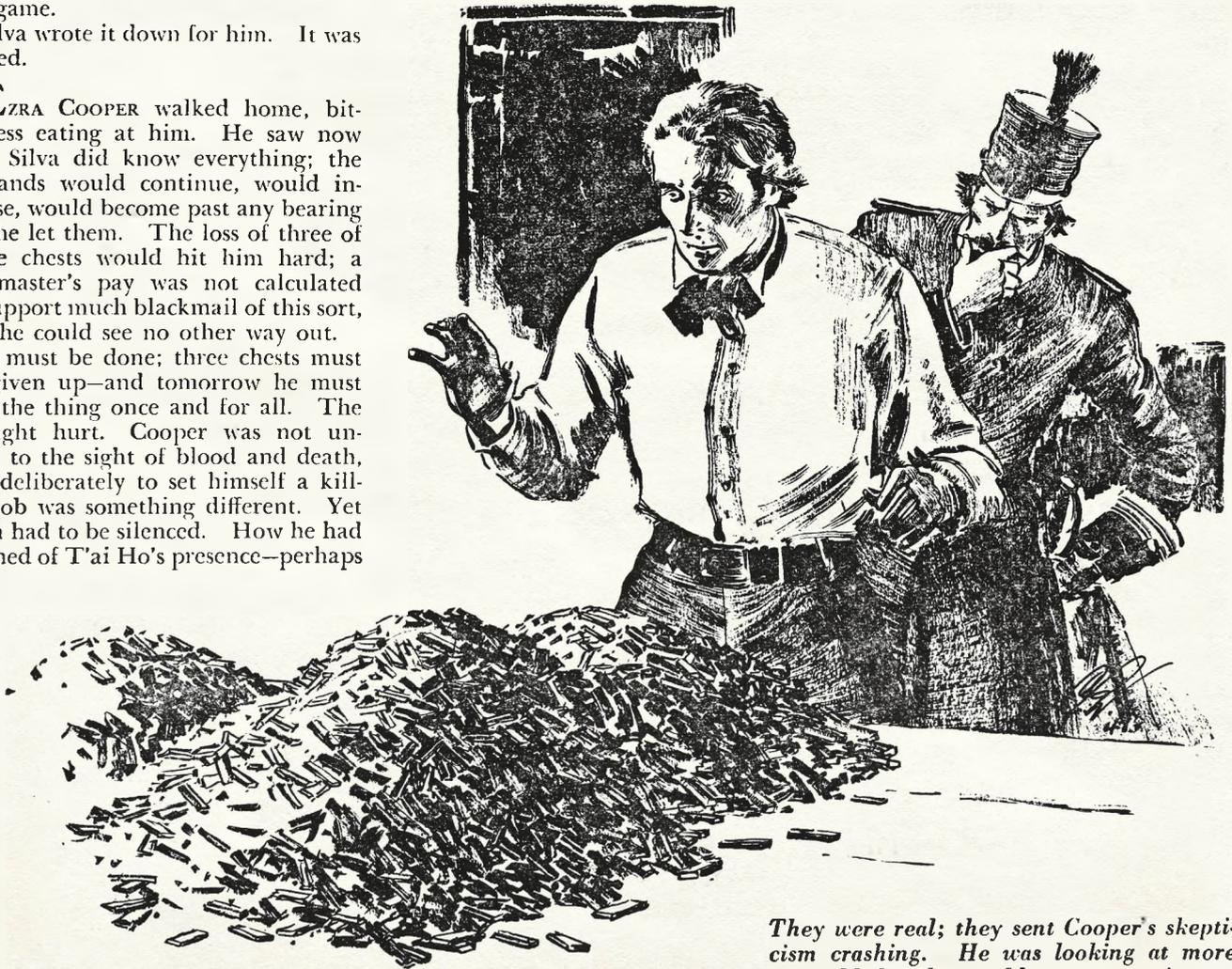
"Leave it to me," assented Clark.

Cooper did so, thankfully. He was most uncertain about the morrow, about what would happen. He loaded a pistol and wrapped it in a strip of cloth, thinking to carry it since it was too large for a pocket; beyond this he refused to plan. He took his pipe out into the garden later in the day, hoping for a sight of T'ai Ho, but had none. Beyond a brief word from Clark that Sing had taken the chests and would attend to all else, he heard nothing.

MORNING came, with the southwest monsoon heat dropping and the refreshing sea breeze of Macao enlivening everything. A hot day inland, said Sing; yes, the chests were on their way. Glad of the warning, Cooper dressed for heat, forewent his morning walk, and had barely breakfasted when Sing brought word that Silva was here. The captain came in smiling, and apologized for lateness.

"I stopped to examine some bundles that arrived," he said, looking Cooper in the eyes. "Most satisfactory indeed!"

That was certainly strange, thought Cooper; perhaps the man had not recognized the bars, the shroff's mark.



They were real; they sent Cooper's skepticism crashing. He was looking at more gold than he would ever see again.

Silva refused even a cup of tea. The palanquins were waiting, the day's excursion would be a long one ("perhaps longer than you think," muttered Cooper), and they should get away at once.

So they got away. The palanquins were covered litters, each carried by four men; half-a-dozen other men preceded them. All would wait at the barrier, said Silva. Cooper got in, the parcel in his hand and a coat flung over it, and stretched out, with a farewell to Clark. Next moment they were off.

An odd sensation, this of being carried. The silken covering overhead was light and airy; once out of the city, Cooper drew it off. The half-naked coolies trotted along with cheerful chatter.

THERE WAS no shade, and the route rapidly warmed as the sea dropped behind. Into sight ahead came what was called the "barrier," a low, half-ruined wall of stones that barred the way, with a squat building for shelter. Here half-a-dozen Portuguese and as many Chinese soldiers were stationed. Countryfolk with handcarts of produce entered here; outside, the roads branched away. Time had passed and the morning was wearing on to noon. The palanquins halted, the men drew into a group; Cooper and Silva alighted.

"Now we go on alone," said Silva, returning the slovenly salutes of the soldiers and their officer. "I have passes for us both."

Cooper held his package, his coat flung over it.

"Our destination," said Silva when they had left the barrier behind, "is only a couple of miles from here. It is a very old farmhouse; now only bar gold is produced there—"

"I thought your gold came from Hankow?" said Cooper. "It bore the mark of a shroff well known there."

The other blinked. "Ah, correct, my friend; but this gold is made to smuggle out, so he has an agent here who applies his mark as the bars leave the furnace. Two men here do all the work. We shall get a bite to eat and some tea when we get there—or after you have seen the place, eh?"

Cooper gave his companion a look. "Aren't you too hot in that uniform?" he asked.

"Yes, but it is necessary to impress the men. Without tokens of rank one does not obtain due respect."

They were following not a road but a rough track, and talk languished. Cooper was thinking of what must happen: at the farmhouse would be better than on these naked hillsides. Against this thought of what he must do, clashed the memory of that verse on the cup, and the clash was disagreeable.

Then will come age
To crown, as with myriad apricot
blossoms,
Your hoary wisdom!

Mockery, he thought, a damnable mockery; he had neither wisdom nor scholarship. He was planning to kill this smiling Portuguese, and liked the idea less every moment; yet it was imperative, a necessity wherein he had no alternative. That two-mile walk was not a pleasant one; the pistol cradled in his hand was a weight of evil.

It struck Cooper abruptly that there must be some purpose in this excursion. Silva must have a reason for bringing him out to this far place. . . . Thought-transference, perhaps, for the man turned to him with an oily smile.

"Perhaps you wonder why I show you this secret place of mine? It is simple. I shall show you gold such as you never before saw. You are an American, and therefore are able to buy much. That is all. We shall make huge profits, my friend."

The word grated. *Friend!* Rather, a victim, a blackmail go-between, a poor fool caught fast in the trap! Well, the pistol might offer a way out—the only way, thought Cooper in bitterness. He would see this vaunted gold-hoard before he took any action.

A hollow opened ahead, to reveal small trees and roofs. A clump of ruined buildings, a large, low structure in good condition, with the chimney of a furnace—not now smoking—old fields, once tilled, now abandoned; a lonely spot of desolation where no living creature now appeared.

Yet life was here. A man came out as the two walkers approached—a man naked to the waist, who answered Silva's call with a wave of the hand—a yellow man; and another joined him, staring at the two white men. These were Silva's two gold-workers located here. Silva exchanged a few words with them while Cooper waited; then he turned, smiling.

"All is well, my friend. Come and look at the gold while they prepare some refreshments for us. You are not too tired to feast your eyes on gold, eh?"

"No, but too thirsty. Any water here to drink?"

Silva spoke to one of the men, who darted away and presently returned with a hollowed-out gourd filled with water. Cooper found it cold and apparently good, and drank it off. He was wondering what Silva's game could be, for he quite disbelieved the story about gold. In the shade, he clung to his little bundle and coat, while getting his pipe alight.

"Ready?" asked Silva. "They say they are not smelting today; a big batch of bars was finished last night and they are cleaning the furnace, making ready for the next batch."

Cooper followed him into the house, which was more like a huge shed. They passed through several ruined chambers, then came into a long, low room. As they entered this, the American caught his breath sharply, and stopped.

Here stood a table, long and sturdy, covered with a tattered silk cloth; Silva had just drawn back this cloth, and on the table lay heap after heap of gold bars. They were real; they sent Cooper's skepticism crashing. He was looking at more gold than he would ever see again at one time. Each bar bore stamped in the center the *k'ow* rectangle, with certain other marks. Silva tried to explain the involved system of weights, which differed in every Chinese city, but it was beyond him. One of these bars weighed ten Hankow taels and was guaranteed as such, but the Canton tael might be far more or less. Cooper had estimated them at a half-pound each, and would win or lose on the showdown.

"They are made," said Silva nodding, "in the furnace-room there at the far end. Look, if it pleases you."

Somewhat dazed, Cooper walked past the long table with its gorgeous burden and put aside a curtain. Here there was another room, smaller and absolutely crowded. He could make out very little; here were molds, goldsmiths' scales, utensils quite unknown to him. As he stood there, he heard outside a shrill, wild cry.

It was echoed by Silva, who spat forth a hasty oath and went dashing from the room.

COOPER came back a few steps, paused at the table. He took up a gold bar and examined it; yes, precisely like the sample Wu-pei had showed him. He looked at the piles of glittering metal before him—it was starkly incredible, impossible! Yet there it was. Gold! A king's ransom. Bullion past estimating. He had already purchased twelve chests of this stuff; if his resources held out he could purchase a shipload. And that was exactly why Silva was taking him into the secret.

A confused sound of voices came to him from somewhere outside. The door darkened and he looked up. Two men entered, to his amazement, and neither was Silva. One was Wu-pei, blandly smiling. The other was a stranger, who wore a robe embroidered with a unicorn—a military official, then. Both looked at him, spoke politely, shook hands with themselves.

"Here! Where's Captain Silva?" asked Cooper. "What's going on?"

"This my pidgin," said Wu-pei. "You look-see."

He picked up one of the gold bars, produced a knife, and worked at the bar. After a little he had it severed. He handed one portion to the man-

darin, and the other to Cooper, who examined it with dismay and instant understanding:

The gold was all on the outside. The bar was of lead.

"Him say you go quick, my come-along," said Wu-pei.

Forgetful of the half-bar in his hand, Cooper went out, preceding the agent. But once in the open sunlight he stood paralyzed, horror slowly rising in him.

Here were a dozen or more Chinese; Wu-pei emerged and began to talk with their leader; the mandarin remained inside. It was not at these that Cooper looked. He noticed that several of the men had portions of Silva's uniform, and one held his handsome gold-mounted sword. As for Silva himself, only his head was visible—and it was on the end of a spear whose shaft was red and sticky. His body was not in sight.

Wu-pei spoke to him again.

"You go?" My go too. This man,"—and he waved a hand toward the leader of the Chinese,—"belong shroff, Tien-k'ow. Say all finish plopah."

All properly finished; Cooper shivered in the sunlight and walked away with Wu-pei. He was in a daze. The ghastly grin of Silva followed him as though in horrible mockery. His companion prattled along in pidgin English and he heard not a word. He was entirely oblivious, and stumbled along the path almost blindly.

Presently he became aware that he still had the pistol. He threw it away and donned the coat, pocketing the half-bar. This, he saw, was beautifully and heavily plated, not unlike the little square cup—plating done in the fire. Gradually he came to himself again; it took time.

A well-defined pattern—yes, there was no chance in this hideous affair. Wu-pei, quite clearly, had taken action to bring the shroff's agent and an officer to the scene. Silva had been caught red-handed and had been punished on the spot—for what? Forgery of the shroff's mark? Probably. It was not at all clear to Cooper and he could make no sense of Wu-pei's chatter. How had the latter known? Then, at thought of the dozen chests he had purchased, Cooper began to sweat until his clothes were moist. Chests of worthless lead, probably.

This was on his mind when they reached the barrier. He got into his own palanquin, Wu-pei into the other, and they started homeward. Cooper pulled the curtains and lay miserably. He felt no grief for Silva, no gratitude that he himself had been saved the job he loathed; the shock was still strong. That severed head grinning in the sunlight could not be easily forgotten. And if his chests held only imitation gold, he was ruined financially.

Home at last. He caught sight of Clark, stammered out something, and went hurriedly to his own room. He was still in a daze from those reiterated, harsh happenings: sight of the supposed gold in almost incredible quantity; the abrupt discovery that it was worthless; the severed head on the pole, and realization that he was probably ruined. In the room, he glanced at the chests and halted with a frown.

Strange! He distinctly remembered there had been four rows, each three chests high; and of these, three chests had gone to Silva. Yet Silva had said nothing about getting his own faked gold! And now there were twelve chests again—but this time three rows, stacked four chests high! It was all very strange. He could not understand, and did not try, but laid out clean clothes and turned to his bath.

This cleared his head. By the time he was dressed and went downstairs to find Clark, he was himself again—clear-headed and coolly cynical. To his surprise, Clark was not alone; with him were Wu-pei and, greeting him with her slight smile, T'ai-Ho.

"Hello! We've been awaiting you, Captain," said Clark. "Well, things are cleared up in splendid shape."

Cooper grunted. "Hm! Glad you think so. They're not cleared up for me. Do you know what happened?"

"Aye; can't say I envy you the experience, though. Yesterday you told

me I might follow my own lead, so I spoke to T'ai Ho about the affair. She was interested, and got Wu-pei busy. To counterfeit the mark of a shroff is a serious offense, you know. That's why Silva was executed—promptly."

"That does me no good, though I'm not sorry for it," said Cooper. "You forget that I bought twelve chests of worthless stuff."

"So it was found, when the three you ordered sent to Silva were opened. Instead, T'ai Ho sent him three of her own—perfectly good bars."

"Oh!" Light began to break on Cooper. "You mean—"

"Aye. There's been fast work between here and Canton, Captain! The payment by Houqua has probably been stopped, though we're not sure yet. The agent of that shroff, Tien-k'ow, lost no time, for Tien-k'ow had to stand behind his own mark, remember. He's more than grateful for the discovery of our tricky friend's work. You lose nothing; if you desire, he'll take your payment and give you twelve chests of good bar gold in place of the counterfeit."

"Eh? But why should T'ai Ho lose the three chests she put up for me?"

"She won't. The top row of bars—from which samples would be taken—in all of Silva's chests are good gold; when put together, they'll make about three chests. If any lacks, Tien-k'ow will make up the amount to her. You see? It's perfect."

Cooper looked around. Wu-pei was beaming blandly like a cat that has swallowed the cream. T'ai Ho was radiant with laughter, and broke into a stream of Chinese that made Clark smile. The truth broke upon Cooper; it was indeed properly finished, and her quick wit had accomplished it.

He rose, went to a table against the wall, and picked up the tiny square cup standing there. He came back, held it up, and chuckled.

"I don't know what to say, Clark; let it go with this quotation:

Yours be the brightness of the golden-age unicorn.

Celestial harbinger of prosperity,
Provided that in your future life
You fulfill this promise of talent.

As he spoke, he looked at T'ai Ho, and her eyes twinkled when Clark translated. Then Cooper made her an awkward bow.

"Clark, call Sing and have him serve the best rice-wine he has in the place, and we'll all have a drink in honor of T'ai Ho from this cup. And you might tell her that I said she's a smart gal!"

Sing entered upon laughter—but behind the laughter was the grim memory of that severed head in the sunlight. Chinese laughter has its own kind of humor.

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Old Man Owlhoot

WHEN A MODERN GANGSTER TACKLED THREE OLD-TIME WESTERNERS—A STRANGE THING HAPPENED.

by NORMAN A. FOX

CALL it a busman's holiday, for I had no business fetching along my Graflex and portable on my vacation; neither camera nor typewriter are necessary equipment for fishing. And I had no business snooping into the affairs of Old Man Owlhoot. A reporter may be a Paul Pry fifty weeks of the year, but for one fortnight he should be plain Joe Blow, citizen. I tried to put it to Tierney that way, but Tierney didn't get to be managing editor of the Big Falls *Sentinel* without being a composite of Anthony Eden and *Simon Legree*. Both tact and truculence were at his command. "Fish?" he said reflectively when he'd queried me about my vacation plans. "Have you heard of the big ones they're hauling out at Wolf Crossing?"

"Hooley!" I said.

Tierney went into a trance. "Cool mountain breezes," he murmured. "Best scenery in Montana. Creeks teeming with fish. Two weeks at Wolf Crossing would do you a world of good, Barlow."

"Old Man Owlhoot?" I guessed. "You've had that gleam in your eye ever since Bates picked up that picture and paragraph."

Tierney took a clipping off his desk spindle; it was from the *Sentinel* of the day before, and it showed a one-column cut of a wizened old character captioned: CONFIDANT OF KID CURRY? Beneath the cut was this paragraph:

Jefferson Tucker, an old-timer now residing at Wolf Crossing, is called Old Man Owlhoot by his friends. Tucker makes no secret of having once ridden with Montana's most notorious outlaw, or owlhooter, the famous Kid Curry, whose Hole-in-the-Wall gang's most remembered exploit was the holding up of a Great Northern train at Wagner, Montana in 1901. Tucker hints broadly that he knows the whereabouts of the unrecovered portion of the \$41,000 stolen at that time, claiming that Kid Curry entrusted him with the secret. Fact or fiction?

Tierney sighed. "You know more about those old-time outlaws than anybody else on the sheet, Barlow. I was thinking of sending you to Wolf Crossing to see if this old codger is worth a feature. Now if you happened to be going there anyway—"

"Expense account?" I asked pointedly.

Tierney stiffened as though I'd asked him for his right arm. "After all, we can't subsidize your vacation," he said. "But it wouldn't take you an hour to look up this fellow and interview him."

"I'm going to Glacier Park," I said firmly. "I shall not read a line. I shall not write a line. I shall ask no man a question, unless it pertains to the weather. Do I make myself entirely plain?"

"Now look here, old friend—" said Tierney.

That was how I came to climb on the Helena-bound Greyhound the next morning with a ticket as far as Wolf Crossing. A most persuasive man, Tierney. Yet there *might* be something to that business about big fish, and Wolf Crossing was as good a vacation spot as any. I'd spend no more than one hour on Old Man Owlhoot, mind you. I'd not have my vacation cluttered by some old windbag who was probably pining to get his picture on Page One. Not me! I had my mind made up. . . . But I didn't count on the babe, and I didn't count on Louie Silva

SILVA was on the bus, but I didn't discover him until we'd crossed the Missouri and climbed the hill and were rolling over the flatness toward the mountains. I shared a seat with a taciturn farmer who got off at Cascade; then Silva eased in beside me. I knew him, of course. You didn't cover the police beat without knowing Louie Silva. He dated back to Prohibition days, and when they repealed the Act, they should have found a way to repeal fellows like Louie. He was pint-sized and poisonous, and wore a



double-breasted pin-striped suit that must have been cut for a Singer midget, and he might have been good-looking in an oily sort of way, except that the pox had once visited him and left him with a sand-blasted look.

"Going far?" he asked.

"Wolf Crossing," I muttered, and wished he'd move back to his own seat.

Yet curiosity was tickling me. You can't be a reporter and completely cut off your nose for news, not even for two weeks. Louie's being on a bus didn't quite add up. He just wasn't the bus type. But perhaps now that a black-market tire no longer commanded a fancy price, Louie had fallen on less lucrative days. I'd heard as much whispered in Big Falls. Louie smiled affably, a display of gold, and said: "Got a quart in my grip."

I'm no signer of pledges, but I could think of nothing less enticing than swilling whisky on a bus on a hot summer day, and I told him so. After



that I pretended to doze. He gave me the elbow about twenty minutes later, and I snapped open my eyes. We were beyond the bridge and dipping into Wolf Crossing Cañon; the mountains opened their arms and enfolded us, and we skirted the Missouri, which ran muddily to our right with a wall of the cañon towering to our left.

Louie said: "I read all them articles you had in the tab section of the *Sentinel* a year ago. Was that the straight goods about those early-day outlaws?"

I sighed in resignation. "As straight as I could get the goods. The Hole-in-the-Wall gang operated over a lot of country, including Montana. Kid Curry was one of the leaders; Butch Cassidy was another. A good many men rode with them, off and on. They cut quite a swath in their day."

"All of 'em dead now?"

"Likely. Probably you have heard tell, Louie, that crime does not pay.

Kid Curry is supposed to have shot himself when he was trapped at Rifle, Colorado, about forty years ago. Some old-timers claim, though, that Curry escaped to South America. That was the goal of all those old-time outlaws; they couldn't extradite them in those days. Butch Cassidy did get out of the country, but he was killed in 1909, after trying a hold-up in Bolivia. What gives you such a fondness for ancient history, Louie?"

"It's kind of interesting," Louie said blandly.

"Going to Helena?"

"Wolf Crossing," replied Louie. "I thought I'd rest up a few days."

It didn't hit me. I just didn't tie up Louie Silva and Old Man Owlhoot in my mind, in spite of Louie's curiosity about old-time outlaws. I supposed that Louie, seeing me on the bus, had automatically remembered my feature articles and asked about them; I didn't put two and two

together. If I had, it would have given me a fantastic four. A practical man, Louie Silva—hard-headed and both feet on the ground. He wasn't the kind to go wild-goose-chasing after lost outlaw loot of forty-odd years ago. Not Louie. That's the way I would have figured it.

It's sixty miles from Big Falls to Wolf Crossing as the gopher gallops, and we rolled in around noon and piled off; and when the driver dug my luggage from the compartment, I lit out for the best motel, a row of neat log cabins flanking the bright, oiled highway. I found the office and marched inside, and that's where the babe came into the picture. She was sitting behind a desk, looking as official as anybody could look in shorts and a halter, and she was quite an eyeful—quite an eyeful. Her hair was golden, and she let it hang as it pleased, and her eyes were blue—but it took a moment to get that far. Right



"You've got an old codger around here who's called Old Man Owlhoot." I tell you, she froze up.

then and there I dropped all my regrets about Glacier Park.

She said, very businesslike: "What can I do for you?"

I could have thought up a lot of answers to that one but I mumbled something about a cabin. She took a key from a pigeonhole and led me along the row to a vacancy. It was a one-room affair, clean and airy, and you can't ask for more than that in a cabin. She quoted the price, and I reached for my wallet, and then she got out a receipt book. When I gave her my name, her glance got personal for the first time. "I thought I knew you," she said. "I live in Big Falls in the winters. I was there the night you spoke to the University Women about journalism."

I winced. "You liked my talk?"

Her eyes laughed at me. "You made yourself sound just like a character out of *Front Page*."

Then she got grave. "Maybe you are a gift from the gods," she said. "You could help me out of a hole."

I was set to swim the Hellespont. Besides, I could use a friend in Wolf Crossing; there was that little job to be done for Tiernoy, and sometimes you can do your best interviewing second-hand. I said; "Just name it."

"We're putting on a box social at the community hall tomorrow night. I'm on the program committee, and

we've got a blank spot. If you could give a fifteen-minute talk—"

"Sure," I said, just as though I had a trunkful of lectures. "And you can do something for me in return."

"I hope so," she said.

"You've got an old codger around here who's called Old Man Owlhoot. Claims he once rode with Kid Curry. I'd like the straight of that."

I tell you, it brought on an early winter. She froze up and snowed all over me. But only for a moment. Then she smiled, but it was only her lips that worked at it. "We can talk about that later," she said. She made herself very busy; she fussed about the cabin, and muttered something about clean sheets, and started for the door. I looked at the receipt. It was signed "*Ellen Sawyer*." I let her go. She wasn't the kind of girl you stopped.

I LET my things lie and went out for a look at Wolf Crossing. I'd passed through many times, going to Helena or Butte, but I'd never stopped before, and I'd never got the real feel of the place. There wasn't much to it, but it had a certain something. Montana is a mighty big State, and it holds many worlds and many spans of time. You'll find as much sophistication in some of its larger cities, like Big Falls, as you'll find in San Francisco or Boston; but between

the cities, you'll find places like Wolf Crossing. They have their motels and their gas pumps and their juke-boxes; yet time has stood still in the shadowy corners, and the breath of the Old West is there.

Wolf Crossing was cupped down here in the cañon with the pines climbing to the sky on either side. I crossed a rustic bridge that spanned a creek, and found a scattering of ancient dwellings and, high above, a decrepit old two-story frame house clinging to the hillside. A path led upward to this house, and Ellen Sawyer was climbing the path with a great deal of haste. Those legs of hers were more than ornamental. I watched her go; I watched her disappear into the house, and then I wandered to a service station.

"Who lives up yonder?" I asked.

The attendant had nothing to do but sun himself. He was a slack-jawed man of uncertain age, and he grinned widely. "Why, that's the home of the Spittin' and Lyin' Club," he said.

I grinned too. "Large organization?"

"Three old coots. They draw pensions, I guess, and they live together. There's Reed Kingsley; he's an Englishman, out of Canada, and claims he fought against Louis Riel in that rebellion they had in Saskatchewan

fifty years back. And there's Rip McMasters; he used to be a ranch-hand before rheumatism got him; says he fought in the Johnson County cattle war down in Wyoming. The third coot is Jeff Tucker; his claim is that he rode with Kid Curry. The three of 'em sit around and spit at the stove and jaw about how high they used to live long ago."

"Thanks," I said, and walked away. But I wanted to run.

I got up that trail with none of Ellen's grace, but I made it. I came to the sagging porch and looked in through the open doorway, and saw two old men seated in the front room. Ellen was not there; she must have made her visit and got back down the slope while I was at the service station. No sense in knocking; the two had seen me, and I said: "I'm looking for a Mr. Jefferson Tucker."

ONE of these men was big and broad-chested, but he was the one who stayed seated, a cribbage board in his lap; and I saw that his hands were crippled: Rip McMasters of the rheumatism and the Johnson County war, evidently. The other old fellow was taller, and his voice had a British accent that had been diluted by many years on this side of the Atlantic. It was he who came to the door. He said angrily: "Are you another of those bloody reporters?"

"I'm with the Big Falls *Sentinel*," I admitted.

"Jeff hain't 'ere," said Kingsley.

"Expect him back?"

"Not for a couple of weeks."

They had put up a wall of antipathy toward me; it was high, and it was insurmountable; and I knew I had Ellen Sawyer to thank for it. I was remembering her iciness when I'd mentioned Old Man Owlhoot; I was remembering how quickly she'd run here after I'd announced my interest in the third of this trio of ancients. I said: "If Mr. Tucker shows back sooner than you expect, I'm at the motel. Tell him I won't bite him."

I went angrily down the hill and found my way to my service-station man. I had my back up now; and if there was a story, I was going to root it out. I said: "Have you been around here long?"

He squinted at the sun. "Since '32," he said. "No, it was '33. When was Roosevelt first elected?"

"Know Jeff Tucker pretty well?"

"Everybody does."

"Do you believe he really rode with Kid Curry?"

The man gave me a quick frown. "What's it to you?"

I showed him the corner of a five-spot. "Newspaper story," I said.

The man's eyes mellowed. "You never know about these old-timers.

Add up their experiences, and most of them would have to be three hundred years old. Jeff tells a good story, but he might have got it out of books. He reads a lot."

"Ever actually hear him say he knew where Curry buried his loot?"

"Jeff came here only about four-five years ago. At first he did janitor work at the motel. The Sawyer girl's dad was running the shebang then. He gave old Jeff a cabin for doing the chores. But a cabin is worth good money during tourist season. Then Kingsley and McMasters asked Jeff to move in with them. . . . Yes, I've heard Jeff tell about how Curry trusted him with a map. I even asked to see it, once. The old coot bristled up good and plenty. Waved a brown envelope at me, and said the map was inside, and that he was putting it into the hand of nobody but Kid Curry. You know, some think Curry is still alive."

"So you think he's really got a map?"

The man grinned and reached for the five-spot. "Mister," he asked me. "would you wash windows for a living if you had a map that could lead you to enough money to choke an ox?"

I remembered the digging I'd done for those articles on the Hole-in-the-Wall gang. "Kid Curry was a pretty formidable character," I said. "A fellow might go slow about double-crossing him if there was a chance he was still alive—especially an old fellow like Tucker, who's likely got a screw loose on the subject of Curry. Besides, those owlhooters had their own code of loyalty, you know."

The man shrugged. "You couldn't prove it by me," he said.

I went back to the motel, and Ellen was sitting in the office as I passed it. I didn't even give her a nod. I got out the portable and wrote a few letters, and then shaved and skinned into some fresh clothes and decided it was time to eat. The key had a paddle on it, and it didn't fit into a pocket any too well, so I went into the office and put it into the numbered pigeonhole where Ellen had got it. She wasn't around. I found a restaurant and had something to eat, and then I strolled the burg some more. I found the community hall; it was a big barn of a building, dark and silent. I looked up the slope to where the Spittin' and Lyin' Club held out, and lamplight winked from a window. It was getting on to dusk, and I went back to the office—and the key was gone from the pigeonhole!

It rocked me back on my heels. I remembered my Graflex and typewriter, and figured what they'd fetch in a Big Falls pawnshop, and came to the cabin with my fists cocked and wishing I packed a gun. Then it

dawned on me that maybe Ellen was using the key to get inside and change the bedding—but just the same I approached soft-footed. The cabin was dark, and the door gave to my hand; and there was Louie Silva sitting on my bed, a cigarette burning in his face, and enough smoke fouling the air to tell me he'd been there quite a while.

I said: "You're sort of mixed-up, aren't you, Louie?"

"I got one of these cabins too," he said.

"But not this one. Fork over that key."

"It's in the door," he said, and spouted smoke through his nose contemptuously. "A hick outfit! Look, I'm here to talk business."

"Monkey business, Louie?"

"You went up to that house on the hill today. Did you see the old coot?"

"Tucker!" Surprise almost floored me. "What do you know about Tucker?"

"I went up there too. But they slammed the door in my face."

I had to grin at that. "Maybe they thought you were peddling brushes, Louie."

Louie's mouth got mean. "Making with the smart talk won't get you anywhere. You and me could maybe split a buck. Do you think the old bird really has a map of where that train money is stashed?"

THAT'S when it hit me, the thing I'd missed on the bus. It hit me hard, and I wanted to laugh; but suddenly I was scared, and I couldn't have said why. Not at first. I said: "Louie, do you mean to say you're after that map? Because of that little piece in the paper the other day?"

"Why not?" he said.

I did laugh then. "Louie," I said, "you're a romanticist at heart! Nobody ever suspected it before! Look me up when we get back to Big Falls. Maybe I can sell you a good, juicy lost gold-mine. Or a piece of the Civic Center."

Louie's mouth got meaner, and the chill of his look cooled the cabin. "I don't pass up the angles," he said. "Maybe the old coot *has* got a map. Don't tell me a reporter's pay is so fat that you wouldn't be interested. And maybe you can get a gander at that map where I couldn't."

I quit laughing. He was deadly serious about all this—and when I say *deadly*, I mean just that. And suddenly I was remembering a lot of things I'd heard about Louie Silva over the years, and some of those things dated back to Prohibition days when I was just a kid, and they had made bloodcurdling listening. Nothing that was ever proved, of course. Just whispers about men highjacked and left beaten to death on the back roads that led down from Canada in

that halcyon era. And I was remembering that picture of Old Man Owlhoot, who was a frail old man and maybe minus some of his buttons; and I said: "The whole thing's a lot of malarky, Louie."

Louie's eyes grew smaller, and he said: "Would you have found that out already?"

"The old fellow's up at the house. I talked to him," I lied. "He's just a blowhard who's put one over on the local yokels. You're wasting your time, Louie. Better climb on that bus tomorrow and head back to Big Falls, where the pickings are real."

"You wouldn't be kidding me, Barlow?"

"Kidding you, Louie?"

He got up off the bed, and I guessed that I'd sold him a solid bill of goods, for he crossed to the door and said: "You never know about these things till you check the angles." He stood there, and I saw him with new eyes now; he wasn't just an oily little guy who mixed up in cheap little rackets; he was dangerous and not too bright, and all the more dangerous because of that. He went out, and I heard his feet crunch against the gravel walk. I opened up the windows, figuring that the place needed airing in more ways than one; and I tumbled into bed shortly after that.

NO alarm clock for me. I was on a vacation, wasn't I? I got up when the sun was in my eyes and had breakfast, and climbed into old clothes and got my gear and went up the creek. I put in a day at tangling my line in the brush, and before sundown I was putting a hex on Tierney. Him and his gigantic fish! All I got was a case of sunburn; and when I came back to the motel in time to change for supper, I would have growled back at any dog that growled at me.

I'd finished dressing when Ellen tapped at the door.

"The program will start at eight o'clock," she said. "Just walk to the hall whenever you're ready. You'll find me somewhere about."

"Look," I said, "do you think I'm going to make a speech for you after the way you double-crossed me yesterday?"

Her mouth twisted as though she were going to cry, and her glance dropped to the floor. She was wearing a silk jersey print dress with a figured design, and I liked the way it clung to her, but I was darned if I was going to let anything sway me. And yet I'll say this for her; she didn't try to bluff, and she didn't try to lie. She said: "So you know I warned Jeff that you were here to interview him."

"Just as fast as your legs would carry you!"

She said: "Just what do you want from him?"

"The truth!"

She said: "He didn't want to have his picture or his name in the paper. The reporter took the picture before Jeff could stop him. Then the reporter got that stuff about Jeff riding with Kid Curry by talking to other folks—not to Jeff."

"But if it's true, he's copy," I said. "And if he's copy, he's my meat."

"And if it's true, the law might have a claim on Jeff, even after all these years," she said. "The Pinkerton people offered a sixty-five-hundred-dollar reward after the Wagner hold-up. That's history. He's just an old man, minding his own business and perhaps talking too much; but that's an old man's privilege. It gives him importance. Does he have to pay for it by being dragged into the newspapers against his wishes?"

"What is he to you?" I demanded. "A relative?"

"He's no more to me than he is to anybody in Wolf Crossing. I'm asking you not to make a liar out of him. And I'm asking you not to turn a spotlight on him in your newspaper, either. If you'll leave him alone, I'll tell you the whole truth about him before you leave—but just as one person to another."

She was proposing a bargain, and she was so straightforward about it that she melted me down like butter under a July sun. Maybe those blue eyes made a difference. I won't argue the point. But I'm no cigar-store Indian. I said gruffly: "I'm trying to understand, but it gets thicker all the time. When did you say that program started?"

*Illustrated by
John Fulton*



"I don't pass up the angles."

Her eyes lifted and shone. "Then you will make a speech?"

I quit playing Mr. Stern & Stubborn. "I'll even give your pet old codger a boost," I said. "Will you have supper with me?"

She said, "Why not?" and she took my arm.

WE went to the community hall together after we'd eaten. The place was lighted tonight, and was lively enough; parked cars were banked before it and to the sides, and I hadn't imagined there were so many people in the vicinity. But I knew there were sheep ranches back in the hills; and the ranchers had turned out full force, their wives and kids with them.

We had to elbow our way inside. Around a vast floor were card tables, and at the end was an orchestra platform, and I gathered there would be dancing later. A soft-drink bar was on one wall, and a little giggle-water was somewhere in the offing, for nobody ever got as happy as some of those boys, on soda pop! Pretty soon Ellen had me up on the platform and was introducing me. She called me an eminent journalist from Big Falls, and I was glad I had the sunburn to conceal my blush.

I gave it to them then, the canned stuff; and they quieted down and listened. I made out that I was a hat-on-the-back-of-my-head reporter of the old school. Tell 'em the truth about a reporter's daily grind, and it makes dull listening, but I didn't overlord the glamour. In conclusion I told them how pretty I thought their little settlement was, and what a reflection their community spirit was upon the place, and they ate it up. I'd been looking around as I talked, trying to catch a glimpse of either Reed Kingsley or Rip McMasters, but the Spittin' and Lyin' Club didn't seem to be represented at all. Then I remembered that I'd seen lamplight in the house on the hill as we'd come from the restaurant to the hall.

"Our paper," I said, "recently gave a little publicity to one of your citizens. I refer to Mr. Jefferson Tucker. I'm told that Mr. Tucker shuns the limelight, so I'm happy to assure you that we'll respect his wishes. But I know that all of you are proud to have in your midst a man of his stature. Anybody courageous enough to have won the trust of the notorious Kid Curry is a man in the true sense of the word."

That was for Ellen, her and her big blue eyes.

I gave them a quick bow, and the applause was hearty, and flattering enough. But I turned deaf to it mighty quick. I had spotted Louie Silva. He'd been at the bar, and I hadn't glimpsed him until now, but he had detached himself at the end

of my speech and was making for the door as fast as his bandy little legs could pump. He hadn't caught the bus out that morning, after all! And suddenly I knew where he was going and why, and fear was a churning propeller in the pit of my stomach. I'd given Old Man Owlhoot a pat on the back for Ellen's sake, but I'd laid it on a little thick. And last night I'd told Silva that Tucker was up at the house. Now Louie was convinced that Jeff Tucker indeed had a map to Kid Curry's hidden loot—and Louie was on his way to do a little business!

That's what I'd done, me and my big mouth!

Ellen was pressing through the crowd toward me, her hand out and a smile on her lips, but I didn't wait to hear what she had to say.

"Where's Tucker?" I barked, and I got my hands on her shoulders and gripped hard. "Is he really gone for two weeks?"

My eyes and my voice must have told her I had to have a straight answer. She said: "Why, he's up at the house! He's been there all the time! I just told him to keep out of your sight!"

"I've let him in for trouble!" I said, and I went elbowing through the crowd and got to the door and started at a hard run for the bridge. I heard her behind me, and I turned and shouted, ordering her back, but she paid me no heed. It was no time for an argument. I got to the path leading up the hill and humped along it, and Ellen overtook me then. We reached the house, and the front door was still open, lamplight spilling out upon the porch; and I looked inside and saw the four men who were there, in the big room to the front.

Two of them were Reed Kingsley and Rip McMasters, and those two I knew from yesterday. That made the third old fellow Jeff Tucker, and I would have known him from the *Sentinel* cut. He was little and wizened and gray, and he wore bibless overalls and a snakeskin belt, and a sombrero that a horse wouldn't have eaten oats out of. He was backed against the wall, and Louie Silva had a gun pushed hard against his belly; and Silva, standing there in the lamplight with his face twisted, was like something out of an early Edward G. Robinson movie. But that gun was real—it was mighty real!

Silva said: "You've got a map, and I'm guessing that it's somewhere in this house. Now fork it over, or I'll blow a hole in you!"

I'll say this for Old Man Owlhoot; he had the kind of guts a man would have needed to ride with Kid Curry long ago. I'll keep remembering his face as it was at that moment; it was ashy gray, and fear was

written upon it, but it was the face of a man who has found something worth dying for. His voice quavered, but its tone was stubborn. "I ain't giving it to you!" he cried shrilly.

I came through the doorway then. Silva heard me and turned, swinging the gun; and I kicked at it, and it exploded, flame bursting in my face; and I'll swear the bullet parted my hair. But the gun went arcing and clattered to the floor; and I slammed Silva hard, planting my left in his midriff and aiming my right at his jaw. He went down as though all the bones had been plucked out of him, and I said hoarsely: "Somebody get a rope!"

Ellen said: "I'll run for the marshal!"

AND she did. It was more than an hour before the matter was all ironed out, and Louie was on his way in the marshal's car to Helena, which was the nearest county seat. I got to use my Grallex, after all: I got a nifty of Louie handcuffed to the marshal's biggest deputy. I could have gone back up the hill then, and interviewed Jeff Tucker, I suppose. He owed me his life, and likely he would have been cooperative. But Ellen steered me to the motel, once the ruckus was over, and she unlocked her office and took a brown envelope from a desk drawer and handed it to me.

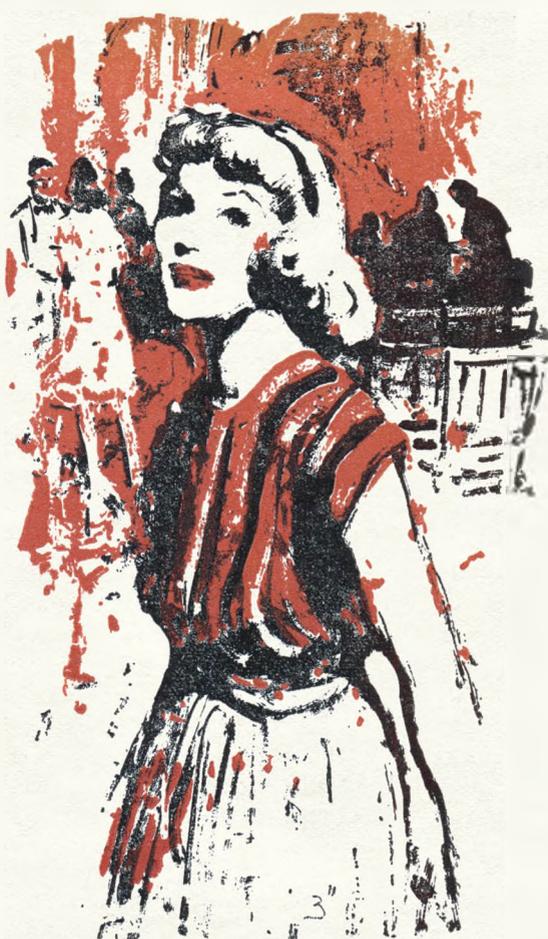
"Here it is," she said. "Jeff gave it to me yesterday, and asked me to keep it safe for him. It's the envelope that he always waved when anybody wanted to see the map Kid Curry gave him. He trusted me enough to let me look at it. I'm trusting you just as much."

There was a letter inside. It was on the stationery of a varnish company in Indiana, and was dated five years back. It said that Jefferson Tucker had been a faithful employee of theirs for the past forty years, and that they were reluctantly letting him go because of a policy concerning men past sixty-five. It was a mighty nice recommendation.

I handed it back to her, my head whirling a little. "Then it was all a lie," I said. "He wasn't even West until five years ago. He got his yarn out of books."

She nodded. "That lie was his ticket to the company of Kingsley and McMasters. You see, Kingsley really fought in the Riel Rebellion; and McMasters was in that Johnson County trouble long ago. But Jeff had to make up his story, and he had to make it stick. Can you understand why it would have been easier for him to die tonight than to have admitted he'd never known Kid Curry?"

I turned it over in my mind, and I saw how it was. I could picture



"I'll tell you the whole truth."

that old man, his best years behind him, turning his face West—coming to loneliness; I could understand what it had meant to him to be asked into the Spittin' and Lyin' Club, and I could understand his desperate desire to measure up to his new-found cronies, to keep their company at any cost. Somehow it had made Jefferson Tucker magnificent. Men die for principles, and men die for a lot of things that we call honorable; but here was a man who'd been ready to die for a lie that made him kin to other men.

Ellen must have guessed the run of my thoughts. She said: "What sort of story will you give your paper?"

I could see a whale of a headline—BADMAN OF THE OLD WEST TAMES BADMAN OF THE NEW—but I didn't need a lie as badly as Jeff Tucker had needed one. I said: "My boss gets the yarn on Louie Silva being arrested for armed robbery. And if he tries to play up the Old Man Owlhoot angle, he'll have to get himself a new Man Friday!"

She came close to me and tucked her arm in mine, and she said: "I guess I owe you a favor again. You haven't got a thing out of this trip!"

I gave her my best grin. "That remains to be seen," I said.

Down the highway, dance music was coming from the community hall, and the night was still young. I took her by the hand and led her out of the office, and we went skipping along the road just like a couple of carefree kids.

Back



FROM TASMANIA (WHERE THE AUTHOR IS ALSO ENGAGED IN SHEEP-RAISING) COMES THIS FINE DRAMA OF ADVENTURE DOWN UNDER.

by LOUIS KAYE

THE desert was empty all day. It was only at night that people came out of it. Stone Age men, they seemed; Johnny Brent was scared of them.

They had taken the rifle from inside the shack in the dark, and the revolver from under Bill Chaney's head while he slept. Johnny couldn't guard the place all the time. Not even his fear could hold his eyes open interminably.

Bill Chaney had been sick three weeks; and now, getting into the fourth, he wasn't any better. He said he was no worse, but Johnny didn't know.

The first time he had seen him, away back in Oodnadatta, nearly four hundred miles away, Bill Chaney had been a big fellow, tanned, stringy-strong, vigorous with health that a big check and a long drunk hadn't dimmed. And here at Unkiyara, riding the gibber and the saltbush reaches where his cattle grazed thinly and afar, he'd been a bronzed god in a saddle.

Johnny's compelling ambition: To grow up like Bill Chaney, a big devil of a man on a horse or a camel, accord-

ing to the country—a man with a gun who rode over a Government lease of three thousand square miles.

Now the big fellow was down with something that was squeezing all the health out of him, and almost his life. Johnny sometimes thought his life was gone, so still Bill Chaney was, and quiet, and unbreathing. But he would come back again.

He'd come back and say: "Johnny, stick it out, kid. Saltbush Hallam will be here by the tenth."

But it was now the nineteenth, and Saltbush hadn't come. Wouldn't come now. Johnny knew. In moonlight he'd seen a painted buck wearing a pair of pants, and another a hat, that he knew were old Saltbush's. The prospector's tucker-bags had been too much for them. They still had a lip-smacking look. But it was due now to Bill Chaney's steers and cows, spared when they came to water.

But Johnny's immediate problem was not the stock. It was Bill Chaney. He knew he would have to get Bill Chaney out to civilization. He came to this decision on the twentieth day

of November, which was a day of terrific heat here on the furnace-blast plains of central Australia—heat that shimmered in vitreous waves, hurting the eyes, burning the skin and filling the hollows of the land with blue mirages and cutting off pieces of the red plain so that they seemed to float in the sky. But Johnny was bored with the phenomenon of saltbush and spinifex clumps hanging upside down from the blue. He had seen it often since he was a baby in his mother's arms on a mica field. His mother had washed and cooked for the miners. His father had gone away before he was born. But Bill Chaney, in these later years, had been like a father to him.

He had been fourteen when he came to ride for Bill. He was sixteen and something now. Riding with Bill Chaney, he'd felt older, a man fit to ride beside a man. Now, with those shadows materializing in the night, he was like a helpless, scared child. But he tried not to show it. He'd be ashamed to let Bill Chaney see, and it was fatal for the blacks to know he was scared. They'd just walk in and raid the storeroom, taking anything they wanted.

They had Gnumi with them. Gnumi had been taken out of the Stone Age with an iron chain round his neck and placed in a concrete cell of a Twentieth Century prison, and he'd returned knowing too much, and communicating it to others.

He was a big buck, ugly and bearded, and in the moonlight he made faces at Johnny, as at a child, and laughed. And Johnny burned at the insult, and felt miserable afterward with the realization that he was the scared kid Gnumi thought he was.

SCARED OF NOT, Johnny had to do something. Inaction was eating his nerves away; and Bill Chaney, as things were, would maybe die.

"You ain't getting any better," Johnny said now. "We'll head for Ernabella. Closest place. You'll be all right, bedded on a camel. I can rig up a stretcher between the water barrels."

Bill Chaney turned his emaciated face; and his hot, deep eyes got clear and steady for a while. "Take some pushing through, bub, with the blacks chasin' the camels off at night. Be okay if our own boys were back." Gnumi had been pulling strings with

Country Boy

the witch doctors and inkatas, and so the tribal elders had called Chaney's black-fellows up to a corroborrec. "Better wait for Saltbush," he said again.

"It's no use," Johnny said. He told about the pants and hat.

"I'd know old Saltbush's hat with the snakeskin band and the fly-corks. Besides, I've seen pack-sacks that weren't ours. And a buck carryin' a pick-head. There's never been no pick on this place."

"By hell, no!" Bill Chaney agreed, proud even in sickness of being a straight-out stockman who worked in the saddle and did nothing on his feet, like dam-sinkers and miners. "Sounds like it was Saltbush. So maybe you're right, and we better go on in the morning."

"I'll get the camels before sundown," said Johnny, "and keep 'em where the myalls can't run 'em off."

He tried to make his voice sound casual, but he was keyed up with an uneasiness that overrode his relief at the decision. The camps would be more perilous than these solid walls. But he would have to get through.

He was telling himself this when he went after the camels. Even though it was daylight and the plain had little cover for tribesmen, he knew a fear that increased, the farther he walked from the house.

At the distance of a couple of miles he looked back across the plain and had difficulty in going on, for he seemed so far from the comparative security of that white rectangle set down in a sea of red gibber dust.

Eventually he saw the camels walking across a blue mirage. From that unreal lake they passed fantastically over the top of a string of mulga thickets that quivered and slanted in heat, and finally ran together like toy trees of melting green wax. In this restless conglomeration of harassed desert growth, the camels vanished except for the gray indefinite movement of a hump as they fed.

Johnny approached the thickets with wary glances. On the open plain he could see as well as be seen, but here his own vision met a screening wall of scrub. His thin legs wanted to take him back to the walls of Bill Chaney's house, but he managed to go on. "I'm only being a kid," he scolded himself.

He walked with a little more confidence, for the camels had entered the

thickets without scenting any blacks. One of the tall beasts sighted him in a moment and stared with sulky black eyes in a high, haughty head. Other heads lifted from the coarse foliage that their strong teeth had pulled at; and then as a herd the camels moved away, their slim fore-legs jerking at the hobbles.

They continued to elude Johnny as he ran to head them off. "Hoosh-ta!" he kept saying, like an Afghan cameleer. "Hoosh, kushna, you!" Finally an old cow camel let him catch and nose-line her.

After that, the herd of ten was easy, all the camels obeying him in turn till he had them nose-lined in a string.

Illustrated by Albert de Vine



Then, as he led the camels through the thickets, he came upon the speared body of a horse.

There were other horse tracks where a small bunch had passed this way, obviously running, and apparently in the night. A solitary spearman's track led to a thicket. Here he had waited while others drove the herd past, and the spearman had chosen as his victim Bill Chaney's favorite horse, big Whiteface. "That blazed face and white socks gave you away in the moonlight," Johnny said aloud. He hardly had the heart to tell Bill Chaney.

BILL CHANEY SWORE. "That's Gnumi—the others would kill for meat or sport, but Gnumi's shrewder. He's trying to hit me where it hurts the most."

Then Bill Chaney went away on one of his delirious rambles. Once his fever-dried lips caressed a woman's name, so that Johnny knew he was back again with the young wife who had come to Unkiyara one hot summer, had suffered the lonely stillness of the days and the blacks' corroborrecs of nights for less than a year before she died. Johnny had never seen her, but he knew Akooya, the old woman who had been her kitchen-lubra, and he saw her again now, a black silhouette in the white glare of the doorway.

"Akooya," the boy said hopefully, "are our own blacks coming back?"

"No." She huddled against the wall in a ragged *narja*. "They make corroborrec."

"What are you doing here now, then, Akooya?"

"Me see you fetch camels. Take sick boss away. But Gnumi say no go. He want to say boss feller die this place plenty sick."

Johnny nodded; Gnumi was cunning enough to try to plan a murder and an alibi at the same time. "Well, I reckon we won't let him stop us, Akooya. What are you going to do now? Gnumi'll beat you up if he knows you've come here to warn me."

She hugged the wall closer—an old, thin, wrinkled woman, dirty and afraid. "I come with you, might be. Look after sick boss..."

Johnny was glad to have Akooya along. She made the fire, she cooked, and she watched over Bill Chaney. Johnny was free to saddle and un-

saddle, load and unload the camels—the trail gear, pack bags and water barrels. Important, the barrels, in that gehenna of dust and heat. So important that Gnumi, with his stolen gun and handful of cartridges, took a couple of shots at them from a thicket near the camp.

Johnny plugged a spurting hole. "If I just had a rifle too!" he said to Bill Chaney.

The sick man's sallow face twisted to an encouraging grin. "Stick to it, son! Gnumi's trying to get you rattled. A kid, see? But he don't know what I know—that you were a man the day you wore your first long pants. So was your dad."

JOHNNY stared. "Who?" He'd never seen his father; his mother had hardly ever mentioned him, and his childhood had been haunted by a sense of incompleteness—no dad like the other kids around the diggings.

"Your father," Bill Chaney said.

"I didn't know you ever knew him," Johnny said wistfully. "You never said so."

"You seemed to have got along without a father, and there was no use telling you about a man you could never see now. He died up Timor way about ten years ago."

"What was he like?" Johnny wanted to know.

"A tall, fair-headed man—not heavily built, lean, sort of—but strong and tough as saddle leather. Had blue eyes and a grin like he didn't care a tinker's cuss which way the wind blew, so long as he could smell danger in it. Ride, shoot and fight better'n most, but kind of quiet-like too. Not much of a talker. You'll be a dead ringer for him in ten or fifteen years."

Johnny thought for a time. "Did you know him well?"

"Him and me were together on the Victoria when the blacks fed Burton and Coyle to the crocodiles. Up there they *were* bad. Then we nearly perished over by the Canning stock route when me and your dad—Dusty, I always knew him as—"

"Charley was his name, Mum said."

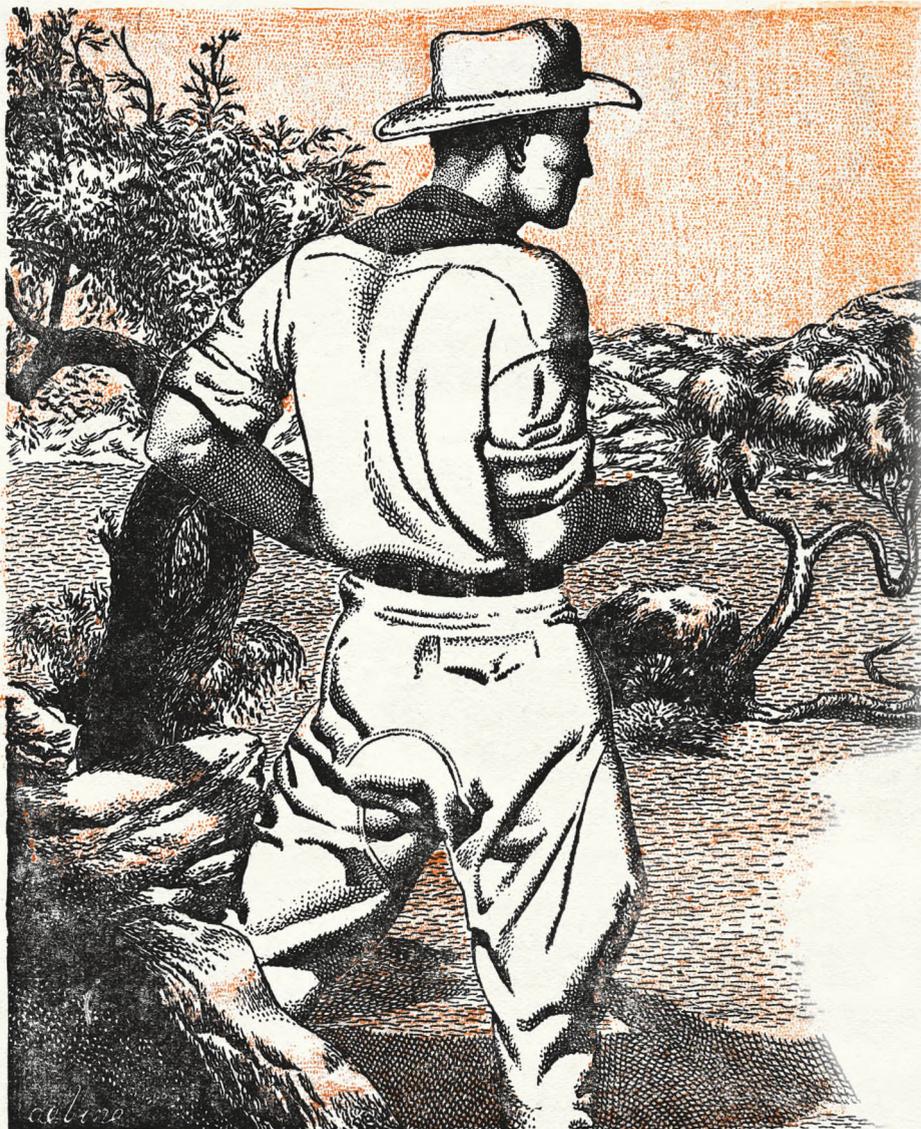
"Yeh, but he was always Dusty to me. . . . Well, like I said, we nearly turned it in over the western border when we were prospecting and lost our camels. It happens sometimes."

"It could happen here," Johnny nodded.

"But you're not going to let it, son," Bill Chaney said. "It's a trick the blacks have, running off camels, but you're wise to it."

"But you and Dad,"—the word was unfamiliar on his tongue—"you and Dad must have guessed they'd try it."

"Yeh, but we expected only a few to be around on that dry stretch. But there was a big mob—four hundred strong with war-sticks in their hair,



and a powerful hunger for the food we had in the pack bags—flour and sugar and jam and all kinds of canned stuff, enough to stock a store, because we planned to be out a long time. A year, maybe. Only thing we didn't have enough of was cartridges. They were short at the store that year because of a strike on the coast. It was no picnic, I'm telling you, gettin' out of that jam."

"It would have been easier getting out of this one," Johnny said, "if I hadn't let Gnumi lift the guns. I didn't think a wild black-fellow would come into a house like that."

"They had that boy shut up inside prison walls long enough for him to get used to a doorway," Bill Chaney said. "He's foxy, but he'll run out of courage when he runs out of bullets. Meantime, he won't shoot anything more than a water barrel that can't hit back, or a steer that's good to eat."

"He speared Whiteface," Johnny said, and wished he hadn't.

"The hell he did!" Chaney grieved again, and was silent a long time.

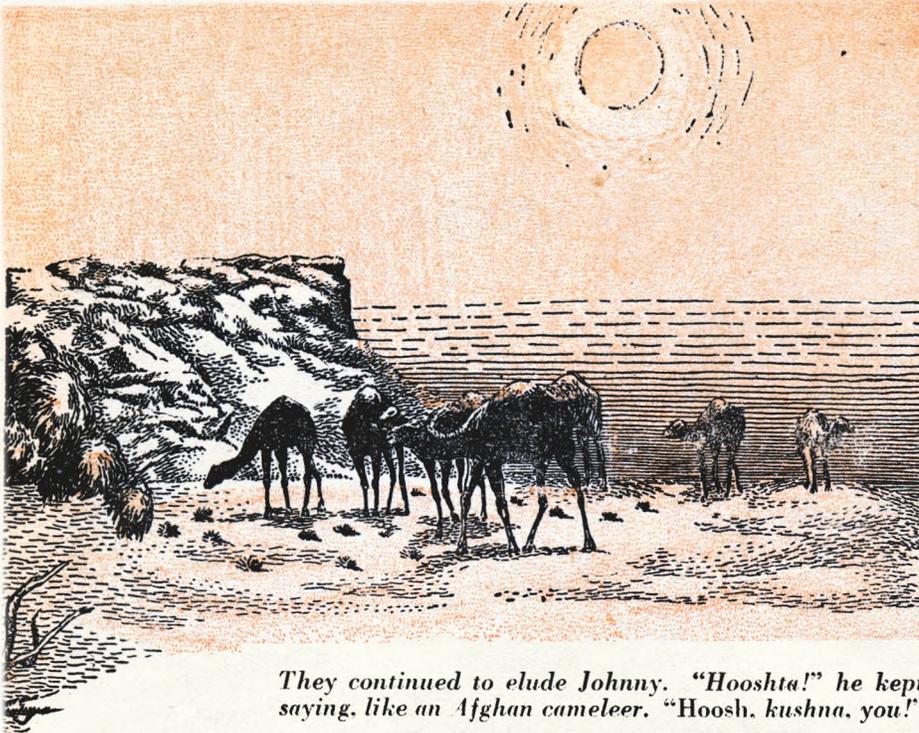
Johnny knew it still hurt a lot, for horses were in Bill Chaney's blood—the gallop of hoofs, the swing and reach of fleet limbs, the lather of sweat. A camel might carry him and serve him, and even, in a bad desert place, perhaps save his life; but it was a horse that really quickened Bill Chaney's heart.

"Your dad was mighty fond of a horse, Johnny. If he was here now, he'd be pretty mad. He'd know the way I feel about Gnumi."

"I know the way," Johnny said. "I wish I could do something about Whiteface. But it'll take me all my time to do something about the camels. Gnumi'll want them next, and if he gets 'em—"

"Being the son of your father," Bill Chaney said, "you sure won't let him."

THE night was the time when Johnny wondered most anxiously whether Bill Chaney was right. Akooya huddled by the pack dump in shivering terror, and her terror was infectious.



They continued to elude Johnny. "Hooshta!" he kept saying, like an Afghan cameleer. "Hoosh, kushna, you!"

And then Gnumi himself came out of the night with a rising moon behind him to show his contempt for the white camp. On Gnumi's head was the hat of the prospector Saltbush Hallam, but nothing was on his body except white ochre stripes curving in the tribal design that had remained unchanged since the time of his remote ancestors.

"I am Gnumi," he said to Johnny. "You stop with dying white man, and you die like him."

Johnny said: "I've got to take that chance. Who's going to do the killing?" It took all the guts he had, but he got it out in a fine careless jeer just as Bill Chaney would have managed it had he been clear in his mind now—or Johnny's father, had he been living.

Gnumi was taunted to fury. He raged and cursed, using the profanities of white men mixed up with the screaming obscenities of his own tongue.

"In night we take camels," Gnumi wound up. "What you do with sick white man then? He die. You die. And that old bitch of an Akooya, she die too. Akooya," he yelled, "you come out of that bush. Come with me and Mu-yupi."

The boy could hear Akooya weeping. Mu-yupi was a witch doctor.

"Don't go," Johnny said. "Mu-yupi never ordered it. Only Gnumi. Gnumi's no witch doctor."

The old lubra hovered unhappily between Gnumi's threats and the white boy's advice. Then she hid herself so cunningly in the saltbush that Gnumi finally gave up searching for her.

"What is an old woman to me? A *haditcha* man will get her," he said. "This camp is no safe place for her or anybody. *Anybody*," he emphasized.

IN the morning there were smoke signals. Johnny saw them with eyes red-rimmed from want of sleep. Blacks smoke-talking back and forth as they moved toward a meeting place, Johnny thought.

It comforted him a little. "They're held up enough by this camp to gather and talk it over," he said to Akooya. "We've bluffed 'em off a bit."

It seemed incredible, even while it encouraged him. A sick man, an old native woman and himself, a kid—nothing there to hold off so big a band.

"But we ain't alone, you see?" Johnny said to the lubra. "In Alice Springs and in Oodnadatta there's troopers. If they knew about this—"

And then, of course, there was his father. His dad was helping him too—by the way he himself had behaved in such jams. "I wouldn't be your son, Dad, if I didn't try to put up as good a show as you," he said silently to the stars of another night. "Dad, maybe you're hearin' me right now."

Then in the dark Akooya screamed. A wave of blacks swept in over the camp, and with it went the camel herd.

Johnny picked himself up and went to the camel line and found nothing but cut rope. "They did it easy!" he cried out. "By God, I might as well not have been here to

look after them. Right under my eyes!"

"Take it easy, bub," Bill Chaney said. It was one of his lucid intervals, and it had to come right now, when he could know the worst. "Could have happened to anybody. Did they get Akooya?"

"No," said Johnny. She was there by the pack dump, weeping in the relief of her escape. "They just got the camels, that's all—but it's plenty."

He didn't know what he could do. A good man might have been able to get the camels back without a gun—Bill Chaney might have been able to in the full arrogance of his health; but Johnny knew they did not respect nor fear him. He was a raw kid, and they were taking advantage of it, from Gnumi down to the cowardliest buck who wanted to throw a scare into a white. Something to laugh about, as they were laughing now, those who had come back.

They stood in the light of the moon with Gnumi in their midst. And as proof that the jeer began with the dawn of man, these Stone Age warriors taunted and mocked Johnny. They laughed with raked bellies hard with mirth. And Gnumi, the tallest, toughest of all, bearded with a growth that measured the time since he'd left a prison compound, jeered louder than any.

"What you do now, white boy? No gun. No camel."

Nothing, Johnny agreed silently, but his bare, useless hands!

But then he had company across the glaring sprawl of gibber. The smoke had shown again, and he knew now that it was not a tribal sign. It stayed in the one place, and went up at intervals in dark, unvarying puffs as though the man who made the sign had but one message to put out.

"Why, I reckon that's a camel camp with some trouble in it," Johnny said to Akooya. "Tribesmen don't make that sign."

Not unless they wanted to trick him, Akooya said. "Might be they want you to walk out that way where they can get you."

Johnny watched the smoke. "No. I reckon that sign's genuine," he decided. "And whoever it is out there, wouldn't be makin' it—giving the camp away with Gnumi around—unless there was a gun there."

He mulled it over, and then took a chance. He answered the smoke.

ACROSS the plain the column broke off to show that his reply had been seen.

"Now what?" Johnny wondered. "Can anybody there get across to me?"

By night he was morally certain nobody could. It was not one of



A bunch formed in a squatting group. Johnny realized what they meant to do—bar his way.

Bill Chaney's conscious moments, so he had no help there in making up his mind. But as he saw it, the other camp had a gun, and if the other camp couldn't do any good with it, maybe he could. Anyway, he wanted the gun, for with a gun he might get the camels back. Bill Chaney would have seen it the same way, and gone for the gun. And his dad would have gone for it. And so he, Johnny Brent, now wearing long pants, would have to go for it. "Your dad was a man, from the time he started wearing long pants," Bill Chaney had said.

"I'm a man—I got to be," Johnny thought, watching the dark pools of moonshade where the saltbush clumped, or a lone wind-twisted mulga grew.

He walked fast but steadily, keeping the Southern Cross on his left shoulder. He didn't slacken his pace, though he was getting tired after an hour of it. He was not used to walking, for in his and Bill Chaney's world legs were only used to convey you to the nearest horse or camel. He kept his eyes alert, watching each saltbush clump and each bulwaddy thicket.

All at once he stopped in his tracks. Out of the saltbush rose figures that now didn't attempt to hide—men with spears and boomerangs.

He hardly breathed, and for a moment it seemed that he had no power to move. Then he swung in a quick dodge for a thicket. The air whirred over him, and a spearman laughed. In line ahead of him was a run of bulwaddy and he got its friendly dark. He waited and listened to blacks hunting for him.

They didn't bother to be silent; nor did they spread out to cover more ground. They searched in bunches. Superstitious, they were afraid of the night's deep darkness in the bulwaddy. They were coming nearer, though, Johnny realized.

FEAR snaked coldly up his spine as a group turned directly toward him, talking in their labial desert tongue, and making a noise in the foliage to keep evil spirits away.

Johnny looked round hastily; there wasn't another thicket that he could reach now without crossing an open space where the moonlight would strike him. He had to stick it and take a chance.

He came out of it almost between the blacks' legs as they went on, beating the bush and chattering. He held on to a slim bulwaddy bole while he got control of his lungs and muscles. Cold sweat still oozed. The sounds of the searchers went on and away.

This time, they didn't return. By and by he worked himself out to the edge of the thickets, and looked out onto open plain. A bunch of natives formed in a squatting group, and he knew there were others. He realized what they meant to do—bar his way on the plain when he came out of the thickets. It was simpler than hunting him out. And so long as he didn't go on the way he had been going, they didn't seem to care. But they didn't want him to reach that other camp.

Johnny mulled it over. Plainly he saw that to go back would be the easy thing to go back and tell Bill Chaney and trembling old Akooya that he had failed. His jaw tightened on it. He wouldn't quit, but the hell of it was to go on—to thrust his scared, unwilling body out of those sheltering thickets and run the gantlet of the open plain.

Ten, fifteen minutes went by while Johnny wrestled with his fear. He had it in his slim boy's body to save Bill Chaney and Akooya—he had it in his body, if he had it in his nerve. "Dad," the boy almost said aloud, "I've got to do it. You wouldn't have run out on it, even when you were a kid like me. Bill Chaney said you were never scared like I am now—not so that you couldn't fight back. Gosh, Dad, I've got to be game."

IT was a prayer, and afterward Johnny felt better. Somehow now he didn't seem to be alone, but to have his father there, invisible and intangible, but nevertheless a calm, encouraging reality. The man Bill Chaney said was the gamest that ever walked. . . .

Johnny came out of the thickets into the revealing moonlight. Here he had no cover but saltbush clumps, not tall enough to screen him if he stood. He had to keep down, close to the red gibber dust, until he was well clear of the blacks watching the thickets. He was hardly breathing, readying himself to come up out of the saltbush, when a form rose in front of him and stood looking toward the bulwaddy.

The boy could smell the lizard grease on the man's body, and see the dust on his flesh clear to his shoulder. He had been lying down, maybe sleeping a little, as a wild animal sleeps transiently and lightly between moments of clear-eyed alertness. He was a mature man with his hair tied back from his suncreased forehead with a band of kangaroo skin. In a band about his waist two boomerangs were stuck, and by his feet were a spear and a shield, decorated with a totem design. The shield was superfluous, since nobody was opposing him with native weapons; but he had it, as he had his war-sticks in his hair, and his nosebone, because he was living again, briefly, in the warrior tradition of his primitive race. Gnumi had come back to the tribe with grand dreams and many promises. Some were ready to believe that the troopers were the blind fools Gnumi said they were.

Johnny didn't think it out at such length, but he knew that painted tribesman was different from the tame boys who rode Bill Chaney's horses. He hardly expected to escape detection, for though he was well down in the saltbush, he was near enough for the black to scent him. Those thick Stone Age man's nostrils that twitched like a dog's. . . . But the wind, the desert wind that rose like a cold night draft and ceased as though a door had been closed, favored Johnny. The black stretched, picked up his spear and shield, and

went off toward his grouped comrades.

For a while longer Johnny kept down in the saltbush. Then he got up and walked. Then, because he knew he would have to travel fast to keep ahead of Gnumi's men, he ran. He kept on running till his wind was gone; then he walked only till he got it back again. . . .

The Afghan cameleer, bleeding and sore from the attack of a rogue camel and only half conscious, couldn't have been sure the figure he saw stumbling down a rock-strewn slope from one meager patch of brush to another, was real; for the turbaned head he'd jerked up from his ancient rifle remained raised in a long, wondering stare.

"You can put the gun down, or turn it on Gnumi," Johnny said. "I'm the one that answered your smoke signal." He recognized the cameleer in the dawn light as Dhoda Ali, who had packed stores to the diggings beyond Chaney's station; and he listened now to his story of the rogue camel's treachery and Dhoda Ali's subsequent attempts to keep black looters from the pack dump. "Well, you've got your camels still," he said. "I'll line 'em up for you, and we'll quit."

"But eef we ride without cover—" the cameleer began.

"We've got to," Johnny said. "You're in bad shape, but Bill Chaney is in worse. He's got to be taken through to Ernabella. The only way to do it that I know of is with camels."

And a gun, he added mentally. He was going to feel a whole lot better with that gun of Dhoda Ali's. . . .

The Afghan rode in comfort, well bedded between water barrels slung on either side of a camel's hump, and Johnny carried the heavy old 30-gauge rifle. The tribesmen knew how far it flung a bullet, and none knew better than Gnumi.

But Gnumi had to make a showing. Near Chaney's camp, he called out some of his followers to head the camel string off. He had his stolen rifle, and he fired the one shot that apparently was left to him. A piece was nicked out of the neck of Johnny's camel as though by a knife, and he had a time controlling the beast. Gnumi and his men enjoyed the spectacle.

Johnny was hot with anger and embarrassment. But he wasn't scared now. He'd had a night of it, and the night was over; and he knew he'd come through without disgrace in the eyes of his dad—the father he had never seen, but who had been with him, it had seemed in the night. And he knew Gnumi now for what he was—just a jail-compound braggart, ready to run if anybody with a gun chased him.

So he made use now of the cameleer's rifle, kicking up the dust in little nerve-cracking spurts around Gnumi, until the big black—watched obliquely by the Stone Age warriors he had bragged he would lead to great things—backed off and ran for shelter, and tribal laughter rose in a great roar.

"THE boy seems to have done a good job," the missionary said to Chaney, in a mission bed. "Usually we deplore these conflicts between whites and blacks, but I must say Gnumi is a pest and a bad influence on the rest of the tribe."

"Johnny sure got in his way," Bill Chaney agreed. "He's only a kid, and it was more than I expected of anybody his age."

"He tells me," said the missionary, a tall and grave-eyed man, "that his father, whom he never saw, was a friend of yours. Is he still living?"

Bill Chaney said: "I don't know." "You mean—"

"No kid ever needed a father more," Bill Chaney said. "Why shouldn't he have had a good one?"

THE CARDIFF GIANT

by Harold Helfer

OF all the hoaxes ever perpetrated, few were quite as bizarre, lasted as long or had a more fantastic ending than that of the Cardiff Giant.

On October 9, 1869, two brothers-in-law announced that the giant figure of a man had been unearthed on their property at Cardiff, N. Y. Thousands upon thousands of people—many from distant parts of the earth—came to see the "petrified remains" of a grotesque giant. It later came to light that the figure had been made of gypsum—though not until some ten years after the Cardiff Giant had become one of the wonders of the world and had amassed a fortune for the two men.

But before the facts about the gypsum statue became generally known, two showmen had acquired it, transported it over to England and were bringing it by rail to London. Meanwhile, these men had a falling-out. One obtained an injunction forbidding the railroad to deliver the giant until its ownership could be established in court. Before the issue was decided, both men died; so for years the giant figure occupied valuable storage space.

The London blitz was a grim affair but there was one bomb that brought a smile to the faces of a few men. These were railroad men. For the Cardiff Giant, at last, was no more.

Thunderbolt *at* Large

A DEEPLY INTERESTING STORY OF STRANGE ADVENTURE BY THE MAN WHO GAVE US "THE FLIGHT OF THE XS-102"

by ROSS DE LUE

GEORGE BRADFORD cast an anxious look at the sky. The mass of angry black thunderheads piling up on the horizon was moving with startling swiftness; and as he watched, he could see forked streaks of lightning ripping through the heavy clouds. The muted sound of the thunder grew louder as the clear blue overhead was blotted out. It was a typical mountain storm, and he knew there was no chance of getting back to his camp before it broke.

Sharp gusts of wind began to disturb the still air in the narrow cañon through which he was riding. He knew he had to hole in—and fast. It wasn't only a matter of being caught in the storm; his position was decidedly dangerous. On one side of the trail, barely wide enough for one horse, was the rocky cañon wall, on the other a sheer drop of several hundred feet to the turbulent mountain stream cutting its way through the floor of the chasm.

He urged his tiring horse forward, and as he rounded a bend, saw as if in answer to a prayer a large overhanging rock jutting from the side of the cliff. Beneath it, the trail widened, and he could see there was space enough for his horse as well.

Dismounting, he led his horse under the rock and set out to gather a sizable pile of brush and twigs. There was nothing to do, he decided, except to make camp and spend the night. It had grown much darker, and now the crashing thunder reached a new crescendo of sound, seeming to bounce from wall to wall of the cañon.

Sheltered from the wind, which was getting colder, and with a fire going, he settled back against the rocks. A moment later, far down the cañon, he could see the onrushing curtain of rain sweep toward him. Like a solid wall of water, it blotted out everything behind it. Almost instantly it was on him, and the sound of the driving rain drowned out the crackling of his fire.

For several minutes he sat quietly, enjoying a feeling of snugness; then he set about preparing his supper.

A veteran of twenty-eight months in the Pacific, in which he had picked up a Purple Heart with two clusters, George had left the Bar O on a lone camping trip into the mountains a little over a week ago. He had come West at his doctor's advice in an effort to shake the last vestiges of what is known as battle fatigue. Although the trip had taken every cent of his mustering-out pay, he felt it was worth it.

The solitude, exercise and plain wholesome food had brought an end to his sleeplessness, and his nerves felt completely relaxed. Five days' travel from the ranch had brought him to a wild and peaceful valley, where he established his camp. The past three days had been spent in lazy exploration of the surrounding countryside.

A few hours earlier he had found himself traveling through unfamiliar country. He had gone several miles up the trail on which he now found himself, when he first noticed the gathering clouds. Unable to turn around, he had been forced to continue, hoping he'd find a suitable place to camp.

Finishing his dinner, he lighted a cigarette and sat for a while contemplatively watching the flickering of the flames. The wind had risen again; and the rain, which had slackened a little after its first wild rush, was now coming down with a steady drumming sound. He knew the storm wouldn't blow over before morning at the earliest. With a contented sigh he rolled himself into a blanket, stretched out on the ground, and in an instant, was asleep.

The sound of his horse stirring uneasily awakened him, and a glance at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch showed him it was two A.M. The fire had burned down to a few glowing embers, and he quickly built it up. His makeshift refuge was dry and warm, and the smell of the wood-

smoke was pleasant... It was perhaps a half-hour later that he heard someone shout.

For an instant he thought his imagination was playing tricks, and then he heard it again. Throwing another handful of brush on the fire, he listened intently. For a long time he heard only the steady beat of the rain, and was about to sit back when, from off to the left, he distinctly heard a faint voice calling for help.

He stepped out into the black wet night, and in a minute his thin shirt was soaked. The icy rain chilled him to the bone. The darkness was like an impenetrable curtain, and he could see nothing. At his back the fire threw a warm glow against the rocks.

IF there was actually someone out there, he needed help and needed it immediately. George began feeling his way down the trail. Several times he lost his footing and stumbled; but even though he stopped frequently and listened, he heard nothing more. He had gone about a hundred yards without seeing anything, and was debating whether to turn back when he heard a groan, almost at his feet.

Getting down on his hands and knees, he crawled forward another few feet, and suddenly his groping hands felt a man's body. He knew how a blind man must feel as he struggled to get hold of the limp body. He finally managed to hoist it over his shoulder, and slipping and sliding, made his way back up the trail to his rude camp.

He dragged the man as close to the fire as he dared, and began rubbing the wrists and hands briskly. In the light from the flickering flames he could see it was an old man, easily seventy, with a mane of thick white hair. There was a deep gash on his forehead; and from the flow of blood, George knew he was still alive. He got out his pocket first-aid kit and bandaged the cut, then resumed massaging the cold hands.

It was another fifteen minutes before his efforts were rewarded. The man's eyelids fluttered, and he groaned feebly. His eyes opened, and he looked curiously at George.

"Guess you heard me, after all," he said weakly.

George, busy removing the injured man's wet shoes and socks, nodded. "You're O.K. now, old-timer," he said. "Just take it easy and get some rest."

THE man smiled faintly. "I saw your fire and tried to make it up here, but I guess I fell and hit my head. Feels like an awful hangover." His hand went up and touched the crude bandage. "Guess I'm still lucky." He tried to struggle to a sitting position.

"Be careful," warned George, "you have a nasty cut there."

"Feel much better," he protested. George helped him sit up. "My name's Thomas, John Thomas," he said. "Got a house not more than four miles from here. That's where I was heading when my horse stumbled and broke his leg, and I had to shoot him. I hurt my ankle when he fell and had a little trouble walking." He looked at George. "How come you're camped up here?" he asked casually.

"Got caught in the storm," said George. Thomas listened with interest to his brief recital.

"Well," said Thomas, "if it hadn't been for you, I'd have been in a bad way. You come over to my place with me as soon as it gets light. I can promise you a bang-up breakfast." Then, worn out, he closed his eyes, and almost immediately was asleep.

George sat tending the fire, and wondered if this stranger could be the same John Thomas about whom he'd heard at the Bar O. It hardly seemed possible, but now that he thought

about it, he realized he must be somewhere in the neighborhood of the fabulous Lucky Thomas ranch. Now he recalled some of the things he had heard: Thomas had come out there years before, and from the first, had been a mysterious figure. Within a few years' time, without raising cattle, sheep or crops, he had purchased over sixty thousand acres of land, built what was reputed to be a castle in the wilderness, and barred everyone but Indians from his property. The vast acreage he owned had been turned into what amounted to a game preserve; and Thomas himself was rarely seen, although it was reported he made frequent long trips to the "outside." Everyone believed that somewhere on his property was a mine in which gold nuggets as big as coconuts could be found.

He had the reputation in many quarters of being crazy; others said he was merely eccentric; but all were agreed on one point—he had no use for visitors. The few who, unwittingly or otherwise, had set foot on his property, had been warned off by grim, silent Indians. So far as George knew, no one in the area had ever seen the fabled castle in which Thomas was reputed to live. George supposed that, like so many similar tales, it was ten per cent fact and ninety per cent fiction. . . .

At daybreak the rain was still coming down as hard as ever. Thomas had grown restless, and when George tried to rouse him, noticed that his skin felt hot and dry. After considerable shaking, Thomas opened his eyes. They were bright and glassy, and for a minute he couldn't seem to remember where he was. When he spoke, his voice was barely a whisper, and George had to lean close to hear him. "I feel all beat up," he said.

"Got to get to my place quick. Anna'll know what to do. Go down the trail to where it forks by the big pine, and bear to the right." He coughed, tried to speak again, but the effort had exhausted him and he fell back.

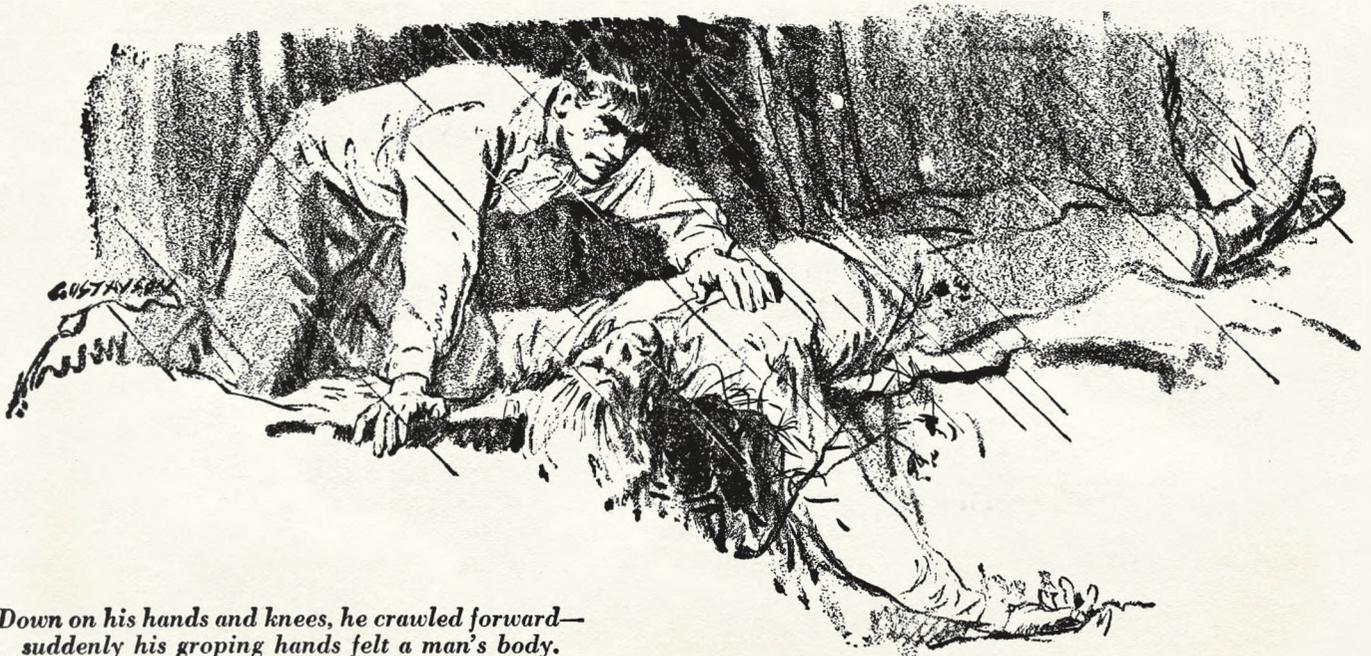
George wondered if his horse could make the four miles down the slippery trail and across rough country carrying a double load, or whether he should go alone and bring help back. He decided against the latter course—Thomas was too sick to be left alone. The safest thing would be to tie Thomas across the saddle and lead the horse. Taking hold of the limp right arm, he hoisted the old man across the saddle, roped him on as well as he could, and set out.

He found the fork easily and followed the narrow path to the right. Several times he stopped to rest, and each time Thomas looked worse. His breath was coming in gasps and his face had taken on a sallow appearance. George's legs and back ached; but if the man was not to die, George knew he had to get him some place where he could be properly cared for.

MAKING his way as rapidly as he could over the rough trail, his head down and sweat pouring into his eyes, he didn't see the Indian step from behind a tree. At the words, "*Stop where you are!*" he looked up into a pair of unfriendly eyes and the muzzle of a rifle.

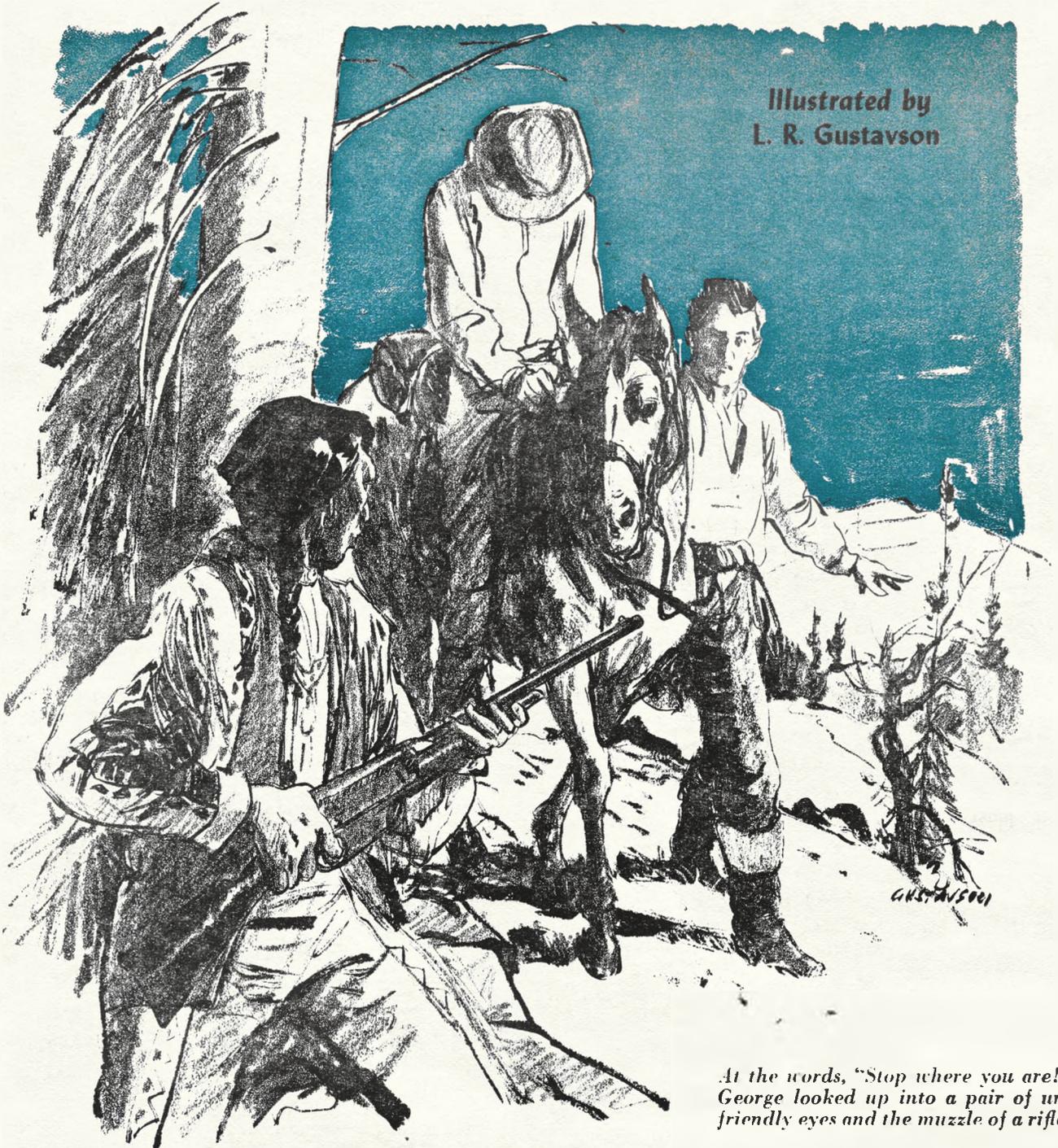
Ignoring the gun, he addressed the Indian. "Can you tell me how far it is to the Thomas house?" he asked. There was a note of urgency in his voice that the Indian recognized. "This man is very sick," continued George. "He must have help right away."

A look of contempt appeared on the Indian's face. "You're on Thomas'



Down on his hands and knees, he crawled forward—suddenly his groping hands felt a man's body.

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



At the words, "Stop where you are!" George looked up into a pair of unfriendly eyes and the muzzle of a rifle.

property now, and trespassing. You'll have to turn around. Visitors aren't welcome here." His English was perfect, and he spoke without a trace of accent or emotion.

"But you don't understand," said George. "This is John Thomas on my horse. He's very sick and asked me to take him to his home—he's had an accident."

THE Indian stepped forward, lowering his gun, took one quick glance at the face of the unconscious man, seized the reins from George, and shouted, "Follow me." He started at an effortless lope down the path. George, already tired, found it difficult to keep up with his guide.

They had gone only a short distance when they left the shelter of the trees, and George saw stretching ahead of him, a wide valley. About a mile ahead, built against the side of a mountain, stood a large, rambling ranch-house. From where he was, it looked like a large country club. To one side was a corral, and what looked like a sizable Indian village. A creek cut through the middle of the valley floor.

The Indian, increasing his speed, headed for a small bridge crossing the stream, George at his heels. Once on the other side, George slowed to a walk and by the time he reached the steps to the wide porch surrounding the house, the Indian had already van-

ished inside, the injured man in his arms. Climbing the steps wearily, George fell panting into a large chair.

After getting his breath, he looked around curiously. The old man must be *the* John Thomas. The Indian guard, this house—it all added up. From where he sat he could see that the grounds were beautifully landscaped, yet all done so cleverly that it seemed to blend into the wild grandeur of the surrounding countryside.

He was debating with himself whether to go inside the house when the Indian reappeared. There was no sign of friendliness in his face as he said: "Tell me what happened."

George recounted the events of the previous day, his meeting with Thom-

as, and of their conversation. "So you see," he finished, "I was hurrying here when we met you. How is he?"

The Indian, who had listened quietly, ignored the question. "I'm Joe Twotrees," he said. "You'll have to stay here until Mr. Thomas awakens and decides what's to happen. Meanwhile, I'll check your story. If it's as you say, you've nothing to worry about."

"Nothing to worry about—" began George, puzzled.

"That's right," interrupted Joe. "Mr. Thomas doesn't like visitors—sometimes they're curious—too curious."

"But he invited me here," said George.

"If he did, it'll be O.K. Meanwhile, I'll have to ask you not to try to leave here."

"You mean I'm a prisoner?"

"Let's say you're a guest. Dora will show you your room, and will take care of anything you need." He went to the door and called. An Indian woman appeared. In her early thirties, she looked like something out of a Western movie. Her long black hair hung in two braids; she wore a buckskin skirt and beaded moccasins. George was to discover later that this amounted to almost a uniform for the several Indians employed as house servants. "This is Mr. Bradford," said Joe; "he'll be staying with us for a few days." Nodding curtly to George, he walked down the steps and disappeared around the side of the house.

DORA led the way inside. They walked through a huge luxuriously furnished living-room. It was obvious that Thomas was not only wealthy—he had excellent taste, as well. Fur rugs covered the floors, and the furniture had been specially designed and made. There were half a dozen Frederic Remington paintings on the walls. They crossed the room to a corridor on the far side, and stopped at the first door, which Dora opened.

He preceded her into a large bedroom that reminded him of a luxury suite at Sun Valley. The illusion was made more complete when through another open door he saw a tiled bathroom. After asking him what time he wanted lunch, she left, closing the door behind her.

Experimentally he sat on the oversized double bed. It was as soft as it looked. He noticed that dry clothes had been provided for him, and after a shower, he felt better. Twotrees had seemed unfriendly, to say the least, and he remembered the weird stories he'd heard about the Thomas ranch. He wondered what would happen if the old man died. They might even kill him, he reflected, and nobody would ever know the difference. When he failed to reappear at

the Bar O, a search party would be sent out. Failing to find him, they'd figure he'd become lost in the mountains or had met with an accident. He decided he was getting morbid and a little romantic—but made up his mind he'd leave the next morning, even if he had to walk.

Dora served him lunch on the veranda, and when he asked how Thomas was, she said: "Anna is taking care of him; he's very sick." She would say no more.

However, that night at dinner Dora informed him Thomas had been asking for him, and would see him after dinner.

As he entered the bedroom, he saw Thomas propped up in a large bed. He looked weak, but the fever was gone. Thomas greeted him with a smile, then turned to the woman sitting by his bed. "Anna," he said, "this is Mr. Bradford." She acknowledged the introduction with a nod. "She knows more about medicine than all the doctors in the world," he continued. "I'd be a lot worse off than I am now if it wasn't for her hocus-pocus."

"I'd say she's performed a miracle," said George.

"She says I'll be able to get up tomorrow," he said. "Have they made you comfortable—got everything you need?"

George hesitated. "Yes." Then he paused: "Except for one thing."

The smile left the old man's face. "What's that?" he asked. "What's on your mind?"

"I've been given to understand that I'm a prisoner here," he said. "Your man, Twotrees, has warned me not to try to leave. I'd like to be on my way, so if you've no objections—"

Thomas relaxed. George had the impression he had expected him to say something else. In a mild tone, he said: "Is that all? Well, you're not a prisoner; you're my guest, and I'd appreciate it if you'd stay on a day or so until I get back on my feet."

He looked at George shrewdly. "There's mighty good hunting and fishing right here on my place, and I'll have one of my boys take you to the best spots for both."

He seemed so genuinely anxious that George felt to refuse would be discourteous. "I'll stay until the end of the week, then," he said.

"Fine," said Thomas, and lay back on his pillow. Anna motioned for him to leave the room.

AT breakfast the next morning George received word that Thomas was still too sick to be allowed up. He had sent word, however, that his guest was to have anything he wanted. For the next two days George enjoyed himself thoroughly. The stream in front of the house was literally choked

with big rainbows. His guide, a young Indian named Pete, proved a pleasant companion. He had been born and raised on the ranch and worshiped the old man. From him, George learned that Twotrees acted as general manager of the ranch, and often accompanied Thomas on trips.

IT was three days before he saw Thomas again. He had come in for dinner and noticed the table was set for two. Before he could ask who the other place was for, Thomas entered the room. Despite his years and recent illness, he walked like a young man. Greeting George heartily, he said: "The invalid is up and around. Mind if I join you?"

As they ate, Thomas fired a barrage of questions at him, and by the time coffee was served, knew his life history. But George learned nothing about his fabulous host. Every time he asked a question, the old man would ignore it and counter with one of his own. He had a feeling there was some purpose behind the innumerable questions, and was puzzled by it. He wondered again if he was imagining things, or if it was actually just idle curiosity.

Then Thomas said casually: "You may be wondering why I've asked you a lot of things that are apparently none of my business. I was just checking the report."

"Report?" asked George.

"Sure," he said. "I've had a complete investigation made on your background—and I must say it's a good one—your background, I mean."

George felt his cheeks turn red. "May I ask," he said coldly, "why I've been made the subject of an investigation? What right—"

"Now, don't get excited," said Thomas, "after all, I have to be careful. A lot of people are curious about my business." He pulled a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "Here," he continued; "you may want to keep it."

George had got to his feet. "Under the circumstances," he said, "I think I'd better leave here as soon as possible. I'm damn' sick and tired of the mystery around here, and if you have no objections, I'll be glad to leave tonight."

"Sit down," said Thomas, "and don't be a fool." His tone was friendly. "First, you can go whenever you want. In the second place, I've a proposition I'd like to make; and if it doesn't appeal to you, there's nothing to stop you from going the first thing in the morning."

George's inclination was to leave at once, but the mystery surrounding the house and its owner intrigued him. "All right," he said; "but I don't mind telling you I don't go for all this."

Thomas laughed. "I'd like to show you my workshop," he said, "and we

can talk business there without being disturbed." Taking a key from his pocket he unlocked a door, one of many lining the corridor, and preceded George into the room. It was small and unfurnished. Locking the door from the inside, Thomas walked to the far wall, slid back a panel and motioned him into an elevator. As George hesitated, he explained: "The workshop is underground." He closed the panel and pressed a button. The car dropped rapidly for a few seconds, then stopped and the two men stepped out into a brightly lighted room. Half of the small apartment, in which they found themselves, was furnished with big overstuffed leather chairs. The other half was given over to a well-outfitted laboratory. A long table lined one wall, and on it were retorts, bottles, several Bunsen burners and other equipment. Set into another wall were several heavy steel doors, each about two by three feet, which looked like small bulkhead doors on a ship. Thomas looked at him keenly as he took in the room.

"You look surprised," he said.

"I am," admitted George. "You see, you have an advantage. You know all about me, and I don't know anything about you." He hesitated. "It's unusual, you'll have to admit, to find a house like yours in this wilderness—and now this. I'm not only surprised; I'm curious too."

"I think you'll understand before you leave; at any rate, I promise to satisfy your curiosity," said Thomas. He took George by the arm. "Come over here; I want to show you something." Leading the way to a large glass case, he unlocked the door, picked up a large object from one of the shelves and handed it to him. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Very nice. What is it—quartz?"

Thomas smiled gently. "No, not quartz. That's a diamond—and a very good one, too."

GEORGE stared at it blankly. It didn't bear the slightest resemblance to any diamond he had ever seen. The size of a small orange, it had no luster or sparkle, and while it was undoubtedly a crystal of some sort—he wondered what Thomas was trying to pull. The shelves of the case contained approximately two dozen other specimens, some larger, some smaller than the piece he held in his hand. He handed it back. "If that was really a diamond," he said, "it would be worth a fortune."

"It is worth a fortune," said Thomas seriously. "It's one of the finest stones I ever turned out."

George stared at him, suddenly realizing he wasn't joking, that he meant what he said. At that moment he wanted nothing more than to get out

of this odd workshop and away from the ranch. Thomas, without a doubt, was mad. He would have to be careful and humor him, and watch for a chance to get out. This was a story his friends in New York would never believe—that is, if he got back to New York.

"You don't believe me, do you?" Thomas was saying.

"Why, sure I do—if you say it's a diamond, why should I doubt you?"

Thomas nodded. "Of course you've probably only seen them after they're cut and polished, and this one's rough."

"Of course," agreed George.

"Making them is a lot simpler than you'd think."

Involuntarily George said, "Making them—" and stopped short. Thomas didn't seem to take exception to his remark.

"That startles you, doesn't it?" And without waiting for an answer: "It startled me too, when I first realized I could. I was employed as a physicist by a large industrial company at the time. I was working on a project to utilize by-products of coal when I stumbled on this thing."

His manner and voice remained calm, and George's apprehension began to subside. Perhaps it would be better to let him tell his story. There was plenty of time to worry if he should show signs of growing violent.

"Everything was theoretical, of course," continued Thomas, "but I checked and double-checked my findings. When I was convinced it would work, I took what money I had and bought enough equipment to carry out my first experiments." He shook his head. "There's no need to tell you there were plenty of problems—it's enough that after a lot of effort and a number of failures, I succeeded in turning out real diamonds." He pointed to the glass case. "Not like those, you understand; the first were tiny and almost valueless, but they were diamonds, and I knew that with the proper equipment, greater heat and greater pressure, I could match any turned out by nature."

He stopped pacing the room, sat down and motioned George to a chair. "I scraped together every cent I could," he continued, "and came out here. There's plenty of water; and in the summer, intense electrical storms. It took me more than a year to turn out what I was after, gem stones. After that it was easy. With the first money that came in from their sale, I bought more elaborate equipment."

George was now listening intently. Fantastic as the story was, he felt Thomas was telling the truth, that he wasn't crazy. If, a few years ago, someone had told him of the atomic bomb, he'd have dismissed the possi-

bility as pure fantasy, and the fact that diamonds could be made was no more improbable.

THOMAS shrugged impatiently. "Even out here people talk—even the more charitable say I'm eccentric. Well, I'm like a lot of scientists—my work means more to me than anything else; it's been my sole interest in life. Research demands time and concentration, whether the field is medicine, chemistry, physics or anything else. I was lucky in that the result of mine brought me unlimited funds, which in turn, bought me the seclusion I want."

"I've already heard some of those stories," said George, "but they were way off the beam. I'd heard you had a gold mine: but diamonds—" His voice trailed off.

"I know it seems strange to you," said Thomas, "but remember that a diamond is only crystallized carbon; and carbon is allotropic. I mean by that," he explained, seeing the puzzled look on George's face, "it exists in various forms, each of them having different properties, but remaining pure carbon."

He smiled. "However, I don't mean to be too technical. Just believe that, in this room, I've taken common graphite, subjected it to terrific heat and pressure, and succeeded in crystallizing it." He got up, walked over to a small safe, twirled the dial and swung the door open. Removing a small chamois bag, he dumped the contents in George's hand. "This is what happens after they're cut and polished."

George gasped. In his hand were a dozen gleaming, sparkling diamonds. Even to his unpracticed eye he could see they were magnificent.

"Each one is perfect," said Thomas.

"They look pretty big."

"They aren't, really. They range from three to five carats. Naturally, I could make them a lot bigger, but there's a good market for that size."

"What about that one?" He pointed to the rough diamond in the glass case.

"They lose a lot of weight in cutting," Thomas said; "that will be cut into a lot of small ones like these." He hesitated. "You see, if I threw any on the market that were too big or unusual, it would excite comment. There would be talk and questions about where it came from. All really large diamonds are well known. It's better this way."

George stared at the glittering gems in his palm. Could this be a hoax? On one hand, he was convinced that Thomas wasn't lying—yet there was something fantastic about manufacturing diamonds. He wondered why the carefully kept secret was being revealed at last—and to him. He didn't have long to wait for the answer. As



Thomas smiled gently. "No, not quartz. That's a diamond—and a very good one, too."

if reading his mind, Thomas said: "I brought you down here because I feel I owe you a lot. You saved my life, and while I'm an old man, and perhaps, haven't many years left, those that I have are precious to me."

"I didn't do anything more than anyone else would have done under the circumstances."

"Perhaps not," admitted Thomas, "but the fact remains that you were at the right place at the right time." He hesitated. "If I had died, all this would have died with me." He looked at George seriously. "Would you consider accepting a partnership in this little enterprise of mine?" Then, before he could answer, Thomas continued: "I don't expect you to decide without thinking about it. There are several conditions: First, that you'll

never divulge the secret; second, that you make your home here, and third, that when I die, you agree to continue to care for the Indians, as I have."

It was so unexpected that for a minute George was speechless. "I—I hardly know what to say," he stammered. "Don't say anything until you've given it some thought. Maybe part of the reason I've made the offer is that I'd like company here, someone I can talk to, that I can trust. Had I married and had children—" His voice trailed off.

George felt that whatever he might say would be inadequate. He felt a wave of pity for the old man who, in a few words, had drawn aside the curtain on his loneliness. "I'm very flattered," he said at last, "and don't

think me ungrateful or unappreciative if I don't accept at once. It involves so much—well, I don't know what to say."

Thomas smiled. "I can appreciate your feelings," he said. He rose and walking over to one of the steel doors opened it. "These are ovens," he explained, "and the process itself is really quite simple, so simple that I'm surprised it hasn't been discovered by others. I mentioned the need for water and electrical storms before when I told you that was why I came here."

"On top of the mountain outside is what amounts to a large lightning rod. Instead of being grounded, a cable runs from the rod to these ovens. During a heavy electrical storm, a couple of bolts of lightning, attracted to that rod, will provide me in a fra-

tion of a second with the intense heat I need.

"The stream, which you fished the other day, provides me with hydraulic power for pressure, and also acts as a cooling agent. Normally carbon, in any of its forms, is insoluble; but it will dissolve in molten metals, such as iron. My problem was to learn how to cool it rapidly while still keeping it under sufficient pressure. When that happens, the carbon crystallizes—and you've seen the result."

George nodded. The explanation seemed reasonable to him. Slowly he poured the handful of glittering gems back into the chamois bag and handed them to Thomas. The old man waved them away. "Keep them," he said; "they're only partial payment for what I owe you."

When he protested that he couldn't accept such a gift, Thomas insisted so vehemently that George shrugged and slipped them into his pocket.

Thomas studied a large barometer on the wall. "It's been dropping steadily all day," he said with satisfaction. "Looks as if we might have a good storm before morning."

Some of the older man's mounting excitement communicated itself to George. "Do you think conditions will be right to make diamonds?" he asked.

Thomas shrugged. "That depends on the intensity of the lightning. About one storm out of ten proves suitable. Here, let me show you."

He led the way to one of the oven doors and opened it. George, peering into the dark interior, could see that it was lined with what looked like brick. On either side were two rods, and between them, an oddly shaped prong made of some sort of metal.

Thomas pointed to the rods. "Those are the electrodes," he said. "The lightning, arcing between them, provides the heat. The furnaces are rigged so that at the same instant that maximum heat is achieved, tremendous pressure is applied hydraulically. Simultaneously, the interior of the furnace is cooled rapidly. My secret lies in the method with which it's accomplished."

"And that prong in the center?"

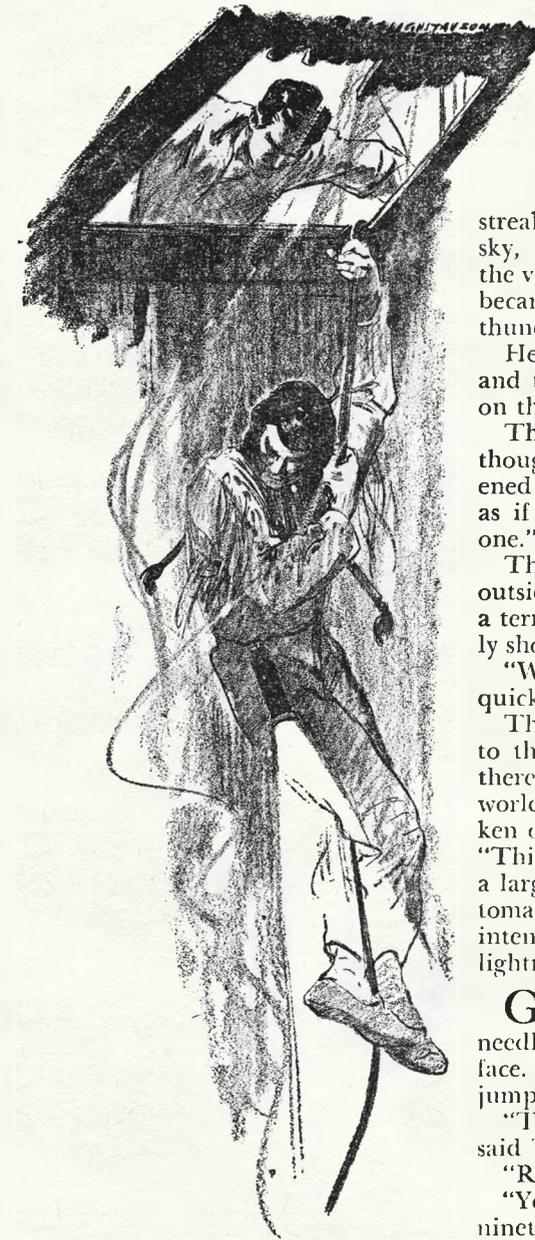
"That holds the carbon."

"It certainly sounds simple."

Thomas smiled. "It's actually a little more complicated than it sounds," he explained. "Industry uses three different types of electric furnaces—resistance, induction and arc. The arc is used where extremely high temperatures are required." He paused. "However, mine differs from the normal arc furnace in several respects."

"You mean there's a basic difference?"

"More than that. The arc in an industrial furnace is provided by alternating current to avoid the electro-



When George saw that Joe was clear, he called, "I'm coming down now," and followed into the shaft.

streaks of lightning played across the sky, lighting the peaks surrounding the valley. As the intermittent flashes became more frequent, the rolling thunder increased.

He was hastily pulling on his shirt and trousers when there was a knock on the door. "Come in," he called.

Thomas, fully dressed, entered. "I thought the storm might have awakened you," he explained. "This looks as if it might be an unusually good one."

There was a blinding flash of light outside, followed almost instantly by a terrific crash of thunder that literally shook the house.

"We'd better get down to the lab quickly," said Thomas.

The old man led the way rapidly to the underground chamber. Once there, it was as if they were in another world. The absolute quiet was broken only by the sound of their voices. "This dial," said Thomas, indicating a large round gauge on the wall, "automatically counts the number and intensity of the bolts attracted to my lightning rod."

GEORGE could see that the thin needle moved at intervals across the face. As he watched, he noticed it was jumping more and more frequently.

"This storm may set a new record," said Thomas quietly.

"Record?"

"Yes," he explained. "We've had nineteen bolts in the last minute and a half—I'd say five a minute is about average for a good storm. These aren't only frequent—they're severe."

George looked on with interest as Thomas inspected his equipment, and was careful to remain in the background, out of the way, as much as possible in order not to interfere.

Finally, the old man, apparently satisfied, said: "In another minute or two you're going to see something that no other man, aside from myself, has ever seen."

As he spoke, the lights in the room dimmed, brightened, then flickered and went out entirely. George heard Thomas curse, and an instant later saw the beam of a flashlight. Thomas anxiously played the round spot of light from one dial to another, and hastily pulled several switches. The room remained dark. "George," he said suddenly, "listen carefully. Something's gone wrong—I don't know what." There was a note of urgency in his voice. "Go up to the room at the head of the elevator. As you step

lytic action of direct current. My process gets around that problem, even though lightning provides direct current. My arc only lasts a fraction of a second—but that's all that's needed. Sustained heat isn't necessary." He looked at George and added slowly: "The ordinary arc furnace operates at around three thousand degrees centigrade; these are designed to withstand better than 18,000 degrees centigrade."

He closed the oven door, and the two men returned to the living-room upstairs. "Well, I'd better get some sleep," Thomas said. He put his arm around George's shoulder. "I meant what I said about that partnership," he continued seriously. "Think it over for a couple of days, and when you come to a decision, either way, let me know."

THE sound of thunder awakened George. In an instant he was out of bed and at the window. The rain was coming down in sheets, and jagged

out, you'll see a large switchbox on the wall to your right. Open it. At the bottom you'll see a lever with a red handle. Get up there fast and pull that handle."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, but hurry." He pushed him into the elevator. "You're sure you understand? The red handle at the bottom," he shouted as he slammed the door. The machinery whirred, and George could feel the little car move upward. He was out of it almost before it had come to a stop. The light was on in the room. The laboratory must be on a different circuit, he reasoned, as he ran to the switchbox.

His hand was on the knob of the big metal door when he heard a muffled explosion that seemed to come from far underground. The floor vibrated under his feet. Yanking the door open, he frantically grabbed the lever and gave it a yank. Turning back to the elevator, he saw smoke pouring out of the shaft. There was a smell of burning rubber, and mingled with it, the odor of scorching metal.

Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he wrapped it around his face and made his way to the elevator, but it refused to start. The heat rising from the bottom of the shaft was terrific, and in that instant he knew that only a miracle could save Thomas. Choking from the acrid fumes, his eyes smarting, he stumbled out of the room and almost into the arms of Joe Twotrees, who had come running down the corridor. "Get help," he gasped. "There's been a bad accident."

Joe seemed to understand, and without asking any questions, raced away. It seemed to George he was back almost instantly, followed by a group of silent Indians.

"Do you know about the laboratory?" George asked Joe.

The Indian nodded. "I knew Mr. Thomas was experimenting," he said: "but I've never seen it. My father helped build it."

George explained briefly the circumstances preceding the accident. He said nothing, however, about the diamonds. As soon as he finished, Joe turned to one of the Indians. "Get rope," he said. "a lot of it. Get an ax, too."

Most of the smoke had vanished by the time the little group reentered the room. Waves of heat were still ascending from the bottom of the shaft as Joe rapidly chopped a hole in the floor of the stalled car.

Fastening one end of the rope to a pipe, he dropped the other end down the shaft and turned to George. "I'll go first," he said, "give me a two- or three-second start and follow me." He instructed the Indians to haul the rope up when he jerked twice. Then, twist-

ing the dangling end around his leg, he lowered himself into the shaft. Peering down, George could follow his progress as Joe lowered himself.

When George saw that Joe was clear, he called, "I'm coming down now," and followed him into the shaft.

The Indian was waiting for him when he reached the bottom. George gasped as Joe turned his electric torch on the entrance to the laboratory—or what was left of it.

The steel door leading into the room from the elevator shaft was warped and twisted, and hung grotesquely inside the shaft on one hinge. The heat was still almost overpowering, and perspiration poured into his eyes as he stepped into the room he had left a short time before.

JOE, right behind him, swung his light rapidly around the chamber, seeking some trace of Thomas, but almost instantly both men realized it was useless. The heavy oven door, before which Thomas had been working, lay at the far end of the room, a blob of molten metal, almost unidentifiable.

The workbench, the glass case in which the rough diamonds had been kept, the furniture, had all vanished into charred ash. Where the small wall safe had been, there was now simply a round hole. The floor, ceiling and walls were pitted and scarred, the stone discolored by heat. George could feel the hot floor burning through the soles of his shoes.

There was no trace of Thomas, and George knew that his cremated body was scattered in the debris of the workshop. As he realized the work of a lifetime had been wiped out in a flash of brilliant, unbelievable heat, he shuddered. The temperature in the small room was still so intense that every breath seared his lungs. Slowly he turned to Joe. "There's no use," he said dully, and his voice sounded strange. In the reflected beam of the flashlight, he saw that Joe's eyes were filled with tears.

"He was a good man," said Joe softly. "I'm glad death came swiftly. He would have wished it that way."

George's hand closed over the small chamois bag in his pocket. Then he followed Joe out of the room.

THE WIN MACABRE

by Harold Heljer

IN the course of the history of baseball many dramatic runs have crossed home plate, but few have been as bizarre as one that occurred in a game between Willmar and Benson, two top-notch Minnesota semi-pro baseball teams, at the turn of the century.

It was an important game and all the players were keyed up for it. For nine tense innings the two teams struggled grimly, but neither was able to score a single run.

Then it happened—a break-through: Benson, in the first half of the tenth, propelled a run across.

But the Willmar players refused to let this daunt them. They strode off the field for their turn at bat, with heads held high.

The first man up for Willmar was Thielman, their pitcher. He had given everything he had on the mound and now he waved his bat menacingly, his eyes gleaming and his jaw set—determined, if it were humanly possible, that he should not strike out.

He swung into the ball with a cold fury—and there was a solid clicking noise as ball met bat.

It was a clean single and Thielman was on first base.

The crowd was hushed as O'Toole took his turn at the plate for the Willmar nine. And then, a split second

later, the crowd roared and screeched in a frenzy of excitement.

O'Toole had laced into the ball with all his brawn and smashed a tremendous wallop into the far outfield.

It was victory for Willmar—if both players could get across home plate ahead of the ball.

Wan and tired as he was from the exhausting game he had pitched for ten long, hard-fought innings, Thielman started off with the crack of the bat and ran for all he was worth.

With gritted teeth, he crossed second and started for third, with O'Toole in hot pursuit.

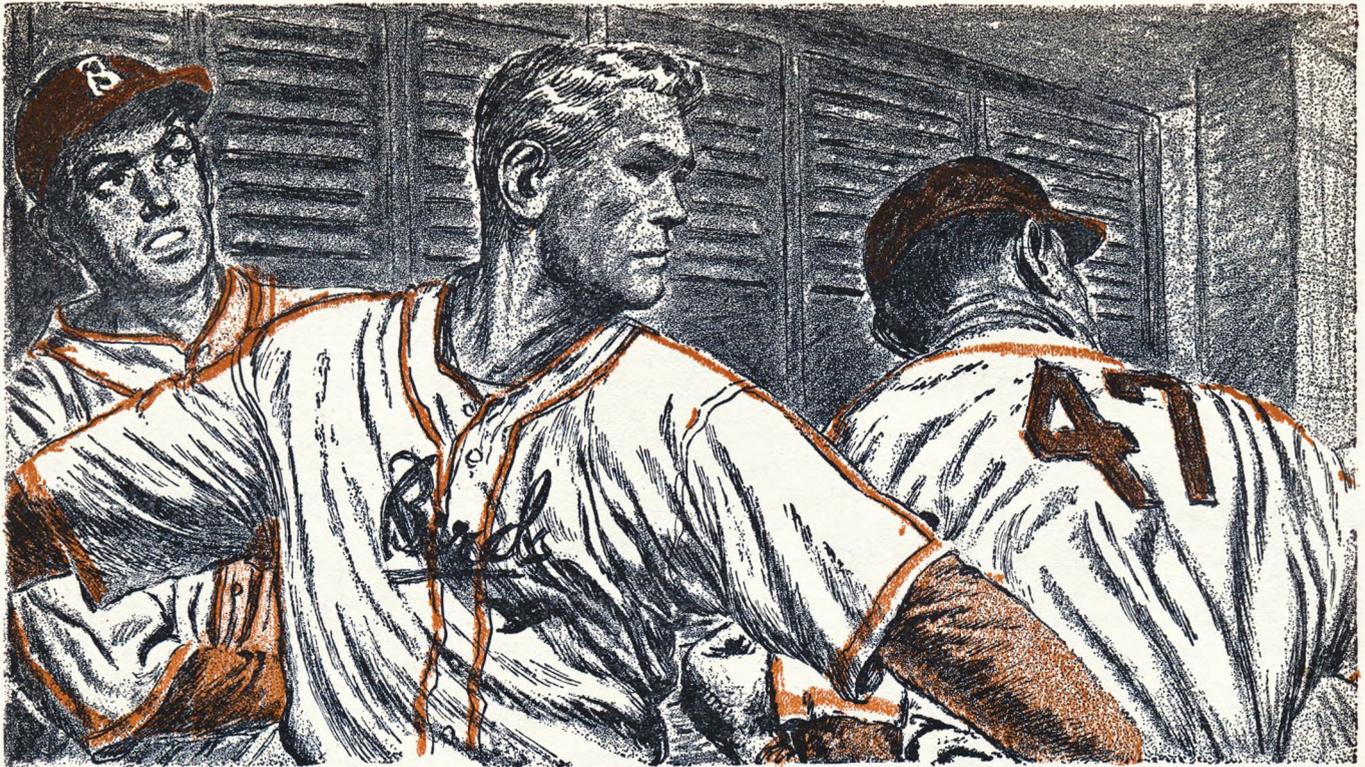
But something happened—Thielman suddenly came to an almost abrupt halt, staggered and then collapsed across third base.

O'Toole was now at third base too—but unable to go any farther, although the ball still had not been returned from the outfield, because he couldn't pass the fallen pitcher.

O'Toole hesitated an instant, then bent and picked up Thielman. And with Thielman in his arms, O'Toole pounded his way across home plate.

The umpire allowed the two runs to count—so Thielman had won the game for Willmar after all.

Only he never knew it—he was dead when O'Toole carried him across the plate.



The Needed Spark

LUCKY YOUNG HAS TO EARN HIS WELCOME IN PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL.

LUCKY said: "Sure, I know the International League is terrific baseball for a rookie. I know I'm a lucky kid, and the pay is good, and I never had to ride the buses on the bush-league route. I know all that."

Alice Hale, browned and slim and long-legged and dark-eyed, looked at the big blond boy who was grown into a man in the years since they had met at Midstate College, back in Midstate. They sat in a midtown café in New York, where she was visiting a cousin. It was late spring in 1946, and the war which had taken Lucky Andy Young from the athletic fields where his talents lay, was already fading into memory.

The war had not changed him much, she thought, not inside. He was still good, kindly, honest. His jaw was longer and harder; but the gray eyes were warm and steady. He still believed in himself without arrogance.

But he was ambitious now. He had never considered any career but athletics. He had shown enough in the All Star football game to get a contract

from the New York Mastodons. His baseball had gained him a trial with the New York Birds, who had farmed him out to Newark. He was, however, twenty-six years old. Because of the war, he was four years late in arriving among the pro's. Alice Hale, daughter of the president of Midstate, knew very well the real problem which faced him.

The café was noted for its clientele of sports people. It was evening, and the din about the young couple was like a succession of waves, crashing on the sensitive ears of the girl. But Lucky Young's eyes went about, enjoying the lively scene, recognizing here and there a prominent figure of his world.

She said: "You're too impatient, Andy."

"I made a mistake," he answered. "I should never have signed with the Birds. They have outfield talent like crazy. They have Willy Lake and Mort Frome, with plenty of years left in them. And as if that wasn't enough, they have that fellow over there."

She said: "Oh? The big man? Is he an outfielder?"

"Darling, that's Dud Jason," said Lucky Young.

"That giant? I thought he was slim and handsome."

Dud Jason sat against the wall, enjoying the attention of the girl, of the customers who stared openly at him. He was paid seventy thousand dollars a year by the Birds for patrolling the center garden. He had strong, harsh features which photographed well. He was generally considered the best outfielder in the big leagues, the leader of the always great Birds, the hardest hitter and greatest fielder in many a long year.

"Of course, he is thirty-five," said Lucky. "An old man. But if he hasn't got four years left, I'm a monkey's uncle. And I'll be thirty in four years. Lake and Frome are my age or less. You see where that leaves me?"

MARY met the bold eyes of the big man across the room, and flushed. She said: "Andy—I'm sorry. I believe he's coming over. I stared."

"He wouldn't speak to a bushier like me," said Lucky. "In the little time I was with the Birds in spring train-



*Illustrated by
John McDermott*

by JOEL REEVE

ing, he never spoke to me. He never gives a rookie a break. He's old school—an individualist, yet a team man on the field."

She said: "I know he's coming over." She was very beautiful in her quiet way, not flashy, but stylish and greyhound sleek and slender. She had learned about males in her years of assisting her father at Midstate College. She weighed the man who was gravitating toward the modest corner from which she watched him.

He had strength, of course, physical and mental; and undoubtedly moral strength, for he had bolstered wobbling Birds teams with his spirit and his drive under discouraging circumstances. Right now he was reported to have a bad arm, but it was not noticeable in his playing. He was a big man who met obstacles with a cold grin and drove through or over them, seldom bothering to go around. His smile was wide and attractive, Alice thought, but rather cool, as though he was never really quite smiling.

He towered over them, saying: "Hi-ya, Andy Young? That's a fine .340 you're hitting over in Newark."

Lucky rose, flushing despite himself. He made introductions, and Dud Jason helped himself to a chair. Lucky said: "You're going all right yourself."

"Some days good, some days bad," said Jason. "You been out?"

"I've never seen you play," Alice confessed.

"I'm always out there." He was neither boastful nor modest.

Lucky said: "The Birds would be sick fowl without you."

"Ha-ha!" said Jason. "Good crack. But the Birds are solid. They've got Knocker Cone—and you comin' up." The man's blue eyes were chilly upon Lucky. "Y' know, they like that. A hitter like you. Behind a veteran like me. Makes it tougher for me at contract time."

"Maybe they'll trade me," said Lucky hopefully. "I always wanted to play for Kid Ryan. But I'd be better off traded."

"We'd both be better off." The grin stretched, and Jason said: "But that's treason. . . . How long've you been in New York, Miss Hale?"

"How can you tell I'm not a native?" she couldn't help asking.

Jason roared: "I don't need a pat on the back from you!"



Jason said: "This has been fun. I'll call you, Miss Hale, if it's all right. I like nice girls."

He shook his head. "Too pretty—and too natural. Not the New York type. And then—I saw you at a football game once. With your father. Lucky, here, was havin' one of his field days. Y' know, I played football, back at Bucknell. But it was small time." He seemed regretful.

"You have a remarkable memory," she said.

He shrugged. "But only for irrelevancies." He talked, telling them funny stories about himself, his career. They ordered more coffee and a delicious cheesecake which he recommended, and he talked. He was amusing, even if his entire conversation was about himself.

Lucky Young was enthralled. Baseball lore dripped from the big mouth; hints and tips on batting were in every tale. Time went by, and it was midnight, and Dud Jason's party had long since left, so the three went out together. Jason said: "This has been fun. I'll call you, Miss Hale, if it's all right. I like nice girls." His frankness was disarming.

Alice said: "Why, Dud, I'm engaged to Lucky. Didn't you know?"

The big man's face went hard, then again relaxed. He laughed shortly. "That I didn't know. Congratulations, Lucky. You *are* well named."

A taxi drew up. The great man stepped into it without so much as a

by-your-leave and was whisked away into the night, as abruptly as he had come.

Lucky said slowly: "Now, there is a character. You know what I bet? I bet right now he is thinking that I am after his job—and that I stole the girl he would have liked to go after!"

Alice Hale said: "And you know what? Sometimes you amaze me by the things you understand. You are exactly right. Look out for Dud Jason. He will not be your friend."

They walked back to her apartment. She was going back to Midstate, but during the summer vacation she was leaving a girl in her place, and coming East to visit the same cousin. Newark was near enough.

"If I'm not shipped to Peoria by then," said Lucky.

"How is your knee?" It was a great secret about the knee. The Army had pronounced it all right, but there was a slight weakness from the wound where the cartilage had been cut. It was the one worry in Andy Young's mind.

He said: "All right, so far. I get around." He hated to speak of it, even to Alice. He tried to force it out of the foreground of his mind.

She said: "You'll make it, Andy. We'll be married in the fall. We'll know as much as we need to know about the future by then. We know

enough now—if you weren't so stubbornly proud."

He kissed her in a shadow in front of the apartment, and they parted. He went over to the Pennsylvania Station and took a train back to Newark. He sat hunched, his head sunk on his chest, his curly hair rumpled, thinking about Dud Jason.

That was a hell of a man to be succeeding. Those were enormous shoes to be filled—if there was ever an occasion to fill them. Lucky was fully aware that it was not necessary to like Dud Jason in order to admire him. The man was terrific—and he would never love Lucky Andy Young.

THE Newark Ball Park is big-league in design. The center field is grassy and deep, running to a black scoreboard. Babe Ruth, playing exhibitions there, never hit a ball over that center-field fence. Bill Terry did, but the fashion is to underrate Terry as a hitter.

The Bears, under Bill Tracey, were a hustling organization. They were in third place, but aiming higher when July came along. The pennant race was very close, and the pressure was on the Bears hitters, because the Bears pitchers were young and green and uncertain.

The hot weather had found Lucky in the greatest shape of his career. He

kept strict training; he moved among his fellows with smiling ease; he wore his monkey suit with dash and *elan*. He looked and moved like a baseball player, and Bill Tracey depended upon him rather more than that astute handler of young talent would allow Lucky to believe. There came a crucial series, as there always does in baseball, over the week-end of the Fourth of July, with the league-leading Orioles invading Ruppert Stadium.

The first of the four-game series came down to the ninth inning with the score tied at two apiece. Lucky had scored one of the runs and knocked in the other. He swung two bats as the first Bears hitter nailed one to right and got down to first with ease.

Tracey gave him the sign from third—hit away, go all out. This was passing strange, as there was none out, and a run would win the game. A bunt to place the runner on second was the play.

Lucky went to bat, thinking hard. This pitcher had handcuffed the two men behind him all during the game, whereas Lucky had two hits and a walk. Tracey was playing a long shot, but it was percentage in a way.

Lucky gripped the willow, facing the mound. He had a loose stance in the box, legs not too far apart, feet ready to move. The Baltimore hurler took his semi-wind-up, threatened first, then chucked his best ball, a slider. It came in about waist-high, dipping.

Lucky never thought about hitting. He went purely on reflexes. The pitcher's slider was not as good as he fondly believed. The main difference between the International League and the big leagues is pitching, as Lucky well knew. The light-colored bat came swishing around.

There was a loud impact. The runner on first sprinted, took a look, then stopped, hands on hips. Lucky almost ran into him.

The ball was going up and up. It seemed to be alive, to be winging its way onward by some inner power. The entire audience in the stands was up, yelling. Lucky almost ran down his own runner.

The man said: "Hey! You done it, pal. There she goes."

Lucky looked. The ball was disappearing in the direction of Newark Airport. It was going over the center-field fence.

Lucky said: "Touch all the bags, chum, and let's go home. We done won this ball game. Three more, and we'll be in first place."

The next day the Orioles dug in, got an early lead and held it through once more. In the ninth it was six to three. Lucky had managed to have a hand in all three of the Bears' runs, and was again averaging a perfect day at bat. The first hitters in the last of the ninth put on a rally and

filled the bags; the Baltimores rushed in their ace game-saver, and Lucky was up.

He decided against letting the relief pitcher get warmed up. He picked on the second pitch, a curve. He nailed it on the end of his bat and dumped it into the right-field bleachers, a cheap-enough homer along the first base-line, but good enough to win the ball-game.

He won the third game in the fifth, with a base-clearing poke into the same spot. He won the fourth game in the eighth by singling, stealing second, then stretching into slide which just beat the throw to score the deciding tally. The Bears went into the first-place hole with a splurge which made the sports pages of the nation, owing to the Frank Merriwell performance of their rookie football-baseball hero.

And Dud Jason threw his bum arm out entirely, in a game between the Birds and the Panthers.

KID RYAN was a little man, baldish, gray, eagle-faced, choppy of speech and manner. He said: "Knocker's in a slump. Jason'll be out for a month. Can you do it?"

"I'm scared," said Andy Young.

"Sure. But can you do it?"

"It's only that I'm a busher," said Lucky. "The team—the Birds—" He was thinking of Dud Jason, of course.

Kid Ryan said: "Some men never are bushers. You did all right with Newark. Takin' a chance on you, Young."

That was all. He got his uniforms, and in the morning he worked out. He walked onto the grass of center field in the big ball-park, and the heat of July did not account for the sweat in the palms of his big hands.

He had one great asset—he was a natural. When the first fungoes came looping, he did not think about missing one. He camped under each and took it, and threw the ball into the diamond. He was graceful and easy, and his throwing arm was magnificent. There was no strain in his performance.

But he could feel the eyes of the Birds upon him. Willy Lake, in left, a swift slender man, dark and hawk-like; Mort Frome, short, wide, bull-like in right field, the long hitter; Knocker Cone, red-haired, thin-faced, no longer youthful—nervous, irritable because he was not hitting, and this was his chance, and he was missing it. They were the three outfielders who counted.

The infielders kept turning to watch him, too: Ken Cooper, the first baseman, Wingy Connor on second, Jack Lamonte at short, Melvin Mace on third, all were wondering about the new rookie. And the pitchers—who needed long hits to give them a lead

on which to operate—the pitchers glowered at him.

He went in to take his turn at bat, and Dud Jason lounged from the dugout, his arm in a sling. The big man's face was like granite. He said: "Well, you got here."

"I'm sorry about your arm," said Lucky. He swung two bats.

Jason said: "I'll be back in time to knock off the Whales." The Whales were the only other team which had a chance for the pennant that year.

Lucky said: "Sure. You'll be back." He got into the line waiting to hit, and thought about Jason's tone. It was not friendly, for sure. Alice had known. He watched the Birds crack the easy batting-practice pitches to all corners of the lot, and soon it was his turn. No one had spoken to him.

The man on the mound eyed him, called: "Whatta you like?"

"Anything," said Lucky. "It's all right."

The pitcher stared. "You hit anything? You must be good."

There was a thick silence. The atmosphere became oppressive. Kid Ryan was in the dugout, listening to what was said. Suddenly impatient, Lucky said: "Throw the ball."

The pitcher wound up and snapped one straight at Lucky's head. He waited until he saw it was not going to break, then dropped flat. Ryan was out of the dugout, running, eyes shooting fire.

Lucky got up and said: "It's all right, Mr. Ryan. Must've slipped; he didn't mean it."

Ryan stopped dead. His face was flinty, but he said nothing. Slowly he turned and went back out of the sunshine.

The pitcher wound up again. This time he threw one around the knees. Lucky reached with his natural swing. The ball cracked into the right field stands, almost gentle in its flight.

The hurler threw five balls. Lucky parked them all into the reaches of the park. Then he turned away, put his bat carefully in the rack and reached for his worn glove.

Ryan called: "Come here, Young."

LUCKY turned and trotted to the dugout. The manager did not look at him. He looked at Jason, sitting on the end of the bench. His voice was sharp. "Don't take anything from anybody, Young. Not from anybody, you hear? I brought you up. I'm responsible. You play ball. Anyone gets in your way—you're big enough to take care of yourself."

Lucky said: "That's not my style, Mr. Ryan. I'm a team man. I don't want to fight my own teammates."

"This is big league," said Ryan. "You'll learn. G'wan, take a shower."

He had to walk past Jason, going to the tunnel. He paused, looking

at the big man. He said: "Like you say, I got here. So far, I don't like it."

"It takes guts," said Jason coldly.

Lucky nodded. "Thanks for everything." He shrugged, and went to the showers. He knew where he stood, now. Jason would be against him all the way. Jason's pals on the team would be his enemies. The proud Birds did not love a rookie in his freshman year coming into the place vacated by their hero.

THE month went swiftly by. Alice sent a wire—she was coming in time to see the series against the Whales.

Lucky was in Boston when he received the message. He was pretty lonely. He laughed dryly when he saw the date of Alice's arrival in New York. Dud Jason was due to return to action for that series. Lucky would be riding the bench.

Not that he had failed to perform his duty. He was hitting for .320. He had punched in five homers. His fielding was flawless.

But his home runs were not towering blows. They were not flashy; nor was his easy, bred-in-the-bone swing a colorful thing to watch. His baseball was sure, steady, almost the quiet type. He never argued an umpire's decision. He never brawled with the opposition.

Of course he had yet to meet the Whales. They were the fighters of the league. Led by Bat Donner, their fiery manager, the whole team was scrappy, ornery and full of dirty tricks. But Lucky was not to meet the Whales. Dud Jason would be in there, bellowing back at them, daring them, wielding his big black bat. Dud was at his best against Donner's club, people said.

Jason was taking work-outs now, favoring his arm, but getting back into shape. He would come out into center field and share it with Lucky, making the catches and tossing the ball for Lucky to throw it back in. It was strange the way they worked together, without exchanging a civil word.

Lucky thought about it, in Boston. Some of the Birds had been pretty nice to him. But not Willy Lake, nor Mort Frome, nor Knocker Cone. The outfielders seemed leagued against him. There was nothing in the open; and as he made no mistakes in the field, no criticism was offered. But he could feel the enmity, and he could feel them waiting for him to make one mistake. It was a strain, but he continued doggedly to play ball and keep his own counsel. It was difficult, for he was a gregarious, sunny young man; but he stuck to it. In Boston he got four for four, all solid hits, and the team came into the home park a full game ahead of the Whales, with a four-game series in prospect which could well decide the race.

He met Alice at the station. His pulse quickened at sight of her, the slim beauty of her, the steady glow in her eyes when they met his. She said quickly: "I read the paper. I didn't know you'd be out of the line-up. I'm terribly sorry, Andy. I hoped to see you as a big-leaguer—where you belong."

He said: "It's all right. Jason's the biggest star in the game. He'll spark the team. I couldn't do much with those veterans. It's not like college ball, baby."

"No, I can imagine it isn't," she said. "Men like Jason—" She took his arm, and they followed the red-cap to the taxicab stand. She said: "Back at Midstate, everyone is excited about the pennant race. Your father lives near a radio. Can the Birds beat the Whales?"

He said: "It's a matter of fight, and the Whales are full of it. The teams are about even on paper—we've got hitters; they've got pitchers. But in a four-game series—fight will count heavily."

She said: "And the Birds are down?" "I don't know," he said. "With Jason back, they may perk up."

She understood, then, what he had been combating. She squeezed his arm, and in the cab she impulsively kissed him. He said: "That's worth anything. That makes life fine again."

She said: "We'll go right to my cousin's apartment, then the park—even if you're not playing."

"That's fine," he said. "I'll like having you there. I'll peek up from the dugout."

He was a little late arriving at the dressing-room under the stand. Kid Ryan was waiting for him, he saw with surprise. The manager growled: "You with this club? What the hell?"

"I'm sorry; I didn't think it would matter," said Lucky. "Jason's all right, isn't he?"

Ryan drew him into the office. Closing the door, he said: "Jason's all right. Like he was yesterday. He's got to play."

Lucky said: "I know. I did good, but Jason is—Jason."

Ryan nodded. "People pay to see him. . . . You never did fight 'em, didja?"

Lucky said: "Why should I? They left me alone."

"Yeah. Strictly alone," snarled Ryan deep in his throat. "The Birds. Them stiffs."

Lucky said: "Why, they're big league. I'm a green busher."

Ryan snapped: "You ain't made a mistake out there. You hit. If you only had some of the old fight—" He did not finish. He shrugged and nodded. "All right. You done good, like you say. And stick around, in uniform. Just like you was playin'—unna-stand?"

"Sure," said Lucky. "I'm drawing pay. Not much—but regular."

He went in and dressed. Wingy Connor, the chunky second baseman, said: "How you feel, kid?"

"Okay," said Lucky. "Hit one for me today, huh?"

Wingy said: "I ain't hittin' the size of my hat. If I had your swing—"

Lucky said: "Keep swinging in there." He patted Wingy's shoulder. He smiled at Ken Cooper, who also had been decent to him. The big first baseman nodded, his face gloomy. There was tension in the dressing-room.

Dud Jason stood up, spikes in hand. He boomed: "Come on, you dogs. Let's go out and see what the tough guys have got. I'm eatin' Whale steak tonight. C'mon, you bums!"

They went out, but somehow they were not up there. Lucky shagged flies. To his amazement, Jason never did throw one in. He kept underhanding the ball to Lucky to perform that task. Lucky wondered what he would do in a game, if the big man's arm was really recovered.

GAME time came. Alice had long since arrived, and was in the box with the wives and sweethearts of the other players. Lucky waved to her and went into the dugout and sat on the edge of the bench, watching. A loss today would create a tie for first place between the Whales and the Birds. Ryan was tense and dour, hunched at the far end of the dugout. The Birds took the field.

Ted Tremaine was pitching that day. He was a good right-hander, a curve-baller with control, a twenty-game winner last season. He started fine for the Birds, giving up nothing like a hit for five innings.

Lucky watched Dud Jason. Batting third, the big man came up in the first with none on and two away. He stood like a colossus in the batter's box, looking over the pitcher's slants. He picked on one of them and nailed it. The ball went deep into center.

Jap Gould, a fleet man, ran and ran. Then he turned and reached. The ball dropped. The center fielder of the Whales gathered it in for the out.

In the fifth, with a man on, Jason came up again. He drilled a liner past the pitcher, and Lucky came off the bench. The Whales' shortstop, Tex Cole, went over and dived. He trapped the ball in his gloved hand, and doubled the runner off first with a perfect throw.

Jason came back to the bench. He said ferociously: "I'm jinxed. There's a Jonah on the club." He stared straight at Lucky, and little lights flickered in his blue eyes, which were like fiery ice.

"Your timin' is off," said Ryan. "You ain't pullin' it."

"I know what I'm doin'," snapped Jason.

Ryan's flat mouth tightened. The game went on. The Whales, fighting every pitch, every close decision, each other and the delighted fans, pieced together a run.

That run did it. And Dud Jason never got a hit.

At the hotel where the single players lived, Alice came to dinner with Lucky. They talked over the game. She said: "Jason never had to make a throw, I noticed."

"You're a noticin' gal," said Lucky. "But don't get any wrong ideas. Dud'll be in there when the clutch comes."

At that moment the big man entered the dining-room. His glance went around and fell upon Alice Hale. Deliberately he threaded his way to the table. He sat down without invitation and said: "You're looking mighty pretty, Miss Hale... Did you see the game?"

"I saw it," she said. "It was sad. The Whales really fight, don't they?"

The big outfielder stared at her. "Yeah. They do that." His voice was heavy, but in another moment he was off, talking, dominating the dining-room with his size, his manner, his pleasant-enough voice.

It was eleven before they got away from him. Then Lucky took Alice to the apartment nearby where she was staying, and said: "He never gives up, you see?"

"I see more than you think," she said. "He's got something, all right."

"Yeah," said Lucky. "He's pretty terrific." He went home feeling sort of empty inside. There had been something in Alice's tone—

THE Whales hopped on Soda Rich the next day and blasted the left-hander from the box. The final score, Whales 4, Birds 0. Dud Jason did not get a hit.

That brought the series to Sunday and a double-header, put the Birds a game behind in the race and started the sports reporters to writing yarns beginning: "The failing Birds, floundering helplessly with the big bat of Dud Jason silenced by tight Whales pitching—"

But the Whales pitching had not been that good, Lucky Young thought. He had watched every throw. He had heard Kid Ryan's sharp utterances on the subject. The timing of the Birds was off, because they were being fought to a standstill, because they were trying too hard.

And every day Bat Donner and his men reviled them, laughed at them, mocked them and dared them to battle. The Birds, smarting silently under the abuse, lamely answered back, but their hearts were not in it. Lucky, never one to use rowdy tactics, began



He growled: "You with this club?"

to hate the strutting Whales. The loud-mouthed Bat Donner particularly roused his ire.

Sunday morning there was to be a meeting of the Birds. Before he went to the park, Lucky Young called upon Alice at her cousin's apartment.

She said: "Dud Jason called me. He wanted to talk to me."

Lucky said: "He's been raving like a maniac. The whole team is on edge worse than ever. He can't buy a hit."

"He's never failed before," she said. "I talked to him for a half-hour."

Lucky considered this. Then he said: "He wanted to see you, huh?"

"I didn't see him," she said quietly. "I talked to him."

"Okay," said Lucky. "It's all right."

They talked quietly, and he did not refer to Dud Jason again. He had to leave for the meeting, and all the way uptown in the subway his mind went around and around like a squirrel on a treadmill. He sat in the dressing-room and scarcely heard the driving words of Kid Ryan, who was on a real rampage. He sat next to Ken Cooper, and when there was a lull, the first baseman said suddenly: "So why don't you put Young back in there?"

The silence was the most profound Lucky had ever experienced. Dud

Jason started up, then sank back onto the bench. Wingy Connor broke it up. The second baseman said: "Yeah. Why don't you, Kid? Let's face it."

Frome and Lake said in unison: "No! Dud'll snap out of it." The rest of the team took sides immediately—nerves were on edge, and an open scene was a relief. Kid Ryan let them snap at each other for a moment.

Then the manager said coldly: "I'm runnin' the club. I play the man I want in every position."

Lucky struggled to his feet between Wingy and Cooper. He said: "Please, Mr. Ryan. . . . I agree that Dud is overdue. I've got confidence in him. He's been away a month—we all know it takes time to get back your eye."

Jason roared: "I don't need a pat on the back from you!" Then he shut his big mouth and stared around. He was on his feet, his shoulders bent, his fists clenched. For a moment he held the fighting pose. Then he swung through the door and was gone.

WINGY CONNOR said: "I still say Lucky held us up, and he could do it again. I still say—"

"You talk too much," said Ryan. But he did not seem displeased. He closed the meeting, and they went to their lunch.

Lucky ate mechanically, his mind on Dud Jason. He honestly did not like the big outfielding star, but he had a strong hunch. Back at the field, he dressed early and went into the outfield to warm up. After a while Jason appeared.

A ball was hit out to Lucky. He caught it, wheeled and tossed it to Jason. He said: "You throw it in."

Jason slammed it back. He said: "You damn' busher—"

"It's your arm," said Lucky, nodding. "I figured it out. You haven't had to make a throw yet. You can't make a good one."

"You smart young—"

"Lay off," said Lucky. "I'm not scared. You are."

Sweat stood out on the giant's face. He said, "If you go shootin' off your big yap—"

"You heard me in the clubhouse," said Lucky.

Jason said: "I'm playin' out the string, see?"

"Even if you hurt the club?" asked Lucky curiously.

"I know what's best for the club. I just about *am* the club! The way I go—that's the way the Birds go." The outfielder's head was up, proud.

Lucky said: "I'll be watching."

He was watching when the game started, with the Birds in second place and the Whales taunting them with the fact. Lefty Dees was pitching for the home club, and he had his stuff. He gave the fighting Whales very little during the first four innings.

In the fifth he did allow Ring Smith a look. The Whales' center gardener laced into the ball. It skidded past second and into center. Dud Jason fielded it, and tossed it in as Smith held up on first.

A SECOND later the Whale runner stole second, almost spiking Connor. The Whale coaches leaped up and down; the Whale bench shrieked. Jap Gould slapped a slow roller into right, and only last play by Frome held Smith on third. Now the Whales really raised the ball-park roof.

Lucky suffered on the bench. Lefty took a brace. He struck out Piper. Dale Hawkins, the redoubtable Whale first-sacker, came up. There was one away, men on first and third.

Hawkins took an outside ball and nailed it. For a second, Lucky thought Hawkins had homered; then he saw the ball was too high. It was going into center field, not too deep. Dud Jason was under it.

But Smith was touched up at third. The Whales were going to take a chance and send him home on the catch. They knew Jason's arm had been sore. The ball was too short; the chance was desperate, but they were going to take it.

Lucky came off the bench. Jason made the catch. His arm went back, he threw. Smith was legging it for home; Pete Gonzola had whipped aside his mask and was crouching.

The ball arched in. It was a perfect strike. Gonzola trapped it and put the ball on Smith. The Whale rally had been broken.

Wingy Connor was leaping, laughing, thumbing his nose at Bat Donner, whose strategy had at last backfired. Ken Cooper was howling insults. Lamonte waved the ball at the Whales' bench, chortling.

Jason came trotting in. His skin was pale beneath the tan. He was first at bat in the inning. He took the sticks and his jaw muscles bulged as he went up there. He loosened his wrists, swinging the bats gently, then took his place.

The Whales pitcher bent to his task. The count rose to three and two. The ball had to come over.

It did. It came right to the plate. Then Dud Jason, swinging from his heels, met it on the nose. Every man on the Birds team jumped, shouting. The ball took flight and soared. It went deep in center. It went right over the scoreboard, the longest ball Dud Jason had ever hit.

The big man came around the bases. He touched his cap to the crowd. It seemed to Lucky that he particularly aimed his acknowledgment at the box where Alice sat, but that was all right, too.

He came in and said quietly to Kid Ryan: "All right."

Ryan nodded. The Birds were leaping and reaching for their bats. They went up—Frome, Cooper, Mace, Lamonte, and all hit safely. They drove the Whale pitchers to the showers one after the other. They batted around, and then there was a strange hush over the park.

The announcer was saying: "Young batting for Jason."

Lucky went up. A strong young right-hander gave him a hard look. Bat Donner was bawling orders. The Whales were grim. The pitcher threw a duster, and Lucky barely evaded it.

The noise was terrific. Lucky waited, ducking his blond head. The pitcher threw him a fast curve.

Lucky belted it into the right-field stands. The score became Birds 10, Whales 0.

That was the final score. The world knew the next morning through the sports pages how Dud Jason had sparked the faltering team to a new start with a magnificent homer and then had retired "because his injury was giving him a little trouble."

The crowd which filled the stadium the next day was electrified, however, when the starting line-up was read off. For in the third slot, instead of Jason, the name of Andy Young came over the loud-speakers. The buzz which went around was like a funeral dirge. The Birds had tied it up again; but now they had lost their big gun.

Somehow the Birds did not seem to notice. They started the game like any other. Sam Baer, their smart veteran right-hander, was working. Jason sat on the bench in uniform.

Bat Donner and the Whales were at fever pitch. They hit at anything which Baer got close to the platter. They tried merely to hammer the cover off the ball. In the first inning Gould hit one which made Lucky's hair stand on end.

He turned and ran. He saw it was coming inside the park. He put on all the considerable speed he possessed. He saw the fence in left center, heard Lake's voice: "Your ball, kid, your ball."

He went into the slot, and the dangerous concrete wall was over him. He thought of his knee, his football contract, his whole future as an athlete. The fence had ruined many a ball-player. He took a sight on the dropping ball. He stuck out a glove and wheeled, spinning.

He grabbed the ball. Then he glanced off the fence, his spinning motion breaking the impact. He tossed the ball to Lake as he fell and rolled.

He got up. His knee gave him a slight twinge, but he did not limp. He had saved himself that time. He heard a roar far away.

Lake said ungrudgingly: "That was circus, kid. That was guts."

"Thanks, pal," grinned Lucky. "Nearly knocked out my brains, huh?"

"You got it," said Lake. "Baer'll kiss you for that one."

When he came into the bench, the roar went up again. He glanced up, startled. Kid Ryan said dryly, "They're cheerin' yuh, Lucky."

Lucky touched his cap. He glanced at Jason. The big man sat on the bench, his left hand caressing his right arm.

Connor was up. He was not hitting, and the second baseman died every time he got out. He popped to short and cursed, turning back. Lake got up. Lake hit one to third and was thrown out. George Yorke was pitching for the Whales, a good man for a tight spot.

The blond rookie went into the batter's box. Bat Donner and the Whales began on him at once. They called him dirty names. They referred to his ancestry—among themselves, of course, within the rules.

Yorke threw some fancy control pitching at him. Lucky got into a hole at two and two, then waited out a close one. Donner came storming out, protesting the decision, a wasted gesture designed to annoy Lucky.

Donner said: "This punk is called 'Lucky,' and he earns it."

Lucky said to the umpire: "Send the tramp back before I get mad." His dislike of Donner was growing active. Anger was rising in him.

Donner walked away, spitting back over his shoulder. Lucky faced Yorke. The pitcher wound up, threw a good curve for the corner.

Lucky smacked into it. The ball went down toward short. Cole dived for it, couldn't quite get it. Lucky turned first with Hawkins snarling at him. He tore for second. Midget Gray was blocking the bag, waiting for the throw.

Lucky took right off. He slid under Gray and hoisted with his legs. He pitched the little keystone sacker right into center field.

Cole, backing up, immediately yowled: "You can't do that to my pal!" He threw a typical baseball player's punch, a wild swing. Lucky moved his head a fraction of an inch. His left shot out and caught the Whales' shortstop on the jaw.

THE umpires arrived and stared. Cole was flat on his back, out like a light. Gray lay in center field, moaning. Lucky was standing on the bag, looking as innocent as possible under the circumstances. Donner was racing out, hollering like a stuck pig.

An umpire said: "What happened to the big bad Whales? You been doin' all the fightin', Bat. What's a matter? Softenin' up?"

Order was at length restored. Cole had a lump on his jaw, but stayed in

the game. Gray limped. Lucky took a lead, scampered back on his toes. Nobody blocked the bag.

Lucky died there, but he chuckled going into the field. The sight of the two supine Whales had done a lot for him. He roamed center field as the Whales went down one after another. The game became a pitchers' battle.

Lucky was on twice more, but he never could get home with a run. Yorke was pitching a great game. Baer was matching him. They went into the ninth nothing to nothing.

Baer was lead-off man. He never got off the bench. While the crowd stood and yelled, a familiar figure came out to grasp a bat.

Jason picked up a stick and turned. His hard blue eyes were on Lucky. His cold voice said: "I'm just aimin' to get on. These other bums can't get me around. I'm no speed boy. I'll be lookin' for you to come up."

Lucky said: "That's all right."

Jason nodded. Yorke looked him over and shook off some signs. Then he pitched slow, control stuff at the big mauler. Jason disdainfully let the count run up. Then a fat one came twisting up.

The great man reached out his bat. Laying the wood to the leather almost delicately, he knocked the ball into left field. He ran down to first on a clean single. He turned and bawled: "Here I am, you guys!"

Bat Donner howled: "And there you stay, you trambo!"

It looked as though Donner was right. Wingy, still in the slump, struck out. Willy Lake, swinging

from away back, only lifted a high foul to short center for the second out. Then Lucky Young was up, and the noise became almost unbearable.

Jason held onto first, trying nothing fancy in the way of a lead. Yorke, pitching a great game, began working on this rookie who had been on base too often. He threw a fast one, then a slow change-of-pace ball. Then with two strikes on Lucky, he threw his curve, a slider around the shoulders, on the outside to a left-handed hitter.

The yellow stick came around. The strong wrists snapped at the last possible instant. The welcome sound of ball on bat echoed through the din.

LUCKY began running. He had pulled it for the bleachers, but he saw that he had failed. The ball was going on a line for the fence in right center. Dud Jason was really moving, rounding second, then third, tearing for home. Lucky put on speed, hitting the bags with his spikes. He slid into third in a cloud of dust, a step ahead of the ball.

He stood up. The fans were yelling themselves hoarse. Mort Frome, at the plate, was waving a bat at him. Mort was yelling something. Lucky took a lead. Yorke pitched. Mort tore into the ball. It skidded past first; and Mort, still shouting, ran down to first as Lucky skidded home without sliding.

Jason was waiting for him. The big man's handgrip was hard. Ryan was patting him. He could hear Mort now, howling: "If Lucky can do it, we can do it. Jump on these bums!"

"Mort's come over," said Wingy Connor. "He likes you now."

Ken Cooper, in the on-deck box, called: "I'm gettin' one for you too, Lucky. We're all for you, kid."

Jason said: "I'm for you, too, kid. You and that fine gal of yours. We'll beat the brains out of these guys. You really started something when you banged into Gray and conked Cole. Your girl was right."

Lucky said: "Huh? Alice?"

"She told me on the phone to get you in there and let someone pick on you." Jason's grin was warm, now. "She shamed me into it. She told me to let the Whales think you had rabbit ears, that you were nervous. She said if I'd do that, you'd supply the spark the club needed, and I could rest my wing."

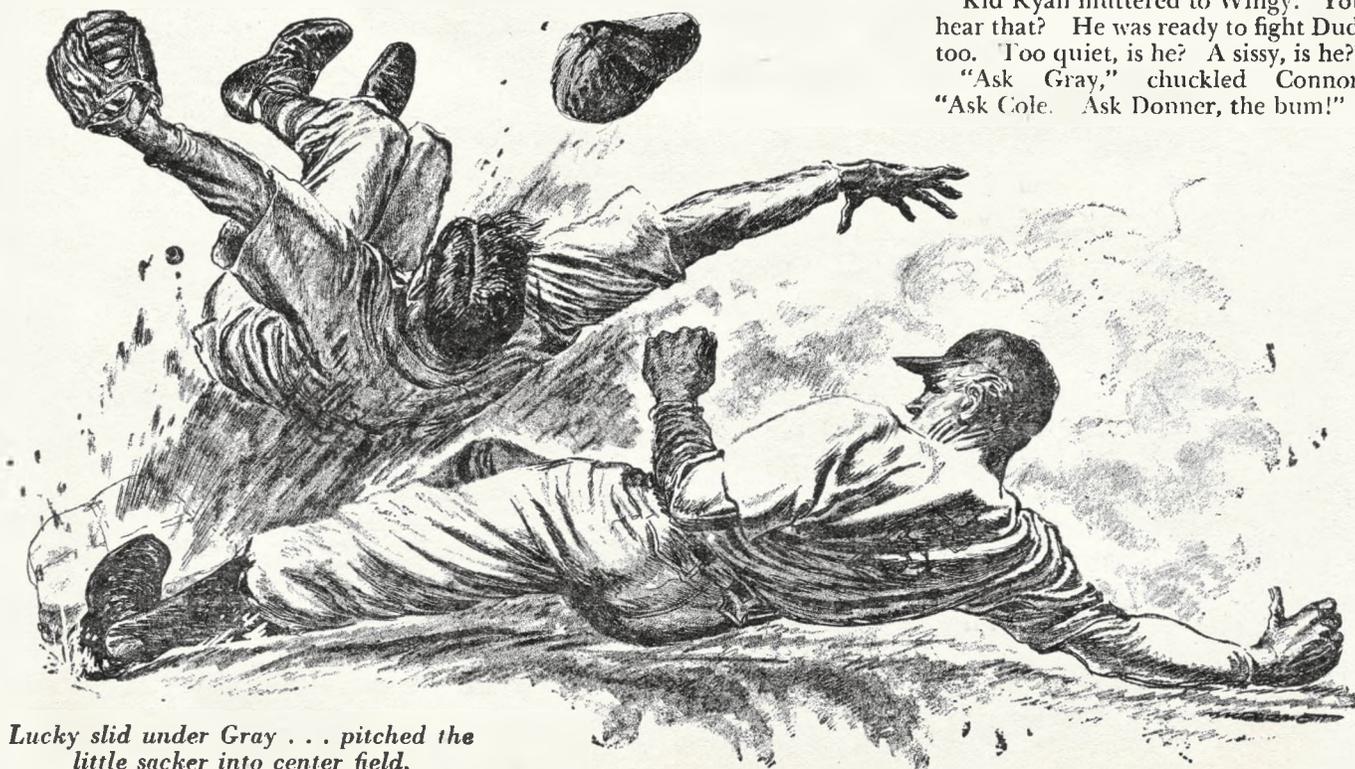
"You—your arm is all right?"

"Hell, no. You guessed it about the arm. It needs more rest. I can pinch-hit and take it easy. You can play center field." The big man's face went cool again. "But I'll be back for my job. The club can't support two of us. . . . I just want you to know your girl is fine and you're a great competitor, and we got a chance to win the pennant with you in there. I honestly didn't think so—thought you'd blow sooner or later. But kid, I'm for the team, too. I'm for me and the team both. . . . And how about dinner tonight, you and the gal and me?"

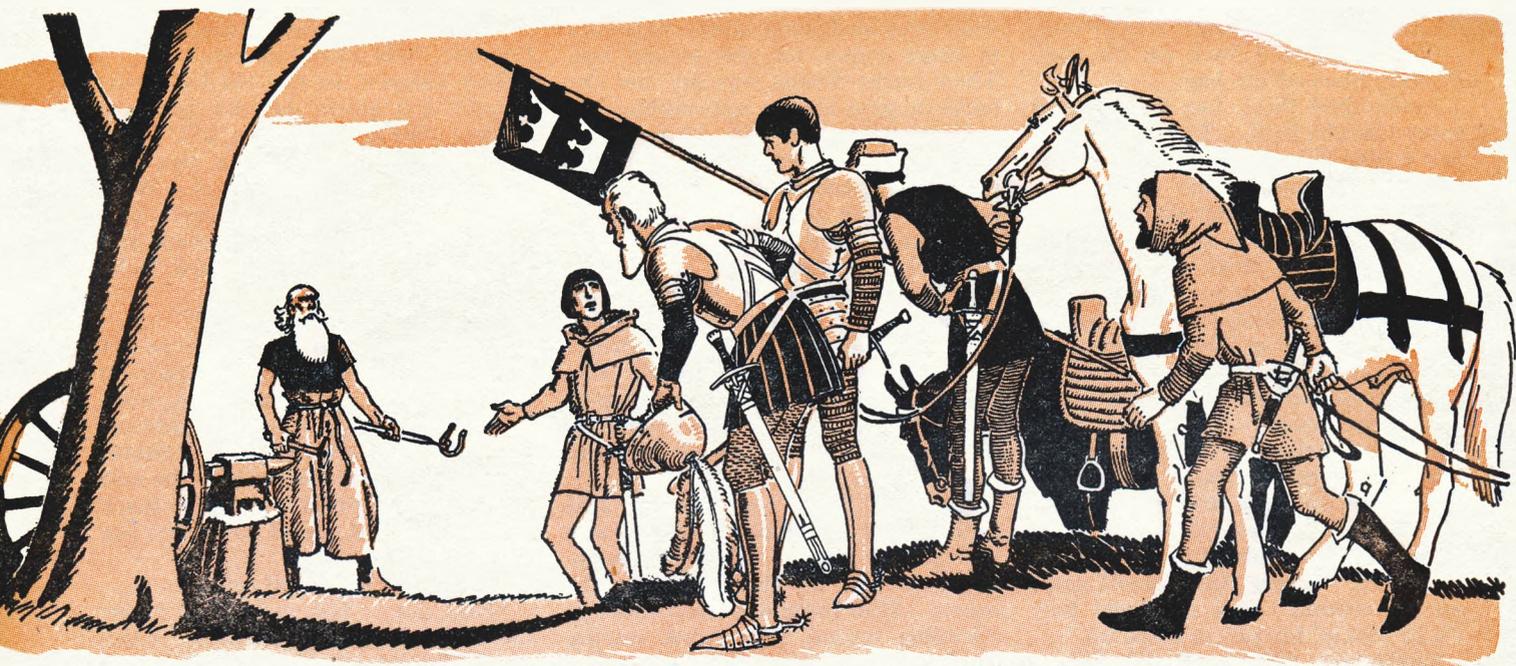
The Birds were scoring runs galore. Lucky shifted to where he could get a glimpse of Alice, smiling and happy in the box. He said: "Pal, that's an idea! And I'm mighty glad I don't have to fight you. This way it is definitely better for us all!"

Kid Ryan muttered to Wingy: "You hear that? He was ready to fight Dud, too. Too quiet, is he? A sissy, is he?"

"Ask Gray," chuckled Connor. "Ask Cole. Ask Donner, the bum!"



Lucky slid under Gray . . . pitched the little sacker into center field.



A Quest Must End

THE FORGE IN THE WILDERNESS



QUESTS ridden on, and sweated and bled for, and peradventure perished in, are as multitudinous as the stars. They have been of dreams, vanities, love, ambition, hate, whiffs of temper and idle whimsey; for the Fountain of Youth, the Phoenix' nest, unicorns with golden horns, dryads and nymphs and yet more elusive beauties, the Questing Beast which ran with a noise in its belly as of a pack of baying hounds, and was chased by King Pellinore and others of renown; and latterly the Holy Grail, which was sought by many and achieved—quite obviously with the assistance of the celestial hierarchy—by exemplary Sir Galahad.

Almost all questers rode singly, and won their places in song and story as solitary champions, but a few shared their quests and went in couples, and of these were old King Torrice of Har and his young Irish grandson Sir Lorn Geraldine. Once met (as already recorded), only death could break that fellowship or divide its mad adventures.

For more than a sennight they had followed tracks which had come to nothing, day after day, save narrower and rougher tracks. It was fifteen days since their last dealings with a

farrier or any other kind of smith; and now, what with broken shoes or no hoof-iron at all, every horse was lame; and every man, whatever his degree, was on his own two feet. King Torrice was in a fretful humor, for pedestrianism was as foreign to his spirit as it was to his feet, and irked his soul equally with his corns. But young Sir Lorn maintained his habitual air and appearance of baffled thought and pensive abstraction, walking equably and unconcernedly. In truth, it was only when violently employed with spear or sword that he seemed to know or care how many legs were under him and at his service. Ah, but he knew then, never fear, and made the most of whatever number it happened to be!

"We'll be carrying them on our backs before we can win clear of this cursed wilderness," complained the King.

Next moment, one of the squires cried out and pointed a hand.

"A smith! Look there under the great oak. Forge and anvil complete, by Judas!"

All came to a dead stop and looked, like one man and one horse; and there it was, sure enough—a rustic hut with an open front disclosing forge and bellows and anvil.

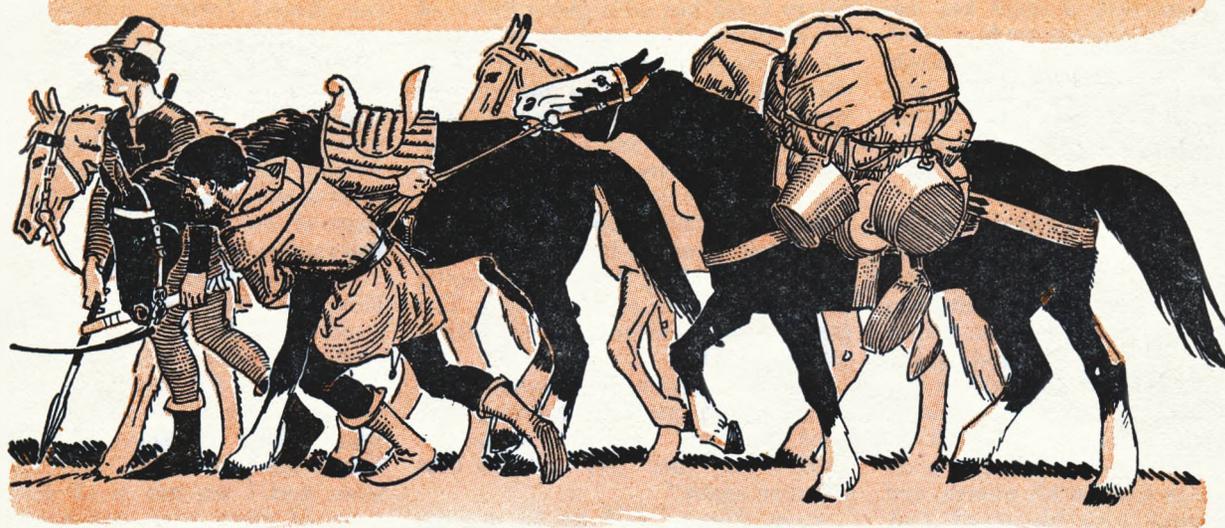
"But no smith, of course," said the King. "He's gone off in despair—and small blame to him! A fool he must

be to look for trade where there's no population—unless he counted on the patronage of unicorns and wild cattle."

"Nay, sire, look again!" cried the same squire. "At the forge. Stirring the fire. But I'll swear there was no blink of fire a moment ago!"

All except Sir Lorn gasped and gaped in astonishment, and even he looked interested; for there, for all to see, was a human figure where naught but wood and iron and the leather bellows had been visible a moment before. A lively figure, at that, with the right hand busy at the red glow in the blackness of the forge, and the left raised high to the upper beam of the bellows; and while the travelers still stared as if at a warlock, the bellows creaked and exhaled gustily, and the fiery heart amid the black coals pulsed and expanded. A piece of white-hot metal was withdrawn in the grip of long pincers and laid on the anvil and smitten with a hammer, and sparks spurted and flew.

THEN King Torrice bestirred himself; with a mutter in which irritability was somewhat tempered by awe, he turned left into the ferns and brambles, and advanced upon the smithy stiffly but resolutely, with his hoof-sore charger stumbling after, and did not halt until his whiskers were threatened by the sparks. Then he



IN THE WILD ENGLAND OF KING ARTHUR'S DAY, WE FOLLOW NEW AND FASCINATING ADVENTURES OF KING TORRICE, OF THE MAZED KNIGHT LORN AND HIS GREAT WARHORSE BAHRAM; THEIR MEETING WITH THE FAMOUS WELSH WIZARD MERLIN; AND THEIR RESCUE OF LOVELY DAME CLARA FROM A RECREANT KNIGHT AND HIS OUTLAW CLAN.

by THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

spoke in a loud voice, but the tone was constrainedly affable.

"Greetings, good Master Smith! Well met, my fine fellow!"

After six more hammer-clangs of cold iron on hot, the din and sparks ceased and the smith looked up from the anvil. He too was of venerable appearance and whiskery, but most of his snowy beard was tucked out of view and danger into the top of his leather apron, whereas Torrice's luxuriant appendage flowed broadly down his breastplate even to his belt.

"So here you are!" said the smith. "Well and good! One score and three completed, and this one will fill the tally." He nodded toward clusters of horseshoes of various sizes dangling from spikes in a wall, then thrust the cooling iron in his pincers back into the heart of fire.

"What d'ye say?" the old King-erant gasped. "Irons ready for six horses? Even so—and I don't believe it!—they'll not fit my six!"

"I'll attend to you in a minute," mumbled the smith.

The bellows creaked and snored, and the fire glowed; and soon that piece of iron, again white as noonday sun, was back on the ringing anvil, and the sparks were flying again like golden bees. King Torrice stood silent, gawking like a boy, until the iron was beaten exactly to the smith's fancy, and pierced for nails, and final-

ly plunged into a tub of water with a hiss and jet of steam. Now the smith was at his horse, and old nails and fragments of old shoes and hoof-parings fell simultaneously.

"He must have six hands!" muttered the King.

Now a little hammer went tapping as fast as the sedate charger could lift and lower his feet.

"Next!" cried the smith.

SIR LORN's great white horse came next, then the squire's hackneys, and last the two packhorses led by grooms, but all so fast—for every ready shoe fitted—that the King and the squires began a suspicious inspection. The smith straightened his back, tossed his apron aside and uttered a cackle of laughter.

"You are wasting your time," he said, and fell to combing his whiskers with a golden comb that appeared in his hand as if by magic. "All is as it seems, if not more so," he added, and cackled again.

"In all my life I never saw anything like it," said the King.

"You could forget a few things in that length of time," said the smith.

Torrice stiffened and asked loftily: "What do I owe you, my good fellow?"

"I'll name you a special fee, a mere token price, having taken a fancy to Your Worship," replied the smith. "What d'ye say to paying for the nails

only, and never mind the shoes and the labor? One farthing for the first nail, a ha'penny for the second, a penny for the third, and so on?"

"I can afford to pay what I owe," said Torrice, with a royal air, "and am accustomed to paying more, so you will oblige me by stating your charge and having done with it."

"Not so fast!" cried the squire who had spotted the forge. "What d'ye mean by 'and so on,' old man? Tuppence for the fourth nail and fourpence for the fifth, is that it?"

The King exclaimed fretfully: "Enough of this vulgar talk of farthings and pennies! Pay him what he asks, good Peter."

"Nay, sir, mauger my head!" cried the squire. "I learned that manner of computation from a farrier at St. Audrey's Fair, in my youth, an' would still be in his debt—and I had but one beast, mark ye!—if I hadn't settled the score with my stout cudgel, there an' then."

The smith laughed heartily, patted Squire Peter's shoulder and chuckled: "Spare the cudgel, friend, and I'll be content with a horn of ale."

"I don't get it," muttered Torrice. "All this jabber about nails. But let it pass." His voice and brow cleared. "But ale you shall have, worthy smith, and a share of our supper, and three silver crowns for your pouch."

"Gromercy," said the smith.

The horses, all firm of foot now, were soon unsaddled, unloaded and hobbled in a nearby glade of sweet grasses to which the smith had led the way. But now the sun was behind the westward tree-tops. A small pavilion was pitched; a small keg was broached; and a fire was made of dead-wood from thickets of underbrush. By the time the black pots were boiling, the smith's horn had been replenished twice, and a white star was glinting in the east.

It was a simple supper of boiled corned beef and bacon and wheaten dumplings, barley scones and cheese and honey; and for drink there was malt ale for all, and mead and usquebaugh too for the knights and squires and thirsty guest. The smith ate and drank more than anyone else, and at the same time, did most of the talking. The King, who had been taught never to drink with food in his mouth, and never to speak with his mouth full, was horrified at the simultaneous flaunting of both rules of behavior: and at last he cried out a protest:

"There's plenty of time, friend! Have a care, or you'll choke!"

The smith laughed, and said: "I apologize for offending your quality, of which I cannot pretend ignorance, for this is not our first meeting. I would know you anywhere and at any time for what you are, no matter how small your retinue and how restricted your commissariat at the moment. But don't misunderstand me. Your present company makes up in character and promise what it lacks in strength. This young knight is suffering from a misadventure, but the fact that he survived it with nothing more serious than a gap in his memory and a grievous void in his heart is proof that he is destined for great things."

"What do you know of that?" Torrice interrupted, loudly and with a violent gesture.

"What I see," replied the smith coolly.

"And what's that? There's nothing to see!"

"Nothing for dull eyes, you mean. But as I was saying, this is the first time I have known the munificent Torrice of Har to lack a few flasks, at least, of French or Spanish wine."

"So you know me?" the King cried.

"But I was never in this forest before!"

"Nor was I," the smith chuckled; and while all save Sir Lorn gaped in wonder, he added: "Are you so old, my friend, that you no longer recognize the master-touch?"

The King clapped a hand to his head, and sighed and muttered:

"Merlin! I should have known it at the forge! But you were not so helpful at our last meeting—on the contrary! But that was long ago." He stood up and did the correct thing,

though still dazedly. "Duke Merlin, this is my grandson Lorn Geraldine—an Irish grandson. And these two gentlemen are our squires Peter and Gervis."

Sir Lorn stood up and louted low, cap in hand, but no slightest flicker of eye or twitch of lip paid the tribute of recognition to that potent name. But the squires' reaction was entirely flattering. Standing bare-headed and bowed double, Peter and Gervis regarded with awestruck eyes and blanched faces the person who had so lately shod their horses; and the uncouth fellows at the far side of the fire sat with podding eyes and hanging jaws, powerless to stir a muscle. The great magician looked around with a gratified smirk.

"Gramercy, friends," he said. "You have heard of me, it seems—and only good, I'm sure. But sit down, gentlemen, I pray you. Let us be at ease together again."

King Torrice said to his squire: "Peter, be so good as to fetch that flask of green glass you wot of."

"Good Master Peter, by fetching all four flasks you wot of, two green and two brown, you will spare yourself a deal of footing to and fro," said Merlin dryly.

"Quite," said the King resignedly; whereupon Peter moved off hastily toward the stacked baggage.

Those treasured flasks contained potent foreign cordials, and not wine at all. The squires took their shares of the first one, then slept where they lay. The young knight went on to his share of the second flask, then retired to the pavilion on wavering legs but with unabated dignity. This left the two ancients tête-a-tête; and the talk, which had been anecdotal, changed in its character.

"A fine young man, your grandson, despite what happened to him," said Merlin. "Bewitched, of course! His case suggests the fine and merciless art of—but why name her? She goes by more names than Satan, and has done so since before Stonehenge was set up, like as not: *Lilith, Circe, Queen Mab, la Belle Dame sans Merci, the Maid of Tintagel, the Lost Lady of Caer Loyw, Fair Fiona, Dark Essylit, Weeping Rosamund, the Damosel of the Tower* and as many more as I have fingers and toes, but all one and the same perilous and indestructible witch, in my opinion. There are other and lesser enchantresses abroad; and as one can never be quite sure of one's ground in such matters, a man is well advised—aye, even such a man as myself—to avoid them all. I have taken chances, naturally—but as you see, without serious consequences.

"But my case is beside the point, considering the fact that my power of wisdom—call it magic, if you like—is greater than that of any known or re-

corded wizard or witch, and I doubt that I would have suffered more than a slight and temporary emotional disturbance even if I had ever fallen into the clutches of Lilith herself, under whatever guise or name. But your case, friend Torrice, is different; and I must confess that your respectable mentality—I say respectable for want of a more precise term—surprises me somewhat, after all your years of errantry. I am sure it has been by good fortune rather than by good management that you have escaped the attentions of one or more of those mischievous ladies."

"I am not so sure of that," said the King, unstopping the third flask and replenishing both cups. "In my quest of Beauty, which I have followed devotedly, save for occasional domestic interludes, ever since winning my spurs, I have had many contacts with ladies, many of whom were mischievous; and I am not at all sure that some of them were not witches. I have never consciously avoided that sort of thing, but in the interests of my high quest have sought it, and even now I would not avoid the most disastrous of them all."

"Stout fellow!" exclaimed Merlin merrily, but on a note of derision.

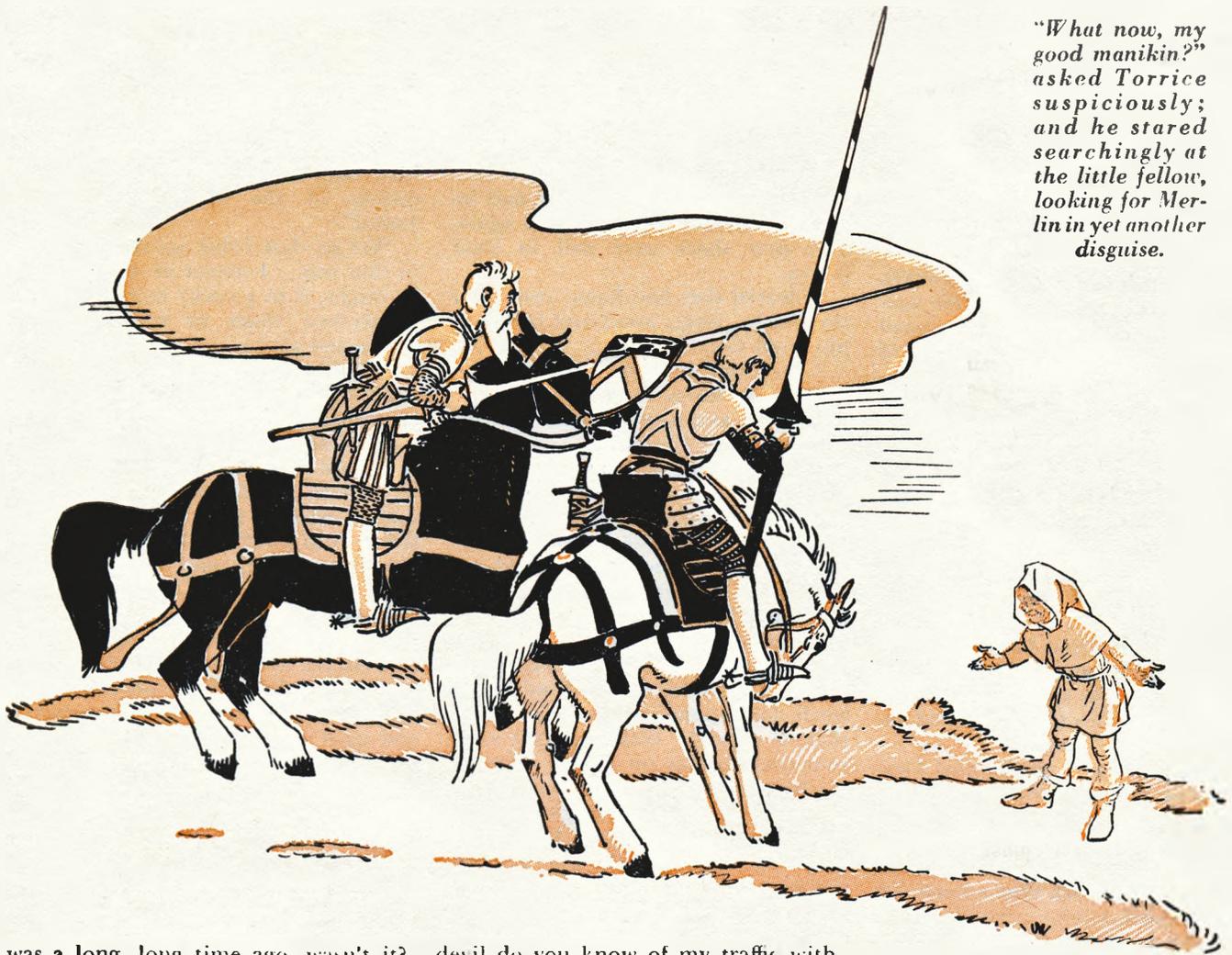
He laughed, but briefly. He leaned toward his companion in sudden gravity and wagged a finger at him.

"HAVE a care, my friend," he cautioned. "Don't be too cock-a-hoop about your powers of resistance and survival. You've been lucky, that's all. I admit that your luck has held a long time, but I warn you that it will not last forever. That you have encountered many enchantresses in your long and comprehensive quest I'll not deny, but I tell you—and I'll stake my reputation on it—that every one of them has been entirely human. There wasn't a witch in the lot. Just daughters of Eve, all of them; and even they have caused numerous deviations from your quest, and not a few considerable delays.

"Don't think I don't know what I am talking about, old friend, for I have followed your extraordinary course with interest ever since chance first brought you to my attention, though you have been blissfully ignorant of my surveillance most of the time. And I'll tell you now when that was. It was a great day with you, poor Torrice—young Torrice, then—the day an old woman in a red cloak gave you a little crystal vial containing two ounces of what she claimed to be the Elixir of Life. You have not forgotten it, I see."

"Certainly not!" cried the King. "Why should I forget it?" he demanded, with a defiant gesture in the course of which he drained and refilled his cup. "I drank it, didn't I? And it

"What now, my good manikin?" asked Torrice suspiciously; and he stared searchingly at the little fellow, looking for Merlin in yet another disguise.



was a long, long time ago, wasn't it? And here I am!"

"True, my friend, here you are, and a marvel of spirit and physical fitness for a man of your age. Aye, or for one of a quarter your age. But what you swallowed that day was not the real thing—not the magical liquor you believed it to be. It was but an experimental step in the development of the true, the pure, the perfected elixir. But even so, it was not without merit, as you have proved. It has served you well so far, my friend; but it is my duty to warn you that the virtue of the stuff you drank on that May morning of the first year of your—ah, if you'll forgive the expression, your delightfully latitudinous quest—cannot be depended upon indefinitely."

"It was the Elixir of Life! And I am as good as I ever was!"

"Nay, not quite."

"Not quite? What do you mean by that?"

"Calm yourself, old friend. I speak for your own comfort and guidance. I mean that the old woman in the red cloak gave you a liquor that was not the perfected article, and that you are showing signs of—"

"Not so! I'll prove it on your person with spear or sword, horsed or afoot, if you promise to keep your unholy magic out of it! And what the

devil do you know of my traffic with that old hag?"

"I abstain from all armed encounters, for the very reason that I could not keep my advantage of magic out of them even if I would: and my answer to your question is: *I was that old woman.*"

SOBERED as if by a bucketful of cold water, Torrice hung his head in silence. Merlin also was in no mood for further speech at the moment, but refilled his cup and sipped with a contemplative and compassionate air.

The King was the first to resume the conversation.

"But what of you? You have drunk of it."

"Yes, when I had perfected it, I drank it," said Merlin.

"Then I may still drink of it," said Torrice hopefully.

"Nay, old friend, or you would live forever," Merlin replied gently.

"Why not? You will live forever. Then why not both of us?"

"I have my wisdom to support me—magic, to you, but the greatest in the world, by any name—to strengthen and console me. You have none of it."

"I could learn it."

"Nay, good Torrice of Har, not in a century. Nor in a millennium, for

that matter. You lack the necessary—ah!—you are not the type for that sort of thing, dear old friend."

"Never mind the magic, then, but give me the elixir."

"No. I don't want to be the object of your curses throughout the ages. You have discovered a grandson and companion-at-arms. Do you want to outlive him? Consider that prospect, my friend."

The King considered it, sighed deeply and shook his head. He stared and sat blinking at the red embers of the fire.

"How long have I left to go?" he whispered.

"Long enough," said Merlin cheerfully. "I can't be more exact than that," he added; and the lie was cheerful too.

"And the end?" whispered the King anxiously.

Before replying to that, the magician pressed a hand to his brow as if in an extraordinary effort of foresight.

"I see it. Hah! Well done! Nobly done! . . . Ah, old friend, I envy you."

"Gramercy! And the lad? What of his— How fares he—at the last?"

"Nay, I cannot see so far."

Chapter Two

THE SMITH IS GONE BUT THEY HEAR OF A PILGRIM

THE squire named Peter was the first of that company to awake to the new day. The sun was still behind the eastward wall of the forest when he opened his eyes. Having lain out all night, he was damp with dew from head to foot. He sat up and blinked at slumbering Gervis, at four overturned flasks of rare outlandish glass on the dew-gemmed sward, and at the black and gray of the fallen fire. The events of the previous evening flashed on his mind, confusedly yet vividly, and painfully, for his brain felt tender and his eyes too big and hot for their sockets.

"Honest ale will be good enough for me from now on," he muttered.

He made his stumbling way to a brook which skirted the glade, knelt there and immersed arms and head in the cool water. Vastly refreshed, he went back and stirred Gervis and the grooms to action; and all four, without a word but as if by spoken agreement, began rounding up the horses and examining their hooves.

"So it wasn't a dream!" cried Gervis; and he called all the saints whose names he could remember to bear witness that the episode of the forge had been sober fact. "I never thought to have that old warlock shoe a horse for me," he added.

"When you have served good old Torrice as long as I have, nothing will surprise you," Peter answered with a superior air.

"A search of the smithy now might be worth our while," suggested Gervis. "The secret of that trick would be useful, and it might even win a battle under certain circumstances."

So the two squires left the glade by the way they had come into it less than twelve hours before, in the hope of wresting a hint at least of Merlin's formula for horseshoeing from the deserted smithy while the magician continued to sleep off his potations in the pavilion. They had not far to go; and the back-tracking of the passage of six horses and seven men over fat moss and through lush fern was a simple matter. And there they were. There was the great oak, anyway—the identical old forest patriarch bearing scars of thunderbolts, a herons' nest and three bushes of mistletoe, and doubtless, a hamadryad in its wide and soaring world of greenery. The squires stood and stared. They moved their lips, but no sound came forth. Gervis' tongue was the first to thaw.

"Not here," he whispered. "Not the same tree. This isn't the place."

But he knew better. This was a unique tree. And here were the two ancient thorns that had crowded one end of the smithy, and the hollies that

had crowded the other end of it. This was the place, certainly. A fool would recognize it. Everything was here, just as it had been—except the smithy.

Peter shivered and found his tongue and said: "We'll go back and take another look at the horses' feet."

They returned to the glade and inspected all twenty-four hooves again. The new shoes were still in their places.

"I feared they had flown away after the smithy, forge, anvil and bellows," muttered Gervis.

"They may yet," said Peter grimly.

"But he seems to be a merry old gentleman and a true friend to King Torrice," said Gervis.

"There's more to that old warlock than meets the eye," Peter answered. "As for his friendship—well, from all I've heard, I'd liefer have him with me than against me, but it would suit me best to be entirely free of his attentions. He has a queer sense of humor, and a devilish odd idea of a joke, by old wives' tales I've heard here and there. Take King Arthur Pendragon's birth, for instance: You know about that, of course! Well, was that a decent trick to play on a lady? For all his high blood—he was born a duke, no doubt of that—the mighty wizard Merlin is no gentleman. He doesn't think like one—not like our Torrice, nor like our Lorn, nor like you who can boast an honorable knight for a father, nor even like me, stable-born and stable-bred. Aye, though my gentility be scarce a year old, I'm a better gentleman than Duke Merlin, by my halidom!"

"I agree with you, my Peter—but not so loud, for here they come from the pavilion," warned Gervis.

King Torrice, in a kingly long robe of red silk, issued from the pavilion and looked to his front and right and left with an inquiring air. Sir Lorn, in an equally fine robe, appeared and stood beside his grandfather, yawning and blinking. And that was all. The guest, the great Merlin, did not come forth. The squires ran and halted and uncapped before their knights.

"How are the horses' feet?" asked the King.

"We have inspected them twice this morning, sir, and found all in order and every shoe in its place," Peter replied, and after a moment's hesitation, added: "But the smithy is gone, sir."

King Torrice nodded. He looked thoughtful, but not surprised.

"So is the smithy," he said. "Let us hope and pray that his handiwork does not follow him."

"Every iron is tight and true, sir," Gervis assured him.

Peter spoke hesitantly.

"Sir, may I suggest that it might happen? His handiwork might follow him—the twenty-four iron shoes—

even on the hooves of Your Honor's horses—if all I've heard of that old warlock's magic be true."

The venerable quester blinked and asked: "How so, lad? D'ye suggest that their potency could, and might, pull the hooves off the horses? And why not, come to think of it? It smacks of the Merlin touch, by Judas!"

"Yes sir—but I did not mean it just in that way. I meant to suggest that he might, if in a tricky mood, bid the twenty-four shoes to follow him—horses and all."

"Hah!" the King exclaimed: and he swore by half a dozen saints. "That's his game, depend upon it! And I was simple enough to think he had done us a good turn out of pure good will! The master touch, indeed! But what does he want of us? What devilment is he up to now? 'A horn of ale will settle my score,' said he. And he leaves an empty cask, empty bottles and four empty flasks of Araby. But he is welcome to all that, and would be welcome to a hundred silver crowns besides if I knew that the score was settled. But forewarned is forearmed; and we'll see to it that our horses go our way, not Wizard Merlin's, even if we have to unshoe them and lead them afoot again."

BREAKFAST was eaten; packhorses were loaded; the squires harnessed the knights and then each the other; and all four mounted into their high saddles. It was in all their minds that the march would be resumed in the same direction from which it had been diverted by the discovery of the smithy; so when all the horses wheeled to the right and plunged from the track as if by a common and irresistible impulse, King Torrice cried "Halt!" and pulled mightily on his reins. The squires pulled too, and the grooms pushed manfully against the thrusting heads of the packhorses; but Sir Lorn, up on mighty Bahram and with his thoughts elsewhere—probably in Faeryland—neither drew rein nor cried halt, but crashed onward through fern and underbrush. The pulling and pushing and protesting of the others was of no avail. Where Lorn's great white warhorse led, the King's old charger, the squires' hackneys and the stubborn beasts of burden would follow.

"Sir, this is what I meant!" cried Peter, coming up on the King's left.

"Gramercy!" gasped Torrice, who seldom forgot his manners, especially to his inferiors in rank.

Now they were beneath great oaks, with fallow deer bounding before them through netted sunshine and shadow, and tawny wild swine scattering right and left. Now charger and hackneys and ponies took their own heads for it, and ran as if pos-

essed by devils. At the same moment Lorn drew rein and turned his head and waved a hand. The King and squires were soon up with him. He pointed through a screen of saplings.

"A good track," he said. "A wide and beaten track."

They all looked. There below them lay a better track than they had seen in a sennight, sure enough.

"It must go to some fine town, sir!" Gervis cried.

"I don't like it," said the King. "'Tis not of our own choosing."

"'Twill lead us out of the wilderness, sir, wherever to," Peter said; and in his eagerness to see a market and a tavern again, and houses with ladies and damosels looking down from windows, his distrust of Merlin was almost forgotten.

"Still I don't like it!" Torrice muttered. "Nor what brought us to it against our wills. I have gone my own way since first donning gold spurs. I'm a knight-errant, and baron and king. I acknowledge no human overlord save Arthur Pendragon—and I might defy even him at a pinch, as I have defied his father King Uther upon occasion. And now am I to jink this way and that at the whim of a tricky old magic-monger and the itch of bedeviled horseshoes? Nay, by my halidom!"

Just then the white stallion and Sir Lorn went through the saplings and down the short bank, turned left on the track and trotted purposefully; and the King's charger and the King followed, willy-nilly; and the hackneys and the squires; and the grooms and their charges, clanking and running and eating dust.

"Hold! Hold!" King Torrice bawled, worked up by now to a fury of defiance that was foreign to his naturally placid though restless spirit—but all he got for it was a bitten tongue.

But that flurry of advance took the little cavalcade no farther than around the next curve in the track. There Lorn pulled up, and all the others at his stirrups and his tail. Then all saw that which he had seen first. It was a dwarf standing fairly in the middle of the way and louting low.

"What now, my good manikin?" asked Torrice suspiciously; and he stared searchingly at the little fellow, looking for Merlin in yet another disguise.

Clearly and briefly the dwarf revealed his business. His mistress, Dame Clara, a defenceless widow, begged their lordships' protection from a cruel oppressor who had confined her within her manor house, beaten her stewards, driven off a full half of her flocks and herds, and was even now collecting her rents into his own pouch and demanding her hand in marriage.

"A widow," said the King reflectively, stroking his beard and wagging his head. "A beautiful widow, I presume—and as virtuous as beautiful, of course."

"The most beautiful lady in the land, Sir King!" cried the dwarf.

"Sir King?" queried Torrice. "Hahl! So you know me, my friend! We have met before, is that it?"

"Nay, Your Kingship, but a poor old palmer home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem visited us but a few hours since, and informed my mistress of the approach of the great King Torrice of Har and his noble Irish grandson Sir Lorn, and assured her that now her troubles were ended," replied the manikin.

Torrice looked at Lorn in consternation. He placed a shaking hand on the other's mailed thigh.

"You hear that, dear lad? Merlin—just as I expected! But he'll not make monkeys of us—to pluck his chestnuts out of fires. I'll wrench off those cursed shoes with my bare hands first! We'll turn now, and ride hard the other way."

The young knight said, "Yes, sir," but immediately acted contrarily. Instead of wheeling Bahram, he stooped from his saddle and extended a hand downward to the dwarf, who seized it and was up behind him quick as a wink; and next moment all six horses were trotting forward again, with the great white stallion leading, but the King's tall gray—despite the King's protests—pressing him close.

The forest fell back on either hand, and they rode between ditches and hedges, green meadows and fields of young wheat and barley.

"Not so fast, young lord," cautioned the messenger. "Your great horse may need all his wind in a little while."

Lorn slowed the stallion's pace to a walk, and the rest slowed as well.

"I fear we'll pay dearly yet for our new shoes," said the King.

"But this is in the true spirit of our quest, sir—to succor distressed ladies and damosels," Lorn answered, with unusual animation in voice and eye. "How better can we discover what we are questing for, dear sir—whatever that is?"

"The soul of Beauty," said his grandfather. "In her true and imperishable shape! But at that time I believed myself to be imperishable too. But never mind that now. You are right, dear lad—the quest is the thing; and the higher and harder it is, the more honor to the quester, win or lose. But I'd feel happier about this if Merlin hadn't a finger in it."

They came to the brow of a hill and looked down upon a wide and verdant vale. There was a little river with a red mill, a great water-wheel and a pond lively with fat ducks. There were cornlands and grasslands: or-

chards of apple, pear and plum; hop-gardens which foretold brown ale, and little gardens of sage and thyme and savory foretelling well-stuffed ducks and capons and Michaelmas geese spitted and roasting to a turn; thatched roofs of farmsteads, and in the midst of all, the slated roofs, timber walls and stone tower of a great manor house. They drew rein and gazed at the fair prospect.

"WHAT is it called?" asked King Torrice.

"Joyous Vale," the dwarf replied in a pathetic voice. "It was named in a happier time than now. Your Kingship," he added with a sigh.

"And where is your grievous tyrant?" asked the King.

"His pavilion is behind that screen of willows beyond the ford there; but he will show himself at the sound of a horn," said the dwarf.

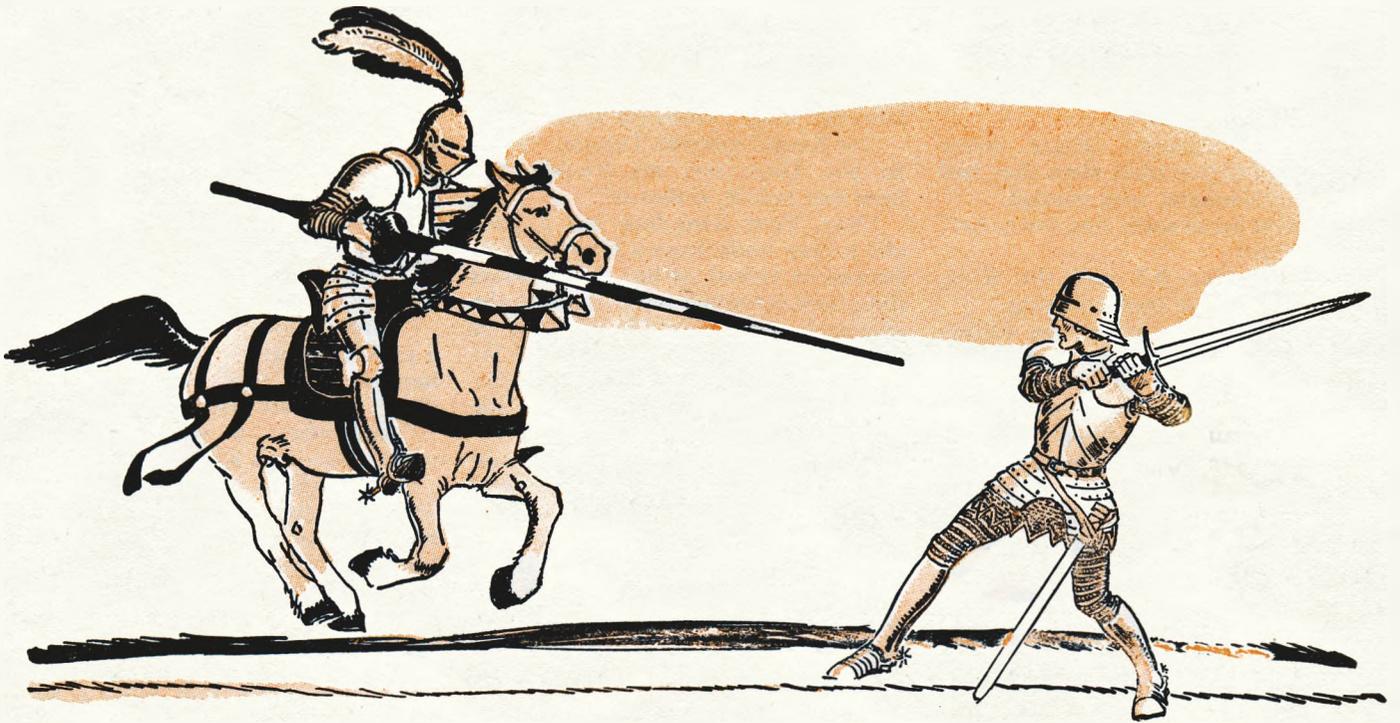
Torrice stroked his beard and said: "As we have come thus far at Merlin's whim, we may as well see this thing through of our own will and in our own way. Peter, you have a horn. But just a moment, if you please. Lorn, the fellow is yours. If there is another, I'll attend to him. If there are more"—he smiled kindly at each of the squires in turn—"we'll have a proper ding-dong set-to, all for one and one for all. And now the horn, friend Peter."

It was already at Peter's lips; and he blew as if he would split it and his cheeks too. The echoes were still flying when a tall and wide figure in a blue robe appeared from behind the willows, stared, shook a fist and retreated from view.

"That is Sir Drecker, the false knight," said the dwarf. "He has a comrade as knavish as himself, but not so large, called Sir Barl, and four stout fellows who are readier with knives than swords. If they are all in camp now, Sir Drecker will soon reappear in full force; but if his rogues are tax-collecting and looting cupboards around-about, Your Kingship will not have to do with him yet awhile, for he will avoid contact until he has a sure advantage."

"D'ye say so, Master Manikin!" cried the King, snapping his eyes and bristling his whiskers. "Then you don't know me and my grandson, nor these two gentlemen our squires, nor, for that matter, these two grooms neither! We'll hunt him like a red pig! We'll exterminate him and his dirty marauders like rats in a granary!"

The dwarf smiled slyly, well pleased with the old King's temper. Sir Lorn, gazing fixedly at the willows beyond the little river, did not speak, but his nostrils quivered and his lips were parted expectantly. The horses stood with tossing heads and pricking ears.



Drecker laughed, for the advantage of horse and spear and shield was all his.

"Here they come!" cried the dwarf.

Two knights on great black horses came slowly into view from the screen of willows. Their visors were closed and their shields dressed before them, but their spears were still at the carry, cocked straight up. They wheeled and drew rein above the ford.

"They have chosen their ground," said the dwarf.

"And very prettily—if they think we are fools enough to go charging down and through and up at them like mad bulls," jeered the King. "But where are the others?" he asked.

"Hiding under the bank, sir, among the osiers, depend upon it, Sir King—just in case their knives are needed," said the little man in green.

Torrice jeered again.

"In silk and fur-lined slippers I am one of the world's most artless fools, but in leather and iron I am quite another person," he told them. "Just as I have acquired all the skills of knightly combat, even so have I learned all the answers to the cowardly tricks of such scoundrels as these: by the hard way. Now give me your attention."

Chapter Three

FIVE DIE, BUT ONE RIDES AWAY

TORRICE and Lorn rode down to the ford at a hand-gallop, with closed visors, dressed shields and leveled spears; and the oppressors of the lady of the manor laughed derisively within their helmets, for now they would have nothing to do but push the witless intruders back into

the river, men and horses together, as they scrambled, blown and off balance, to the top of the bank. But it did not happen just so. The false knights moved forward easily to the sounds of splashing and the clanging of iron on stones down there below their line of vision; but when nothing appeared at the top of the bank—no head of horse, no plume-topped casque, no wobbling spear-point—they drew rein. Now all was silent down there. And now the two squires of the intrusive knights came on at a hand-gallop, and clattered down to the ford and so from view; and silence reigned again.

Sir Drecker felt a chill of misgiving. He cursed, but uncertainly, and ordered his companion to advance until he could see what was going on under the bank. Instead of obeying, Sir Barl uttered a warning cry and pointed a hand. Drecker looked and saw a dismounted knight straightening himself at the top of the bank some ten spear-lengths to his left. Drecker laughed, for the advantage of horse and spear and shield was all his. He wheeled his great charger; but not even a good horse can be jumped to full gallop from a standing start, however deep the spurring. In this case, the spurring was too deep. The horse came on crookedly, with rebellious plunges. Sir Lorn moved suddenly in every muscle, and his sword whirled and bit the shaft of the spear clean through. Lorn dropped his sword then, and laid hold of the tyrant with both hands and dragged him from the lurching saddle. He knelt to unlatch the tyrant's helmet.

"Mercy!" screamed Drecker; and he straightway made a prayer pitiful enough to soften a heart of stone.

Lorn stayed his hand, but the weakening of his purpose was due to disgust, not pity.

"Faugh!" he cried; and he rose from his knees and booted Drecker's iron-clad ribs with an iron toe.

HE stood straight and looked around him. He saw King Torrice come up from the ford on his venerable gray, moving slowly but with leveled lance, and ride at Sir Barl, who was ready and riding hard. Lorn's heart misgave him for a moment, but recovered as quickly when Barl's horse went clean out from under its master and galloped away, leaving that unhandy rogue grassed beneath a split shield and a punctured breastplate. Now he remembered the rogue Drecker, but only to see him up and running and already ten yards off. And now his white stallion Bahram topped the bank within a few paces of him, swung his great head and glowing eyes to survey the field, snorted like a dragon and went in thunderous pursuit of Sir Drecker.

After one backward glance, the tyrant went faster than any knight in full harness had ever before gone on his own unaided legs. He fled toward his own horse, which stood at no great distance. He would make it, even though the white stallion should continue to gain a yard on him at every earth-jarring bound. He would just make it, with nothing to spare—but once in his saddle, he would beat the

devil off with his mace. He saw the mace, short-hafted and spike-headed, where it awaited his hand on the saddlebow; and it held his agonized gaze, and spurred him to the utmost cruel fury of effort, like a bright star of salvation. Now! One more wrench of muscles, nerves and heart, and he would be safe! He flung himself at the saddle, touched it with outflung hands—and the black horse swerved. Screaming like a snared rabbit, he fell flat on his vized face.

SIR LORN, who had stood staring like one entranced, shook off a mailed glove, thrust two fingers into his mouth and whistled like a kelpie. The great stallion clamped all four hooves to earth, tearing and uprolling the sod before him, and stayed his course a hand's-breadth short of his quarry. He stood uncertain, tossing and swinging his head and clashing bared teeth; but at a second shrill blast, he wheeled and trotted back to his master. Lorn patted his neck and was about to mount, but was checked by King Torrice.

"Too late," said Torrice, pointing.

Sir Lorn looked and saw the scoundrel whom he had spared twice up on his strong horse and in full flight, across meadow and cornland, toward the nearest edge of forest.

"Why did you let him go, dear lad?"

Lorn looked apologetically at his grandfather, who was afoot only a pace away, with the old gray's reins in his hand.

"A false knight," continued Torrice mildly. "Murderer, torturer, infanticide, seducer, traducer and common thief, according to the manikin Joseph. He would be better dead."

"I'm sorry," Lorn muttered with a red face. "Had he cursed me, or had he turned on Bahram—but no, he squealed for mercy. Mice have more manhood. I stayed my hand, and Bahram's hooves, for very shame—shame of all creatures made by Almighty God in His own image."

The old man was startled, distressed and confused. For all his ding-dong years of unconventional, even crazy questing, and his competence in the making of romaunts and rondels, he was still, at heart and head, a gentleman of the old school rather than a philosopher.

"Never mind it, dear lad!" he cried hurriedly. "There's no great harm done, I dare say. But your squire could have used that big horse very well. We have five remounts, however; and the least of them is bigger than a hackney. All proper war-horses. I shall shift my saddle to the late Sir Barl's big courser, and so let faithful old Clarence here travel light from now on. We have done very well. Five dead rogues and five quick horses, and not a scratch taken."

"And the blackest rogue and the biggest horse gone clean away!" moaned Sir Lorn. "But never again—no matter how so he may squeal and pray like a soul in torment!" he cried.

They crossed the little river and went behind the willows and took possession of the pavilions and everything else that they found there. The false knight who had fallen to King Torrice's spear, and the four knaves who had fallen to the swords and knives of squires Peter and Gervis and grooms Goggin and Billikin, were buried deep, and without benefit of clergy, by a party of rejoicing yokels.

The dwarf, whose name was Joseph, ran forth and back between manor house and camp, whistling in high spirits. He was a lively little man of uncertain age, flickering eyes and a sly smile. He fetched wine and cakes, with the Lady Clara's compliments and thanks, and took back King Torrice's poetical expressions of devotion. He fetched jellies and sweetmeats, and a pretty message from the lady to the import that she had made them with her own hands of the very last of her store of honey and other such ingredients: whereupon the King sent back to her, by the two squires in their best suits of velvet and Turkey leather, his last crock of brandied peaches, a cup of silver gilt and a necklace of French workmanship.

The squires went side by side, with Joseph strutting importantly before. Master Peter carried the crock, which was considered by King Torrice as the senior gift, and Master Gervis carried the cup and necklace. Peter did not like the mission.

"Much more of this tomfoolery, and by Sir Michael and Sir George, I cast my new gentility like a snake his old skin and go back to my currycombs!" he muttered to his companion, as they marched along the most direct path to the great house.

Gervis laughed at him. Gervis had been born and bred to this sort of thing, and liked it.

"Then the more fool you, my Peterkin!" replied Gervis. "There would be no gentility but for the thing this mission of ours is a token of. Without it, chivalry would be naught but dust and sweat and spilled blood and broken teeth; and if bruises and empty bellies and foundered horses were the only rewards for questing, how long would knights-errant continue to mount and ride? Our royal old Torrice prates of the Spirit of Beauty, but it's the soft eyes and red lips which beset his ways that have withheld him all these years from the softest arm-chair in the biggest castle of Har. As for young Lorn—do you think he rides only for love of weary marches and hard knocks? Nay, nay, my Peterkin! He seeks that which he can neither remember nor forget. The Spirit of

Beauty? Not so! The eyes and lips and hands and tender breast of a damosel he knew are his quest: and that she happened to be a heartless witch as well as an enchanting companion is his sad misfortune."

"I've had neither time nor opportunity for such plays, and no more acquaintance with elegant damosels than with luring witches," said Peter gruffly.

"But you have bussed goosegirls behind haycocks," said Gervis, and as Peter ignored this, he added: "Goose-girl or damosel or Queen Mab herself, the only differences between them are rosewater and moonshine. They all ply the same arts: otherwise, there would be no more chivalry in the courts of Camelot and Carleon than in forests of red swine."

"A pox on it!" muttered Peter.

People of all ages and several conditions gathered about their path from every direction. There were wobbly gaffers and gammers, and able-bodied men and women, and youths and wenches and toddlers and babes in arms. Only a few wore the bronze collars of serfs, but all appeared to be of the humblest sorts of peasantry—plowmen and herdsmen and ditchers, without a yeoman or steward among them, nor even a smith. All stared curiously and hopefully, yet fearfully, at the two squires, though these bore gifts in their hands and had only short ornamental daggers at their belts.

"Bah!" exclaimed Peter; whereat the nearer members of the crowd cringed backward as if from a whip.

"Are they sheep?" he continued, but less emphatically. "The tyrants were but six—and right here I see enough brawn to overcome a dozen such."

JOSEPH turned his head and replied, with a rueful grimace:

"You say truth, fair sir: but lacking a master, muscly brawn has no more fight in it than clods of earth. Sir Gayling and his squire were long past their physical prime; nor had they ever been notable cavaliers, but bookmen and stargazers and alchemists. They were murdered in my lady's rose-garden by the base knight Drecker—spitted like larks, and as easily; and the high steward and Tom Bowman the head forester—old gentlemen both—were waylaid and done to death in the North Wood; and the miller, a masterful man, was slain trickily in his mill by the other dastard knight; and their six knaves set upon Ned Smith working late at his anvil, and slew him; and after that, the four that had come alive out of the smithy, murdered three farmers and a master cheesewright in their beds."

"Weren't there any men about the house—butlers and the like?" asked Peter. "Scullions? Grooms and gardeners?"

"All too old," said Joseph. "Boo-hood companions of poor Sir Gayling, most of them."

"A dozen old men hobbling on sticks, or old women even, would have served to chase off Drecker and his rogues," said Gervis. "Better still, a mixed force. I can see it in my mind's eye: the old lady herself, up on her palfrey, leading a host armed with crutches and distaffs against the invaders. That would have confounded them, and saved us the trouble of killing them."

He chuckled at the conceit, then sighed. Being young and romantic, he had hoped for something more amusing than the relict and household of a doddering old philosopher. The dwarf's only answer was a slow, peculiar smile. And so they passed through the wide gate and were met in the courtyard by an ancient major-domo and two old lackeys. After having names and style and mission shouted into his left ear by Joseph, the major-domo, leaning on his staff of office, led the squires into the great hall.

Chapter Four

DAME CLARA ENTERTAINS HER CHAMPIONS

THE squires were gone a long time on that errand: fully two hours, by King Torrice's impatient reckoning.

"So here you are at last!" the King exclaimed with a poor effort at severity. "I began to fear that Merlin had waylaid you in the guise of a distressed damosel. Now what of your visit, lads? Were my poor gifts well received? And what is your opinion of the poor lady, and of the situation generally? The late Sir Gayling, I gather, devoted his time to stargazing and kindred impractical pursuits, with the result that his affairs were in a sad way even before his foul murder. The manikin has hinted as much, at least, in his own elusive manner. But even so, we have no time to administer the estate of every distressed person who receives our chivalrous services. We are knights-errant, not lawyers or magistrates. Have I neglected my own earthy interests all my life—the one score baronies and five score manors of my Kingdom of Har—to concern myself, at this late day, with a stranger's petty problems of lost rents and ravished cheeselofts? Not so, by my halidom!

"I am sorry for the poor old dame, of course; but we have already done our knightly duty by her. If she will accept a few hundred crowns, she is welcome to them. But we must be on our way again by noon tomorrow, without fail. Now tell me your opinion of this Lady Clara, my lads. Her messages have been prettily worded—

but her manikin Joseph is a clever fellow, I suspect."

Gervis slanted a glance at Peter, but the senior squire continued to look straight to his front.

"Yes sir," said Gervis. "Very clever. I mean very pretty. That's to say, the lady was very polite. And she sent another message to Your Highness—and Sir Lorn—and it includes Peter and me too. It is an invitation to supper this evening."

Torrice sighed. "Supper with a mourning widow," he muttered. "Do you know, dear lads," he went on in a better voice, "I fear I took a strain in the spitting of that rogue Barl. It looked easy—but the fact is, I'm a shade past my physical prime. A wrench when the full weight of man and horse was arrested by my point, you understand. A wrench of the back, which has already extended upward to the neck—a thing not to be disregarded, especially at my age. I have seen young knights incapacitated for days by just such wrenches. I shall stop here and rub my neck with tallow. See—I can hardly turn my head. And I am sure that my company would be of no more comfort to the bereaved chatelaine than her tears and moans would be to me. With a grandson and two squires to represent me at the supper table, I shall rest here on my cot with an easy conscience, no matter how uneasy a neck."

Again Gervis slanted a glance at Peter; and this time it was returned.

"Then we may go, sir?" cried Gervis, joyously.

Torrice regarded him with raised brows.

"It is the wine, sir," said Peter. "Gervis enjoys his cup. Dame Clara is very hospitable. We have tasted her wine already, sir. Wines, I should say—various but all rare. The despoilers did not get into the cellar. Old Sir Gayling's father was a collector of vintages from many lands, but Sir Gayling drank only milk and whey, it seems. And the lady said that she would produce even rarer vintages at supper than those already tasted by Gervis and me. And the butler told me there will be a lark-and-pigeon pie for supper."

"And strawberries and a sillabub," said Gervis.

"Say you so?" murmured the King; and he bent his brows and stroked his whiskers consideringly. "Poor lady! She might take it to heart, as an affront—my refusal of her hospitality. I don't want to hurt her feelings, but neither do I want her or any woman to think me discourteous, which she might if I excused myself on the plea of a crick in the neck. So, on second thoughts and for our common credit in the poor dame's eyes, I shall go, and grin and bear it."

Sir Lorn, who had lain flat and motionless and silent on a cot throughout the conversation, now swung his feet to the ground and sat up and spoke in a dull voice.

"I'll stay here. The poor lady owes me nothing at all—neither supper nor thanks."

"Nonsense!" his grandfather protested. "You pulled down the biggest of them all—and you afoot! No champion in Arthur Pendragon's train could have done it better, my dear boy."

"And to what end, sir?" Lorn muttered. "I pulled down the biggest rogue from the biggest horse—and they are gone unscathed, man and horse! But your rogue, and all the rest of them, are buried deep, and their good horses are ours. Peter and Gervis bloodied their swords, and the grooms their knives. Only I failed in duty. I'll stop right here, sir, by your leave."

But after half an hour of argument—in which Gervis was almost as voluble as the King, and even Peter grumbled and swore in support of the majority argument—Sir Lorn gave in.

Joseph reappeared at the pavilion to escort the guests to the manor house. The dwarf was still in green, but now of silk and velvet instead of wool. The knights and squires were sumptuously garbed. Having arrayed himself as if for a royal feast at Westminster or the court of Camelot, the King had insisted that Lorn and the squires should help themselves to what remained of his extensive wardrobe. Sir Lorn and Peter had accepted no more of this additional finery than could be politely avoided, but young Gervis had taken full advantage of the opportunity. They made the short passage from pavilion to great house on foot, with Joseph strutting before. People came running.

"MARK His Kingship's mortal great whiskers with more hair in them than three horses' tails!" cackled a toothless gaffer.

"I vum they be all kings an' princes," shrilled a woman.

A young man cried: "It was him—the old gentleman—as run a spear through Sir Barl—through shield an' mail an' breastbone—like skewer through duckling."

Another cried: "And I see the big young prince there pull Sir Drecker to earth like a sack of corn an' set dagger to gullet—an' Sir Drecker get up an' run an' ride away with his head half cut off."

"Not so!" cried the first. "I see that too, but not like that, Dickon Cowherd. I was up in the pollard willow. I see the prince spare his gullet, an' kick his ribs, an'—"

"Mind your manners, you louts!" screamed the dwarf, with a baleful glare around and a hand at his belt.

IT was still daylight without, but the torches flared and smoked in the great hall. The tottering major-domo met King Torrice and his companions at the threshold and led them within. Joseph ran ahead and disappeared. The guests advanced slowly on the heels of the house-steward. The King looked about him alertly, narrowing his eyes against the wavering reds and blacks of flames and shadows. He observed trophies of arms and the chase on the walls—weapons of chivalry and vengery of an earlier time, and moth-eaten boars' heads with upthrust tusks, and pale skulls and horns of stags and wild bulls, and one even of a unicorn; and toothy masks of wolves, badgers, wildcats, otters and a dragon; but though he gave the green fangs and leathery forked tongue of the dragon a second glance—an inferior specimen, in his opinion, obviously—his concern was for the weapons.

He stepped twice from his place in the slow procession to jiggle antique swords in their sheaths, and nodded at finding that they would come clear easily, despite the dust of idle years. He glanced and smiled meaningly at his grandson and over a shoulder at the squires. Peter and Gervis grinned and nodded back at him. Good old Torrice! Always the gentleman! He would as lief and as likely be seen consorting with murderers as wearing arms and armor—little begemmed daggers are but table-gear—when supping with ladies; but to ascertain the whereabouts of the nearest weapons, just in case of accident, was no breach of etiquette.

The major-domo drew aside a curtain of arras and stood aside with it, bowed low. The King and Sir Lorn halted and blinked, and the squires halted at their heels and blinked past their shoulders. For a moment, all their eyes were dazed by the shimmer and shine of tapers. For a moment it seemed to them that the place was full of slender, pointed yellow flames, and gleams and sparkles of fire from metal and crystal.

"Welcome, King Torrice," said a lilting voice. "Welcome, Sir Lorn. Welcome again, friends Peter and Gervis."

And now they saw her, but vaguely and glimmeringly at first, like a face and form materializing from the sheen and soft radiance about her, but more clearly as she approached, and definitely when she stood within a small step of the King and extended a hand.

"This—forgive me, my dear! Your Ladyship must try to excuse me—forgive me—my confusion—surprise," he stammered.

"You are forgiven," she murmured, and laughed softly.

He sank on one knee, took the proffered hand lightly and pressed his lips gallantly to the bejeweled fingers,

while his twirling wits cried a warning between his ears:

"This isn't real—nor right! More devilment of Merlin's, this—or worse! Have a care, old fool!"

But he was smiling blandly when he straightened his knees and released her hand, though he staggered slightly and blinked again.

Now the lady gazed at Lorn, and he stared back at her. She smiled a little with her bright, soft mouth; and her eyes—whatever their color in honest sunlight—were black and warm and limpid. But his eyes were clouded strangely, and his lips unsmiling. She put out her hand shyly and uttered a shy, tender whisper of soft laughter. Then he knelt lightly, took and kissed her fingers and rose lightly to his feet again—but to sway and stagger for a moment, and steady himself with a fumbling hand on the King's shoulder. Squire Peter saluted the lady's hand without kneeling to it, but his face and the back of his leathery neck were red as fire. Squire Gervis put even the King's courtly gesture to shame, and kept his lips on the jeweled and scented fingers so long that he might well have been testing the pearls in the rings.

The guests found themselves at table: but how this came about, not one of the four could have told you. It was a round table, and not large. It was spread with damask as white and bright as snow, and illuminated by scores of beeswax tapers in tall, branched sticks of silver; and there were other clusters of tapers in sconces on the walls. Stemmed cups of foreign crystal as fragile as bubbles to the eye, and vessels of gold and silver, some of them studded with gems, glowed and glistened like flowers and stars. Behind one chair stood the major-domo in his robes of office, with the manikin beside him, and behind each of the others stood an ancient footman in a livery of murrey and peagreen laced with tarnished silver. There were only five chairs. There was but the one lady present. The King and Peter were on her right, and Sir Lorn and Gervis on her left—but thanks to the smallness and shape of the table, none was far removed from her. In fact, the squires could gaze at their ease, whereas their masters had to turn their heads slightly to look at her.

"My companion, the damosel Mary, is indisposed, but hopes to join us later, with her harp," the lady informed them all, but with her gaze and smile on the King.

Torrice acknowledged the information with a feeble smirk. He was still mazed. He had braced himself to meet the lachrymose gratitude of a bereaved dame of advanced age, and heartbreaking pleas for further relief. And what had he met? Could this be

the widow of a doddering old stargazer? He had seen, and had to do with, beauties in every court in Christendom, and dames and damosels of devastating charms in many sylvan bowers and remote castles, and—or was this but vain thinking?—ladies whose enchantments were more than human, without losing his freedom for long at a time. And to lose it now! His very soul, at last! Nay, it could not be! Not his free and questing soul! He would not believe it. He glanced past her, at his grandson. Lorn was staring fixedly to his front, with a pale face. Torrice glanced farther, at young Gervis, who was regarding their hostess with bright-eyed, pink-faced and rapturous ardor. He looked at Peter, hoping that his practical, unvisionary, tough ex-groom at least would be unaffected by this thing which had already enmeshed his gentler companions. But not so! That matter-of-fact young man was gaping even more ardently than Gervis.

Yellow wine was poured. It made giant topazes of the cups of crystal. The lark-and-pigeon pie was served. The King had set out with a fine appetite, but where was it now? He had only a thirst now. He drained his cup. It was refilled, and so he emptied it again. The squires also had lost their appetites and retained their thirsts. But the young knight, it seemed, had lost both. Of the five, only the lady comported herself without sign of mental or emotional disturbance. She sipped the yellow wine occasionally and composedly, but not—so Torrice observed excitedly—from a bubble of rare glass, but from the little silver-gilt cup of his giving.

And when he saw, at that incomparable white throat, the modest necklace which he had sent to her, a confusion of shame and exultation all but suffocated him. Why had he not sent his finest remaining string of emeralds, or of diamonds or rubies, or brought it in his pouch? Why had he ever distributed such things—priceless treasures all from the secret and immemorial treasure-chest of Har—to the right and the left up and down the world and over the years? He moaned at the thought of the wasted expenditures of his lifelong quest. No exception could be taken to the quest itself, as he had proved on the bodies of hundreds with spear and sword: but it graveled him now to recall, however mistily in most instances, the innumerable necks and bosoms of beauties—aye, and the wrists and fingers—adorned by him on his long and crooked road to Beauty herself.

FOR he could not doubt he had found her—Beauty herself, soul and body in one—though this astounding realization was tinged with a fearful reluctance and a sense of weariness

that was almost of despair. His crystal cup was shining like a topaz again. He drained it once more and sighed profoundly. So this was the end of the high quest! And the achievement was as dust and ashes in his heart and mouth—in the heart and mouth of an old man. For Merlin had destroyed his dream of immortal manhood. Now he mourned the fact that his quest had not lasted out his mortal life. Now he knew that, however far he might ride in the months or years remaining to him, the marvel he had sought would lie behind him, found by him, but not for him to grasp.

His crystal cup glowed again, but now redly like a great ruby. He drained it. He turned his head and met her questioning gaze. Or was it questioning? Or telling? Which ever—whatever—it held his own gaze fast.

"Who are you?" he asked; and his voice sounded strange to him, and from far away.

She whispered, leaning a little to him and smiling: "I am the lady of the manor."

He said: "You are very young, and Sir Gayling was old—but not so old as I."

She veiled her eyes and unveiled them instantly, even brighter, and deeper, and kinder than before.

"You are not old like poor Gayling. He was so old that only the stars were old enough for him to love. But I know about you, King Torrice of Har, who have kept a young heart without the help of sorcery, on a high quest. Oh, a mad quest—of pleasure and excitement and change: but you called it noble, and by a noble name—the Quest of the Soul of Beauty."

"It is noble," he protested, but weakly. He tried to avoid her gaze, but in vain.

"I am a poet too—not only a knight-at-arms, not only a lord of lands," he went on confusedly. "Beauty! I have sought her at peril of limb and life, at cost of blood and treasure. The Soul of Beauty. I have made songs to her: the best in all Christendom. They have been stolen and sung by generations of jinking troubadours. But I am not the Lord God, nor Archangel Michael, nor even a sneaking wizard, to know soul from body at a glance. There was Lorn's grandmother. There was nothing of beauty there deeper than her skin. And the Princess of Castile, with—but what matter now? It was long ago."

"And now you have given up," she sighed, and withdrew her gaze.

He saw that the cup of crystal had become a glowing ruby again; and again he turned it back to a bubble of air.

"No, I have found you," he muttered. "Beauty! Soul and body in one. And mortal. And I am mortal

—but old—as old as Merlin; but not ageless, like that warlock. There is nothing now—the quest ended—only the hope for a quick end left—and God's mercy!"

She looked at him. His head drooped, and he stared down at his trencher with unseeing, desolated eyes. She glanced to her left. The young knight, staring fixedly at a candle-flame, paid no heed. She smiled at the squires, both of whom were regarding her ardently. She turned back to the old King.

"I know all about you and your quest, and the Irish grandson and the trick Merlin played you, long ago, in the guise of a hag in a red cloak," she said.

"The old palmer told you," he muttered. "He was Merlin."

She laughed softly.

"Yes, he was that warlock, that poor palmer. Do you think I did not know? Or that I did not know about you without any help from him? Look at me."

He looked at her. She smiled and touched his nearer wrist with light finger-tips.

"Do you see that for which you have quested and bled, and kissed and ridden away from, all your long, mad life?"

He nodded and moaned.

"Nay, do not grieve, dear Torrice. You are old, 'tis true—but the beauty you quested for is old too. And I am old too."

"Are you? What are you?" he gasped.

"Are you afraid of me—even if I am a sorceress?" she sighed.

Chapter Five

WAS IT SORCERY OR INSPIRATION?

IT was late when the Lady Clara's guests returned to the pavilion beside the river and the willows. Joseph, who had guided them with a lanthorn, stopped only long enough to light a few tapers for them. King Torrice sat down heavily on the first couch he chanced to stumble against, and held his head with both hands. Peter and Gervis did likewise. Only Sir Lorn appeared to have the complete mastery of his legs.

"It was the wines—yellow and red and green," moaned the King.

"And pink," moaned Gervis.

"Pink? Nay, I saw no pink. What did you see, Lorn? Did you see a pink wine?"

"No sir, only yellow—and I drank but two cups," mumbled the young knight, who stood steadily enough, but with a hand to his brow and his eyes burning in his pallid face.

"There were wines of every color," said Peter thickly, "and I drank them all—like one bewitched."

"And you're drunk!" Torrice cried fretfully. "You too, Gervis! Me too! But you, dear lad? You must be sober—on two cups."

"I don't know," muttered Lorn.

"You can't be otherwise, dear lad. Two cups. Tell me what you saw. Tell me of this Dame Clara. She looked very young to me. How did she look to you?"

"Yes sir. Very young."

"And—ah!—comely?"

"Beautiful!" cried Gervis, springing to his feet, only to reseal himself as suddenly and clasp his head again.

Lorn nodded.

"And you found her beautiful, dear lad?"

Lorn nodded again. Squire Peter uttered a short, harsh note of despairing laughter.

"Why don't you say it?" he cried.

"Drunk or sober, you could see she's beautiful! I could see she's beautiful, and I'm not afraid to say so—tell the world—mauger my head! Me, stable-born! That lady's beautiful, I say! Rose of the world! Who says she isn't?"

"You are drunk, good Peter," said the King. "Calm yourself. My poor brains are jangled enough without your unmannerly howls. Nobody says she's not beautiful. I asked for a sober man's opinion, that's all."

Peter muttered an apology and hung his head.

"Sir, I'm not sober, but I want to say that I think as you do. Your Highness—Your Majesty," said young Gervis, speaking with care and a look of profound deliberation. "I think—my studied opinion, sir—she is everything you named her in your wonderful song."

"What's that?" cried King Torrice. "What song?"

"Your latest, sir—and most wonderful, in my humble opinion. The one you sang tonight."

"You're mad! I did not sing tonight. But hold! Or did I? Now that you mention it, I seem to—but no, I'd remember it—unless I was bewitched!"

"Gervis speaks truth," said Sir Lorn, gravely and sadly. "You sang tonight, sir; and it was a song I had never heard before, and the best I have ever heard. It was after the Damosel Mary played her harp and sang a few ditties."

The King protested that he knew nothing of it.

"Then you were bewitched in very truth," said his grandson. "For she made a great to-do with the biggest harp I ever saw."

"And a voice to match it," said Peter.

Torrice protested ignorance again, but uncertainly.

"And yet you left your seat and went to her and took the harp from her,"



"You took the harp, and made a song to Lady Clara. You called her Beauty and Desire, and some heathenish names I had not heard before."

said Gervis. "You must remember that, sir! Your eyes were wide open. And Lady Clara said to the damosel, who tried to push you away—and she was old enough to be Lady Clara's grandmother: 'Let him have it, Mary.' So she let Your Majesty have it, but with a scowl on her face. Then you made a song to Lady Clara. You sang like a flute, sir, and now and again like a trumpet, but mostly like a flute; all the while the harp sobbed and sighed and hummed like little breezes in a forest of pines. You called her Beauty and Desire, sunshine and moonlight and starshine, saint and enchantress, Love and Life and Immortality, goddess and witch, a rose and a dew-drop and a star, and by some heathenish names I had not heard before. And Lady Clara wept but did not hide her face, and smiled through her tears. And the ancient damosel covered her face with her hands, and so did Sir Lorn, and even Peter had to wipe his eyes."

THE KING turned a troubled, inquiring face to his grandson.

"It is the truth," said Sir Lorn grimly.

The King looked at Peter.

"It is Christ's truth," honest Peter told him, gruffly. "Nay, Satan's, more likely! You were bewitched and bedeviled, sir. No mortal man—not the best poet in the world—could make such a song else—nor any drink from this side heaven or hell!"

"Inspiration!" cried Torrice fretfully. "Must you bawl witchcraft and devilry just because I make a good song? I'm a poet. Pure inspiration. But as I cannot recall it—song nor incident—not clearly. . . . The wine may have something to do with it. But enough of this! Let me sleep now. We all need sleep."

"May I suggest, sir, that Duke Merlin bedeviled the wine?" ventured Gervis.

"Hah—that old trickster!" the King exclaimed. "What more likely—since he brought us here on his bedeviled horseshoes? He doesn't love me, that warlock! He first tricked me long ago, in the matter of an elixir. And today he stayed Lorn's dagger from Drecker's throat. And tonight those wines! We must be on our guard every moment, at every step. But now let me sleep!"

AFTER a little while of grumbling and uneasy tossing, the dark pavilion was silent save for the old King's fitful and uneven snores, and the occasional sighs and moans of his companions. Every one of them suffered strange dreams. Torrice fought with a knight in black armor, both of them afoot in dry sand, until arms and legs ached with weariness; and his sword broke on the black helmet, but that same stroke brought the sable knight groveling in the sand; and when Torrice tore away the helmet—behold, the thing disclosed was a fleshless, eyeless skull! He had done battle with a dead man.

And Sir Lorn wandered about the margins of autumnal tarns and in desolate mountain gorges with red sunsets flaring at their far ends. And the squires pursued damosels who turned into hags in red cloaks, and creatures of mist and moonshine, and hedge-goblins and young dragons, between their hands. All were dreams of ill omen, according to the best authorities; so it was fortunate that only illusive and elusive fragments remained with the dreamers when they woke. . . .

It was another fine summer morning. Sir Lorn, who had taken only

two cups of the Lady Clara's yellow wine, was the first of the four cavaliers to wake. He went out from the pavilion softly and into a new world of level sunshine and dew-washed greenery. His eyes were clear, but his mind and heart were darkened by dream-shadows. As he looked about him, the shadows withdrew. He saw Goggin and Billikin busy among the horses; and he heard them too, for the lively fellows were whistling to match the birds in the willows and orchards. Observing the increase of the herd by the five big black chargers, yesterday flashed on his mind like pictures:

Five strange horses? Five instead of six! He alone had failed to contribute a good beast to the herd and a dead rogue to the common grave! Again he saw Drecker galloping off unscathed; and he blushed with shame. To blame the warlock Merlin did not occur to his honest mind. He blamed his own faint heart. To slay a man horsed and spear in hand, or afoot and sword in hand on even terms, had never distressed him greatly, for he had never—unless in that time of which he had no clear memory?—engaged to the death with any save tyrants and murderers and false knights of sorts; but to kill one beaten and disarmed and squealing for mercy, he lacked the required hardihood. He knew this, and felt guilt and shame. And then he thought of that old questing king-errant his grandfather, asleep there in the pavilion behind him. He had seen that champion in six mortal combats, but never had he seen him put a disarmed and beaten foe to death.

So he thought less shamefully now of having spared that false knight.

YOUNG Gervis issued from the pavilion and greeted his master with a merry face. Sir Lorn regarded him with surprise, having expected to see pallid cheeks and bleary eyes.

"It was faery wine of a certainty, sir, for even if I had drunk as little last night as you did, I swear I'd feel no brighter than I do," babbled the squire. "And I pray the same for the King and Peter. I suffered some horrid dreams—but they have fled already, glory be to the holy saints! And now to bathe and shave, sir."

"Shave what?" Lorn asked gravely.

"I have numerous sprouts, sir," Gervis informed him proudly; "and 'tis a full sennight since I last laid steel to them. And may I venture to suggest that a touch of the razor might become you as well, sir; for I seem to remember having noticed something last night—and that by the dazzle of tapers. We may meet her again—the lady of the manor, that is to say!—at any moment; and in broad daylight, I hope. That's to say, I hope the King doesn't intend to ride away without seeing her again."

Lorn fingered his chin and cheeks thoughtfully, and puckered his brow, before he replied:

"I hope not. He can't do that. She—these defenceless people—are still in peril. It is my fault, for letting Drecker escape. So it is my duty to remain till all danger from Drecker is past. He will see that, at a word from me—my grandfather will. And I think you are right about my face. But my razor is duller than a hedger's hook."

"You may use mine. It is of Damascus-steel and honed to a whisper. Come down to the river, sir, and we'll both use it."

So they went down to a screened pool in the river and bathed and shaved. They were joined there by Peter, who raised his eyebrows for a moment in acknowledgment of their smooth faces, but reported matter-of-factly that he had inspected the horse-lines and found all correct.

"The shoes?" murmured Lorn.

"Every shoe still firm in its place," Peter assured him.

"Is the King awake yet?" asked Lorn.

"He was combing essence of lavender into his beard when I saw him last," said Peter.

Gervis laughed and said: "A dash of the same, and a touch of the razor, would not be amiss with you, my Peterkin."

Peter nodded, stepped close to his fellow squire, took the razor of Damascus from unresisting fingers, and a little vial of crystal from Gervis' wallet with his other hand, and knelt and stooped to the mirror of the pool—all without a word or a smile. Merry young Gervis laughed again.

"But that's not lavender, my Peterkin! 'Tis essence of laylock."

"Anything will serve but essence of horse," muttered Peter.

Gervis winked at Sir Lorn.

"There's sorcery in it, by my halidom!" he cried, and laughed again. "And sorcery more potent than any of old Duke Merlin's hocus-pocus. When did our Peterkin ever before prefer lavender or laylock to honest horse?"

"I don't agree with you," Lorn said gravely. "I think all this babbling of witchcraft is childish—in this case. It is all quite human and natural—especially for Peter to become more particular about his toilet, no matter how suddenly. As for your faery wine—it was good wine, pure and old, that's all. There's no sorcery here."

"I but joked, sir," Gervis replied. "But you cannot deny enchantment. There was enchantment last night of more than the juice of earthy grapes, else how did the King come to make that song, and sing it like an angel, without knowing anything about it?"

"Inspiration—as he told us himself," said the knight; but his tone was more troubled than assured. "He is, in truth, a great poet. I admit that the

wine he drank made him forget the performance when we told him of it last night—but I think we shall find that he can recall it now, and even the words and air of the song."

They returned to the pavilion, leaving Peter still splashing and scraping.

"Look there!" gasped Gervis, gripping his master's arm.

THEY stood and looked. The curtains of the pavilion's doorway were drawn back to right and left, and King Torrice sat smiling out at them across a table bright with naperies and silver dishes and polished horns and flagons. Behind him stood the manikin Joseph and one of the ancient footmen.

"Fried trout and hot scones!" he cried. "Strawberries and clotted cream. Brown ale and dandelion wine. Lady Clara sent it over. Come and eat, dear lads. No time to spare. Where's Peter?"

"No time to spare?" Lorn echoed. "What d'ye mean, sir? You cannot possibly intend to take the road today, dear sir—and that parlous rogue I spared, foul Drecker, still at large?"

"Certainly not!" retorted the King, fretfully, with a quick change of countenance for the worse. "We recognize our responsibilities, I hope. I said nothing of taking to the road again." His merry smile flashed again. "We are to attend Lady Clara on a tour of inspection of her demesne, to see what damage it has suffered. She sent word of it with our breakfasts. Half-armor and swords. All six of us mounted."

Both Sir Lorn and Gervis looked their relief. They took their places at the table and ate and drank as if for a wager. Peter arrived, smelling like a spring garden, and with his face shining like a summer apple; and upon hearing the King's news, he sat down and fairly gobbled and guzzled.

They paraded in the forecourt of the great house within the hour. Sir Lorn was up on his white stallion, but the King rode the black charger from which he had so recently hurled the late Sir Barl. The squires were on black warhorses too, and the grooms Goggin and Billikin forked the squires' lively hackneys. All six wore breast-plates and long swords, but there was not a helmet among them. The King's, Lorn's, Peter's and Gervis' caps were of crimson velvet, and the grooms' were of leather. The gentlemen sported long feathers in theirs, the knights' fastened with gold brooches and the squires' with silver. The Lady Clara appeared from the gloom within and paused under the arch of the doorway, with the Damosel Mary, seemingly old enough to be her grandmother, blinking over her shoulder. The King and Sir Lorn and the squires came to earth and louted low, caps in hand, like one man. The lady blushed like a rose and curtseyed

like a blowing dallodil. She was encased in samite of white and gold, and from the white wimple which framed her face soared a pointed hat like a steeple with veils of golden gauze floating about it like morning clouds.

"Our jennets were stabled beyond the wall — and carried off to the forest, saddles and all; so Mary and I must go afoot," she cried in pretty distress.

"Nay, our horses are at your service," the King told her. "Choose any two that take your fancy, my dear."

"Gramercy!" she laughed. "But the saddles?"

"Hah!" Torrice exclaimed; and he regarded the great war saddles with baffled looks.

Then Gervis spoke up, in dulcet tones.

"If I may venture a suggestion, Your Majesty and Your Ladyship, I suggest pillions. And may I add that this newly acquired steed of mine is as gentle and easy-gaited as a jennet for all his size and strength, and is therefore peculiarly suited to the task of carrying double."

Torrice eyed him dubiously, then turned a glance of doting inquiry upon Dame Clara.

"The very thing!" she cried, with a swift widening and half-veiling of her multi-colored eyes; and she turned her head and called for two pillions.

(Lorn thought: "*I can't make out their color, even by daylight; and they are not always black by candlelight.*" Something with a sharp, hot edge stirred in his brain. Memory? A thin splinter of it from that lost time by which he was haunted night and day, and yet of which nothing remained to him save the sense of loss? He tried, fearfully yet hopefully, to remember. He racked brain and heart cruelly but in vain. He sighed.)

Two of the ancient footmen brought two pillions and followed their mistress and the Damosel Mary down the steps. Dame Clara, moving very slowly because of the attentions of King Torrice and the squires, inspected and seemed to consider each of the four chargers, and spared gentle glances even for the hackneys upon which Goggin and Billikin sat like seasoned men-at-arms.

"May I sit behind you?" she asked the King.

HIS eyes shone, and his lavender-scented whiskers rippled. He strapped a pillion to the back of his saddle with his own hands, mounted with but little apparent effort, leaned and held down his right hand. A hand touched his, a foot touched his stirruped foot, and she came up to the pillion like a white bird. From that soft perch she pointed at Sir Lorn's saddle with her left hand, while holding fast to the King's belt with her right. And so it was that the Damosel Mary had a

higher seat than the lady of the manor, by half a hand. Lorn's face wore a polite smile which was entirely muscular. His eyes were blank. Gervis looked dismally dashed, and Peter grinned derisively. As the little cavalcade moved off, the manikin Joseph leaped up behind Peter.

"What else would happen to me?" Peter grumbled.

"Worse might have happened to you, my friend," said the dwarf. "Would you liefer it was the big damosel gripping you about the middle, as she even now grips the young knight? You might do far worse than ride double with poor Joseph."

"I am glad to hear it, since I seem to have no choice in the matter," said the squire. "But will you be so kind as to tell me why?" he added.

"There are many reasons why," the dwarf replied. "One is, I was born with seven wits, whereas you and your grand friends have only five—and those somewhat deranged in the cases of your old King and your young knight. But I was born with seven, but at a sad cost to flesh and bone. If I had your stature, King Arthur Pendragon would be taking his orders from me."

"I believe it," said Peter, with mock solemnity. "I feel your power and see it in your eye, but I don't quite understand it. I never before met a person possessed with seven wits. Is it the power of knowledge or wisdom or cunning?"

"Of all three," the dwarf answered, complacently. "I know everything; I understand everything; and I can think as quick and crooked as any witch or wizard."

"In that case, you would know Duke Merlin if you saw him."

"Yes, it was that old warlock brought you here, though he pretended to be a holy palmer. But he didn't fool me. He drank two quarts of wine and took the road to Camelot. He said he was going to Tintagel, but I knew better."

"You are wonderful, Master Joseph. Now tell me why you and Merlin brought us to this place?"

"To rid the lady of her oppressors."

"So they are friends—your mistress and Merlin?"

After a moment's hesitation, Joseph said: "No, it was old Sir Gayling, the star-gazer, who was Merlin's friend."

"And yet Sir Gayling was stabbed to death in a rose-garden, while his friend the powerful magician played his hocus-pocus elsewhere," sneered Peter.

"As to that, my friend, I could enlighten you if I would, but I know without trying that it would be too much for your five poor wits," the dwarf replied, in a voice so insufferably supercilious that Peter was hard put to it to control an impulse to reach a hand behind him and brush the little man to the ground. "How-

ever," Joseph resumed, "I shall satisfy your curiosity concerning the Dame Clara."

But, at that very moment, King Torrice drew rein at a word from his passenger; whereupon Sir Lorn drew rein, and Peter drew rein, and the dwarf slid to the ground, and every rider drew rein. Peter and Gervis fairly flung themselves from their saddles in desperate competition for the honor of dismounting Dame Clara from the King's pillion. Gervis won. The lady descended to earth like a feather, and the King followed her down smartly.

All were down now save Sir Lorn and his passenger from the back of the mighty Bahram. The knight could not dismount in the orthodox manner while Damosel Mary remained up behind him; and he was not in the mood to sacrifice his own dignity, not to mention proud Bahram's, by quitting the saddle with a forward, instead of a backward, swing of the right leg. His grandfather and the squires were too intent upon Lady Clara to perceive his difficulty; and it was not until the dwarf had pinched both the squires, and Peter had come—however ungraciously—to his rescue, that he dismounted.

AFOOT, they inspected a farmstead in which the farmer had been murdered and from which five beeves had been driven into the forest by the Drecker gang and there handed over to confederate but less daring outlaws, and a bag of silver pieces taken and pouched by that rogue knight himself: a second farm from which a dairymaid and cheeses and barrels of ale had been carried off after the murder of a stubborn cowherd; and a third in which the master had been tickled with knives—he was still in bandages—until he had handed over all his life's hoardings of ducats and crowns. And all this was no more than a representative fraction of the villainies perpetrated by the scoundrel Drecker.

"I don't understand this," said King Torrice, who had suffered more footwork and more emotional strain than he could endure with manly resignation. "Are your people mice? Nay, for mice will fight. Then why didn't the rogues make a job of it, instead of only killing and thieving a little every here and there? Why didn't he put your own house and household to the torch and sword? Hah!—now I recall what the manikin told me—that the foul Drecker aspired to your hand!"

He leaned against his horse and clapped a hand to his brow. The lady hung her head and touched a very small handkerchief to her eyes. Sir Lorn moved close to her; and if he thought, it was subconsciously. Without a word, and with a dazed, far-away look in his eyes, he laid a hand on her

nearer arm and propelled and guided her, gently but firmly, a few paces aside to where his great white stallion stood watching them. King Torrice lowered his hand from his fretful brow and blinked after them, but before he could utter a word of inquiry or protest, his squire Peter spoke at his shoulder.

"Sir, I've but now heard it all from her dwarf. Let us mount and ride into the fields, and I'll tell you the whole story."

There was no argument. The King mounted with alacrity, though a trifle stiffly. He was eager to hear what trusty Peter had heard from the lady's dwarf, and even more eager to get his weight off his poor feet.

Chapter Six

THE DWARF TOLD PETER AND PETER TOLD THE KING

THE Dame Clara (so Peter told King Torrice) was one of four daughters of a gentleman of remote kinship with the late rich and star-struck old philosopher of Joyous Vale. The father, when young and single, had cut a dash in the train of old King Uther Pendragon for a few years, but had been cheated out of all his patrimony by certain fashionable companions; and too hot of head to retire from court gracefully, he had brawled with, and mortally wounded, one of the cheaters in the King's own hall; and so he had fled for his very life and not stayed his flight save to sleep, and to eat when he could find food, until he was across the Marches of Wales.

A Welsh chieftain of the lesser and wilder sort—not one of the nine princes—had befriended and practically adopted him; and so, in due course, he had married a beautiful daughter of the chieftain. Married, as single, they had continued to live with her family in her parental home, which was a confusion of stone and timber towers and halls, and bowers and byres, overlooking a glen of crofts and huts, and itself overhung by a great forest of oaks. Strange to say, the life had suited him better than it had his mountain-bred wife. This had not been so in the first year, but with the arrival of the first daughter, and increasingly so with the arrival of each of the following three, the mother had bemoaned the lack of social opportunities for young ladies in those parts. But the exiled courtier had laughed at her—for he preferred his present to his past and looked to the future with gusto. In hunting wolves and bears and wild boars, in occasional armed clashes with encroaching neighbors or invading savages, and in less frequent but even more exciting raids into the Marches under the banneret

of his father-in-law and the banner of Prince Powys, he had found life very much to his taste and nothing to worry about. But he had died in the course of one of those battles of the disputed Marches, leaving hundreds of mourners, chief of whom were his widow and four daughters.

Now for a jump of time and space to Sir Gayling of Joyous Vale. Hearing from a wandering soothsayer that the most knowledgeable of all living stargazers, and the one possessed of the finest astrolabe and cross-staff in the world, inhabited a high tower atop the highest mountain of Wales, Sir Gayling had set out to find him, accompanied by his squire and lifelong friend Master John of Yarrow (who was as old and almost as stargazy as himself) and a few servants. It was a most other-worldly and untraveled company, for the gentlemen had never before been farther afield than Salisbury, where both of them, as youths, had studied astrology and kindred sciences under the famous Friar Gamish; and the servants had never been out of the Vale.

But they went unmolested, day and night, league after league. Some took them for holy men, others for mental cases (and so equally under divine protection), and yet others for magicians or worse. Their innocence was their armor. Jinking thieves and all manner of roving, masterless knaves, shared the best of their stolen meats and drinks with them, and honest farmers and lords of castles alike entertained them honorably. They came into Wales in due course, unscathed and in good health, and Sir Gayling and Master John still keen in their pursuit of knowledge.

There they asked the way to the highest mountain in the world of everyone they met, and at every door, but the answers were mostly conflicting. One point which all their informants agreed upon, however, was that it was somewhere in Wales. In most cases, the person questioned simply pointed to the highest summit within his range of vision. Up and down, up and down and around, toiled the questers after stellar wisdom. They found the people hospitable but inconveniently scattered. They were glad when they came at last, after weeks of fruitless mountaineering, upon a narrow valley full of crofts. The crofters regaled them with strange and potent liquors and collops of venison, but it was not long before a little man in green came to them and requested them to follow him to his master.

It was the manikin Joseph himself; and his master was the father of the widow with four beautiful daughters. The chieftain was an old man by then, and the widowed daughter had

silver in her black hair, and only one of the beautiful girls remained unmarried and at home. She was the youngest and the most beautiful—and, as you may have guessed, her name was Clara. The travelers were so well treated that they almost lost sight of their reason for being so far from home; and when the mountain lord himself had assured them, after mental searchings, that he had never heard of an outstanding Welsh stargazer in all his life, nor of an astrolabe,* whatever that might be, but could name the world's twenty greatest bards and harpers and ten greatest warriors, and all of them Welshmen, Sir Gayling decided to let the matter rest—and himself with it—for a few days. The cushion of the chair he sat in was softer than his saddle, and the bearskins underfoot did not cut and bruise like rocky mountain tracks.

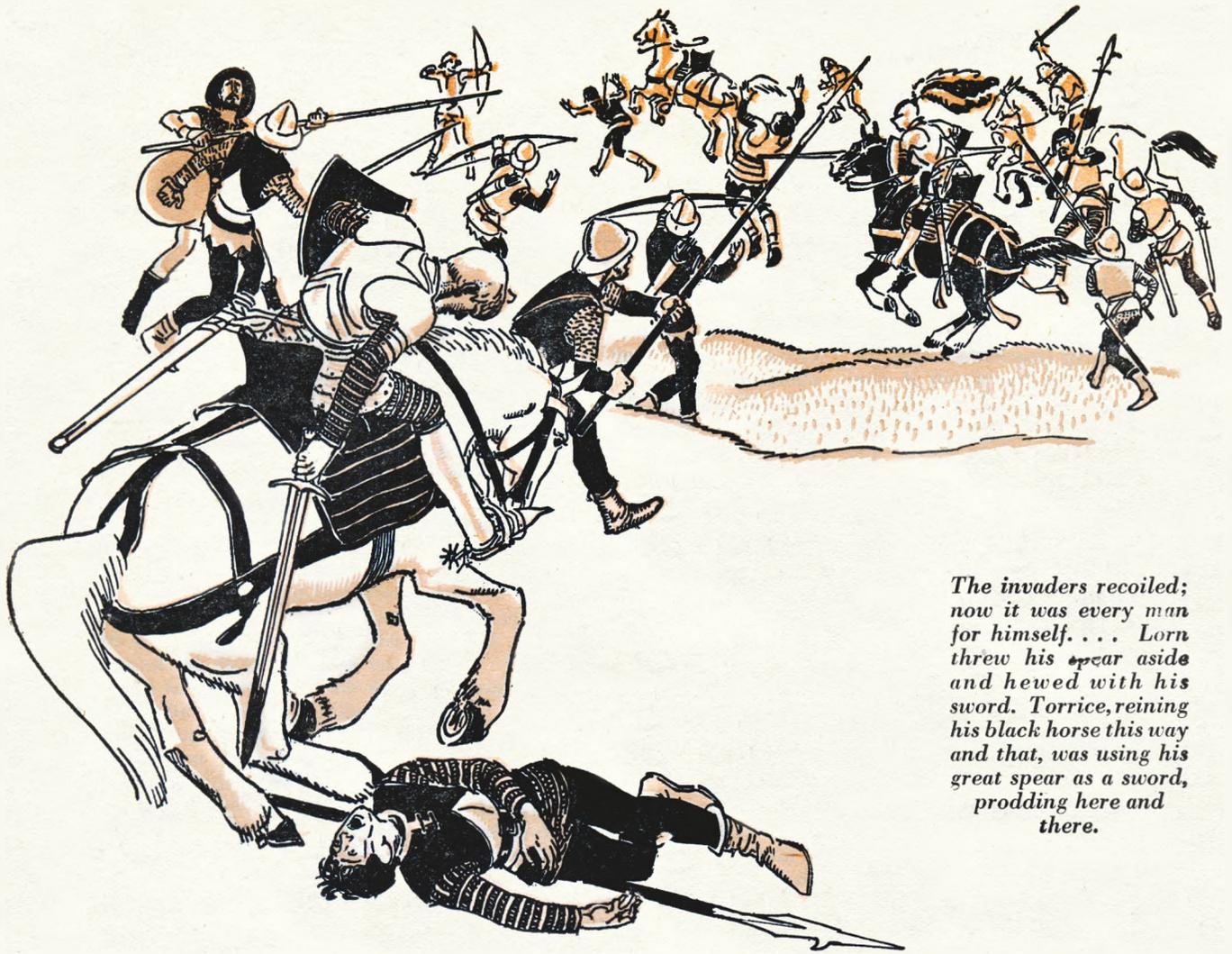
Lapped in comfort, he drowsed while the widow told her romantic story, which was always in her heart and never far from her tongue. She began by telling him that her husband had been an English fugitive like himself, only larger and much younger. He protested sleepily that he was not a fugitive. She continued with a glowing description of her lamented partner, and a dramatic account of his career at King Uther's court, his justifiable slaying of a false friend in the royal presence, and his subsequent flight. Sir Gayling, who had heard rumors of an affair of the kind a long time ago, bestirred himself sufficiently to inquire as to the gentleman's name and style.

"Roland of Fenchurch, the Earl of Fenland's third son," the lady informed him proudly.

"I heard something of it at the time," he replied; and he went on, though reluctantly, for he was still drowsy, to say that the Fenland family was distantly related to him on the spindle side.

AS the lady accepted this information in silence (a very busy silence, but he didn't know that), he thought no more of it till the following morning, when Master John told him that the widow had questioned him, John, exhaustively concerning Sir Gayling's life, condition, affairs and establishment; and he confessed that he had answered her fully, though against his better judgment. The old squire was suspicious and uneasy, but the old knight laughed at him, saying that the lady's curiosity was perfectly natural. Even when his anxious friend suggested that she was contemplating a second English marriage, he refused to be alarmed. Days and nights passed,

*An instrument for charting the stars, used centuries before the telescope was invented.



The invaders recoiled; now it was every man for himself. . . . Lorn threw his spear aside and hewed with his sword. Torrice, reining his black horse this way and that, was using his great spear as a sword, prodding here and there.

and ran into weeks—days of ease and good cheer, and nights in feather beds—so peacefully that Master John forgot his suspicions of the dame's intentions and both old stargazers forgot their mission. Nothing in the place was too good for them, and their servants and horses grew fat and frisky with idleness and high living.

But this idyllic time came to an end. One morning the widowed daughter of the chieftain and mother of the beautiful damosel requested an astonishing service of the knight. Addressing him as Cousin Gayling, and with a hand on his shoulder and a compelling gleam in her eyes, she advised him to set out for home within the week, so as to establish Clara comfortably before the first hard frosts. The stargazer could only gape, at that: but when she added that Clara would prove to be the ideal wife for him, he cried out in agonized protest. She laughed at him kindly, even affectionately, and made known her plans to him patiently and with the utmost good humor, as if to a dull but beloved child. His continued protests became feebler and feebler, though no less agonized. The damosel herself was

of no help to him. When he protested to her that she could not possibly want him for a husband, she contradicted him, politely but firmly.

WELL, they were married by the domestic chaplain of Prince Powys before many witnesses. The bride and her mother were radiant, the company was merry; but Sir Gayling and Master John were dazed beyond words. They set out for home with a formidable escort, to which the prince and neighboring chiefs had contributed generously to assure them a safe passage of the Marches. Twenty leagues south of the border, the bulk of the escort turned about and withdrew. Only the bride and her grandfather, her mother, her harpist ex-governess the Damosel Mary, the family counselor Joseph and a score of clansmen on mountain ponies remained in addition to the original English party. Forty leagues farther on, every Welsh heart save Dame Clara's, Damosel Mary's and Joseph's was seized by irresistible and unreasoning nostalgia for the mountains and airs of home; and in a fit of mob panic, the old chief and the widow and their highland cavalry wheeled about and

headed back on the long road to Wales.

The ladies were somewhat dashed by that, but Sir Gayling, who had feared that his mother-in-law intended to make of Joyous Vale her permanent abode, congratulated himself and Master John. . . . Two days later, they were joined by two cavaliers who introduced themselves as Sir Drecker and Sir Barl, knights-errant from King Arthur's court. Their manners were excellent, and they made themselves very entertaining; especially Sir Drecker, and he very particularly to Sir Gayling and Master John, to whom he declared a keen interest in astrology—and a lamentable ignorance of it.

From then onward all the way to Joyous Vale, the two old stargazers belabored their pupil's ears with stellar truths and mysteries. But the dwarf noted the furtive roving and oblique glances of Drecker's small but lively eyes. Trust Joseph—by his own telling! He warned his mistress against the stranger, and received in return an enigmatic smile. His warning to Sir Gayling won a promise of consideration upon the proper drawing up and study of Sir Drecker's horo-

scope, which would require at least ten days. But Joseph continued to watch and suspect, wore a shirt of chain-mail under his tunic, and added a short sword to his armament of daggers.

They reached Joyous Vale in safety, however, and found all as the astrologers had left it five months before, save for a few natural deaths and those mostly of old age. Dame Clara established herself and her ex-governess in the best bedroom, and Sir Gayling and Master John returned thankfully to their old quarters and neglected telescope at the top of the tower and set to work on Sir Drecker's horoscope. What might have happened if that task had been completed is anybody's guess, for upon the departure of the self-styled knights-errant within the week, the astrologers laid it aside and forgot it in the pursuit of more abstruse stellar secrets.

WINTER came and passed uneventfully. Sir Gayling and Master John were happy with their books and arguments, and since philosophically accepting the rumored Welsh astrologer and his peerless instrument as mere myths, with their telescope too. Also, they became aware of improvements in food and service, and the whole economy and atmosphere of the place; and each confessed to himself, though neither to the other, that the adventure into Wales had been nothing worse than a loss of time. April brought back Sir Drecker and Sir Barl. Drecker's original intention was (by Joseph's reckoning) to carry off Lady Clara and the old knight's treasure-chests, but he changed it for the more ambitious plan of marrying the lady and settling down as a lord of lands. The first step toward his goal—the transforming of a wife to a widow—was mere child's play for him, but then difficulties developed. The gates of the great house were closed and barred against him. Accepting that as a purely provocative gesture on the lady's part, he subdued the tenantry, murdering and robbing and despoiling just enough to show her who was master, and bided his time.

That is the story, as told (rather more than less) by the Welsh manikin Joseph to the squire Peter and by the said Peter to King Torrice.

"It's a queer tale, but I've heard queerer," said the King. "How old did you say she is?"

"I didn't say, but Joseph told me she will be eighteen very soon," Peter answered.

"Eighteen or eight hundred," the King muttered. "If but eighteen, how can she be what I believe her to be—the achievement and the end of my quest?" He looked at Peter keenly and added: "If that is the whole story, why has Merlin dragged us into the affair? He is not one to take all the

trouble of conjuring up a forge and shoeing our horses just to save a distressed lady from a tyrant. But whatever and whoever she is, and whatever that old fox's game may be, we are committed to her protection."

He looked back at the farmyard from which he and his squire had come away and saw it empty. He turned the other way then, and looking widely over meadows and cornlands and orchards, saw the little cavalcade enter the outer court of the great house; and he sighed. Peter, who looked too and also saw that Lady Clara rode pillion with Sir Lorn, chuckled to see that Damosel Mary rode pillion with Gervis.

"This is no laughing matter," the King reproved mildly; and he added: "Have you forgotten that the rogue Drecker is at large?"

Peter replied that he had not forgotten Drecker's escape.

"Has it occurred to you that he will return some day, any day now, with all the cutthroats and robbers from forty leagues around at his heels?" demanded Torrice.

"It has, sir; but, knowing that you would bring the subject up in plenty of time for us to do something about it, I haven't worried over it, sir," replied Peter.

The King looked embarrassed and muttered: "I hope you are right, but I must confess that I had quite forgotten the peril we are in—not the rogue, but the menace of him—until now, God forgive me!"

Chapter Seven

THE LADY RIDES WITH A HAND ON SIR LORN'S SWORD-BELT

THE Lady Clara rode home on Sir Lorn's pillion, up on the great white stallion Bahram.

"King Torrice told me of your quest," she murmured.

He neither spoke in reply nor did he turn his head to glance at her. She murmured again, leaning a little closer to his apparently unresponsive back.

"But how can it be one and the same quest, if he searches for that which he has never known, and you for something you have known and lost?"

Lorn continued to gaze straight to his front in silence. The great warhorse's advance was very slow, despite much showy action. He tossed his head and plumed his silver tail; but high though he lifted each massive hoof in turn, it was only to set it down softly on practically the same spot of ground.

"You heard his song?" she murmured. "The things he called me? Poor old man!—it must have been the wine he drank. If I am a wicked old witch, how can I be the end of his

quest? And yet he truly believes me to be both, it seems—poor me!—and he is unhappy and afraid now for his quest's end."

"Not afraid," he said. "Whatever he may believe, he is not afraid of it. He has never feared anything—neither its end nor its beginning."

"Do you too take me for a witch?"

He let that pass.

She sighed: "You do not take me for the end of your quest, that is sure."

Her right hand, which grasped his sword-belt, transmitted a slight quiver to her heart.

"He is mad, I fear, for how else could he think me beautiful? And now he is unhappy because of me, in his new madness, and you are still unhappy in your old madness. So your unhappiness is my fault too, for if I were actually as your dear grandfather sees me in his madness, you might forget your loss or mistake me for the lost one. But I am not, and you do not; and so two brave knights are unhappy because of me—one in the foolish belief that his quest is ended, and the other because he knows that he has not found what he seeks."

Again her hand transmitted a quiver from his sword-belt to her heart. He spoke a word; but it was to Bahram, who instantly stopped his shilly-shallying and went forward at a purposeful walk. But not for long.

"I fear I'll be shaken right off, at this pace," the lady whispered.

At another word from Lorn, Bahram resumed his dilatory posturings.

"If I were a witch," she said, "I would make myself appear to the king as you see me, and to you as he sees me."

Though the only response she received was by way of the telltale belt, she smiled quite contentedly at the knowledge that, no matter how he might pretend to ignore her, she could make him tremble like a leaf. . . .

Later, Dame Clara told one of the ancient servitors to find Joseph and send him to her. It took four of the old men the better part of an hour to carry out the order.

"Take my compliments to King Torrice, and remind him that I am expecting him and Sir Lorn and their gentlemen to supper," she instructed the manikin. "And don't take all night about it," she admonished gently.

"They won't come," he said, consequentially. "Too busy. Even Sir Lorn is busy. And why shouldn't he be busy now—that moon-struck quarter!—since 'tis all the fault of his fuddling?"

Before Dame Clara could speak, for astonishment and indignation, Damosel Mary spoke.

"How now, little man? If you have forgotten my teachings of ten years ago, I shall have to take your education in hand again."

Joseph had not forgotten. Sadly deflated, he recalled to mind the matter and the occasions referred to by the gray-haired damosel. That stalwart and learned governess had not confined her instructions to little Clara, but had given the household dwarf and mascot a course in manners that, being much needed and long overdue, had proved extremely painful to the recipient. Now he ducked and turned to slip out by the way he had swaggered in; but Lady Clara was upon him like a falcon on a partridge.

"No, you don't!" she cried. "Oh, you saucy knave, how dare you speak so? For a pin, I'd send you back where you came from! Fuddling? What d'ye mean by that, you jack-anapes? How dare you speak so of that—of your betters? For a pin—at one more word—I'll shake you out of your boots, you wicked Joseph!"

She had him in both hands. Her face was pink; her eyes shot fire and her lofty head-dress was askew. She shook him like a clout.

"And quite rightly too," said the old ex-governess judicially. "The silly rascal has outgrown his boots anyhow. But stay your hand, my dear, I beg you, so that he may tell us more of this business that's afoot—unless he invented it to puff up his own importance—before he loses the power of speech, which might happen if he bit off his tongue."

Clara complied instantly, but kept a grip on Joseph with one hand while straightening her headdress with the other.

"Now then, out with it!" she demanded, but in a softer and reasonable tone of voice. "Tell us what it is they are all so busy about."

He hung limp and gasping in the grip of that small white hand and rolled his eyes piteously. Never before had he been treated with violence, or angry words even, by his beautiful young mistress.

"He needs wine, poor fellow!" she cried.

The damosel thought so too, and brought it quickly. He drained the cup and recovered his breath and something of his assurance.

"It's the rogue Drecker," he said.

"Drecker? But he's gone," the ladies protested.

"That's it," he said. "He's gone, whole and horsed. Would they fear him now if he were dead and buried with the others? They'd not give him a thought. But now they must guard against his return."

"But he dare not come back!" Clara cried.

The dwarf shot an oblique glance at Mary; and as she was not watching him, but gazing thoughtfully at nothing, he risked a sneer.

"Dare not?" he questioned, with curling lips. But he kept the curl

out of his voice. "With all the outlaws of the forest at his heels? And this time it will be with fire and sword. This time he will take what he wants—and that will be what brought him here the first time, and everything else he can carry off—and hot torches and cold iron for the rest."

"But our defenders?" she whispered. "They'll not desert us!"

"Six," Joseph said contemptuously. "They were enough against six—enough to slay five, anyway. But against sixty or eighty or a hundred? That will be another story."

"Not so fast, little man," the governess interrupted. "Why not a thousand, while you are about it? But tell me first, does Drecker's army grow on trees?"

"You can say that," the dwarf answered, with more than a hint of his old impudence. "On the ground under the trees, anyhow. Runaway serfs and all manner of masterless knaves, and Gypsies and thieving packmen and renegade warders and archers, and first of all, the band that has been receiving and marketing our beeves and cheeses all the while."

"And just what have our defenders become so suddenly so busy about?" asked Damosel Mary.

"Bringing the people closer in, with their livestock and goods and gear, and setting them to work on walls and ditches, and making men-at-arms of clodhoppers," Joseph told her, civilly enough.

"We must get busy too!" Clara cried. "We're both good bowmen, Mary. We'll teach the old men to shoot. My grandfather Cadwaller made me a little bow when I was only four years old; and when I was six, I could pick his cap clean off his head without waking him up, at ten paces. I hit him only once, and that was only a scratch; but after that he always retired to his chamber for his naps. There must be scores of old bows and arrows somewhere about here. We'll look high and low; and we'll have new ones made, if need be. I know that one of the cooks used to be a bowyer. We'll start now. Where has Joseph gone?"

"You let go of him, my dear," said the damosel resignedly.

"Good riddance to him!" the dame cried. "He would only tell us where to look and then what to do and how. He will be much happier advising the King and Sir Lorn. Now to work!"

Chapter Eight

WHEN TWO MEN LOOK OUT OF ONE MAN'S EYES

THERE was little rest in Joyous Vale that night, either within or without the manor house. Lady Clara permitted only the oldest

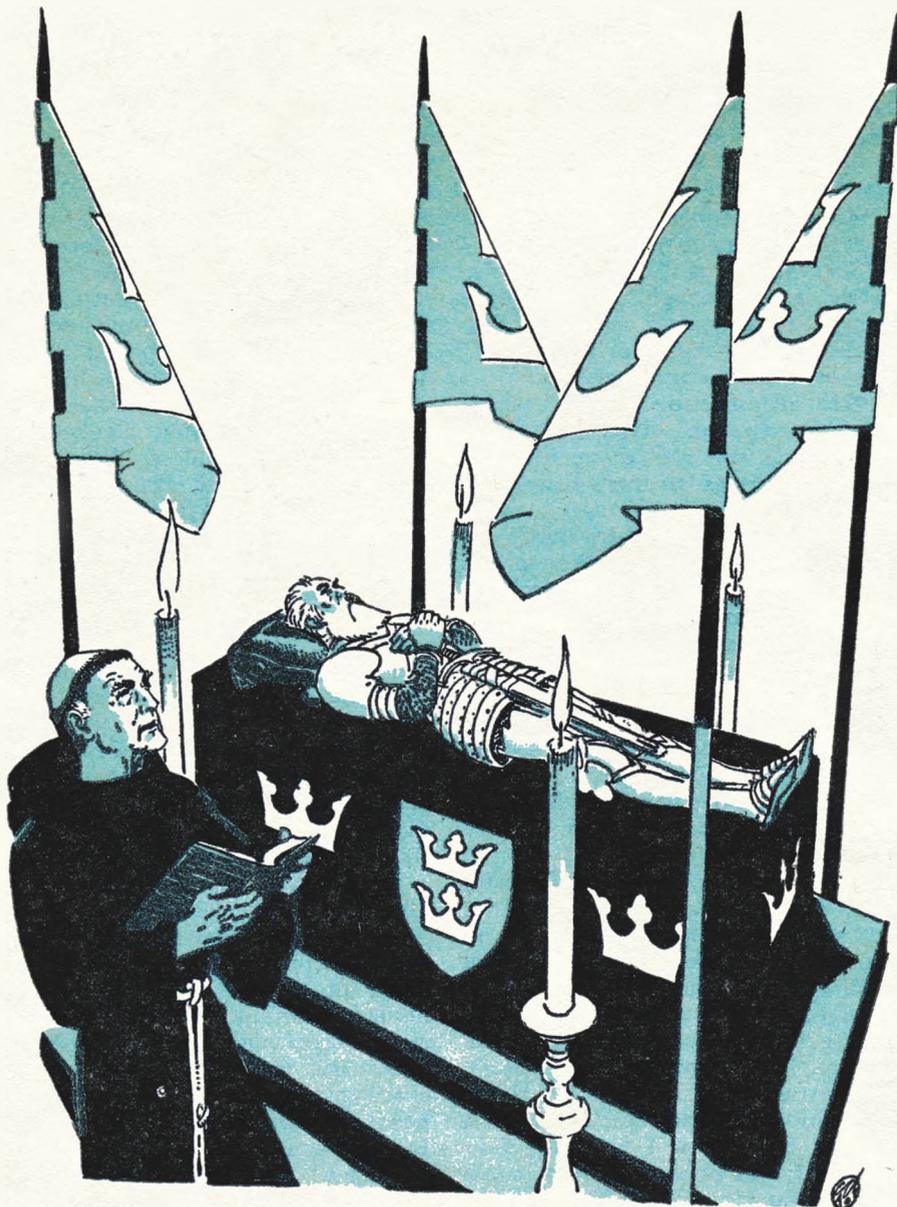
and shakiest members of the household to retire to their couches at the customary hour. As for the old ex-bowyer Tomkyn, it was long past midnight when he was allowed to creep off to bed; and as for the dame and the damosel, they heard the false dawn saluted by sleepy roosters. And so it was without, abroad over the whole manor to the edges of the forest on every side. By sunrise, every farmstead and croft had been warned and set astir by one or another of the King's party, or by Joseph up on one of the King's ponies; and when the chatelaine, wakened from a short sleep by the hubbub without, looked out from her high window, she rubbed her eyes and looked again. For the inner court was gay with the colored pavilions which Drecker and his rogues had pitched, and left perforce, under the willows beside the river. The chivalry had moved in. The outer courtyard was not so gay, but was far livelier. Here were tents of hide, makeshift shelters of spars and thatch, heaps of country provisions and household gear, pens of swine and poultry, excited women jabbering and gesticulating, gaffers seated on bundles of bedding, and barking dogs and shouting children dashing around.

The home orchard and paddocks also had undergone a startling change. The latter were alive with horned cattle and sheep, all in confusion and many in violent disagreement, and herds and woolly sheep-dogs trying to restore order and keep the peace with sticks and teeth. Through the orchard greenery appeared the tops of hastily constructed stacks of last year's hay and straw, and arose the bellows, moos and bleats of more displaced livestock. Beyond all this moved wains and wheelless drags, horse-drawn and ox-drawn, the loaded approaching and the empty departing; and groups of rustics coming and going; and here and there a cavalier in half-armor riding this way or that.

Dame and damosel were back at their self-appointed tasks when King Torrice presented himself. He had been in the saddle sixteen hours, with two changes of horses, and yet looked fresh as a daisy. It was only leg and footwork, or sitting on chairs, that fatigued him.

"Lady, I crave your indulgence for the liberties I have taken with your people and property, and shall continue to take, for your own and their good—but all with due respect to your title and lordship, madam," he pronounced.

Lady Clara dropped what she was about and jumped up and toward him, and extended both hands to him. Still regarding her gravely, he received her hands in his own, then blinked and started slightly and looked down curiously at the little hands in his big



King Torrice was dead—that long questing forever stilled.

ones, at the right and at the left, then turned the right palm-upward and fairly stared at it, then the left and stared at it.

"Blisters!" he exclaimed.

"We have been making arrows. Mary and I," she answered, gently and shyly. "And splicing old bows. And twisting and waxing bowstrings."

He looked her in the eyes, then stooped over her hands again and touched his lips lightly to each of the blistered palms in turn, muttered "Gramercy, my dear!" and straightened and backed out by the way he had come in.

Clara returned to her work, but fumblingly. She blinked to clear her vision, and tears sparkled on her cheeks.

Mary eyed her thoughtfully.

"A grand old man," said Mary. "Well, a grand old knight-at-arms,

however—and as good a poet as any in Wales, even. But as simple and innocent as a baby, or poor Sir Gayling even, for all his questing and gallivanting: and I'd liefer have him for a battling champion, in the ding-dong of rescue and defence, than for a husband or father."

"Is that so?" cried Clara. "I don't believe it! We don't know anything of him as a father, but we can see that he is a good grandfather to poor Lorn; and I have my own opinion as to what your answer would be if he asked you to marry him."

"Fiddlesticks, my dear! And if you contemplate becoming the Queen of Har yourself—and a crook of your finger is all that's needed—I advise you to be quick about it."

Clara stared at her ex-governess and asked tremulously: "Why do you say that—and look so strange?"

"Because you have no time to lose; and if I look strange, who wouldn't, after glimpsing a dead man in a living man's eyes?"

"What d'ye mean by that? Speak out, or I'll shake you!"

"Calm yourself, child. I mean what I say. I saw him dead—that poor old King—just as surely as I foresaw your own grandmother dead while she was still walking and laughing, and just as surely as my grandsire True Thomas foresaw and foretold the death of King David at his marriage feast and was whipped for the telling. It is when you see two pairs of eyes glimmering in the eyeholes of the one head—and one pair of those eyes are cold and blind."

Lady Clara cried out, "To the devil with your soothsaying!" and clapped her hands to her face; and her tears burned and stung the abraded palms. Mary sighed, brushed a furtive hand over her own still face and took up her work again.

AT noon, Lady Clara told the major-domo to send Joseph to her. That important person received the command in silence, and with a weary shake of the head. He was thinking of the easy and peaceful years before poor dear Sir Gayling's mad expedition into Wales. Those had been the times. There had been no big Welsh damosel then to drive honest men around every day with besoms and mops, in pursuit of honest dirt and dust and cobwebs; and no giddy young dame to demand gleaming crystal and shining plate, and tarts and jellies and custards for every meal till the cooks and scullions were fit to tear out their beards. And now it was worse. Now it was the very devil. Sweeping and scrubbing, and polishing and burnishing and cooking, had been hard enough on the poor fellows, but ferretting out ancient war-gear and repairing it, grinding edges onto rusty swords and axes, splicing old bows and whittling new bows and arrows, and being driven and drilled by Tomkyn the ex-bowyer, was harder.

"The whole world be turned upside-down," grumbled the major-domo; and instead of going on the lady's errand, he went in search of some hole or corner in which he might evade Tomkyn's officious attentions for a little while. Imagine a major-domo hiding from a cook! Such a thing could never have been in the days of Sir Gayling. And so, quite naturally, the dwarf failed to answer his mistress' summons; but Squire Gervis presented himself some three hours later, and quite of his own volition. He was dusty, but in high spirits. When he took Dame Clara's proffered hand, he turned it over tenderly, gazed at it adoringly and said that he had heard about it from the King.

"How fares the dear King?" she asked softly.

"That old wonder-boy is as lively as a grig," he replied enthusiastically. "And as merry too. And even Sir Lorn is companionable. That's the way it always is with those two. The prospect of a fight, and never mind the odds against them, acts like mothers' milk—if you'll forgive the expression—on those mad questers."

"Mad?" she whispered; and Damosel Mary looked up from her work with glue and feathers on a clothyard shaft and said, in the voice of a governess: "It's a very wise man, or a fool, who dares cry 'Mad!' at his fellows."

Unabashed, Gervis replied with unabated good humor:

"A fool, then! And in my folly I repeat that our noble friends are mad. Who but a madman would spend a hundred years and more—some say two hundred—in pursuit of the very thing from which he turns and flees whenever he catches up with it?"

"What thing is that?" murmured Clara.

"He calls it beauty," he laughed.

"Nay, he calls it the soul of beauty," she murmured.

He shrugged a shoulder delicately and winked politely.

"And what have you to say of Sir Lorn's madness?" she asked gently.

"I'll say that is different," he answered, with a touch of gravity. "Who wouldn't be mad, after a year in Færyland with the Maid of Tintagel, or Helen of Troy, or maybe it was Queen Mab herself? But he is mad, our poor Lorn; and it's struck deep, else he would forget her now, whoever she was."

He gazed adoringly into her eyes, and she smiled back very kindly, and a little sadly and with just a flicker of pity.

"It is sometimes difficult to distinguish madness from foolishness," said Damosel Mary.

He turned to her and shook a playful finger, then turned back to Clara.

"I'll tear myself away now, back to my duty, before one of those mad questers appears and drags me away ingloriously by the scruff of the neck—for my folly."

And he was gone as lightly as he had come.

Chapter Nine

THE INVADING HORDE

DAME CLARA told the dwarf Joseph to take post on the tower and keep watch on the edges of the forest from dawn till dark: but he excused himself on the plea that he could not be spared from his duties as galloping aide-de-camp to King Torrice. This was on the night of the second day after the

King's and and Gervis' visits. For two days and a night now the lady had been neglected by her champions, save for the verbal message from Torrice, by Joseph, to the effect that she had nothing graver to worry about now than the blisters on her pretty hands, and that he would compose another song to her as soon as the dastard Drecker reappeared and was finally disposed of.

"He sounds very sure," she said to the messenger.

"And with reason," he replied condescendingly. "We are ready and waiting for Master Drecker and his ruff-raff. Every stratagem of defence and attack is planned; and we have made more than a score of men-at-arms, all horsed and harnessed and armed, out of your clodhoppers of yesterday."

So Joseph escaped back to his active military duties; and at the first pale gleam of the next dawn, Lady Clara herself took post on the watch-tower, leaving the command and business of the household archery to Damosel Mary and the bowyer Tomkyn.

She peered down at a shadowy world, but not a sleeping one. A few dark figures moved to and fro about the inner court, and more in the outer court, and yet more in the paddocks beyond and about the edges of the home orchard; and her heart swelled with gentle pride and sweet gratitude and perhaps with even tenderer emotions at the thought that she was the inspiration and first cause of this vigilance and devotion. She wept a little in happy sadness, but soon dried her eyes on the silken lining of one of the hanging sleeves of her green gown. As the clear light increased, rising and flooding, she saw more and more, and farther and farther. Thin feathers of smoke uncurled above the leafy roof of the orchard, the busy human figures increased in number and formless bulks of darkness took shape. Now she saw the abatis of new-felled forest trees which enforced and topped the old wall of tumbled field-stones around the home farm, and four massy clumps of leafy timber far out toward the four nearest screens of the surrounding forest, and each at a point where nothing taller than hay had grown previously.

By now she could see to the forest walls all around, beyond the farthest meadows and cornlands and deserted steadings. The forest edges to the westward, struck full by the level rays, showed leafy boughs and brown boles like a picture on tapestry, but to the eastward they were still gloomed with their own shadows. . . . It was from the shadows that the first running figure appeared. It was of a tall man in leather, with a strung bow in his left hand. He checked for a backward look, then ran again. A horn brayed in the shadows and was answered from

the right, and then from the left, as if by echoes. A second man in leather appeared, and three more a moment later, all running like partridges from the shadow of a stooping hawk. A leather cap lifted and fell to earth, leaving the shaggy hair of that runner streaming in the wind of his flight. The watcher on the tower could make nothing of that: but after another had stumbled and run on with bowed head and hunched shoulders and in zig-zagging jumps, and yet another had fallen flat and then crawled like a snake, she made out little glints and gleams in the sunshine, and knew them for flying arrows.

Again a horn brayed, but louder and nearer this time. Now a horseman appeared as if from nowhere, galloping toward the screen of shadow from which the men in leather were fleeing, gesticulating and screaming. Four of the runners turned and set arrows to their bowstrings and shot, hard and fast, into the green gloom.

THE rider drove through them, wheeled, dismounted and laid hold on the crawler with both hands. The wounded man rose to his knees, to his feet, and sagged across the horse. It was a small horse, but hardy; and so the rescue was made, with the pony running like a dog, the wounded forerunner draped across like a half-filled sack and the rescuer running beside and holding him in place. He was a small rescuer. Boys of nine years have been taller.

"Joseph!" cried the lady on the tower. "'Tis none other, by my halidom! Run, Joseph, run!"

All the visible actors in that flurry of action disappeared among the hedges and walls, and under the thatched roofs, of a steading. Now, for a long minute, nothing moved in Lady Clara's wide field of vision—though she looked in every direction—save a few feathers of smoke and wings of birds and ever-trembling leaves of tall poplars. No more arrows leaped from shadow to shine. Nothing moved on the ground. The horns were silent now, but cocks crowed in the home orchard. She gazed abroad and down in growing and fearful wonder, peering for some sign of awareness of danger, listening for a sudden commotion and shouting of armed men; but the great house below her, and the bright landscape all about her, were as still and quiet as if they lay under a spell. Was some wicked magic at work here, to her undoing? What of her champions?

But no, she had already seen little Joseph and five scouts in action; and she refused to believe that any spell save death itself could withhold the hands of that old King and the squires from her defence. Of Lorn she was not so sure. Even though she had

made him tremble with a touch of her hand on his sword-belt, she did not blink the fact of his old bewitchment and sojourn in Faeryland. What were her frail enchantments, though exercised with all her heart, against those of ageless sorcery? For that dear knight—for succor from those dear hands—she could but hope and pray.

Now the lightening rim of gloom from which the five vanished foresters had emerged stirred again, and the base of that green obscurity was alive suddenly with a score of men in leather and wool, with strung bows in their hands. They did not dash forward, but extended to right and left and advanced cautiously, setting arrows to strings. As many more invaders now emerged and formed a second line. A few of these were bowmen too, but most of them carried boar-spears, short axes or halberds. Close behind these came a fellow with a burning torch and two with a black kettle slung from a pole between them. The torch smoked blackly and flamed palely in the sunshine, and a thin haze of heat quivered above the kettle.

"The rogues! They mean to set us afire!" cried Clara.

Again she looked all around, and again in vain for any sign of a defender. The skirmishers continued to advance, and with more assurance. A big knight in full armor, on a black horse to match, came into view in rear of the two-score skirmishers, riding at a foot-pace. He signaled with a hand—its mail flashed in the sunlight—and shouted a command, whereupon the fellows in front drew together on the run and headed straight for the steading into which Joseph and the five foresters had disappeared. The knight followed them, but neither fast nor far, and soon drew rein and sat with uneasy shiftings and turnings, as if he too (like the watcher on the tower) was puzzled by the stillness. The two-score raiders halted and sent a flight of arrows into the farmstead, and then a second flight, and three fire-arrows flaming like comets: but no shaft came from hedge or wall in retaliation. They loosed a dozen fire-arrows, one of which struck a thatched roof, stuck there and blossomed like a great poppy. And still the spell was unbroken.

Clara, up on her tower, was as spell-bound as the menaced steading and the fields spreading stilly all around from the silent house under her to the still walls of the forest. She wanted to scream, but her throat refused. It seemed to her that the forest watched and waited expectantly, and that everything within its sinister circuit, seen and unseen, would start and cry out in protest but for the same fatal hand that gripped and silenced herself. . . . Once more she tried to scream—and for cause, God wot—but with no

more success than before. That same span of leafy gloom stirred to life again and spewed forth running men; but this time it was a multitude. It flooded into the sunshine like a dark tide flecked with glinting spear-points and uplifted blades and spotted with garments of tattered finery among the jerkins of drab leather and wool. An awesome sound rose from it like the hum and growl of sea surf. It flooded to and around the mounted knight, and bore him with it toward the smoking farmstead into which the vanguard continued to shoot fire. It did not check, but in its weight of hundreds, carried the first two score forward with it against the still hedges and silent walls. And then the spell broke.

A hundred arrows darted from hedges and walls and gables; shouts and the braying of horns shook the smoke and were answered by shouts and horns from the right and the left; and more arrows darted forth and struck and stood quivering. From the ambushes of felled trees on either hand came armored men on large horses, shouting and with leveled spears, breaking from the trot to the gallop—a dozen from the right and a dozen from the left. Lorn led one party, up on the mighty Bahram, and in front of the other charged King Torrice under his plume of black-and-white ostrich feathers. The invading flood recoiled; and its front—what remained alive of it—turned upon the pressure from behind, screaming and striking for a way of escape. Now it was every knave for himself, of those murderous hundreds.

They were spitted like partridges. Lorn was among them. He threw his spear aside and hewed with his sword. They were split like fish. The white stallion tore them with his teeth and crushed them under his terrible hooves. Torrice was among them, not charging now but reining his black horse this way and that and using his great spear as a lesser craftsman might use a light sword, prodding here and there. Though a master of every chivalrous combat-tool, he held that the spear was the knight's first weapon. Peter and Gervis were among them. Like Lorn, they too had discarded spears for swords for such infighting as this. Goggin and Billikin were among them, plying their long blades like gentlemen born. Twenty armored rustics on plow-horses were among them, hacking with axes and bashing with spiked maces. And even the big knight who had brought them here with promises of easy rich rapine now took part in the slaughtering of them, cutting them down and riding them down in his frantic efforts to win clear and away. Screaming like trapped beasts, the remnants of the horde broke in every direction—but not all of them to safe-

ty, for the dwarf Joseph and the hundred archers from the burning farmstead were on their heels.

The lady on the tower shut her eyes. She cried out, but in the din of triumphant shouts and horns from the house and courts below, her voice was no more than whisper in her own ears. After a little while, she looked again, avoiding the motionless shapes on the ground. Footmen still ran in groups and pairs, pursued and pursuing, to the flashes of knives and axes. Some of the horsemen still galloped and struck, but most of them moved more slowly and with an air of aimlessness now.

But King Torrice and all his five men, and Joseph on his running pony, were still in play. And Drecker, clear of the rabble at last, was riding like a madman for the nearest edge of the forest. His spear was gone. His great shield was cast off. He dropped his sword and cast off mace and ax from his saddle-bow. Anything for speed with which to escape a red doom: for that old King and that young knight were after him, converging on him from right and left. But he hadn't a chance. At the very edge of the forest— But the watcher on the tower had closed her eyes again.

Chapter Ten

QUEST'S END

KING TORRICE OF HAR was dead. The exertions of that last melee and the final stroke on Drecker's neck had stilled that long questing forever. He had lived to be carried in by Lorn, and to smile and murmur a few words at the touch of Clara's tears on his face. Now he lay on a couch of silks and furs in the great hall, in full armor, with tall candles at his head and feet. His hands were crossed on his breast, on the cross of the long sword that lay there unsheathed. His helmet, with its proud plume, was at his left elbow. Clara and Lorn knelt on the right of the couch and the squires on the left. At the head of it, a wandering friar read from a great missal, now muttering and now chanting. All the surrounding gloom was full of kneeling people, and over all rang and sighed and sobbed a dirge from the Damosel Mary's harp.

Clara turned her face to Lorn.

"He told me he was happy—in his quest's end," she sighed.

The young knight gazed at her with clear eyes.

She sighed again.

"But what of *your* quest?"

He moved his right hand a little toward her; he found her left hand and clasped it.

"I have forgotten what it was," he answered.

Crooked Face

THE SPORT OF KINGS IS SOMETIMES ALSO THE SPORT OF CROOKS —
AS WITNESS THE HAZARDOUS JOB OF DETECTIVE WORK IN THIS
SPIRITED SHORT NOVEL.

by ADRIAN KUEPPER



THE maroon convertible with the battered fenders swung sharply off the highway and up the graveled drive. It skidded to a stop in front of the stone-columned gate, and the man behind the wheel took off his dark glasses to glance at the brass plates which read: BLUE GRASS FARMS.

Freshly healed scar tissue ridged his forehead and branded a broad welt across his broken nose. It gave him a professionally knuckled-up look, but there were no other marks around his mouth or ears, nothing punchy about his sharp deep-set eyes; and his soft chalk-flannel suit wasn't the kind the boys in the leather leagues go for.

Without the scars, he would have been good looking. Not handsome, but good looking. The way it was, he had a problem. He sat looking absently at the brass plates. Then he put the dark glasses on again and pulled the gear-shift back. Gravel scattered out from under the tires.

Endless miles of white fence cut green-carpeted acres into a gently rolling checkerboard. Horses grazed in several of the boxed-off pastures, and spindly-legged colts romped over the soft grass, kicking heels at the sky. Neat red-and-white shelters stood out here and there with a peppermint brightness. Through a cluster of trees in the distance the snub-nosed top of a silo gleamed in the sun.

The convertible took the curve on the edge of the shoulder, then cut in sharply to pass a farmhand walking down the middle of the road. It jerked to a stop, and the man wearing the dark glasses leaned out to call back: "Where do I find Colonel Rigby around here, Doc?"

The farmhand was carrying a riding saddle and a bucket. He came up to the car.

"Cunnel might be up to the office. Might not. Wouldn't exactly know."

"Where's the office?"

"Fust barn over the hill."

"Heading that way?"

The farmhand shifted the saddle higher on his arm and zeroed in on a fence post. "Not now, I ain't."

"Thanks, Doc."

Tires bit into the gravel again. There was a group of smaller red-and-white buildings off on a side road; a passing glimpse of white-railed oval track; then a flower-trimmed circle fronting a long rectangular stable that had a cupola tower pointing up from the middle of it. Like the other buildings, the stable was a bright red-and-white, with matching striped awnings over a row of barred windows. Everything about it looked freshly painted—including two little jockeys in white-enameled breeches and red-and-white jackets and caps that stood at either side of the circle, holding iron hitching rings in their hands.

The man got out of the car and walked past them to the wide flagstone walk leading up to the entrance of the building. A large doorway opened on a full-length corridor lined with stalls that had sliding doors of fine-grained hardwood and wrought-iron grillwork. There was a rich smell of horses in the air, but the stalls were empty. He stared at the polished paneling, the chrome fittings, and the almost antiseptic cleanliness of the floor shining like glass in the reflected light.

"Did you want something?"

Rolled-up levis and a man's shirt didn't hide the shape of things to come. She was young, blonde, and tan as a walnut. He looked her over and nodded.

"Colonel Rigby. Any idea where he hangs out around this bangtail Ritz?"

The girl smiled, and pointed to an enclosed room off the side of the entrance. "He's right in there."

"You work here?"

"I live here," the girl said. "Daddy runs the farms for the Colonel."

She waited for more questions. When there weren't any, she smiled again and started off down the corridor. One of her legs dragged stiffly as she walked, and she had to swing it forward with a contorted effort at every step. He watched her pull herself along down to the end of the corridor like that before he called after her: "Thanks, Sis." She smiled back at him, and he watched the smile disappear around a corner and out of sight. Then he straightened his dark glasses, went over to the enclosed room and knocked on the door. He went in without waiting for an answer.

It was a small paneled office, made smaller by rows of filing cases, trophies, scattered racing gear, and hundreds of pictures of horses that covered the walls and overflowed the tops of the filing cases. Two men were sitting at a flat-top desk in the center of the room.

One was lean, long-legged, and in his seventies. His wide-brimmed black hat, old-style four-button black suit with high rolled lapels, and narrow black tie that lost itself inside the folds of a Hoover collar made him look like an undertaker, before undertakers got to look like morticians. The other one was stocky, about middle age, and well varnished by the wind and sun. He had on an open-neck shirt and riding slacks, and looked as if he belonged there. They both glanced up when the man wearing the dark glasses entered, but neither one spoke. The man broke it up with: "I'm Tonky Fallon. Mike Margoulis sent me."

There was a slight pause before the long-legged one said: "Yes. Have a chair, Mr. Fallon." He didn't seem surprised, nor particularly interested. He went on talking to the other man.

"That fence in the south quarter section needs paint, Fred. And the gate on the far side of the underpass is sagging."

"I tell 'em not to, Colonel, but the kids keep swinging on it." Fred made some notations in a memorandum book, glanced casually at Tonky Fallon, and put the book in his shirt pocket. He stood up. "Anything else for now?"

The older man shook his head and turned around slowly. "How is Mike Margoulis, Mr. Fallon?"

TONKY FALLON watched the cool slate-gray eyes go over him. They were eyes that went well with the finely wrinkled parchment skin, the strong jaws and firm chin—eyes to match the poker face.

"Not any lighter on his feet, Colonel. He sent his regards."

"You handled some jobs for him. I believe?"

"A couple. They didn't amount to much. He said he thought you could use me, but he didn't say what it was about."

The Colonel nodded. "I didn't tell him." He turned as the other man was going out. "Oh, and Fred, bring those estimates on the reservoir wall up to the house with you. Swenson wants to go over them tomorrow."

"Yes sir," Fred said. He closed the door after him.

The Colonel reached into his coat pocket and brought out a silver case filled with thin black cigars. He held it out.

Fallon said; "Thanks. I use cigarettes." He offered his lighter in return. The old man took a cigar from the case but waved the lighter away.

"Know anything about horses?"

Fallon lit a cigarette and thought it over. "I've improved the breed some," he admitted. "There's no future in it."

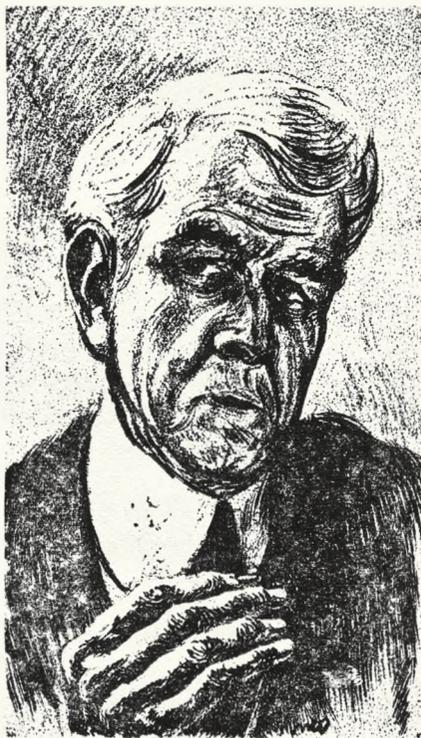
"Yes. Anything else?"

Tonky Fallon's shoulders lifted and dropped. There was a stretch of silence while Colonel Rigby rolled the end of the cigar between his teeth and looked at Fallon. Then he held the cigar up and looked at it.

"Know anything about me?"

Fallon said slowly: "I know you're a multi-millionaire. This horse playground carries a book value of more than three million, and you've got holdings in Las Vegas, and California, and Florida, probably worth as much. I also know you're a bachelor and don't have any close relatives to leave it to. It's a cinch there'll be litigation over your will." He broke off and waited, but the Colonel was rolling the cigar between his teeth again. He went on:

"You're running your usual string of gee-gees this season and doing all right, although none of 'em are exact-



"I should have known the crooked face was bad luck."

ly sensational. So far you've grand-slammed the Derby, Preakness, and Belmont twice, but you think more of the Jockey Club's Gold Cup that you've wrapped up four times. You're a member of the National Turf Association, a director of the Thoroughbred Breeders' Association, and on the board of the Horseman's Association. You keep your help a long time, spend most of the year in Florida, and don't go out much for dinner." There was another pause. "That's enough, or do I go on?"

The Colonel grunted. His slate-gray eyes studied the dark glasses. "It'll do—unless you can tell me what I'm going to have to eat tonight."

"I forgot to mention," Fallon added, "I couldn't find anything that makes you a Colonel."

The fine network of wrinkles in the parchment face rippled with the hint of a smile. "Never could either, son. But the folks down here won't believe it."

Fallon looked around for a tray, didn't find one, and flicked his cigarette ash on the floor. "I suppose you'd like to know something about me. It's customary."

Colonel Rigby glanced idly at the scattered ash, stretched out his long legs and ran his hands up and down the creases in his trousers. He said:

"Full name: Anthony Francis Fallon. Thirty-three and single. You did insurance and agency investigation work before the war. Got shot down in China—"

"Manchuria." Fallon said mechanically.

"Yes—Manchuria. Cut up pretty bad, and been in hospitals most of the time since. You wear those dark glasses to hide what you can of it, I guess." The Colonel studied him again thoughtfully. "I told Margoulis to send me a man who could do a job and keep his mouth shut. He sent you."

"I didn't know he had me cased that well," Fallon said. "Is it good enough for what you want?"

The Colonel's hand lifted slightly. "That's for you to decide." He got to his feet. "We'll talk about it on a full stomach."

From where he leveled off at fifteen, Fallon found himself still looking up at the slate-gray eyes.

"Supper's at six. You'll join us, of course."

The invitation didn't require any answer. Fallon followed him outside.

A station wagon had driven into the circle. There was a young Negro at the wheel, and the Colonel walked over to him.

"George, you drive on ahead and show this gentleman the way up to the house. Tell Alphonso he'll be staying with us tonight, and to make him at home. Then come back here for me. I'll be over at the stallion barn with Gay Bard."

"Yes suh," George said.

Fallon got into his car and thumbed the starter button. The station wagon headed around the circle and down the drive. He followed it on out. At the road, velvet-napped lawn stretched off once more into white-fenced pastures. The sun danced brightly over the green grass, and heat waves shimmered up through the film of white dust kicked out by the station wagon ahead.

Fallon shifted into high and glanced back over his shoulder. The Colonel was still standing in the circle—a splay-legged, gaunt, picturesque figure; a tintype out of cavalier days when gentlemen carried their honor, as well as their liquor, under their belts. Quite a character, the Colonel. Fallon wondered what the old boy had on his mind.

Chapter Two

FALLON read: *Hip number 257. Chestnut colt bred similar to Boxer, out of a winner. Family of St. Brideaux, Traquair, Neil Gow, Cross Bow, Magpie. . .* Tonky Fallon flipped the page, but it was more of the same on the other side, and he tossed the catalogue to the floor and gazed off restlessly across the broad white-columned porch.

Horses. Nothing but horses.

The night was soft and warm and filled with alien smells. A scattering of stars pinned up the sky, and only

the chirping of crickets and occasional throaty croaks from the tree-frogs broke the deep silence. An elderly Negro soft-shoed out on the porch. He picked up the empty glass from the arm of the chair, took it over to a table, where he poured another drink out of a cut-glass decanter, and brought it back. Fallon settled deeper into his chair and said to nobody in particular: "Pagan luxury."

COLONEL RIGBY said apologetically as he strode long-leggedly out of the house:

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Fallon, but I like to get as many things done as I can while I can." He pulled up a chair and took a cigar out of the silver case. "Wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for the yearling sales coming up. Never miss them." Then he jerked up and shouted angrily: "Alphonso!"

The servant turned in the doorway. "Bring that back here!"

Alphonso came back to the table with the decanter. He took the stopper off and poured out half a glass of whisky.

"Fill it up," the Colonel said tartly.

The servant filled the glass to the top, but disapproval etched every step as he carried it over. "Doctor says you don't stop drinkin', you'll die."

The Colonel snorted. "Never mind what the doctor says. You do what I tell you. I'll die when my time comes. Like everybody else."

"Ain't nobody else in that much of a hurry." Alphonso left the decanter on the table, and shuffled off stiffly into the house.

The Colonel stared after him. "The old mossback's getting childish. If I've told him once, I've told him a hundred times—" He shook his head and settled back again in the chair, the drink in one hand, the cigar in the other. "Now, sir, as to what I want—"

Fallon ran a finger around his glass and waited.

"This horse playground happens to be a stud farm. I breed thoroughbred racehorses on it. Some I keep, and some I sell. One in particular, I sold last year—a bay colt. I want you to locate it for me."

As simple as that, Fallon thought. Seven hundred and seventy miles to hunt up a horse. He said: "You know who bought it?"

Colonel Rigby remarked thinly: "Naturally. It's changed hands since. The last time, to my knowledge, at Gulfstream Park in Florida this spring. Went to a man named Keach. You'll have to follow through from there."

Fallon studied the long-legged figure stretched out in the chair across from him. "Any objections to another question?"

The cigar cut an abrupt arc through the air.

"If you want this horse back, why did you sell it in the first place?"

"You misunderstood me, sir." The slate-gray eyes suddenly hardened. "I didn't say I wanted it back. I said I wanted you to find it. As to my reason for selling—" The Colonel appeared about to dismiss this as irrelevant, then reconsidered. "You've seen the girl."

"Marylin?"

"Yes." Agitation crowded the gray eyes now. "You've also seen how she walks. There was an accident. The horse crippled her for life."

"Cute kid," Fallon said. "I imagine that—"

"Imagination won't change anything," the Colonel remarked curtly. "I was merely answering a question."

Fallon let it ride, and sipped at his drink. "You wouldn't have sold the horse otherwise?"

Colonel Rigby glanced at him sharply. He rolled the cigar between his fingers, and stared off into space. When he spoke again, his voice sounded tired, older.

"It was nervous and high-strung, an out-of-season foal. But it had the best nick in the stud-book, came along fine as a yearling, and I had very high hopes for it until—" The old man's fingers tightened around the cigar, and the muscles in his jaw got taut. He shook his head slowly. "I should have known the crooked face was bad luck."

Fallon waited it out.

"The colt had a very unusual marking: An outsize white patch that gave his face a crooked appearance."

"And you figure that put the whammy on him?"

Colonel Rigby frowned. "If you mean what I think you mean—yes." Up to this point, he hadn't touched his drink. Now he raised the glass, and when he brought it down again, it was empty. He ran the back of a finger across his lips. "Do you want the job?"

Fallon said slowly: "It could depend on what goes with it."

"The colt brought me thirty thousand dollars." Colonel Rigby set his glass on the floor. "That goes with it."

Conversation took a holiday while Fallon shook the drink around in his glass and looked into the expressionless gray eyes. Finally he said:

"Thirty thousand makes a lot of dollars, Colonel. It makes a potful of dollars, if you ask me. But then you didn't ask me." He shook the drink around again. "What I meant was, what goes with the horse?"

The reply was matter-of-fact: "Information. And a murder."

Fallon ran the tip of his tongue slowly over his lips, then bit into them. He grunted. "I guess that ties it. Information's as far as my license goes. Homicide is strictly for the cops."

The gray eyes flicked impassively. "The police are not interested in Eddie Snow's death. If they were, you wouldn't be here."

"Excuse me. I thought you said—"

"Eddie Snow was a black man."

Fallon settled back and cleared his throat carefully. "Apart from that, what was he?"

"My exercise boy," the Colonel snapped. Then, in a suddenly softer tone, he added: "And my friend."

"Where'd it happen?"

"Chicago. He traveled with my stable. During a meet there last month, they found him along a railroad siding with his head beaten in. He died at a hospital shortly afterward."

"And what ties the horse in with it?"

Colonel Rigby reached into his pocket and fished out a piece of paper. He handed it to Fallon. Pencil-marks on it formed a crudely drawn horse's head—a head with a crooked face.

"Snow was conscious for a while at the hospital before he died," the Colonel said. "He tried to talk, but couldn't get the words out. They gave him pencil and paper, but he couldn't write, either, because he didn't know how. So he drew a picture." The old man's eyes were frosty. "It tells the story."

Fallon looked it over, then tapped the paper against his fingers. "You figure this puts the horse in Chicago?"

Colonel Rigby's face showed that he figured it was a stupid question.

Fallon shrugged. "I'm reaching. But I don't get it."

The cigar jerked impatiently.

"They were racing the horse under another name. The crooked patch had undoubtedly been disguised, but Snow knew the horse well enough to recognize it anyhow. That made him dangerous, because he could expose them. They put him out of the way."

"They?" Fallon straightened his dark glasses. "I thought you said a man named Keach bought it."

"He did. It's also possible he could have sold it later."

Fallon tapped the paper again. "Anything else but this to go on?"

"WHAT more do you want?" The Colonel was getting peevish. "The horse's properly registered name is Bay Adjutant. There was no such entry listed under that name at any time during the meet. Officially, Bay Adjutant hasn't run a race since it was bought at Gulfstream. As far as the records go, it's disappeared." He pointed a finger at the paper. "You think a dying man drew that just for the hell of it?"

Fallon handed the paper back. "And where are the track Pinkertons while all this goes on?"

That did it; Colonel Rigby bounced out of his chair as if he had been



catapulted out of it, and started pacing up and down the porch, hands behind his back. He stopped short once, sank his teeth into the cigar viciously, then started in again. He chewed on the cigar as he paced. Suddenly he stopped again and swung around. He snorted:

"Turning the tracks into police line-ups and mice laboratories didn't stop the smart crooks from fixing races; so now the Racing Bureau's cramming their so-called code of standards down every honest horseman's throat." He snorted some more. "By God, sir, this nonsense of fingerprinting owners and trainers, and branding thoroughbreds, is an insult to horse and man alike!" He pointed the chewed-up end of the cigar. "Before they tattoo the lips of any horse of mine, or take my fingerprints like a common criminal, I'll quit racing—and I've damn' well told 'em so. That's why—"

But Fallon never found out why. The flow of angry words shut off abruptly, and the old man stood stewing for several seconds in thoughtful silence. Then he came back to his chair and sat down. His voice was brittle but quiet:

"I said I needed a man who could do a job and keep his mouth shut. Do you want it, or don't you?"

Fallon finished off his drink and held up the empty glass. He shifted it from one hand to the other and looked at the smudges his fingers had left on the smooth surface. "I want that thirty thousand dollars," he said.

The gray eyes measured him carefully.

"You may not have much time."

Fallon shrugged. "Then I won't take much."

The Colonel mulled that over and liked it. He nodded abruptly, and reached down to the floor for his own glass. "Help yourself. And pour one for me."

Chapter Three

THE custom-made expanse of green leather upholstery tilted back under the impact of three hundred pounds of human aspic, then recoiled slowly on its hydraulic springs into position again. Breathing heavily from the major effort of sitting down, Mike Margoulis stared across the massive carved oak desk, an article of Seventeenth Century Tudor that should have been in the Metropolitan, and gave Tonky Fallon the once-over through puffy, half-lidded eyes.

"You look healthier," he observed finally. "The climate must have agreed with you."

"Bonded Bourbon, and riding with the top down," Fallon said.

"Have a good trip?"

"If you like trips."

"What'd Rigby have on his mind?"

"Thirty thousand dollars' worth of horse-meat."

"Meaning?"

"He thinks somebody's running a ring around the Big Apple."

Margoulis' eyebrows slowly arched up, pulling the lids along with them. It was another major effort. After a while he sighed heavily and said:

"If he thinks so, somebody probably is."

Fallon shook a cigarette out of a crumpled package and straightened it with his fingers.

"I dropped in to see what you think."

Meaty palms turned upward, resting on the arms of the chair. "With the horses, there is a saying: *Caveat emptor*. That's Latin for—"

"Never give a sucker an even break," Fallon said. "I got through Cæsar in high school. I also stopped in Chicago on my way back here. I figure the old boy could be off-base, but for thirty grand I'll buy it."

This time the eyebrows contracted.

"You mean he's paying you that much?"

Fallon shrugged. "On the cuff. The Colonel made it a gambling proposition."

The fat man closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the chair. Plump, well-manicured fingers came together to interlace across his tremendous belly.

"Whatever I know about making a price, Rigby taught me," he said reflectively. "He's still as good as they come." There was more reflection. "Thirty thousand dollars adds up to something more than just curiosity. And what has Chicago got to do with it?"

"Some skin," Fallon said. "His exercise boy played nosey at the track, and doesn't live here any more."

It brought the eyes open—not wide, but open.

"Murder?"

"The Colonel says. The cops in Chicago say different. Officially, it's down on the blotter as an accident. He hit a train with his head." Fallon lighted the cigarette and watched blue smoke curl up toward the ceiling, where it swirled out of sight into hidden air-conditioning vents. "I wonder what the accident rate is here in Harlem."

"Still, you like the cops' angle?"

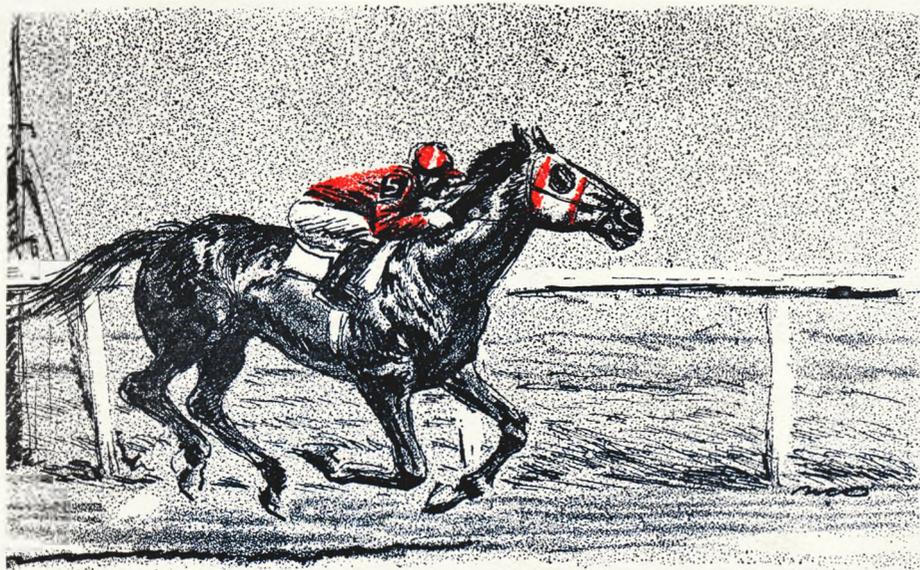
"If it wasn't for the thirty grand, I could."

"Continue."

"This horse has a twisted pan," Fallon said. "Or at least it did have. Hair-dye could fix that, but I don't see why anybody would take a chance on it." He set the dark glasses higher over his eyebrows. "And I still don't know if it's murder, the horse, or something else the old boy wants to settle for."

"Exactly how does the horse concern him?"

"He brought it into the world."



*Four of them fighting it out...
Then one all alone.*

"Not since the war."

"It's an idea."

Fallon looked down through the dark glasses. "I got sort of allergic to guns."

Margoulis shrugged. "Skip it."

Fallon started out across the deep-napped carpet. He thought of something and turned around. "The Colonel said I was to get in touch with him through you."

"Then you better have my phone number."

"I thought I did."

The puffy lids were half closed again. "Too many other people had it, too."

Fallon jotted the number down. "I'll keep in touch."

AT the door he looked back. The fat man's eyes had closed all the way again, and he was breathing softly and regularly, but blowing a little with his lips. His face looked bland and blank. Fallon went out through the door and pulled it shut quietly.

The private office connected with a front room through a small areaway. The room was plain-paneled, without windows, and plainly furnished with chairs and tables that didn't belong in the Metropolitan. There was a stock ticker and a teletype in one corner, and a large blackboard covered the far wall. Prevailing odds on current sporting events and other betting information was posted on it. Except for a heavy-set individual with a bald head and muscular jaws who sat at a large desk behind a battery of telephones and a sheaf of papers, the room was unoccupied.

Fallon stopped at the desk. "What's Gandy Dancer in the third at Empire City, Pletke?" he asked.

The heavy-set individual thumbed through some of the papers. "Twenty."

"Worth a bob or two?"

Pletke looked up sourly. "You got rocks in your head?"

"Probably," Fallon said. "Let you know later."

He went down the steps and out through a plain glass-paneled door set inconspicuously between the fronts of a music store and a pet shop. He flagged down a taxi and gave the driver an address on East 52nd Street. As the cab rolled on out into the traffic, he took a piece of paper out of his wallet. It was a clipping from *Racing Form* listing the past performances of Gandy Dancer.

The horse had a typical plater's record. Out twenty-three times in 1946 with one win, three seconds, and five thirds for a total of \$4,790. Out seven

The telephone on the desk buzzed quietly. Margoulis opened his eyes, unclasped his hands, picked it up and listened; then he said: "Done. Marigold, ten thousand." He depressed the connection, punched one of the phone buttons and took his hand off the metal riser: "Pletke, when Skiff calls in from the track, tell him to lay off eight thousand on Marigold in the sixth." He listened for a moment, put the receiver in its cradle, and wrote something down on a pad. Then he leaned back and closed his eyes again.

"*Caveat emptor*," Fallon said dryly. "You ought to have a license to steal."

Margoulis said: "What do you expect to accomplish here in New York?"

Fallon screwed out his cigarette and looked around the room. It was modern executive at its most expensive. Soundproof, gray-shaded walls, with a few oils hanging in the right places. Soft indirect lighting. Thick drapes that contrasted. Luxurious deep carpeting that matched. And centering it, the dramatically massive period piece with just enough hammered copper gadgets on it. A room that jack built—carriage-trade jack that came in over the phone without working up a sweat. He said:

"I've got an appointment with a guy named Keach. Only he doesn't know it yet."

"Keach?" Margoulis' face creased into a frown. "Please come to the point."

"It gets a bit complicated," Fallon explained. "Keach is a one-horse gypsy who owns a broken-down plater called Gandy Dancer. Some months back he claimed another horse named Bay Adjutant, the one Rigby's interested in. That's where it begins to get complicated." He leaned back in his chair. "Bay Adjutant disappears, and Gandy Dancer suddenly comes home for heavy bacon at the ticket windows in

Chicago—on the same day the Colonel's boy gets knocked off. Now, maybe it is all just a coincidence; and maybe—"

"A horse named Gandy Dancer is running today in the third at Jamaica," Margoulis said. His eyes were still closed.

"I plan to be there for the performance," Fallon said.

It came without warning—a sudden grayness, muddying the fat man's face. His eyes plopped open with a startled look, and he began gasping for breath. He groped into a drawer of the desk, shook a white pellet from a small glass vial and fumbled the top off a vacuum jug. He put the pellet on his tongue, gulped it down with some water, then leaned heavily on the desk and sucked in and blew out air like a bellows. The sound of his gasping filled the room. It didn't last long. After a few minutes his complexion got brighter and his breathing was better. He lay back in the chair, pulled out a handkerchief and rubbed it across his forehead.

Fallon began breathing easier himself. "What's wrong enough to bring that on?"

Margoulis said raspily: "Wrong? Something's always wrong with anybody as fat as I am. Now and then it catches up with me."

Fallon looked at the small vial with the white pellets in it. "So you fix it with digitalis?"

The fat man stared across the desk. "So I fix it with digitalis."

"Why don't you go on a diet, and get some of that load off your ticker?"

"Why don't you go to the races?" Tonky Fallon's shoulders lifted and dropped. "Just leaving." He got up. "Any other suggestions?"

Margoulis wet his thick lips with his tongue and wiped his forehead again with the handkerchief. "You wear a gun?"

times so far this year with one trip to the winner's circle, and that was all. It had won at Chicago, raced twice after that just for the exercise at Detroit and River Downs, and now it was twenty to one in the morning line at Empire City.

Fallon took off his glasses and ran a finger over the scars on his face thoughtfully. On the record it didn't look much like a set-up for smart money. Still—

Chapter Four

THE taxicab pulled over and stopped. He put his glasses on, paid the driver and got out in front of a narrow stone building that had a canopy extending from the door to the curb. Gold lettering on the door said it was the Club Bali. He went in through a small foyer and past an empty check-room to a circular bamboo bar. A bus-boy was absent-mindedly wiping glasses behind it, and stared at him blankly. Fallon went on into the main room.

It wasn't exactly glamorous. In the dull light the expensive and authentic décor looked nakedly garish. A litter of bare tables and upended chairs added a depressing sort of drabness, and an unpleasant odor of stale tobacco cloyed the dead air. He walked across the small dance floor toward the bandstand where a man in a Hawaiian-print sport shirt was sorting out sheets of music. The man looked up, then came out to the edge of the stand.

"Tonky! Thought you'd brushed town. Or did you?" His glance was speculative. "Nice tan. Florida?"

"Upper Mason-Dixon," Fallon said. "Linda around?"

"Probably back in her dressing-room. We broke up rehearsal about ten minutes ago."

Fallon went around the bandstand and down a narrow corridor leading off from it.

"Better go in backward," the man called after him.

He stopped at a door with a "6" on it, rapped lightly, turned the knob and walked in. She was at a dressing-table with her back toward him and brushing her hair, but he could see her reflection in the mirror:

The soft red mouth, the long dark lashes over the lovely green eyes, the salt-taffy hair that gleamed like pale gold as she brushed it. He leaned against the doorway and got that old feeling. The same old wonderful feeling that was always there whenever she was around. He watched her hands drop slowly to the table.

"I knocked," he said.

"Get out," the face in the mirror said.

"We'll start over. I'll go out and come in again."

"Stay out."

"Fine reception," Fallon told her. "Here I—"

"You're a louse," the face in the mirror said.

He grinned through the dark glasses and walked up behind her.

"Where's your hat? We're off to the races."

"Get out," she said again, tonelessly.

He reached around and pulled her up off the bench. A smartly tailored outfit fitted her slim, softly curved figure as if it had been painted on.

"Let's change the record, Grandma. I'll make with the details on the way to Jamaica."

She turned her face away from him. He turned it back again. He kissed her hair and the tip of her nose while she stood small and still and impassive, as though it didn't matter. Then, suddenly, her arms were up around his neck, and her lips were tight and hard against his, her fingers digging into his shoulders and pressing him closer to her. He could feel her tremble a little. She pushed him away and looked up searchingly into the dark glasses. Her voice was softly husky as she said: "I hate you, Grandma. And you're still a louse."

He pulled her back. The feel of her body quivering and tight against him was warm and exciting. The taste of her lips was real again. . . .

Linda Carroll was busy putting her face back on when it occurred to her to ask: "What's so important about the races?"

"A horse." Fallon folded his handkerchief so the lipstick smears on it wouldn't show, and stuffed it into his breast pocket. "A horse with a crooked face that's running a crooked six furlongs. I hope."

She bit on a paper tissue a couple of times to smooth out her lips, and turned around. She looked like what the better magazines put on their covers to build up circulation.

"You're only on probation, Grandma. This had better be good."

He took her arm. "It's either very, very good, or I'm a louse strictly for nothing."

They walked to the garage on 54th Street where the convertible was parked, drove north from there to cross the river over the 59th Street Bridge, and slipped through an amber light into the eastbound traffic. With his eye on the rear-view mirror and his foot down hard on the accelerator, Fallon told her about Colonel Rigby and Eddie Snow and Dervish. About everything but the thirty thousand dollars. For some reason he wasn't quite sure of, he held out on that. When he was finished, he wondered if she'd been listening, because all she said was:

"Why didn't you let me know you were leaving?"

He thought it over. "It wasn't the South Pole. I didn't figure you'd miss—"

"Tonky!"

They were going too fast to stop. He jerked the wheel over and back again, and the convertible caromed wildly, screeching, through the traffic-jammed intersection. It put two more dents in the fenders, took along some paint, and left the air behind them filled with the angry blaring of horns. Linda pulled her teeth out of her lips, settled back against the seat and looked at him musingly.

"So that's your story?"

He studied the rear-view mirror and put his foot down harder on the accelerator.

"That's it. Like it?"

She stared off at the passing scenery. "I'm crazy about it."

Fallon kept busy driving.

They reached the track without getting arrested, and made it into the stands just as the horses were coming out from the paddock. It was the third race.

"On the nose," Fallon said. He checked his program and focused a pair of binoculars down at the track.

"There was something about a crooked face," Linda reminded him. "Number Seven, Gandy Dancer."

She looked at the line marching past. "That gray horse is pretty. Number Seven hasn't got a crooked face, and you know it."

"Lady Godiva didn't have any clothes on when she went to the post," Fallon said, "but she fooled a lot of people."

Linda said suddenly: "Was she a blonde or a brunette?"

He brought the binoculars down and looked at her with a blank expression. "Lady Godiva?"

"The other woman."

"What other woman?"

"There was another woman while you were gone, wasn't there?"

"Oh," Fallon said. He took out his wallet and handed her a twenty. "A redhead named Scarlett O'Hara. See if you can get a bet down on Number Seven before the windows close."

She gave him a woman-look. "Hush money."

"Hunch money, Grandma! Beat it."

LATE odds changes flashing on the tote-boards put Number Seven up to thirty-to-one. Fallon frowned. His hunch was beginning to look a little thin. Maybe Pletke was right. Maybe he did have rocks in his head. He took off his dark glasses and focused the binoculars across the track. The horses had reached the post and were going into the stalls. A couple of the nervous ones began bucking and rearing, and it took a while to get them calmed down. Finally they were all

in. The starter checked them over while the handlers climbed down off the gate and the outriders moved to the rear. Fallon turned around to look for Linda. He was still looking when the bell jangled and the loud-speakers rasped into action.

Thin lines of dust drifted back lazily as the horses bunched over toward the inside rail. Away slow, Number Seven trailed the pack; but it was moving easily and without urging. The boy held it back, feeling out the pace, until space began to widen between the runners. Then Fallon saw him coil forward with his head down close, hands far out, knees up tight as a steel spring, and start taking it home the hard way.

It shot past one, then another and another of the runners as if they were standing still.

"Gandy Dancer coming up fast on the outside," the loud-speakers said.

But fast!

It hit the turn burning up distance, and heeled wide around the pace-setters blocking off the inside of the track. Second by a head halfway around, and neck-and-neck for the lead, coming out of the turn, it streaked in for the pole position.

A PULSE hammered in Fallon's throat as he held the binoculars on the montage of flying legs coming down the stretch. This could be the pay-off. The jackpot.

He saw the whips flicking mercilessly now. The distended, flaring nostrils and the straining muscles responding to the sting of the crop. The dancing flashes of shiny plates—the billowing shirt-tail. . . . Four of them fighting it out. . . . Three. . . . Then one all alone out front and under the wire. A roar went up.

The loud-speakers drowned out under the noise of the crowd. Fallon brought his binoculars down slowly and watched the horses fan out around the turn, with the jockeys up straight-legged in the stirrups and pulling tight on the bits. Number Seven was galloping high along the rim of the track, blowing like *Moby Dick*.

The crooked face that wasn't there.

His jaws ached. He was rubbing them softly when Linda came back. She held out a couple of tickets. "Next time you can make your own bets. I'll take riding the subway."

Fallon put the dark glasses back on. "Wrong hunch, Grandma." He said it absently, as though trying to make up his mind about something.

Linda moaned with exasperation. "And I didn't even see the finish. Who won?"

Lights flashed on the tote-boards. He pointed at them and handed her the binoculars. "Look the rest of the suckers over. I have to see a man." Before she had a chance to say any-



"You're only on probation, Grandpa. This had better be good," Linda said.

thing, he had disappeared into the crowd.

He was gone for about twenty minutes. When he came back, he had a couple of pieces of paper in his hand. He took her by the arm and started off once more.

"Look," Linda protested, "what kind of a game is this?"

"Recon mission. I think it's the phony war."

"Well, it's certainly not my idea of a day at the races," she complained bitterly. "And me with a tight skirt."

They went down steps, crossed the paddock runway where a guard took their passes, on through a gate past the receiving barn, and into the stable area. Fallon checked the numbers as they passed between the rows of sheds, turned off under one of the sloping roofs and stopped in front of a narrow stall that had the upper half of its Dutch doors open. Linda trailed after him with a look in her eyes that wasn't exactly happy.

A sweat-stained horse in the stall was getting a rubdown from a man in a dirty yellow shirt. Fallon leaned his elbows over the lower half of the door and watched it. The sponge made a soft hissing sound with every stroke, and the man didn't notice that he had visitors until he reached around for the bucket. When he saw Fallon, he froze, crouched and watchful, for a moment. Then he dropped the sponge in the bucket, straightened up slowly, and came over to the door. A dead cigarette butt hung in the corner of his mouth.

His eyes were small and shifty, his face badly pockmarked. He had a bull neck and a barrel chest, and the voice that came up out of it was hard and suspicious. "Something, Mister?"

"That horse is Gandy Dancer?" Fallon asked.

Yellow Shirt wiped his hands under his armpits. "So it's Gandy Dancer. Then what?"

Fallon smiled amiably. "Just wondered if it faded away completely. I had some lettuce with it in the last one."

Yellow Shirt's tongue played along his lips until it touched the dead cigarette butt. The clipped way he had of talking, with his mouth hard and tight, he could have forgotten it was there. He took it out and dropped it on the floor. "So Gandy Dancer don't have enough of that pepper out there today. Anything else?"

"Not as much as it had in Chicago, anyway," Fallon said.

The small eyes narrowed to sharp slits. The hard voice grew harder. "What's your gimmick, Mister?"

"Where's Keach?"

"He ain't here."

"Some days I leave my seeing-eye dog home," Fallon said. He took a five out of his wallet and creased it between his fingers. "Any idea where I can find him?"

Muscles in Yellow Shirt's bull neck stiffened. He looked at Fallon for a long time. He seemed to want to remember what he was looking at. "Come back in a couple years, Jack," he said tightly. He went back to the horse, picked the sponge out of the bucket, and started rubbing it down again.

Fallon looked the animal over carefully for a moment or two. Then he glanced around at Linda and shrugged. He put the money away, walked over and slipped his arm through hers. They were going past one of the stalls farther down along the shed when a man sitting in front of it in a tilted-back chair said in a quiet voice: "You looking for Keach?"

"It might be," Fallon said.

The man pushed a battered hat back off his forehead. "Might be I could tell you where to look."

The five came out again.

"Try Angelito's. East 114th, up in Harlem."

"Something you don't like about Keach?"

"What difference would that make?"

FALLON nodded back toward Gandy Dancer's stall. "When does it go again?"

"You work your dough pretty hard, don't you?"

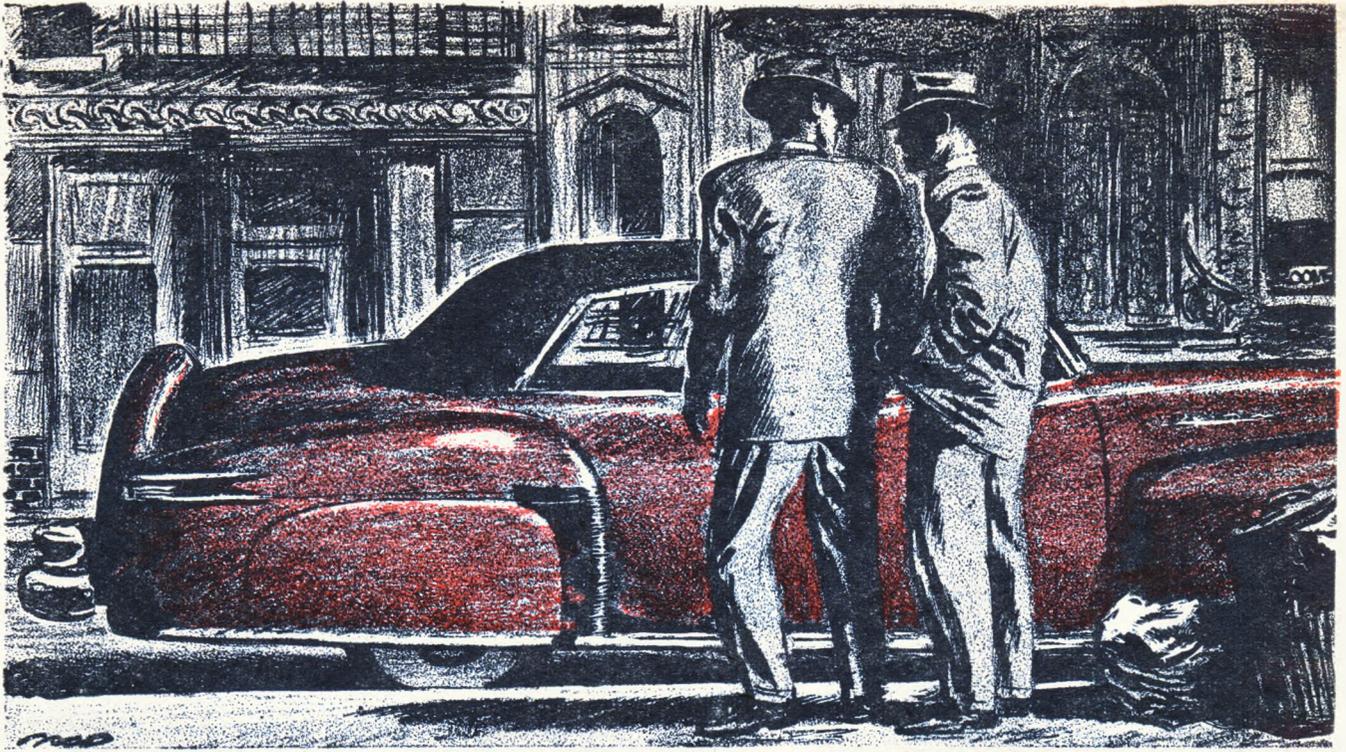
Another five joined the first one.

"It don't go any more in this meet," the man said. "Pulling out tonight for Jersey."

Fallon handed him the money. "Thanks."

"Any time," the man said.

There was a preoccupied but satisfied look on Fallon's face as they



Outside, the little man told him: "Your car. You drive." His voice was flat and dry, and he

walked back to the convertible. Linda made only one comment, and that was when she dropped into the seat with a sigh of weariness and vexation.

"Don't think this hasn't been a lovely afternoon," she remarked acidly. "But-remind me to ask why."

Fallon slipped the key into the dash-lock and grinned over at her. "For thirty thousand reasons, Grandma, I've got a feeling it's been a wonderful afternoon."

Chapter Five

EAST 114TH STREET runs through the Italian section of Harlem. The neighborhood wasn't one that Fallon frequented often, and he would have missed Angelito's entirely but for the small neon sign that hung over its narrow sandwiched-in front. He drove to the end of the block, circled around to come back along the dark rows of shuttered store fronts, upstairs flats, and soiled-looking tenements, and parked in an open space on ahead of the solitary flickering beacon. He wanted room to move out in a hurry. From the looks of the place, he had an idea it might be necessary.

The sputtering neon threw out a fitful red glow over the sidewalk. He stopped under it a moment to snap his cigarette into the gutter, straightened his dark glasses, and went in.

A bar took up one side of the small and narrow interior; empty tables and booths lined the other. In the dim light of yellowish bulbs and a long

fluorescent tube over the bar he counted four customers. They stopped talking suddenly as he walked up, and their eyes went over him carefully. The silence that closed around him was flat and hostile.

The bartender dropped the newspaper he was reading and got off his stool behind the bar. One of the customers started for the rear of the room at the same time. It was neat and quick. Before Fallon had time to bend his knuckles, the man had shouldered into him, slipped past, and disappeared through a door at the back. When he turned around, the bartender was looking at him stolidly and flapping his hands gently on the bar.

"Something you wanted?" he asked. The customers started talking again.

Fallon relaxed. It was probably one of the fastest frisks on record. "Scotch."

The bartender looked at the ceiling. "No Scotch."

"Okay. Make it bond."

"Make it bond," the bartender told the ceiling. He brought his eyes down level with Fallon's. "Maybe you are looking for the Plaza or the St. Moritz. At the other end of the Park."

"Make it a Mickey," Fallon said. "I'm thirsty."

The bartender was a big man. He had a very dark face with a broad hooked nose, and his open shirt showed lots of chest with hair on it. Fallon would have taken him for a Turk rather than an Italian.

"A sense of humor," the bartender said. He reached under the bar,

brought up a bottle and a glass and poured out a shot. "What with it?"

"Water's okay."

The bartender filled a glass with water and set it on the bar. Fallon put down a five-dollar bill. The bartender picked it up, folded it, put it in his pocket and started flapping his hands again gently.

"What about the change?" Fallon asked.

"Just right," the bartender said. "No change."

Fallon's face got a little red. "The Plaza would be cheaper, at that."

It was an opening, and the bartender leaned into it. His voice sounded hopeful as he said: "You making a complaint?" The customers stopped talking once more.

FALLON decided there was nothing in it for him; he picked up his drink and went over to one of the booths to get something solid behind his back. A greasy-looking individual came up from the back of the room and started wiping off the table with a dirty rag. He had a nasty voice.

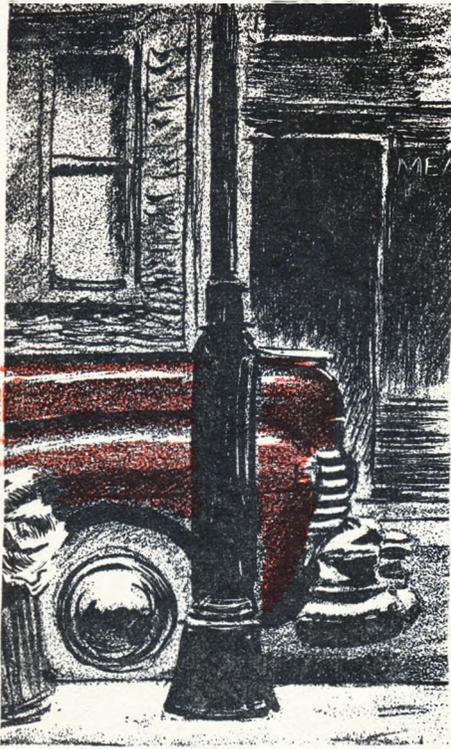
"In the boot' you order from the waiter."

"That you?"

"One funny guy," the waiter said. He picked up the rag and squeezed it out deliberately over the drink. Fallon watched the dirty water drip into his glass. They weren't missing a trick. He figured it was time to get it over with.

"Keach around?"

The grease-ball worked off a hard look.



wasn't wasting any of it.

"They got seven million people in Manhat', Joe. Maybe they got a Keach. Who cares?"

"That was five dollars' worth of drink, and I do," Fallon said.

The waiter had the rag wrapped around his fist now, and his eyes were on the dark glasses. Fallon shifted his feet a little and got ready to slide with the punch when the waiter suddenly made up his mind to pass the ball to somebody else, turned and disappeared into the back end. Fallon took a deep breath and relaxed once more.

The next one to show was tall, dark and handsome. Genuine squeal bait with oil-curly hair, a Windsor collar with the big knot in the tie, loud tweed jacket and slacks. Hollywood all the way. The only thing that spoiled it was his walk. He shuffled on the balls of his feet as if he were coming out with the bell. As he sat down on the other side of the booth, Fallon noticed that he was wearing a military discharge-button in his lapel. He said:

"I hear you want somebody named Keach."

"You've got good ears," Fallon said. "You Keach?"

"The name's Apollo." His smile was Hollywood too. "What's yours?"

Fallon smiled back democratically. "The drinks are too high to put the bite on you, chum. And since you're not Keach, my name won't make any difference."

Apollo kept on smiling. Fallon decided that he practiced at it in a mirror. The waiter came back and set

two drinks on the table. He took the one Fallon hadn't touched, poured it on the floor and walked off.

Apollo nodded. "Pre-war stuff. Try it."

Fallon tried it. It tasted like excellent Scotch. He twisted the glass around in his fingers. "See what the boys in the back room will have. On me."

Apollo leaned forward and put his arms on the table. The smile was gone now, but he didn't try to get tough. He was keeping the menace on the smooth side. He said:

"You look like a moderately intelligent guy, so we park the small-talk from here on. You want to see Keach. I want to know why."

Fallon let him think he was thinking it over. He tried some more of the Scotch before he said: "I want to find out if his cousin's still an usher at the Hippodrome."

Apollo was puzzled. "His cousin—" he began. Then he caught up with it, and his dark eyes went suddenly ex-Hollywood. The 114th Street look that came into them had the quiet, vicious deadliness of a stiletto. He got up, and his lips curled as he said softly: "That kills me. That puts me right out in the aisle. Stick around, Mac. I'll be back in a minute for some more of that."

Fallon didn't wait for the first team. He edged out of the booth, headed through the door, and took off fast for the car. Pulling up for a traffic stop at Madison Avenue, he tried to make something out of the lights he saw in the rear-view mirror, but he couldn't be sure.

He thought about playing hide-and-seek through the park, then discarded the idea. He thought about stopping at the Club Bali, and tossed that one overboard too. Instead he drove south on the Avenue, swung left when he got to 54th, and went on to the garage where he kept the convertible. There were lights following him all the way, but too many to tell if they were the right ones. He made no effort to stay out of sight as he walked from the garage to his apartment hotel in the next block. Going into the lobby, he still didn't know if they'd tailed him.

IN his rooms he undressed slowly, threw on pajamas and a robe and made himself comfortable. Time passed. He wasn't exactly sure what he was waiting for, but when the telephone rang, he guessed that was it. He reached for the hand-set on the table beside him, pressed his finger down to keep the connection cut off, and lifted the receiver from the pedestal. Then he let the metal riser come up very slowly. The other end was open, and the silence got pregnant with waiting and listening. Af-

ter several seconds of that, there was a quiet click, followed by a buzzing. He put the hand set back on the table and looked at it.

They were thorough, anyhow.

He yawned, and got into bed. He still didn't know how they were doing it. But he was getting warm. Could be he was getting hot. He yawned again, and was asleep before his mouth went shut.

Chapter Six

THE following afternoon was when Fallon figured it out. But it was no sudden flash of intuition, no brilliant bit of deduction, not even a modest touch of genius. Just three hours and twenty minutes of looking at drawings and pictures of crests, muzzles, polls, withers, cannons, cannon-bones, coronets, stifles, gaskins, and hocks. Which are parts of a horse —parts of two horses where Fallon was concerned.

He got up at noon, showered and shaved. Over breakfast at a nearby drugstore, he checked the Jersey entries in *Racing Form*. Even platers like Gandy Dancer weren't in the habit of going to the post two days in a row, but he decided not to leave any openings. It wasn't listed, and he tossed the paper aside. He finished his coffee, used the pay phone to inform Linda she had a date with him for dinner, and headed downtown.

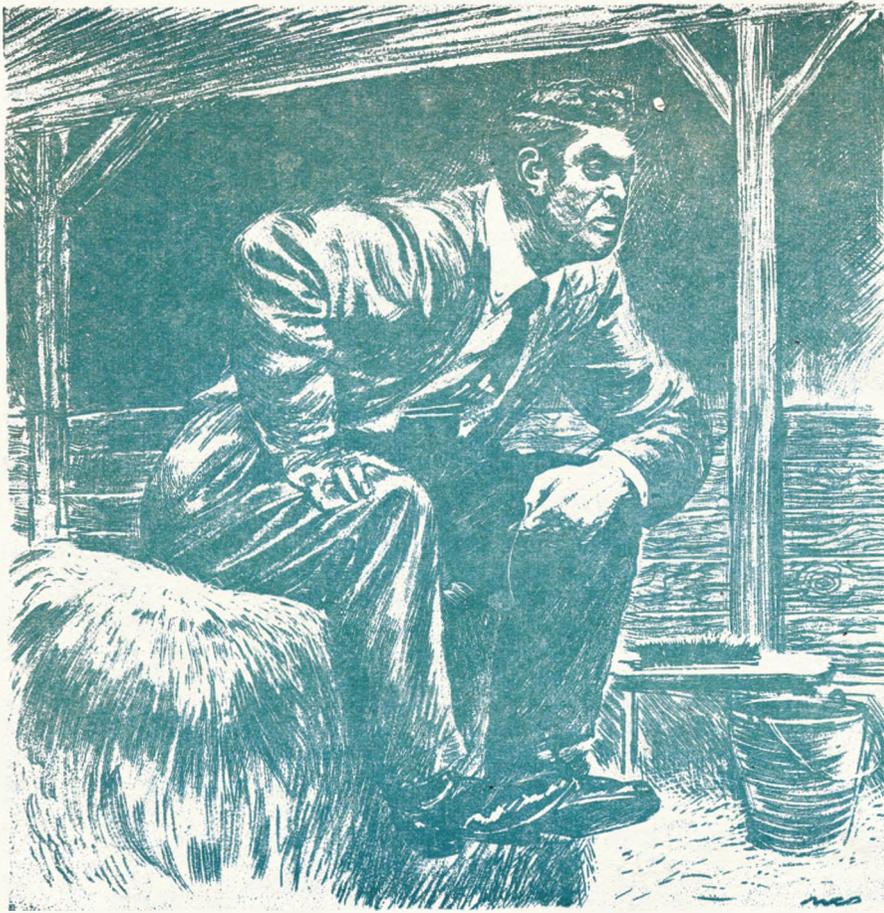
There was a no-parking sign along the curb at the Park Avenue address. He pulled the convertible over in front of it and went inside. The elevator took him up, stopped, and he stepped out into an atmosphere of quiet dignity underlined with polished walnut, morocco leather, and framed oils of famous thoroughbreds. A sherry-haired lovely in a town-and-country get-up was sitting behind the receptionist's desk. She turned a pair of dark eyes on him questioningly as he walked up.

He dusted off a gambit that usually went over with the dark-eyed type, but all it got was a frosty smile. Something told him she was making a career out of her work. He handed her Colonel Rigby's letter, and waited while the dark eyes went over it carefully. She looked up and said in a precise, Junior League voice: "Just what is it you want, Mr. Fallon?"

He resisted an urge to leer at her. "Information." Then he added politely: "About some horses, that is."

She laid the letter down on the desk neatly in front of her. He noticed she didn't wear polish on her nails.

"The Jockey Club has information on thousands of horses, Mr. Fallon." She said it a bit wearily, as though she had spent her life collecting it. "Rather extensive records on every thor-



"You got it a little mixed up, Anthony Francis," he said softly.

oughbred in America. Could you be more specific?"

"I could be," Fallon conceded, "but I'd only have to go over it again later on. Why not clear me through channels, and save time?"

She flushed a little at that, and tapped a polishless nail on the letter once or twice. Then she picked it up and headed for an inner sanctum. She said over her shoulder: "Please have a chair, Mr. Fallon."

Fallon surveyed her trim lines going through the door. Selective breeding, he concluded, had its points. She was out in a moment, followed by a rotund and brisk-looking executive type with the letter in his hand.

"Mr. Fallon?" He gave the paper a quick glance. "I see that you represent Colonel Rigby." His eyes came up to look over the caliber of the representation. They didn't seem very impressed. "The Jockey Club is happy, of course, to be of any service to the Colonel that it can. Unfortunately, the registrar is away at the moment. I am the assistant secretary. Perhaps I can help you?"

Fallon came to the point. "I'd like to see the registration and identification records on two horses. I also want whatever history you have on an owner-trainer by the name of Arly Keach."

The other took it under consideration. He glanced at the letter again, put his chin between his fingers and went through the business of pinching it several times. It seemed to help him arrive at a decision.

"Yes, of course. Will you come this way, please?"

Fallon followed through the inner suite of offices and into the file-rooms. . . . Three hours and twenty minutes later he followed him out again. He expressed his thanks to the gentleman, gave the dark-eyed lovely a smile that dropped dead of loneliness when it reached her, and made his exit quietly out of turfdom's holy-of-holies, a wiser if not a richer man.

He knew now how it was done. He still had to find out why they weren't doing it.

There was a parking ticket under the windshield-wiper of the convertible. He looked it over thoughtfully, tore it up, and headed for the Club Bali.

When he got there this time, a doorman was out to open the door, a sloe-eyed chick gave him a sultry smile from the check-room, and white-coats salaamed in back of the bamboo as he passed on by the bar. Silver and glass glinted over snow-white linen on the tables, and the fantastically colored batik on the walls was glowing under

the softly diffused light with an incredibly deep richness.

Linda was in a housecoat and working over an eyebrow when he got to the dressing-room. She greeted him in the mirror, then stopped to turn around. She said suspiciously: "You look as if you just swallowed a bowl of goldfish. Now what?"

He grinned at her through the dark glasses, and was starting to say something when the door swung open and a suave-looking olive-complexioned personality came in. He was very smoothly poured into a couple of hundred dollars' worth of dinner jacket, and he had a large box under his arm.

"Linda, I want you—" He noticed Fallon and broke off to say: "Tonky! Nice to see you. Thought maybe you'd given us the pitch."

"So you own the joint, Lanza," Fallon said flatly. "Don't you ever knock when you come in here?"

Linda leaned around. "Don't mind him, Marty. He's been picking the wrong horses lately."

LANZA laughed it off. "Know how it is. But lately I've got no complaints. Matter of fact, the bangtails are responsible for this."

He put the box on the chair, opened it up, and pulled out a softly fabulous dream of silver-blue fur. Looking at it, Fallon estimated it had cost no less than a colony of mink the best of their skins, and Lanza about twenty thousand or more of the same.

"Got it today for Marina," Lanza said. He told Linda: "Wanted to see how you liked it."

She sat spellbound.

"Here, try it on."

She got up quickly and swung around. He draped the coat over her shoulders, and she cuddled under it and stroked the fur sensuously with her fingers. Then she wrapped it about her and stared into the mirror. Her eyes got a far-away, starry look in them.

"What do you think, Tonky?" Lanza asked.

Fallon was watching the mirror. He shrugged. "In those brackets I can't afford to think."

"They told me it had to go with the right kind of complexion, and Linda is enough like Marina that I wanted to see her in it. She looks okay."

"I look wonderful," Linda said dreamily. She did several more turns in the mirror. Then she came back to life slowly, slipped out of the coat and handed it to him. "Marina's a lucky woman, Marty."

"At these prices she better think so," Lanza said. He folded it into the box and put the lid on. "Well, thanks for the try-on, kid." He started out, and turned at the door. "See you around, Tonky?"

"I'll be around," Fallon said.

Linda sat down again at the dressing-table and picked up the eyebrow pencil absent-mindedly.

"You went for that, didn't you, Grandma?" Fallon asked.

She sighed. "I'd need a psychiatrist if I didn't."

He straightened his dark glasses and said musingly: "The ponies would have to pay off in a large way to lift the mortgage on a fur farm like that."

"It helps when you pick the right ones," Linda needled him. "Oh, yes, I—" She picked up a telegram propped against the mirror and handed it back. "They sent this over from your hotel. Rush off somewhere to read it, will you, darling? I'm ready to get into my glamour."

He put the yellow envelope into his pocket and came up behind her. She turned, then quickly put a hand out in front of her lips. "Uh-uh, Grandpa. Just fixed." He settled for one on the nose.

The telegram was from Washington, D.C. It said:

CUTTING CORNERS FOR THIS BUT RESULTS NEGATIVE SO WON'T MATTER. NO PRINTS IN FBI THAT CORRESPOND WITH EXHIBITS YOU FORWARDED. WHAT GIVES AND HOW ARE THE FACE LIFTINGS COMING ALONG? TING HAO.

BRITT

Fallon didn't immediately think about what the telegram said. He ordered a dry Martini at the bar, and thought about an egg-laying job over Fushun. About Jap steel in the 29's gas-tanks, and the sudden swan-dive through the plexiglas fishbowl. About a pint-size guy with a quart-size grin who'd swindled the Nips out of the quinine and sake that kept him alive—a guy named Britt, one of Mr. Whiskers' handy little helpers now. He would be one of the best.

Results negative. He hadn't expected anything else. But at least he could earn his money with an easier conscience.

He was starting another Martini when Linda came up beside him at the bar. She looked like a lotus-eater's dream, fresh out of her cocoon in a black strapless job that covered only what was essential, and very little of that.

Fallon glanced at the bare midriff and gave a low whistle. He told the bartender: "Make one extra dry for the débutante, Manuel. That peek-a-boo isn't built for shrinkage."

Linda shook her head. "Have to do a number, Grandpa. I'll take a rain-check." Smiling at him, she swished off through the tables.

Fallon turned around to listen. No critic, he figured it was about eight to five she'd never have the Jo Staffords or Hildegardes rushing the window for their unemployment compensation. But on the other hand, some

overted flesh-buyer from the celluloids was going to catch her in that strapless number one of these nights, and then—thanks for the memories. The Martinis had him a little mellow, and a little sad. Well, fun was fun while it lasted. And nothing lasted forever. Or did it? The cocktail crowd kept her on for more, and he turned back to the bar.

"Congratulate me, Manuel. I'm a lucky guy."

"Yess, Mr. Fallon." Manuel gave him the grin with the teeth. "You are very lucky guy. One more Martini coming up."

They took a table in a far corner. Linda was still a little breathless as she sat down.

"Three encores. I'm terrific, but don't tell me."

Fallon parked the dark glasses in his coat pocket. "It's that oversize G-string. And the liquor in 'em."

"Love that flattery, Grandpa." She picked up a menu. "I forgot to tell you: We're invited to Sid Chappel's tonight. He's throwing a party after his new show. And this is not so an oversize G-string."

"Would it crush something fine in you if we didn't go? I mean, if I didn't?" Fallon toyed with a fork. "I've got a little business to take care of that I don't think will wait."

Linda put the menu down and looked at him. She said slowly: "But you think I will." Her lower lip came out. "Tonky Fallon, some of these days I'm going to"—she took a deep breath—"spit in your eye. And what's more, I'm going to start letting some of those nice old men who want to ply me with orchids and other kinds of attention go right ahead and ply me with orchids and—other kinds of attention." She warmed to her subject. "Furthermore, there are some nice young ones—"

"We'll start with a couple of dry Martinis," Fallon told the waiter.

Chapter Seven

AT Angelito's the bar was crowded when he got there, and he managed to make it to one of the booths without attracting attention. He lit a cigarette and waited. When the grease-ball showed up, he smiled at him through the dark glasses. "Remember me?"

The grease-ball took off fast for the back room. Fallon waited some more. It wasn't long.

He was about five feet seven, and not more than one hundred and forty pounds. He came out of the back room and stood quietly for a minute with his hands in his pockets, a mousy little man in a mustard-colored suit. Then he walked up to the booth. He had a small, lined face, receding chin,

and pale watery eyes that twitched almost constantly behind a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles. There weren't any formalities. Just: "We'll go out the front."

It wasn't what Fallon had expected. He twisted out his cigarette. "Why? I just came in that way."

The pale eyes twitched disgustedly. "Oh, for God's sake. Move it."

Fallon looked him over. He didn't look cut out for the rough work. "A little light, aren't you?"

"I carry the difference, pal. Now do I have to—"

Fallon shrugged. He moved it. Outside, the little man told him: "Your car. You drive." His voice was flat and dry, and he wasn't wasting any of it.

They went north as far as 125th Street, and then swung up onto the Triborough ramp. The little man was huddled far over in the seat, one hand inside his coat, his twitching eyes staring off into the night. Going over the Hell Gate, Fallon said: "Is the stuff hard to get?"

The steel-rimmed spectacles came around to bear on him. They stayed there while the eyes twitched some more.

"You're cute, pal. Real cute. Only maybe you think you're going along because you want to. That ain't the way it is. Follow the Parkway."

Fallon let it go at that, and there wasn't any more conversation until they got to Flushing. Following directions there, he drove down a side-street and into a parking lot. The little man picked up the ticket from the attendant, and motioned Fallon on ahead.

They walked up a block to a filling station where a large black sedan was parked. The little man pulled open the back door and said: "In."

Apollo was seated at the wheel. He watched them get in, and stepped on the starter. Then he glanced back at Fallon and his lips curled nastily. "Bright-boy give you any trouble, Solly?"

"No trouble." Solly huddled into the corner. "He's cute. Move it."

Slatted shades covered the back windows. From the traffic and what little he could see out ahead, Fallon decided they were taking Northern Boulevard. The car moved fast, but not too fast. Lights glowed bright and faded as they rolled through suburban sections, and he mentally checked off Bayside, Douglaston and Manhasset. Then the car gradually pulled away from the more traveled lanes, and he began to get the smell of salt air. When it left the pavement and began bouncing over a rough dirt road, he estimated the time and distance. It added up to Great Neck, somewhere along the Sound. The car rolled over a slight incline, cut around to the side

of what looked like a frame house, and came to a stop at the back of it. Apollo got out and disappeared.

He was back in a few minutes and said: "Okay." The little man jerked his head. Fallon got out.

APOLLO led the way through the darkness. The indistinct shape of a building loomed up, and light suddenly seared the night as a door opened. The little man jerked his head again, and Fallon stepped inside. It was a large barn, and it was being used for a stable. There were two stalls at the rear, one of them occupied, but Fallon couldn't tell what the horse in it looked like. Bales of hay lined the front end, and a man was sitting on one of them, picking his teeth with a straw. He headed the rest so far.

Thick black wavy hair, parted far on the side. Heavy brows over small pig eyes that had dark, unhealthy-looking pouches under them. Puffy jowls, steel-blue with perpetual five-o'clock shadow; a clipped lobe on the left ear; large, overweight construction. Fallon wondered how near he was to the top with this one. Apollo came up and leaned against a post nearby. Solly stayed behind somewhere, out of sight.

The big shot looked him over for a while. Then he pulled the straw out of his teeth and pointed at the dark glasses.

"Take 'em off."

Fallon only smiled amiably. "How would you like to try?"

Apollo jerked up straight and then stepped forward with his shoulders hunched. He said in a tight voice: "That's for me."

The big shot glanced over at him. "Take it easy, Mr. Raft," he said scornfully. "Those double features got you snapping your cap. Relax." He turned back, leaned his hands on the bale of hay and started swinging his heels against it.

Fallon changed his mind. He took off the dark glasses and put them in his coat pocket.

The pig eyes stared at the scars on Fallon's face. Then they shifted back again to Apollo. "Okay. Look him over. See if you can do that right." The flat heavy voice was still scornful.

Apollo's handsome face was dark with anger. His fists clenched, and he muttered something under his breath.

"I make him clean at the joint," Solly said from the shadows.

The big shot nodded vacantly. "We'll look him over, anyhow."

Apollo did it viciously. Probing Fallon's pockets, he pulled out his wallet and flipped open the card-holder. He went through the frames one by one, and then his face came up with

a hard sneer. "Well, whattaya know! Beat-up fly boy is playing fly cop."

The big shot was off the hay in a hurry. "Gimme that," he snapped. He grabbed the wallet out of Apollo's hand, and went through it very carefully. When he came to the photostat license, he looked at it for a long time. "Last Fallon I knew was a legal lip," he said reminiscently. "A right guy, and a smart mouthpiece until he cracked up." He folded the wallet shut and started tapping it against his hand. His eyes came up level with Fallon's. "Okay, Anthony Francis. Who you working for?"

Fallon smiled slowly again. "Am I working? I got the idea this trip was on the house."

The big shot massaged his blue jowls with the back of his hand. "Things around the big town don't change much," he said. "Sometimes I think I ain't even been away." He concentrated on Apollo again. "Okay. Go get him."

"Get who?"

The big shot shook his head dolefully. "'Get who,' he says. Maybe I mean the horse back there. Or maybe I mean Keach. Get who do you think?"

Apollo's voice was mean and sullen. "Keep it up, and I think maybe you can get you a new boy."

"That's an idea," the big shot said softly. He watched him leave, and his thick lips pulled back from his teeth. He shook his head some more. "Relatives!" He tossed the wallet back to Fallon, lifted himself up on the bale of hay, and started kicking his heels against it again.

"You been very busy sticking your nose around lately, Anthony Francis. Out at the track, up at Angy's, maybe elsewhere. Who's paying you to get so curious?"

Fallon knew that time was running out. He didn't have any illusions about what was likely to happen when it did. He'd played this very smart. Like a fox! Only, foxes had holes to crawl into. He looked around behind him. Solly was against the wall with his hands in his pockets. There was something deadly in the quiet way the little man was standing there, his eyes twitching blankly.

"Don't get any ideas, Anthony Francis," the big shot said.

The door opened, and Apollo came in with a seedy-looking individual in a dirty blue shirt, and baggy pants that hung loosely on his lean frame from a pair of web suspenders. A couple days' growth of beard stubbled his gaunt face; his iron-gray hair was unkempt and matted; and he had a sharply protruding Adam's apple that kept bobbing up and down. His bloodshot eyes blinked when he came into the light, and Fallon got a strong odor of whisky as he walked up closer.

He looked around blankly, and his eyes gravitated over to the big shot.

"Friend of yours here been asking about you, Arly," the big shot said.

Keach blinked and turned. He stared at Fallon. "This guy? He ain't no friend of mine. Never see him before."

The big shot raised his arm and tapped a ring slowly against his teeth. "Okay, Anthony Francis. Your turn."

Fallon knew it was a waste of breath, but just to be saying something, he said: "There's a horse named Bay Adjutant. You claimed it in Florida. Where is it now?"

Keach looked at him dully. Then he looked at the big shot.

"Go ahead, Arly," the big shot said softly. "Tell him where it is."

Keach turned back again, and his bloodshot eyes batted some more. "Legs went bad," he said. His voice was cracked and unsteady. "Sold it to a guy that took it to South America for stud."

There was a sardonic smile on the big shot's face. "You see how it is, Anthony Francis? We should tell you everything, and you should tell us nothing. That ain't nice."

Fallon thought he saw something in the sodden bloodshot eyes. And he grabbed at it. "Bay Adjutant isn't in South America, Mr. Keach. It ran in Chicago as Gandy Dancer, and it's here in New York right now, isn't it?"

"Drift," the big shot told Keach.

The drunken horseman stood where he was, swaying uncertainly. He blinked again and ran a hand under his nose.

"I said get lost, stupid," the big shot snarled.

Keach nodded nervously and shuffled off toward the door, his Adam's apple bobbing. He was still nodding as he went out. The big shot's pig eyes had a vicious glitter in them as they came back to Fallon.

"You got it a little mixed up, Anthony Francis," he said softly. "Bay Adjutant ain't in New York. He's over in Jersey. But he ain't Bay Adjutant, he's Gandy Dancer. And he's going Thursday for seven-eighths. Only you won't be there to see it."

THE end of the line. There was a tightness in Fallon's chest, and a hollow emptiness in his stomach. This was where he got off. He shifted his feet slightly to try to get into a position to swing his back toward the near wall.

"Now we listen to your story," the big shot said. His voice suddenly had a hard and dangerous edge to it. "It starts with who you're working for. It starts right away like that."

Fallon tried to make it sound casual. "We haven't been properly introduced. I make it a point never to tell stories to—"

It came from behind. Paralyzing pain shot up and down his spine. At the same time Apollo moved in fast on the balls of his feet. Numb and helpless, Fallon watched his fist flick out. There was a sickening snap, hot wetness gushed into the back of his mouth chokingly, and he sagged over to the floor, coughing out blood.

"Up, fly boy." Apollo was standing over him in a loose fighter's crouch, bouncing his fists together. His eyes were gleaming like water. "This singing lesson's just starting."

Fallon propped his hands against the floor and shook his head. As his eyes cleared, he pushed himself sharply sidewise and staggered to his feet. Apollo closed in, but Fallon got a knee up hard into his groin. It brought a gasp of pain and he hunched over to catch a handful of knuckles that straightened him back up and dancing rearward on his heels into the post with a surprised, twisted look. As he sank dazedly to the floor, Fallon spun around, but he wasn't fast enough. The little man's gun-butt smashed down again and the lights went out.

Holding a hand to his stomach, Apollo got up painfully to his feet. The big shot looked at him.

"That the way it goes in the double features?" he asked sarcastically. He slid off the bale of hay, walked over to where Fallon lay, and rolled him over with his foot.

Solly slipped the gun back into the holster inside his coat. His nose was twitching now, along with his eyes. "You through playing with this guy?"

The big shot rubbed his five-o'clock shadow reflectively. "I ain't playing. I been a long while nursing this caper into the big time, and I don't want nothing lousing it up." He looked meaningfully at Solly. "Nothing's going to." Then his pig eyes shifted over to Apollo. "You can use some practice. Take him over to the house, but keep him breathing. He talks, first."

Apollo was still holding his stomach. "He'll talk," he said savagely. "I got a treatment that'll have him running off at the mouth." He walked over and grabbed Fallon's coat-collar and

jerked him up off the floor. "Gimme a hand with the Air Corps, Solly."

The little man didn't say anything. He came over and took Fallon's legs, and the two of them carried him out the door.

Chapter Eight

It was a small plaster-walled room, a little dirty, a little smelly, and unfurnished except for a table and two chairs. A bulb with a green shade around it threw out a cone of light over the table. Solly was in one of the chairs shuffling a soiled deck of cards. His arms had wiped an arc on the table free of dust. He looked over into a corner of the room and said impatiently: "Come on. He ain't gonna unbutton."

Apollo was standing straddle-legged over the limp form huddled on the floor. He was breathing a little heavily and his eyes had a bright wild look in them. "Fly boy likes this," he said. "He always keeps asking for more." "He ain't now."

Apollo lifted a leg over the limp figure and came back to the table. "Another Brody," he said with a smile. He was enjoying himself. "How much I owe you so far?"

Solly's eyes twitched. "A yard and a half."

"You can double it this hand if you got the guts."

The little man pushed the cards across the table. He said softly: "This is going to be a dirty shame."

Apollo was just starting to deal when the big shot came in. He looked over in the corner and said roughly: "He still dummied up?"

"A little throat trouble," Apollo said.

"Bring him around."

Apollo laid the cards down and went over to the corner. He dragged Fallon back toward the chair, lifted him into it and held his head up. Solly went out of the room and then came back in with a pitcher of water and poured it over him. Fallon groaned once or twice, and his eyes flickered open. The big shot bent down close to him.

"Okay, chump. You had enough, or you want some more of it?"

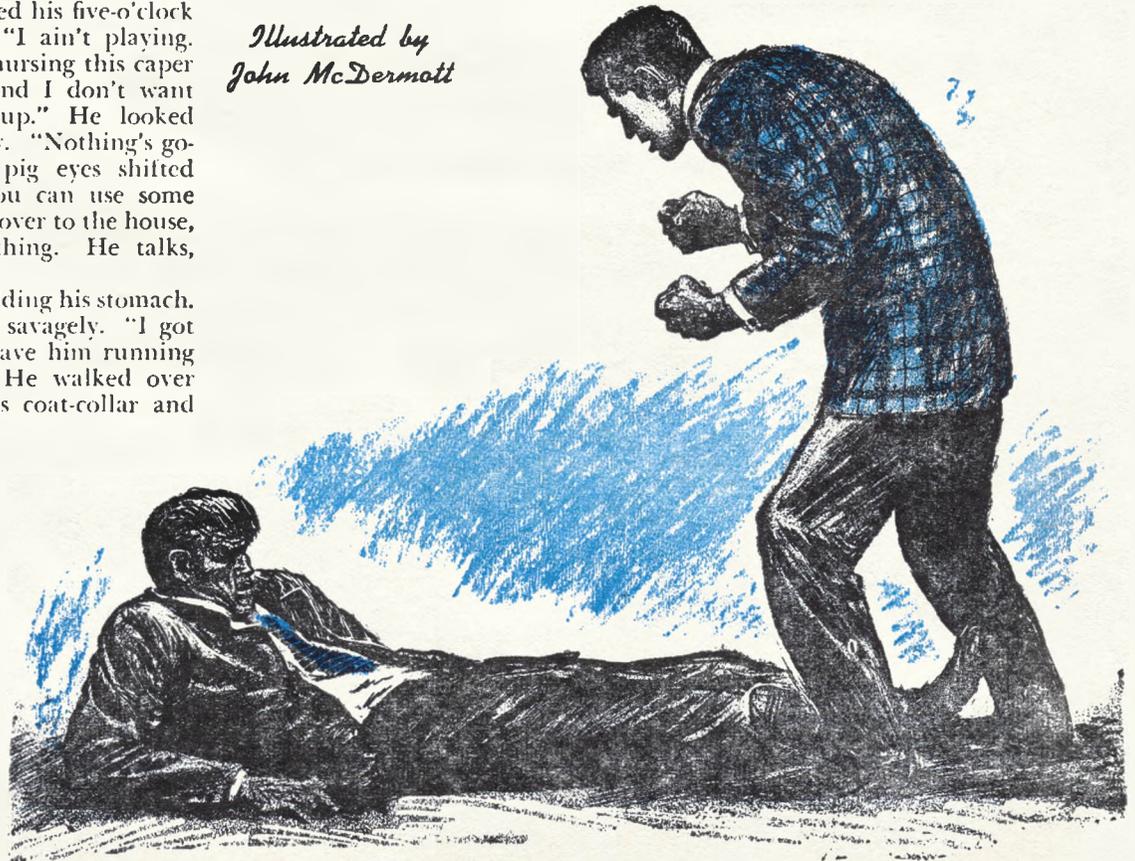
Fallon stared at him stupidly and his head dropped forward. Apollo pulled it up again and laughed. The big shot came still closer.

"Who you working for?" he rapped out.

Fallon raised his head slowly as far as he could, and tried to spit into the pig eyes but nothing came through his cut and swollen lips.

The big shot straightened up. Then he went over to the table and leaned his hips against it. "Hero stuff," he said disgustedly. He looked at Apollo. "Okay. So it's like in the movies. Work him over."

*Illustrated by
John McDermott*



"Up, fly boy . . .
this singing lesson's
just starting."

Apollo came around in front. He took Fallon by the hair and jerked his head up. Then he drew his arm back. The big shot rubbed his cheeks with the back of his hand and watched it. . . .

Fallon could see Solly and Apollo hazily at the table. Not in the room but somewhere near, he could also hear a voice. It seemed to echo in his ears as though it were reverberating around in a well or a deep cave, and it kept repeating a number. Dully, he wondered what day it was and what sounded so familiar about the number the voice was saying. Then he wondered what he was doing lying on the hard floor, and he started to roll over so he could put his arms out and get up. But his hands seemed to be asleep and wouldn't support him. He snickered.

Apollo left the table and came over. He put his hands under Fallon's armpits, lifted him up off the floor and pushed him back into the corner.

"What's funny, fly boy? Tell us, and we'll all laugh."

Fallon decided that he would kill the grinning face in front of him. It was an evil face and ought to be destroyed. But he couldn't raise his arms. It was a ridiculous situation. He snickered again idiotically.

"You don't ever give in, do you, fly boy?" Apollo pushed him back more firmly against the wall with one hand and then hit him back and forth in the face with the other. Everything got smeary and black once more. . . .

The next time Fallon was alone in the room and the light was out. He lay still and closed his eyes again to get the dizziness out of them. After a while he worked himself painfully into a sitting position. Then he attempted to get to his feet. It took several tries to make it, and when he finally did, he lurched forward blindly and stumbled into the wall. His outstretched hand came up against the door. Step by step he moved over in front of it and tried the handle fumblingly. It was locked. He leaned his head against the wood to quiet the awful throbbing, and tried to moisten his bloodcaked lips with his tongue.

When he was stronger, he started feeling his way along the wall until he came to a window. The latch on it was too tight for his nerveless fingers to open. He stared at it a long time through the darkness. Then he raised up his arm and brought it down sidewise. Glass shattered outward. A slow, horrible smile came over his battered face. He stumbled back a few steps. With all the strength he had left he lunged forward and threw himself through the broken window.

At first there was only a shimmering haze. Then a misty brightness. Finally, a white blur. A white blur

that moved. Fallon put a hand up gropingly toward his face. Where his nose should have been there was a mound of something uneven and rough, and everything else felt strange and sore to the touch. His fingers trailed back over the mound again. Recognition came slowly, and with it a sudden intense anger. He opened his mouth in protest, then stiffened as pain stabbed up under his ears. Carefully he took his jaw in both hands and moved it a few times, rolled his tongue around slowly in his mouth and tried again. His voice at first sounded thick and unnatural:

"I said I didn't want any more of those damn' skin-grafts, didn't I? I told you butchers to leave my face alone!"

It seemed as if the white blur moved slightly. Then it spoke:

"Easy, Buster. We only put your map back where it belonged. You had it spread out in too many directions."

Fallon raised himself up on his elbows. The blur gradually shaped into a man in a white uniform standing at the foot of the bed and writing down something on a board. An interne or a male nurse, Fallon decided rationally—depending on what kind of a place it was.

The man in white finished writing and hung the board on a hook. He put his pen in the pocket of his short-sleeved smock, leaned on the bed and watched Fallon stare around the room.

"New York General," he explained. "A guy from Canarsie brought you in."

Fallon heard the words, but they didn't make sense.

"This good Samaritan said he found you running around loose on the turnpike, trying to hitch a lift or get killed. He stopped to pick you up; you started swinging haymakers at him; and he had to lower the boom on you in self-defense. That's what he says. How does it fit?"

There wasn't any answer to that, and the man in white finally asked: "You're a private eye, aren't you?"

Fallon stared at him blankly.

The interne laughed. "All right. A private detective."

Fallon was trying desperately to think. He said:

"What day is it?"

"What's the difference? You're good for a week here at least."

Fallon's voice was urgent. "I think it's important. What day is it?"

The interne shrugged and glanced at his watch. "Three forty-five P.M., Thursday."

Thursday. The dam of blankness broke, and memory flooded back with a rush. He closed his eyes tightly and tried to channel the swirling pattern into a sensible sequence:

Solly and Apollo. The house on Great Neck. The big shot's voice, and the number it kept repeating. The darkened room, and the tangle of bushes, broken glass, flowers and soft earth outside of it. The endless night filled with unseen things that tore at him and tripped him. The pounding in his chest and the roaring in his ears. The cool black slime of the ditch, and the swinging shafts of light over it. The cars careening and roaring past. The fixed brightness and the figure coming toward him out of it. The evil, grinning face. . . .

Thursday! He groaned suddenly and looked around the room in a panic. There was a small closet at the end of it. He threw off the covers and slid his feet out on the floor.

The interne was around the bed in a hurry and had a hand on his shoulder. "Huh-uh! You're in no shape to—"

Fallon pushed his hand aside, stood up, winced sharply and almost pitched forward. Needles and pins danced over his body, and beads of sweat came out on his forehead. He sat down again and looked up at the interne. "Lay off, Doc," he said gaspingly. "I've got some unfinished business to take care of. I'll get my legs back in a minute. I'm okay."

The interne stared at him for a couple of seconds; then he shrugged and started for the door. Going out, he turned around and gave Fallon another look. "Hell," he said, "you ought to be in Bellevue."

Fallon watched him leave, and then tried out his legs again. They were wobbly, but he managed to make it to the closet. He was pulling his clothes out when a starched big-bosomed female stalked into the room. Her eyebrows shot up disapprovingly.

"Here, here! We'll have none of this now, will we?"

Fallon threw the clothes onto the bed. "What you'll have I wouldn't know, Sis. Me, I'm getting dressed. Out!"

"Young man," she snapped, "you're in no condition—"

Fallon's nerves were gone. "My God," he shouted back at her, "don't you think I know what condition I'm in? Get my bill ready, and I'll pay it on the way out."

The nurse's voice chilled to an icicle drip. "Very gladly, indeed. With conditions as crowded as they are, we can certainly make a bed more useful—"

"If you're going to stick around gabbing, Gabby," Fallon said, "make yourself useful and help me into my pants." He started pulling his pajama top over his head, and the door slammed with a sudden violence.

He was breathing hard when he looked himself over in the mirror.

The reflection wasn't pretty. Eyes that were yellowish-purple mushrooms under the livid scar tissue. A swollen mound of gauze and tape for a nose. Discolored lumps of cheekbones. Lips still puffed and black-and-blue. And what little there was left in between, a joss-house pallor. Bloodstains and dark smears streaked his clothes and there were rips and tears in the coat and trousers. He reached inside his coat for the dark glasses, and brought out a handful of pieces. Looking at them, he reflected they'd hardly make much difference now, anyway. He dropped the pieces into the wastebasket and headed unsteadily for the door. The things a guy wouldn't do for money!

Chapter Nine

THE cab-driver pulled over to the curb and swung open the door, then did a quick double-take as Fallon got in. He leaned around to make sure.

"Brother," he confided softly, "I see some sights in my time, but what happens to you shouldn't happen." His head waggled in sympathy.

Fallon lay back against the seat and caught up on his breathing. He was weaker than he'd thought. "Hit it," he told the driver. "The nearest bar that's open."

The driver made a slow clucking noise with his tongue. "I might of knowed." His head waggled again, and a look of honest worry came into his eyes. "I am once a full-time dipso myself, brother. I am as low as I can get, and lower, and losing so many week-ends I am ten years behind before I see my folly. And then I sign up with the Alcohols Anonymous." A triumphant smile lit up his face. "I ain't off my feed a day since, and I got money in the bank. What I done, brother, you can do."

"What I can and will do," Fallon said grimly, "is bend this heap over your head if you don't get it rolling. And where I told you."

The driver turned around with a sigh of resignation and nosed the cab out into the southbound traffic. He said philosophically: "You are the doctor, brother. But it's later than you think."

It was a small bar, and Fallon went on past it to the phone booth at the far end. He got out his memo-book, opened it, dropped a nickel in the slot and started to dial. His finger was halfway around when he stopped and took another look. He knew then why the number he'd heard the voice repeating at the house on Great Neck had sounded so familiar. He suddenly felt sick to his stomach.

He hung up the receiver and the nickel dropped down into the coin-

return. Breathing slow and hard, he looked at it for a long time. Then he slid it out of the slot and put it in his pocket. At the bar he asked for a double Bourbon.

The bartender looked him over and hesitated.

"An auto accident," Fallon said quickly. "I'm on my way home from the hospital."

The bartender still looked skeptical, but he poured the whisky. It warmed Fallon's entire body. The tightness in his stomach, the weakness in his arms and legs faded away, and a slow burning anger began to rise in him. It was something more than the money now. It was a personal matter.

The cab headed crosstown to Broadway. The driver was surprised Fallon had come out so soon and so sober.

"Maybe I was wrong about you, brother. Maybe you are one who knows how to handle it."

Fallon's smile was bitter. "That's me. Smartest little handler you ever saw. Any time you want a nice friendly knife in the back, give me a ring. I'll let you have this one in mine."

The driver said something sharply under his breath, and looked up in the rear-view mirror. The worry was back in his eyes.

On nearing Times Square, Fallon leaned over into the front opening. "This will do, brother." He dropped a bill on the seat, and swung open the door as the cab drew into the curb. "Give my regards to Alcohols Anonymous."

The driver picked up the bill, put it into his pocket without looking at it, and stared after him. He was still staring when the traffic cop started over toward him. He saw the cop coming, and hesitated. Then he took the bill out, looked at it, quickly changed his mind and shifted gears. "I hope you make it, brother," he said gently.

Fallon stopped in front of a newsstand, picked up a paper and started to read. A hunchback with a thick mop of black curly hair finished counting some change into the cash register and came over to him.

"Hello, Tito," Fallon said.

The hunchback moved his head around delicately and studied Fallon from a couple different angles. Then his face lit up with a smile of recognition. "Mr. Tonky! I would hardly know you." He shook his head. "You look very bad."

Fallon put the paper down. "I feel very bad. How's my credit?"

The hunchback pulled the cuffs of his shirt out from under his coat sleeves. Scribbled pencil-markings covered them. He made a pretense of looking them over, then twisted his head up and smiled.

"For you it's good, Mr. Tonky. Nothing on the books. How can I help?"

"I went to a party, but I don't know who threw it," Fallon said dryly. He gave him a rapid thumbnail description of Apollo, Solly and the big shot.

Tito listened carefully while he straightened out several piles of magazines. Then he said, "Excuse me," and went over to wait on a customer. He rang up a sale on the cash register and came back. He kept working on the magazines as he talked.

"The muscle I don't know. They are all over the place since the war, and mostly punks. It would take an adding-machine." He shrugged. "But the gunsel is Solly Drukman. He makes with the nose candy, and if they burn him seven times in a row, it will still not be good enough." He looked up, his eyes careful and serious. "He is bad company. Very bad. The third one—" This time he frowned uncertainly. "I would say Big Vincent Scalerno. Only I did not know he was back."

"Where's Vincent been?"

"Cuba," Tito said. "Used to be a pocket man for Schultz. When the Dutchman got bulletted, he felt unhealthy and dusted town. I heard he had a nice pitch in Cuba."

NOW the pieces were gradually falling into place. "He's got a clipped left ear," Fallon said.

"That is Big Vincent." Tito nodded and scratched his nose. "Once they are on top around here, everywhere else is bush league. They always come back if they can."

"I don't think he's on top of this set-up," Fallon said. "He works out of Harlem. Know anybody up there who could be playing sponsor for him?"

Tito fingered the magazines for several seconds without answering. Then he said slowly: "I can guess."

"And—"

The hunchback looked up. "Lay off, Mr. Tonky." He studied Fallon's battered face. "There is more where that came from. Lots more."

"Oh, sure," Fallon said bitterly. "And do I get the advice on credit too?"

Tito smiled. He faced away from Fallon and turned his deformed back up slightly.

"That is for free. But I would like to be able to collect for the rest of it."

Fallon touched the hump with his fingers.

"You'll collect, Tito. This job is going to pay off all around."

"Good luck," the hunchback whispered softly.

"I can use some of that too," Fallon said.

He ignored the curious stares of the passers-by and walked out to the street.

He got a break on a cab. He gave the driver an address and settled back to wait for him to make some kind of a crack. The cabby took one look, kept his mouth shut and drove. It was a short ride. Fallon paid the fare and got out in front of the music-store. He headed for the side door and went up the steps two at a time.

The front room was busier than when he had seen it last. About five or six well-dressed men were seated at the tables reading newspapers or looking at the figures chalked up on the board. A couple more were standing around the teletype watching a bulletin click out on the paper. The smoke in the air had an aroma of expensive tobacco.

The man with the bald head and muscular jaws saw Fallon coming. He got up easily from his desk and moved over into the small areaway, blocking off the entrance to the private office.

"Mike's busy," he said.

FALLON put everything he had into a short hard punch that traveled only a few inches, but all of his body was behind it. The muscular jaws twisted oddly, and the bald head spun back against the wall.

"Now he's busier," Fallon said. His face was flushed. He went on through the areaway, jerked open the door and strode into the private office.

Margoulis was in the big chair behind the desk, writing. He looked up at Fallon, then put the pen down slowly on the paper. His puffy, half-lidded eyes had a brooding look in them, but he didn't seem to resent the interruption; nor did he appear surprised to see Fallon. The first thing he said, and he said it explosively, was: "Pletke!"

Fallon swung around. Pletke stood behind him with a leather sap in his hand. He stood foolishly, his upraised arm halted in midair, like a model posing for a sculptor. The left side of his muscular jaws was red and already swelling.

"The bastard hit me," he complained indignantly. "And besides, you said—"

"Never mind what I said," Margoulis snapped. He lifted a meaty hand an inch or two in a gesture of dismissal. "Get on out front and close the door after you."

Pletke put the sap in his pocket, rubbed his jaw feelingly, and walked out with a surly glance at Fallon. He closed the door so hard the room shook.

"Why didn't you let him finish it?" Fallon sneered. He came up to the desk. "What's another slug, more or less, between friends?"

The fat man spread the palms of his hand out on the desk and sighed softly. "Sit down."



There was a lot of noise for a few seconds. Something red-hot

"No, thanks. I tried that once. Get your hat."

"Don't be a complete damn' fool." Margoulis was exasperated. "Sit down. You look like you need it, and it's too much of an effort to talk to you standing up."

"That breaks me all up," Fallon said savagely. "But you might as well get used to the idea, fat boy. You're going to be doing a lot of talking from here on out—standing, sitting, and probably lying down."

Margoulis' eyes went almost closed. His voice was ominous. "Do you want to hear what I have to say, or not?"

"If you want to waste it here on a rehearsal, go ahead," Fallon said grimly. "Maybe you'll tell it better later with the kinks ironed out."

"Then sit down," the fat man said again, quietly.

In spite of himself, Fallon sat down. Margoulis' eyes came open a little wider, and he looked silently across the desk for several seconds. He took a deep breath.

"How did you learn I was in on it?"

Fallon reached into his pocket and tossed the nickel he had taken out of the telephone coin-slot onto the desk. He said contemptuously: "You and Judas! Your number just happens to be the same one Scalermo called the other night when your boys were giving me a going-over." He stared at the fat man. "The only thing I can't

figure is why you didn't tell them I was working for Rigby and save them all the effort. Or was that one of your subtle touches?"

Margoulis took his pen and pushed the nickel back and forth with it. "There are several things you can't seem to figure. And they are not my boys." He dropped the pen, leaned back slowly in the massive chair and spread his hands across his belly. "Did you ever hear of cotton futures?"

A frown came over Fallon's face. "Look, Margoulis: I'm not in the mood to play Twenty Questions, and I don't have the time. The only cotton in my book is what boll weevils get into."

"I got into it too," the fat man said softly. His eyes seemed to recede under the lids dreamily, and even from across the desk Fallon could see that they were deeply flecked with red veins. "Over my neck into it. The market broke, and I had to have somebody bail me out. Somebody did."

Fallon studied him, trying to figure the angle. He took a shot in the dark. "Scalermo?"

The fat man's eyes popped open with a contemptuous scowl. "Scalermo! A cheap mobster. A gorilla. A moron."

"All right. Then light some place. Or does it make any difference?"

"Call him Mr. X," Margoulis went on, ignoring the remark. "He did me



smashed against Fallon, but he kept on pulling the trigger.

a favor, in return for which I did him one." The heavy-lidded eyes steadied on Fallon without blinking. "But I did not know until the other night when Scalermo called, what that favor was. I did not even know until then that such a person as Scalermo existed—or that you were in his hands." His massive frame moved slightly in what could have been a shrug. "It would have made no difference if I had."

"This gets better as it goes along," Fallon said. His voice had a bite of irony in it. "Don't let me stop you."

Margoulis' eyes went half-shut again.

"Mr. X is a man of influence, also of some financial standing. But he is not particular where his money comes from. Some time ago, apparently, Scalermo interested him in a proposition. He agreed to finance it. The proposition you already know about." He raised a finger as if he were brushing away a fly. "When X decided the time was opportune to take a profit on his investment, he had Scalermo notify me."

"So you were the front for the fix?"

"The amount involved was large," Margoulis went on. "Almost too large to keep the sharpshooters from hearing something about it and cutting themselves in. It had to be placed very carefully to protect the price." The fat man paused. "I had the connections to handle the action. I owed a favor. I repaid it."

Fallon was nailing down every word now. "Let's have it in round figures," he said sharply.

"Five hundred thousand," Margoulis said. "Distributed in twenty-seven books from coast to coast at thirty to one." There was a touch of pride in his voice as he added: "So nicely spotted, the come-back money lowered the odds only ten points."

Fallon leaned back and let his breath out slowly. "Quite a favor," he said sarcastically. "But of course, you didn't get any of it on you?"

A strange expression came over the fat man's face. "You don't know what happened this afternoon?"

"Oh, sure," Fallon snapped curtly. "They gave me all the details in the hospital. Only I was unconscious at the time."

A faint smile creased the flaccid face. "Then this should amuse you." The puffy eyes stayed watchful. "Three of the horses stumbled coming out of the stall gate and went down. They had to hypo two of them."

Fallon's voice was hard and cold. "I don't amuse that easily."

Sudden irritation washed Margoulis' smile off. His meaty hands clenched tightly. "Do I have to draw you a picture? Gandy Dancer broke a couple legs in the spill. It washed up the fix. *Kaput!*"

"So that makes everything lovely." Fallon's face was wooden. "Mr. X

writes the five hundred grand off his income taxes. Scalermo starts looking for a new proposition with rubber legs. And everybody else just forgets about it and goes home." He stood up and kicked the chair back. "Try again. Who's this guy X?"

The fat man stared at him. "Don't be silly. You couldn't reach him by telegraph."

"That was your chance to play it my way," Fallon said. "Now we'll let the D.A. kick it around. Let's go."

Margoulis' breathing got heavier. He said frigidly: "You're out of your mind. I haven't the slightest intention of going anywhere. And you haven't the slightest chance of getting past the D.A.'s office-boy."

The dark oily sheen of a gun brought Fallon around the desk fast. He had his hand down over it before Margoulis' fingers were off the drawer handle.

Thick rolls of flesh in the fat man's neck twisted angrily. "Idiot!" he snorted. He put his hand into the drawer and brought out the glass vial with the white pellets in it. He was reaching for the water-jug when the door swung open.

The three of them came into the room like a song-and-dance team: Solly first, then Scalermo, then Apollo. They stopped short when they saw Fallon, but he didn't wait for them to get their hands inside their coats. He lifted the gun and started pulling the trigger.

There was a lot of noise for a few seconds. Something red-hot smashed against him and half turned him around, but he kept on pulling the trigger. Then suddenly it was very quiet in the room.

He dropped the gun and tried to hold on to the desk, but it was slippery and moved away. The floor came floating up, and he clawed at it desperately. He felt as if he were sliding off the earth. The strong fumes of the cordite choked him and made him cough. His body racked with a sharp burning sensation, and the soft deep nap of the carpet pulled out slowly from under his fingers. As he started drifting off into space, a comfortable sort of numbness lulled him to sleep.

Chapter Ten

THE framework hanging overhead looked like something the plumbers had walked away from during lunch-hour. It was an oblong canopy of pipes with weights and pulleys attached to it. A crooked metal trough was attached to the weights and pulleys. Something heavily strapped and bandaged was attached to the trough. And Fallon was attached to the something thus strapped and bandaged. It turned out to be his left arm and shoulder.

After studying the contraption for a while, Fallon felt around with his free right arm and discovered that he was in bed again. He said out loud: "This is getting monotonous."

"Grandpa!"

He was suddenly buried under a swirl of taffy-yellow hair, intoxicating perfume, and warm curved softness—very pleasantly buried. When he could see again, he saw that Linda's green eyes were wide and glistening and the long dark lashes over them were wet.

"Oh, Grandpa!" she said. She ran her fingers lightly over his face. "You poor darling. Does it hurt a lot?"

"It hurts wonderful," he told her, trying to grin. "Do it some more." With his good arm he pulled her down close.

AFTER a while she wrinkled her nose and touched the mound of gauze and tape on his face. "That tickles."

Fallon looked at her soberly. "It'll be a different mug than it was before, Grandma. Maybe better. Or maybe worse."

She touched a finger to her lips and then touched it to his. "I'll take a chance, darling," she said softly. "I like what goes with it." She sat up suddenly, and her green eyes shaded into seriousness. "When you told me about that horse with the crooked face, I didn't have any idea it could be as awful as this." Color came into her cheeks and she added repentantly, "I didn't really believe it, to tell the truth. I thought—"

"There were times when I wasn't too sold on it myself, Grandma." He winked at her. "Which only goes to prove that it helps when you pick the wrong ones sometimes. The crooked face that wasn't there is going to have you dripping in mink. And soon."

"I don't want to drip in mink," Linda said. "I just want you to fly right and—do the way other men do."

"You don't—" Fallon stared at her. "I'll get up, and you lie down, Grandma. I said *mink*. You know, that stuff Lanza was tossing around."

"Oh—" she exclaimed suddenly. "I've got to go call Marty and tell him I'll be late." She stood up. "He's very unhappy. He lost a lot of money on the horses today. I'll be back directly, darling." She blew him a kiss and started out, then she stopped and turned. "I'm so forgetful. These two gentlemen want to see you." She smiled vaguely at the other side of the room, blew him another kiss and went out.

The first one Fallon saw was Colonel Rigby. He came up to the foot of the bed and stood there, rolling an unlit cigar between his fingers. His slate-gray eyes were thoughtful.

"I regret that all this happened to you, Fallon," he said slowly.

Where Fallon's face could get red, it was red. He looked around. "The regret is mutual, Colonel. I thought Linda—Miss Carroll, said 'two gentlemen.'"

The Colonel nodded. His glance drifted over to the side of the room. "Yes. A policeman."

The other man was sitting in a chair tilted back against the wall with his hat on his knees. The elevated metal trough hid him from Fallon's view. He let the chair come down on all four legs and walked over to the bed with his hat in his hand. He was about medium height and lean and serious looking in a conservative tweed suit. His voice had a sharp but not unpleasant edge to it:

"As he said, a policeman."

"Fine body of men," Fallon said. "You're here officially, I take it."

The plain-clothes man looked at him dryly, pulled out his wallet and flashed a badge briefly. "Lieutenant-Detective Motz. Homicide Squad."

"Oh," Fallon said.

Lieutenant Motz looked him over with a quiet stare. "Where'd you learn to shoot like that?"

"Like what?"

"Six slugs," Lieutenant Motz said. "Three in the cokey, two in Big Vincent, and one in the kid. Nice score."

Fallon lay his head back and looked at the ceiling. "Are they dead?"

"All but Apollo," Motz said. "If he makes it, he won't look the same." He fingered his hat. "Ready to tell me about it?"

Still looking up at the ceiling, Fallon asked: "What did Mike Margoulis tell you about it?"

"Nothing. He's in the morgue."

It was a while before Fallon got around to saying: "So the fat boy couldn't take it?"

Motz gave him a careful look and pursed his lips. "Most people can't. Not after they get their eyebrows parted with a .38."

"Oh," Fallon said again, flatly. "I thought—" He stopped.

"You thought what?"

"Nothing."

Motz shifted his hat, ran a hand down over his face, and let it go at that. Fallon had a feeling he was behaving strangely for a homicide dick. A little too nice. Homicide dicks could be very hard to get along with.

"I'm going to put in a call to Center Street for a shorthand man," Motz said. "When he gets here, I'll take your statement." He looked over at Colonel Rigby briefly, then back at Fallon. "You understand it's not exactly Hoyle letting visitors have the run of the place in a matter like this." He shifted the hat again. "But it seems the gentleman here and the Commissioner are—acquainted." His smile was brief. Very brief. "The rules are on when I come back."

After he had gone, Fallon laughed. "So that's it. You and the Commissioner."

Colonel Rigby took the cigar out from between his teeth. "We've been friends for over twenty years. He is also a horse-breeder."

Fallon laughed again. "He'd probably throw a colt if he knew I sent your prints to Washington for an F.B.I. check."

The slate-gray eyes looked puzzled. "My prints?"

"It's the Sherlock in me," Fallon grinned. "You raised such a row about having them inked, I thought it could be you had a skeleton wrapped up in the closet some place. I lifted the latents off your whisky glass. Special service I give my clients."

The old man stared at him. He was neither angry nor amused. He said slowly: "The skeletons in my closet got there before fingerprints were thought of."

"Strictly off the cob," Fallon admitted. "But people don't go around every day offering thirty grand just to find a horse. I didn't know whether you were leveling with me, or using me." He paused. "Maybe I still don't."

Colonel Rigby let it pass. He said: "What did you mean by that remark you made about Margoulis?"

Fallon eased back in the bed and tried to get into a more comfortable position.

"He had heart trouble and was taking digitalis. There was some of it handy. I thought maybe he emptied the bottle." He studied the tall, gaunt figure in the high stiff collar and the somber black clothes at the foot of the bed. "I don't know how well you knew Margoulis, but I got the impression you respected him. Anyhow, he planted the big lettuce for the Gandy Dancer fix in Jersey today. But he claimed it was somebody else's lettuce. Maybe it was."

COLONEL RIGBY nodded abruptly. "It was." He waved the cigar. "Margoulis and I once were partners in a gambling casino. I bought him out, but we parted on good terms and we have always stayed that way. When he found out what the setup was the other night, he called me because he knew I was interested. That's how I happen to be here now." The cigar waved again. "I would probably have done what he did under the circumstances."

Fallon ran a finger across his lips thoughtfully. "Then it wasn't a wild shot that plugged him. Scalermo and his boys dropped in to cancel a few bets."

Colonel Rigby changed the subject. "I have deposited thirty thousand dollars to your account in the Manhattan Security Bank. There is

an additional twenty with it to compensate for your injuries. Bay Adjutant was destroyed this afternoon. I think we can consider your services ended."

Fallon stared into the gray eyes steadily. "I wouldn't say that I've earned it yet, Colonel."

The cigar began to roll between the long thin fingers.

"If you mean the man at the top, there's no use wasting your time. Keach has been arrested, but he doesn't even know who the man is. The police know who he is, but it seems unlikely anything can be done. He not only has a great deal of political influence, but with Scalermo and Margoulis both dead, there isn't enough evidence to charge him with fraud, let alone murder." Colonel Rigby's jaws tightened. He said grimly: "If I were younger—" He took a deep breath, then shrugged.

"I wasn't thinking about him," Fallon said quietly. "I was thinking about Eddie Snow."

The parchment skin grew taut. "I think it's obvious—"

FALLON interrupted: "Not particularly about who actually killed him. That was probably one of Scalermo's hired hands. The groom, I think; and I'll see that it's sweated out of him if he did. But about who was really responsible for Snow's death."

Colonel Rigby stared at his cigar for several seconds. Then he walked over to the window at the side of the room and stared out of it. He said finally, "And who *was* responsible?" "You."

The lanky form silhouetted against the window stiffened slightly. Silence filled the room for a long time. Slowly, Colonel Rigby turned around.

"Keach told you?"

Fallon shook his head. "You did. Just now."

The old man seemed to grow older as he stood looking over at the bed. "I underestimated you, Mr. Fallon."

Fallon smiled a little bitterly. "I've been second-guessing my way around ever since I started on this. Now I'd like to take the blindfold off. Any objections?"

The Colonel didn't say anything. Fallon went on:

"I think you like horses better than people. Horses first, anyway. When your favorite colt crippled Marilyn, you made a noble gesture and sold it. Later on you regretted it and wanted the horse back, but you didn't like to do it openly, so you got Keach to do it for you." Fallon smoothed out the bed-cover with his free hand. "I found a letter of recommendation in Keach's file at the Jockey Club that said he was once one of your trainers. I have an idea he hit the circuit on his own after he hit the bottle once too

often on the job—but that wasn't in the letter.

"Anyhow," Fallon went on slowly: "Keach claimed Bay Adjutant for you. Maybe you had in mind sending it to one of your other places, or maybe you were going to let him race it for you. Either way, it was your horse once more. And everything would have been fine and dandy but for one thing." Fallon paused. The somber black figure might have been carved out of granite. He added:

"I found it out later, going over the charts and pictures in the files. Keach found it out as soon as he got Bay Adjutant and his own horse, Gandy Dancer, together. I wouldn't know how often that sort of thing happens, but except for the crooked patch on Bay Adjutant's face, the two horses could have been twins. Their appearance, coloring, measurements, and other distinguishing features were practically identical." He stopped suddenly. "Or am I telling you something you don't already know?"

The Colonel didn't answer that, either, but the cigar in his hand lifted slightly.

Fallon said:

"I don't think Keach would ever have done anything about it by himself. But an ex-mobster by the name of Scalermo moved into the picture. Scalermo was cooling off in Cuba and had probably dropped over to Florida for a change of scenery. When he ran into the two look-alikes, he saw a chance to cut himself a slice of smart money and work his way back to the big league all in one operation." Fallon put his hand over the straps on his shoulder.

"Keach must have figured he had you over a barrel because you wanted to keep your ownership of Bay Adjutant quiet. It's my hunch he went in with the fix strictly as a one-shot. A quick grab at some easy dough. But when Snow recognized the horse in spite of a face-lifting and got inquisitive about it, that gave Big Vincent his chance to take over and run things his own way. He had Snow bumped, put Keach on the bottle, and started taking bids on a gilt-edged proposition. He needed somebody with political pull to ease his way back into New York, so he decided to cut in Mr. X, Margoulis' pal, on the deal." Fallon stopped again to ask, "How am I doing?"

The slate-gray eyes stared impassively. "Go on."

Fallon's arm was beginning to throb painfully, and he tried to adjust the metal trough to ease the strain of turning sidewise while he talked.

"With a murder behind him and a bright future ahead of him, Scalermo decided to play it safe. He vanned Bay Adjutant to a hideout on Long Island, and had Keach keep on mak-

ing the rounds with Gandy Dancer. It was a good twist. If there was an investigation of any kind after the Chicago deal, whoever was investigating would find that it was the real Gandy Dancer doing the running again, and since it was running as lousy as usual, the odds were building back up for a killing when the time was right to ring in Bay Adjutant once more."

The muscles in Colonel Rigby's jaws tightened. "But it was racing on tracks that are now using the lip-identification system."

Fallon smiled. "That wasn't too difficult to work out. They entered Bay Adjutant in Chicago with Gandy Dancer's papers, and Bay Adjutant got Gandy Dancer's number tattooed under its upper lip. Later on, they just duplicated the tattoo on Gandy Dancer, since it hadn't yet been marked. A new slant on the old cattle-rustling racket. They had two Gandy Dancers, then, and both legitimate. Bay Adjutant no longer existed."

The Colonel said grimly: "Then that's why—"

"That's why," Fallon said, "all the inquiries you made after Snow was killed showed Keach was running his own nag and not Bay Adjutant, as you suspected. Keach had rooked you, but you didn't know how. You probably figured he'd either sold the horse to somebody else, or got scared after Snow's murder and disposed of Bay Adjutant to cover up. You might even have figured him for the murder. But you were in a bad spot. You couldn't accuse him openly, or prefer any charges, because it would come to light that one of your own horses had been used as a ringer—a horse you'd acquired under rather strange circumstances. That's why—and when—you hired me to find out where you stood." Fallon's voice got a little scornful. "I was just beginning to find out when Gandy Dancer—Bay Adjutant, this time—conveniently broke its legs and had to be done away with. You knew then you were in the clear. You pay me off, but generously, and the case is closed. Neat, but not gaudy."

THE old man's cigar fell to the floor, and his long fingers clenched together until the knuckles were white. He turned back again to the window and folded his hands behind him. He stared out at nothing for a long time. When he spoke at last, it was in a low voice as if talking to himself.

"You said I like horses better than people, Mr. Fallon. You were right, I do. Horses don't cheat, lie, steal, and kill one another. They don't slobber over you because you have money, or fawn on you because you've got political influence or what is called social position. They don't—" He stopped and was silent for several moments.

"You said I was responsible for Snow's death. Snow was one of the few human beings I ever really considered as a friend. But in a way, you were right about that, too. If I hadn't tried to get Bay Adjutant back, he would probably be alive today." There was more silence. The room filled with it.

"You said that selling the colt after it crippled Marylin was a noble gesture, and that I regretted it later." The Colonel took a deep breath. "The only thing I have ever regretted is that I can't make up to her what she has lost." He went on staring moodily out of the window. "The idea of buying Bay Adjutant back was really hers, not mine. She never quite forgave me for selling it in the first place, because she understood that it hadn't harmed her intentionally. I made the arrangement with Keach to get it back for me quietly, because I intended to surprise her." His voice trailed off still lower. "The crooked face was still bad luck."

Fallon shifted uneasily in the bed. He started to say something but the Colonel went on, his tone brittle now:

"You also suggested that the reason I didn't expose Snow's murder and Keach's fraud was because I was involved in it personally. That's only half right." He turned around, and his slate-gray eyes fixed intently on Fallon. "I gave up caring what people might think about me a long time ago. I've been around too many years to give a damn for human respect. It wasn't quite that simple." He walked over to a chair and slumped into it wearily.

"I had been fighting the Racing Bureau's code of standards—fighting it because I believed that the methods it imposed not only degraded the finest sport on earth, but insulted the char-

acter of those connected with it. Many other horsemen were with me in that fight. If I had turned loose a scandal in the middle of it, a scandal with which I was connected, it would have made fools of them. And I don't make fools of people who trust me." He shrugged. "I knew Bay Adjutant was being run as a ringer for Gandy Dancer, but, as you say, I didn't know how they were doing it. I wanted to find out because if they had discovered a way to beat the lip-identification system, I could use it to prove to the Racing Bureau their code of standards was no good." He shook his head. "I was wrong. Now that it's too late, I realize as long as there are men as weak as Keach and as vicious as Scallermo, everything possible must be done to keep them out of racing."

Fallon's face had a guilty look on it. "You have my apology, Colonel. There were loose ends that needed tying up. What I said seemed the best way to get it done."

COLONEL RIGBY apparently didn't hear him. He put his hands on his knees and got up slowly. "I have made an appointment with the Racing Bureau's board of stewards tomorrow, at which time I'll give them all the details about Bay Adjutant and Gandy Dancer. Then I am turning my stable over to Marylin, for her to do with as she pleases."

The old man walked to the bureau and picked up his wide-brimmed black hat. He was showing his years. As he came back past the bed on his way to the door, Fallon said:

"I'm sorry this turned out for you the way it did, Colonel. Very sorry."

Colonel Rigby set his hat on his head, and his slate-gray eyes, cool and impassive, measured the man in bed. He said: "Nothing to worry about,

son. You earned your money. And I'm ready for pasture."

Linda came through the door as he was going out. He stepped aside and lifted his broad-brimmed hat gallantly. She gave him a big smile and came over to the bed and sat on the edge of it.

"Who is that nice old man, Grandpa?"

Fallon said slowly: "One of the world's few remaining gentlemen." Then he added with a sudden snort of disgust: "And I'm one of the world's lousiest detectives."

Linda Carroll looked at him with the wisdom of a woman who has waited long and patiently. "I'm glad you've decided that, darling. Now you can settle down to something that won't bruise you up so much."

Suspicion stole into his eyes. "Like what, for instance?"

"Well," she said helpfully, "lots of men get married." She ran her fingers through his hair. "By the way, darling, I just happened to mention it to Marty, and he gave me the address."

The change of pace stopped him. He asked bewilderedly: "What address?"

"Where he got that gorgeous silver-blue thing for Marina, silly."

Lieutenant Motz came into the room with a uniformed policeman. He looked over at the bed, and when he spoke this time, he sounded more like what homicide dicks usually sound like. "All right. Let's break it up."

Fallon's gaze drifted slowly from Linda's brightly innocent eyes to the detective's slightly irritated ones.

"It seems," Motz said acidly, "I've got to keep reminding people around here this is a slight case of murder."

Fallon looked back into the green eyes. "Lieutenant," he said, "you are so right."

THAT WAS A LONG WAR

by Fairfax Downey

THE Thirty Years' War lasted a whole generation (1618-1648). It began as a religious war, but as "an awful chain" continued for a new reason or without reason. Predatory armies lived off the country, leaving desolation behind them.

It has been estimated that twelve million died in Germany out of a population of eighteen or twenty million. Franconia was so depopulated that monastic vows were forbidden before the age of sixty. Men were allowed two wives. But in other sections the sexes remained in balance. Matching battlefield casualties in men were the many women killed in sieges and raids.

Not only heavy taxes but forced labor reduced a free peasantry to serfdom. Hopeless indebtedness was a general state. The Hanseatic League

was ruined. The labor shortage gave foreign competition its chance. Two hundred years after the conflict the burghers of Marburg still were paying interest on their war loans.

Flourishing universities decayed, for students used vacations to go off to war; they swaggered back to college in uniform and with campaign habits. All winter there were frequent town-and-gown battles.

The war affected fashion. Men wore wide-brimmed military hats and top-boots. Women's hats also went military. The girls cut their hair short and wound scarfs in patriotic colors around their waists. From the intervention of France in this war dates her rule as the arbiter of styles.

When peace was declared, the dazed soldiery were sunk in gloom. A camp

woman declared: "I was born in war. I have no home, no country and no friends. War is all my wealth—and now whither shall I go?"

In some cases, dependency upon labor and its shortage after the war enabled farmers to assert their rights. In others, reaction destroyed their gains. The leveling of classes did not last long, but more rigid social lines than before were drawn.

This was not the occasion for the rise of German militarism. That can be dated from the Crusades. But it did teach the Germans a "slavish endurance," an element of their later militarism.

"The Peace of Westphalia," declares a cynical authority, "was, like most peace treaties, a rearrangement of the European map ready for the next war."

Who's Who *in this* Issue



Adrian Kuepper

BURLINGTON, Iowa, was my birthplace. Still single.

Infected at a tender age with literary virus that broke out in the form of a dramatic opus in 1918, imaginatively titled "Over There." It ran one performance in a storeroom over the family garage, and went off very well except that the curtain fell down and hit the heroine in the head. I was influenced toward the stage at this time by my oldest brother, who was in show business. But nothing came of it.

Turned to more serious things in the local high school, such as irritating my English teachers with frequent references to H. L. Mencken, who was not in good odor in those days—at least with my English teachers. Carried this intellectual bent to the University of Wisconsin, where it won a twenty-five-dollar prize for an essay entitled "Contemporary Loyalties in American Life and Letters," which I probably wouldn't understand if I read it today.

Took up advertising in the early thirties as campaign manager for a soap company, but this terminated abruptly when the depression caught up with huckstering. Reverted to practice of journalism, in which I successively, and sometimes jointly, labored as correspondent and feature writer for the United Press, INS, Trans-Radio Press, the Des Moines *Register and Tribune*, and managing editor of the Burlington (Iowa) *Post*. Went from there into a mixture of politics and public relations with the Federal Government, but managed to keep a finger lightly in the literary pie with a series of royalty radio plays.

Came the war, and I enlisted to get in the Air Corps. What I got was five different military schools ending up with Field Artillery OCS, from which I resigned to get back in the Air Corps. I then got transferred from

waist gunner on a B-17 into combat intelligence, without any combat, and finally was cited by ATC Headquarters for beating out Volume I (between visits to Waikiki Beach) of the Historical Record Report of Air Transport Command Operations in the Pacific. I am still gathering material for a book in which I hope to get even with the War Department for all this.

Advertising snared me again in 1946 when I took over as radio director for a Louisville, Kentucky, agency; and "Crooked Face" was born there between Derbies and singing commercials. Recently converted to television as the thing of the future.

Among his best-known books are "The Case of Mr. Crump," "The Island Within," "Stephen Escott," "The Last Days of Shylock," "Breathe Upon These," and "The Story of American Literature."

Dr. Lewisohn lives in Brooklyn, New York. He is working on what he considers one of his most important books, "Star Son," a massive historical novel about the last revolt of the Jewish people against Rome at the time of the Emperor Hadrian.

*Donovan
Fitzpatrick*



Ludwig Lewisohn

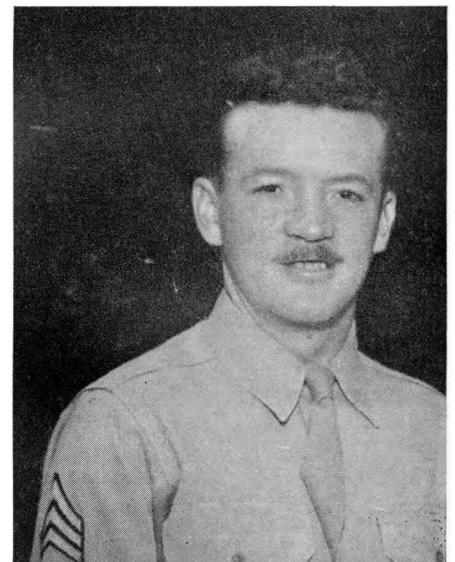
ONE of the great literary figures of our time, Ludwig Lewisohn, was born in Berlin in 1883. Brought to America at the age of seven, he grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees and his doctorate from the College of Charleston, and a master's degree from Columbia University in New York.

His early career was in free-lance writing, literary criticism, and French and German translation. For a time he was professor of German language and literature at Ohio State University. He next served as dramatic editor of *The Nation*, later becoming associate editor. In 1925 he went to live in Paris, where he remained for many years.

BORN (1914) in Olean, N. Y., and was obviously fated to be a writer because, after the usual schooling, I followed the traditional pattern and wandered in and out of the following jobs: school teacher, grocery clerk, factory worker, advertising salesman, hotel clerk, bartender, small-town newspaper handy-man, and several others which I prefer to forget.

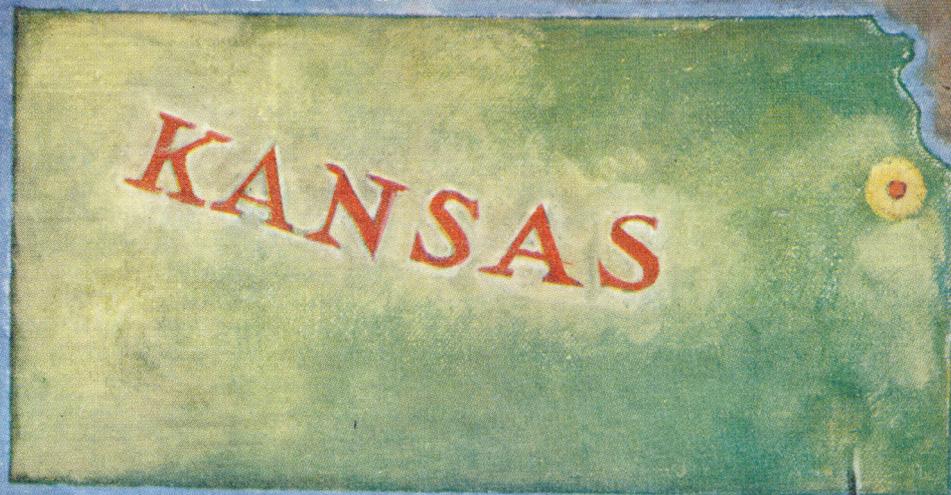
In 1942 I got in the infantry, then got right out and into the Air Forces, preferring to ride rather than to walk. Spent the next three years instructing in radio navigation and instrument flying at Chanute Field, Illinois.

Discharged, I found an apartment in Brooklyn and began turning out aviation articles. One year and thirty articles later I found I was spending more time in research than in writing, so switched to fiction, because fiction is mellow. "The Wild Blue Yonder" is my sixth sale.



BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE for
APRIL, 1948



Ten Short Stories, Including:

THE COURSE OF JUSTICE

by LUDWIG LEWISOHN

THE NEEDED SPARK by JOEL REEVE

MARDI GRAS BONDMAID

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

THUNDERBOLT AT LARGE

by ROSS DeLUE

ANIMAL MAN

by ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON